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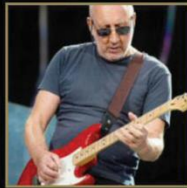
PAUL McCARTNEY

Inside the guitars, gear and sessions of his new album



TWO-ROCK AMPS

The tone secrets behind this revered maker's amps



PETE TOWNSHEND

A rare look at the gear that powers his huge live sound

Guitarist

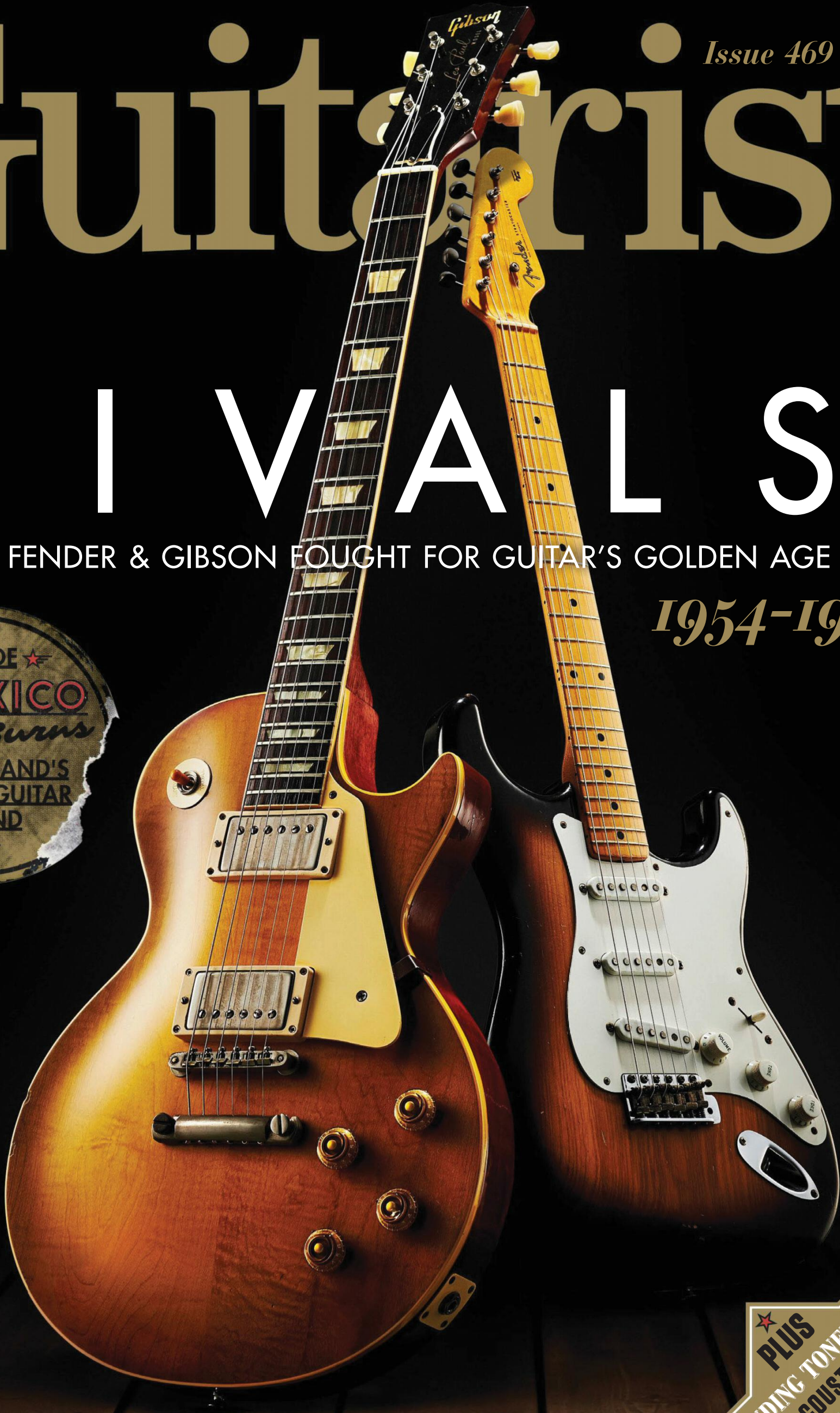
Issue 469

MARCH 2021

RIVALS

HOW FENDER & GIBSON FOUGHT FOR GUITAR'S GOLDEN AGE

1954-1960



FUTURE

PLUS
UNDERSTANDING TONEWOOD GUIDE
JON GOMM ACOUSTIC INTERVIEW
LESLIE WEST TRIBUTE
RICKENBACKER REVIEW



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Getting Motivated



My New Year's resolution for 2021 is to thoroughly familiarise myself with music theory as it applies to the fretboard. Many times over the years, I've rued the fact I didn't start learning music on piano, where each note appears only once in a very logical sequence on the keyboard, making early understanding of how intervals, scales and chords relate to one another a lot easier, I'd imagine. Instead, I did as most budding guitar players do when starting out and completely ignored theory in favour of just bashing out my first Beatles and Hendrix songs.

That changed when I went to music college, but I've let that knowledge get a bit rusty since then, so I've now started studying again with a will as there's no way to break into playing jazz guitar without it, which is my goal. To my surprise, learning theory has been a pleasure rather than a chore this time round. What's changed? Motivation, I think. I realised that playing guitar without decent theory knowledge is like trying to navigate your house at night without the lights on. Sure, you know roughly where everything is from long habit – and you can get from A to B okay, after a few stumbles and a bit of groping around. But it's just so much easier when you can see where you're going! What's motivating you on guitar in 2021? Write in and tell us and we'll print the most inspiring stories. In the meantime, enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



A Breed Apart
Breedlove's superb Premier Concertina CE has the perfect balance between projection and sweet, silvery tone **p16**



The Rivals
The story of how Fender and Gibson battled to define the soul of the electric guitar resonates to this day as we see on **p52**



PHOTO BY LEWIS TOWER

Wood Work
Don't know the difference between quarter-sawn tonewood and other grades? Be confused no longer with our expert guide on **p118**



Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jamie Dickson

jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

DEPUTY EDITOR

David Mead

david.mead@futurenet.com

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC

Scott Rowley

scott.rowley@futurenet.com

REVIEWS EDITOR

Dave Burrluck

dave@daveburrluck.com

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR

Jason Sidwell

jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

ART EDITOR

Darren Phillips

darren.phillips@futurenet.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Lucy Rice

lucy.rice@futurenet.com

CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD BARRETT, ALEX BISHOP, ROD BRAKES, TREVOR CURWEN, CHRIS FRANCIS, ADAM GOLDSMITH,
NICK GUPPY, MARTIN HOLMES, RICHARD HOOD, ROB LAING, NEVILLE MARTEN, ROGER NEWELL,
DAVINA RUNGASAMY, GARY STUCKEY, ADRIAN THORPE, ALVIN WEETMAN, STUART WILLIAMS, HENRY YATES

IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHIL BARKER, OLLY CURTIS, NEIL GODWIN

ADVERTISING

MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

CHIEF REVENUE DIRECTOR Zack Sullivan zack.sullivan@futurenet.com

UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com

ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com

ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Alison Watson alison.watson@futurenet.com

ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Guy Meredith guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING

MAGAZINE MARKETING DIRECTOR Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com

HEAD OF ACQUISITIONS Helen Harding helen.harding@futurenet.com

ACQUISITIONS CAMPAIGN MANAGER Faith Wardle faith.wardle@futurenet.com

ACQUISITIONS MARKETING EXECUTIVE Sally Sebesta sally.sebesta@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentymann frances.twentymann@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION PROJECT MANAGER Clare Scott clare.scott@futurenet.com

SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com

DIGITAL EDITIONS CONTROLLER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION

GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. CONTACT THE LICENSING TEAM TO DISCUSS PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION

HEAD OF NEWSTRADE Tim Mathers

MANAGEMENT

CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER Aaron Asadi aaron.asadi@futurenet.com

BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com

COMMERCIAL FINANCE DIRECTOR Dan Jotcham dan.jotcham@futurenet.com

HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com

HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com

GROUP ART DIRECTOR Graham Dalzell graham.dalzell@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS, BACK ISSUES & CUSTOMER SERVICE

TELEPHONE +44 (0)330 333 1113 ONLINE www.magazinesdirect.com

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Chief Executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
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Chief Financial Officer **Rachel Addison**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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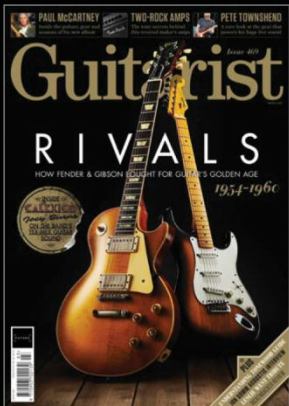
The PRS Hybrid "X"/Classical bracing was originally designed for our premium Private Stock instruments but now can be found on almost all of our SE acoustics. The design locks down the back and sides and allows the top to vibrate freely giving the instruments a surprising volume and a delicately nuanced sound. To find out more about all of our SE acoustic models please visit:

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Contents



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Olly Curtis

COVER FEATURE RIVALS

52 In the early 1950s Fender and Gibson released instruments that are the stuff of legend – the mighty Les Paul Standard and the monumental Stratocaster. Join us as we trace the development of these genre-bending giants as the two companies battled it out for rock 'n' roll supremacy...





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VIDEO & AUDIO

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>

EVERGREENS DO NOT SUFFER FROM ALZHEIMER'S.

Carol is no longer who she used to be.

She no longer recognises Nancy, her sister, or Jim, her husband. Most of the time it's as though she isn't aware of the things going on around her.

But when Nancy carefully puts headphones over Carol's ears and plays her most beloved song, her sister's eyes light up. She gently sways to the beat of the song, she even remembers the dance routine. She may nudge Jim's arm. Or tell him what

a fun guy he is. For the duration of that song, she's back again. For 4:35, she's Carol.

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KITHARA HARLAND
From £2,299

.....
WHAT IS IT? Strikingly original
retro mash-up by new Northern
Ireland-based maker Chris Moffitt

New Wave

Bored rigid with clones of past glories?
Well, here's something a little different in
looks, style and sound to further showcase
the talents of the small 'shop guitar maker

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

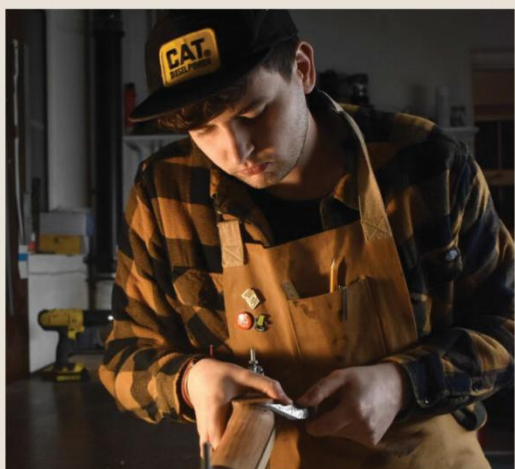
While the mainstream über-brands continue to fill our musical instrument outlets with new versions of the same, many of us have to search a little further for something we find inspiring. Increasingly, it seems it's the small 'shop makers that offer a very much new style, even though it can quite often look like something you can't remember from yesteryear.

We have to thank Ariel Posen for the birth of this Kithara Harland. "After some fans of Ariel pointed him in our direction, Chris Moffitt met with him and there was an immediate click around a shared philosophy of guitar building," explains Matthew Cordiner who looks after Kithara Guitar's business, while Chris builds the guitars.

"From there, a conversation was born around designing something together," Matthew continues. "Ariel wanted to explore using his signature 648mm [25.5-inch] baritone style while incorporating a Bigsby. And after months of back and forth the Harland model was born, with Harland #1 residing in Canada with Ariel. Since then we've adapted it to also be offered in standard tuning as well as the baritone and it's currently our bestseller!"

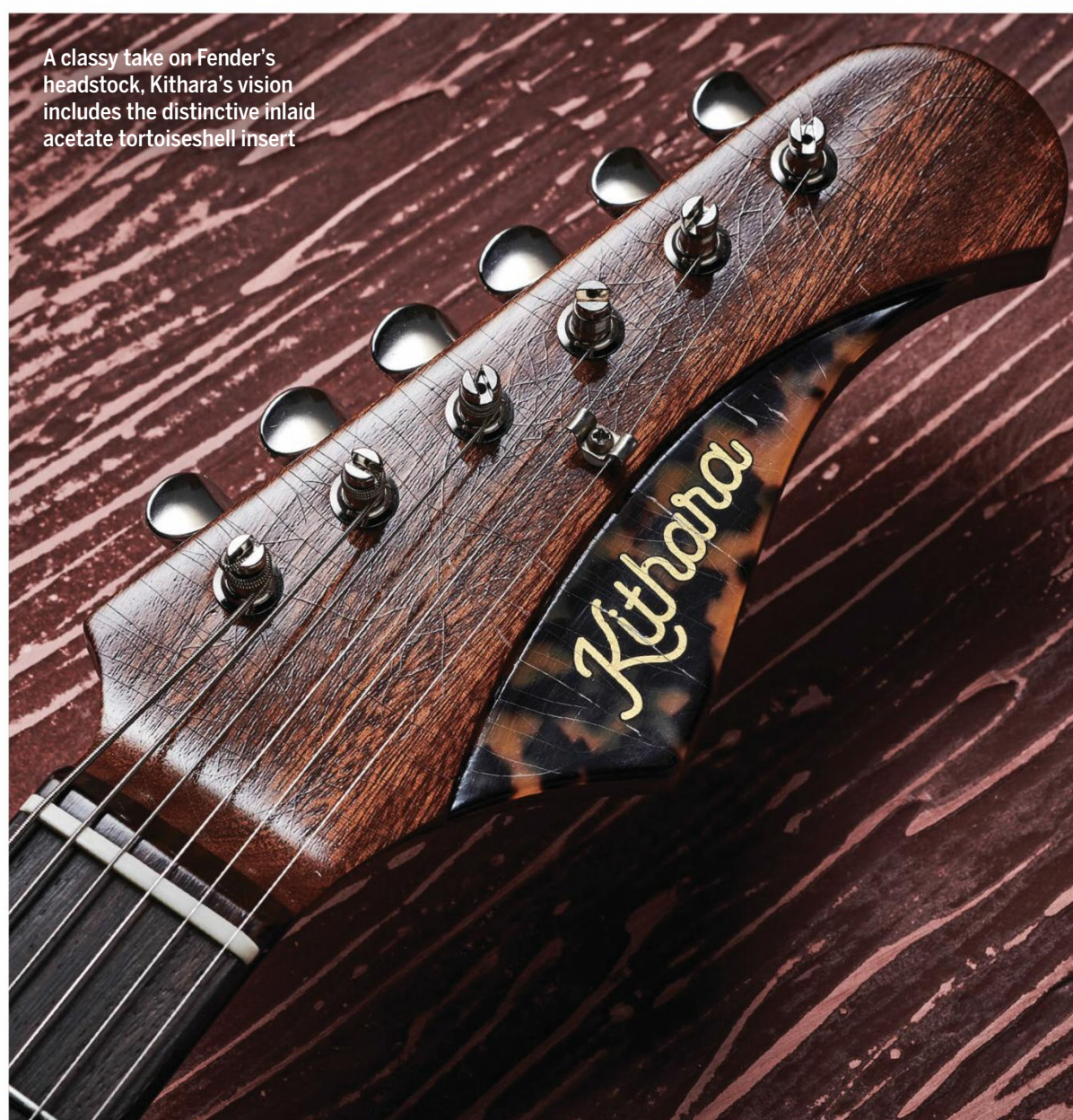






BUILDER PROFILE

NAME: Kithara Guitars
EMAIL: kitharaguitars@gmail.com
PHONE: 07833 464597
WEB: www.kitharaguitars.com
FOUNDER: Chris Moffitt
LOCATION: Belfast, Northern Ireland
STATUS: Fully professional
EMPLOYEES: One – Matthew Cordiner
FIRST GUITAR SHIPPED: January 2018
CURRENT OUTPUT: Approx. 30 per year
STYLE: Bolt-on and glued-neck solid and hollowbody electrics
CAD/CNC: None
PICKUPS/HARDWARE: Gotoh hardware/ Mojo and Deacci pickups
FINISHING: In-house
REPAIRS: No
CUSTOM ORDERS: Mainly custom options on base models
DEPOSIT/BUILD TIME: £700 deposit/ 10 weeks
WAITING LIST: Not outside build time
DEALERS: Windmill Guitars (www.windmillguitars.com), Some Neck Guitars (www.someneckguitars.com)
PRICE RANGE: From approx. £2,249



A classy take on Fender's headstock, Kithara's vision includes the distinctive inlaid acetate tortoiseshell insert

Opening the hard case we're taken back in time. This is hugely characterful guitar making, full of top-quality craft and parts, yet it looks like something you might have found in a loft. It's alluringly odd. The design is based around a Strat, of course, although the treble half is more Tele with a tight edge radius. Meanwhile, the bass side of the body adds an elongated chamfer to the top edge and a longer rib-cage contour

on the back. But it's the heavily cracked black nitro finish that'll be the talking point. It's not reliced as such (although you can order that), and on one hand looks like a gloss finish that's gone wrong. In defence, though, the interlocking crazing looks like a studied work of art.

The neck has a similar cracked and glossed finish to the headstock face with its attractive relief and tortoise-shell insert with a sympathetic gold transfer logo. The back has a lighter satin nitro finish and, despite it looking like a darker chocolate roasted maple, it's actually mahogany topped with a deep and rich brown Indian rosewood fingerboard, devoid of face markers. In fact, the only position markers are the very small side dots that might prove, er, fun on a dark stage.

The hardware and pickup style moves the Harland still further from the mainstream. The antique Bigsby brings its own vibe to the build, contrasted by the way-more-modern and beautifully engineered Gotoh Tele-style bridge with its 'In-Tune' brass saddles and relaxed side walls. And while that holds a flush pole Mojo 52, the GTone at the neck is based on a Guyatone 'gold foil' and, frankly, even if it sounds pants we'd keep it on as it looks like something Kithara nicked from



Specifically designed for use with a Bigsby vibrato, this Gotoh bridge with In-Tune compensated brass saddles is about as good as it gets. Same goes for the Mojo 52 single coil



This Mojo GTone single coil is "built to vintage 60s Guyatone spec". Trust us, it sounds just as good as it looks

a radiogram... which is clearly where the control knobs come from. The retro style is accentuated by the beautiful slice of acetate tortoiseshell that's used for the pickguard, the same material found on the control cavity coverplate.

Feel & Sounds

The feel of the Harland is again a little unusual but far from unlikeable. It's not the lightest instrument of this style we've encountered, but the weight gives the instrument a very centred strapped-on feel. And yet the neck seems almost delicate in comparison with a thin-depth shape that isn't a million miles away from the Charvel we evaluated last issue. There's virtually zero taper to the depth, which measures 20.9mm at the 1st fret and 21mm at the 12th, with a shallow C profile rather than the more shouldered flat D of that Charvel. As Matthew points out, though, "neck profiles can be carved specifically to the customer or retailer's preference. The black demo model you have showcases one of our thinner necks, but the majority of what we do would be a standard or chunky C shape neck. We can, however, do a very wide range of profiles/thicknesses, which is one of the many benefits of each one being hand-carved in-house."

The Jescar medium frets take it a long way from feeling like a shred machine, and while the work is excellent, slightly smoother tops to the frets would enhance the feel. Again, like that Charvel, we have the open-wheel-style truss rod adjuster, which makes any tweaks quick and easy, although the setup feels quite firm with a string height of 1.78mm (0.070 inches) and 0.011 to 0.052-gauge D'Addarios. It invites you to dig in, and the unplugged response is certainly lively. Once the strings have been stretched tuning is stable – although, oddly, the tuners themselves feel rather stiff.

But with its simple drive and a balanced low output from the two disparate pickups, there's nothing to get in the way of the important bit: your playing. And if you live in the clean-to-lighter crunch area, you're in for a treat here.

Opening the case we're taken back in time. This is hugely characterful guitar making, full of top-quality craft

UNDER THE HOOD

Inside the simple, spacious cavity

In what is quite a large back cavity, the two CTS 250k pots and the Switchcraft toggle switch look a little lonely. The components are hooked up with vintage-style cloth covered wire, the top cap is a .047 microfarads Orange Drop, and the simple circuit is wired modern style. There's no shielding whatsoever in the cavity or on the coverplate, but it's nice to see an Electrosocket output jackplate.

Both pickups are single coils with DCRs of 5.52kohms at the neck and 7.39k at the bridge. "The GTone is faithfully built to vintage 60s Guyatone spec," states Mojo and uses a "reproduction ceramic magnet". As supplied, it sat a little low without usable height adjustment, something that was quickly cured by placing some hard foam underneath it, meaning both pickups could get a little closer to the strings. The Mojo 52 at the bridge is wound with 43AWG wire and uses Alnico III magnets and a copper baseplate.



The Harland's circuit (top) is very simple, but there's plenty of room in the cavity to try some mods

The Mojo GTone's underside (above). Those 'adjustable polepieces' are clearly for show!



Dominated by its Bigsby vibrato, here you can clearly see the intentionally cracked finish and the simple volume, tone and three-way pickup selector controls



KITHARA HARLAND

PRICE: From £2,299 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.1mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, small side-dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, Jescar medium jumbo (47095)

HARDWARE: Gotoh 'In-Tune' bridge with compensated brass saddles, Bigsby B5 vibrato, Gotoh vintage-style tuners nickel/chromed-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Mojo 52 single coil (bridge) and Mojo GTone single coil (neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.67/8.1

OPTIONS: Include maple neck, ebony fingerboard, Deacci TeleTone (at bridge), brown control knobs, baritone setup and colour. Contact Kithara for pricing confirmation and custom options

RANGE OPTIONS: Other Kithara models include the offset Fifty-Six, the Tele-inspired Astral and the chambered non-cutaway Ormsby (all from £2,249)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISHES: Piano Black – aged nitro to body with satin nitro neck back. 8 standard colours plus custom colours on request



9/10

PROS Nicely competent build; excellent component and pickup choice; characterful, evocative sounds

CONS Aside from a few minor issues there's very little not to like here

Both pickups are quite a bit further from the strings than we might normally set them. The high E response of the GTone is consequently a little soft, but that was quickly sorted (see Under The Hood) and it's the character of this pickup, a warm single coil, that keeps you engrossed with an excellent dynamic range that really reacts to pick strength and position. Kicking in a bit of dirt or fuzz adds bite, and it sounds both grungy and defined at the same time. It's a welcome alternative voice and one we'd like more time to explore.

The bridge pickup also has that subtly rounded high-end that sounds a little smoother, certainly when compared with a Fender American Vintage Tele's bite. But, of course, it's still very much in Tele territory and, sound-wise, quite a contrast to the neck pickup. But it really broadens the range of the Harland with plenty of

Kicking in a bit of dirt or fuzz adds bite, and it sounds both grungy and defined at the same time

country lead bite if you need. With that little bit of height adjustment, this pickup really does the job, sounding nicely raw but not too thin. From the 50s jazz voice at the neck to roots-rock at the bridge, and a simply beautiful mix, its characterful roots-rock Americana voice is superb and banishes any Charvel-like thoughts from our minds, not least with some light shimmers from that Bigsby. Some players might prefer a slightly more graduated volume taper as so much of the sonic appeal is the subtle shading of the tones and it drops off a little too quickly. The tone, meanwhile, is nicely tapered as you pull it back.

Verdict

This is a very nicely made instrument with plenty of custom options. Its polarising style is exactly the point, but if your taste nods back to the glories of the 60s you might well be attracted. We certainly are. Yet it's the combination of the seemingly disparate elements that's the appeal: the alder body with its mahogany bolt-on neck pairs down the Tele 'bite', while that GTone 'gold foil' takes us off in another direction altogether... particularly with the Bigsby's specific feel and tone. An inspiring instrument for the creative musician. **G**

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FIRST PLAY



**BREEDLOVE PREMIER
CONCERTINA CE**
£3,299

WHAT IS IT? A top-notch, all-solid small-bodied cutaway 12-fret acoustic with a big sound

A New Breed

A hand-built parlour-on-steroids from Breedlove's Bend, Oregon, facility – and it's full of surprises!

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

If the name is unfamiliar to you then it might come as something of a surprise that Breedlove has been making guitars for more than 30 years. It may not be at the forefront of an acoustic player's mind or a name ready to trip off the tongue when the subject of hand-crafted acoustics enters the conversation, but its reputation as a builder of a broad range of fine instruments has been long established.

The company was founded in Oregon by Larry Breedlove and Steve Henderson, both having worked previously for Taylor Guitars. In 2010 Two Old Hippies – in the form of Tom Bedell – bought the company, now established in Bend, Oregon, where the workshops remain until this day. "Breedlove has continued, really, from the dreams of Larry and Steve," Tom tells us. "Everything we're doing today is still based on innovation and customisation. Those are the themes that inspire us. We're constantly learning. It's just this real passion to create the best-sounding instruments possible."

The company's USA facility now has a team of around 30 builders, turning out







1. The folk at Breedlove strive to establish a personal relationship with the suppliers of their timber, stating that “sustainable sourcing is the right thing to do”

2. The Concertina's neck is made from a single piece of Honduran mahogany with East Indian rosewood for the back and sides

3. Adirondack spruce has a reputation for providing a powerful performance

4. Breedlove has established a range of body shapes that are all its own

With some gentle strumming and fingerstyle, you can hear the Adirondack earning its crust

approximately 2,000 guitars per year, and its dedication to sustainability is still high on its list of priorities, with the company manifesto declaring: “Travelling throughout the world we go to the forests and work with local families and mills whenever possible. Sustainable sourcing is the right thing to do...” Furthermore, the company wasn’t happy to base its instruments on the established designs of yore, either, choosing instead to innovate with body shapes of its own. The Concertina is joined by its larger-bodied siblings the Concert and Concerto models, each sleek and elegant in its own right. We have the baby of the family on test, so let’s open the case and take it out for a whirl.

The Premier Concertina CE mixes traditional good looks with some endearing flourishes – the distinctive asymmetrical headstock shape and that deep cutaway catch the eye immediately. To give you a set of proportions to consider, the Concertina’s lower bout measures in at 375mm (14.75 inches), which means that it sits in between the size of a Martin 00 and 000. And, at 107mm (four inches) deep,

it shaves a tad from both those models in terms of depth, too. When you add in the tight waist at 219mm (8.6 inches) and the upper bout’s sleek 274mm (10.8-inch) dimension, you can see that we’re dealing with an instrument that orbits around the parlour area. But while the 12-frets-to-the-body also aids the guitar’s diminutive appearance, Breedlove is quick to point out that the presence of an Adirondack top means that we’re dealing with a little powerhouse and there’s a surprise in store for the idle strummer when the strings are summoned into action. To be sure, Adirondack has a reputation for dishing out volume and its presence here might be seen as akin to putting a powerful engine into a smaller car. We’ll have to wait and see.

Supporting the spruce top there is East Indian rosewood at work in the guitar’s back and sides, and here its dark chocolate appearance acts as contrast to the pale spruce and the Concertina’s general good looks. We would imagine that if we were to see this instrument in a few years when the spruce has become a mellow yellow, it will be an absolute stunner.



The neck is one-piece Honduran mahogany, the familiar grain of this prince among timbers evident along its length. African ebony is the choice for the fingerboard, with a Graph Tech Tusq nut and string saddle at either end of the Concertina's 635mm (25-inch) scale length.

There's an LR Baggs EAS VTC under-saddle pickup installed, with volume and tone controls concealed within the soundhole for amplified fine-tuning.

In much the same way as a good dish is the result of its ingredients, the recipe above leads us to believe that we're in for a treat. But before we adjudicate its performance, we must just mention Breedlove's Sound Optimization Process. No two pieces of timber are the same – even those from the same tree – and so all the woods used in Breedlove's instruments are subject to rigorous testing and analysis to make sure that every component part of the guitar is acting together to produce the best possible sound. Every guitar has a top that is thinned to suit its capabilities, and braces are shaved accordingly to form a compatible supporting cast.





Strings are loaded via the back of the Concertina's bridge – no pegs in this vicinity!



BREEDLOVE PREMIER CONCERTINA CE

PRICE: £3,299 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Concertina acoustic

TOP: Adirondack spruce

BACK/SIDES: East Indian rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 375mm

NECK: Honduran mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

TUNERS: Breedlove branded, chrome-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech

Tusq/44.4mm

FINGERBOARD: African ebony

FRETS: 18

BRIDGE/SPACING: African ebony w/ compensated Tusq saddle/57mm

ELECTRICS: LR Baggs EAS VTC

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.86/4.1

OPTIONS: Breedlove's Premier Concertina redwood/East Indian rosewood is priced at £3,175. Larger-bodied versions with Adirondack spruce/East Indian rosewood body woods include the Premier Concert CE (£3,299) and Premier Concerto CE (£3,439)

RANGE OPTIONS: The extensive Concertina range starts at the Discovery (£389) and moves up to the Legacy Concertina Natural Shadow (£4,629). See website for details

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Natural gloss poly

Rosetti

01376 550033

www.rosetti.co.uk



9/10

PROS A beautifully wrought petite guitar with a voice that belies its size

CONS It's up against the big boys and there's plenty of competition from bespoke makers

Feel & Sounds

We're told that the Concertina suits a lighter touch and so our natural inclination to belt out a bit of Delta blues is shelved in favour of some gentle strumming and polite fingerstyle. Immediately, it's possible to hear the Adirondack earning its crust. The sound is surprisingly full and rich – more power than we suspected, despite being aware of this timber's reputation. There's a full range of dynamics available, too, as everything from a whisper to a yell – a restrained yell, you understand – is rewarded by a sweet sensitivity. We were unable to find any boxiness or nasal midrange that sometimes darkens the sound picture of smaller-bodied instruments, either. The slim neck and generous nut width mean that nothing is out of reach, stylistically speaking.

Through an amp, the LR Baggs Element VTC (that's Volume, Tone and an analogue Compression circuit that kicks in below 400Hz) pickup swings into action and

The Concertina was a refreshing surprise. It's a breeze to play and it really does sound beautiful

does an excellent job of delivering the Concertina's aural charms into the electronic domain with deft transparency. Overall, this guitar sounds rather lovely...

Verdict

At a price point that sits north of £3k, the Concertina is set against the big league players such as Martin and Taylor. But it's also in competition with bespoke makers, too; the advantage there is that you can sculpt a guitar to your precise requirements, rather than settling for something that's 'off the peg', so to speak. The downside, though, is that many builders have long waiting lists to endure before the instrument arrives at your door.

But the Breedlove plays the part of a supremely able everyman – and if body size is an issue then you can look at the Concerto or Concert models. If you're not particularly a fan of spruce tops, Breedlove introduced redwood tops into the range last year, and so there really is something for everyone within the range.

We found the Concertina to be a refreshing surprise. It's a breeze to play and it really does sound beautiful, with a pickup that will guarantee a great sound at gigs. We loved what we found here and, if the name is unfamiliar, we can assure you that Breedlove is worth adding to your potential shopping list. **G**

VOX Bobcat



Vintage Style Modern Control

The VOX Bobcat V90 and S66 guitars call back to the guitar design of the '60s, with vintage Italian-inspired pickups and semi-hollow body construction as well as modern improvements in playability and minimising feedback. These guitars are versatile and perfect for any player.



Learn More at VOXAMPS.com

FIRST PLAY



ASHDOWN AGM-5C COMBO
£599

.....
WHAT IS IT? A great-sounding small combo from Ashdown's Guitar Magnifier range, with a pure class A single-ended EL84 output stage

All About That Guitar

British bass company Ashdown presents the Guitar Magnifier series, with proper valve tone at tempting prices

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

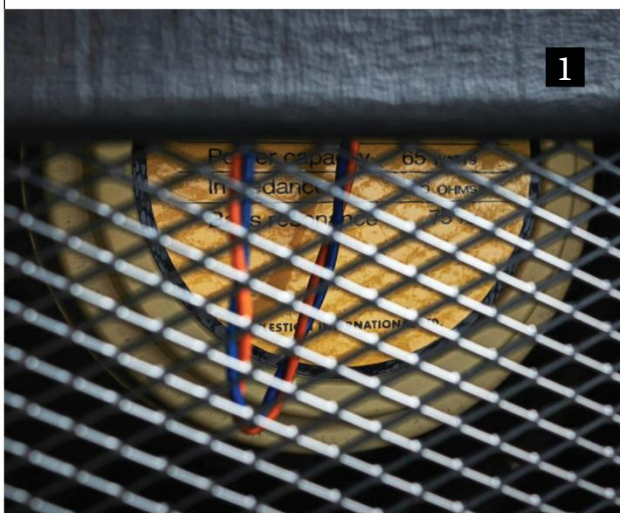
Ashdown Music is well known all over the world as a leading purveyor of sound reinforcement to the lower octaves. With such a strong following in the bass community, its equally impressive guitar amplification has sometimes been a little unfairly overshadowed. However, the company's latest range could change all of that.

Introduced at the beginning of 2020, the new Ashdown Guitar Magnifier series takes its cue from the company's world-beating Bass Magnifier amps. Handmade in the UK at Ashdown's Essex HQ, the AGM amplifiers promise a tempting blend of real valve tone, legendary Ashdown build quality and affordable pricing. There are heads and combos to suit all needs and pockets; here we're looking at the best-selling AGM-5C combo.

The AGM-5C is a smartly presented compact combo, featuring a deeper than average plywood cabinet with a semi-closed back. The woodwork is expertly covered in heavy duty black vinyl with metal corner protectors, white piping,







1. A premium Celestion Creamback G12M-65 loudspeaker faithfully reproduces classic mid-60s Celestion blues-rock tones but with modern reliability and power handling. It's a great match for this amp and sounds superb

2. The AGM-5C's controls are straightforward and easy to use, with plenty of tonal range to suit a wide variety of guitars and styles. The illuminated VU meter is an Ashdown trademark, appearing on many of its world-beating bass amplifiers. Meanwhile, the Speaker Mute switch turns off the loudspeaker for silent recording; the recording output is speaker compensated, making it easy to hook up to a desk

a black cloth speaker grille and a smart brushed gold control panel. A piped curve on the front panel adds a touch of boutique style; it's easy to get details like this wrong, but to our eyes it's perfectly balanced and sits nicely over the famous Ashdown badge.

All the electronics live on a hefty L-shaped steel chassis that's bolted to the cabinet's rear baffle, with the short leg forming the top-facing control panel. There's one large high-quality printed circuit board that holds most of the small components, including the Accutronics digital reverb module and bases for the AGM-5C's two valves: a 12AX7 preamp and a single EL84 for the output stage. The resistors are mostly metal film, which helps keep hiss levels down, while the front-panel controls connect to the PCB with short flying leads. All the hand wiring is neatly routed, with nice bright solder joints. There's no convenient access to the AGM-5C's valves – if you need to replace them, the entire chassis must come out.

The Ashdown's decibels are delivered by a premium Celestion G12M-65 Creamback loudspeaker, one of the most popular drivers in Celestion's current range. The Creamback's hefty ceramic magnet together with a pair of generously sized Demeter transformers mean this combo is no lightweight, though it's still easy to lift and carry single-handed.

The Guitar Magnifier series takes its cue from the company's world-beating Bass Magnifier amps

This is a straightforward single-channel design but with some interesting features. There are rotary controls for gain, bass, mid, treble and master volume, with a level control for the digital reverb effect. There's an Aux In jack socket with its own Mix control for attaching mp3 players or second instruments, together with a headphones jack and a separate speaker-compensated recording output. We also get a pair of send/return jacks for its series effects loop.

Close to the input jack, a push-button switch marked 'Stealth' drops the output down to around one watt for home use, while a Speaker Mute switch turns off the sound completely for silent recording. On the far right of the control panel, Ashdown's trademark VU meter lights up to tell you the amp is on and gives you a useful indication of how loud you can go before the neighbours start hammering on the walls.

Overall, the AGM-5C is a good-looking small combo that can sit unobtrusively in studio corners or small club bandstands without taking up much room.



DESIGNER DETAILS

We catch up with Ashdown's chief designer Dave Green as he takes a break from his soldering iron

A well-known design guru in the amp and speaker manufacturing industry, Dave Green moved down from the north of England to Essex around 15 years ago to work for bass amp legends Ashdown Music, and he's been there ever since, helping to create some of Ashdown's best-selling products for bass and guitar...

What got you started in electronics and amps?

"When I was about eight years old, I used to go to my grandfather's house on Sundays. He used to do repairs for the local TV and radio shop and had a cellar full of all kinds of tools and gadgets: Variacs, Bunsen burners, huge soldering irons, you name it! It was all incredibly dangerous and as an eight year old I naturally found that exciting and interesting. I'd just watch him repairing stuff and take in what he was doing. Later on I started to do some things for myself. We'd finish whatever work he was doing, have Sunday lunch and walk up to the shop to take the repairs back for collection, then he'd pack me off home on the bus. I suppose that gave me the interest in building things and making them work better.

"My first guitar amp was built for a mate from an old Philco valve radiogram. I found a Celestion speaker and made the cabinet for it, which I think sparked my interest in speaker and cabinet design. Much later, I did some work for Maplin on guitar amp

kits, which led to me working for a couple of other amp manufacturers. Eventually, I found my way down to Essex and I've been at Ashdown ever since."

What was the design brief for the AGM series?

"To make a range of cool affordable amps that sound great without sacrificing the build quality. I like it that they all have individual characters, but there's a group identity, too. The AGM-5C turned out nicely; the digital reverb is great and helps to make the amp a little more affordable. Then there's the recording output, which is filtered to sound just like a Celestion Alnico. That's analogue circuitry, not DSP, and it's a great little circuit that just works.

"At the other end of the scale there's the AGM-684C with cascaded gain and six EL84s, which is a bit unusual – you can switch different output valve configurations, so there's a lot of flexibility there with more of a focus on live band work, while the AGM-5C is mostly aimed at studio and home use but with the ability to handle smaller venues."

What's the difference between designing amps for bass and guitar?

"In a word, power. You need lots of power to amplify low frequencies cleanly. You can add on overdrives later if you want, but the clarity must be there

in the first place. For that you need big power supplies, big transformers, speakers with lots of power handling in reserve and so on. Having said that, there are some interesting things happening with Class D right now and there's a trend toward making everything smaller and lighter, which is more difficult to do well with bass as things that are small and light tend to get shaken around a lot by low frequencies.

"Guitar amps might have been about power back in the 1960s, but today it's much more about getting the right feel and response, which seems to work best with smaller amplifiers. I don't really play guitar – well, I do, but not very well – so I work with several great players who test prototypes for me and tell me what works and what doesn't. Then we go off and make various adjustments to things like negative feedback and so on, until we're all happy with the results."

Has the pandemic changed what guitarists are looking for in an amp?

"I don't think so. Perhaps there'll be more of a focus on smaller combos and what you can do with them at home and in the studio, but most guitarists are still looking to buy amps they can gig with. Live music will be back soon, I'm sure, and Ashdown will be there to help make it happen, for bass and for guitar!"



Feel & Sounds

Warming up quickly and quietly, with practically zero hiss and hum, the AGM-5C is an ideal partner for home use and recording. We tried out the Ashdown with our usual test guitars: a Les Paul fitted with an old pair of PAFs, and a Strat loaded with low-ish output Duncan Alnico Pro 2s.

AC/tweed-inspired voicing is perfect for classic British rock and blues and revs up to an impressive crunch when the Gain control is maxed out, especially when partnered with the Les Paul. Back the gain off and it sounds equally inspiring for indie, jazz and country stuff, with a satisfying woody low-end thump, helped by the generous cabinet dimensions and semi-closed-back design.

The reverb comes from the popular Accutronics Digi-Log BTDR-2 module, which does a great job of emulating the behaviour of a physical reverb spring. Ashdown uses the 'L' (long decay) version and there's plenty of effect available. The most realistic reverberations happen in the first quarter of the Reverb knob's travel – as you go beyond halfway, the dry amp sound is progressively dialled out, leaving just the effect signal with the knob set at 10. This is



There's a useful Aux input onboard with its own Mix control, handy for plugging in mp3 players or second instruments using the regular 6mm jack socket



ASHDOWN AGM-5C 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £599

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp with digital reverb

OUTPUT: 5W switchable to 1W

VALVES: 1x 12AX7, 1x EL84

DIMENSIONS: 435 (h) x 460 (w) x 265mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 13/28

CABINET: Plywood

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x12" Celestion Creamback G12M-65

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, master volume, aux input mix level, reverb level. Stealth button and Speaker Mute switch

FOOTSWITCH: None

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: External speaker jack, series effects loop, aux in with mix control, speaker-compensated recording out with speaker mute switch, headphones socket, Stealth feature reduces output to approx. 1W

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Ashdown's Guitar Magnifier range includes: AGM-484 30W all-valve head (£699), AGM-30 Offset head (£699), 45W AGM-684C combo (£999) and 15W AGM-284C combo (£799). Matching speaker cabs include AGM-112 (£299), AGM-210 (£349) and AGM-212 (£459)

Ashdown Music

01621 857853

www.ashdownmusic.com



9/10

PROS Very versatile, ideal for pedals; classic British sounds and style; legendary Ashdown build quality; very competitive pricing

CONS Fully enclosed chassis makes quick valve replacement difficult

great fun for creating ethereal background washes and, while it's not something you'd use every day, it's a nice extra to have in your back pocket for those moments when an artist/producer asks, 'Can you make some spacey guitar sounds over this track?'

Despite the modest five-watt rating, the AGM-5C is plenty loud enough for recording or small clubs. If you need to go quieter, the Stealth button is a useful feature that drops the output right down to around one watt, engaging a clever ASC (Active Speaker Compensation) circuit that makes the amp sound like it's cranked up even at conversation levels. Meanwhile, with the AGM-5C's speaker muted, the compensated recording output provides a great direct sound, with little or no desk EQ needed.

Verdict

While we wait for live music to return in some shape or form, small combos that sound cranked up at internet-friendly volume levels are the amps *du jour*. Ashdown's AGM-5C does this easily and much more, with the flexibility to record

Its single-ended Class A valve output stage makes for a very rewarding playing experience, with classic British sounds

great tracks that sit nicely in a mix and handle smaller gigs, as and when they begin to appear again.

As good as digital and solid-state have become, pure valve tone still takes some beating and this combo's single-ended Class A valve output stage makes for a very rewarding playing experience, with classic British sounds and touch-sensitive dynamics that sound great with or without pedals, flattering any playing style. For a product that's made in Ashdown's UK custom shop, the AGM-5C is great value for money, too. Look beyond the bass and you'll be more than pleasantly surprised! **G**

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ULTRA
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theWishlist

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

Atkin 25th Anniversary J43 £6,500

CONTACT **Atkin Guitars** PHONE **01227 719933** WEB <https://atkinguitars.com> Words Neville Marten Photography Neil Godwin

You may recall we reviewed Atkin's standard The Forty Three model in issue 460. In that article, Alister Atkin mentioned that the brand's 25th anniversary was imminent and that a special run of the guitar with upgraded tonewoods and other goodies was in the offing. The guitar has now arrived and we have #9 of a very limited run of 25 instruments.

The J43 clearly pays visual homage to a legendary Gibson 'workhorse' acoustic, but Atkin's construction methods depart from Gibson's in a number of ways. With Honduran mahogany and Brazilian rosewood not readily available, Alister and his small team generally use African mahogany for body and neck, and Santos rosewood for bridge and fingerboard (having switched from Indian rosewood bridge and 'board when the CITES regulations changed). The Anniversary model features Cuban mahogany and Madagascar rosewood, often deemed to be the next best thing to those original heritage timbers used by Gibson on its earlier J-45s.

Like all Atkin guitars the J43's neck is bolted in place rather than being glued. Alister believes it offers the best sound transfer and allows for simpler repairs. Alister has been using thermally aged tops and bracing on his guitars for around 10 years. Where

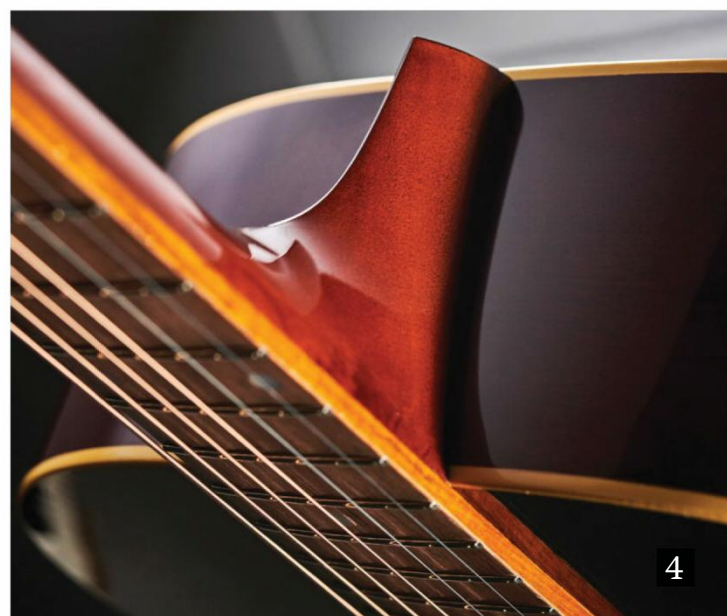
that's normally Sitka spruce, for the Anniversary he's chosen AAA-grade Adirondack, one of the most revered tonewoods for acoustic tops. Again, it's baked to simulate natural ageing, as are the scalloped braces.

But what about those extra goodies? Well, Alister has been working with leather craftsman Pete Allen on the Buddy Holly Foundation instruments he's been building for notable Holly fans for some years. Each Anniversary J43 comes in one of Pete's glorious tooled leather jackets. This is removable, but really does look the rock 'n' roll part. On top of this, a beautiful screen-printed poster, unique to the limited run, is included. Painted by artist Vic Lee and signed by Vic and Alister, it's decorated with lyrics from many of the great songwriters who use Atkin guitars and will be a collector's item in its own right.

