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Guitarist

Issue 398

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GUTHRIE GOVAN

On advanced
string-bending **p148**

ROBBEN FORD

Next-level blues
licks lesson **p60**

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Gretsch

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SETZER'S NEW 6120

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a forgotten classic



Rory Gallagher's
blues machines



Dominic Miller on
touring with Sting



Supro Reverbs:
retro combos rated



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The Zen Of Tone



As we were putting together this issue's free guide to strings, I started musing about tone. It's very easy to start fantasising that if you only bought that beautiful old guitar or that exotic hand-wired amp, then your tone would be sorted forever. But in this narrow, sometimes obsessive pursuit of 'ultimate' bits of big-ticket kit, it's possible to overlook the wider truth that great tone starts with the player and extends through every link in the chain: from guitars to strings to pickups and all the rest. For example, Brian May's Red Special, quite a toppy guitar, played hard into quite a toppy amp, ought to sound so piercing it hurts. But then Brian often used long curly guitar leads – often derided as tone-sapping relics of the past. Because such high-capacitance cables tend to roll off highs you could argue that they served to balance out his sound.

Ultimately, your signal chain could be considered as a balance of tonal yin and yang, comprised of factors that tend to improve clarity, brightness and penetration on one side, and factors that add grain, warmth and elasticity on the other. It's your own touch as a player that animates these influences and tells you what you need more or less of to achieve your ideal tone. So, next time you're fettling your rig, remember that there are many links in the chain – from strings to cables to plectrums – that can be used to alter that subtle balance of expressive forces in your favour, not just the expensive bits of kit we all fantasise about.

Speaking of kit, we have two amazing competitions for you this month that could help you overhaul your tone. First up, in our strings supplement, we're giving you the chance to win a RFB1 60s Reissue Fuzz pedal and a year's supply of strings from Rotosound. The big noise, however, can be found on p40, where we're giving you the opportunity to win an entire new backline for your band – guitars, amps, pedals, cable drums, recording gear... even a smoke machine! The whole package is worth more than £14,000 – yes, £14,000! – which is a whole lot of links in your tonal chain to experiment with, so don't waste time and get entering now! Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Editor's Highlights



Guthrie In Residence

Yep, the mega-talented Mr Govan will be teaching us how to play better over the next four issues. This month's bending lesson is a cracker **Page 148**



Remembering Rory

20 years on from Rory Gallagher's death, it was fascinating to read about his initial struggle to be accepted in blues. He won it alright **Page 68**



More Bending?

B-Bender guitars: the greatest gear innovation you never played in your life. We met a slightly mad man who owns over 40 of the things **Page 78**

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HOT ROD GRETSCH

88

Rockabilly legend Brian Setzer gives *Guitarist* the lowdown on the development of his new Hot Rod 6120 signature model, and talks through the amps, guitars, effects and techniques that make up his timeless tone



COVER PORTRAIT BY
Joseph Branton

FIRST PLAY



PRS P245 SEMI-HOLLOW
£3,575

WHAT IS IT? Piezo-equipped,
semi-solidbody electric

Double Vision

PRS's latest piezo-equipped electric is a semi-solid Singlecut. The best yet? We think so...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Adam Gasson

PRS's 'P' series kicked off in 2012 with the P22. That P stands for piezo, and the P22 was the first PRS electric solidbody to feature the LR Baggs/PRS co-designed circuit that provides a highly credible acoustic-like voice in addition to the usual magnetic pickup tones. The system launched back in 1999, as an option on the Hollowbody, but its size prevented it being fitted to a thinner solidbody until a redesign of the electronics led to the hard-tail 22-fret P22, followed by a vibrato version, and the 24-fret P24 Trem in late 2013. These Custom-based double-cuts finally got a Singlecut partner, the P245, at the start of this year... and before we had time to review that, this Semi-Hollow version was released in June.

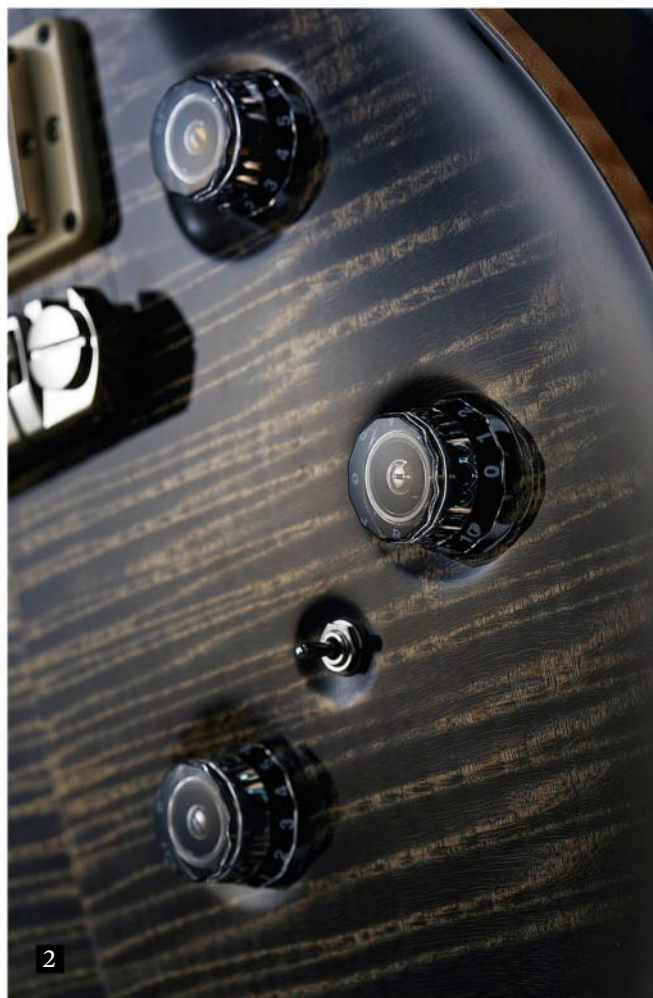
Both guitars closely follow the existing SC245, which gets its name from its 24.5-inch scale length (half-an-inch shorter than PRS's standard scale and very close to Gibson's actual scale of 24.6 inches). The Semi-Hollow is rarer, because although semi-hollow guitars are featured in the more affordable USA-made S2 and Korean SE ranges, they've always been







1



2

rare birds in the core USA line. Aside from Neal Schon's NS-14, it's the only other semi-hollow guitar (single- or double-cut) in the current high-end line-up.

So, while the P245 is all solid, the Semi-Hollow emulates the earlier SE Zach Myers and the S2 Singlecut Semi-Hollow designs by hollowing out the bass side only of both the mahogany back and flame maple top, indicated by the sole bass-side 'f' hole – the Hollowbodies have 'f' holes on both flanks to illustrate their full hollow-body construction. They're thicker in depth, too, and have carved tops and backs, unlike the carved top and flat back here.

PRS rarely lets heavy guitars out of its Maryland HQ – unless requested, of course! – and the P245 has a very good single-cut weight of 3.6kg (7.9lbs); the Semi is marginally lighter at 3.46kg (7.6lbs), while an older Singlecut Hollowbody we had for reference is considerably lighter at 2.8kg (6.2lbs).

Typically, there's nothing remotely penny-pinching about either guitar. PRS has long been the benchmark for ultimate quality and the highly detailed build is never less than impressive. The headstock's inlaid signature

is surrounded by unfinished rosewood; the Phase III locking tuners are elegantly minimalist, while the ever-present bird inlays are ultra-clean. Bound fingerboards are another rarity in PRS's history. Here, the clean white plastic edges, overhung by the perfect frets, match the proprietary-shaped pickup rings. A faultless build.

As the latest in the line of the 'date' series PRS humbuckers, the 58/15s here employ all of the continuing tweaks to the classic PAF design on which they're based. These pickups don't use the historic coil wire of the previous 'date' pickups, but aside from that, Paul Reed Smith won't divulge anything about their internal construction. A pull/push switch on the tone control provides some partial tap, single-coil texture, but that's just the start of the sonic sorcery.

Outwardly, the new piezo system shares the same side-mounted panel as the previous design with the necessary battery compartment to power the active preamp of the piezo circuit and dual outputs – 'mix/mag' and 'piezo' – so you can either run the magnetic and piezo outputs to different amps or use them in mixed mono. Control-wise, we

1. The adjustable Stoptail bridge shown here uses six saddle-mounted piezo elements. If you pull out the battery, you can see six level trim-pots, one for each string, which can be used to adjust the response. Best left to a professional!

2. With a shoulder-placed pickup selector, and no treble side 'f' hole, the control area is more spacious compared to the Singlecut Hollowbody II. An easier drive, not least with the volume-control position



3. Unlike the Singlecut Hollowbody, the Semi-Hollow is hollowed out on the bass-side only, making it less acoustic, but with a higher feedback threshold

4. Personally designed by Paul Reed Smith, these latest humbuckers are also available on the SC245, the new McCarty and (uncovered) as 85/15s on the 30th Anniversary Custom



have a three-way mini toggle 'system selector' switch (mag/both/piezo) but depending on the mono- or dual-output modes, the controls function differently. In 'mix/mag' mode, the volume is global; the lowest control furthest into the body acts as a blend between the magnetic and piezo sounds. The tone control only works on the magnetic pickups – there's no tone for the piezo system. In 'stereo' mode, with both jacks used, the blend becomes a volume for the piezo system and the global volume becomes a volume for the magnetic system only.

Feel & Sounds

With its Les Paul inspiration, the Singlecut has an immediately familiar feel. Likewise, the 'pattern' neck (a 'wide fat', in PRS's old parlance), that feels meaty but far from over-big, with a subtle V'ing to the lower positions. Playability is effortless on the bigger-than-standard frets (approx 2.7mm x 1.4mm as opposed to 2.6mm x 1.2mm). Unplugged, there's a vibrant response from the Semi with just a shade of additional openness compared with the solidbody that, typically, is extremely resonant and ringing.

Listening to the acoustic sound into a Line 6 StageSource, the first thing we notice is a very acoustic-like character that, even with flat EQ, is really nicely balanced and underpinned by a very long sustain. It's certainly a sound with a wide frequency response that allows you, via outboard EQ, to go from crystalline modern brightness, with a slight mid scoop and enhanced high frequency, to a much older electro-acoustic voice or even a more archtop-like character by adding some mids and bringing down the high end.

The potential for recording is vast. Blend in some neck for some jazzy thickness, or start on the neck and add a touch of the piezo. Even in mono mode, it's more than useful, not least for those playing on the jazzier, or modern-soul side of the tracks, and let alone modern country, where the slick playability makes those show-off country licks a lot easier than on a typically heavier strung electro-acoustic.

Singlecuts are big-sounding guitars and cranked up, with no thoughts of piezo acoustic tones, this is classic-rock heaven. There's a tube-y and vocal neck pickup, powerful chunk from the bridge, snarl and bite but never a hint of sharpness. Pulling the gain levels



5. With upside-down legends, which appear correct when you check which output you're plugging into, the two outputs allow the dual voices of the guitar to be summed in mono or sent to two separate amps

Singlecuts are big-sounding guitars and cranked up, with no thoughts of piezo acoustic tones, this is classic rock heaven

down and pulling up the tone control voices the partial coil-splits, which move to Fender but are never thin or crispy. Adding a little piezo here works rather well, too: almost like brightening a tracked guitar without altering your core sound.

Of course, if you're using a dual setup, things take on quite gigantic proportions. It's stadium rock at one extreme, café jazz or singer-songwriter at the other and an awful lot in-between. The characters of the solid and semi versions are shades of a similar thing – certainly not like switching from a Les Paul to an ES-335. But the semi does exhibit a little more thickness and less direct spike. It's the one we'd take to the party.

Verdict

As the song says, it's not about the money. No, it's about the craft. That's what Paul Reed Smith has worked so hard on these past 40 years and that's what's displayed here. It's one of the most versatile, creative electric instruments money can buy. Our reviewed model has an additional 10-Top but, trust us, the standard model sounds just as good – a saving that you can put towards the extra gear you'll need to maximise the sonic potential of the dual magnetic and piezo voices. Certainly not for everyone, but if you're an electric player needing a highly vintage-informed electric and some credible acoustic-like voices all in one instrument, then here it is. **G**



PRS P245 SEMI-HOLLOW

PRICE: £3,575 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway, piezo-equipped semi-solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with figured maple carved top

NECK: Mahogany, pattern profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 622mm (24.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.9mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: PRS Piezo Adjustable Stoptail bridge, PRS Phase III locking tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x PRS 58/15 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, volume and tone (with coil-splits). Piezo/mag blend, mag/both/piezo mini-toggle. Piezo-only and mix/mag outputs. 9V block battery

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.46/7.6

OPTIONS: 10-Top (as reviewed, £549), Artist Package (£4,195)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Charcoal Burst (as reviewed) is one of 18 V12 finishes

PRS Guitars Europe

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10/10

PROS A superb Singlecut that might seem expensive, but this is two guitars in one: electric and 'acoustic'

CONS Some would like a 25-inch scale version; an S2 version would be cool on the wallet, too!



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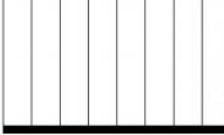
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FIRST PLAY



TAYLOR 914CE
£4,439

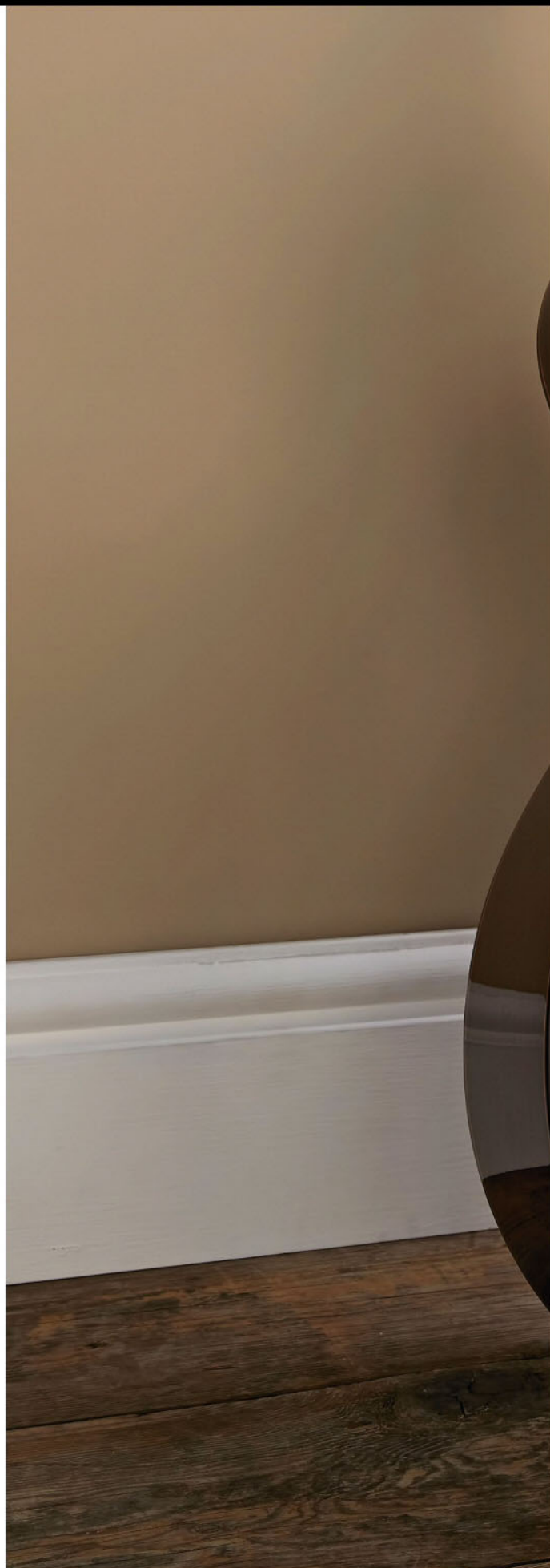
WHAT IS IT? Upgraded top-of-the-line version of Taylor's GA

Sweet Dreams

Taylor's opulent 914ce is brimming with thoughtful and progressive luthiery, but does its performance match the big-ticket price?

Words David Mead **Photography** Adam Gasson

Taylor's top-end 900 series has enjoyed a bit of a makeover since we last took a look in its direction. Perhaps the most obvious new feature is the arm rest atop the guitar's lower bout, but there's plenty more happening under the hood here. In fact, Taylor tells us that the instrument has enjoyed something of a tonal overhaul, too, with an enhanced bass response and a sweeter midrange being the standout upgrades. But what hits you upon opening the case is the 914's overall look; it's a thing of beauty to be sure, with an abundance of pāua trim, sleek curves and a deft Venetian cutaway bolstering that top-of-the-range appearance. However, let's not run away with ourselves too much with the guitar's stunning good looks. First, let's get down to the nitty gritty and see what makes this beautiful beast tick.







Where the outside of an acoustic guitar might be optimised for its looks, the engine room of tone-producing power lies in its belly. We're talking bracing and here, and Taylor has a few cards up its sleeve in this department thanks to the innovative activities of master luthier, Andy Powers. Part of this sorcery lies in what Taylor calls its 'Advanced Performance Bracing' and the mysterious-sounding 'Relief Rout'. In plain English, this means that the bracing has been rethought and optimised for each of the 900 range's individual body dimensions – in this case a Grand Auditorium – with an additional rout around the underside edges of the guitar's top in order to add flexibility. Taylor has been using the latter technique since 2002 and claims this patented innovation adds additional volume and projection. We'll see if that's the case with the 914 later on. For now, let's continue our grand tour of the general construction.

The Taylor's Sitka spruce top is embellished with an edge trim that comprises koa and pāua, the green shell glowing like cat's eyes in bright light. The arm rest is effectively a sliver of ebony, providing a comfortable bevel for the forearm, ensuring a snug playing experience for those long practice sessions. Back and sides are Indian rosewood and although the grain pattern here is very plain, it's dead straight and uniform across the board. It's worth remembering that the very best Indian is every bit as tonally capable as many of the other rosewoods on the market today and wholly less contentious than any of the more 'naughty' varieties that can cause you difficulties at customs. We know of one very well known artist who was forced to buy a replacement guitar to replace his own Brazilian rosewood-backed acoustic just to make sure that his US tour went smoothly, for instance.



Staying with the Taylor's reverse side, the 914's neck is a very fine-looking piece of mahogany, with an ebony heel cap at the body end and an ebony veneer to the back of the headstock – another touch of luxury. One of the talking points around the *Guitarist* office is the Gotoh 510 tuners, finished in what the company refers to as 'aged gold'. It might sound like a piece of vintage chic, but they really do set things off nicely and complement the headstock's ebony fascia well.

The fingerboard plays host to another piece of decorative excellence in the form of Taylor's 'Ascension' position markers – basically a fleur-de-lis that gracefully unravels as it makes its way down the fretboard.

Moving on to the other end of the strings' length, there's an ebony bridge with a micarta saddle (bone is an optional extra) that also plays host to Taylor's Expression System 2, which sees three separate piezo sensors located behind the saddle as opposed to the more conventional position underneath. According to Taylor, this allows for a far more natural-sounding dynamic range than it would do if the strings' pressure was directed

1. Gotoh's 'aged gold' tuners add a touch of class to the Taylor's headstock and feel really good under the fingers, too

2. Every part of the 914ce is finely tuned and fully spec'd. From subtle bindings to the spectacular inlays seen here, it adds a touch of considerable class

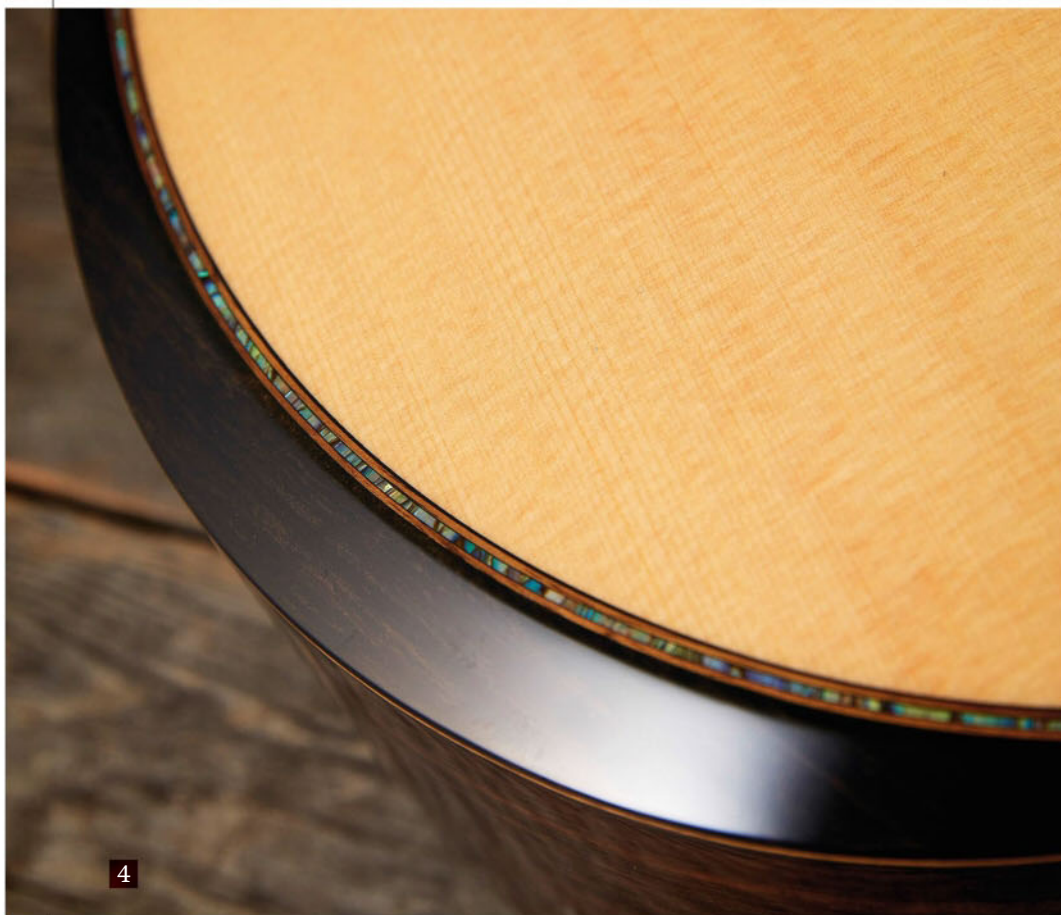
3. The Indian rosewood on the back of the guitar is straight-grained, no-nonsense perfection in terms of craftsmanship: simple, effective and beautiful at the same time



downwards. Along with this the preamp has been tweaked to include a slightly enhanced gain structure which – when combined with the volume and tone controls subtly embedded into the guitar's upper bout – ensures a true plug-in-and-play experience for the user. In other words, turn up at a venue or an open-mic session and you're pretty much good to go.

Feel & Sounds

To begin with, it's immediately apparent that we're dealing with a fingerstyle-friendly wider nut with the 914ce. It may only be 1.5mm above the normal 43mm, but it's something that the hand seems to recognise straight away. Taking this into account, the Taylor is a guitar that will suit both instrumentalists and happy strummers alike. Another thing that springs to the fore is how sweet the acoustic sound of this Grand Auditorium is – it really does have a considerable array of dulcet tones on display. Furthermore, despite the dynamic range being every bit as good as you'd want it to be, there's an additional element to the sound that's difficult to describe. It's almost like it has a natural reverb – which is, no doubt, down



4. The most immediately noticeable physical change on the new 914ce is this the ebony arm rest on the top bout

This is a guitar that will suit both instrumentalists and happy strummers alike... it really does have a considerable array of dulcet tones on display

to the quality of the rosewood – but also a sort of compression that makes it very hard to overdrive the timbral response. Some guitars begin to break up and become harsh when played hard, but the 914 remains demure, whatever you throw its way. It even shrugs off our attempts to anger it with some drop tunings...

Played through an amp, the sweetness remains and the simplicity of the Taylor Expression 2 preamp controls – just volume, treble and bass – means that it's relatively simple to dial up a sound that suits with very little trouble at all. We detected a very slight tendency towards a muddy midrange, but that might just be something that time and playing in will solve.

Verdict

There's no doubt that the 914ce is a good looking, sweet-sounding instrument and a worthy flagship for the Taylor line. The company has striven to coax as much tone out of the guitar as it can, even going to the inordinate length of recommending a very specific set of strings in order to do so (Elixir HD Lights). From what we hear, Taylor has succeeded on all counts, making the 914 both an object of desire and a guitar for all seasons. **G**



TAYLOR 914CE

PRICE: £4,439 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Grand Auditorium-size electro-acoustic

TOP: Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 117.4mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 406.4mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Gotoh 510

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, Ascension inlays, 381mm (15") radius

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with compensated Micarta saddle/57mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2 with volume, treble and bass shoulder-mounted controls

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.2/4.9

OPTIONS: Pickguard, 3-piece back, bone nut/saddle, nut width variations, Taylor tuners, Florentine cutaway, short scale neck, £POA

RANGE OPTIONS: Taylor's 900 Series includes the 916ce, 914e, 912e, 912ce & 912ce-N, 910e & 910ce

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same price

FINISH: Gloss polyester body, satin neck

Taylor Guitars

+31 (0) 20 667 6033

www.taylorguitars.com

8/10

PROS Stunning looks and the sweetest of voices – a premium guitar for premium players

CONS The amplified sound of the new ES2 system doesn't quite do justice to its acoustic virtues



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FIRST PLAY



**SUPRO 1648RT
SATURN REVERB**
£1,149

WHAT IS IT? New all-valve
15-watt combo design from the
revitalised Supro brand



**SUPRO 1650RT
ROYAL REVERB**
£1,249

WHAT IS IT? Another new design
with switchable power between
35 and 60 watts





Royal Rumble

Supro's vintage thunderbolt strikes again, but boutique tone tweaks make this pair of combos surprisingly progressive

Words Nick Guppy Photography Adam Gasson

The revitalised Supro brand continues to excite vintage enthusiasts all over the world, as Abasara Audio releases more products to tempt us with. Supro's heritage is one of the most coveted, associated with many blues legends, not to mention its associations with Jimi Hendrix prior to the Experience, and Jimmy Page, whose use of Supro amps and Danelectro guitars to record many early Led Zep tracks adds significant mojo to the badge. This issue, we're taking a look at the low-powered Saturn Reverb and the more powerful top-of-the-range Royal Reverb – a couple of new combos that aren't actually reissues, although they look just as vintage as the Coronado and Dual-Tone recently reviewed in *Guitarist*.

Designed with input from Fender Custom Shop legend Bruce Zinky – who was responsible for keeping the Supro brand alive before Absara – the Saturn and Royal amps both occupy the same-size compact combo cabinet, which is covered in traditional blue and silver 'rhino' vinyl with a silver sparkle grille cloth. Both amps are vintage-styled single-channel designs without modern amenities like effects loops or master volumes. There are controls for volume, bass and treble, speed and depth for the built-in tremolo circuit, and a level control for the built-in spring reverb.

The Royal has one extra control, in the shape of a three-way rectifier switch, which governs the output stage power and response. You can use the Royal with a 5U4G rectifier valve in cathode-biased class A mode for around

35 watts, grid-biased class AB for around 45 watts, or switch to silicon-rectified class AB operation for around 60 watts output. Amp nerds may remember this feature from its first appearance on the short-lived but highly coveted Fender Prosonic – another well-known Zinky design.

Apart from the Royal's silicon rectifier option, both Supros are pure valve designs, with nothing other than resistors and capacitors in the circuit. The small components are mostly held on a pair of very high-quality PCBs, with a smaller board for mains and standby switches. The preamp board holds the control panel knobs and three horizontally-mounted 12AX7s, while the output stage board's valve sockets face downwards. There's a good deal of wiring between these two boards, which all looks tough enough to handle any amount of live

stage work. It's also twisted to reduce hum and properly tied together to stop any handling noise. Overall, both Supros exude an air of tough reliability combined with retro cool.

Feel & Sounds

In common with all valve-rectified amps, the Supros need a few minutes to warm up properly before the voltages stabilise. Thanks to high-quality metal film resistors and orange drop capacitors, background hum and hiss is practically nonexistent, which makes either amplifier here ideal for low-volume home use and recording.

We picked a variety of different instruments to check out the Supros' sonic chops, including a '72 Les Paul Custom, a Fender Custom Shop Stratocaster, an old Strat powered with Duncan Alnico Pro IIs and an old PAF-loaded Les Paul Standard. The Saturn uses a pair

1. The Royal's switchable rectifier adds extra flexibility, as well as a huge clean sound in the silicon rectifier mode
2. The vintage-looking control panel is simple and easy to operate
3. The Royal's pair of custom 10-inch drivers add extra weight and significant volume, giving it a powerful clean sound
4. The silver-sparkle speaker grille and 'thunderbolt' logo are classic Supro styling touches





Thanks to high-quality metal film resistors and orange drop capacitors, hum and hiss is practically nonexistent



of 6973 valves in Class A mode, the classic Supro output stage, driving a single 12-inch Supro-branded loudspeaker. The Royal's power comes courtesy of a pair of 6L6s and two 10-inch drivers. With no preamp gain controls or master volumes, overdrive effects come from turning the amps up loud, and they're both very loud indeed. The Saturn's pair of valve-rectified 6973s generates around 15 watts, but when coupled to a very efficient modern loudspeaker, that's plenty for live gigs. The Royal is significantly louder, with lots of headroom in reserve for huge clean sounds when needed.

The overdrive on both amps is mostly output stage-generated and starts to happen at the halfway mark on the volume controls. The Saturn has the classic Supro tone, warm and sweet when played clean, with a subtle mid edge that sits roughly halfway between tweed and blackface tonality. It's very touch-sensitive with a distinctive bite when you dig in. The

Royal has a faster response and an edgier character, which is great for country picking. On its lowest power setting, the natural valve-rectified compression adds a nice bloom to clean and slightly overdriven tones, although we felt the overdrive was a touch too raspy. This amp favoured the darker, warm sounds of the '72 Les Paul Custom and Duncan-powered Strat, while the brighter tones of our old PAF-powered Les Paul and the Custom Shop 60s single coils worked best with the Saturn. Turn your guitar's volume control down, and both amps clean up nicely, with rich clean sounds and a sugar-sweet treble.

The reverb and tremolo effects work really well on both amps – a warm reverb tail with a long smooth decay, and a generally smooth tremolo. There's a noticeable difference in the tremolo's oscillation when you switch from valve to silicon rectifier on the Royal; it becomes more pronounced, with a harder edge. Used with the valve rectifier



5. The Saturn uses a single 12-inch loudspeaker, making it quite portable and ideal for small to medium gigs



Overdrive effects come from turning the amps up loud, and they're both very loud indeed

on either amp, the trem sounds are warmer and do a good job of evoking that vintage Americana vibe.

Verdict

Both amps are unmistakably Supro. It's hard to take that least definable amp characteristic – feel – and transfer it from the classic circuits of the 1960s into a brand new design, but Absara and Zinky have done a stellar job. Aimed mostly at vintage-amp purists, there are no modern concessions, but effects users will be pleasantly surprised at how good their pedalboards sound plugged into the front-panel input. Drive pedals work really well – we tried a few different ones from both ends of the price spectrum and were very impressed with the results. The prices are on the high side, but remember that these amps are USA-designed and made, with plenty of boutique credibility. We think they compare very favourably with the competition. If you want to relive the heady days of the 1960s, without the reliability worries of using 50-year old originals, the new Supros make perfect sense. **G**



SUPRO 1648RT SATURN REVERB

PRICE: £1,149
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp
OUTPUT: 15 watts RMS
VALVES: 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6973, 1x 5U4 rectifier
DIMENSIONS: 405 (h) x 600 (w) x 260mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 18/40
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x 12" Supro Custom
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Volume, bass, treble. Tremolo speed and depth, reverb level
FOOTSWITCH: Not supplied – 2-button footswitch toggles reverb and trem effects
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Spring reverb, valve-powered tremolo
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Supro range of combos currently includes the Royal Reverb (£1,249), Coronado (£1,129), 1x15 Thunderbolt (£999) also available with the rectifier switch (£1,089), Dual Tone (£999) and the Tremo-Verb (£1,099)

JHS
01132 865 381
www.suprousa.com

8/10

PROS A punchy low-powered combo with enough bite to handle small gigs

CONS The lower output means some of the clean definition is lost at higher volume



SUPRO 1650RT ROYAL REVERB

PRICE: £1,249
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp
OUTPUT: Switchable between 35/45/60watts RMS
VALVES: 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6L6, 1x 5U4 rectifier
DIMENSIONS: 405 (h) x 600 (w) x 260mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 30/65
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKER: 2x 10" Supro Custom
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Volume, bass, treble. Tremolo speed and depth, reverb level. 3-way power switch
FOOTSWITCH: Not supplied – 2-button footswitch toggles reverb and trem effects
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Spring reverb, valve-powered tremolo
OPTIONS: None

8/10

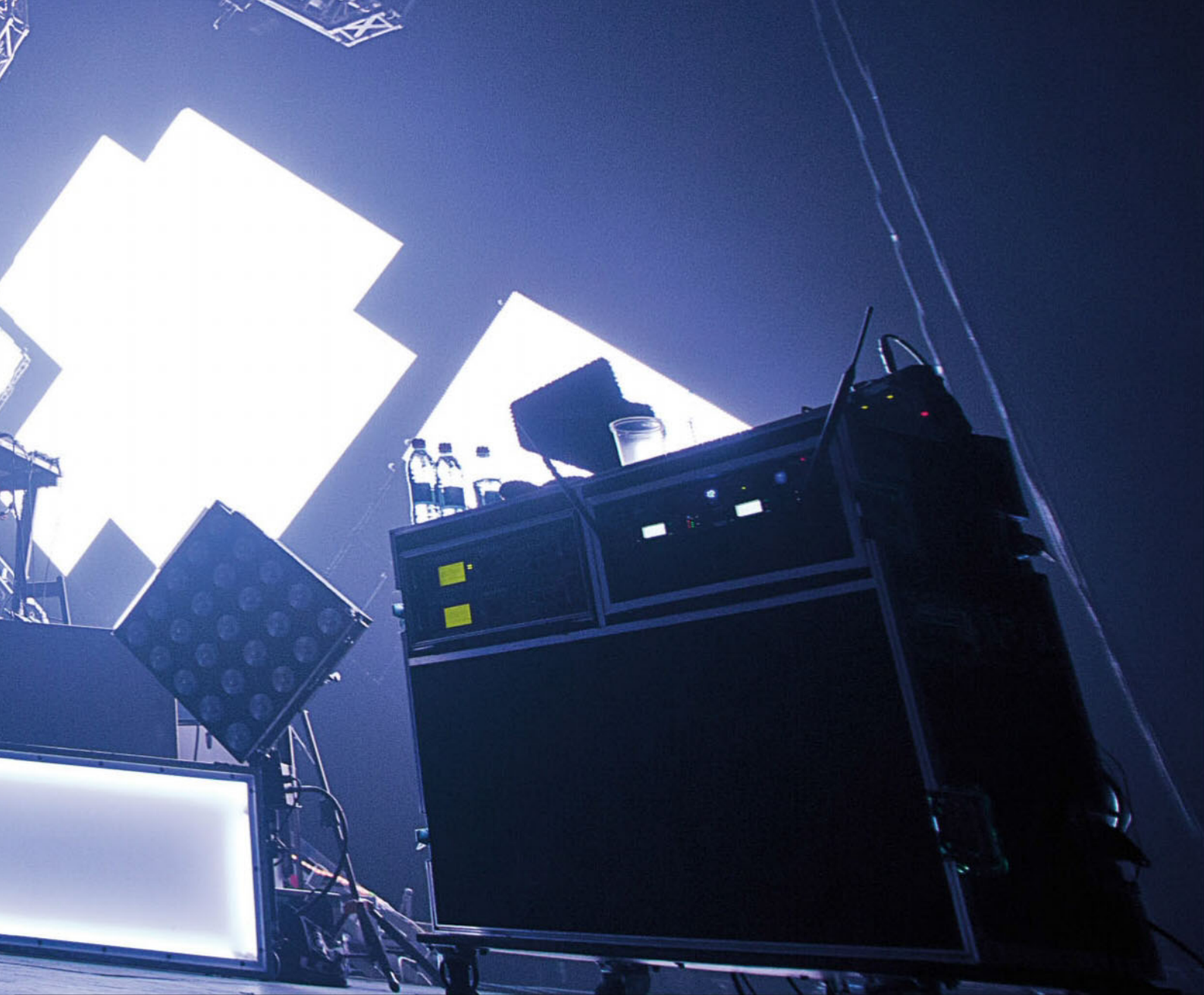
PROS A loud combo that provides a huge clean tone from a reasonably compact package

CONS It's heavy, and with just a single carry handle, it's not the easiest thing to cart around



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





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The Paul Brady Signature model



The Lineup

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



115 luthiers will be showing their wares at Berlin's Holy Grail Guitar Show

Holy Grail Guitar Show

31 October-1 November, Estrel Berlin, Germany

Subtitled 'Guitars: Bold As Love', the second Holy Grail Guitar Show is the brainchild of the European Guitar Builders Association, a collective of small builders from the continent. The show aims to promote the art and craft of handmade acoustic and electric guitars and basses through exhibits, demo concerts, lectures and seminars, with a stunning line-up of 115 luthiers from around the world taking part.

Guitarist spoke to Michael Spalt, president of the European Guitar Builders Association, to find out more...

How did the show come about, and what was its original aim?

"Several of the European luthiers who attended the 2011 Montreal Guitar Show felt there was a need for such a show in Europe. At the time, there was really no European venue dedicated to the handmade boutique builder – aside from the Musikmesse in Frankfurt there were a number of vintage and local shows, but nothing comparable to Montreal in terms of scope and focus. These discussions led to the formation of the European Guitar Builders Association, which is the organising body behind the Holy Grail

Guitar Show. What's special about the show is that it's entirely organised by luthiers, drawing on their combined experience gathered at literally hundreds of shows of all types and sizes."

What can potential visitors expect from the 2015 event?

"It'll be a place for 115 builders from all over the world to meet and present some of their most exciting and innovative instruments. There will be an expanded program of demo concerts, featuring great musicians playing the instruments on display, plus lectures and seminars. There's also the opportunity to meet some legendary builders, as well as to discover some exciting newcomers. Instruments can be tested in sound-proofed cabins on a variety of amps, and of course they can also be purchased! It will be two days of pure heaven for guitar lovers."

What were last year's highlights?

"What most visitors and exhibitors commented on was the great atmosphere at last year's show, which was very relaxed and friendly, as well as the number and variety of instruments on display."

What are you most looking forward to?

"There will be some new faces, along with some of the exhibitors from last year, for a new mix of attractions. The success of last year's show has piqued some of the luthiers' ambitions, and there will be some very special guitars on display as a result."

How would you persuade people from outside of Germany to make the trip?

"For any serious guitar lover, this will be the highlight of the year. The chance to meet some of the world's top builders, never before seen in Europe, along with the opportunity to try out their guitars, is one of the main attractions. As an international show, it offers a varied cast of builders from all corners for the globe, with many great discoveries waiting for the visitor. Berlin was chosen as a venue for its rich cultural vibe, and the affordability and accessibility it offers the visitor." **G**

The Holy Grail Guitar Show: Guitars Bold As Love

takes place in Estrel Berlin Hotel And Convention Center, Berlin, between 31 October and 1 November. Go to holygrailguitarshow.com for exhibitors and further info

What's Goin' On

All the best guitar events happening over the next few weeks, in one place

Prudential BluesFest London

6-8 November 2015, The O2, London

The blues headline at this three-day festival in November is the coming together of two of music's household names for the main event. Billed as 'Bring It On Home – An Evening With Tom Jones And Van Morrison', the concert will feature two solo sets by the greats of R&B and soul, with probable duets in each set, which – despite the pair having recorded together – will be the first time they've ever performed together in public.

The festival's line-up also features the Dave Matthews Band, the phenomenal Tedeschi Trucks Band (featuring the incredible slide skills of Derek Trucks, of course), Jo Harman, and *Guitarist* favourite, Brit blueser Matt Schofield. Head over to prudentialbluesfest.co.uk for more info, and www.livenation.co.uk to book tickets.

prudentialbluesfest.co.uk



See the Tedeschi Trucks Band at the O2 this November

Dave Davies

18 December
Islington Assembly Hall

Co-founder and guitarist of The Kinks Dave Davies is to play a rare gig in Islington in December. Tickets for the show are on sale now, and Dave will be joined by guitarist Jonathan Lea, bassist Tom Currier and drummer Dennis Diken of the Smithereens for a set of solo songs and Kinks classics.

www.alt-tickets.co.uk

Joe Bonamassa

30 October
Brighton Centre

Tickets are available for the extra date that Joe Bonamassa added to his UK tour. The gig is on 30 October, at the Brighton Centre; for ticket info, see jbonamassa.com/tour-dates or www.ticketmaster.co.uk.

www.jbonamassa.com

Jazz On A Summer's Day

28 August
DVD/CD release

Jazz fans should investigate the re-release of Bert Stern's 1958 Newport Jazz Festival doc. Entitled *Jazz On A Summer's Day*, the 1960 film has become a cult classic, and features Jimmy Giuffrè, Thelonius Monk, Louis Armstrong and Chuck Berry among many others.

The boxed set features an audio CD, the original film and a new making of documentary.

Rich Robinson

27 Sept-3 October

Various UK venues

Ex-Black Crowe Rich Robinson is touring the UK in autumn. He'll perform material from his three solo albums, including 2014's *The Ceaseless Sight*.

www.richrobinson.net

Robert Cray Band

October 3-16
Various UK venues

We urge you to catch the inimitable Robert Cray as he tours the UK in October, in support of his excellent 2014 album, *In My Soul*, a record that marked 40 years in the business for the multi Grammy Award-winning blues artist.

www.robertcray.com

The London Acoustic Guitar Show 2015

12-13 September
Olympia, London

A celebration of all things acoustic, the London Acoustic Guitar Show mixes masterclasses, clinics and live performances with exhibitors. Entry is £32.50 for an advance weekend ticket and £17.50 for a day pass.

www.londonacousticshow.com

Gary Clark Jr

16 November
Electric Ballroom, London

A rare chance to see new blues-rock sensation Gary Clark Jr in the UK, as he plays a one-night stand at Camden's Electric Ballroom. Clark Jr's fresh from supporting the likes of The Rolling Stones and Foo Fighters, making this one of the last times you'll catch him at a relatively intimate venue.

www.garyclarkjr.com

Glenn Hughes

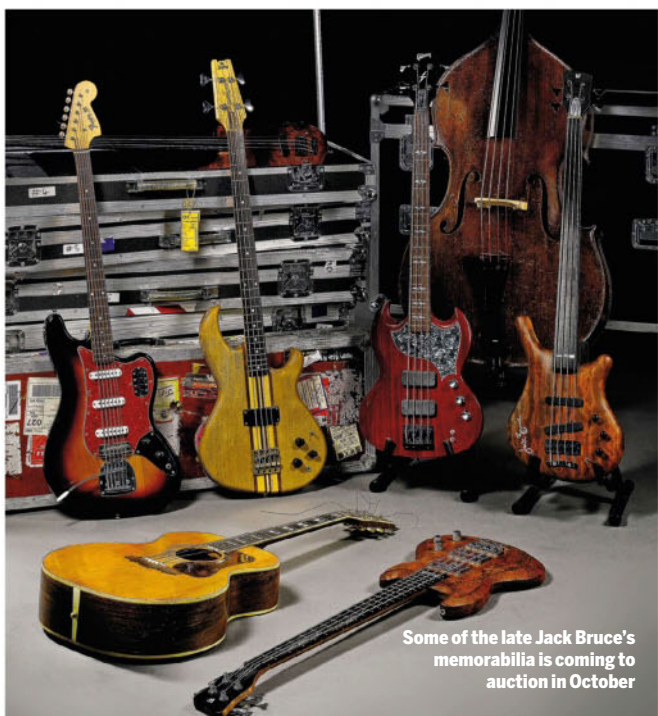
19 Oct-1 November
Various UK venues

Glenn Hughes is touring the UK in autumn with his solo show featuring Doug Aldrich. There's a bluesy bonus for fans, too, in the shape of rising star Jared James Nichols (interviewed on p52) in support.

www.glennhughes.com

The Players

News and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists



Some of the late Jack Bruce's memorabilia is coming to auction in October

Sunshine Of Your Love

24 October, Roundhouse

A concert celebrating the life and music of the late Jack Bruce, who died in October 2014, is set for 24 October at London's Roundhouse. The concert, on what would've been the ex-Cream bassist and vocalist's 72nd birthday, features Ginger Baker, Ian Anderson, Joss Stone, Phil Manzanera, Hugh Cornwell, Bernie Marsden, Vernon Reid, Uli Jon Roth and Jack's nephew Nico Bruce among others in its star-studded line-up.

