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Guitarist

Issue 467

JANUARY 2021

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A New Age Of Tone

While I was demo'ing this month's crop of review instruments, I was struck by how great-sounding a couple in particular were: the Taylor GTe and the Godin Radiator 2020. Good work, guys – but so what, you might ask? Well, both are distinguished not only by their tone, but by the fact they're built with non-traditional woods, or at least woods used in non-traditional roles.

The Godin (see review, page 10) has a silver leaf maple body and neck, but confounds stereotypes by being neither overly bright nor overly heavy. The use of sustainable Northern Hemisphere wood also keeps costs well below a grand (some Black Friday deals had them down to around £500 street price), which is brilliant for a sorted, North American-built electric such as the Radiator. The Taylor (see review, page 98) is even more progressive: its back and sides are built from 'Urban Ash' a mahogany-like wood harvested from the streets of California's cities – trees that would have otherwise have been turned into mulch. Its fretboard, meanwhile, is eucalyptus.

Both guitars sound great and are proof that we needn't view buying a guitar made of non-traditional tonewoods as an act of self-sacrifice reluctantly committed for the sake of the planet. Instead, I'd argue we should reframe these instruments as adding to – rather than taking away from – the richness of our musical world.

Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Nile Rodgers
The hit-making king of groove explains how a $149 Strat ended up making $2 billion worth of music **p78**

Jimmy Page
Zoso himself gives us the last word on what guitars and amps got used for Zep's greatest recordings and gigs **p42**

Home Brew
Are you Britain's best amateur guitar maker? If so, you should enter our competition! Find out more on **p40**

JIMMY PAGE (ABOVE MIDDLE) PHOTO BY KEVIN KANE/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Guitarist

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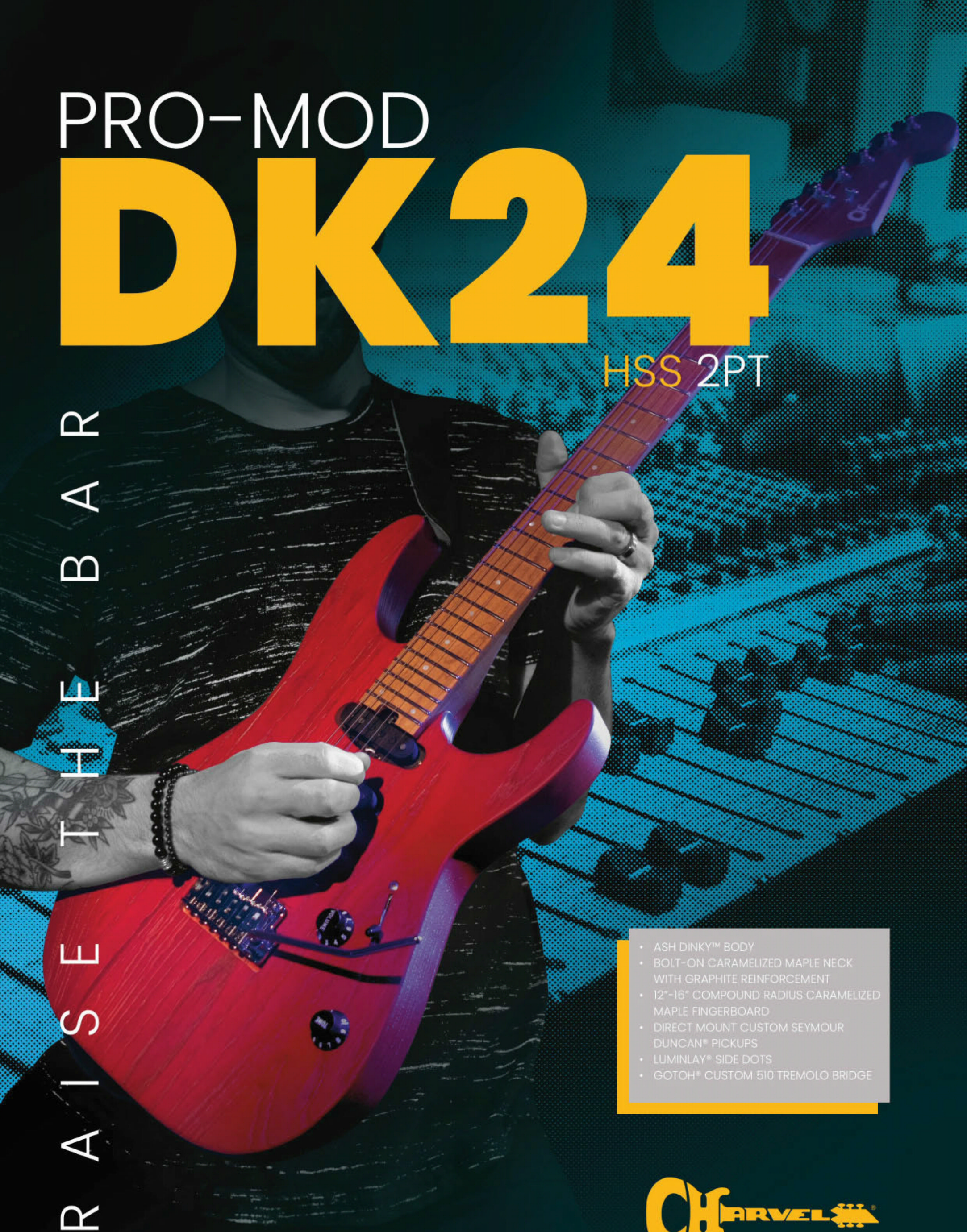

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Neil Godwin

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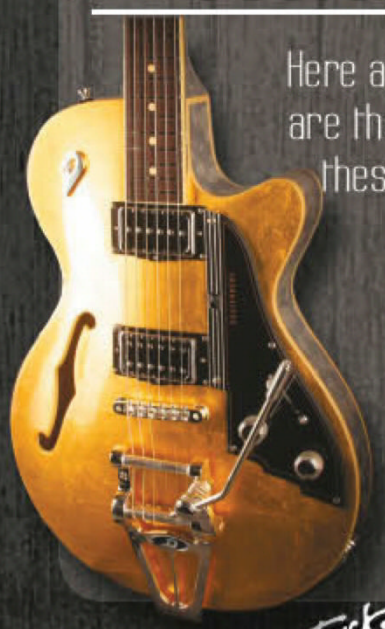

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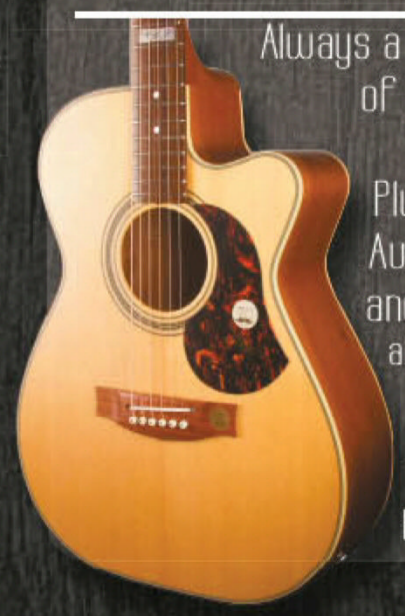

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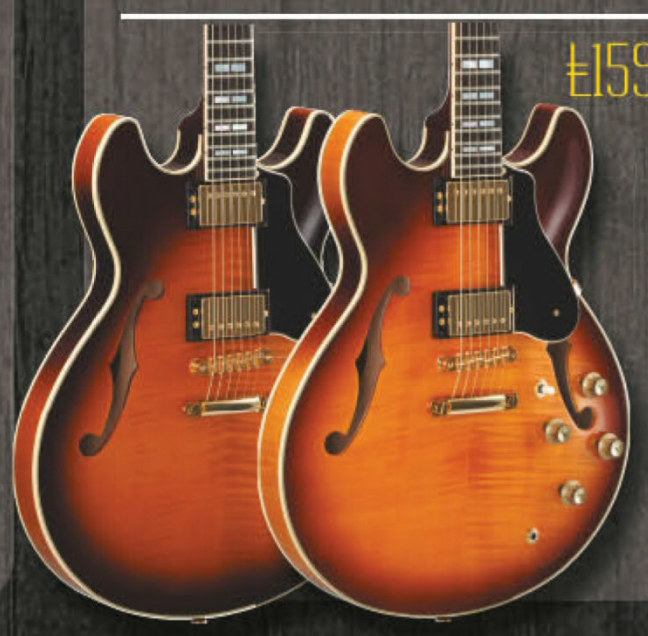

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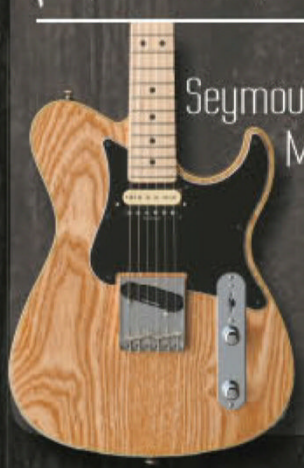

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GODIN RADIATOR
£829

WHAT IS IT? Affordable Canadian-made chambered-body, set-neck electric released 20 years after the original Godin Radiator

Hot Ticket

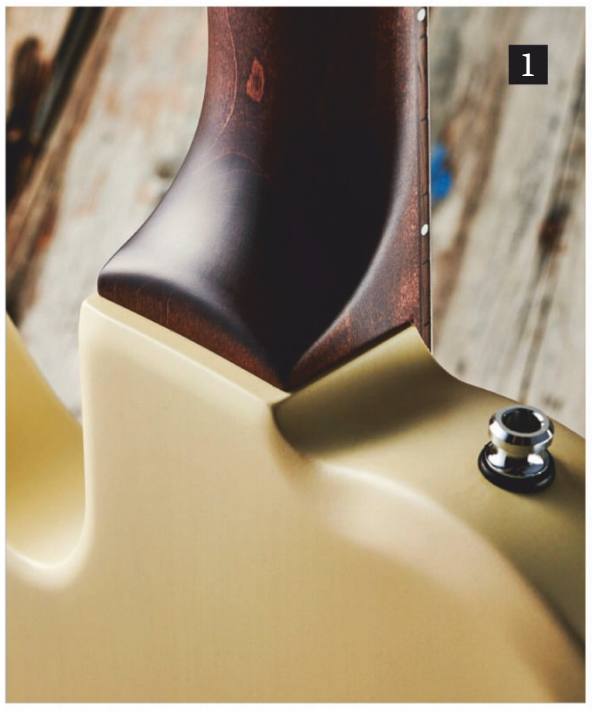
Fancy some boutique style without the four-figure price tag? Well, Godin's 2020 Radiator is exactly that: a Canadian-made guitar that might well be one of the bargains of the year

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

Godin's original Radiator launched back in 1999 as a very retro-styled entry-level model – the antithesis of the more complex dual- and three-voice (including synth access) electrics that the Canadian company was becoming known for. It used the elongated single-cut SD shape, pretty similar to today's LGXT, with a bolt-on 24-fret maple neck, while the fairly heavily chambered body was covered with pearloid, including a full-face scratchplate, creating that retro vibe and probably inspired by certain Magnatone electrics from the 50s. Along with a string-through bridge with six L-shaped saddles, it featured a pair of retro-y Rickenbacker-style single coils with dual volumes and a master tone all mounted on its plastic front. That original model also came in a range of natty colours, too.

Today's version certainly has some of that DNA, although the body shape follows the more contemporary single-cut outline used on Godin's Summit Classic SG. The colours are also more muted like our matt Trans Cream with its tortie face; the Matte Black version comes with a black fascia, while Bourbon Burst features a whiter pearloid

Radiator



1. The set-neck here is brown-stained silver leaf maple with a nicely crafted heel. The original Radiator was a bolt-on
2. We get a volume and tone for each pickup with these classy knurled knobs, all mounted on the full-face scratchplate
3. Adding a little budget Gibson-like style, the wrapover bridge has overall intonation adjustment with raised preset saddle ridges for each string
4. These proprietary and retro-looking Godin High Ratio tuners use a 18:1 ratio on the bass side and 26:1 on the treble
5. The scratchplate material is unusually used as a headstock facing here and matches the colour of the body's fascia

facing. Incidentally, the colour-matched pearloid is also overlaid on the very classic-style and back-angled three-a-side headstock here.

Like the original, the 45mm thick silver leaf maple body is chambered, but here it's more heavily done, though that aspect of the design is not mentioned in any Godin marketing. It means the guitar drops comfortably below the 3.6kg (8lb) mark, but certainly doesn't feel feather-light. In fact, it's got a good business-like and purposeful feel to it, less gimmicky perhaps than that original design.

Now, you could bash it up a bit and load it up with boutique parts, and a design like this could easily set you back £3k. But Godin has long loaded in the quality while keeping costs pared down, thanks to their immense production experience. We've mentioned the matt body finish, which is obviously quicker to apply than a high gloss. The neck appears brown-stained and is a little more silky satin in feel, but we'd guess that's pretty fast to apply, too. There's a little rear edge chamfering on the back, but otherwise we just get an edge radius to the slab body. The heel is left square and Gibson-esque, and the neck appears to be a three-piece construction with its headstock spliced on and a heel stack.

Godin doesn't go deep on pickup specs. These are clearly covered and classic looking with individual volume and tones, a shoulder-placed toggle and output jack below the lowest controls. It means, of course, that all the wiring and pickups can

It's a gutsy-sounding Les Paul Special-style instrument with a great weight and a big sound

be mounted to the face-plate, although with 13 screws to attach it to the guitar (there's a hidden screw under the bridge) you won't want to be removing and replacing it too often. Don't worry, though – we've done it for you (see Under The Hood, opposite).

And while the Summit Classic SG, which we looked at back in issue 440, sported a rather nice Graph Tech ResoMax Sonic 1 one-piece "wraparound" bridge, the wrapover here is more generic in style, a heavier cast bridge with raised ridges to act as intonated 'saddles'. Overall, intonation is via the two protruding steel bolts that connect directly to the steel posts adding to the rather Melody Maker-like vibe.

Feel & Sounds

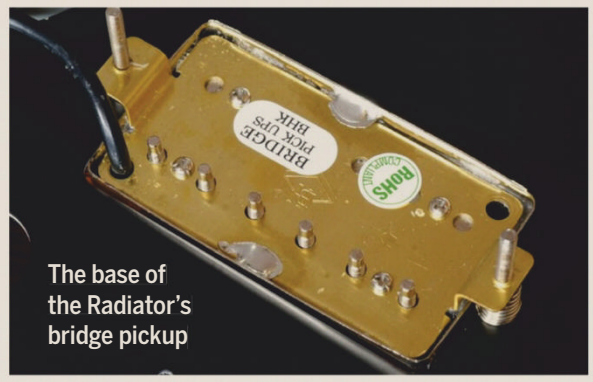
The craft is excellent, particularly for the price. The neck really does feel like it should be on a much higher priced guitar. It features a Gibson-like scale length and similar 305mm (12-inch) radius and the medium gauge fretwire (approx. 2.36mm wide by 1.2-1.25mm high) is beautifully installed and highly polished. The fingerboard edges are lightly rolled, too, and the Graph Tech Tusq nut is perfectly cut.

UNDER THE HOOD

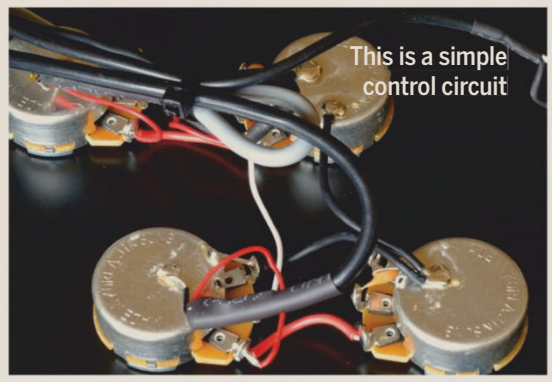
How the 2020 model measures up to its predecessor

Now, to access the electrics you have to remove the bridge and undo the 13 screws (albeit two fewer than a Fender Tele Deluxe): quite a palaver. Unlike the Summit Classic SG we looked at back in issue 440, which used very modern and small pots, here we have standard-sized 500kohm types with 'Made in Korea Jinsung' stamped on their bases. Again, unlike that Summit, there's no treble bleed and the wiring is modern style using a small ceramic 333 code (.033 microfarads) tone cap on each tone control. The humbuckers are four-conductor types, so if you fancy a bit of modding then that would be easy enough, and the stickers on the brass baseplates identify the pickups as being made by Booheung Precision Machinery Co, Ltd in Korea.

Exactly what's going on under the covers is anyone's guess, and DCRs measured 16.17kohms at the bridge and 9.26k at the neck – both slightly higher than the uncovered Godin Custom Zebra humbuckers of the Summit SG we previously looked at, which certainly reinforced the hot humbucker vibe when we plugged in. This entire full-face scratchplate and its electronics are probably assembled in Korea and shipped to Godin HQ for assembly.



The base of the Radiator's bridge pickup


This is a simple control circuit

With the bridge and scratchplate removed you can see the extensive chambering

In terms of profile it's a pretty regular medium C style: 21.5mm at the 1st fret and 24mm at the 12th, almost Fender-y in lower positions with a little more bulk by the heel. Aside from needing a slight tweak of the truss rod, the setup is low and slinky as supplied with a string height of 1.3mm on the high E and 1.5mm on the bass.

The very retro Godin logo'd tuners are a little special as well, with a very smooth feel and higher-than-usual gear ratios (18:1 on the bass side and 26:1 on the treble), which makes them very fine tuning, especially on the treble side. Once we'd stretched the strings, we barely touched them: this is one very stable guitar.

The bridge, though, is a little rudimentary. Intonation was slightly sharp overall during our test, but that can be easily dialled in with those outer pair of Allen key bolts. If you live in the upper-fret positions, certainly chordally, it simply might not be 'in' enough, but we suspect this guitar has more of a rock 'n' roll aim.

Although we have four controls they're not laid out like our benchmark Gibson's;

Godin's nickel-covered Custom pickups are made in Korea, although their specs aren't publicised. As with the other electronics they also mount to the full-face scratchplate

the outer treble pickup volume and tone are lower than the closer neck pickup pair. It's hard, then, to do the classic move where you can pull up or down both volume or tone controls simultaneously with a swipe of your right hand. It's not a dealbreaker, but it is a slightly different drive and you'll need a cable with a right-angled jack for the face-mounted output socket, of course.

Despite hanging on (or should that be clinging on?) to its retro past, this Radiator is revoiced with much more rock intention. It's kind of like a pawnshop relic from the 50s that Larry DiMarzio modded back in New York city in the early 70s. There's nothing wrong with that, nor the sounds we're hearing with a nicely gained Marshall-y amp voice where the bridge has that sort of overwound grind about it that would grace most classic rock to early metal styles perfectly. The neck is no slouch with a tube-y voice that, in the environment, has just enough clarity for those vocal lead lines. On a cleaner Fender-y channel, it ain't a Tele that's for sure, although the mix does add a little more chime and some dirty funk, especially if you knock the neck volume back a little. It's a thicker, tougher sound than you might expect, and you can't help thinking that some coil-splits and/or a simple treble bleed circuit would add some versatility to what is a very good-playing guitar. If the original Radiator was more indie, this one is more alt-rock, armed with some pretty serious clout. Above all, it's the playability that punches way above its weight. Godin really knows how to make a good guitar.

> The craft is excellent… The neck really does feel like it should be on a much higher priced guitar

Verdict

A very different guitar to the original Radiator, this 2020 version – full-face scratchplate aside – seems more rock-aimed and much less retro-sounding. Of course, you could easily swap the pickups or even mod what you have here to increase the versatility, and on a quality platform such as this any work would be money well spent. The bridge, while certainly suiting the vibe, is a little rudimentary, but again that's easy to upgrade. That's not to say there's anything really lacking here. It's a gutsy-sounding Les Paul Special-style instrument with a great weight and a big sound. It's crisply made and actually feels more like an old guitar; it plays like butter, too, and comes with a proper gigbag. If we were Godin we'd be shouting about this guitar a lot more. This really is a slice of modded boutique style at a very tempting price. G

GODIN RADIATOR 2020

PRICE: £829 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Silver leaf maple, chambered
NECK: Silver leaf maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.79mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Wraparound bridge, 'High-Ratio' tuners (18:1 bass side, 26:1 treble) – nickel/chrome-plated
STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Nickel-covered Custom Godin humbuckers (GHB1 bridge & GHN1 neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: Colour/scratchplate only
RANGE OPTIONS: The similar-style Summit Classic SG in Matte Green, with Canadian Laurentian basswood body, is next up at £935. Godin's solidbody range starts with the bolt-on Session HT and Stadium HT, both at £735
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Trans Cream (as reviewed), Matte Black, Bourbon Burst

440 Distribution
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Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Simple but classy build; great neck and playability; rock-ready voicing and subtle retro vibe

CONS Might be a little dark sounding for some

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WHAT IS IT? A lunchbox-style amp head available exclusively from Thomann, powered by a pair of Ruby EL84Cs and with a 'magic eye' power indicator

Cheap Lunch

As one of a two-amp range from Harley Benton, this lunchbox-style amp offers boutique valve tone at a budget price. But can it *really* sound any good?

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Probably the world's fastest-growing musical instrument brand right now, Harley Benton has already earned a reputation for astonishing quality at hard-to-beat price points. For high-volume manufacturers, you'd think the easy route would be to stick with the simpler manufacturing process and reliability of solid-state amplification. However, Harley Benton has upped the ante somewhat by including some proper all-valve designs in its rapidly expanding catalogue, available exclusively from German retail giant Thomann. Here we're looking at a tempting new addition that's likely to make more than a few waves: Harley Benton's Mighty-15TH head.

The first thing we look for in low-priced valve amps is corner-cutting, so we're pleased to see the Mighty-15TH is built to last, with attention to detail evident in both its design and build. The precision-folded steel case is thicker than some lunchbox-style products we've seen, adding reassuring weight when you pick up the amp by its folding carry

1. The Mighty-15TH features a 6E2 'magic eye' power indicator (an old-school vacuum fluorescent display or VFD for short) to tell you the amp is on and help keep your sound from tipping over the edge. It's not so bright, but it looks cool

2. A Boost switch adds a dose of extra gain and level for a more aggressive feel. As it functions as a character switch, rather than a clean/overdrive choice, the lack of a footswitch is less of an issue

3. The standby switch provides seven- and 15-watt output power options to match home, studio or stage use. Thanks to the exceptionally low noise floor, it's perfect for home recording or internet broadcasting, and sounds superb with pedals

4. Harley Benton is rapidly becoming one of the world's best-known brands for high build quality at almost unheard-of low prices. Its Mighty-15TH offers great tone, pro-standard noise performance and robust build quality

handle. All the case components fit together nicely, with no sharp edges. Meanwhile, the exterior is neatly finished in satin black enamel, and has contrasting silver paint for the front and rear grilles, and white lettering for the control panel.

Inside the chassis, most of the electronics sit on a large decent-quality printed circuit board that's double-sided and through-plated for reliability. This board holds all the front-panel controls and valve sockets, with wired connections to the mains sockets, switches and transformers. The relatively simple circuit leaves plenty of space on the PCB to maximise the layout; the wide tracks and quality components wouldn't be out of place in an amp costing three times as much.

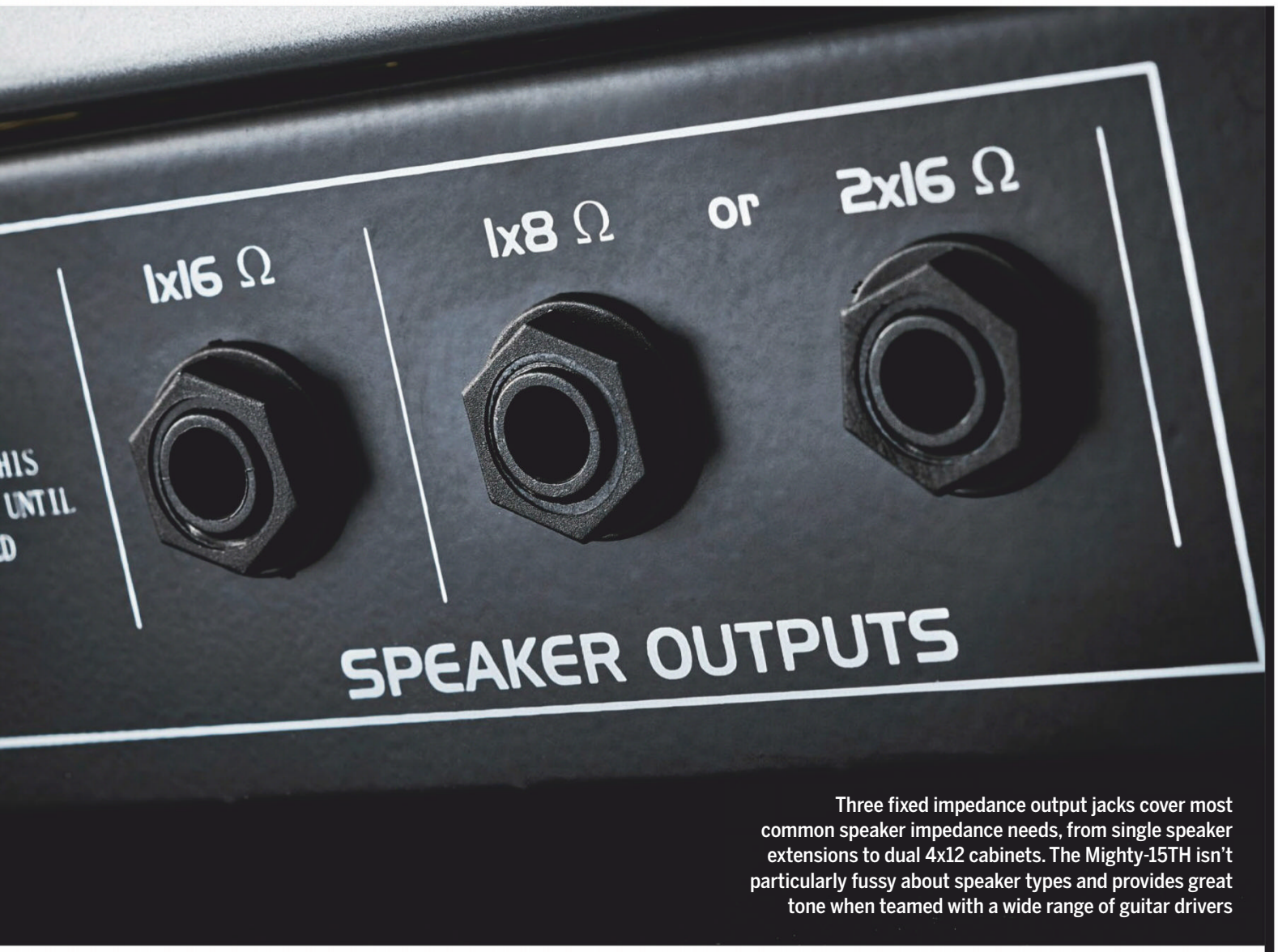
The Mighty-15TH is a no-frills single-channel design, using two 12AX7 preamp valves to drive a pair of Ruby EL84Cs, with no solid-state overdrive assistance. Front-panel controls include Gain and master volume, with a regular passive three-band EQ. There's a Boost switch on the front panel that adds a dose of extra gain and volume, together with a three-position standby switch for full- and half-power output choices.

There's no 'power on' light, but the Mighty-15TH has a trick up its sleeve in the shape of a 6E2 'magic eye' valve, which lights up in fluorescent green. Two small rectangles at the top and bottom of the display increase in length as the signal gets louder, eventually joining up in the middle of the valve as you play harder. Thankfully, the 6E2 is tied to the Gain knob rather than the master volume, so you can see full deflection without rattling the windows. Dating back to the 1950s, many thousands of magic eye valves (more accurately described as vacuum fluorescent displays) were used as indicators in radiograms and portable reel-to-reel tape recorders. They found their way into guitar amplifiers, too, most notably early 60s crocodile-era Selmers including the Concord, Zodiac and Thunderbird, where the eye pulsed in time with the tremolo effect. On the Harley Benton, it adds a hint of vintage style, although as a 'power on' indicator it's not so practical because the display isn't particularly bright. Overall, though, the Mighty-15TH exudes impressively solid, reliable quality that's way above what we'd expect at this price point.

Feel & Sounds

We tried out the Mighty-15TH with our usual complement of guitars, including a Les Paul fitted with a pair of old PAFs and a Strat loaded with lowish-output Duncan Alnico Pros. Sound reinforcement was courtesy of an open-backed cabinet loaded with a pair of Celestion Vintage 30s – standard equipment for many amps over the years and a useful benchmark.

The first thing to impress us was the almost total lack of hiss and hum, making it difficult to tell whether the amp was on or off. Sonically, the Mighty-15TH



Three fixed impedance output jacks cover most common speaker impedance needs, from single speaker extensions to dual 4x12 cabinets. The Mighty-15TH isn't particularly fussy about speaker types and provides great tone when teamed with a wide range of guitar drivers

is surprisingly close to a 6V6-powered Californian tweed, with pleasantly balanced cleans, enhanced by sparkling highs that stay easy on the ear even at higher volume levels. The midrange isn't quite as full-on as, say, a tweed Champ or Deluxe, while the bass is tight and well defined. For both our guitars, the best tonal balance was with all three tone controls near the centre of their travel, using just small nudges to trim the treble and midrange to taste.

The amp's best clean sounds happen with the Gain control set around a third into its travel, shifting into bluesy mild overdrive effects at the halfway mark, with more than enough gain for a ZZ Top-inspired growl with the Gain knob maxed out. While the Boost function adds extra gain and level, it's in huge amounts. Still, it's a useful character switch for more aggressive playing styles. With just two preamp gain stages the overdrive sounds are open and responsive, best suited to blues and classic rock, rather than metal. There's plenty of volume on tap, even in the lower seven-watt output mode, while selecting the 15-watt option provides plenty of headroom for cleaner sounds and pedals, with which the Mighty-15TH excels.

Sonically, the Mighty-15TH is surprisingly close to a 6V6-powered Californian tweed

Verdict

We've had a lot of fun with this amp. The impressive build quality and exceptional low-noise performance team up with a lively, open-sounding voice that lets the guitar's character through, producing sweet tweed-inspired overdrive tones to delight beginners and experienced players alike. This amp sounds great on its own or with pedals, something that's often the case with simpler valve circuits, while the popular seven/15-watt output is ideal for studio and home use, with power to spare for most live gigs.

We'd like to see a couple of 'on' and 'off' labels added to the front-panel silk screen for the Boost and mains power switches, together with a nice bright 'on' LED or neon indicator, but that's really all we can come up with in the way of criticism here. Okay, there's no padded gigbag, no effects loop and no footswitch for the Boost function. However, we commenced our Mighty-15TH review thinking that £399 would be pretty good value, so to buy it for almost half that price including VAT and free delivery is probably the amp bargain of the decade. Check it out now! G

HARLEY BENTON MIGHTY-15TH HEAD

PRICE: £211
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp
OUTPUT: 15W RMS, switchable to 7W RMS
VALVES: 2x 12AX7, 2x EL84C, 1x 6E2
DIMENSIONS: 330 (w) x 162 (h) x 146mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 6/13
CABINET: Steel
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, master volume, boost switch
FOOTSWITCH: No
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Power reduction switch drops output from 15W to approx. 7W, front-panel boost switch, 3x speaker output jacks
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The 5W Mighty-5TH head is £119

www.thomann.de
www.harleybenton.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Exceptional low-noise performance; range of clean and overdriven sounds; sweet EQ flatters humbuckers and single coils

CONS While we'd like a proper 'on' light and a gigbag, at this price it's practically impossible to criticise

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Gibson Adam Jones 1979 Les Paul Custom $9,999/$6,000

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB **www.gibson.com**

Adam Jones... Doesn't he look a bit like Alex Skolnick?

Well, arguably, from a distance... and if you squint a bit. But they do both share an affinity for Silverburst guitars. Adam Jones is the much-loved guitar slinger in progressive metal band Tool. And more importantly, this is his brand-new signature Les Paul Custom, which is based on his go-to 1979 model.

Progressive metal: so this is a guitar for shredders then?

Not really, no. Tool's music covers a wide range of influences, but think more towards the sonically experimental side of things rather than the note-heavy, precise playing of modern metal. Adam's tones are more Pink Floyd than Periphery, and they range from some fairly pristine cleans to thick, heavy distortion. When it comes to lead playing, he's much more atmospheric, and his Silverburst Les Paul Custom has been round his neck ever since the band first turned heads in the early 90s.

Customs are never cheap, though, are they?

No! And this one doesn't break from tradition, either. What we have here is a premium example of the Gibson Custom Shop's attention to detail. We'll start with the painful bit: it's $9,999 for the aged version (signed by Jones). If you want it without the wear or Jones's squiggle, you can bag one for a mere $6,000.

That's a big chunk o' change!

Well, first off, this guitar is a Les Paul Custom. Gibson doesn't make a 'standard' US version of an LPC, so the 'base' level starts in the Custom Shop with the regular 1968 Custom we all know and love setting you back $5,799. So chuck in the Silverburst finish and the VOS version of this guitar actually appears fair. Then consider the detailed ageing of the full-fat model, which duplicates Jones's #1 to a T. Gibson has even included a replica of the headstock mirror that Jones has on his own guitar – find it in the case as an optional accoutrement.

Tell us about the construction...

This being based on a 1979 model, it follows the same make-up: a mahogany body, capped with a maple top (three-piece). There's zero weight-relief here, so you're looking at a meaty guitar, just like your dad used to play. The whole lot is decorated with seven-ply binding, and fitted with a reverse-mounted Custombucker in the neck position and a custom-wound Seymour Duncan DDJ in the bridge position.

The neck is of the three-piece maple variety, with an ebony 'board, and Gibson says the profile is a 'C' shape, also replicated from Adam's original. Elsewhere, there are premium-level appointments all round with a bone nut, Schaller M6 tuners, abalone and binding a plenty, and that all-important 'split diamond' on the headstock.

That bridge pickup sounds interesting...

It is! Seymour Duncan released the DDJ in the 80s, but didn't make them for long. We spoke to Jones when the guitar was announced earlier this year and he told us about his quest to snap up as many units as possible: "Yes, they were hand-wound and they only did them for about three or four years. I buy those on eBay. I'm happy they're willing [to use third-party pickups] and that's what Gibson is: they'll put someone else's thing in there just to make it authentic. They're a great company." Just as well, as we imagine the DDJ will become even more rare now.

I thought you said it was Silverburst?

This isn't your modern, ice-cold Silverburst. Take a look at 10 vintage Silverburst Customs and you'll see 10 different tints varying from 'quite silver' to 'green'. It's how the finish ages, and this being a meticulous recreation, Gibson has made it faithful, naming it Antique Silverburst.

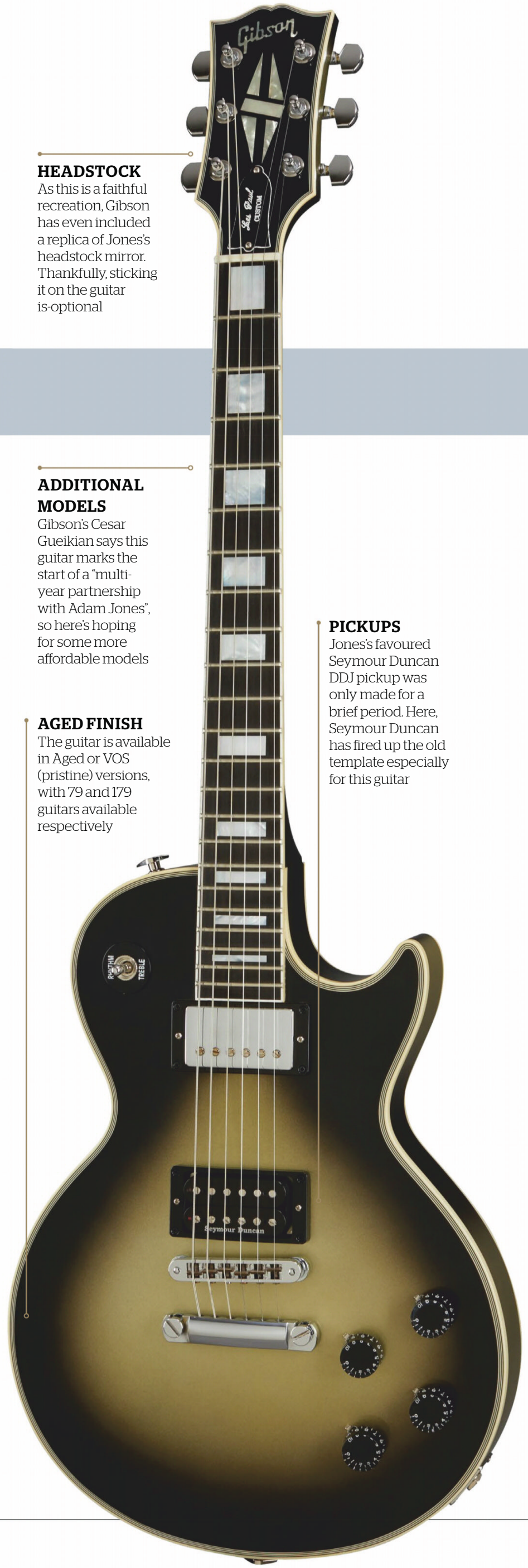
I'm sold, but I can't afford it! Is there an alternative that's easier on the wallet?

Currently, no. We're keeping everything crossed for a US version, or even an Epiphone, but Tool are notoriously protective over their image (and everything else). So if you want to keep up with The Jones on a budget, you'll have to broaden your horizons to 'Silverburst single-cuts', of which there are a few available from non-Gibson brands. G

JARGON CRUNCHING

Antique Silverburst: Unless your eyes need recalibrating, you'll have noticed that the silver part of this Silverburst is actually, err, green. That's because this guitar has been designed to play, feel and look like a vintage Silverburst from the late 70s in every way – which includes the tinting of the clear lacquer/silver flake used to give this guitar its name.

TUNERS
Adam's signature guitar features chrome-plated Schaller M6 tuners



HEADSTOCK
As this is a faithful recreation, Gibson has even included a replica of Jones's headstock mirror. Thankfully, sticking it on the guitar is-optional

ADDITIONAL MODELS
Gibson's Cesar Gueikian says this guitar marks the start of a "multi-year partnership with Adam Jones", so here's hoping for some more affordable models

AGED FINISH
The guitar is available in Aged or VOS (pristine) versions, with 79 and 179 guitars available respectively

PICKUPS
Jones's favoured Seymour Duncan DDJ pickup was only made for a brief period. Here, Seymour Duncan has fired up the old template especially for this guitar

ALSO OUT NOW...

HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS ZENITH AMPLITUDE CONTROLLER £279

EQ, compression and boost: the three amigos you least want to get cornered by at a party. That's because although you know you'll need these guys later, they're also going to tell you to drink plenty of water and that "five a day is actually the minimum". They're the crushingly sensible antidote to your tonehound whimsy.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Hamstead Soundworks has combined this trio of functional swats into the Zenith, a tonal Swiss Army knife to help you sound better. It incorporates 20dB of clean, transparent boost, an easy-to-use compressor circuit with dry blend, plus an EQ section with a three-position mid frequency shift, complete with three 'Q' width options. But the Zenith has a couple of twist up its sleeve, too. It's the first Hamstead pedal to use the company's Secret Switching via the programmable footswitch, giving you global on/off, 'flip-flop' mode, either compressor or EQ always-on and cycle. The Hamstead Zenith is shipping now.
www.hamsteadsoundworks.com

REVV GENERATOR MKIII $3,299/$2,699

Canadian amp brand Revv has continued to grab the attention of high-gain seekers who still want to maintain a thick slice of tone since it began in 2014. Now, Revv has introduced the new Generator MKIII series. The three-strong line-up includes the flagship Generator 120 (complete with a revoiced clean channel), and 100P and 100R. The 120 features four channels, while the 100P and 100R have three channels, with the high-gain channel limited to Revv Purple and Red channels respectively.

As well as the five-12AX7 preamp section and quad-6L6GC output stage, Revv's new Generator series comes with a big boast: it includes a Two Notes Torpedo-powered stereo output, giving you access to virtual cab and mic emulations, impulse responses, Two Notes' Twin Tracker stereo doubler, plus additional effects including reverb, EQ, an enhancer and more. You can also edit your settings via Bluetooth for easy tweaking. As well as this, Revv has included a new "state of the art" noise gate and digital reverb effects. The Generator 120, 100P and 100R are available priced at $3,299/$2,699.
https://revvamplification.com

The Players

The latest news, views and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists

Photo by Yoram Kahana, courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

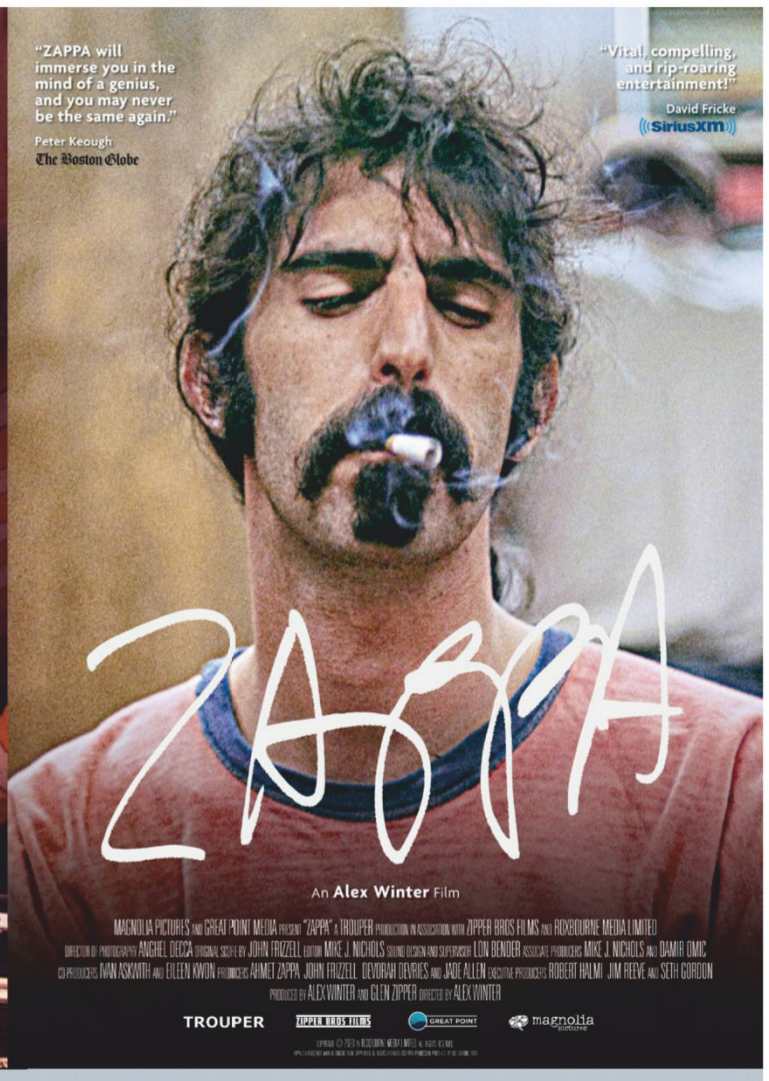


Photo by Bill Gubbins, courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

To Be Frank

New film *Zappa* features unrivalled access to the late legend's archives

Photo by Philip Cheung, courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

Alex Winter, director of the new *Zappa* documentary, brings the visionary guitarist and composer's story to life with the blessing of Frank's late widow, Gail

A new Frank Zappa documentary is "by far the most intimate and expansive look into the innovative life" of the musician, according to the late musician's son Ahmet. And its scope will go far beyond the perspective of Zappa as a seminal guitarist.

Simply titled *Zappa*, the film is directed by Alex Winter of *Bill & Ted* and *The Lost Boys* fame and had unrestricted access to the Zappa archive, the two-year preservation process of which had been initially funded by fans via a crowdfunding campaign. The film will include home movies from the archive that date as far back as Zappa's high school days with fellow maverick-in-waiting Don Van Vliet (later known as Captain Beefheart), all the way up to the struggles before his passing in 1993 from prostate cancer.

"[Frank]'s a great storyteller and I was able to have him essentially narrate the story of his own life"

"When I first began the preservation work on the vault, I discovered hours and hours of never-before-heard interviews that Frank had stored down there from throughout his life," Winter fold *Rolling Stone*. "He's a great storyteller and I was able to have him essentially narrate the story of his own life."

Five years in the making, *Zappa* is set to be an intimate portrayal of Zappa's remarkable musical career. Winter gained the support of Zappa's widow, Gail, who sadly passed away in 2015 before she could see its completion.

"I realise now that one of the reasons she allowed me the access to tell his story when she had refused so many others before is that my pitch to her was for a film that specifically looked at Frank as one of our great 20th century composers, mistakenly defined as primarily a rock guitar player," adds Winter. Nevertheless, several of Frank's musical collaborators contributed to the film including guitarists Mike Keneally, Steve Vai and Ray White. **[RL]**

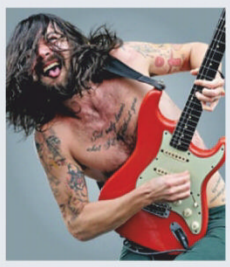
www.zappa.com

ALSO THIS MONTH

PASSING OF KEN HENSLEY

Guitarist was saddened to hear of the death of Uriah Heep guitarist Ken Hensley on 4 November at the age of 75. He was the principal songwriter for the band throughout the 1970s and sang lead vocals on fan-favourite *Lady In Black*, from 1971's *Salisbury*. Before his work with the band he formed The Gods, featuring a young Mick Taylor, Greg Lake and future Uriah Heep bandmate, drummer Lee Kerslake, in the ranks.

SIMON NEIL GOES BOOOOOM



Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil has released his first signature pedal; the Booooom/Blast distortion (£299). Built by his longtime tech, Richard 'Churd' Pratt, with an initial limited run of 200, the dual-circuit pedal features Booooom ("big, brash overdrive") and Blast ("a blistering, out-of-control fuzz"). Control names, including Syrup, Stink and Jaggy, are inspired by the band's song titles.