The upgraded timbers make the guitar sing with a power and clarity that works for any playing style. Fingerpick or strum and the J43 responds with a voice that blends vintage and modern – warmth, balance and precision in equal measure. The C-profile neck is comfy and familiar, helping to make this guitar not only a fabulous (and serious!) investment but also a delightful playmate that could be with you a lifetime. **G**



1. The beautiful Vic Lee poster adds a real collector's vibe to this unique package
2. Each Anniversary J43 comes with a gorgeous Pete Allen leather jacket
3. The 25th Anniversary logo is an attractive and subtle reminder that your guitar is ultra exclusive
4. Madagascar rosewood is Brazilian's close cousin. The neck is bolted on

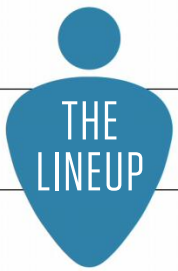


5. Atkin guitars feature thermally aged (baked) spruce tops. While on regular models this is Sitka spruce, on the Anniversary J43 it's AAA Adirondack, one of the most revered acoustic top woods. Braces, too, are aged Adirondack, scalloped for strength and tone

6. Like the fingerboard, the classic bridge is made of Madagascar rosewood. Saddle and nut are both bone, while fingerboard inlays are mother-of-pearl dots with side markers of silver steel

7. To lend extra authenticity the Anniversary J43 comes equipped with a handmade 'fire stripe' pickguard. This looks fabulous alongside the lightly aged tobacco sunburst toner, covered with an ultra-thin nitro cellulose finish. Note the simple and understated black/white/black soundhole ring





Gas Supply

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

Ibanez Paul Gilbert FRM300 £1,095

CONTACT **Headstock Distribution** PHONE **0121 508 6666** WEB www.ibanez.com

JARGON CRUNCHING

Fire & Ice

Paul sent fans crazy when he appeared on the cover of *Fuzz Universe* with his original production Fireman in 2010. Until then, it was a custom model made for him based on a reversed Iceman body with some additional tweaks. In true PG humour, it's also what gave the guitar its name. What's the opposite of an Iceman? A Fireman, of course!

That looks purple. Is it something to do with Prince or that bloke from Andertons?

No, sir! This is the latest incarnation of the Fireman, Paul Gilbert's signature-shaped Ibanez. There have been a few of these since the first production-model Fireman launched a decade ago.

Right! So what's new about this one?

The original production Fireman FRM100 featured a mahogany body, three-piece mahogany and maple neck, rosewood fingerboard and three DiMarzio Injector hum-cancelling single coils. Here (as with the discontinued FRM200), the mahogany parts have been swapped for okoume, a lighter-weight, softer alternative, and the fretboard is ebony. It's also fitted with a trio of Paul's DiMarzio PG-13 mini-humbuckers, which you might be familiar with from the FRM200 and PGM333.

What's the neck like?

On his more svelte shred guitars, Paul favours a thinner profile. But here the Fireman has a bit more meat on the

bones. First up it has a longer scale length at a 'traditional rock' 62.865mm (24.75 inches). The neck is 22mm thick at the 1st fret, moving up to 24mm at the 12th. It also has a narrower radius and features 22 frets rather than the two-octave versions you'll find on the RG shapes.

So this one is more of a rock machine?

Well, we'd say that Paul Gilbert can – and probably has – shredded his phenomenal licks on anything from a broomstick to a cricket bat, but for us mere mortals, yes, this is a bit more chunky both physically and tonally with the inclusion of those punchy mini-humbuckers.

Tell us about those...

As we said, these are some of Paul's signature pickups and they've already featured in a couple of signature guitars. The previous Fireman FRM200 had a pair, but this version sees the same triple layout as Paul's PGM333 01. They feature ceramic magnets and are designed to sit somewhere between the beef of a humbucker and the clarity of single coils. In the FRM300 they're wired to a

FIREMAN

Paul's signature Fireman shape takes the outline of a reversed Iceman, and we love it as a departure from more traditional double-cuts

CONTROLS

One master volume, one master tone and a selector switch are all the controls Paul needs, so that's what you're getting here. That switch has five positions, giving you individual and blended middle-position settings



MINI-HUMBUCKERS

Joining P-90s in the 'in-between' category, mini-humbuckers are known for their midway combination of beef and bite. Paul's signature DiMarzio PG-13s feature punchy ceramic magnets



The Quik Change III tailpiece is designed to enable rapid, hassle-free string swaps

five-way switch for neck, neck and middle, middle, middle and bridge, and bridge switch positions. There are master volume and tone controls, positioned nicely out of the way.

What else does it have?

The nut comes courtesy of Graph Tech and there's a bridge by Gibraltar, complete with a Quik Change III tailpiece – slotted at the top rather than through-holes in order to make changing strings quicker. The FRM300 includes a gigbag for that distinctive body shape.

Gibraltar? I've seen that on my drummer's kit.

Yes, Gibraltar made its name producing sturdy stands for hitty things. If it's metal, covered in chrome and says 'Gibraltar' on it, you can be sure it's going to stand up to the test of time. Just ask your mate at the back.

Okay! How much is it?

Less than you might think, actually. It comes in at a not-out-of-reach £1,095 including gigbag. But there's a slight catch: it's only available in purple. [SW]

MORE THAN SHRED

Mini-humbuckers? 24.75-inch scale? 22 frets? A fixed bridge? This isn't the type of shred guitar you've come to know and love/dislike



ALSO OUT NOW...

M-AUDIO M-TRACK SOLO & DUO £40/£50



With more time at home, many guitarists have turned their thoughts to recording, collaborations or simply jamming along with tracks online. To do these things you'll need an audio interface, and M-Audio has just come up with two perfect, easy-to-use and affordable solutions for anyone with itchy fretting fingers during these times.

The M-Audio M-Track Solo and Duo recording units both give you two-channel interfaces, with the Solo offering a mic/line channel, plus an instrument-level channel for connecting your guitar directly. Meanwhile, the Duo comes packing two flexible mic/line/instrument channels. Both units feature phantom power for the mic inputs as well as switchable monitoring options. You also receive an impressive software bundle including Pro Tools First M-Audio Edition, Eleven Light amp modelling and more, and the best part? They cost £40 and £50 respectively.

www.m-audio.com

MAXON SUPER SONIC SSD-9 \$199



Pedal fans will know the Maxon SD-9 has been a favourite among fusionistas for decades, finding its way under the hooves of Mike Landau, Oz Noy and Scott Henderson (who also has a signature version), and many more. Now, Susumu Tamura – the man who created the Tube Screamer – has reworked the pedal for a Maxon Custom Shop version: the SSD-9 Super Sonic Distortion.

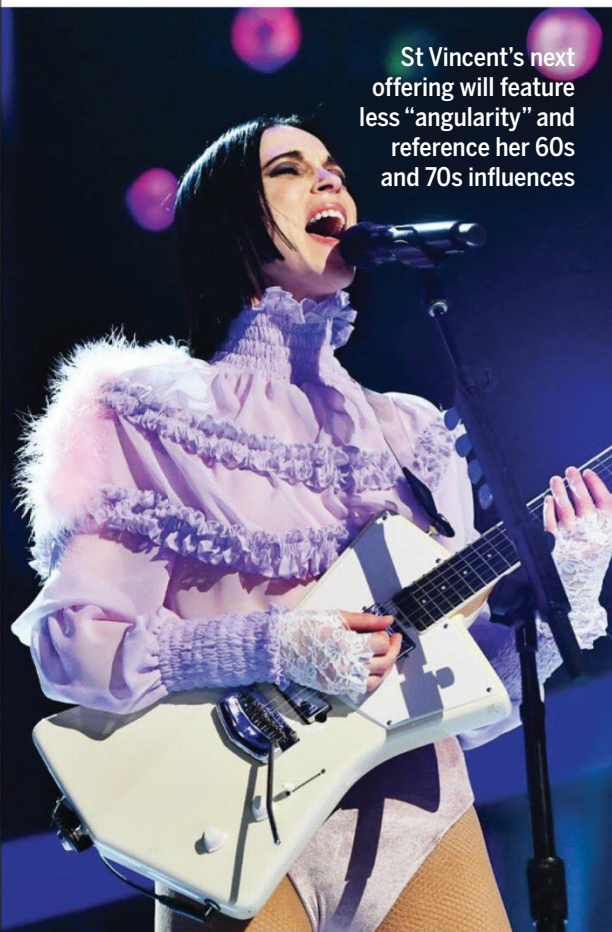
After delving into Scott Henderson's signal chain and listening to feedback from other SD-9 players, Mr Tamura and Maxon arrived at a pedal that delivers "rich, thick, amp-like tone with massive sustain" and has an increased output level, wider tone control range to boost lows/low mids, the ability to run at 18 volts and true bypass. The SSD-9 costs \$199, and the first 50 pedals are signed by Mr Tamura himself (still available at time of writing). To bag your pedal, visit Maxon's online store at the address below.

www.maxonfx.com

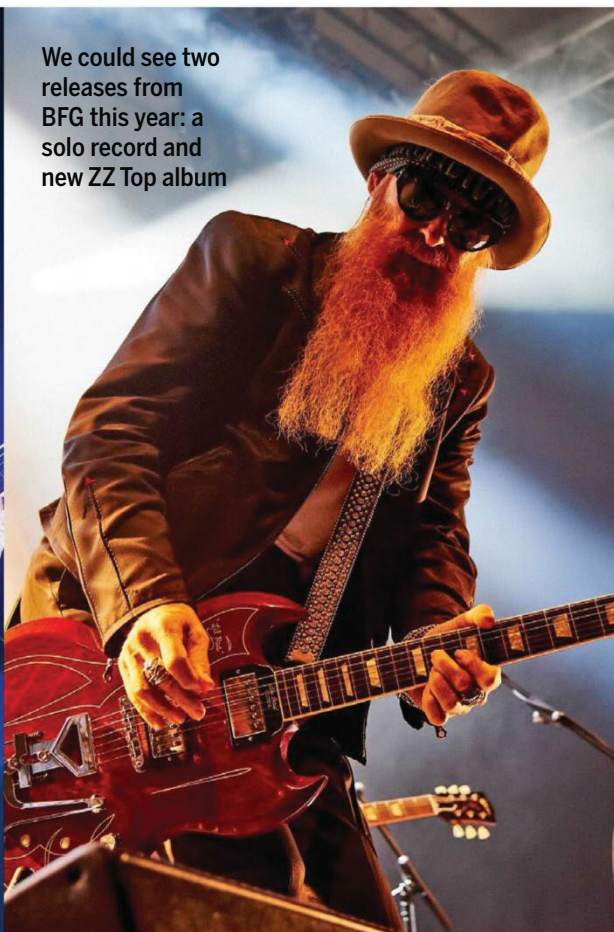


The Players

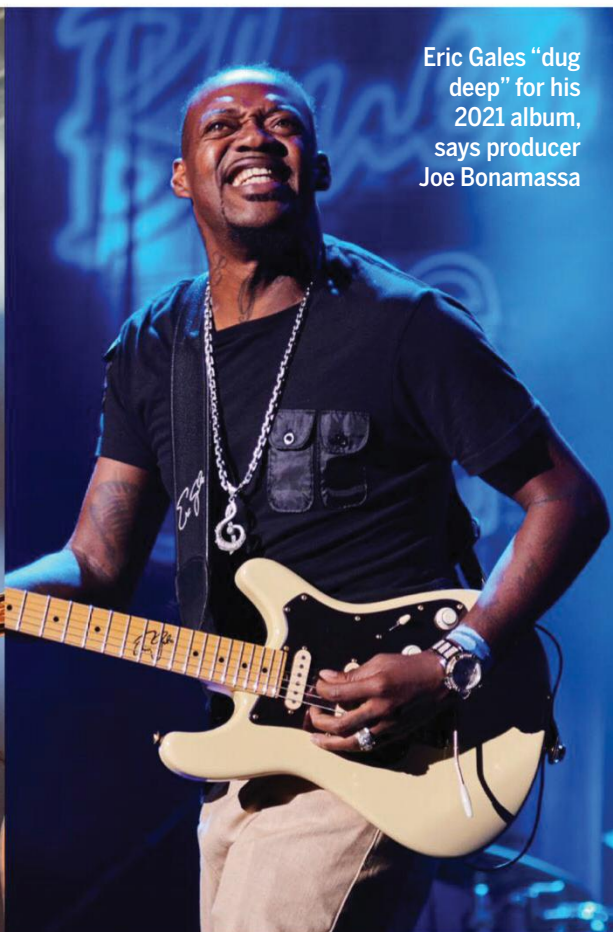
The latest news, views and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists



St Vincent's next offering will feature less "angularity" and reference her 60s and 70s influences



We could see two releases from BFG this year: a solo record and new ZZ Top album



Eric Gales "dug deep" for his 2021 album, says producer Joe Bonamassa

Studio Saviours

New albums to listen out for in 2021

Eric Gales

Gales' latest was tracked in 2020 and produced by friends Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith, suggesting this will be a landmark release for the bluesman. "I am so proud to call this man my friend," said Bonamassa of Gales. "Truly one of the greatest of all time. He dug deep within his soul to deliver the record of his career."

Greta Van Fleet

Details of the band's second album, *The Battle At Garden's Gate*, set for release this April, remain a closely guarded secret as we go to press. It will be interesting to see if they manage to shake off the Led Zeppelin comparisons that have plagued them thus far in their nine-year career.

Joe Bonamassa

Joe being Joe, he's got his own music to make as well as sitting in the producer's chair. This spring he's going back to basics for a 'subway record' in New York. "A couple of guitars, a couple of amps," he told MusicRadar on the new record. "That's just how I used to do it; take the subway down to the studio."

Mammoth WVH

Wolfgang Van Halen has taken on his father's pre-VH band moniker for his debut solo release, and first single from the album, *Distance* (a tribute to Eddie and already well received), suggests the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The young musician played all the instruments in the studio.

Nita Strauss

Nita's second solo album will feature at least one departure from 2018's instrumental *Controlled Chaos*. "There will definitely be a wide spectrum of different emotions going on," she told Heavy New York. "And the biggest change, I guess, would be I am gonna have a guest singer or two on this one."

St Vincent

"I felt I had gone as far as I could possibly go with angularity," Annie Clark told Stereogum about the follow-up to 2017's *Masseduction*. "I was interested in going back to the music I've listened to more than any other – Stevie Wonder records from the early 70s, Sly And The Family Stone. I studied at the feet of those masters."

Steve Vai

Vai celebrated his 60th birthday last year and he's ramping things up with talk of multiple new albums in the works: another *Real Illusions* record, an acoustic project, and three trio-based instrumental albums with no overdubs. It's surely a given we'll hear at least one this year.

ZZ Top

Billy Gibbons has used his lockdown time to focus on recording projects, believed to be a new solo release and the ZZ Top album that Rick Rubin was mooted as helming as far back as January last year. It's unclear if the super-producer is still onboard (he also worked on 2012's *La Futura*), but Gibbons has assured fans there's "loads of cool grooving going on". **[RL]**

ALSO THIS MONTH

GERRY MARSDEN: 1942-2021



Guitarist was saddened to hear of the passing of Gerry Marsden on 3 January, aged 78. The Gerry And The Pacemakers leader penned hits *Ferry Cross The Mersey* and *Don't Let The Sun Catch You Crying* with the Liverpool band, after recording 1963 No 1s *How Do You Do It?*, *I Like It* and *You'll Never Walk Alone*. He received an MBE in 2003 for his services in support of the victims of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster and last year released a version of *You'll Never Walk Alone* in tribute to the NHS. Paul McCartney wrote on Twitter: "Gerry was a mate from our early days in Liverpool... His unforgettable performances ... remain in many people's hearts as reminders of a joyful time in British music."

TONY RICE: 1951-2020



Bluegrass guitar legend Tony Rice died on Christmas Day, aged 69. His innovative style paved the way for many modern players in the country idiom. Tommy Emmanuel CGP remembers Tony's impactful career: "Tony was an inventive bluegrass giant who caught my ear with [David Grisman's] *Hot Dawg* album in the 70s. Nobody sounded like him, he had an unusual style influenced by jazz piano players like Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson. He had a soulful style of singing and playing and he's one of the most copied bluegrass stylists in the history of the genre. RIP Tony."

ALEXI LAIHO: 1979-2020



The music world also said goodbye to Alexi Laiho – guitarist, vocalist and founder of the Finnish metal band Children Of Bodom – who died in December, aged 41. His neoclassical style proved influential on a new generation of metal players and he wrote across the band's 10 studio albums until their 2019 dissolution. He had recorded three songs with new outfit Bodom After Midnight; Napalm Records has said they are planned for posthumous release. Steve Vai said in tribute: "He was always respectful, personable, quiet and unassuming, but then you'd hear him play and you realise that embodied in that delicate frame was a fiercely confident and monstrous guitar commander of the highest order."

SMITH/KOTZEN COLLABORATION

Iron Maiden's Adrian Smith and The Winery Dogs' Richie Kotzen have joined forces for a collaborative project. Their first single is entitled *Taking My Chances* and an album is expected to follow. "Richie is a virtuoso guitarist, but he's got a great sense of melody – the whole thing just felt very natural," said Smith. Kotzen adds: "We found common ground in classic and blues-based rock. We both come from that mentality. We've been writing and recording together for the past year and I'm ecstatic with the results."

Photo by Stanley Bielecki/ASP/Getty Images

Photo by Stephen A. Ide/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Photo by Joby Sessions



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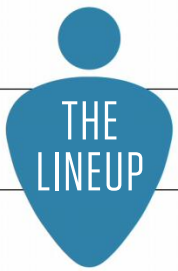
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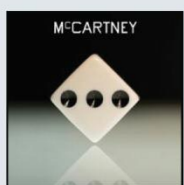


Macca's latest solo album was recorded during 2020 lockdown

Paul McCartney McCartney III

Universal

8/10



Macca completes his triptych of eponymous solo albums

What exactly do we expect from Paul McCartney in his seventh decade of music making? During The Beatles' heyday he wrote many songs that have since become indelible in the fabric of rock and pop music, leaving many other songwriters back at the starting line. *Penny Lane*, *Yesterday* and *Here*, *There And Everywhere* alone would be enough to guarantee some kind of musical immortality, but his post-Beatles projects have yielded a whole slew of classics, too.

The original album in this loose series of three, *McCartney*, was released in 1970, its sequel, *McCartney II*, in 1980, but it took a global pandemic and a rifle through some unfinished songs to produce this latest platter. The story goes that Paul found a song entitled *When Winter Comes* that was co-produced by Beatles producer George Martin. He decided to revisit and finish it and it takes its place as the album's closer. Suitably motivated, he decided to carry on.

Rockers such as *Lavatory Lil* and *Seize The Day* sit alongside ballads like the acoustic *The Kiss Of Venus*, all of them with a distinct back to basics feel but with McCartney's watermark of quality and originality running throughout. How does it stack up against *Abbey Road* or *Revolver*? That brings us back to our point made at the beginning of this review: is it relevant to make that kind of comparison? C'mon, it's Macca; it's fun and playful and, furthermore, it's a master craftsman at work. **[DM]**

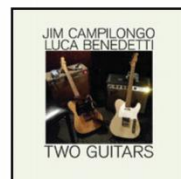
Standout track: *The Kiss Of Venus*

For fans of: The Beatles, John, George & Ringo

Jim Campilongo & Luca Benedetti Two Guitars

Blue Hen Records

9/10



Chopin meets Chet in dreamland

Readers may already be familiar with Jim Campilongo from the twisted Tele genius of his solo albums such as *Orange*, but he also plays in Honeyfingers, whose music revisits the era of Chet Atkins and Nat King Cole, viewing it through a wonderfully warped lens. Jazz picker Luca Benedetti is Campilongo's guitar compadre in the latter act and, following a successful duo gig when the rest of the band couldn't make it, they decided to do an album together. The result is a series of serene, charming instrumentals that recall Chet and Oscar Moore but have a dash of strangeness to them, too, thanks to Campilongo's woozy, dreamlike vibrato, deft melodic instincts and sly sense of musical humour. Benedetti's artful, elegant jazz picking provides rich harmony and flourishes of bewitching virtuosity. The effect is by turns sincere, strange and beautiful – as deliciously delirious as spending an afternoon quaffing absinthe in a ragtime saloon. A musical balm for troubled times. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Denisse*

For fans of: Roy Buchanan, Chet Atkins, Joe Pass

John Smith The Fray

Thirty Tigers

9/10



Stellar songwriter returns with his most personal album yet

Whereas 2020 was a heck of a year for all of us, for John Smith it had an additional bitter twist. Apart from being forced to cancel around 200 gigs, there was some unexpected turmoil in his private life to deal with, too, involving illness and loss. His response was to look inside, pick up his songwriter's pen and sculpt this album. So much exceptional art has been fashioned from hardship and *The Fray* can be added to that list. Recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios with a host of socially distanced collaborators including Bill Frisell, The Milk Carton Kids, Sarah Jarosz and Lisa Hannigan, *The Fray* succeeds on so many levels. Songs such as *Friends*, *The Best Of Me* and *Just As You Are* are bound to become setlist staples when the open road beckons John once again. And we can't wait. **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Best Of Me*

For fans of: John Martyn, Seth Lakeman

The Lineup

John Smith: new album turns loss into rich songcraft



Son Of Man State Of Dystopia
Esoteric/Antenna

8/10



Gutsy, epic prog-rock for a broken age

To paraphrase a familiar saying, when prog is good it's very, very good – and when it's bad it's 'orrid. Fortunately, Son Of Man's latest long-player is squarely in the former camp. Frontman and guitarist George Jones is, as the band's name hints, the son of famous 70s rocker Micky Jones of Man and there's plenty his dad would have been proud of here. Opener *Conscience* opens with the kind of riff that characterises the album: a sound as hard-nosed as AC/DC but as melodically aware as ELO. The songs are constructed with flair, featuring great ensemble playing from the band and taut, fiery guitar work from Jones. Besides proggy, high-concept numbers such as the Yes-like *One With The Voice*, there are some balls-to-the-wall rockers, too, such as *Auto Devotion*, which is about the petrolhead's addiction to speed. A hard-charging, immersive effort. **[JD]**

Standout track: *One With The Voice*

For fans of: Man, The Who, Yes, AC/DC, Asia

START ME UP

Lee Wrathe Awakening
Revolver Music

8/10



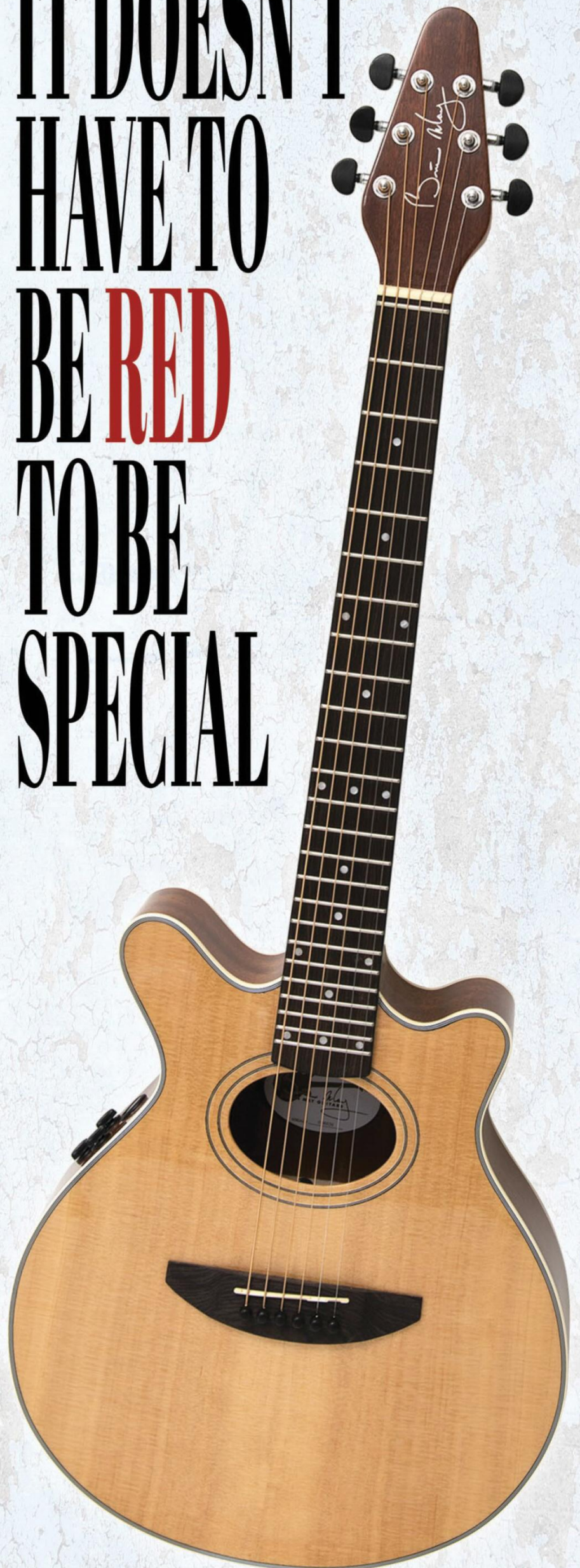
Scintillating post-Vai virtuosity

Keen-eyed readers may recognise Lee from his dazzling demos for Ibanez, which have earned praise from Steve Vai and show off his formidable blend of feel and monster licks. *Awakening* sees Lee give free rein to his talents as a composer, too. Opener *Illusion* is a rich soundscape with an Eastern feel that Lee illuminates with intricate runs. He's a master of dynamics, controlling the ebb and flow of the music beautifully. His intense, mercurial playing style never settles on a single idea so long that it stales – and yet returns to the main theme of each song effortlessly. While referencing shred's masters, Lee wisely ensures the soul of the record is pure, original melody, presented with huge virtuosity and élan. Recommended. **[JD]**

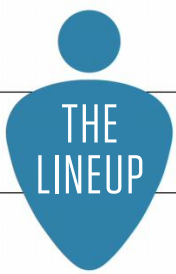
Standout track: *Angry Sky*

For fans of: Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Guthrie Govan

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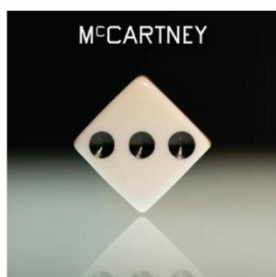


Tones Behind The Tracks

Engineer **Steve Orchard** and tech manager **Keith Smith** take us behind the scenes of McCartney's latest solo album, recorded during lockdown

Artist: Paul McCartney

Album: McCartney III



What did you do during the extended periods of downtime in 2020? As gigs ground to a halt and collaborating in person became a no-go, musicians everywhere looked for ways to keep their creative pulse ticking. This applied to Paul McCartney, too, who, after finishing some soundtrack work pre-Covid, turned his attention to getting some song ideas down.

"He's always writing, Paul. He's forever recording or scribbling down little bits of ideas and he's collected them for years," Paul's technical manager, Keith Smith, tells us. "Sometimes he has a big purge and we document them all. He just started to come in with some of these ideas and said, 'Let's work on it.' It was literally demos for a bit of fun."

The three quickly formed a bubble, recording in the already remote setting of McCartney's Hogg Hill Mill studio and these ideas – with McCartney playing every instrument – became a lockdown distraction for the former Beatle: making music in anger. "We did that for 10 weeks," Keith continues, "and seriously, we didn't start thinking about an album until the three of us started thinking, 'There's 10 really good songs here.'"

And they were right. The resulting collection is some of McCartney's best-received work in years, spanning

everything we've come to know and love from one of the greatest songwriters of all time. From delicate fingerstyle folk through to raunchy *Revolver*-style R&B, there's something for fans of every facet of McCartney's style. Here, Steve and Keith take us through the signal chain and gear used across the whole album.

Many musicians turned to their recording setups during lockdown, but presumably Paul's is a bit more than a laptop in the corner of a spare room?

Steve Orchard: "It's an amazing setup we've got here. It's centred around a 60-channel Neve V Series desk then we've got some vintage Neve preamps: 1081s and 1064s; we've got 10 channels of those. Then we've also got 10 channels of Focusrite ISA 110 vintage modules, too. So that's the bulk of the preamps then we've also got some Helios and Chandler units as well. There's a very good mic collection, a nice live room, everything is set up, mic'd-up so we're always ready to record and mix at the same time."

What's the main recording format in the studio – tape or a DAW?

Steve: "Pro Tools, really. We do go to tape sometimes – we've got a variety of tape machines here. But we use tape as an effect because Pro Tools is the main crux of it. We've got nice mics, nice preamps. I think that if you get the front-end stage of your recording-chain correct, it's captured nicely."

Let's talk about the guitars – what were the main instruments on the album?

Keith Smith: "For a really straightforward rock 'n' roll sound Paul has a '57 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop, which is always his go-to chord-y rock sound. It's PAFs in that, and it's all original as far as I know. That's his big rock sound through his AC30."

"The Tele is a real favourite of his at the moment because he hasn't had it that long. It's a mint-condition 1954 lefty, which is rare as hen's teeth. He's had it three or four years now and he's really enjoying playing it at the moment. It just sounds beautiful. In Paul's mind a Tele is a really nice clean, sparkly, almost country sound. He'll say, 'I want something really clean... let's try a Tele.' He sticks the guitar straight into the AC30 and gets the sound. That's how he's always done it and I think that's how he'll always do it."

In the studio (left to right): technical manager Keith Smith, Paul McCartney and engineer Steve Orchard





Did he use any others from his collection?

Keith: “A few years ago Gibson wanted to do a signature version of his ‘64 Epiphone Casino. We umm’d and ahh’d, and it didn’t really take off. But to demonstrate the quality of the guitar that they’d make for him, they sent a really nice ES-330 from the Custom Shop. I’m always going through Paul’s guitar collection and making sure they’re all up to scratch, so we sort of rediscovered this 330. It’s just a really great-sounding guitar.

“Then when I was going through the guitars I found a 1949 Gibson ES-5 lefty, which again is just so rare. It’s a really weird guitar because I think it’s a precursor to the Switchmaster. It’s got three pickup controls but only one tone; it doesn’t have the switches in it or anything. We spent a lot of time with it plugged in, messing with the controls trying to get the right tone out of the three pickups without any individual tone. But you get a very particular sound. Again, Paul will think, ‘I want a nice warm tone’ and that’s the ES-5.”

Can you tell us a bit more about the AC30?

Keith: “That one was born in 1975 for a Wings tour. He’s got two of them. The AC30 tends to be ‘Brilliant-Brilliant’. If he’s in the Brilliant channel then he’ll have the top-end all the way up, bass rolled off and the volume up. It’s always loud in the room!

“We’ve always used the Celestion Blue speakers. The Alnico ones sound so different and it’s very much a preferred sound for some people, but we’ve always veered toward the Blues. His AC30 is so straightforward and simple – just plug the guitar in and bang!”

What was the recording chain for the electrics?

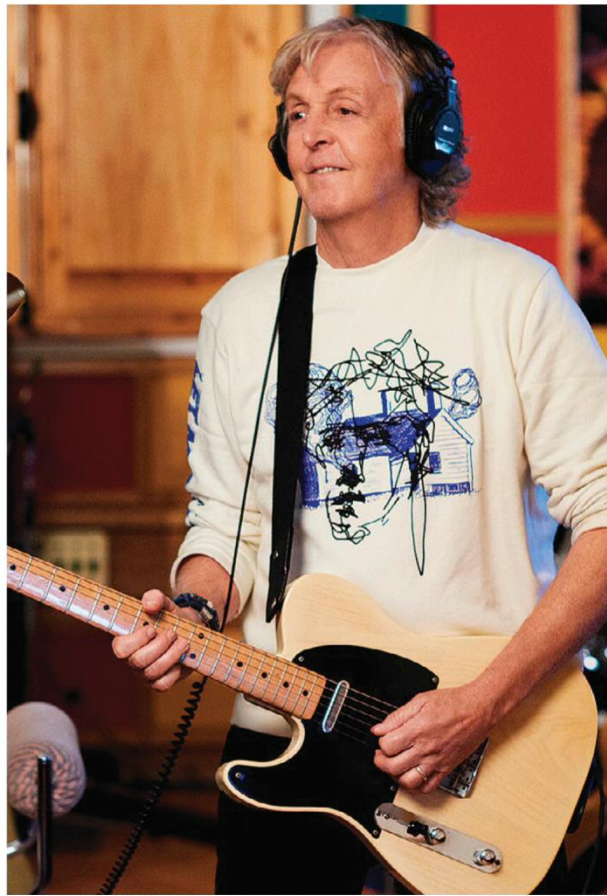
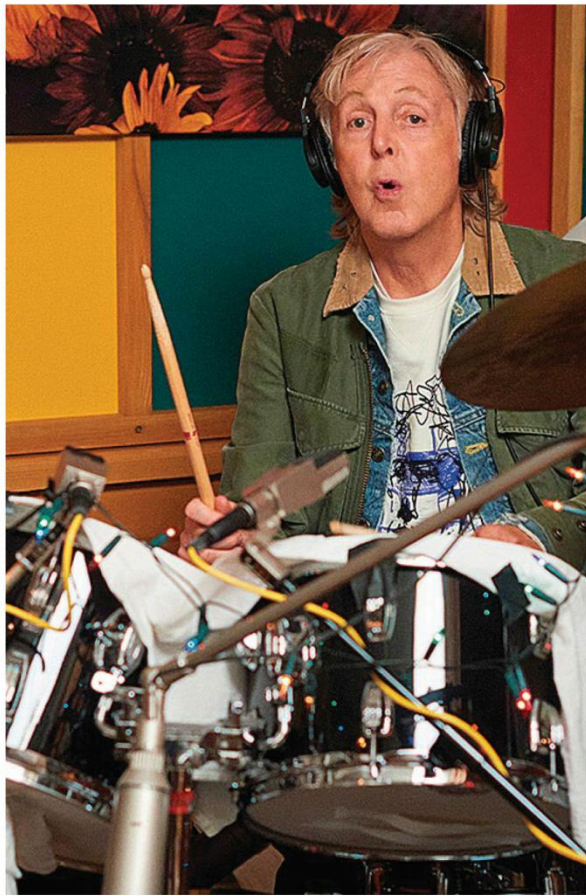
Steve: “I’ll have a Shure SM57 and a Neumann U 67 on the guitar amp, with both capsules lined up on top of each other. They’re a few inches away from the cone, just slightly off axis. Then they go into a couple of Neve 1081 channels. I’ll also put a pair of AEA ribbon mics in front of the amp. I’ll move them around a couple of feet away, and they’re going through a TG limiter. So with the amount of compression/limiting going on it sounds like they’re miles away.”

“He sticks the [Tele] straight into the AC30 and gets the sound. That’s how he’s always done it and I think that’s how he’ll always do it”

There’s quite a lot of acoustic on the album, too. What were you using?

Keith: “Paul’s main acoustic is his Martin D-28, which he’s had for about 30 years. We’ve got a couple: we’ve just got a new-ish one and he’s got an older one, a ‘64 D-28 that lives at home with him. He’s got a nice collection of acoustics. One of the other ones that he uses a little bit is the Blueridge. When he goes to the office in London, he often goes for a little walk past Hobgoblin Guitars and they often have left-handed guitars in there, and that’s where he picked up the Blueridge. It’s a really nice-sounding guitar, quite a bit brighter than the D-28 and he loves the way it plays and sounds. I think it’s on at least one song.”

Paul pictured with a rare mint-condition left-handed 1954 Tele, which was one of three main guitars used to record his album



McCartney's instrument collection includes an upright bass previously owned by Elvis's bass player Bill Black

Steve: "I've got a couple of setups for recording the acoustic, depending on what feels appropriate for the song. The first one is a couple of Neumann U 67s through the Helios channels. I'll put one near the soundhole and one near the neck as a combination. I'll often compress them with the Neve 33609, too. But I also have a pair of JZ mics. There's a Black Hole and a 201; they'll go through the Neve 1081 preamps with some EQ.

"Most of the time I'll mic them in stereo like that. Even if you pan the mics together so it's a mono point, it just helps with the size of it. Sometimes when you use just one mic you'll get certain notes ringing out so strongly, so doing it in stereo can help with getting the balance."

"When he plays [the Hofner] you can tell that it's just part of him. It's so organic and such a natural feel and sound - it always sounds phenomenal"



McCartney included technical manager Keith Smith (right) in his bubble in order to record an album during the 2020 lockdown

We hear Paul's been known to dabble on the bass from time to time as well...

Keith: "90 per cent of it was the number one Hofner 5001. Paul's got other Hofners, and he's got other basses – the Rickenbacker from the 1970s, a Wal five-string and a couple of other things. But nine times out of 10, he'll pick up the Hofner. When he plays it you can tell that it's just part of him. It's so organic and such a natural feel and sound for him, and it always sounds phenomenal. It's one of the most unique-sounding – not just basses but – Hofners."

How do you record the Hofner? Is it DI, amp or do you use both?

Keith: "He's been using Mesa/Boogie amps for years, live and in the studio. For the studio it's half-size, Prodigy I think it's called. That goes into a really nice sealed 4x10 Boogie cabinet. Then Steve mixes it with the mic on the cab."

Steve: "Yeah, I've got an Avalon valve DI box then I've got a Neumann FET 47 into a Neve 1081 preamp. I also have a 'speaker-mic', which is a Dynaudio bass driver mounted on a mic stand. I have that parallel with the 47 and use that as a mic. You get a nice big, fat, round sound from that. I have a couple of compressors, Urei 1176s that I'll use on the way in, but the tone just comes from him. For the distorted sound on *Slidin'* we reamp'd the DI signal. There are a couple of different pedals on that. There's the little Big Trees, which is by Audio Kitchen. It's a little 2.5-watt valve stompbox and it sounds amazing. Then I also put it through an Electro-Harmonix Bass Micro Synth. So it's just a mix of that and the clean signal."

Keith: "I should just add, on the track *Women And Wives* Paul used Bill Black's [Elvis's bass player] upright bass, which is famously owned by Paul. It's a Kay Maestro M-1, 1952 or '53 I think. It's still strung right-handed for Bill Black – Paul just turns it around and plays it the other way round!" [SW]

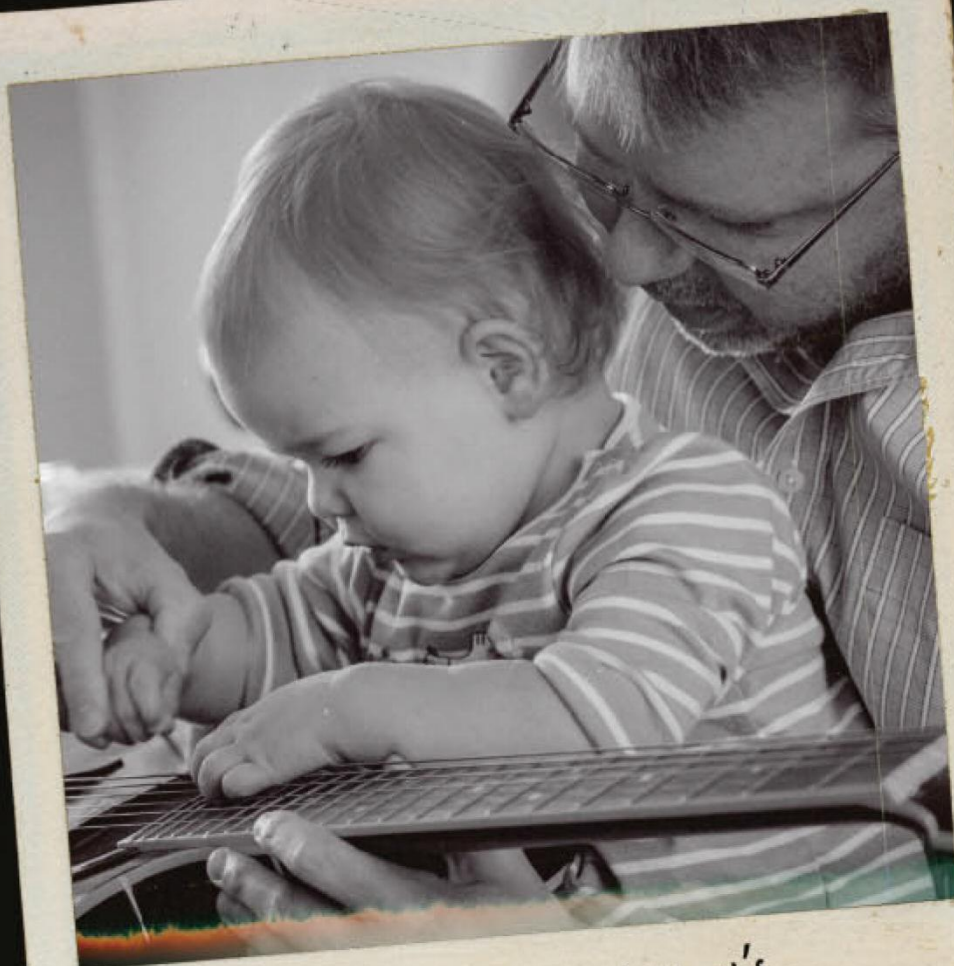


a lifelong friend

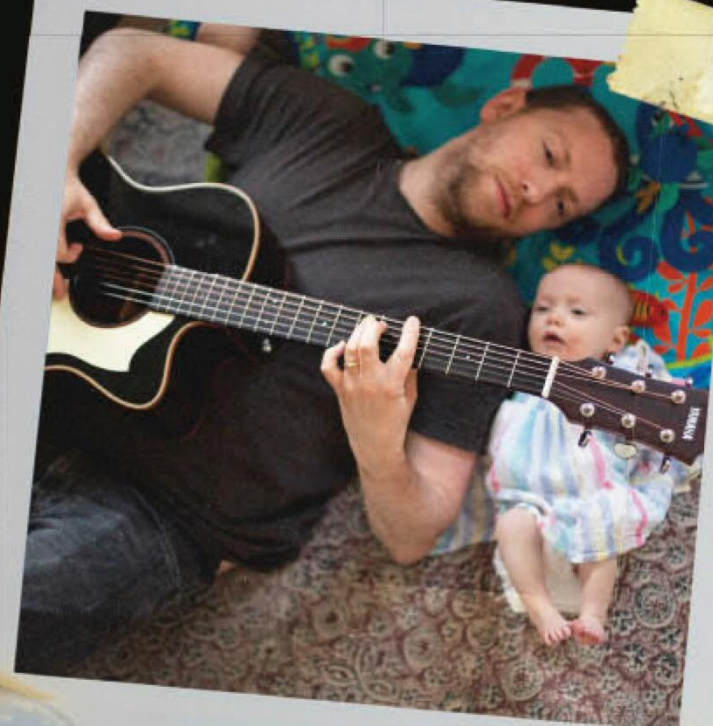
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Instant Access

Adam Goldsmith shares his experience of modelling processors to streamline his setup and get all his sounds on tap

Seeing as editor Jamie is in the process of doing a Longtermers report on the Kemper Profiler Stage, I thought I'd add my opinion from the perspective of a working guitar player. Over the past two or three years I've gradually migrated from the Kemper (non-powered 'toaster' edition, plus separate foot controller) through to the Line 6 Helix, before finally settling on the Kemper Profiler Stage.

I originally bought the first-edition Kemper with the external foot controller not long after they first came out, then immediately installed the Michael Britt profiles of several amps on the recommendation of colleagues and some general internet research. I found these to be a vast improvement on the stock

and amps. For my job I need to be able to access all kind of sounds and effects very quickly, and not have an entire symphony orchestra wait while I consult paragraph 98, subsection 12, clause B of the owner's manual in order to adjust my delay times...

I moved through the original Kemper quite quickly for similar reasons, although reluctantly, as the amp sound and feel was great, but at that time I found it slightly lacking in the effects department. In stepped the Helix, with added Michael Britt patch presets. I was super happy with this setup for a while, and indeed am still very happy with it, not least because the user interface is so incredibly intuitive and quick to learn. It's perfect for so much of my work. The effects section, in my opinion, still outranks the Kemper, but I was aware there was a very slight superiority with the feel and sound of the Kemper amps.

The obvious solution was presented to me by friend and colleague John Parricelli last January when we did some sessions together at North London's AIR Studios (previously owned by Beatles producer George Martin). He was running his pedalboard directly into the Kemper. I swiftly went down to my local guitar shop and bought the more elegantly designed Kemper Profiler Stage, with its now-improved effects section, and proceeded to put a few pedals in front of it.

I have the Line 6 HX Effects, which has a similarly brilliant user interface to that of the full-fat Helix, a lovely Strymon Flint, an Analog Man King Of Tone and an Origin Effects RevivalDRIVE. Between all these things there's now no sound I can't access and – most importantly for me – access very quickly and accurately for whoever I'm working for. I can't see I'll be needing to change this setup for a good while. **G**

"I need to access effects quickly, and not have an orchestra wait while I consult paragraph 98, subsection 12, clause B of the owner's manual..."

sounds. I was happy with the amp sounds and thought the general feel and response was a real step up from the Fractal Audio Axe-Fx that I'd previously owned (especially for slightly distorted crunchy amp-like tones) and used for a run on the West End musical *Made In Dagenham*.

I know these Axe-Fx units have proved popular with a lot of rock and metal guys and girls, but in all honesty it didn't really do it for me. And, in addition to not feeling particularly organic and amp-like, I also found it fairly complicated to program. To qualify this judgement I'd point out that I have very little patience for technology and learning operating systems in relation to guitars



Adam has all the sounds he might need at his feet, with the help of Kemper's Profiler Stage (left) and the Line 6 HX Effects



Getting A Fix

Spurred on by the efforts of colleague David Mead, **Neville Marten** gets round to doing a long-awaited job or two on his own guitars

Most Fridays over the past nine months or so, deputy editor Dave Mead and I have been meeting for a socially distanced lunchtime stroll and natter. We've known each other for around 30 years, since Martyn Booth and I used to work on Dave's instruments when we had Don't Fret guitar repairs – so even before he joined us on *Guitarist* in the early 90s.