Musical director Nitin Sawhney said: "I am very excited about the repertoire chosen by Jack's wife Margrit and his family. The show will consist of two halves, covering the broad range of Jack's solo work and his most classic gems with Cream."

Tickets are £37.50 to £45 from www.gigsandtours.com, and the concert is in aid of East Anglia Children's Hospices.

On 29 September, Sotheby's will auction 20 memorabilia items hand-picked by Jack Bruce, including bass guitars, clothes and musical manuscripts. See www.sothebys.com to view the lots.

Johnny Marr Autobiography

Book release, autumn 2016

Johnny Marr has revealed to the NME that he'll be releasing his first memoir in autumn 2016, via Century Publishing. "I take writing seriously, but I also want it to be entertaining, because I don't want to be too self-important or pompous," the guitarist said. Marr also hinted that he'd be releasing two new EPs later this year.

RIP Buddy Emmons

1937-2015

Steel-guitar legend Buddy Emmons passed away in July in Hermitage, near Nashville, aged 78. Emmons popularised the steel-guitar sound in genres such as country, jazz and Western swing and played with many of music's greatest stars, including Ray Charles, the Everly Brothers and Bob Dylan.

Keith Richards Album

Album release, 18 September

Keith Richards will release his first solo album since 1992's *Main Offender*, in September. Richards contributed guitar, vocals, bass and piano and co-wrote most of the 15 songs with producer Steve Jordan. X-Pensive Winos guitarist Waddy Wachtel and steel player Larry Campbell feature. See www.keithrichards.com for info.

Post-Morrison Doors Reissues

Album release, 2 September

Two out-of-print albums that were released by The Doors after Jim Morrison died are to be re-released in September this year. *Other Voices* and *Full Circle*, the band's seventh and eighth albums, were originally released in 1971 and 1972; the audio has been remastered by *Other Voices'* original producer, Bruce Botnick.

Blackmore's Rights

No smoke without fire?

The *Mail On Sunday* reports that former Deep Purple guitarist Ritchie Blackmore is locked in a legal battle for royalties from his time with the band. The paper claims Blackmore is suing two management companies for a share of Deep Purple's profits from 14 of the band's albums, including 1972's *Machine Head*, featuring *Smoke On The Water*.

Iommi Epiphone Signature

www.epiphone.com

Epiphone has officially announced a new limited edition Tony Iommi Signature SG Custom. 2,000 of the models will be made, each with Gibson USA pickups and the iconic cross inlays along the neck. Iommi also recently mentored contestants in the Sky Arts TV show, *Guitar Star*.

U2 Onstage Antics

www.u2.com

U2 have been varying their stage line-ups on their current *Innocence + Experience* tour of North America. The band invited a young fan named Stephanie onstage to play guitar on a couple of songs with the band, and also welcomed Canadian U2 tribute act Acrobat on for a tune – though it was the song *Desire* and not the far-more-suitable *Even Better Than The Real Thing* that they performed...

Glastonbury Reflections

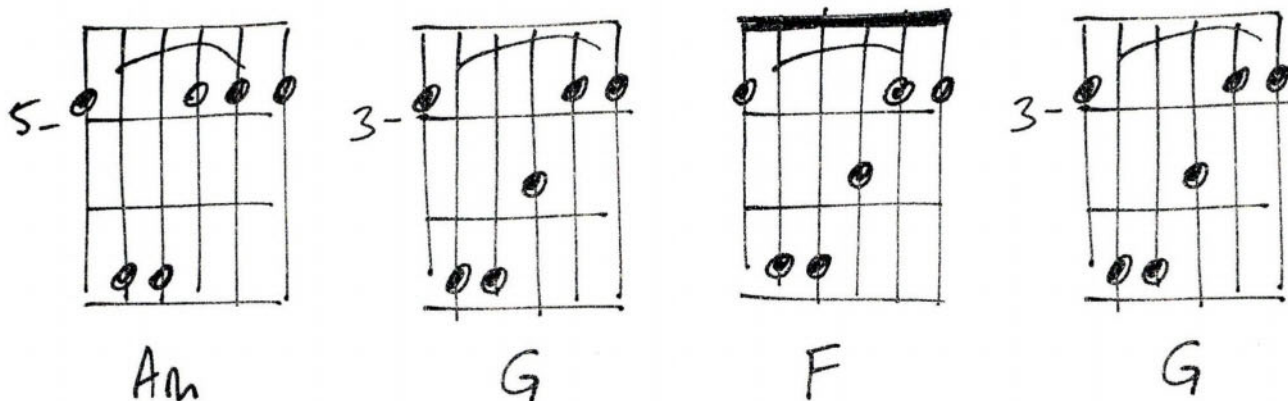
www.thewho.com

A blog post on The Who's website offered a 'review' of the band's experiences headlining Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage. Read all about rumours of sabotage, and the challenges posed by playing one of the world's biggest music festivals.

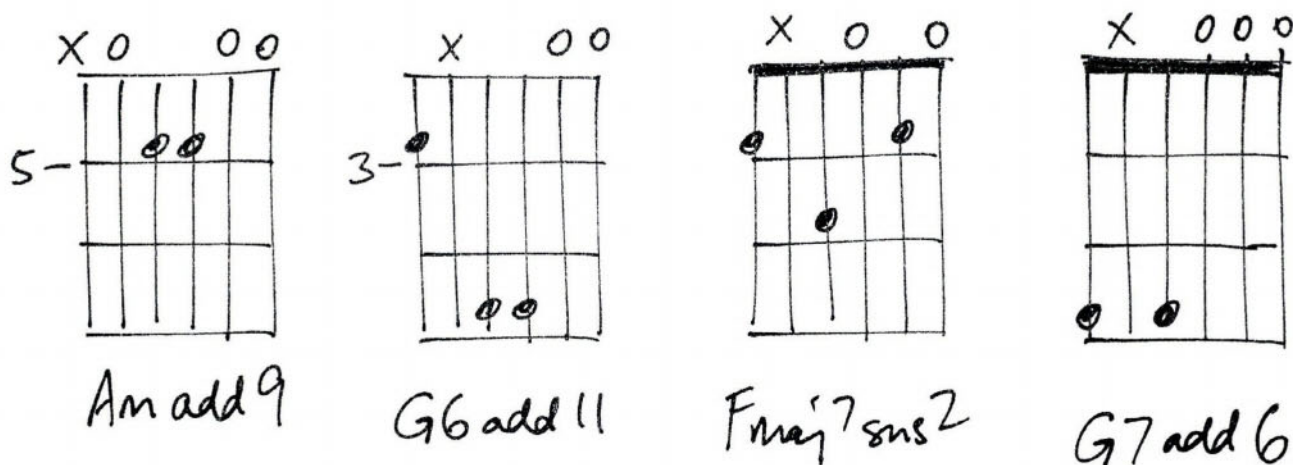
Substitute

This Issue: Stairway To Rapture

Welcome to the all-new expanded Substitute, where we'll aim to show you some of the thought processes involved with modifying chord progressions. Now, if ever there was a chord progression that's been overused, it must be that old descending minor-key figure under the solo in *Stairway To Heaven*. We've turned it into a kind of euphoric, spiritual jazz fusion with a touch of bossa nova!



ON the original, Jimmy Page mostly uses A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) the majority of the time. Over the F chord, he adds the F note from the natural minor, or Aeolian mode (A B C D E F G). You can do the same on these new chords, but do try being bolder with the Aeolian scale. Look at the notes in each chord and experiment with picking them out in your lead lines.



FIRST UP, let's add some shimmering open strings, creating this simple Am(add9). Ordinarily when soloing, the 9th (B) isn't a note you'd want to sit on, but it's in the chord, and it will give a pleasantly jazzy sound, so why not give it a go.

OKAY... we did just change the bass note of the previous chord. But that's a fun thing to try, not least because it provides the impression of a chord change, while also retaining continuity. Despite the similarity, the bass note makes it a clear G chord, so treat G as the strong root note now.

AGAIN, retaining that open E string as a kind of musical 'glue', the suspended 2nd in this chord means you can again make more of that note in your soloing (G). There's no reason why this chord has to have the sus2 instead of regular Fmaj7... it just sounded interesting to our ears.

RATHER than simply returning to the previous G chord, as on the original, here's something a bit closer to the F chord, with the same open E and G strings.

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THE TONE DIARIES

Crack Shot

In the first of a regular series of articles on cutting-edge tone-makers, we meet Adrian Thorpe, the Army explosives expert who has brought the rigour and precision of his military electronics training to bear on the problem of designing a drive pedal that sounds like a studio full of classic amps... *Words Jamie Dickson*

The history of effects pedals is littered with stompboxes that are flimsily constructed yet, against the odds, still sound great. We've seen cult-following fuzz pedals whose circuit boards are held in position with electrical tape, for example. But if it sounds good, should we care?

Adrian Thorpe, currently serving as a Major in the Army, thinks we should. Adrian is an explosives expert and in that dangerous field, unimpeachable build quality is essential. As well as being a keen guitarist in his spare time, Adrian is also the maker behind the Gunshot overdrive, which is currently winning plaudits for its stonking tone, hardcore build quality and progressive design.

Adrian says he got into building effects as a means to relax away from the stresses of active service. Curious by nature, he opened up a few so-called boutique pedals and was surprised by how indifferent the build quality could be, even if the pedal sounded good. It was, he says, a world of difference from the kind of electronics he was used to working with. "If you ever open up a missile or something like that, the things are immaculate," he says. "Everything is as minimal as it can possibly be and the reason is that they're all tested on vibration tables and they all go on aircraft and up to altitude... so the stresses on those electronic components are way over and above anything that guitarists would ever put their pedals through. But they look neat and they look purposeful. So that was really my inspiration.

"So I thought, if I build effects, I'll build them tidily. I'll make sure every cable run is short and I'll make sure I'm using the best cable possible, pre-bonded wire, and ask myself what are the best capacitors available? What are the best resistors available? My reasoning was, pedals are

all built from components with a certain tolerance and a certain specification. But if I ratchet down that tolerance, I'm going to end up with consistency of tone."

Inspired By Amps

After building pedals to this exacting standard for his own amusement, Adrian eventually decided to build an overdrive that other players could buy. He didn't make life easy for himself, though, setting a tricky brief for his first commercially available pedal, the Gunshot.

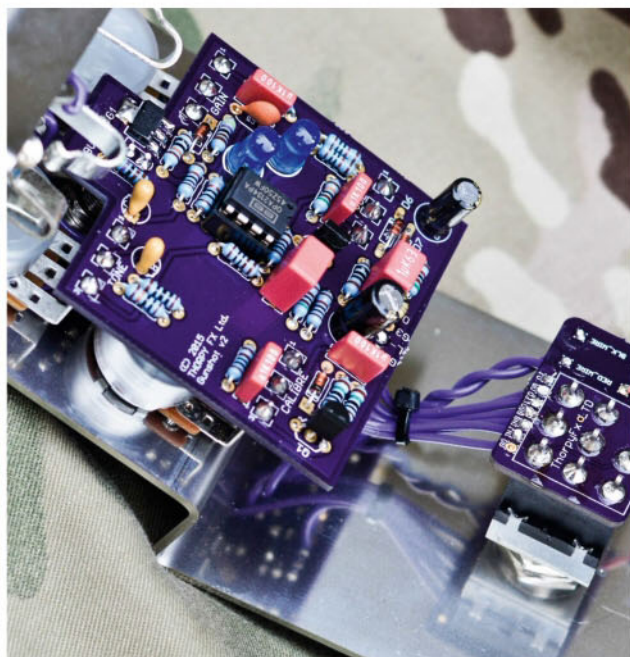
"Over the years of looking at boutique pedals and also building them, it became clear that what a lot of players were doing was stacking their pedals to get a certain drive sound – and the drive sound they were trying to achieve was that of a good valve amp, be it Marshall, Dumble, Fender, whatever. So what I tried to do with the Gunshot was to get a rich, saturated overdrive that was tweakable, so you can achieve many different drive tones from one pedal. But I didn't want it to be jack of all trades, master of none – I wanted it to sound good, fundamentally."

And it does. Plugging into the Gunshot immediately reveals it has a complexity and valve-like detail that is to lesser drives what HD video is to cine film, and it morphs chameleon-like from a woody growl to a savage but detailed overdrive with just the twist of a dial. It doesn't seem to get bloated and blown-out as gain is added, either, retaining bite and structure all the way up. What's the secret, we ask?

"Within the pedal, you've got a typical mid-hump overdrive. But running into the front end of the pedal you've also got a high-output drive section that is more treble- and bass-focused, with less 'mid-hump', so you can balance the two [halves of the drive structure]. Drive

"I didn't want it to be jack of all trades, master of none – I wanted it to sound good, fundamentally"





ABOVE The Gunshot Overdrive's components and build quality are impressively high-spec

BELOW The pedal delivers a range of tonal flavours by enabling you to blend two differently EQ'd drive sections using the Calibre control

characteristics are all very reliant upon how they are EQ'd, so the aim is to have two differently EQ'd drive sections that you can blend. And then you've got an infinite amount of possibilities to get the drive tone that you want," he explains, speaking of the pedal's Calibre dial that blends in the high and bass-oriented side of the pedal's sound. Because Calibre adjusts bias, it crackles slightly as you turn it, signalling the innovative approach Adrian's taken to tone shaping here. Because Adrian had already decided to build with very high-spec components, he says it wasn't necessary to raise the internal voltage – and thus headroom – with charge-pump circuitry of the kind found in pedals such as the Klon Centaur in order to retain clarity in the tone.

"The operational amplifier in the Gunshot is quite expensive," he says. "It's what you typically find in high-end audio. It's a brand called Burr-Brown: typically you pay pence for an op-amp, but these are in the order of pounds. But to be able to run that amount of gain within the pedal, I needed an op-amp that was as well made as it could possibly be. The Burr-Brown range is made to a very low tolerance, very low noise floor. And so it doesn't clip too early."

At £185, the Gunshot is, consequently, not a cheap unit. But building down to a price is not what Adrian was interested in, and he hopes some players will appreciate what he was trying to achieve in hand-building the pedal to military spec, if you will. It may not quite be a case of turning swords into ploughshares, but if you're interested in engineering at the upper end of what's possible to put on a 'board, Adrian's work is eminently worth a look. **G**

Look out for a full review of the Gunshot Overdrive in *Guitarist* soon. For more info, visit:

www.thorpyfx.com

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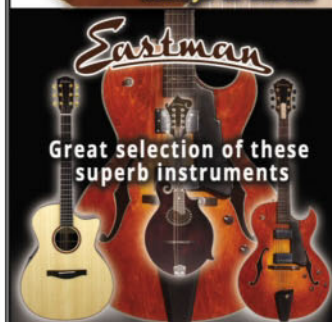
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Headroom

New gear, must-have accessories and fresh tech for guitarists

1 London Calling £399

Marshall has launched a new smartphone, called London, which it claims is "probably the loudest in the world". Resplendent in tolex-esque matte-black covering, the phone is designed for music lovers, and has dual front-facing speakers, a hi-fi grade soundcard, twin headphone outputs and a stereo mic for recording. London runs Android's Lollipop OS, and is available from late August.

marshallamps.com

2 Model Behaviour £138

Vox calls its new VX II modelling practice amp "an evolutionary step for modelling technology". It features 11 amp models (which use Vox's new component-modelling Virtual Element Technology), 10 classic effects, a sealed rear enclosure to enhance bass from its custom eight-inch speaker, and a USB out for recording.

www.voxamps.com

3 Jazz Icon £575

Roland is celebrating, too, with the JC-40 Jazz Chorus amp – a modern, compact iteration of its JC lineage that's now entering its 40th year. The 2x10 JC-40 offers stereo clean tone, and Roland's distinctive Dimensional Space Chorus effect along with updated vibrato, delay and reverb, all controllable by footswitch.

www.roland.co.uk

4 Good Floor-Tune \$699

Antares, the company behind the tuning technology in Peavey's AT-200 guitar, now has an Auto-Tune for Guitar multi-effects pedal – the ATG-1. Provided your guitar has a 13-pin output, the ATG-1 will ensure perfect tuning and intonation via Solid-Tune pitch monitoring, plus alternate tuning support and more.

www.autotuneforguitar.com

5 Boss To The Future £549

Boss's new SY-300 guitar synth, announced at Frankfurt's Musikmesse show, is now available in UK shops, offering latency-free polyphonic synth sounds from any guitar you care to plug into it. The SY-300 enables you to shape a normal guitar tone via LFOs, synth filters and amplifiers, and comes with 70 preset patches.

www.boss.info

6 Campfire Chords £2,799

Artist William Matthews designed this Western-themed Martin LE-Cowboy-2015, one of four limited-edition models on display at Summer NAMM. The 000-12 fret guitar has a Sitka top and gongalo alves back and sides, plus Martin's Vintage Tone System, and is only available throughout 2015.

www.martinguitar.com

7 Release The Kraken £829

Brit amp company Victory Amps has unveiled its latest compact head, the Kraken VX. Pitched at the high-gain hard-rock player, it delivers a molten 50 watts of power, which can be voiced for Brit rock and American styles via two footswitchable master-volume modes.

www.victoryamps.com

8 Devil Horns

Each year, luthier Cynosure creates a special instrument for August's Bloodstock Festival. Last year, he summoned forth the inverted-cruciform Infernus; this time round, his new creation, the cherry-wood RAM (Rock And Metal) Guitar, was inspired by an emblem that's a hybrid of human skull and ram horn.

See more details of his spectacular creations online.

www.cynosureguitars.com





THE MAN WHO DROVE A NAIL

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Martin Taylor

The jazz fingerstyle champion of the world confesses to an embarrassing past project and that he almost quit in the 80s as he takes on the 10 questions we ask everyone

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

"I started playing the guitar when I was about four years old. My dad brought home a Russian acoustic guitar that he bought on Petticoat Lane Market in the East End of London. It was a dreadful thing, a true instrument of torture. But despite the thick metal strings and impossibly high action, I just fell in love with playing the guitar immediately. I should have run a mile, but for some reason I didn't. I just kept on playing the guitar from that moment on, even when it made my fingers bleed."

2 Suppose the building were burning down – what one guitar from your collection would you choose to save?

"My guitar mentor was the great Ike Isaacs. Ike gave me his WG Barker guitar in 1977 for my 21st birthday. I played that guitar all through my Stéphane Grappelli years [1979 to 1990] and I used it on about 20 Grappelli recordings and numerous world tours. It's very special to me.

"But a close second is a 1958 Clifford Essex guitar that Val Doonican gave me many years ago. I used to watch Val on TV every Saturday night when I was a kid and dreamed of owning a guitar like Val's. Many years later, I appeared on a couple of his TV shows and we became friends. He really liked my playing, and gave me the guitar in appreciation... I guess I'd have to save two, sorry!"

3 What's the oldest guitar you own?

"I have a 1929 Martin 000-45, which is very rare and extremely collectable. In the mid 1990s, Steve Howe and I recorded the Scott Chinery Guitar Collection in the USA. At the end of the recording Scott gave Steve and me a guitar each as a little extra. He gave Steve a vintage Gibson – but I can't remember the details – and me the Martin. It's a very special guitar."

4 What plectrums do you use?

"I started out playing with a pick for the first 15 years, then switched to fingerstyle, but I play both techniques and am very comfortable and fluent in both now. The important thing for me with a pick is the sound, and I don't mind having to



work harder to achieve a good sound. I use Jim Dunlop Sculpted Plectra Primetone 1.5mm mandolin picks."

5 When was the last time you practised and what did you play?

"I've never been very good at practising. It's not something I enjoy; it's too solitary. I'm constantly working on ideas that I can play either on my shows or on recordings, but I tend to work them out in my head first for quite a long time before I actually pick up the guitar and physically play them. I practise a lot in my head when I take my dog for a walk, and recently I've been thinking of some new ideas, but they're not fully formulated yet."

6 When was the last time you changed your own strings?

"I changed strings on some of my guitars about a month ago because I was off the road for a while and had a spare couple of afternoons. I don't enjoy changing strings, but I find changing them in front of some mindless daytime TV with a cup of tea and a packet of Hobnobs makes the task easier. I don't like anyone to string my guitars for me. Like a lot of guitar players, I'm a bit OCD so it's all got to be done just right. Whenever I get a guitar back from a guitar builder or technician, I change the strings straight away because they don't have the right amount of turns on them. I prefer the way I do it."

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

"I made a double-CD many years ago for Woolworths – for their easy listening market. It was a selection of instrumental 80s pop songs played on acoustic guitar to a pre-recorded synth backing track. I agreed to do it on the one condition that under no circumstances would my name appear anywhere in the advertising or on the cover, and I even came up with a stage name for the project so I could remain totally anonymous.

"For reasons too complicated to go into here, my real name was put on the CD [*Acoustic Guitar Moods*, 1995. Sorry, Martin! – Ed]. However, they did get my bank account details correct, which was more than a fair trade for any embarrassment caused."

8 What are you doing five minutes before you go on stage and five minutes after?

"Having a pre-show pee and a post-show pee... I'm getting older!"

9 What's the worst thing that has happened to you on stage?

"I did a concert with Stéphane Grappelli, Michel Legrand and the London Symphony Orchestra, which was broadcast live on TV from the Royal Festival Hall, London. I had to sit right up front and play the opening introduction for Stéphane. I played the first three chords then my guitar lead cracked and died. I still sometimes wake up at 3am sobbing and screaming."

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

"In the mid 1980s I went through a very quiet patch and began to think seriously that maybe there wasn't a place within the music world that I could slot into. Fortunately, that quiet patch gave me time to start working on developing my solo style, and ironically turned out to be an amazing turning point in my life where I really found my own musical voice." [DM]

Martin Taylor is on tour in the UK during September 2015. For further information, visit www.martintaylor.com



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[†] Monitoring Report of the European
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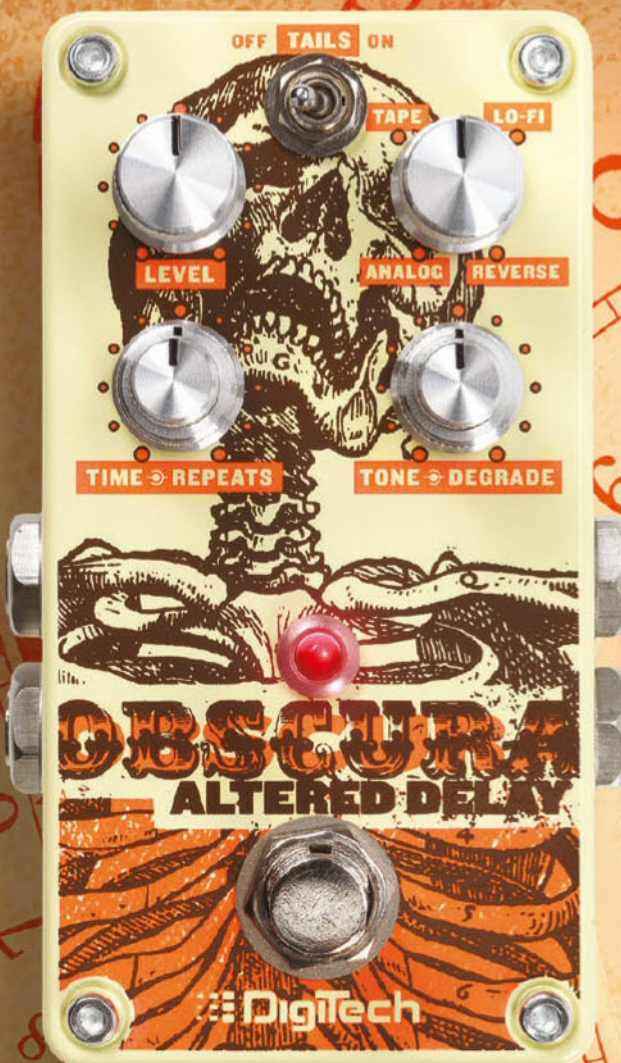
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Feedback

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

Star Letter



THAT SOUND IN YOUR HEAD

A lot has been written about the 'ultimate tone', the idea of this 'sound in your head'. You've written great articles on pickups, great clean tones, tone woods and lots of other stuff, but I have one concern in all this: my own hearing. It is acknowledged that age and body structure plays a significant part in the way we hear. This means that not one of us hears the same sound as another and unfortunately means that '59 Gibson LP may not seem as 'hot' to one player as the next.

Guitarists hear a significant amount of their lower frequency sound through bone structure, just as we do when we talk. The louder the gig, the more we feel the sound,

perhaps the very reason why gigging with a live band is so appealing? Higher frequencies are heard via the ears and, depending on how much you have played live and at what levels, will largely depend on which mix of frequencies you hear.

Younger players will typically hear higher registered notes more easily than say someone twice their age, and by the time you reach 55, this range could be somewhat diminished. What effect does this have on our choice of guitars, or even choice of notes?

When you're a bit older, just like me, and you have decided 'that ol' girl' doesn't sound quite as sweet as she used to and before you reach for the soldering iron, just ask yourself: is it me that's in need of a new pair of ears?

Perry Freeman, via email

It's an interesting point, Perry – as you say, it's receptivity to high frequencies that goes first as time goes by. The best advice we can give for guitarists worried about hearing loss is to get a set of professional in-ear attenuators from companies such as Read Audio or ACS Custom. These are pro-grade earplugs that prevent harmful levels of sound from hitting the sensitive parts of your inner ear, but – unlike cheap industrial earplugs – they're cleverly designed to allow you to hear music in its normal balance of frequencies, only a bit quieter. They're not cheap, and they have to be custom-fitted to suit your ears. But if you work or play in high sound-pressure environments, or even just go to a lot of gigs, they're a very good investment.

QUEASY DOES IT

Having purchased every copy since the famous '84 George Benson first issue, I think you might have finally done it! The planets have aligned as I think this is the best issue I have clapped eyes on. Guthrie and Larry plus the world's most emotive slide player, and love him or hate him but a great songwriter in Mr Hawkins. Great new music from Godsticks coming, a sexy small Laney and fab articles on Marshall and... at last, a Fender Strat review that is finally worth me reading, as the left-handed version is POA!

I am trying to savour this issue having completed the initial 'flick-through', as too much in one go may make me queasy. Before I run off to the sofa, requests for Michael Landau and Allan Holdsworth, as I know he is finally working on a sequel to *The Sixteen Men Of Tain*. Maybe catch young-gun legato maestros Tom Quayle and Jack Gardiner, too.

Pete Clark, via email

Many thanks indeed for the kind words, Pete – it means a lot to us. Put it this way, we've never been so pleased to hear the mag makes a reader sick! We'll be doing our best to get hold of Messrs Landau, Holdsworth, Quayle and Gardiner for future issues, but in the meantime, look out for an interview with fusion godfather John Etheridge in the next issue.

WRONG SCALE

Hi *Guitarist*, I read with interest the letter from David Carpenter (Feedback, issue 396) about the regret Nic James felt when he sold a cherished Les Paul – then later regretted the sale. I had a similar problem with both Strats and Teles over the years.

I absolutely love both Strats and Teles: the way they look, that they are both works of art and yet very functional, that they come in so many fantastic colours. The Strat was the guitar I lusted after when all I could afford was a second-hand Watkins Rapier. I can't walk into a guitar shop without buying one or the other, so I avoid eye contact with them if at all possible. And yet for all this desire and longing, I can't play the damned things!

It's the scale length: why is everything on the neck so far away? Why are simple chords on an LP a stretch on a Strat or Tele? So each



KORG

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One Ikea shelf, handily repurposed into Tim's new 'board!

time I bought one, I sold it and sloped off back to my Man Cave to ruminate and sulk. Then one day, eureka! On the Warmoth website I spotted a short-scale compensated neck for a Strat, and at last my endless search for the perfect guitar was over.

As soon as the new neck arrived, I fitted it and got straight to playing, it couldn't have been easier. Rhythm, lead, blues, rock, some strange jazzy stuff, all flowed from my fingertips as the floodgates opened. Anyway, a couple of weeks later I sold it, so maybe it wasn't the scale length after all...

Mike Dawes, via email

Thanks, Mike, we feel your pain. We like your solution of changing the neck, however! Perhaps you should try something like the short-ish scale PRS P245 some time, reviewed on p8.

GOOD IKEA

Hi guys, thought you might be interested in this discovery I made when a leftover shelf made it into the same room as my guitar gear. There are plenty of pedalboards out there, but here's one which you need no tools to make and potentially only £4.90 for an Ikea Ribba picture ledge, plus some Velcro tape. **1.** Turn shelf upside down and apply Velcro tape along its flat side; **2.** Put tape on pedals and then pedals on 'board'; **3.** Repeat for power supply (the Diago happens to be perfect size for back edge); **4.** Spend money saved on another pedal! The resulting board is at an ergonomic angle for using and

viewing pedals (coincidentally, it's the same angle as a Laney footswitch fascia), and there's a handy gap underneath made by the shelf. At 55cm wide, it fits six standard-size pedals using pancake-style patch cables – more if some are mini. It would be great for a suite of mini-pedals as it's the perfect height for the TC Ditto, for example.

Obviously, it's no Pedaltrain, but does the job on a budget. I hope it's useful to others.

Tim Clear, via email

Nice idea, Tim – thanks for sharing. Did you really measure the angle of a Laney footswitch fascia? If so, we marvel at your thoroughness, sir.

YET TO MAKE ITS MARK

I read with interest David Carpenter's letter regarding bonding with a new guitar (Feedback, issue 396). I turned 60 this year and my mum passed away three months prior to my birthday. My wife asked if there was anything I'd like to mark the two events, so having played almost continuously in bands since my teens, the current one for well over 20 years, I said: "I think a new guitar, love." I felt this would really be fitting as my mum and late dad had encouraged me selflessly through those annoyingly noisy bedroom-practice years. So I did just what David suggested. I went to a store out of town instead of making an online purchase, I played so many guitars I lost track of which I'd liked, but eventually reduced the pick to a Rickenbacker or a PRS Tremonti singlecut.

I eventually plumped for the Tremonti. The varnished neck of the Ricky didn't really suit. Now, I know they are chalk-and-cheese as guitars go and I already had a Custom 24, but I really enjoyed the whole process of spending hours in the shop with a great sales guy called Joey who helped no end. But now I find that I just don't pick up the new investment. I desperately hope that eventually I do bond with it, because every week when it comes to rehearsal or gig, I just turn to my old PRS or my Tele or Gordon Smith, and think, "Maybe I'll take the Tremonti next week." It's undoubtedly a superb guitar and looks stunning, but just what makes you bond with a new instrument? I'd love to think it's a big candle and a photo – but as yet it's not quite done the trick.

Paul Squires, via email

Thanks for the letter, Paul. You have two options here, really. First, you could sell the Tremonti and then hold onto the money until you find a guitar you really gel with. If you can be patient, we guarantee that one day you'll drop into a guitar shop and happen upon 'the one'. Alternatively, you could always just keep the PRS but don't put yourself under any pressure to play it. As time goes by and you get involved in different musical projects, you may find that it comes into its own in a role you can't currently foresee – and if that does happen, you'll love it for solid, practical reasons, not simply because you feel like you should.

Send your letters to: guitarist@futurenet.com

We Have A Winner...



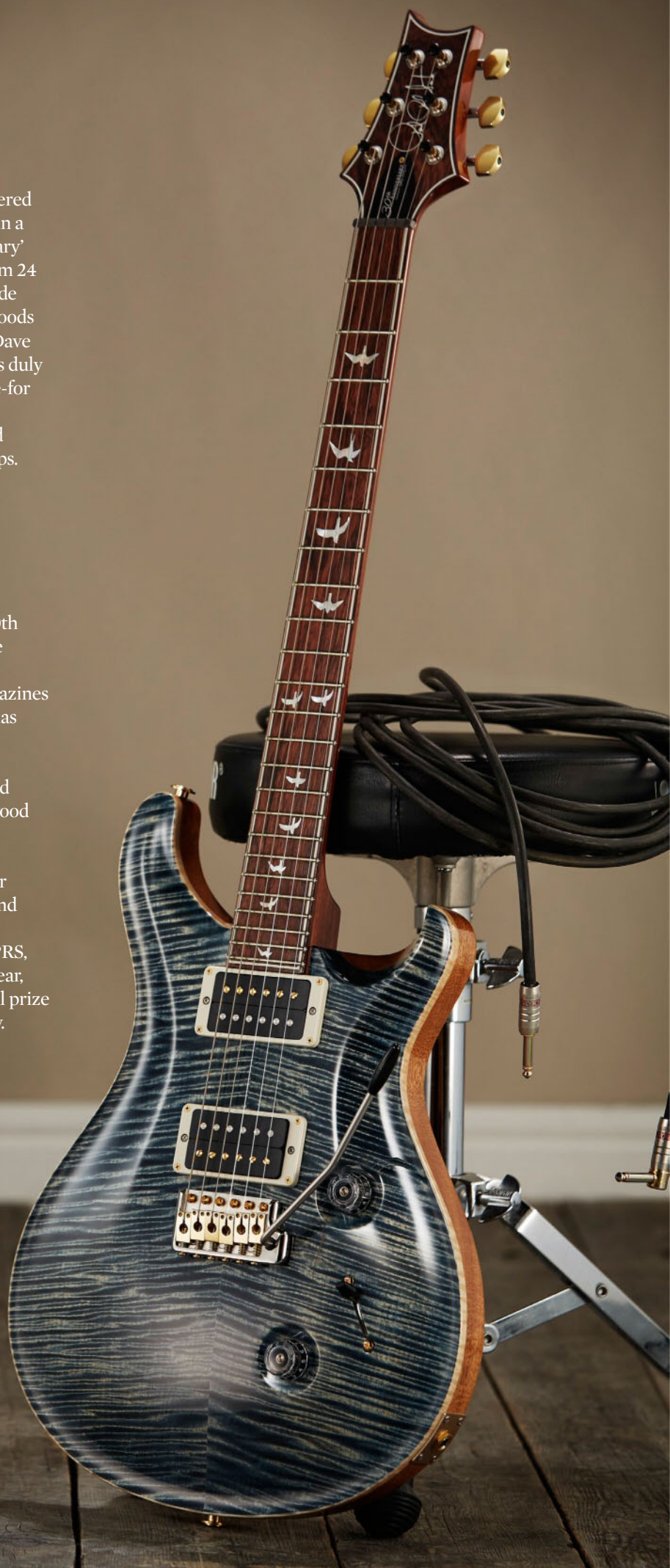
Back in issue 391, we offered readers the chance to win a unique PRS 'Wood Library' 30th Anniversary Custom 24 worth a cool £4,500, made from exceptional tonewoods selected by gear editor Dave Burrluck. The guitar was dully built and featured to-die-for

appointments such as Honduran mahogany fingerboard and headstock facing, hand-picked '10' top, flame mahogany back and 85/15 pickups.

We're happy to report that our eventual winner, Dag Sonstebo of Glasgow, was gobsmacked when we let him know the happy news, emailing back to say he was "absolutely speechless" at the win. Having got hold of his prize, he had this to report of his new guitar:

"Thanks a lot to *Guitarist* magazine for the 30th Anniversary PRS Custom 24 competition prize guitar. I've wanted a PRS ever since the iconic bird-inlay guitars started appearing in the magazines in the late 80s/early 90s and now the guitar has arrived, it doesn't disappoint. Absolutely lovely guitar, which looks as good as it sounds. The flamed maple top is gorgeous, a piece of art, and the pearl bird inlays and bindings on the rosewood fretboard look great. Top quality hardware all around sets it all off. I really like the thin wide neck it's lovely to play. As expected, the guitar sounds brilliant very versatile, classic tones and great resonance. All in all a great piece of kit."

It only remains for us to give a thank you to PRS, which is celebrating 30 years in business this year, for offering *Guitarist* readers a truly exceptional prize that is also a little slice of guitar-making history.



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The Book Of Souls (Sanctuary)

7/10



Maiden go for the double in 90 minutes on their 16th album

Maiden's decision to release their first double studio album isn't so surprising in context. 2010's *The Final Frontier* clocked in at 74 minutes and Maiden have always flirted with ambitious themes, alongside the direct and anthemic. It turns out this is actually a more accessible, immediate listen compared with its predecessor, but there's still a lot to digest with five songwriters in the 90-minute mix.

The band have a method of working quickly with producer Kevin Shirley (who has manned the desk with founder Steve Harris since 2000's comeback, *Brave New World*) and it reflects in the live feel here, but they've chosen not to rehearse the songs before recording for the first time.

For Harris's 13 minute-plus *The Red And The Black*, this results in meandering, though the solo turns from Adrian Smith, Janick Gers and Dave Murray feel more improvisational than ever (a recurring vibe

on this album). Murray's maudlin *The Man Of Sorrow* also sounds like a set of ideas without an arc to connect them. Thankfully, these are exceptions.

It's Smith's songwriting contributions that emerge as the key. With vocalist Bruce Dickinson, he's behind the two most immediate songs, recalling the spirit of past classics. *Speed Of Light* burns with the Celtic fire of Smith's heroes Thin Lizzy. *Death Or Glory* boasts a *Flight Of Icarus*-feel to its ringing chorus powerchords and vintage Smith/Dickinson vocal harmonies. Teaming with Harris on the pacey *When The River Runs Deep* unleashes the album's battle cry, complete with an extended three-tiered solo section.

18-minute closer, *Empire Of The Clouds*, finds the band entering new orchestral territory, but the real heart in *The Book Of Souls* is Maiden embracing classic traits and underlining their well-earned national-treasure status. **[DH]**

Download: *When The River Runs Deep*

For fans of: Judas Priest, Thin Lizzy

Malted Milk & Toni Green

Milk & Green

Nueva Onda

7/10



R&B gets lowdown and funky...

'Rhythm and blues' is a musical genre that has suffered a redefinition in recent years, having been claimed by artists that bear little or no resemblance to the original 1960s acts who operated under its banner. As far as Malted Milk and Toni Green are concerned, though, things might be set to change. This album celebrates the funkier side of R&B with a winning formula comprising Malted Milk – a band capable of sitting in a groove for days – and a singer, Toni Green, who cut her teeth singing with Isaac Hayes, Betty Wright and Millie Jackson. If you think that sounds like a winning formula, you'd be spot on. And is it funky? Damn right! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Slipped, Tripped And Fell In Love*

For fans of: Al Green, Ann Peebles

Joe Bonamassa

Live At Radio City Music Hall

Provogue/Mascot

8/10



Iconic venue levelled by super-powered blues hero!

We don't know if Joe Bonamassa is striking out for the world record for live album and DVD releases, but it's tempting to think that he might be. This time around, the fiery bluesman is to be found playing at The Rockefeller Center in New York, a venue that has a personal allure for Joe as this is where his father would take him as a youngster and it has remained on his list of 'must-play' sites in which to unleash a little blues fury. The full package comes with a DVD or Blu-ray – alas we have only the audio – but JB's scorching guitar holds centre stage throughout as he rampages through acoustic and electric sets that are sure to delight blueshounds everywhere. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Happier Times*

For fans of: Eric Clapton, Gary Moore

Tommy Emmanuel

It's Never Too Late

Thirty Tigers

9/10



Solo acoustic guitar from the hands of a master

In many ways, this could end up being the definitive album from acoustic superstar Tommy Emmanuel. Where many of his previous releases have featured a rhythm section plus

guest artists, *It's Never Too Late* is totally solo. In fact, much of it was recorded in the intimate surroundings of the producer's living room and it represents some of the finest acoustic guitar playing you're likely to find anywhere on the planet. From the simple eloquence of tracks like *Hellos And Goodbyes* to the all-out frenzy of *The Bug* and *El Vaquero*, these are chops that have taken a lifetime to polish and temper – and the music world is a better place for it. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Miyazaki's Dream*

For fans of: Chet Atkins, Jerry Reed

The London Souls

Here Come The Girls

Round Hill Records

8/10



Revivalist band sporting a few subtle musical twists

Every so often, a band comes along that's infuriatingly difficult to categorise. Such a band is The London Souls, a duo comprising guitarist and singer Tash Neal and drummer Chris St Hilaire who have managed to decant the very best of 60s and 70s British rock and pop and fused it into something captivatingly original. You'll detect elements of The Beatles, Traffic, Marc Bolan and Led Zeppelin, among others, although, enigmatically, the duo hails from New York. We get the impression that the real fireworks begin when they play live – and YouTube has all the evidence. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Isabel*

For fans of: Small Faces, The Spencer Davis Group

Richard Hawley

Hollow Meadows

Parlophone

7/10



Finely crafted pop pressé

Hollow Meadows is Richard Hawley's eighth studio solo album and one that marks a return to the ex-Pulp guitar man's classic up close and personal songwriting style. Recorded at Sheffield's Yellow Arch Studios earlier this year, the songs actually began their journey to completion in Richard's garden shed, nicknamed 'Disgraceland'. As such, by the time he hit the studios to press record, the material was fully formed and ready to go. This feeling of completeness certainly comes across on the album as songs dealing with the Hawley heartland of relationships and coming to terms with the passing of years meddle with your emotions and leave you yearning. Listen out for a guest appearance by folk virtuoso Martin Simpson. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Serenade Of Blue*

For fans of: Pulp, Lou Reed

Led Zeppelin

Presence

Atlantic

9/10



Days of thunder revisited!

