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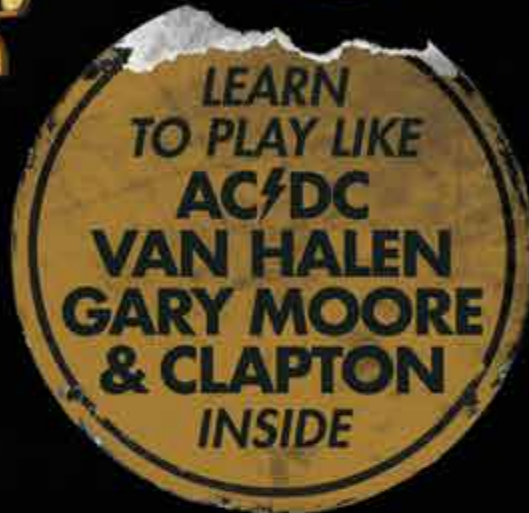
NEED FOR TWEED

A guide to Fender's most richly toneful vintage amps

Issue 471

Guitarist

MAY 2021



THE

ROCK

ISSUE

INTERVIEWS WITH

**ANGUS
YOUNG**

THE BLACK
CROWES

**ADRIAN
SMITH**

RICHIE
KOTZEN

PLUS!

ROCK TECHNIQUES
MASTERCLASS

PLUS
DIMARZIO SUPER DISTORTION
LOWDEN WL-25 & S-23
ES-175 HISTORY





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Rock Of Ages



How rock was born is one of the most interesting parts of guitar music history. At the start of the 60s, *Apache* by The Shadows topped the charts. Just seven years later Jimi was setting fire to his Strat as an astonished Monterey Pop Festival crowd looked on. The musician sang *Wild Thing* before committing the most famous act of instrument vandalism in music history. In many ways, that moment captures what made rock different – born of blues and its unruly child, rock 'n' roll, it was louder, harder and faster than any of its influences. Yet rock's most famous players, such as Angus Young (see interview, page 48), remained in touch with the roots of rock throughout their careers, and that kept their playing authentic and emotionally powerful where others just maxed out the bombast.

In this special issue, we explore what great rock guitar is all about in the company of some exceptional players, including Iron Maiden's Adrian Smith and virtuoso Tele wrangler Richie Kotzen, who tell us about their return to their classic rock roots on their hard-charging, eponymous new album *Smith/Kotzen*, over on page 60.

Rock's story has always been about excess, such as the sudden and stratospheric success that can catapult musicians from obscurity into the world's largest stadiums in just a few months – which is exactly what happened to Chris and Rich Robinson when The Black Crowes' debut album, *Shake Your Money Maker*, exploded in 1990. Read their extraordinary recollections of that time in our Classic Sessions feature on page 54. If all that's whet your appetite for distraction, why not pick up some essential rock techniques with Richard Barrett on page 66? Enjoy the issue and see you next month, hopefully with eardrums still intact...

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Pearly King

Cream T's unique scanning tech has yielded some scarily good and authentic pickups. We join Thomas Nilsen to find out more **p124**



Smitty Guitars

Eric Smid is the talented Dutch luthier behind Smitty Guitars and his approach to lutherie is as refreshing as it is rich with tone **p104**



Super Distortion

Dave Burrluck explores the story behind DiMarzio's most influential pickup as its 50th birthday approaches **p118**



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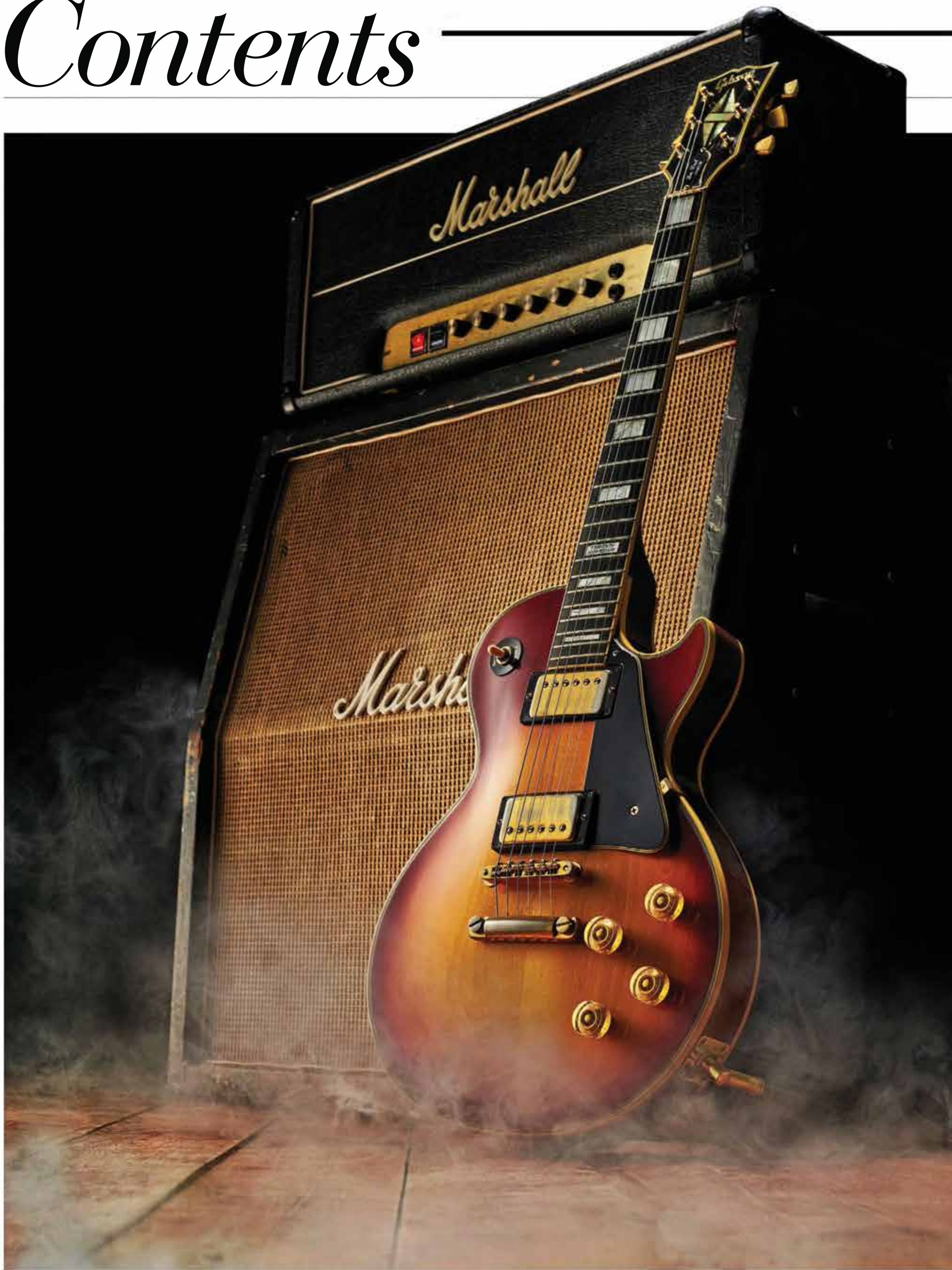
Fender

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● The AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER shown in Green Turquoise. Iconic acoustic voicings. Big electric tones. One powerful Blend Knob.

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Neil Godwin

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**THE ROCK
ISSUE**

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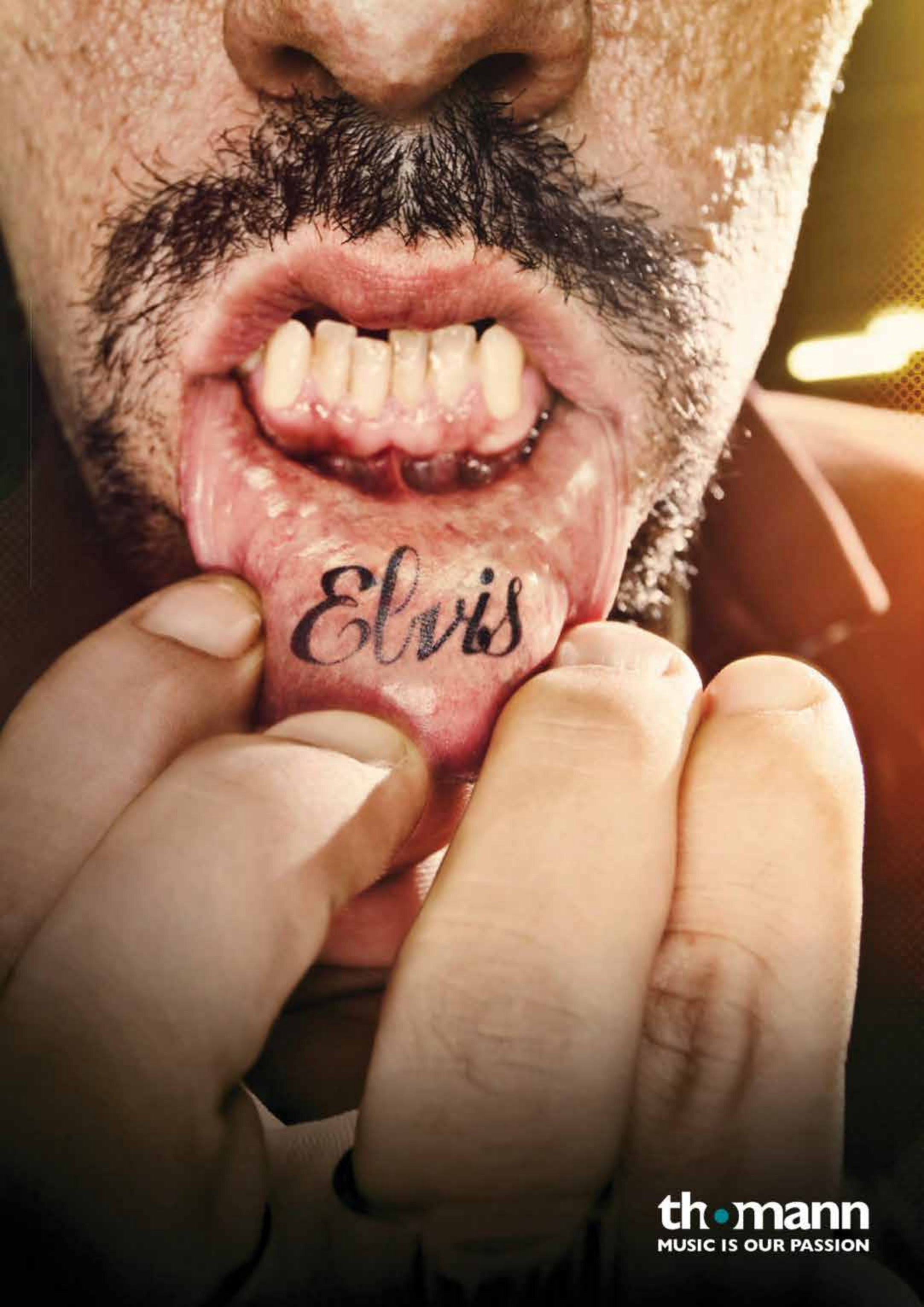
DEATH ELVIS 0:1

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

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

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

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FIRST PLAY



FENDER 75TH ANNIVERSARY TELECASTER £889

WHAT IS IT? A Mexican-made limited-edition Tele celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Fender company with alder body, modern C profile maple neck and a price tag well under £1k

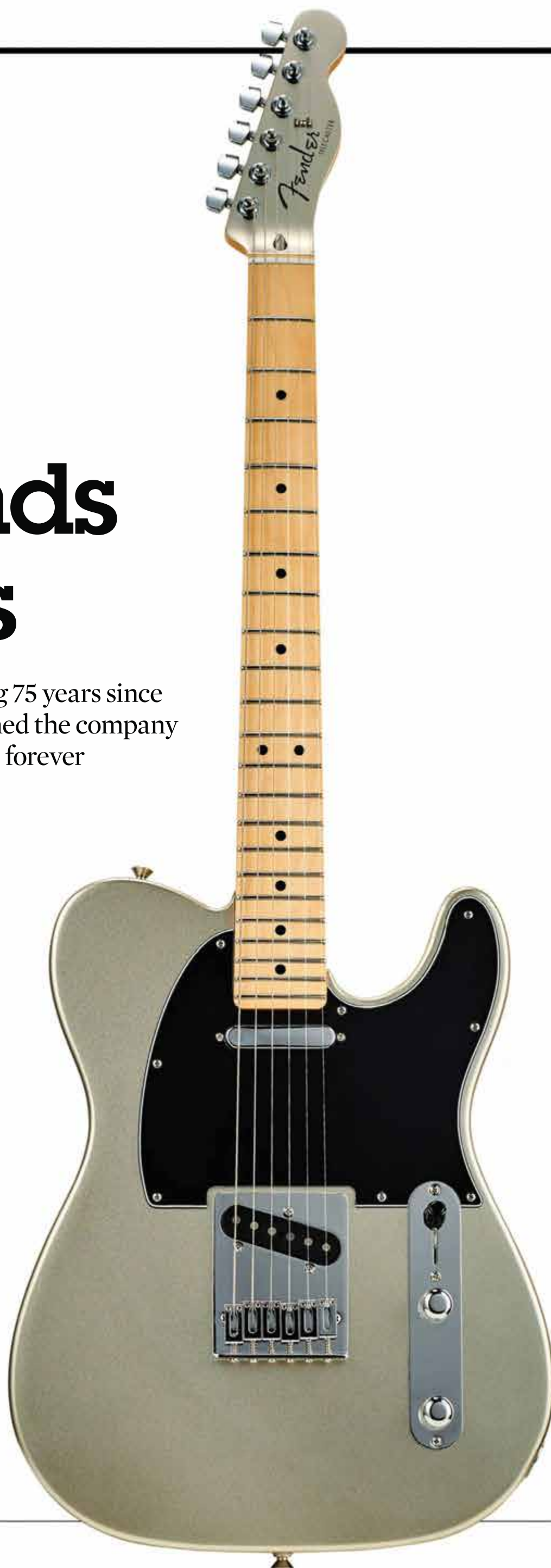
Diamonds & Pearls

An anniversary model celebrating 75 years since Clarence Leonidas Fender launched the company that would change popular music forever

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Neil Godwin

You might feel it's a little odd that Fender releases a range of guitars and basses to commemorate the formation of Leo's company in 1946. After all, the first six-string didn't materialise until 1950, and the equally radical four-string a year later. Still, we're always happy to see another twist on the ever-malleable Tele theme, since that's the model we have for review. In fact, there are two 75th Anniversary Teles on offer: a £1,839 US-made version in 2-Color Bourbon Burst, and the more affordable one we have here, built in Mexico and finished in Diamond metallic with matching headstock. Other instruments in the line-up include various Strats, plus Precision and Jazz basses.

Instead of taking the vintage-correct route, Fender has if anything chosen to celebrate how the Telecaster's seven-decades-old design has evolved to be more in keeping with what today's players might prefer. After all, not every guitarist hankers for micron-perfect recreations of 'good old days' guitars, and many have desired the exact mods that Fender has incorporated here.







1



2

1. Notice the satin-finished polyurethane finish on the silky smooth medium-profile neck, and the ever reliable Schaller style tuners stamped with the Fender logo

2. The Anniversary guitar's extra fret sits on a slight overhang to the body, allowing a tone bend to hit the second octave. Unlike vintage-style Teles, this neck pickup is adjustable without having to remove the black pickguard

The extra fret is so well incorporated that it neither looks nor feels obviously different to a regular Tele's neck

So, what do we actually have? Well, it's an alder-bodied, maple-necked Tele with standard post-'67 wiring of master volume and tone plus three-way pickup selector controlling a pair of vintage-style American-made single-coil pickups. You'll also notice the solid bridge plate with six block steel saddles, rather than the classic ashtray Tele bridge with three saddles that carry two strings each. The 'ashtray' was the almost-never-used cover, not the bridge and pickup housing plate itself. Of course, those six individual saddles eradicate the intonation compromise inherent in the three-saddle original. It's something that frustrates many Tele players, even though compensated saddles are readily available from Fender and others.

On top of that, and just as interesting, is the 22-fret all-maple neck with 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius and medium jumbo wires. As you'd imagine with a modern take on the septuagenarian beast, this Tele also features enclosed Schaller tuners, hex-key-adjustable truss rod socket at the headstock end, and the neck pickup adjustment screws visible rather than

hidden beneath the pickguard as on vintage Fenders. There's also a commemorative four-bolt 75th Anniversary neckplate to round things off.

As always with Fender Mexico, the finish is beautifully done, the polyester body in high-gloss metallic and the polyurethane-coated neck in silky smooth satin, which sits all but friction-free in the palm. This Diamond Anniversary metallic lands somewhere between silver and gold to create an almost champagne colour that changes depending on the light in which it's viewed. There's an obvious if subtle sparkle under the poly gloss, and that's going to really catch an audience's eye under those super troupers! That the headstock is similarly finished lends a distinctly posh edge to this otherwise affordable model – it is under £900, after all.

Feel & Sounds

Fitted with what Fender describes as a 'modern C profile' neck, it's certainly a welcoming place to visit. With a 1st fret depth of 21mm and 23mm at the 12th, it's just a millimetre less at both points than



3. Six chrome-plated steel block saddles sit on a modern-style Tele bridge plate, although the strings still anchor through the body. See how the Diamond metallic finish sparkles

4. A four-bolt neckplate proclaims the guitar's 75th Anniversary status, while the usual maple neck skunk stripe is clearly visible. The guitar is very nicely made, too

this reviewer's own Custom Shop Tele yet it feels markedly different. There's a touch more 'shoulder' on the CS guitar, so the impression is of a much fatter lump.

We don't want to be perceived as ageist or 'ability-ist' here, but we would imagine a slender neck would be more inviting to younger or less experienced hands. That the 75th comes strung with 0.009-gauge strings rather than the 10s fitted to Custom Shop instruments points to the fact that Fender feels this way, too.

That said, it's an utterly delightful and engaging guitar to play – the satin-finished neck is extremely slinky and fast, and the flatter 'board and larger frets create a bend- and vibrato-friendly experience. And there's that extra fret, too, which is so well incorporated that it neither looks nor feels obviously different to a regular Tele's neck, but does allow a tone bend to hit the second-octave 'E'.

At 3.6kg (7.9lb) in weight it's a touch heavier than our CS's 3.25kg (7.15lb), but still well within the 'normal' ballpark. On a strap it certainly doesn't feel like a hefty beast, and anyway the jury's still out on whether

the mania for light over heavy guitars is justified, tone-wise. Talking of which...

With that Custom Shop guitar to hand, brandishing Twisted Tele pickups, this was going to be interesting. Fender describes the Anniversary's vintage-style '50s Telecaster pickups (which are called 'Vintera '50s' on the launch PR) as "warm and twangy", which is just what most players desire from the model.

Through our Blues Junior set clean, first impression is that the Mexican guitar is marginally quieter on every pickup selector setting. It's also a little brighter all-round, too, but not in a spiky or unpleasant way. But remember the Twisted Tele set is designed to be higher output and with a touch more 'gutsy Strat' about it – especially on the neck pickup, which is certainly the case here.

Pile on maximum gain and while the CS guitar begins to get very rocky – almost pushing SG territory at times – the Anniversary model is a little more polite. But in true Tele form the bridge pickup darkens considerably, for a bullish if strikingly articulate tone that suits everything from modern country to Setzer-



Master volume and tone controls with three-way pickup selector are the usual Telecaster fare

style rockabilly, hot blues in the Josh Smith vein to early Led Zeppelin.

Likewise when switching across to the neck position: where the Twisted Tele is distinctly Stevie Ray in nature, the vintage Tele's neck coil remains lighter in voice but very musical and expressive. In 'both pickups on' mode the CS guitar is altogether tougher, while the Mexican model returns that classic but gorgeous 'tinny' country tone that's perfect for Luther Perkins' Johnny Cash 'boom-chicka' rhythm, or even the occasional Albert King impersonation.

In many respects it's a fruitless exercise comparing what are superficially similar guitars but voiced to be deliberately different. And while some would definitely prefer the pokier Custom Shop Tele, the Anniversary is equally musical and offers a more subtle Tele experience. In certain circumstances you might even pick it over the instrument that retails for four times its price. And that's no mean feat from Fender.

Verdict

It's quite hard to sum up the 75th Anniversary Telecaster. As a modern Tele it does its job impeccably, as they almost always do. Compared to our far more upmarket version it holds its own extremely well, and by no means was this either a knockout in the first round or a throwing in of the towel at the 12th. To keep the corny (and getting rather thin) boxing analogy,

As a standalone version of this redoubtable model, this is a fine guitar that can hold its head high among its more upmarket kin

pit Liston against Ali and where one is a bruiser, built for power and the killer punch, the other is lighter on his feet and with arguably greater dexterity and range. We've said before that it's hard to pull back from a powerful, super-fat Les Paul tone, but you can stick any number of pedals between a lighter-edged instrument to boost, fatten or colour it anyway you want.

Whether there's any need for 75th Anniversary Fender guitars or not is another question, and more for you to decide than us. But as a standalone version of this redoubtable model, this is a fine guitar that can hold its head high among its more upmarket kin and perform in a way that few guitarists would find wanting.

The neck is fabulous, the guitar is beautifully built and sonically satisfying. And with six saddles the intonation won't be a problem; truss-rod adjustments don't require neck removal, and the flatter 'board with 22 medium jumbo frets contributes to a capable instrument that makes solid sense. It looks pretty cool, too! **G**



FENDER 75TH ANNIVERSARY TELECASTER

PRICE: £889 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, medium C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Integral maple, black dot inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.9

HARDWARE: Modern-style Telecaster bridge with through-body stringing, block steel saddles; Schaller enclosed 6-a-side tuners. Includes neckplate with '75 Years' inscription – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Fender vintage-style '50s Telecaster neck and bridge pickups, master volume, master tone, 3-way selector switch

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: US-made 75th Commemorative Telecaster in 2-Color Bourbon Burst (£1,839)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Diamond Anniversary metallic (as reviewed)

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.fender.com

8/10

PROS An excellent modern Tele that looks, plays and sounds great

CONS Nothing to speak of, but why a 75th Anniversary guitar?

Designed for Sound

SE



PRS HYBRID BRACING

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:

www.prsguitars.com/se_acoustics



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FIRST PLAY



**BLACKSTAR ID:CORE V3
STEREO 40 COMBO**
£185

WHAT IS IT? The latest upgrade of Blackstar's compact and affordable entry-level digital amps, with improved voicings, effects and the all-new Architect software

Practically Packed

Blackstar's upgraded entry-level practice amp delivers great tone and much more for what, in anyone's book, is a serious steal

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Like rust, technology never sleeps and if you don't keep moving forwards you end up getting left behind. Happily, that's not something you could say about Blackstar, where a continuous program of improvement seems to come up with something new and innovative almost every week. This time round, it's the turn of Blackstar's popular ID:Core entry-level practice combos to get the upgrade treatment, along with a similar refresh for the Insider software app that partners them. So, let's take a look at the biggest of the new three-amp mini range, the ID:Core V3 Stereo 40 combo.

Like all Blackstar amps, the ID:Core V3 Stereo 40 has a smart, purposeful vibe, covered in decent quality black vinyl over a robust MDF cabinet, with a recessed grip handle on the back. Behind the classy black and silver grille cloth sit two 6.5-inch full-range Blackstar loudspeakers, while the electronics live on a printed circuit



1. Unlike a regular 3.5mm audio jack, the ID:Core V3's line in/streaming jack sends audio in both directions at the same time, using a regular TRRS (tip/ring/ring/sleeve) cable. As well as performing the usual aux in function, you can stream, using GarageBand and Instagram for example, with one

cable. Meanwhile, the Cab Rig/headphones socket incorporates Cab Rig Lite, Blackstar's next-generation speaker simulator, which reproduces the sound of real mic'd up speaker cabinets in unprecedented detail. For full stereo operation, a stereo jack to two mono jack adaptor is needed

The Architect software is an integral part of the playing experience, allowing real-time editing and patch saving

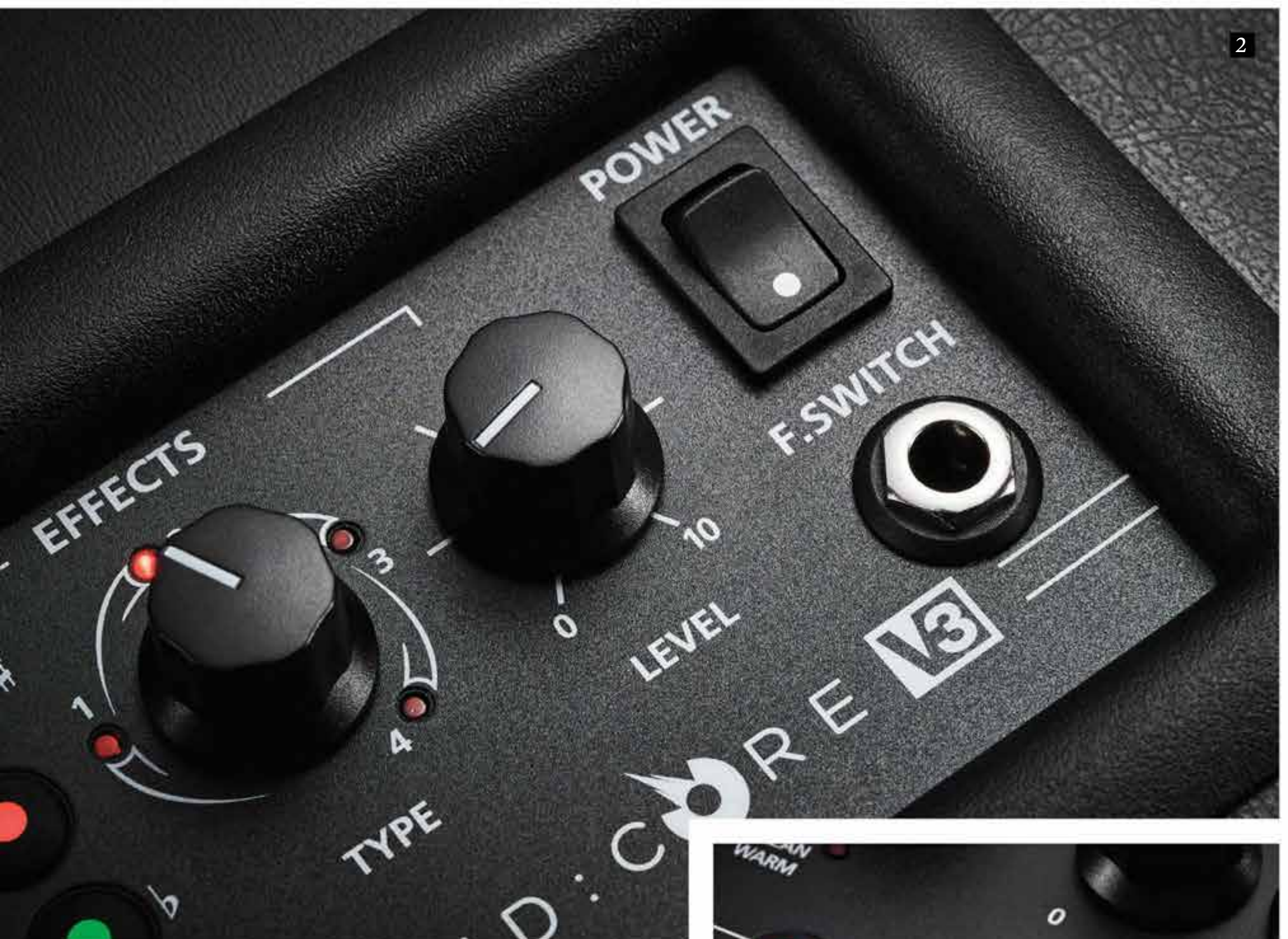
board placed underneath the control panel. Most of the components are surface mount, which makes the ID:Core's technology possible in such a small space, as well as lowering the power requirements. Here, power comes from a laptop-style external supply, or there's the optional PB-1 battery pack for mains-free use anywhere.

The new ID:Core amps share identical controls, which should be familiar to anyone with previous Blackstar experience and easy to understand for first-timers. Over the single-input jack are two 3.5mm sockets. One is for headphones, featuring speaker simulation from Blackstar's new Cab Rig Lite emulation engine, while the other is an aux/line in but also sends audio out via a TRRS (tip, ring, ring, sleeve) cable. This new feature makes easy live streaming possible without the need for any outboards – simply connect the ID:Core to your mobile device (iPhones and iPads will need a TRRS to Lightning adaptor) and away you go.

Next to the input jack is the voice selector, with two choices each for clean, crunch

and overdrive, together with gain and level controls. Hardware EQ is limited to Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature) knob, which progressively changes the entire EQ stack from classic USA to UK, providing a wide range of subtle enhancement, with slightly scooped mids at one end and slightly boosted mids at the other. The ID:Core V3's bass, mid and treble controls now exist on the other side of the screen in Blackstar's new Architect app, which replaces the Insider software on all amps that use it, past and present.

Moving on to the effects section, there are focus/edit buttons for the ID:Core's built-in modulation, delay and reverb, with four effects available for each type and a tap tempo button to manually alter speed. A rotary selector takes care of effects selection and a main parameter, while a Level control adjusts rate or time. Towards the bottom of the control panel, there's a Manual/Store button, which puts the ID:Core into Manual mode and stores patch presets, one in each of the six amp voice slots.



2. The ID:Core V3 Stereo 40 and Stereo 20 models can both be footswitched, with two different modes available in Blackstar's new Architect software, which replaces the familiar Insider app. The default mode uses one button to toggle between two pre-selected patches; the other button turns all effects on or off. In Alternative mode, the two buttons function as patch up/down

A USB mini 'B' socket connects the ID:Core to a desktop for recording and editing with the Architect app. The USB audio is versatile, with four simultaneous output channels including stereo left and right, a mono 'dry' preamp without effects, and a clean guitar signal as it appears at the input jack for reamping. The USB also accepts stereo left and right line inputs and a clean guitar reamping input on channel 3.

Feel & Sounds

The ID:Core Stereo 40's twin full-range loudspeakers kick out plenty of volume and bass, with a valve-like dynamic kick from each of the six amp voices making for a rewarding playing experience. Both clean sounds are great for rhythm work: Clean Warm has the highest headroom, while Clean Bright can be pushed into a mild, chiming overdrive. Crunch is a ticket to 70s classic rock, while Super Crunch has a more contemporary voicing with extra gain. OD1 is the smooth ballad solo overdrive, and



then, finally, OD2 is aimed more at metal, with a tight, fast attack. Super Crunch is the real stand-out for us – articulate and responsive with a hint of OD2, it's ideal for classy fusion leads and cleans up nicely with the volume control.

The revoiced effects are superb and definitely a step up in quality, with lush modulations, plenty of delay options and a choice of plate, room, hall and spring reverbs, enhanced by the clever Super Wide Stereo effect, which gives the illusion of a much wider sound stage.

3. The USB socket sends and receives audio for recording and reamping, as well as connecting the ID:Core V3 to the Architect software. Existing ID:Core owners needn't fret – Architect is fully compatible with all past and present amps that use Insider



Behind the attractive grille cloth are two 6.5-inch special-design Blackstar speakers in a sealed cabinet, generating a surprisingly powerful bottom-end response. Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo feature creates the illusion of a much larger cab, a clever effect that works really well

The Architect software is an integral part of the playing experience, allowing real-time editing as well as storing and saving patches. There are clever 'randomise' buttons for those moments when creativity needs a nudge; rolling the dice for unexpected preamp and effects combinations works really well and adds to the fun. The app is a breeze to use – updates to the software and amp firmware are painlessly downloaded and applied at start-up, while the clean, uncluttered graphics make it easy to navigate. Blackstar's Cab Rig Lite is superb and far more flexible than IRs, providing highly authentic cabinet/microphone emulations that turn the ID:Core into a powerful

Cab Rig Lite's cab/mic emulations turn the amp into a powerful recording tool

recording tool thanks to four-channel USB audio that allows reamping. The streaming function is equally simple to use, although iPhone/iPad users will need that Lightning/TRRS adaptor to hook things up.

Verdict

With most live music venues still shuttered because of the pandemic, the internet has taken over for the time being as the primary performance space for bands and solo artists. Many of us have had to learn new broadcast and finance technologies to get our music out there and hopefully earn a crust. Anything to help that is more than welcome, so we think the ID:Core V3's new streaming feature alone is worth a hefty portion of the asking price. With the enhanced effects and software app, Blackstar's upgrade to the ID:Core has once again put the company back into pole position. Aimed at all levels from beginner to seasoned pro, this is a highly compelling choice for studio, home and small gigs. **G**



BLACKSTAR ID:CORE V3 STEREO 40 COMBO

PRICE: £185

ORIGIN: UK design, made in China

TYPE: Digital modelling combo with stereo power stage and built-in effects

OUTPUT: 2x 20W stereo

VALVES: None

DIMENSIONS: 336 (h) x 434 (w) x 185mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 6/14

CABINET: MDF

LOUDSPEAKERS: 2x 6.5" Blackstar special design

CHANNELS: 6x fully programmable voices/memory slots

CONTROLS: Voice select, gain, volume, ISF, mod/del/rev select buttons, effects select knob, tap tempo button, hold/store button

FOOTSWITCH: FS-11 or FS-18, not supplied

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Cab Rig/headphones output, line in/streaming jack, USB for recording and connection to the Architect software editor, built-in tuner

OPTIONS: FS-11 & FS-18 footswitches (both £39)

RANGE OPTIONS: The ID:Core V3 range includes a 10W 2x3" (non-footswitchable) combo for £119 and 20W 2x5" combo at £155. The FS-11 and FS-18 footswitches are both £39, while the PB-1 rechargeable battery pack costs £60

Blackstar Amplification

01604 817817

www.blackstaramps.com



PROS Great-sounding entry-level modern practice amp at a highly competitive price

CONS At this price? We can't think of anything negative

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FIRST PLAY

**CORT G300 PRO**
£749

WHAT IS IT? A super slice of modern-aimed electric guitar featuring roasted maple, stainless steel and Seymour Duncan

Modern World

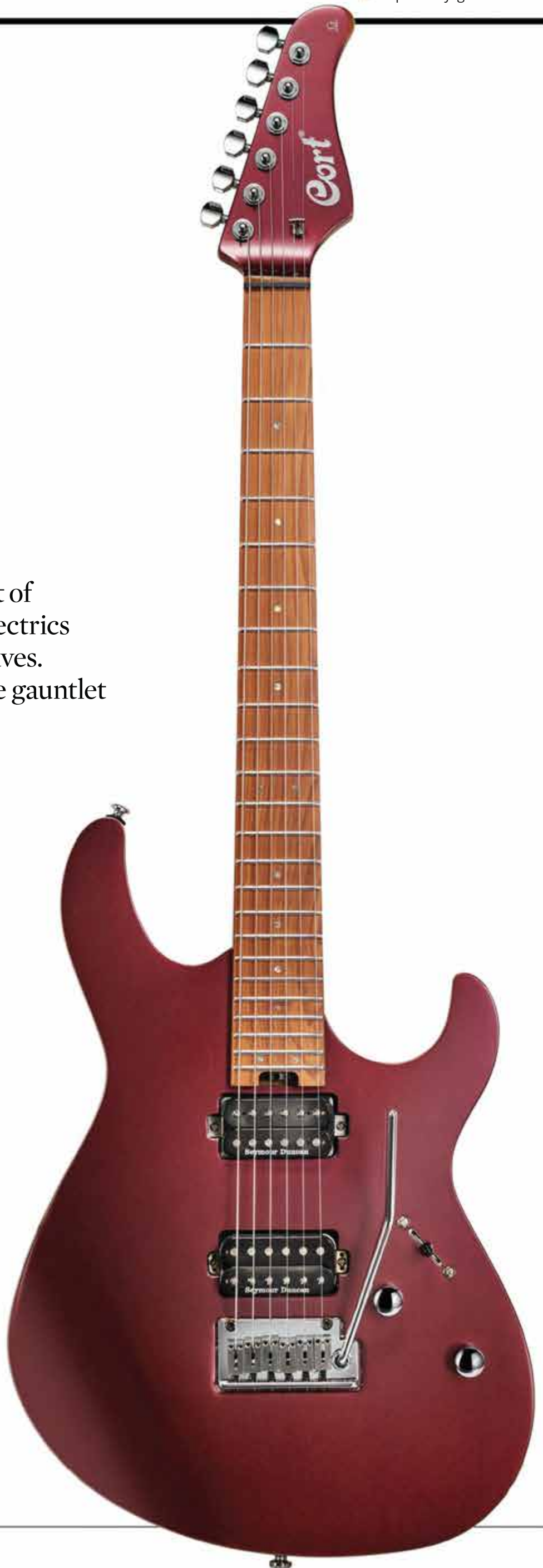
Aside from making guitars for a host of brands including PRS, Cort's own electrics and acoustics are making serious waves. This new G300 Pro throws down the gauntlet

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

If you're serious about your guitars, you'll know that Cor-Tek produces instruments for numerous brands in its Indonesian super-factory. Not everyone wants to shout about that, of course, but plenty do, not least Manson Guitar Works here in the UK and Relish in Switzerland. PRS is also happy to praise its relationship with Cor-Tek in making its SE electric line; only in our last issue we gave a Cor-Tek-made PRS SE Custom 24-08 a 10-star Gold Award.

Cor-Tek's own brand, Cort, predates this huge Indonesian facility, yet now there is proper UK distribution we're seeing more examples. We last caught up with Cort in issue 465 and here we've snagged one of the first of its new 2021 G Series models – and the electrics have some traction. The G300 Pro is the new flagship model and tops the mini-range, which starts at £279 with the G250.

The price doesn't include a gigbag and the cardboard shipping box doesn't exactly suggest the quality of the instrument inside. The thing is, however, this new G300 Pro is a hugely feature-led slice of modern guitar craft, the sort of instrument that covers a lot of ground without overly suggesting a specific genre or style. Admittedly, there's plenty that puts it in the 'modern progressive'







1. Based closely on Gotoh's 510 vibrato, the CFA-III is a two-post design, here with a back recess. It's an all-steel design with six stainless-steel block saddles. The Seymour Duncan JB is another rock classic humbucker, which, like the Jazz, uses an Alnico V bar magnet
2. The combination of the deep cutaways and this domed heel means upper access to the top 24th fret is easy
3. Classy and functional, the headstock sports rear-locking tuners with staggered height posts and a single roller-style string tree. The nut is Graph Tech's Black Tusq
4. Seymour Duncan humbuckers are used here. The Jazz Model in the neck position dates back to the early 70s. Note the easy-to-adjust spoke-wheel truss-rod – hardly a new design but welcome here

The G300 Pro is the sort of instrument that spans pretty much every rock genre and quite a bit more

piegeonhole if you listen to guitars from their specification sheets. We have a compound radius fingerboard, big ol' stainless-steel frets and those see-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots that are essential for prog rockers and their sparsely lit performance spaces. Back in the day we'd have called this a 'SuperStrat', pure and simple.

Like Eddie Van Halen's first Music Man signature, the body under that slightly metallic opaque finish is American basswood, with a 6mm maple top and its edges left natural. Its slightly elongated Strat-inspired outline hardly brings any new concepts to the fray, but the ribcage and forearm contours – not to mention the rounded neck heel with inset neck screws – all aid the form. It really doesn't get in your way and, with a good light weight, feels great strapped on or seated.

The vibrato here is based closely on Gotoh's modern classic 510 and has a machined-steel block, steel baseplate and block stainless-steel saddles with two pivot posts and push-in arm with tension adjustment at the collar. It appears to be set flush with the top of the body until you notice the recess. This doesn't actually

increase the up-bend over a similar vibrato with a Fender-style tilt, so when set with just two springs, it has a light feel and we get a minor 3rd on the G and a semitone on the high E, while down bend is pretty much to slack. What we will say, though, is that tuning stability is superb right out of the box – we didn't even stretch the strings. The tuners are rear locking and have staggered posts (three different heights), and the Graph Tech black Tusq nut is clearly doing its job.

