



STEVE LUKATHER

Toto's virtuoso looks back on legendary studio sessions



THE FIRST BOOGIE

The wicker wonder that began the Mesa/Boogie cult of tone



RITCHIE BLACKMORE

Learn the hallmark licks of Deep Purple's master of early shred

Gu^{ar}ist

Issue 472

JUNE 2021

Fender
 ACOUSTASONIC
 JAZZMASTER
CHRISSIE HYNDE TELE
 '68 CUSTOM PRO
 REVERB
Reviewed Inside!

Frank Zappa
 & THE GUITAR REVOLUTION HE IGNITED

With...
STEVE VAI
GUTHRIE GOVAN
MIKE KENEALLY
& More

PLUS! ROGER MAYER PURPLE HAZE OCTAVIA WAY HI ATREIDES
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Live Forever



By the time this issue of *Guitarist* hits the shops, Britain will be emerging cautiously from lockdown with the hope, still fragile, that the worst of Covid-19 is behind us. The pandemic has caused untold heartbreak to those who have lost loved ones or their own health to the virus. And it has also blighted livelihoods, not least among musicians who depended on gigs for their income. Now, as the prospect of live music returns, *Guitarist* is proud

to support the return of music as it should be played, live and in the moment, in front of a real audience.

Of course, things won't return to normal overnight and there will continue to be health restrictions for public gatherings for some time to come, even supposing we don't have any further relapses into lockdown. But isn't it nice to hear musician friends talk about their first gigs in ages, as some are now doing? As society continues to open up, we'll be promoting live guitar music in lots of ways in these pages and inviting you to help us – so watch this space and look out for the hashtag #BackToLive, the campaign to support gigs and venues as they reopen for business.

On that note, this issue we celebrate the life and music of Frank Zappa, who staged some of the most dazzling virtuosic, unpredictable and ambitious live gigs ever seen. Filmmaker Alex Winter, director of a new film on Zappa's life, joins us along with Zappa-band alumni Steve Vai and Mike Keneally to talk about the subversive guitar genius of the musician on page 54. Enjoy the issue and see you next time – hopefully a little nearer to getting gigging once again.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Pierre Bensusan

The French fingerstyle acoustic master and DADGAD specialist has a lifetime of unplugged wisdom to impart on **p48**



Steve Lukather

Toto's irreverent virtuoso looks back on an eventful life in guitar, as he regales tales of sessions, splurges and A-list friends on **p66**



Electric Boogie

As Mesa Engineering passes into new ownership, we explore a rare 'Mark I' Mesa/Boogie amp from 1977 on **p72**

Guitarist

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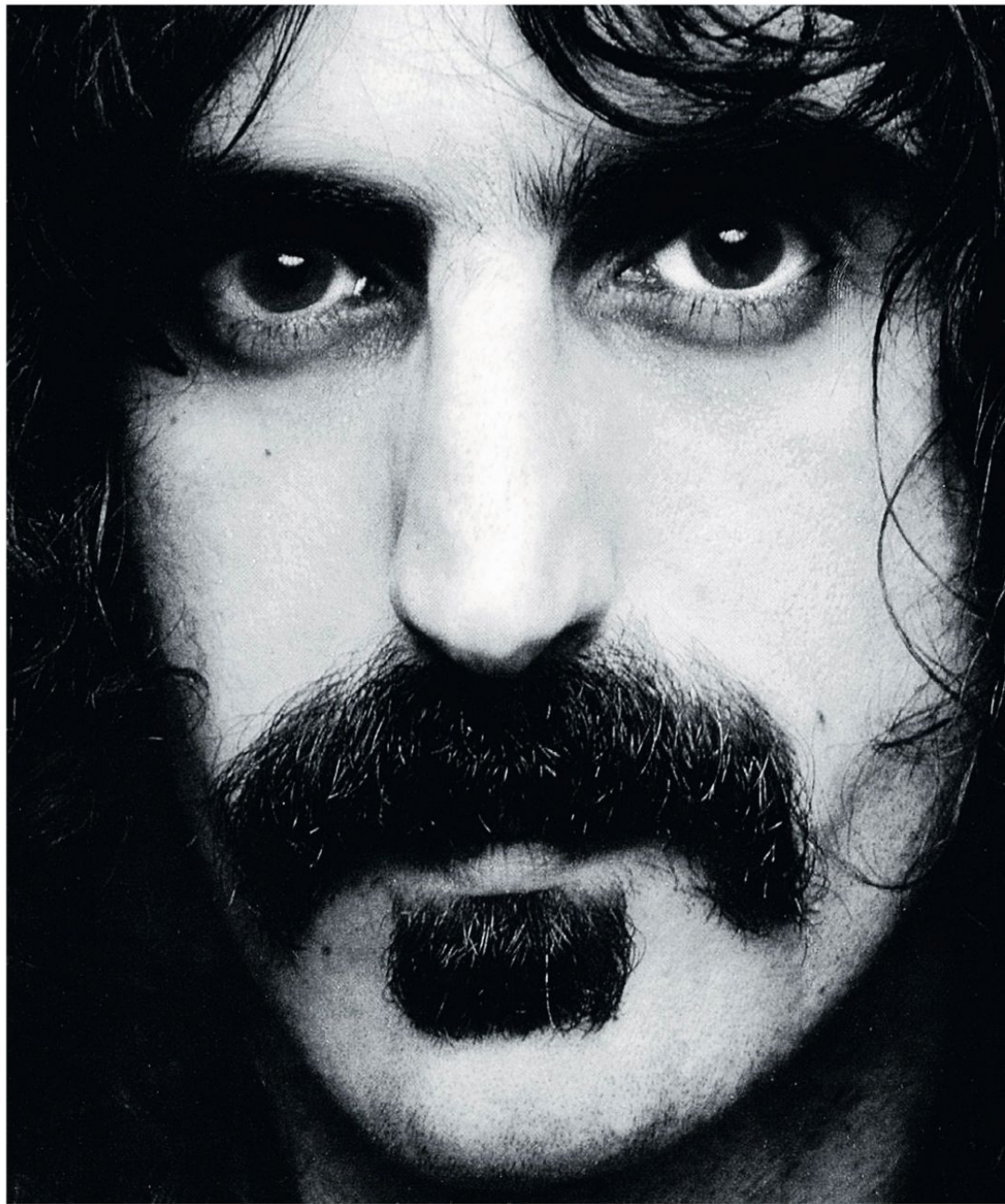


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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Neil Zlozower

COVER FEATURE

ZAPPA

54 A new documentary on the life and times of Frank Zappa has just been released in the UK. We take a look behind the scenes and find out what it took to bring the movie to the screen – and talk to Steve Vai and Mike Keneally about what it was like playing guitar in his legendary band

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<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



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FIRST PLAY



**MCNALLY SHANE
HENNESSY OM SIGNATURE**
£3,999

WHAT IS IT? A high-end cutaway electro-acoustic for the touring pro

Stage Struck

With experience at both Lowden and Atkin, Ciaran McNally now has his own name on the headstock. Designed with Shane Hennessy, this handmade electro is a thoroughbred for pro-grade gigs

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Phil Barker

When it comes to guitar design, one of the hardest nuts to crack is making an acoustic guitar sound natural when plugged in. This is particularly important for touring pros. They don't necessarily need their stage guitars to be the lushest-sounding instruments when unplugged – but they do need guitars that are strong yet responsive platforms for performing on the amplified stage. Such guitars need to be able to cross continents and climates without losing their stability and playability. They must sound good, of course, but above all they must be reliable night after night, from stage to stage, with a pickup system that translates every nuance of the player's touch into rich, gremlin-free sound.

This is the tough challenge that luthier Ciaran McNally took on when he designed this Signature OM for multi-faceted Irish guitarist Shane Hennessy. Ciaran honed his craft working for renowned maker George Lowden, followed by a stint at Atkin – no slouches at guitar making, either. Ciaran's signature style is building guitars that take inspiration both from classic American acoustics and European guitar design. We're therefore expecting something that







1



2

1. The single-piece mahogany neck feels quite contemporary and fast with its tactile satin/matt finish
2. The Santos rosewood fingerboard is lighter in weight than rosewood and looks great with the EVO gold frets. Santos is not under threat and thus is unlikely to face any CITES restrictions in future

There's a classic OM flavour here, with sweet treble, vibrant, bright-ish mids and a modest bass response

stands apart from all the boutique Martin and Gibson clones out there. The ace up Ciaran's sleeve is that he's been working with Udo Roesner, the famed designer of AER acoustic amps, on a brand-new pro-grade pickup system that makes its debut in this guitar, more of which shortly. With all that in mind, Ciaran asked us to evaluate the guitar as a stage instrument first and foremost. And with gigs looking possible for the first time in what feels like forever, it's an invitation we're happy to accept.

As we cast our eye over the Shane Hennessy OM Signature we can see evidence of its tour-focused design immediately. The first tell-tale sign is the fingerboard, which is made with attractively grained Santos rosewood (aka pau ferro) instead of the ebony or East Indian rosewood you might expect at this price. That's no oversight – Santos was chosen because it performs in a similar way to rosewood but isn't likely to face any CITES restrictions, and it's also relatively lightweight – important considerations for touring guitarists. The back and sides of the guitar are walnut, an abundant but

excellent wood that's also used by Lowden. The OM-size body wears a thin matt nitro finish and has an elegant florentine cutaway for easy progress north of the 14th fret.

The top, meanwhile, is of Sitka spruce, with quite a tight, characterful grain here. A glance inside the body reveals that the guitar's interior is also lightly lacquer-sealed. This is to increase the instrument's stability while touring through different climates, a very professional touch. Ciaran tells us that the back and sides have also been reinforced for touring, while additional bracing was judiciously applied to the top to help it stand up to percussive playing techniques.

The 20-fret, one-piece mahogany neck has a crescent-section, shallow 'D' profile that feels fast, contemporary and precise with its 645mm (25.4-inch) scale. Though some players may prefer a slightly fuller, palm-supporting shape, it's far from a lollipop stick and the EVO gold fretwire brings a touch of opulence to otherwise understated styling. The rear of the headstock features a perfectly executed U-shape volute that is one of the few obvious hints of McNally's past at Lowden.



Moving to the electronics, the unique Udo Roesner-designed 'Bracket' pickup system features both an under-saddle transducer and a side-mounted 'floating microphone'. These two signal sources are controlled from sliders on the upper edge of the body: Volume controls the level of the transducer, while Mic simply blends in signal from the microphone. Bass, Treble and Presence controls (the latter accessed via a recessed screw) provide simple but powerful EQ, while access for the jack is through the strap button. The system is powered by a single nine-volt brick, which we found swinging loose from its metal clip inside the body when the guitar arrived. Not ideal. Our review guitar is essentially a near-final prototype, however, and Ciaran McNally assures us that the battery mounting has since been redesigned to be completely secure and accessible from outside the soundhole – both crucial improvements, in our view, for a touring instrument.

The final feature that must be mentioned is the wooden soundhole cover bearing Shane Hennessy's personal emblem, an Irish harp – this, like the guitar's body,

is crafted of walnut and provides extra feedback suppression when fitted snugly in place with its rubberised seal. The latter has a little cutout along one edge to allow for string excursion near the neck: a nice detail.

Feel & Sounds

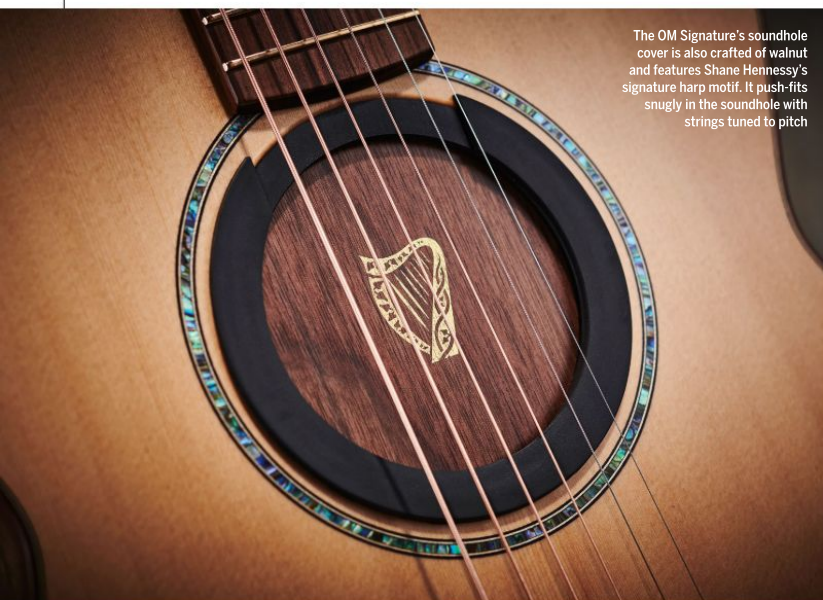
Playing acoustically, without the soundhole cover in place, our first impression is that it is the best intonated acoustic guitar we've played in a long time, possibly ever. Strum the open strings in standard tuning and it's like playing a chord on the piano with the sustain pedal down. There's not a hair out of place, harmonically. Ciaran later explains that Shane Hennessy has perfect pitch and the bridge placement was tweaked during R&D until the guitar had spookily accurate intonation.

Tonally, there's a classic OM flavour here, with sweet treble, vibrant, bright-ish mids and a modest bass response. The Shane Hennessy Signature OM has a slightly more punchy, strident voice overall than a Martin OM-28, however, which may reflect its beefed-up build. It comes fully to life when you play with precision and a bit of



3. The walnut body has been judiciously strengthened to be light but very strong. Extra top bracing has also been fitted to this model to make it a more stable stage performer

4. The Udo Roesner-designed 'Bracket' pickup is all new and yields a very natural yet controllable sound via a transducer pickup and a side-mounted 'floating' microphone



The OM Signature's soundhole cover is also crafted of walnut and features Shane Hennessy's signature harp motif. It push-fits snugly in the soundhole with strings tuned to pitch



MCNALLY SHANE HENNESSY OM SIGNATURE

PRICE: £3,999 (inc Mono gigbag)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: Cutaway electro-acoustic Orchestra Model
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: Single-piece mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4")
TUNERS: Gotoh open-back tuners
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Santos Rosewood
FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Santos rosewood w/bone saddle/55mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.9/4.2
OPTIONS: An Adirondack spruce/Honduras rosewood OM Cutaway 'Studio' version of the Shane Hennessy OM Signature with lighter bracing, optimised for pure acoustic performance, is available for custom order (£5,115)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra charge
FINISH: Thin matt natural cellulose (as reviewed)

McNally Guitars
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PROS Superb stage tones from a beautifully executed, specialist design; superb intonation; great pickup system

CONS It's a bit niche and not cheap; needs better battery housing – but we're told that's now sorted for standard production guitars

spirit. It won't flatter aimless noodling like a comfy old J-45, for example, but bring your A-game to it and it will voice every detail with sonorous, expressive clarity.

Fitting the soundhole cover dampens the guitar's unplugged voice – but remember the cover is to help the guitar's amplified sound. It's therefore time to plug the McNally into our AER Compact 60 combo to discover what Udo Roesner's new pickup system can do. Our immediate impression, with both the floating mic and transducer at their mid-point, is of a detailed and airy amplified tone. Inserting the soundhole cover settles down incipient feedback and fattens up the guitar's bass response slightly – it feels like this was how the guitar was meant to be played when amplified.

Increase the transducer pickup's presence in the mix and the core of each note becomes more solid, round and full. Turning up the output of the floating mic yields a more spacious, hollow and vibrant voice. How you balance those 'yin and yang' voices is up to you: we liked the mic set just a tad lower than the transducer to give a firm, supple tone with some air in the tail of each note. The Bass and Treble EQ controls are powerful and, together with the option of leaving the soundhole cover in or out, allow you to dial the guitar in for any room.

Plugging in our Taylor Builder's Edition 324ce for comparison was illuminating: the Taylor's well-regarded Expression System 2 pickup provides a sweet, pleasing amplified

It pulls off the trick of being both sensitive to touch while providing effective control over tone and feedback

voice that is simpler to dial in – but also less three-dimensional, airy and flexible than the pickup in the McNally. Of course, these are two very different guitars, so this can offer no more than a rough A/B comparison for context. But it does underline that the McNally's pickup was designed to give voice to a wide spectrum of playing techniques – from delicate fingerstyle to percussive taps and slaps – and, as such, it responds to player input on so many levels.

Verdict

The Shane Hennessy OM Signature is a fully professional instrument designed to fill the auditoriums of the world with rich, dependable sound. It pulls off the difficult trick of being both sensitive to the player's touch while providing precise, effective control over both tone and feedback. The guitar's attention to detail with regard to tourability is second to none (with the exception of the now-upgraded battery mounting). If you want to bring a live audience to its feet, the OM Signature deserves your serious attention, especially as the world wakes up to gigging once again. **A**

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**FENDER '68 CUSTOM
PRO REVERB**
£1,349

WHAT IS IT? A new addition to Fender's '68 Custom range, blending late-60s visuals with stunning tone derived from early Pro Reverbs

Go Pro

Classic Fender style and tone from one of the all-time great guitar amp circuits are revisited and refined in a more contemporary, portable package

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis

With arguably the world's richest guitar amplification legacy, Fender can hardly be blamed for occasionally looking to its own back catalogue for a little inspiration. Fender's classic early 60s black-panel amplifiers are universal benchmarks for American guitar tone, responsible for countless hit records and the industry-standard backline on the world's stages for decades. We all know the star turns from this era such as the mighty Twin Reverb with its quartet of 6L6 valves, and the Deluxe Reverb, powered by a pair of 6V6s driving a single 12-inch speaker – ideal for studios and smaller venues.

Sat in between these two legends were the 4x10 Super Reverb and, from 1965 onwards, the less well known and slightly less powerful Pro Reverb, featuring a pair of 12-inch speakers and a dual 6L6 output stage, producing around 40 watts into a slightly smaller output transformer than the Super. While these weren't in the spotlight as much as the Twin and Deluxe, early Pro Reverbs had – and still have – a fiercely loyal fanbase, many of whom consider them to be the best amps Fender ever made, and by



1. The '68 Custom Pro Reverb uses a pair of silicon-rectified Groove Tubes 6L6-S output valves to produce around 40 watts. Original Pro models used a GZ34 rectifier valve, changed firstly to a 5U4 and then to silicon diodes. Later Pros were capable of nearly 70 watts, but lacked the earlier amp's pleasing dynamics. Fender has done other clever things to restore the valve-rectified 'sag' effect, while retaining the reliability of silicon diodes

2. One big change from the original model is that this '68 Custom features one speaker – Celestion's G12 Neo Creamback loudspeaker – instead of two. The special rare earth magnet represents a weight saving of around 2kg compared with a conventional ceramic magnet, making the Pro easier to carry. There's nothing lightweight about the tone, though – we rate the Neo as one of the best Celestions ever made

extension the best amps *anyone* has ever made, with the sweetest tone and a perfect balance of power and headroom.

Taking its cue from that combo is Fender's new '68 Custom Pro Reverb, which joins the '68 Custom range together with the new '68 Custom Vibro Champ Reverb. Not just straight reissues, these '68 Customs are refined and upgraded to be more in keeping with modern demands without sacrificing the tone and character of the originals.

The '68 Custom Pro Reverb is as handsome a Fender as we've ever seen. The company has revisited the styling from that specific year, combining blue graphics on a silver control panel with a silver and blue sparkle grille cloth. The grille has an aluminium 'drip edge surround', a distinctive feature that appeared between 1967 and 1969, with 1968 thought to be the only full year of 'drip edge' production. The rest of the construction is typical 60s Fender, with a solid ply cabinet covered in thick black Tolex and a hefty steel box chassis secured by four bolts, reinforced with chrome strap washers.

Inside the chassis, the electronics are a mix of PCB and hand wiring. There are two main circuit boards: one behind the control panel supporting the control pots and switches, and a larger board that holds most of the preamp, power amp and power supply components.

The original's coveted blend of medium headroom, 6L6 clarity and squashy dynamic response has been enhanced

Meanwhile, the valve bases are all chassis-mounted and hand-wired just like the originals, keeping heat away from the PCBs and vastly improving reliability. There are three 12AX7 and two 12AT7 preamp valves, along with a matched pair of Groove Tubes 6L6-S valves providing the power. The first Pro Reverbs used a GZ34 rectifier valve, which was replaced with a 5U4 on later iterations, followed by silicon diodes. The '68 Custom Pro Reverb uses silicon for reliability and consistency, but its custom Schumacher transformers have been specially designed to add some elusive 'sag' and the negative feedback has been reduced, further enhancing the dynamic response.

The '68 Custom Pro Reverb is a one-channel design, based on the classic Fender 'Vibrato' channel, with two input jacks, a Bright switch and an added midrange control, something that didn't appear on





the originals. There's a level control for the traditional valve-powered spring reverb, together with Speed and Intensity controls for the valve-powered tremolo effect, which sits after the reverb in the output stage, modulating volume via the grid bias.

The other big change is the transition from two speakers to one – a single 12-inch Celestion Neo Creamback. This reduces the cabinet size to slightly less than Deluxe Reverb proportions and keeps the weight down, making the '68 Custom Pro Reverb a tough yet portable combo that's easily carried with one hand.

Feel & Sounds

We used our regular PAF-equipped Les Paul and Duncan APS-loaded Strat, and after a little experimenting we settled with leaving the volume and tone controls all roughly on 6, with the Bright switch set to 'on' for our Les Paul and 'off' for the Strat. The sweet treble, balanced mids and extended bass are great for jazz, country and pop, while the reverb and tremolo are like taking a journey through American pop culture. Low settings on the spring add subtle ambience and smokey, diffused jazz-club warmth, while the halfway mark is full-on Americana, conjuring up visions of dust-coated pickup trucks, tumbleweeds and endless desert highways punctuated with Googie-styled gas stations and motels.



Pushing the reverb higher still takes you to surf city, with cavernous delay and ping-pong oscillation nailing the Dick Dale tone. The tremolo is equally evocative, from dark, brooding slow pulses to Bo Diddley stutter at full speed. The tremolo 'vibrato' circuit works on the output power stage's grid bias, modulating the reverb tail as well as the guitar signal for authentic vintage tones, and it behaves very dynamically, with the effect becoming more noticeable the quieter the guitar is played, and less apparent as you dig in hard.

3. The '68 Custom Pro Reverb's preamp is based on the historically misnamed 'Vibrato' channel, with dual inputs and a Bright switch. The midrange control is a modern addition – originally it was only available on the Twin Reverb. Both effects are valve-powered and closely follow the original circuit

4. The classic Fender script of the logo evokes the late 60s inspiration behind this amp's creation. And while the mains indicator would have originally been red, here it's been changed to a funky blue, something small but important that tells you how much attention to detail has gone into this amp



This model recreates CBS's makeover, with a 'tailed' Fender badge and vertical blue threads in the grille cloth. The aluminium 'drip edge' trim was a short-lived addition in '67, while the thin vertical lines on the control panel are another period-correct detail, only appearing on the earliest 'silver-panel' amps, most of which had 'black-panel' electronics

The original Pro Reverb's coveted blend of medium headroom, 6L6 clarity and squashy dynamic response has not only been retained but enhanced, with a wider dynamic range on the '68 Custom thanks to that reduction in negative feedback and some clever work on the transformers. The amp stays clean up until around 4 on the volume control, after which the output stage distortion builds from a subtle chime at around 4 or 5, to a toothsome crunch with the volume maxed out. Original Pro Reverbs could sound a little mushy when driven hard, but the '68 Custom's Celestion Neo Creamback adds extra focus and definition – it's a truly superb driver, blending the low-end thump of 60S G12s with a woody midrange and complex treble that rivals the Alnico Gold.

Verdict

The '68 Custom Pro Reverb might be brand-new, but it's chock-full of vintage American tone and shares the perfectly balanced power of its ancestor, with ample headroom for country twang and yet not so much that you lose those organic squashy dynamics needed for blues and classic rock. As well as sounding great on its own, it's also a superb platform for pedals, although once you've heard the Pro's monster reverb and tremolo, your pedalboard could possibly be taking an

This brand-new model is chock-full of vintage American tone and shares the perfectly balanced power of its ancestor

extended holiday. While both effects are foot-switchable, there are no other concessions to modern functionality: effects loops, boosts and other tone-altering features are absent, which is great, because when an amp sounds this good, you simply don't need them. It really looks the part, too. The smart late-60s visuals exude a retro-modern cool vibe that's very much 'in' at the moment.

We're obviously in a different league here compared with an all-digital mass-produced combo, and that's reflected in the price. However, we think Fender's '68 Custom Pro Reverb could easily end up being the perfect desert island amp for many pro and dedicated amateur guitarists. For sheer quality of tone, the price is more than fair – when you add in the robust build quality and classic styling, things become more than a little tempting. With those compact proportions and easy handling, it's a perfect partner for home, studio and stage. **F**



FENDER '68 CUSTOM PRO REVERB 1X12" COMBO

PRICE: £1,349

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: All valve preamp and power amp

OUTPUT: 40W RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 2x 12AT7, 2x 6L6-S

DIMENSIONS: 435 (h) x 570 (w) x 238mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 16/35

CABINET: Birch ply

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x12" Celestion G12 Neo Creamback

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Bright switch, Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Reverb level, vibrato Speed and Intensity

FOOTSWITCH: Supplied vintage 2-button switch, toggles reverb and vibrato effects (needs to be plugged in for vibrato to work)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Valve-powered spring reverb, valve tremolo 'vibrato' effect, external speaker jack

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The other new addition to the '68 Custom range is the 5W '68 Custom Vibro Champ (£799). Other '68 Custom amps include the Princeton Reverb (£1,049), Deluxe Reverb (£1,299) and Twin Reverb (£1,599)

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.fender.com



PROS Authentic American clean and mild overdrive tone; superlative reverb and tremolo effects

CONS One minor disappointment at this price is the lack of a pair of tilt-back legs

GOOD TO GO

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A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.

Elixir Strings. Performance-ready with long-lasting tone.



FIRST PLAY



**FENDER CHRISSIE HYNDE
TELECASTER**
£1,249

WHAT IS IT? A Chrissie Hynde present courtesy of Fender and the great Pretender

Golden Hynde

If you've given up hope of owning a vintage-spec Tele, here's an affordable nitro-clad '65-style pretender that's set to be talk of the town

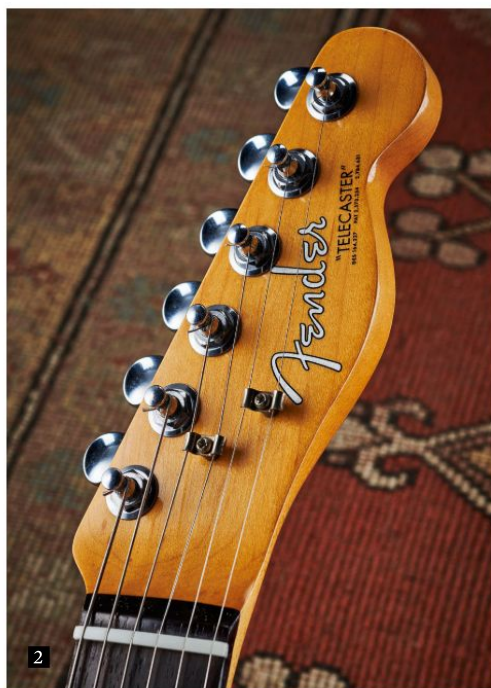
Words Ed Mitchell **Photography** Olly Curtis

As leader of The Pretenders, Chrissie Hynde has been behind more hits than La Cosa Nostra. *I Go To Sleep*, *Don't Get Me Wrong*, *Back On The Chain Gang*, *2000 Miles*, *I'll Stand By You*... The list goes on and on. As a guitarist, Chrissie has been utterly faithful to the Telecaster since she founded The Pretenders in 1978. It's fitting, then, that Fender has taken the opportunity to reward that loyalty with a new Telecaster release. It's not a signature model as such. It hasn't been spec'd from the ground up. No, this is far more interesting. The Chrissie Hynde Telecaster is a replica of her cherished '65 original.

Aside from a few tweaks, which we'll go into shortly, this Mexico-sourced model is all classic 60s. Things kick off with a timeless alder coated in a beautiful faded Ice Blue Metallic nitrocellulose lacquer. Now, this is an aged Road Worn finish, but at first glance you wouldn't even guess that this paint has been aged – there are no obvious chips, gouges or similar signs of trauma. It's only when the light catches it at certain angles that you can spot spidery silver lines threading through the nitro. The hardware has been lightly aged, too, and looks great against the custom colour paint job.







1. An obvious custom tweak from the '65 Telecaster spec is the six-saddle bridge

2. One major concession to modern practicality is a set of locking tuners with smaller vintage-style buttons to match the old-school style

3. The alder body's metallic Road Worn nitro finish is particularly subtle and should acquire more patina over the years. This chromed 'mirror' scratchplate is aged to give the heavily-gigged vibe of Chrissie's original model

4. The bolt-on maple neck is about as slim as Tele profiles come. Note the 'CH' on the neckplate – you won't find Chrissie's signature on this model

Sticking with the hardware, you'll notice the ashtray bridge comes loaded with six individual saddles. We've never been the biggest fan of these things, but we'll maintain an open mind until we've given the guitar a good workout.

While there's no Chrissie Hynde signature anywhere on this guitar, you will find a big 'CH' etched into the chrome on the neck plate. Although it's technically not hardware, the mirror scratchplate is made from actual metal, not the thick plastic stuff you usually find these things cut out of. The 'plate has been subtly distressed adding to this Tele's curb appeal and quality feel.

Despite the fact that this is essentially a replica of a '65 Telecaster, Fender has installed a set of what it calls Chrissie Hynde Tele pickups – “exactly matching Chrissie's original, vintage-output pickups” – but they're referred to on the spec sheet as '50s spec pickups. Either way, they run just under 7kohms output apiece and are presumably the closest match tonally to what's lurking in Chrissie's original guitar. As expected, the pickups are wired through a master volume, master tone and three-way pickup selector switch. You get the modern Tele switching here: bridge, both and neck. No surprises.

The ageing on the slim-profile bolt-on maple neck is even harder to make out than that on the body. Again, you get a nitrocellulose lacquer, but it's a full gloss finish that hasn't been cut back like a Custom Shop relic. The neck is topped with a nice piece of rosewood that's been planed into a period-correct 184mm (7.25-inch) radius and studded with 21 vintage/tall frets. The top nut is made from a synthetic bone material. Long-time vegetarian and animal rights campaigner Chrissie will be pleased about that. The other concession to modern thinking is a set of locking tuners, dressed up with some vintage-style buttons.

Feel & Sounds

Fender has spec'd this guitar with what it describes as a Chrissie Hynde approved Custom Mid '60s 'C' neck profile. Now, that might look cool in the marketing blurbs, but it doesn't tell us much. It's only when we engage our trusty calipers that we discover that the neck depth at the 1st fret is a super-slim 0.20mm (0.79 inches) and at the 12th fret it's 23.6mm (0.93 inches). These vital statistics match the popular Fender Custom Shop 60s Style Oval 'C' profile, the shape you'll find on most of its '63 Telecaster models. It's the kind of neck you can hang your thumb over, Wilko Johnson-style.

Aside from a few tweaks, this Mexico-sourced model is all classic 60s



We love the fact that Fender and Chrissie didn't update the feel of this guitar. There are plenty Fenders that offer old-school looks and modern playability, but few give you access to authentic 60s spec. We had a lot more fun with that original fingerboard radius and the vintage tall frets than we expected, and we put a lot of mileage on this Tele before it went back to Fender.

A great Telecaster should reveal its character before you even plug it in. Sans amplifier, Chrissie's signature practically chimes. Sustain is impressive and Luther Perkins would've loved the twang pinging off the bottom strings. In other words, that six-saddle bridge is doing just fine. We stand corrected.

Back on the chain signal gang and turning up the volume on our clean channel makes good on the promise of the unamplified CH. The bridge pickup rings like a bell. It really nails that *Brass In Pocket* tone. This Tele loves being strummed. The tone is bright yet well rounded, something we associate with the best vintage wound pickups. There's enough grunt here to give your valves a good kicking, but not so much that you overpower the guitar's natural tone. By the way, those of you who think metal scratchplates adversely affect tone, we found zero evidence of that...





Pickups are 50s-spec single coils with master volume, master tone and a three-way pickup selector switch



FENDER CHRISSIE HYNDE TELECASTER

PRICE: £1,249 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white pearloid dots, 184.1mm (7.25") radius

FRETS: 21, vintage/tall

HARDWARE: Nickel/chrome Tele bridge 6 stainless steel saddles, Deluxe cast locking tuners with vintage-style buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Fender Vintage Style

'50s Single-Coil Tele pickups, master volume, master tone, 3-way pickup selector lever switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.2/7.12

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Check out Fender's Vintera '60s Tele Modified (£939) for another Mexican-made hot-rod Tele

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Faded Ice Blue Metallic – Road Worn nitrocellulose

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA

01342 331700

www.fender.com

Adding overdrive by increments takes you into Wilko Johnson territory before it all gets a bit more Jimmy Page. The definition you experience with the bridge pup remains evident when you change to the middle position on the switch. As ever, this is a great location for rock rhythm stuff and rockabilly playing. The neck pickup has all the depth you could wish for, excelling in everything from blues licks to jazz comping. We expect a lot from a Telecaster. A great one can cover a lot of ground tonally. This is a great one.

Verdict

Chrissie's Telecaster took this reviewer back to school. After years of Tele addiction, we've got this ideal of our perfect 10: a swamp ash body and the classic 'U' profile fat neck with a 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius. Of course, the Chrissie Hynde Telecaster has none of these attributes. Strange, then, that we found this thing so totally addictive.

We thought we'd struggle with the thin-depth neck, but we grew to love it. Surely the smaller vintage-correct fingerboard radius would make upper-fret bending difficult? Again, our fears were unfounded. This Tele was so well set up that it was a joy to play. Oh, and we've always considered a six-saddle setup tonally inferior to the 50s-style three-brass-saddle arrangement, but here again Chrissie's guitar challenged our

This is a vintage-spec Tele for a price that some people pay for a secondhand Japanese import

prejudices. Tone and sustain both turned up in abundance. You live and learn.

Bottom line, this is an exceptional Telecaster. It sounds great, plays like a dream and couldn't look any cuter if it was wearing an Easter bonnet. And a sub-8lb weight puts it right in the Tele sweet spot, while the subtle ageing shouldn't put off the relic-deniers among you.

While it's great to see a pioneering player honoured with a 'signature' Tele, you don't have to be a fan of Chrissie Hynde to get excited about this guitar. This is a vintage-spec Tele for a price that some people pay for a secondhand Japanese import. Let that sink in – and the fact that it comes with a proper Fender hardshell case, a white nylon strap and a sheriff's badge.