Probably the best of the final set of remastered reissues – the others being the rather tame *In Through The Out Door* and

the contract-filler epitaph *Coda* – *Presence* finds Zeppelin in all their riffmongous glory. Recorded under duress – with Robert Plant in a wheelchair after a serious car crash – the band blasts their way through seven tracks from the epic *Achilles Last Stand* to the smoky blues of *Tea For One* in all their rejuvenated glory. Jimmy Page has done an excellent job of bringing out every punchy nuance that resided in the original tapes and served up a companion disc of five alternate versions of selected tracks along the way. Their glory is unfaded and their strength undiminished! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Nobody's Fault But Mine*

For fans of: Deep Purple, Robert Plant

Dave Rawlings Machine

Nashville Obsolete

Acony

7/10



Bluegrass finesse from a renowned sideman and songsmith

Dave Rawlings is best known as a producer and long-time musical partner to the bluegrass singer Gillian Welch. His previous solo album, *Friend Of A Friend*, was released in 2009 and so fans have been waiting a long time for *Nashville Obsolete* to appear on the shelves. The end result is a collection of finely crafted songs that follow the country road fairly faithfully, although we had to check the label when we heard the first track – *The Weekend* – because it sounds like Neil Young had come along for the ride! The rest of the album features a range of instrumentation of the acoustic variety, including Rawling's own 1935 Epiphone Olympic that's accompanied by mandolin, fiddle, bass and drums. Sometimes mesmerising, but always enchanting. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Bodysnatchers Lament*

For fans of: Gillian Welch, Robyn Hitchcock, Ryan Adams

Joel Hoekstra's 13

Dying To Live

Frontiers Records

6/10



Whitesnake's guitar man goes solo

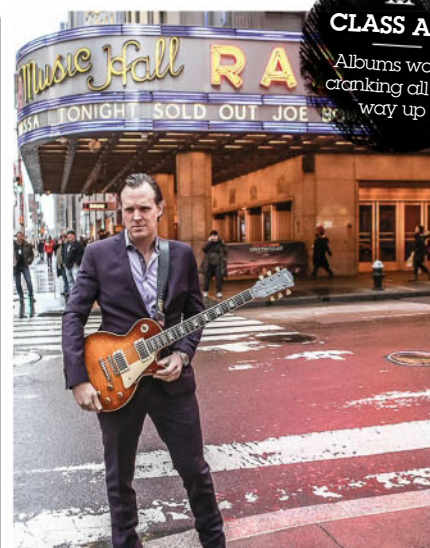
What happens when Whitesnake's axeman, Joel Hoekstra, employs the talents of Jeff Scott Soto (Journey, Yngwie Malmsteen), Vinny Appice (Black Sabbath, Dio) and Russell Allen (Adrenaline Mob, Symphony X) plus a host of other similarly qualified metalheads and makes an album of uncompromising melodic rock? The answers are all here on *Dying To Live*, an album that was already on the drawing board before Hoekstra joined Coverdale's celebrated band. As you might expect from the line-up above, the music homes in on the hard-rock heartland and follows the established course that has set generations head-banging since the dawn of time. Testosterone-tinged lyrics with some seriously furious guitar playing from Joel add up to hurricane-force rawk intensity! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Long For The Days*

For fans of: Whitesnake, Dio

CLASS ACT

Albums worth cranking all the way up



© CHRISTIE GOODMAN

Hugh Cornwell

The Fall And Rise Of Hugh Cornwell

Invisible Hands Music

7/10



Stranglers man releases a solo anthology

It's almost unbelievable that 25 years have elapsed since Hugh Cornwell left The Stranglers, but after releasing six albums, the time is quite possibly ripe for an anthology of his solo work. Diehard fans will probably own most, if not all, of the songs featured here, but Hugh has good-naturedly added a new track recorded this year, entitled *Live It And Breathe It*. The material is only a few streets away from the punky pop of The Stranglers, and it retains much of the hooky appeal of songs such as *Golden Brown* and *Peaches* but with perhaps less sleaze than was apparent in the latter. Watch out for an acoustic tour later on in the year. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Under Her Spell*

For fans of: The Stranglers, The Clash

The Robert Cray Band

4 Nights Of 40 Years Live

Provogue

8/10



Live outing from a blues original

This live set from multi-Grammy Award winner Robert Cray was captured recently over four nights at different venues in LA and catalogues the illustrious 40 year career of one of the world's top blues acts. The material spans Cray's 20-album output and includes sizzling versions of fan favourites such as *Bad Influence*, as well as blues standards like *Sittin' On Top Of The World*, with some truly masterful Strat fretwork throughout. The album package is available in vinyl, CD and digital download, plus a bonus CD featuring additional live tracks and rare archive live performances from the 1980s. If that wasn't enough, there's also a DVD/Blu-ray that contains all concert material and backstage footage. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Right Next Door (Because Of Me)*

For fans of: Eric Clapton, BB King



Dominic Miller

Sting's strings man talks about the perils of night-driving across continents – along with a highly unusual introduction to Burt Bacharach

Words

David Mead



What was your first ever gig?

"I was 15 years old, in Racine, Wisconsin, with a band called The Love Expressions, which was a soul band I joined at school. We played in a club and I was the only white person, not only in the band but in the whole fucking building. It was just a covers band, but it was a great experience and I really enjoyed it."

Describe your current stage rig...

"Two Mesa Lone Stars with 2x12 Mesa cabinets underneath them. I have a Dunlop wah and an Ernie Ball volume pedal, then there's the Line 6 delay – the little one, not the big green one. I also have the classic Boss Delay and the old mono Boss Chorus pedal – instant David Gilmour. There's a Boss Flanger, the Boss Tremolo/Pan, an A/DA Flanger and I have the choice between grunge pedals, depending on the stage. So I have either the Maxon OD-808 or the Ibanez TS-808 – basically, they're the same pedal – plus a Boss Super Phaser and Boss Compression Sustainer, which helps me control everything."

What piece of gear is most essential to your live sound?

"My 1961 Strat. I've got a replica one – a fake old one – and it's gorgeous and everything, but it doesn't sound anything like it. When

you're playing the '61 acoustically, it kind of shimmers in a way the new ones don't. It's a bit unreliable with the tuning, but it's got that glassy Strat thing I can't hear anywhere else. I've also got the Les Paul, too, but it depends on my mood: if I'm feeling rocky, then I'm going to go with the 1972 Les Paul Custom, which is like picking up a piano, it's so heavy."

What's the nearest you've come to a Spinal Tap moment on tour?

"We were opening for The Grateful Dead in Las Vegas Stadium. We went backstage just before going on and we've got our crisps, the guacamole with the cellophane on the top and there's some geezer in our dressing room just helping himself. I'm thinking, 'What the fuck?' We've got to go on in five minutes and who's this wanker helping himself to our gear? So I said, 'Excuse me, mate. Are you in the music business or something?' and there was silence. I saw Sting walking towards me like I'd done something really, really terrible and he came up to me and said, 'Dominic, meet Burt Bacharach...'"

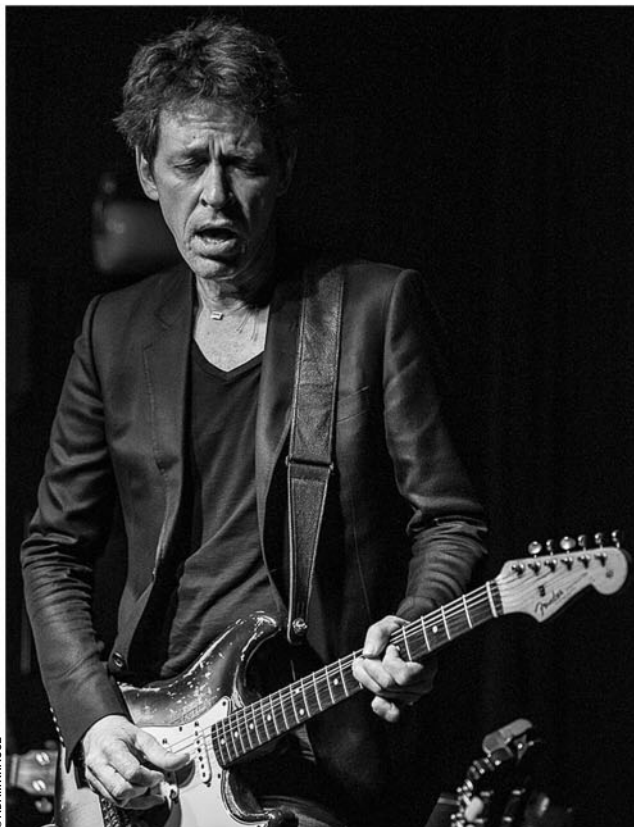
What's the best venue you've played in, from a musician's point of view?

"In the UK, I would say The Albert Hall. I get the feeling that everyone's right there with

you: people are behind you, next to you, almost on the stage. It's not a great sound, but I just love the feeling of playing in a sphere and the history of it and the fact that it's in London, a home gig. A lot of my favourite bands played there and just the feeling of being in an old Victorian building – I've had some wonderful nights there."

What's the worst journey you've had, either to or from a gig?

"It wasn't a journey to gig, it was actually a journey to a music video I did with this guy called Vlado Georgiev who is a Serbian pop star. I was doing a gig with Sting in Thessalonica in Greece and Vlado wanted me to come to Belgrade to do his video. I said, 'I can't do it, mate. I'm doing a gig in Thessalonica and then we're going somewhere else.' But he said, 'No, Dominic, you must come!' There were no flights or anything and so I said that it was a no-can-do. To cut a very long story short, he said, 'I send driver.' He said they'd pick me up after the show and so the band's left, and I'm standing there with my guitar and my carry-on, and it turned out that I had to drive through the night across three different countries with three different drivers to get to Belgrade. That was quite a journey."



© ADAM KRAUSE

ABOVE Dominic alternates between his 1961 Strat and 1972 Les Paul Custom

“I had to drive through the night across three different countries with three different drivers to get to Belgrade”

What’s your best tip for getting the audience on your side?

“Just be honest: that’s the number-one thing. The way I look at it is, it’s a bit like going on a dinner date with somebody you don’t know that well. There will be awkward moments, but eventually, what you want is to make that connection. So you don’t want to be too confident, because that doesn’t look good to the other side. There’s got to be some humility or vulnerability as well – just show them who you really are, and it’s cool.”

What do you do to warm up?

“I just do chromatic exercises in 5ths or octaves and still, after all these years, I play Bach – slowly. I just want to be in control of the instrument instead of the instrument being in charge of me. I’m very lucky, because I watch the best people in the world practise, like Vinnie [Colaiuta]. It’s a beautiful thing to witness, because he starts slowly and methodically, and I’ve learnt from that. It’s like Tai Chi or musical yoga: I just like to do things slowly and purposefully and purely, and then I can go on stage feeling that I’m in sync with my instrument.”

What’s your favourite live album?

“*Made In Japan*, Deep Purple, end of. I’m not a big fan of live albums generally, which is why I’ve never done one, because I think you really have to be there at the gig to experience it. But with *Made In Japan*, you really feel that you’re there and it’s the best version of *Smoke On The Water* ever recorded.” **G**



A remastered version of Dominic Miller’s first solo album, *First Touch*, is out now.

www.dominicmiller.com



“One of the finest guitar straps in the world”

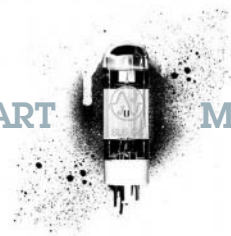
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JARED JAMES NICHOLS

New and notable guitarists you need to hear

Who Is He?

Born and raised in Wisconsin, Jared James Nichols started playing when he was about 14 years old. At a time when some of his friends were getting into playing sports, music caught the embryonic bluesman's attention. He didn't want to play soccer or football, but there was just something about the music he began hearing that started to have the effect of a siren's call...

"I wanted to play drums, but for some reason, I heard guitar players and went, 'You're not playing that riff right; it doesn't sound like that, let me try!'. Then, all of a sudden, I got hooked and I was like, 'Hey, I kinda like this.'"

Who Has He Listened To?

As far as influences are concerned, Jared says that he was attracted to all the riff-rock bands such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, with a side helping of classic 70s prog fare, including Pink Floyd. Later on, he encountered the playing of Jimi Hendrix, and shortly afterwards, his musical world changed. "The bridge broke for me when I heard Stevie Ray Vaughan play. Then I understood that he was doing more than just playing the guitar; there was a connection that I could feel, and it got really exciting for me then."

Why Do You Need To Hear Him?

Jared's playing is all about fire and passion, with critics citing him as a natural torch-bearer for the blues. Now aged just 25, as a youngster he was a prodigy, playing his first gig only a week and a half after he first picked up an instrument.

"My friends were saying, 'We have a battle of the bands – are you ready?' And, of course, I wasn't, but I said, 'Yeah, yeah – let's go, guys!' I knew I wanted to be a professional musician probably when I was 16 or 17 years old, when I began to play around the area and I started to see people's reactions and I figured out how much fun it was to play live."

What's So Great About His Playing?

Back in April of this year, Jared was invited to play on stage with Southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd at an arena gig in Germany – testament to the impact he's having on the blues scene at present. Skynyrd's offer came



"Gary Rossington came up to me and said, 'Man, you've got to come jam with us – come up and play Sweet Home Alabama!'"

after Jared's band had supported them on some tour dates in Europe.

"On the last show at Germany's MHP Arena, Gary [Rossington] came up to me and said, 'Man, you've got to come jam with us – come up and play *Sweet Home Alabama!*' To play in an arena in front of 8,000 people and hear them screaming, it was like, 'Oh my God, where am I?; y'know? It was one of those experiences that I'll never forget."

What Gear Does He Use?

Intrigued by the tone that SRV and Hendrix were achieving, Jared's first choice of guitar was a Fender Strat. After a brief flirtation with Gibson Flying Vs, he moved on to Les Pauls, eventually settling for a Custom with a single P-90 in the bridge – a kind of tribute to Mountain's Les Paul Junior-toting Leslie West, whose playing, Jared insists, is criminally underrated. As far as amplification is concerned, it's Blackstar 50s all the way with no pedals on the floor at all.

Opting to play without a pick, he says that he prefers to coax the tone from his guitar just using his fingers. "I prefer to just plug straight in. For a while, I was doing what everyone was doing and using pedals and trying to chase the sound but I found out that, on all my favourite recordings, those guys were just plugging in and letting go, you know what I mean? I never got into Tube Screamers or anything like that."

Where Should I Start?

If you've missed Jared's band opening for Lynyrd Skynyrd or ZZ Top, then you would be advised to check out his debut album, *Old Glory And The Wild Revival*, a 14-track dissertation on blues-flavoured rock. And if that whets your appetite, be aware that he is on tour in the UK this autumn in support of Glenn Hughes. Be prepared for a refreshingly old-school approach to playing; for example, of his Blackstar backline, he enthuses: "They break up pretty well if you just turn them up – I just run my hand over the knobs so they're all the way up and use the volume control on the guitar." **[DM]**

Jared James Nichols' *Old Glory And The Wild Revival* is out now on Listenable Records. Jared is special guest on Glenn Hughes' October UK tour. www.facebook.com/jaredjamesnichols

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AL DI MEOLA

He's the king of fusion guitar and few players wield a Les Paul with such precision. We join Al Di Meola to find out why rhythm is the soul of style

Words Jamie Dickson

Back in the 1970s, Al Di Meola was the pace-setter for what was possible on the electric guitar in terms of outrageously proficient chops and heavy calibre electric tone. Since then, the New Jersey native has found other musical pathways to explore in his quest for guitar enlightenment. The most notable of these has been his move into acoustic guitar, but it should hardly have surprised anyone, as rhythmic invention has always been the engine of his style.

The release of Al's latest album, *Elysium*, sees his playing come full circle, with a blend of lyrical acoustic and incisive electric parts – and he's even picked up that old black Les Paul Custom again. We joined him to get his take on what really matters on guitar.

Get Into Jazz Early

"My first guitar teacher was so versed in jazz and allowed me to explore and also develop to know what I wanted to learn. His name was Bob Aslainian: he had great technique, he had great knowledge of scales and chords and chord substitutions and all that. I was getting into this stuff early on, whether I liked it or not – and that helped shape me. And then in my mid-teen years, my big inspiration was discovering Larry Coryell, whose playing brought together rock and jazz. He was the first one to bring those elements of rock and jazz together in the studio, and later on he became a good friend."

Take Notes From Tango

"I was always drawn to players who had great articulation and rhythmic sense like Chick Corea had in the beginning. But the most important step forward in my playing came from my friendship with [Argentinian Tango musician] Astor Piazzola. That really took me to another level as a composer. His ability to run the gamut of all kinds of emotions had a big influence on me because it was less of a cerebral thing and more of a sentimental music – but not at the expense of the intellect of the music: for me it was stimulating both ways. Whereas fusion music and a lot of jazz became purely intellectual and not much of it ever was really touching the heart. So that early influence of Piazzola really informed my musical attitude."

Rhythm Is King

"I was highly influenced by percussion and drums. Those were really my first loves and all through school I didn't pay attention so much and constantly I was tapping my fingers on the top of the desk while keeping a steady quarter-note 4/4 with my foot under the desk – and I would practise playing counter-rhythms against my foot. And I would do this all day, every day in school. Not paying too much attention to what was happening in class! Why I was so driven to that, is beyond me. But I thought that perhaps by developing that I could really kind of transfer that over to the way

that I play guitar and form a rhythmic sensibility. I would also hang in Latin clubs in New York, by myself, and just absorb most of the salsa stuff that was going on – so I was really highly drawn to percussion. It's something you either you discover you have in you or you don't have it at all. A lot of people study their whole lives but never feel the clave."

Good Articulation Involves Your Whole Body

"Timing, rhythm is everything. You *must* be able to tap your foot in time when you're playing. Because if you attempt to play any counter rhythms – which is basically controlled by your upper body – and it throws off your lower body where your foot resides, you're in serious trouble. So you have to be able to keep your foot locked like a metronome while you play counter-rhythms. So the lower part of your body and the upper part have to get in synch, because if you fall out of synch, it's one of the worst things that can happen to a player. Because that separates the guys that fall into the lesser category of good articulation from the guys with better articulation, better rhythmic sense."

Use Your Pinkie

"Playing in Return To Forever was like the most wanted, desirable music job for a guitar player in the world at that time. They weren't just a band of great players jamming

“Once you get the basic scales down you start playing with ideas. With rhythms, you can take something that’s harmonically simple and make it very cool”



Al's back playing his trusty Les Paul custom for 'Elysium'

at a high level: they *were* playing at a high level but the compositions were just the coolest. Luckily, my ability to read music and play different scales and chords, from my early training and at Berklee [College Of Music], paid off a lot. Because it didn't matter if I had the rock sensibility: there were plenty of rock players that they could have used but a lot of them couldn't read music. And a lot of them couldn't play scales – they could play guitar riffs using the first and the third finger. And a lot of those great players couldn't play scales because they didn't use their pinkie at all, ever, and very seldom the second finger. It was all based around pentatonic runs.”

Chords Unlock The Neck

“Everything’s based around the chords. Once you get the basic scales down that pertain to the chord, you start playing around with ideas. What really varies even very simple scales in my world is the variation in skips that you can do with rhythms. With rhythms, you can take something that’s harmonically simple and make something very cool out of it. So it’s about sitting and playing, sitting there and experimenting: thinking of the chord, playing around with the scale of the chord but in my world it’s really about how you apply the off-beats or the syncopation against the time signature. Without that you don’t have much variety. That’s most of it in a nutshell.”

Les Pauls Have Something Unique

“I played my Les Paul Custom on this album again because hopefully it draws the listener back into a sound reminiscent

of my earlier records that were really the most successful records in the 70s. And I didn’t plan on this record having that sound, which is why there’s no bass on the record, hardly. It was supposed to be purely acoustic but I had gotten turned on to the Les Paul again by Sean Haines who was a tech for me back in the 80s. He had made this amazing pedalboard that he showed me and he happened to be playing his own Les Paul through that system. I was completely blown away, so I started to play some of the new music I was writing and I loved the way it sounded. I said, ‘Man this brings me back to that original vibe that I had – I feel that I’m going home again.’ But the music was more sophisticated.”

Keep An Open Mind About Effects

“I was so anti-pedalboard up until just recently. In the beginning I never used pedalboards. I thought that by using any of that stuff you’re going to lose some punch, and my whole sound was based on that whole attack and punch. Every time you added in an effects unit, you’d lose some of that. I have used pedalboards live because you didn’t notice so much getting lost, but in the studio, I would notice it more. But recently I’ve changed my mind; I have a big pedalboard now that was designed by Sean Haines. The day that he brought his own pedalboard over it transformed my whole thought process on how to make this record and how to include electric again. For most of the new record I went straight into the amp, but for certain parts I used the pedalboard. The amp happened to be a Fuchs [Overdrive Supreme 100-watt head and 212 cabinet] for both the clean and dirty tones.”

Define Your Sound

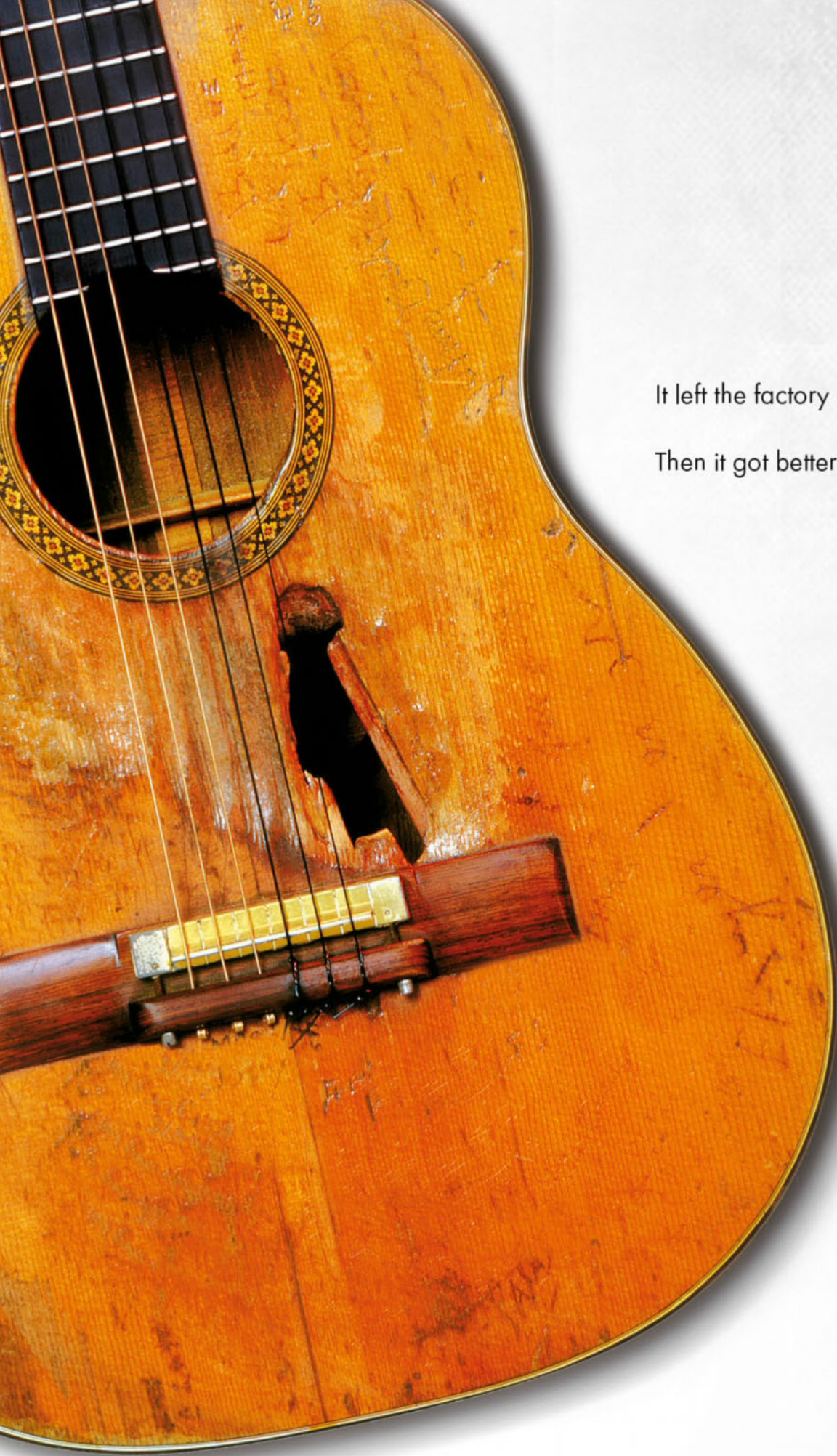
“For so many years I just totally forgot what it was about a Les Paul. Then Gibson got in touch with me and said, ‘We gotta get you back playing a Gibson,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, yeah...’ Because Paul Reed Smith is a good friend of mine and I support PRS. But they said, ‘No, you have to get back to *your* sound.’ And it kept echoing in my head. My sound – does it really matter that much? And it was right at the time that Sean Haines had come over with *his* Les Paul. And I said, ‘You know, maybe it does matter.’ So I started to do a more serious A/B between the PRS and a Les Paul and the difference was that the Les Paul had more of an aggressive sound that was a little bit more reminiscent of my earlier records. So I kind of started to agree with them on that. I still like the PRS, though: it has a very creamy, really clear sustain sound. It’s definitely different.”

Recognise Your Roots

“When it came out on Facebook that I was using the Les Paul again it got an unbelievable response and then it started to come together that this is what people want. They want to be reminded about that early period – and that sound that they know me for from the early years. And so hopefully the new album brings that thing that they loved from the early records but combined with the new direction of my composing and where I’m at in 2015.” **G**

Al Di Meola’s latest album, *Elysium*, is available now on Inakustic Records. For more information about the album, visit Al’s website

www.aldimeola.com



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The Sun King

Robben Ford opens up about blues ruts, seeing BB King for the first time and why he's so happy with his new album, *Into The Sun...*

Words Matt Frost Photography Will Ireland

It's late afternoon, just hours before virtuoso Robben Ford is set to scorch the roof off London's O2 Academy, Islington. Between posing for photos and treating us to a fascinating video tutorial, Robben takes a pew to tell us all about his new guest-studded long player and answer a few questions about the blues. As a player, Ford has always defied categorisation. His solo recordings have embraced jazz, blues, rock, funk, fusion and whatever else he's into at the time, while the artists he has recorded and toured with illustrate a similar fondness for mixing it up. Miles Davis, Joni Mitchell, KISS, Dizzy Gillespie, Georgie Fame and Jimmy Witherspoon are just a few of the legends who have called on Robben's services. In addition, his tutorial books, videos and DVDs have helped teach generations of six-stringers how to make their instruments really sing.

Into The Sun, released earlier this year, is an album of which Robben is rightly very proud. As well as featuring an ace core band of musicians – with Brian Allen on bass, Wes Little on drums and Jim Cox on keys – the record also showcases some jaw-dropping guest stars.

You've recently been quoted as saying your new album, *Into The Sun*, is one of your favourite recordings. Why do you think that is?

"I love the record and I'm very proud of it, largely because of the songwriting,

something that I've focused on and been developing for years and I really feel like it has come to full fruition on this one. And the band that I currently have seemed particularly suited for it as well because they're very versatile. They've played R&B, they've played jazz and they've played in rock bands. Versatility is really important for me, I need guys who can really play in a variety of styles and then everything comes together into one package. I have found a way for myself personally to focus all these influences. I've put it all into a package that is kind of my own, so finding guys who can work with me is important. It really came together with these guys on this record."

Did you have a vision for the record?

"I wanted it to sound modern. I wanted it to be a record that was clearly made today and that couldn't have been made yesterday. That was my one intent but, you know, it doesn't really matter, because the record's just going to be the record, unless you're baking a cake by a recipe when you go in. I'm never sure what kind of cake we're going to make because an album's a product of everybody's input. It's really a collaboration and I like working that way."

There are some fantastic guests on the album, including Warren Haynes, Sonny Landreth, Keb' Mo' and Robert Randolph. How did they become involved?

"My management actually came to me with the idea of having a bunch of guests

on the record and, after thinking about it, I thought, 'Yeah, this is a good idea'. I had actually already invited Sonny Landreth to play on the record and Keb' Mo' was one of the next guys to come to mind. He and I have recorded and even written together in the past. I met Warren Haynes with the Allman Brothers and I was mildly acquainted with Robert Randolph, too. He's a great player and I was really happy to have both him and Keb' Mo' on the same song [*Justified*]. ZZ Ward and Tyler Bryant were recommended by management, so I checked them both out on YouTube and I liked what I saw."

What guitars were you using when you recorded *Into The Sun*?

"Well, I've been trying to break in this beautiful '63 Gibson SG to be my main guitar. I literally cut everything on the record with that except for one or two songs that I cut deliberately with the 1960 Telecaster that I've been playing the heck out of for many years now. Then *Rose Of Sharon* was recorded live with my Gibson [B-25] acoustic guitar and the electric was overdubbed after the fact. I used that '63 SG to cut almost every track on the record, knowing that I could change it later – and what wound up happening was that I did end up going back to the Telecaster for a lot of things. I also have a '64 SG, which I used on a few songs. There's actually very little in the way of electric rhythm guitar on the record. There's a song called *Rainbow*

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“The record’s just going to be the record, unless you’re baking a cake by a recipe when you go in. I’m never sure what kind of cake we’re going to make because an album’s a product of everybody’s input. It’s really a collaboration and I like working that way”

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Cover where the Telecaster is just playing the riff and chords throughout, but most of what you hear on this record is acoustic guitar and [Hammond] B-3 as the kind of underpinning and then the electric guitars riffing over the top. That’s a first for me, using the acoustic guitar that much.”

Did you use any effects?

“Not really. I was plugged into a small board that I use live, but the effects were turned off. When I go in the studio to play, I try to approach it like it’s a gig, so it’s almost a psychological thing as well, having my pedalboard there in front of me. I believe it’s generally inadvisable to record with effects, because there’s a possibility that you might

want to change the sounds and so I’ve got into the habit of recording without effects pretty much all the time.”

Do you remember the first blues songs you ever heard, and the effect they had on you?

“Oh yeah. The first blues that I ever heard was The Paul Butterfield Blues Band with Mike Bloomfield on lead guitar. It was incredible how intense it was compared to everything that I’d heard up to that point. It was a revelation, and it gave me my direction to play the electric guitar. I then started buying records just because they were blues records... or jazz. There’s a three-record set called *The Blues Box* with Jimmy Witherspoon, Sonny Terry, Brownie

McGhee, and Lightnin’ Hopkins. I really learned everything I know today about Mississippi Delta-style blues guitar playing from those records.”

When did you start fusing jazz into your blues playing?

“After I got out of school, I bought Mickey Baker’s first book on jazz chords and I learned all these jazz chord voicings. I’ve since done my own book called *Blues Rhythms*, which is my version of the Mickey Baker one, but taking all the information and putting it into a traditional blues format. Within a short period of time, I had an experience where I was playing with Charlie Musselwhite; I was 19 and we were on the same bill with Larry Coryell and his trio in Los Angeles. I asked him what all that ‘out’ stuff was that he was playing – the things that I couldn’t understand! And, of course, it wasn’t ‘out’ at all, it was just the diminished scale, the half step, whole step scale. So then I went home, took him at his word and I just went, ‘Half step, whole step, half step, whole step’ within the scale and started messing with it and making up licks with it. I realised that it sounded like Miles Davis’s music to me, so that was a cool revelation and it basically opened up the world of the II-V-I progression, which is basically jazz in a nutshell. That

DUMBLE D’OR

Robben Ford has been plugging into his Dumble amp (serial number 002!) ever since he acquired it in 1983. Here, he tells us what he loves about it so much...

“For me, I would just describe it as the perfect amplifier. It’s got a very strong low end that is clear and not muddy, not mushy. The midrange is very punchy and clear and then the high end is also clear but not piercing. I think of it as this perfect sound curve – there’s clarity with all the frequencies. I am kind of a midrange guy, my sound comes out of the midrange and the Dumble reproduces whatever my guitar is doing impeccably. The amp and the guitar are one and it’s like the three of us are doing the same work. I found my voice with the Dumble amplifier and, with it, I’m really able to manifest as myself.”



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“Blues doesn’t require a lot of harmonic knowledge to deliver its message but it is really a very expressive form of music. It’s meant to tell you something, so what’s important is the sound of the voice and the way in which you say the things you’re trying to say.”

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really helped me and I started being able to expand my harmonic playing.”

You were still a teenager when you toured with Charlie Musselwhite and then Jimmy Witherspoon. What did you learn about blues from those guys?

“Charlie was playing very straight-up Chicago blues, which I was already into, but, quite frankly, I wanted to become a jazz player. The good thing about playing with him was that I was able to exercise these chords that I had taken from the Mickey Baker book. I started putting that into what I was doing in the Chicago blues tradition, so that was good. Jimmy Witherspoon was just such a class act. As a blues singer, he was just fantastic and he had so much personality. He was always saying my name and really promoting me on the bandstand, which was very cool.”

What defines good blues playing?

“Number one is tone and number two is phrasing. Blues doesn’t require a lot of harmonic knowledge to deliver its message but it is really a very expressive form of music. It’s meant to tell you something, so what’s important is the sound of the voice and the way in which you say the things you’re trying to say. There are a lot of different styles in the blues, which is really

quite incredible. For such a simple form, there are so many different voices. For me, BB King was the first true messenger. I’d gone to see Mike Bloomfield’s band, The Electric Flag, in San Francisco and BB King was on the bill and it was the second great revelation! He was so wonderful and was like 40 – a young, strong, powerful, great man. We were just floored by him and he became instantly a super reference point for blues guitar. And then everybody else started appearing; suddenly, there’s Albert King and here’s Albert Collins. I’ve heard all of these people live and I was within 10 feet of every one of them, man! They were brilliant!”

How far would you say there are common ruts players fall into when it comes to blues?

“For the most part, people just know three chords and the pentatonic scale. That is a box. That is a cul-de-sac! You know, it takes someone like BB King to continue to mine that field. I’m not that guy, but that’s why I opened up my mind to a broader harmonic world and learned chords and scales. That’s how you get out of the rut – give yourself further opportunities and more harmonic and melodic information that you can expand upon. You will see that what you can do and what is possible is limitless.”

What does the blues mean in 2015?

“Blues music means the same thing it always has. It will never go away... but there was actually one period when I was beginning my solo career when it really looked to me like the blues was dead. This was in the very early 80s and I had even been trying to school myself in pop music, because I really thought that it was where I was going to have to go to make a living. But suddenly, Stevie Ray Vaughan arrived on the scene and Robert Cray started getting attention and then John Lee Hooker was suddenly a star. That was good news for me, because the *Talk To Your Daughter* album had already been recorded and when I released that [1988], it was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Recording. Now, not so long ago, The Black Keys came out with just a guitar player and a drummer playing blues music and this became the biggest thing in America, so, you know, it’s not going anywhere, man! The blues will never die because it’s like dirt. It’s like the earth. You have to have something to walk on and that’s American music.” **G**



Robben Ford’s *Into The Sun* is available now on Provogue, for more information, visit his website

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A MASTERCLASS WITH

ROBBEN FORD

You've read the interview and watched the video, so let's get up close and personal with the diminished scale in all its dark, dissonant glory

Words Adrian Clark Photography Will Ireland

Robben Ford has spent his career carving out a musical buffer between blues, rock and jazz/fusion. That could be a recipe for slick blandness, but Robben creates something wonderful, combining the best elements of his diverse influences.

One of the best-known aspects of his playing is the diminished scale, which “seems to loom large in my legend”, as he jokes. In these examples, we’ll work through the concepts that Robben discusses on the video, showing how the diminished scale is closely bound up with the old 12-bar blues progression.

EX1

First of all, the technical stuff. The diminished scale has eight notes, with alternating semitone and whole tone intervals. You can start with either interval, but the more common half-whole variety is applicable to what we're doing here. Here it is in G.

G half / whole diminished scale

Scale notes: G, A $\flat$, A $\sharp$, B, C $\sharp$, D, E, F, G

Fret positions: 3, 4, 6, 2, 4, 5, 2, 3, 3

EX2

It's a strange scale, but it works nicely over a (jazzy) blues in G because it contains so many tasty notes. The 9th (A $\flat$), #9th (A $\sharp$) and 13th (E) are common extensions added to the G7 chord, and then the C $\sharp$ (or D $\flat$) is the tritone, a vital bluesy sound!

G half / whole diminished scale

Scale notes: G, A $\flat$, A $\sharp$, B, C $\sharp$, D, E, F, G

Fret positions: 5, 6, 3, 4, 6, 3, 5, 6, 8

Chords: G7, G7 $\sharp$ 9, G7 $\flat$ 9, G13

(basic G7 is root, major 3rd, 5th, minor 7th)

EX3

Feel free to jam with the scale, but here's what Robben shows us on the video. The B note in the G diminished scale becomes a moment of tension as we await the imminent C7 chord. Moving chromatically to the C note takes us out of the diminished scale, but the urge to resolve to the root note of C7 is more powerful.

Scale notes: G, A $\flat$, A $\sharp$, B, C $\sharp$, D, E, F, G

Fret positions: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 9, 8, 8

Chords: G13, C13

Diminished scale notes . . . B note resolves chromatically to C

EX4

Using B $\flat$ 13 as a passing chord, Robben creates this cool chord-melody change from G to C. Strictly speaking, a 13 chord should also include the 9th, but by omitting it, all of the notes from G13 and B $\flat$ 13 are within the G diminished scale. Clever!

Scale notes: G, A $\flat$, A $\sharp$, B, C $\sharp$, D, E, F, G

Fret positions: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 9, 8, 8

Chords: G13, B $\flat$ 13, C13

EX5

Robben prefers not to use this trick with C diminished (C D $\flat$ D $\sharp$ E F $\sharp$ G A B $\flat$) for the C7-G7 (IV-I) change. There's certainly a different shape to it, without that chromatic resolution. However, he uses it later in the blues progression, for the D7-G7 (V-I) change.

D half / whole diminished scale

D E $\flat$ F F $\sharp$ G $\sharp$ A B C D

12—13 10—11 13 10—12—13 10 10—11—13—14 15 12—15 10—14 10—13 15

D13 F13 G13 8va

EX6

People often confuse the diminished scale with the diminished 7th arpeggio, which is basically a stack of minor 3rd intervals (Gdim7 is G B $\flat$ D $\flat$ E). That's not so daft, though; the diminished scale contains two interlocking dim7 arpeggios, Gdim7 and A $\flat$ dim7 in this case.

G half / whole diminished scale **G Diminished 7 arpeggio** **A $\flat$ Diminished 7 arpeggio**

G A $\flat$ B $\flat$ C $\sharp$ D E F G

5—6—3—4 6—3—5—6 5—3—6—5 6—4—3—6

G A $\sharp$ C $\sharp$ E A $\flat$ B D F

(unlike normal scales / keys, the note names are a bit more flexible in diminished scales . . . A $\sharp$ can be B $\flat$, etc)

EX7

And the upshot of that is that every note in the scale is a minor 3rd (three frets) from another scale note. Therefore, any diminished scale phrase or lick can be moved up or down three frets and you'll still be within the scale.

5—6—3—4—3—6—6—9 11—12—9—10—9—12—15—15—18



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Always Edged In Blue

Rory Gallagher was one of the most important and incendiary blues guitarists of his generation. Though he sadly passed away at the young age of 47 in 1995, the Irishman's amazing blues legacy still resonates 20 years later. To mark two decades since his tragic death, we sat down with his brother, Donal, to discuss the magic of his music and the unique instruments he used to make it

Words Julian Piper Photography Will Ireland

Montreux Jazz Festival, 1977: "I'm gonna hang these young boys by their toes up here tonight," Albert King said when he walked out on stage. The great bluesman was directing his comment at Rory Gallagher and Louisiana Red, who were to join him at times during his set on that occasion. As introductions go, it was hardly welcoming, and must have been particularly intimidating for Rory. But as the recording of that night shows – notably on King's nine-minute-long reading of *As The Years Go Passing By* – Rory more than justified his presence, reeling off an extended fiery solo that perfectly complemented King's own playing.

Almost four decades later, the details are still perfectly etched in Donal Gallagher's memory. "That wasn't a very cordial affair," he recalls. "Rory was under a lot of pressure at the time. It was the one break he had for holiday, and because Warners wanted to sign him, I'd gone to California. Then, Claude Nobbs, who was the director of the Montreux Festival, said that he had Ronnie Hawkins and The Band due to appear for a reunion gig, but Robbie Robertson had refused to play. Would he stand in?"

"The next night, Albert King was due to play and was being recorded for the album that became *On The Road*. I think the record company wanted to get Rory on the album,

too, and needless to say, Rory was chuffed to bits. He went down to find that there wasn't going to be any rehearsal and King wasn't being at all communicative. Rory felt very awkward and that he wasn't really wanted.

"When eventually he was called on stage, the band didn't make it very pleasant for him; there were no keys written down and it was a case of being thrown in the deep end. If you could swim, fine – if you couldn't, tough! Rory tried looking at Albert's fretboard to see what key he was in, but that didn't help. Albert King had such a unique system of playing – the guitar was upside down and he was left-handed. Rory asked one of the brass players, who just said, 'B natural, boy – B natural.' And that was it! Rory was really up against the wall, but when you listen to the album, he does a smashing couple of solos and really acquitted himself well."

One Of A Kind

As Donal talks about his brother 20 years after his untimely passing, it's a poignant reminder that there's never been another guitar hero quite like Rory Gallagher. From the earliest days, when he blew out of Cork with Taste, his brass-knuckle-in-your-face approach to playing was always capable of outgunning anyone else on the block. Only the formative blues players he adored, such as Muddy Waters and Albert King, were in the same league. Rory was always a triple threat; it's difficult to think of any white blues player who has ever

matched the intensity of his performance, the brilliance of his guitar playing or had the strength of his songwriting. And the blues in all its forms was the cornerstone, the essence of everything he did.

"If you spoke to Rory, he'd always talk about some obscure blues guy, never about himself, and there never seemed to be any musical barriers to his playing," Donal continues. "His blues appreciation stretched from the hard-line electric Chicago style of Muddy Waters, through to the subtle country blues of people like Big Bill Broonzy and Blind Boy Fuller."

Nowhere is this more evident than in Rory's early Taste recordings, now reissued as part of a four-CD box set. A jazz-inflected version of Leadbelly's *Leaving Blues*, heavily borrowing from folk icon Davey Graham's version on *Folk, Blues And Beyond*, sits comfortably alongside Gallagher originals, plus Howling Wolf's *Sugar Mama* and Muddy Waters' *Catfish*.

"Rory was also a huge fan of Bo Carter and the Mississippi Sheiks. He wrote a song about them, and it was one of the reasons that he bought his National Steel guitar. He loved the idea of these guys standing on Mississippi street corners wearing turbans so that they would be noticed, banging away on loud guitars," Donal adds.

After Taste first moved to London, Rory struck up a firm friendship with Alexis Korner, at the time very much the spiritual godfather of the British blues movement. "Rory got to play on a radio show that



“Taste took a lot of flack from the ‘bluesers’. There was a slight resentment there. ‘You can’t play the blues if you don’t come from London’ — ”

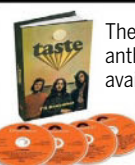
the stage, but before he got there, Steve Marriott went up and took the guitar! In typical fashion, Rory just shied away and backed off.”

In 1971, Rory finally got his opportunity to play with Muddy Waters when he was invited to appear on the *London Muddy Waters Sessions* album. “Rory was always far more into the Chicago guys’ cut-to-the-chase, straight-in-your-face kind of guitar, and particularly the sharpness of the bottleneck style, than the BB Kings,” says Donal. Certainly, the two men appeared to get along well, and Rory’s interaction with the Chicago master on tracks like *Walking Blues* provides an authentic edge to the recording, sadly missing with some of the other players.