But Cort could probably do with a PR person who understands the history of the electric guitar. The Seymour Duncan TB4 and SH-2 humbucker set doesn't mean much unless you know your product codes. We have what Duncan calls its 'Hot Rodded' set: "Seymour created this classic humbucker combination while in England in 1974, and it remains his favourite set of pickups to this day – an SH-4 JB for the bridge and SH-2n Jazz Model for the neck. Together these pickups have become one of the most timeless and versatile humbucker sets ever built."

Both appear to be direct mounted, but they actually sit on foam so you can tweak the pickup heights if you need to.



Feel & Sounds

If the neck specification suggests a certain style, then the actual neck here is really quite full and feels quite 'old Fender' if we're honest. It has a slim but not skinny depth in the lower positions, measuring 21.6mm at the 1st fret, and a D-style profile with quite full shoulders, filling out to almost old-Tele dimensions by the 12th at 24mm. The satin neck back will undoubtedly burnish to a low gloss with playing, but you can't help thinking a quick rub with a Scotch-Brite pad at the factory would just break it in a bit for a slightly slinkier feel.

The fingerboard edges are slightly rounded and, despite the apparently 'flat' fingerboard camber, it feels quite mainstream. The stainless-steel frets could fit into the narrow/tall category, too: they're nicely installed, although a little more polishing of the tops would prevent the slightly scratchy feel as you bend, especially on the wound strings. It's just a few minutes away from turning good into exceptional.

Overall, the supplied setup is flawless and low – pretty much 1.3mm on both treble and bass sides, as supplied. To be honest, that's a little low for us, and raising the string heights to 1.6mm on both sides at the 12th



The 300 Pro is the only G Series guitar to feature a roasted maple neck with stainless-steel frets and Luminlay side dots



fret felt a bit more universal and gave the strings attack less snap and more air.

Like the rest of the design, the drive is simple and really doesn't get in the way. There are plenty of ways you can wire a pair of four-conductor humbuckers and here we get (from positions 1 to 5): bridge humbucker; screw single coils of both in parallel; both humbuckers; slug single coils of both in parallel; and neck humbucker. It certainly covers a lot of ground. The circuit is simple with 500k Alpha Korean mini pots and a four-pole, five-way switch with a .033 microfarads tone cap.

Now, you could probably have a career on the back pickup alone. The JB is a real classic, hot with a big thumping midrange bark, quite the antidote to the 'wimpy' PAF. Pull the volume back and it can get a little indistinct, but if you're running into a crisp, gained amp voicing that's little problem. That said, a simple treble-bleed circuit would be an easy and cheap upgrade. But there's plenty more to explore here and both parallel mixes not only thin out the voice but add Fender-y funk and bounce. The wide-spaced screw coils sound a little more

If the neck spec suggests a certain style, the actual neck is really quite full and feels quite 'old Fender'

'Tele', the closer slugs coil hints more at a Strat's mix, while the more scooped Jazz at the neck is almost a halfway between those and the JB's thickness. And just like the JB, the Jazz has a useful voice, clean enough for almost single-coil-like clarity on those soupy leads and snappy enough for some funkier blues/jazz comping with clean and crunch amp voices. The dual humbucker mix is perhaps less suited to gained sounds but is surprisingly wide and full with a little snappy clarity on cleaner amp settings.

Verdict

"I think I need a Cort" are probably not words you've uttered – unless you're a Matt Bellamy fan, of course. That said, you've probably played one (at least in terms of where it was made), possibly without even knowing it because not every brand is like PRS who happily credits Cor-Tek for its excellent SE builds.

In a different modern bolt-on style, the G300 Pro is a difficult guitar to fault – it's the sort of instrument that spans pretty much every rock genre there is and quite a bit more, although it does veer towards generic in style. Parts of the market may care that this guitar lacks history, isn't retro nor based on an instrument designed in the 1950s. But don't for a moment think it isn't fit for purpose: it's a real everyman instrument that could sit in a modern metal band just as easily as a function pop/soul ensemble. In fact, for those stylistically diverse wedding/function setlists, we doubt you'd need more. **G**



CORT G300 PRO

PRICE: £749

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solid body electric guitar

BODY: Basswood w/ 6mm maple top

NECK: Roasted maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq/42.13mm

FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple, 305-406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 24, jumbo stainless steel

HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Cort CFA-III 2-post 6-saddle vibrato with push-in arm, Cort staggered-post rear locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan JB (TB4, bridge) and Jazz (SH24, neck) direct mount humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone,

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.47/7.6

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The swamp ash/figured maple-topped G290 FAT (£599) is recommended with versatile twin VTH-77 covered humbuckers. The new alder/figured maple G280 (£579) goes for an HSS configuration. Both have two colour options each

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Vivid Burgundy metallic (as reviewed), Black – gloss body and headstock face, satin neck

440 Distribution

0113 4433145

www.cortguitars.com



PROS Superb feature-led build for the money: roasted maple neck, stainless-steel frets and Seymour Duncan pickups

CONS Colour choice isn't great and there's no gigbag. But do we care?

12
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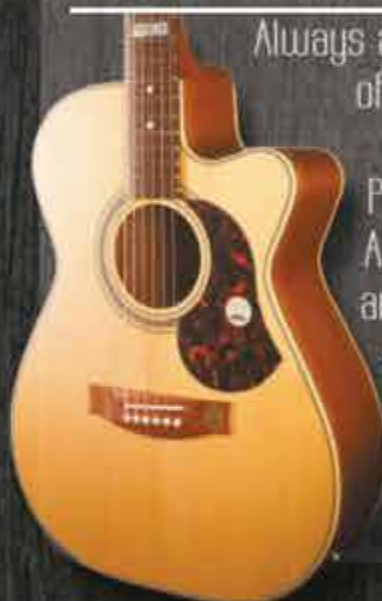
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Featured George Harrison

Godin
GUITARS

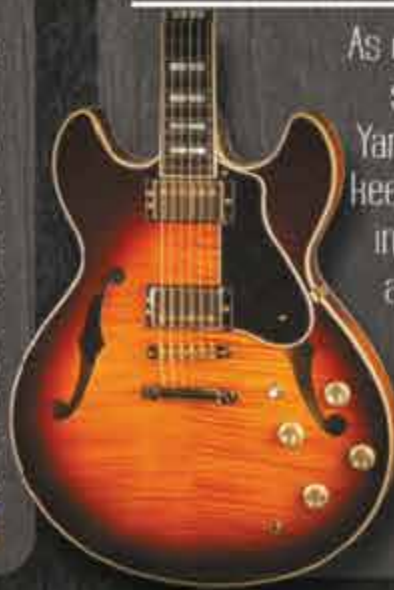


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theWishlist

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

Hammett Guitar Company H620 Nazaré £2,400

CONTACT **Pat Hammett** PHONE **07595 772121** WEB **HammettGuitarco.com** Words Jamie Dickson Photography Olly Curtis

The popularity of offbeat 60s electrics has never been higher, with cult brands such as Teisco enjoying a second life in the hands of players looking for something a little different – that's at once retro and futuristic in style. It's a vibe that's inspired many modern guitar makers, too, including Pat Hammett, the luthier behind the Hammett Guitar Company of Bristol (shortly to relocate to Stroud), which specialises in finely crafted reimaginings of off-piste 60s six-stringers. After all, one of the main problems of using original vintage Teiscos and the like is that the quality and playability of surviving examples can vary wildly, from acceptable to atrocious.

Enter the H620 Nazaré, which brings high-end, luthier-built quality together with retro sci-fi styling. Loosely based on the vintage Maton Fyrbyrd outline, the Nazaré has a plethora of tone tweaks and craftsman-like touches beneath its kitsch-but-cool skin. Though there are plenty of options to choose from, the core-model Nazaré is a straight-mortised, set-neck solidbody. Its Honduran mahogany neck has a Gibson-esque 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length with a 305mm (12-inch) radius. Patrick will build you a Nazaré with either a mahogany or poplar body and there are

numerous finish options, with a sensible upcharge for metallic and sunburst finishes, all clad in light relic nitro.

The tonal heart of the H620 is a trio of 'Mojobyrd' pickups – an intriguing custom design from Mojo Pickups that sees a Thunderbird bass-inspired cover housing gold foil pickup-style internals with exposed poles. The custom chrome surrounds are a Hammett touch. The switching system cleverly lets you utilise the neck and bridge pickup in a conventional Tele-style way via a three-way switch, with a dedicated volume control for the middle pickup that allows you to blend it in as desired. The neck and bridge have their own master volume, while a master tone governs all three pickups at once. It's an ingenious way to get the best from three pickups while retaining the familiarity of a simple three-way should you crave a conventional drive.

A B5 Bigsby vibrato provides vintage-style shimmers and shakes, while tuning is kept honest at the paddle-like headstock end by Kluson closed-back butterbean tuners. It adds up to a bracingly flamboyant design that you could easily imagine forming part of the sound and look of an act such as Little Barrie or maybe Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds. The world has enough Strat and Les Paul clones. Why not surf a different wave? **G**

1. The custom 'Mojobyrd' pickups have a classic gold foil sound, despite the P-90 looks, and are made by Mojo Pickups' Marc Ransley. A custom chrome surround completes the sleek, hot-rod looks

2. The broad cresting-wave-like headstock echoes the surfy curves of the body with that distinctive 'bite' out of the top edge

3. A Bigsby B5 vibrato is the obvious choice for a retro-futuristic piece of this kind and has sensibly been sited far enough back that string break angles down from the bridge are not too acute



1



2



3

4. The fingerboard on the H620 Nazaré shown here is ebony, but you can choose rosewood if you prefer. Markers are mother-of-pearl and the radius is 305mm (12 inches) on a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale

5. The guitar's control layout is unusual but surprisingly practical, with a three-way switch to govern the neck and bridge pickups and a dedicated volume for the middle pickup, so you can blend in as much or little of its voice as you like. A single master tone adjusts all three pickups

6. The Nazaré's outline is inspired by the long-lost Maton Fyrbyrd – but also by the sea. The surfers among you may have clocked that Nazaré in Portugal is where the world's biggest surfable waves are found. It's no coincidence and Pat Hammett says the guitar "has psychedelic surf tones at its soul"





Gas Supply

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

Fender American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster £1,879

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.fender.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING Acoustic 'models'

We've seen plenty of great attempts at hybrid electric/acoustic guitars over the years, most recently PRS's excellent SE Hollowbody II Piezo. The difference here, though, is that rather than starting with an electric guitar and adding a piezo transducer, the Acoustasonic has been designed with many acoustic guitar attributes from the start. This results in not only a more acoustic base, but makes the processing for the acoustic 'models' much more faithful than 'acoustic-like' sounds from an electric guitar.

It says Fender and looks like a Jazzmaster...

Top marks! The American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster is the latest evolution of Fender's hybrid acoustic/electric guitar.

Okay, but my Jazzmaster has two single coils and a vibrato. What's going on here?

The Acoustasonic is part electro-acoustic and part electric guitar, making use of classic Fender electric body shapes and playability but with some clever electronics going on under the hood. Each Acoustasonic guitar includes three separate pickup systems: a Fishman under-saddle transducer, an internal body sensor and a Fender Acoustasonic magnetic pickup. The real magic happens when these signals are combined with the Fender/Fishman Acoustic Engine, which processes the incoming signal from the pickups to give you detailed approximations of common acoustic guitar sounds. So far, Fender has applied the concept to a Stratocaster and Telecaster, and now it's the turn of the Jazzmaster.

Ah! So it's just a new body shape, then?

Far from it. Yes, it's a new shape for the range, but Fender has added four new acoustic models that it says are made possible by the Jazzmaster's larger body size and

the resonances created by the offset shape. Included in these options are a jumbo and Triple O.

What about that pickup - is it a standard Jazzmaster model?

Negative. What you're looking at there is the latest creation from Fender's Custom Shop pickup guru, Mr Tim Shaw. It's a humbucker – another first for the Acoustasonic line-up – so if you've had your interests piqued by previous models but found yourself wanting a humbucker, this guitar is the solution. It can be selected as its own sound or blended with an acoustic voice, with Fender telling us you can go from Joni Mitchell to Sonic Youth with just the turn of a control.

Tell us more about the guitar itself...

Following in the footsteps of previous two Acoustasonic models, the American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster is designed to bridge the gap between the feel of both electric and acoustic guitars. Thanks to that hollow mahogany body and the satin-finished forearm contour, you can pick it up and play it acoustically and still get the sense that you're playing an acoustic. The bridge is of the 'modern asymmetrical' acoustic variety.

BODY & FINISH

Not only is the offset body likely to extend the appeal of the Acoustasonic, but Fender says the larger size and volume actually helps with the processing. The guitar is available in five finishes: Ocean Turquoise (pictured), Natural, Tungsten, Tobacco Sunburst, and Arctic White



HUMBUCKER

Where the Strat and Tele versions featured noiseless single coils on the magnetic side, the Jazzmaster comes equipped with a Tim Shaw-designed humbucker for more weighty electric tones

Meanwhile, the neck is also mahogany (with an ebony 'board), shaped to an electric-friendly Modern 'Deep C' profile in order to make electric players feel at home, and the headstock features a set of six-in-line Fender sealed tuners. Around the back, the neck heel has been carved to make access to the upper frets easier. The neck is tweakable via a Bi-Flex truss rod (accessed at the nut for simpler setup), and Fender has also included its Micro-Tilt adjustment at the other end to help find the perfect pitch.

What about that soundhole?

It doesn't only look fantastic, but Fender reckons the design of the soundhole (which is more of a 'port', really) contributes greatly to the overall acoustic response of the Acoustasonic. So much so, in fact, that it has its own acronym. The SIRS – Stringed Instrument Resonance System – is shaped with a sloping 'waterfall' contour in order to direct airflow into the cavity and enhance the liveliness of the sound.

So, when can I try one?

The American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster should be on its way to guitar stores right now. Keep your eyes peeled for a full review next issue! **[SW]**

NECK

The neck is a much more electric-friendly player than many acoustics. It features a C-shape profile, ebony 'board, nut-adjusted Bi-Flex truss rod, and Fender's Micro-Tilt adjustment



NEW MODELS

From the Big Jumbo to Triple O, the Jazzmaster version of the Acoustasonic offers four new acoustic guitar sounds

ALSO OUT NOW...

MXR ERIC GALES RAW DAWG OVERDRIVE £119



When it comes to modern blues players, there are few who capture the imagination – both technically and tonally – as much as Eric Gales. This is why we think the new Raw Dawg overdrive from MXR is a thoroughly good idea. It's a micro-sized overdrive 'inspired by' a classic overdrive renowned for its "grit and crunch". As such, the Raw Dawg features familiar Drive/Tone/Output controls, while the overall sound of the pedal builds on its inspiration by delivering a more even midrange and a higher gain range. Finally, the pedal is decorated with custom Raw Dawg artwork.

www.jimdunlop.com

WAY HUGE PENNY SAVER ROYALE £299

What do you get if you cross a Blue Hippo with an Overrated Special? Answer: a humourless punchline and Joe Bonamassa's latest signature pedal – the Penny Saver Royale. Building on his Dumble-inspired signature drive, the new pedal marries Bonamassa's favourite Way Huge chorus, the analogue Blue Hippo, with the Overrated Special for a modulation/overdrive combo that he says has "changed the relationship between chorus and overdrive".

On the left side of the pedal, there are Speed and Depth controls for the chorus, while the overdrive section gives you Volume, Drive, Tone and Freq (for dialling in the mids) controls. Both effects are switched independently, and the pedal can be powered by battery or a PSU.

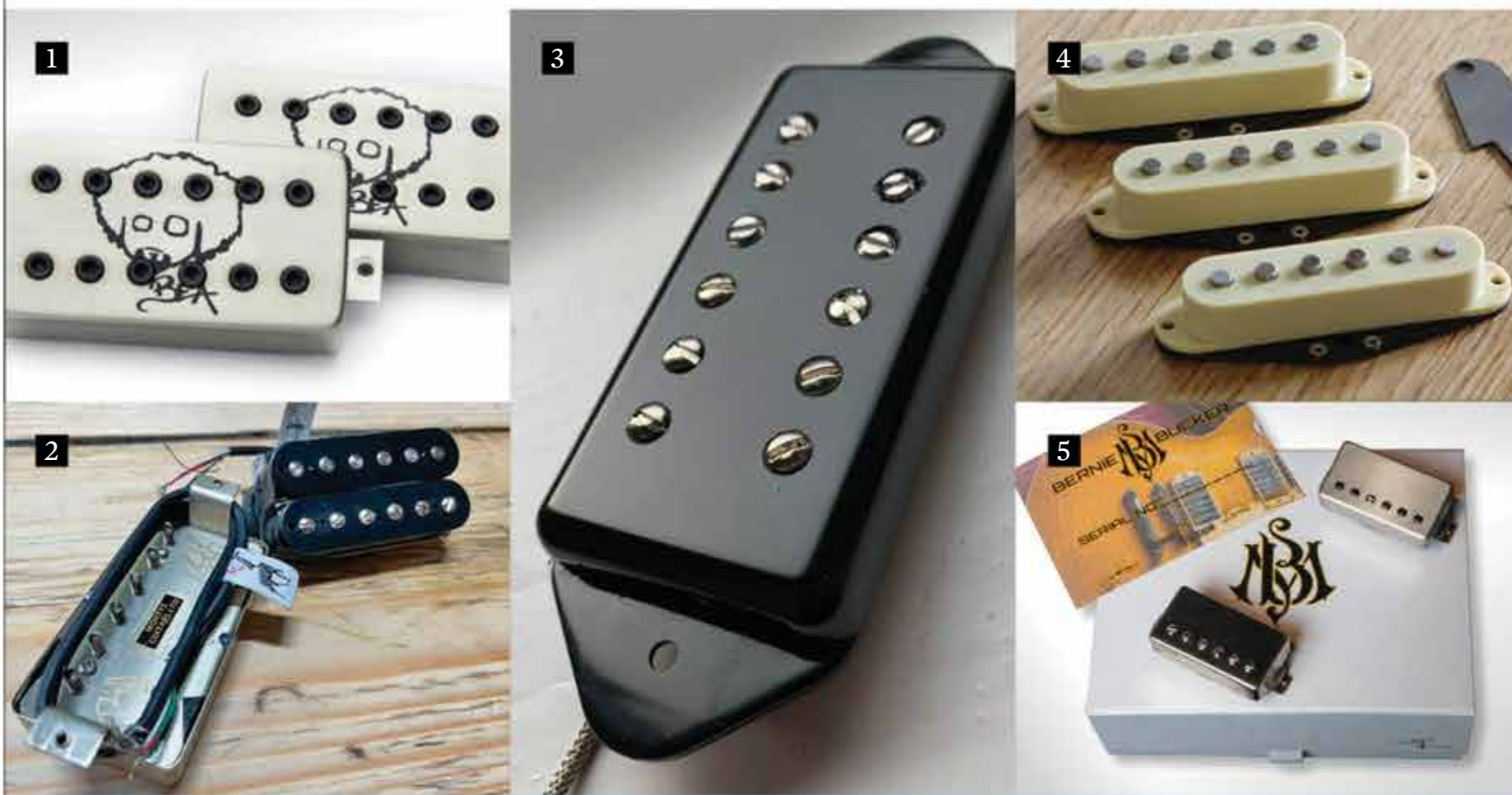
www.jimdunlop.com





The Players

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



Magnetic Attraction

5 signature pickups we're drawn to from UK makers

1. Bare Knuckle Pickups Rabea Massaad Silo

Individual from £154.80; set from £298.80

www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk

The world-class Cornwall pickup maker's signature set with Frog Leap/Toska/Dorje guitarist and YouTube pro Rabea Massaad is a true collaboration, delivering the clarity that's become a hallmark of the guitarist's tone. These humbuckers use Alnico V magnets and a pairing of 44 AWG wound bridge and 42 AWG wound neck wire, and deliver overdriven definition and warm cleans.

2. Monty's Bill Steer Humbucker

Individual from £116.33; set from £264.20

www.montysguitars.com

Steer's role in death metal and grindcore's evolution as part of Carcass is slightly misleading – he's also a superb blues-rock player, forming Firebird in 1999. And so his signature bridge offers depth with Alnico VI, for power and warmth, and offset coils, "helping keep clarity and responsiveness despite the thinner wire". The neck pickup is an overwound version of Monty's PAF pickup with an Alnico IV magnet.

3. The Creamery Custom '13 P-90

Individual P-90/humbucker £95/£94; humbucker set £173

www.creamery-pickups.co.uk

Not strictly a signature, but The Creamery's Jaime Campbell designed this hum-cancelling P-90 dog-ear with Bernard Sumner to provide "clearer, more defined E, A and D strings" and "creamier, warmer G, B and E strings" by using two magnet types. There's a choice of Alnico II or V for the lower strings to pair with the custom Alnico V for the higher three strings. It's also available as a humbucker.

4. Radioshop Pickups ID:Chris Buck

Individual £83; set £240

www.radioshoppickups.com

Chris Buck's sublime playing must have sold a fair few sets from the Welsh pickup maker, but the quality speaks for itself. These Strat sets have done so well that a new '57 variation is now available with hand-bevelled Alnico III magnets. The originals were the first to feature Radioshop's Increased Dynamics (ID), using an unpotted inner core of wire to enhance playing dynamics and tonal character.

5. Cream T Pickups Bernie Bucker

Set £349

www.creamtpickupsdirect.com

Cream T Pickups founder Thomas Nilsen is known for his work with Billy Gibbons (see Pickup Lines on page 124 for more), and he's used his 'Super Scanner' process once more for "100 per cent exact electronic reproductions" of the pickups from Bernie Marsden's famed '59 Les Paul Burst, known as The Beast. "I have to say that I'm totally knocked out with the results," says Bernie.

ALSO THIS MONTH

NEW DREAM THEATER GEAR & MUSIC

John Petrucci is using an eight-string guitar for the first time to record a new Dream Theater song – and it's a prototype Ernie Ball Majesty signature model. "We have two prototypes so far. I was able to use one to write and record with," he told *Ultimate Guitar* about the new DT album sessions. "We're still working some things out to get it perfect. But it will be on the record... I don't have a release date yet, but it's awesome. It's totally inspiring and I can't wait for people to hear it. I'm so glad it made it on the new record."

FLEETWOOD & BUCKINGHAM REUNITED?

Mick Fleetwood has reportedly reconciled with former Fleetwood Mac guitarist Lindsey Buckingham and is open to a musical reunion. "I know for a fact that I intend to make music and play again with Lindsey," the drummer told *Rolling Stone*. "I would love that. It doesn't have to be in Fleetwood Mac."

ARIEL POSEN ON SRV



With new solo album *Headway* now out, Ariel Posen looks back on the impact of one of his key guitar influences, Stevie Ray Vaughan. "I'll never forget the day I first heard *Scuttle Buttin'* for the first time," says Ariel. "The fluidity, the attack, the aggression, the creativity, the excitement. It melted my mind... Once I heard that and listened to the entire album, it made me rethink everything

about guitar and music itself and I realised how much work I had to do. It didn't feel like work, though, because it inspired me so greatly. I still feel like I haven't picked my head up."

BUCKLEY BIOPIC IN THE WORKS

An official Jeff Buckley biopic, co-produced by his mother, Mary Guibert, has been confirmed. *Everybody Here Wants You* will see musician and actor Reeve Carney play the late singer-songwriter, with filming set to start later this year. "This will be the only official dramatisation of Jeff's story, which, I can promise his fans, will be true to him and to his legacy," Guibert said in a statement. "Thankfully, my determination to assemble all the right participants, no matter how long it took, is about to culminate in the best way possible."

DAVE MUSTAINE COLLECTION

Dave Mustaine signature models for Gibson and Kramer have been revealed as a new partnership with Gibson Brands is announced. Three Flying V models are joined by Gibson's first ever 24-fret acoustic design, which required redesigned bracing. Epiphone signature models are said to be in the pipeline for the Megadeth founder, too.



“

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The latest Gary Moore collection uncovers further gems

Gary Moore How Blue Can You Get

Provogue

9/10



A raft of unreleased tracks from the blues master

It's unbelievable to think that 10 years have passed since the world lost Gary Moore and yet, as this album proves, there are still gems to be found in the archives. And listeners may be pleased to discover the tracks form a kind of Gary-by-numbers – in other words, there's a little of everything that made the man the blues monster that he was.

You have the traditional side of his repertoire, such as scorching versions of Freddie King's *I'm Tore Down*, Memphis Slim's *Steppin' Out* and Elmore James's *Done Somebody Wrong* – with Gary on slide guitar – coupled with slow ballads in the *Empty Rooms* and *Parisienne Walkways* vein including the title track and *Love Can Make A Fool Of You*, the latter stealing the show with its positively volcanic guitar solo.

Fans of slow-tempo blues are catered for, too, with the seven-plus-minutes *Living With The Blues* that demonstrates Gary's ability to pace a song and fire off a solo imbued with restrained drama. About halfway through the CD we began to wonder why these tracks hadn't enjoyed a full release during Gary's lifetime. We know he was a perfectionist and renowned self-critic, but, to us at least, there's all the passion and pyrotechnics that are to be found throughout his catalogue. That he is sadly missed is without question – but the fact albums like this can appear after a decade is a marvel. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Love Can Make A Fool Of You*

For fans of: Clapton, BB King, Albert King

John Mayall

The First Generation 1965-1974

Madfish

9/10



Mayall's epic pilgrimage through blues

Loathe though we are to begin a review with an apology, it's almost impossible to cover such an epic chunk of British blues history here – but here goes. Comprising 35 discs (count them), this absorbing set covers the seminal, arguably greatest years of Mayall's career. Yes, *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* is a jewel in the crown, but there is much more gold to enjoy here. From the introspective warmth of 1968's *Blues From Laurel Canyon* to Peter Green's magical, inimitable playing on *A Hard Road*, there's just so much to savour here. It's not all about the major works, either: 1972's *Jazz Blues Fusion* live LP is a sumptuous pleasure, and on it goes. The set, which is limited to 5,000 copies, also features tracks from seven previously unreleased gig recordings as well as 28 unreleased BBC tracks featuring Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mick Taylor. An absolute feast. **[JD]**

Standout track: *All Your Love*

For fans of: Clapton, Mick Taylor, Peter Green

Dumpstaphunk

Where Do We Go From Here

Mascot

8/10



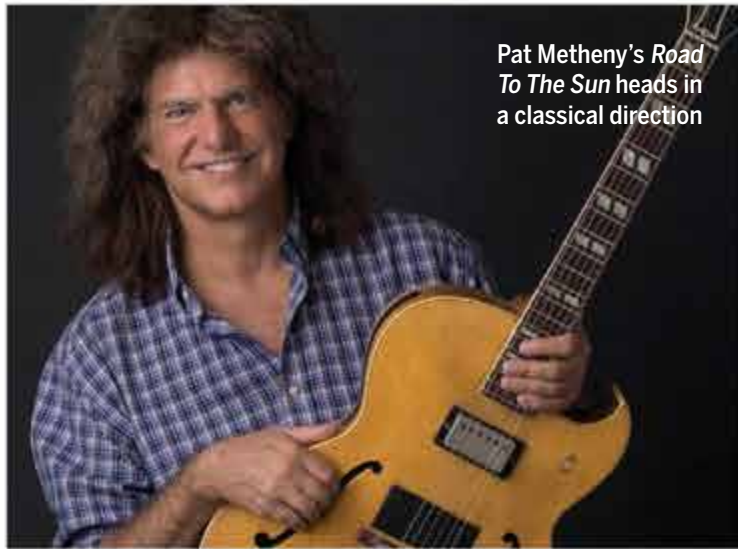
Get the funk out with the Dumpstas

Fancy something that sounds like The Meters, James Brown and Sly And The Family Stone with a dash of Living Color and Parliament? Then you'll want to check out Dumpstaphunk, a New Orleans band that includes two of the famous Neville family: Ivan Neville (vocals/keyboards) and Ian Neville (guitar). Here, the drums are thick and punchy, the guitars snapping, the bass thudding, the organ is church-infused and the horns exclamatory with soulful vocals on top – a perfect mix! With 11 tracks on offer, Dumpstaphunk know how to arrange a song well, leaving space for vocals or leaning in hard when they want to whack the funk down. Opener, *United Nation Stomp*, is one of the rockiest songs, evoking Hendrix's funky Band Of Gypsies period with a searing guitar solo to match. As for how rocking they can be, *Sounds* is worth checking out – as pumping as many a Living Color song. Slamming stuff. **[JS]**

Standout track: *United Nations Stomp*

For fans of: James Brown, Living Color, Parliament

The Lineup



Pat Metheny's *Road To The Sun* heads in a classical direction

Pat Metheny
Road To The Sun
BMG

8/10



The chameleon jazzier mixes it up

When you look back at Pat Metheny's catalogue, you'll see he's a musician of outstanding breadth making it difficult to pin him down with a single adjective. You wouldn't necessarily think *Bright Size Life* and *Rejoicing* came from the same pen as *One Quiet Night* or even *Zero Tolerance For Silence*, and yet his presence as a composer is undoubtedly present in the background. *Road To The Sun* sees him writing classical guitar music for Jason Vieaux and The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and is split into three: *Four Paths Of Light* for solo guitar, *Road To The Sun* for four guitars, and, as a bonus, Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina*, which features Pat playing his Linda Manzer 42-string 'Pikasso' guitar. Unmistakably Metheny throughout, it's yet another facet of this amazing player's output. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Road To The Sun Pt 1*

For fans of: William Kanengiser, The LA Guitar Quartet

START ME UP

Will Stratton
The Changing Wilderness
Bella Union

8/10



Singer-songwriter of pure class and quality

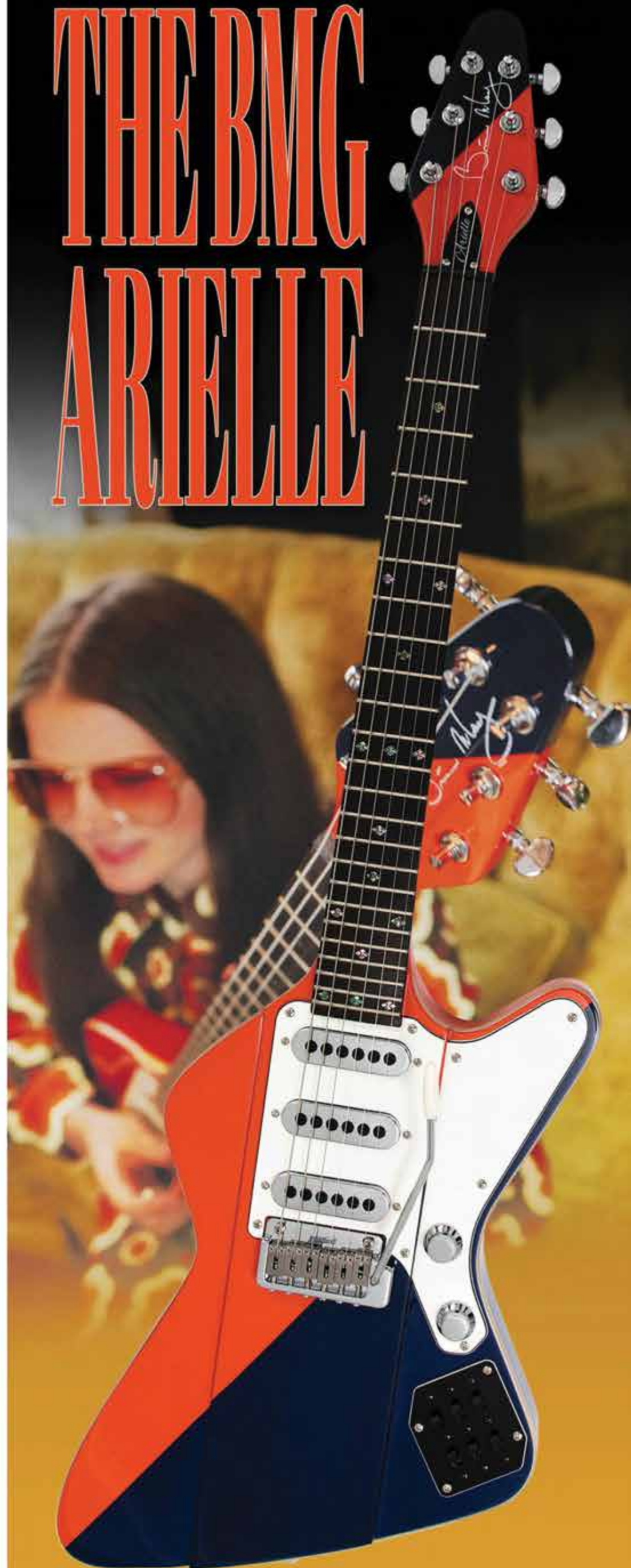
We've sung Will Stratton's praises before in these pages, but obviously didn't sing loudly enough, hence his new album's presence under the Start Me Up banner. It's Will's seventh studio release and yet he's somehow managed to hang on to his 'best kept secret' status for all this time. Let's just say that if deft fingerstyle guitar with warm vocals and thought-provoking lyrics are your thing, then you are in for a real treat with *The Changing Wilderness*. Hailing from Hudson Valley, New York State, Will undertook a four-year bout of intense soul-searching to create this album, the songs dealing with current world issues, invoking the spirit of the greats such as Leonard Cohen and Nick Drake in its wake. Wonderful. **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Rain*

For fans of: Nick Drake, Leonard Cohen

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Tones Behind The Tracks

Recorded at Real World studios last September, the worst of times has produced an album that **John Smith** cites as his best to date

Artist: John Smith

Album: *The Fray* (Commoner Records/Thirty Tigers)



“I’m really happy with it,” John Smith declares at the beginning of our conversation about his new album, *The Fray*. The title refers to recent turbulent times in John’s life, with the cover summing up everything with a bright yellow flower that’s seen better days. But writing and recording the music seems to have been a cathartic experience for the singer-songwriter. “I went with that brash yellow because it’s optimistic, it’s a happy colour. The whole time my wife has been calling the record ‘Sad songs, happy man’.”

The Fray’s creation was fast, with John and co-producer Sam Lakeman spending only a week at Peter Gabriel’s studios just outside of Bath. “Yes, well... Real World isn’t cheap, y’know,” John says. “I fund my records myself and so we worked long days and came out the other end with this album.”

Can you tell us about the writing process for the album?

“I’d written a couple of the songs the year before, in 2019. When I was on the road, driving from Asheville to Nashville, I stopped off and wrote a couple of songs with Sarah Siskind. The rest of the songs kind of came to me in the spring of 2020. In among everything that was going on I was having a bit of drama in my personal life – just real life happening, life and death stuff – and that informed

the songs. As ever, life provided the impetus for writing a record, y’know? Ordinarily, I was just going to be resting after two years on the road, but then all this stuff happened and the only way to cope with life is to write songs, for me. As soon as I picked up the pen, the songs started falling out. Then, come September, I had enough to go and record.”

You called on Sam Lakeman to co-produce the album – you’ve worked together in the past, haven’t you?

“Yes, he produced *Hummingbird* and *Headlong*. With this one we decided it would be a co-production; we would both be steering the ship. I had a very clear idea of how I wanted it to sound, and Sam is such a great engineer and safe pair of hands that I wanted him by my side when I was committing all of this stuff to tape. So he came in and we co-produced the record and it worked really well. We worked fast and we worked really hard, and in seven days we had the record.”

How close was the sound you had in your head to the finished product?

“We hit it. There were a few twists and turns along the way, a few bits of instrumentation that I put down that didn’t quite work out, but recording is an instinctive process. When you’re recording your own songs you have to make decisions on the fly that can shape the whole album, because if you do away with a string arrangement here or some drums there, suddenly the rest of the album should sit in the flow that you’ve dictated. We just allowed ourselves to be supple and to roll with it. The main thing was that I went into the studio able to play everything in one take. There’s a lot of stuff on the album that I recorded once and didn’t play again.”

Did you find that the songs suggested the arrangements in terms of instrumentation?

“Yeah, I think so. There were some that really felt like they wanted some drums, but there’s not an awful lot going on. For a lot of it, there’s just the implication of a groove or an arrangement and there’s just a bit of clarinet, a little bit of flugelhorn here and there... I’m leaning heavily into the electric guitar on this record and it’s a little more effected, which kind of creates this impression of density, but still always going with the mantra that less is more: if there’s space, you don’t have to fill it, just let it breathe.”

John’s latest album was created in a week. “I fund my records myself and so we worked long days,” he says



Photo by Elly Lucas



What electric guitars did you use on the album?

"I've got three main electric guitars at the moment. I've got my 'kind-of-Coodercaster' – it's not a proper 'Coodercaster' but it's a Strat with gold foil pickups and heavy flat-wound strings and it's a great slide guitar. I've got a Heritage 530 with P-90s that is a beautifully warm, transparent-sounding guitar, and I've got a '56 Telecaster replica that has a humbucker in it – it's a sunburst with heavy flat-wounds and it's slung in a low C tuning – and as soon as I picked up that guitar I wrote *Hold On*."

But you haven't completely forsaken acoustic guitars?

"No, there's a Fylde Falstaff and an Alexander on there and I've got my old '72 Martin D-28 and a '64 Gibson LG-1 and I bought myself a Ramirez classical guitar, having played one in America. David Pulkingham, from Patty Griffin's band, plays one and as soon as I played his I had to get one. I came back and sold a few things, bought myself a Ramirez and immediately wrote *Star-Crossed Lovers* on it. I'd already written *Sanctuary* when I bought that guitar, but, man, I'm so glad I've got it because I couldn't play that song on a steel-string."

How did you go about mic'ing the acoustics up in the studio?

"I think Sam knows my guitars really well and he just sits in front of the guitar, moves his head around a little until he's happy and then he'll replace his head with a

very expensive Neumann microphone – and Real World has no shortage of really nice expensive Neumann microphones. The signal chain was ridiculous. We had a very expensive mic into a beautiful Neve preamp and it just came out sounding great; it came out sounding just like my guitar."

You mentioned that you used a few effects on *The Fray*...

"My mainstays are the Strymon BlueSky and El Capistan, and I was using an Origin Effects SlideRIG, a fantastic tool just for squashing the guitar sound, and I've got a Jam Pedals WaterFall, which is a really

"I was going to rest after two years on the road, but then all this stuff happened and the only way to cope with life is to write songs, for me"

beautiful wet chorus that I was using on the record as well. These Jam Pedals are from Greece and they're handmade analogue pedals – they sent me a couple and they're incredible. Amp-wise, I used a Benson Nathan Junior and the AER Alpha."

What are your hopes for when we'll be able to get back out on the road?

"Hopefully by the autumn, when the world achieves some kind of normalcy, I'll go out and play these songs for people, because that's my job." [DM]

John used a Fylde Falstaff (as above) on the album, along with others from his acoustic collection, but he says he's "leaning heavily into the electric guitar" on *The Fray* with a 'Coodercaster'-style Strat, Heritage H-530 and a humbucker-loaded '56 Tele replica



In The Loop

Recording sample packs is not only physically demanding, it requires mental stamina, too, as **Adam Goldsmith** explains

One of my latest sessions has been recording an album at Master Chord Studio in North London. For those of you who might have use for a mid-sized studio I can't recommend them highly enough. I first worked there a few years ago on an album for Uriah Heep keyboard player Phil Lanzon. The owner of the studio, Michele Catri, goes out of his way to make you feel welcome and looked after, and all the equipment is state of the art and very well maintained.

This project wasn't really an album in the traditional sense. It was a sample pack, which is a collection of hundreds of audio loops recorded at various tempos, keys and levels of dynamics. These are then sold as download packs on websites, from which producers

addition to studio work. Selling sample packs can be one way to add to this, although the recording process can be exceptionally laborious and, quite frankly, dull. It can involve playing a given phrase at several different dynamics and several different tempos, repeating this process for several hours during the day.