Dave and I have been chatting lately about one or two jobs we need to get done on our various instruments. After Dave's course at Crimson Guitars in Dorset, he's very capable of doing his own tweaks and additions, so these tasks have occupied at least part of our discussions. Dave's been much more proactive than I, removing a neck shim from his Tele and redoing the action and intonation. He's now in the midst of sorting out an electrics fault on one of his Strats (a new Switchcraft jack socket is in the post). He also admits to spending time looking at Charles Guitars' website, playing "fantasy updates". So, after shaming me into it, I finally got my own ES-335 on the bench.

Mine's a Custom Shop '63 Reissue in classic Gibson Cherry. I've had it for about seven years and it took me ages to find. The ones I came across either didn't look right (the colour or wood grain wasn't what I liked), they were too heavy, didn't feel great to me, or a host of other personal niggles. I think I must have tried about 10, all of which were rejected.

Then one day I was in World Guitars not thinking about 335s at all, and they'd had a delivery of Gibsons. I asked my dear friend Jeff Pumfrett (who was still with us back then) if I could try a couple, and he put me in the demo booth with their Matchless DC-30 head and cab. One beauty from the bunch 'spoke to me'. The colour and grain were just like the 60s ones, it was light in weight and everything about it was right. I bought it there and then.

There were two tiny niggles though – the first string was a tad too close to the fingerboard edge, and the

nut was cut so low that the same string was on the edge of buzzing on the 1st fret. I reslotted the nylon saddle, ordered a new one to cut it afresh, and tweaked the truss rod so it just about didn't buzz. It had always bugged me and yet I played it like that right up until last week, when I finally got round to fixing it.

Having bought a couple of bone nuts online from Northwest Guitars, I bit the bullet and removed the old Delrin one. Luckily, it came off with ease. An hour later and the new bone one was in place, deftly cut (if I say so myself) and the guitar restrung with Curt Mangan 0.010s. The guitar looks and plays so much better now – it feels like a new instrument and has inspired me to play so much more.

"One beauty from the bunch 'spoke to me'. The colour and grain were just like the 60s ones, everything was right. I bought it there and then"

What's more, given that guitar repairs is what I did in a past life, and that I have a knack for certain aspects of it (keep me away from a soldering iron, though!), I started to wonder if I should start doing it again on a low-key basis. Maybe setups, fret dresses and the like. I have no facilities at home so it would mean finding a few square feet to rent, getting a few of the specialist tools I no longer possess, and setting up a workbench. Even if it never happens, the thought really does appeal to me, as those days at Gibson UK with Robbie Gladwell, Martyn Booth and Mark Willmott were among some of my most enjoyable work times ever.

Mind you, I was in my 20s and 30s then, with perfect eyesight, dextrous fingers and a back that didn't cave in after a few hours bent over a bench. Perhaps I'll do a few more little jobs on my own guitars, and then decide... See you next month. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH Parlour Plaything

What? Lâg Tramontane Travel RC Red Cedar Natural **Where seen?** www.guitarvillage.co.uk **Price?** £329

Like me, I bet you're knocked out by the price and impressed at how great this parlour/travel guitar from Lâg looks. Lâg was formed in 1981 in France by Michel Lâg, and for some years the instruments were mainly electric and built by hand in Michel's own custom facility. These days it's mainly acoustic guitars designed

under the tutelage of Michel, as well as luthier Maurice Dupont and acoustical expert Dr Adrien Mamou-Mani. They are then built in China to exacting specs.

The Tramontane Travel smacks of cool French design – check out that elegant oval soundhole ring gazing out from a solid red-cedar top. And then there's the

mahogany back and sides, an attractive brownwood fingerboard and bridge, plus black tulip tuners, nut, saddle and bridge pins – it all adds up to a most attractive picture. Available with built-in electrics as the Tramontane Travel RCE, I think you'd agree it's a handsome guitar that looks worth three times the price.



PHOTO BY GUITAR VILLAGE



Tuning Up

Alex Bishop tackles the common misconceptions around intonation, and why trying to play the guitar 'in tune' is a fool's errand anyway...

Between the shifting tides and local lockdowns of the past few months, I have been fortunate enough to have found myself teaching numerous guitar setup masterclasses. These sessions are designed to give my students the confidence to be able to make adjustments to their beloved six-strings, and it's been encouraging to see so many guitarists and amateur luthiers signing up to broaden their understanding of the mechanics of the guitar. Even though setting up a guitar is a relatively easy affair once you know how, there's always a bit of myth busting involved. At the top of my list of lutherie folklore is the matter of 'intonation' – or fixing a guitar that doesn't play in tune.

“It is worth exploring the world of tunings, if only to absolve yourself of any responsibility towards ever playing a perfectly in-tune guitar”

We may be inclined to blame the saddle for many an intonation woe, but often it's more helpful to take a closer look at your choice of string gauge

Consider firstly what happens when we play a note on the fingerboard. A certain amount of pressure is needed from the fretting hand to get the note to sound clearly: we have all felt, at some point, the agonising union of a high E string with an uncalloused fingertip. This pressure stretches the string over the top of the fret and increases the pitch of the note slightly causing it to sound out of tune, especially against any perfectly tuned open strings.

We can fix this problem by moving the saddles slightly further away on each string, a process known as 'compensation'. The distortion of the fretted notes tends to be more pronounced on the lower strings, often resulting in a familiar-looking slanted saddle.

In my experience, though, incorrect alignment of the saddle is rarely the main cause of a poorly performing guitar, and this is what I've been highlighting so often during my workshops. The first of the pitch-wobbling offenders is string gauge. We are spoilt for choice when choosing strings these days, and guitarists opting for nine or 10s should understand that – while easier to play – these thinner strings are far less likely to sound the desired pitch with any accuracy. Players with a lighter touch will have more luck, but heavy handed players with a sensitive ear would be better off stringing their instrument up with spaghetti. Alternatively, the higher tension that comes from 12s or 13s will not only produce a robust tone but far improve your guitar's ability to resist the pressure from your fretting hand and sound the intended note with precision.

Tunings & Temperaments

You might have tossed your nines in the bin, but don't expect a higher string gauge to instantly solve all your problems; you'll need a good setup, too. Those 13s will put quite the bow in your guitar's neck, meaning that the height of the strings is being raised from the surface at the same time. A high action is not a friend of good intonation, so make sure the truss rod is adjusted accordingly to allow only a little neck relief, as well as keeping the saddle heights in check. Finally, don't forget your nut slots, otherwise the consonance of those cowboy chords will suffer, too!

If you are keen to go down the rabbit hole of improving intonation further, it is worth exploring the world of tunings and temperaments, if only to ultimately absolve yourself of any responsibility towards ever playing (or making) a guitar that is perfectly in tune with itself. There is not enough space to discuss this topic in detail here, but essentially there is a beautiful mismatch between the 'perfect' guitar (in intonation terms) and an instrument capable of playing equally well in all keys. You can blame mother nature or physics for this one, but achieving both on a fretted musical instrument is impossible.

This realisation always reminds me that it is all too easy to get lost in the minutiae of detail with setting up guitars, when really they are not instruments of mathematical perfection but rather tools for channelling emotion and expressing creativity. There is something beguiling about this notion that music can only ever just miss the mark – perfection always seems to be over the brow of the next hill. **G**



PHOTO BY BARBARA CETLOVA (WWW.BARKAPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.UK)



MAKING HISTORY SINCE 1958



John Entwistle, Pete Townshend,
and Keith Moon with Rotosound's
Alan Marcuson in 1966.
© Rotosound Archive

Legendary tone starts with authentic strings.
That's why we still use the same family-made
machinery that wound strings for Pete Townshend
and John Entwistle of The Who back in 1966.

  
@rotosound_uk



Townshend's Tone

Jamie Dickson joins guitar detective Steve Clarke to explore Pete Townshend's live rig

Steve Clarke admits he's a lucky man. As a deeply experienced guitar tech, Steve's passion for vintage guitars has brought him into contact with some of the most historic instruments in the world. As well as his guitar restoration work, Steve is a consultant on vintage guitars for Bonhams auction house and an author to boot. In 2019, Steve published a fascinating book entitled *Famous Frets*, in which he forensically examines an impressive list of iconic guitars – including Paul Kossoff's 'stripped top' 'Burst, which we looked at with Steve back in issue 463. Because Steve made detailed inspections of each of the famous instruments featured in the book, he was able to bust scores of myths about those guitars, which ranged from Prince's 'Cloud' electric to Pete Townshend's Stratocasters.

"One of the interesting things that came up on the day was Pete's choice of strings... The set was a 0.010 to 0.046, but [Alan] threw away the 0.046"

Facilitated by Pete Townshend's late tech, Alan Rogan, Steve Clarke gained backstage access to the band's equipment at The Who's Hyde Park gig in 2015. Steve's photo below shows Townshend's Strat with its additional control knob behind the bridge – and the keen-eyed among you may notice a heavier sixth string!

So, when reader David Desborough wrote in to ask what the extra control knob on Pete Townshend's Strats does (see Feedback, page 45), I picked up the phone to Steve, who was lucky enough to be invited backstage at The Who's Hyde Park gig back in 2015 to take a close look at how Townshend gets his massive live sound. As you'd imagine, this wasn't an easy thing to set up, but his chance finally came through the good graces of the late, much-missed Alan Rogan, who was Townshend's personal tech for years.

"It was very difficult to get that one nailed, I'll be honest with you," Steve recalls. "I never thought it was going to happen. Alan told me they hadn't done something like that for about 14 years and the security was so tight that it would have been easier for me to have had tea with the Queen! But in the end he let me have complete and utter free rein, not just on Pete's guitars but the whole backline."

Steve says that this exclusive access into Pete's gear yielded fascinating insights, even before he inspected the guitars themselves.

"One of the interesting things that came up on the day was Pete's choice of strings," Steve recalls. "I was watching Alan put strings on Pete's Torino Red Strat and I saw him take the bottom E off. The set was like a 0.010 to 0.046, but he threw away the 0.046. So I said, 'What are you doing?' because Alan was just throwing them on the floor. And then he went into a drawer and pulled out a 0.048. So I said, 'What's going on here?' and he said, 'Pete likes to use 48s on the bottom E – he prefers that.'

"I said to Alan, 'Why don't you just get Ernie Ball to make him a signature Townshend set, 0.010 to 0.048?' but he looked at me and said, 'Pete isn't beholden to anybody. And I'll tell you something else – he pays for *all* his Strats. He doesn't accept gifts [from gear makers]. So I have to go and buy whole packs of 48s.'"

Piezo The Action

Moving on to the guitars themselves, Steve was able to gain a crucial insight into how Townshend gets such a massive live sound.

"The volume control behind the bridge controls the output of the piezo acoustic signal," Steve explains of Pete's Strats, which have a bridge-mounted Fishman pickup system onboard to provide a quasi-acoustic sound in addition to the guitar's electric tone. "Alan Rogan was directly involved with this layout and the components. I had a look at the back of the guitar and there is an EMG preamp, which boosts the signal from the acoustic side, that goes directly into the board."

Aside from making acoustic parts easy to play without swapping to another guitar, the hidden benefit of this system is that blending in a little acoustic tone with the electric voice of the Strat beefs its sound up without requiring a big hike in volume, as Steve discovered when he took a look at Townshend's stage amps.

"The biggest shock was that the [Fender] Vibro-Kings that he uses are set with the volume on 3! Alan said to me before I looked at the amps, 'What number do you think Pete plays at?' and I said, 'Oh, it must be at least 6 or 7...' He went, 'Try again...' and I said, 'Go on then, flat out – how about that?' He said, 'Go and have a look, Clarkey.' And I looked and there was a little piece of masking tape by the number 3, which



PHOTO BY STEVE CLARKE OF FAMOUS FRETS



PHOTO BY NEIL LUPIN/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES

means that's *exactly* where that dial has got to be when they're setting it up.

"Alan said on *Won't Get Fooled Again* Pete nudges it a bit higher sometimes, but it's never over 4. It gives that crunch tone he uses – which he then blends in with the acoustic sound from that piezo and the harmonics from that give the illusion that he's got a bigger, louder sound than he actually has. It's an acoustic trick, if you like. But it's misleading because you hear him and think, 'He's got to be playing loud.' So that was a shock to me."

Steve adds that Townshend's modded Strats are typical of the Who guitarist, who has long been a hands-on experimenter with tone and hardware.

Townshend's live rig and setup include a few surprises, including his choice of amp settings and use of a piezo in his Strats

"[Looking at Townshend's amps] the biggest shock was that the [Fender] Vibro-Kings that he uses are set with the volume on 3!"

"Just before that Hyde Park gig I was fortunate enough to look at the SG Special that was used by Pete on the *Rock And Roll Circus* film. It's got the Batwing scratchplate on it, but actually it's a '64 SG, so you think, 'What's going on there?' But around that time Pete was always chopping and changing parts on his guitars. So all he did was take a batwing 'plate off another SG and he put it on the 1964 one, which would have originally had the smaller 'plate.

"It looks a bit weird and at first I thought, 'Oh, it must be a '66 or '67 SG Special.' But when I looked at it properly I thought, 'Hang on a minute – the screw holes are in the wrong place.' Then I looked at the serial number and, of course, that serial number wouldn't have been around in '66/'67. I go into the detail of that particular guitar in the book because I got a nice letter about it from Pete himself, which I got permission to print. For example, on that particular guitar you'll see Cascamite glue around the neck joint and the headstock where Pete glued it himself. He said, 'I dare say it will last longer than I will.' 

For more info on Steve Clarke's superb *Famous Frets* book, see www.famousfrets.com

THREE TO GET READY

Three electrics that can do acoustic



PRS SE Hollowbody II Piezo £1,349

The beautifully appointed SE Hollowbody II covers so much ground with its combination of two 85/15S humbuckers and Fishman piezo bridge. There are two output jacks, too, so you can amplify your acoustic and electric signals separately for optimal tone. Maple binding and pearl birds complete a very classy – and capable – package.



Fender American Acoustasonic Strat £1,749

By contrast to the PRS above, Fender's American Acoustasonic Strat isn't so much an electric with acoustic capability as an acoustic with great electric sounds onboard. The innovative design offers five pairs of voices (A and B) that you can use individually or blend together via the Mod control. These voicings range from boutique Dreadnought-style voicings to electric tones via a Fender N4 Noiseless magnetic pickup. It's Nile Rodgers' latest squeeze, which speaks well of its musical potential.



Taylor T5z Classic DLX £2,759

We loved this Taylor hybrid when we had it in for review a few years back and it's evenly poised between the world of acoustic and electric, with two stacked humbuckers (the neck unit is cleverly hidden under the top of the guitar) and an acoustic body sensor for natural 'unplugged' tones. The compact body is almost as dinky as a Les Paul and the fingerboard's 304.8mm (12-inch) radius and jumbo frets make this instantly comfortable for electric players looking to branch out into a wider palette of tones.



Open D Tuning

Richard Barrett encourages you to explore alternative tunings and the challenges and surprises they present to your playing habits

Sometimes it's good to change things up and try a different guitar, or even a different instrument entirely. This frees you from habits that may have become traps, and forces you to think consciously about the simplest things. The approach we'll take to this idea here is alternative/open tunings, in this case open D (low to high: D A D F# A D).

Raking across the open strings will give you a ringing D major chord, with exactly the same 'stacking' of intervals found when playing an E chord in standard tuning. However, regular chord shapes may or may not work in this new tuning. Part of the fun is trying them out for yourself and discovering some nice (and not so nice!) surprises, though the chords below will give you some good options for voicings that are unavailable or difficult to achieve in standard tuning.

Open tunings are also great for Ry Cooder-style bottleneck or moving single-note melodies around using the open strings as a 'drone' like Jimmy Page. **G**

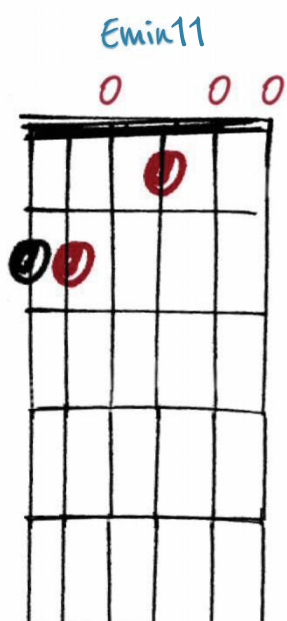
Right: Try experimenting with voicings that are made available to you via altered and open tunings as the greats such as Joni Mitchell have done in their music



PHOTO BY RON POWNALL/GETTY IMAGES

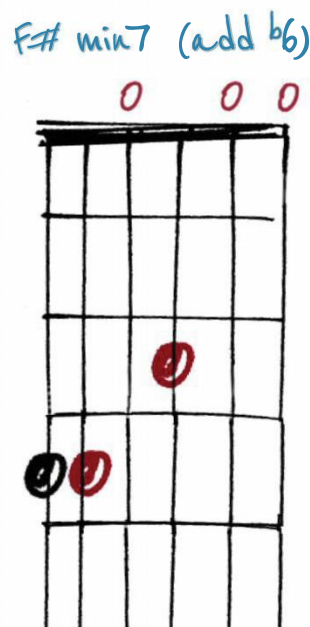
Example 1

This three-finger shape gives a surprisingly complex (and lovely) Emin11 chord, but there is also the option to keep the sixth string open, giving you a Gsus2/D chord, which fits nicely with the Emin11. Between these two and the open D chord, there are already lots of options.



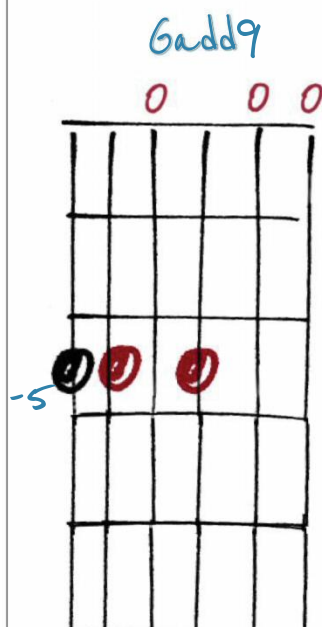
Example 2

What to call this one?! By sliding the Emin11 shape up two frets, we create a dissonant but interesting chord. Let's start at the bottom: F# on the root, then the 5th (C#), then the open D string. Hmm, we'll call it a ♭6 as there's already a 5th present in the chord. Third and second strings give A in unison, which is the ♭3rd, and the open first gives us D – another ♭6. How about F#min7 (add ♭6)?



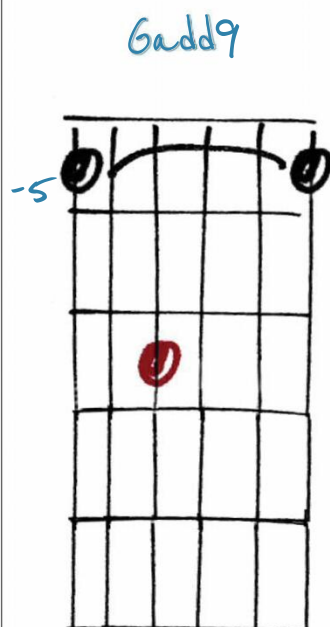
Example 3

Sliding up and altering the shape slightly gives this ringing Gadd9. You could easily change to a minor version by shifting the B at the 5th fret of the G string down a fret/semitone. Note the slightly chorused effect given by the unison D on the fifth and fourth strings, too.



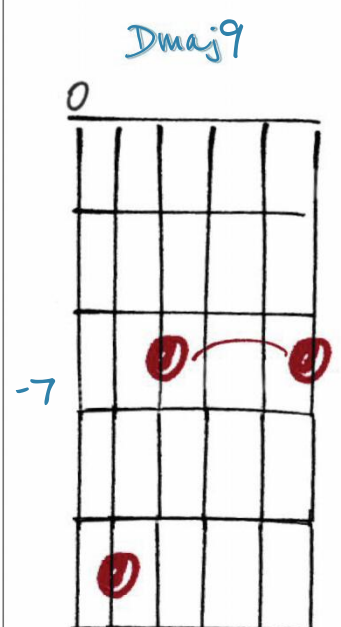
Example 4

Another way of creating Gadd9 but with different possibilities: try removing the 9th, meaning the A played at the 7th fret of the D string, then adding it again. This hints at some of the possibilities explored by players such as Nick Drake and Joni Mitchell.



Example 5

This Dmaj9 requires only two fingers and is a much clearer, wider version than we can achieve in standard tuning. We are now in the territory of Jimmy Page in *The Rain Song*, or Nick Drake with *Bryter Layter*. Don't forget to try moving this around, both with and without the open sixth string.





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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

I PLAYED EC'S BEANO 'BURST



While I haven't found the Beano 'Burst, I was fortunate to play it very briefly. In a spectacular mismatch we – a pop covers band – played support to The Bluesbreakers at Camberley in December 1965. We, a bunch of Carlisle Grammar School boys called 'Normans Conquests'

(don't ask) had just finished our O-Level resits, and ventured more than 300 miles away on a 'tour' of Hampshire and Surrey. Anywhere south of Manchester felt so exotic! The fact we had to resort to resits probably emphasises the skew of our music/education life-balance, further highlighted by the lack of an apostrophe in the band name...

My Selmer Zodiac amp packed in during our second set and Eric let me borrow his Marshall combo. After the gig he was really chatty both about Beano and the amp. I had a play on the Les Paul while he explained the merits of how its powerful signal overdrove the amp to create warm distortion. This is all basic stuff to today's guitarist, but was fascinating back then. He was also becoming increasingly happy with his then-new Marshall, which he was getting used to after having had his previous amp stolen in Spain. He was so enthusiastic about his instrument and eager to chat, the occasion has stuck with me during the intervening 55 years. I guess the only criticism would be his lack of attention to security during that period! Lastly, I seem to have neglected to point out that Eric's playing was magnificent on the night.

Peter Smithson, via email

Many thanks for your fascinating recollections, Peter – you are in a very rare club indeed having played Beano with Eric himself there to point out its virtues! Something to tell the grandchildren, for sure. Didn't happen to note down the serial number did you? Seriously, though, that's such a fantastic memory – and it's nice to reflect on a scene in which Eric Clapton was just an accessible young musician sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with others. If we ever find the real Beano again, we'll bring you in for the identity parade! In the meantime, we hope you can find a use for a more modern bit of kit – the excellent Korg tuner that accompanies a Star Letter.



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

GREENY & THE LYNX

I loved the article about Clapton's missing Les Paul from the 'Beano'-album era. I was amazed to see the photos from The Lynx youth centre – I spent my teenage years growing up in Borehamwood and saw my first live show there in 1967, Amen Corner! I didn't even know about The Bluesbreakers in February 1966 – my favourite bands at the time were The Stones, The Pretty Things and The Yardbirds – Jeff Beck was my guitar idol and I was introduced to the 'Beano' album by a school friend that autumn. I still don't think I've ever recovered. I did get to see Fleetwood Mac at The Lynx (shortly after Danny Kirwan had been revealed to the public) on 5 October 1968... the night before they recorded *Albatross*. Greeny was using his 335 that night and he was on fire! Great days. I've been playing guitar since 1968 and love semi-pro gigging... but when are we all going to be able to do it again?

Steve Johnson, via email

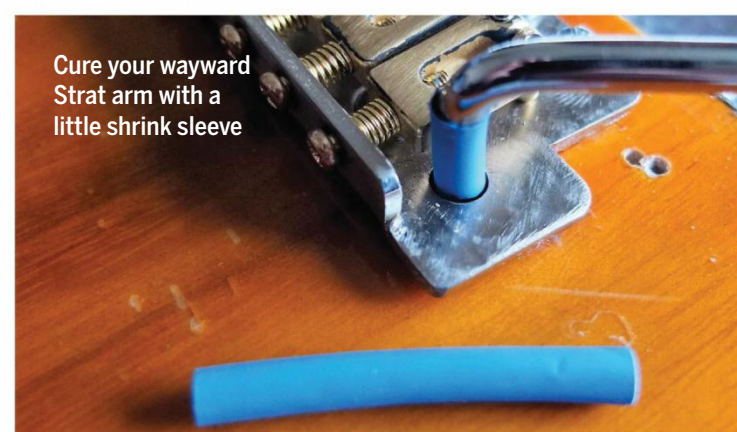
Now that's what we call a youth club, Steve! Peter Green and Danny Kirwan must have been quite a bit more exciting than table tennis... As for gigging again, let's hope it's soon. We've certainly missed it, as well as seeing everyone for a pint and some great music.

YOU NEED A SHRINK!

A wayward Stratocaster arm can be tamed by putting a shrink sleeve of the correct size over the screw-thread of the arm then reinserting it. You can then shrink-fit it or not, as it works either way. See the attached photo of my recent build (still to be completed). You can buy shrink sleeves from any decent hardware store and they are always useful for joining wires and protecting the joints from shorting.

Paul Kelly, via email

Thanks Paul, that's a nifty little dodge and inexpensive, too – keep them coming everyone, these tips are great!





Fender Custom Classic Strat £1,995

You glimpsed this limited edition American beauty last month, but now here's Corona's latest wonder in all its golden glory by Neville Martin

FENDER CUSTOM AMERICAN CLASSIC STRAT
PRICE: £1,995
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Solidbody electric
BODY: Top-grade ash, contoured
NECK: Bird's-eye maple, one-piece
SCALE LENGTH: 25.5 inches
NEUTRONICS: 22 medium oval
HARDWARE: Fender two-point floating bridge with milled stainless steel saddles, Kluson-style vintage tuners, Schaller Straplock buttons, all chrome
STRING SPACING: 11mm
BRIDGE: 22 medium oval
ELECTRICS: Three Fender Custom Shop Vintage Noiseless pickups, one volume and two tone controls, secured with no-lad pot for controlling bridge pickup's tone, mini toggle bridge pickup's neck pickup at any time
WEIGHT (approx): 3.75kg
OPTIONS: None, but as a Custom Shop guitar, almost anything would be available
LEFT HANDERS: This model is, Custom Shop

like they're made from a single plank. Instead we have a more, dare we say, honest approach, with two or three well-matched lengths glued side by side. Of course, this is a two-grade version of the American Standard Strat from the Custom Shop, so you'd expect something a little higher grade even than that. Sure enough, top notch ash has been used and the guitar's weight, while not as feather-light as some Strats of yore, is comfortable yet solid-feeling – just like all Stratocasters, it hangs from a strap like a fifth limb as though you were born with it. Plush is low-build lugger over a bright metallic paint that Fender call frost gold. It's a vibrant, yellowy gold that shows off those sexy, 47-year-old contours to perfect advantage. It's just as flawless as it should be and contrasts beautifully with the other hues, like the dappled fawn maple neck, the almost white scratchplate and pickup covers, and – surprisingly perhaps – the chrome of the hardware (which includes Fender's two-point floating

by the scratchplate, at the end of the neck. Unanimously voted the best Strat neck we've ever played, the hand-rolled edges of the maple fingerboard and a tack-free finish make this a player's dream. Although the frets are only medium weight and the strings a quite hefty-feeling 10-gauge, this is a great guitar to get to grips with. It fights back, but in a musically challenging way, making you think about your playing, rather than running away with you like some eighteen-wheeler machine. The Vintage Noiseless pickups are the company's own take on the authentic-sounding but noise-inhibiting, stacked humbucking single-coil-size units as pioneered by DiMarzio and Kimmon – the Aussie brand preferred by Hank Marvin. They're easily recognisable by the Cadillac-style gold script logo on each plastic cover. These pickups are designed by Bill Turner (brother of EMO Pickups' boss Rob) who's now heavily involved in Fender's pickup development. They're the result of

NICK'S LOST GUITAR LOCATED

I'm responding to your request for assistance on behalf of Nick Farren, as featured in last issue's Feedback. The review of Nick's guitar appears in *Guitarist* September 2001 issue 214 [see above]. This seems to be the first copy of *Guitarist* I bought, so I don't have the earlier copy with the double-page photo.

Well done for continuing to produce the magazine – your efforts are appreciated.

Paul Harris, via email

Who needs Google when you have *Guitarist* readers to help? Many thanks, Paul, you're a gent to look it up for Nick. Thanks also to reader Keith Alderton who also sent in the right answer. Want a job in the *Guitarist* archive, guys?

DID JOHNSON DIE OF RARE SYNDROME?

Thank you for your fascinating article on Annye Anderson's new book, *Brother Robert: Growing Up With Robert Johnson* (Hachette Books). Amazing to think, aged 93, she carries her own personal memories of Robert Johnson. In 2006, Eric Clapton caught my attention when he was recounting how challenging it was recreating Robert Johnson's music for his *Me And Mr Johnson* album. I wondered then if Robert had some advantage that made him so unnaturally gifted. Some clues fell into place – his long slender fingers, his bad eye and the events of his death – led me to wonder if he suffered from Marfan syndrome, an inherited defect in connective tissue formation in the body. Sufferers are usually tall, have abnormally long slender limbs and fingers, heart defects and eye lens dislocation. I must now revisit the evidence; Annye Anderson's book will be at the top of my list. I suspect finger-popping will take on more significance!

David G Connell (GP), via email

Thanks David for this fascinating insight from the world of professional medicine. It seems that Marfan syndrome was first identified by French paediatrician Antoine Marfan in 1896. Despite being a known condition by Johnson's time, the tragic truth is that, as an itinerant black musician, his chances of being diagnosed in the Deep South of the 30s were probably near zero. And when a certain cause is unknown, myth fills the gap – 'poisoned by a jealous lover' is just the kind of story that folklore thrives on. But perhaps we may be doing Johnson's memory a sad disservice if, as you compellingly argue, he may have actually died of this serious inherited disease.

Reader Paul Harris's old issue of *Guitarist* reveals the answer to another reader question

REQUESTS...

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

Here's a features idea for *Guitarist*: the guitar playing of Elvis Presley! How good was he? Better than people think, or not?
Victor Lewis, via email

That's an interesting idea, Victor – while Elvis himself was probably more of a workmanlike guitar player rather than a great one, the line-ups of his band featured some of the greatest players from Scotty Moore to James Burton. Sidemen and session pros are a fascinating subject in themselves – worthy of a series of features – but if we even talk to any of Elvis's former band members we'll certainly ask about the King's abilities with a pick, too.

BANDING TOGETHER

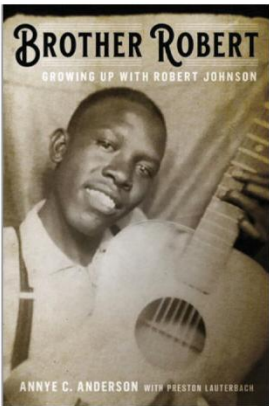
Hello! I'm 11 and I play guitar, and I was wondering if you had any ideas on how to form a band with friends my age. I play lead guitar, but the rest of it is uncertain. I have a friend who is going to play guitar – rhythm guitar would be ideal – and another friend was going to be the drummer, but he's refused, so I asked him to be the bassist, but he hasn't got back to me on that yet...

Do you have any advice on how to get a band together, and keep it that way with regular rehearsals, etc? I would appreciate it if you did, as it would be awesome to have an actual band for the first time.

Rufus King, via email

Congratulations on taking up guitar, Rufus – starting early will serve you well. I wish we could tell you the secret to keeping bands together, but the truth is even the biggest acts don't have the answer – just ask Fleetwood Mac. Musicians are creative but also diverse in character; this means even when the music's going well, things can still fall apart. We urge you to recognise that it's part of the nature of bands to change and occasionally fall apart over time. Persevere, ask around and try to find other young musicians who are into the same music. Each member's ideas and preferences should also be listened to and respected if you want them to stay.

When you're older and using rehearsal rooms, they usually have a message board where you can leave a note to recruit new members, and check out online groups to recruit local musicians, too. Once you find the magic combination you'll be amazed how much fun it is to play together. Good luck!



Thanks to reader David Connell who points out Robert Johnson may have suffered from Marfan Syndrome

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



THE MOUNTAIN KING

On the 23 December last year the music world lost Leslie West, a guitar giant whose touch and tone went on to influence a generation of players. Here, his friend and fellow guitarist Martin Barre remembers their first meeting and subsequent friendship

Interview by David Mead

LESLIE WEST

1945-2020



“Jethro Tull would do lots of tours of America and I think it was 1970 that we were touring the States and Mountain was our support

band. Up to then bands were very competitive in an offhand way and not particularly friendly. It was all about blowing the other bands off stage. But Mountain was the first band that we became really good friends with. They were just so different and the great thing about them was they just loved what they were doing. They enjoyed playing so much that nothing else mattered. All the rock star idiosyncrasies didn't seem to enter their world at all. I used to sit backstage and watch them every night; never missed a night when they played with us. They were just so inspirational as a band, the way they interacted with



Leslie West on stage with Joe Satriani in California, 2008

Photo by Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

“His sound was awe-inspiring; it was incredible. Better than anything at all that was happening in rock music at the time” MARTIN BARRE

each other on stage. It was just a pleasure to see and I always think that I learned more from that than I did from the notes that Leslie was playing. His approach to music and his approach to being in a band was the real centre of all that inspiration.

“Quite a few people wanted a Les Paul Junior because of Leslie. I think Mick Ralphs was another player who was very impressed by Leslie in many ways. His sound was awe-inspiring; it was incredible. Better than anything at all that was happening in rock music at the time. It was clean but beautifully overdriven with a glorious tone. I love Les Paul Juniors, and Leslie and I spent a lot of time together just talking about guitars, playing and jamming backstage and, of course, I got to borrow his guitar and I fell in love with the instrument. Very shortly afterwards I bought one for myself, which became the *Aqualung* guitar. I used it throughout the album.

“Leslie was a very funny guy. They were our support band at Red Rocks [in Colorado] and I bought this little Fender Champ and he wanted to have a go on

it, and everywhere he went his roadie came with him, I have no idea why. So he came in the room and he had this yellow duster, which he placed in the middle of the dressing room floor next to the amp and then he stood on it and his roadie handed him his guitar and he plugged in. This huge figure – larger than life – standing on a yellow duster, playing through this little amp. I said, ‘Leslie, why are you doing that?’ and he said, ‘It stops you getting electric shocks.’ I don’t think so... But I can picture it as if it was yesterday. It was hilarious.

“He told me a funny story about when he was on another tour when they were travelling on a regular bus and not a tour bus. They were completely wiped out and tired and it was midnight and they stopped at a gas station to use the toilet and grab a sandwich. He said he was half asleep and got back on the bus about 10 minutes later and immediately fell asleep. They were on their way to Texas, but he woke up the next morning in Florida and, looking around him, he was with a load of pensioners. He’d got on the wrong bus.

“I was set up on a Howard Stern interview by Leslie once. I’d been running marathons back in those days and I was as thin as a rake and Leslie phoned in pretending to be a doctor who was concerned that I wasn’t going to make it because I was a bag of bones. This was live on *The Howard Stern Show* and in the end Leslie said, ‘Hey Martin, it’s me!’

“We sort of kept in touch over the years. He came over to London once and I had this little mews house in Putney. I set little amps up in the spare bedroom, which was probably about 10ft square, and he came in, again with his roadie, and the three of us sat in this bedroom and we jammed for three or four hours. I have the cassette somewhere. I can’t imagine how we came up with the ideas, but it was a wonderful occasion. We met a lot at gigs and festivals and it was always wonderful to have him around again.

“He was a nice person and that’s the primary image – not behind all that music but in front of it. Great playing, power and presence, but first of all he was such a nice person to be around and he had a great sense of humour. He was my friend and that is my enduring memory. He was one of the few very, very best friends that I made, particularly in the music business. I miss him as a person very much.” **G**



R I V A L S

1954-1960

The 1950s battle between Fender and Gibson to design the perfect solidbody electric guitar created two contrasting icons: the Strat and the Les Paul. Here we retrace the history of that clash of titans

Words Rod Brakes Photography Olly Curtis

Ubiquitous among guitar heroes for generations, Stratocasters and Sunburst Les Pauls are icons of popular culture in their own right. They're considered by countless guitar builders to be templates of perfection and have therefore become the world's most imitated electric solidbodies. And while music technology relentlessly pushes forward in the digital age, time and again we return to the familiar comforts of these trusty old mid-20th century designs. When it comes down to the practicalities of making music, many guitarists would argue there is nothing more essential than a Strat or a Les Paul, although star quality and vintage appeal are often what initially piques an interest in these seemingly timeless instruments.

"Sunburst Les Pauls are still our most popular models today," reveals Gibson's head of product development, Mat Koehler. "Demand has not ceased since the 1970s. Its resurgence in popularity in the

1970s was directly tied to the famous musicians using them. We are still riding that wave today." It's a sentiment also expressed by vintage guitar collector Andrew Raymond, whose 1954 Strat and 1960 'Burst featured here are currently on sale at Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath. "I first got interested in 'Bursts in the mid-70s," he recalls. "I really wanted a '57 Goldtop like Steve Hackett's. That's what sparked off my interest, along with Jimmy Page who played a '59."

According to *Fender: The Golden Age 1946-1970*, the Strat is "inarguably the most important electric guitar in history... a true design classic and a 20th-century icon", and as co-author Martin Kelly points out to us, "a Stratocaster is what many people imagine when they think of an electric guitar, and Jimi Hendrix's patronage didn't do that notion any harm. Certainly, people tend to reference him as 'the greatest guitarist of all time'. It's become an icon because, for many people, it sums up everything an electric guitar should be."

Guitarist would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for supplying the stunning 1954 Fender Stratocaster and 1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard shown in this feature
www.vintageandrareguitars.com



FIRST GEAR

With one of the earliest known Stratocasters and an original Holy Grail '59-spec 1960 'Burst to hand, Guitarist chats with three vintage guitar experts about the enduring allure of these iconic models



Mat Koehler
HEAD OF PRODUCT
DEVELOPMENT, GIBSON



Andrew Raymond
VINTAGE GUITAR COLLECTOR



Martin Kelly
CO-AUTHOR OF FENDER:
THE GOLDEN AGE 1946-1970

“I bought this 'Burst about 10 years ago,” Andrew, a bona fide 'Burst aficionado, says of this guitar, one of several he has had the pleasure of owning over the years. “I think 'Bursts are in a different category in terms of craftsmanship and how well they're made,” he continues. “This one is currently valued at £285,000, but I remember back in 1975 you could buy a 'Burst for £500. Goldtops were about £350 and an early 60s Strat was about £150. By the early 80s, a reasonable quality 'Burst was about £2,000 and in the late 80s I was offered a '59 for £5,000.

“The big jump in price came from about 1990 onwards, up until the early 00s. When I first started collecting in the early 90s, there was hardly any information around. I barely knew where to start. I think the internet really kicked it off because before that all you had was word of mouth between collectors and dealers, along with a few books.

“I got into collecting 'Bursts from listening to Gary Moore,” Andrew explains. “He brought two blues albums out in the early 90s – *Still Got The Blues* and *After Hours* – and they seemed to provoke an interest in Les Pauls. Around that time, Gibson started to make good-quality reissues and that also helped get the whole 'Burst thing going.

“Although it's a 1960, it's an early one with the same specs typically associated with a '59. I've had a couple of later 1960 'Bursts – cool guitars, but they're not the same. They could almost be made by a different manufacturer. They're not like '59s at all. For a start, they changed the [red] pigment so it didn't fade, and the necks are completely different. The typical '60 necks are much thinner and don't feel as nice to me. The pickups in a '60 still sound great – it's just they don't play like a '59.”

“In 1960, the most extreme changes happened over a period of a few months,” Gibson's Mat Koehler tells us. “These included bright 'colourfast' Cherry Sunburst tops that did not fade in sunlight, super-thin neck profiles, and the newly introduced reflector-insert knobs. The [Kluson Deluxe] tuners gained a ring of plastic, and the capacitors went from the bumblebee paper-in-oil variety to black foil. But not everything happened at once, and those were portfolio-wide changes more than they were specific to the Les Paul Standard model. When Gibson formally introduced their sunburst Les Paul to the world, only then was it called the Les Paul Standard. Before that, it was known as just the Les Paul or internally the Les Paul Regular. So, technically, a Les Paul Standard is always a Sunburst, not a Goldtop.”

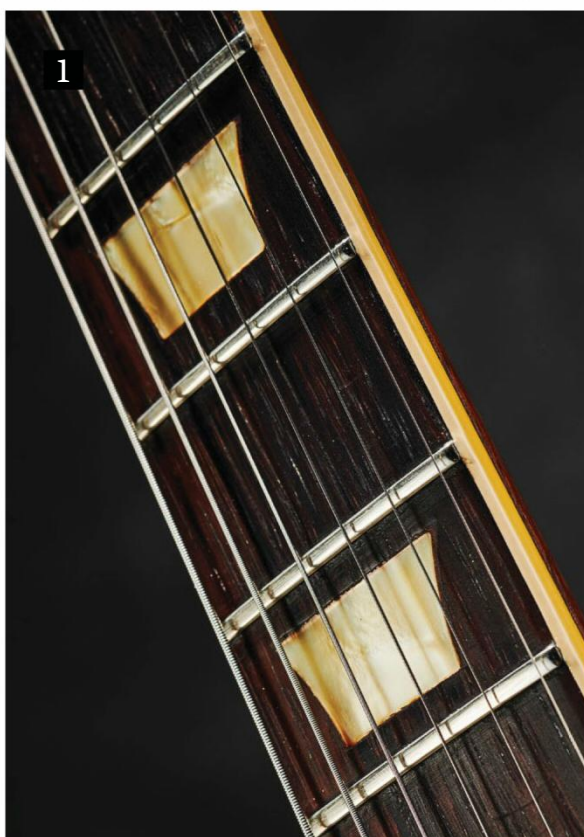
“KEITH RICHARDS AND THEN MIKE BLOOMFIELD WERE PROBABLY MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR TURNING OTHERS ON TO THE MYSTIQUE [OF THE 'BURST]. THE SOUND WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME” **MAT KOEHLER**

Sales of Gibson's debut solidbody – the Les Paul Model/Goldtop – peaked in the first two years of production, with about 1,700 and 2,250 guitars shipped in '52 and '53 respectively. In '54, however, sales dipped sharply to around 1,500. '55 and '56 proved even less fruitful as annual sales fell well below 1,000, and '57 was the Goldtop's poorest year with figures at approximately a quarter of their 1953 zenith. When the 'Burst was introduced in '58, its new Cherry Sunburst finish did little to rescue the situation, with an all-time low of 434 guitars registered shipped that year, followed

1. The 22-fret trapezoid-inlay fretboards were originally unbound; single binding became standard in 1952. Jumbo frets were introduced in '59

2. Single-piece mahogany neck and rear of headstock showing Kluson Deluxe tuners with 'keystone' buttons

3. Individual pickup controls consist of four Centralab 500K audio taper pots and two Sprague 'bumblebee' tone capacitors

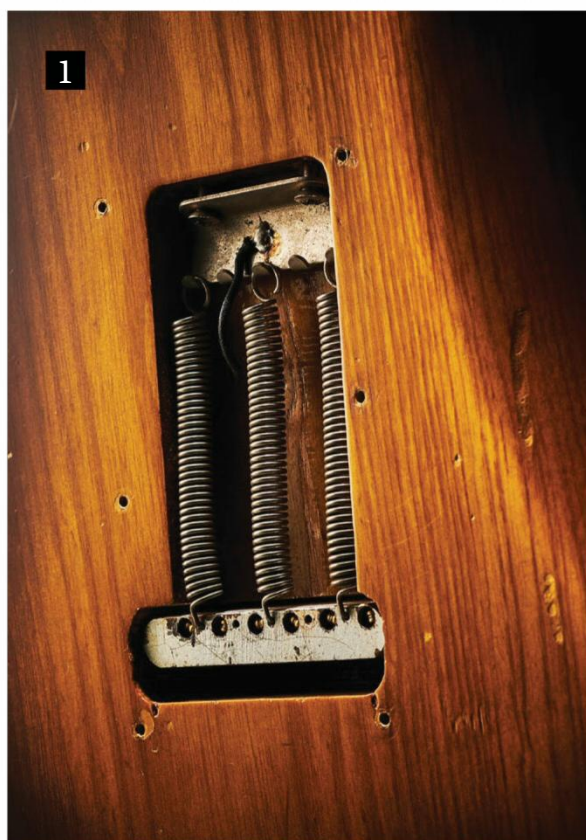


4. Gold 'bonnet' knobs were used up until 1960 when the metal-capped 'reflector' type was introduced

5. One-piece mahogany body with single-bound two-piece carved flamed maple top. The red aniline dye used in the first Cherry Sunburst finishes was especially prone to fading with UV exposure

6. Nickel-plated hardware includes adjustable ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece and PAF humbucker pickup covers





1. Unlike Paul Bigsby's large vibrato units, Leo Fender's Synchronized Tremolo was designed from the bottom up and tucked away inside the Stratocaster's body. Up to five tension springs can be installed

2. The Strat's single-piece hard rock-maple neck and rear of headstock showing 'no line' Kluson Deluxe tuners. In late 1965, the headstock shape was altered to a wider Jaguar/Jazzmaster-style design

3. As per the Strat's headstock decals, a "comfort contoured" body and "Synchronized Tremolo Action" were big selling points for Fender's futuristic new guitar ("with Synchronized Tremolo" was simply clipped off the decal on hardtail variants)

by 643 in '59. The plug was eventually pulled during 1960 in tandem with the introduction of the SG-style Les Paul Standard, and only 635 single-cutaway guitars made it out of the factory. Considering SG sales immediately rekindled Gibson's earlier solidbody success (much like the Goldtop's inaugural year of '52, around 1,700 Standards were shipped in 1961), the 'Burst was naturally considered to be a failure. At the time, who could have predicted its phoenix-like rise to become Gibson's most popular model ever?

"The shot heard round the world was probably Keith Richards playing his 'Burst on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964," highlights Mat. "George Benson actually had one and he was using it for shows before that, but Keef and then Mike Bloomfield were probably most responsible for turning others on to the mystique. The sound was obviously ahead of its time because it was adopted by guitarists playing loud rock music not long after it was discontinued. At the time it was released, its tonal characteristics like sustain and feedback-suppressing design were not as important to the average player.