Like his blues idols, undoubtedly Rory would have liked to keep playing guitar until he dropped, but in a 1990 interview, there was a worryingly ominous foreboding in his comments.

“Over the last four or five years, I’ve wondered if I can keep it going. I think if I can get over the next couple of months, when the album comes out and I can get back touring, I’ll go for about 60. That would be my dream, and a fair time to retire. It’s not so easy as when you’re 19, or 25, or 30 – but it’s still better than retiring to Buckinghamshire, getting a mansion and six corgi dogs and writing the next rock opera!”

When Rory Gallagher tragically died on 14 June 1995 at the age of just 47, we lost not only one of our greatest guitar heroes ever, but a guitarist who was undoubtedly one of the finest blues players ever to emerge from this side of the Atlantic. **G**



The brand new four-CD Taste anthology, *I'll Remember*, is available now on Polydor Records

Alexis was running at the time, played some beautiful acoustic guitar and they hit it off really well. Subsequently, they often ended up on the same gigs together and became very close friends, which is why Rory wrote the tribute track to him, *Alexis*, which is included on *Fresh Evidence*.”

Despite this, Donal still ruefully recalls the antipathy Rory received in some circles. “Taste took a lot of flack from the so called ‘bluesers’, and they were intimidated by the Mayalls of the world – people who, ironically, had once been very happy to share bills in the North of Ireland where Rory was very popular. Bands like Cream and Fleetwood Mac knew Rory and rated his playing, but there was a slight resentment because it wasn’t a London thing: ‘You can’t play the blues if you don’t come from London.’ This even spilled over into the press, with Saint Someone of the Blues saying that because Rory was Irish, this really shouldn’t be happening.”

The Taste Test

In 1969, Taste embarked on the ill-fated Blind Faith tour of America. Intended to expose the band to large American audiences for the first time, the tour ended up being a total disaster, but it did provide Rory with the opportunity of experiencing the blues first-hand in its home environment. He hung out with slide master Hound Dog Taylor in a Southside Chicago juke joint, and Donal laughs as he remembers how Rory missed the opportunity to play with his main man, Muddy ‘Mississippi’ Waters.

“We went down to see Muddy and his band playing in a New York club called Ungano’s. The gig was very badly attended by the public, but it was the million-dollar audience with Eric Clapton, Steve Winwood, Steve Marriott, Buddy Miles and Hendrix all sitting there. At the end of Muddy’s set, it inevitably turned into a jam session and Muddy called Rory to



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1 Rory would often tune this old Martin D-35 to DADGAD when playing tunes such as *Out On The Western Plain*

2 This 1965 Teisco Trg-1 is a Zim Gar model complete with gold-foil pickup and built-in amplifier

3 This beautiful white 1963 Supro Dual Tone is similar to one that David Bowie has been spotted using

4&5 Rory's beaten-up but much loved 'number one' Stratocaster. Only the middle pickup is original and the controls have been modified, so that the tone control also works on the bridge pickup

Rory's Blues Guitars

Although Rory amassed a formidable collection of guitars – he is reputed to have owned 121 – as Donal explains, he was the antithesis of a guitar collector...

“Rory was attracted to cheap guitars like the Supros and Silvertones, rather than the all-singing-and-dancing Stratocaster, because they were the poor man's guitar of the time and were what the blues players used. He was prepared to put up with them being perhaps a little cumbersome and difficult to play, just to get the original feel. He never wanted to buy a guitar just because it was one of only three in the world; everything had to have a use on stage or in the studio. You could buy a pedal that would make the guitar sound like a sitar, but Rory would always rather get an instrument like a Coral guitar that would do the job. On *A Million Miles Away* and *Cradle Rock*, he used a Danelectro Silvertone he bought for \$15 in a pawn shop, and he hated to see all these guys on stage with racks and racks of guitars. Because he played acoustically as well as electrically, he did need to use quite a few, but there was never anything flashy.”

Fender Stratocaster

Rory's battered 1961 Stratocaster is certainly the stuff of legend. Purchased in 1963 from Crowley's Music Shop in Cork, only the wear and tear evidenced on Stevie Ray Vaughan's Strat compares. With little of the original finish intact, it was the classic bluesman's instrument. "There were people who thought that Rory was chiselling it away each night, but it certainly wasn't the case," Donal laughs. "Rory's sweat was so acidic that the effect on the guitar finish was like paint stripper. After a three-hour set, it was always covered with sweat and you could just see the paint starting to bubble up. Rory was very concerned about it, it felt like premature balding! The sweat was such a problem that in the late 70s, he started getting terrible tuning problems with the neck. He took it to Fender, who discovered that a combination of the huge amount of moisture in it and the heat of the lights each night wasn't allowing the wood to settle.

"Fender made him a replica neck and Rory put the original in his house in London, as little more than an ornament. Several years afterwards, Rory was putting a guitar together and as an experiment, tried the old neck again, which had by then dried out and gone back to its original form. It was quickly repatriated."

Red Supro

Rory wanted a Supro after seeing anarchic Chicago slide guitarist JB Hutto in action, and his early 60s Res-O-Glas model – the



same guitar that Jack White would later make his White Stripes calling card – would probably have been originally sold through the Montgomery Ward mail-order catalogue. Hutto's song *Too Much Alcohol* became a staple of Rory's set, sometimes played with the band, but more often as part of his solo acoustic set.

Gretsch Corvette 1963

Bought by Donal for \$56 from a Los Angeles pawn shop while Rory was in the guitar shop over the road, the Corvette was a particular favourite of Rory's and was fitted with a replacement Gibson P-90 pickup. Donal recalls, "Rory was very fond of that guitar, because it had the big fat chunky pickup and a neck that was ideal for slide – it became the *Bullfrog Blues* guitar, the one he always used for that tune." Rory would tune the Gretsch to either G or A with 0.013 to 0.050 heavy gauge strings, and his favourite slide for electric playing was a glass Coricidin bottle.

White Fender Telecaster And Esquire

Rory was fond of the Telecaster's biting sound for slide, particularly on Muddy Waters-style songs. The Esquire, which is reputed to be a 1953, was painted black by Rory when he first bought it and in the time he used it, went through many pickup changes, including a three-pickup Strat configuration. After being damaged in transit, his 1967 white Telecaster was refinished in green by guitar repairer Chris Eccleshall. Rory was apparently not pleased, and only returned to using the guitar when it had been resprayed its original white.

6 This red Airline Supro Res-O-Glas is Rory's JB Hutto guitar and the inspiration for him including *Too Much Alcohol* in his set

7 Rory always preferred the treble pickup on his Teles, such as this 1969 model, to a Stratocaster, and at one time even thought of fitting one to his famous '61 Strat

8 Donal picked up this '63 Gretsch Corvette in an LA pawn shop for just \$56. When Rory saw what a steal his brother had got, they beat a hasty retreat before the shop owner changed his mind!

9 This 1959 Fender Esquire was painted black by Rory himself – at one time it had three pickups





Planetary Alignment

With Paul Weller's latest album, *Saturns Pattern*, being touted one of his best yet, *Guitarist* headed to New York to seek an audience with the Modfather...

Words Jeff Slate

Paul Weller is relaxing in the bar of his New York City hotel, on a rare day off during the first week of a short tour of the States to support *Saturns Pattern*, perhaps the best in a string of excellent, genre-crossing albums that began with 2008's *22 Dreams*. "Most of the tunes started off with a drum beat and a riff," he says of the creative process on the new record. "It could have been a bass riff, a guitar lick or something. Often we just started with a groove."

Saturns Pattern has only nine songs, but it's hardly short, balancing Weller's beloved soul with swaggering T Rex-style rock. While stylistically adventurous, it also has a sharp focus, with a clear thread throughout. Of course, Weller knows how to craft short, sharp rockers, but *Saturns Pattern* jams it out just the right amount, something that Weller tells us he was encouraged by new collaborator, producer Jan 'Stan' Kybert.

In fact, it seems Weller has taken everything great about his last three albums – *22 Dreams*, *Wake Up The Nation* and *Sonik Kicks* – and crammed them into one, brilliant package. "I didn't have a plan, as such," Weller says. "But I knew I didn't want to make *Sonik Kicks Part Two*. It's not always possible to do something different every time, but that's what I had in mind and I think we succeeded. Obviously, it's still me. My influences are all still there. But I don't think this one is like anything else I've done and I don't think you can compare it to anything else that's out there right now, which I really like."

Saturns Pattern also sounds great. The mix is deep, rich and sparkingly clear. Weller attributes it to the fact that he has his own recording space, Black Barn Studios in Surrey, which allows him to create without ever having to watch the clock. Not known for his willingness to talk gear or about his creative process, Weller immediately digs deep. "The only kind of grief I gave the team I worked with on this record was that I wanted it to have big drums," Weller confesses. "I wanted the tracks to have some feeling of movement and dance, some sort of fluidity about it. That was kind of it, man – as vague as that."

Alone among his peers from punk's Class Of '77, Weller continues to top the charts with vital music, filling everything from theatres in out-of-the-way towns to stadiums with shows that feature a setlist of more new than old songs. The Modfather is equally unapologetic about the experimental nature of *Saturns Pattern*. "I never worry about what anyone will think," Weller says, flatly. "I just follow my nose. I have a great team at my studio because I can't be bothered with all of the technical aspects, so the sky's the limit."

That's Entertainment

You might expect a man of Weller's retro sensibilities to be strictly analogue, but in fact he's a firm fan of digital technology and Pro Tools. "The depth is back, don't you think?" Weller asks. "I remember when I first used to work with digital recording that it was so flat. I think now it's got some

real depth to it. And what we've done on the past few records – and especially the new one – just would not have been possible in the old analogue days. There were quite a lot of songs, the majority of them really, where we had a groove and maybe would then add melody ideas on top of that. We'd leave eight bars, four bars, whatever it may be, and then come back to it later. Some just would have a count, or others we'd just have the drummer play a bit madly. We kind of did things like that, just piecing them together into songs. But the production team really made use of that whole editing facility. There are things you couldn't do on tape, it would be impossible. It's incredible. I think digital recording has got better as well, even in the last two years. The sound just has much more depth to it."

As for the endless array of plug-ins available these days to anyone with a laptop, Weller welcomed them on board, too. "We made really good use of those as well I think," he says. "Things to warm everything up and make them sound more analogue – and great analogue gear, of course. That added an awful lot to the record as well. We also added a lot of weird shit that you wouldn't expect – middle eights and stuff. Just twists and turns to make each song a little different, and the technology really aided that."

When we mention that Noel Gallagher recently told us that he insists on working on one song at a time in the studio, focusing his attention in an effort to make each track the best it can be, Weller scoffs. "He's



© JUAN AGUADO/GETTY IMAGES

Weller attempted to steer clear of his trusty Epiphone Casino during the recording of *Saturns Pattern*, but it's still his trusty sidekick live

from Manchester, that's why," Weller says with a chuckle. Then he becomes more serious. "We work on something, and if we feel we're going somewhere with it, we'll keep working on it," Weller says. "But we'll equally do two or three songs a day as well. Not from start to finish, but I'll get bored, so I like to jump around and stay energised.

"Sometimes, we'll get through a couple of tracks in a day," Weller explains. "Some take longer, of course. I had a few songs that I'd written, but they were acoustic songs, really, and that's not where I wanted to go. We didn't really have any songs to work with like I usually do, so we were making it up as we went along with no pattern to it, really. And if I felt like we'd hit on a pattern, I'd break it and start again. I've realised that there's no wrong way to make records, and I think that was very freeing for me. I didn't really know what I wanted, but I knew what I *didn't* want. So I think that helped. We just experimented with sounds and songs until we hit a point on something that was exciting. Then we'd try to make it as good as we possibly could, but not too perfect, either. I like rough edges."

Ever Changing Moods

As for gear, Weller steered clear of the '66 Epiphone Casino, '66 Fender Telecaster and '68 SG he's known to use live, as well as the Rickenbackers he became so synonymous with in his early career. "On this record, I used some Danelectros and a Vox Teardrop reissue," he says. "I tended to just use those guitars as well as a President and a Club that Hofner sent me. It's the same family, I think, after all these years, and they're really great pieces. Really well made."

As for effects, Weller is at a bit of a loss when we press him. "I don't remember," he says, and laughs when we ask him if he was indeed there at the sessions. "I was there," he says with a smile. "Kind of there. Let's see: the main thing I used was this kind of synth pedal thing. It was blue and silver. Again, it was just to make the guitar sound different. I can easily get hung up just doing my thing with one sound. But I think it's important to take yourself out

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"I think it's important to take yourself out of the comfort zone and do things you're not familiar with. It makes you do things you wouldn't do normally"

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of the comfort zone and do things you're not familiar with, as well. It makes you play things differently and do things you wouldn't do normally."

We remind Weller that he mentioned the songs often started out as a drum and bass groove, with him on bass. Given that he was originally the bass player in The Jam's early days, does he find himself missing playing a four-stringer? "I had to stop because I couldn't sing and play bass at the same time," Weller says. "That's fucking tough.

But in the studio, I do like to play the bass. And I try to get Andy [Lewis, Weller's touring bass player] to try and stick to what I've laid down, because that's the groove. Once I've locked it down, we're going with it."

Sessions these days, though, sound loose. Recording in Black Barn, so close to his Surrey home, has not only afforded him the luxury of working without having to watch the clock, it's allowed him to work in small bursts, whenever he pleases or is inspired. Then he can go away and think about what he's done, rather than working for several months at a time, often on deadline, the way he used to. "It depends who's there," Weller says, when we ask him about how he divides up the guitar duties, often between him and longtime foil Steve Cradock. "Usually, I'll just say, 'Are you around next Monday or Tuesday?' and whoever's around can come play on my records, and whoever isn't, they won't. So it's one of those things, right? Whoever comes down to the studio. I've got family and friends who play as well, so whoever comes down gets to play."

Sometimes, though, Weller can be more accommodating, as when Steve Winwood guested on the 1995 album, *Stanley Road*. "That took some time to get him down, 'cos he's a busy man," Weller admits. "But it was great. Well worth it. It was *Stanley Road*, but we probably asked him around the time of [1994's] *Wild Wood!*" **G**



Paul Weller's new album, *Saturns Pattern*, is available now on Parlophone Records

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ROUND THE BEND

Designed by Gene Parsons and Clarence White of The Byrds, the B-Bender is an ingenious mechanism designed to make regular electric guitars sound like a pedal-steel. Many players have never heard of the invention, but Samuel Åhdén has 41 guitars fitted with B-Benders in his collection. We visited Guitars: The Museum to find out why he's got such a B in his bonnet...

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Joby Sessions

There's a fine line between taking a keen interest in certain guitars and outright obsession. By his own cheerful admission, collector Samuel Åhdén's interest in B-Bender guitars strayed into the latter category some time ago. He now has a collection of 41 of them.

Let's consider that surprising figure for a moment. Guitars fitted with a B-Bender system are rare beasts to begin with. The mechanism was invented in 1965 by Gene Parsons and Clarence White of The Byrds, who wanted to emulate the weeping sound of a pedal-steel guitar, whose sweet, sighing voice adds poignancy to so many country records. Because real pedal-steel guitars are bulky, complex instruments that are notoriously difficult to play, Parsons and White tried various ways to generate the same sound by simpler means.

"Gene told me they were in the studio and Clarence wanted to do the recording in one step," Samuel Åhdén explains. "But some parts of the song called for a pedal-steel sound, so Gene had to stand behind him and push down his Telecaster's B string [behind the nut]. But during live shows, of course, Gene had to play the drums."

Clearly, this two-man approach to emulating the pedal-steel sound was rather

limiting. And so, with White's feedback, Parsons devised what they initially dubbed the 'pull-string' mechanism, commonly known as a B-Bender. Essentially, this was a system of levers that could smoothly raise the pitch of the B string by up to a full tone. The system worked via a modified strap button on the Telecaster's upper bout, which was mounted on the end of a lever pivoting in a narrow slot. This lever was connected to further fulcrums and springs that altered the tension of the B-string when the player pushed the guitar's neck downwards during play.

"Gene actually took the mechanism from a Fender pedal steel and bolted it on the back of Clarence's guitar," Samuel explains. "He had to build a wooden frame with a Masonite backboard to cover it up, making the guitar almost twice as thick as an original Telecaster."

Although variants that could bend multiple strings were tried, the B-bending version proved the most successful design and Parson's bulky prototype soon evolved into a sleeker form that could be fitted – after some careful routing – inside the body of a Telecaster. When installed and set up carefully, it did a surprisingly good job of emulating the sound of a pedal-steel guitar and rarely went out of tune.

"It's very stable," says Samuel of the system. "I have never had to make any adjustments to the green B-Bender Tele that I have and that has been installed for 40 years."

Parsons Knows

It was an ingenious idea, and though a little niche, it's surprising that there aren't more around. One reason for the relative scarcity of B-Benders is that Gene Parsons began fitting them to order personally from 1973, allowing only a very limited number of approved workshops to do so on his behalf. With the exception of some niche Teles made by Fender (Gibson has also recently issued a 'Music City' B-Bender Les Paul Special), B-Bender guitars have never been widely mass produced.

So when Samuel Åhdén, co-founder of Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden – no stranger to these pages – decided he wanted to own a B-Bender guitar, many years ago, he had to write and ask Gene Parsons if he'd be prepared to fit one to a donor instrument for him. His interest was prompted, unsurprisingly, by a love of The Byrds' work on vinyl.

"I heard the album *Untitled* and I actually thought that Clarence White played a pedal steel on it, because the notes jumped up and



Number One B-Bender

"The black Telecaster I actually bought on eBay. And the bridge has a 1954 serial number, so the guitar's original condition is completely destroyed. The previous owner even painted the neck black – and you can't really do that to such a guitar. But all the same, that's my number one B-Bender guitar. It's been fitted with custom pickups by a small company called Harmonic Design. On the Tele, it looks similar to a normal bridge pickup, but it's more like a P-90 in terms of its design. It's quite hot, with a DC resistance of 14k."



down in a strange way. But I later found out in a magazine that he'd actually played a Telecaster. And I really wanted that kind of sound, but it took 14 years before I actually got in touch with Gene Parsons. And then I sent a Telecaster to him."

When the guitar returned with B-Bender installed, Sam had to re-program his fingers to make use of the new possibilities it offered.

"It was a whole other way of thinking when you play the B-Bender," Sam adds.

"The first gig I used it on was playing with a rock 'n' roll trio here in Umeå, with Elvis's original drummer, DJ Fontana, in the band. And that really got me into the B-Bender thing. But it was very hard to get them, because there was no internet back then."

Sam's next step along the road towards irrevocable B-Bender obsession was to ask Parsons to fit a B-Bender not to a Telecaster but a Les Paul Junior.

"I saw a picture of Jimmy Page playing a Les Paul Standard – some kind of burgundy

red colour – that had been fitted with a B-Bender. And so I wrote once more to Gene and asked if he could do a B-Bender installation on a Les Paul Junior. And he replied that he had never done it before but that he could do a custom installation."

Sam still has the guitar, which takes pride of place in Guitars: The Museum's collection in Umeå.

"It's a 1955 Les Paul Junior," he says. "I bought it then painted it black and put a maple veneer on the top because someone had tried to make it into a double-cutaway Junior at home. So it was already damaged and non-original. It's actually the only Junior in the world he has installed a B-Bender on. Gene also made a chrome backplate that I custom-ordered, and he also let me buy three of the Bill Keith banjo tuners that he had, because Clarence White also used two of those," Samuel adds, referring to specially designed machineheads that permit instant retuning to drop D and other pitch intervals.

"You can set an upper stop and a lower stop on the tuner by adjusting a little screw, so you can tune to an open tuning and then just turn it back till it stops and you're back in standard tuning," Sam explains. "They work extremely well."

As Sam added more B-Bender guitars to his collection, he acquired more unusual



Samuel has many items of B-Bender arcana including rare installation kits and backplates



1 Rarer even than a B-Bender is this G- and B-Bender Paisley Tele. Note the dual-action mechanism. Known officially as the StringBender today, standard B-Benders and their variants are nearly all made by Gene Parsons

2 Bill Keith banjo tuners allow instant pitch changes by pre-set intervals on Sam's Junior

3 A certain Mike B Guff was apparently responsible for repainting this '54 Tele a distinctly non-factory black all over!

4 Sam Åhdén has kept all the original documentation he received from Gene Parsons relating to B-Bender installations, including this bill for \$296.80 that he received for Gene's work on his green '72 Telecaster

5 This '55 Gibson Les Paul Junior was in a sorry state when Sam acquired it, having suffered crude DIY mods to its body. He had no qualms, therefore, in modding it further (but with much more skill) with a Page-emulating veneer top and a B-Bender





Parsons and White devised what they dubbed the 'Pull-String' mechanism, later known as a B-Bender – a system of levers that could raise the pitch of the B string



examples of Parsons' work, including a Tele modified to bend both B and G strings – though it's not the easiest instrument in the world to operate, he reports.

"The B-Bender is operated by the shoulder strap on the upper horn of the Telecaster, but to operate the G-Bender at the same time you put a loop in your belt with a short length of shoulder strap attached – and you have to move your hips like a hula-hula dance to make it work. It looks very strange [laughs]."

He also has some later variants of the standard B-Bender mechanism with a slightly different action.

"You can order it with an option called 'long throw,'" Sam explains, referring to

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*"I hope having these
 guitars in the museum
 benefits Gene Parsons
 in some way. This is an
 extremely important
 invention"*
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a later type of B-Bender that permits more sensitive bends. "But I actually prefer the original mechanism; it's much faster with a shorter throw."

But the rarest jewel in his B-Bender collection is also the most recent: an acoustic guitar custom-fitted with a B-Bender by Gene Parsons.

"I have been searching for that guitar for eight years," Sam says, with a note of triumph. "I saw some pictures of it on the internet and never knew who owned it, but at last, I found it on a classified ads site called Reverb.com. I bought the guitar from the guy who owned it and it's a David Matlin guitar, custom-built for Gene Parsons, and it's the only one ever made, actually. I talked with Gene about that and he said the guitar was used on a number of recordings. He was very proud of it."

With unique LP Junior and acoustic B-Bender guitars safely in his collection and on show at Guitars: The Museum, surely Sam can now afford to take a rest from his search for more B-Benders? Not a bit of it, he says...

"The searching I think will never stop – I will buy every Parsons White B-Bender that I actually can find. It's my mission in life! I gig with the black B-Bender Tele and the green one – they are meant to be used. That's the whole idea. But I also hope having these guitars in the museum benefits Gene Parsons in some way. I think it's a little bit forgotten in music history, and this an extremely important invention, I think." 

Cream Of The Crop

"The green Telecaster was found in an American [horticultural] community on the internet. I found it by accident while I was searching for metal scratchplates engraved with flowers. And somehow, the seller had also misspelled 'B-Bender' his advert in the same way as I had in my internet search. So I joined the community just to get an email to this guy and I finally bought the guitar. It was a 1972 Telecaster and the guy I bought it from still had the original receipt from the installation by Gene Parsons. It cost \$296 in 1975."





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Brian Setzer

As the rockabilly king unveils his new Hot Rod signature model, he tells us about competing with the drums, his problem with Teles and why great tone is all down to blood, sweat and beer...

Words Henry Yates Photography Russ Harington

Cut Brian Setzer and he bleeds Gretsch. Since he broke cover with The Stray Cats in 1981, the notion of the rockabilly kingpin toting anything else is both unthinkable and unsettling, like Slash wearing a beret or Angus Young hitting the stage in a pinstripe suit. “I don’t feel comfortable with any other guitar,” says the 56-year-old, shaking his bequipped head. “I just don’t. I’ve pretty much gotten rid of anything that’s not a Gretsch.”

Not only Gretsch’s greatest living brand ambassador, Setzer has long been a keen collaborator on a volley of signature guitars, mostly based on the ’59 6120 that drove early hits such as *Stray Cat Strut* and *Rock This Town*. This year, he unveils a new Hot Rod model with updates that are more than skin-deep. “Gretsch came after me,” he remembers, “and said, ‘We want to do something to continue the Hot Rod line.’ And so I said, ‘Well, we need to do a little more than just slap a coat of paint on it.’ I really wanted to think this out. Because it’s a big deal. You always want them to be absolutely perfect...”

Did it take a lot of prototypes to nail the Hot Rod?

“I did go through a couple, because archtops are notoriously more difficult to create than solidbody guitars. You have a top that’s arched, and so it has to be made, whereas a solidbody goes through a jig, y’know? I remember, one prototype came back where I was like, ‘Nah, I don’t care for this fretwork.’ But for the most part, Gretsch now really have it down. They

didn’t always. I went back and forth with them on the trestle bracing for years, y’know, 15 years ago, when they were first becoming marketable again. Now, they have it together. The Custom Shop is ridiculous, with Steve Stern over there. I think it’s like the second golden age of Gretsch.”

What are the defining spec changes?

“First of all, I wanted to get the body a little deeper [70mm], just to get a little more resonance out of the guitar. So we went ahead, we got that done. The main upgrade, I think, is the TV Jones pickups that he came up with for me. What happened was, TV had a guitar [of mine] that he was trading pickups in and out of. So I’d be playing it, and eventually I was like, ‘This one Hot Rod guitar sounds better than the rest – what the hell’s going on?’ And then they told me, ‘Well, we’ve been changing pickups on ya.’ Ah, for crying out loud, y’know? But once I’d gotten those pickups... I mean, TV Jones is a mad scientist. He did a great job with those.”

What do you like about those pickups?

“I think he’s messing with the magnets, using a different kind of material. To me, my God, the original TV Jones pickups sounded great. And these sound just like the originals, but I noticed that when I fingerpicked, I could really get a nice clean sound out. And then, when I dug in with a pick, I could really get a nice overdriven sound. That was the main difference I noticed with these signature pickups – they could go from clean to dirty without touching anything.”

Why do you prefer Filter’Tron-style pickups to Dynasonics or DeArmonds?

“I’ve always gotten the best sound out of them. They’re my favourites, of any of them. These new ones that TV came up with, maybe there’s a little more midrange. All I can tell you is, when I’m playing them, when I fingerpick and I want a clean sound, I don’t have to go to the amp and adjust anything. I just fingerpick, and just my skin against the string is enough that it gets it nice and clean. Because, y’know, I play a lot of jazz chords and fingerpicking style, and you want to hear all that stuff – you don’t want a lot of distortion. But you want a little more edge when you’re getting into a solo.”

Tonally, how do the Hot Rods compare to your original ’59 Stray Cats 6120?

“Well, that old Stray Cats guitar had a lot of beer poured in the pickups, a lotta sweat. It probably doesn’t sound the way it sounded 35 years ago. That’s a real bar guitar: it’s gotten used. But if you’re gonna compare it to the way it used to sound on a record or something, then it’s pretty hard to compare. Because that’s pretty much the one I was chasing, y’know?”

You’ve also chosen a pinned bridge: what’s the appeal?

“In the early days, I’d always tape ’em down or screw ’em down, because that’s what I had to do, just to get through the gig. And now, they’ve gotten it down to the fine art of having a pin in there where they hold them stable. Y’know, they stay in place, but they move around enough so you can intonate them and get the strings on and off.”

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“When I stand in front of an amp, the sound comes out of that amp and it goes back through the guitar. That hollow-bodied sound, it’s got magic about it”

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The fingerboard has a 9.5-inch radius, compared to the usual 12...

“Boy, I’ll tell you what: really, I’m a player, and there are a lot of people who are more educated than I am with radiuses. But they measured my original Stray Cat Gretsch and that’s what they got off the neck. So that leads me to believe that back in the 50s, they weren’t as particular as you’d think. I’ve played 12-inch radiuses, and with the 9.5, it’s very subtle, but to me, with a rounder neck, you’re getting a better chord frame. You can chord more easily, and yet you can still bend the strings.

“To me, the guitar, it should replicate a violin or a double bass, y’know, where the neck is an extreme curve. So I kinda like it with a little more of a curve in it than a 12. The 12 is a little flat.”

How important was it that the Hot Rod looked cool?

“I wanted it to look really rock ‘n’ roll. So I thought, y’know, ‘Let’s get rid of the pickguard.’ I don’t know that anybody really scratches the paint on their guitar. I think it’s more decorative, and for me, I can’t get my fingers underneath with that pickguard in the way. The finishes came out of a ’57 Chevy catalogue. I like the colours from that year, so I thought, ‘Whoa, why don’t we use those, rather than just orange?’ But on a car, it’s a solid finish. I thought it’d be cool if we got tinted colours that showed the maple through.”

How does the Hot Rod’s target market differ to your Nashville model?

“Y’know, I haven’t aimed them at anyone in particular. I think the Hot Rod is more, y’know, you plug the thing straight in, get your band onstage and get going with it. These guitars, you gotta play ‘em. They come off the line, and a big part of it is to get out there and play the thing. You gotta wear it in, y’know? I think the Nashville

maybe could be more for a guy who wants to sit down and play a little more fingerstyle guitar.”

Most rockabilly players love Teles, too. Would you ever consider one?

“I love the look of old Teles. But for the life of me, I just can’t play ‘em. First of all, it’s the maple neck. It just doesn’t feel finished to me, like, ‘Where’s the fingerboard? You didn’t finish it!’ I feel like I’m on an ice-skating rink. And the layout... I’m so used to hitting the toggle switch up and down, whereas I have to take my fingers off the strings and switch it. It takes too much time.”

Do you appreciate other models in the Gretsch line – the White Falcon, perhaps?

“Yeah, I’ve actually played a White Falcon on this tour I just did in the States: the Custom Shop model, and it’s got my pickups in it. People just can’t stop talking about it. They’re saying, ‘What was that guitar? It was unbelievable, the sound on that thing...’”

Are there certain techniques that should be played on a Gretsch? What do they specialise in?

“Well, for me, there’s something about a hollow-bodied guitar. When I stand in front of an amp, the sound comes out of that amp and it goes back through the guitar. That hollow-bodied sound, it’s got magic about it. I don’t see why you couldn’t use a Gretsch for any kind of music. Even for metal-type music, where you have a very overdriven sound, I mean, it would play fine for that. I don’t see why not. I’d love to hear a guy play a good blues on a hollowbody Gretsch. That could be a really nice tone that someone should do.”

Duane Eddy used to stuff his 6120 to stop feedback: has that ever been an issue?

“No, I never had to do that. Y’know, before the ‘58s, they didn’t have the trestle bracing, and I would imagine those would feed back. But once they started with that trestle bracing, that eliminated the problem.”

What amps do you think give the best rockabilly tones?

“Y’know, rockabilly is kinda different in everybody’s head. For me, what I need is – let’s call it ‘rockabilly plus’. I don’t live in the 50s – I like all that stuff that was created then, and I like the sound, but here’s the thing: you gotta beat the drummer. And Slim Jim [Stray Cats drummer] pounded the crap out of those things. I could never get loud enough to beat him.

“But my Fender Bassman was just enough, y’know? Even though it’s an







early-60s model, it had just enough of the great tone, but also the volume. Y'know, they originally came with Oxford speakers. We'd blow 'em out, so the speaker of choice would be the Celestion Vintage 30. I've been using those forever."

What role does delay play in your sound?

"Well, my favourite unit is the Roland Space Echo, the 301, because it's built like a tank, but it's still a tape echo. The Echoplexes are just unreliable. I could never get those things to work. They sounded great, but they always broke."

What is it that impresses you in other rockabilly players?

"I think it's taking your own spin on the music. It's great to hear someone play like it's the 50s, but when you put your own personality into it, that's when it brings it somewhere else. I love JD McPherson, that's fantastic stuff. I love Imelda May, and Darrel Higham is a fantastic rockabilly player. There's a Canadian guy called Paul Pigat: he's just great. There's a whole bunch of them. Whereas back in the 80s, when I was playing it, it was the new thing again, so there wasn't many guys doing it."

In your opinion, who was the original rockabilly player?

"I'd say that if you really want to hear Rockabilly 101, you've gotta put on Elvis

•

*"If you really want to
hear Rockabilly 101,
you've gotta put on
Elvis Presley's The Sun
Sessions – I would say
Scotty Moore is the
guy"*

•

Presley's *The Sun Sessions*. I would say Scotty Moore is the guy."

Were you pleased with the reaction to last year's *Rockabilly Riot*?

"Well, I've just finished the States tour, and it was like, the songs I played off that record, like *Let's Shake* and *Nothing Is A Sure Thing*, got the same reaction as old hits like *Rock This Town* and *Rumble In Brighton*. Which is fantastic. Because, let's face it, most people go out and have a smoke or get a beer, like, 'Oh, he's playing something from the new album, it's time to hit the men's room...'"

What else do you have in the pipeline?

"I've just finished a Christmas album called *Rockin' Rudolph*. It's with a big band and it's really good. Y'know, I haven't made one in about 10 years, and I thought, 'Well, how many [Christmas songs] could be left?' But there's a ton of them. Like, I hadn't done *Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree* or *Here Comes Santa Claus*. They're classic songs that you can take anywhere. You have to have the imagination to make 'em swing. But a good song is a good song." 

The Brian Setzer Orchestra will release Brian's first Christmas album for 10 years, *Rockin' Rudolph*, on 16 October.

www.briansetzer.com



Gibson

Huge reductions on Gibson USA 2015 guitars. Prices from £499



Echopark

With an artist roster including Joe Perry, Josh Homme & Troy Van Leeuwen - these guitars mean business! Coda Music are excited to be the first and only UK dealer to stock these stunning guitars! New delivery due soon, including Model J, 59 and La Came.



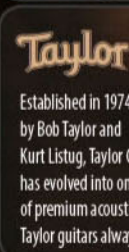
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We're delighted to have our first shipment of Kauer guitars, designed & hand-built by Doug Kauer in Sacramento, USA. They mix traditional building techniques and materials along with modern technology to create unique and great sounding guitars.



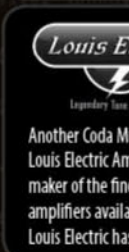
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We always carry a great selection Fender & Squier guitars, basses & amps. Amazing selection of American Standard Series guitars & basses in stock. It's been 60 years since Fender introduced the Stratocaster. Full range of 60th Anniversary guitars now in stock. Prices start from £364



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Established in 1974 by Bob Taylor and Kurt Listug, Taylor Guitars has evolved into one of the world's leading manufacturers of premium acoustic & electric guitars. We have nearly 100 Taylor guitars always on display in our new acoustic centre.



Louis Electric

Another Coda Music UK exclusive. Louis Electric Amplifiers, a boutique maker of the finest hand-wired guitar amplifiers available today. Based in New Jersey, Louis Electric has been building tube amps for over 20 years.



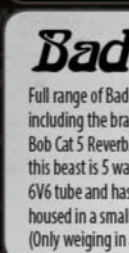
Two-Rock

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



Collings

Amazing selection of Collings Acoustic & Electric guitars in stock at our Stevenage store.



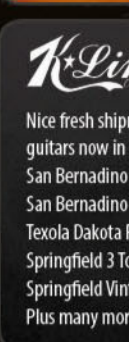
BadCat

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



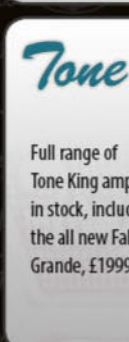
fano guitars

The only place in the UK to see Fano guitars. Currently in stock..GF6's in Pelham blue, candy apple orange, faded tea burst, black over inca silver, amber burst TC6's, black & tan, faded tea burst, SP6's roundup orange, butterscotch blonde, JM6's, faded tea burst, sea foam green, vintage cream, Pelham blue, RB6's bull black, Cadillac green.



K-Line

Nice fresh shipment of K Line guitars now in stock, including: San Bernadino Sonic Blue San Bernadino Oly White Texola Dakota Red Springfield 3 Tone Sunburst Springfield Vintage White Plus many more, please call



Tone King

Full range of Tone King amps in stock, including the all new Falcon Grande, £1999

100's of secondhand guitars, amps & pedals in stock, see www.coda-music.com for an up to date list.

We buy secondhand guitars - bring yours in for a quote & try something new at the same time

Acoustic Guitars

We are delighted to announce our new acoustic only showroom in Stevenage is now open.

This new showroom and demo facility is home to an enormous choice of exquisite acoustic instruments from Bedell, Collings, Gibson, Gretsch, Lowden, Martin, National, Taylor, Yamaha and many, many more!!!

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WHEN YOU'RE READY A Custom Shop guitar embodies everything Fender has learned over 60 years of building the world's most revered electric solidbodies. The finest materials, all the right details, hand built in Corona, California - it's the guitar of your dreams, realised.

WE HAVE THE GUITAR FOR YOU Coda Music is Europe's biggest and best Fender Custom Shop dealer, so whether you want a perfect New Old Stock, vintage-correct model, or the heaviest of Heavy Relics with a raft of custom playability tweaks, you'll find it here and with over 100 in stock in one store you won't find a better selection anywhere.

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CAN WE BUILD IT? Yes we can! If you have that extra special something in mind, we can work with you to make it a reality. Custom orders can be ready in a matter of months and cost less than you might think - call us, email us or drop in to discuss your perfect combination of features.



CARR

Great selection of models and finishes, Europe's number one Carr amp dealer. Carr Skylark now in stock, prices start at £1999.



Bedell

Incredible craftsmanship using only responsibly sourced tonewoods.

These beautiful guitars are all hand built in the USA adhering to strict environmental policies regarding the use of exotic hard wood...finally you can have an incredible sounding, gorgeous looking acoustic instrument and be 100% guilt free!



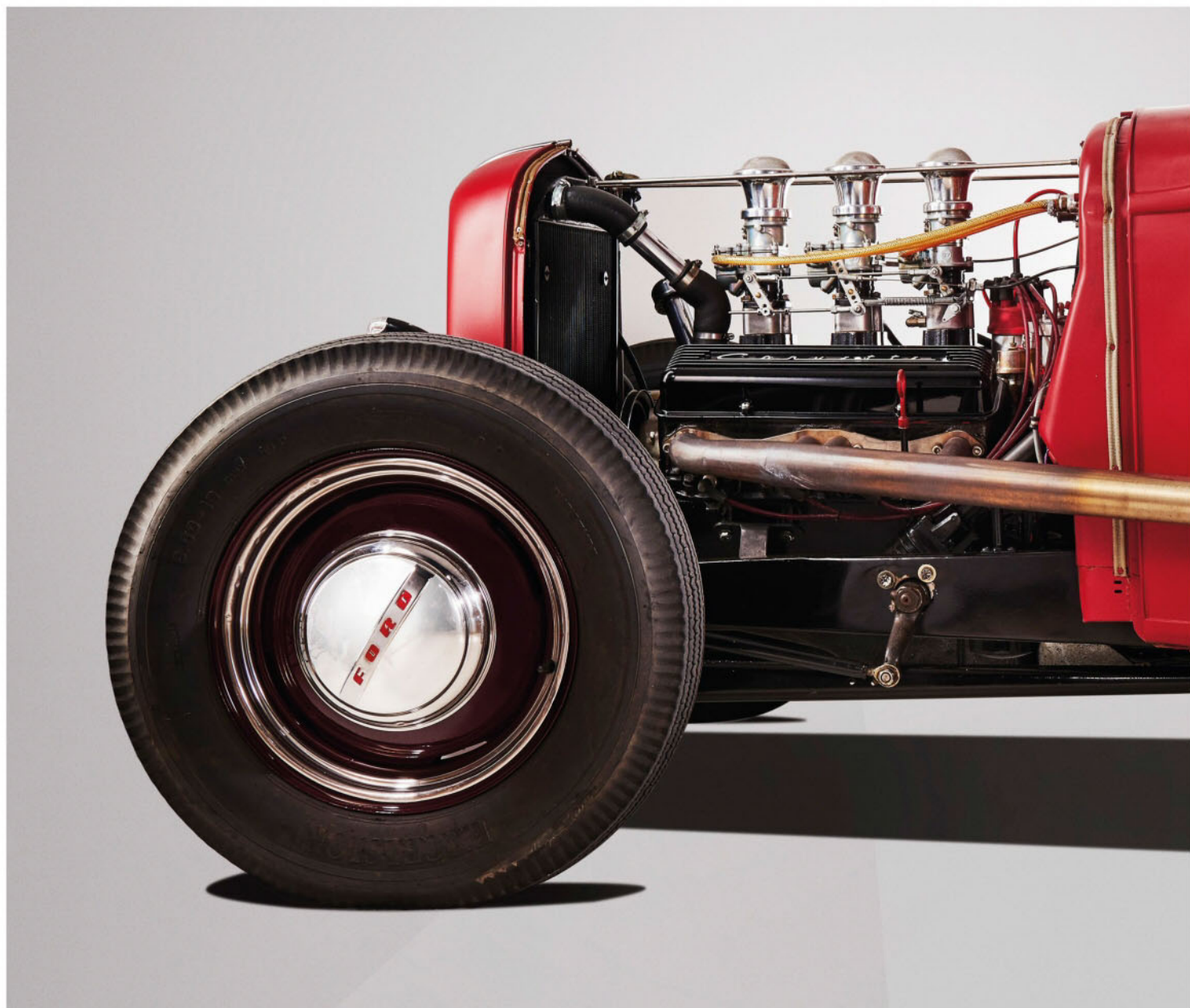
Effects

Our pedal range includes the usual suspects such as Boss, Electro Harmonix, Ibanez, Jim Dunlop, Joyo, Line 6, Mesa Boogie, Mooer, MXR, Strymon, T-Rex, TC Electronic, Visual Sound, Voodoo Lab, Wampler, Way Huge, Xotic..... we also have a huge selection of the less ordinary suspects like Bad Cat, Death By Audio, Earthquaker Devices, EWS, Fairfield Electronic, Free The Tone, Fulltone Custom Shop, Jetter Gear, Keeley, Mad Professor, Providence, Rothwell and Sonic Edge!!!

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



Rockabilly Rockets





When Gretsch gets together with the world's foremost rockabilly guitarist, you can be sure that the sparks – and the fingers – are going to fly!

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Joe Branston



GRETSCH G6120 BRIAN SETZER NASHVILLE & G6120 HOT ROD £3,149 & £2,699

CONTACT **Fender GBI** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.gretschguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1

Who's Brian Setzer when he's at home, then?

Only the world's greatest rockabilly guitarist! When he stormed onto the 80s scene with his band, The Stray Cats, many believed it was producer Dave Edmunds that played guitar on the records, not this 20-year-old upstart. But Setzer was, and is, a stunning musician and perhaps the ultimate modern Gretsch player.

2

Rockabilly and Gretsch – what's the connection?

Rock 'n' roll legends such as Cliff Gallup with Gene Vincent's Blue Caps, and the remarkable Eddie Cochran used Gretsch guitars to create a heady mix of jazz, country and rock, thus inventing the sound – and look – of rockabilly.

3

Wasn't Gretsch an American instrument brand?

The company still is, but the guitars are mostly made in Japan. Some would say that, ignoring the glow of real vintage vibe, today's instruments are better built and more consistent than ever before.

Brian Setzer has been associated with Gretsch guitars throughout his long and illustrious career. Taking on the mantle of a latter-day Eddie Cochran, his use of primarily orange 6120 models helped reinforce the identity of Gretsch as the instrument of rockabilly. He and his band, The Stray Cats, also set a fire under a thousand cool cats who wanted to keep this exciting rock 'n' roll sub-genre alive and kicking. There have been various Gretsch Setzer models for years – who doesn't recognise the tell-tale 'dice' control knobs? But this latest clutch comes with several cool upgrades, making them some of the most interesting yet to emerge from the brand.