As you can imagine it can also be pretty mentally challenging as all the phrases need to be precise and well played, otherwise they're useless to the end customer. Keeping that level of concentration up for eight hours can be hard, and the pressure is on you as an individual – there aren't any other members of the band to provide you with any covering fire, so to speak. You also have to be super-meticulous with your tuning, in terms of string-bending and vibrato as well as tuning your guitar accurately, as inaccuracies will render the final product potentially useless. For this reason I kept an eye on the in-built strobe-style tuner in the Kemper Profiler Stage, which does an excellent job. I brought a fairly standard selection of guitars – including a Strat, a Tele, a 335 and a rockier-style PRS – but I found the most important thing I had to do for this job was physical preparation in order to meet the demands of the long hours.

I have a set technical practice routine of roughly 90 minutes, which I'll try to do every day, in addition to having some fun playing over records and keeping my improvising chops as fresh as possible without actually doing any live gigs. It's important to keep your technique in shape in case physically demanding jobs such as this come up. Indeed, to this end, I've also been having lessons with rock virtuoso Martin Goulding to work on the finer aspects of these kind of things: wrist and pick angle, breathing, tension – all sorts of aspects that can make or break a day like this. **G**

“These days, most of us need to augment our incomes with other musical sources in order to make a good living from playing guitar...”

can choose (in this project's case) appropriate guitar fills to go in whatever track they're writing or producing. This kind of work falls very much under the 'diversification of income streams' heading for me. By that I mean the session scene, as I'm sure everyone knows, isn't what it was in the 70s and 80s, or indeed the 90s and early Noughties when I started working. You could definitely make a good living from playing on artists albums, TV and film soundtracks and so on.

These days, most of us need to augment our incomes with other musical sources in order to make a good living from playing guitar. Personally, I'm involved in writing library music (mostly background music for TV), live work, West End shows and teaching, in

Right: focus is the key when it comes to a long day recording samples
Far right: Adam's line-up for the day includes a Strat, a 335, a Tele and a PRS





Up To Speed

Neville Marten stresses the importance of playing slow before you play fast, and offers a way to hone your skills once lockdown is lifted

For many years I've taught at the International Guitar Foundation's Summer School, passing on whatever knowledge I've gained over the years. As long as the technical demands aren't too high, that is...

You see, playing fast is not something I'm particularly brilliant at – although I can conjure up a fair pace when pushed, when panic sets in, or when lack of inspiration finds me floundering. But that's the cheap option and rarely shows a guitarist in their best light. Of course, there's the occasional moment when a following wind provides enough assistance to pull a speedy passage together, and that's a welcome and pleasing moment. So, yes, a cleverly constructed flurry of 16th or 32nd notes can be beautiful and exciting, but executed poorly it's cringeworthy for player and listener alike.

I've spoken about this to everyone from Guthrie Govan to Allan Holdsworth, Gary Moore and beyond, and each one had the same answer. In fact, Gary once stressed that it's pointless to try to play fast, before you've learned to play well, slowly. This is so true, and you'll hear tutor after tutor saying, "Learn the piece slowly and only build up to speed when you can play it in time, with confidence and no fluffs."

Back To School

A fairly common request was showing a student how to play this mode or that, thinking that gaining even more notes will somehow give their playing an instant boost of musicality. But, more often than not, the student couldn't yet play the minor pentatonic with any conviction, bend a string in tune or hold a note with a satisfying vibrato. The mistaken belief was that knowing more notes would improve them as players.

So I'd point them to something like Peter Green's soloing over the intro and outro of *Need Your Love So Bad*. It's slow, it's simple, it's beautifully played, full of subtlety and with expression in every note. Everyone that knows it can whistle it, but it needs a good player to pull it off with anything like Peter's panache. So, if you can't manage that, what's the point in heading straight for Steve Lukather's outro in *Rosanna*, or Gary's brilliant one-take wonder on *Still Got The Blues*?

I'm reminded of this because the IGF Summer School is back 'live' this year. 2020's was obviously online only, but I chose not to do it as I didn't feel up to the more 'tutorly' presentation. However, as 17 to 21 August will see the beautiful Bath Spa University opening up its spectacular grounds, teaching spaces and facilities again, a group of great teachers and players will be on hand with a finely honed set of classes designed to meet almost all stylistic and playing-level requirements.

My class will be Blues Songs, and we'll be putting together around half a dozen tracks covering the whole gamut of blues-based tunes from the early days up to

now. Once my class has a big enough cohort, I'll send out a list of suggestions from which to pick. I'll then turn that into a shortlist of the numbers we'll be learning, send out backing tracks and tab beforehand, so you have a chance to get to know them. Then, in class, we'll refine them, decide who's doing what – playing rhythm, riffs and solos, or even singing lead and vocal harmonies. This all builds up to the student concert on the final night where we perform a selection from our learned repertoire in front of the Summer School.

"A cleverly constructed flurry of 16th or 32nd notes can be beautiful, but executed poorly it's cringeworthy for player and listener alike"

We'll also talk about specific techniques and I'll do my best to help with technical or theory problems – although don't expect a demonstration of Holdsworthian legato or an in-depth examination of Super-Locrian mode! If you're up for getting back out into the world again, need to brush up your skills or want to show us what you've learned during lockdown, we'll be most happy to welcome you. To bag yourself an early bird ticket, keep an eye on www.igf.org.uk.

Hope to see you there, and, in the meantime, why not pull out something you 'think' you know, take it back to the beginning and learn it again slowly, properly. I can guarantee it will be better! See you next time. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Fly like a 'bird

What? Epiphone 'Inspired By Gibson' Hummingbird

Where seen? Peach Guitars **Price?** £749

If you desire an acoustic that's about as handsome as an acoustic can be but don't fancy selling your grandma to get it, then Epiphone's new take on the Hummingbird might just fit the bill. Built from all the right timbers – solid mahogany back, sides and neck with solid Sitka spruce top in Aged Cherry Sunburst and the fabulous 'hummingbird and flowers' pickguard – from a distance you'd be pushed to know it wasn't the real thing. Bridge and fingerboard are Indian laurel, a worthy rosewood substitute, while the guitar comes fitted with the effective Fishman Sonicore pickup. Tuners are classic Kluson-alikes and there's a great demo of the complete 'Inspired By Gibson' Epiphone range on Peach's website. At the time of going to press, all dealers are offering the range at the same price, so visit your favourite store's website for details.



PHOTO BY ADAM BIGGIN PEACH GUITARS



Small Talk

Alex Bishop reflects on the experience of building his first tenor guitars, and considers whether four strings might even be better than six...

I don't think that I'm mistaken when I say that the guitar-slinging popstars I see on television these days seem to prefer a scaled down variety of six-string. Add to that the rise in prominence of the ukulele in the last few years, and it appears that smaller-than-usual guitar shaped instruments are very much in vogue at the moment. And yet I feel that there is one instrument that has been overlooked entirely, even though it was once the mainstay of the popular music scene over 100 years ago: the tenor guitar.

Despite its prominence in the dance halls of the 1920s, many players were attempting to make the move from banjo to guitar, which was fast rising in popularity.

"There is the tight, focused tone that you might expect from a parlour guitar coupled with the narrow range of only four strings"

The four-string tenor guitar was offered as an easy way for banjoists to make the transition without requiring any effort to relearn the fingerboard. However, thanks to the continued innovations of musical instrument companies like Gibson and Martin, combined with the musicality of players such as Eddie Lang, Robert Johnson and Django Reinhardt (to name a few), six-strings soon reigned supreme and the popularity of tenor guitars and banjos began to wane.

Once you've overcome the challenge of navigating a new fretboard map, a tenor guitar has a lot to offer in both size and tone

Despite this flash in the pan moment, many players celebrate the tenor guitar as an instrument deserving of a place in the rack of any guitarist's music studio or practice room today. So, what makes it special? Well, this week I finally finished a project to build three tenor guitars and was keen to find out what the fuss was about.

Unlike our familiar EADGBE tuning, where the strings are mostly tuned in 4ths, the tenor guitar is typically tuned in 5ths. A frequent tuning is CGDA, although GDAE (pitched a 4th lower and requiring different strings) is also common. I'll get the downside – and there's only one – out the way first: for the regular guitarist, navigating the fingerboard is initially a bit of a challenge, and given that we can't rely on the usual guitar shapes and patterns it can take a bit of getting used to. However, if you've ever dabbled in alternative guitar tunings such as DADGAD or even just drop D, you will have already experienced the joy of exploring a new fingerboard layout and the often pleasing, unexpected sounds that can emerge.

Tenor guitars themselves are also physically different to handle. Scale lengths range from around 21 to 23 inches – so the neck is comfortably shorter than a typical guitar and yet not totally unfamiliar. String selection normally means that the tension in the strings roughly matches what you would expect on a typical acoustic guitar. Tenor guitar body sizes are also reduced meaning they feel like slimmed-down parlour guitars, and are substantially lighter as a result. The four single strings are also easier to navigate with the picking hand when compared with, say, the four double courses of a mandolin.

For a guitar maker like me, the big moment really comes when you get the strings on for the first time. Despite coming to the end of a year-long woodworking project, I've learned to be quite relaxed about what I can expect from those first few notes. It often takes a few weeks (or even months) of playing the instrument before the sound starts to really 'open up'. Some players may be sceptical about this idea, of course, and yet from my experience there is a depth of character and a personality to every instrument I've made that is not apparent at the beginning.

These tenor guitars, however, come as no disappointment. As soon as I find some open chords, I'm struck by the punch and volume delivered. There is the tight, focused tone that you might expect from a parlour guitar coupled with the narrow range of only four strings. There is no reason to bemoan a lack of bottom-end clarity at the expense of sweet, singing trebles here, because the four-string tenor knows its limits. And, just like the two-fingered guitar virtuoso Django Reinhardt proved, the sooner you reach the boundaries, the faster you can break them. **G**



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TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell



This course is for guitarists that desire strong abilities to suit being in a band. This will include picking approaches and band relevant chord voicings to modes for soloing and exciting repertoire analysis with a bias towards funk and RnB legends like Chic, James Brown and Michael Jackson.

JUMP BLUES with Chris Corcoran



Referencing the big sound of '40s & '50s R&B and Jump Blues guitar, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention. Licks, riffs and phrases will be covered as well as the styles of guitarists like T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Johnson, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel.

BLUES SONGS with Neville Marten



The aim for this course is to cover a range of blues tunes from classic to more modern. The onus is on great blues songs that everyone will know and enjoy playing. Guitarists of every level will be able to join in, whether you can improvise full solos or just play chords and a few licks.

ACOUSTIC SONGS with Chris Quinn



This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

CLASSIC ROCK & INDIE ROCK with Jon Bishop



This course will cover many of the main components that guitarists use, ranging from scales and chord riffing through to string bending and use of harmonics. Lots of classic rock and indie riffs will be looked at with iconic songs.

MODERN ROCK with Tolis Zavalieris



The focus of this course will be on relevant techniques, from picking to legato, and to improve and supercharge your rock guitar playing. Guitarists covered will range from Randy Rhoads to Paul Gilbert, Yngwie Malmsteen to Steve Vai.

JAZZ with Gianluca Corona



This course will cover the basics (extended chords, simple diatonic licks, swing feel, blues) through to more advanced concepts and devices (chord substitution, modal phrasing, outside playing).

GYPSY JAZZ with John Wheatcroft



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Tone Transplant

Using a preamp pedal in the effects loop Return of your amp can transform its sound. **Jamie Dickson** explores further with Dan Steinhardt

Last issue we looked at how to get the most from your amp's effects loop when using it as a home for your delay and reverb effects. Plus we also examined the 4-cable method that lets you use delay and reverb in the loop while keeping the pedals themselves at your feet, where they are easy to adjust. Our guide was effects expert Dan Steinhardt of The GigRig, who is also one half of the hugely popular *That Pedal Show* on YouTube, alongside former *Guitarist* editor Mick Taylor. Dan rejoins us this month to talk about what other uses your amp's effects loop can be put to – because it's not

“You’ll find overdrive pedals calling themselves preamps. Perhaps it’s not misinformation, but often the difference is not understood correctly”

just time-based effects that belong there. Quite a few readers will have seen preamp pedals on the market, often sold alongside overdrives, and some may have wondered what the difference is.

“When it comes to preamps versus a normal overdrive, there’s a lot of misinformation out there,” Dan explains. “For example, you’ll often find overdrive pedals calling themselves preamps. Perhaps it’s not misinformation as such, but sometimes the difference

One important thing to consider when running a pedal into your amp's effects loop is headroom, stresses The GigRig's Dan Steinhardt

is just not understood correctly. A preamp, as far as I'm concerned, has got to be able to increase the gain of the signal to line level, enough to be able to be amplified [directly] by the power amp.”

Why would you want that? Well, your amp has a built-in preamp, which has its own inherent tonal character and which generates a given amount of gain. Unsurprisingly, the way an amp's onboard preamp is designed contributes a huge amount to how it sounds and feels to play. But what if you could just take that preamp out and replace it with a different one that sounded more like a Marshall and less like a Fender, for example? Then you'd be able to change the tonal heart of your rig without having to own lots of different combos and heads. Sound tempting? Well, that's just what preamp pedals can do – except you don't plug them into the front of your amp like a normal overdrive (that would be like plugging a preamp into another preamp). Instead, you have to approach things a little differently.

“There are lots of valve preamps out there,” says Dan. “For example, the Kingsley Maiden is basically a valve version of a Dumble preamp, but it's in a pedal. So if you're using a Hot Rod Deluxe, for instance, you can bypass the Hot Rod Deluxe's internal preamp by plugging the Maiden directly into the effects loop Return. And then all of a sudden you have a Hot Rod Deluxe that sounds like a Dumble.”

Go Your Own Way

Obviously, your amp's power valves, speakers and cab lend their own qualities to the overall sound, too, meaning a 100 per cent faithful replication of a different type of amp isn't possible just by changing the preamp – but it certainly goes a long way towards it. Yet inserting a substitute preamp is not the only unconventional use you can put the effects loop to.

“You can also stick your volume pedal in the loop if you're using an active volume pedal and it has enough headroom,” says Dan.

This brings us to an important point that sometimes gets overlooked. Delays and reverbs usually sound good in an effects loop because they are designed to work well in that slot. But not all stompboxes fare so well.

“A standard overdrive pedal is basically an instrument-level device that needs to hit the front of the amplifier to create overdrive,” Dan tells us. “By contrast, signal level from a preamp is much higher because it needs to be able to drive the power amp stage. In fact, any effect that goes in the loop has to have good headroom – and needs to be able to operate within the voltage range of AC signal [that the power amp needs to receive].

“This is where people run into trouble when trying to use things like analogue choruses in the effects loop, because they typically don't have enough headroom to





work in the loop. That's because when the preamp hits them [with relatively high signal], they don't have the headroom to deal with it – so they start squaring off the edges [of the waveform] and they distort. So whatever you're going to stick in that loop, whatever you're going to stick after the preamp, it's got to have enough headroom to work there."

As mentioned last issue, it's also essential to keep any cabling that runs between pedals and the effects loop relatively short to avoid treble-sapping capacitance – unless you have an amp with an advanced buffered effects loop, such as those fitted to Friedman amps.

"If you put a passive split between your preamp and your power amp, then your output impedance is generally quite high," Dan explains, "which means that it's going to be susceptible to cable capacitance from long cable runs."

"Whatever you're going to stick in that loop, whatever you're going to stick after the preamp, it's got to have enough headroom to work there"

The advent of studio-grade compressors in pedal format also holds out another intriguing possibility, Dan continues: "There's a new pedal called the Zenith from Hamstead [more on this, right and on page 96], which is an EQ and compressor. Now, if you stick that in the effects loop of an amplifier, you can simulate sag and valve compression at low [output] level. The Zenith has so much headroom that it can take the signal from the preamp – but then you can change the EQ and compression level with the Zenith so that you can get the feel of a cranked amp without the volume being high or using an attenuator.

"There's something that happens with a valve amp when you turn it up: you're hitting the power valves harder and they start to [clip] and add a harmonic, which is really amazing. But using a really good high-headroom compressor like the Zenith in the loop means you can simulate that kind of valve sag at lower volume levels. It's so much fun." 

www.thegigrig.com

Valve preamps such as the Kingsley Maiden (right) allow you to bypass your amp's own preamp for new, different sounds via the amp's effects loop

THREE TO GET READY

Preamps and compressors to try in your effects loop



Kingsley Amplifiers Maiden V2 \$425

As mentioned in the main article, the Kingsley Maiden is a superb Dumble-esque preamp powered by a single Tungsol 12AX7 valve. The V2 version features "a second footswitch for accessing either the mid boost, the EQ lift boost function, or both". We've heard it in action on Mick Taylor's 'board and it sounds the business.



Victory V4 The Sheriff preamp £369

Want to get a flavour of early 'Plexi' tone from your Fender combo? Victory's V4 The Sheriff does the job superbly. Powered by an EC900 and three CV4014 valves in the signal path, this dual-channel preamp pedal runs from bluesy crunch to Angus-style punch all the way through to chunky high-gain tones. It also features a three-band EQ and Bright switch for tone tailoring. It's built beautifully, too.



Hamstead Soundworks Zenith £279

A studio-quality compressor that's also an EQ and clean boost, the Zenith (reviewed in full on page 96) is probably best described by its official moniker of 'Amplitude Controller' since it's so versatile at tone topiary. An OptoKick footswitch by The GigRig means it engages silently and smoothly, while its Blend control lets you dial in how much unaffected clean tone is retained, making really natural compression tones easy to dial in.



Taking The 5th

This issue **Richard Barrett** explores how omitting the 5th in chords can affect their sound and open doors to a much wider vocabulary

Right: Joe Pass, seen here playing his signature Ibanez JP20 archtop, would teach students the CAGED system to help them figure out chord theory on the fretboard

Anyone who has studied chord theory will confirm that the basis of a major or minor chord is the triad of root, 3rd (or ♭3rd) and 5th. Once we start altering or extending chords, though, the picture becomes slightly less clear. A sharp or flat 5th deviates from the norm, but it still refers to the 'root, 3rd, 5th' formula as a basis.

Sometimes, one of the notes from the basic triad is omitted altogether. Power or '5' chords omit the 3rd, blurring the lines between major and minor. In extended chords (7th, 9th, 11th and 13th) the 5th is usually omitted – partly to keep these chords from sounding too harmonically 'dense'. The 5th is a very strong-sounding interval, lending itself more to rock than jazzy extended chords. Another reason to omit the 5th is because we only have a finite number of strings and fingers to work with and something has to give!

Ultimately, this can be a judgement call, but certain conventions have developed over time, so check out these examples to get you started. **G**

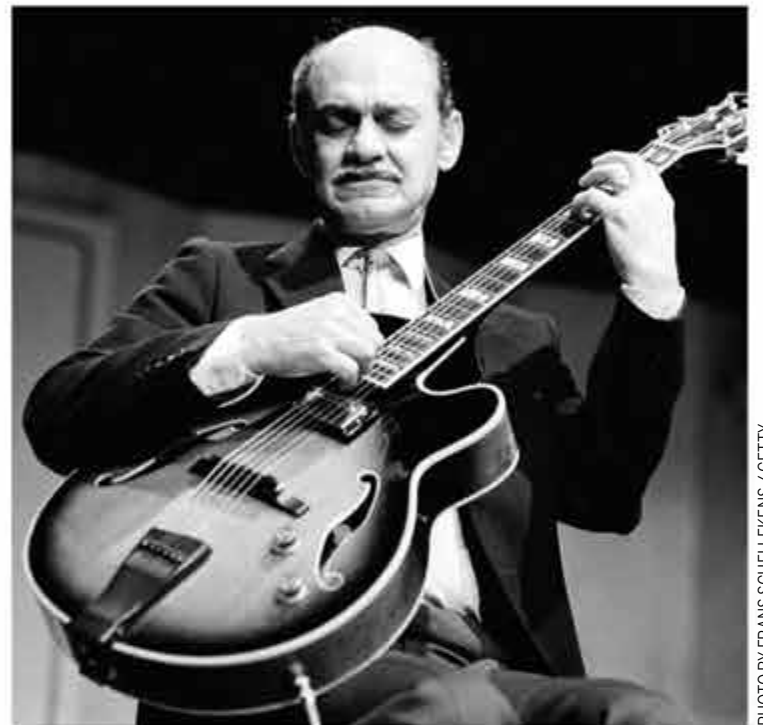
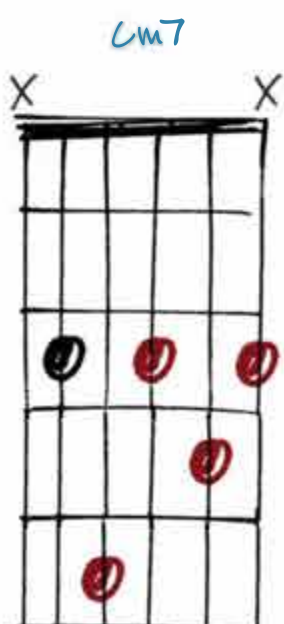


PHOTO BY FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

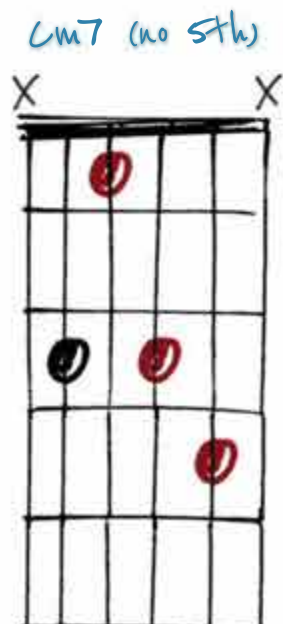
Example 1

This Cmin7 is here for comparison with Example 2: note the 5th (G) on the fourth string. This isn't a problem at all. In fact, this shape is probably what the majority of us reach for when asked to play a minor 7th chord. However, there is another voicing available in Example 2...



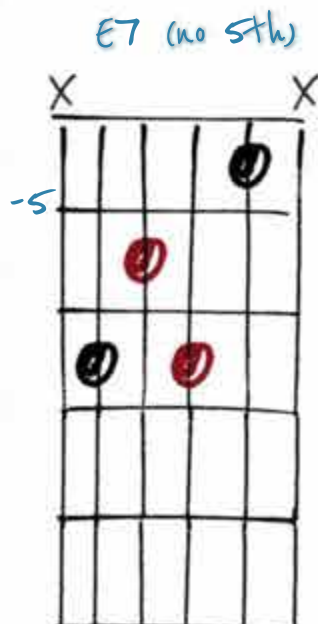
Example 2

This version of Cmin7 is somehow more 'dark and mysterious' sounding, less about the strong relationship between the root and 5th and more about the minor 3rd and (♭)7th. Sometimes chords like this are referred to as 'shell' voicings, as they outline the harmony minimally/without containing every note.



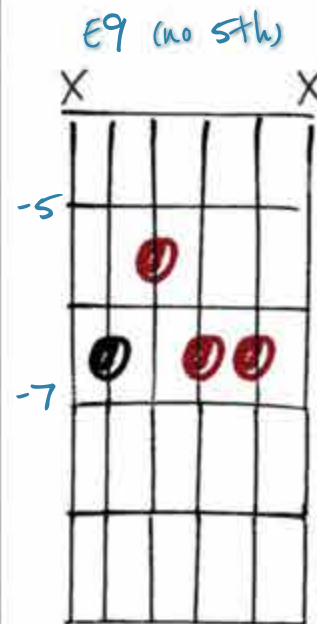
Example 3

This E7 (no 5th) gets its name from the D (♭7), which in this case features on the 7th fret of the G string. There is no 5th (B) to be seen, which puts the focus on the major 3rd, ♭7th and roots on the top and bottom. Note this is essentially a C7 shape moved to a different position and can work at any fret.



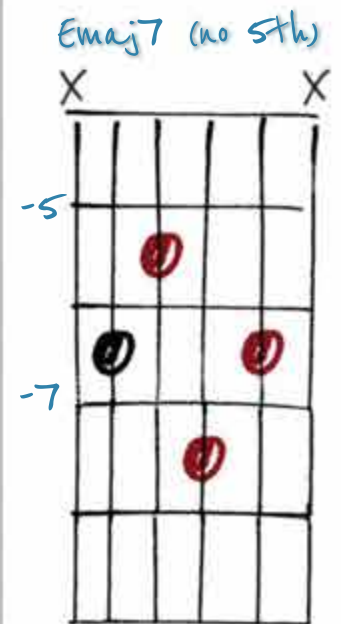
Example 4

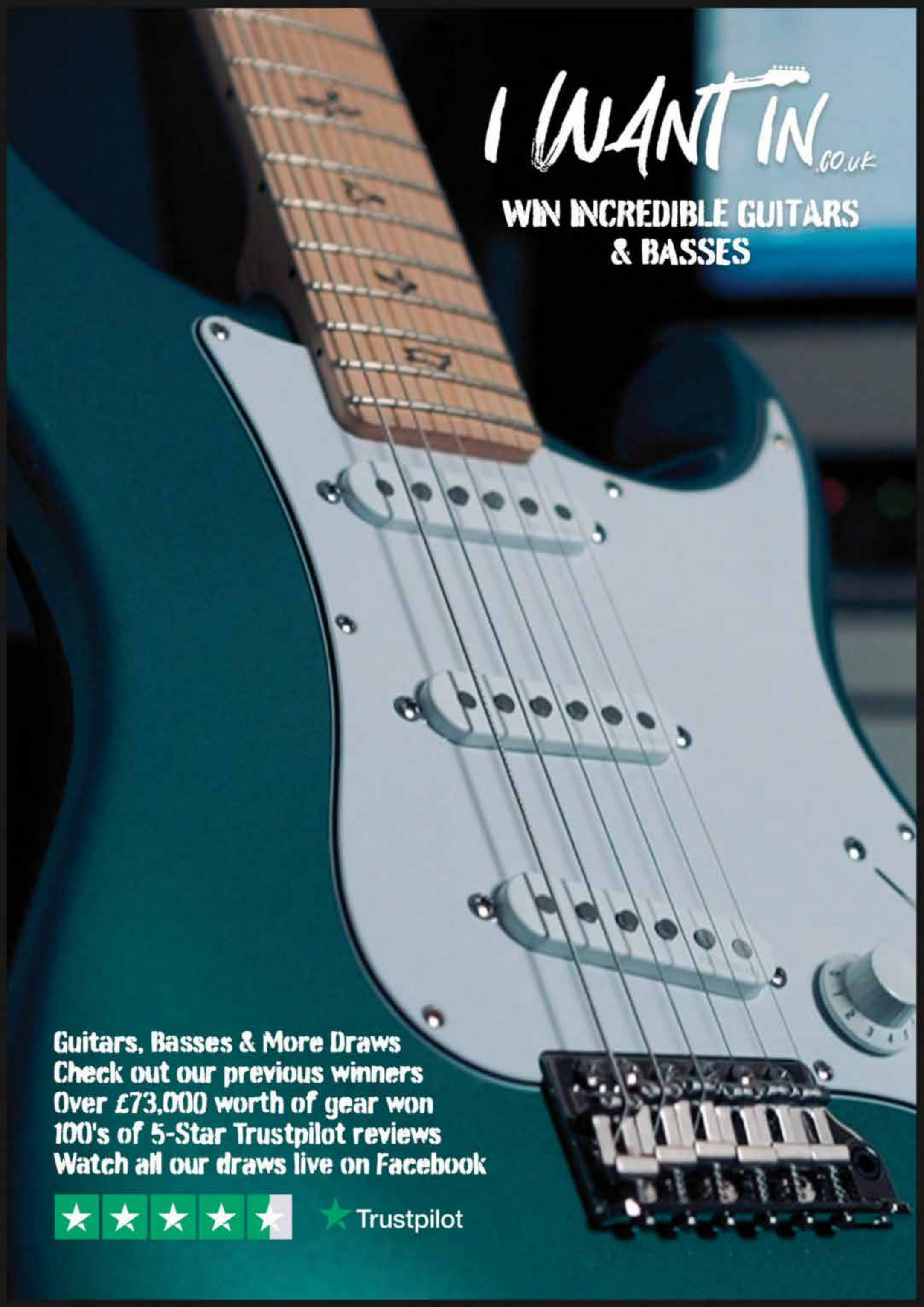
Using the same basic shape as Example 3 but shifting the highest note up a tone to the 7th fret (F#) changes the chord to an E9 – or to be more precise E dominant 9th (no 5th), as the 7th (D) is actually a ♭7th rather than the D# you will find in the E major scale.



Example 5

Shifting the ♭7th up a semitone to use the D# from the E major scale makes it a major 7th, so this chord becomes an Emaj9 (no 5th), the 'major' referring to the 7th and the 9th being the highest extension – for which we always presume the presence of a 7th, or this would be an add9 chord!





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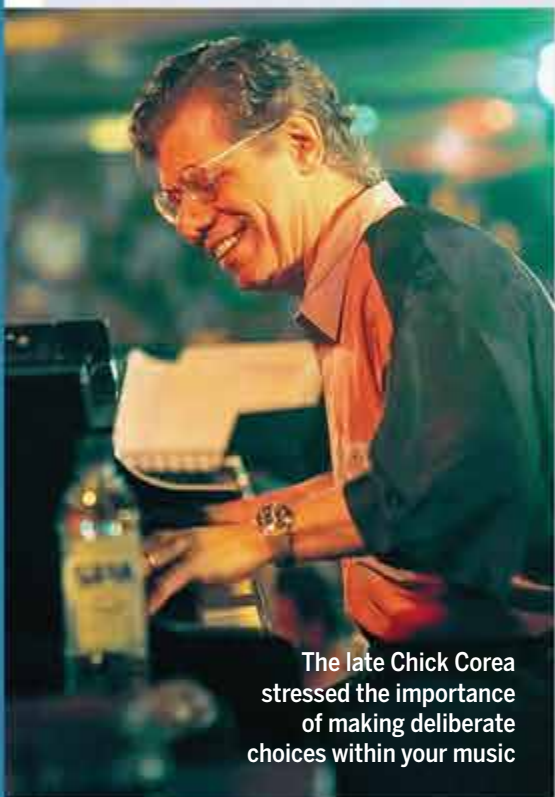
Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

ALL THAT JAZZ...



The late Chick Corea stressed the importance of making deliberate choices within your music

Re Jamie's editorial (issue 469). After many years of playing and listening to jazz I agree that a decent amount of theory can be helpful, but don't allow yourself to get hung up on it. Major and minor scales are good to know, but don't get trapped into playing them in solos, even more so with modes, which some players seem to think are an end in themselves. They're just tools, not rules written in stone to be followed regardless of their suitability to the music at hand.

Don't just listen to guitar players, either – many of my favourite musicians are saxophonists, pianists or trumpeters. Most important of all: listen. It takes a long time for the sound of jazz to become embedded, but it's worth

it. Find players who are better than you to jam with. You'll never get rich, but most musos will tell you that the ability to play jazz is its own reward.

Ian Andrew, via email

Many thanks for those valuable perspectives, Ian. When jazz giant Chick Corea died recently a hand-typed list of musical tips, which was attributed to him, did the rounds of the internet. Entitled *Cheap But Good Advice On Playing Music In A Band*, the document contained some simple but powerful ideas, including this excellent one: "Don't make any of your music mechanically or just through patterns or habit. Create each sound, phrase or piece with choice – deliberately."

This is wonderful, timeless advice and very much in step with what you are saying here. When we are absolute beginners we start out with music in our mind's ear that we wish we could express out loud on guitar. Though we may learn all the theory in the world to help us do so, it will not bring that music into the world by itself. As you say, musical 'rules' are therefore tools to help you navigate, not the destination itself.



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

MASTER OF DISASTER

I was so pleased to read Neville's column in issue 470 as it made me feel so human knowing that at least one other person has experienced what I have. It was New Year's Eve 2018/'19 and a gig in our local pub. There were two sets. I started with our ukulele band, The Kettleleles (we come from Kettleburgh and we play ukuleles), using a basic rig of a PA for vocals and separate amps for instruments. Then a short break before my solo effort as 'Squibnocket' where I use two amps for the guitar through a pedalboard, the same PA for vocals and homemade backing tracks made on Boss drum machines, recorded on a MiniDisc player.

At the start of the break I set up my pedalboards, plugged everything in and... nothing. No signal from the guitar to the amps. All the lights were on, the amps were working when I plugged the guitar straight into them. To cut a long story short, in a cold sweat and panic I rewired my 'boards to get at least the basics working. I had no time for a half-time beer, but managed to do my set, although it was not as good as it could have been as the sound from the guitar was not what I had rehearsed. I am not sure if anyone really noticed; my Kettleleles bandmates said it sounded okay to them...

So, what was the problem? When I set up my pedalboards I had the foresight to laminate a picture of them with my preferred settings marked. This is kept in the pedals' gigbags. On the night I had not bothered to check the settings from the picture as, at first glance, they looked okay. On the 'boards are some TC Electronic pedals that operate in stereo with twin signal paths and lo, one of the TC pedals at the start of the chain had a volume control set to zero so no signal. I now check my pedal settings with my laminated photograph every time!

Bill Phone aka Trevor Jessop aka Squibnocket, via email

A cautionary tale there, thanks for sharing. I'm sure many, many readers can relate. It's amazing how the heat of the moment blinds us to the obvious and, in fact, psychologists have a term for this effect: perceptual narrowing. As adrenaline kicks in, the 'fight or flight' instinct shuts down our analytical faculties, meaning we overlook simple remedies to serious problems. Ignoring your own wisely prepared checksheet, which should have provided a safety net here, compounded the situation – though you got round like a trouper by just carrying on with the show.

So, while it doesn't sound like your gig was a failure in the end, your story proves there's a lot of worth in the maxim 'Failure to prepare is preparing to fail' – the lesson sounds like it was well and truly learned in your case, though!



Nev's column about gear cock-ups inspired a load of letters. We've published two of the best below

PET SOUNDS

In January 2002 I was lucky enough to get the job as second guitarist in the Pet Shop Boys live touring band. It was my first experience at this level, so naturally I was a bit apprehensive. We rehearsed solidly throughout the whole of January in a Kings Cross rehearsal studio and it was the first time I'd used a line selector A/B box, meaning I didn't have to worry about guitar changeovers. I had three electrics and one acoustic that I would use for different songs in the set. A guitar was handed to me for whatever song it was needed for and all I had to do was stomp on the A/B box to make sure it was live and ready to play. Simple. Or so I thought.

After a month of intensive rehearsals we were as ready as we'd ever be. It was decided to do a private, invite-only performance at the rehearsal studio. The first song was *Disco Potential* and I was quite proud of the funky little riff I'd come up with. The song started, a fantastic looping beat filled the room and I became aware of a hum that grew in volume gradually over the intro. I ignored it, "Nothing to do with me," I thought. My time had come so I started to play and I couldn't hear a thing. In a flash of tech revelation I realised that my Epiphone Casino on the stand was actually the source of said hum. It was in line. It was live. It was feeding back. I stomped on the A/B box the hardest I've ever stomped, but my moment had passed and for me it was downhill for the rest of the gig.

I imagined Neil and Chris glaring at me and thinking, "Where did we get this loser from?" The Pet Shop Boys' manager came my way and I thought this would be the moment I'd get my train ticket back to Northampton. She put her arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks, screeching, "That was absolutely *fantastic*!" As it turned out, it went down a treat and we went on to do a massive world tour for the best part of that year.

Mark Refoy, via email

A heart-stopping moment of gear failure, Mark. Kudos for pulling it off – that's what it means to be a pro. Also a salutary reminder that the little bumps in the road that a guitarist is hyper-attuned to will often pass unnoticed by the audience.

Another high-level pro of our acquaintance told us a story about fluffing some notes in a famous solo while being recorded by the BBC. Convinced it was the worst trainwreck ever, he contacted the Beeb to see if they could edit it out. However, when he saw the raw footage, he could barely detect what had seemed a howling clanger. Needless to say, the footage was left as it was and it simply became a good story.

REQUESTS...

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

The Archers? On *The Repair Shop*, the BBC recently showed a luthier completely renovate a broken, battered Levin archtop, which reignited my desire to own one of these much forgotten versions of the acoustic guitar. After much trailing through Reverb and eBay I was lucky enough to find just the job from a local store in Ashburton: a 70-year-old Besson Ariston. Clearly well used, the intonation and tuning were still solid as a rock, and the guitar has great tone and projection.

I don't recall a feature on these fabulous instruments. It would be good to see both new examples and a comparison with older models one may find secondhand, along with the possible pitfalls associated with buying old archtop acoustics. It may also serve to explode the myths that they lack volume and great tone.

Paul Docker, via email

Hi Paul, we've featured a few nice old archtops in our Classic Gear and Historic Hardware features in the past, but perhaps there's room for a dedicated feature in a coming issue. After all, some of the best-value vintage guitars you can buy are pre-war archtops – which can get pigeonholed as jazz guitars of limited appeal to the average player. This is doing these fine old instruments a disservice in many cases, so we'll look into it.

TEARS FOR SOUVENIRS

I thought you may be interested in the guitar body that I have made from a 90-year-old ash tree that the local council cut down recently. Due to its shape it reminded me of a Vox Teardrop, so I thought I would give it a go. It was all cut by using a handsaw, a cordless drill and a wood chisel. The pickup is unbranded, the pot is new but unconnected, the jack socket is new, the bridge is homemade using a piece of dowel and a bit of angled metal, the strings are new D'Addario 10s, and the neck is from a Stag guitar. The body was sprayed white then black stripes added. The body is 17¼ inches long by 10½ inches wide by 1¼ thick. This is my first attempt at making my own guitar and, yes, it does play okay!

Tony Lloyd, via email

Bravo, Tony, we admire your hands-on attitude and think the guitar looks rather elegant – yes, we can see the Vox inspiration, but there's just a touch of Van Halen about it, too! A better use for that ash than for it to end up as mulch or firewood. Will you call it the 'Councilcaster' after the local authority who cut the tree down, we wonder?



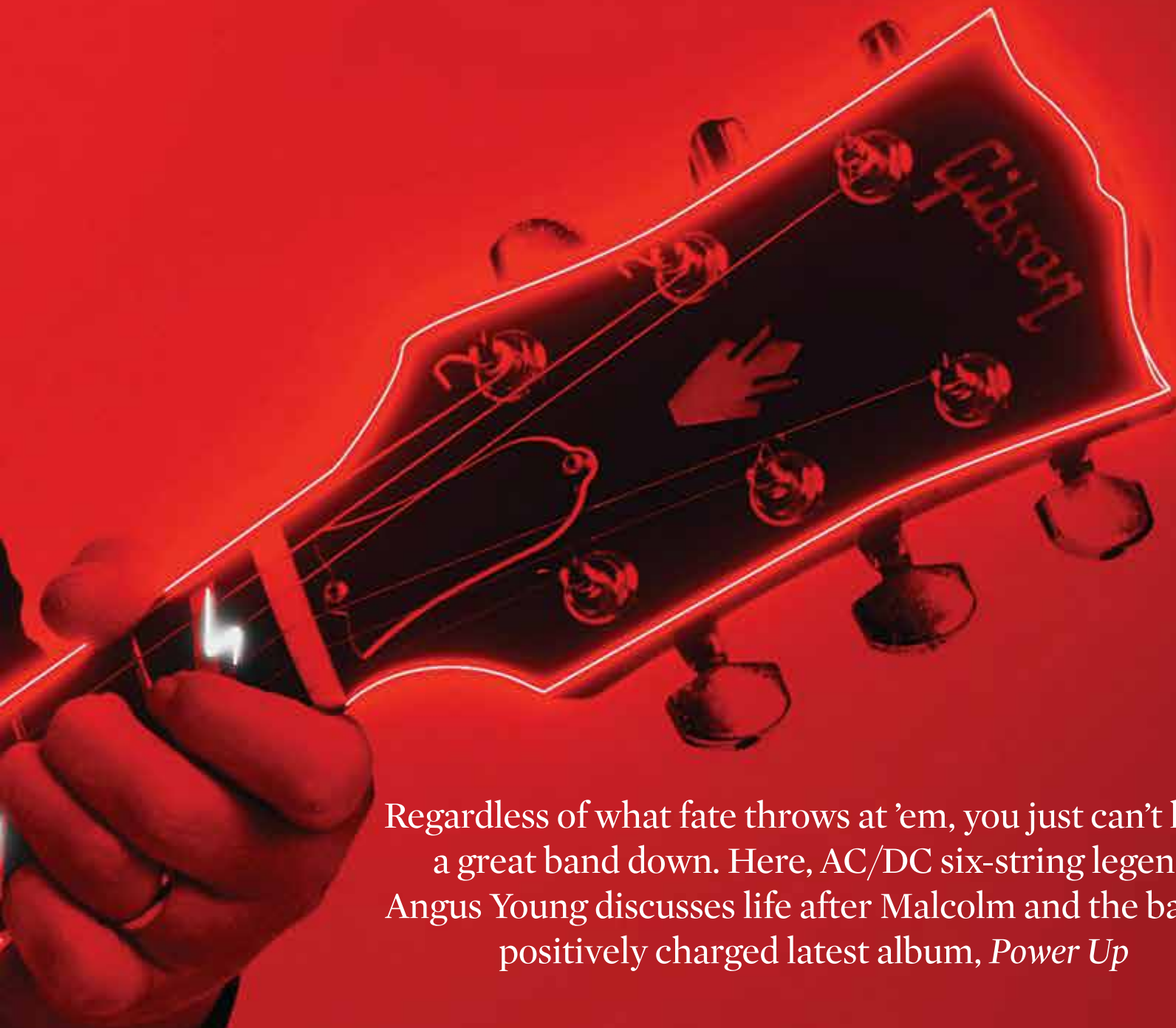
Tony Lloyd's Teardrop-evoking home build is made from a reclaimed local 90-year-old ash tree

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



POWER PLAY

Words Richard Bienstock Photography Josh Cheuse



Regardless of what fate throws at 'em, you just can't keep a great band down. Here, AC/DC six-string legend Angus Young discusses life after Malcolm and the band's positively charged latest album, *Power Up*

Like all of us, Angus Young has been spending a lot of time at home lately. "It's a bit different," the 66-year-old guitarist admits about life in the time of quarantining and social distancing. Although in some ways, he adds, not so much. "I guess I'm used to being tucked away somewhere in a room and just putting together ideas and songs," he says with a laugh.

