



LP DELUXE REDUX

Does the new Les Paul Deluxe remake capture that 70s mojo?



FENDER NOVENTA

New Mexican-built range brings P-90 power to classic electrics



BROWN SOURCE

Friedman's £299 BE-Mini amp nails the Brown Sound for less

Guitarist

Issue 476

SEPTEMBER 2021

60 SG

YEARS OF THE

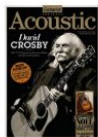
60th Anniversary

1961 LES PAUL SG STANDARD

Full feature, SG history
& more, page 32

RORY GALLAGHER

THE GEAR & TONES BEHIND THE
IRISH GUITAR LEGEND'S
FIRST SOLO ALBUM
PAGE 36



FREE Inside
ACOUSTIC
DIGITAL
MINI-MAG

INTERVIEWS

Chris
BUCK

Joan
ARMATRADING

Teenage
FANCLUB

Troy
REDFERN

& MORE



PLUS
GRETSCH G6136T LTD EDITION FALCON
VINTAGE 1941 MARTIN D-45
YAMAHA NTX & NCX5



BORN PLAY^{TO}

Sheeran
BY *Louden*



SheeranGuitars.com

Future Classics



This month's cover story on page 52 is about the anniversary of Gibson's twin-horned devil, the SG, and is a reminder that we have little idea of how new gear will stand the test of time. At the time of launch, the SG was rejected by its supposed endorsee, Les Paul, and the guitar went on to have an up-and-down 60s career before being eclipsed by the very guitar it replaced – the sunburst Les Paul – after the latter was championed by

Eric Clapton. The SG found its true métier later, in the hands of hard rock and metal players during the 70s. In both cases, the fortunes of the designs were determined by how much backing they received from high-profile players. Likewise, Fender's offset Jaguar and Jazzmaster electrics languished in bargain bins until 80s and 90s new wave and grunge artists made them cool and relevant in a way they hadn't been since their launch.

Makes you wonder if any guitars launched after 2010, that haven't made much of a splash yet, will go on to become hugely valuable classics in decades to come? What designs would you stake your money on? The difficulty is, as the electric guitar matures, there are fewer truly original designs – with many new models being partly or wholly inspired by existing classics. All of the above means if guitar companies want to write fresh pages in music history, they have to keep making new designs that challenge player's preconceptions, take risks and offer genuinely new sounds and features. Some of these may well fail to set the market alight at first – but if they innovate, they may end up becoming future classics rather than mere updates on established designs, as useful as those are. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Joan Armatrading

She's one of Britain's greatest singer-songwriters but she hates to stand still, as she explains in a career-spanning interview on **p70**



Teenage Fanclub

The hugely respected Glaswegian indie band has decades of recording wisdom (and classic guitars) to share on **p76**



Neo Classical

Yamaha's contrasting takes on the concept of a stage-ready nylon-string guitar are both beguiling in different ways on **p94**

Guitarist

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

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jamie Dickson

jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

DEPUTY EDITOR

David Mead

david.mead@futurenet.com

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC

Scott Rowley

scott.rowley@futurenet.com

REVIEWS EDITOR

Dave Burrluck

dave@daveburrluck.com

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR

Jason Sidwell

jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

ART EDITOR

Darren Phillips

darren.phillips@futurenet.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Lucy Rice

lucy.rice@futurenet.com

CONTRIBUTORS

TONY BACON, RICHARD BARRETT, ALEX BISHOP, ROD BRAKES, TREVOR CURWEN, DAVID DAVIDSON, STEFAN FAST, ADAM GOLDSMITH, NICK GUPPY, MARTIN HOLMES, RICHARD HOOD, MARTIN KELLY, GLENN KIMPTON, ROB LAING, NEVILLE MARTEN, ROGER NEWELL, DAVINA RUNGASAMY, GARY STUCKEY, STUART WILLIAMS, HENRY YATES

IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHIL BARKER, OLLY CURTIS, NEIL GOWDIN

ADVERTISING

MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

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

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

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

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

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

MARKETING

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

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

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

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

PRINT & PRODUCTION

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

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

PRODUCTION MANAGER **Frances Twentyman** frances.twentyman@futurenet.com

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

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

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION

GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. TO FIND OUR MORE CONTACT US AT LICENSING@FUTURENET.COM

OR VIEW OUR AVAILABLE CONTENT AT WWW.FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING **Rachel Shaw** licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION

HEAD OF NEWSTRADE **Tim Mathers**

MANAGEMENT

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

BRAND DIRECTOR **Stuart Williams** stuart.williams1@futurenet.com

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

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

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

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

CUSTOMER SERVICES

APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com



Future plc is a public company
quoted on the London Stock
Exchange
(Symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Rachel Addison**
Tel: +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2021 Future Publishing Limited or published under license. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher Future Publishing Limited, company number 2008859, registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/ services offered in this publication. Tips and advice mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their content or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

You submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensors a license to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensors shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt, abridge submissions.

Designed for Sound

SE[®]



PRS HYBRID BRACING

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

www.prsguitars.com/se_acoustics



PRS PAUL REED SMITH[®]
GUITARS

Contents



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Neil Godwin

COVER FEATURE **60 YEARS OF THE SG**

52 With sales of its Les Paul model in decline at the beginning of the 1960s, Gibson knew it had to take action. The result was the twin-horned beast that was to become an icon in its own right: the Gibson SG. Tony Bacon tells the story of a legendary guitar



REGULARS

- 030.....Gas Supply
- 032.....The Lineup
- 034.....New Music
- 036.....Tones Behind The Tracks
- 038.....Opinion
- 042.....Substitute
- 044.....Feedback
- 106.....Subscribe
- 114.....Tonal Teamwork
- 116.....Longtermers
- 118.....Bought & Sold
- 120.....Dazed & Confused
- 122.....The Mod Squad
- 128.....Pickup Lines
- 130.....Classic Gear
- 132.....Vintage Icons
- 138.....Next Month



SUBSCRIBE TO
GUITARIST AND
SAVE UP TO 57% & GET
A **FREE BLACKSTAR**
FLY 3 MINI AMP
WORTH £65!
See p106 for details

FEATURES

- 046.....Troy Redfern
- 052.....60 Years Of The SG
- 070.....Joan Armatrading
- 076.....Teenage Fancub

NEW GEAR

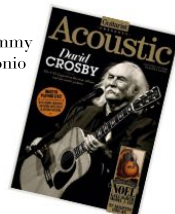
- 010.....**Friedman** BE-Mini
- 016.....**Fender** Noventa Telecaster &
Noventa Stratocaster
- 022.....**Gibson** Les Paul 70s Deluxe
- 028.....**Gretsch** G6136T Limited Edition Falcon
- 082.....**Vintage** ProShop V120 & ProShop V100
- 094.....**Yamaha** NCX5 & NTX5
- 108.....**Walrus Audio** Polychrome Analog Flanger
- 110.....**Redbeard Effects** Angry Rhubarb
Paradynamic MKII
- 112.....**Browne Amplification** Protein Dual
Overdrive & T4 Fuzz

TECHNIQUES

- 134.....Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

ACOUSTIC DIGITAL MINI-MAG

- 141.....David Crosby, Jon Gomm, Tommy
Emmanuel, Mike Dawes, Antonio
Forcione, KT Tunstall & more



VIDEO

Please note: to enjoy all of the video content in this issue, you will need a WiFi connection



INSEPA

WWW.THOMANN.DE



ARABLE

th•mann

FIRST PLAY


FRIEDMAN BE-MINI HEAD
 £299

WHAT IS IT? Desktop-sized 30-watt solid-state head, inspired by Friedman's BE-OD overdrive pedal and the 'Brown Eye' channel from Friedman's coveted all-valve heads

Pocket Plexi

Friedman Amplification is known for its boutique hot-rod all-valve amp tone, so what can this affordable solid-state alternative bring to the party?

