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LET IT BEATLES! 50TH ANNIVERSARY GUITAR SPECIAL

Guitarist

Issue 460

NEW GEAR!
MARTIN SC-13E

SOUNDS ACOUSTIC,
PLAYS ELECTRIC.
IS IT A GAME
CHANGER?

THE BEATLES

GUITAR BY GUITAR



REVIEWED ATKIN THE FORTY THREE GUILD ARISTOCRAT VOX CAMBRIDGE50
MUSIC MAN SABRE THORPYFX FENDER REFLECTING POOL & MORE!

PLUS

JOHNNY A. ON THE YARDBIRDS
KIT-BUILD GUITAR WORKSHOP
TORA DAHLE AAGÅRD
VINTAGE JAGUARS

FUTURE

BORN PLAY^{TO}

Sheeran
BY Lowden



SheeranGuitars.com

Alone Together



Hello again, everyone. It's great to be back after a short spell working on a book project (guitar-related, more of which another time). Big thanks to David Mead for very ably stepping into the editor's chair while I was away. At time of writing, global efforts to halt the COVID-19 virus mean restrictions on socialising are still in place for most people, denying working guitarists much of their livelihood. Tragically, we've also lost some wonderful musicians to this

horrible disease, including American troubadour John Prine, jazz guitar master John 'Bucky' Pizzarelli, and Matthew Seligman, who was bassist with new wave pioneers The Soft Boys and played on albums by numerous luminaries including Tori Amos, Morrissey and The Waterboys. Our deepest sympathies go out to the families, friends and fans they leave behind.

It can be hard to find bright points against such a grim backdrop, but there are some consolations. Instrument sales have been booming as people wake up to the soul-soothing benefits of music-making, while even seasoned guitarists have gotten to know their instruments better. Many of us have embarked on long-put-off recording projects as well. Why not send us links to what you've been up to in your home studio – via YouTube, Soundcloud or what have you – and we'll share the best in these pages. Until then, stay safe and see you next time.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.D.' or 'Jamie'.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Editor's Highlights



Tora's Take On It

Fearlessly expressive blues phenom Tora Dahle Aagård shares her fretboard strategies from **p42**



Casino Royale

Tony Bacon traces the ever-evolving guitars behind history's greatest band: The Beatles **p58**



Big Cat

Leo's often-overlooked offset is packed full of top-drawer tones, writes Rod Brakes on **p74**



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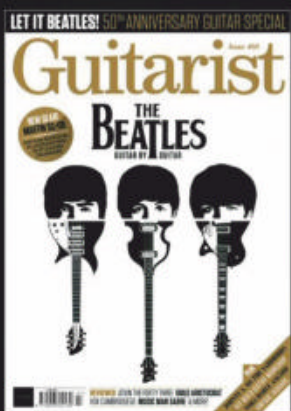
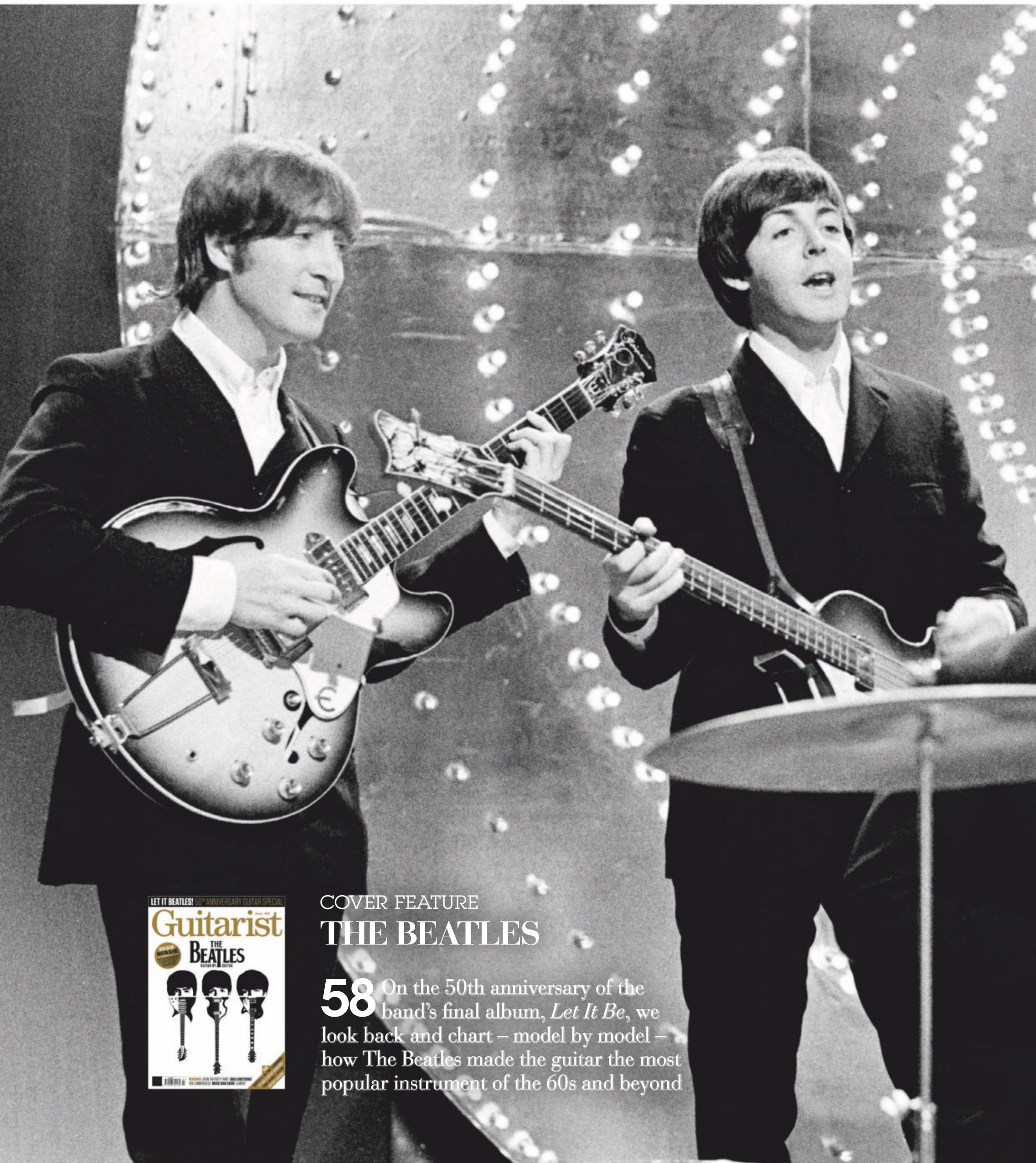
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FIRST PLAY



MUSIC MAN SABRE
£3,399

WHAT IS IT? An old model name on a spectacularly modern rock machine

Making The Cut

En garde! Christened after a sword, this latest model from John Petrucci and Albert Lee's favourite guitar builder reboots the name of a 70s classic, but it's no vintage reissue...

Words Ed Mitchell **Photography** Neil Godwin

We have to 'fess up here. If we hadn't eyeballed the headstock of the new for 2020 Sabre, we'd never have guessed it was built by Music Man. It's easy to pick a Music Man StingRay or Axis out of a line-up. The body shapes are a dead giveaway, not to mention the StingRay's conspicuous control plate. The St Vincent model is too outlandish to go incognito, and the Albert Lee and Steve Lukather signatures couldn't mask their origins if they hid behind big sunglasses and a Magnum PI moustache. The same could be said of the new Sabre's illustrious if short-lived ancestors.

The original Music Man Sabre made its debut in 1978 and was in production for a couple of years. Aside from a better known bass variant, the guitar was available in two formats, the imaginatively titled I and II. Designed by Leo Fender and George Fullerton shortly before they scuttled off to found G&L, the I had a 12-inch fingerboard radius and regular-size frets. The II featured an old-school 7.25-inch radius, with skinnier vintage-style frets to match. Both models were spec'd with an active preamp, two-band EQ, and a phase reversal switch. In fact, aside from a Strat-ish chassis, bolt-on neck and HH

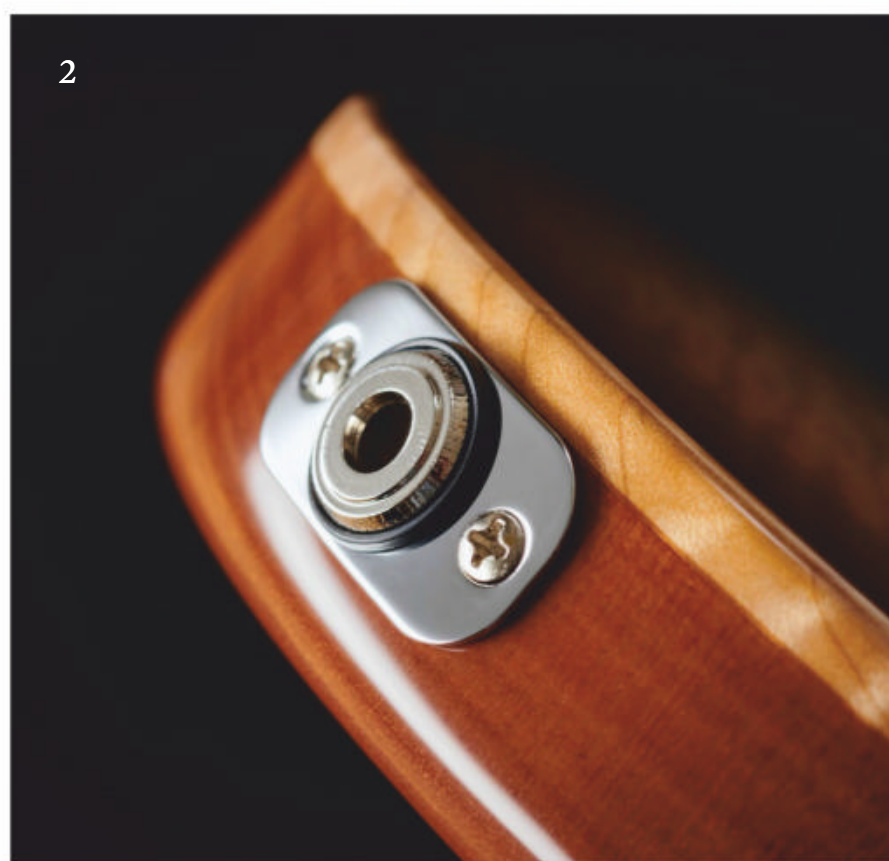






1. The Modern Tremolo bridge features a contemporary two-point operation, six vintage-style bent steel saddles, and a smart-looking 'crescent cover'. You can palm-mute the strings and intonate the guitar with the cover in place, but it can be removed. It's held in situ with a couple of screws

2. Every part of the Sabre feels well thought out and engineered; that's even evident on the bits you don't normally notice. While we're impressed by the tidiness and noise-suppressing features in the control cavity, we also appreciate the robust jack plate. It doesn't feel like there's much chance of it working loose



These humbuckers are full, punchy-sounding characters, but there's a lot of tonal variety on tap

pickup layout, the new Sabre has just about zero in common with those original guitars. Oh well, out with the old...

Like any 'S-style' guitar with direct-mount humbuckers, the Sabre is also a descendent of Eddie Van Halen's Frankenstrat. Yet while Eddie's old amigo looked like it had been dragged through a hedge backwards, our Sabre is way more refined, like it gets its clobber from a tailor on Savile Row. The spec sheet opens with a okoume body crowned with a 13mm thick slice of bookmatched flame maple, finished in high-gloss polyester. Okoume is an African hardwood that's sustainable and provides aesthetics and weight that might convince some that they're dealing with mahogany. The "subtly carved" flame maple top has exposed edges that act as pretty body binding. Just like PRS.

As previously mentioned, the humbucking pickups are direct-mounted. Both units are wound in-house. The bridge pickup is loaded with Alnico V magnets with an quoted DCR of 18kohms. The

neck pickup runs a Ceramic 8 magnet with a reading of 12.2kohms. The wiring loom offers none of the over-engineered exuberance of a 70s Sabre. Here, all you'll find is a master volume, master tone and a five-way pickup selector switch. Peeking inside the control cavity, you'll uncover a well-ordered layout protected by graphite acrylic resin paint and an aluminium cover plate to ward off electrical hum. The vibrato cover plate is also made from aluminium. We were surprised to see that these plates are not recessed. That little craftsman's touch is something we'd expect on a guitar of this value.

You must have noticed this guitar's 'Modern Tremolo'. Music Man describes it as having a "crescent cover" and vintage bent steel saddles. We'd agree with all that. The cover is reminiscent of the ashtray thing that came with old Strats and their Custom Shop doppelgängers. It's possible to palm-mute with the Sabre's cover in place, and you can also intonate the guitar with it



3



4

3. The new Sabre fences the now classic 'four over two' headstock layout. Like the rest of the neck, there's a hand-rubbed gun stock oil and wax finish that brings out the subtle figuring of the flame maple. You'll also find a beautifully cut compensated top nut to aid intonation

4. It's not just the medium-profile frets, slim neck profile and easy 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius that makes this guitar a joy to work with. Upper-fret access on the Sabre is excellent thanks to a sculpted heel. The deep treble side cutaway helps, too

5. Aside from the easily recognisable headstock shape, another classic Music Man feature is the easily accessible truss rod adjuster. Housed next to the front pickup, this small wheel allows you to make adjustments without removing the neck



5

in place. There are six access holes. If it gets in your way, it can be removed by undoing a couple of screws from inside the vibrato cavity – it doesn't just pop on and off like the old Fender covers. That just leaves the push-in vibrato arm wanting of a mention. It's all good news there, too. There's no thread to strip and the arm obediently stays put wherever you abandon it.

Moving in to the pointy bit, the 648mm (25.5-inch) bolt-on roasted figured maple neck is held to account by the body with five screws. Playability is maximised by a 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius, 22 high-profile medium stainless-steel frets, and a sculpted neck/body join. A hand-rubbed gun stock oil and wax finish helps you avoid any sticky situations. Tuning stability is maintained with a slippery graphite compensated top nut and a set of Schaller M6-IND tuners. The headstock is, of course, your now iconic 'four over two' format. The original Sabres came with the Fender six-in-line tuner design.

Feel & Sounds

Incredibly, we've reached this point without a single sword pun, so let's say that the Sabre's neck feels rapier thin. If you've ever heard the expression 'this thing plays itself' then this is your opportunity to experience that first hand. Despite being supplied with Ernie Ball Slinkys 0.010 to 0.046-gauge strings, the feel is super-light. We figured incorrectly that we were dealing with a compound radius 'board here. The fact is, this guitar is just very well set up.

Brandished at an amplifier's clean channel, the sustain is immediately impressive. First impressions? These

humbuckers are full, punchy-sounding characters, but there's a lot of tonal variety on tap. At either end of its travel, the five-way selector switch offers access to the bridge or neck 'bucker running solo in series. Position 2 is the coil-split outer coils on each pickup in parallel. The third position is both 'buckers on full in parallel. Finally, you get a coil-split option with just the inner coils of the bridge and neck pups.

The Sabre presents itself as a guitar for modern players. The high-output bridge pup is mouthy enough for metal and its countless sub genres. There's bags of definition in those coils. You can hear every



While tuning stability is excellent thanks to the stiffer roasted maple neck and that well sorted compensated top nut, the biggest shout-out goes to the Schaller M6-IND locking tuners. There are no string trees or bars to snag the strings

note, and harmonics ping off the 'board like fizzy bottle tops. Engaging the coil-split modes introduces some woodiness, but it doesn't come across as retro. It's more like laser-cut than hand-crafted. The two coil-split modes might appear pretty similar, but there is a discernible increase in bottom-end when you employ the outside coil option. The inside coil setting gets you some way down the road to an in-between Strat thing that's perfect for that funky stuff, if you're guilty of doing that sort of thing.

While we were initially sceptical of the neck pickup's ceramic magnets, we're sold on the sharp definition this thing pumps out. Bottom-end is all present and correct, but there's a sliver of top-end that lays waste to any muddiness, regardless of the amount of gain on show.

Verdict

What's our stance after all this Sabre rattling? We're exceptionally happy if you must know. The Sabre is hard to fault on any level. In other words, this gem represents contemporary guitar building at its finest. The Sabre looks fantastic and practically

The Sabre is hard to fault on any level. In other words, this gem represents contemporary guitar building at its finest

plays itself, with fit and finish that's tidier than Marie Kondo's sock drawer. It also comes with a lightweight but tough moulded hard case.

These days, £3,339 will get you wrapped around any number of high-spec electric guitars. That choice is narrowed if your heart's set on a vintage reissue from the likes of Fender and Gibson. There are, however, many guitarists looking for something with all mod cons, and all the faultless playability and expanded tone palette that implies. The Sabre is the guitar that can compete with Grosh, Suhr and the like. It might not immediately scream "Music Man" but it does live up to its weaponised name tag. Yes, those who choose to live by this sword will be very happy indeed. **G**



MUSIC MAN SABRE

PRICE: £3,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Okoume with bookmatched flame maple top

NECK: Roasted figured maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple with dot inlays and hand-rubbed oil and wax finish, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, high-profile medium, stainless steel

HARDWARE: Chrome 'Modern Tremolo' 6-saddle bridge with push-in arm, Schaller M6-IND locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Music Man Custom Wound humbuckers, master volume, master tone, 5-way pickup selector blade switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.9

OPTIONS: None. The Ball Family Reserve edition costs £3,999

RANGE OPTIONS: Dual-humbucker w/ vibrato options: StingRay RS, Valentine Tremolo and Steve Lukather (from £2,399, £2,649 & £2,349)

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Honey Suckle (as reviewed), Cobra (roasted maple 'board, black hardware), Boujee Burst and Blue Moonstone (ebony 'boards, chrome hardware). High gloss polyester (body), hand-rubbed oil and wax finish (neck)

Strings and Things

01273 440442

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PROS Outstanding looks, stellar playability, great set of pickups; the weight is in the sweet spot, too

CONS The slim neck and modern voice may discourage some

**SE**

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FIRST PLAY



VOX CAMBRIDGE50
1X12 COMBO
£275

WHAT IS IT? Compact, affordable 1x12 combo combining digital modelling with Vox's NuTube miniature valve

NuTube Revolution

Vox's affordable NuTube-loaded modeller combines digital flexibility with valve dynamics for the best of both worlds

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Neil Godwin

Innovation has always been part of the Vox ethos. The brand's early groundbreaking AC models powered The Beatles and other music legends to fame and continue to provide the tonal foundation for many contemporary artists. Beyond the electron valve, Vox has also set new standards for affordable digital modelling and recently announced another innovation, the 6P1 NuTube – a vacuum fluorescent display (VFD) that potentially replaces the industry-standard ECC83 twin triode preamp valve.

VFDs have been around for almost as long as the AC30; most people will have seen their characteristic green digits in microwave ovens and washing machines. They use the same components as an electron valve (anode, cathode and grid) to switch display segments on and off, so it's no surprise many homebrew amp experimenters have tinkered with them. However, the 6P1 is significant, because it's the first VFD that has been specifically designed for audio.



1. Variable power control reduces the output down from 50 watts to zero for silent recording
2. There's USB connection on the rear panel to allow for four direct recording and reamping modes, with noise reduction and speaker simulation options from the Tone Room app, as well as patch storage and recall
3. The Cambridge50 is easy to dial in, with straightforward controls and minimal fuss, getting you to the tones as quickly as possible. While there's no mid control here, you can adjust mids separately from the Tone Room app
4. In case you didn't know, this badge reminds you that the amp not only has a 6P1 NuTube but also a custom-designed Celestion VX 12-inch loudspeaker



Jointly developed by Vox's parent company Korg and Noritake Itron, the inventors of the VFD, the NuTube has already been used in a variety of Vox products, starting with the jaw-dropping miniature MV50 range from a few years ago. Now, Vox has combined the NuTube with digital modelling in the Cambridge50, a new combo that promises the flexibility of a digital platform with valve dynamics.

The Cambridge50 is a smart, compact combo with a 'none blacker' version of Vox's trademark diamond grille cloth. Lurking behind that grille in a deep cabinet there's a custom-design Celestion VX 12-inch loudspeaker, while the electronics sit in a steel tray chassis that's as tough as it needs to be. Power comes courtesy of an external DC brick supply. The NuTube doesn't need the high voltages of conventional electron valves, so there are no heavy transformers weighing the Cambridge50 down.

Blue LEDs provide tasteful illumination from behind two perforated vents on the control panel, with other LEDs to indicate channel status, tuner and tap tempo speed. The controls are familiar territory for anyone who's used a Vox modelling amp. There's a rotary model selector with 11 choices, including a flat-response Line option. Tone shaping is taken care of by gain, bass, treble and master volume controls, with a non-programmable Power Level knob that reduces the Cambridge50's output down from 50 watts to almost zero for practice or recording.

Effects are handled on two more chickenhead knobs: one for modulations; one for delays and reverbs. There are four choices on each and you can use one from each type simultaneously.

Other useful features include a USB socket, which can be used to record or reamp audio tracks, together with a headphone jack, aux in and a footswitch socket that lets you access two or eight memory slots, depending on which switch you buy. USB also connects the Cambridge50 to Vox's excellent Tone Room editor/librarian app, which can store and recall presets, as well as accessing all the controls and a few hidden features, including a midrange tone knob, variable noise reduction and a choice of four USB recording modes. There's even a simple tuner that handles the 'give us an E' task.

Sounds

The onboard amp models include Normal Channel and Top Boost AC30 choices alongside other classic British and American designs, digitally recreated using Korg's Virtual Element Technology, which replicates classic circuits at component level.

Using just a hint of ambient reverb, the Cambridge50's tonal superiority is immediately obvious, with the NuTube 6P1 adding convincing warmth and dynamic punch that's difficult to replicate digitally. Turning up the Gain control adds preamp distortion, while turning up the master Volume control past halfway adds virtual



A full-size 12-inch custom-designed Celestion VX loudspeaker adds authentic punch, top-end sparkle and plenty of volume when needed

power amp clipping, giving a quite realistic impression of a valve power stage being driven hard. This is especially noticeable with Vox's own amp models; at lower gain and volume settings the AC30 Normal and TB voices chime with convincing realism, while maxing out both controls will get you close to Rory and Brian's Class A grind. Robben Ford/John Mayer/SRV fans take note: the Cambridge50's Boutique OD and Boutique Cl voices are very rewarding to play – there are more expensive and exclusive ODS/SSS-type pedals that can't easily match its responsive drive tones and airy clarity.

Unlike some modelling products, the Cambridge50 doesn't mask the guitar's character, so a Les Paul sounds like a Les Paul and drives the preamp harder than a regular Strat, for example. The effects are equally impressive. Standouts include the warm, spacious chorus, while the twin tremolo scores instant vintage appeal when paired with the Deluxe or Vox models.

With no deep menus to get lost in, the Cambridge50 scores highly by providing almost instant gratification from every amp model, covering a full spectrum from shimmering cleans to gobs of thick, greasy distortion. Dialling down the Power Level control enables you to retain those big amp dynamics at conversation levels, making the Cambridge50 a great tool for home practice and recording – while at full tilt it's also plenty loud enough for smaller stages and rehearsals.

Verdict

We started off by thinking that the Cambridge50's relative simplicity and lack of programmability might be a weak point, but ended up deciding this is actually its strength. Everything's quick and easy to dial in, and as long as you don't overdo the effects, it's practically impossible to get a bad sound out of it. Following the current restrictions on live music, internet performances are now a popular way for musicians to connect with audiences around the world, and the

It scores highly by providing almost instant gratification from every amp model, covering a spectrum from shimmering cleans to thick distortion

Cambridge50 sounds impressively big even at low volume, making it a perfect tool for amateur and professional web showcases. Crank up the Power Level control and there's plenty of volume to spare for the average pub gig, too.

The most compelling sales pitch of all, though, has to be the price. With tones that wouldn't be out of place in an amp costing at least twice as much, the Cambridge50 is an absolute steal. **G**



VOX CAMBRIDGE50 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £275

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: NuTube/digital preamp, solid-state power amp

OUTPUT: 50W into 4ohms

VALVES: 1x NuTube 6P1 twin triode

DIMENSIONS: 410 (h) x 452 (w) x 240mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 9/20

CABINET: Particle board

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x Celestion VX 12"

CHANNELS: 11 amp voices with 2 user patches, expandable to 8

CONTROLS: Amp select, gain, volume, bass, treble, power level, effects select x2, tap tempo/tuner button

FOOTSWITCH: Not supplied

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Aux in, headphones/line out with cabinet simulator, USB for direct recording/reamping and connection to desktop, JamVOX III download card

OPTIONS: The VFS2 2-button footswitch (£25) toggles 2 user patches, while the VFS5 (£60) can store and recall up to 8 patches

RANGE OPTIONS: None

Vox Amplification Ltd

01908 304600

www.voxamps.com



PROS Top-quality tones that wouldn't be out of place on amps costing over double the price; compact and very portable; Tone Room editor/librarian app is superb

CONS A strain-relief clip for the DC power cable would be handy, but it's not essential as the plug stays firmly put

FIRST PLAY



ATKIN THE FORTY THREE
£2,899

WHAT IS IT? Sumptuous UK-made baked Sitka spruce/mahogany slope-shoulder dreadnought inspired by Gibson's early 40s J-45

Natty Dread

Alister Atkin and his small team make superlative quality guitars, inspired by classic models from heritage brands. Here's his take on the 'workman' acoustic designed over 80 years ago

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

There's no disguising the influence of Gibson's ubiquitous J-45 on The Forty Three from Atkin. As any connoisseur of acoustic guitars will know, from the model's outset Gibson never stopped tinkering with its appointments, until recently mostly to its detriment. But with The Forty Three, Alister has settled on what many believe is its finest incarnation.

This particular set of features arrived a year after the model's 1942 debut. So we see the perfectly proportioned round-shouldered dreadnought outline, sultry dark brown sunburst finish, dot-inlaid fingerboard, straight bridge, torty teardrop pickguard, 'banner'-style headstock with three-on-a-plate Kluson plastic-button tuners, seven-ply black-and-white soundhole rosette, and simple cream body binding. All this is built around a solid mahogany back, sides and neck, plus Santos rosewood fingerboard (pau ferro) and baked Sitka spruce top construction.

Designed to go head to head with arch competitor Martin's already market-leading and similarly mahogany-bodied D-18, Gibson's decision to distance the two models in looks was a good one. From those days until now, both have their followers and both remain each builder's workhorse flat-top.







1. The colours of the faux tortoiseshell pickguard, bronzed toner to enrich the lacquer finish, and the subtle grain of the Santos rosewood bridge create a glorious mix of warm earth tones

But back to The Forty Three. While many vintage acoustics sound fantastic and play with a slipperiness that belies their generally large necks, modern builders have seriously upped the ante when it comes to precision and consistency of construction. Atkin is no exception and his guitars are widely seen as some of the best around. Indeed, the Buddy Holly Educational Foundation (Buddy played an early J-45) would surely otherwise not have entrusted him to create instruments that his widow, María Elena Holly, gifts to the likes of Paul McCartney, Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Dave Grohl, Willie Nelson, Robert Plant and many more.

Atkin offers two levels of finish: full gloss and aged (with lacquer checking but no dings or dents). Rather than some of Alister's extreme ageing that we've seen, our review model has more of a gentle patina, not unlike Gibson's VOS look, with only mild finish checking here and there. The lacquer is also tinted and lends a lovely bronzed look to the top's yellow middle

The Atkin's simplicity makes it so compelling. It seems warm and welcoming, not looking down its pearl-encrusted, gold-plated nose



2

2. Aged three-on-a-plate Kluson tuners with classic plastic buttons sit behind a walnut-capped headstock with Alister Atkin's striking pyramid top design

area, edge binding, soundhole ring, Atkin logo and 'The Forty Three' banner script.

Since the model this one seeks to emulate was released as America entered WWII, with part of Kalamazoo's production given over to the war effort and with a general feeling of austerity in the air, the Atkin, too, is as simple as it gets, with no fancy backstrip and no ornamentation anywhere save a subtle heel cap and those pearl dot markers.

Yet that's what's makes the instrument so compelling. It seems warm and welcoming to all, not looking down its pearl-encrusted, gold-plated nose and accessible only to a select band of elites. Of course, Alister's renowned attention to detail and impeccable craftsmanship, including his own take on pre-war-style hand-scalloped spruce bracing and meticulous mahogany kerfing, means that in every other respect The Forty Three is designed and built to deliver at the highest level.



3



4

Feel & Sounds

The Forty Three boasts a fine palm-full of a neck; it's a classic rounded 'C' that's fulsome but comfortable. In fact, for the open-position chording that's most likely to be its staple duty it's just about perfect. The 42mm (1.65-inch) nut width might deter serious fingerpickers, but it didn't fuss James Taylor or Ralph McTell, both fine fingerstyle songsmiths and both J-45/J-50 players.

Moving further up the neck, The Forty Three's medium-low action makes those occasional licks slick and easy. Of course, even though the guitar apes the early Gibson model's 19 medium-fine frets (one less than usual), you'd surely never miss it.

Regarding sounds, there are so many preconceptions around acoustic guitar tones that one must be wary of that rabbit hole. For instance, "dreadnoughts are booming strummers and don't fingerpick

3. The close-grained Sitka spruce top is baked or 'torrefied' to help create an open, vintage-style tone. Note the 'pre-belly' style straight bridge

4. Gibson created what some say is the perfect shape and proportions for its dreadnought jumbo guitars. The rich nitro finish on The Forty Three's African mahogany back, sides and neck allow the tinted cream binding to stand out perfectly

Maker's Marks

Alister Atkin takes us through the materials and style of The Forty Three

What type of mahogany are you using?

"We use the highest grade African mahogany and I'm surprised how good it is. When I started, no-one would touch sapele or African mahogany; it was all about Brazilian. But Brazilian can be variable and a pain to work. When the Brazilian ran out, we tried it all. I can honestly say that African works very well for us. We're using Cuban mahogany for our 25th Anniversary The Forty Three models, which I'm looking forward to hearing."

What about rosewood?

"We switched from Indian to Santos when the CITES restrictions came in. Santos can look wonderful if the colour's right. Again, on our 25th Anniversary we have some beautiful Madagascan rosewood for bridges and fretboards, so that combined with the Cuban mahogany and Adirondack tops will help us get closer to the originals."

Do you only offer baked Sitka spruce?

"We can still get a good supply of great quality Adirondack spruce, which comes at a premium. I am definitely a fan and we offer it on some of our custom guitars. But I think our standard baked Sitka tops, as on your review guitar, produce a very rich tone. We've been baking our tops for nearly 10 years and it's been a game-changer. They sound stable and dry with that vintage boldness that everyone is hankering after."

Where do you stand on vintage versus modern guitars?

"When my friend Andy Crockett used to repair guitars in my workshop, and he was always working on vintage instruments, it was clear that the earlier Martins had a higher hit rate than the Gibsons. But when we got a great Gibson in it was fantastic, so at every opportunity I tried to see what was going on inside. From there I would play with the bracing pattern, heights and thicknesses to see what worked. I have an image in my head of what works, and then I jam with the shapes and flow of the braces."

"With modern guitar building, everyone's buying the most expensive straight-grained timber, and then you look at a 1940s J-45 and the top grain is 4mm apart and the braces are roughly sawn. And yet every so often one sounds better than the majority of new guitars. I think you have to be able to know what to concentrate on. For me, a thin finish helps, as well as not building too



heavily. Then an acceptance that most of the truly beautiful things in life aren't perfect. Imagine if Bob Dylan's voice sounded like Michael Bublé's..."

How about the bracing?

"Our Forty Three is not the same as the original. It is an X-brace, but we have scallops and transverse braces. They aren't as high as the J-45 braces, either. We also bake all of our brace wood, which helps with stability."

Do you offer 'new' finishes?

"Yes, we offer two types: Aged and Mirror. They are both nitro, but they have very different amounts of lacquer. The review guitar you have is a lightly aged finish with minimal checking. These days, 95 per cent of our 300 yearly production actually has the Aged finish. At the beginning, we used to get flak for it; now people can genuinely see, feel and hear the difference. I would choose it every time. The Aged guitars have about eight coats of lacquer applied over three days. They are left to cure, cut back and polished, and then we put them through a freezing process for between five and 10 days."

What type of neck join do you use?

"We use a bolt-on neck, much like some of the top US brands. It's a mortise and tenon joint with two bolts. The fretboards are glued down. It means that we can do a neck reset easily. I also believe the neck is held against the body so well that the vibrations flow through the whole guitar with a very little amount of interference."

And strings?

"We ship our guitars with Elixir 0.012 to 0.053 Nanoweb Phosphor Bronze."

Do you offer electro versions?

"We do fit pickups if asked. I really like the K&K Pure Mini, but we stock Fishman and LR Baggs. I think all of these work well in the right environments."



well"; or, "mahogany is bright-sounding and not as rich as rosewood." Well, anyone that's heard Messrs Taylor and McTell, Donovan, Woody Guthrie, Buddy Holly and Paul Weller, or blues legends like Lightnin' Hopkins and Mississippi John Hurt, can hear that round-shoulder dreadnoughts excel at almost everything. Yes, more specialist instruments do certain things specifically well, but as a rule a dread is one of the greatest all-rounders.

With that in mind, a strum with the fingers over The Forty Three's strings elicits clear and resonant chords. It's bright – more so than a Martin D-18 that was to hand – and less scooped in the mids, although the two were pretty evenly matched in the bass. All round it's a more strident tone than the D-18's mellower voice, and if anything louder and more aggressive. Those powerful mids also mean that fingerpicking stands out strongly, the deep 120mm (4.75-inch) body lending real punch.

Grabbing a pick and bashing out a bit of Delta-style blues, The Forty Three complies beautifully. It kicks out an almost dirty acoustic tone if you dig in hard, with single-string licks standing loud and proud. But then back off for pop-style strumming and the balance across the EQ spectrum ensures that no frequency dominates. One has to



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take care not to sound like a pretentious wine buff here, but The Forty Three combines rich and bright in a pleasing but almost bolshie manner.

Verdict

We've been lucky enough to play quite a few Atkins guitars. Every one exudes mojo and tone by the bucketload. While the model from which The Forty Three took inspiration is usually one of the softer-sounding acoustics with warm bottom-end and sweet trebles, the Atkins is a strident beast that takes no prisoners. A subtle picker it's not (think more Paul Weller than Paul Simon), although if you tickle the strings they'll oblige. No, where The Forty Three excels is in being a loud cannon of a guitar that barks with a voice demanding to be heard above the *melée*.

We haven't mentioned that the Sitka spruce top is baked to add an aged element that many say brings an openness of tone new instruments can lack. That's probably contributing to its power and aggression. It's possibly also why it's so responsive to different styles of pick; harder materials like Tortex or softer ones such as nylon or celluloid give very different results (try it on your own guitars – our favourite was a Dunlop Jazz III XL).

The Sitka spruce top is baked to add an aged element that many say brings an openness of tone new instruments can lack

The elephant in the room, of course, is that the Gibson J-45 is still being made, in similar guise to this and really rather well. So whether you'd plump for an instrument built in larger quantities with the original name on the headstock, or one that's crafted by a tiny group of artisans in the UK in small volumes to exacting specs is your choice. Resale price is often a worry, too. Well, Atkins guitars strongly retain their value; we only found one used The Forty Three for sale in the UK, and the asking price was just shy of £2,500.

But this was an extremely enjoyable guitar to 'own' for a while and, even with several fine acoustics joining this reviewer in lockdown, as often as not The Forty Three proved to be the irresistible choice. Several dealers stock them and they are currently available online, so if you want a brand-new brute of an acoustic with eight decades of mojo, get clicking now! 



ATKIN THE FORTY THREE

PRICE: £2,899 (inc hard case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Round-shoulder dreadnought acoustic

TOP: Solid baked Sitka spruce, vintage X-braced, hand-scalloped

BACK/SIDES: Solid African mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 120.7mm (4.75")

MAX BODY WIDTH: 410mm (16.14")

NECK: African mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 630mm (24.8")

TUNERS: 3-on-a-plate Kluson with plastic buttons

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm (1.65")

FINGERBOARD: Santos rosewood (pau ferro)

FRETS: 19, medium fine

BRIDGE/SPACING: Santos rosewood/56mm (2.2")

ELECTRICS: None

OPTIONS: See 'Maker's Marks' box

RANGE OPTIONS: Plenty of slope-shoulder choice: the Hawaiian Master, The Thirty Eight, The Nineteen, The Nineteen Deluxe, The Forty Seven and The Thirty Six

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Nitrocellulose, aged (as reviewed; gloss also available)

Atkin Guitars

01227 719933

<https://atkinguitars.com>



PROS Impeccable build, big tone, versatile, great playability

CONS The Gibson it's modelled after is still available

What's Goin' On

The best guitar events happening online

Gibson TV

Nine ongoing shows

Video

When Gibson announced its own online broadcasting ambitions at the beginning of the year, there were no half measures: it already had a feast of guitar goodness ready to go for its web-based TV channel with six regular series now expanded to nine. These include artist-focused formats including *Icons* going in-depth with Tony Iommi, to *My First Gibson*, and live acoustic showcase *The Songbook*. And don't miss gear extravaganza *The Collection*, where you'll see how Paul McCartney guitarist Brian Ray's enviable Gibson collection is complemented by his Les Paul-shaped swimming pool in sunny Palm Springs. One of our favourite series, however, is *The Process*, which shines a light on the work and expertise that goes into crafting Gibson's guitars. The lockdown is inevitably going to delay updates to these shows, but there's more than enough goodness here to keep you busy for some time.

gibson.com/GibsonTV / youtube.com/GibsonGuitarCorp



Check out Tony Iommi on Gibson TV's *Icons* programme

Chris Buck

Friday Fretworks

Video

Chris Buck, one of our favourite young players, puts out a weekly show looking at gear and the sounds behind classic compositions. Recent episodes include recreating Clapton's uncredited solo from *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. It's a great mix of tone and technique – he even does lessons, too.

www.facebook.com/ChrisBuckGuitar

Brian Fallon

Sittin' Round At Home

Video

The songwriter was supposed to be on a UK tour to support third album, *Local Honey*, but with that postponed until 2021, he's using this downtime to support other artists with conversations and performances every week. Featured players include Chris Shiflett and John Paul White.

www.instagram.com/thebrianfallon

Brian May

#Jamwithbri

Video

When it comes to the guitar elite, nobody comes close to being as open and prolific as Brian May right now. His Instagram is full covers, lick lessons and a willingness to engage. And he's welcoming fans to play along and post their videos on YouTube too with the hashtag #jamwithbri. If nothing else you can learn how the man himself plays Queen's classics.

www.instagram.com/brianmayforreal

John Mayer

Current Mood

Video

Mayer's Instagram TV show may be sporadic but it's always interesting, whether he's interviewing musician friends or performing catchy comedy songs (check out *Drone Shot Of My Yacht* and crooner lockdown ballad *You Are Still You*), he proves he's got chops even without a guitar.

www.instagram.com/johnmayer

Steve Vai

Alien Guitar Secrets
& Under It All:
Hard Questions

Video

It doesn't matter if you're a Vai fan or not, these free YouTube shows are gold. While *Alien Guitar Secrets* is playing-focused, *Under It All: Hard Questions* finds the virtuoso going in-depth on a mindset that's applicable to more than music. His perspectives are dazzling here.

www.youtube.com/stevevaihimself

Fender

Fender Play

Video

Fender Play's online teaching is ideal for beginners or lapsed players of bass, guitar and ukulele with lessons that can be watched at your leisure. At the time of going to press, the first three months were free, instead of the usual one month's free access.