As it turns out, Young has indeed spent a fair amount of time these past few years "tucked away putting together ideas

and songs". Which is how we wound up, rather unexpectedly but certainly quite happily, with *Power Up*, AC/DC's 16th (or, if we're counting in Australian, 17th) full-length effort.

As for what makes it unexpected? For starters, the band recorded it under a complete media blackout; aside from a few rumours things had been radio silent in the AC/DC camp for several years. More significant, of course, is the fact that since the end of the *Rock Or Bust* world tour in 2016, there has been the looming question

of just who, or even *what*, AC/DC is any more, with only two members – Angus and his nephew Stevie Young – remaining from the line-up that had recorded the album. The following year, of course, the band would suffer the loss of their co-founder, stalwart rhythm guitar player Malcolm Young, who died at the age of 64.

So, what did Angus do? What Angus always does: he wrote. And while he didn't have his brother next to him physically during this time, he did still have his riffs. According to Angus, the majority of the material on *Power Up* was constructed from songs and ideas he and Malcolm had logged over the years. "They were things that we knew were good and so we put them aside and said, 'We should get them down on record at some point,'" Angus says. "And I thought, well, maybe now's the time to go through and pick out all those ideas."

When it came to getting them down on tape, Angus called up a few friends. In fact, amazingly, *Power Up* finds the *Rock Or Bust*-era lineup – Angus, Stevie, Phil Rudd, Cliff Williams and Brian Johnson – back together again. The result is an album that is unrefined AC/DC. "I treat everything as a song and I hear it as a song," Angus says. "I'm not on some sort of mission." He laughs. "That might not be the right word. But I just look at everything on the musical side and then I say, 'Does it attract me?'"

You mentioned that many of the songs on *Power Up* have their origins in riffs you and Malcolm came up with together. Do you have a stockpile you can just tap into whenever you're writing music?

"I have lots of ideas the two of us worked on pretty much through the years. Even when we were in studios and recording rooms there were always ideas that we would put down. It's just something where, the two of us together, we always seemed to be playing back and forth and coming up with stuff. From the beginning that was always a part of us."

•

"Power Up' just sounded very powerful. Simple. Direct. Or you could go the other way and say it's very Frankenstein, you know. Almost like creating a monster"

•

Angus Young in the spotlight, supported (as he usually is) by Gibson and Marshall



Do you also write on your own? Or do you prefer having someone to bounce your ideas off of?

"I've done it both ways. You get an idea and if you have a tape recorder you try to put it down. And if you haven't got a tape recorder you do your best to try to remember it. But then when Malcolm and myself would get together it would be a case of rolling through the ideas and seeing what we believed was material for AC/DC. And the material you're hearing is stuff that we did that was always for AC/DC. We would try to separate what we had. You know, we could have 100 things – I've got boxes full of stuff the two of us have done over the days – and out of that there are 20 good, strong AC/DC ideas. And we'd put them to the side."

For *Power Up* you guys worked with Brendan O'Brien, who also produced your last two records. What did he bring to your sound?

"I always say the role of your producer is pretty much that he's your audience. He's the man that's sitting there hearing the whole picture, the outside ear that's listening to everything. And he'll tell you, 'I think this is AC/DC,' or, 'That bit there, I don't know...' That's the role he plays in order to get the best performance from you. And Brendan's very talented. He knows his music. So if we get stuck somewhere, maybe if we say, 'Oh, do we do a break here?,' he'll sit down and we can have it out together."

On first listen, *Power Up* feels a bit darker in tone than *Rock Or Bust*.

"A lot of it's down to the songs and what you're working on. But when we're doing a song, I always think... I never go negative.

I always go positive with song ideas. And with AC/DC, we never get too serious about what we're doing. We don't try to put in, you know, a real 'statement' that means something. It's just, that's the mood when you wrote the song and then you bring it to the track."

If there's any song on the record that sticks out as a slight departure from the standard AC/DC approach it's *Through The Mists Of Time*. Did that one feel a bit different to you?

"Umm... no. [Laughs] As I said earlier, I treat it as a song and I hear it as a song. You know, my older brother George used to always tell me that chances are when you come up with an idea, you come up with an image. And he said, 'You might even come up with a singin' line, and it might not fit the track at that time but it sets the mood in what you do. So jot that down. If there's birds twittering in the background, just write, "birds twittering". Call it that, even just to get you started.' [Laughs] Obviously, you're not going to write a song called *Birds Twittering*, but you just want to get something that's going to fit in that melody line, if that makes sense."

Did that happen with any of these new tracks? Did a phrase turn into a song?

"Well, I came up with a lot of titles. Malcolm would call them 'hook titles'. And I've always done that. The two of us from the beginning always did that. I've written down a lot over the years and I would just go through some of the books and mark out things I liked and then sometimes bring singin' lines. Or sometimes I might see a title and go, 'That's a great title.' And then I say, 'Ah, I've got some great riffs here that'll work with that.'"

ANGUS LOOKS BACK *(In Black)*

Back In Black, the home of rock 'n' roll staples like *You Shook Me All Night Long*, *Hells Bells* and the title track, turned 40 in July 2020, and the landmark album received a fitting birthday celebration, with artists including Slash and members of Alice In Chains and Lamb Of God testifying to its greatness and influence, Gibson giving away a very Angus Young-like rig headlined by a Custom Shop 1961 Les Paul SG 'Red Devil', and the internet awash in plenty of think-pieces and retrospectives. As for how Angus felt about the anniversary? "It's a strange thing when you think of it," he says. "We didn't know what our future really would be when we made that album, because we had lost Bon Scott. We had a tragedy. And we found somebody, Brian, who we thought might work, but we didn't know really if it was going to work or if anyone would accept another person performing in Bon's role. But everyone said, 'Well, this is what we're gonna do,' and we were going to do it the best we could do it at the time." Clearly, AC/DC did it rather well – *Back In Black*, 25 times platinum and counting, now stands as one of the best-selling albums of all time. That said, Angus isn't one for living in the past. "I do try to think on what I'm doing now," he says. "Because if I have to go back in time, I've gotta rerun that video." He laughs. "And then it's like, 'What happened here?'"

"[The ideas] were things [Malcolm and I] knew were good, and so we put them aside and said, 'We should get them down on record at some point.' And I thought, maybe now's the time to go through and pick out all those ideas"

A good example of that might be something like *Hells Bells*, where the title is so evocative and the music really sounds like the name of the song.

“Yeah. And that’s what you aim for. Or something like *Highway To Hell* – you hear those opening chords and you go, ‘Uh oh... what’s coming?’ It’s something a little ominous. [Laughs]”

It’s not too often that an AC/DC record isn’t titled after one of its songs. Is there any special significance with *Power Up*?

“The significant side of it was I just wanted something that meant something to the band, and especially to my brother. I always thought his whole thing with AC/DC was it had to be powerful as a band. So I wanted something that called up what we do and that sums up what AC/DC is. And also, being guitarists, whenever I would plug in the guitar I always felt I was plugged into the ‘big electrical grid’. [Laughs] So *Power Up* just sounded very powerful. Simple. Direct. Or you could go the other way and say it’s very Frankenstein, you know? Almost like creating a monster.”

AC/DC has obviously experienced a lot of turmoil over the past few years. After you came off the *Rock Or Bust* tour, was there ever a moment where you felt, ‘This could be it’?

“At that point you’re at the great unknown. We didn’t know what would happen. You’re in a bit of a case of limbo. But at the time you just go, ‘I’m committed to getting through this and then after that I’ll concentrate on what comes.’”

And could you ever envision a life without AC/DC?

“I’ve been doing this most of my life, since I was in my teens. So it’s very hard to think of something other than that when it comes to making music. I’ve always said if I do anything music-wise, I can only do it the AC/DC way. Even if I wasn’t in AC/DC, I think it would probably still sound like AC/DC. [Laughs]”

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“I’ve always said if I do anything music-wise, I can only do it the AC/DC way. Even if I wasn’t in AC/DC, I think it would probably sound like AC/DC!”

•



AC/DC’s *Power Up* line-up (left to right): Cliff Williams on bass, Phil Rudd on drums, Angus Young on lead guitar, Brian Johnson on vocals, and Stevie Young, Angus and Malcolm’s nephew, on rhythm guitar

On the guitar side of things, how did you and Stevie work together on this record?

“Stevie is a bit like... even when he was starting off with us he picked up on what Malcolm did rhythm-wise. I mean, Stevie can do solos and stuff like that, too, but he went the route a bit like Malcolm. It’s the rhythm that he enjoyed doing best and that’s how he applied himself. And you know, Stevie had filled in for Malcolm in the past, in the 80s [when Malcolm left the *Blow Up Your Video* tour in 1988 to battle alcohol dependency]. So, for me, it was, I’m looking at somebody I know is dependable and who can also do that role. And, I mean, nothing could ever replace Malcolm, because Malcolm is the founder and he set the whole style. But Stevie certainly can do the role. He knows how it should be. So it’s just a case of the two of us sitting down and making sure we’re in sync.”

What gear were you using this time out?

“The guitar that I use and that I consistently use has always been the same, the Gibson SG. And everyone always asks me what year it is. I’ve heard somebody say, ‘Oh, it’s a 1970s Gibson,’ and then other people say, ‘No, it’s a bit earlier than that.’ I don’t really know what year it is, but all I know is it couldn’t have been past 1970, because that’s when I got it! [Laughs] So I used that a lot, and then I’ve got a few other guitars. One is a black SG, I think there’s a photo of it from *Back In Black*. And then I have another SG that’s maybe a ’68 or ’69 that I used on *Highway To Hell*.”

How about amps?

“Marshall. They’re just 100 watts. But they’re all older, going back to the 70s. And the cabinets have the older-style Celestions in them.”

How do you approach your solos?

“If you go to a song that’s dependent on following a lead line, you’d best get your lead lines sorted out. And it also depends on how prominent it is and how long you’re gonna go – ‘Okay, am I going to do a long piece here or a rhythmic piece?’ So it’s always track by track what you do. Like on *Back In Black*, the track *Shoot To Thrill*. If you listen to where you would say, ‘Here comes the guitar solo...,’ it’s actually more rhythmic playing. It’s got a little bit of a guitar bite to it, but it’s more of a rhythmic thing. And it’s only really at the later part of the song, after a little breakdown piece, that the guitar – what you would call lead lines and phrases – picks up more. So it’s really down to the song itself and how you hear it. Because one note can be a hell of a lot better than 50, you know?”

You clearly have this guitar thing figured out. Even so, does Angus Young ever sit at home and just practise?

“Oh, yeah! All the time. Sometimes I just sit and doodle. I’ll maybe play a bit of blues or I’ll try to get my fingers moving and see if I can come up with any different phrases. Experiment a little bit. I mean, I don’t sit there... even when I was younger, I didn’t sort of say, ‘It’s two o’clock – I’d better practise now!’ I played when I felt good about playing. I’d pick up the guitar and start playing and then, you know, you end up going, ‘Oh geez, I’ve been sitting here now for hours!’ [Laughs] You don’t know where the time goes.” 



AC/DC’s latest album, *Power Up*, is available now on Columbia Records

<https://pwrap.acdc.com>

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 - Bluebridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GF52202)
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
19266 - Fender CD-60 Dread V3 DS 0970110521 Nat
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
18950 - Yairi YER2 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
21788 - Martin D45 Reimagined
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
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
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
19482 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
18104 - Vintage V200MGG Giltap Mahog Acoustic
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13129 - Vintage VTR800PB Vator Travel Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars



19390 - Martin D10E Electro Acoustic Guitar
21587 - Martin DC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19489 - Martin DJ-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 LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Outaway Acoustic
17418 - Northwood Auditorium With Hard Case
19339 - Ovalion 1771 V-1 GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovalion 2771 STR-MB Main Street
19347 - Ovalion C207BAXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovalion C207BAXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
19346 - Ovalion CS24C-4 Celebrity Standard, Nat
19338 - Ovalion 1771 STG-ES
14913 - P.J. Eggle Linville Outaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - P.J. Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
20594 - RainSong BI-DR1000N2 Black Ice Series
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17657 - RainSong CHPA1000NS Concert Hybrid
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - RainSong CO-OM1000N2
20595 - RainSong CO-PA1000NS
9818 - RainSong CO-WS1000N2
19557 - RainSong Co-WS1005NSM
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
19555 - RainSong N-JM1000N2X
21563 - RainSong N-JM3000X 12-String Guitar
19556 - RainSong V-DR1100N2 Acoustic
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
7974 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
21562 - RainSong VWS1000N2X Vintage Series
19947 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith Q1T Dread BB
19949 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith Parlour A/E
19676 - Simon & Patrick Trek SG Dreadnought Electro
19951 - Simon & Patrick Trek Parlour Electro Nat
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
19571 - Simon & Patrick Woodland Parlour, Used
16427 - Takamine EF261S-AN, Gloss Antique Stain
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
19461 - Tanglewood TW4 E VC KOA Electro Acoustic
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 E WB LH, Left-handed
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
8293 - Tanglewood TW5NS, Nat, Secondhand
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
12305 - Tanglewood TWJF E
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Parl. Pro X47E
19660 - Taylor 220ce K DLX Guitar, Used
12317 - Taylor GC8 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat
18786 - Vintage VE300N Electro-Acoustic, Natural
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
18790 - Vintage VGB00N 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 Bouton
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
21880 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar
20441 - Fishman AGX094 Passive Undersaddle
20440 - Fishman AGX125 Passive Undersaddle
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
17847 - Hiscoc LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscoc LA-GCL-MB/S Medium Hard Case
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
19800 - Yairi CY62CE Electro Classical
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
19376 - Mendieta Artizan V Classical Guitar
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16035 - Mendieta Artizan X Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
8584 - Mendieta Conservatoire A Classical
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
6773 - Mendieta Flamenco LCE Electro Flamenco
8585 - Mendieta Professional Classica Guitar
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
12178 - Protection Plectrum Class Gtr Case Dlx
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
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15291 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar Blue
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
19471 - Stagg SCL50 4/4N Pack, Natural
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Ukuleles



19999 - Aloha Concert With Engraved Soundhole
19893 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Spruce Top
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Ukulele In Mahogany
19911 - Aloha Student Concert Mahogany Ukulele
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Uke (GF5048B)
20533 - Ashbury AU-10 Concert Resonator
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano
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 - Elms Hanauma Mahogany Soprano With Bag
19913 - Elms Hawaii Student Soprano In Mahogany
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert, Layered Headstock
19882 - Factory Prototype Concert, Sapele Top
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19997 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
21531 - Fender Fullerton Jazzmaster Uke Tidepool
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
21528 - Fender Fullerton Tele Uke Butterscotch
21875 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Daphne Blue
21876 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Shell Pink
21877 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Surf Green
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19886 - Flight NUS310 Blackbird Soprano
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
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele, Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Uke Banjo in 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 KS10 10 Series Soprano Ukulele, Mahog.
18522 - Kai KT700 Tenor Uke
19391 - Kai KT80 Tenor Ukulele
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
21584 - Kanile'a Islander MST-4 Tenor Uke, Used
18833 - Kweya KSU1 Mahogany Student Soprano
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert Electro-Ac.
13084 - Magic Fluke M80 Maple Uke Banjo, Hwood
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
18203 - Mahalo MH-2CE Electro-Acoustic Concert Uke
18211 - Mahalo MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
18195 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18197 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
18199 - Mahalo Union Jack Soprano Uke
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19867 - Malibu 23s Concert Ukulele With Bag
19875 - Malibu C26 Deluxe Concert Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
19884 - Martin Romas MRD1 F Soprano With Bag
19896 - Martin Romas MRD2F Concert With Bag
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
19892 - No Name Concert In Mahogany Inc Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Dig" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
19005 - Ohana BK-70M 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-150CEL Concert Ukulele
21575 - Ohana CK-28-5 Solid Premium 5-String
21576 - Ohana CK-35GCE-LH Left-Handed Concert
21602 - Ohana CK-70-8 8 String Concert Ukulele
0000 - Many more from Ohana, Risa & Tanglewood

Electro Acoustic Guitars



19673 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCRI Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GF33024
21766 - Breedlove Artista Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
21767 - Breedlove Pursuit Concertina Myrtlewood
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
19795 - Brian May Phaedra Electro, Natural
18875 - D'Angelico Excel Tammany OM Electro
18886 - D'Angelico Premier Gramercy Acoustic
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
21839 - Faith FKMVG Naked Venus Mahogany
19542 - Faith FNBCHEG HIGBES Baritone Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Cognac
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Outaway
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Outaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFTHAND
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
19095 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
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 - Lariée C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
19891 - Lariée D03 Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
21495 - Lariée OM40 Electro Acoustic
19524 - Maestro Custom Series LE Raffles KOCSBAU
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Raffles IFCSBD
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE CSB C
19530 - Maestro Private Coll. Victoria FH CSBAX
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-OO
21798 - Martin 00012E Koa Electro Acoustic Guitar
21585 - Martin 000-13E Guitar

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-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21563 - RainSong N-JM3000X 12-String Guitar
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

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 Signature Compt 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 Wall 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 GO, Dark Brown
21588 - Fender Acoustic Junior, Dark Brown
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13656 - 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 - MOBILEAC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp



THE BLACK CROWES

SHAKE YOUR MONEY MAKER

Three decades since they crashed the hair-metal party with 1990's *Shake Your Money Maker*, Chris and Rich Robinson still have faith in the redemptive power of rock 'n' roll. We spoke to the Southern brothers about tracking that classic debut, their notorious sibling rivalry, the barbs of the rock press, and why fame is best left to David Hasselhoff...

Words Henry Yates

Rewind to February 1990. With the grunge cavalry still a distant rumble, it is a godless age of choking hairspray, tiger-stripe Kramers and gratuitous go-faster solos. And with an almost perverse sense of timing, it is now that the universe chooses to push The Black Crowes into contention with debut album, *Shake Your Money Maker*.

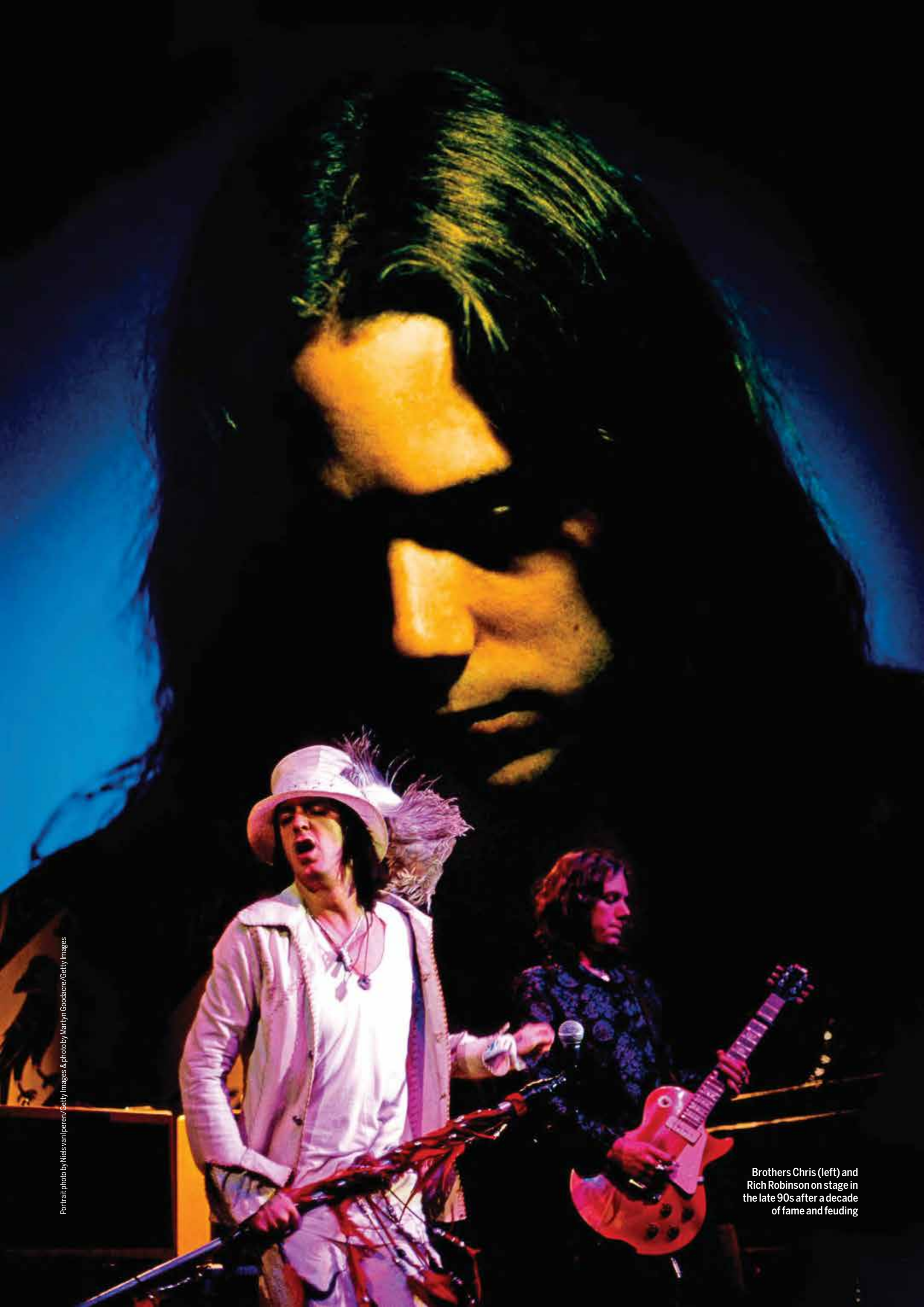
In thrall to The Stones, clutching scuffed Teles and beat-up Goldtops, vocalist Chris Robinson and kid brother/guitarist Rich's unapologetically retro brand of rock 'n' roll is widely tipped for oblivion. If the prevailing music scene doesn't kill them then the Robinsons – hot-headed Southerners who proudly tell the rock press that “we knuckle” – will surely do the job themselves.

And yet, here we are, three decades later. The Robinsons are bona fide rock stars. *Shake Your Money Maker* is a five-million-selling classic, sufficiently iconic to be given a new Super Deluxe reissue treatment. Most unlikely of all, the brothers who once ran the Gallaghers close for sibling rivalry are back on civil terms. “It’s funny,” agrees Chris. “For me, the unimaginable part is to be sitting around talking about this record 30 years later...”

How were The Black Crowes doing when you first started recording *Shake Your Money Maker* back in 1989?

Chris Robinson: “You mean, anonymity and abject poverty? That was pretty much the vibe. Life is very different when no one gives a shit. *Shake Your Money Maker* [SYMM] was the first time we put something together that people would listen to. Up until that point, we were like, ‘Please, someone come to this fucking show!’ You used to tell someone you were in a band and they’d look at you like you were an idiot. Y’know, you’re a loser, you’re never gonna make it, that’s just for Los Angeles and New York. So there was a lot of ‘no’ and ‘can’t’ and ‘won’t’. It was good, though, because we had to rise up past that with our belief in what we were doing.”

Rich Robinson: “We had toured around in the South in vans, played to no-one, had club owners write us bad cheques, had fights – the typical shit bands have to deal with. With SYMM, we were making the best record we knew how to make, but it was a rock 'n' roll record and rock 'n' roll wasn't very popular at the time – it was all Mariah Carey and hair-metal.”



Portrait photo by Niels van Iperen/Getty Images & photo by Martyn Goodacre/Getty Images

Brothers Chris (left) and Rich Robinson on stage in the late 90s after a decade of fame and feuding



Photo by Niels van Iperen/Getty Images

1. The band in 1991 (left to right): Jeff Cease (lead guitar), Rich Robinson, Johnny Colt (bass), Steve Gorman (drums) and Chris Robinson

2. Rich (pictured here in 1992) and his brother were both in their early 20s when *Shake Your Money Maker* shot them to fame

3. Riff family Robinson: the brothers relax backstage with their father, ex-singer Stan Robinson, who passed away in 2013. “My dad showed me three chords,” Rich remembers from his teenage years, “which was all he had the patience for. He said, ‘Here’s G, C and D, you figure the rest out’”

31 years later, how do you think the album has aged?

Chris: “A lot of people bagged us. Y’know, a lot of older journalists and the fuckin’ *NME* said we were not cool. We were like Neil on *The Young Ones*... In the 90s, the 70s weren’t cool, y’know? And we took a lot of shit for it. But when I look back, there were a lot of throwaway, dumb, cheesy rock ballads at the time.

“I like a lot of 90s music, but some of it you’re like, ‘Wow, that sounds really 90s.’ And you can say whatever you want, but I think our record is more timeless, without sounding too [conceited]. I don’t think it’s the best record ever made or anything, but there’s a timeless quality to it.”

Rich: “I hadn’t listened to *SYMM* in decades. I just didn’t do it, until we started getting it remastered. It was interesting to hear, y’know? I think it really holds up. It’s an exciting record and there’s a lot of youthful exuberance on there.”

What was the atmosphere like in the studio?

Chris: “We were still pretty punk-rock and street-oriented at that point. We didn’t do any drugs then – we didn’t have any money. It was all about the record. You were making records in the old way, too, man. Like, there’s no Pro Tools. We played *Twice As Hard* 30 times to get it right.”

Rich: “We didn’t have hundreds of shows under our belts and we hated rehearsals, so we had to play these songs over and over again. But we took it very seriously and we trusted George Drakoulis [producer]. But we were just kids – I was 19 – so we did some stupid shit, too. I’m sure there was a little bit of vandalism. The opening car wreck to *Thick N’ Thin*: we actually

“‘Shake Your Money Maker’ really holds up. There’s a lot of youthful exuberance on there”

RICH ROBINSON

recorded that. Our drummer, Steve Gorman, had an old Dodge car and there was a gigantic industrial rubbish bin, so our engineer held a mic over this trash can and Steve just kept running into it over and over again.”

Chris: “At that time, Rich and I weren’t really clashing. Later, we would clash over sessions. But it was George’s world. I mean, we wrote the songs and did the performances, but when George said, ‘That’s it’ – that was it.”

When you listen back to *SYMM*, what do you think of your guitar playing?

Rich: “I’d only been playing since I’d gotten a guitar for Christmas when I was 14 because my dad didn’t want me messing around with his guitar. Chris got a bass. My dad showed me three chords, which was all he had the patience for. He said, ‘Here’s G, C and D, you figure the rest out.’”

Chris: “When we were in [Black Crowes precursor] Mr Crowe’s Garden, Rich wasn’t the flashy guitar player that played solos and stuff...”

Rich: “On *SYMM*, it was only a couple of years since I’d delved into open tunings. So I wasn’t a master, by any means. I also wasn’t the type of person to practise a ton and obsess. I always believed in letting it happen naturally and focus mainly on writing songs. That’s



Photo by Brian Rasic/Getty Images



Photo by Acey Harper/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images

what Chris and I did from day one. We got guitars, we wrote songs. It's like, you can write a lot of songs with G, C and D. I was obviously into Keith Richards, but Nick Drake really influenced how I played. You see that a little bit in *She Talks To Angels*. That's more where I got my open tunings from, him and Stephen Stills. Now, I'm up to about 15 different tunings that I use to write and play songs."

Chris: "No-one else was really working that hard on their guitars back then. I hear Rich's playing now and it sounds fucking good. He's always had an amazing metre."

Chris, we think of you as a solid player these days.

Did you play on SYMM?

Chris: "God, no. I play guitar now in my solo folky, tripped-out world. I'm a rhythm guitarist and I play a little bit of lead – but my leads are like Syd Barrett."

Rich, what guitars did you use for SYMM?

Rich: "I had my blonde '68 Tele that I've had forever, and my Goldtop that I've had forever and had a Bigsby on it. At first, we thought that was a mid-50s model, but later we found out it was a '68. That Goldtop was really messed up, y'know, the paint had worn off and it had a DiMarzio humbucker and a P-90 in the neck. My dad also loaned me his '53 Martin D-28 for *She Talks To Angels*. He later gave it to me and I've played that on every record as well."

Chris: "Rich had an interesting guitar sound that was different. I mean, before Guns N' Roses was the biggest thing of all time, you could go buy Les Pauls and they weren't that expensive. When Missing Persons is on MTV, Les Pauls aren't going for much money, y'know? Les Pauls were Allman Brothers and shit, so you could get these guitars for cheap. I think we borrowed a friend's guitar, too, broke the neck off of it somehow, fucking around, and we didn't have the money to pay for it. We didn't have all the shit we'd have two years later. Y'know, when you have money to start procuring good gear."

Rich: "When I graduated from high school, my parents bought me a Silver Jubilee half-stack and that was it. I didn't start using pedals until much later, maybe around *By Your Side* [1999]. So that's all I had. But that's kind of how it was. The label didn't give us an advance. We had zero money. There wasn't even a food budget. George bought us a sandwich and we had to split it."

As well as the remastered record and live show, there's an LP/CD of unreleased songs and B-sides. Which of these bonus tracks should we check out?

Chris: "Things like the *She Talks To Angels* demo are interesting because you can see the seeds of what would be. I wouldn't usually listen to any music I made, once it's done. But when I heard the live show from December 1990, I was like, 'Wow, that's a band who just spent a year on the road.' Every night, we were grinding it out. When I listen back to that group of kids... you don't have to love The Black Crowes, but you can never say we weren't doing our thing. We were the first band in a long time to play mid-tempo rock. That's super-70s. Everyone was like, 'Oh, you don't do that...'"

Rich: "To hear our covers of *30 Days In The Hole* and *Jealous Guy* again has been great. *Charming Mess* is cool because it's an unreleased track, like if someone found a



Photo by Paul Natkin/WireImage

4. Chris Robinson up close with Jimmy Page in Chicago, 2000

5. While Chris enjoyed some of what went hand in hand with fame as the band's frontman, "the writer in me had always liked the anonymity of my adventures", he says

6. Three decades after its release in 1990, the band's multi-platinum debut album will be played on stage in full in a US and European tour

really cool song that came off of *Exile On Main St.* Chris and I were always looking for the next thing, always writing songs, much to the chagrin of our management and label at the time. I remember the opening night of our tour with Aerosmith – our first arena tour – we opened with this slow, dirgey brand-new song. And no-one was too pleased."

Chris: "When we wrote *Charming Mess*, we knew the intro was pretty much *Hot Legs* – and Mr Stewart has given us his approval to put it out. We released that as a single in January, and we had more adds than the Foo Fighters or AC/DC. I was like, 'Wow, amazing.' Because the song's 31 years old."

Did you have a sense that SYMM was going to sell five million copies?

Rich: "Not even remotely. We played to 12 people when we started out, in Salt Lake City, and then we played to 600,000 people in Moscow a year later. Like, how can you quantify that?"

How did you enjoy the fame that was suddenly thrust on you?

Rich: "Chris definitely took the brunt of it – for all of us. It was never something that I really strived for. I'm a much more shy and private person than Chris is. No-one told us how to deal with [the fame]. It was

just overnight. We put the record out and within a few months we were touring with Aerosmith and Robert Plant, and our record is gold. Within a few more months, it's platinum. And then, between December and the end of January, we had sold three million albums. It was going that fast. If I remember correctly, *Hard To Handle* was the most-played video on MTV in America that year."

Chris: "The punk-rock streak in me is deep and wide. I always hated the corporate part of it, the record company. I knew we were only as good as the money we made them. Y'know, our next album, [*The*] *Southern Harmony* [*And Musical Companion*, 1992], debuted at No 1, but we only sold a couple of million copies so the label was like, 'Whatever, they're kind of over:'

"The fame part... I liked some of it. But the writer in me had always liked the anonymity of my adventures. Y'know, after *SYMM*, you had a bodyguard just because people are going, 'Fuck you!' And back then, I'd be like, 'Well, fuck you, too!' I was one behind Liam Gallagher, y'know? Fame and money is boring. David Hasselhoff is famous – who gives a shit? I like being recognised for my music, but I don't need any other shit. I don't have a Twitter account. If you need me, come see me, you know what I mean?"

What was your backline when you took SYMM out on the road in the 90s?

Rich: "For all of the *Southern Harmony* and *Shake Your Money Maker* tour, I had three Marshall stacks and I think I only used two full stacks, but one was a Silver Jubilee and the other was a Fender Showman running the two cabinets. I wanted to mix the two sounds. And

"The punk-rock streak in me is deep. I hated the corporate part – we were only as good as the money we made [the record company]" **CHRIS ROBINSON**

Photo by Lindsay Brice/Getty Images

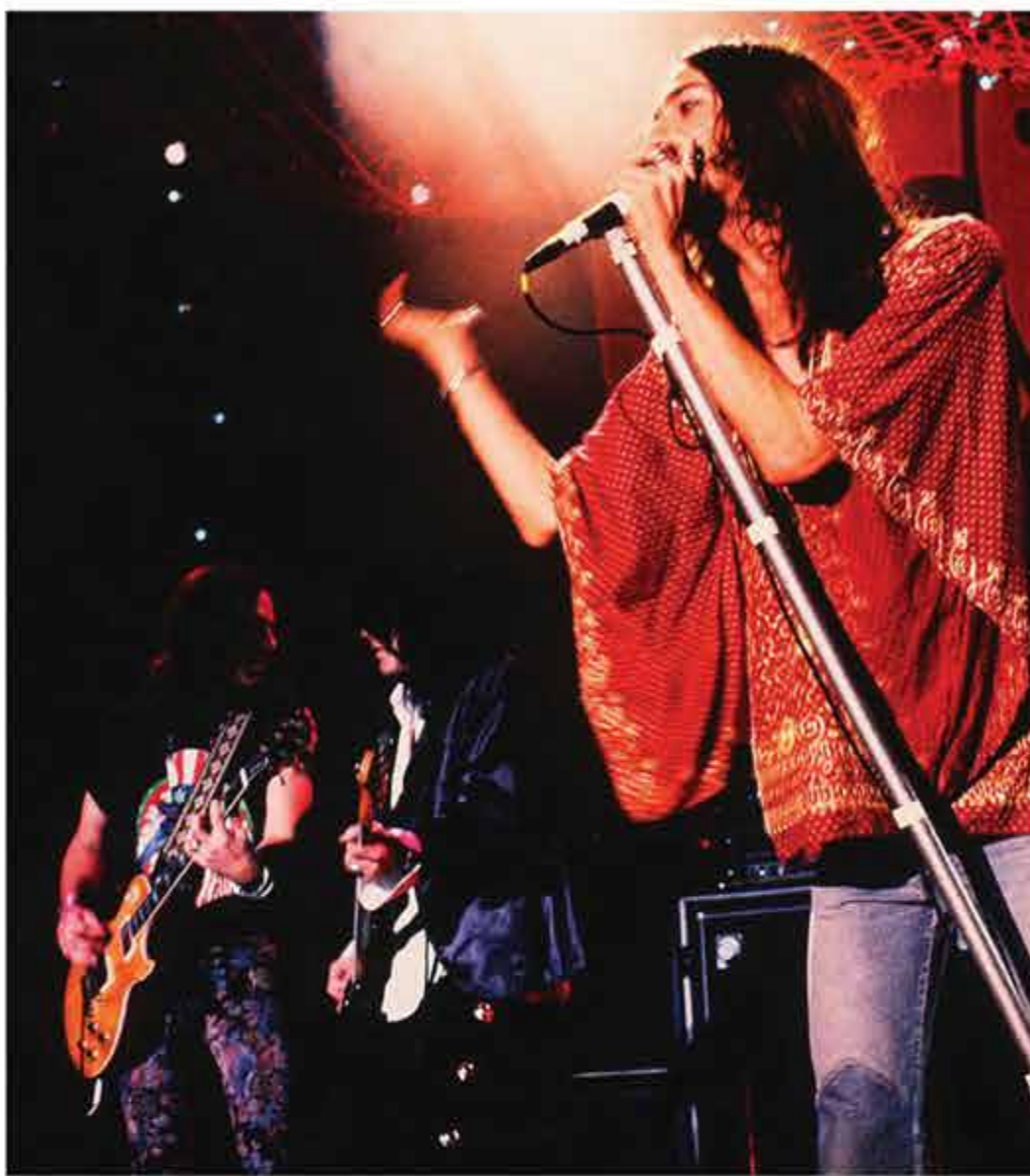
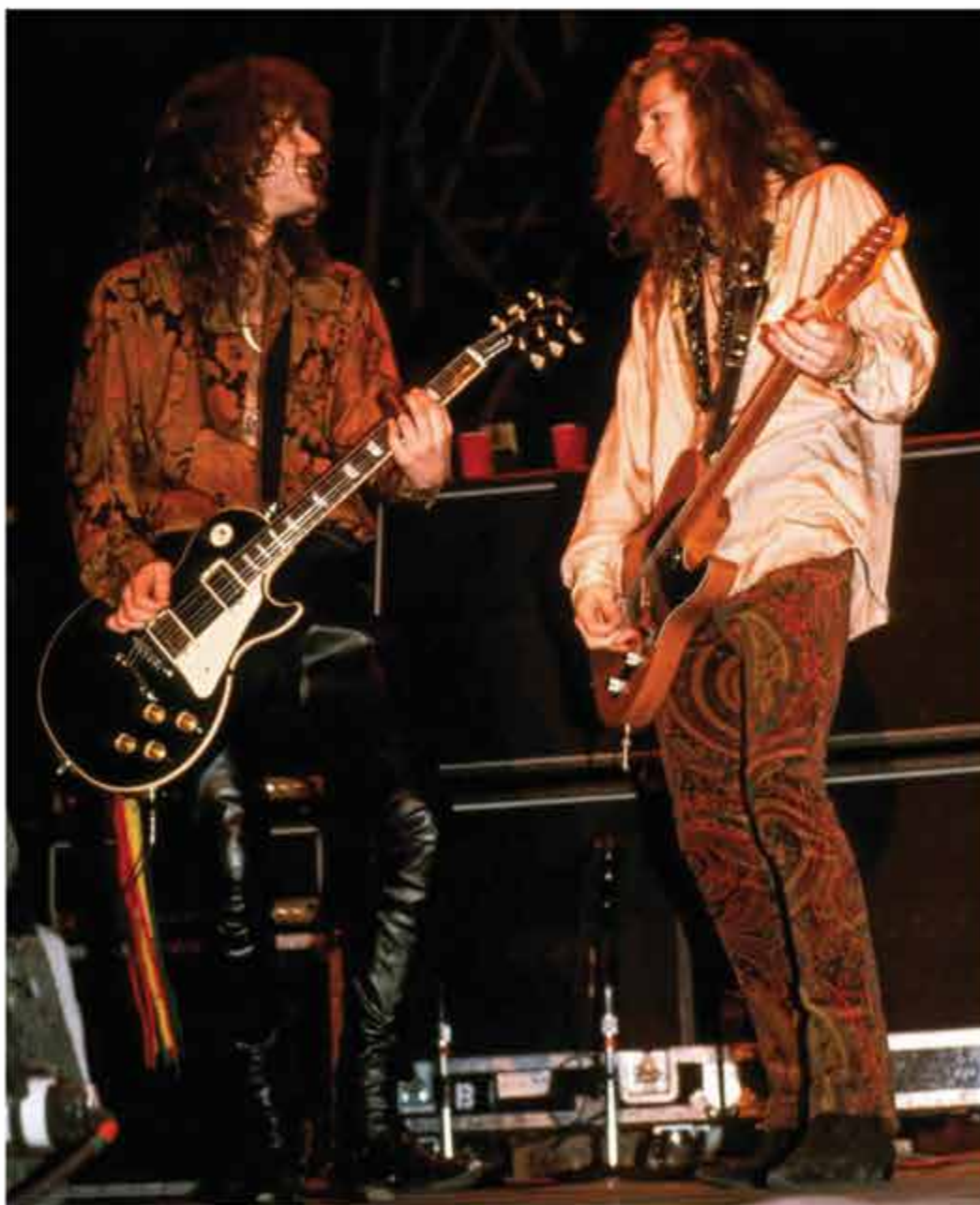


Photo by Ebet Roberts/Redferns



if we played stadiums, like we did with AC/DC – for that Monsters Of Rock stadium tour in 1991 – I think I played all three stacks, which would then be two Silver Jubilees and one stack of Showman.”