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

With nearly three decades of industry experience, amp designer Dave Friedman has the reputation as the 'go-to amp guy' for many top players (including Steve Stevens and Eddie Van Halen) and is no longer an underground phenomenon. As well as his range of highly coveted USA-made heads and pedals, he has his own brand of guitars designed in partnership with the legendary Grover Jackson.

Friedman's speciality is the 'hot-rodded Marshall' tone, a product of his own ears and sonic taste rather than a reproduction

of any particular circuit, which just happens to click with many of today's top players. While most of Friedman's amp range is valve, this new solid-state design is inspired by the all-valve Brown Eye 50 head and the BE-OD pedal, the BE-Mini. But can this pint-size head with its very affordable price tag (relatively speaking), really produce the same sonic magic as an all-valve, top-of-the-range Friedman?

Looking more like an immaculately finished scale model rather than the real thing, the BE-Mini is roughly a quarter of the size of a regular head. It weighs just a







1. The black knobs on a gold background evoke classic British designs from the 70s and 80s, while the controls make it easy to dial in any guitar for stunning supercharged tone

fraction of its all-valve equivalent because the electronics are solid state, and has an external 24-volt laptop-style power supply. The signature Friedman look of a black vinyl covering accented with gold piping and gold control panels pays tribute to classic British designs from the 70s and 80s and looks very smart.

Inside, the tiny ply cabinet is a robust open-ended steel-tray chassis, with a perforated square area over the output stage to ventilate warm air. There's one high-quality PCB, plus a separate PCB strip for the rear-panel sockets and a smaller surface-mount daughter board that holds the BE-Mini's Class D output stage. The minimal wiring is neatly tied back and routed.

This is a straightforward single-channel preamp design with a single input jack feeding controls for gain, master volume, bass, mid, treble and presence. There are

two small three-way toggle switches, labelled Cut and Tight, that help tailor the BE-Mini's response to individual tastes: Cut affects the range of the gain control, while Tight progressively reduces the bass response, helping stop flabby bass syndrome at higher gain settings.

Moving to the back panel, there's a pair of speaker outlet jacks and a series effects loop, together with the 24-volt DC power inlet. Despite the reduced dimensions, the BE-Mini exudes the same cool boutique vibe of its bigger brothers, and the overall impression is that, like all Friedman products, it's built to last and provide many trouble-free years of use.

Feel & Sounds

Despite a lack of valves, there's plenty of heat in the BE-Mini's wide-ranging overdrive channel. The supercharged Marshall sounds that Friedman is known for are here in abundance, ranging from mild-crunch classic-rock tones to screaming sustain and 'edge of the pick' harmonic squeals, ideal for the blues-metal genre, as typified by players such as Eric Steekel and Doug Rappoport.

2. The Cut and Tight switches both have three positions and work on the BE-Mini's gain range and bass response to optimise the sound at any gain setting

3. The BE-Mini uses a 24-volt laptop-style power supply, compatible with most international voltages, so you can use it practically anywhere there's a mains socket

4. The amp's minimum load is 8 ohms, making it compatible with a wide range of single- and dual-speaker cabinets. You can also plug in two 16-ohm cabinets using both output jacks for a total load of 8 ohms

The supercharged Marshall sounds that Friedman is known for are here in abundance

2



The 24-volt DC power supply provides improved headroom and dynamic range, making it easier to accept the illusion that you're playing through a real valve amp, although we'd have to say that after an extended session with the BE-Mini, you can hear the difference when swapping over to a decent all-valve product.

There's no clean channel, or anything remotely close to a clean sound, which is okay because players who buy the BE-Mini aren't likely to use it for jazz or country gigs. At the top end of the gain range, it doesn't really matter what guitar you plug in; a Strat with averagely low-output pickups will sound more or less the same as a Les Paul. At lower gain settings, however, the BE-Mini is more transparent and you hear more of the guitar's character. With the Gain control around halfway and the Cut control on its low or medium settings, we found the most rewarding sounds.

The BE-Mini's tone controls interact smoothly and predictably. Used in conjunction with the Cut and Tight switches, it's quick and easy to dial in a great tone at any gain level. While the slightly compressed dynamics sound really good

3



4





The BE-Mini features a quality series effects loop; the send output can also be used for direct recording with the loudspeaker disconnected

when recorded, albeit with a little more hiss than we'd like to hear. Using a Sennheiser MD 421 up close to a Celestion V30-loaded cabinet (at volume levels low enough to talk over comfortably), the results were positively huge, creating a satisfying tone that sounded like a big hundred-watt head with everything on 11.

The BE-Mini's 30-watt output stage is also loud enough to use live when teamed with a suitable enclosure. The minimum recommended load is eight ohms, which makes the BE-Mini compatible with most single- and twin-speaker cabinets, while you can connect a pair of 4x12 16-ohm cabs using both output jacks.

Verdict

When it comes to delivering the supercharged British overdrive tone its larger siblings are renowned for, Friedman's BE-Mini is quite the animal, proving that analogue solid-state still packs a punch. There's also the matter of reliability and consistency – the best valve amps are only as good as the valves you put in them, and we're in an uncertain time with valve quality and long-term supply far from assured. There's nothing more frustrating

There's enough gain and EQ range to satisfy blues, rock and metal players at any level

than being halfway through a gig when a valve starts to let go and your signal is perforated by the sound of chips being fried while you lose gain and tone, something that will never happen with the BE-Mini.

Okay, there's no clean channel, but that's unlikely to put any prospective customer off, because the drive tones are gloriously mad, with more than enough gain and EQ range to satisfy most blues, rock and metal players at any level.

The money is eyebrow-raising, but this time for the right reasons: the BE-Mini comes in at less than a tenth of Friedman's all-valve Brown Eye 50 Deluxe head. Despite the fact it only has one channel and might be a tad too noisy to record without a noise gate, this is a proper USA-made Friedman, so the sub-£300 asking price will surely be all the justification many gain fiends will need. **B**



FRIEDMAN BE-MINI HEAD

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Analogue solid state preamp, Class D power amp
OUTPUT: 30W RMS into 8Ω minimum load
VALVES: None
DIMENSIONS: 240 (w) x 160 (d) x 135mm (h)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 1.8/4
CABINET: Plywood
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, master volume, 3-position Cut and Tight toggle switches
FOOTSWITCH: None
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series effects loop
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None

First Line Distribution Ltd
 01626 832410

www.friedmanamplification.com

8/10

PROS Compact and very portable; superb overdrive tones; surprisingly loud

CONS No proper clean channel and slightly too much hiss for more demanding recording applications (a decent noise gate will mostly get around this); a strain relief for the power lead would be nice

THE SONIC SHAPE- SHIFTER



AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC® JAZZMASTER®

An otherworldly guitar that combines iconic acoustic voicings and big electric tones with one powerful Blend Knob. Unlock an impossible range of sounds - no matter how you spin it.