So, if you're wringing out a wet hankie because you don't have enough, ahem, brass in pocket for a vintage Tele, let Chrissie's sweet '65 replica get you closer than you could possibly imagine at a fraction of the cost. As the icon herself once sang, it's time for you to stop all of your sobbing. **G**



PROS Vintage specs; authentic 60s tone; drop-dead gorgeous looks

CONS Just because we've made peace with the skinny neck doesn't mean you will



Ashdown Guitar Magnifiers

ALL VALVE TONE MADE IN ENGLAND

Designed, engineered and lovingly hand built in the UK custom shop the AGM-5C is designed for genuine tonal purists wanting luscious British valve driven guitar tones but at home/studio friendly volume levels combined with a host of modern player friendly features.

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WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM





theWishlist

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

Roger Mayer Purple Haze Octavia £1,440

CONTACT **Guitar Village** PHONE **01252 726821** WEB www.guitarvillage.co.uk Words **Rod Brakes** Photography **Olly Curtis**

As Jimi Hendrix's right-hand man in the studio during the recording of 1967's *Axis: Bold As Love*, Roger Mayer knows what it means to be at the cutting edge of studio effects. Shortly after Roger's 21st birthday, the pair hit it off while discussing guitar pedals. "I introduced the Octavia to Jimi back in early 1967," recalls Roger. "We were both into new and innovative sounds and I mentioned I'd helped out Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page with some of my stuff for their hit records. Jimi asked me if I had anything new and I told him about this new pedal – the Octavia."

"He asked me to bring it along to a gig he was playing at Chislehurst Caves [in Kent] and he tried it out through a practice amp in the dressing room. He said, 'I know what I can use this for. Come down to the Ricky Tick Club gig next week; we're going to Olympic Studios after the show to record the overdubs for *Purple Haze* and *Fire*.' Jimi ended up using a Telecaster to record those solos with, and that's how he discovered the Octavia."

The pedal that Jimi used to record *Purple Haze* with uniquely featured a hand-wound ferrite transformer, and for the first time this all-important component has been incorporated into an official Octavia design.

"It's also the first time since then that I've made an Octavia in a wedge-shaped enclosure," points out Roger. "But this one doesn't just use a battery; it also takes nine to 24 volts DC. The higher the voltage, the greater the headroom or output capacity – before the signal distorts. So you can get the perfect Octavia sound and boost it with a higher output, which makes it much more usable in the studio. When I was in the studio with Jimi, we had access to a variable power supply, so we could fine-tune the sound of the Octavia."

Although the Octavia is often lumped into the category of fuzz pedals, Roger considers this too generic a label. "It's more about wave shaping," he explains. "The sound of an Octavia is about mirror imaging; you've got twice as many [wave] peaks as you would normally have, and that's what gives the frequency doubling effect. It sounds alien, but it also sounds human. It was made for making hit records and it debuted on arguably Jimi Hendrix's most famous record – *Purple Haze*. It's got an impeccable heritage. If you want a genuine Octavia tone, you need to buy a genuine pedal. Some of my early pedals go for a lot more money; the original Band Of Gypsies Octavia just went for \$70,400!"

1. Roger designed and custom-winds these ferrite transformers (bottom left) as per the earliest examples used by Jimi Hendrix. They are more hum-resistant and offer a superior high-frequency detailed response than standard audio transformers

2. While the Octave knob (right) controls the wave-shaping properties of the harmonics, the volume knob amplifies the selected sound (and turns the power on and off). Maximum output level is obtained when using a 24-volt power supply rail

3. According to Roger, the Purple Haze Octavia is not only identical to Jimi's original pedal in terms of sound but it also comes with a recording studio-quality output stage



4. With collectors hot on the trail, a mere 100 of these Roger Mayer-signed Purple Haze Octavias have been made available to musicians, engineers and producers worldwide. "They also make a nice gift and they're a good investment, too," says Roger

5. "The original Octavia brand is mine," underscores Roger. "Years ago, Tycobrahe just copied an Octavia I had made for [The Yardbirds'] Keith Relf. However, that pedal wasn't the same version that was used by Jimi Hendrix to record *Purple Haze* with"

6. The Roger Mayer Purple Haze Octavia is hand-built in the UK using UK-supplied parts, including gold-plated Cluff jack plug connectors and conductive plastic low-noise potentiometers. Ultimate low-noise performance is obtained by advanced electronics design techniques, including a six-layer printed circuit card





Gas Supply

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

Neural DSP Quad Cortex £1,449

CONTACT Neural DSP PHONE N/A WEBSITE www.neuraldsp.com

JARGON CRUNCHING

Impulse responses: There's an ever-growing trend for hardware to play nice with impulse responses (IRs): that is, multiple 'snapshots' of a tone that help emulate the sound of, say, a speaker cab. By switching between many IRs, it's possible to recreate the sound of different microphones, their distance from the speaker and the angle they're pointing at the cab. Think of it like sampling but for tone.

Cool! So what's this gadget then - a new multi-effects unit?

Wash your mouth out. This is the Neural DSP Quad Cortex, and if you've been keeping an eye on the gear sphere since the NAMM Show in 2020 then you'll know that it's one of the most highly anticipated 'modelling units' we've seen in recent years.

Neural makes software, doesn't it?

You've probably heard of Neural's plug-ins; there are software emulations of classics such as the Soldano SLO-100 and modern icons from the likes of Fortin and Darkglass. As well as this, Neural's Archetype series plug-ins offer signature virtual rigs from artists including Cory Wong, Tosin Abasi and Gojira. The Quad Cortex is the first hardware product from Neural.

So it doesn't have previous when it comes to 'real' gear, then?

Not unless you consider that Neural DSP founder Doug Castro also happened to start Darkglass Electronics. Add to that the fact that Neural has snuck in some very clever functions with the Quad Cortex, and we think we're in safe hands.

What's it all about?

Well, it's a modelling unit first and foremost: that's more than 50 amp models, 70-plus effects and more than 1,000 cabinet impulse responses. It also has some exciting additional features that help put it among the must-try modellers that are on the market right now. For a start, it's got a pair of SHARC DSP chips onboard, giving you a total of 2GHz of power from its (you guessed it)



FOOTSWITCHES

More than simple buttons, the footswitch caps are also rotary controllers. Not only does it lend itself to more cohesive control but it's a clever way of saving space, too

TOUCHSCREEN

Intuitive control and visuals are here in spades thanks to a seven-inch strengthened glass multi-touchscreen that does away with fiddly menus

NEURAL CAPTURE

Neural DSP tells us its method of cloning the tone of hardware amps, cabs and overdrives is different and better than anyone else's. With talk of biometric AI, we're inclined to believe them

QUAD-CORE

We're increasingly swapping watts for GHz these days, and with two SHARC DSP chips offering four cores of power, the total is 2GHz. That's enough to power a four-amp rig with additional effects!



CONNECTIVITY

Multiple inputs, outputs, effects loops, USB and a dedicated Capture jack plug mean that you've got plenty of flexible routing



quad-core processors. You can run up to four amps at once, complete with effects, depending on how complex you make the chain.

That's three more than I normally use. What else does it do?

We'll start with Neural Capture. As has become popular with the likes of the Kemper Profiler, Neural Capture aims to replicate the sound of any hardware amp, overdrive or cabinet that you connect to the Quad Cortex. There's a dedicated connection on the back for doing this and it uses AI to analyse the signal in a way that's similar to "human perception". From here, you can store the sound, share it, or import other 'captured' tones from fellow users via the Capture software.

What about the hardware side?

Everything is centred around a seven-inch multi-touchscreen that's faced by 1.8mm thick, chemically strengthened Corning glass. The 11 stomp switches have a trick up their sleeves, too, as their caps double as rotary controllers for making adjustments. On the back, the connectivity side of things offers: two combo XLR/jack inputs, two effects loops, two L/R outputs, MIDI I/O, two expression pedal inputs and USB, which also works as a high-grade audio interface. The whole lot is housed in an anodised aluminium body, weighs just 1.95kg (4.3lb), and measures 29 by 19 by 4.9cm.

It sounds impressive. How does it compare to the competition on price?

Fairly well, we'd say. With models just starting to make their way towards dealers, it's early days, but it's currently listed at £1,449 in a number of UK stores. Given the features and the processing power, we think these are going to be popular. Look out for a full review coming soon! [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...

BOSS BAS-1 AMP STAND £62



Remember that time you perched your combo atop a bottle crate, hoping for the best? Or the time you sat it on a tiny bar stool to get it off the ground? Well, there's no need to precariously balance your pride and joy any longer. Boss has joined the amp stand game, giving you the perfect platform to seat your amp on stage. By raising up your amp and tilting it back, the BAS-1 ensures that your speakers are firing towards the audience's heads rather than their ankles. The combined result isn't just volume but also delivers a better representation of that tone. It's adjustable, it can fold down for ease of transportation and will hold a maximum weight of 21kg (46.3lb).

www.boss.info

FENDER MUSTANG MICRO £89.99



Fender's Mustang amps have always impressed us, and now the Big F has made its most portable 'Stang to date. The Mustang Micro is an all-in-one headphone amp that fits in your pocket, but small apparently doesn't mean limited. There are 12 amp models, 12 effect combinations, EQ, Bluetooth audio streaming for jamming along to music, and it runs off a rechargeable lithium ion battery that lasts for up to four hours. It's been designed with a rotating jack plug so that it'll connect regardless of your guitar type/socket placement. If that wasn't enough, this little brute can also double as a USB recording interface.

www.fender.com

The Players

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



Get On 'Board

Four stage-friendly signature pedals to help get you #BackToLive

1. Tech 21 Richie Kotzen RK5 Fly Rig v2 £389

Kotzen always chooses his endorsements meticulously – and here he has an all-in-one solution. This second iteration changes the SansAmp footswitch to an on/off push-button, and includes a tuner, headphone out, XLR output, delay, independent reverb, pre-boost, compression, fuzz, rotary speaker and Kotzen's OMG overdrive.

www.tech21nyc.com

2. Laney Black Country Customs TI-Boost £149

Tony Iommi has never relied on many effects, but his modified Dallas Rangemaster treble booster was an early favourite. This pedal functions in the same way with a generous bass cut and mid boost, but more gain on tap and a mid switch offering additional scope.

www.laney.co.uk

3. J Rockett Audio Designs Melody \$199

Mark Lettieri's signature drive stems from a need for versatility, and a six-band graphic EQ – which allows you to adjust frequencies from 100Hz to 3.5kHz – helps deliver it. The man himself calls it "the most flexible overdrive I've ever played", and the EQ sliders not only cater for your amp/guitar combo but also encourage experimentation.

<https://rockettpedals.com>

4. JHS Pedals PG-14 £195

Another signature pedal whose scope spans far and wide, Paul Gilbert's PG-14 encourages tweaking – and rewards it. The Push and Drive controls are especially influential on the pedal's tone, and there's high-gain aplenty to be found, though it's kept musical by the mid frequency control. It's also a lot of fun for simulating a full-throttle amp experience at home-friendly volumes.

www.jhspedals.info

ALSO THIS MONTH

MELVYN HISCOCK: 1957-2021



We were saddened to hear of the passing of Melvyn Hiscock in February this year. Melvyn was the author of the pioneering book *Make Your Own Electric Guitar* (Blandford Press, 1986) and a great many luthiers have been influenced by his work over the years. He had recently completed a revised and expanded third edition of his book – find out more at www.melvynhiscock.com

GEAR FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED

Glasgow-based social enterprise 12Guitars recently donated instruments and equipment to the Teenage Cancer Trust ward at The Beatson hospital in Glasgow. UK music charity Music For All donated a number of high-quality guitars for 12Guitars to distribute with Rotosound supplying new strings for each of them. "When we approached the Teenage Cancer Trust at The Beatson in Glasgow, we couldn't have been more welcomed by Julie Cain, the advanced clinical nurse specialist, and her inspirational team," says 12Guitars' director Ken Morton.

After restringing the three acoustic guitars already on the ward, Ken and the team followed up with the donation of brand-new guitars, amps and other equipment for the young patients to use. "It is our ambition to reach out to all the other Teenage Cancer Trust wards and outlying support staff in the UK," adds Ken. Find out more and how to donate your unused gear at www.12guitars.org

EMILY WOLFE PUTS NAME TO EPIPHONE



US rock 'n' roller Emily Wolfe has partnered with Epiphone to release the Sheraton Stealth signature model. It's the first ever Epiphone model to feature diamond f-holes while other features include an aged black gloss finish, a mother-of-pearl tree-of-life inlay on the headstock, Grover Rotomatic tuners and Epiphone Alnico Classic PRO humbuckers. "My Sheraton is more than a guitar," says Wolfe, "it's an extension of me and somehow has the same magic that a rare vintage instrument has, in that songs flow out of it every day."

HITS ONLY FOR KISS

Although KISS are planning to spend the next couple of years on their farewell tour, Paul Stanley has admitted the band are unlikely to record new music before they finish. "It's odd to me that people always want you to do a new album, but then they go, 'That's great. Now play your hits,'" the guitarist/vocalist told *USA Today*. "So, at this point, there isn't a real reward in it. There's much more of a reward in changing lanes – I'm still going forward." Stanley recently released *Now And Then*, the debut album from his side project *Soul Station*.

THE BMG ARIELLE

NEW FROM BRIAN MAY GUITARS

A large, vertical photograph of a woman with long dark hair playing a red and blue electric guitar. The guitar has a white pickguard and three humbuckers. The background is dark with some bokeh light effects.

www.BrianMayGuitars.co.uk

Albums

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



The charismatic Greg Koch (centre) with Dylan Koch and Toby Lee Marshall

Koch Marshall Trio From The Up'Nuh

Koch Marshall Productions

10/10



A masterclass in blues, country-infused funky finesse

If you haven't experienced Greg Koch at full throttle, do yourself a favour and head on over to YouTube and be amazed. Monster chops doesn't even begin to cover it. And, to cap it all, he's a Michelin Star tonemeister, serving up

Telecaster-flavoured haute cuisine to satisfy even the most picky palate. Here, Greg is joined by his son Dylan on drums and Toby Lee Marshall on organ, with the maestro himself adding the occasional vocal and the contrasting deep grunt of baritone guitar.

From *The Up'Nuh's* opener, *Luna Girl*, tells you what to expect, with a Sonny Landreth-style riff before a maelstrom of country-rock inspired soloing hits the air. It'll leave you breathless. The album's subsequent tracks continue to affirm Greg as one of guitar's most underrated virtuosos. The renowned Koch humour shines through on tracks such as *Quarantonne*, a funky blues outing that addresses the problem of lockdown weight gain, but it's back to serious business – jazz business, to be precise – on *Brushes*, showing that Greg can swing with the best of them. It's time to bring out the slide on *Soul Stroll* and *Nubby The Hoarder Man* – there's virtually no guitar style that Mr Koch can't turn his hand to with a flourish.

To sum up, the album is more than just a showcase for fretboard mastery, it's entertaining and jaw-on-the-floor amazing. We've all been locked down for so long you deserve a treat. Go on, buy it! **[DM]**

Standout track: *A Real Mother For Ya*

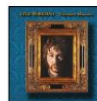
For fans of: Robben Ford, Sonny Landreth

Lyle Workman

Uncommon Measures

Blue Canoe Records

10/10



Instrumental gold from established sideman

To cut to the chase, if you want rich and sophisticated music with adult virtuosity and no shallow showboating, you will

be hard pressed to find a better arranged instrumental album in 2021. Lyle has had two considerable career progressions, one being a sideman guitarist (Sting, Todd Rundgren, Frank Black, Sheryl Crow) and a TV/film composer (*The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Superbad*, *Stand Up Guys*). These aspects certainly inform this album, but there's much more on offer. Emotive/shred/slide guitar moments, pop, blues and prog-rock stylings and harmonic vocabulary that evokes early 70s fusion through to epic Jerry Goldsmith/Lalo Schiffrin Hollywood scores. With nine tracks on offer, *Uncommon Measures* features a 63-piece orchestra alongside A-list musicians including Vinnie Colaiuta and Tim Lefebvre to produce deeply rich and colourful music. Unique and immensely impressive. **[JS]**

Standout track: *North Star*

For fans of: Jeff Beck, Mahavishnu Orchestra

Richard Barrett

Colours

richardbarrettguitar.com

9/10



A look beyond the headlines from Guitarist's bluesman

Full disclosure, Richard Barrett is of course the author of *Blues Headlines* in this magazine. So if you've read that

column or seen his gear demos on YouTube, you'll know that he's a monster player. Having played on many other people's albums as well as touring as part of Tony Hadley's band, Richard decided it was high time he launched something of his own into the world's musicscape. Inspired by some of the backing tracks he's used in *Guitarist* videos, the instrumental album runs the gamut of rock guitar stylings from all out rockers such as *Five Finger Shuffle* to more ambient guitar adventuring like the haunting *Ghost On The Bridge* and the Gilmour-like *Deep Blue*. Mate of ours or not, the playing is superb throughout, the production pristine. A class act. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Deep Blue*

For fans of: David Gilmour, Steve Lukather

The Lineup

PHOTO BY GREG VORBEY



Hollywood composer and session/sidekick Lyle Workman releases a sophisticated new instrumental record

Ant Law

The Sleeper Wakes

Ant Law

9/10



Tantalising new music from UK jazz

Ant Law leads a busy life as the leader of his quintet, a member of Tim Garland's band and Trio HLK. With admirable versatility, Ant straddles guitaristic and compositional elements of traditional jazz (Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery) and modern jazz (Bill Frisell, Ben Monder) in a uniquely personal way. Consider *2 Bridges* from the 11-track album: strongly rhythmic, clearly diatonic and well arranged, it moves from specific instrument placement through to a wider groove and broad improvisational passages. The title track is involving, with an ambient start that grows into an enthused rhythmic thrust as guitar and saxophone solos fly above. *Our Church* is beautiful and sedate, while *Her Majesty* is broad in both harmonic development and band interplay, quite cinematic in fact. If you're after a new jazz guitarist with fresh ideas, Ant is well worth checking out. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Our Church*

For fans of: Joe Pass, Bill Frisell

START ME UP

Mdou Mocrar Afrique Victime

Matador Records

8/10



Unique fusion album

When we receive a press release describing an album as being "Saharan rock meets Van Halen guitar style" we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't investigate. And in the case of Mdou Mocrar's new album, we're really glad we did. Lyrically, the album explores political issues, decrying the exploitation of Mdou's culture and raising awareness of women's issues in his country, but he's chosen to get the message across with the most interesting fusion of music cultures we've experienced. Using both electric and acoustic guitars to seriously great effect, Mdou gathers his influences together to deliver a powerful and engaging album. If you enjoy music that draws from a very deep well of diverse musical traditions, look no further. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Tala Tannam*

For fans of: Baaba Maal, Youssou N'Dour



The new album from UK guitarist

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Tones Behind The Tracks

Shred legend **Marty Friedman** spills the beans on the third in his *Tokyo Jukebox* series, which celebrates his love for Japan

Artist: Marty Friedman

Album: *Tokyo Jukebox 3* (Mascot Label Group/The Players Club)



Marty recorded the entire album with his signature gear, including his Jackson guitars

Regularly hailed as one of the most innovative and explosive guitarists in the rock arena since his appearance on Cacophony's 1987 debut album, *Speed Metal Symphony*, Marty Friedman went on to spend 10 years in Megadeth from 1990. For many, the albums Megadeth released with Friedman onboard are the best in their catalogue.

Marty left Megadeth in 2000, stating that he felt restricted by the boundaries of traditional metal and that it was counter-productive to his evolution as a musician. Life after 'Deth included a move to Japan in 2003, where he had already experienced success while in Cacophony and Megadeth. Since then he's become a huge multimedia star in his new home-country, appearing on more than 800 TV shows – everything from cookery to sitcoms and movie roles. His love of Japan is evident in all that he does, and the high esteem in which he is regarded there was reflected when the Japanese government commissioned him to compose *Japan Heritage Official Theme Song*, to be played at government-sponsored events celebrating Japanese heritage.

This is your third album of instrumental covers of Japanese pop songs. How do you choose the tracks and turn them into the guitar powerhouses they've become?

"It's a crazy long process. They are all very different from the originals, but still retain all the essential motifs of the original song. Doing that and also trying to make it sound like an original of mine is a challenging thing. I make demos of a bunch of songs; some work and some don't. When one does, I approach the artist, manager or publisher to get the rights to cover it. I never ask for the rights until I'm sure it will work as it would be very impolite to get approval and then not use the track. It is all about the vocal melody; if it is too fast or too repetitive, it can sound funny when you play it on the guitar. Some melodies just sing and those are the ones that I really enjoy.

"As this is my third album of Japanese pop covers, often I will automatically know where I'll take something, but *Shukumei* was an unusual one for me to choose. The group who does that, Official Hige Dandism, is huge in Japan at the moment. I like their stuff and I wanted to have a very current song on the record. It wound up going in an extremely progressive direction with really tricky lines to play. When you know what you want it to sound like, sometimes the parts to get there can be crazy hard."

The melodies on the songs are all very Western-sounding and quite retro, although the artists are all Japanese.

"That's a great observation. There is a lot of influence from Western pop in Japanese chart music. Much of the Japanese music that is currently very popular has a melodic structure that really echoes a lot of 70s Western rock and pop – the chords, progressions and key modulations. There is also a Japanese trademark thing where they can use a major melody in a major key yet still make it sound wistful and melancholy. I always wondered how they made that happen – that's a key element in Japanese music that I like to dig into.

"The cover versions add a lot of weight to the originals and really take them into the rock arena with the loud distorted guitars. I definitely put a ton of weight on them and with a ton of guitars. It is a very guitar-intensive type of album. To do that many parts and make them all clear to allow all the melodies, harmonies



Photo by Satoru Miyawaki



Photo by Susumu Miyazaki

and counterpoints to shine, you inevitably wind up with a pretty weighty piece of music. I put a lot of emphasis on things that may not have been obvious about the originals, but you have to do that sort of thing when you're taking the place of a vocalist; you have to replace the vocals with something that will hold the listener equally as much."

Tonally, you cover a really wide range. What were your key pieces of gear for this album?

"The whole record was basically all recorded with my signature stuff – my Jackson guitars, Engl amps and EMG pickups. The differences between the clean parts and heavy parts were purely down to playing around with what I always use and just rolling the volume off and that kind of thing. My whole purpose of creating a signature guitar was that I could go to any music store in the world and pick one up off the wall. I'm not a huge gear junkie or gear maniac; I just want something that works and is consistent. If I'm not touring, I might be doing seminars or clinics in strange places, and all that I need to know is that they have a music store that carries my guitar. I can just show up and use that."

"The only effect I find essential is a Maxon AF-9 Auto Filter. It's a wonderful pedal – it gives a bit of the human wah voice feel without being a typical wah sound. It's got to the point where I've played with it so much that my guitar tech tells me that my playing sounds that way even when it's turned off [laughs]. I think I'm subconsciously adjusting my playing habits to the sound being shaped by that pedal so much that I'm still getting those nuances, even when it's turned off. The way I use it is subtle – I keep everything on zero so it just adds a small hint of expression and perhaps humanness than it would otherwise have had."

What was the recording process?

"I don't ever do anything more than rough demos at home; I'm no big home-studio kind of guy. I mostly recorded the tracks in Tokyo and mixed them in Sweden. I work so fast that I need a great engineer who can also work super fast with me. Even though I am a very quick worker, it took several months to get everything completed because there is so much going on with each track. The only plus of the world shutdown was that I actually went back and spent an extra few months really polishing every detail as I had the time to do it. For so many artists, I guess the best way to use the lockdown time has been to make the very best record that they can do. For me, there were no distractions and that degree of focus has been really beneficial."

Marty confesses to working so fast that he needs "a great engineer who can also work super-fast with me". Nevertheless, the world's lockdown granted him the time to really focus on and polish each track of *Tokyo Jukebox 3*

"The cover versions add a lot of weight to the originals and really take them into the rock arena with the loud distorted guitars"

What's coming up for you next?

"I'm going to be making videos for tracks from the record and I've got a tour of Japan in April. Japan is almost up and running for live shows now. There are restrictions on crowd sizes, but we can work with that. I'm also doing a big classical concert in April with an orchestra as well. When it comes to playing tracks from *Tokyo Jukebox* live, I have another guitarist who is in my band. We just keep the main guitar lines and cover as much as we can. Playing live, it's more about energy and the overall power. As soon as the world opens up I'll be touring again like crazy the minute it's safe to do so, hopefully getting back to the UK as I really love playing there." [MM]



Ready, Steady...

As musicians gear up to get #BackToLive, **Adam Goldsmith** explains how he's honing his practice regime and sight-reading in preparation

The two questions I get asked most when I'm teaching are: 'How do you learn to sight-read?' and 'Do you have a practice schedule?' In terms of my experience with guitar, a lot of my skills are perishable – and this has become particularly evident during the pandemic. I've played guitar a lot, but because a lot of sessions have been done remotely, there isn't the same time pressure, playing wise. A client will usually say something along the lines of, 'Here is the track. I need it done by lunchtime tomorrow,' which gives me a good few hours to experiment on my own with parts and sounds and so on. Obviously, if I'm booked for an in-person session then the timescale is much reduced and there's a lot more immediate pressure.

"Beginner's classical guitar music prepares you for reading more than one note at a time, which is surprisingly easy to forget to practise"

I'll soon be travelling to the BBC studios in Manchester's MediaCityUK to film two episodes of a TV show where I'm in the house band. We have snippets of 100 songs – in all conceivable styles – to play over the course of the week, with fairly minimal rehearsal time in advance. Before Covid hit, this kind of schedule was very common, but over the past year I can think of less than 10 occasions when I've experienced that particular type of pressure. With that in mind, I've been doing a fair amount of practice over the last few days to refresh my skills.

When I look at learning how to read music, there are essentially two stages, which overlap for obvious reasons. The first stage is learning the technicalities of written music: for example, the note lengths, key

signatures, where the notes are on the guitar (a surprising number of great guitar players don't know what notes they're actually playing half the time), and any other basics of theory. In my experience of teaching and playing, anyone can learn this stuff if they put in enough time. It's basic maths and an ability to count to (usually) four without speeding up or slowing down.

In order to get to this stage I'd recommend a few things. After you've learned the basics of note values and names, flute music for grades one to five works very well for guitar. Much of flute music will be written on ledger lines above the staff (namely, where you might play lead lines on the guitar). Many other instruments are written mainly within the staff, which can leave the aspiring studio guitar player ill-prepared for written-out lines and solos, which are exactly the occasions when you don't want to get caught out. Beginner's classical guitar music is also useful. Not only is a lot of the music very nice but it prepares you for reading more than one note at a time, which is surprisingly easy to forget to practise in my experience. Fernando Sor, a renowned classical guitar composer, wrote many studies that fit the bill perfectly for our purposes, so investigate some of his work.

Onto the next stage and this is where the art comes into play: how you interpret the written music. As a simple exercise, I'll get my students to take a sample piece from any 'how to read music' instructional book and set them a stylistic challenge, such as 'Play this line in the style of Joe Satriani' (think about sound, touch and phrasing) or 'Play this piece in a country style.' The options are endless here. My other tip would be to only ever practise these skills with a metronome, even if it's super slow at first. In my opinion, it's an ideal time to brush up on these skills before we all get busy outside the house once more as we get #BackToLive. **G**



Right: With live music on the horizon, musicians are readying their chops to return to the stage



Call Of Duty

Neville Marten returns to his days working on guitars and recalls a fishy incident involving a repair that had hitherto gone particularly well...

Last issue I spoke about a self-induced equipment malfunction that left me a tad red-faced. In response we've received several emails detailing your own 'pilot error' moments, which have made me feel somewhat better about my own faux pas over the years and got me remembering other incidents, too.

I was recently talking with a luthier friend about my history doing guitar stuff. I mentioned how, when Norlin switched Gibson's distribution centre from the UK to Rotterdam and no longer needed a repair department, Martyn Booth and I had taken over the premises with all its equipment, and carried on as Don't Fret Guitar Repairs. I got to thinking more about those heady days. I loved it, as much as anything I've since done. Sadly, our business burned down when the wiring in next door's roof, having been chewed to bits by rodents, shorted out and incinerated the ex-Norlin warehouse, our little building with it. It was horrible. 10 Fender Jazz basses that had been hanging up and ready to be collected the next day lay in charred pieces on the floor, and everything else just melted or was cremated, including a 1966 Strat and my own Yamaha SA2000. Luckily, we had unofficial contracts with both Fender and Yamaha, so I stayed with the former and Martyn went off to do great things for the latter. This included designing the legendary MSG.

Tea-Time Torment

Running through various Don't Fret incidents in my mind, most of which were happy, positive and rewarding, I recalled one moment that mixed a repair success with a truly cringe-worthy moment. It involved Martyn as well as my mother (with whom I shared a house at the time). A chap had come to pick up his guitar. I don't recall what it was, but it had been in for a fret-dress and setup and, as was often the case, needed a few peripheral things doing, so I'd given it a bit of extra love. It turned out really well and when he came to pick it up I put the case on the bench, opened it and began to regale him with everything I'd done.

He was a new customer so I had wanted to impress him, and presented my most professional front while I described, in serious detail, every piece of additional work I'd carried out. Having finished demoing it through my Mesa/Boogie Mark II to show how brilliantly it now played, and how balanced and musical it sounded, he seemed pretty wowed. I was about to conclude the deal when suddenly the workshop phone rang.

Martyn, who had been quietly working on another guitar at his own bench – which was positioned between my own desk and the telephone – stopped what he was doing, walked up to the office area and picked up the receiver: "Don't Fret Guitar Repairs... Oh, hello Pauline..."

I'd closed the case, taken the happy customer's cash and was about to usher him through the door when Martyn called out to me rather loudly: "Nev." I stopped in my tracks and replied, "Er... yes, Martyn?" still holding onto my most self-assured business manner. "Your mum wants to know... do you want one piece of fish for tea or two?"

My confident swagger evaporated in a second. I went from the full-blown professional who co-ran a business working on the world's finest musical instruments to

"My swagger evaporated in a second. I went from a full-blown professional to a 10-year-old boy whose mum was calling him in for supper"

a 10-year-old schoolboy whose mum was calling him in for his supper. I think it was the last time my face actually blushed pure crimson. It was neither's fault, but it certainly gave Martyn a wry smile. Even now I shudder whenever I tell the story.

Martyn still builds stunning guitars by hand at his facility in Sudbury, Suffolk. They're based around his original MSG design (as used by legendary session guitarist Alan Murphy) but updated and upgraded to superlative status. *Guitar Techniques* contributors John Wheatcroft and Steve Laney both play them, as does fusion master John Etheridge and Blur's Graham Coxon. And to that end... **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Signature licks

What? Martyn Booth Signature

Where seen? www.martynboothguitars.co.uk

Price? £5,350 (with MB logo Hiscox or TKL case)

If you want a guitar that's built with the finest materials, with as much skill and attention to detail as you'd find anywhere on the planet, check this out. While you might imagine Martyn's guitars to be 'trophy' pieces that sit on a pedestal never to see the light of day or, heaven forbid, a stage, rest assured they are definitely used by top musicians because they play and sound amazing.

This instrument is Martyn's personal guitar, with Brazilian mahogany neck and back (tone chambered), quilted maple top, ebony fingerboard, Seymour Duncan Custom at the bridge and Jazz at the neck, coil-splits via a push-push switch on the tone pot, Hipshot US Contour vibrato, Sperzel tuners, gold-plated parts and abalone inlays. Martyn builds to order, so check out his website and give him a call!





On The Mend

Alex Bishop attempts a tricky repair job on an unusual handmade guitar, and tries to preserve its character at the same time, warts and all

Since I started working as a guitar maker, I have always taken on repair and restoration jobs. As well as helping to establish a steady income stream in the feast-or-famine world of guitar making, repair work has allowed me to see first-hand the successes and failures of various guitar designs. Given the physical abuse players dole out to their beloved instruments, it can take some serious creative problem solving to fix the multitude of crises that present themselves. If you asked me to summarise my decade of experience so far in this field, I would propose there are two types of guitar repair: those you have done before and those you haven't.

"Considerate guitar restoration is sometimes about preserving things that are 'wrong' at the expense of a more convenient repair"

This challenge is often set against the demands of a rapid turnaround. I recall once having to fix all the instruments belonging to a mariachi band that had just stepped off a plane from Mexico for a concert that evening, only to discover some major baggage mishandling had occurred. I toiled hard and fast that afternoon, but free concert tickets and plenty of tequila that evening certainly helped to make up for it.

These before and after shots show the drastic transformation that's possible at the hands of a highly skilled luthier



Ultimately, I'm always drawn in by the unknown, so when a beguiling walnut guitar arrived at the workshop a few weeks ago, I was under its spell even before I knew what I was getting myself into. Made almost entirely from an old piano, this guitar was put together by a furniture maker with no formal lutherie training, who did a very fine job nonetheless in crafting an exquisite guitar with a sonorous voice. However, the use of dangerously thin flat-sawn timber and an ill-prepared batch of hide glue meant large areas of the back of the instrument were very badly cracked. An improvised repair had been attempted, which had only made matters worse. Loose braces were barely held to the surface with toothpick-sized dowels and glue was liberally drizzled around the interior, none of which would be doing any favours to the sound of the instrument.

Considerate guitar restoration is sometimes about preserving things that are 'wrong' at the expense of going about a more convenient repair. For someone in my position, the obvious solution to fixing this guitar may have been to make a new back for it. However, given the maker had expertly attempted to repair the gaping cracks with wavy strands of mismatched hardwood, and peppered the back with ebony dowels, it didn't feel right to destroy these quirky features, so we opted instead to install a network of cleats throughout the interior to strengthen the cracked areas, preserving in the process the appearance of the instrument on the outside.

I carefully removed the thin padauk binding, which came away in three separate pieces, and then gently prised the brittle walnut back away from the sides. With the back removed I was able to tease off the braces one at a time, replacing each one with a new plumply curved brace before moving onto the next. With all four braces in situ, I set about sticking in more than 40 cross-grained spruce cleats to the interior, each of which had to be shaved down into a neat little pyramid in an effort to reduce excess mass. Upon seeing these wooden stitches running along the inside, my customer remarked that it now looked like Frankenstein's guitar...

I knew that my customer already loved the way the guitar played, so ensuring that the action and feel of the neck remained the same was crucial to a successful repair job. Fortunately, when it came down to stringing back up, only a minuscule adjustment to the saddle height was necessary to keep things in balance.