<https://try.fender.com/play/playthrough>

Robert Fripp

Music For Quiet Moments

Audio

Every Friday, King Crimson founder Fripp releases a different soundscape produced with David Singleton. Find them on Fripp's social media, streaming services and DGMLive.com. "Hopefully, [it's] something that will nourish us," says producer Singleton. "I have certainly enjoyed the peace that comes with editing and mastering them."

www.dgmlive.com

Jude Gold

No Guitar Is Safe

Podcast

No Guitar Is Safe is well established as a superb podcast with session player and *Guitar Player* writer Jude Gold meeting a different pro each episode for a chat. Previous guests include Slash, Dave Hill, Tosin Abasi, Jennifer Batten and Jim Campilongo.

www.soundcloud.com/guitar-player-magazine

The Players

News and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists



Ashes To Ashes

Fender stops use of ash for its production guitars

With the exception of select reissues and limited editions, ash will no longer be used to make Fender guitars. The move comes as a result of serious threats to the wood's sustainability, especially the swamp ash variety Fender harvests in the south of the US. "It's something none of us took lightly," Fender executive vice president of Fender Product, Justin Novell, tells us. "Ash is part of the DNA of what we do at Fender."

The destruction to ash trees caused by the emerald ash borer species of beetle has been widespread and swift, moving down from Canada. "It's eating its way through the forest," Justin explains, "and ash will be completely gone in a couple of years – I guess like how American chestnut got destroyed in the 30s, and it's over. This is not like it will go away for a couple of seasons and eventually grow back."

Swamp ash in particular has also been affected by a second issue. It's named because it has been soaked in flood waters and harvested when they recede. But opportunities for this have been few. "We only use the bottom part of the tree, where the water is," adds Justin. "But the floods have not been receding, so these areas are underwater for two thirds of the year, and it's gotten to the point where we are sitting there for six or eight months waiting for ash we can't get reliably. The beetle is still coming whether there's floods or not, so it's really narrowing down."

"It just hit the point where we couldn't put it in a production guitar telling everyone we can make something that we can't get any more," Justin concludes. "That said, there will probably be a couple more feasts and famines before the species is entirely gone. If we get ash, we'll use it and make limited editions. But due to the circumstances, our ash production will be winding down."

The company is now looking into using pine to complement its roster of core woods, which includes the fast-growing and replenishing alder and maple.

www.fender.com

Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks have responded to ongoing fan demand for a reunion of **Genesis**'s early era line-up. "I think a reunion with Steve and Pete would be uphill," Phil said when asked by *Mojo*. "Playing with Mike and Tony is the easy option." Rutherford added: "I know people love the idea that the five of us will get together again, but the songs most people know and love are from the last 40 years. Peter left so long ago. I really don't know what we could do with him now." Tony Banks weighed in, too: "As much as I love those early albums, it would be weird to just do songs from that period." The trio plan to begin their reunion tour in the UK this November. Collins' 18-year-old son Nicholas will play drums.

US singer-songwriter **Dion DiMucci**'s new album, *Blues With Friends*, features a stellar roster of guests including Bruce Springsteen, Jeff Beck, Billy Gibbons, Brian Setzer, Paul Simon, Van Morrison, Joe Bonamassa and Samantha Fish. "I needed to round up the best guitarists and musicians alive and pick them from every generation, every variation of blues," Dion said. The album is set for release on Bonamassa's KTBA label on 5 June (see p40 for our review).

In other **Jeff Beck** news, the guitarist has been working on an album with **Johnny Depp**. The first fruit of their collaboration was a cover of John Lennon's *Isolation*, released last month. "Johnny and I have been working on music together for a while now and we recorded this track during our time in the studio last year," said Beck. "We weren't expecting to release it so soon, but given all the hard days and true 'isolation' that people are going through in these challenging times, we

decided now might be the right time to let you all hear it. You'll be hearing more from Johnny and me in a little while, but until then we hope you find some comfort and solidarity in our take on this Lennon classic." As a result of the pandemic, the 75-year-old guitarist has been forced to postpone his 2020 UK tour until April and May 2021.

Joe Bonamassa has launched a new initiative to provide artists with help to get them back to touring. The Fueling Musicians Program aims to provide players with cash and vouchers for fuel in an emergency relief program to run alongside Bonamassa's Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation. It will make immediate cash payments of \$1,000 for essential living expenses, in addition to pre-paid fuel vouchers of \$500. "Right now, the music industry has been brought to its knees," Bonamassa said. "We are in a critical time in the music business and I want to see as many bands and artists survive and flourish going forward when they are given the green light to tour again."



The Lineup

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable, wallet-bothering new gear

Gretsch G2210 Streamliner Junior Jet Club £269

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



PICKUPS

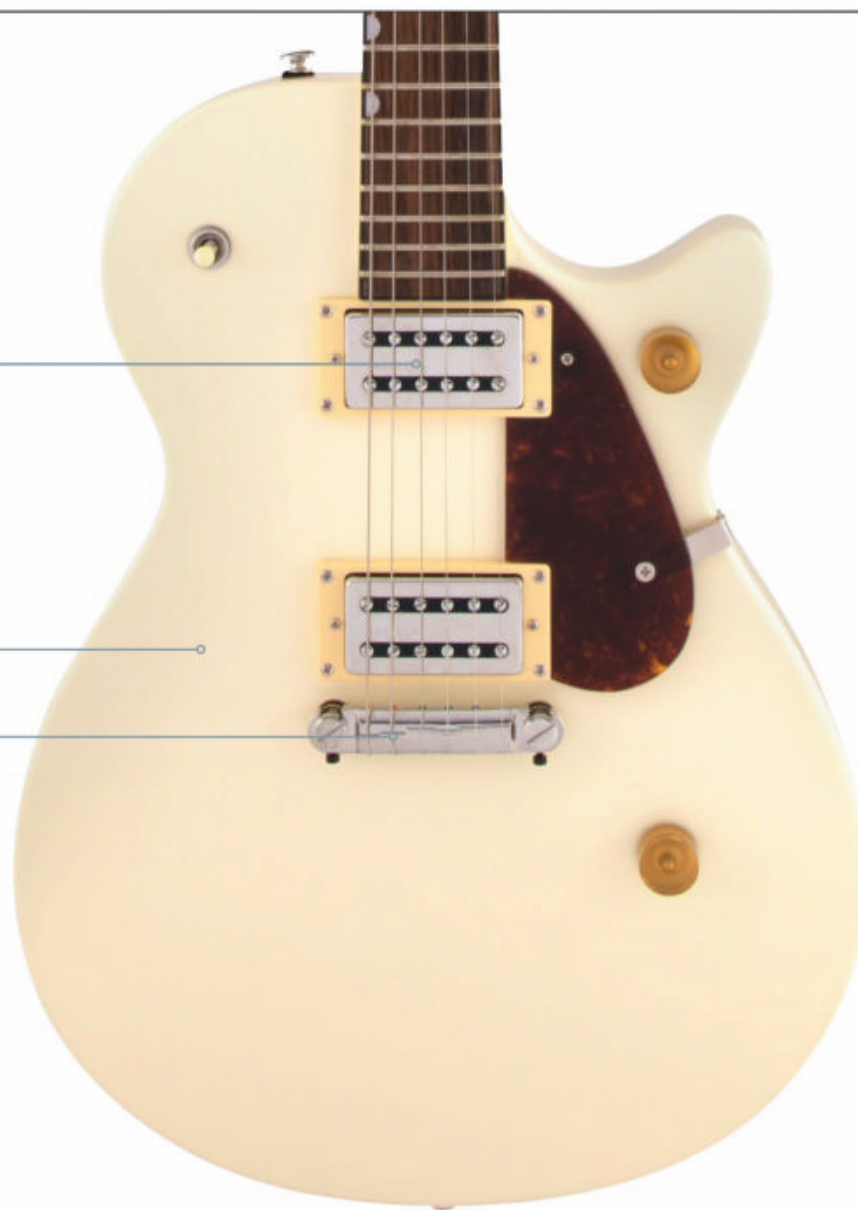
The Broad'Tron humbuckers are best suited to modern rock and punk tones. The stripped-down control layout consists of a master volume, master tone and a three-way pickup switch

BODY

While Gretsch Jets are usually chambered, the G2210 Streamliner Junior Jet Club features a solid nato body that runs to a depth of 44.45mm (1.75 inches)

BRIDGE

This Jet comes loaded with a nickel-finish wraparound bridge/tailpiece unit. This Gibson-style design is compensated to improve intonation



Q&A

Is this a reissue, then?

Not as such. What Gretsch has done with the G2210 Streamliner is combine some of the aesthetics of the original 50s Duo Jet with features we usually associate with a Gibson Les Paul Junior. The result is a stripped-down rock guitar with loads of retro curb appeal sans the usual rockabilly pigeonholing Gretsch is often subjected to.

Break the features down a bit...

The body and headstock silhouettes are classic Gretsch Jet. Same goes for the scratchplate and Neo-Classic 'thumbnail' fingerboard inlays. The body depth is the 44.45mm (1.75-inch) measurement you'll encounter on most Jet reissues. Original 1950s Jets, and the current Vintage Select and George Harrison models, are a bit deeper at 51mm (two inches).

And the Les Paul stuff?

We're talking about the wraparound bridge/tailpiece, not to mention the decidedly un-Gretsch 'speed' knobs. Then there's the 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length – Gretsch guitars usually run at 625mm (24.6 inches). You also have to figure in the body construction. Your classic Jet guitars featured a chambered mahogany body with a laminated maple top. The G2210 Streamliner Junior Jet Club, meanwhile, has a solid nato body, which gives it that Les Paul Special vibe.

How come it's so affordable?

For a start, this Streamliner is "crafted in Indonesia", not Japan like the Gretsch Professional stuff. That keeps the costs down a bit. The G2210 also comes spec'd with yet another non-Gretsch feature...

a bolt-on neck. That style of construction is cheaper and faster to produce than a glued-in item.

What's the skinny on the neck?

You answered your own question, right there. The neck has a thin 'U' profile. We should extrapolate here, though. People might normally associate 'U' shapes with super-chubby early 50s Fender Broadcaster and Nocaster necks, and the slimmer shape found on late-60s Stratocasters. Both types have plenty of shoulder but different depths. The same is true of the chunky 'Standard U' shape found on '53 Gretsch Duo Jets and reissues. We therefore expect some shoulder on the Junior Jet Club's slim 'U' profile neck. The message is, get your hand wrapped round one to see if it's for 'U', er, we mean 'you'...

NECK

Unlike pricier Gretsch guitars, the G2210 comes spec'd with a bolt-on neck. The scale length is longer than the traditional Gretsch measurement of 625mm (24.6 inches) – you actually get a Gibson style 629mm (24.75-inch) scale



Any other details?

Indeed. Also cut from nato, the neck features a laurel fingerboard with a 305mm (12-inch) radius and 22 medium-jumbo frets, plus you get a set of die-cast tuners finished in nickel to match the wraparound bridge/tailpiece. Finish options are Gold Dust, Gunmetal and Vintage White, all with a single-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate, and transparent Imperial Stain with black 'guard.

That just leaves the pickups...

The fact Gretsch loaded the G2210 Streamliner Junior Jet Club with Broad'Tron humbuckers reveals these pups are at home barking out punk, rock and metal. This is a guitar for beating out fat string riffs and powerchords. If that's your thing... join the Club. **[EM]**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Nato: According to Wikipedia, nato is "a collective name for wood from Mora trees – the best-known species are *Mora excelsa* (Mora) and *Mora gonggrijpii* (Morabukea)". Yeah, tell us something we don't know. The point is that it looks reddish brown enough to allow it to stand in for mahogany. Nato has been used on more affordable guitars for years, and provides a classic look and a light weight with good sustain. Although it's often referred to as Eastern mahogany, the two timbers are not related.

ALSO OUT NOW...

STRYMON COMPADRE

£299

©2020 JOHN EARLY



Effects guru Strymon has released the Compadre, a dual-voice compressor and boost pedal. Described as offering "true studio-quality analog compression with two distinct

voices for smooth transparency or vintage squeeze", the Compadre also provides a boost circuit that runs from clean to clipped. Your two comp options are Studio, which offers a "smooth, beautifully transparent" compression found in vintage studio gear, and Squeeze, a guitar-pedal-style compression that promotes maximum sustain. The boost function has three EQ settings (treble, mid and flat) and there's a Dry control that allows you to mix the level of dry signal with the compressed output.

www.strymon.net

DANELECTRO '57

£599

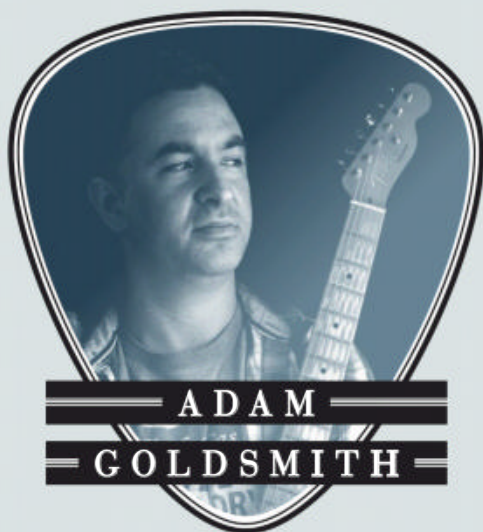
DANELECTRO



Danelectro's run of retro reissues continues with the '57 guitar. Like the current catalogue's '56 Baritone model (£599), the '57 features a single-cutaway body constructed in classic Dano fashion from a solid spruce

frame capped front and back with Masonite boards. Based on the original 50s U2 design, the '57 is also spec'd with the iconic 'coke bottle' headstock shape, a D logo scratchplate, cream concentric volume and tone controls, and a duo of 50s-voiced lipstick tube single-coil pickups. Aside from the six-saddle bridge and a pau ferro fingerboard, the '57 is pretty damn close to the guitar Nathan Daniel invented back in the day. Finish options are Limo Black and Jade Green.

www.danelectro.com



SESSION DIARY

For Better For Worse

For Adam's latest commission, he swaps studio sparkle for a set of old strings...

Hopefully, by the time you read, this things have moved on a bit. But I'm currently writing this column from my home studio in north London, having very little option of being anywhere else at the moment because of the lockdown. I have, however, just finished sending some guitar tracks for an advertising campaign with a well-known media company for my friend Chris Hill – writer, renowned studio bass player and all round gentleman. The ad is an acoustic recreation of the Starship classic *Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now* and I was required to supply the acoustic guitar tracks.

There's an interesting phenomenon I've come across quite a few times, whereby producers don't want you to sound too polished or practised (the first time I came across this was on a Ronan Keating record about 15 years ago where I was asked if I could play like a "student on Valium"). From what I can tell from this project's audio, I'm accompanying a small choir of children and it needs to have a homespun 'lockdown' kind of feel.

The first tracks I sent off were my Martin John Mayer acoustic, recorded via a stereo

pair of Neumann KM184 microphones, into my Universal Audio Apollo recording interface using UA's Neve 1073 preamp plug-in. I was happy with what I sent off: well executed parts, clean audio at good levels, and everything perfectly in tune and in time. Chris came back to me with (I'm paraphrasing), 'Everything's brilliant, but could you make it a lot worse?', the idea being that the whole project has a cohesive feel. You don't want an amateur choir of children singing over a perfectly produced backing track. You want the primary school music teacher strumming along in the background, not the recording chops of a studio professional.

To this end, I duly dug out a fantastic guitar that I normally reserve for Nashville tuning parts on records and films, the Sigma 00R-28VS, basically a cheap recreation of a small-bodied Martin. This brilliant guitar has more than earned its keep over the years. I think I paid about £200 for it on a trade deal, and it's seen me through a few big movie soundtracks and BBC TV series *Frankie* as a featured instrument for the whole season.

Oh, This Old String?

I duly removed the Nashville tuning set of strings that normally live on the Sigma and replaced them with some old strings from my Taylor dreadnought, which I hadn't used in ages, and were sounding a bit flat (not too sparkly and 'studio'). I also removed the stereo Neumanns and replaced them with a single AKG 414 BULS from the 80s, which sounds warmer than the modern equivalent, and sent off a couple of intentionally absent-minded campfire strummy takes. These were met with instant approval.

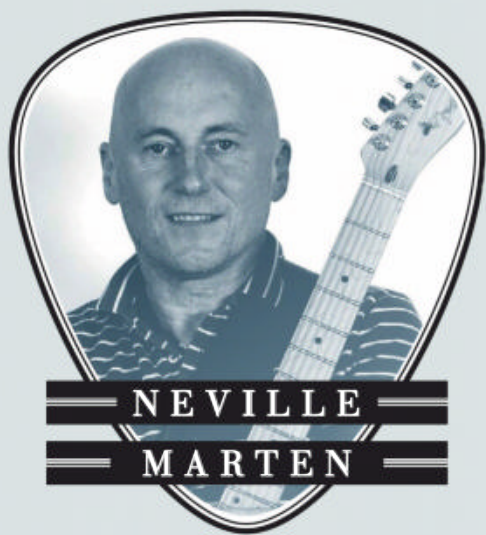
When I'm working remotely, I tend to send tracks from my home studio as completely dry, so no reverb or delay unless it's integral to the sound – for example, a touch of amp spring reverb and a slapback delay on a Telecaster country sound. But for projects such as this ad campaign I didn't add anything, which means whoever is mixing it can make their own decisions in order for the guitars to sit well in the track, rather than feeling like they have been superimposed on top or are separate in any way. **G**



Adam's high-end Martin John Mayer acoustic had to sit out of this session...



...in favour of his trusty (and slightly dusty) Sigma 00R-28VS



NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

This month, as **Nev** muses on how the guitar world is managing lockdown, he has a confession to make...

Although, at the time of writing, the nation's music stores have their doors closed, it seems they are being way more active on social media, and their websites are buzzing with fantastic deals to keep things buoyant. Manufacturers, too, are carrying on within the guidelines, and so new models are still arriving, which is a very positive sign. I've also spoken with a few UK builders who have furloughed staff or are operating a minimal production schedule to keep customers happy and orders fulfilled. The point of this being that, when things do return to some semblance of normality, the music world will hopefully be able to pick up again and rebuild.

Artists have also been busy, but this time it's all on social media – not just the famous faces but local bands, too, creating videos via Zoom and uploading them to eager fans. The group I play with, Marty Wilde's Wildcats, have also done this. We filmed ourselves at home, miming to a track we'd already recorded, Del Shannon's *Runaway*, and a band member's son edited it all together. It came out really well and has received thousands of views. It was really great fun to do, allowed us to stay connected as a band, and our fans and

followers absolutely adored it. It even got to Del Shannon's widow and son in America and we received a lovely message back. Hopefully we'll do one with Marty soon, and I'll probably post a link to that when it's done.

Ambition On Lockdown

Like many of us, when lockdown began I was determined to use the extra time to get down and bone up on my technique. In fact, music editor Jason Sidwell suggested that I go through all Robben Ford's albums, play along and try to suss out what Ford is doing, harmonically and rhythmically, so that I can bring some of it into my own playing. Great idea. Yes, I'll do that!

In last month's musings I mentioned how I was going to go through my guitars, restringing and set them up. And I figured that would be the ideal opportunity to get going with the Robben licks, too. Well, I have indeed done what I said with the guitars and they all play beautifully and sound great through my Yamaha THR30II home amp. I also have most of the styles of instrument that Robben plays – Tele, ES-335, Les Paul, etc – so I was all set to go.

And yet, you know what? I've hardly touched them, save for strumming the

acoustic from time to time. Usually I play every day, either plugged in or otherwise. But I seem to have developed guitar lethargy. I've reorganised my clothes and shoes, tidied every drawer, cleaned the windows inside and out, redone the tubs on my balcony, washed my car (twice!), and I dilligently take my hour-long walk every day. But these beautiful instruments that are the perfect way of reducing stress, keeping the brain active and the fingers flexed – not to mention having the potential to make me money if I learn to play them a bit better – remained resolutely stuck in their stand.

The Struggle Is Real

Whether it's a lockdown-induced syndrome or not, I hope to snap out of it soon. And having confessed all (and considering the fact I edit a magazine called *Guitar Techniques...*), I think I'd better get my act together so I can come back next month with more positive news. In the meantime, I'd love to know whether you've been inspired to play more during the past few weeks or, like me, you found it all a bit of a struggle? Anyway, for today at least, I'll start by tracking down that copy of *Talk To Your Daughter...* **G**



NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

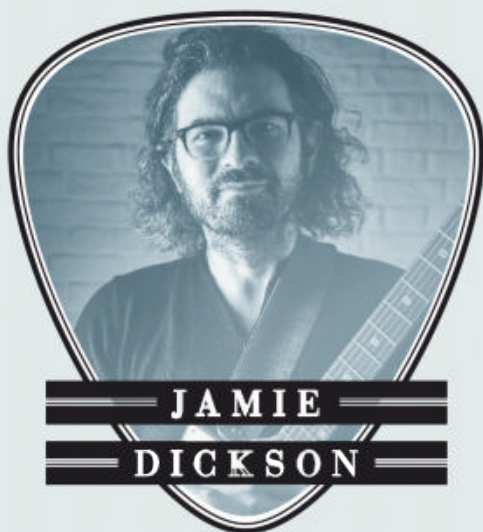
And now for something completely different

What? Recording King RM991 Resonator

Where seen? Thomann.de

Price? £655

Description? When I'm struggling to find inspiration, it's often a new bit of gear that gets me back on track. A different type of pick, a pedal I haven't tried, or a different style of guitar can all do it. To that end, how about this gorgeous-looking resonator from Recording King (a great old name recently brought back to life)? Like all good metal-body resonators, it's made of nickel-plated bell brass. It also has a round mahogany neck (not square so it can only be used for slide), a rosewood fingerboard and three cones for a complex resonator tone. This looks like a lot of guitar for the money – the big names can retail for over £3,500 – so whether you want to play Manfred Mann's *Pretty Flamingo*, The Kinks' *Lola*, Knopfler's *Romeo And Juliet*, or feel like delving into the worlds of Son House, Rory Gallagher or Jerry Douglas, this would be a great place to start.



RAISING THE TONE

Old Souls

Jamie Dickson meets Mat Koehler, the tone archaeologist behind Gibson's resurgent reissues

One of the highlights of the January NAMM show in Anaheim – and doesn't that feel a world away now – was the vibey display of custom colour SGs and Firebirds on show from Gibson. You couldn't help feeling a thrill of excitement gazing at '64 SG Standard reissues clad in Inverness Green and '63 Firebirds in Heather Poly, historic custom colours that are vanishingly rare. But as Gibson's resident vintage guru Mat Koehler explains, new technology has given Gibson the means to take an even more exacting approach to its reissues as the company enters a new era.

"We already did a lot of work on hardware," Mat says. "Last year saw us move to more accurate potentiometers and unpotted pickups. We really felt like now was the time to develop these new models, so we did a '63 SG Junior, '63 SG Special and a '63 Firebird that's spot-on, using some of [curator] David Davidson's input on the guitars he has at Songbirds Museum. We also did a '65 non-reverse Firebird, because the vintage values of those are now five digits, and a '67 Flying V."

Mat says that a new laser-scanning system installed in Gibson's Custom Shop has been a bit of a game-changer, revealing a treasure trove of fresh insights about how the guitars of Gibson's past were made, enabling the company to tackle reissues more ambitiously. This proved especially true when it came to the company's 50s and 60s semis, such as the ES-335 and its derivatives.

"The older reissues made in Memphis were fantastic instruments and they had a soul and a character that I loved," Mat explains. "But, using the scanner, we found out that

original 50s and early 60s 335s were quite a bit thinner than we previously thought," Mat says. "Another challenge was getting the contours around the cutaways exactly right," he adds, referring to the gentle arching of the top that extends into the horns of a 335. "It's subtle, but it's like the dish of a good 'Burst, where you see it and you know it's right."

Mat's efforts to replicate the elusive shape of these contours proved harder than he expected, leading him all the way down the proverbial rabbit hole.

"The original 1958 press plates were still in use in Memphis," Mat explains, referring to the tooling used to mould an arch into the four-ply maple/poplar/polar/maple laminate that was used for the 335's top and back in all but the earliest examples.

"We discovered they had become worn out by years of use and had drifted away from the original shape," Mat continues. "So we had to recut the press plates with a diamond cutter to get them back to the exact form they originally were. We didn't really know how it would turn out – but the first new sets of tops and backs that we made with it were spot on."

•
"The older reissues made in Memphis were fantastic instruments and had a soul and character I loved"
 •



1965 Non-Reverse Firebird with Maestro Vibrola in Heather Poly Metallic at NAMM



Mat Koehler, Gibson's maestro of all things vintage



1964 SG Standard Reissue in Inverness Green at NAMM



A 1958 Gibson ES-335
at Guitars: The
Museum in Sweden

Despite having the technology to make reissues more accurate, Mat explains that discretion has to be used when choosing which features to slavishly recreate. For example, very early ES-335s made in 1958 – which featured unbound necks – are beautiful instruments but had niggling design issues that were ironed out in later 335s.

“The ‘58 neck angle is often not very good,” Mat observes. “When I see the unbound neck [of an original ‘58 ES-335] my first thought is usually, ‘Oh, gosh, what’s the neck angle going to be like?’ Sometimes they’re okay, but most of them are no good – so when Memphis did a reissue of the ‘58 they made them with a better neck angle and they’re real fun to play.”

Also, despite the usefulness of scanning technology in mapping out the exact shapes of the past, it doesn’t deal with every problem – and is often only the starting point for figuring out how to make vintage dreams into reissue reality.

“What’s funny is that when we’re scanning old guitars, the cleanest examples are often the hardest to get good data from,” Mat explains. “When you’re scanning contours, you actually want the finish to be a little rough

so that the laser isn’t getting confused by reflections, and black guitars are especially tough. But that’s the easy part. The hard part is: when you have that data, how do you apply it to production guitars? There’s no metric for how a good rolled neck binding feels – you just have to know how to do it.”

But, as Mat is happy to confess, nothing pleases him more than a deep dive into Gibson’s past. As well as arming him with a wealth of knowledge about what was typical in Gibson’s 50s and 60s guitars, his work also unearths some freakish anomalies, too.

“I have a pretty big, ravenous appetite for weird stuff and learning more about that. I just like the different periods of Gibson’s history and relationships between different builders and influencers, so I don’t really know where to start, but if I just think of some outliers that I’ve seen, there are couple of J-200s from ‘57 with the scimitar headstock you see on the Explorer. I saw an ES-175 and an ES-350 and a Byrdland all with a mandolin-style headstock, which was really interesting – they were factory originals. I learn something new every single day,” he concludes, with a smile. **G**

THREE TOGETHER

Three of our favourite recent vintage-inspired Gibsons



GIBSON.COM

Gibson Custom Shop 1964 SG Standard Reissue with Maestro Vibrola £3,699

This was the guitar that we were pulled towards like a Bisto kid when we entered the Gibson booth at the NAMM Show in California earlier this year. From the red aniline-dye finish to that fulsome ‘64 profile neck to the Custombucker Alnico III pups, it was love at first sight – though at a price.



GIBSON.COM

Gibson SG Special in Faded Pelham Blue £1,199

Simple, toneful and oh-so-cool in Faded Pelham Blue, this SG Special demonstrates how Gibson has given us a treat in these relatively affordable Custom Colour Specials. The Slim Taper neck profile is accessible and fast, and the version in Sparkling Burgundy is just as stunning for your money.



GIBSON.COM

Gibson USA Flying V in Antique Natural £1,399

If you feel like emulating Albert King, you could do worse than this vibey V with a nod to the rare korina models of the late 50s. Okay, the body is mahogany, but Gibson has returned to rosewood fingerboards, and the BurstBucker 2 and 3 humbuckers promise rich tonal pickin’.

Substitute

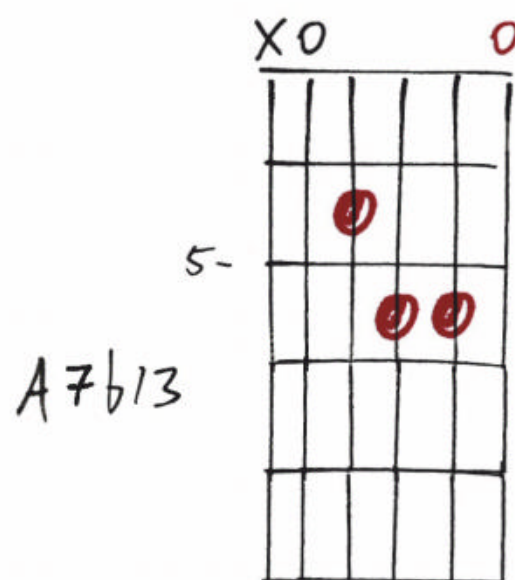
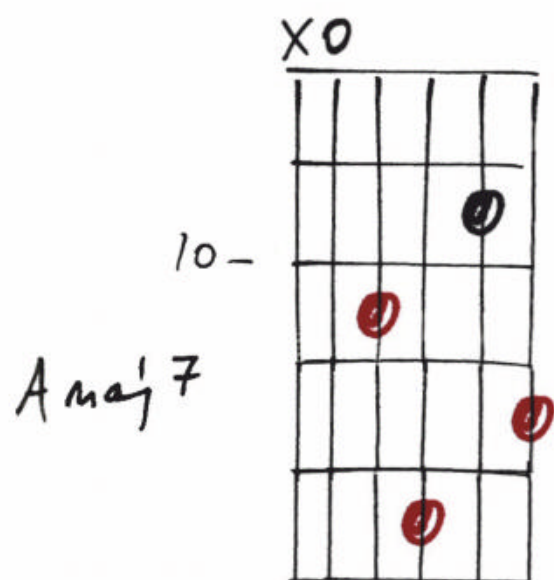
This Issue: Clashing With The Neighbours (Part 2)

Having written about this back in issue 451, what better time than lockdown to explore Part 2 of Clashing With The Neighbours? Perhaps we can scare them, too... These chords vary between friendly and frightening – some, such as the G#7 (#9), are quite bittersweet. All of them add interest, intrigue or a sense of unease to a

composition. Perhaps these are intriguing because chord voicings with adjacent semitones are not a particularly easy prospect on the guitar – they depend on the use of open strings in most cases, so it's quite challenging to shift between keys.

When playing as part of a band, it may be possible to delegate the root note to the

bass player and/or split the chord with a second guitar or keyboard player, but this requires a bit of working knowledge – namely, exactly what notes are required to get the desired effect? Subtle changes can make a big difference, so it's worth the detailed analysis and will improve all areas of your playing.

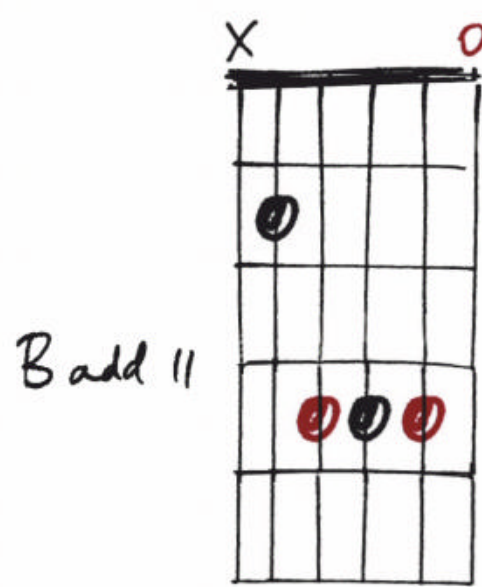
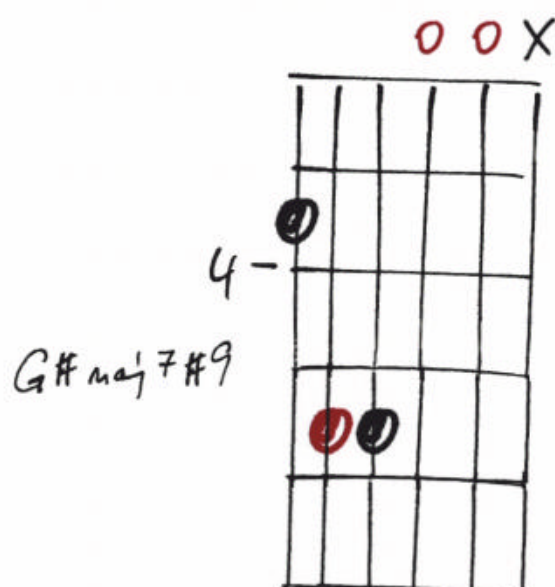
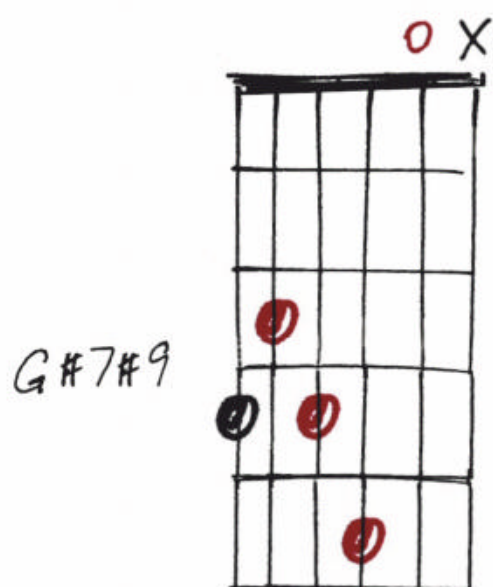


Example 1

Using the open fifth string as an A root, this version of the major 7th sounds more exotic than the one down in open position. The semitone, happening between the G and B strings, adds tension that stops short of dissonance. Keeping the open fifth string, you can move this shape up and down for other interesting chords.

Example 2

Using the fifth and first strings open, this A7b13 features a semitone between the B and high E strings. It is slightly more ominous than Example 1, but it's fairly easy to imagine it resolving to a Dmin7th, then everything is nice and safe, like it used to be...



Example 3

A dark-sounding G#7 #9 makes great soundtrack material as a hanging final chord, though can resolve nicely to a Gmaj7. This is an important function of dissonant chords such as this – they provide an excellent 'tension-and-release' to keep a chord progression or song interesting.

Example 4

This G# major #9 is dissonant and foreboding. It isn't a chord that easily resolves to another, making sense after a couple of subtle shifts; it is a potent weapon in the soundtrack/mood music toolbox. A chord like this could completely change your perception of what you see on the movie screen!

Example 5

We finish our set of chords with this relatively harmless Badd 11. It differs from a regular B major by borrowing the 4th (aka the 11th) from the rest of the parent scale. However, this should not be mixed up with a Bsus4, where the 4th replaces the 3rd; the presence of both notes gives us our semitone 'clash'.

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Star Letter



FULL CIRCLE

The first issue of *Guitarist* I bought was around 20 years ago. I was 16 at the time and I remember it having a pink Paisley Telecaster on the cover. Reading with avid interest, I wanted to be like the featured guitar heroes and immerse myself in all the gear reviewed. Those were very exciting times.

Inspired, my first electric guitar was a cheap Marlin Sidewinder from my local guitar shop, which cost £30. I thought it was the best thing ever. As I progressed, I then bought

various Japanese, UK and American-made guitars, all of them wonderful in their own way – and many of which I regret selling. Life continued and I matured. As much as I love all styles of music, my passion to play heavy styles progressively – and very quickly – ebbed. Blues would soon become my go-to style of playing every time I picked up my favoured instrument.

Then, in 2013, I got the urge to learn classical guitar. So I did. For seven years. All my electric equipment went and in a strange and unexpected turnaround, I was left with an old Spanish six-string that I used to work my way through my grades. I thought, 'That's it, I'm a classical guitarist.' I honestly believed that my journey in electric guitar had genuinely come to an end.

However, they say things often go full circle. Several weeks ago the desire to play electric – and blues – bit me again. So I found a Hamer USA Studio online and bought a high-end valve amp as its sparring partner soon after – if I was going to do this, I wanted to do it properly. After setting up, I played some old ideas, churned out some 12-bar progressions and improvised some blues licks. This initial session showed that while I was rusty, I hadn't lost it altogether. What I had lost was all concept of time – and I was grinning ear to ear. The feeling I had was great – electric, as it were!

But this story isn't over just yet. If rekindling my love for electric guitar and blues wasn't enough to make me feel like a 16 year old starting out again, then rushing out to buy issue 456 of *Guitarist* certainly did just that.

Ben Edwards, via email

Hi Ben, thanks for your inspiring story. It's a reminder not to pigeonhole yourself or rule out areas of guitar you've never tried. The guitar is one of the most flexible and expressive instruments ever devised and, even more usefully, what is learned in one discipline can often be transferred to another. Yngwie Malmsteen and Ritchie Blackmore both borrowed from classical music in their influential hard-rock playing – no reason why phrasing, taste and tone lessons from classical guitar shouldn't bring something to blues as well. Have you tried acoustic fingerstyle blues yet? Might well suit someone with a well-developed right-hand technique.



KORG

Each issue's Star Letter wins a Korg Pitchblack Custom – a smart pedal tuner with ultra-high +/-0.1 precision for sharp visibility and pinpoint accuracy right at your feet.
www.korg.co.uk

GLORIOUS GREENY

I'm not usually one to kiss backsides, but credit where credit is due. I thought issue 449 was the best for ages, until 458 arrived which I think is simply the best I can remember in over 20 years of taking *Guitarist*. The reviews had everything, modern and traditional gear, new and established names, expensive and affordable stuff.

The clincher for me, though, was the Peter Green series of articles. The coverage beyond just his career and music to encompass the surrounding subjects of guitars, pickups, etc, is just brilliant. The lesson also is superb in that it can be tackled by inexperienced players for note choices, and the more experienced players can tackle the subtlety of the phrasing and timing. Excellent all round: more of this type of in-depth article, please.