Fender

CRAFTED IN CORONA, CALIFORNIA

FIRST PLAY



FENDER NOVENTA TELECASTER £799

WHAT IS IT? Mexican-built Telecaster guitar with single P-90-style pickup



FENDER NOVENTA STRATOCASTER £849

WHAT IS IT? Strat version of the above, but sporting a pair of the same power units

Nineties Style

Fender has treated some of its most iconic guitar models to a new, stripped-down format that turns them into lean, mean rocking machines

Words Neville Marten Photography Neil Godwin

Fender continues to mine the well of potential so brilliantly presented in its most famous models. But when we saw this latest Noventa range, the sheer coolness could hardly be denied.

These guitars are made in Fender's Mexican plant in Ensenada, with the range's name translating as Spanish for 'ninety', since the guitars come equipped with P-90-style pickups.

But why would you buy a Fender guitar with a Gibson-style pickup? Well, putting a Les Paul Goldtop's P-90 in a Telecaster isn't going to make it sound like a Lester. There's too much going on with the construction and materials for that to be so. But it does make for a new and interesting sound.

The simplicity of the Telecaster means it's the perfect vehicle for all kinds of experimentation, as we've seen with the earlier Cabronita series. The Stratocaster, however, is a trickier proposition: its design is so perfect that you mess with it at your peril. And we feel that those large black

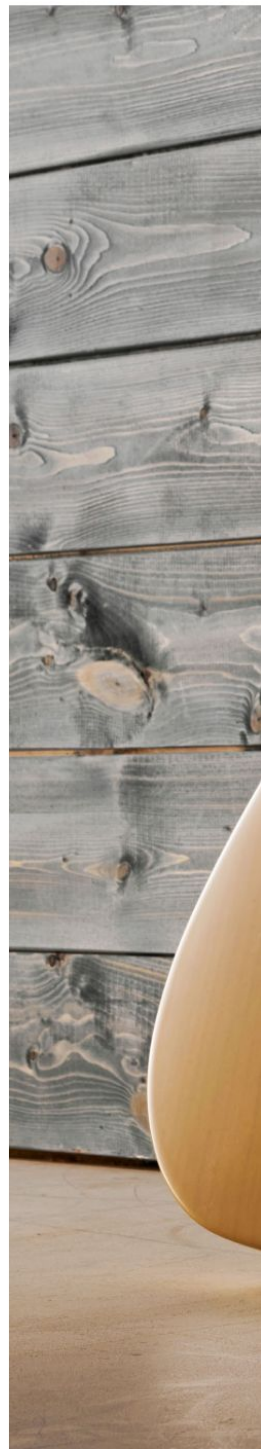
P-90-style pickups (the neck one is a bit too big for that space) look rather, well, 'sticky-outy'. Cream would perhaps have been a less drastic choice aesthetically. Time will tell on that one.

With our stalwart Blues Junior and a small but tasty set of pedals at the ready, let's give the charms of both guitars the opportunity to win us over.

Noventa Telecaster

We've remained highly impressed by guitars built at Fender's Ensenada facility. Fit and finish are rarely less than flawless, and they are generally playable straight out of the box. And so it is here, with the Tele's polyester Vintage Blonde gloss as flat as glass, and buffed to a perfect finish. You couldn't even fit the crispest, newest banknote into the neck-body gap – and you couldn't say that for many 70s USA Fenders, which some consider 'vintage'.

Alder is the body wood, a classic Fender timber. Deemed to give a less springy or







1. Fender fits its own compensated brass bridge saddles to the Noventa Tele. Note the glass-like finish and cool P-90 style soapbar

bright sound than ash, you can clearly see its grain through the finish here. Alder Fenders with rosewood boards are generally believed to sound fatter than their ash and maple counterparts, so this alder P-90 maple combination could be interesting.

As mentioned, Fender has chosen maple for the Noventas' necks, and here we see a glued-on maple fingerboard, too. This is unusual but not unheard of. A certain well-known Fender user from the 60s played a Strat with this construction at Woodstock, and this writer once owned a beautiful Sunburst '68 Tele built this way, too. Of course, this means no walnut skunk-stripe or headstock fillet, and truss-rod adjustment is done at the body end, vintage style. This, it has to be said, is much more of a palaver than locating it at the headstock, as most modern-style Fenders do. The neck itself is finished in satin urethane, with only the headstock facing done in gloss.

Hardware-wise, we have six-a-side tuners in the classic Kluson style, a four-bolt neckplate, early P-Bass-style control plate with chromed, knurled knobs, plus a cut-down Telecaster bridge with three intonation compensated brass saddles. This will go down well with Tele aficionados, who generally prefer the tone of brass over steel, but often complain about compromised intonation. This arrangement fixes both issues at a swipe. As there's no neck pickup, the 'half





2



3

pickguard, as Fender calls it, is very cool-looking, with its top curve in the opposite direction to that of a regular Tele 'guard.

A single Noventa P-90-style pickup and single volume and tone controls are all you get with regards to electrics. But that look works so well here. In fact, overall, the Noventa's look is a triumph of perfectly executed simplicity.

Noventa Stratocaster

Whether it's the overly large neck pickup compared with the slimmer, shorter regular Strat one, the fact that we're not used to the look of a two-pickup Strat, or simply the fact that we're not yet visually attuned to it, the Noventa Strat is not quite the happy marriage that we see in the Tele. Of course, it's clearly the more versatile instrument of the two, plus these are purely subjective opinions, since the next person might love this and abhor the basic-looking Tele.

Construction-wise, the two instruments have the same body and neck woods and finishes, and the glossy Daphne Blue of the Strat certainly looks smart against the translucent Vintage Blonde of the Tele. Here, the pickguard is regular three-ply mint green and black, while the bridge is the vintage hardtail style with through-body stringing and carrying half a dozen bent steel saddles. All the other usual Strat attributes apply, such as the recessed jack and contoured body.

The pair of Noventa soapbar pickups is mated to single volume and tone controls, plus a three-way switch offering neck, neck and bridge, and bridge-pickup-only options, as per a Les Paul or Telecaster. Knobs and the switch tips are black.

Feel & Sounds

You might expect, given that both guitars fall under one Noventa umbrella, that the necks would feature the same carve. Instead, the Tele has a '60s C' and the Strat a 'Modern C' profile. While not dramatically different, the Strat's is slightly more slender front to back, although both share the same fingerboard dimensions: 42mm at the synthetic bone nut, widening to 51mm at the 12th. Both instruments also boast the modern 241mm fingerboard radius.

Measured from behind the 1st fret, both necks come in at around 22mm, while at the 12th, it's 24mm for the Tele and 23mm for the Strat. While the Tele has the merest hint of a 'V' section, the Strat is that bit flatter, but it's the tiniest difference.

In the spec sheet, Fender states it fits Noventas with 250R 0.10-gauge strings, but these instruments feel loose and easy under the fingers, even with the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length.

