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G2215-P90 STREAMLINER™ JUNIOR JET™ CLUB

GRETSCH®

YUSUF/CAT STEVENS

A songwriting legend on the guitar stories behind the hits

CHARVEL OR EVH?

Two shred-centric electrics that deliver so much more

BROTHER ROBERT

A new book shatters myths about Robert Johnson's life

Guitarist

Issue 468

FEBRUARY 2021

EPIPHONE *Rebooted*

ARE THESE THE *BEST* REISSUES YOU CAN BUY FOR LESS THAN £500?

CLAPTON'S LOST LES PAUL

ON THE TRAIL OF THE BEANO 'BURST

REVIEWED MANSON META MBM-1 **VICTORY V4 THE COPPER PREAMP PEDAL** STRYMON NIGHTSKY **CHARVEL HENRIK DANHAGE SIGNATURE PRO-MOD** EVH WOLFGANG SPECIAL SASSAFRASS

WIN! A DANELECTRO '64XT ELECTRIC

TONE BENDER FUZZ PEDALS

MATT BELLAMY

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Why Buy A Guitar?

Last issue's Gear Of The Year round-up got me thinking about buying another guitar again (it's a bit of an occupational hazard, that) and, while mulling possible choices, I started reflecting on the whole tangle of emotions, musical requirements, gut feelings and carefully reasoned motives that goes into the average guitar purchase. In a purely rational world, we'd choose guitars solely for their musical utility – but thankfully people are more complex than that and it's amazing how a particular guitar can creep into our dreams even if we don't have a sensible use for it.

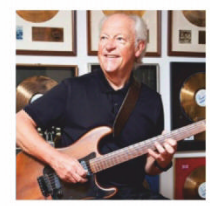
Guitars are always, in some measure, about the heart as much as the head. The flip side of that, however, is that it's healthy to remember that many of the greatest musicians in the world began their careers with makeshift or basic instruments – but despite that they didn't agonise about finding the perfect guitar before getting started on making hits. Songwriting legend Yusuf/Cat Stevens, whom we interviewed for this issue on page 68, recalls the decent but unremarkable Hagström 12-string that propelled him to early fame, and his experience is by no means unique. As Kurt Vile observed a couple of issues back, at the end of the day "it's the wizard, not the wand". I doubt that will stop me (or any of us) wanting just *one more* guitar, though. Enjoy the issue and see you next time – hopefully there might even be a gig or two this year...

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Steve Gunn
The American indie songsmith takes us inside the sounds of his album *The Unseen In Between* on **p34**

Epiphone Rebooted
A trio of new Epiphone solidbody electric reissues seriously impressed us – at a great price, too. Read the full review on **p80**



Martin Barre
He was the guitar wizard behind Tull's prog hits, and the affable Mr Barre has some great guitar-buying stories, too, on **p114**

COVER IMAGE CREDITS: ERIC CLAPTON INSET IMAGES: BETSY FOWLER COLLECTION YUSUF/CAT STEVENS IMAGE: AMINAH ISLAM ROBERT JOHNSON IMAGE: © HERITAGE IMAGE PARTNERSHIP LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
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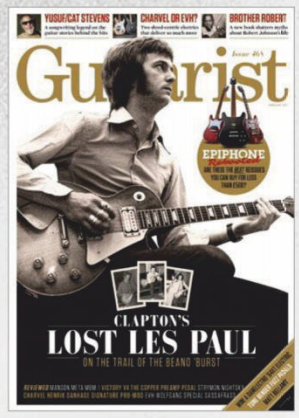

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
David Wedgbury

COVER FEATURE

CLAPTON'S LOST LES PAUL

58 Eric Clapton's Beano 'Burst helped define the sound of a generation, but sadly it was a short-lived partnership. In the summer of '66, after a rehearsal with new band Cream, the Les Paul was stolen and never recovered. Join us as we recount one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of rock 'n' roll…

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To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio':
http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

MANSON META MBM-1
£569

WHAT IS IT? The latest, most affordable Matt Bellamy signature model, including two Manson humbuckers and a kill switch

Feelin' Good

If ruling the world's stadiums isn't enough, Muse's main-man Matt Bellamy now has his sights set on dominating the guitar world

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

For decades, Hugh Manson's custom builds pushed what we expected from a hand-built guitar. Attention to detail and meticulous selection of woods, hardware and components all added up to some of the finest UK-made instruments to pass through *Guitarist* HQ. But there was one association in particular that put the Manson name on the tip of guitar players' tongues, and that was the long-standing relationship between Hugh, the brand and one Matthew Bellamy.

As an upstart on the scene back in the mid-to-late 90s, Bellamy frequented Mansons Guitar Shop in Exeter, acquiring his first custom-made Manson guitar after receiving his initial advance when Muse were signed. Usually, we'd say the rest is history, but as we've seen since this was simply the origin of strumm-etry...

Now, in a time where our credit cards live in fear of being wiped by the magnets of a period-correct PAF clone and where accidentally scraping the finish on our guitars simply makes them more 'vibe-y', Manson and Bellamy turned their attentions to making the guitar do things it shouldn't. "The guy that says, 'I want you to build me a Strat'. What is the point?" Hugh said in 2015. "I can sell you a perfectly good reissue of a Strat. How am I going to improve on however many million have been made already? Our challenges lie elsewhere."

1. You can't do the old 'one pickup off, one pickup on' trick with this guitar, but thankfully you can still stutter at your audience with this neatly fitted kill switch. It operates smoothly and without pops, too

2. Gone is the Cort logo in favour of a Manson one. Matt Bellamy's signature is on the headstock, too, but it's subtle enough not to be a divisive

3. One of the big differences between the MBC-1 and this Meta MBM-1 is the neck humbucker. It's beefy without being over-woolly and you can order the guitar with a coil-split direct from Manson if you like

Those challenges? How about fitting an X/Y MIDI controller into the body? Or perhaps you'd consider a ZVEX Fuzz Factory, a ribbon controller... maybe a Fernandes Sustainer and a kill switch? While we're at it, can we do lasers, too? Then we'll talk finishes...

The answer, of course, was 'yes' all round. But this level of outlandish mods and customisation doesn't lend itself to mass production, nor the kinds of price tags that put it within reach of those of us who play the pub round the corner from Wembley, rather than the stadium itself. Even Manson's limited runs of MB replicas cost more and likely feature better tech than a small run-around.

But this was finally remedied in 2015, when Manson announced a partnership with Cort guitars, known for its own superb, affordable instruments as well as being a not-so-secret OEM builder for a number of household names. The result of that partnership was the Cort/Manson MBC-1, one of the best sub-£500 guitars we saw that year, and – truth be told – for the couple following.

But that was five years ago and a lot has changed since. For one, Hugh Manson has retired, giving Matt Bellamy himself the opportunity to grab the baton as a majority shareholder in the brand, and with the help of Adrian Ashton, Tim Stark and the Manson Guitar Works team, continue the quest for evolution.

Everything onboard the MBM-1 has a purpose: playability and convenience come first

The first playable example of this is a continuation of the Cort/Manson partnership: the MBM-1. "An Asian single-cut-ish body with a couple of humbuckers? Sounds like an evolution!" we hear you cry. Well, dig a little deeper and you'll find that this is far from a quick nudge to the bandsaw and a different logo: the Manson DNA runs thick through this one.

Starting with that body, it's cut from lightweight basswood into the classic Matt Bellamy part-T-style/part-LP outline. There's a simultaneous slabby and sleek feel to it, with the belly carve to make it comfortable. Visually, it's a smart-looking contemporary guitar, set off by the utilitarian one volume/one tone control layout and matt black finish (itself undergoing a lot of research from Hugh during the development of the MBC-1) and plenty of space. Almost like it was designed to be a blank canvas for further modding, eh?

One of the biggest changes on this model comes from the neck pickup. The MBC-1 featured a single coil in the neck position, but here it's replaced with a second Manson humbucker to offer a "fuller neck voicing to more closely match the raw and powerful sounding bridge humbucker pickup". There's the usual three-way switching, too. So far, so standard.

But this is a Matt Bellamy model. Where's the rocket launcher? We'll start by reminding you of the £569 retail price, so don't expect to take control of your keyboard player's rig just yet. That said, we'll assume you've already spotted that little button on the upper horn. That's the kill switch, one of the most simple yet addictive ways of introducing on-body effects to a guitar.

Moving on, you'll find the Canadian hard maple neck and Indian laurel fingerboard. Once again, it's an economical, minimal design without front-facing fret markers (there are dots on the side), but it is a compound 305 to 406mm (12 to 16-inch) radius, making it ideal if you make your money playing chords then blow the lot at the other end of the neck. The matching headstock completes the look, with a Manson logo – rather than the Cort logo of the MBC-1 – and on the back you'll find a set of Cort-branded locking tuners.

There are two cavities on the back of the MBM-1: one on the upper horn for the kill switch, and one for the rest of the electronics. Intrigued to see just how those stuttering effects are implemented, we opened up both for a quick delve. The kill switch is wired in the standard way, sending the signal to ground, creating the momentary cut-out when pressed. Follow the wire back to the control cavity and you'll notice that there's plenty of space for additional batteries and wiring in there, and that those humbuckers are four-conductor, so if you wanted to split them at a later stage, you can.

4. You don't get many satin necks that also feature a compound radius and play as comfortably as this one in this price range. It's a 'soft V' profile, yet another step away from the same old standards

5. The MBM-1's chrome-finished hardware, including this tune-o-matic style bridge, contributes to its sleek, utilitarian aesthetic

TAKING CONTROL

We catch up with Manson's new Mr Big, Matt Bellamy

First up, how did your involvement on the business side of Manson Guitar Works come about?
"It really all started from Hugh retiring and him passing it on to me to keep it going. It's run by Adrian [Ashton, Manson CEO] and there's about four or five employees there. It was good timing, too, because at the time the band was finishing a tour [in 2019] and it seemed like a good time to put some focus into this. It's close to my heart because it's a small company based in Devon, where I'm from. The factory is just down the road from where I went to school. So it's nice to be part of a small business in Devon; that's my homeland."

How important is it to you to be able to offer affordable guitars via Manson?
"Over the years we had a lot of enquiries from people who just can't afford to pay the £1,800 to £2,000 for a handmade Manson. The Meta series don't always have all the electronics built in, but I'm hoping that if our collaboration with Cort goes deeper, we might be able to get some guitars with some of the more special effects stuff built-in.

"We've been working with Cort – the majority of the guitars that we do are handmade in Devon – but since I've come onboard we've done a deal with Cort for a higher volume of guitars at a lower price. We design them, they manufacture them and send them to us, then we put the electronics in, verify the guitar and send them out. So our Meta series is really our first foray into real low-priced guitars that are Manson-branded and everything."

What's next for Manson Guitar Works?
"I have lots of ideas about how to try to develop the company further, expanding it with other guitar lines. Different styles of guitars – maybe even other signature models and that kind of stuff. I always felt the company has been aimed towards metal and hard rock styles, so I'd like to expand the range to encompass vintage-style guitars, classic-style as well as modern guitars.

"We might also start doing a really high-end, precise exact replica of one of my first Manson guitars that I had made. There are two guitars that I regard as the two most special guitars that I've had, and they were made around about 20 years ago. There's the Delorean – the one that I used on the first few tours with the band – and it has that metal, aluminium look like the DeLorean from *Back To The Future*. The other one I just used to call the 'Black Manson', but Hugh has another name for it, 007 or something. That was the first one to have all the electronics in. It had the proximity wah-wah, the phaser, it also had a ribbon control in it. I've used that guitar on pretty much every album that Muse has ever recorded: it's like my go-to recording guitar. So we're thinking this year or next year to do a limited-edition replica as a celebration."

Will you continue to experiment with the electronics onboard?
"I've got lots of ideas around integrating technology into guitars and we keep trying to find ways to make that more cost-effective. The main thing I'm focusing on right now – my favourite effect to have built-into a guitar – is the Whammy pedal. I have all the components of that built into the guitar itself, and then I also have the Kaoss Pad as well. So, essentially, instead of having the whammy bar, I've got the X/Y controller and I can set it to anything from a divebomb to just going up or down a tone, or entire octaves. At the moment that's very expensive, but we're hoping to do a collaboration with DigiTech where we can maybe launch a guitar that has that built in.

"Up until now we've had the XY pad as a MIDI controller, and obviously you can control anything with MIDI. But some people buy the guitar thinking that they can just get effects straight out of the box; they don't realise that you actually have to plug it into something like a synth or effects unit. So what I'm keen to do is a guitar that can do something quite impressive using the XY controller straight out of the box and something like a Whammy/pitch shifter built into the guitar."

PHOTO COPYRIGHT MANSON GUITAR WORKS LTD. PHOTO BY JOLYON HOLROYD

The neck plate of this bolt-on model provides a subtle reminder of the successful Cort/Manson partnership

Feel & Sounds

The MBM-1 immediately feels comfortable in our lap. The body shape and weight is agile, with everything in reach – and with so little to get in the way, it's straight to playing. The maple neck comes with an increasingly popular satin finish, and combined with the 'soft V' profile and low-action setup of our review model, this design is clearly built for comfort *and* speed. The neck leans toward the modern side, and the 'soft' part of that description is accurate. While it's noticeable, it's not a pronounced ridge like you'd find on a 50s Strat, nor is it lollipop-thin like a modern shred machine.

We tried the MBM-1 on a number of different Bellamy-inspired settings. Played clean, we're rewarded with warm but not woolly rhythm sounds. It's here that we miss that neck single coil the most, but there is still some snap and depth to the sound, at least. It's under some generous Diezel-powered gain from our UAD emulation that the bridge 'bucker really springs to life. The sound is big, thick and full of harmonics, and

Simple, considered design points don't fit at this price bracket, but they're here on this guitar, from the placement of the switches, to the future-proof control cavity, and easy tweaking of the truss rod

tuning to drop D really hits the sweet spot with our review model. Even with a fairly large amount of gain, there's still separation between the notes and it maintains its core sound. Jumping back and forth between the pickups confirms that Cort/Manson has indeed struck a great balance: the tones change, but the volume doesn't.

Not everyone is going to use this guitar on zero or 60, though, and there are some versatile tones to be found in the middle, too. While the svelte and sleek overall aesthetic doesn't conjure smoky blues tones or 'vintage mojo', it's perfectly feasible that the MBM-1 can cover you for the humbucker tones in your set.

Verdict

This price point is a savage arena. Just look at what's available from the likes of PRS, Gretsch, Fender and more for under £600 and you'll find some serious contenders vying for the mid-priced crown. There are a lot of parallels between the ideas and designs that have stemmed from Bellamy and Manson's minds, and the ones that Eddie Van Halen implemented with his own EVH brand.

The overriding impression we got from playing the MBM-1 is that everything onboard has a purpose: playability and convenience come first, from simple time-saving features such as the exposed truss rod wheel, to the fact that the control cavity is begging to have some more electronics installed. Of course, the elephant that used to be in the room is that neck humbucker. A coil-split would make this an absolute all-rounder, but the good news is that it is still a mod you can do yourself (or Manson will oblige for an extra £55).

For Bellamy and Muse fans, this is just what they've been looking for. For those who don't necessarily like the band but still want an affordable, highly playable and great-sounding rock machine, the MBM-1 represents an open book with minimal signature association. Once we're allowed back outside, we expect to be seeing a lot of these on stages everywhere. G

MANSON META MBM-1

PRICE: £569
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Single-cut bolt on solidbody electric
NECK: Canadian hard maple, satin finish
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel, 305-406mm (12-16") radius
FRETS: 22
HARDWARE: Cort/Manson tune-o-matic-style bridge and stopbar, Cort locking tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Manson humbuckers, volume, tone, 3-position switch, kill switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.9
RANGE OPTIONS: Available via Manson Guitar Works: Manson aluminium control knob (£25), coil-split mod (£55), Sustainiac Sustainer upgrade (£369), Manson Mother Superior quad-rail pickup upgrade (£189), Manson gigbag (£45)
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Satin Black (as reviewed), Starlight Silver

Manson Guitar Works
01364 653751
www.mansonguitarworks.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Slick, playable, versatile and affordable; kill switch; primed for modding but equally great as is

CONS Some would lose the kill switch in favour of a single coil or coil-split as standard

MAYBACH LITTLE WING FLAT TOP CUTAWAY
£1,899

WHAT IS IT? Delicious old-school build, a cutaway 00/parlour-size electric semi with Amber humbuckers and an aged nitro finish

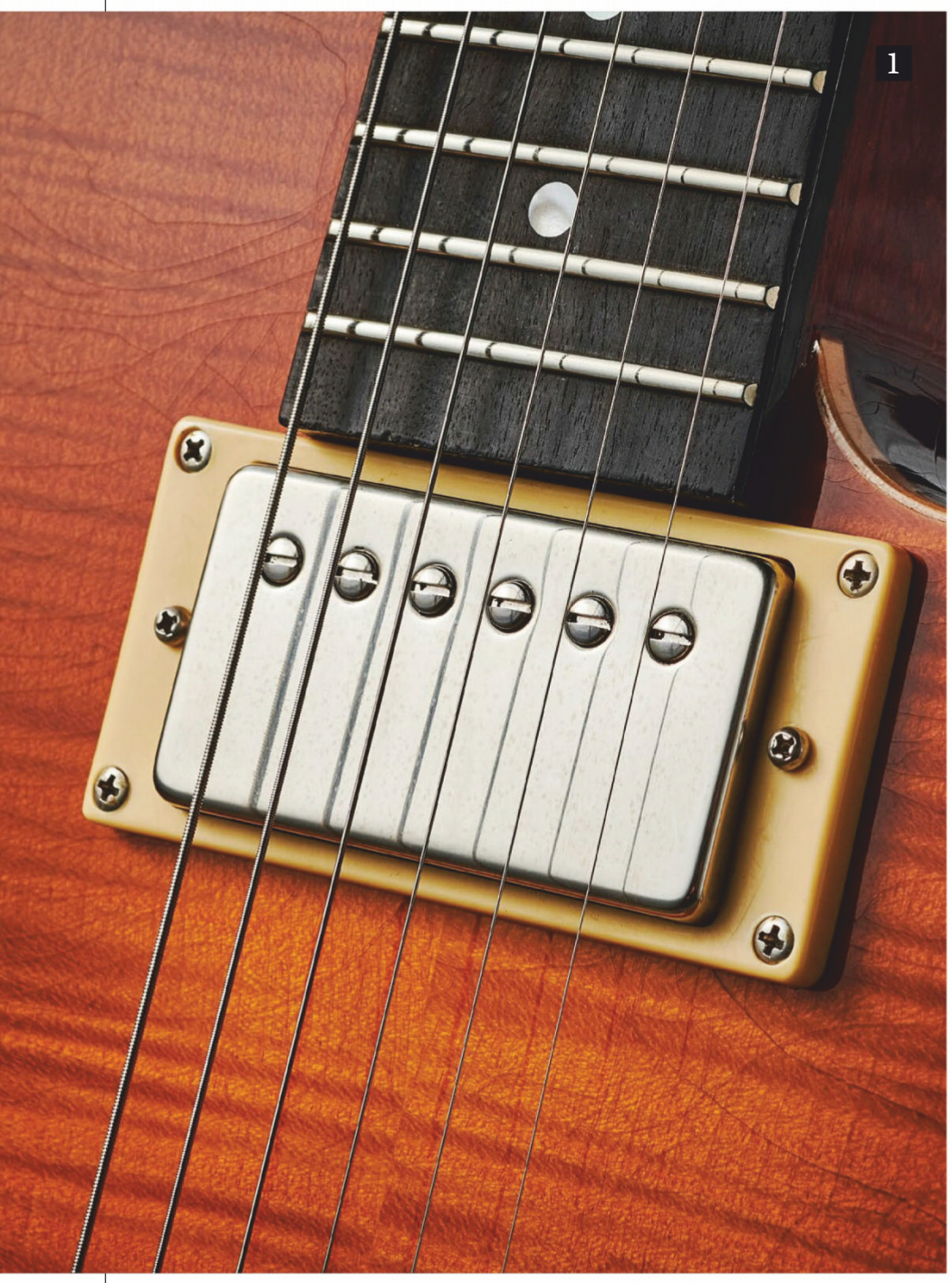
New Faithful

In among a range of copies is Maybach's Little Wing – the company's only original design and a rather fine slice of classic guitar craft from central Europe

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

This writer's head hit his laptop keyboard with a resonant thump after a request to review another copy guitar. As if our market doesn't have enough of those already, here are some more. Maybach's range covers the bolt-on and set-neck classics in some style, which are pretty similar to Eastman's more 'inspired by' instruments, not least on price. Yet Maybach's instruments aren't made in Asia. They're constructed in the Czech Republic and Germany and, from what we're told, in a pretty old-school fashion, too. Sensing our reluctance to review what are pretty straight copies, however, brand CEO Toni Götz quickly suggested a more original model: this Little Wing with its cutaway 00/parlour-size body. The Little Wing is available with a flat or arched maple top in both cutaway and non-cutaway styles (see Range Options in the final spec), and, like B&G or Wide Sky, imagines a sort of prototype pre-50s electric guitar.

Far from futuristic, then, this lil' Maybach looks and feels like something made a few years ago. Quite a few years, in fact. The nitro lacquer's cracking and relicing is relatively light, which makes it all the more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2

1. With a measured DCR of 6.94kohms this Amber Spirit of '59 falls right into the PAF camp

2. The slotted headstock adds to the 'prototype electric' vibe. The Schaller GrandTune tuners are beautifully made – these feature classical-style rollers

This Little Wing sounds glorious, with a nicely filled pillow-like depth to the neck pickup that keeps us engrossed for ages

believable. Numerous times during this test we glanced at the guitar and thought, "Oh no, a ding!" until we remembered it was (hopefully) there by design. But there's plenty more to the Little Wing than a realistic finish.

Its shape and size are very close to that of a Les Paul: the flanks of the lower bouts as they flow into the waist are slightly flatter, and the bass side shoulder is a little more relaxed as its line curves to meet the 16th fret. But the main visual difference here is the more obvious cutaway, which is deeper and less curved. The slab body has an overall depth of 46mm and is mainly two-piece centre-joined mahogany with a lovely lightly flamed maple cap that's approximately 6mm thick. The edge is left natural, like a PRS, to simulate edge binding, the two f-holes are unbound, and as you peer through and tap the body you can see it's routed out to leave an ES-335-like centre block. The neck is one-piece mahogany with pretty much quarter-sawn grain, and the full neck (both in depth and width) fits into the body over a small body ledge and into the pickup cavity, a little unusual for the style but not dissimilar to PRS's long-standing neck join.

The slot headstock certainly adds to that sort of 'prototype electric' style and is faced with what looks like ebony. But the big surprise is the set of Schaller GrandTune tuners, which are more the sort of thing you'd see on a classical guitar with their white plastic rollers. The actual tuners are beautiful: state-of-the-art but retro in style with a quoted 18:1 ratio and oval grained ivoroid buttons. Aside from that surprise, hardware is Les Paul-like, as are the pickup complement and controls.

Still, it's a subtly different drive with the pickup selector toggle switch placed close to the bridge, with the classic Gibson control layout some way below, which is probably sensible with that slightly smaller shoulder, not to mention the sealed semi construction, meaning all the wiring goes in and out through the bridge pickup cavity. The only way to access the controls is to pull them out, but what we can see through the f-hole looks very vintage-like, with cloth-covered wire, CTS pots and modern-style wiring.

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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Feel & Sounds

Not everyone enjoys aged and reliced guitars, but when it's done as well as this it really is like slipping on those old trainers that have pounded the miles and feel just right. There's a delicacy to the lightweight build that draws us in, too. Strapped on, the lack of body girth gives a slight neck dive, but with a weight like this that's easily balanced by your right forearm, and in seconds the instrument feels a part of you.

The neck certainly feels out of step with more modern times, as it's relatively deep and wide. For example, it measures 23.4mm at the 1st fret and 24.7mm by the 10th as the neck curves into the quite traditional rounded heel. If that puts it into the larger Gibson '58-style then its full shoulders add to the feel of size with quite a taper, width-wise, from 43.2mm at the nut spreading to 58.2mm at the 22nd fret. Although the saddle radius is Gibson standard (305mm/12 inches), the dark ebony fingerboard measures slightly flatter, around 254mm (10 inches) in lower positions and more like 356mm (14 inches) at the 22nd fret. The wire (approximately 2.4mm wide by 1.1mm high) doesn't feel over-big and is nicely installed, and with a pretty slinky string height and minimal relief it's an excellent player. We'd probably tweak the intonation a little, and those classic tuners do creak slightly as you tune, but once the strings have settled it's a very stable instrument, tuning-wise.

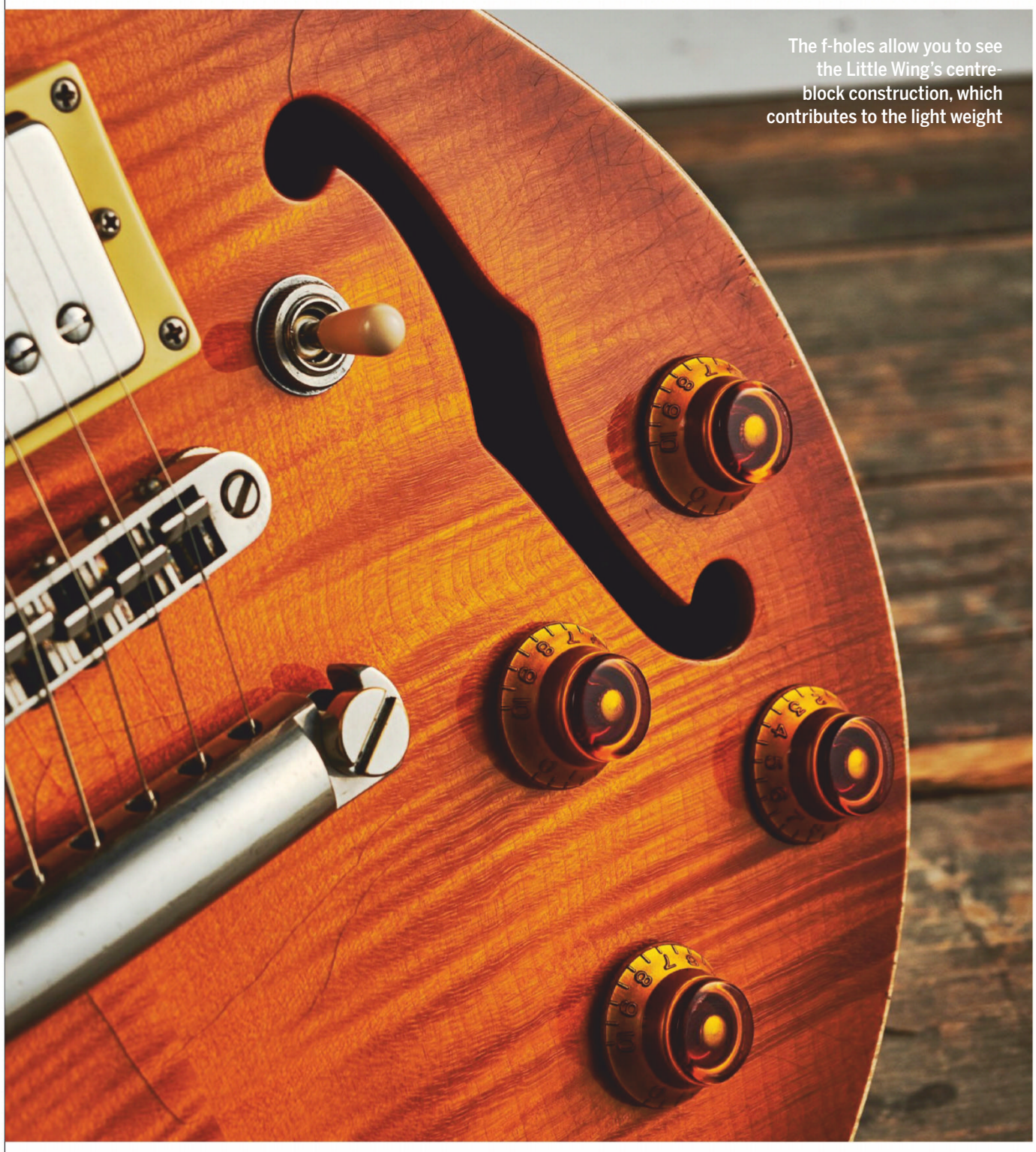
Which is all good because this Little Wing sounds glorious, with a nicely filled pillow-like depth to the neck pickup that keeps us engrossed for ages, especially using the volume and tone – the former softening the attack while the latter, as you roll it back, brings in a small midrange-y

3. The heel shape is very elegant, although the neck join is more PRS-like than typical Gibson

4. Wolfgang Damm's Amber pickups are the choice of numerous European makers, not least Vigier. The bridge, marked 'T', has a measured DCR of 8.10kohms

5. The quality continues with the aged bridge and stud tailpiece from Gotoh. The tailpiece is lightweight aluminium

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra



The f-holes allow you to see the Little Wing's centre-block construction, which contributes to the light weight

hump. Put your plectrum down and use your finger pads and this is pure Knopfler-esque subtlety.

But it's not just more intimate styles at which the Little Wing excels. The bridge pickup can initially sound a little sharp in contrast to the neck, but that's what many love about the PAF style: surprising width from neck to bridge, the latter with a much more single-coil-like tonality and attack. While this guitar doesn't have the lower-end 'chunk' of a Les Paul or the solid midrange thickness (or the weight!), as we crank things up the resonant drive dips into the LP Junior's palette, and at both bridge and mix positions offers superb classic crunch. You need some pretty serious volume to coax any feedback, so if those on-the-edge kind of sounds are your thing, we can't help thinking that adding unpotted pickups and a Bigsby might well make this a near-religious experience. Beautiful guitar making matched by equally attractive sounds.

A simply gorgeous example of old-school guitar making, and the realistic ageing and relicing just add to the vibe

Verdict

We'd wager it's the Les Paul, SG, Strat and Tele clones that pay the bills at Maybach compared with the trickle of income that this Little Wing will provide. But this is a simply gorgeous example of old-school guitar making, and the realistic ageing and relicing just add to the vibe. If someone told us it'd been built in the 70s by a local guitar maker, we'd probably believe them. But loaded with these very classy Amber PAF-alikes and a hugely responsive circuit on this beautifully resonant chassis, the guitar excels – from its playability right through to the old-school classic voices we hear. Can we order one with a Bigsby, please? G

MAYBACH LITTLE WING FLAT TOP CUTAWAY

PRICE: £1,899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Czech Republic/Germany
TYPE: Single-cutaway, centre-blocked thinline electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany, chambered w/ centre block
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, pearl dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Aged nickel tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud aluminium tailpiece (by Gotoh), individual Schaller GrandTune classical-style tuners w/ oval grained ivoroid buttons
STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 51mm
ELECTRICS: Nickel-covered Amber Spirit of '59 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.06/6.73
OPTIONS: Order with either humbuckers or single-coil P-90s
RANGE OPTIONS: Little Wing range also includes: flat-top Non Cutaway (£1,879); Arched Top version is available in both non-cutaway (£2,095) and cutaway styles (£2,160)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Midnight Sunset (as reviewed), Earl Grey, Havana Tobacco, Honey Pie and Ice Tea as well as opaque options – aged nitrocellulose

DCM Music
07963 278601
www.dcm-music.com

8/10

PROS Beautiful old-school build; realistic ageing and cracked lacquer; super sounds and pickup choice

CONS The tuners are an odd choice; overshadowed by copies in the range

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1
2
3
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GAIN
TB MASTER
BASS
MASTER
MIDDLE
TREBLE
TONE
TREBLE BOOST
BYPAS
The Copper
VICTORY V4 SERIES

VICTORY V4 THE COPPER PREAMP PEDAL
£369

WHAT IS IT? Not just an overdrive pedal, this is a complete replacement preamp that adds two AC30-inspired foot-switchable channels to your existing amp

Fair Cop

Victory's new preamp pedal adds a modern twist to vintage Brit tone with spec-beating valves onboard

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

Since their debut a couple of years ago, Victory's award-winning V4 series of preamp pedals has proved very popular, distilling full-sized Victory tone into a pedalboard-sized steel case, with real valve power at proper high voltages. This issue, we're looking at the new and much-anticipated V4 pedal version of Victory's very impressive VC35 The Copper head, a modern boutique-flavoured tribute to the AC30 that's full of vintage Brit chime, jangle and crunch. Like the other V4 pedal preamps, the V4 The Copper isn't just a stompbox. With the capacity to function as a foot-switchable complete preamp replacement, it can significantly expand your rig's versatility.

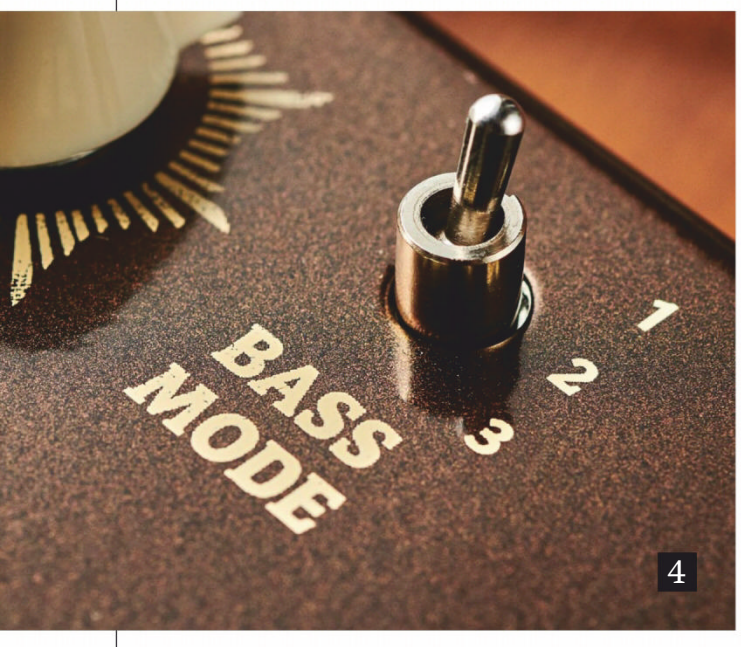
The Copper is typical of the other V4 pedals we've seen so far, with a rugged steel case that's perforated on the back and one side to help cool the two NOS EC900 triodes and two CV4014s, which produce The Copper's vintage tones. According to Victory, the V4s have an all-valve signal path and are the only valve preamp pedals with four valves. If you live with a valve amplifier, you'll probably know that modern valve quality isn't what it used to be, expensive replacements sometimes degrading in a year or less of minimal use.

1. The Copper can be hooked up as a stompbox drive pedal, but the best tones happen when it's used in 'amp through' mode, where it functions as a foot-switchable complete preamp replacement

2. Generous ventilation helps to keep The Copper's four valves from overheating – just keep your beers out of harm's way...

3. The remote TRS (Tip/Ring/Sleeve) jack allows the V4 pedals to work with external remote switching options. It's a typical pro feature that means the V4 doesn't have to be on the floor

4. The three-way Bass Mode switch works with The Copper's master tone control to simplify dialling in the V4, making it easy to suit various amps and guitars



Victory is justifiably proud that the valves used in its V4s are some of the best ever. The CV4014s were made in the UK in 1981 to NATO specifications at Mullard's famous Mitcham factory, then shipped to the Royal Navy's supply depot in Spring Quarry, Wiltshire, part of an underground nuclear bunker complex, where they've been stored for the past four decades in perfect conditions. Meanwhile, the EC900s are equally robust, made by EI on former Philips production lines in what was Yugoslavia, allowing Victory to offer an unprecedented two-year warranty on all the V4's valves, which they hold ample stocks of. It's worth pointing out that while they're visually similar, neither valve is interchangeable with the commonly used 12AX7 twin triode; the bases have seven pins rather than nine.

Internally, there's very little free space and yet the electronics are beautifully assembled, with neat hand wiring and top-quality components throughout. There are two footswitches on the pedal for bypass and toggling between Normal and Treble Boost voices. You can also switch both functions remotely using the TRS jack on the side of the case. There's a single gain control with two separate master volumes, accompanied by LED indicators to let you know which voice is active. Tone control comes from a regular passive bass, mid and treble EQ network, augmented by a three-position bass cut toggle switch and a global tone knob, which works like the Vox cut control except it's the right way round, with the most treble fully clockwise.

On the rear panel you'll find the familiar V4 jack socket array, allowing the V4 to hook up in line between guitar and amp, or in 'amp through' mode, making use of your amplifier's effects loop. Power comes from an external brick. Pedalboard users take note: your power supply needs to provide 12 volts and at least 800mA of current; the one that comes with The Copper is rated at two amps, giving plenty of headroom.

Feel & Sounds

Like all of Victory's V4 pedals, The Copper is exceptionally quiet in operation, with practically inaudible hiss and hum levels. While you can use the V4 like a stompbox between your guitar and amp, if your amp has an effects loop you can opt for the preferred four-cable 'amp through' mode, where the V4 becomes a foot-switchable alternative preamp section, completely replacing your amp's front-end at the tap of the Bypass footswitch.

There are plenty of authentic 50s and 60s tone in The Copper's Normal mode, which stays clean almost to the top of the gain knob's travel. With bags of headroom, it's ideal for emulating the instrumental

Like all the V4 pedals, there's a solid steel case with a protective bar over the controls for maximum reliability. The military spec valves are guaranteed for two years and should last much longer

hits of that era, from The Shadows to The Ventures, sounding particularly impressive when teamed with a hefty dose of reverb and a tape delay.

Meanwhile, the Treble Boost voice adds more gain, with complex highs and upper mid harmonics that shift with picking strength. This mode brings this V4 into the late 60s and early 70s blues and classic rock era, with a lot more gain on tap. It's ballsy and quite aggressive, working best when you dig in hard. With a Strat you can get into Rory Gallagher territory, while swapping for a Les Paul delivers fat Bryan Adams-style crunch chords. The bass cut switch works in a similar manner to the one on the VC35 amp: position 1 cuts bass on the treble boost mode only; position 2 cuts bass on both modes; position 3 is full bass in both modes. We found this very handy for tightening up the bass when using a Les Paul with a lot of gain in treble boost mode.

Verdict

Victory's V4 The Copper is packed with AC30-inspired tone. Used in the clever 'amp through' mode, it's almost as if you're playing through an entirely different rig, with a much wider frequency response that gives the impression of jumping from mono to high-definition stereo. It also sounds great when recorded, helped by the impressively low noise levels.

Used in the clever 'amp through' mode, it's almost as if you're playing through an entirely different rig

Like all Victory products, the V4 The Copper will handle non-stop professional use, with a solid five-year warranty and two years on the valves. However, like any floor-dwelling equipment, it's vulnerable to those liquid accidents that occasionally happen on pub gigs. Bear in mind a pint of beer tipped over hot valves running at high voltages is likely to result in 'Hamlet moment' pyrotechnics.

Public service announcements aside, Victory's V4 The Copper is quite brilliant if you like the AC30 vibe. Its enhanced highs, three-dimensional harmonics, juicy naturally compressed cleans and wicked crunch overdrives all add up to a wealth of inspiration. Talking of wealth, it isn't cheap – good things rarely are – but built to Victory's usual high standards, it's excellent value for money, going way beyond the one or two sounds you might expect from a solid-state AC30-style overdrive/boost stompbox. Definitely worth checking out. G

VICTORY V4 THE COPPER PREAMP PEDAL

PRICE: £369
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: All valve preamp
VALVES: 2x EC900, 2x CV4014
DIMENSIONS: 225 (w) x 140 (h) x 79mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6/3.5
CASE: Steel
CHANNELS: Normal and Treble Boost voices, foot-switchable
CONTROLS: Bass, mid, treble, gain, normal volume, treble boost volume, 3-way bass cut switch, global tone control
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button Normal/Treble Boost select, Bypass
CONNECTIONS: Input, Through, Loop In, Loop out, Effect Out, all on 6.5mm jack
POWER: 12V DC (adaptor supplied), 800mA minimum, recommended 2000mA
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The expanding V4 preamp pedal range currently includes the Countess, Sherriff, Jack and Kraken, all at £369. There's also the Duchess powered preamp pedal at £699

Victory Amplification
info@victoryamps.com
www.victoryamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Wide range of AC30-inspired tones available; superb Treble Boost drive mode

CONS We felt the Treble Boost mode could have done with a touch more gain, but that's all

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

the Wishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Joe Doe 'Tumblin' Cowboys' Acoustic £2,599

CONTACT **Ben Court** PHONE **07970 323855** WEB **www.joedoeguitars.com** **Words** David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

"Duke 'Nine Lives' Jones was a Hollywood stuntman who worked during the 1950s golden era of Hollywood Westerns. If he wasn't jumping from a speeding stagecoach to a galloping horse, he was being shotgunned in the chest and flung through saloon doors. However, while performing a simple horse fall for the 1957 MGM film *Shotgun Sheriff*, Jones was crushed underneath the animal and suffered numerous broken ribs and a shattered femur. It was during his recovery that he started playing guitar..." So begins the entirely fictitious backstory of how this unique creation from Joe Doe (alias luthier Ben Court) came about.

Remember the Joe Doe by Vintage electrics we reviewed back in issue 463? They had an equally tongue-in-cheek story attached to them that was all part of the fun. The same is true here, but, at £2.5k, the 'Tumblin' Cowboys' has a second string as a serious instrument.

So, where does Ben draw his inspiration from to create these instruments? "Every guitar I build has a unique story built into it," he tells us. "Inspiration can come from real events – say, the Apollo 11 mission to the moon, or people, like Lucky Lucy, a stuntwoman from the 1950s. That's normally the spark I need to start creating a fictional character who would have owned and played the guitar." And to complete the picture, Ben adds: "My aim is to create a musical artefact that can be admired while hanging on a wall as well as played and beaten at a gig."

The 'Tumblin' Cowboys' acoustic has a Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides, plus a bolt-on mahogany neck with a rosewood fingerboard. The finish is, somewhat appropriately, Oscar Gold nitrocellulose on the sides and back of the neck, and overall the guitar has received a very light relicing. "I wanted it to look like it's taken a sucker punch or two, but nothing too bone-breaking," says Ben.

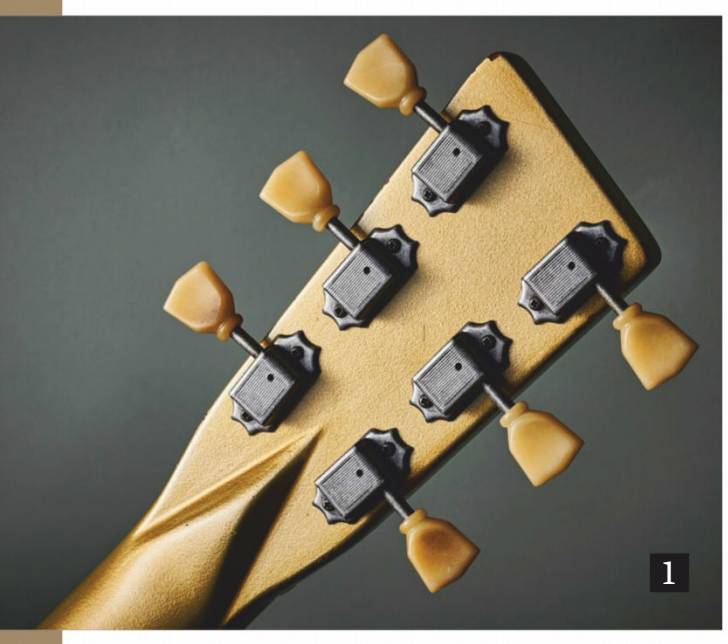
You will have noticed the 'Twist-O-Coil' pickup arrangement, which was inspired by Ben seeing a video featuring a 1959 Martin D-18E. It features a Bare Knuckle Apache neck-position single coil, so you can enjoy the "thrilling electric rodeo experience of amplified performance... if you're brave enough to try it".

The lucky owner of the guitar will also find candy inside its Kinsman case, with a branded 'Tumblin' Cowboys' guitar strap. And there are more surprises waiting inside the guitar's soundhole. "If you peek inside, you'll see an aged and signed photo from a long forgotten cowgirl sweetheart. Touch it for luck." G

1. The finish is nitrocellulose throughout with 'nicotine yellow' for the top and back and 'Oscar Gold' for the sides and back of the neck. Both received light relicing

2. The inlay uses flamed sycamore. "It's the origin stories that make them more than just wood, wire and magnets, so that's the magic I try to conjure up with each of my Joe Doe original builds," says Ben

3. Inside the guitar's soundhole is more hidden evidence of the fictitious Duke 'Nine Lives' Jones's past adventures with a singed photograph from an old flame, bearing the words, 'Always land on your feet, sugar'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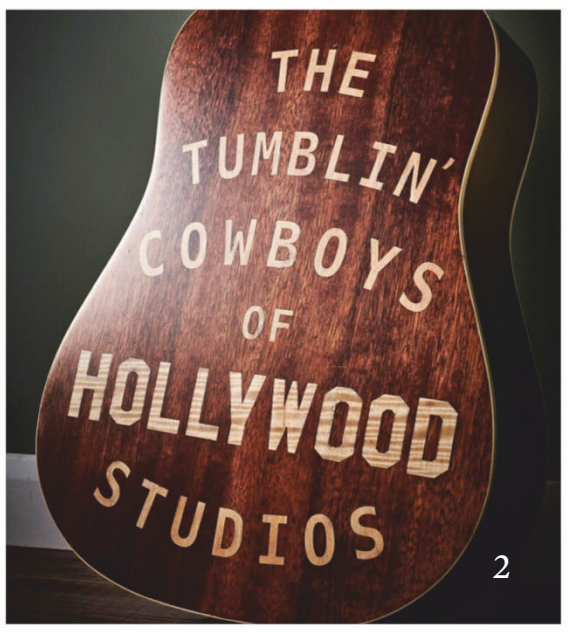

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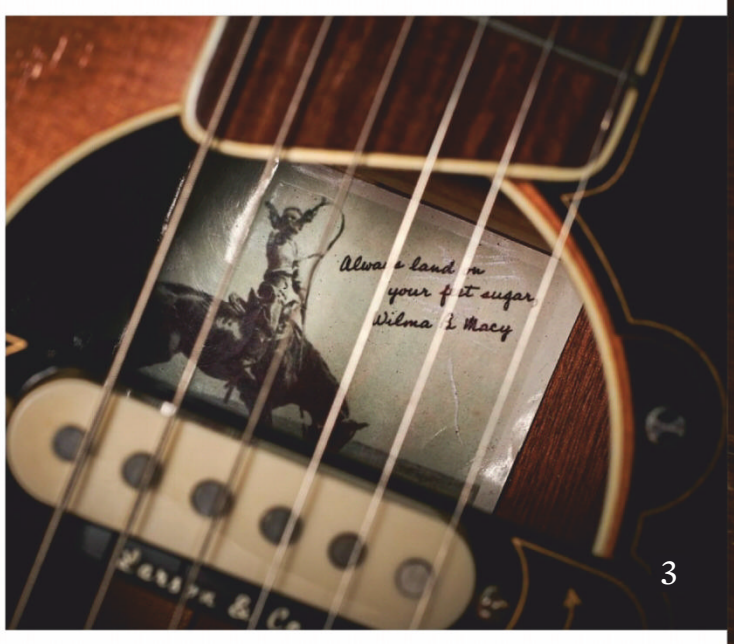
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4. With electronics inspired by a 1959 Martin D-18E, with perhaps a nod towards the Gibson J-160E for the surface mounting of the volume and tone controls, the 'Tumblin' Cowboys' acoustic features a Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides

5. Ben tells us he also drew inspiration from the real-life Hollywood stuntman Yakima Canutt who defied death several times. Spielberg paid tribute to Canutt in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* where Indy, played by Harrison Ford, is dragged along behind a horse

6. Ben's invention, the Twist-O-Coil system, finds a Bare Knuckle Apache pickup (which "tries its best to handle the inevitable feedback") mounted on a swivel device that gives the user a choice between a rhythm or lead configuration. Ben tells us this probably won't "win any tone awards..."

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Gibson Slash 'Victoria' Les Paul Standard Goldtop £2,999

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

JARGON CRUNCHING

Who's Victoria?
Given Slash's rock star 'dabblings', you'd be forgiven for thinking that this Victoria model is named after a long-lost love. In a way it is, but not how you might suspect. Victoria is the name of the woman who stole a number of guitars from Slash's studio way back in the 90s. Slash has since recovered most of them, but the Goldtop remains at large. As they say, if you can't be with the one you love, get Gibson to recreate it for you!