One final thing that struck me was Kirk Hammett's comment on him only being the custodian of 'Greeny'. I am very lucky to have one of the only three left-handed Custom Classic (Les Poole) guitars that he ever built by the legendary Sid Poole, and while it has none of the fame and provenance of 'Greeny', it is still a very special guitar and I, too, only consider myself to be looking after it until somebody else looks after it next, but that won't be till after I've moved to the next realm. So, to sum up, best issue I can remember – let's have more like that, please.

Peter Collister, via email

Glad you enjoyed the feature that David Mead and the *Guitarist* team put together on the bewitching sound of Peter Green, who we've always felt is the most enigmatic and distinctive of the blues players to emerge from the British scene at that time. Also, as you say, none of us really owns guitars – we're just their keepers for a while and there's sometimes a real pleasure in passing them on to the perfect next owner. Anyway, we'll do our best to keep you happy with more issues of the same stamp in future.

THIN PICKINS

I've always loved my first 'proper' guitar. Bought way back in 1984 from what was then my local guitar shop in Cheltenham, the

Reader Paul Harmer learned an interesting modding lesson when he fitted this pre-wired pickguard from Fender

appeal of my Olympic White Japanese Strat has never faded – much like its polyester finish. It's extremely light and has the thinnest neck I've ever come across. And it's not losing money, either, which is a first.

However, despite being a dream to play, I've always thought it sounded particularly 'thin'. Thinner, in fact, than just about any other Strat I've played – an unusually scooped sound. I've always been tempted to swap the pickups, but I have shied away from getting the soldering iron out, until I saw recently that Fender have released a range of pre-wired pickguards, a mod even I could handle. I ordered one with Custom Shop '69 pickups mounted in a rather fetching tortoiseshell 'guard.

Noticing the quality of the wiring harness and components on the new 'guard are in a different league to the rather flimsy-looking switches, caps and hair-thin wiring on the original, I nevertheless decided to be slightly more scientific about it and recorded the guitar in its pre-modded state in Logic for later reference. The swap was painless, with all screws perfectly aligned and only a quick dab of solder required on the output jack. And I think the new pickguard looks the business. All that remained was to plug in... And it sounded exactly the same. Well, not *exactly* the same perhaps, but far more so than I was expecting. Maybe a slight increase



in output, but still that very characteristic scoop and that very 'thin' sound. Repeating the Logic session proved the point and I was hard-pressed to tell before-and-after apart on the timeline. I have a couple of other Strats I know very well and further A/B comparisons confirmed that Old Faithful No1 still sounded pretty much like Old Faithful No1.

The moral of the story? I have no idea, really, other than being able to add more fuel to the eternal pub conversation about how

it's the sum of the parts that make a guitar sound the way it does rather than any single item. That poly finish, that light wood, that thin neck and that big 70s headstock must contribute more than I'd given them credit for? Of course, I could order a set of Fat '50s, but the exercise starts to become very expensive. It's easier to sort that scoop out with a Tube Screamer. And it still looks great!
Paul Harmer, via email

Thanks Paul, as you say, there's no single 'magic bullet' when it comes to tweaking the sound of your guitar in a desired direction. You don't mention what amp you play through, but we'd be tempted to look there for at least some of the answer. Fender-derived amps often tend to have a slight mid-scoop, as you may know. Switching to something British-inspired and richer in mids like a Vox AC15, to name but one example, might help fill out that sound a little. You're also correct to mention the fattening potential of pedals – many overdrives have a so-called 'mid hump' that will fill out your sound. Use them with the level set to 12 o'clock but the gain set low if you want to fatten your sound without distorting it. Also, it's worth trying EQ pedals. It's not 'cheating' to use one – they're an unsung hero of tone-tailoring as many top guitarists will attest. Finally, if you do decide to go further down the pickup route, why not



The oft-overlooked John Morshead playing here with the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation at North Yorkshire's Redcar Jazz Club in the late 60s

work with a maker who can craft a set to meet your exact needs rather than buy off the peg? You will find that makers such as Bare Knuckle, The Creamery and Mojo have great experience in helping players home in on the sound they really want, taking the whole rig into consideration. You might be surprised by what they come up with and how well it works. It's certainly a looker, so good luck getting the sound to follow suit!

SIT DOWN & BE COUNTED

I read with interest the interview with Peter Frampton and how he is dealing with his condition (issue 457). I myself have been diagnosed with cerebral atrophy, a brain condition that affects my speech, balance and ability to stand for any length of time. Sadly, this means gigging with my Tele and Les Paul has had to go on the back burner. However, I think I might try sing-a-round and open-mic nights in folk clubs where playing seated is more accepted. My acoustic guitars are a vintage Martin D-28, a Guild D-35, which I have had since new, and various 12-string acoustics. Thanks for great mag, one of the few things that keep me sane – well, nearly.

Terry Mailing (72 & 3/4), via email

Hi Terry, we're glad to hear you haven't let the condition stop you playing guitar for an audience of fellow music-lovers, which we all know is the best way to enjoy the instrument. Yes, a quiet nook in a folk-friendly pub is a great place for some seated jamming, but I'm sure people would understand if you wanted to play electric sitting down. Also, have you tried your hand at lap steel? Sitting to play is almost mandatory with these instruments, though you can sling them on a strap as Megan Lovell of Larkin Poe does, for instance, and they might offer another avenue to explore. Either way, we hope the punters at your local will be enjoying the sound of your playing for a long time yet.

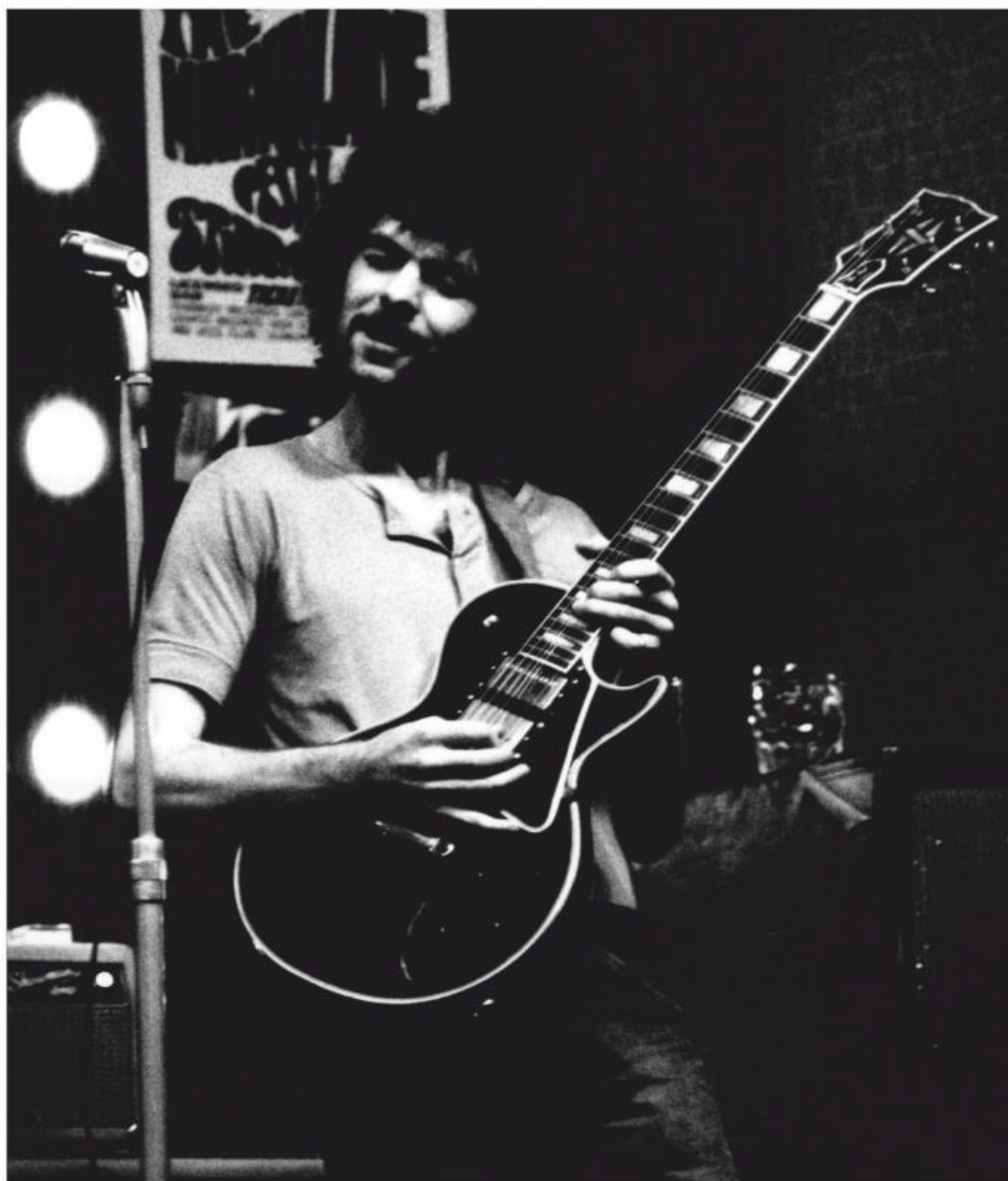


Photo by Graham Lowe/Redferns/Getty Images

GIMME MORSHEAD

Many thanks for the great feature on Peter Green. Like Neville Marten, it was the *Bluesbreakers* album that inspired me to play guitar (although I didn't start until 1969!), but it was Peter Green and BB King who showed me how I wanted to play. Now to the main point of my email, which is to extol the virtues of John Morshead, who must be the most criminally overlooked guitarist of the 60s blues boom. His main work was with the excellent Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation, although he had previously played with Johnny Kidd & The Pirates and later with Heavy Jelly. Morshead was another player of the 'less is more' school, as was Greeny, although he was not a copier, as both were a similar age and working at the same time. Indeed, they were together briefly in Shotgun Express.

Morshead had an exquisite tone from his three-pickup Les Paul Custom and a lovely blonde 335. He also had a sweet touch: check out 'Till Your Lovin' Makes Me Blue from *Doctor Dunbar's Prescription*, and *Downhearted* from *Remains To Be Heard*. Retaliation released four albums that perfectly reflected his lyrical blues playing.

It would be wonderful to see an article in such a highly regarded magazine as *Guitarist*, paying tribute to such a fine player. His work all those years ago deserves to be heard again, and he should be acknowledged as one of the blues greats.

John Holmes, via email

We're ashamed to say we hadn't clocked John's talents properly before, but after checking out his playing on the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation's version of *I'm Tore Down* on the French TV Show *Bouton Rouge* in '68 we're converts. Lovely phrasing and a mighty sound from that 335 of his. We're certainly going back for more – look out for more on his work in these pages in future.

Danelectro Divine Correction

In issue 459, we printed the incorrect price for the new Danelectro Divine; its UK retail price is £899 and not as stated. Our apologies for this error.



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

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Music

The month's best guitar music, plus top players in the studio



Chris Corcoran

Coolerator

Shack Records

9/10



Joyous jump-blues transports you back to the 50s

We've long been fans of Chris Corcoran's evocative and edgy jump-blues playing and his latest doesn't disappoint. Clearly a man with a great record collection, Corcoran's influences range from Rick Holmstrom to Jimmy Reed, yet he's developed a swinging, stinging playing style of his own that carries you back to the era of 1950s juke-joints and scruffy valve amps played to bursting point. Corcoran covers some great material on this deftly arranged album, which balances plush horns with a nimble rhythm section – and there's so much taste and elegant playing to relish from Chris himself on tracks such as Jimmy Smith's *Back At The Chicken Shack* and The Dave Bailey Quintet's jiving jazz number *Comin' Home Baby*. It's joyous stuff – get it, you won't regret it. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Comin' Home Baby*

For fans of: Kenny Burrell, Whit Smith, Wes Montgomery

Dion

Blues With Friends

KTBA Records

8/10



All-star line-up join US pop king

Dion DiMucci has some serious pull in the American pop world. His first major hits, 1958 doo-wop track *I Wonder Why* and '59's *A Teenager In Love* were cut when he was with The Belmonts and he toured with Buddy Holly, missing the latter's tragic fate only because he couldn't afford the \$36 flight. Today, he's a kind of elder statesman of the Great American Songbook, with a contact book to die for.

The guests on this album are not so much A-list as triple platinum: Bruce Springsteen, Paul Simon, Jeff Beck, Brian Setzer, Billy Gibbons, Van Morrison, Sonny Landreth and a raft of other rock bigwigs. Even the liner notes are by Bob Dylan. Still, many are the star-encrusted albums that have failed to add up to the sum of their parts, so we set *Blues With Friends* spinning with curiosity firmly piqued but guarded expectations. What we get is a beautifully produced slice

of Americana – glued together by Dion's grizzled vocal presence.

Blues is the thematic thread and it fades in and out like a radio signal, coming up strong and hot as black coffee on *Bam Bang Boom*, with the drawling Texas guitar of Billy Gibbons, and on *My Baby Loves To Boogie* with John Hammond. Dion moves into more Marty Robbins territory with the worship-meets-Western *Hymn To Him*, Springsteen's tremolo-shimmered Tele lines understated but oddly unmistakable in the background. The album ventures into more crying-into-your-beer country with *Can't Start Over Again*, and a nice cameo from Jeff Beck. It's a little confusing that the less obviously bluesy tracks seem the most powerful, but what the heck, Dion's among friends and will likely make a few more with this likeable yet substantial guest-fest. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Uptown Number 7*

For fans of: Late-era Dylan, Boz Scaggs, Bruce Springsteen

Chris Corcoran's second 'big band' album, *Coolerator*, doesn't disappoint



PHOTO BY ADAM GASCON

Brit singer-songwriter
John Smith showcases
his set on *Live In Chester*



PHOTO BY CULY CURTIS

Pat Metheny

From This Place
Nonesuch Records

10/10



Sumptuous new release from contemporary jazz master

Fair-weather listening is never an option with a new Pat Metheny album; the care and detail that goes into its creation warrants substantial submersion from listeners. *From This Place* is no different – he's with his present quartet (Antonio Sanchez on drums, Linda May Han Oh on bass, and Gwilym Simcock on piano), which is augmented with orchestra, percussion, harmonica and vocal colourings. The 10-track album is richly vibrant with a harmonic palette and deft arranging that makes it so much more than just a 'guitar album'. That said, Metheny's warm Ibanez hollowbody tone is the core of the music and his playing remains a masterclass as he slips and slides around his varying rhythmic phrases with a jazz-blues zest that evokes his heroes Wes Montgomery and Jim Hall. A unique blend of jazz, folk, blues and classical. Gorgeous. **[JS]**

Standout track: *From This Place*

For fans of: Jim Hall, Weather Report

Pierre Bensusan

Azwan
MVD

9/10



DADGAD maestro's latest six-string studio adventure

It's impossible to mistake Pierre Bensusan's guitar style for that of any other contemporary player. With his Lowden signature acoustic tuned permanently to DADGAD, he's forged a unique style since his debut album, *Près De Paris*, won him

the Grand Prix du Disque for Folk Music at the Montreux Festival in 1976 at the tender age of 17. *Azwan* (pronounced "as one") celebrates unity and the connection of every living thing on our planet: "The concept of *Azwan* came from observing flocks of birds flying and dancing together as one," he tells us. "It has been an inspiring symbolic representation of the continuum of music." And he paints vivid pictures with intriguing compositions and impeccable performances throughout. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Portnoo*

For fans of: Thomas Leeb, Clive Carroll

Start me up

On-the-rise guitar acts to look out for

Blank Spaces

A Home Away From Home
Self-Released

8/10



Firey indie guitar pop from NYC

This is the second album from New York-based artist and producer Blank Spaces, but if you missed his well-regarded debut long-player, *Memory Man*, you'd do well to get acquainted with this compelling and mercurial follow-up. We're too often slaves to labels when describing music, but *A Home Away From Home* is, at root, an album of intelligent indie guitar pop with more virtuosity and fire in the playing than you might typically expect of the genre, making Blank Spaces something of a latter-day Tom Verlaine. Metropolitan in spirit yet wide ranging in its themes, *Note To Self*'s stark but propulsive guitar lines and declamatory vocals channel Talking Heads, while the syncopated delay patterns of *Magnet For Trouble* recall Lloyd Cole's cerebral, gritty style. The cascading, dotted-eighth delay lines of *Optimistic* also reveal there's serious chops underlying the minimalist, art-rock hooks, too. We urge you to seek out a copy and make yourself at home with it soon. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Optimistic*

For fans of: Lloyd Cole, Talking Heads, Belew-Era King Crimson

John Smith

Live In Chester

Commoner/Thirty Tigers

9/10



Live set from folk's brightest rising star

When lockdown began in March, John Smith was in the midst of an Australian tour and was forced to hoof it back to Blighty as soon as he could. He also had to postpone his first headline US tour. But *Live In Chester* was ready to go, and rather than postpone the album's release as so many artists have been forced to do, he let it loose and took to the internet in order to promote it with live performances from his living room. With superlative recording and production quality, the track listing reads like a 'best of' with staples such as *Winter, Salty And Sweet* and *Save My Life* included alongside tracks from his most recent studio release, *Hummingbird*. Excellent stuff. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Hares On The Mountain*

For fans of: John Martyn, Martin Simpson



T O R A

DAHLE
AAGÅRD

Soulful and fearless on the fretboard, Tora Dahle Aagård is one of the most exciting guitarists to emerge from an increasingly eclectic blues scene

Words David Mead **Photography** Jesse Wild



Last year was both a busy and a notable one for Tora Dahle Aagård. She played with Paul Gilbert and Jennifer Batten, did a gig at The Royal Albert Hall, and released her first eponymously titled album. One reviewer noted her “playful virtuosity” and stage presence, while another applauded her “incredible talent” and dubbed her “the most courageous guitarist I have ever met”.

Hugely popular on social media, her enthusiasm for both music and the guitar is infectious and yet she was a relative latecomer to the instrument...

“When I was 14 years old, I saw *School Of Rock* with Jack Black,” she enthuses as we settle in the *Guitarist* studios shortly before the shadow of lockdown. “There were these kids playing instruments and they were so young, but they were so good at it. This kid called Zack in the movie played guitar, and he played rock ’n’ roll guitar, so fast. I was like, ‘Well, that’s the coolest

thing ever and he is the coolest person ever... I want to be that.”

As a reaction to watching the movie, Tora formed her first band, and sheer hard work and the refusal to give up has launched her well into public view. But where did it all really begin?

“I come from a very musical family,” she says. “I grew up with music around the house constantly. I just picked up a very bad acoustic guitar and started playing and I have played ever since, because I wanted to become good at it. I’m still working on that... that’s the short story. I’m not like your typical guitar player, because I don’t very often listen to guitar players or guitar music. But if I do, I love to listen to Derek Trucks, John Scofield, John Mayer is great, and Marcus King is amazing. But I think if I were to choose my favourite guitar player, I would say Derek Trucks, because I don’t think anyone can play like him. He’s from a different world when he plays.”

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“I come from a very small town. I just found the two guys that also played, started the band and they are still with me today”

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When did you start playing in bands?

“I started my band almost the day I started playing guitar. I come from a very small place in Norway, a very small town on the coast. I think maybe like 100 people, 200 people live in my town. I just found the two guys that also played music, started the band and they are still playing with me today. We rehearsed in the worst rehearsal space ever and I just booked gigs from when I was 14 until now, when finally someone does it for me. I worked really hard and wanted to play live.”

Did you have a very intense practice routine in those early days?

“I had played guitar for six years before I really started practising. And I regret that now, because I wish I had started practising earlier. But when I was 20 years old – I’m 26 now – I realised that being a girl playing blues and rock ‘n’ roll guitar, it meant that I had to be very good to be taken seriously and to be respected and to be heard. I realised I wasn’t there, because I hadn’t taken my instrument seriously; I couldn’t expect that respect from other people when I was just wasting my time not practising.

“When I decided that I was going to try to be as good as I can be, every day, I woke up, I plugged in my guitar and I practised. I think I played whatever I wanted. I don’t practise scales or technique. I just play. I record everything I play and listen to it, so I can hear what I did wrong and what I like and what I don’t like. That works for me.”

What’s your approach to songwriting?

“I don’t like to have that many rules. Like, if there are too many chords when I’m writing my vocal part I feel like I have to adapt to the chords, instead of just jamming on an A and finding a groove. I can sing in so many directions over that chord, and play with the rhythm with my voice as well. I can do whatever I want. I can go major, minor, I can go up – all of these things.



From small-town roots in Norway, Tora and her band are now touring worldwide

PHOTO BY HANNAEVENSEN

Writing music like that brings out songs I never thought I could write, because I’m so free. It works. A lot of the songs on the next album were written like that.”

Thanks to social media, you’ve become something of a role model now...

“Yes, I feel like I now have a responsibility when I see how many girls, young girls, contact me through social media and say, ‘You are a role model to me. What you do inspires me to do the same.’ But it has to mean something else other than just, ‘Oh, look at me. I’m playing a concert and I’m super cool.’ You have to have something more than just that.”

How have you gone about keeping a band together through the years?

“Keeping a band alive is not easy. People move and people want to do other things. I remember, when I was like 17 years old, and the band, we were nothing. We were

just jamming and having fun. But I told my band members that, you know, ‘We are going to do a tour outside of Norway. Just wait. We are going to get there.’ They laugh at you, and everybody laughs at you, because... come on. Now we are doing a UK tour in the autumn, so it kind of worked out. But it has just been hard work keeping a band together, making music, and at the same time having fun. Because that’s important.”

Your second EP attracted a lot of attention, didn’t it?

“Yes. We released the EP [*Change Of Scenery*] in 2016 with five songs. That was supposed to be our last thing we did before we quit, because someone was going to the army, someone was doing this and that, and we were like, ‘We will release five songs and we are out. This is our legacy. You’re welcome.’ Right? What happened was after we released that one,

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*“I feel like I now have
a responsibility when
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“For me, music is an escape in many ways... To practise and play guitar, that is my meditation”

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people liked it and they played it on the radio. We got great gigs and we played all over Norway, so we couldn't stop, right? We had to keep going. Now it was fun [to be in a band] again, because people were actually noticing us and liking it. This year we are releasing our third album [as yet untitled]. It's going to be great.”

What gear are you using at present?

“I have the Vintage [V6] Thomas Blug S-type, which I think is the guitar I have used the most. I also have two Chapman guitars: a Chapman ML1 and a Chapman ML3. They are great, I use them a lot. Now I also have a Yamaha Revstar – that's a beautiful guitar. I think it's one of the most beautiful guitars I've ever seen. It's kind of sexy, that guitar. I need time to get to know new guitars, you know, become friends with them. We are talking, the Revstar and me. We are getting there. I also have a Fender Custom Shop Strat – very beautiful. I have an Epiphone and two acoustic guitars, an Alvarez and a Tanglewood.”

What about amplifiers, pedals and so on?

“I have always used a Fender Hot Rod, but now I'm using a Boss Nextone. I'm getting to know that one. I think it's a beautiful amp; I have it now at home in my living room, so my neighbours are pissed, but that's okay. You know, it's the same with amps and guitars – you have to spend time with them and you have to test them on stage before you can say if it's love or not.

“Pedals? I have so many, because people keep sending me them to try, which is super fun, right? But I'm not a geek. On my pedalboard I have the J Rockett Dude pedal and I mix that with the Xotic BB Preamp boost then you almost get a wah-wah kind of sound, only with distortion. That's kind of my sound. If people like the way my guitar playing sounds then that's the secret trick. I have a delay, reverb, boost and a tuner, and I'm good.”



PHOTO BY HANNA EVENSEN

How do you see the band developing over the coming years?

“You know, a lot of festivals, just touring and playing and playing and playing, which is super fun. The next goal is to have a tour in the US, and also come back to the UK next year, if they want us back. That's also a goal.”

You're at the start of your career. What's your philosophy on making music?

“For me, music is an escape in many ways. I don't do yoga or meditation, I don't work out. I need something to help my brain, you know, take a break from life. We all do that sometimes. For me, to practise and play guitar, that is my meditation. It makes me relax and after six hours in a small room playing guitar on my own I can come out and feel fresh, you know? I'm back. That's music to me.

“Also, it's the thing I know how to do. I feel at home when I'm on stage. I feel safe. I'm super scared at birthday parties, like when you have to sit around a table and talk. But put me on stage in front of hundreds of people... I have this watch that measures my pulse and it's lower on stage than it is at home on the couch. That's no joke. It's home and that's where I want to be. I know this because I've been doing it for so many years; it's not just something I'm saying to sound cool. Music is very important for me – to feel that I'm good enough, that I can do something. I can master it, it's my thing. We all need a thing.” **G**



Tora's autumn UK tour is set to begin on 30 November 2020 at the Half Moon, Putney

backstage.no/en/artister/tora



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BLUES

SHADES
OF

Try out Tora's interpretation of the archetypal genre with these dynamic licks

Words Adrian Clark

"BLUES IS BLUES," says Tora Dahle Aagård in our interview, and while that opens one of the biggest cans of worms in music history, she's got a point. We can all learn something from the many strands of blues, whether it's the rawest Delta slide playing or the hippest New York fusion. Every generation adds a novel slant to what has gone before, so let's learn some new takes on classic licks from this expressive Norwegian guitar-slinger...



Example 1 Playing Through Changes

THERE'S SOMETHING VERY SATISFYING about finding a symmetrical pattern that works across chord changes.

Tora's use of approach notes here is interesting: she uses the minor 3rd (G over E major) on two different strings, first to target the major 3rd (G#) and then to target the 9th (F#). The pattern then repeats for the D major chord.

Example 2 Fingerstyle Flair

THIS IS A SIMPLE CLASSIC LINE built around A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) including the ♭5th 'blue note' (E_b) and adding the major 3rd (C#) to resolve to the usual Mixolydian tonality of blues. Most importantly, though, Tora's bare-fingers approach gives her lots of funky dynamic control. It's all about those muted ghost notes!

Example 3 Slip Slidin' Away

THIS IS A GRACEFUL BENDING LICK, using slides to smoothly link multiple bends. You really need to be confident of your intonation here, so work slowly at first, listening carefully to each bend in isolation and checking the pitch against the 'normal' fretted version of the note.

Example 4 Triads Rule...

ALTHOUGH TORA would probably play this lick in a bluesy context, it'll work in lots of styles. We're basically outlining an A major triad (A C# E), with a couple of extra notes added from the Mixolydian scale (A B C# D E F# G). The C note near the end adds a touch of bluesy major/minor tension.

Free tempo N.C. Asus2

BU 9 (10) 10 9 10 9 7 6 7 6 4 2 4 5 4 2 0 2 2 0

Example 5 Rockin' In Rhythm

DON'T BE PUT OFF by the apparent complexity of the tab! Most of those muted notes (the X note-heads) are infinitely variable. Listen for the strongest sound in each bar: it's usually beat 1 and then the fourth 16th note of beats 1, 2 and 3. Bar 2 is the perfect illustration of this.

$\text{♩} = 93$ $\text{♩} = \frac{3}{4}$ B F#m7 E5

D#7 B F#m7

E5 Em7 F#7 B

Example 6 Texas Hold 'Em

THERE'S A STRONG TEXAN BLUES VIBE HERE! The key to this line is varying the dynamics and also the palm muting. Every other bar, there's a 'push', which you need to hit harder, and briefly release the palm muting. Listen to how Tora plays it and then try to copy her phrasing. The second part is a little E major pentatonic (E F# G# B C#) phrase.

$\text{♩} = 212$ $\text{♪} = \text{♩}^3$ **E**

E **A** **E** **B**

E **B7** **E**

E **B** **G** **D** **A** **E**

1 15 X 0 0 3 4 2 2 4 4 2 2 3 4 2 2 4 2 0 0 3 4 2 2 4 4

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

10 2 4 4 5 5 4 4 2 2 0 0 4 4 2 0 0 3 4 0 0 1 1 2 2 2 X 9 2 2 2 X 0

14 9 11 9 9 9 11 9 9 9 11 12 11 9 11 9 9 9 11 9 11 9 11 9 11 9 11 9 7 7



JOHNNY A.

He's got taste and tone to die for, Gibson and Epiphone signature models to his name, and he's played in the band that he grew up idolising. We join the mercurial Massachusetts guitar legend to talk gear, Yardbirds and the future...

Words Rod Brakes

PHOTO BY PHIL BOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Johnny A. played his last show with The Yardbirds in 2018. Here he is with the band in 2016, with Kenny Aaronson (bass) and John Idan (vocals and guitar)

I was a huge fan of The Yardbirds when I was a kid. They were my second favourite band behind The Beatles, and it is a great honour to be part of that legacy,” Johnny A. tells us. Having filled some of the biggest shoes in rock ‘n’ roll history, however, he’s now treading his own path with a standalone solo show. “It was great to fulfil the experience of playing music under the moniker of a band that influenced me so much as a kid,” he says. “I had a great time doing it, but I’ve been out of The Yardbirds since 2018. That’s when I started doing the solo shows. The completely solo shows. It was a huge undertaking to get that going. And it was a strange time for me.”

How did The Yardbirds gig come about?

“I had met them previously, because we were both on Steve Vai’s label [Favored Nations] and had albums coming out at the same time. When they played Boston at the original House Of Blues, I went along and introduced myself and they asked me to sit in, which I did. I had a great time. We crossed paths over the years since then and the opportunity eventually came when Jim [McCarty] was reforming the band. He was looking for guys in the States and Steve Vai recommended me for the gig. Initially,

I couldn’t do it as I was already committed to a tour, but when their tour got cancelled, they rescheduled and called me again. It worked out well, and I ended up working with them for close to four years.”

How soon did things fall into place with The Yardbirds’ new line-up?

“We got a song list, rehearsed for a day and a half, and just went out and did about 25 shows in a month! It was a lot of fun. It was a really good line-up. It was very authentic-sounding and feeling, because the three guys that came into the band at the same time – myself, [harmonica player] Myke Scavone, who plays in a New Jersey garage band called The Doughboys, and Kenny Aaronson on bass – were all very much

steeped in that early Yardbirds stuff. We really had an understanding of where that music came from. I think there’s a certain feeling of the era that helps in understanding how to make that band click.”

Presumably, being a fan of The Yardbirds stood you in good stead...

“I was such a huge fan. The ’65/’66 version of the band with Jeff Beck was really, really influential to me as far as approaching the way I played rock blues guitar goes. There are different influences for me with the different things that I do, but as far as rock blues guitar goes, I would say The Yardbirds are extremely inspirational and influential.”

Why did your time with The Yardbirds come to an end in 2018?

“I had been doing a solo thing for many years prior to The Yardbirds. I think it’s important to be creatively progressive and try to go forwards. I have a career as a songwriter, and I want to be progressive and current. So my band thing and The Yardbirds ended up dovetailing me into the solo project that I’m doing now – the completely solo shows. This project is about playing music that influenced me growing up. I’m not doing any of my own songs – there are none of my own compositions in the show.”

“I think it’s important to try to go forwards. I have a career as a songwriter, and I want to be progressive and current”

“I got to see *The Beatles* live in 1966. Their music inspires me every day, still. When I’m working on music, I always look to them as the benchmark”

How do you find performing alone?

“It’s emotionally challenging and it’s physically challenging, because it’s solo guitar with looping, which takes a shit-load of concentration. But when it works and it’s smooth and I’m relaxed, it’s fun. Then there’s nothing like it. It feels really intimate with the audience. It’s a very communal feeling, like we’re all in this together. There are a lot of stories about the songs that influenced me as a child and moulded me.”

When did you begin playing music?

“I started playing music when I was six. I was a drummer. I was into jazz guys like Sandy Nelson and Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. But when I saw The Beatles on 9 February [1964] on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, it completely changed the whole trajectory of who I wanted to be. I just heard all that melody and suddenly I wasn’t interested in playing drums any more. I begged my mother for a guitar, and she bought me a \$49 electric guitar with a tiny little amp. I didn’t even know how to tune the thing. It was a Lafayette [Radio] Electronics, which was like a RadioShack type of place.”

Did you ever see The Beatles in concert?

“I got to see The Beatles live in 1966 in Boston. Their music inspires me every day, still. When I’m working on music or recording and arrangements, I always look to them as the benchmark of production, parts and hooks. And tone. To me, they’re like the encyclopaedia of it all. I love it.”

What was the Boston music scene like back in the day?

“I formed my first band, The Streets, in Boston in 1975 – and that kind of broke up in ’79. There was a great music scene in Boston in the 70s. It was very diverse. There was a heavy jazz scene because of the Berklee College of Music. You had a heavy blues scene. There was a really good folk scene, because you had people like Bonnie Raitt in town, and James Taylor and Livingston Taylor. And then there was a great rock



1. Johnny A.'s pedalboard for The Yardbirds included an Analog Man Sun Bender MK-IV and a custom-built reverse-engineered David Main MKI Tone Bender; an Xotic wah, SL Drive and EP Booster; and a Barn3 OX9-enhanced Eventide H9

2. Johnny A. bought his Vox Clyde McCoy Wah-Wah in 1967, the same week that *Are You Experienced* was released

3. His one-man 'board includes TC Electronic Ditto X4s, Fractal's FC-12, Mission expression pedal, and TC PolyTune 3

scene, too; you had bands coming up like The J Geils Band and Peter Wolf, who I played with for years, and Aerosmith. It was just a great scene with a lot of venues to play. There was also a radio station called WBCN, which was very progressive and also very supportive to local bands. They would play local bands' music, even if they didn't have a record deal.”

Your 1999 solo debut, *Sometime Tuesday Morning*, got plenty of radio play before being re-released in 2001 on Steve Vai's Favoured Nations label...

“Right. I recorded it and put it out independently. I was actually selling it pretty good on my own. It was getting a lot of radio airplay in the New England area, and because it was making so much noise, labels were approaching me. I got approached by a lot of labels back then, but I ended up going with Steve Vai's Favoured Nations and we did really well. The first single off that record [*Oh Yeah*] ended up being No 1 on the AAA [Adult Album Alternative radio format] charts across the country. The album went on to sell over 100,000 copies.”

Was *Sometime Tuesday Morning* a turning point for you?

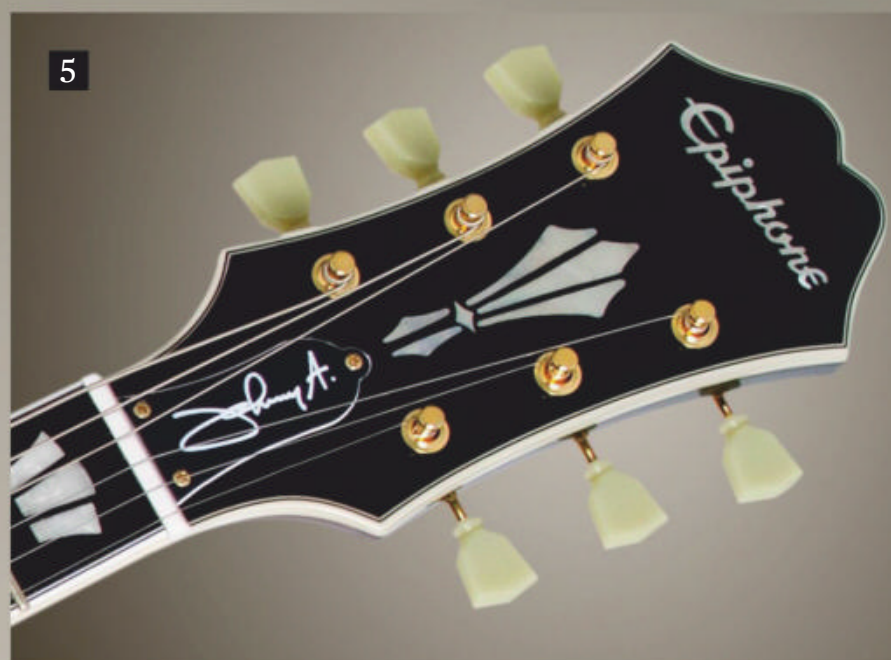
“I think there was an element of surprise when people heard it, because people didn't know me for that type of guitar playing back then and I'd been working really hard to define a different-sounding record. I had never really intended to make that album. I had just left Peter Wolf's band after about eight or nine years, and I had a family to support. It was about putting together a little trio so that I could go and work and make money, but I couldn't sing because I'd lost my singing voice due to a really bad bronchial infection and a severe case of laryngitis. So I just decided to focus on being an instrumental guitarist. I was never an instrumentalist before that, I just developed it.”

How did the Gibson Johnny A. signature models come about?