In the palm, the Tele's neck seems at one with the guitar as a whole. With its satin finish it's so comfy, and with that slack feel it's as smooth as syrup. The

2. While the neck is satin finish the headstock face is gloss. Vintage style tuners, artificial bone nut and a single string tree complete the picture

3. Close-up of the tuner backs and buttons, and the nicely grained satin finish of the neck and headstock's rear

Overall, the Noventa Telecaster's look is a triumph of perfectly executed simplicity



4. Bent steel saddles feature on the Noventa Strat's hardtail bridge. No trem will impact slightly on the tone, too

big frets and flatter fingerboard add up to a contemporary feel on a guitar that looks to be from another era. With that millimetre 12th-fret difference and the marginally more slender feel overall, the Strat feels like an even more modern beast. Of course, its body shape is so much more streamlined so perhaps that's subliminally adding to the vibe. But both instruments play superbly.

With the Blues Junior's valves and transformers fully warmed up, it's time to plug in. Tele first. Try as hard as you like and you won't make this Noventa sound like a Telecaster. This single-coil pickup with its considerably bigger footprint offers a different kind of twang when turned down to 6 or 7; back this off to 2 or 3 and big, open strums sound almost acoustic in nature. Full up again but still clean, it's clear, big and bold, but pull back even a touch and it's a bit more subtle. Kick in a Fulltone OCD and, good grief, it's huge! Yes, there's Les Paul there, but perhaps more SG as it remains highly expressive but a little less dense. Knock the tone back to 7 and we're in our element. Add some Keeley-modded Boss DD-3 delay and it's sonic heaven. We've not had this much fun in ages.

The Strat's bridge pickup is much of a muchness, so we'll concentrate on the neck and both units together. Keeping the Fulltone OCD on and starting at the neck,





5

it's so warm and musical. Yes, the old clichés such as 'flutey' and 'woody' come tripping out, but it really is that. With no pixelation to the sound, it's almost liquid under the fingers. Again, play with the tone controls and you'll find 'woman' tone, the *Money For Nothing* sound and so much more.

Off with the drive and a flip to middle position – rockabilly lives here. Chuck on the slapback and hours of fun are to be had. Bring back the gain and it's Jimmy Page and Brian May territory. Both players chose 'honky' sounds for certain things, and you can easily find that here.

Each of these instruments is impressive. But for pure versatility the Strat wins – and one can begin to forgive that bulky neck pickup due to what it brings, musically.

Verdict

After examining and playing this pair, Fender Mexico's excellence and consistency in build and finish added greatly to the expectation. But it was plugging in that made us realise just how good these guitars are. The Tele is bonkers good with a small set of pedals into a simple amp. And if you're not a neck-pickup person, it's all you could ever need – especially if you're canny with the controls. But with the superb extra tones the Strat delivers, it wins the 'head' decision. Whether the Tele might steal your heart, of course, we'll leave to you. **G**

5. Is the P-90 too big and too close to the pickguard's upper edge? We'll leave that to you. But great fit and finish all round, as you can plainly see here



FENDER NOVENTA TELECASTER

PRICE: £799 (with Deluxe padded gigbag)

ORIGIN: Ensenada, Mexico

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Solid 2-piece alder

NECK: Maple, 4-bolt neck join, satin urethane finish with gloss urethane headstock facing

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT: Synthetic bone, 42mm

FINGERBOARD: Glued-on maple, with black dot markers, satin urethane finish, 241mm radius

FRETS: 21, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Cut-down Telecaster bridge with through-body stringing, early P-Bass style control plate

TUNERS: Vintage style 6-a-side, chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm

ELECTRICS: 1x Noventa soapbar pickup, single volume and tone control

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.5/7.7

OPTIONS: Pau ferro fingerboard on Sunburst version

RANGE OPTIONS: Noventa Strat (as reviewed, £849), Noventa Jazzmaster with 3x Noventa pickups (£899)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet available

FINISHES: Vintage Blonde (as reviewed), Fiesta Red, Two-Tone Sunburst



9/10

PROS It's the simplest of guitars, but with tones like these on offer, plus superb playability and extremely keen price, it's a winner on every level

CONS Perhaps that very simplicity will put some players off



FENDER NOVENTA STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £849 (with Deluxe padded gigbag)

ORIGIN: Ensenada, Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Solid 2-piece alder

NECK: Maple, 4-bolt neck join, satin urethane finish with gloss urethane headstock facing

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone, 42mm

FINGERBOARD: Glued-on maple, with black dot markers, satin urethane finish, 241mm radius

FRETS: 21, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Hardtail Stratocaster bridge with through-body stringing, recessed jack socket

TUNERS: Vintage style 6-a-side, chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Noventa soapbar pickups, single volume and tone controls, 3-way selector

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.3/7.27

OPTIONS: Pau ferro fingerboard on Crimson Red version

RANGE OPTIONS: Noventa Tele (as reviewed, £799), Noventa Jazzmaster with 3x Noventa pickups (£899)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet available

FINISHES: Daphne Blue (as reviewed), Crimson Red, Surf Green



9/10

PROS It has everything the Noventa Tele has and much more; that musical neck P-90 tone and the extra ones found in the middle position will sway many players

CONS Arguably not as happy visually as the Tele

FIRST PLAY



**GIBSON LES PAUL 70s
DELUXE**
£2,199

WHAT IS IT? Homage to the mini-humbucking Les Paul Deluxe but with regular LP construction. No volutes or pancakes here!

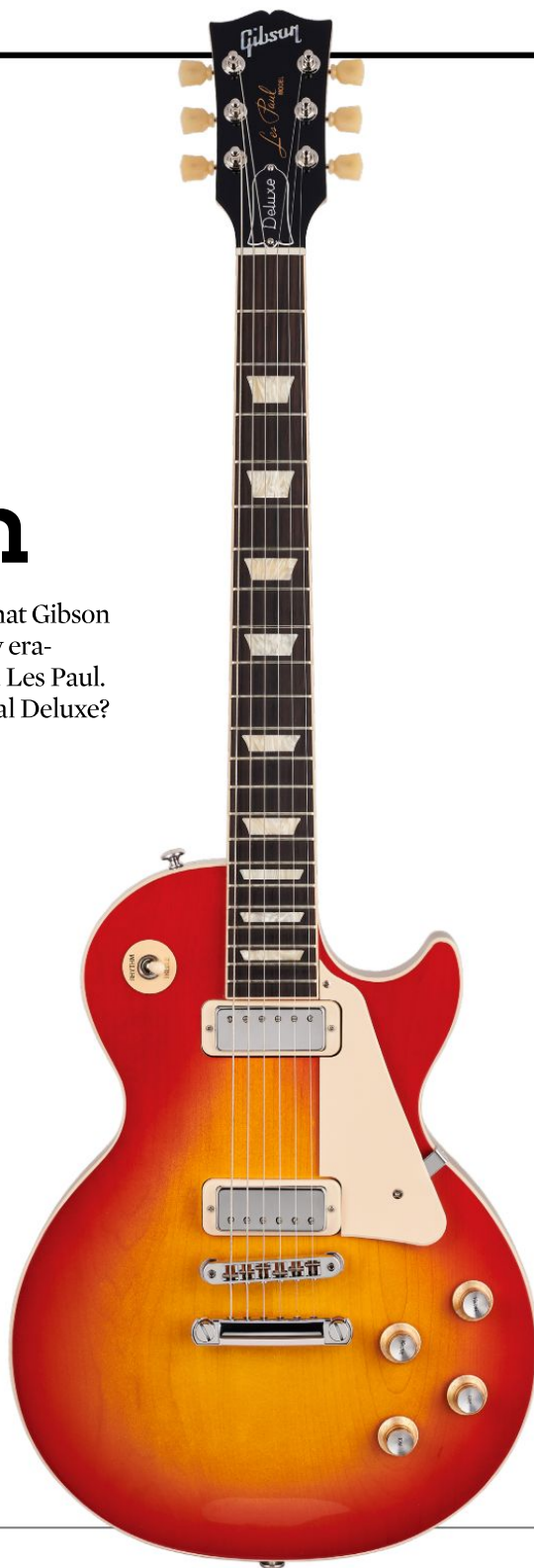
Deluxe Addition

The 70s are back, at least that's what Gibson would like us to think with its new era-inspired, mini-humbucker-loaded Les Paul. But does it do justice to the original Deluxe?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