"I would argue that Les Paul was the first to popularise the solidbody sound, but Paul Bigsby was the first to create a modern interpretation that laid the groundwork for Leo Fender to capitalise on with an easily reproduced model. Les told it a little differently, saying that Leo was asking him questions about his 'Log' guitar and that he was familiar with Paul Bigsby, too. I don't think it's a stretch to say the three knew each other, but how that affected the development of the modern solidbody guitar is still up for debate. Gibson was going to trade shows and associating with dealers globally, so I'm sure they were very aware of Fender's Broadcaster coming on the scene in 1950. I believe that is what prompted Gibson to re-explore the viability of a solidbody model. The Les Paul Model as we know it today was very clearly an original Gibson design."

"I think Leo Fender approached building solidbody electrics from a completely different place," agrees Martin. "Gibson were coming at it from a traditional standpoint; they were making a guitar the way they'd always made a guitar, just now it had a solid body. We

know Leo isn't the originator of the solidbody, but he was the first to mass-produce one. He made Gibson realise they had to get in on the act, but they were two different schools of thought. The Les Paul is still a very traditional guitar, whereas Leo Fender almost started from scratch. He showed everyone the future – how things will be. The changes that occurred on a Strat were cosmetic; they're not because of design flaws. I don't think they were trying to compete just with Gibson when they went to using rosewood 'boards – they were competing with all the other manufacturers that also used rosewood 'boards.

"THE LES PAUL IS STILL A VERY TRADITIONAL GUITAR, WHEREAS LEO FENDER ALMOST STARTED FROM SCRATCH [WITH THE STRAT]. HE SHOWED EVERYONE THE FUTURE – HOW THINGS WILL BE" **MARTIN KELLY**

"The real evolution is from Leo's [K&F/Fender] lap steels, but then Leo didn't invent the lap steel, he just took a logical approach. He was probably thinking, 'Why don't I make a guitar like that?' Leo didn't need the 'Log' to copy, but I think he definitely borrowed aspects of the Stratocaster design from Paul Bigsby, particularly the headstock. And Bigsby had already developed a vibrato before the Strat came out. I don't think Leo ever denied he was influenced by Bigsby; the Strat naturally comes out of their connection. Also, I know that [Leo's business partner] Don Randall was requesting a new model with three pickups and a vibrato. There's a direct ask from Don for something new in the market and they envisage it with three pickups – partly because Gibson had a three-pickup model [the ES-5] – and I think the Strat is Leo's response."

As per Leo's response, one of the first Stratocasters to see the light of day is this incredible ex-John Entwistle guitar dated to April 1954 and featuring the serial number 0146. "The first production Strat [also from April 1954] has the serial number 0100," points out Martin, "so 0146 is definitely an early example." **G**

4. The Strat's original white single-layer eight-hole pickguard was replaced in 1959 by a three-ply (w/b/w) 11-hole celluloid type, although from 1965 a more stable plastic was used due to excessive discolouration, cracking and shrinkage

5. Originally finished with a two-tone sunburst consisting of yellow and dark brown, an additional layer of red was introduced in 1958, although the pigment was prone to fading (much like 'Bursts at the time)

6. Ash bodies tend to have a pronounced grain figuring and were used until mid-1956 when Fender switched to alder (with the exception of transparent blonde finishes)



DECADE OF EVOLUTION

How the Fender Stratocaster and Gibson Les Paul Model/Standard evolved during their first 10 years in production

FENDER STRATOCASTER

- '54** Ash body; two-tone sunburst; white single-ply pickguard; polystyrene plastic parts; round string tree
- '55** Sharper headstock edges; chunky neck profile retained; c.450 shipped (c.70% increase on 1954)
- '56** Alder body (excluding blonde); butterfly string tree; V-profile neck; single-line Kluson Deluxe tuners
- '57** Transition to ABS plastic parts; V-profile neck
- '58** Three-tone sunburst; slimmer neck profile
- '59** 'Slab' (flat base) rosewood fingerboard; three-ply (w/b/w) celluloid pickguard
- '60** Fade-resistant red/bolder three-tone sunburst
- '61** Headstock patent numbers; thicker modern-style C-profile neck
- '62** Veneer rosewood fingerboard; stamped neck date/code (was pencilled); paint stick mark
- '63** L-series serial numbers (some from previous year); pickguard screw adjacent to middle pickup



GIBSON LES PAUL MODEL/STANDARD

- '52** Released as Les Paul Model; gold finish; bar bridge/trapeze tailpiece; dual cream soapbar P-90s
- '53** 'Stud' bar bridge/tailpiece; most shipped (c.2,250)
- '54** Shallow neck angle deepened for improved playability
- '55** Adjustable ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece
- '56** Sprague 'bumblebee' capacitors replace 'grey tiger' Cornell Dubilier type
- '57** Dual PAF humbuckers; some with black pickguard, pickup surrounds and switch ring
- '58** Cherry Sunburst finish (renamed Les Paul Standard); full neck profile; least shipped (c.435)
- '59** Jumbo fretwire; slimmer/slightly V-shaped neck profile; white pickup bobbins; c.645 shipped
- '60** Fade-resistant finish; slim neck profile; double-ring Kluson Deluxe tuners; 'reflector' knobs; c.635 shipped
- Late '60** Thin, double Florentine cutaway SG-style body (renamed SG Standard in 1963)



JOHNNY A.

The Gibson signature artist talks 'Bursts and reveals why he has recently fallen back in love with the Stratocaster



Right now, Johnny A. is in the beginning stages of recording a new instrumental guitar album in the style of his career-defining solo debut, 1999's *Sometime Tuesday Morning*. "Think Hank Marvin meets The Beatles with my own spin on it," Johnny tells us. "You know – instrumental Beatles songs with some really nice, pure guitar tones and ambiances. I've been playing Gibsons almost religiously since the beginning of my solo career in 1999, so over 20 years, but I've decided to go for a Stratocaster with this project. I was listening to *Revolver* and Hank Marvin, and thought it was maybe time for me to break my own mould a little bit. I was searching for something that would inspire me and make me respond in a different way."

With both Gibson and Epiphone signature models to his name, Johnny A. is far less renowned for playing Fender guitars, despite having used them extensively in the past. "Before my solo thing, I played Stratocasters all the time, particularly with Peter Wolf and Bobby Whitlock," he recalls. "I had four old Strats – a 1963, '64, '65 and '66 – so I'm quite familiar with them. Interestingly, however, I didn't have a good Stratocaster for a long time, until I ran into Chris Fleming from the Fender Custom Shop recently. He told me he had one of my signature Epiphones and I said, 'That's funny, I've been jonesing for a good Stratocaster lately.' He said, 'Well, let me make one for you!'

Gibson guitars have dominated Johnny A.'s sound for over two decades, but his next record is set to change that with the introduction of a Strat: "Think Hank Marvin meets The Beatles with my own spin on it," he says

Before long, Johnny was firmly reacquainted with the sound and feel of a good Strat, courtesy of the Fender Custom Shop. "Chris made me two Strats – a Sonic Blue one and a Lake Placid Blue one," he continues. "They have deeper body contours, like a '65 I used to own. I called it a 'blade' body because the rib contour was so deep and the edge was so thin. My new Strats have got a thin laminated rosewood 'board like a '65 but with a '63 neck profile. They're all stock hardware, but the wiring schematic is a little bit different. I had a special set of '56-style low-output pickups fitted, and Chris put a plate underneath the bridge pickup, like a Telecaster, to get a beefier sound out of it."

"All bias aside, I think the Fender Stratocaster is probably the best electric guitar ever designed. It's extremely versatile in terms of sound and I love everything about it ergonomically: the way it contours with your body; the neck position and upper-fret access; the location of the volume control; how the switch is at a perfect angle and follows the sweep of your hand; the way the tremolo reacts. I think Leo got it right."

"Having said that, an original 'Burst – or a vintage-style Les Paul – is a guitar that Gibson also got right. It's maybe not as comfortable to play as a Stratocaster, just because it's got the 90-degree angle on the back and no body contours, but by virtue of the 24 3/4-inch scale length and neck set it

"ALL BIAS ASIDE, I THINK THE FENDER STRATOCASTER IS PROBABLY THE BEST ELECTRIC GUITAR EVER DESIGNED. IT'S EXTREMELY VERSATILE IN TERMS OF SOUND AND I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT IT ERGONOMICALLY"



is an extremely comfortable guitar to play when the weight is balanced nicely. What Gibson are doing now is incredible. In fact, one of my new Les Pauls is the lightest I've ever come across: 7.25lb! And it's non-chambered. I love it. I love light guitars because it feels more like it's an extension of me."

"I own about a dozen Les Pauls and I think the new Anniversary 'Bursts Gibson are making in the Custom Shop are fucking amazing. The pickups and the way they're wiring them, along with the pots and caps, make them react like 50s Les Pauls. I recently got two '59 60th Anniversary 'Bursts and they clean up unbelievably good. If you turn the volume and tone down to like 3.5, they're crystal clear – really beautiful and airy – which means you can do so much more with them if you've got a good amp."

"There's a song on my first album called *Tex Critter* and people always ask me if I'm playing a Tele on that, but it's a Les Paul. They're definitely more versatile than people think, especially if you make good use of the volume and tone controls. After Jimmy Page, the Les Paul became the iconic rock guitar, but if you think about Gibson and Les Paul in the early days, or listen to some of the early stuff, it was pure, clear Gibson tone. When the British blues guys came along in the 60s, it turned into something else, but the Les Paul is quite capable of getting beautiful jazz and country tones."

"If I had to pick two desert island guitars, it would be a 'Burst and a Stratocaster – along with the Gibson Johnny A. of course!"

INNES SIBUN

The British blues rocker and Stratocaster devotee recounts his conversion to the Les Paul Standard



Innes Sibun had never even owned a Les Paul until he suddenly needed to fill one of the biggest pairs of shoes in rock history. “When I got the gig with Robert Plant back in 1993, I needed a Les Paul to play the Led Zeppelin stuff and was fortunate enough to be given one by Gibson,” he tells us. “The Gibson people in London gave me a sunburst Standard, which was a really lovely guitar. And when we went to America, I got a guided tour of the Gibson factory in Nashville, which was really lucky. I’d always been a Strat player before that, but since then I’ve had quite a few Les Pauls over the years. The Les Paul I have now is about 20 years old – just a stock Standard modded with Bare Knuckle Abraxas humbuckers.”

Although Innes previously favoured Strats, he soon found the tone of a Les Paul to be exactly what was needed to fill stadiums with the sound of Led Zeppelin classics while he was on tour with Robert Plant. “When I was learning the Zep songs, I found the Les Paul made me play a bit more aggressively,” he recalls. “It was just naturally more aggressive sounding – a bit like Eric Clapton’s playing on the ‘Beano’ album with the Les Paul through the cranked Marshall. Some of that playing is so fiery. People do play like that on Strats, but I don’t think the Strat is aggressive in the same way, especially when it comes to the bridge pickup. Also, I know you can get good sustain on a

Innes put down his Stratocaster in favour of a Les Paul when he got the gig with Robert Plant in 1993, but still appreciates the unmatched versatility of Fender’s Strat

Strat, but I think you can get a creamier sustain with Les Pauls. I love that really creamy Carlos Santana neck pickup sound.

“Personally, I think a Les Paul is a lot easier to play because of the scale length,” continues Innes. “It’s all down to individual guitars, but the two definitely make you think differently. When I pick up a Les Paul, I go more for the big, fat A powerchord stuff, whereas when I pick a Strat, it feels a bit more genteel. Sometimes I find I need to dig in and fight a bit more with a Strat, but that’s often a good thing. The Strat is a lot more versatile and there are things you can do more easily. Like the volume and tone knobs are much closer to hand, so it’s not as tricky to do volume swells and wah-wah effects. I learned that from listening to Rory Gallagher, and I learned about the behind-the-nut bends from him, too. Jimmy did that on *Dazed And Confused*, but you can’t get as much of a bend on a Les Paul.

“I find there’s a broader palette of sound with a Strat – a wider spectrum of tone. There’s the three pickups, obviously, but also when you use the volume and tone controls you can get anything from a nice jazz sound on the neck to crystal clear treble on the bridge. Also, I think a Strat is better for chordal playing. You’ve got that clearer sound because of the single coils. If I’m recording something and I want a clean tone, I’m much more likely to use a Strat. And then there’s the out-of-

“I THINK CLAPTON IS PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR GIBSON SELLING SO MANY LES PAULS. A BIT LIKE HOW HENDRIX MADE EVERYONE WANT A STRAT. HE WAS A MASSIVE INFLUENCE ON MY PLAYING, AS WAS RORY GALLAGHER”

phase sounds, which are pretty unique. Clapton used those tones on a Strat, but I much prefer the sounds he got from the Les Paul when he was playing with John Mayall in the early days. He was just on fire! The way he played it just sounded so angry. I’ve worked with [‘Beano’ album producer] Mike Vernon and he said everyone wanted a Les Paul after Clapton did the ‘Beano’ album.

“I think Clapton is partly responsible for Gibson selling so many Les Pauls. A bit like how Hendrix made everyone want a Strat. He was a massive influence on my playing, as was Rory Gallagher, and I love John Frusciante’s playing – he’s a brilliantly creative Strat player. It’s funny how people often identify with one guitar or the other, but Clapton and Jeff Beck both later gravitated towards Strats. People immediately identify Peter Green with a ‘Burst and, to me, it’s difficult to find a better example than the tone he got out of a Les Paul. But he told me it wasn’t the guitar for him. The closest thing I saw him playing was an Epiphone 335 at Moles [club in Bath].

“A 50s Strat or Les Paul is the Holy Grail. They’re definitely my two desert island guitars. It sometimes pains me to see things like robot tuners and luminous green finishes on those models – it’s like putting a moustache on the Mona Lisa. I’m such an old duffer, I’m like, ‘Don’t fuck with it!’ [laughs]. It’s amazing how right they got it back in the 50s. Those designs were so groundbreaking and they’ve never been bettered. They really are perfection.” **G**



ORIGINAL INTENT

A closer look at the original prices and specs of Les Pauls and Strats against today's offerings

While original vintage instruments continue to rise in price, our choice of quality budget guitars just keeps on getting better. And as this gulf continues to widen, many of us can't help but notice our opinions about the worth of guitars are also becoming polarised. Be it a £110 Harley Benton S-type or a £110,000 '54 Strat (such as the one featured in this article), we'd hedge our bets and say you could probably get a decent tune out of either. Which begs the question: what is a guitar worth? Well, from a collector's point of view the 1960 Les Paul Standard in this feature is worth £285,000, while, as mentioned, the 1954 Stratocaster commands £110,000. Originally, however, not only were Les Pauls cheaper than the upstart Strat, but when you adjust for 70 years of inflation, you discover that they also cost broadly the same as US Strats and Les Pauls cost now...

WHAT 50S STRATS AND LES PAULS COST NEW

YEAR	MODEL	ORIGINAL COST (\$)*	TODAY'S EQUIVALENT (£)**
1952	LES PAUL MODEL	\$210	£1,500
1954	LES PAUL MODEL	\$225	£1,600
1954	STRATOCASTER	\$249.50	£1,750
1956	LES PAUL MODEL	\$235	£1,700
1957	STRATOCASTER	\$274.50	£1,900
1959	LES PAUL STANDARD	\$265	£1,750
1961	LES PAUL STANDARD	\$265	£1,700
1961	STRATOCASTER	\$289.50	£1,850

*Prices based on Les Pauls and vibrato-equipped sunburst Stratocasters without cases **Today's equivalent price in £s approximate (calculated using original price lists, US Bureau of Labor Statistics' online inflation calculator and xe.com exchange rate calculator)

REGULAR CUSTOMERS *A look at Fender and Gibson's current regular production 50s-style classics*

FENDER AMERICAN ORIGINAL 50S STRATOCASTER £1,699

Choice 50s Strat specs with a wider radius, five-way switch and bridge tone control



- HEADSTOCK:** Decals: 'Spaghetti' Fender logo, 'Stratocaster... With Synchronized Tremolo', and 'Original Contour Body'; single butterfly string tree
- HARDWARE:** Pure Vintage six-saddle Synchronized Tremolo and single-line Kluson Deluxe-style Fender tuners
- NECK:** One-piece maple; soft V-profile; 25½-inch scale length; 21 frets; black dot inlays; 9½-inch fretboard radius; bone nut; vintage-style truss rod; nitrocellulose finish
- BODY:** Alder with two-tone sunburst or Inca Silver and ash with White Blonde nitrocellulose finishes
- PLASTICS:** 'Eggshell'-coloured plastics parts including eight-hole/single-ply pickguard
- PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS:** Three Pure Vintage '59 Single-Coil Strat pickups; five-way selector switch; master volume control; separate neck and bridge/middle pickup tone controls

GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION LES PAUL STANDARD 50s £2,199

No weight relief or PCBs here as Gibson returns to its source of inspiration again



- HEADSTOCK:** Gibson logo inlay; 'Les Paul Model' gold silkscreen; 'Standard' engraved on truss rod cover
- HARDWARE:** Nickel-plated: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge; aluminium stop bar; Kluson Deluxe-style tuners
- NECK:** Mahogany; full, rounded 'Vintage 50s' profile; 24¾-inch scale length; bound rosewood fretboard with acrylic trapezoid inlays; 22 'medium jumbo' frets; 12-inch fretboard radius; Graph Tech nut
- BODY:** Mahogany (not weight-relieved); single-bound figured maple top; Tobacco Burst, Heritage Cherry Sunburst (pictured) or Gold Top nitrocellulose finish
- PLASTICS:** Two-ply (b/w) bell truss rod cover; white keystone tuner buttons; cream pickguard, pickup surrounds, jack plate and switch ring; amber switch tip; gold bonnet knobs; black control cavity covers
- PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS:** No PCB; Burstbucker 1 and Burstbucker 2 Alnico 2 humbuckers; three-way selector switch; audio taper pots; individual tone and volume controls hand-wired with 'orange drop' tone capacitors



1957 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Veteran vintage guitar dealer David Davidson of Davidson's Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York, explains why Fender got it right in the 50s



“When I was a kid, my first feeling of ‘I really need to own one of those guitars!’ was when I looked at a photo of a Stratocaster. It was sexy and curvy, and the itch was beyond control. I thought, ‘That’s what I want to hold.’ Fender just hit it out of the park when they made the first Strat. Sonically, I’ve always liked ’54 and ’55 Strats the most. I love the sound of ash-body Strats and I’ve found the heavier, thicker necks provide more sustain. For some guys, like Eric Johnson, ’54 is the year. One good thing about vintage guitars is that they’re all snowflakes – each one is special and different. You have to find the one that scratches the itch, man! It’s all about the quest.

“Even though the ’54 Strat is a wonderful instrument out of the box, things are a little more refined a few years down the line in ’57. It’s a bit like the Tele: by the time you get to ’53, it’s more refined and consistent. There are three Stratocaster years that seem to always stick out: ’54 (because it’s the first year), ’57 and ’62. I love the ’57 V-neck. Fender used ’57 as their flagship maple-neck reissue Strat in the early 80s, alongside the reissue rosewood-’board ’62. They weren’t perfect, but the ’57 and ’62 reissues were far superior to the regular Stratocasters they were making at the time. They were the foundation of what kept Fender in business.

“’57 Strats represent a perfect storm. By then, Fender had started to phase out the Bakelite parts and they had switched to using alder [from mid-’56], which was cheaper, more plentiful and lighter. ’57 sunbursts have one of the sweeter looks. There’s a beautiful burnt amber tone to them that I like. If they needed to cover something up, they might blow a little more around the edge, but by then Fender had gotten to a point where they were able to get the lacquer really thin. If you look at a ’54, the paint is thicker on the body and neck. Also, the ’54 neck profile is fuller with more of a U shape, which was a bit of a hindrance for some players.

“I’ve seen V-necks as early as ’55, albeit with a subtler, softer V, but by late ’56 they really started getting that harder V-neck shape into play. The V neck tended to be very pronounced in early 1957, and by late 1957 they had changed to the more standard C shape you see on a ’58. A lot of people really love the ’56/’57 V neck because you can place your thumb below or above it – it gives you that centre point for hand positioning that a lot of pros really like. The maple V neck is something that really stuck for Clapton, as per his famed guitars

Brownie and Blackie. When an artist is using a tool, they might want to make that tool their own, and he really did like the feel of a V neck.

“The Stratocaster has a great woody tone, especially that neck pickup. Due to the Strat’s design, you can find those sweet in-between spots and get an out-of-phase tone. Clapton popularised that sound early on – that’s why everyone rushed to get five-way switches installed – and then Fender themselves eventually changed the switch [in 1977]. In the early days, Fender would give guitars to local musicians to play and give feedback on directly. It was a case of, ‘What would you change? Is the neck too big or too small? Is the belly cut deep enough? Is the arm cut deep enough?’ Back then, Fender were always looking for improvements.

“There was fierce competition between Gibson and Fender. Unfortunately, Gibsons were sometimes seen as old man’s guitars, while Fenders were seen as toys, and that was probably something Leo Fender didn’t like. He was constantly tinkering, so he fancied the guitars up while trying to get the perfect look. I believe Leo thought a three-tone sunburst would be fancy – like putting

“EVEN THOUGH THE ’54 STRAT IS A WONDERFUL INSTRUMENT OUT OF THE BOX, THINGS ARE A LITTLE MORE REFINED A FEW YEARS DOWN THE LINE IN ’57... ’57 STRATS REPRESENT A PERFECT STORM”

binding on Custom Esquire and Tele bodies, or on Jaguar and Jazzmaster necks later on – but a lot things went wrong with the finish when they went to the three-tone sunburst in ’58. I think they had it right in ’57.

“These guitars are really special and were made at a very specific time in American history. Most of the people who built these guitars in the 50s were part of that generation who put the same effort into their jobs as they did during World War II. People were happier because they had more free time and they went to work with a little more optimism. They enjoyed their jobs and took a lot of pride in their workmanship. It’s important to keep educating the younger generations about what a wonderful time this was in American guitar making.” **G**

If you enjoyed this article, then look out for David’s new column in future issues where he shares his expert knowledge and experience from the frontline of vintage guitar dealing

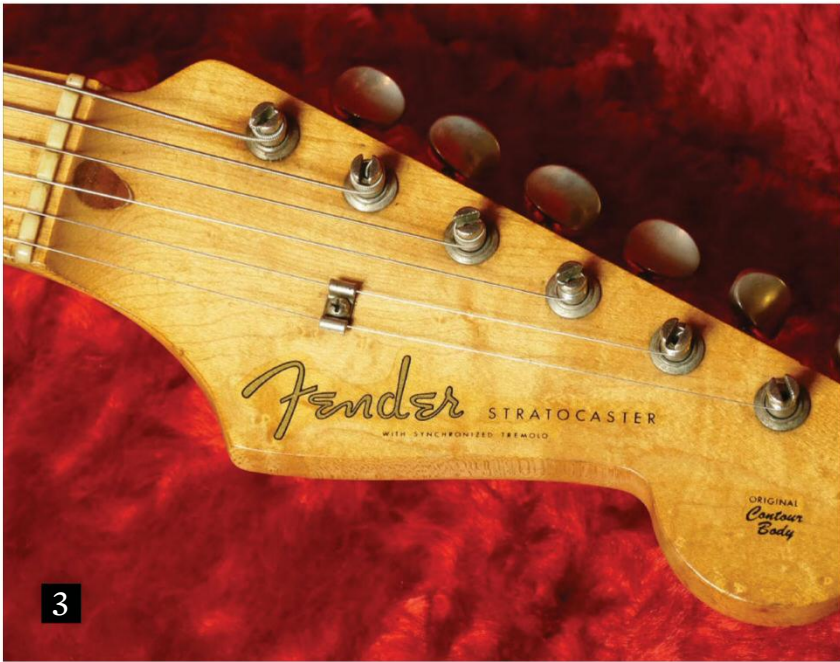
1. By 1957, Fender had switched from spraying to dip-dyeing sunburst bodies yellow to speed up the production process, giving the finish a different appearance

2. Along with overall height adjustment, the Strat’s pickups originally featured staggered polepieces for a more even tonal response from each string

3. Fender’s ‘spaghetti’ logo was used on Stratocaster headstocks up until the bolder ‘transition’ logo in ’64, while patent numbers appeared in the early 60s

4. ‘Single line’ Kluson Deluxe tuners replaced the ‘no line’ type in ’56 and were superseded by the ‘double line’ in ’64

5. In ’57, Fender transitioned from polystyrene (often dubbed ‘Bakelite’) over to harder-wearing ABS plastic knobs and pickup covers





JON GOMM

As a pioneer of percussive guitar, Jon Gomm has always tweaked the nose of ‘impossible’. Now, as the maestro returns with new music that healed him in hard times, he tells us about inventing the pentatonic scale, indulging his inner shredder, mad tunings – and why he’d pay to watch himself play guitar...

Words Henry Yates

Jon Gomm can play guitar. We know this. Since his debut album, *Hypertension*, sparked the tap ‘n’ slap acoustic sub-genre back in 2003, Gomm’s polyrhythmic dexterity has been so well established that the Blackpool-born wizard can spare the fireworks and give himself over entirely to songcraft on his 2020 album, *The Faintest Idea*.

Well, almost, that is. Because while *The Faintest Idea* is first and foremost a songwriting masterclass – with Gomm exploring the beauty and pain of life’s travails – it hasn’t stopped him casually ripping up accepted truths of acoustic technique along the way, with a slew of sounds-like-six-hands guitar parts.

“I’ve just always got that itch at the back of my mind,” he says, “where I’m thinking, ‘I wonder how I could play *that*...?’”

How pleased are you with *The Faintest Idea*?

“There’ll always be times my critical mind won’t switch off. But I can listen to the album and feel proud. Y’know, there are moments it’s hard to listen to, emotionally. I’ve lost a couple of friends and close family in the last few years. So there’s music here that’s helped me express that. I’ve also had a daughter and that’s changed how I look at the world. I used to separate myself off and tried to maintain my own little isolated universe. But with a loss or a birth, you realise you’re really connected to other people and you can’t avoid that.”

The song *Deep Sea Fishes* on the album has a more unusual inspiration, though, doesn’t it?

“Yeah. I was watching a nature documentary about fish down at the bottom of the ocean. It’s really bleak in that environment. No light, no plants, almost no life. Just these hideous sea monsters, creeping around, completely alone, blind. I became quite depressed watching it. But then I figured out, they must have come from somewhere. There must be a daddy hideous sea monster and a mummy hideous sea monster, and they must fall in love and make little baby hideous sea monsters. So I wrote a love song.”

Do you have favourite guitar moments in your songs?

“There’s loads going on with the percussion and bass and melody. But my favourite ‘riff’ is on *Universal Biology*, which is a kind of slow harmonic minor metal groove. There’s a melody and counter-melody happening, a pretty complete drum part and vocals, and they’re all played at once. *Deep Sea Fishes* has a proper solo, with these fast arpeggios that are basically sweep-picking licks, but because I’m playing drums with my right hand they’re all played legato. I *can* actually sweep-pick. So to have spent countless hours learning that and then, finally, when I have a sweep-picking lick on an album, it’s pretend – that’s hilarious. Steve Lukather actually sent me a message saying, ‘I’ve always known there’s a secret shredder inside that emotional singer-songwriter persona.’”



Jon previously toured and recorded with his Lowden O12C. “My Lowden has retired now. She’s called ‘Wilma’ and I love her very much...” he says

Did you do anything for the first time on this album?

“Yeah, there’s new tunings and techniques I’ve come up with. I mean, I say I’ve ‘come up’ with them – who knows who invented what? I was one of those guitarists who ‘invented’ the pentatonic scale. When I was a kid, I was learning blues licks and realised they fell into this pattern. I remember thinking, ‘Wow, wait until people hear about this!’ But, yeah, quite often, I’ll write things I can’t play. So I then have to really woodshed. There isn’t a song on the album that’s easy. They’re all a nightmare in one way or another...”

What’s the hardest guitar part?

“Well, there’s a song called *Until The Sun Destroys The Earth*. It starts off with a simple strumming part. But then there’s soloing over the top – all tapped stuff, really high up on the bass strings. It’s hard work, y’know? I’m deliberately not releasing a video for that one until the album is out. Because when people see me play it, they’re gonna be shocked that it’s all played on one guitar!”

You mentioned new tunings...

“That particular song is in CGCGBC. I’ve never used that tuning before, but it’s basically a big C powerchord. *Deep Sea Fishes* is B F# D# F# Bb C#, which sounds evil, but it’s actually quite a pretty chord. So many guitarists are scared of tunings, because they’ve spent so much time learning their scales. Y’know, I went to The Guitar Institute, I’ve got a jazz degree, I’m one of those guitarists who knows his way around in standard

tuning. But the only thing you lose if you retune is your ability to noodle. It’s a really bad tendency. It can become what you’re known for. I’d encourage people to think about the music you truly love – and how much of that consists of improvised guitar soloing. Probably, the amount is quite small.”

The new album combines your acoustic with the synth work of your producer, Andy Sorenson...

“For me, it’s an obvious match. Because there’s things the acoustic can’t do, sonically. Like, gaps in the frequency range. It can be very hollow in the midrange, for example. You can’t sustain a chord or play a note and make it get louder. Y’know, certain things are impossible, because it would defy the laws of physics. So Andy’s synths complement the guitar really well.

“What I don’t want to do is break the intimacy you have when you watch a solo performer. So I was very clear that, okay, we could use synthetic sounds – but no synthetic beats of any kind, because it’s my job to do those on the guitar. That’s why I don’t like looping. I mean, I love watching people looping. But in terms of doing it myself, it adds this layer of possible confusion. People want to know where the sound is coming from. With synths, you can create a landscape. But inside that landscape, it’s still just me. So it doesn’t break that directness and intimacy. From my mind to your mind – that’s what I want.”

What was your core gear on this album?

“I’ve been developing a guitar with Ibanez that I think will be called the JGM-10. To me, that’s really exciting. With all my peers, like Andy McKee, Thomas Leeb, Mike Dawes – we mostly play boutique instruments that are super expensive and really hard to get. That’s one of the things I think has always made us feel like we’re on the fringes, not just of the music world but of the guitar world. And having a company like Ibanez willing to make a guitar that’s built for modern fingerstyle is kind of a moment of acceptance. Because it will make those techniques sound better and easier to play, rather than somebody just buying a regular steel-string off the shelf. So I recorded most of the album with a prototype. Which is now pretty battered!”

So what’s new with the Ibanez?

“I’m not sure what I’m allowed to say, specifically. But it’s everything, from the scale to the fret materials to the shape of the body and bridge, the bracing pattern. The dimensions of the playing area are different from a regular steel-string and exactly what you’d get on a boutique fingerstyle acoustic that costs \$25,000. And the pickup system has taken so much experimentation.”

What’s happened to your trusty Lowden?

“My Lowden has retired now. She’s called ‘Wilma’ and I love her very much. And so, for the time being, my relationship with Lowden is kind of done. But George Lowden is honestly one of the nicest people I’ve ever met. I was obviously very sheepish about calling to tell him I was developing this guitar with Ibanez. But he was so unbelievably gracious. It’s been an absolute honour and joy to play their guitars for the last 20 years. And they’ve got their Ed Sheeran line now. So I’m sure they’ll be okay without me [laughs].”

“I was very clear that, okay, we could use synthetic sounds – but no synthetic beats of any kind, because it’s my job to do those on the guitar...”

“It doesn’t matter how crazy your technique is, the hardest thing is always playing in time and in tune”



How has your approach to amplification changed?

“Back in the day, I’d be playing noisy gigs and my amplification might not have been that good – so I was beating the shit out of the guitar, putting massive cracks in the soundboard. Now I have a pedalboard with various things on it. The new Boss OC-5 – that’s replaced my OC-3. I use a Zoom MS-100BT MultiStomp effects pedal for really fun reverbs and delays. Then I have a TC Helicon VoiceLive 3 for guitar and vocals, and I go into a pair of Blackstar Sonnet amplifiers, which are amazing, and really cheap. I helped with the design of those.

“I’d always found there were two kinds of acoustic amp. There was the ‘electric amp in a brown box’ kind; they can be loud and really good for acoustic guitarists in a rock band. But for actually getting a realistic acoustic guitar sound, they’re awful. Then you get the more expensive hi-fi ones – and they tend to compress the sound horrifically.”

If all the trees in the world were being chopped down except one, which tonewood would you save?

“I’m wary of answering that kind of question! Because people get paradigms in their heads, and think, ‘Oh, I’ve got to have Brazilian rosewood.’ There’s a project called the Leonardo Guitar Research Project. They create pristinely recorded audio samples of guitars made from different woods and they’ll commission guitars to be made, usually using sustainable alternatives to trees that are becoming endangered. And they do live events where they’ll have experts go in and listen to a guitar being played, and they’re blindfolded or whatever, so they can’t see what the guitar is. And people’s desire to have Brazilian rosewood is entirely psychological. That’s the project’s findings, y’know?”

You’ve been open about your struggles with mental health. Are there any silver linings as a songwriter?

“Yeah, there are. They’re not worth it, though. I think there’s a cliché about artists in general. That artists feel things more deeply than others. I think that’s probably true in some respects. I definitely do feel things. My emotions can be really overwhelming. Like,

PHOTO BY TOM MARTIN



Jon's flawless percussive technique, rich layered sound and emotive vocals make for an impressive live performance

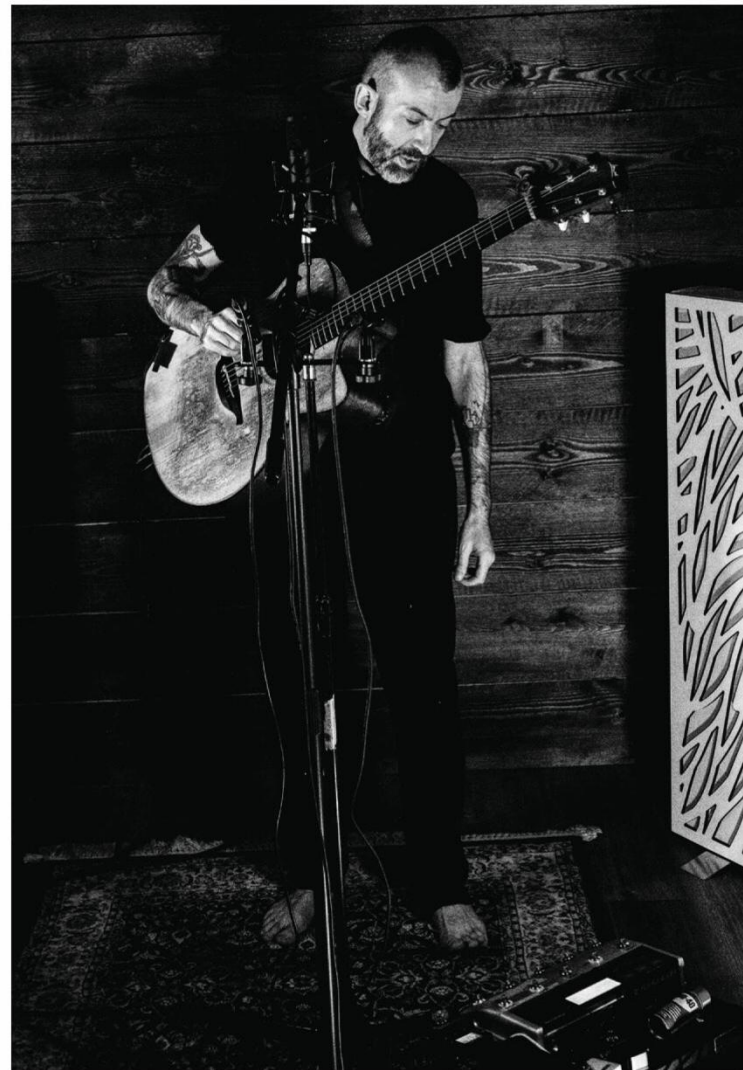
an emotional response that people might normally expect to have once every few years, I can have once a week. That definitely changes the way I react to events and to the world. I can't ignore those emotional depths. They're there and they're part of my life, so that goes into the music. So I think it does help in that way. But I'd rather be healthy. There's just no doubt about it."

There's been plenty of debate in 2020 about streaming payment rates. Has your viral hit *Passionflower* been a big money-spinner?

"The way it's helped to sell gig tickets and other stuff has been helpful financially. But in terms of actual direct income from a viral video, from royalties or advertising, no, it's really tiny. And that's with 17 million views. I'm not even close to living off it. Nowhere near. It's probably five per cent of what you'd need to make a living."

Did you set out to be a guitar revolutionary back in 2003?

"Not really. I just always liked people doing things 'wrong' on the guitar. My classical guitar teacher had already taught me some percussive flamenco things. But I think I was 10 when I first saw a blues guitarist doing a kind of Bukka White drumbeat, with slide, and I was just like, 'Wow, that is so exciting.' It sounds so much better than you think it would. When it's mic'd up and plugged in, it just sounds so huge. The kick drum is so deep and fat. But it was the same thing, like, the first time I heard Tom Morello with the killswitch or Jonny Greenwood do something strange with a step phaser,



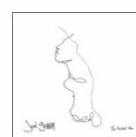
PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH GOMM

or Joe Satriani doing two-handed tapping pieces like *Midnight*. The first time I heard all of those different things, it was just like a 'wow' moment. Y'know, I spent months trying to be Stanley Jordan before realising that it's almost impossible. You'd need to devote your life to playing that well. Which I wasn't prepared to do, because I wanted to be able to do everything."

Do you feel pressure that people expect technical fireworks from you?

"I definitely do feel a bit of expectation, but I don't feel the pressure from that, particularly. I'm fairly secure in the fact that I'm a good guitarist. Or a creative guitarist. I don't think of myself as being 'one of the world's greatest guitarists' or anything like that. But I'm decent. Y'know, I'd watch myself, with at least curiosity, if nothing else. I'm more worried about how good my songs are and how good my voice is going to be. It doesn't matter how crazy your technique is, the hardest thing is always playing in time and in tune. It's those basic things that I worry about before a gig, more than, 'Am I going to be able to do this eight-finger tapping?' Because if you're watching a circus performer on the high-wire, if they fall, it's more exciting than if they don't. If I fuck up something hard, it just makes it seem even harder, so it's kind of a no-lose situation. I do try not to fuck up too often, but if I do, on a technical level, it's not the end of the world. But if I come offstage thinking that I didn't connect to the audience, I feel much more disappointed." **G**

"I think I was 10 when I first saw a blues guitarist doing a kind of Bukka White drumbeat, with slide, and I was just like, 'Wow, that is so exciting'..."



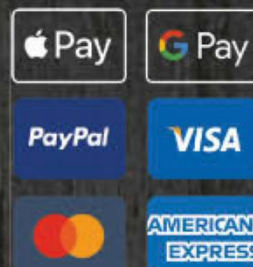
Jon's new album, *The Faintest Idea*, is out now on Kscope. Buy the album and discover Jon's latest news over on his website <https://jongomm.com>

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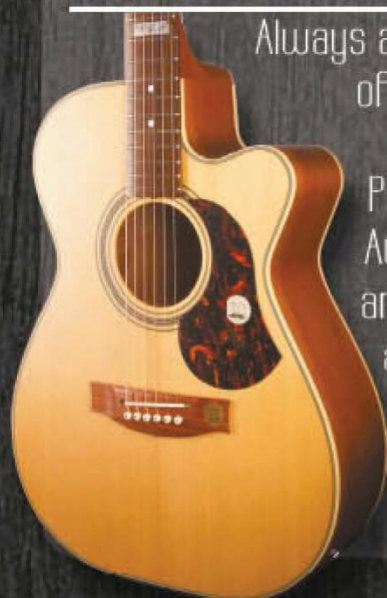
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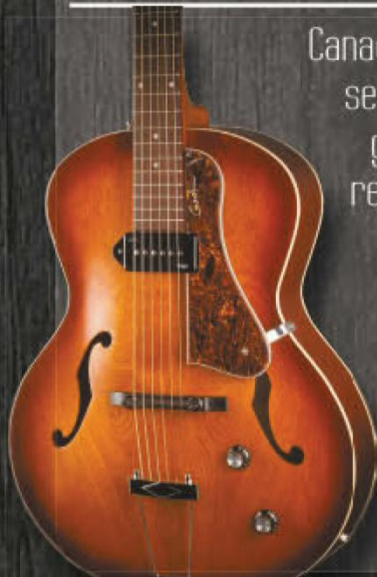
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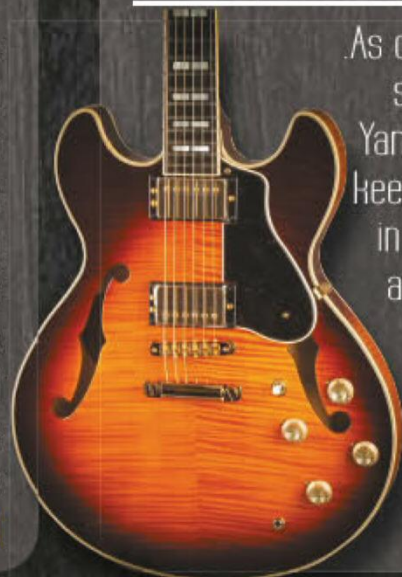


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CALEXICO

From Bartók to bossa nova, Joey Burns tells us about what keeps him interested and inspired as Calexico's latest studio album, *Seasonal Shift*, hits the shelves brimming with musical diversity

Words Rod Brakes Photography Colin H Clark

Change is in the air for Calexico's guitar-slinging frontman Joey Burns. It's a sentiment that is strongly echoed throughout the band's most current LP, *Seasonal Shift*, as a new year – perhaps a new era – gets underway. Having lived in the desert city of Tucson, Arizona, for well over a quarter of a century, Joey is now moving on to the decidedly greener pastures of Idaho's capital, Boise. Yet Tucson is a locale that holds an epoch of memories for him. Despite being a place of retirement for many, Joey and fellow Calexico co-founder John Convertino relocated there from Los Angeles in the mid-90s as their band's globetrotting musical journey began to take off.

"Tucson is so unique," begins Joey. "That's where the band was formed originally. It's one of those places where not only do people go to retire, but it's like there's an accumulation of things. People sell their things at swap meets and secondhand stores, and there's also an Air Force base there with a massive collection of retired planes. We call it the 'airplane graveyard'. And there's another couple of privately owned airplane boneyards you can go and see. We shot a music video in one of them for a song called *Two Silver Trees* and it was a blast."

It sounds like it could be perfect vintage-guitar shopping territory...

"There are certainly some great guitar stores in Tucson. Ever since vintage guitars became popular everyone's looking for them, but you can still find stuff. There's a friend of ours who's a vintage guitar

collector and they own a really cool shop called Rainbow Guitars. There's another place that was fantastic over the years called the Chicago Music Store. And there's The Folk Shop. I remember getting a call from the owner there, Paul [Blumentritt], who has since retired. He called me one day and said, 'Hey, I've got something for you.' He knew I liked nylon-string guitars and he had a Baldwin, but it was the Baldwin pickup I was really interested in. I told him, 'Hey, I'd like to buy it. I'd like to gift it to Willie Nelson as a backup,' because he uses the same kind of pickup. I'd just met him and thought it would be a cool gift."

How did you meet Willie Nelson?

"We were asked to do a Bob Dylan song with him – *Señor (Tales Of Yankee Power)* – for the movie *I'm Not There*. The music supervisors said to us, 'You've just done a song [*Goin' To Acapulco*] with Jim James and My Morning Jacket – are you interested in doing more? How about a song with Willie Nelson?' and I just about fell over."

How did the recording go?

"It was pretty awesome. We were in Austin, Texas, doing some work at a show and we go to the studio and meet Mickey Raphael, the harmonica player, and I said, 'Where's Willie?' Nobody knew where he was. Turns out he was sleeping in because he'd been playing poker all night in Dallas. He was just on his way down on his tour bus, which he basically used as his mobile home. He arrived and his crew got out his



1. “This Airline guitar I have is from the 60s. I’ve got two of them,” Joey tells us. “One I keep in Europe and the other I keep here in the States. I love these old guitars for their funkiness”

2. With a Bigsby vibrato, a master volume knob, and three pickups with individual tone and volume controls, the “Fiberglass” body Airline Professional was quoted in a 1960s Montgomery Ward catalogue as “our finest guitar”

guitar, Trigger, and I got to try it. It’s beautiful. I loved it. I love nylon-string guitars. I’m drawn to players like Willie Nelson. I first heard nylon-string guitar on The Beatles’ song *And I Love Her*. I mean, that got me. I was like, ‘What is this melody? What is this rhythm? And what are those instruments?’ That really got my attention, even as a 10-year-old kid.”

What was your first instrument?

“Piano, then drums, then guitar. Then bass. I think that route turned me into a bass-y guitarist. That’s the best way I can put it. I’m pretty good with rhythms and I think that’s also why I gravitated towards Latin music; there’s just a lot more places to go with rhythms, whether you’re playing bass or strumming and playing rhythm guitar. I discovered that early on in jazz bands when we would play bossa nova or anything that was from Latin America. It was just so much more fun as a bass player. It swings in a different way. I mean, I love rock and folk and world music – I love it all. I think I’ve always been curious about different instruments.”

Was that something you explored in music school?

“In college, I bought a used sitar for one of my music theory classes and used it to write a fugue for sitar and a small string ensemble. All the string players were pissed off at me because it was in the key of F# minor, but the sitar was tuned in a certain way. It’s a labour of love. I’ve always been curious – or as some of my friends call me, a ‘frustrated musicologist’. Ultimately, that’s what led me to collaborating with people from all around the world. At the same time, I told my orchestra conductor, ‘I’m going to miss the dress rehearsal for this upcoming show because I’ve got tickets to see REM,’ and he goes, ‘Well, I’m just going to have to fail you then.’ I was like, ‘Okay’ [laughs]. I mean, I liked classical, but I think he and some of my other teachers knew that wasn’t the be-all-end-all for me.”

Who have you collaborated with recently?