WHOLE LOTTA MARSHALL

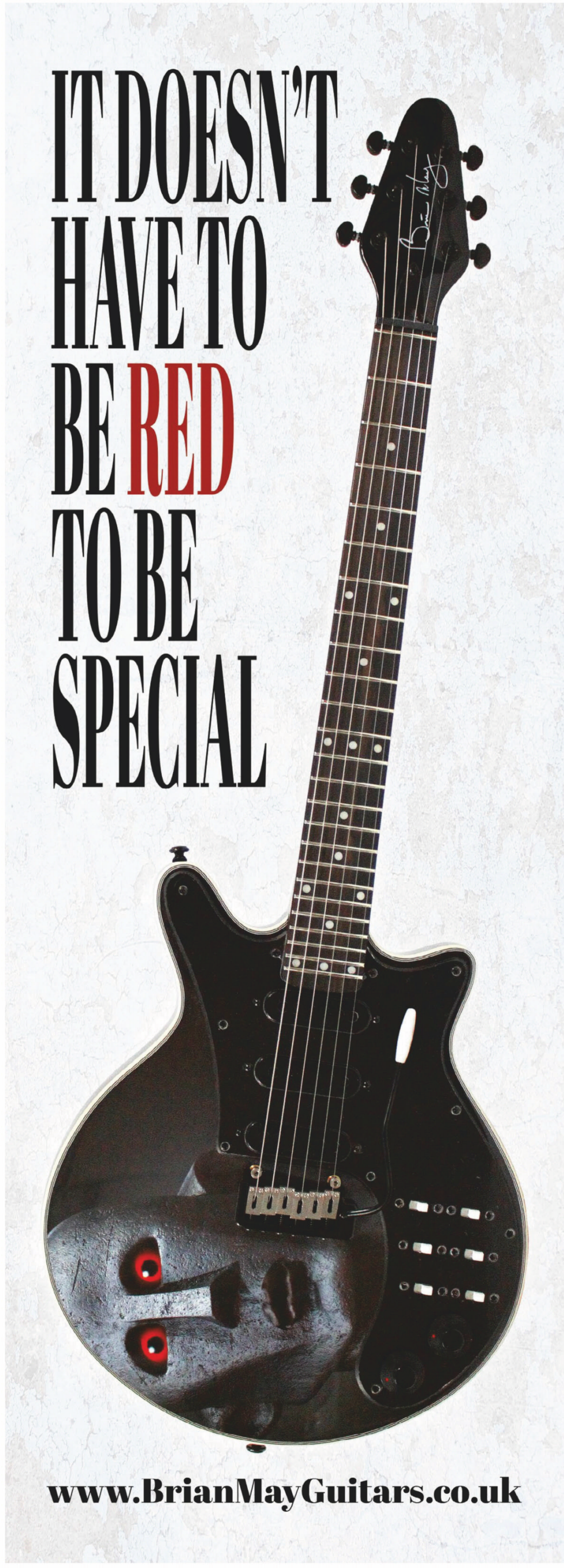
Jimmy Page has confirmed the amp he used to record *Whole Lotta Love* as part of a cover feature interview with our sister magazine *Total Guitar*. "I was using the Super Beatle amps with the [Rickenbacker] Transonic cabinets," he said. "That's exactly what's on *Whole Lotta Love*." (Head to page 44 for a pic.) But by 1969 he'd switched to the Marshalls he became synonymous with: "By the time we get to 1969, we've got so much work ahead of us, and the road manager is getting really, really nervous about the amplifier going down and not getting a replacement. So they're saying, 'Well, everybody else has got Marshalls'... I did go to Marshall because if it broke down you'd be able to find a shop that would have one... Once I'd done the second album, the Marshall is being used by the end of those tracks [recorded] in New York. I got those during that '69 tour. So maybe *Heartbreaker* was done on a Marshall. That's how it stayed, with the Marshall cabinet all the way through."

THEFT OF SPENCER DAVIS COLLECTION

Following the passing of Spencer Davis of The Spencer Davis Group fame at the age of 81 on 19 October, his longtime guitar tech has reported the theft of Davis's guitar collection. It includes a 1967 Zemaitis given to him by Long John Baldry featuring an engraved truss rod cover with Davis's name on.

EVH TRIBUTES CONTINUE

Slash, Tom Morello and Kirk Hammett paid tribute to Eddie Van Halen at the 2020 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony on 7 November. Morello called Eddie the "Mozart of our generation," while Slash said, "I don't think there's anybody that's picked up the guitar since 1978 that hasn't been touched in some way by Eddie Van Halen's influence."



THE LINEUP

Albums

The month's best guitar music – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

AC/DC keep it high voltage in tribute to the late Malcolm Young

AC/DC
Power Up

Columbia

9/10

Electric return from Aussie rockers

Now virtually part of the rock 'n' roll furniture, AC/DC have straddled the decades since their debut in the 1970s, selling more than 200 million albums with their triple-X stadium anthems like *Whole Lotta Rosie* and *The Jack* delighting a legion of fans in the process. There have been personnel changes along the way, including the somewhat bizarre decision to temporarily replace lead singer Brian Johnson with Axl Rose for their last tour. But the saddest of those changes was due to the failing health and ultimate demise of ace rhythm guitarist Malcolm Young.

Power Up is the first album since Malcolm's passing, and so there's the question as to whether his mile-wide open chord blast could ever be replaced. Thankfully, another Young family member stepped up to the plate in the shape of Stevie Young who provides the necessary thick-pile underlay to Angus and the boys' raw muscle. Angus is on record as saying Malcolm left a legacy of riffs and ideas, and this album absolutely rocks as a result.

It's everything you need from an AC/DC album with tracks like *Kick You When You're Down*, *Witch's Spell* and *Demon Fire* providing a demolition derby for the senses. Business as usual, then? Absolutely. Needless to say Angus's SG antics are well to the fore with some fiery soloing throughout and, from what we hear on this album, it won't be any surprise if the band feature in next year's Grammy Awards, adding to the well-deserved accolades already poured upon this amazing band. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Money Shot*
For fans of: Guns N' Roses, The Rolling Stones

Stephen Dale Petit
2020 Visions

333 Records

9/10

Explosive rock 'n' roll from master bluesman

As far as 2020 goes, it's clearly been a challenging year for album releases. Nevertheless, we've had some absolute bangers across the *Guitarist* desk in recent months and Stephen Dale Petit's *2020 Visions* is no exception. Recorded at Sputnik Sound in Nashville by Grammy Award-winning producer Vance Powell (The White Stripes, Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown), the album follows up 2013's *Cracking The Code* and is backed by a rock-solid rhythm section comprising bassist Sophie Lord and drummer Jack Greenwood. This is a lesson in blues guitar mastery and features the gamut of classic tones ranging from gentle 50s-era slapback to wild seat-of-your-pants Hendrix-style fuzz. In these uncertain times, we can be sure that Stephen Dale Petit, Gibson in hand, is keeping the spirit of blues well and truly alive. **[RB]**

Standout track: *The Fall Of America*
For fans of: Joe Bonamassa, Marcus King

Martin Simpson
Home Recordings

Topic

10/10

Lockdown adventures in DIY recording from folk's finest

"So, how did you spend 2020?" is going to be a saying we'll all take well into the ongoing decade. For Martin Simpson, it meant recording an album at home and it's one of his most intimate projects to date. Under normal, non-lockdown circumstances, Martin invites other instrumentalists to join him on his albums, but here it's virtually solo all the way through. This means that his guitar – and banjo – playing is to the fore and his virtuosity on both instruments shines through on tracks like *Family Reserve* and *Plains Of Waterloo*. It's like a good, old-fashioned home concert. To give you an idea of how resourceful Martin has been here, two of the tracks – *Lonesome Valley Geese* and *March 22nd* – were recorded on an iPhone in his back garden. But the quality is such that if we hadn't told you, you wouldn't guess. A marvellous album. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Wren Variations*
For fans of: Davey Graham, Martin Carthy

PHOTO BY RYAN SWANICH

Kenny Wayne Shepherd
Straight To You: Live

Provogue

8/10

Live and loud Strat fury from KWS

Even at the age of 43, Kenny has been a prominent US blues guitarist for 30 years. Considering much of blues rock's strength is through live music, this new 12-track album will not disappoint. Newer song *Woman Like You* is a big track with an infectious riff and a biting Strat on the edge of break-up neck pickup tone. *Long Time Running* admirably features the full band, complete with horn section, and a solo full of blazing pentatonics and string bends. *I Want You* has swagger, horn section blasts and a showcasing of Kenny's lead vocals. The Elmore James classic *Talk To Me Baby* is a fantastically rousing performance as the honky-tonk feel inspires some great solos from the band. Kenny's solo on *Down For Love* is worth checking out: thick and rippling, it's an ultimate tone reference point for any blues rocker. **[JS]**

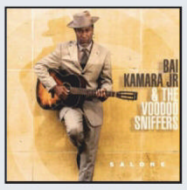
Standout track: *Shame, Shame, Shame*
For fans of: Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimi Hendrix

START ME UP

Bai Kamara Jr Salone

Mig Music

8/10



Sizzling solo blues that draws from many influences

With a 20-year career in music so far and a *Blues Blast* award nomination, Bai Kamara Jr deserves to be on your radar. Born in Bo Town, Sierra Leone he later moved first to the UK and then on to Belgium, where he now lives. His music embraces jazz, blues, soul, folk and rock, and on *Salone* is performed mainly solo on a variety of guitars, electric and acoustic, swirling between the aforementioned styles with effortless ease. Listen with chills to tracks like *Black Widow Spider* and *Cry Baby*, or the distortion-drenched *Fortune*, to hear an artist comfortable with his music. If we had to sum him up we'd say that he sounds very much like a modern-day John Lee Hooker. Smoky vocals and sizzling guitar very adeptly done. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Black Widow Spider*
For fans of: Taj Mahal, Eric Bibb, John Lee Hooker

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Barrie Cadogan talks us through how he captured the atmospheric sounds of his latest long-player, a vibey, Can-influenced collaboration

Album: Quatermass Seven
Artist: Little Barrie & Malcolm Catto

Known for his namesake outfit Little Barrie, Barrie Cadogan has recently collaborated with producer and drummer Malcolm Catto on new project, *Quatermass Seven*

Barrie Cadogan has written and performed some of the most charismatic garage-rock and freak-beat inspired music of recent times with his outfit Little Barrie. Following the tragically young passing of the band's drummer, Virgil Howe (son of Steve Howe), in 2017, Barrie and bassist Lewis Wharton took time out before recording a brilliant new collaborative album with London producer and drummer Malcolm Catto, which blends elements of Krautrock, psychedelia and 60s film-score music into a minimal, mesmerising album.

"When we lost Virgil it just threw everything out the window," Barrie reflects today. "But then, when me and Lewis thought it might be time to start trying to do some music again, we thought about asking Malcolm if he'd be up for doing something, because it wouldn't be like 'Little Barrie are getting a new drummer' and going out on the road or something. We thought, 'Well, we could just try something different and there's no pressure on it.' So we asked him and he said yes, which was great."

Here, Barrie talks us through the tones behind the album's tracks, describing the studio methods and gear used, but also, more importantly, the ethos behind the recording that helped him achieve its magnetically listenable sound.

What vibe were you aiming for with the record?

"It was a sound I had in my head for quite a long time. And it is a bit folkier and a bit moodier [than some of Little Barrie's work] and I suppose those ideas sort of led to where we were at with Malcolm. I was really interested in some of the stuff he was doing with The Heliocentrics. We wanted to keep the energy of rock 'n' roll and blues and things that we loved – the spirit of that music. But we were trying to do something that was a bit away from sort of typical rock or even typical garage-rock format... the idea was to try to move it somewhere different. The sort of production that interested me was things such as the early Can records like *Tago Mago*, and bands like the Silver Apples."

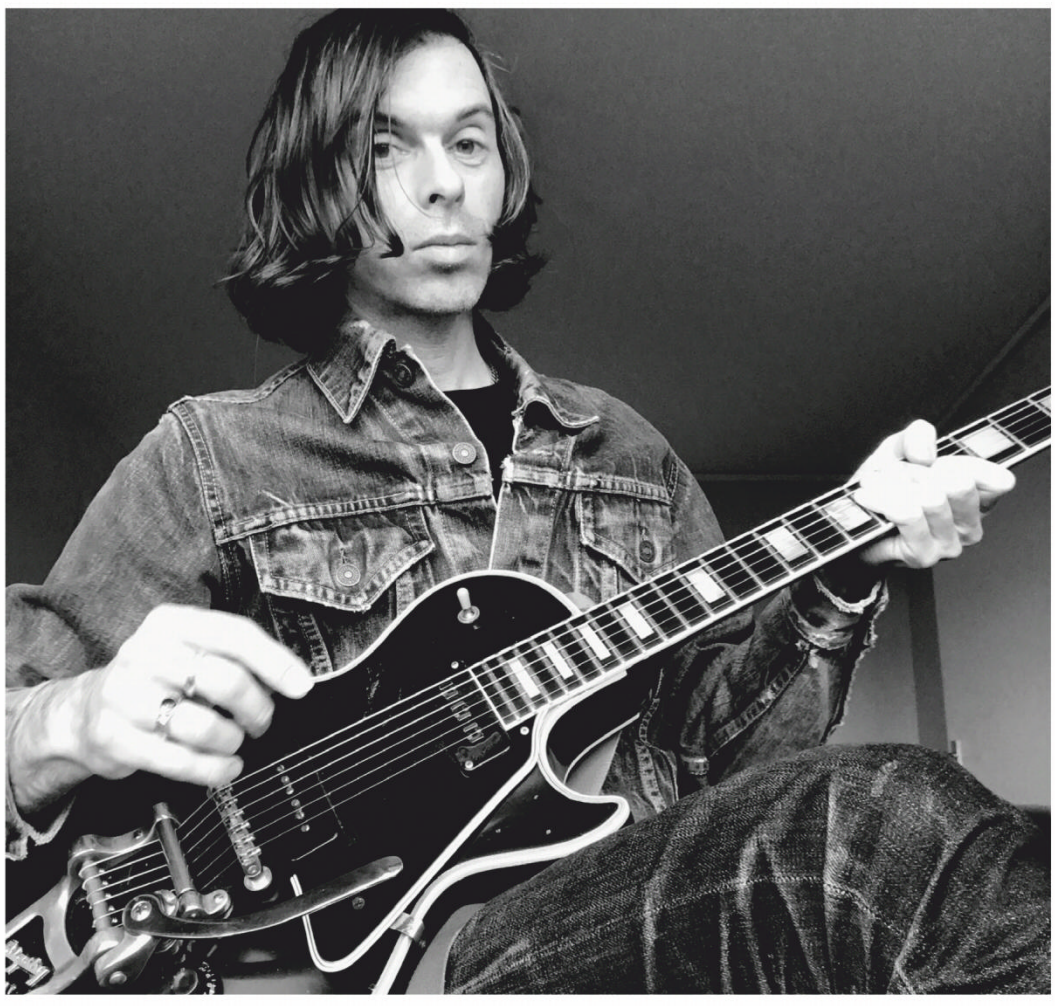


Photo by Carl Fox

Where was the record tracked?

'It was recorded at Malcolm Catto's studio, which is quite a small space, but Malcolm's got a brilliant ear and he knows how to get the best out of the room. We all played in the same room and we didn't do that many days tracking – just four in total. I used a small amplifier because the live room was small: it wouldn't have worked if I had gone in there with my white Bassman and turned it up, because it would have dominated everything.

"I remember on the first day we set a few baffles up round Malcolm's kit [to achieve some separation between sound sources] and we got a good sound. But the next day Malcolm was like, 'You know what? I think we're going to take all the baffles away.' So we did it without and it sounded fantastic, and not a lot of mics were used. So the basic tracks were done live and some tracks were overdubbed afterwards."

What gear did you rely on to get the album's guitar sounds down?

"I had a really minimal setup. I took my black ES-345, I took my custom white [Philippe Dubreuille] guitar plus a guitar that I acquired in the last couple of years, which is an old Kay Red Devil. I only used one amp and I borrowed that from a friend. You know JPF amplifiers? I've got a 212 combo by JPF, which I used a lot on *Death*

Photo by Car Fox

Left to right: Barrie Cadogan (guitars), Malcolm Catto (drums) and Lewis Wharton (bass)

Express, but that amp was a bit too big for Malcolm's studio. So his friend Charlie lent me his 1x12 JPF combo, which was fine for the studio and it was only about 15 watts. So virtually all the guitars were done with that.

"There were a few effects, like a germanium-transistor Cornell Fuzz Face and a bit of slapback delay sometimes. But quite a few of the more tripped-out guitar sounds were done by Malcolm in the mix. But in general we kept it mega simple, you know? So it's just basically those guitars and Lewis used his trusty old Fender P-Bass and a silverfront Bassman head and cabinet from the early 70s."

How did you get the guitar sounds down on tape?

"There was only one mic on the guitar cab. There weren't mics in the back or anything sophisticated, there was just one mic. Malcolm's got a custom-made microphone that's got a Neumann capsule in for vocals, which I really liked, because at Edwyn Collins' place – which we used to work at a lot – he's got an original vintage Neumann U47. Just an incredible microphone, you know?

"But Mal's got some good stuff that he's picked up over the years, too. He got this interesting Russian microphone, which he actually found at a car-boot sale, and he used that for mic'ing up my guitar recently when we pre-recorded some stuff for radio promos. It sounded incredible."

Give us a piece of advice on recording...

"Having a lot of separation [between sound sources or musicians] doesn't always work for certain styles of music. I think people do it because they think the editing options are better. But to be honest, if you've got your chops together, your band's well rehearsed, you know the room and do a good take, it makes life a lot easier afterwards. Sometimes it fills you with dread when you go into the studio and there are about 12 mics on the drum kits: it's like, 'Oh, no!' because you just don't need them, not for the sort of stuff we want to do anyway. You don't always need that separation to capture the vibe and the spirit. I mean, you need balance – but that's more about pre-production rather than post-production. I remember reading about the Sun studios recordings; some of them were done with one microphone for everything.

"In recent years people have tried to go back to sounds they might think have a bit more of an earthiness or a soulfulness about them. But they seem to go about it a really weird way, where they'll still throw 12 mics on the drum kit, but then they'll try to do things [to get a vintage-style tone] afterwards or something like that. It just seems such a long-winded, backwards way of doing it. It's almost like people haven't got the guts to take a lot of those safety nets away. You've got more chance of getting those sounds properly with fewer microphones or by putting yourself all in a room together." **[JD]**

> "The album was recorded at Malcolm's studio, which is quite small, but he's got a brilliant ear and knows how to get the best out of the room"

***Quatermass Seven* by Little Barrie & Malcolm Catto is available now on Madlib Invazion**

SESSION DIARY

Show Time

This month **Adam Goldsmith**'s nerves are put to the test with a live performance for *Children In Need*

© BBC; photo by Gary Moyes

Beverley Knight dazzled on stage in November during her performance of *Wish You Were Here* on *Children In Need*

Much of what is involved in being a freelance session guitarist is musically relatively simple but involves a lot of pressure. For the purposes of this column, obviously I'm generalising somewhat – and this doesn't include things like being hired to be second guitar in John Scofield's band or similar. But I have found this to be true for the majority of my career in commercial music (for want of a better description).

Mid-November I was lucky enough to be asked to accompany the fabulous singer Beverley Knight for a performance of Pink Floyd's classic *Wish You Were Here* at the climax of BBC's *Children In Need* TV show. It very much brought to mind the occasion when I had to play *Stairway To Heaven* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Albert Hall. Most of us can give that tune a good crack, but trying to do it with a world-famous conductor and 4,000 people staring at you while you're wearing a white dinner jacket, it becomes a different process altogether. And such was my experience with *Children In Need*. This was again exacerbated by having only done one or two live TV shows for the majority of 2020's pandemic.

"There's no soundcheck immediately before the performance, and there's the small matter of several million people watching..."

Beverley came to my home studio for a brief rehearsal a few days before. She decided on singing it in the key of B♭/G minor, a minor 3rd up from the original. This necessitated the use of a capo, and I was also asked to use a 12-string acoustic. This instantly makes things a bit more tricky, as it's obviously very exposed: there's no soundcheck immediately before the performance to check tuning/capo stability and so on, and there's the small matter of several million people watching, a lot of whom know exactly how this song is supposed to sound (hence my comparison with *Stairway To Heaven*).

Pressure of this type can do funny things to one's mental process, so I usually go overboard with making sure I'm familiar with super-obvious details. For example, do I use a downstroke or upstroke for the first note? And what notes on what strings immediately follow? Once I'm a couple of bars in, these things usually take care of themselves and I've settled into the music, but playing a very well-known riff on an extremely exposed instrument in front of millions of people isn't something anyone wants to make a hash of, so I find it's best to have a 'belt and braces approach'. To that end, I also had a spare guitar, provided by the BBC, set up and tuned with the capo in place in case of any last-minute emergencies.

A note on 12-strings: I've found the main thing here is whether they are easy to play or not, and I've found Taylor guitars to do a great job (again, for full disclosure I have no relationship with Taylor; it's merely my experience). With this performance being a duo, and no musical director in charge of anything, I also had to watch out for the cue from the floor manager as to when to start, after we'd been rushed into place during the VT (pre-recorded playback of other footage for broadcast), which gave us about two minutes to get settled before we started. In the end, everything went very well and Beverley was, needless to say, incredible. Plus we had the bonus of being involved in a project that does fabulous work for charity. G

Watch the performance at https://bit.ly/467_adamg

Adam's capo'd 12-string (and some intense prep) did the legendary tune justice on the guitar side

Laney

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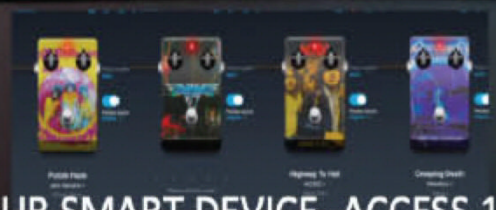

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NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

One Of The Greats

This month **Neville Marten** talks about one of the greatest under-sung session musicians – the incredible Larry Knechtel

Back in the 90s I did sessions in a couple of London studios. It was a part-lovely and part-terrifying experience. Often you didn't hear the song until you got there, or you'd receive a lo-fi cassette of it in basic form, so it was a mix of luck and judgement as to whether you came up with the goods.

Now, I did this at an extremely basic level, certainly not in the realms of the great sessionistas such as Glen Campbell, Tommy Tedesco, Reggie Young, and so on. Or the amazing session 'crews' like Motown's Funk Brothers, Stax's Booker T & The MG's, 'the Section' which included Waddy Wachtel, Danny Kortchmar, Leland Sklar, and of course The Wrecking Crew, which embodied Campbell, Tedesco, Carol Kaye, and a guy I hadn't heard about until recently, Larry Knechtel.

"Our bass player left so Larry said he'd like to try. When he played it I thought, 'Well, bass does count after all...'" ***Duane Eddy***

Larry, among many achievements, played bass on The Byrds' *Mr Tambourine Man*, lead guitar on David Gates's hit *The Guitar Man*, and that fantastic piano on *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, for which he won a Grammy.

I mention this because MusicRadar recently asked me to interview legendary guitar instrumentalist Duane Eddy. In my research, I discovered that Knechtel was in Duane's band from 1959 to 1963. I mentioned this to Duane in passing, but he went on to wax lyrical about Larry and filled me in on more of the story...

"Larry became the most beloved one of all," Duane said. "They all had such respect for him. He was one of the world's finest pianists and he went on the road with me. We were at a gig one night and the piano was all torn up. The theatre owner apologised and Larry said, 'I don't think I can play anything on this.' Strings were broken and everything. The theatre owner said, 'Well, we had Jerry Lee Lewis here last night.' Say no more!

"Larry played bass for me, too. Our bass player left so Larry said he'd like to try, but he didn't have a bass guitar. I said, 'We are in New York next week, we'll buy one at Manny's.' When he played it I thought, 'Well, bass does count after all'. I remember Ry Cooder was working on a session with me and he was talking about the 'innovative bass' on *Mr Tambourine Man*. One of the other guys on the session said it was Larry. 'That was Knechtel?' said Ry. Larry became first call in Hollywood on The Wrecking Crew, but you had to specify piano or bass."

Late Session

"Another session mate of his was David Gates. David arranged some things on my RCA albums, and Larry would play either bass or piano. David asked him to join him in Bread full-time, and that's how he got to play guitar on *Guitar Man*. He was in the session all day with David who was trying to get a sound he heard in his head for the solo. It was around 10 o'clock at night and Larry was thinking, 'Man, I'd sure like to go to bed'. David had tried about six or eight guitar players and when the last guy came out, David said, 'Thanks, man, but it's still not what I want to hear. I'll know it when I hear it.' Larry said to the guy, 'Can I borrow your equipment?' David said, 'I didn't know you played guitar?' Larry said, 'I don't really, but I think I know what you want.' So he went in and played it and David jumped up and said, 'That's it!' And that first take is what you hear on the record."

Larry died in 2009, but his legacy is on all the great recordings he's left behind. Next time you hear any of those tracks, picture Larry in the studio, taking it all in his stride. And then imagine being that gifted – as indeed so many of them were. It's pretty humbling to us mere mortals. G

GAS OF THE MONTH Session guitarist's best friend?

What? Fender 65 Deluxe Reverb **Where seen?** www.gak.co.uk **Price?** £1,349

A couple of years ago *Guitar Techniques* sent a list of questions out to some of the world's greatest session guitarists to learn about their experiences. One question was about their chosen gear. The amp that beat all comers hands down was the Deluxe. Watching a recent *That Pedal Show* where Mick and Dan compared the 65 Reissue to the new Tone Master 'virtual' version, set me thinking that yes, perhaps it is the ultimate. You can get black-panel, silver-panel and tweed versions, and they all do a splendid job. But so fantastic did Dan's Tele sound through their loaner black-panel that I rather fancy trying one again. It's the perfect volume for small gigs, for mic'ing up on bigger stages or in the studio. Add brilliant reverb and tremolo and its stunning ability to handle pedals, and it really could be all the amp you ever need.

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CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Once Upon A Guitar...

Why do some guitars sound special? **Alex Bishop** considers whether there may be more to it than meets the ears

This month the repair 'department' at Alex Bishop Guitars has seen the satisfying completion of a number of restoration jobs. As anyone who has dabbled in this field will know, guitar repair work is often riddled with unforeseen niggles. Manufacturers use a differing variety of designs, materials and methods to construct their instruments, so you can rarely predict with certainty how a job will unravel each time.

Included in my roster of recent repairs are a substantial rebuild of a 1970s Yamaha, an overhaul of a 1980s Japanese dreadnought, and the resetting of a neck from a 1960s Martin Coletti archtop. All the clients are unconnected to one another, though two common themes run through every one: each owner bought their instrument new, and all are fixing up their instruments on sentimental grounds.

"I'd love to take the credit for some extraordinary setup work, but the guitar took on this new lease of life because of its newly discovered heritage"

You don't need me to tell you that a guitar is more than just a guitar. Whether it is battered and bruised from a hard life on the road, or a well-looked-after bedroom guitar, we all know well that bond between player and instrument. Playing guitar is about so much more than just hearing a sound. It's the feel of the neck, the lustre of the finish, perhaps the smell of the wood. It's also about the story.

When I moved into my first workshop in London, I used to visit Deptford market regularly. For a cash-strapped, aspiring luthier it was a great place to look for cheap tools, sometimes instruments, and always local paraphernalia. One week I picked up a 1984 copy of the *Jazz Express* for 20p because it featured UK Gypsy jazz legend Diz Disley on the cover, performing at Soho's 100 Club with a youthful-looking Biréli Lagrène. Diz is playing a beautiful Selmer-Maccaferri style guitar and – since these were my guitars of choice – I decided it had to go on the wall of my new place.

It was several years later, when I took one of these kinds of guitars in for a service, that I made an interesting realisation. The guitar in Diz Disley's hands in the photo bore many similarities to the one lying on the workbench in front of me. Despite the granular black and white photo, it was possible to make out a distinctive rosette and an unusual fretboard dot layout. I made a couple of enquiries and was able to complete the chain of five or so previous owners right back to that moment at the 100 Club, 30 years ago.

The guitar changed in an instant. Its sound seemed to resonate more fully, each note inspired the next more effortlessly. While I would love to take the credit for some extraordinary setup work, it seemed to me that it really took on this new lease of life because of its newly discovered heritage.

But it's not just old guitars that can have a story. I recently wrote about my enjoyment in building a guitar entirely from reclaimed wood, each piece of timber having already lived a life as a dining table, roof beam or floorboard. I believe the unique sound of this guitar has to do with more than just the mere translation of vibrations through wood and air hitting the ear. The human brain adds to this sensation the entire context surrounding the player, too: the feel of a performance space, the reaction of an audience, the uniqueness of the instrument.

Branching Out

It was dwelling on this important aspect of guitar building that I decided this month to commence a new life-long lutherie project. Not long ago I decided I would attempt to visit all of the 50 'Great British Trees' and I've visited four of them so far. Spread far and wide across the UK, these trees were selected by The Tree Council in 2002 for their noteworthy magnificence. Some are ancient, or especially enormous, and several are historically significant. So it only seems fitting that I should build a guitar to represent each of the trees that I meet on this dendrological pilgrimage. My hope for these guitars is that they, too, will develop their own unique history and inspire generations of players to come. Wish me luck! G

A 1984 copy of *Jazz Express* (pictured below) found at Deptford market would, several years later, allow Alex to join the dots between a guitar on his workbench and Gypsy jazz legend Diz Disley

COMPLIMENTARY COPY

JAZZ EXPRESS

NOVEMBER 1984 — first on the scene — 58

ALBERTA HUNTER DIES AT 89

By LEONARD FEATHER

LEGENDARY BLUES SINGER Alberta Hunter died peacefully, of natural causes, on October 17 at her New York apartment. She was 89.

The singer and songwriter, whose *Downhearted Blues* as recorded by Bessie Smith became the best selling blues record of 1923, had an amazing up-and-down career that began in 1910, when she ran away from her Memphis home to Chicago, and sang in Dago Frank's club at the age of 15.

Moving to New York, she made records with Fletcher Henderson in 1923, Louis and Lil Armstrong in '24, Fats Waller in '27, Perry Bradford and the Original Memphis Five. She also worked in Broadway shows and speakeasies.

She spent much of her time in Europe in the '30s, appearing in the London production of *Showboat* with Paul Robeson. During World War II she toured extensively for the USO, making 25 trips to Europe and the South Pacific.

When work in the US became scarce, she studied nursing, and from 1957 was in obscurity as a nurse in a New York hospital. By chance she was rediscovered at a party and was persuaded, after a 20-year retirement, to work at The Cookery in 1977. She was there off and on for years but had been in failing health for the past two years. During this time she also returned to records, making LPs for Columbia under the supervision of John Hammond.

HANS HARZHEIM

BENNY CARTER TOURS

A WIDE-RANGING BRITISH TOUR starts in mid-November for Benny Carter.

His first appearance is at Belfast's Queens Festival (12-14), after which he spends three days in Vienna, returning to play Yalding (19), Eastleigh (21), Birmingham – with the Birmingham Youth Jazz Orchestra (22), Brighton (23), Birmingham (24), Nelson (25, lunchtime), Halifax (25, evening), Kendal (26), South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell (27), Pizza Express, Dean Street, London (28-29) and Cardiff (30).

Most of the bookings feature Carter with guitarist Herb Ellis, singer Elaine Delmar and the Brian Dee Trio.

HANS HARZHEIM

DAVID ADAR

QUINTETTE DU 100 CLUB DE LONDRES: *guitarist Bireli Lagrene (right), with Diz Disley and group at the '100', October 1. Harmonica-player Kenny Baker goes for a solo.*

In your Jazz Express—

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RAISING THE TONE

Inside The Fuzz Factory

Jamie Dickson talks to maverick pedal-maker Zachary Vex about his most famous creation, 25 years on

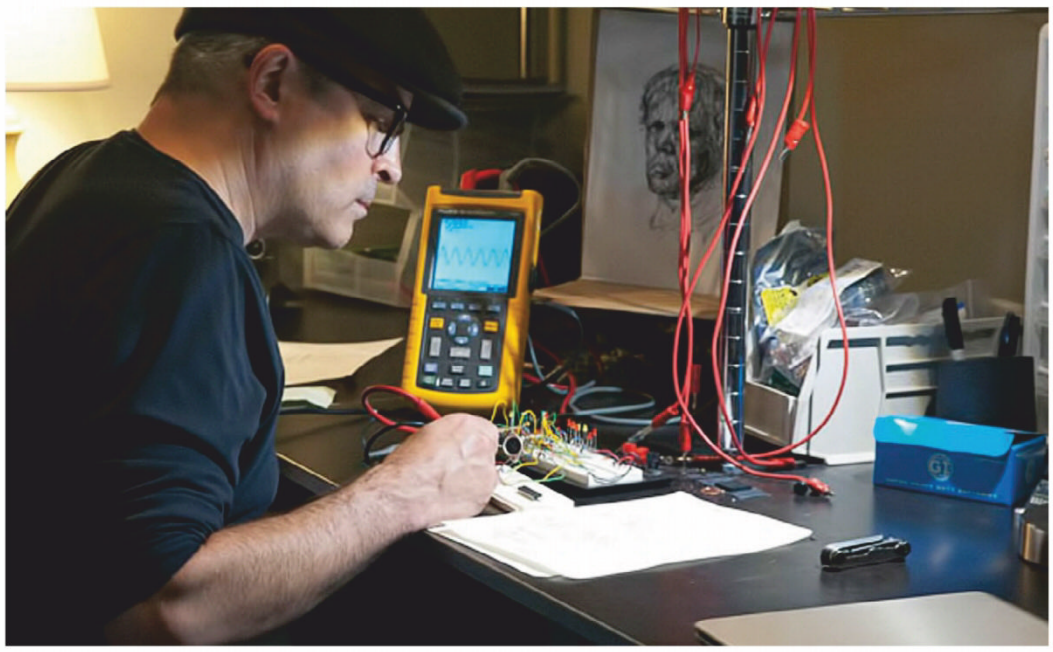
This year effects maker ZVEX celebrates its 25th anniversary. The company is the creation of Zachary Vex, a Minneapolis sound engineer who got the bug for making effects during the grunge era – becoming a godfather of the indie stompbox scene in the process. Many of Zachary's designs are rightly regarded as classics, from the brutal Super Hard On booster to the Plexi-style Box Of Rock distortion. His masterpiece, however, is the Fuzz Factory. Intuitive to use but near-infinite in its tone-sculpting potential, the five-knob design of this iconic fuzz pedal still cuts plenty of ice today. In fact, rising maker Chase Bliss Audio and ZVEX have just collaborated on an evolved, digitally controlled version called the Bliss Factory, offering yet another spin on Zachary Vex's apparently ageless design.

"These [surplus-store] transistors were the most interesting-looking I'd ever seen and they were only a dime apiece and so I bought them all"

When I called Zachary to talk to him about a quarter-century of ZVEX Effects, I asked about the Fuzz Factory, assuming that it was a mature design he'd worked up to after a few years of building pedals. Surprisingly, perhaps, he told me it was in fact only the second pedal he'd ever built, the first being an octave fuzz called the Octane, which made its low-key debut in a Minneapolis guitar store called Willie's American Guitars. The store's owner, Nate Westgor, bought Zachary's first batch of Octane pedals sight unseen, trusting his sound engineering background, and they sold out almost immediately. Nate ordered more – leaving Zachary charged up with excitement about his future as a pedal maker. Local demand for the Octane was soon exhausted, however, and Nate told Zachary he didn't need any more. This is where we pick up the extraordinary story of how Vex's most famous creation, the Fuzz Factory, came to be designed literally overnight.

"I said, 'Well, what do I do?' Vex recalls. "And Nate said, 'Design me a new pedal!' So I went home and I was shaking because my world kind of broke apart at that moment – somehow it felt like things were going to keep growing and suddenly it felt like it was all gone in one day: a strange sensation. So in my fright and complete panic I stayed up all night working on another pedal.

"I was thinking to myself, 'Well, I have an octave fuzz, how about if I just made a regular fuzz – something with its own tone but like a Fuzz Face-type thing.' I had some germanium transistors that I bought at a surplus store called Ax-Man that would buy components from companies that were going bankrupt and then sell them really cheap. I walked in there one day and there was a bin full of these transistors and they were huge. They were the most interesting-looking transistors I'd ever seen and they were only a dime apiece and so I bought them all. But these transistors were so odd... I plugged them in every possible way and no matter what I did the circuit sounded like mush – like there was nothing there. No gain, no fuzz, no fun."



It may now be the maker's best-known pedal, but the Fuzz Factory originally sprung from a panicked all-night building session

All-Night Innovation

"I was pissed off, because I really wanted to make something and now it was getting really late at night," he continues. "So I put a little booster on the front of it, a little like an Electro-Harmonix LPB booster, though not exactly the same. I built that on to the front of the pedal so now it was a three-transistor pedal and then the pedal just went haywire: it started squealing and making all kinds of weird noises and I couldn't get it to settle down. So I took out a lot of the resistors that were fixed [value] and I put in pots instead. The idea was that I could start tweaking, using the pots to find the values that would get it to settle down and work right.

"So I now had three knobs that didn't really have good descriptions, because they were influencing such odd parts of the circuit, as well as a volume – but I could turn them all to different positions and get several different textures that I really loved. So I wrote out a little list that said things like: 'Turn this one to 60 degrees, turn this one to 20 degrees, turn that one to 120 degrees...' you know? One of the sounds I found I named 'Ripping Velcro', for example. By that point I was exhausted... I think I went to sleep at 11 in the morning because I was up all night working on that thing."

When Zachary woke again, hours later he was concerned that exhaustion might have clouded his judgment. Was the pedal he'd built really any good or just the product of a tired mind and tired ears?

Zachary Vex with a custom-painted Fuzz Factory 7, a seven-knob version of the original creation, and which uses two rare Russian GT308V germanium transistors

"I woke up in the afternoon and went and played through it again and, sure enough, it sounded just as good, if not better," he recalls. "I thought, 'This is amazing, I love this thing... but it's just really weird.' So my first idea was to put it in a box with all the knobs on it and let my friends listen to it, then tell me what their favourite sounds are, and then I'll put fixed resistors in and leave it. But when I showed my friends they thought I should leave the knobs in. Because they just liked screwing around with it, turning all the knobs to different positions, getting all these crazy sounds.

"The prototype also had two switches: a bypass switch and then this other switch that flipped the ground – you could make it positive ground or negative ground – because it made the circuit a lot less stable when you made it positive ground. And I figured out why that was happening later and I got rid of that switch and turned it into another knob. So now I had five knobs, but I didn't know what to call it. But one day, the name 'Fuzz Factory' popped into my head – because it's a factory of fuzz, a way of manufacturing your own tone, something unique to yourself."

> "I called the pedal the 'Fuzz Factory' – because it's a factory of fuzz, a way of manufacturing your own tone, something unique to yourself"

Zachary's creation went on to become his first major hit, after it was reviewed in *Guitar Player* magazine by PJ Harvey guitarist and columnist Joe Gore. But the core of its success was the way it connected with musicians. With its powerful analogue controls, the Fuzz Factory could be interpreted both as a blank canvas and a blistering wall of sound, imposing few limitations on the musician's creativity. In a world of orderly but anodyne modellers and multi-effects, the excitement of using such pedals is as important now as it was 25 years ago.

To sample the tonal melting pot of the Fuzz Factory try the ZVEX original or check out the limited-edition Chase Bliss x ZVEX Bliss Factory (https://bit.ly/bliss_factory) for sale over at Reverb.com. G

www.zvex.com

THREE TO GET READY

Unconventional ZVEX stompboxes to try

25th Anniversary Fuzz Factory $299

To celebrate a quarter-century of five-knob fuzz ferocity, ZVEX has made 50 limited-edition Fuzz Factorys UV-printed with 1930s-style power station graphics. Beneath the hood, it's the same NOS germanium transistor design with controls governing Volume, Gate, Comp, Drive and Stab – standing for stability, in everyday terms, how scuzzy, unpredictable and trashed you want it to sound! A classic. The basic model Fuzz Factory Vexter comes in at £179.

Box Of Rock Vertical £199

In the early days ZVEX stood out for using horizontal format pedals, but, more recently, the company has bowed to popular demand and issued some of its best-sellers in a more conventional form factor. The Box Of Rock is intended to "simulate Zachary's favourite amp turned up all the way, a 1966 Marshall. The Tone control adjusts brightness and there's a high-headroom, low-noise boost."

Lo-Fi Loop Junky £299

Highlighting the more off-the-wall side of ZVEX's work, the Lo-Fi Loop Junky is "a 20-second analogue phrase-sampling looper with very low fidelity... brick-wall compression, hiss, distortion and a warped-record vibrato feature that makes your guitar sound like an ancient radio transmission." If grain and dirt are part of your soundworld, you should try one.

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Extended Chords: Minor (PT2)

Following last issue's topic of extended major chords, **Richard Barrett** explains the construction of darker, more complex minor chords

The conventions for creating and naming a minor chord are similar to those for major chords – but not the same, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the origin and point of reference remains the major scale, however counter-intuitive that may seem!

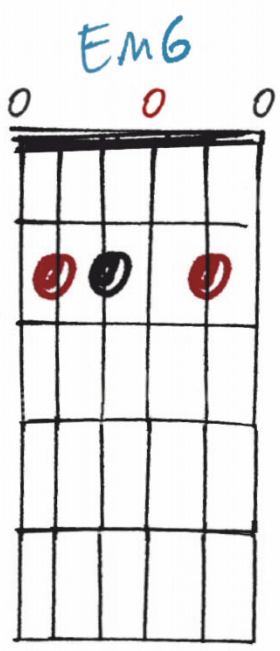
Minor chords are commonly described as having a '♭3rd'; this means the 3rd is lowered by a semitone, rather than necessarily being a 'flat' note. For example, in E minor, the 3rd is G♮ rather than G#. Extending the chords, adding further notes than the root, (♭)3rd and 5th, follows the same numerical system as major chords – though gives a darker, more complex sound.

7ths are also dealt with in the same way. Simply adding the 7th from the scale gives us a major 7th chord (which would result in a minor/major 7th as featured later), or a '♭7th' to give the more commonly heard 'dominant' 7th. Always remember, we are simply dealing with names for sounds here. Check out the examples, which will help explain further. G

Right: Robben Ford is an expert in adding colour to chord voicings to keep things interesting

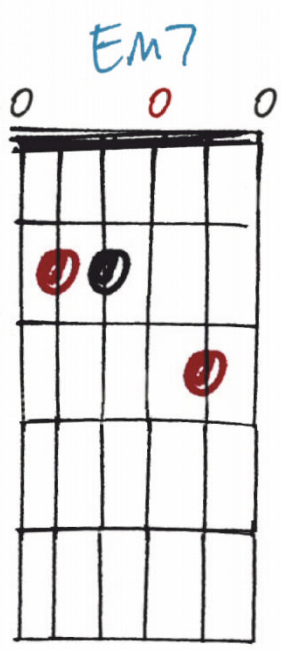
Example 1

This Emin6 chord features the root (E), ♭3rd (G) and the 5th (B), though they appear out of scale sequence due to the guitar's non-linear nature. The '6' part of the name refers to the C# happening on the second string – the sixth note of the E major scale (not minor!) added to the existing chord. From low to high, we now have: E, B, E, G, C#, E.



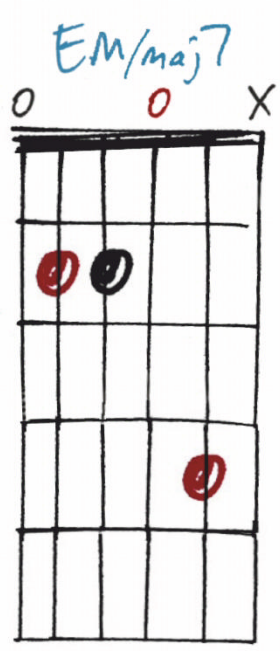
Example 2

By raising the 6th a semitone/fret, we create an Emin7 chord. This is actually quite a simplistic name for what could be described as Emin/♭7, which actually counts as an altered chord due to the ♭7th not being lifted straight from the major scale. Thankfully, ♭7ths (also called dominant) are usually referred to by default simply as '7th'.



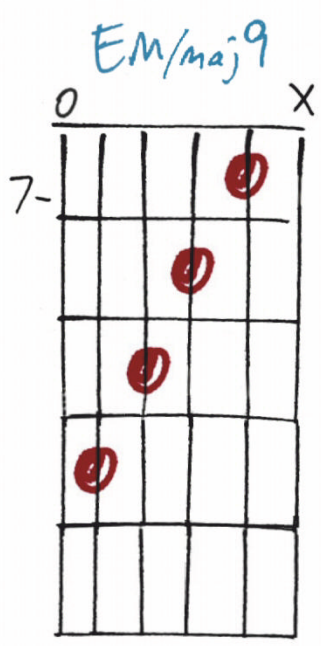
Example 3

If we take a minor chord and add the major 7th (D#), it is no longer an altered chord, as this note has been taken straight from the major scale. But the name needs to specify that this is a major rather than ♭/dominant 7th, hence this initially contradictory sounding name, in which the term minor describes the chord and major describes the extension/added note!



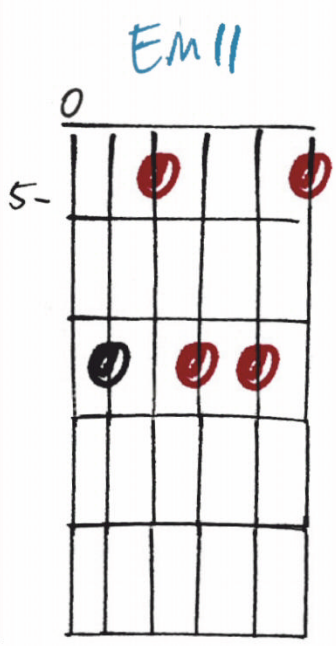
Example 4

Here is a take on the previous Emin/maj7, extending it further to add a 9th (F#). For this reason, we call it Emin/maj9. We're not ignoring the 7th – that is what the 'maj' is referring to – but we always name after the highest extension. Sometimes a 9th is added without the 7th, but this would be called 'add9'.



Example 5

Extending beyond the 9th, we add the 11th (A), for an Emin11. You will find the root (E), ♭3rd (G) ♭7th (D) 9th (F#) and 11th (A). Where is the 5th, you may ask? It's not very practical to reach on the guitar, but you will also find it's pretty common to drop the 5th in extended chords like this. Why? Because it sounds prettier and less harmonically 'dense'.