By contrast to the mighty Standard and Custom, the Les Paul Deluxe, originally produced from 1969 until 1984, was never quite in the same classic league. It shone brightly and sold in significant numbers in its early years because the single-cut Standard had, of course, been replaced in 1961 by the very different Les Paul/SG. But more and more high-profile players were picking up and playing Standards during the 60s, which simply increased demand that Gibson ignored. Even when the classic shape made a comeback in 1968, it was in the form of the twin-pickup Custom and, briefly, the goldtop P-90. So when the Deluxe launched the following year, its appeal was obvious. Except for the fact that, with its mini-humbuckers, it *wasn't* a Les Paul Standard – and its construction had changed, too, with a laminated 'pancake' body, three-piece mahogany (then maple) neck with a volute and a larger headstock.

Artists didn't exactly jump onboard. Pete Townshend was one famous exception, as was Scott Gorham, while Stateside, Barry Bailey of the Atlanta Rhythm Section, nicknamed 'The Steely Dan of The South', is a well-documented Deluxe user (although his very early '69 doesn't have that 'pancake'







1

1. These tuners are a modern take on the classic vintage style and are used on numerous other Original Collection guitars. They're smooth and precise in use, too. Take note, there's no volute here!

2. Typically, a Les Paul's pickups tilt to match the string line. Presumably due to the pickup route, this neck pickup is angled in the wrong direction



2

The instruments we've seen from the new regime have all been pretty tidy, especially at this top-tier USA production level

body). The '68 Custom, however, had much bigger reach in the hands of Carlos Santana and Bowie sideman Mick Ronson – just two examples – and it's little surprise that although the Deluxe sold well during the early 70s, it was eclipsed by the Custom as the decade progressed.

But this isn't Historic Hardware – and although history hasn't been kind to the Deluxe (especially since the weights can be excessive and those mini-humbuckers are an acquired taste), it was a well-used and, in many quarters, well-loved Les Paul.

Fast forward to the present and this new Deluxe, now priced the same as the Standard '50s and '60s, is the first Les Paul that Gibson has introduced to its Original Collection since the reorganisation of the line back in late 2019. Except, of course, it's not really new. It's certainly not a reissue – and Gibson isn't marketing it as such – and as the mini-humbuckers have the same footprint as soapbar P-90s, it's pretty much a Les Paul Standard '50s P-90 with different pickups and chrome parts.

Like the other Original Collection Les Pauls, the new Deluxe isn't weight relieved, and pulling our cased review sample

from its cardboard shipping box we're wondering if it's made from concrete... At 4.44kg (9.77lb), the guitar is no lightweight, but neither is the shaped brown hard-case, which has a lighter red interior and noticeably rectangular-shaped latches compared with the earlier 2019 case. The case weighs 5.94kg (13lb) – the previous one is 3.94kg (8.67lb) – which means you're actually lugging 10.4kg (22.8lb) of cased guitar around. Time to hit the gym.

While the internet rants about the variances of Gibson's quality control, the instruments we've seen from the new regime have all been pretty tidy, especially at this top-tier USA production level. So, while this new Deluxe side-steps the construction of the originals, there's very little to moan about. In fact, the bright red of the Cherry Sunburst over the plain maple top transports this writer back to the days of the late 70s and early 80s flea-bitten rehearsal and recording studios when he owned a '72 original. This new guitar is unnervingly close in colour.

The chrome hardware adds to the 70s sheen. The Nashville-style tune-o-matic and aluminium stud tailpiece

VINTAGE VS MODERN

It might be far from a reissue, but how does the new Deluxe compare with an early 70s example?

Despite its speckled past, you'll be lucky to snag a real 70s Les Paul Deluxe for the price of this new model. As ever, vintage prices centre on condition and you'll often find repaired neck cracks or full breaks, and plenty of Deluxes routed for humbuckers with the minis long gone. Then there's the notorious weight, often 10lbs and over – the main reason why Pete Townshend stopped using his Deluxes.

But side-stepping vintage value, we're reminded of the potency of this 'wrong' Les Paul when playing an early 70s example that's been well used and has a neck repair that's been totally stable since 1980. The sample we get to play is lighter (3.94kg/8.67lb) than many, despite its 'pancake' body and three-piece mahogany neck. In fact, it's the lightest we've ever found.

The headstock actually looks huge. It measures 88mm across its upper tip; the modern head is 79mm and is around 0.6mm thinner in depth at 9.6mm. Both the neck pitch and headstock angle of the old guitar are flatter, too.

Typical of a well-used and near 50-year-old guitar, its condition isn't great with plenty of wear and finish cracks to the back, sides and headstock, but less on the top, which suggests it was over-sprayed. The dual ring 'tulip' Gibson Deluxe tuners have definitely seen some action; the B, D and G string buttons have all been

severely bashed out of line. And while the owner can tell us all about its life from the early 80s, before that we can only guess. It's been played, that's for sure. The original wide 'n' low frets are now very low – approximately 2.65mm wide by 0.86mm high – and the fingerboard, as a result, is heavily worn, almost scalloped in places. A definite candidate for a refret!

But the neck profile is good and it's thinner back to front than our review sample – 20.1mm at the first, 24.9mm at the 12th – with a lovely

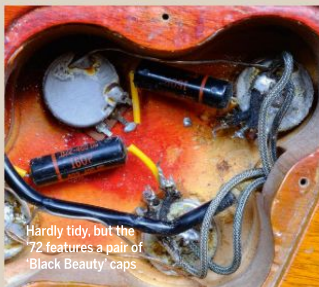
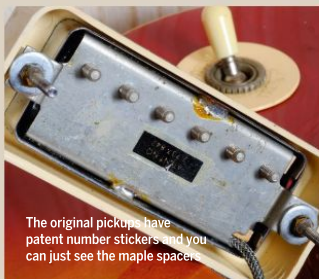
Comparing the decades-apart two guitars, it's not just the construction that differs, and no doubt informs the sound, but the unpotted mini-humbuckers of the original guitar expand and enhance what we hear from the new example. They are slightly hotter from their DCRs – 6.72kohms (bridge), 6.88k (neck) – but have so much more 'old Les Paul' about the voice, and that's with not particularly fresh strings and those really low frets. What does that mean? The old example is more vocal. There's also a

We're reminded of the potency of this Les Paul when playing an example with a neck repair that's been totally stable since 1980

unclubby C shape. The large binding strip in the cutaway looks rather funky, but you could certainly live with that. While the controls and probably the pickups have been removed at some point (probably during its repair and refinish) and then refitted, the pot codes date the guitar to 1972, as do the 'Gibson' logos on the front of the mini-humbuckers. The original 'Black Beauty' caps are still in situ, but about the only mod we can see is a replacement aluminium output jack plate and, possibly, what appears to be a reshaped heel.

little more depth but still with that focus and a beautiful touch-sensitivity. Terms such as 'wiry' spring to mind, but in a very positive sense.