“Gibson was basically my voice. My guitar was my voice, in the tradition of guitarists from the 50s and 60s like Johnny Smith, or any other guitarists playing vocal songs instrumentally. So when the *Sometime Tuesday Morning* album started to get all



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4. In addition to the Gibson Johnny A. signature models, the Epiphone Johnny A. Custom was launched in 2017 featuring a mahogany body with figured maple top and 25.5-inch scale length mahogany neck with ebony fretboard

5. The headstock has the classic Epiphone elongated profile and gold-plated Epiphone Deluxe 18:1 ratio tuners with tulip buttons

6. This Epiphone model has a pair of Gibson USA '57 Classic humbuckers with gold-plated covers and an inlaid ebony fretboard with three-ply (w/b/w) binding

7. Gold-plated ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, Bigsby B70 vibrato, and three-way selector switch with individual pickup volume and tone controls

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“I still try to get an analogue feel and tone even if I’m using digital gear. I still hear with analogue ears and feel with an analogue soul”

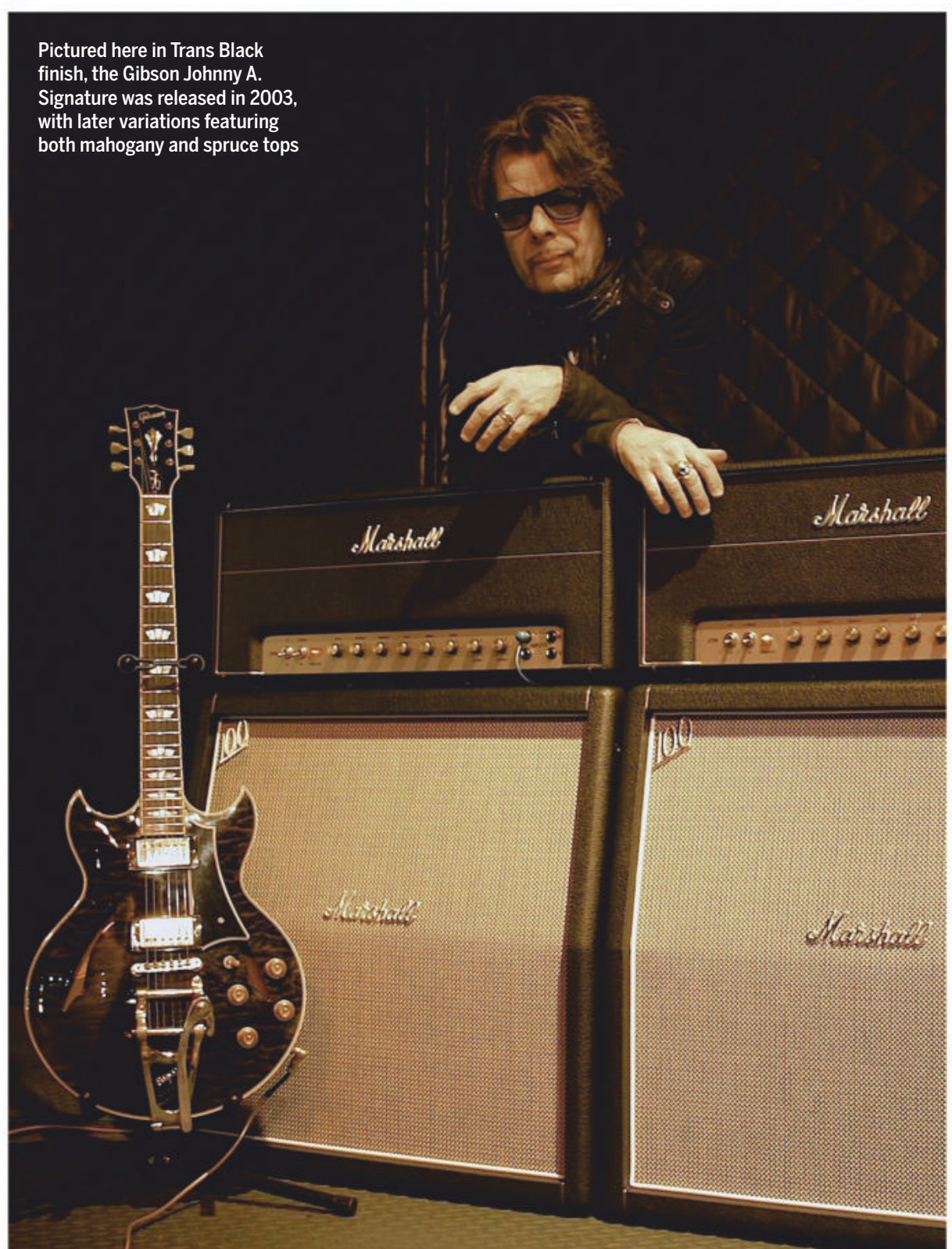
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that success, one thing led to another and we collaborated. The idea came out of the need for one guitar to cover a lot of bases. Most of that first record was recorded with an ES-295, but I also used Les Pauls, Firebirds, 335s and an L-5. Playing live, I was switching between a 295, a 335 and a Les Paul, but I really don’t like playing different guitars live – I’d rather just play one guitar.

“Gibson originally approached me at the Summer NAMM in 2002. They asked me how my Les Pauls were working out and I said, ‘I really can’t fault the design, but I’m missing the hollow tone I got from using a hollowbody. I wish there was something we could do to kind of get me everything that the Les Paul’s getting me but with a hollow tone.’ So they said they’d be interested in working with me and developing something that would fit that niche.”

Evidently, you’ll go to great lengths to find the right tone. How did you nail The Yardbirds sound?

“I was looking for a MKI Tone Bender, because that’s what those early Yardbirds records were. Jeff Beck used them pre-Jimmy Page. Jimmy used the later one [the MKII Tone Bender]. So I called up Ant at Macari’s and he said, ‘We are going to do a series of MKIs, but we don’t have any ready yet.’ I said, ‘Well, we have rehearsals in three weeks and then I go on the road. Is there any way you can get me a prototype?’ So he had David Main [of D*A*M Stompboxes] do a series of MKIs and they made me the prototype. I have the very first one. Which was interesting because Ant [Macari] told me the very first MKI made went to Jeff Beck for The Yardbirds. And 50 years later, the very first prototype that David Main made of the MKI went to me for The Yardbirds!”



Pictured here in Trans Black finish, the Gibson Johnny A. Signature was released in 2003, with later variations featuring both mahogany and spruce tops

PHOTO BY ALAN JENKINS

What amp did you use for The Yardbirds gig?

“For The Yardbirds, you’ve really got to use an AC30. I tried using Marshalls in that band and it really doesn’t work. There’s a certain aggressiveness and in-your-face thing that happens with an AC30, and it works for that band. But my preference for amplifiers has always been Marshalls, particularly JTM45s – I have four of the hand-wired JTM45s. I’m partial to a Marshall! I think their clean sounds are very much under-discovered. Every track on all of my records was recorded with a 30th Anniversary Marshall 6100. I have nine blue ones from 1992.”

Your current rig is another thing altogether...

“I really love vintage tones, but on this solo gig I’m doing now, I’m using a Fractal Axe-FX III. It works perfect for that. I’ve also just picked up a Kemper and I’ve been messing around with that. The Fractal doesn’t feel like an amp, but it’s the perfect

choice for what I’m doing with the solo looping gig, because it doesn’t really sag and it keeps all the loops articulate. The Kemper gives you more of an amp feel, no doubt about it. These days, I think it would be very hard for anybody to tell the difference between a mic’d amp and a Kemper by listening to a recording. But if I’m standing in front of a regular amp, or playing a Kemper through powered cabinets, I think I could probably tell the difference.

“At the end of the day, I still try to get an analogue feel and tone even if I’m using digital gear. I still hear with analogue ears and feel with an analogue soul. Those are the sounds I love. I’m not a vintage snob. I love vintage guitars and amps, but I love new guitars and new amps, too, if they’re good. The bottom line is: does it sound good? And who really cares what the tool is to get you the end result? In the end: do I like it or not? Does it work or not?” **G**

www.johnnya.com



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THE BEATLES

Guitar By Guitar

Words Tony Bacon **Photograph** David Redfern/Redferns/Getty



From the Hamburg dives in 1960 to London's Apple HQ rooftop in '69 and their break-up the following year, The Beatles not only revolutionised music but made the guitar the most popular musical instrument in the world. On the 50th anniversary of their final album, we trace the models that made the magic...



PHOTO BY KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

1. Early days: The Beatles, callow-looking and still clad in leathers, with Pete Best still occupying the drummer's chair. Best is seen here supporting Paul's earlier 1961 model Hofner 500/1 bass. John Lennon holds "the most beautiful guitar", as he termed his three-pickup Rickenbacker 325, bought in Hamburg in 1960

John Lennon wrote a typically oddball piece for *Mersey Beat* magazine in 1961 titled 'Being A Short Diversion On The Dubious Origins Of Beatles'. He said that three boys called John, George and Paul got together. "When they were together," he wrote, "they wondered what for after all, what for? So all of a sudden they grew guitars and fashioned a noise."

In fact, the fledgling Beatles were like most young bands starting out. They had no money to buy good instruments and managed with anything they could get their hands on. John had a Gallotone Champion flat-top, then an electric Hofner Club 40. George Harrison moved from an Egmond/Rosetti acoustic to a Hofner President, then his own Club 40, followed by a Futurama. Paul McCartney played a Zenith Model 17 acoustic, then a Rosetti Solid 7 electric.

For their first gigs in Hamburg, Paul (still a guitarist) took the Solid 7, John his Club 40, George the Futurama, and Stu Sutcliffe a Hofner 500/5 bass. None of these were great guitars –

those came later. And, fortunately, the Hamburg audience required nothing much more than a noise to drink to.

George was later asked about his early guitar days. "I started to learn to play when I was 13 on an old Spanish model my dad picked up for 50 bob," he explained. "It's funny how little things can change your life. Don't ask me why he chose a guitar instead of a mouth organ or something – they certainly weren't popular at the time."

JOHN & RICKENBACKER

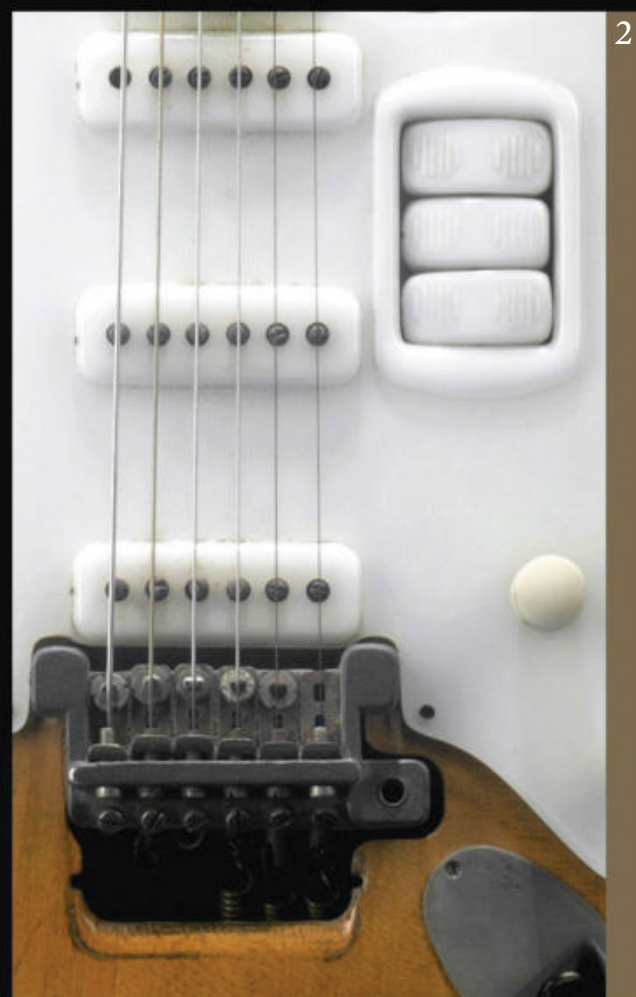
John Lennon was the first Beatle to get a real American guitar, at a time when a restriction on imports of US instruments to Britain had only just been lifted. In 1960, during a working visit to Hamburg, he got a Rickenbacker 325 in Mapleglo (natural) finish to replace his Club 40. He told an interviewer at the time that his semi-solid three-pickup short-scale '58 325 – which evidently had been on the shop wall for some time – was "the most beautiful guitar".

It had the cooker knobs that Rickenbacker fitted at the time and it had a Kauffman vibrato, neither apparently to John's liking. The knobs he replaced quickly with smaller Hofner types. The Kauffman he replaced with a better Bigsby unit. Later, he had the guitar refinished black.

A gift from Rickenbacker provided a replacement for the road-weary original, a new Jetglo (black) 325 presented during The Beatles'

John Lennon was the first Beatle to get a real American guitar, at a time when a restriction on imports of US instruments to Britain had only just been lifted

2. George Harrison bought this late-50s Futurama from Hussy's music store in Liverpool in the late 1950s. Like many electric guitars sold in Britain during this period, it was built in Europe. This was due to a trade embargo on selected American goods that was in force from the end of World War II until 1959, though the specific restrictions on guitars began in late 1951. As such, the Futurama is a kind of hopeful pastiche of a Stratocaster intended to sate consumer appetite for the unavailable Strat, albeit with three-a-side headstock and lightswitch-style pickup selectors (shown right). Its current owners report that it is surprisingly well engineered and still plays well



WHEN WE WAS FAB

"I bought a Futurama. This was the guitar which I played right through the Cavern and German Night Club days..."

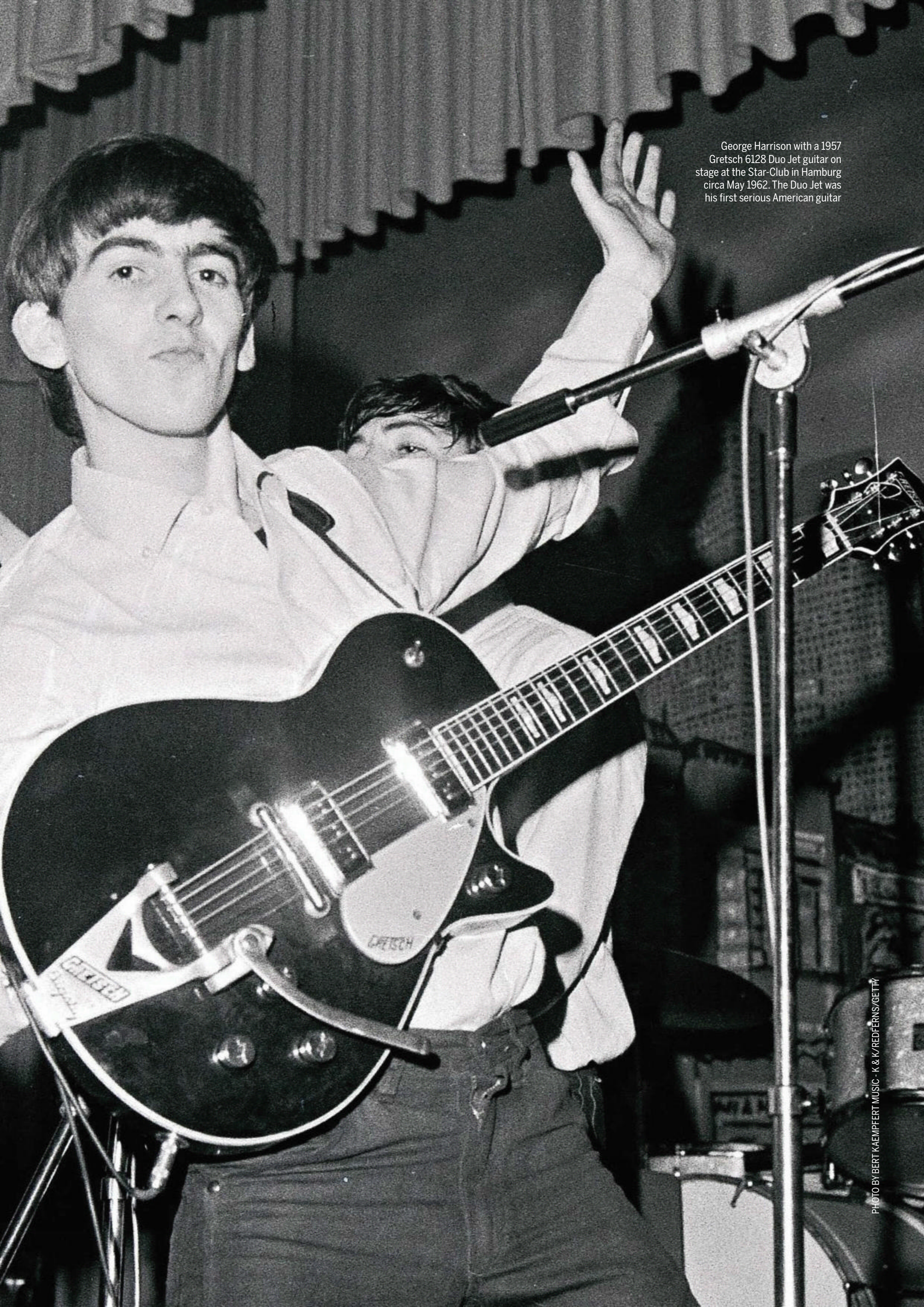
– **George Harrison**

George Harrison bought his Futurama from Hussy's Music Centre in Liverpool in the late 1950s and used it for the next few years until it was retired and replaced with a Gretsch Duo Jet in 1961. The guitar was initially given to the magazine *Beat Instrumental* as a competition prize, but, surprisingly, when the winner was drawn, he didn't play guitar and opted to take a cash alternative. The guitar spent the next few decades in the care of *Beat Instrumental*'s editor Sean Mahoney and was put up for auction at Bonhams in June 2019 but didn't make its reserve price.

Seven Decades' Phil Hylander subsequently negotiated directly with Mahoney's family and bought the guitar. "If you look at pretty much any picture from that era, George is holding this guitar," Phil tells us. "It was used on [one of] the very first Beatles recording[s], *Cry For A Shadow*, on the infamous Hamburg tapes. It's stood up incredibly well, it was an incredibly well-made guitar. The manufacturers [Drevokov in Czechoslovakia] were classical instrument manufacturers and it's quite over-engineered."

Plans are afoot for the guitar to feature in a film detailing its recommissioning, culminating in it being played live. "In our minds, it would be at an amazing gig where Dhani Harrison plays it..., " says Phil.

www.sevendecades.com



George Harrison with a 1957
Gretsch 6128 Duo Jet guitar on
stage at the Star-Club in Hamburg
circa May 1962. The Duo Jet was
his first serious American guitar

PHOTO BY BETTMANN/GETTY



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3. Paul McCartney and John Lennon on the set of *The Ed Sullivan Show* at the CBS television studios in Manhattan on 9 February 1964, when they would make their historic nationwide TV debut

4. George Harrison plays a Gretsch 6119 Tennessean guitar with Bigsby vibrato on *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, recorded at Alpha Television Studios in Aston, Birmingham in March 1965

first American visit early in 1964. The new Rick arrived in time for the band's second appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. It remained his main guitar on stage and in the studio through 1964 and into 1965, and it's the guitar most associated with John on stage with The Beatles.

He had a couple of related models, too. Rose-Morris, which for a while distributed Rickenbackers in the UK, gave John a 325-like 1996 in Fireglo (red sunburst) to use briefly in late '64 when he damaged his 325. Rickenbacker also gave him a one-off 325-style Jetglo 12-string in '64, but he didn't use it much.

» Where Are They Now?

Yoko Ono owns the '58 and '64 325s and the '64 325/12. John gave the stopgap 1996 to Ringo, who auctioned it in 2015 for \$910,000.

GEORGE & GRETSCH

George Harrison's opportunity to join John as the owner of a real American guitar came in 1961, when he heard about a '57 Duo Jet that a merchant seaman had for sale in Liverpool. George snapped up the guitar to replace his Futurama. The Jet had two DynaSonic single coils, hump-block markers and arrow-through-G knobs, and it remained his favoured stage and studio guitar into 1962.

George was a big Chet Atkins fan and soon he indulged his Gretsch passion some more, buying a new Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman model in London in 1963. It was a '62 model in Walnut (dark brown) finish and had a double-cut thinline hollow body with trestle bracing and fake f-holes, a pair of Filter'Trons, and a Bigsby vibrato.



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PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY



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PHOTO BY ART ZELIN/GETTY

5. George with his 1962 Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman, a beautiful double-cut design with fake f-holes that have fooled many an untutored eye over the years



6. John Lennon's 1958 Mapleglo-finish Rickenbacker 325. Note original 'cooker' control knobs replaced by Hofner ones

George and John bought a virtually identical pair of guitars in 1962, the Gibson J-160Es, to fill a gap in their instrumental setup



7. George's black 1957 Gretsch Duo Jet remained his main instrument until 1962



8. The pickup-equipped J-160E was ordered by both George and John. George's one was stolen while being used by Lennon. This is the other

A few weeks later, George used it to record *She Loves You*, but later in '63 he acquired a replacement Gent after that first one was damaged. The main visual clue of the second Gent is its flip-up mute switches either side of the tailpiece, where the first had screw-down knobs.

It's possible the second Gent was refinished black, though maybe it just had a very dark version of the regular brown. Anyway, it was quickly George's favourite and he used it regularly until it was destroyed in late '65 when it fell from the band's car and was run over by a truck. He'd acquired yet another Gretsch Chet model over the 1963/'64 new year, a single-cut Tennessean with two single-coil HiLo'Trons, which he used in the studio and for live shows in '64 and particularly into '65.

» Where Are They Now?

Olivia Harrison owns the '57 Duo Jet. George gave Brian O'Hara of The Fourmost his '62 Gent, present whereabouts unknown, and the '63 Gent perished in 1965. The Tennessean was stolen in 1969 and hasn't been seen since.

A PAIR OF GIBSON JUMBOS

George and John bought a virtually identical pair of guitars in 1962, the source of some confusion later as to which instrument belonged to which Beatle. They ordered a pair of Gibson J-160E electro flat-tops from the Rushworth's music shop in Liverpool – which in turn had to make a special order, because this was not a model generally available in Britain through Gibson's distributor, Selmer.

The two Beatles chose the J-160Es to fill a gap in their instrumental setup. It was essentially a traditional round-soundhole acoustic but with a pickup and controls built in. They regularly used the pair of big Gibsons either unplugged as regular acoustic guitars for songwriting on the road and for studio work, or plugged in for an amplified approximation of an acoustic on stage or when recording. So similar were the guitars that inevitably they were swapped around. Late in 1963, the J-160E John Lennon was playing was stolen during the band's Christmas concert residency in London. In fact, it was the one billed originally to George – so George and John in effect continued to use John's.

John picked up a new J-160E while on tour in the States later in 1964, and this one stayed with him for the rest of his life. He had it painted with a blue and lilac psychedelic pattern in 1967, stripped it to the wood the following year, and drew portraits of himself and Yoko on the front in 1969. George kept John's original 160 for the rest of his life, too.

» Where Are They Now?

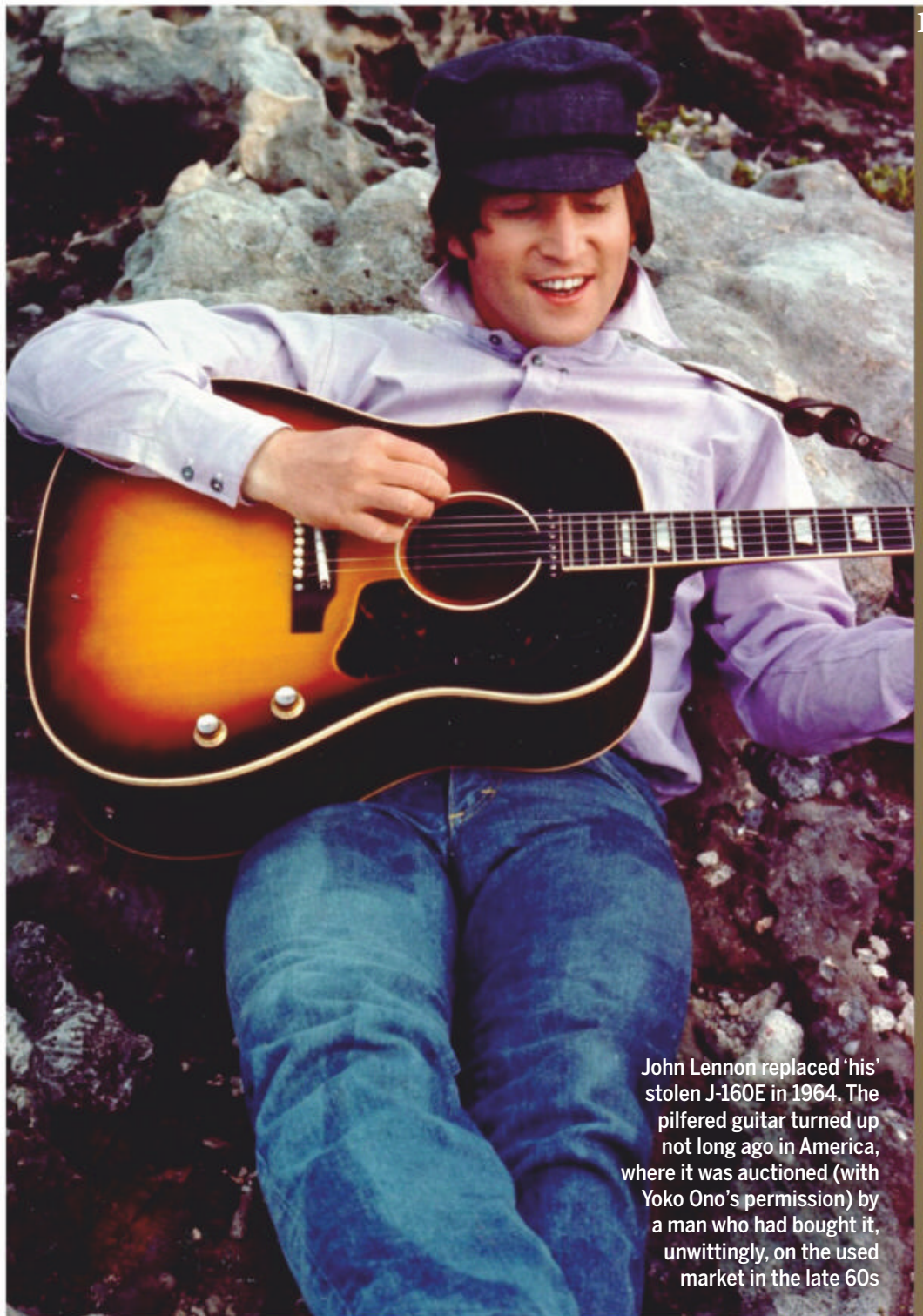
Yoko Ono owns John's '64 J-160E and Olivia Harrison owns what became George's 160E. John's long-lost '62 model was sold at auction in 2015 for \$2,410,000.



George Harrison with one of the Gibson J-160Es ordered for him and John. They used the guitars interchangeably, causing confusion for later historians of the band's gear

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PHOTO BY MARKA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



John Lennon replaced 'his' stolen J-160E in 1964. The pilfered guitar turned up not long ago in America, where it was auctioned (with Yoko Ono's permission) by a man who had bought it, unwittingly, on the used market in the late 60s

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PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

OPPOSITE PAGE: PHOTOS BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY



11. The prototype Rickenbacker 360/12 made its studio debut on George's 21st birthday on 25 February 1964

At the end of 1964, Paul bought himself an Epiphone Casino, restrung and played “upside down” to accommodate his left-handed style



12. Paul's Epiphone Casino was acquired in 1964 and strung the 'wrong' way round to accommodate his lefty style

GEORGE & THE RICK 12

The Beatles' live TV performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on 9 February 1964 broke the band in the States in spectacular fashion. For George, though, the day before was just as important. Rickenbacker boss Francis Hall brought the band some new gear to check out. George ended up with a fabulous gift of a prototype Rick 360/12 (and John got that gleaming new-look version of his 325, too).

George waited until the band returned home to use his new toy, and the studio debut of his chiming 360/12 can be heard on the lively take of *You Can't Do That*, recorded on 25 February, his 21st birthday. He started to use the 12-string – described by *Melody Maker* as “the beat boys' secret weapon” – all over live and studio Beatle performances. During the band's third US tour, in 1965, he received a 360/12 in Rickenbacker's new rounded-body style. He began using it rather than his original, as on the session for *If I Needed Someone* for *Rubber Soul*, the last Beatles track with electric 12, and on stage into '66.

George once compared the Rick 12's sound to an organ or electric piano, which makes sense when you hear some of the sounds he got from it on *A Hard Day's Night*, notably its most famous studio moment within the opening chord of the album's title song. “That sound,” George said much later, “you just associate with those early 60s Beatle records. The Rickenbacker 12-string sound is a sound on its own.”

» Where Are They Now?

Olivia Harrison owns the original '63 360/12, but the '65 model was stolen and remains lost.

A PAIR OF EPIPHONE THINLINES

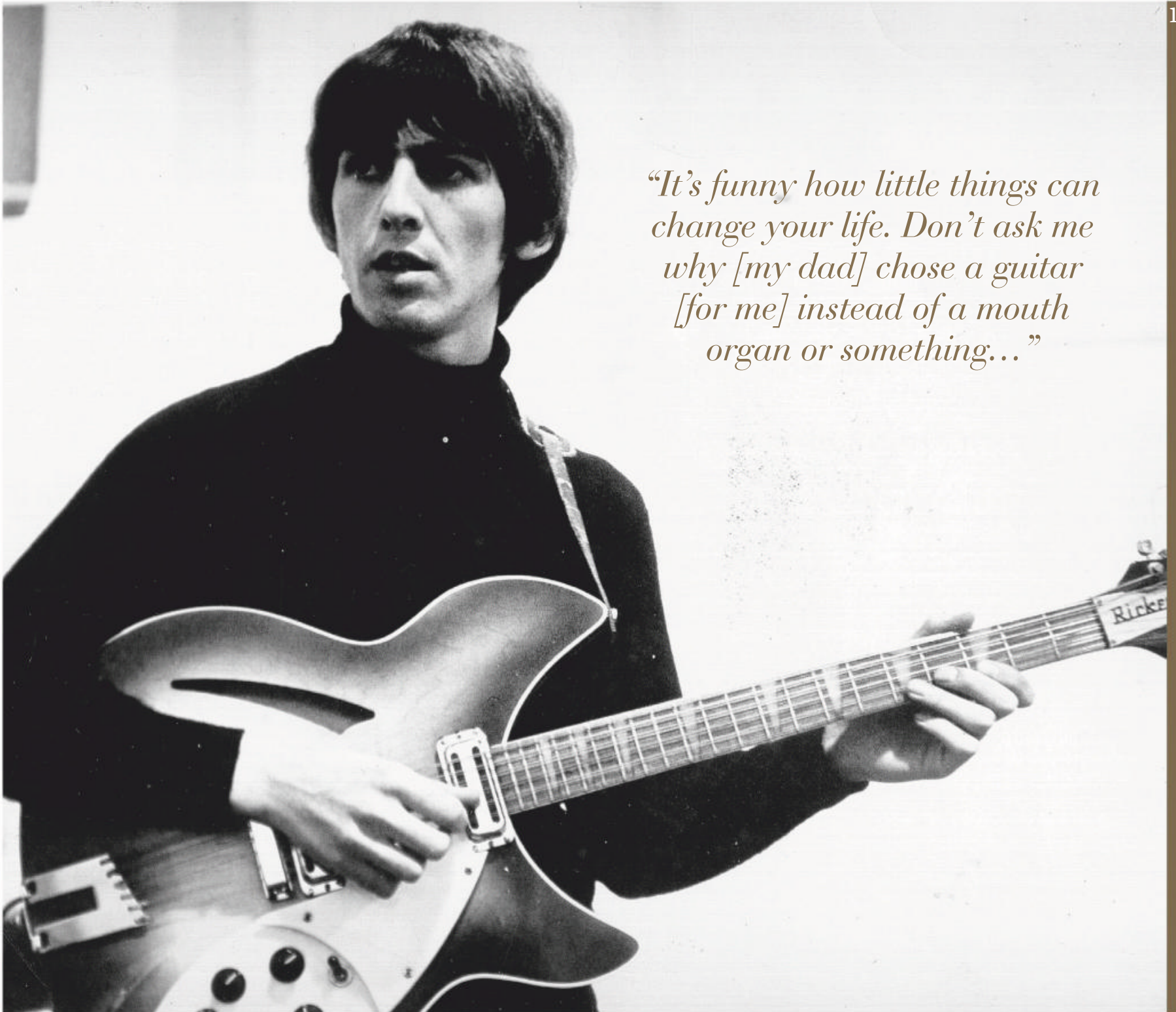
Early in 1965, John played some new recordings to a *Melody Maker* reporter at Abbey Road. Suddenly, he said, “Hey, listen! Hear that playing by Paul?” It was probably during playback of *Ticket To Ride* or *Another Girl*. “Paul's been doing quite a bit of lead guitar work this week,” John explained. “I reckon he's moving in.”

ABOVE: PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY

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“It’s funny how little things can change your life. Don’t ask me why [my dad] chose a guitar [for me] instead of a mouth organ or something...”

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY



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13. George Harrison with the ‘organ’-like Rickenbacker 360/12 that he used so effectively on *A Hard Day’s Night*

14. The Beatles perform *Rain* and *Paperback Writer* on the BBC’s *Top Of The Pops* in London on 16 June 1966, fully equipped with Epiphone Casinos to match their harder-edged sound

PHOTO BY MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS/GETTY





15. A gift from Eric Clapton, George's 'Lucy' Les Paul became his in 1968 and was originally a Goldtop

16. Paul's left-handed 1963 Hofner 500/1 became his definitive 'violin' bass, used throughout the span of The Beatles' career

Not content with his bass work at the lower end of Beatle cuts, Paul was taking more interest in guitar playing – and remember, he'd started in the band as a guitarist. At the end of 1964, Paul bought himself an Epiphone Casino, restrung and played “upside down” to accommodate his left-handed style. Gibson had owned Epiphone since the late 50s, and the new-for-1961 Casino model was based on Gibson's hollowbody ES-330.

The year after Paul's purchase, John and George each bought a Casino, too, and they used them on the sessions for *Revolver*, as did Paul. Paul's '62 model had the black knobs and Gibson-style headstock of the period, while John

In '68, Clapton gave a '57 Les Paul to George who let Eric play it for the solo on 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps', making Eric the only non-Beatle to play a solo on a Beatles record

and George's '65 models had gold knobs and the later 'flared' Epi head. George's came with a Bigsby, John's with the regular trapeze tailpiece.

John and George played their Casinos during most of the band's final live dates in 1966, including the very last Beatles concert at Candlestick Park in San Francisco that August. Later, both guitarists had the sunburst finish stripped from their Casinos to reveal the natural wood. George said later he thought it improved the sound of his guitar.

» Where Are They Now?

Paul owns his '62 Casino, Olivia Harrison owns George's '65 model, and Yoko Ono owns John's '65.

RHYTHM MAKERS

The Beatle basses

Stu Sutcliffe was the first bass player in The Beatles, using a '59 Hofner 500/5, but he left the band in 1961, and soon Paul switched to bass. Paul bought his first bass guitar in Hamburg in 1961. It was a left-handed Hofner 500/1, a type known since as a Beatle Bass or, for its shape, as a violin bass.

That '61 Hofner saw him through the band's early days, but in 1963 he bought a replacement, using the lefty '63 500/1 on stage and in the studio throughout the glory years of The Beatles. The pickups provide the main visual clues to tell the two Hofners apart: the pickups of the '61 bass are close together at the neck, while the '63 bass has the pickups spaced conventionally at the neck and bridge.

Paul was another beneficiary of Rickenbacker's generosity, receiving a lefty 4001S bass from the company on a US tour in 1965, and he used it on many Beatle records. Originally, it had a red Fireglo finish, but Paul gave it some colourful additions in 1967. Later, he stripped it back to natural wood and reshaped the top horn. Paul used another gift, a lefty Fender Jazz Bass, on some of the later Beatle sessions.

» Where Are They Now?

Paul owns the '63 Hofner bass, the 4001S, and the Jazz Bass, but the '61 Hofner was stolen in 1969, and Stu's 500/5 is owned by the Hard Rock Cafe.

ABOVE: PHOTOS BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Paul McCartney plays a Hofner 500/1
'violin' bass guitar as the band perform on
TV show *Shindig!*, recorded at Granville
Studio in London on 3 October 1964



*In 1963, Paul bought a replacement
[for his '61 Hofner 500/1], using the lefty
'63 500/1 on stage and in the studio
throughout the glory years of The Beatles*



In 1967, George took some paint and nail varnish and transformed his Strat into a personalised psychedelic artwork

17. George Harrison's self-decorated 'Rocky' Strat, acquired in late 1964, was originally Sonic Blue and was honoured with a limited series of 100 ultra-high-end Custom Shop Master Built replicas at this year's Winter NAMM show. For George fans with very deep pockets, the replica can be yours for just over £23,400...

A PAIR OF BLUE STRATS

Rubber Soul had many Beatle fans wondering about the new sounds contained in its grooves. Take that concise solo in *Nowhere Man*, where two unison guitars give way to one solitary pinging harmonic. A new Beatle sound, for sure! The source? A pair of Fender Stratocasters freshly added to the band's guitar store.

George and John decided around the end of '64 to get a Strat each. The story goes that they sent out Beatles roadie Mal Evans to find them and he returned with two Strats in Fender's pale Sonic Blue finish. They were often used in the studio, while John played his at least once at the band's Christmas '64 concerts. And during rehearsals in late '65, John briefly used a Strat in black finish with matching headstock.

In 1967, The Beatles decided to paint a few of their instruments in psychedelia-inspired colour schemes. Paul decorated his Rickenbacker bass. John had his J-160E painted blue and lilac and sprayed the back of his Casino silver.

George, meanwhile, took some paint and nail varnish and transformed his Strat into a personalised psychedelic artwork. That summer, his newly daubed Fender was just about visible – in glorious black-and-white – as the band performed *All You Need Is Love* for the *Our World* global satellite broadcast.

His psych Strat was more colourfully displayed in the *I Am The Walrus* sequence from the band's TV film shown that Christmas, *Magical Mystery Tour*, with its central character of a dayglo-painted charabanc. Later, maybe in a fit of post-trip good taste, Paul and John had the paint stripped off the coloured guitars, down to the natural wood, but George's Strat stayed steadfastly psychedelic.

» Where Are They Now?

John's 60s Strat hasn't been seen since, but Olivia Harrison owns George's '61 'Rocky' Strat.

FOREVER FAB

Other Beatle guitars

The Beatles acquired a number of other guitars beyond their main instruments, and we'll consider a selection here. Paul got a Fender Esquire in the first few months of 1967, which he used briefly in the studio, notably on his solo on *Good Morning, Good Morning* from *Sgt Pepper's*. He'd also picked up an Epiphone Texan flat-top in '64, mainly to use live for *Yesterday*, but also as a songwriting tool – and he landed another nice acoustic, a Martin D-28, in '68.

A few guitars were used by the band collectively, including a Framus Hootenanny 5/024 flat-top 12-string, picked up around the start of '65, and a Fender VI, given to the band by Fender along with several other bits of gear in 1968.

John got a Martin D-28 at the same time Paul got his, and he came by a Gretsch 6120 in 1965, which he was photographed using briefly at Abbey Road. In 1969, he played a Hofner Hawaiian Standard lap-steel for the slide part on *For You Blue*.

George borrowed a Gretsch Jet Fire Bird early in '63 while his Duo Jet was being repaired, and that same year bought a Rickenbacker 425 in the States while visiting his sister and used it for a few performances. Another temporary replacement in '63 for a guitar undergoing repairs was a Maton MS500. George also acquired a couple of useful acoustics: a Ramírez Guitarra de Estudio classical that he used in '64 for *And I Love Her*, and a Gibson J-200 that he bought in America in '68.

» Where Are They Now?

Paul owns his Texan and his D-28. The 6120 John used briefly was sold privately in 2015 for \$530,000. The 425 George used briefly was sold at auction in 2014 for \$657,000, and the Maton he used was sold at auction in 2018 for £280,000. George gave his J-200 to Bob Dylan (as seen on the cover of Nashville Skyline). The Esquire, Hawaiian Standard, Hootenanny, Jet Fire Bird, Ramírez, VI, and John's D-28 have since gone AWOL.

PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY

(OPPOSITE) PHOTO BY STEVE MORLEY/REDFERNS/GETTY

In the post-Beatles days, George Harrison travelled the US and Canada with Ravi Shankar and his orchestra on the Dark Horse tour. Here he performs in December 1974 with his psychedelic 'Rocky' Strat



LET IT BE

Finale revived for September release

The Beatles' final album, *Let It Be*, was released 50 years ago on 8 May 1970. Essentially the soundtrack to Michael Lindsay-Hogg's 'making of' documentary that came out at the same time, the album attracted harshly critical reviews and the film itself was soured by the obvious turmoil within the band as they began to self-destruct. Happily, a new and more optimistic edit by Peter Jackson is due out in September, provisionally titled *The Beatles: Get Back*, and promising never before seen footage of The Fabs at work.

18. George's Gibson SG Standard saw use for the *Revolver* studio sessions in 1966 and continued in use through 1968

19. Fender's Custom Shop launched a reissue of George's Rosewood Tele in 2017. Rumours swirl about plans for a cheaper version



PHOTO BY KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

GEORGE THE GUITAR FAN

George got his first Gibson with humbuckers in 1965, a luscious ES-345 that he used while miming in promo videos for *Day Tripper*, *Help!*, *I Feel Fine*, *Ticket To Ride*, and *We Can Work It Out*. He played it that December on what turned out to be the band's final British tour.

The following year, George got an SG Standard, used at Abbey Road when sessions began in April 1966 for *Revolver* and played at an *NME* concert in London in May, which marked The Beatles' final British concert appearance. George also used his SG in more videos to promote the *Paperback Writer*/*Rain* single in '66 and *Lady Madonna* in '68.

In 1968, Eric Clapton gave a Les Paul to George. It was a '57 Goldtop refinished in Cherry, and George named it Lucy and used it on several White Album and *Abbey Road* cuts. He let Eric play it once more for the solo on *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, making Eric the only non-Beatle to play a guitar solo on a Beatles record.

George's final new Beatle guitar was a prototype Fender Rosewood Telecaster, made by Roger Rossmeisl, a gift from Fender that arrived at the band's London Apple HQ in late '68. George played it for the Apple rooftop concert on 30 January 1969 – The Beatles' last ever public performance, seen in their *Let It Be* film.

» Where Are They Now?

George gave his SG to Badfinger's Pete Ham, whose brother sold it at auction in 2004 for \$567,500, and his Rosewood Tele to Delaney Bramlett, who auctioned it in 2003 for \$434,750. Both are owned now by Olivia Harrison, who also owns George's Les Paul. The 345's whereabouts are unknown. **G**



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CLEAN CUT

From clean-cut surf to the filth and the fury of punk and beyond, we chart the rise, fall and rediscovery of Fender's price-list-topping 'big four' solidbody with vintage guitar historian Martin Kelly...

Words Rod Brakes Photography Olly Curtis

“I’ve been into Fenders since I can remember,” says Martin Kelly, co-author of *Fender: The Golden Age 1946-1970* (Cassell Illustrated). “I only got a real job because I wanted to play more guitars!” he jokes, with just a hint of irony. While shooting for success in the late 80s and early 90s with cult indie band East Village, Martin decided to start up the Heavenly Recordings label with co-founder Jeff Barrett and has been working in the music industry ever since. An avid researcher, his passion for collecting Fender instruments began as a teenager in the early 80s, when offsets could be regularly snapped up for a fraction of their current price.

“Fender offsets were always my thing,” continues Martin. “There was a shop in Leytonstone called Holiday Music and it was like a Mecca for me and my brother [Paul Kelly, also co-author of *Fender: The Golden Age 1946-1970*]. They used to import guitars from America by the container-load and I remember seeing well over a dozen custom colour Jags in there. They were priced between £160 and £250, and £250 would get you a Shoreline Gold Jaguar in absolutely pristine condition.”

At the time of writing, there are two 1964 Shoreline Gold Jaguars for sale on Reverb's website: one priced at just under £12,000 and the other at just over £14,000. It's safe to say, therefore, that the asking price of vintage Fender Jaguars has changed dramatically over the years. Nevertheless, these figures represent a fraction of the cost

of an equivalent year/finish Stratocaster or Telecaster. But this was not always the case. When it was released in 1962, the Jaguar topped Fender's solidbody price list at \$379.50, while the Stratocaster (released in 1954) and Telecaster (originally released as the Broadcaster in 1950) sat much further down at \$259.50 and \$209.50 respectively. The \$349.50 Jazzmaster (released in 1958) compared much more closely, however, both in terms of price and features.

“The Jazzmaster introduced a more flared out headstock shape,” says Martin. “I don't buy into the idea that it somehow prevents the neck from warping, as is sometimes believed. I just think Leo [Fender] was going for a different design. He would always try and incorporate something new. Then the Bass VI came out [in 1961] and the Jaguar also borrowed its headstock shape from that. The Jaguar borrowed from the design of the Bass VI, and vice versa. Early Bass VI models had a regular chrome pickup surround, but that changed to a Jaguar-like pickup cradle design with notched metal sides [in 1963] after the Jaguar came out.

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“The offset body was designed to be played in a seated position”
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MARTIN KELLY

At the same time, they also added a Jag-style mute and ‘strangle’ switch to the Bass VI.

“With all those chrome parts, Jaguars probably looked really flashy in the early 60s. It certainly went down well on the Bass VI and the Jazz Bass [released in 1960]. The Bass VI is where Fender introduced the chrome switch panel seen on Jaguars [located on the upper treble bout]. That made for easier servicing – which was very much Fender's ethos – because you could just unscrew it like a Tele control panel. With Strats and Jazzmasters, you have to take the strings and the scratchplate off to examine any part of the electronics.”

As per its flared headstock profile, the Jaguar's offset body was also derived from the original Jazzmaster design.

“The offset body design was developed for jazz players and designed to be played in a seated position,” points out Martin. “The Jazzmaster patent drawing is interesting, because it illustrates a person playing sat down. Jags and Jazzmasters sit naturally on your lap, but when you play them stood up with a strap, the bridge becomes much more centralised. When you're standing up, it doesn't feel compact like a Strat or Tele. The ergonomics are different. Even though the Jazzmaster has the same [25.5-inch] scale length as a Strat or Tele, the neck feels like it's an inch or two further away, because the bridge is quite far into the middle of the body. My theory is the Jaguar was designed with a shorter [24-inch] scale to combat that. I'm convinced that's why they decided to do a shorter-scale model.”

This rare 1962 model features
a slab rosewood fretboard
and Green Sparkle finish





1

1. Alongside standard tortoiseshell-pickguard/Sunburst-finish instruments, Jaguars were offered in a range of custom colours until mid-1973

2. A pair of slab-'board Fender offsets from 1962: an Olympic White Jaguar and a Lake Placid Blue Jazzmaster from the collection of Guns N' Roses guitarist Richard Fortus



2

“The Jaguar and Jazzmaster tremolos are so underrated”

MARTIN KELLY

Perhaps the most significant difference between a Jaguar and a Jazzmaster, aside from scale length, is its pickups.

“Jazzmaster pickups can be quite mellow, which suits certain types of music,” reasons Martin, “but it’s easy to imagine that people requested something with more bite. I think Leo wanted to give each guitar its own identity, and although the Jaguar is probably the first one to borrow heavily from another instrument, in his mind that meant having a new pickup. The Jaguar pickup’s chrome cradle was designed to reduce hum and achieve a more focused sound. It sounds brighter and thinner than a Strat, and they’ve got a good bite when you drive them. They’re maybe not as versatile as other Fender pickups, but they really do their own unique thing well. The controls are pretty similar to a Jazzmaster. Aside from being able to switch the pickups on and off [individually], you also have a ‘strangle’ switch, which gives the tone a sort of muted quality.”

Also borrowed from the Jazzmaster, the Jaguar’s ‘floating tremolo’ system was highlighted in company literature as one of the guitar’s key selling points.

“I absolutely love the Jaguar and Jazzmaster tremolo,” says Martin. “They’re so underrated. I think they’re much better than a Strat tremolo, and I prefer them to a Bigsby. It’s the bridge that Jaguars often get a kicking for. But you’ve got to remember the gauges of string that were fitted back then tended to be much heavier. If you put a set of 12s on a Jag it really comes to life and the bridge works fine. I certainly wouldn’t recommend going below 0.011[-gauge]. I don’t think the design was wrong, I just think Fender couldn’t have anticipated that string gauges were going to keep dropping.

“I’ve never quite got on with the mute, however, although you can get some interesting sounds from it. On some early 60s records you can hear that muted dead-string sound. It turned out to be a bit of a novel gimmick, but I think it was Leo

3

“The Jaguar pickup’s chrome cradle was designed to reduce hum and achieve a more focused sound”

MARTIN KELLY

3. This 1965 Fender Jaguar in Black custom colour finish features the single-bound/dot-inlay fretboard design introduced that year

4. Matching headstocks were a common feature of custom colour Jaguars and Jazzmasters. Note the gold ‘transition’ logo on this ‘65 model

4



reaching to do something he hadn’t done on a guitar before. In the early 60s, there were a number of instrumental groups like The Ventures, and I wouldn’t be surprised if Fender had that type of sound and that type of playing in mind with the Jaguar. It certainly became the surf guitar – it was the staple instrument. Surf bands might have a Strat and they might have a Jazzmaster, but they nearly always have a Jag.”

Perhaps the most well-known Jaguar player in the early days was Carl Wilson of The Beach Boys fame.

“He was pretty inseparable from his,” recalls Martin. “He had a white one with a tortoiseshell pickguard, which was beautiful. I think he did a lot to promote the Jaguar to other surf groups. It was definitely a guitar you would see in bands with colour-matched sets of Fenders. It goes hand in hand with that [early-60s] era – bands like The Ventures and The Shadows who had matching outfits and gear. It was a strong image. But



Gibson-style block inlays were introduced on Fender's top-of-the-line offset models in 1966. This '66 Jag belongs to Warpaint's Emily Kokal and was gifted to her by John Frusciante

by the late 60s that was an unthinkable image for a lot of bands – it's hard to imagine a late-60s band with long hair and matching guitars! By that time, the Les Paul was becoming popular, Jimi Hendrix was playing a Strat, and the Tele was finding its followers. These models were holding their own, but the offsets were dying a death. The Jaguar was so tied in to early 60s culture that it looked very unfashionable by the late 60s/early 70s."

Throughout the late 60s and early 70s, the Jaguar continued to be offered in custom colours and with the option of a maple fingerboard – each for an additional five per cent cost. Left-handed models were an extra 10 per cent. In the January 1973 price list, the choice of custom colours included Blond, Lake Placid Blue, Olympic White, Black, Candy Apple Red, Natural and Walnut. At this point, the Jaguar was still the most expensive of Fender's solid-bodied guitars, with an impressive array of options to boot. In June that year, however, the price list presented a very different picture as the word 'discontinued' repeatedly replaced all options bar the left- and right-handed versions of standard rosewood-'board/Sunburst-finish instruments. By 1974, only the latter remained – and come the following year, the Jaguar had disappeared from the price list entirely.

"Jaguar sales had plummeted by the late 60s, and you really don't see many 70s ones around," says Martin. "They discontinued it before they discontinued the Jazzmaster – the Jazzmaster outlives it [Jazzmasters stayed in production for around another five years and were dropped from the price list in 1980]. By the late 70s, the Jag had become a cheap pawn-shop guitar, and that's when you get punk and new wave bands playing them. In later years, offsets have found their following in a more alternative rock scene. Johnny Marr has probably become the most famous exponent – possibly of all time. He made it his own. I'm sure kids today, when they think of a Jag, think of Johnny Marr straight away."

"The Jaguar is a really intuitive guitar to play," Johnny told us in a recent interview. "And, therefore, it's very musical. It's a fantastic instrument. It was a really beautiful

moment when I first connected with a Jag. I'd had one for years, but I'd overlooked it. I don't think I was interested enough in it for some reason, because if I had been, I would have recognised how great it was in a second. It really was a jumping off point for me as a player. If I play on other people's records in sessions and they want me to sound like me, I don't need to bring any of those old Smiths guitars – I just plug in a Jag and it sounds like me."

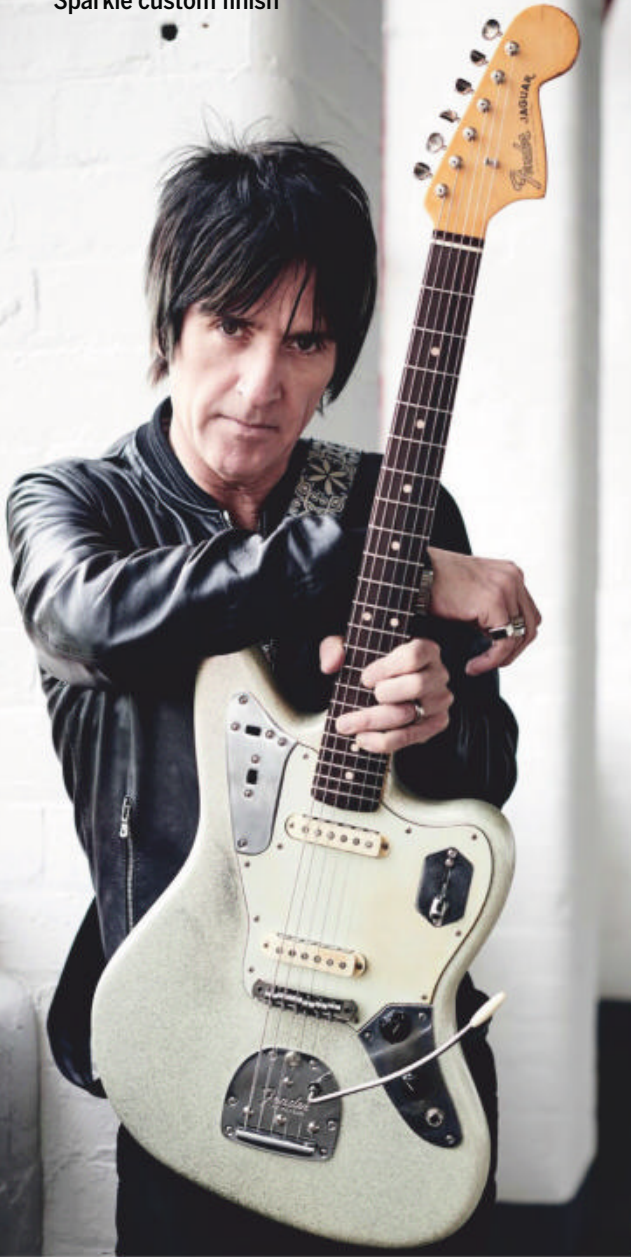
"It was great being involved with Johnny's signature model [the Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar]," remembers Martin. "I got to name a Fender colour, Metallic KO – which I'm very proud of! Fender made Johnny a prototype that was the colour of a Candy Apple Red guitar he had that had faded out to a kind of orange colour. He said, 'I don't know what to call it,' and I said, 'In the 60s, they always had the word 'metallic' within the colour name – like Lake Placid Blue Metallic, Candy Apple Red Metallic and so on – so why not call it Metallic KO, after The Stooges album?'"

With such endorsements and a range of new Jaguar models currently available across Fender's American Professional, American Original, Player and Vintera series – not to mention the Kurt Cobain signature model – the Jaguar has never appeared more in demand.

•
"The Jaguar is a really intuitive guitar to play... , therefore, it's very musical"
 •

JOHNNY MARR

This particular Johnny Marr Jaguar signature model features a one-off Comet Sparkle custom finish



“I think Jaguars are enjoying their heyday in many respects,” agrees Martin. “Since their point of launch, they’re at their most popular now. Up until recently, Jaguars and Jazzmasters didn’t really have the player association that made Strats and Teles so popular. But the younger guitar heroes do play them, so it’s putting them up on a different pedestal.

“The latest generation of guitarists seem to really like offsets. My 15-year-old son plays guitar and he really doesn’t want a Strat – he sees it as a whole other thing. I often wonder if the price of Strats and Teles will fall off the cliff. Are the younger kids who don’t have access to those vintage guitars, because they’re too expensive, ever going to care enough? Will the market then become flooded with baby boomer guitars?

“They were the most expensive of the original line, and it’s ironic they’ve become the least expensive to pick up on the vintage market. I think they represent good value. If you’re looking to get into 60s Fenders, and you’re on a bit of a budget, I think a Jaguar is a really good buy. You can buy a lot of vintage guitar for relatively little outlay. You can still see Sunburst ones and refinished guitars on sale for around £2,500 to £3,000.” 

Guitarist would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham and Vintage’n’ Rare Guitars in Bath

This 1963 Jaguar was originally Sunburst and has been refinished in Black. As a rule of thumb, refinished Fenders are worth 50 per cent of their original factory-finish counterparts







Top Ranking

After a lull of new models, Guild launched plenty of them at the start of 2020. This pair of single-cuts combines vintage style and lighter weight at a temptingly affordable price

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin



GUILD ARISTOCRAT HH & P90 BOTH £795

CONTACT **Selectron UK Ltd** PHONE **01795 419460** WEB **www.guildguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 More Les Paul copies?**
Single-cuts, yes; Les Paul copies, no. Both of these new-for-2020 Aristocrats are 'chambered' resulting in relatively light weights. Of course, that'll also influence the sound, along with that distinctive harp tailpiece.
- 2 So, these are Asian builds, then?**
Yes, China to be precise. The Newark St Collection – released in 2013 by then-owners Fender and continued after the brand was bought by Cordoba Music Group – were all Korean-made, and while they don't aim to be exact replicas of models from Guild's past, there are plentiful nods in that direction.
- 3 Doesn't Guild already have an Aristocrat? I'm confused...**
The original Newark St Collection boasted a (Korean-made) M-75 Aristocrat in Antique Sunburst or Black (with a limited M-75G gold-top version) that was fully hollow in construction. Yes, it looks the same, but that one is a very different guitar and is slightly higher in price than our chambered duo here.

The Guild M-75 Aristocrat might not be a household name in terms of classic electric guitars, but over some 66 years it has been played by the likes of John Lee Hooker, Keith Richards, John Mayer and Annie Clark, to name but four. Even if you've never played an original from the 50s or 60s – which now command around \$4k on the vintage market – the current Newark St Collection M-75 Aristocrat of the past seven years is a pretty tidy facsimile of the guitar that first appeared in 1954. It might have looked like Guild's response to the Les Paul, but, as many of us have found, it is actually an evocative mini-archtop that's just as useful for your jazz studies as it is for really rootsy Chicago electric blues and quite a bit more. Accurately classed as a "hollowbody with spruce braced top", the Korean-made M-75 is built like an acoustic guitar with separate back, laminated sides and arched top, joined with kerfed linings: the laminate spruce top has two longitudinal braces; the back has a couple of transverse braces.

But while these two new versions of that original M-75 Aristocrat look very similar, pretty much everything has changed. We have the same outline and classic three-a-side domed-top headstock but on the P90 model a more generic-looking tortie plastic pickguard replaces the usual style with its cartoon-ish 'Guild' under a small chevron

seen on that M-75 and many others in the range. The top's edge binding doesn't have the inner black/white purfling stripe, either, and the HH model ditches the pickguard altogether.

Colour options are limited, too. The P90 comes in Vintage Sunburst, and the top's bursting is very subtle – it looks more like a deep mahogany brown, pretty much the colour of the back, sides and neck, too. As well as an opaque Snow Crest White option, our HH model comes in Trans Black Burst and has a figured maple veneer top, hinting at a more contemporary style. Aside from the top, though, the rest of the guitar is opaque black. Hidden under these sombre but classy-looking glossy colours, the construction is all mahogany aside from that flame maple veneer.

Of course, it's the weight that gives the game away, even if you're wearing a blindfold. Our reference M-75 weighs in at just 2.46kg (5.4lb), while the P90 here is 3.45kg (7.59lb) and the HH a shade heavier

Strapping on either chambered Aristocrat feels great: the beefy bulk of a Les Paul but without the tonnage



THE RIVALS

Chambered electrics without f-holes (let alone single-cuts) are a rare breed, especially at this price. However, PRS has the well-liked SE Zach Myers (£799, inc gigbag) with its semi-solid construction, single f-hole, figured maple veneered maple top with mahogany back and neck, a pair of 245 'S' humbuckers and adjustable Stoptail bridge.

Gretsch's Duo Jet preceded Guild's M-75 Aristocrat by a year and was another example of a Les Paul-ish electric but with semi-solid construction. Offering great value for money, the solid-bodied G5230T Electromatic Jet FT in Black With Bigsby (£459 street price) features a chambered mahogany body, includes a licensed Bigsby and comes fitted with dual Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers.

Meanwhile, many of D'Angelico's contemporary designs come from its illustrious jazz archtop heritage. The Indonesian-made single-cut Premier SS Stairstep (£719 street price) is a centre-blocked model that has dual f-holes, a stairstep tailpiece and dual Duncan-designed humbuckers.

at 3.52kg (7.74lb), reflecting the 'chambered' rather than hollow construction. What do we mean by chambered? Our new 'Crats start out with a solid chunk of mahogany that is routed out leaving the central section solid with plenty of air in the wings. You can easily see that if you peer into the rear control cavity of either, and you can also see that the separate top is mahogany, too. In fact, this chambered construction style here is closer to the Newark St Bluesbird, although both new models retain the depth of the M-75: 50mm at the rim with an overall depth of approximately 60mm. The Bluesbird is slimmer: 40mm at the rim and 49mm overall.

The actual Guild legend with its Chesterfield logo on the headstock appears to be simply silk-screened metallic paint in certain lights: gold on the P90 and silver on the HH to match the hardware's plating. But move either in the light and they become more pearlescent, rather like one of those metallic-looking stamps on a bank note. The back of the headstock bears a simple GY-prefixed serial number with peel-off compliance and 'Made in China' stickers; our older M-75 has a KSG-prefixed serial number and 'Handcrafted in Korea' legend underneath. A final identifier is simply the maple stripe down the back of the M-75's neck; you don't see that through the slightly translucent finish of

the P90 model, but you can clearly see the headstock splice and the additional heel stack. On closer inspection, the specs differ further with a flatter 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius on these new models as opposed to the slightly more rounded 240mm (9.5-inch) radius of the M-75.

Hardware is identical across both the new models, the obvious exception being the plating: gold on the P90, nickel on the Trans Black Burst HH (although, just to confuse things, its Snow Crest White

1. Although it looks like the slightly larger Guild HB-1, the HB-2 is regular humbucking size
2. Guild's elegant headstock with its 'Chesterfield' logo. The top nuts on both guitars on review are bone





3. Both guitars are a classic drive with individual volume and tone controls, with these very neat Guild 'reflector' knobs

option comes with gold hardware). Their tuners are simple, open-backed and Grover Sta-Tite in style but have a Guild logo and metal 'butterbean' buttons; the tune-o-matic bridge mounts into ferrules inset into the top. Again, this differs from the M-75 model: its tune-o-matic style bridge actually sits on metal feet and 'floats' (although we understand later models are pinned), more like an unpinned archtop bridge, while its tuners are stamped Grover with oval metal buttons.



Feel & Sounds

While that earlier M-75 is extremely light and feels it on a strap, both these new chambered Aristocrats feel much more Les Paul-like – although you'll struggle to find ones in this weight range. Strapping on either feels great: the beefy bulk of a Les Paul but without the tonnage. But the combination of the chambering and that harp tailpiece give them a different response even before you plug in – a little more semi-like and acoustic-y than an

4 & 5. Unlike the existing M-75 Aristocrat, both tune-o-matic bridges here mount directly into the top. The only difference is the gold-plating of the P90 model's bridge (below)



'A bit different' sums up these single-cuts that move away from the original 'midget' jazz hollowbody M-75

all-solid single-cut with a stud tailpiece but noticeably less acoustic-like than the hollow M-75.

The neck profiles are nicely done if a little generic-feeling: a perfectly good C that's thinner in depth at the 1st fret, 21mm, than it actually feels, filling out to 23.3mm by the 10th fret and, in typical Guild style, the heel feels quite square and consequently a little bulky in higher positions. The frets are pretty beefy but not overly high

UNDER THE HOOD

How the electrics measure up to the Gibson standard

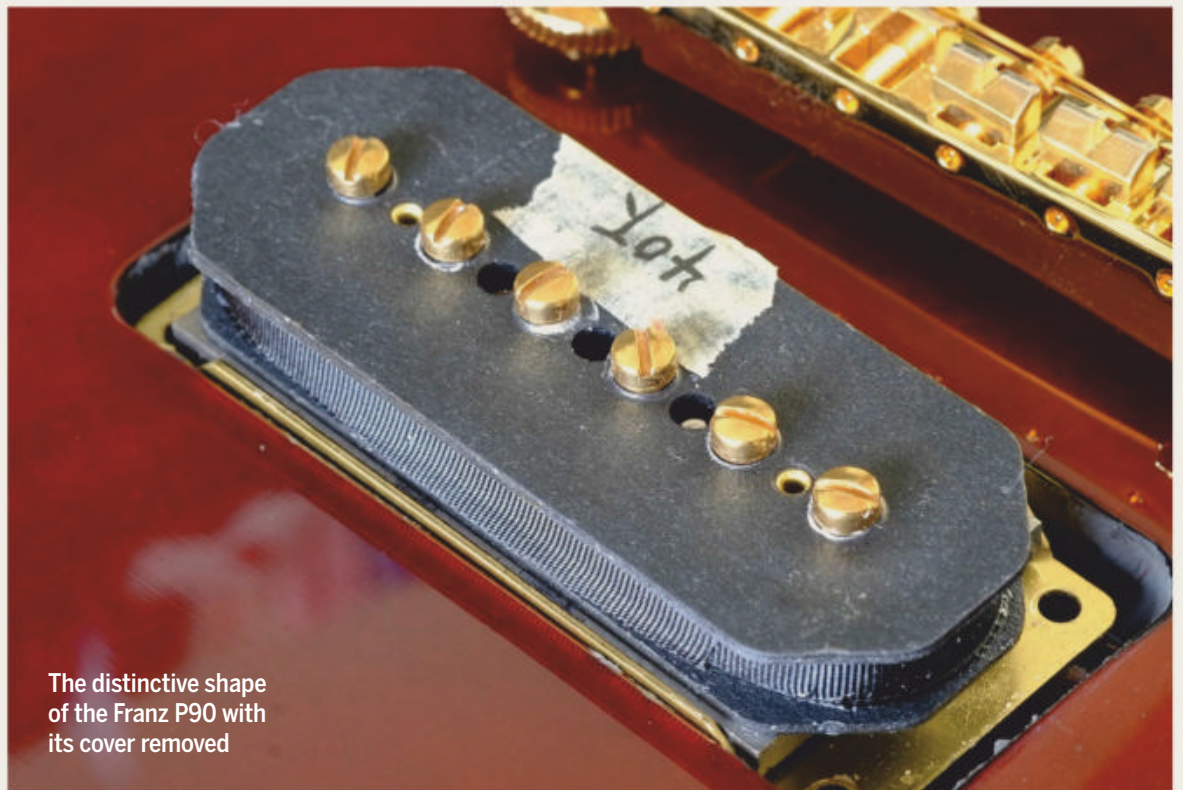
Both guitars use the same Gibson-style circuit with a shoulder-placed toggle switch pickup selector and quite widely spaced volume and tone for each pickup. The pots all sit in a rear cavity, with a recessed cover plate that also bears the 'Guild Guarantee' label – always a nice touch. Circuit wise, there are no surprises with a green polyester film .022 microfarad (233J) capacitor on each tone, wired modern style with 500k pots. The HH model has simple coil-splits accessed via pull-switch on the individual volumes, not the more usual tone controls. The cavities are all screened, and whichever factory these come from they've clearly made a big effort to produce a tidy guitar.

Both HH and P90 pickup types are made by Booheung in Korea – like the pickups we've seen on other Newark St Guilds. The Guild HB-2 humbuckers on the HH feature the distinctive covers of both the larger HB-1 humbuckers and smaller LB-1 'mini-humbuckers' fitted on the

P-90-style single coils can polarise opinion, but on the right guitar they can be glorious

Starfires, for example. Those original or replica HB-1s are the same width (treble to bass) as the industry standard Gibson humbucker but slightly broader as if the two coils inside are wider. As a consequence, the pickup mounting ring is larger than standard and has two height-adjustment screws on the bass side, too, so you can adjust both the height and tilt of the pickup to match the string angle. These HB-2s aim to offer the same tonality as the HB-1 but are standard humbucker-sized and sit in standard mounting rings. It means any standard-sized humbucker will fit. Good news, tone tweakers.

The Franz P90s differ from the Gibson standard as they look like standard soapbars but mount differently to the guitar. If you remove the cover via that single central bolt between the D and G strings' polepieces, you can see mounting screws on each corner of the baseplate. Both neck and bridge pickups have two pieces of hard foam under their bases that act as cushions and allow a little height adjustment. To do that, you have to remove the covers, which means slackening the strings.



The distinctive shape of the Franz P90 with its cover removed



These rubber strips on the underside provide minimal height adjustment



The circuits are the same on both guitars, although the P90 (here) doesn't have the pull/push switched volumes



6. These Franz soapbar single coils mount to the guitar in a different fashion to a regular Gibson P-90 (see Under The Hood on the previous page)

(approximately 2.73 by 1.08mm) and sit over the binding, which is slightly edge-rounded. Pretty tidy stuff.

P-90-style single coils can polarise opinion, but on the right guitar and in the right song they can be glorious, especially for those of us after a rootsy, rawer voice. Yes, they hum (the mix here is hum-cancelling, though) and these don't sound or feel heavily potted at all. It's an airy voice, spiky, punky at the bridge, thicker at the neck (and a little louder), but above

all unrefined... and that's a compliment. The HH actually sounds a little polite by comparison in humbucking mode – smoother but still with some spike and life. The splits do thin things out considerably, but dial in a little level boost and you're certainly in the ballpark if you like your single-cuts cleaner and brighter, particularly on the neck pickup. In mix position, voicing the neck split with the full bridge cleans things up a little, too. These HB-2s don't capture the power of the real thing when we plug in our 1976 Guild S-90, but with some pedal/amp adjustment that raw, bright-edged voice is almost there. Either way, both sit in the lower-output category compared with something like Gibson's Burstbucker 1 and 2s on our modded 2019 Les Paul Classic.

Using both models for an ongoing recording project, however, reveals just how good 'cheap' guitars have become. Straight out of the boxes the setups are good, the guitars are in tune and stable, and while both would benefit from a little fine-tuning it's not a necessity. Some hours later the tracks sound good and we've formed quite an attachment to the P90. The HH is little different – used for some cleaner parts and overdubs, and chasing a more hollow Gretsch-y voice, it really delivered, especially that split neck and full bridge mix.

7. A typical Guild feature is this squared heel, which you'll also see on the hollowbody M-75 Aristocrat





Verdict

It's fair to say that Guild has struggled to gain market share against more obvious classic brands. Even back in the day it was the guitar you played until you could afford a Gibson. That past perception is impossible to change, but the Newark St Collection offers considerable style, particularly if you dare to be a bit different.

And 'a bit different' sums up these two well-priced single-cuts, which move away from the original 'midget' jazz hollowbody

8. Tuners on both guitars are simple, open-backed and in the style of Grover Sta-Tite but have a Guild logo and metal 'butterbean' buttons

Using both models for a recording project reveals just how good 'cheap' guitars have become

M-75 Aristocrat to a contemporary voice that's as at home with 60s hipsters as it is with much rockier and even heavier styles. From a practical point, the good weights here mean we have a pair of single-cuts that won't bother you on a long set, and straight from the shipping boxes they were ready to go. Of course, it's a combination of all their parts that result in what we hear – and that's a subtly different texture and sound compared with more generic single-cuts. There's character in spades and some vintage-styled class, all at a very tempting price. **G**



GUILD ARISTOCRAT HH

PRICE: £795
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway chambered body electric
BODY: Chambered mahogany with carved figured maple (veneer) top
NECK: Mahogany (3-piece), 'C' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound pau ferro, pearloid block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge with harp tailpiece, vintage-style open-gear tuners with 'butterbean' buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Guild HB-2 humbuckers with nickel covers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume (with pull/push coil-splits) and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.52/7.74
OPTIONS: See Aristocrat P-90
RANGE OPTIONS: See gallery over the page
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Trans Black Burst (as reviewed) and Snow Crest White with gold hardware – all gloss polyester



9/10

PROS Vintage style, weight, good build, pretty versatile old-school voice; excellent modding potential

CONS Limited colour choice; coil-splits are a little thin especially at the bridge; no gigbag or lefty option



GUILD ARISTOCRAT P90

PRICE: £795
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway chambered body electric
BODY: Chambered mahogany with carved spruce (veneer) top
NECK: Mahogany (3-piece), 'C' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.57mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound pau ferro, pearloid block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge with harp tailpiece, vintage-style open-gear tuners with 'butterbean' buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Guild Franz P90 soapbar single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.45/7.59
OPTIONS: See Aristocrat HH
RANGE OPTIONS: See gallery over the page
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed)



9/10

PROS As the HH – vintage style, weight, good build and characterful old-school voice

CONS No colour choice; no gigbag or lefty option



'Street Style

It's seven years since we saw the very first Guild Newark St Collection. Today, there's plenty on offer...



GUILD JETSTAR ST £545

The first Newark St model to be made in China instead of Korea, this Jetstar was relaunched in 2018 and is loosely based on the original Guild S-50, one of the first Guild electric solidbodies, originally released in 1963. The Jetstar ST differs from most of the other Newark St models with its 648mm (25.5-inch) scale and features all-mahogany construction with a pau ferro fingerboard. Powering comes from the pair of Guild LB-1 mini-humbuckers. It's available in Black, Sea Foam Green and Vintage White finishes. "A retro vibe that's matched by the sounds we hear," we said in issue 437.



GUILD S-100 POLARA £725

While the original S-100 Polara appeared in 1963, it didn't adopt this more Gibson SG-like style until 1970. This contemporary version was the only solidbody in the original Newark St range and launched in 2013. It's a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale, all-mahogany guitar with a pau ferro fingerboard (originally rosewood) and is still made in Korea. The pickups here are a pair of Guild HB-1 slightly oversized humbuckers that certainly chase the original Guild versions known for their low-output, slightly edgy humbucking voice. The Polara is available in Black, Cherry Red and White finishes.



GUILD S-200 T-BIRD £819

This bonkers creation (that originally featured a flip-out stand) appeared as the S-200 Thunderbird in 1963 and was famously adopted by Muddy Waters. The Newark St version, without the stand, is a close cousin, again with 629mm (24.75-inch) scale, all-mahogany construction and Guild LB-1 mini-humbuckers wired with four rotary controls and four slide switches in a seemingly Jazzmaster-inspired 'dual mode' fashion. The Hagstrom Vintage Tremar vibrato closely replicates the original but is a bit of an acquired taste. It comes in Antique Burst or Black. The T-Bird ST P90, with Franz P90s and a hardtail bridge, is available in Pelham Blue only.



GUILD M-75 ARISTOCRAT **£909**

As discussed in our preceding review, this is the original-style M-75 Aristocrat, as introduced by Guild in 1954, and again one of the original relaunched Newark St models. It's a true hollowbody – unlike our chambered Aristocrat HH and P90 review instruments – and features a pair of Franz 'frequency tested' P-90-style single coils that screw directly to the laminate spruce top. It might have a Les Paul-style solidbody appearance but its weight and sound look back to the jazz age. Available only in Antique Burst, it's the epitome of Guild's slightly different style.

GUILD BLUESBIRD £909

Its roots might lie with the original M-75 Aristocrat, but this Bluesbird is closer to the later Guild single-cuts made by the then Fender-owned brand. However, it uses the original M-75 outline and is chambered with a maple veneered top; it's thinner in depth, too, than our reviewed Aristocrats. Pickups reflect its more modern style – Seymour Duncan's classic JB and '59 humbucker setup – as does the hardware, which switches to TonePros' locking tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece. We still get that classic headstock, though, and this Bluesbird is available in Iced Tea Burst or solid Black (£809) finishes.

GUILD STARFIRE V WITH BIGSBY **£1,180**

Guild's response to the Gibson ES-335, the double-cut centre-blocked Starfire V was originally introduced in 1963 – and it has style. There's its wooden foot bridge base for one, and its master volume control just below the three-way toggle pickup selector (placed on the treble horn) is very different from the Gibson design. The Newark St version, again one of the original models, is a pretty close reissue, including its mahogany laminate construction, 'Guildsby' vibrato and a pair of those LB-1 mini-humbuckers. It's available in Cherry Red, Black and Snowcrest White. One of our favourites.



No Limits

Martin's big launch for 2020 is a very un-Martin-style 'crossover' guitar, strongly hinting at a desire to move forwards. A designer's folly or the future?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Neil Godwin



MARTIN SC-13E £1,599

CONTACT **Westside Distribution** PHONE **0141 248 4812** WEB **www.martinguitar.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 Bit late for an April fool, isn't it?**
 Calm down in the cheap seats! This electro-acoustic certainly pushes the envelope with its 13-frets-to-the-body neck join, offset body and heel-less neck joint, not to mention the subtler 'morphing' asymmetric neck profile. Together, it allows "a blurring of the line between traditional acoustic and more electric-like styles", says Martin.
- 2 So, this is a serious attempt at a new Martin, then?**
 Very much. It's the result of some serious R&D that started about four years ago and was ramped up in the past two. The concept is one thing, but a considerable amount of engineering was required to put it into production. We're surprised it's so affordable.
- 3 Who's it aimed at?**
 Martin admits it's not aimed at the die-hard fan or those obsessed with conventional acoustic playing styles. Martin says it was conceived from an intention "to fill a void in the marketplace: the desire to take one guitar to a gig that would cover all your acoustic needs but with more electric-like playability". We'd say it comes across as a 'crossover' acoustic for the electric player, or someone who's new to this whole playing lark who can't get on with the limited fret access and invariably higher action and bigger strings of a typical acoustic.

If you're a dyed in the wool Martin guitar fan, you might want to look away. By design, the new SC-13E isn't for you. "It's time to rethink what an acoustic-electric guitar can do," states Martin. If you're expecting a guitar loaded with digital images or perhaps the in-built acoustic effects of Yamaha's TransAcoustic technology, you'd be some way off the mark. The electro SC-13E does feature the Fishman MX-T preamp, which includes a very neat onboard tuner, volume and tone controls, plus a phase switch intended to maximise bass response at lower volumes and conversely suppress feedback at higher levels. This is all placed in easy reach just inside the soundhole, which was developed at the request of Martin for its Road Series – but that's it for any electronic trickery.