What's this all about, then?

Have you ever heard the phrase 'You can never have too many guitars'? Well, our favourite tab smokin', Les Paul totin', top-hatted guitar legend is testing the boundaries of the gearhead's mantra by adding another signature model to his Gibson Slash Collection, launched for 2020 at the NAMM Show. This time it's a Goldtop named – as many iconic guitars are – after a woman.

A collection? How many variations on a Les Paul can there be?

The Gibson Slash Collection is the first signature range that the company has worked on. Slash officially became Gibson's first 'Brand Ambassador' a few years ago, and a lot has changed at the company since. The Slash Collection was born out of discussions between Slash and Gibson's Cesar Gueikian about where the brand is heading, and the collection is based on some Gibson Custom Les Pauls that Slash spec'd for his own use, combined with some of Slash's favourite guitars from his 30-plus-year relationship with the brand. So far it has included the Slash Les Paul Standard in Appetite Burst and November Burst finishes, plus a limited-edition Les Paul Standard in Vermillion Burst and Anaconda Burst. There's also a J-45 for when you're feeling sensitive, and now this 'Victoria' Goldtop.

Slash clutching his new 'Victoria' model, surrounded by the rest of the Les Paul Standards in his Gibson signature collection

It's just a new finish, then?

It's a signature guitar, so for all intents and purposes, yes. This model carries an almost-identical spec to the other current Slash signature Les Pauls, and it takes an 'if it ain't broke...' approach to the most popular single-cut electric on the planet. But this series doesn't really appear to be about covering a wide tonal ground and versatile playing experience. As with any signature guitar, it's aimed at fans and we think it's one of the best-looking guitars in the range so far.

I like Slash! I like Goldtops! Tell me more...

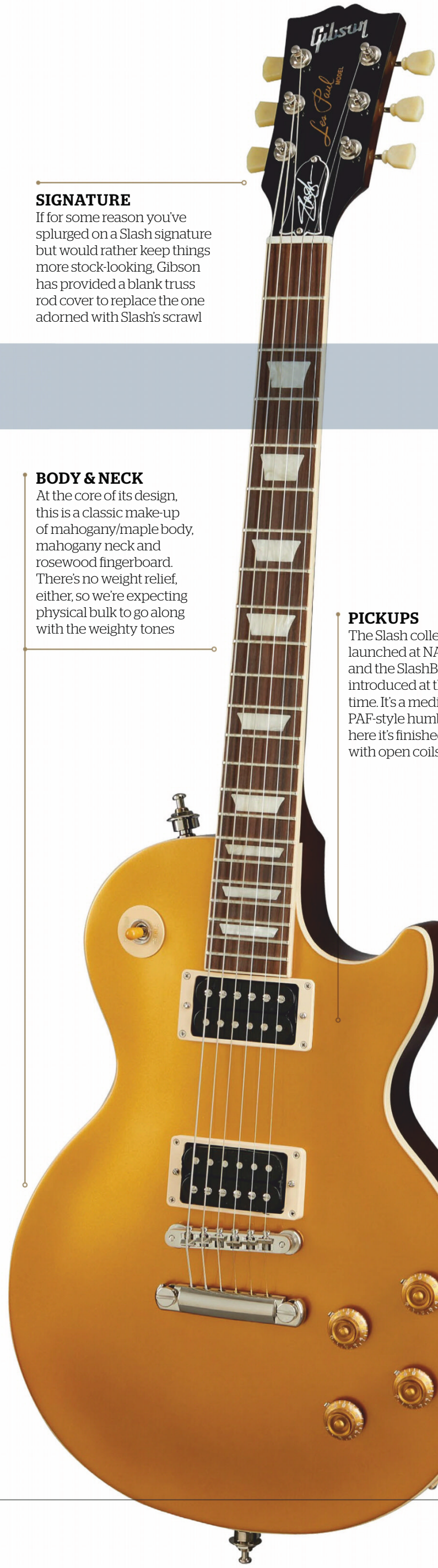
Okay, there's probably no need to hold onto your hats. At its core this is a mahogany-bodied/maple-capped, non-weight-relieved Les Paul with two humbuckers, the standard four controls and a three-way switch. The neck is also mahogany, carved to Slash's favourite C-shape profile and topped-off with a bound rosewood fingerboard.

What's signature about it?

As with the other Les Pauls in the range, this one is equipped with a pair of SlashBuckers, based on Gibson's Burstbucker pickups but using Alnico II magnets. In this case, they're presented in black with open coils. The guitar comes fitted with Schaller straplocks, a Graph Tech nut and a set of Slash Ernie Ball strings (0.010 to 0.046). You've probably also noticed the Slash signature on the truss rod cover (there's a blank one included, too), plus there's Slash's 'Skully' graphic on the back of the headstock. Inside the case you'll find a dusting of candy, including a Slash pick set, USA leather strap and multi-tool.

What else do I need to know?

That's about it: the guitars are shipping as of right now with a full retail price of £2,999. However, we're already seeing these offered online for a few hundred off that, putting this guitar into expensive but more affordable territory. Gibson isn't currently listing a left-handed version, but we're keeping our fingers crossed. G



SIGNATURE
If for some reason you've splurged on a Slash signature but would rather keep things more stock-looking, Gibson has provided a blank truss rod cover to replace the one adorned with Slash's scrawl

BODY & NECK
At the core of its design, this is a classic make-up of mahogany/maple body, mahogany neck and rosewood fingerboard. There's no weight relief, either, so we're expecting physical bulk to go along with the weighty tones

PICKUPS
The Slash collection launched at NAMM 2020, and the SlashBucker was introduced at the same time. It's a medium-output PAF-style humbucker, and here it's finished in black with open coils

ALSO OUT NOW...

BOSS WAZA CRAFT TB-2W TONE BENDER £TBC

As you can discover in Dazed & Confused on page 116, the Sola Sound Tone Bender is one of the Holy Grails of fuzz tones. In its latest addition to the Waza Craft range, Boss has introduced a collaboration with Sola Sound to recreate the revered Tone Bender Mk II. Boss and Sola Sound plucked a master Tone Bender Mk II (serial number 500) from the vaults to recreate the pedal, which features germanium transistors and the simple Level and Attack control layout in a compact Boss-size format. The pedal also includes a switchable voltage selector (seven to 12 volts) and selectable buffered/true bypass. It'll be available towards spring 2021, with the price yet to be confirmed.
www.roland.co.uk

YAMAHA PETER HOOK SIGNATURE BB BASS £1,129

Peter Hook has been hitting his knees on Yamaha basses throughout his career, and now Yamaha has honoured the man with the lowest-slung bass in rock with his own signature model. Hooky's new bass takes its cues from the BB1200 and BB734A models he plays the most, and includes a three-piece body, 21-fret, bolt-on neck and split-single-coil VSP7n pickup, along with a true active/passive preamp. On the back of the headstock there's Peter's signature, along with a shout-out to the former Joy Division/New Order man's hometown, reading 'Manchester, England!' It's available in BB1200S Red.
http://uk.yamaha.com

The Players

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

Members Only

Guitarists offer exclusive content for fans on Patreon

With most of 2020 a wipeout for gigging guitarists, more players are looking for ways to connect with fans and gain support via Patreon, a subscription service that offers perks to members. We take a look at what the Patreon schemes for some of the world's finest guitarists have to offer...

Eric Bibb

patreon.com/ericbibb

£7 per month (plus VAT)

One of the greatest acoustic bluesmen around offers weekly mini-gigs of three to four songs to fans for a truly intimate experience, while also allowing Eric to keep playing shows and support his craft, despite being off the road.

Jim Campilongo

patreon.com/jimcampilongo

£Give what you can (min of $5 recommended)

With gear showcases, performances and lessons (some even include tab), this is essential content for anyone who admires the sublime playing of Campilongo – and really all guitar players should take a listen.

Nita Strauss

patreon.com/hurricanenita

From £4.50 per month (plus VAT)

Nita's masterclass clinics are always recommended, so a Patreon offering livestreams (from category 2 upwards) with Q&As is a logical step. With plenty of cool extras, these members gain access to a Facebook community, too.

Darrel Higham

patreon.com/darrelhighammusic

£4.50 per month (plus VAT)

The British rockabilly ace offers great value for anyone looking to learn more from an expert with four tuition videos per month. Darrel will focus on showcasing solos – his own, as well as those that have influenced him.

Martin Miller

patreon.com/MartinMillerGuitar

From £4.50 per month (plus VAT)

The German guitarist has plenty on offer with three different packages – Bronze, Silver and Gold – which include access to community groups, online group tutorials, listening parties and tab, plus there are also Helix and Axe-Fx patches.

Nigel Price

patreon.com/Nigethejazzer

From £2.50 per month (plus VAT)

UK jazz player Nigel Price also offers a tiered Patreon membership. The first tier gets you access to album reviews, monthly blog and early access to releases, while the VIP Learn With Me membership offers lessons and gig tickets.

Tyler Bryant

patreon.com/thetylerbryant

From £1 per month (plus VAT)

The US blues-rock talent caters to all pockets with highest-tier subscribers getting streams, Jam Zone backing tracks, exclusive B-sides, a personalised video message, guitar pick, and handwritten lyrics to a song of their choice. **[RL]**

ALSO THIS MONTH

SLOWHAND AUCTION

Bidding started at a cool $1 million for Eric Clapton's 1954 'Slowhand' Strat, which went to auction in the US in November, hosted by Gotta Have Rock And Roll. Clapton bought the hardtail Sunburst model in 1979 and tuned it to open G for slide, and it was in regular circulation until 1985. The serial number reads '7431' and under the neck butt it reads 'T-G-54' in pencil, 'TG' standing for Tadeo Gomez, the Fender employee who shaped the neck. Failed to sell, though.

TOTO-LLY FOR TECHNIQUE

Steve Lukather believes knowledge of music theory has been essential to his creativity over the years. "It has really helped my playing" he told *Ultimate Guitar*, "especially back in the day when I had to come up with parts on the spot. They'd just give you a chord symbol and count off the tune and you're supposed to come up with something brilliant on the spot.

"I could give you a thousand reasons why knowing harmony and theory has helped the writing process, the options, the improvisation. The biggest lie is that knowing how to read music or knowing anything about music theory takes your soul away."

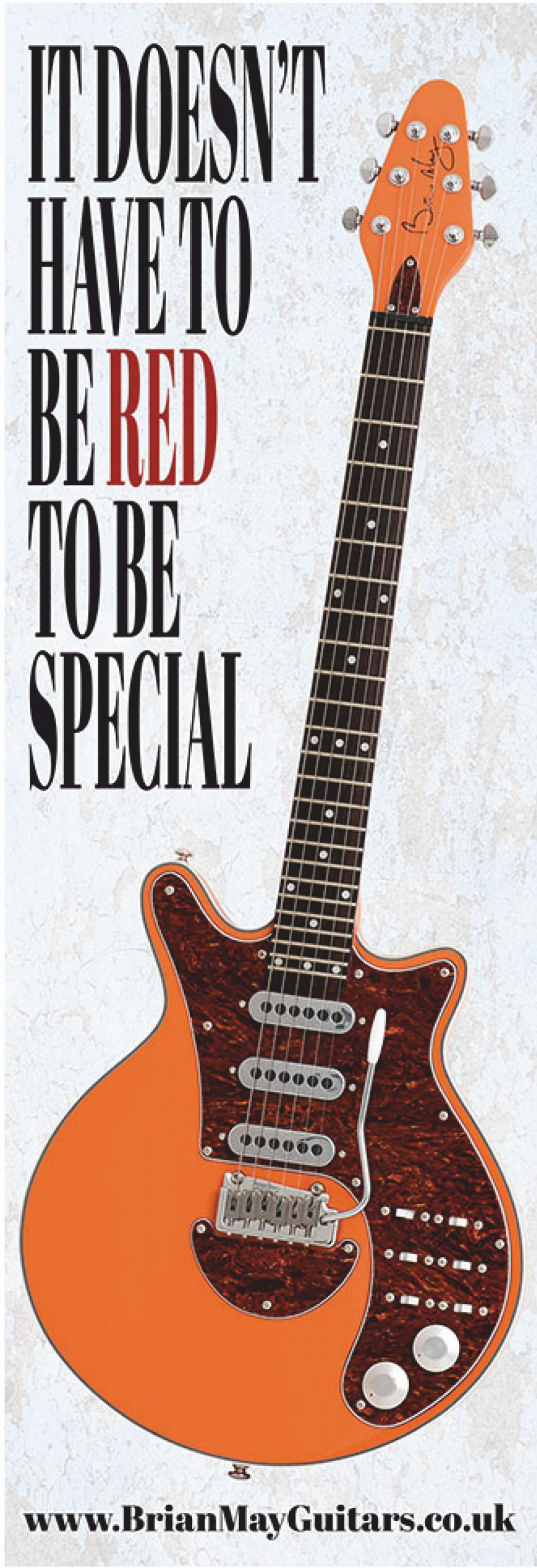
CALL TO ROCK AT MOBO AWARDS

London rock-duo Nova Twins have penned an open letter challenging the MOBO Awards organisers to introduce an Alternative/Rock category for 2021. The duo, which comprises Amy Love on guitar and vocals, and Georgia South on bass, argued that: "We want to raise the voices of the unheard, diversifying the space for alternative POC bands, but we can't do it alone... People often don't know rock 'n' roll was largely originated by a black woman. Starting her career in the 1930s, Sister Rosetta Tharpe went on to inspire household names through the decades... We all owe her a huge debt and with the help of others, we want to continue the work she started. We feel this needs to be represented in the MOBO Awards."

LEGENDARY FRIENDS

In an interview with *Guitarist* contributor and *Guitar Techniques* editor Neville Marten, Duane Eddy recalled swapping guitars with two legends. "Eddie Cochran was a dear friend. I was with him a couple of days before he died, staying in the same hotel off Oxford Street in London. He was with his fiancée Sharon Sheeley. She was a great songwriter, too – wrote *Poor Little Fool* for Ricky Nelson among other things.

"We swapped guitars. They had similar necks, but I think mine had the best neck in the business. Everyone used to say that. Buddy Holly and I passed each other going to and from the stage one day and he said, 'I wanna try your guitar,' and I took his Strat and he took my Gretsch. He said, 'Man, this has got a great neck!'"



THE LINEUP

Albums

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

PHOTO BY ALEX SOLCA PHOTOGRAPHY

Steve Lukather with Toto frontman Joseph Williams who features on multiple tracks

Steve Lukather I Found The Sun Again

The Players Club — **10/10**

Toto's guitar main-man returns with seductive solo album

At this point, Steve Lukather needs little introduction, perhaps even to the man on the street, let alone to readers of guitar magazines. In short, this is a new studio album of originals and covers that Luke recorded with various other A-list musicians – Greg Bissonette, David Paich, Joseph Williams – and the boss of his side project band, Ringo Starr.

Luke states that it's his most honest record ever, with live tracking and solos, no clicks, mostly first/second takes and no synths. The focus is on eight solid songs featuring interactive playing and comprising five originals and three from-the-70s cover songs. The three covers are well realised: Traffic's *The Low Spark Of High Heeled Boys* uses space well with great piano, organ and guitar solos; Joe Walsh's *Welcome To The Club* has a punchy groove (Luke evokes many of Walsh's classic delivery traits); and Robin Trower's *Bridge Of Sighs* sounds as spacey as ever with big reverb and a throbbing Uni-Vibe plus neck-position single-coil guitar tone.

Of the originals, the 'big internet hit' of *Run To Me* features Ringo on drums and an infectious rock 'n' roll groove with piles of lush vocals on top. For the musos, check out the instrumental *Journey Through*, which displays Luke's Beck-isms with deft whammy bar antics, the 'adult chords', the soaring phrasing and the knowing jazz-isms delivered with a crisp distorted tone. This really is an album to savour. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Journey Through*
For fans of: Toto, Foreigner, Journey

J Mascis Fed Up And Feeling Strange (Live and In Person 1993-1998)

Cherry Red Records — **10/10**

Dinosaur Jr legend releases album of 90s acoustic shows

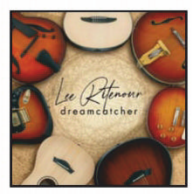
These days, J Mascis' solo performances are most notable for him cranking a vintage Gibson CF-100E through a ZVEX Fuzz Factory, yet back in the heady days of the 90s, his lone outings tended to be a decidedly more 'unplugged' affair.

As the title of the second disk in this three-album set – *Martin + Me* – attests, Mascis's stripped-down acoustic shows consisted simply of a 1970 Martin 00-21 and... him. Dinosaur Jr devotees will relish this collection of live recordings, featuring the musician at his rawest. Originally released in '96, *Martin + Me* chronicles J's solo US tour from the previous year, while his "first ever acoustic performance" from 1993, *Live At CBGB*, saw the light of day more recently in 2006. The third disk in the set, however, *Live In Copenhagen (1998)*, is a previously unreleased gem. One for existing fans and new followers alike. **[RB]**

Standout track: *Thumb (Martin + Me)*
For fans of: Dinosaur Jr, John Frusciante

Lee Ritenour Dreamcatcher

The Players Club — **8/10**



Superb sounds from ex-session ace

For various reasons, the LA ex-session guitar legend Lee Ritenour has been off the radar for a while, but he's now back with a passion, as proved by his latest release, this superb new 12-track album featuring both nylon-string and electric guitar.

While Ritenour has championed the guitar in many formats (check out his South American albums such as *Rio* and *Festival*), he's not been as exposed before. He knows how to get a round fingerstyle tone and his playing throughout the album is never less than exquisite. He has a talent for creating variety in an album, too, so his tempo/arrangement or timbral/articulation choices keep you glued to your speakers.

Standouts include the title track with lush nylon-string chords and soloing, and the thick semi-tone on the bouncy *Charleston*. Riveting pieces and rich tones. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Dreamcatcher*
For fans of: Larry Carlton, Robben Ford

Joni Mitchell Archives – Vol 1

Rhino

9/10

Unexpected delights from a legend

After Joni Mitchell was struck by a brain aneurysm rupture back in 2015 and had already semi-retired from the music industry owing to ongoing Morgellons disease in 2010, fans didn't expect any further recorded output from her in the near future. So the release of *Archives – Vol 1* has taken us all by surprise. As you can guess from the title, the collection of five discs, carrying the collective subtitle *The Early Years 1963-1967,* reveals Joni at the very start of her career. Disc one begins the journey with a radio broadcast on CFQC AM and finds her performing nine tracks, including *House Of The Rising Sun* and *Molly Malone*. The final disc is a live recording done at Canterbury House in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in October 1967, with more familiar self-penned tracks like *Little Green* and *The Circle Game*. The quality throughout is very good, meanwhile the material is priceless. **[DM]**

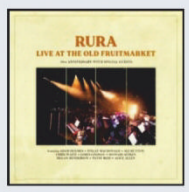
Standout track: *Michael From Mountains (home demo)*
For fans of: Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Graham Nash

START ME UP

Rura Live At The Old Fruitmarket

Rura Music

8/10



Wonderfully energetic live folk

Rura is a four-piece folk outfit from Glasgow. Far from being a new act, last year they celebrated their 10th anniversary, but as is often the case with artists working within the folk genre, they're kind of a best-kept secret. Legend has it they're best experienced as a spirited live act and, if this album is anything to go by, it's most certainly the case. Instrumentation includes guitarist Adam Brown on DADGAD-tuned acoustic, Steven Blake on pipes and keys, David Foley on bodhrán and flute, and Jack Smedley on fiddle. Moody ambience builds to a climax on tracks such as *Mary* and *Weary Days* whereas *Catriona's* treads the more traditional fiery path. The album is a wondrous celebration of folk and contemporary songwriting. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Weary Days*
For fans of: Dervish, Ímar

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

The Philadelphian troubadour **Steve Gunn** shares more about his enigmatic alt-folk masterpiece *The Unseen In Between*

Artist: Steve Gunn
Album: The Unseen In Between

The Unseen In Between offers effortless yet deep introspection from Gunn

Steve Gunn is one of those artists who you happen upon one day and discover, with joy, that they have a long back-catalogue of great recordings – but his latest, *The Unseen In Between*, is one of the best. Combining the art-house cool of a latter-day Tom Verlaine with thoughtful, introspective songcraft, Gunn is a troubadour for our times. He's a great electric player, who was a member of fellow Philadelphian Kurt Vile's band, but the spiritual heart of his music is unplugged guitar. We joined him to talk about how he achieved the rich acoustic sounds of the album's standout tracks such as *Vagabond* and *Stonehurst Cowboy* and learn what his next studio project will be.

Photo by Clay Benskin

Vagabond is a really beautiful track that sets the tone of the album...

"That was more or less one of the first songs I had written and usually, you know, a lot of the songs I come up with are based around simple licks and then connecting the chords, and that has the one simple lick that runs through the whole song. Also I'm really into filmmakers and watching films and Agnès Varda, who directed a film called *Vagabond,* is one of my favourite directors. I love that film, so the song is directly inspired by that film. Actually, I watched the film and then I wrote the song pretty much right there.

"And that song kind of formed the foundation of the album. It was the first thing I had written and the first thing I think we recorded for the record. When I think back on the session again, equipment-wise I was using a D-18 and a triple-0. I also had a Fender Princeton as we were doing some electric as well. I have a custom Stratocaster that a friend of mine made for me, and that has Lindy Fralin pickups and it's a really wonderful, funky guitar that I've also been playing for years. And so those were the instruments I had, playing along with Tony and the other guys in my group."

The recordings, especially the acoustic guitars, sound fantastic. What techniques and gear did you rely on?

"I was working in a studio that had really, really nice microphones. There was a Neumann U 87 that they were using on my acoustic – actually, there was a pair of those – vintage ones. For me, particularly if I was recording at home, I would buy more savvy kinds of things like copies of Neumanns. I have these Oktava microphones that I still use today and they're from Russia. They're pretty decent and I got them years ago. They're good and fairly well made, but when I went into the studio and he pulled out these U 87s from the 60s, I had never heard an acoustic sound so good before. So that was my dream scenario – I don't think I'm a purist in that respect, but they were magical microphones."

What were your go-to guitars when you recorded the latest album?

"For the song *Stonehurst Cowboy* I was using a Martin 000-18 and that was my main guitar for that session.

Photo by Jamie Alnwick

There was another guitar that was definitely greatly used, which was a D-28 Martin and I also have this custom guitar that was made in Pittsburgh by a luthier called Plainview. And that's kind of like a Gibson L-00. The Plainview guitars are also kind of similar to the old Recording King guitars, but the bracing is a lot lighter. It's more of a hollow, bluesy sound.

"But I think particularly for that song, I used my Martin, my trusty sort of 'road' guitar, which I really fell in love with. I had been playing D-35s and all kinds of different models. I remember the exact moment when I was in Nashville and my friend had a vintage triple-0 and came in and I just had one of those lightning-bolt moments about the style I play and fingerpicks... and I had this realisation it was the perfect model for me after playing all different kinds of things over the years. And so then I finally found one that wasn't like an old one, but a well-made one. And I played that for five years straight. But since then I've gotten the D-28.

"But that particular song, *Stonehurst Cowboy*, there was kind of a magical moment in that session because the bass player, Tony Garnier, had this upright bass from 1850 and which had also belonged to Charles Mingus. And he didn't tell us that until about day three. He just said, 'Ah, yeah, check this out,' and it had his name written on the side. Just the acoustic along with that bass created a really magical moment."

"There was a magical moment in that session because we had this upright bass from 1850 that had also belonged to Charles Mingus"

What recording project do you plan on tackling next?

"During lockdown I ended up buying a classical guitar. And it's funny because I'd never really had one or played nylon-string guitars much before. So I just kind of bought one quickly on a whim, a cheap one. I actually asked my friend, who works at Chicago Music Exchange, if he could recommend a cheap one, maybe a couple hundred bucks, just to have around the house. And he said, 'You gotta get one by Córdoba – just buy one of those.' He sold me one for a really good price and I've been playing that for five months straight.

"So I've been writing a new record that I was supposed to start recording in Los Angeles back in May and June 2020, but of course that got postponed. I've also been redoing demos, editing things and doing different versions of songs recently. So it's been kind of interesting to slowly work on songwriting. [The enforced break from recording has] allowed me to really take my time with it and try different things." **[JD]**

***The Unseen In Between* is out now on Matador**
www.matadorrecords.com

A man of many Martins (the D-35 in particular), Gunn used a 000-18 for *The Unseen In Between* as well as a D-28

SESSION DIARY

All That Jazz

Want to up your hire-ability as a session musician? Get some jazz in your repertoire, says **Adam Goldsmith**

While many of us, myself included, grew up playing rock music, in my professional experience as a session musician, one of the most useful styles to have some experience of is jazz. Not only does it widen ones harmonic knowledge, but, in turn, it provides employment opportunities that might not have otherwise materialised. For example, before Covid hit, I did a show in a cut-down version of Robbie Williams' band, stepping in for the fabulous Tom Longworth (Robbie's regular guitar player), simply because Robbie wanted to combine a smaller jazz set into a set involving some of his well-known hits. I've also had similar experiences with artists including Gloria Estefan and TV shows using big bands, such as *The X Factor* and *American Idol*.

Recently, it's been very useful as the only venues that are currently open during the pandemic are smaller jazz and cabaret clubs, which suit that style of music. I'd recommend that any aspiring session players familiarise themselves with some basic jazz harmony. This could take the form of a traditional 12-bar blues but with some of the chords 'jazzed up' a bit. For example, the regular dominant 7th chords can be easily replaced with 13th or 9th chords, and a diminished chord can be inserted as a passing chord between the 4 and 5 chords. This, combined with a good jazz sound, can give a more harmonically and musically interesting edge to your playing, which will make you more employable as a player, rather than just being a straight ahead rock 'n' roll player.

My go-to small jazz setup is a Gibson ES-175 and my trusty Princeton amp, which I'll be using (this evening, as I write) on a small cabaret gig in central London with West End star Lee Mead. Lee is a great example of how a breadth of musical knowledge is beneficial for employment. His regular repertoire is a mixture of more modern-sounding pop and some show tunes, but tonight he wants to play a jazzier set, so he didn't need to look for a different guitar player for this occasion. This is obviously good for me, but also makes his life easier as there is already a working relationship established and he can perform better if he trusts who is on stage accompanying him. G

"Familiarising yourself with some basic jazz harmony can give a more harmonically and musically interesting edge to your playing"

Adam soundchecking for Lee Mead at The Crazy Coqs venue in Soho

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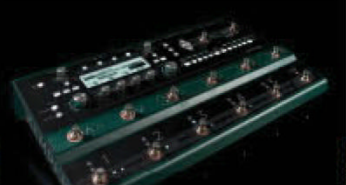

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NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Damage Control

This month **Neville Marten** muses upon the sorry state of his fingertips, the possibility of a new acoustic, and the prospect of gigs on the horizon

Now here's a thing. I've spoken before about strings and how when there's a consistent run of gigs I invariably find myself going up a gauge. I've also mentioned how my playing had became somewhat stagnant during lockdown and the tier system – meaning I hadn't exactly been doing much. You'd therefore be forgiven for breaking into a sly smirk when I admit that I was genuinely surprised recently at how soft and painful my fingertips had become.

You see, I have to go and put a few guitar tracks down on my mate's project. He plays keys and does harmony vocals on my stuff and we always reciprocate in kind. Realising that I had to come up with the goods without wasting his time and money, I got down to some serious practice. Well, that was the intention. In fact, I had to give up after just a few minutes, so sensitive had those digital extremities become. It's actually the first time this has happened since I started playing at age 14.

"My playing had became somewhat stagnant during lockdown and I was surprised recently at how soft and painful my fingertips had become"

As I write this I have just nine days to sort it out, and I therefore need a plan. So I've decided to spend an hour or so a day playing acoustic, just to get the basic calluses back. Then I'll practise a few solos on electric – some of the classics with plenty of bends and vibrato thrown in – so I'm concentrating on getting the notes and feel right, rather than on how much it hurts. It's totally unscientific, but I reason that this method is better than merely noodling around. I'll do this for a couple of days on my regular 10s and then, nearer the time, I'll restring the guitars I'm going to use with either nines or 9.5s, depending on how my fingers feel then. That's the idea, anyway.

On another tack, several friends have recently reported the desire to buy stuff again. Those lucky enough to have retained their incomes during these awful times say they've saved on fuel, clothes and loads of other things, and now feel the desire to offload some of it – especially since Christmas for many will have been a pretty barren affair. Likewise, I usually spend the festive season at my sister's in Istanbul, and go laden with gifts for three generations of my family that live there. That was clearly out this time, so I'm currently awaiting delivery (just to try, mind!) of an Atkin 25th Anniversary J43.

I reviewed the regular one, The Forty Three, a while back and loved it; it reminded me of a '59 Gibson J-45 I once owned and stupidly sold. The 25th Anniversary is made from Cuban mahogany and Madagascan rosewood and I suspect it will be vying strongly for those Christmas air ticket and pressie savings. But I'll need to offload something, and to be honest there's not much I want to get rid of since I've pared my guitars down to the basics in recent years. So we'll see.

The Show Must Go On...

Finally, there's a fair bit of excitement surrounding the prospect of live shows returning in the coming months, now that vaccines have signalled a light at the end of a pretty dismal tunnel. Our band lost every gig after 16 March last year, and even some that were put forward into 2021 were shunted even further back as the *annus horribilis* hobbled woundedly on. But, fingers crossed, it looks like I'll need to get the stage suit cleaned and sort my rig out in the not too distant future. Can I even remember what goes where, and will I even recall what it is I do? A while back my friends at Guitar Village ordered a Custom Shop 1960 Tele in Daphne Blue. If that arrives soon, who knows, my 2021 setup might be taking on a rather different hue... See you next time.

GAS OF THE MONTH

Talking of Telecasters...

What? Squier Paranormal Cabronita Thinline Tele **Where seen?** www.coda-music.com **Price?** £349

The guys at Coda Music recently posted some new Squier guitars on their Facebook page and I thought they looked stunning, especially this Paranormal Thinline in Fiesta Red with cream Jazzmaster pickups and matching scratchplate. Crafted in China and at just £349 it might be the perfect purchase for those who, for obvious reasons, received a few quid by bank transfer this Christmas. It has a strings-through-body hardtail bridge plus single volume and tone controls mounted direct to the body. Thousands of kids take up guitar at this time of year and with its slim gloss-finished maple neck the Paranormal Thinline might also be the perfect electric for younger hands. An instrument like this would have been a dream when I think of the Rosetti Lucky 7 acoustic that I started on, with its patented egg-slicer action and miles-out intonation. So, what are you waiting for?

GOOD TO GO

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CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Fan Club

With design, innovation and wonkiness in mind, **Alex Bishop** ponders the intriguing world of multi-scale guitars

The job of the small-scale luthier, as I see it, is not just to hand-build great-sounding guitars, but also to probe around at the very edges of guitar design. We are getting used to seeing side soundports, arm bevels and scoop-shaped cutaways, but, in my experience, nothing grabs the attention of a casual passerby like a fanned-fret guitar.

When confronted with such an instrument for the first time, most people (whether they be guitarists or not) tend to stare at the fingerboard for a moment with a look of uncertainty, trying to comprehend whether such an instrument could ever actually work. Eventually, bewilderment gives way to curiosity as I am asked why I – as a luthier – have undertaken the task of building such a heretical instrument...

> "When confronted with such an instrument for the first time, most people tend to stare at the fingerboard with a look of uncertainty"

For the uninitiated, fanned frets are best described as an arrangement of frets that appear to radiate from an imaginary centre point some distance away from the fingerboard. The nut is normally angled away from the player on the bass side, with the bridge slanted in the opposite direction. Sometimes the visual impact is subtle, and other times it is quite striking. It is regularly assumed that contorting the frets in this way has something to do with intonation or tuning, but this is not the case.

A wonderful sight to behold, fanned frets are equally wonderful to play, with surprising ergonomic qualities on offer

PHOTO BY RICK SMEE

In order to understand the purpose behind such a design, we must first appreciate that fanned frets go back to the 16th century with the invention of the orpharion, a type of English lute. Back then, string technology was much more limited, and it was impossible to add enough mass to a string to make it resonate at the lowest desired pitches. If the note was detuned (in the same way that we might go into drop D tuning, for example) the string would become too slack. Instead, the scale length of the instrument had to become longer on the bass side. The result is a multi-scale instrument, capable of covering a broader range of notes than equivalent straight-fretted lutes could handle.

Given that today's guitarist is spoiled for choice with almost every kind of guitar string imaginable, one might ask: what is the point of fanned-fret guitars now? Well, first, we can say that for the same set of strings, we are experiencing different tensions. Most notably, the longer scale length on the bass strings will produce a more robust tone because they are more taut, but the trebles will retain a sweetness from staying slacker. Second is the ergonomic case: fanned frets are surprisingly comfortable to play on. While the degree of fanning varies between guitars, most players agree that slanted frets better suit the natural resting position of the left hand than the parallel frets of a 'normal' guitar.

Full Circle

For me, the repercussions of choosing fanned frets go a little deeper. By skewing the bridge, there is a change in the distribution of tensile stresses in the top, so bracing design has to be reassessed to counter this. My first fanned-fret guitar had slanted ladder bracing radiating away from the bridge, roughly in line with the frets on the fingerboard. The result was a soundboard that was excessively stiff in particular areas on the treble side, and more opened up on the bass side. The tone of this instrument was pleasingly distinct from its parallel-fretted siblings. I recall that it had a focused bottom-end, an extra-pronounced midrange, and a more delicate upper register.

I have since evolved my ideas of a ladder-braced fanned-fret guitar. I realised it would also be possible to avoid the problem of redesigning bracing patterns by skewing the grain of the soundboard so that it runs perpendicular to the angle of the bridge, rather than parallel with the centreline. This way, all horizontal braces can run pretty much parallel to one another. The result is (rather ironically) a fanned-fret guitar that sounds much closer to what I would expect from a guitar that doesn't have fanned frets. Sometimes, when you are trying hard to push the envelope, you have to tell yourself that there is no shame in going full circle, and simply ending up right back where you started. G

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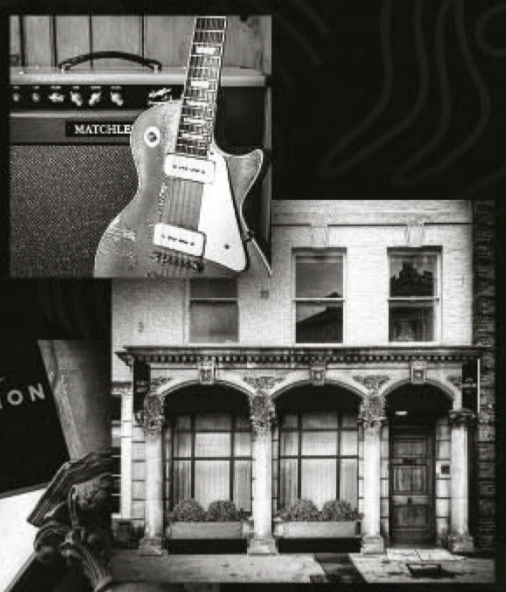

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Practice Made Perfect

Editor **Jamie Dickson** looks at creating the ideal tone-rich home practice room

Last issue reader David Hughes asked for advice on creating an inspiring practice room at home. This column normally focuses on the finer points of tone, so I decided to look into what setup might provide the best combination of incredible sounds, ease of use and living-room friendly looks. We'll need to make a few working assumptions. First, we're going to assume that most players don't have a large dedicated practice room in their home – so we're probably looking at a spare bedroom, loft space or communal lounge. We'll also assume that high volume levels won't be easy to achieve due to neighbours, flatmates or family being in the general vicinity.

With all that in mind, if we can avoid a lot of messy cabling it will help make our home practice space easy to use and minimise the amount of tidying away needed after practice. We'll also assume that having our effects aboard the amp makes sense, to minimise the clutter of separate amp and effects units and maximise one-stop tone tweaking. Finally, we'll focus on small but tone-rich amplifiers that look good in the home setting.

"Having our effects aboard the amp makes sense, to minimise the clutter of separate units and maximise one-stop tone tweaking"

I have to admit I haven't had much prior experience with wireless systems to get signal from the guitar to the amp, but Nev Marten spoke highly about the cable-free convenience of the Line 6 Relay G30 units (£145) he uses at home. A more recent entry to the wireless market, the Mooer Air P10 system (£85) arrived at *Guitarist* a few days ago, so I decided to give it a try for this piece. The Air P10s are small lozenge-shaped units (comprising a colour-coded transmitter and receiver) that are rechargeable via USB. Mooer quotes a 90ft range and up to five hours of battery life.

In the old days, wireless units used to have the reputation of sucking the life out of your tone, but plugging the P10s in I'm pleasantly surprised to find no noticeable latency and only a very faint difference in tone and responsiveness compared with going straight into my Dr Z amp with a high-end Free The Tone cable. Essentially, the P10s are a shade brighter than cable alone, which is likely down to the buffering involved in signal transmission. The transmitted tone is clear, detailed and responsive, so if you want to stroll around while noodling without intrusive cables tripping you, they're a really good shout – and well priced.

On to amps. Online marketplace Reverb.com revealed that the Boss Katana-50 MkII combo (£219) was a 2020 bestseller and that's a choice I'd make a beeline for here as well. You'd be incredibly hard pressed to find more compelling features on one inexpensive amp, from the girthy valve-amp-style tones to the raft of 65 fully editable effects that can be loaded on to the amp via the accompanying Boss Tone Studio app. There are also some great additional features like mic'd cabinet emulation for silent recording and the ability to save all your favourite settings and tones for quick recall. The newer MkII version has more features, but the Mark I version is arguably a little more intuitive in operation for players coming straight from traditional valve amps. Both come highly recommended, however.

Something In The Air

Staying with Boss a moment longer, I'd also recommend checking out its innovative Waza-Air Wireless Personal Guitar Amplification headphones (£337). They use clever audio design to not only emulate classic amp and effects tones but position the virtual amp's sound in the headphones' stereo field so as to give the eery sensation that a real amp is in the room with you. As Boss puts it: "With Gyro Ambience Technology, the Waza-Air places the amp in the room with you, and as you turn your head from left to right, the amp stays in the same position." The signal from your guitar is transmitted to the 'phones wirelessly; it's a really innovative, immersive way to practise and play silently at home – and there are bags of other features onboard, too. Well worth checking out, especially if silent practice and space saving are a priority.

When considering a home practice space, it's also impossible not to mention a new tech-enabled amp that's really caused a big stir this year due to its sophisticated practice-promoting features. The Positive Grid Spark is billed as "the Smart Guitar Amp and App that jam along with you". The amp offers up to 10,000 virtual amp and effects tones via its app-based library, but the real draw is its jamming software. Somewhat

Mooer's Air P10 (left) is a compact wireless solution with a range of up to 90ft, while the Vox Adio Air GT (right) offers built-in amp models and effects, as well as Bluetooth connectivity that enables wireless music streaming

Blackstar's Studio 10 10-watt amps are well worth a look – try the whole range if you can to find the right flavour to suit your needs

like DigiTech's Trio Band Creator pedal, play a chord sequence into the Spark and it will generate a backing track with bass and drums for you to jam along to. You can also play chords into the Spark and the app will display the identity of the chords in real-time. I tried the Spark at last year's NAMM and the technology is seriously cool and straightforward to use. You can also use the Spark as your recording interface, harnessing its tones in your DAW-based recordings, making this a must-try-out for a home practice space at just £226.

If small, stylish modelling amps appeal, don't overlook Yamaha's well-liked THR series of amps, now in Mark II spec (£various), while Vox's Adio Air GT (£222) and the Boss Katana-Air (£359) are well worth investigating as well. Many such amps will stream your music collection, too, via mobile device, so they can sit inobtrusively on the bookshelf as your stereo-cum-practice amp if you are short on space. Notably, the Katana-Air transmits signal from your guitar to the amp via an included wireless system that cleverly switches itself on and off when you pick the guitar up or set it down.

"One last component of any home practice space, I'd say, is a good looper pedal. As a means to jam along with yourself they're hard to beat"

Modelling amps not your thing? Do not despair. There are some amazing small valve amps that sound great at home volume levels. For example, Blackstar's 2019 Gear Of The Year winning Studio 10 range of 10-watt amps (£575) comes in either 6L6, EL34 or KT66-based variants, each offering slightly different supporting features such as boost, digital reverb and so on.

One last component of any home practice space, I'd say, is a good looper pedal. As a means to jam along with yourself they're hard to beat, so I've dedicated Three To Get Ready (right) to our pedal-based favourites. Finally, don't forget a simple metronome – it's amazing how overlooked developing a solid sense of time is when practising. The best news is that most of this kit is relatively affordable, so there's never been a better – nor more inspiring – time to woodshed at home. G

THREE TO GET READY

A trio of practice-boosting looper pedals

DigiTech Trio+ Band Creator & Looper £165

The original, now discontinued Trio coined the neat trick of generating a bass and drums accompaniment to a sequence of chords played by the guitarist. The 'Plus' version adds a sync'd looper (so you can layer up your own rhythm parts and jam over the top), an SD Memory Card expansion that allows for 12 songs with loops to be stored to an included card, plus a useful effects loop to bring other pedals into your jam seamlessly.

Boss RC-10R Rhythm Loop Station £223

A deserving winner in last issue's Gear Of The Year awards, the RC-10R is a looper with a built-in drum machine that can be sync'd to your loops and play fills, alternate grooves and intro/outros. You could use the RC-10R live in small settings, but we like it most as a tool to inspire creative practice sessions. The built-in grooves help tighten up your timing and the range of rhythms on offer throws interesting phrasing challenges at you.

TC Electronic Ditto Jam X2 Looper £132

Loopers keep getting more interesting every year – this one 'listens' to the tempo of your band's performance and automatically syncs loops to match the ambient tempo. It does this via clever time-stretch processing that locks your loops to the rhythm of the band even when tempo speeds up and slows down, keeping audio quality natural sounding throughout. Definitely one for when we return to group rehearsals!

SUBSTITUTE

Stretches

This issue's selection from **Richard Barrett** presents a workout for your fingers with a physical examination of extended chords

Regular readers will know that we've concentrated on extended chords in recent times. Now we're going to take a look at this in a physical – rather than theoretical – way, though the two approaches coincide, as we'll see. One of the challenges presented by the guitar is creating piano-style wide-interval chord voicings. Players such as Barney Kessel and Jimi Hendrix used the thumb of their fretting hands to expand the possibilities and reach notes or embellishments that were otherwise impossible.

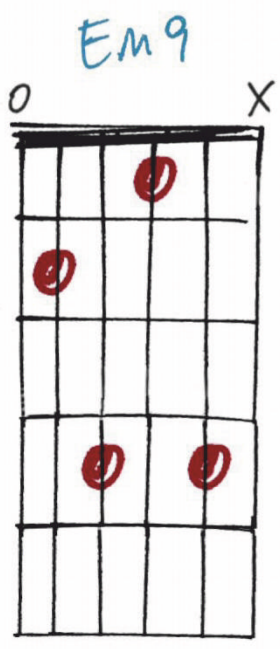
Elsewhere, Allan Holdsworth and Tal Farlow were fortunate enough to have large hands and long fingers, though it's amazing what can be achieved with small to average hands by simply shifting to a more 'classical' grip with the fretting hand thumb more centred on the back of the neck for wider stretches. Tal Farlow would also add extended notes at the top of chords with his picking hand, so check out the examples for more on this. Finally, be sure to build up to bigger stretches gradually – and patiently! G

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Right: American jazz guitarist Tal Farlow was nicknamed 'the Octopus' on account of his large hands that allowed him to traverse the fretboard with ease and speed

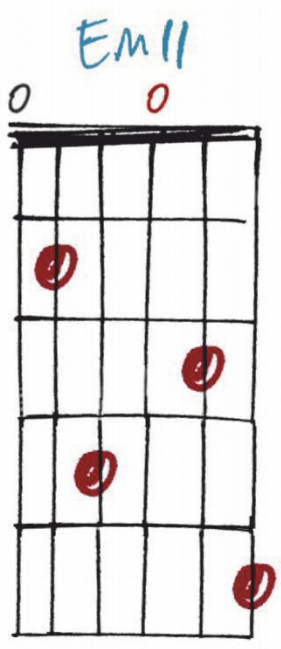
Example 1

This Emaj9 chord requires careful fretting hand positioning – not only to reach the notes but to let all the notes ring. I've omitted the top E string here. Even though it fits from a theoretical standpoint, it isn't really needed and the focus really belongs on the D# (the major 7th) here.



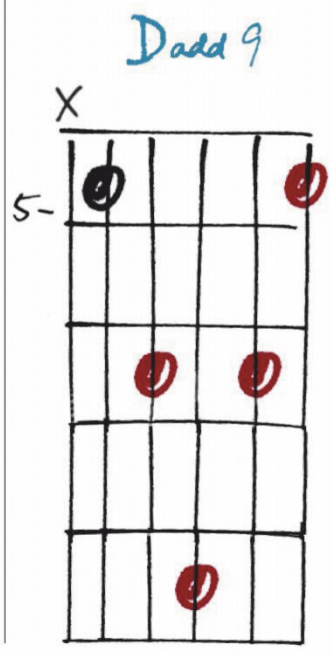
Example 2

Stretching out a bit further, this Emin11 includes the open third string. Letting this ring clearly while stretching to the other notes is probably the most challenging aspect of playing this chord. Remember to move your fretting hand thumb downwards on the back of the neck like a classical player; this will help with the stretch required.



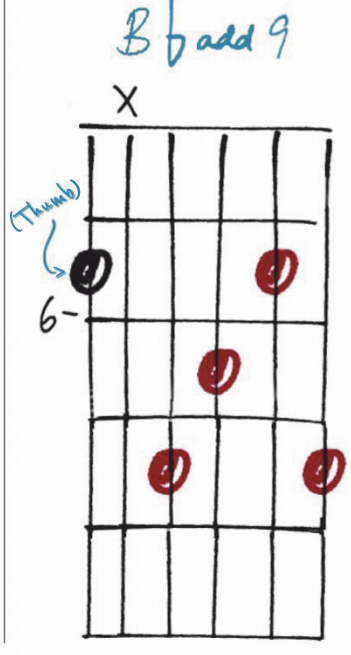
Example 3

This Dadd9 can be a challenge to make sound perfectly in tune, because it's hard to stretch to the 9th (E) on the third string without adding downward pressure, too. This may seem unreasonably difficult at first, but it becomes easier over time. Not one for vamping through a whole song, though...



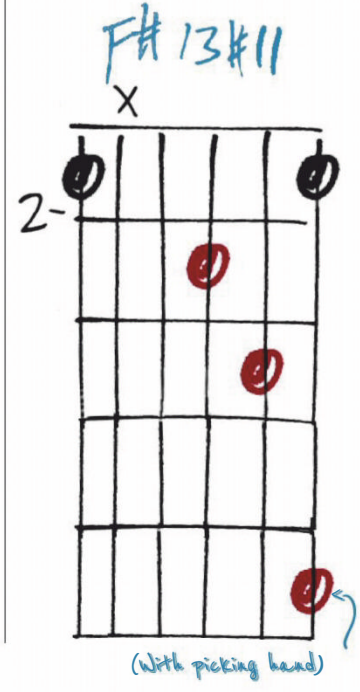
Example 4

Not such a stretch, but this B♭add9 requires you to use your fretting hand thumb over the top of the neck to press that root note at the 6th fret of the low E, allowing the four-finger chord on top. The fifth string is also muted. I find fretting slightly off-centre on the fourth string to let your third finger rest against it is the easiest way.



Example 5

Perhaps the ultimate way to extend a chord, Tal Farlow-style. This F#13#11 could not be played using conventional technique: the top note is fretted with the picking had, while the thumb of that same hand rakes across the chord over the fretboard, which gives a harp-like sound. The fifth string is muted with the third finger of the fretting hand – phew!