Of course, you can Deluxe-ise any soapbar Les Paul and the potential duality has immense appeal. There's a surprising choice of mini-humbuckers available, including from the UK's Ben Fletcher (www.fletcherpickups.co.uk) who we featured in Pickup Lines back in issue 463, and a multitude of P-90 soapbars. We can't help thinking that this new 70s Deluxe could be quite the tone-tinkerer's favourite.



UNDER THE HOOD

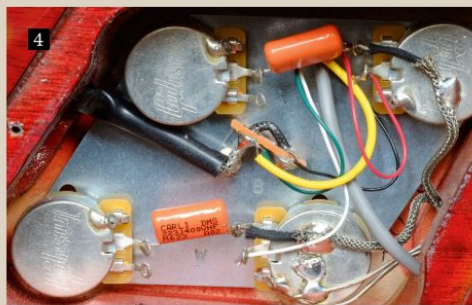
What's happening inside the Deluxe?

While an original Deluxe invariably used brown plastic coverplates for the control and switch cavities, here they're standard black. Inside the control cavity, mounted via a conductive metal screening plate, are four 'Gibson' stamped CTS audio taper pots, nominally valued at 500kohms as you'd expect with a twin-humbucker guitar. That said, both volumes are lower – the neck drops to 422kohms, the bridge closer at 496k – and we can't help thinking that reversing these would suit the guitar. The Orange Drop caps are .022microfarads on both neck and bridge, and the circuit is wired modern-style, like original Deluxes.

The pickups are labelled for lead and rhythm positions, the Pat number is stamped on the baseplate, and the bridge is slightly hotter, but not by much going simply by the DCRs measured at output of 6.31k ohms (bridge) and 6.16k (neck). Gibson states these wax-potted pickups are "vintage replicas of the original mini-humbucker with Alnico II bar magnets" and "authentic in every detail, from the cream-colored plastic mounting and coated enamel-like wire, to the maple spacers and vintage braided lead wire". Typically both have the same polepiece spacing that we measured at 49.54mm.

3. The patent number is stamped on the pickup base, while the sticker tells us this is the bridge pickup

4. The tidy control cavity here features Orange Drop caps and modern wiring



The rosewood fingerboard here is almost ebony-like black in colour, and we can't help wondering if it's stained. The fret work, however, is excellent and this example was very well set up

(with steel anchor bolts) are made by Advanced Plating in Portland, Tennessee; the steel saddles are pre-notched and height adjustment is easy via the Allen-keyed bolts. The tuners, meanwhile, do appear to be nickel plated with nicely antique-looking keystone buttons, but, importantly, they feel smooth and positive. We have no complaints.

Mini-Humbuckers

These mini-humbuckers were designed by Seth Lover for the Gibson-owned Epiphone line, and the reasons for employing them are also well documented. They were initially surplus stock once Gibson had stopped USA production of Epiphone, and they do give the Deluxe an almost player-modded vibe, sitting in their modified P-90 soapbar covers. Of course, there's nothing to stop you swapping over to standard P-90s here.

The minis also mount to the guitar in a different fashion from a P-90 or standard humbucker. The pickup has a preset height within its surround so, when you go to adjust it, both the pickup and surround move up or down. The bridge pickup is fine, but the neck is right down as far as it will go and it tilts in the opposite direction to the rake of the strings. It's not the end of the world, but it does look a bit odd.

Feel & Sounds

This new Deluxe is a big, chunky, weighty beast. Hey, it's a Les Paul! The neck feels very similar to the Standard '50s and dimensionally is very slightly bigger than the one we reviewed back in issue 448: 43.53mm at the nut with a 1st fret depth of 22.8mm filling out to 25.4mm by the 12th. There's no tapering to the shoulders, which tells your left hand it's bigger than it actually measures. Did we say it feels big? The fretting is perfectly good, from a low-ish medium gauge (approx. 2.28mm wide by 1mm high). The nut is well cut and, once strings are stretched and settled, tuning is stable. The rosewood fingerboard is very dark brown here, almost black, certainly compared with our reference late-2019 Les Paul Classic.

Rather like the Deluxe itself, the mini-humbucker is far less a part of our sonic DNA than the PAF or P-90. The smaller pickup senses a narrower portion of the string, and with a lower inductance and output it produces a cleaner and brighter sound. We're not saying it sounds like a Fender, because it doesn't, yet it certainly loses some of that thump and chunk; it's lower in output than our Les Paul Classic with Burstbuckers 1 and 2. There seems to be a little more cut to the attack, but it's smoother – less grainy, if you like – than our

5. Like the chrome-plated hardware, these gold reflector knobs evoke the 70s, and unlike Gibson's Modern Collection there are no wiring tricks (or PCBs) here

6. Both these new mini humbuckers – which have one coil with adjustable polepieces, the other coil with a bar polepiece – use Alnico II magnets and have a relatively low output



GIBSON LES PAUL 70s DELUXE

PRICE: £2,199 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: 1-piece mahogany (no weight relief) with carved plain maple top

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, rounded 'C' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph

Tech/43.53mm

FINGERBOARD: Single-bound Indian rosewood, acrylic trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stud tailpiece, vintage-style 'Gibson Deluxe' keystone tuners – chrome plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson Mini Humbucker w/chrome covers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls (hand-wired with Orange Drop capacitors)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.44/9.77

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: The Les Paul Standard '50s, '50s P-90 and '60s all cost the same (£2,199)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently listed for this model, but the '50s and '60s Standard are available left-handed

FINISHES: 70s Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Gold Top – gloss nitrocellulose

Gibson
www.gibson.com

8/10

PROS Tidy build and finish; big neck; good playability; evocative, valid sounds from the mini-humbuckers

CONS It's the heaviest of Gibson's new Les Pauls that we've played; the reverse-tilt of the neck pickup looks wrong

Broadcaster-style 'Tele' reference. If you like your Les Pauls on the low-output side, which can certainly be surprisingly bright and clear at the bridge, that's where this Deluxe is aimed. It has more clarity than any other single-cuts we had to hand, and a little tone roll-off on the bridge pickup just tames the beast a little.

There might be less power, but we still have a good snarl at the bridge as we begin to add in some gain. Again, that lack of lower midrange thickness works in its favour at the neck, resulting in a clarity where our Burstbucker 1 now almost sounds too thick.

We simply didn't have the range and quality of outboard gear back in the 70s that we have today. Pickup outputs can be easily increased with simple boosts so the Deluxe's mini humbuckers become simply a different 'colour', and the clear humbucking voice is hugely valid, particularly for the recording musician. We don't all want to wail away like Mr Moore – and, actually, the Deluxe not only has a little more funk to its voicing, it begins to blur the line between those perhaps hackneyed Gibson and Fender contrasts, not least with both pickups engaged.