The feeling that comes with playing and hearing the guitar again after many weeks of effort is when things truly pay off, and seeing that a customer is happy after trusting you with their precious instrument for so long is a big relief. Deeper than this is the joyful feeling of being part of the story of another maker's work, paying respect to their craftsmanship and keeping that guitar on the road for another 20 years. 

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Making Small Sound Big

Forget what you think you know about how small acoustic guitars sound, urges Taylor's Andy Powers. **Jamie Dickson** listens up...

Guitars, like clothing, go through fashions and trends. Right now, we're seeing a revival of interest in small acoustic guitars – from vibey vintage parlours to grab-and-go contemporary designs such as Taylor's hugely popular GS Mini.

In the past, such guitars have often been seen as niche instruments whose depth of tone is limited by their size. People will say, "Small guitars lack bass," or "small guitars aren't very loud". But one day you may encounter a small acoustic that confounds these expectations. For example, a few years back, *Guitarist* reviewed a high-end parlour made by Patrick James Eggle that was rich and full of voice, with abundant volume, too. Taylor's new mid-size GT range of acoustics is the same, sounding both fuller and louder than size alone suggests. So, what's going on?

Few people are as qualified to answer this question as Taylor's master builder Andy Powers, who has built hundreds of experimental guitars in an effort to advance the art of guitar making.

"There are a lot of good reasons to build a smaller-sized guitar and some of them are very practical," Andy explains. "I mean, it's fun and comfortable to play a smaller guitar. And when a musician is comfortable, they end up playing well because they're more at ease

and more relaxed. The other thing is that you can derive unique sounds out of a smaller body," he argues, adding that many of the clichés about how small guitars sound aren't necessarily true.

"They don't need to be quieter," Andy says. "I think that's a pretty common misconception about small-bodied guitars. Typically, a smaller air chamber will exaggerate higher frequencies. But that doesn't mean that you can't get a robust and balanced voice from a small guitar."

So, what key factors do you change to help them punch above their weight? Some small-bodied guitars on the market have deeper bodies than others, for example. Will that make them sound bigger, bassier and louder?

"Okay, so that's a simple question – but it has a relatively complex answer because the exact effect of changing one aspect of a guitar's design depends on what's happening in the rest of the guitar," Andy explains. "So, let's say you want to increase the depth of the guitar: if I then brace that deeper-bodied guitar with a conventional brace on a flat-top design, that'll have one effect. But if I change the depth of a guitar that has a different bracing architecture, it'll have a slightly different effect."

"With that said, when you make a guitar deeper, it tends to translate to an almost reverb-like quality. It doesn't necessarily produce more volume, though, and it doesn't necessarily produce a deeper tone or more bass response, either – it changes the quantity of air that's inside the body, which can emphasise a lower register. But it can also create an unbalancing effect where it'll feel like the guitar's swallowing certain notes up – like the notes can't escape out of the guitar body."

"If you go in the other direction and make the sides of the guitar less deep, you tend to get a drier, more direct sound because you're eliminating that air mass that's inside the body. That's why builders often prefer to use a thinner side-depth for stage guitars, because you're taking out much of that responsive air mass inside the body, or at least shifting its pitch up so high that it doesn't create the same feedback problems that a full-depth guitar would normally experience."

Stiff Opposition

The luthier's design headaches don't end there, however. While it's relatively easy to increase (or reduce) the depth of a small guitar to taste, you can't do much about the fact that the guitar's top, its 'speaker cone' if you like, is automatically going to be on the small side. What challenges does this bring?

"If there's less surface area, you have a higher degree of stiffness," Andy explains, "so typically a smaller top is going to be inherently stiffer. You have that as one

Taylor's Andy Powers notes how important it is to view the design considerations of smaller-bodied acoustics in a holistic manner





kind of rule of thumb. The second thing to consider is that there's an extra-stiff area around the perimeter of the top, which I call the boundary edge, where the top just doesn't want to move, partly because it's glued to a solid mass of lining or kerfing underneath.

"Let's say you have to come in by one inch from the perimeter before you start seeing much flexibility in the top," Andy suggests. "That means if you have a guitar body that's 16 inches wide you might only have an [active] top surface that's 14 inches wide. And if you shrink that down to a guitar that's 14 inches wide overall, and then you take an inch away from either side of that, you have an area of only 12 inches of top that's able to move freely. Proportionally, that is significantly smaller – so as you downsize guitars, that 'boundary

Many stereotypes surround smaller acoustics, but compact bodies needn't mean less volume and character

"[A smaller-sized guitar is] fun and comfortable to play... The other thing is that you can derive unique sounds out of a smaller body"

edge' effect starts to influence the guitar way more than we sometimes give it credit for."

This means that designers of small guitars have to think of clever ways to make the most of the relatively small area of top that can vibrate. Does that mean making the bracing that supports the top super light?

"Well, it means that you can make the bracing lighter because you don't need as much mass to make the top strong enough to withstand the string tension. You'll typically see thinner tops and lighter-weight, smaller braces, which help counteract the inherent rigidity of a small top because lighter, smaller braces are set in motion more easily – that's a better way to say it."

As you can see, few elements of a guitar's design work in isolation. Instead, the luthier has to keep the big picture in mind at all times and orchestrate all the details to work together if they want to coax more performance from a guitar than its size would typically permit. Next month, we'll find out how Andy used these principles to make Taylor's new GT instruments some of the best-sounding compact guitars on the market. **B**

www.taylorguitars.com

THREE TO GET READY

A trio of small guitars with a big heart



Taylor GS Mini £589

A huge crossover success for Taylor, the GS Mini redefined the level of performance players could expect from a small guitar. Effortlessly playable, it's been made in several wood combinations over the years, but we still like the original flavour, with a Sitka spruce top and laminate (or layered, as Taylor terms it) rosewood back and sides. Punchy, lively and devilishly hard to put down, it's great value at this price.



Auden Artist Emily Rose £1,499

A boutique-feel parlour with dozens of classy touches, we loved how rich the Emily Rose we reviewed in 2019 sounded. A 12-fret design made in a variety of wood options, the rosewood body of our cedar-topped review model was built 5mm deeper than usual to "allow the sound to develop a little bit more in the guitar", Auden's Doug Sparkes says. When amplified, it actually sounded bigger and fuller than its big brother the Austin Artist.



Lowden S-23 £3,475

While it's not as diminutive as the 'Wee Lowden' WL-25 we reviewed alongside it last issue, we were bowled over by the poise, clarity and warmth of Lowden's compact S-23 with its 630mm (24.8-inch) scale, red cedar top and walnut back and sides. Sweetly sonorous, this is a top-notch guitar with easy handling and understated beauty that deserves to become a lifelong companion.



Alex Lifeson's Open Chords

This issue, **Richard Barrett** explores the Rush legend's pioneering approach to achieve wider, fuller sounds

Compared with the piano, the guitar's potential to play a variety of chords may seem limited, but these supposed restrictions force us to explore its scope for mixing the tones of open and fretted strings, creating unusual voicings that contain scale and chord tones out of sequence, as well as unison 'drone' type effects.

In the late 70s, when Rush were closer to their original power trio format than the more heavily layered synths of the 80s, Alex Lifeson pioneered a way to create a fuller, wider sound by incorporating lots of ringing open strings, suspended chords and arpeggiated patterns. This was aided by the relatively new Roland Jazz Chorus amps – primarily for clean tones at first – then the Boss CE-1 to widen the powerchords on *Hemispheres*.

From a non-theory point of view, try shifting open position chords to higher positions on the fretboard, or removing the barre from barre chords (only holding the lowest note) with the same approach. I will, of course, untangle the 'theory' side as much as possible, too! **G**

Right: Rush's sixth studio album, *Hemispheres*, is a showcase for how Alex Lifeson expanded his sound in the band's power trio format

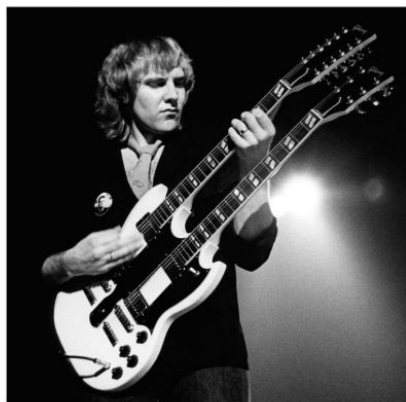
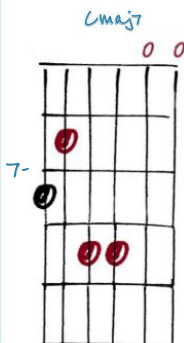


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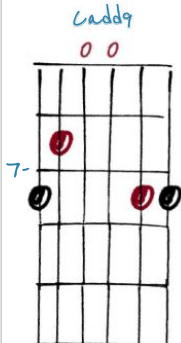
Example 1

It wouldn't occur to many of us to play a Cmaj7 like this through a distorted amp, but that's exactly what Alex did on *Jacob's Ladder*, allowing the open first and second strings to ring while forming this jazz-type voicing using the lower four strings. We've jumped in at an advanced level here rather than moving open chords around, but why not?



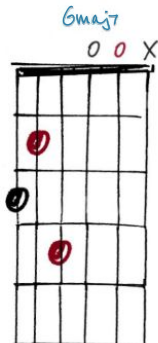
Example 2

The unusual stacking of notes in this Cadd9 is what you get if you move an open G chord from the 3rd to the 8th fret. If you've ever heard *La Villa Strangiato*, this will be familiar to you. It also appears in *Moving by Supergrass* and *The Pretenders' 2000 Miles*.



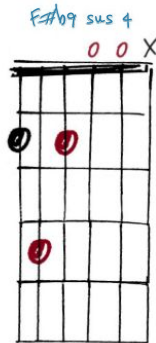
Example 3

This Gmaj7 is similar to Example 1 but makes use of the open third string, setting a root note directly against the major 7th for a pretty chord but with a certain dissonance. This features heavily on *Cygnus X-1 Book II* as both a powerchord and delicate arpeggio, as does Example 4...



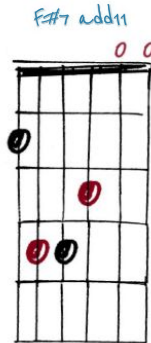
Example 4

This complex, dissonant chord features alongside Example 3 on the *Hemispheres* album and is probably most accurately described as an F#7,9sus4. In practice, it's a sparse fingering of something like an F#m7 with extra open strings. Alex had cited Paco De Lucia as an influence – not surprising hearing this flamenco-type chord.



Example 5

The 'Hemispheres' chord: fast catching up with the 'Hendrix' chord (E7#9) in legendary status! Alex has used this F#7add11 and 'open-yet-barre-chord' approach in many keys/board positions, but the first repeated chord of the *Hemispheres* album is the ultimate example. Try leaving the third string open and moving the shape around for further Rush-isms.



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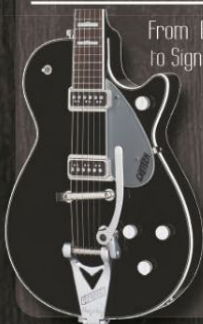
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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

PLAY, BUILD, REMEMBER



I recently sent an email to Guy Fletcher asking some questions about album production, which he kindly answered the next day! I started the email with "Late in life I've found an interest in music production...", and he ended his reply with the sentence "Never too late to make music!" For me, this answers your question of "What's motivating you on guitar in 2021?"

My father passed away two years ago. He was 94 and I was 59. He was a wonderful man and a skilled woodworker. He left his family with a lot of woodworking pieces –

carvings, furniture, musical instruments and more. At roughly the same time, I started playing guitar again, having played a bit when I was younger. When I lost my father, I found a sudden motivation to focus on the guitar, which continues to this day. The motivation has manifested itself through two goals: to write songs about my family, perform them on guitar and record them for an album; and to build guitars.

I now spend my free time working on improving my guitar playing, to the point where it might sound decent when recorded, and trying to write songs. At the same time, I started building electric guitars. I have made two so far and I am currently working on the third. I have three boys, so even if I stop after the third they will each get a guitar.

So, what's motivating me on guitar in 2021? Making music, making an album, making guitars, honoring the legacy of my father, and leaving future generations of the family with a little something to remember me by. Wish me luck!

Scott Ruck, via email

Many thanks for your letter, Scott. What treasure stores of memory, music and heritage guitars are. So bringing all those strands together in your appreciation of the instrument – and making that love of guitar so personal to your family's story – must be satisfying. As you say, at times of loss or upheaval, the guitar can offer solace. Recording something for your children to have is a lovely touch, too. That way, guitar becomes more than just a hobby but a thread that connects generations and a positive, enduring presence in your family history.



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

FEVRA PITCH

My 'first love' was a classical guitar made by a company called Fevra in Lancaster. I got it from my guitar teacher in the mid-70s and seem to remember it was an 18th birthday present. I have googled the company, but cannot find any information about the maker and wondered if anybody could help? It would be nice to have some background about the guitar, as it is clearly a quality instrument. It has a beautiful tone and is a joy to play. Any info would be gratefully received.

Peter Holland, via email

We must confess it's not a brand we have come across in our travels, Peter. Could it possibly have been built by a well-known maker but marketed under a flag of convenience as it were, for a retailer or catalogue company, much as Dwight guitars were built by Epiphone? I'm afraid we can only speculate for the moment. Can any readers shed any light and help Peter find out more about his first love?

GETTING MORE FROM AMPS

Reader Tom made an important point in issue 470. Online amp demos often focus on the customer, and we do not all necessarily want to sound like Bonamassa. For me, an ideal amp review would feature:

- No additional sound modification: reverb (should be tested separately in case the amp features reverb) or compression or chorus or delay etc.
- At least two guitars, single coil and humbucker style, with both tested clean, edge and overdriven – bridge and neck pickup.
- A variety of style examples but not just unmotivated arpeggios and full shred, rather: fingerpicking slow and fast country style; chords, easy and jazzy voicings (how good is the separation?) and soloing.
- How the amp sounds with main volume not only at 4 but also at 11.
- Checking the tone controls – is anything happening when going from 0 to max?

As for testing a guitar, the same route should be taken: show a variety of styles and sounds with acceptable skills, and don't use effects.

Bernd Langer, via email

Thanks Bernd, there's certainly a line to walk between playing well enough to reveal the capabilities of the instrument or device and providing a methodical, comparative evaluation of features that you mention. We'll certainly be keeping your requests in mind for future *Guitarist* demos, so, readers, keep the suggestions coming as to what you want to see from our video demos and artist videos.



Mike Lording's 1959 Hofner Senator was found as a result of a search for a guitar from the year of his birth

I CAN EXPLAIN...

Much speculation has been made about Pete Townshend's chord sound on *I Can't Explain*. The suddenness of six strings sounding apparently together can be achieved by hitting across all strings fairly hard with a pencil. Even without a Ricky, the sound is pretty close!

Pete Caruana, via email

Thanks for that, Pete – an intriguing suggestion. On a recent tuition video by rockabilly guitarist and educator Jason Loughlin, he showed off the Johnny Cash 'card trick' of inserting a playing card between the strings of an acoustic. Naturally, this mutes the notes to produce a snare-drum-like sound instead, which one player of a guitar can use to provide a skiffle-like rhythm section to the other player. Have readers got any more suggestions for creating guitar sounds using everyday objects?

HAPPINESS IS A HOFNER

While I subscribe to *Guitarist*, I usually read them several copies behind. So I have just read issue 465 with its feature on affordable vintage and, in particular, the Hofner Senator. I decided three years ago I would like to get a guitar from the year of my birth. Unfortunately, that is 1958 and I couldn't justify a Les Paul from that year. But I found a 1959 Hofner Senator and fell for it. Given I was born in late 1958, I thought that was close enough. While it represented good value, I remember that as a kid, with US imports being unavailable, Hofner was one of the better guitar brands. It is a joy to own. I bought it from A Slade Guitars in Beccles [Suffolk], a shop with a relatively small number of top-end secondhand pieces – it's well worth a visit. Thanks for the magazine, I always enjoy the varied content.

Mike Lording, via email

Congratulations on your commemorative purchase there Mike, sounds like a beauty. Hofners seem to be steadily rising in desirability as people recognise them as vintage guitars with real character and attractive looks to boot. They were, as you suggest, among the best of the embargo-era guitars that gave British guitarists good service at a time when American guitars were effectively blocked from the UK market by the protectionist import laws of the 50s. Have readers got any good stories of embargo-era guitars that have given them pleasure over the years?

REQUESTS...

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

Delicate Sound Of Thunder I'm dropping you a line in response to a mention in your [issue 470] Feedback pages about Westone Guitars. I look forward to the article about Westone in a future issue and thought you might be interested in my photos [see below]. This is a very good example of a Westone Thunder III guitar that I purchased brand-new many years ago from Allan Gordon Studios in Walthamstow. I had originally bought a cheaper Westone from them, but went back a few days later after deciding I should have paid a bit more for the top-of-the-range model, complete with hard case. Luckily, they kindly agreed to the 'upgrade' and I'm very glad they did!

The guitar has been very much neglected since then, hence its almost perfect condition, albeit minus an E string in the photos. Having recently 'come back' to an interest in music, I realise what a lovely guitar it is and how beautifully made these were.

A final suggestion – how about an article on long-lost music shops? I don't think Allan Gordon Studios exist any more, and I'm sure quite a few of the music shops I used to frequent in East London have also gone.

Peter Crush, via email

Thanks for sending in pictures of your pristine Westone, Peter – it's a lovely instrument and evokes a very particular moment in guitar design history. It's easy to forget that the neck-through construction style was huge in its day, and even Martin – yes, that Martin – had a go at making a solidbody electric in that style with its E18 model of the late 70s. We'd love to play the Westone and hear how it sounds. And yes, your idea about influential music shops is intriguing – we'll look into it.



Reader Peter Crush is revisiting his Westone Thunder III

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



THE HALF MOON
PUT NEY

PIERRE BENSUSAN

When the world turned upside down last year, the French-Algerian DADGAD maestro was forced to abandon a mammoth North American tour. And yet his feeling of connectedness has only grown since – and so maybe, he reflects, his latest album “could have not come at a better time...”

Words David Mead



“My intention is every action and behaviour contributes, supports and adds value to our interconnectivity, especially through music”

Just before the world fully felt the impact of lockdown in 2020, Pierre Bensusan released a new album, *Azwan*, and embarked on a US tour to promote it. These best-laid plans were soon scuppered and Pierre was forced to make the dash back to France to rethink the immediate future. While few people are yet to hear it live, this album remains his best for years, with intense and evocative compositions delivered with a remarkable level of finesse.

Tell us about the concept of the album...

“The concept of *Azwan* came from observing bees, those solar insects working in the darkness together as one, and by observing flocks of birds flying and dancing together as one. It has been an inspiring symbolic representation of the continuum of music. When seeing *Azwan* written, it can evoke a place, a city or a mood, but when hearing it said out loud, it sounds like ‘as one’. I’ve been contemplating all the music from *Azwan* for years before actually recording it, taking time to allow all the notes to come together, as one.”

Your latest book, the dual-language *Pierre Bensusan Guitar Collection*, not only draws upon your latest album but also includes some pieces from your live repertoire, too. How did it come about?

“I’ve had this book in mind for a while. It was meant to be a collection of scores from the new album, but my Chinese publisher suggested I should include some pedagogical approaches. He also wanted to see a selection of pieces that are played at concerts, where the renditions could be different from the original versions. On the other hand, my manager in

England, Dave Bevan, was expecting an introspective book about DADGAD. In the meantime, I released *DADGAD Explorer* with the US company TrueFire. This is an instructional DVD, which deals with my approach to practising and playing the guitar, as seen through the prism of DADGAD.

“Since *The Guitar Book*, published by Hal Leonard in 1986, I’ve had plenty of time to revisit my path, to put some of my thoughts down on paper. After 40 years of touring, giving residential seminars, private lessons, masterclasses and workshops, I’m looking forward to presenting this collection of 18 pieces, complemented by a comprehensive glossary and additional topics.

“I hope this book will be the new companion for people who follow my work. Since every tune in this collection illustrates, in its own way, how the tuning opens up to chords, counterpoint, melody and lead lines, I encourage people to feel free to transform any excerpt into an exercise or a study.”

These releases came during an unprecedented time. How have you been affected since the pandemic hit?

“[Having spent] the last few years off the concert trail in order to meticulously craft the new album, which was to be supported by an extensive 110-date US and Canadian concert tour running from March into July, I suddenly found myself back home on French soil after having to pull the plug three weeks into the concert trek. The entire tour is being rebooked for 2022.

“Once home and on lockdown, I took advantage of all that time and it allowed me to do many things I never had the time to do before. I played a lot and wrote several new pieces.

Pierre has been using Lowden acoustics since 1978 and has his own Signature Series model based upon his original 'Old Lady'. "Every time I play it it's like coming home," he says. "The sound itself disappears behind the music"

"My wife and I live in the country in an old stone house with a garden, so we were locked down in paradise, so to speak – we are very lucky. The other side of this crisis is very freaky, and I fear the world afterwards might be even worse than the world before. But if we are smart, we might learn something from this mess.

"As time goes on, the more I feel connected to all people, to the animal kingdom and universally to the whole of nature. Being that we are all connected, my intention is that every action and behaviour contributes, supports and adds value to our interconnectivity, especially through music. It feels like a nurturing or even a healing process for me and those with whom I share music. In that sense, maybe the album could have not come at a better time."

Can you share with us how you first encountered DADGAD tuning?

"When I was 15 I lived in Brittany and busked around cafes and restaurants. I had time to play and experiment with different ways to tune – and DADGAD revealed itself to me this way. I had never heard of Davey Graham at that point. I then went to

"Ultimately, the goal is to know your fretboard as you know your home, the neck being the tarmac from which you take off and land"

the Kertalg Festival, which was two hours away, and discovered the Irish band Planxty. It was here that I had the revelation that this tuning – I didn't know it was called DADGAD at the time – was perfect for playing and rearranging Celtic music, as I did for my first three albums. From 1978, I chose it as my only tuning and started to study the guitar in a more serious way from then on."

Some players complain that DADGAD traps them into playing in the key of D all the time...

"I'm not surprised. It's not only very jubilant, but it's also addictive. I think the best way to avoid being trapped is to dive in and explore the tuning – then you can choose if you prefer to noodle around and sound like everyone else or really express yourself. You don't want the tuning to be playing you, but the other way around! The way you tune the strings should not be used to hide a possible lack of imagination, but it should enhance it and help you get to new ground, or old ground in a different way. Ultimately, the goal is to know your fretboard as you know your home, the neck being the tarmac from which you take off and land.

"For me, DADGAD is my native tuning, exactly as standard tuning would be for players who have spent the last 40 years or so playing in one tuning. I study it the same way – harmony, scales and modes, relationships to the open strings, harp effect, counterpoint, nuances and expression. Distribution of the notes on the strings and frets, unconventional techniques, ornamentation and slurs give my right hand all the power, vocabulary and versatility it needs, so the articulation and tone are as clear, beautiful, contrasting, sensual and as evocative as could be."



PHOTO BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

What advice would you give to players when it comes to seeking out inspiration?

"Be true to yourself. In order to get there do not hesitate to put yourself in a bubble and stop listening to what people say, think, write, comment, criticise, play, come up with, etc. You have to isolate and protect your secret garden to follow your path and dive deep into your imagination. Make your voice unique and use it to heal you, embellish your life and the world you live in."

Is improvisation still an important part of your writing process?

"It's a different process for each track, but their common point is they have all been initiated by improvisation. Then I let them incubate for months – or even decades – before I turn my attention to them and start writing and arranging the music for guitar. Sometimes I will play and write, and other times I will just sing what I hear and write the notes into Sibelius [music software], which transforms them into tablature. Then I work out the fingering and string arrangements from there.

"For instance, I dreamed *Azwan*, the title track of the album, and was lucky enough to remember it once I woke up. I immediately went and recorded it on my phone and then forgot it and found it again months later. I took it into my 'internal hard drive' and started to compose it, thinking about the places and perspectives it could reach. With such a repetitive motive, the main focus was to find a form and give it an expansive movement. It starts with a straightforward, hummable melody, then develops, then soars, then lands. A novelist has pretty much finished their work once the book is written, but composing music is only half of the

*"Do not hesitate to put yourself
in a bubble and stop listening
to what people say; think,
write, comment, criticise,
play and come up with..."*



IMAGE © COURTESY OF PIERRE BENSUSAN

"I love being in a recording studio, especially when it's in my home, because I can stop, start again, record and pick out the best moments"

While Pierre is quite at home in the recording studio (a definite positive during the pandemic), he credits the live stage as "my means and motivation to embody the musician I aspire to be"

process – the other half is to play it and find the means to interpret it so that the music speaks."

Did you use your Lowden 'Old Lady' for the album?

"Yes, I did. I've been fascinated by the way this guitar has developed since 1978. Every time I play it it's like coming home. The sound itself disappears behind the music. Of course, George Lowden and I have known and worked together since then and have become close friends. George's spirit is in my guitars – I always say it's 'a story with four hands'."

"The way you tune the strings should not hide a lack of imagination, but it should help you get to new ground or old ground in a different way"

Do you enjoy being in the studio?

"I love being in a recording studio, especially when it's in my home, because I can stop, start again, record over 30 minutes or an hour of music and pick out the best moments. It's very different to playing a live concert, the energy is completely different. Nothing can replace an audience and I have been asked many times, since we've entered into this new world, to do a streaming concert alone in front of a camera, but that's not in my DNA, at least for now. But if this situation lasts, I guess I'll have to adapt."

What's your mic setup in the studio?

"For the guitar, I use two microphones: a Tube CAD that's plugged into a PAL Tube Preamp by Requisite Audio, and a CharterOak condenser mic plugged into GML 2020 preamp, plus my LR Baggs VTC pickup that's going into a germanium preamp by Chandler. For the vocals, I use my second Tube CAD plugged into another PAL Tube preamp. My tracking room is small, so there's no need for a stereo mic pair to capture the ambience."

How do you feel about playing live, when it becomes possible again?

"To be honest, playing live seems to belong to a different part of my life. With this pandemic I feel there is a before and after. I'm not sure what playing live will be like in the future or when we'll get there again. Hopefully very soon. I just know that I need the stage, not only because it's how I make my living, but because it has always been my means and motivation to embody the musician I aspire to be. I need to confront the music with the public and give it all to the audience. Meanwhile, I promise to keep my heart and learn to shed the light in other ways..."



Azwan is available now via the DADGAD label. Pierre's book, *The Pierre Bensusan Guitar Collection*, is published by Hal Leonard www.pierrebensusan.com



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PERFECTLY FRANK

Towards the end of last year, a new documentary on the life and times of Frank Zappa was premiered in the United States and now, after a few months' wait, *Zappa* is available for fans to stream in the UK. We go behind the scenes and speak about the man and his music with the film's director, Alex Winter, and producer Ahmet Zappa, as well as former Zappa band guitarists Steve Vai and Mike Keneally

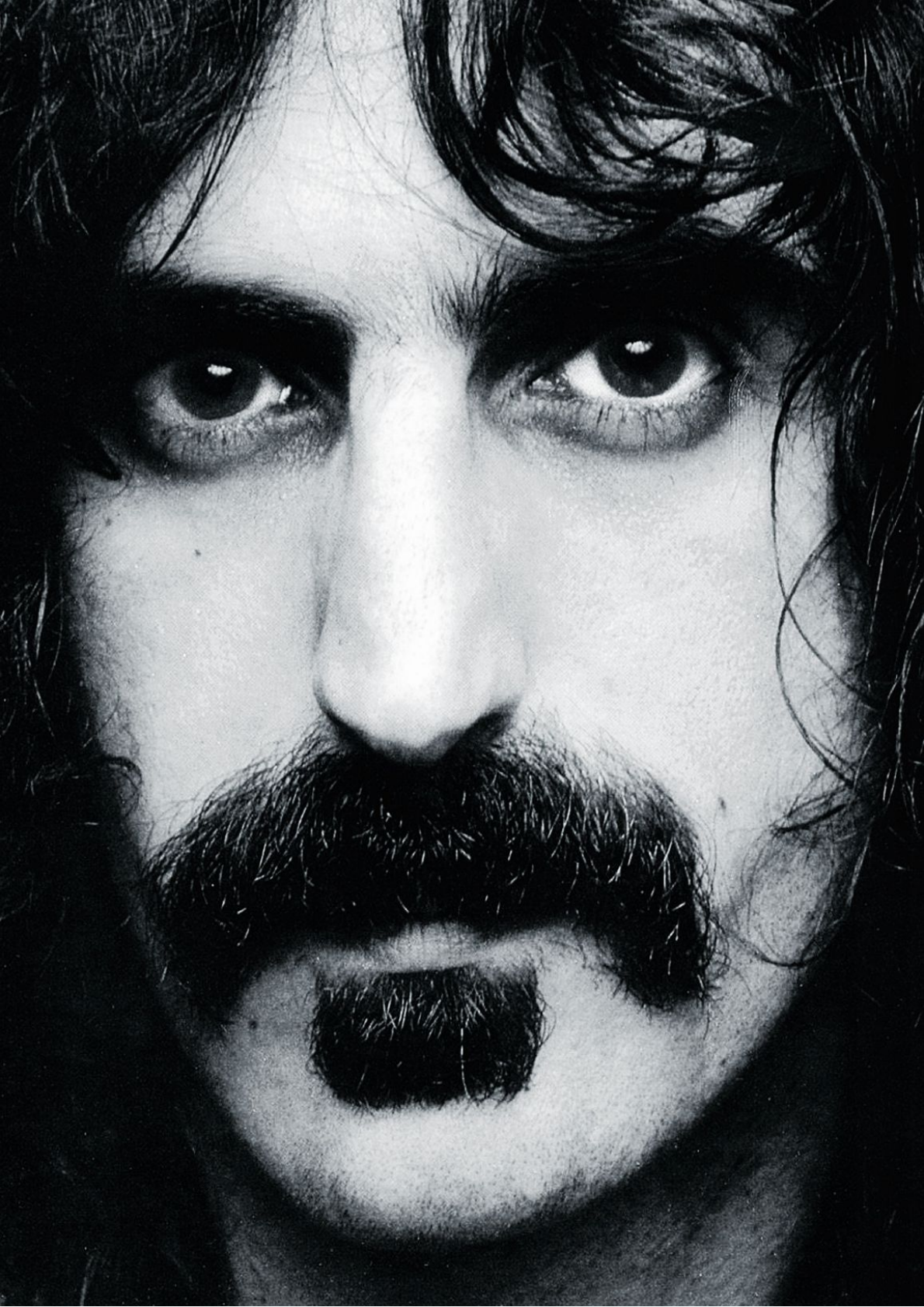
Words David Mead

It was well overdue. Since Zappa's death in 1993 there has been a yawning gap where a film about his life should be, and actor/director Alex Winter found it hard to believe that nothing had been done to fill that space so far. "It seemed striking to me that there had yet to be a definitive, all-access documentary on the life and times of Frank Zappa," he said. "We set out to make that film, to tell a story that is not a music doc, or a conventional biopic, but the dramatic saga of a great American artist and thinker – a film that would set out to convey the scope of Zappa's prodigious

and varied creative output, and the breadth of his extraordinary personal life. First and foremost, I wanted to make a very human, universal cinematic experience about an extraordinary individual."

Alex was granted access to Zappa's famed vault, a multimedia archive containing more than 1,000 hours of largely unseen and unheard footage. Biographical in nature, the 129-minute film accompanies Zappa from the formative years of the original Mothers Of Invention through to his final performance on guitar in Prague in 1991. It's a rare treat and one that every Zappa fan will treasure.

FRANK ZAPPA SIGNATURE LOGO USED WITH PERMISSION
PHOTO BY EMERSON LENN. COURTESY OF THE ZAPPA
FAMILY TRUST AND MAGNOLIA PICTURES



THE CENTRAL SCRUTINIZERS

PHOTO BY PHILIP CHEUNG, COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

ALEX WINTER



The documentary's director and lifelong Zappa fan, Alex Winter, is probably better known to the world as Bill S Preston, Esq from the *Bill & Ted* movies. Zappa was a labour of love that took years to complete, and two key elements to its existence were a successful fundraising campaign and, more crucially, unlimited access to Zappa's infamous vault – an enormous autobiographical archive of film, video and audio.

How did you begin your work with the archives?

"Access to the vault began a two-year process of doing excavation and preservation work on the media that was down there before we even got around to being able to make the film. It was a mammoth undertaking. Thankfully, it's media that we were really happy to be looking at. Every day we were looking at stuff, which was kind of a joy."

A lot of the material had deteriorated over the years. How did you go about restoring it?

"Zappa was such a formidable archivist and he was working in every format. So we had 8mm, Super 8, 16mm, 35mm and every conceivable format of video and audio. It was deteriorated, but we had over a dozen separate companies scattered across the place doing this work for us. It took a great deal of time, but, again, it was gratifying that the media was really beautiful, so we were happy to do it. It was just not easy. The audio is very delicate. It'll get eaten away at



PHOTO BY PHILIP CHEUNG, COURTESY OF THE ZAPPA FAMILY TRUST AND MAGNOLIA PICTURES

by time. The family had it in a temperature-controlled space, but it's very hard for that stuff to survive no matter what. So we were able to save all of the endangered media that was down there. Some of it was already gone, but very little of it."

It must have been a mammoth task deciding what material to select from such a large resource. How did you go about that?

"I had an idea in mind from the beginning in terms of the story I was most interested in, and not trying to please every fan and hit every biographical beat of his life. I was really interested in a narrative of what

"ZAPPA WAS SUCH A FORMIDABLE ARCHIVIST AND HE WAS WORKING IN EVERY FORMAT. WE HAD 8MM, SUPER 8, 16MM, 35MM – EVERY CONCEIVABLE FORMAT OF VIDEO AND AUDIO" ALEX WINTER

it meant to make art in that period of time and the politics of the time and the culture of the time. I think what helped direct Mike [J Nichols, film editor] and I specifically was that quite early on in the preservation work we discovered hours and hours of Frank talking, whether it was on film, video or audio. And we pulled all of that. The lion's share of that had never been heard before and we strung together a narrative of essentially Frank taking us through his life. And then we chose what to use and what not to use."

Was there anything missing from the archive that you wished you'd been able to include in the film?

"I was eager to include the Garrick Theatre period, which is one of the most inspiring periods of Zappa's career, in my opinion, because it was really such a unique way of forming an artistic identity to just walk into a theatre and perform there all day, every day for months on end. And I think he really came out from that experience having formed his artistic identity.