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Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
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STAR LETTER

SUSTAINED APPLAUSE

Recently, I had an emergency text from my 13-year-old grandson, which read: 'My tremolo arm has sheared off.' The arm on his Squier Strat had indeed sheared off in a position that meant removing the nearly new set of Ernie Ball Super Slinkys plus the bridge assembly and then taking the bridge apart. After removing the remaining threaded stub of the arm, I reassembled and refitted the bridge, but struggled to refit the strings – curly ends and all. After straightening the 0.009 gauge top E as much as I could and about a lifetime trying to thread it through the bridge, I was about to tear my hair out when I saw my can of WD-40 and had a genuine eureka moment. I took the four-inch nozzle tube from the can, threaded the string into it and pushed the tube up through the bridge with no problem at all. The thickest string I put through the tube was a wire-wound 0.032 gauge D string. Other players may have already discovered this trick, but I'll pass it on just in case.

Ian Gane, via email

Thanks Ian, your hack for getting more life out of a brand-new set of strings is most ingenious and we applaud you for finding a fix when others might have been tempted to throw out those nearly new strings and buy again. As guitarists, we should really be more in touch with the benefits of inexpensive repair than the average consumer. For a start, we value old guitars and even venerate them, while rare is the guitarist who would turn their nose up at a really good used guitar at the right price. So, unlike yesterday's computer or gaming console, our purchases really can get better with age. It was also interesting to hear Nile Rodgers admit that he hates changing a set of strings for a fresh one, preferring to stick with a set until it fails, which he ascribes to thrifty habits learned on his way up on the American R&B scene. You certainly can't say his sound was defective as a result!

Have any other readers got any great tips for saving money and reducing waste when repairing or setting up guitars? We'd love to hear them and we'll print the best ideas here in the next issue.

KORG

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

Alright, Squier! Steve's Korean Strat is definitely a keeper

CHEAP 'N' TASTY

I read your article on cheap guitars [issue 462] and also the letter from reader Steve Baker with his account of GAS progression and finding a mid-90s Korean Squire Telecaster that performs higher than expectation [issue 464, Feedback]. Back in the 1980s, I bought a Squier Stratocaster that came with a small Yamaha practice amp and the serial number indicates that this Squier was made in 1988, also in Korea. It's been gigged and used over the years, but it also has an absolutely amazing, beautifully finished and playable rosewood neck. Was there something special or unusual about Korean-made Squiers during that period?

I've added to my collection over the years and I'm also the proud owner of a US-made Stratocaster, Telecaster, Les Pauls and most recently a stunning-sounding Lowden GL-10. I use them all and yet I still use the Squier Stratocaster. I get the greatest pleasure from touring local guitar stores just to see what they have and finding an instrument that feels right, looks great and sounds superb. Two low-cost favourites in my collection are a 1970s full and warm-sounding Yamaha FG-160 and a Sigma 00R-28VS.

My view is that GAS can be equally about acquiring alternative ways of adding enjoyment, bringing creativity and inspiration and getting us to play more. We should choose instruments with our hands and ears, but not necessarily the price tag.

Steve Dickinson, via email

Thanks for your thoughts and pic of that tasty Strat, Steve. This really touches on an important issue: when we choose a guitar, why are we doing so? No-one's motives are wholly pure

Strat's amazing – but which issue of *Guitarist* did this golden wonder first appear in?

and while most players buy instruments to meet a musical need, there's a danger of falling prey to snobbery or mere one-upmanship as we get more experienced. Far better to trust your ears and your instincts and be confident enough to use any guitar that really clicks with you, cheap or not.

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

I'm hoping to locate two specific copies of *Guitarist* from 2001 that featured the actual guitar that I purchased. The guitar is a Custom American Classic Strat in Frost Gold. It was part of a Europe-only limited run. It was featured in your magazine, firstly as a double-page photograph and subsequently reviewed and featured on the attached CD the following month. I think the issues were September and October 2001, but I could be a month out either way. I purchased it from Sounds Great in Manchester when the magazine returned it there following the review. Unfortunately, my copies of the magazines have been mislaid over the years during house moves and I'm hoping I can obtain a back copy or maybe one of the original photos, as the guitar has been gigged for 20 years and now sports a finish closer to a Custom Shop Relic. I've attached a couple of recent photographs of the guitar [above] and look forward to hearing from you and I do hope that you can help.
Nick Farren via email

Thanks for writing in, Nick. This is a tricky one we have to admit, as our digital archives don't quite go that far back, and our print library of back issues is still confined within Guitarist Towers, which is shut for the time being until Covid-19 restrictions have eased. So, instead we'll throw this open to the floor – have any readers got the back issue that Nick is looking for? If you know which issue it is, let us know and maybe we can help Nick with a scan of the pages in which the guitar first appeared or, who knows, he may even make you an offer you can't refuse for your copy. Lovely guitar by the way – it's clearly ageing like a fine wine.

BUILDING BUG

Coming to you from Truckee, California, (near Lake Tahoe). I recently discovered *Guitarist*, which I have to pay a fortune for at a bookshop, but it's worth it! This is now my new favourite read; I have to pace myself so I don't get through it too quickly before being able to buy the next issue.

I also recently started building electric guitars, so thought I would send a quick photo [pictured right] of my #2 build. This is a chambered guitar with a quilted sapele top (and sapele peghead veneer cut from a leftover top piece). Trying my hand at binding the body and fretboard, fixing an angled-back neck, applying a lacquer finish in my home garage, and other tasks were quite challenging but rewarding. Now starting #3, which will be a 12-string electric.

By the way, I'm sure you've covered this many times in the past, but since I'm new to the magazine I'm always on the lookout for anything you folks might write about Mark Knopfler. His music, particularly the later stuff, has always been an inspiration; I listen to *Monteleone* every day while starting work on the guitar in the garage.
Scott Ruck, via email

Thanks for sharing your beautiful handiwork with us, Scott. If this is a recent starter's effort we can only imagine the guitars you'll be turning out in future. The quilted sapele looks so good here and the overall vibe is of rich but understated class. Bravo, sir. We wish you the best of luck with your 12-string.

A stunning piece of home luthiery from across the pond by reader Scott Ruck

REQUESTS...

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

Reader Keith Smart would like to see unsung and indie luthiers profiled in the mag

I enjoy seeing the various self-builds featured in the Feedback page, and it gave me an idea... How about each month a reader sends a photo of an instrument built by a new or up-and-coming builder? I can start the ball rolling with Duncan Cruttenden guitars. A friend introduced me to Duncan, and I liked his ideas. He really brings out the grain in the guitars he makes. I commissioned an Esquire-style guitar [pictured above] with a swamp ash body based on Leo's trusted design, with a few tweaks including comfort contours. A Bare Knuckle Yardbird pickup completes the package. Duncan emailed photos during the build, and the finished instrument gets a lot of comments when other players see it. I am using it in the studio, recording the latest album with my band the St John's Wood Affair. Here is Duncan's website: https://duncancruttendenguitars.com
Keith Smart, via email

Thanks Keith, great idea. Your new guitar looks great and the modded Esquire vibe has been beautifully realised by Duncan by the looks of it. The great thing about such guitars, as made by small-output luthiers, is that you can get exactly what you want and talk to the maker all the way through the process, fine-tuning your vision of what the guitar can be together, guided by their experience.

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

WIN!

A DANELECTRO '64XT IN MINT GREEN – WORTH £729!

Closing date: 4 March 2021

Make sure you enter at *http://bit.ly/GIT468dano* before the closing date. Good luck!

With its cool retro vibe and Mint Green livery, this Danelectro '64XT is a knockout both visually and sonically – and all you have to do to stand a chance of making it yours is answer one simple question...

Dano's '64XT offers much more than just its vintage good looks. It has a chambered body, a dual Lipstick humbucker at the bridge and a P-90-style pickup in the neck. The humbucker can be coil-tapped for slinky single-coil sounds by pulling the tone control, and for those whammy bar moments, it comes kitted out with a Wilkinson vibrato. Furthermore, Mint Green isn't offered as a colour in the UK, making this guitar even more unique and desirable.

When *Guitarist* reviewed a Danelectro '64XT back in issue 456, we said that it was "a classic in the making, [with] killer feel and tone..." noting that the Lipstick humbucker has "enough boost on offer to kick your dirty channel up a notch", while the neck pickup resides "in a sweet spot between the girth of a classic P-90 and the bright openness of a Jazzmaster neck pickup". What more could you want?

To enter, all you have to do is pick the correct answer to the question below, click on over to the online entry form, follow the instructions on the page... and keep your fingers crossed that lady luck will smile upon you. Good luck!

What was the name of Danelectro's founder? Was it...

A) ***Dan Armstrong***
B) ***Nathan Daniel***
C) ***Dan Dare***

NB: this competition is open to UK residents only.

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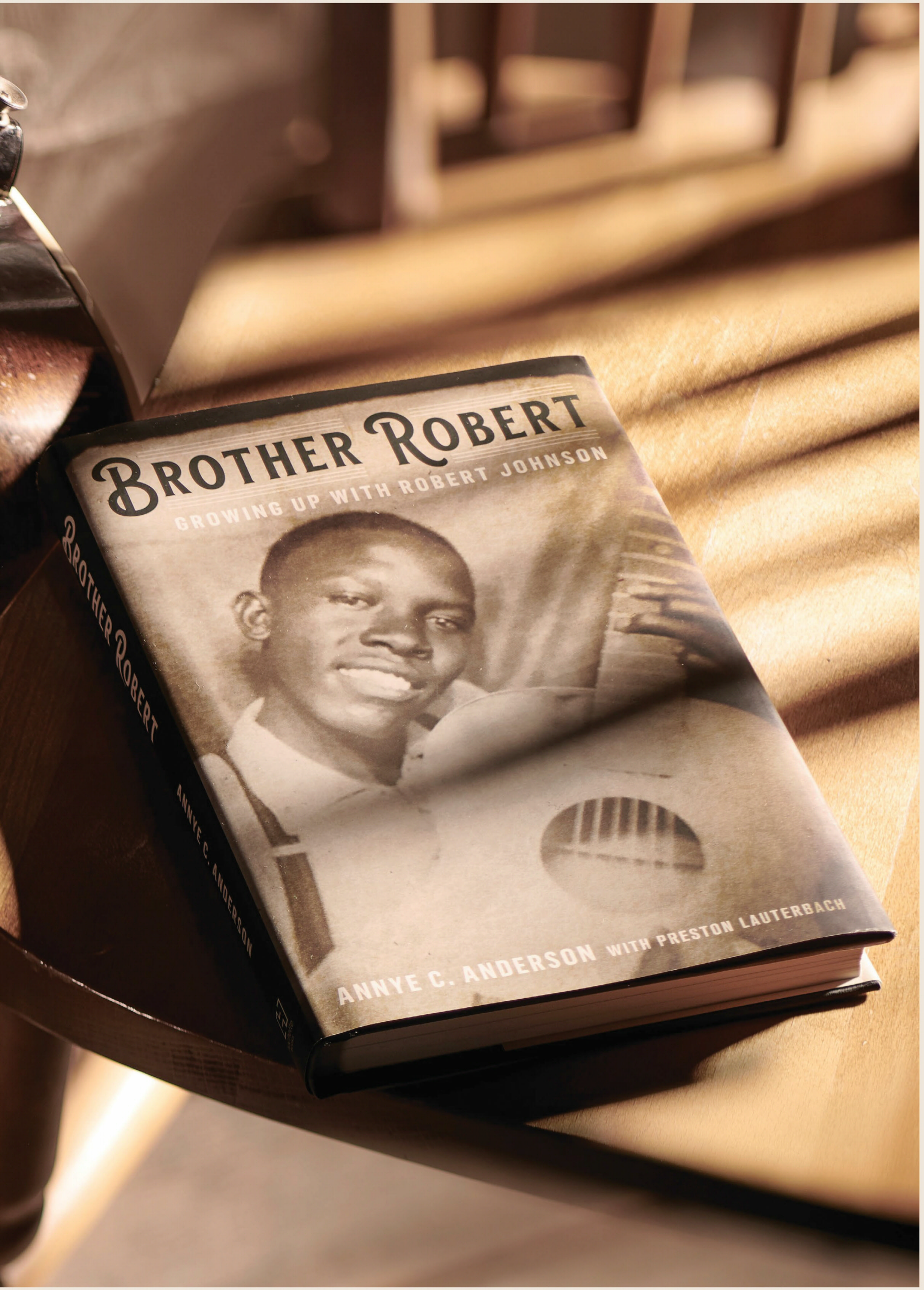
Brother Robert

Robert Johnson has been mythologised more than any other figure in modern music to the extent that it's become very difficult to separate what few facts we know from the fiction that surrounds his story. A new book sets out to put the record straight...

Words David Mead **Photography** Neil Godwin


BROTHER ROBERT
GROWING UP WITH ROBERT JOHNSON
ANNYE C. ANDERSON WITH PRESTON LAUTERBACH

One of the problems we encounter around Robert Johnson's history is that so little is known about the man himself. We know he was born in 1911 and that he died at the age of 27 in 1938. A virtuoso guitarist and singer – someone who Eric Clapton refers to as "the most important blues singer who ever lived" – he was recorded only twice: once in San Antonio in 1936 and again in Dallas a year later. Both sessions resulted in a total of 29 songs that have gone on to influence generation upon generation of blues guitarists and singers ever since.

A new book released in the summer of last year aims to shade in some of Johnson's hitherto unknown background. Entitled *Brother Robert: Growing Up With Robert Johnson* (Hachette Books), it was authored by Johnson's stepsister, Annye C Anderson, and it paints an entirely different picture to that of the troubled 20-something who visited the crossroads at midnight to do a deal with the devil. On the contrary, it conjures up a picture of a warm-hearted, shy individual who was dedicated to his music and guitar playing – but also that the blues wasn't his only stylistic string. The book reveals that Johnson could turn his hand to practically any tune, from jazz

"On the bayou there was a platform that extended out onto the water. In front of our house, he would sit there and play his guitar"

Annye C Anderson

and popular songs of the day to spirituals. There's even an occasion mentioned in the book where he sits on a step and plays nursery rhymes for the local children to sing and dance to. That's a long way from the picture we might have formed about a man who sang about a hellhound on his trail.

The book's biggest revelation is its cover image, which shows a relaxed and smiling Johnson with his guitar in hand, looking directly into the lens. Up until now, only two pictures were known to exist, but the third was revealed by stepsister Annye, it having been stored in a bank safe deposit box since the 1930s.

Annye was born in 1926 to Johnson's stepfather and third wife, Mollie – nobody knows who Johnson's real father was, but his mother's name was Julia, whom Annye refers to as 'Mama Julia' in the book. Other characters who make an appearance here are stepsisters, Carrie (who bought Johnson his first guitar) and Bessie, and a stepbrother nicknamed Son who Johnson would sometimes perform with in a duo. When Johnson's mother split up with her husband she couldn't take care of her son and so Johnson went to live with his stepfather, who taught him to play the guitar. Eventually, Johnson was reunited with his mother... *(page 42)*

Until Stepsister Annye produced a previously unseen picture of Johnson from a bank deposit box, this was one of only two certified photos of him known to exist

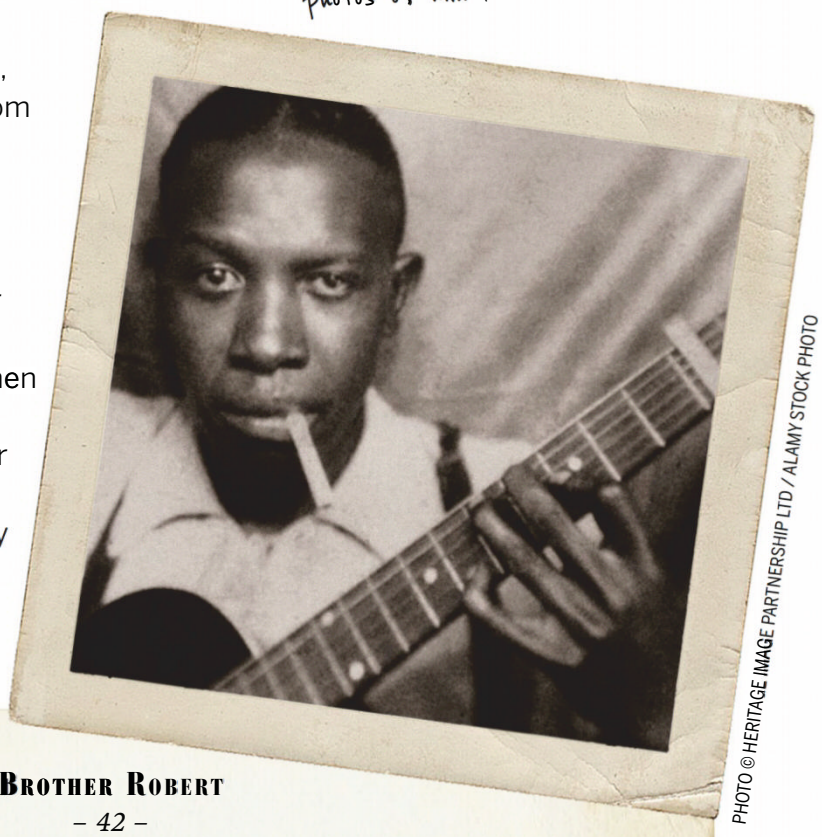


PHOTO © HERITAGE IMAGE PARTNERSHIP LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Brother Robert

– 42 –

Despite what happened to his mother, and having to give him up, he loved his mother. And she loved her "boy."

She usually called him Bob, my boy, or Robert, she would address him by those three. She would often say she made a mistake, but the Lord forgave her a long time ago. Mama Julia had him out of wedlock, but she was a devout Christian. She had great faith and was sincere. I never heard Mama Julia say who Robert's father was. Sister Carrie said she would see her mother sitting in the swing with a man. She didn't know him either.

During this time, Brother Robert began to branch out, lived on and off with Sister Carrie, with his mother, or Sister Bessie. He's been called lazy because he aspired to do something more than pick and chop cotton and say yessuh and nosuh to white folks.

He didn't like farm work, so he had to come to the city. But he was restless and didn't stay long. Sweet as he was, I've come to think that maybe bitterness drove him. You have to understand that about Brother Robert.

When Brother Robert came to town, he was king. Sister Carrie ordered his first guitar from Sears & Roebuck and paid for it. It's my understanding from her mouth. He didn't have any money, so he had to get it from somebody.

He never stayed in my mother's side of the house. On Sister Carrie's side, he could pick his guitar. You could pop your fingers all you want in her house. But my mother wouldn't have had it on her steps or in the house. On the bayou there was a platform that extended out onto the water. In front of our house, he would sit there and play his guitar. If they haven't torn it down, it's still there.

For a while he wore his patched overalls. Then he had the khakis, starched and creased. Son would do that for him. Son could press. I've never seen Brother Robert iron, everything was done for him. He played the guitar – he was the star of the show. I've never seen him cook, everything was cooked for him.

Brother Robert loved to eat and never gained a pound. He loved fried pumpkin. Making ends meet, that's a delicious dish. You use butter, if you could afford it, and we always had bacon grease, to mix in with the butter. You boil the pumpkin first. Your spices are on the sweet side. You mix all your spices together and the sugar, and you add it until the pumpkin thickens. We called that roping. You can drop it in the mixture until the pumpkin dries out. It was just delicious. That could be a dessert. He stayed slender, kept that boyish figure though he'd eat and eat and eat. My mother would feed him, but there wouldn't be any blues in her house.

Johnson was soon to spread his wings, disappearing for days on end, hitching a ride on the trains that passed through the town, a local railroad worker commenting at the time that Johnson spent more time riding the rails than he did. Johnson's song *Walking Blues* details this part of his itinerant musical life. *(page 47)*

"[In 'Walking Blues'] Brother Robert sings about riding the blinds… hitching a ride and catching on wherever you can't see. I never knew where he was going when he left"

Annye C Anderson

Later in the book, Annye offers some insight into her stepbrother's performances. Apart from playing songs for the local kids and passers by, Johnson would perform in juke joints, playing up-tempo songs for people to dance to. And, by any account, he knew a few moves himself. *(page 61)*

Brother Robert
– 47 –

In that same song, Brother Robert sings about riding the blinds. That too comes from his life. Brother Robert rode the blinds. That didn't have to mean a cattle car, I'm talking about anywhere a person can't see. Could be on the running board, and if the wind is blowin', he'd ride backwards. My mother picked cotton and chopped cotton, and they'd pick you up at dark in the morning to take you to Arkansas or Mississippi. If Brother Robert was available, he'd take that ride to Hernando, or that ride across the bridge to Arkansas, and he wasn't going to pick cotton. He wouldn't get a seat inside, under the canopy. Riding the blinds is hitching a ride and catching on wherever you can't see.

I never knew where he was going when he left.

PHOTO BY PRESTON LAUTERBACH, COURTESY OF HACHETTE BOOKS

Book contributors Elijah Wald (left) and Peter Guralnick (right) with Robert Johnson's Stepsister, Annye C Anderson

Brother Robert
– 61 –

Brother Robert could move, he didn't just sit and play. He could do the shimmy. He could snake hip. His foot would move, he had rhythm. Depending on the song, *Sweet Home Chicago*, he wouldn't do a lot of moving. *Terraplane*, he'd move a little more. He could rock on some of that stuff. He could shimmy on down. We'd do the Cake Walk, the Charleston, the Black Bottom, the Break Down, and the Mess Around, plus something we called the Levee Camp Stomp.

Brother Robert picked up songs from spiritual sources and he played old-time folk music. From the latter background, he did *John Henry*, *Casey Jones*, and *John Brown's Body*, plus *Loch Lomond*, *St. James Infirmary*, and *Auld Lang Syne*. His spiritual repertoire included *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, *Dry Bones*, *Mary Don't You Weep*, *When They Ring Them Golden Bells*, and *Joshua Fit The Battle Of Jericho*. Brother Robert knew modern gospel, too, like *Precious Lord (Take My Hand)*. He was conversant with WC Handy songs, *Memphis Blues*, *St. Louis Blues*, and *Beale Street Blues*.

He even got ideas from the men who sold watermelon and tamales, rolling their carts through town and singing things like, "One for a nickel, two for a dime, would give ya more, but they ain't none a mine."

Today some people want to put Brother Robert on the troubled side. I'm not getting in and saying what didn't happen, because I didn't have him in my pocket. I don't know what he did and didn't do. But I know I've never seen him drunk a day in my life. Sister Carrie took her toddy. Son took his. I know there was drinking, Brother Robert just didn't drink when he played.

"Today some people want to put Brother Robert on the troubled side… I don't know what he did and didn't do. But I know I've never seen him drunk a day in my life"

Annye C Anderson

"After he died, a few of his things came to us: his guitar… and a scrap of paper. We were told it was Brother Robert's deathbed confession. The family calls it his testimony"

Annye C Anderson

The final part of Annye's story about her celebrated stepbrother surrounds his death. Legend has it that he was poisoned by a jealous husband in a bar somewhere, but nobody knows the facts for sure. The family didn't hear about his passing until two weeks after it happened, by which time Johnson was already buried – they received a telegram bearing the news and tried to claim the body, but were too late. *(Page 87)*

Brother Robert: Growing Up With Robert Johnson by Annye C Anderson (Hachette Books, £20) is available now. Extracts from the book printed by kind permission of Hachette Books

Brother Robert
– 87 –

After he died, a few of his things came to us: his guitar – which Son later got hold of and pawned – and a scrap of paper. We were told it was Brother Robert's deathbed confession. The family calls it his testimony. He wrote in beautiful cursive with green ink. The message says:

Jesus of Nazareth, king of Jerusalem, I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He Will call me from the Grave

I believe that came true. He's had a life after death longer than his life on earth.

He's been gone so long, over 80 years. I think of saying goodbye to him. Walking with him to Third Street, Highway 61, where he'd hitch a ride across the Harahan Bridge, going over the Mississippi River. I still think of how it felt to hug him. He put his skinny arms around me. His clothes felt starched and pressed. His face felt smooth. He smelled like cigarettes and Dixie Peach.

Author Mrs Annye C Anderson outside her family home, Memphis, 2018

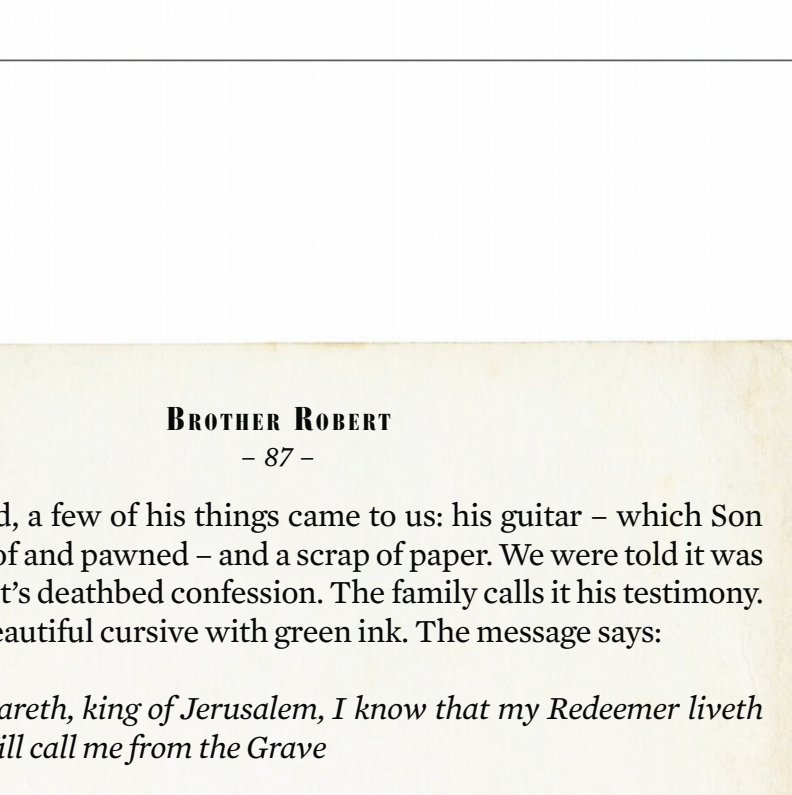


PHOTO BY PRESTON LAUTERBACH, COURTESY OF HACHETTE BOOKS

Robert Johnson's guitar in the Gateway To The Blues Museum in Tunica, Mississippi

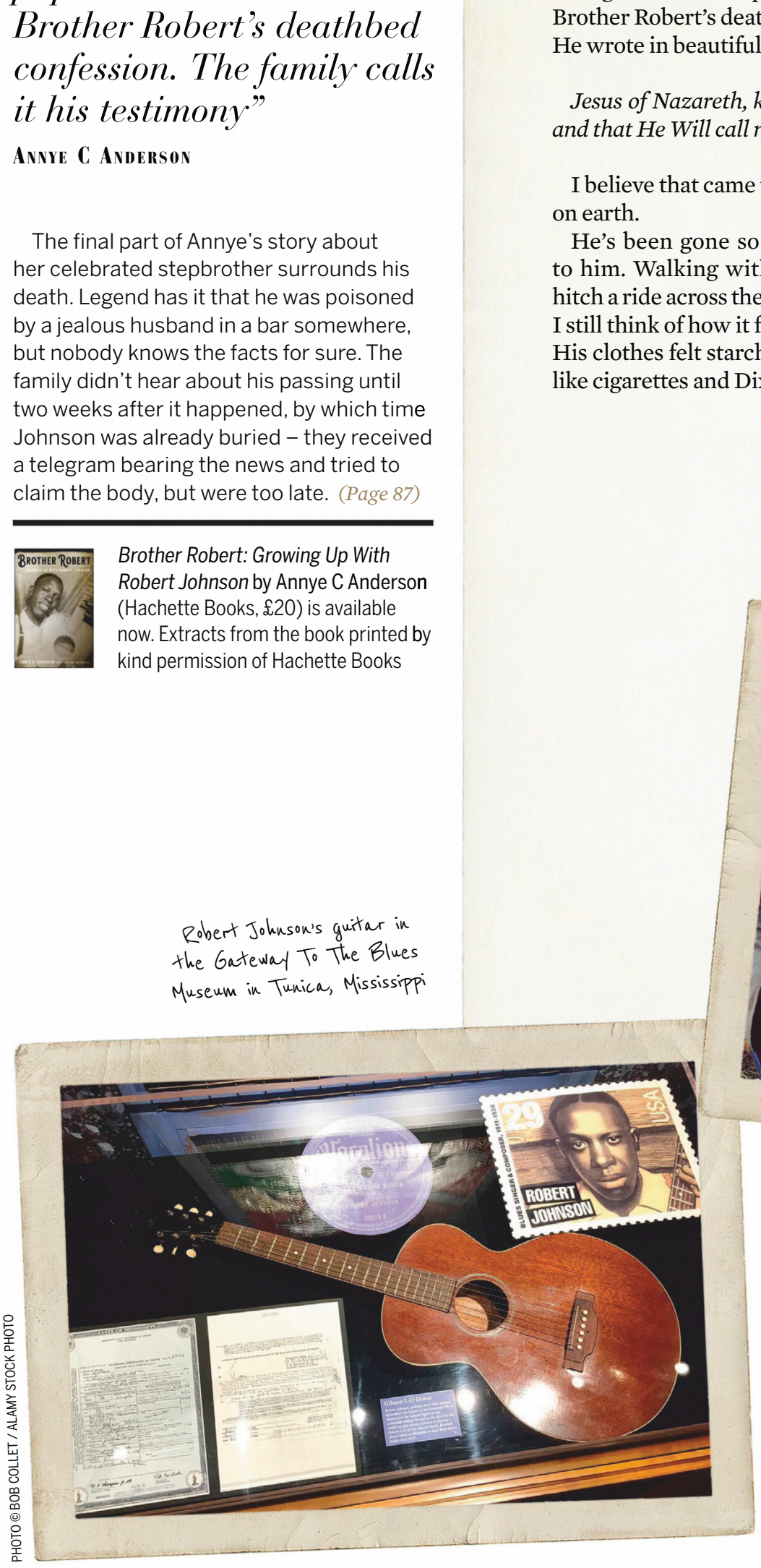


PHOTO © BOB COLLET / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"I still think of how it felt to hug him. He put his skinny arms around me. His clothes felt starched and pressed. His face felt smooth. He smelled like cigarettes and Dixie Peach"

Annye C Anderson

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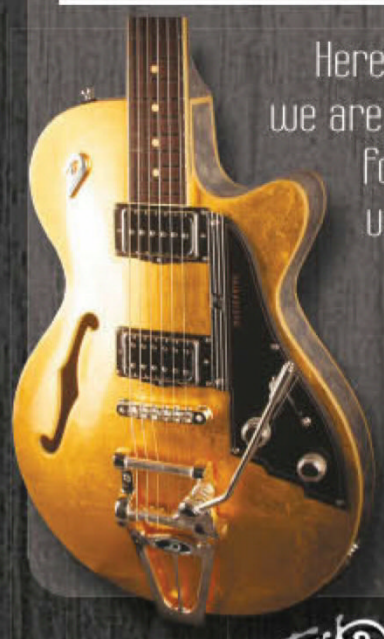

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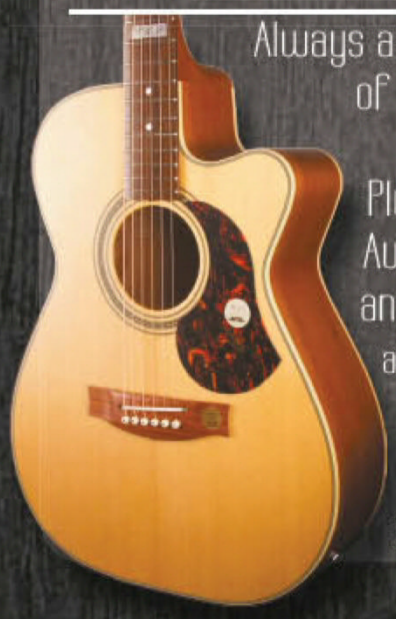

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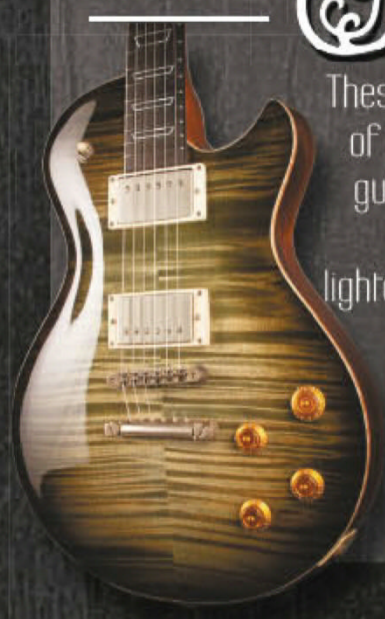

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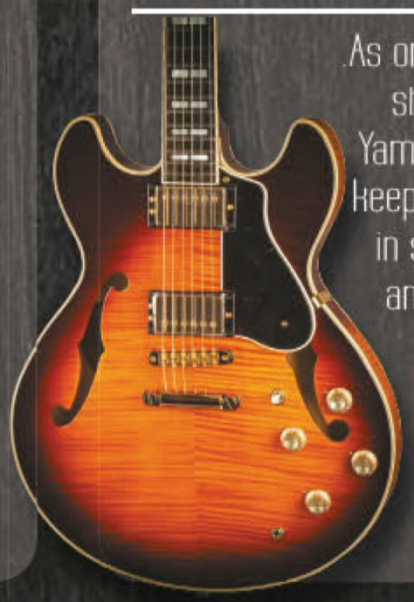

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Until its first flat-tops – the L-0 and L-1 – appeared in 1926, Gibson's L-series guitars were all archtops (such as the 1918 L-1 on the right). The L-00 flat-tops followed in the early 30s; our example on the left here is from 1934

Hear Me When I Moan

A look at Gibson's L-1 & L-00 acoustics, which were contemporaries of the legendary Robert Johnson

Words Rod Brakes **Photography** Neil Godwin

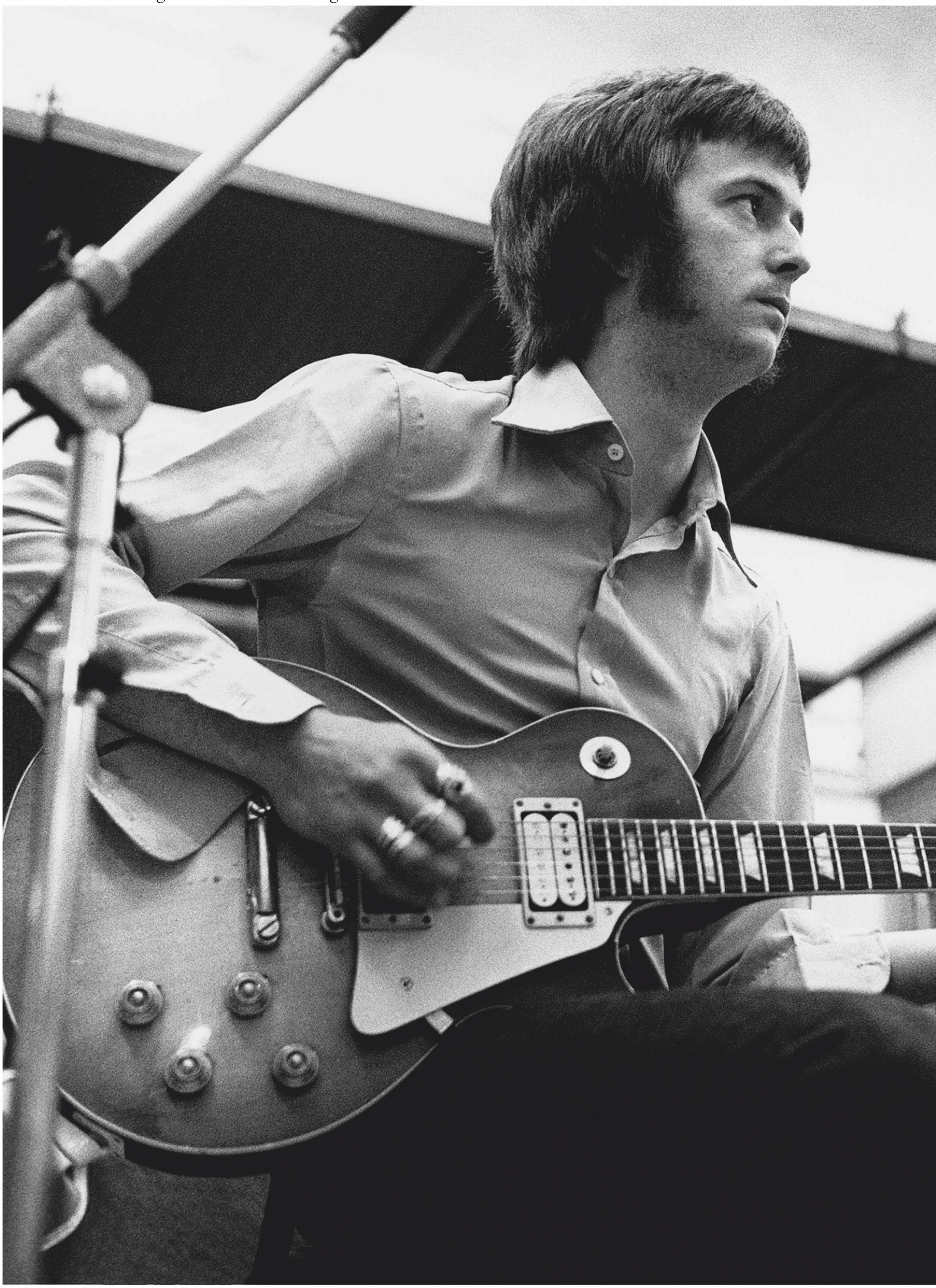
Flat-tops were popular instruments in America throughout the 19th century, with market leaders Martin introducing its first US-made guitar in 1834. However, the first Gibson flat-tops appeared as late as 1926, beginning with the small-bodied L-0 and L-1 models. Prior to this, Gibson's L-series guitars comprised archtops – Orville Gibson's grand contribution to the guitar world – including the 1918 L-1 pictured here (near left). Robert Johnson is perhaps most famously associated with the L-1, having been photographed holding one, albeit the later flat-top version, a markedly different design to its earlier namesake, which was produced from 1902 to 1925.

The L-1 archtop was originally available in standard or concert sizes – 12½ and 13½ inches in width respectively – until 1908, when the smaller size was dropped from production. Inheriting the "concert size" width of 13½ inches, the 1926 flat-top L-1 was introduced with a 12-fret design and this is the more rounded version Robert Johnson was photographed with. In the late-1920s, the L-1's body was redesigned with a squarer lower bout measuring 14¾ inches across, and by 1932 14-fret necks were standard. By 1937, the L-1 was discontinued, although Gibson has since reissued the model due to popular demand.

Much like Martin's 0- and 00-size flat-tops, small-bodied Gibson acoustics have experienced a resurgence in recent years, with Gibson currently offering no less than six variants of the L-00 – namely, the Studio Walnut, Studio Rosewood, Sustainable, Standard, Original and Deluxe models. Introduced in 1931, the L-00 commonly features a width of 14¾ inches and a 14-fret neck, much like the later L-1 models. Upon its release, it was finished in black, with sunburst becoming standard a few years later (as per the 1934 L-00 pictured, far left), followed by a natural option from 1941. Having survived production throughout World War II it was discontinued in 1945.

During the formative blues years of the early 20th century – notably during the Great Depression – many guitarists enjoyed playing less expensive guitars from builders such as Stella and Washburn. Back then, Gibson and Martin were, as they are now, premium brands whose instruments were simply unobtainable for many. Nevertheless, both companies made efforts to provide more affordable flat-tops: Martin with its 17-series, and Gibson as part of its L-series. Skilfully crafted using the same quality materials as higher-end models, these vintage guitars are more revered by players today than ever. G

Guitarist would like to thank Delta blues ace Andrew Bazeley for the loan of these classic Gibsons



CROPPED DETAIL OF NPG X47345, ERIC CLAPTON BY DAVID WEDGBURY, RESIN PRINT, 1966 © NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON. THE COPYING, DISTRIBUTION, TRANSMISSION, PERFORMANCE, DISPLAY, RENTAL, LENDING, COMMUNICATION TO THE PUBLIC OR STORAGE OF THE IMAGES BEYOND THE CONTEXT OF THE SPECIFIED LICENSED DIGITAL PRODUCT IS PROHIBITED.

The Strange Case Of The

THE MISSING BEANO

In the summer of 1966, as *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* hit the record shops and the guitarist himself began rehearsals with his new band Cream, Clapton's beloved sunburst Les Paul was stolen from a church hall practice room. Gone but not forgotten, the guitar left behind a mystery that has never been solved. Here, we trace the lifetime of this legendary 'Burst and ponder the chances of it ever being discovered...

Words Tony Bacon

Eric Clapton's work on the 1966 John Mayall album *Blues Breakers* inspired a whole generation of would-be blues guitarists as he defined the tone and expression that a great guitarist can achieve. And this particular great player found a great instrument to make his music – an original Gibson Les Paul with a sunburst finish. The cover of the record showed Eric reading the *Beano* comic, so it became known as the 'Beano' album, and the instrument he used became known as the Beano guitar.

Many guitarists love Eric's playing on the 'Beano' album. One such musician was Billy Gibbons, who was, at the time, a budding young guitar player in Texas. "The sound was just so fierce and so attractive," he says, "and the appeal drew everyone's curiosity to attempt to suss out where this sound was coming from. The photograph of Eric on the back cover was a clue. We said, 'Ah, look in the background, there's a Marshall, but it's not very big, and ah, look at *that*. They don't make those any more – but it's one of those Les Pauls!'"

The actual guitar Eric used has since taken on an almost mythical quality, not least because it was stolen not long afterward and has never been seen since. It was the short-lived variant known today as the 'Burst, for its sunburst finish, produced by Gibson from 1958 until discontinued in 1960 and replaced by the new double-cutaway SG design. By the mid-60s, the original single-cut Les Pauls were being called the "old model".

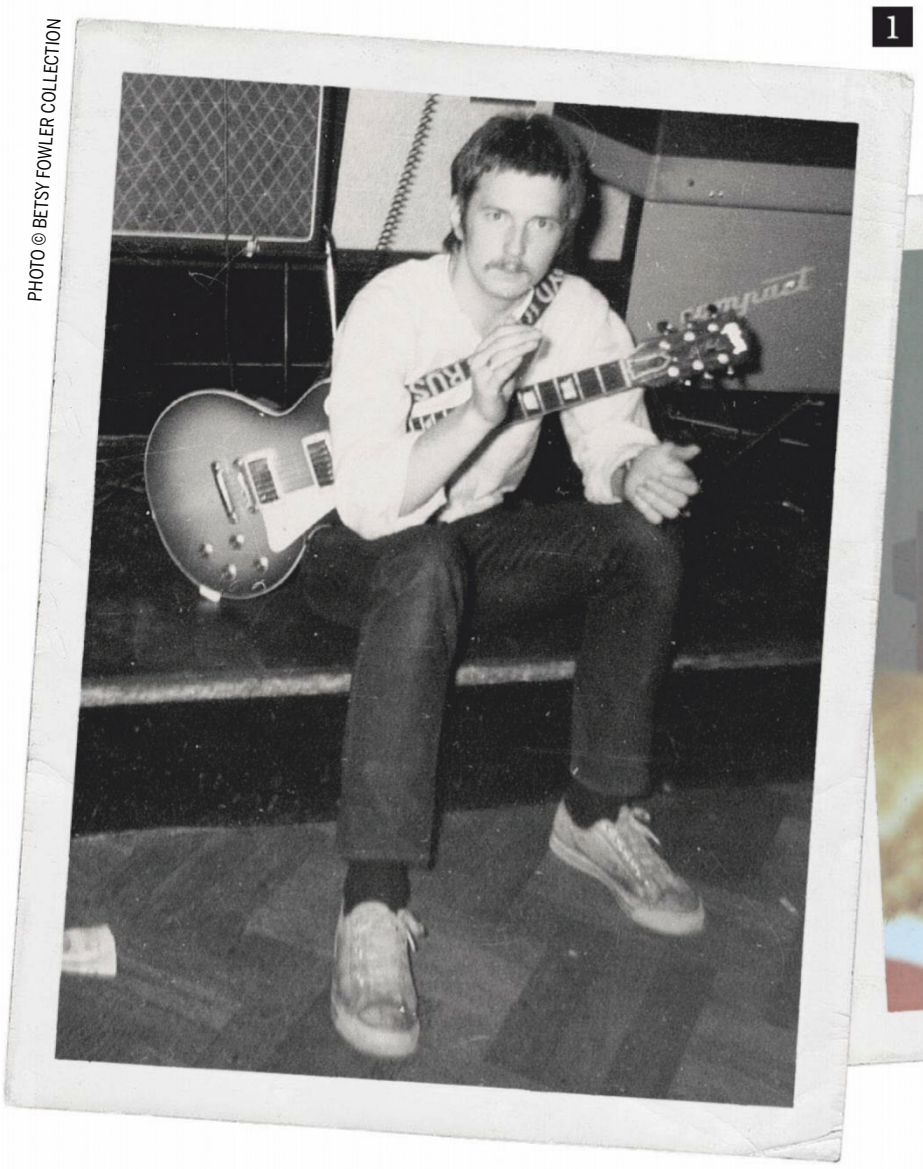


PHOTO © BETSY FOWLER COLLECTION

1

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2

1. Eric with his treasured Les Paul Standard, which he may have bought from Lew Davis's shop on Charing Cross Road for the princely sum of 105 guineas (£110.25)

2. Pictures taken on 4 February 1966, at the Lynx Club, Borehamwood, provide the only known colour shots of Clapton with the Beano 'Burst

THE STORIES SURROUNDING THE BEANO HAVE BEEN SWOLLEN WITH HEARSAY AND HALF-TRUTHS

The theft of the Beano 'Burst helped it pass into legend. And as with many legends, the stories surrounding it have been swollen with hearsay and half-truths ever since. Peter Green estimated the potential value of the lost Beano while talking to Neville Marten for this magazine in 1999. "Eric's Les Paul would go for [£]50 million now," he said with admirable exaggeration. "It was a special one."

STEPPIN' OUT...

Eric Clapton was 20 years old when he joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in April 1965. At first he played a Telecaster, but soon he wanted something different. One of his favourite guitarists was Freddie King, who was pictured on a 1962 album, *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away*, playing an old Les Paul Goldtop. The gaudy picture on the front showed a guitar that looked more brown than gold – more like a sunburst finish than a gold one, perhaps. Eric must have made a mental note.

Christopher Hjort, who researched and wrote about this period of Eric's career for his 2007 book, *Strange Brew*, pinpointed the time during 1965 when Eric bought the Beano 'Burst. "The chronology starts with the last-known photograph of Eric with the Telecaster he used until then, a fan snapshot on Sunday 30 May," Christopher tells us, "when the Mayall band visited Kirklevington Country Club in Yorkshire. Five days later, on Friday 4 June, a local newspaper photographed Eric at the Ricky Tick club in the Plaza Ballroom in Guildford, Surrey, playing his newly acquired Les Paul. This pins down the acquisition to some point in the week between that Sunday and the Friday."

Eric enjoyed visiting central London's guitar shops, like so many other musicians. That's where the best guitars were. A few years later, John Ford at *Beat Instrumental* magazine asked Eric about "those Les Pauls our top guitarists rave about". Eric replied: "I bought my first one at Lew Davis's shop in Charing Cross Road – it's Selmer's now. He had a couple imported from the States and I managed to get hold of one."