Yet experience suggests that on a big ol' chunk of Les Paul we should have an equally big voice – and that's exactly what we don't get. It's like putting a pair of humbuckers

It's leaner sounding than a PAF-style but smoother, less raw than a P-90 and without the hum

on a Strat: for some players, that mismatch can really reap rewards; for others, it's just wrong. If you like the feel of a Les Paul but don't enjoy its sometimes soupy thickness, try one of these.

Verdict

While this is far from a reissue of a Les Paul that ran for a 15-year period – and we're certainly not suggesting Gibson returns to those 'pancake' bodies, maple necks and volutes – it does give us that third pickup style after the P-90 and full-size humbucker. That's the appeal. And just like those other pickups, the mini-humbucker has its own style. It's leaner sounding than a PAF-style but smoother, less raw than a P-90 and without the hum. It's definitely a valid voice, not least at the neck, and although it might be perceived as somehow less 'rock' (although Who and Lizzy fans might disagree!), don't dismiss these minis in any way, especially if you like the Les Paul platform but just want a cleaner voice. It's a different flavour, pure and simple. **G**



theWishlist

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

Gretsch G6136T Limited Edition Falcon £3,379

CONTACT **Fender** WEB www.gretschguitars.com Words Dave Burrluck Photography Philip Barker

Part of a trio of 2021 limited-edition models that includes the G6119TG-62RW-LTD '62 Rosewood Tenny with Bigsby and the G6134T Penguin Koa with Bigsby, this Falcon doesn't disappoint with its metallic copper front contrasted by Sahara Metallic back, sides and neck. It just needs four wheels and a big ol' engine...

The Falcon, of course, first appeared as the top-of-the-line White Falcon back in 1955, the 'dream guitar' of influential player and Gretsch 'ideas man' Jimmy Webster, and it has earned its place in the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in the hands of a diverse number of players not least Stephen Stills, Neil Young, Brian Setzer and the Cult's Billy Duffy. And this Japanese-made hot-rod does nothing to diminish its heritage.

More pink-hued than the spec sheet suggests, the colours are quite coarse metallics immaculately applied. In the flesh the Copper colour of the top resembles a deep muted pink contrasted by the lighter pink Sahara. But this is certainly one pimped ride with its silver sparkle-edged binding around the body, fingerboard, headstock and even lining the large 'f' holes. The bright chrome arrow knobs get a red jewel and mother-of-pearl dot inlay, too.

Under the hood we get the 1959-style trestle bracing, which actually looks quite chunky through the f-holes, but adds some stability to the 406mm (16") wide maple laminate hollowbody that has a rim depth of 70mm. It's certainly a large proposition and despite a good measured weight of 3.9kg (8.58lb) it really does make a Les Paul feel like a ukulele. Yet the combination of the string-thru Bigsby, 'Rocking Bar' bridge, Grover Imperial locking tuners and a very well-cut bone nut means that tuning stability is excellent for anyone who dares to show this a live stage.

Yes, it's form over function but plug one of these in and you're instantly transported back to the brilliance and twang that originally put Gretsch on the map. Meanwhile, just switch off the slap-back echo and add some crunch for more dirt.

But, it's the TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity pickups that really are the icing on this celebratory cake here. They're made according to the inventor's personal notes and designs – and according to TV Jones, in his technical notes, Ray called what became known as the Filter'Tron, the 'Ful-Fidelity'. They are simply superb recreations of *that* sound. **B**

1. This two-tone colour style goes back to Gretsches of the mid-50s, using DuPont car colours – an idea that apparently came from their drum department

2. The 'Tone Pot' array features a master volume with treble bleed circuit and a No-Load tone master control – along with individual pickup volumes – to maximise the high-end response

3. Compared to the demure headstocks of Fender and Gibson, this style emulates the opulence of the original White Falcon



1



2



3

4. TV Jones says these unpotted Ray Butts Full-Fidelity humbuckers offer a "tighter bass response and slightly more top-end EQ than a TV Classic. Truly unique sparkle and dynamics are provided by the lower output and absence of wax"

5. The wooden Rocking Bar bridge base is pinned to the top and, as its name implies, as you move the Bigsby the bridge lightly rocks back and forwards

6. The drilled string bar means you just thread the strings through and there's no messing with anchor pins. If only all Bigsby's had this feature we'd have saved hours restringing our Gretsches over the years





Gas Supply

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

Charvel Guthrie Govan Signature MJ San Dimas £2,299

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

JARGON CRUNCHING

Single-coil simulation
"Guthrie's signature includes a 'single-coil simulator', engaged by a mini-toggle switch. But whatever you do, don't call it a coil-tap! Charvel Product Development Manager, Peter Wichers explains, "Guthrie expressed the desire for a single-coil 'type' sound without the hum, while maintaining similar levels to the humbucking positions. This is a unique sound that we were able to achieve with the help of our great engineering team"

That's a serious-looking instrument!

Indeed. Serious technical ability requires an instrument to match, and this Charvel is the latest signature model for one of the scariest players on the planet, Mr Guthrie Govan. This time it comes out of Charvel's Japanese facility, cutting the price of a Guthrie signature model by hundreds, while still offering the features we've come to know and love from GG's collaborations. But before we start throwing the 'affordable' word around, it's still a pro-level instrument with a far-from-cheap price tag.

Where does this sit with the US-made models?

Let's take a look next to the full-fat version. Basswood body? Tick. Caramelised maple neck? Present (sans flame). HSH pickup configuration with oodles of switching options? Yes, siree!

All the ingredients are here with only seemingly minor tweaks to the spec along the way, and production costs being kept down by its country of origin – which, if you're anything like us, you stopped being concerned about at least one pandemic ago...

What else does it have?

Starting at the top, you get Guthrie's preference of headstock shape: a licensed Fender Strat headstock. That's loaded with six Gotoh locking tuners, and there's a Graph Tech Tusq nut sitting just below. The compound radius fingerboard (304.8 to 406.4mm/12 to 16 inches) is maple, but it's been heated and dried, producing a caramelised look, before being fitted with 24 stainless-steel, extra-jumbo frets.

The front-facing dots are a classy creme, while the side markers are stage-friendly Luminlay dots, as are the volume and tone control knobs. That maple neck is of the Speed Neck variety, comes in a satin finish and is home to graphite truss rod, which is conveniently adjusted at the body end. Further down, you'll have spotted the Charvel locking vibrato unit, which has been recessed, just like Guthrie's other signature models.

Tell us about the finish...

While 80s shred was full of hot fluorescent finishes, you may have noticed contemporary face-melters have long been leaning toward a more discerning – some would

SWITCHING

An HSH pickup configuration plus five-way switch and mini-toggle means there are plenty of switching options to hand

FINISH

If you like to see the wood for the trees, you'll love the deep grain of the ash top, sprayed in a three-tone sunburst finish for additional class



LUMINLAY

The player-facing fretboard edge and both control knobs are decked out with glow-in-the-dark markers, so you'll always be able to find your way on stage



The signature model was made in Charvel's Japanese facility

say mature – palette. Guthrie is no exception, and both of his US models come to the party showing grain.

Here, that basswood body is topped with the unmistakable pattern of ash, which has been sprayed in a three-tone sunburst to give it a refined look and allow that grain to pop through.