"There was always stuff we wanted that we couldn't find. But I mean, time ravages all things, you know?"

www.alexwinter.com

1. Zappa was an assiduous archivist of his work, leaving behind thousands of hours of audio and video in his fabled vault

2. Starting off on drums in a band in San Diego during his junior high school days. "I wasn't a very good drummer," Zappa told *Guitarist* back in March 1993



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZAPPA FAMILY TRUST AND MAGNOLIA PICTURES

AHMET ZAPPA



Zappa's youngest son, Ahmet, became a trustee of the Zappa Family Trust after his mother, Gail, passed away in 2015. But the film project began years before her death at a time when Alex Winter

contacted Ahmet wondering why no-one had ever tried to make a documentary about his father's life. The seed was sown and years later Ahmet took on the role of producer of the new film, a situation that proved to be deeply personal.

What was the starting point when it came to making the documentary?

"I've been friends with Alex [Winter] probably since *The Lost Boys* days and he reached out and said, 'How come no-one's ever done a definitive Zappa doc?' And I go, 'Well, people have tried.' Even just talking to him very quickly about what he would do I thought would appeal to Gail. And I said, 'Well, listen, let me just set this up.' They hit it off right off the bat in a truly organic, awesome way.

"Alex is so generous with this time, his spirit, his energy. He's so funny, but he knows his shit. And I got a bunch of Alex's films and made Gail watch them,

"WE WANTED TO TELL AN HONEST STORY... I'M REALLY HAPPY WITH HOW IT TURNED OUT, BUT I'VE HAD SO MANY TEARS WATCHING IT. IT'S KIND OF LIKE AN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE" AHMET ZAPPA

so she was really inspired. Alex talked to her and this bond was formed. She really liked where Alex was coming from. And I was shocked that she's like, 'Well, look, if you want to do the movie, you're going to need a full access to the vault.' I was like, 'Okay, well, this is different,' because she would never let people down there. And I just watched Alex's jaw hit the ground!"

Did you oversee which material Alex pulled from the vault?

"Not at all. There wasn't a moment of 'take this out' or 'do this or that'. That's the whole thing, you know, making sure that Alex had total access. We wanted him to tell an honest story and I think that's what Alex did. And I'm really happy with how it turned out, but I've had so many tears watching it.

"It's kind of like an out-of-body experience because in one way I can look at it from the point of view that you want it to be the best sort of outcome for Frank. And I do think that it was. But then when you wear the hat of producer to support your director, you want to make sure he has everything that he needs. There's



PHOTO BY YORAM KAHANA, COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

no point in being like some sort of a cop, you know? I mean, I really wanted Alex to be able to explore every avenue possible to tell the story he wanted to tell – and that was the environment I wanted to create, give him the freedom to find his story. And he did. I just love what he's done."

What do you think your father would have made of the film?

"You know, I don't know. No-one's asked me that question. I think he would like it, but I don't know that he would like the attention in that way. He was very self-deprecating. He was an absurdist, so I don't know that he would have necessarily wanted a doc on his life. If he was still around and I was like, 'I want to do a doc on you,' then he'd be like, 'Okay, fine.' And he'd be pretty hands off, to be honest. And then he'd be supportive of the fact that we were doing it. But if he was doing it, it would be a different kind of animal."

www.zappa.com

3. A punishing work schedule saw Zappa spend many hours in the studio when not on tour with his band. He's pictured here with engineer Kerry McNabb

4. Prague, January 1990, with Czech composer Michael Kocáb: a bizarre turn of events saw Zappa appointed 'Special Ambassador to the West on Trade, Culture and Tourism' by the then Czech president Václav Havel



PHOTO BY VAN CARLSON, COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

STEVE VAI



PHOTO BY GREG WURTH

Steve Vai started working for Zappa at the age of 18. In the beginning he was transcribing Zappa's music, some of which was published in *The Frank Zappa Guitar Book* (Munchkin Music, 1982), but in the autumn of 1980 he became a fully paid-up member of Zappa's recording and touring band and can still remember the level of culture shock that was to ensue...

How did you get to know Zappa?

"I was so innocent and naïve. I was a kid that grew up in a teenage bedroom on Long Island listening to the progressive rock music of the 70s, but had an interest in composition from a very early age. And I discovered Frank. When I moved out to California, it was a bit of a shock. It was so exciting and so interesting. And then I got an apartment right down the street from Frank, so I was constantly in the Zappa world. A week later, I just started going up to the house and then that was it, you know?"

Did you go straight into recording sessions?

"Well, that's the interesting thing about Frank. When you go up to the studio and you're a musician and there's something that you can do that he finds useful in his music, you just start recording all sorts of things. Then records start coming out and sometimes they're not necessarily in the order that you worked on things. So, for instance, when I first started going up to the house, Frank had me recording a few pieces of music that were extremely difficult. One of them was *Theme From The 3rd Movement Of Sinister Footwear*. Then the first album I started to record with Frank was *You Are What You Is*. I was all over that record and I thought, 'Well, great, that's going to be the next record that comes out.' But the next record that actually came out was *Tinseltown Rebellion*, which was from the

"FRANK HAD ME RECORDING A FEW PIECES OF MUSIC THAT WERE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. ONE OF THEM WAS *THEME FROM THE 3RD MOVEMENT OF SINISTER FOOTWEAR*" STEVE VAI

1. "Not bad, sport!" Steve earned the title 'Stunt Guitarist' during his tenure in Zappa's early 80s band



PHOTO BY GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY

first fall 1980 tour that I did. And then *You Are What You Is* came out after that. So you just never knew with Frank.”

He was renowned for being very tough in the rehearsal room. Did you experience that?

“The level of excellence that you needed to be at was such that if you didn’t have the goods, you didn’t last. And Frank expected everybody to rise to the occasion. One of the brilliant things about Frank was he had the ability to totally intuitively read your potential. And each musician that he hired for his band had to have something that they could do that was somewhat extraordinary. You had to be a great singer or a great player, whatever it was that you did. That’s what he expected from you. He wouldn’t expect you to do things that you couldn’t do because that wouldn’t work for him. So it didn’t work for you. So ‘tough’ is an interesting word to apply to Frank. He was demanding, but he didn’t demand things that you couldn’t do.”

Personally, what do you feel he drew out of you as a musician?

“Well, first I transcribed his music so he put me in really deep, transcribing all these abstract guitar solos and drum parts for him. For some reason, this was something that was just very organic for me. And then, as far as playing obtuse melodies on the

“FRANK HAD THE ABILITY TO TOTALLY INTUITIVELY READ YOUR POTENTIAL. AND EACH MUSICIAN HE HIRED HAD TO HAVE SOMETHING THEY COULD DO THAT WAS SOMEWHAT EXTRAORDINARY” STEVE VAI

guitar that aren’t very natural for conventional guitar players, I was pretty good at that because in my mind I loved the idea of playing things that were very, very difficult – and Frank had a boatload of that stuff. So he would write music for an instrument like the piano that wouldn’t fall on the guitar in any natural way, but I somehow figured out ways to play it.

“One of the things I was able to do, which I think Frank was able to take advantage of, was play some of those very difficult melodies that in the past he didn’t have guitar players play.”

You played on possibly the most technically difficult of all Zappa’s pieces, *The Black Page*, earning you the title of ‘Stunt Guitarist’ in the band.

“I think he was just interested to see how far he could take me with playing crazy stuff on the guitar. But the things that I did with him that I think he got the biggest kick out of was *The Jazz Discharge Party Hats* or *The Dangerous Kitchen* or *Moggio* or *RDNZL* or *Drowning Witch*. These are all pieces of music that just had an uncanny type of guitar expectations.”

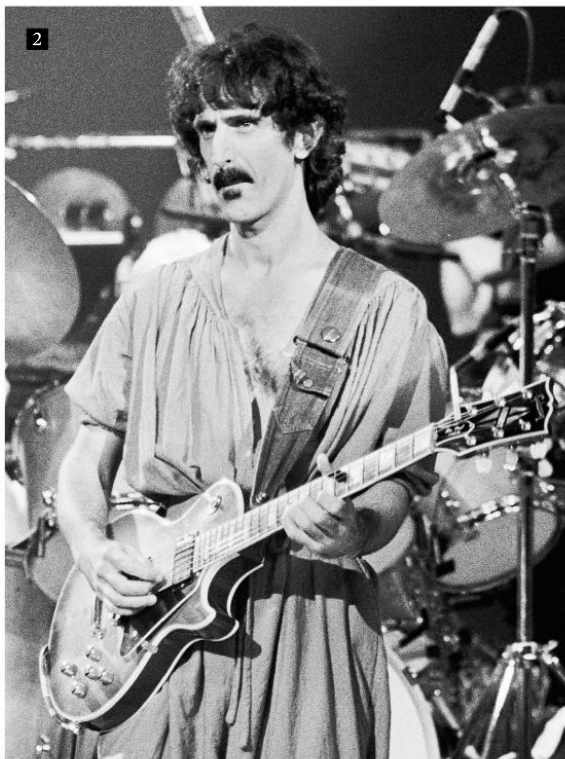


PHOTO BY GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY

Is there a moment on stage that will stay with you for ever, during your time touring with Frank?

“There are so many. The first show of the tour I did with Frank in 1980, he’d never really had somebody playing these types of melodies on the guitar. He had given me the melody to this song, *Montana*, and now you get guys like Mike Keneally and Dweezil [Zappa] and that’s a piece of cake. It’s not a problem for these guys, but back then nobody was doing that stuff. And I’ve seen Frank in a bad mood. If he heard one mistake, one tiny little mistake, something he didn’t like, he threw the whole song out. And if it’s the same person who made the mistake more than two times in a row, they were thrown out of the band.

“Well, we play *Montana* and there’s that interlude in the middle and I just nailed it, you know? I just freakin’ nailed it. And he stopped the show, walks up to me in front of the audience and he says to the mic, ‘Not bad, sport.’ And then we kick in again. Now, I’ve seen him stop the band for other reasons that weren’t as friendly as that, trust me. So that was a surprise.”

www.vai.com

2. One of FZ’s most notoriously difficult compositions was called *The Black Page*, owing to its dense notation when viewed as a score. “That was my audition piece!” Steve tells us

ZAPPA SPIRIT OF '88

PHOTO BY DANIEL KNIGHTON/FILMAGIC

MIKE KENEALLY

It's amazing to think that the guitar isn't Mike Keneally's first instrument. He originally approached Zappa to audition for keyboards, but finding that role already filled he decided to go for the guitar position instead. Having proved to Frank that he could handle the most complex music thrown his way, Mike joined Zappa's band for the 1988 tour.

When you first started the tour, how did you manage the leap from keyboard to guitar?

"I quickly had get up to speed. It's not just executing notes on an instrument, which was kind of the way I approached it at the time, because as a keyboardist initially, I sort of conceptualise the fretboard as just like a different version of a keyboard. So for me to play guitar with Frank at that time was like 90 per cent about executing parts and not really getting into the way personality can be conveyed with a guitar. If you listen to what I play on those on those live recordings from 1988, it's much more about being an ensemble member."

Another startling fact about your tenure with Zappa was that it was your first pro gig.

"I had done such a small amount of playing with large bands, or any kind of live playing on a large scale at all, I had to come to terms with everything at once. So if I could just cut the parts in some form on the guitar, I consider that a success. If it were possible to go back and do those shows again with some portion of the knowledge I have now about guitar playing specifically, things would come off differently but not necessarily better!"

Your in-depth knowledge of Zappa's back catalogue proved to be invaluable during rehearsals, didn't it?

"If Frank wanted to play some song that he hadn't played in a long time, he might say, 'We haven't played *Who Needs The Peace Corps?* for 20 years,' and then he would just turn and look at me and I'd start playing it. So the fact that I was able to provide that service I think is more valuable to what was accomplished on that tour musically than anything specifically about guitar. Although I got lucky on occasion with some of the guitar playing. There are some nice moments on the [live] albums, but it's certainly nothing compared to what Steve [Vai] had going on in terms of the impact that he made as a guitarist."

1. Mike Keneally (right) on stage with Zappa during the European leg of the 1988 tour

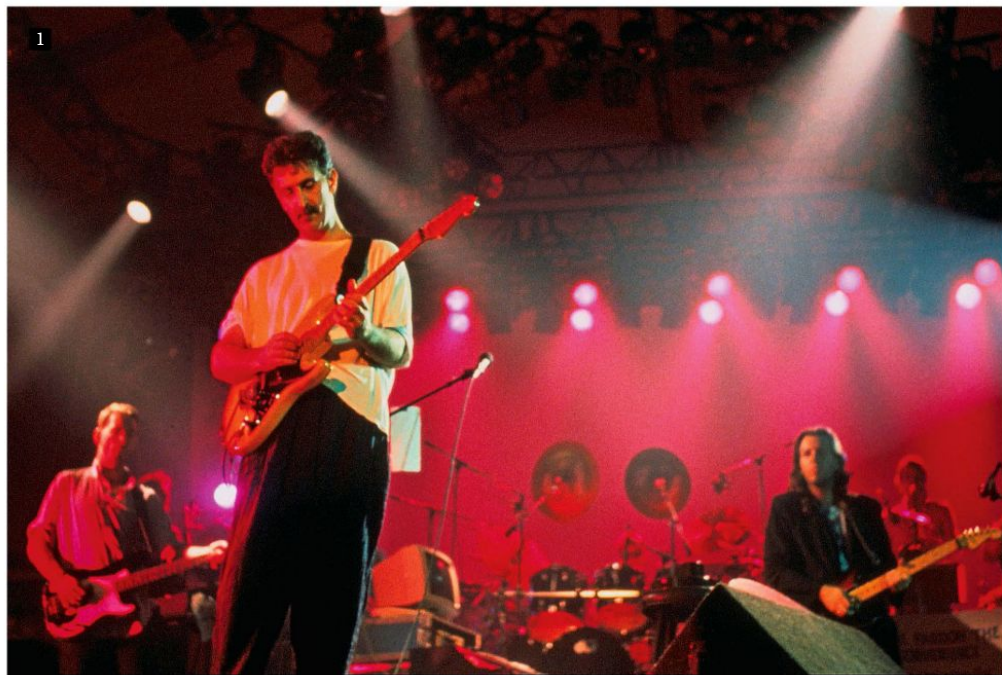


PHOTO BY ERIC CATARINA/STILLS/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Zappa was famous for a putting his bands through a punishing pre-tour rehearsal schedule. What was that like?

"Heaven! Because I personally couldn't imagine anything that I would rather spend the day doing than playing Zappa music. You've got to realise that I came from more of a fan perspective than a lot of guys who would get in the band, where it really would just be tiring grunt work. But not only was I a huge Zappa fan, it was also my first professional music experience of any kind. So my mind was being blown on a daily basis, eight hours a day, five days a week for four months of pretty much sustained bliss.

"33 years later, I can look back and understand why somebody might get fatigued. I'm a lot more sympathetic to that, but I still think, 'You know what? What a blessed situation to be in,' and that overrides anything else. There aren't that many times in life where you can say, 'I'm in rehearsal with Frank Zappa, playing his music.'"

What was the most demanding piece that you had to learn for the '88 tour?

"The first one that comes to mind is *Alien Orifice* because there's a long patch in the middle that actually wasn't even played by guitar on the original

"MY MIND WAS BEING BLOWN ON A DAILY BASIS, EIGHT HOURS A DAY, FIVE DAYS A WEEK FOR FOUR MONTHS OF PRETTY MUCH SUSTAINED BLISS"

MIKE KENEALLY

recording, but Frank decided he wanted to change up the orchestration. It was just a barrage of fast 16th notes and he wanted it to be clean, bassy-sounding guitar, played along with the vibraphone and piano. So I just had to learn this thing and it is the type of part that you just have to drill it and drill it and drill it, and you can't afford to think about it. It has to be complete muscle memory. Giving an ounce of energy to what the next note is supposed to be, you're going to lose it.

"Bob Rice, who was the Synclavier tech on that tour, would keep a running tally on my executions of that song and any time I did okay, he would come up after the show and go, 'Nice Alien.' That was the only thing that was in the back of my mind: trying to elicit a 'Nice Alien' from Bob Rice after the show."

How did the experience of such intense rehearsing translate into actually getting on tour and playing the material live?

"There were certain songs that we drilled constantly while we were rehearsing in Los Angeles. I'm thinking in particular of a song called *Jezebel Boy*, which is not anything that requires rehearsal except for the fact that it involved a certain amount of

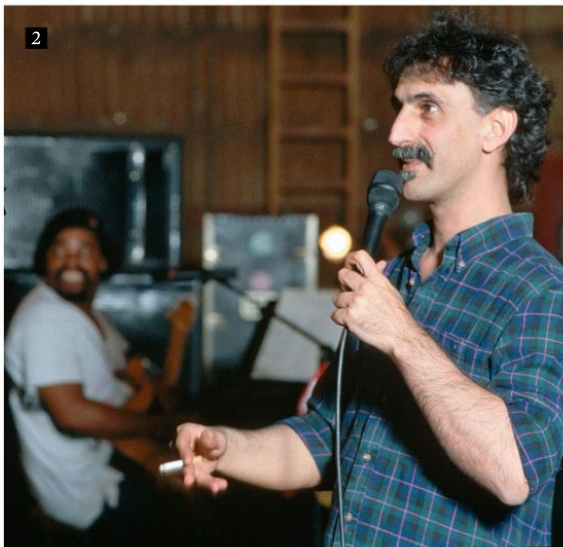


PHOTO BY LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VEZ VIA GETTY IMAGES

improvised vocal stuff. And I think Frank just liked playing it. We'd get back from dinner break and Frank would say, '*Jezebel Boy*', just because he enjoyed it. He and I could get into different improvised stuff every time we played it.

"On the road, we played it one time. We fucked it up. And that's the version that's on *Broadway The Hard Way*, because it was the only version that Frank had to choose from. But I just thought, 'How strange that we played this song relentlessly in rehearsal.'"

What would be your most memorable moment from the tour?

"I used to dream of playing in Frank's band, so the fact that it was finally happening, I opted to just be grateful for it. The night before the tour started, I was panicking because I'd never done anything like it. I was home, unable to sleep, thinking that even though I'd just rehearsed for four months, I didn't feel like I belonged – I felt unworthy somehow.

"Frank may have sensed something about what I was going through because on the first show in Albany, New York, he kept going to me in the second set and having me do things, improvise on guitar and vocal and keyboard simultaneously, you know, all this stuff. And when we came out for the encore Frank says, 'Mike Keneally, ladies and gentlemen!' and I was feeling like I belonged there and apparently Frank felt the same way, so I felt really validated from that moment and for the rest of the tour I just relished every opportunity to perform."

www.keneally.com

2. Rehearsals for the 1988 tour took place over an intense four months, but the band still managed to screw up the only live performance of the song *Jezebel Boy*!

SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR

Where do you begin when you try to put together a listening guide to Zappa's vast repertoire? Well, you can ask a bunch of known 'Frankophiles' to pick their favourite track or era of the man's music, for starters...



THE IDIOT BASTARD SON – MOTHERMANIA (1969)

MIKE KENEALLY: "Mine is the specific version of *The Idiot Bastard Son* that Frank prepared for the *Mothermania* compilation. The tape is running at a different speed from the *[We're] Only In It For The Money* version, there's no weird talking section in the middle, and the mix is completely different. It's very haunting sounding, with more flutes in the mix, and just feels like a complete world unto itself defined by Frank's musicality and harmonic sense."



INCA ROADS – ONE SIZE FITS ALL (1975)

STEVE VAI: "Well, you can ask me and I'd answer differently every time, but right now I'm going to say *Inca Roads* [from *One Size Fits All*]. It's a gem among gems. There's so much embodied in that one piece of music that it's uncanny. That guitar solo is my favourite guitar solo he's ever done. The melody in it is the voice of God, you know? There you have it. There's no other way for me to describe it. That piece of music is extraordinary on so many levels. There's comedy in it, there's historical melody, there's freedom."



TWENTY SMALL CIGARS – CHUNGA'S REVENGE (1970)

ADRIAN CLARK: "I could so easily have picked my favourite solo break, because there are so many, charting the uniqueness and gradual evolution of Frank's playing: *Hungry Freaks*, *Daddy*, *Transylvania Boogie*, *Inca Roads*, *Rat Tomago*. But for me, right now, the essence of the Zappa guitar sound is best conjured up by *Twenty Small Cigars* from *Chunga's Revenge*. It's a simple little tune, mostly composed, but it has that combination of jaunty and wistful that Frank did so well."



ROXY & ELSEWHERE (1974)

ALEX WINTER: "I like Zappa at the two extremes of his career. The most experimental rock era – *Hot Rats* is probably my favourite of the rock albums. And I love *The Yellow Shark*, and how can you not love *Roxy & Elsewhere* and the greatest band he had? That mid-70s period is thought of as his heyday because he just had the ultimate rock band, though there were artists in that band that weren't rock musicians. That's what makes Zappa great. If you listen to *Roxy And Elsewhere* or music from that era, it's hard to beat."



APOSTROPHE(') (1974)

AHMET ZAPPA: "I was born in '74 and the only music I heard probably until I was, you know, 10 maybe, or maybe seven or eight, was just Frank's music because we didn't really have the radio on. Whatever he was working on in that era – and previously – was the stuff that was played the most in the house. My dad's music was my entire musical landscape. The stuff from the early 70s and 80s, I mean, I just love that. I love it all so, so much. *Apostrophe(')*, *Over-Nite Sensation*, *Sheik Yerbouti*... you know?"



WATERMELON IN EASTER HAY – JOE'S GARAGE ACTS II & III (1979)

DAVID MEAD: "I think *Watermelon In Easter Hay*, the penultimate track from *Joe's Garage Acts II & III* is almost the exact opposite of Zappa's accustomed soloing style. Instead of the angular, snarly, angry and often dissonant guitar outing over a single chordal rhythmic vamp, here we find Frank in melodic mode. This is a beautiful, melancholic instrumental featuring a soaring melody and a simply gorgeous solo that you just don't want to end."



ST ETIENNE – JAZZ FROM HELL (1986)

GUTHRIE GOVAN: "I think my favourite FZ guitar moment might be *St Etienne*, from the *Jazz From Hell* album. The phrasing is exquisitely unpredictable and I really enjoy the perverse eccentricity of Frank's decision to include an extended guitar improvisation like this – over a beautifully chilled-out backing – on an album that otherwise comprises wall-to-wall statistically dense Synclavier programming! And then, there's that sound – a classic multi-layered Zappa rig where the sparkling clean attack of each note seems to cross-fade into a thicker, more overdriven amp tone, dialled in to start feeding back at the slightest provocation... Truly splendid."



INCA ROADS – ONE SIZE FITS ALL (1975)

JOHN ETHERIDGE: "I think the number-one Zappa guitar solo has to be on *Inca Roads* from the album *One Size Fits All*. This is a bolted-on solo taken from a live gig in Helsinki (you can hear that as well on *You Can't Do That On Stage Any More Vol 2*). The solo has been somewhat edited and re-EQ'd and the pedal effect is, I think, a Mutron envelope filter. Zappa really plays 'bandleader' solos. He allows himself all the time in the world and is not out to impress. Here it all comes together in a compact masterpiece that ends with the first example I'd heard of fret tapping. Totally individual style and content."



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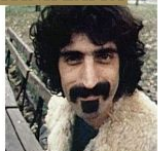
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THE MOTHERLODE

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FRANK ZAPPA



We'll leave the final words to the great man himself. This extract was taken from an exclusive interview Zappa did with *Guitarist* in March 1993 and offers some insight into his playing as well as some of the gear that passed through his hands during his spectacularly leftfield career.

Tell us about your first ever guitar.

"It didn't have a make on it – it had been kinda sandblasted. My brother got it for \$1.50 at an auction and it was an archtop, f-hole, ugly motherfucker with the strings about a half-inch off the fingerboard.

"My father had a guitar, which he kept in a closet, but I didn't really decide to mess around with the thing until we got this godawful thing at the auction. That's why I liked it, because it was so tinny-sounding. It was just an acoustic guitar, but for an acoustic instrument it was moving closer to the direction of that wiry tone I liked with Johnny 'Guitar' Watson, especially if you picked it right next to the bridge."

When did you make the move to electric?

"The guitar my father had was a round-holed guitar of anonymous make and I stuck one of those DeArmond soundhole pickups in that. So it would be one of those bad-sounding magnetic pickups that you stick in the soundhole of a normal acoustic guitar, so it wasn't a real electric guitar. I guess it was around four or five years later that I actually got an electric guitar. There

was a music store not far from my house and I rented this Telecaster for \$15 a month. Eventually, I had to give it back because I couldn't make the payments on it any more."

How would you sum up your guitar style on the early Mothers recordings?

"It was okay, but back then the guitar wasn't a featured instrument in the way it was on the later albums. As far as a precedent for it, I don't think there was anything you could compare it to; it was the only way I knew how to do it. There was no reason to do it another way – and, anyway, everybody else was doing it the other way."

The rock guitar influences that are the most common are the 60s icons, players like Clapton and Hendrix...

"When *Freak Out!* [1966] and *Absolutely Free* [1967] were done, there wasn't any Hendrix. We met Hendrix in the summer of '67; he sat in with us at the Garrick Theatre, so we'd already made those albums before I even knew that he existed. Actually, I think my playing is probably more derived from the folk music records that I heard – Middle Eastern music, Indian music, stuff like that."

What specifically?

"For years I had something called *Music On The Desert Road* [Deben Bhattacharya], which was a recording of all kinds of different ethnic musics from different places in the Middle East. I used to listen to that all the time – I liked that kind of melodic feel. I listened to Indian music, Ravi Shankar and so forth,

"I THINK MY PLAYING IS PROBABLY MORE DERIVED FROM THE FOLK MUSIC RECORDS THAT I HEARD – MIDDLE EASTERN MUSIC, INDIAN MUSIC, STUFF LIKE THAT"

FRANK ZAPPA

before we did the *Freak Out!* album. The idea of creating melody from scratch based on an *ostinato* or single chord that doesn't change, that was the world that I felt most comfortable with. If you listen to Indian classical music, it's not just pentatonic. Some of the ragas that they use are very chromatic, all sustained over a root and a 5th that doesn't change, and by using these chromatic scales they can imply all these other kinds of harmonies. The chords don't change; it's just the listener's aspect that gets to change based on how the melody notes are driven against the ground bass."

That sounds like a parallel with your own guitar improvisations, where the band plays a fairly straightforward rhythmic vamp and you insert dissonance via the solo – you use a lot of chromatic tones and whole tone scales in your solos.

1. Zappa cites his switch to playing Gibson SGs through Marshall amps with his band as a reason why his guitar playing changed up a gear in the early 70s

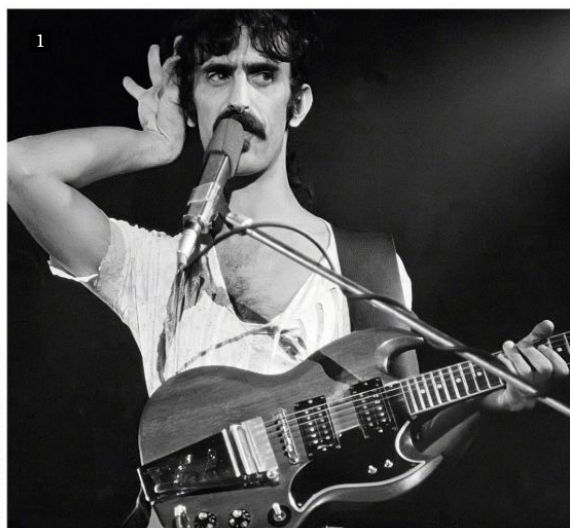


PHOTO BY PL. GOULD/IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



The documentary *Zappa* is available from [altitude.film](#) and via streaming services

PHOTO BY RICHARD ECCLESTONE/REDFERNS



“Well, you stick them in *where* you think they belong *when* you think they belong. Sometimes you guess right, sometimes you guess wrong. The most dangerous thing is improvising with a band and thinking, ‘Okay, now’s the time to play that diminished scale,’ and somebody in the band is thinking, ‘Now’s the time to play a major chord.’ Those kinds of accidents do happen...”

Your guitar style underwent a marked change around the time of *Over-Nite Sensation*.

“That was partly because of the rhythm section and partly because of the equipment I was using. I imagine that anybody’s guitar playing would change if one day your keyboard player was Don Preston and suddenly the next day it’s George Duke – know what I mean? Or the difference between [drummers] Jimmy Carl Black and Chester Thompson; that certainly made a difference. When you have a completely different rhythm section with a different musical perspective, you’d be a fool not to take advantage of it. It also changed because I started playing an SG.”

So, you could put the difference in your guitar sound down, at least in part, to a new instrument?

“Not just a different instrument but also different amplification because prior to that time I’d been playing either a Gold Top Les Paul or a Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster, which was a large, fat three-pickup jazz guitar, which really had uncontrollable feedback. I was playing through a Fender amp or an Acoustic amp with a fairly nondescript tone – I just didn’t have enough money to invest in new equipment. But by the early 70s I was playing this SG and I switched over to Marshalls, and started playing through a device that a friend built for me, which had compression, phase shifting and some other little specialties.”

How did you come to own the fire-damaged ex-Jimi Hendrix Strat?

“There was this guy Howard Parker – they called him ‘H’ – who was Hendrix’s roadie, gofer and general assistant. He stayed at our house for a couple of

months in the late 60s, and he had this guitar which Hendrix had given to him – I thought it was from the Miami concert. He gave it to me and we had it hanging on the wall as a decoration for years and years and then I met some guys who were capable of putting guitars back together, so I had it done.”

Does it have an individual sound?

“Yes, it did have a sound all its own, especially after it was reconstructed, but that sound was not what you would expect from the Hendrix guitar. It didn’t sound like all the Hendrix guitar solos you’ve ever heard.”

It’s had pickup transformations as well, hasn’t it?

“Yeah, it used to have a chrome scratchplate and it had, I think, at that time a Barcus Berry in the neck and also a preamp...”

2. The ‘Hendrix’ Strat gifted to Zappa by Jimi’s roadie, ‘H’. Repeatedly modded, it is seen here with a new neck and without the chrome scratchplate that Frank had fitted

3. On stage with the Mothers Of Invention playing a feedback-prone Gibson ES-5

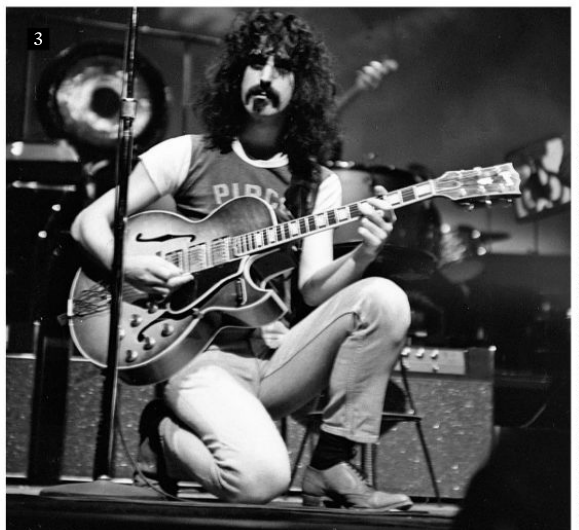


PHOTO BY POPPER RANDOLPH/MICHAEL LOCKS ARCHIVES/CONALUSON COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



STEVE LUKATHER

Growing up in Los Angeles with school friends Steve, Jeff and Mike Porcaro, Steve Lukather would play on thousands of records and become part of the legendary rock band Toto. We hook up with Luke to talk about how The Beatles sowed the musical seed, learn about his stellar career, and the stunning new solo album, *I Found The Sun Again*

Words Neville Marten

First Guitar

"I had a Kay acoustic guitar. A piece of wood with strings on it, man. Five bucks maybe. I struggled to make this thing make noise. My parents made it into a lamp for my 21st birthday, as a joke, because at that point I had a hit record and all this stuff."

Getting Better All The Time

"All of a sudden it made sense to me. My fingers all of a sudden went, 'Yes, I know how to do this.' And I started playing all the 1st position chords over and over. 'Ding, ding, ding.' I was like, 'Wow, man, you're a little teeny kid, you play chords.' And then I got the bug and it all started from the germ of seeing The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Everything happened in real time, from *Meet The Beatles!* to now. Then it was the British Invasion and it got bigger and bigger: you've got Beck, Page and Clapton, and then everything exploded. Jimi Hendrix then the prog rockers and then all of a sudden rock and jazz crashed into each other. And then funk. It's sort of an amalgamation of all of that."

School Of Rock

"Our school band had Jeff Porcaro and David Paich sitting in with us. We realised in high school we had to be as good as those guys. But we caught up real quick. We were so hungry for it. Mike Landau was in the band. We have known each other since we were 12 years old. We're still the 'neighbourhood kids': 'Oh, those two rascals up to no good.'"

"There were a lot of good musicians in Los Angeles. Everybody had bands. In school, you'd meet like-minded people and you see somebody's band play and go, 'Our band is better than your band. We're going to play next week.' And you'd maybe grab a guy from this band and this guy would start another band. Then Steve Porcaro said, 'I'm auditioning guitar players for my band,' so Mike and I both went and we played all the dual harmony shit."

Learning To Read

"I was 14. A musician moved in next door to us and bought the house. My father was like, 'Well, this guy's not famous, but he's a working musician, and he makes

enough money to buy a house. Okay, I'll buy this musician shit for a minute, but you've got to learn how to play, really learn how to do it.' So my dad paid for lessons. I could already play, but he says, 'No, you've got to learn how to read.' You know - Every Good Boy Does Fine and all that shit. But it was the best thing. I had to catch up really fast and it was like cramming for finals."

"It was an incredible time. I was studying music in school, playing in three different bands, including Steve Porcaro's band Still Life. And then I got the idea of being a studio musician, 'Wow, maybe I could be with those guys.' Then I started getting into Larry Carlton, Dean Parks, Jay Graydon, Lee Ritenour and Ray Parker, listening to the parts they were playing on the records and trying to emulate that, and started doing demo sessions for people."

"I didn't know about girls or money, and I was terrible at sports, but I could play the guitar, so all of a sudden that was my shield. It made me different from anybody else. I was playing in a band when I was 11, making money."

PHOTO BY SERGIO INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



By the mid-80s, Steve had already been in the biz for over a decade, making money from playing since his pre-teens



PHOTO BY FALLAIKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Boz, BMW & Birth Of Toto

"I joined Boz Scaggs' band when I was 19 and started working on the first Toto album when I was 19. But I wanted a nice car; I had a '63 VW. It was turquoise blue and I was like, 'I need to upscale myself.' So I went down to BMW and spent all my Boz Scaggs money on a car. I was doing sessions and I needed to show up looking like I belonged there. Here's this 19-, 20-year-old kid with his flash car. It looked like I stole my dad's car. Then I heard Jeff Porcaro and his neighbour were putting a band together and I wanted to be the guitar player so fucking bad. They knew me from high school and Jeff had recommended me for Boz. It was like God blessed me. God and Jeff Porcaro. Meeting Steve Porcaro changed my life."