Essentially split into two, the range offers 'full fat' in the form of the Nashville, with two pickups and the usual bristling complement of electronic switchery, and 'stripped down' as in the Hot Rod – still with twin power-plants but armed only with pickup selector and master volume. Different models come in polyurethane or lacquer (nitrocellulose) finish: our Nashville looks great in Vintage Orange lacquer, while the dapper Hot Rod Tuxedo Black Two-Tone in urethane, exudes a cool James Bond vibe.

Of our two instruments, the Nashville, in classic 6120 livery, looks the part right out of its plush-lined case. Its nitro lacquer looks glossy but not overly so, while the finish itself appears to be thinly applied and is flawless all over. The all-hollow body is built from maple throughout, with five-ply arched back and front bound in black and cream, and oversized bound f-holes. While

not figured, the transparent finish reveals a pleasing grain with minor swirls and patches of dark and light that keep things looking interesting.

A two-piece neck (five, if you count the dark centre strip and two added-on headstock 'wings') carries a fingerboard of pitch-black ebony, edged in cream, and with Gretsch's distinctive 'thumbnail' position markers and 22 medium-gauge frets. A Setzer-badged truss rod cover, horseshoe inlay and 'T-roof' Gretsch logo, plus Brian's signature between the Schaller locking tuners on the rear of the headstock, complete the picture.

When greeted by the Hot Rod, it takes a few seconds to attune oneself to a big-bodied Gretsch that's not orange. That said, two-tone finishes have been a Gretsch trademark since the 60s – the glorious light and dark green Anniversary models spring to mind – so, in truth, this two-tone see-through black and light grey over flamed maple looks appropriate and, it has to be said, pretty darned cool. Finished in urethane, it's equally perfect in execution, but we'd swear we detect an extra dash of sheen – although that could be preconceptions clouding our judgment. Here, the body is single-bound in white, there's no pickguard and chrome is the choice of plating as opposed to the duller sheen of the Nashville's nickel. The truss rod cover bears a flaming Hot Rod logo, and other than this guitar's flamed maple and urethane finish, each instrument employs identical materials and construction.

Our guitars' tops feature Gretsch's 1959-style 'trestle' bracing. In the late 50s, as a



1. The reason we're here: Brian Setzer. The world's foremost rockabilly guitarist has been a long-time Gretsch-ophile
2. These are true hollow-body guitars and both use Gretsch's 1959-style 'trestle' bracing – a direct response to Chet Atkins' request for a guitar with better feedback resistance and superior sustain
3. Both our review models feature a tune-o-matic-style 'Adjusto-Matic' bridge on a pinned wooden foot. It means you won't knock the bridge out of place: a common problem with numerous guitars of this type



4. The G6120 Brian Setzer Hot Rod features a Gretsch-branded B6 with pointed chevron cut-out; the Nashville sports a black-painted 'flat handle' Bigsby B6CB vibrato

5. It's little surprise to see the 'Hot Rod' truss rod cover featuring on this guitar. The Nashville guitar simply states 'Brian Setzer Model' instead

6. The pickups on both guitars are made (originally in secret!) by TV Jones to Mr Setzer's taste: the world's first ever TV Jones artist pickups!





It takes a few seconds to attune oneself to a big-bodied Gretsch that's not orange. But two-tone finishes have been a Gretsch trademark since the 60s – and this one is pretty darned cool

direct response to Chet Atkins' request for a guitar with better feedback resistance and superior sustain, Gretsch developed a pair of U-shaped braces that run parallel to each other, a few inches apart down the centre of the body. Offering infinitely greater mass than the company's soundpost arrangement (essentially simple dowels bridging front and back), the trestle bracing system adds mass and rigidity as it connects the top to the back, between neck block and bridge, and in so doing enhances the guitars' stability at high volumes. This bracing system is only available on certain Gretsch models, including all the Setzer-branded guitars.

Hardware includes the black-painted 'flat handle' Bigsby B6CB vibrato on the Nashville and a Gretsch-branded B6 with pointed chevron cut-out on the Hot Rod, while both guitars feature an Adjusto-Matic bridge with its rosewood foot pinned to the top for intonation stability. Also loaded on the Nashville are Schaller locking tuners and Strap-Loks, and Gretsch screw-on buttons on the Hot Rod.

Both instruments come with new Filter'Tron-style humbuckers from TV Jones. The story goes that while on tour, Setzer's guitars seemed to be sounding better and better. Setzer finally learned that Jones had been working on vintage-toned pickup upgrades and had secretly fitted them to his stage guitars. When the truth was revealed the two agreed to create TV Jones's first ever artist pickup, the Brian Setzer Signature. Jones says the coils are wound asymmetrically in each bobbin – one dark, the other bright – and this provides sparkle while maintaining the low-end growl for which this pickup style is renowned. The neck and bridge pickups are also dissimilar in output – the neck a mellow 4.5kohm DC resistance and the

bridge a beefier 6.3k. Jones reckons they flourish under distortion, with a tight bass and shimmering highs.

Sounds

Vintage Gretsch guitars were lightly built and often suffered from playability issues, including fingerboard turn-ups and unstable neck joints. Today's guitars are an entirely different kettle of fish: they invariably have great necks and play like a dream – like modern instruments instead of something from a bygone era. Our guitars are no different. They feel identical, with what might best be described as 'shallow C meets shallow V' profiles. With the same 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius as many modern Fenders, the compromise is perfect for easy chording – a staple of rockabilly – and fluid leads. While heavy string bending was less prevalent in Cliff Gallup and Eddie Cochran's time, Setzer is a no-holds-barred soloist and the Nashville and Hot Rod respond effortlessly here, too.

What non-Gretsch players might find takes a bit of getting used to is the control setup, especially the master volume sited on the horn adjacent to the cutaway. Anyone used to Gibsons or Fenders will find it counter-intuitive to put their arm across the strings to adjust it – not only can shirt or jacket sleeves get in the way, but also your picking hand is put momentarily out of action. Having used a 6120 on stage for two tours, this reviewer can attest that you get used to it – but it can be a steep learning curve.

Another idiosyncrasy of archtop guitars, in general, is the lack of access to upper frets. Anything past shape 2 of the E minor pentatonic at the 15th to 17th frets is a no-go area. That said, you don't buy a Gretsch for Steve Vai-style excursions, so no rockabilly player will give it a second thought.

THE RIVALS



FENDER TELE CABALLO TONO £3,069

The Custom Shop Cabronita imagined an early Fender/Gretsch collaboration. For 2015, the Caballo Tono keeps the vibe with the neck TV Jones and pickguard, but adds a little Tele with the bridge pickup and vintage RSD bridge.

www.fendercustomshop.com



KOLL DUO GLIDE APPROX £3,000

More retro-style action from the PBG-made Koll brand. The Duo Glide uses Koll's classy Glide shape with semi-solid construction, maple top and wrapover or Bigsby plus TV Jones Classics.

A little bit Gibson, a little bit Gretsch.

www.kollforpbg.com



FANO ALT DE FACTO JM6 APPROX £2,600

From the same home as Koll, Dennis Fano's creations put the past in a blender. So the JM6 is based on Fender's Jazzmaster but with Gibson-style P-90s and tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece. It's lightly bashed up, too.

www.fanoguitars.com



ITALIA MODENA CLASSIC £799

Trevor Wilkinson's Italia creations might not be as hip as Fano or Koll's, but they're much more affordable. This is a bit Firebird but with triple mini 'buckers on an oversized scratchplate with roller-saddled tune-o-matic bridge and whammy.

www.jhs.co.uk



7. Cutaway archtop guitars aren't known for their easy high-fret access – anything past the 17th fret is a no-go area

8. Gretsch has used numerous – often flamboyant – bridge designs over the years. The Adjusto-Matic, of course, is simply a re-named tune-o-matic designed by Ted McCarty for Gibson in the mid-50s

More quirkiness is revealed on plugging in. With the Nashville's regular switching setup, the toggle nearest the end of the fretboard is a regular three-way pickup selector, while the adjacent switch offers three tone presets. In the centre position it's out of circuit, so the tone is always wide open whichever pickup is on. The two other settings offer a mild and a slightly more radical high-frequency roll-off. You quickly get used to using the guitar in this way and, while centre position is where all the classic sparkling Gretsch tones are (on every pickup with varying degrees of body), you can go from gutsy bridge-pickup honk to neck pickup jazziness in the flick of a switch, literally.

It's much simpler over in the Hot Rod camp, as this model offers just pickup selection and master tone. The guitars sound all but identical when set similarly (with the Nashville's tone circuit bypassed) and every sound is superb. Clean, each setting shimmers, while jumping on a drive pedal or with the amp's master volume cranked, it shifts gear to become a rampaging demon. If subtlety and sonic choice is your thing, then it has to be the Nashville, but if you'd rather go straight for the jugular, the Hot Rod may well be the one.



Verdict

Gretsch guitars have always been premium instruments and these Japanese versions are no different. Between £2,699 and £3,149, they represent a serious investment. But when you think that the greatest Gretsch champion since Chet, Cliff and Eddie has been instrumental in their conception, and that the foremost builder of Filter'Tron-style pickups has added his own weight with some brilliant sounding and exclusive

-Faith®

Artist: James Veck-Glodi - Deal Havana

Photo courtesy of: CharlieWallisPhotography.com



FAITH GUITARS®



Meet the owner

The stunning 1933 Ford pickup gracing these pages belongs to drag-racer Julie Evans, above. "It's got a 283 small-block Chevy [engine] in it," she explains of the heavily modded truck. "We do time-trials at Pendine Sands, so the number on the side is my membership number for the Beaters Hot Rod Club." Although the Ford is quite a beast in terms of horsepower Julie says that it shudders pretty violently at speeds over 90mph. Rockabilly goes hand in hand with hot-rod culture, so we ask Julie what her favourite Setzer record is: "It's got to be *Stray Cat Strut*, hasn't it?" she reckons. For info see: www.beaterscarclub.co.uk

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10



12

9. The neck and bridge pickups are dissimilar in output. TV Jones reckons they flourish under distortion, with a tight bass and shimmering highs

10. The horseshoe emblem goes back to the original 6120's Western style, which featured fretboard inlays with cactus and steer's head motifs

11. Setzer has favoured these dice knobs on various signatures

12. The pickups retain the classic Filter'Tron look, a pickup designed by Ray Butts on the request of Chet Atkins

units, the level of class on offer is hard to beat. It's also worth reiterating that Gretsch Japan, under the guidance of Fender, continues to make guitars that give vintage examples a serious run for their money. So, with all that in mind, any rock 'n' roll fan's search for the perfect instrument would probably end here.

Both guitars look utterly gorgeous. They play exceptionally well – fretboard access notwithstanding – and sound like the 50s distilled. And remember, Pete Townshend played the greatest A chord in heavy-rock history on a 6120 when he blasted out *Won't Get Fooled Again*, so these guitars are no one-trick pony. The Setzer models come in an array of groovy finishes, so if the thought of a big, bold and brassy beast has ever crossed your mind, we'd heartily recommend you try one of these. **G**



GRETSCH G6120 BRIAN SETZER NASHVILLE

PRICE: £3,149 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Single-cut hollow-body electric

BODY: Laminated maple back, sides and top, with oversized f-holes

NECK: 2-piece maple plus walnut centre strip and headstock 'wings'

SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Delrin, 42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony with Neoclassic 'thumb' pearl inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Bigsby B6CB 'Flat Handle' vibrato, pinned rosewood bridge foot with Adjusto-matic bridge; Schaller locking tuners; Gretsch strap locks, gold plastic pickup surrounds, gold plexi raised pickguard; 'dice' volume knobs

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x TV Jones 'Brian Setzer' signature pickups; individual pickup volumes plus master volume; 3-way pickup selector plus 3-way preset tone selector

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The huge range of options includes: Brian Setzer Black Phoenix (£3,149); Nashville Orange Tiger Flame (urethane, £2,879); Brian Setzer Nashville (black, £2,789)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge

FINISHES: Vintage Orange (as reviewed), Black Phoenix, Orange, Black, Black Tuxedo



9/10

PROS Unbeatable looks, authentic twang, great neck. A coming of age of the iconic 6120 model

CONS Idiosyncratic master volume control and tone selection; limited upper-fret access



GRETSCH G6120 BRIAN SETZER HOT ROD

PRICE: £2,699 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Single-cut hollow-body electric

BODY: Laminated maple back, sides and top, with oversized f-holes

NECK: 2-piece maple plus walnut centre strip and headstock 'wings'

SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Delrin, 42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony with Neoclassic 'thumb' pearl inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 22 medium

HARDWARE: Bigsby B6 vibrato, pinned rosewood bridge foot with Adjusto-matic bridge; Schaller locking tuners; Gretsch screw-in strap buttons, silver plastic pickup surrounds, chrome master volume knob

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x TV Jones 'Brian Setzer' signature pickups; master volume plus 3-way pickup selector

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: See Nashville

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge

FINISHES: Black Phoenix, Orange, Black, Tuxedo Two-Tone (as reviewed), Harbor Blue Two-Tone, Green Sparkle, Blonde, Candy Apple Red, Roman Red Two-Tone

8/10

PROS Brave new livery, great playability, robust tones and simpler in use than the Nashville

CONS Expensive and with no tone control the sounds are limited; again, upper fretboard access is limited





HUGHES & KETTNER TRIAMP MARK 3 £2,799

Pro spec and MIDI functionality: has H&K built the ultimate head... again?

Words Nick Guppy Photography Adam Gasson

What You Need To Know

- 1 Isn't MIDI for keyboard players?**
Musical Instrument Digital Interface is a digital protocol that was first used on keyboards and digital multi-effects, but now it's found its way into practically every musical instrument type. On a guitar amp, MIDI is typically used to save and switch lots of functions simultaneously, often in concert with digital effects, but some amps also use the continuous controller functions to power volume and tone controls in real-time.
- 2 What's TSC?**
It stands for Tube Safety Control and is Hughes & Kettner's proprietary valve protection and auto-biasing module, which protects the amp from defective valves by shutting them down, while ensuring each valve is biased to perfection at all times for the best performance.
- 3 And the Stomp Boost function?**
Imagine you have a high-end solid-state overdrive pedal plugged into the front end of your TriAmp Mark 3, with pre-set optimised gain, volume and tone settings for each channel, and a true bypass. It can be programmed on or off for each channel.

Hughes & Kettner is one of just a few manufacturers with a catalogue that includes every type of guitar amplification, from affordable solid-state to boutique all-valve products such as the Puretone, to state-of-the-art hybrid designs like the GrandMeister. At the top of the German amp builder's product tree, however, is a head that's challenged the best of the world for 20 years.

The almighty TriAmp is Hughes & Kettner's go-to flagship, intended to be all things to all players, with just about every function a professional might need and a few more besides. H&K unveiled the TriAmp's all-new Mark 3 incarnation at the start of 2015, to the sound of jaws dropping as players and music journalists alike digested the number of knobs on the control panel.

It's no surprise, then, that the Mark 3's front panel is a little intimidating at first glance, with no less than 33 rotary controls and 13 illuminated switches, not counting mains and standby. If that wasn't enough, there's even more functionality on the rear. The big, full-width chassis is immaculately finished and presented; the trademark backlit blue Perspex front is a feature one either loves or hates, something H&K appears to have taken onboard, as there's not just an on/off switch for the lights on the rear, but also a fader control.

Inside the heavy-duty steel chassis, practically all the electronics are PCB-mounted on very high-quality boards, with

typically economical routing and high-quality components, such as metal film resistors to keep hiss down to a minimum. The overall build and design is typical of H&K's high-end German-made products – manufactured to withstand endless pro-level touring and provide the best sound quality possible, night after night.

Some amps can be used almost intuitively, often without reading a user manual, while others need at least one cover-to-cover session before plugging in. You might be surprised to find out that, for us, the TriAmp more or less falls into the former category. There are six preamp channels organised in three pairs, powered by eight 12AX7s. All six channels are individually voiced, going from huge clean sounds with pedal-friendly high headroom, to similarly massive overdrives with practically infinite sustain. Each channel has an identical set of bass, mid and treble controls with gain and master volume. The TriAmp has three global master controls for volume, presence and resonance to fine-tune the power stage's high and low frequency response.

The Mark 3's output stage has increased from four to six valves – four 6L6s and two EL34s, for a maximum output of around 150 watts. However, these can be selected in pairs and pre-set for each channel. The TriAmp's automatic biasing means that most other octal-based valves can be used with no need to adjust anything, including 5881s and KT66s.



1. Depending how you feel about that divisive blue glow, you now have the option to either brighten or darken the lights to your own preference with a dial at the rear

2. The TriAmp Mark 3's effects loop is switchable from series to parallel

3. Despite the sheer number of knobs and switches (pushing almost 50 in total!), TriAmp Mark 3 control is surprisingly intuitive. You may even get away without reading the manual...

Other features include: an effects loop that can be switched from series to parallel; a 'Stomp Boost' solid-state overdrive, which is voiced differently for each channel and has a true bypass; the latest speaker-emulated 'Red Box' DI output with Ambience Emulation; and a very clever intelligent noise gate. Best of all, all the TriAmp's switching functions are MIDI-controllable, and Hughes & Kettner includes the TSM 432 floor controller as part of the package.

Sounds

We've come to expect great things from Hughes & Kettner, and the Mark 3 TriAmp doesn't disappoint. There are fat vintage cleans, airy modern cleans with huge headroom that sound amazing with a touch of chorus and reverb, a superb vintage Brit overdrive from channel 2A that's right on the money for classic rock and blues, all the way up to the most insane filth you could ever want for modern metal and thrash on channel 3B... Although for these extreme tones, some extra EQ in the effects loop might come in handy. This apart, the passive tone controls work smoothly and predictably across all six channels, making it very easy to dial in any guitar.

The Red Box AE output is excellent; the new Ambience Emulation feature gives a



very real impression of air being shifted, while the noise gate samples the signal at two separate points in the audio chain and effectively squashes noise and hum without announcing its presence. The Stomp Boost works differently on each channel, targeting different frequencies, for a creamier tone with a dose of extra pizzazz. If you want pure valve tones, don't fret, it has a true bypass.

Practically every switch setting is MIDI programmable; if you really want to, you can even fade the blue lights up and down using continuous controller commands. The TSM 432 foot controller is a specialised version of the FSM 432, which can be used



Combined with any decent MIDI effects unit, the TriAmp Mark 3 is probably the ultimate do-anything, go-anywhere package



4. Among the feature-packed back panel is Hughes & Kettner's new Red Box AE (Ambience Emulation), a Full Range Flat Response-ready DI output – which gives a real feeling of pushing air

There are fat vintage cleans and airy modern cleans, a superb vintage Brit overdrive, all the way up to the most insane filth you could ever want

in stomptbox mode, where each channel is directly accessed, or conventional bank/patch selection, with up to 128 presets. It's also phantom-powered, as long as you use the special seven-pin DIN cable – so no extra leads and wall-warts to trip over.

Verdict

Beyond any doubt, Hughes & Kettner has raised the bar again. Combined with any decent MIDI effects unit, the TriAmp Mark 3 is probably the ultimate do-anything, go-anywhere package. Aimed primarily at professional users, it's likely to be found on festival stages all over the world. However, its physical size and weight means it perhaps won't be so common at your local blues jam.

The price, as you might expect, is similarly heavy duty. But bear in mind that the floor controller is included, as is a very tough protective cover. But the sounds are generally superb, though some do have more character than others. As you add more channels, so the difference between them tends to diminish, and we think Hughes & Kettner has probably pushed this idea about far as it can go: it's almost (but not quite) overkill! Nevertheless, if you need the ultimate in control, combined with top-notch German build quality and reliability, the TriAmp Mark 3 could well have your name on it. **G**



HUGHES & KETTNER TRIAMP MARK 3

PRICE: £2,799

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp with built-in solid-state drive boost

OUTPUT: Maximum 145 watts RMS

VALVES: 9x 12AX7, 4x 6L6, 2x EL34

DIMENSIONS: 740 (w) x 393 (h) x 254 (d) mm

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 22/49

CABINET: Ply

CHANNELS: 3x 2-channel preamps and 3x assignable power amps

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, bass, mid and treble x6. Master volume, presence and resonance. Channel select buttons, Stomp Boost on/off, output valve pair select x3, MIDI learn button

FOOTSWITCH: TSM 432 MIDI controller (included) handles all MIDI switching functions

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in Red Box AE, programmable series/parallel effects loop, preamp out/power amp in inserts, programmable noise gate, panel light fader. Automatic bias control and output valve protection, stomp boost sits between guitar input and preamp, can be true bypassed

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Mark 2 version of the TriAmp is still available at £2,599. Matching 4x12 cabinets cost £899

JHS

01132 865381

www.hughes-and-kettner.com



9/10

PROS Possibly the ultimate multi-function head; enough features to keep any twacker happy for years

CONS Although it's expensive and pro-aimed, not all channels have the same depth of character



PROGRESSIVE

EXPRESSIVE

DEFINITIVE

MARTYN EVANS / BLACK HAWK

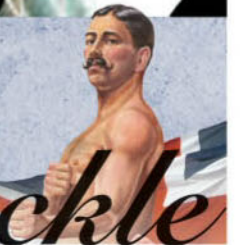
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Heads You Win

No doubt, the TriAmp Mark 3 is one of the ultimate amp heads, but there's tough competition, even at this level

MESA/BOOGIE TRIPLE RECTIFIER **£2,474**

The latest version of Mesa/Boogie's all-conquering Triple Rectifier model features three channels with eight distinct voice modes, an assignable rectifier and an all-new footswitch. A 'go-to' amp for those of a metal, thrash and modern rock persuasion, and has been a backline mainstay of many of the bands in those genres since the early 1990s.

www.mesaboogie.com

ORANGE ROCKERVERB MKIII HEAD **£1,499**

Another mark 3 amp, the latest version of Orange's flagship may not have hundreds of features like the H&K, but it more than makes up for that in the tone department, with lots of extra versatility thanks to a footswitchable attenuator, and bags of British tone wrapped in classic Orange styling.

www.orangeamps.com

MARSHALL JVM410H 100 WATT **£1,799**

Marshall's latest flagship amp has four channels, each with three modes, MIDI control, and a whole lot more. Compared to some more exotic brands, the price is almost a bargain. However, make no mistake, the sound and features are most definitely right up there with the world's best. A total blast to play.

www.marshallamps.com

RIVERA KR7 **£2,100**

Rivera's Knucklehead Reverb Seven is the Mick Thomson signature version of its three-channel all-valve monster, which pushes out close to 120 watts of stunning clean, crunch and lead for the Slipknot man. MIDI switching adds considerably to this amp's versatility; the amount of gain on tap is frankly insane, yet it's still easy to control.

www.rivera.com

ENGL E670 SPECIAL EDITION **£1,919**

Engl's special EL34-powered version of the formidable E670 head features four channels to choose from, MIDI control like our H&K, and so many additional functions and modes that you'll probably never use them all. Ultimately though, this is a seriously great-sounding pro head, especially for rock and metal.

www.englamps.de

BOGNER ECSTASY 101B **£3,249**

Reinhold Bogner's maverick approach occasionally misses the mark, but when he hits it, the results are sublime. The Ecstasy 101B is the latest incarnation of his long-running three-channel super-head with more features than you can shake a stick at, and the unmistakable Bogner magic tone. Once heard, never forgotten.

www.bogneramplification.com

TAT SPECIAL 7

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MARTIN 00X1AE & GPX1AE £599 & £599

The Dread' Junior and Ed Sheeran X may have bagged recent Martin headlines, but this new duo combines affordability with USB output

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Adam Gasson

What You Need To Know

- 1 At these prices they're not 'real' Martins, are they?**
 Well, they aren't made in the fabled Nazareth-based USA factory – they are made in Mexico. But real Martins? Very much. The X Series is the start point for full-size Martin guitars: the prices are kept low with simplified construction and use of synthetic back and sides.
- 2 Is that a USB socket by the preamp? What's it for?**
 It is, and it's simply a recording output. Plug it into your computer's USB socket, open your DAW and start recording. It's that simple.
- 3 Who's going to play 'em?**
 Obviously aimed at players on their way up, they're also good as 'second' guitars for the more experienced player. Both are good recording guitars, too – they really complement each other sound-wise; capo'd or in high-strung Nashville tuning, the lil' 00 would be great for overdubs.

Unlike some USA acoustic makers, you certainly can't accuse Martin of ignoring the beginner, student or simply small-budgeted among us. Although from 22 new models and limited editions released so far this year, only four have three-figure prices, it's those that will be unquestionably the biggest selling. Ed Sheeran's X Signature and the slightly down-sized Dreadnought Junior have certainly grabbed the headlines, but two other X Series models, released earlier this year at the Frankfurt Musikmesse, are far from insignificant.

The non-cutaway 00X1AE, one of three 00-size models released this year and one of only seven currently offered, enters Martin's start-up range as the smallest-bodied full-scale guitar, while the GPX1AE is the first Grand Performance shape in the X Series and, not counting the \$10,999 SS-GP42-15 NAMM Show Special, is the only non-cutaway in this shape. Both are electros, both have USB recording outputs, and while neither comes with a gigbag, both retail at a very tidy £559.

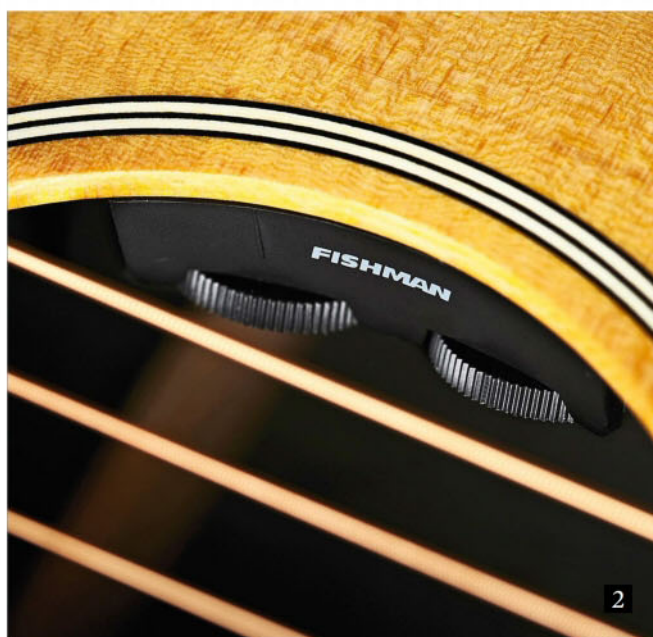
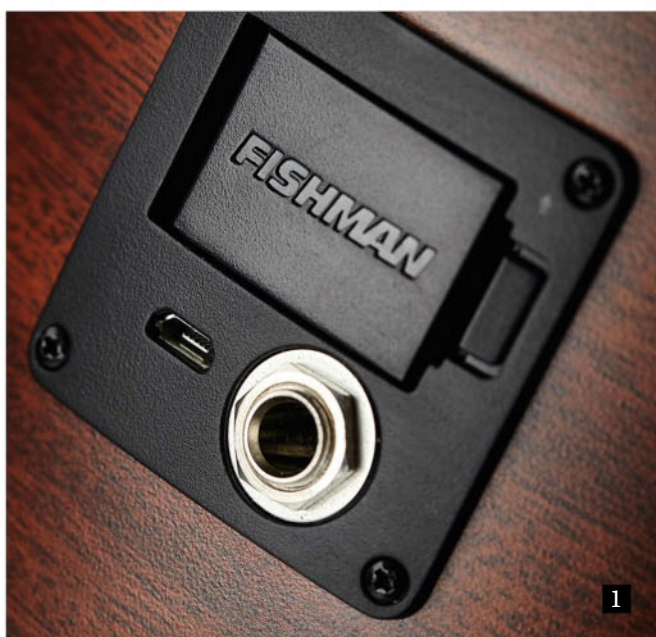
Like the Dreadnought Junior, the X Series guitars are made in Mexico. But unlike that model, which aside from its Richlite fingerboard and bridge is all solid wood, these X Series models feature just solid spruce tops (the X1 part of the model name refers to a solid spruce top with 1 Series-style bracing): the rest is either laminate or synthetic. So on both models here we have the high-pressure laminate (HPL) back and sides with its highly realistic-looking

mahogany-like texture and coloration paired with a multi-laminate neck made from around 37 slices, at its widest point, of birch – like thick, just under 2mm, veneers stacked together. Neither guitar is bound; there are no fingerboard inlays (just small white plastic side dots) and soundhole decoration is simple – the 00 features single-ring black Boltaron and white fibre, while the GPX1AE's double ring is slightly more flamboyant.

Both have ultra-thin 'sealer'-type finishes. The 00 is vintage-toned, and all the better for it, we feel. But while these might seem bare-bones, like the Dreadnought Junior, the quality of the build is exceptionally high: crisp, clean and sharp.

While both share the long 645mm (25.4-inch) Martin scale length, the body sizes are a lot different. The 00 retains similar proportions to the 000/OM but is down-sized from a 492mm length and 387mm width to 479mm x 338mm. Depth-wise, they're virtually identical.

The Grand Performance body shape is undeniably Taylor-esque, and first appeared in the all-cutaway Performing Artist series, where the current GPCPA5 shares exactly the same specs as this model except with a cutaway and Fishman's F1 Analogue pickup system as opposed to the Fishman Sonitone USB setup here. With its Taylor Grand Auditorium-like size (it's actually very slightly smaller), the 502mm x 399mm body size is a different proposition to the much more compact 00, which is trimmer in depth, too.



The other notable differences are the neck shapes. The 00 has a 'Modified Low Oval' (20.8mm deep at the 1st fret, 23mm at the 12th) while the GP has the 'Performing Artist' profile (21.2mm deep at the 1st fret, 22.5mm at the 10th). The nut is wider on the GP, though, and certainly enough for your left hand to notice quite a difference, despite the virtually identical set up, which is quite electric-like in terms of string height.

The Fishman Sonitone under-saddle comes with volume and tone controls placed inside the soundhole. There's no side-mounted preamp – the actual preamp board is attached to those soundhole controls, while the output jack is placed on the side, on a simple plastic plate that also houses the battery and the circuitry for the mini-USB output. While there's a reassuringly solid feel to both guitars, this plastic side plate doesn't fill us with confidence stage-wise – it's fine for the battery holder and indeed the USB output,

There's plenty of volume from both, and quite a direct, strong and strident character



but we'd really prefer the jack output to double as the base strap button, which here, in Martin style, is a plug-in plastic type, like an enlarged bridge pin, that is simply a push fit, albeit firm, into the base block: conjuring visions of straps falling off and wrenching out jack sockets at your nerve-ridden open-mic slot. Mind you, both do have a metal strap-button on the heel, so it's not all bad.

Sounds

With identical construction, materials and scale length, it's primarily the body size here that affects the bass and lower midrange tonality. So, the 00 sounds the thinnest of the duo compared to the broader, deeper tonality of the GP. There's more commonality with the upper mids and highs, very Martin-like, beautifully ringing, zing-y and shimmery. The larger body of the GP gives it a chunkier feel, too, and in lower positions, the rounded but not over deep, and slightly



1. The slightly bigger than normal output jack plate also holds the preamp battery and circuitry for the guitars' USB output

2. The controls of the Fishman Sonitone USB preamp are conveniently and discreetly located inside the soundhole of both guitars

3. The enclosed Martin-logo'd small-button tuners do the job nicely, even if they're not quite as handsome as the Butterbean open-gear jobs you see on higher end models

4. Tops on both are solid spruce, just like the internal bracing. This 00 has a vintage-toned thin finish to give it a slightly older-looking vibe

wider, neck really feels bigger than the almost delicate, soft V of the 00. There's plenty of volume from both – and quite a direct, strong and strident character – and again, if you dig in, the GP especially has a real room-filling projection.

Amplified, the sound is a very accurate representation of each. With a little onboard help, using the tone to subtly roll off the zing, and with a little outboard help to thin the mids and clean things up a little, strumming in lower positions, we'd be happy enough. Although obviously a little piezo-like and unnatural in the midrange, and on higher-fret excursions, the sound really isn't a million miles away from our reference Martin Dreadnought costing over twice the price.

But it's as recording guitars we really hear the benefits. That's not to say we'd be recording our introspective fingerstyle solo record with either: if we had to, it'd be the fuller-sounding GP, but for bigger Americana or rock, and other styles

THE RIVALS



TAYLOR BIG BABY TAYLOR E £514

Featuring a solid spruce top, layered sapele back and sides with ebony fingerboard and bridge and 648mm (25.5-inch) scale, this Big Baby includes a new-for-2015 electro system based on the ES2 with side-mounted preamp/tuner.

www.taylorguitars.com



SIMON & PATRICK SONGSMITH FOLK A3T £499

This very appealing small-body guitar in retro sunburst finish combines Canadian build with a solid spruce top and a body not too far away from Martin's 00. B-Band electronics are included.

www.simonandpatrick.com



TANGLEWOOD SUNDANCE HISTORIC TW40 O AN E £599

The 14-fret 'Orchestra Folk' size is slightly smaller than Martin's GP but with a vintage vibe from its toned solid spruce top. It comes with mahogany back and sides, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, plus Fishman's Sonitone preamp system.

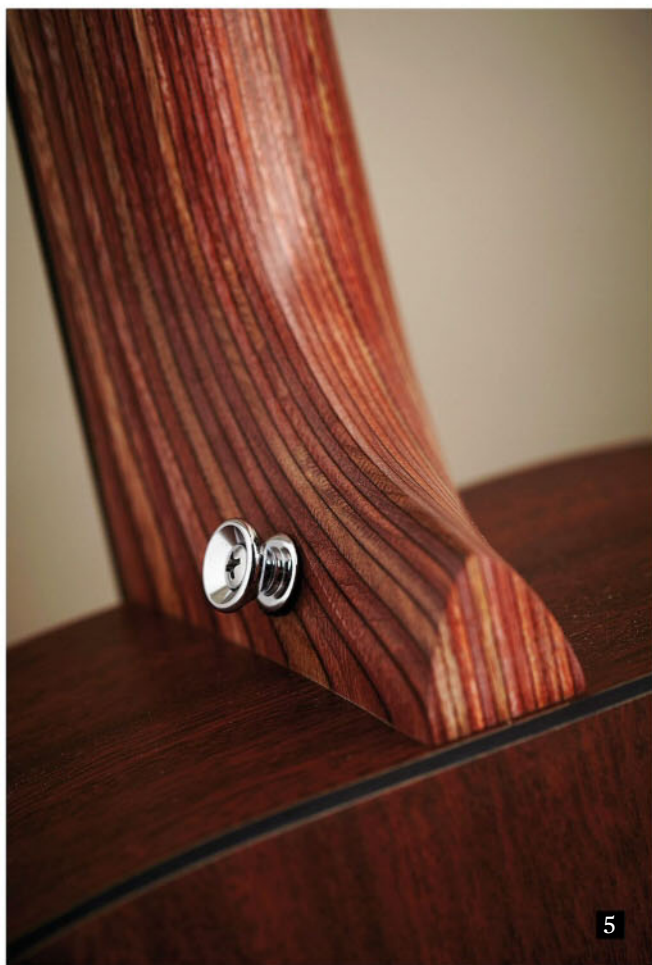
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk



FAITH NATURAL NEPTUNE £699

Faith's Indonesian-made Neptune is classed as a 16-inch baby jumbo but isn't a million miles away from the Taylor GA/Martin Grand Performance with a stylish sloping cutaway. This model has all solid spruce/mahogany construction.

www.faithguitars.com



5. The necks are made from multi-laminate strips of birch with a mahogany-like stain that creates a unique, but not unappealing appearance

where a rhythm bed is so important, these both excel. It's probably not by design, but they're very complementary guitars, sound-wise. The smaller 00 has a tighter bass, but those shimmering highs are contrasted by the altogether bigger-sounding GP. Using the USB outputs into a simple DAW such as GarageBand, you might be surprised at the results, especially for arpeggiated parts and strummed rhythms when double-tracked and given a wide stereo spread. Lead lines are less convincing and do sound a little piezo-like, but that's the same when plugged into a PA or amp.

Verdict

If we're honest, we've been a bit snooty about Martin's seemingly so synthetic X Series. The fact is, both are superbly built and although we have some concerns about durability, the thing that sways us is the easy playability and surprisingly good sound for live or recording duties (with or without the USB feature – it's there if you need it). The GP has to be the best bet for a main guitar choice, or a second as a spare or alternately tuned, but the 00 has intimate practice and songwriter written all over it. As a studio tool, not least in an open tuning, capo'd, or Nashville-tuned, any creative musician would find a use for it. **G**



MARTIN 00X1AE

PRICE: £559
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: 14-fret 00-size electro-acoustic
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany Pattern HPL Textured Finish
MAX RIM DEPTH: 103mm tapering to 84.5mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 362mm
NECK: Birch laminate, Modified Low Oval profile
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4")
TUNERS: Chrome enclosed w/small buttons
NUT/WIDTH: White Corian/42.32mm
FINGERBOARD: Black Richlite, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Black Richlite w/compensated Tusq saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Sonitone USB system (OEM-SON-GU1) with soundhole-placed preamp w/volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.13/4.69
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: 00-15E Retro (£1,549) and the 00-15M (£1,099)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no charge
FINISH: Hand Rubbed Aging Toner Finish, top only
Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.martinguitar.com

7/10

PROS Compact size, impressive build quality, sound and price – and the USB output is very handy

CONS Might be too specialist for some and that plastic output plate worries us for prolonged stage use



MARTIN GPX1AE

PRICE: £559
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: 14-fret Grand Performance-size electro acoustic
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany Pattern HPL Textured Finish
MAX RIM DEPTH: 112mm tapering to 90mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 399mm
NECK: Birch laminate, Performing Artist profile
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4")
TUNERS: Chrome enclosed w/small buttons
NUT/WIDTH: White Corian/44.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Black Richlite, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Black Richlite w/compensated Tusq saddle/55.6mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Sonitone USB system (OEM-SON-GU1) with soundhole-placed preamp w/volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.28/5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: In the Performing Artist series is the GPCPA5 (£799)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no charge
FINISH: Hand Rubbed Finish, top only

8/10

PROS Ditto the 00, but this is more an all-rounder in terms of sound, feel and style

CONS Again, the plastic-mounted output jack and plastic strap button don't fill us with confidence



Guild
EST. 1953



LEFT: Many of the guitars produced in Martin's Navojoa facility use HPL backs and sides

RIGHT: With more than 450 staff, the Navojoa factory produces a large percentage of the Martin guitars sold each year



Down Mexico Way

Rarely seen, Martin's Mexican factory makes a substantial contribution to the number of Martin guitars sold annually. *Guitarist* investigates...

It's been a good year for Martin's lower-end acoustics, which are made not in the fabled Nazareth, PA facility, but some 350 miles south of the US border in Navojoa, Mexico. Originally opened to produce strings back in 1989, today it makes the "Backpackers, Little Martins, certain ukuleles, Dreadnought Junior, X-Series, and Road Series instruments," says Greg Paul who oversees the Navojoa facility. "We have been producing Backpackers in Navojoa since 1989," he adds, although the company itself has stated that didn't happen until 1992: "a project that provided a foundation for developing woodworking and luthiery skills."

"Since then, while becoming Martin's sole manufacturer for strings, the woodworking craftspeople have continued to evolve their skills with training from Martin, including trips to the Nazareth factory, and now produce solid-wood models using the more demanding construction techniques associated with Martin," Paul affirms

When it opened back in 1989, Martin says the factory had only 12 employees. Today, it employs over 450 people, making it one of Navojoa's largest employers. Crucially, the company confirms that unlike many other US companies that have opened sites overseas, Martin has never laid off any of its US workforce as a result of opening and expanding the Navojoa factory.

But it's the use of synthetic materials in the production the X Series guitars, for example, which for a highly traditional

heritage company such as Martin seems out of place. In the early 1990s Martin's director of instrument design, Tim Teel, was looking at ways to make a lower-cost Martin.

"Around that same time, I was remodelling a kitchen and happened to be in one of the hardware stores looking at samples of HPL for counter tops," Teel says. "The thought came to me, 'What would it be like to use this for a guitar body?'" The result, as Martin's Dick Boak says, is that "around 30 per cent of Martin's production is high pressure laminate" and we suspect that figure is rising. High Pressure Laminates (HPL), with brand names such as Formica, are "manufactured through fusing multiple layers of impregnated paper under high pressure and temperature to create a hard wearing, durable and hygienic facing material." Guitars such as the Little Martin LXK2 and LX Black use bodies entirely of HPL, such as the X Series DXMAE and DXK2AE and the DXAE and OMXAE, while our review models, and numerous others in the X Series, combine HPL with real spruce tops.

The birch laminate necks of the X series, with Richlite fingerboards and bridges, are other new paths. "They are not only beautiful, but they are very stable over wide temperature and humidity ranges," says Greg Paul of the necks, adding that "another benefit of using engineered materials in our X Series instruments is that they do not require additional finishes to be applied," again saving massive labour time and

cost in the production of the instruments. Finishes such as the Dreadnought Junior's environmentally friendly hand-rubbed oil is again a fast finish to achieve and provides a stark contrast to the majority of heavily glossed import models from Asia.

Ed Sheeran is synonymous with his short scale (584mm/23-inch) Little Martin, and this year saw the launch of his second signature, the Ed Sheeran X, following on from his 2014 LXIE. Again, it's built in this modern manner with koa HPL textured finish back and sides, brown-stained birch laminate neck and solid spruce top with hand rubbed ageing toner finish and, of course, Richlite fingerboard and bridge. It's powered by a Fishman Isys T system with onboard tuner and has a retail price of £579, including gigbag. Conversely, the full-size GPRSGT (£959, inc case) – which stands for Grand Performance Cutaway Road Series Gloss Top – is the first Performing Artist shape in the Road Series and, aside from its Richlite fingerboard and bridge, is a more conventional build with solid spruce top and solid sapele back and sides with that gloss top and satin finish back and sides. Like our reviewed X Series guitars it comes with Fishman's Sonitone USB preamp system. Its impressive spec and price won it Best In Show at this year's Summer NAMM.

Despite an image that's often dusty and steeped in its considerable heritage, down Mexico way, Martin is actually making some of the most advanced, cost-effective instruments anywhere on the planet. **G**

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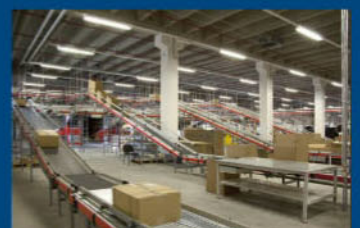


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VINTAGE '65
JAZZMASTER
OLYMPIC WHITE
£1,362



NEW AMERICAN
VINTAGE '64
TELECASTER
FIESTA RED
£1,266



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VINTAGE '52
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£1,266



NEW AMERICAN
VINTAGE '58
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STD - LEMONBURST
Was £4,699
NOW £3,759



'59 VOS LES PAUL
STD - WASHED CHERRY
Was £4,699
NOW £3,759



'59 VOS LES PAUL STD
- SUNRISE
TEA BURST
Was £4,699
NOW £3,759



'59 VOS LES PAUL
STD - FADED TOBACCO
Was £4,699
NOW £3,759



'59 HEAVY AGED LES
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LEMON BURST
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'56 VOS GOLDTOP
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'59 VOS ES-335 -
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LG-0
£850



1957 GIBSON
LG-1
£1,395



1965 GIBSON
DOVE
£3,250



1950 GIBSON
L-50
£1,795



1966 EPIPHONE
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PEDALBOARD

From retro tape delays to far-out reverbs and hard rock-ready overdrives, we test the effects that matter in our dedicated pedal review section



Hank Marvin inspired a generation of guitarists to pick up a guitar, so it's no wonder that replicating the shimmering sounds of milestone Shadows' tracks such as *Apache* is something of an obsession for his devotees. If you're among them, then Hall & Collins' Signature Echo (p122) is a must-try effect. Not only does it highly accurately model the glistening multi-tap delays of vintage tape units used by Hank, from the Meazzi Echomatic to the Vox Long Tom, but it has bespoke circuitry designed to emulate the warm, saturated pre-amp tones associated with these vintage

delays. It's not cheap, but the quality of the delays is stunning.