18+

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STAR LETTER

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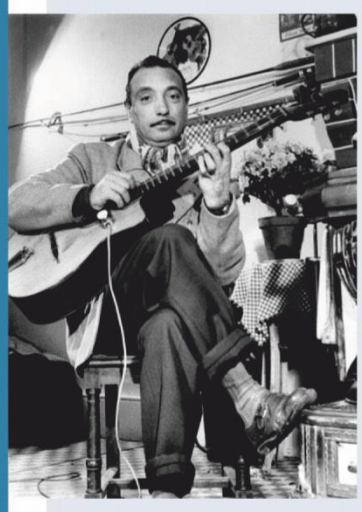

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

I've always taken a strong interest in the development of the guitar and love to listen to all genres right back to the early part of the 20th century. Until the guitar was electrified, apart from classical music, it was purely an accompaniment instrument. Of course, Lonnie Johnson and Django Reinhardt found great acclaim in the pre-war years, but it was the advent of the electric guitar that changed everything. From those first versions, we have seen so many developments, from the early Les Pauls through to the Fender Broadcaster, Telecaster, Stratocaster, the Gibson 335 and so on. But what I feel has been the biggest innovation of all for our instrument has been the ability to sustain notes.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, even the early 60s, there were many great virtuoso players such as the jazz guitarist Charlie Christian, but none could hold onto a note for much longer than a second. Some blues players like BB King were able to hold notes longer by having their amps really loud and sustaining notes by bending the vibrating string.

The ability to produce a long sustained note can convey real emotion. The violin and cello can do this. Likewise in jazz, sax players such as John Coltrane and trumpeters like Miles Davis injected raw emotion in their solos with those long soaring notes. With the advent of sustain in the guitar began the era of the great blues/rock guitars who we now look up to today. Sustain is the name of the game!

Dennis Homes, via email

The ways in which that technological shift influenced music itself are more profound than we might first think, too. Take the 'Fretless Wonder' Gibson Les Paul Customs of the 50s. Why were tiny, barely noticeable frets were ever a good thing? Go back to the 50s and top players wanted to move jazz chords up and down the neck in rapid succession. Swift, painless lateral movement and easy chord forming was the priority. So gains made in the expressiveness of single-note playing thanks to longer sustain may come at the expense of a decline in focus on harmony, which has arguably been sidelined a bit in electric guitar music in the rush to make notes sing loud and long, rather than speak briefly but brilliantly. As the proverb says: "Take what you want and then pay for it..."

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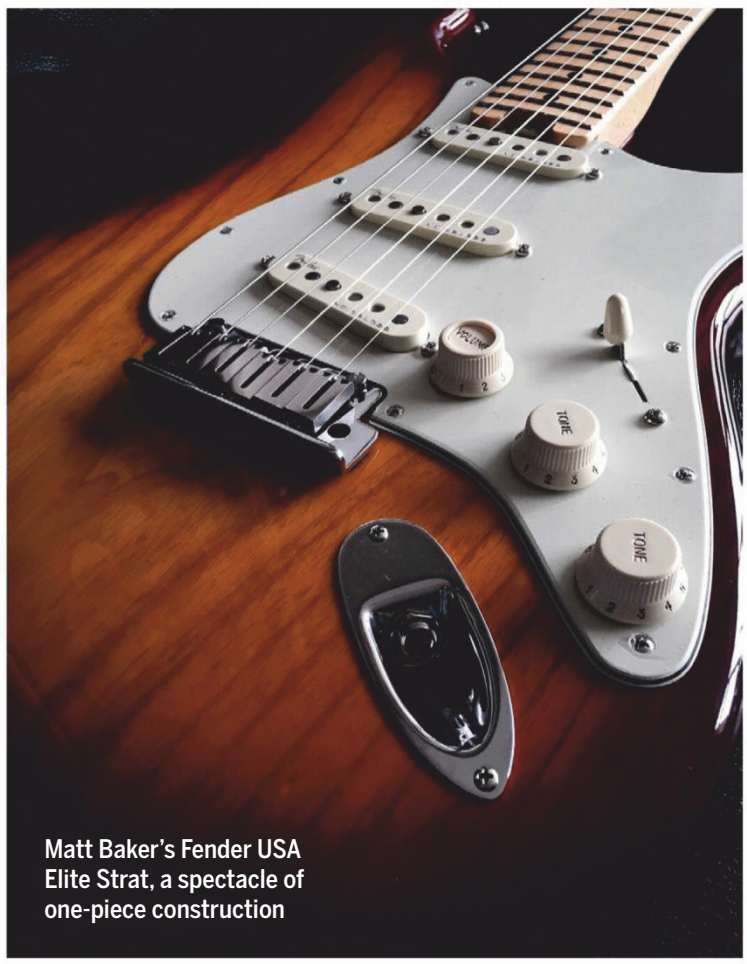

Matt Baker's Fender USA Elite Strat, a spectacle of one-piece construction

CLEAR ADVANTAGE

I'm loving the magazine as always and just wanted to express my agreement with Gary Mclaren's letter in issue 465. I enjoy my guitars both aesthetically as well as sonically, and while I'm a huge Fender fan, I've often pondered upon some of the wood choices for their clear-finish guitars. Assuming it has no effect on tone or build quality, I have no issue with bodies constructed from multiple pieces, but when the guitar is destined to receive a clear coat, surely you want the wood to be attractive?

I'm extremely fortunate to own a 2016 Fender USA Elite Strat in Tobacco Burst that is, quite remarkably, constructed from a single piece of timber. I can still remember the collective gasp on the shop floor of Andertons when the case was opened for the first time. Compared with most other clear-coat guitars, my Strat could easily be mistaken for a product of the Custom Shop. It even gives my PRS Core Custom 24 a run for its money in the looks department.

This stunner didn't cost any more than other Elites I auditioned, some of which clearly displayed joints beneath their lacquer along with mismatched shades of wood or grain pattern. I was just lucky, very lucky! I accept that the core USA Fender line is not competing with the likes of PRS or boutique builders when it comes to aesthetics, but would it be

so difficult to select the best slabs of timber for the clear-finish models? I know you don't necessarily buy a Strat for its wood grain, but when that grain is on display, put in a bit of effort! My guitar is proof that when you do, the results can be spectacular!
Matt Baker, via email

Hi Matt, congratulations on your one-piece find and thanks for your further thoughts on a subject that clearly stirs up feelings. The Elite is, as the name implies, a high-spec Fender. Functionally, there's little evidence well-made bodies built from two or more pieces of wood sound worse than one-piece bodies. Aesthetically, however, the one-piece clearly wins if the finish is transparent. Fender's duty to the customer is to provide a professionally built, functionally effective musical instrument – does that duty extend to finessing the construction of individual guitars on the production line, if those guitars were destined to wear a trans finish? Well, clearly there's consumer desire for that. Logistics and economics probably get the casting vote on that question, however. At what point is it decided that a guitar body is to have a trans finish? If that decision happens after the bodies have been made, someone would need to grade them into two- or one-piece bodies (for the trans-finish examples) and direct the rest to solid-colour guitars. That would possibly entail an upcharge for the trans models, which might be off-putting to buyers or complicate a product line. We'll ask the folk at Fender and let you know what they come back with.

REQUESTS...

Want to see something in the mag? Tell us at guitarist@futurenet.com

Reader David Hughes wants to know how to create the ultimate practice room

I know I'm not alone in my disappointment at failing to use the time made available by lockdown to improve my guitar skills. I've pretty much exhausted all the excuses, but during my many deliberations one useful thing occurred to me: my practice space is uninspiring. So, how about a feature on the 'perfect practice room'? As Christmas approaches it would be great to have a few ideas to pass on to my relatives about fixtures and fittings, gizmos and gear to equip the perfect room. In the meantime, I'll work on my wife about which room I can take over!
David Hughes, via email

Great idea, and something we can almost certainly examine in editor Jamie's Raising The Tone column in coming issues. In the meantime, one of the most powerful aids to inspiring practice is using a looper pedal, so you can jam over your own rhythm playing. Boss went one further this year and incorporated a good drum machine into its RC-10R looper, meaning you can turn dry practice sessions into much more musical affairs, learning how to solo over target chords or just jamming with yourself. That's one of the reasons it won a Gear Of The Year award in this issue, but most loopers will bring a lift to your practice sessions and simpler ones are pretty cheap, too.

FALL GUYS

Since the first lockdown I've caught up on the TV shows I've missed as, being a pro musician, I generally don't watch too much TV. While watching *The Fall*, I noticed the character names seemed strangely familiar, but it wasn't until I saw the complete cast list that I twigged: the writer is obviously a guitar nut – just look at the names from Stella Gibson through to Stagg by way of Jim Burns, Reed Smith... Is this the only time this has happened?
Neil Bowman, via email

This was news to us, too, Neil, we have to admit. The series' writer is Allan Cubitt and, curiosity piqued by your letter, we got in touch with his agent who confirmed that the characters' names in *The Fall* are indeed all derived from guitars. The agent added, rather sniffily, that this had already been widely reported. Well, excuse us for asking... Any readers noticed any other guitar themed Easter eggs in films, games or books? Taylor guitars featured in *The Last of Us Part II* videogame recently so there must be more...

SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT

Back in March I started with the dreaded 'Arthur Ritus' in the thumb of my left hand, to the point where I could feel bones rubbing together. Playing guitar began to have painful drawbacks and I wondered how this was going to pan out in the future. Then my wife read an article in the paper extolling the virtues of turmeric. After taking turmeric and cod liver oil capsules for a couple of weeks, there was a significant reduction in the pain in my hand. I can honestly say that, so far, the improvement has been very positive. I hope this info can be helpful to other readers who suffer similar problems.
Dave Cooper, Sheffield

Thanks Dave, glad to hear you're getting some relief from arthritis, which also seriously threatened the playing career of your fellow Sheffield resident Richard Hawley. While the first port of call should always be your GP, anecdotally we've heard similar stories of turmeric providing some relief from arthritis. Let's hope this info may be useful to others, too.

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

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Attention home guitar builders! We've teamed up with renowned lutherie tool and parts supplier StewMac to launch our first ever competition to find Britain's best amateur guitar builder. To make it worth your while, StewMac has put up a fantastic prize of £370* worth of professional lutherie supplies for the overall winner and one runner-up prize worth £185*. So, as well as the glory of winning, you'll take home pro-grade tools and materials to help you build your next creation.

For this inaugural competition we'll be inviting entries for original electric guitar designs, either solidbody or semi-acoustic. So, what do you have to do? Simply go to the web address below to enter. You'll be asked to submit a single, good-quality image of your creation, as well as a short but detailed description of the guitar you built, describing its spec and standout features. We're particularly looking for evidence of a skilled, original build and outstanding attention to detail – so if you poured heart and soul into your creation, let us know all about it!

Please note that, regretfully, partscaster builds are not eligible – and while it's fine for your entry to be influenced by well-known designs, we won't be accepting clones of famous models by major makers. In other words, it's time to let your creativity and originality shine through... As this is a competition for British amateur guitar builders we regretfully cannot accept submissions from professional guitar makers or overseas makers, either – though we may open up the field in future competitions if there is sufficient interest.

As the competition unfolds, we'll be keeping readers posted on progress with regular reports, so even if your design doesn't win, it may well make it into the mag as part of our ongoing coverage – so there's everything to play for.

When all the entries are in by the deadline of 5 March 2021, *Guitarist*'s review team will hand-select a shortlist of the most promising designs – after which the lutherie experts at StewMac will join us to select the triumphant winners. Please note, more images and info about your guitar may be required by the judges in the event that it is shortlisted, to help them make their final selection, so please be prepared for that eventuality.

As well as the fantastic prizes put up by StewMac, the winners will be invited to visit *Guitarist*'s studio (public health rules permitting) to watch their winning designs being photographed professionally by the same team who shoot our review guitars in loving detail every issue. Naturally, we'll showcase those winning guitars in detail in the mag, too, to celebrate your work and share it with *Guitarist* readers around the world. We can't wait to see what you've been building, so get entering – after reading the full terms and conditions on the left – and may the best luthier win!

Enter here: http://bit.ly/AmateurGuitarBuilder

Closing date: 5 March 2021

Terms & Conditions

By taking part, you agree to be bound by these terms and the Competition Rules: https://www.futureplc.com/competition-rules/. Entries must be submitted via http://bit.ly/AmateurGuitarBuilder by 23:59 (GMT) on 5 March 2021. Late or incomplete entries, or acoustic or kit-built guitar entries, will be disqualified. Entries are limited to one per individual. Images that form part of your entry must not exceed 16MB. Open to all UK residents aged 18 and over, except employees of Future Publishing Limited ("Future") and any party involved in the competition. The winner will be selected by a representative(s) in his/her/their sole discretion from a shortlist of 10 entries selected by a panel of judges from the *Guitarist* team. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The winner will be notified by email or telephone within one week of the judges' final decision. There will be one (1) winner and one (1) runner-up entitled to a $500 and $250 respectively to spend on www.stewmac.com, provided by StewMac. The winner may be invited to Future's photo studios for a photoshoot of their entry (subject to governmental restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic) which will feature in a subsequent issue of *Guitarist* magazine and on the *Guitarist* website. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative. All online entries (not your guitar!) will become the property of Future upon receipt and will not be returned. You retain all rights you have in the copyright and other intellectual property rights comprising your entry but, by entering the Competition, you grant Future, its licensees and the Competition sponsor, the right free of charge to republish your entry in any medium or format. You warrant that the entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. By entering this competition you acknowledge and agree that Future shall have no liability for any loss, damage or injury suffered by you or others (i) during the process of designing, building and submitting your entry, and/or (ii) while travelling to and from the Future photo studios. You also warrant that your entry is entirely your own work and will not infringe any third party intellectual property rights, and that Future shall have no liability as a result of any actual or threatened claim that your entry infringes third party intellectual property rights.

***Prize value:** StewMac is providing gift certificates to the value of $500 and $250 to the winner and runner-up respectively, which converts to around £370 and £185 respectively at the time of going to press. The GBP value is subject to change, depending on the currency exchange rate at the time of the prize giving.

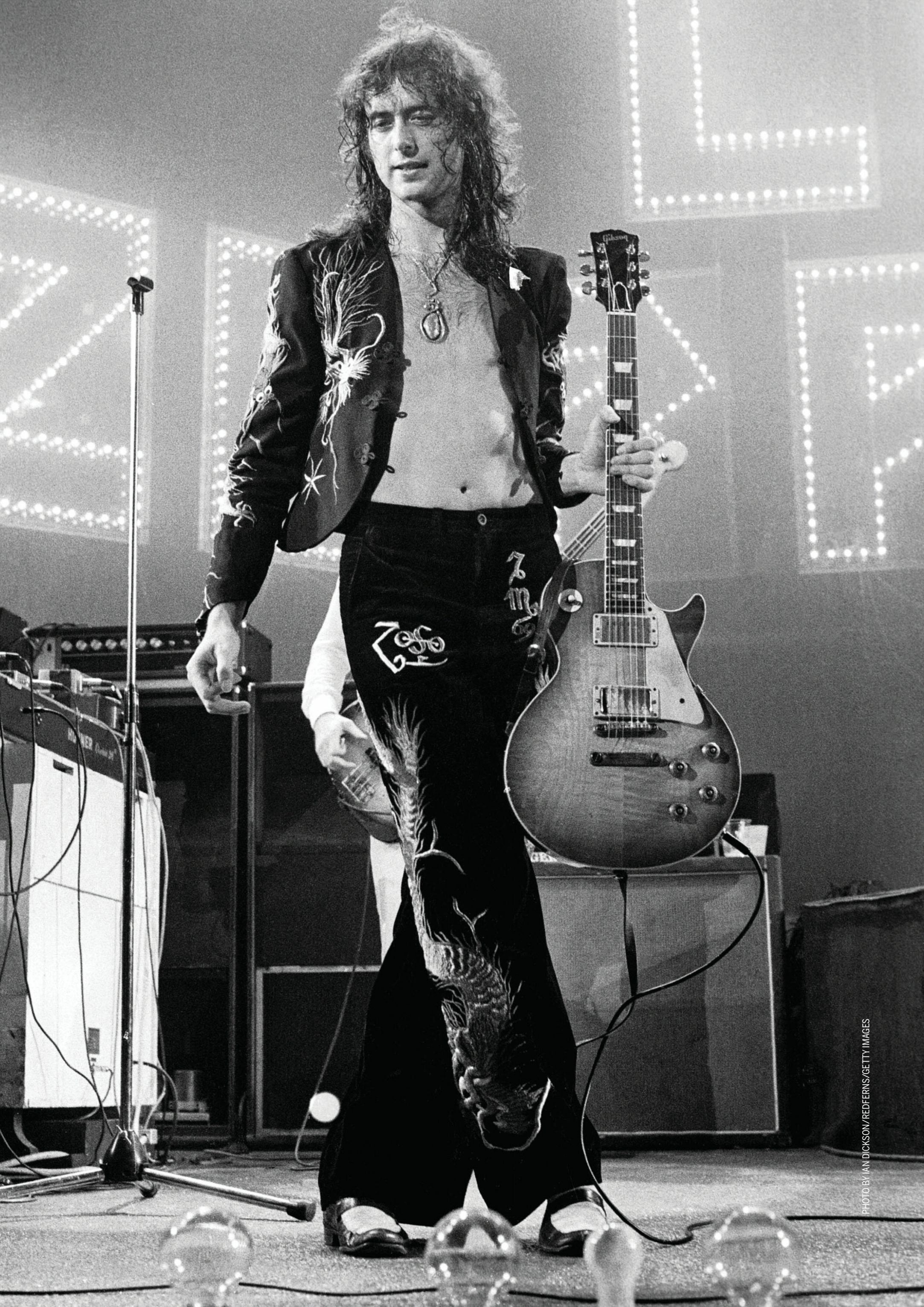

PHOTO BY IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

FULLY LEDDED

Jimmy Page's brand-new book, 'Jimmy Page: The Anthology', goes into exhaustive detail about the gear he used during his career. Here's a brief glimpse between the pages of this massive tome, focusing on some of the instruments and amps that Jimmy used to forge Led Zep's legendary sound with commentary from Jimmy himself

For years, the exact gear that Jimmy Page used during Led Zeppelin's heyday was shrouded in mystery, particularly with regards to what went on behind the closed doors of the recording studio. Always shy of letting the cat out of the bag, Jimmy is on record as joking that he was unwilling to share the details of his studio amp setup because every time he did so the prices rocketed on eBay and that one day he might want to buy a spare. Theories were exchanged between fans and musicians alike, but confirmation was never forthcoming... until now.

In his new book, *Jimmy Page: The Anthology*, Jimmy bares all – and it doesn't just centre on the Zep years, either. The lavishly illustrated 400-page book begins with JP's early life and days as a session ace and comes up to date with the recent reissue of the 'Mirror' and 'Dragon' iterations of his Fender Telecaster, which blasted its way into music fans' collective consciousness with those first E5 chords on *Good Times, Bad Times* from the band's first album.

Page has kept virtually every speck of gear he's used during his career, plus invoices, studio schedules, tape boxes, clothing and, of course, amps, guitars and effects, all pictured in glorious close-up detail. It goes way beyond the average gearaholic's dream and is essential reading for any Zeppelin fan.

Our brief look in this issue really doesn't scratch the surface of what the book details, but we decided to look specifically at the early to mid-Zeppelin era to give you a taste of what exactly is on offer. Possibly the most exciting is the collection of guitars and amps used for *Stairway To Heaven*. Until recently, not everybody would have guessed that the acoustic guitar at the beginning of this momentous track was a Harmony Sovereign and that there were two 12-strings present in the mix, a Fender Electric XII 'hockey stick' and a Vox Phantom 12. The famous Gibson ES-1275 double-neck was bought after the album was recorded as a solution for playing the track live. Also shown in the picture on page 46 is Jimmy's choice of amps for *Stairway...*, a mix of Super Lead and Super Bass heads through a quartet of Marshall 4x12s.

Then there's the rig that Jimmy used for the Zeppelin concert movie, *The Song Remains The Same*, and the story behind Jimmy's 'No 2' Les Paul. So feast your eyes on this glimpse inside Jimmy's new book – we're sure it will make you want to experience the whole thing!

"Moving into the second leg of the American tour, I used the Danelectro on 'White Summer/Black Mountain Side'. The Telecaster had been on the first album and tours until I converted to the Les Paul, which then became the main campaigner"

JIMMY PAGE

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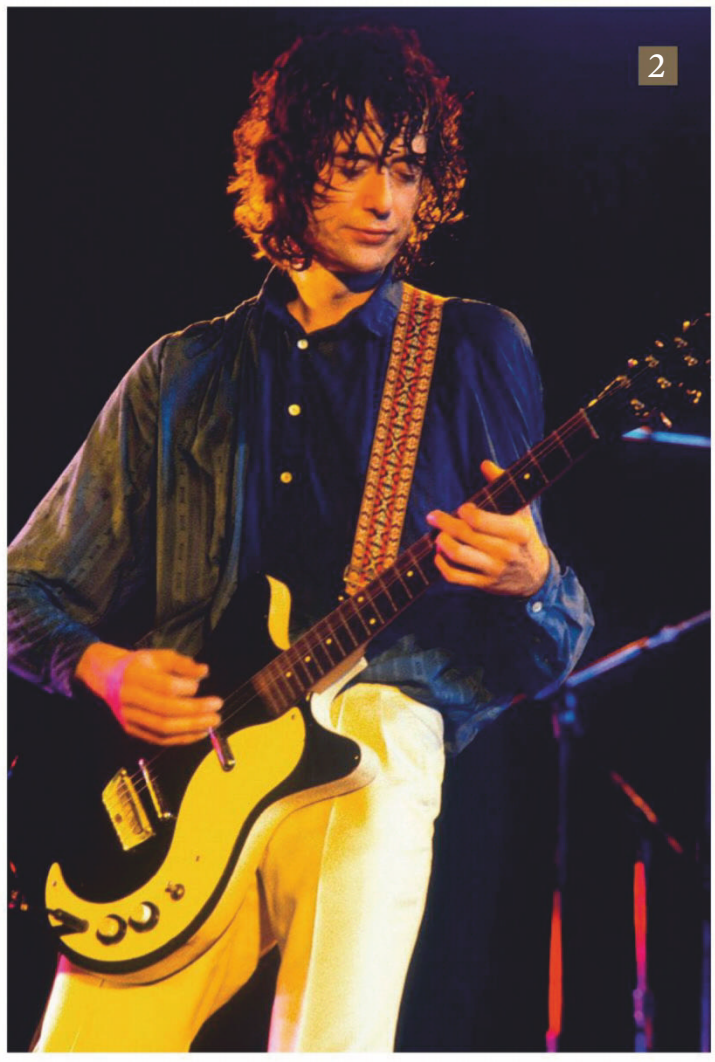

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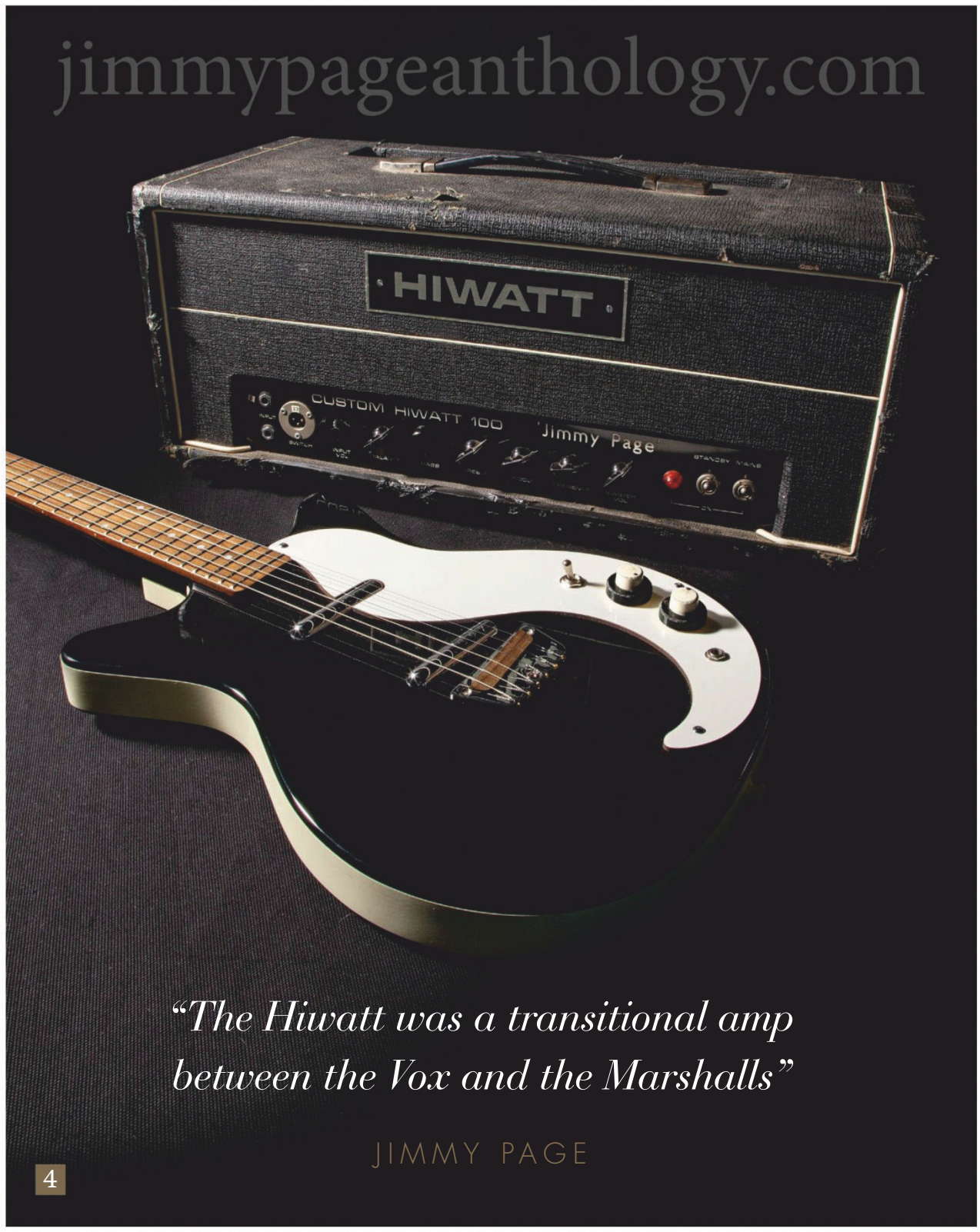

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1. Jimmy's Danelectro 3021, '59 Les Paul Standard and Fender 'Dragon' Telecaster with a Vox UL7120 amp and C02 'Long Tom' tape echo atop Rickenbacker Transonic speaker cabs. This was the set-up for *Whole Lotta Love*

2. 11 August 1979 at Knebworth, Jimmy used the Danelectro tuned to DADGAD for *Kashmir*

3. One of Zeppelin's first gigs in Denmark in 1968 (although they were still known as The New Yardbirds at this point) where Jimmy is playing the 'Dragon' Telecaster

4. A Hiwatt Custom 100 Jimmy Page amp head from 1969

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"The guitars employed in the recording of 'Stairway to Heaven' and the double-neck solution for live performances"

JIMMY PAGE

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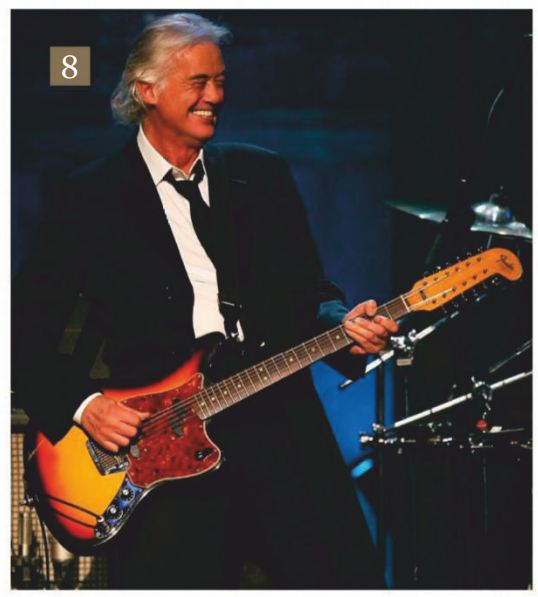

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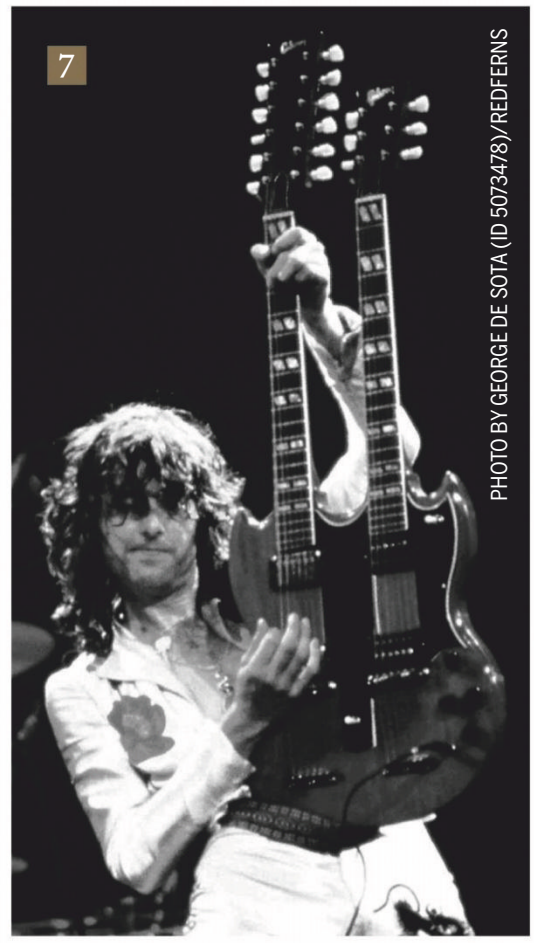

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5. The guitars and amps that were used on *Stairway To Heaven*: Fender Electric XII and Vox Phantom XII 12-strings with the Harmony Sovereign H1260 that played the famous intro sit alongside the Gibson EDS-1275 double-neck Jimmy used to play the track live. Amps are Marshall Super Bass and Super Lead heads atop Marshall 4x12 cabs

6. Jimmy using the Harmony Sovereign live with the band in an acoustic moment

7. Performing live on stage at Madison Square Garden playing the Gibson EDS-1275 double-neck

8. Jimmy using the Fender XII on stage when he played with Jeff Beck at the 24th Annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony on 4 April 2009 in Cleveland, Ohio

9. Marshall Super Lead and Super Bass heads with Marshall 4x12s, Echoplex EP-3 delays, Conn Strobotuner and Sonic Wave Theremin, Les Paul Standard and EDS-1275 double-neck

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10. The 1959 Les Paul Standard 'No 2' that Jimmy bought at The Drake Hotel during Led Zep's Madison Square Garden shows in New York, 1973

11. Robert Plant and Jimmy on stage at Madison Square Garden, New York City on 29 July 1973. The concert movie *The Song Remains the Same* was filmed over the three nights from 27 to 29 July at the venue

12. The 'No 2' 1959 Les Paul Standard seen from behind

"Whilst staying at the Drake Hotel in New York for the Madison Square Garden shows, we had a lot of money stolen from the safety deposit box.

"When I was at the Drake a guitar seller came to my room with a Les Paul Standard for sale (what became my Les Paul 'Number Two'). I played it and I really liked it, so Richard Cole, our tour manager, went down to the lobby to get the money out of the safety deposit box to pay this guy. The night porter was there as he held the duplicate key to undo and then counter lock the safety deposit box. He would have seen cash being deposited into the box from those East Coast tour dates.

"I found out that the money had gone from our manager Peter Grant when I was in the wings of the stage just ready to go on for the final concert at Madison Square Garden. I thought the best remedy was to carry on and do the show.

"Later, I was told that the robbery had something to do with the night porter. When the money disappeared, so did he."

JIMMY PAGE

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13. A Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster is not a guitar that you'd immediately associate with Jimmy, but this one was used on the track *Candy Store Rock* from the Zep album *Presence*

"Keith Harwood was the engineer for *Presence*. He and I had an amazing connection, which had built through the years – especially during *Physical Graffiti*, on which he did all the mixing with me, including recording the orchestra on *Kashmir*.

"It came to the point where we were into the last week of our three-week booking at Musicland and we still had the guitar overdubs and the mixing to do. Everyone else had already left for the UK after completing the tracks and their overdubs.

"Keith and I made a deal that whoever woke up first in the morning had to call the other so as to maximise studio time. Curiously enough, it always seemed to be me who was calling Keith. We were spending many hours in the studio each day.

"When our booking time was up, I still needed one more day to do some editing, the sequencing and the fades. The Rolling Stones were due to go into Musicland straight after us to work on *Black And Blue*. I got through to Mick Jagger, who was staying in the same hotel, and asked if they'd let me have one of their days to finish up. Mick kindly agreed, so I went in there and finished it.

"I saw Mick again at the hotel and he said, 'What were you doing there?' So I asked him if he'd like to have a listen. I had to think which track to play him. I chose *Nobody's Fault But Mine*, because it went back to the blues and he'd understand that.

"He listened to it and he said, 'Oh, wow.' He'd never heard anything like it. Nobody had ever phased an intro in such a bulk of guitar sound. It really came at you. He said, 'So you were doing a single then?' And I said, 'No, we've done a whole album.' And he just said, 'Oh.' I think he was really surprised.

"The band channelled a huge amount of energy and determination into *Presence*, illustrated by the fact we made it in three weeks (and a day!), from initial rehearsals in LA, writing in the studio, through to finishing a complete record. It was a heroic feat, we created a really positive document from a difficult time.

"I used this sunburst Switchmaster on *Candy Store Rock* to give a rockabilly sound in the vein of, and as a homage to, Scotty Moore (although not as good!). It was fun doing that song, and it's a beautiful specimen of that guitar." G

JIMMY PAGE

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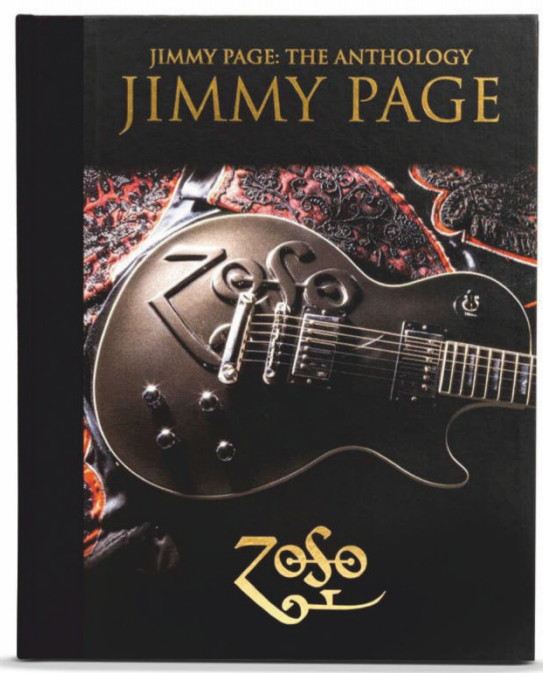

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UK'S NEW START
LET'S GET GOING

The Duchess
REVIVALDRIVE
ORIGIN EFFECTS

GEAR OF THE YEAR

Let's be honest, 2020 hasn't been anybody's idea of a good year, though it has certainly been memorable. Fortunately, even in troubled, socially distant times, one can still take solace in playing guitar. And even though gigs have been mostly off the menu – a disaster for working musicians (see page 58) – we've nonetheless encountered some seriously impressive guitars, amps and effects in the past 12 months, among them some of the best items of kit we've ever played. As we look forward, hopefully, to a year in which live music can begin again, we hope that this hand-picked selection will inspire you to play like never before.

But first a word on how this year's Gear Of The Year winners were chosen. The candidates were initially selected from a longlist that scored either a *Guitarist* Choice or a rare and coveted Gold award when it was first reviewed in these pages. We also allowed one or two wildcard entries from gear that just missed out on a Choice first time round, but proved itself in longterm testing or otherwise distinguished itself with a groundbreaking approach to tone creation that commanded our attention. This already over-achieving list was then whittled away further by our team of reviewers, who duked it out in lengthy debates about which gear deserved to make the final cut. At last, we knew who would be standing on the podium.

So join us now as we reveal the 40 best items of gear that *Guitarist*'s reviewers had the pleasure to play in an otherwise hard year for music. We can't promise all will be a perfect fit for your needs, but we can guarantee that all deserve your serious consideration next time you equip yourself for music-making on six strings.

SOLIDBODY ELECTRICS

High performance with boutique tone has never been so affordable

Words: Dave Burrluck

Epiphone Joe Bonamassa Black Beauty Les Paul Custom

This hugely affordable repro of a Gibson cult classic, modelled on an original from Joe Bonamassa's collection, was a real surprise. Aside from being quite a looker with its aged-colour binding, ebony finish, gold hardware and revised more Gibson-like headstock, the neck is big and period correct. It's chunky but not overweight, and the vintage fixes, such as proper medium-gauge fretwire and in-phase polarity of the middle pickup, means it plays and sounds great, too. We said, "Time to re-evaluate Epiphone? On this evidence, most definitely. And with Mr Bonamassa's guitar collection ever-growing, we can only wonder what's next."

Price: **£749** *Website:* ***www.epiphone.com***

Cort G290 LE

As the manufacturer for numerous brands that we've featured such as PRS, Manson, Relish – to name but three – Cort is becoming a major player in global guitar manufacturing. Its own brand line, now with UK representation via 400 Distribution, is full of well-priced electric and acoustic crackers. This limited-edition version of the G290 packs a great specification, with AAAA maple top, a compound radius ebony fingerboard, excellent vibrato and locking tuners and dual coil-splittable humbuckers. Our review noted, "the combination of the body sustain and the smooth travel of the vibrato almost convinced us we were getting close to a Jeff Beck vibe. It seems there's nothing this guitar can't do..."

Price: **£899** *Website:* ***www.cortguitars.com***

Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM

This Mexican-made Dinky-body bolt-on has all the key points of the 'progressive' guitar, from its graphite-reinforced caramelised maple neck, two-post Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato, Seymour Duncan pickups with a Custom Hot Rails at the bridge, and Luminlay side dots. Its relatively flat compound radius fingerboard (305 to 406mm/12 to 16 inches) suggests it's just built for speed, but it's surprisingly good in a cleaner world. It's a very stable tuning-wise, too, and the versatile circuit, which includes a No-Load tone control, really broadens the palette. Our verdict: "An exceptionally well-built guitar with fantastic playability and a tonal range that runs from vintage to modern."

Price: **£949** *Website:* ***www.charvel.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Cars & Stripes *by Jamie Dickson*

"My curious year in gear has been shaped by the pandemic in an odd way. After getting cabin fever during lockdown I made a snap decision to sell my ES-330 (which was actually a great guitar), and then ignore my own advice to buy an AVRI '52 Telecaster sight unseen from an online seller who turned out to be a teensy bit economical with the truth when describing its rather worn-out condition. However, these two impulsive lapses of judgment actually led me along a really interesting path in the months that followed. The Tele was so beaten up and lacking in documents, case etc, that I decided it was fair game for fairly radical modding – *Guitarist* writer Rod Brakes put me on to his friend Pace Frith, who duly pinstriped it in the style of 50s hot-rods and the project began. Next stop is new pickups and switching options and, as the Tele at least sounded good in stock condition, I'm looking forward to owning and playing a uniquely cool guitar in coming months. I'm still slowly mulling an acoustic guitar purchase – I could use a really good OM or similar for fingerstyle work and recording, but I've promised myself I'll be a bit less impetuous about that purchase when the time comes!"

IN DETAIL

1. Since 1985 the majority of PRS guitars have featured locking tuners, but part of the S2 594's vintage-aimed vibe is the non-locking tuners here. Why? They sound better!

2. The S2 guitars use three-piece necks as opposed to the Core level, which use single-piece stock. So the S2 has a headstock splice and heel stack

3. The 'S' series pickups, now made in Indonesia, are designed by PRS in the USA and aim to replicate those models used in the Core line. These 58/15 'S' units were actually developed for the PRS SE Hollowbody

PRS S2 McCarty 594 Thinline

35 years of guitar making, led by the same man who has his name over the door, is not only virtually unique in the music instrument industry but reeks of colossal experience. The 594 platform was introduced in 2016 and presents a classic Gibson-aimed recipe that differs with its two-piece bridge/tailpiece and four-control layout. While Core-level 594 models will cost you a pretty penny, a trio of S2 versions launched at the start of 2020 distil the essence into a far more affordable instrument. The classic PRS double-cutaway version and the more Les Paul-like Singlecut – both £1,849 – show off maple tops, while this thinner-bodied 43mm deep Thinline double-cut (pictured in a custom colour) is all mahogany and slightly more affordable with it.

The S2's chamfered-edge body is part of the way PRS brings the cost down, but it gives a different and quite stylised appearance: more SG than carved top Les Paul, if you like, which certainly fits the Thinline's vibe. The same two-piece bridge and tailpiece that PRS uses on its Core 594 are employed here, while the offshore 58/15 'S' humbuckers produce a pretty classic voice. In our review we said, "classic mahogany SG-ish grind and one of those planet-aligning combinations. The double-cut and Singlecut are very good, but this Thinline really kicks – vibrant, alive and an effortless player."

Price: ***£1,649*** *Website:* ***www.prsguitars.com***

SOLIDBODY ELECTRICS

Mid-market workhorses with thoroughbred tone and craft

Words: Dave Burrluck

Eastman SB55/v

Hugely vintage informed with a characterful Antique Varnish finish, this SB55/v is probably the closest you'll get to the real thing for a fraction of the price. Yes, it's got the wrong name on the headstock and that outline is slightly different, but the vibe is spot on and the weight from the okoume build is perfect. It's the boutique-style hardware from Faber and the Lollar dog-ear P-90 that elevate it above the asking price – and it comes cased, too. More proof, should we need it, that China can build superb guitars. As we said in our review, it "really gets to the heart of the Junior's simplistic design. It's a very well-informed tribute to a bona fide classic."

Price: **£1,239** *Website:* ***www.eastmanguitars.com***

Fender American Original '70s Telecaster Custom

For many players, humbuckers on a Fender are just wrong, but with the reproduction of its Cunife magnets the return of the *real* Wide Range humbucker might change your mind. On this chassis the Wide Range pairs with the slightly hotter bridge single coil to provide a superb taste of the real thing. It does a great Keef impersonation, but there's a lot more to the seemingly cleaner and brighter PAF-style voice of the Wide Range. Big thanks to Tim Shaw and the Fender team for restoring a true classic, which we deemed "a faultless guitar with, definitely, a wide-ranging voice that feels far from a reissue and very much now".

Price: **£1,789** *Website:* ***www.fender.com***

PJD Carey Standard

Underground boutique is a new expression that we've just invented to sum up this guitar. PJD? Who? We ain't telling, just to say that Leigh Dovey's small-'shop enterprise is one of the UK's best kept secrets. Superb design, crisp quality build, vibe-y resonance from the chambered light ash body and achingly beautiful sounds from the Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard P-90 and bridge humbucker make this a guitar you'll want to keep all to yourself. The neck work alone, from quarter-sawn dark roasted maple, is up the with the best boutique guitars we've played, and at this price, which includes a Hiscox hard case, it's simply a steal.

Price: **£1,799** *Website:* ***www.pjdguitars.com***

TONE TWEAKS

Little Things *by Dave Burrluck*

"I'm sure many of us have used this year's lockdown to give our guitars a simple once-over. I'm always surprised by the state of the guitars I get in for setup, which are easily brought back to shape with minimal work. But when it was time to lend one of my guitars to a mate earlier in lockdown, I couldn't believe the state it was in.

"He needed a Strat for a project and my Fender Road Worn was going spare. I hadn't used it for a while and I suspect I'd just bunged it in its gigbag after its last gig and forgot it. Its strings were well past their sell-by date, the neck seemed to have developed a fit-for-slide type action and, clearly, the gigbag fairies had been mucking around with the vintage-style bridge saddles.

"Typically, I'd just remove the strings and go through the clean and setup procedure. But a tip that might save a little time and money is to clean the strings as best you can (I use switch cleaner on a paper towel and rub vigorously up and down) and use those to dial in any adjustments.

"Finally, remove the strings, give the fingerboard a very light rub with a drop of fingerboard oil on another paper towel, restring, check intonation then stretch the strings. It felt like a new guitar!"

IN DETAIL

1. The DoubleTap humbucker splits well via the switch on lower tone control, and another 'new to this refresh range' feature is that Fender has developed a reliable push-push switch that works much faster than a pull-push type

2. There are many different types of pine and Fender is using "Eastern White pine [*Pinus strobus*], which has also been torrefied to help with weight and stability," we're told

3. Essentially the same vibrato we've seen many times, the upgrade here is a machined cold rolled steel block

Fender American Professional II Stratocaster HSS

Technically a refresh, the American Professional II range comes only four years after Fender significantly updated the long-running American Standard series and called it the American Professional.

Seemingly small tweaks, such as extra fingerboard edge rolling, a vintage-style neck tint and slight upgrades to the V-Mod pickups, all enhance the platform, but with the new DoubleTap humbucker replacing the previous ShawBucker there's a slightly more contemporary edge. And these 'small' upgrades add up to a considerable difference.

This new range also introduces roasted pine to this mainstream production range as a replacement for USA light ash, which has been decimated by the emerald ash borer beetle and flooding. Typically, then, it's used with natural Roasted Pine and Sienna Sunburst finishes on the American Professional II Strats and Butterscotch Blonde on the Telecaster. But there are plenty of other hues to consider over the regular alder bodies, too: the new Mercury, Miami Blue, Dark Night and Mystic Surf Green, along with the classic 3-Color Sunburst and Olympic White.

The result of this Mk II tweakery is a more boutique-style vibe, a perfectly pro-level piece that comes with a great moulded case at a price that's hard to argue with.

Price: ***£1,649*** *Website:* ***www.fender.com***

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

The Covid-19 crisis has changed guitarists' lives forever. We discover how...