"I didn't know about girls or money; I was terrible at sports, but playing the guitar made me different from anybody else"

Generosity Of Musicians

"Gene Page was a legendary arranger, Motown and much more. This was a whole live session: live vocals, live horns, strings – everything. Now, I was just new on the scene. I mean, 19 years old, my balls had just dropped. And I was late because I had a flat tyre in my fucking VW. They had done the run-through and they were going direct to two-track, so everything was live.

"I'm one of 80 people and I sit down with my part and I finally get myself together, get my guitar in tune. And I opened up the chart and there were five flats and not a chord symbol in sight. Lee Ritenour was the other guitar player. I had done a record with him a couple of weeks before and we'd hit it off. I looked over at this chart and I saw 'tacet'. He had 'guitar one', which is like the show-off part, and I have 'guitar two', which is like the fucking piano part in D). I must have looked like I saw my grandmother in the shower or something – all the blood left my face.

"The guy was counting it off and Rit switched parts with me. He just read my part and I had like eight bars' rest. I don't think I cried, but at the end of it I said, 'I owe you for the rest of my life.' If I'd died on that session it would have been the end of my career. So Lee Ritenour saved my life. We're still very, very close friends."

Working With Greats

"We always knew when we were in the room with greatness, when we were working with legends. There was a vibe in the room that you just could not deny. It was like, 'Wow, I've got to play great on this. I want to make these guys love me. I want them to call me back.' And they wanted us to give it to them, so it was a back-and-forth dance.

"There have been some sphincter-tightening moments. I had to read some shit sometimes, but generally most people handed me a chart with some chords on and said, 'Play whatever you want.' Occasionally, they would reference something then I'd interpret that and, luckily, I was able to do that – and do it fast. My first instincts were usually good and I was known for coming up with hooky little parts. I could find a real musical part or a nice arpeggio hooky thing after a vocal phrase.

"I have an arranger's ear. I can hear melodies around melodies – stay out the way of the vocal and play something cool to lead it in or lead it out. In terms of solos, I guess I gave them what they wanted to hear. But there was so much going on there was no time to pre-think anything. I'd be walking down the hallways and somebody would grab me and go, 'Come on and do a solo. Have you got 10

New Solo Album: track by track

"I did the record in eight days," says Steve of his new album, *I Found The Sun Again*. "We'd go in, no rehearsals, no demos, no click tracks, no lockup with a computer. I wanted to do it like they used to in the early '70s: play the track, do the solos live, overdub the vocals. I wanted to see if I could pull it off. Literally a month before lockdown I got everybody in the studio. It's real grand piano, drums at the end of the piano – you can hear the ambience in the room. And Bogner amps, cranked. I only add a little bit of extra sauce if I want. Generally, most of it comes from the guitar. I do use a boost – it's great on stage and you want just a little more 'fuck you.' I tried to get a real throaty, Beckish kind of sound. No-one plays single-note guitar better than Jeff. God's guitar player!"

1. ALONG FOR THE RIDE: powerful pop-rock, a touch reminiscent of *Talk To Ya Later*, a song Steve wrote for The Tubes

"Yes, I'll give you that a little bit. Same key perhaps. It was just a little whammy bar trick riff that I had and I chose to do a song with it."

2. SERPENT SOUL: an almost *Meters*, or even *Dr John*, feel

"That's [David] Paich playing piano. He owns that shit. And [Jeff] Babko can do anything. He's a genius-level musician so he knew what to play. He was playing Wuritzer on that. Nobody plays that kind of music any more, swampy rock; everything's straight eighths and 16ths."

3. THE LOW SPARK OF HIGH HEELED BOYS: from the later *Traffic* – classy rock with whammy dips and massive tone

"I found a sweet spot on these new pickups, manipulated the tone controls... I wanted to get a real throaty sound because distorted guitar sounds are all starting to sound the same. That was a live 'back and forth' thing. Paich and me in the room – that was for real."

4. JOURNEY THROUGH: undisguised Beckisms and a bit of Holdsworth

"One take. That was it. Total homage to Jeff Beck. It was written by Jeff

Babko for me and I was thinking, 'Jesus, I wonder how Jeff would play this?' but in my own demented way, with a few nods to Allan who was a dear friend. Talk about the guv'nor, man. God rest his soul. We ran it once and it sounded good. I go, 'Let's do another pass.' We went back and exactly what happened is the record. No overdubs, nothing at all."

5. WELCOME TO THE CLUB: a laid-back Joe Walsh classic

"The James Gang, 1969. I've been a fan since then and now we're friends. He's one of my favourite musicians – as a writer, producer, songwriter, guitarist or player. He's just got a thing. And I played this song in high school. Gregg Bissonette played some great drum fills."

6. I FOUND THE SUN AGAIN: love song with a guitar motif a bit like Christopher Cross's *Sailing*

"I'll cop to that. Christopher Cross is a good friend and I played on some of his records. My famous chord is Pink Floyd meets Christopher Cross and Joni Mitchell on acid. Strings two and three ringing off each other. It's for my girlfriend, Amber [Thayer]. And that was a live solo, totally off the cuff."

7. RUN TO ME: there's a *Motown* or early *Beatles* song under here

"This is an oddball three-and-a-half-minute pop song. Paich, Joseph Williams and myself wrote this for Ringo. He loved it and wanted to play on it. It's really a birthday present to Ringo. We wrote it – as if we could write a Beatles' song – with a nod to The Heartbreakers, Jeff Lynne and all that stuff."

8. BRIDGE OF SIGHs: was this Robin Trower track a way of doing *Jimi* without covering *Hendrix*?

"It was an homage to Robin, who I don't think gets enough love. I've always really dug him, but obviously we both come from a love of Hendrix, and I was able to channel my inner wannabe Jimi. That was all live, that 'live in the studio' thing that Jimi used to do. I could never be Jimi Hendrix or Robin Trower – I'm just trying to be me doing an impression of both, just total self-indulgence."



PHOTO BY JIM SHEA/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

minutes?' I go, 'Yes, I've got 10 minutes,' and he'd go, 'Bring your guitar. We've got an amp set up.' I'd get a sound and rip a solo and I'd make an extra \$500 to \$1,000.

"There was always healthy competition, 'Hey, man. How many dates you got this week?' 'I've got 20. How many have you got?' 'I've got 22, man.' 'Dude, I got you on that session, man.' But we were a family and if I couldn't do something I'd say, 'Call Landau,' or like Jay Graydon gave me all of his work. I asked [drummer] Jim Keltner once, when things had really started to happen for me, 'How can I pay you guys back for recommending me for stuff?' He goes, 'You've got to pay it forward, you've got to do it for somebody else.' And I've always remembered that and I always kept that rule."

Toto, 1984 (l-r): Mike Porcaro, Steve Porcaro, David Paich, Jeff Porcaro, Steve Lukather and Fergie Frederiksen

"Jeff had recommended me for Boz. It was like God blessed me. God and Jeff Porcaro. Meeting Steve Porcaro changed my life"



Steve's new album, *I Found The Sun Again*, features Toto members past and present, as well as an appearance from long-time friend Ringo Starr

PHOTO BY JABY SESSIONS

Under Pressure

"I sometimes had to redo some guy's part. Even something as simple as straight eighth notes, he just couldn't play it to the click. They'd see the red light and fold up. I've seen great live players go into the studio who just can't get it together. They can't handle the pressure: 'You've got to be great – now!'"

We're So Pretty, Oh So Pretty...

"There was no poster boy of Toto. In the 70s, it wasn't like that. It was like, if you're a great player or great songwriter or great singer, you got the gig. If you looked good that was a plus, but if you didn't, so what? Look at Leslie West: he didn't look the part of a rock star, but he played the fuck out of the guitar and sang like a motherfucker. We didn't think about the image. That was the most punk rock thing about us, we didn't care. Even the punks dressed up! I was too worried about the music to worry about image."

Back On The Road

"The end of Toto was near, the old version. We knew it was coming and it was sad. Me and Joseph were tight brothers, since he was 14 and I was 17, and we wanted to just keep working and the other guys didn't. But I'm not done yet. Joseph and I both have solo records

out. We both worked on each other's records, and David Paich played on both of our records. David said, 'Just go out as Toto, man. There have been so many versions. As long as you and Joe are singing and playing our songs.' I didn't plan on starting over again, but it's like, 'We both did it as solo artists, we should tour together, so why don't we play Toto's songs, too? Well, then why don't we just be Toto?'

"We made a new version. 'The Dogs Of Oz' is our cute little name for the new version. We put a new band together in 10 days and went for it. We got the drummer from Snarky Puppy [Robert 'Sput' Searight], John Pierce from Huey Lewis's band – my oldest friend, we were in our high school band – and Steve

Maggiore who plays second keyboard and sings all the high crazy stuff.

"We came out of the dust and figured we'd do all the Toto hits, some deep cuts and some solo stuff, too. Toto is the music. If I'm there and Joe's there, no matter who else plays it it's going to sound like us."

Fab Friends

"I've played with three Beatles. First, with McCartney on [*The Girl Is Mine* on] *Thriller* and then we did the movie [*Give My Regards To Broad Street*], and I did The Beatles 50th anniversary. I met George in 1992. He played with us at the Jeff Porcaro benefit and we became friends. He was my first guitar hero. Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band is something I always wanted to do, and nine years later we are really close friends. I can't tell you how great it is to have any connection to these guys, but actually to be a real true friend. After nine years with him, he's still Ringo. Some people call him Rich, I'll never call him that. He's Ringo. If anything I call him Boss. I say, 'Hey, Boss, what's up?'"

"I have an arranger's ear. I can hear melodies around melodies – play something cool to lead [the vocals] in or out"



Steve's latest album, *I Found The Sun Again*, is available now via The Players Club / Mascot Label Group

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'MARK I' MESA/BOOGIE

Vintage amp restorer Fabio Cutolo of FM Amps explains how he resurrected a 'Mark I' Mesa/Boogie by transforming it back into the original giant killer it once was in its glory days of the 1970s

Words Rod Brakes Photography Adam Gasson

Every now and then, a bona fide classic amp will be plucked from a cupboard, attic or garage and shown the light of day after spending years in the dark. Many of these amps didn't retire from service in the best shape, having been heavily worked, modded and repaired over the decades, before being cast aside into the twilight confines of storage. Years later, they blearily tumble back into the world without purpose, their owners keen to make some room and maybe a few quid to boot. For some people, such amps are nothing but an expensive burden, although as the saying goes: one person's trash is another's treasure. But who do you turn to when such pieces of historic hardware need expert attention? After all, this kind of project isn't standard fare for your garden-variety electronics engineer. Indeed, restoring a vintage amp properly often takes years' worth of specialist knowledge and experience.

Enter Fabio Cutolo. With nearly 20 years of expertise under his belt, Fabio first began learning about amplifier electronics as a teen on the job at a workshop in his native Rome, before honing his craft on Denmark Street. At his Tin Pan Alley workshop, Fabio soon had his hands full of electronics repairs, with around 1,000 customers a year looking to salvage anything from a pedal to a PA. He has since relocated to North Acton in West London

where he continues to focus on vintage amp restoration under the name FM Amps.

"The principle of my business is to get amps back to original factory spec as closely as possible," he tells us. "I'm old-school. I don't have a website. If I had to spend time online, I'd never have my hands free to work on the amps!"

"This is a Mark I Boogie, serial number A903, and it's dated to 1977. There's a handwritten date underneath the chassis indicating when the amp was finished. I understand around 3,000 of these were built in total. There weren't many imported into the UK in the 70s and it probably came over here with a band. On the side of the chassis is written 'EX RUSH X HG', so it could be an ex-Rush amplifier, which is pretty cool."

Needless to say, restoring this Mark I Boogie required a great deal of work, with Fabio having to completely dismantle it piece by piece.

"Restoring a vintage amp properly often takes years' worth of specialist knowledge and experience"

"Cleaning this amp was a crucial part of the restoration," he says. "On the top of the cabinet are two lighter shades of grain where some gaffer tape had been stuck on for decades. The residue was deeply engrained. That alone took a couple of days to remove: no tools – just me, a cloth and some Brasso! Brasso removes a very small amount of the outer layer, a bit like how T-Cut works on cars – except T-Cut would have been too aggressive for this. The cabinet is made from koa wood, and I had to go easy on it. Normally, I'd let a touch of oil soak in for a few days, but this residue had really worked its way in. The solid wood construction is amazing. I reckon the whole amp weighs at least 35kg. Even with the electronics and speaker out, the cabinet on its own still weighs a fair amount."

"The kind of weave that's used for the grille was invented in Austria and is called Vienna straw. It's often seen on chairs, so it has to be strong and reliable. It was in a state when I got it, and I cleaned it up carefully with cotton buds and a brush. It needed to look great, but also if the grille is dirty, the speaker can be affected. It can take years, but a layer of grime can build up around the edge of the speaker, which prevents it from moving correctly. And if it's bad enough for long enough that can lead to breakages."

"The speaker was full of dust and needed to be cleaned entirely. It also needed some repairs; the suspension had some small



These Mesa Engineering amps
were christened by Carlos
Santana when he remarked,
"This thing really boogies!"



1. The original Boogie amps remained in production from 1971 until late 1978 when they were superseded by the Mark II

2. It's well-known that Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson is no stranger to a Boogie, but was he familiar with this particular amp at some point in the distant past?

3. Positioned after the regular tone stack in the circuit, the graphic equaliser frequencies are centred around 80, 240, 750, 2,200 and 6,600Hz



Photo by Fabio Cutolo



cracks. It was a case of either replacing it, which would have devalued the amp, or making some small patches. It's a JBL K120 speaker. I would have expected it to come with an Electro-Voice or an Altec speaker, but on request you would have been able to get a JBL for a different type of sound. Although this amp doesn't have reverb, you could also order a model with a reverb circuit. With those amps, the reverb doesn't go in series, it's in parallel, so it adds the reverb to the rest of the signal in the same way as, say, a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe or Deville does."

With some of the original knobs missing, Fabio needed to get creative.

"The original Rogan knobs aren't in production any more," he explains. "The old type isn't currently being made, so I needed to make some replicas. I had to re-engage the numbers by hand and then create a mix of dry paint and edding pen to fill the engravings. They needed to look right. It wasn't easy! And it was the same kind of thing for the rest of the parts, including screws, nuts and the handle. They all had to be cleaned up to a certain degree in order to match. If something looks too old or

too new, it doesn't look right. It's the same idea with old guitars; when people need to replace a part, they usually want it to look like it fits with the rest of the instrument."

Although these cottage-industry amps were made at company founder Randall Smith's California home, they are well regarded for their industrial strength build.

"It's built like a tank," confirms Fabio, "but the construction – the wiring, PCB and components – is very intricate. It's an amazing piece of kit, and some parts of the amp were experimental. For example, the schematic has provisions for diodes on the preamp cathodes to work as current regulators, but they were later changed

"It's naturally quite an aggressive-sounding amp, but that helps it sound like it's following you a bit more when you're playing"

to resistors for greater tone control. It's naturally quite an aggressive-sounding amp, but that helps it sound like it's following you a bit more when you're playing – you don't feel as if there's any latency between notes. It sounds clearer and more articulate, particularly if you're playing fast.

"Back then, high power and low power switching was a new thing. In this case, it switches off two of the [four] power valves by disconnecting them from ground. It's a bit optimistic to say the amp has 100 watts in power; I measured the output power to be 56 watts in low mode and 73 watts in high mode. You can really tell the difference between the two. The original valves were four General Electric 6L6s/5881s, and three General Electric 12AX7s. I replaced them with four 6L6/5881 Philips ECG and a 12AX7WA with balanced triode for the driver valve, while retaining the other preamp valves. It's a four-stage preamp. This happens on virtually every amp, but there was some previous work carried out in the past, in this case on the bias circuit, which needed to be corrected. Mesa would normally have calculated the value the resistor needed to be – the same resistor



4. Restoring the black and silver silkscreened panel and engraved knobs was both a delicate and time-consuming process

5. Vienna straw can be seen on furniture the world over and is most famously associated with the Thonet No.14

chair (also known as the Vienna Coffee House Chair), designed in the mid-1800s

6. On the rear panel of the amp you can see the 3A mains fuse, ground phase switch, slave level knob, slave send and return jacks, and presence knob

you would check every time you changed the [6L6] valves – but somewhere along the line, someone had added in a load of extra components and that meant the amp wasn't sounding right. When it was reversed to original, I tested the original GE valves, but they sounded very tired. And that's when I decided to replace them with the new old stock Philips ones."

Although the amp's preamp section is slightly different to the schematic, Fabio is sure this deviation is original, as is sometimes the way with full-scale factory products, let alone boutique builds.

"There are two inputs: 1 and 2," he points out. "With regards to this amp specifically, input 1 goes to one half of the preamp (controlled by the push-pull pot labelled Volume 1 and Gain/Boost), then into a kind of Fender-style tone control circuit (labelled Treble/Bass/Middle) then the Master volume (followed by the power amp section). Pulling the Gain/Boost knob will bypass these tone controls and the signal then goes straight to the Master volume via a single resistor. This uses fewer components between the input jack and the speaker and gives a nice full





The koa cabinet's semi-open-back design helps to prevent the amp from overheating by allowing air to circulate freely

sound with little colouration. Input 2 has two-stage gain and the input resistance is much lower than input 1, which has a 1meg-ohm resistor going to ground. It has the same signal path as 1 but with an extra half preamp valve, which you can mix into the circuit via the Gain/Boost pot. The Volume 2 knob also features a Bright [pull] switch. Then, of course, there is the Master volume, which gives you the ability to set high-gain sounds at lower volume. Even with a lot of gain added, however, the amp is very quiet; there is hardly any hum or noise.

"The Treble, Bass and Middle EQ knobs/controls are similar to what you might find on a Fender amp. It comes off the first preamp valve and the component values are more or less the same. It's a very well-defined EQ system, although the graphic EQ has a more extreme effect on the sound. When I turned up the 80Hz slider, my windows were shaking! It sounded like the amp had a subwoofer. That can work really well for big stages. You can switch the graphic EQ in and out of the circuit, either using a footswitch or on the front panel. I assume it was mainly intended for soloing. It works on resistors and is very precise.

"The main problem I faced during the restoration process was the sliders. I had to dismantle the whole board, take them apart completely, clean them and then put everything back together. There is no

•
"It has a big range of tone and you can drastically change the sound with the EQ"
 •

replacement for those, and when I first saw the amp they weren't moving. The problem there is if they're stuck and you try to move them, you might damage the graphite underneath, and once that happens it will impact the resistance. I didn't use any chemicals – like switch cleaner – to clean those as that may have caused problems. I just used a cotton cloth to do the job and I managed to save them, thankfully."

Mesa/Boogie has since revisited its original amp in the form of the Mark I Reissue, and although these models are not exact replicas, much of the original design has been left intact.

"The amp controls are different," says Fabio. "It doesn't have the push-pull pots for Volume 1 and 2. There are differences between this 70s amp and the Mark I Reissue, although some of it is virtually identical. The power supply for this vintage Mark I is pretty much the same as

the Mark I Reissue, for example. They've only changed the position of a couple of capacitors here and there, and they reproduced it almost like for like. In fact, the mains capacitors have the same model number and dimensions as the ones in recent production.

"This amp uses diodes in a two-phase solid-state rectifier circuit, which basically irons out most of the mains noise. There are two diodes in series and it gets a very clean signal. You get almost no noise whatsoever and you don't lose any harmonics. It's very stable, and when you turn the amp up you get no sag – like you might with valve rectification. What you play comes out immediately. It really suits rock and blues, particularly the American blues sound, as opposed to the classic British blues rock sounds.

"It has a big range of tone and you can drastically change the sound with the EQ. It does gain-y tones really well and can go super heavy into metal, but you can also play very clean sounds. It would work for reggae, for example, really well – particularly because of the sharp attack. Musically, this amp is incredibly versatile and you could use it in pretty much any venue." ■

With thanks to Andrew Raymond of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath
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Eye Poppin' Candy

Combine the vast experience of Joe Knaggs and his team with the fiery blues-metal style of Eric Steckel and we get a superlative single-cut on every level.

Sit back and enjoy the ride...

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker

Ma



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What You Need To Know

1 Joe Knaggs we know, but Eric Steckel?

Eric Steckel was something of a child blues guitar prodigy – touring and recording with John Mayall when he was barely into his teens. Check out our interview with the guitarist at the end of this review to find out more.

2 It's a lot of money...

Of course it is, but it's a lot of guitar, too. The Knaggs Kenai starts a lot lower, then there's a Junior version (see the spec list at the end of the review). The thing is, aside from Joe Knaggs' colossal guitar-making experience, the rest of his team are virtually all ex-PRS Private Stock makers with the sort of experience that most small-'shop brands can only dream of.

3 It seems prices at the high end of the market are rising sharply.

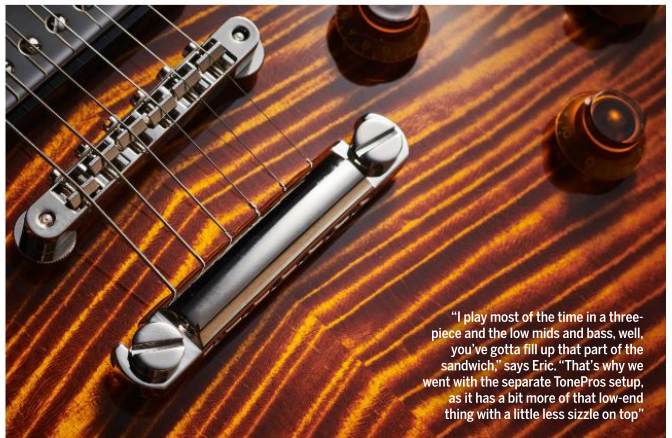
Things ain't what they used to be, that's for sure. But once you move into the world of small-workshop or boutique makers you need to be careful to judge like with like. On a basic level, most makers we talk to have all mentioned their key ingredient – quality wood – has risen in price, in some cases dramatically, over the past decade. Compare some of the prices in this feature to pro-level orchestral instruments and you might conclude that us rock 'n' rollers have it cheap.

There are few top makers who don't have a single-cut in their ranges and Knaggs is no exception. The Kenai is no stranger to these pages and is a part of the more Gibson-inspired Influence Series. It has been a key model since master guitar maker Joe Knaggs set up on his own in Greensboro, Maryland – a relative stone's throw from the home of his previous employer, PRS Guitars – and started shipping guitars in early 2010.

But unlike many, the Kenai is very much Joe's own take on the hallowed Gibson recipe, a very different Tele-meets-Les Paul outline that's broader across its body and is wedge-shaped in profile with substantial rear-chambering in contrast to the carved top. The co-joined Influence bridge provides a subtly different voice, too.

Very much in the modern 'boutique' model, a small staff of hugely experienced (mainly ex-PRS) employees crafts a wide range of guitars, which – like the Kenai – can be custom spec'd to a considerable degree, and has spawned signature models for Steve Stevens, Doug Rapoport and, most recently, Eric Steckel. The Kenai currently starts at \$5,425, but add in the whims of those artists and we're into the super league, the sort of price you'd pay for top-drawer European makers such as Nik Huber, or Seth Baccus here in the UK, for a similar specification.

For the record, we did request a 'basic' level sample, but something clearly got lost in translation! There is nothing basic about this build, not least the top-grade (Tier 1) bookmatched, striped maple carved top that's duplicated on the flat back. Not



"I play most of the time in a three-piece and the low mids and bass, well, you've gotta fill up that part of the sandwich," says Eric. "That's why we went with the separate TonePros setup, as it has a bit more of that low-end thing with a little less sizzle on top"



1

1. The pickups here are Eric's signature 'Candy' set, made by the Seymour Duncan Custom Shop. Previously, the model used Seymour Duncan's Saturday Night Special set

2. The three-a-side headstock used on Knaggs' Influence instruments reflects the very classic style of these guitars. The facing is ebony with 'modern morning star' inlay

3. Like the bridge pickup, this 'Candy' neck humbucker is on the lower side of the classic PAF outputs. It measures 7.55kohms and the bridge is 7.68k

only does it add considerable cost, but it provides a certain opulence to the build referencing – a violin's figured maple back or that of a high-line archtop or flat-top steel-string. It's rare to see a back like this on a rock 'n' roll-aimed electric.

Wedge between these two maple plates, of course, is a one-piece slab of mahogany. And if you're expecting a boat-anchor weight you'd be way off the mark. At just over 4kgs (just shy of 9lb), it's no featherweight, but pretty 'right' for the non-weight-relieved style. And despite the dark, vividly contrasted top and back, decoration is demure by some standards. The edge binding, for example, isn't binding at all; it's the edge of the maple top that's stained a dark grey with a black/white/black strip inlaid inside the edge – just like the purfling on a violin.

The 'modern morning star' inlays that were conceived for this model add subtle sparkle on the face of the unbound Indian rosewood fingerboard. The larger inlay sits under the unshowy brand logo on the ebony-faced headstock, while the outline is a throwback to classic, traditional craft rather than the modernism of

2



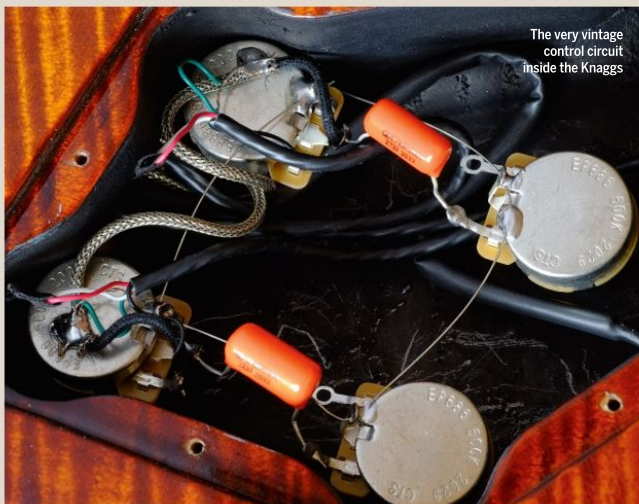
It doesn't look like an old Les Paul, but the sounds are really here... it's doing everything we'd expect

UNDER THE HOOD

A close-up look at the pickup circuit candy

The vintage-style control circuit uses long shaft CTS 500k pots and Orange Drop 223J (.022 microfarads) tone caps. Both the Seymour Duncan 'Candy' humbuckers here have four-conductor wiring, although that's not used; they are simply linked in series. Meanwhile, the wires from the output leg (middle) of the volume pots to the three-way shoulder-placed toggle pickup selector are old-style silver braided. There's no actual shielding in the cavity or on the back cover plate, either.

According to Seymour Duncan, the pickups are "spot-on recreations of the Alnico III humbuckers found in 'Candy'". From the sound, and when tapped on the covers, they don't sound potted to us. The quoted DCRs (7.55kohms, neck; 7.68k, bridge) are on the lower range of measured original PAFs, which typically range from 7k to over 9k. In comparison, Seymour Duncan's Seth Lovers have a quoted DCRs of 7.4k at the neck and 8.25k at the bridge.



Joe's previous employer's headstock, for example. Timeless might be a better word.

The full width of the neck glues into the body. Its heel has a boat-bow-like tip and is certainly more traditional than the carved heel designs of Patrick James Eggle's or Nik Huber's builds. The top carve is very classic, too, and not overly sculptured.

Like Steve Stevens' first deviation of the Kenai and instead of Joe's Influence bridge, the separate bridge and tailpiece here – both locking TonePros parts – revert to standard. Elsewhere, and somewhat ironically for a maker based on the US East Coast, Knaggs is increasingly using the UK-made pickups from Bare Knuckle: the standard Kenai set are Mules. Eric's choice are from Seymour Duncan's Custom Shop, reverse-engineered from a well-documented 1960 Les Paul named Candy.

Feel & Sounds

Comparing this with our reference standard Kenai, it feels bigger, chunkier, although at the same time a little more delicate in terms of the neck shape. The Kenai's body is a little broader than a Les Paul by around 12.5mm (0.5 inches) and is approximately 54mm deep overall with quite a complex wedge shape in profile; there's a substantial rib-cage contour and edge chamfering on the rear, too. The Steckel, meanwhile, is the same thickness throughout the body (top carve aside) and



4. One of the upgrades on our review model is this Tier 1 maple back, which matches the high-grade maple of the carved top. Note the 'boat bow' heel

5. It looks like an added binding strip, but this is actually the edge of the maple top stained a different colour with an inlaid violin-like purfling

6. These Kluson Revolution tuners are an updated vintage design that was introduced in 2015. They have a high tuning ratio of 19:1 and a one-piece sealed die-cast housing

has a more Les Paul-like overall depth of just over 57mm. The 'C w/Slight V' neck profile is now pretty much default on Knaggs' Influence guitars, with a depth at the 1st fret of 22mm and just a whisker over 25mm by the 12th. The lower position feels pretty classic C, but as the depth increases so the shoulders are slimmed, creating a very subtle V'd feel. If anything, the Steckel feels a little 'smaller' than our own Kenai, though dimensionally they're identical.

We warmed up our test amps with this writer's far more lowly, basic-spec Kenai loaded with Seymour Duncan Seth Lover units. And although it's been a while since we've gigged it, even in basic form, Knaggs' take on the Les Paul comes across as a 'Paul with attitude – not least with the co-joined Influence bridge and thinner body. There's a little more attack in the upper mids, and it's leaner in the deep low-end, but with a remarkable loop to the sustain.

The Steckel feels like we've gone up a level – or five. It might look pristine, but its voice sounds older, more mature-sounding, aged. It's not about output, it's about the woody quality of the voice, the responsiveness, the depth and an almost smear to the note. It has a huge dynamic range, too. Show this the front-end of any



6



In its base spec with a plainer top and more classic-coloured satin nitro finish, it just has workhorse written all over it

cranked Marshall-inspired valve amp and prepare for take-off. Indeed, if you let the amp do the lifting, with a little help from a pedal or two, the Steckel does sound remarkably clear and unmushy. Dig in and it's really fiery; pinched harmonics fall off your pick. But lay back and there is a beautifully nuanced smoothness and a depth that would sit in a late-night smoky jazz setting knowing that it'd still scream when you hit the stage at Woodstock.

In either setting, the vintage-style control setup really aids the various voices. It's not for everyone and the interaction between volume and tone takes a little getting used to. Pull back the treble volume a little then wind down the tone until it's about to really get dark and there's a drop in volume, too, a more hollowed, sweet, clear voice. Wind the

tone back up and the volume lifts, adding a little extra sizzle to a good valve tone.

It doesn't look like an old Les Paul, but the sounds are really here: from the clean, bright-edged bridge pickup, through classic rock heaven and a lot more. That's just the one pickup. The neck here... Well, it's certainly not overdone or syrupy thick. Again, with the responsive controls it's just doing everything we'd expect: a great example of the recipe.

Verdict

You could take a look at the pictures and price here and quickly conclude that this is hardly an everyman guitar. And yet that is the foundation of the Knaggs proposition. Even in basic dress, all the guitars we're played and gigged just sound exceptional. In its base specification with a plainer top and more classic-coloured satin nitro finish, it just has workhorse written all over it. This writer has never played a Knaggs guitar that wasn't 100 per cent fit for purpose as a musical tool. Yes, the Knaggs team will craft you a work of art that you might be afraid to take anywhere near a stage, but if you did we'd pretty much guarantee what you'd hear would be stellar, like this achingly beautiful-sounding single-cut. **B**



KNAGGS ERIC STECKEL KENAI T/S

PRICE: £5,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway, carved top, solidbody electric

BODY: 1-piece mahogany with carved Tier 1 maple top and back

NECK: Mahogany, Knaggs 'C w/Slight V' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.38mm

FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, modern morning star inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: TonePros tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, Kluson Revolution tuners w/

'keystone' buttons – all nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan

Custom Shop 'Candy' covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup

selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone control

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.05/8.91

OPTIONS: The US base price is \$7,000, but check with Peach Guitars on the actual price you'd pay and to discuss any options, all of which are listed on the Knaggs website

RANGE OPTIONS: The Knaggs Kenai, on which the Eric Steckel is based, starts at \$5,425. The more Junior/Special-style Kenai-J starts at \$3,650; a single P-90 model currently retails for £2,799 at Peach Guitars

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Aged Scotch/Onyx (as reviewed), large range of opaque and trans colours – all gloss nitrocellulose



PROS Faultless build that really nails its inspiration's recipe; a 'chunk monster' with a clear voice and huge depth of sound; plenty of options

CONS Even at base price, this is serious money; the Knaggs aesthetic won't fit everyone



The Man Behind The Signature

We catch up with Eric Steckel while he's hunkered down in LA and waiting to get back on the road

Words Dave Burrluck

Joe Knaggs' business partner, Peter Wolf, has been around guitars and guitar players all his life. "You gotta hear this guy," he exclaimed to this writer a few years back when a mutual friend had sent him a video of Eric in action, playing a Knaggs Severn X. Indeed, Eric has quite a backstory, playing with John Mayall when he was 12 and touring with him the following year, as well as contributing to Mayall's 2005 *Road Dogs* album. But the old Strat and Fender Super Reverb of his teens gave way to more modern tastes and, as he recounts today, he had been a Tom Anderson player since his *Feels Like Home* album, released in 2008. By 2015, Knaggs had started to register on Eric's radar.

"I'd been seeing quite a lot of chatter about Knaggs on online forums," he says, "and it seemed to me like the people with the best tone and taste were playing them. At this point, I didn't know either Joe Knaggs or Peter Wolf. Anyway, one afternoon I was searching on Reverb

"I was going to order a regular guitar, but [Knaggs said] it didn't make sense to play a guitar with someone else's name on it"

and I found a really cool-looking Knaggs Severn X. I just bought the guitar and paid the asking price. When I got the guitar it was like, 'Wow, this is a cut above,' and it became my number one guitar instantly. I used it for all my tour dates in the USA, Europe, Australia, wherever."

As videos of Eric's performances with his Knaggs began to circulate, one found its way to Peter Wolf who had neither heard of Eric nor had any idea he played a Knaggs.

"He can really play and is one the few players I can stand listening to for more than three minutes when they are playing alone. 30 years old and he has been touring since he was 11," said Peter at the time. Soon after, Eric received an email from Peter saying, "Let's talk!"

"My first Knaggs, I just bought online," Eric confirms. "Funnily enough, that same year a friend of mine stopped by and he had a standard Kenai in a Faded Blue and we were just jamming at my old house. I played his guitar and I remember thinking the feel of the neck and the guitar were unbelievable. I thought, 'I need to get one of these, too!'"