“Our new record [*Seasonal Shift*] features a guitarist called Bombino from Niger and he’s an amazing guitar player. What strikes me the most is that even though he’s playing a Fender Strat, all his tone is in his fingers and his phrasing. The familiarity of some of the sounds is what catches a lot of Westerners’ ears, but the phrasing and the modes and scales are really different. It’s a new perspective and feeling. It’s really exciting.

“I’ve always been curious – or as my friends call me, a ‘frustrated musicologist’. That’s what led me to collaborating with people from around the world”



"The Airline guitar and this nylon-string are my mainstays," says Joey. "I take them with me wherever I go"

"I've done some really interesting collaborations over the years. Some of them have been recorded, but some of my favourite ones haven't. And that's okay, too. We were lucky enough to do a collaboration with a duo called Correo Aereo, which means 'airmail' in Spanish. They're just one of countless incredible musicians out there that not many people know about. The guitar player, Abel [Rocha], is a great songwriter and taught me a lot, as did various members of Mariachi Luz de Luna."

What did you learn from Mariachi Luz de Luna?

"These are guys I met in Tucson back in the 90s. We did quite a few tours in Europe together and it was incredible. We would play aftershow parties backstage or in a bar, or we would go to a plaza somewhere and just jam. From all that, I learned about different strumming techniques and different rhythm forms, thanks to Johnny Contreras mainly. He also teaches mariachi at Pueblo High School in Tucson. I was lucky enough for him to teach me some of his strumming studies. Like a lot of musicians, he's really forthcoming and wants to teach you what he knows."

How has that knowledge helped you creatively?

"Mariachi is tied to various types of music from around the world. It's incredible the way it's grown. There are so many different styles of rhythm and



3. "I notice a lot of people that play acoustic instruments live often struggle with monitoring tone and volume," says Joey. "And what often ends up happening is that dynamics take a backseat"

expression within the form, and because of those dynamics and instrumental passages and transitions there's a big connection with soundtrack music. I love soundtracks, and I love writing and performing for soundtracks. The instrumental aspects come naturally for us. We come from a pretty strong instrumental background and grew up loving classical music, jazz and rock music. In addition to drums, my partner in the band, John, also plays vibes, marimba, accordion and piano. In high school, I was in the jazz band playing bass and I ended up getting a degree in performance on the double bass – all the while driving around the south of Los Angeles playing everything from free jazz to folk to rock, you name it!"

John Convertino and yourself go back a long way...

"Before Calexico, we were in a band together called the Friends Of Dean Martin. We did a lot of lounge songs and instrumentals. We had to change the name to the Friends Of Dean Martinez because Dean Martin's manager said, 'You can use the name, but it's going to cost you 30 per cent of your profits,' which

was a little too much! When we started Calexico, we'd already been playing a lot of instrumentals, so soundtracks were easy for us because instrumentals were always part of the vocabulary."

Have you worked on any soundtracks recently?

"Back in March [2020] some of the producers who worked on *Breaking Bad* came to us asking if we could write a 30-second main title theme for a new project they were working on called *Coyote*, starring Michael Chiklis. That was the first thing we did during [the] Covid-19 [pandemic] – work on this main title theme. In *Breaking Bad* they used a song of ours called *Banderilla*. It's been really fun to see where the songs can go and how they can be used in movies like *Dead Man's Shoes*."

Do you think Morricone was inspired by mariachi?

"For sure. When you hear some of those trumpet passages, especially in the spaghetti western soundtracks, I feel like he's picking up on that. It's not a far leap. I have so much respect for him because he wasn't just one thing. Some of those western soundtracks are so completely inventive, and at times comical and haunting. I mean, it plays on a lot of different emotions. He had so much room to explore and experiment, including those long, uncomfortable pauses, and that really saved movies."

"When we started Calexico, we'd already played a lot of instrumentals, so soundtracks were easy [as] instrumentals were always part of the vocabulary"



Musical dynamics can be powerful...

“Dynamic range is a really beautiful thing. It can be really emotional, right? And certain people get that. I remember when I was in the symphony orchestra the conductor said to us, ‘How are we going to get louder on this next piece?’ and everyone was just like, ‘Do I dig into my instrument more?’ His answer was really simple: start quieter. It’s fascinating. Dynamic range is something I think about a lot as a guitar player.”

How do you go about capturing that in the studio?

“We’re not a band that worries about having the loudest mastering; we’re about getting musical and making it natural sounding. Everyone can get concerned about volume and the latest effects techniques, but what it really comes down to for us is an exciting performance.”

Do you think modern PA systems have changed the way people experience the dynamics of live music?

“When I saw The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion play this club called Jabberjaw in LA in the 90s, the only thing going through the PA was the vocal, and I imagine that’s how things felt in the late 60s when rock was starting to blossom. Imagine a venue like the Roundhouse doing a show now with a period-style PA, instrumentation and amplification on

stage. Imagine what that would be like! Have you ever seen Jonathan Richman play live? You have to check him out. He makes sure that the volume isn’t too loud, and for many years he brought his own PA system on tour. I thought that was really great. But the point is: sometimes it’s not that the PA has to be louder, it’s that the audience and the musicians have to be quieter.”

Who is your favourite rock guitarist?

“Jimmy Page is definitely my favourite of the rock guitarists, particularly because of his melodic sense. His guitar playing, songwriting and arrangements went outside of being a rock band. It went into a transitional experience. I was thinking about Bartók recently and how he kind of went back to folk music. A lot of classical composers have gone to folk music to find inspiration. If you get too caught up in what you’re doing and what you really like and love, at a certain point you might go on a quest to uncover something and get a new perspective. I think that’s a natural thing. It’s what keeps me engaged and excited.” 



Calexico's latest album, *Seasonal Shift*, is available now on City Slang

www.casadecalexico.com

4. Joey's Manuel Rodriguez Cutaway B nylon-string electro-acoustic features a solid cedar top along with rosewood back and sides

5. Based in Madrid, Manuel Rodriguez Guitars is a family-run business with a global history stretching back to 1905

6. The LR Baggs Ribbon Transducer Interface active acoustic guitar preamp features detailed EQ and volume controls

7. Joey's Danelectro baritone guitar is fitted with dual singlecoil pickups (often referred to as 'lipstick' pickups on account of their tubular chrome covers)

Modern Revival

Back in the day, it wasn't just amplifiers that Vox put its name to. Some five decades later, the company resurrects the Bobcat guitar from the mid-60s and adds a few modern twists along the way

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin





VOX BOBCAT S66 & V90

FROM £1,279

CONTACT **Vox Amplification Ltd** PHONE **01908 304600** WEB www.voxamps.com

What You Need To Know

1 **More Gibson ES-335 copies! Don't tell us... they're made in China?**

Actually, these new models are made in Korea, which for certain brands is still preferred to China or Indonesia. The Bobcat goes back to the glory years of Vox, though those originals were made in Italy, not the UK.

2 **So what, if anything, do they bring to the table?**

Well, that's the interesting bit. Like the majority of Vox guitar designs over the past couple of decades, the design team is headed by Rich Lasner – the very same of Ibanez JEM/ RG fame, not to mention a primary designer of Yamaha's Pacifica. Rich and his team were behind the stylish Vox Virage designs, too.

3 **There's some pedigree there...**

Yes, so we've got a viable take on the centre-blocked thinline design, new pickups and a dash of heritage. All good? Let's find out...

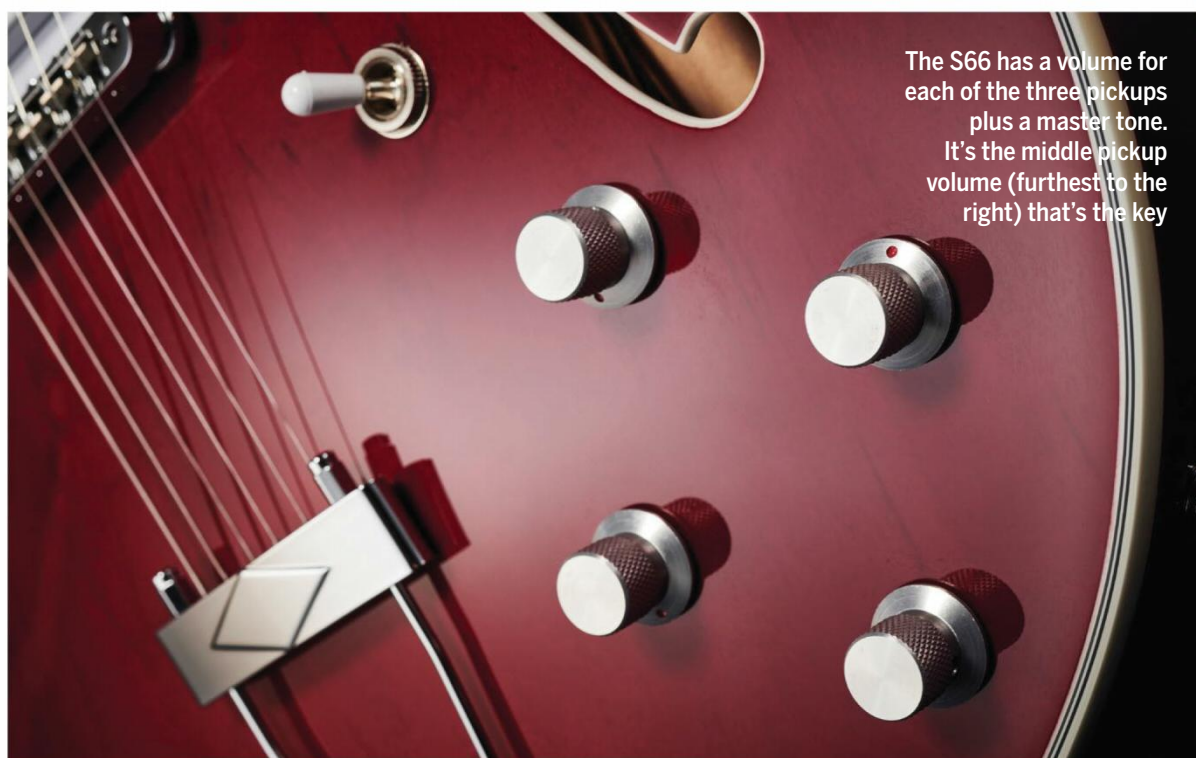
Think Vox guitars and your memory takes you back. Brian Jones with his teardrop-shaped Mk series perhaps?

Yep. Thinlines inspired by the Gibson ES-335? Nope, no bells are ringing. But when we strolled onto Vox's 2020 NAMM booth, a couple caught our eye: the Bobcat S66 and V90. We hastily ordered them up and, thanks to the general chaos of 2020, waited nearly a year before they arrived.

The original Vox Bobcat dates back to the mid-60s (see From The Archives later in the review for more) when everyone was clamouring to make guitars as the musical

world exploded. Demand on that scale unfortunately didn't last and there were plenty of casualties. By the end of the 60s many brands were sold or simply stopped producing instruments.

So, the first problem these new Bobcats have is that few (ourselves included) will remember the originals. The second is that Vox really isn't renowned for making guitars in contemporary times. We had high hopes for the Virage ranges, which first appeared back in 2008, but those limped on to obscurity. For the record, these finely designed and made instruments command



The S66 has a volume for each of the three pickups plus a master tone. It's the middle pickup volume (furthest to the right) that's the key



1. As we explain in Under The Hood over the page, these single coils are pretty much like a regular vintage Strat set with a little more power

2. There's no doubt anyone will think you're playing anything else but a Vox! This large logo was found on the original 60s semis, too

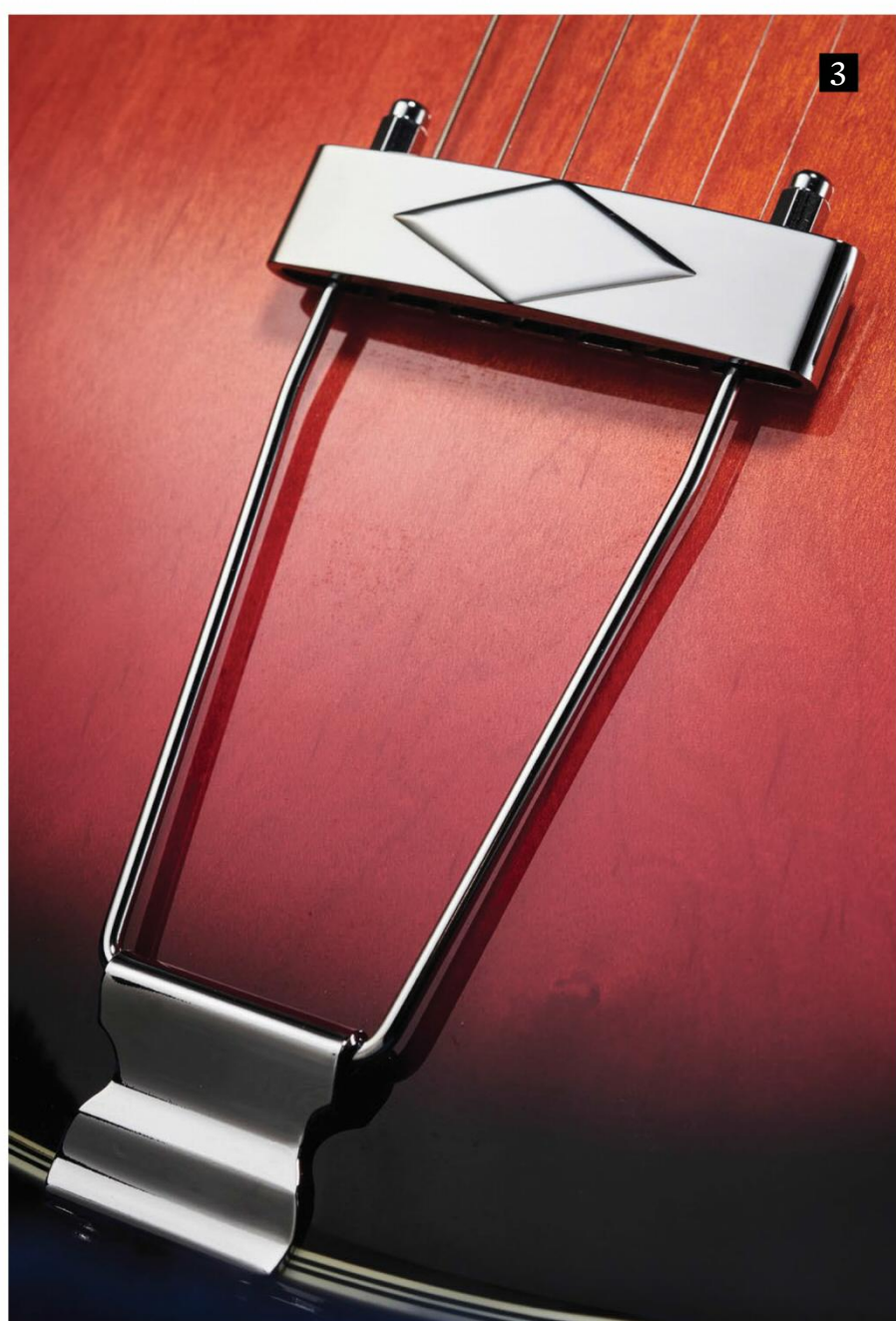
3. Although the original S66 came with a Bigsby-style vibrato, both of the new 'cats have this fairly generic-looking trapeze tailpiece

4. You'll find these open-back tuners on numerous retro builds: Guild uses a very similar style, for example

good prices on the used market – if you can find any. But, as we all know, designing and making a good guitar is one thing; hitting the right price point, not least the zeitgeist, is another matter entirely. Then there's brand confidence. Alongside these retro-looking electrics, the other guitars in the current Vox range include the highly polarising high-tech modelling Starstream. Let's move on...

Far from a modernist statement, then, these two new Bobcats differ only in their pickups and controls, which we'll get to in a minute. Both are fairly classic-style semis using maple laminate construction for the bodies, and mahogany necks – possibly with a headstock splice, certainly a heel stack, although it's hard to tell under even the more translucent red of our S66 and impossible on the V90 due to the dark/near black 'bursting over the heel area and back of the headstock. Both necks also feature a volute to strengthen the thinnest area of the neck at the nut, which is, of course, weakened by the truss rod access route. Note, too, the two screws that hold the large plastic cover in place (holding the cover better than a single screw) are far less fussy than the typical dual screws placed at the bottom of the cover.





The Bobcat is a full-size semi, too, like an ES-335, meaning there's no down-sizing here, although Vox has gone for a 'halfway' scale length of 635mm (25 inches), like PRS uses, to sit between the Fender and Gibson classics.

Overall craft is perfectly good, certainly of a similar level to the Guild Newark St

Both are very lively and seem to sit in the middle of those ES-330 and ES-335 benchmarks

Korean-made offerings. The bindings are very cleanly scraped, the inner purfling inside the binding on the top edge looks very neat and tidy, and peering through the f-holes the insides look shipshape, too, with neatly sawn (aka kerfed) linings. Here, you can see that spruce centre block is reduced in width pretty much under the pickups but full width from the bridge to the base and where the neck joins the body, just slightly wider than the spread of the tune-o-matic bridge.

While the colour choice is pretty classic, all the plastic parts are bright white along with the bound edges, f-holes, fingerboard and headstock. That large Vox logo, which goes back to the 60s, and the lightly engraved Vox Bobcat logo on the pickguard leave us in little doubt of what we're playing. The machined and knurled-top control aluminium knobs also add an element of modernism to the design – despite the fact that they actually ape the original knobs – but we have to say they feel great in use, particularly the smooth rotational feel of the pots themselves.

The neck pitch on both is very similar, which means both tune-o-matic bridges sit just right height-wise, after which the strings relax down to the trapeze tailpiece. Many prefer the more solidbody style of a stud tailpiece – and, who knows, maybe we'll see that 'HT' version soon – but there's something about the resonance, especially played unplugged, of trapezes like these that gets to the essence of the semi-hollow design. Of course, if you want to add a Bigsby then there are no stud post holes to fill. Again, maybe that'll be an option down the road.

We're not told the specific factory that Vox is using in Korea, and unlike the more

THE RIVALS

There's no shortage of affordable versions of Gibson's ES-335 and an obvious place to start is Epiphone where you'll easily snag an 'Inspired by Gibson' ES-335 under £500. If P-90s are your thing, you'll find non-centre-blocked Casinos in a similar price area, and if you fancy the three-pickup vibe there's the Epiphone Ltd Ed Riviera Custom P93 (approx £550), which comes with a Bigsby, too.

While Guild's Newark St Starfire semis, such as the Bigsby-loaded V, invariably come cased and retail closer to £1k, the new Starfire I models are much more affordable and are available in single- or double-cut versions, with or without a Bigsby-style vibrato in the £450 to £550 price area. New here is the three-pickup Bigsby-loaded Starfire I Jet for around £600.

D'Angelico's massive range offers plenty of thinline semi action and price point depends on the range, with the Indonesian Premier models in that £550 area and the Korean-made Excel and Deluxe ranges upwards of approximately £1,200.

UNDER THE HOOD

Rich Lasner explains the Bobcat pickup choices

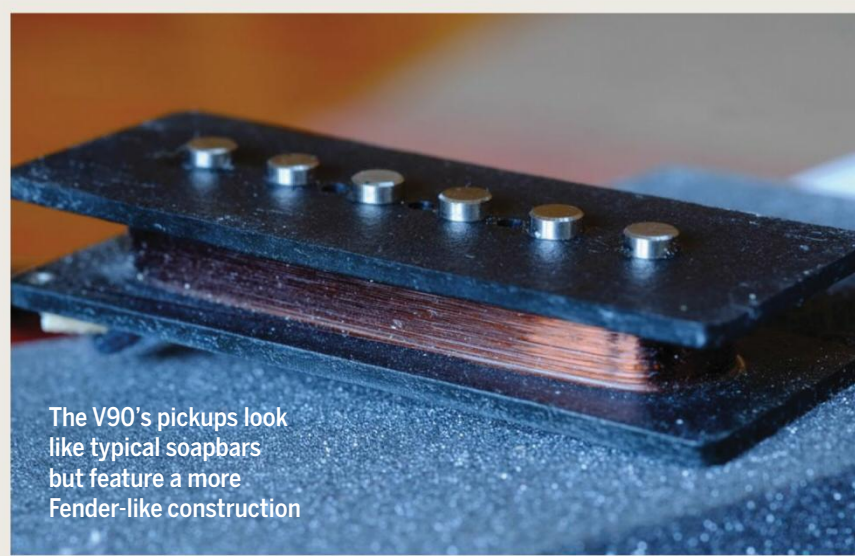
“G&B pickups in Korea makes the pickups for the Bobcats,” confirms designer Rich Lasner. “They have been producing high-quality guitar pickups for many years and have the flexibility to try new ideas that we don’t find with other pickup manufacturers we have worked with. Since both the V90 and the S66 pickups have unique construction and manufacturing elements, we felt confident using G&B, as we have in the past.”

Visually, there’s nothing cut-price-looking about the pickups. The S66’s have fibreboard top and bottom plates, just like a vintage-style single coil, along with cloth-covered hot and ground wires. The bridge is slightly hotter with a measured DCR of 6.58kohms; the middle and bridge are very similar at 6.21k and 6.26k respectively. The V90’s soapbars are little different aside from the larger top and bottom plates and DCRs of 8.10k (bridge) and 7.76k (neck).

“There’s nothing too strange under the hood here,” continues Rich. “250kohm audio taper pots all round and a .047 microfarad polyester film tone cap along with a standard three-way toggle switch. The S66, of course, has separate volume controls for the neck and bridge pickup, an independent middle pickup volume control, a master tone control and a three-way pickup switch to choose neck, bridge or neck and bridge. Once you get used to bringing the middle pickup in regardless of the toggle-switch pickup selection, players will find quite a bit of character can be controlled by adding or subtracting the amount of middle pickup in the mix.”



The S66's single coils are essentially vintage style under those rectangular covers



The V90's pickups look like typical soapbars but feature a more Fender-like construction



5. The V90's controls look identical to the S66, but in this case are simply a volume and tone for each pickup

6. Another update to these new Bobcats is the glued-in neck; the originals used a Fender-style bolt-on joint

characterful Guild Newark St models the inside label here looks like it was created by the design department's intern. What's wrong with printing what factory a guitar comes from, let alone giving the designers a shout-out?

If the actual build is pretty conventional then the pickups on both are a little different from what's found on the majority of thinline semis we're offered from the mainstream market. The S66 recalls the original Bobcat's array and the style used on quite a few classic Vox guitars: they're single coils but in distinct square-edged covers and are mounted in individual rectangular pickup rings. The V90's soapbars appear more conventional but have magnetic rod-style polepieces instead of the usual height-adjustable poles of the Gibson classic. And while the V90 uses a pretty standard control style with a three-way toggle and individual pickup volume and tones, laid out like those original Vox semis, the S66 looks the same but we actually have a volume control for *each* pickup and a master tone.

Feel & Sounds

The first thing this writer did was plug in and play. And before we get to the details it's fair to say we were very engrossed in the S66. It's not that the V90 doesn't hold its own, it's just that the unusual pickup array,

not to mention its controls, create a guitar with plenty to listen to. It's the middle pickup volume control that's the key as you can remove the middle pickup totally from the circuit, creating a two-pickup guitar with the usual bridge, both and neck selections from the three-way toggle, or via that dedicated volume control blend it in with any of those selections. Any Strat owners with the 'seven-sound mod' will be aware of the two extra sounds – bridge and neck together and all three pickups – but this interesting circuit could be applied, and we're sure many have done this on a three-pickup Les Paul Custom, for example. Once you quickly get used to the key controls – that middle pickup volume control and the master tone – it's surprisingly intuitive and, to be honest, Vox could easily have added a Gretsch/Guild-style master volume here, too, as there are a host of subtle colours available by altering the specific volumes in either a two- or three-pickup mix: the ability to raise or lower the output without upsetting that mix would be handy, not least when we get back to a stage.

But what do they *sound* like? Ah, yes. Well, that's another thing. Both are very lively and perhaps blindfolded we might guess we were playing a hollow ES-330 rather than a centre-blocked ES-335-alike. In truth, both seem to sit in the middle of those



6

ES-330 and ES-335 benchmarks. It would be rude not to audition these with anything else but a Vox amp in person and in the digital world, and in moments we're time-travelling to bright, happy shiny jangle that is easily nudged into Townshend/Weller edgy crunch on either. Game on. The V90 would perhaps be the more classic choice, but those who like to work with a more subtle palette will find plenty in the slightly lighter-sounding S66.

The pickups on both are a little different from what's found on the majority of thinline semis on the market

The overall voicing does sit in the brighter single coil area, certainly in comparison with our Seymour Duncan Seth Lover loaded Ibanez AS-50 and Guild Newark St Starfire V with its smaller aperture LB-1 mini-humbuckers. But rolling back the tone a little or plugging back the volumes certainly warms things up.

The soapbars on the V90, then, provide a brighter, cleaner voicing than our PAF-y Ibanez, and in terms of output the neck

pickup is a little dominant. Both tones are smoothly graduated and you can pull back the treble spike if you prefer more classic warmth. However, there's no hum-cancelling in the mix position. The S66 doesn't seem to be hum-cancelling in any position, either, and the nature of the pickups means that it sounds a little quiet again compared with our Ibanez's PAF-alikes. So, the sonic experience is certainly a little different from a more generic ES-335-alike, but the quality is good.

To rein in the horses a bit it's got to be said that out of the box, even after string stretching, tuning stability is a little wayward, which we'd put down to the nut fettling: with a headstock back angle and splayed strings from the nut to the tuners, the usually troublesome D and G string nut grooves need a little more attention.

That aside, these are perfectly good players. There's nothing objectionable yet neither comes across as overly generic. Familiar, certainly, but there's just that little extra something going on that keeps us playing. The fretwork is very tidy from a sensible medium gauge, the frets sitting over the binding with well-rounded ends. Both fingerboards are a deep, rich brown-coloured ebony with crisply installed pearloid block inlays. The shallow C neck carves are virtually identical, relatively slim

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Famously based on the Dartford Riviera, the Bobcat was among plenty of solidbodies Vox released back in the 60s, but the semi-acoustic models that appeared between 1964 and '68 were actually made in Italy by established guitar brands Eko and Crucianelli. In fact, many models – the Bobcat included – were made by both factories: the Eko-made versions featured the three-a-side headstock we see on our contemporary models; those made by Crucianelli used a six-in-a-line headstock.

The V219 Bobcat appeared in 1966 and followed on from the rather more dowdy-styled V213 Lynx and V215 Challenger, and it was one of a mini-range that included the twin-pickup-with-trapeze tailpiece V243 Super Lynx. That original Bobcat, aside from its three pickups, also featured a vibrato and – as with all of those Vox semis – a very un-Gibson-like bolt-on maple neck.

Back then, Vox made (or had made) pretty much everything an up-and-coming beat band of “longhairs” – as Vox referred to the musicians of the day in its trade advertising – would need: guitars (electric and acoustic), basses, backline amps, sound reinforcement, microphones, and don't forget organs such as the classic Continental. The 1966 JMI catalogue was certainly extensive!

Of the Bobcat, the quaintly worded 60s catalogue had this to say: “Exciting addition to the electro/acoustic range. Fast low action neck with inlaid scale marking. Adjustable truss rod. Three adjustable six pole pickups capable of reproducing widest variety of tonal effects. Fitted with exclusive Vox acoustic tremolo arm of latest design incorporating high-grade needle bearings to ensure low friction. Double cutaway body allows player complete use of fingerboard. Sunburst finish in durable polyester. All parts heavily chromed complete this attractive and competitively priced instrument.”

If the style of the Bobcat seems pretty conservative today then plenty of Vox's “electro/acoustic” models reflected the swinging 60s, particularly those such as the Starstream, Grand Prix, Cheetah, Viper and Ultrasonic, which all featured onboard effects.

Should Vox decide to commission more modernised reissues like our 2020 Bobcats, there's a rich seam of ‘seemed like a good idea at the time’ models to draw from. Here's hoping!



depths of 20.5mm at the 1st fret, filling out to 23mm by the 12th with plenty of width to accommodate the modern 52.5mm string spacing at the bridge. The setups don't offend, either. Those easily sorted tuning issues aside, both are perfectly good players.

Verdict

The world really doesn't need another copy, does it? Outwardly, that's what it looks like we have here. But with some constructional and pickup twists these have some credibility. The S66 is quite inspired: plonk a set of Strat singles on a full-size thinline semi and throw in a wiring loom from a modded Les Paul Custom. Neat. The V90's more direct drive is no less valid, not least to those who like to spice their music with some Mod sheen.

But as we illustrate in The Rivals there's plenty of credible semi action at a lower price point to these – even a few with three pickups – and that perhaps is the quandary here: you're going to have to be very confident that either of these will suit your style, or indeed take you somewhere new. That said, the brighter voicing, lightweight resonance and overall playability has plenty going for it. 

7. Again apeing the originals, Vox places the name of the guitar on the pickguard, just so you don't forget



VOX BOBCAT S66

PRICE: £1,279 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway centre-blocked thinline semi hollow electric
BODY: Laminated maple w/ weight relieved spruce centre-block
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/42.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Indonesian ebony, block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic style bridge with trapeze tailpiece, Grover open-back tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Vox S66 single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume controls and master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.27/7.19
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See Vox Bobcat V90 (right)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Translucent Red (as reviewed) and Sunburst, opaque Black – all gloss polyester

 9/10

PROS Good build; light weight and resonant; pickup quality and switching; brighter semi voicing

CONS Plenty of lower-priced competition, although with its three single coils it's more unique than the V90



VOX BOBCAT V90

PRICE: From £1,279 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway centre-blocked thinline semi hollow electric
BODY: Laminated maple w/ weight relieved spruce centre-block
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Indonesian ebony, block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic style bridge with trapeze tailpiece, Grover open back tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Vox V90 soapbar single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.13/6.89
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See Vox Bobcat S66 (left)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Translucent Sunburst (as reviewed) and Cherry Red, opaque Black – all gloss

NB: Just as we were going to press, Vox announced the 2021 Bobcats with Bigsby B70 vibratos in both V90 and S66 styles. They'll be offered in Jet Black (around £1,699) and Sapphire Blue (around £1,599) finishes with black plastic parts

8/10

PROS As per the S66 with more classic 'semi' voicing and controls

CONS There's plenty of lower-priced competition out there



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Behind The Sheen

We hook up with head designer Rich Lasner to uncover the inspiration behind the Vox Bobcat 2020

Words Dave Burrluck



If you're into the history of the electric guitar, you don't have to delve too far to find the name Rich Lasner. He has provided primary input to numerous huge-selling guitar designs, from Ibanez where he was heavily involved with important designs such as the Ibanez JEM and RG guitars, to Yamaha where he co-created the company's best-selling Pacifica. Peavey, Modulus Graphite and Line 6 all followed. After leaving Line 6 in 2006 he was hired by Korg as a consultant to complete a four-year plan for a Vox guitar line, which became the Virage DC and SC and numerous subsequent models.

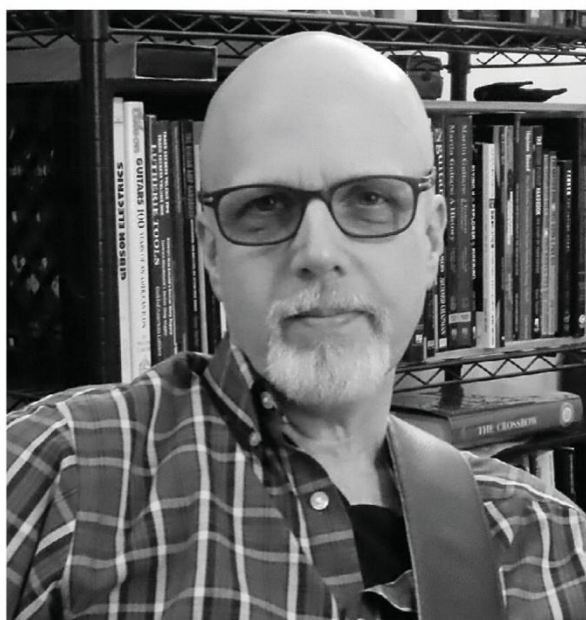
As is the way with many companies, though, designers rarely get the credit they deserve and all too swiftly – certainly in the case of Yamaha – they're written out of history. Even with these new Bobcats there's no mention of the design team, which is somewhat ironic as these new models have considerably more pedigree and credibility than Vox's current smattering of stringed instruments.

evolved into if they had remained in production since their inception.

"As we morphed them into instruments that contemporary players would find valuable, certain aspects fell into place: set-neck construction for better stability with a lower neck-angle for ease of playability and elimination of the wooden base for the bridge; consistent neck shapes; better pickups and the like. We kept elements that we found were important to the identity and vibe of the originals, like light weight, period-correct parts and a different sound than other semis due to the unique pickups."

Since those innovative Virage and the subsequent Virage II models, Vox has taken a more high-tech route with guitars such as the Starstream and Giulietta, and it was mooted to this writer that the head of Korg wanted modern, technology-laden designs. These Bobcats are a lot more retro...

"It was listening to what players were asking us for that was key. We liked the



"Listening to what players were asking us was key. We liked the Eko-built originals, but they had drawbacks for contemporary players"

As vice president of development, Rich heads up G-Rok (Korg – the owners of the Vox brand – in reverse), based just outside San Francisco and including long-time associates Eric Kirkland (director of Vox guitar product development and chief designer) and Bob McDonald (chief R&D engineer). Here, Rich discusses the design process for the new Bobcats.

When did you start work on this project and what was the basic concept behind these guitars?

"We came to the idea a couple of years ago while looking at Vox's guitar heritage and seeing what the essential concepts were for the original models back in the 60s. We bought a few original semi-hollows – which were actually fully hollow instruments that look like semis – and tasked ourselves to project what these guitars could have

Eko-built originals very much, but they had certain drawbacks for contemporary players, like microphonic pickups and feedback from those fully hollow bodies. Playability of the 60s models was different from what was expected of other semis and thin-body guitars like the ES-335 and Casino due to a high neck-angle and using a tall wooden bridge base. We saw a challenge we wanted to take on, to bring the guitars back in a form that would echo the 60s models but make sure they were fully usable for modern players. We feel there is room in the Vox offerings for more fully realised versions of classics from our past."

So what have you brought to the table in terms of innovation here? Outwardly, they appear to be standard ES-335-alikes...

"On a certain level, we wanted to bring familiarity to the Bobcats while having



The G-Rok design team (top to bottom): VP of development, Rich Lasner; director of guitar development, Eric Kirkland; and Bob McDonald, chief R&D engineer

According to Eric Kirkland, this Vox Super Lynx Deluxe is from 1966 or 1967 and was one of the original guitars used to prototype the new Bobcat design. Eric had disassembled the guitar to check its specs and hastily reassembled it for this photo!

points where they diverge from the ordinary to bring some new flavours to the semi-hollow market. The centre blocks, for example, are made of highly weight-relieved spruce. The specific weight-relief configuration is tuned for even resonance and sustain. We found that by using spruce we were able to keep the light weight of the original models, while adding feedback suppression – and at the same time it focuses the sound of the guitar.”

The S66, while echoing the original Bobcat, certainly brings a pretty unique, or at least rare, voicing to a full-size semi.

“Yes, we brought the most common pickup configuration there is – three single coils – to a style of guitar where it traditionally isn’t available. We all love the chimey upper harmonics and sparkle of the combinations available with those three-single-coil-equipped guitars. We felt that seeing what that might sound like on a contemporary semi-hollow would be interesting. We modelled the pickups after vintage American single coils and then added a bit of output to give them extra kick.

“Then, of course, the different wiring of the new models means the independent middle pickup volume can be rolled in or out at any level to create new sounds such as all three pickups on or, by rolling it back, you can get just the neck and the bridge pickups together.”

The V90’s soapbar single coils seem to fit the style more, even though they use rod magnets here.

“We heard from artists during development of the V90 Bobcat that one thing they felt was missing from most semis was a brilliant, articulated top-end. The consensus was that semis sounded warm and fat, but lacked the kind of glistening high harmonics players were looking for. By using a P-90-style coil as a starting point and replacing the under-pickup bar magnet and iron load common to P-90-type pickups with focused pole magnets normally found in Fender single coils, we were able to retain the broad, powerful tone of a P-90 while bringing sparkle and chimey upper harmonics to play.” **G**



Capri Son

A new limited-edition model from a brand that's been a leading voice in popular music since the 60s. But is Rickenbacker's 330 still relevant today?

Words Neville Marten
Photography Phil Barker





RICKENBACKER 330 LIMITED EDITION

£2,879

CONTACT **Rosetti** PHONE **01376 550033** WEB **www.rickenbacker.com**

What You Need To Know

1 We haven't seen a Ricky for a while in these pages...

You're right there! The truth is Rickenbacker rarely releases any new models. Our review guitar here is a UK-only limited edition, one of 25 only, in its certainly eye-catching Pillar Box Red.

2 Strange that while all the classic designs have numerous inspired-by copies, there are very few that clone Rickenbacker.

True. Owner John Hall has constantly worked on protecting the brand and its trademarks. You'll see Rickenbacker's influence everywhere, though, not least Dennis Fano's Fano, Novo and Rivolta designs. There are plenty of Ricky-style pickups available from many makers, too, not least The Creamery here in the UK.

3 But, really, unless you're into the Beatles or The Who, why would you consider buying one?

There is a host of artists who have wielded Rickies beyond those and as we explain here, and in the accompanying Love Me Do feature, their style and sound remains unique. Nothing quite feels or sounds like a Rickenbacker, does it?

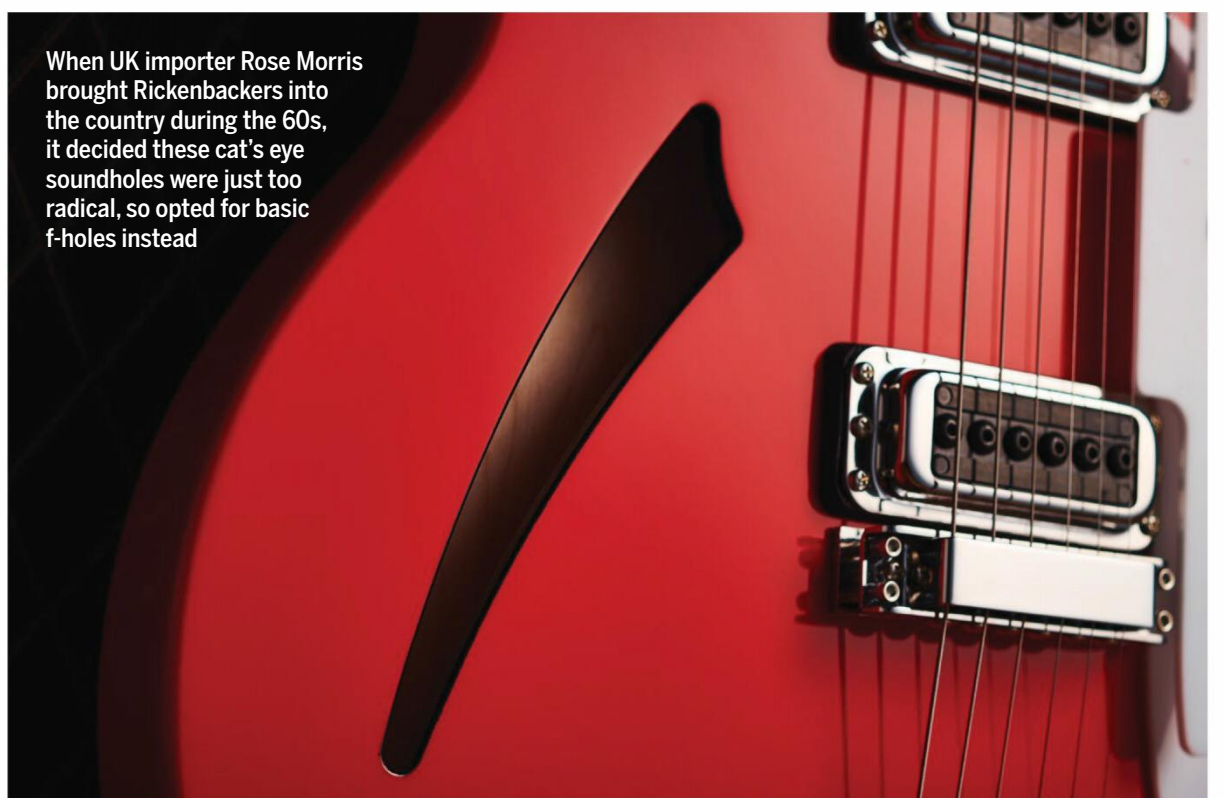
It's something of an occasion when *Guitarist* gets its hands on a new Rickenbacker guitar, so rare is it that they come along. And this one's rarer than most, being a UK-only limited edition of only 25 guitars. Imagine, then, the expectation on receiving a large cardboard box, opening the lightweight moulded case inside and finding this Pillar Box Red 330 model glowing back.

It's almost impossible to imagine how music from the latter part of the 20th century on would have sounded without Rickenbacker guitars and basses. Pack-

leading artists such as The Beatles, The Who, The Byrds, Steppenwolf, Tom Petty, REM, The Jam, Motörhead, The Eagles, Yes, Genesis, Rush, The Smiths, U2 and more have all used Rickenbacker instruments to help them stand out from the crowd.

As the decades progressed, brands including Gibson and Fender, Gretsch and Epiphone expanded massively, with Asian production and models at every conceivable price point. Yet Rickenbacker stuck resolutely to its traditional formula, making instruments in Santa Ana,

When UK importer Rose Morris brought Rickenbackers into the country during the 60s, it decided these cat's eye soundholes were just too radical, so opted for basic f-holes instead





1

1. The neck-position Hi-Gain pickup butts right up to the maple fingerboard. Note the hex-key adjustable polepieces, the large sponge rubber 'foot' and the height-adjusting screws
2. You'll never be lost as to what brand of guitar this is with this gloriously confident chrome-plated Rickenbacker 'R' tailpiece

It's almost impossible to imagine how music from the latter part of the 20th century on would have sounded without Rickenbackers

California, in quantities that its production facilities and team of craftspeople allowed, and concentrating on the model range its customers expected to see.

The 330 is one of Rickenbacker's core models. Consistently its biggest seller, the 330 was an evolution of the Capri models from the late 50s. Designed primarily by German luthier Roger Rossmeisl these were deep-bodied, double-bound instruments bearing this same 'cresting wave' cutaway design. In 1961 Rickenbacker reduced their body depth by an inch, from 2.5 inches (63.5mm) to 1.5 inches (38.1mm) making for a much more streamlined look and feel.

Other models in the 300 series included the 335 (with vibrato), the 340 (with an extra pickup), the 345 (three pickups and vibrato), the 360 (bound body and 'shark fin' inlays) and, of course, the 360/12 12-string as played by The Beatles and The Byrds. John Lennon famously used the smaller-bodied, short-scale 325 (vibrato version of the 320). To cloud the issue somewhat, UK importer Rose Morris not only altered one or two of the guitars' features – including replacing the cat's eye or 'slash' soundholes with standard f-holes – but also used its own numbering system, so the 325 became the 1996, the 330 the 1997, the 340 the 1998, and so on.

Construction of these guitars is complex but clever. A flat maple back is glued to a top and sides that have been pre-routed from a two-piece spread of maple to create acoustic cavities, pickup and control cut-outs and the neck's mortise. Its tenon extends deep into the body, almost to the bridge, surrounded above and below by this sandwich and making repairs complicated and expensive, if not prohibitive. Necks were generally maple-and-walnut laminates, with a thick chunk of unbound but lacquered African rosewood on top. The fingerboard's 254mm (10-inch) radius initially featured 21 small frets, but this was increased to 24 in 1970. It was a radical if logical ploy, given that it laid out two complete octaves for the guitarist to explore. Unusually, the neck also features twin truss rods in order to eliminate twisting – these are accessed (and can even be removed) via the large 'shark fin' plastic cover, inscribed with the legendary underlined Rickenbacker logo.

Our 330 Limited Edition is somewhat different to the norm, in that its neck material is stated as all maple, and the fingerboard a hefty lump of the same timber. As before it's lacquered, remains unbound (as does the body), and retains the small position markers with double



THE RIVALS

Fano's GF6 Alt De Facto (£POA) is a made-to-order range that's offered with tons of options. It has a semi-solid, offset, carved-top with chambered alder body and bolt-on maple neck, and a range of pickups is available including TV Jones T-Armonds; their bright, 'sprangy' tone is not a million miles away from Rickenbacker. It's one of the coolest guitars around, and a fantastic instrument in its own right. Duesenberg's Caribou (from around £1,975 street price) is another fabulous looking high-end semi-solid. With cat's eye style soundholes on a chambered alder body with single-coil pickups and 'Tremola' Bigsby-type vibrato, these are great-quality and highly individual guitars. Rickenbacker fiercely guards its intellectual property, so direct copies are all but non-existent. But if you want almost all the vibe but without the price tag, how about a Gretsch G5422TG Electromatic (£829 street)? With Bigsby tailpiece, GraphTech Tusq nut, Black Top FilterTron pickups, and 'hump top' inlays on a rosewood fingerboard, it's a big slice of cool for comparatively little dosh.

Rickenbackers feel and play like no other guitars... [but] this guitar feels very normal on a strap

dots at the 12th and 24th frets. The Pillar Box Red finish is beautifully executed and buffed to a perfect gloss.

Early 330s featured Rickenbacker's Toaster Top single-coil pickups while later versions, ours included, carry the more powerful but still jangly-toned Hi-Gain models. These occupy the same footprint, but feature black hex-key-adjustable polepieces in chrome surrounds, sit on full-sized sponge feet and are adjustable via crosshead screws at either end.

Other notable features include: the evocative 'R' tailpiece that resides in a sculpted recess with curved sides to mirror those of the cutaways; a five-control, two-tier plexiglass (acrylic) pickguard in white; a height- and intonation-adjustable bridge with removable chrome cover; and Schaller enclosed tuners and locking strap buttons. Of course, we can't forget the black-edged cat's eye soundhole so evocative of this model.