Words: Jamie Dickson

This year, the novel coronavirus created the biggest global upheaval since World War II, so it's hardly surprising that our musical lives have been seriously affected, too. The virus left a trail of shattered livelihoods in its wake, not least in the music industry, which depends on people getting together in venues for much of its income. The effect has been as if a hurricane swept through a normally vibrant town: a grim report issued by UK Music, an organisation representing Britain's commercial music industry, said the industry was set to halve in size and drop £3 billion from its contribution to the economy. Worse still, a survey undertaken by the Musicians' Union found that a third of British professional musicians are considering leaving the profession. This is all too understandable, as the MU adds that most have not worked since March and an estimated 38 per cent of pro players also fall through the gaps of the government SEISS support scheme and thus receive no financial assistance at all.

This sobering big picture has affected our world of guitar in great and small ways, many of which were reflected in the gear guitarists of all kinds chose to buy this year. Online gear marketplace Reverb.com is well placed to observe how buying habits have changed. We asked them to break down some of the most significant trends and they came back with armfuls of insights – some obvious and others surprising. One silver lining was that Reverb saw an increase in used guitars being sold through their site. Anecdotally, many big-name retailers of new gear reported that when Covid first hit, they held crisis meetings to work out how they'd cope with the plummeting sales they expected to see. Instead, some doubled their usual takings.

In hindsight, it seems clear that, for many, lockdown provided the ideal time to pursue a long-held ambition to learn to play. Some of Reverb's stats certainly suggest a wave of new starters in guitar. For example, Reverb told us that searches for left-handed guitars were up 75 per cent year on year (from January through October, as per all the Reverb figures here). It seems reasonably safe to assume that the underlying ratio of right- to left-handed people hasn't changed dramatically this year, so the rise in searches for lefties probably reflects a higher overall volume of beginners looking for guitars, a proportion of whom are naturally left-handed.

"Some stats suggest a wave of new starters in guitar. Reverb told us that searches for left-handed guitars were up 75 per cent year on year"

Interestingly, Reverb also reports that acoustic guitar sales through their site outpaced electric. Again, it's tempting to ascribe that to a rise in beginners who want to get started strumming a few favourite songs without having to invest in an amp as well – except that Reverb reports that searches for acoustic guitar amps were also up 50 per cent year on year. Guitar's future may be increasingly unplugged, it seems: acoustic amps are only really of use to people who intend to perform, after all.

A little sadly, self-accompaniment seemed to be the order of the day, too: Reverb reports that searches for looper pedals were up 24 per cent year on year. Who knows, Ed Sheeran fans alone could be responsible for the above trends...

Another big trend, unsurprisingly, was a revived interest in home studios. "This year, particularly from April to June, pro-audio and home-recording equipment – everything from soundproofing gear to mixing software – saw a significant increase in sales, presumably as musicians began outfitting their home studios," a Reverb spokesperson told us.

Again, this increase in sales makes sense as gig diaries got torn in two and musicians turned to recording projects instead. This trend did lead to some bemusing side effects, however: searches for noise gates were up 350 per cent year on year, Reverb reports.

But what about core guitar gear? Again, it's no surprise to learn that home-friendly kit proved popular.

"The Taylor GS Mini continues to be a popular acoustic guitar choice," Reverb content editor Carly Smith told us. "Thanks to its small size, it's ideal for road trips or for playing on your couch, two activities that were certainly popular this year."

The couch-noodling aspect of the above is understandable, but we have to admit, we're not quite sure how road trips factor in. Open-air jam at Barnard Castle, anyone?

Home alone: the unprecedented periods of time guitarists spent at home this year led to an upsurge of interest in home studio gear, but also tech-enabled small amps such as the Positive Grid Spark (left)

Taylor's GS Mini proved the perfect couch companion for many guitarists

Even more polarised by suitability for home playing was the amps sector, Reverb reports: "More than any other category, amps might be the one impacted the most by the shift in music-making from a public, social activity to an at-home-only affair," said Carly Smith. "We're seeing increased searches for many different amp models that are ideal for low-volume playing, including the Positive Grid Spark, Boss Katana-50 and Yamaha THR10II modelling amps. While capable of 40-watts, 50-watts, and 20-watts respectively, they are known to sound good at low volumes, especially when playing with lots of effects and amp and cabinet simulators. Smaller heads such as the Orange Micro Dark and PRS MT15 have been popular, as has the Universal Audio OX Amp Top Box Attenuator, which attaches to guitarists' existing tube amps and allows them to play at lower volumes while still maintaining high-output tube sound."

"More than any other category, amps might be the most affected by the shift in music-making from a public, social activity to an at-home-only affair"

We should, of course, bear in mind that the above findings are those of only one marketplace for gear. It's possible that other major gear retailers experienced things differently. But, anecdotally, the trends outlined above seem to have been pretty general. The overall message seems to be that, if we don't want guitar to become a solitary pursuit, we should maybe all consider spending a bit of our budget for new gear on supporting venues and pro musicians in 2021, just as soon as it's safe to mingle, meet and enjoy live music once again. While it's good to woodshed at home sometimes, everyone at *Guitarist* is certainly looking forward to that day. G

www.reverb.com

PRESTIGE ELECTRICS

Our high-end line-up represents the epitome of guitar craft

Words: Dave Burrluck

Fender 70th Anniversary Broadcaster

As a celebration of the guitar that kicked off this whole industry, this 2020-only tribute is the first Broadcaster sold by Fender for 70 years. It's also the most expensive and early vintage-like 'Tele' in the USA production range before you head up to the Custom Shop, where you can get a relic version for considerably more money. It really is a piece that reminds us of the brutal simplicity of this classic design, with the sort of vintage spec you'd expect: U-shaped neck, 184mm (7.25-inch) 'board radius, nitro finish and details like slot-head screws. "For us," stated our review, "it's all about the sound – and this is a rather glorious example of why Fender is still making them and we're still writing about them."

Price: £2,009 Website: www.fender.com

Patrick James Eggle Oz Cream T

What the Oz lacks in originality is made up for in consummate craft from Patrick James Eggle and his small team. It's hard to see how you could better this design with its roasted maple neck, contoured heel, Patrick's superb 'worn-through' neck finish, and aged but not reliced style. Added interest comes from the now UK-made Cream T Banger and Mash humbucker at the neck (originally designed for Keef) that, paired with the Cream T Tele-style bridge pickup, makes for a sound that easily matches the quality build. "This Oz is quite possibly in the top five best guitars of this type – vintage or contemporary – that this writer has ever had his hands on. It's guitar making at its finest level," we said.

Price: £2,999 Website: www.eggle.co.uk

PRS McCarty

Why are we writing about a guitar that first appeared in 1994? Back then it was the most vintage-aimed PRS guitar with considerable input from David Grissom, and while it might have been eclipsed by the more Gibson-style 594, the McCarty remains much truer to Paul Reed Smith's original 'hybrid' vision. It also illustrates how far PRS has come over the past 26 years with a raft of seemingly small tweaks – unplated hardware, TCI tuned 58/15LT pickups and a new nitro-over-cellulose finish – that all add up to a superior and stellar guitar. As our review said, "There's not a hair out of place and the experience of its makers drips from every note. It's always been a *Guitarist* favourite and unquestionably still is."

Price: £3,499 Website: www.prsguitars.com

TONE TWEAKS

T-Type Custom Build *by Rod Brakes*

"Some readers may remember my Joseph Kaye Guitars 'Epicaster' custom build from the cover of last summer's Hot Mods issue – the black T-type with white binding, matching headstock, white DeArmond Model 2000 pickups and Jaguar vibrato. The majority of wood used to build this guitar is recycled, the body carved from 150-year-old pine reclaimed from the roof joists of a London building renovation, while the Brazilian rosewood fretboard was rescued from the irreparably damaged neck of an early 60s Epiphone Crestwood Custom. It was something of an unknown quantity, and after several months' playing I decided to try a few tone tweaks.

"Following a conversation with a fellow guitarist about the joys of using flat-wound strings on Teles, I was inspired to try a set of D'Addario ECG24 XL Chromes. After some setup adjustment to accommodate the slightly heavier 0.011-gauge strings, the tone of the pickups became instantly smoother and more balanced. With the addition of a simple treble bleed circuit (using a 0.001uF capacitor and 150kohm resistor in parallel across the 1meg-ohm volume pot), this unique design really came into its own."

IN DETAIL

1 The Piet is a bolt-on style model with a slab alder body, and it is the entry point to this highly regarded range. Custom options abound, too

2 The Mastery bridge/vibrato is beautifully engineered but doesn't come cheap. That said, if you want an 'offset' vibrato that stays in tune, look no further

3 A big part of Huber's reputation comes down to wood choice. Nik uses a special stash of lighter weight quarter-sawn American maple for the neck here: "Piet wood," he says

Nik Huber Piet

Known for his high-end craft over the past 24 years, Nik Huber was one of the first so-called 'boutique' makers and has certainly been an inspiration to many of today's new wave of small-output makers. With a team of 11 employees, Huber still makes under 300 guitars a year.

It may be a simple recipe, but quality and detail are in abundance. The Piet, based on the outline of his long-running Dolphin model and named after his youngest son (pronounced 'Pete'), is also a perfect vehicle for the optional Mastery vibrato (it comes as standard with a Huber-designed wrapover bridge), creating an 'offset' without the size or weight.

The paint was barely dry on this prototype #4 when we tested it back in issue 461, and although a far from cheap piece (with its vibrato and vintage tint neck finish, it costs £3.5k), it's a perfect reminder that many of us aspire to the craft of the boutique maker.

Powered by Harry Häussel's single-coils pickups, a Broad at the neck and custom covered P90-style at the bridge, the circuit is simply volume and tone. But that simplicity is of no concern – it's the quality of sound and exceptional playability that have kept us engrossed and inspired by the Piet throughout this year. A guitar that literally blew our Covid blues away: a lockdown buddy of huge class and elegance.

Price: ***From £2,676*** *Website:* ***www.nikhuber-guitars.com***

SEMI-SOLID ELECTRICS

A selection of f-holed beauties vie for the semi-acoustic crown

Words: Dave Burrluck

Guild Starfire I SC GVT

After a fairly barren couple of years in terms of new products, Guild introduced some highly affordable, vibe-y and good-sounding guitars for 2020. These included the chambered Aristocrat HH and P90 (both £795) and the four-strong Indonesian-made Starfire I mini-range of both double-cut and single-cut (above) versions of its historic models. Our single-cut with 'Guildsby' vibrato is modelled after the early 60s Starfire III and comes in around half the price of the current Newark St repro. It employs the very good-sounding standard humbucking sized HB-IIs with coil-splits from the tone control rotaries. "Retro style with more-than-competent sounds and little to dislike" was our verdict.

Price: ***£569*** *Website:* ***www.guildguitars.com***

PRS SE Hollowbody II Piezo

There were plenty of rants about this Chinese-made PRS – "How much?" – but the SE Hollowbody Standard and II that launched late 2019 are finely made with a more classic laminate body thinline construction compared with the long-running USA Core models. The third instrument added earlier this year is this piezo version, an impressively versatile electric-meets-acoustic for the price. Along with an almost timeless classic voice to the magnetic 58/15 'S' humbuckers, the new PRS/LR Baggs piezo system is extremely good. "There's little doubt the Piezo model expands the sonic potential of the previous SE Hollowbodies," we said, "making a very good guitar quite exceptional."

Price: ***£1,349*** *Website:* ***www.prsguitars.com***

Eastman Romeo

Designed by archtop maker Otto D'Ambrosio who heads up Eastman's USA design and custom shop, the Romeo is a thinline for modern times. Downsized and perfectly balanced, it features a carved spruce top, with a bridge block – a modern design that reflects its archtop heritage – paired with a lightly flamed maple neck and ebony fingerboard. Eastman also introduced the Romeo-SC (£1,950), which swaps the Lollar pickups for a Seymour Duncan Tele-style Vintage Stack at the neck and a full-size '59 at the bridge. We said: "The Romeo is a thoroughly modern take on the electric archtop, built exceptionally well with its custom Lollar Imperials being the icing on the perfectly baked cake."

Price: ***£1,950*** *Website:* ***www.eastmanguitars.com***

PEDAL POWER

Onwards & Upwards *by Rod Brakes*

"This year has shown us once again that we really are spoilt for choice when it comes to well-made, great-sounding effects. Now that most of us have got our heads around what true bypass means, the number-one gripe I hear about stompboxes is that there are far too many to choose from. Although picking the right one can sometimes feel like trying to find the proverbial needle, stiff competition within the industry has meant pedal builders have continually raised the bar and taken our expectations to new heights. As far as effects pedals go, I think we've never had it so good. And that's a good problem to have.

"While yesteryear's cutting-edge DSP technology continues to devalue into the realms of affordable music gear, our digital teething problems have now mostly faded – as recently attested to in *Guitarist* by fan Steve Howe and Fractal Axe-Fx III buff Johnny A. With this in mind, we can only expect our digital horizons to expand in future. We all love a good Fuzz Face, but if Jimi Hendrix were alive today (wishful thinking, I know) my guess is he'd still be as progressive as he was in the late 60s."

IN DETAIL

1 Refretted by TV Jones, who has maintained Brian's original Smoke, the fingerboard now features a conical (compound) radius (241 to 305mm/9.5 to 12 inches) as used here

2 Under the hood this new Smoke uses the '59-style trestle bracing that was actually x-rayed from Brian's original

3 The TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity Filter'Trons are probably the closest to the real thing you can buy: "These pickups are made according to Ray's personal notes, designs and Jones's extensive, multi-decade analysis of original Filter'Tron pickups." Superb

Gretsch G6120T-BSSMK Brian Setzer Signature Nashville '59 'Smoke'

It's impossible to separate Brian Setzer from his Gretsch guitars and one of the latest additions to his signature line is this replica of one of his most cherished geetars: Smoke. "It's an exact replica of the guitar I've played for 30 years," says Brian. "I've played it on all the albums and tours, on *Sleepwalk* and all those songs."

It's not reliced, but the Smoke Orange finish is semi-gloss nitro that matches the lightly faded colour of the original guitar, and the fingerboard edges are rolled to emulate the feel of the original, too.

As a workhorse instrument the original 'Smoke' has been maintained and refretted by TV Jones. The retrofitted tune-o-matic... oh, we mean Adjusto-matic bridge replicates Brian's original and it was TV Jones who removed the original zero fret. Here, it's Delrin, while rear-lock Gotoh tuners keep things stable when the Bigsby B6C is brought into action.

Powering is from TV Jones's Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity single coils (note the period-correct 'Pat. Applied For' engraved covers) plus the Gretsch Tone Switch circuit of dual volumes and master volume (with treble bleed), and the three-way tone toggle. Why wrestle with an original when Brian, Gretsch and TV Jones have done the work for you?

Price: ***£3,199*** ***Website:*** ***www.gretschguitars.com***

ACOUSTIC GUITARS

Innovation meets old-world charm in this year's scramble to the top of the acoustic tree

Words: David Mead

Takamine TSP138C TBS

When this guitar reached *Guitarist*'s mighty halls, it was accompanied by its slightly bigger brother, the TSP178AC SBB, and so we reviewed them as a twosome. What stood out for us with the TSP138C was its downright playability and the fact that everyone who picked it up said the same thing: it was both good sounding and fun to play. Factor in its not at all unreasonable price point and you have a worthy entry into the best of the best of 2020's acoustics. Another of its attributes is the fact that its body size and neck make the transition from electric to acoustic as easy as pie, meaning that Takamine's thinline compact cutaway wins accolades on several points.

Price: ***£1,199*** *Website:* ***www.takamine.com***

Taylor American Dream AD17 Blacktop

Taylor's American Dream guitars were the perfect acoustics for the year where Covid turned all of us into instant recluses. Harking back to the USA's depression-era instruments, the AD17 is a stripped-back workmanlike, no-nonsense instrument that stands by Taylor's renowned build ethic, while using ecologically worthy timbers, thus sparing the planet's precious resources. It might make the nod towards vintage chic on the surface, but inside it's a different story, where tonal considerations are well taken care of thanks to the company's groundbreaking V-Class bracing system. With an all-rounder personality and great sound, this guitar ticked as many boxes as we could throw at it.

Price: ***£1,715*** *Website:* ***www.taylorguitars.com***

Atkin The Forty Three

Alister Atkin's Canterbury-based team has been turning out high-quality acoustics for many years, and The Forty Three represents a significant jewel in the workshop's output. Based upon Gibson's J-45 workhorse, it is modelled upon the 1943 iteration – hence its name – and we were captivated by the sensitive ageing, workmanship and, most of all, quality of sound. With a good fistful of neck and a low, eminently playable action, The Forty Three sang sweetly in reviewer Neville Marten's hands, eliciting the comment: "The Atkin is a strident beast that takes no prisoners... The Forty Three excels in being a loud cannon of a guitar that barks with a voice demanding to be heard above the melée."

Price: ***£2,899*** *Website:* ***www.atkinguitars.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Tuneful Telecasting *by David Mead*

"Thinking back, I've only really bought a couple of notable items this year on top of the usual strings and other sundries. The first was out of necessity because a clip-on tuner I've been using for 10 years or so literally fell apart in my hands, so I had to seek out a replacement. I'd previously been so impressed with the Peterson StroboStomp HD the company lent me that I decided to opt for the clip-on equivalent. Needless to say, I was pleased I did as these things leave your guitars more in tune than ever before.

"The other thing I bought was a '62 reissue Telecaster from Fender Japan. I was lucky enough to track down a dealer in Kent (whitstableguitars.co.uk) that specialises in limited-run, Japan home market instruments – and this one's a corker. Vintage white with a mint green pickguard and factory-fitted US pickups that were unspecified in the spec, but I've done some research and it looks like they're Fender's Original Vintage Tele pickups and they sound really sweet. I'm a happy bunny."

IN DETAIL

1. If you're introducing something new, don't be shy about it – Martin's body shape is designed to catch the eye from the outset

2. The SC-13E's radical neck joint, named the Sure Align neck system, allows the player uninhibited access to the guitar's upper frets via the absence of a traditional heel

3. Originally designed for Martin's Road Series instruments, the onboard Fishman MT-X electro system guarantees that the SC-13E sounds as good as it looks

4. While the design might make you take a step back, the presence of a Sitka spruce top and koa laminate back and sides treads a tried-and-trusted path

Martin SC-13E

If there's one thing that the acoustic world loves it's tradition. Ever since plans for steel-strung acoustic guitars were forged in CF Martin & Co's workshops over a century ago very little has changed, as generation upon generation of players have opted for familiar OM or Dreadnought-based designs. Various luthiers have offered up bespoke variations along the way, and things such as fanned frets and side ports are creeping their way into the acoustic player's mindset, but the mainstay seem to like their acoustics, well, acoustic-shaped.

So what a surprise when not only the longest established manufacturer but also the inventor of steel-string acoustics itself decided to shake things up with the SC-13E. Look at that body shape, the absence of a traditional heel and its 13-frets-to-the-body join... what the heck were the folk at CF Martin thinking? But hold on a minute. If anyone was going to introduce the next generation of acoustic guitars, who better to take that first step than the originator itself? We approached this new build with caution at first, but, wow, it soon grew on us, and after just a short while, we were totally smitten. A worthy winner in this category.

Price: ***£1,599*** *Website:* ***www.martinguitar.com***

A YEAR IN MODDING

TIME ON OUR HANDS

With zero gigs or rehearsals to look forward to, what have we been doing to pass the time? Modding and fixing, of course! Welcome to a year in The Mod Squad

Words: Dave Burrluck

Judging by our mailbox, we're not the only ones who have put these lockdown/no-gig times to good use. I'd like to say I'd planned a series of Telecaster-centric articles in support of the 70th Anniversary of the Fender Broadcaster, but I can't claim that, even though it's the humble Tele that's featured heavily these pages over the past months.

At the start of the year I was planning a trip to India to visit the Harmony Musical Instrument factory, based in Chennai, that is making the wood parts for Trev Wilkinson's new range of quality mod-central guitar kits. By late February that was looking less and less likely, and the other half put the spanner firmly in those works when I mentioned I might be going: "No, you're bloody not!" World events put the end to Trev and Dave's road trip, of course, and I have subsequently wondered when – if ever – I'll get to visit.

Despite obvious supply difficulties as India began to cope with the first wave of the pandemic, I managed to get a kit sample that certainly filled those hours when I should have been practising and gigging. Easily put together on the kitchen table with little more than basic hand tools, the TE 52 kit-build has remained in constant use, particularly in its current guise as a 'Broadcaster' with additional quality kit: a Charles Guitars wiring loom and a set of Bare Knuckle Blackguard Tele Series Flat '50s. With an outlay of a little over £700, it's a guitar that – to me – is worth an awful lot more than the sum of its parts. No, I won't be heading off to become a master builder at Fender's Custom Shop any time soon, but, hey, I made (well, assembled) the guitar and that time, effort and learning is priceless.

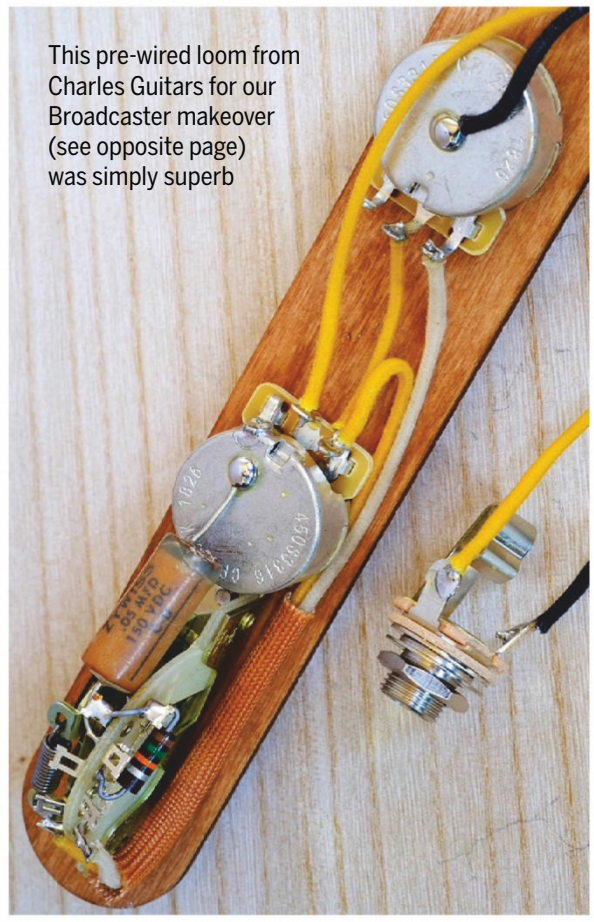
Indian craft aside, British craft has hugely informed what The Mod Squad has been up to. Bare Knuckle needs no introduction – its work is first class – yet below that pinnacle is a huge and seemingly increasing number of pickup makers. I'd never heard of Mike Rose's Gemini pickups, but a set of schizophrenic Ghostriders that combine a hot vintage humbucker with a beautifully evocative Gretsch Filter'Tron-y voice when 'split' were a revelation. Thomas Nilsen's Cream T pickups, now made in the UK, have more rock 'n' roll credentials, and while, as I've written before, I don't exactly know how he weaves his magic, the sets I've listened to have hugely impressed.

"There's usually way more than one solution to an issue you might encounter, and being honest with yourself is key to your progression"

Another Brit invention is the Free-Way switch, which we featured back in issue 456 with its gear-shift versions of originally the Gibson-style three-way toggle and now both the Fender-style three- and five-way lever switches. It's a unique way to coax more sounds from your existing guitar. Indeed, in terms of aftermarket pickups and parts, what started back in the 70s as a little wave is now a tsunami, yet despite the choice the good stuff seems to float to the top, doesn't it? The trouble is, 'the best' is always just around the corner...

Don't forget, part of The Mod Squad ethos is finding your own way. There's usually way more than one solution

Thomas Nilsen's Cream T Bangers hugely impressed us in issue 466 and come Billy Gibbons approved!



This pre-wired loom from Charles Guitars for our Broadcaster makeover (see opposite page) was simply superb

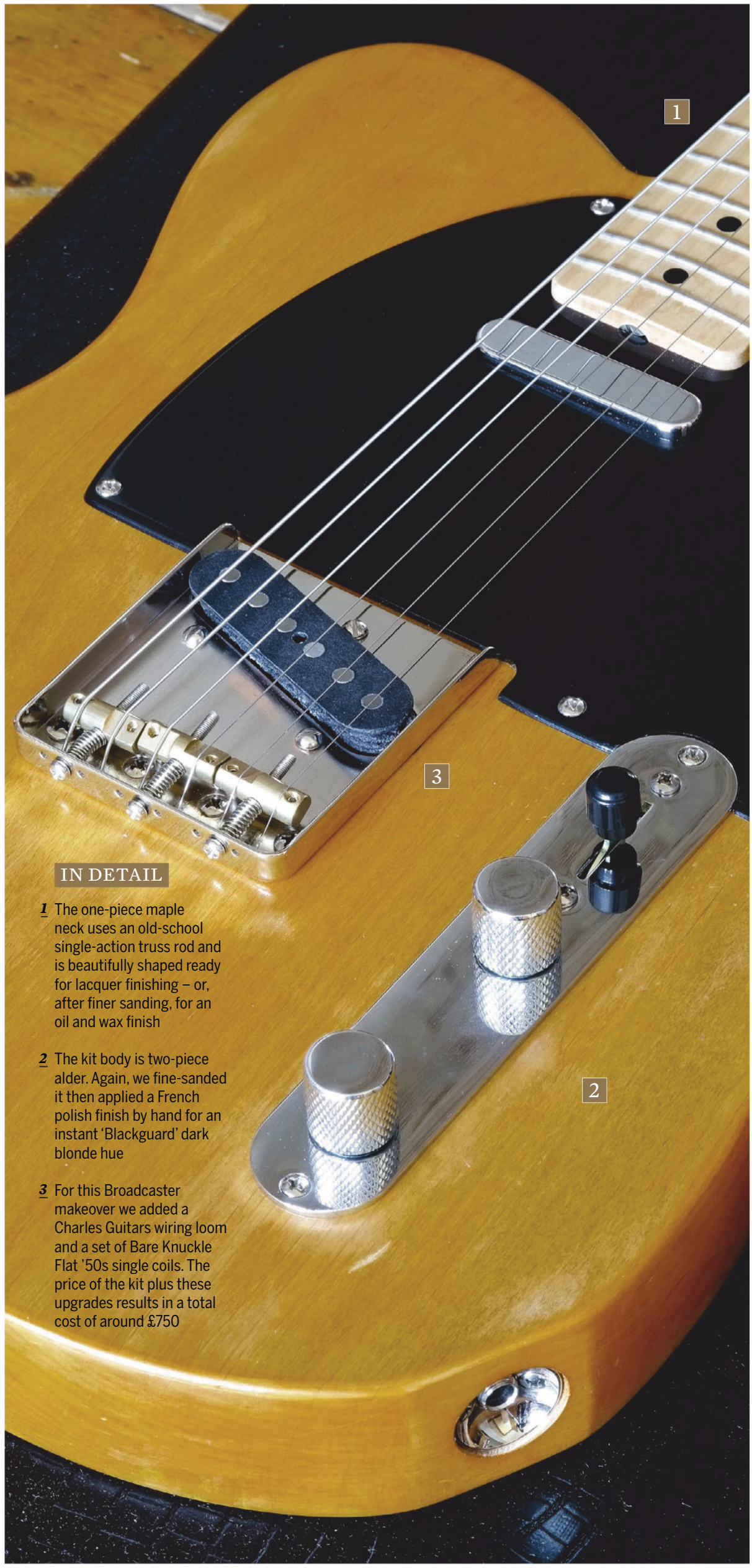
to an issue you might encounter, and being honest with yourself is key to your progression. I'd like to thank numerous guitar makers who have offered their tips and advice for various Mod Squad columns, not to mention our wider features on getting the best from your gear. I'm constantly surprised and gratified when the likes of Patrick James Eggle or Seth Baccus patiently explain a neck finishing or hardware ageing process. This sense of community should not be overlooked in these – or, indeed, any other – times.

Again, how much the pandemic has played its part is difficult to determine, but we can definitely say that as far as you readers are concerned, there is

"Change, experiment and let the specific instrument be your guide. The aim of this game is simple: to make the guitar 'disappear'"

growing interest in how to maximise what you have, not to mention building your own instruments. Whatever level you're at with your modding, always feel free to drop us a line at the usual address. If we can't help, we'll more than likely know someone who can.

You see, when you change your strings you're on your way if – for a moment – you consider the gauge you use, the make-up and what those things can do to the feel and sound of your guitar. And I'd strongly suggest more of us swap gauges and brands. How does that affect what you're feeling and hearing? Listen and learn. It's the same with setup: you might have done it the same way for years, but change, experiment and let the specific instrument be your guide. The aim of this game is simple: to make the guitar 'disappear', to make it sound and feel seamless so you, the player, can have the best possible experience. Until the next one, of course. G



IN DETAIL

1 The one-piece maple neck uses an old-school single-action truss rod and is beautifully shaped ready for lacquer finishing – or, after finer sanding, for an oil and wax finish

2 The kit body is two-piece alder. Again, we fine-sanded it then applied a French polish finish by hand for an instant 'Blackguard' dark blonde hue

3 For this Broadcaster makeover we added a Charles Guitars wiring loom and a set of Bare Knuckle Flat '50s single coils. The price of the kit plus these upgrades results in a total cost of around £750

AMPLIFIERS

Make yours a boundary-pushing backline with this year's top picks

Words: Nick Guppy

Vox Cambridge50

Vox's Cambridge50 adds Nutube magic and Celestion power to an already accomplished digital preamp. With 11 amp models, eight onboard effects and 11 presets to explore, this amp is great fun to use, as well as being compact and highly portable. The amp models include a selection of classic British and American tones that cover every base, from jazz to full-on metal mayhem. There are a few cool hidden extras accessed through the Tone Room app, but we liked the way the amp understates its high-tech wizardry, leaving players to focus on the music. Great sounds with minimal hassle make the Cambridge50 perfect for smaller gigs, internet broadcasting, practice and recording, all at an unbeatable price.

Price: ***£275*** *Website:* ***www.voxamps.com***

Blackstar HT Club 40 MkII 6L6

Even with the best market research, introducing a new range of amps is always a gamble. Blackstar scored a resounding success with the original HT Venue series and then chose to roll the dice again with a fully redeveloped MkII version, with features that have proved to be a positive benefit in our post-pandemic world, including USB audio, speaker emulation and balanced DI outputs. This particular combo swaps the standard-issue EL34s for a pair of 6L6 output valves – a popular request from Blackstar customers. The 6L6 valve emphasises the sweet treble, less prominent mids and extended bass associated with classic 60s Fender tone, giving the already highly versatile Club 40 a new sonic palette.

Price: ***£749*** *Website:* ***www.blackstaramps.com***

Victory VC35 The Copper

Victory's sensational compact lunchbox design pays tribute to another famous amp manufacturer with historic roots in Kent. 'The Copper' has a slightly quirky preamp design that's typical Victory, with a NOS EF184 pentode in classic cathode follower configuration driving the tone stack, which in turn feeds a quartet of EL84s. Victory has catapulted the much-loved AC30 sound into the present day with a more 'boutique' flavour. Bass Cut and Mid Boost switches tailor the low-end response, while the complex highs are quite unlike the rest of Victory's range, giving The Copper unique appeal for discerning players. With a series effects loop and smooth digital reverb, it's a fair cop and no mistake.

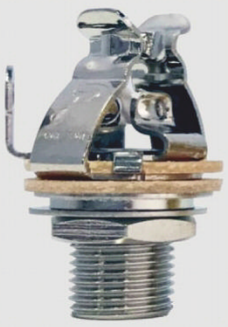
Price: ***£1,079*** *Website:* ***www.victoryamps.com***

TONE TWEAKS

Socket To Me *by Nick Guppy*

"For me, tweaking and tinkering with guitars and amplifiers has been part of the journey, something that's gone hand in hand with fathoming the half-diminished scale or learning Steely Dan parts. For years I've used stereo jack sockets on my guitars, with the ring contact strapped to earth, giving me spring contacts for both the signal wire and screen. Some jack sockets aren't particularly well made and over time the barrel part corrodes, resulting in a less than perfect screen connection. The screen is important: its continuity through your guitar, effects and amp, all the way to the ground pin on your mains plug, needs to be as perfect as possible to reduce noise pickup and other gremlins.

"Earlier this year I found the pro equivalent of my stereo jack bodge: the Pure Tone jack socket (puretonetechnologies.com), which features four spring contacts, two each for signal and screen. It struck me as one of those 'why didn't I think of that' products and I've subsequently put them on all my electric guitars. If your guitar's new, you probably won't hear any difference, but on guitars with older, corroded jack sockets, the Pure Tone will restore your signal integrity and assures a perfect connection. Available from all good parts stockists..."



IN DETAIL

1 The Cub-Super12's cool two-tone vinyl and close-up attention to detail provide plenty of visual appeal, with robust electronics designed to handle the rough and tumble of life on the road

2 A pair of input jacks gives you a choice of full power or an attenuated one-watt output setting that's ideal for home practice and recording, while the foot-switchable boost function has an adjustable level control, making it easy to dial in

3 The HH 12-inch loudspeaker was custom-designed for the Cub-Super and plays a key part in producing the Laney's epic USA-influenced tones, sounding full and responsive at lower volume, with plenty of power for smaller live gigs

Laney Cub-Super12

Laney's place in the rock guitar pantheon is assured. From founder Lyndon Laney's early days in Band Of Joy with John Bonham and Robert Plant, through the genesis of prog-rock and metal to today's diversity, the company has always stayed true to its core values of combining great tone, real-world features and affordable prices – tools for working musicians.

Laney scored a bullseye at NAMM 2020 with its new Cub-Super range, which combines cool boutique-influenced styling and typically robust build quality with a highly responsive and versatile circuit. Currently demonstrated and promoted across the media by Laney artist Lari Basilio, the Cub-Super12's deceptively simple single-channel preamp drives a pair of EL84 output valves and a single custom-design HH 12-inch loudspeaker, producing a more transatlantic vibe than you might expect, with sparkling highs, smooth mids and a tight, punchy bass, all enhanced by an excellent in-house digital reverb and a foot-switchable boost.

Comfortable sitting in many diverse genres and environments, the Cub-Super12 really won us over. It's a perfect modern guitar combo that's ideal for home noodling, pro-standard recording, pedals, internet outings and live gigs, with a tempting sub-£400 price tag that belies its stellar boutique-influenced tones. A winner for the many, rather than the few.

Price: **£399** ***Website:*** ***www.laney.co.uk***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

FLOOR AMPS

Cutting-edge tone at your feet from a host of compact new amp solutions

Words: Nick Guppy

Strymon
Iridium

The Californian effects supremo has pulled it off again with this deceptively simple-looking pedal that's totally crammed with tone. Three highly accurate models of the Fender blackpanel-era Deluxe, Vox AC30 and Marshall 1959 'Plexi' head combine with nine 24-bit 96kHz cabinet IR responses and the ability to add more as required. Mind-boggling real-time processing goes on under the hood, with a 32-bit SHARC processor and ARM co-processor working to provide stunning fidelity and realism. Strymon has condensed the audio experience of playing a great amp in a room into a small box, and at a relatively affordable price.

Price: ***£399*** *Website:* ***www.strymon.net***

Hughes & Kettner
Black Spirit 200 Floor head

The Black Spirit 200 saw Hughes & Kettner take its valve-powered GrandMeister 40 head and translate it into the digital domain, with no apparent loss of tone or power. The obvious next step was to combine the Black Spirit 200 with a foot controller, resulting in a powerhouse of tone with four superb amp voices, studio-quality effects and Red Box cab emulation. The 200-watt power stage easily drives any cab, with balanced outputs to hook the amp up to live or studio desks. Free of the menus associated with digital modellers, it's a delight to play, sounding and responding like a great valve amp with the consistency and reliability of solid-state.

Price: ***£899*** *Website:* ***www.hughes-and-kettner.com***

Fractal Audio Systems
FM3 Amp Modeler/FX Processor

Fractal Audio's FM3 shoehorns most of the award-winning Axe-Fx III into a highly usable floorboard that can be expanded with extra footswitch and expression pedal modules. A rugged steel chassis protects the technology from accidental damage, while controls and flashing lights are kept to a sensible minimum. Fractal's proprietary Ares modelling technology leverages unprecedented processing power to capture the tone and feel of real valve amps, with 265 models and the entire IR collection found in the Axe-Fx III. Add in hundreds of superb effects, with all the connectivity you'll ever need, and it's a compelling choice.

Price: ***€1,266*** *Website:* ***www.fractalaudio.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Gas Return *by Neville Marten*

"While I had resisted GAS during my Lockdown Lethargy due to all the obvious uncertainties, I've recently capitulated. I'm a total noob when it comes to recording technology, but two similarly-minded mates convinced me that even I could crack the laptop-sized Zoom R16 digital studio. So a quick call to Anderton's and there it was. I've already written, recorded and mixed a track, and it really is easy-peasy. I've not yet fathomed how to get finished tracks into Cubase or Audacity, but that will come.

"My second splash was much more serious: I needed a bass to record at home. At first, I was going to nip down and pick up a Squier Mustang from my local shop. But, of course, the devil on the other shoulder whispered 'buy cheap, buy twice', and while that really can't be said of those most excellent Squiers, it didn't take much (a quick sale of a couple of unused bits and a look on Gear4music.com) to convince me that a Faded Fiesta Custom Shop Precision was what I really needed. In fact, it matches my red Strat perfectly – and, suffice to say, my wallet is now stapled firmly shut!"

IN DETAIL

1. The Duchess's unique pen and ink inspired visuals enclose a package that's hard as nails, with fan cooling for maximum reliability and military spec valves that will last for years before needing replacement

2. As well as a small but powerful output stage, the Duchess V4 includes a foot-switchable tremolo effect with speed and depth controls, and a lush digital reverb

3. Other handy extras on the V4's rear panel include a series effects loop and a balanced line out, which works with or without a loudspeaker connection and feeds a desk or a speaker simulator. There's also a useful nine-volt DC output for powering your favourite pedals

Victory V4 'The Duchess'

It's official: floor amps are now definitely 'a thing', with a steadily increasing number of products that transform your backline into a compact 'board on the floor in front of you. Victory Amplification sprang a surprise on us with its V4 'The Duchess' preamp pedal. Unlike its other V4 products, the Duchess took the next step and included a solid-state power stage capable of delivering a whopping 180 watts RMS into a four-ohm load. The low-ish gain preamp uses a single EC900 triode and three CV4014 military spec pentodes, running at proper voltages for a full-on valve experience. Not content with adding an output stage, Victory also shoehorned a cool foot-switchable tremolo effect and a lush digital reverb into the ultra-compact chassis. Top-panel controls include gain, bass, mid and treble, together with tremolo speed and depth, and a reverb level. Inside the box, there's very little spare room, but everything fits together neatly and securely – this is a Victory and it's built to last. The Duchess's lush black-panel-inspired tones sound great on their own or with pedals, and combined with Victory's recommended V112-Neo cabinet, which easily handles the full 180-watt output, you've got huge tone from a surprisingly lightweight package. We reckon it's one of the ultimate compact guitar rigs.

Price: **£699** *Website:* ***www.victoryamps.com***

EFFECTS

Take your ears to tonal Shangri-La with these little boxes of gain-rich delight

Words: Jamie Dickson

Electro-Harmonix Ram's Head Big Muff Pi

There have been so many iterations and variations on the Muff theme over the years that it's glorious to play one that feels definitive: redolent of the best of the vintage Muffs but at a fraction of the price and in a more stable, reliable form. That's what we loved about the Ram's Head Big Muff Pi, a reissue of the sought-after 'Ram's Head' V2 1973 Muff, which is the model most closely associated with David Gilmour. Reviewer Trevor Curwen wrote of it that "the midrange scoop is there, but the pedal's overall balance of frequencies seems just right, yielding a lovely degree of string articulation..." At this price, every 'board should have one.

Price: ***£92*** *Website:* ***www.ehx.com***

Nobels ODR-1 BC

The original ODR-1 has been a sleeper classic for a while, and though Nobels is by no means a boutique brand, the original ODR-1 has gained a serious following among Nashville pros such as Guthrie Trapp and others for its amp-like, responsive drive tones. Designer Kai Tachibana didn't like the pronounced mid-hump of the ubiquitous Tube Screamer and instead came up with a more transparent, natural-sounding drive. This updated version can be run at 18 volts for extra headroom, if that's your thing, and has a bass cut control to give humbuckers more clarity and focus. At under a ton, it's also reasonably priced, offering top-drawer tones at everyday outlay. A no-brainer for fans of organic-voiced drives.

Price: ***£99*** *Website:* ***https://nobels.de***

ThorpyFX The Field Marshal

Adrian Thorpe recently brought Dan Coggins, the designer behind the legendary Lovetone pedals of the 90s, into the ThorpyFX team full-time and this is one of the fruits of their combined efforts. Based on the sought-after Lovetone Big Cheese fuzz, but adding extra functions and Thorpy's bombproof build quality to the equation, The Field Marshall has well-harmonised controls that let you toggle between gated fuzz, flat mids and midrange hump modes to yield girthy, flexible, useable fuzz – there's also a tone stack bypass footswitch that can be used as a boost or to switch between two distinct fuzz voices. We can't wait to find out where Thorpy and Coggins go next in their top-rank design partnership.

Price: ***£189*** *Website:* ***https://thorpyfx.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

To Tube Or Not *by Nick Guppy*

"2020 has largely been a non-starter for me. Plans to upgrade or replace guitars, amps and pedals have been shelved as an empty gig calendar makes big purchases difficult to justify. Instead, I've been consolidating and maintaining. My workhorse Rivera Quiana has recently been treated to a service with liberal doses of contact cleaner on every jack plug, potentiometer, switch and valve socket, and a long overdue new set of decent valves, all of which thankfully restored its sonic magic.

"I shouldn't be surprised; background crackles that were inaudible at stage volume and scratchy pots have crept up on me and, I confess, were largely ignored. After thinking for some time that I should leave valve-amp inconsistency and maintenance costs behind and go solid-state, my rejuvenated Rivera has made me reconsider. Yes, I'll probably invest in a smaller non-valve product when live gigs return. One of the simpler digital combos, combined with a juicy analogue drive pedal ticks most of the boxes for me. For the time being, though, I'm just happy to reconnect with my favourite guitar and amp, both now sounding like they should again."

IN DETAIL

1 The useful Dry control lets you dial back in some of your amp's own voice, yielding subtle blended drive tones

2 The smaller form factor makes the Compact an easier fit than the bigger Custom for most 'boards

3 Powerful EQ controls let you sweep from Fender to Marshall-style voices intuitively

Origin Effects RevivalDrive Compact

The original RevivalDRIVE Custom was an excellent, almost exhaustive evocation of vintage amp tones in a pedal. It was a complex beast, though, with a chunky form factor and a price to match at £559.

With the new Compact version, however, Origin has distilled an already excellent design down to its essential elements, rehousing it in a smaller box to suit a typical slot on the pedalboard, while also bringing the ticket down to a less salty level. Some of the more arcane features of the original, such as a choice of silicon or valve rectifier-style modes, have gone, but as reviewer Trevor Curwen commented in his write-up of the Compact, "the essence of the sound remains the same, as does the excellent touch sensitivity, while the reduced control set makes it so much easier and quicker to get to where you want to be".

We're big fans of gear that doesn't obstruct your path to making music, so we reckon the average user will get more from less with this Compact version. The six-knob design still permits deep tone sculpting, while a Dry knob lets you choose how much of your amp's natural voice shines through. Focused yet endlessly adaptable and compelling to play, this top-notch drive will amply repay your investment.

Price: ***£315*** ***Website:*** ***https://origineffects.com***

EFFECTS

Shimmering delays and irresistible grooves to enhance your playing

Words: Jamie Dickson

Source Audio Collider Delay + Reverb

The Collider brings Source's well-liked Nemesis and Ventris pedals together in one box with a common control interface, so you get five evocative delay voices and seven atmospheric reverbs. There are separate footswitches for delay and reverb that you can use individually or simultaneously, and the pedal has dual inputs and outputs, allowing for a range of mono and stereo routing options. Its standard mode is to run delay into reverb, but you can reverse this order, and you can also run the effects in parallel. The pedal can also be configured as two delays or two reverbs if you wish. The nice thing about the Collider is that all this is brought together in a relatively affordable package.

Price: ***£279*** *Website:* ***www.sourceaudio.net***

Wampler Terraform

Modulation effects such as chorus and phaser aren't usually sounds you'll leave 'always on', so it makes sense to have a bunch of them in one box, rather than have half a dozen separate pedals. Enter the Wampler Terraform, which delivers 11 different modulation effect types in a compact twin-footswitch chassis. The sounds are rich and compelling and include two types of amp trem, two classy choruses, a nice crisp flanger and a phaser, plus a suitably gloopy U-Vibe. These cover several decades of time-based effects, alongside a Rotary effect for those Jimi/Gatton sounds. You can also save your favourite sounds and settings as presets, making this a sonic landscaper par excellence.

Price: ***£299*** *Website:* ***www.wamplerpedals.com***

Walrus Audio
Mako D1 High-Fidelity Delay

Some effects are desirable because they offer a lot for little money. Others draw you in through sheer quality. The Mako D1 falls into the latter bracket, and is versatile to boot. The intuitive controls govern five delay types, but the D1's appeal lies in the way you can modify these voices via the Tweak knob: Mod adds pitch modulation to repeats; Tone applies EQ filters; and Age offers overdrive and treble roll-off for all programs except Digital, where it applies bitcrushing to repeats. Meanwhile, Attack softens the attack of repeats by applying a volume envelope, creating diffuse-sounding echoes. A formidable but compact, pro-grade pedal.

Price: ***£359*** *Website:* ***www.walrusaudio.com***

PEDAL POWER

Penalty Shootout *by Jamie Dickson*

"I've been chopping and changing a lot on my 'board this year, partly thanks to new guitars joining the family, so I decided to have a drive pedal shootout to see which suited my new rig best. The defending champions were Free The Tone's Red Jasper low-gain overdrive, a nice, mid-rich boost effectively, and the excellent Caliber 45 'Plexi'-style overdrive by J Rockett, which provides singing drive tones with plenty of focus and clarity. Both are gig-proven favourites but were under pressure from the Ariel Posen version of the Hudson Electronics Broadcast, which excels at clean boost tones with a flattering fuzzy edge. Also in the running were various nice ODs from Providence, ThorpyFX, Brantone and others.