A little while later, Eric had called up the company to discuss a Kenai build, only to find Peter had other plans...



Eric cut his first record aged 11, shared the stage with John Mayall at 12, and has since toured his blend of blues-metal worldwide

PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIC STECKEL

"I said I wanted to order a Kenai or a Steve Stevens SSC, a single-cut," Eric tells us. "Peter said, 'Before you put in an order, let me speak with Joe.' I think the wheels were already turning in his head. See, I was just going to order a regular guitar, but Peter called back and both he and Joe had agreed that it didn't make sense for me to play a guitar with someone else's name on it: 'You should have your own model.'"

"I was honoured and very flattered to be offered the chance to collaborate on a signature guitar. Over the next hour we discussed the idea and Peter asked me what I wanted to change or add to the Kenai. The first thing was that I wanted a thicker body; the Kenai was just too thin for my taste – not in sound, just in size. Also the neck was a little too fat for me. I also decided to go with the separate TonePros [bridge/tailpiece] setup because it has a bit more of that low-end thing with a little less sizzle on top."

Aside from his Knaggs signature guitar, Eric now has his own signature pickup set from the Seymour Duncan Custom Shop. How did that happen?

"Well, we started with Bare Knuckle Mules – a good baseline PAF-alike, if you like. Then a friend at Seymour Duncan

suggested the Saturday Night Special set. I guess this was 2018. I put them in and thought, 'Wow, a little more low mids, a little hotter.' So for the next two years that's what we put in my model."

Later on, Eric had the chance to play a 1960 'Burst named Candy with its Australian owner. "I fell in love," says Eric. This not only led to a Knaggs version in a limited-run of 11 relic'd CherryBurst guitars, but Seymour Duncan reverse-engineered the pickups from pictures, specs and measurements of Candy.

"With their extensive knowledge of old PAFs they said, 'We know exactly what we're looking at here: Alnico III, 7.5k at neck, 7.68k for bridge, this type of wire, blah blah blah!' They nailed it. We put those pickups in the limited run, but people were saying these pickups need to be sold 'cos they wanted to put them in their guitars. So in early 2020 we started that project with Seymour Duncan and through the early part of the pandemic they were sending me stuff. I was listening and testing, and in October we finally released them [via the Custom Shop]. It's been great – a very cool, organic process that Knaggs were heavily involved in." 🎸

<https://ericsteckel.com>



Singled Out

There are plenty of tasty versions of Gibson's benchmark design, including from Gibson itself, of course. Here are six showstoppers



GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD **'50S APPROX. £2,199**

Many of us want the *right* name on the headstock, and in recent years Gibson's revitalised management has upped the ante on its USA production models. Available in '60s or '50s versions, it's hard to argue with the proposition. Weights on the non-weight-relieved bodies vary, but the Alnico II loaded Burstbuckers (1 and 2), vintage wiring, not to mention the chubby neck profile, all add up to a lot of single-cut guitar, which comes in a trio of nitro gloss colours – Gold Top, Heritage Cherry Sunburst and Tobacco Burst.

www.gibson.com

PRS MCCARTY SINGLECUT 594 **FROM £3,849**

The result of over two decades of forensic research, PRS's Singlecut remains hugely popular with artists, not least Robben Ford. As its name implies, the 594 (after the scale length of 24.594 inches as used originally by Gibson) lays the ground for this vintage-inspired but still very PRS-like take on the single-cut style. Every detail is tweaked, from the unique two-piece bridge and vintage-style tuners to the 58/15 LT+ humbuckers. Limited options (only 10-top grade maple top with hybrid hardware), but wide colour choice.

www.prguitars.com

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE **MACON SINGLE CUT** **FROM £4,200**

This recent review model completely floored the *Guitarist* team with exceptional experience-based craft and a delicious old-school voice from its Cream T Whiskerbuckers. Considerable custom choice means you can tailor the build to exactly your needs, be that muted, classic satin style or bling-tastic gloss and sheen. We concluded: "Patrick has taken the inspiration and made it very much his own with an altered appearance but a sound and feel that many of us can only dream of."

www.eggle.co.uk



SETH BACCUS NAUTILUS
CLASSIC **FROM £4,899**

A more stylised take on the classic recipe, Seth's Nautilus was actually inspired by a guitar made by his stepdad, the legendary luthier Andy Manson. The various models typically use a longer 648mm (25.5-inch) 'Fender' scale length. That said, the Nautilus Junior (from £2,899) does use a shorter 626mm (24.65-inch) scale, but options are "no problem". Bare Knuckle founder, Tim Mills, doesn't mince his words: "The definitive P-90 loaded Junior – beautifully simple in its execution and brutally destructive in its range of tones."

www.sethbaccus.com

GIBSON CUSTOM SHOP 1959
LES PAUL STANDARD REISSUE
APPROX. £5,699

There's a very wide choice of reissue, artist and special-run models in the Custom line-up, and with the new Murphy Lab in place, the aged models look more authentic than ever. The 1959 Les Paul Standard Reissue starts around £5,699 in a standard VOS finish, while the lightly aged Murphy Lab version is £6,099 – the heavier the ageing, the higher the price. Unpotted Custombucker Alnico III pickups are standard, with paper-in-oil tone caps and vintage detail, including a long-tenon neck joint.

www.gibson.com

NIK HUBER ORCA '59
FROM £5,995

A true old-meets-new version of the recipe, Nik Huber wears his heart on his sleeve with the Orca '59, saying "its magic and authenticity unfold from day one". Featuring wood from Nik's extensive and ever-growing stock, including a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard option (from €6,995), the guitar features German craft for the tuners (Schaller), bridge and tailpiece (ABM), and pickups (Häussel). On a tighter budget is the Krautster II (from €3,195); the slab-body LP Special vibe has been highly influential on boutique makers worldwide. <https://nikhuber-guitars.com>



The Third Dimension

We've had Telecaster and Stratocaster versions, now comes the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster. The best Acoustasonic yet or just a "rowdy cousin"? We find out...

Words Dave Burriluck Photography Olly Curtis



FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER £1,879

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

What You Need To Know

1 We didn't see this one coming...

Nor us! Fender distributed samples to the world's media a couple of weeks before its launch, and when the embargo was lifted on the news first-look videos and the like were everywhere. The internet nearly broke. Fender should be used to opinion, though: when the brand launched its American Acoustasonic series with the Telecaster back in 2019, the model received a lot of negative response but went on to sell plenty well enough for Fender to launch the Stratocaster version the following year.

2 Is it just a digital modelling guitar?

No. It's an acoustic platform first, on which the Fishman-designed 'sound engine' creates some realistic acoustic voices and electric ones, too. The technology, based on Fishman's Aura concept, remains totally unique – the result of a huge amount of R&D.

3 And is this new offset version just a different shape?

That's the primary difference, but along with a new Tim Shaw-designed humbucker there are some changes to the acoustic voices, too, which are informed by the larger body size.

If you've missed our coverage so far of the American Acoustasonic Tele and Strat, we'll recap here as this new Jazzmaster version is very much a sibling. The Acoustasonic might use the shape of those classic solidbodies, but it is an acoustic guitar first and foremost. It's also a Fender, so all three guitars are bolt-ons and have the Micro-Tilt adjustment (albeit it with four screws to secure the neck, rather than the two-screws-plus-bolt of the original 70s design), which is essential for setup when you have a non-adjustable acoustic-style pin bridge.

Although the guitars still employ the standard Fender scale length, the necks themselves break with tradition: mahogany, quarter-sawn for maximum stiffness, with a 22-fret ebony 'board and a flatter 305mm (12-inch) Gibson-like radius. The mainstream neck shape is the same across all three, a modern deep C like Fender's American Professional II.

The body shells are again mahogany. Our Jazzmaster's is two-piece, finely centre-joined, with the grain of the two pieces diagonally matched. The thin (approximately 3mm) inset spruce top here is hidden under the deep grey Tungsten finish, one of five offered, which is edged with what looks like black/white/black purfling. However, this entire top finish is a printed paint process including those stripes, which are not inlaid; it's the same with the rings around the small soundhole.

Despite the mainly hollow build, we still have a forearm and ribcage contour, although both are less extreme than you'd

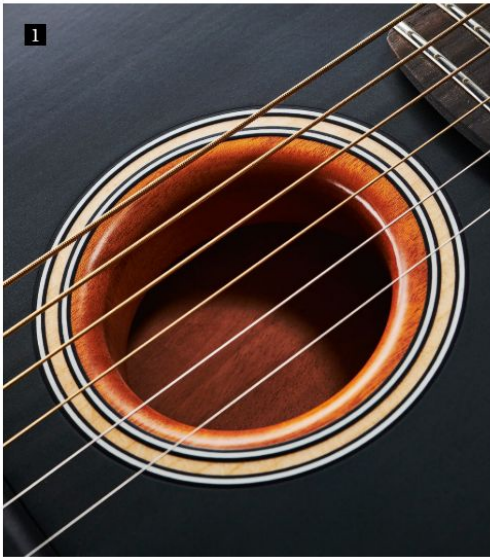
see on a 50s solidbody. Colour of the top aside, the guitar is natural finished – it feels almost *unfinished* like an oil process, and if anything the neck back, not to mention that forearm contour, feels more burnished than the two previous models we've played. Like any light satin finish, you can expect it to gloss up the more you play it.

That small sound hole – or, more accurately, sound port aka 'doughnut' – not only gives the Acoustasonic a very different appearance to any other mainstream electro-acoustic guitar we're aware of but actually tunes the acoustic response of the guitar: the start point of the design.

This creative all-in-one musical tool completely blurs the lines between acoustic and electric

It means that, despite its solidbody size and depth (45mm), there's surprising volume unplugged, although the low-end is obviously a lot trimmer than even quite a small-bodied, thin-depth conventional acoustic. So, while the Acoustasonic is a rather good 'quiet' acoustic for home use, that's just scratching the surface of what's on offer here.

Is this Jazzmaster version the same as we've heard before, then? Yes and no. To backtrack, the guitars use a trio of pickups: an under-saddle transducer, a top sensor



and a magnetic pickup. These three pickups are voiced in a stupidly simple manner via a five-way lever switch renamed for this platform as the Voice Selector. In each of its five positions two sounds can be accessed at the extremes of the lower rotary control – originally called the Mod knob and now also known as the Blend. So, fully anti-clockwise we have sound A, fully clockwise we have sound B, and as you move between those points the two sounds are morphed together in a totally unique fashion.

Position 5 – what us Strat players think of as the neck pickup position – is where we start with the acoustic sounds, and it all becomes more electric as we move to position 1, which voices the magnetic electric sounds with a little bit of crunch. Here, for the first time, we have a full-size humbucker as opposed to the single-coiled Noiseless humbuckers of the Tele and Strat versions.

The onboard electronics to make all of this possible do need powering, but that's done very discreetly via a USB charge lead that plugs into the output jack plate. There's a small LED charge indicator that lights when you plug in; green, you're fully charged; blinking red you have about an hour's play time left.

Feel & Sounds

While it's the position 2 and 1 sounds that are new here (see the Onboard Sounds chart over the page), as Tim Shaw explains the other sounds that do feature on the Tele and Strat are enhanced by the bigger top area and body, which we're told "sends

THE RIVALS

The unique nature of the Acoustasonic means the Jazzmaster's closest rivals are the others in the series, the original Telecaster and the Stratocaster. It's also worth noting that the Telecaster is available left-handed and there's an exotic version of the Stratocaster (£2,999).

Taylor's solidbody-size T5z Classic (approx. £2,200) is based on the larger T5 and starts at a similar point with its braced top and trio of pickups: a visible magnetic humbucker at the bridge, a body sensor and a hidden neck humbucker. A five-way switch controls the sounds, too. Preamp aside, there are no tricky electronics involved.

Taking the more usual 'electric guitar with added piezo bridge pickup' style route, PRS's SE Hollowbody II Piezo (£1,349) is a fine slice of classic-semi style with a very good PRS/LR Baggs acoustic voice. Dual outputs mean you can voice both simultaneously through the same, or different, amps.

1. The key to getting the small-bodied acoustic guitar to work is this sound port, aka the 'doughnut', part of the patented Stringed Instrument Resonance System (SIRS), which is the start-point of the Acoustasonic design
2. The pin bridge here features a saddle that's compensated for the acoustic strings. It ships with Fender Dura-Tone coated phosphor bronze 0.011 to 0.052

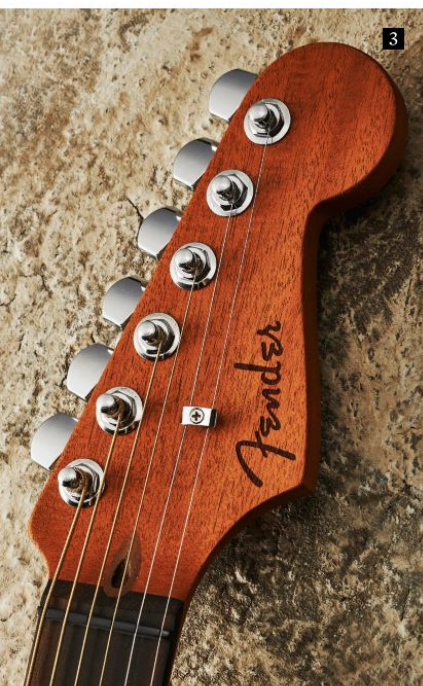


more acoustic information to the processor to create the warmest and most natural tone Fender have ever offered".

Now, unlike some 'hybrid' guitars (PRS's Hollowbody Piezo, for example), we only have a single mono output, which means you can't voice 'acoustic' and 'electric' sounds simultaneously. And, as Fender demonstrates, positions 3 to 5 ideally need to be treated as you would your Martin or Taylor electro-acoustic through an acoustic amp or PA. Position 1 should go into your electric amp, and Position 2, the Lo-Fi piezo sound, probably should be voiced into that electro-acoustic setting, but the same sound

with some crunch could be either. The beauty of the design, though, is that you can do what you want – and Fender encourages you to do just that.

Before we start breaking the rules, however, we listen to the sounds via the above destinations. And then get completely lost. If there's a slightly plinky response from the acoustic voice it disappears coming out of our AER. Frankly, this writer would be happy with anything from positions 5 to 3. We're drawn to position 3 with a little of the body sensor 'tap' pickup brought in – it certainly suggests you're playing a bigger-sounding instrument than you are.



In use, things are so intuitive here that we're thinking less about the described style of the sound than the sound itself, certainly when we're recording. You might start on sound A on the Mod/Blend knob then slowly move across the range of the pot, which, on Position 5 for example, cleans up the bass end a little. In position 4, doing the same brings a little punch to the quite wide-sounding jumbo. As we've said, the quality of the sounds is very good. Would you get a better sound from mic'ing a similarly priced acoustic? In theory, yes, but that assumes you're set up to do that and have a quiet environment, good microphones and know how to use them.

The Acoustasonic is totally plug-in-and-go. The different voicings, while hardly chalk a cheese, are certainly distinct enough from each other; they sound like different guitars at just the flick of a switch. It's very quick to track them while recording, too – just switch position and maybe change your chord inversion and after a couple of passes you have a huge-sounding acoustic bed.

Moving to position 2 is where things begin to get a little different. The Lo-Fi piezo setting is the sort of electro-acoustic sound we've heard for years at gigs and on plenty of live recordings. It's more electric, less detailed and a little strident, but not

UNDER THE HOOD

The scale of innovation here is clearly evident when you remove the backplate

Once again peering into the rear control cavity we're met with that large PCB loaded with trillions (well, over 380 components) of surface-mount components and that has little in common with the simple radio technology of the solidbody versions. Interestingly, this 'board is clearly marked 'Fishman Acoustasonic Offset'.

If that isn't alien enough, removing the rear 'spring' cavity cover, to which the rechargeable Fishman battery pack is attached, allows you to peer into the inside. The new humbucker has a standard Fender baseplate, but, as with the stacked humbuckers of the Acoustasonic Tele and Strat, there's no polepiece for the B string to maintain string-to-string balance. The slot-head polepieces are installed from the rear, so they can be adjusted for the best response. As with the other Acoustasonics, the Fishman body sensor sits adjacent to the humbucker.

You can also clearly see the two quite small section longitudinal braces that run either side of that circular sound port, which connects to the thin spruce top but not the back of the guitar. While the top is barely 3mm in thickness, the back is closer to 11mm.



1. The Jazzmaster's full circuit board

2. With the 'spring' cavity cover removed, you can see the humbucker and the Fishman body sensor

3. The baseplate of the humbucker shows the reverse-mounted polepieces

4. This detail of the neck pocket confirms that the purfling isn't an inlay

ONBOARD SOUNDS

The three Acoustasonic guitars also have three different sound arsenals

SWITCH & MOD KNOB POSITIONS

	TELECASTER	STRATOCASTER	JAZZMASTER
5 A	Sitka spruce/rosewood dreadnought	Sitka spruce/mahogany dreadnought	Rosewood dreadnought
5 B	Alpine spruce/rosewood auditorium	Sitka spruce/rosewood concert (slot-head)	Mahogany slope-shoulder
4 A	Engelmann spruce/maple small body	Sitka spruce/walnut back and sides (short-scale)	Mahogany jumbo
4 B	Sitka spruce/mahogany dreadnought	Sitka spruce/mahogany 'Americana' dreadnought	All-mahogany small body
3 A	Sitka spruce/Brazilian rosewood dreadnought	Sitka spruce/rosewood auditorium	Rosewood auditorium
3 B	Body sensor pickup	Body sensor pickup	Body sensor pickup
2 A	Sitka spruce/mahogany dreadnought	Engelmann spruce/rosewood dreadnought	Lo-Fi piezo
2 B	Fender electric semi-clean (magnetic pup)	Fender electric clean (magnetic pup)	Lo-Fi piezo crunch
1 A	Fender electric clean (magnetic pup)	Fender electric fat/semi-clean (magnetic pup)	Fender electric fat/semi-clean (magnetic pup)
1 B	Fender electric fat/semi-clean (magnetic pup)	Fender electric dirty (magnetic pup)	Fender electric overdriven (magnetic pup)



only is it familiar, it's very useful from a recording perspective, especially when you need to add a little sheen, with less body than the more accurate acoustic voices. The crunch is relatively subtle and actually reminds this writer of an old piezo with a slightly flat battery; it adds a little texture. Both these sounds really work with your pedalboard, too.

Finally, position 1 is the new humbucker, but it's worth remembering that it's a humbucker on an *acoustic* guitar, so running it through our AER, for example, or direct into our DAW, it's quite steel guitar-like but still with a little acoustic-like texture and string noise if you're not careful. Again, moving from voice A to B simply increases the crunch, so you just tailor that to the part you're playing – pull it back to clean up and vice versa. We have no idea if it was part of the design, but it's a superb slide guitar sound, too: rooty and biting with seemingly a little compression.

Now, run this guitar through an electric amp and the fun *really* starts. Having gigged the Acoustasonic Telecaster in this mode, we'd suggest that things can get a little lively here. It's still a pretty resonant platform, but when it's used as a recording tool via our Line 6 Helix you can heap on gain, fuzz or both for your alt-rock or frankly fairly metal leanings.

3. While the bolt-on neck is very similar to the Fender American Pro II, for example, it's mahogany not maple here and the fingerboard is ebony

4. Tim Shaw describes this as a "medium-high output, Alnico II-driven, side-by-side humbucker", which is designed specifically for this Jazzmaster. It goes to 11

5. Like your phone, you need to charge the battery here, but it's really simple via this neat Fishman-designed output jack with USB mini-plug and LED status indicator

WHICH ONE TO BUY?

Fender's Tim Shaw considers the models' sizes, sounds and versatility

You might just prefer one shape to another, but while these models share the same DNA, each very much has its own character. Fender's Tim Shaw gives us some pointers...

"First off, there's the ergonomic factor and that can't be overstated," says Tim. "Certain guitars just feel better to different people's bodies. I'm actually a little small for a Jazzmaster. I love what it does, but when it's on my lap it's a little bit big for me. So you need to bear that in mind."

"The sounds – even the rosewood dreadnought voice, which all three of them share – have a different voice on all three guitars because, as we've discussed, the body does make a huge difference to the sonic modelling. So, of the three, the Strat's voices are the brightest and tightest, and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense, more focused, but it's the brightest and most forward. The Tele falls in the middle, and if I'm honest I'm far more familiar with that because I have one right here and have had longer to live with it. I've got to the point with that, and I have one of the new Fender acoustic amps, I'm going almost instinctively to a sound I want to hear. It's very versatile, too. Because the Jazzmaster has the biggest voice, I think it means that the voice 3 rosewood dreadnought sound has more bloom through the system."

"As for the electric sounds, well, the Tele and the Strat are pretty much in their respective pockets whereas the Jazzmaster, particularly with the position 2 settings we've discussed, takes you off on a whole different little journey. I think the Jazzmaster, as a tool, will push people to do stuff that they might not have tried on the first two, so it's actually probably the most versatile of the three. But then we've had the other two previously and all the experience of voicing them. That doesn't mean, however, the Tele and Strat are dead and static and we'll never change them."

"One thing I was thinking about as we were comparing and contrasting the three models is that the Tele does invite a more country/blues approach while the Strat leans a bit more to pop. The Jazzmaster speaks to a much broader and more 'alt' group of players, particularly in positions 1 and 2. It's my favourite of the three overall."

Things are so intuitive that we're thinking less about the described style than the sound itself

Verdict

You can watch all the YouTube demos in the world, but actually getting one of these in your hands and working with it proves – to us, at least – the immense validity of the Acoustasonic concept. Realistic acoustic sounds and credible electric voices are all easily accessed. The actual guitar? That disappeared days ago: it's completely fit-for-purpose, stable and in tune, even though we might be tempted to drop down a gauge on the string front. Played acoustically, no, it doesn't capture the depth of the real thing, but it's perfectly engaging for quiet songwriting and practice.

For us, it's about the flexibility of the sounds on offer – as simple as that – and this Jazzmaster really stretches out. It's one of the most creative all-in-one musical tools we've encountered and completely blurs the lines between acoustic and electric. **A**

Like the Acoustasonic Tele and Strat we have a bevelled edge to the heel and there's a Micro-Tilt adjuster essential for the very electric-like setup



FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER

PRICE: £1,879 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway offset-style electro-acoustic

BODY: Mahogany (hollow) with inset Sitka spruce top

NECK: Mahogany, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Fender standard cast/sealed staggered tuners

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, white dot markers, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, narrow/tall

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony w/ compensated Black Tusq saddle/54mm

ELECTRICS: 3-pickup configuration: Fishman under-saddle transducer and bridge plate body sensor Enhancer, Fender Acoustasonic Shawbucker humbucker. Master volume, Mod knob, 5-way Voice Selector lever switch. Single mono output with USB battery charge

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.93/6.45

OPTIONS: Colour only

RANGE OPTIONS: The Acoustasonic Telecaster and Stratocaster both cost £1,779; the Ltd Edition Stratocaster is the same spec but with various exotic wood combinations at £2,999

LEFT-HANDERS: Telecaster (£1,779)

FINISHES: Tungsten (as reviewed), Ocean Turquoise, Natural, Tobacco Sunburst and Arctic White – satin matt polyester to body; satin urethane to neck and headstock



PROS Expanded body size, 'bigger' voices and new humbucker might make this the best Acoustasonic yet

CONS The Jazzmaster shape might be too big for some; for many, the Acoustasonic concept is just too new!

The Rowdy Cousin

As the latest addition to the Acoustasonic family, this Jazzmaster pushed the design team in “different and interesting directions”. Fender’s Tim Shaw talks us through its creation

Words Dave Burrluck

Breaking the rules is a key part of the design of the American Acoustasonic platform. It’s a concept that really shouldn’t work, but with the release of this Jazzmaster, the third version, it clearly does. It was just as much a surprise as the original Telecaster model when it was unveiled at the NAMM Show back in January 2019.

“You kept pretty quiet about this one,” we say as we settle into our chat with Tim Shaw, although we’re surprised by his response: “Originally, we thought the Jazzmaster would come before the Strat. I forget what the reasoning was, but, obviously, we did the Strat first.”

One reason for that potential switch could well have been the larger body size of the Jazzmaster. Despite the solidbody shape, these Acoustasonics are acoustic guitars first and proving that could work was fundamental to the concept originally imagined by Brian Swedfeger, Fender’s

“I think the whole family of sounds here are more ‘high-definition’ than on the other guitars”

VP of research and design. “I had the idea three years ago and enlisted Tim Shaw and Larry Fishman to help bring it to life,” Brian told us in 2019. The key lay in the sound port – originally referred to as the ‘Stringed Instrument Resonance System’ (SIRS) – the lightly braced top and, of course, the mainly hollow body. “The design, size, location and depth [of the port] all contribute to the voicing of the instrument,” said Brian, “and give it a fuller voice on your lap. This voicing, in concert with the movement of the top, are major components of what you hear when the guitar is plugged in. What you hear from the output jack is 55 per cent from the guitar and analogue circuit, and 45 per cent shaped by the electronics.”

Back to today and Tim Shaw joins us from his Nashville base to go deeper into the new Jazzmaster concept.



Did you find that the Jazzmaster was tricky to voice in regard to its body size and resonance?

“Actually, it wasn’t all that hard. The trick is that there is a whole lot more real estate on the top because it’s larger and the Helmholtz resonance was lowered – because of the cavity size – from the start. We built up the first prototype and immediately realised it was going to have more [acoustic] volume.

“Initially, we figured out what the cavity might look like because there’s a whole lot more to route in there. If you remember, although the Strat looks bigger than a Tele it actually has *less* room inside it. This one was not acreage... but there’s certainly an allotment or two in there [laughs]. So, after we listened to the first one we modified the cavity a little bit – because there was

one resonance I wanted to get rid of – and extended the bracing on the treble side a little bit further down. But we did very little to the sound port in terms of tuning it at all. So this one was more cavity, less port!

“It ended up pushing us in different and interesting directions. I mean, I think the whole family of sounds here are more high-definition, if you want to call it that, than on the other guitars. It’s more responsive against your body, and the extra information from the top is giving us more acoustic subtlety that we didn’t get with the Strat – the smallest of the three in the way in which the top works. It was a lot of fun because it just gave us more to work with. It’s like, err, a painter having five extra colours, or having a horn section you can write for!”



Speaking of extra colours, the Lo-fi Piezo voice (2A) is just the under-saddle pickup, correct?

"I don't know if the final mix ended up with a little bit of the guitar in there, but, basically, yes: it's the under-saddle pickup, buffered, but otherwise pretty much straight out so a lot of the snazzy stuff is gone. When we first heard that sound at Fishman, it was kinda a happy accident."

It's the sound of amplified acoustics we've grown up with on live recordings or performances, anyone from The Rolling Stones in concert to Oasis.

"Absolutely! It's like the P-Bass started being used for recording because it sounded good through a five-inch car speaker, so we all grew up knowing that a P-Bass with flat-wounds was 'how an

electric bass is supposed to sound'. It kind of became embedded in our sonic DNA, if you like. When you hear that Lo-Fi piezo, and I think we're using it in a playful context, it's exactly what you've just pointed out: it's all this stuff we've heard for years. And now we can kinda tip our hats and say, 'We think this sounded cool. Check it out.'"

Is the Lo-Fi Crunch voicing (2B) using the same tone stack as the clean electric (1A and B)?

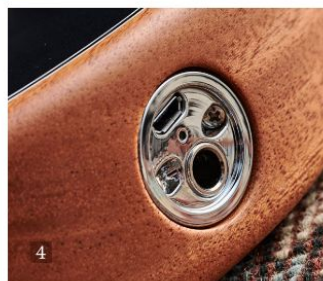
"No. I want to say it's more... for lack of a better term... AC30-ish. It's a completely different tone stack to the one we use on voice 1. It's a small valve amp, basically. I think we were sort of on a route to somewhere else when we heard that and said, 'Wait a minute, what's that?'"

1. The Telecaster was the first of the American Acoustasonic models, kicking off the series back in 2019

2. In 2020 Fender took the wraps off the Stratocaster version, which has the smallest body cavity of the now three-strong range

3. Whatever the model, the Acoustasonics all have three pickups: the only one that's visible is the magnetic humbucker, as seen here on the Strat

4. The models are loaded with electronics, powered up via Fishman's discreet USB input on the Tele-style output jack



It makes the Jazzmaster seem more 'electric' than the previous two Acoustasonic models...

"I think the acoustic sound-pairs sound really, really good: voices 3 to 5. You've got a ton of useful stuff, seriously musical, I believe. I think on voice 2 – this Lo-Fi piezo sound – because the Jazzmaster has such a reputation as an alt instrument, kind of a grunge thing, we felt we had the liberty to mess with that sound instead of going, 'Yes, we need one more acoustic then a final clean electric sound.' So we thought, 'What the hell? It's a Jazzmaster!'"

We talked about how people are playing their electric guitars in a different way today. The pandemic has amplified that.

"Yes, absolutely. That was a part of the mission statement for the [Acoustasonic]

guitar. Brian and I talked a lot about this. People don't play guitar like they did before. A lot of people are doing exactly what you're doing: running into a DAW and listening on headphones. This kind of platform suits that well. The sitting playing your acoustic on your lap with a few friends, particularly during the pandemic, went away entirely.

"I was saying in the first promo video for the Jazzmaster that different guitars make us play differently. You play different stuff on a Tele or Strat to the way you do on a Les Paul. I think you did a Longtermers piece on a guitar last year that I wasn't familiar with [the Nik Huber Piet] and you said something similar: we're different players on different things."

This Jazzmaster especially reminds us of early amp modellers, such as Line 6's POD, that revolutionised the way we could capture an amp sound. We're not saying the Acoustasonic is a revolution, but...

"If 'revolution' is too strong and 'paradigm shift' is a little too tech-y, we're still leaning towards that end of the equation with it. The platform has been out now for, well, this is the third year. Some of the studio guys initially said, 'Well, I'm just going to stick with my rack full of Martins and Gibsons and my Neumann mics, thanks very much.' But we've actually seen increasing adoption at their level: 'Man,

"There is so much interesting stuff in the middle – sounds that could not and did not occur in nature"

I can just work so fast.' And in the context of a mix where a lot of the nuance of a beautiful mic'd and recorded acoustic is going to evaporate anyway – all that high-end sweet stuff is going to disappear under the cymbals – this is just a really, really useful tool. And that, too, was part of the original design brief: precisely that."

Maybe it's our familiarity, but the Jazzmaster seems less about the accuracy of the acoustic voices – it just travels very intuitively from acoustic to electric as you move through the five-way selector switch.

"It feels more intuitive, I agree. On voice 5A, the rosewood dreadnought where it swoops over to the slope shoulder [5B], you can sort or hear where that style of guitar's compression comes in before you get to the

full sound of the second voice. You really do, sound-wise, feel like you're moving from a dreadnought to a slope shoulder."

This morphing of two voices did initially feel a little bit alien...

"Well, that's because it had never been done before. As I think we discussed, Larry Fishman didn't even think it could be done when we started. There is so much interesting stuff there in the middle – sounds that could not and did not occur in nature."

We have a new-design large humbucker here. What's under the hood?

"Basically, it's a medium-high output, Alnico II-driven, side-by-side humbucker. I think I wound six different pickups. Three were for the first sound test and we ended up going for the hottest one in that

Leo Fender couldn't have imagined the Jazzmaster in its Acoustasonic dress. We can only wonder what the next model in the series will be!



group. Then, probably in mid-summer of last year, Larry called and said, 'You know, the more we work with the electric sounds, we're not quite getting enough here. Can you make something hotter?' And I went, 'Really? Okay.' We did that and ended up with the highest-output pickup of the whole group. It could be a lot closer to the strings because it's got steel polepieces not magnets, and it just pushed us into the 'hot humbucker by the bridge' modality that the other Acoustasonic guitars simply don't do. Again, this harkens back to the kind of rowdy punk/grunge thing, everyone's modification of the Jazzmaster: the first thing anyone did was to rip out the original pickups and put humbuckers in. So the Jazzmaster, of the three Acoustasonics, is the rowdy cousin: the one who'll take the fourth shot of tequila!"

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WAY HUGE

Atreides Analog Weiriding Module

A synth-style pedal ready to give your music a sci-fi flavour

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

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

Way Huge designer George Tripps has been responsible for some cheekily named pedals in his time – this is the man behind the Swollen Pickle, the Camel Toe and the Purple Platypus, among others. Weird names perhaps, but generally applied to pedals that reside in conventional genres such as overdrive. This time, though, it's the pedal itself that's genuinely weird: the Atreides Analog Weiriding Module offers a combination of envelope filter, fuzz, phaser and sub octave.

The pedal actually takes its name from David Lynch's 1984 film adaptation of the Frank Herbert *Dune* novel where the Weiriding Module is a sonic beam weapon that translates sounds into attacks, and

Paul Atreides is the protagonist. The pedal itself is said to take inspiration from the battery-powered Electro-Harmonix Mini Synth from the 80s, which is notable for its array of sliders. Consequently, the control surface of the Atreides here consists of a set of seven sliders, all with a detente notch at their central travel position and all lighting up blue when the pedal is active. Setting up your sound requires a juxtaposition of the sliders to bring in the overall effect you require.

IN USE

We thought that getting a fix on what each slider did would be advisable before diving straight in and arranging them in nice patterns, but, to be fair, plenty of happy

accidents can result in playable sounds just by messing around with them. Of course, it's also possible to dial in an unholy row!

The first slider is purely a volume control for the output and can tailor whether the pedal gives you unity gain, a boost or a cut when kicked in, dependent on the setting of the other sliders. The central slider, Bright, is also conventional, providing a tweak to the EQ to add cut-through stridency at the top-end. The first effect to dial in is an envelope filter that's controlled by the second and third sliders, which offer filter sensitivity and filter range respectively for some synth-style quackiness. If you want to add a bit of dirt to the stew, the fifth fader brings in a gnarly fuzz. Modulation in the form of a phaser

01. BATTERY COMPARTMENT

If you don't choose to use a nine-volt adaptor, the battery is easily accessible via compartment with a hinged plastic door

02. SENS & RANGE SLIDERS

These give you control over the sensitivity and the range of the envelope filter

03. FUZZ SLIDER

Turn up the fuzz – you know you want to!