So, what exactly is the SC-13E? "It's looks like a Taylor that's been left on a radiator," quipped an onlooker at the sizeable launch of the guitar earlier this year at the NAMM Show. And, yes, that's the first most obvious difference: the new S-shape asymmetric body, a trendy offset if you like, that appears to take Martin's interpretation of Taylor's Grand Performer shape and drops its treble side, with it pulling the cutaway to a very un-Martin-like downward-pointing stance.

If that doesn't have you spluttering, flip the guitar over and that curve of the cutaway is mirrored flowing into the heel, or rather the lack of heel. Says Martin: "With our patent-pending Sure Align neck system, we removed the heel, providing full access to all 20 frets. No more contorting your hand to reach the high notes. Now you can comfortably play the entire fretboard."

To put the guitar in context, it sits at the top end of the Martin's Mexican-made Road Series, and the equivalent conventional model is probably the GPC-13E with its 14th-fret neck join, conventional heel but



Part of the Fishman MX-T electro system design is this very handy onboard tuner. Just plug in, switch it on and it mutes your output while you tune, as it should



The SC-13E's most radical feature is this Sure Align neck system, which Martin refers to as a linear dovetail joint, "allowing you to get to pieces of the guitar you couldn't before". It also features both neck pitch and intonation adjustment – accessed through the soundhole

still with the Style 13 appointments. It also comes with the same Fishman MT-X and a soft shell case. And just to add a little more confusion, the '13' in the SC's model name not only refers to that decoration style but also the fact that the neck joins the body at the 13th fret as opposed to the time-honoured 12th or 14th frets – one of the many firsts within this guitar.

Radical modernism aside, the SC-13E sits with the all-natural gloss-finished body of the upper-end Road Series and shoots for a very traditional Sitka spruce top, while the back and sides are referred to as koa fine veneer. "Some have got confused about the back and sides material," notes Martin's international marketing consultant, Steve Harvey. "It's essentially solid mahogany with a thin – we call it 'fine' – koa veneer over the top to give it some bling."

The body, then, has the simple white top-edge binding with a black/white inner purfling strip, although the back edge is unbound and you can see that laminate koa/mahogany/koa sandwich, especially under a loupe. Through the soundhole, you'll also see that the outer koa veneer is vibrantly flamed; the inner facing is contrastingly plain.

This guitar has few – if any – boundaries and a design that's a huge credit to the art and craft of the luthier

While you're peering through the soundhole, you can't help but notice the back's X-brace – mirroring the top's X-brace – surrounded by a circular label that looks like it's come off a vinyl record. "We've always been an X-brace guitar," says Martin's VP of product management, Fred Greene. "Martin invented the X-brace, but it's always on the top of the guitar and you can never see it: a feature experienced guitar players know about but new players do not. So, we just thought, why don't we put the X-brace in a place that you could actually see it? Just advertise it and put it out there. We experimented with using the X-brace on the back and it didn't really have an effect on the instrument, sound-wise, positively or negatively: it just looks good. And as a piece of whimsy, and not taking ourselves too seriously, we developed that

THE RIVALS

Taylor's 214ce (approx. £1,049) illustrates the friendly rivalry with Martin: it's made in Mexico, with a Sitka spruce top, 'layered' koa back and sides, and a cutaway to maximise the top-fret access. It's powered by Taylor's ES electro system.

Yamaha's LL-TA TransAcoustic (approx. £879) is made in China at Yamaha's own huge facility, and while it's a 14-fret non-cutaway design, it features the unique ability to add chorus and reverb to its acoustic sound. Perfect at-home guitar?

Our third choice here isn't a traditional acoustic at all but certainly provides some excellent amplified acoustic and electric sounds: Fender's Acoustasonic Stratocaster (£1,749). Via its doughnut-shaped soundhole, the unplugged acoustic response is certainly good enough for home noodling and practice, but it's the Fishman-designed acoustic voices that provide diversity and choice, and with a Fender Noiseless humbucker by the bridge, it all combines to create a hugely practical acoustic/electric hybrid.



Despite the forward-looking design, there's little decorative embellishment. This 'Celestial Bullseye' style inlay is about it and reflects the circular record label inside the guitar

ASYMMETRIC STYLE

The new body shape isn't the only asymmetric feature of the SC-13E. While Martin's Fred Greene explains the genesis of the new Low Profile Velocity neck design elsewhere in this feature, the neck "actually morphs from two asymmetric profiles: in the lower positions the bass side is rounder and fuller, the treble side with less of a shoulder – a shape that is virtually reversed in higher positions, the 'meat' moving to the treble side", Martin tells us.

The fingerboard is thinner, too: "Part of [the design] is making the neck feel how we wanted it," says Fred Greene. "Those fingerboards are thinner than what are on our regular guitars." Despite its electric-like setup, the frets remain very acoustic-like, measuring approximately 1.92mm wide by 0.9mm high on a fingerboard radius of 406mm (16 inches), which is pretty much an acoustic standard, although a lot flatter than the vast majority of electrics. Martin, of course, uses the computer-controlled Plek system to enhance playability – yet another example of the considerable high-technology that informs the modern Martin design and production.

label that looks like a record label. Just have some fun with it, that was all it was."

Thankfully, too, the traditional headstock reminds us this is a Martin guitar, as does the bridge. It certainly helps to temper the disorienting feeling of modernism.

Feel & Sounds

Bombarded with all sorts of online media, videos and the like, you'd think this new SC-13E was the second coming. And, yes, while Martin should get the trumpets out, it's quite a relief to spend some downtime with *just* the guitar. Quite a lot of downtime, in fact. Clearly, we were unable to try this on a stage (we're not sure the outside decking counts), but this is a well-aimed design that has way more scope than simply being our lockdown buddy. Die-hard acousticists might be a little sniffy, but those of us who just like to play guitar of any variety – electric, archtop or nylon-string – will be more than pleasantly surprised. Indeed, it's that latter category that is a good reference, especially the 'crossover'-style nylon-string

Little detracts from its purpose: a guitar you just want to play, and with zero adjustment from your favourite electric

that isn't designed to fill a concert hall. And yet crossover or hybrid guitars, call 'em what you will, can sometimes be jacks of all trades, masters of none, can't they?

As supplied, the setup chases Taylor's renowned electric-like playability, and in comparison with a 324ce we're a little taken aback. Even if you're not aware of what's going on with that neck shape, or indeed the fingerboard thickness (see 'Asymmetric Style' box above), true to intention it really does feel very comfortable in the hand. It also seems to be slightly more balanced on the lap with that offset body shape in turn perhaps offsetting any potential neck dive.

But back to the setup here and it's honestly the slinkiest Martin (new or old) we've ever played. It ships with custom light gauge (0.011 to 0.052) Martin Authentic Acoustic Lifespan 2.0 92/8 Phosphor Bronze strings. There's approximately 1.2mm string height over the 12th fret on the treble side; 1.8mm on the bass. This writer doesn't set his own *electrics* that low, certainly on the treble side. Our Taylor is frankly more regular but still quite electric-like, with its string height measuring 1.6mm on the treble and 1.8mm on the bass side. In terms of depth, the SC-13E's neck shaves a couple of hairs off the Taylor in lower positions: 20.9mm at the 1st fret, as opposed to the Taylor's 21.3mm. Depth at the 10th fret is bang on 22mm; the Taylor is 22.5mm. Coincidence or industrial

brinksmanship? There is a similarity, but the Martin neck feels less bulky, more electric-like than the Taylor and quite probably the reverse of your expectation.

If the idea was to create an all-rounder, Martin has pretty much hit it bang on. For conventional strumming and picking, not only is it very engaging, the neck shape feels neither narrow nor wide, over-thin nor thick, and you can say pretty much the same about its voice. The basses don't override the mids or the highs; there's a suggestion of OM or 000 character in that regard, and it certainly doesn't sound mid-focused or even boxy like a smaller size can. Yes, we could do with a little more strength on the high E as we move – effortlessly – past the 12th, and we can't help thinking a little more 'air' to the setup would help, especially if you're hitting hard with a pick.

Swapping between our now rather ancient Martin DC-16GTE, its neck feels skinnier in both depth and width – but, again, it's dimensionally very similar aside from its slightly narrower nut width. The dreadnought body has the sort of low-end that's wonderful around the kitchen table or on a solo piece but can easily overpower a recording, not least with a simple rhythm section playing along. The SC-13E seems almost pre-EQ'd to sit in a band recording.

But, clearly, this is a guitar that's designed to be played out live – when we have that



The Fishman MT-X electro system was designed for Martin's Road Series. Along with this easy access battery compartment, there are volume and tone controls, plus a phase switch, all accessible within the soundhole



While this unusual back-placed X-brace doesn't add or detract from the instrument's sound, it certainly reminds us of Martin's heritage. The top also features an X-brace, specifically voiced for the offset S-style body

luxury again. Amplified, for general use, then, there's little to complain about. That tuner is a handy addition, even though it's a little slow compared with the faster note recognition of our well-used Seiko STX7 headstock tuner – something to bear in mind if you use a lot of open or altered tunings. The actual volume and tone could be moved up a little to the waist area of the soundhole, too. Until you get used to it, finding the volume is a little harder than it could be. And because of the placement of the rotary controls, although 'up' is still clockwise, you're actually moving the control downwards toward the bridge. Do the same with the tone and you have a lovely sparkly mid-scoop; at the other extreme the response is flatter, aimed to sit better in the mix with a band.

So, there's not a huge range of amp'd sounds, especially compared with Taylor's ES2 system, which offers a lot more range from its dual treble and bass EQs and is also slightly less piezo-y in terms of the note attack – the SC-13E is marginally less realistic in that regard. But what is realistic when part of the intention here is to run the SC-13E into your electric pedalboard and amp? Now, that's not unique to this guitar (although Martin does mention that the offset body with its reduced 102mm/four-inch depth seems to help to limit feedback, relatively speaking), but using it through

our Line 6 Helix LT, it sort of just becomes another guitar, not just an acoustic, thanks to the combination of the extended easy access, the low string height and that neck shape.

The trouble is, after playing the SC-13E then going back to either our Taylor or Martin references, they both feel like clunky battleships and that high-fret access – while not for everyone – is a new standard.

Verdict

As with any heritage brand, coming up with genuinely new designs is problematic. Martin's conservative reputation, especially when compared with the modernism of Taylor, makes it doubly difficult. Except, of course, perception is one thing, reality is another, and there's plenty in Martin's canon, not least last year's Modern Deluxe series, that illustrates a more progressive intention. And the SC-13E is certainly that.

Certain elements, particularly the offset shape, might not be to your taste, but rather like Fender's Acoustasonic Tele and Strat, don't knock it till you've tried it. Overall, it's such a well considered design that little, if anything, detracts from its purpose: a guitar you just want to play, and with zero adjustment from your favourite electric. If you're into making music rather than cork sniffing, here's a guitar with few – if any – boundaries and a design that's a huge credit to the art and craft of the luthier. **G**



MARTIN SC-13E

PRICE: £1,599 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: 13-fret cutaway electro-acoustic

TOP: Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Koa fine veneer

MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm (4")

MAX BODY WIDTH: 394mm (15.5")

NECK: Select hardwood,

Low Profile Velocity neck shape w/ High performance taper

SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4")

TUNERS: Nickel-plated, open-g geared Grover w/ 'butterbean' buttons

NUT/WIDTH: White Corian/ 44.23mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, Celestial Bullseye style inlays, 406mm (16") radius

FRETS: 20, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony w/ compensated Tusq saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: Fishman MX-T w/ SoniCore under-saddle transducer, soundhole-placed volume and tone, phase switch and tuner

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.04/4.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Mexican-made Road Series is expansive and starts at £839 for the 000-10E all-matt finish

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently

FINISH: All gloss natural with satin neck back (as reviewed)



9/10

PROS Price, design, fingerboard access, electro system and both acoustic and plugged-in sound; a lot of guitar for the money

CONS The onboard tuner, though welcome, did seem a little slow; as supplied, the string height might actually be a little low!



Revolution Rock

Martin's vice president of product management, Fred Greene, explains some of the concepts and rationale behind the SC-13E, and admits that one aim of the design was to “upset the old guard”

Words Dave Burrluck

It's telling that the early videos made by Martin to support the launch of the SC-13E feature very electric guitar-style soundtracks. There are no delicate drop-tuned fingerstyle dabbings to accompany the images. It's all a little unnerving, a perception that's not helped in that no sooner do we catch up with Fred Greene than we're discussing our mutual love of Joe Strummer and The Clash. What on earth is going on?

"I'm sitting here with my Telecaster," explains Fred. "I have a Telecaster because of Joe Strummer. I always like that it feels good, stood up around my neck. I wanted an acoustic guitar that felt that way: not too big, not too heavy," he explains getting back on topic. "Certain guitars when you stand up and play can either make you look better or look worse. It's very hard to look cool playing a Steinberger, isn't it? It might play great, but... On the other hand, some guitars make *everyone* look cool. So we tried to make a guitar that when you stand up makes you look cool. It didn't look strange or weird, but it didn't look overly traditional. But then it has to balance in the right place on your knee, so, again, a lot of thought went into that."

It's pretty obvious that "a lot of thought" went into this entire project, but it did start with that shape. "It was an outline I sort of had been doodling. I'm a notorious doodler during meetings and while you often just turn the page, this one kept coming up again and again. There was a feeling of wanting that offset look on an acoustic guitar. How would that work for Martin? You know, that sort of Jazzmaster, Jaguar vibe. It just felt quite organic and easy to draw."

"But after we'd played around with it for a bit we could never seem to get the heel; it would be too difficult to manufacture a [conventional] heel with that slant [at the



The SC-13E began with a doodle by Fred Greene (above). Making the guitar required considerable investment, such as this treble side press (right)

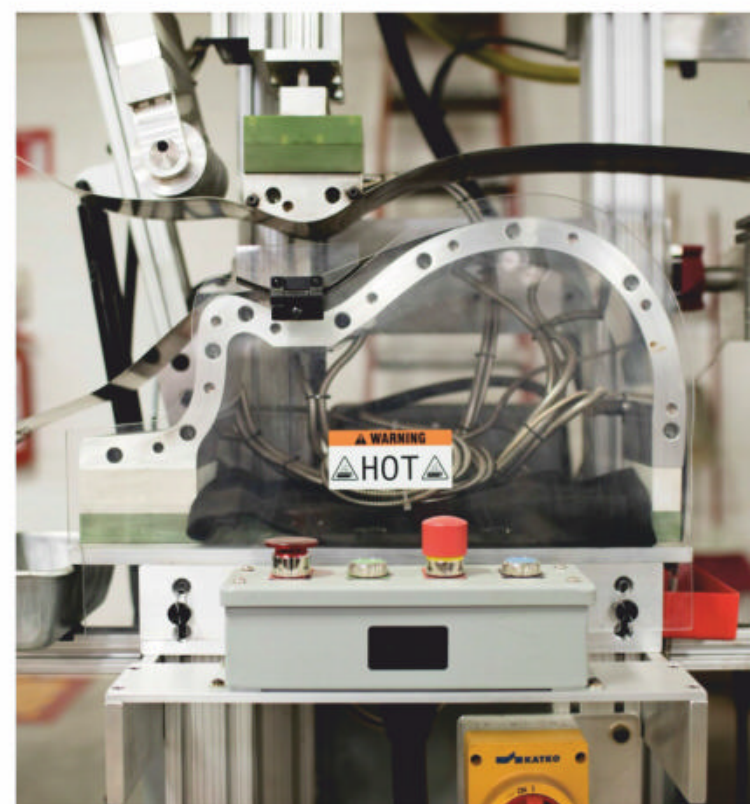
"The neck is a very unique hybrid of the bolt-on concept and the dovetail concept"

Fred Greene

top of the body]. That was what was holding us up and we also felt that the shape by itself wasn't compelling enough to justify the expense of all the tooling. It wasn't until we started thinking about changing the neck joint that it really became a project."

Clampdown

"There's certainly an element of a bolt-on at work, but not in the way you'd think of in most guitars today," Fred begins in explaining the new Sure Align neck joint.

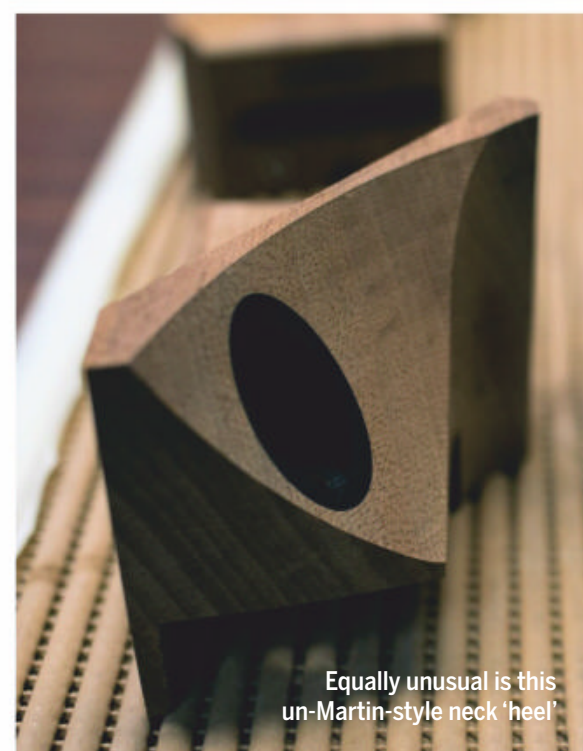


"You see two bolts [one in the scooped heel area and the other on the back], but in no way do they actually enter the neck of the guitar. So the dovetail is bolted on and, of course, the dovetail pulls the neck into the body, so it's almost an applied dovetail, more so than a bolt-on neck: it's a very unique hybrid of the bolt-on concept and the dovetail concept."

"We certainly had the opportunity to just bolt on the neck – and that would have been much easier for us," he admits. "It would have been effective and it would have worked, but it just didn't feel Martin-esque and we didn't feel it really moved the art of the guitar forward. So we wanted to challenge ourselves to do something that felt more true to who we are as a brand, but at the same time be as interesting and compelling from a sonic standpoint. By developing this sort of applied dovetail – where the two bolts enter a dovetail neck



Adding the unusual X-brace to the back of the SC-13E



Equally unusual is this un-Martin-style neck 'heel'

joint and then the neck slides onto the dovetail and then the dovetail is pulled tight to the body – we felt that *was* Martin, and Martin guitars have a dovetail neck joint. That allowed us, so to speak, to bridge the gap between a bolt-on and a traditional dovetail neck joint.”

As we state in our preceding review, it’s also the first Martin to feature a 13th-fret neck joint instead of the much more common 12th- or 14th-fret join. “It was about wanting the instrument to feel comfortable and look right when you stood up with it, but at the same time not be overly neck heavy. We wanted to retain that 25.4-inch scale length but for it to feel shorter, like a 24.9-inch scale, so that when you stood up with it, it was a little more like an electric guitar. The 13th fret thing then was a compromise piece allowing us to keep the bridge back, keep the 25.4-inch sound we liked better on this particular guitar, but at the same time it pulled the nut a little closer to the body in a way that felt a little more comfortable to play.”

The Right Profile

The so-called ‘Low Profile Velocity’ neck profile is another departure with the SC-13E, although part of its more electric-like appeal was actually inspired by a

“We wanted people to notice how easy the guitar was to play, so we set the guitar [action] low” **Fred Greene**

much older Martin. “Martin guitars have normally had symmetrical necks, but when we were doing some research as part of our Custom Shop Authentic instruments, we had an older OM-45 Deluxe in the museum; I think it was from 1931. Everyone really loved its neck and we decided to digitise it so we could recreate it. But going through our digital measurements, we discovered it actually had an asymmetrical neck shape. Now, the craftsperson carving that neck probably just took a little more off or made it the way they felt made it the best. Obviously, they weren’t using CNC machines in those days! But we loved it and we recreated that neck several years ago on an Authentic. Ever since then we’ve been toying with the idea of doing more asymmetrical necks.

“Technology today allows us to do things that just weren’t practical even 10 years ago, so I thought, ‘Well, what’s the point of having this technology that allows you to do all these things if all you’re going to do is cut straight lines with it?’ So we thought, ‘Let’s



take advantage of that [technology] and push the boundaries a little bit, understand that guitar players are changing and their expectations are different nowadays.’

“You’re absolutely right in terms of specifications of it being similar to the Taylor neck. We admire a lot of what Taylor does – they do some really great guitars and they are super-nice people. We talk. They’ve been to our factory; we’ve been to theirs. It’s not an adversarial relationship: we compete from a sales standpoint, but it’s a friendly competition. So we admired that neck and wanted to take that and move it one step further and make some modifications to it to feel the way we felt like it should be. We rounded the edges a little more and thinned it out in a couple of spots and just made it *our* guitar.”

As we report, the SC-13E’s setup is pretty low, even for an electric guitar, let alone an acoustic. “Yes, it is set low,” Fred agrees. “We wanted people to notice how easy the guitar was to play, so we sort of made

a point of making sure we set the guitar a little lower than we normally would. Part of the reason is that we made the neck easy to adjust and we don’t have that option on our other guitars – and we ship with light-gauge strings rather than medium. I think your readers should understand that you can get more volume and it will change the sound with medium-gauge strings, as opposed to light. This guitar seems to react to string gauge more.”

And although the Sure Align neck system allows pitch and intonation adjustment, “we’re advising people take it to an authorised dealer”, says Fred. “Later on we will be putting out ‘How to...’ videos, because no matter how much I tell people to take it to an authorised dealer so that everything gets done correctly, I know there are the adventurous types out there who are going to do it themselves anyway. It is pretty simple under the hood. It’s almost so simple it makes you feel like, why didn’t someone else think of this sooner?” **G**

6 String Acoustics



19453 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parbur, T. Red
19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
18340 - Atkin The Forty-Three J43, Aged Finish
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
19360 - Bluebird BR-63 000 Contemporary GF52035
18269 - Breedlove [Guitar] Acoustic, Strings
13910 - The Cort AF5100P Acoustic Folk Guitar
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
18240 - Faith FN Natural Neptune
19765 - Fender Redondo Player, Fiesta Red
19764 - Fender Sonoran Mini, Natural, 3/4 Guitar
14615 - Gibson Dobro, circa 1961, Original Vintage
19761 - Gibson J30 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
19120 - Gibson Vintage Ultimate J45 Ltd Ed, Used
19720 - Gretsch G9500 Jim Dandy 2-Color Sunburst
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
16760 - Martin D28 Re-Imagined Version
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
19459 - Martin LX1RE Acoustic Guitar
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
9185 - Seagull S6 Acoustic Guitar
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Outaway
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parbur
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
17056 - Tanglewood TWJ D Union Dreadnought
18602 - Vintage LHV3000FT Acoustic Lefthand, Nat
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR600PB Visitor Travel Guitar
12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
18948 - Yairi NY-65V NT Acoustic Parlour Guitar
18950 - Yairi YBF2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
18705 - Yamaha LL6 Acoustic Guitar, Natural

6 String Electro Acoustics



19524 - Maestro Custom LE Paffles KOCBAU
19523 - Maestro Custom Series Singa KOCSBK
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Paffles FCSBD
18258 - Maestro OO-IR Traditional Series Guitar
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WECSB C
19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria PHCSBAX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
19531 - Maestro Special Build Tlad. Series D-CO
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic
12418 - Martin & Co DX1AEL Acoustic Guitar
19244 - Martin 000-10E Guitar
19714 - Martin 000CJR10E, Cherry Stain B&S
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
19403 - Martin 00X1AE Guitar
19716 - Martin DX1E Koa Guitar
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
19390 - Martin D10E Electro Acoustic Guitar
16760 - Martin D28 Re-Imagined Version
19489 - Martin DJR 10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 + Signature Edition
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC1 1E Electro Acoustic
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
8039 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Natural
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
19497 - Maton EBG808L in Satin Natural
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Dreadnought
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Outaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium With Hard Case
19283 - Ovalion 1512 Secondhand
19113 - Ovalion 1627 Balladeer Glen Campbell Sig.
18952 - Ovalion 1761 USA Made Electro Acoustic
19339 - Ovalion 1771 V-1 GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovalion 2771 STR-MB Main Street
11087 - Ovalion Standard Elite 6778LX Black
19347 - Ovalion C2078AXR-KQA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovalion C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
19344 - Ovalion CE44L-5 Celebrity Elite - Left Hand
19338 - Ovalion 1771 STG-ES
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Outaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BIWS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17657 - RainSong CHPA1000NS Concert Hybrid
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - RainSong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - RainSong CO-WS1000N2
19557 - RainSong Co-WS1005NsM
19555 - RainSong NJM1000N2X
19556 - RainSong V-DR1000N2X
7974 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
18051 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar, USED
18316 - Seagull Entourage Autumn Burst CW QIT
18504 - Seagull Entourage Folk Burst Umber QIT
19672 - Seagull Performer Mini-Jumbo Flame Maple
19671 - Seagull S6 Cedar Original Slim QIT
19676 - Simon & Patrick Trek SG Dreadnought Nat
19571 - Simon & Patrick Woodland Parlour, Used
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parbur
15376 - Takamine EP360GF Glen Frey Model
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
19547 - Tanglewood DBT FE HR
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
14952 - Tanglewood TSFCE Black
19099 - Tanglewood TSP 15 CE
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 EWB LH, Left-handed
15582 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk CE
18214 - Tanglewood TW4ER, Electro Acoustic, Red
8293 - Tanglewood TW55NS, Nat, Secondhand
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
12305 - Tanglewood TWJFE
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
19660 - Taylor 220ce KDLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taylor GC8 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
18789 - Vintage LVE0501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18786 - Vintage VE300N Electro-Acoustic, Natural
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
18788 - Vintage VEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18791 - Vintage VGA900N Electro-Acoustic, Nat.
18790 - Vintage VGE900N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
15575 - Yamaha FGX720SCA, Black
19602 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tnt
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

Classical Guitars



19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electro Acoustic
15547 - David Peller Handmade Classical Guitar
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
0000 - Mendieta - 16 Models In Stock Now
9482 - Ovation 1616 Electro Acoustic Nylon, Nat
19346 - Ovation CS244 Celebrity Standard, Nat
12178 - Protection Racket Class Gtr Case Dk
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Anniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15291 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar Blue
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
17107 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
19471 - Stagg SCL50 4/4N Pack, Natural
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical Guitar

Ukuleles



16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19306 - Kai KSH1010 Series Soprano Ukulele, Mahog.
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
15833 - Koral UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
19464 - Mahab Halloween Soprano Ukulele Pumpkin
18223 - Mahab Java Soprano Ukulele, Sunburst
18195 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18196 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Brown
18197 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
15691 - Mahab MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
19480 - Mahab Snowflake Soprano Ukulele
18199 - Mahab Union Jack Soprano Uke
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digil" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Stainite Bottle Ukulele
8508 - Ohana FK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Ohana FK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
19007 - Ohana Pequeno All-Solid Soprano Uke
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21 Premium Mahogany Soprano
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15957 - Ohana SK28 Soprano Uke
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9051 - Ohana SK50 Soprano Uke
7108 - Ohana SK70MG Soprano Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
16017 - Ohana Ukuleles SK30M Large Neck Soprano
19008 - Ohana Ukuleles SK39 Mahogany Soprano
12740 - ResoVile Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
17059 - Tanglewood TWT1 Tiare Soprano Uke in Satin
17063 - Tanglewood TWT11 Concert Uke
17068 - Tanglewood TWT14-E Tenor Uke
17062 - Tanglewood TWT4 Soprano Ukulele
17090 - Tanglewood Tiare TWT SP Soprano Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
19697 - B&M Electro Acoustic Concert BMUK7CE
19695 - Barnes & Mullins Concert Uke, BMUK8C
19664 - B&M BMUK5CE Concert Electro Uke
15931 - Baton Rouge UR21C Concert Ukulele
19709 - Baton Rouge V2/C-OR Concert Uke Orange
19707 - Baton Rouge V2/C-SR Concert Uke Sunrise
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
18973 - Lu'au Concert Uke Ghost Burst Myrtlewood
18166 - Kai KCI 100M Concert Ukulele
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Soprano
18524 - Kiwaya KSU1L Long Neck Soprano Uke
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Ukulele With Case
13086 - Magic Fluke M40 Mango Concert Uke, USED
18203 - Mahab MH2CE Electro-Acoustic Concert Uke
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
19016 - Ohana CK14E Electro Mahogany Concert
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
13639 - Ohana CK22Z Concert Ukulele, Zebrawood
15958 - Ohana CK28 Concert Ukulele
12604 - Ohana CK35 Concert Ukulele
12603 - Ohana CK38 Concert Ukulele
19020 - Ohana CK70 A6
19021 - Ohana CK70M Solid Spruce Concert Ukulele
19022 - Ohana CK70R Spruce/Rosewood Concert
19023 - Ohana CK70M Solid Spruce Concert Ukulele
16022 - Ohana CK75CG Concert Uke
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
18277 - Tanglewood TWT10 [Ukulele]
17066 - Tanglewood TWT12-E Electro Acoustic Uke
17954 - Tanglewood TWT3 Concert Ukulele
18217 - Tanglewood TWT9 Concert Ukulele
19694 - Barnes & Mullins Ukulele Tenor BMUK8T
19700 - Barnes & Mullins Uke Tenor Walnut BMUK5T
19705 - Baton Rouge V2-B Sun Baritone Ukulele
19713 - Kai KTI-5000 Solid Acacia Tenor Ukulele
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_DAE)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
19392 - Kai KCI90 Concert Ukulele
19389 - Kai KCI30 Tenor Ukulele, Mango
19391 - Kai KTI90 Tenor Ukulele
10955 - Magic Fluke M20 Nat Fluke Tenor Uke UKE
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Elec. Bass, Fretless
18211 - Mahab MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele
19013 - Ohana BK35GCE Baritone Ukulele Uke
7101 - Ohana BK35G Baritone Ukulele Uke
19005 - Ohana BK70M Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
19004 - Ohana BK70R Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
0000 - Many More Tenor, Baritone & Bass Ukles In Stock

6 String Electro Acoustics



19673 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCRI Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
18336 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic CE 12-String
19661 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic Concert CE AB
18865 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic Concert CE
10265 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert AB SB
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
18875 - D'Angelico Excel Tammany OM Electro
18886 - D'Angelico Premier Gramercy Acoustic
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HIGloss Baritone Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Cognac
18899 - Faith FRIESB45L Dreadnought Electro Lefty
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Outaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFTH
18897 - Faith Neptune Classic Burst FNCESB45
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19575 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Nat.
19576 - Fender Am Acoustasonic Strat, TS Blue
18564 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Black
19760 - Fender CD60CE, Electro, Nat, Secondhand
16861 - Fender CP140SE, Natural
16862 - Fender CP140SE Electro-Acoustic Sunburst
19260 - Fender Malibu Player, Burgandy Satin
16889 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
19765 - Fender Redondo Player, Fiesta Red
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
5602 - K Yairi WY1 Natural
19069 - Kios F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Kios T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Kios F_AE Electro Acoustic
19070 - Kios T_A Acoustic Travel
19691 - Lantive D03 Dreadnought

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8"
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8"
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19483 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30, Black
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
1658 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

12 Strings



18336 - Breedlove Pursuit Exotic CE 12-String
18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
18792 - Vintage V5000SB12 Statesboro 12 String
18807 - Vintage VE5000SB12 Electro 12 String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB12 Paul Brett 12 String

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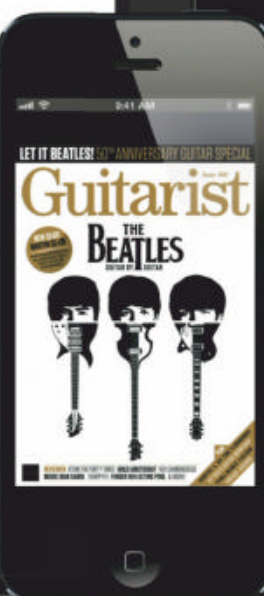
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FENDER

Reflecting Pool Delay/Reverb

Dive in for a sonic soaking with this one-box ambient solution

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

If you're going to have delay and reverb on your pedalboard, both effects in the same pedal can be a practical way to go about things by saving on space, power outlets and audio cabling, as well as likely looking neater. Fender's take on that particular genre is the Reflecting Pool, with separately footswitchable delay and reverb that can be used independently or together – the delay feeding the reverb. This good-looking stereo and mono pedal appears on the surface to be a combination of the Mirror Image Delay and the Marine Layer Reverb, but it's much more than just that. While those may have formed the building blocks, the features of each have been expanded for more versatility, and both offer nine variations on their effect instead of six for starters.

SOUND

The delay side of the pedal is equipped with an easily operated tap tempo footswitch allied to seven selectable subdivisions. If you're not using tap tempo, the Time knob selects the delay time from 10ms, where you can dial in a neat dry modulation through to a full one-second delay. Standard Feedback and Level knobs respectively adjust the number of repeats and their volume against the dry sound through to fully wet, while modulation can be added via Rate and Depth knobs, whether that be subtle chorusing or more wayward pitch fluctuations.

The final knob in the delay section is Mix, which controls the feature that sets this particular delay apart from many others on the market. As with the Mirror Image's fixed-volume extra dotted eighth

note, you can add in a secondary repeat related to the main repeat. Here, however, you get control over its volume, the relative levels of this secondary tap and the main repeat being set via this Mix knob, which has a 50:50 mix at its central position. There's plenty here to sculpt some tasty U2-style rhythmic echoes with three choices of how the two relate in timing to the quarter note: the second tap can be 50 per cent (eighth note), 66 per cent (quarter note triplet) or 75 per cent (dotted eighth note).

As for the actual sound of the delay, you have a choice of straight digital delay, a BBD analogue delay emulation or a tape echo emulation. Each has three variations of repeat quality: one standard, the others progressively degraded. The Analog and Tape delays both reflect the tonal flavour

01. DELAY TIME KNOB

This sets the delay time but has a secondary function: if you hold down the Tap footswitch, you can set a timing subdivision for the tap tempo

02. DELAY MIX KNOB

This pedal lets you add a second time-related repeat to the main repeat and you can mix between 100 per cent main repeat and 100 per cent secondary repeat with this knob

03. DELAY RATE & DEPTH KNOBS

If adding modulation to your repeats appeals, you can do it with these Rate and Depth knobs; the LED flashes in time with the modulation speed (rate)

04. REVERB TYPE & VARIATION SWITCHES

A combination of these two switches delivers nine reverb types: Small, Medium and Large Halls and Rooms, plus Shimmer, Gated/Reverse and Modulated reverbs

05. REVERB EXTRA KNOB

Here's where you can adjust a parameter that's specific to each of the Special reverb types selected. It also controls the amount of bass in the Hall and Room reverb tails

06. SUBD SWITCH

This subdivision switch sets the timing of the second delay tap in relation to the main delay



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb & delay pedal

FEATURES: True or Trails bypass, 10ms to 1,000ms delay range, tap tempo, firmware updates via USB, LED markers on control knobs

CONTROLS: Reverb Decay, Reverb Damp, Reverb Level, Reverb Extra, Reverb Type switch, Reverb Variation switch, Delay Time, Delay Feedback, Delay Mix, Delay Rate, Delay Depth, Delay Type switch, Delay Subdivision switch, Delay Quality switch, True/Trails bypass switch, LEDs on/off switch, Reverb footswitch, Tap footswitch, Delay footswitch

EFFECTS TYPES: Hall Reverb, Room Reverb, Special Reverb, Digital Delay, Analog Delay, Tape Delay

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Left/Mono, Right), standard outputs (Left/Mono, Right), Tap footswitch, USB

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 250mA

DIMENSIONS: 170 (w) x 125 (d) x 63mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

of the originals very well, but that extra nuance of lower fidelity and altered EQ conferred by the Quality switch options greatly increases flexibility.

There are three selectable reverb types, Hall, Room and Special, each with three variations. The Hall and Room variations are small, medium and large versions of the chosen space, but select the Special type and it will offer a Shimmer reverb with high octaves, a Gated/Reverse reverb and a Modulated reverb.

Besides knobs for reverb Level, Decay (length of tail) and Damp (high-frequency roll-off), an Extra knob controls low-frequency roll-off for the Hall and Room reverbs but adjusts the Shimmer reverb's octave level, sets the Gated/Reverse reverb's tail shape to determine whether you hear reverse, gated or just a typical

small space, and controls the mod depth of the modulated reverb.

The Halls and Room reverbs are workmanlike in delivering a varied palette of space around your playing, but given Fender's legacy, it's odd that there's no dedicated spring emulation included. Nevertheless, you can conjure up some pretty decent substitutes for onboard amp spring sounds with the controls on offer. The Shimmer reverb offers tasty ambient pads hanging cloud-like behind your playing, while the Modulated 'verb also delivers large floaty ambiances. We were less confident of the musical applicability of the Gated reverb, but some players will undoubtedly find a use for it, while the Reverse reverb proved to be the sort of effect that you can dig into and release your inner freak.

VERDICT

While combining separate pedals could possibly be more focused for specific needs and give a wider range of options, this two-fer is a very balanced and practical pedal with enough variety in both of its sides to fulfil the needs of many players. On the delay side, the three basic flavours of the last six decades are amply covered, while that second delay tap opens up many possibilities, and the reverb complements the delay well. Together, they could deliver all the ambience you'd need on a gig. **G**

PROS Simple operation; two effects in one pedal; flexible use of a secondary delay; tap tempo with a range of subdivisions; variable delay repeat quality; optional LED-lit controls

CONS We'd liked to have seen a specific spring emulation

ROUND-UP

Fender pedals

The SoCal giant bolsters its pedal line-up with another batch

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

What, more Fender pedals? Yes, once Fender got started with its new range of all-original pedals back in 2018, the company has just kept pushing 'em out in regular batches. At the time of writing, there are 22 available with who knows how many more on the way. This time, we're looking at a pedal genre that Fender hasn't tackled before, an envelope filter, as well as a couple of dual-footswitch units that build on some of what Fender has already released – a fuzz pedal with extended

feature set and a pedal that offers both compressor and distortion circuits. There's no surprise in the styling – it's the same anodized aluminium chassis with practical offset input and output jacks, a 'jewel' bypass LED, and the familiar knobs with blue LED position markers that can be turned off if you don't need them lit. Power is by nine-volt adaptor or nine-volt battery, which has probably the easiest access of any pedal we've seen – the whole of the end of the pedal is a pull-down flap. Neat.