"I matched them up in pairs then A/B'd each pair carefully, removing the one I liked least, rather like heats of a football tournament. After round two, there were just two drives left: the Red Jasper and the Ariel Posen Broadcast. In the process I gained loads of insight into why certain pedals just aren't for me – and others 'click' with my style and rig. Try holding your own tone 'World Cup'; it's a valuable exercise."

IN DETAIL

1. Two circular displays show you where you are in the loop/drum groove cycle
2. Alternate grooves, fills and endings can be triggered with the right footswitch
3. You can auto-synchronise your guitar loops to the drum pattern so things stay in step

Boss RC-10R Rhythm Loop Station

Want to become a better player? Buy a looper pedal. The benefits of jamming along to your own playing are many. Not only does it hold a mirror up to the accuracy of your rhythm playing, but you can set the agenda for what you want to practise soloing over. Did we mention they're also great for music making? Nothing new in all that of course, but with the RC-10R, Boss has now made the concept even more useful by adding a drum machine.

There are two sides to the pedal, a looper on the left and drum machine on the right. These can be synchronised (recommended for most purposes) or can cycle independently, with the clock-like displays above each footswitch showing where you are in the loop at any given time. On the drum machine side, you get 280 preset rhythms that cover a wide variety of musical genres (merengue, anyone?) with alternate grooves, transition fills, an intro and an ending triggered by the right-hand footswitch. So much for the spec. The real revelation here is how recording loops backed by a drum machine sharpens your timing, while playing over the heaped buffet of rhythm styles stretches your versatility and phrasing. With solid build, sensible controls and good-quality grooves aboard, this could be just the tool you need to elevate your playing to a new level.

Price: ***£263*** *Website:* ***www.boss.info/uk***

INNOVATION

Boundary-pushing gear that will transform your playing

Words: Rod Brakes

Free-Way 5B5-01 10-position switch

Free-Way promises "a whole new dimension in pickup switching for electric guitars", and with its 5B5-01 10-position switch you may be surprised to discover more tones under the hood of your Strat than you thought possible. Strats originally came with a three-way until the late 70s when Fender made the 'in-between' tones an official thing with a five-way switch. In addition to these sounds, the 5B5-01 provides parallel combinations of neck and bridge, and neck, middle and bridge, as well as three series combinations for a higher output. Upgrading your Strat with this reversible mod is easy to do and might pay off in spades by doubling the pickup options of an already versatile electric guitar.

Price: ***£39.95*** *Website:* ***www.freewayswitch.com***

Sheeran by Lowden S03

The Sheeran by Lowden range saw pop megastar Ed Sheeran team up with revered luthier George Lowden to make a series of small-bodied guitars at an attainable price point. We liked the sprightly sonic performance of both the S and W ranges, especially the S03 model, but this award also reflects its progressive build and design, which saw aerospace-inspired, waste-reducing construction techniques used to create a guitar that points the way for sustainable, lateral-thinking lutherie. Newly featuring a five-piece Indian rosewood back and sides along with a cedar top, mahogany neck and ebony 'board, the S03 also boasts an LR Baggs Element VTC pickup.

Price: ***£930*** *Website:* ***https://sheeranguitars.com***

Trinity by Relish

This year, we saw boutique guitar maker Relish extend the concept of its pull-out/push-in pickup swapping system into a more affordable area with the release of the Trinity. With its single-cutaway basswood body and bolt-on satin finish maple neck with dot-inlaid laurel fingerboard, the Trinity features a streamlined design that complements the main attraction of being able to slot different pickups in and out almost instantaneously. With no soldering or tools necessary, pickups can be changed by hand in seconds from the rear of the body. The Trinity ships with two sets of pickups and a variety of others are available now, including some from Seymour Duncan and Bare Knuckle brands.

Price: ***€1,614*** *Website:* ***https://relish.swiss***

TONE TWEAKS

Mr Fixit... Well, Almost *by David Mead*

"Since we began working from home back in March, I decided it would be an opportune time to sort out some of the niggly things on various guitars that have been semi-permanent residents on my to-do list for way too long. I handled some restringing, neck oiling and minor adjustments myself, but there were a couple of jobs I thought best left to a full-time tech. The first of those was lowering the action on my Admira Elena-E nylon-string by replacing the saddle. I've owned the guitar for 15 years and it's always troubled me that the action is slightly on the high side, despite recording two albums using it. I placed it in the hands of luthier Alex Bishop who did a splendid job.

"Next in line was my Les Paul. I wanted a better balance between bridge and neck pups and so, after taking advice from Bare Knuckles' Tim Mills, I acquired a Stormy Monday neck pup and, while I was at it, some new pots and caps. Off to see Alex once again, who also installed an ABR bridge for me, as I really seem to have a thing against the modern Nashville bridges. It's been a busy few months!"

IN DETAIL

1. The clickable rotary knob allows you to dial in parameters with precision and select various options displayed on the screen including patches and modules

2. Modules consist of parameters and connections (inputs and outputs) that are laid out in a row of identical colours on this 'page'/ grid of 40 buttons

3. As well as being used to navigate through and select saved patches, the footswitches can be employed to dynamically effect parameters via the Stompswitch module

4. Left and right ins and outs provide mono or stereo connectivity (including headphones) and may be used to patch in external units in an effects loop

Empress Effects Zoia

Empress Effects' "infinite trick pony", the Zoia, stands out in today's incredibly competitive (and often repetitive) stompbox world for being a truly innovative and forward-thinking piece of gear that can take your musical vision to new creative heights.

You may have heard this gadget described as "a fully featured modular synthesizer in pedal form", but if synthesizer modules aren't your forte, don't let that put you off in any way – patching units/modules together is the basic principle of pedalboards.

Here, a virtual studio full of gear is available to patch together in limitless ways, with footswitch and expression pedal options available for added dynamic control, in addition to MIDI and CV. There are currently 20 ready-made effects modules worthy of high praise, including various reverbs, delays, modulations, distortions and so on. But to help you imagine possibilities beyond the norm and create something unique, the Zoia offers the ability to build your own effects using distinct modules such as Envelope Follower, LFO and Delay Line, for example.

Use it as an effects processor, a virtual pedalboard or as a virtual amp with the Cabinet Sim module. You can also utilise it as an instrument by patching in the Oscillator module. It is, after all, also a synth!

Price: ***£479*** *Website:* ***https://empresseffects.com***

NILE RODGERS

A Wes Montgomery die-hard in his formative years, Nile Rodgers reveals that being upstaged by a 'kid' was the reason he first picked up a Strat...

Words **Jamie Dickson**

To call Nile Rodgers' guitar-playing career a success is a gross understatement. More than $2 billion worth of music has been recorded with his 'Hitmaker' Strat, a guitar that cost him just $149 and which, at the time, he wasn't even sure he should buy. He's not regretting that purchase anymore, to say the least. We caught up with the Hitmaker himself while he was in town testing out the new Acoustasonic version of Fender's ever-adaptable Strat at Abbey Road. Here, he opens up about the secrets behind his hyper-effective rhythm playing, his enduring love of jazz guitar and why being upstaged back in the 70s led to him picking up a Strat for the first time.

You've just filmed a video for Fender in which you're playing the new Acoustasonic Stratocaster. It's quite a departure from the 'Hitmaker' Strat you're known for using. What attracted you to it?

"They gave it to me over at Abbey Road and I was just putting the guitar through its paces. And the next thing you know I wound up doing session after session after session – just over and over and over again, trying to figure out what the guitar did. And as I did it I wound up having so much fun playing it that I just didn't stop playing it – it was a weird thing. It sort of grew on me almost right away... I really love jazz guitars, I just can't help it.

"When I'm sitting at home and I practise, I'm playing a D'Aquisto or a D'Angelico or

PHOTO BY HELEN BOAST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Nile with his Fender Acoustasonic Strat: "It feels like a jazz guitar to me"

© FENDER

an L-5, and typically I have the L-5 in my bedroom, because it's just right there and the other ones have to go to my locker. But by having this guitar and starting to play jazz on it, I was like, 'Oh wow, it's doing what I like jazz guitars to do.' I can hear it in the room, but when I amplify it, it's got the same kind of vibe – I can manipulate it and I can do what I can do with an L-5.

"And, just think, I haven't had to put flat-wound strings on it: I'm still using the acoustic strings that came on the guitar. I haven't changed them since I got it. Some people laugh, but old-school guitarists keep their strings on their guitars for a *really* long time. It's just a thing. I don't know if it's an R&B thing or a blues thing or a black thing or whatever, but it's just something that we do. My guitar techs know that I'm gonna have an attitude if I say, 'Did you change my strings last night?' and they say 'Err, yeah, man, we changed them before the last show....' It's just a thing, man, and I can't explain it, but I like old guitar strings."

Which jazz guitarists influenced your own style the most?

"I started out really, really loving Wes Montgomery and then for a bit I started to go into the Django Reinhardt school – I really got into the Gypsy jazz thing. But then practical life tends to take over and I realised that my life was going to be, for a certain amount of time, playing other people's music. That was going to be my job: I was not going to play my own music, I was going to play other people's music. I needed to have a guitar that satisfied composers and producers and artists, so I started playing different styles of hollowbody guitar. Eventually, I worked my way to a 335 and then that just didn't quite feel right to me, and so I went back to the other big box guitars."

"I needed a guitar that satisfied composers and producers and artists, so I played different styles of hollowbody guitar"

Why did you make the switch to becoming a Strat player?

"We were opening for The Jackson 5 on the first leg of their first world tour in 1973 and we were substituting for a really great R&B band called the O'Jays. Whenever they had a headlining gig, they didn't want to open for the Jacksons, so they would turn it over to my band.

"We were a group called New York City We had a hit record called *I'm Doin' Fine Now* – we toured on that record for about two or three years. One day we were doing a gig that we were headlining and we had an opening act; it was a young kid. We didn't want to have a stage changeover because we weren't that big, so we would just let the opening act use our gear. And so this young kid plugged into my amp, and at that time I was playing through an Acoustic [brand] amp with the horn in it, because we all wanted to look like Sly And The Family Stone. But it was stupid because I was playing a jazz guitar that would feedback and I'd have to put tape over the f-holes. But, still, you wanted to look like Sly! Anyway, this young kid plugged into my amp and he was playing a Fender Stratocaster and he was *smoking*! [laughs]

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Musicians' Union

Nile (right) with Bernard Edwards: "All along Bernard kept telling me, 'Buy a Strat, buy a Strat. It'll change our whole sound, it's going be so funky'"

PHOTO BY ALLAN TANNENBAUM/GETTY IMAGES

"It sounded unbelievable to me. I'll never forget this. Man, my partner at the time, Bernard Edwards, he gave me the dirtiest look... if looks could kill, I would be dead years ago and I would not be talking to you. Because all along Bernard kept telling me, 'Buy a Strat, buy a Strat. It'll change our whole sound, it's going be so funky. The way you play jazz, if you do that on a Strat, man, you're going to be killing, you're going to be known for something.'

"He kept trying to talk me into it, but I was a hippy, so I was like, 'No, man, I just want to play like Wes...' But this kid, he was playing some of the songs that we were playing, because we were doing cover songs as well as a few originals, but he would do the cover and he would sound *exactly* like the dude on the record and I was like, 'Whoa!' So that day I went out and I traded my Gibson Barney Kessel for the cheapest Strat I could find because I was not convinced. So there was this really cheap guitar and I think it was going for about $149. At that time, Strats with maple necks had become expensive because of Hendrix. So typically in those days if you bought a Strat, especially if it had some age on it, it would be around $300, which was a lot of money. But with this one I traded in my Barney Kessel and the dude gave *me* $300 back! I was like, 'Oh, *man* – this really was a cheap guitar.' That guitar has now become the 'Hitmaker'. I play it on damn near every record and it was the runt of the litter. And it sounds amazing – it's the only Strat I know that sounds like that."

[Ed's note: given that the Hitmaker is estimated to have been used to make $2 billion worth of music, Nile received a 1,342,281,779 per cent return on his modest $149 investment...]

•

"One thing that's a big part of my sound is that I'm a 10-inch speaker guy and I've been that way forever"

•

What musical uses do you think you will put the new Acoustasonic Strat to?

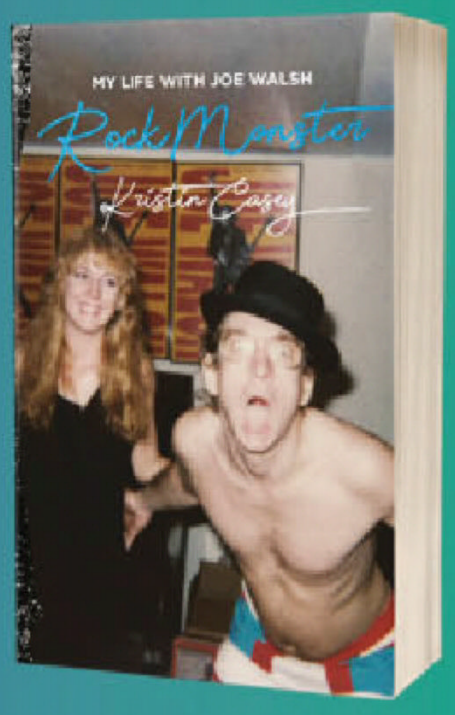
"I really think it's going to wind up being my jazz guitar. Because it's right next to my bed, it's in the bed with me at night, and I'll probably play jazz on it – it feels like a jazz guitar to me, it doesn't feel like a dreadnought or something to me. I think it's going to wind up being that for me."

What does the rest of your rig look like these days – have you got into modelling amps at all?

"I'm so old-fashioned, man. I just play a regular Fender Strat. One thing that's a big part of my sound is that I'm a 10-inch speaker guy and I've been that way for-*ever*. Even when I had like big stacks, I'd have the Sunn amplifier with like six 10-inch speakers [laughs] and then stack them up and have 12 10s or something like that. Because I think that it's the most flattering thing to a funky sound. For me, 12-inch speakers were just like not the thing. I can use them, but it's just not... it's just...[shudders].

"So I really just use a Fender Strat, a Fender amp and I've just added a wah-wah pedal to my rig as well as a delay pedal.

ROCK MONSTER
MY LIFE WITH JOE WALSH



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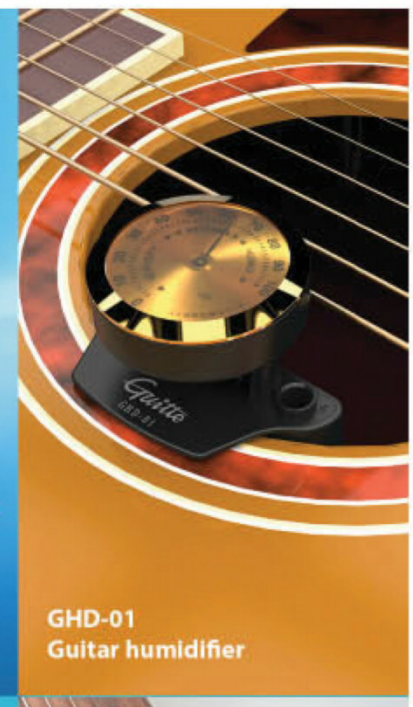

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Nile Rodgers & Chic on stage at Lowlands Festival, Netherlands, 2018

PHOTO BY GORDON STABBINS/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

But it's only for playing one song, which is *Let's Dance*. I have a chorus pedal, too, that's for one song that we play in the show – I think it's Sister Sledge's *He's The Greatest Dancer*. On the record it's tremolo, but in a live gig the tremolo won't be in the pocket, so I just put the chorus on heavy and I just play extra notes."

Developing a solid sense of time and groove is often overlooked by guitarists. What's your advice on using time more creatively in playing?

"Yeah, man, you just touched upon the real essence of my life and my world. When I was younger I was fortunate enough to be around great jazz musicians and hear them say things that may or may not have been true – and may have just been bullshit for a magazine – but when you're a kid, you're very impressionable and you hear this stuff and it becomes the gospel to you. So when I was younger, and I had encountered Miles [Davis] or had read articles and heard him say things like, 'It ain't the notes you play, it's the notes you *don't* play...' I would think, 'Oh, wow.'

"So ghosting [partially muting passing chords] became so important to my style of playing. I'm mean, I ghost all the time and the reason why I ghost a lot is just because it sounds funky to me. To me, the less information I throw at you at once, the funkier something sounds. You rarely will ever hear me play a six-note chord... to me, that's like, 'Aggghhh!' It's horrible to me. But every now and then I have to because it's the right thing to do. So typically when I'm playing 13th chords or something like that you will hear me do a [full] voicing, but it's very rare I'd rather go [plays partial chords with tighter sound]. That just sounds funkier to me. What I'll do is reduce the harmonic package to its smallest components to project that tonality or that information – and that's really where the fun comes in."

How did you prefer to write with Chic?

"I write the hooks first. The very first song I wrote for Chic was called *Everybody Dance*. And when I wrote it I started with [plays a sequence of open chords], but then I thought, 'Wait a minute, that's not cool enough,' so I went [plays linking melodic licks and adds two passing 11th chords] and then I had the hook that was on the record. I write everything like that, like when I wrote *We Are Family*. I always want to have a lick. I wanna have a riff. Because I come from the school of rock 'n' roll where you had to have a riff. You could just play the chords to *We Are Family,* but that doesn't work to me – it's actually a riff."

"I always want to have a lick. I wanna have a riff. Because I come from the school of rock 'n' roll where you had to have a riff"

Is there a difference between funk and disco, in terms of guitar parts?

"Not to me. But then, to me, there isn't really a distinction between funk or jazz – it's all the same. When I was lucky enough to play with jazz big bands, after I learned to play funk, man, people used to like hiring me because instead of just playing traditional jazz rhythm I could play [plays Chic-style jazz rhythm pattern with punchy inversions]. People like to hear that extra [syncopation and embellishment]. They started getting into it – they were having fun. And they'd say, 'Get that kid... get that funky kid.' I remember when I was a kid, jazz started to become like pop music. Some jazz musicians started having hit records. Of course, in R&B, guitar is essential, certainly when I was a kid, and almost every record would have two or three guitar players on it. So I was able to fill the spot sometimes that would normally be filled by two guitar players when I was playing with a jazz orchestra or a big band or something. I'm a lucky guy [laughs]." G

HM Government

From 1 January 2021

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Free movement is ending, and the new points-based immigration system will introduce job, salary and language requirements that will change the way you hire from the EU.

You will need to be a licensed sponsor to hire eligible employees from outside the UK. Becoming a sponsor normally takes 8 weeks and fees apply.

This will not apply when hiring Irish citizens or those eligible for status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Find out more at GOV.UK/HiringFromTheEU

DEATH ELVIS 0:1

Probably the most useless debate in the world: Is Elvis alive?

No question. He'll still live on long after everyone who now claims he is alive has died.

It is his music that made him immortal - along with Janis, Jimi, Wolfgang Amadeus, Freddie and all the others. Many of them lost the battle against drugs, alcohol and their inner demons far too soon. But they all had vanquished death long before.

Elvis
th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

Down Memory Lane

Yamaha's longest running electric guitars are enduring characters. Yet what they lack in new specification is made up for in exemplary Japanese craft. Are they still valid after all these years? We find out...

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Olly Curtis

YAMAHA SG1820 & SA2200 £1,999 & £1,699

CONTACT **Yamaha** PHONE **01908 366700** WEB **http://uk.yamaha.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **You're just rehashing old reviews now, right?**
Not quite. We last looked at the 'latest' version of Yamaha's groundbreaking SG design – which first appeared in the mid-70s – back in 2010. It hasn't changed since.

2. **And the SA2200?**
Technically, this is the longest-running Yamaha electric, which was first manufactured in October 1991 and is the only survivor of the SA semis. We thought it was about time we revisited this 29-year-old guitar!

3. **But why?**
Yamaha established the level for Japanese craft with guitars like these and, while once commonplace, you have to look pretty hard in today's market for a new Japanese-made guitar. These Yamahas are made as they have been for many years, in very limited numbers at Yamaha Music Manufacturing Japan Corporation (YMMJ), formerly Yamaha Music Craft (YMC), in Hamamatsu, Japan.

The giant Yamaha Corporation was once likened to a vast ocean tanker to this writer: it moves slowly and in a very considered fashion, at least as far as its guitars are concerned. Yet some 54 years after Yamaha entered the electric guitar market its reputation for consummate quality and consistency remains – across price points, from beginner to professional. It's hard to remember playing a 'bad' Yamaha guitar, if indeed we ever have.

Most recently, of course, it's been the Revstar range that has revived interest. This mainly Indonesian-made range didn't change the guitar world, but it's probably one of the best examples of a 'sleeper' range we can think of. Only recently, our editor-in-chief Jamie Dickson purchased a 502T, and hasn't got a bad word to say about it, even though it's now four years since we wrote about its launch. It's part of the Yamaha style: if it's worth doing, it's worth doing properly. Flash in the pan they ain't.

SG1820

The idea for this review started with a simple question: whatever happened to the Yamaha SG? Well, the latest – and only – SGs left in the Yamaha range are a trio of 1800 models launched back in 2010. They're pretty much identical guitars save for a few cosmetic details and their pickups: the 1802 features Seymour Duncan single-coil soapbars; the 1820A features EMGs; and the 1820 here (probably the most mainstream) comes with industry standard Seymour Duncan '59s. Colours are limited and very classic, too. By design, these are pro-aimed with pretty much zero of the design innovations or idiosyncrasies of that groundbreaking SG2000. If that original SG was intended to be a better and different-sounding Gibson Les Paul, the 1820 is, well, a Les Paul with a different shape, and despite its symmetrical double-cutaway outline, it sounds like one without question.

In terms of outline, the SG follows the lower body of the Les Paul very closely: its waist is slightly lower and wider across the body, while those horns flare out a little adding to the slightly chunkier look. The cutaway of the treble horn mirrors that of the Les Paul and the heel sits a little lower. This could be an advantage for the SG, except that the upper strap button

If you need proof that Yamaha can build world-class guitars, look no further than this handmade, artisan-style pair

1

1. The SG1820's headstock is slightly downsized compared with the older style of the SA2200. Interestingly, for the contemporary Revstar range the block Yamaha legend here was replaced with the company's 'tuning fork' logo

2. The original, more ornate stud tailpiece of the SG2000 is replaced here with very fit-for-purpose TonePros hardware

THE RIVALS

You should be able to pick up a new Gibson Les Paul Standard '50s for £2k, so the Yamaha SG1820 has some serious competition. PRS's Core 594 Singlecut is considerably higher priced: you're looking at around £3.5k, although the S2 version should cost you around £1.8k. There's no shortage of classy single-cuts on the market, not least Heritage's H150 (around £2.5k) or the Chinese-made Eastman SB59/v, which seems to start around £1.7k in various stores.

It's the same story with the Gibson ES-335 style of the SA2200. Gibsons seem to start with stock of the Satin model (around £2k), moving up to around £2.5k for the gloss models, or nearly double that for a Custom Shop Historic reissue. Heritage's H-535 (around £2.7k) has similar under-the-radar appeal but at a price, while Eastman's T59/v sells at around £1.6k.

mounts behind the heel (like a Gibson SG or ES-335) and, depending on what strap you attach, can certainly impede your upper fretting. It also slightly alters the strapped-on hang of the SG, meaning it tends to tip forward, again like a Gibson SG or ES-335, or indeed the SA2200. The headstock is a little shorter and squarer compared with a Les Paul, and the back-angle is slightly flatter.

More than a few modern guitars don't last five years in production, let alone a decade without change. But our new sample, whose serial number says it was made in November 2019, is identical to our reference 1820, which was made a decade ago in January 2010. Consistent? Colour aside, it's hard to tell the two guitars apart.

The construction of the 1800 SG differs in numerous ways to that original SG2000. It features a flat back to the three-piece African mahogany body – intended to maximise the Les Paul-like chunk. The neck is three-piece, too, although with only one translucent colour you might not notice that detail. On investigating our sunburst example, though, the centre

2

The 1820 features the near classic Seymour Duncan '59 in both neck and bridge positions. The other models in the range feature EMG and Seymour Duncan soapbar P-90s

section appears to be quartered, and you can also see that the maple cap clearly drops into the 'plain top' grade. With a rim depth of pretty much bang on 50mm and overall depth of 60mm, there's no weight relief or chambering – and it's little surprise that the guitar is no lightweight at 4.41kg (9.7lb), just a little heavier than our 10-year-old reference, which weighs in at 4.14kg (9.1lb).

Part of the 1800 concept back in 2010 was to use up-to-the-minute hardware that was fit for performance purpose. So the TonePros tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece are firmly locked to their posts, the Grover tuners are locking, and the nut is Graph Tech Tusq. But this is now the sort of kit you'll see on guitars a third of this price, a bit like the almost generic Duncan '59s. Then there's the gloss polyurethane finish, which you won't find on a Gibson or PRS. However, it's very thin – it's sunken into the grain a little on our decade-old example. There's also a final important and proprietary twist in the form of Initial Response Acceleration (IRA; see the Vibrating Wood box over the page), which features on both our review models.

SA2200

With its resplendent gold-plated hardware and lightly flamed laminate facings, our SA2200 (which was made in May 2020) is the sort of guitar that should come with a tuxedo. Its inspiration is obvious and there's no downsizing here. No, this is a pretty straight 16-inch-wide thinline with a soft maple centre block and five-ply maple-faced laminate construction. For the record, the Yamaha USA website says it's sycamore.

It's immaculately turned out, of course, from the careful craft of the super-tidy inside with its kerfed mahogany linings to the great binding with inner purfling lines that drop just to a single-ply cream for the fingerboard. It's even jazzier around the headstock, which, at around 180mm long by 85mm at its widest point, is slightly bigger than the 166mm by 78mm dimension of the SG's. It's also slightly flatter in terms of its back angle than the SG.

> The huge-sounding SG1820 'single-cut' would easily warrant retrofitting more boutique-style pickups

The body rise seems slighter than the classic it's imitating and, as you can see, the dual horns are thinned, a style we've seen on many Japanese and other reruns of this classic. Like the SG, the finish is quoted as gloss polyurethane, but again it appears extremely thin and beautifully applied. This attention to detail is everywhere: from obvious things like fretting on the ebony fingerboard with its bright, vibrant inlays and the superbly cut bone nut, to more subtle details such as the rounding of the bound fingerboard edge and the perfect shaping of the traditional heel.

Unlike the SG1820, the SA2200 sticks with homegrown Gotoh hardware that no one is going to turn their nose up at, and the pickups are simply Yamaha Alnico V, which are actually slightly hotter that those '59s going on measured DCRs. Here, we also get coil-splits on the tone controls – pull-push switches not push-push types, which we've seen on previous Yamahas.

UNDER THE HOOD

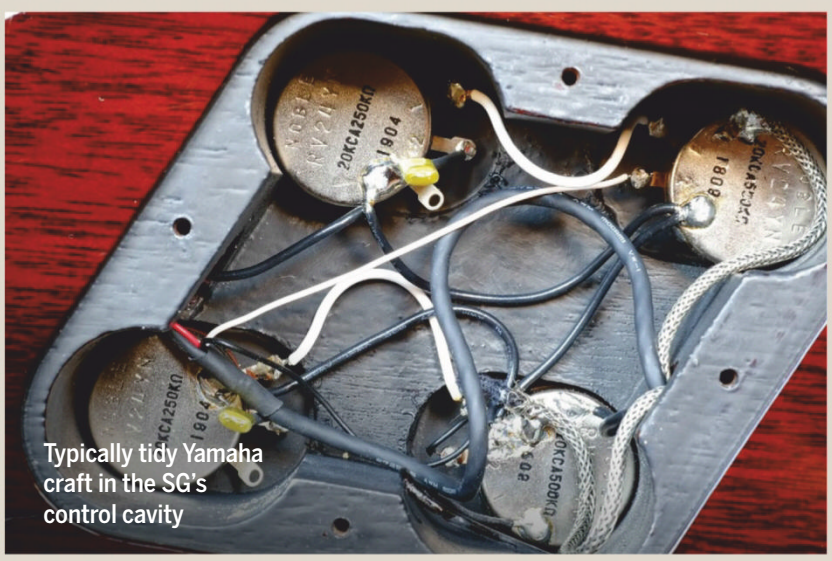
It's tidy, modern-style wiring here from Yamaha

The SG1800 has a tidy cavity, although the circuit is straightforward, using Noble pots (500k audio taper for the volume and 250k audio for the tones) and small 223J code (.022 microfarads) film capacitors. There are no tricks and it's all cleanly wired, modern style. All the cavities use screening paint; even the cavity cover has a silver coloured conductive layer. It's super tidy and efficient.

Removing the controls, as you need to do on a thinline such as the SA2200, is not something we would do on a new guitar like this. However, according to Yamaha's service diagram, the SA2200 uses 500k volume pots with 300k tone pots, with pull-push switches and the same-value capacitors. Again, these are wired without treble bleeds or anything, modern style.

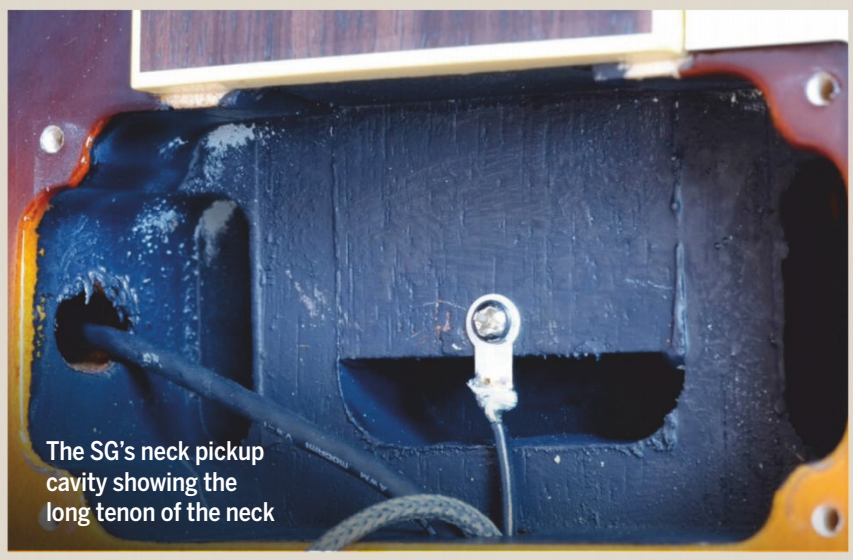
While the SG1820's Seymour Duncan '59 pickups are clearly labelled on the nickel-silver baseplates, those on the SA2200 are completely bare with no ID; the backs appear to be brass. A nice touch is the extra screw on the bass side, which means you can precisely set the pickups to match the angle of the strings. As for DCRs, the SG's Alnico V '59s measure 8.14kohms at the bridge and 7.3k at the neck. The SA's also use Alnico V magnets with measured DCRs (full-coil/split-coil) of 8.29/4.19kohms (bridge) and 7.41/3.72k (neck).

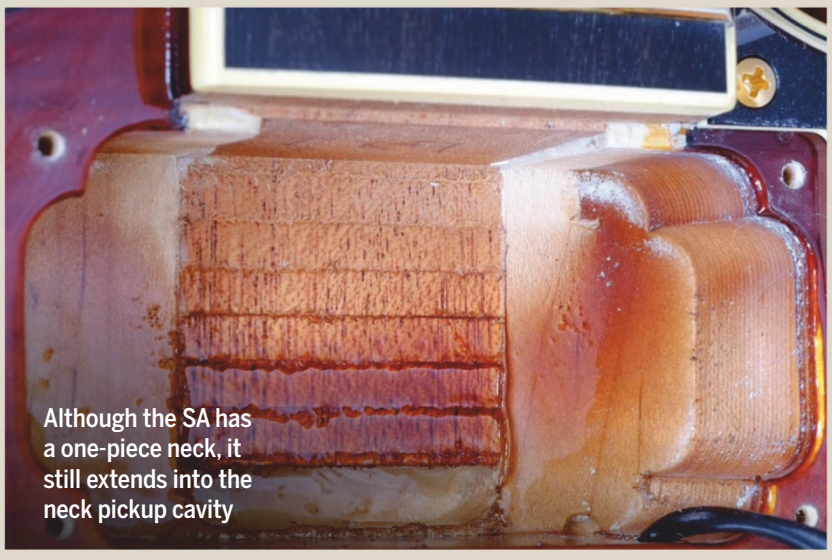
When you remove the neck pickups on both guitars you can see that the neck tenon extends into the pickup cavity (as seen in the images below). In the bridge pickup cavity of the SA2200 you can also see the quarter-sawn spruce layer that sits between the soft maple centre block and the curve of the laminate top. There's a similar layer between the bottom of the block and the curved back.

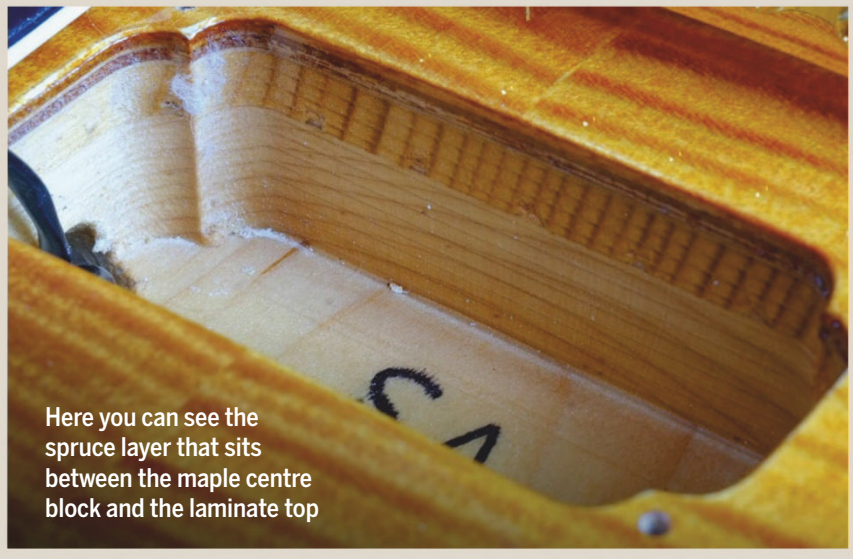

Typically tidy Yamaha craft in the SG's control cavity

There's no doubt what neck pickup this is on the SG

The SA's pickup base offers up no ID


The SG's neck pickup cavity showing the long tenon of the neck


Although the SA has a one-piece neck, it still extends into the neck pickup cavity


Here you can see the spruce layer that sits between the maple centre block and the laminate top

VIBRATING WOOD

What exactly is Yamaha doing to its high-end guitars? We find out...

We first came across Yamaha's Initial Response Acceleration (IRA) back in 2007 when the company released some more vintage-specific SG2000 and 1000 models, again made by YMMJ, and both featuring this technology. IRA was "initially developed to help the company's high-end acoustic violins mimic the sound and maturity that decades of playing and the ageing process ingrain in a quality vintage instrument", we explained back then. "The team at Yamaha identified vibration as a fundamental part of the process, believing that the day-to-day vibrations to which instruments are subjected physically change them, and therefore their sound, over a 10- or 20-year period.

"Following the success of this process when applied to its £5,000-plus violins, the Yamaha Music Craft [as it was then called] team decided to apply the same thinking to its new SG guitars. Rather than having to wait a number of years for vibration-induced ageing to take effect, each completely finished, strung, set up and tuned SG is placed on a custom-built machine that vibrates the instrument to find its resonant frequency, which itself is slightly different for each individual guitar. When the specific frequency has been determined, the machine vibrates the instrument at that frequency for 15 minutes. According to Yamaha this results in a measurably smoother sustain with a more linear decay and a more balanced sustain. It's nice to see a company take a scientific approach towards recreating the most important, sonic aspects of vintage 'mojo'."

Although in Yamaha's specs it appears that only the SG1820 receives its dose of IRA, according to the small certificate that comes with each guitar, both our SG and SA receive the same treatment.

The SA2200's older style features Yamaha's own-design Alnico V-loaded humbuckers. Note the extra screw on the bass side, so you can tilt the pickup to precisely match the taper of the strings

Feel & Sounds

These 1800 series SGs might have changed to a more conventional construction, but this 1820 still comes across as a big grown-up guitar from its overall weight, that body girth and a neck that most of us would call big. Dimensionally, it's virtually identical – and clearly an influence on – the more contemporary Revstars: approximately 21.4mm at the 1st fret filling out to 25.4mm by the 12th with a slightly wider nut width of 43.7mm and virtually identical at the 12th fret at 53mm. It's certainly a full C profile, the rounded shoulders actually making it feel bigger than it is. Our reference 1820 is in Vintage White and we'd swear the neck is bigger than the Sunburst model we have on review, though in reality it isn't – not the first time colour is playing a trick on our hand. The SA2200 is very similar width-wise with a similar 1st fret depth but a more manageable depth as the neck progresses, at 23.5mm by the 12th. The shoulders feel slightly more relaxed, too.

The other thing is that, much like a Gibson SG – or any other guitar with a top strap button behind the heel – the feel of the guitar when strapped on does take a little adjustment if you're used to the more conventional button placement on the top horn. The body does tip forward more. It's a more 'extreme' experience than playing a contemporary Revstar, but it shares some family traits, not least its relatively big neck.

Artificial ageing, the conditioning of wood, is pretty much as dark as this art gets. It is impossible to evaluate what effect Yamaha's IRA is having as the end user: we simply don't have an identical guitar that's untreated to compare it to. But listening to the new SG and comparing it to our own 10-year-old model and our usual single-cut references, it's a very good example of the style, the recipe.

The SA2200? It's a deliciously regal voice played clean with slightly more air to the sound and a deft balance of smoothness with clarity. Yes, it might look like the sort of thing you'd play cocktail jazz on – which you certainly can, of course – but show it a pretty cranked amp and it really displays its rock credentials, slipping into musical feedback with just a lean towards your amp. Okay, you say, that's what a ES-335 does. And let's not pretend otherwise; this is someone else's design. But it's such a

3

well-made, carefully considered piece that the guitar just disappears while we spend far too much time playing it. It's one of those 'desert island' guitars, for sure.

Yet it's also a superbly complex voice that effortlessly morphs from rich velveteen jazz and juicy fusion through to also Fender-y quack from the coil-splits, which voice the inner slug coils of both and are where the mix and the neck pickup excel. Whatever is going on under the hood here is also considered: the tone control taper and cap values make both tones, in both modes, hugely reactive. If there's a bad sound on this guitar, we didn't find it. It's one of the best-sounding and most versatile guitars of its style we've had the pleasure to play.

Verdict

If you need proof that Yamaha can build world-class guitars, look no further than this pair. They are handmade, artisan style, in small numbers at a relatively small workshop in Japan, which crafts all the high-end Yamaha electrics, acoustics and basses. Our SG1820 is one of only a 100 exclusive models to the UK, and who knows when we'll get more. In truth, we're told that the facility simply cannot make enough guitars to satisfy worldwide demand, hence their exclusivity.

4

5

The SA2200 is probably one of the best kept secrets out there and is laughably good value

Their build style is at odds with the name of the facility, though – Yamaha Music Manufacturing Japan Corporation – and is just one example of the oddities involved here. And then there's the price: Yamaha's official SRP prices both instruments out of the market, which is why we've used the UK on-sale price here, which is approximately 35 per cent lower.

The now 10-year-old SG1820, then, is a guitar full of style and history that slots in price-wise under Gibson's production Les Paul Standard. And although its specification is a little more generic, it's a beautifully made, huge-sounding 'single-cut' as is, and would easily warrant retrofitting more boutique-style pickups and appointments if that's your thing.

The SA2200, virtually unchanged since it was introduced late in 1991, is probably one of the best kept secrets out there and, again, at the selling price is laughably good value. Its tuxedo style might not appeal to everyone, but its sounds and feel are simply superb: a very professional-level workhorse guitar that really should be on the radar of any serious player. G

3. The SA2200 features the wider-travel 'Nashville'-style bridge made by Gotoh

4. Part of the SA2200's enduring appeal is its subtly 'posh' vibe – one of the finest versions of Gibson's ES-335 that we've ever played

5. The more ornate style of the SA2200 is reflected by the multi-stripe purfling that sits inside the bound edge of the headstock. Tuners differ here, too: these are also by Gotoh. The top nut is bone

YAMAHA SG1820

PRICE: £1,999 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: 3-piece African mahogany with maple top
NECK: 3-piece mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/43.8mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood arrow pearloid inlays, 350mm (13.75") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated TonePros AVRII tune-o-matic-style bridge and T1Z stud tailpiece, locking Grover tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50.5mm
ELECTRICS: Nickel-covered Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.14/9.1
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The SG1802 features Seymour Duncan P-90 soapbars; the 1820A comes with an active EMG 81/85 pickup set
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Brown Sunburst (as reviewed) Black, Vintage White – gloss polyurethane

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Big weighty 'single-cut' guitar with the sounds to match; impeccable construction, feel and playability

CONS Limited colour choice and no left-hand options

YAMAHA SA2200

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Double-cutaway thinline electric
BODY: Laminated 5-ply figured sycamore with soft maple centre block
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, split rectangle mother-of-pearl inlays, 350mm (13.75") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Gold-plated Gotoh GE103B Nashville-style bridge and GE101Z stud tailpiece, Gotoh SG30 tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Gold-plated covered Yamaha Alnico V humbuckers, individual pickup volume and tone controls (with pull-push Bi-Sound coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.79/8.34
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Violin Sunburst (as reviewed), Brown Sunburst – gloss polyurethane

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Beautifully made semi-hollow that makes up for its lack of originality in style, playability and sounds

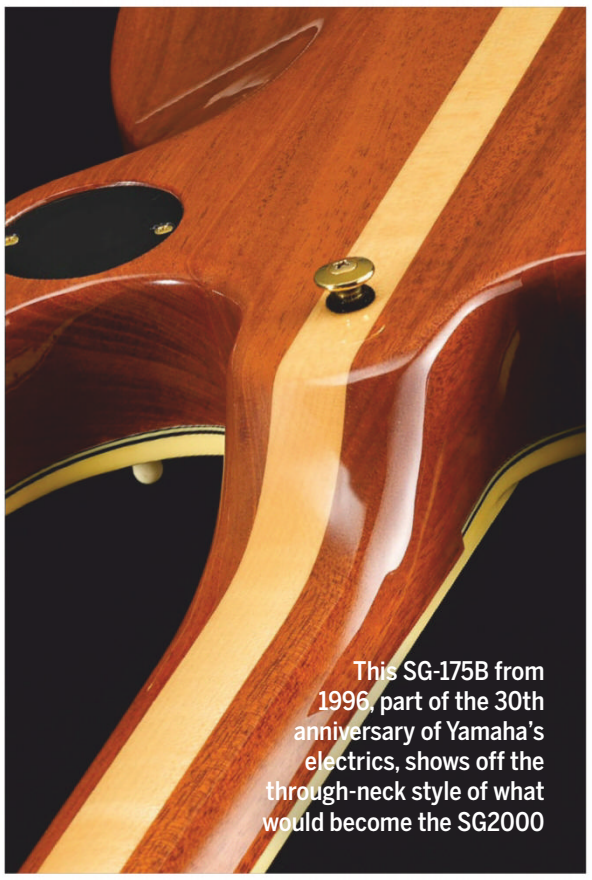
CONS Might be too posh for some and, again, limited colours and no left-handers. But what a guitar!

Turn Back Time

The guitars we see today date right back to the beginning of Yamaha's electric guitar program as our trawl through the archive reveals...

Words Dave Burrluck

The SG2000 was a great looking guitar and heavily feature led. It was a turning point for Yamaha and the Japanese guitar industry



This SG-175B from 1996, part of the 30th anniversary of Yamaha's electrics, shows off the through-neck style of what would become the SG2000

Nobody took Japanese guitars seriously in the 60s, and it's fair to say that Yamaha's early solidbodies – such as the surf-style SG7 of 1966 – were an acquired taste. Production and development was halted in '69 and resumed again in '72 with the more mainstream direction of the bolt-on single-cut SG40, 60 and 80 with a distinctive sloping treble horn along with the set-neck, twin-humbucking SG45, 65 and 85. Like many other Japanese brands of the time, Yamaha also made copies, not least the Studio Lord (SL) and Lord Player (LP) during the 70s, something the brand chooses not to mention today.

The first rumblings of the symmetrical pointed-horn shape came with the bolt-on SG30 in 1973 and the set-neck SG50 and 70 of the following year. But the SG we all got to know really started with the 'Super Session' SG175 (apparently conceived in 1974, but it didn't make it into production until the following year). With the design input of Carlos Santana, it effectively became the SG2000 of 1976: the guitar that really made the US market sit up and take notice. Incidentally, it became the SBG2000 in 1980, after Gibson objected...