04. RATE SLIDER

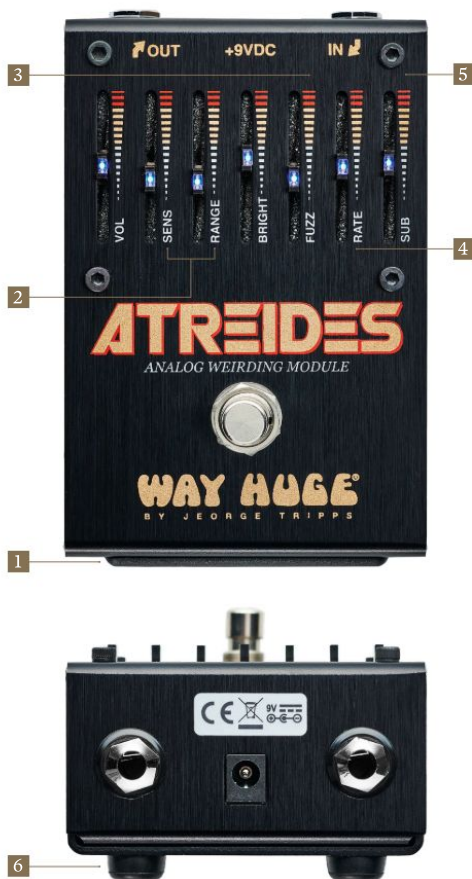
This controls the rate of the phasing, but you need to get inside the pedal with a screwdriver to turn up its feedback

05. SUB SLIDER

This fattens things up with some sub octave action – you have a choice of one or two octaves below

06. REAR COVER

You'll have to undo the four screws retaining the rubber feet to get in here and adjust the slider for selecting one or two octaves and the phaser feedback trimmer



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Analog Weirding
Module pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: 7x sliders: Vol, Sens, Range, Bright, Fuzz, Rate, Sub. Internal slide switch and trimpot, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or

9V DC adaptor 9mA

DIMENSIONS: 80 (w) x 123 (d)
x 65mm (h)

8/10

is also present with its rate controlled by the sixth slider. Should you want a more intense or maybe subdued effect, there's an internal trimmer to adjust the fader's feedback. The final slider in the array blends in a sub octave effect that can be set to be either one or two octaves down via an internal slide switch.

SOUNDS

The thing with this pedal is that there's no null position of the sliders where there's no effect – if you only have the volume slider up and switch it out of bypass, you'll still get a basic distorted sound, which you can use as a starting point to bring the other sliders in and layer things together. Pushing up the Bright slider immediately

gives you a snarky distortion that you can use for chords as well as single notes, but generally the pedal is monophonic.

Like just about every other guitar synth, you have to adjust your playing technique to get the best out of it without glitches, and maybe pay more attention to your fretboard position and pickup choice. With certain sounds, we found it behaved best with playing further up the fretboard when using the neck pickup. There's a certain dynamic response so you can dig in and 'play' the pedal, but there's also gating built in so you can roll guitar volume back for staccato notes. As for the sounds, we quite liked the tone with just the sub octave with a little of the fuzz and phaser mixed in for a fat fusion lead tone. Elsewhere,

there's some robust riffing sounds to be extracted, plus plenty of warbly, growly and spiky nastiness that's possibly anathema to classic rock and blues purists, but may be exactly what's need for off-the-wall onstage impact.

VERDICT

Is this for you? Well, ask yourself: do I want to get weird? If the answer is no, walk away now. Otherwise, this pedal could be the gateway to a whole new range of guitar tones and textures. **G**

PROS It's well weird; nice control array in a compact size; easy battery access

CONS Can need careful technique to play without glitches on some settings

DUNLOP

Cry Baby GCB65 Custom Badass

Limited-edition wah offers the best of both with Fasel and Halo inductors

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

Get cornered by a vintage wah pedal aficionado in full anorak mode and you'll be regaled with the merits of the various types of inductor found in the circuitry, most notably the Halo and Fasel types. Working in conjunction with a capacitor to move the cut-off frequency, the inductor exerts its influence on the smoothness of the pedal's sweep and the character of the filter. Consequently, you may have a different wah experience depending whether there's a Halo or a Fasel onboard your pedal. So, how about having both? This limited-edition Dunlop Cry Baby GCB65 Custom Badass puts a Halo and a red Fasel inductor into one chassis, giving you added versatility.

In use, you can quickly switch between the inductors with a kickswitch, which looks like a tiny red mushroom, on the right hand side of the pedal. Also on this side of the pedal, each inductor has a coloured LED – red for Fasel, blue for Halo – indicating that it is active. This is also mirrored on the rear of the pedal

next to the white LED, which indicates that the pedal is active, turned on with the usual footswitch under the treadle at the toe position. Each inductor circuit has its own knob to shape the sound by setting the frequency at the pedal's toe-down position. Fully clockwise basically gives you the maximum amount of treble at toe-down, so you can roll the knob back to limit the frequency range covered in the treadle's travel, taming the highs for a less aggressive or smoother sound.

The treadle action here is smooth and even, and it will sit firmly if you want to leave it 'cocked'. Both inductors offer eminently playable wah voicings. The Fasel is the more aggressive of the two with a definite stridency in the upper mids and treble, and a touch of harmonic distortion; Dunlop says this is the sound of modern Cry Babies. That being the case, the darker midrange roar of the Halo may be your go-to for the more 60s vintage tones and a smooth vocal quality in single-note leads.



VERDICT

Putting the two most popular types of inductors in one pedal is a brilliant idea, making the GCB65 Custom Badass a versatile wah pedal with instant access to two distinct flavours. **A**

PROS Smooth and solid treadle action; two distinct sounds in one pedal; adjustable frequency ranges; clear LED on/off indication

CONS Side-mounted kickswitch could compromise the positioning options on your pedalboard

ALSO TRY...



MC404 £171

Developed by Bob Bradshaw of CAE and the Cry Baby team, this variation has dual Fasel (red and yellow) inductors with two distinct voices and a built-in MXR MC401 Boost/LineDriver. Both are switched with side-mounted kickswitches.

www.customaudioelectronics.com



2Wah £169

This wah features two instantly selectable voices via a treadle heel switch: High and Low. Three different settings of each voice, representing recreations of vintage wah sounds, are available via two three-way mode switches.

www.carlmartin.com



Wahcko £274

A boutique offering from Greece, the Wahcko features a red Fasel inductor and a six-position rotary switch for different frequency sweep ranges, plus the optional extra (£24) of the seagull effect heard in Pink Floyd's *Echoes*!

www.jampedals.com



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Wah pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, switchable Fasel and Halo inductors, adjustable toe-down frequency

CONTROLS: Fasel frequency, Halo frequency, inductor selector (side-mounted kickswitch), Bypass footswitch (under treadle toe)

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor 3mA

DIMENSIONS: 110 (w) x 252 (d) x 75mm (h)



9/10

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Oceans 12

EHX builds on its previous Oceans reverb – this one goes to 12!

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

When we took a look at the Oceans 11 a few issues back, we were aware that its lack of stereo outputs could be a dealbreaker for some potential users. Now, Electro-Harmonix is back with a version that can not only run in stereo if required but actually features two simultaneous, independent stereo reverb engines, A and B, which can run in series or parallel should you wish to use both together. If you prefer to operate in mono, the spare input and output can be used as a send/return loop either pre- or post-reverb, so you can add in another pedal to alter the reverb sound.

There are, of course, 12 different reverb types to choose from here, each with two instantly accessible programme-dependent parameters as listed on the front panel. Each type also has two or three variations known as modes; the tremolo reverb, for instance, can have triangle, square or sine waves. There is also a bunch of general adjustments for each, specifically via four white knobs

that have dual functions. These cover eight parameters including pre-delay and reverb time, but there is also a Tide control for stereo image alteration and a Lo-fi control for a grainier tail texture. What's more, an accessible Tails switch determines whether the reverb effect fades out naturally or cuts out abruptly on bypass. Your created sounds can be stored in 24 presets – 12 for reverb A and 12 for reverb B – but these are limited to one for each reverb type.

The 12 single reverbs offer everything from a twangy emulation of a vintage Fender 6G15 outboard spring unit, through reverb combined with echo or modulation, to infinite shimmery ambiances – plenty to cover most needs without even getting into the intriguing combinations possible from using two together. Add in some very useful performance features – such as expression pedal capability, optional momentary footswitch action, tap tempo, plus the infinite reverbs that can be played over with a different reverb effect – and you have a very flexible pedal.



VERDICT

With two independent or combinable reverbs in a pedal that won't take up much space at all on your board, this is a potent ambience tool at a decent price. **A**

PROS Compact size; two reverb engines; eclectic range of reverb types; plenty of editable parameters

CONS Hands-on operation can be somewhat fiddly; limitations in how presets are configured

ALSO TRY...



ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Oceans 11 £119

If you don't need stereo and some of the extra features on offer with the Oceans 12 then this will give you a very similar set of reverb sounds for about two-thirds of the price.



SOURCE AUDIO

Ventris £375

This is basically a matching pair of high-powered stereo reverb pedals in a single box featuring 12 onboard reverb engines. You can run two reverbs together in parallel, cascaded or split paths.



BOSS

RV-500 £359

The flagship reverb processor from Boss features 21 reverb types and 297 onboard presets. You can run a digital delay along with every reverb patch, and run two reverb patches at once.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 24 presets, 12 reverb types (Room, Spring, Plate, Reverse, Echo, Trem, Mod, Dyna, Auto-Inf, Shimmer, Polyphonic, Resonant)

CONTROLS: Reverb Type selector, 2x parameter knobs, Fx Level/Inf Level, Predelay/Send Level, Time/Lo Fi, Tone/Tide, buttons for Exp Mode, Moment, Tails, Function, Mode and A/B Select, Reverb A footswitch, Reverb B footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L/Mono, R/Return), standard outputs (L/Mono, R/Send), EXP/FSW

POWER: Supplied 9V adaptor (not supplied) 150 mA

DIMENSIONS: 119 (w) x 97 (d) x 60mm (h)

8/10





Lo-Fi

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone lives his best lo-fi life as he shares some steps towards a perfectly imperfect tone



We're living in the golden age of audio. It's never been easier to achieve great-sounding high-quality recordings in the comfort of your own home, and many of today's guitar effects can effortlessly produce sounds far more complex and hi-fi than ever. But have things simply become too precise? Too clean? Too 'perfect'? Because more than ever, it seems like we musicians are searching for that vintage vibe. You know, that slight wobble, irregularity and warm gritty character that helps glue a track together so well.

This has only become more apparent with the volley of lo-fi pedals released in the last couple of years. Whether it be warbly vinyl emulators, fluttery tape saturators or 8-bit resampling machines, I'm all about it. I can't get enough of one-stop lo-fi solutions such as the SolidGoldFX NU-33, Meris Ottobit and Fairfield Circuitry Shallow Water. But maybe you just want to add a hint of lo-fi character once in a while, or maybe you want to go far beyond what's available now and totally design your own lo-fi flavour? So, let's dive into all the things you can do to make your tone sound perfectly imperfect.

VIBRATO

Over time, old vinyl records can bend, tapes can wear and tear, and an unserviced tape deck can cause the playback speed to fluctuate. All of these defects would cause subtle or radical pitch-bends to happen. You can use vibrato to emulate that. A super-slow and deep sine wave or triangle wave is great for emulating the subtle warps of a spinning vinyl, a sawtooth wave will create a more radical effect like a vinyl that's skipping, whereas a random wave is perfect for simulating a worn-out tape.

EQUALIZER

The consumer-level microphones and speakers of yesteryear simply weren't able to reproduce as wide a frequency response as what we have readily available today. You can use an EQ pedal to emulate that. Cut the lows and let the highs and high-mids shine through to emulate the sound of a small speaker. Cut the highs and boost the lows to add some vinyl warmth to your sound. Or cut both some highs and lows and boost the mids to simulate the narrower frequency response of some cassette tapes.

ENVELOPE FILTER

A worn-out tape or a worn-out playback head on a cassette player can create random irregularities in the reproduced frequency response. Some parts would play back as intended and others would be muffled or garbled. An envelope filter can help simulate that. Dial the resonance all the way back to remove the quaky nature of the effect and set the depth and threshold to taste. This works really well with chordal playing and drones with subtle dynamic spikes.

COMPRESSOR

The dynamic range of old phonographs and most consumer magnetic tape (that mere mortals like us used to record on) were somewhere between 40dB and 70dB, hence much lower than that of today's digital hi-fi recordings, which can go all the way up to 144dB. You can simulate this with a decent dose of compression. If you want an even more extreme result such as that of the preamp of cheap cassette decks being pushed to their limits, then max out the compression for really 'messy', gritty and pumping results.

1. Dedicated pedals, such as the Meris Ottobit, SolidGoldFX NU-33 and Fairfield Circuitry Shallow Water, are one-stop lo-fi solutions

2. Fuzz effects and drives can help simulate the 'warm' tone of vintage recordings, from subtle saturation to full-blown lo-fi sounds

3. If you're after the vibe of a worn cassette tape, an envelope filter with the resonance dialled back can create a similar effect



OVERDRIVE/FUZZ

Analogue tape recorders were also equipped with preamps, which helped impart some of that 'warm' tone that old recordings are known for through harmonic saturation. These preamps could, of course, also be pushed to the breaking point, creating a more blown-out fuzzy result. You can use subtle overdrives for a more organic saturation or fuzz pedals for a really extreme lo-fi effect. If your fuzz or overdrive has a Bias control, then you can use that to simulate lowered transistor voltage for really spitty, saggy and disintegrating lo-fi dirt tones.

BITCRUSHER

It's not just mechanical analogue gear that's known for quirky character and irregularities. Early digital technology from the 80s was also limited through lower-level bit-rate sampling, which would create digital artefacts known as aliasing. Just listen to the drum

and synth sounds from your favourite NES games and you'll know exactly what I'm talking about. Slight sample-reducing adds a unique nostalgic feel, while heavier distorted bitcrushing will add a chaotic lo-fi character to your tone.

PITCH SHIFTER

Turntables and tape decks also often have the ability to alter the speed of the playback in order to accommodate different media formats. This could, of course, also just be applied as an effect, enabling you to play the record back at half or double speed. You can simulate this with pitch shifters. Max out the mix and set the interval to -1 or -2 octaves to give your sound the illusion of it being played back twice as slow. If you have something like a DigiTech Whammy or a Red Panda Tensor, you can also use an expression pedal to glide from unison to -2 octaves, enabling you to create a faux tape-stop effect.



THE ORDER OF THE LO-FI TONE

A great pedal order trick for better emulating lo-fi sounds is to run the vibrato at the end of your chain. That way you get the feeling of instantly committing your entire sound to tape. You can also emulate the preamp of a tape recorder by running your dirt, fuzz or compressor directly before the vibrato and then run all of your wet effects into the dirt and vibrato.

HEAR IT HERE

Have fun creating your own lo-fi landscapes. To hear how to get lo-fi tape effects by running vibrato and overdrive at the end of your signal chain, check out my video on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at <http://bit.ly/472Ttlofi>



« BLUEPRINT »

TAPESTRY OF TONE

Dale Wilson is one of the most sought-after master builders in Fender's Custom Shop. We join him to hear how art and resonator history collided to inspire a unique Telecaster

Words Jamie Dickson

Fender's Custom Shop guitars are the best the Californian company makes. And yet, within the Custom Shop itself, there is also another tier beyond that: guitars made by the company's master builders, its most experienced and skilled luthiers, each of whom has their own signature style and specialisms. Dale Wilson's guitars are particularly sought after, especially the exquisitely aged Relics he produces. But, like all the master builders, Dale is a hugely versatile guitar-maker and his talents are not limited to Relics – as his contribution to a series of ornate one-off Prestige instruments demonstrates.

Dale's new Tapestry Telecaster was made in collaboration with the LA-based artist Pamelina who has worked on several high-profile guitars made in the Custom Shop. The resulting guitar is a dazzling one-off that takes its place alongside other unique pieces made by the Custom Shop's top luthiers in the 2021 Masterbuilt Prestige collection. We join Dale to hear how a vintage Dobro inspired this remarkable guitar and why he thinks the pickups he used are the best pairing you can get for a Tele.



What's the idea behind the Masterbuilt Prestige guitars?

"I guess they represent the best of what we're doing at the moment and it tends to give to the builder free access to anything and everything that Fender offers, you know? It kind of lets us run wild with whatever. We could do that with pretty much all of our NAMM Show guitars. But this is just like, 'Okay, just go all out on Prestige guitars.' It's supposed to be something that's just wild and different."

Why did you choose to work with Pamelina to produce the Tapestry Telecaster?

"Well, I love working with Pamelina and she's always really easy to work with and has a lot of great ideas. She sent me a couple of sketches of the project and I wanted to do a Telecaster. So we had that laid out and then she sent over a couple of sketches and one of them really called out to me – this tapestry Tele. I used to work for Dobro and it reminded me of one of the old Dobros that we had, which was a Model 39, I think. It was either engraved in or it might have been silkscreened, but it was a lattice type of work, you know? Anyway, I saw that and I was like, 'Oh, that's cool. It kind of has a classic vibe to me.' And so I said, 'I want to do this one.' We decided to do a flame maple backing, so it would pop, you know? So the original inspiration came from her."

What are the special considerations for building a guitar with a one-off artwork?

"For me, it's been about establishing an idea and then doing as much to support the artist as I can – and then staying out of the way. When [the painted body] comes in, we need to go over it because they're artists, they're not trying to do a finished



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“The Prestige guitars
represent the best of
what we’re doing at the
moment... It’s supposed
to be something wild
and different”
»

Dale Wilson is renowned
for his Relic Fenders, but
his repertoire is much
broader and the Prestige
instruments allow him to
show that off a little



1. The combination of a Strat-like Twisted Tele neck pickup with a Broadcaster-style OBG in the bridge is Dale's favourite

2. The body has a flamed maple cap on both top and bottom, providing a beautiful backdrop for Pamela's artwork

3. There's a very slight sunburst at the edge of the Tapestry Tele's body to tie the top in with the back

4. The neck is made of a stunningly figured piece of flamed maple and has a chunky profile



[product] – so that means finding all the things that could be a snag before topcoat, pencil lines or whatever. The artist is focused on doing the actual artwork and making it look really incredible, not the final product.

“That’s pretty much it: just supporting them as much as possible, getting them the raw materials, determining the best way to give them a canvas and then supporting them through that and staying out of the way. That means not interjecting a lot of, ‘This is what I would do...’ You have to just let them be creative because that’s their gig. I’ll establish what I want, but the more input I give that is encroaching on their creativity, the more constricted they’ll feel and you never want that. So I just try to establish the goal.

“There is a very slight sunburst on the edge of the body that was done after the art. We did a walnut [coloured] finish on the edge of the guitar and just carried that over to the top with the ‘burst, just barely. I didn’t want to cover up any of her artwork, but it needed a little tie-in. And that was also kind of on that original

Model 39, that Dobro thing I was talking about. I wanted to capture that vibe.”

The Tapestry Tele has a flamed maple cap on the front and rear of the body. Does that alter the voice of the guitar to any significant degree?

“I don’t think so. You know, it’s only about an eighth of an inch, so it’s not a whole lot. It’s just for looks. It might brighten [the sound] up a little bit, but I don’t think it’s adding that much to it. I was almost tempted to do it with a raw-wood binding on the side, too. But, again, I wanted to get a classic kind of vibe to it.

“As you know, I do a lot of Relics and even with those we’ve been doing quite a bit of figured maple. I love the way they look. I love the different things you can do with them with stain and different finish combinations to make that figure pop. Flamed maple is a little bit more challenging to work with; it needs to be sanded out correctly and it blows out a little bit easier when you’re routing, so you’ve got to be careful. But we’re careful anyway with every piece of wood.”





Why did you decide to pair the Josefin Campos-wound Broadcaster-style OBG pickup in the bridge with a Twisted Tele in the neck position?

"They're both super-punchy pickups and I think they sound wonderful together. It's one of my favourite combinations and they never disappoint. You got that really punchy, bright, great-sounding Broadcaster pickup in the bridge and the Twisted Tele is one of my favourite Telecaster pickups by far. It's the closest thing you can get to having a hot Strat pickup inside your Telecaster. It does well against any bridge pickup, actually. No matter how hot or mild the bridge might be, it gives you that great Strat pickup tone – or as close as you can get with a Tele."

The Tapestry Tele has a pretty chunky neck but wonderfully rolled-in edges to the fingerboard. What's the secret to doing that right?

"Well, I love a lot of old vintage Fender guitars, and I've looked at and studied them and many, after years of playing,

they roll over to a really comfortable feel. And that neck is a '52 'U', so it's a pretty beefy neck. I wanted it to feel a little bit like a baseball bat but super comfortable. So I pretty much roll all my 'boards to one extent or another. But I really wanted that one to be something you can wrap your hand around and feel comfortable when you're playing chords. There is quite an art to that.

"When you start rolling the 'board, the frets tend to want to protrude a little bit more. And if you take those frets down too much, you're encroaching on the precious real estate of a Strat or a

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"It's a pretty beefy neck. I wanted it to feel a little bit like a baseball bat but super comfortable"
»

Telecaster. So the trick is getting the roll right and making those frets still feel nice and soft and comfortable without taking away too much. I think Steve Vai had a little technique back in the day [to make something musical out of slipping the string off the fretboard]. But other than that, I don't see much use in having a string fall off the edge!"

The Fender Custom Shop has a few newer master builders in its ranks now, including Vincent Van Trigt, Carlos Lopez and Kyle McMillin. As a master builder of many years, how do you feel that influx has changed the atmosphere and output of the workshop?

"It's always great to have new builders in the house, and it tends to reignite ideas and direction, and lights a fire under our butts to think outside the box and try to come up with new ideas. It livens up the Custom Shop a little bit – I think it's great. I'm really happy about the people that have been chosen. I think they're doing a really good job." 🎸

www.fendercustomshop.com



STEVE CRADOCK

The Ocean Colour Scene man reflects on the mystique of flat-wound strings and recounts a lucky strike with some JCM800s



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

"The first guitar I bought was from a catalogue. It was a Kay bass guitar and it didn't have a name on it, and I remember I paid 65 quid for it. I believe it had copper strings on it for some reason, which I don't think I've ever seen before. I used to sweat while I was learning and I'd end up with blue and gold fingers. I think it got sat on and the neck snapped. After that I got a Rickenbacker 4001 – that was a huge jump up. My dad bought me that. I must have proved to him that I meant the music thing. But unfortunately I got rid of that as well!"

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"It was an Alvarez jazz guitar and I bought it because it had a set of flat-wounds on it, which I hadn't used before, so I just thought it would be good to buy that guitar. It's different to the normal things that I play, like the Gibsons or Fenders, but it just had this beautiful dead tone. Even though I did take a few jazz guitar lessons after that, it wasn't the reason I bought it. It was just lying around and I played it. It was my first intro to flat-wound strings and I thought the tone was incredible."

"There was a lot of heavy rock in Birmingham [in the 90s] and the JCM800s were seen as being old... I paid 30 quid each!"

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying gear?

"It would have been my Marshall JCM800 100-watt heads around 1994. I think I paid 30 quid each for them! It could have been a 'Birmingham thing' where people were going for the nu-metal amps at the time. There was a lot of heavy rock in Birmingham and the JCM800s were seen as being old and obsolete, but they weren't old enough to be vintage, like 60s amps. It was around the time that Marshall's 900 series came out and so that could have been why they were so cheap. So I picked up about four or five of them that I ended up using through the early part of Ocean Colour Scene. I've still got them, and I've got all the 4x12s as well, and back in the day I got them all covered in purple. They're still in really good nick."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse that you've had after buying gear?

"I had one of those headless Steinberger basses where the tuning things were on the bridge and it was disgraceful. I think I had it for hours, not days. I think that was the worst purchase I've ever done. It looked shit and I didn't



STEVE'S GO-TO RIG

"I've got two Blackstar combos that have got Peter Blake artwork put on them. Then I go into my effects 'board, which is quite old-school. I've got quite a lot of Boss gear: a delay that I use for reverse delay, two distortions, an RE-20 delay, and also the Boss [RT-20] Leslie[-style] double pedal. Then I use either my Gibson 335 or my Les Paul, and I've got a Gibson ES-195, an orange one, that I've been using recently. So I would use one of those three guitars."

like anything about it; I don't even know why it came home with me. It was one of those strange moments."

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

"No, I've only sold a couple over the years – that's a bit of a boring answer. I sold a Gibson J-200 acoustic and I sold one of my Les Pauls. But I don't regret it because I've got all of my original 335s and Les Pauls. I don't hoard gear. I think I've got around 25 guitars in my studio and 10 of those would be used if I went out on the road. I know people who have got many more guitars than that, but I'm quite frugal with it."

What's your best guitar buying tip?

"I don't know. I mean, when I used to go to guitar shops in the late 70s and 80s it just used to be full of 'greebos' playing heavy rock music. So it wasn't a thing that I used to love doing, if I'm honest with you. I'll tell you where I had my best guitar shopping experience and that would be in America. They've got all the original stuff going on. But my advice would be just to keep it quiet and cool. Be understated and nice, and hopefully you'll get a good deal."

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

"It would have been in Dublin and there was a beautiful harp in a guitar shop window. It kinda had me mesmerised for a good few minutes. I think it was an old secondhand one – beautiful wood, beautifully made."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather have a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a really good amp?

"That's almost an impossible question... [But] a good guitar, definitely, if it was in the studio because you could use an app that goes straight into a DAW and also you can go straight into a desk with a 12-string Rickenbacker like Roger McGuinn used to. Just a bit of compression, a bit of the preamp on the desk, and you're away."

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

"I'd have to say humbuckers because I would always want to use either my Les Pauls or my Gibson 335s. But that, again, is almost an impossible question to answer because on certain tracks you need to use a Fender Jazzmaster or whatever."

What's your favourite guitar shop?

"Back in the day it would have been Musical Exchanges in Birmingham, but I don't know what happened to them. I've lived in Devon for the past 12 years and so it would be Mansons in Exeter as I get my stuff serviced there. But I don't really go and hang out in music shops, if I'm honest. I'm too old for that sorta shit." **[DM]**



Steve Cradock's reworking of his 2011 album, *Peace City West*, is available now via Kundalini Records www.stevecradock.com

Steve's discography features time with Ocean Colour Scene, Paul Weller and The Specials, along with his solo work, and yet he's never succumbed to the guitar GAS of some of his peers



Steve's Blackstar combos that bear the artwork of Peter Blake

ACOUSTIC GUITAR TONEWOOD

David Dyke of Luthiers Supplies in East Sussex explains more about the most common types of acoustic guitar tonewood

“Wood, like a lot of woodworkers, does not like to be hurried or stressed,” David tells us from his base at Luthiers Supplies. “Going abruptly from green to dry in a kiln can distort or even collapse the cell structure, in which case vital elasticity and strength will be compromised. To quote Irving Sloane: ‘A guitar put together under stress will come apart under stress.’ If the wood was stressed, unstable and forced into place, the guitar will likely fall apart.

“Not all wood deserves to be called tonewood. A spruce soundboard should sound lively when tapped and whisper a little of its potential when you slide

it between your fingers. The wood should be from trees that are straight and cylindrical, have even growth rings and were felled when sap isn’t rising. It should be broken down into smaller pieces before it can discolour, and split into wedges before being sawn parallel to the line of cleaving – quarter-sawn, in other words. It’s then sawn into bookmatched pairs and ideally dried slowly. If the soundboard is strong, resonant and elastic, it can work effectively as an air pump to amplify energy and impart the harmonic range delivered by the vibrating strings.” [RB]

David Dyke would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Melvyn Hiscock



PHOTO BY LEWIS FLOWER

David Dyke of Luthier Supplies works with woods for high-quality stringed instruments and furniture

Disclaimer: “The following contains a lot of generalisations and wood seldom conforms, rather it confounds the luthier who has to juggle many variables. Nevertheless, out of this, magic can be born.” – David Dyke

1 SPRUCE

“These woods, if properly worked, perform the amazing balancing act of vibrating freely while maintaining the huge tension the strings introduce. The toughest is Sitka spruce – it’s great for steel-strings and it responds well to those harder styles of playing, but it’s not so good with nylon-strings. Western red cedar needs less energy input, so is good for both nylon- and steel-strings. It ranges from pale to dark brown and splits beautifully from the log to produce perfect long-grain soundboards. The downside is that, although it responds well at first, it doesn’t mature over time as spruce does.

“Engelmann spruce is much whiter and less dense, and unless perfectly quarter-sawn can feel weak. European spruce has an unbeatable track record, appearing on early violins, pianos, lutes and guitars. It’s capable of doing its job for lifetimes. Adirondack spruce and redwood also make great soundboards.”

3 ROSEWOOD

“Indian rosewood is the strong, hard extreme in the maker’s palette. Most classical guitars are Indian rosewood because it helps with projecting the energy of nylon-strings. Unlike Brazilian rosewood, which has been a CITES-listed species for many years, Indian rosewood seems to be sustainable and the industry that processes it is kept in India. When I first got into the luthiers supplies business in the 1970s, you could still buy Indian rosewood logs, but these days a lot of the processing is done in the country of origin.

“Indian rosewood means straight, uneventful-looking material. The top grade is likely to be a good colour and without any defects. It pays to pick straight-grained wood and not figured grain. Rosewood, when not straight or quarter-sawn, can have a mind of its own. We’ve seen guitar backs go from slightly convex to concave, popping struts off in the process.”

2 MAHOGANY

“A lot of tropical woods are mahogany coloured, but South American mahogany (*Swietenia Macrophylla*) is the one that works best for necks, backs and sides, and as a soundboard wood in some cases. Although its structure is different to spruce, it can work well as a top [for example, Martin 15 series, Guild M-20 and D-20, Gibson LG-0 and so on]. If rosewood is the harder wood – allowing sound to sustain and bounce around, producing more overtones – then mahogany is the more absorbent wood, promoting sweeter sounds. With steel-string guitars that need less help to sound bright, there are more options like mahogany, which is at the other end of the spectrum to rosewood in terms of hardness.

“Walnut is similar in density to mahogany, but is non-tropical and easy to work. It can produce lovely patterns and colour variations, and is a good choice for a luthier’s first guitar.”

4 MAPLE

“This includes our great maple known as sycamore. It sits nicely in between rosewood and mahogany in terms of density. When dried properly, it stays white and can then be tinted to any desirable colour. However, keeping maple white is a challenge. The trees must be winter-felled and then quickly converted before fungus stains the wood. Traditionally, planks are stood on one end with air freely circulating round them; the free water – up to 30 per cent in weight – can then drain out. Later in the year, the wood can be stacked horizontally and further dried.

“Maple sometimes turns up with a ripple or fiddleback, flame and tiger-stripe figure. Bird’s eye and quilt figuring occurs less often. All these aberrations make plain white wood pleasing to the eye. But spare a thought for the luthier planing and trying to bend wood that has a pattern of rising and falling grain – some is unbendable!”



STRAIGHT EIGHTS

Are we stuck in a rut when it comes to string gauge? Is big still best? Maybe we're missing out, reckons Dave Burluck, as he wrestles with some thinner wires

A missed call on my phone from my dentist had me quickly redialling. I didn't know dentists had reopened, but I could do with a quick check-up. "Oh, hi, Dave. Would you be able to take a look at a couple of my guitars?" I should have guessed. And, yes, before you ask, my dentist owns a PRS.

In fact, I've been having a one-sided conversation about guitars with my dentist for some years. He does the talking while the best I do – with numb, open mouth – is to gurgle a reply. He also plays bass, and a while ago I gave his 70s Fender Mustang a bit of a spit 'n' polish.

With masks on we stood on his practice doorstep as he handed me two cases. "They could both do with a clean-up and restring. The PRS SE has a dodgy coil-tap thingy and



"Once upon a time, big was best and you, the player, were deemed inferior if you used thin wires"

the Strat... well, I don't think anyone's taken a look at that since it left that factory about 10 years ago. If you could make it play like the PRS, that'd be great." Just as I turned to leave I thought I'd better check what string gauges he prefers. "Eights. Rototounds."

Like most of us I suspect, I've used nines, 10s and 11s on my electric guitars over the years, and occasionally I'll go higher on specific slide guitars, for example. I've often said I'm probably not the best person

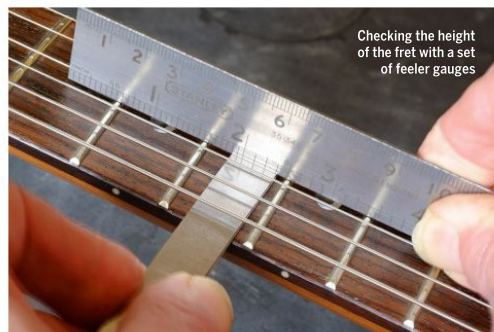
to comment on the 'feel' of certain string gauges and scale lengths, simply because we have so many instruments coming through our review pages. But my dentist, a home playing enthusiast, clearly wasn't going to be swayed by anything I had to say on the subject, so I didn't. But eights? Nope, I've never strung a guitar with eights – ever.

This particular wheel has turned in recent years. Once upon a time, big was best and you, the player, were deemed inferior if you used thin wires. Then, of course, Billy Gibbons stood up for the cause, apparently after advice from BB King, and a little research reveals plenty of huge sounds were created by pros using skinny strings. I was tempted to call Billy Gibbons for some advice, but I didn't have his number. However, Cream T's Thomas Nilsen does – he's constantly in touch with the Gibbons

camp – and he offered to see what Billy's tech, the almost-as-famous Elwood Francis, had to say about thin wire.

"He doesn't have a long specific description on tips for a setup with 0.007[s] or 0.008[s], which they use," reported Thomas, "but he said this: firstly, they use a special lube sauce for the nut. Also don't [top] wrap the strings at the stoptail as it can cause the light strings to jump off the bridge saddles. Elwood rarely adjusts the neck since the guitars are specific and made for Billy.