When you finally get out on the road this year, how will the live versions of these songs be different to the studio originals?

Chris: “Well, one thing we’ve never done is play the album the way it was. We’ve changed things, we were always problematic. But this time we’ll be playing the album versions, the album lengths. So, for us, it’s kind of a brand-new frontier and I’m excited about that. I’ve been in the wilderness for a while – I’m happy to get back on Broadway.”

Rich: “It’s the little quirks that you do live. It’s like when we played the Zeppelin songs with Jimmy Page. He remembered the live version, the things Zeppelin would do live. So we’d play these songs and Jimmy would be like, ‘No, this was the ending we did.’ I can only imagine that Jimmy was covering three guitar parts and having to work those down into one part. So whenever you tour a song, they’re gonna take lives of their own, however you wanted them to be when you wrote them.”

How did it feel to get back together in 2019?

Chris: “I remember walking into the rehearsals on the first day and I’m like, ‘Yes!’ There’s just this avalanche of guitars and I love it. It’s like, ‘I’ve been in this jam-band world now for 10 years. Just give me a bleeding ear right now.’ It was the thing I needed the most.”

You’re known for butting heads. Has revisiting SYMM brought you closer?

Rich: “Yeah. It kind of brings us back to the beginning and helps me tap into why we started doing this in the first place. Music was always our love and passion – but when it’s mired in pettiness and fighting and bullshit... a lot of times caused by dudes in the band... I mean, Steve Gorman told me one time, ‘Man, when you and Chris got along, it scared the shit out of us because we couldn’t get you to do anything we wanted.’ Or however he put it. It was something to that effect. Basically, what he said was that they worked to keep us apart – whereas the band succeeded and made the greatest records when Chris and I worked together. So to dive back into this record, that was really created in a very innocent place, has been really cathartic.”

Chris: “It puts things in perspective. We’ve spent so much time being negative about each other and being surrounded by negative entities that it’s nice to be in a positive place in our 50s. Again, our music is the easy part. We never really fought when we were making music. It was all the other shit that’s been a problem. Now we’re in a better place. We can be each other’s brothers and be in a band now. And that’s what it’s about. Before, we were just in a band – but we didn’t behave like brothers, y’know?” 



Shake Your Money Maker Super Deluxe Box Set is out now on UMe/American Recordings. The Black Crowes bring the *Shake Your Money Maker* tour to the UK and Ireland from 21 October <https://theblackcrowes.com>

SMITH/ KOTZEN

Recorded days before Covid bit, the debut album from Iron Maiden's Adrian Smith and journeyman virtuoso Richie Kotzen fuses guitar heroics with stellar songwriting.

The pair told us about swapping rigs, moonlighting on bass and why analysing guitar technique is "creepy"

Words Henry Yates





Unroll a map of the Caribbean and you'll spot a pinprick representing the tropical paradise of the Turks and Caicos Islands. For most of us, this is as close as we'll ever get, with the archipelago's sprinkle of luxury resorts pricing out all but the well-heeled international jet-set. But if a shipwrecked interloper were to make it onto those unblemished private beaches, they'd spy the biggest beasts in rock, from Paul McCartney weighing anchor in the azure waters of Grace Bay to Keith Richards playing pirates at his Parrot Cay bolthole.

To that celebrity roll-call, add Adrian Smith of Iron Maiden and king-among-journeymen Richie Kotzen. Back in February 2020, the pair jetted in with a bare-bones rig to track their self-titled debut album as Smith/Kotzen, escaping mere days before the coronavirus shut down the world. One year later, we caught up with the two guitarists to hear about a heavy-blues classic that exceeds the sum of its considerable parts.

How did you end up working together?

Adrian Smith: "Eight years ago, I bought a house in California. There's a community of musicians out there and we got friendly, had a few jams at my place, playing Stevie Ray and Bad Company, having a blast. My missus said, 'Why don't you write some songs?' I thought, 'Well, Richie's a great guitarist and singer, what does he need me for?' But we started writing and it just flowed, y'know?"

Richie Kotzen: "To talk about something and to actually see it through are two different things. Now this record exists, I haven't been this excited about something in a long time. I don't know that I've ever done a record like this, where I'm sharing lead vocals and guitar. I really liked throwing the reins up 50 per cent of the time and saying, 'Okay, you walk the dog here.'"

You're divided by age and nationality. Why does it work so well?

Richie: "We have a common taste in music. I grew up listening to Adrian, actually, but also to classic rock as well as traditional R&B. Adrian grew up with classic rock and the blues. So we find this common ground. Occasionally we'll drag each other this way or that way. But down the middle, the core is our love for blues-based rock 'n' roll."

Adrian: "I've always had a soft spot for that heavy, soulful bluesy rock. I grew up listening to Free, Humble Pie then later on Bad Company – as well as your Sabbaths and Purples. It's in tune with

the way I look at the world. And I like the space in it. You can put in as many or as little notes as you like. To me, blues is timeless. I think people underestimate how difficult it is to play well. I mean, with BB King or Stevie Ray or Clapton – the phrasing is so important and that is so difficult to do. What we’re doing is not pure blues, but it’s definitely got that element. You’re trying to get straight to the heart with the guitar. There’s a solo on the end of *You Don’t Know Me*, that’s quite bluesy. I do the first bit then Richie plays it out. That’s quite a moment.”

So, what was it like recording on Turks?

Adrian: “It’s brilliant, mate. It’s good fishing round there. You might even see Keith Richards if you’re lucky. We didn’t go to a studio, we just took a laptop and a few bits and pieces, a few good mics, did it ourselves. I had a little bit of gear there and Richie brought some guitars.”

Richie: “It’s like paradise. You wake up, go for a swim, have breakfast, do your recording, go out for dinner. We had access to some great white wines...”

What do you like about each other’s approaches on guitar?

Richie: “It’s Adrian’s sense of melody and his ability to execute the idea very quickly. He comes up with these great parts that really bring the song to life.”

Adrian: “I suppose I almost hear a solo

before I play, rather than go on autopilot and shred off a load of licks. I think there should be a catchy beginning to get people’s ears, a melodic passage, maybe a bit of fireworks and a conclusion.

“Richie’s obviously technically very gifted. But he’s got amazing feel as well. It was amazing watching him up close, putting his solos on. Very unusual technique: he doesn’t use a pick. Sometimes I do that, too, but if we’re playing together I avoid it because he’s the master. He gets such definition. A lot of it must be in the left hand. Having said that, I’ve watched him from a few feet away and I still can’t work out what he’s doing. But Richie’s been playing since he was eight. That makes a difference. With me, it was more like, when I got to 15, everyone was going, ‘What are you going to do with your life?’ And I thought, ‘Guitar sounds pretty good.’”

“Adrian’s sense of melody and his ability to execute the idea quickly... really bring the songs to life”

RICHIE KOTZEN

What are your respective strengths when it comes to technique?

Richie: “Well, that’s very complex to get into and I don’t have the constitution to put myself through that sort of analysis. I think once you start looking at someone’s playing, y’know, ‘Richie excels at left-hand legato and this other guy excels at alternate picking...’, it’s like you have a pretty girl and then suddenly you start analysing every element of her physique. It becomes a little creepy, y’know? Suffice to say, both of us have found a way to take our personalities as people and have it come through on the instrument, which to me is the ultimate goal for any musician. It’s very tricky to psychoanalyse because I think it comes from the heart.”

Don’t you like talking about your technique, Richie?

Richie: “I don’t know how to do it. I have a lot of friends who are brilliant musicians and they can dissect the hows and the whys. I really have this belief that music kinda comes through people. I mean, there’s people that are very cerebral and they go, ‘Okay, I’m playing over this chord progression so I can do this diminished run and it’ll work.’ It’s impressive they can do that math. But my brain doesn’t work that way. Y’know, when I was young, I learned how to look at staff paper and read the notes. I used to write



*“I have this belief that music
kinda comes through people”*

RICHIE KOTZEN

a column for *Guitar World* where I had to transcribe. But ultimately, I like that feeling of, ‘Wow, where did that come from?’ If someone said to me, ‘Why does that work?’ then I could say, ‘Well, that’s a Mixolydian mode.’ Y’know, I can go down that road. But I would literally have to be sitting there with the audio file. But off the top of my head... y’know, I’m laying down right now with my left foot elevated ‘cos I screwed my toe up, and I’m in excruciating pain, so I don’t exactly know what I played when and where on this album.”

Adrian: “He doesn’t want to give any secrets away, that’s why!”

Can you tell us what some of these songs are about?

Adrian: “*Some People* is about those people who test your patience. *Scars* could be about things that have happened in your past. At some point, you’ve got to face up to it and move on. *Running* could be about someone who maybe indulges a bit too much and they’re running from themselves, can’t look at themselves in the mirror. They’re always running. But what happens when you get exhausted and you have to stop?”

Richie: “*Taking My Chances* is about being at a point where you’ve got nothing to lose. Which is how my approach to life has always been. I remember being a teenager, in a full-time cover band in Pennsylvania. And on that circuit I’d gone as far as I could. I either needed to get out or I was just gonna be stuck. I wanted to go to California and all I heard was, ‘You can’t’. But I took my chance, put all the eggs in the basket and moved out. And it paid off.”

Can you tell us about the gear you used on this album?

Richie: “Well, that’s a question I can answer. We were going through my signature Victory 100-watt amp. It’s a very special limited-edition made in the UK and it’s just a beast. It can sound aggressive. It can sound clean. You can get that Bassman kinda ‘saggy’ sound if you need to. But you also can get the percussive Marshall tonality that I love. So all my parts, I ran through that amp. For effects, I used the rotary speaker from my Tech 21 Fly Rig. You can hear that, very obviously, on the solo to *Taking My Chances*. For guitars, I’m using my signature Telecaster and Strat, going back and forth evenly.”

Adrian: “I didn’t have access to a lot of my gear – I don’t think I even used a wah. But they say a lot of the sound is in your hands and your head. The trouble

1. Plenty of Richie’s signature gear was used to record the album, including his Strat (pictured) and signature Tele (above) with his preferred C-profile neck

2. Richie’s signature single-channel RK50 Victory signature amp (top) has a huge range of gain and plays to the musician’s strengths with its simplicity

3. The Richie Kotzen RK5 Fly Rig is now on version 2, and includes independent reverb with a rotary speaker mode, compression, fuzz and tuner capability

is, if you give me 10 guitars and five amps, I'd be there for weeks. Keeping it simple keeps it more focused. I only used two guitars. I had my green SDQM Jackson and a Les Paul Standard. There were one or two ideas that spring from that 70s Free vibe, like the song *Glory Road*, which has a [The] Stealer kind of strut, so I used a Les Paul on that. But I pretty much split between the two. My Jackson has the Seymour Duncan Jeff Beck pickup in the bridge then two Jackson [Samarium Cobalt Noiseless] single coils: you just go up to the neck pickup and there's your Strat sound. If you've got a Strat and a Les Paul, you've pretty much got the bases covered. I did some stuff on the Marshall DSL 100-watt. You always get a sound out of a Marshall valve amp. It does the job."

Did you do anything new with your gear?

Richie: "I did do something I've not done in a long time. Towards the end of the recording, I grabbed Adrian's Jackson a few times. He has a locking tremolo and I was joking that on a couple of those solos, I sound like the 19-year-old Richie Kotzen. I found myself doing some tremolo bar things that I just couldn't do on my guitar."

Adrian: "He really got into it because he hasn't played a guitar with a whammy bar for ages. I tried his rig, too. On the song *Running*, I used his signature Strat with the DiMarzio pickups. It's got quite a chunky neck. I've never really got on with Telecasters, but he gave me one of his signature models, which I haven't had a chance to get going on yet. So many guitars, so little time..."

•

"Richie's got nothing to prove. We're about the songs... no pure shred"

ADRIAN SMITH

•

Do you think a guitarist still sounds like themselves, even if they swap rigs?

Richie: "Yeah. Oftentimes, if I get a guitar and amp, and neither are mine, I'll start fiddling with the knobs to get the sound I hear in my head or get it to react to my fingers. So in the end, no matter what gear I get, I'm pretty much gonna sound like me. The variable is: how difficult is it for me to execute my ideas? So when I have my stuff, I'm not handicapped. Whereas, if you stick me



Photo by John McMurtrie

through somebody else's setup, it might create obstacles. Like, if I was gonna play through a super-hot high-gain amp with a real flat fingerboard and a skinny neck – that'll screw me up. I'm gonna have a hard time with that. The same way as if someone grabs my guitar."

You guys also shared bass duties. Do you agree with the theory that any guitarist can play bass?

Adrian: "No. The few times I've jammed on bass it's very difficult because you can't always hear what you're playing. It's a boomy bottom-end, it's like you're playing in the dark. But sat down in the studio, yeah. I try not to play bass like a guitarist. I use a pick or have my treble all the way up like a lot of guitarists who play bass. I try to approach it like a bass player."

Richie: "No, not any guitar player can play bass. Bass is a different instrument. It does something different to guitar. Growing up, I listened to a lot of soul and R&B, and it was very bass-driven. Y'know, Stevie Wonder was my first concert and I think it was Nathan Watts playing bass. And then, as I evolved, I had the luxury of playing with great bass players. On my first record, Stu Hamm. I was in a band with Stanley Clarke. I've played with Jeff Berlin, Billy Sheehan, TM Stevens. I have a long history of playing with great bass players. I've actually studied what the bass does at the same level that I've studied guitar. So I am a bass player. I'm not a guitar player who plays bass."

When virtuosos get together, they often overplay. How did you avoid that?

Adrian: "Well, Richie's got nothing to prove. We're about the songs. There's no pure shred, which I suppose we could have done."

Richie: "You have to realise, both of us are seasoned musicians. So when I hear someone play, I know when they have something to say and I know to keep my mouth shut and keep out of the way. And if I'm gonna speak musically, I'm gonna play a supportive role. That's one of the things that I learned from playing in Stanley Clarke's band. There were multiple soloists in the band. There was a violin soloist, there was a keyboard soloist, Stanley was a soloist, the drummer soloed. And it was all about creating space. And if I was gonna speak – add to the conversation. If you can't add to the conversation, don't say anything. Take it all in, and learn, and react later. So that is the key to it. You have two guitar players and in this genre of music – it's loud. There's two heavy Victory or Marshall-driven loud guitars. You have to learn how to be quiet and take the back seat."

Ordinarily, you'd be out touring this record. How frustrating is lockdown?

Adrian: "It is frustrating. It's been nice catching up on other things. I've been playing along to backing tracks, just doing covers of Free, Hendrix, Purple – anything, really. I can't sit around doing scales. I cannot bear that. So I just play for fun and before I know it, a couple of hours have gone by and I've had my workout. But the bottom line is, we'd love to go out and play this music because that's when people will know we're serious. And we are serious about it. We'll have to wait and see. Nothing is worth dying over, is it?"



Smith/Kotzen is out now on BMG. Find merch and more info over at the Smith/Kotzen website

www.smithkotzen.com

With most of his gear back in the UK – except for a Les Paul Standard and his signature Jackson – Adrian relied heavily on Richie's kit to record the album



“If you give me 10 guitars and five amps, I’d be there for weeks. Keeping it simple keeps it more focused”
ADRIAN SMITH

ROCK TILL YOU DROP

RICHARD BARRETT TURNS
UP THE VOLUME TO
GIVE YOU A PRACTICAL
LESSON IN HOW BLUES
GUITAR EVOLVED INTO
MODERN ROCK



Tutor: Richard Barrett

Gear used: Knaggs SSC, STL ToneHub

Time: 20 mins per example

Difficulty: ★★★★★

It has long been acknowledged that the roots of rock lie in the blues. From a historical standpoint, it's possible to draw a direct line from Robert Johnson to Eric Clapton, from Chuck Berry to Angus Young, and through subsequent generations to hard rock and many of the sub-genres of heavy metal. However, tracing the development of a musical style could never be that simple. We should consider the styles and fashions of various eras, too: Chicago blues, rock 'n' roll, the British Invasion and so on.

If we take the mid-60s as a line in the sand – when guitarists began to actively use the distortion and sustain produced by pushing an amp to its limit as an integral part of their sound – this is where we pick up the story. Eric Clapton's work on the infamous 'Beano' album with John Mayall captures what became an 'aha' moment for a generation of aspiring electric guitarists who took the blues they loved and quite literally turned up the volume. Forward-thinking players have since driven amplifier design in the direction of brighter circuits (which distort more easily), master volume, higher gain, switchable channels, effects loops and even MIDI. In fact, the tones on these demo solos were produced with software, so there's yet another layer!

Nevertheless, there is also a case for the idea that guitarists are influenced by the possibilities that arise from existing gear – Jimmy Page, for one, has said the first thing he explores when trying new equipment is what it *isn't* supposed to do. Players such as Gary Moore and Eddie Van Halen, who represent the more modern-rock approach in this feature, are known for pushing their amplifiers hard, using techniques facilitated greatly by their amplification – try tapping or holding an infinitely sustained note on a Dobro!

All that's left to do now is play along with our examples and journey through the blues-rock evolution...

Photo by Sulfati Magnuson/Getty Images



Example 1

ERIC CLAPTON

IN 1966, THE YEAR OF THE FAMED 'BEANO' ALBUM, Eric Clapton was already rehearsing with Cream. Though he was (and is) a blues purist at heart, Eric's work in this period established many 'norms' in rock solo guitar playing. This example borrows an idea or two from Cream in the later 60s. It is very much pentatonic, but the frequent use of 6ths (F# in this case) is part of the blues vocabulary. Note the G# in bar 6 – you'll hear Eric use this idea in a few solos of the period.

♩ = 120

A D7 A

BU BU

E B G D A E

1

E A D7

BU BU BU BU BD

E B G D A E

4

A E

E B G D A E

7

Example 2

ANGUS YOUNG

TAKING A LEAF OUT OF ANGUS YOUNG'S BOOK, we find he in turn has done the same with Chuck Berry – as did the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones shortly thereafter. The aggressive doublestops are a big part of this solo, though they take a slightly gentler blues feel in bars 3, 5 and 6. It's very much A minor pentatonic here, but the way you put it across is everything. Angus is not a 'high-gain' player with lots of pedals/ gain stages, and this influences the phrasing and vibrato, too.



Photo by Ross Marino/Getty Images

♩ = 120 A5

BU BU BU BU BU

7 (9) 5 5 7 (9) 5 5 7 (9) 5 5 5 7 (9) 5 5 7 (9) 5 5 8 9

1

1/4 1/4

Let ring

0 7 0 5 5 6 7 7 5 7 5 7 9 8 8 9 11 10 10 12 14 13

4

8va

Let ring

BU BU BU BD BU

13 14 13 14 15 (17) 15 15 (17) 15 15 (17) (15) 13 15 (17) 14

7

Photo by Fin Costello/Redferns/Getty Images



Example 3

GARY MOORE

ERIC CLAPTON AND PETER GREEN were massively influential to the young Gary Moore. Though he did later return to his roots somewhat, it was via his impressive technical accomplishments with Colosseum II, his rock playing with Thin Lizzy and going into the 80s. This solo aims to combine the precision and melodic restraint he always prioritised with some no holds barred alternate picking!

♩ = 120

A5 **F5/A** **G5/A**

BU PM

E B G D A E

7 (9) 7 5 6 5 7 5 5 7 5 4 7 5 4 7 5 7 9

1

D/A **A5** *8va* **F5/A**

BU

E B G D A E

7 7 9 11 14 16 17 15 17 15 17 15 17 16 17 16 17 19 17 19 17 20 17 20 (22) 17 20 17

4

(8va)

BU BU

E B G D A E

20 17 20 17 20 17 20 17 20 17 20 17 20 17 20 17 20 (22) 20 (22)

7

Example 4

EDDIE VAN HALEN

AS ERIC CLAPTON CHANGED THE GAME for so many in the mid-60s, Eddie Van Halen broke fresh ground from the late 70s and way beyond. The intensely driven sound, big riffs and unique solo approach caused ripples that are still being felt. This example should be considered as a starting point, but the principles are here. A phaser and echo also help with authenticity. We really are in the realm of the amplifier – with effects being played like an instrument here, too!



Photo by Paul Natkin/Getty Images

Sheet music for Example 4, featuring Eddie Van Halen's style. The music is in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 120. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

The notation includes standard musical notation (treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, accidentals) and guitar-specific notation (fingering, bends, vibrato, tremolo pick, and effects like phaser and echo). The music is divided into three systems, each with a key signature change indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va).

System 1: The first system starts with a key signature change to one sharp (F#). The tempo is 120. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature change symbol (8va). The music features a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature change symbol (8va). The music features a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va).

System 2: The second system continues the music, featuring a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature change symbol (8va). The music features a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va).

System 3: The third system concludes the music, featuring a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature change symbol (8va). The music features a series of notes and rests, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a dashed line and a key signature change symbol (8va).

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ANNIVERSARY GIBSON LES PAULS

We catch up with Steve Hove of Vintage ‘n’ Rare Guitars in Bath for a close-up look at a stunning collection of anniversary model Gibson Les Pauls dating back to the mid-1970s

Words Rod Brakes Photography Neil Godwin & Olly Curtis

Aluminium, silver, pearl, gold and diamond may very well be traditional names for different landmark anniversaries, but all of the above materials actually went into making a Les Paul at one time or another. Because every so often, Gibson made something just a little bit different and a little bit special – sometimes a lot more special, in fact – to mark an occasion. Whether it be a Standard or a Custom (or somewhere in between the two), these anniversary guitars are all unique. They also tell a story about the evolution of Gibson’s most popular solidbodies, those iconic guitars that have a long-earned reputation as the ultimate rock machines: the Les Pauls.

“These Les Paul anniversary models aren’t so much reissues as they are commemorative interpretations,” begins Steve Hove, co-owner of Vintage ‘n’ Rare Guitars in Bath. “Gibson mixed it up a little bit. It depended on what was fashionable at the time or what other guitars they had in their catalogue. A lot of people bought them as collectors’ items. And they still do.”

The earliest stirrings of an anniversary Les Paul occurred in 1974 when the Les Paul Custom was embellished with an engraving reading “Twentieth Anniversary” on its 15th-fret block inlay. This subtle announcement was a standard

appointment for the Les Paul Custom that year – a guitar that, due to popular demand, had been reintroduced with dual humbuckers in its original single-cutaway form in 1968, following a seven-year hiatus. The ’74 model pictured opposite (which also happens to be this issue’s cover star) is one of the last ‘fretless wonder’-style guitars made as the Custom was brought up to date with larger frets the following year.

The idea of an anniversary Les Paul soon caught on and in 1977 the limited-edition Les Paul Custom 25th Anniversary appeared, resplendent in its metallic silver finish. The following year, Gibson revisited this concept with the release of the 25th Anniversary Les Paul, aka the 25/50 (pic 1).

“This model was released in 1978 to celebrate 25 years of the Les Paul Model,” clarifies Steve. “Well, kind of. ’77 would have been the 25th anniversary of the Les

Paul Model [released in 1952], while ’79 would have been the 25th anniversary of the Custom [released in 1954]. So, strictly speaking, it was either a year later or earlier than it should have been! It was also to commemorate 50 years of Les Paul’s career.

“The cool thing about this one is its black finish, which is rare; most of them were made with a Tobacco Sunburst and a flamed top. They also did them in Wine Red and Natural, which is very much a 70s thing, as is the TP-6 tailpiece, the neck volute, and the brass nut and studs. It’s got the Series VII pickups, which are quite hot, and these guitars also have a coil-tap that Gibson introduced in the 70s. It’s an interesting mix of features with the Super 400-style fretboard markers, ‘Les Paul Anniversary’-engraved gold truss rod cover, and fancy ‘25/50’ headstock inlays.”

By 1982, something of a theme was established with the introduction of the 30th Anniversary Les Paul Standard, as Steve explains...

“This model [pic 2] was released in 1982 to commemorate 30 years of the Les Paul Model. The 19th-fret trapezoid inlay reads ‘30th Anniversary’. The guitar we have at the shop was built slightly later, in 1983. It was one of the last guitars made in Kalamazoo before Gibson closed the plant in 1984. It was the end of an era. They put quite a bit of marketing behind this at the

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In 1974, Gibson's Les Paul Custom was embellished with an engraved fretboard marker that read 'Twentieth Anniversary'



1. The elaborate '25/50' headstock inlays of the 25th Anniversary Les Paul simultaneously commemorated 25 years of Les Paul guitars and 50 years of Les Paul's extraordinary music career

2. Although the gorgeous 30th Anniversary Les Paul Standard was released in 1982, its dual humbuckers coupled with a gold finish are indicative of a Les Paul Model from 1957/1958



time, and Les Paul himself was involved in the campaign. They tried to get some aspects of the guitar historically accurate. The gold finish, for example, looks really good. It's even started to check like a 50s Goldtop. And the dish looks accurate. It's a classic example of Gibson almost doing a reissue guitar but then adding in a few quirks and non-historically accurate details to make it its own unique thing.

"It's a 30th anniversary guitar, but it's not based on a '52," Steve continues. "It's more like a '57, which is when they changed from P-90s to humbuckers. These are Tim Shaw PAF replica humbuckers and they sound wicked. Being a Goldtop with humbuckers it looks like a '57, but there are odd things like the double-ring Kluson tuners, which actually came in in 1960, and it's got speed knobs [used from 1953 to 1955]. The neck profile is much slimmer than a '57, which would have been more on the chunky side; this is like a typically slim 1960 profile. But slim necks were popular in the early 80s and they were catering for people's tastes. In the 80s, synths and electronic music became a thing, which affected sales, but simultaneously there was a resurgence of some of the older designs. The 80s were the heyday of the shredder era and 'Super Strat' guitars became popular, but then guitarists like Slash took the demand for Les Paul Standards up another level."

In 1989, Gibson released the 35th Anniversary Les Paul Custom (pic 3). It was based on the three-pickup version of the Les Paul Custom available from '57 to '61 and marked the 35th anniversary of the model's introduction in '54. The five-piece split diamond inlay on the headstock is indicative of Gibson's top-of-the-line instruments (including the Les Paul Custom solidbody, Super 400CES hollowbody and ES-355 semi) and is the location of this guitar's anniversary year engraving.

"The middle section – the parallelogram – is engraved '35th Anniversary'," highlights Steve, "and that's really the main difference between this guitar and a regular three-pickup Les Paul Custom. The 1954 Les Paul Custom was a different spec. It was introduced with two pickups: an Alnico V/ staple pickup in the neck and a P-90 in the bridge. So this guitar isn't a reissue of a

'54. It's more a celebration of the model's introduction, and in terms of features is actually akin to a '59.

"It's not got the original Black Beauty-style small 'fretless wonder' frets – these are medium, and a little on the tall side, which makes it a much more playable guitar. Not everyone liked the 'fretless wonder' feel – it can be a bit of a struggle getting enough purchase trying to do string bends. It's amazing how a small change like the height of the fret completely opened up a new playing style. Back in the day, people would often refret Customs so they could have a decent tool for the job.

"This one has a set of PAF-style pickups that have the typical open, airy PAF sound. And the top-end is really sweet. In the middle position, the middle and treble pickups are out of phase, so if you roll off the tone of the treble pickup you can get an awesome cocked-wah sound. It's a very versatile guitar."

A few years later, Gibson introduced the 40th Anniversary Les Paul Standard (pic 4).

"It marks the 40th anniversary of the Les Paul Model, which in theory should be 1992," points out Steve, "but they brought it in a year early – this guitar is a '91. It's got '40th Anniversary' engraved on the 12th-fret trapezoid inlay. I guess it's loosely based on a '55/'56 Les Paul Model as you've got the fully adjustable bridge and stop

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*"We couldn't stop playing
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 when it came in... It very
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3. Released in 1989, the 35th Anniversary Les Paul Custom is based on the three-pickup single-cutaway version available from 1957 to 1961. A section of the headstock inlays reads '35th Anniversary'



4. This 40th Anniversary Les Paul Standard was brought out a year early in 1991 and boasts Les Paul Custom-style features including an ebony fretboard, gold hardware and a black finish



tailpiece that replaced the stud bridge/tailpiece in '55. Unlike the old-style Goldtop ABR-1, this guitar has the later Nashville bridge and the hardware is gold-plated, as opposed to nickel-plated like the 50s Goldtops. Also, this guitar has an ebony fretboard, whereas the regular Les Paul Models and Standards have a rosewood fretboard. Normally, it's the top-of-the-line guitars like the Les Paul Custom that feature an ebony fretboard.

"The two-tone look is really cool. We couldn't stop playing this guitar when it came in – it sounds really nice and the neck is a very comfy medium-to-slim 'C' profile. It has P-100 pickups with gold polepieces and screws. P-100s look like the original soapbar P-90 single coils but are, in fact, stacked humbuckers. Those pickups with an ebony 'board are an interesting combination; it very much has its own thing going on. There is something unique about the way it sounds. It has an interesting throaty growl to it, especially with a little gain. It sounds quite aggressive, but not in an offensive way."

Taking the anniversary guitar concept to another level entirely, in 1994 Gibson celebrated its 100th anniversary in style by releasing new commemorative acoustic and electric models every month throughout the year, including the Centennial Collection Les Paul Classic Goldtop (pic 5).

5. Gibson's 1994 Centennial Collection comprised 12 acoustic and 12 electric models in order to celebrate 100 years of Gibson (from 1894 to 1994), including this bejewelled Les Paul Classic



6. The none-more-bling 2003 Custom, Art & Historic '68 Custom 10th Anniversary is testament to the extraordinary lengths Gibson is able to go when it really wants to impress



"This guitar was made in 1994 and commemorates the 100th anniversary of Gibson," confirms Steve. "The 12th-fret ribbon inlay is labelled '100th Anniversary 1894 1994'. They did four different Les Paul models that year including a three-pickup Custom, a 'Burst, a double-cutaway Special and this Goldtop. It's got P-100 pickups. They've got a little growl to them. They made 100 of each, all individually numbered from 1894 upwards. This one is numbered 1901, so it's really early on in the run. They produced a different Centennial electric model every month throughout 1994 – so 12 models in total – each with its own corresponding serial number suffix. This model is numbered '4', hence the serial number on the rear of the headstock reads '1901 4'.

"The '1901' serial number on the stop tailpiece is jewelled sterling silver and there are little diamonds embedded in the knobs. There's also a diamond embedded in the Gibson headstock logo as the dot of the 'i', and there's a commemorative 22-karat gold-plated Orville Gibson coin on the back of the headstock. Gibson threw a lot at these models. It came with all sorts of extra bits and pieces. There's a protective bag that goes over the case, and they even produced customised rings for the person who bought it. Gibson really went the extra mile. I guess 100 years is a big one!"

Perhaps the most flamboyant guitar in the collection, however, is the Custom, Art & Historic '68 Custom 10th Anniversary model from 2003 (pic 6).

"This one was made to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Gibson Custom, Art & Historic division. And they went all out with it," Steve tells us. "It's a looker! They call the finish Diamond White Sparkle. I've never seen another Gibson with that finish. There's lots of hand-engraved gold-plated hardware. I mean, they really went to town on the aesthetic. Even the switch-tip is gold. Very bling! I believe they only made 100 of them. They're very rare. One of the features you see consistently throughout these models are the anniversary inlays and this one has '10th Anniversary' engraved in the 12th-fret block marker. Although it looks like a work of art, it's a really great-sounding guitar and the finish on the back

of the neck feels good. The pickups are '57 Classics. It has a very full sound and there's a nice percussive quality to the tone in the middle position. The neck is on the large side, but it doesn't get in the way – it's not restricting and you don't have to fight with it. I'd describe it as a 'D' profile."

In later years, the Gibson Custom Shop has produced further anniversary models of note, such as the none-more-gold 50th Anniversary 1957 Les Paul Standard, which marked the golden anniversary of the '57 Goldtop in 2007. Following suit in 2010, the Custom Shop released three versions of a 50th Anniversary 1960 Les Paul Standard model in limited runs of 500, each sporting different 'Burst finishes and neck profiles. The version pictured opposite features a Cherry Burst finish and has the slimmest neck profile of the set. While last year saw the Custom Shop produce similar guitars in the form of the 60th Anniversary 1960 Les Paul Standards, next year marks the 70th anniversary of the original Les Paul Model – the one that started it all. How Gibson will decide to commemorate this momentous occasion is anyone's guess, although we have a feeling platinum may come into it. Better start saving! 

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*Next year marks
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Guitarist would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for supplying these guitars www.vintageandrareguitars.com

The 2010 Custom Shop
50th Anniversary 1960
Les Paul Standard came
in three versions. Catering
to popular tastes, these
later anniversary Les
Pauls are more along the
lines of a reissue guitar



Studio Returns

It's the second return to the PRS Core line for the Studio. So, what's new and what's changed since it was last introduced 10 years ago?

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin





PRs STUDIO FROM £3,885

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

What You Need To Know

1 We've seen this before, correct?
Indeed. The Studio first appeared way back in 1988 as an all-mahogany Standard but with a humbucker at the bridge and two conventional single coils – the first production PRs guitar to feature true single coils. A maple-top version was added the following year, but the model left the line in 1990 (although the Studio's pickup configuration was offered as an option until 1996).

2 Wasn't there a later version?
Yes, in 2011 it reappeared sporting the then new 57/08 full-size humbucker in the bridge position and two 57/08 Narrowfield humbuckers – the original version of the two narrow aperture pickups we see today.

3 Seems like lot of guitar, but it's a heck of a lot of money...
The base price is £3,885 (no doubt less in-store), which means it's risen £886 in the past 10 years, around a 29.5 per cent increase. We do get fewer options, though, just the 10-grade maple top that comes with hybrid hardware (and adds £615), neither of which are going to affect what you hear and feel. Back in 2011 we had a choice of vibrato or Stoptail, Pattern or Pattern Thin neck profiles, flame or quilted maple top, 10-Top flame or quilted maple top, gold hardware and special-order finishes.

There's little doubt that Paul Reed Smith has got considerable mileage from a guitar he designed back in the early 80s. Having a quick tot-up of the flagship Core USA model range for 2021, there are 17 guitars, 14 of which use this shape, one earlier design (the Santana Retro) and two later Singlecuts. Surely, this reliance on one outline has to be unique in the history of the instrument, doesn't it?

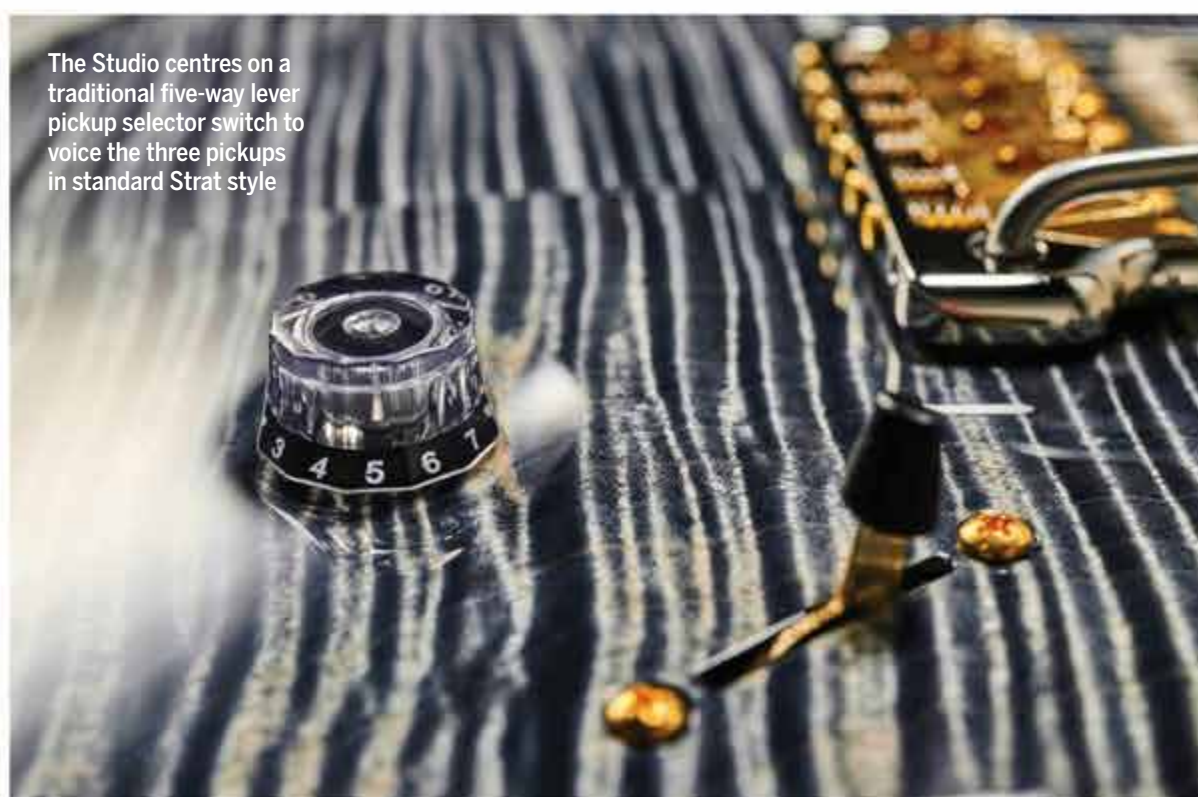
This design polarity is often cited by those who don't 'get' PRs: 'They're all the same!' The thing is, they're not. The differences lie in a host of features, even though that outline remains constant and has done over 36 years of production guitar making. Yet many invisible changes – often unannounced – continually push PRs forwards. Is there a better way, a better

sound? Few open-minded players would say "the old ones are better" and PRs can't be accused of sitting on its well-earned laurels. In fact, it's not always easy to keep up.

As we say in our intro, the Studio isn't new to the PRs range, although our new-for-2021 example references the previous 2011 model in that we have a pair of the unique Narrowfield narrow aperture humbuckers instead of the dual single coils of the original 80s guitar.