One element that often confuses guitarists is the five-control layout – and exactly what that smaller fifth knob does. Essentially,

it's a sort of 'blend' control, operating only on the naturally louder neck pickup to bring it in line with the bridge unit's brighter but weaker tone. Those who know Rickenbacker guitars well use this control to extract some of those warm but chiming rhythm and lead tones. The four larger knobs operate like a Gibson, albeit with the cluster rotated anti-clockwise by one turn so the two volume knobs are at the bottom and the tones at the top, the bridge pair to the right (as you play the guitar), and the rhythm pair to the left.

Feel & Sounds

Rickenbackers feel and play like no other guitars. Since the neck of the 330 joins the body at the 21st fret and the longer of the two cutaway horns protrudes to around the 13th, not only does it provide almost total fretboard access, it also means the guitar feels very normal on a strap. There's also very little fattening of the neck from the 1st to the 12th fret – it expands from 22mm to just 24mm.



3. Under the removable chrome-plated bridge cover lies a fairly traditional six-saddle bridge. The saddles are individually adjustable for height and intonation

4. Under the bold 'shark fin' cover (designed by CEO John Hall's mother) lies the heads of twin truss rods, designed to eliminate neck twisting. Tuners are by Schaller





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Given our preconceptions about what Rickies do, it might come as a surprise to learn that you can indeed play bluesy bends and vibrato on a 330, and of course there's no reason why not. The 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius with its fine vintage-style frets and the guitar's 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length should lend familiarity, yet there's some indefinable element that makes it stand out as quite different. Nevertheless the medium C profile makes for a tireless playing experience, and at 3.6kg (8lbs) it's a perfect weight on a strap and balances superbly.

The 330 offers a range of glorious chiming voices that run from Pete Townshend's stuttering ejaculations to Paul Weller's vicious attack; Peter Buck's melodious arpeggios to Johnny Marr's intricate lead-meets-rhythm lines. The Hi-Gain pickups are scatter-wound but in an identical, preordained way each time. They offer a clarity that's all but impossible to extract from other guitars. With both Strat and Tele to hand as comparators, each sounded more strident, a touch more powerful and ready to rock. The

330's voice on the other hand is thinner, but never in a tinny, weedy way – the string separation is exceptional and the response immediate. And even though these Hi-Gain pickups are more powerful than the old toaster top types, they sing in that incontrovertible Rickenbacker accent. If really pushed, we'd say it's a bit like a slimmer-toned Gretsch, but nothing like the aforementioned Fenders.

Although the neck pickup is warm there's a shimmering character to it that's exceptionally pleasing. While the tone controls do what you'd expect, bringing in an almost jazzy or 'woman' tone element, a 330 is unlikely to be used that way; this is a tool for bright, articulate and musical tones. Flipping to the middle 'both pickups on' position, the blend control comes into play. Balancing this against the even brighter (but never piercing) bridge pickup, all manner of glistening tones can be invoked – you could even leave the guitar set this way and use this control as a sort of tone 'master'. But then you'd lose the spiteful edge that the bridge pickup delivers so brilliantly. Choices, choices.

5. To the right lies a standard three-way pickup toggle; next to this sit tone (top) and volume (bottom) controls for the neck pickup. Alongside these are matching pots for the neck pickup, and finally the smaller knob that mixes neck pickup tones with the bridge unit

It might come as a surprise to learn that you can indeed play bluesy bends and vibrato on a 330



The 330's neck tenon extends deep into the body, almost to the bridge, and is sandwiched between the glued-on back and pre-routed top

Verdict

Once you've spent some time with a Rickenbacker you begin to understand why certain guitarists are drawn to their unique charms. While this very limited edition's bright red finish won't be to everyone's taste, there's always the company's small but classic palette of colours to choose from (a standard 330 costs £500 less, too).

And yes, you can play lead on it – indeed, Townshend and Weller have both done it – but there cannot be a better guitar on which to strum rhythm and pick out arpeggios. The 330 is glorious in that regard because it offers a delightful set of sounds that are certain to rise above any mix. Image-wise, we can't see many blues or rock guitarists going for one of these, so it's likely to stay a staple of the 60s-inspired bands so associated with the model.

However, were you thinking about adding a new musical voice to your guitar arsenal, rather than opting for yet another

Once you spend time with a Rickenbacker you understand why guitarists are drawn to their unique charms

of the usual suspects, we'd strongly suggest you get down to your local Rickenbacker dealer (once it's allowed, of course) and try one. Plug into something like a Vox AC15 or Fender Blues Junior, make sure you set aside enough time to get used to how it plays and works, and odds on you'll be pulled across to the dark side.

And in answer to our opening question 'is the Rickenbacker 330 still relevant?', you betcha! In fact, we reckon it might be time for the next Who, Jam or REM to come along and upset today's all too predictable musical applecart. Kerchang! **G**



RICKENBACKER 330 LIMITED EDITION

PRICE: £2,879

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-acoustic

BODY: Solid maple top and sides routed for pickups, controls, etc, with glued-on maple back

NECK: Maple, medium C profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Black phenolic, 41.4mm

FINGERBOARD: Thick maple, unbound with black dot inlays

FRETS: 24, vintage-style small

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8

HARDWARE: Chrome plated 'R' tailpiece, adjustable bridge with chrome cover, Schaller tuners and strap lock buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Rickenbacker Hi-Gain pickups, 2x tones, 2x volumes, blend control operating on neck pickup only, 3-way pickup selector

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Rosetti approached Rickenbacker to do a limited run of Pillar Box Red (PBR) guitars and basses with maple fretboards across 5 models. The others include the 360 PBR (25 only, £3,520); 4003 PBR bass (25 only, £3,265); 4003S PBR bass (25 only, £2,880); 4003S/5 PBR bass (10 only, £3,959). The standard 330 comes in at £2,398

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

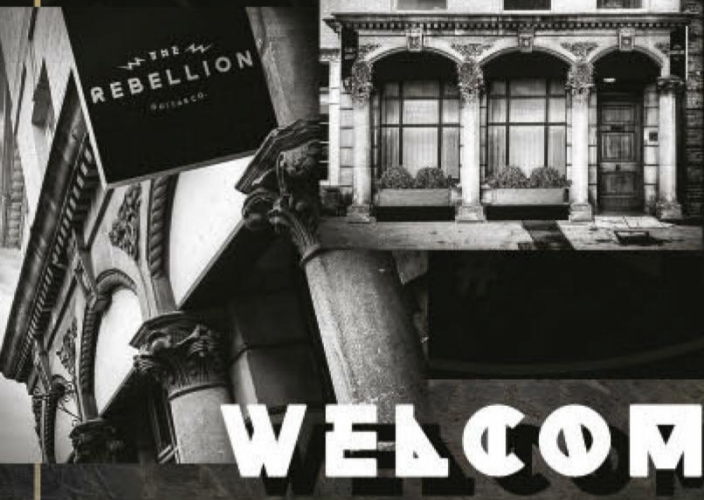
FINISHES: Pillar Box Red (this model only). Fire Glo, Jet Glo, Maple Glo, Midnight Blue (Standard 330)



PROS Unrivalled chiming tones, originality, build quality, image

CONS Some will find it too quirky; not a top choice for blues and rock

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Love Me Do

Rickenbacker's esoteric instruments not only look unique but feel and sound it, too. Why? We take a closer look with the help of two used classics

Words Dave Burrluck

If you've never played a Rickenbacker, you might be in for a shock when you do. Even before you plug in, it's the feel of the apparent narrow-width neck – with its gloss-finished fingerboard and small, low frets – that will probably feel pretty alien in comparison to the majority, if not all, of the other instruments you own. Many players, not least those who enjoy their multi-toned blues bends, can feel rather ill at ease until they get used to the unusual feel and drive.

Nuts & Necks

So, what's actually different? Let's start with that neck. Many people look at a quoted nut width and decide the neck is too big or too small for them. Rickenbacker quotes a nut width of 41.4mm (1.63 inches) for both our loaned 2006 620 and 2005 330 six-strings, which puts you very much in the vintage Fender size or more contemporary Music Man.

Measuring both guitars we find there is, of course, some variance: our 620 actually measures 41.84mm at its nut, identical to Fender's 70th Anniversary Broadcaster and a shade wider than the EVH Wolfgang we recently reviewed. Our 330 is slightly wider and more mainstream at 42.12mm [pic 1].

But nut width is only one part of the story. If the nut width is on the narrower side of the tracks, the width at the 12th fret is more uniquely narrow: Rickenbacker quotes 49.05mm (1.931 inches), our 620 actually measures 50.07mm and our 330 comes in at 50.43mm. Now, of around 170 guitars we've weighed and measured over the past three years, *none* have a 12th fret width that narrow and indeed only two – a 1976 Guild S-90 (50.27mm) and a 1952 Fender Telecaster (50.69mm) – are similar. No guitars we've measured over this period have a 12th-fret width that drops below 50mm.

Of course, Rickenbacker does offer model-specific wider neck options, such as the 660 with a nut/12th-fret width of 44.5mm/52.4mm, and the 650C with that same wider nut and 53.52mm at the 12th. They are in the minority, though.

We often overlook the actual string spacing, too, both at the nut and the bridge. At 34mm, the 620's nut string spacing – measured from the centre of the two outer strings – is again very similar in contemporary terms to Music Man's, although plenty more have a 34.5mm dimension, while the majority settle on 35mm. And, again showing some variance, our 330's nut spacing is slightly wider still

at 35.3mm, but it's also unbound, the frets running the full width of the fingerboard.

Our 620 is bound and, like Gibson, the frets stop before the binding again, slightly narrowing the perceived width [pic 2]. You might think this is all splitting hairs, but your left hand doesn't lie and the 330's neck feels wider, albeit thanks to very small dimensional changes.

So, if the relatively narrow-tapered width is playing its part in the feel so, too, is the *depth*, which is similarly lacking taper, measuring approximately 23.6mm at the 1st fret and 23.8mm by the 12th. Again, that's a little odd as a depth of 23mm is pretty 'big' in modern terms and actually unusual at the 1st fret; it's a dimension that's much more mainstream at the 12th fret.

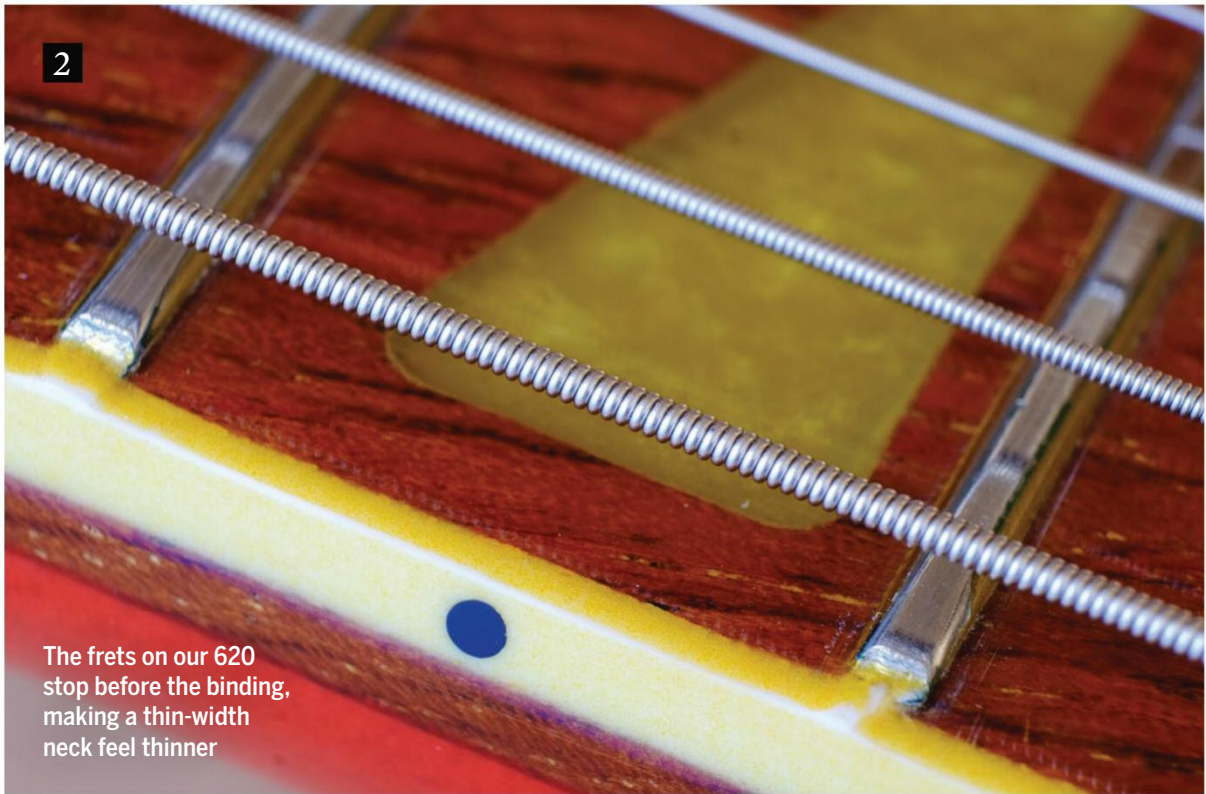
The bridge spacing, measured at 49.5mm on both our reference Rickies, is pretty much 'old Gibson' spacing, which is narrow

The apparent narrow neck with gloss fingerboard and small, low frets will probably feel alien



compared with Fender's historic 55/56mm spread or even the modern bridge spacing – used by PRS, for example – that sits halfway between those at 52.5mm. The bridge itself, while tune-o-matic-like, features what appear to be notched aluminium saddles, and the unit simply sits on a chromed metal baseplate that can be moved either towards or away from the neck to aid intonation [pic 3]. It also sits quite high above the body, despite the fact there's no back-angled neck pitch – a necessity as the pickups themselves sit above the face of the guitar unlike virtually any other, certainly in the classic Fender/Gibson style.

At least we're on familiar ground with the 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius, the same used by PRS, minimally flatter than Fender's 241mm (9.5-inch) and slightly rounder than Gibson's 305mm (12-inch) [pic 4]. The big difference, however, is although Rickenbacker primarily uses

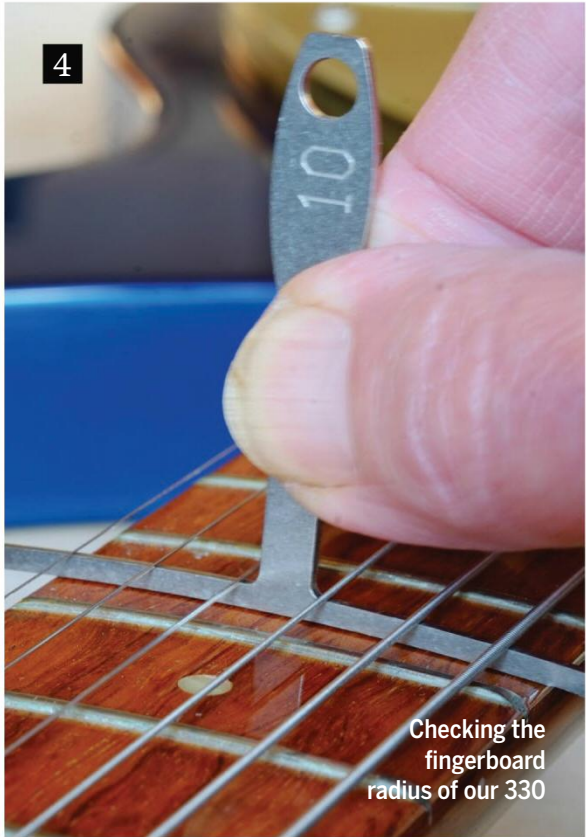


a specific rosewood for its fingerboards (occasionally maple), it's gloss coated after fretting, a protocol usually reserved for Fender-style maple fingerboards. So the Ricky fingerboard actually feels like one of those 'fretless wonder' gloss-finished Fender necks from the 70s – not the company's finest moment.



As with those necks, the build-up of finish either side of the frets effectively reduces their height. Measuring at various places on our 620's fingerboard, for example, we get a maximum fret height of around 0.7mm (slightly lower on the treble side, oddly). Even on that Fender 70th Anniversary Broadcaster, with its vintage small frets and gloss-lacquered fingerboard, the fret height is closer to 0.9mm. Again, fractions of millimetres, but they all add up and, compared with a regular guitar such as a Core PRS, you'd be looking at a fret height of around 1.2mm – plenty for easy bends without feeling over-big.

As we point out in our preceding review, Rickenbacker uses two (single-action) truss rods – 100 per cent unique in the modern guitar world [pic 5]. The idea that you can accurately set different relief amounts on the treble and bass sides of such a thin-width'd neck is not something we want to



put to the test. Basically, good luck with that. Of course, with the neck-through body construction of models like our 620 or the deep tenon set-neck of the 330, this design might well have been seen as extra insurance. After all, if there's a problem with the neck, you can't bolt a new one on or even replace it as with a Gibson's glued-in neck.

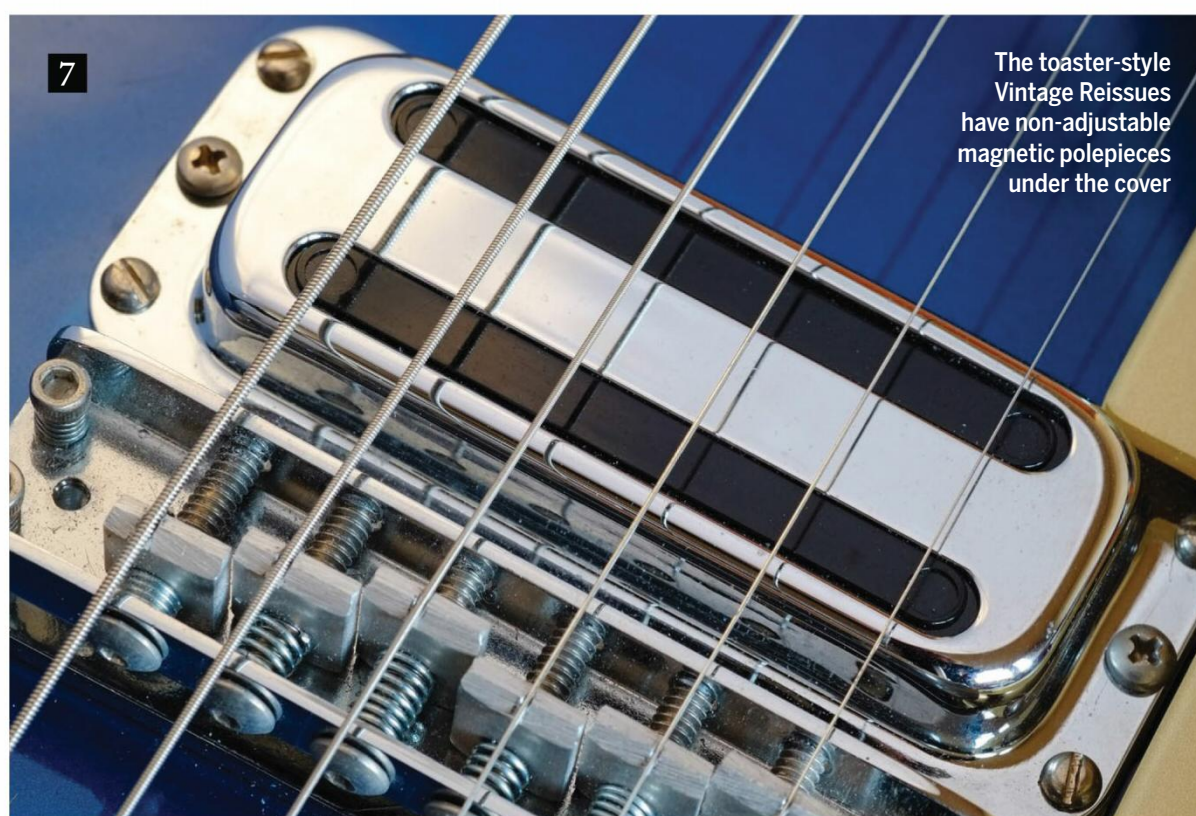
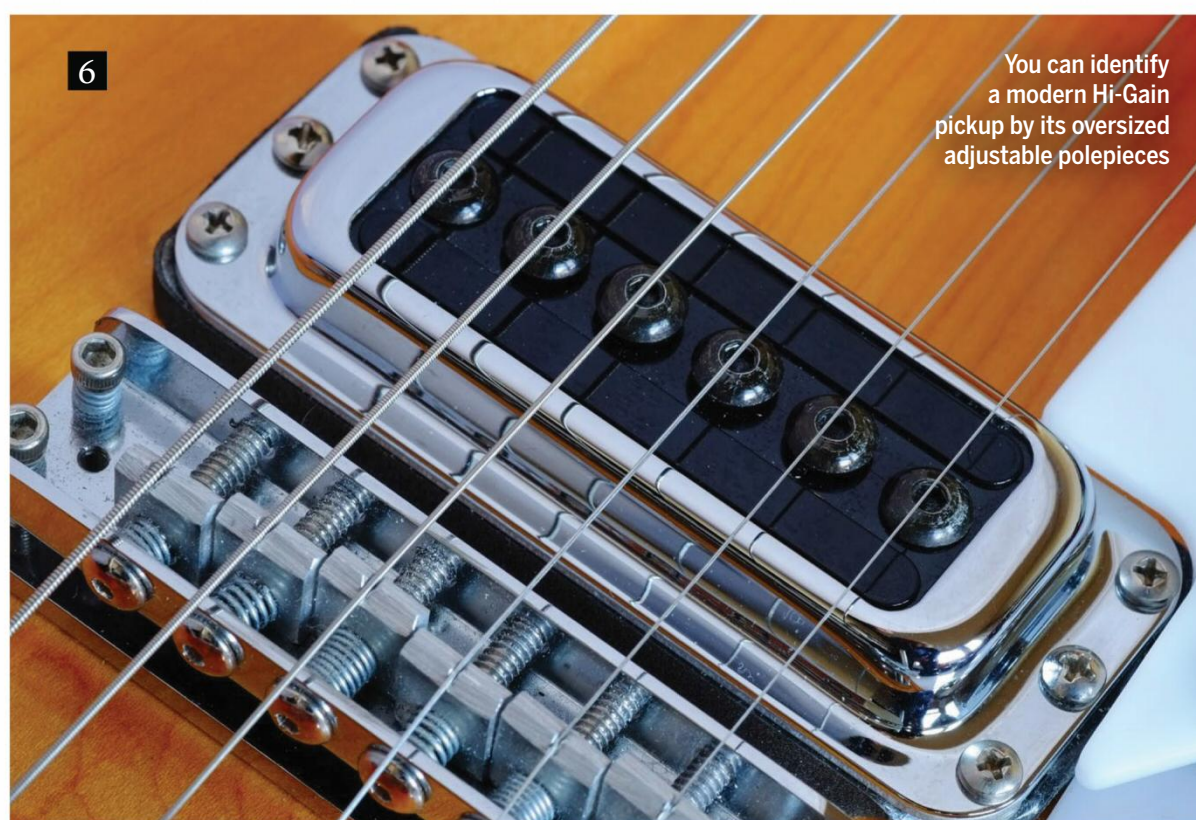
Pickups & Controls

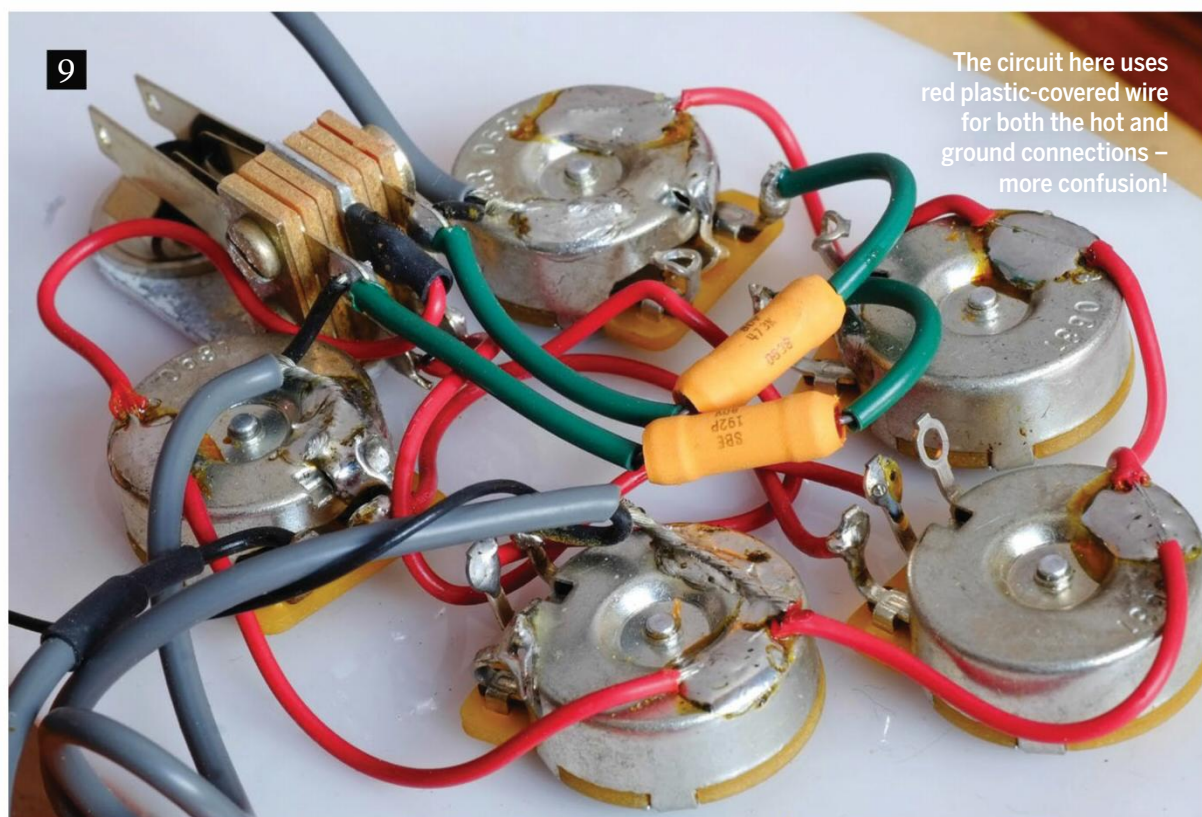
Even some seasoned Ricky owners still scratch their heads a little when asked to explain what the fifth control, with its smaller knob, actually does. Typically, Rickenbacker pickups are wound to pretty much the same output, which means the neck pickup is usually louder as they have limited height adjustment. That's certainly the case with our loaner Rickies: the 620 has the Hi-Gain single coils with virtually identical measured DCRs of 11kohms [pic 6].

Even seasoned Ricky owners still scratch their heads when asked to explain the fifth control

The 330's pickups are retrofitted 'toaster'-type single coils to a more vintage spec with similar DCRs of 6.85k (bridge) and 6.75k (neck) [pic 7]. You'll hear this imbalance if you turn the pickup volume and tones full up (clockwise) and that fifth knob fully down (anti-clockwise). So, as Rickenbacker tell us, that fifth knob can act as a bass pickup 'volume equaliser'; you turn 'up' (clockwise) that fifth control in either mixed or neck pickup selections of the three-way toggle to achieve a more balanced mix or reduced output for the neck. Another trick is to wind the pickup controls full up, then fully back off the neck pickup tone. Now that fifth control sweeps through the fullest range of the guitar from neck pickup with its tone roll off to the full spiky treble of the bridge.

If you're thinking you could do all this with just the volume and tone controls, well,

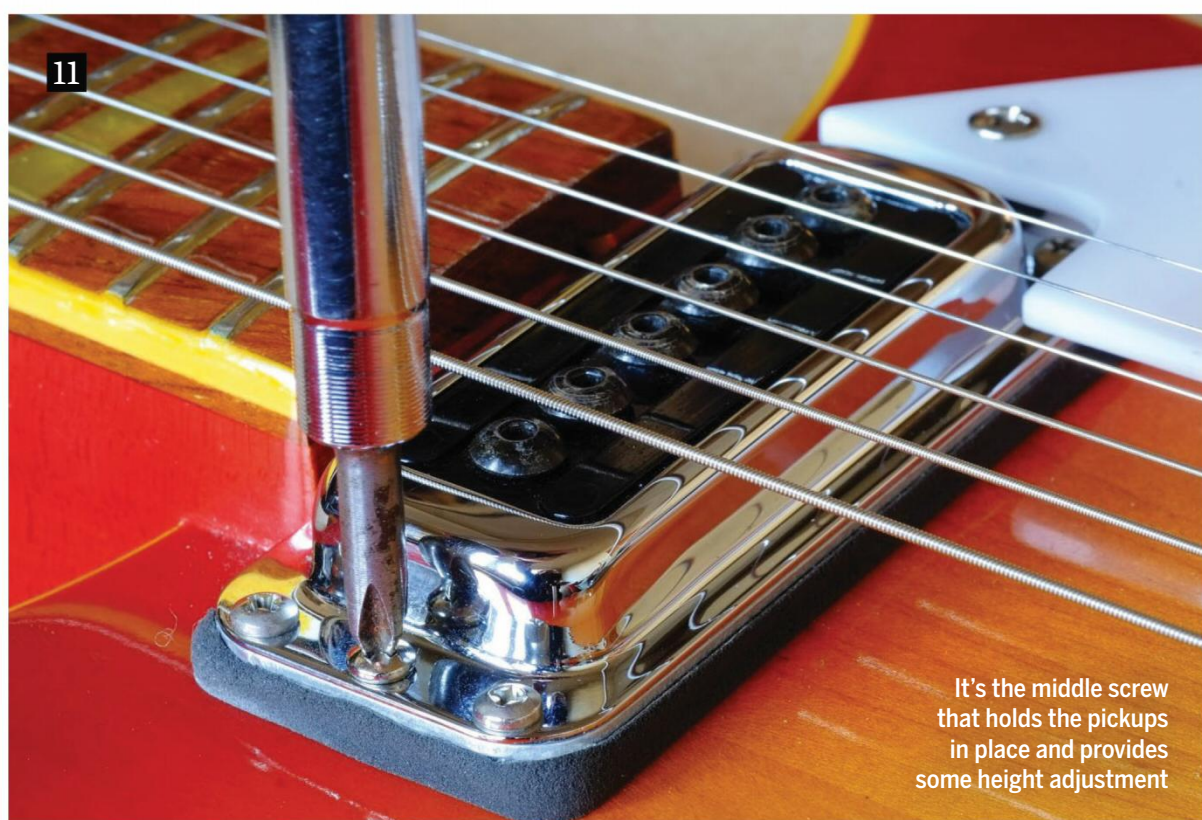




The circuit here uses red plastic-covered wire for both the hot and ground connections – more confusion!



The underside of the Hi-Gain pickup showing the rubber magnet



It's the middle screw that holds the pickups in place and provides some height adjustment

you pretty much can except – unhelpfully – the four main controls are laid out in a different manner to the industry (Gibson) standard. The controls nearest to the top E string are the pickup tones – neck pickup above bridge pickup – while the two controls furthest from that top string are the volumes [pic 8]. If you're a Les Paul player you'll get in a right ol' mess, so actually leaving the main controls as described and using that fifth control makes some sense.

Should you fancy a bit of circuit modding, the components are all easily accessed by removing those dual-level acrylic plates held with just four screws. The main controls are all 330kohm pots, as is the fifth control. The two tone caps are both .047 microfarads. Despite the circuit itself, there's nothing that unusual here and certainly no additional screening [pic 9].

The pickups themselves are unique to Rickenbacker, narrow-aperture single coils,

The components are easily accessed by removing dual-level acrylic plates held with just four screws

the open top covers presumably providing some shielding. The so-called 'toaster' top style (officially called Vintage Reissue pickups) use cylindrical Alnico magnets. The Hi-Gain, or 'modern', pickups "use 'rubber' magnets which are actually a zillion magnetic bits supported in a synthetic block", says John Hall, with large adjustable polepieces [pic 10]. He also confirms "from the early 60s until today, we've only used 44-gauge wire". Along with the Hi-Gain's adjustable poles, the pickups sit on a foam rubber cushion, held in place by the centre of the three screws at each end: it's this screw that provides the limited height adjustment we mentioned earlier [pic 11].

The reality is that the majority of construction features and parts are *completely* unique to Rickenbacker. Is it any wonder that they sound, play and feel gloriously unique? **G**

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A space-saving two-in-one pedal with quality sounds

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Neil Godwin

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Maybe it was the idea of giving any amp the built-in ‘effects’ found in vintage Fender amps that spawned the first pedal to combine reverb and tremolo, but that type of stompbox has become a bit of staple represented by the likes of Strymon’s Flint, Fender’s Tre-Verb and Source Audio’s True Spring, to name just three. Now there’s a new one from Keeley. The brand is no stranger to this genre as it happens – we’ve already taken a look at its Verb-o-Trem series of pedals – but the Hydra brings something new to the table, condensing a host of features into a really pedalboard-friendly unit.

A companion piece to the Eccos delay, the Hydra is a compact pedal that manages to feature two ergonomically spaced footswitches, one each for the independent tremolo and reverb sections. These effects run in serial in either order,

something that can be quickly changed on the fly, as can the choice of whether the reverbs cut abruptly or trail off naturally with bypass. You get a choice of three reverb types (Spring, Plate and Room) and three modulation types (Sine, Harmonic and Vibrato), and there are three directly accessible preset slots.

IN USE

The pedal’s two inputs and two outputs allow several possibilities for mono and stereo connection, including true stereo or a wet/dry setup for the reverb, and stereo tremolo options of panning, sync’d or wet/dry. Operation is relatively straightforward once you get familiar with secondary functions and the multiple-function footswitches.

Of the five front-panel knobs, Rate and Depth allow instant tweaks to the tremolo,

Dwell adjusts the length of the reverb trail, and Mixer controls the reverb level. Meanwhile, the Color knob (reverb trail tone) doubles as a mode switch that’s held down to access secondary parameters for the other four knobs: Trem Sync addresses the tremolo stereo options; Trem Level, which includes a 6dB boost; Wet/Dry provides reverb stereo options; and Reverb Modifier, which has a different adjustment for each type of reverb.

These three reverb types are scrolled through and selected with a spring-loaded toggle switch, as are the trem types if the Color knob is held down. Alternatively, you can give the Color knob a double-tap (easily done by foot because it stands prouder than other knobs) and use the respective footswitches to select the effects. With this amount of parameters available you may wish to store some of the



01. SWITCH

This selects your choice of the three reverbs and also selects your choice of tremolo if you operate it while holding down the Color knob

02. LEDS

Three central red LEDs indicate which (if any) preset is active. The two blue LEDs show when their associated effect is active – the tremolo LED flashes at the set rate

03. COLOR KNOB

This adjusts the tonal content of the reverb and also offers access to Secondary functions – press and hold it while turning

the appropriate knob (secondary functions are legended in grey). A double-tap will show you which tremolo and reverb are currently selected and lets you change that with the footswitches

04. TREMOLO FOOTSWITCH

This turns the tremolo on and off, but a press-and-hold for about one second will put it into tap tempo mode

05. REVERB FOOTSWITCH

This turns the reverb on and off, but pressing and holding freezes the signal going into the reverb for infinite sustain

sounds you set up, which is where those three presets come in very handy. A quick double-tap on the tremolo footswitch puts you into preset mode where you can scroll through the three with presses on the reverb footswitch and load the chosen one with another push on the tremolo footswitch. Getting back to WYSIWYG mode is similarly easy.

SOUNDS

The sounds in the Hydra are all high quality. The Sine Wave tremolo offers the smooth undulations you'd expect from a lot of vintage amp tremolos, while Harmonic – based on the onboard trem found in a select few vintage amps – is a little more tonally complex. Unlike many iterations of the effect, the Vibrato setting here is musical across most of its range; there's no extreme adjustment

available that will give you seasick pitch variations. Reverbs cover all traditional guitar needs without getting too far into the esoteric. Spring is nicely authentic and you can adjust 'Spring Age' with the reverb modifier to keep it smooth or dial in some more pronounced echoes. Plate sits really well with guitar sounds and has the added reverb modifier bonus of an adjustable octave up shimmer effect; combine that with some harmonic tremolo and you'll get a really rich sound. The Room sound can be modified, too, to the point where you can conjure up cavernous spaces.

The footswitches also double up with useful performance functions: the Tremolo footswitch can undertake tap tempo for the tremolo rate, plus if you already have reverb engaged you have an Infinite Hold mode whereby the reverb keeps going as long as you hold the Reverb

footswitch down, allowing you to play over the sustained sound. In addition, there are facilities for connecting remote footswitching, a tap tempo footswitch or an expression pedal, which can be assigned to a combination of parameters.

VERDICT

Not only a space-saving way to add both tremolo and reverb to your pedalboard, the Hydra also features quality sounds and has practical footswitching capabilities for handy onstage use. **G**

PROS Tremolo and reverb in one box; compact size; extensive parameter set; onboard presets; tap tempo; expression pedal functions

CONS This one's not for you if you don't want tremolo and reverb next to each other in the signal chain

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Tremolo and reverb pedal

FEATURES: Switchable true or buffered trails bypass, tap tempo, infinite hold function, expression pedal capability

CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Color/Mode switch, Dwell, Mixer, selector switch, Tremolo footswitch, Reverb footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L/Mono, Right), standard outputs (Stereo, Mono), TRS EXP pedal, Remote switching input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor, 115mA

DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 124 (d) x 61mm (h)

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

9/10

MANUFACTURER	PRICE
MXR	£169 & £185
MODEL	CONTACT
M305 TREMOLO & M251 FOD	WESTSIDE DISTRIBUTION 0844 326 2000 WWW.JIMDUNLOP.COM

ROUND-UP

MXR pedals

MXR packs the effects into this new duo of compact pedals

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Neil Godwin

It's been a little while since we've seen any new MXR pedals and now two come along at once. Both adhere to the same shape and size that MXR pioneered way back in the 1970s with the likes of the Dyna Comp and Phase 90, so in the case of the M251 FOD Drive the battery access is old style by removing

the four-screw baseplate. The M305 Tremolo pedal replaces the discontinued M159 Tremolo model, which launched in 2008 and ran at 18 volts, necessitating the use of two batteries or another arrangement. This new iteration runs more conveniently from a single nine volts power source.



M305 Tremolo £169

This tremolo can run in mono or stereo and features six different trem types, scrolled through by pushing the Gain knob. There are standard Speed and Depth controls and that Gain knob can not only compensate for the perceived volume drop that the effect can engender but can also give you a boost to drive an amp a little harder. One tremolo type, called MXR, recreates the pulsing of the previous M159's sine wave trem, plus, still in the vintage amp-style, you get the softer flavoured Bias and Opto types. Revo is an optical tremolo with a reversed waveform for a slightly harder edged attack, something that finds its full expression in the square wave trem's choppy on/off effects. Finally, there's the increasingly popular Harmonic tremolo that recreates the phasey sound of a rarer type of vintage amp trem. A very cool envelope mode allows tremolo speed to be determined by the intensity of your playing, put to great effect with a trem that slows right down as a chord fades out. Other performance options include connection of a tap tempo footswitch or expression pedal, which is able to blend between two settings to incorporate all three of the front-panel knobs. **G**

VERDICT A pretty comprehensive set of tremolo sounds in a compact footprint with plenty of performance options



M251 FOD £185

MXR's Dookie Drive pedal was based on the rig of modified Marshalls that Billie Joe Armstrong used on Green Day's third album. It had the basic aim of putting the sound of two amp stacks in a single housing with options for blending the two – and that's exactly what the new FOD Drive is designed to do, albeit with no artist affiliation and the option of a toggle-switched midrange boost, plus a scoop and a flat setting. A Blend knob sets the mix between the two sounds. To the right is the High Gain channel, with Gain controlled by a the front-panel knob while to the left is the Crunch Gain channel with internal set-and-forget trimmers for its gain and volume if you want to deviate from the factory settings. Both sides have the flavour of a nicely cranked stack and each individually has a range of useful tones whether you're looking for rhythmic graunch or saturated leads. It's the combinations, though, that give the pedal its signature voicing and these are where you can dial in really rich tones that combine saturation and sustain with an extra edge of clarity from the Crunch side. Tailored EQ and extra boost from the Output knob add to the options. **G**

VERDICT Layering two different overdrive flavours in one pedal is an inspired idea and this does it seamlessly

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Taiwan

TYPE: Tremolo pedal

FEATURES: Selectable True or buffered bypass, 6 tremolo styles (MXR, Bias, Opto, Revo, Square, Harmonic), mono or stereo output, external tap tempo, envelope mode, expression pedal control

CONTROLS: Speed, Depth, Gain (push to cycle through tremolo types), CTR switch, internal stereo/mono switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input (TRS), standard output (TRS), CTR

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 190mA

DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 110 (d) x 47mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Output, Blend, Gain, Tone, Scoop switch, internal Crunch Gain trimmer, internal Crunch Volume trimmer, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 11mA

DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 110 (d) x 47mm (h)

8/10



ROUND-UP

Vox Valvenergy pedals

A trio of valve-powered drive pedals that use a Nutube for an old sound

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Neil Godwin

The Valvenerergy pedals, each based around a Nutube miniature vacuum tube in its all-analogue signal path, are designed to emulate the response and harmonic distortion of a valve amp. Four popular amp types are represented, in order of increasing gain: Silk Drive, Mystic Edge, Copperhead Drive and Cutting Edge. Each pedal has an oscilloscope-like OLED display that shows the resulting waveform as you play and all have basically the same front-panel configuration, apart from the Cutting Edge

(not featured here), which is based on a US high-gain amp suitable for metal tones and has a Tight knob in place of the Bright switch.

The pedals have a choice of three output modes: they can be used in standard pedal mode in front of your amp, as a line-level preamp or, with the built-in cab sim engaged, direct into an audio interface or PA. If you use two or more pedals together, a Channel Link feature lets you turn one pedal on while bypassing the others, rather like amp channel switching.



Mystic Edge £169

The only one of the pedals that can be quite specific about its inspiration is the Mystic Edge, based on an AC30. It's nicely responsive to playing dynamics and, with a combination of grit and chime, some familiar Vox tones are here to be explored. The midrange character seems to be about right, so there's no point messing with it, and where the other pedals have a Middle knob, here you get Tone Cut, as found in the original amp, adding an extra layer of tonal subtlety in calming down aspects of the top-end.

The gain range takes the pedal from clean to a fully cranked amp, offering plenty of punchy drive along the way, and while the analogue cabinet simulator offers a decent impression of the original's 2x12 open-backed cab, there's always the option to use the pedal in preamp mode and add an impulse response further down the line if you want different speaker simulation choices. **G**

VERDICT An AC30-in-a-box pedal from Vox itself. What's not to like?



Silk Drive £169

The Silk Drive, based on an American clean amp, represents the amp with the lowest gain in this series. The drive in the pedal doesn't really become apparent until past midway on the Gain knob, which allows it to be a useful clean boost and tone conditioning pedal. There's a certain scooped character in the midrange and (of course) a silky top-end, especially with the Bright switch engaged – a definite enhancement to your sound that you may wish to leave permanently on. With further travel on the Gain knob things quite quickly get decidedly raunchy past three o'clock, but before you get there, there are some very attractive edge-of-break-up tones on tap.

Interestingly, the amount of clean headroom enables you to use the pedal into a distorted amp as a switchable clean channel. With cab sim engaged, this is a great choice for recording a range of clean tones, ably tweaked with the EQ knobs. **G**

VERDICT A versatile pedal with a range of uses, not least an alternative clean voice



Copperhead Drive £169

It's probably no coincidence that the Copperhead Drive, which Vox says is based around a British stack, has the same finish as a classic Marshall front panel. This is the pedal for vintage (and more modern) rock sounds and comes with fulsome low-end and midrange. A full range of overdriven tones are covered here with plenty of dynamic crunch and grind leading the way to saturated lead tones, made all the better by engaging the Bright switch for some extra sizzle in the top-end to bring out the harmonics.

For this whole series of pedals the oscilloscope-like OLED display window is cute, but it isn't exactly necessary as long as your ears are still working. However, the three output modes offer real versatility for live use and recording – the cab sim here will put some 4x12 heft straight into your DAW, while in standard mode this pedal will give your clean amp an M-flavoured makeover. **G**

VERDICT As MIAB pedals go, this one goes that extra mile in terms of practicality

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, oscilloscope display (switchable)

CONTROLS: Volume, Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Bright switch, Mode switch (STD/PRE/CAB), Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 95mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, oscilloscope display (switchable)

CONTROLS: Volume, Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Bright switch, Mode switch (STD/PRE/CAB), Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 95mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

9/10



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, oscilloscope display (switchable)

CONTROLS: Volume, Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Bright switch, Mode switch (STD/PRE/CAB), Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 95mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10





Budget 'Boards

You pedalboard doesn't need to cost the earth to give you the tones you're after. Adrian Thorpe does the sums...

THE BACKGROUND

TERRY MCIVOR, Via email

I've been following your 'agony aunt' pedal advice for quite some time now. While your advice has been very logical, my concern is that my budget just doesn't meet my aspirations with regards to pedalboards. I look around the various gear forums and it looks as though people have a year's savings invested in their pedalboards. Is there any way I can have an enjoyable pedalboard on a more friendly budget? I'd like to spend a maximum of approximately £400 and ideally a whole lot less. I believe I have a great pedal-friendly valve amp.

THE ANSWERS

Terry, thanks for the real head-scratcher, and just in time for my final 'pedal agony aunt' column.

01. The honest truth is that guitar is enjoyable regardless of your personal financial status: just because someone doesn't have deep pockets doesn't mean that they can't find joy in guitar pedals. When I first got into pedal building it was because I wanted to have premium sounds at a more modest budget. Times have changed, though, and I thoroughly believe it is possible to build a decent-sounding 'board on a budget.