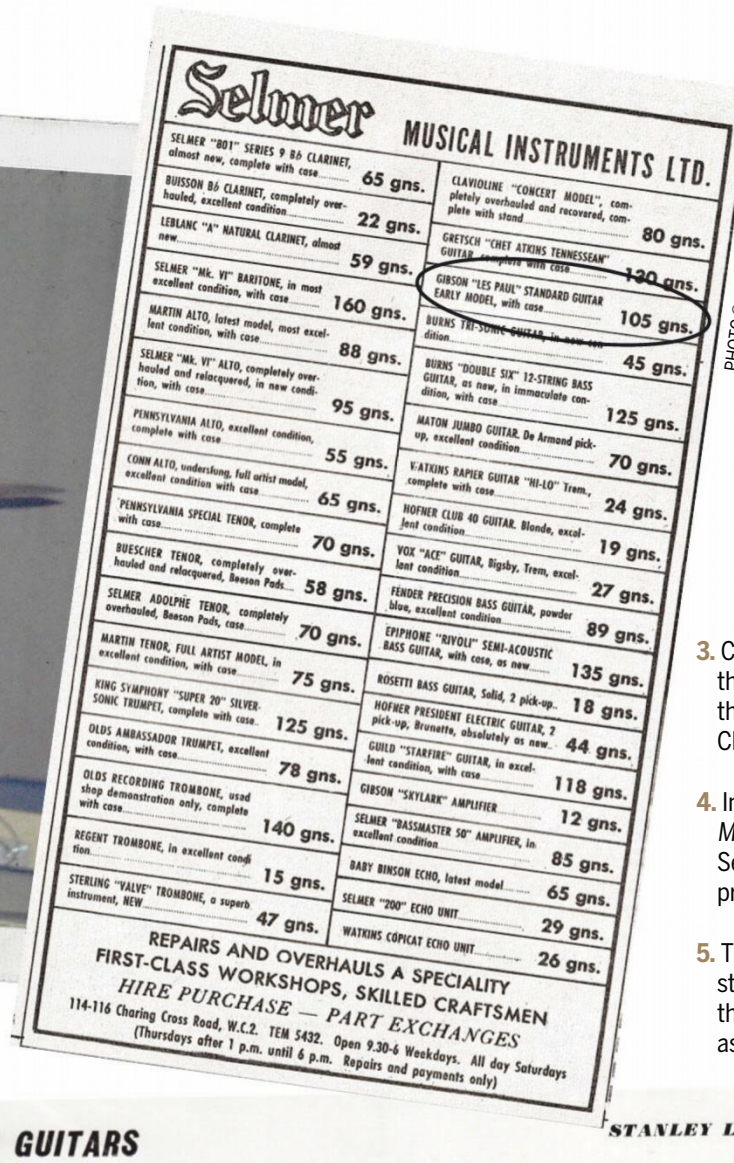
Two brothers, Ben and Lew Davis, ran two shops: Selmer at 114-116 Charing Cross Road and Lew Davis at 134. Eric's mention of Selmer in that 1968 interview relates to the closure of the Lew Davis shop in summer '67. When he said "it's Selmer's now" he probably meant that by the time of his *Beat* interview, there was only Selmer left of the two shops.

Ray Smith was at Lew Davis in the 60s – he'd bought a 335 from the shop before he started working there in 1961 – and he recalls selling a Les Paul to Eric. "We all thought he was great, but he was just one of the guys who came in the shop regularly. Lew Davis was a small shop and Selmer had the fancy stuff. As you went into Lew Davis, on the right was the counter all the way along, with guitars

3

PHOTO © KEITH TURNER COLLECTION

4



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SELMER "Mk. VI" ALTO, completely overhauled and relacquered, in new condition, with case	95 gns.	MATON JUMBO GUITAR. De Armond pick-up, excellent condition	70 gns.
PENNSYLVANIA ALTO, excellent condition, complete with case	55 gns.	V-ATKINS RAPIER GUITAR "HI-LO" Trem., complete with case	24 gns.
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PHOTO © MARTIN KELLY COLLECTION

3. Clue-hunters take from this different angle of the Beano at the Lynx Club, 1966

4. In June 1965, *Melody Maker* ran an ad for Selmer that listed the presumed Beano

5. The Stanley Lewis UK store catalogue featured the Les Paul Standard, as shown, probably 1960

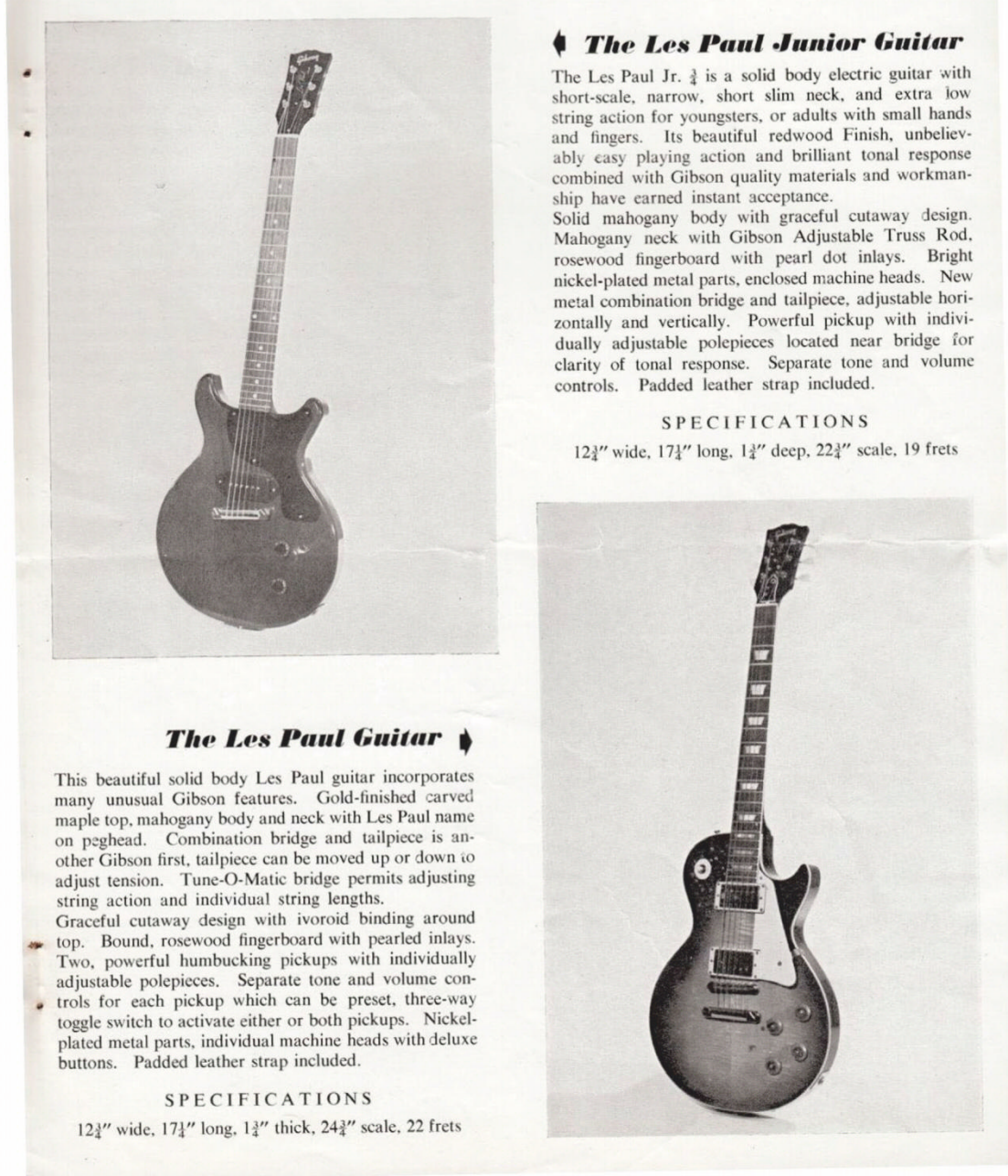
hanging on the wall. Ahead was the manager's desk, a couple of guitars behind him, and then a staircase down to where we put the part-exchanges. But the good guitars were upstairs."

At the time Eric bought the Beano guitar in 1965, both shops advertised regularly in *Melody Maker*, and the stock was considered interchangeable. Ray Smith says, "Sometimes we'd say to Selmer, 'Oh, you've got a Gibson so-and-so down there, and we've just had a sale for it.' So we'd go down there and bring it back with us to Lew Davis."

Lew Davis didn't advertise any Gibson Les Pauls during this period, but Selmer did. In an ad in early June (see above), this entry stands out: "Les Paul Standard, early model, with case, 105 gns." In other words, not the new SG style but an "early model" 1958 to 1960 'Burst. It's very possible this was the guitar Eric bought from Ray Smith at Lew Davis.

Sometimes, goods were priced in guineas ("gns"), usually to make them sound posh, and a guinea was equivalent to one pound and one shilling. It means the Beano Les Paul set Eric back £110/5/-, which we'd call £110.25 these days. At the time, the average weekly wage in Britain was around £12, and Eric probably made about £20 a week with the Bluesbreakers. A brand-new Gibson SG Standard or Fender Stratocaster would have set you back a little over £170.

5



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The Les Paul Junior Guitar

The Les Paul Jr. ¾ is a solid body electric guitar with short-scale, narrow, short slim neck, and extra low string action for youngsters, or adults with small hands and fingers. Its beautiful redwood Finish, unbelievably easy playing action and brilliant tonal response combined with Gibson quality materials and workmanship have earned instant acceptance.
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SPECIFICATIONS

12¾" wide, 17¼" long, 1¾" deep, 22¾" scale, 19 frets

The Les Paul Guitar

This beautiful solid body Les Paul guitar incorporates many unusual Gibson features. Gold-finished carved maple top, mahogany body and neck with Les Paul name on peghead. Combination bridge and tailpiece is another Gibson first, tailpiece can be moved up or down to adjust tension. Tune-O-Matic bridge permits adjusting string action and individual string lengths.
Graceful cutaway design with ivoroid binding around top. Bound, rosewood fingerboard with pearled inlays. Two, powerful humbucking pickups with individually adjustable polepieces. Separate tone and volume controls for each pickup which can be preset, three-way toggle switch to activate either or both pickups. Nickel-plated metal parts, individual machine heads with deluxe buttons. Padded leather strap included.

SPECIFICATIONS

12¾" wide, 17¼" long, 1¾" thick, 24¾" scale, 22 frets

PHOTO © MARTIN KELLY COLLECTION

ERIC FONDLY DESCRIBED THE BEANO IN A LATER INTERVIEW AS THE BEST LES PAUL GUITAR HE EVER HAD

Eric fondly described the Beano guitar in a later interview as the best Les Paul he ever had. He told Dan Forte at *Guitar Player* in 1985 that it was "just a regular sunburst Les Paul" with humbucking pickups, that he bought it in London, and that it was "almost brand-new". Maybe he meant Beano was a used guitar: not new, but in "almost new" condition. Or maybe he meant it was a new guitar: "almost new" because it had been in stock a while.

Restrictions on imports of American guitars were lifted during the second half of 1959, and by the start of 1960, Selmer had the Gibson agency, selling new Gibson guitars in its stores and distributing them to others. That would have included a few of the last Les Paul 'Bursts: the Stanley Lewis store in London published a brochure in 1959/1960 that included a 'Burst among UK-shot pictures of the newly available Gibson models. But that price of 105 guineas in 1965 for what we think was Eric's 'Burst points to a used guitar. Stanley Lewis's price for a new one in '59 or '60 was £120, and Selmer's '61 list price for a new SG Standard was £147, so Eric's 110 quid in '65 looks like the price of a premium used guitar.

Eric, meanwhile, wouldn't have bothered about how new his guitar was. He didn't do very much to it apart from play it as much as possible, though it did have a couple of changes, which were made either by Eric or (more probably) a repairer. First, the original Kluson tuners were removed and a set of Grovers added. Second, toward the end of 1965, the metal covers of the pickups were removed, revealing the bobbins below: double-white at the neck, double-black at the bridge. "You've probably heard about me taking the covers off my pickups," Eric told *Beat Instrumental* in the early months of '66. "This is something I would definitely recommend for any guitarist. The improvement, sound-wise, is unbelievable."

6

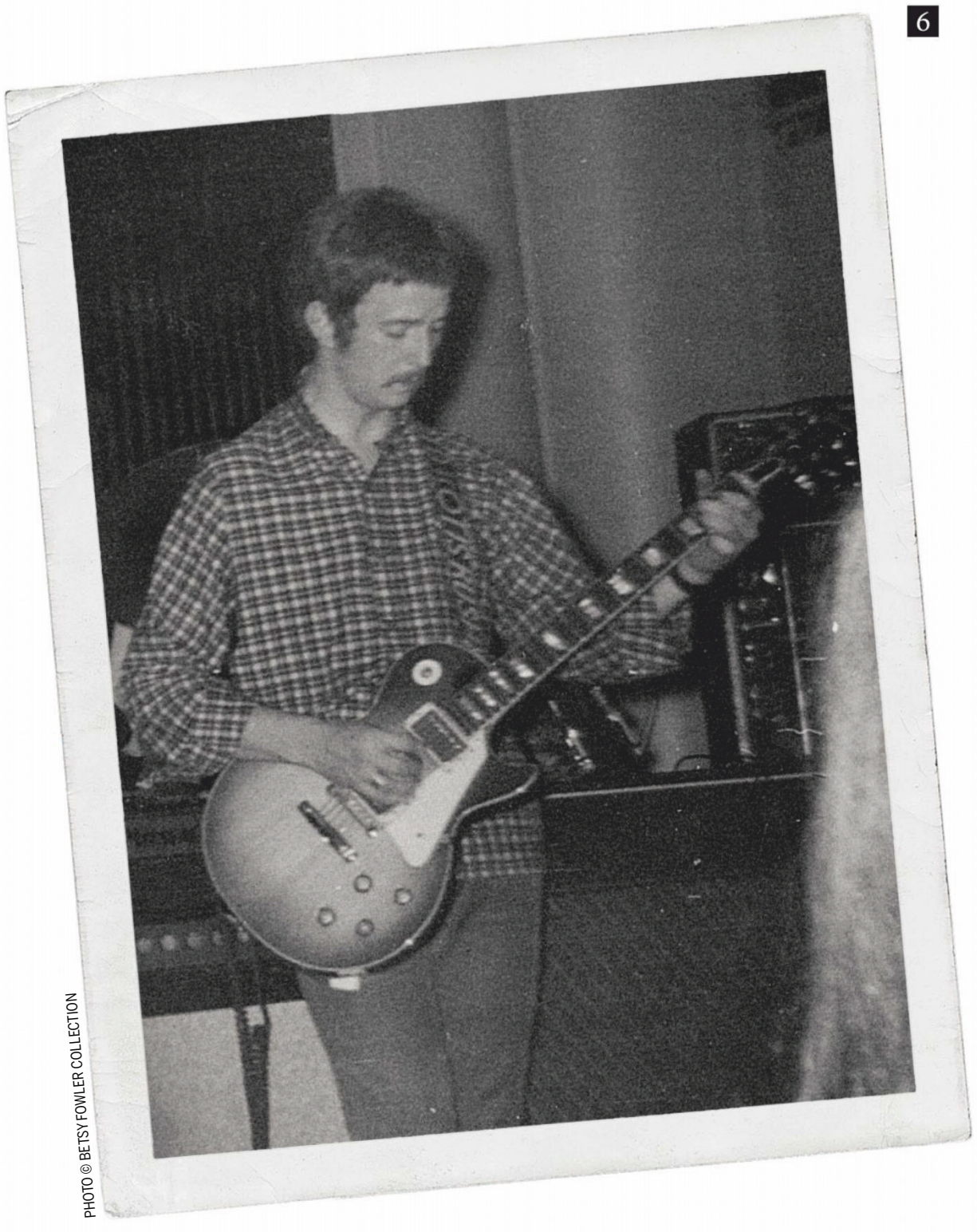

PHOTO © BETSY FOWLER COLLECTION

6. Clapton plays his now legendary Les Paul Standard at the Pontiac Club, Putney, 1965

HAVE YOU HEARD

Many who heard Clapton play the Beano 'Burst live with Mayall's Bluesbreakers during 1965 and '66 heard a guitarist near the top of his game. "On his best nights," Neil Slaven wrote in the 'Beano' sleeve notes, "Eric can make time stand still." Today, we only have the few recordings he made with the guitar, including several singles: Mayall's *I'm Your Witch Doctor/Telephone Blues*, produced by Jimmy Page, Champion Jack Dupree's *Third Degree*, and Mayall's *Bernard Jenkins*. But the main prize is that Beano album, recorded at Decca's studio in north-west London between 27 and 31 March 1966, right around Eric's 21st birthday.

The record still has the ability to tingle the spine, not least for Eric's combination of controlled distortion and feedback, his vibrato style and his melodic sense, all wrapped up in an enviable tone and natural sustain. *Have You Heard*, *Key To Love* and *Steppin' Out* are high spots, and the cover of Freddie King's *Hideaway* is a great moment for a guitar inspired by the album that includes Freddie's original of that tune. "I was very pleased with my sound while I was with John [Mayall]," Eric said a few years later. "Those Gibsons have the perfect blues sound."

DOUBLE CROSSING TIME

By the time the Mayall 'Beano' album was released in the summer of 1966, the restless Clapton was already rehearsing with his next band, which included bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker. 'Beano' made a respectable No 6 on the UK charts, but soon died away, its reputation growing only in later years.

Cream, on the other hand, became superstars very quickly, though they could hardly have foreseen the scope and impact of that stardom in July, when they began rehearsals at a church hall in Brondesbury, north-west London. They quickly realised they had something special – but Eric was hit by disaster. His beloved Les Paul was stolen during those rehearsals, before he'd even had a chance to play it in public or in the studio with his new band.

News of the theft came in an interview with Richard Green for *Record Mirror*, published early that August. "Someone stole it at the rehearsal room," a dejected Eric explained. "I wouldn't have sold it. It was worth about £400 to me. It was the only one I had and the one I always played. I'm borrowing guitars now. I'd like to get another Les Paul; there are only about six or seven in the country."

The *Mirror* journalist asked Eric for a description of the guitar to include in the piece "in the hope that someone sees it being used or hanging in a shop window". He wrote: "It's a Les Paul Standard, five or six years old, small and solid. It has one cutaway and is a red-gold colour with Grover machine heads. The back is very scratched and there are several cigarette burns on the front. The strap is a big, black leather belt with the names 'Buddy Guy', 'Big Maceo' and 'Otis Rush' carved on the inside."

That wasn't the end of the sorry tale. Among Cream's first gigs in the weeks following the rehearsals was one on 2 August at Klooks Kleek, a club a few doors along from the Decca studio. "Someone stole the case at Klooks Kleek," Eric said. "That takes a lot of doing, to walk out of Klooks Kleek with my guitar case. Whoever took the guitar must have come back for the case."

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PHOTO © KEITH TURNER COLLECTION

7. Another shot in the set taken at the Lynx Club, 1966, manages to just about reveal a clear view of the guitar in colour

IT AIN'T RIGHT

Following the theft of the Beano 'Burst, Eric borrowed a few guitars as he searched for a replacement. There was Keith Richards' Bigsby-equipped Les Paul, which he used for Cream's debut at a festival in Windsor on 31 July and a try-out in Manchester the night before. At the Marquee in London on 16 August, Eric played a cherry double-cut Les Paul Special borrowed from Denny Alexander who played in the support group, The Clayton Squares.

Eventually, probably in late August 1966, Eric bought a 'Burst from Andy Summers, which he used for most of Cream's first album, *Fresh Cream*, as well as the single A-side *I Feel Free*. That guitar suffered a head-break early in 1967, probably in March. Eric rejected the unsympathetically repaired guitar and moved to an SG Standard. Today, musician and dealer Drew Berlin owns the *Fresh Cream* 'Burst, complete with the Gibson-mandolin-style headstock inscribed "Eric Clapton" grafted on where its original head had been.

Eric got a third 'Burst while with Cream, a '58 model that he used occasionally on stage during the band's farewell tour in October and November 1968. But this, too, did not last long, going to Paul Kossoff in a trade when Free supported Eric's new band, Blind Faith, the following summer. The guitar, sometimes referred to as the 'Darkburst', is now owned by a collector in New York. Later, Eric became a big fan of Stratocasters, although today he does own at least one 'Burst, a '60 model.

HIDEAWAY

For any guitar-hound keen to sniff out the great lost Beano, one large problem looms. There is precious little evidence to prove that a particular guitar you have in

"THE STRAP HAS THE NAMES 'BUDDY GUY', 'BIG MACEO' AND 'OTIS RUSH' CARVED INSIDE"

PHOTO © BETSY FOWLER COLLECTION

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8. Eric and Beano (right) get together with bassist John McVie (middle) and John Mayall (left) at a gig at the Pontiac Club, London, August 1965

THE PATTERN IN A 'BURST'S MAPLE TOP CAN BE SOMETHING OF A FINGERPRINT WHEN IT COMES TO IDENTIFICATION

front of you is the Beano 'Burst. No official paperwork or human memory survives to reveal its serial number. We're not even sure what year it was made. 'Burst nuts will tell you the colours of the Beano's pickup bobbins (double-white at the neck and double-black at the bridge) narrow it to a '59 or a '60. There is talk of a slim neck, but with little evidence, though some have taken this to narrow it further to a late '59 or early '60.

What about photographs? These days, we're used to multiple photos and videos of every single moment of this or that musician. Back in the 60s it was very different. And anyway, during the period when Eric had the Beano guitar, he enjoyed limited and relatively local renown. It was only subsequently, with Cream and beyond, that his fame grew enormously. The upshot is only 20 or so photos survive of the Beano 'Burst – they can be seen among a swathe of pictures at Michael Chaiken's archival resource for Eric's so-called "god years" (1963 to '72) at www.instagram.com/clapton_was_god. Most, inevitably, are low-quality fan snaps.

When you want to match a photograph of a particular 'Burst with a guitar that claims to be that instrument, there are two main indicators. First is the figure in the wood, the specific pattern in a 'Burst's maple top. It can be something of a fingerprint when it comes to identification. Second is the pattern in the various mother-of-pearl fingerboard markers. These are unique, so they, too, can indicate that the guitar in a photograph is the one we're seeing today.

Subsidiary identification can come from unique marks and dings on the guitar, though these can be relatively easy to fake and so should not be considered alone. And even with the generally reliable patterns in figure and markers, there are factors that can play tricks with what you think you're seeing, such as the way light falls, the angle the guitar is held at, and 'confirmation bias' – the inclination to interpret information in a way that fits whatever you want to believe.

The best of the surviving photos are the professional black-and-white shots from a 'Beano' recording session by David Wedgbury of the Decca publicity art department, some of which were used on the back of the original album cover (and for subsequent reissues).

However, Wedgbury's two best frames showing close-ups of the guitar are frustrating for identification purposes. There is little or no figure visible, implying that Beano had a relatively plain maple top. That's not unusual: some 'Bursts have vibrant figure; others have none; some sit somewhere in the middle. The shots do reveal some detail in a few of the fingerboard markers for the upper frets, and there seem to be spots and marks on the body front, though it's not clear if these are on the guitar or the negatives.

WHAT'D I SAY

Inevitably, rumours have circulated about where the Beano 'Burst might be – mostly since the rise of the internet and its suitability for spreading speculation as if it were fact... But there are no facts about the whereabouts of this guitar. And, naturally, that circles back to create yet more half-truths and conjecture.

A recent skirmish with the legend came in 2016 when Joe Bonamassa told this magazine that he knew Beano was in a collection on the East Coast of America. "That's all I can tell you – and that's all I will say," he told our editor, Jamie Dickson. "It still exists and I haven't seen it, but I have it on good authority from people who have." However, he quickly retracted these comments when they originally appeared on musicradar.com.

Joe posted at lespaulforum.com: "Just so we are clear, it was a last-minute interview and I regret getting caught off guard... Given a second shot I would of [sic] passed on the question." We did ask Joe for a comment for this feature, but he declined, saying he had nothing to add or speculate about Beano.

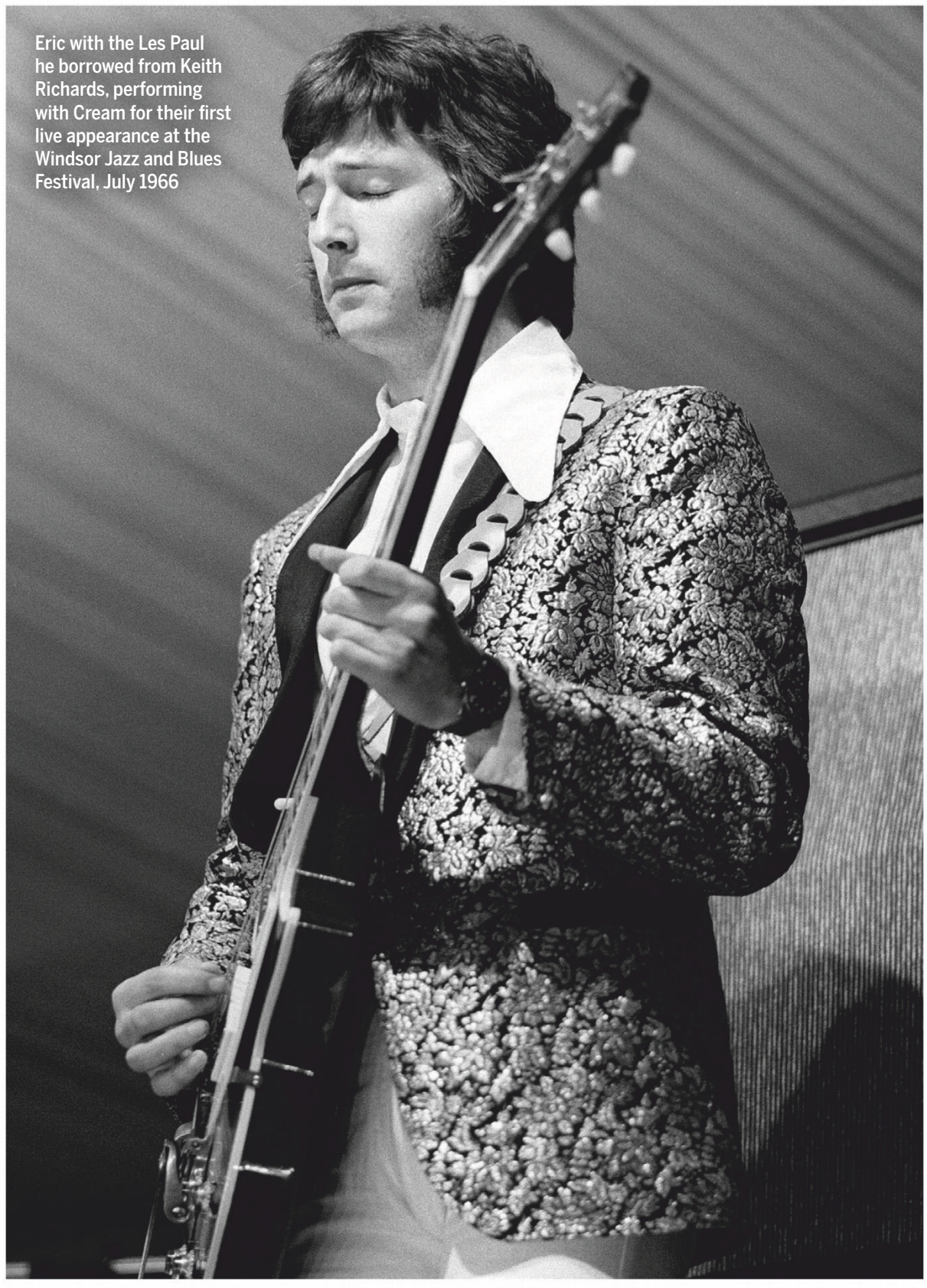
Even if the Beano guitar were to turn up today and somehow was authenticated, there is another issue. In the States, there is a statute of limitations that might prevent any legal action so long after the theft. In Britain, however, matters are more complicated.

Let's say you are the original thief and you still have the guitar. If the police could prove you stole it, you could be prosecuted for the theft. It's trickier, however, once the guitar is sold on. A spokesman at New Scotland Yard told us there were so-called "open markets" in London at the time of the Beano theft. Sales there had to be made between dusk and dawn to allow the rightful owner to claim back their goods before sunrise. After sun-up, the sale could take place – and some big civil cases concerning transactions at these places resulted in the buyer keeping the goods.

If the stolen guitar was sold elsewhere and the buyer did not pay a reasonable

John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers: (l-r) John Mayall, Hughie Flint, Eric and John McVie

© PASSION PICTURES / *ERIC CLAPTON: LIFE IN 12 BARS*



Eric with the Les Paul he borrowed from Keith Richards, performing with Cream for their first live appearance at the Windsor Jazz and Blues Festival, July 1966

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

MANY 'BURSTS ARE OUT THERE THAT MIGHT BE THE LONG-LOST GUITAR, EVEN IF SOME OWNERS ARE SECRETIVE

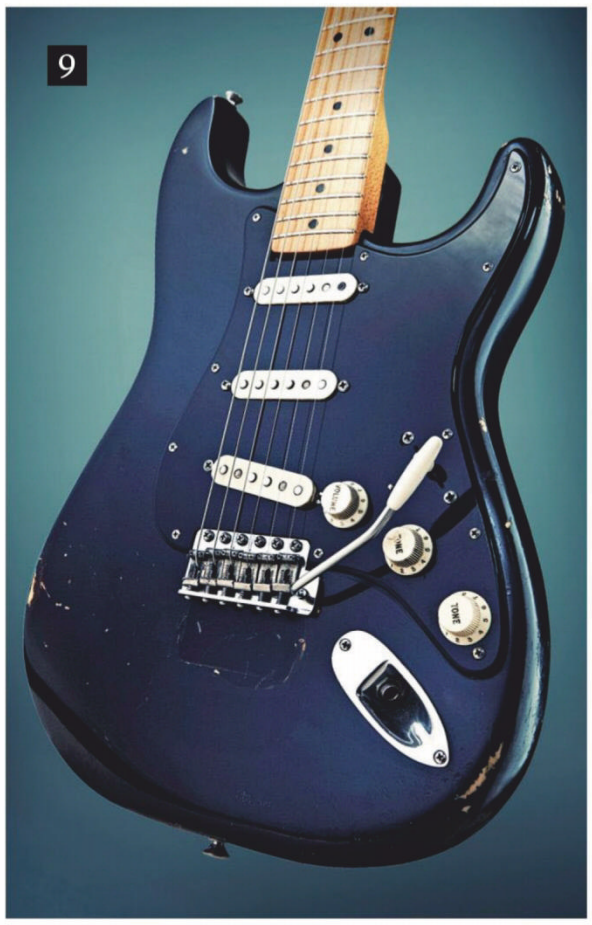
market price for it, the courts in any civil action could rule that the buyer must have known something was suspect and that the item was, therefore, not theirs. This could result in it being returned to the original owner, where possible. If, however, the buyer bought the item in good faith and paid a reasonable market value – even if it was from someone who did not do so – then the courts might rule that the rights in the item are with that buyer.

KEY TO LOVE

There are still undiscovered 'Bursts to be found, and Beano could be among them. Gibson logs show 434 Les Pauls shipped for 1958, 643 for 1959, and 635 for 1960, totalling 1,712. Crudely removing some from '58 (which includes the last of the Goldtops) and from '60 (which has a small number of the first of the SG-style models) provides a rough total of 1,406 'Bursts made by Gibson.

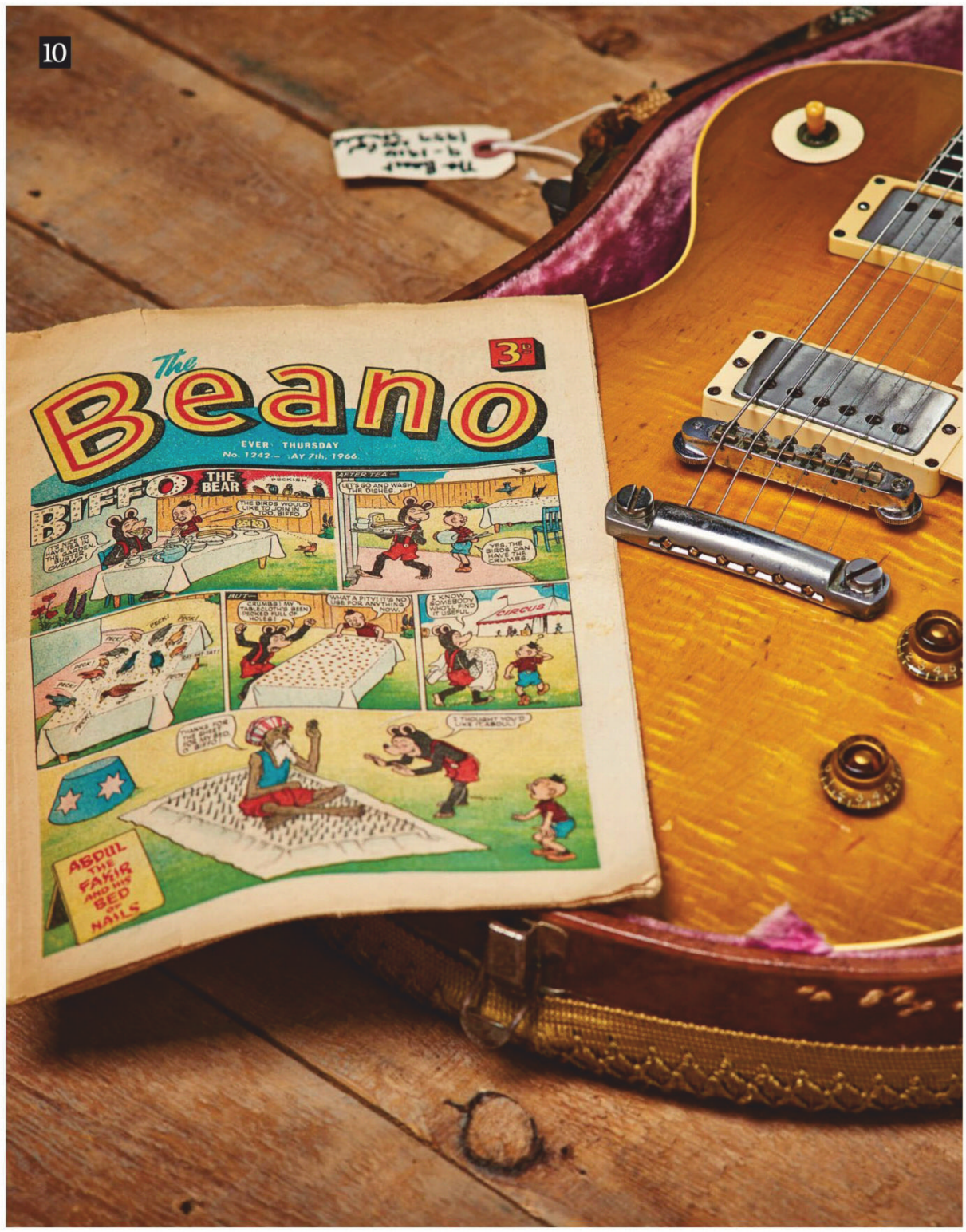
Julio Sanchez runs Burstserial.com, which gathers public information and contributions from collectors to create a database of 'Burst material, serial numbers and pictures. At the time of writing, Julio had 829 'Bursts logged by serial number. Considering the 436 '59s reported to him as a percentage of the known shipping for that year, and applying it to his data for the other two years, his estimate – "using our own experience on what's been logged by the community in the last 20 years" – is that 1,146 'Bursts were made by Gibson.

With those two estimates in mind, it's clear that many potential 'Bursts are still out there that might just be the long-lost Beano guitar, even if some owners are secretive. "More and more," Julio reports, "I get messages from owners willing to let me know about their 'new' 'Burst – but frequently they are not ready to share it with the bigger audience and make it public. I would say we see no more than six to 12 'new' ones per year."



9. If the Beano 'Burst were ever to be found and sold, it's thought the guitar would overtake Gilmour's Black Strat, which went for almost $4 million at auction in 2019

10. Bernie Marsden's '59 'Burst (aka 'The Beast') and a copy of *The Beano* comic from 7 May 1966 – the same edition Eric is reading on the cover of the album



RAMBLIN' ON MY MIND

How much would the Beano 'Burst be worth if it ever resurfaced? This is another of the great imponderables surrounding the instrument. Vic DaPra got his first 'Burst in 1972, and he's published five *Burst Believers* books that profile Les Paul owners and their axes. "I think Beano has probably more mystique than any other 'Burst," he says. "When the guitar was stolen, it was no Holy Grail guitar, nothing special, just a used guitar back then. Now, it would probably pull millions and millions of dollars. I've heard of crazy offers on Duane Allman's 'Burst and Mike Bloomfield's 'Burst, but I think the Beano would command the ultimate big-dollar price."

Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay has a remarkable guitar collection that includes several high-end instruments previously owned by well-known players, such as David Gilmour, whose Black Strat Jim secured at a Christie's sale in 2019 for $3,975,000. Would he be interested in the Beano 'Burst if it ever showed up? "Sure," he tells us. "It's Eric, and it's rare." And how much might it be worth? "I don't know what its value would be," Jim says, "and I would prefer not to speculate."

Drew at Drew Berlin's Vintage Guitars specialises in 'Bursts – he played his first one in 1969, trying out Jeff Beck's when his band opened for The Jeff Beck Group. Today, Drew says if anyone tried to get him involved in an Eric-related Les Paul, the first thing he would do is call Eric – as he would with any artist or owner of a guitar that went missing. Having worked with Eric before, Drew's impression is that he's moved on. "Eric doesn't have to dwell on the past, because he continues to be more and more successful. So he's not like, 'Oh, this is a memory from when I was famous.' I don't think he holds on to those memories as much as maybe some other people would."

How much could the Beano be worth? "It's hard to tell," Drew says, "but I think it would be somewhere between five and [$]10 million. I think, though, it would need Eric himself personally to sign off on it. I think the proper thing to do, if it did surface, and if Eric would verify it – and if he wasn't interested in it himself – is that part of its sale would go to his charity. That way he'd still have an involvement, and it would do good for him and his cause."

Drew says the value in the Beano 'Burst would revolve around its iconic status in the history of guitar music. "So many people, myself included, were influenced by the sound of that John Mayall *Blues Breakers* record. Even now, young guitarists coming up hear that record and they're inspired to play guitar and to try to get that sound. I think the reason Beano is so sought after and still discussed today is because it marked a turning point in time, in music, that really changed things."

Back in 1985, Eric tried to explain to Dan Forte at *Guitar Player* what the old Beano guitar had been like. "The best Les Paul I ever had was stolen during rehearsals for Cream's first gig," he said. "It was... just magnificent. I never really found one as good as that. I do miss that one." G

Tony Bacon would like to thank: Jim Avey, Drew Berlin, Sid Bishop, Michael Chaiken, Vic DaPra, Doug Ellis, Colin Falconer, Pat Foley, Betsy Fowler, Billy Gibbons, Dave Gregory, Mike Hickey, Christopher Hjort, Jim Irsay, J.P. James, Martin Kelly, Christian Larsen, Perry Margouleff, Bernie Marsden, Bill Puplett, Julio Sanchez, Brinsley Schwarz, Ray Smith, Keith Turner and Edwin Wilson

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PHOTO © BETSY FOWLER COLLECTION

11. Eric Clapton and John McVie on stage at a Bluesbreakers gig: note EC's unique guitar strap

HOW MUCH WOULD THE BEANO BE WORTH IF IT EVER RESURFACED? THIS IS ANOTHER OF THE GREAT IMPONDERABLES

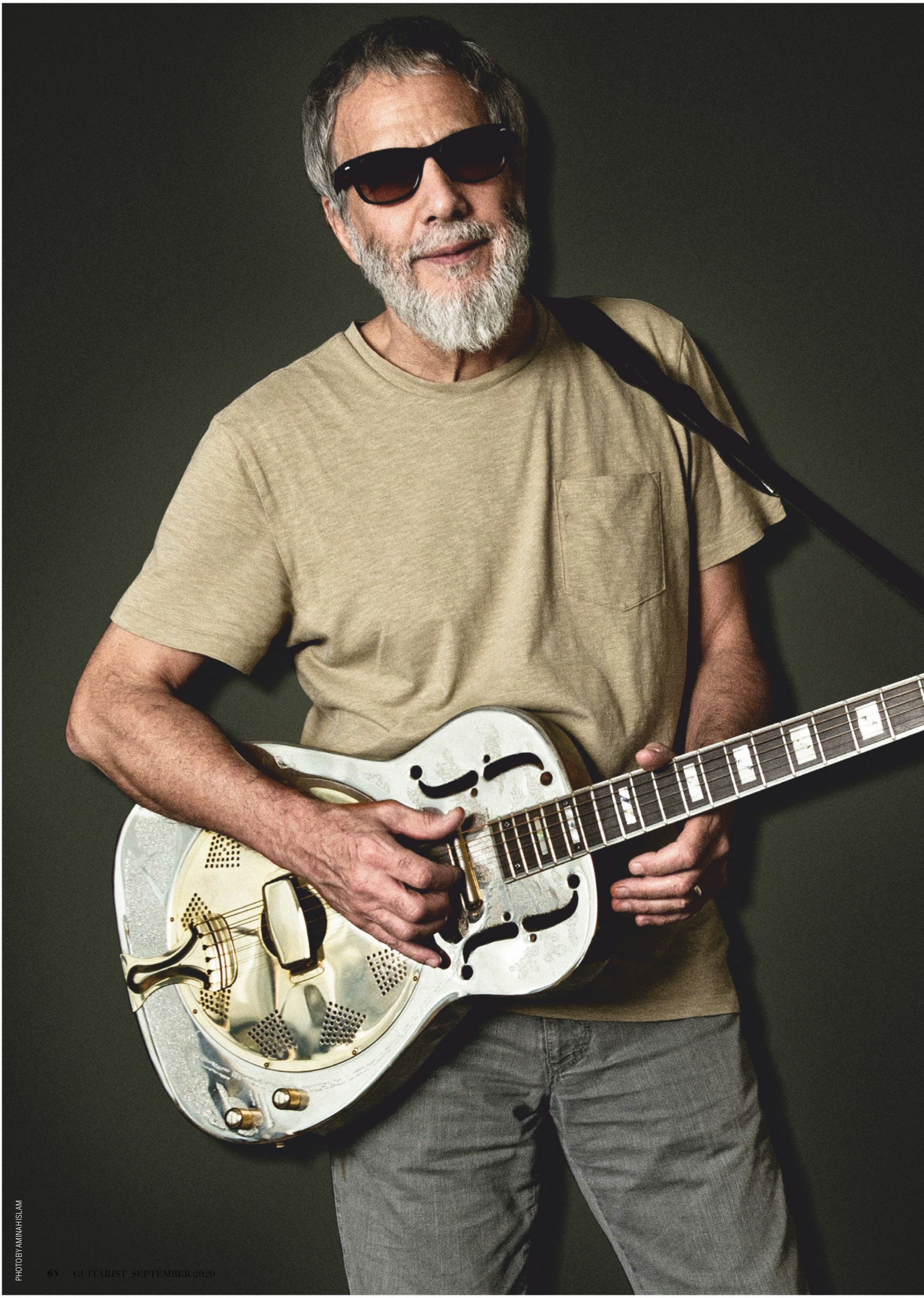


PHOTO BY AMINA HISLAM

YUSUF/ CAT STEVENS

He's one of the most influential singer-songwriters in the world but left fame behind to complete a journey of spiritual growth. Now he's returned to music and joins us to talk guitars and songcraft – and explain why he decided to revisit his most famous album, *Tea For The Tillerman*, 50 years on

Words Jamie Dickson

Steep Learning Curve

"My first guitar was an eight-quid Eko made in Italy. It was pretty cheap and didn't sound that great, either. All the problems you have learning the guitar were quadrupled by the fact it had such a high action, and I didn't understand what strings to use or what gauge. So I was trying to keep my fingers down and make the notes as clear as possible. I was trying to do The Kinks' *You Really Got Me*... But it was way too fast. My fingers just wouldn't react quick enough... It was just too much of a challenge, so I gave it up. But then I came back to it and, when I did, I found I mastered it more easily. I don't know why that happened. But the second time around I knew what I was doing. So that was the process that got me going towards playing the guitar."

First Good Guitar

"I never had any doubt that I had something. It was just how long would the world take to catch up with me? Even though I wasn't really that great at writing songs in the beginning, although I did have a few – in fact, *The First Cut Is The Deepest* was one of the earliest. So I had this confidence pretty much from day one... I'd written a few songs and I think my brother had seen the light, you know? A bulb flashed above his head and he said, 'Hang on, this sounds good.' And so he convinced my father to lay out 80 quid. And I bought myself a Hagström 12-string. I loved 12-strings because I was always a fan of Lead Belly. Those kind of early blues-folk songs were also relatively easy to learn as well. And the Hagström sounded loud, which was great."

Coping With Fame

"Basically, like most artists, I was kind of an introvert. And to actually stand up and do this thing in front of other people – and be as good as you are when you're all alone – is not that easy to achieve. There are so many faces looking at you, expecting you to be great and you have to be great at that moment. The challenge was enormous, so I hated it. I *hated* it. Because after cutting my teeth in the folk clubs and just doing [my music] quietly, occasionally taking the mic and doing a little song, the next big step was being seen by about three million people on television,

PHOTO BY ANWAR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES

Above: Entertaining the crowds at London's Hammersmith Apollo, 2005

Below: Cat Stevens pictured in 1967, just two years before contracting tuberculosis. His convalescence was a pivotal time in his personal and creative life: a "spiritual exploration", he says

PHOTO BY MONITOR PICTURE LIBRARY/PHOTOSHOT/GETTY IMAGES

live on Simon Dee's show [*Dee Time*]. I could have died – but I had to go through with it. So you can imagine that the trajectory that I was on was just like 'Zap! Boom!' – and suddenly I was there."

Developing A Voice On Guitar

"Early on, I was impressed by the Bert Jansch clique: John Renbourn, Davey Graham... I remember that everybody could play *Anji* [by Davey Graham] and I loved that kind of folk thing. But, of course, The Beatles were absolutely dominating everything for me: the skill of the writing. The problem was I never had an electric guitar, so it was always acoustic. So I tended to write on an acoustic and I was always more of a rhythm guitarist than a solo player. I couldn't do that.

"As you experiment with chords, it starts to get boring when you can only do simple strumming. And that's where fingerstyle does the job. You're on a chord, it's a simple thing, you've got the shape right but now you can make it sing in a different way. I never really learnt the intricacies of fingerpicking properly. I mean, even today, I'm shy of playing in front of someone like Paul Simon because I never learned anything properly. But the way I did it was kind of unique and that's why I suppose it works in my songs."

Life-Changing Illness

"Getting sick [with tuberculosis] completely changed the course of my life. I mean, up to that point, I'd been living kind of a shell of a life. I had not really developed an identity. And I'd been kept in my [early career signature-garb of] tuxedos, if you like, by the business and the agencies around me at the time. And so this was a chance for me to break free of the image and to kind of find myself. And I was looking very, very deeply into my psyche of who I was... and that spiritual exploration began in the hospital. But the illness didn't stop me [writing] and, in fact, I started writing very soon. One of the things I wrote around then was a song called *The View From The Top*, which is a very sad song. It was saying, 'Why am I always trying to be like somebody else?' I was really digging into the question of identity. And so that is very, very important."

Who Are You?

"I had to go and convalesce for a long time. They told me, 'Don't work for a year.' I can't for the life of me remember how it came about, but one of the first gigs I did after the hospital thing was as the support act for The Who at the Roundhouse. By that time I had got

myself an electric guitar – a Gibson 355 or 335, I think – and I had my little Fender amp and I'd written some really wonky songs... it was a blip [laughs]. But I was still looking for the right moment for things to happen and for me to find out what I wanted to do next."

Blessed Isle

"Signing to Island Records was the greatest liberating opportunity I ever had in my career, certainly up to that point. It was like: now you can do whatever you want. And Chris Blackwell [Island's founder] was absolutely bowled over by my songwriting, because by that time I'd written things like *Father And Son* and *Where Do The Children Play?* and he'd listened to quite a few of them. He introduced me to [Yardbirds founder and producer] Paul Samwell-Smith and there was already some history there, because I'd been in the 100 Club and danced to his band when they were playing. So Chris gave me all the freedom I wanted and – not only that – when it came to the record cover, he said, 'Well, you're an artist – why don't you draw it?' I couldn't have asked for anything more! He gave us the freedom to do things like that. He got a little bit gripey when we overspent by more than £3,000 on the first album, though..."

"Signing to Island Records was the greatest liberating opportunity I ever had in my career. It was like: now you can do whatever you want"

PHOTO BY JACK MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY MAYMANAHISLAM

Yusuf/Cat Stevens' almost two-decade long break from releasing Western music allowed him to explore life – and its meanings – outside of the studio and away from touring

"I always felt 'Wild World' was a bit too commercial, so when they talked about me releasing it, I said no"

Mona Bone Jakon

"I think originally it was intended that Jon Mark should be the guitarist on my album *Mona Bone Jakon*, but then he couldn't do it. So his friend Alun Davies came along in his place. And we got on just so perfectly because he had this intricacy that could fill out all the gaps in my chord playing, and he gave them another dimension. And so it was just a perfect partnership. You can hear the beauty of that relationship in the chords of *Lady D'Arbanville*. That song was a little bit influenced by Peter Green and his track *Oh Well* – and in more than one way, in fact, because Peter Green was one of those people who actually walked away from the business at one point. It was pretty impressive to me that somebody could do that. I ended up drawing a dustbin as the cover design. I think I was trying to just say, 'Look, this is raw, this is grit-level, so if you're going to listen to this, get ready.'"