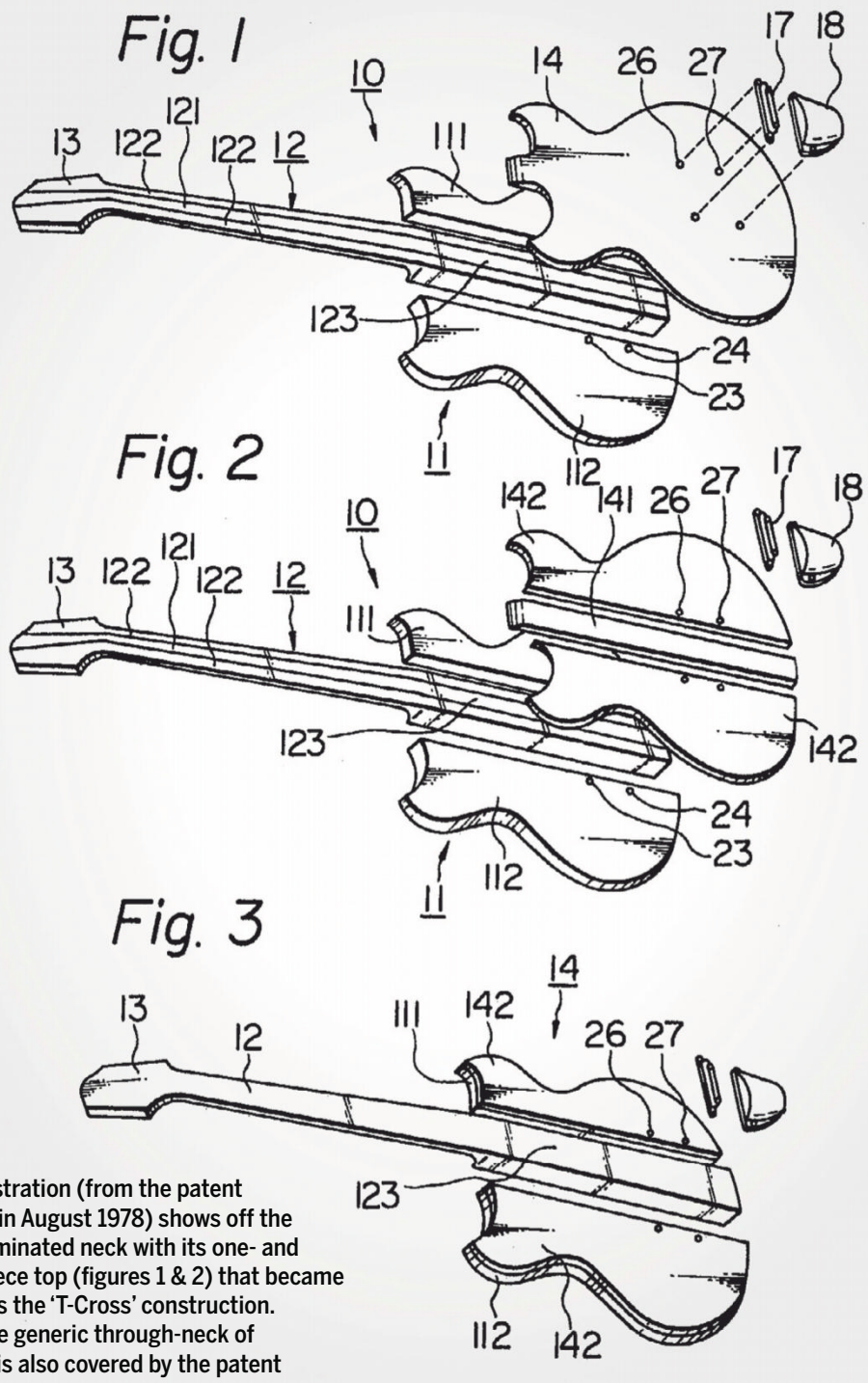
The SG2000 primarily differed from the all-mahogany, set-neck SG175 with its 'T Cross' construction: a neck-through design topped with a maple cap and brass 'Sustain Plate' underneath the tune-o-matic-style bridge, also apparently brass, while retaining the ebony 'board with its dual split-arrow (or split-wing) inlays of the SG175. The famous custom-made SG175/SG2000 that's associated with Santana is suggested to have a teak top. Along with a lotus flower headstock inlay and ultra-fancy Buddha body inlay, it also featured 24 frets, instead of 22. This style was issued as the SG-175B in 1996, part of the 30th Anniversary of Yamaha's electric guitars.

Credit Where It's Due

It's a little odd, however, that while Carlos Santana is quoted and credited with his design input, there's little mention of the actual Yamaha design team, headed by Yojiro Takabayashi (also seen spelt as Yojirou), we believe. It's certainly his name (Yojiro Takabayashi), as the inventor, on a US patent for "an improved electric guitar construction" assigned to Nippon Gakki Seizo Kabushiki Kaisha, Japan (Yamaha), which outlines what was subsequently called the 'T-Cross' construction. It was filed on 19 July 1976 and granted in August 1978. There is another patent – again citing Yojiro Takabayashi as the inventor – that seems slightly less specific: it was filed slightly earlier on 6 July 1976 and granted in November 1978, although both patents were initially filed in Japan on 18 July 1975.

The more relevant Yojiro patent states the abstract: "An improved electric guitar construction is disclosed. The guitar includes an elongated neck formed of a plurality of elongated pieces. One of the elongated pieces is formed of a harder material than the remaining elongated pieces. A body is coupled to one end of the neck. A top board covers at least part of the surface of the body as well as the elongated piece of the neck which is formed of a harder material than the remaining elongated pieces. The top board is made of a harder material than the body. A bridge element is attached to the top board."

Indeed, the harder top over the neck-through spline and its softer body wings are key here. The top can be a three-piece design, as many SG2000s were. However, the centre piece over that neck-through spline is the important bit. Also, despite



This illustration (from the patent granted in August 1978) shows off the multi-laminated neck with its one- and three-piece top (figures 1 & 2) that became known as the 'T-Cross' construction. The more generic through-neck of figure 3 is also covered by the patent

being "somewhat inferior", even if you don't have that hard top, the patent covers a more simple neck-through with body wings as being preferable to the conventional bolt-on or set-neck neck-to-body coupling.

Oddly, the cited prior art doesn't include actual prior art from Bigsby (1948), Rickenbacker (1956) or Gibson (1963) – all of whom employed neck-through-body designs. Nor did it cite, more relevantly, Alembic with its multi-laminate neck-through designs of the early 70s. The patents, then, appear tenuous at best, and we're not aware of any action taken by Yamaha to uphold either as multi-laminate neck-through designs became hugely popular during the latter part of the 70s and early 80s. Washburn's Japanese-made Wing series, which was produced from 1978 – specifically, the first Hawk model – was, shape aside, a pretty much direct copy of the Yamaha 'T-Cross' concept.

Another key part of the SG2000 is its brass 'Sustain Plate', which is recessed and screwed into the top and provides the mounting plate for the bridge. That is supposed to be patented, too, although we could find no evidence of that. Again, Alembic was definitely using such a design – also to increase sustain – before Yamaha, something that San Francisco-based Carlos Santana would have been aware of. Then there's the actual shape, which was surely directly inspired by Gibson's Double 12 (aka EDS-1275) of 1957.

Expansion & Legacy

Of course, the SG2000 and the more conventional SG1000 ('76) were just the start. Numerous variants appeared, not least the very deluxe SG3000 ('82). The SG line lasted until 1988, after which only models for artists and various limited models were produced. Fast forward to 2005 and Yamaha recommenced production of the SG2000 and SG1000, which introduced the IRA process, and presumably it's this renewed interest that sparked the 2010-introduced SG1800 models.

Carlos Santana, of course, jumped ship to his PRS guitars in the early 80s, but had used his Yamaha SGs for some pretty classic recordings, according to UltimateSantana.com: "...the most notable being 1977's *Moonflower*. From that record came the studio version of *She's Not There*, along with live versions of *Dance Sister Dance (Baila Mi Hermana)*, *Let The Children Play* and *Europa*, all of which blew away the previously released studio versions." Head over to YouTube to see and hear the evidence.

Those original years of the SG2000 racked up plenty of big-name users alongside Carlos: Robben Ford, Steve Cropper, Phil Manzanera, even Bob Marley. It also has impeccable post-punk credentials thanks to the likes of Bill Nelson, John McGeoch, Stuart Adamson and Jake Burns, while Duran Duran's Andy Taylor and Flock Of Seagulls' Paul Reynolds put the contemporary SG centre stage. John Frusciante is a more recent user of original SG2000s: "You can get a lot of tonal variety out of them, and in terms of the wood they're very heavy guitars, so they have a very fat sound," he said.

> The SG2000 of 1976 was the guitar that really made the US market sit up and take notice

The altogether less original SA, certainly in its post-'77 style, has also attracted big names, among them Carlos Rios, Tommy Tedesco, Phil Keaggy, Lukasz Gottwald, Troy Van Leeuwen and, again, Robben Ford. But it's acquired quite a standing in the jazz world, in similar style to Ibanez.

But does SA stand for Semi-Acoustic or, as was featured on certain models' headstock, Super Axe? Again, we asked that question but got no firm reply. Whatever, its origins go right back to Yamaha's start in 1966 with the SA-5. This early design, clearly inspired by the ES-335, featured quite squared horns – although the SA15 went for a more Rickenbacker-like semi style with an elongated treble horn. Numerous models followed this template over the next decade until we get to the SA700, the SA1000 and SA2000 (all from 1977) with the more rounded and thinned horns we see today. Various SAs followed until the range was trimmed to just the SA2200 of late 1991. As they say, if it ain't broke... G

Small World

Two bouncing baby electro-acoustics reveal their tonal wares at vastly different points on the price spectrum – and small really is beautiful, it seems...

Words David Mead **Photography** Neil Godwin

PRS SE P20E & **TAYLOR** GTE URBAN ASH

£499 & £1,835

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

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars** PHONE **00800 2375 0011** WEB **www.taylorguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **The price differential here means that this isn't a fair fight, surely?** Absolutely correct, and that's why we're not pitting this pair against one another, we're merely taking two smaller-bodied acoustics at two very different price points to illustrate that there's something to suit everyone's pocket in the compact acoustic range.

2. **So, parlour is the new dreadnought?** It would appear that smaller acoustics are enjoying something of a heyday, yes. But while a more diminutive guitar might pack quite a surprisingly hefty punch, if you're after the majesty of the sound of a dreadnought then you know where you can start looking.

3. **Home-use only or are these guitars crowd-pleasingly performance fit?** We're going to stick our necks out and generalise a bit. If you put a good pickup on any well-built acoustic, irrespective of body size, and feed it into a good acoustic amp or capable PA, you're entering a whole new sonic dimension. In our experience, even the tiniest mite can be made to roar, given the right setup – and a good pair of ears behind the mixing desk.

You have to admit that in recent months the world has gone a little mad. And one of the more surprising offshoots of lockdown, isolation, working from home and no live gigs is the increased sales of acoustic guitars across the land. Not only that, we hear that it's the smaller, boudoir-friendly instruments that are receiving a disproportionate amount of interest. It seems that everyone is after a sofa-buddy six-string to soundtrack their solitary social hours these days, and, of course, the industry has responded accordingly.

We've selected two models to take a look at, but we'd like to point out first and foremost that this is no slugging match between grossly mismatched opponents. On the contrary, we've been careful to pick this pair as being representative of what's available on the market at very different price points. Both PRS and Taylor are well known for their high-quality instruments that come with hefty price tags to match. But we're focusing in on the somewhat specialist area of smaller-bodied instruments in order to find out how both these heavyweights have addressed the quandary of achieving

The PRS SE P20E is available in three different finishes: the Black Top reviewed here, Charcoal and Vintage Mahogany

1. PRS's SE P20E comes loaded with a Fishman GT1 pickup for live use. But if you can do without, the P20 model is available at £100 less

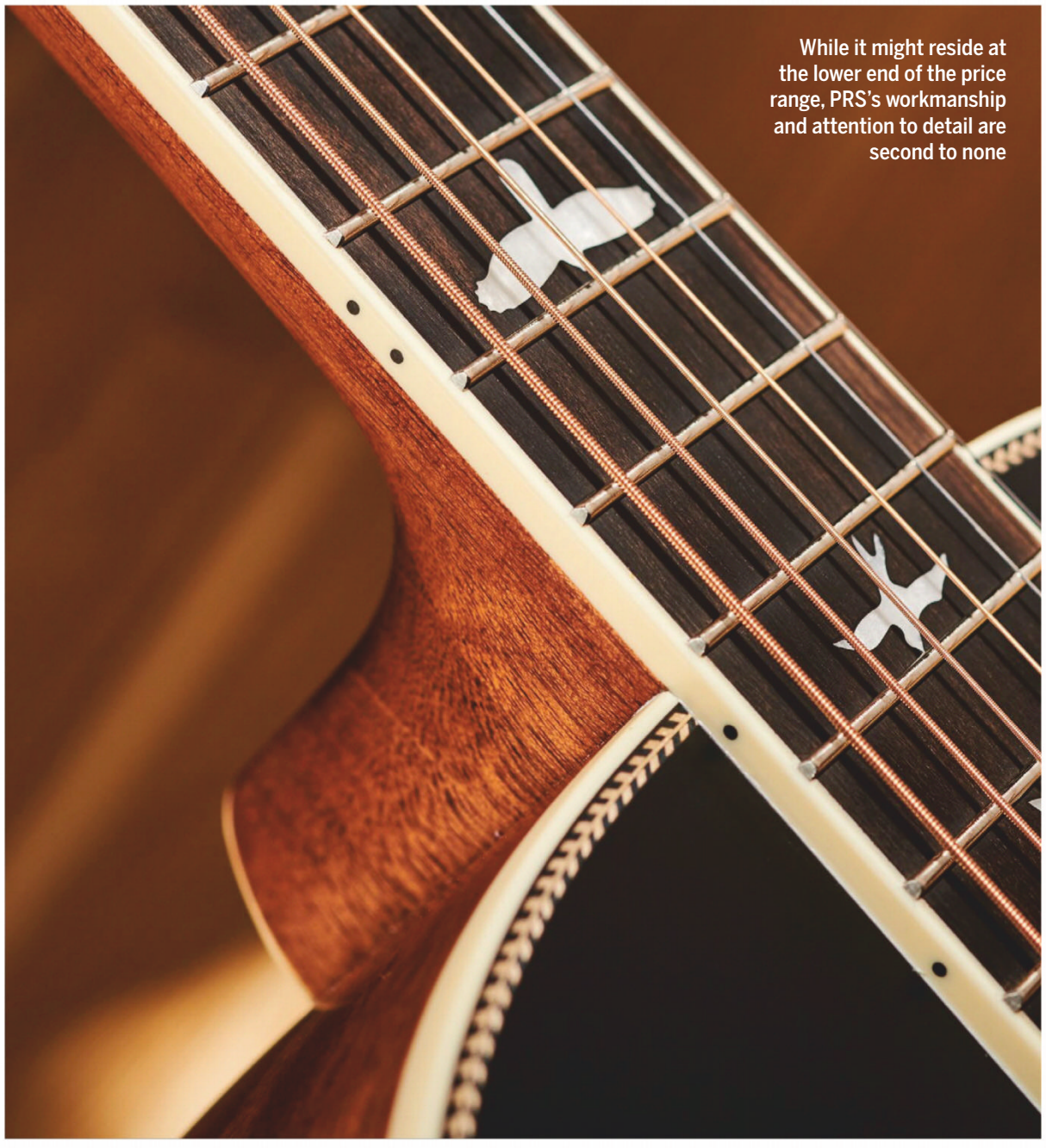
2. The distinctive PRS headstock is adorned with Kluson-style tuners and white buttons, adding a dash of vintage chic to the instrument

With an ebony 'board, 20 frets and a Wide Fat neck shape, PRS's P20E is open for serious business

concert-hall performance from parlour-sized – or thereabouts – instruments. So, let's start opening cases, and in the interest of being scrupulously fair, we'll look at each guitar individually.

PRS SE P20E

PRS's parlour acoustic – or Tonare, to give it its catalogue name – is available in three different liveries: the Black Top we have here, Vintage Mahogany, and the all-black Charcoal, with the all-mahogany cocktail of body woods remaining static throughout. If you're not particularly fussed about having a pickup installed, then your wishes are accommodated with the SE P20, which comes in at around at £100 less. Kerb appeal is very high; this is a very attractive guitar, from its signature PRS headstock and bird inlayed fingerboard to the herringbone bound black-topped body. It's cute and it makes us want to pick it up and start playing immediately, but first we have to run our eyes down the spec sheet and look at what's going on behind the scenes.



While it might reside at the lower end of the price range, PRS's workmanship and attention to detail are second to none

3. Controls for the PRS SE P20E reside just inside the bass edge of the guitar's soundhole, within easy reach during live performance

4. The jack output is situated on the lower reaches of the body below the strap button, with an easy-change battery compartment

The top is solid mahogany, whereas the back and sides are, we suspect, a hog-topped laminate. Nevertheless, we know roughly what to expect from all-mahogany instruments – mellowness and warmth but with a definite bite when played hard. Traditionally good for playing a bit of Delta blues if you're so inclined, but it's capable of addressing most musical styles you care to throw at it.

As we've found many times in the past when reviewing instruments hailing from China, build quality really is excellent. Considering the price, you're getting something seriously attractive on a sub-£500 ticket. The combo of herringbone and white binding has been expertly done, as have the other decorative refinements onboard. With an ebony fingerboard, 20 frets and PRS's Wide Fat neck shape, the P20E is open for serious business – and a Fishman GT1 pickup means that it's not shy of performing on stage either. Controls for the aforementioned are hidden away unobtrusively inside the bass side of the soundhole where they're under the fingers but otherwise anonymous, as far as the overall appearance of the guitar is concerned.

Vintage-style butterbean tuners adorn the headstock and tuning seems absolutely stable. We only had to tune once and didn't have to touch that side of things again for all of the time it took to write this review.

Taylor's GTe is a fun instrument with serious ambitions, standing tall among acoustic big hitters

First impressions of the sound are as good as our reaction to the design. There's plenty of volume – more than you'd expect, in fact – with the basses and trebles evenly represented. Both fingerstyle and chord work are effortless, thanks to the low action, generous nut width and the palm-friendly feel of the neck. Fretting and neck binding are, again, exemplary – everything we'd expect from PRS's SE instruments.

When amplified via our trusty AER Compact 60, the Fishman GT1 does its thing as you'd expect and reproduces the acoustic vibe of the P20E faithfully while allowing you to EQ things to taste. Want a bit of gritty blues? Then walk this way. If it's sensitive fingerstyle ballads you had in mind, no problem. We're seriously impressed.

Taylor GTe Urban Ash

Taylor's entry into pint-size pluckery moves us away from the parlour-sized end of the spectrum and up to what Taylor refers to as Grand Theater territory. Technically speaking, the GTe is, in Taylor's own

THE RIVALS

If the smaller-bodied acoustic is your idea of a strummer's bliss, the marketplace is positively awash with models that will suit your needs. For starters, how about checking out Vintage's Viator range? Although designated as travel guitars, they fit the brief of smaller body with a lively sound. The VTR800PB-USB (£349) has antiqued good looks plus a Fishman Sonitone preamp for those plugged-in moments, and even a USB output to help out with all those recording projects you've been putting off for ages.

Then there's the Baby Taylor (circa £350 depending on model), which is available in various guises and body wood combos, and you should check out Martin's Dreadnought Junior, for example, the DJR-10E (£637) – loads of toneful heft for a little 'un.

Moving upscale, Lowden's Wee range delivers the goods, with the cedar-topped WL-25 (£2,890) and its stablemates packed with performance power. Martin's mahogany-topped 0-15M (£1,499) should be included here, too, and a quick Google search will reveal that companies such as Faith, Washburn, Guild and Seagull all have entries in the compact acoustic race and so exploration is well advised.

words, a "scaled-down body that echoes the jumbo curves of our Grand Orchestra shape, with its dimensions reduced to create a remarkably approachable feel". Couldn't have put it better ourselves. It's another good looker and it has some serious ecological credentials, too.

We've looked at Taylor's use of Urban Ash before in these pages when we reviewed the Builder's Edition 324ce, but if you missed it, a brief sketch of events goes something like this. On the lookout for alternative timbers for use in its guitars, Taylor's Andy Powers wondered what happened to the trees that line the highways and byways of California after they reach the end of their time, that is, when West Coast Arborists – the local tree-minders and carers of the state – are forced to remove trees from the streets due to age or safety concerns. Luckily, the wood is being archived with the expectation that it might enjoy a second life at the hands of furniture makers or, as it turns out, luthiers. Andy found that the wood produced a similar sonic quality to that of Honduran mahogany – one of the royal family of instrument timbers – and so a plentiful supply of ethically resourced, good-sounding wood suddenly became available. And it's Urban Ash that we find on the GTe's back and sides here.

The guitar's top wood is the more familiar Sitka spruce, but the fingerboard features eucalyptus on a mahogany neck. So, not only is this guitar a new venture in terms of body size for Taylor, its 'green' credentials are fully intact, too.

There's a new form of bracing under the top of the soundboard, as well. A relative of Taylor's groundbreaking V-Class bracing, the GTe boasts asymmetric C-Class, aimed at producing "more volume and longer sustain, while also bolstering the GT's bass response to surprising levels of low-end power from a smaller guitar".

It's another very playable instrument and we would agree about the sustain and full bottom-end. The trebles are sweet,

5. Taylor's GTe has a fingerboard made from eucalyptus, in line with the company's ongoing 'green' philosophy

6. The rustic look of the wood grain on the fingerboard and headstock veneer suit the guitar's ecologically minded aesthetic down to the ground

7. A more traditional Sitka spruce soundboard sits atop the GTe's Urban Ash back and sides

with very good separation, the basses rich without being in any way overpowering. Both fingerstyle and strumming are well catered for, meaning that this is another all-rounder that will be a happy companion for virtually any stylistic persuasion you could name.

The GTe's acoustic voice is aided and abetted for the live stage by Taylor's renowned Expression System 2. Suddenly size doesn't matter and the sound from the guitar can get as big and boisterous as you want, while retaining its sonic integrity to the full. It's a serious instrument, to be sure.

Verdict

Two very different instruments, each with a well-considered set of features and a sonic portfolio to match. The PRS parlour is amazingly priced, considering the build quality and general sound capabilities – and you have to consider the fact that the non-pickup version is even cheaper still. It represents very good value that would be equally at home as an erstwhile songwriting companion or performance ally.

Onto the Taylor and it is in line with the company's reputation for acoustic luxury, with a great build-quality and a seductive and sophisticated sound palette. It's a fun instrument with serious ambitions, as it could stand tall among the big hitters in the acoustic world, despite its diminutive appearance. And let's not forget those green credentials, as well.

Overall, a dynamic duo that were both very difficult for us to put down. G

8. Taylor's renowned Expression System 2, with its trio of subtle side-mounted controls, offers the prospect of great live sound

PRS SE P20E

PRICE: £499 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Tonare parlour-sized electro-acoustic
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 98.4mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 355mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Vintage-style with butterbean buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/51mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman GT1
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.76/3.9
OPTIONS: The SE P20 without pickup costs £399 and both models are available in three colours: Black Top (as reviewed), Charcoal and Vintage Mahogany
RANGE OPTIONS: PRS SE acoustic models have 3 basic body shapes: the Tonare Parlour (2 models), Tonare Grand (4 models) and Angelus Cutaway (5 models). See website for details
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Black Top (as reviewed), Charcoal, Vintage Mahogany – satin

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A well-made, good-looking and great-sounding guitar at a bargain basement price

CONS Practically nothing for this very modest price

TAYLOR GTE URBAN ASH

PRICE: £1,835 (inc AeroCase)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Grand Theater sized electro-acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Urban Ash
MAX RIM DEPTH: 108mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: Tropical mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 638mm (25.1")
TUNERS: Taylor nickel mini
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Eucalyptus
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Eucalyptus/51mm
ELECTRICS: Expression System 2
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.71/3.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The GT model without pickup costs £1,619
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural Matte

8/10

PROS Sophisticated sounds from an ecological thoroughbred

CONS The price might put off those who want a smaller-bodied guitar for home-use only

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www.promenademusic.co.uk

Acoustic Guitars

20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
18269 - Breedlove| Guitar| Acoustic| Strings
14615 - Gibson Dobro, circa 1961, Original Vintage
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
18948 - Yairi NY-65V NT Acoustic Parlour Guitar
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
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
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
19459 - Martin LX1RE Acoustic Guitar
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
9185 - Seagull S6 Acoustic Guitar
21551 - Seagull S6 Original Slim
19953 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith Dread Blue
20425 - Tanglewood Blackbird TWBB-O Smokestack
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW -Discovery Exotic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acosutic
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19673 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCR I.Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
19795 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Natural
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
18897 - Faith Neptune Classic Burst FNCESB45
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Cognac
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFT-H
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
19575 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Nat.
19576 - Fender Am Acoustasonic Strat, TS Blue
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat
20377 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Tele Nat Lefty
18241 - Fender FA125CE Dreadnought Electro Nat
21625 - Fender Malibu Player, Natural
21583 - Gibson J200 Standard, LR BAGGS Nat, Used
19095 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
5602 - K Yairi WY1 Natural
19070 - Klos T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Klos F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19064 - Klos F_AE Electro Acoustic
21494 - Larrivée C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
19691 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought ElectroAcoustic
21495 - Larrivée OM40 Electro Acoustic
19524 - Maestro Custom Series LE Raffles KOCSBAU
19523 - Maestro Custom Series Singa KO CSB K
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Raffles IRCSBD
18258 - Maestro OO-IR Traditional Series Guitar
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE CSB C
19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria PH CSB AX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-OO
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
21585 - Martin 000-13E Guitar
19244 - Martin 000-10E Guitar
19714 - Martin 000CJR10E, Cherry Stain B&S
19403 - Martin 00X1AE Guitar
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar
19390 - Martin D10E Electro Acoustic Guitar
21587 - Martin DC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19489 - Martin DJr-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
19805 - Martin DX Johnny Cash Guitar
12418 - Martin & Co DX1AEL Acoustic Guitar
20186 - Martin D-X2E 6 String Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1 E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway Guitar
17418 - Northwood Auditorium With Hard Case
19339 - Ovation 1771VI-1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771STR-MB Main Street
11087 - Ovation Standard Elite 6778LX Black
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovation C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elte
19346 - Ovation CS24C-4 Celebrity Standard, Nat
19338 - Ovation 1771STG-ES
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
20594 - RainSong BI-DR1000N2 Black Ice Series
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17657 - RainSong CHPA1000NS Concert Hybrid
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
20595 - RainSong CO-PA1000NS
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
19557 - RainSong Co-WS1005NsM
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
19555 - RainSong N-JM1000N2X
21563 - RainSong N-JM3000X 12-String Guitar
19556 - RainSong V-DR1100N2 Acoustic
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
21562 - Rainsong WWS1000N2X Vintage Cutaway
18504 - Seagull Entourage Folk Burnt Umber QIT
19671 - Seagull S6 Cedar Original Slim QIT
19947 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith QIT Dread BB
19954 - S&P Songsmith Folk QIT Sunburst
19949 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith Parlour A/E
19676 - Simon & Patrick Trek SG Dreadnought Natural
19951 - Simon & Patrick Trek Parlour Electro Nat
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
19571 - Simon & Patrick Woodland Parlour, Used
16427 - Takamine EF261 S-AN, Gloss Antique Stain
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
19461 - Tanglewood TW4 E VC KOA Electro Acoustic
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 E WB LH, Lefthanded
18214 - Tanglewood TW4ER, Electro Acoustic, Red
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parbur
8293 - Tanglewood TW55NS, Nat, Secondhand
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
12305 - Tanglewood TWJF E
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
19660 - Taybr 220ce K DLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taybr GC8 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18786 - Vintage VE300N Electro-Acoustic, Natural
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
19602 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

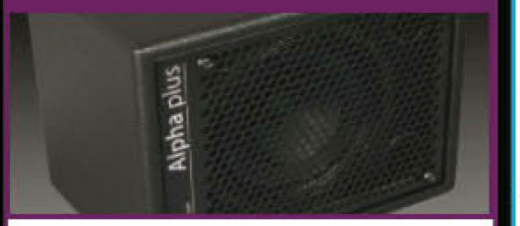
Classical Guitars

19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line , S/hand
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 20 Models In Stock Now
12178 - Protection Racket Class Gtr Case Dlx
21595 - Raimundo C8s 7/8 Size Classical, Used
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top
6029 - Ramirez 1 NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco 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
0000 - Stagg - 9 Models In Stock Now
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon,
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

12 Strings

18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
9715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
16029 - Patrick James Eggle Saluda 12 String
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21563 - RainSong N-JM3000X 12-String Guitar
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
9817 - Rainsong WS3000 Classic Series Electro
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett 12-String

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
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GO, Dark Brown
21588 - Fender Acoustic Junior, Dark Brown
I 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
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
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

19912 - Aloha Concert In Mahogany With Inlay
19899 - Aloha Concert, Engraved Soundhole
19893 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Spruce Top
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Ukulele
19911 - Aloha Student Concert Mahogany Ukulele
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone (GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AUR-10 Concert Resonator Uke
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
19675 - B & M UBJ2 Banjo Uke Open Back
19698 - B&M Uke Bass Mahogany BMUKB1
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
15931 - Baton Rouge UR21C Concert Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
19705 - Baton Rouge V2-B Sun Baritone Ukulele
15557 - Baton Rouge V4C Concert Ukulele
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
18973 - Lu'au Concert Uke Ghost Burst Myrtlewood
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
19915 - Elvis Hanauma Mahogany Soprano Ukulele
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano In Mahogany
19890 - Elvis Princeville Custom Concert Ukulele
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele With Bag
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele With Bag
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert, Layered Headstock
19882 - Factory Prototype Concert, Sapele Top
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Ukulele
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Ukulele
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Ukulele
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
21532 - Fender Fullerton Jazzmaster Uke O White
21531 - Fender Fullerton Jazzmaster Uke Tidepool
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
21528 - Fender Fullerton Tele Uke Butterscotch
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19886 - Flight Nus310 Blackbird Soprano Ukulele
19888 - Flight NUS310 Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19883 - Flight Nus350dc Dreamcatcher Soprano
19877 - Flight Prototype Concert With Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Spruce Top
19891 - Flight Red Mahogany Concert Cutaway
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert , Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele With Bag
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo, Amethyst
18289 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Clear
20216 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Ruby
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
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)
19306 - Kai KSI1010 Series Soprano, Mahogany
18522 - Kai KTI700 Tenor Uke
19391 - Kai KTI90 Tenor Ukulele
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
21584 - Kanile'a Islander MST-4 Tenor Uke, Used
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Soprano
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert El-Acoustic
13084 - Magic Fluke M80 Maple Uke Banjo, H/wood
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
18203 - Mahalo MH2CE ElectroAcoustic Concert Uke
18222 - Mahalo Java Soprano Ukulele, 2515S
18211 - Mahalo MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
18195 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18196 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Brown
18197 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
19480 - Mahalo Snowflake Soprano Ukulele
18199 - Mahalo Union Jack Soprano Uke
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19867 - Malibu 23s Concert Ukulele With Bag
19875 - Malibu C26 Deluxe Concert Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
19884 - Martin Romas MR01F SopranoWith Bag
19896 - Martin Romas MR02F Concert With Bag
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
19892 - No Name Concert Ukulele In Mahogany
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
0000 - Ohana - 71 Models In Stock Now
19889 - Radiotone Custom Mottled Top Concert Uke
19878 - Radiotone Reverse Headstock Concert Uke
19914 - Radiotone Soprano Ukulele In Mahogany
0000 - Many more from Risa & Tanglewood

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Pulse

David Gilmour's rotary speaker sounds recreated

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

We've all heard the name Leslie used as a generic term for a rotary speaker, but although that company was the original inventor and manufacturer, several brands have produced rotary speakers over the years. The Fender Vibratone is well known to guitarists, but how many know that arch rival Gibson also got in on the act with the Maestro Rover RO-1?

Launched in 1972 and looking very space-age in its silver circular housing, the now extremely rare Rover was a much smaller and lighter proposition than its rivals. It featured a built-in 35-watt amp feeding a six-inch rotating speaker and had fully variable speed controlled by a foot pedal moving between slow and fast speeds set by the user. A notable Rover user is David Gilmour. He's used Leslie and Yamaha rotary speakers at various times, but he employed a Rover for the recording of *The Division Bell*. Furthermore, to recreate that album's sound on stage, Gilmour got his techs to make several custom cabinets, called Doppolas, based on the Rover six-inch rotating speaker design but with more power. And it's with that little bit of history that we introduce Dawner Prince's Pulse, a pedal taking its inspiration from those Rover and Doppola sounds.

Taking a mono guitar signal and offering mono or stereo output, the Pulse has a pretty straightforward user interface. Besides the standard bypass switch, you get a second footswitch that toggles between fast and slow speeds; acceleration or deceleration when switching from one speed to the next is set by the Inertia knob. Those speeds are set by the Slow and Fast knobs, which respectively run from 0.4 to four and from four to eight revolutions per second, so you can have two speeds that are quite close together. Alternatively, you can do the speed switching with a footswitch plugged into the external input, but you may prefer an expression pedal for foot control over the whole speed range or a chosen part of it.

SOUNDS

Since the pedal is designed to recreate the sound of a mic'd up rotary cabinet it has a knob to set the distance between the virtual microphones and the revolving speaker cabinet, offering a very practical

01. FAST/SLOW FOOTSWITCH
Press this to change the rotation speed: the blue LED indicates Fast speed, the yellow LED indicates Slow speed

02. INERTIA KNOB
This knob basically sets how long it takes the speed to accelerate from Slow to Fast or decelerate from Fast to Slow

03. DISTANCE KNOB
This adjusts the mic'ing distance of the virtual cab. The minimum setting is the furthest distance, while turning it clockwise moves the virtual mics closer

04. MIX KNOB
Running from fully dry to fully wet, this is crucial for setting the intensity of your overall effect

05. L AND R OUTPUT TRIMMERS
A pair of inset screwdriver-adjusted trimmers control the levels of the output signals for the left and right channels

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Croatia
TYPE: Revolving speaker emulator
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Slow Speed, Fast Speed, Distance, Inertia, Mix, Volume L trimmer, Volume R Trimmer, Fast/Slow speed footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard outputs L & R, Ext In
POWER: 9V DC adaptor, 70mA
DIMENSIONS: 124 (w) x 94 (d) x 51mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE
9/10

degree of sonic variation. Turning it up brings the 'mics' closer for a less diffuse and more intense effect, with the top-end increasing in stridency towards the far end of travel. The final knob is a Mix knob that runs from 100 per cent dry sound to 100 per cent wet, allowing you to blend the rotary speaker effect in proportion with your normal tone, from an intriguing dusting of modulation through to the full effect. This is arguably the most important control on the front panel for anyone wanting to approximate certain Gilmour tones, as his onstage setup utilises the Doppolas in tandem with stationary cabs for a hybrid blend.

The Pulse does a really good job of recreating the multi-dimensional sound of a rotary speaker in action, especially if you can run it in stereo where you get a real sense of motion and spaciousness. That said, it also does the business in a standard mono effects chain and can deliver classy modulation over a whole range, from the deep phasey swirl of the slower speeds to the more chorused tremolo-like warble at the fastest. It takes dirt really well, too, and sounds great with a drive pedal in front of it, emphasising the effect. We didn't have a real RO-1 to compare it to (and certainly not a Doppola!), but it does Pink Floyd-style rotary sounds very nicely.

There are some quality dedicated rotary speaker pedals available on the market and this holds its own alongside them, offering sounds in the same ballpark but with its own airy flavour that works brilliantly with guitar tone.

VERDICT
As with the Echorec-emulating Boonar pedal that came before the Pulse, Dawner Prince deserves praise for conceiving this pedal on two counts: first for bringing back the sound of some almost-forgotten gear, as well as adding another piece to the jigsaw of the Gilmour sound. Whether you're an avid Gilmour fan or not, this pedal has plenty going for it: compact and with comprehensive fast/slow switching arrangements, it's a great pedalboard choice for anyone who wants a dedicated rotary speaker emulator. G

PROS *Compact size; sound quality; variable slow and fast speeds; speed switching; expression pedal control; dry/wet mix control*
CONS *Nothing*

MANUFACTURER
ELECTRO-HARMONIX

MODEL
1440 STEREO LOOPER

PRICE
£184

CONTACT
ELECTRO-HARMONIX WWW.EHX.COM

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

1440 Stereo Looper

Compact looper offers twice the memory of the 720 and even more features

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

Following on in the tradition of naming its loopers after the number of seconds of looping time they provide, Electro-Harmonix's latest offers 1440 seconds (24 minutes) of uncompressed 24-bit/44.1kHz stereo audio with an unlimited number of overdubs. This pedal has the ability to store 20 different loops and can connect via USB to a computer running the associated free EHX 1440 Loop Manager app for download and upload of loop audio flies. It can also be synchronised to the external MIDI Clock.

Operation of the looper is pretty straightforward: once you've selected a loop number with the Mode knob you use the Loop footswitch to carry out recording, overdubbing and playback. A two-second press will do the job if you need to undo or redo a layer, while a double tap will stop playback. The second footswitch, which is always available to erase loops when held down, offers a number of user-set functions. While its default use is to stop playback, it can also be set up to retrigger loops from the start or to bring in either of two effects that are otherwise operated by front-panel buttons: a reverse function that will play the loop backwards, and an octave function that drops a loop down to half-speed and an octave lower.

The other way to change the speed/pitch of a loop is with the Tempo knob, which operates either side of the 120bpm default looper operation in a range from 60bpm up to 240bpm. Should you want more foot control, the EHX Triple Foot Controller (£40) can be used both for selecting loops and undo/redo. Sound quality is pristine, and you can choose how to build layers as an Overdub knob sets how quiet the previously recorded layer gets with each loop cycle, if you don't want to keep the layers at a constant volume.

VERDICT

With loads of memory and cool creative effects, this pedal is a solid choice if you need a compact looper either as a performance tool for live looping (or running onstage backing tracks), a practice aid or as a creative sketchpad where loop transfer means that any song ideas or elements you come up with can be easily transferred to a DAW. G

PROS *Compact size; two footswitches for easy operation; audio quality; decent amount of looping time; informative display window; reverse and pitch effects; loop transfer*
CONS *Hard to fault this one...*

ALSO TRY...

BOSS

RC-3 Loop Station £169

With three hours of stereo recording capacity and 99 memory locations in a standard compact pedal chassis, the RC-3 also features onboard rhythm patterns and USB file transfer.

PIGTRONIX

Infinity 2 £229

A stereo looping pedal with two independent loops, the Infinity 2 may be ideal for anyone who wants to have separate verse and chorus loops. It also features an octave effect.

TC ELECTRONIC

Ditto Stereo £83

If you're looking for stereo looping with a very small pedalboard footprint, then give this simple no-frills design a go: it offers five minutes of looping time and unlimited overdubs.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Looper pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 20 loop memories, 24 minutes of audio, 1 Shot playback, adjustable loop fadeout time, Reverse & Octave effects, MIDI sync
CONTROLS: Level, Tempo, Overdub, Mode, Reverse button, Octave button, 1 Shot button, Ext Clock button, Loop footswitch, Stop footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L/Mono, R), standard outputs (L/Mono, R), FC, MIDI, USB
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 200mA
DIMENSIONS: 105 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER
HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

MODEL
SIGNATURE ANALOGUE TREMOLO MKII

PRICE
£219

CONTACT
HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS 01223 208809
WWW.HAMSTEADSOUNDWORKS.COM

HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

Signature Analogue Tremolo MKII

A very respected tremolo gets revamped with new features

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

Hamstead Soundworks first put the tremolo circuitry from its Artist +RT series amps into a pedal in 2016 with the Signature Analogue Tremolo, and now the company is back with a MKII version. This time it loses the extra footswitch for the boost circuit but offers a smaller footprint, a control input, a third waveform for the tremolo and a Shape control delivering the ability to tilt any of the waveforms to the left or right.

As an all-analogue design, the pedal eschews the common use of digital waveform circuitry for an analogue circuit, resulting in three subtly different but great-sounding waveforms. The Classic setting delivers the authentic sound of output bias tremolo as found in some vintage amps, while Hamstead's signature sinewave tremolo is buttery smooth, melding naturally with your tone.

The new kid on the block is the Triangle waveform, which you might expect to be more defined, but it's not too far removed in flavour from the sinewave. Still, the Triangle waveform is capable of sawtooth and reverse sawtooth patterns with the Shape knob in play. That knob has no effect in its notched central position, but turned left or right it skews the tremolo waveform in that direction. To the extreme left, the swift rise to the peak gives you a sharp attack for a choppy rhythmic sound.

Piling on the Shape knob with the Sinewave and Classic modes can deliver similar sounds, but it's great in moderation for a little lopsided wave action to recreate some of the tremolos of certain vintage amps. From a slow deep throb to a fast shimmer, the Depth and Speed knobs give you a great range, and the speed can be placed under the control of an expression pedal for changes on the fly. The pedal displays none of the typical perceived volume drop when the effect is kicked in, so you can use the Gain knob (with up to 10dB of transparent boost) to emphasise the effect or use it to naturally push the front-end of your amp.

VERDICT

Waveform-shaping versatility adds another level to this excellent source of old-school 'board-based analogue tremolo. G

PROS *Rock-solid build quality; classy tone; 10dB of usable boost; Shape knob; expression pedal control*
CONS *Nothing really, but be aware that the differences between waveforms are subtle*

ALSO TRY...

WALRUS AUDIO

Monument V2 £179

Pretty much a do-everything trem, this features an extra tap tempo footswitch, five tremolo waveform shapes, and the choice of standard trem or the Harmonic type with a whisper of pitch shift.

SUPRO

1310 Tremolo £229

A straightforward design with standard or harmonic tremolo. Extra tonal mojo comes via a Gain knob, which sets the level of preamp gain, adding various degrees of overdriven texture to the tremolo.

EFFECTRODE

Delta-Trem £369

This is the UK-based valve pedal specialist's take on tremolo. The vacuum valve design combined with with Raysistor photocell circuitry offers vintage tremolo sounds in mono or stereo with tap tempo.

Tech Spec

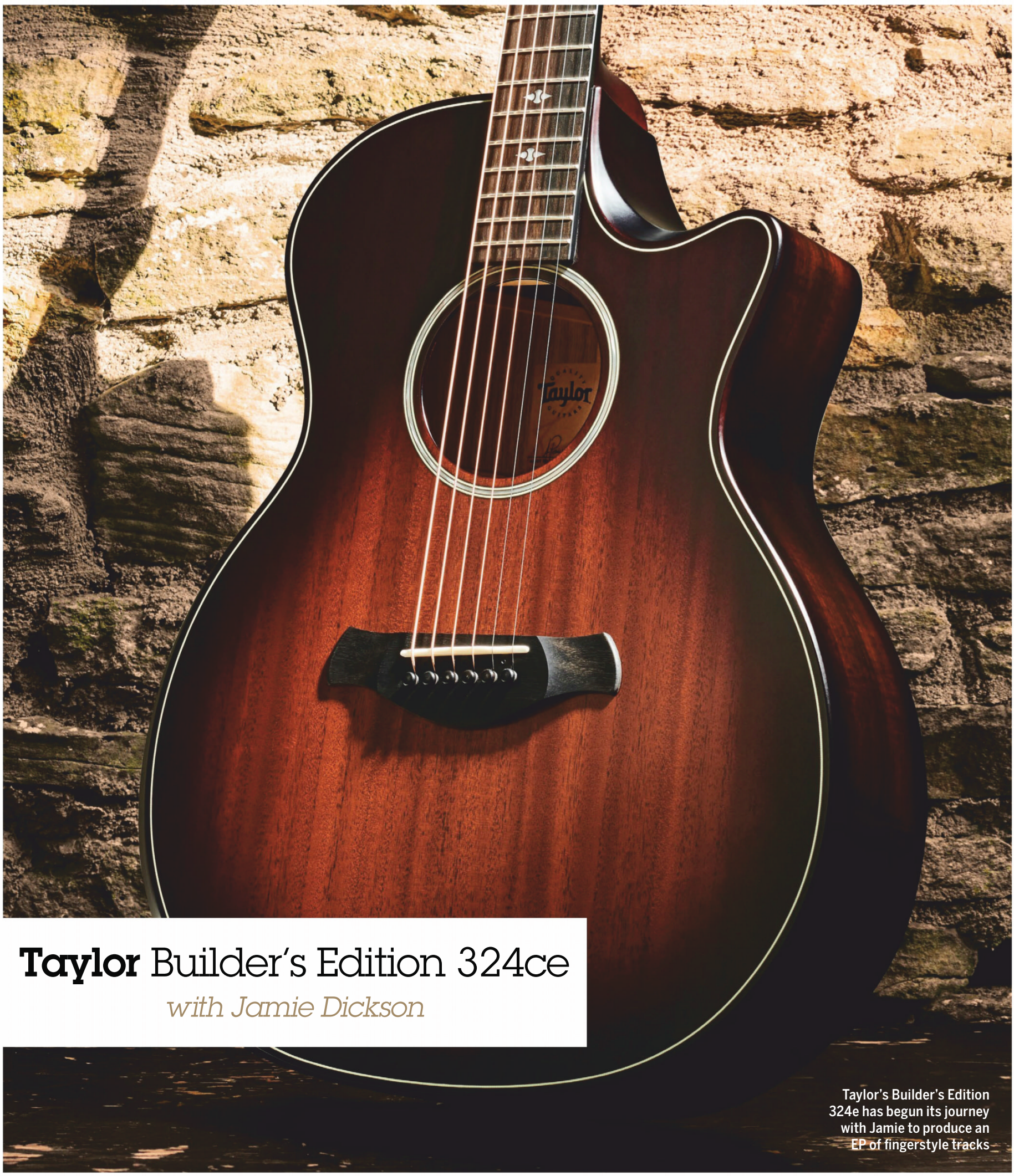
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Tremolo pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, optokick footswitch, external speed control
CONTROLS: Depth, Speed, Gain, Shape, Modulation Mode switch, internal Power Up mode dipswitch, bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard Control input
POWER: 9V-18V DC adaptor (not supplied) 250mA at 9V
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 130 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Longtermers

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



Taylor Builder's Edition 324ce

with Jamie Dickson

Taylor's Builder's Edition 324e has begun its journey with Jamie to produce an EP of fingerstyle tracks

Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist, editor-in-chief

Editor Jamie sizes up a thoroughly modern Taylor for his next recording project

This acoustic brings two innovations to the fore: Taylor's V-Class bracing and its use of sustainable ash

It's become almost a cliché of modern guitar lore – and an unfair one, I might add – to declare that Taylors are nice guitars but lack 'character'. I think that's partly because Taylors often don't sound instantly familiar to our mind's ear – namely, they don't closely resemble the tones of the pre-war Martin and Gibson designs that form our archetypes of modern acoustic tone. That doesn't mean they lack a vibe, however. And which Taylors are we talking about, anyway? The Taylor range is unusually diverse, including several highly progressive designs such as the maple-bodied 600 Series instruments and the guitar we're looking at here, which is built partly of Shamel ash – dubbed 'Urban Ash' by Taylor – a new tonewood sourced from the streets of California. So when people talk about 'Taylors' as if they were a homogenous mass, it's a big generalisation before we even talk about tone.

For what it's worth, two things I've generally come to expect from all Taylor guitars are thoughtful design and balanced, sweet tone. By thoughtful design, I mean that master luthier Andy Powers doesn't really do guitar building by numbers; he seems to design each new instrument from the ground up.