02. For your £400 budget I have chosen: Donner DB-3 'board, £47.99 (including bag, hook-and-loop fixings and three patch leads); Harley Benton PowerPlant ISO-1 Pro power supply, £36; four Harley Benton FPC-28 patch leads, £14.40; Zoom MS-70CDR MultiStomp Chorus/Delay/Reverb pedal, £105; and ThorpyFx The Warthog, £184.99.

This lot comes to £388.38*. Now, it may seem weird that you have only two pedals on your 'board, but I wanted to give you the best quality for your money. The pedalboard, cables and power supply will be your foundations. The Zoom pedal is possibly the best 'bang for buck' digital all-in-one out there. As for recommending my own

pedal, The Warthog can give you a clean boost, light overdrive, heavy overdrive, distortion and even fuzz. With this setup you should be able sound incredible across most genres.

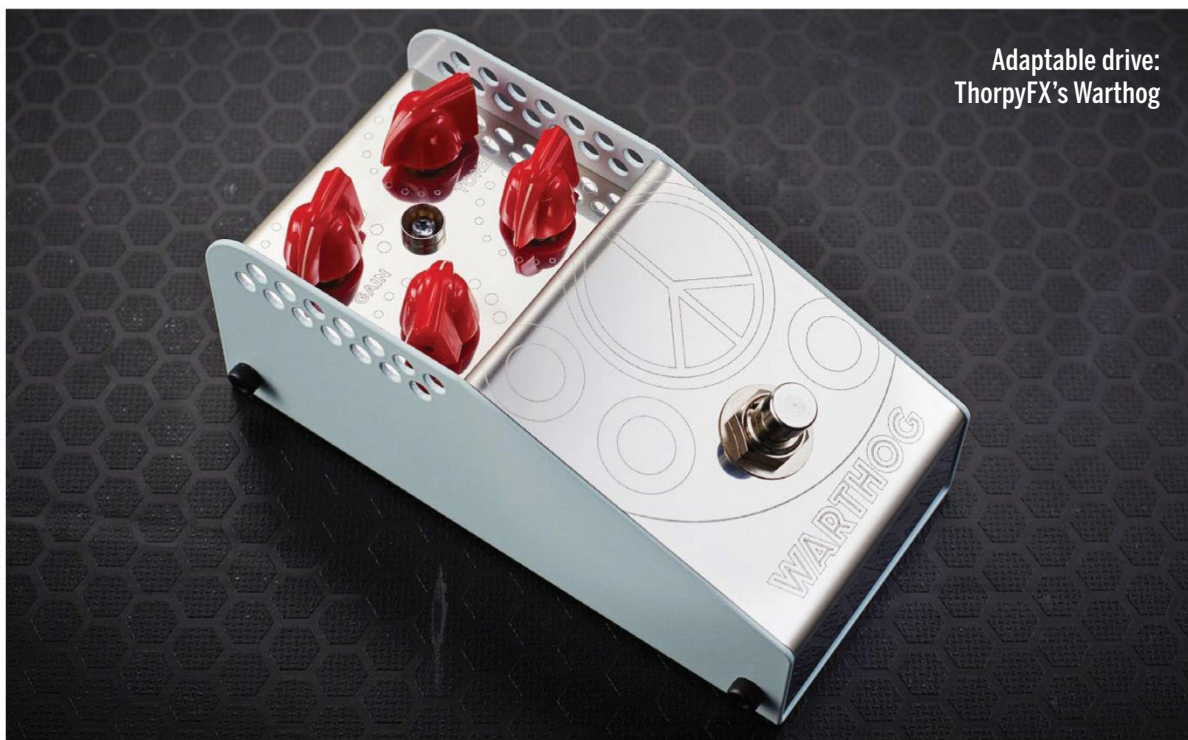
03. For your more modest budget, I started with the same foundations but also add some quantity to the guitar pedal choices: Donner DB-3 'board, £47.99 (including bag, hook-and-loop fixings and three patch leads); Harley Benton PowerPlant ISO-1 Pro power supply, £36; four Harley Benton FPC-28 patch leads, £14.40; Tone City Tape Machine Delay, £49.99; Tone City Durple Overdrive, £44.99; Tone City Wild Fro Rabea Massaad Distortion,

£44.99; Behringer SF300 Fuzz, £21.70; Behringer FX600 Multi Effects, £21.99.

So for £282.05* you have a variety of choices and, crucially, should you want to buy more boutique pedals in the future, you have the foundations in place to add new pedals in with ease.

In essence, you should try to see your pedalboard as a journey of sorts: go at the pace you want to, enjoy every part of it and don't worry about what others are doing with their pedalboards. If you find your pedalboard inspiring and fun then you're 100 per cent on the right path, regardless of your choices.

*All prices correct at time of going to press; delivery costs not included in quoted prices.



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ThorpyFX's Warthog

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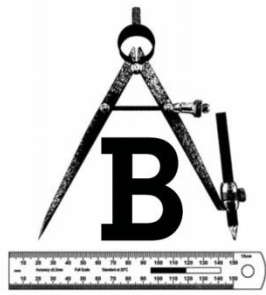
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« BLUEPRINT »

ROCK SOLID

Two-Rock Amps has built up an enviable following among tone-conscious pros such as Ariel Posen and Doyle Bramhall II. We talk to Eli Lester about how the California company's flagship Classic Reverb Signature amp was designed

Words Jamie Dickson

If you look closely at the backline of guitarists who take tone really seriously, you'll often spot a Two-Rock amp. The company's designs are rooted in the legendary Fender amps of the 50s and 60s, but evolved to the point where they have become their own unique thing.

Two-Rock is especially known for muscular, high-wattage amps that somehow also possess a lot of nuance and sensitivity to their sound. Intrigued, we caught up with Two-Rock co-owner Eli Lester about how the company has carved out a distinctive sonic niche in a crowded marketplace for boutique amps.

How are things going at Two-Rock in the midst of the current pandemic? Do people still want amps that are built for the professional stage?

"We're very fortunate that the demand is there. It seems like more people are at home not travelling, but building rigs, just kind of playing at home, buying gear and stuff. So, ironically, we're doing really well. And we made a very 'command' decision about three years ago to not grow. You know, I don't ever want to be in a position that I'm not personally testing every amplifier that leaves the shop. So we are just a small shop, really,

really hand-built. And, you know, we handle everything in-house, drill every eyelet by hand. We make a very high-end, artisan kind of product."

It's notable now many tone-conscious pros use Two-Rock, from Ariel Posen to Doyle Bramhall II. What are the key ingredients in Two-Rock's appeal do you think?

"Obviously reliability is a huge deal for us. As much as we love all the vintage amps, it's nice to have something reliable night after night. And it's also a feeling – it's how that amp feels and reacts with the way



Eli Lester of Two-Rock is a self-confessed geek when it comes to stellar tone and hand-tests all Two-Rock amps

that you're playing, much more than how it actually sounds in most instances. And with a lot of players like Ariel and Eric Johnson and Doyle Bramhall, if they dig into the amp and it gives them something back, it inspires them to play. We're building the amplifier for the artist, as much as we are for people to hear it."

A lot of people associate Two-Rock amps with powerful but warm tone, and tons of headroom. Is that a fair assessment?

"I've been working with [designer] Bill Krinard for 15 or 16 years. I've always said I've owned dozens of overdrive pedals, but I don't have any *clean* pedals. So I'm always looking for the fattest, most robust big headroom clean amp that we can make. When we took over the company about five years ago and we started building 100-watt amplifiers, the market was really going towards smaller amps. And a lot of people looked at us like we were kind of crazy. But that's what I enjoy to play through: I love big headroom, that low-end snap that Stevie Ray loved... So that's really important to us. So 95 per cent of the amps we build are 100- or 150-watt platforms.

"I'm a huge vintage Fender amp collector and those are my favourite amps. And in my office when we're play-testing and designing amps, Bill and



*Two-Rock
Classic
Reverb
Signature*

ON

STANDBY

Two-Rock



I have vintage tweed and [black-panel] amps – '64 Supers and '64 Vibroverbs, and all those amps to compare ours to. And our amps have to have that same feel and top-end, or I would just tell people to play a vintage Fender amp, you know? So we put a lot of work into having the amps that feel right and have very usable master volumes, so they sound decent at lower volumes – so you can actually push them.”

What power valves do you like designing amps around the most?

“Do you know, 6L6s and 6V6s are kind of where we live. We’ve done several EL34 and EL84 amps over the years, but 99 per cent of our product line is 6L6 based. I think it’s a very versatile power valve. It’s nice and big. It’s round. I like the way it compresses... [it] takes pedals very well. But all our amps you can get in a ‘4 x 6V6’ [format] where obviously the tube’s running hotter. You can get more gain out of it and really dig into the amp and push it back a little more. So we like 6V6s as well, but 6L6s are just round and shiny and it’s what we really like.”

Part of the appeal of high-end amps is the care taken in choosing every component, from transformers to speakers, for optimal performance. How does that equate to the design of Two-Rock amps?

“The transformers are a huge deal. We actually have a proprietary transformer manufactured for us – and it does do power scaling. And we made a dual primary transformer, which, when you put it in half-power mode, doesn’t change the phase or the impedance of the amplifier. Overall, it just gives more headroom and ‘shoulder’ and bounce to the amp. It’s a very beautiful transformer that we put a lot of work into.

“As far as the kind of ‘chewiness’ and tone of the parts goes, we have our capacitors and resistors built for us to our own specs, mostly. So we have a very unique front-end of the amp where it has sparkle and some character, but it also takes pedals very well, too. So you can put anything in front of it and the amp still holds together nicely. We also have all the



potentiometers made to our specs, so we have the right sweep on everything, the right taper.”

What amp typifies Two-Rock’s approach to design the most, would you say?

“The Classic Reverb Signature is kind of our flagship amp. It’s been around for a few years, but it definitely embodies everything Two-Rock. I like the way a vintage Fender’s top-end spikes. There’s something about turning up a Vibrolux Reverb and playing a gig and you look at it and you go, ‘That’s pretty good.’ Beyond that, it’s about getting the Two-Rock power supply working right, so the amp’s voice is big, it takes pedals like a champ, but also has high-end sparkle like a vintage amp would have, so the amp’s sound holds together and you can get any amount of gain tweakability out of it with just the amp and no pedals.

“The Classic Reverb also has a three-way position switch on the front of the amp that changes it from kind of a [black-panel] vibe to a Two-Rock front-end, which is what we’re known for. That’s so you can

have a little bit more gain, so you can push the amp to almost the point of overdrive and then just hit it with a clean boost pedal or [the] FET on the front of the amp. So we were looking to offer a lot of tweakability [in that area] to get the amount of compression or front-end gain that you’re looking for just out of the amp.”

Where did you start when you were designing the Classic Reverb Signature?

“We tinkered around with circuits and front-ends until we found what’s most comfortable and what we like – not to give away too much, obviously [laughs]. Then we looked at the power supply... It had to have enough bounce to it and be comfortable to play. Then it was about making sure the input stage took all kinds of pedals well. I mean, we had it with every kind of Fuzz Face, because I’m a bit of a pedal junkie! So, typically, we’ll have a prototype and maybe say, ‘This is really good.’ But when I hit it with an Octavia and a Fuzz Face, for example, I might realise it needs a bit more compression on the top-end.

1. Eli says Two-Rock doesn’t build anything down to a price. He and the team get the amps sounding their best then tot up what the component cost is

2. Eli stresses that the team has deliberately kept the company at a scale where they can hand-make and test every single amp. The hands-on approach extends to R&D, too, with Eli exhaustively play-testing prototypes down to the level of individual components

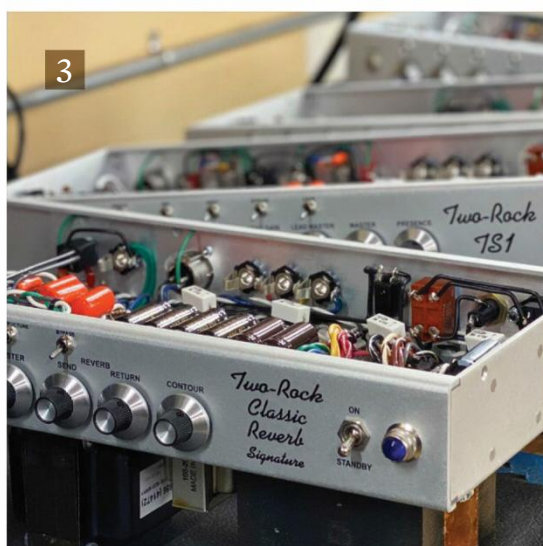
“The Classic Reverb Signature has been around for a few years [and] embodies everything Two-Rock”



3. The Classic Reverb Signature is Two-Rock's flagship amp and is built to deliver huge headroom with a sensitive side

4. Canadian guitarist Ariel Posen is one of many tone-conscious pro players who value the sound and reliability of Two-Rock's amps

5. A Classic Reverb Signature atop a vertical format cab. Eli is a huge believer in trying different speaker and cab types with amps and Two-Rock offers many options in this area



"A lot of the design process is about tweaking and voicing the amp until we're happy with the way that it sounds. All our amps have a three-tube analogue reverb circuit in them. That's another juggling act to consider; we need the reverb to sound good when you hit it with multiple pedals."

How about speakers?

"We started with the G-12 65 speaker [as the inspiration and starting point], because that's such a neutral speaker it works with a lot of models of amps – but we upped the wattage to 100 watts, and we put a slightly thinner paper in like a Jensen P12N to give it more of a vintage sparkle, larger voice coil. We can use any wattage amp with that speaker. I actually don't think people play around with speakers and cabinets enough. A lot of times you get more tonal variation by switching speakers and cabinets than you do by changing amp heads."

"I literally have eight 2x12 cabinets in my office with different speakers in all of them and all of them are [routed through] a switcher. I spent hours playing with

different speaker combinations, trying to find the right thing – trying different baffle thicknesses on our cabinets, that kind of thing. Likewise with the electronic components, I might sit there and spend two, three, four weeks just working on one capacitor so I can find which one I want to use in a particular area of the amp we're working on."

"We had a model come out recently and we'd got it all voiced, got the first 10 built and put in boxes ready to go out the door. But I went home and started playing with a couple more caps and said, 'You know what, I like this one better.' So then the

“I might sit there and spend two, three, four weeks just working on one capacitor so I can find which one I want”

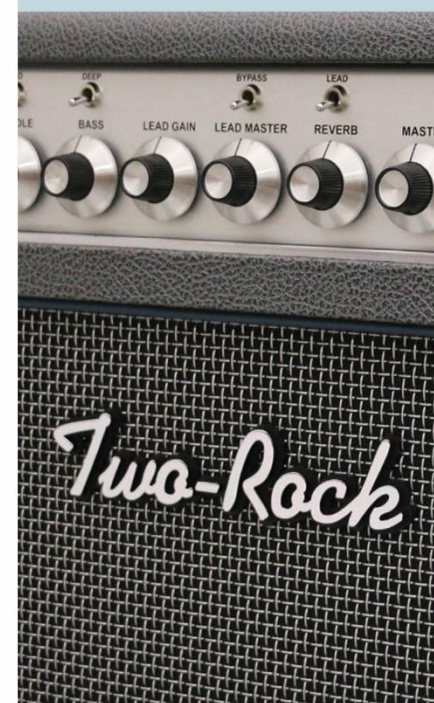
guys had to pull those amps out of the boxes again and swap those parts out. So we're always tweaking. We're geeks!"

Is there anything about making hand-built boutique amps that you feel people tend to misunderstand?

"We really just put the best parts in there we can. We don't even look at the price of anything, we just put the best stuff in there and then price the amp afterwards. And, you know, I'm playing every amp and voicing them before they leave – Mac Skinner, who's my partner and co-owner, looks at all the aspects of production. And it's not uncommon to get two amplifiers off the line that may have slightly different components in them. And it's funny because on some of the forums, people will go, 'Oh, this is crazy – they're using, say, a silver mica cap here and why do they have this particular component on this Classic Reverb Signature but this other one has a different component?' Well, sometimes you just have to change the recipe a little bit for that particular amp. It's not the same every single time."



Blues sensation Matt Schofield is a fan of Two-Rock's big clean tones



ELI'S TONE TIP

"I think the hardest thing for me to relay to people is not to look at the knobs," Eli Lester says. "Use your ears to dial in your amplifier. It's easy to get stuck in a rut and say, 'Well, I like my treble at 2 o'clock and I like my mid at 11 o'clock,' and then complain your amp is too bright with not enough mids halfway through a gig. Use your ears to dial in your amplifier, not your eyes."

"We could have two amps next to each other and one would have this value cap and the other one that value, because that's how they needed to be to get them to sound the way we need them to. And it's funny because, like I said, sometimes people on the forums go, 'Whoa, I have two amps right next to each other and they have different parts in them...' Well, it's because one of those amps may have needed more top-end for some reason. Some amps are dead perfect and all they need is a little bit of tweaking with some internal trim pots. Other ones I may spend two or three hours playing around with power supply and other things to get them where I feel they need to be."

You do make lower-wattage amps, such as the 28-watt tweed-influenced Burnside. What are the contrasting challenges of building a good lower-output amp versus building a big amp?

"I love vintage tweeds and things like little 20-watt modified Filmosound projector amps that I gig with and love. With low-wattage amps it's hard to get them so [the

voice and feel] is not so immediate, so quick, and so the master volume actually does something. With a lot of lower-wattage amps, once you get that control past 11, 12 o'clock, the amp's not adding anything [extra, tonally], it's just piling on more gain. It's not really helping anything. So getting the input stage of a low-wattage amp to where you can get some different tones out of it is hard.

"With high-wattage amps there are other variables. You're trying to get the biggest tone you can, but also trying to get lots more components working right together. Generally, larger-wattage amps have a lot

»
"We want to be able to hear if it's a maple 'board or a rosewood 'board or if it's Les Paul or an SG"
»

more things going on than lower-wattage amps. Generally speaking, the more stuff you put on the amp, the more it can [detract] from tone if you're not careful, so it is a juggling act."

Option-rich amps can have an important role in helping players optimise their sound to suit different guitars and effects, though...

"Absolutely. I mean, we have an EQ1/EQ2 switch on the front of our amplifiers and EQ1 is really voiced for if you're playing with humbuckers, while EQ2 has quite a bit more gain and mids to it – and that's the voice for single-coil guitars. So if you have a single-coil guitar you can have it on the EQ2 setting, but if you then grab a humbucker guitar, you can just flip it up and the gain structure kind of lines up to work optimally for humbuckers.

"One of our big goals is making amps so you can actually hear the guitar. We want to be able to hear if it's a maple 'board or a rosewood 'board or if it's Les Paul or an SG. We want to hear fingers and fretboard more than the amplifier." **G**



RABEA MASSAAD

S I G N A T U R E S I L O H U M B U C K E R S



'I need a pickup with the ability to create glassy, ambient leads and warm, clear chord tones. Equally I need it to sound crushingly heavy and aggressive. The Silo humbuckers give me everything I need and more. I couldn't be happier.'

Rabea

launch your tone into the ambient-sphere

Photo: Max Taylor-Grant

Bare Knuckle

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Longtermers

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



Emerald X10
Artisan Woody
with David Mead

Writer

DAVID MEAD,
Guitarist, Deputy Editor



David sums up his time with the fibreglass-bodied X10 and its myriad sonic possibilities, despite plans to use all of them simultaneously being dashed by the ongoing pandemic...



For this final look at Emerald's X10 Artisan Woody I was ready to try to use all its available outputs – piezo, humbucker and MIDI – simultaneously in a mighty fusion of acoustic/electric accord. But once again my efforts were thwarted by the prevailing situation with regards to Covid-19. Alas, access to the *Guitarist* studios was still restricted at the time of writing and I felt I couldn't delay any longer before adding the final full stop to my time spent with the guitar.

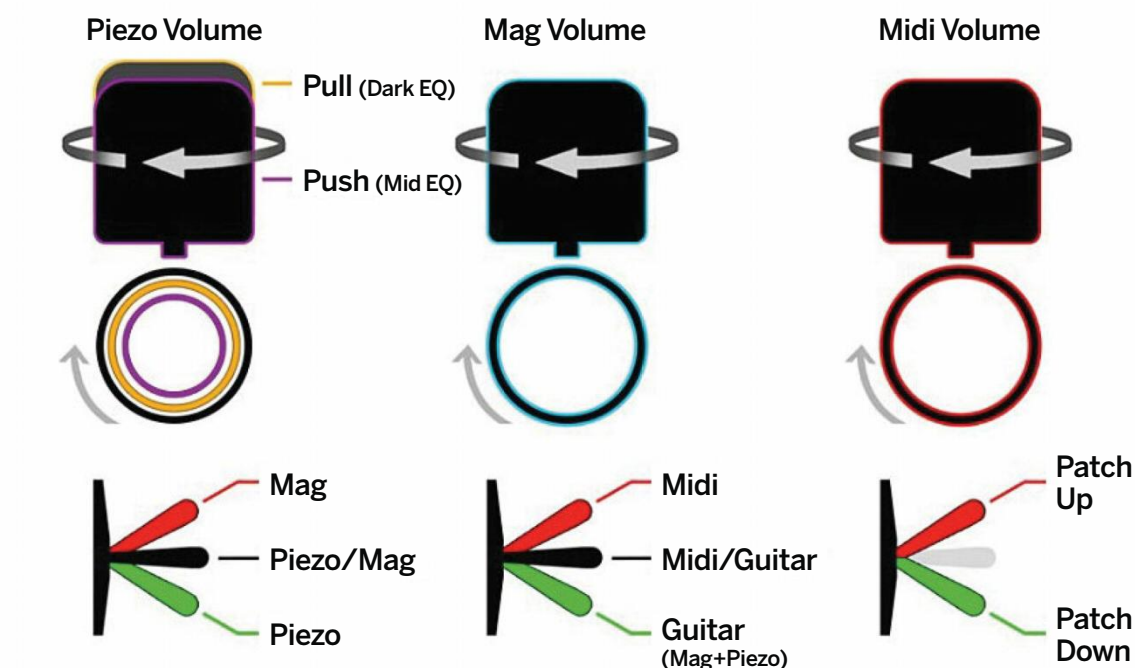
So I had to cancel 'Operation Three Ring Circus' in favour of a final glance at its sound opportunities individually. For the video connected to my original review in the magazine, we managed to have both piezo and humbucker reporting for duty, albeit not at the same time, and so I formed what I think is a fairly accurate picture of what this guitar's capabilities are. I've also spent time with it as a straight acoustic and picked up on thoughts of other players who have had a chance to have a quick strum while it was with me.

In order to offer a brief recap, the Emerald X10 Artisan Woody is an all-fibreglass acoustic with a surprisingly 'woody' acoustic tone. The facilities to amplify it come via a Graph Tech Ghost Acousti-phonics piezo, a wafer-thin Krivo humbucker at the neck and, taking advantage of the six individual saddles from the Ghost

"All fears of it feeling plasticky are allayed by its slim neck with unfettered access to the upper register"

piezo, a MIDI facility. Outputs are either via a stereo Y cable to connect to two separate amps, or an amp and PA, a mono cable to sum the piezo and humbucker together and a 13-pin cable for the MIDI.

Dealing with the pure acoustic tone first, I am still in awe of this instrument's ability to hold its tuning. Its fibreglass construction means it's virtually invulnerable as far as changing humidity levels are concerned and this alone has made the Emerald range very popular with players living in areas where this would otherwise be a problem with wooden-



bodied instruments. I would imagine you could gig this guitar in Alaska one night and Texas the next without any of the roadside tweaking I've heard about from the many travelling minstrels of my acquaintance.

Apart from that plus point, and the thought that an Emerald guitar might just be the instrument that all-weather buskers everywhere have been dreaming about, the guitar is a real joy to play. All fears of it feeling plasticky are quickly allayed by its slim, friendly neck with unfettered access to the upper register by virtue of its clever neck join – which isn't really a join at all because neck and body are moulded together, but you see what I mean.

On to the Krivo humbucker and another surprise as this super-thin pickup delivers a wonderfully warm and responsive sound. If an occasional bout of jazz is your type of thing, then archtop tonality is all there, but, if your mood takes you, then some gutbucket blues through a distorted amp is well within the Krivo's repertoire, too. Mixing the two together isn't a problem, either, thanks to the X10's comprehensive switching system. It might seem a little daunting at first (see the diagram above), but, like everything, you soon fall into step with it. Put it this way, if you can operate a smartphone, you're home free.

I said in my last instalment that MIDI and I are old adversaries and I've since come across the term 'MIDIOT', which probably sums up my abilities in this direction admirably. Last time I was able to access my ancient

(aka 'classic' or 'vintage') Roland GR-50 without any problem at all and was soon walking through the guitar synth's presets from the guitar like a pro. Unfortunately, my capabilities as far as MIDI is concerned don't extend to exploring the whole universe of possibilities its presence here might suggest – switching through presets on a pedalboard or accessing the inner workings of some of the acoustic-friendly pedals out there, for instance. The possibilities are quite probably endless, it's only my resources and status as a long-serving technophobe that provide a limiting factor.

To be honest, I can't think of too many situations where I personally would use all three voices of the X10 together during a performance, but I know a few players who have had a piezo, soundhole humbucker and MIDI pickup installed on their wooden-bodied acoustics and have used them to great effect. The late great Eric Roche was one and I could never fathom what he was using the MIDI side of his gear for until I went in really close and listened to his live sound. It was subtle but present, and I think that would be the key to its successful operation here. Of course, as far as the Emerald range is concerned, MIDI is an option and so you don't need to have it if you don't think you'd use it.

To sum up, I've enjoyed the time I've spent with the X10. It really is a fantastically capable instrument with a mind-stretching range of sonic possibilities and a tuning stability that's off the scale. **G**



JAKKO JAKSZYK

King Crimson's guitarist and vocalist expresses regret about upgrading a Gordon Smith vibrato and recalls finding a bargain Marshall amp



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

"I don't know whether it's a *serious* guitar... I bought a copy of a 345 from Macari's in Charing Cross Road and I think the brand name was [El] Degas, and although it sounds Spanish I think they were Japanese. I scrubbed off the original name and made a little stencil from a Gibson advert and I put 'Gibson' on the top. That was my first kind of proper guitar that I bought with my own money. I was an enormous fan of Robert Fripp and I remember reading that he said he had two main guitars. One was the famous black Les Paul, but the other was a 345 and there are some pictures of him playing the 345 while recording *In The Wake of Poseidon*. Oh, and Fred Frith had one. I was a big Henry Cow fan, so that's why I was particularly enamoured of that."

"The value is all down to how much someone is prepared to pay for it. I'm not a collector, I'm a guitarist that likes guitars"

What was the most recent guitar you bought and why?

"It was this afternoon! It's a Gordon Smith Gemini. Apparently it's immaculate and hasn't been played, I'm assured. I bought it on eBay so I'm expecting it to arrive next week. I used to have a number of Gordon Smiths. In fact, I had a black one that I loved and I foolishly replaced the Gordon Smith tremolo in the early or mid-80s. It was simple but functional and very good, but I replaced it with a Kahler, which completely fucked the whole sound of it and so I sold it. Apparently Greg Lake bought it."

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

"Do you remember those Record Exchange and Music Exchange shops? There used to be one in Notting Hill Gate and I bought a 20-watt Marshall head from the 60s for £25 and years later I flogged it for about £500. I think it was basically a PA amp – I remember Allan Holdsworth having one. I would say that's definitely a bargain."

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

"That's a tough one to answer, actually. There have been a few, I think. I had a Les Paul that cost a lot of money and I didn't like it. I think that might be it. The remorse has been flogging stuff rather than buying stuff, actually. There have been a lot of those..."

PHOTO BY TINA KORHONEN

PHOTO BY TINA KORHONEN



Which brings us neatly on to... Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go of?

"I sold three. I bought a 1951 Gibson ES-175 with a single Alnico bridge pickup and I used it on the first Dizrhythmia record. I loved that guitar, but a tax bill came in and the guitar was the most valuable thing I had. Of course now, in order to buy that same model back, it would be a small fortune. Another is a 1961 white Les Paul/SG. I really regretted selling that; it was a fantastic instrument. Same reason. Tax bill. And here's one – when I was a kid I would buy any album if Dave Stewart, the keyboard player, was on it and one such album I bought was called *Fish Rising* by Steve Hillage. On the back cover Steve is standing by a riverbank playing an early 60s SG Junior and I thought, 'That's just about the coolest-looking guitar I have ever seen...' and I bought it off him and I really regret selling it."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Oh lordy. You know, the value of anything is all down to how much someone is prepared to pay for it. I'm not a collector, I'm a guitarist that likes guitars. I've had a number of 345s, but by far the best one I ever had was an Antoria copy from the 80s, and I gave it back to the shop because it didn't say Gibson on it. So my advice would be do not let that sway you. If it looks great, it feels great and it plays great, who gives a fuck what's written on it? I've regretted selling that ever since and I wished I'd kept hold of it. It was a great instrument."

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...)

"The last time I got transfixed by a guitar – that's kind of the question, right? – was a few summers ago. Crimson were on tour in Europe and we had a long-ish lay-off in Amsterdam. I think we had arrived there one day, had the next day off and then we had two shows. On the day

off it was a glorious summer's day and I was about a 14-minute walk from all the museums: the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum and there's a Banksy [exhibition at Moco] Museum.

"I passed this guitar shop and it was fantastic. Upstairs it had lots of guitars and there was a glass case with a few select guitars in it and it had a guitar I'd never seen in real life, a Gibson ES-150D. When you look at it straight on, it looks like a 335. It's walnut, it's got block mother-of-pearl markers and a master volume on the lower horn. When you look at it from the side, it's the depth of a 175. So it's like a 175 but in the shape of a 335.

"Next thing I did was phone my guitar tech and said, 'If I buy a semi-acoustic, have we got room in the big flight case?' He said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah...' So I bought it. I took it to the soundcheck and Robert [Fripp] was very enamoured of it, so now I play it on two tunes."

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

"Humbuckers. You can't get the fullness of tone that I like out of a single coil. I like the sound of single coils in context, but I would ultimately miss the humbuckers. Fatter, warmer... for a lead sound it's more my thing."

What's your favourite guitar shop and why?

"I guess it used to be Chandlers in Kew, but it's not there any more. It was lovely for lots of reasons. I knew most of the people that worked there, they always had an interesting selection of older instruments, as well as new things. Where else is there? It was my guitar shop of choice and now it's not there and if there is another guitar shop that's like that I don't know where it is. Please tell me." **[DM]**

Jakko's Gibson ES-150D, a lucky find in a music shop in Amsterdam, is now used on two songs with King Crimson in their live set



Jakko Jakszyk's latest album, *Secrets & Lies*, is available now via Inside Out Music

<https://jakko.com>

CUT & DRIED

With more than 40 years' experience in the luthier supplies business, David Dyke points out some of the differences in how tonewoods can be sawn

“**F**irstly, timber sawn from a log gets stood on its end to drain the moisture,” David tells us from his base in East Sussex. “It literally runs out of it. Within the first year of drying, around 30 per cent of the weight of maple is lost through free water. After some time standing up – anywhere between six and 12 months – it can go into a dehumidifier, so we can dry it efficiently and slowly. In the old days, it was sometimes kept for decades before it was dry enough to use. Nowadays, the turnover is so huge I don’t think we could go back to air drying.

“If you rush the drying process of timber with heat – as is sometimes the

case with commercial kilns – then you can end up with distortions in the wood where the surface has dried more quickly than the inside,” David continues.

“Those differences get locked in and you can end up with what’s known as ‘case hardening’. I prefer dehumidifying because we don’t add heat – we just collect the moisture, which comes off naturally. Circulating air is frozen and then the latent heat that’s released in the thawing phase is returned to the system. Until you’ve opened the log you don’t really know how to maximise its potential – whether that be for violin backs or guitar necks.” **[RB]**

www.luthierssupplies.co.uk



PHOTO BY LEWIS TOWER

David Dyke of David Dyke Fretted Instrument and Luthier Supplies, based in East Sussex

1 QUARTER-SAWN

“Most of the time when I’m converting a tree, I’m looking to produce quarter-sawn wood. It’s nearly always the best way to convert wood for musical instruments. The timber industry doesn’t tend to quarter-saw wood because it takes more time. It’s a specialist thing. Your average timber supplier will have flat-sawn. If you were looking for quarter-sawn, you’d be wanting to see close to 90-degree vertical end grain, maybe up to 10 degrees off, with even growth rings ideally.

“Quarter-sawn is ideal for necks and fingerboards. It’s superior in most cases due to stability and stiffness. It also tends to have the least shrinkage across the grain. Dried quarter-sawn wood does shrink, but it’s so minimal that most of the time people don’t notice. Slab-sawn can shrink 10 to 30 per cent more sideways than quarter-sawn, and in that case you’re more likely to find a guitar with the fret ends sticking out.”

2 SLAB/FLAT/PLAIN-SAWN

“Bolt-on electric necks traditionally used slab-sawn or flat-sawn wood and I think that’s because manufacturers used what the local lumberyard sold. In America, they sold cheap rock maple – a north-eastern hard maple used for things like bowling alley and gym flooring. Top of Leo Fender’s thoughts at the time was probably, ‘What can I buy that’s strong and stiff, but cheap and cheerful?’ Ash, alder and maple were at the very cheapest end of the American market.

“Once you get to the thickness of solidbodies, the cut isn’t so important, but I would recommend people join pieces of wood because one-piece bodies are more prone to ‘dishing’ or ‘cupping’. Slab-sawn will generally give you a more interesting grain, whereas quarter-sawn will give you straight lines, which would be very boring for ash. Properly flat-sawn ash shows lovely contour lines with circular, mountain-like patterns.”

3 RIFT-SAWN

“The term ‘rift-sawn’ is a bit of a minefield. It’s one of the most misleading terms you might come across because not only does it mean different things to different people but rift-sawn and quarter-sawn are often regarded as the same thing in the timber industry. In my book, it’s somewhere in between quarter-sawn and flat-sawn, but it’s open to interpretation and is best qualified with a reference to what you’re actually expecting as a customer.

“If you can imagine a cross section of a plank and instead of having a horizontal grain like flat-sawn or vertical grain like quarter-sawn, it’s somewhere in between. It’s certainly not a term I would use when ordering. If you ask an old-fashioned timber merchant for rift-sawn you might get anything from perfect 90-degree quarter-sawn to a 45-degree end-grain slant. What you won’t get, however, is flat-sawn.”

4 LAMINATION

“Through-necks should always be laminated with two or more pieces, in which case the end-grain direction is less important. Plywood is immediately more stable. One piece of wood has a mind of its own; two pieces of wood may cancel that out; and three pieces of wood do that even better. It’s a very good idea to laminate maple because the growth of those trees often isn’t even enough, whereas you can make lovely mahogany one-piece necks – the problem being, of course, that if you drop them the headstocks fall off!

“Gibson machined mahogany necks out of one piece of wood, but at the point the headstock angle begins, the grain is shortened and a weak spot arises. Quite sensibly, a lot of acoustic makers will splice the headstock on. Glue joints are a strong and stabilising influence, which is why laminated necks often make a lot of sense.”



1



2



3



4

DETENTION!

Mod Squad headmaster Dave Burrluck is appalled by the behaviour of our esteemed editor-in-chief Jamie Dickson. Why? Because he broke the school rules...

We all do it, don't we? Despite our own best advice and intentions we just can't stop ourselves. So our tale goes something like this. Despite us saying that in an ideal world you shouldn't buy a used guitar unless you've had a play on it, Jamie saw a Fender American Vintage '52 Tele and thought he'd take a punt. Then, before he'd given it a close inspection, he thought he'd get it pinstriped, as we documented back in issue 466's The Build feature. Next thing, he's knocking on the The Mod Squad door asking us to "hot-rod" the guitar. He'd got a set of Lollar pickups that cost a pretty penny, breaking another fundamental rule: before you mod *anything*, get your guitar playing as best as it can and *then* decide what you want, or what needs to be changed. Oh, and then Jamie noticed some fretwear: "Does it need a refret?"

When the guitar arrives, there are no strings on it and the new Lollar pickups [see pics 1 & 2] are unboxed and loose in the gigbag pocket. Can things get any worse?

Reinspection

Looking past the top-notch pinstriping, the guitar is in okay condition. There are a number of dings to the body finish, but the neck finish looks pristine. There is noticeable, if quite mild, fretwear, too. So let's start where we should. Strings on, Jamie's choice is 10s. Setting a playing feel for someone else isn't easy, but I recently checked over Jamie's Revstar 502T so I decide to aim for a string height at the 12th fret of around 1.6mm (1/16-inch) on both treble and bass and work from there. This play test is particularly important, not least if we need a truss rod tweak, and I'd always



Lollar's Vintage Tele pickup set

advise living with the guitar for a day or two. Why? Well, if you make assumptions or judgements just after you've restrung a guitar, especially one that hasn't been strung for a while, they might not be accurate after the neck has settled back under the string tension. Immediately after I'd restrung, for example, I was getting a nasty buzz caused by that fretwear around 2nd fret. A day later, yes, it was still there but far less troublesome. In addition, I notice that there's a little unevenness to the frets in the higher positions, too.

Mod Or Repair?

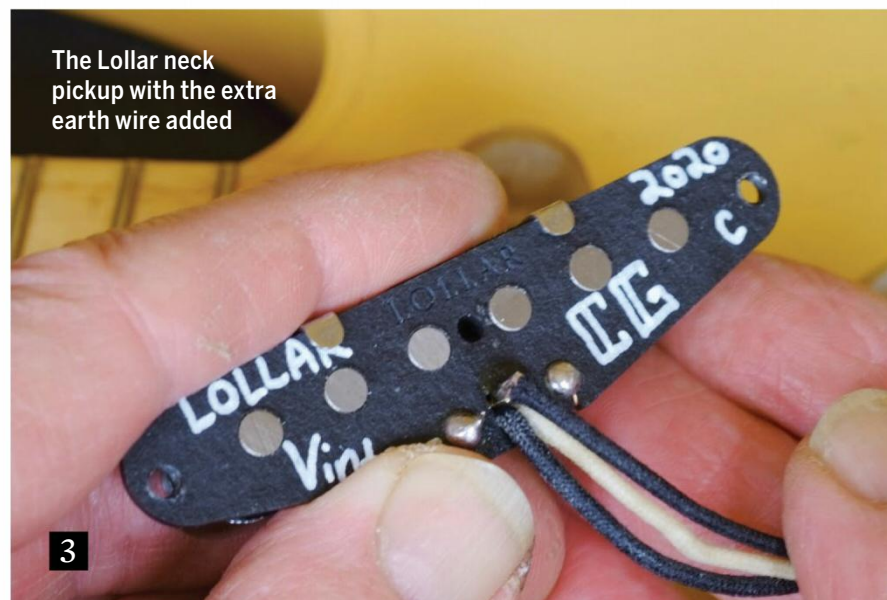
A full refret can dramatically affect – and hopefully improve – a guitar's playing feel. As we've said, if you're buying a used guitar, checking fretwear is extremely important. If you can do your own fretwork, that's one thing, but getting a pro involved can

be costly, not least on a lacquered maple fingerboard as we have here, because it'll probably need some refinishing. A light levelling and reprofiling can work magic, the 'but' is you will lower the height of the frets, which can have an impact on playability. So it's a trade-off: it might be better to live with some slightly isolated fretwear rather than lower all the frets, even microscopically, over the entire (or certainly most of the) fingerboard. If this was my own guitar I'd probably lightly level and dress the frets, but it's not. It's playing okay and I decide to leave any decision of pro fretwork to Jamie.

Aside from a pickup change, are there any other obvious 'hot-rod' upgrades? Well, you can't set individual intonation with the original-style brass saddles. Is the intonation close enough for rock 'n' roll or just out enough to annoy those working in



Unlike many pickup makers, these Lollars are clearly marked on the pickup busses



The Lollar neck pickup with the extra earth wire added



Editor Jamie played fast and loose with the rules for his Fender American Vintage Tele



Fitting the new Gotoh compensated saddles



Installing the neck pickup with the scratchplate removed

this Auto-Tune world? Second guessing my editor, and knowing he's doing a lot of recording at present, I decide we need some compensated brass saddles. If for any reason he doesn't like them, swapping back to the originals is dead easy.

Circuit Considerations

Chatting about theoretical concepts of pot values, caps, vintage-correct this and that is all very well, but actually finding your own fit is the key. Modding a guitar for another player, then, isn't always easy. Discussing the circuit with Jamie we're not after loading in rocket launchers or a Fuzz Factory. Simply a pull-switch on the tone pot to engage a series link of the two pickups and nicely graduated pot tapers become our aim.

In a standard Tele circuit the two pickups are linked in parallel, a real classic Fender sound. Linking them in series produces a bigger and fatter sound, one I've used for many years on my Tele with a four-way

“Chatting about theoretical concepts is all very well, but actually finding your own fit is the key”

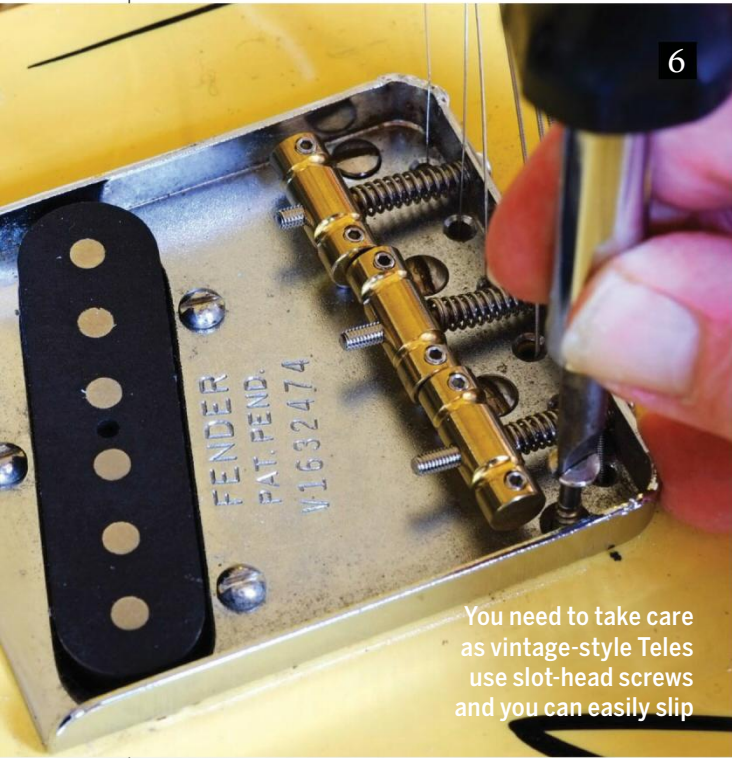
Fender lever switch. Whether you go down that route, or go for our intended pull-push switch, a series link does require modification to one of the Tele's pickups (usually the neck). On a standard covered Tele pickup the ground lead also connects to that cover. In the series link we need to turn that pickup around, if you like, so its ground connects to the hot output of the bridge pickup – just like a humbucker's dual series-wired coils – so you need to separate that joint ground wire and run a specific ground for the cover. Now, do I want to be modding a brand-new set of boutique pickups? Not really, although I'll

have to [pic 3]. That's the beauty of being able to discuss what you want with the person who's going to make your pickups – they could have done it for you. Another lesson learned.