Pop Star

"Once you're taken as a model or as kind of an idol, you've got a lot to live up to. You've got to be bigger than you are. And that's impossible to sustain. At some point, you've got to find your feet where you feel comfortable. And that's why I think, when I wrote the song *Pop Star*, I kind of knew it was a temporary thing that while it was good, it was good. My goal was much higher than just the charts, but it was the only way I knew how to express myself, so that's what I did. I'm not belittling music, it was everything to me at that time."

Wild World

"*Wild World* was a song that I wrote coming out of a relationship with my girlfriend at the time, Patti D'Arbanville. It had ended, and I wished her well, which came out as a kind of nice message... But I always felt the song was a little bit too commercial, so when they were talking about me releasing it, I said no. But I know that Chris Blackwell loved the song and he wanted Jimmy Cliff to do it. So I produced that song for Jimmy and he had a hit with it and it went very well, and in America they were screaming for me to release my version of it. I said okay, but for me it was a little bit like the kind of commercial song that I used to write in the early days of my 60s career. So I was slightly averse to that being representative of me.

"By comparison, *Miles From Nowhere* from *Tea For The Tillerman* represented much of my journey and my placement in this universe. We all come in here [to the world] and we don't quite know why we're here, but we know that we've got to get somewhere and that place has got to be better than where we are."

"My goal [in leaving music] was to find that place where I understood what life was about"

Game-Changing Gibson

"I really turned a corner when I got my hands on a black Gibson Everly Brothers J-180. It was my favourite guitar, I just loved it. It was really dynamic and it had a very easy action, very thin neck. It was just such a beautiful instrument, too. But, of course, it didn't have any [means of] amplification, and so here we get to the problem. Because in the old days, how do you mic an acoustic? There was always a horrible, horrible ever-present feedback. You couldn't really play that loud. That guitar got supplemented later with things like the Ovation – but the Ovation was just a necessity because it really wasn't a guitar that you wanted to play."

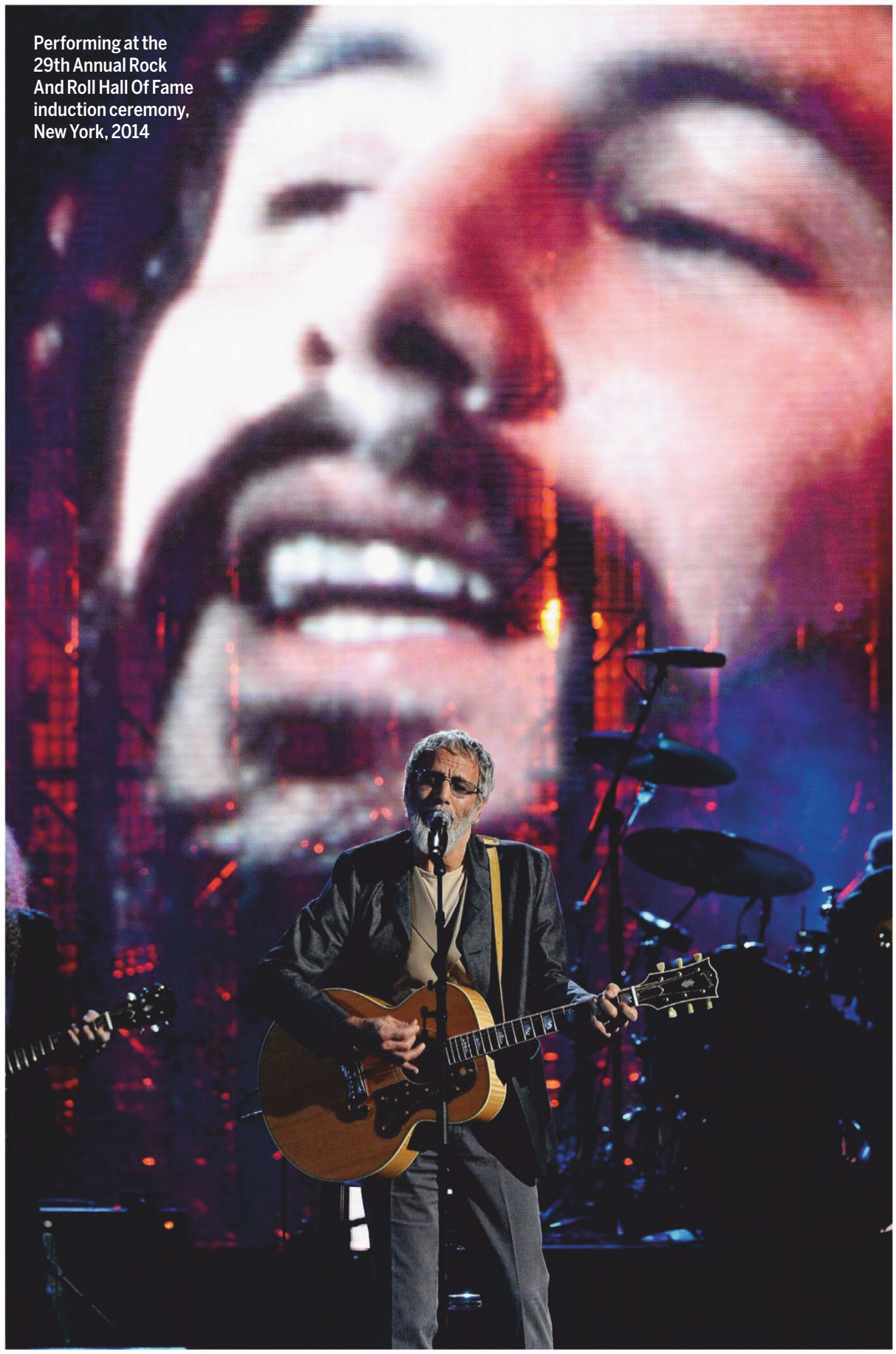
Foreign Affair

"The album *Foreigner* kind of describes itself. It was my wanting to escape the spotlight and the image I'd been cast into. It was running away with me. The success was so big, so overwhelming. My last album before that, *Catch Bull At Four*, went to No 1 and suddenly everybody was full of expectation. And I hadn't found myself. So I decided to do something completely different – Alun was not there, Paul wasn't there... I just went to Jamaica and recorded in the heat of everything. I recorded all these parts of songs that I had written at some point and kind of threaded them together in a way that made sense to me, and that became the *Foreigner Suite*."

Finding Faith

"People asked me how could I leave and just give up music, but it was because I'd actually found what I was looking for [with religion]. My goal was to find that place where I understood what life was about. I had to go through a lot of adventures, in a way, to get to that point. But when I did, I thought, 'Well, this is great.' You get to a point where you've written songs and you've got to be inspired to write another one. By that time, I was just so excited: I was learning about so many other things.

"I got married and had so many wonderful opportunities to do things I've never done before because I was always on the road or in the studio. And this was freedom: the freedom to do whatever I wanted in life, like have children. So all these things took over and I just gave up my guitar and said 'Well, this is it.' Until I see a way forward, this is what I'm going to do."

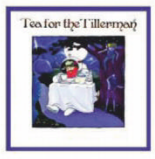


Performing at the 29th Annual Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony, New York, 2014

PHOTO BY LARRY BUSACCA/GETTY IMAGES

Peace Train

"Why I came back to making music is to try to make sure that people understood that I'm still who I am. You know, I haven't really gone away from my ideals – peace is the first stop for me and it's the last stop. When you've got something to say, you should say it. And music is a way of making candid your thoughts, even your dreams, your hopes, your fears. Everything can be said in music." G



Yusuf/Cat Stevens' latest album, *Tea For The Tillerman²*, is available now on Cat-O-Log Records

https://catstevens.com

A Second Cup Of Tea

In September 2020, Yusuf/Cat Stevens released *Tea For The Tillerman²*, a reworking of his most famous long-player from 1970. Here he explains the reasoning behind the new record: "It was very much a spark of an idea that came from my son because we were coming up to the 50th anniversary and time has flown so fast," he says. "Anyway, I thought it was quite cool. I certainly wasn't aiming to make it kind of a replica of the [original] album, but just to kind of bring it up to date to where we are today and how we feel today and how incredibly the songs relate to the condition of the world and to my own spiritual vocation. So that was where it came from."

EPIPHONE EPIPHANY

Gibson pumped new life into Epiphone while rescuing the brand from sinking in the late 50s. Head of product development, Mat Koehler, recounts the tale as Gibson returns to its source of inspiration with Epiphone once again...

Words Rod Brakes **Photography** Olly Curtis

During rock 'n' roll's fledgling years of the 1950s, Gibson was riding the wave of the electric guitar boom while Epiphone's once-feted archtops became dead in the water. Whereas Gibson flourished in the post-war years following its acquisition by Chicago Musical Instruments (CMI) in 1944 and the subsequent appointment of Ted McCarty as CEO in 1948, Epiphone embarked on a long, slow decline following the death of its visionary founder, Epi Stathopoulo, in 1943. Along with infighting, unionisation problems and a partial relocation to Philadelphia in 1953, the House of Stathopoulo (as it was previously known) stood divided. The once-proud brand, Epiphone Inc. of New York – Gibson's fiercest competitor in the revolutionary pre-war archtop era – was now a spent force. Save for one thing: it still built some of the best upright basses in the industry.

Despite its troubles, Epiphone managed to sustain an enviable reputation as a quality builder of upright basses, or 'bass viols' as they were often called – an avenue Gibson wished to further explore in the 50s while competing against Fender's game-changing Precision Bass. Ted McCarty was so impressed with the instruments that he suggested to Epiphone's president, Orphie Stathopoulo, that if ever he decided to sell the bass business, he should give Ted a call. The seed was planted in Orphie's mind, and in the spring of 1957, he did just that.

After years of struggling to stay afloat and with morale at an all-time low, he eventually keeled over and reached out to Ted for a lifeline. With more than 80 years in the American instrument-building business, the Stathopoulo family were finally bowing out.

"Ted McCarty sent his right-hand man on a reconnaissance mission to Epiphone"

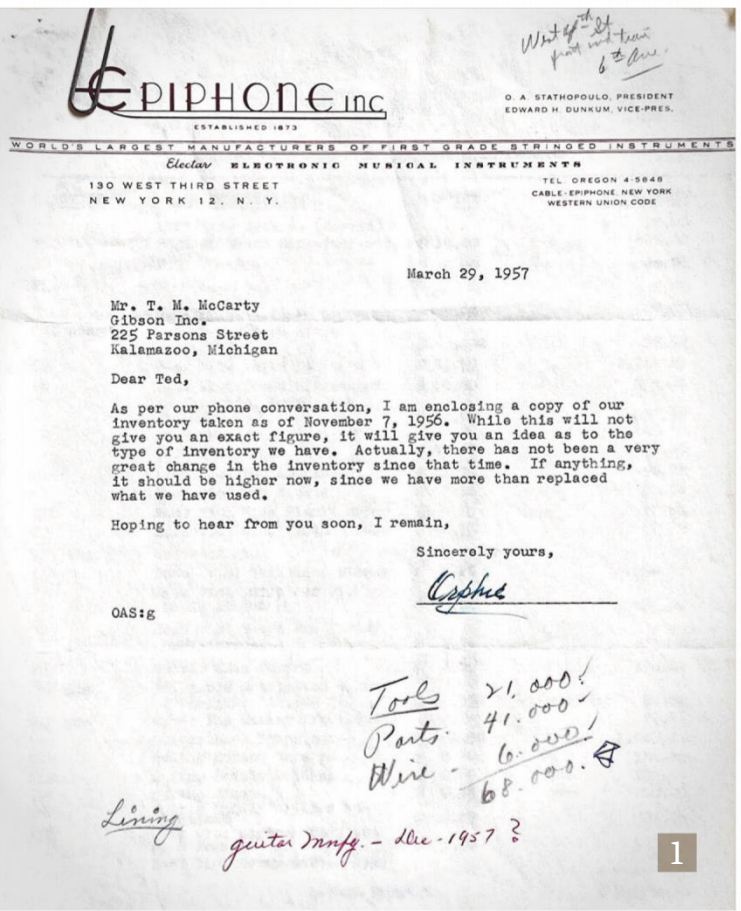
"Looking through our archives, my favourite topic of all is Epiphone," begins Gibson's head of product development, Mat Koehler. "When I see this stuff, I realise what a creative boom it was at the time, and we're witnessing a renaissance of Epiphone right now. The Epiphone stuff really gets me going. We have memos from April 1957, when Ted McCarty sent his right-hand man, John Huis, and Ward Arbanas on a reconnaissance mission to Epiphone. Ward would soon head up the project and become the [production manager] of Epiphone, Kalamazoo. The mission wasn't necessarily to snoop on Epiphone – it was about gauging the opportunity to purchase its upright bass business. John and Ward reported back that [Gibson] was very well equipped to be making upright basses. Ted then contacted Orphie Stathopoulo with an offer of $20,000, which he accepted right away."

While the Gibson team was busy organising transportation of the basses along with associated parts and machinery from Epiphone's New York and Philadelphia sites to its Kalamazoo factory,

Assembled in Kalamazoo, this 1959 Epiphone Coronet features an early-style slab body, 'bikini' headstock logo plate, octagonal knobs, and 'New Yorker' pickup

1. Dated 29 March 1957, this letter from Epiphone president Orphie Stathopoulo is addressed directly to Gibson president Ted McCarty and chronicles a turning point in guitar history

2. The slab bodies of Epiphone's seminal Coronet, Wilshire and Crestwood electrics soon gave way to a thinner design with rounded edges, as seen here on this 1961 Epiphone Wilshire



EPIPHONE inc
ESTABLISHED 1873
O. A. STATHOPOULO, PRESIDENT
EDWARD H. DUNKUM, VICE-PRES.
WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURERS OF FIRST GRADE STRINGED INSTRUMENTS
Electar ELECTRONIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
130 WEST THIRD STREET
NEW YORK 12, N. Y.
TEL. OREGON 4-5846
CABLE-EPIPHONE NEW YORK
WESTERN UNION CODE

March 29, 1957

Mr. T. M. McCarty
Gibson Inc.
225 Parsons Street
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Ted,

As per our phone conversation, I am enclosing a copy of our inventory taken as of November 7, 1956. While this will not give you an exact figure, it will give you an idea as to the type of inventory we have. Actually, there has not been a very great change in the inventory since that time. If anything, it should be higher now, since we have more than replaced what we have used.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

OAS:g

Tools ×1,000
Parts 41,000
Wire 6,000
68,000

Living guitar mnfg. - die - 1957 ?

1

2

John Huis suddenly realised Epiphone wasn't just packing up the bass business.

"They were gathering up everything: basses, guitar bodies, necks, pickups – they were clearing out," continues Mat. "[Gibson] quickly became concerned about Orphie realising they may not have intended to buy everything for $20,000. John sent a hurried telegraph to Ted saying, 'They think we're buying everything: guitars, amplifiers, you name it – they've pulled everything out for us to ship to Kalamazoo,' and then Ted changed course and alerted his lawyers saying, 'We need to make this happen ASAP because this opportunity is too good to pass up.' It was all orchestrated by Ted, and once everything was on the move, CMI set up Epiphone Inc. of Kalamazoo.

"There's a letter from Orphie dated 'March 29, 1957' [pictured above] where he talks about Epiphone's inventory, which was done in the previous November. Tongue in cheek, he says, 'The inventory hasn't changed since then,' basically insinuating that sales were stagnant. Its main problem was it didn't have any product direction. Gibson also floundered a little bit before '57 and '58, but Epiphone did not have solidbody guitars. There wasn't much in the way of forward-thinking designs. You could argue the same for Gibson with respect to basses; while Fender were busy creating the industry standard in electric bass, Gibson were still thinking there was a real opportunity with upright basses. But, interestingly, that's how Gibson were able to acquire their former competitor."

Although Gibson's ambition to produce a successful line of upright basses was never fulfilled (its attempts had ceased by 1961), the large influx of Epiphone guitar parts inspired a radical change of direction.

"Around early to mid-1957, it became apparent they were going to be getting everything from Epiphone and [Gibson] immediately came up with the idea to create an entire product line – but not just basses," clarifies Mat. "They had already worked out what basses they wanted right off the bat, and now they were scrambling to come up with an entire product line of guitars. They were trying to make the most of the spare parts. [Gibson's] parent company, CMI, in Chicago said, 'Send us a product portfolio. What does the price list look like?' Some of the names and prices were modified, but it was approved. And they consulted with Clarence Havenga, the sales manager, who said, 'Here's your in: if you come up with a product line, we can sell them in stores where we previously denied them the Gibson line because they are too close to an existing dealer.'"

"Gibson were scrambling to come up with a product line… trying to make the most of the spare parts"

With a plan in place and CMI keen to make progress, Ted McCarty whipped his team into action ahead of the rapidly approaching July 1958 NAMM Show in Chicago where the new line of Epiphone guitars was to be unveiled.

"The guitars were concepted in the early part of 1958," Mat tells us, "and in May, Ted McCarty felt compelled to send a memo with words to the effect of, 'If anybody has a problem building a guitar with Epiphone on the headstock then see me because we need this done immediately – any delay will result in serious consequences.' There was so much going on at the time and Gibson were creating their own new models. The July 1958 NAMM Show in Chicago was epic. Epiphone had their own room – number 729 – at Palmer House. Their order book was not earth shattering right after NAMM, but in a letter Ward sent to Ted recounting the event, he made a note that Forrest White from Fender stopped by to offer his 'congratulations on the nice-

3. Ted McCarty's ambitions for the new Kalamazoo-built Epiphone range extended to the production of flat-top acoustics such as this maple-bodied FT-110 Frontier dreadnought from 1963

4. One of the lesser-known models, the E252 Broadway is a deep-bodied electric archtop, and with its dual mini-humbuckers and Frequensator tailpiece it showcases a unique Epiphone design

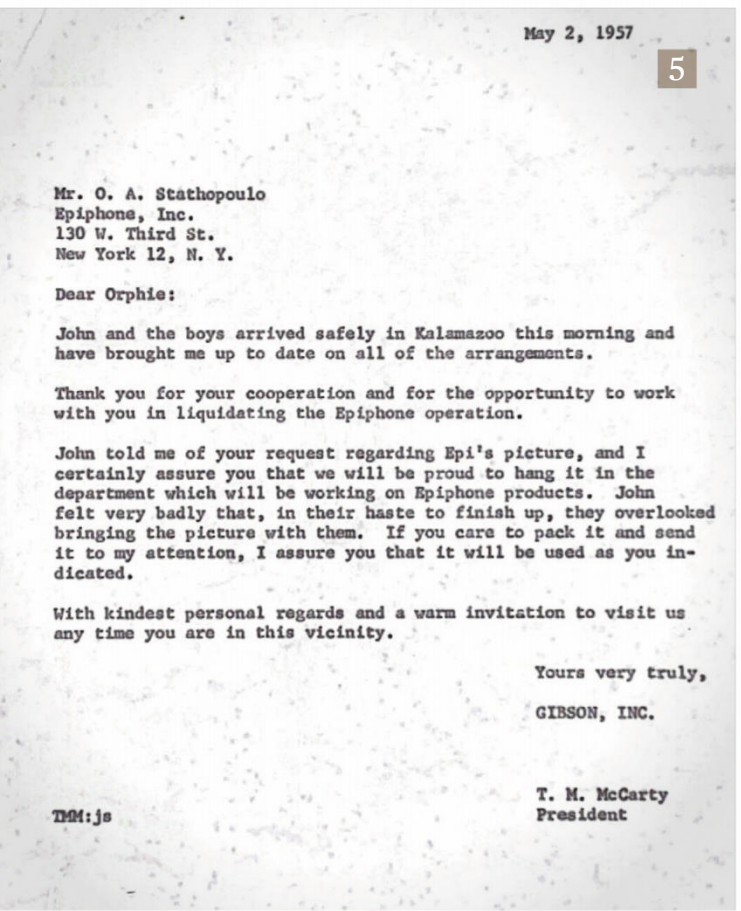
looking instruments'. Ward thought they did pretty good.

"My favourite Epiphone story concerns the fabled Moderne. The name Moderne probably originated from that [1957 Gibson Modernistic series] patent drawing, but by the time they were submitting their ideas for Epiphone, they felt the most viable use of that name would be for the double-cutaway [Epiphone solidbodies]. Looking at this memo in front me, it appears there are two Modernes, both with poplar bodies – which is very unusual, although that does tie in with some other Ted McCarty blueprints and drawings I've found that mention poplar. It says, 'poplar body, black finish, nickel hardware, single pickup and wrap[around] tailpiece'. Clearly, that's referring to the Coronet, but it's called the Moderne. And then they've got the Moderne Deluxe. That also specifies a poplar body but with 'dual pickups, gold hardware, Sunburst finish and wrap[around] tailpiece', and that's what becomes the Crestwood. To me, the slab-bodied Coronet is one of the coolest models of all time. It hasn't yet got its due."

As the new Epiphone guitars began to catch on, sales steadily crept up in the early 60s (comprising around 10 per cent of Kalamazoo's output of instruments by 1961) and the team continued to refine the brand's identity, notably with the

5. In this letter from the Gibson company archives dated 2 May 1957, Ted McCarty thanks Orphie Stathopoulo for "the opportunity to work with you in liquidating the Epiphone operation"

6. The EB-232 Rivoli semi-hollowbody electric bass is highly regarded for its full, deep tone – courtesy of its neck-positioned humbucker – and is the Epiphone equivalent of the Gibson EB-2



May 2, 1957

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Mr. O. A. Stathopoulo
Epiphone, Inc.
130 W. Third St.
New York 12, N. Y.

Dear Orphie:

John and the boys arrived safely in Kalamazoo this morning and have brought me up to date on all of the arrangements.

Thank you for your cooperation and for the opportunity to work with you in liquidating the Epiphone operation.

John told me of your request regarding Epi's picture, and I certainly assure you that we will be proud to hang it in the department which will be working on Epiphone products. John felt very badly that, in their haste to finish up, they overlooked bringing the picture with them. If you care to pack it and send it to my attention, I assure you that it will be used as you indicated.

With kindest personal regards and a warm invitation to visit us any time you are in this vicinity.

Yours very truly,

GIBSON, INC.

T. M. McCarty
President

TMM:js

6

introduction of the mini-humbucker – a dual-coil pickup derived from Seth Lover's original humbucker design.

"The reasons for the mini-humbucker are twofold," highlights Mat. "One, they were looking at what they would use on Epiphone guitars when they ran out of the old stock of 'New York' pickups; and two, they were already developing pickups for Silvertone, specifically the Chris Isaak 1446L model. We've found Seth Lover's unit cover blueprints – one for Silvertone and one for Epiphone – and they are both dated within the same time frame [spring 1961]. This blueprint was just for the unit covers, so they had probably developed the whole strategy by then. Functionally, they are the same, but the design differs slightly. They knew they wanted something unique for Epiphone, plus it was more or less the same form factor as the New Yorker pickup.

"I'd say Epiphone was a more focused product line than Gibson because they had the opportunity to start afresh. And it was apparent that they had a better strategy: Coronet, Wilshire, Crestwood; Casino, Riviera, Sheraton; Texan, Frontier, Excellente. It was really important to the guys that worked on these concepts – particularly Ward Arbanas, [demonstrator] Andy Nelson and [chief engineer] Larry Allers – that the price differences were justified visually. The Epiphone guitars sometimes looked a little bit fancier then the Gibson high-end models. The Epiphone Riviera was actually more expensive than its Gibson equivalent, the ES-335. I've heard old-timers say that Epiphone was almost considered like a custom shop – an elite team of skilled workers and designers with top sales feedback. They knew what they wanted, and they did their best to execute it."

While looking to improve its products, feedback from the sales department was considered crucial; those suggestions and requests from customers and dealers directly influenced the evolution of Epiphone guitars.

"Andy Nelson was the main consultant for Epiphone out in the field," says Mat. "He was the guy in the stores giving the clinics because he was a world-class guitarist. He would hear from dealers and players that would say things like, 'I could really do with a skinnier neck with a narrower nut width.' That's the kind of feedback that instigated a lot of the changes in the product line. Epiphone did those changes at least a year ahead of Gibson. Epiphone were moving to the narrower nut width and slimmer necks as early as 1963.

"We're sitting on a cache of blueprints and design files for items that were never even created"

"Epiphone's order book was strong in the mid-60s. Kalamazoo's best year ever preceded Ted McCarty's exit [in 1966], which has always been a mystery to me. Did he see the writing on the wall? He clearly wanted out in 1965, but at the same time they were the most successful they had ever been. The Kalamazoo factory was producing more than 100,000 instruments [of which Epiphone made up around 20 per cent]. At that time, Epiphone's order book was very healthy, but, as I learned from Andy Nelson's nephew, Andy felt that the workers were deliberately not converting the order book to meet the demand.

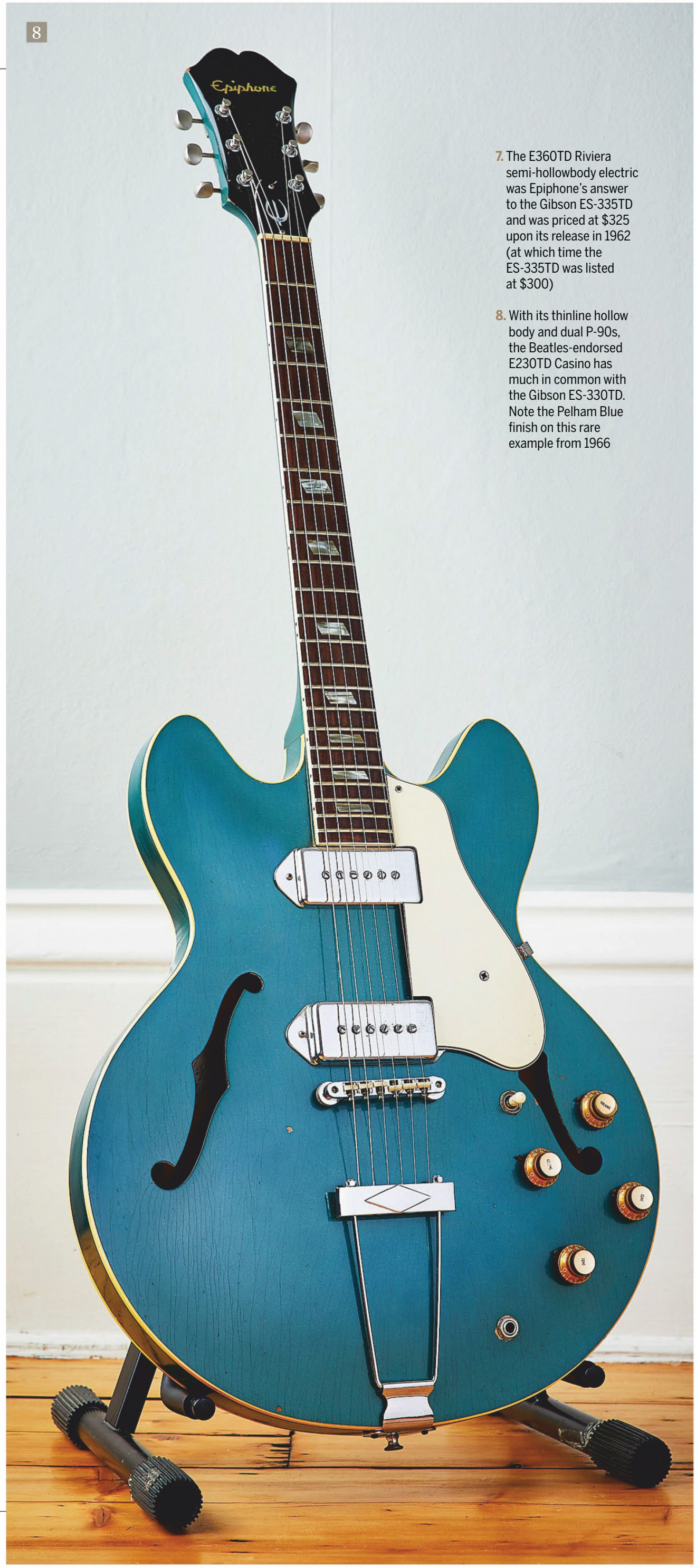
"That was one of the things that doomed Epiphone; even though they were wildly popular, and The Beatles were playing Casinos, they just couldn't meet the demand. And I've heard that from a few other sources – there was competition between Gibson and Epiphone because Epiphone was treated differently. [The instruments] went through the factory side

by side but they were managed separately, and that kind of created a rift."

With production at a fraction of its peak by the end of the 60s, Epiphone guitar manufacturing was shipped overseas in an effort to beat the more affordable import brands at their own game, and the last of the remaining instruments trickled out from Kalamazoo during 1970.

"The reason the market peaked in the mid-60s in Kalamazoo is because immediately after that Japan started catching up and building really great lower-cost instruments," reasons Mat. "There's more demand than ever now because our product line is more focused and it's coming at the time of this [COVID-19] pandemic when people are looking at more budget-friendly instruments. I'm so in love with Epiphone because of the amount of thought and energy that went into the brand in such a short amount of time. They produced some really cool ideas back in the day – many of which we haven't released yet. We're sitting on a cache of blueprints and design files for items that were never even created. We've revamped some of the old designs and they're killer. In my opinion, these new Epiphones are truly the best value electric guitars." G

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



7. The E360TD Riviera semi-hollowbody electric was Epiphone's answer to the Gibson ES-335TD and was priced at $325 upon its release in 1962 (at which time the ES-335TD was listed at $300)

8. With its thinline hollow body and dual P-90s, the Beatles-endorsed E230TD Casino has much in common with the Gibson ES-330TD. Note the Pelham Blue finish on this rare example from 1966

Crest Of A Wave

Epiphone's trio of 'Junior' style reissues look fantastic. But with their entry-level prices, can they really impress a gnarled old *Guitarist* reviewer? Let's find out!

Words Neville Marten
Photography Olly Curtis

EPIPHONE CORONET, WILSHIRE & CRESTWOOD CUSTOM £349, £399 & £489

CONTACT **Epiphone** WEB **www.epiphone.com**

Let's get the obvious out of the way right here: these are some of the coolest-looking electric guitars ever made. There's no debating that fact, so let's quickly move on...

The Coronet, Wilshire and Crestwood were released in 1958 (Crestwood) and 1959 (Wilshire and Coronet) as Epiphone's answer to the Gibson Les Paul Junior and Special. Epiphone had been part of the Gibson family since the two companies came together just the year before. But the once rival firm became vital to the parent brand in that it allowed Kalamazoo-made instruments to be sold to retailers that, due to territorial restrictions in Gibson dealers' contracts, were otherwise out of bounds.

As was so often the case with new models that emerged around this time, all three underwent changes – big and small – in the five or so years post launch. And without presenting you with a comprehensive and almost certainly tedious list, some of the most obvious changes include: slimming the body down from the original 44.45mm (1.75 inches) to 35mm (1.375 inches) as here, and rounding off the squarer Tele-style edges; losing the kitsch-but-cool metal nameplate seen on our guitars and switching from this short double-sided headstock to the famous 'batwing' six-a-side design; and lessening the lower horn and replacing the launch models' asymmetrical pickguards with the 'butterfly'-style and large 'E' logo, again as here. Possibly most notable of all was that, when they ran out of the single-coil Epiphone New York pickup, Gibson wisely fitted its more powerful P-90 to the Coronet and Wilshire, and its new mini-humbucker to the Crestwood – which became the Crestwood Custom a year after launch. Phew!

> Let's get the obvious out of the way right here: these are some of coolest-looking electrics ever made

So, even with that stripped-down version of events, you can see it was a complicated if not turbulent time for the range, and, in a way, what we have here is the most pleasing visual and working compromises of all the above versions.

Clearly there's a hierarchy present, with the flashier two-pickup Crestwood Custom sitting at the top of the pile and the simplest of the three, the single-P-90 Coronet, at the bottom. Snuggled in the middle sits the Wilshire, a sort of 'Special' to the Coronet's 'Junior'.

All three guitars are finished in lustrous polyester, and all feature nickel-plated hardware and the stylised Epiphone 'E' in gold foil in the centre of their 'butterfly'-style pickguards. And just to show the level of thought that's gone into the new range, they all come with Graph Tech NuBone fingerboard nuts, where Epiphone could have easily insinuated cheapo plastic.

Spot The Difference

Actually, Epiphone has made the demarcations very clear in these new models. And, while they all sit on the

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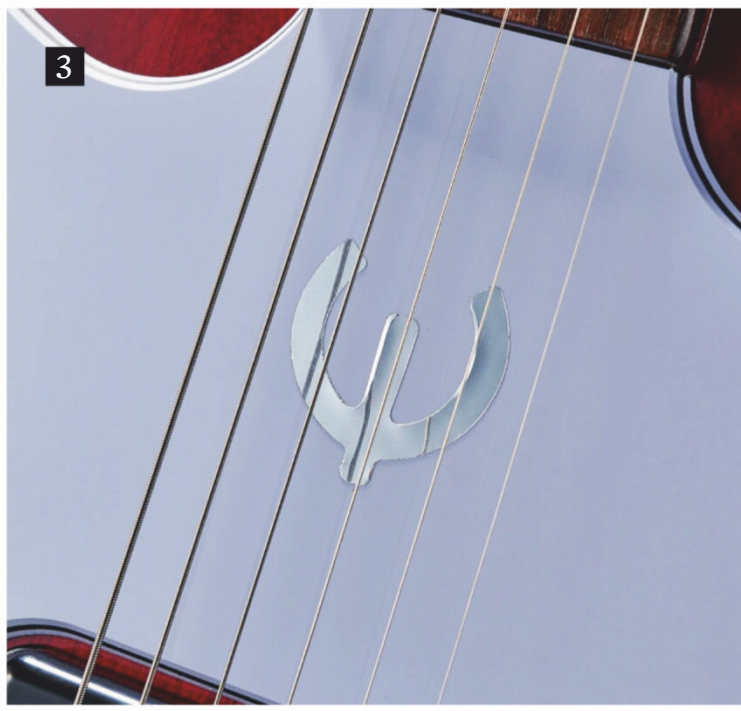
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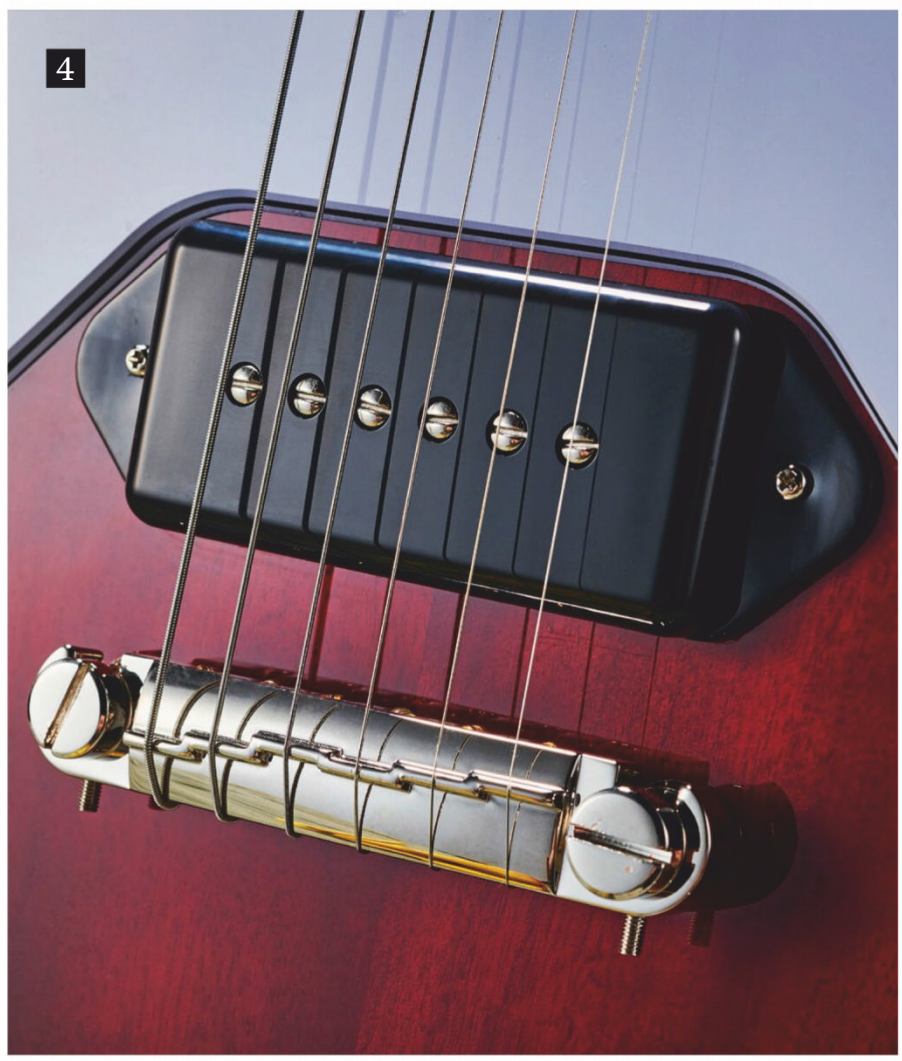
same double-cutaway body, they've been designed as specific propositions in their own right, each one bringing something specific to the table. Going from bottom to top of the range, we begin with the delightfully basic Coronet.

Checking the spec on Epiphone's website it's clear that, despite these instruments' entry-level price points, the company has not stinted with the quality of materials or parts. We don't know what genus of mahogany this is, but it's stated as that fabled guitar tonewood in the spec, while the fingerboard is Indian laurel. Also known as Indian walnut, this timber (which other makers, not least Gretsch, have also employed in certain recent models) is grown in both that country and Myanmar and is not on the CITES list of endangered species. With its dark streaky lines on a medium-brown background it looks like a super alternative to the scarcer rosewood. The body is centre-jointed while the glued-in neck is a single piece, save for the added headstock wings that you'll find even on Custom Shop Gibsons. So, no scarf joints or stacked heels here.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1. The Coronet's simple symmetrical design is incredibly appealing, helping to make it one of our favourite vintage guitar designs

2. Indian laurel is the fingerboard material. It's an excellent alternative to rosewood and looks the part, too. Frets are medium jumbo and the dots pearloid plastic

3. The pickguards on all three Epiphones feature the stylised 'E' that appeared on most of the brand's models during the 'golden era'. It rather reminds us of the Gretsch 'G' and is a cool visual touch

4. Epiphone has fitted its P-90 Pro in 'dog-ear' format to the Coronet, as well as an intonation compensated Lightning Bar bridge/tailpiece

5. On the Wilshire we find a pair of Epiphone P-90 Pros; these are powerful and fruity sounding and here they are black 'soapbar' style. Note the single-ply faux-tortoise pickguard and 'E' logo

6. The Wilshire's bridge and tailpiece follow the Gibson norm. Epiphone calls this tune-o-matic the LockTone. Two volumes and tones sit with the three-way toggle and jack socket

There's a real sense of purpose to these simple designs. The black Wilshire here looks ready to plug in

The Coronet's single pickup is a dog-ear P-90 Pro, which we already know is a great-sounding, fat-toned single coil, here mated to quality CTS pots and heavy-duty output jack. The wrapover bridge/tailpiece is the same compensated 'Lightning Bar' that Gibson fitted to certain SGs in the 60s, and is a preferable alternative to the basic stopbar that lacks individual string intonation.

Moving up a rung we come to the Wilshire. Essentially a double-P-90 version of the Coronet, it's based around an identical platform but with two 'soapbar' style P-90 Pros linked to twin volume and tone pots. The three-way pickup selector toggle and jack socket are located in the same cluster. Here, the pickguard is single-ply faux tortoise and we find a regular tune-o-matic style bridge that Epiphone calls the 'LockTone', with standard stud tailpiece. The finish is black, and just like the Coronet's classic Cherry, is perfectly buffed to a bright gloss.

Moving on up to the top-of-the-range Crestwood Custom, this is the most different of this trio. Visually, what one notices first is the clear plastic pickguard with large white centre stripe – actually painted onto the underside so the top is perfectly smooth. On this Cherry finish

7. The great Steve Marriott played an Epiphone Crestwood with Humble Pie. Our Chinese-made reissue retains all the original's coolness, with great sounds and a vibrato that works!

8. Epiphone used the short three-a-side headstock for these reissues, rather than the 'batwing' design found on later models. Quality plastic button Kluson-a-like tuners complete the picture

you might think it looks a little odd – perhaps a touch too busy – but check out the Polaris White version and it makes instant visual sense.

Here, the pickups are Epiphone Pro mini-humbuckers. Gibson has used mini-humbuckers in various forms on a variety of instruments, from Les Paul Deluxes to Firebirds and, of course, on the Epiphone Riviera and Sheraton models – even jazz guitars like the Johnny Smith. So, as you can see, it's a fantastically versatile pickup with a sound all of its own – that narrow footprint providing a brighter, clearer voice than that of its bulkier siblings.

Control layout is as on the Wilshire, but the big departure here is that interesting-looking vibrato tailpiece. The 'Tremtone', as Epiphone titled it (we love all those corny monikers the electric guitar and amp companies dreamt up), naturally evokes thoughts of Paul Bigsby's classic unit, and there are certainly elements of that in how it operates. However, unlike the former contraption, which is notoriously tricky to load (with the strings' ball-ends having to hook onto tiny posts on a wrap-around bar), here the strings simply load through rearward-facing holes and pull up and over without the 'popping off' problem that afflicts regular-style Bigsbys (some recent versions have addressed this, of course).

What also sets this tailpiece apart is the Indian laurel insert, with the attractive Epiphone 'E' emblem making a second appearance. And check out the two extra holes in the vibrato arm: these are for relocating its pivot point should you prefer it shorter for a more positive action – simple but cool, and just the kind of clever hack that our own Trev Wilkinson might dream up.

Feel & Sounds

The guitars all came with slightly different setups out of the box, mostly a little on the high side for this particular player. But a few minor tweaks soon brought them into line – and bear in mind we often do the same on instruments far higher up the food chain. All three necks are exactly the same medium C profile, thickening slightly from approximately 21mm at the 1st fret up to 23mm at the 12th. Scale length is a uniform 628mm (24.72 inches) and nut width is a ubiquitous 43mm (1.69 inches). Frets are medium jumbo – pretty much par for the course these days and likely to provide a fuss-free playing experience on the 305mm (12-inch) radius fingerboard.

> Each neck is an enjoyable playground, and the Gibson-style scale length makes for easy string bends

The necks join the body at the last of their 22 frets, leaving the entire fingerboard available for your explorations. On a strap it's a little like a Gibson SG with its strap button also located behind the heel, so there's a tendency for the necks to drop when not supported. The popular fix was usually to add another button on the top horn, as on a Strat, and that might be worth doing if this top-heaviness offends.

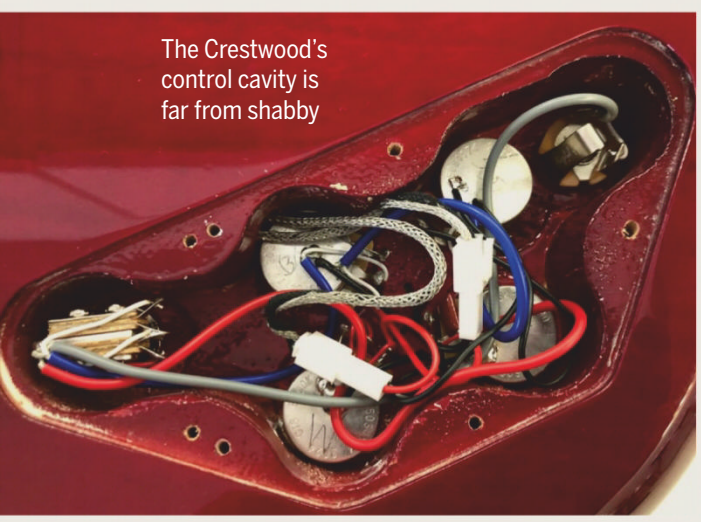
Otherwise, each guitar's neck is an enjoyable playground, and the Gibson-style scale length makes for easy string bends, while the medium jumbo frets and laurel 'board do indeed contribute to that comfortable and familiar feel.

Sonically, the Coronet's bridge P-90 Pro is a killer. Even with the tone wide open it's fat but very present, cleaning up a treat when you knock the volume back to 3, or

UNDER THE HOOD

A peek at the 'busy' innards of the Crestwood Custom

It's always interesting to see how the innards of any guitar stack up when compared with the more obvious external build quality. Here's the control cavity of our Crestwood Custom. There's a lot crammed into this small space: four pots (quality CTS), plus the toggle switch and output jack. We'd say it looks 'busy' rather than untidy. The soldering is neat, with no huge blobs, and note that the pickups are fitted via two white push-in connectors. We can't actually see anything written on the capacitors, but would guess they are Gibson-style .022 microfarads. It looks like someone made a second attempt at fitting the cavity cover, as two sets of screw holes are visible towards the selector switch end (this is not apparent on the other guitars). Let's just say it adds a bit of personality!



The Crestwood's control cavity is far from shabby

9. The mini-humbuckers on the Crestwood sound crisp and ballsy; they work superbly with drive pedals as they don't 'mush up'. The pickguard's large white stripe is painted onto its underside

10. Epiphone calls this vibrato the TremTone. It's solidly built and the arm length is adjustable via two extra holes (see main pic). Indian laurel is used for the wooden insert and the 'E' logo appears in metal here

11. The large oblong position markers on the Crestwood Custom are unique to the model. Again, notice the rosewood-like Indian laurel fingerboard and medium jumbo frets, of which there are 22

even 2. With the power cranked back up and the treble tamed, the sound is huge – like Clapton meets Leslie West and, really, what more could you want?

Swapping to the Wilshire its bridge pickup offers more of the same ballsy fare, while the neck unit kicks out smooth, fruity tones that never get too muddy, even when pushing the gain. Kind of like a really fat Strat. Select the middle position on the three-way and things get distinctly 'quacky', in the nicest possible way – sort of 'country meets *Crossroads*' if you will, and the kind of tone Joe Walsh often goes for with The Eagles.

The Crestwood Custom is the big surprise. The Pro mini-humbuckers are spectacularly good. Clean, they retain an open clarity that's bright but never piercing. Add a nice drive pedal and it's one of the most musical sounds around; that lovely high-end remains but the voice becomes incredibly expressive. Each position on the switch sounds great, and the nearest player whose sound you might recognise in it is Johnny Winter, whose Firebird pickups were, of course, close relations to these. Try some dirty slide with both pickups on – it's Texas blues-rock heaven!

Verdict

At the top of this piece we asked whether guitars at this entry-level price point could impress a gnarled old *Guitarist* reviewer. Well, the answer is a resounding yes! Of course, these are not Honduran mahogany

Crestwood Custom's Pro mini-humbuckers are spectacularly good… Add a drive pedal and it's one of the most musical sounds around

10

11

and Brazilian rosewood marvels, but modern-day versions of 60-year-old Epiphone entry models using today's available materials. That Epiphone has done it so well, and employed such great-sounding pickups and even bothered with quality pots and nut material, is a testament to the brand's clear desire to get it right.