"Two things I've come to expect from all Taylor guitars are thoughtful design and balanced, sweet tone"

This approach reached a watershed not long ago when he designed a new type of bracing to replace the time-honoured X-bracing pattern that has been supporting acoustic guitar tops and defining the sound of acoustic guitars since CF Martin invented it in the 19th century. This new pattern was dubbed the 'V-Class' and Taylor made some pretty bold claims for it, including enhanced sustain and even superior intonation. As a high-end, recent design from Taylor, my longterm test Builder's Edition 324ce comes with V-Class as standard and, as bracing should, its influence dominates the voice of the guitar.

First, though, we should briefly explain the Builder's Edition moniker. The term covers a series of special designs that Powers has described as being the lutherie equivalent of a 'director's cut': these guitars are meant to make a bolder, more experimental statement than the rank-and-file Taylor models. In that sense, they could be thought of as similar to the concept cars shown off at motor shows, except the Builder's Edition guitars actually get put into production.

A Class Of Its Own

With that in mind, the main 'concept' element of this 324ce is its use of Urban Ash for its back and sides, a wood that has since been rolled out to other models such as the GTe (see page 98), but which made its debut on this guitar. Taylor says it has mahogany-like qualities, but unlike tropical mahogany it is in plentiful supply as it is planted widely in California's parks and streets where trees have a carefully managed lifespan. So that and the V-class bracing represent the 'thoughtful design' part of the Taylor formula here, along with some nice touches such as the low-handling-noise satin finish and comfortably bevelled edges of the body.

An acoustic guitar stands or falls on the quality of its voice, however. A few years ago I had the opportunity to directly compare both the older X-brace and successor V-Class versions of the 914ce. One of the most notable differences was that the V-Class version seemed to have less prominent bass. The claims of a balanced and beautifully harmonised voice really did hold water, but I did miss the additional thump in the bottom-end of the X-braced version.

Picking up the 324ce Builder's Edition, I feel a similar thing. Its voice is light, airy and pleasant and the ample 45mm nut width makes it a perfect match for fingerstyle playing. Running through a tricky piece that I struggled with on a Martin Modern Deluxe OM-28, I found it really easy to articulate the phrases in a flowing, musical way. Chalk one up to the 324ce's easygoing handling. Tone-wise, I'm hearing lots of silvery, airy top-end and the guitar sustains like a piano. But I am still hankering for a little more low-end. To be fair, with a body depth of 117.5mm (12.7mm deeper than an OM but 6.4mm shallower than a D-model Martin), this was never intended to be a booming Jumbo.

All the same, there are a few things I can do to tweak the tone further to my preference. The guitar comes fitted with Elixir Phosphor Bronze light gauge strings so I'll try a few alternatives to see what sounds best to me. Then it's time to start the recording project that is the ultimate goal here: to produce an EP's worth of fingerstyle acoustic tracks. I'll let you know how I get on next time round... G

Reviewed *461* ***Price:*** *£3,239 (inc. case)* ***On Test Since*** *November 2020* ***Studio Sessions?*** *Preliminary recordings* ***Gigged?*** *You're kidding!* ***Mods?*** *None yet*

JD SIMO

Vintage chic and a fondness for the Gibson ES-335 fuel JD's unique brand of funky psycho blues…

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

"I believe I was in the fourth grade – I suppose I was 10 or 11 – and I saved up my gig money, because I was already playing quite a bit, and I bought a Mexican Stratocaster. I actually still have it. It really was special because, up to that point, I had two other guitars that my parents had gotten me. One was a really inexpensive travel guitar – it was an electric guitar, but it was like a shortened scale thing – and after that I got a really off-brand S-type that was maybe $100 or something. So to have one that actually said 'Fender' on it was really exciting. I ordered it through the mail and I remember the pain of waiting for it to be delivered. The day it was finally delivered was a really good day!"

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought – I don't know the year of it – was a Silvertone 1446. It's a hollowbody that Silvertone made in the 60s and sold through Sears & Roebuck,

> "The instruments that made the biggest impact were ones I just happened to run into but wasn't necessarily seeking out"

a mail-order store in America back then, and it's got a Bigsby on it and two mini-humbuckers. The reason why I got it was that I was wanting something like it, like an old Harmony, and I'd actually gone to Carter Vintage here in Nashville just wanting something different. They're closed to the public because of the pandemic and so I arranged to borrow this other guitar to check it out to see if I wanted it. They made a mistake and it wasn't there; it had either been sold or sent back to the consigner or something like that. So off-handedly I said, 'Is there anything else there that's cool?' And the guy said, 'Well, there's this Silvertone that's sort of similar to what I think you're into,' and I said, 'Cool, I'll check it out,' and got it home and I loved the damn thing. That's pretty much the only guitar I've been playing lately."

What's your best guitar buying tip?

"Never buy a guitar that you haven't played. I just don't think it works that well, I think you've got to put your hands on it. All of the important instruments that have found their way to me that made the biggest impact were ones that I just happened to run into but wasn't necessarily seeking out. I'd pick it up and I just knew; I feel that you just seem to know when you pick something up whether it's for you or not."

GEARING UP

We discover some of the esoteric instruments that accompany JD on tour

"My main 335 is a '62. I put the Bigsby back on it and the nylon saddles back in the bridge, so it's back to stock, pretty much. The other guitars I use are a 1952 ES-5 and the Silvertone, which is an alternative to my 335. I use them both for the same stuff, even though they're wildly different. Then I have an early – I think it's a '62 – Custom Kraft Red Fury. Custom Kraft was a rebranding of a Kay and it's really rare. It's funky and cheap and out of phase in the middle. The last guitar I use is a sort of a partscaster Jazzmaster that a buddy of mine put together from old parts. It's Sherwood Green – he refinished it with spray paint from the hardware store – and it's got a humbucker in the bridge and a Strat pickup in the neck and it's wired out of phase. I put 0.016 gauge strings on it and tune it down to B."

JD's favourite guitar, his Gibson ES-335, set him back a pretty penny – the most he'd ever spent on an instrument – but it's travelled the world with him and has more than earned its keep

What was the most incredible guitar find or bargain you've ever had?

"To be honest, it's my old 335 that I play all the time and it's been with me all over the world – we've been through everything together. I paid a significant amount of money for it – more than I've paid for any other piece of equipment before or since – but the guy who I did the deal with did me a solid, y'know? It was significantly lower than what it was really worth, but it was still more money than I'd ever spent on anything. He knew I was going to use it and I've more than got my money out of that instrument."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying a guitar?

"It's happened multiple times [laughs]. Basically, any time I've ever sought out a particular instrument because I was like, 'I gotta have *this*,' I've had buyer's remorse. I get it, I'm into it for a second and then I just kinda revert back to my 335 because it really is my instrument. I've had two 50s Strats that were fantastic and I was like, 'I'm totally going to use this…' and then I end up not using it. Then I had a 60s Telecaster – same thing. I mean, I could go on and on."

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

"I had a Telecaster that I used for the entire time that I was in a band here in Nashville called the Don Kelley Band, a fairly notable club band that featured my predecessors Brent Mason, Johnny Hiland, Guthrie Trapp and a million other guitar players who are way better than me. I did thousands of gigs on the Telecaster and also used it on the bulk of the sessions I was doing every day, playing on people's records and stuff. When I transitioned into doing my own thing I wasn't using it that much so I made the decision to let it go – very reasonably – to a fan in Switzerland. I became a man on that instrument, y'know?"

Are there any common design features on electric guitars that are an instant turn-off for you?

"Floyd Rose tremolos and stuff like that immediately turn me off. I've learned over time that the shape of a neck, the scale length, where the controls are, how the pickups are mounted, what kind of bridge is on it, all these different things… if a guitar feels right to me, it just doesn't matter. The five main instruments that I play all the time could not be more different from each other."

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

"You know what? I would probably opt for the better amp and the cheaper guitar. There's a lot of cheap guitars that are awesome; there aren't a lot of cheap amps that are awesome. Case in point, I'm really into these old pawnshop guitars from the 50s and 60s – Silvertones, Kays and Teiscos and stuff like that – and even at the most expensive [end of the spectrum] we're talking under $1,000 and some are $500, $400, you know? There aren't many amplifiers, new or old, that are gonna fall into that category that I think are really good."

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

"I would use humbuckers because they happen to be in my favourite guitar and I know that I could play it for the rest of my life and have no problem. But if my favourite guitar was a Telecaster then the answer would be different. It just happens to be that my favourite instrument happens to have humbuckers in it, and that's about it." **[DM]**

JD's latest CD, *JD Simo* is available now via Crow's Feet Records Inc

https://simo.fm

DAZED & CONFUSED

GIBSON ELECTRIC ARCHTOPS

We shed light on some of the key differences between Gibson's early flagship models…

The first 'Electric Spanish' guitar produced by Gibson was the groundbreaking ES-150 in 1936. The company's solid/carved-top pre-war 'ES' range was gradually extended with the development of the ES-100 in 1937 (renamed the ES-125 by 1941) and the arrival of the short-lived ES-250 in 1939, along with its replacement, the ES-300, in 1940. Although World War II temporarily put the kibosh on electric guitar-building from 1942, Gibson soon returned to Electric Spanish production after the war with its revamped, laminated body designs, including the ES-125, ES-150 and ES-300 in 1946, followed by the single-cutaway ES-350P (Premier) in 1947.

In 1948 the ES-350P was upgraded with a dual-pickup assembly in tandem with the ES-300, whereupon it became known simply as the ES-350. At this point, it was clear that pickups were the future, and with Ted McCarty's arrival the same year Gibson's golden era of electric guitar design truly got underway with the triple P-90-loaded laminated body ES-5 appearing in 1949. With demand for electric guitars growing, equivalent versions of Gibson's foremost acoustics, the L-5 and Super 400, then followed. Thus, in 1951 the solid/carved-top L-5CES and Super 400CES (Cutaway Electric Spanish) became the firm's undisputed flagship archtops. **[RB]**

1 ES-350

Essentially a 'Premier' (archaic Gibson speak for cutaway) version of its sibling, the ES-300, the ES-350 was introduced in 1947 as the ES-350P and enjoyed its moment in the sun as Gibson's primo electric archtop until the arrival of the ES-5 in 1949. With its gold-plated hardware, multiple pickups and single Venetian cutaway – a first for regular production Gibson electrics – it set a benchmark for future top-of-the-line models.

Like the ES-300, the ES-350 measures 17 inches across, has a full body depth of 3 3/8 inches and sports a 25½-inch scale length neck with a rosewood 'board inlaid with double-parallelogram markers. Its body is constructed using laminated maple and features unbound f-holes along with triple-binding on the top and back. A favourite of jazz stars Tal Farlow and Barney Kessel, it was phased out at the dawn of rock 'n' roll in 1956, having been superseded by the Chuck Berry-endorsed ES-350T (Thinline).

2 ES-5

When Gibson released the ES-5 in 1949 it was hailed as "the supreme electronic version of the famed Gibson L-5" – the Lloyd Loar-designed progenitor of all jazzboxes released earlier in 1923. But while the ES-5 borrowed its multiple-bound pointed fingerboard design and large pearl block inlays from the L-5, its body was more akin to the laminated-maple construction of the ES-350, with the same dimensions, single Venetian cutaway, triple-bound top and back, and unbound f-holes.

The ES-5 was originally loaded with three P-90 single coils that feature separate volume controls along with a master tone control, making it "the instrument of a thousand voices", according to Gibson. In 1955 it was dubbed the ES-5 Switchmaster while a four-way pickup selector switch was added and three separate tone controls replaced the single master tone knob. In 1957, the ES-5 was augmented with PAF humbuckers before eventually being discontinued by 1962.

3 L-5CES

Although Gibson initially claimed that the ES-5 was to be "the supreme electronic version" of the L-5, it was soon decided that a more faithful design was required in order to appeal to the upper echelons of the rapidly expanding electric guitar market. Subsequently, in 1951 the L-5CES was introduced, surpassing the ES-5 on all fronts as the L-5's electric sibling. More accurately, the L-5CES was derived from the single-cutaway L-5C (previously known as the L-5P or L-5 Premier).

The L-5CES may share the same body dimensions as the ES-5, but with its carved spruce top and solid maple back and sides its construction is fundamentally different. Furthermore, its fancy appointments and stylish ebony fretboard go on to place it in a different class to the plainer, rosewood-endowed ES-5 altogether.

The dual-pickup L-5CES was originally fitted with P-90s prior to the arrival of Alnico pickups in 1953. In 1958 these were supplanted by PAF humbuckers.

4 SUPER 400CES

With a design that originated from the 1934 Super 400 acoustic archtop, the Super 400CES was introduced in tandem with the L-5CES in 1951 and represented the pinnacle of Gibson's ingenuity and craftsmanship. Measuring 18 inches across and decked out with large fancy inlays, multiple-ply binding and gold-plated hardware from top to bottom, this model was the largest and dearest of Gibson's archtop family. Like all the aforementioned guitars, it was available in either Sunburst or Natural finishes as standard (the latter designated with an 'N' suffix).

With its carved spruce top and solid maple back and sides, the Super 400CES was similar in construction to the L-5CES and these two leading electrics followed the same trajectory with respect to pickup changes – moving from P-90s to Alnico units in late 1953, followed by PAFs in 1958 as standard. In 1960 the cutaway was changed to a Florentine design, before reverting to the original Venetian style in 1969.

PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS

1

2

3

4

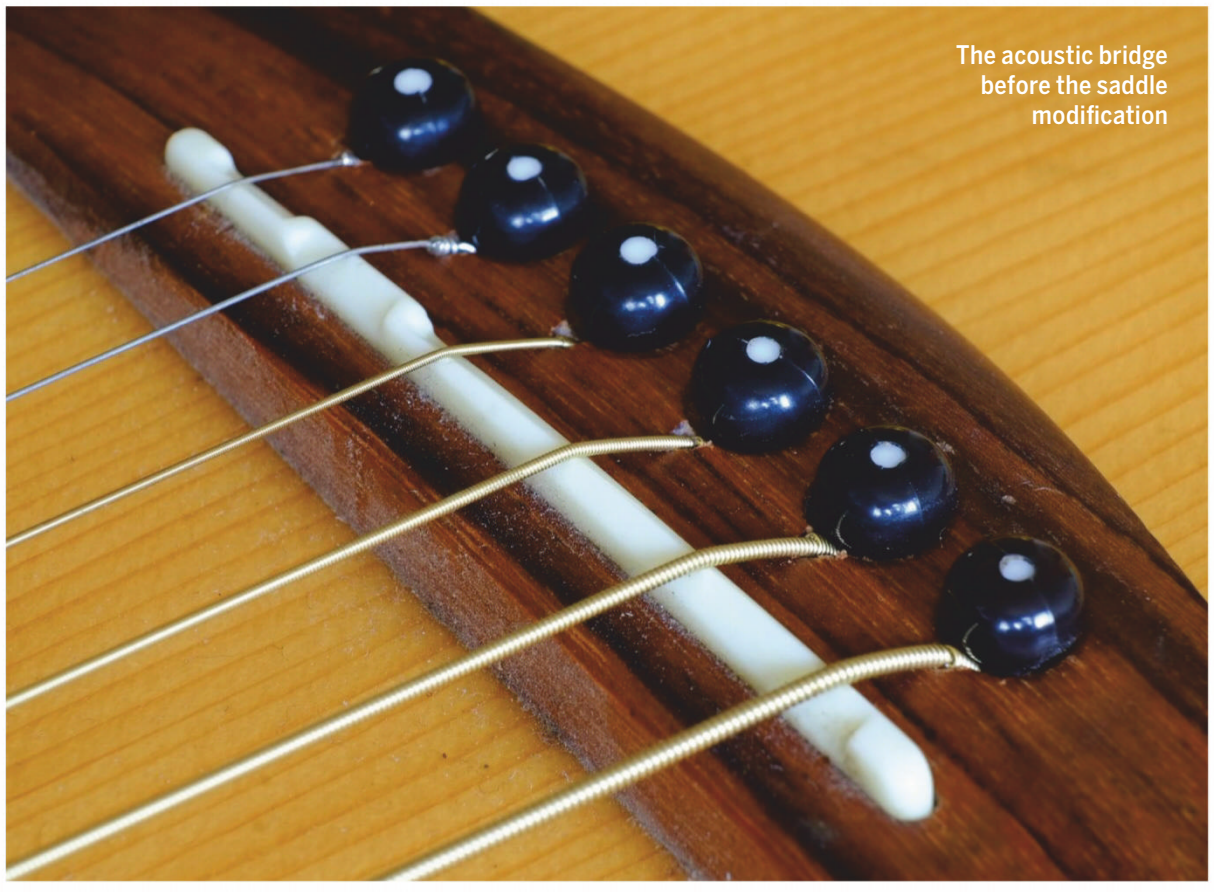
The MOD SQUAD

THE REPAIR SHOP

Modding your own guitars is one thing, but don't think you're a guitar repairer. Dave Burrluck steps out of his comfort zone when he tries to improve a low-end acoustic

We might be looking at the best gear we've encountered in 2020 elsewhere in this issue, but in the mucky world of modding I can honestly say I've had some terrible guitars through for, ahem, 'adjustment' in the past year. It's my own fault, of course, because when people begin to get to know you're 'handy' there's always the "Oh, my daughter has just started playing the guitar. Could you restring it for her?"

A little while later I'm wishing I'd said I was anything but handy in the guitar department as I'm sitting trying to play a 'Made in Hurry' acoustic guitar-shaped object with a string height most slide players would turn their noses up at. The second obvious observation is that unlike a Strat or Tele, which you can – or at least should be able to – get playing like a Suhr with a few basic tweaks, a steel-string acoustic has next-to-zero adjustability.



The acoustic bridge before the saddle modification

First Steps

A quick inspection reveals the obvious issues. This guitar's neck has a concave bow that's quite alarming, resulting in a string height at the 12th that's easily chasing 4mm. You might expect a slightly higher string height than your electric, but in combination with the heavier string gauge, even simple 1st position cowboy chords hurt – and for a beginner, you honestly wonder how they're still playing.

The situation is exacerbated by the bridge, which has pulled forward a little more than we'd like, and a neck that's slightly pitched the wrong way. Slackening off the strings and having a feel around the underside of the bridge, it doesn't feel like any braces are loose, so this top distortion is something we'll have to live with.

Clearly, the first step is to get the neck a little straighter. Like the majority, the truss-rod adjuster is accessed through the soundhole, and, with a few tentative anti-clockwise quarter-turns, the adjuster nut becomes looser and can be removed – obviously this is a single-action rod. A drop of oil on the inner thread and a rub with Wilkinson SlipStick on the outer surface means it should operate as freely as possible.

I reinstall the nut and tighten it until, well, it's feeling tight without undue pressure being applied. Tuning up to tension you can check the relief – a small clockwise turn then check again. As ever, always use small turns; if things feel very tight, stop. With a near-straight neck, and just very light relief, I leave it overnight. The following morning nothing untoward has happened and measuring the string height now, capo'd at the 1st fret, it's closer to 2.8mm on the treble, a little more on the bass side, which is certainly better. The nut looks like it's been fettled before and the string groove heights are pretty much spot on, so we'll leave that for the moment.

With the saddle reduced it sits very low in the bridge

"This 'Made in Hurry' acoustic has a string height most slide players would turn their noses up at"

"The neck has a concave bow that's quite alarming, resulting in a string height at the 12th that's easily chasing 4mm – for a beginner, you wonder how they're still playing…"

A simple restring turned into a full Mod Squad adjustment

With the neck and nut pretty much how we want them, the only way to get the action feeling a little slinkier is to reduce the height of the saddle. It's far from over-high, so there's only going to be so much we can do. As the guitar is an electro, I was assuming an under-saddle piezo, but when I carefully remove the saddle there's nothing there – the pickup is actually a contact mic on the soundboard, which works in our favour.

The Non-Reversible Bit

One path would be to sand down the top of the bridge, but then that would reduce the depth of the saddle slot, which could cause the saddle to tip forward, invariably affecting its sound/output as an electro. Now, in a pro repair shop that slot could be deepened with a jig and router, but on our kitchen table? Not blooming likely.

My best shot is to get the saddle as low as possible, which will reduce the back angle of the string, so we might have to enlarge and/or 'ramp' the slight notches to help. The most I can reduce the base of the saddle by is around 1.5mm and that's the next step. Firmly capo'd at the 1st fret, slackening the strings and then carefully removing the bridge pins, the saddle comes out easily. It's a hard plastic and is easily trimmed in depth by rubbing it over either a flat file or abrasive paper or, if you have one, in a small bench vice. Whatever you do, you must keep that base square and level.

Reinstall the saddle then the strings and tune to pitch before you measure the hopefully reduced string height and, yes, it's a little better. We're now looking at around 1.8mm on the treble side, 2mm on the bass. About the best we can do.

Just kissing the fret tops with an oil stone

I'm tempted to ramp the strings between the bridge pins and the saddle, but instead I just make sure the notches in front of the bridge pins are nice and smooth, reducing slightly the sharp edge that the string is seeing on its way to the saddle. There's no obvious finish on the bridge, so I lightly sand the top and rub in a little dab of fingerboard oil.

Time To Fret

The guitar is probably at least a decade old from a major brand's economy line. It's clearly had some play time and you can see that there's a little fretwear in the lower positions. We're now on more familiar territory in terms of frets and fingerboard. Here the frets are pretty small, so levelling them (if necessary) means we have very little to play with. StewMac's Fret Rocker earns its cost once more and – aside from a couple of unlevel frets right at the top 18th/19th, which I don't think I'll worry about – it's not looking too bad.

Now, levelling frets and redressing them is not something you want to practise on somebody else's guitar, but I decide to just kiss the tops by rubbing a lightly lubricated oil stone (used only for this purpose, not to sharpen your chisels with) over the frets, first in the direction of the strings then across in the direction of the frets. Then I continue in that direction with 600- then 800-grit abrasive paper on a flat sanding block. Finally, some elbow grease and 0000 wire wool has things looking pretty decent.

Smoothing the fret top with a hard cork block and 600-grit abrasive paper

"Levelling frets and redressing them is not something you want to practise on somebody else's guitar…"

On a higher level instrument I would typically mask off the fingerboard, but we're not using any files, and its only that fine wire wool that has touched the fingerboard itself. So I finally scrape the fingerboard face between the frets with a backed razor blade and apply a little fingerboard oil, which deepens the colour of the rather light wood. While that's drying I clean up the guitar and give it a good polish.

A vigorous rub with 0000 wire wool and we're nearly done

Scraping the fingerboard with a backed razor blade

I always believe a guitar that looks, feels and smells a little nicer is going to be more engaging to the player – it's part of this whole fast makeover experience.

String Choice

In the acoustic world, 0.011 to 0.052 gauge is considered by most to be extra light, while 0.012 to 0.053 is considered light. In electric world, where 0.009 to 0.042 sets are normal, those acoustic gauges aren't going to feel extra-light to young, inexperienced hands. I have a bit of a hunt for some light gauge acoustic strings as this high-action/big-string acoustic guitar thing seems silly when you're talking about young player. If we're trying to encourage youngsters – or even lapsed or older players – to have a go at playing, why do we insist on selling them instruments that even seasoned pros would feel uncomfortable with?

"A guitar that looks, feels and smells a little nicer is going to be more engaging to the player"

I find a set of Ernie Ball 2150 Earthwood Phosphor Bronze strings, actually classed as extra-light but gauged from 0.010 to 0.050, and thanks to the hugely efficient service of Strings Direct they arrive the following day. I string up and just lightly relax the truss rod a smidge and have a play.

If you're going to really lay into a lightly strung acoustic like this it'll buzz, but with a much lighter touch it's pretty engaging. Hopefully, it'll pass muster with the young owner. I think this quick makeover has ticked all the boxes.

Final Thoughts

I remember a few years back I helped a mate doing live sound at a local venue. On some open-mic style events there was usually no shortage of youngsters nervously picking and strumming away. Invariably, I often got to play their guitars and would say that in 99 per cent of cases the sort of pretty simple adjustment and TLC we've performed here would have, albeit with beefier strings, dramatically improved their playing experience.

The guitar industry constantly goes on about encouraging young people (or new players of any age) with 'learn to play' days and suchlike, but at the same time they are more than happy to sell them cheap-and-cheerful instruments that really haven't been set up for purpose.

I certainly haven't transformed this lowly guitar into a Taylor-esque beauty by any means, but hopefully it'll encourage the player to keep at it. If so, there's no reason to look at more extensive remedial work, such as increasing those ramps at the bridge. To be truthful, I'm more tempted to suggest that something a little better and more suitable would be money well spent, if that was an option. G

A dab of fingerboard oil deepens the colour of the fingerboard

LOCKED & LOADED

Our reader could remedy his wobbly Gibson bridge with locking parts. But is this movement always a problem?

Q I was wondering of you could give me some advice. I have a Les Paul from around 2000. When I restring it, the bridge posts seem very, very loose. Is that normal? I feel they should be a good tight fit, but I have to reset the string heights from scratch every time. What's happening?
Kevin Currie, via email

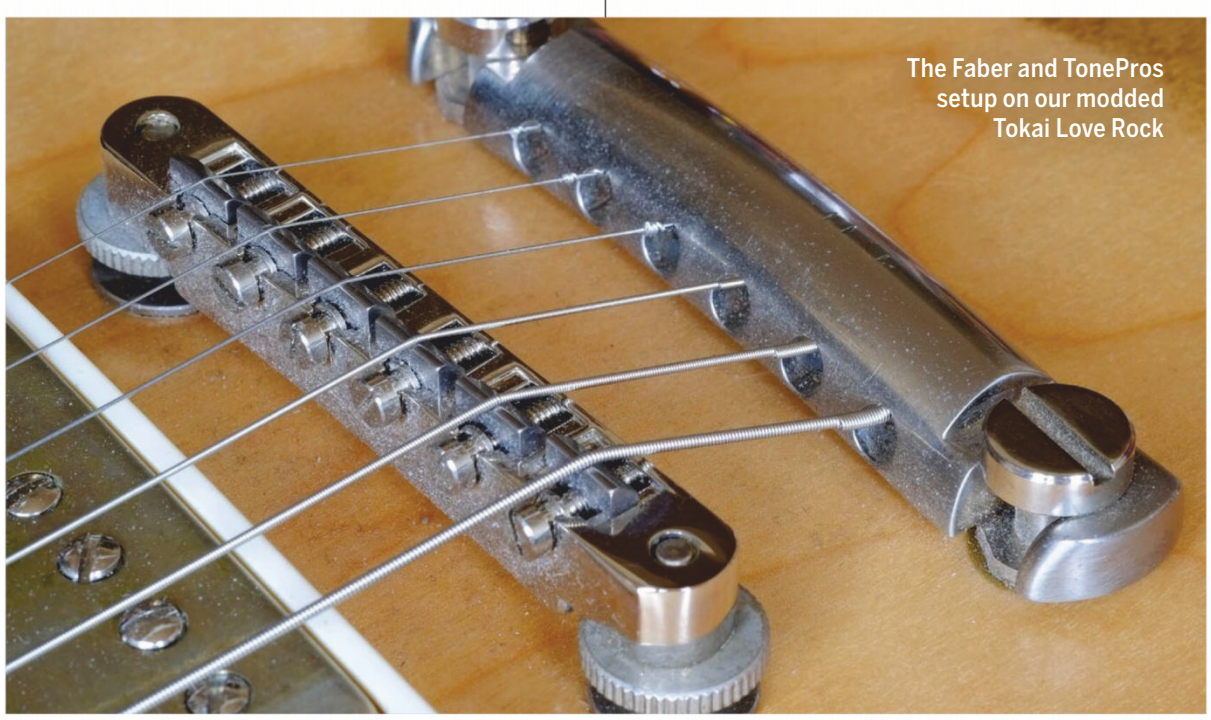
A Well, there are a few schools of thought on this age-old dilemma. First, change one string at a time and you won't have a problem. Second, if you lay the guitar on its back in front of you (don't forget to support the neck), even if you remove all six strings then restring, the bridge will stay put, although the stud tailpiece will probably fall out of place.

Some of us like to combine a string change with a bit of clean up. If you have to, you can carefully lift off the tune-o-matic bridge and secure the adjustment wheels and posts. Some will suggest using a small drop of clear nail varnish or Loctite on the threads, but using masking tape instead is actually very quick and won't mark a modern Gibson nitro finish. If it's an old, cracked finish, however, then we don't recommend trying that. If you just want to clean your fingerboard, then slacken the old strings and pull them to either side of the neck and hold them from behind with some masking tape. You will then be able to clean the fingerboard and there will be enough tension to keep the bridge and tailpiece in place.

> "Cure the bridge and tailpiece from dropping off by using locking parts"

Of course, one way to cure both the bridge and tailpiece from dropping off is to use locking parts. TonePros are the obvious source here. As we've illustrated in The Mod Squad back in issues 457 and 458, using the TonePros locking bridge keeps that in place and then locking studs on the stud tailpiece not only mean it stays put, but you can capo, slacken strings then unlock the stud tailpiece in seconds for a quick pickup swap, for example, without changing strings.

TonePros tune-o-matic: that small set screw locks the bridge in place



The Faber and TonePros setup on our modded Tokai Love Rock

TonePros isn't the only one offering locking bridges and tailpieces. Faber has its vintage-aimed Tone-Lock system for both bridge and tailpiece, and Heritage uses a neat TOM with slot-head post caps to lock it firmly in place, made by Advanced Plating in the USA. Meanwhile, Gotoh has a 510 series option, too. As with any hardware upgrade, you need to double-check that the new hardware will correctly fit your guitar.

The apparent loose fit of the tune-o-matic in particular is really part of the production tolerances necessary to build guitars back in the day, not least with those threaded posts being screwed directly into the top. The tune-o-matic is designed with this in mind and is, of course, held firmly in place by the string tension. With today's uses of CNC routers to make both guitars and hardware, those tolerances are tighter and that's reflected by some aftermarket suppliers. When I fitted some Faber conversion posts to the pictured Tokai Love Rock (see image, left) the tune-o-matic was a really tight fit. It stays in place without any locks, but wasn't easy to adjust. G

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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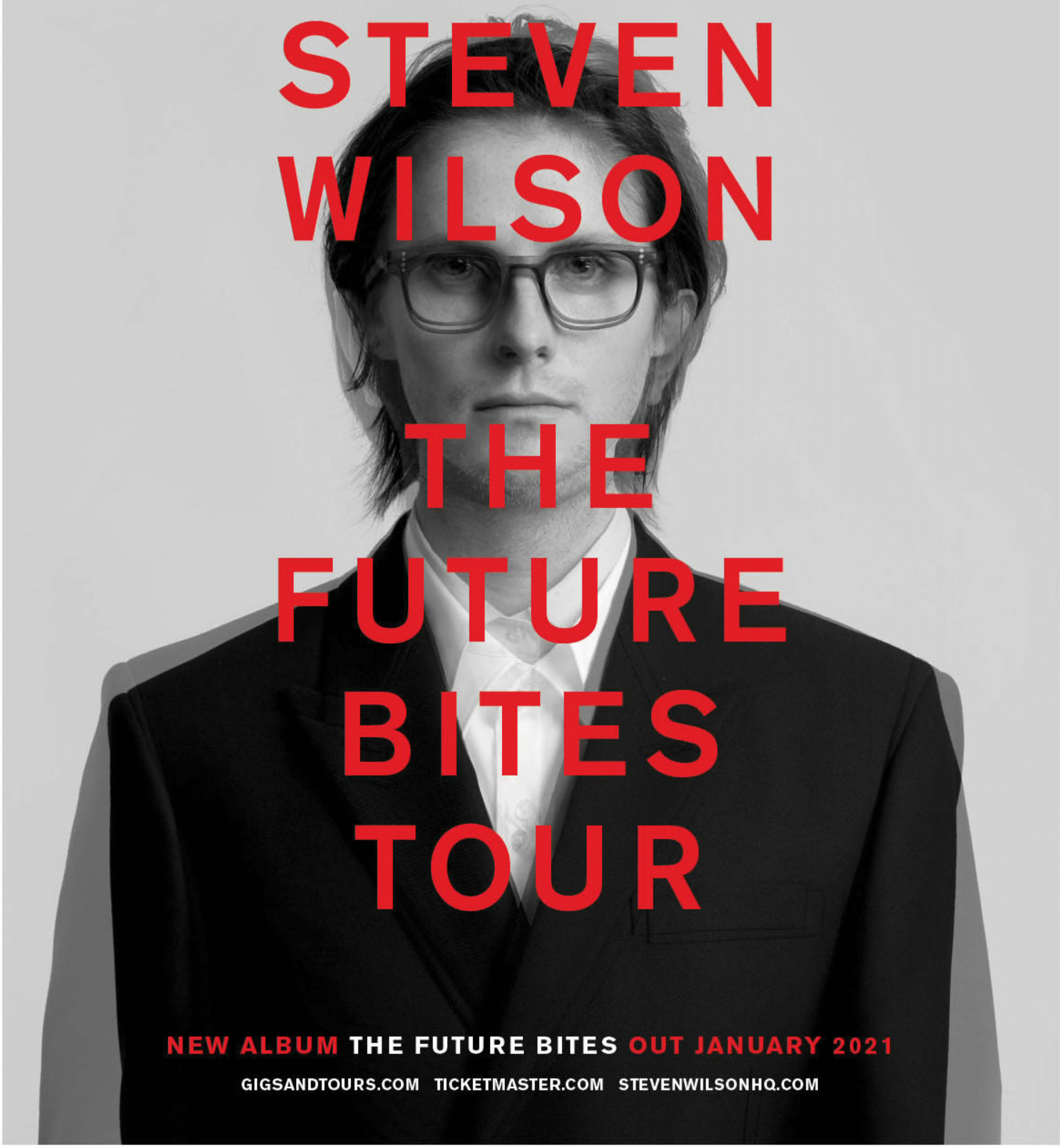
9TH - SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
11TH - MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
12TH - GLASGOW CONCERT HALL
13TH - BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
15TH - PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
16TH - LONDON EVENTIM APOLLO
17TH - NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL

STEVEN WILSON



THE FUTURE BITES TOUR

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PICKUP LINES

Epiphone 'New Yorker' Pickups

The "chief mad scientist" at Curtis Novak Classic Pickups shares his findings on these lesser-known single coils

Once Curtis was able to find a 50s original that sounded good, he set about making his own version of the pickup

Epiphone had been designing electric guitar pickups since the mid-30s when, in 1949, its efforts culminated in the Spectrum single-coil model. Appearing across the Epiphone range, variations included those with or without adjustable polepieces, gold-plated or nickel-plated covers, and white or black plastic surrounds. It was also available as an aftermarket accessory that was mounted to a pickguard unit in both single- and dual-pickup formats for either cutaway or non-cutaway guitars.

When CMI/Gibson acquired Epiphone in 1957, the New York firm's remaining stock of parts was shipped to Gibson's Kalamazoo plant in Michigan for use in the assembly of Epiphone-branded instruments. This included Spectrum pickups, which were used prior to the introduction of the mini-humbucker in the early 60s. Thus, on account of their geographical origin, the Spectrum units are commonly referred to as 'New Yorker' pickups.

> "They're single-coil pickups, but they're sidewinder coils, meaning the coil lies on its side"

"Sometimes people confuse them with mini-humbuckers," says computer scientist turned pickup builder, Curtis Novak, "but those are faux polepieces in the originals – they are outside the bobbin. They're single-coil pickups, but they're sidewinder coils, meaning the coil lies on its side. It's a bit like if you took a Strat pickup and laid it on its side. With a regular single-coil pickup, north and south [magnet poles] point away and towards the body. But with these pickups, north points towards the bridge and south points towards the neck. It's a tricky design because any side coil has a certain focus to it – almost nasal-y and out of phase – and they're a little bit more humbucker-ish sounding. But it's hard to pin down the characteristic sound of a New Yorker pickup because each one is different. By comparison, you could buy a P-90 from a few different eras and you're going to get basically the same thing, whereas these pickups are so hit and miss.

"They vary a lot in their tone and internal construction, and every single one of them was hand-built," continues Curtis. "They're all different and were truly custom made. The pole spacing is not uniform and none of the covers are the same size. Sometimes the cover is a millimetre or two longer, or the side depth is different, because they were just cutting and bending sheet metal. They'd make the surround to match the pickup and would carve the back [of the pickup] to match the guitar top. Some of them used a huge sideways bar magnet, while other ones I've seen have a steel blade with a magnet on the end. Some were wound high in the 8k[ohms] range and some were wound low in the 3k area. It seems to me there were no consistent specs. I keep a database of the pickups that come through the shop and these things are all over the place."

Despite the relative scarcity and inconsistencies of original examples, in recent years a growing number of people have become interested in these 50s New York throwbacks.

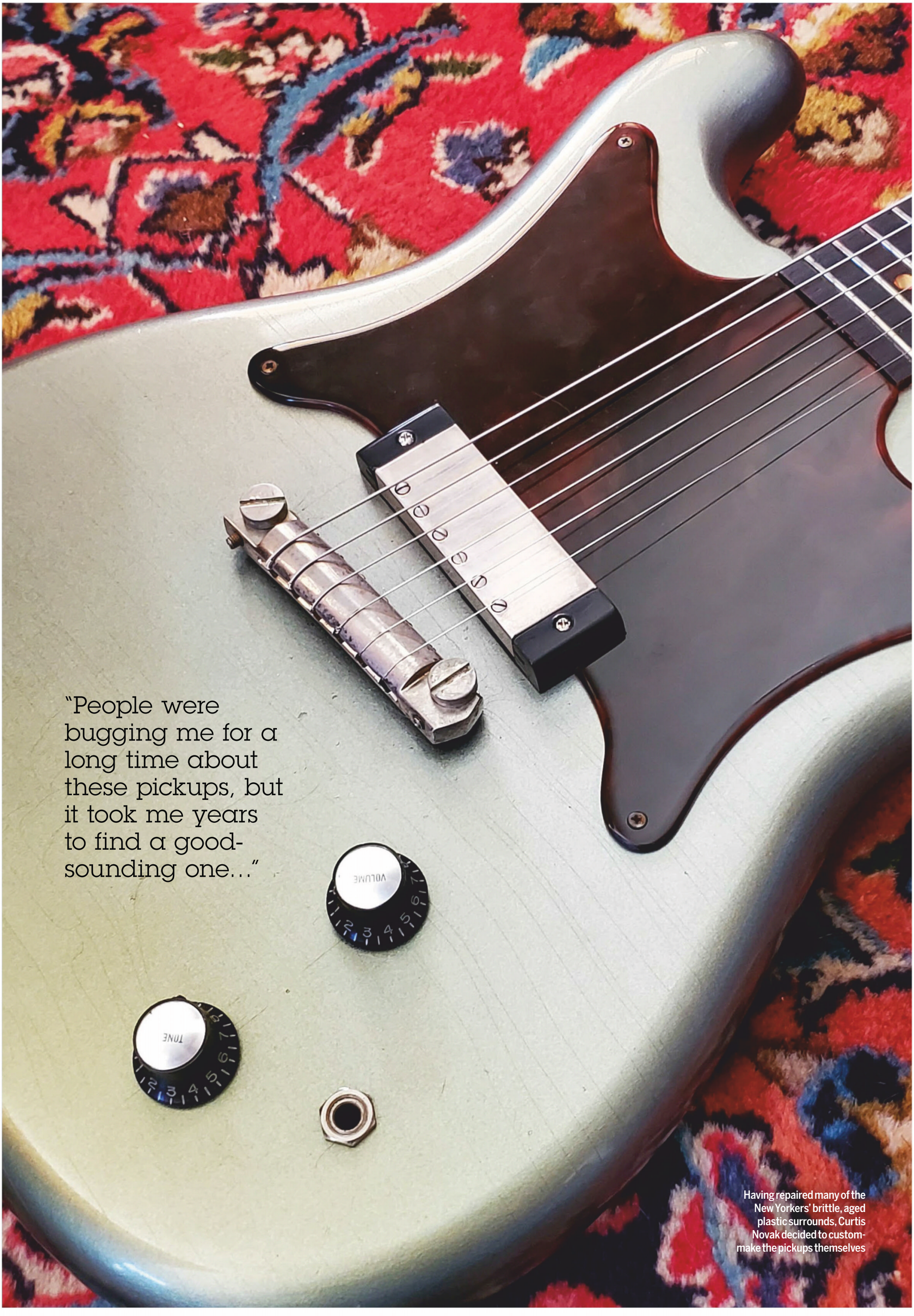
"People were bugging me for a long time about these pickups," recalls Curtis, "but it took me years to find a good-sounding one. For a long time, I thought they were pretty crappy sounding, and every once in a while, I'd get grief from people saying, 'You have no idea. This is a great-sounding pickup. John Lee Hooker used it, blah blah,' so I thought, 'Okay, I'll give it another try,' and eventually I got one in that was good. This good one sounded more P-90-like.

"I've had a lot of them come through the shop for repair over the years and the first thing that typically breaks is the surround because the plastic material they used becomes super brittle as it ages. That's how I got into making them – by custom making the surrounds. The intriguing thing is that it's a simple design with a cool Art Deco look. That's what grabbed me.

"I don't advertise them, but I will build New Yorkers when people call. I do both the polepiece version and the no-polepiece version. And I also create a mini-humbucker version." **[RB]**

www.curtisnovak.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CURTIS NOVAK



"People were bugging me for a long time about these pickups, but it took me years to find a good-sounding one…"

Having repaired many of the New Yorkers' brittle, aged plastic surrounds, Curtis Novak decided to custom-make the pickups themselves

The definitive tweed tone that still sounds "as modern as tomorrow"…

Fender 'Tweed' Deluxe

For many, the Deluxe amp defines the Fender tweed sound. Its rock 'n' roll growl and sweet singing saturation has long been associated with countless guitar luminaries over the years including Larry Carlton, Mike Campbell, Neil Young, Scotty Moore and Don Felder. Several permutations of the Deluxe were designed, although it's the sixth version – the 5E3, released in 1955 and manufactured until 1961 – that is the most widely acclaimed and serves as the basis for Fender's hand-wired '57 Custom Deluxe reissue.

The story of the Deluxe begins in 1946, when the first Fender-branded amps were released. Referred to as 'woodie' amps because of their natural hardwood finish, they are easily identified by their distinctive red, blue or gold-coloured grille cloths and chrome-plated vertical front strips. These original woodie models consisted of the Princeton, Deluxe (branded 'Model 26' on the control panel) and Professional, and were fitted with either an eight, 10 or 15-inch speaker (respectively). Featuring two inputs labelled 'instruments', and one 'microphone' input, along with separate volume controls for each and a single tone control, the Model 26 Deluxe is the precursor to the first tweed Deluxe model, the 5A3.

In 1947, Fender added the 'V'-front Dual Professional 2x10 combo (later renamed the Super) to the top of the company's amp range, and with its new tweed covering it set the standard in Fender amp aesthetics until the end of the 50s when harder wearing Tolex vinyl covering appeared.

By 1948, Fender's entire amp range had transitioned to the new-look tweed style. Affectionately known as 'TV-front' amps on account of their resemblance to a 1950s TV set, this included the upgraded 1x12 Deluxe model 5A3. The next Deluxe model – the 5B3 – appeared in 1953 and is essentially the same as the 5A3 in terms of circuitry, although by this point Fender's 'wide panel' tweed amp format had been implemented across the line. Significant revisions to the Deluxe's electronics came with the 5C3, which included a negative feedback circuit, although this was removed from the further revised 1954 5D3 'wide panel' design.

Appearing in 1955, Fender's 'narrow panel' tweed amp range featured the now legendary 5E3 model. As per all previous versions, it runs on a pair of cathode-biased 6V6GT power valves (which some hear as akin to the chime of a Vox AC15) and features a 5Y3GT rectifier valve, which has a tendency to sag and produce a slightly spongey attack. Partly due to its lack of a negative feedback circuit, the 5E3 sounds characteristically sweet at lower volume due to added harmonics, before breaking up into saturated distortion at higher settings. The 5E3's unique cathodyne phase splitter also adds to its distinctive tone.