Elsewhere, EarthQuaker Devices' mind-warping stompboxes (p126) are a spur to sonic invention. From the ultra-heavy drive of the Bit Commander to the wilderness of echoes summoned up by the Afterneath reverb, if you like far-out effects you need to check these out. Meanwhile, shred-legend Richie Kotzen launches his aggressive boost and drive pedal, the aptly named OMG from Tech21 (p124), and bass-effect gurus EBS makes its first foray into guitar effects, with three compelling new stompboxes for six-stringers (p128). **G**



HALL & COLLINS SIGNATURE ECHO £599

A new digital delay pedal that delivers emulations of several vintage multi-head echo units. Hank's for the memories?

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Adam Gasson

There are plenty of delay pedals out there that aim to emulate the sound of delay and echo units of years gone by. Building a bit of degradation into the repeats or a touch of modulation to simulate the fluctuations of a moving tape is commonplace and can give you a flavour of that vintage sound. Most supply equally-spaced repeats – which is fine if you are looking for the sound of an BBD-based analogue delay or an Echoplex-style single-head tape echo. Few address more complex multi-tap echoes, however: the sort of sounds achieved by an electro-mechanical tape or drum delay (such as a Binson Echorec) with multiple playback heads that aren't always equidistantly spaced, typified by the ambiances and rippling echoes made famous by The Shadows.

If those sounds interest you, your dreams may have just come true with the Hall & Collins Signature Echo.

It not only delivers highly editable multi-tap echoes, but also accurately emulates several vintage units from the 1950s to the 1970s, including several variations of rare units such as the Meazzi Echomatic, the Vox Long Tom and the Binson Echorec 2.

Charlie Hall and John Collins are the men responsible for a pedal that they say represents the culmination of a project to emulate echo sounds to an accuracy that had never been reached with other effects processors. Charlie Hall may already be known to some readers for his Echoes From The Past series of patches for digital multi-tap delay units, from Alesis and Yamaha, and also for supplying echo patches to Hank Marvin himself.

What you get is a chunky and rock-solid mono pedal that features 64 preset patches and 64 user patches. A central footswitch turns the effect on and

ABOVE The Signature Echo is designed to emulate the ambient, rippling delays of old electro-mechanical tape or drum delays



LEFT The Signature Echo is fully stocked with knobs and buttons for on-the-fly tweakability of the 64 user-editable echo patches onboard

off while Patch Down and Patch Up footswitches to either side scroll through the patches and load them. A large backlit display gives you the patch number, the model of echo unit emulated and a descriptive name. Some are named after representative songs. Many, unsurprisingly, are by The Shadows, plus a couple from U2 – flagging up that the unit can also deliver slightly more contemporary sounds. A row of five knobs allows instant tweaks of dry and echo sound levels, echo drive, feedback and simulated wow and flutter.

Sounds

The first thing to note is that the pedal will alter your tone even when bypassed, but in a good way, as its preamp emulates the valves-working-hard sound of an old Meazzi Echomatic 2 echo. It also has an analogue circuit that emulates the distortion and compression characteristics of tape-echo units very nicely. Now this is not like a delay pedal where you just turn the delay time up or down: the sounds and the often distinct pattern of repeats of vintage echo units are determined by the number of heads, their distance apart, the speed of the tape (or rotating drum), the relative playback volume of each head and the amount of feedback (often different for individual heads), and the pedal offers parameter editing that takes all of that into account.

So, you get up to six 'playback heads' in each patch and can set the timings between them to a resolution of 0.1ms. Charlie Hall's research has ensured that he has got the timing, volume and feedback of the repeats

for the emulated machines spot-on, and they sound excellent. There's plenty of potential to create your own sounds, too, be they complex multi-tap echoes or more simple stuff. Be aware, though, that the editing methodology may seem a little 1980s and clunky to anyone used to a data dial or software editor.

Verdict

Let's face it, this is a specialist unit. For just shy of 600 notes, it's not going to appeal to the casual delay user, but that doesn't mean that it's just a toy for wealthy Shadows fans. While it's true that anyone who has listened to a Shadows recording and marvelled at the echo will love this – grab a Strat and a Vox amp and there's the sound for each song at the press of a footswitch – it goes way beyond that. What this offers is not only an entry into the arcane world of vintage echo units, all reproduced here with scrupulous attention to detail, but also the potential to create your own pattern of repeats for something new and individual. There are sounds here that you won't find in any other pedal, and they could be just as valid for the modern guitarist as they were for Hank all those years ago. **G**

PROS Emulates a range of vintage echo units that would cost a mint even if you could find them in working order. Great tone

CONS It's expensive, it's bulky and some may find it a bit too 'specialist' and fiddly to edit. Tap-tempo would be nice

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Delay pedal

FEATURES: 64 preset patches, 64 editable user patches

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 12V AC

adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 165 (l) x 220 (w) x 80mm (h)

Hall And Collins

support@

hallandcollins.com

hallandcollins.com



TECH 21 OMG RICHIE KOTZEN SIGNATURE OVERDRIVE £209

Various megastar guitar players have had design input into signature pedals before, but now it's Richie Kotzen and Tech21's turn...

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Adam Gasson

NYC-based Tech 21 and Richie Kotzen – guitarist, singer, songwriter and producer, formerly of Poison, Mr Big and currently Winery Dogs – have collaborated to come up with the OMG, an all-analogue distortion pedal, which also features in Kotzen's signature version of the Fly Rig 5. The OMG is a dual-footswitch pedal: the left-hand switch operates the distortion, while the right one brings in up to 28dB of boost, set via a knob. Both footswitches operate independently of each other, so you can just use the pedal as a booster without the distortion, if you wish. The distortion is controlled by the four knobs in a row at the top of the pedal. Level sets the output level, while the Drive knob sets the overall amount of gain and overdrive. Interestingly, you get two knobs to adjust the EQ. The Tone knob offers a flat setting when fully clockwise, but you can wind it back to tone down the high end; Girth is an active midrange control that offers cut or boost with a null setting at the 12 o'clock point.

Sounds

Disregarding the distortion section for a minute, and engaging just the boost switch, the OMG yields great results as a pure boost pedal – there's plenty there from just minimal volume hikes to getting your valves really cooking. The pedal was designed to replicate the distortion flavour of a single-power-tube Class A

amplifier and kicking in the distortion section yields some natural valve-like overdrive at quite low drive knob settings. With the boost footswitch available to take that up a notch, there's versatility right there in adding a driven extra channel to your amp with two levels of gain, although the higher gain settings can sound a little blown-out or lacking in focus. All the same, you can access some really saturated and sustaining tones that will suit players on the heavier side of the rock spectrum, especially lead players who like to squeeze out harmonics. The EQ knobs do a great job of matching the sound to complement your amp, with Girth putting some bark or weight in the tone or alternatively dialling in a bit of a scoop.

Verdict

With massive range in the amount of drive available, optional boost and EQ that puts the sound where you want it, Richie Kotzen and the Tech 21 designers have come up with a practical if pricy variation on the overdrive/distortion pedal genre. **A**

PROS Powerful and flexible overdrive and distortion with plenty of tonal variations, plus boost to kick it up when needed

CONS Some will regard the asking price as a lot of money for a distortion pedal. Can sound loose and over-compressed

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, comes in a nice tin!

CONTROLS: Level, Tone, Girth, Drive, Boost, boost footswitch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 118 (l) x 98 (w) x 50mm (h)

Rocky Road

01494 535333

www.tech21nyc.com

6/10

PERFECTION



PolyTune® Clip perfectly combines state of the art tuning technology with an unprecedented attention to aesthetics and functionality. Unmatched in speed, precision and grace, PolyTune Clip isn't just the best PolyTune we've ever made - it's the best tuner by any measure.

1



2



3



4



1 EARTHQUAKER AFTERNEATH £199

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Length, Diffuse, Dampen, Drag, Reflect, Mix, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input & output

POWER: 9V adaptor

(not supplied)

65mA current draw

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x

125 (d) x 57mm (h)

Rocky Road

01494 535333

earthquakerdevices.com

The **Afterneath** is designed to provide otherworldly reverb effects, created by a collection of short delays working together and set up by juxtaposition of its six knobs. Three of these control standard reverb pedal parameters – the dry/reverb mix, the length of the reverb tail and how bright or dull it sounds, but the others offer more unusual tones.

Diffuse blurs the repeats that make up the reverbs from sharp to soft and washy, while Reflect turns up the regeneration for an effect that lingers longer and will self-oscillate. Drag separates the delay lines ranging from ‘a bunch of delays piled on top of each other’ to a dense reverb. The overall result is a pedal that delivers massive crystalline washes of sound.

It's a cool purveyor of ethereal soundscapes that envelop your guitar, but at this price, it's for committed sonic experimentalists only. **[TC]**

VERDICT The Afterneath is not your typical reverb pedal, but massive sounds like this don't come cheap

7/10

2 EARTHQUAKER BIT COMMANDER £159

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Analogue

synth pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Sub, Down

1, Up 1, Filter, Level, Base,

Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input,

standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor

(not supplied)

25mA current draw

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x

125 (d) x 57mm (h)

The **Bit Commander** is a monophonic

analogue synthesiser that will give you

square-wave synth tones from your

guitar notes. Three knobs add in and

turn up the level of three synth tones

– two octaves down, one octave down

and one octave up. The Base knob adds

a distorted version of your guitar sound

that sits really well with the octaves: it

can actually do straight distortion if you

choose to keep the synth tones turned

down. While it's easier to trigger stutters

and glitches lower down, single notes

played above the 7th fret track really

well and sound really good, with the

combination of four sounds offering

many useful blends, all sharpened or

dulled down by the Filter knob.

If you want to turn your guitar into a

hard-edged mono-synth this will do it,

but to add to the versatility, it also does

a neat line in distortion with a touch of

added octave. **[TC]**

VERDICT Cool analogue synth sounds for guitar with a hard edge and tweakability, too

7/10

3 EARTHQUAKER ARPANOID £199

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Polyphonic pitch

arpeggiator pedal

FEATURES: True bypass,

CONTROLS: Rate, Step,

Wet, Dry, Mode selector,

Up/Down toggle switch,

bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input,

standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor

(not supplied)

52mA current draw

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x

125 (d) x 57mm (h)

Want to hear a scale when you play a single note? The Arpanoid will oblige you by taking what you play and transforming it into an ascending or descending scale or one that ascends and descends continually. Wet and Dry knobs let you set the relative levels of the generated sequence and your dry sound while two more determine the speed of the sequence and how many notes are in it.

There are eight sequence modes: four follow a major scale and four follow a minor scale. The sequence can variously run from an octave down to the root, the root to an octave up or an octave down through the root to an octave up. The adventurous can select a random pattern instead...

A very clever pedal, if you can find a musical use for it other than to simultaneously surprise and baffle your audience. **[TC]**

VERDICT Not the most universally useful pedal, but creative sonic explorers will have lots of fun here

6/10

4 EARTHQUAKER DISPATCH MASTER £169

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Digital delay and

reverb pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Reverb,

Repeats, Mix, Time,

bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input,

standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor

(not supplied)

60mA current draw

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x

110 (d) x 47mm (h)

So, you want to add a bit of ambience to your sound and are looking at getting a delay or reverb pedal? Perhaps you want both, but are concerned about pedalboard space? Well, here's a compact, single-footswitch pedal that fits the bill. While the Dispatch Master delivers a mix of both effects at once, you can also have delay only or reverb only by respectively setting the Reverb and Time knobs to minimum. The delay is nicely voiced and offers delays up to 1.5 seconds, while the reverb is reassuringly dense and deep. Both together provide a hugely practical range of sounds.

Delay and reverb in one pedal is a great idea. As both effects combined share a set of controls, you'd get more sonic variation by using two pedals, but the Dispatch Master's format has other advantages and it's great for cloaking your sound with ambience and space with one footswitch press. **[TC]**

VERDICT Perhaps not as versatile as two separate pedals, but for the space-savvy, this is a good shout

8/10

1



1 EBS DYNAVERB GUITAR EDITION £159

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Stereo reverb pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 3 Rooms, 3 Plates and 2 Halls, serial or parallel operation

CONTROLS: Reverb, Tone, Hall/Plate/Room switch, A/B/C switch, bypass footswitch, Serial/parallel (internal switch)

CONNECTIONS: 2x Standard input, 2x standard output

POWER: 9-12V DC adaptor (not supplied), 9V battery (emergency use)

DIMENSIONS: 115 (l) x 70 (w) x 35mm (h)

Sound Technology

01462 480000

www.bass.se

Swedish company EBS

primarily offers a range of pro-level products for bass players, which includes amps, cabinets and that oft-neglected corner of the guitar world – bass effects. While they're aimed at our four-string cousins, some of these bass pedals have been taken up by guitarists in the know, and as a result, EBS has decided that it would like to get more guitarists onboard.

That brings us to the Red Label Guitar Edition pedals, a new range of EBS effects that are adjusted for optimal performance with guitar, the first three of which we have on test here.

Physically, the pedals exude a quality that you'd expect at this price point – sporting a weighty metal body with the knobs partly recessed into the top surface, metal sockets and a soft-touch footswitch.

The EBS DynaVerb Guitar Edition is a digital reverb pedal offering a choice of Hall, Plate

and Room reverbs, each having a choice of variations with fine-tuning taken care of via a Reverb and a Tone knob. The reverb knob sets the amount of reverb mixed in with the dry signal in normal in-line use, but you can also use the pedal in parallel mode (set with an internal switch) where there is no dry signal present so it can be used as a send and return effect – in this instance, the reverb knob sets its overall volume. The tone knob is designed to be rolled back from fully clockwise to reduce top end, so can go from a bright reverb that is quite prominent to something darker that may blend better into the background.

The three plate reverbs featured here offer useful variations on the length of the reverb tail from a tightly-controlled dampened plate,

through one with naturally short decay to one where the reverberations take a lot longer to die out and that is a viable substitute in the absence of a dedicated spring simulation. The room simulations offer a typical studio room, a small warm room and a large room and sound nicely authentic, while the two hall variations offer the large ambiances that you'd expect for adding more of a widescreen cinematic ambience to your playing.

At £159, the DynaVerb is by no means a budget pedal and will likely face stiff competition from other pedals on the market that offer a wider range of variations on the reverb theme at this price point. However, in its favour, that very solid build quality and easy user interface are definite assets for the gigging guitarist. **[TC]**

VERDICT A very classy, if premium-priced, reverb that will endow your tone with an authentic sense of space or the ambience of a vintage studio recording

7/10

2



3



2 EBS MULTICOMP GUITAR EDITION £149

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Dual-band compressor pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, adjustable input for active and passive instruments
CONTROLS: Comp/Limit, Gain, Tubesim/MB/Normal switch, Active/Passive switch, internal Threshold trim pots, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9-12V DC adaptor (not supplied), 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 115 (l) x 70 (w) x 35mm (h)

The **MultiComp** is a guitar compressor that offers you a choice of solid state (Normal), tube simulation (Tubesim) and multi-band (MB) compression modes. All three modes are easily set up with knobs to turn up the compression and set the output gain, with the pedal's LED handily growing brighter to indicate when you are compressing, and how hard the level of compression is.

When it's in Normal mode, the MultiComp offers clean compression from a mild smoothing to a squashier vibe, with an increase in note snap that's just right for country picking, all with spare output gain to drive your amp a touch if desired. Tubesim offers more of the same, but adds a tickle of pleasant harmonic distortion to the mix.

Most interesting, however, is the MB mode where the bass and treble compressors work independently so neither end of the spectrum unnaturally affects the other. Individual threshold levels can be fine-tuned with internal trim pots, allowing you to, say, keep the sound on your bass strings tight while the top end is less molested. **[TC]**



VERDICT That multi-band facility, rare in a pedal, could make this your go-to compressor

9/10

3 EBS RED TWISTER GUITAR EDITION £149

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue chorus pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, flanger and 2x chorus sounds

CONTROLS: Depth, Speed, Flange/Heavy/Soft switch, internal mix level control, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, 2x standard output (mono, stereo)

POWER: 9-12V DC adaptor (not supplied), 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 115 (l) x 70 (w) x 35mm (h)

With the inclusion of both a mono input and either a mono or stereo output, the EBS Red Twister offers chorus and flanging sounds delivered via the instantly tweakable medium of standard depth and speed knobs.

The ratio between effected and dry sound is factory-set at a standard 50/50, but if you want to mix that up a little bit, there's an internal trim pot that lets you set up different blends in a range from zero to 100 per cent effect.

Kicked in, the pedal offers modulation with a bright tonality. The Flange setting offers flanging with a nice metallic edge to it, but delivers a more polite take on the effect than the 'stunt' flanging with that pronounced 'jet-taking-off' swoosh that you can get from some pedals.

It may seem a little bit dated, but it's actually a very musical sound that lends itself nicely to arpeggio picking and will do a convincing take on The Police's *Message In A Bottle*, too. Two chorus settings – one with a longer delay time than the other – also offer intense and gentler variations on a classic 1980s theme. **[TC]**

VERDICT Classy flanging and chorus in one pedal, nicely implemented

8/10



|||||

Audition

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

Photography Joe Branston & Adam Gasson



GODIN CORE CT P90 £849

CONTACT 440 Distribution PHONE 01132 589599 WEB www.godinguitars.com

Up to this point, Godin's three Core models have shared a chambered mahogany slab body with a choice of humbuckers – P-90s or active EMGs – with a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length and Graph Tech's impressive ResoMax adjustable wrapover bridge. This year's additions keep the same scale and bridge, but the CT (carved top) version not only moves to a much more Gibson Les Paul-like outline, it also adds a glossed maple top that we'd call contoured – the top itself is flat but its edges are chamfered, a little like a Gibson SG. Two CT versions are offered: with two Seymour Duncan P-90s, as here, or a Godin/Seymour Duncan humbucker setup.

The body outline certainly isn't a draw-around clone of a Les Paul. The geometry of that cutaway, for example, is noticeably different, and Spanish cedar (favoured for classical guitar necks, most commonly) replaces mahogany for the body wood. Godin boasts that the three-piece body is "incredibly light weight, resonant and chambered", and by tapping the body we'd surmise that it's hollowed behind the bridge and on most of the bass side leaving a pretty solid treble side and, of course, centre area to which the bridge, neck and pickups are secured. At 3.36kg (7.4lb), it's light, but not incredibly so. Depth is a pretty standard 44mm at the edge, with the maple cap adding to the overall body thickness of 49mm – trimmer than a Les Paul.

While the black-faced headstock, a very unfussy classic three-a-side design, is cream bound (like the body), the rosewood fingerboard's edges are au naturel, the edges subtly rounded, and the fretting, from a not-over-big medium wire, is precise and tidy on the 300mm (12-inch) radius'd face that just has simple pearloid dot markers with smaller cream plastic side dots. The profile suits the 'classic' vibe of the guitar: a simple quite deep oval (21.5mm deep at the 1st fret, 23.4mm at the 12th) with a 43.23mm width at the nut and modern 52.5mm spacing at the bridge.

Both nut (Tusq) and the ResoMax bridge are made by Graph Tech, the latter a really smart nickel-plated design made from a "lightweight, high strength alloy that boosts harmonic content", and it magnetically locks to the posts so it won't drop off during a full string change. At the other end, the Godin logo'd tuners are more generic, although the case housings are a

proprietary design with, again, some classic retro thought. All very classy indeed.

Sounds

With a good weight, seated or strapped-on, it feels just right, like the neck, or the shoulder-placed toggle. The first difference is the control knobs, which are laid out in a more upright diamond to Gibson's classic placement. It's still easy enough to adjust both volumes with one move of your right hand, though. The Duncan soapbars are different designs, too: an Alnico V Vintage SP90-1 at neck, and hotter ceramic-loaded Classic SP90-3 at the bridge (although Seymour Duncan calls this the Custom).

P-90s have been used in virtually all genres from jazz to pretty gained classic rock, and this single-cut seems happiest in the latter camp, so a slightly crunchy amp seems a good place to start. There's quite a honky nose to the bridge pickup at the expense of some sparkly highs that you'd expect to hear on some lower-powered P-90s, and as a consequence both volume and tone controls are best left full up; a slight reduction of either rounds off the highs a little too swiftly. The neck adds some soul flavour, and cleaning up the amp tone reveals a nice character along with the more Tele-like wide, funkier edge with both pickups on. The chambered construction, not to mention the wood choice, hints at a little semi-like woodiness, but it's more apparent in the welcome resonance and overall character. Hum can be a problem on the solo pickups (with both on they're hum-cancelling), and we'd be tempted to add some treble bleed caps to keep the highs as the volume controls are reduced.

Verdict

While plenty of Godin's Canadian-made instruments can be quite out there with dual and even triple voices, here's a more, well, *core* guitar whose appearance and specs tell you pretty much where it's aimed. With a considered build, it's a fine guitar to audition some P-90 flavour, especially in rockier settings, but thanks to a great neck pickup and evocative pickup mix, its stylistic potential is much wider. **[DB]**



9/10



PRS SE ACE SIGNATURE MODEL £749

CONTACT **PRS Europe** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB www.prsguitars.com

PRS's SE range may represent its start point, but from the first Santana guitar, it's hosted more artist signature models than the high-ticket USA line (including Bernie Marsden, Mark Tremonti, Marty Friedman, and Shinedown's Zach Myers).

Brit rocker and tutor Ace is the latest addition to the roster, although he's been playing PRS for some 15 years now. After a headstock break disabled his main guitar, in 2008, Ace sought help from PRS, as he explains: "I went to PRS and told them that I needed a killer guitar to replace my trusty axe. We tried out every guitar in the warehouse and ended up with a Tremonti signature model that played and sounded better than any other guitar there." Ace retrofitted 57/08 humbuckers and the Tremonti became his "ultimate guitar for touring and playing".

It's no surprise, then, that his SE signature – a limited run of just 180 pieces available in Europe alone – is modelled closely on the SE Tremonti Custom. Sticking with the original PRS 635mm (25-inch) scale length, his model is a full-depth Singlecut with mahogany back and subtly arched maple

cap. There's no flamed maple veneer like the Tremonti signature – you'd never see it under the all-black only opaque finish. So, instead of the natural edge of the Tremonti, Ace's signature is white bound around the top body edge and the fingerboard. Of course, that's inlaid with old-school pearloid bird inlays. Plus you get Ace's trademark swallow-in-flight in sticker format for the body, if you want to stick it on and go the whole Ace hog.

The majority of parts are USA-designed and made in Korea but remain highly serviceable, especially in regard to the price compared with the USA-made models. The PRS vibrato has a back route, and the pickups are modelled on the USA 245's and controlled in Singlecut fashion by a shoulder-placed toggle switch and volume and tone for each pickup.

Sounds

With a good, not over-meaty weight of 3.87kg (8.5lb), the SE Ace features a comfortable wide thin neck profile, well-polished medium gauge frets, and a very slinky setup – this one almost plays itself.

There's an engaging ring and resonance to this guitar, and plugged in, classic gained rock is at its core with enough heat from the hot vintage 'buckers to go well beyond that. There's plenty of high-end cut, too, which certainly helps definition in more gained environments – there's a good balance between the pickups and turning one fully off won't mute your output if you want to do any kill-switch tricks.

Once stretched in, the vibrato has a two-tone-up bend on the G and goes down to floppy, but still comes back in tune and reminds us – although quite a rarity – just how well a vibrato works on a big sounding single-cut guitar.

Verdict

There are no surprises here, but that's no bad thing. Ace has given us a beefy mainstream rock tool that's more than fit for purpose for anyone who can't afford the higher priced PRS USA models. **[DB]**

8/10



IK MULTIMEDIA AMPLITUBE 4 FOR IOS £7.99

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

IK Multimedia's AmpliTube for iPhone and iPad has reached Version 4 (a free upgrade for current users), and in doing so has not only acquired an updated interface with streamlined navigation but also features improved DSP, giving it the same sound quality as the AmpliTube 3 Custom Shop desktop version. The tweaks under the hood include an increase in the number of stompboxes in the rig to six (four in front of the amp and two after it), plus new features that are available as in-app purchases.

Sounds

With its initial five amps and cabs, and 11 effects, there's plenty here to create a wide range of very playable sounds as well as a tuner, metronome, song player and a single track recorder. Everything else – additional amp and effects models, multitrack recorder, loop drummer, and so on – are in-app purchases. The new addition in this update is Cab Room, which allows more sonic options with cabinet mic'ing in 3D using up to two mics, a set of 16 mics to take advantage of the facility, and a looper capable of up to four loops at a time.

Verdict

AmpliTube on iOS remains a useful resource for guitarists. The basic model is a good buy, but be wary of the mounting costs when you embark upon in-app purchasing (IK ensures you'll be tempted!). **[TC]**

7/10

JZ MICS GTR1 £89

CONTACT **Hand In Hand** PHONE **01752 696633** WEB **www.jzmic.com**

Recording an electric guitar through an amp or mic'ing it up for a live gig doesn't have to be complicated – a cardioid-pattern dynamic mic close to the speaker grille will do the business and will give you a brighter sound in the centre of the cone than it will towards the speaker edge.

By far the most used mic for the job – the Shure SM57 – has been around for donkey's years and is still going strong today, but every so often another company comes up with a new design for cab-mic'ing tasks. The latest is the GTR1 from JZ Microphones, a Latvian company with several well-respected mics in its portfolio.

Sounds

The GTR1 is a side-entry mic – namely, it's not shaped like a cylinder with the sound entering from the end. Instead, the sound enters into the flat front surface of the

circular basket – an advantage in some ways, because that will take up a little less room on a tightly packed stage. This is especially true if you don't have a mic stand and don't mind dangling it on its lead from the top of your cab/combo where its shape will keep it in place. Sound-wise, the GTR1 reproduces what's coming out of your speaker very well, and emphasises the top end presence of the sound, as it features a peak in its response at around 5kHz.

Verdict

The GTR1 is a valid alternative to the usual suspects if you want to record a cabinet speaker or reinforce your amp sound through a PA. **[TC]**

7/10



Longtermers

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

Victory V40H 'The Duchess' Head

Jamie Dickson



"It's an amp for players, not posers, and yet it has a boutique soul"

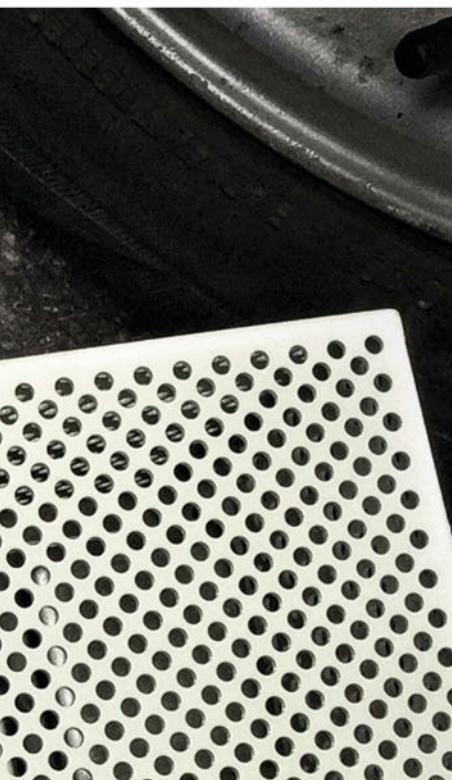


Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Editor, *Guitarist*



In his final report on Victory's small but capable V40 head and its accompanying 112 cabinet, our editor puts it to the test in both the studio and on stage in the same frenetic day – and finds it the perfect companion for those who like to travel light



It's one of those days when you look at your diary and wonder what you were thinking when you said yes to what's on the page. There's a pile of gear waiting for me over in Corsham, where *Guitarist* records many of its video demos, and it'll take at least until 5.30pm to do all the filming. Helpfully, I'll be driving there via the vet's because the cat needs his arthritis pills picking up on the way. Oh, the glamorous life of the musician! Meanwhile, back in Bristol – some 30 miles distant through rush-hour traffic – I've got a soundcheck at one of the city's rock venues, at 6pm. I grab the V40 and head out.

An hour or so later, we're in business in the studio with the PRS P245. It's a lovely guitar (see the review on p8), generating a thick, sustaining lead voice from its 58/15 humbuckers, and the value of the V40's voicing switch is really apparent here. Voice 1 is designed to give you Fender-ish 60s-style tones with good clarity and projection, while Voice 2 is intended to be more saggy, bluesy and Tweedy. The difference is subtle but significant, and I've found the voicing switch particularly useful for dialling in the V40 to

suit a particular guitar. In this case, the clarity of Voice 1 really suits the PRS.

I'm less sold on the confusing structure of the amp's output modes, though. The big chrome toggle switch on the front of the amp enables you to select either a full 40 watts of output when set to High or a bedroom-friendly seven watts of output when set to Low. When the toggle is placed in the centre position – it's a three-position switch – the amp is in Standby mode. The labelling isn't all that clear, however, and as a result, it looks like nothing so much as a big, old-fashioned on/off switch – I've seen several seasoned guitarists try, unwittingly, to use it as such. Meanwhile, the actual mains power switch is tiny and located round the back of the head. You can also run the amp in single-ended mode, via another switch, and this yields an output of 1.5 and 0.5 watts in High and Low power modes respectively, for a looser, more organic feel. It's nice to have the choice, but it's a bit elaborate. Ultimately, I've used it full power 98 per cent of the time and loved it.

Demos done, it's over to Bristol for the gig. As we're romping through the opening

number, I have a moment to enjoy how clear and warm that Creamback speaker is and how nicely the lightweight cab balances projection with a bit of useful spill. I've played a couple of gigs with this amp running at a healthy volume, so I know it can handle switching from pristine cleans to a 'board-full of drive and modulation effects without losing its clarity, and that's a big plus.

At the end of the set, I reflect on what appeals about the V40. While it has great individual features, it's as a package that I find it most compelling. It's light and yet very capable and the cab is a superb match with it. Together, they literally do punch above their weight. It's an amp for players, not posers, and yet it has a boutique soul and I'd be thinking hard about one of these with its Creamback-loaded cab or a Mesa Recto-Verb 25 at this price point. They both offer portable, pro-grade punch with less bulk and more tonal options than workaday alternatives such as Fender's Hot Rod Deluxe. Also, James Bay and Matt Schofield have both used V40s live, so you'd be in good company – and it's made in Britain! **G**

Reviewed 391 **Price** £829 **On Test Since** February 2015 **Studio Sessions** Yes **Gigged** Yes

www.victoryamps.com



Laney A1+

Rob Laing

Writer

ROB LAING
Content Editor, Total Guitar



This month, Rob has stretched the Laney A1+'s legs and recorded a live demo with his band. This scenario wasn't without its challenges, though, so post-gig, is it finally time to properly commit to using an acoustic combo?

Last time around, I was looking forward to the chance not only to just test this acoustic combo on the live stage, but to find out whether it could also be useful for recording. I'm pleased to say the A1+ has now popped its cherry on both fronts, and has proved to be a trusty friend in challenging conditions.

I say 'friend', because in both experiences this little combo emerged as something I could count on. First up, the acoustic rock band I front decided we'd been putting off recording for too long, and to prepare ourselves for our first session with a producer



later in the year, we decided to track some live demos. Our small Portakabin rehearsal space poses mic'ing challenges for the band, but by using the XLR DI connection with an additional condenser room mic, I could monitor both my live sound in the room and what we were capturing through our recording through Logic. No, this method is not going to give the richness and personality

that a condenser close to the guitar offers, but for my rhythm parts in a live recording, it reaped impressive results that were easy to control in the mix.

It was the gig test that really sold the A1+ to me, though. That DI connection, combined with the wedge shape, meant I could go straight to the desk while using the Laney as a kickback monitor. A very rushed setup with a minute's soundcheck for our support slot meant I was playing a guessing game on EQ settings to begin with, but the Laney showed its worth with clear, undistorted mids. The phase switch managed to deal with a few feedback gremlins early on, and being able to hear my Taylor GS Mini and Sigma dreadnought guitars with the venue's separate wedge focused on my vocals was an absolute treat. So, you can now consider me an acoustic-combo convert where this Laney's concerned – and I'm yet to even explore its effects features (I already have a pedalboard handling that side of things), or the independent second channel. But I don't need to, because the A1+ has already proved too integral for me to live without. **G**

Reviewed 389 Price £279 On Test Since March 2015 Studio Sessions Not yet Gigged Not yet

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Q&A

This issue: valve replacement, dual amps and G-DECs appeal...

Expert Panel



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.

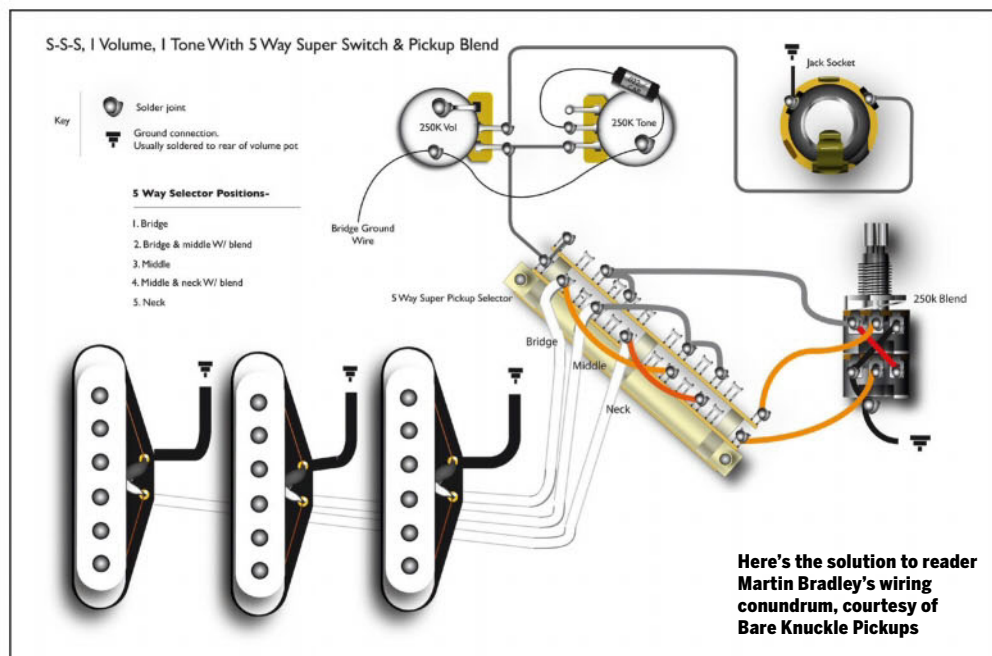


Nick Guppy

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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DOWN TO THE WIRE

Can you help with a wiring layout I'm attempting on my Stratocaster? At the moment, it is wired for a single volume control and master tone control, leaving room for an additional pot.

My intention is to fit a volume blend pot into the circuit so that, when the five position switch is in the 'in-between' position activating both bridge and middle pickups, I can adjust the respective volume levels between either of those two pickups, thereby leaning toward either more bridge pickup tone or more middle pickup tone.

With this in mind, I have purchased a specific 250k 'blend' pot, with a central 'indent' position and from there will pan to either side as would be required for this purpose. I am confused as to how this can best be achieved; if indeed at all, with the normal five-way switch. My local guitar shop did sketch out a wiring diagram for me,

but this did not prove effective, as, in either of the two 'panned' positions, it unfortunately only succeeded in completely switching off both pickups at the same time.

Martin Bradley, via email

We turned to Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle Pickups for this one Martin, who tells us that you can do it, but it should be pointed out that when both coils are on in parallel in the centre detent of the rotary there might be a volume drop. Tim then had his team draw up a dedicated wiring diagram, that requires the use of a super switch (double-pole, double-wafer) five-way along with the blend to achieve all of your desired settings. Diagram above, with big thanks to all at Bare Knuckle Pickups.

KILLING LIFT?

I've been considering a two-amp setup for a while, as I believe it will

give me a bigger, fuller tone, with one amp running predominantly 'wet' (ie, with reverb and delay) and the other predominantly 'dry' (ie, just with my overdrive pedals). My question concerns the issue of ground lift, in order to get rid of ground-loop hum. I have read that you should never disconnect the ground of any amp in the plug, so could you shed some light on the subject and advise me how to go about setting up two amps without hum, please?

James Beech, via email

You're right, James: NEVER disconnect the earth of any plug, anywhere (assuming it's supposed to have one, of course). So there are two ways to do this. First, some amps have an earth/ground lift function on their rear panels that you can use if you're connected to two amps. Use the ground lift on one amp only, if you need it.

Better still, any high-quality AB-Y or modern switching

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com

What Should I Buy?

Drive Pedal For Quiet Lazy?

Q I've bought a lovely new Lazy J 20, really for practising, but I wanted the best tone possible. It has reverb and tremolo but even with the onboard attenuator it's still too loud to crank for overdriven sounds at spouse-friendly volumes. So I need a medium to higher gain overdrive pedal, or a lower to medium gain distortion that can sit on the amp – it needs to look good, otherwise my wife won't approve! MXR '78 Badass Distortion? Vemuram Jan Ray? I was thinking of avoiding a Tube Screamer type – the amp is rich in mids already.

Jonathan Soye, via email

A The market is totally saturated – pun entirely intended – so choosing just one is impossible. The only certainty is that you need gain and master volume controls so that you can regulate the overall output. That's to say not a one-knob booster. These three of our faves will appeal more or less, depending on the sounds you tend to go for. The MXR you mention is very rock/modded-Marshall voiced with lots of compression, while the Jan Ray is more bluesy – richer midrange, less hair up top and less compressed. Also very hard to come by!



1. Fulltone OCD £139

Touch sensitive and dynamic, this offers up full and fat classic rock overdrive that can be crunchy/sizzly, or smoother with the tone knob turned down. It also has a two-position switch for a more Marshall-y/Vox-y vibe (high peak) or with less pronounced mids (low peak).



2. J Rockett Chicken Soup Overdrive £169

It's green and it can do the mid-rich thing, but this super-smooth drive also has plenty of upper end clarity with a nice compression to boot that feels great at low volumes. Nashville blues and country is its forté, and we think it works best with single coils.



3. Boss BD-2 Blues Driver £75

Overshadowed by the plethora of 'cool' boutique brands, we shouldn't forget dear old Boss, and this is a stellar choice as a fat-sounding, all-round overdrive. Ahem, all that said, the er, 'boutique' Keeley-modded version (around £159) is a significant improvement on the standard issue, in our opinion.

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gizmo will have a transformer-isolated earth lift built in.

It'll be a switch on the device somewhere and will usually control the 'second' amp. It's a really good idea to use a dedicated switch or device, both in terms of functionality and getting the best possible sound quality. Check Radial, Lehle and TheGigRig for options that best suit your needs.

The other big consideration when using two amps is making sure they're in phase with one another. When choosing your switching gizmo, make sure it has a phase option on one of the outputs, too.

DECLEMMMA

I'm in a dilemma, because I'm lending a Telecaster and my Fender G-DEC 30 amp to my son's friend who wants to get into guitar, and I'm really happy that I can help him out.

To be honest, I never really bonded with the Tele, but the G-DEC is a very handy bit of kit. I love being able to plug in, select a backing track (either a pre-loaded one, or perhaps one of Neville's from Blues Headlines) and just play along.

So what can I replace the G-DEC with? I want a one box solution like the G-DEC, but I think times have changed. I have a little Yamaha THR, but I have to plug an iPad in to listen to backing

tracks. Line 6 AMPLIFIi? But that also requires an iPad.

Paul Harmer, via email

Most practice amps come with a mini jack input so you can plug in some kind of external music player as you say, Paul. It never sounds great through the guitar speaker, but if they have stereo, full-range audio capabilities such as the THR you mention, they can sound decent. Moreover, we reckon this route is less hassle than loading backing tracks into an amp. If you want to stick to that approach, however (and with the G-DEC notably discontinued), the Boss JS-10 eBand is the only alternative we can turn up.

Two other possible solutions: one would be Line 6 AMPLIFIi – you can play your backing tracks over Bluetooth from an iOS (or Android) device such as your iPad, so there are no cables required; the other is a wholly app-based solution on the iPad, such as JamUp by Positive Grid. This enables you to call up lots of different sounds over which you can jam along to anything from your iTunes library. But of course, you'd need a full-range amp or stereo to make it louder/sound good.

If push came to shove, we'd go the AMPLIFIi route based on ease of use, quality of sound and the likelihood that it'll still work in five years' time.

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Board Games

Pedalboard problems solved

The background

Steve Brady, Guitarist reader: "Compressors: I don't get it. I see them on lots of people's pedalboards and there are many different kinds out there. People tell me they sound great in certain situations, but every time I think about what they do and how they work, I can't see why that would be desirable for electric guitar. I even borrowed one from a friend and struggled to understand what it was doing. I'm obviously missing something, so perhaps you can help? I like playing a range of bluesy, rocky, funky things, all sorts really..."

The answers

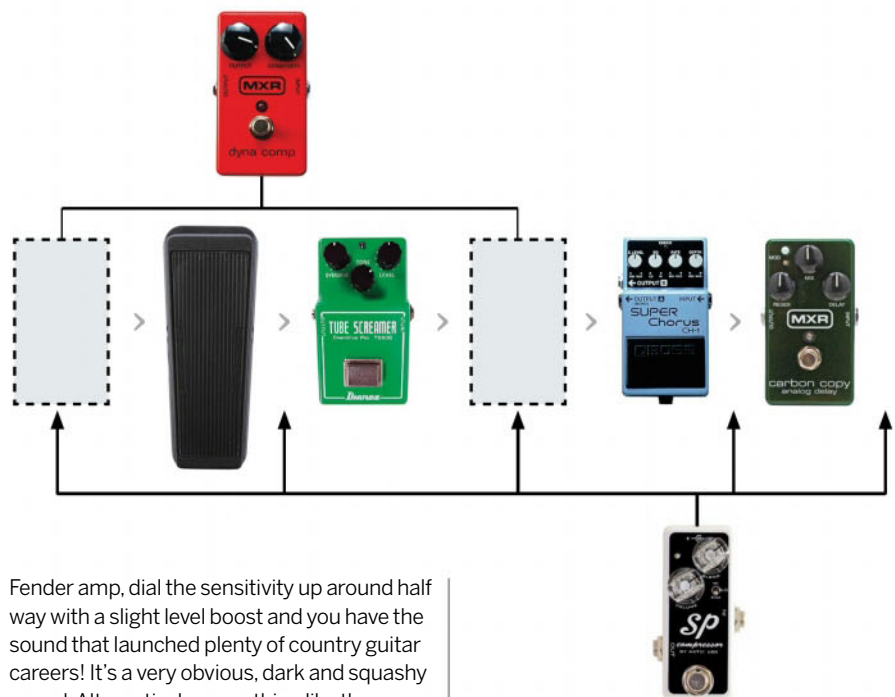
1. Compression controls the dynamic range of your signal level. It makes the quiet signals louder (eg when picking softly) and the loud signals quieter (eg when strumming hard).