And if you go back to the days of the company's original Coronet, its parent marque's LP Junior and, yes, even the Fender Duo-Sonic, it's exactly what they did all those years ago. "Get them playing your brand at the start and they'll stay with you forever; put them off with an unplayable, cheap-sounding plank and they'll go elsewhere," is what a fairly high-up Gibson man told this reviewer back in 1978. How right he was. And on the basis of these three lovelies, we'd certainly stick with Epiphone. G

EPIPHONE CORONET

PRICE: £349
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with rounded edges
NECK: Mahogany, medium C profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.72")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel, unbound with pearloid dot inlays
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Epiphone Lightning Bar compensated wraparound bridge/tailpiece, '3 On A Plate' tuners with ivory buttons and press in bushings
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Single Epiphone P-90 Pro 'dog-ear', single volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6
OPTIONS: Colours only
RANGE OPTIONS: Wilshire and Crestwood Custom, as reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Cherry (as reviewed), Black

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Fabulous value, brilliantly ballsy tones, great neck

CONS Location of strap button makes it a tad headstock-heavy

EPIPHONE WILSHIRE

PRICE: £399
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with rounded edges
NECK: Mahogany, medium C profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.72")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel, unbound with pearloid dot inlays
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, Epiphone Deluxe tuners with ivory buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Epiphone P-90 Pro 'soapbar', twin volume and tone controls, 3-way selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.1/6.82
OPTIONS: Colours only
RANGE OPTIONS: Coronet and Crestwood Custom, as reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Cherry, Black (as reviewed)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS As Coronet, but the Wilshire is more versatile due to that second pickup

CONS Ditto Coronet

EPIPHONE CRESTWOOD CUSTOM

PRICE: £489
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with rounded edges
NECK: Mahogany, medium C profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.72")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel, unbound with large oblong inlays
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone tune-o-matic bridge w/ nylon saddles, Tremotone vibrato tailpiece with Indian laurel insert, Epiphone Deluxe Vintage tuners with ivory buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Epiphone Pro mini-humbuckers, twin volume and tone controls, 3-way selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.2/7.04
OPTIONS: Colours only
RANGE OPTIONS: Wilshire and Coronet, as reviewed
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Cherry (as reviewed), Polaris White

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Gorgeous bright but 'important' tones, versatility, quirky but cool vibrato system

CONS Ditto Coronet/Wilshire

Hit The Gym

Two recent releases from the Fender-owned Charvel and EVH brands remind us of the legacy and guitar design skills of Eddie Van Halen

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

CHARVEL HENRIK DANHAGE SIGNATURE PRO-MOD SO-CAL STYLE 1 & EVH LIMITED EDITION WOLFGANG SPECIAL SASSAFRAS £1,519 & £1,089

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** PHONE **01342 331700** WEBSITE **www.charvel.com / www.evhgear.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's going on? Has *Guitarist* gone shred?
Like many, we've been relistening to plenty of the ridiculous skills of Eddie Van Halen these past weeks, but you don't need us to tell you how the world of shred and all its sub-cultures is a fine place to discover some seriously incendiary guitar chops.

2 You mean, like Henrik Danhage?
That's about the size of it. Henrik is a key member of Swedish progressive metal band Evergrey. He's a very amiable chap and clearly has fine taste in guitars judging by his beat-up signature.

3 It looks like just like the sort of thing Eddie played before he went proper...
Exactly. This signature looks like Eddie screwed it together for Henrik back in the day. But Eddie moved on via tie-ups with Kramer, Music Man and Peavey then finally with Fender where the EVH brand formed in 2007. The limited-edition model shows off a very considered, player-centric design.

Spending some time with these two guitars invariably took us back to the 80s when it seemed every guitar was little more than a fingerboard with a Floyd Rose vibrato. Many of the 'big hair' bands and their music has aged, ahem, somewhat awkwardly, and the guitars they played seem equally far from classic. But as those of us of a certain age will remember, it was an explosive time for the electric guitar, and many of the heroes it produced really haven't been bettered.

It might not be hip to admit it, but this writer is quite a closet fan of the polarising Floyd Rose vibrato – the essential piece of kit for any serious player back then, even if it was one of the many high-performance vibratos that came and went, some more thankfully than others. Many of us don't need to dump a vibrato so the strings literally fall off the fingerboard; try that in the wrong band and you'll be shown the door. But with the expansive and great-sounding multi-effects we all have

This looks like a single coil, but it's a DiMarzio Area 67 hum-cancelling design. Note the easy-to-adjust truss rod wheel

Contrasting the neck pickup, the Charvel goes for the classic Seymour Duncan JB in the bridge position. The Floyd Rose vibrato is slightly tilted for standard up-bends

access to, the Floyd can be used in a highly creative fashion. With less palaver than restringing a Bigsby and then trying to keep the lightest of wobbles in tune, the Floyd is dead easy to set up and string – so long as you have the right Allen key, of course. Lock those strings at both the saddle and nut and – after some judicious string stretching – these things will stay in tune with all but the slightest tweak of those fine tuners. The cork-sniffing tone gurus will have something to say about that we expect, but far from being a 'tone drain', on the right guitar there's nothing to touch it.

Irrespective of the artists behind these models, what they actually do is almost bookend Eddie's stylistic journey, from the beat-up Frankenstein starting point style of the Henrik Charvel, to the altogether more considered and really very developed Wolfgang. Aside from being made in Fender's Mexican factory, they share plenty.

> These models possess a huge amount of mojo, both for their intended purposes and a lot more besides

Henrik Danhage Signature Pro-Mod So-Cal Style 1

There's nothing classy about the relic job of this Charvel: by design, it looks like the proverbial 'I tied it to the bus and headed off on tour' level of relicing. It's a nice weight, and showcases a nicely jointed four-piece spread of tightly striped ash, which is really rather beautiful on the rib-cage contour, for example – and another reminder of a wood that we're seeing in serious decline as far as the USA is concerned. There's a brutal simplicity that was so much a part of Van Halen's original vision: bolt a neck to a body, chuck on a wide-travel vibrato and a couple of pickups, and the rest is down to you.

One area that's more refined here is the neck: slim in depth but with dual graphite-rod reinforcement to hopefully keep it straight as you cross the time zones. If you need to tweak it, the truss rod adjustment wheel is at the end of the neck, and the compound radius fingerboard – similarly built for speed – frankly looks as worn out as the body. But there are some very nice touches, such as the heavy fingerboard edge rounding. Reverse headstock aside, this could once have been a 50s Stratocaster that has been extensively modded!

The zebra Seymour JB at the bridge will be familiar to most of us, but it's paired with a DiMarzio Area 67, a hum-cancelling 'single coil'. "Single coils in 1967 were bright and very clean," says DiMarzio, "and, of course, they hummed. We've captured the classic bright and clean sound but totally eliminated the hum with our patented Area technology. We've also reduced magnet pull by 40 per cent for improved sustain and clarity."

This hot-rod modded vibe continues to the controls – or lack of them. There's just a single volume control, with its Stratocaster 'Tone' knob, of course. So how do you select the pickups? Easy. That single control has a push switch: down is bridge; up is neck. Both on? Nope.

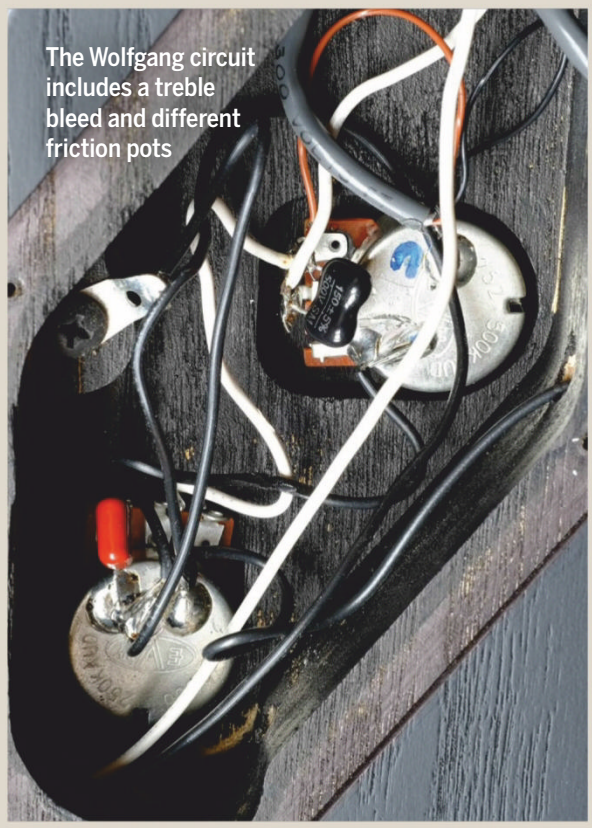
UNDER THE HOOD We inspect the circuits of the Charvel and EVH

Removing the tight-fitting, recessed backplate of the Wolfgang you'll see a considered, simple circuit that combines an EVH/Bourns 500k volume pot with a 250k tone pot. By design, the volume is lower fiction (looser in use), the tone is higher friction. The tone cap value is .022 microfarads and there's a treble bleed capacitor across the volume – a TAD silver mica cap valued at 150 picofarads. The cavity itself is screened with conductive paint, while the cavity cover has foil shielding.

The Charvel's more simple circuit is a lot harder to access without removing the strings then the scratchplate, which sits under the fingerboard overhang. To be fair, though, there's not much to see! The push-push switched pot is 500k audio taper as you'd expect, with a rat's nest of wires surrounding it. The actual switch part of the pot here is a little loose, although that doesn't affect its function. What dismantling the guitar allows us to see is that it's routed for an HSH configuration if you ever fancy giving it your own signature by loading a different scratchplate and pickups/controls.

The EVH humbuckers are Alnico II powered with measured DCRs of 12.79kohms at the bridge and 15.04k at the neck. Beyond that, there's little to add. Of course, the Charvel's Seymour Duncan JB is a legendary 'bucker: this Trembucker (TB-4) version uses an Alnico V magnet with a measured DCR of 17.07k. The DiMarzio Area 67, as we explain, is a hum-cancelling design with a measured DCR of 6.03k.

The Charvel's body rout means there's plenty of scope for future modding



The Wolfgang circuit includes a treble bleed and different friction pots

With just a single switched pot, the Charvel is as simple as it gets

The classic EVH-style 'Tone' knob on the Henrik Danhage Signature is simply a master volume but with a push-switch to engage either pickup

EVH Limited Edition Wolfgang Special Sassafras

If Henrik's signature has the look of something that was screwed together in the backyard and might need some help from The Repair Shop, the Wolfgang comes across as, well, a proper guitar. It shares the same Fender scale as the Charvel signature, along with those graphite rods and wheel truss rod adjustor, but the slightly downsized body is going to look Les Paul-size tiny on a tall frame.

You can clearly see the wood grain under the very thin and quite textured satin black finish (with its single cream edge binding) and if asked we'd say it was ash, too. It's actually sassafras, a light and relatively soft wood from Eastern USA. Fender believes Leo Fender used it to make an undisclosed number of Strats back in the 50s and it recently appeared on the Fender Stories Collection Eric Johnson 1954 'Virginia' Stratocaster. Although it's about 5mm thinner in depth at the rim compared with the 45mm-thick Charvel, the top's arching increases the overall depth to 50mm. But it's lighter than the ash-bodied Charvel on our

1. The necks on both guitars are superb. The Henrik Danhage Signature features heavily rolled edges, a compound radius and a speed profile

2. Owned by Fender, Charvel is allowed to use that classic headstock outline. Here, of course, it's reversed

3. While the EVH has a tapered heel join, the Charvel follows Fender protocol along with a chunky metal neckplate

scales – and feels it. The small three-a-side headstock adds to the compact style, but it's not just a size thing that differentiates the two: the EVH just seems more finished, particularly the rounded nose of the tiered heel join, the screws passing through individual domed washers as opposed to the Charvel's chunky cast metal neckplate and standard squared-off Fender heel. While both necks are maple, the EVH's is roasted and quarter-sawn, which adds to the very contemporary specification.

The drive is very simple here, too, but we get a proper tone control and a shoulder-placed three-way toggle to select the dual direct-mount EVH humbuckers. We're not done yet. Plating aside, we have the same Floyd Rose, but while it's slightly recessed into the top, here it sits flat with no up-bend – typical EVH style. It also features that D-Tuna to drop the low E down a tone. It's such a stable guitar, something that's helped by the neck construction: a quick tune-up using the fine tuners when we started the test and that was it.

Feel & Sounds

Both guitars share the same scale length and overall neck construction, and our calipers suggest the same-width jumbo fretwire (the EVH's wire is very slightly lower) on the same 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) radius fingerboard. But the different profiles, depths and widths create a markedly different feel. The Charvel's 'speed' profile is a relatively thin depth'd D (19.3mm at the 1st fret and 21.2mm by the 12th) with its back feeling flatter than it actually is. The EVH isn't a million miles away, but the additional depth (19.9mm at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 12th) feels a little more classic, and it's marginally thinner in width, too: 41.5mm at the nut and 51.24mm at the 12th fret compared with the Charvel's 43.1mm nut width and 52.63mm dimension at the 12th fret. Both have nicely rounded fingerboard edges, especially the Charvel. With its 'dirty' maple face, it certainly creates the look and feel of being heavily played.

> There's a brutal simplicity to the Charvel that was so much a part of Van Halen's original vision

Getting used to each guitar and playing unplugged also gives us a hint of the sonic differences. There's a little more snap to the very Fender-y sounding unplugged voice of the Charvel. The EVH has slightly less zing and is less snappy, but both have a wonderfully fulsome sustain development.

These similarities in build belie the rather different sounds they produce. The Charvel's voice comes across as lighter in the low-end and brighter, too. The JB at the bridge has power and quite an upper midrange attack that's completely contrasted by the Area 67 at the neck, which has the sort of spank you'd expect from a brightly voiced Strat's neck pickup. The EVH seemingly has a fuller voice with

more depth – more 'Gibson' to the Charvel's 'Fender', if you like. Here, the bridge initially sounds fuller with a little more cocked wah-like tonality and almost a little less hot-sounding than that JB. But recording both – playing the same parts through the same gained Marshall, and with battering ram drums and bass – the overall tonality at the bridge is actually very similar, even when the tracks are solo'd. We'd swear they sound more different when we listen in front of our amp. Not for the first time, then, that actually evaluating the 'front of house' mix proves quite a leveller.

The EVH's neck voice is obviously very different from the Charvel's and it keeps the full-fat tonality of the bridge, although it's softer, nicely vocal and needs some amp sizzle to give it clarity. The mix, missing from the Charvel, is quite distinct and adds some welcome bounce for a very usable third voice, combining thickness but with some of the funkier clarity you'd expect in this parallel link. Its volume and tone work very well to subtly tame the beast, too. The

4. The stylised EVH headstock is very compact, as is the guitar itself, despite its regular Fender scale length

5. The Floyd Rose here is slightly recessed into the top, but sits flat with no up-bend. It also features the D-Tuna on the low E string

6. Unlike Eddie's own guitars where the toggle switch function is reversed, here it's standard and selects the pickups like a Les Paul

7. In typical Van Halen style the pickups screw directly to the body: all part of his tonal pursuit

8. The tuners on both guitars are perfectly functional, but because of the combination of the hugely stable graphite reinforced necks and the locking Floyd Rose vibratos, we barely touched them

treble bleed is certainly useful, allowing you to clean up heavier gains. However, to approach that Area 67 sound of the Charvel you'd need some coil splits, which, to be honest, would probably be very useful here when we have this much wire involved.

Verdict

We like our pigeonholes and the inclusion of a Floyd Rose vibrato instantly suggests a genre-specific instrument. And, yes, both of these allow you to rip it up, warble and waggle in spades. But just studying a spec sheet doesn't tell anywhere near the full story. Firstly, both are exceptionally stable in terms of tuning, even with some heavy vibrato use. They're also great weights and, with a couple of minor exceptions, are 100 per cent performance-ready. Plus, in the same way someone such as Mike Stern uses seemingly inappropriate hot pickups on his Yamaha signature to produce big fat and rounded cleans, the EVH does exactly that here. In short, to pigeonhole these as simply metal guitars is really missing the point.

Neither is a particularly cheap date, and neither comes with even a gigbag. But these models possess a huge amount of mojo, both for their intended purposes and a lot more besides. From his early beat-up hot-rod style to the much more refined and considered Wolfgang, we have an awful lot to thank Eddie for.

CHARVEL HENRIK DANHAGE SIGNATURE PRO-MOD SO-CAL STYLE 1

PRICE: £1,519
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Double-cutaway reliced solidbody
BODY: Ash
NECK: Maple, graphite reinforced, 'speed' profile bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43.1mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Floyd Rose 1000 series double-locking vibrato, Charvel logo'd die-cast tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 humbucker (bridge), DiMarzio Area 67 DP419CR (neck), master volume (with 'tone' knob and a push switch to voice pickups: down, bridge; up, neck)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.51/7.72
OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: White Relic (as reviewed) – semi-gloss lacquer to body, hand-rubbed satin urethane to neck

8/10

PROS Great example of an 80s-style hot-rod 'SuperStrat'; great weight and neck feel; contrasting pickups

CONS Just one reliced colour; no gigbag supplied

EVH LIMITED EDITION WOLFGANG SPECIAL SASSAFRAS

PRICE: £1,089
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Double-cutaway arched top solidbody
BODY: Sassafras
NECK: Baked maple, graphite reinforced, Wolfgang profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/41.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Baked maple, black dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Floyd Rose 1000 series double-locking vibrato (with brass block), EVH-logo'd Gotoh tuners – black
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Direct mount EVH Wolfgang humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume (Bourns low friction) and master tone (Bourns high friction)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.01/6.62
OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Satin Black (as reviewed) – satin urethane to body, hand-rubbed satin urethane to neck

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Simply a great guitar design: lightweight, superb neck construction and feel, excellent tuning stability, and big sounds

CONS No gigbag

Serious Style

Whether you're an Eddie Van Halen acolyte or simply want some progressive style, there's plenty of choice from Charvel and EVH

EVH STRIPED SERIES FRANKIE £1,329

This Mexico-made repro of Eddie's early hot-rod style goes deep on the details, but comes in a long way from the custom shop price, which was $25,000 for the original 2007 300-only run. It's probably the only new guitar out there to feature a purposely non-functioning neck pickup and five-way switch, too. Under the striped, aged finish is a basswood body, while the graphite-reinforced maple neck is quarter-sawn and oil-finished. We'd call it functional art.
www.evhgear.com

EVH WOLFGANG SPECIAL £1,089

This standard Wolfgang Special, also made in Mexico, differs from our reviewed limited-edition model with its arched top basswood body and ebony fingerboard. Although not roasted, the maple neck again features the graphite reinforcement. Pictured here in Deep Purple Metallic with black hardware and edge binding, the model is also available in Burgundy Mist Metallic and Ice Blue Metallic, both with chrome hardware and cream body binding.
www.evhgear.com

EVH WOLFGANG USA EDWARD VAN HALEN SIGNATURE £3,379

This USA model reflects how Eddie's design style evolved, featuring a basswood body but with a big leaf maple top and five-ply binding under the finish. The neck is quarter-sawn, graphite-reinforced maple with a slightly bigger profile. The direct-mount zebra humbuckers offer Alnico III at the neck and Alnico II at the bridge. The three-way toggle works in reverse as per Eddie's preference, the red button is a kill switch and the Floyd Rose features a D-Tuna.
www.evhgear.com

CHARVEL PRO-MOD SO-CAL STYLE 1 HH FR M £909

Like our more costly signature Charvel on review, this one also hails from Mexico but comes in a range of pristine unreliced colours. Still, it's heavy on the features such as the default graphite-reinforced maple neck with that speed profile, and the dual scratchplate-mounted humbuckers are Seymour Duncan Distortion TB-6 (bridge) and SH-6N (neck). We also get some tricky switching via the three-way lever and push-pull split switch on the volume control.
www.charvel.com

CHARVEL USA SELECT SO-CAL STYLE 1 HSS FR £2,179

If you're serious about shred you might want to go up to the USA Select Series like this one with its 'back to the 80s' style. The hot-rod Strat vibe is reflected by the alder body and quarter-sawn maple neck with its single action 'vintage'-style truss rod. A classic DiMarzio Super Distortion sits at the bridge with the HS2 stacked hum-cancelling 'single coil' in middle and neck positions. The five-way lever switch splits the bridge humbucker in positions 2, 3 and 4.
www.charvel.com

CHARVEL JOE DUPLANTIER SIGNATURE PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 2 HH E £819

It's not just about the Strat! This Indonesian-made signature for Gojira's Joe Duplantier mashes up a Tele and Les Paul Custom. Unusually, we get a graphite-reinforced *mahogany* bolt-on neck with a block inlaid, compound radius ebony 'board, while a standard tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece replace the ubiquitous Floyd Rose. DiMarzio's Fortitude at the bridge, designed in conjunction with Joe, is based on the 36th Anniversary unit used at the neck.
www.charvel.com

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STRYMON

NightSky

Venture to the outer reaches of reverb with this soundscape workstation

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

For many players, Strymon has been the go-to company for reverb pedals with its largely conventional Blue Sky and the later Big Sky, which offered more esoteric 'altered' reverbs alongside the standard options. The next pedal in that Sky series ventures far deeper into that rabbit hole of altered reverbs and otherworldly ambiences. Defined by Strymon as a "Time-Warped Reverberator", the NightSky offers real-time continuous control over a whole host of parameters affecting the reverb.

At first glance, the NightSky may seem to have a formidable amount of knobs and switches, but it's not as daunting as it looks. Having everything on the clear and logically sectioned front panel means that there are no menus to dive into (there are some secondary parameters such as pre-delay, but these are easily manageable), and you get onboard presets so all that creative knob-tweaking can be safely stored away and not lost. 16 presets can be saved and accessed directly from the buttons on the front of the pedal, and there's access to 300 via MIDI.

SOUNDS

The starting point here is the choice of three basic reverb textures: Sparse, a set of delay taps; Dense, which is like a plate reverb; and Diffuse, a large ambient reverb. While a knob setting decay length is pretty straightforward, the Size/Pitch knob not only adjusts the perceived size of the reverberant space but also simultaneously changes the pitch – either completely smoothly or quantized to a variety of musical scales. There are low-cut and high-cut filters to shape the boundaries of reverb EQ and comprehensive modulation that can be applied to one of three targets – reverb, pitch or filter.

Strymon is known for its Shimmer reverb and has extended the idea in the pedal's Voice section where the Shimmer can be tuned to a specific musical interval and either applied to the input of the reverb core or within the core itself for more of a lingering effect. You also get a switchable Glimmer that enhances the harmonic content of the reverb tail, adding texture at either top- or bottom-end frequencies, plus a Drive switch that adds a touch of distortion at a choice of two points in the signal path.

The consequence of all that available processing power is a range of sounds that go way beyond what we've heard from

01. MOD SECTION
Set what you want to modulate (verb, pitch or filter), choose a waveshape or the envelope follower, Adjust Speed and Depth

02. INTERVAL KNOB
Use this to 'tune' the shimmer effect; a range of musically useful intervals are available

03. INFINITE FOOTSWITCH
Press once to hold the input to the reverb for a sustained sound that you can play over. Alternatively, a press-and-hold enters sequence mode

04. DECAY SECTION
Your starting point is to choose Sparse, Dense or Diffuse reverb with the Texture switch. The other controls determine size and length

05. BUTTONS 1 TO 8
You can select the 16 onboard presets with these (1 to 8 green/9 to 16 amber). They can also represent steps in the sequence

06. FAVORITE KNOB
You can use this footswitch to toggle between an active preset and the WYSIWYG current state of the knobs and switches

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Reverb pedal
FEATURES: Selectable true or buffered bypass, 16 onboard presets (300 via MIDI)
CONTROLS: Mod Speed, Mod Depth, Decay Length, Decay Size/Pitch, Reverb Mix, Dry Mix, Low Cut, High Cut, Interval, Shimmer, Target switch, Shape switch, Texture switch, Quantize switch, Filter switch, Shimmer switch, Glimmer switch, Drive switch, 8x Sequence/Preset switch, Inst/Line switch, On footswitch, Favorite footswitch, Infinite footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L, R), standard outputs (L, R), EXP, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor (300mA minimum)
DIMENSIONS: 178 (w) x 114 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE
9/10

any other reverb pedal. If you want the conventional, you can have it: the Dense algorithm will give you straight reverb that sounds very natural with guitar, and the Sparse setting can offer tape echo effects. But the NightSky's USP is to explore uncharted reverberant territory – and it certainly does that.

This thing can sound pretty damn epic as it adds a cinematic backdrop to your playing; one played note or chord can summon an extended shimmering cloud of spacey sound. While there are myriad ways to alter the basic size, texture and pitch aspects of the reverb for fairly static sounds, you can bring in more movement and colour via the Mod section: long reverb trails that morph over time, pulsing reverbs, analogue synth-like sounds including filter sweeps, and much more.

Also, taking a cue from synths is a step sequencer with up to eight steps based around the preset buttons, each representing independent settings of the Size/Pitch knob, so pitches can be played back rhythmically using the Favorite footswitch for tap tempo, or stepped through using the main bypass footswitch, like different settings within a preset. Another useful performance feature is triggered with a hold on that footswitch, allowing you to morph between the current sound and a set of alternate knob settings – pretty useful if you don't have an expression pedal to hand for the continual control over knobs that's also on offer.

Finally, the Infinite footswitch is one of the pedal's coolest features. One press freezes a section of the reverb following something you just played, and lets you play over it with the reverbed sound (or dry if you prefer), which is perfect for jamming with yourself.

VERDICT
It's probably a bit too specialised for many players, but if the words ambient, experimental and soundscape really excite you then the NightSky is a must-have. This pedal is a toolkit for reverberant synthesis, ripe for exploration and exactly what you need if you want to get deeply creative with reverb. G

PROS *Complete reverb workstation; stunning sounds; plenty of presets; multi-task footswitches; infinite freeze feature*
CONS *Very little to complain about, but you'd have to be really into esoteric reverbs for the required outlay*

MANUFACTURER
CARL MARTIN

MODEL
PLEXIRANGER

PRICE
£159

CONTACT
SELECTRON UK 01795 419460 WWW.CARLMARTIN.COM

CARL MARTIN

PlexiRanger

Footswitchable control for the classic sound of a treble-boosted Brit amp

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

The combination of vintage British amp and treble booster (Dallas Rangemaster et al) as put into practice by the likes of Tony Iommi, Rory Gallagher and Brian May is a shoo-in recipe for a classic rock sound. It makes sense, then, to put a British amp-flavoured overdrive and a booster into the same pedal. And that's just what Carl Martin has done here with the aptly named PlexiRanger, a pedal that provides separately footswitchable drive and boost sections that can be used independently or in tandem.

The right-hand side of the pedal takes care of boost functions as well as low-end attenuation with a Lo-Cut switch. This switch offers two levels of bottom-end roll-off that work really well for taking the murk out of your tone or taming the excesses of a 4x12 cab. Up to 15dB of pure clean volume boost is delivered by the Boost knob, but if you want some tonal shift, you can find your desired frequency via the wide-ranging Freq knob and use the Range knob to set how much you want it boosted by.

There are plenty of options, from a tonal sweetening with minimal added boost through powerful, tightly targeted, tonally shaped boosts whether fat, throaty or toppy to get your amp singing. It works a treat with our vintage Vox AC30 and Marshall JMP50, bringing in a richness with just the right amount of extra treble combined with a front-end push.

We don't all have vintage British amps, though, and that's where the pedal's other half comes in. Carl Martin is known for its Marshall-flavoured Plexi drive pedals, and one of those is exactly what you get in this pedal's left-hand section. This is classy overdrive from almost clean to driven raunch with plenty of top-end adjustable via the Tone knob. While the Plexi side doesn't get into high-gain territory by itself, kicking in the boost adds an extra dimension to the sound, bringing out the harmonics, and can really get it screaming.

VERDICT

This is a versatile pedal that would be worth the money for either one of its two footswitchable effects. But getting

both together in one package makes it a really solid buy as an eminently practical pedalboard workhorse. G

PROS *Drive and boost in a single pedal; independent footswitching for both effects; classic sound revisited; practical range of frequencies for the boost; Lo-Cut switch*
CONS *Not a thing*

ALSO TRY...

WAMPLER

Plexi-Drive Deluxe £219

This Deluxe version coaxes vintage Marshall-style tone from any amp, with plenty of adjustment available and a separately footswitchable pre-gain boost for Tube Screamer-style pushed mids.

BOGNER

La Grange £199

Presumably named after the ZZ Top song, this pedal is designed to emulate a range of 'Plexi' amplifier tones and sports an independent footswitchable boost in series after the distortion.

TEISCO

Distortion £134

Aiming to deliver Brit flavour, Tesico offers a footswitchable distortion channel here and a More channel, a cleanish boost to be used independently or stacked with the distortion circuit.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Denmark
TYPE: Drive and boost pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Tone, Level, Frequency, Boost, Range, Lo-Cut switch, Plexi footswitch, Boost footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard Remote
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 100mA
DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 95 (d) x 56mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER
ELECTRO-HARMONIX

MODEL
PITCH FORK+

PRICE
£199

CONTACT
ELECTRO-HARMONIX WWW.EHX.COM

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Pitch Fork+

Harmonies and more from this dual pitch-shifting tool

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

The Pitch Fork+ provides two identical but independent pitch-shifting engines in a single pedal, both offering pitch up or down over a +/- three octave range and detuning of +/- 99 cents. There are separate volume knobs for each pitch shifter and for the dry sound, so there are plenty of options for totally pitch-shifted sounds or blends.

Besides the main output you'll also find an AUX output that has various signal routing options, including stereo pitch shifting and keeping dry and effected sounds separate, while a second (User) footswitch can be assigned to different functions such as toggling channels on and off, selecting presets, crossfades and more. Should you want more switching capability, there's a connection for a triple footswitcher.

There is a lot of creative sonic potential available from this pedal and plenty of places to store your creativity in its 100 presets; the 10 presets that have been programmed at the factory offer a good overview. The mildest effect in the pedal is detuning – just a few cents each side can give you some useful alternatives to using a chorus pedal or similar.

Tracking and tuning stability are good, so it's possible to turn off the dry sound and use an octave down, turning your guitar into a workable bass. You could also conjure up a baritone guitar or other dropped tunings, or turn the pitch up for an instant capo effect, albeit with altered tonality, especially noticeable as a metallic timbre on the pitched up settings.

With dry sound back in play you can dial in a faux 12-string sound, and even opt for an 18-string! There are, of course, loads of exquisitely beautiful harmonies on tap, as well as totally discordant stuff for the noiseniks who'll be sure to embrace the X-Mod mode, which offers cross modulation for creating ring mod and frequency modulation. The bypass footswitch can be set for latching or momentary action where it can be used for *glissando* effects if desired. But if you really want to get into the performance aspect then you can plug in an expression pedal for instant octave rises and other Whammy-style action.

VERDICT

A diminutive pitch-shifting powerhouse with a tasty combination of features to suit many needs. G

PROS *Two pitch shifters; solid tracking; wide frequency range; practical footswitching options; expression pedal capability*

CONS *At this price, it would be churlish to complain about the usual warbly artefacts on extreme shifts*

ALSO TRY...

MERIS

Hedra £319

Two voices not enough? Take a look at the Hedra from Meris, which offers three voices. Described as a rhythmic pitch shifter, it comes with tap tempo synchronised delay for esoteric effects.

BOSS

PS-6 Harmonist £129

This Boss compact pedal has the ability to create up to three-part harmonies and other pitch shifts, including detuning and the option of controlling the pitch via an expression pedal.

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

Rainbow Machine V2 £225

This is the leftfield choice, built around a DSP pitch-warping engine that's designed to be slightly imperfect and described by its makers as "totally not for purists and/or tone hounds".

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Pitch-shift pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, 2x pitch-shift engines with a +/-3 octave range
CONTROLS: Dry, Shift 1, Shift 2, Value, 8x buttons (Aux, Shift 1, Shift 2, Exp, User, X-Mod, Preset, Latch), User footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard outputs (main, Aux) Ext, Exp
POWER: Supplied 9V DC 200mA adaptor – pedal requires 120mA
DIMENSIONS: 104 (w) x 119 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

Welcome To The 'Board

How do you integrate your new pedals into an already functioning pedalboard without causing issues? Adrian Thorpe shares his tips...

THE BACKGROUND

JOE REECE, Via email

While my Christmas list was full of guitar pedals, I am still trepidatious every time I get a new one – the reason being that with a new pedal comes a new 'board layout and consequently a new litany of problems, incompatibility and troubleshooting for days. So how do you cope with adding new pedals to a 'board? How can I prevent problems? And do you have any methodology for troubleshooting when the inevitable problems do occur?

THE QUESTIONS

1. **HOW DO I AVOID ANXIETY WHEN ADDING PEDALS TO MY PEDALBOARD?**
2. **HOW DO I PREVENT ISSUES WHEN ADDING MY NEW PEDALS TO THE 'BOARD?**
3. **HOW DO I TROUBLESHOOT WHEN PROBLEMS DO OCCUR?**

THE ANSWERS

Joe, thanks for the questions. It's really nice that your family and friends were willing to purchase you guitar pedals, so if we can avoid stress as a result of that then we should!

Before bringing them into the fold, set up an off-'board audition area to get to know your new pedals

01. The simplest way to avoid anxiety here is to not embark on adding new gifts to your 'board... But there is a different route. First, prepare an 'off-'board' audition area, be it a smaller empty pedalboard, a plank, a section of rug and so on. Have a batch of patch cables prepared, tested as working and ready to grab. Have a power supply or stack of batteries ready to go, too. Then you can have fun trying out your new pedals safe in the knowledge they will not affect your current pedalboard in all its carefully curated goodness.

The other way to do it, and something I fully recommend to all pedal addicts, is to always have a spot on the 'board that you designate specifically for auditioning. It needs to be easy to access for both power and jack cables (have them slightly longer than needed), and then you'll be able to integrate them in a pseudo-permanent way on your 'board.

02. To prevent issues, do the most boring things possible. Read the manual, ensure the patch cables are 100 per cent working as intended, and have the right voltage and polarity of power needed, as well as enough current. Then audition on a temporary 'board or in the audition slot on your main pedalboard. This should highlight any known issues that could arise.

03. This is the tricky part of things, but the quickest route to troubleshooting is to adopt a logical approach to running through the issues. Go back to the preventative items and check through them all again. Check through the power requirements. Ensure the DC jack is correct and seated correctly, and that the audio jacks are seated correctly. If it's a compatibility issue, move the new pedal around to find if there is a more suitable spot that doesn't have interaction issues with your 'board. Sometimes, despite manufacturers' best efforts, pedals just don't like each other. If, after all of these checks, you are still having issues and have exhausted the direction given in the manual then please contact the manufacturer directly and ask for help. Nine times out of 10 it'll be something simple causing the issue and you can get to rocking out asap.

If you follow these directions, you'll integrate any pedal onto your pedalboard with ease. Enjoy!

EMAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS: **GUITARIST@FUTURENET.COM**

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THE NEXT STAGE

Ciaran McNally learned his craft at Lowden and helped take Atkin to greater heights. Now building guitars under his own name, he explains how he used lockdown to design a touring acoustic for Irish virtuoso Shane Hennessy

Words Jamie Dickson

There are many fine acoustic luthiers out there – but you'd be hard-pressed to find many who have the breadth of contrasting experience that Armagh-based guitar maker Ciaran McNally possesses. A protegé of George Lowden and then a key member of the Atkin Guitars team, Ciaran has worked on, by his estimate, several thousand guitars over the years, most of which were finely crafted, high-end instruments. But it all started out much more simply, he recalls: "I started making kits when I was 15/16 years old, and that was just on the kitchen table at home...

"The story goes that I wrecked the kitchen table so much that my mum had to refinish it," he continues. "She was better at finishing than I was back then [laughs]. So they were just partscasters that you put together, but that naturally progressed to where I thought, 'Well, I'm not sure I really want to buy the parts any more, I really want to make them.'

"So I went to a college in Belfast that did an evening course in instrument-making run by an ex-Avalon luthier. People did make various instruments there, though the vast majority of them were acoustic steel-strings. But I went with the intention of making a Les Paul copy. The tutor, Sam, told me, 'Most people make acoustics and, if you want, you could do an acoustic and you'd probably find a lot of the skills are transferable. You could probably even make an electric at the same time or in your own time.'

Luthier Ciaran McNally in his Armagh workshop. His designs combine the best of both American and Irish guitar-making traditions and are built beautifully

"So I started on an acoustic. I was quite into Eric Clapton at the time, so I did a copy of a triple-0 Martin. And I've never made an electric guitar since! I really just got totally hooked."

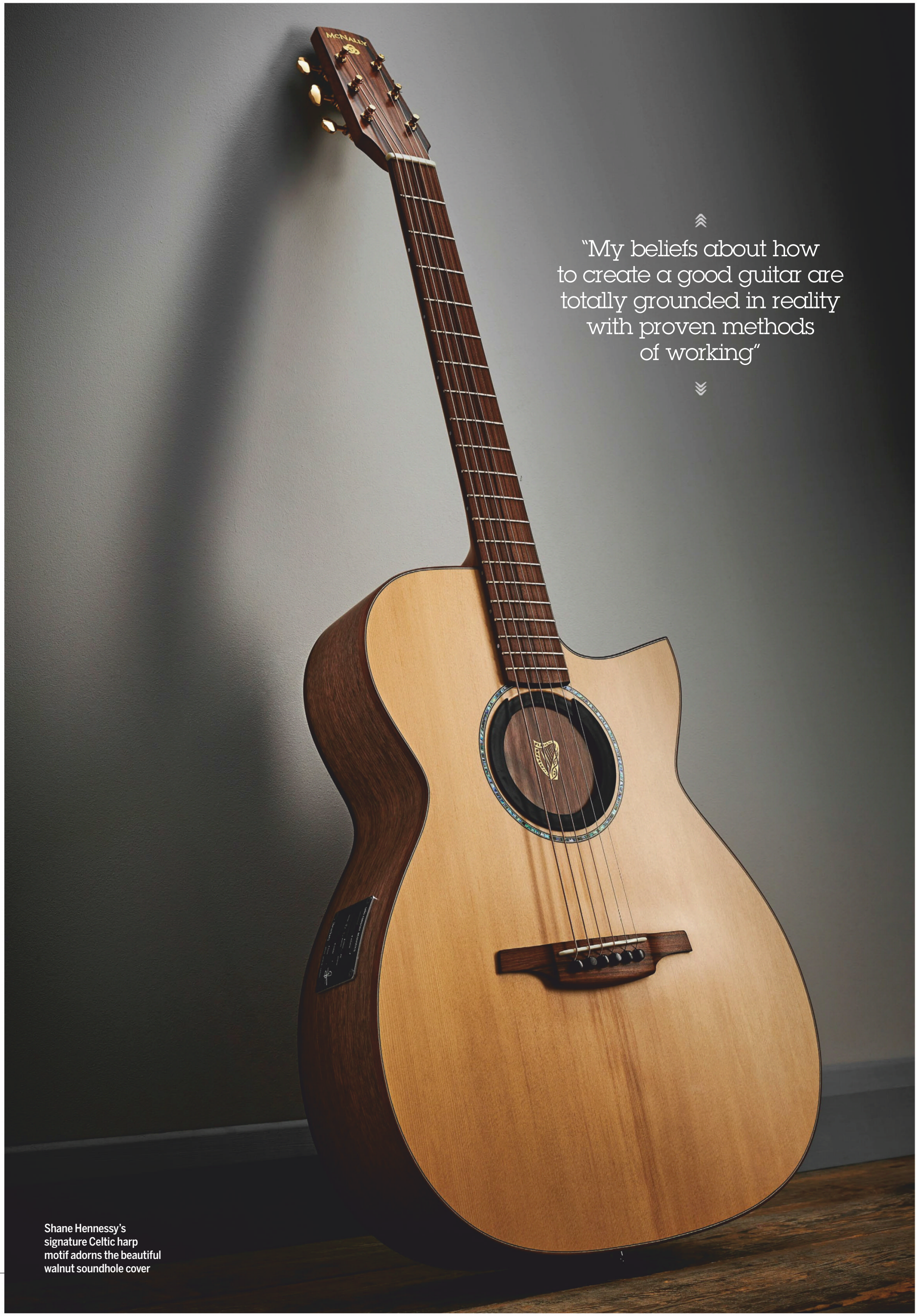
Having been bitten by the bug, Ciaran's first big break was getting hired by revered luthier George Lowden, a connection that came about in such a fortuitous way it almost seemed like an act of fate.

"I went travelling in the East Coast of the US with one of my friends and on a flight back from New York George Lowden was on the same plane. I hadn't met him before and he didn't know me, and I was so jetlagged that I could barely keep my eyes open. But I said to myself, 'Well, if he sits near me, I'll have to say hello,' you know?

"The flight was empty so there were loads of unused seats, but he still ended up being in the same row as me – which was odd. So I said hello and made the connection and then a few months later, I heard there were openings at Lowden. So I emailed them on a Wednesday, he emailed me back on the Thursday, I went to visit them on Friday and I started working for them on the Monday."

Ciaran says his prior experience in making guitars meant he was soon employed on a variety of tasks, from binding to machining, working wherever he was needed. But he admits that, three years later, the intense yet painstaking workload left him feeling a little jaded.

"I needed to get out because I'd started to lose the love of it a little bit," he admits.



"My beliefs about how to create a good guitar are totally grounded in reality with proven methods of working"

Shane Hennessy's signature Celtic harp motif adorns the beautiful walnut soundhole cover

1. Bracing was optimised for strength, stability and amplified tone rather than out-and-out unplugged performance

2. An elegantly pointed cutaway permits Shane all the access he needs to the upper frets

3. Here, the signature model's neck is being fitted in Ciaran's Armagh workshop. This is very much a craft-led process, backed by years of experience

Ciaran then left and joined a high-end coffee-making firm – another passion of his – where his pragmatism and eye for detail saw him become production manager as the company expanded. He kept on making his own guitars, however, as he had done even during his time at Lowden. Ciaran exhibited this private work at 2016's Holy Grail Guitar Show, where he met Alister Atkin.

The two clicked and, catching up via email afterwards, Ciaran was able to make suggestions as to how Atkin could improve workflow and scale up his expanding manufacturing operation. To his surprise, he promptly received an offer to come over and work for Atkin. He spent a fruitful couple of years there as Atkin's success grew, but at the end of 2019 Ciaran decided it was finally time to start his own guitar-making firm in Armagh.

Celtic Crossover

Given his time with two exceptional makers, one building acoustics in the Celtic tradition and the other in the American tradition, it's unsurprising that a hallmark of Ciaran's own designs is a graceful blend of those two worlds.

"A Celtic guitar is very much a certain thing that works for certain styles very, very well," Ciaran says. "And an American guitar is almost the polar opposite. But I've always liked really traditional American guitars. The first guitar I made was that copy of a triple-0 and I've always just liked that vibe. So injecting a bit of that into the Irish-style guitar was a way to create something that actually is a bit unique as well. Being somewhere in between always seemed really beneficial because, personally, I like a really versatile guitar."

The third element in his designs is a strong desire not to work in a vacuum and always focus his designs on the music-making needs of working guitarists. Irish acoustic virtuoso Shane Hennessy caught his ear and Ciaran soon realised that designing a guitar for a player who toured relentlessly, in different climates and stage conditions, could be a fascinating challenge.

"Shane is a kind of Tommy Emmanuel-style virtuoso player – he's an incredible guitarist," Ciaran says. "He was using a Maton instrument, as a lot of players working in that style do, mostly because of the pickup system. But a few years ago, I approached him and asked him if he wanted to do something.

> "A Celtic guitar works for certain styles very well. And an American guitar is almost the polar opposite"

"He was hesitant at first because he's very much about [getting a great] live sound and Maton does that so well. His point was that [stage-focused guitars] weren't something that luthiers covered very well. I thought this was brilliant because it was actually something I really wanted to get into. So I said, 'Well, let's work on it. Let's actually make an Irish-made guitar that is designed for the stage.'"

At this point, Shane himself joins the conversation to pick up the rest of the story: "Ciaran was over in Margate in England at the time and I said, 'Look, if it's possible at some point next year and you have some guitars ready, you might let me know when a good time would be to come over and try them. The more we spoke online, the more our opinions of what a guitar should – and shouldn't – be lined up.

"Then in March 2019, I had a couple of concerts in Germany... and on the way back, I stopped off at Stanstead [airport] and Ciaran picked me up and brought me to his house. He had four guitars ready. I think they were going off to different parts of the world. But it was the first time I had a chance to sit down and spend a lot of time with his guitars. And I was just blown away by how good they were."

Shane continues: "The first thing I think most people would think of if you mentioned guitars from Northern Ireland is going to be a Lowden and that's what I was expecting when I picked them up. But, in fact, they were totally, completely the opposite. Ciaran told me that he was trying to get what he thought of as an American or a Western sound in the guitar, but combine it with that sort of lovely, lush European or Lowden style of guitar. And from the second I played the first one he gave me, I thought, 'Yeah, he's nailed this idea completely.'

"So we talked about what I would look for in a guitar and Ciaran brought up the idea of having one model for the stage and then a studio model as well – essentially an unplugged model – because we both agreed that a stage guitar is a completely

4. Acoustic amplification expert Udo Roesner contributed the groundbreaking prototype pickup

5. Walnut back and sides were chosen for the guitar for light weight and CITES-safe travel

6. Santos rosewood was selected for the fingerboard and bridge, again to avoid any CITES-related travel complications

7. Integral to the guitar's stage performance are these walnut soundhole covers

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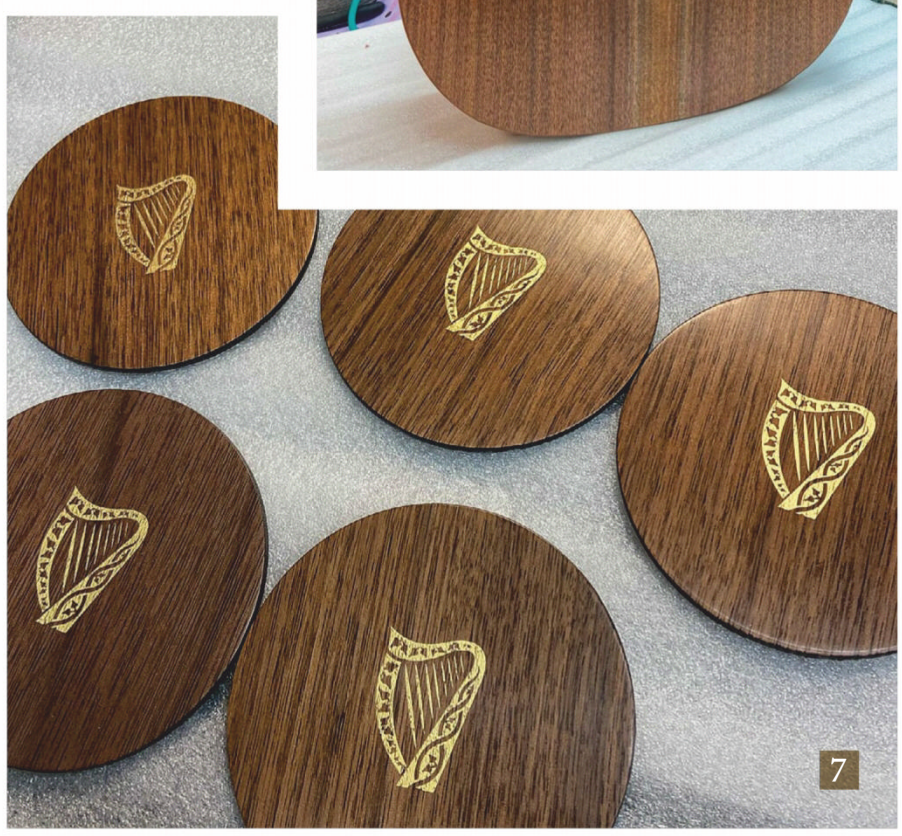
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different beast to a nice unplugged acoustic guitar. I mean, that's the reason I've been using Maton for so long – the pickup system is phenomenal. It seems to be able to handle anything."

Shane had been touring relentlessly for two and a half years and needed something that sounded great plugged in and that was stable and strong enough to cope with continual trips through airports. Building a robust guitar was easy enough for someone of Ciaran's experience – but Shane reckoned the crucial matter of getting its amplified sound just right would prove harder. Fortunately, he knew just the man to help.

He tells us: "I said to Ciaran, 'You know, I reckon it'll be easy to build a guitar that is a stage performer. What's going to be hard is getting the pickup right.' At the same time, kind of serendipitously, I had been back in touch with a man named Udo Roesner in Germany who had started AER Amps a few years before. I'd played at his booth at the Frankfurt Musikmesse so I got back in touch and he was telling me he had a new amplifier and he'd just given the first one to Tommy Emmanuel.

"Udo said, 'I'd like to send you one as well before I go public with them,' essentially. So I tried out his amplifier, and it was fantastic. I liked it more than my old AER and I also remembered he'd been doing some pickups before. So I said to him, 'You know, do you have any plans to do pickups?' And he said, 'Oh, yeah, I've got a couple of prototypes that I'm working on.' So while Ciaran was building the guitars, Udo sent over a prototype of an under-saddle pickup that had a microphone installed in it. And then he also sent over a prototype sidemount pickup to try as well. So I kind of said, 'Ciaran, the only person I would have faith in to do as good a job as the Maton pickup, or possibly better, would be Udo.'"