> Throughout the early days of rock 'n' roll, the tweed Deluxe was dependable for use on stage and in the studio

Throughout the early days of rock 'n' roll, the tweed Deluxe proved to be a dependable amp for use both on stage and in the studio. However, in 1961 the end of the tweed Deluxe era was heralded by the arrival of the more powerful tremolo-equipped brown Tolex-covered 6G3 Deluxe. **[RB]**

1

4

Evolution of the Fender Deluxe

1946
Model 26 'woodie'; natural finish; 10" speaker; 3 inputs

1948
Model 5A3; tweed cover; top/rear chrome control panel; 12" speaker

1953
Model 5B3 & 5C3; 5C3 with negative feedback circuit added

1954
Model 5D3; 'wide panel' design; negative feedback circuit removed

1955
Model 5E3; 'narrow panel' design; 4 inputs; cathodyne phase splitter

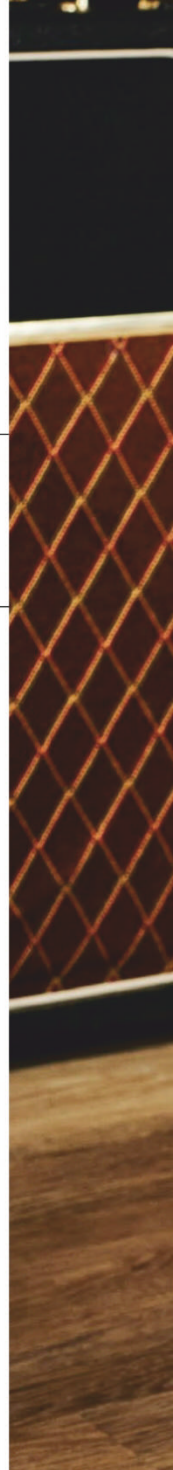
1961
Model 6G3; brown front panel and Tolex cover; tremolo circuit

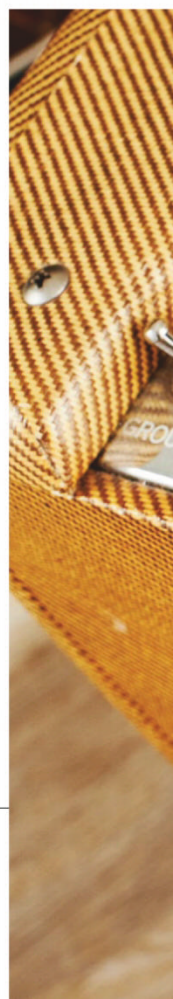
1963
Model/circuit AA/AB763; Deluxe Reverb released

1967
Discontinued; Deluxe Reverb with silver panel

1982
Deluxe Reverb discontinued (superseded by Deluxe Reverb II)

2007
Custom Series '57 Deluxe released (5E3 reissue)





1955 Fender Deluxe

1. CODES
Tube chart: 'Serial No.' scribed 'D00491' matches code impressed into chassis (normally D00001-D01400 during 1955); ink-stamped date code 'EH' denotes August (H), 1955 (E)

2. CABINET
Solid pine; 18-inch width by 16½-inch height by 8¾-inch depth; birch ply vented two-piece wooden back; birch ply speaker baffle; top/rear control panel cutaway; four metal feet; one brown leather handle with two metal brackets

3. ORNAMENTATION
Chrome control-panel with white font (no model name); tweed cover; brown and yellow striped grille cloth; metal nameplate with Fender script logo

4. CIRCUIT
Tube chart reads 'Deluxe Amplifier... Model 5E3'; 1x12 Jensen P12R speaker; advertised as 15 watts; valves: one 5Y3GT, two 6V6GT, one 12AX7, one 12AY7

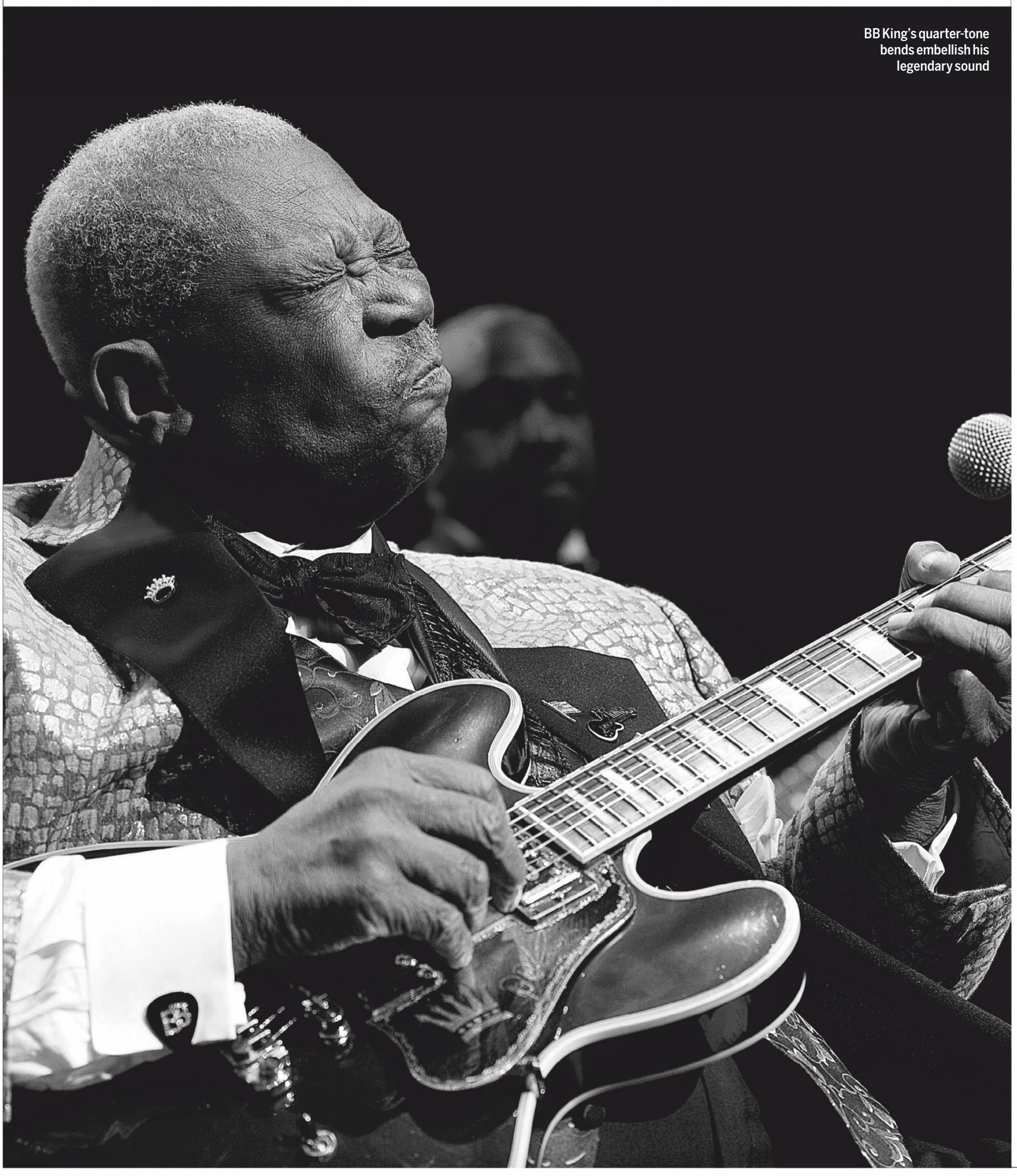
5. POWER & CONNECTIONS
From left to right: ground switch; fuse; power on/off switch; red pilot light jewel; four standard (¼-inch TS) inputs labelled 'INST.' and 'MIC' (channels 1 and 2)

6. CONTROLS
Three black plastic chickenhead knobs labelled 'Tone', Inst. Vol.' and 'Mic. Vol." (from left to right)

***Guitarist* would like to thank ATB Guitars of Cheltenham**

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



BB King's quarter-tone bends embellish his legendary sound

The Bends

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Knaggs Choptank, Vox AC15C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins

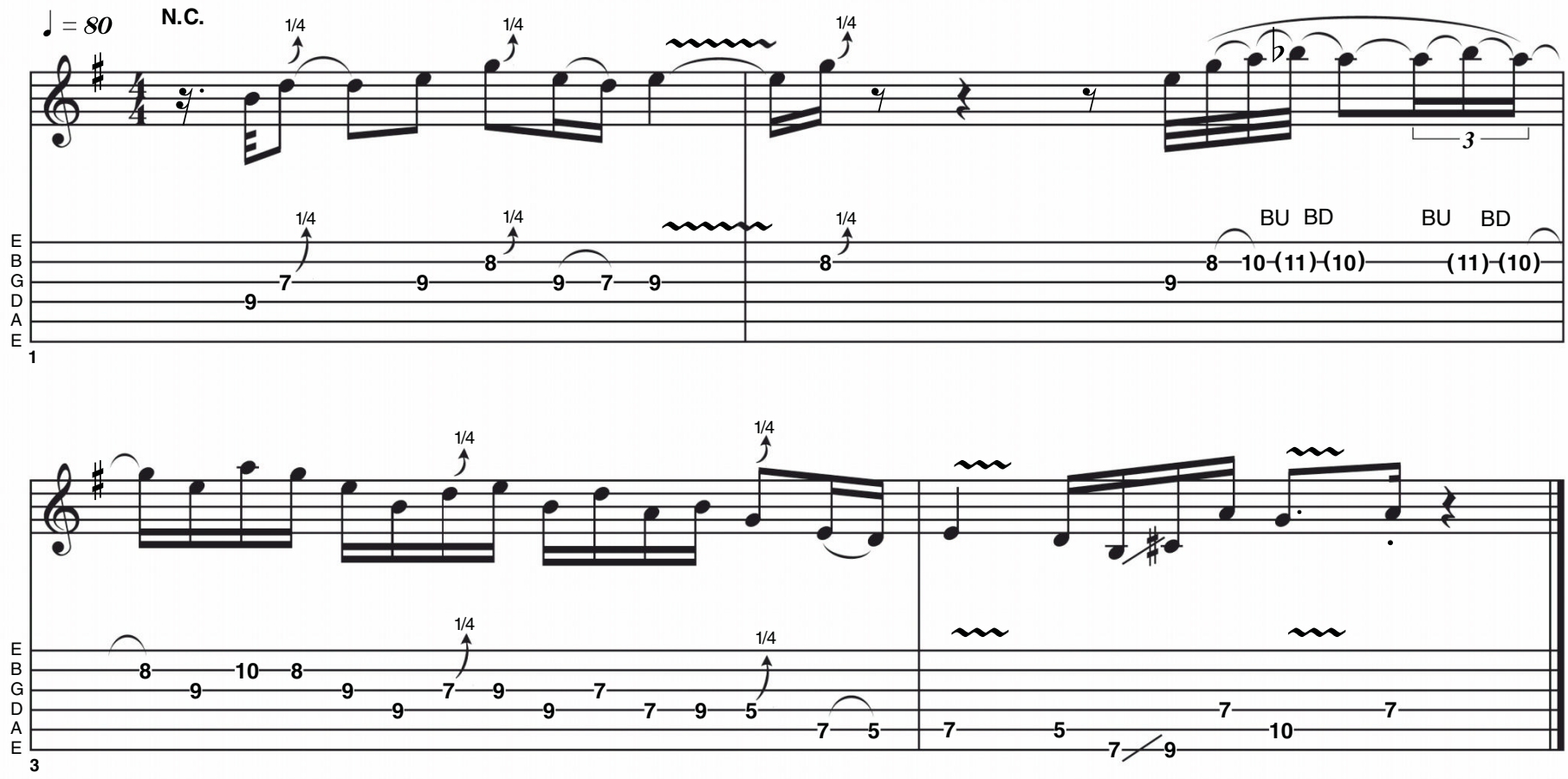
MANIPULATING THE PITCH of a note beyond its strict 'quantised' value has always been an essential part of the blues. We often see this notated as a quarter-tone bend, but this is rather a 'catch-all' term. In reality, various degrees of bending slightly sharp can give a variety of effects. A common use of the quarter-tone or 'blues' bend is to exploit the territory between major and minor, which is so characteristic of the blues. Piano players do this by trilling between the major and minor 3rd, giving this feeling of a place in-between. On a guitar we can go directly to that in-between note, and that is exactly what players such as BB and Albert King pioneered decades ago.

Raising the minor 3rd slightly towards (but not all the way to) a major 3rd enables minor pentatonic licks to be played over major chords – a quick and dirty fix for players who struggle in the major domain! You can also try subtly raising the dominant/♭7th or arguably any other note from the blues scale, though as with any device, it's best not to overuse it – and I would probably steer clear of the root, too!

If you're in any doubt about the effectiveness of this device, try any minor pentatonic phrase with a blues bend on the minor 3rd, then again without. Certainly both have their place, but in terms of 'attitude', the bends add so much. However, as with so many devices we employ all the time such as vibrato, it's good to be aware of what we're doing rather than always falling into a default pattern. There are a couple of unexpected chord changes in the backing track. Give this a try and look out for a Headlines soon giving further hints on how to get round these!

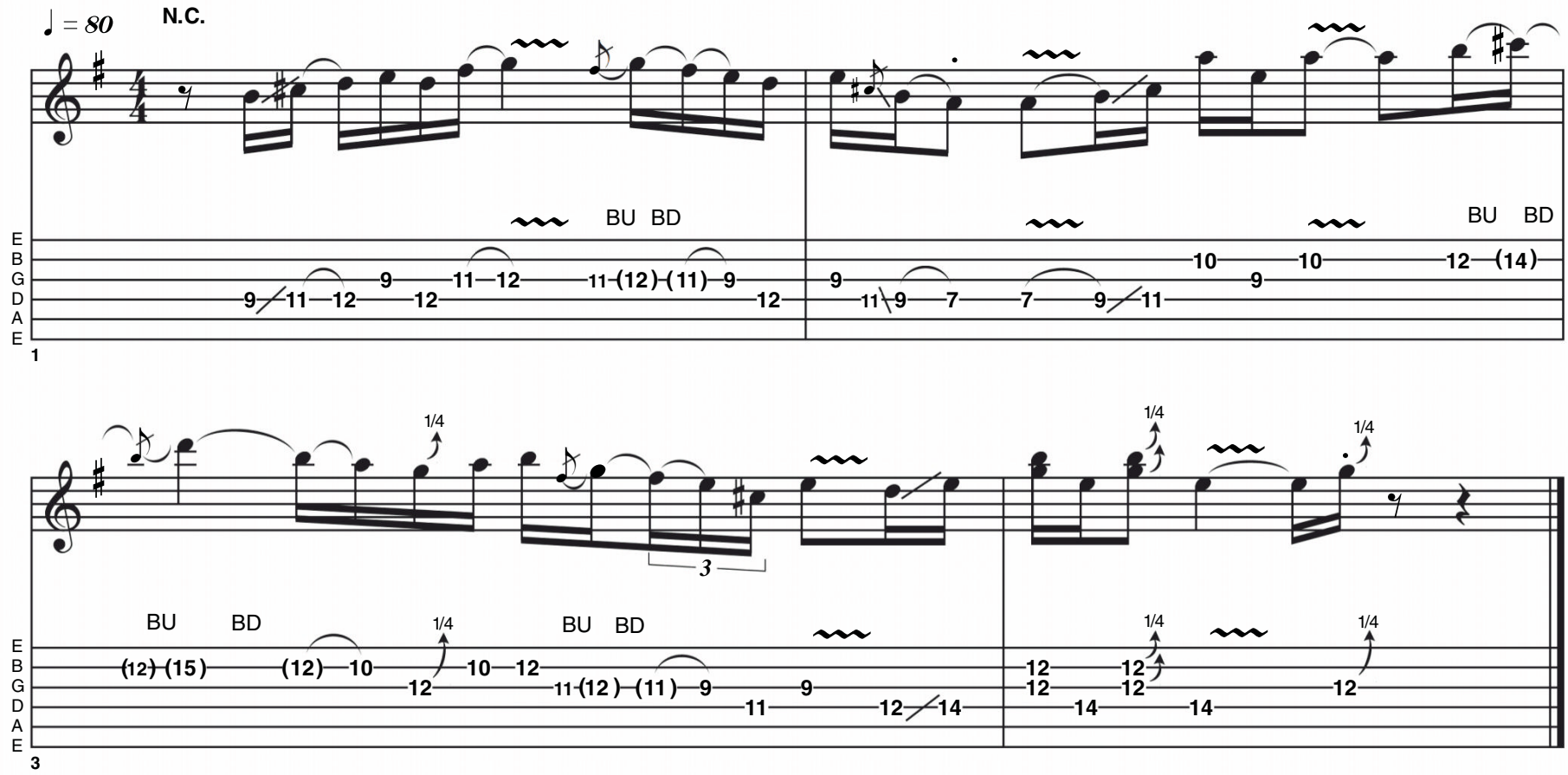
Example 1

WE GET STRAIGHT down to business right from the beginning here with the held, slow quarter-tone bend on the D. These subtle bends are not an optional extra in phrases like this, they are an essential part of the style. There is a short, sharp version at the beginning of bar 2 and the following bend reverses the whole approach by only releasing part of the way before returning up to B.



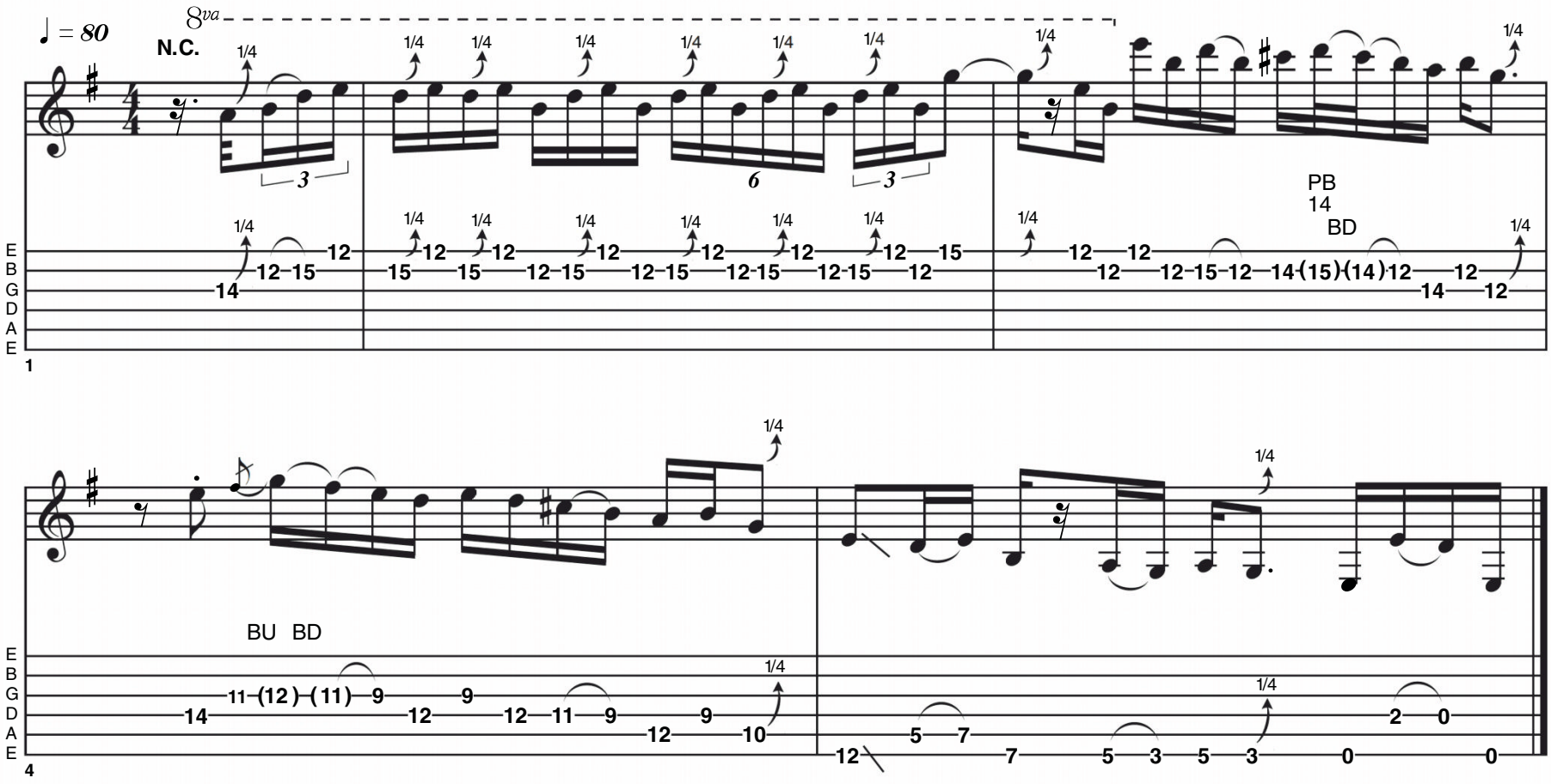
Example 2

A LITTLE BREAK FROM ALL the bending action at the beginning of this example, but soon we're going above and beyond with a tone and a half bend in that order, then a couple of quarter tones, including a doublestop at the beginning of bar 4. Note the 'full-stop' added with a quarter-tone bend at the end of the phrase – this has become something of a habit I haven't addressed yet!



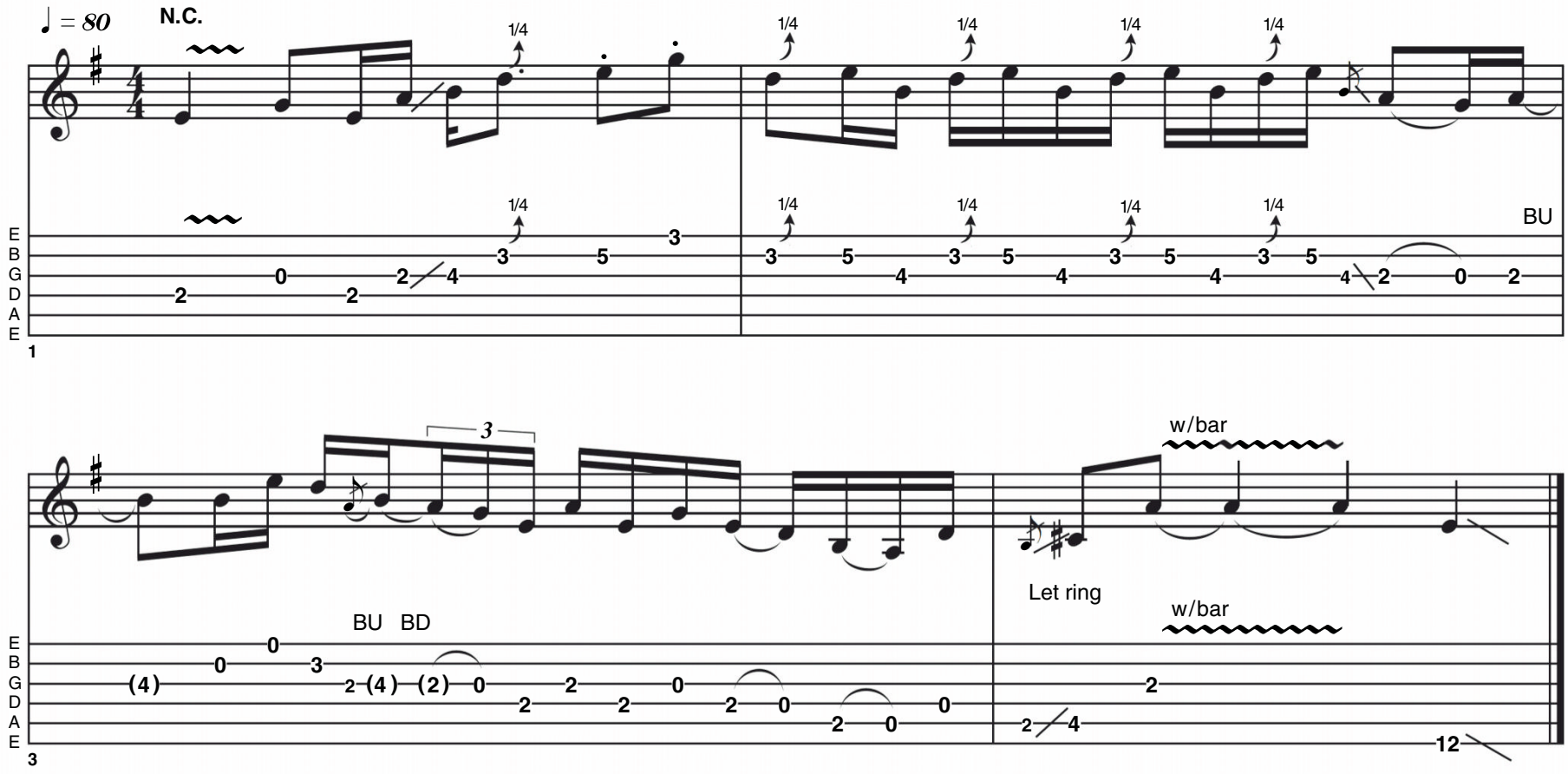
Example 3

AFTER A BRIEF SETUP, there is a quick succession of quarter-tone bends, between the ♭7th (D) and the root (E), leading into a minor 3rd (G), which is given the blues-bend treatment. As the phrase heads down towards the low register, you'll hear each and every G is bent or pulled slightly sharp. Quarter tone is a nominal measurement of how much, so let your ears be the judge!



Example 4

THE DOMINANT 7TH (D) features prominently again here, pushed slightly sharp and contrasted against the root two frets above. Next, you'll hear a slightly lazy bend from A up to B♭ at the 2nd fret of the G string – worth bearing in mind as an alternative to an 'absolute pitch' bend, or going for the 3rd fret B♭ here. As with all ideas like this, try it out and see.

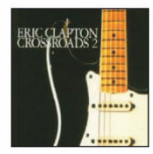


Hear It Here

BB KING
ANTHOLOGY

BB King defined so much of what has become the vocabulary of solo blues guitar, including a keen ear for altering pitch with string bends and vibrato. Listen to *Sweet Sixteen Pts 1 & 2*, recorded live in 1966 – it's lost none of its power over the decades. *Better Not Look Down* demonstrates lots of variations on a similar idea, showing that you don't always need lots of notes. *Let The Good Times Roll* (with Bobby Bland) live in '67 is another good frame of reference.

ERIC CLAPTON
Crossroads 2: Live In The Seventies



Much is made of how the 70s may not be remembered clearly in the same way that is claimed about the 60s. However, Eric Clapton's playing does not seem to have suffered in the slightest: check out *Rambling On My Mind/Have You Ever Loved a Woman*, *Further On Up the Road* and *Driftin' Blues*, the latter of which has some very fluid phrasing, complemented by sparse instrumentation. It really does make you yearn for the 70s.

JEFF BECK
Performing This Week… Live at Ronnie Scott's

When we're talking about manipulating pitch, there are fewer (if any) better examples than Jeff Beck, who uses string bends and the whammy for both subtle scoops into notes and wilder swoops. Check out *Behind The Veil*, *Nadia* and *Angel (Footsteps)* to hear a bewildering variety of subtle and not so subtle trickery, including the use of a bottleneck touched upon the strings over the pickups for some impressively ultra-high passages!

Trading Licks

Robbie Calvo helps you enhance your lead playing with expert concepts to add to your own licks

Demystifying The Modes Part 1: The Ionian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Revstar 502TFM, Line 6 Helix & Powercab 212 Plus
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example

SECRET SOCIETIES HAVE kept deep within their vaults a sacred manuscript said to impart musical eloquence to the reader... the major scale modes, a guitar system so complex that only immortal rock gods with an intelligence quotient of 180 can apply and comprehend.

Unfortunately, this is the kind of rhetoric that's been spun and proliferated among the guitar community for way too long. The major scale modes are super easy to understand and I'm going to show you just how easy it is to apply the major scale to each of its seven modalities. If you think you don't need to learn the modes, think again. Every chord progression you'll ever play over has a tonal-centre resolution point and is therefore a modal progression.

Myth Busting

Let's dispel a few myths right away! You don't need to learn seven scale shapes. All seven modes, relative chords and arpeggios reside within one major scale pattern. The other six patterns are merely inverted versions of the same seven notes. The chord progression and its resolution point (tonal centre) determine the mode, not the melody or scale tones.

Okay, let's dig in. The A major scale contains seven notes:

A - B - C# - D - E - F# - G#

We use the those seven notes to build seven chords. This is called harmonising the major scale. We build those chords by stacking consecutive 3rd intervals. Let's build the first chord...

R	maj3	5th	maj7	I
A - B - **C#** - D - **E** - F# - **G#**				The resulting chord is Amaj7

These four tones form an Amaj7 chord and chord arpeggio. Play one octave of the A major scale over the Amaj7 chord. This is the A Ionian mode, the first mode of the A major scale, and relates directly to the A major chord built from it.

The second chord is built by stacking consecutive 3rd intervals starting from the second degree of the A major scale.

R	min3	5th	min7	IImin
A - **B** - C# - **D** - E - **F#** - G# - **A**				The resulting chord is Bm7

Play the A major scale one octave starting and ending on the note B. This is the second mode of the A major scale: B Dorian. The third chord is built by starting from the third degree of the A major scale:

R	min3	5th	min7	IIImin
A - B - **C#** - D - **E** - F# - **G#** - A - **B**				The resulting chord is C#m7

Play the A major scale one octave starting and ending on C#. This is the third mode of the A major scale: C# Phrygian.

If we continue this process we'll end up with seven chords and we'll have inverted the major scale seven times to follow each of those seven chords. Here are the seven chords of the A major scale, which we use to create chord progressions in the key of A:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Amaj7 - Bm7 - C#m7 - Dmaj7 - E7 - F#m7 - G#m7(♭5)						

Finding The Tonal Centre

If we build a chord progression that resolves to the I chord (A, Amaj7 or any variation of an A major chord) then the chord progression is said to have a tonal centre of the I chord and is therefore an Ionian chord progression. We can then use the A major scale (Ionian, first mode) to improvise over the progression, but we phrase our resolutions towards the tonal-centre chord (Amaj7) and its chord tones: (A - C# - E - G#). Note that, typically, the first chord of a progression will be the tonal centre of that progression.

Each mode of the major scale will have a characteristic note that evokes the sound of that mode. The characteristic note of the Ionian mode is the major 7th. In the key of A, G# is the major 7th. Creating lines that target the G# will really solidify the modality and characteristic sound of the Ionian Mode.

I've created a cool four-bar A Ionian chord progression that we'll be playing over this issue:

I	I	III	IV	VI	V
‖: A6 Amaj9 | A6 Amaj9 | C#m7 Dmaj7 | F#m7 E :‖					

You'll want to evoke the flavour of the Ionian mode by using G# within your lines and phrase your ideas to resolve on the chord tones of the tonal-centre chord, A. I'd advocate learning where each of those chord tones resides within your A major scale pattern(s).

Take a moment and analyse my examples to see and hear the chord-tone resolutions and characteristic note within each phrase. Have fun and I'll see you next month to study and play over a cool B Dorian rock progression.

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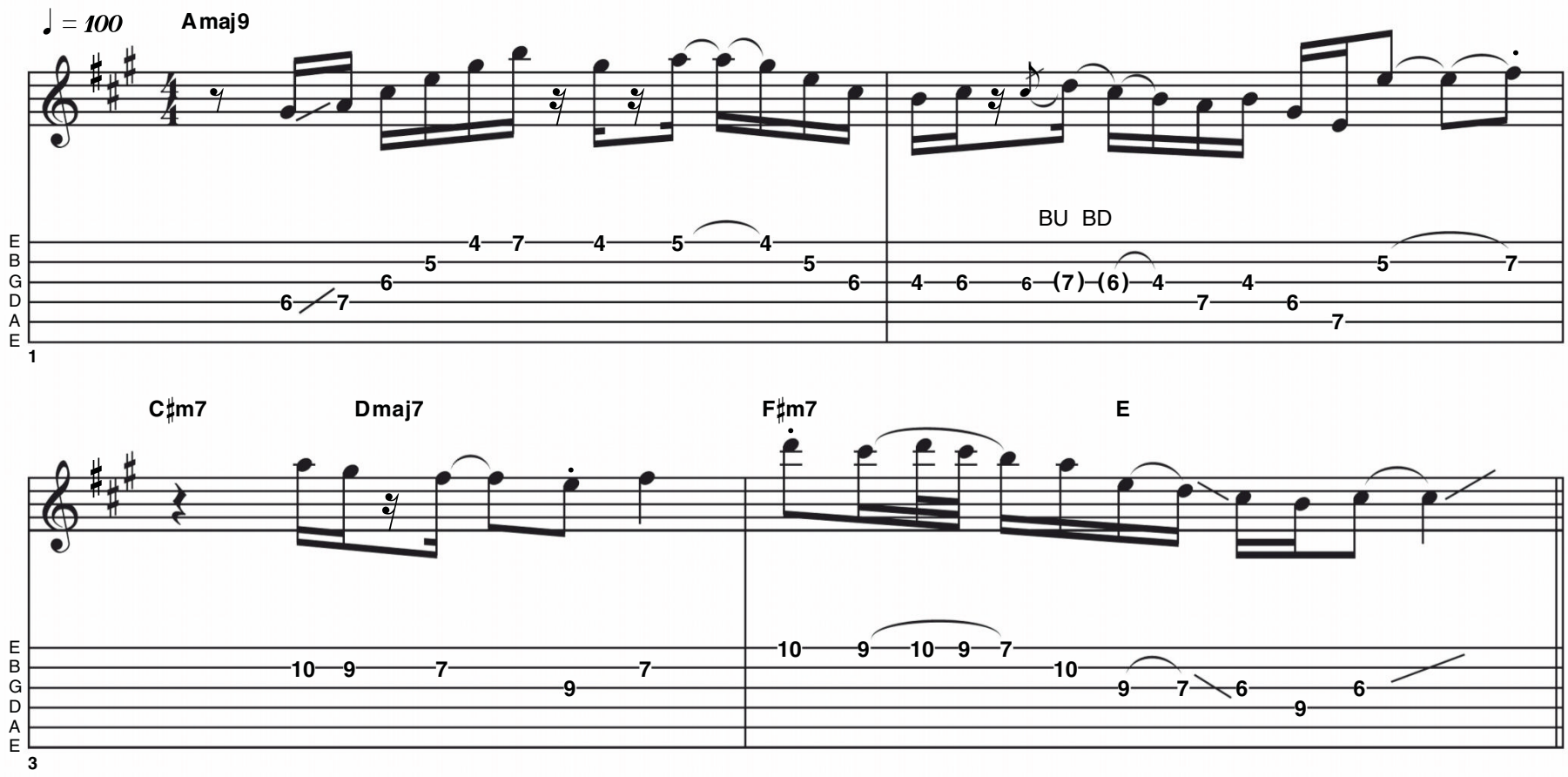
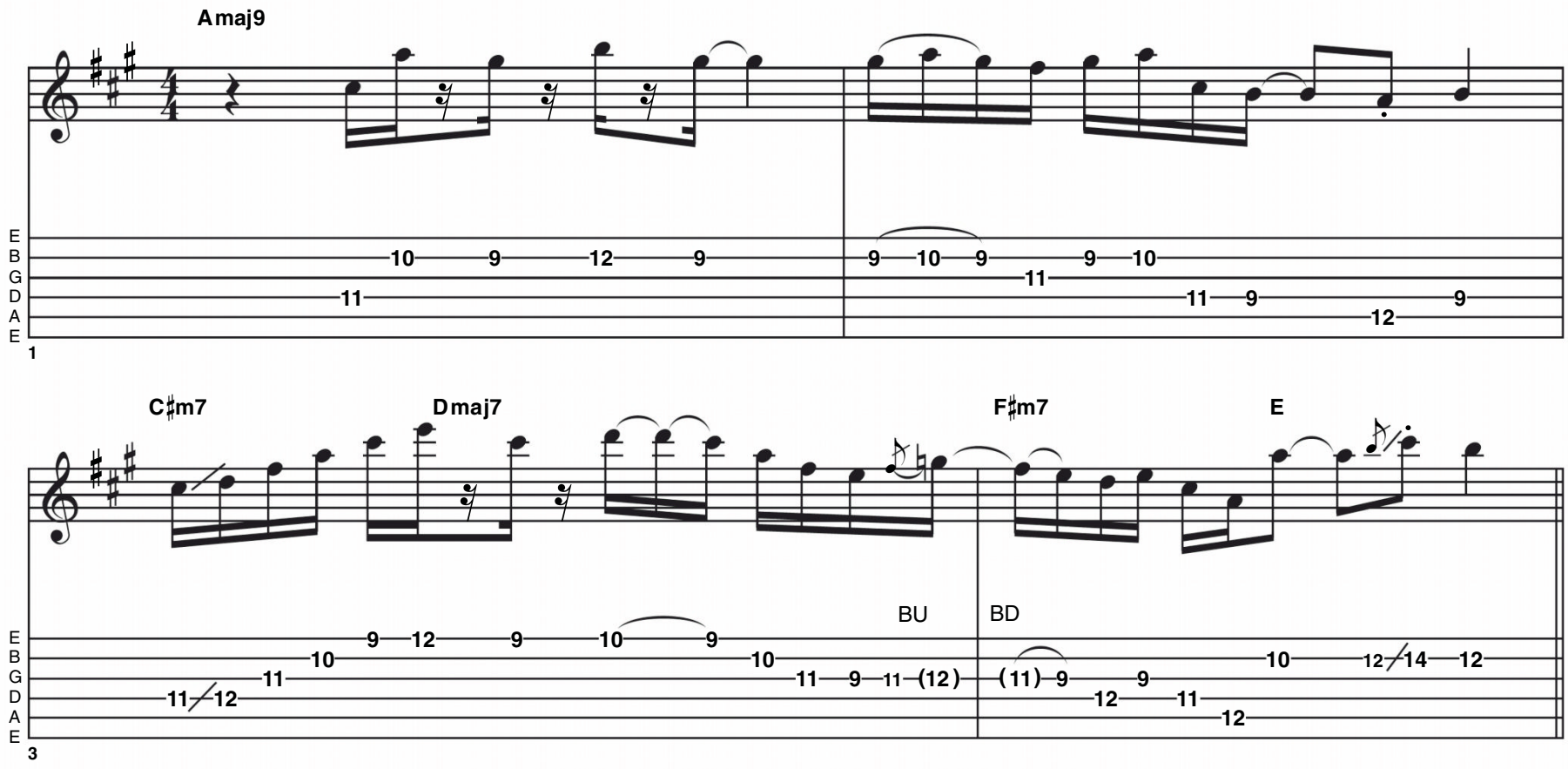
Lick 1 Setting the modal mood

THE OPENING PHRASE to my solo starts on the characteristic note of G# and ascends and descends through my favourite Amaj9 arpeggio shape. I'm targeting the chord tones of the tonal-centre chord to solidify the Ionian modal sound. The second half of the solo resolves nicely to C#, the major 3rd of the A6 / Amaj9 chord.



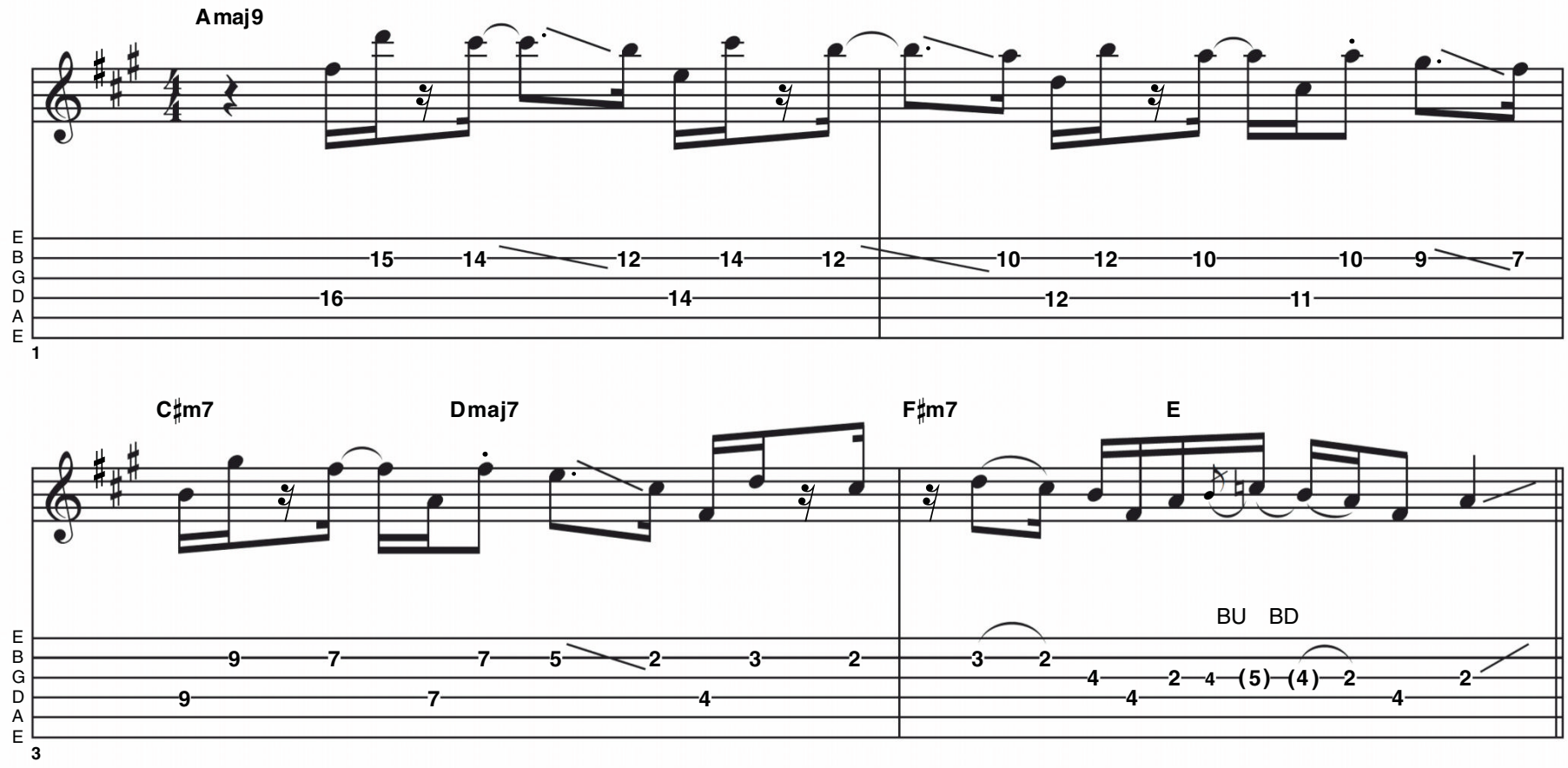
Lick 2 Skipping intervals breaks up linear runs

I'M DELIBERATELY TARGETING the G# characteristic note of the Ionian mode and also resolving there for a moment or two. You'll also notice the simple intervallic aspect of this line – wider interval skips add space between scale tones and break up linear runs. The second half of this lick is derived from a Dmaj9 arpeggio and outlines the Dmaj7 chord perfectly, while the 9th (E) is a chord tone within all four chords in bars 3 and 4.



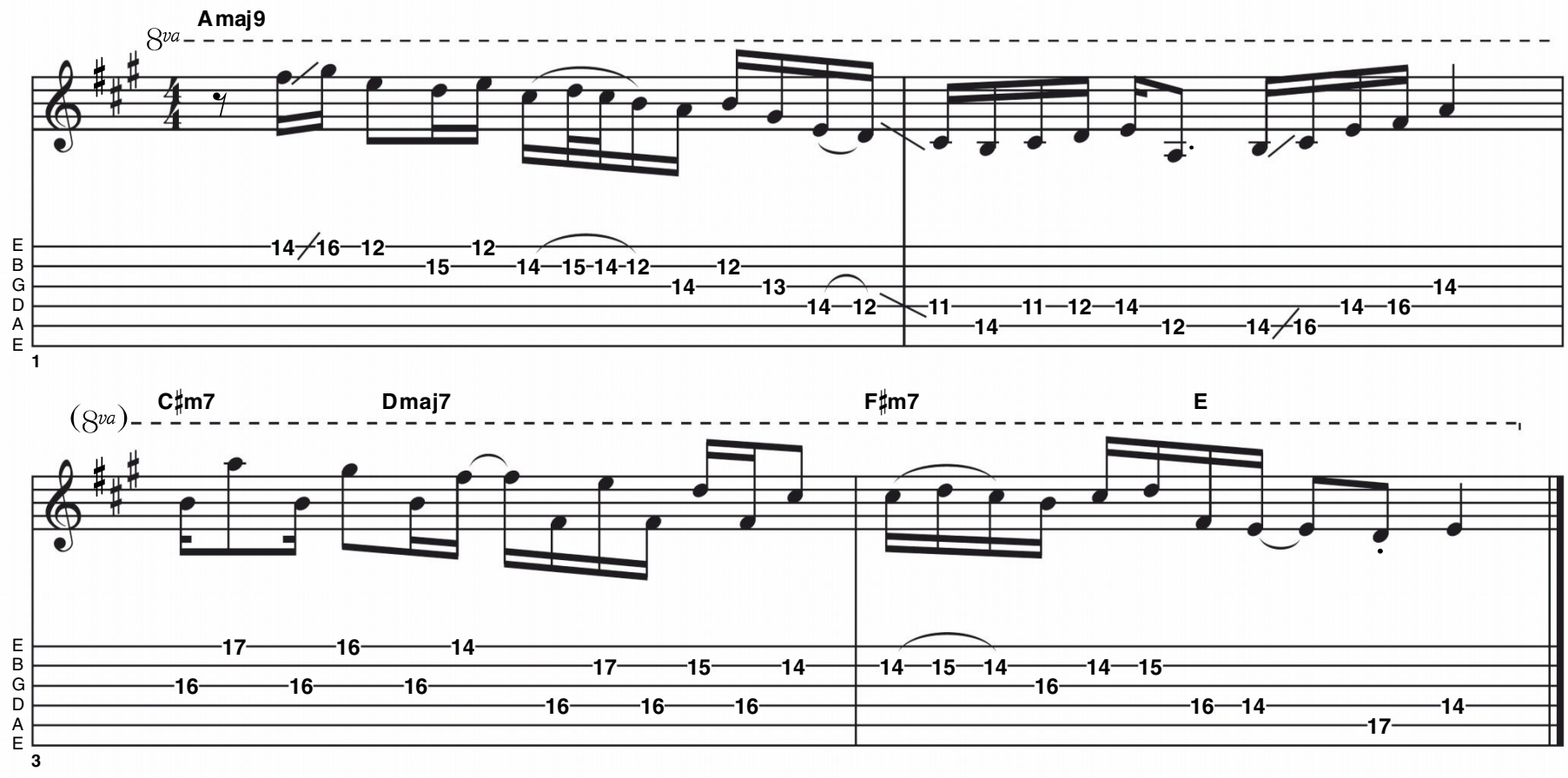
Lick 3 Descending in major and minor 6ths

I LOVE THESE DESCENDING intervallic phrases. This idea is based on descending, diatonic major and minor 6ths. You'll notice that the first two-bar phrase resolves to G# and the second phrase resolves to A – a nice way to add tension with the major 7th and then release that tension by concluding the phrase with the tonic tone of the Ionian mode.



Lick 4 Adding legato and pedal-tone ideas

THE FIRST HALF of this phrase is a pseudo-classical guitar line that starts on the G# and descends through the A major scale to resolve to A. Try to make this line as *legato* as possible. The second two-bar phrase features a couple of pedal-tone ideas: the first pedal tone is B and descends through the notes A, G# and F#. The second pedal tone is F# and descends through the notes E, D and C#. The intervallic nature of this lick may be tricky to articulate at first when using a pick. Slow the idea down and build up to speed, or simply use your thumb and fingers!



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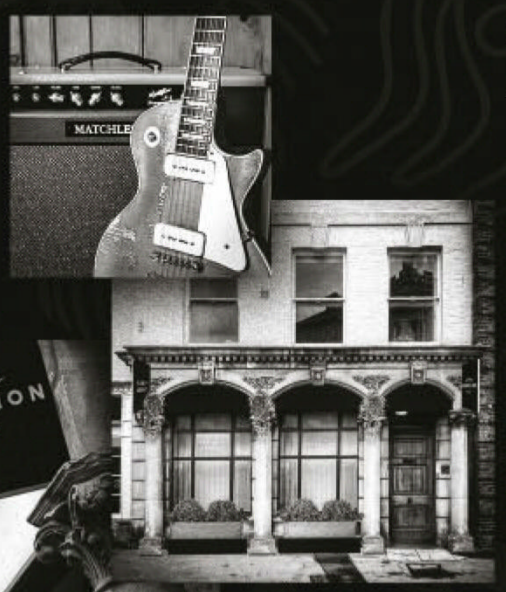

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