"The biggest and most important thing for the light strings to work," Thomas continues, "is how you play and approach the strings. [Elwood] said that you can't push the strings too hard to the fretboard. If you do, the guitar will be out of tune. And you can't press the chords like you would on

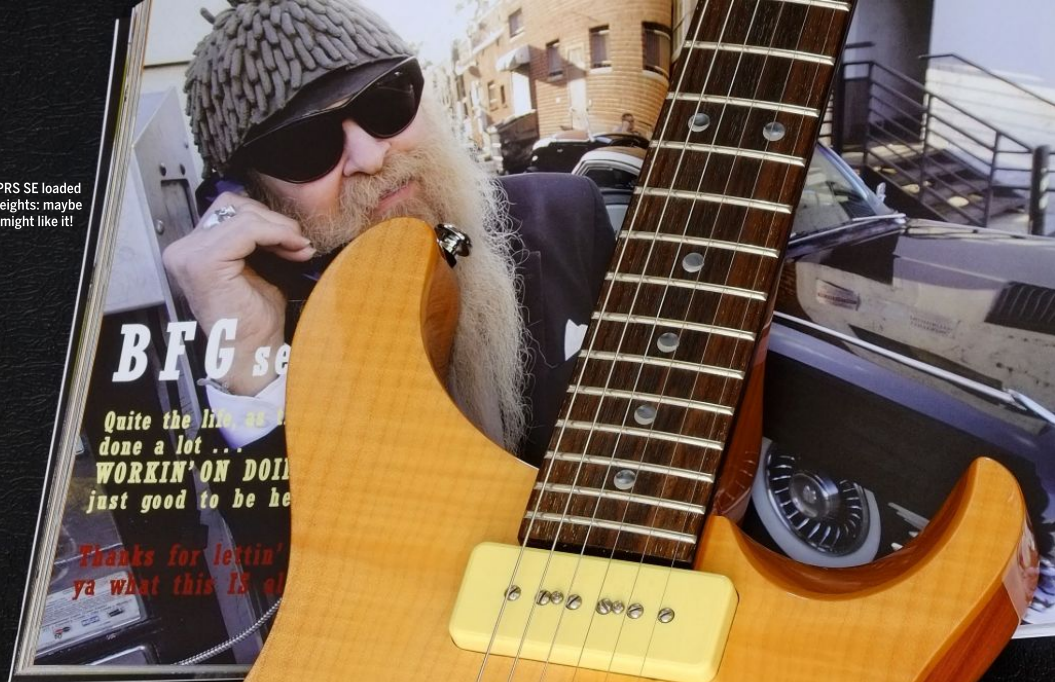


Checking the height of the fret with a set of feeler gauges



How level are your frets? Check them

Our PRS SE loaded
with eights; maybe
Billy might like it!



BFG se

Quite the life as
done a lot ...
WORKIN' ON DOIN
just good to be he

Thanks for lettin'
ya what this is ab



WHAT A RELIEF...

Neck relief is often a personal choice. But what happens when you change your strings?

We get lots of questions about neck relief – the slight forward concave bow that allows a pretty buzz-free action. Some players, not to mention makers and repairers, like more relief; others prefer to keep things virtually straight. It's easy to check. Simply capo your guitar at the 1st fret and hold down the G string (and check the high and low E strings) at the top fret. You should see a slight gap – about the thickness of the top string as a visual guide – between the top of the 8th or 9th fret and the underside of the string. Do the same with the G and low E string. Of course, you can measure the gap with a set of feeler gauges, but developing your own visual 'gauge' is your goal. To straighten the neck and reduce relief, you need to tighten the truss rod – and vice versa.

Dropping down from 10s to eights as we've done here should slightly reduce the relief in the neck. But do the more flexible eights need more or less relief? I honestly wasn't sure, and after some research and calls to trusted repairers it's a bit of a 'jury's out' situation.

"I personally think all things should stay the same," suggests Patrick Eggle, "because the physics is the same and I'm a great advocate of the school of thought that says that once the bridge is set correctly and the relief is set correctly then if you want a higher action you do it with the truss rod. With a lower action you need the neck to be straighter. But Kieran Potts, who does the setups here, would suggest very, very slightly more relief – that's certainly what he did on the guitars we made for Billy Gibbons last year. I thought they were very elastic band-y, but that was with sevens and a shorter [625.5mm] scale length than what you're working with there."

Having double-checked that the frets on my 635mm (25-inch) scale PRS SE were super level, I increased the relief slightly... and then put it back. When I measured it, as I thought, it has minimal relief: 0.127mm (0.005-inch) over the 8th fret with a string height at the 12th of 1.5mm on the high E and 1.8mm on the low E. It's a great example of how one size rarely fits all and how you actually set your relief as part of your overall setup is really quite personal.



Three nut lubes: Nut Sauce, SlipStick and, if nothing else is to hand, pencil lead

a guitar with nines or 10s. So, it's all about the gentle touch of playing, which Billy is mastering. That is the main thing. Even how you bend the strings as well; Elmore said Billy has a very special way of bending the strings without getting the guitar out of tune. So that's it. That's how it works and where the magic is to play with light strings. Hope this helps!"

Masterclass tips from the horse's mouth, then, but it's as much about what Elwood *doesn't* say. Let's backtrack a bit...

In Theory

We probably all know the basics from our own trial, error and experience. Personally, I use 10s on pretty much everything unless dictated otherwise. I like the effect the scale

length has. On a long-scale Fender, as a rule of thumb, 10s have some fight. The same set on my shorter-scale Les Paul Junior feel a little smoother, slinkier. A mid-scale PRS? Well, it should be halfway between the two, but as we have to test so many different guitars with different scales and string gauges my fingers probably aren't as sensitive to string gauge/scale differences as someone who might have played a Fender for decades then switches to a Gibson, for example. Something to bear in mind.

A heavier gauge of the same string type will exert more tension on the neck. D'Addario has an excellent string gauge chart on its site that proves this basic point. We can, in theory, expect more pull on the neck, which will encourage a forward



It's important to clean any debris from your nut grooves

(concave) bow and provide slightly more relief. The larger-diameter strings, especially the wound ones, might need the nut's string grooves widening to ensure the strings don't stick in the nut and cause tuning problems. Going up a gauge will pull the vibrato on a Strat up, increasing the tilt more – same with a PRS or any other vibrato that balances string with spring tension. Now, if we're thinking of going down in gauge, all the above is opposite.

In Practice

As well as fettling my dentist's guitars, which are already strung with eights, I thought I'd downsize on one of my own. The intriguing thing about Billy Gibbons is the constant stream of custom guitars he has made by John Bolin and others. Many of these not only use thin wires but are lightweight and chambered (including the necks, apparently). I didn't have anything quite like that to experiment on, but a PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar from the late Noughties seemed to fit. It's a very neat, simple guitar with a very light weight of 2.54kg (5.6lb).

Bear in mind, though, what Elwood had to say about pressing those strings down. A specific issue could be fret size, as in height. Getting used to a fret is crucial. Certainly with tall frets, you won't actually be pushing the string down onto the fretboard very often – if you do you'll hear it sharpen in pitch and that might throw out an otherwise in-tune guitar. The PRS's SE fretwire was slightly wider back then and a little lower than the USA models, and measuring the height on mine it's just under a millimetre (0.965mm). Light weight, relatively low frets – perfect! Mind you,



Applying some SlipStick to our PRS nut grooves

I will be dropping down two gauges and that's going to be, erm, interesting. There's only one way to find out...

The Process

You don't need us to tell you how to put a set of strings on. But working with eights everything seems a little more delicate. If you're downsizing your strings, I suggest you give the guitar a very careful inspection. Elwood has already indicated the nut, so double-check the bases of the grooves: not only rake back to the tuners at the right angle but check they are smooth and free from any debris. Also, the strings really need to be as low as possible over the 1st fret. Again, the PRS's were fine, but on my dentist's Strat the nut grooves were a little

higher than they could be and it made simple low-position chords sound slightly out. If Billy Gibbons had to get used to this new, delicate feel, so will we.

There are plenty of nut lubes out there. Big Bends' Nut Sauce comes in a handy small-tipped dispenser, or our favourite Wilkinson SlipStick can just be rubbed over the nut, pushing the lube into the slots. String trees and vibratos add to the complication, so lube all friction points. It's just like your normal routine, but somehow you just need – or I felt I needed – to pay even more attention.

It's worth paying very close attention to your frets, specifically how level they are. Our default StewMac Fret Rocker is the ideal tool for checking, and while



Check these tuner mounting nuts occasionally to make sure they're tight

“Elwood Francis says you can't push [light strings] too hard to the fretboard. If you do, the guitar will be out of tune”

both PRSes' frets were mirror-flat, the Fender's were less so. A very light fret dress and polish narrowed the gap. I also dialled in the Strat with its old strings in situ. That way, if they needed to come off or be constantly moved in and out of the nut slots, the actual new strings would simply be newer. Many techs will use two sets during a setup: the first to dial everything in then, when it's 100 per cent, a completely fresh set for the perfect job.



LIGHT WORK

Options abound in the light string gauge market

If you've never dropped below your nines and 10s, you might be surprised by the choice you have. Our Rotosound set (£5.49) is gauged at 0.008, 0.011, 0.014, 0.022, 0.030, 0.038. Like all our set suggestions here, the bottom three are wound, the tops are plain. This seems a pretty popular set gauge, with most of the main string brands – including Ernie Ball and D'Addario – offering the same.

Of course, Billy F Gibbons has his own quaintly titled Rev Willy by Dunlop sets (£6.99) at slightly different gauges: 0.008, 0.010, 0.012, 0.020, 0.030, 0.040, and he also dares to drop to 0.007, 0.009, 0.011, 0.020, 0.030, 0.038. Other artist sets we stumbled across include the Fender Yngwie Malmsteen set (£7.99) at 0.008, 0.011, 0.014, 0.022, 0.032, 0.046, while Optima's Frank Zappa set (£14.99) are 0.008, 0.010, 0.013, 0.024, 0.032, 0.046 and gold-plated.

If you're undecided you could try an 0.008.5 set. D'Addario has the 0.008.5, 0.010.5, 0.015, 0.022, 0.032, 0.039w (£5.99), while Ernie Ball's Mighty Slinky set (£7.99) is 0.008.5, 0.011, 0.015, 0.022, 0.030, 0.040 and costs £7.29.

All the above are available from Strings Direct. In our experience they've always provided fast and excellent service. www.stringsdirect.co.uk

Once they're on, you need to stretch the strings with a little more care. Don't just yank the strings away from the fingerboard: these are fine wires, especially the top E. Instead, with the guitar laid in front of you, put your right-hand thumb over the string just before the saddle. Now grip the string between your thumb and fingers on your left hand and bend, moving up and down the string until it's coming back pretty much to pitch. Tightening the buttons on the die-cast enclosed tuners can also help the feel when tuning, and before you restring just make sure that the tuners' retaining bolts are tight. All three of our guitars here had similar enclosed die-cast tuners – and the washers on all three were loose.

Double-check pickup heights, too, particularly the bass-side poles of those Strat pickups, which can 'grab' the string if they're too close. Be sure to check your intonation, too, of course.

Play Test

Three guitars in, I felt less of an 0.008 virgin. I actually began to enjoy the light touch, especially when playing with fingers and nails rather than a pick. With the relatively low fret-height on both PRS SEs, it became pretty fast to adjust to the necessary lighter left-hand finger pressure. Less so that Strat, maybe because I'm so used to hitting them hard to maximise the percussion. Simple string bends require some adjustment: you have less to push against and hitting the correct pitch (not forgetting the control you need on a slower bend) does need a bit of a rethink.

Eights are obviously a lot easier on your fingers than 10s. Like many of us, my fingers are prone to cracks during the colder months and constant hand sanitising isn't helping, not to mention the lack of long playing sessions to punters. These eights are much kinder than my usual 10s.

The lightweight, resonant SE Soapbar seems to lap up these strings. There's an almost ethereal character; it's flexible, nuanced and could certainly be enhanced by looking at the hardware, pickups and control circuit. Is it a case of matching strings to the guitar, or that a different take on string gauge can take an instrument to a different place? Try for yourself and see. **G**



That should give you something to think about till our next issue.

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

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PICKUP LINES

Radioshop Loaded Pickguards

This hassle-free upgrade from Radioshop Pickups can transform the look and sound of virtually any S-type guitar

Back in 2013, teachers Paul Best and Paul Dunn ventured into some extracurricular activities hand-building their own brand of classic Fender- and Gibson-style pickups under the name of Radioshop. Ever since then, their firm has gained a solid reputation in the guitar world, with Strat-wielding prodigy and fellow Welshman Chris Buck getting onboard as a signature model artist.

"We're about eight years in," says Paul Best, "and we've been full-time for about two-and-a-half years now. I was a Welsh teacher and the other Paul [Dunn] was a science teacher."

Their award-winning range of S-type pickups includes the golden era-style Vintage '63 and '57 Specials, Jimi-inspired The Montereys, and progressive ID:63GT

"Loaded pickguards will very much raise the game, especially when it comes to a non-USA-grade Strat"

and ID:Evolution sets, and Radioshop also offers fully loaded pickguards for Strats – a ready-made all-in-one solution that can transform the look and sound of a guitar with a minimum of fuss.

"We just wanted to make everything easier for people," says Paul. "In years gone by, I used to approach this kind of thing with trepidation. A lot of musicians just aren't comfortable with rewiring an entire guitar to the standards they require, so we're solving that problem. By the time you factor in soldering equipment, tech fees and your own time, it can work out cheaper, too."

"With our non-solderless option there are only three simple solder-joint connections to do: the jack hot and ground, and the trem claw ground (some guitars use a cavity screw instead). But we also do a solderless solution. It's a piece of cake to install and it's been really popular in



lockdown because visiting techs hasn't been as easy as it normally would be.

"It's usually a tenner on top, but we've been waiving it to try to help people stay safe. You can install a solderless pickguard in around 10 minutes. It's really simple. One of our customers recently ordered a 'plate with the aim of being able to swap from P-90s to Strat pickups on the same guitar mid-gig!

"We do 50s-style single-layer 'guards in white and black, and there's a good choice of three-layer 'guards including: Black, White, Vintage White, Mint Green, Light Mint Green, Marbled Tortoiseshell and Brown Tortoiseshell. There's also a nice Gold Anodised one, which is quite popular. Then you can match the colour scheme with different pickup covers. But we can generally get our hands on anything.

"We avoid any confusion by making sure the screw holes are all in the right place as they can vary slightly, say, between USA and Mexican spec and import/Asian spec. In terms of components, we use high-quality industry standard stuff: logarithmic CTS pots, Sprague 'orange drop' caps, CRL or Oak Grigsby switches (they're both excellent), and Switchcraft jacks.

"There are a few wiring options to choose from – in addition to the older Strat

format with no tone control on the bridge pickup. Our Tone Knob Mod 1 will allow control of both the middle and bridge pickups from the second tone pot, while Tone Knob Mod 2 provides adjustment of the neck and middle with the first tone pot while leaving the bridge with its own control [pot two]. Then there's the Blender Knob Mod, which turns the second tone pot into a blend control for either the neck or bridge pickups – leaving the first tone pot as a master tone for all three pickups. For example, if you have the neck pickup selected, you can blend in the bridge pickup for some great Tele tones.

"Quite often, people want to not only upgrade their pickups but also change the wiring and components, as well as the look of the guitar. It will very much raise the game, especially when it comes to a non-USA-grade Strat. And our loaded pickguards are a pro-level one-stop solution. I bought a guitar yesterday from Ishibashi in Japan – a Japanese-made Edwards S-type. I got it for an absolute song and I'll definitely be putting one of the Radioshop loaded pickguards on – probably the solderless solution so that I can quickly swap pickups in and out and experiment with different sounds." [RB]

www.radioshoppickups.com

"A lot of musicians
aren't comfortable with
rewiring a guitar to the
standards they require,
so we're solving that"



Soulful bluesman Chris
Buck's signature ID:
pickups are also available
on a pre-loaded 'guard



ClassicGear

This top-of-the-range signature model was at the frontline of the British Invasion

Gretsch 6122 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman

The Gretsch model 6122/Chet Atkins Country Gentleman is more often referred to simply as the 'Country Gent'. First shipped in 1957 for the 1958 model year, it followed the appearance of the 6120/Chet Atkins Hollow Body and 6121/Chet Atkins Solid Body models in Gretsch's 1955 full-colour catalogue *Guitars For Moderns*. The more budget-friendly single-pickup 6119/Chet Atkins Tennessean similarly made its advertising debut in 1958, completing this set of four classic Gretsch signature guitars.

Hailed by Gretsch as a recording sensation and TV star with "an army of enthusiastic admirers", Chet Atkins (Chester Burton Atkins, 1924-2001) was, in more ways than one, instrumental in helping the electric guitar gain mass acceptance during the post-war years. In a similar vein as his friend Les Paul (Lester William Polfuss, 1915-2009), Chet widely promoted the instrument via popular media and played a vital role in the evolution of modern guitar playing styles and recording techniques.

Both Chester and Lester's influence on the electric guitar is legendary, though these days most people are probably more aware of their signature instruments than their music. As studio engineers and tinkers, they were practically minded and full of interesting ideas when it came to guitar design, but Chet had significantly more

input into the development of the Country Gent than his earlier signature models. When he first began collaborating with Gretsch in 1954, the bulk of the design was already in place for his Hollow Body and Solid Body guitars, which borrowed heavily from Gretsch's pre-existing Streamliner and Round Up models respectively.

Thus, intent on helping create a signature guitar he could be truly proud of, Chet worked closely with Gretsch, eventually settling on several new concepts for his top-of-the-line model, including simulation/fake f-holes to reduce feedback, a wider 17-inch thinline body, a subtler "mahogany grained"

Chet Atkins was instrumental in helping the electric guitar gain mass acceptance

stain finish, trestle bracing, and Neo-Classic/half-moon 'thumbnail' inlays. Also among his requests was the inclusion of two newly developed Filter'Tron humbucking pickups – something inventor Ray Butts had been working on in conjunction with Gretsch and Chet as early as 1954.

Chet had long been dissatisfied with the sound of Gretsch's ubiquitous DeArmond Model 2000 pickup (marketed by Gretsch as the Dynasonic), which he felt was too bassy in the neck position and overly bright in the bridge position. Measuring anywhere between 7.5 and 13kohms, these powerful, punchy single coils are inherently different to the gritty sparkle of Filter'Tron humbuckers (which normally read around 4k), and the Country Gent was the first of Chet's models to be fitted with what would soon eclipse the Dynasonic as Gretsch's de facto standard pickup.

As well as being a preference of Chet's, the Country Gent was favoured by George Harrison, who owned two double-cutaway models from the early 60s. Following The Beatles' TV appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964 when a reported 73 million Americans tuned in to watch, the Country Gent instantly became an icon of rock 'n' roll and production multiplied. It was retired from the Gretsch catalogue in the early 80s when Chet allied with Gibson, taking his name and ultimately the Country Gentleman name with him. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman

1954

Chet Atkins begins collaborating with Gretsch

Autumn 1957

First batch of 50 manufactured; single-cutaway; dual Filter'Trons; 'stairstep' Grover tuners

1958

Advertised alongside 6119, 6120 & 6121 signature models

1959

Zero fret; bone nut (replaces metal nut); Gretsch-branded Bigsby

1961

Double-cutaway; standby switch; double-mute; padded back

1964

Filter'Tron (bridge) and Super'Tron II (neck); 'kidney bean' Grover tuners

1966

Dual Filter'Trons; single mute; model name on pickguard; black finish (rare)

Early 70s

Redesignated model 7670; open f-holes; adjustable bridge; no mute

Early 80s

Rebranded Southern Belle (model 7176)

Current

Players Edition G6122T; 3x Vintage Select models (G6122T-62, G6122-6212 & G6122T-59)





1957 Gretsch 6122 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman

1. SERIAL NUMBER

26431; one of 50 guitars from first batch made (running 26400 to 26449); serial number appears on the headstock nameplate

2. HEADSTOCK

Single-layer white binding; black finish; T-roof Gretsch logo; metal nameplate reads 'The Chet Atkins Country Gentleman 26431'

3. BODY

Hollowbody archtop; 17 inches wide; 2¼ inches deep; laminated maple; single-cutaway, treble bracing; four-layer (w/b/w/b) bound top and back; transparent-brown stain finish

4. PICKUPS

Two Filter'Tron humbuckers with blank covers; three-way selector switch; three-way tone preset switch; independent volume pots (lower treble bout); master volume pot (upper treble bout)

5. HARDWARE

B6 Bigsby vibrato, metal bar bridge; ebony bridge base; gold-plated Grover Imperial 'stairstep' tuners; three 'arrow-through-G' knobs; side-mounted jack socket; two thumbscrew strap buttons

6. PLASTICS

Two-layer (b/w) laminated truss-rod cover; gold pickguard with T-roof Gretsch logo; gold pickup surrounds; two black simulation f-holes veneers

7. NECK

Glued-in maple neck; circa 24½-inch scale length; single-bound 22-fret ebony fingerboard with Neo-Classic 'thumbprint' inlays; metal nut

Guitarist would like to thank
Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath
(www.vintageandrareguitars.com)



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

One of Fender's lesser-spotted models with an even lesser-spotted custom colour finish

1965 Fender VI in Burgundy Mist Metallic

The Fender VI was a favourite of 60s legends Jet Harris, Jack Bruce, John Lennon, George Harrison and Peter Green



This is a very interesting instrument. It's a beautiful piece. It was part of a really nice collection we bought of around a dozen Fender VI guitars in all sorts of custom colours. Burgundy Mist is a DuPont Lucite acrylic colour that dates back to 1959. It's not a DuPont Duco nitrocellulose colour, although the Fender guitars will have a nitrocellulose clearcoat. It's a pretty rare colour. In the 1960s, most of the electric guitar players were men, and so Burgundy Mist Metallic along with pastel shades like Shell Pink proved to be less popular. The most popular custom colours were Candy Apple Red Metallic, Olympic White and Lake Placid Blue Metallic. Fender made a lot of custom colour VIs because of that whole push in the surf era. I've seen most of them in my time: Foam Green, Sonic Blue, Natural, Black, Shoreline Gold, Firemist Gold and Inca Silver to name some. But I've never had a Fender VI in Shell Pink or Surf Green.

"Right now, we also have a '62 slab-'board Roman Red, which is cool. It's darker than Fiesta [Red] but lighter than Dakota [Red], and it has a really crazy swirly Brazilian rosewood fretboard. We had a '62 slab-'board Burgundy Mist last year with a matching headstock that was mint. This one is from '65 and has a little bit more wear, but it's honest playing wear. It has a white 'guard, as opposed to the earlier green nitrate type, and it has clay-dot fretboard markers.

"Fender made so many VI necks in advance. In fact, it's very common to find a neck that was made two years prior to the guitar being completed. I've had 1965 Fender VI guitars with necks that were made in 1963 before. I think sales weren't as

brisk as they'd hoped, and parts sat around for a while until they were used.

"Most people call it a 'bass VI', but strictly speaking its model name is simply the Fender VI [pronounced 'six']. It's a bit like when people add the word 'sea' to Foam Green, as in 'sea foam green'. I bought my first Fender VI about 30 years ago and it's still the earliest one I've ever seen. Fender introduced them in '61, but this one had a neck date of November 1960. The first VIs had the Stratocaster-style pickup with the bigger surrounds and three switches, but from early '63 they changed to the Jaguar-style pickup and added a fourth switch.

"I've seen them used in surf rock to country to jazz. They provide a pretty wide range of tonal possibilities"

I don't think they were huge sellers right out of the gate, but they hit their peak around '63 to '64 and Fender made them all the way up until the mid-70s. We have one here at Well Strung Guitars at the moment from 1974 that has a Natural [finish] ash body with block inlays. That's pretty cool because you don't often see them from that era.

"I've seen them used in all types of music from surf rock to country to jazz. I mean, they're very versatile. They provide a pretty wide range of tonal possibilities. You can get them sounding very mushy and soupy or very bright and woody. They're great because you can play them through either

a guitar amp or a bass amp, but I generally prefer them through a guitar amp as they tend to preserve the highs a little bit better. You can play them with reverb and tremolo, and they sound wonderful through a Fender amp like a Twin Reverb. There's no better example of that sound than Glen Campbell's solo in his [1968] hit *Wichita Lineman* [listen from 1:47]. It's not an intricate solo, but it is great. It perfectly encapsulates the sound of a Fender VI.

"The vibrato is kind of interesting, but I don't know if many people actually used it. The switching works in the same way as a Jaguar's Lead circuit in that you have an on/off switch for each pickup along with a tone switch, plus master volume and master tone knobs. Fender VIs can sound nice and focused and percussive, and they can really add support to a bassline or guitar line. John Entwistle made the thing sound like a regular guitar by playing it up in the higher registers. They have a 30-inch scale and are usually tuned in standard tuning but an octave lower than a regular six-string guitar. The interesting thing about these instruments is that, unlike other basses, you can easily play chords as well as single-note lines. You might not necessarily want to strum the chords as it might get a little muddy, but arpeggios and fingerstyle playing often sounds really good. A lot of well-known musicians used a 'Bass VI' back in the day and there are a lot of videos online you can watch and hear people playing them." [RB]

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York www.wellstrungguitars.com

Burgundy Mist appeared on Fender's original 1961 custom colour chart alongside the Lake Placid Blue, Sherwood Green, Shoreline Gold and Inca Silver Metallic finishes



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



Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank, Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

Ritchie Blackmore expertly fused classical, blues and rock styles

Ritchie Blackmore expertly fused classical, blues and rock styles

PHOTO BY EIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

♩ = 171 Swung

w/bar

1/4

3

1/4

1/4

1/4

1/4

BU RP BD

3

5

5 (7) (7) (5) 3

5 3 3 5 3

5 5 3

3

Example 2

STARTING WITH A REITERATION of the repeated bends idea, this example then moves on to some rapid hammer-on/pull-offs on the third string, making use of the open G as a root note. If you're quick, you'll catch a hint of this in Ritchie's solo at the end of *Since You've Been Gone*. We're moving between positions here, switching between a G minor pentatonic (or blues scale) and G natural minor approach; watch out for this throughout the solo.

♩ = 171 Swung

C5

BU BU BU BU BU BU BU BD

G5

w/bar

w/bar

Example 3

REJOINING THE ACTION later in the solo, we have a shape 3 blues scale run, incorporating the ♯5 by playing chromatically through three frets on the top E before descending down through the pattern, referencing an F from what might be considered G Dorian then incorporating a G minor arpeggio right at the end. These considerations don't need to be at the forefront of your mind while playing, but it's really beneficial to piece together and understand for future ideas.

Swung

♩ = 171 Swung

C5

BU RP RP BU

1

G5

4

Example 4

ANOTHER FUSION OF APPROACHES HERE, starting with a *Child In Time*-style repeated arpeggio, we move on to a descending G Dorian (within the 'framework' of a shape 4 G minor pentatonic) in groups of six, a couple of four, then a group of five. This wasn't deliberate – it was more about where I wanted the run to land at the next bar – but this does demonstrate the way Ritchie incorporates 'tricky' phrases into his solos and lines.

Hear It Here

DEEP PURPLE MACHINE HEAD



Recorded in 1971, this album still stands tall as a pioneering fusion of blues and rock, with some strong hints at what was to come later in terms of neo-classical touches, particularly evident on *Highway Star*. Maybe I'm A Leo combines a bouncing funk/blues riff with Ritchie's unique take on a bluesy solo. We all know about *Smoke On The Water*... so we'll skip ahead to *Lazy* for the last word in the fusion of classical, blues and rock with some exemplary playing in Ritchie's extended solos.

DEEP PURPLE MADE IN JAPAN



Spawning the priceless line "everything louder than everything else", this album also showcases Ritchie at the top of his game and gives us an insight into how he translated some of his complex lines live using the more forceful sound of his Marshall stacks. Comparing *Highway Star*, *Child In Time* and *Lazy* is really informative, particularly the extended improvs on *Lazy*, which also show what an important ingredient the chemistry of the whole band was.

RAINBOW DOWN TO EARTH



An album that starts with a riff like *All Night Long* should catch the attention of any blues or rock guitarist immediately! Rainbow took a more mainstream – some might even say 'pop' rock – approach, but in no way did this compromise Ritchie's memorable solos in that first track, or the classic *Since You've Been Gone*. *Danger Zone* features a solo with some definite *Highway Star*-style harmony lines along with some classical influenced arpeggios.

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Demystifying The Modes Part 6: The F# Aeolian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Revstar 720B & Line 6 Helix Floor

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

THE AEOLIAN MODE is the sixth mode of the major scale and can literally be seen as the natural minor scale, the relative minor scale to the parent key, A. The A major scale contains the following seven notes: A B C# D E F# G# A

The F# Aeolian mode contains the same seven tones as the A major scale but it starts and resolves on the sixth degree, which is F#: F# G# A B C# D E F#

Playing the A major scale from the sixth degree produces the F# Aeolian mode, which is a minor scale with a minor 6th degree.

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 that are built from the tones of the sixth mode are F#m or F#m7 (this includes any diatonic variation and chord extensions).

R	Min3	P5	Min7	Chord tones	Resulting chord			
F#	G#	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	F# + A + C# + E = F#m7

The Tonal Centre

When we see a chord progression that starts with either F#m or F#m7 and it cycles through a series of chords derived from the A major scale then we have an F# Aeolian chord progression. This progression will resolve and sound rested on the F# minor chord. The resolution point of a chord progression is called the tonal centre.

Aeolian Characteristic Note

Each mode of the major scale has a characteristic note that evokes the unique sound of that mode. The characteristic note of the Aeolian mode is the minor 6th. The F# Aeolian characteristic note is D.

We further enhance the melodic sound of the F# Aeolian mode by specifically targeting its characteristic note and creating phrases that outline and resolve to the chord tones of F#m7 (F# A C# E).

Note: Any chord-tone extensions automatically become chord-tone resolution points for your melodies.

Here is an example of an F# Aeolian chord progression:

| F#m9 Dmaj7#11 | Dmaj7#11 | F#m add9 A E | A/C# Dmaj7#11 :||

Notice that the progression resolves nicely on the F#m add9 chord, the tonal centre of the progression. It's this tonal-centre resolution point that determines the modality within the major scale.

I'm taking a melodic motif approach to this month's solo, repeating some ideas to create hooks and memorable passages. None of the lines are complex, but the phrasing, *glissandi* and semitone bends are tricky to apply in a smooth and deliberate way. I'm hoping some of these ideas will find their way into your playing and inspire you to find similar contours of melody within the major scale.

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 my phrases and then dig into creating your own F# Aeolian solos over the backing track. See you next month for a slinky little solo from the seventh mode of the A major scale, G# Locrian.

www.robbiocalvo.com

Lick 1 Establishing the mode

I'M INTENTIONALLY STARTING THIS PHRASE on the characteristic note of D to establish the Aeolian tonality.

I wanted to create a distinctive line that could be repeated as a motif, so you'll hear this phrase again in Example 2.

Don't 'throw away' great lines – develop and repack those motifs to reinforce the melodic recognition of your style.

♩ = 100

F#madd9 Dmaj7#11 F#madd9 A E Dmaj7#11

E
B
G
D
A

1

Lick 2 Developing a theme

THE MELODIC MOTIF from Example 1 is repeated here to develop a theme within my solo. The second half of this phrase is a nice descending line on the top two strings. I added a harmony part a diatonic '3rd above' the melody for a little surprise feature that would highlight the last two bars.

♩ = 100

F#madd9 Dmaj7#11 F#madd9 A E Dmaj7#11

Lick 3 Show some emotion

I'M A BIG FAN OF EMOTIVE SEMITONE BENDS. I'm intentionally letting this bend up to C# really sing over the F#m add9 and Dmaj7#11. I call this 'letting the chords do the work'. I'll repeat this phrase in the next lick to continue motif development. The second half of this phrase utilises a nice R&B-flavoured doublestop idea, another signature device that you'll hear me use to add harmonic impact to the melody.

♩ = 100

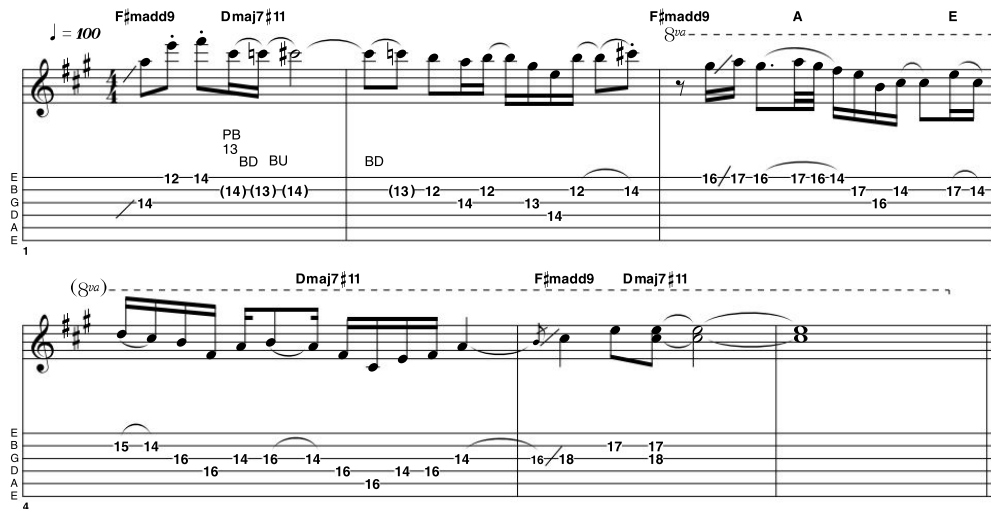
F#madd9 Dmaj7#11

PB 13 BD BU BD

F#madd9 A E Dmaj7#11

Lick 4 Letting the melody breathe

HERE'S THAT NICE SEMITONE BEND AGAIN, echoing the motif from the previous example. I like how the sustained note allows this melody to 'breathe' a little before my *crescendo* line. I'm now more adding pace to my solo with a 16th-note descending and ascending line. My phrase culminates in a *glissandi* slide into a doublestop minor 3rd (C# and E) resolution point over the F#m add9 chord. Try adding vibrato to the note E with your first finger, while keeping your second finger static.



The image displays two systems of musical notation for Lick 4. The first system (measures 1-4) is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 100. It features a melody in standard notation and guitar tablature. Chords indicated are F#madd9, Dmaj7#11, F#madd9, A, and E. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melody, ending with a doublestop minor 3rd (C# and E) over the F#m add9 chord. The tablature includes fingerings and bends (PB, BD, BU) and a glissandi slide.

System 1 (Measures 1-4):

- Measure 1: F#madd9 (100 bpm). Tab: 12-14, (14)-(13)-(14). Fingering: 14, 13, 14.
- Measure 2: Dmaj7#11. Tab: (13)-12, 12-13, 12-14. Fingering: 13, 12, 13, 12, 14.
- Measure 3: F#madd9. Tab: 16-17-16-17-16-14. Fingering: 16, 17, 16, 17, 16, 14.
- Measure 4: A, E. Tab: 17-14, 16-17-14. Fingering: 17, 14, 16, 17, 14.

System 2 (Measures 5-8):

- Measure 5: (8va) Dmaj7#11. Tab: 15-14, 16-14, 16-14, 16-14. Fingering: 15, 14, 16, 14, 16, 14, 16, 14, 16, 14.
- Measure 6: F#madd9, Dmaj7#11. Tab: 16-18, 17-18. Fingering: 16, 18, 17, 18.
- Measure 7: F#madd9. Tab: 8. Fingering: 8.
- Measure 8: Dmaj7#11. Tab: 8. Fingering: 8.

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