Pour Over Envelope Filter £129

Envelope filters, eh? One could make the case that Mike Beigel's Musitronics got it right with the Mu-Tron III in the 70s and that everyone since has been using that template and just adding their own bells and whistles. Fender's first foray into the genre has a similar set of controls to a Mu-Tron on the right with the familiar three-way filter choice (high-pass, low-pass and bandpass) and an Up/Down switch. Here, however, there's the addition of a distortion section on the left-hand side via a toggle switch. Without the distortion, there's plenty of variations of auto-wah, quacky shifted tonality and filter sweeps available with careful juxtapositioning of the controls, but bringing in the distortion adds an instant edge and throatiness that can make those filter sweeps more synth-like and get you closer to talkbox-like sounds. As a bonus, you can use the distortion on its own – possibly adding some tonal shading rather than filter movement. **G**

VERDICT There's plenty to explore here if you're up for taking your pedalboard in more of a leftfield direction



The Trapper £129

What's better than a fuzz pedal? Answer: two fuzz pedals. The Trapper isn't exactly that, but it does feature two different fuzz voices and lets you footswitch between the two. Fuzz 1, which has Fuzz and Level controls, is a smooth everyday silicon fuzz that is also capable of octave fuzz via a toggle switch that adds in that extra harmonic element. The second fuzz is more full-on hooligan, and while it only has a Level control it also has an integrated noise gate, the idea being that you use your guitar volume and tone controls to bring out its variations – back off your guitar volume for sputter and glitch. Both circuits feed an EQ array consisting of a Tone knob that rolls off treble and a Contour knob that has bass boost/treble cut at one extreme and the opposite at the other, with scooped mids at its centre. Between the two knobs you can dial in loads of tonal variation, from thick and woolly to eardrum-shredding spikiness. **G**

VERDICT Three fuzz flavours in one box (if you count the octave fuzz) is a definite bargain in our book



Compugilist £129

Fender has drawn on its The Bends compressor and Pugilist Distortion to create the Compugilist, which puts separately switchable compressor and distortion in one pedal. While you don't get the full feature set here, you do get the essential controls for each. The compressor side is in the classic Dynacomp mould, keeping your dynamics even but capable of getting squashier and adding some snap to the start of your note, the nature of which can be dialled in with the Recovery knob, usefully adjusting the compression envelope. Meanwhile, the volume knob is capable of building in a boost. The distortion has plenty of range, from edgy early break-up drive through to cranked amp, with a Tone knob to adjust the upper-mid presence and top-end, plus a switched Bass Boost for fat low-end. This pedal offers plenty of practical options, such as using the compressor as a boost for the drive or using both sides to build your overall tone. **G**

VERDICT Compression and distortion are a good fit in one box and their combination is well implemented here

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Envelope filter pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Tone, Gain, Freq, Q, Level, Drive, Distortion switch, Filter switch (HP/BP/LP), Up/Down switch, LED kill switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 75mA

DIMENSIONS: 95 (w) x 125 (d) x 64mm (h)

7/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 2x fuzz voices, selectable octave

CONTROLS: Tone, Contour, Level 1, Level 2, Fuzz 1, Octave switch, LED kill switch, Select footswitch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 80mA

DIMENSIONS: 95 (w) x 125 (d) x 64mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Distortion and compression pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Tone, Gain, Level, Bass Boost switch, Recovery, Comp, Level, LED kill switch, Distortion footswitch, Compression footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 75mA

DIMENSIONS: 95 (w) x 125 (d) x 64mm (h)

9/10



ROUND UP

ThorpyFX pedals

Revisit Lovetone's roots with 'MK II' Big Cheese and Brown Source effects

Words Rod Brakes Photography Olly Curtis

So far, Dan Coggins' ongoing collaboration with ThorpyFX has yielded two modulation pedals, The Deep Oggin chorus/vibrato and The Camoflange flanger, and The Fat General compressor, a design that evolved directly from his now-discontinued Dinosaural OTC-21 compressor. In a similar vein, The Bunker overdrive and Field Marshal fuzz hark back to Dan's long out of production Lovetone Brown Source overdrive and Big Cheese fuzz circuits. Building upon the enduring success of the original 90s boutique boomers, not only do these 'MK II' ThorpyFX

versions feature additional ranges of sound and function, they also come in a more rugged, compact and pedalboard-friendly format. And without a several hundred quid price tag!

With more of Dan's authentically enhanced Lovetone circuits in the pipeline (a revamped version of the Meatball envelope filter is next, we understand), we decided to find out why so many people have been retiring their original Lovetone pedals to the safe confines of the home and studio while investing in the next best thing. Or should we say the next *better* thing?



The Field Marshal £189

In classic ThorpyFX military style, The Field Marshal derives its name from "the biggest cheese in the army", according to founder Adrian Thorpe, and is based on the Lovetone Big Cheese circuit designed by Dan in the early 90s. This flavour of fuzz falls somewhere between a Big Muff and a Fuzz Face, but with a new and expanded range of functions it could easily be viewed as several fuzzes in one box.

The original Big Cheese featured a four-way switch that has been supplanted here by a three-way toggle – enabling gated fuzz, flat mids and midrange hump (from top to bottom) – and a tone stack bypass footswitch labelled Cheese. This can be used as a solo boost and/or to switch between two distinct fuzz sounds. Unlike many fuzzes, The Field Marshal doesn't appear to be overly fussy with respect to its position in the signal chain, and with the ability to clean up using the guitar volume control, a large palette of very usable sounds can be explored. **G**

VERDICT An expanded range of fuzz sounds encompassing the unique feel and tonal character of its much-loved predecessor



The Bunker £189

Much like a bunker is covered in brown dirt, so too will your signal with this upgraded version of the Lovetone Brown Source overdrive. The prototype was voiced using a Tele and Hiwatt amp while aiming for *Jumpin' Jack Flash* guitar tone, and The Bunker manages to capture that stack-in-a-box overdrive sound in spades, covering an impressive amount of sonic ground with depth, dynamics and cut.

Similar to the Big Cheese/The Field Marshal, the four-way tone switch of the Brown Source has been reworked to include a three-way EQ/tone Mode toggle with a tone stack bypass footswitch labelled Sauce. When engaged, the sound is brighter and more gain-y with the Texture control set between nine o'clock and minimum. Adjusting Texture – a feedback loop producing intermodulation distortion – adds harmonics and complexity to the sound, and, with the knob set around four o'clock, is roughly in line with the fixed position of the original incarnation. **G**

VERDICT A more flexible and rugged version that should appeal to a wider variety of contemporary guitar players

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: Tone stack bypass; 3 modes (gated fuzz, flat mids & enhanced mids)

CONTROLS: 4x knobs: Vol, Fuzz, Tone & Balance; 2x footswitches: Bypass & Cheese; 3-way Mode selector switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input and output jacks; 2.1mm barrel (centre negative)

POWER: 9V DC (adaptor not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 65(w) x 125 (d) x 53mm (h)



9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Tone stack bypass; 3 tone modes

CONTROLS: 4x knobs: Vol, Drive, Texture & Tone; 2x footswitches: Bypass & Sauce; 3-way Mode selector switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input and output jacks; 2.1mm barrel (centre negative)

POWER: 9V DC (adaptor not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 65 (w) x 125 (d) x 53mm (h)



9/10





DIY Not?

To build or not to build? Adrian Thorpe advises a reader on a Pete Cornish-style pedalboard project

THE BACKGROUND

PETER COLLISTER, [Via email](#)

I have a mid-sized pedalboard with a homemade plywood carcass, two plywood decks on split levels, power supply underneath and mostly concealed cabling below the decks. Being left-handed, I have hard-wired jacks in the left-hand side of the carcass so I don't have a cable trailing across my legs. It works really well, but I wondered about making it look more like a Pete Cornish rig – and also making it a fair bit lighter. Maybe I could take all the pedal innards out and bolt them all up to the underneath of an aluminium top plate within a ply carcass. The question is, is there any reason not to do this in aluminium, such as earthing between pedals? I'm not electrically minded, but I am reasonably handy at building stuff in wood or metal.

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A CORNISH- OR BRADSHAW-STYLE ALL-IN-ONE RIG?
- 2 ARE THERE ANY REASONS NOT TO DO THIS?

THE ANSWERS

Peter, that's a very interesting project to be contemplating. Pete Cornish built his business upon making custom professional rigs for industry heavyweights such as David Gilmour, Brian May and Andy Summers. The requirement for such a rig was not to do with weight, though, as at that time all of these players had absolutely monster rigs with huge amounts of amps that dwarf the weight of any pedalboard. They all had massive amounts of roadies to carry the gear, too. Let's discuss the other reasons for this route.

01 The first benefit was simplicity of use, in the same way that many people seek multi-effects units to simplify their gigging workflow. Well-spaced-out large footswitches helped the pro clientele operate them on a dark stage, while enhanced and integrated power meant their 'boards would work anywhere on their international touring schedule. This power also needed to cope with the 'noisy' unpredictable power of differing voltages. Buffered input and outputs ensured signal loss and degradation was kept to a minimum over long cable runs. On top of this, the 'board needed to be robust enough to handle being thrown around on trains, planes and trucks yet be quickly set up ready for soundcheck. It's hard to believe now, but all of these benefits are taken for granted.

Pete Cornish built this S/N 0595 Mk 2 All Tube system for David Gilmour in October 2005



02 Considering the benefits, what are the reasons for not doing this? You mention you aren't electrically minded, which, to me, is a massive red flag, so I really wouldn't proceed if you're not confident. In fact, I'd actually recommend against doing this work anyway. First, the weight you'll save won't be all that great considering the spacing you'd have to put in place to make the pedals useful. Second, you're pretty much stuck with the pedals you choose at the project's start, which removes the whole benefit and joy of owning pedals – swapping and changing them as your mood takes you. Third, it won't be any more robust than a well

designed and built pedalboard. Finally, there is a whole lot of value lost when you dismantle a pedal and remove its warranty. That, coupled with the fact that not all pedals integrate easily with others and many use different switching methodologies, means you may end up with more problems than you expect. This is especially true if you can't plan for these eventualities.

I feel very badly about not presenting a more enthusiastic approach towards this idea, as it is possible to do it right, but I strongly believe that individual pedals on 'boards is the best solution for 99.9 per cent of guitarists. Good luck with your pedalboard journey.

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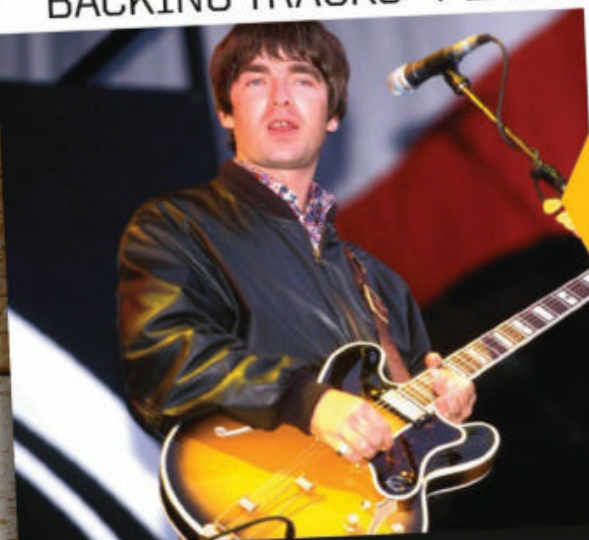
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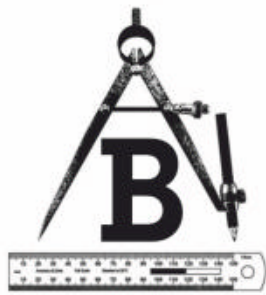
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« BLUEPRINT »

ROCKET MEN

In a new series of features on how guitar gear is designed, Tim Mills talks about the tricky technical challenges of crafting Bare Knuckle Pickups' new Silo humbuckers for the formidable guitar talents of Rabea Massaad

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Josefa Torres & Bare Knuckle Pickups

Music never stops moving and the current generation of virtuosic but eclectic players are demanding more versatility and performance from their gear than ever before – especially when it comes to pickups. Rabea Massaad is well known from both his work in bands such as Dorje and also from his insightful YouTube demos of new gear. His playing ranges from intense, geometrically precise metal to Hendrixian fusion but also serene soundscapes of clean, contemporary tone. Therefore, making him a signature set of humbuckers to cover all bases without being bland was an intriguing puzzle that Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups was happy to take on.

“Rabea’s used my pickups in his guitars for donkey’s years,” Tim reflects. “He’s a very genuine person and he’s absolutely 100 per cent obsessed with playing guitar and creating music. So I felt that it would be interesting to see if we could really home in on a set of pickups that would define who he is as a player.”



Bare Knuckle’s Tim Mills founded the company in 2003 – and with many years as a session and touring guitarist under his belt before that, he is a bona fide master of tone

Rabea had long used Bare Knuckle’s Warpig humbuckers, but wanted an even greater breadth of tones than these deceptively flexible high-output pups could give him – posing Tim one of his toughest design challenges for a while.

“Rabea is very much at the forefront of a modern movement of guitar playing. He has a very broad skill set: some of the music he plays is very heavily down-tuned and there’s a lot baritone work, but then again, there’s a lot of stuff he does that isn’t, too. So the design had to sort of straddle a wide range of six-string applications but be able to handle other tunings as well.”

Fortunately, Tim has developed a system for working with artists that helps him target exactly the performance they want from pickups – a process that is informed by his knowledge of what makes guitar players tick.

“Once I had the list of qualities that Rabea wanted, I went away to start working out how I could voice a set of pickups to reproduce those tones,” Tim explains. “Rabea was quite strict with his brief in that he wanted the pickups to be





1. The process began with a blind test in which pickup prototypes were identified only by colour, meaning Rabea Massaad could select a favourite without being unconsciously influenced by spec. After a front-runner was identified, further play-testing took place to refine the design

2. Perfecting the Silo humbucker involved a lot of good old fashioned elbow grease, with Tim Mills swapping tweaked versions of the prototype in and out of Rabea's guitars throughout the design process

3. The new pickup was designed to an exacting brief from Rabea himself, including a requirement for the pickups to have two rows of adjustable polepieces



what we call a twin screw-coil design. Humbuckers traditionally have one coil with adjustable poles – screws, if you like – and one that has slugs that are non-adjustable. But there is another way to design humbuckers, where both coils have adjustable poles. These alter the way that the pickup performs quite a lot as a general rule, and typically reproduce more bottom-end.”

With this distinctive design feature as a starting point, Tim took the first steps towards crafting a sound and feel that Rabea would click with.

“The trick I’ve found with artists is that the first thing you’ve got to do is get the output range right: you’ve got to put them in their comfort zone. It’s no good trying to take them way off leftfield with something that they’re immediately going to be uneasy with. So the output range has to be the first thing. Then you can start looking at what tonal colours and flavours you can put in and around that.

“After that, it’s about sitting down and working out what wire gauges I’m going to use and deciding which magnets will put me in the kind of output range that Rabea will be comfortable with. Because, if he’s comfortable, he’ll sit and he’ll play naturally – and then we can start to focus in on actual tones. But if I put him in an uncomfortable area, where he’s digging around for drive or snap or what have you, he isn’t going to be able to focus on the tone.”

“What I like to do is to force the artist to only use their ears. This is a little game that I’ve evolved over the years”

Tim duly worked up some prototypes and soon had a feeling that one in particular was going to be a standout. However, he says it was important to set up a blind test that removed the possibility of preconceived ideas muddying the selection process.

“What I like to do is to force the artist to only use their ears,” Tim explains. “This is a little game that I’ve evolved over the years with all the signature artists. We’ll get together with the artist in a recording studio and they’ll bring along their guitars. Bear in mind I’ve used my own prototyping guitars up to this point, so I’ve got a very good idea of what to expect from the pickups in a range of different instruments, with different tonewoods and so on.

“I generally bring along maybe about five or six sets of prototype pickups and they’re labelled with numbers or colours, rather than written descriptions. So the artist has no idea what is inside each of



4



4. You can't have a signature pickup without a unique cover design to go with it!

5. Each pickup from the group of prototypes was recorded so that Rabea could analyse the performance of each prototype on screen and compare it to the others

6. The Silo is designed to offer a great deal of sonic flexibility, while still delivering aggressive high-gain tones when required

5



6



the prototype pickups and this is actually helpful, because over the years I found that if you start telling an artist the spec beforehand, it starts to colour their judgement. They can get so absorbed with the spec that they're not actually listening any more, when in fact this test should be 100 per cent about tone."

Tim then enlisted the help of Periphery bassist and producer Adam 'Nolly' Getgood to set up the perfect environment for sonic evaluation.

"We got together with Adam 'Nolly' Getgood at his studio just outside Bristol. Adam is a fantastic adjudicator to sit in on these sessions, because a) he's an amazing guitar player, and b) he's got an incredible set of ears. He's an incredible mix engineer and producer, and he's also somebody that's well known to Rabea and myself, so everybody's comfortable. I set up my workshop in a room at the studio and basically gutted one of Rabea's guitars and loaded the first set of pickups.

Rabea then went and sat with Adam and they started recording some test pieces of music while I prepped up the next guitar for the next set.

"We went through this process all day. Basically, all Rabea knew about the pickups was a colour: that's a gray one, that's a blue one, that's a red one... He had no idea of what the magnets were. I also played another little game with Adam. He and I have worked together for at least 10 years now and he knows quite a bit about pickups, so I got him to write down what he thought was inside the pickup, making notes as to whether he thought it was an Alnico or a ceramic. What sort of wire gauge was used? And had I used offset coils or symmetrical coils?

"During this process, Rabea started to score the pickups and, actually, a favourite emerged relatively quickly: one set was head and shoulders above the rest for him. And, invariably, I know which pickup it is that is 'the one'. But

I often say to the artist, 'If I just came along here with one pickup, put it on the table and said, 'There it is,' it's almost a bit of a damp squib.' They have to find it themselves, if that makes any sense. At the end of the day, I'll normally reveal what it is they've chosen and quite often it's a bit of an eye opener."

The pickup choice that was a clear winner for both Rabea and 'tone umpire' Adam 'Nolly' Getgood was conventional in some respects – but unusual in others. The finished pickups were built with the required twin screw-coils housing Alnico V magnets but wound with 42-gauge wire for the neck and finer 44 AWG wire for the bridge. This yielded a measured DC resistance of 7.18kohms for the neck and 15.7k for the bridge, though it's important to note that pickups wound with finer wire can be deceptive, as the extra number of turns increases the measured resistance without necessarily making them blunt-instrument gain monsters.



7. Designing a pickup for Rabea Massaad's guitar style was a challenge from the outset. Tim knew that Rabea's sound included both clarity and precision and bone-shaking depth and power. Of the end result, Rabea says, "The Silo humbuckers give me everything I need and more"

8. Colour-coded prototypes in Tim Mills' workshop. He tried several approaches to the design as the Silo not only had to work for Rabea but other players, too. Tim took the challenge on the chin: "No biggie, then," he laughs



"What Rabea wanted from the bridge was very, very different from what he wanted from the neck," Tim recalls. "So it was quite a challenge getting two pickups that were tonally so different to sit together as a pair. Rabea is a very dynamic player and likes to use a lot of split[-coil] tones up on the neck – so I had to make sure we were leaving headroom there, because he wanted a bright, open, clear sound. The neck pickup was obviously going to have a moderate output. Meanwhile, for the bridge, he wanted depth in the midrange and a very full high-end, so that single notes didn't sound thin. Again, I had to do that without soaking up all the headroom, so that when he backed off, notes would bloom naturally. It was a tough remit, but it was a lot of fun," Tim reflects.

Rabea was very happy with the result, but Tim says it was still necessary to test the pickups in the live environment before they hit the button and put the

pickups into production – as ever, live performance reveals weak points in gear with unforgiving clarity, which helps ensure the finished product is absolutely fit for purpose.

"We loaded up some of Rabea's live guitars and he did a little festival run to test them under fire," Tim says. "Because that's always a very good way of telling it if you're in the right zone with something. Sometimes in the studio you can tweak gain levels and so on and so forth and get

»
"Sometimes you can get comfortable in the studio, but stood in front of a crowd... That's the definitive test"
»

comfortable. But when you're actually stood in front of a crowd, if your gear is not working for you, you soon know it, because your playing goes completely out the window and notes are dying under your fingers. That always has to be the definitive test. After a couple of months of play testing and putting them on some other guitars that he owns, Rabea came back and signed off on them."

The last aspect of the design process, though unrelated to performance, was the important step of giving Rabea's new pickups a name. Rabea was clear from the start that he didn't want to make a set of niche 'metal' pickups but something that a wide range of players could take inspiration from.

"Rabea said, 'I want these pickups to have a really broad appeal. It's got to work for me – but I want for it to be able to work for lots of other players, too...' Right. Okay. No biggie, then!" Tim laughs, recalling how this turned the thumbscrews on the



LOUDER THAN BOMBS

Rabea Massaad gives us his take on the design process...

Why did you want to design a signature set of humbuckers?

"I started using Bare Knuckle in 2007, when Tim used to answer sales calls himself – it was that long ago [laughs]. He put me onto his Warpig humbuckers back then, and I tried other ones out, but that was the one that, for some reason, was best for what I was trying to do. It had great dynamic range, even though it's really high-output. That might sound silly to say, but for some reason I could get quite a lot out of them for the kind of thing I was trying to do.

"But then when it came to doing the Silo and the opportunity to actually design something from scratch, I think it was that I wanted the Warpig to be the foundation but actually to try to clean it up. That was my thought process – because it was really good for aggressive tones, you know? The Warpig has really good string definition and it was just a very angry-sounding pickup in the context I was using it. But [these days] I like to use similar tones but play lighter and get more of a clean tone from the guitar. I like Les Pauls and Strats and the more old-school tones you get from them – so I wanted to incorporate some of that lighter, more classic character into the pickup that I used but at the same time have it be really aggressive, which was what was missing from traditional humbuckers, for me.

"The way I run my rig, I very much use the amplifier for my drive and only use fuzzes to make things very intense. But where I need

the pickups to do the most work is the main rhythm sounds and all the kind of ambient crisp, clean stuff. Particularly if I'm playing more dynamically, the Warpig did have quite a honky midrange. And although I needed that for the heavy stuff, we tried to [tame that in the new pickups] so they could do justice to the dynamic, ambient stuff as well."

When Tim revealed the spec of the prototypes you liked best, did it surprise you?

"To be honest, no. I've always preferred Alnico from when I was playing with the Warpigs [which come in Alnico and ceramic versions], and even though I started using ceramic pickups in more recent guitars, just something about it wasn't the same – I think it was the edginess of it. Me and Nolly were talking about it before we actually tried the prototypes that became the Silo, in fact. He was showing me one of his guitars, a PRS Modern Eagle, and I can't remember what the pickups were, but I think they were an Italian brand. But anyway, we were commenting on how wide and defined the whole guitar was sonically in terms of the low-end, top-end and midrange being smooth but it being very clear, even with a lot of gain. It was funny, because the next pickup Tim brought up was the 'blue' coloured prototype and we just put them in and it was like, 'That's exactly the quality that we were talking about,' and we sort of looked at each other and went, 'Wow, definitely that's the one!'"

www.rabemassaad.com

project's difficulty a bit more – and was possibly the most tricky aspect of the brief.

"When you're given a remit that is quite wide there's a danger you can get lost in that and end up with a jack of... nothing," Tim laughs. "If that happens you end up with a very generic-sounding pickup."

Fortunately, both artist and designer rose to the occasion and came up with a set of contemporary humbuckers that is at once distinctive yet accessible – and offers flexible performance characteristics for guitarists who bring a lot of light and shade to their playing.

"We came up with this idea of a 'silo'," Tim says of the name they finally chose for their creation. "It just seemed to embrace the contemporary nature of his playing, I suppose. It also gave us a couple of good marketing angles, because silos are where rockets and things come from – so these pickups are where we keep the tone bombs," he laughs. **G**

www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk



Rabea Massaad needed a pickup that could handle the breadth of his style and technique – and the Silo answered his call

Longtermers

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

Kemper Profiler Stage Floorboard

with Jamie Dickson



Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist, Editor-in-chief



Editor Jamie tackles a recording project without mics or valve tone – but will

Kemper's newest profiling amp be the answer to his prayers?

During the first instalment of this test, I decided to try out Kemper's unique approach to digital amplification because my valve amp, a Dr Z Jaz 20/40 was proving too noisy for home recording. I made a quick call to the good folk at Kemper and they suggested I simply hang on to the Kemper Stage we reviewed back in issue 456 for the duration of this longterm test.

The Stage is the latest incarnation of Kemper's profiling hardware and resembles a floor-based multi-effects rather than the head-like units that preceded it. Many really big touring acts (including Mark Knopfler) now use Kemper's live for their consistency, portability and editability – and many pro session players swear by them, too. Kemper calls its devices Profiling Amps, meaning they run a diagnostic signal through a real valve amp to determine how it reacts across the full spectrum of its performance envelope. It then makes a digital 'profile' of that amp that can be stored and loaded up on any Kemper device. When you play through the resulting profile, it sounds and reacts eerily like the

"The beauty of the Kemper is that it can lead you to unlikely but luscious-sounding pairings of gear"

amp it's been generated from, and thousands of such profiles have been created by Kemper and its growing community of users. Consequently, all the Holy Grail amps, from Dumbles to vintage Marshalls, can now be found, in profile form, aboard Kemper's digital amps – and you can even profile your own amp to create a digital doppelgänger to store and play. Will this mean green machine deliver the panoply of classic valve tones I'm after and obviate the need for mic stands and leads cluttering the place, too? It's time to find out.

As I previously discovered, the Stage really requires you to consult the manual from the get-go. The learning curve is consequently steeper than with Line 6's Helix – that I've gigged with in the past – which is pretty intuitive. For starters, the screen on the top



The Stage allows you to experiment with a host of vintage and lesser-known profiles to yield myriad ear-pleasing results

of the Stage doesn't deliver the colourful graphical representations of signal chains we've come to expect from Line 6, HeadRush et al. Kemper instead opts to use front-panel space for a range of physical controls, in the form of robust, tour-proof dials and buttons, rather than large touchscreens and the like. They're not alone in this design philosophy: Fractal's floor-based AX8 modeller/multi-effects processor also rejects big colour screens in favour of a more workmanlike, physical interface. You may prefer this way of doing things, you may not. Either way, it takes a little getting used to if you're more familiar with iPad apps than rackmount gear.

The core of the machine, from a tone-creation point of view, is the Stage's 'Stack' section of controls. This horizontal line of 12 buttons represents the classic signal chain, from input to output. At its centre are the Amplifier and Cabinet buttons, which are used to activate and edit your choice of amp profile plus whatever cab you want to match with it. To the left are four buttons that cover the effects that usually go in front of an amp, such as overdrive, wah and fuzz (buttons A to D). To the right are four buttons set aside for the kinds of effects you'd typically put in the effects loop of an amp, including delay and reverb. At the far left of the row is an Input button for editing input levels and input sources, and at the far right, an Output button does the same for output levels and routing.

The Stage operates in two main modes: Browser Mode is optimised for creating and storing rigs; Performance Mode is for use

when you want to access your preferred tones during live performance, as on a pedalboard. As my first task is to create some virtual rigs that I like, I'm going to start in Browser Mode. The first step is to choose an amp profile to form my rig around. To do so I hit the Amplifier button in the Stack section of the controls and the main display now focuses on a list of possible amp profiles to choose from.

After trialling some profiles of vintage Vox, Fender and Marshall amps, I plump for a mysteriously named 'Rainheart Mimic Me' profile, which a quick internet search suggests is a profile of a Reinhardt Mini Me, an eight-watt boutique amp from the US. Further auditioning of cab types leads me to a profile called Mars 1960AV. You don't have to use much imagination to guess that its origins are nearer Milton Keynes than the Red Planet... This combo yields some surprisingly sweet, haunting clean tones – and that is really the beauty of the Kemper. You can just try stuff out until your ears like the result, which leads you to sometimes unlikely but luscious-sounding pairings of gear you'd probably never have put together in real life. I then use the Mod button in the right-hand side of the Stack section to dial in a tremolo. Add a touch of spring reverb and things are sounding soulful indeed – and so I save this little combo out as my first user-created rig.

Before my next report, I'll create some more tones that I think will be useful for my project – and we'll start getting them down on a recording, where I can A/B them against my mic'd-up Dr Z. May the best amp win... **G**



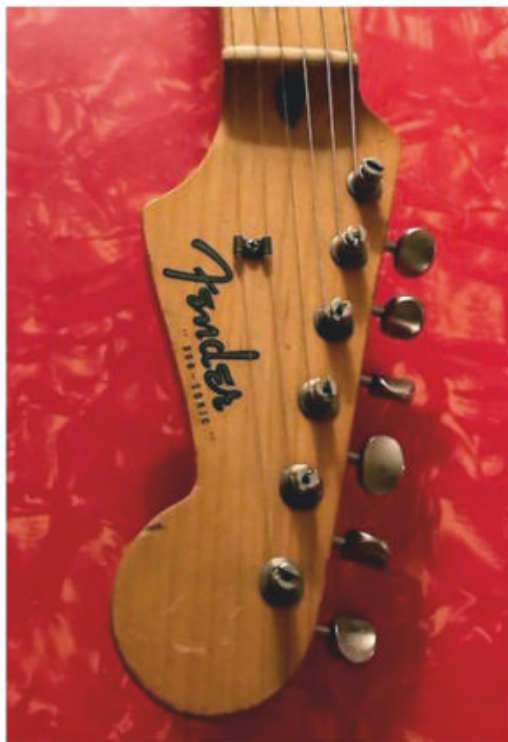
JIM CAMPILONGO

Tele maestro and member of The Little Willies with Norah Jones, Jim reflects on some trading experiences...

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I bought a 1956 Fender Duo-Sonic. I bought it because Luca Benedetti, the guy I play with frequently in Honeyfingers, came over with one and I just fell in love with it. The neck was like this perfect C shape. I mean, it's a smaller scale, but that said, it just kissed your left hand. And the bevel, where the fingerboard curves on the top and bottom, is so lovely. Not to mention the Desert Sand paint job and the gold anodised pickguard, and somehow the silver volume and tone knobs look perfect. The middle position is just an amazing-sounding configuration. Honestly, the front and back pickups by themselves are wonderfully crappy – real low-fidelity – but that middle position... all of a sudden it's a great jazz sound. So I bought one on Reverb, I think it was about \$2,000 – still a really affordable vintage instrument."

Love at first sight: the "perfect C shape" neck, Desert Sand finish and middle-position sound all attracted Jim to his newly acquired '56 Fender Duo-Sonic



What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"It was a Gibson 330 and it was 300 bucks. It was, I guess, around 1975. I played a borrowed Tiesco for a couple of years and, literally, my right hand would bleed after I played it, because where the bridge was, there were these two screws sticking up and, you know, I was a teenager and very passionate about music and I pressed my right hand down on the guitar and I wouldn't notice, but there'd be blood. My parents helped, but I got a Gibson 330 and I sold it, I don't know, 10 or 12 years after that. It was back in the day where I was struggling and I think I sold it for rent or some awful reason."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Well, I mean, I don't know. I look to see if the guitar has been played; that's a real bonus. You know, fingerboard wear and if the pickguard looks like somebody was flailing away. And if a guitar is played, to me, that's a real good sign. The other thing is how does it sound when it's not plugged in? I mean, a solidbody – what does it sound like acoustically? Those are kind of the two obvious things I look for. I'll play the whole thing, for sure, meaning that I might run some arpeggios from the 1st fret to the 12th and I would bend the G on the 15th fret up to the B $\flat$ and see what happens. If it frets out, which they do a lot... I mean, it's kind of difficult sometimes to get that. So if it frets out, then why? Is it the setup? Do the frets need milling, or whatever the word is? Bend it up in the higher register, just to see if it's speaking or not."

"Quit putting bells and whistles on [guitars]... I feel it takes the guitar out of my hands"

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've had?

"For some reason, back in the 80s, I got this Hamer and I don't know why it was, it just seemed like a good idea at the music store. I was at Guitar Center and I brought it home and instantly didn't like it, so I brought it back and got my money back. The other thing was a Gibson Lab Series amp, again in the 80s when I was young and still, you know, very, very curious. I think it had a compression thing on it and it seemed like a really good idea at the time. But I think I returned that and got my money back, too."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"Oh, yeah. That Gibson 330 and I had a '54 Les Paul with the single-coil pickups that I sold for 800 bucks. I had a red Silvertone with the amp in the case – really cool –



PHOTO BY FEDERICO CHIESA

and what made me feel really bad is that a lovely friend gave it to me and I really liked it, but I wanted to get an acoustic. I don't know what I was thinking. And I got this Yamaha acoustic with mostly the money I made selling the guitar. And I looked back and it was kind of betraying my friend's generosity. I was a stupid kid, you know, a stupid teenager, like 15 years old. Those are the three."

Are there any common design features on electric guitars that are an instant turn-off for you when you're auditioning a potential new guitar?

"Yeah, anything that's a modification. I don't like push-pull tone controls, I don't like Lace Sensor pickups, I just think that Leo Fender got it right. Quit putting bells and whistles on it, those things annoy me, I feel it takes the guitar out of my hands – like those potentiometers that 'add tone as you turn them down'. Somebody thought of that and was really proud of themselves. It sounds good on paper, but it's like, 'Why? I'll just do it myself – and maybe I don't want my tone to increase when I turn down.' Actually, I really don't want it to. That's just a deal-breaker."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at?

"You know, it was about maybe two months ago and I was looking at these little lap steels. I can't remember what brand they were, but they were not Fender. There were these beautiful little lap steels with probably poker-card emblems on the fingerboard to indicate the fret.

I can't remember specifically, but there were a few of them and I was really thinking I would love to have one of those and learn to play it, you know? It was at Southside Guitars in Brooklyn."

If you were forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or would you prefer to have a cheap guitar and a really top-notch amp?

"Cheap guitar, top-notch amp, assuming it plays in tune. If a guitar plays in tune, no problem; I'd enjoy the cheapness of it. I mean, even in the context of our interview, the Duo-Sonic: the bridge pickup, like I said, it sounds kinda cheap. But, man, it sounds great and if you play it through an amp that has some oomph – it's wonderfully idiosyncratic and has a unique voice."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your life, which one would you choose and why?

"Oh, boy, big mystery. I have never, ever owned a humbucking guitar. Other than that Hamer, which I owned for about three hours. And I have been playing guitar, I think, for 47 years. I'm not saying they're bad, but even my Les Paul had single coils. So yeah, single coil." **[JD]**

Jim refers to the '59 Fender Tele he's owned for over 25 years as his "musical home". It's a string-through-bridge design, whose sound Jim describes as "a bit more 'rubbery' than a standard Tele"



The Best Of Jim Campilongo – Volume One (vinyl) is available now via Sundazed Records

www.jimcampilongo.com

VINTAGE FENDER FINISHES

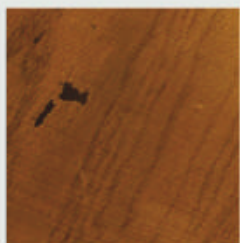
In a new column that demystifies a topic each month, we shed some light on the colourful (yet often murky) past of Fender finishes...

Today, we have more information than ever about the vast topic of vintage Fender finishes. However, the line where science meets art can often get blurry and so the subject remains full of conflicting facts and opinions from the top down.

Manufacturing techniques and materials have chopped, changed and evolved over time, along with the personal touches

of those who were working in the factory, and it seems there have always been exceptions to the 'rules'. Consequently, over the years, much confusion has arisen with regards to the dark art of guitar finishing, despite some well-established truths. Here we aim to furnish you with a good handful of that demystifying knowledge... **[RB]**

1 BLONDE

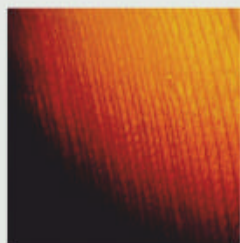


Traditionally applied to ash-bodied Fender guitars, blonde was the standard transparent finish on Fender's first solidbody electric models released in 1950, the Esquire and Broadcaster (renamed the 'Telecaster' in 1951). In the post-war period, blonde was a popular choice of

furniture finish, and in the early days before a spray technique was developed, Fender used furniture lacquers from McFadden and Sherwin-Williams and applied them by hand. Known as 'Blackguards' on account of their black pickguards, these instruments often yellowed over time to a butterscotch hue.

In 1954, white pickguards became standard on Teles and Fender began using DuPont Duco (nitrocellulose) automotive lacquer routinely. These later blonde finishes are more UV-resistant and generally appear lighter than aged 'butterscotch' Blackguard Teles. The transparency of blonde finishes can vary considerably, and in extreme cases they are sometimes mistaken for the opaque Olympic White custom colour. It remained a standard finish on Teles until 1981.

2 SUNBURST

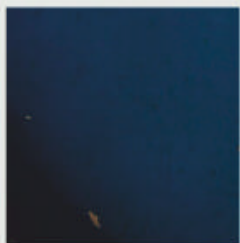


The Stratocaster was the first Fender guitar to receive a sunburst finish as standard upon its release in 1954. This original two-tone nitrocellulose lacquer sunburst consists of an outer layer of Dark Salem brown graduating into Canary Yellow. Two-tone sunbursts continued

until 1958, when Fender began blending in a Cherry Red to create three-tone sunbursts. Unfortunately, the red hue faded dramatically when exposed to UV light (much like Gibson's late-50s Les Paul Standards). Consequently, many of these instruments appear to have a two-tone sunburst.

In 1960, a more UV-resistant red lacquer was utilised, and by 1961, the deep brown outer layer was darkened to near-black, creating a much bolder appearance. In 1964, Fender began spraying the bodies yellow in addition to using a yellow dip-dye, creating a more opaque effect. These vibrant, contrasting three-tone finishes are sometimes referred to as 'target' sunbursts. Throughout these changes, sunbursts were applied by hand and, therefore, naturally vary in appearance.

3 CUSTOM COLOURS

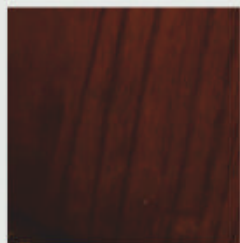


Throughout the 50s, Fender occasionally obliged customer requests for unusual finishes and, in 1957, its catalogue officially offered custom colours for Stratocasters, Telecasters and Esquires "at an additional five per cent cost." Fender's first custom-colour chip chart was put together in 1960

and displayed a choice of nine DuPont Duco (nitrocellulose) colours – comprising Shell Pink, Black, Daphne Blue, Sonic Blue, Fiesta Red, Dakota Red, Sherwood Green Metallic, Foam Green, and Surf Green (note, no 'Sea Foam Green') – along with five DuPont Lucite (acrylic) shades, namely Olympic White, Lake Placid Blue Metallic, Shoreline Gold Metallic, Burgundy Mist Metallic, and Inca Silver Metallic. Both finishes were topped with a nitrocellulose clearcoat.