> "The design was made through Zoom with Udo in Germany and Shane in the South [of Ireland] and me in the North"

Ready For The Road

With a master of plugged-in acoustic tone adding to his expertise, Ciaran was able to forge ahead with his all-new design for a stage-focused signature model for Shane. Ciaran says the work was a refreshing change from the more typical acoustic guitar designs he's made to date.

"It's been really interesting and it's kind of been developed during lockdown as well," Ciaran reflects. "The design was made through Zoom calls with Udo in Germany and Shane in the South [of Ireland] and me in the North. We'd be sending each other drawings of designs and stuff. One of the things I'm really focused on with my brand is sometimes I feel like the luthier world is quite music-less. It's often about lots of photographs of nicely polished guitars – and I want to connect more with music.

"Shane saying that luthiers don't necessarily approach this problem in the right way was very interesting to me because I like to think of myself very

The finished guitar looks stunning and is poised for professional gigs

much as a pragmatic luthier. I don't over-romanticise what I do. My way of building guitars and my beliefs about how to create a good guitar are just totally grounded in reality with proven methods of working and the knowledge of having worked on probably around four or five thousand guitars in my life."

Describing the fruit of their joint labours, Ciaran explains that the Shane Hennessy stage model has several unusual features that are tailored for its road-ready role: "It's quite a unique guitar from me," he says. "It'll be a totally matt finish and it'll have a Sitka top with walnut back and sides, which makes it very lightweight. It'll be lacquered inside so that it's stable for travel [in different climate conditions]. Shane always plays with a soundhole cover and so I've made a custom soundhole cover, made from the same wood as the back – so when you look at the soundhole it kind of looks like the back."

> "I don't necessarily believe that a certain species of wood gives a certain tone"

Ease of transport across continents also dictated wood choices that would raise no eyebrows at border control.

"It's got a Santos rosewood bridge, fingerboard and bindings – again, when we were designing it as a guitar for touring we thought we'd cover ourselves CITES-wise. It's also a lighter weight wood as well – the idea was that it was going to be around Shane's neck for two hours a night so let's keep it as light as possible."

The result is an elegant instrument that's unquestionably a thoroughbred acoustic – but one that is purpose-built to bring music to auditoriums across the globe. As the world looks forward to a hopefully brighter 2021 and a return to being able to gig again, it's an instrument that will hopefully soon be completely in its element. Look out for a full review in *Guitarist* next month. G

mcnallyguitars.com

NO NONSENSE

Forget everything you think you know about tonewoods, Ciaran McNally advises...

"I do not believe people should buy [based only on] wood choice," Ciaran McNally explains, reflecting on his pragmatic approach to guitar design. "I think they should decide the guitar maker they want to work with or the guitar brand they want to work with, because that is by far and away a bigger deciding factor. What two guitar makers do with one wood combination will be vastly different compared with what one guitar maker would do with two wood combinations. So I think you've got to find the guitar first and then the wood is the secondary last 10 per cent of the choice.

"That said, I unfortunately do love all the classic combinations," Ciaran laughs. "Sitka, rosewood and mahogany... I love Adirondack as well – but I love Adirondack with a heavy back and sides, like a more dense rosewood, like Honduras rosewood or cocobolo. Because you get this dynamic thing that goes on with Adirondack: it's so stiff you can hit it lightly and get a good response or you can absolutely dig in and it just shouts back at you and doesn't break up or anything. And when you add that to a dense back and sides it gives the kind of brightness and projection that just forces the sound out of the guitar quite quickly.

"So I don't necessarily believe that a certain species of wood gives a certain tone. To me, it comes more down to density and texture. So, to give an example, if I find a piece of mahogany and a piece of rosewood and they have the same density and texture, to me, I think they'll sound the same. But it just so happens that within the species, you have a typical range of density and texture that creates these generalisations. It's not a romantic ethereal, magical thing – it's just that mahogany tends to be lighter in weight and softer than rosewood. There are exceptions: things like Cuban mahogany can be quite dense and people do say you get a kind of rosewood tone off that. So, again, I take maybe a more pragmatic approach to the woods."

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Longtermers

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

PJD Carey Standard

with Dave Burrluck

The Standard has seen no gig time, but it suits Dave's recording to a T

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor

Our gear reviews editor is asked whether this guitar is really as good as he thinks it is... and then he changes its pickups. What's going on?

This Carey Standard came with Bare Knuckle pickups, but there is now an option for Cream Ts

On my daily (well, nearly) exercise walk I bumped into a local from a pub I'd played at a year or so ago. As a keen player himself, and a *Guitarist* reader, it was no surprise that our conversation went directly to guitars. "Every time I read your magazine it makes me want to buy something," he laughed. I didn't want to state the bloomin' obvious and say, "Well, that's the point..." but before I could answer he asked, "How are you getting on with that PJD?" It was a timely reminder that I had to write this column. "Is it as good as you say it is?" he then asked.

In normal times I would have said I'll bring it to the next gig so he could have a go, but as our world tour of local boozers has been put on hold, the best I could do was answer in the affirmative. Continuing my stroll, however, I couldn't help thinking about that "Is it as good as you say it is?" question. With absolutely no live engagements to evaluate its performance – or indeed that of virtually any other instrument during these long months – there's a caveat involved, isn't there? This

"This PJD has certainly got play time, and practising, testing, recording is all good, but live?"

PJD has certainly got some play time, and practising, testing, recording is all well and good, but live?

Since I reviewed the PJD Carey Standard back in issue 465 there's been a development. Alongside the Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard P90 and humbucker that are on the guitar I have, you can now order your own model with a similarly sized pair of Cream Ts: a P-90 'The Duke' at the neck and an Eliminator humbucker at the bridge. A couple of days later a box arrived from Cream T's HQ, Sound Affects in Ormskirk.

The Duke, apparently, is named after the first duke of Normandy, a Norwegian invader and obvious parallel to Thomas Nilsen's own journey. It's actually a scan of a P-90 from a Gibson 1961 ES-330T Electric Guitar. Expecting an Eliminator from the BFG Whisker range, I realised I'd been sent a Scan 1 '59 Burst for the bridge, which is apparently scanned from a famous guitar player's 'Burst. Who? "We'd have to shoot you if we told you," quipped Sound Affects' Tim Lobley. It would appear it's a very slightly hotter version of the Eliminator and I was keen to give it a listen.

I realised that I'm going to have to – rather reluctantly – mod a guitar I'm perfectly happy with. As has become routine for the rather alarming number of pickup swaps I've undertaken during these past few months, I check I have some clean recordings of the Bare Knuckle-equipped Carey Standard. A little while later and with some more tracks recorded, I'm now even more reluctant about a pickup change. There's something about this Standard that fits the music I'm making like a glove.

If the Nik Huber Piet that I was lucky enough to loan for some time last year was dubbed 'the overdub guitar' then this PJD Carey Standard is going for the title of 'the riff machine'. Using the cranked AC30 emulation in my Helix LT I can almost smell the whiff of an audience... And beer.

Sometime later, with the Bare Knuckle units swapped for the Cream Ts, my world hasn't changed: if I'm honest, I'm hearing more similarities than differences with the different sets playing the same parts mixed into a basic mid-tempo rock track. Soloing the passes is a little more revealing and I'd wager there's a little more sparkle to the Bare Knuckle soapbar, while the Cream T bridge just sounds ever so slightly, erm, older, a little drier and very, very slightly lower in output.

I'd be very happy with either set as both really suit this Standard's resonant, almost Tele-ish voice – and it's definitely that which both pickup sets enhance. For the record, it's dead easy to swap pickups on this PJD platform and, again, I'm reminded of the quality and care of its build.

But what am I going to say to my new-found walking buddy the next time I bump into him? Is this guitar as good as I've said it is? Unquestionably. And with two stellar UK pickup makers in collaboration the allure is even stronger, although choosing which one to go for might be any potential buyer's biggest dilemma. When it comes to choice, we've never had it so good. G

PJD Carey Standard **Reviewed** *465* **Price** *£1,799 (inc case)* **On Test Since** *August 2020* **Studio Session** *At home, lots* **Gigged** *We wish* **Mods** *New pickups* **https://pjdguitars.com**

MARTIN BARRE

The Tull guitarist mourns the loss of his cherished '59 Les Paul and details a lucky find in Yakima…

PHOTO BY ELAYNE BARRE

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

"Now, here's a coincidence and a half because one of your readers sent a picture in of himself playing a Dallas Tuxedo Burns Fenton Weill and he said the only other person you'd see playing one was me. Obviously, a long, long time ago… But today one came on eBay and I bought it straight away. It's not mine: I've got a photo of me playing mine and I got a magnifying glass out and I can tell the one I bought today isn't the one I played way back when I was 15 or something.

"It's a very sexy, pointy, space-age guitar and obviously that's the only reason I bought it and I'm sure it sounded okay for my abilities at the time. My dad came with me to Kay Westworth's in Birmingham and he had to sign the papers to finance it, so I didn't really pay for it or buy it, but that was the only way I could get it."

What was the last guitar you bought? (Before today's eBay purchase, that is…)

"I did a gig in Yakima, Washington, and this guy brought me a picture of his pride and joy, which he said had been under the bed for 50 years. He showed me the photo and I said, 'That's very nice, yeah lovely,' as you do. So we chat about guitars. Nice guy. The next morning we are about to leave and he turns up at the hotel with the guitar and he says, 'Mr Barre, would you consider buying this guitar? You're the only person I would like to own it.' You can't say no. Believe me. I wasn't going to say no, anyway.

"It was a Gibson ES-330 sunburst, single pickup and it had been bought buy the guitar player in a school band and he'd played it twice and then never played it again. It literally doesn't have a fingerprint on it. But it plays beautifully. It's the most gorgeous thing to play. It's very light and I'm now the proud owner. It's a '58. I almost wanted to send an email to Joe Bonamassa saying, 'I've just found the only guitar you haven't bought in America.' That was the last one and I bought a proper cast-iron flight case to bring it back from America. It's a lovely instrument."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've had while buying guitars?

"In the early days, a lot of the English bands playing in the States got bombarded by these kids going round the pawn shops, getting all the '59 Sunbursts and the Strats and all the really great guitars, and then they'd bring them to the gigs to sell them to the bands. I'd been playing with Mountain and I wanted a '59 Les Paul Junior, which this guy brought up from Philadelphia to New York on the plane. It was perfect and I said, 'Yeah, that's exactly what I want,' and he said, 'I've got this other guitar. Do you want to have a look?' It was a '57 Fender Strat and I said, 'No, I'm not interested in a Strat, I'm playing Gibsons.' So he said, 'Well, just have a look at it.' Got it out of the case. It was quite rough. I said, 'Ah, yeah okay. It's very nice, but I don't want to buy it.' He said, 'I can't afford to buy a seat on the plane to take it home…' But I just didn't want it. He said, 'Well, just give me $130.' I felt sorry for him, so I bought it. $130."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you intensely regret letting go?
"Yes, several. But I think the big one is the '59 Sunburst Les Paul, which I sold maybe 20 years ago. Essentially, looking back, it's such an important part of my musical heritage. I used it on *Thick As A Brick* [1972] – did all the album on just one guitar. Toured round the world many, many times. It's a shame, because historically it's really important, particularly to me, and I should have it, really. I saw it in a very expensive coffee table book, but didn't enjoy looking at it."

Have you ever had a particularly serious case of buyer's remorse?
"I don't think so. In fact, I'm pretty sure that it's never the case. I sort of know what I'm buying most times. I've been given a guitar that, obviously, the guy wanted me to play. He built them. I won't say anything else, but obviously he was giving me this to play, but it was actually a horrible guitar. It was really, really horrible. Badly made, badly balanced, silly inlays and exotic wood but nothing behind it. I gave it him back, so no damage done. But no, I'm quite careful with what I buy."

"It was a very sexy, pointy, space-age guitar and obviously that's the only reason I bought it. I'm sure it sounded okay…"

PHOTO BY ELAYNE BARRE

What's your best guitar-buying tip?
"I'd say try to persuade the seller to lend it you for 24 hours: take it home, play it through your amps, your gear, and be in a place where you're not under pressure and really think about what you're doing and listen hard to what the instrument does for you. Of course, that's not always possible, but I just think playing a guitar in a shop doesn't give you much of an idea of anything. I'm lucky because Mansons Guitars in Exeter know me enough to let me take anything home for 24 hours, particularly as they're fairly certain I'm going to buy it because they know me inside out!"

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at? (We'll extend this to online shopping in view of the current circumstances…)
"I guess I'll have to say the Dallas Tuxedo that I bought this morning. I'll know in a few days when I open the package when it comes. It will be a squeal of delight or a howl of terror. You'll probably hear it."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a really good amp?
"The Soldanos I use are so rock-solid. They don't change. They don't let me down. They do exactly what I want them to do every night of every year, so it's a constant. I think a cheap instrument can be improved to get it the way you want it, but an amp is what it is. You can't change it. So I'd always invest in a good amp."

If you could choose only humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?
"A few years ago I would have said humbuckers, but I've sort of got back into Strats again. Again, Mansons Guitars 'lent me' a '63 Fiesta Red and, of course, 24 hours later it was mine. I just love it. I think there's more subtlety and response in a single coil. It adjusts to what you put into it, so you can employ little nuances of technique and it throws them back at you. Humbuckers are more full-on, rock 'n' roll, heads down, which is great. Yeah, I think I would go for the single coil, just for the subtlety." **[DM]**

Martin Barre's latest album, *50 Years Of Jethro Tull*, is out now through The Store For Music
http://martinbarre.com

A humbucker devotee for years, Martin has recently rethought his pickup preferences: "I think there's more subtlety and response in a single coil…"

SOLA SOUND TONE BENDERS

Tone Bender builder David Main of D*A*M cleans up the fuzzy picture of these classic British stompboxes

"The first Tone Bender is essentially a modified Maestro FZ-1 [Fuzz-Tone] and was designed by Gary Hurst in 1965," says David Main. "When the Fuzz-Tone came out in '62, they weren't selling, but when *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* came out in '65, everybody wanted a fuzz pedal. The story goes that Vic Flick took his FZ-1 to Gary saying it didn't sustain for long enough. Basically, the UK cold was shortening the note decay and making it sound spluttery – which some people like!

"Anything germanium is sensitive to temperature and the lower the voltage, the more sensitive it's going to be. So Gary set about making a longer sustaining pedal and the difference is to do with the voltage: an FZ-1 is three volts, and a MK I is nine volts.

"The earliest ones have the classic cheese-wedge kind of shape, but are made of wood and were pretty fragile. Jeff Beck was using them from the start and destroyed a few, which probably led Gary to consider making them out of steel. When the Macari brothers got interested in the idea of making a commercial product out of it there were other names flying about, but they eventually settled on Tone Bender." **[RB]**

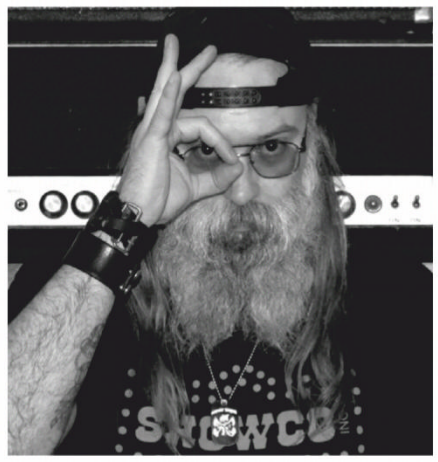

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID MAIN

DAM's David Main has always had a keen eye for a stompbox...

1 MK I

"The MK I sounds quite loud compared with the other Tone Benders, which is surprising considering it's the first in the line. The units can differ a little bit and were super DIY. Gary was tuning them as he went along, and sometimes you can see where different value resistors have been chopped in and out. They were kind of voiced individually, but back in the day the parts were expensive – particularly transistors – and they didn't want to waste anything.

"It's a simple circuit that uses three [germanium] transistors: normally two Mullard OC75s and one Texas Instruments TI2G381. They're made using Tufnol board with the components twisted together – point to point in its truest form! Like the 1.5, there's no [model] designation on the case. Back in the day, they weren't referred to as 'MK I' or '1.5'; until the MK II Professional came along, they just called them Tone Benders."

2 MK 1.5

"The MK I was possibly only in production for a matter of months before the MK 1.5 came along. The earliest MK 1.5 I've seen is also from '65. There was probably a crossover period. The MK I and MK 1.5 are quite different. The 1.5 is where the Fuzz Face [released in 1966] originated from. The component values are different and it's biased differently, but it's the same type of two-transistor circuit, albeit the 1.5 mostly uses OC75 transistors [early Fuzz Faces tend to use NKT275s].

"Early germanium Fuzz Faces are biased cold with the voltage between three and four volts, but a lot of the 1.5 versions are seven to nine volts. You get the full voltage of the battery in some cases. That gives it a really choppy, angry Stooges-like sound – not the typical smooth Fuzz Face sound. A lot of the 1.5s also have a really gated sound, which doesn't give you much sustain."

3 MK II

"[Appearing in around 1966], these pedals were branded for Sola Sound and Vox and have the first official version name, 'Professional MK II', screenprinted on them.

"The first MK IIs are modified 1.5s. The earliest ones have the same small circuit board, but the parts are just crammed in. They have an extra gain stage, so three transistors – usually OC75s and less commonly Impex S3-1Ts and Mullard OC81Ds – rather than two. It's the same kind of two-transistor circuit as a 1.5 or a Fuzz Face but with an extra gain stage at the front-end. It's a bit like taking a Fuzz Face and sticking a booster in front of it. It's just slamming the front-end of the circuit to get more sustain – lots of gain and midrange.

"In an original [MK II] advertisement it says, 'Long 20-second sustain' – and that's what they were trying to achieve with the MK II model."

4 MK III & IV

"MK IIIs were made as early as '68, but they're more commonly branded as a Vox pedal. The MK IIIs and IVs are essentially the same thing in terms of circuitry, but the MK IV has a slightly different [angled] case [as pictured] and that's where they really got into OEM manufacturing, for other brands like Park and Carlsboro. By this point, they're going for full-on mass production with a pressed case and printed circuit board. They use three transistors – manufactured by STC and generally unbranded – but it's a totally different circuit to the MK II. It uses a Darlington [transistor] configuration, meaning the first two transistors in the circuit work as one, effectively making two low-gain devices into one really high-gain device. And then there's a germanium diode in there to try to stabilise the shift you get with temperature fluctuations. Early MK IIIs can sound choppy, like the MK I."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID MAIN

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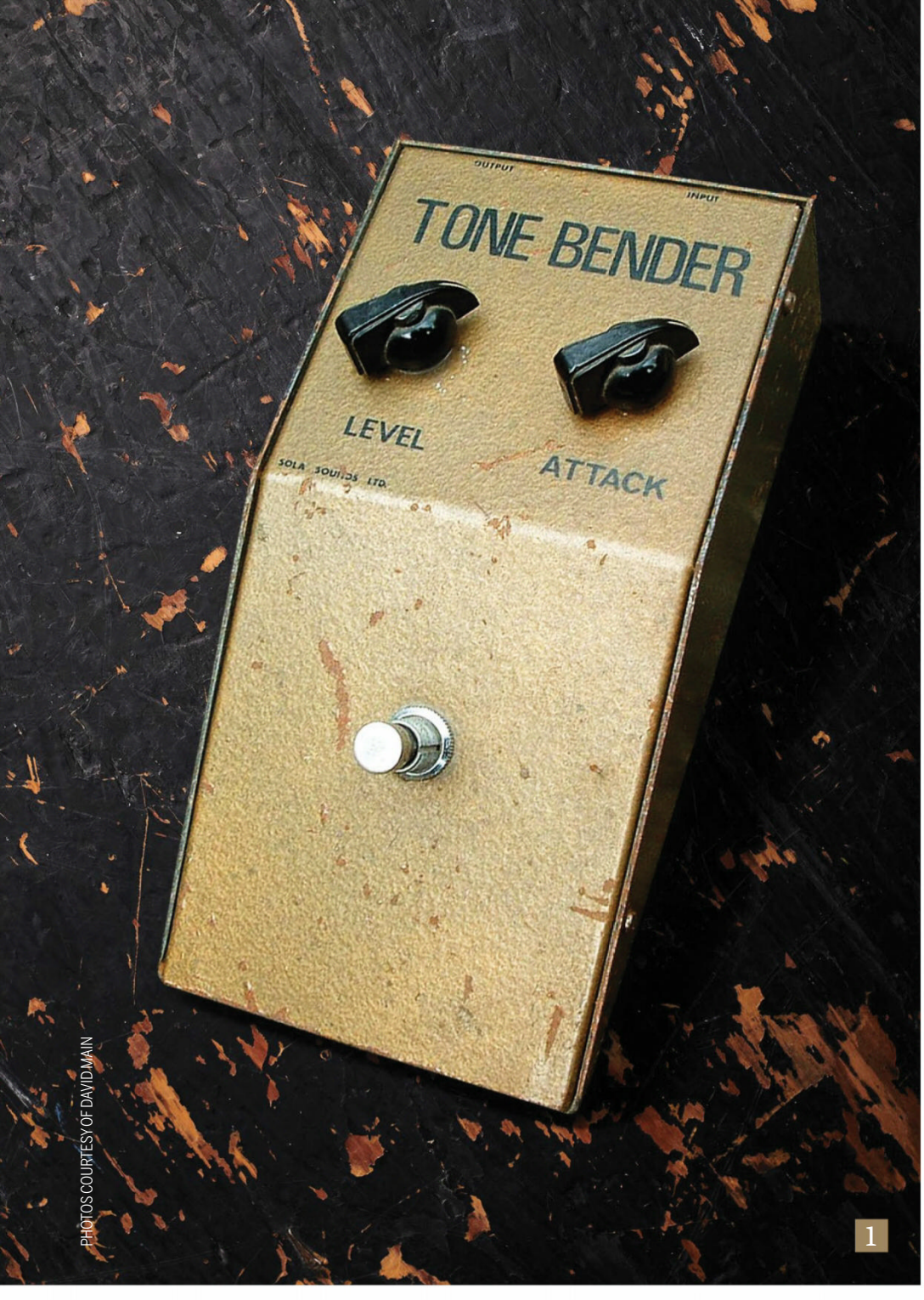

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The MOD SQUAD

PICK 'N' MIX

The matched pickup 'set' is so last year, reckons our reviews editor Dave Burrluck, who suggests a pickup mismatch is the new black…

Combining a Gibson humbucker with a Fender single coil – a benchmark mod-favourite – has certainly produced some stellar sounds, be it in the hands of Keith Richards or Andy Summers just for starters. Then there's the allure of Fender's neck humbucking/bridge single-coil Telecaster Custom. These are all invariably unbalanced pairings and it's that mismatch that interests us here. While the matched pickup set still rules, actually mixing up the styles and different brands can be rather inspiring, especially to the many of us who have been stuck recording these past months – anything that kicks a new riff, lick or song is very welcome.

In recent years we've definitely seen an expansion of pickup styles that are available to us beyond the de facto humbucker and single coils. As a consequence, numerous guitar makers have been mixing it up for some time. A very common setup, for example, is pairing a standard-sized bridge humbucker with a single-coil P-90 soapbar at the neck. You'll commonly find that setup on numerous boutique builds, but also on much more affordable instruments such as Gretsch's lowly G2215-P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club, which pairs a Broad'Tron BT-2S at the bridge with a soapbar P-90 at the neck. Nik Huber's Piet – which has featured heavily in these pages over the past few months – uses a Telecaster-style neck single coil and a P-90 soapbar in a very funky, almost Gold Foil-like cover. And judging by our email inbox, there are plenty of DIYers posing the question, "What if...?"

Oil City's Winterizer, unpotted and with four-conductor wiring

Researching a couple of songs recently, I stumbled across Daniel Lanois playing his 1953 Les Paul Goldtop to which, if I understand correctly, he'd added a Bigsby and an early 60s Firebird pickup at the bridge. Now, irreversibly modding a vintage guitar is not usually the sort of thing we'd recommend, but probably inspired by fellow Canadian Neil Young whose 'Old Black' features a similar P-90/Firebird setup, this mismatch in the hands of Messers Young and Lanois has created some pretty inspirational songs and recordings. It's so wrong, but it sounds *so* right. And while the P-90 couldn't be closer to my heart, that Firebird pickup is one I've only ever played in situ. Clearly, I have some catching up to do.

While I'm right out of 1953 Les Pauls, I decide that having a guitar with individual pickup volume and tone controls is a must for a mismatch experiment like this. It means we can treat each disparate pickup to its own circuit when switched independently. That could mean different pot values, independent treble bleeds (or not), not to mention tone cap types and values and whether we want to go 'vintage' or 'modern' with our wiring.

A quick request to Guild resulted in a loaner Aristocrat P90, which I'd been rather impressed with when we reviewed it in 2020: dual soapbar P-90s and four controls, plus a pretty lightweight chambered construction. The caveat, however, is the word 'loaner'. That means they'll want it back in the same condition it was lent to us, so unlike Daniel and Neil we're going to have to make our mods completely reversible.

This mounting ring for the Winterizer means the pickup can be suspended like a standard humbucker

Brand Awareness

Not only is my knowledge and experience of Firebird pickups scant, I honestly have no idea where to start, aside from following Dan and Neil's style: an 'early 60s' pickup. I don't fancy the cost – or risk – of trying to buy an original. In terms of new versions, however, I was surprised by the choice available. And with great respect to the

"The Guild is a loaner – we're going to have to make our mods completely reversible…"

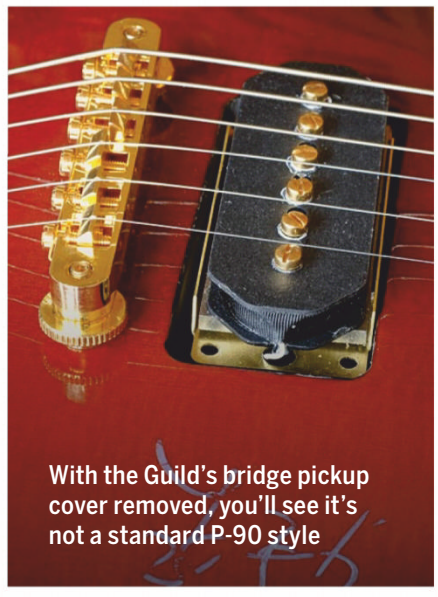
BUYING BLIND

When I started swapping out pickups I knew zero about their design and what was under the cover. Today, we're told what magnets 'sound' like, the advantages of different types of wire coating and gauge, machine- or hand-wound – on it goes. Everyone is a pickup 'expert', even if they're incapable of using a soldering iron. What's the problem? The only way you're going to know what a pickup *actually* sounds like is when you've installed it in your guitar and you've played it through your own setup. I'd go so far as to say that pickup specs can be really *un*helpful and could potentially even give us the completely wrong impression of sound or style.

Many of us will turn up our noses when a pickup advertises a ceramic magnetic, because of some far-flung association with overwound brightness. We forget that many makers, not least Joe Barden, used ceramic to great effect. It's not the material but how it's used that's important: the same basic ingredients used by different pickup chefs will result in different sonic dishes.

Yes, if you want more/less power or to brighten/darken your Strat single coil or PAF then a pickup maker can advise you, or you can take a punt based on your own knowledge – but ultimately you're not going to know if you've hit your goal until that pickup is loaded into your guitar. What's under the cover of the Oil City Winterizer in terms of its magnet type or wire? I have no idea, sorry. I really like its sound – which doesn't make it 'the best' – and where it's taking some song demos I'm working on. That's the point, isn't it?

The Guild's dual volume and tone controls mean we can treat each pickup to its own circuit

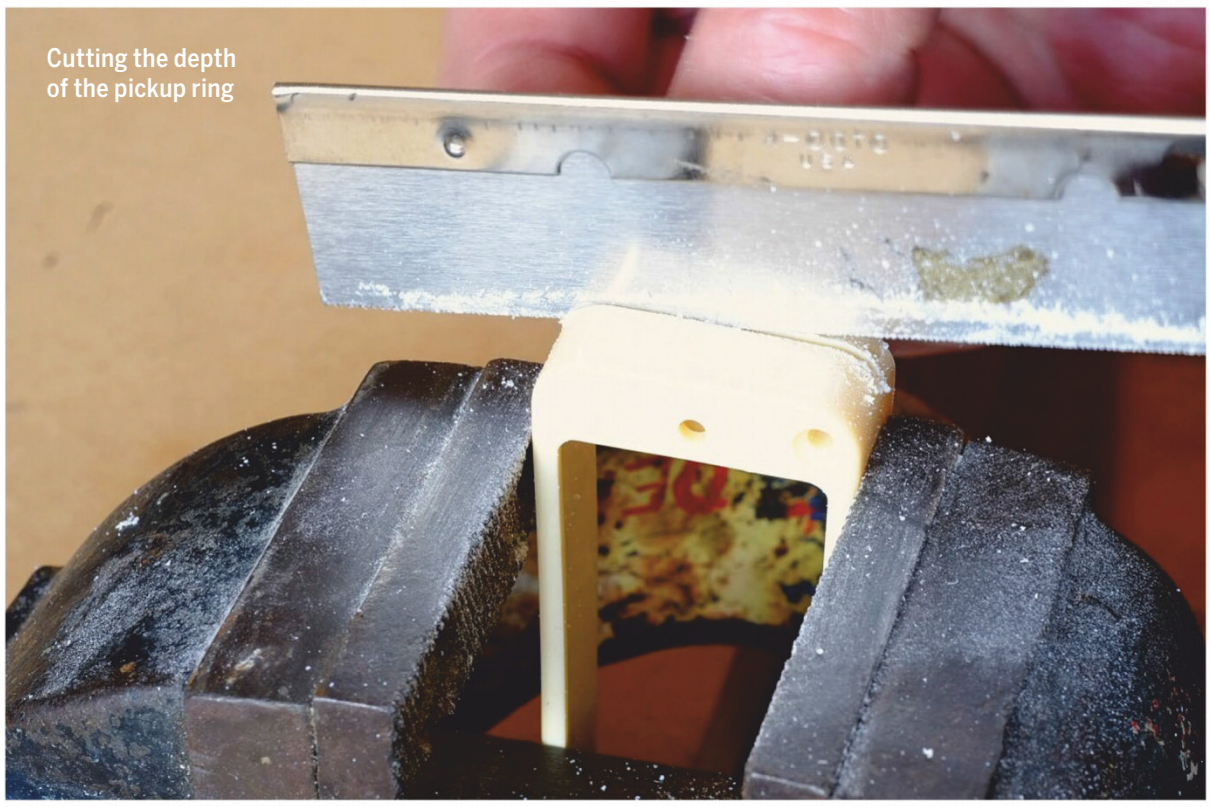


With the Guild's bridge pickup cover removed, you'll see it's not a standard P-90 style

Cutting the mounting ring walls so the oversized ring will sit over the pickup rout

slew of tasty offerings from the world's makers, I decide the least I can do in these times is to buy British, and I decide to try my local pickup maker, Oil City Pickups, based just across the river in Leyton. I call up Ash Scott-Lockyer and about an hour later, having learned more than I can remember about the ins and outs of the mini-humbucker, especially the Firebird's, I order up a Winterizer bridge (named after Johnny, of course, who was certainly a major standard-bearer for the Firebird). If the pickup is a fraction as enjoyable as our chat, I'm going to be a happy punter.

My only deviation from that 'early 60s' spec is to go for four-conduction wiring. It's not that I plan to split the pickup or anything like that, it's simply that if it's out of phase with whatever neck pickup I end up using, I can quickly cure that by swapping two leads. Phase is one of those rather convoluted principles that I don't have space to go into here, but if you're combining different styles and brands then having one pickup with four-conductor wiring simply gives you a choice of whether you want to be in or out of phase with both pickups on. This is particularly helpful on a dual-volume guitar where you can lessen the effect – that overly thin and nasal sound – by simply backing off one of the volume controls.



Cutting the depth of the pickup ring

The Installation

If you've ever uninstalled a Les Paul Deluxe's mini-humbucker, you'll know it has a pretty unique attachment that requires fitting a mounting plate into the cavity. Hmm. Typically, because of the way it installs, a Deluxe's mini-humbucker doesn't have a thread in the holes in its legs. A Firebird style does and was originally mounted to a narrower pickup ring. Now, I'm hoping I'm going to like my mismatch

Checking the fit of the new pickup in its adapted mounting ring

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Oil City Pickups Winterizer bridge
COST: £92
SKILL LEVEL: In our mix 'n' match scenario it's not the easiest mod but certainly doable

www.oilcitypickups.co.uk

PROS & CONS

PROS Beautifully made with a sound to match; great service and good price. What more can you ask?

CONS Not yet!

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

experiment, but if I don't, I want to be able to sell the Firebird pickup on in unmolested condition. I pick up the phone again to Ash and he has an answer straight away: a set of Vanson mini-humbucker rings that mount within the P-90 cavity via two diagonally placed corner screws, meaning I can suspend the pickup in the usual humbucking fashion. Game on.

It's all too easy to let a simple pickup swap turn into a much bigger modding project, especially as I completely forgot that the Aristocrat comes with gold hardware and my new Firebird purchase is in gleaming nickel – a mismatch in more than sound! But before I consider how to 'fix' that, I want to hear what the Firebird style has to offer and decide to wire it in, keeping the Franz soapbar in place at the neck and the original pots and switches. I do a few passes of both the original pickup mix position and the bridge on a song I'm working on then get to work.

Schoolboy Error

P-90 soapbars are a standard size, right? Wrong. Guild calls 'em P-90s, but they're shorter across the pickup by about 5mm, which means my standard-sized surround won't fit. D'oh! With some measuring and quite a bit of swearing I realise that by cutting the end walls to the correct height, the pickup cover will sit in the small rout and I should be able to mount the pickup. At worst, I'll have ruined a perfectly good pickup ring. In an ideal world a couple of small wood blocks glued into the end of the pickup cavity would help, but I find some long thin screws (like those used for mounting a traditional P-90-style soapbar), and mark and drill two holes to mount the slightly cut-off ring with the Winterizer suspended in the standard fashion with its springs and screws – the latter of which are a little long so you'll need to cut them.

> "That steely, penetrating voice of the unpotted Winterizer cuts through…"

Finally…

Typically, we listen and evaluate the pickup set as a whole and adjust the pickup heights so the graduation from neck through mix to bridge is balanced; that's why bridge pickups usually have a little more output. Here, though, we're using one guitar to host two purposely different sounds, which takes me back a little because – no surprise, Sherlock! – they really are different. While the Guild's P-90 is a perfectly good pickup on a £700 guitar and certainly captures a bright and a little gritty tone, the Oil City Winterizer is on an elevated level. Obviously, it's bright, but there's a smooth almost lap-steel sort of tonality here that rounds off any ice-pick and is simply glorious with cleaner Fender or Vox AC30-type amps.

Generous delays and reverbs just enhance the ethereal voice while the neck P-90, with the volume pulled back and strummed with your thumb, Lanois-style, creates a moodier, softer rhythm voice. Does it do Mr Young? Wind up your amps, add some gnarly boost and it sounds – literally – like something's going to break yet still that steely, penetrating voice of the unpotted Winterizer cuts through. Don't be afraid to roll back the volume or tone to subtly soften the voice. And, as its name suggests, it's a near-perfect slide guitar voice that's pedal-steel like with volume swells and cleaner tones or vicious and visceral with some dirt.

The mini-humbucker isn't usually a first modding choice. Historically, many players have taken them out and got a tech to rout out a cavity for a full-size humbucker. But there's something quite delicious about this small aperture design that bridges the gap between the tougher and rougher P-90 and the classic PAF. Looking for a something a little different? Try one. G

THAT UNUSUAL 'BIRD

We investigate the genesis and style of the Firebird's mini-humbucker

Ushered in on Gibson's 1963 reverse Firebird, this fully covered mini-humbucker was just one of the raft of changes that the 'bird brought to the table. But overshadowed by car designer Ray Dietrich who'd conceived the design, its pickup seems more of an afterthought: Gibson needed something "different while keeping costs under control", writes Andre Duchossoir in *Gibson Electrics: The Classic Years*. "Gibson's reluctance to invest in the development of an entirely new pickup design quickly narrowed down the choice to the mini-humbucker devised by Seth Lover in the late 50s."

Yup, that's the mini-humbucker Seth designed for Epiphone, and which most of us became aware of on the Les Paul Deluxe launched later in the decade. There was another variant of the mini-humbucker (codenamed the 'PU-120', apparently) that graced the 1961 jazz archtop Johnny Smith Model, making it technically the first Gibson guitar that used the mini design. So, despite being seen as the 'first' mini-humbucker Gibson had used, the Firebird version (codenamed 'PU-720' with a nickel-plated cover and 'PU-740' with a gold-plated cover) was actually the last to the party.

Whether it was due to cost-cutting or down to the desire for a more Fender-like tonality, the Firebird pickup is rather different to the Deluxe model's mini-humbucker. For a start, its two bar magnets sit 'rail style' in the centre of the two bobbins. Also, under the coils there's a steel 'reflector plate', like a Telecaster, which modifies the magnetic field, while a smaller secondary plate sits across the top of the coils on the treble, pretty much under the B string.

The often-called Deluxe mini-humbucker looks like a thinner version of Seth's full-size pickup with its single row of small diameter adjustable polepieces. Under the cover it's very similar, although instead of a row of steel slug polepieces like the iconic design, there's a single bar polepiece in the centre of the second coil that connects to the single bar magnet. That Johnny Smith mini-humbucker is slightly different, too: again, we have the row of adjustable poles, but this time there's a bar magnet in the slug coil.

Aside from their use on Epiphone instruments, the mini-humbucker was also sold to other companies as Seth Lover recounted to music writer Tony Bacon, also illustrating that cash for pickup development was short: "I designed the small pickup [mini-humbucker] that we used on the Epiphone guitars," Seth said.

A 1964 Gibson Firebird III with two bespoke mini-humbuckers

"Despite being seen as the 'first' mini-humbucker Gibson had used, the Firebird version was actually the last to the party"

"I don't use that second top plate," say Oil City Pickups' Ash Scott-Lockyer. "Gibson didn't always use it from what I've seen, either. I have tried it, but I didn't find it very useful. But the reflector plate under the two coils is crucial. You have an amount of ferrous mass in the magnetic core – that's the magnetic mass. So you're adding to the mass of that: it adds inductance. The more steel/ferrous in the magnetic field, the more inductance you have.

"Now, connecting the reflector plate to the base of each magnet also creates a horseshoe," Ash adds, "which increases the magnetic mass and the efficiency. More inductance means more power without more winds, so you don't lose top-end. An old trick with Strat pickups was to use a piece of hacksaw blade under the pickup; it gives more 'oomph' without having an overwound pickup. It works with any single coil – and the Firebird is very much like two single coils slapped together – to beef up the lower end. You see, it's a smaller pickup with a smaller coil aperture, which senses a narrower portion of the string, so I believe the idea of the reflector plate was to beef up the bottom-end: exactly what they've done."

"There they [presumably Gibson] even balked at paying the cost of the mounting ring for that. Harmony came along and wanted to buy that pickup to use on some guitars they were building for Sears, and they put out the money for a mounting ring [laughs]. They spent the money for the mounting ring, so from then on we had mounting rings to put that pickup on."

There was at least one more mini design, made for Harmony's 1964 Silvertone 1446 (aka the 'Chris Isaak' guitar), that uses offset adjustable polepieces – the forerunner of the Wide Range-style that Seth would famously design for Fender virtually a decade later.

Depending on the source, the slightly smaller size of the mini-humbucking pickup meant fewer coil turns than the full-size 'bucker, approximately 4250 turns of 42 gauge plain enamel with an approximate DCR of 7kohms. Seth Lover's mini design clearly interested other brands, too: Guild's 'Anti Hum' appeared in 1962/'63, again using one coil with adjustable poles, the other with a bar polepiece, we believe. Like the Deluxe's mini-humbucker, it's known for its clearer sound. 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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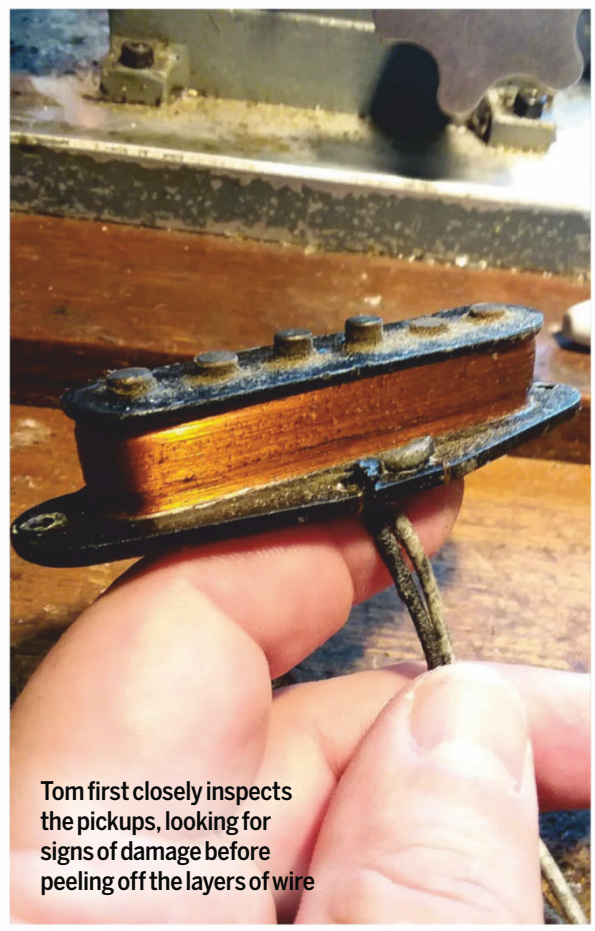
PICKUP LINES

Repairing Fender Single Coils

We take a look at the brighter side of pickup restoration as Tom Brantley shines a light on his workbench

Decades into their working lives, many Fender single coils continue to function quite happily while others have required a visit to the workbench for a spot of TLC. They may take quite a beating over the years, but the sweat, humidity, ageing process and general wear and tear can all take their toll. If a pickup does go down, it's certainly not the end of the world, however, and there are usually plenty of things to consider. "Pickups can often be repaired without needing a rewind, especially when it comes to pre-CBS Fenders," says pickup guru Tom Brantley of Tom Brantley Rewinds. "I'll always look at what can be done, because it's better for the customer and it's better for me."

If you're comfortable with a multimeter and soldering iron you may wish to attempt tackling the problem yourself, although many feel this kind of thing is best left to the experts. "One of the first things I do is reflow any visible solder joints," Tom tells us. "There may be some residual insulation



Tom first closely inspects the pickups, looking for signs of damage before peeling off the layers of wire

If a polepiece oxidises then it will kill the coil from the inside, meaning a rewind is imminent

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM BRANTLEY

> "In my experience, [using wire from the pickup] never sounds as good as using new wire to rewind"

– formvar or enamel – inhibiting the connection between the copper and solder, or sometimes I'll see cold solder joints on the other end going into the circuit. If the lead material wasn't pre-tinned properly before the solder joint was made, going into a switch or pot, then that can cause problems.

"When it comes to Fender pickups, I'll always make a close inspection of the coil exterior," continues Tom. "If I see damage, I'll peel off one or two layers of wire to see if I can find a break. Once you've pulled X-amount of wire, however, you're going to substantially alter the sound of the pickup, so it soon gets to be a judgement call. I don't like going more than about four or five layers. If that doesn't work, then most likely what's happened is the polepiece has oxidised from the top of the bobbin, it goes brown and crusty, and then killed the coil from the inside out. If that's the case, it'll need a rewind.

"People ask me all the time if I can use the good wire from the outside to rewind with, but the problem is the insulation gets brittle with age and you're restretching the wire twice when you do that. In my experience, it never sounds as good as using new wire to rewind with. I've got all the vintage-correct formvar and enamel wire and I don't think there's any difference in tone between new and old; it's all to do with how – and how well – the coil is constructed. When you machine-wind, all your wires are lying directly on top of each other in a straight line, which can build capacitance, but with hand-wound pickups the wires are crossing each other and that can lower capacitance, meaning you get a cleaner, bigger sound.

"If I can hear a difference between formvar and plain enamel it's because formvar insulation is generally ever so slightly thicker, which means that with the same number of turns, the outside diameter [of the coil] is larger. It adds up after 8,000 turns! If you have the same number of turns using plain enamel wire, the outside diameter is slightly smaller, therefore more of the coil is within the stronger part of the magnetic field; the efficiency of the magnets decreases exponentially as you move further away. Every now and then, there may be a problem with magnet degaussing. It's another step in the diagnostic process that could trip you up if you're not careful. You can occasionally get an occlusion – a large air gap – within single-coil Alnico polepieces, formed when the material was cast. And that can destroy the magnetic field. All manner of weird things can happen!

"You can measure from the jack, but if you're getting weird [multimeter] readings it could be something else other than the pickup that's incorrect. You don't immediately have to unsolder it. I always recommend just checking the pickup out of circuit and start at one end of the chain. You might actually find the pickup is okay." **[RB]**

http://tombrantleyrewinds.com

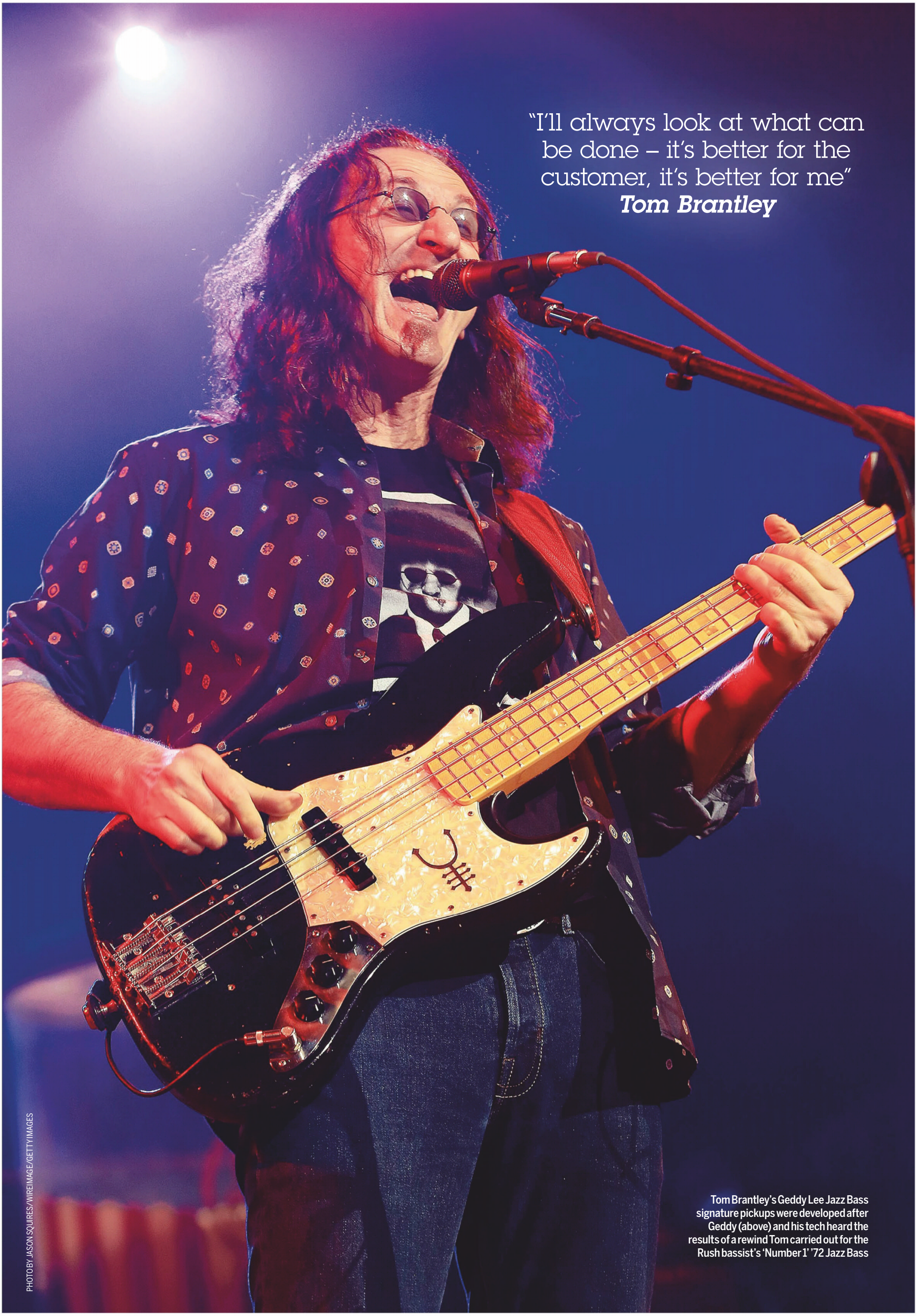


PHOTO BY JASON SQUIRES/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Tom Brantley's Geddy Lee Jazz Bass signature pickups were developed after Geddy (above) and his tech heard the results of a rewind Tom carried out for the Rush bassist's 'Number 1' '72 Jazz Bass

Fender chimes in with its answer to an electric 12-string…

Fender Electric XII

The Electric XII may not be Fender's most popular or well-known guitar, but in terms of design it's one of the best 12-string electrics ever made. Easy to play, stable and with an impressive breadth of tone, it's hard to find a more practical instrument of its type. Although many people these days would be inclined to use a chorus pedal to conveniently simulate the tone of a 12-string, the natural complexity, shimmer and chime of multiple string courses is a wonderful sound that endures across various guitar-playing styles.