You'll notice that the compressor plug-in in your computer DAW has a lot more controls than your average guitar pedal compressor, because the pedal is summing some of these functions into a greatly reduced set of knobs. In fact, some guitar compressors have only one knob...

Variable parameters for compression include the amount of compression you dial in (ratio), the point at which compression cuts in (threshold) and the time it takes for the compression to cut in and out (attack and release). You may also see references to knees! 'Hard' and 'soft' knee is easy to mix up with 'attack', so it's worth pointing out that attack deals with how long it takes for the compressor to turn on after the signal hits the threshold – off/on – while hard and soft knee refer to how smoothly it turns on; how smoothly the ratio moves from 1:1 (no compression) to whatever compression ratio you've selected. Soft knee is a smoother, some would say more 'natural' transition when it comes to guitar sounds.

In addition to all of that, a compressor can also boost or cut the overall level of the whole deal, in exactly the same way that an overdrive pedal has varying amounts of gain, but the overall output can be increased or decreased. Most pedals use transistors to create the compression (VCA/FET, OTA) while others use optical components; light dependent resistors.

2. The MXR Dyna Comp (OTA type) is a good place to start. Pair it with a Telecaster and a



Fender amp, dial the sensitivity up around half way with a slight level boost and you have the sound that launched plenty of country guitar careers! It's a very obvious, dark and squashy sound. Alternatively, something like the Dinosaur Optocompressor (optical type) sounds smoother and brighter, and has an input gain switch that makes it work better with P-90s and humbuckers, in addition to single coils. For funky playing, you may want a faster attack.

For the blues-rock stuff, you'd probably want a slightly lower ratio so the effect isn't so overt... or choose a compressor with a parallel dry signal option, such as the Xotic SP Compressor (OTA type). What that means is that your dry signal stays intact for the attack and feel on of the front of your notes, but the parallel compression gives you plenty of sustain on the back end.

3. When it comes to placement in the signal chain, conventional wisdom puts the

compressor near the front of the chain before your overdrives and maybe even your wah, if you use one.

If you play predominantly clean sounds, this is all good. However, if you use overdrive pedals, it's worth trying the compressor after your overdrives and before your modulation/delay/reverb to stop the compressor affecting the gain from the pedals and giving you unpredictable results. On the other hand, if you have a compressor with a parallel dry signal, this is less of an issue – put it anywhere.

Thanks to Daniel Steinhardt at TheGigRig for his input on these answers

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Old Gold

1968 Fender Telecaster

Photograph by Neil Godwin

The Fender Telecaster, along with its Stratocaster sidekick, is among the best documented guitars in music history. Based upon Fender's single-pickup Esquire, production commenced at the dawn of the 1950s, the first models being called the Broadcaster. Only a few hundred were made before it came to light that Gretsch owned the trademark and had been using it on part of its drum range since the 1920s. As a result, the name was removed from the headstock in February 1951, but production continued while a new name was sought. The models that left the factory during this time are fondly known to collectors as 'No-casters,' but it wasn't long before the word 'Telecaster' filled the blank space atop Leo Fender's fledgling two-pickup solidbody, and it became poised to spring into guitar folklore forever.

Generally speaking, the Tele has remained pretty faithful to its original design over the years with many of the initial tweaks and modifications remaining hidden from sight. As an example, the very first models had no routing between pickup cavities, screws were changed from slot to Phillips head, decals moved, and other minor nips and tucks were to follow, but the Telecaster's basic essence remained pure throughout. A thoroughbred, two-pickup fireball that would eventually straddle the seemingly diverse worlds of blues, country, jazz and rock.

The 1968 model here may look Blonde at first glance, but we're reliably informed that it was once Olympic White – a colour prone to yellowing as it ages. Note how the fretboard wear is a virtual street map of the E minor pentatonic scale – rock 'n' roll!





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~ Doug Short
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~ Eddie Mapp
FOH - Evanescence, Papa Roach, Stone Temple Pilots.



"The JDX is almost too good to be true. The artists hear the sound they are playing and I'm not fighting mic coloration. Plug it in & turn it up."

~ Jon Garber
FOH - Rascal Flatts, Brad Paisley.



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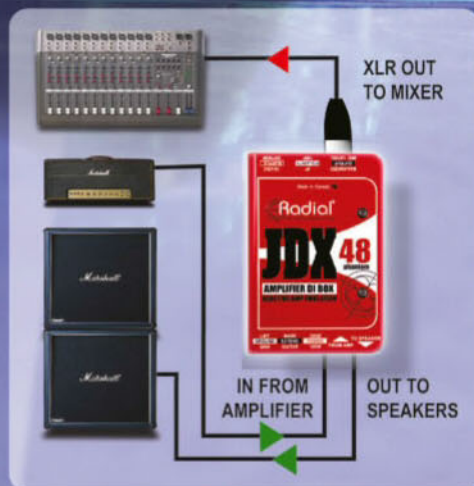
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Bending Rules

Guitarist is proud to present the first instalment of Guthrie Govan's exclusive five-part series on string bending. This issue, Guthrie will be applying a systematic approach to exploring the bending potential that lurks within everyone's favourite scale...

ONE of my favourite aspects of the electric guitar has always been the wide variety of string bending options that it presents. Even a basic command of bending techniques provides a very effective means of defying the chromatic restrictions that the frets would otherwise impose, presenting you with new ways to connect adjacent notes of a melody and thus allowing you to phrase in a much more 'vocal' manner.

Anyone who has dabbled in blues or rock will already be familiar with some of the best-known blues box bending clichés. So, for this first column, I thought it might be fun to begin by staying within the confines of the ubiquitous minor pentatonic scale, but applying a more systematic approach to locate all of the possible string bends therein, rather than just the handful of bends which continually crop up in the traditional canon of overused blues licks!

It's my hope that the accompanying video lesson will be suitably self-explanatory. What follows is essentially a recap of the main points mentioned in it, accompanied by some useful diagrams and transcriptions of a few sample licks...

There are two basic kinds of bending that apply to the minor pentatonic scale. One of them entails microtonal bending – ie, bending the pitch of a note less than a semitone – and I propose to start there for the simple reason that small bends hurt less! Example 1 (over the page) illustrates the five positions of the minor pentatonic scale and, as is traditionally the case with such diagrams, the root note has been clearly marked (if you make sure that this note matches the key of the song, you're all set!). Additionally, you'll see that the ♭3 and ♭7 have been highlighted...

When you're using these scale shapes in a bluesy context, the ♭3 and ♭7 notes respond particularly well to being bent slightly sharp:

part of becoming familiar with each scale shape thus entails remembering where these particular notes are (if instead you try to bend something such as the root note slightly sharp, catastrophe will ensue!). In terms of popular Western music, this practice of bending notes sharp only really works when your intention is to imply a certain degree of blues flavouring, so a good starting point would be to associate this kind of bend specifically with minor pentatonic fingerings,

“The correct execution of the bend won't necessarily look much different from an excruciatingly out-of-tune version of the same thing”

rather than trying to make it work in any other scalar contexts.

Of course, one thing to bear in mind is the need to dampen the string somehow after you've bent it, so the note ends in its slightly sharpened state rather than being allowed to return to its original pitch. Failure to do this can spoil the whole effect, so it's worth experimenting with different parts of your fretting and picking hand in order to find the string-muting approach that feels the most natural and generates the least amount of handling noise.

The other approach that needs to be explored here is what I sometimes like to describe as 'melodic bends', where you're raising the pitch of the note by a specific number of semitones and aiming to reach the next available note of the scale. In terms of the minor pentatonic, this means that any note is either a tone (two frets) or a tone and a half (three frets) away from the next note of the scale. Example 2 (over the page) demonstrates which kind of bend is required for each note within each position.

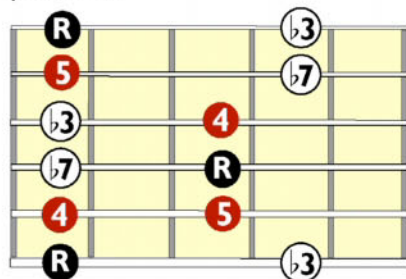
Some of these might prove to be too painful, depending on such factors as string gauge, action and so forth. I still think it makes sense to try each of them, if only to remember which bends require an unrealistic degree of finger strength and are thus not worth attempting in a real-life playing situation. The first-finger note on the first string in position one, for instance, is a particularly nasty one... but do try using your first and second fingers together to execute this bend, before giving up on it altogether.

You'll see in the accompanying video lesson that I recommend testing your familiarity with each of these bends by executing them backwards – ie, pre-bending each note up to your target pitch, then striking the note in its bent state and finally releasing it. This kind of thing can only be memorised in terms of how each bend feels and whether or not it sounds right – visually, the correct execution of the bend won't necessarily look much different from an excruciatingly out-of-tune version of the same thing, so using a backing track of some kind will definitely help you to be a more discerning judge of whether or not your guesses are accurate.

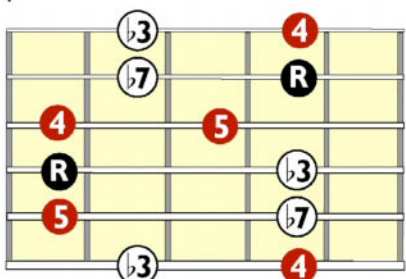
The following examples, transcribed from the video lesson, illustrate some of these ideas being applied within each of the pentatonic scale positions. Good luck! 

Example 1

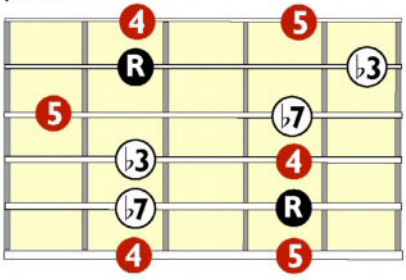
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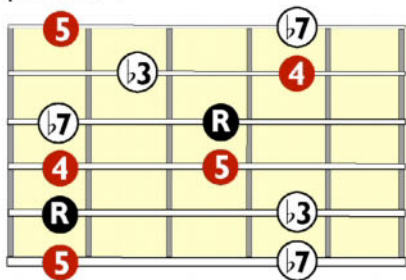
position 2



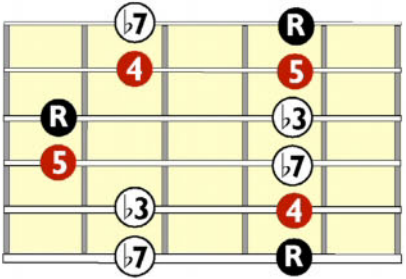
position 3



position 4

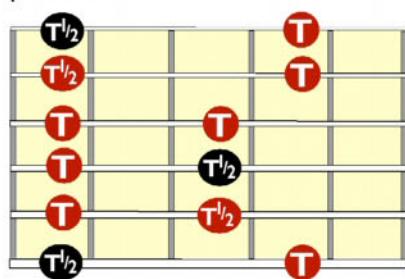


position 5

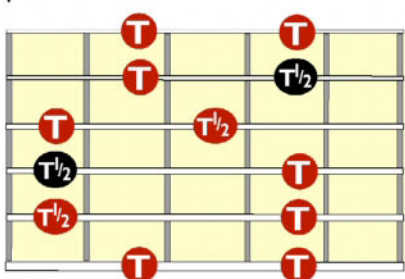


Example 2

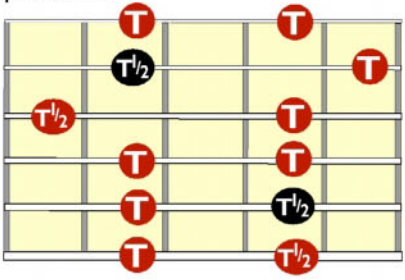
position 1



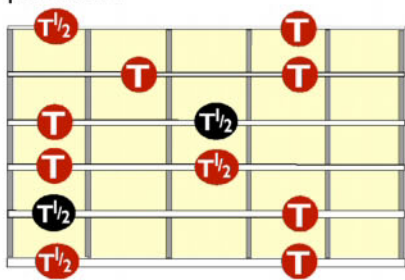
position 2



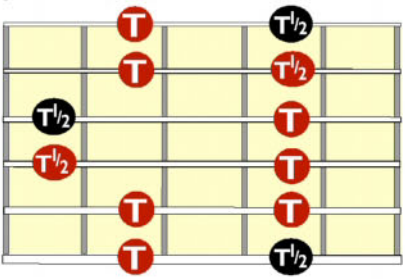
position 3



position 4



position 5



Lick 4

NOW for some fun in position three. Don't be alarmed by the illegal-looking E_b at the start of beat 2: this is a ♭5, a note that is commonly added to blues licks for added flavouring.

4:33

E B G D A E

Lick 5

THIS lick mostly dwells in position four, but the bending/sliding combination in between the first and second bars offers a brief visit to the realms of position five. In a future column, we'll be examining the potential of bend/slide combinations in a little more detail, so you can think of this merely as a taster!

4:48

E B G D A E

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A convincing vibrato is a key element of Brit blues style, and Gary Moore had one of the best ever

British Heritage

Difficulty ★★★★★

20 mins per example

Tutor: Neville Marten | Gear used: Gibson 1956 Les Paul Goldtop Reissue, Vox AC15



THERE'S something about the British approach to blues that marks it out from anything else. You can recognise it in an instant, be it early Clapton, Green, Kossoff, Gary Moore and even Joe Bonamassa who happily admits to all of the above as influences.

Yes, the use of primarily Gibson guitars – Les Pauls mostly – gives that dark edge to the tone, but there's also something about the intensity of the Brit bluesers that gets the hairs standing up on many a guitar fan's neck. With that in mind, I thought I'd have a go at a

Brit-style blues solo, and see if I could imbue it with the kind of tone and intensity of delivery that the above lineage brought to the table.

So that means heavier vibrato, the odd faster flurry of notes (although I deliberately didn't go mad), meaningful bends and, of course, that dark-edged Les Paul tone. Okay, my Les Paul has P-90s and we put it through a cranked-up Chinese Vox AC15, but nevertheless, I think we hit the sonic ballpark pretty close to bullseye.

Good vibrato is vital in this style: I opted for something between Gary Moore and vintage

Clapton; but if yours is not convincing (there's nothing worse than a half-hearted, tremulous wobble that's never quite in tune), I'd suggest spending quality practice time trying to perfect it. String bending, too: remember to support the string finger with any spare ones, and don't try to bend using the finger muscle itself, but rotate the hand from around 45 degrees to upright to create the effect.

This month, I've played a full solo but isolated four licks from it, as it's hard to be intense for just a few notes. I hope you enjoy my take on the classic Brit solo... Have fun.

Example 1

OUR first lick also happens to be the solo's opener. We did a few takes and I pretty much kept this lick the same for every one, only improvising the rest until something sounded like I wanted. The lick comes over the opening turnaround chords of Fmaj7 and Em7, and the first bent notes target E, the maj7 note of F; the next target note is D, the ♭7 of Em7 – both great 'colour' tones.

Example 2

THIS is so simple, yet so effective as a means of climbing up from the low notes into middle of the neck and beyond. It's typical of early Clapton; it's dark and brooding and feels like we're building up to something more intense higher up the neck. It's all A minor pentatonic, with the first phrase echoed almost note-for-note an octave up. Simple sometimes just works!

Example 3

THIS begins in Gary mode, with a three-fret bend from the 5th to the ♭7th on the first string; this is milked for all it's worth before the lick snakes its way along the neck into shape 2 of Am pentatonic, where it ends up sounding more like Eric. Notice at the beginning of the lick how the first bend has no vibrato; there's vib on the second for some impact; then none again as the lick moves on. This really helps expression.

Example 4

I'D SAY this is Gary, meets Eric, meets *A Hard Road*-era Peter. Again, it's all A minor pentatonic, but shows how a little expression from hammer-ons and pull-offs, repeated bends, vibrato and of course, the ubiquitous minor 3rd pushed pretty sharp, all contribute to a solo that sounds relatively wholesome – and very British!

The musical notation for Example 4 is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a tempo marking of 135. It features a Dm chord and a 1/4 Am chord. The notation includes various guitar techniques such as bends (BU), double bends (BD), and vibrato (1/4). The fretboard is shown with fingerings and bends indicated. The second system starts with an E7 chord and includes an Am chord. The notation continues with various guitar techniques and fingerings.

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John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers

Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton



There's little left to say about this game-changing album, that saw a young Eric morph from a Chuck Berry-style rhythm and blueser in The Yardbirds, to the most scintillating blues guitar soloist most people had yet witnessed. *Have You Heard* and *Double Crossing Time* typify Eric's intense approach, with strong vibrato and speedy technique.

John Mayall's Bluesbreakers

A Hard Road



This album has Peter Green not only trying to fill Clapton's shoes but succeeding a little too well. Still obviously influenced by his idol, you can nonetheless hear many traits that marked him out as an original. The title track is classic Greeny minor blues; and if you have the more recent expanded CD version, you'll also hear his take on the wonderful *So Many Roads*.

Gary Moore

Still Got The Blues



There's direct lineage between these three great Brit blues guitarists, and Gary would acknowledge how Eric and Peter helped shape his style. With hugely advanced technique over his forbears – incredible speed and a monster vibrato – Moore always remembered blues is all about feel. The title track (one take) encapsulates everything that made him such a marvellous feel player.

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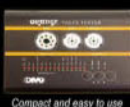
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STRING THEORY



Every note you play starts life as a string vibrating at a desired frequency. Looked at that way, strings cease to be a workaday accessory but the very vocal chords of your guitar. As guitar components go, they are cheap and can be fitted by any guitarist in minutes, so it's amazing most of us don't

experiment much with the various types of strings that are out there – each of which opens up new tonal possibilities.

But how do you know what will work for you? After all, Stevie Ray Vaughan played very heavy 0.013 gauge strings and sounded great. On the other hand, Billy Gibbons reputedly plays very light 0.008-gauge sets and sounds... great. Behind the apparent contradiction is a fundamental tonal truth. Strings are an important link in your signal chain, just like an overdrive pedal or an amp – so what works for your heroes won't necessarily bring out the best in your own sound, because every player's touch and feel is unique.

Strings are a part of a subtle web of tonal influences, so picking the right ones is really a matter of trying things out and discovering what works. To help you get there quicker, we've made this free guide, replete with expert opinion and buying advice. Hopefully next time you change a set of strings it'll open some doors to new sounds. Enjoy.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

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JEFF PUMFRETT
WORLD GUITARS

Meet your guide to fitting strings the professional way. Jeff's shop, World Guitars – located in an old courthouse – is an Alladin's Cave of gorgeous guitars and amps and is a standing temptation to any guitarist passing through Stonehouse in Gloucestershire. If you fancy dropping in, check out what's in store at worldguitars.co.uk

STRING 'EM UP!

Getting the best from your strings starts with putting them on properly. Jeff Pumfrett of World Guitars in Gloucestershire has set up thousands of high-end guitars over the years, and he knows how to string 'em up good and proper. We dropped in on his workshop to see how it's done...

BEFORE YOU START

"I generally prefer to change strings one at a time, rather than take all of them off before replacing them," Jeff says, laying our first guitar down on some soft non-abrasive matting and supporting its neck with a padded block – an ideal work environment for changing strings. "So loosen off the string you want to replace first – I'm going to use a string-winding tool to make life very, very easy. De-tune it completely and then pull the string free of the tuning post and snip off the coiled-up part at the end that has been wound around the post, using some wire-cutters. This will make it easier to pull the discarded string through the saddles or the stop bar when you remove it from the guitar."

METHOD A HAND-WOUND

"First, I'm going to show you the way that I've always done it, and I'm not saying it's 'correct' but it certainly works and I've never had any problems," says Jeff. "With this method you *don't* thread the string through the post first."

1. "Pull the string taut, then wind it one to three times round the tuning post by hand – but without threading it through the hole yet." Note that when making these turns, Jeff winds the string round the post in the same direction because the post will turn when it is wound up to pitch.
2. "Next, thread the end of the string through the hole in the tuning post, then give it a tug at right angles to the post to really lock it in place."
3. "Now, use your string winder to bring the string up to pitch. Once tuned to the correct pitch give the string a firm tug or two to stretch it in, then tune to pitch again."
4. "Neatly trim off any excess string close to the tuning post with a pair of clippers."



PHOTOGRAPHY JOE BRANSTON



METHOD B

MEASURE & CUT

This method is a little more conventional, but includes a handy method that Jeff shows us to you gauge the correct length of string you need to wind three neat turns onto the post.

- 1.** First you need to estimate how much of the string to pass through the hole in the tuning post before you start winding it up to pitch, Jeff explains. The idea is to start winding at a point in the string's length that will give you two to three neat turns on the post when the string is wound fully up to pitch.
- 2.** First, thread the string through the hole in the tuning post and pull it gently taut. It's best if the hole is aligned at about 45 degrees to the fretboard when you do this.
- 3.** Next, insert the flat of your right hand under the string near the bottom of the fretboard. Keeping your hand flat, rotate it by 90 degrees. This should lever up the string to a height of around three inches or so above the fretboard. Using a string-winder in your left hand, wind the string up to pitch, carefully withdrawing your right hand as the string begins to 'bite' on the post and the tension increases – the idea is to keep a little tension on the string at all times during winding.

- 4.** Neatly trim off any excess string close to the tuning post with a pair of clippers.

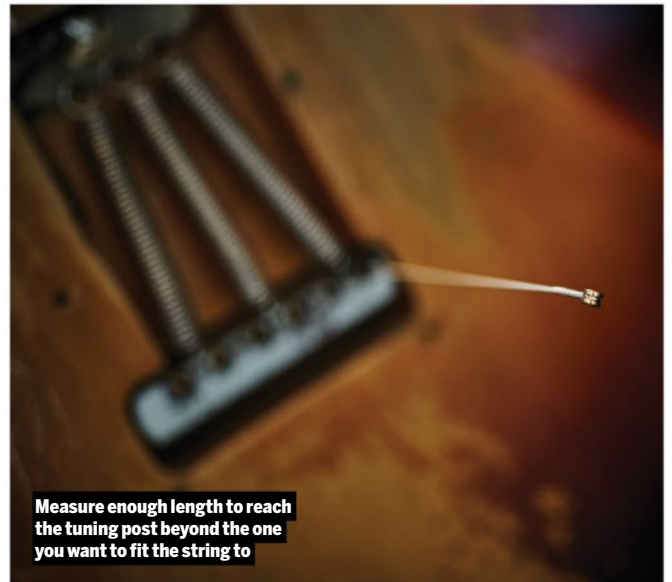
A third popular method worth trying is to use the other tuning posts on the headstock as a guide for trimming the string to the correct length before fitting. For example, if you are fitting a low E string, install the string at the bridge or tailpiece as normal, then pull the string taut all the way up to the headstock. Measure out the length of string you'd need to reach two tuning posts *beyond* the one you want to fit the string to. Clip the string at that point. Then thread the shortened string through the hole in the bottom E tuning post, but so the end only just protrudes the other side.

Next, use a string winder in your left hand to start winding it up to pitch. A good tip is to use the fingers of your right hand to hold the string in place against the post until it 'bites' and then keep a little tension on the string with your fingers as you wind it up to pitch, to ensure each turn winds on snugly. Thanks to the trim, you should be left with two to three neat turns on the post. Repeat on the other strings, using tuning posts as your guide.

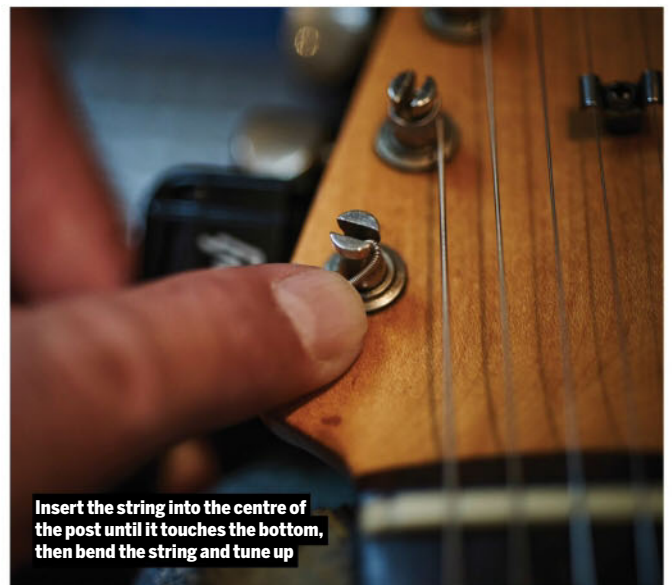
Once the string is tightened to pitch you need to give it a couple of firm-ish tugs to stretch it in, and then tune to pitch once more. Remember: you should always tune *up* to pitch rather than tune down. If you over-tighten and the string's open pitch becomes sharp, you should loosen it to the point where it is flat and then tune it *up* to pitch correctly.



Jeff's '59 Strat, like many vintage Teles and Strats, has open slotted tuning posts



Measure enough length to reach the tuning post beyond the one you want to fit the string to

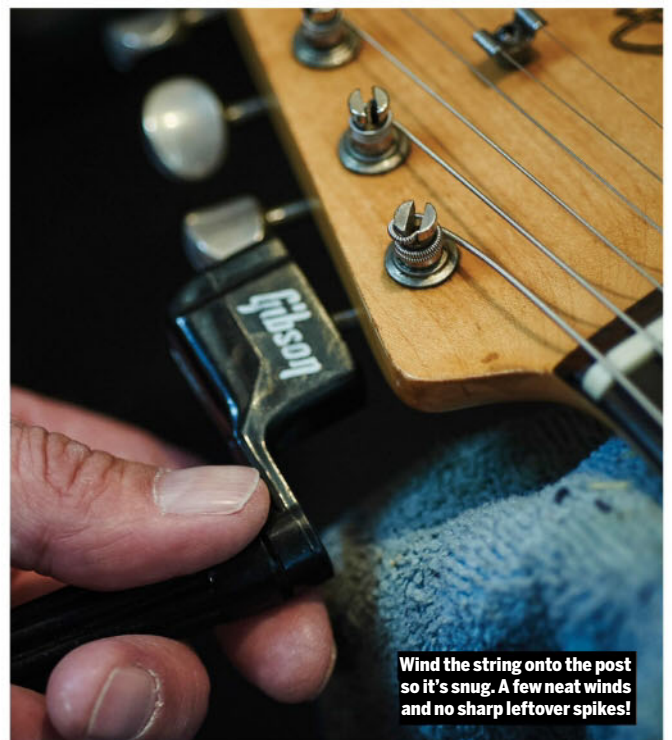


Insert the string into the centre of the post until it touches the bottom, then bend the string and tune up

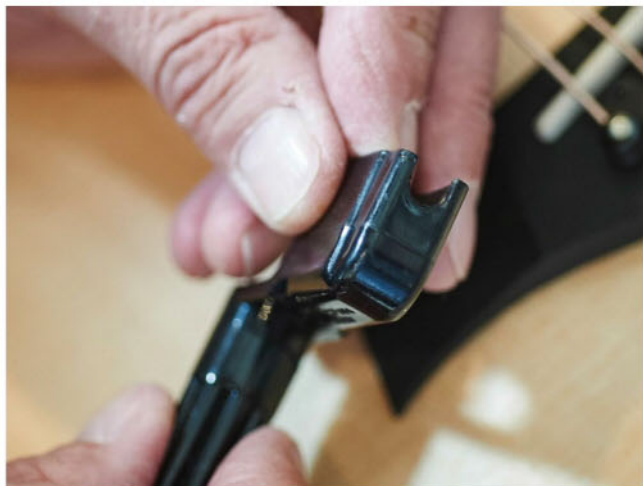
METHOD C VINTAGE FENDER

We've chosen to use Jeff's gorgeous transitional '59 Strat to demonstrate this, just because we can, really! "I'm being a wuss and using 0.009 to 0.042s on this Strat these days," says Jeff – light sets always used to be the most popular, but now it's Regular Slinkies." But we digress... If you own certain vintage and reissue Fender Strats or Teles you'll have noticed that their tuning posts have open slots rather than holes in them. The slot-head tuning posts weren't some weirdly primitive design – they're actually an oft-misunderstood but very effective early 'locking' tuner system.

To use them correctly, first measure the length of the string you'll need. A rule of thumb is to measure out a sufficient length of string to reach the tuning post *beyond* the one you want to fit the string to – this will give you around two inches of excess length, Jeff says. Then cut the string at this point and insert the end of the string vertically down the centre of the hollow tuning post that you want to fit the string to, until it touches the bottom. Next, bend the string over one edge of the slot in the top of the tuning post and tune up to pitch – maintaining a little tension on the main length of the string with your right hand throughout, to ensure the string winds onto the post snugly and neatly. You should end up with two or three neat winds on the post when you're done with no sharp leftover stub of string to cut your finger on!



Wind the string onto the post so it's snug. A few neat winds and no sharp leftover spikes!



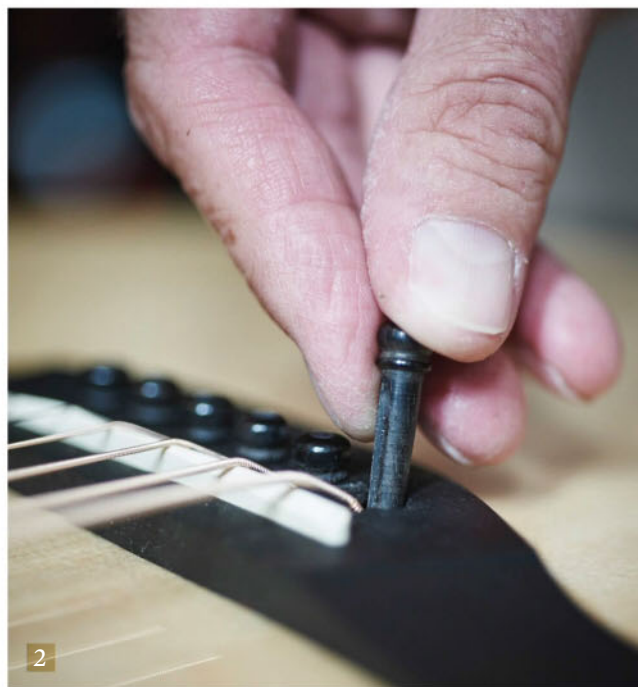
ACOUSTICS

Although the previous procedures for fitting strings will work for acoustic as well as electric guitars, the pins holding strings in place at the bridge of most acoustics deserve special attention. Removing old strings without damaging the bridge of your guitar is your first concern. Removing the bridge pins can be a delicate job – and while some use pliers to do this, Jeff recommends levering the pins up using the U-shaped tool found on many plastic string winders.

1. “You can use your wire-cutters, but this string-winder tool is plastic, so it doesn’t damage the rosewood bridge or the pin itself,” he says.

2. The next job is to ensure the bridge pin is re-seated securely over the ball-end of the fresh string that you fit to replace the old one.

3. “Obviously, the bridge pin is gonna push down on the ball-end of the string and there’s a little groove in the bridge pin, which obviously has to be aligned with the string itself. And then what you want to do is keep your thumb pressed firmly on the bridge pin as you tune up the guitar. Otherwise, the pin will just pop out.”



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LIVING IN HARMONY

The relationship between your acoustic guitar's tone and its strings is one of the most overlooked keys to tonal nirvana. Taylor's master luthier, Andy Powers, explains how a little science can enhance your unplugged sound

There are few people better placed to offer insight and guidance on the fine balance between acoustic guitars their and strings than Taylor's Andy Powers. The US company's master luthier's pioneering work in his guitar design has found that there's a sensitive synergy that needs to be struck, influenced by key factors. And it makes our acoustics rather special. "Every instrument is as unique as a fingerprint," Andy explains. "Even 10 different versions of the same model, they are all a little unique because they were all made from a unique piece of material. Even with the most carefully built instrument, there is this wonderful unique quality that means that it will respond best to a certain setup, a certain set of strings, a certain touch by the player."

How does the force exerted by a set of strings influence your choices when designing a guitar?

"The amount of string tension has a preloading effect from a practical perspective. I am preloading a certain amount of tension onto a soundboard. It is a lateral tension so it is not necessarily pulling straight on the top in the way that you would think. That is kind of a misconception that you will see reported, that a set of strings pulls 160lbs of tension at concert pitch but that is not really 160lbs pulling straight, perpendicular to the face of the guitar. The guitar would break if that were the case. The top of a guitar is actually a fairly strong mechanism in that way, but there is a preloading effect. At the same time, that preloading effect can have sort of a dampening factor because when something is placed under tension it is resistant to moving.

"So, when I am building a guitar I like to keep in mind the tension range that I am expecting to put on it because I want to use that as an asset and not necessarily a detriment. It could go either way. Let's say I have a grand concert guitar, a small guitar, because of the small size, that is a relatively strong top actually. There is not this big long span of very flexible wood. It is a shorter span of flexible wood. Knowing that, if I put a huge amount of string tension on there, it is a relatively stiff top to start with and I have all this

tension holding the top in place even further, that thing is not going to sound all that great. I am actually going to have a hard time getting a whole lot of volume out of that guitar. So sometimes bigger strings are not necessarily louder or more robust sounding. Sometimes they are quieter. It depends on the guitar and that is why string tension is something that I take into consideration a great deal when I am designing a guitar.



Powers is a devotee of the science of string tension



String gauge has a complex influence on your guitar's tone— heavy strings don't always mean extra volume

“There is kind of a window that makes something work well. Let's say I take a grand concert guitar, it might work very well with what somebody would describe as a custom light set which is maybe an 0.011 through 0.050 set of strings. I could also work well with something like the HD light set that we developed with Elixir Strings that have a 0.013 string for that high E down to a 0.053 on the low E. So there is a range that you can work in but it is a bit variable that way.”

What is the science behind why certain guitars respond well to specific string sets sonically?

“One of the bigger factors that often gets overlooked with instruments is that there are two wave forms that occur in the string. It is actually interesting why certain strings are wound and certain strings are plain. Not many people ever ask that question but there are two wave forms that occur simultaneously. One of them is what a scientist would call a transverse wave. That is the string moving more or less in a circle or side to side. When you pluck the string, that is the wave that you really see; it is a kind of fuzzy looking line. The other wave form that exists is running back and forth along length of the string. Scientists will call that the longitudinal wave form. Interestingly, most of the energy in the guitar string falls into the longitudinal wave.

“At a specific tension there is a certain length range where those two wave forms can coexist in a happy place; they get along with each other. If you deviate outside of that by making the scale length very long or very short or dramatically altering a certain tension you are tuning those two different wave forms to be either more alike or more unlike. So you can run into an area potentially where you have a gauge that means

CHOOSING THE RIGHT STRINGS FOR YOUR ACOUSTIC

We all have our favourites; strings brands and gauges, but how can we find the right balance for favourite acoustic? Andy explains...

"I prefer players start with a real common setup, a common set of strings on an instrument. There is a reason that 90 per cent of us use one set of strings. You realise that there are good reasons that lots of us like a standard medium or a standard light set in either an **80/20 bronze** or a **phosphor bronze**. They work for a lot of different instruments, a lot of different playing styles and a lot of different players.

"From there I recommend you experiment a little to see what works best on one particular instrument for the way they want to play it. That can change over time as styles develop but that seems to be the method where a player gets the most satisfaction out of their instrument; when they have exactly the right set of strings for that particular guitar." As Andy suggests, the alloys used in your acoustic strings are just as significant as gauge in shaping tone. Justin Fogleman, Application Engineer with Elixir strings, picks up the theme.

"We offer the phosphor-bronze acoustic strings and the 80/20



[80 per cent copper 20 per cent zinc] acoustic strings. The difference between the two of them is the wrap wire itself. Ultimately I think what players are going to notice are the different sounds of the strings. And although it's always tough to talk about how things sound, the best I've found to describe it is that 80/20 strings have more of a pure, bell-like tone and phosphor bronze have more of a harmonically rich earthy tone. As far as figuring out which one makes sense for the player, it's really hard to give guidance without letting them try it. For example, there are some bluegrass players who are die-hard phosphor bronze fans, and there are some who are die-hard 80/20 fans. It comes down to their instrument and the sound they expect to come out of the instrument itself."

In addition to those two, classic all-round alloy options other makers also offer overtly vintage-voiced strings, such as Martin's

Retro Monel Vintage Tone strings, which utilise a monel [nickel-copper] alloy that harks back to the types of strings commonly used on acoustic guitars before the 1950s and these may suit players who want to evoke tonal spirit of early blues or country recordings.

As Andy says – experiment!

at a certain concert pitch you have inappropriate tension. The two wave forms are out of tune with each other and you end up with this real strange fighting effect where the string almost never settles into a cohesive, orderly motion. It is almost like the string is out of tune with itself.

That is why you see fairly common scale lengths on a guitar and fairly common string sizes for the way that we make strings nowadays. By the time you get out side of that 25 or so inches with what we have come to agree as typical set of strings, if you go either way you start getting some real unusual interference.

Are there specific string sets that you'll recommend for certain Taylor models?

"There are specific strings that I like recommending for specific models because I find that they work well in those contexts. For a slightly shorter scale length, maybe something in the neighbourhood of 24 to 25 inches, I would recommend a slightly larger string, maybe a medium set or HD Light set. For a slightly longer scale, you could use that same string but you might also like standard light set at 0.012 through to 0.053, because you are ever so slightly balancing that tension and therefore the tuning between those two wave forms."

You previously mentioned the influence a guitar's top can have, but what other factors determine your gauge choice?

"The neck of a guitar is like one leg of a tuning fork. It is vibrating and flopping around over here, and just like a stick that you held at the edge of your desk and plucked your thumb over it, it has a tone to it. The body, the other end of the strings, those are attached to a moving diaphragm so one end of the string is attached to this vibrating tuning fork leg and the other end is attached to this vibrating thin resonant plate of spruce or cedar or whatever the top is made of.

"So if I have this string that has this interesting flexibility at both ends, that means that the amount of pressure I feel when I both play the string and also press the strings down can vary from one guitar to the next. If I take two guitars that are slightly different designs and set them up with the same set of strings and the same action, the same distance between the string and the fret, they will probably feel a little different because of the different flexibility factors you have there. To balance that I might prefer a light gauge set on one guitar that has a little stiffer, stronger neck and I might prefer a slightly stiffer set of strings on a more flexible guitar in order to balance that panned tension out."

Do you feel that finding the right combination of string and guitar is about unlocking the instrument's potential, and that applies to when players are looking for a new guitar?

"It is a tricky thing. When you first pick up an instrument that is unfamiliar, maybe it is a brand new



Changing your strings can have a massive impact on your tone – experiment and see what happens!

guitar, maybe it is a vintage piece, it is almost like you have to look at it as the instrument potential. Sometimes when you play the very first chord it is like the clouds parted and heaven was shining through and it is just amazing. Other times you have to dig a little deeper and go, “Well, I like certain qualities about this guitar with these strings, but I think I would really enjoy this if it were set up with maybe a different alloy of string in a different size.” Or perhaps how the intonation is not just quite on for the way that I need to play this. Those kinds of factors can definitely play into it.

“I am really fortunate with the guitars that we build here at Taylor in that we go to great lengths to ensure that we are building a very accurate, very consistent neck with a very consistent fingerboard and that allows me to have a very predictable intonation curve that I can expect out of a guitar. I can alter it slightly by shifting things around a little but we have a very specific neck. That means that if you pick one of our guitars up you have a very good chance of it playing very, very close to perfect tune.

“Fundamentally, it cannot be perfect because no guitar can be – no fretted instrument can be really – but these guitars, we have the control that we need to be able to make them so that they intonate very accurately. I really appreciate that about the way that we design and build our guitars.”

Strings are the cheapest thing that you can change about your guitar's tone, and yet people don't tend to do it very often...

“Yes, it is true. I have some very good friends who are wonderful musicians and there are certain instruments that they specifically do not like to change the strings on because they like the way that an old, really dead-sounding set of strings happens to record on one particular guitar. They go, ‘Well, I’ll change them when I really need to, but that set of strings has been on there for a year and they are real dead and that suits this particular guitar’s place in life for me right now.’ If that’s what they really want then that’s fine. It is not what I like to hear players doing. I am a fresh strings guy.

“Every instrument has its place and its setup and what set of strings works best, just like different alloys. By and large I like phosphor bronze alloys on flat top acoustic guitars. I find that works very well for my playing style and for a lot of other players in different styles. It just works really well but there are certain instruments where I will hear it and I will watch the player perform on it and think that they probably would be better suited with an 80/20 set of strings or pure bronze set of strings that have been coated or any number of the different alloys that you see available. They all have their own unique characteristic that they lend into that sonic recipe.”

FINGERPICKIN' GOOD

Six sets of advanced acoustic strings to up your unplugged game...