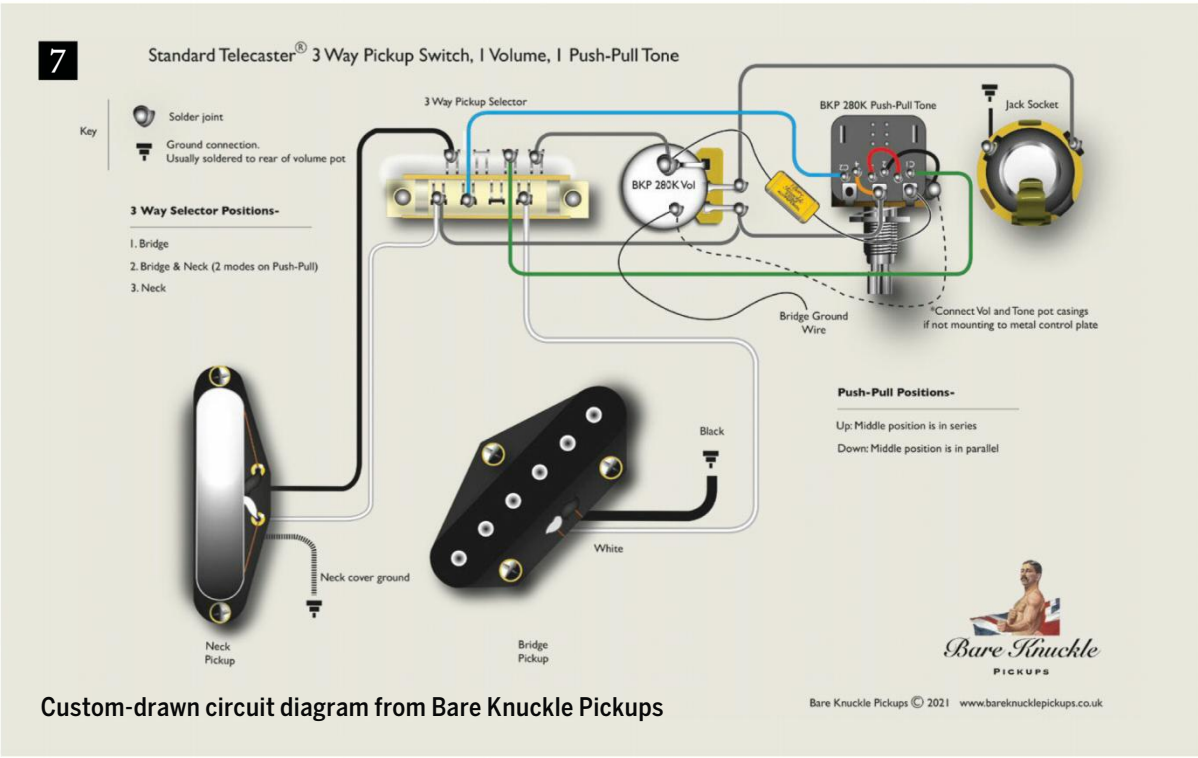
Fit For Purpose

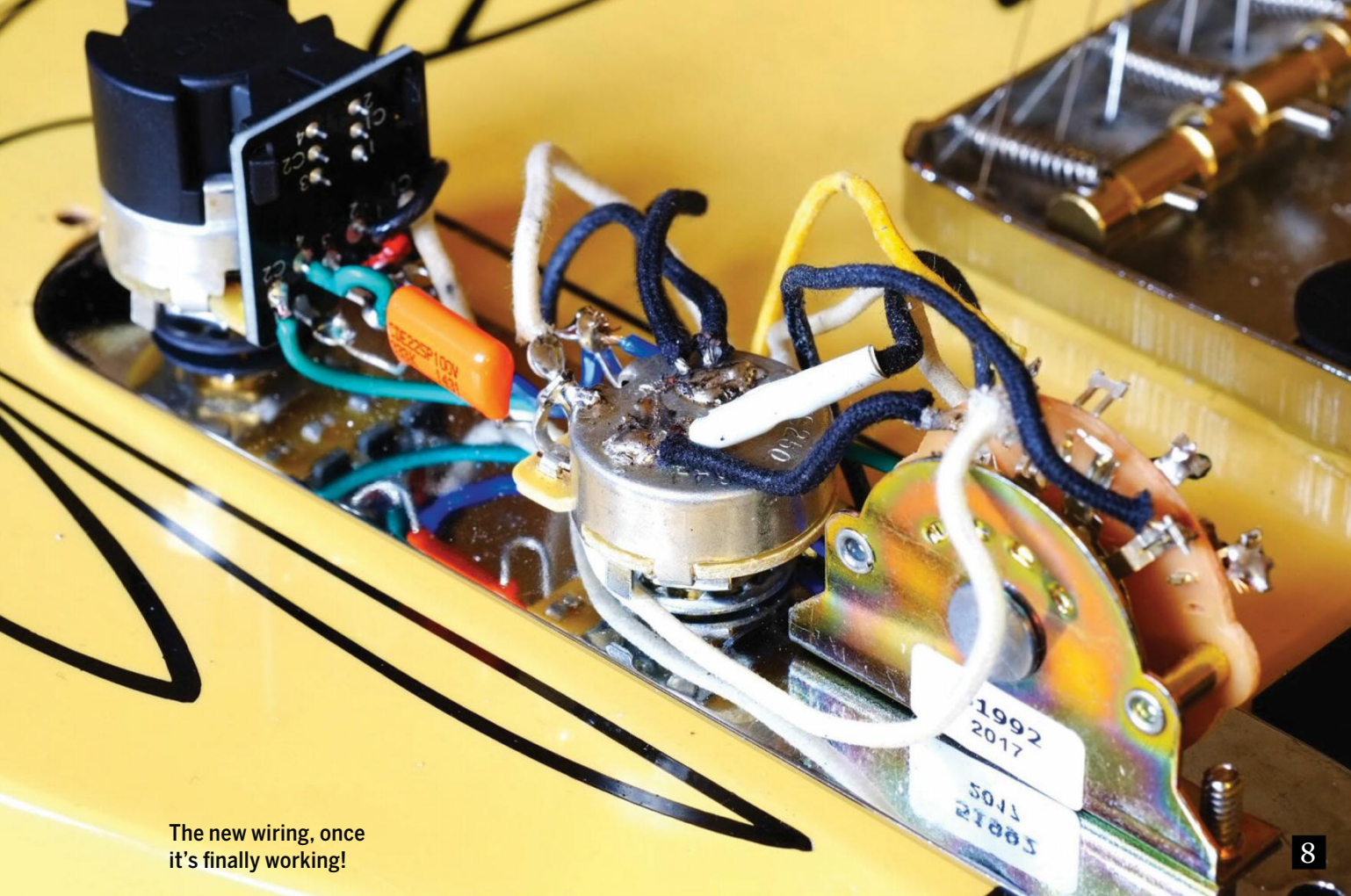
Okay, so with a plan in place it's not a bad idea to map out the process of the necessary work. On the mechanical side I need to fit those new Tele saddles (I chose Gotoh 'In-Tune' types, although there's plenty of choice out there), and it makes sense to take a quick measurement of where the centre of each of the old saddles sits to the back wall of the bridge, for example, which will allow you to place the new saddles in approximately the correct position [pic 4].

The cleverly cut string slots of the 'In-Tune' saddles are offset to approximate the slanted intonation lines of a typical six-saddle bridge. Obviously, I need to take off the bridge to remove and replace



You need to take care as vintage-style Teles use slot-head screws and you can easily slip





The new wiring, once it's finally working!

the original Fender pickup with the Lollar, so it makes sense to mount the new saddles then. The scratchplate needs to be removed so you can access the screws holding the neck pickup. In fact, with the exception of the output jack, which I unsolder from the circuit but leave in place, I'm effectively gutting the guitar completely. My thinking here is that should Jamie want, he could easily revert to the guitar's original wiring (or get me to do it, of course!). With the new Lollars in place [pic 5] and the bridge remounted [pic 6] we're ready for the wiring up.

Circuit Chaos!

Confident that the circuit I drew from our recently reviewed Fender American Pro II Tele – with its series link via a push switch – is accurate, I set about replicating that. I'm using one of those posh CTS pull-push switched pots for the tone control, although they're quite fiddly to solder, a little like a circuit board rather than the easier-to-access standard pull-push. If you're new to soldering, you might need some help here, or at least a soldering iron with a very fine tip.

A little while later I'm ready to tap test the circuit... only to find it doesn't work. Quite a while later I'm still flummoxed. I've triple-checked my wiring and I really don't understand what has gone wrong. Another deadline missed! I need some help and call on the experience of Tim Bartle at Bare Knuckle Pickups who sends over a custom-drawn graphic circuit diagram [pic 7]. The following morning I warm up my soldering irons again and start over. My purposely tidy wiring is slightly rejigged, and not so tidy any more, but *finally* it works [pic 8]. Thanks, Tim!

There's still plenty to do: double-check pickup heights, replace that scratchplate and then intonate [pic 9] before I can



finally record the guitar to have a listen to the Lollars, compared with the tracks I'd previously recorded with the original pickups and circuit, plus, of course, the added series mode.

The bridge pickups are very close tonally, the Lollar seeming to have slightly more presence as if you were perhaps comparing a slightly older set of strings with a brand-new set of the same type. Again, the tonality is very similar at the neck, but the Lollar seems to have more definition with slightly more clarity in the midrange. The dual pickup mix is perhaps the most noticeable difference in that the added definition of both Lollars produces a markedly more complex sound, more twang, sparkle and funk. The Lollar-only

series mix of the same, well, that's a chalk-and-cheese moment. The bigger-sounding series mix is glorious, hitting the amp harder, too, and quite a foil for the parallel mix. It still has some of the parallel mix's funky, bouncy tonality, but, yes, just bigger and rounder. As I said, wiring in that CTS pull-push wasn't the most fun I've had, but the action and feel of the pot and the added sound is more than worth it.

So, there are still some playability issues to consider, plus the deadline for my copy and pictures is now well overdue (as our managing editor reminds me!), so I have no choice but to leave those final niggles for a poor unsuspecting pro. So far, though, Jamie should be a happy camper... until I show him my bill, of course! **G**

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Lollar Tele Vintage set

COST: £220

SKILL LEVEL: Never the easiest pickup swap as you have to remove the bridge to mount the new pickup. We also needed to mod the ground connection on the neck pickup

www.guitargearpro.co.uk

PROS & CONS

PROS Simply superb on every level

CONS Not cheap, but if you're serious about your Tele tone they're a must-try

Guitarist
GOLD

10/10

ADDITIONAL PARTS

Gotoh 'In-Tune' solid brass

3-piece saddle set: **£21.95**

CTS Solid Shaft 250k audio

taper pot: **£6.95**

CTS Push Pull DPDT Pot 250k

Audio Tape: **£9.95**

Oak 3-Way Lever Switch

For Tele: **£9.95**

Sprague Orange Drop 0.033mfd

capacitor: **£4.95**

WD Music Telecaster 3-Way

Switch Knob Black: **£1.95**

Total £55.70 (exc. shipping)

www.wdmusic.co.uk

POLES APART

With his dream guitar now in his possession, one reader needs some help in taming an over-bright bridge pickup

Q I subscribe to *Guitarist* and enjoy your Mod Squad feature each issue, and I was hoping to ask for advice on pickup adjustments. Last April I purchased my dream guitar, a 2009 Gibson R8 VOS, and as much as I love the guitar I noticed how bright the treble pickup was. I know they are stock Burstbuckers, but the previous owner had raised the pickup's screw polepieces on the G, B and E strings and tilted the pickups towards these strings as well. They must have loved treble – or have lost a band of their higher frequencies! Shrill did not describe it...

I've tried to find some information on resetting the pickups and wondered when you installed, say, those Cream T BFG Bangers humbuckers, how did you adjust them and how do the manufacturers do it before shipping?

I tried putting the polepieces back level with the cover and used the 1.6mm treble/2.4mm bass settings I found online, but to be honest I am not sure on the best procedure and have tweaked so much I have lost confidence in what I am trying to do! I also read that curving the polepieces to the neck radius is also a good idea.

I realise this is a very selective and personal thing, but could you help so I can get the most from my R8? I have an 80s JCM800 combo and love classic 'Lizzy/AC/DC and the backed-off volume tones for cleaner stuff.

David, via email

A It doesn't sound like you're doing anything wrong at all, David. Certainly, using the pretty-much-standard 1.6mm treble/2.4mm bass (which in old money was $\frac{1}{16}$ and $\frac{3}{32}$ of an inch) is the starting point I use, obviously measuring from the high E fretted at the top fret to the pickup cover or polepiece and the same on the low E. You need a rule whose increments start right at the edge. If you don't have one of those, simply measure those fractions from the rule you have and mark them on either end of a lolly stick creating an instant pickup height gauge!

Typically, polepieces on PAF-like humbuckers are very slightly rounded to match the fingerboard radius, but you really



don't need to be 100 per cent precise. Why? Well, when you've set the pickups like that, plug in and play. What are you hearing?

Getting the bridge pickup 'right', for the styles of music you like, would be where I'd concentrate: the balance between the relative brightness of something like a Burstbucker but with enough depth. If that pickup is too bright, try a combination of amp tone and moving the treble side of the pickup slightly further away from the strings and moving the bass side slightly closer to the strings. If you use your volumes, as you say you do, make sure things are sounding right there, too. Don't forget to consider your string condition: if the strings are old and haven't been changed for some time they'll naturally sound softer, less bright, for example.

If, as I suspect, your Les Paul is wired vintage style, the volume and tone work together in a more interactive fashion.

"If the string sounds hot or soft then slightly reduce or raise the polepiece respectively"

Basically, the goal is to get things sounding right in all – or certainly most – of the sounds you need. Personally, I like plenty of high-end clarity, which I can always back off with the tone or by slightly pulling back the volume.

Balancing the neck pickup with the bridge is something many obsess about, but it really depends on what you want to hear. There is no right way. The retrofitted Burstbuckers 1 and 2 on our Les Paul Classic, for example, are actually set approximately 1.6mm treble/1.6mm bass at the bridge pickup and 2mm treble/3mm bass at the neck pickup. Don't forget the mix position: sometimes a slightly hotter neck pickup can warm that up nicely, not least if you've palm-rolled both volumes back a little. And if those adjustable polepieces are flat or very slightly curved, you probably won't need to touch them. If I'm honest, I rarely do. If, during your play test, one or more strings sound hot or soft then you can slightly reduce or raise the polepiece respectively.

Pickup-height adjustments are one part of making the guitar 'disappear'. You're aiming to have the guitar work perfectly *for you* as you play through your favourite songs and use the controls naturally. How you actually achieve that is up to you. **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.

Acoustic Guitars



20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
18341 - Alkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
18281 - Alkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
21716 - Blueidge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
18950 - Yairi YBF2 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 Orchestra, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
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
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
17056 - Tanglewood TWU D Union Dreadnought
18104 - Vintage V2000MGG Gilt Mahog Acoustic
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars



19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Raffles IRCSBD
18258 - Maestro OO-IR Traditional Series Guitar
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE CSB C
19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria PH CSB AX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-CO
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 DJF-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
12418 - Martin & Co DX1AEL Acoustic Guitar
20186 - Martin D-X2E 6 String Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic
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 Outaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium With Hard Case
19339 - Ovalion 1771V-1 GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovalion 2771 STR-MB Main Street
19347 - Ovalion C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovalion C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
19346 - Ovalion CS24C-4 Celebrity Standard, Nat
19338 - Ovalion 1771 STG-ES
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Outaway 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-W51000N2 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 Burst 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 FE HR
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 EVC Koa Electro Acoustic
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 EWB LH, Left-handed
18214 - Tanglewood TW4ER, Electro Acoustic, Red
14943 - Tanglewood TW40SD 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 TWJFE
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Performance Pro X47E
19660 - Taylor 220ce K DLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taylor GC8 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
19500 - Taylor GS Mini Acoustic, Secondhand
18789 - Vintage LVE501N 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
21770 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Satin Bourbon
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
19800 - Yairi CY62CE Electro Classical
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 19 Models In Stock Now
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top
6029 - Ramirez 1NE 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

Ukuleles



19912 - Aloha Concert Ukulele in Mahogany With Inlay
19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele, Engraved Soundhole
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 Uke (GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AU-10 Concert Resonator Ukulele
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Sop Ukulele
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBU1 Banjo Ukulele
19675 - B & M UBU2 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 in Mahogany
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert, Layered Head
19882 - Factory Prototype Concert Sapele Top
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19886 - Flight NUS310 Blackbird Soprano With Bag
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 Outaway
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele, Spruce
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Amethyst
18289 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Clear
20216 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Ruby
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19713 - Kai KTI-5000 Solid Acacia Tenor Ukulele
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_DAE)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
19306 - Kai KSI1010 Series Soprano, Mahogany
18522 - Kai KTI700 Tenor Uke
19391 - Kai KTI90 Tenor Ukulele
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
21584 - Kanileia Islander MST4 Tenor Uke, Used
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Sop Uke
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 - Mahab MH2CE ElectroAcoustic Concert Uke
18222 - Mahab Java Soprano Ukulele, 2515S
18211 - Mahab MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
18195 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18197 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahab MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
18199 - Mahab 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 MF01F Soprano Ukulele
19896 - Martin Romas MF02F Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
19892 - No Name Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13679 - Nukulele "Abbotts Digi" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Sainte 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 Left-Handed Concert
21602 - Ohana CK-70-8 8 String Concert Ukulele
21566 - Ohana CK14 Concert Ukulele
19016 - Ohana CK14E Electro Mahogany Concert
0000 - Many more from Ohana, Flisa & Tanglewood

12 Strings



21764 - Breedlove Solo Concert 12-String CE
18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
16029 - Patrick James Eggle Saluda 12 String
21559 - RainSong BI-W53000 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
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GQ, 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
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Electro Acoustic Guitars



19673 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCRI Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
21766 - Breedlove Artist Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Concertina Copper
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
21767 - Breedlove Pursuit Concertina Myrtlewood
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 HG Gloss Baritone Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNEOG Nexus Neptune Electro Cognac
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Outaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFT-H
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
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 - KYairi WY1 Natural
19070 - Kios T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Kios F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Kios T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Kios F_AE Electro Acoustic
21494 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
19891 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
21495 - Larrivee 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

Repairing Gibson Humbuckers

In the second part of our focus on pickup repairs we take a look at Gibson humbuckers with restoration wizard Tom Brantley

Modern humbuckers tend to be very consistent in terms of quality. Indeed, Tom Brantley gets hardly any passing through his North Carolina workshop for repair; the majority of poorly pickups he sees date back to the late 80s and prior. “I usually work on stuff that’s 40, 50 or 60 years old, often older – it’s taken that long for them to fail,” Tom tells us. “With the covers on, humbuckers are less prone to failure, being protected from accidental physical damage in the form of picks and strings... not to mention unqualified exploratory surgery! The taping also helps.”

Despite their sturdy, reliable construction, humbuckers share some common points of failure. “The square/round hole on the top of a PAF-style humbucker – where you can see the windings – is a point of access for moisture and can be a weak spot for corrosion,” continues Tom, “especially when somebody takes the cover off. They can fail there and they can fail at the solder joints where the coil wire is attached to



A rare double-white aka ‘full cream’ PAF humbucker from ‘59 (early that year, Gibson’s supplier ran out of black bobbins)

“I’ll do everything I can to preserve the originality, especially in the case of a valuable pickup”

the leads. That can be another weak spot, possibly due to oxidation or maybe the solder joint was overheated.

“Very occasionally I’ll see unmade solder joints in PAF and T-Top humbuckers. So at the factory, they’ll have sanded the winding wire and then wrapped it around the coil lead, but then forgotten to solder it. It’s a bit of a ‘Friday afternoon’ thing. It’ll work for a while and then it’ll eventually start to fail when it oxidises. This is conjecture on my part, but I think sometimes [Gibson factory employees] just made things work when they had to. If they had to hit a quota that day and the winding wire ran out a thousand turns short for example, then

they might just go ahead and finish the coil. It might not be full power, but technically it’s functioning.

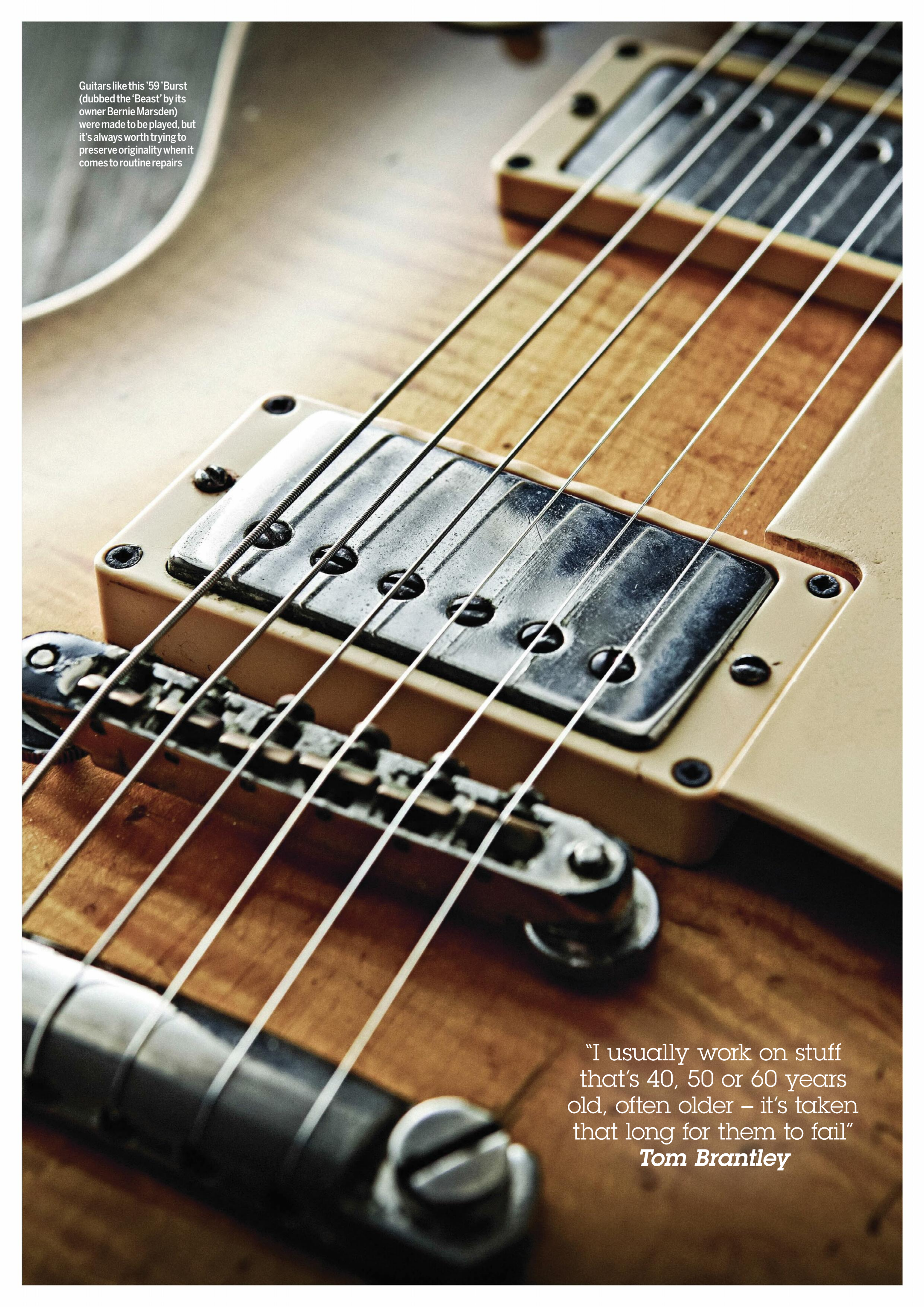
“When a humbucker comes in, the first thing I do is put it on the [multi]meter and check for an ohm reading. The meter might read okay and the magnetism looks good, but then I’ll do a phase check and might discover the pickup is out of phase with itself. When a humbucker is out of phase with itself it’ll sound very thin and plinky, but that’s easily fixed by swapping around two wires. If the magnet’s faulty, it won’t hold a charge when you recharge it. Magnets generally degauss slightly over the years, so I tend to only recharge them if there’s a significant problem with the magnetic field – because with that full energy it sounds virtually new again!

“If it’s [reading] open, I’ll take the cover off, remove the tape and look for a break. If the coil wire connection is good then I have to surmise it’s a break on the outside or inside of the coil, so I’ll peel it down a few layers to see if I find it.

“If I can’t find a break within the first four or five layers then it’ll need a rewind. It’s normally just one coil out of the two that’s dead. I’ll do everything I can to preserve the originality, especially in the case of a valuable pickup. Like with a real PAF, I’ll try to save the paper acetate tape because you can’t get it any more. I can usually repair and preserve the originality of around one in five, while a majority of the rest will need just one coil rewind.

“It’s best to avoid rewinding with the same old wire. I rewind the old PAFs with 42 [AWG] plain enamel, and the T-Tops are generally 42 poly. But I have seen original patent sticker and stamp pickups that were wound with the ‘wrong’ wire – poly when it should have been plain enamel and vice versa. I rarely see that, but it goes back to what I was saying about Gibson just making it work back in the day. I’ve even seen green Gibson Ripper [electric bass] wire in a humbucker! I guess they just needed to get the job done.” [RB]

<http://tombrantleyrewinds.com>



Guitars like this '59 'Burst (dubbed the 'Beast' by its owner Bernie Marsden) were made to be played, but it's always worth trying to preserve originality when it comes to routine repairs

"I usually work on stuff that's 40, 50 or 60 years old, often older – it's taken that long for them to fail"

Tom Brantley

classicGear

This revolutionary thinline hollowbody was a leading voice in rock 'n' roll

Gibson ES-350T

In 1954, Gibson was left in little doubt about which direction guitars were headed in as electrics outsold acoustics for the first time in the company's history. By this stage, the best part of two decades had passed since its first electric Spanish – the ES-150 – was unveiled to the public, and within that time, the popularity of the electric guitar had gained serious momentum. As the instrument really began to capture the imagination of the latest generation of musicians, fresh styles and sounds emerged, permeating American popular culture from coast to coast via record, radio and the powerful new medium of television. The golden age of rock 'n' roll was fast approaching.

With the release of the Les Paul Model/Goldtop in 1952, followed by the Les Paul Custom, Junior and TV in '54, solidbody electrics were proving in demand. Nevertheless, while some players enjoyed their resistance to feedback and thinner 1 3/4-inch body depth, others still preferred the look, sound and feel of Gibson's more traditional 3 3/8-inch-deep electric jazzboxes. Thus, the Gibson team – which was spearheaded by president, Ted McCarty – set about developing a concept that would strike a balance between the slinkier, more progressive design of its solidbody guitars and the good, old-fashioned full-body archtops.



With input from two of the most prominent guitarists of the time, Billy Byrd and Hank Garland, the first of Gibson's new thinline guitars were prototyped and recorded in a factory ledger as "special thin model" L-5CEs in April 1955. From there, this premium carved-top design was refined for regular production and subsequently dubbed the 'Byrdland'. Making its debut at the July 1955 NAMM show and costing \$550 in Sunburst or \$565 in Natural, it appeared alongside the mid-priced ES-350T (marked up at \$155 less in either finish) and the "popular priced" \$179.50 Sunburst ES-225T.

This new premium design was refined for regular production and dubbed the 'Byrdland'

As per its full-body predecessor, the ES-350 (originally released in 1947 as the ES-350P and phased out during '56 when its thinline/'T' successor began shipping in earnest), the ES-350T measures 17 inches in width, although it boasts a thinner body depth of 2 1/4 inches, as opposed to 3 3/8 inches. Along with a shorter 23 1/2-inch scale length and narrower 1 5/8-inch nut width, it shares these dimensions with the top-of-the-line Byrdland, while the 16 1/4-inch-wide ES-225T/D thinlines feature the standard Les Paul/solidbody 1 3/4-inch depth and 24 3/4-inch scale length.

Whereas the Byrdland boasts an L-5CES-style ebony fingerboard, solid maple back and sides and carved spruce top, the ES-350T is constructed with laminated maple and features a rosewood fretboard with double parallelogram inlays. From '57, ES-350Ts were fitted with a pair of humbuckers in place of dual 'dog-ear' P-90s, although this upgrade did nothing to improve the model's sales, which steadily declined after peaking that year, and it was eventually discontinued in '63. It was briefly reintroduced in 1977, albeit with a long 25 1/2-inch scale length, before disappearing from production again in the early 80s. More recently, in 2019, Gibson unveiled the Chuck Berry 1955 ES-350T signature model in honour of the ES-350T's most famous proponent – the father of rock 'n' roll himself. [RB]

The Evolution of the Gibson ES-350TD/N

1955

Introduced as ES-350T/N; sunburst or natural (with 'N') finish; dual P-90s; 2 shipped

1956

c.220 shipped

1957

PAF humbuckers; 'ES-350 T' engraved on tailpiece; c.225 shipped (peak)

1959

Redesignated ES-350TD/N; nut width changes from 1 5/8 to 1 11/16 inches

1960

Florentine/sharp cutaway; shorter pickguard

1961

c.80 guitars shipped

1962

Neck changes from 2- to 3-piece laminated maple

1963

Discontinued

1977

Reintroduced as ES-350T; Natural, Fireburst and Sunburst finishes; 25 1/2-inch scale

2019

Chuck Berry 1955 ES-350T; Antique Natural finish; limited run of 55

1955 Gibson ES-350T

1. SERIAL NUMBER

A-series five-digit serial number ink-stamped on orange oval label; factory order number prefixed with 'W' (1955) ink-stamped on interior side of back

2. HEADSTOCK

Single bound; pearl Gibson logo and crown inlays; black nitrocellulose finish

3. HARDWARE

Gold-plated: Kluson Deluxe tuners; tune-o-matic bridge with rosewood base; pickguard bracket; looped tailpiece

4. NECK

Two-piece maple with mahogany centre-strip; 23½-inch scale length; 1⅝-inch nut width; single-bound 22-fret rosewood fingerboard with double parallelogram inlays; 14th-fret body join; nitrocellulose finish

5. BODY

Hollow; arched top; laminated maple; two single-bound f-holes; single Venetian cutaway; 17 (w) by 21 (l) by 2¼ inches (D); three-ply (w/b/w) top and back binding; Sunburst nitrocellulose finish

6. PLASTICS

White keystone tuner buttons; two-ply (b/w) 'bell' truss rod cover; two black 'dog-ear' P-90 pickup covers; five-ply (b/w/b/w/b) bevelled edge pickguard; four gold bonnet knobs; white selector switch tip

7. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS

Two P-90 pickups with adjustable polepieces; four 500kohms pots (individual pickup volume and tone); two tone capacitors; three-way Switchcraft pickup selector switch; side-mounted Switchcraft jack



Blues Headlines

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



Slide Away

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Knaggs Choptank, Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 10 mins per example



Lowell George of Little Feat favoured open tunings of A or G for his slide playing

IF YOU LISTEN TO Robert Johnson, Bonnie Raitt or Derek Trucks, you'll come away with the realisation there are many ways to use a bottleneck or slide. Players who specialise in slide often use open tunings, but this isn't always the case. Players such as Rory Gallagher, George Harrison and Duane Allman often played slide in regular tuning, and this is especially convenient if you don't want to retune or change guitars whenever you need to incorporate this sound into your playing. Note that if your guitar is set up with very light strings, super-low action and tall jumbo frets you will need to develop an incredibly light touch, which might render this already difficult technique impossible... However, a regular setup should work fine with a lighter slide – and you'll need a lot of patience, too!

On a couple of occasions during my solo, I decided to add a conventional fretted note or two (more Duane Allman than Sonny Landreth), but the principle is similar. I was looking to demonstrate that you don't need to be completely 'locked' into playing slide, especially when using a lighter one, which is easier to lift out of the way while using the remaining fretting-hand fingers. Speaking of those, use some of them to mute behind the slide – this will give you a clearer note and minimise mechanical noise, though some might say this is part of the charm of this technique.

Another thing to bear in mind is pitching. Certain different degrees of sharp or flat can add expression, but generally you should position the slide as accurately as possible above the crown of the fret, rather than just behind. An obvious note, perhaps, but it can take a while to rewire your thinking on this, so it's worth mentioning. Hope you enjoy and see you next time!

Example 1

INITIALLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE D, G AND B STRINGS to slide up to an E major triad at the 9th fret, this first section of the solo then moves into single-note territory. I'm keeping within a relatively narrow area of the fretboard, but venturing to add the D natural/ $\flat$ 7th on the first string as part of a melodic line, which acknowledges the chord movement underneath. This phrase finishes where it started in fretboard terms but using only the D and G strings, omitting the major 3rd on the B string.

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Example 2

SHIFTING TO THE A CHORD, I could have moved the same pattern as seen in Example 1 to the 12th to 14th frets. But, in this case, I opted for a riskier single-note approach, with some major pentatonic lines roughly framing where an A major chord would be around the 5th and 6th frets, before sliding down to incorporate some conventional fretted notes, roughly outlining the change back to E major. In the final phrase I've headed back for the 7th to 9th frets, incorporating the major 6th (C#), which makes a nice alternative to the 7th and is frequently referenced in the backing chords.

Example 3

TAKEN FROM LATER IN THE SOLO, this example is like an alternate take on Example 2. It outlines the A major with pointed inclusion of the 7th (G) and a more daring approach with the slide, travelling up to the 10th fret (root) then all the way down to the open second string, before bringing in some conventional fretting and a final lick back around E major chord at the 7th to 9th frets.

Example 3 musical notation. It consists of two systems of guitar notation. The first system is labeled 'A' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 4th fret to the 6th, then a sequence of notes: 5, 7, 8, 8/10, 8, 8, 5, 5, 3, 4, 2, 0. The second system is labeled 'E' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 6th fret to the 5th, then a sequence of notes: 5, 6, 5, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9. A dashed line labeled 'Regular fretting' is shown between the two systems.

Example 4

THIS FINAL PHRASE STAYS WITH THE CHORD CHANGES, while acknowledging some of the movement in the different version of A heard in the second bar. Like Example 3, there are a couple of jumps in position – something it's easy to take for granted in conventional playing but quite risky when using a slide because of the mechanical noise and distinct possibility of 'landing' in an exceptionally out-of-tune spot! The long upward slide at the end could perhaps be viewed as 'stagecraft'!

Example 4 musical notation. It consists of two systems of guitar notation. The first system is labeled 'B' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 7th fret to the 10th, then a sequence of notes: 10, 12, 12, 10, 9, 9, 7, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9. A dashed line labeled 'Let ring' is shown between the two systems. The second system is labeled 'A' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 10th fret to the 9th, then a sequence of notes: 9, 7, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9. A dashed line labeled 'Let ring' is shown between the two systems. The third system is labeled 'E' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 4th fret to the 5th, then a sequence of notes: 5, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9. A dashed line labeled 'Let ring' is shown between the two systems. The fourth system is labeled 'B' and shows a melodic line in treble clef and a fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows a slide from the 4th fret to the 5th, then a sequence of notes: 5, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9. A dashed line labeled 'Let ring' is shown between the two systems.

Hear It Here

GEORGE HARRISON

ALL THINGS MUST PASS



George Harrison had only recently discovered bottleneck playing when this album was released in 1970, so his intelligent melodic and accurate use of it really is something. *My Sweet Lord* will be familiar to many, but listen again to his melodic/hook lines, which would surely have attracted admiration whether he'd been a Beatle or not. *Isn't It A Pity* also showcases his ability to play the right thing at the right time. Finally, *Let It Down* also displays a melodic sensibility and dynamic, which is worth emulating.

LITTLE FEAT

SAILIN' SHOES



Little Feat (featuring the slide guitar talents of Lowell George) would change to a funkier direction with follow-up *Dixie Chicken*, but here they are taking a rockier, bluesier approach. I suggest checking out the playing on tracks such as *Easy To Slip*, *Cold, Cold, Cold* and *Tripe Face Boogie* for a general overview of the way Lowell George handled his slide. He favoured open tunings such as A or G, so this is worth bearing in mind, though not essential unless you want to copy note for note.

BONNIE RAITT

SLIPSTREAM



Like George Harrison, Bonnie Raitt doesn't feel the need to dominate the song with her prowess – and with a voice like that she doesn't need to. Listen to *Used To Rule The World* to hear her in fine form on slide guitar. The interplay with the Hammond organ and funky chord changes also call to mind Tommy Bolin-era Deep Purple! *Million Miles* is a great showcase for her side talents in the context of a slow shuffle blues, and there's deft interplay between slide and conventional playing on *Not Cause I Wanted To*.

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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 3: The C# Phrygian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Mike Stern Pacifica & Line 6 Helix Rack
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

THE PHRYGIAN MODE is the third mode of the major scale and can literally be seen as a major scale that starts and ends on the third note of the scale. The A major scale contains these seven notes: A B C# D E F# G# A

C# Phrygian contains the same seven tones as the A major scale but starts and resolves to the third degree, which is: C# D E F# G# A B C#

Playing the A major scale from the third degree produces the C# Phrygian mode, which is a minor scale with a minor second interval instead of a major second Interval.

Harmonising The Scale

When we harmonise the major scale (build chords from those tones) we produce seven chords. Chords are built by stacking consecutive 3rd intervals from each of the seven scale tones. The resulting chord built from the tones of the third mode is C#m or C#m7 (including any diatonic variation and chord extension).

R Min3 5th Min7

C# D E F# G# A B C# C# + E + G# + B = C#m7

Tonal Centre

When we see a chord progression that starts with C#m and cycles through a series of chords derived from the A major scale, we have a C# Phrygian chord progression. The progression will resolve and sound rested on the C#m chord. The resolution point of a chord progression is called the tonal centre.

When it's time to improvise over the C# Phrygian progression we use the C# Phrygian mode. C# Phrygian is simply the A major scale with a focus towards creating phrases that outline and resolve to the tonal centre chord: C#m.

Phrygian Characteristic Note

Each mode of the major scale has a characteristic note that evokes the unique sound of that mode. The characteristic note of the Phrygian mode is the minor 2nd. The C# Phrygian characteristic note is D (the minor 2nd interval from the tonic of C#). We further enhance the unique flavour of the C# Phrygian mode by specifically targeting its characteristic note and creating phrases that outline and resolve to the chord tones of C#m or C#m7 (C# E G# B).

Here is an example of a C# Phrygian chord progression:

||:C#m7 C#m7(♭13) | F#m7 D/F# | C#m7 C#m7(♭13) | D/F# F#m7 Esus4 E :||

Take a moment to play through the chord progression above, resting on the C#m7 chord. You'll notice that the chord progression resolves to the first chord, C#m7: this is the tonal centre of the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBBIE CALVO

chord progression. The tonal centre determines the mode, and the characteristic note enhances and evokes the true sound of that mode.

The solo I created over this progression is nicely packaged into four main phrases that ascend along the fretboard through a series of major scale shapes. Take a moment to analyse the notation for phrasing ideas and read the text breakdown for each example before trying to play each line. You may even recognise some superimposed major 7th arpeggios in these phrases. I'll be covering chord substitution ideas in another Trading Licks session.

Work on creating your own C# Phrygian phrases over the track, this will solidify your complete understanding of the Phrygian modal sound and tonal centre resolution. Have fun and I'll see you next month for more modal clarity using the fourth mode of the A major scale, D Lydian.

www.robbiecalvo.com

Lick 1 Introducing the Phrygian sound

MY OPENING LINE heads straight towards the characteristic note of D to establish the Phrygian sound of that tasty minor 2nd from the tonic tone of C#. The second half of this phrase utilises an A major 7th arpeggio, which can be seen as a chord substitution for the C#m7 chord. This works well because both chords contain three of the same chord tones (C#, E, G#). More on chord substitution melodies in another article.

♩ = 96 C#m7 F#m7 Dadd9 E D F#m7 Esus4 E

Lick 2 Outlining the C# minor chord tones

THE MUTED RAKE starts on the characteristic note and then targets the minor 7th (B) on the top string. The following tones on the high E string outline the chord tones of C# minor and also integrate the minor 2nd of D. The D major 7th arpeggio sounds super sweet and is a nice nod to one of the previous melodic phrases. It also contains the C# and D tones to further evoke the Phrygian tonality.

C#m7 F#m7 Dadd9 E D F#m7 Esus4 E

Lick 3 Opening up the sound

TRY ADDING VIBRATO to both notes within the doublestop major 6th at the end of the first phrase and let those chord tones sustain and ring together for a solid resolution over the C#m7 chords. I'm using F# as a pivot tone to ascend through the F# minor pentatonic scale, opening up those intervals for a wider melodic sound before resolving to C#.

C#m7 F#m7 Dadd9 E D F#m7 Esus4 E

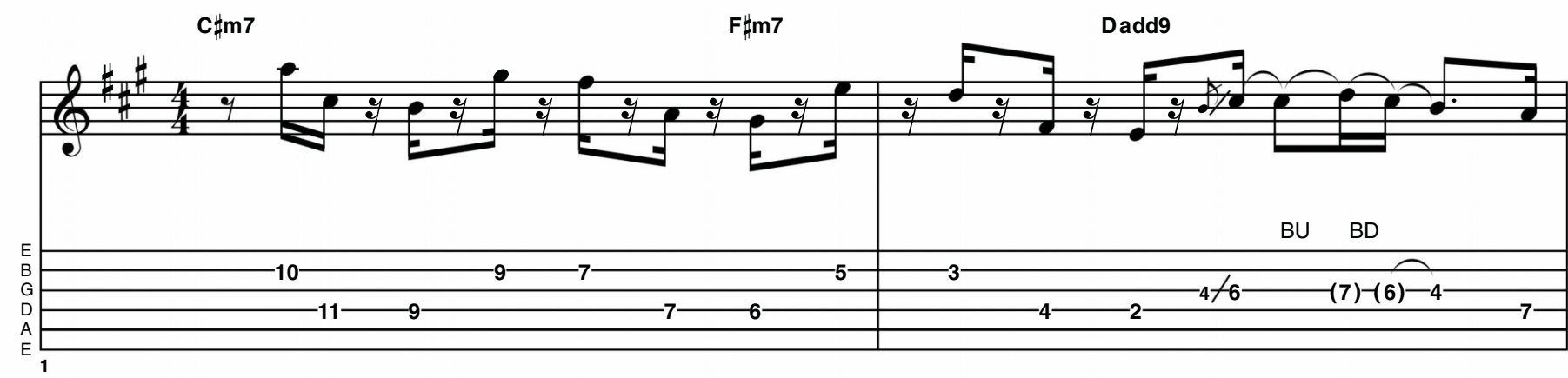
Lick 4 Ups and downs

THE DESCENDING AND ASCENDING ASPECTS of this phrase can both be seen as diatonic doublestop major and minor 6ths that I'm playing as staccato single-note lines. This is a great way to widen your melodic phrases without having to play both tones at the same time. You'll also notice that each two-bar phrase resolves on the same melodic idea, only an octave apart.

C#m7

F#m7

Dadd9



E B G D A E

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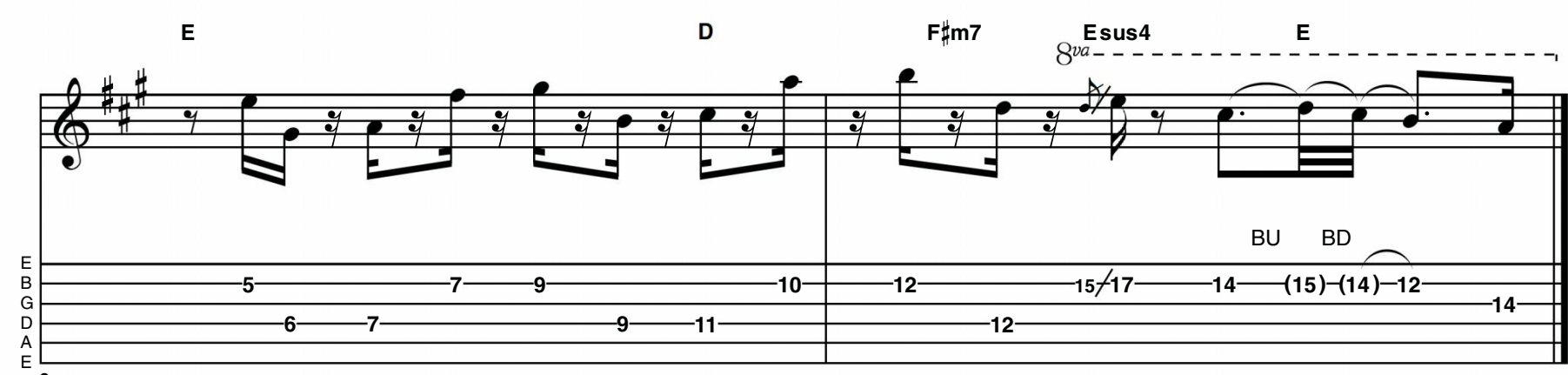
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F#m7

Esus4

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E B G D A E

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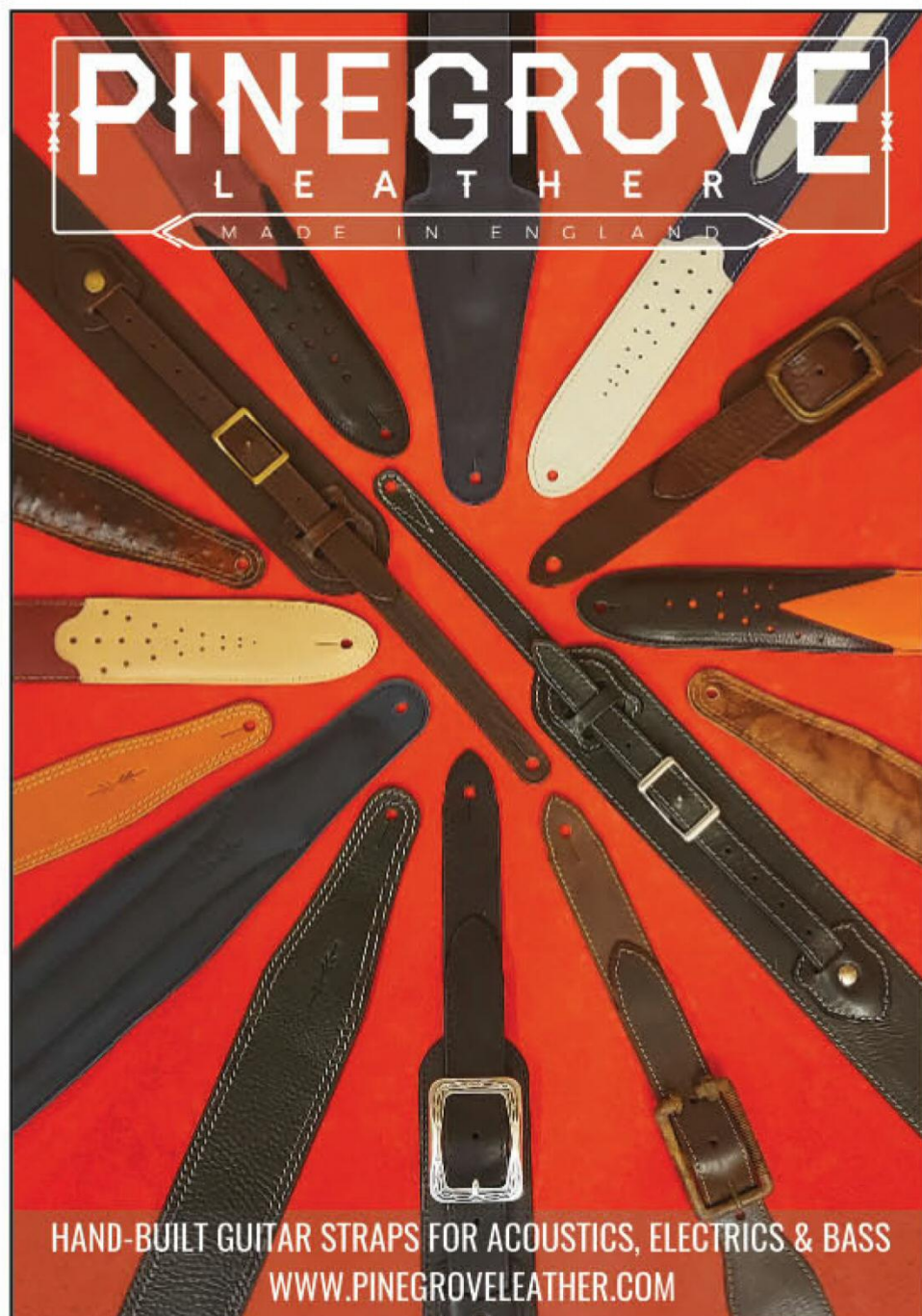
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