12-string acoustics were around for a long time before the advent of their electric siblings and became relatively popular after appearing in catalogues during the early 1900s. As inexpensive blues and folk instruments, they were adopted by some of the early guitar luminaries such as Blind Willie McTell and "King of the 12-String Guitar" Huddie 'Lead Belly' Ledbetter, while in later years 12-strings became a regular fixture of the 50s/60s folk boom. By this stage, electric solidbodies were well established and the concept migrated over to this more modern format, beginning with the Gibson Double 12/EDS-1275 and Danelectro Bellzouki.

It was Fender's fellow Californian builder Rickenbacker, however, that really brought the instrument to the fore in 1964 when George Harrison's prototype 360-12 appeared in The Beatles' film *A Hard Day's Night*. After that, Fender developed an electric 12-string model of its own in anticipation of a continued surge in demand, but they were never a huge seller and the Electric XII was produced for only a short time between '65 and '69.

2

Synonymous with mid-60s hits such as The Beatles' *Ticket To Ride* and The Byrds' *Mr Tambourine Man,* electric 12-strings are something of a secret weapon in the studio, with Eric Clapton, Pete Townshend and Jimmy Page all having used an Electric XII to record with. Soon after its release, Bob Dylan was photographed using a standard sunburst finish model during his '65 *Highway 61 Revisited* sessions (as pictured in the album's artwork), while The Beach Boys' Carl Wilson was snapped the same year playing an Olympic White pre-production Electric XII. Custom

> Synonymous with mid-60s hits, electric 12-strings are something of a secret weapon in the studio

colour Electric XIIs were produced in greater relative proportion to catch the eye of would-be buyers, with Olympic White, Candy Apple Red and Lake Placid Blue being among the more common.

With an offset body, the Electric XII follows the basic form of its predecessors the Jazzmaster, Jazz Bass, Bass VI and Jaguar, while its most distinguishing feature is undoubtedly the large six-a-side hockey stick-shaped headstock (as per the Fender Villager and Shenandoah 12-string acoustics, also released in '65).

Masterminded by Leo Fender, the Electric XII's 12-saddle bridge is a stroke of genius, providing full adjustment of each string for near-perfect intonation and action, while its string-through-body design and tight break angle enhances sustain. Two split pickups located in the bridge and neck positions provide expansive tonal options in conjunction with master tone and volume controls and a four-way switch (offering either individual, dual or out-of-phase operation). **[RB]**

The Evolution of Fender 12-String Electrics

June 1965
Electric XII solidbody released; standard sunburst finishes with white pearloid pickguard

1965
Sunburst with faux tortoiseshell pickguard; pearloid dot inlays

Early 1966
Fender Coronado XII thinline introduced (final Antigua XII version discontinued 1973)

Mid-1966
Electric XII with bound neck with block inlays (rare)

1969
Electric XII discontinued

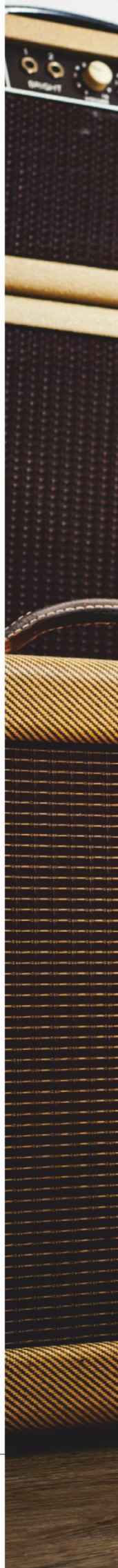
1987-1990
Stratocaster XII

1993-1996
Strat XII

1995
Telecaster XII

2005-2009
Stratocaster XII

2019
Alternate Reality Series Electric XII



1965 Fender Electric XII in Firemist Gold

1. SERIAL NUMBER
F-series ('F' neckplate logo); six-digit serial number impressed into neckplate (usually 100000-110000 range for 1965)

2. HEADSTOCK
Large 'hockey stick' headstock; six-a-side tuners; matching Firemist Gold custom colour finish; decal reads 'Fender Electric XII'

3. BODY
Solid alder; offset contoured design; Firemist Gold custom colour finish

4. PICKUPS & ELECTRICS
Adjustable dual split pickups; four-way rotary selector switch (individual, together and out-of-phase operation); master volume and tone controls (two 1meg-ohms pots and 0.022uF ceramic 'pancake' tone capacitor); front-loading jack socket

5. HARDWARE
Chrome-plated: control panel; string-through-body bridge with 12 fully adjustable 'barrel' saddles; 12 individual 'F'-stamped tuners; string guide

6. PLASTICS
Three-ply (w/b/w) pickguard with bevelled edge; four black pickup covers; two black metal-capped Fender amp-style knobs; black selector switch

7. NECK
One-piece maple; bolt-on; 25½-inch scale length; 21-fret rosewood veneer fretboard with pearloid dot inlays; date-stamped 'OCT65'

***Guitarist* would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham for showing us this 1965 Fender Electric XII in Firemist Gold**

*Reverb*Rarities

Carly Smith profiles a 60s stunner with a storied past

1960 Gibson ES-335TD

Welcome to another instalment of Reverb Rarities, where we take a deeper look at a special piece of vintage guitar history currently listed on Reverb. Today's listing is an absolutely beautiful Gibson ES-335TD from 1960. And what makes it even more special is that this 60-year-old guitar has only had one owner.

On offer from The Music Locker in Derby, this guitar was purchased brand-new in the early 60s from Waltons Music in Dublin – one of just two Gibson ES-335TDs that were imported into Ireland that year. The original owner was a gigging jazz musician who played it on the road throughout his career, but also cared for it lovingly, even adorning it with the attractive rose decals that you can see on the body and headstock.

While the headstock has been cracked but carefully repaired and there are also a few other player's-grade blemishes, what's particularly special about this guitar is that it features the model's 100 per cent original PAF pickups in perfect working condition. This gives the guitar a tone that sounds just as good – if not sweeter – today than it did fresh off the production line six decades ago.

What's more, this beauty purposely hasn't been cleaned by The Music Locker, guaranteeing that the lucky buyer gets a guitar quite literally filled with history.

To find the full listing, head to: **http://bit.ly/Reverb60Gibson**

Carly Smith is an editor at Reverb.com – a leading website and app for buying and selling new, used and vintage music gear, and a go-to resource for gear history, sales trends and pricing. Carly edits Reverb News and works with the content team to produce articles and videos focused on gear and music-making.

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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, Original Vintage
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
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
19604 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
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
18361 - Tanglewood TW2T Travel Size Guitar
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acosutic
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
17056 - Tanglewood TWU D Union Dreadnought
17055 - Tanglewood Union TWU F
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 L-HANDED
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
19576 - Fender Am Acoustasonic Strat, TS Blue
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat
18241 - Fender FA125CE Dreadnought Electro Nat
21625 - Fender Malibu Player, Natural
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
19065 - Klos T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Klos F_AE Electro Acoustic
21494 - Larrivée C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
19691 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
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

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria PH CSB AX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
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
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
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar
19339 - Ovation 1771 Vi-1 GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771 STR-MB Main Street
11087 - Ovation Standard Elite 6778LX Black
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovation C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
19346 - Ovation CS24C-4 Celebrity Standard, Nat
19338 - Ovation 1771 STG-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 VWS1000N2X Vintage Series
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
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
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 Parlour
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 - Taylor 220ce K DLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taylor 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

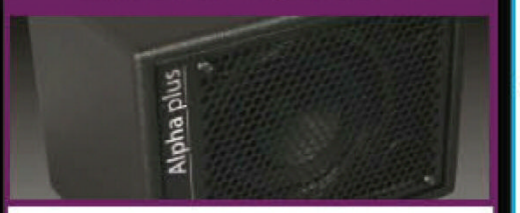
Classical Guitars

19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line , Secondhand
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
19600 - Yairi CY62CE Electro Classical
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 20 Models In Stock Now
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
19715 - 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
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19483 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30, Black
24976 - 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 Ukulele In Mahogany With Inlay
19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Engraved hole
19893 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Spruce Top
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Ukulele In Mahog
19911 - Aloha Student Concert Mahogany Ukulele
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Ukulele (GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AUR-10 Concert Resonator
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano Uke
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
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 Uke In Mahog
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype ConcertWith Black Bag
19894 - Factory Prototype ConcerWith Layered Head
19882 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele, Sapele Top
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock
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 Ukulele, Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele,Spruce Top
19891 - Flight Red Mahogany Concert Cutaway
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele, Spruce Top,
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert With Black Bag
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banj,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 KSI10 10 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 Electro-Ac.
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
18197 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
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 Soprano Ukulele
19896 - Martin Romas MR02F Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15593 - Martin T1 K 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
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
19005 - Ohana BK-70M Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
19004 - Ohana BK70R Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
19006 - Ohana BK70W Spruce/Walnut Baritone Uke
21591 - Ohana Bass OBU-22 Fretted Bass Ukulele
19003 - Ohana Bass with Fretless Marks OBU-22FLM
21599 - Ohana CK-150QEL Concert Ukulele
21575 - Ohana CK-28-5 Solid Premium Mahogany
21576 - Ohana CK-35GCE-LH LeftHanded Concert
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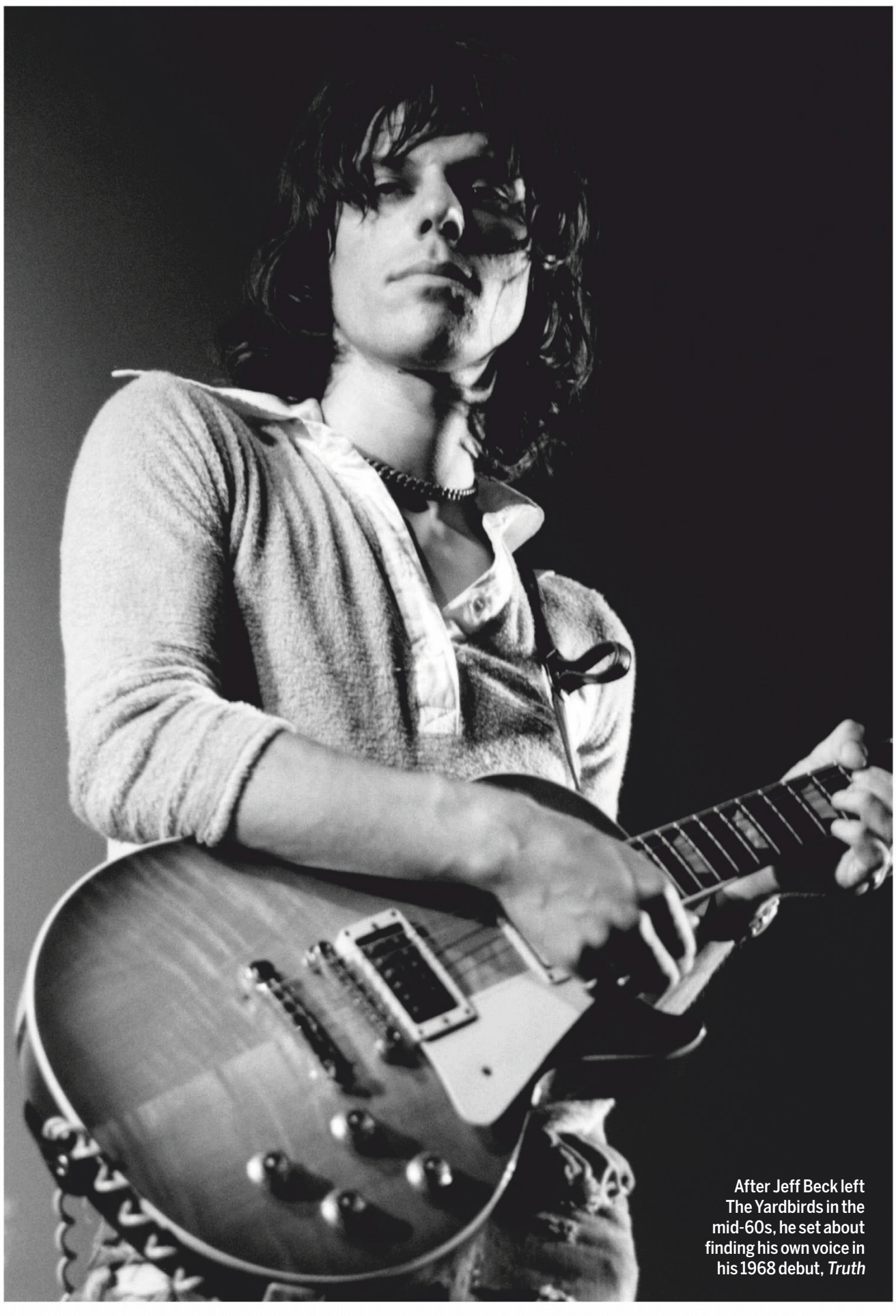
Blues Headlines

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

Five Chords & The Truth

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Knaggs SSC, Marshall JTM45
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example



After Jeff Beck left The Yardbirds in the mid-60s, he set about finding his own voice in his 1968 debut, *Truth*

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

JEFF BECK'S DEBUT ALBUM, *Truth*, was recorded in two sessions and a total of four days in May 1968, after he resisted putting out any more solo singles in the Mickie Most approved *Hi Ho Silver Lining* vein. These days, most conversations about Jeff begin with how he has maintained consistent creativity and innovation over the years, particularly with his unique whammy bar approach – and fair enough. However, this Headlines is focused on his cutting-edge role in the British Invasion of the 1960s (before helping define jazz-rock going into the early to mid-1970s).

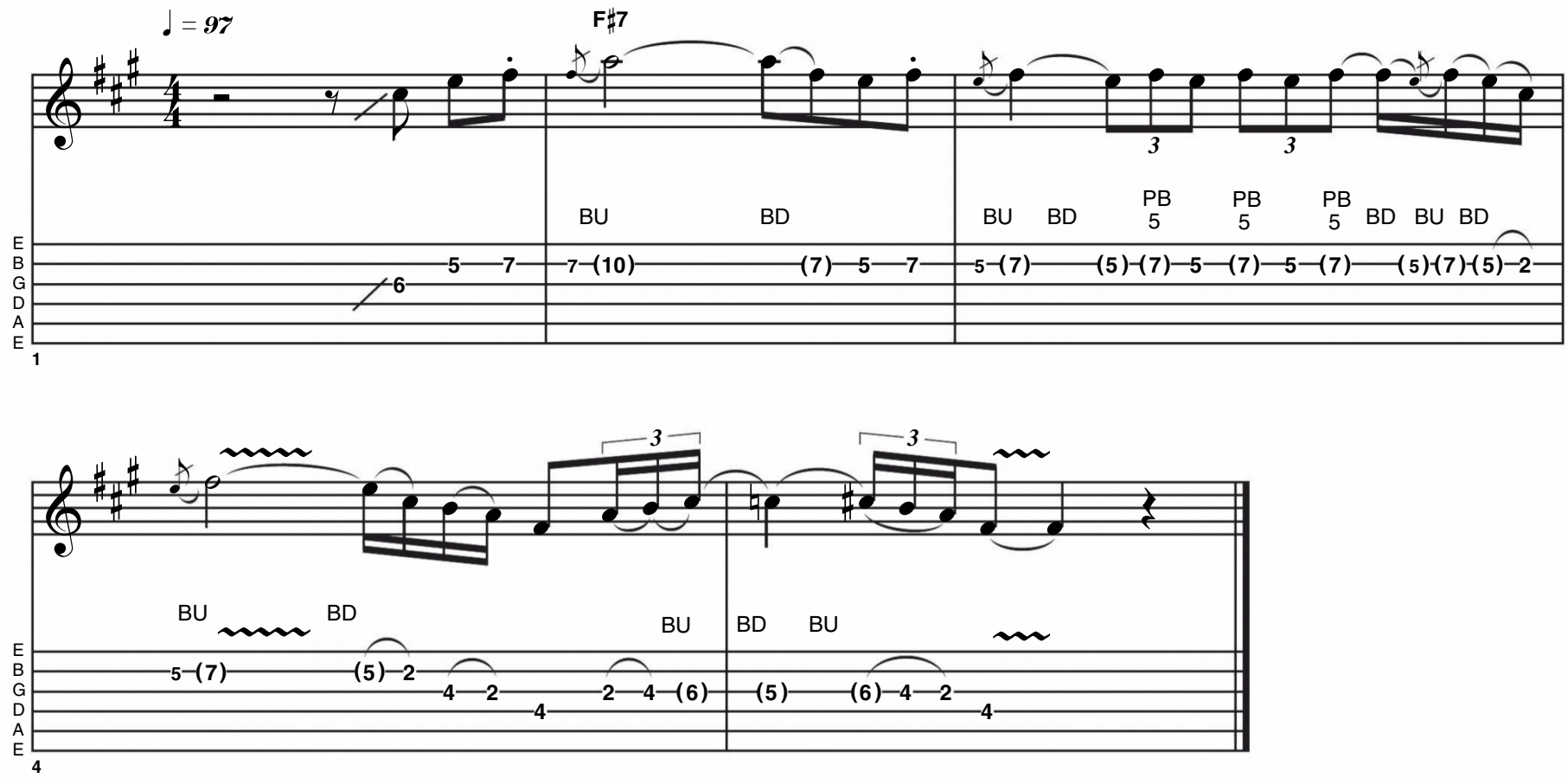
Back then, he played a Gibson Les Paul with a pick, and even without a whammy bar he manipulated the pitch of notes in an innovative way, adding rhythmic, stuttering phrases – often punctuating Rod Stewart's raw vocals. Ronnie Wood's complex guitar-like lines on the bass must have been a valuable support, too, particularly live.

Jeff has always followed his own path, taking inspiration from a wide range of styles. Cliff Gallup's rockabilly pyrotechnics were a big early influence –and still are – but Jeff has also moved forward to take on styles as diverse as Stevie Wonder and Nitin Sawhney. Second guessing what a player like Jeff may come up with is an unenviable task, but having a listen to his playing on *Truth* and taking some cues from that led me to the solo transcribed here (albeit split into four sections).

It's likely that Jeff was plugged into Marshall amps for the majority of the *Truth* sessions, possibly with a Marshall Supa Fuzz. The main ingredient, though, is his fingers. To get the tone on my solo, we linked the channels on a small box JTM45 and pretty much maxed both volumes – not for the faint hearted!

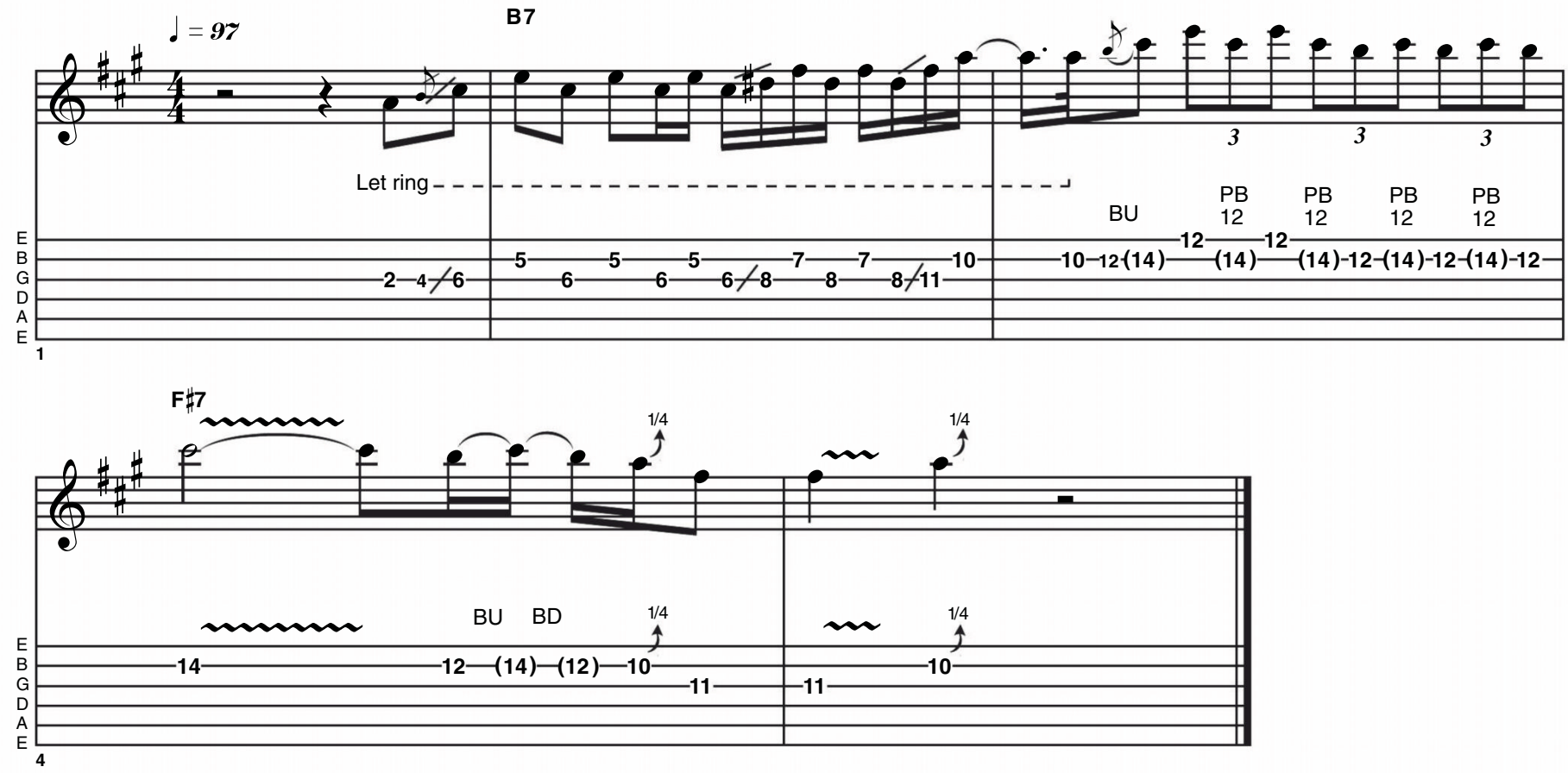
Example 1

WHILE RECOGNISABLY PENTATONIC (not necessarily a norm for Jeff, even in the 60s), this opening phrase demonstrates his rhythmic approach: picked hard and emphasised through a series of pre-bends and releases. The release from the 5th to ♭5th (C# to C) in bar 4 is an example of how Jeff would take what might sound like standard blues (or just plain wrong) in other hands to create a twist on what was still a very new style in 1968!



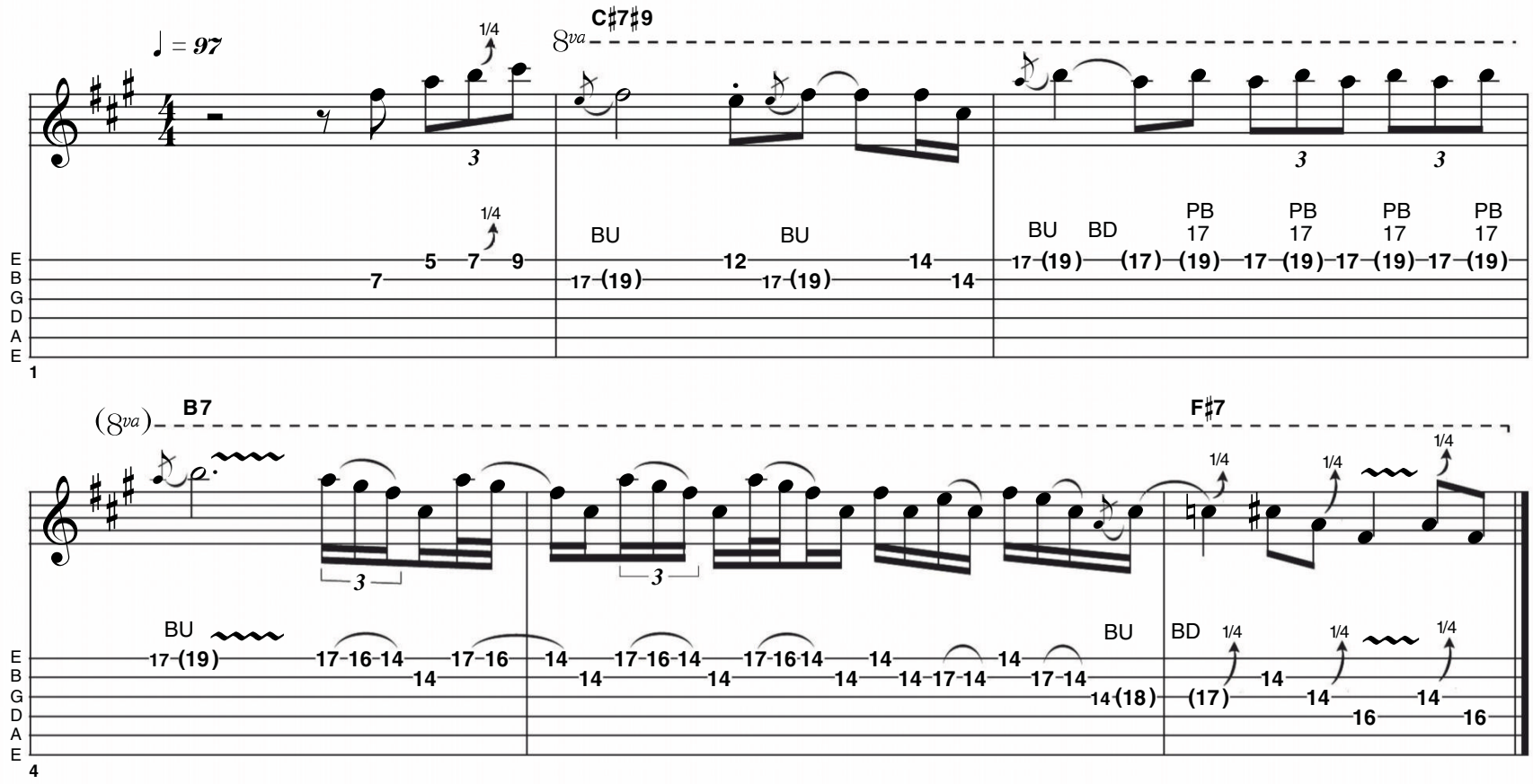
Example 2

MOVING UP THE fretboard, these doublestops arrive at a stuttering series of bends and releases similar to Example 1, but this time combining that idea with the 5th and ♭5. This is a bold move, which may have been inspired by the psychedelic sounds that would have been everywhere at the time, or perhaps the way blues harp players would bend a note. Who knows, but it is certainly worth trying out to add an exotic edge to your solos.



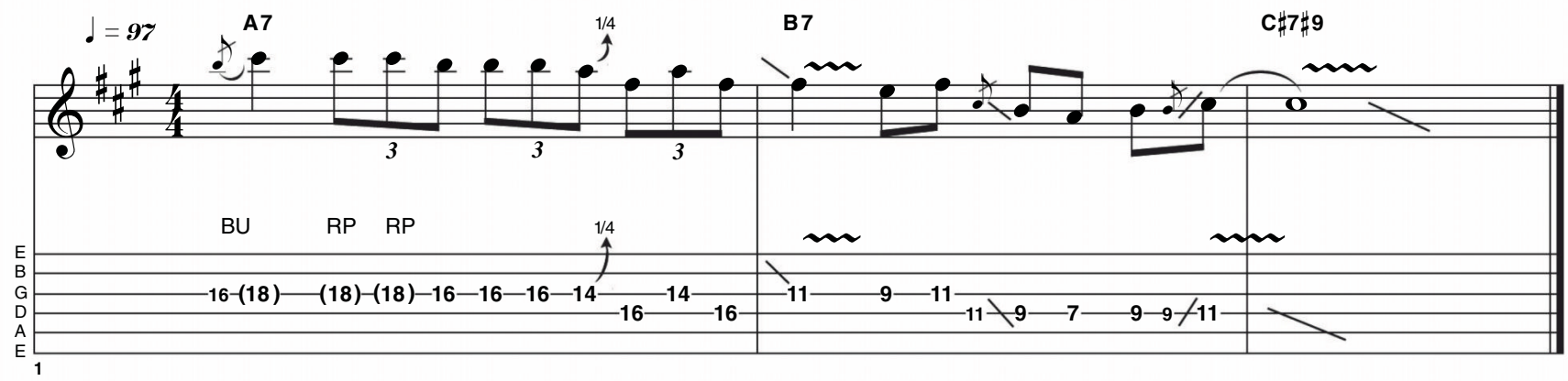
Example 3

A SLIGHTLY LONGER phrase here, incorporating some of the same devices (including a particularly unsubtle released bend to the ♭5 in the final bar!). I've also added in a more rapid-fire section over the pause in the backing track. Jeff has never made fast playing a goal in itself, but there's no doubt he can go there if he feels the song calls for it.



Example 4

CLOSING THE SOLO, this example jumps position quickly in bar 2, something I hadn't consciously intended to do, but after the event felt it was probably true to Jeff's non-linear approach. Ending with a high screeching note also feels like something that would have come later (perhaps the 70s). I don't believe Jeff thinks in linear terms/scales – maybe not even in terms of stock licks!



Hear It Here

JEFF BECK
TRUTH

As the focus of this month's Headlines, the solo is inspired by Jeff's playing on *Let Me Love You*. There's no track to skip, really (except possibly *Greensleeves*, as it's played on acoustic). Have a listen to his reworking of The Yardbirds' *Shapes Of Things* and *You Shook Me* – the same song that appeared on Led Zeppelin's debut within months. While this kind of rock/blues may be familiar now, this is largely where it came from.

JEFF BECK
BECK-OLA

The follow-up to *Truth*, this has a slightly more polished sound overall, partly due to production, partly due to Jeff having recently toured the US and being in great shape! However, Jeff's guitar is as raw and present as ever. *All Shook Up* and *Spanish Boots* both feature his unmistakable touch, and *Plynth (Water Down The Drain)* showcases an early appearance of the Fender Strat, which would become his guitar of choice.

JEFF BECK
JEFF

Skipping forward to 2003, we can hear that Jeff has not become formulaic nor rested on his laurels in any way in the decades following his debut. Embracing modern sounds, production and arrangements, he is still as recognisable as ever. Listen to *So What*, *Trouble Man* and *Grease Monkeys* to hear a fuller realisation of what was probably already brewing somewhat in Jeff Beck's mind back in the 60s.

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Trading Licks

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

Demystifying The Modes Part 2: The B Dorian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Mike Stern Pacifica & Line 6 Helix Rack
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example

THE DORIAN MODE is the second mode of the major scale and can literally be seen as a major scale that starts on the second degree and ends on the same tone an octave higher. The A major scale is as follows: A B C# D E F# G# A.

B Dorian contains the same tones as the A major scale but starts and resolves to the second degree (B). It's that simple. The B Dorian mode (A major scale from B to B) is: B C# D E F# G# A B.

When we harmonise the major scale (build chords from those tones) we produce seven chords. Chords are built by stacking consecutive 3rd intervals from the scale. The resulting chord built from the second mode is Bm or Bm7 (including any diatonic variation and chord extension).

R	min3	5th	min7

B C# **D** E **F#** G# **A** B **B** + **D** + **F#** + **A** = Bm7

Tonal Centre

When we see a chord progression that starts with Bm and cycles through a series of chords derived from the A major scale, we have a B Dorian progression. The progression will likely resolve and sound rested on the Bm chord. This resolution point of a chord progression is called the tonal centre.

When it's time to improvise, then, we can use the B Dorian mode (A major scale) over that progression targeting tones of the Bm7 chord and phrasing our lines towards the tonal-centre chord.

Finding The Character

Each mode has a characteristic note that evokes the unique sound of that particular mode. The characteristic note of the Dorian mode is the major 6th. In B Dorian, then, that note would be G#. This means that we can enhance the unique flavour of the B Dorian mode by targeting its characteristic note and creating phrases that resolve to the chord tones of B minor.

Here is an example of a B Dorian chord progression:

IImi	I	V	VImi	IV	V

||: Bmin(add2) | A E/G# | F#min7 | Dma7 E/G# :||

Take a moment to play through the chord progression above and then end on the Bm(add2) chord. You'll hear that the chord progression resolves to the first chord: Bm(add2) – this is the tonal centre of the chord progression. The tonal centre determines the mode and the characteristic note enhances and evokes the true sound of that mode.

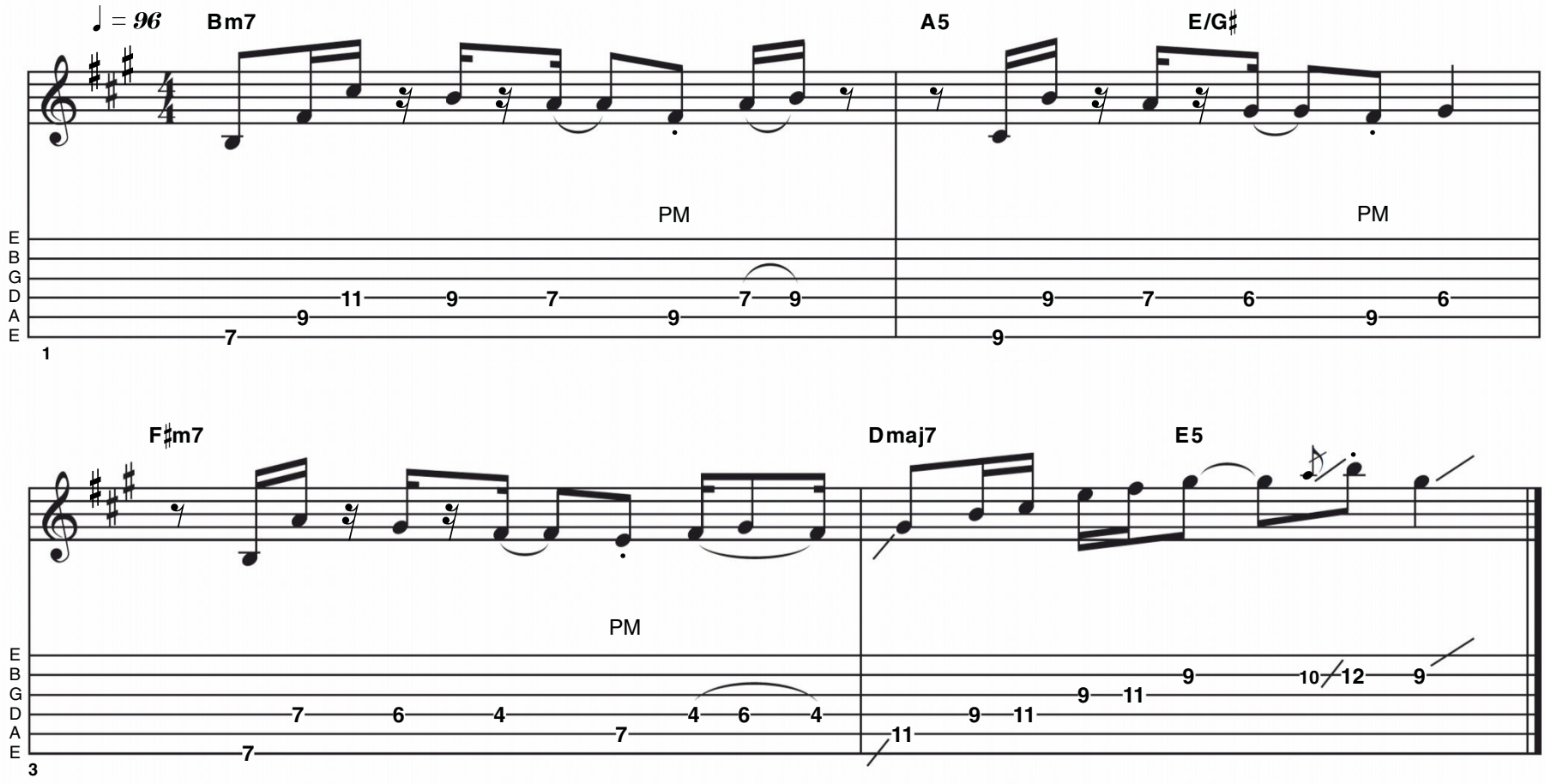
Next, try playing through my B Dorian phrases below, and analyse the tones that are used and where each resolution occurs. Then it's time to work on creating your own B Dorian phrases over the track – this will solidify your complete understanding of the Dorian sound and tonal centre modality. Have fun and I'll see you next issue where I'll introduce the haunting sound of the Phrygian mode.

www.robbiecalvo.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBBIE CALVO

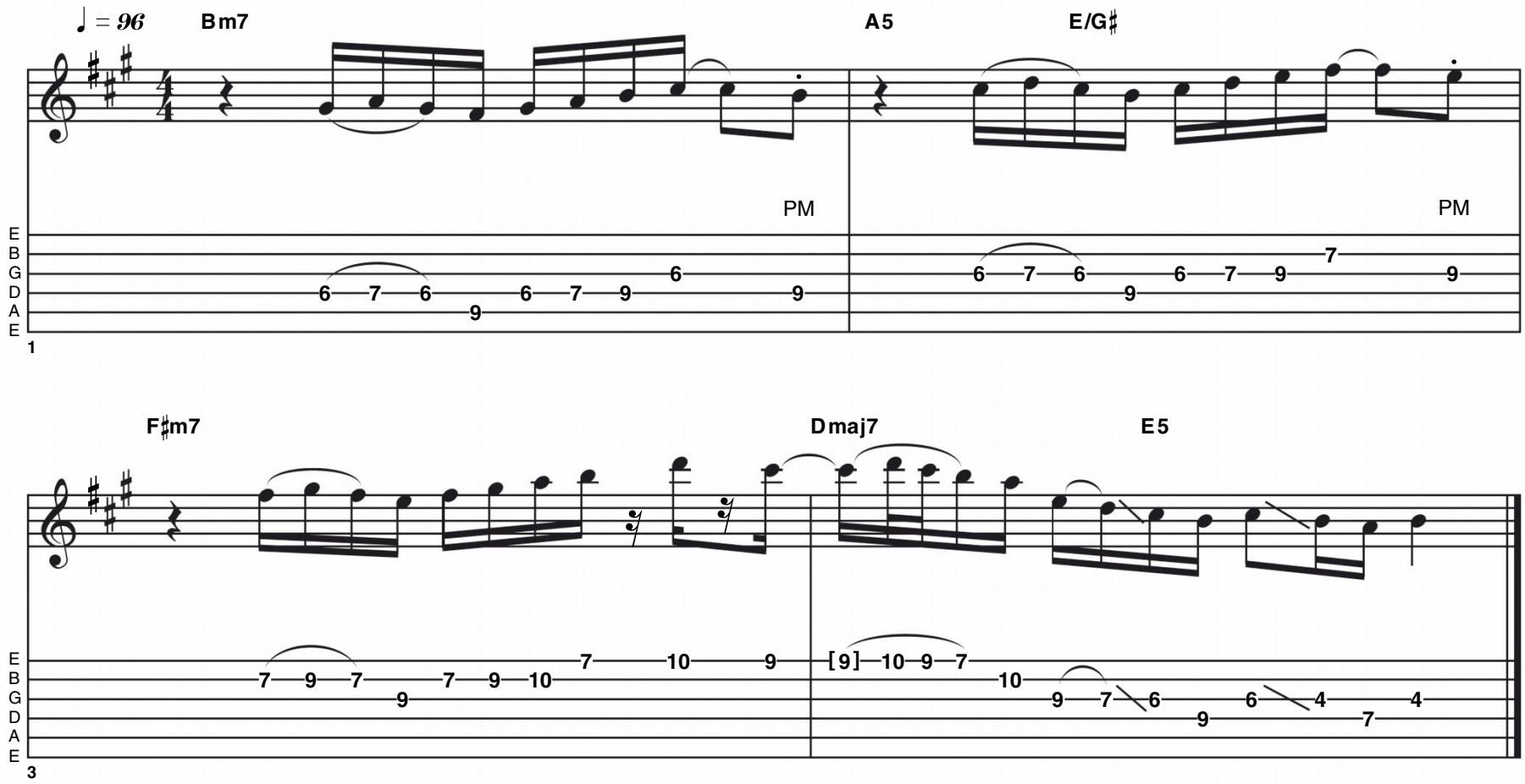
Lick 1 Skip don't run

MY OPENING PHRASE outlines the Bm(add2) exclusively with chord tones, descends through a series of string-skipping ideas that target the G# characteristic note, and resolves nicely an octave higher on G#. I'm also a proponent of starting a solo in the lower register and creating dynamic expression through ascending runs. Give it a try.



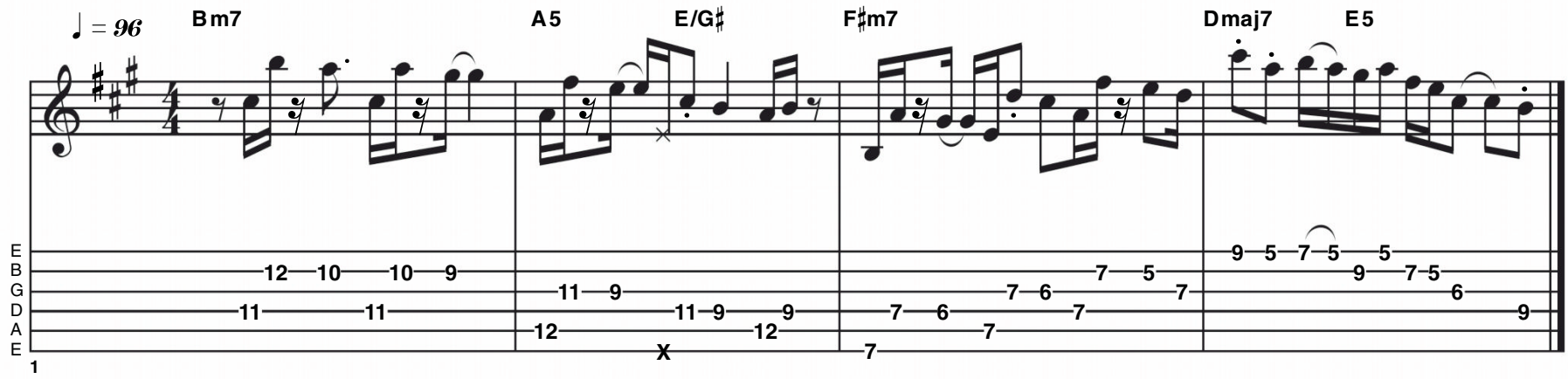
Lick 2 Rhythmic motifs

IN THIS EXAMPLE I employ a rhythmic motif that starts on the G# characteristic note and ascends through the B Dorian mode. I'm leaving plenty of space between these phrases to let the music 'breathe'. I reverse the phrase through the same series of notes to resolve on the 5th (B) of the E/G# chord. The note B is also the root of the tonal-centre chord, Bm(add2). You'll also notice that I'm making sure the G# is an integral part of these lines to bring out the true flavour of the Dorian mode.



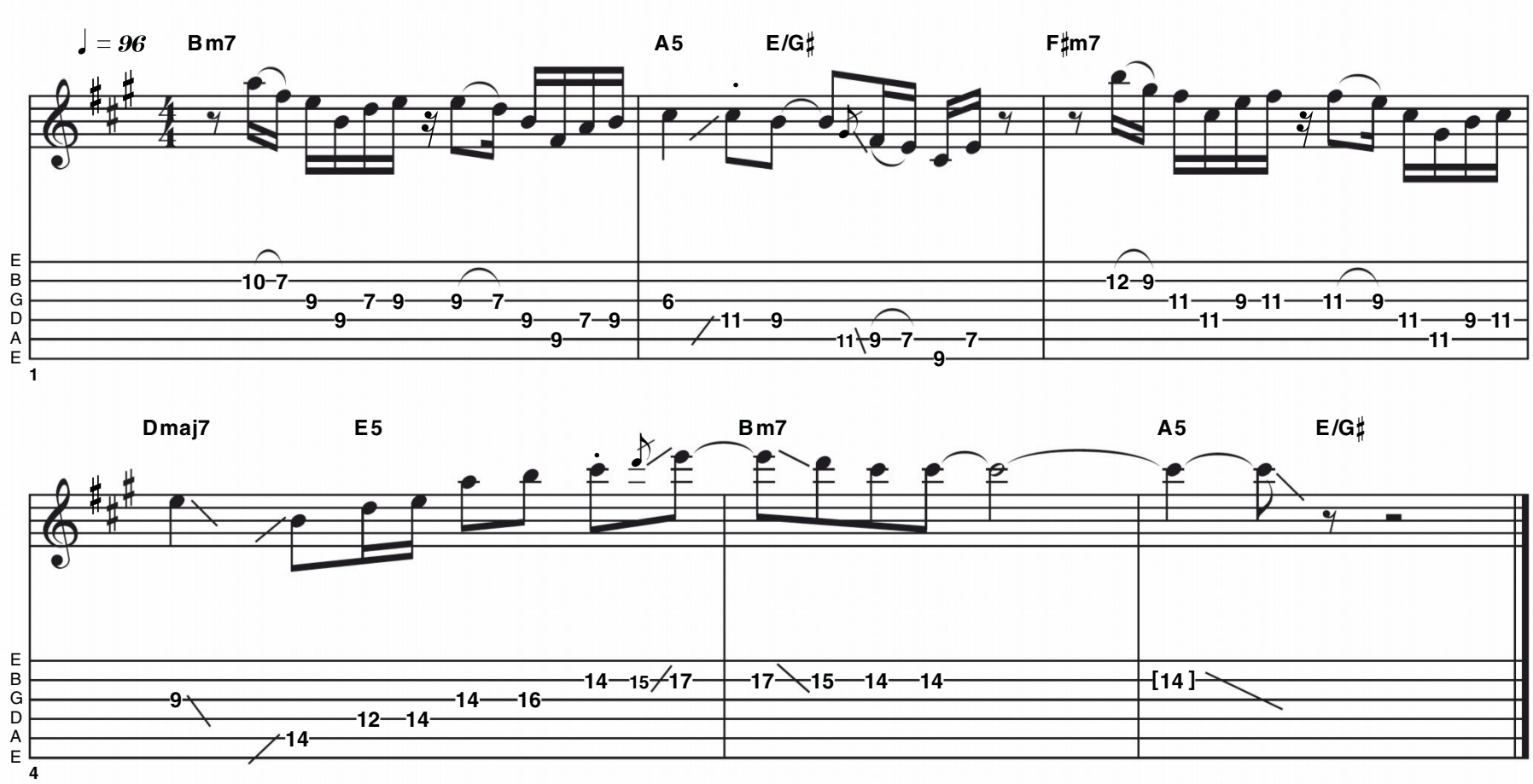
Lick 3 Groups of three

I'M ARTICULATING NOTES in groups of three and descending through the first half of the phrase with an intervallic string-skipping idea that favours an F#m7 arpeggio (the relative minor to our key centre of A). Notice how the second half of the phrase outlines the Bm(add2) chord with another intervallic line that ascends in groups of three notes.



Lick 4 Pentatonics for modal playing?!

I'M COMBINING B MINOR, C# minor and F# minor pentatonic scales for this example. All three of these minor pentatonic scales are derived from the A major scale and work perfectly over this B Dorian progression. I find that my phrasing changes when I play pentatonic lines – so this is a nice way to add variation within the context of the A major scale.



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