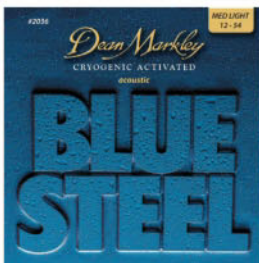
ELIXIR NANOWEB HD LIGHT

This coated phosphor bronze light/medium hybrid (0.013-0.053) set was developed with Taylor for use on its Grand Concert models to aid a warmer bottom end and bolder top end with some mid projection boost in between. **£15.99**
www.elixirstrings.co.uk



MARTIN SP LIFESPAN

Martin offers various acoustic strings, and the Lifespans are its coated option. Designed with Cleartone technology, they have ultra-pure steel SP core wire and are available in 80/20 and phosphor bronze sets. 12-string and acoustic baritone players are also catered for. **£13.99**
www.martinguitar.com



DEAN MARKLEY BLUE STEEL

The 'cryogenic processing' with liquid nitrogen that Dean Markley use for the Blue Steel range may sound a little like something from a sci-fi movie, but by freezing strings to -320 degrees Fahrenheit and then gradually bringing the temp up, greater frequency response and tuning stability is claimed. **£6.99**
www.deanmarkley.com



D'ADDARIO EXP

We highly recommend sampling a range of coated strings from various brands in order to narrow down your preferences. The New York company's EXP range should be on your list. D'Addario claims that its coating offers more of the natural feel you get with uncoated strings, while still having the life-extending benefits of the coated types. **£11.95**
www.daddario.com



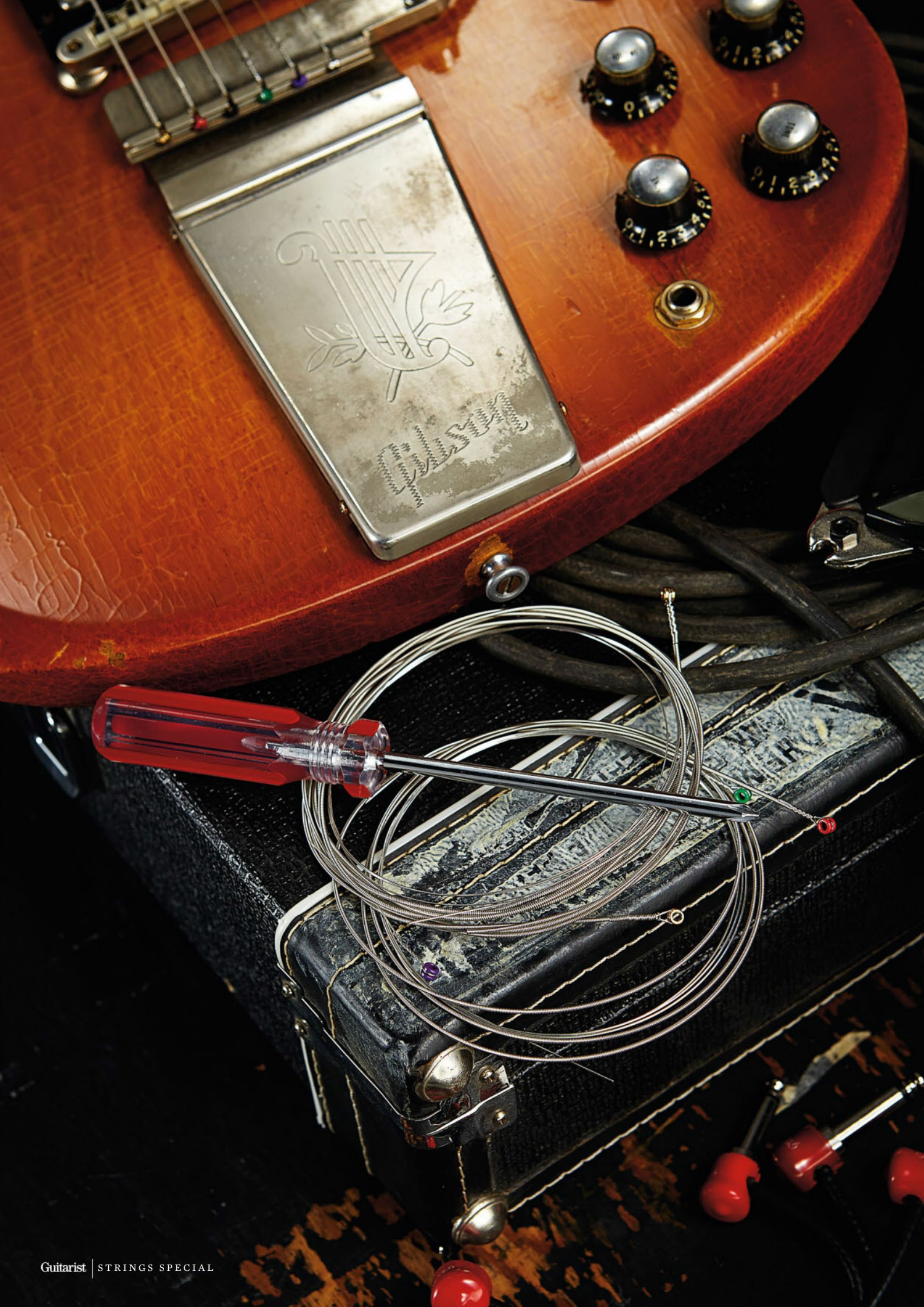
ERNIE BALL EARTHWOOD EXTRA SOFT SILK AND STEEL

The 80/20 bronze Earthwood range also offers this iteration with a layer of silk between the wrap and steel core to make things easier on your fingers, and a mellower sound with reduced finger noise that could prove useful for recording sessions. **£9.99**
www.ernieball.com



NEWTONE HERITAGE SERIES LOW TENSION

The British company's Low Tension series strings are designed to produce virtually equal tension on each string. The round-core phosphor bronze strings could be good for vintage acoustics that you don't want to put too heavy a load on, and players suffering from arthritis and tendonitis. **£11.99**
www.newtoneststrings.com



GOOD VIBRATIONS

The D'Addario family business is one of the biggest names in strings, and has helped shape the evolution of amplified tone from the 50s to the present day. Who better, then, to explain how different types of strings – from heavy-gauge flatwounds to ultra-light stainless steel strings – affect the playability and tone of your electric guitar. We joined D'Addario's string technology guru, Brian Vance, to find out how you can get more bang from your twang...

So, tell us a bit about how strings for electric guitars first evolved...

"If you took a leap backwards, and let's say we went back to the 1940s and 50s, steel and nickel were primarily used: the former was low-carbon steel, which would be like a stainless steel type of material and in some cases you also had materials like monel [a nickel-copper alloy]. Surprisingly, given that magnetic pickups rely on strings being magnetic to a degree, monel is not really that magnetic. And nickel is even *less* magnetic, but it was still used as the primary electric guitar string in the 40s and 50s – sort of by accident, actually.

"Later, in the 60s, nickel-plated steel became the go-to metal, and that happened initially because of the rising cost of pure nickel back in the early 60s: it was getting very expensive. D'Addario didn't have a string brand in the 50s and 60s, we were an OEM company – a string manufacturer that made strings for other brands. So the demand for lower-priced, roundwound strings forced us to look for alternative alloys – and nickel-plated steel was one of those alloys that was identified as a lower-cost alternative to pure nickel.

"So that became the next wave: so you had stainless steel, pure nickel, then nickel-plated steel. And actually the advent of nickel-plated strings happened at the same time as a boom in electric guitar in general. The British Invasion of the early 60s time period, when guitar players were wanting to get more volume out of their strings and more dynamics than you could get with pure nickel strings, for example. People were bending strings and playing more solos, at that time, so they wanted more sustain – and nickel-plated steel strings gave them that."

The way strings are wound has changed a lot, too. Early electric strings were flatwound – can you explain what sort of tone that generates?

"Flatwound strings basically came out of the world of how orchestral strings were made; violins and violas and cellos and upright basses and all those things are all made with a flat outer wrap wire. Most of the electric guitar strings up until the late 1950s were made with flatwound, flat wire. So if you think about if you took a piece of round wire and you literally put it between two rollers and flattened it out like a ribbon would be in a bow. When you wind that flat piece of metal around a string you get a warmer, rounder tone and less vibration. Because you don't have rounded edges up against each other, you have two pieces of flat metal next to each other, which tends to dampen the vibration between those wraps. One of the advantages of a flatwound string to an electric or acoustic guitar player, or just a guitar player in general, is just smoother feel. You have less resistance on the string and so it's a much quieter string [that might suit recording applications where you want to reduce handling noise]."

How do halfwound strings compare to full flats?

"The halfwound string is a string that D'Addario created. It's a combination; it's meant to be a hybrid and a middle ground between a roundwound string and a flatwound string. You get the roundwound flexibility and tension, and you get most of the roundwound [brighter] tone. Most of the brightness of a regular nickel-plated steel string you're going to have in a halfwound string, but then you get a little bit of the smoother feel and less friction and surface noise that you would get from flatwound string."

ALLOY ALLOY

Brian Vance of D'Addario and Jason How of British string-makers Rotosound offer their views on the tonal differences between pure nickel, stainless steel and nickel-plated strings

Stainless steel

"A low-carbon or stainless steel is very corrosion resistant," Brian Vance of D'Addario explains. "But in terms of tonal attributes, stainless steel strings are going to give you more crunch; it's kind of a heavier, a little bit brighter, but it's a crunchier, rougher sound."

"Stainless steel strings are far and away the brightest-sounding", adds Jason How of Rotosound. "Stainless was used a lot in string manufacturing in the 60s and all the bands then, if they weren't using flatwounds, were using stainless strings – it was a gritty, hard-edged sound. A great example of that is on the James Bond theme tune – those were our stainless steel guitar strings. As well as being bright-sounding, stainless strings can have quite a coarse feel. However, some of Rotosound's endorsees say that they like stainless steel strings because it gives them a bit of grip when they're playing in certain positions."

Pure nickel

"These strings typically have a very mellow, warm sound. It's interesting that pure nickel has sort of had

a comeback in the last 10 years or so," says D'Addario's Brian Vance. "A lot of players like that more vintage, old-school sound. It doesn't have as much output and it's warmer, not as bright and so on. That has a certain attraction for certain musical styles."

Jason How of Rotosound adds: "Most players will use nickel-plated steel in preference to the warmer, but less bright-sounding sounding, pure nickel – but nickel is certainly an option if you want to get an authentic vintage tone for semi-acoustic jazz stuff."

Nickel-plated

"Everything was changing in the early 60s and the then-new nickel-plated steel strings actually complemented the musical styles and the guitar designs that were happening then. Essentially, nickel-plated steel has a really great balance between warmth and brightness," says Brian Vance of the ideal tonal middle ground offered by nickel-plated steel strings.

Rotosound's Jason How adds that the sleeker feel of nickel-plated steel strings also makes it finger-friendly for the majority of guitarists: "Nickel-plated steel didn't come into circulation in Britain until the 70s and one reason nickel-plated strings were brought in is that players wanted a smoother feel than stainless steel," he says. "Plus it's got a warmer sound, generally, than stainless steel."



Today's strings come in a variety of gauges to suit your playing needs

Going back to basics, how is a conventional, modern nickel-plated string made – and what sort of factors influence its tone?

"If you take a regular XL string as an example, all of our strings use a hex core, which is a hex-shaped high-carbon steel core wire. With the hex shape, if you cross-section the wire, it would have six soft edges to it, as opposed to being perfectly round. All of our strings have a hex core and our machines are designed specifically to optimise the use of a hex core to make a string that has a better bond between the wrap wire and the core wire. Also, that creates better intonation with generally a brighter, more naturally vibrating string and a longer-lasting string. The outer wrap wire part of it is nickel-plated steel on an XL."

Back in the 60s, electric guitar strings were, proverbially, as thick as baling wire and if you didn't like that... tough! What range of gauges is available to players these days?

"The lightest gauge we make is an 0.008. There are some companies that make down to a 0.007 for a high E string, but for 0.008 gauge is the lowest. We don't even draw plain steel wire really down to a 0.007. We could, but we don't really see a huge trend in lighter gauge strings out there. Even 0.008s are a pretty small chunk of the market. In terms of heavier gauges, we have a 0.013 to 0.062 set, which is the largest set we make in our regular XL. We do make a 0.014 to 0.068 set, but that was primarily made for baritone guitars.



**Correct intonation is essential:
make sure yours is sorted!**

But you could use that string on a standard electric and tune down a lot.

“On the other hand, we’ve been designing a lot of new heavy wound strings in singles [stand-alone strings that players can use to make their own custom sets]. With our new NYXLs, we have wound strings – low strings – that go down to an 0.080 now. Think about that: that’s traditionally an A string on a bass! So the whole world’s changing and we’re definitely responding to the marketplace that’s out there for heavier gauges, for down-tuning and different instruments, scale lengths and those kind of things.”

If you switch to a heavier set to get chunkier tone, is it necessary to adjust your guitar’s intonation?

“Yes, usually you are going to have to re-intonate. Definitely from 0.009s to 0.010s, you’re probably going to adjust your intonation.” (see box)

How much tension do different gauges of strings exert on guitars in standard tuning – and how does that affect playability?

“Well, for example, on a guitar with a 25.5-inch scale guitar [a typical Fender scale-length – Ed], a set of 0.008s exerts a total of 70.03lbs of tension onto the instrument’s neck. By comparison, a 0.009 to 0.042 set produces 84.4lbs of tension, while a 0.010 to 0.046 set produces 102.5lbs of tension. So, it’s pretty significant. I mean, the difference between going from an 0.008s to a 0.010 set is 32lbs of tension on the guitar. So you can feel it and your setup may also need adjustment.

“That’s a pretty big jump [in feel and tone] for most players, so we also make half-gauge sets: we have a 0.009.5 gauge set, for example, that has a tension of 89.9lbs in standard tuning versus a regular set of nines, which produces 84.4lbs. So it adds five, almost six pounds of tension, but it’s also 10 pounds of tension *less* than a 0.010 set. So we think it’s a perfect stepping stone for a player who wants to move progressively towards a heavier set.”

SET YOUR INTONATION

This is utterly essential to making chords and notes ring out sonorously all over the neck. A badly intonated guitar – one that can’t sit precisely in tune – will quite simply sound bad! Either get it done by a professional, or do it yourself...

- Play a harmonic at the 12th fret
- Compare its pitch with the note produced when you fret a note normally at the 12th fret
- If the fretted note is sharper than the harmonic, adjust the saddle to move backwards slightly. If the fretted note is flatter than the harmonic, adjust the saddle forwards slightly. Remember FFF: fret, flat, forward
- Repeat for each string until 12th fret harmonic and fretted notes are equal in pitch on all strings



ELECTRIC AVENUES

Want to hone your tone for the price of a couple of pints? These state of the art strings for electric guitars will help you stand out from the herd...



ERNIE BALL COBALT SLINKY

The company's latest step in the Super Slinky catalogue is the first cobalt string – a material said to provide a stronger magnetic relationship with pickups for higher output, clarity and harmonic response. **£13.95**
www.ernieball.co.uk



D'ADDARIO NYXL

Claimed to be the strongest electric guitar strings ever made, D'Addario's technology offers a high-carbon steel core to resist breakage and refined frequency response to enhance presence and crunch. **£16.70**
www.daddario.com

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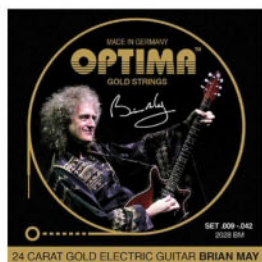
DUNLOP HEAVY CORE

A number of brands now have sets catered for drop tunings like drop C, and these are designed with heavier cores to enable comfortable tension at lower tunings. There's a seven-string option, too. **£6.99**
www.jimdunlop.com



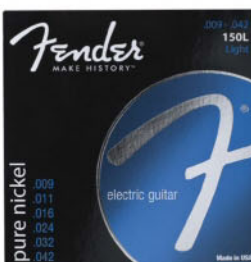
ROTSOUND ROTOS

The Brit company has been making strings since 1959 and now colour-codes according to gauge as Roto Reds, Pinks, Yellows and Purples. The extra first string is a useful addition to these nickel-on-steel sets. **£5.50**
www.rotosound.com



OPTIMA GOLD BRIAN MAY SIGNATURE

These long-life strings from German company Optima are the only 24-karat gold strings in the world (don't fear, they're priced in the upper medium end of the spectrum). These 0.009 to 0.042 sets are used by May exclusively. **£14.95**
www.optima-strings.com

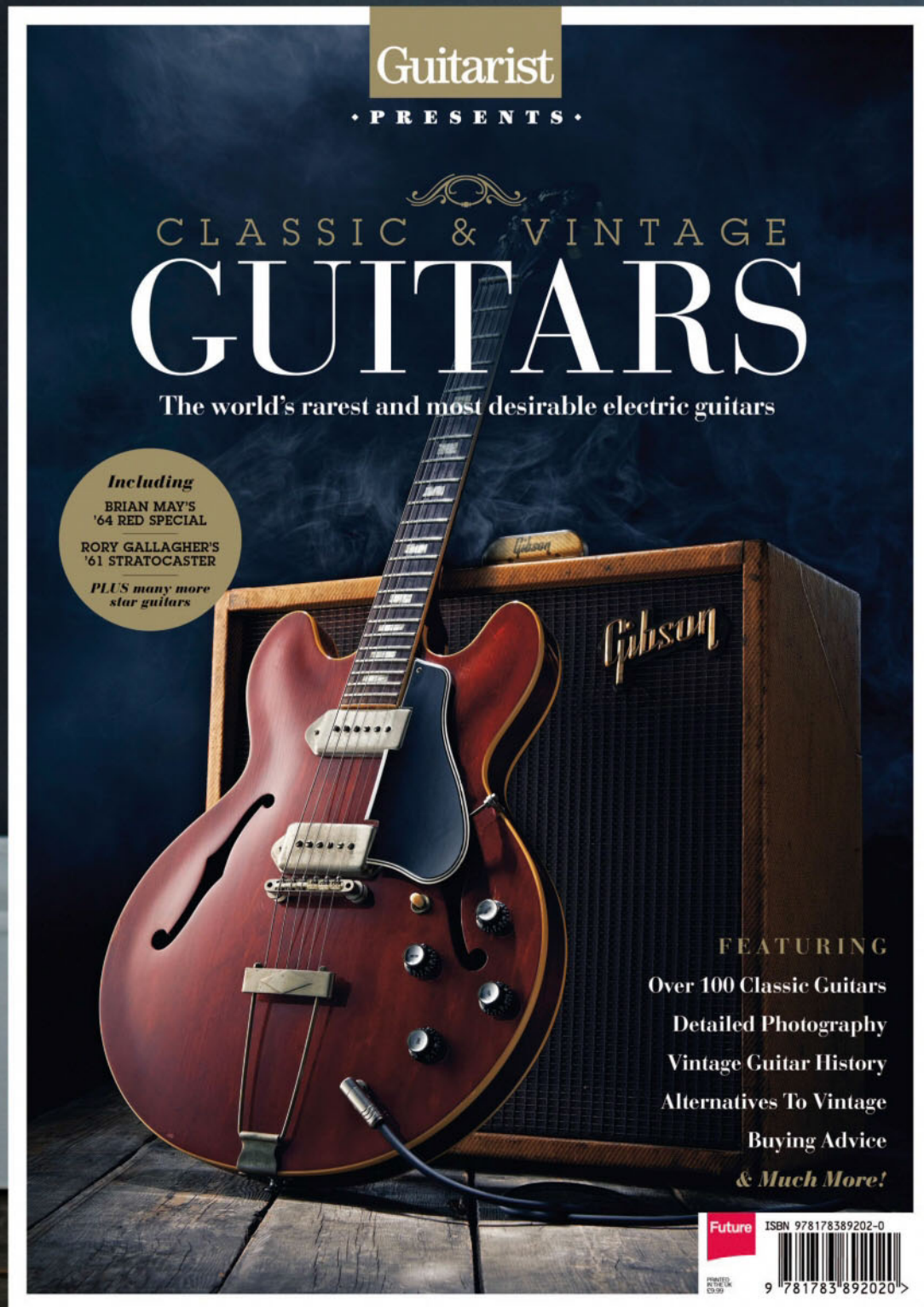


FENDER 150 ORIGINAL PURE NICKEL WOUND

The vintage, warmer character of pure nickel has had a bit of a renaissance over the last decade and Fender has recognised the demand with its 150 range. These strings are available in a wide selection of gauges. **£5.60**
www.fender.com

A Golden Era of Tone

Experience the beauty of vintage guitars with this stunning new bookazine



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www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/guides-and-specials



FUTURE SOUNDS

We're in a brave new world of tone these days. At the bleeding edge of current technology, you'll find strings with built-in 'EQ' that also offer, it is claimed, enhanced playability and tone thanks to clever tweaking of tension. We join Brian Vance of D'Addario to find out more about the shape of strings to come...

We're used to seeing technical advances in guitars amps and effects, but has there been any big steps forward in string design since the 70s? And if so, how can players exploit them? Brian Vance of string-maker D'Addario is once again our guide to developments in modern guitar strings that can help you sound better. .

The impact of nickel-plated steel strings was significant, but what changes followed?

"Nickel-plated steel kind of became adopted as the industry standard throughout the 60s and into the 70s and 80s and nothing really changed that much after that. You'd have companies trying different things with cryogenics and this and that, to try and make the wire sound different. But honestly the market really wasn't – even after 20 or 30 years of using nickel-plated steel as the standard – the market wasn't screaming for a different type of electric guitar string.

"With coated strings (see p26), it created a whole new market of what we call the premium guitar string; Elixir and us and other companies started coating strings [to boost their longevity].

"But the advent of the premium string opened up a new opportunity for companies to innovate further. If the customer is willing to pay more money for a string and there's value there for them, then it opens up a lot of options for innovation and ways to do different things.

We've seen novel – and sometimes even gimmicky – string designs come and go. But which types of innovation hold real promise, in your view?

"We took the premium strings idea to heart pretty well and actually we completely redesigned the nickel-plated steel out of wrap wire for our NYXL strings. That was actually intended to improve and increase the magnetic permeability of the wire, which makes it interact better with the pickup, in a way that's very positive too; it doesn't just make the string louder. There are other alloys out there that you can wrap the string with that just give you more value and make the string louder, but nickel-plated steel actually has a combination of warmth and brightness to it.

"Through the engineering and reengineering of this nickel-plated steel that we've done, we've actually increased specific frequencies in the wire. If you're an engineer in the studio and you want to bump up the sound of the string in the mix a little bit, instead of just turning the volume up, you can take certain frequencies – anywhere from 1.5 to 3.5k – and you can boost those frequencies in the mix and they actually make the guitar stand out more.

"What our new NYXL wire has done is actually pre-EQ'd some of those frequencies into the wire. When a player actually plays the strings now, the strings have more brilliance and more complimentary mid ranges and more dynamics with the pickup.

"As far as our product line goes, you're looking at a pure nickel string, you're looking at a stainless steel string. The stainless steel traditionally would have been the crunchier, brighter string. It's not even necessarily more magnetic, but it gives you different tonal options. There are disadvantages to stainless steel. A lot of people don't like them because stainless steel tends to be a harder, gruffer type of string, whereas nickel-plated steel has a smoother feel to it. Each wire kind of has its advantages and place in the product line, but the new NYXL stuff that we're doing now, we feel like it's sort of the holy grail. It gives everybody a smooth feel that they're used to having and bumps up the frequencies of the wrap wire to give you more dynamics. "

D'Addario also makes what you call a 'balanced-tension' set of guitar strings. What's the idea behind that?

"Okay, so interestingly enough, with tradition and history sometimes comes habit and somewhat mythology even. It's not that these gauges that are out there are wrong. Things like our 0.009- and 0.010-gauge electric guitar string sets with an unwound third, for example, have been standard gauges since the 60s. And a lot of those gauges were discovered through a process of trial and error [with] guitar string makers or major artist preferences and those kind of things. And they just kind of become the 'standards' that people are used to playing.



The wire in D'Addario's new NYXL strings is designed to interact better with a magnetic pickup

"But over the years of just watching people on the internet, engaging with people on forums and talking to people, and engaging with them at consumer events and those kind of things, and through our retailers, we started to realise that there was a sort of trend for people to start customising their own sets. Some players have very specific needs, so they want to experiment more. There are a lot of players that customise sets out of singles, for example. And so the whole balanced-tension phenomena... we would get requests for years and years for that. And we're like, "You know, our gauges are kind of the same that they've always been, and people seem to like them and we don't really get any complaints. But just because people aren't complaining about something or saying they don't like something doesn't mean that there's not a need for, or an interest in, change.

"So as we started seeing more of this information, we started playing around with this more scientific approach to string gauges, building sets that had a built-in even tension across all the strings so that when you go from bending on an XL110 set for example, the 0.010 and the 0.046 are the same gauges, but the inner gauges within the string set have changed somewhat. So we have a little bit heavier B string to compensate for the tension that you feel between your G and your B string, so that a 0.0135 actually makes the strings feel more even between the strings as you bend on the plain steel strings.

"And interestingly the wound strings in the middle, those strings got a little lighter than a normal 0.010 set. The end result is when you play a set of balanced-tension 0.010-gauge strings versus a traditional set

strings; you're going to have a more even playing experience. The strings are going to vibrate more evenly. It's interesting even when you strum the set, the strings blend together a little more naturally and you get an even sound. So it's not just about feel, it actually does impact the tone of the strings as well."

What steps would you advise players to take if they want to experiment with string gauges?

"Most players make a journey where they start off lighter and as they progress in their playing and they get better, then they generally tend to go up heavier in gauges, because you're going to get more tone out of your strings as you go up into heavier gauges. You get somebody like Stevie Ray Vaughan, tuned down a half step and played a 0.014 [gauge set]. That's probably out of the question for most players, but going from a 0.009 to a 0.010 to an 0.011, that can make a big impact on your experience as a player. So maybe start by going up a half a gauge and just see how that feels and see if you get more volume and more intensity out of your strings. It just feels better sometimes to strengthen your hands.

"You know, that's another factor too: building up the physicality of your hand. Is that something that you're interested in doing, in getting stronger? One of the things I find is I play a lot more acoustic now than I used to, so when I go back to electric, because I'm often playing 0.012s and 0.013s on acoustic, I tend to play 0.011s on electric now. So that might be one thing to try: as you migrate between acoustic and electric. As your hands get stronger playing acoustic, you might go up a gauge on electric, for example."

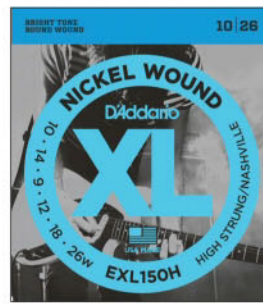
BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS

Next time you come to change your strings, why not try something a little bit different? You've got plenty of options...



ELIXIR NANOWEB COATED ELECTRIC STRINGS

As a company at the forefront of the longer-life coated strings market when it was developed in the 90s, Elixir has continued to refine the technology. The Nanoweb is the company's newer thinner fluoropolymer coating, helping to protect the string from corrosion, and offering a brighter tone compared to Polyweb. **£11.99**
www.elixirstrings.co.uk



D'ADDARIO NICKEL WOUND NASHVILLE HIGH STRUNG STRINGS

Reinvent an old six-string electric for adding layers to your recording with the 12-string-esque tonality of Nashville tuning. These strings (0.010-0.026) essentially give you the octave strings from a 12-string set. You might be very surprised at how inspiring they can be. **£5.99**
www.daddario.com



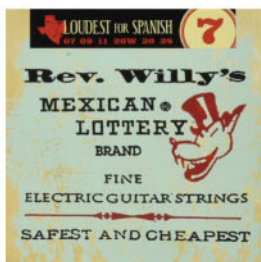
LA BELLA VAPOR SHIELD ACOUSTIC STRINGS

La Bella coats its strings in a different way to others; changing the actual surface of the string during the Ionic Vapor Process where "proprietary compounds are activated in a glow discharge electromagnetic plasma to modify the surface". The result is a string the company says lasts five times no longer than non-treated strings and sound brighter than the coated competition. **£14.99**
www.labella.com



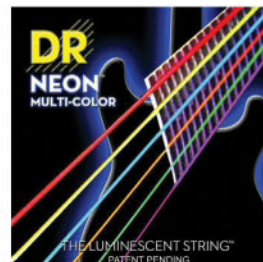
MARTIN RETRO MONEL VINTAGE TONE ACOUSTIC STRINGS

A back to the future move from Martin saw these strings launched back in 2014; think of these as a vintage string. Returning to the old nickel-based alloy blend of monel results in a softer touch and warm tone, to bring out the inherent tone in your acoustic's wood. There's also a claimed longer life than some other phosphor or 80/20 options. **£7.99**
www.martinguitar.com



JIM DUNLOP REV WILLY'S ELECTRIC STRINGS

Extra light indeed! But these come with great providence; they're design in collaboration with Rev Billy F Gibbons himself. Few players will have experimented with a gauge this light, and intonation alternation may be required, but you'll be surprised at the doors they'll open in the world of bending and subtle vibrato. **£6.99**
www.jimdunlop.com



DR NEON MULTI-COLOR

If you really want your guitar strings to stand out as well as your playing does, then these colourful options from DR are a novel eye-catcher. For even more fun, stick them under a UV light and they'll glow, too! They might also serve a practical purpose for beginners, too, as new guitarists can quickly identify specific strings based on their colour. **£12.99**
www.drstrings.com



LIVE LONG AND PHOSPHOR

Sweat, dust, humidity and even your own chemical make up – all these things pose a threat to your strings. We talk to Elixir's Justin Fogleman about the conditions that can shorten the life of your strings, and what coating can do to prolong their life

Your guitar strings are under attack, and it's not just your hands that are to blame for shortening their lifespan. A number of factors can cause string corrosion, but there is also technology to help keep these agents of harm at bay. A number of companies have risen to the challenge to give us the tone we want, for longer.

Elixir pioneered in the market during the 1990s with its fluoropolymer coated long-life strings and while many other brands such as D'Addario and Ernie Ball make coated strings these days, Elixir is still a leader in this area. We asked application engineer Justin Fogleman to explain the science of coating strings, what factors shorten our string life, and hear his answer to players who claim coated strings adversely affect tone compared to traditional strings.

What are the causes of corrosion on strings and what happens to the string in terms of playability as it starts to degrade?

"Corrosion can be caused by a number of different things: it can be anything from rust that just occurs from the metal degrading over time, to dust that accumulates as you play. You wouldn't think that dust would get stuck in there, that it would brush off while you play, but actually the combination of the rust, some of your skin particles, sweat from your skin and moisture from the air – all those things combine to make a pretty sticky mess that can get stuck between the windings of the strings.

"And the reason why it's a problem is if you think about strings vibrating and moving, as you start to cram that gunk between the windings, it keeps the string from being able to vibrate fully. And the way you hear it is that it rolls off the high frequencies; it's kind of like putting a pillow over your sound. So it doesn't impede the low frequencies as much as it will the high frequencies of the string vibration. It's rolling down

the treble knob of your tone, so to speak. By doing that you have end up with this dull, dead tone over time."

Can changes in environment also play a role in string corrosion?

"Absolutely, humidity and environment have a huge impact. Even if you're not playing the instrument and it's sitting out in an environment like that, the string will start to rust and corrode, and pick up debris from the air. Even travelling from place to place, a more humid environment will cause your strings to rust quicker. It allows rust to build up between the gaps and once that starts, there's no turning back."

What about our own individual body chemistry as players ourselves – can the pH levels in our skin affect the life of our strings?

"Whether it's perspiration or whether it's your inherent make up, it does have an impact. A good example of that is that we do a lot of different field trials of strings. And we'll get back sets of strings from some players who have played them for five hours and they'll look like they've been through the war; they'll look really rough. Then we'll get sets of strings from people that have played them for well over 100 hours and they look brand new. It just depends on the player: every player is different, and every environment is different."

How does coating the strings help tackle the issues you've mentioned?

"The basic idea is we're protecting the string from beginning to end, and we want to keep the dirt and debris from collecting between the windings by using a very thin fluoropolymer that we have. And by protecting those gaps between the windings from the dirt and debris, we're able to have a longer tone life of any other string, coated or uncoated. The brief



Elixir's fluoropolymer coating keeps sweat and debris at bay by covering the windings completely. Bluesman Eric Bibb is a fan

sales pitch, or the brief education, is by protecting the gaps between the windings of the string, you're able to preserve your string longer. Whether you play 20 hours a day or whether you play 20 hours a year, that's a benefit. If you're playing often, it means you have to change your strings less and if you don't play often, it means your guitar is ready to go when you pick it up. Regardless of the type of player, it's a really valuable thing for any musician."

One of the prejudices some players have about coated strings is that they fear they will adversely affect tone. How would you respond to that?

"We hear that a lot, too, and the feedback we hear from customers is when they put on a set of Elixir strings, they sound like a set of strings that they've played for a little bit. Whether it's an hour or whether it's a day, everyone is a little different. There's definitely that bright aggressive tone of a brand new set of strings and players who prefer Elixir have told me that Elixir sound like a set that's been broken in. So they don't have that immediate, aggressive bright tone. They're ready to go, at the peak level and then they hold that tone for longer."

A few companies make coated strings – Elixir itself offers both Nanoweb and Polyweb coated string options. What's the difference?

"Polyweb is the original coating we came out with when Elixir strings first came out on the market, and the Nanoweb is a newer web coating that has a feel

more like a traditional string and a tone more like a traditional string. Players have told me the Polyweb string has a warmer tone and a smoother feel, whereas the Nanoweb strings have a brighter tone and a more traditional feel. So more like an uncoated string.

"The coating is a little different. Essentially, the Nanoweb coating is a thinner coating that still maintains the durability. It's thin enough that you can't see it."

Have you got any tips for players who want to branch out and explore how different strings influence the tone of their guitar?

"One thing I've found interesting, in terms of acoustic guitar, is finding the right gauging for your instrument. It doesn't seem like a huge innovation, but sometimes players might forget that gauging is a great way to impact the tone of their instrument. Although it's not a huge technical innovation, understanding the physics of sound and understanding how the string tension on your guitar impacts the tone is an important piece of the puzzle. Take a big dreadnought guitar, for example. Every player is different but a lot of players use medium-gauge strings – they want bigger strings to help drive the top of the guitar – while a smaller bodied guitar would probably benefit from lighter strings.

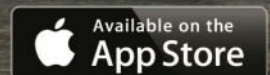
"One of the things we've looked at recently is how to help players find the right gauge of strings for them based on the instrument they're playing and how the string tension interacts with the guitar itself."

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John Entwistle discussing bass strings
with Alan Marcuson, Rotosound sales
director, in the mid-60s



BASS INSTINCTS

With more and more guitarists playing a bit of bass in home studios or during jobbing gigs, we joined Jason How of Rotosound to get a guitarist's guide to selecting bass strings to suit your needs – and hear why flatwound strings are classic rock's best-kept tonal secret...

Rotosound is a bit of a national institution – the Kent company has equipped some of the most legendary players in rock with strings since it started manufacturing in 1959, from Pink Floyd to Jimi Hendrix. And while the company also makes top-flight effects pedals and strings for electric guitar, it's arguably best-known for its bass strings, thanks in part to a stellar list of endorsees that ranges from John Paul Jones of Led Zepp to Bristol trip-hop pioneers Massive Attack.

And it all started with a certain Mr Entwistle from The Who, explains Jason How of Rotosound. Jason is the son of Rotosound's founder James How, who began making strings after taking a youthful interest in the zither and discovering that strings for the instrument were hard to obtain. Today, like his father, Jason still designs the machines that make Rotosound's strings himself. Back in the early days, Jason says that bringing artists into the factory to explain what they wanted was vital in helping his father understand what made great bass tone as the company moved on from zithers and clavichords and entered the rock 'n' roll era in the early 60s.

"Our most famous connection is with John Entwistle of The Who and that dates from 1965 when he visited the Rotosound factory," Jason explains. "I was born in '65 so obviously I don't remember that personally – but he came to my father looking for a certain sound and they spent a long time looking at different gauges and materials to come up with the bass set that is pretty much the standard 0.045 to 0.105 set. From that point on, the endorsement thing became very important because once John Entwistle was using our strings, as generations moved on and you had your Chris Squires and Geddy Lees – Billy Sheehan, all these other players, they were all influenced by Entwistle's sound. So it was like, that's what we're gonna use because that's the sound that we like.

"I've heard loads of stories over the years about artists giving our strings to other players," Jason tells

us. "I think it was Martin Turner from Wishbone Ash who told me that he was once backstage in the late 60s at a Who gig and John Entwistle was chatting to him and Martin was saying how much he liked his sound and John said, 'Well, I've got some of my old bass strings here – you can have those.' And that got him onto Rotosound strings. Of course, once players got onto them, a lot of them stayed with it."

Back in the 1960s and early 70s, what we would now consider to be vintage-spec strings were the norm, and Jason says that bands who want to closely emulate the bass sounds of classic rock albums should consider flatwounds made using older alloys such as monel.

"My father tried a lot of different materials back in the 50s and 60s and one of our most famous bass sets was a monel string," Jason recalls, referring to the copper-nickel alloy that is associated with warm, rounded tone. "That was the RS77, which was used on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and a lot of classic albums from that period. It's a much warmer sound.

"A lot of other companies make flatwounds out of stainless steel," he continues, "and it's a very cheap material, a cheap way to make flatwounds. We tried it about 20 years ago and we sent one of our endorsees, Steve Harris of Iron Maiden, some stainless flatwounds and he said, 'They're shit, I don't like 'em. I don't want to use anything other than what you make [in monel].' So we've experimented over the years, but we think that with flatwounds, you really don't want a bright 'steel' sound.

"Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy was another player who always used the flatwounds, which again a lot of people don't realise. They think they must have been using roundwounds or that Led Zeppelin must have been using roundwound bass strings. But they weren't – they were using flatwounds. And the flatwound bass string is kind of the unsung hero of a lot of bands. People often don't realise that if they're trying to get that warm, classic rock sound, that's where they need to go."



Pink Floyd were some of the early adopters of Rotosound strings

Choosing Bass Strings

While seasoned bassists become familiar with which strings best suit their style over time, guitarists who play a bit of bass from time to time can find themselves in unfamiliar territory – and may struggle to get exactly the bass sound they’re after as a result. So we asked Jason to talk us through the tonal options available for guitarists who are prepping a bass for use in a home studio or for the odd gig. First up, Jason recommends starting with a good ‘all-rounder’ gauge of bass string that will suit a wide range of tasks.

“90 per cent of the bass strings we sell are the 0.045 0.060 0.080 0.105 set,” Jason explains. “That set is the go-to gauge, a bit like 0.010 to 0.046 would be for guitar players.”

Secondly, although something of a niche these days, users of short-scale bass guitars, such as Gibson’s EB-3, should be aware that they’ll need to seek out strings specifically drawn for the shorter necks of these instruments.

“There’s a set we do for short scale: we do that in roundwound, flatwound and black nylon,” Jason explains. “The gauges for that set are slightly lighter. Years ago, back in the 70s, we used to do around five or six gauges of short-scale strings. But we actually now only do one gauge in that set, because the demand on short-scale is not so great these days.”

With those two considerations as a starting point, the next step is to consider how the design of the string – especially the alloy used in its construction and the winding style – will influence tone.

“The brightest sound for bass strings will be roundwound stainless steel,” Jason continues. “In our range, that’s the Swing Bass RS66 set. Then we do the same string, specification-wise, in nickel and that’s also a Swing Bass set, but a little less bright than the stainless set. After that, you’ve got some options that are even warmer than the roundwounds I’ve just mentioned – you’ve got the RS77, which is the flatwound monel set we spoke about earlier, which is smoother to play and you don’t get any handling noise with that, which can be useful for recording.”

“There are also strings that are designed to sound relatively bright but feel a bit smoother in play,” Jason continues. “In our range, you’ve got the RS55 set, which is what we call a pressure-wound set. That is stainless steel, but when we’re making the string, it gets pressed between two rollers so the top of the string gets slightly flattened. So it’s not a flatwound string as such, but just flattened off a little – so you still get quite a bright sound, but a much smoother feel.”

“Lastly, you might want to consider trying some nylon-tape covered bass strings. In our range, that’s the RS88 Tru Bass, which is the black nylon set that came out in 1962. Most famously they were the ones you’ll hear used by Paul McCartney on *Abbey Road* by The Beatles, but they were also used by players like Herbie Flowers on *Transformer* by Lou Reed, Bruce Foxton on some of The Jam stuff. That’s a really warm thud, because those strings were designed to replicate the sound of a double bass but on an electric bass guitar.”

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ROTSOUND

The 60s was a golden era of British guitar music, and Kent company Rotosound led the pack in giving guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix and bassists such as John Entwistle the commanding tones with which they made music history. Now you can win a slice of classic Brit Invasion tone, in the form of this period-correct, handwired RFB1 60s reissue Fuzz.

The original Rotosound fuzzes were used by legends such as Jimmy Page, but were made in very limited numbers. So Rotosound got together with electronics guru Barry R Pyatt to engage in some sonic archaeology and create this stunningly authentic reissue of the original, in all its growling, evocative glory. You'll find hand-fettled, period-correct features throughout including a 'Darlington Pair' of NOS germanium input transistors driving a third, temperature-compensated 'fuzz' transistor on a neatly hand-wired 'board.

Add to that a year's supply of 12 sets of Rotosound guitar strings and you've got a stunning prize for any guitarist who loves the sound of British rock and psychedelia. To be in with a chance of winning this bundle of glorious British tone, simply answer the question below correctly:

Who was Rotosound's founder?

A) Steve Howe B) James How C) Geoffrey Howe

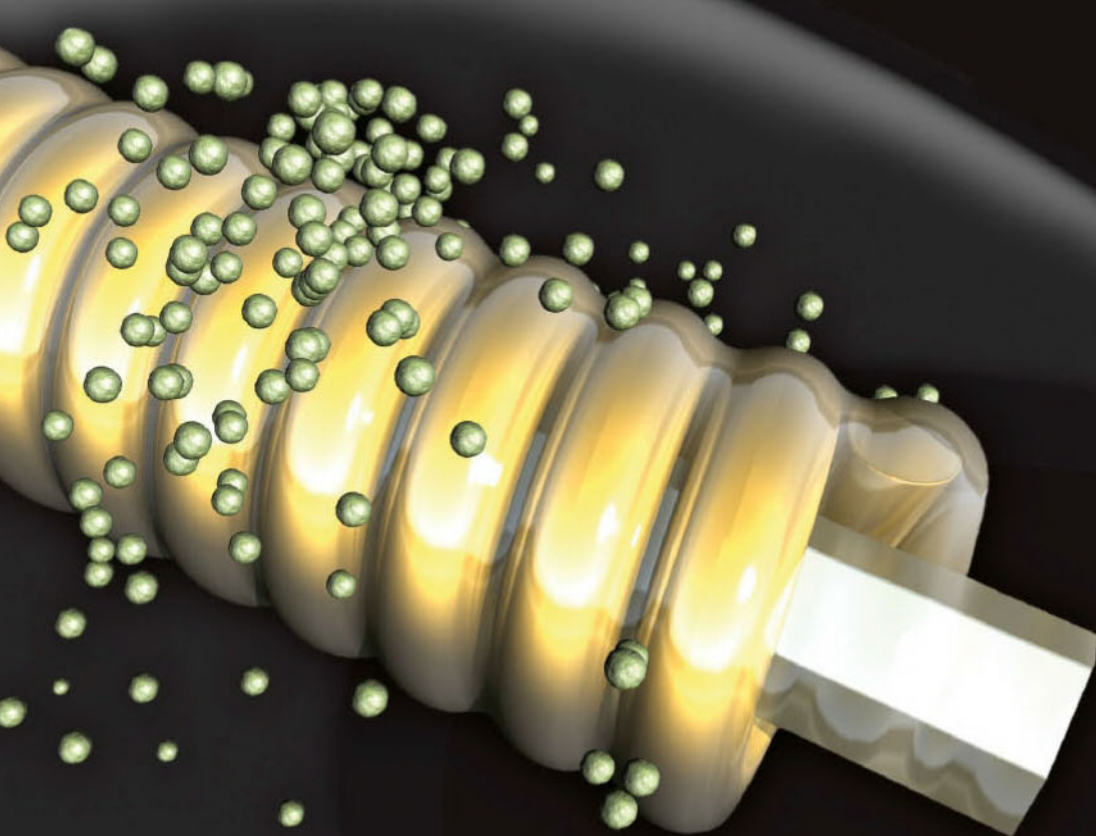
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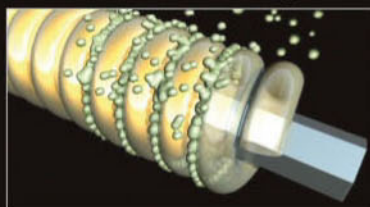
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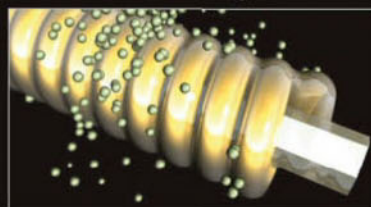
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1. Illustration shows potential for particles to accumulate between the windings and cause product corrosion/tarnish over time. 2. Illustration shows potential for particles to accumulate between the windings. 3. Illustration shows ability for coating to protect against the incidence of particle accumulation between the windings. All illustrations above are simulations only - Not to scale

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