So, the 2011 and the 2021 versions share plenty. Both are based around the original 635mm (25-inch) scale length that PRs has used since 1985. Both are 22-fret guitars, not 24 like that initial late-80s Studio, and use the 'Pattern' neck profile, originally the Wide-Fat (the 2011 model had the option of a Pattern Thin neck, aka the Wide-

The Studio centres on a traditional five-way lever pickup selector switch to voice the three pickups in standard Strat style





The Narrowfields here have their own voice and it's one that's worth getting to know

1. East Indian Rosewood is used for the headstock facing, while the brand logo is inlaid with vintage ivory acrylic
2. The gold/nickel 'hybrid' hardware and the 10-top grade maple top are the only options on this model
3. The very standard PRS circuit of the new Studio. Note the large resistor on the pull-switch

Thin, something we don't get today). The body thickness is slightly deeper than the Custom, McCarty-style, at 52mm. But that's about it. Virtually every other detail has been tweaked: both the locking tuners and vibrato are now in their Gen III progression; the bird inlays use different materials; the finish, as with all the current Core models, is now 'NOC', which stands for nitro sprayed over what is effectively a cellulose/acrylic basecoat; and, most profoundly, we now have different pickups. This model is loaded with a 58/15 LT at the bridge (LT standing for 'low turn' – the bridge pickup is the same in terms of output as a 58/15 neck pickup, instead of typically being slightly hotter) and slightly reworked Narrowfield small aperture humbuckers. So, as we say, while outwardly things look the same, so many of the details have been improved.

As ever, the detailed construction is faultless. PRS set the bar high back in 1985 and has continued to raise it. But rarely has it been style over substance, not where the Core USA range guitars are concerned anyway. We probably take for granted the ergonomics of that shape: always the right weight, beautifully balanced played seated or strapped on. Then there's the Pattern neck shape (which was never particularly wide nor fat), the 'halfway' scale length and the fingerboard radius that sits between the original Fender and Gibson curves. PRS was probably the first to pre-wear its guitars with a subtle rounding of the fingerboard edge, something that's now common across the industry. You don't necessarily notice these small details, but they're all a part of making the guitar disappear in your hands.



UNDER THE HOOD

What trickery lies inside the Studio? Very little...

You might think that a guitar called a Studio would be crammed with switches and knobs to create a wide palette of sounds. But no, this is a very simple setup and a regular PRS: a 500k volume pot with 181J (180 picofarads) treble bleed capacitor wired modern-style with the 500k tone control that uses a .033 microfarads capacitor. Only one side of the tone control's pull switch is used, which takes the coil junction of the bridge humbucker to ground via a 2.2kohms

resistor, a partial split as opposed to just dumping one full coil, and it voices primarily the neck-facing coil. As ever, there's no shielding in the cavity.

PRS doesn't like to spill too many beans about its pickup designs, but the 'low turns' suffix of the 58/15 LT humbucker is backed up by a measured DCR of 7.41kohms, which drops to 5.07k when split. Both Narrowfield designs have the same readings of 6.88k – and for once these DCRs do reflect the outputs we hear.



THE RIVALS

Before you look elsewhere, PRS itself provides plenty of rivals. The new PRS Fiore (£2,599), Mark Lettieri's new signature model, looks and sounds more like a classic HSS Superstrat with its swamp ash body, 22-fret maple neck and a two-post vibrato with special pickups and tricky wiring. Yup, a hot-rod!

The new Narrowfield mini-humbucker is also used on the Special Semi Hollow (from £4,055) paired with a pair of 58/15 LTs. It uses the 24-08-style pickup switching via two mini-toggle switches providing nine sounds in total.

PRS is not just about offering humbucker and single coils; the piezo-loaded guitars have long been part of the range. The Core Custom 24 Piezo (from £4,195) and the Hollowbody II Piezo (from £4,939) are stellar examples. On a tighter budget, the Chinese-made SE Hollowbody II Piezo (£1,349) uses 58/15 'S' humbuckers and a new piezo system designed with LR Baggs.

Of course, that headstock – now a real classic, like the body shape – does hint back to its 80s origins, but the near-straight string pull over the nut to the tuners is one reason PRS guitars stay in tune while us Les Paul owners can still struggle. But function is only one part of this equation. Plating is removed on any parts of the guitar that may affect or dissipate the strings' vibrations, along with any plastic washers and the like. Squeezing every last drop of energy is central to the design, and while the construction, the neck's stiffness, the wood drying and so on had all been sorted by the early 90s, the fact that PRS – primarily driven by Paul himself – is still finding ways to improve, to maximise that string energy, is quite frankly remarkable. Off-the-shelf is no longer good enough: virtually every part here is proprietary.

Feel & Sounds

The Pattern neck profile here combines sensible depth (22.2mm at the 1st fret filling out to 24.5mm by the 12th) with slightly tapered shoulders in lower positions and is certainly one of our favourite neck shapes. The setup is perfectly dialled in, as it should be, and the vibrato needs no introduction. It's all very stable tuning-wise and perfectly intonated with a beautiful ring and resonance to its unplugged voice.

Like a Strat, we find ourselves listening to the neck pickup first, and while the Narrowfield might have been tweaked for this year we still hear a voice that very much blurs the lines between humbucker and



single coil. To our ears, it certainly doesn't approach the crisp attack of a Fender single coil – the sound is deeper, rounded with soft-toned clarity. Pull the volume back and it's a little more 'single coil', but it sounds expensive and really chameleon-like. The middle Narrowfield has more bite, as you'd expect, but those parallel mixes – the misnamed 'out-of-phase' sounds – are really stellar here, unmistakable Fender-like funk and bounce yet with this beautiful depth. Again, pulling the volume back we're hearing more single-coil-like tonality.

The full-coil 58/15 LT bridge pickup in this environment is certainly in the PAF style. When split, it is thinner, but it's no

4. These 2021 Narrowfield mini-humbuckers look like the originals but have been subtly revoiced via PRS's TCI process

5. Under the black finish of the back PRS uses African mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*) for the body and genuine mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) for the neck – both one-piece – as the company does on virtually all of its Core models



As distinctive as the figured 'curly' maple top, PRS's bird inlays use various materials. Here, they're inlaid with vintage ivory acrylic outlines and green standard abalone centres

wig-lifter, typically a partial split leaving some of the usually fully dumped coil in circuit. This writer would happily suggest that it could be the default voice – and if you want a tad more power then you pull the switch up. It's a superb clean Peter Green-y voice and hugely expressive. It mixes very well with the middle, in both full and split modes, and keeps things clear with crunch and gain but with no sharpness to the attack.

Hey, it's not a cheap guitar and you'd expect a wide dynamic range – which you get in spades. As ever, use the well-tapered volume and tone. Can you get a bad sound of this guitar? Well, we tried... But it is worth pointing out it's not that hot-rod Superstrat style of a beefy bridge humbucker mixed with a pair of Fender-like single coils. No, the Narrowfields here definitely have their own voice and it's one that's worth getting to know.

Verdict

As we discuss, PRS's current USA range is about providing choice. If you want an old-school HSS guitar, the new Fiore would be our first suggestion. This Studio, frankly, sounds more grown up: the neck pickup has a softer, richer voice than a Strat, the middle adding a little edge, while both

The small details are all a part of making the guitar disappear in your hands

mixes are perhaps the most Strat-y voices here yet, with a depth that you'd struggle to find from a Fender-style bolt-on. The bridge pickup is exceptional, both split and in full coil modes, respectively dipping below and above the Narrowfields in output. It sounds to us less about copping the sound of a 60s Strat with a hot PAF at the bridge, and more about offering a broad spectrum of fully hum-cancelling voices that sound classy and sophisticated played clean and really quite huge but defined with some crunch and gain.

Factor in the feel, the neck shape and the ergonomics and it's like the best vintage guitar you've never owned, certainly not at this price anyway. PRS's S2 models are good. SEs, at the price, are exceptional. But these Cores just rip it up. The last ones we've reviewed – Paul's Guitar, the 2020 McCarty and now this Studio – are all stellar pieces: vintage-informed, exceptional guitars that really do make you consider the guitars you own. **G**



PRS STUDIO 2021

PRICE: From £3,885 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: 1-piece mahogany back with carved flamed maple top

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, Pattern profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic friction reducing/43.25mm

FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, bird inlays (green abalone centre/vintage ivory outline), 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: PRS Gen III vibrato, PRS Phase III locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: PRS 58/15 LT full-size humbucker at bridge; PRS Narrowfield humbucker at neck and middle positions. 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and master tone (with pull-push switch to split the bridge humbucker)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.62/7.96

OPTIONS: The base price of the Studio is £3,885. The only option is the 10-Top w/ hybrid hardware (as reviewed), which adds £615

RANGE OPTIONS: See Rivals. The Custom 24-08 (£3,799) offers simple humbucker/true single-coil switching

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Faded Whale Blue (as reviewed), one of 20 standard finishes available – all gloss 'NOC' (nitro over cellulose)



PROS Design, build, proprietary hardware and pickups all elevate this way above the standard; fully hum-cancelling performance

CONS It's not cheap; minimal options aside from colour; no lefties; not everyone gets the flame 'n' birds aesthetic



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Choices, Choices

It might centre on that one classic outline, but PRS's Core range is full of options, particularly when it comes to pickups. We ask Paul Reed Smith for some advice

Words Dave Burrluck

Back in 1988 when PRS originally introduced the Studio, the company had been in the business of making production guitars for less than three years. But if the new brand was beginning to make waves, it was also starting to illustrate a theme that has underpinned over 35 years of guitar building: choice. Even back then, PRS recognised the desire for something different, second-guessing the market and providing a different sound.

The Studio was the first PRS guitar with three pickups – a Hot Vintage humbucker at the bridge and two regular single coils – and it was an attempt to entice the LA studio musicians into the PRS fraternity in the same way that the Special, with its back-routed vibrato cavity, was designed to attract the whammy brigade when it launched that same year. Although you could order a PRS with that same three-

pickup Studio package until the mid-90s, the model itself lasted barely two years.

The majority of PRS guitars, from the first Custom, include both humbucking and single-coil sounds, but despite many proprietary attempts PRS didn't nail the single coil until the John Mayer Silver Sky. You could argue that a couple of those JM635 single coils would be truer to the original Studio design. But, no – today's Studio came about, Paul Reed Smith tells us, "because we'd got the Narrowfields to sound different in a really good way".

Paul continues: "Look, here's the problem. These guys like Jimmy Herring [who uses an original Narrowfield-loaded NF3] play really, really loud. They need really big, fat, powerful-sounding stuff that's clear sounding. The idea that you can make a humbucker that's got the character of a single coil is fascinating to us, so the Studio

is really an alternative to a Custom – but in a good way, right? If you were PRS and you'd got those Narrowfields sounding like that, would you start making the Studio again?" We reply in the affirmative. "So, why are you asking me?" laughs Paul.

A Pickup Of Its Own

Chatting to Paul back in 2009 on the eve of the company's 25th anniversary and the launch of numerous Narrowfield-equipped models (originally it was the 57/08 Narrow Field), the new pickup seemed a little unusual, especially visually: a mini-humbucker without a cover and stepped bobbins with flush poles that allow it to match the camber of the strings. But that difference – the fact that it was a proprietary model rather than using the benchmark Fender single coil and Gibson humbucker – was a prime driver of the design.

"[The Narrowfield pickup] is somewhere between a P-90 and a Strat, and it's very full sounding"

"Can I tell you what that's about?" he asked, pointing at the various parts of the guitar he was holding. "This is a PRS guitar with Gibson parts on it. That's a Gibson part," he said, pointing to the control knobs, "and those are Gibson tuning pegs. It's driving me nuts. Fender didn't have Gibson parts on their guitars, and Gibson didn't have Fender parts on theirs. Gretsch didn't have Fender or Gibson parts... It's true these have become generic parts," he said, pointing this time at the pickup bobbins, "but I want out. I have the Narrow Field pickup, I have a Medium Field pickup coming. I want our own pickups. I want never again to be doing this.

"I haven't heard the Medium Fields yet," he told us. "But I want to put them all on the Customs. It'll be halfway between the Narrow Fields and the Standard humbucker... maybe I need to make Narrow Fields, Medium Fields and Wide Fields, that would be cool, but I think that the Narrow Fields look wonderful."



PRS's Swamp Ash Special with its trio of Narrowfields flanked by the 305, both in their 25th Anniversary guise



The 2011 Studio came with numerous options such as the wrapover Stoptail bridge



New design pickup rings, square-edged pickup bobbins and 'lampshade' knobs – all part of PRS's proprietary design



Dual mini-switches on a Core Paul's Guitar: Paul used a similar array on the early 80s guitars he made for Carlos Santana

Back to today and we never got to see those Medium Field pickups, although the concept is pretty close to the slightly narrower aperture units used on the 408 and Paul's Guitar. The 2021 Narrowfields, meanwhile, benefit from PRS's relatively new TCI (Tuned Capacitance and Inductance) process.

"So, what's new? Obviously, the bobbins haven't changed or the studs, but we've learned that pickups are whistles," he reminds us. "It's what note they whistle at – they're resonating at a note. Just like if you play a Strat you can hear that whistle in every note you play. It's like a port is a whistle for a bass note in a speaker cabinet. So, [on the new Narrowfields] we've changed the whistle note: it's higher in pitch. We liked the original Narrowfields a lot, the old ones sound beautiful, but we've raised the note to a musical note that's higher in pitch. It's just like on a Neve console as you click through the different frequencies; you're changing the whistle note of the EQ. We can do that on pickups now. It's an inductive coil, exactly like what is in a Neve console – it's a resistor, capacitor and inductor, an RC network."

"[The Narrowfield pickup] is somewhere between a P-90 and a Strat, and it's very full sounding because it's a humbucker. The whistle note is dead in the middle between a P-90 and a Strat single coil."

The current Core line-up centres on the 58/15 humbuckers, along with the LT, MT and LT+ versions, the more modern-sounding 85/15 'buckers, the TCI pickups of Paul's Guitar, and the 509 single coils, not to mention the different pickup arrays on the John Mayer Silver Sky and Mark Lettieri's new Fiore. Still, there are also some different approaches to switching the humbuckers to either partial or true single-coil modes, with the overall pickup selection falling to either a five-way lever or three-way toggle. Did you find your fit? There's plenty of choice.

Controlling The Changes

"We offer what many others don't," Paul agrees, before admitting that, as a very active player himself: "Personally, I like simple guitars. On my own Paul's Guitar, the one I have it doesn't have the [two mini-toggle humbucker/single coil] switches, but it sounds gorgeous. I'm so happy with it. All these options are cool and I think they work, but *nothing* replaces a good guitar part when you're in the studio. I don't care how many switches you've got!"

Paul Reed Smith remains brutally honest – and is a total gear obsessive, just like the rest of us. He agrees that it can be an expensive pastime: "I have a Dragon that I just got that has the Paul's Guitar pickups in it. I plugged it in downstairs when I was checking Private Stocks and it did something that I've never

experienced a guitar do before. I bought that guitar as fast as I could possibly buy it. I didn't *want* a Dragon. I mean, they're beautiful, but I didn't expect that one to be the best electric guitar I'd ever plugged in. So I bought it. I'm just as susceptible as you are."

It probably helps, then, that the demand for guitars has risen across price ranges during the pandemic. PRS entered these troubled times with a healthy back order, which has only got healthier. To avoid a long wait for buyers, production has increased.

"We're now making a 100 guitars a day and we're going to end up at 140 a day," says Paul. "Either the market wants more guitars than you have or they want less guitars than you have – so everyone's mad at us all the time. Right now, we're in the place that we're not making enough. One of the [side effects] of the pandemic is that people bought guitars to make them[selves] feel better."

But, still, aren't their too many choices? "Yes, but we're PRS, we're offering other choices. Mark Lettieri has a big impact on the market – he's really, really respected, and the Fiore is the guitar *he* wanted, so we built it. John Mayer, huge impact on the market – the Silver Sky is what he wanted, so we built it. The Super Eagle was what he needed for Dead & Co, so we made it. These are tools to do a job. You're right, there are too many choices, but if you get your hands on one you love, buy it!" 



Little Mix

It's the age of the smaller-bodied acoustic – but being petite doesn't mean you won't stand out in a crowd, as these two new 12-fretters from the Lowden workshops set out to prove

Words David Mead
Photography Olly Curtis



LOWDEN WL-25 & S-23 12-FRETS BOTH £3,475

CONTACT **Lowden Guitars** PHONE **02844 619161** WEB www.lowdenguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 So, 14 and 12 frets to the body. Not much of a difference, surely?
On the contrary. The principal difference is that the bridge is in a different position on a 12-fretter in that it's situated at the widest point of the soundboard. George Lowden explains more in the review, but in a nutshell it results in a subtle shift in tonal response, making a 12-fretter a slightly different animal altogether.

2 Isn't access to the upper fretboard going to feel a little limited?
Well, classical and flamenco guitars traditionally have a 12th-fret neck join and that doesn't seem to have placed much of a restriction on the vast repertoire of music in that genre. If you spend a great deal of time above the 12th fret, try before you buy or go for a guitar with a 14th-fret join.

3 Are the guitars here available in different wood combos?
Indeed. Lowden guitars are, in the main, built to customer orders, so you have a vast amount of choice when you begin to map out your ideal instrument. We've given a few examples of different wood combos in the spec at the end of the review.

You're probably tired of us telling you that small is the new large as far as acoustic guitars are concerned. In recent months we've seen a few tiny tots pass through these pages and have been consistently in awe of how much sound it's possible to get from a smaller frame. And if you add a 12-frets-to-the-body configuration into the equation, things can become even more compact. Where's it all going to end, we wonder?

These two models from Lowden are the latest to receive the 12-fret treatment, a WL – that is, 'Wee Lowden' – and an S

model, the next range up from the Wee in terms of body size. Whereas the difference between these models and the more regular 14-fretters is immediately apparent to the eye, things actually go a lot deeper than that when it comes to construction. It's not just a case of moving everything along a bit so that the neck joins the body a little earlier. If only things were that simple.

When we spoke to George Lowden last year and drifted onto the subject of 12-fret guitar construction, he told us this: "When you join the neck at the 12th fret, it moves the bridge more or less into the centre of





the bottom bout. Of course, acoustically, that's a good thing." He went on to explain that on a 12-fret design the bridge sits at the widest part of the guitar's soundboard so that the top is responding far more to vibration transmitted through the bridge from the strings. But, talking about what has to change inside the guitar, he added, "there are a lot of changes that have to take place there. The bridge position has changed in relation to the soundbox so you have to change the bracing and then we have to experiment with the position of the braces,

Think of a very well behaved parlour guitar and you're in the right aural space with the WL-25

as well as the way they're carved. The first one of those that I designed about three years ago, I actually designed two different bracing systems for the same guitar and we made prototypes up using both systems and then made a judgement call on which we considered to be the best. That process is incredibly interesting to me, because when you play the new guitar – whether it be with a new wood or a new position for the bridge or new voicing or the bracing being

changed – you will get a difference in tone and it's often very subtle. For me, as a guitar maker, I'm not only relying on my own ears but I'm relying on the players' ears as well and asking them for their viewpoints."

We're told that the bracing configuration that resides within our two review models here has been dubbed 'Dolphin Bracing', but you can see what we mean when we say that converting a 14-fretter to a 12 is a job that has to be thoroughly thought through.

Feel & Sounds

Looking at the WL-25 to begin with, we have to declare a soft spot for the Lowden Wee range. Size-wise, it has the appearance of a classical guitar but comes in a tad more slender when compared to our Admira Elena nylon-string. The WL measures 335mm at its widest point, whereas the

1. Red cedar is the choice for the top wood on both of our review models, but there are plenty of other options available

2. Necks are mahogany spliced with rosewood strips, crowned by a set of Gotoh 381 tuners

3. The WL-25's back and sides are made from East Indian rosewood with contrasting mahogany bindings top and bottom

4. As we've found in the past with Lowden acoustics, craftsmanship and quality are supreme



5

5. Both models have headstocks decorated with rosewood faceplates

6. A close-up look at the S-23's mahogany neck with rosewood splices

Admira sits at 375mm at the same spot. It's very cute-looking; let's leave it at that.

From a construction point of view, the WL has a cedar top with rosewood back and sides and mahogany bindings, but if this particular wood combo doesn't float your boat, Lowden will accommodate practically anything you can imagine on demand. The neck is mahogany with rosewood strips and the fingerboard is ebony, and, as we've seen so many times in the past when confronted with an instrument from Lowden, the workmanship is second to none.

The overall matt finish gives the guitar a sort of 'worn in' feel under the fingers and we found ourselves settling in with it from the offset. The body might be wee but the neck is fully grown with a satisfying full C profile, and its 45mm nut width acts as an open invitation for some deft fingerstyle activity. It's true to say that a diminutive body size matched with a fully realised neck means a little neck heaviness, but this is inevitable and almost completely unnoticeable after a very short period of playing. Standing up on a strap you wouldn't even think about it.

How does it sound? Well, the trebles are loud and proud, with a level of volume and sustain that completely contradicts the size of the body. Basses are understandably not quite as full and rich – you can't argue with science, after all – but what's there is packed with a surprising amount of tone. And, once again, single notes and chords ring on for days. Playing the WL-25 is a great experience and we found ourselves opting for quasi Renaissance fingerstyle before we even noticed. Think of a very well behaved parlour guitar and you're in the right aural space.

Moving over to the WL's companion and the S-23 shares many of the WL's construction details, save that its back and sides are walnut, which – legend has it – has a tonal fingerprint that sits between the dark complexity of rosewood and the



6



7. Bindings on the S-23 are made from sycamore

8. Walnut is the choice of timber for the S-23's back and sides, offering a tone that sits between the complexity of rosewood and the trebly zing of maple

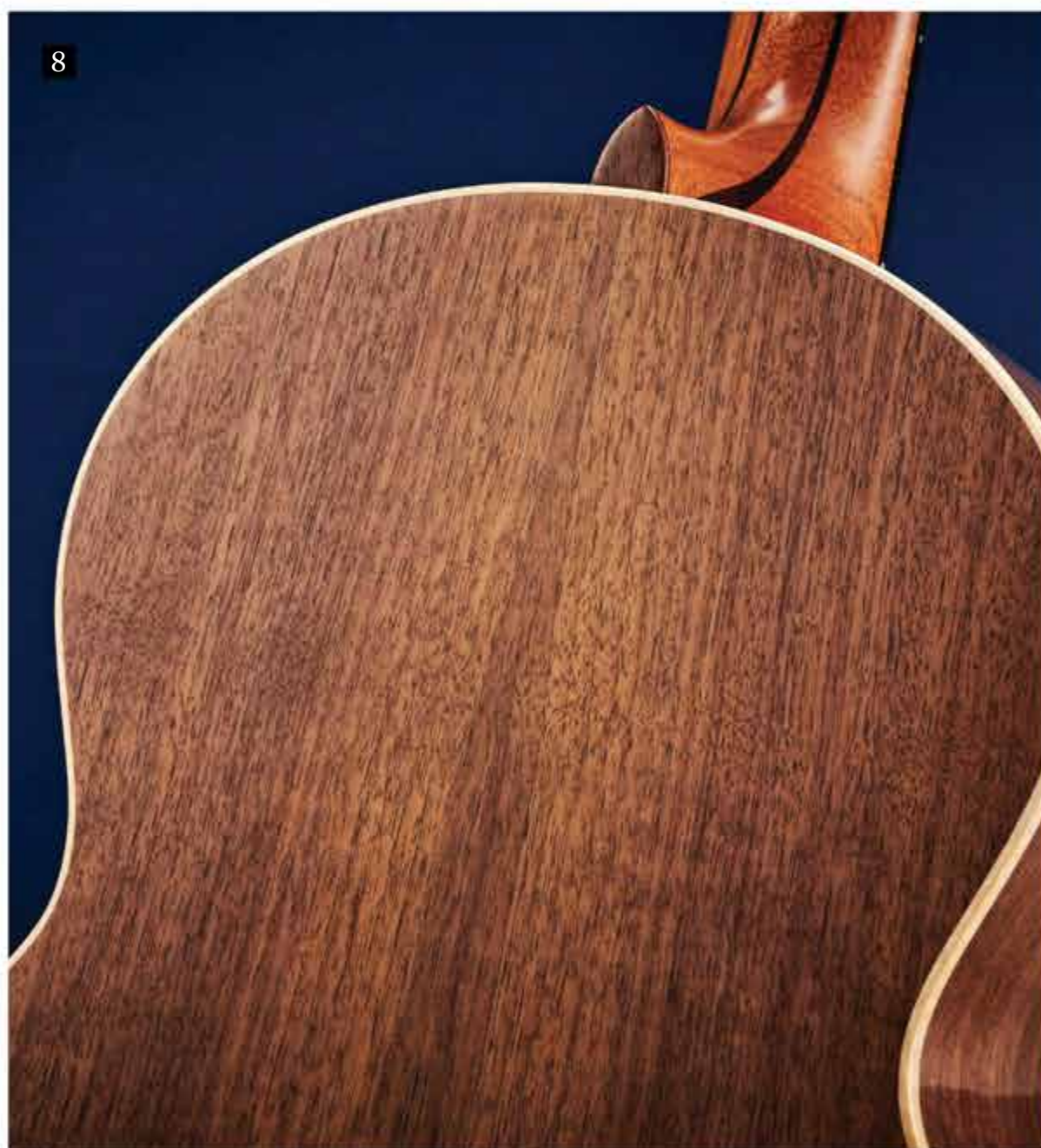
bright zing of maple. Instruments featuring walnut have inspired us in the past in these pages and so it came as no surprise to find that the S-23 sings with a beautifully bright, airy voice. Sustain is practically infinite, too, with bass notes ringing on underneath our melodic noodlings, and drop tuning the bass string to D took us to a modal wonderland.

Maybe it's the combination of walnut with the red cedar working their magic together, or that extra few mill on the width of the soundbox, but this guitar has really

The S-23 sings with a beautifully bright, airy voice.... this guitar has really hit the sweet spot in our vicinity

hit the sweet spot in our vicinity. So much so, we didn't want to put it down.

There are no pickups installed on either of our review models, but Lowden will happily fit one when you order your instrument. We can only imagine what both these littl'uns would sound like through a good acoustic amp or a PA. As we've been finding recently, body size is definitely not a determining factor once you enter the domain of amplification.





Verdict

You want us to name a champion, don't you? Well, this sort of thing is very subjective and if we can allow ourselves the luxury of favouring one instrument over the other for just a moment then the S-23 would take the laurels. But remember that it's only because it holds the tonal key that unlocks our own specific desires in terms of what we want from an acoustic. Others may prefer the more parlour-like tonal range of the WL. It's horses for courses, and the advantage of being able to order exactly what you want from Lowden's stable of body sizes and wood combos really hits the mark.

Now that body size isn't necessarily proportionate to volume and tonal output, the world really is your oyster in terms of what your particular needs are. If you feel that a dreadnought has all the road handling capabilities of a monster truck and need something more manageable then there's never been a better time to state your case with a custom order – and the team at Lowden should be one of the first places to direct your gaze. 

9. Frets are seated in ebony fretboards on both guitars
10. The split bone saddle and top-loading rosewood bridge are well known characteristics of Lowden's acoustic range



LOWDEN WL-25
12-FRET

PRICE: £3,475 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: Small body 'Wee Lowden'
TOP: Red cedar
BACK/SIDES: East Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 100mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 335mm
NECK: Mahogany with rosewood splices
SCALE LENGTH: 610mm (24")
TUNERS: Gotoh 381
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 18
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood w/ bone saddle/56mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6/3.5
OPTIONS: Various pickups/minor build variations are available when ordering. See website for details
RANGE OPTIONS: The 12-fret WL body size comes in a variety of body wood combos across the Lowden range from the WL-22 red cedar/mahogany (£3,365) and red cedar/walnut (£3,475) up to the WL-35 Adirondack/Cocobolo (£5,975)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Matte Natural

8/10

PROS Small-bodied, tonally satisfying instrument with bags of charm and sophistication

CONS After more boom in your bass? Look further up the range



LOWDEN S-23
12-FRET

PRICE: £3,475 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: S-type acoustic
TOP: Red cedar
BACK/SIDES: Walnut with sycamore bindings
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 374mm
NECK: Mahogany with rosewood splices
SCALE LENGTH: 630mm (24.8")
TUNERS: Gotoh 381
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 18
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood w/ bone saddles/55.6mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.7/3.74
OPTIONS: Various pickups/minor build variations are available when ordering. See website for details
RANGE OPTIONS: The 12-fret S body size comes in a variety of body wood combos across the Lowden S range from the S-22 red cedar/mahogany (£3,365) and S-25 red cedar/Indian rosewood (£3,475) up to the S-35 Adirondack/Cocobolo (£5,975)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Matt Natural



9/10

PROS Petite good looks combined with an excellent airy voice and tone in spades

CONS We've really nothing much to say here...

Small Wonders

A round-up of acoustic 12-fretters to suit every budget



CORT AP550-M £129

With an all-mahogany body and neck, this parlour-sized acoustic features a laurel or merbau fretboard, X-bracing and an open pore finish. Fancy touches include the slotted headstock, vintage-classic machineheads and a “surprisingly loud volume for a guitar of its compact size”. With a cool vibe hailing from guitar’s golden age, you have to admit, it’s a bit of a looker, too!
www.cortguitars.com



FENDER PM-2 £619

When we reviewed Fender’s PM-2 all-mahogany parlour acoustic back in issue 422 we found “a bigger and bolder voice than you might expect from a parlour-style guitar”. As part of Fender’s celebrated Paramount Series, it’s inspired by the company’s ’60s acoustics, with a narrower headstock and distinctive chequerboard purfling.
www.fender.com



FAITH FECM-BNC £925

Faith acoustics have always received encouraging reviews in these pages and its FECM-BNC – Eclipse Mercury Electro Scoop enters the short-scale parlour-style race with style. A solid Engelmann spruce top is partnered with solid mahogany back and sides, a mahogany neck, and a Fishman INK3 pickup. You gotta have Faith.
www.faithguitars.com



AUDEN ARTIST ROSEWOOD EMILY ROSE £1,499

Auden says of its parlour model: “The slightly deeper body allows the guitar to resonate with a volume and presence not usually heard in guitars of this size.” With a AAA grade cedar top, rosewood back and sides and an ebony fingerboard, coupled with the revolutionary Brad Clark Supernatural pickup system, you’re good to go.
www.audenguitars.com



TAYLOR 322CE 12-FRET £2,300

According to Taylor, you can expect “a strong voice with a pleasing midrange focus and a splash of top-end shimmer” from its V-Class-braced smaller body acoustic. At only 381mm (15 inches) wide, this Grand Concert cutaway acoustic has a mahogany top with Tasmanian blackwood for the back and sides, and comes fitted with an ES2 pickup.
www.taylorguitars.com



MARTIN 00-17 AUTHENTIC 1931 APPROX. \$4,799

If your tastes and purse extend to the exotic then Martin is bound to satisfy your every 12-fret whim. This all-mahogany model comes with a VTS (Vintage Tone System) top, plus a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard in a smaller-body 000 instrument that pays tribute to the company’s celebrated pre-war designs with bags of mojo to spare.
www.martinguitar.com

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HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

Zenith Amplitude Controller

A classy tone-conditioning workhorse from the Brit boutique amp maker

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

Hamstead knows a thing or two about creating tone and its new pedal, the Zenith Amplitude Controller, is all about getting the best tone out of your own equipment by offering EQ, boost and compression in one place. The signal path is all analogue, but three selectable routing options and some clever digital switching technology give you plenty of options for using the EQ and compression separately or combined.

SOUNDS

The three EQ knobs each offer 15dB of cut or boost with some selectable options on how the Middle operates: you can have centre frequencies of 500Hz, 800Hz or 1.2 kHz, and wide, medium and narrow Q (bandwidth). This is quality musical tone-

tweaking, with the Bass knob rolling off unwanted weight or adding girth without sounding flabby, the Treble knob adjusting the natural airy top-end, and the Middle knob offering targeted tweaks such as a Tube Screamer-ish mid hump or a Fender black-panel-style mid scoop. The output Level knob can add up to 20dB of boost to solidly hit your amp's front-end.

Compression is controlled by a single knob and has a very fast attack and medium/long release. The very natural, smooth compression will even things out and add sustain with a pleasing note bloom at higher settings. While it can affect note attack (although not the more extreme envelope change at the start of a note like, say, a Dynacomp), you can put some of that back by rolling the Blend knob back

from 100 per cent wet and bringing in a proportion of your dry sound.

You can choose to set the serial order of EQ and compression or run them in parallel. If your guitar hits the compressor first it will react to the full frequency of your playing dynamics, but putting the EQ first lets the compressor react to the EQ'd sound. This gives you the opportunity to tailor its operation, so you can set it not to overreact to low-end frequencies, for example. In Parallel mode the signal is split, so both get it equally, giving you the chance to mix two different versions of your original tone – one compressed and one with a different EQ profile layered together to create a composite sound.

Hamstead has built what it calls 'secret switching' into the pedal. As standard,

01. FRONT-PANEL TOGGLE SWITCHES

These set up how the Middle tone control operates: one for Q, one for frequency

02. FOOTSWITCH

The GigRig OptoKick footswitch offers silent optical switching and is also used to scroll through the modes (indicated by the state of the LED)

03. BLEND KNOB

This mixes between totally dry sound and 100 per cent compressed sound

04. LEVEL KNOB

This sets the pedal's master output level and can supply up to 20dB of boost if required

05. BASS, MIDDLE & TREBLE KNOBS

These adjust the EQ – each has a notched centre detent position and offers 15dB of cut or boost

06. REAR-PANEL SWITCH

Choose whether compression or EQ comes first in the chain or run them in parallel



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Boost, EQ and compressor pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, OptoKick footswitch

CONTROLS: Comp, Blend, Level, Bass, Middle, Treble, Q switch, Frequency switch, Circuit Order switch, internal trim pot for Compressor Master Level, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard Control input

POWER: 9V-18V DC adaptor (not supplied) 280mA at 9V

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 130 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

the Zenith operates like any pedal with the footswitch bypassing the whole effects (EQ and comp). However, you can hold the footswitch down for a couple of seconds and then use it to scroll through all the modes. Flip/Flop mode uses the footswitch to alternate between EQ and comp, which is useful if you're using the pedal with a separate switcher for bypass – the pedal's footswitch then becomes the effect selector. There's EQ Always On and the previously mentioned Comp Always On modes, with the footswitch bringing in the other effect. This is great if you want one of the effects as an always-on tonal component and then to bring the other in when needed. We liked this when running the effects in parallel, keeping a touch of compression permanently on

and switching an EQ-enhanced boost in when needed. In Comp Always On mode the Level knob is inactive until the EQ is switched in, so you can set it where you want for the amount of extra kick needed. Finally, there's Cycle where subsequent presses go from bypass to comp on to EQ on to both on. Independent switching of the EQ and comp circuits is also possible via external footswitch.

It's one of those pedals that just gives you more: playing through it with some mild compression, a little treble lift and a few decibels of boost delivers a real enhanced quality that is immediately missed when bypassed. But that's just one of a range of practical functions it is capable of in front of a decent amp. It can also be put to use in an amp's effects loop where,

with careful adjustment, you can use it to attenuate volume to keep levels low while still retaining the sound and feel of your cooking amp.

VERDICT

Fully versatile as an always-on tonal building block, a switched-in variation, or a combination of both (in comp-only or EQ-only mode), the Zenith could be the perfect complement to your guitar and amp, offering practical options to enhance your core sound. **G**

PROS Solid build quality; compact size; natural-sounding EQ with midrange options; smooth compression; substantial boost; OptoKick footswitch

CONS Nothing we can think of

ROUND-UP

Echoline pedals

Homegrown, hand-built effects in new, more compact enclosures

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

Based in Surrey, UK pedal maker Echoline was established in 2008 and has a roster of pedals that are handmade, one at a time, using traditional techniques. The pedals feature a mix of carefully chosen NOS (new old stock) and quality modern parts such as Neutrik jacks, Alpha pots and heavy duty footswitches. Echoline has recently redesigned its entire range – currently five pedals, including a booster, high-gain silicon fuzz, distortion and two overdrives – and moved from larger enclosures to version 2.0

pedals. These are built into a metal body with the same footprint as a Boss compact but with a four-screw base, similar to MXR pedals. The distinctive-looking pedals feature a thin black metal faceplate fixed on top, hosting the extremely neat laser-etched legending. None of the pedals offer battery power – all run from a nine-volt supply and have a Class A line driver built in. This shows your pickups the same impedance as plugging straight into an amp, the idea being to preserve signal strength, tone and dynamics.



Germanium Distortion V2.0 £129

The Germanium in the pedal’s name comes from the fact that Echoline is using a pair of NOS 70s military-spec germanium diodes as a crucial element in its circuitry, which utilises four gain stages. A fairly standard distortion pedal triumvirate of Volume, Gain and Tone knobs controls the action, which starts with a gritty drive at the minimum setting of the Gain knob. It’s a nice bright sound at the fully clockwise setting of the Tone knob, all fully usable with no spiky nastiness, but there’s a thoughtful range of hi-cut as you roll it back to best suit your tonal needs. Turning up the gain increases the raunch factor into cranked Brit stack territory; it’s a detailed sound, loaded with harmonics, that responds really well under your fingertips and cleans up nicely as you roll the guitar volume knob down. This is a great pedal to kick in for solos, well capable of some Gilmour-esque liquid lead tones. **G**

VERDICT Boutique-quality but reasonably priced pedal for a range of dynamically responsive drive and distortion tones



Roadrunner V2.0 £129

Designed mainly for low-gain drive and boost functions, this pedal features a toggle-switched choice of diode clipping modes: asymmetrical, symmetrical or bypassed diodes. Keeping Gain to zero, the Roadrunner functions as a boost from just before three o’clock on the Volume knob. This is certainly enough to coax your amp into natural overdrive, the Presence knob rolling off some bottom-end and adding some upper-mid stridency if needed. As you increase the gain, those diodes start to play a part in the sound – this is organically rich amp-style drive. Choose the diode mode to suit your playing: the asymmetrical clipping offers a looser, more open sound than symmetrical, which is more compressed. The sound with the diodes bypassed is a distinctive third option – more raucous, with a hint of fuzz when playing single notes at higher gain settings. **G**

VERDICT Keeping your guitar’s natural voice, this pedal offers classy drive with a choice of three distinct options



Signal Driver Boost V2.0 £119

The Signal Driver’s distinctive look, with that large knob surrounded by graduations from 0 to 100, was inspired by *Back To The Future*, specifically Doc Brown’s mega-amplifier that Marty McFly plugs into. The pedal even comes with a red Dymo label that says ‘Primary Driver’ if you want to add to the retro vibe. Capable of up to 30dB of gain, this has to be one of the most potent boost pedals on the market. In front of a clean valve amp, it will really heat things up for very natural driven tone, while in the effects loop it can get your power valves going for a different vibe, and it teams up well to add an extra level to dirt pedals. Whether it’s a subtle volume lift or a powerful boost, the graduations around the knob enable you to be precise when dialling in the amount you’re after. Mind you, if you suddenly need a bit more on stage, the knob is pretty easy to move with your foot. **G**

VERDICT An elegantly presented and powerful booster with the advantage of working as a buffer in your chain

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Distortion pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Tone, Gain,
Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor
(not supplied) 30 mA

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 121 (d) x 55mm (h)



9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass,
diode clipping options

CONTROLS: Volume, Presence, Gain,
Diodes switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor
(not supplied) 30 mA

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 121 (d) x 55mm (h)



9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Boost pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass,
alternative Dymo label

CONTROLS: Boost, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor
(not supplied) 30 mA

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 121 (d) x 58mm (h)



9/10



ROUND-UP

Walrus Audio Mako pedals

Boutique maker bolsters its Mako series with a reverb and amp/cab sim

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

VIDEO DEMO ► <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

Typically you'd find elaborate graphic designs on Walrus Audio pedals, but its Mako series (the first of which, the D1 Delay, we reviewed in issue 459) each feature a different and more plain metallic shade. The twin-footswitch pedals are similar in size to a Boss compact pedal and have an array of six

knobs and three mini-toggle switches, plus inputs that allow various combinations of mono and stereo use. A small number of onboard presets are easily accessible, but each pedal actually supports a full 128 via MIDI, which also offers full control over all parameters.