Throughout the 1960s, several shades were replaced, beginning in 1963 when the über-rare Shell Pink was replaced by Candy Apple Red Metallic. By the mid-70s, however, a broader range of stock finishes temporarily supplanted the concept of custom colours itself.

4 POLY



Later Fender poly finishes (meaning polyester or polyurethane) are much harder wearing and more production-friendly than the nitrocellulose and acrylic materials that were mainly used up until 1968. In the early 70s, Fender proclaimed that its "thick-skin, high-gloss finishes

provide Fender instruments with an outer beauty that is both durable and attractive". Such was the company's confidence and enthusiasm for poly that it even had the term 'thick-skin' federally trademarked.

Despite the inferior rep of these finishes, countless players managed to change the course of music history perfectly well with a poly-finish guitar, including Jimi Hendrix. These days, many of us can appreciate the silky, driftwood-like feel of a decades-old nitro neck that's been worn matt smooth by countless hours of playing, but back in the pre-vintage/pre-relic era of the late 60s, trying to keep the ever-more numerous customers happy with harder, more roadworthy music gear was the order of the day (lighter fluid notwithstanding).





HOME-GROWN TONE

Ever fancied building your own guitar but feel daunted by the options? Dave Burrluck, or rather Trev Wilkinson, has the answer with a new range of all-in-one kits. How hard can it be?

Around a couple of years back, partly as a response to the criticism that *Guitarist* only writes about gear that costs an arm and a leg, I put together a cheap-as-chips guitar from a Chinese kit that cost roughly £100, including strings. To say it stretched my lapsed guitar-making skills is an understatement, but after a fair bit of swearing and fettling I did create a perfectly giggable instrument, even though the original pickups are now in service as fridge magnets. It was a vivid illustration of you get what you pay for.

Mind you, it did rekindle my passion for DIY guitar building, despite the fact the only ‘workshop’ I have is my well-used kitchen table and a large box of hand tools inherited from my father and grandfather. But as we’ve said countless times, to build a bolt-on (assuming the neck and body are made for you), you need little more than a couple of screwdrivers, a soldering iron and some setup tools. Yes, ‘luxuries’ such as a bench drill press, or even a flippin’ bench, would be handy, but for many of us those are things we dream about.

Earlier this year, Mod Squad mentor Trev Wilkinson announced a range of mid-priced guitar kits that are a whole different level to those Chinese kits I’d wrestled with earlier. Priced around £500 apiece, they include everything you need to “create

a true ‘legend’”, and are of impressive quality, made in India by Harmony Musical Instruments. Indeed, the overall kit quality was high enough to impress StewMac’s Dan Erlewine – a respected figure in the world of guitar repair and building – who immediately placed a large order. If it’s good enough for Dan...

What’s In The Box?

Us guitar nuts are odd, aren’t we? A simple spec sheet can get our pulses racing, and that’s the first thing I checked when I received a TE 52 kit. No prizes for guessing what we’re going to be building, but we’re looking at a list that includes a one-piece maple neck with single-action truss rod, and vintage-style frets on the original-style 184mm (7.25-inch) radius’d neck face. The body is alder, not ash (there is a worldwide shortage of lightweight ash), but it’s two-piece centre-jointed with

“To build a bolt-on, you need little more than a couple of screwdrivers, a soldering iron and some setup tools”

a good weight of 2.14kg (4.7lb), which, added to the 0.53kg (1.17lb) of the neck, is pointing towards a good light weight for the finished guitar. These unfinished parts are nicely machined and impressively sanded with plenty of vintage reference. It’s a good start [pics 1 & 2].

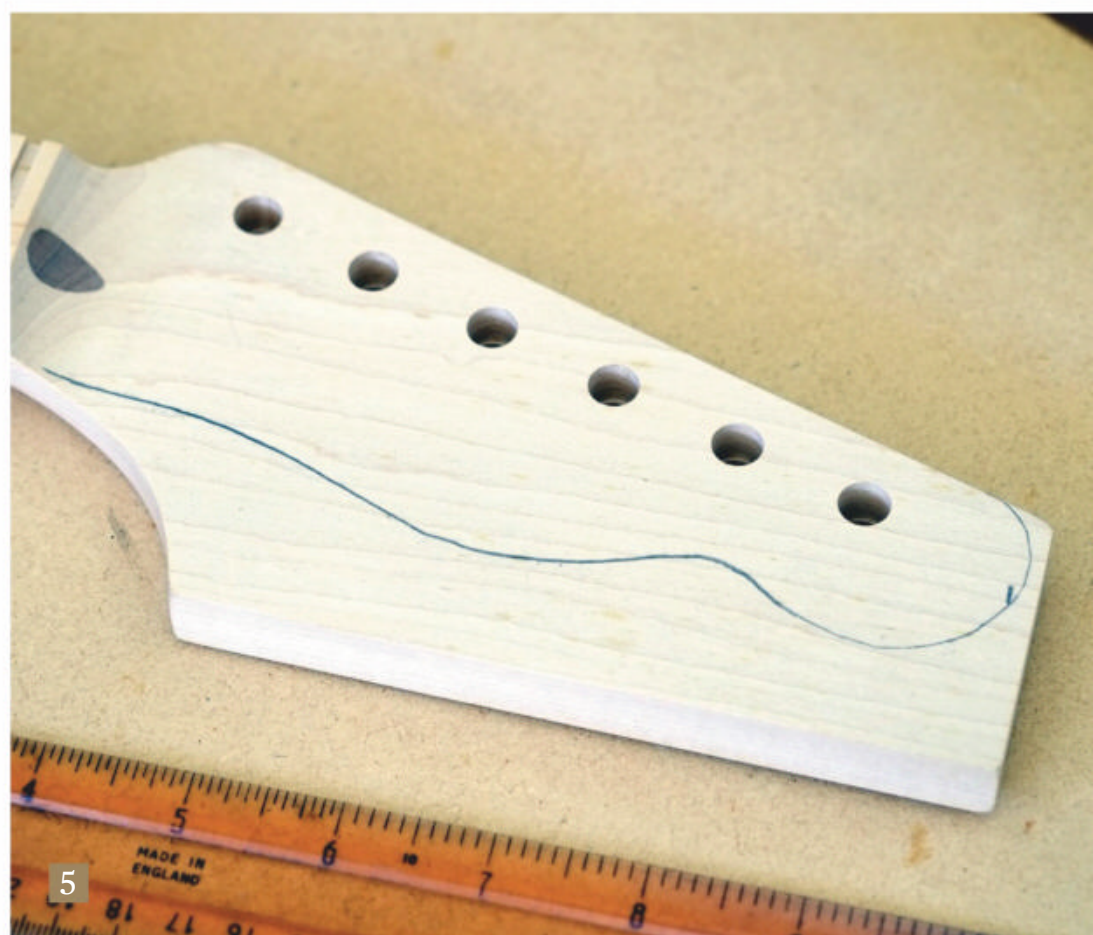
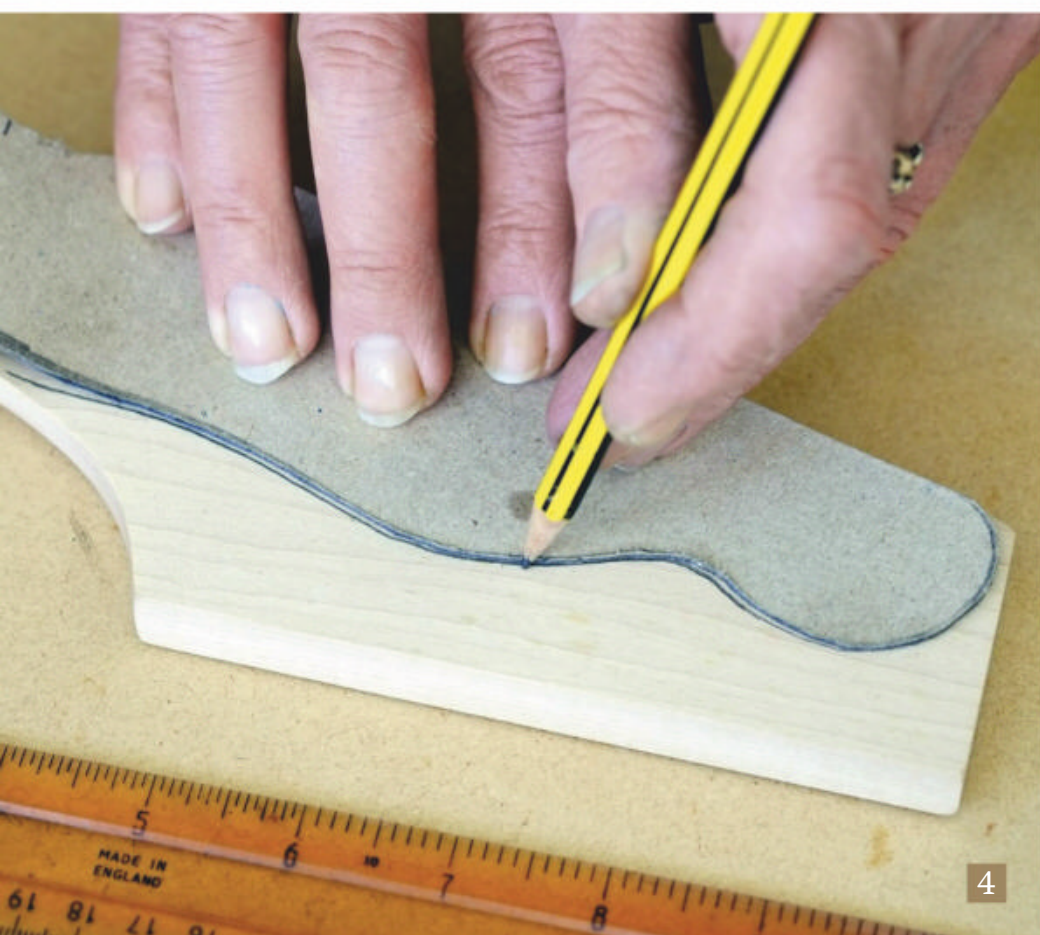
The hardware, obviously, is by Wilkinson, so it’s not exactly 100 per cent vintage ‘1952’ in appearance. The Tele-style WTB bridge, for example, has its ‘Wilkinson by Sung-il’ logo but comes with both compensated brass saddles and holes for top-loading. You’ll have recently seen this on Fret-King’s Country Squire. The WJ55 tuners, however, look the part with slot-head posts and Kluson-like rear covers. Trev draws further into his parts empire with a pair of Tele-specific, Wilkinson-logo’d single coils: a WVOB at the bridge and covered WVTN at the neck [pic 3, opposite].

A quick glance over the control plate and you see some tidy wiring with a CRL three-way pickup selector and CTS 250kohms pots, which reflect the kit’s ‘professional’ aim. There’s even a cap/resistor treble bleed circuit on the volume: plenty to investigate when we get there. It’s worth mentioning to those who have a fear of soldering that all you’ll need to do is attach just two wires to hook up the output jack.



The guitar, with its authentic Bakelite pickguard, is now all prepped and ready for assembly





Where To Start?

Like any good kit, this one comes with well-written assembly instructions that are printed on old-fashioned paper – such a relief from having to sit through a rambling YouTube video. All good. The only problem I’m facing is that Trev sent me a ‘paddle’ headstock neck (as I had with that previous Chinese kit build) that needs transforming into something that resembles a headstock before I can get to the fun part. And, yes, Wilkinson is offering more classic-style headstock shapes, but obviously the paddle type allows you to be a bit creative if that’s what you fancy.

Now, cutting a headstock shape [pics 4, 5 & 6] with just a coping saw, the neck held to my ‘bench’ with a G-clamp, isn’t something I’d be suggesting anyone does unless they have some pretty sound woodworking experience. You’ll then need some files and rasps to smooth the outline and create the back curve if, like me, you were going for a stylised Tele-ish headstock. So, while certainly not impossible at the kitchen table, I’d definitely suggest being a bit less ‘creative’ and getting a kit with a more familiar headstock already cut for you.

Anyway, where to start? I need a plan. As ever, a list of questions always helps. Clearly, part of the aim of these kits – and I’d guess the intention of many builders – is to create that professional ‘Custom Shop’ Tele- or Strat-alike, probably with a vintage reference or three. You might even be thinking of upgrading the pickups or parts to create your ‘ultimate’ partscaster with a pristine finish or a beat-to-hell relic job. The reason you need to give this some thought is that if you’re planning to apply

a production-style finish, it’s best to do it before you start assembling the guitar. Once you’ve pushed the tuner grommets into the headstock, for example, you don’t want to be removing them before you apply a finish, even if it is possible.

Of course, building ‘in the white’ without any finish means you can actually see, feel and hear what you have before you start thinking about finish, a pickup swap, ageing the hardware and so on. If you’re more adventurous, you might think about reshaping the neck a little and there’s nothing stopping you adding rib-cage and forearm contours to your slab body.

“Ultimately, I’m looking for a ‘Tele’ to record with, vintage inspired in terms of sound but without any intonation issues”

Personally, I’m not going to bother too much about the finish at this stage, because I need to evaluate just how good this actual kit is. Ultimately, I decide, I’m looking for a ‘Tele’ to record with, certainly vintage inspired in terms of sound but without any intonation issues. I’m less worried about what it looks like, because the reality is nobody but me will see it. The secondary plan – probably for future a Mod Squad column – is to experiment with the early Esquire/Tele circuits.

Keep Calm & Carry On

But to backtrack a little, before you start spending time on the neck, not least cutting that headstock, you need to evaluate it. All we know about the truss rod is that it’s single action with the adjustment at the base of the neck, period-style. Simply unscrew that cross head nut [pic 7] so there’s no tension on the neck and double-check the neck for straightness. Hold the neck on its side and sight down the edge of the fingerboard bass side then treble side. You’re looking for a pretty straight line. What you don’t want to see is a forward hump; the only thing that will straighten that is the string tension, because a single-action truss rod can only *add* tension and increase that hump. Much less of a worry – so long as the neck isn’t twisted – is a slightly concave dish. A little tension on the truss rod should easily correct that. This neck seems very straight with no tension on the truss rod. Checked with an 18-inch straight edge laid down the centre of the fingerboard, it’s not rocking (which would indicate that convex hump we don’t want). Using a shorter straight edge or something like StewMac’s Fret Rocker [pic 8], the frets are pretty level, although they might need dressing when we get to the setup, especially if you want a low string-height on this small radius fingerboard.

Having spent a couple of hours cutting, shaping and sanding the headstock, I was now ready to prep the neck and body. I started with the neck. Again, I’ll say it, this is a really good neck. Technically rift-sawn with slightly diagonal grain that sits between slab- and quarter-sawn, the machining, shaping and sanding of the



neck is excellent. The fingerboard edge is left very clean and sharp, unlike a real '52's whose fingerboard edges will be rounded with wear. If this were a rosewood fingerboard, I'd leave any thought of rounding or 'rolling' the edges until we're at the setup stage, that way you can get a more realistic feel. Obviously, those edges don't wear round on the bass side, for example, where the neck sits in the body. Invariably, too, there would be more rounding in the centre of the neck. Here, though, we need to round the edges before we apply any sealing finish. I used a flat-backed razor running up and down the edge at approximately 45 degrees [pic 9], slowly flattening and increasing that angle to round the edge and simulate that wear. Don't go mad, less is always more – and as I'm planning to use an oil finish, I can always increase the rolling at a later stage and just apply a little more oil.

It's already 'fine-sanded', but I lightly sanded again and moved through the grades from 400-, 600- to 800-grit then finished off with fine wire wool, creating an almost burnished feel.

Measuring the neck after this very light sanding, we have a depth of 22.5mm at the 1st fret and 25mm at the 12th [pic 10] with a really well-graduated deep C profile. Nut width is 41.63mm [pic 11], 51.8mm at the 12th and 55.72mm at the 21st fret. How does that actually compare with an early 50s Tele? Compared with the specs from that gorgeous Seven Decades '52 Tele we looked at a while back, the kit neck is very close, a little deeper but only by a hair or two. The frets are very well installed with a quoted gauge of 1.98mm (0.078



12

inches) wide by 1.1mm (0.043 inches) high. 'Vintage small', in other words – and with the original fingerboard radius, we're in for a pretty vintage-specific drive.

When I was satisfied with the prep, I applied a few coats of Danish oil – actually three, leaving some time for the oil to dry between coats [pic 12]. When fully dry you can lightly smooth it with 0000 wire wool, or a similarly fine abrasive pad, and apply some wax. Oil finishes do need maintenance, but I love them. You can clean, even resand if necessary, and over time and some playing they'll burnish up to a silky smooth sheen.

The body? Again, it really is a nice piece: very cleanly machined and very well sanded. However, there's a bit of a question mark on my planning list as I'm honestly not sure whether I should do a 'proper' finish or keep it *au naturel* and mirror the neck finish. Personally, I'm less of an oil-finish fan when it comes to the body, although there is plenty of potential to stain then apply a brushed varnish (very 70s) or a pseudo French polish. First off, though, put some time aside and sand through the grades again – use a cork or similar sanding block and spend time on the sides to maximise any of the grain and figure.



13

Before your final rub, a wipe with a damp cloth will not only let you see the how the colour will look after it's had a clear finish but also raise the grain so that when dry, and after your final sand, it becomes ultra-smooth. You might have an orbital sander or similar, but, hey, there's little wrong with our hand method and some good ol' elbow grease. After all, there's no production manager looking over your shoulder.

I then wiped it over a couple of times with a pine stain and when fully dry applied a few coats of French polish. I left it for a full 24 hours, before very lightly cutting it back with 800-grit on a felt-backed sanding pad, then hand-buffed with a very light polishing compound [pic 13] and lastly a light polish.

Next comes the fun part: the assembly. See you next issue! **G**

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Wilkinson by HMI TE 52 guitar kit

COST: £500 (approx)

TYPE: Excellent quality all-in-one guitar kit, all you need is strings

PARTS: Alder body, maple neck with 184mm fretboard radius; Wilkinson hardware and pickups; CRL and CTS electrical components

SKILL LEVEL: Intermediate; needs some experience for nut, setup and finish

Contact: support@wilkinsondirect.com

Web: www.stewmac.com

PROS & CONS

PROS Superb quality wood parts, hardware and electrics

CONS Too many logo'd parts can spoil a vintage-intended build

Guitarist GOLD 10/10

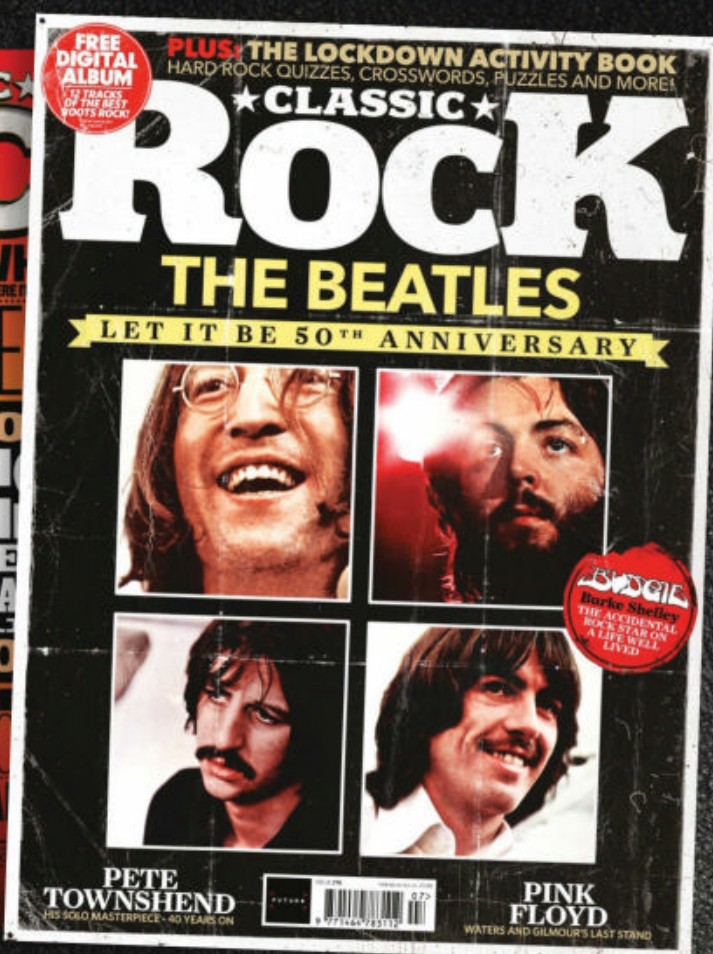
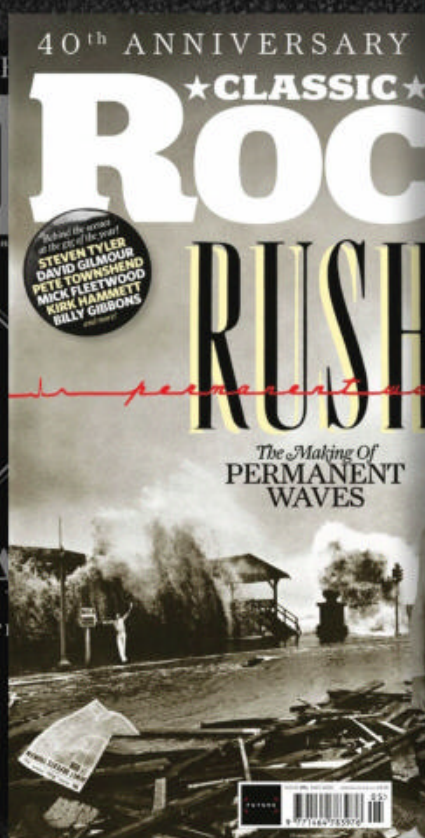
That should give you something to think about till our next issue.

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.



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PICKUP LINES

Firebird Pickups

Gibson's original Firebird pickup design is far more than just a regular mini-humbucker...

Released in 1963, the Gibson Firebird I, III, V and VII guitars were a new breed. While automobile designer Raymond Dietrich was drafted in to collaborate on the guitar's distinctive bodywork, Gibson set about creating a bespoke pickup for the new models. Sporting custom colours and the sleek, angular geometry of car tailfins, Firebirds didn't just look different – with their unique pickup design, they sounded different, too.

Derived from the Kalamazoo-era Epiphone mini-humbucker (itself a derivative of the Seth Lover-designed PAF), original Firebird humbuckers are constructed with two bobbins wound with 42 AWG wire and have around 15 per cent fewer turns than a PAF on account of their smaller size. Being 'underwound', their DC resistance is lower, and a brighter tone

Firebirds didn't just look different – with their unique pickup design, they sounded different, too

is produced. However, unlike PAFs and other mini-humbuckers, which have a single Alnico bar magnet positioned below ferrous polepiece screws and slugs, Firebird pickups use a pair of Alnico bar magnets located near the strings – one 'blade' in each coil – along with steel reflector plates located underneath and above the bobbins.

"They were very different to other Gibson pickups at the time," says Ash Scott-Lockyer of London's Oil City Pickups. "They are a bit of a special case in the sense they didn't appear on any other guitar, but the Firebird pickup was a logical progression from the mini-humbucker. If you don't have enough cut in the mids or enough bass – a criticism people level at the mini-humbucker – a reflector plate can help with that, and there's a certain bite that comes from using magnetic polepieces, as opposed to passive polepieces.



"The Firebird pickup uses two blade magnets," continues Ash. "Generally speaking, the wider the gap between the bobbins of a humbucker, the more bass frequencies you sample from the strings. Therefore, the narrower the gap, the more upper mids and treble you get, which is another reason Firebird pickups sound different – they have a narrower aperture than PAFs. The reflector plates are simple ferrous metal plates and work in a similar way to the baseplate of Tele bridge pickups: they increase inductance. And that gives you a bit of a free ride as far as power's concerned – it rounds off the treble a bit and gives more punch to the lower and midrange frequencies.

"The original Firebird pickups measure around 6.5kohms, which is somewhere between a Strat pickup and a PAF in terms of DCR. They're the ideal halfway house between a full-size humbucker and a single coil. They give sparkle, bite and directness of a single coil but with the benefits of a humbucker. The DCR, the twin magnets, the reflector plates, and the narrow coil aperture all bias the response of the pickup towards frequencies in the upper midrange. Slide players like them for their midrange bite. Used in the right

way, they've got a kind of rude tone – it's raunchy and a bit aggressive. I used to play slide on a Tele with Firebird pickups through a [Fender] Bassman and it sounded bloody amazing! That was a great setup.

"Johnny Winter played a Firebird, and one of the reasons I started making Firebird pickups was because, as a teenager, I was obsessed with his sound – that thick, chewy, not quite a humbucker but not a single coil, biting tone that he used a lot. My Winterizer and Winterizer II Firebird Pickups are standard early Firebird-style pickups, albeit the Winterizer II is in a [PAF-sized] humbucker shell. They work well in other guitars. Firebird pickups have got something different. They're fabulous in the neck of Telecaster, for example. It's a different palette of sound and it bites through an awful lot better in the mix, plus they make an interesting change from putting a regular humbucker in the neck.

"Gibson have never done a proper remake of it. All the reissues have been different from the originals – either way overpowered, or they have ceramic magnets, or it's a sidewinder design. I'm fascinated by all this, because it seems to be the forgotten Gibson pickup." **[RB]**
www.oilcitypickups.co.uk



Unlike other Gibson mini-humbuckers, Firebird pickups have no adjustable polepieces, as can be seen on this ex-Johnny Winter '65 Inverness Green Firebird V

classicGear

Epiphone's mini-'bucker-loaded answer to Gibson's PAF-toting ES-335

Epiphone Riviera

Epiphone guitars have a chequered history. During the 1930s, the New York-based firm posed serious competition to Gibson in the burgeoning jazzbox market. Unfortunately, however, following the death of company founder Epaminondas 'Epi' Stathopoulos in 1943, and in the wake of World War II, Epiphone became plagued with problems. The brand's steady decline during the post-war period eventually came to an end when Gibson's owners CMI acquired it in 1957. At the same time, Gibson president Ted McCarty was leading the Kalamazoo plant into a particularly fertile period of innovation, and while some of the most groundbreaking designs in guitar building history were developed, Gibson and Epiphone thrived under the same roof.

The ES-335T (later designated as the ES-335TD) is often recognised as being the most significant new model developed during this period. Unveiled in 1958, it pioneered a unique semi-hollow double-cutaway thinline design that set a template for all that followed. Its Epiphone-branded equivalent, the Riviera E360TD, appeared later in 1962 priced at \$325 – at which time the ES-335TD was listed at \$300. Although 335s command a far greater price on the vintage market nowadays, this clearly demonstrates that Epiphone guitars made in Kalamazoo were not intended as inferior instruments in terms of quality.

Aside from some typical Epiphone hallmarks including mini-humbuckers, Frequensator or Tremotone tailpieces, single parallelogram fretboard inlays, and headstock profile, Rivieras share much in common with 335s. Sporting a solid maple centre block and measuring

16 inches wide by 1¾ inches deep, both instruments feature a laminated maple body construction with single top and back binding and unbound f-holes. Additionally, both instruments have a one-piece mahogany neck that joins the body at the 19th fret, a 24¾-inch scale length, and a single-bound 22-fret rosewood fretboard.

The E360TD was originally listed with a Royal Tan finish – a bright two-tone red/yellow sunburst. This remained the model's only finish option until 1965 when a darker three-tone brown/red/yellow sunburst referred to as "shaded" was offered concurrently. By 1966, Royal Tan was no longer listed, and Cherry became a second option with the model designation E360TDC – Thinline Dual (pickup) Cherry. That same year, Sparkling Burgundy metallic finishes frequently began to appear, also labelled as E360TDC models. Although there is no mention of it in Epiphone's '66

Aside from some typical Epiphone hallmarks, Rivieras share much with 335s

catalogue or price list, this corresponds with Gibson's price list the following year, when Sparkling Burgundy appears as a regular/non custom colour option for its thinline double-cutaways.

Aside from finish, Rivieras changed relatively little from 1962 until they were discontinued in 1969. Perhaps the most obvious change occurred in '63 when headstocks began to transition from the shorter traditional 'open book' profile to an elongated design with bevelled edges (standard from 1964). Another transition began in '64 when the 1 11/16-inch nut width was decreased to 1 9/16 inches on some models, with examples of both continuing into the following year. In 1965, chrome-plated hardware began to replace the older nickel-plated type, and from '66, black 'witch hat' knobs appeared concurrently with metal cap 'reflector' knobs.

Notable Riviera players include Stevie Ray Vaughan and Carl Wilson, who played a 12-string version after it was added to the Epiphone line in 1965. In later years, Jorma Kaukonen and The Strokes' Nick Valensi boasted their own Riviera signatures. [RB]

The Evolution of the Epiphone Riviera

1957

CMI purchases Epiphone and production relocates to Gibson's Kalamazoo factory

1958

Gibson ES-335T introduced (same dimensions as Riviera)

1962

Riviera E360TD introduced; Royal Tan finish

1963

Transition from short 'open book' headstock to elongated type begins

1964

Nut width begins to transition from 1 11/16 to 1 9/16 inches

1965

Riviera 12-string (E360TD-12) introduced; Royal Tan or "shaded" sunburst finish

1966

Cherry & Sparkling Burgundy finishes (E360TDC/-12); 'reflector' & 'witch hat' knobs

1967

Tremotone vibrato tailpiece (E360TDV/C); peak production (over 1,400 Rivieras shipped)

1968

Production declines by around 77%

1969

Discontinued



Guitarist would like to thank
ATB Guitars in Cheltenham
www.atbguitars.com

classicGear

1965 Epiphone Riviera E360TD

1. SERIAL NUMBER

Six digits impressed into upper rear of headstock; 'Style E360TD', 'Epiphone Riviera' and corresponding serial number ink-stamped onto rectangular blue label (visible through bass f-hole)

2. HEADSTOCK

Elongated profile with bevelled edges; Epiphone logo and oval 'cloud' pearl inlays; black finish

3. PLASTICS

Two-ply (b/w) truss rod cover with white epsilon logo; three-ply (w/b/w) bevelled edge pickguard with silver epsilon logo; two black pickup surrounds; four metal cap bonnet knobs (two 'Volume' and two 'Tone'); white selector switch tip

4. HARDWARE

Nickel-plated hardware: Frequensator tailpiece; ABR-1 Tune-o-matic bridge with nylon saddles; individual double-line Kluson Deluxe tuners with metal buttons

5. PICKUPS

Two patent number (2,737,842) sticker mini-humbuckers with nickel-plated covers; independent volume and tone controls (including four 500kohms pots and two tone capacitors); three-way selector switch; front loading jack socket

6. BODY

16 inches wide; 1¾ inches deep; double-cutaway thinline; laminated maple construction with solid maple centre block; pressed arched top with two unbound f-holes; single-bound top and back

7. NECK

One-piece mahogany; 24¾-inch scale length; 1 11/16-inch nut width; 22 frets; 19th-fret body join; single-bound rosewood fretboard; single parallelogram pearloid inlays

ReverbRarities

Dan Orkin of Reverb.com finds a Kalamazoo-made model in a rare finish

Epiphone Riviera E360-TDC 1967



In this edition of Reverb Rarities, we're highlighting an Epiphone Riviera from 1967 in a stunning Sparkling Burgundy finish. This particular finish was only available on this model for a few short years back in the 60s, making this a particularly rare specimen.

This Riviera was built in Gibson's Kalamazoo, Michigan, factory. As many guitar aficionados already know, the Epiphone brand was purchased by Gibson in the late 50s, which initiated a process by which that name was used to market instruments made at the Gibson factory in Michigan to different markets and retailers. With some notable exceptions, most Epiphone models from this period have a corollary Gibson model – in the case of the Riviera, the equivalent Gibson

would be the iconic ES-335, though the guitars differed in a few key ways. Notably, the Riviera used mini-humbucker pickups instead of full-sized ones, along with a different tailpiece and headstock shape. Unlike the Beatles-approved Casino, the Riviera and ES-335 are semi-hollowbody guitars with feedback-reducing centre blocks in their body cavities.

Today's guitar is on offer from Guitar Village of Farnham. Sparkling Burgundy finished guitars from the 60s tend to fade in different ways over time, and as Guitar Village's listing notes, this guitar "has faded heavily on the top giving in an almost Goldtop-like appearance, but the back and sides still have plenty of colour showing".

To find the full listing, head to: <https://bit.ly/ReverbEpiRiviera>



Dan Orkin is director of content and international marketing at Reverb, a leading website and app for buying and selling new, used and vintage music gear and go-to resource for gear history, sales trends and pricing data. Dan edits the Reverb Price Guide and leads the Reverb team that produces daily videos and articles

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Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Difficulty ★★★★★

10 mins per example

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Fender Strat, Keeley Boss SD-1 mod, Audient Sono

Larry Carlton's skill of superimposing one chord over another suggests more detailed chord extensions

What Are You Implying?



DUE TO ISOLATION, this Headlines is audio-only, which we hope will tide us over until we find a new normal, and

deals with spelling out chords or harmony when soloing – a useful skill in a trio with just bass and drums. Listen to The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Cream and the John Mayer trio to see what I mean. As a soloist on guitar, this context gives a great deal of freedom, and also carries the responsibility of outlining the underlying chords/harmony, at least some of the time!

Listen to *Little Wing* or Tal Farlow play *Here's That Rainy Day* and you'll hear chords, triads and single-note melodies weaved together to create a harmonic picture. This approach is obviously most challenging when playing unaccompanied, but even the simplest bass part can relieve you of the responsibility for holding down the root notes, and the drums can carry the rhythmic momentum. Having the technique to play intricate lines interspersed with chord fragments really helps, but the core skill here is the knowledge of chord shapes/inversions around the fretboard. The more you know, the more choices you will have.

Keeping an eye open for where chord shapes coincide with pentatonic shapes is a real game-changer, as is separating them into single-note arpeggios to create a harmonically detailed line. There is various musical language to describe the way you might organise your scale and chord fragments, but I've found it helpful to think of the pentatonic shapes as the 'safe' zone, with various options to depart temporarily – or completely if you're feeling it. This approach can also be used over chords, as long as you know what they are! Larry Carlton manages to imply detailed chord extensions by superimposing one chord over another, so check him out, too.

Example 1

THIS EXAMPLE DOESN'T KNOW if it's trying to be Jimi, SRV or Mark Knopfler, but that aside, these raked 'small' chord inversions spell out the harmony and pave the way for less detailed pentatonic/natural minor scale ideas later in the solo. In bar 3, I've taken the Larry Carlton approach of superimposing a different chord over implied E minor we've already established. This D major voicing gives a hint of E minor 11th, by including the dominant 7th (D), the 9th (F#) and the 11th (A).

♩ = 105

Em

w/bar

rake

w/bar

3

3

E
B
G
D
A
E

Example 2

SKIPPING AHEAD A FEW BARS, I'm spelling out the B minor chord with a quick rake into a short pentatonic phrase, before combining some pentatonic doublestops to make an A minor 9th-7th descending phrase lifted straight from *Little Wing*. Steal from the best and all that... You'll notice a lot of these rakes are left to ring in the first half of this solo with its cleaner tone.

♩ = 105

Bm7

Am7

Em

3

1/4

Bm7

E
B
G
D
A
E

Example 3

KICKING IN THE OVERDRIVE/BOOST and flicking to the bridge pickup, this second half takes more of a single-note 'solo' approach. This is helped by having established the chords/harmony early on in the solo, but it's also because triads and chords like this don't come over as well with this kind of tone. However, in bars 2 and 3, there are some descending arpeggio lines implying Em7, Bm7 and G6 – all using shape 4 E minor pentatonic!

♩ = 105

Em

rake

3

rake

E
B
G
D
A
E

Example 4

THERE ARE A COUPLE OF RAKED TRIADS and an arpeggio here, based around the underlying pentatonic framework. Bar 2 is an exception, spelling out an A minor chord, then a bit of A Dorian – or could it be that I’ve simply returned briefly to the E minor pentatonic? In any case, this shifts swiftly to a raked B minor arpeggio to finish. Keep this from ringing together by releasing the fret-hand pressure (but not lifting the fingers!) just after playing each note.

♩ = 105

Bm rake ———

Am rake ———

1

Em

Bm rake ———

4

The musical notation for Example 4 consists of two systems, each with a guitar staff (treble clef) and a bass staff (bass clef). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 105. The first system (measures 1-3) features a Bm chord in measure 1, an Am chord in measure 2, and a Bm chord in measure 3. The guitar staff shows raked triads and arpeggios with triplet markings. The bass staff shows corresponding fret numbers (7, 9, 10, 8, 7, 10, 8, 7, 9, 10, 8, 7, 7). The second system (measures 4-5) features an Em chord in measure 4 and a Bm chord in measure 5. The guitar staff shows raked triads and arpeggios with triplet markings. The bass staff shows corresponding fret numbers (11, 12, 11, 9, 12, 9, 12, 13, 12, 10, 14, 14, 12, 11, 12). The notation includes 'rake' labels with dashed lines indicating the raking motion.

Hear It Here

LARRY CARLTON TRIO

The Paris Concert



This album showcases more of Larry’s blues side, stripped of the production and overdubs you hear on many of his studio releases. We get to hear how he manages to put across *Room 335* with just bass and drums, plus the laid-back blues of *Cold Gold*, and the funky doublestops and overdriven lead lines of *The Prince*. Larry’s deft touch with the guitar’s controls to manipulate the tone from moment to moment is in evidence throughout.

JIMI HENDRIX

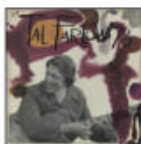
Band Of Gypsies



Here’s another live trio – Jimi, Billy Cox and Buddy Miles – coming from a very different angle to Larry Carlton. However, give it a listen and you’ll find that the combination of lead and rhythm ideas using chord voicings, doublestops, octaves and riffs is founded on the same principles. Check out *Who Knows*, *Power To Love* and *Message Of Love* to hear how Jimi combined influences and styles in a way people that are still mentally unpacking 50 years later.

TAL FARLOW

Tal Farlow '78



A stunning example of the possibilities, if we can only acquire the man’s expertise! Admittedly, Gary Mazzaroppi’s bass lays a sophisticated, detailed foundation (especially on *Mahoney’s 11 Ohms*), but Tal’s chord/melody arrangements and lines are pretty comprehensive. *Autumn Leaves* begins with his unaccompanied guitar, showing how he covers all bases, using his thumb for some bass notes. *Gymkhana In Soho* is his advanced take on a 12-bar progression.

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