WALRUS AUDIO

Mako Series R1 High-Fidelity Stereo Reverb £319

As a companion to the D1 Delay, the R1 features six reverb types with plenty of adjustment. There are individual Decay, Swell and Mix knobs, plus Rate, Depth and Pre Delay, which are adjusted by a Tweak knob. The Tune knob adjusts to Lo and High frequency, and there's an X parameter that's different for each reverb type – typically overdrive for the Spring or room size for the Hall.

All of this offers real versatility whether you're adding space around the guitar (the Spring, Hall and Plate programs are definitely up to the task) or creating more otherworldly ambient washes with the BFR ('Big F***** Reverb') program, Refract with its glitchy textures, or Air, which boasts a filigree 'shimmer' effect via the X knob. Meanwhile, there are three banks (A, B, C) of three presets, so your sculpted 'verbs can be recalled. The Swell parameter engages a volume envelope applied to your wet and dry guitar signal for ethereal fade-ins, and the second footswitch lets you sustain the current reverb decay while you play over it with the same reverb.

VERDICT Compact yet versatile reverb offering the conventional alongside the esoteric with practical operation for onstage use



WALRUS AUDIO

Mako Series ACS1 Amp + Cab Simulator £365

The ACS1 is an amp and cab simulator in a stompbox, not dissimilar to the Strymon Iridium. You get a choice of three amps based on a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a 1962 Marshall Bluesbreaker and a 1960s vintage Vox AC30. These can be paired with six onboard cabinet impulse responses, or you can load your own IRs via USB. There are a range of knobs for tweaking the amp sound (Volume, Gain, Bass, Mid and Treble) plus a knob to add in some very useful room-simulating ambience.

The ACS1 can be used in mono but also supports stereo operation, whereby one amp can be used through both channels or you can mix and match amps and cabinets on the left and right channels with the L + R switch. Three presets keep your preferred sounds ready to go, and the second footswitch brings in a user-set boost with different volume and gain knob settings to kick things up.

The amps and cabs deliver an authentic playing experience over a range from clean through dirtier sounds, although we feel that if Walrus offered a little more gain for each beyond the presumably authentically recreated limits, it would add to the versatility.

VERDICT Three highly desired classic amp flavours made easily accessible for headphone practice, recording and live use

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: 3 selectable bypass types (True bypass, DSP+True Bypass (trails), and DSP Bypass), 9 onboard presets, MIDI

CONTROLS: Program selector, Decay, Swell, Mix, Tweak, Tune, Tweak switch (Rate/Depth/Pre Delay), Bank switch (A/B/C), Tune switch (Lo/High/X), Sus/Latch footswitch, Bypass footswitch

EFFECTS PROGRAMS: Spring, Hall, Plate, BFR, Refract, Air

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Left/Mono, Right), standard outputs (Left/Mono, Right), USB, MIDI in, MIDI out

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 300mA

DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 125 (d) x 60mm (h)



9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Amp and cab simulator pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 3 onboard presets, MIDI, 3 amp types, 6 factory IRs, IR loading

CONTROLS: Bass, Mid, Treble, Volume, Gain, Room, Cab switch (A/B/C), L+R switch, Amp switch (Fullerton/London/Dartford), Boost footswitch, Bypass footswitch

AMP & CABS: Fullerton (Fender), London (Marshall), Dartford (Vox);

Cabs: Fender Deluxe, Marshall 4x12, Vox Green Back, Fender Super Reverb, Two Rock, Vox Blue Back

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Left/Mono, Right), standard outputs (Left/Mono, Right), mini-jack headphone output, USB, MIDI in, MIDI out

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 300mA

DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 125 (d) x 60mm (h)

8/10





Synth Sounds

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone shares his love of synth and shows you how to add synthetic flair to your sound with common effect types

Delivering synth sounds is the job of dedicated pedals such as these, but you can also add a synthy flavour with what's already on your 'board



Over the past couple of years, one of the biggest trends in the pedal industry has been synth pedals. These devices are far from a new thing, though – Roland started experimenting with the genre all the way back in 1977 when it released the GR-500. However, modern technology has seen synth pedals become super compact and much easier to use, while sporting impeccable note tracking and sound quality.

I love this phase we're in! Things can't get synthy enough for me. If you're like me and you want your guitar to coax actual synth sounds from a single pedal, then definitely dive into boxes such as the Meris Enzo, Boss SY-1, Keeley Synth-1 or EarthQuaker Devices Data Corrupter. But if you just want to add a touch of synthetic flair once in a while during a set, then you can actually create really great-sounding results with fairly common effect types once you understand how a synthesizer works – and that's what I'm going to share with you today.

1. OSCILLATOR

At its most basic, a synthesizer is made up of an oscillator that produces the sound and a filter that shapes the sound. In our case, our guitar is the oscillator, while the tone knob on the guitar as well as the EQ section on our amp act as very basic filters. But synthesizers typically have the ability to stack several oscillators at once for really rich sounds and can pitch them up and down far beyond the normal scope of a guitar. Pitch shifters and octavers will give you the ability to simulate that. Analogue octavers, such as the KMA Moai Maea,

are perfect for big warm mono synth tones, whereas digital pitch shifters including the Meris Hedra, Red Panda Tensor or Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork will let you create more complex harmonic structures. If you're using a digital pitch shifter, try adding in a 5th above. It's great for dreamy, mysterious melodies as well as big pads.

2. OSCILLATOR DETUNE

Synthesizers typically also allow you to slightly detune their different oscillators to create an even wider sound. You can emulate this with chorus pedals. You don't need a chorus that can do all kinds of crazy things – a nice warm, lush analogue chorus, like the Maxon PAC-9, is perfect for the job.

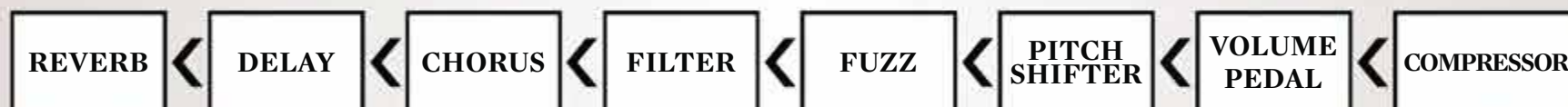
3. FILTER

The filter is a pivotal part of a synth as it helps you shape and control the raw sound from the oscillators. Analogue synths (and many digital emulations) are best known for their

“At its most basic, a synthesizer is made up of an oscillator that produces the sound and a filter that shapes it”



THE SIGNAL PATH



The order of these effects is not carved in stone, but I personally like a really aggressive and pronounced filter sweep, hence I've placed the filter after the fuzz. If you want a more mellow and organic filter effect then you can place it before the fuzz

fat and resonant low-pass filters, but you can also often encounter band-pass and high-pass filters in synths as well. Envelope filters are great for emulating synthy low-pass filter sweeps, whereas phasers are great for emulating band-pass sweeps. You can also use a wah pedal for manually controlled sweeps. If the pedal gives you control over resonance then that'll get you even more into the synthy ballpark.

4. ENVELOPE GENERATOR

Another big part of a synthesizer's sound is its envelope generator, also known as an ADSR (Attack, Decay, Sustain and Release). This lets you manipulate how long it takes for the sound to reach its volume peak, how long it sustains and when it decays. You don't even need a pedal to emulate

iconic synth pad swells, you can just use the volume knob on your guitar. But if you prefer to use your hands for playing then a volume pedal or an auto-swell pedal will get those blooming pads going, while a compressor pedal will help you increase the sustain and extend the decay of your notes. If you want a really quick synthetic sustain while doing volume swells, I recommend placing the compressor before your volume pedal.

5. OSCILLATOR WAVE SHAPES

Synthesizers also have the ability to change the wave shape of their oscillators in order to create really complex sounds. That task is more complicated when it comes to the world of guitar. But a simple way to change the waveform of your entire instrument

is with a fuzz pedal as it evens out the peaks and turns your instrument into an aggressive and compressed square wave. Octa-fuzzes such as the SolidGoldFX 76 are great for sharp robotic synth tones with a quick decay, whereas Big Muff-inspired fuzzes like the EarthQuaker Devices Hoof are sweet for bold synth textures with a long sustain.

6. DELAY/REVERB

You often don't know how good a synth sound is until you throw some delay or reverb at it. A big ambient reverb with a long decay can really help make your synthetic swells sound larger than life and extend the decay of your sound even further. Meanwhile, a pristine delay can add rhythmic complexity to arpeggio patterns.

HEAR IT HERE

If you want to hear how all of this actually sounds, check out my video 'Make Your Guitar Sound Like A Synthesizer – The Effects and Techniques Needed' on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at <http://bit.ly/471TTsynth>



« BLUEPRINT »

DUTCH COURAGE

Eric Smid of Smitty Custom Guitars is the kind of maker the world could do with more of: dedicated to quality and blissfully unconcerned with marketing hype. We meet him to find out what makes his guitars sound so good

Words Jamie Dickson

In a world filled with corporate PR, it's a breath of fresh air to talk to a guitar maker who is as open and frank as he is skilled at building superlative electrics. Netherlands-based luthier Eric Smid is the man behind Smitty Guitars, and his approach to making instruments is refreshingly pragmatic. An avowed enemy of snake oil in all its forms, Eric selects his tonewoods and hardware based on the evidence of his ears and eyes rather than forum folklore. The result is a series of original electrics and subtly tweaked classics that are a dream to play, sound exceptional and which have an understated beauty all of their own.

We join Eric to talk about his no-nonsense approach to building guitars and gain an insight into the design evolution behind his debut electric, the Model 1, which is today just one of many thoroughbreds in the Smitty stable.

What was your route into lutherie?

"I have played guitar since I was 12 years old, but I started tinkering with guitars when I first bought my first real guitar, which was a Fender Telecaster, in 1979. Later on, I discovered it was one of the

worst production years of Fender, lots of finish problems. The pickups were giving me so much trouble feeding back so I replaced them with DiMarzios, which was a brand that was coming up in those years. And that's where it started. But building professionally started in 2009. So it's a little over 11 years ago now."

Why did you decide to start building guitars professionally?

"I always had an idea of the ultimate guitar in my head, you know? But I could never get it. I tried many builders, went all over the country, even US Custom Shop instruments – I found them too expensive and I couldn't get all the specs I was asking for. So I decided to build what I thought of as the ultimate Strat- and Tele-style

"I found a way to build guitars, ignoring most of the forum stuff and the myths surrounding guitar building"

guitars, and I also always wanted to have my own designs out, too. So I contacted a CAD/CAM engineer and we started drawing guitars, until I had a pretty strong idea about shape and form and specs for each. And so that's how the Model 1, 2, 3 and 4 electrics happened. Designs for a Model X, Double-X, 5, 6, 7 and 8 followed after that."

Your electrics often feature beautifully figured, roasted maple necks. What are your favourite tonewoods and why?

"I like maple-and-rosewood necks best. I like alder bodies, but I also like swamp ash a lot because it's lighter in weight. On the other hand, the very first Strat-style electric I ever made had a one-piece swamp ash body that's on the heavy side – but it has tone and sustain for days. So I don't know. There are a lot of myths about the qualities of lightweight woods, old woods, air-dried woods, kiln-dried woods... There are just so many factors that come into play. But I found a way to build guitars, ignoring most of the forum stuff and the myths surrounding guitar building and even the vintage myths – because I've played lots and lots of vintage Strats and Teles and the quality and the vibe and the feel are all so different from one guitar to another."

Two stunning Smittys: The Model 2 (right) features an American walnut body with Mastergrade figured maple top. The TP in Pelham Blue, meanwhile, has an Les Paul Junior-meets-Tele vibe

»
"I always had an idea of the ultimate guitar in my head, you know? But I could never get it"
»



1. This carved-top, set-neck version of the Model 1 has an upmarket ES-330 vibe, with dog-ear P-90s and figured top

2. Seen full length, the set-neck Model 1 has a classic three-a-side headstock and vintage-style tuners

3. Detail of the cut-down Tele-style bridge on a Smitty TP electric, currently residing at World Guitars



The necks of your guitars are always super-comfortable to play. What's your approach to that?

“What always worked for me personally is like a medium-C shape with no shoulders because shoulders will hinder your thumb. I like thumb-over-neck playing, like Hendrix did with his style of chord playing. So my necks are usually a medium C profile: not too thick but, compared with thinner early 60s necks, they still have a bit more meat and that really helps the tone and sustain and resonance. So it's a medium-full neck that's not too big. And everyone who plays that neck likes it – that's just my standard neck.

“That said, every neck is a bit different because each one is hand-shaped and sanded and so on. But I manage to achieve a pretty standard neck-shape, every time I make a neck. So it's pretty consistent and that's my personal preference. I also do a lot of custom stuff and work with whatever specs my customers provide me with. But that standard shape works really well for most people. Some customers are like, ‘Oh, I've never tried one of your guitars...’, so I try to put them at ease and

tell them I have this one C shape that pretty much everyone likes, you know? So that works.”

Are highly figured woods harder to work with on necks – and if so, how do you get round that?

“I've had some trouble in the past with highly figured, flamed stuff. When it's just traditionally dried, just like a regular wood, it can be unstable and that can manifest itself in back-bow. So if you don't have a two-way truss rod, you can end up having a lot of trouble. But then I discovered roasted maple and that just makes necks so much more reliable and

“There's actually no secret! Anyone can buy magnets, wire and bobbin material to make pickups”

stable and also more resonant. So my first choice for making necks is roasted maple. It's lighter, too: you lose about 10 per cent of the weight during the roasting process, which is mostly just plain water loss, actually. And that really helps the weight and resonance.

“So, yeah, that's my preference in building necks – and I also like the maple to be quarter-sawn. It also depends on the type of maple: there are different species you can use. We all know sugar maple, which is also called hard-rock maple, but there's also red-leaf maple, which is a bit lighter and softer compared with sugar maple. It's lighter in weight and the roasting makes it more stable and even hardens the wood a bit, you know, so that compensates. So I've grown quite fond of using the roasted maple stuff.”

Your pickups are notable for having clarity and detail but also warmth and suppleness. What's your approach to winding them?

“Well, I know nothing [laughs]. I'm not a physics expert, so forget about all that. The first time I wound up a pickup, I had no clue – there weren't many videos on



YouTube, but I bought a winding machine and started experimenting, just hand-guiding the wire between thumb and forefinger and maybe breaking the wire a couple of times until I got the feel for it. Then I put one of the pickups I'd made in a Strat-style guitar and just threw the switch on the amp. It was unbelievable to me that it actually worked! And it sounded great, too, which was to my surprise.

"What I do these days is wind pickups as they were wound in the 50s and 60s, using fully charged magnets: Alnico V or II or IV... whatever someone wants. That said, my standard pickups for Strat-type guitars are built with Alnico V magnets and heavy formvar wire. As I mentioned, I don't weaken the magnets. If I want a warmer sound, I do it the other way: I just do more windings, which will give you fuller mid frequencies. The way your ear will experience it, if there's more mids in the sound, it will feel as if it's a softer sound – not in volume but the way you just hear it. By contrast, low-output pickups are more piercing or cut a bit more.

"I don't know, it's just the way I make my pickups. I'm pretty straightforward.

There's actually no secret! Anyone can buy the magnets and bobbin material to make pickups and have a go themselves. The copper wire is widely available, too, including heavy formvar, the mythical stuff of legends! But you can even use poly wire, which is a lot cheaper, and still achieve fantastic results. And, well, even I couldn't tell the difference if we did a blind test. Am I spoiling it for you now? [Laughs]"

Tell us about the Model 1 design that started it all...

"I bought my first electric guitar from a neighbour when I was 15. She was a jazz guitarist and she actually gave up playing guitar and switched to the saxophone. She had this Welson guitar, which was like a Gibson ES, with many switches and lots of knobs, three pickups on it. It even had a vibrato bar and a bolt-on neck and it also had a maple back and sides and a spruce top. It was Italian-made.

"And that became my first guitar. So I always had that style of guitar in mind, an ES-style guitar – mainly from the point of view of aesthetics, actually. I'm not really a Les Paul, set-neck kind of player

STAGGERING ACHIEVEMENTS

While some makers approach making pickups from a strictly vintage-authentic point of view, Eric Smid usually chooses the methods and materials that sound best to his ears, regardless of period correctness, while also explaining that vintage-stagger pickups don't really stack up for him.

Originally designed to balance out the sound of string sets of the 50s and 60s, which typically included a wound third, such vintage methods no longer make sense to Eric for use with modern string sets. He says: "I don't believe in the [uneven] vintage stagger pickups – that's ridiculous with modern strings. Even if you go to a 9.5- or 10-inch radius 'board, I prefer to have a more balanced radius in the [height profile of the] magnets so it just follows the fingerboard radius a bit. Flat profile with no radius doesn't work for me, either – to my ears, at least."

He also shares how he developed a feel for winding great pickups by trial and error. "In the beginning, I started experimenting with the number of turns and all kinds of variables, like loose or tight or scatter-wound, which is all okay. Winding pickups can be boring, though. You need strong coffee to stay awake..."

Nonetheless he believes that each maker's personal touch and attitude is what differentiates their pickups from others, even if their aims and techniques are broadly the same. "It's like these cooking competitions where you take 10 chefs," he says. "You give them the same equipment, same materials, groceries... the same knives. The end result is still different from one chef to the other, even if they have equal skills or the same materials, it's still different. But I don't see it as a competition. I just do my thing and if it works for my customers that makes me really happy."







4. Smitty's Model 1 is highly configurable, but Eric Smid describes the bolt-on version as a real rock 'n' roll machine

5. Seen full-length, the Fender-like six-a-side headstock evokes a Coronado-meets-Gretsch vibe

6. The bolt-on Model 1 is Eric's personal favourite. Note the chamfered heel and neckplate



myself, but the Model 1 with a bolt-on neck is what I call a rock 'n' roll guitar. I was also inspired by Fender Coronados, the old ones that they stopped making – those are set-necks, though. We started by designing that body shape first of all. I already had it in my head and then my CAD/CAM engineer helped me design it. And I think the lines really flow. I think it has what painters or photographers call the 'golden cut': if you follow the lines they meet at a certain point in space. So it's easy on the eyes too.

"I also make the Model 1 in a set-neck version, but there are a few major differences. The set-neck has 24.75-inch scale neck, which is shorter and warmer-sounding. The set-neck version also has a carved top and all solid woods, no plywood. I hate that! By comparison, the bolt-on is snappier sounding, like a Gretsch – so that's another inspiration, the Gretsch White Falcon. It has a Fender scale, 25.5 inches, and that changes the tone; it gives a bit more string tension and a snappier tone. But both guitars are versatile, depending on pickups. The bolt-on is my personal favourite, though."

What's next in terms of design work at Smitty Guitars?

"I'm redesigning my Model 1 set-neck. The back will be flat and it will have a small cover so you can access the electronics. I can't get over the fact that with ES-style guitars you have to find a way to get the potentiometers through f-holes, and these days I actually ask a colleague to do this for me because it drives me totally nuts. It makes me want to smash guitars! [Laughs] Basically, I like the modular thing a lot, like what Fender always did. If there's a bad

“I like the modular thing a lot – if there's a bad part, you just take the pickguard off and replace it and you're fine”

part, you just take the pickguard off and replace it and you're fine. If that happens to any of those ES-style guitars, though, you're in trouble. I just don't have the patience for it.

"So I took the first Model 1 set-neck to a colleague of mine and he was looking at me, like, 'Are you serious?' I had to drive for an hour to get to his place and for me it was a day out away from the workshop. I told him, 'If you can do the job for me that would make me very happy.' So that's why I eventually said, 'Why do I need a carved back? Why can I not have a single cover for the electronics cavities?' So those are the only design changes I'm going to do, take them or leave them. It doesn't change the sound, has no effect whatsoever on playability, sustain and all those musical factors that people need. It's going to be an excellent guitar and nice to look at, too. And it's an original design – and that's what I like." **G**

Guitarist would like to thank World Guitars in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, for the loan of the beautiful Smitty guitars that appear on page 105

Longtermers

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

Kemper Profiler Stage Floorboard

with Jamie Dickson



Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist, Editor-in-chief



This month, Jamie uses the Kemper on its first pro session of the test as he creates some guitar parts for producer and solo artist Mr Benn

While gigs may still be off the menu for most guitarists, lockdown hasn't been entirely barren of musical jobs. Not long after taking delivery of the Kemper Profiler Stage for longterm testing I got a call from an old friend, Bristol producer and solo artist Ben Menter, aka Mr Benn, who's on Nice Up! Records. Ben specialises in dance music influenced by Jamaican reggae and dancehall, as well as hip-hop and more besides, and he's an established favourite on the stages of festivals such as Boomtown and Bestival.

Every so often he's kind enough to get in touch to ask if I could play some guitar parts on his records – always an absolute pleasure, partly since we've been making music together since college days and partly because he's just a great musician to work with. He always knows exactly what he wants for a track, generally favouring simple yet impeccably tasteful, groovy hooks and in-the-pocket-rhythm parts. The classic guitar recipe for success on the dancefloor.

"We agree The Tamlins' 'Baltimore' is a loose musical touchstone for the guitar parts' style"

The job in hand this time is a Mr Benn remix of *Good Time Not A Long Time* by Bristol MC Gardna featuring soul singer Omar. Mr Benn is known for incorporating a vintage reggae feel into his tracks and, chatting the remix over, we talk about the 1977 Randy Newman track *Baltimore*, which was covered majestically by Nina Simone the following year. A further reggae version was recorded by The Tamlins in 1979 – a beautiful, minor-feel reggae track with a blues-like edge of melancholy and plush horn parts. We agree this is useful as a loose musical touchstone for the style of the guitar parts I'll play on the remix. Ben reaffirms that he'd like a few simple but strong melodic hooks and fills that he can arrange over the track, plus some basic rhythm, choppy parts.

Like many musicians who also have children and a day job, I find the best time to focus on



While other multi-effects units and modellers have simpler interfaces and control setups, the Kemper is less complicated to use than it first appears

recording is after everyone else has gone to bed. I'm a night-owl by nature so this is no hardship. In this setting, the Kemper is an essential tool for silent recording. I don't have to set up mics or run any amps out loud. I can monitor everything in headphones as I go and it can sit on a little table beside my computer. For this part I need a clean tone with the faintest suggestion of crunch to warm it up – a little hair, basically – but something that's also crisp enough to retain definition in the mix. Using the Browse dial on the Kemper, I flick through dozens of amp models, finally settling on something AC30-like that's been dialled in by Michael Britt, who's known for crafting great-sounding custom presets for high-end modelling multi-effects such as the Helix and also Kemper's profiling amps.

Kemper's control layout is quite different from the screen-based, highly visual interfaces of things like the Helix and Boss's GT-1000. Kemper seems to prefer using dedicated hardware buttons on the front panel that engage specific elements of the Stage's functionality, such as the amp model being used. At first glance it makes the Kemper look more complex than something like the Helix, but it's really just a different interface philosophy, a little more hands-on, a little less tightly centralised – though the Kemper's screen is big enough to be clearly legible and delivers all the information you need. I would say that it has a slightly steeper learning curve than either the Boss or Line 6 approach, possibly because it doesn't really resemble an interface you'll find on anything else and thus is less familiar and intuitive if you haven't used one before. That said, it's logical and well laid-out.

Sound-wise, the Kemper remains impressive and full of feel. I especially like the way the 'front' of each note sounds on the Kemper. On some modelling multi-effects the initial attack can sound a bit plasticky and

unyielding, whereas the Kemper breaks up very naturally when you dig in. Anecdotally, I feel like Kemper is the choice of a lot of guitarists who don't normally like digital kit. It has a very warm, organic feel that feels like home – more of which shortly.

Tones dialled in for the remix, I use two XLR cables in the back of the Kemper to connect in stereo to my PreSonus AudioBox iTwo audio interface, which is connected to the excellent Studio One DAW, also by PreSonus. I then spend a couple of hours at maximum focus laying down multiple takes of different ideas for Ben, saving the best and discarding the weaker takes as I go, until I have about a dozen strong rhythm and melodic parts that he can use whole or chop up as he pleases.

As Ben was working to a tight deadline, I was pleased to get a link to the finished release only a couple of weeks later. I loved what he'd done with my parts, judiciously selecting the hooks he liked best and crafting them beautifully into a soulful reggae reimagining of Gardna's original track. The great thing about working with the Kemper was that I didn't have to waste time fiddling about with mics or chasing down a buzzing amp or loose connection, and yet the resulting tones didn't sound sterile or coldly digital, either – especially important on a track that abounds in rich horn sounds, warm drum sounds and emotive vocals.

It's the first pro-grade test for me and the Kemper and, thanks to Mr Benn's wizardry far more than my playing, it sounds great. It's also fired up my passion for recording this way – so next time I'm going to pit the Kemper head to head with a leading modelling multi-effects to see how they compare in the studio. See you next time. **G**

Check out Mr Benn's remix of *Good Time Not A Long Time* by Gardna feat. Omar at: http://bit.ly/mrbenn_gardna. Mr Benn's new single *Strangers* feat. Tyla XAn is out on Nice Up!

PJD Corey Standard

with Dave Burrluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



We might all be wishing that things get back to normal, but our reviews ed is going to miss his lockdown buddy



Like the rest of the Standard, even the logo is tastefully understated



The now well-used Cream T pickup set replaced the original Bare Knuckles – two great options

Concluding my Longtermers time with this superb slice of British craft, I had hoped – like all of us, I imagine – I could have strapped it on and done a gig by now. Instead, its white finish is matching what I can see out of the window. Snow. Even if I could go out for more than an exercise walk and essential shopping, it's too bloomin' cold.

In normal times, a few mates would have popped around and no doubt exclaimed, "What's that?" pointing a finger at the housebound Standard. I can imagine myself telling the backstory and seeing said mates' expressions change from ridicule to respect as they had a quick strum. Yes, we know guitars have been selling very well over these

"There's another thing going on and that's how playing-time changes an instrument"

pandemic times, but taking a punt on a new name that you've never played is never going to be easy. An old classic, or one that looks like one (that treat to yourself) is always going to win, isn't it?

Aside from a pickup swap to check out how the Standard sounds with the now-optional Cream T pickups – actually pretty close to the Bare Knuckle Boot Camps that were originally fitted – the guitar remains

completely stock. I did initially consider trying a coil-split on the bridge humbucker, but both the Bare Knuckle and Cream T bridge are old-school single conductor, so that would mean *another* pickup change. Even then, both 'buckers sit right in that clear PAF territory and I couldn't help wondering if I'd be adding something for the sake of it. One reason why PJD founder Leigh Dovey doesn't like coil-splits is that they sort of take something away from the guitar, something to fiddle with while you should be playing. When a guitar sounds as good as this, I'm in agreement.

Yet just as this design has proved to me, it's a hugely versatile platform. Its construction – chambered ash body, roasted maple bolt-on neck – may shout 'Fender', but the sounds from either the Bare Knuckle or Cream T neck-placed soapbars suggest old Gibson, including those late-50s jazz masters (the players, not the later solidbody) when paired with a clean amp tone. And attempting to sharpen my jazz chops during lockdown, it's a sound I've really enjoyed. If I don't sound like Joe Pass, it's got nothing to do with this guitar!

There's another thing going on here and that's how playing-time changes an instrument. I have zero scientific backup for this assumption, but the 'young', almost over-eager voice when I first tested the guitar seems to have matured, even after a couple of string changes. The highs sound less sharp and I'd swear there's more depth to its voice, too. The neck's thin satin nitro has certainly burnished up to a rich sheen, while even everyday use has worked its way into the

very lightly finished ash grain, darkening it and giving those vivid grain lines a little more contrast. The relatively sharp chamfered edge is also beginning to wear a little over the forearm position. I can't help thinking after a few long gigs it'll look even better. Now, that's not good news for those of you who like your instruments pristine, but the PJD proposition seems to shout 'gig me'. If only.

Speaking with Leigh at the start of 2021, however, things are moving apace at PJD HQ. You might have noticed news of the Woodford Classic in our previous issue's Gas Supply. With a trio of Bare Knuckle Boot Camp single coils, this model will start at £999 with an £84 upcharge for an HSS layout. Astonishing value for a British handmade guitar.

"The only thing that comes from overseas is the hardware because it's made in Japan," comments Leigh. "But all the woodwork, and everything else, is all done here in-house. People can be suspicious about 'how are they doing that? It must be made in China and put together here.' But it's 100 per cent British-made." It'll also be offered in 11 different nitro colours, and Leigh is also looking at more available body woods, including paulownia, and has promised to send down a couple of Classics as soon as the paint is dry.

If the Woodford Classic is anywhere near close to this superb Carey Standard, we'll be in for a treat and one that won't break the bank. Considering the post-Brexit confusion, these past months have made me think: when guitars are as good as this, shouldn't we be buying closer to home? **G**

Featured 465 Price £1,799 (inc case) On Test Since August 2020 Studio Sessions At home Gigged If only Mods Yes, new pickups www.pjdguitars.com

"It's a hugely versatile platform. Its construction – chambered ash body, roasted maple bolt-on neck – may shout 'Fender', but the sounds suggest old Gibson"



JOANNA CONNOR

The blues guitar maven reveals her aversion to baseball-bat guitar necks and regret at trading in a '64 Fender Twin



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

"Aha! Well, I was given some type of Sears & Roebuck classical guitar when I was seven years old by my mom. I quit playing after a couple of years and then got interested around the age of 13 again. My cousin Fred Waxler owned a pretty serious music store called Bananas At Large in San Rafael, California. He shipped me an acoustic guitar in 1975 called an Aspen. I had the guitar for the next few years. My first serious guitar was a mid-70s Telecaster I bought from somebody in 1980. It was cream and white. What I really couldn't get into on that guitar was that the neck was like a baseball bat!"

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I have been extremely fortunate. My four beautiful guitars were given to me: three from Gibson and one recently was given to me by Mike Delaney of Delaney Guitars. We kind of collaborated and he made me my own signature guitar. It's a mash-up of a Les Paul-style body with a pure Strat tone. However, a few years ago I purchased a used SG Standard from Sam Ash just to travel with. It was a great deal, like \$500, so I didn't feel too bad taking it on a plane in case I had to check it."

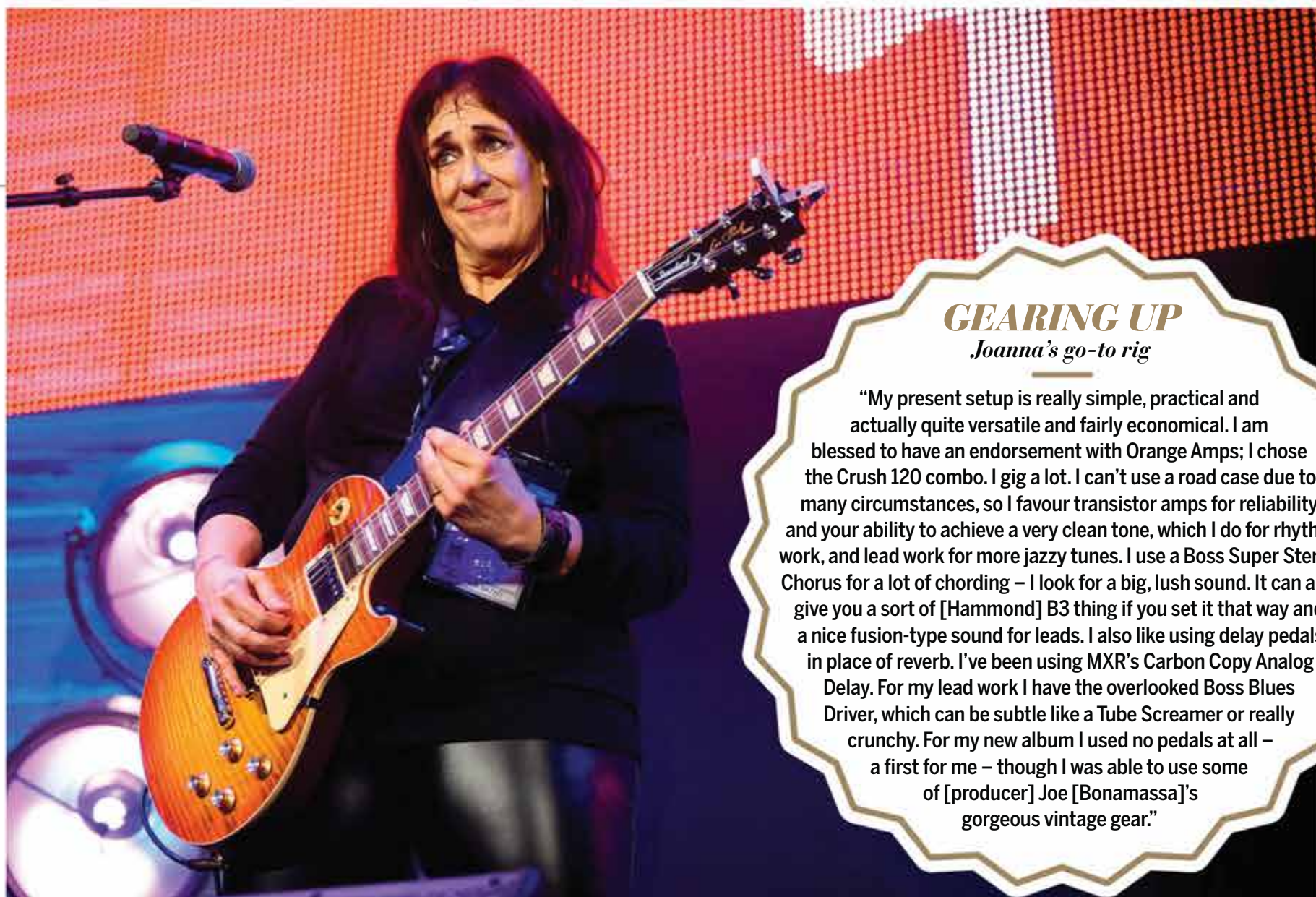
"The tactile aspect of playing guitar is very crucial to me. Touch is everything, even when I am playing slide"

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"You really have to sit down and play whatever guitar you want. Even though most are manufactured, there are always slight variations on any guitar. It's still an organic product. My most crucial factor is the neck, followed by the balance of the neck and body weight. Everyone's hands are different. Everyone's tastes are different. Everyone's hips, etc, are different. It has to feel good to you. Now, if you are a real collector and buying vintage guitars and stuff online, you probably know what you're getting yourself into. But I still say try it before you buy it. You can always modify electronics, but it's got to feel like magic in your hands."

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

"Like I said earlier I haven't bought a lot of guitars, but the second guitar I bought was a 1977 Les Paul Special '55 reissue. But this is the kicker: it came as a package deal with a 1964 Fender Twin Reverb. I got both for \$400 in total in 1981. A guy that played in a polka band sold it to me. I found it in the classified section of my local newspaper."



GEARING UP

Joanna's go-to rig

"My present setup is really simple, practical and actually quite versatile and fairly economical. I am blessed to have an endorsement with Orange Amps; I chose the Crush 120 combo. I gig a lot. I can't use a road case due to many circumstances, so I favour transistor amps for reliability and your ability to achieve a very clean tone, which I do for rhythm work, and lead work for more jazzy tunes. I use a Boss Super Stereo Chorus for a lot of chording – I look for a big, lush sound. It can also give you a sort of [Hammond] B3 thing if you set it that way and a nice fusion-type sound for leads. I also like using delay pedals in place of reverb. I've been using MXR's Carbon Copy Analog Delay. For my lead work I have the overlooked Boss Blues Driver, which can be subtle like a Tube Screamer or really crunchy. For my new album I used no pedals at all – a first for me – though I was able to use some of [producer] Joe [Bonamassa]'s gorgeous vintage gear."

PHOTO BY ALLISON MORGAN

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

"Well, I hate to even put this in print, but that Fender Twin I just talked about I traded for a Peavey Bandit 65 at a music store in Hyde Park, Chicago, in 1985. I did this because it had an overdrive channel; I didn't know much about anything back then. I didn't really become any kind of guitar player until I was 24."

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

"I had to sell a gorgeous natural wood finish Gibson ES-335 that a fan had given me because I was pregnant with my daughter, who was a lovely surprise, and I needed the cash."

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

"I am in love with resonator guitars. I want a National Steel really badly. The sound of guitars like that are mesmerising to me."

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

"Yes. I love the U-shape on my Delaney and my Les Paul Modern, and I really love the ultra-thin neck of my Les Paul Classic '60 reissue. When I pick up a guitar and it's like a baseball bat or a severe C shape it's like... No! My hands are about the size of an average man's hands, I have large hands for a woman, but big chunky, round necks tire me out. In Chicago, before the pandemic, I was playing

really long nights. I averaged 24 hours a week on stage, so [avoiding] hand fatigue is crucial."

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

"I would much rather buy a great guitar and have a cheap amp, although that can be a real struggle. Neither situation is optimal, but your tool, your weapon of love, your appendage, is that intricate piece of wood you are holding in your hands and against your body. The tactile aspect of playing guitar is very crucial to me. Touch is everything, even when I am playing slide."

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

"Humbuckers! They emit big, fat, round, juicy tone and power, and I feel a kinship with that."

What's your favourite guitar shop and why?

"Chicago Music Exchange is a premier shop with incredible product variety and quality and a super-knowledgeable but down-to-earth staff who really seem to love to be there. I used to live two minutes from there. Now I live maybe a half-hour drive away, but I'm fortunate a store of that calibre is nearby." **[DM]**



Joanna Connor's new album, *4801 South Indiana Avenue*, is available now via KTBA Records

www.joannaconnor.com

A slim neck is essential for Joanna – a feature of the various Les Pauls in her collection and her Delaney Signature LaGrange (pictured left)



DAZED & CONFUSED

FENDER TWEED AMPS

Terry Foster, co-author of *Fender: The Golden Age 1946-1970*, imparts his expert knowledge on Fender's earliest amps

“Fender amps are rooted in Leo Fender's radio repair shop,” says Terry. “By 1940, he had a full-time business with several employees in Fullerton under the Fender name. It was very successful in the local area, and, according to Leo, they did over 10,000 repair jobs in 1943 alone. Around that time, Doc Kauffman – a local professional musician and inventor – would often go into Leo's shop, which also sold records and sheet music, and they struck up a friendship. Doc came onboard full-time in 1942 and they ended up patenting a pickup [called the Direct String Pickup], so Leo used his existing knowledge of radio to adapt an amp for it.

That's when Doc starts making lap steels and Leo starts making custom amplifiers.

“They also invented an automatic record changer and could have made millions, but they sold the rights and used the money to start up K&F [Kauffman & Fender], building lap steel sets with amplifiers designed by Leo and his employee Ray Massie. However, because of the war effort, it didn't really get going until November 1945. They had distribution deals and it was a relatively successful start-up, but K&F didn't last long; Doc was more risk-averse than Leo and they amicably parted ways in February 1946. Manufacturing then continued under the Fender brand.” [RB]



PHOTO BY JOHN PEDEN

Vintage-guitar enthusiast and author Terry Foster is an authority on Fender through the ages

1 WOODIES (1946-1948)

“These are the earliest Fender-branded amps and although they existed prior to Doc and Leo splitting, Leo did advance the designs somewhat. By this stage, Leo had a line of amplifiers. There was the [4.5-watt] Princeton, which was a tiny student model with an eight-inch speaker. Then there was the single 10-inch [10-watt] Deluxe/Model 26 – it has often been said the ‘26’ is a reference to February ‘46. And there was the [18-watt] Professional, which has a 15-inch speaker.

“In terms of rarity, I've only seen a handful of Princetons and a handful of Professionals. Most of the woodies you see are the mid-line Deluxe/Model 26, so that was probably their bestseller. In early '48, Leo introduced the [16-watt] Dual Professional, which is the very first Fender tweed amp. It's got two 10-inch speakers and has an angled front with a vertical metal strip. Leo was constantly moving forward trying to improve his designs.”

2 TV-FRONTS (1948-1953)

“This first full tweed line was easier to manufacture than the woodies. It meant they could use less expensive pine – rather than hardwoods such as maple and walnut – and the wood didn't need to be finished. It was all about simple, elegant designs that were easy to service and replicate at scale. At this point in time, Leo's radio shop was selling TVs, which was the next big thing, so Leo likely took inspiration from there.

“The first TV-front samples went out in May '48. In the TV-front line, there was still a Princeton and a [1x12] Deluxe, but the Professional became the Pro-Amp, and the Dual Professional was renamed the Super. That year, the line was expanded to include the [4-watt/1x8] Champion 800 student amp [superseded by the 3-watt/1x6] Champion 600 in '49], and in '52, the [26-watt/1x15] Bassman was released to accompany the Precision Bass.”

3 WIDE PANELS (1952-1955)

“Leo was always tweaking his designs and moving forward. The look of the amps changed for the same reason things change now: how do you promote the new stuff? It's got to look different from the old stuff. Fender were selling more amplifiers than electric Spanish guitars during this period. There are some great photos online of BB King playing Gibson guitars, but he's using TV-front and wide panel Fender amps.

“The new [15-watt/1x15] Bandmaster and [25-watt/2x12] Twin amps that were added to the line were directed at the professional musician. Audiences were getting bigger; the Western swing bands of the early 50s were playing dance halls packed with 5,000 people every night. It was big business in the South West and California. This new technology meant they could project the sound and make the same music with less people on stage, which made their business more profitable.”

4 NARROW PANELS (1955-1964)

“The narrow panel line used less wood, but it was also another way of refreshing the look. The block logo, which appeared in 1946, is replaced by a Fender script logo in 1955, and the cloth grille is supplanted by a more robust plastic material. The narrow panels consisted of 11 amplifiers with the addition of the [10-watt/1x8 and 1x10] Harvard, [10-watt/1x10] Vibrolux, and [15-watt/1x12] Tremolux. The Tremolux came out in mid-1955 and was the first Fender amp with tremolo.

“The top-of-the-line Twin changed as music changed, meaning it got louder, going from 25 to 50 watts, then 85 watts in '58. This period from '55 onwards is the rock 'n' roll explosion. Smaller bands needed to be louder. Also, the Bassman went from 26 to 50 watts and the [5F6A] circuit became the basis for the first Marshall amp. The first [brown] Tolex amps appeared in '59, but the Champ remained in tweed up to '64.”



D-DAY

Five decades ago, a young guitar player on the New York scene named Larry DiMarzio was about to change the future of the electric guitar. Dave Burrluck looks back on the birth of modding

We're a fickle bunch, aren't we? A common topic in these pages is how we're all influenced by brand, its musical genre association, by specification and, I'll add another, name. If I suggested you try a Full Shredder, Total Metal or Super Gain humbucker for your clean jazz tones, you'd laugh.

When I was writing about Mike Stern's long-running Yamaha signature last year, checking out the pickups and circuit I was rather surprised to find a Seymour Duncan '59 *bridge* humbucker in the neck position paired with a single coil-sized Hot Rails at the bridge, wired not in series but parallel. Pot values for the volume and tone were nominally 250kohms – they actually measured 240k ohms (volume) and 237k (tone). Chatting to Mike, it was pretty clear he didn't have a clue what actual pickups were in his guitar and had simply listened to prototypes provided by Yamaha until he found what sounded right. Hundreds of gigs later, not to mention recordings, it clearly works for him. It could be argued, in Mike's case, that the apparently wrong pickups and the wrong pot values makes a big right.

But you could also argue that the majority of the keystone pickups weren't designed for the uses they've since become associated with. The P-90, created back



The author's old Super Distortion, now in need of some TLC

"The Super Distortion was the first readily available replacement pickup – uptake was huge"

in the mid-40s, clearly wasn't designed to produce the gritty and raw tones we relate it to today. The original Gibson humbucker? The Tele's and Strat's single coils? The clever move was that none of these pickups had names that linked them to any genre. That came later.

However, if you call your pickup the Super Distortion then its intention is obvious – not least when you learn that it has a near 14kohms DCR and uses an oversized ceramic magnet. If I admit that it's one of my favourite pickups, I'm going to get laughed at and thrown out of the Cool Tone School.

How It Started

Researching the late, great Leslie West, I found a short video interview Larry DiMarzio carried out with the Mountain man where he says that it was Leslie's "live tone in the late 60s that was the inspiration for my first pickup, the Super Distortion. My challenge was how to get his arena sound in a small club."

Larry credits another New Yorker, Earl Slick, with realising how important the pickup was – an eye opener. Earl relates how the fledgling pickup maker kept rewinding a pickup in his SG until he got there: "What was it like when you first got the Super Distortion in your guitar because no-one else had one?" asks Larry. "Well,



This later DiMarzio PAF has more regular screw and slug polepieces

A Dean Leslie West with
its new DiMarzio: our
tribute to the Mountain
man who inspired the
DiMarzio sound



SPACED OUT

Your strings taper from the bridge to the nut. Original pickups were one-size-fits-all when it comes to polepiece spacing, meaning that the poles can sit outside or inside the string spread. Sonically, it's not as bad as it looks, in most cases, though it can be offputting to those who have a picky eye for detail. Many single-coil makers have cured this with different spacing: DiMarzio has its 'F-spaced' option, for example, and Seymour Duncan the Trembucker. Standard spacing, measured from the centre of the outer two poles, is 48.64mm (1.92 inches); the F-spacing is 51.05mm (2.01 inches).

Now, on an old-style vintage tune-o-matic you get a 50mm spacing, a Fender was 55mm, while more modern designers have settled on 52.5mm. In practice, there's variance, so measure your bridge spacing and work out what's best. DiMarzio has a simple template on its website that you can print and use. We're talking bridge-placed humbuckers here: in most cases your neck humbucker will be standard-spaced thanks to that string taper.



first of all it was cool because no-one else had one,” quips Earl, exactly what he said when I had a brief chat with him a few years back in Frankfurt. “At the time I was anti-pedal, not that there were many pedals about. I liked the idea of pushing the amp through the guitar: enough gain coming out of the guitar to break the amp up. You couldn’t get that out of a stock humbucker back then. It gave me something no-one else had.”

DiMarzio states that the Super Distortion (DP100) was ‘introduced’ in 1972, but I think it’s fair to say that it was later in the 70s, certainly in the UK, that it began to make any impact. It was the first readily available replacement pickup offered – certainly the first without a cover while those double cream bobbins became part of the brand – and uptake was huge. Soon, Earl was not the only one with a Super Distortion powering his sound.

To me, a fledgling guitar maker in 70s, getting a pair of DiMarzios – double-cream, obviously – was a *big* deal, especially after reading about this ‘revolution’ in the few music papers and magazines there were (probably *Sounds*, *Beat Instrumental* and then *International Musician And Recording World*). If my shaky memory is correct I’d actually bought a Mighty Mite humbucker previously; as Larry’s revolution quickly spread, others were quick to jump aboard the wagon. Guitar companies weren’t listening to what the players wanted and the replacement pickups and parts business began to have noticeable and revolutionary presence as the 70s progressed: Mighty Mite’s pickups and parts, particularly those made from brass, Seymour Duncan, Schecter... Suddenly, making and modding guitars was a lot easier. I still remember hopping on the tube to Richmond to pop into Chandler Guitars to buy an assortment of Schecter screws from a far-from-impressed Doug Chandler as I reeled of what I needed: 11 scratchplate screws, eight pickup ring screws, etc, etc. Having the right parts gave a build huge authenticity, even if the build itself was still very much at rank amateur level.

If the overwound, ceramic-powered Super Distortion (DP100) gave numerous players’ signal chain a big kick, for a period it wasn’t genre specific; it was simply a way of ‘improving’ your sound without having





The old Super distortion (left) with its large ceramic magnet compared with the PAF's more regular Alnico magnet

“The replacement parts business began to have noticeable presence as the 70s progressed”

to buy a whole new guitar. Starting out in a classic heavy metal band, such a pickup would have been very handy, but by the late 70s and into the 80s my ‘style’ reflected the post-punk world, yet DiMarzio still powered my own custom-built guitar. And listening back to tracks I played during that period, well, it ain’t heavy metal.

Switch-ability

If the Super Distortion did what it said on the tin, the slightly later Dual Sound (DP101) – initially a three- then four-conductor version of the Super Distortion – was another ‘eureka’ moment, giving clear instruction on how you could wire the pickup in standard series *and* parallel for a cleaner, lower output but still hum-cancelling sound. Of course, you could split it to single coil, too – either, actually. That potentially gave us intrepid modders four sounds from one humbucker. Combine that with your volume control (with or without the then-still-mysterious treble bleed circuit) and your tone control there

was plenty to muck about with beyond just frying the front-end of your amp. Perhaps just as importantly back then, the Dual Sound came with a DPDT mini-toggle switch, something that wasn’t easy to find in the UK back in those pre-internet days.

Here we had a hugely flexible pickup for the time and a name that didn’t – and still doesn’t – sound like a metal pickup. Perfect. Things were never the same again.

Today, of course, a humbucker with a four-conductor output is common place, as is coil-splitting. Far less common is the parallel link of the two coils, which could easily be suggested is a forgotten sound. I honestly can’t remember the last time I reviewed a guitar with a series/parallel switch, although I did notice it’s offered on the new PRS Fiore, Mark Lettieri’s signature model.

Still Valid?

My original Dual Sound has one coil down and tempted as I was (am?) to get it rewound, another more contemporary 10-year-old DP100 with four-conductor wiring was in perfect condition. Time for a little sonic archeology. With the late Leslie West in mind, his Korean-made single-pickup Dean signature seemed the obvious candidate, especially as its original pickup was long gone and the guitar was in need of a bit of TLC. It had just volume and tone controls, so I wasn’t going to drill a couple

DIMARZIO’S EMPIRE

It might have started with the Super Distortion, but the range of DiMarzio pickups and the artists using them is now vast. Namechecks here must go to Larry’s associate Steve Blucher, the sonic sorcerer who joined the company in the later 70s, and the likes of Eddie Van Halen, Steve Vai, John Petrucci, Paul Gilbert, Yngwie Malmsteen, Eric Johnson, The Edge, not to mention stadium pioneers such as KISS, even for a time Pete Townshend, and let’s not forget Leslie West and Earl Slick. Humbuckers, single coils, hum-cancelling single coils, soapbars, pickups for multi-string guitars – all are available and use numerous different design concepts, such as dual resonance coils and Airbucker technology to name but two. DiMarzio also makes pickups for guitar brands including Ibanez and Music Man, as well as the special pickups for the pioneering Parker Fly.

This progressive attitude certainly hasn’t excluded DiMarzio’s own versions of those pre-rock classics. The PAF 59 released a couple of years back, for example, is a homage to the pickups on Larry’s own ‘Burst. Incidentally, some years back DiMarzio trademarked ‘PAF’ because no-one else had bothered to.



The 'new' 10-year-old Super Distortion installed

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: DiMarzio Super Distortion DP100

COST: Approx £75

SKILL LEVEL: Pretty easy, although wiring the pickup to a mini-toggle or pull-push switched pot requires a bit of care and patience

www.dimarzio.com

PROS & CONS

PROS Does what it says on the tin but is overlooked for split and parallel voices; large choice of colour options

CONS Wrongly pigeonholed as a 'metal'-only pickup – it's a vintage classic!



9/10

of holes for a pair of mini-toggle switches. Instead, I chose a couple of Bourns pull-push switched pots. You'll find the series/parallel wiring on DiMarzio's excellent website. To apply the single coil I used a second pull-push on the tone control and wired a single link from the first switch's centre lug, opposite the white conductor, to the centre lug of one side of the second switch with a connection to earth on the lower lug. This meant that in series position I could voice the single coil by pulling up the second switch, which voiced the neck-facing coil (obviously it doesn't work in parallel mode).

Real Estate

Pickups such as the Super Distortion/Dual Sound get pigeonholed as hard rock or metal. In fact, so does DiMarzio. It's the foundation of its empire and there's nothing wrong with that. However, using the Dual Sound on cleaner tones really reminded me why I've always had a soft spot for this pickup: there's a lot of real estate here and each individual coil has a hefty DCR. Split a 8kohm PAF-alike and

"Here's a true vintage pickup... Forget the name, enjoy the potential and listen with your ears"

you have a miserly 4k (or under) per coil, less if one coil is underwound. Split this 13.97kohms Dual Sound and the neck-facing single coil gives a DCR of 7.14k (measured at output), a hot single coil in anyone's book.

The overlooked parallel humbucker is a great 'backup' if you're on a gig and you need a single coil-like voice but there's so much hum from the 'dirty' environment. For some, a parallel linked humbucker lacks character. For others, not only does it clean up the crunch but its smoother response works perfectly for brighter, balanced cleans. These sounds can work in lots of situations, especially those with dense effects – it's a cool funk sound, too. In

both these modes there's plenty of clarity as well, so using your tone and volume control helps to round things out, plus there's plenty of scope to 'tune' the pickup with a lower pot resistance, a partial coil-split with a resistor, and/or pull the clarity back with a capacitor.

Then there's the frankly unbridled joy of the series voice, which puts you right back in those gained early 70s – and way beyond. Saturated sounds that always bring a smile to this writer's face. Still, clean up your amp, pull back the volume and tone a little and it comes across as a surprisingly big, fat and round sound.

Of course, we don't need hot pickups to drive our sound today, the plethora of stompboxes and the digital world of Kemper, Helix et al mean that we're looking at pickups in a different way. But here's a true vintage pickup that won't break the bank. Forget the name, enjoy the potential and listen with your ears. Larry DiMarzio more than deserves his place in the history of the electric guitar – us modders should remember where this whole thing really started. **G**

*That should give you something to think about till our next issue.
In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.*

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Cream T Billy F Gibbons WhiskerBucker

Cream T's Thomas Nilsen has made pickup winding a science of his own

For the past 30-odd years, Thomas Nilsen has been hard at work creating some of the most authentic-sounding humbuckers around. "It all started in the late 90s when I bought some Custom Shop guitars," Thomas tells us. "They were nicely built, but I wasn't happy with the sound. I was after the kind of tone from the 50s and 60s when people mostly plugged straight into the amp – that authentic rounded tone with no sharp edges on the high frequencies. It's not harsh; it has a softer treble. When I realised this was missing from my Custom Shop guitars, I set up my own workshop in the basement of my house, specifically to make pickups."



These Billy F Gibbons WhiskerBuckers are part of Cream T Pickups' new Super Scanner range

PHOTO BY PAUL BANNISTER

"I built a scanner so I could record across the frequency range of the Pearly Gates [pickups]"

Labouring away in his basement in search of that elusive sound, Thomas finally emerged with what he thought was a more accurate representation of those classic 'Burst tones. He was keen to get some feedback so immediately went straight to the Top and reached out to Billy Gibbons' guitar tech, Elwood Francis.

"Billy tried them out backstage at a gig and he loved them immediately," recalls Thomas. "He said, 'Can I have five sets please, mister?' And that started the ball rolling. Since then, Billy has brought a lot of ideas to the table. He's very into the details of guitar tone and he wanted to recreate the specific sound of his 1959 Les Paul, famously known as the Pearly Gates guitar. That had never been done before."

While researching the Pearly Gates' famous tone, Thomas designed and built a frequency spectrum recorder with the aim

of plotting out the humbuckers' unique sonic characteristics.

"I built a scanner so I could record across the frequency range of the Pearly Gates," continues Thomas. "We read the decibels at various points across a range of frequencies from 70Hz up to 95kHz and discovered the pickups in the Pearly Gates Les Paul are very different from others. The readings were very special. So that informed me about the coil winding pattern."

"I have various templates in my head that tell me how to put the wire on the coil to reach certain frequencies. For example, with the WhiskerBucker, I start in the middle of the coil and do 48 turns, go to the left side and do 132 turns, go over to the right side and do 64 turns, then I go back and add some more. After, I repeat that movement before doing 2,700 turns with a completely different winding pattern, then another with 1,000 turns, and then I finish it off in a certain way. It's very deep. There's a very specific way of doing it. I have about 1,300 different coil winding patterns."

Thomas decided against aiming to produce yet another PAF-alike with the same old Gibson-style materials, instead opting for a different approach by focusing purely on sound.

"I use 0.061mm enamel-insulated copper wire," he reveals. "It's not the regular type of wire people use to make PAF replicas. You have to do a completely different number of turns using a different wire, and I spent over a year just AB testing different winding patterns with the same magnets and the same output (same number of turns). It's a far more scientific approach than people may realise. I had all these different windings and scanned the whole frequency range to get to where we wanted. It was very time-consuming and extremely focused. It's all about the route the signal travels in the coil. If you create a different path – a different way for that signal to go – you will have completely different decibel readings across the frequencies."

"The magnets are a special unoriented type and are not 100 per cent charged; they are degaussed a bit. I measured the [Pearly Gates] pickups when I scanned them and found the gauss readings in Billy's guitar are unique, so the WhiskerBuckers sound how the Pearly Gates guitar sounds on the ZZ Top albums, not when it was brand-new in 1959. If people want that authentic Pearly Gates guitar tone, the WhiskerBucker is definitely the way to go." [RB]

www.creamtpickupsdirect.com

Get that Pearly Gates '59
'Burst tone in a guitar of
your choosing, such as
this Patrick James Eggle
Macon Single Cut

"I spent over a year
AB testing different
winding patterns with
the same magnets
and output. It's a [very]
scientific approach"



ClassicGear

With its Florentine cutaway, this hollowbody electric archtop was a Gibson first

Gibson ES-175

Following its release in 1949, the 175 proved to be one of Gibson's most popular designs. Author Adrian Ingram calls it "Gibson's most successful electro-acoustic guitar" in his book *The Gibson ES175: Its History And Players*, quoting an estimated 37,000 having been sold within its first half-century of production alone. Like many classic guitars, the 175's essential layout didn't change a great deal after it came off the drawing board – its dynamic sound, comfy ergonomics and understated cool ticked all the right boxes from the start. This timeless design has consistently won guitar players over throughout the decades, and although it is perhaps more strongly associated with jazz virtuosos such as Joe Pass and Herb Ellis, it's just as likely to be spotted in the hands of rock guitarists like Steve Howe and John Frusciante.

The 175 came about during a turning point in Gibson's history. Having acquired the company in 1944, Chicago Musical Instruments' financial support aided Gibson in the pursuit of cutting-edge designs during the post-war years. Still, chairman of the board at CMI, Maurice Berlin, was concerned about the Kalamazoo factory's continued losses of "\$100,000 per month". It would take a young engineering graduate turned music industry executive named Ted McCarty to turn things around.

Having resigned from Wurlitzer, Ted joined Gibson in 1948 and was immediately tasked with reversing its ailing fortunes by modernising the firm.

That year, Ted expanded Gibson's electric range with a pickup-loaded scratchplate design. Later known as the 'McCarty unit', this innovation came in either single- or dual-pickup formats for cutaway and non-cutaway guitars and led to the addition of several new electrified archtop models based on the L-7 acoustic. As per Gibson's pre-war electrics, however, these guitars were constructed with solid tops, backs and sides, and Ted's focus soon shifted to

Its dynamic sound,
comfy ergonomics and
understated cool ticked
all the right boxes

the newer laminate body 'ES' ("electric Spanish") line with the aim of developing a mid-priced cutaway model.

With a sunburst finish and costing \$175 upon its release in 1949, the ES-175 had a Florentine/sharp cutaway, which was a Gibson first. Featuring double-parallelgram fretboard inlays along with a pearl Gibson logo and 'crown' headstock inlays, it was introduced alongside its acoustic equivalent, the L-4C. The ES-175 has the same full 3 3/8-inch body depth that was standard for all other 'ES' guitars back then, though many players found its width of 16 1/4 inches to be more comfortable than the broader 17-inch-wide 'ES' guitars of the time, namely the ES-150, ES-300 and ES-350.

The original ES-175 is a single (neck) pickup guitar, although dual-pickup instruments were custom ordered in the early 50s on occasion. It wasn't until 1953 that the officially designated 'D'/dual pickup version – the ES-175D – was released. This followed the arrival of the \$295 ES-295 in 1952 – a fancy all-gold finish guitar with dual pickups that was itself inspired by the ES-175 and marketed as the archtop companion to the 'Goldtop' Les Paul Model. While the ES-295 and ES-175 were discontinued in 1958 and 1971 respectively, the ES-175D went on to become one of the most enduring electric guitars ever designed by Gibson. [RB]

The Evolution of the Gibson ES-175

1949

ES-175 released; single pickup; sunburst or natural finish

1952

ES-295 released; dual pickups; all-gold finish

1953

ES-175D released; dual pickups; sunburst or natural finish

Mid-50s

Some with 'alnico'/'staple' pickups (rare)

1955

20 frets (previously 19)

1956

Zig-zag 'T'-shaped tailpiece replaces pointed trapeze tailpiece

1957

PAF humbuckers replace P-90s

1958

ES-295 discontinued

1959

Natural-finish ES-175 discontinued

1971

Sunburst finish ES-175 discontinued



1959 Gibson ES-175D

1. SERIAL NUMBER

A-prefixed five-digit number ink-stamped onto orange oval label on rear of back (visible through bass f-hole)

2. HEADSTOCK

Unbound; pearl Gibson logo and crown inlays; black finish

3. PLASTICS

Two-ply (b/w) bell truss rod cover; white keystone tuner buttons; white pickup selector switch tip; black rubber switch grommet; five-ply (b/w/b/w/b) bevelled edge pickguard; two black pickup surrounds; four gold 'bonnet' knobs

4. HARDWARE

Nickel-plated zig-zag 'T'-shaped tailpiece; height-adjustable compensated rosewood bridge; individual Kluson Deluxe tuners

5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS

Two PAF humbuckers with independent volume and tone controls; three-way pickup selector switch; side-mounted jack socket

6. BODY

16 ¼ inches wide; 3 ¾ inches deep; laminated maple with pressed, arched top; single Florentine cutaway; three-ply (w/b/w) top binding; single-bound back; two unbound f-holes; sunburst finish

7. NECK

Glued-in one-piece mahogany neck; 24 ¾-inch scale length; 14th-fret body join; single-bound 20-fret rosewood fingerboard with double-parallelogram inlays

Guitarist would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath (www.vintageandrareguitars.com)



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Our vintage guitar veteran shines his light on this custom-ordered sparkle finish Jet

1962 Gretsch Duo Jet in Champagne



In addition to its standard black finish, the Duo Jet was offered in custom sparkle finishes at no extra cost, including Silver, Gold, Champagne, Burgundy and Tangerine

This is a cool Champagne sparkle finish Duo Jet from 1962. A lot of people think of a Jet as a single-cut guitar, but double-cut Jets definitely have a place in rock 'n' roll history, particularly with respect to the Malcolm Young connection. The AC/DC guys used to come into my store when we were in New York City and buy every double-cut Jet we had! Jets stayed with a single-cut until '61. Which would remind you very much of the Les Paul changing over to the SG body style. They were all following each other. The Duo Jet came out in '53, so it was only a matter of months after the Les Paul came out [in 1952]. Interestingly, the Duo Jet was the more playable guitar to begin with because of the Les Paul's combination tailpiece. Also, earlier on, the Gretsches were fitted with DeArmond [Model 2000/Dynasonic] pickups, which had a wonderful reputation within the archtop community. Jets stayed with the DeArmond pickups until '58 when Gretsch introduced the Filter'Tron.

"Gretsch had the Silver Jet listed as a separate model [from 1954], but then from the early 60s you could just custom order a Duo Jet in various sparkle finishes like Silver, Gold and Champagne. I have also seen some in a red sparkle, and I've seen some in a blue sparkle. And there's the 'pink champagne' Jet that used to belong to Eric Clapton. It eventually ended up in the Songbirds museum. That's a very special guitar – a sort of pinky, purple sparkle. Lighter than a plum, but darker than a pink, almost like a lavender sparkle. Just gorgeous. I bought this Champagne sparkle Jet originally in about 2004 from a collector called Gordon Dow, who's sadly now passed

away. He was a huge authority on Gretsch guitars and was the guy who originally sold Eric the 'pink champagne' Jet.

"When I first got into the vintage guitar business, there were so many used Gretsches around New York. I mean, the old Gretsch factory [in Brooklyn] was only about 30 miles from where I'm sitting right now. I imagine it was very similar if you were in southern California in the 70s; there were tons of used Fenders around. I wish I was there! We would always get lots of people coming in with original Gretsches. One day, I had a guy in the store and he was looking at a 6120, like the Pete Townshend

"I'm amazed to tell you that we still get about half a dozen walk-in original-owner Gretsch guitars a year"

Won't Get Fooled Again guitar, which was hanging up on the wall. I said, 'Hi, can I help you?' and he says, 'I made that guitar. I was on that production run for more than a year. If you take out the bridge pickup, you'll see my initials on the back of the wood.' I was intrigued, so I took the guitar down, took the pickup out, and sure enough there were his initials: 'FG'. It was Fred Gretsch Jr!

"I've always loved these 'thumb print' inlays. At the time, everybody was doing dots or blocks, and I thought the neo-classic inlays looked great. Even as a child I found those to be intriguing. There was a music store – long gone now – in New York called

Sam Goody. It was a record shop, but they also sold Gretsch guitars. When I was a child, I would go into Sam Goody to look at records, but I would always end up walking over to look at the guitars. Gretsch even had their own Sam Goody model. The f-holes were shaped like a 'G'. I've had a couple over the years. Again, being brought up in Gretsch country over here in New York, you see everything at some point or another. One of the first walk-in guitars I bought off the original owner was a double-cut Silver Jet, and that was probably in the late 70s. Back then, they were just used guitars; nobody called them 'vintage guitars'.

"Gretsch Duo Jets were very popular guitars. I'm amazed to tell you that we still get about half a dozen walk-in original-owner Gretsch guitars a year. And they're pretty much all locals. Last year, I had a guy walk in with a '54 Duo Jet with a 'T'-top logo and a tweed case. He says, 'Yeah, I bought this when I was young.' He's an old man now. He got it when he was a teenager. Back then there were plenty of guys playing Jets who couldn't spit out the big money for a Gibson. Most of the guitar heroes of the 50s and 60s were playing Gibsons and Fenders. But Gretsch did good with Eddie Cochran. I remember seeing him in clips of rock 'n' roll movies from the 50s. He was one of the first guys I really remember using the guitar as a weapon, like Buddy Holly did. It was so inspiring. The guitar wasn't going to play second fiddle; it was right up there with the voice." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York www.wellstrungguitars.com

During 1961, Duo Jets switched from single- to double-cutaway bodies in a similar fashion to Gibson's Les Paul range



Photography By Maddie Patch / Well Strung Guitars

Blues Headlines

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

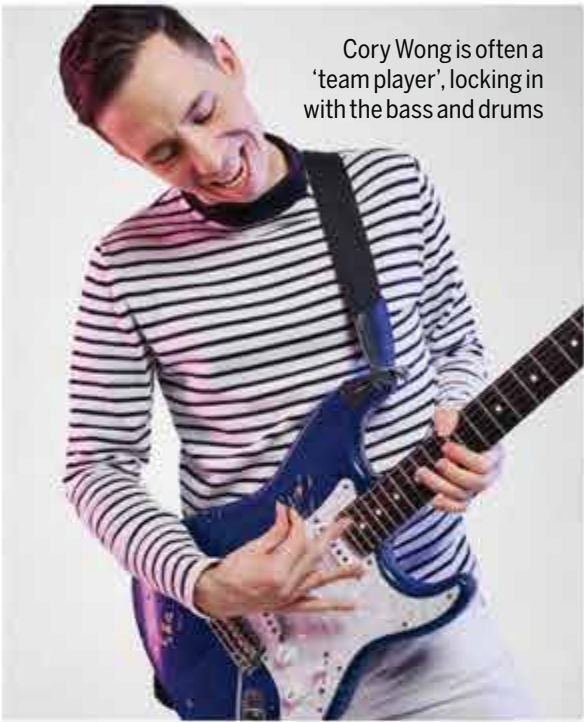


Blues Jam

Tutor: Richard Barrett | **Gear used:** Knaggs Choptank, Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

THERE ARE VARIOUS ways we can view the patterns, scales and chords that live in the various locations of the fretboard – and the permutations are infinite. I guess that’s one of the things that keeps us all motivated to improve year after year! For this Headlines, I’ve taken a static one-note ‘jam’ in which the harmonic and melodic content is provided solely by the guitar over a repetitive bass and drum pattern. The D minor pentatonic/blues scale will work well, but that’s only one possibility, and one which may not hold your (or any listener’s) interest indefinitely. Let’s do lots of soloing by all means, but in the context of an interactive ‘team-player’ approach. To that end, I’ve taken an approach of moving lots of rhythmic three-note chords around, in many cases superimposing C, G and F major triads over the implied D minor

of the bass and drum track. This isn’t as theoretically complex as it may sound. An F major triad (F, A, C) over the D bass note implies a Dmin7 chord, and there is already a D in the G major triad (G, B, D). The C major triad isn’t such an obvious choice at first glance, but it also fits well. Rather than getting too deep into chord theory, it’s worth expanding on this approach and throwing in a few wild cards as an experiment, maybe a B $\flat$ triad! It’s perfectly valid to try random chords and work out the harmonic relationships afterwards to understand what you’ve done. Many great solos have been created in this way! Finally, a reminder that rhythm and space are as important as harmonic content. This solo is pretty intense as I wanted to fit in lots of ideas, so feel free to lay back a bit!



Cory Wong is often a ‘team player’, locking in with the bass and drums

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Example 1

THIS OPENING PHRASE really hits the ground running, establishing the D minor as a default in the first bar, then moving triads around rhythmically, outlining C, G and F major (in a couple of inversions) before linking with some D minor pentatonic. Keep a close eye on the relationships between the triads and pentatonic lines, as these frequently coincide. Over time, this will give you greater vocabulary in both chord and solo playing.

$\text{♩} = 83$

The musical notation for Example 1 consists of three measures of music. Measure 1 starts with a Dm chord, followed by a C/D chord. Measure 2 contains Dm7, G/D, Dm7, and G/D chords. Measure 3 contains G/D and Dm7 chords. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is written on a six-string staff with fret numbers indicated below the notes. The bass and drum parts are indicated by 'x' marks on the E, B, G, D, A, and E strings.

Example 2

HAVING MADE THE JUMP from 'rhythm' to 'solo' playing in Example 1, I'm continuing that feel with this single-note passage. After the opening 'pick-up' phrase, this moves through shapes 4 and 5 of the D minor pentatonic (briefly) before reaching shape 1 halfway through bar 2. Here we stay until the end! However, check back over bar 2 and notice how the shape 4 pentatonic outlines an F/Dm7 triad, then shifting to shape 5, where we 'let ring' with a C major triad!

Example 2 musical notation. The first system (measures 1-2) shows a single-note passage. The fretboard diagram for the first system (measures 1-2) shows the following frets: 5/7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 6, 7, 5, 7, 9, 8, 8, 8, 9, 8. Annotations include "Let ring" and "C/D". The second system (measures 3-4) shows a continuation of the passage. The fretboard diagram for the second system (measures 3-4) shows the following frets: 13, 13, 12, 10, 10, 12, 11, 12, 10, 12, 10, 12, 13, 10, 12, 13, 10, 12. Annotations include "to bridge pickup", "1/4", "3", "6", "6", and "Vol".

Example 3

THIS STAYS WITH THE SHAPE 1 D minor pentatonic until beat 2, where we slide to shape 2, facilitating the Fmaj/Dm7 triad, then shifting up again to make a G major triad. We're still in shape 2 really, apart from the B natural, but at this point I'm thinking in terms of (fairly random) triads rather than strict scales. Another piece in the puzzle in terms of fretboard knowledge!

Example 3 musical notation. The first system (measures 1-2) shows a single-note passage. The fretboard diagram for the first system (measures 1-2) shows the following frets: 10, 13, 10, 12, 14, 13, 13, 13, 13, 15, 15, 15, 13, 13, 12, 13, 12, 10, 10, 13, 12, 10, 12. Annotations include "8va", "Dm7", "G/D", "Dm7", "C/D", "Dm", "PB 12", "w/bar", and "w/bar". The second system (measures 3-4) shows a continuation of the passage. The fretboard diagram for the second system (measures 3-4) shows the following frets: 13, 12, 10, 12, 12, 9, 10, 9, 7, 10, 7, 10, 11, 10, 8, 10, 10, 8, 10, 12, 10, 12, 13, 10, 12, 10. Annotations include "BU BD", "BU BD", "BU BD", and "3".

Example 4

CONTINUING WITH THE MIXTURE of pentatonic and chord fragments, here we have a mixture of doublestops (including the deliberately dissonant major 2nd in bar 1) leading to a few more rhythmic moving triads, now descending back down the fretboard before ending on the root (D). Experiment with looking at each triad as part of a pentatonic shape, with the chance to 'branch out' into single notes/embellishments and you'll really be expanding your horizons in any style!

1

4

Hear It Here

KIRK FLETCHER

LIVE AT THE BAKED POTATO –
BURNING BLUES



Live albums are always a great way to get inside the head of a player and see what they come up with in the heat of the moment. Kirk is known for being very comfortable switching between 'rhythm' and 'solo' techniques, and you'll hear this to great effect on *Rockwithme*, *El Medio Stomp* and *I'm In Love*, the latter being a great example of how pentatonics, triads and the CAGED chord approach all interlink.

CORY WONG

CORY AND THE WONGNOTES



A superb funky rhythm player, Cory also excels at bluesy pentatonic lines and unison riffs, all executed with precision. There are plenty of ideas to be borrowed from *Merci*, *Tiki Hut Strut* and *Headin' Down To Bunkers*. Cory takes a 'team-player' approach throughout, often locking in with the bass and drums rather than stepping obviously forward, but as we all know, keeping this kind of intensity and accuracy is a key skill, so it's worth learning from one of the best.

PINK FLOYD

THE WALL



David Gilmour is a big influence, so he's cropping up in Blues Headlines again! In justification, his approach to the rhythm and infamous solo on *Another Brick In The Wall Part 2* is precisely what we're looking at. To hear how David likes to move triads around, check out *Run Like Hell* and *Another Brick In The Wall Part 1*. Bouncing delays around like this is really great for your timing. I believe David's funky playing can also be heard on Grace Jones's epic *Slave To The Rhythm*.

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Demystifying The Modes Part 5: The E Mixolydian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Mike Stern Pacifica & Line 6 Helix Floor

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

THE MIXOLYDIAN MODE is the fifth mode of the major scale and can literally be seen as a major scale that starts and ends on the 5th note of the scale. The A major scale contains these seven notes: A B C# D E F# G# A

The E Mixolydian mode contains the same seven tones as the A major scale but starts and resolves to the fifth degree, E: E F# G# A B C# D E

Playing the A major scale from the fifth degree produces the E Mixolydian mode, which is a major scale with a minor 7th (♭7th) degree, instead of a major 7th. It's this minor 7th that gives the Mixolydian mode its unique flavour.

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 chords built from the tones of the fifth mode are E or E7 (including any diatonic variation and chord extensions).

R	Maj3	P5	Min7	Chord tones
E	F#	G#	A B C# D E	E + G# + B + D = E7 (E dominant 7th)

Tonal Centre

When we see a chord progression that starts with E or E7 and cycles through a series of chords derived from the A major scale, we have an E Mixolydian chord progression. This progression will resolve and sound rested on the E/E7 chord. The resolution point of a chord progression is called the tonal centre.

Mixolydian Characteristic Note

Each mode of the major scale has a characteristic note that evokes the unique sound of that mode – here it is the minor 7th. The E Mixolydian characteristic note is D. We further enhance the bluesy flavour of this mode by targeting its characteristic note and creating phrases that outline and resolve to the chord tones of E or E7 (E G# B D).

Note: Any chord tone extensions automatically become chord-tone resolution points for your melodies.

Here is an example of an E Mixolydian chord progression:

||: E | D A | E | D A :||

Listen carefully as you play through the chord progression. You'll notice that the progression keeps revolving and resolving back to the E chord. This resolution point is called the tonal centre of the progression. It's this tonal-centre resolution point that determines the modality within the major scale.

Notice that I'm using E dominant 9th arpeggios and chromatic tones within this month's solo. The E9 arpeggios are derived from the A major scale and the chromatic tones are used to create movement between those chord tones. The key to evoking the Mixolydian flavour is to incorporate the characteristic note of D into your phrases. Of course, resolving each line to a chord tone of E is just as important (E G# B).

Take a moment to analyse the chord progression, tab and notation for a deeper understanding of why the lines work so well over the harmonic structure. Have fun learning the lines and then dig into creating your own E Mixolydian solos over the backing track. See you next month for a super-sweet, melodic solo using the F# Aeolian mode.

www.robbiecalvo.com

Lick 1 Slide intro...

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE to show that modal playing is not restricted to single-note lines. The slide intro is highlighting the 'rock tonality' of the piece and also outlining the chord tones of the E chord. You'll notice that I resolve all of my slide phrases on the chord tones of E, plus I intentionally target the characteristic note of D within the lines and final resolution point.

♩ = 96

E D/E A5 E D/E A5

w/slide Let ring

E B G D A E

7 7 7 9 7 9 9 9 9 10 9 12 9 7 9 9 9 7

Lick 2 Using doublestops

THIS FOUR-BAR PHRASE can be seen as the E major pentatonic scale played in two fretboard locations. The E major pentatonic scale is derived from the A major scale and is therefore perfect for outlining the chord tones of an E chord. The second half of this phrase utilises doublestop 3rds, 4ths and 5ths that are centred around the E triad shape at the 4th fret. I recommend you use your fingers, or pick and fingers to articulate this line.

Sheet music for Lick 2, a four-bar phrase in E major. The tempo is 96 bpm. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The first two bars are in the key of E, and the last two bars are in the key of A (D/E). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two sharps. The first two bars are in the key of E, and the last two bars are in the key of A (D/E). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two sharps. The first two bars are in the key of E, and the last two bars are in the key of A (D/E). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two sharps.

Lick 3 Adding chromatic tones

I'M A HUGE FAN OF IMPROVISING WITH ARPEGGIOS. In this example I'm using an E9 arpeggio with a few chromatic tones thrown in for good measure. Adding the 9th to these dominant 7th arpeggios gives us a more pentatonic-like, two-notes-per-string shape to work with. The chromatic tones are giving me colour and movement within the phrases. The doublestop major and minor 6ths are also chord tones of E7, and I think they sound stylistically 'correct' on this kind of rhythm and blues progression.

Sheet music for Lick 3, a four-bar phrase in E major. The tempo is 96 bpm. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The first two bars are in the key of E, and the last two bars are in the key of A (D/E). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two sharps. The first two bars are in the key of E, and the last two bars are in the key of A (D/E). The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two sharps.

Lick 4 Arpeggiated movement

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED that I like to package my solos in two- or four-bar phrases that migrate up the fretboard through a series of scale or arpeggio patterns. This example combines two E9 arpeggio shapes that I articulate in a very bluesy fashion, the semi-tone bends and chromatics adding subtle nuance between the chord tones. Just make sure you don't end a phrase on any of the chromatic tones!

♩ = 96

E **D/E** **A5**

BU BD

E **D/E** **A5**

BU BU BD

1 3

Lick 5 The complete melodic toolkit

IN THIS EXAMPLE I'm combining doublestop major 3rds, an E9 arpeggio and the E major pentatonic scale – all of which outline the E major tonal centre chord and are all found within the A major scale. Those tasty chromatics are a great way to make your lines flow between chord tones. Combining melodic tools like this will open up the sound of your improvisations and keep your phrases sounding fresh and inspired.

♩ = 96

E **D/E** **A5** **E** **D/E**

8va

Let ring ---

A5 **E**

BU BU BD

1 4

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Guitarist

Nextmonth



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