You mentioned switching – what's the deal?

There's a pair of Charvel Custom humbuckers bookending a Charvel single coil, and five-way blade switch to jump between positions. There's also a full bridge humbucker; bridge inner coil and middle; bridge outer coil and neck outer coil; middle pickup and neck outer coil; and neck humbucker. Plus the mini-toggle that's present on Guthrie's other signature models. With this engaged, selecting positions 1 and 5 gives us a 'single-coil simulation'. The only option not present is engaging the middle-position single coil on its own.

Anything else?

It's currently right-handed only. Expect to see these filling racks around October, priced at £2,299. [SW]

PREMIUM FEATURES

It might be more affordable, but this guitar is by no means budget. Gotoh hardware, Charvel Custom pickups and a Graph Tech Tusq nut are all present



STRATOCASTER HEADSTOCK

Charvel has snuck next door and borrowed the headstock from big brother. It's caramelised to match the visuals of the fingerboard, too

ALSO OUT NOW...



IK MULTIMEDIA AMPLITUBE X-GEAR €299

IK Multimedia is the latest software company to expand its hardware offering in the form of its new AmpliTube X-Gear pedals. The four-pedal line-up of 'boutique' digital effects, ports the power of AmpliTube's algorithms into guitar-friendly pedals: X-Drive (distortion), X-Vibe (modulation), X-Space (reverb) and X-Time (delay). Each has 16 effect models, a range of real-time controllers and true/soft bypass options.

There's plenty of connectivity, too, with analogue outputs, MIDI and a socket for an external controller. The X-Drive also has a cab-simulated output, while the mod/time-based pedals include stereo ins/outs, plus flexible handling of trails when switching. All pedals feature a well-spec'd USB audio interface and license for AmpliTube 5 SE. Prices start at €299, but IK is offering pre-order bundles on two or more units, which are due to start shipping in this month. www.ikmultimedia.com



BOSS EURUS GS-1 £749

Companies have been on a quest of late to offer more ways of making the instrument sound like everything but a guitar. Boss has joined the party with its first six-string electric guitar – and it's packed with synth technology. The announcement makes total sense, given parent company Roland's pedigree in creating guitar-synth products.

The GS-1 features an alder body, satin C-shape maple neck and 24-fret Indian rosewood fretboard (304.8 to 406.4mm/12 to 16 inches compound radius). The pickups are a pair of Euror humbuckers. The GS-1 is also fitted with a polyphonic synth engine, giving you analogue synth sounds with six assignable presets available from the guitar.

Thanks to the Synth Control knob, you can modify the sounds in real-time. Bluetooth functionality connects you to the Boss iOS or Android editor and also lets you hook up to Boss's new EV-1-WL MIDI expression pedal. Finally, you get two outputs (one 'traditional', one for the synth sounds). The Euror should start shipping in autumn.

www.boss.info/uk

The Players

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

1



1. Strum As You Are

Fender Jag-Stang returns as a Mexican-made model

To commemorate the 30th anniversary of *Nevermind*, Fender has reissued the Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang model, which the Nirvana singer helped design before his death in 1994. The guitar's body combines features from Cobain's favoured Jaguar and Mustang with a 24-inch short-scale body and slider switches for phase options on the single-coil and humbucker pickups. It retails at £1,249 and will be available in October.

2. Roxy Music

All aboard for new PRS John Mayer Silver Sky finish

The Roxy Pink guitar as played by John Mayer in his video for *Last Train Home*, from new album *Sob Rock*, is now available to buy as a production finish with a rosewood fretboard. Mayer gifted early models to musician Tomo Fujita, as well as K-Pop star Rosé. The latter had covered Mayer's song *Slow Dancing In A Burning Room* on the Korean variety show *Sea Of Hope*.

3. Wood Cutting

Ronnie Wood recording with The Faces and Stones

According to guitarist Ronnie Wood, The Faces are recording their first new music in more than 40 years. The musician has also been working with Rolling Stones bandmate Mick Jagger.

"I saw Mick [Jagger] here last week and Rod [Stewart] and Kenney [Jones] were here yesterday," Wood told *The Times*. "Me and Mick have done nine new tracks for the [40th anniversary] re-release of *Tattoo You*. And me, Rod and Kenney have been recording some new Faces music. I've had a front-row seat on some amazing rock 'n' roll projects these past couple of weeks."



3



4

2



4. Slide Rules

Derek Trucks tackles the slide genesis of Clapton and Allman

The Tedeschi Trucks Band recently released *Layla Revisited (Live at LOCKN')* – their performance of Derek And The Dominos' classic 1970 album in its entirety. And it's given guitarist Derek Trucks a unique insight into the different slide approaches of Eric Clapton and the late, great Duane Allman. "I love hearing the Strat with the slide," he told *MusicRadar* in reference to Clapton on the original record. "I just love hearing that approach. It's a little more tucked in, whereas Duane's just sounded like it could totally flame out or go off the rails at any time. It was so wide open with the way he played, whereas Eric was very precise, which is cool to hear. But I love the sound of his slide playing."

5. Power Trio

Iommi, Cantrell and Rateliff Gibson signatures arrive

Three new Gibson signature models will arrive this month: a Custom Shop recreation of Jerry Cantrell's 'Wino' Les Paul, the Gibson USA Tony Iommi SG Special, and a Nathaniel Rateliff LG-2 Western Acoustic in Vintage Sunburst. Cantrell's 'Wino' is a recreation of his early 90s Les Paul Custom made for him by Gibson.



5

PHOTO BY DAVE VANN



CAPTURE » ENHANCE » CONNECT

The Voiceprint DI[®], paired with our AcousticLive[™] app, is a new type of impulse response system that uses your iPhone[®] to capture your guitar's one-of-a-kind voice. In just a few simple steps and by leveraging the power of the phone, a Voiceprint is created, transforming your pickup into the most authentic sound we have engineered in our 40+ years.

Learn more at lrbaggs.com/voiceprint

L.R. Baggs





Albums

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

John Mayer goes back to the 80s for his latest album



John Mayer

Sob Rock

Columbia

9/10



Stellar songwriter and guitarist releases a taste of the 80s for this concept album

It's the 1980s (and a little bit of 90s added in for good measure) that sets the theme for this, John Mayer's first release since 2017's *The Search For Everything*.

The track that opens the album, *Last Train Home* gives the 80s game away immediately as it conjures up the sounds of Clapton's *August* and *Journeyman* albums from the Soldano-infused guitar tones, gated drums and Greg Phillinganes' (Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder) yesteryear synth sounds. It's an album about love gone bad that Mayer insists is, "Sweet but never sappy... but never to the point where it gets cloying and syrupy. I like to teeter on that line."

As you might expect from a multiple-Grammy winner, the album's production is slickness personified, the songs hanging around in your head hours after listening. One parlour game we played during our first listen was to trace each song's sonic ancestry – we've already mentioned Clapton, but check out *Wild Blue*'s tip of the hat to Mark Knopfler in the guitar solo. While we're on the subject of the guitar playing, it's hard to tell how far Mayer's adoption of the PRS Silver Sky has changed his style, which is poised and eloquent as ever. Crystal-clear Strat-alike tones are the order of the day – and they're in the hands of a modern master. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Shot In The Dark*

For fans of: Clapton, Don Henley, Dire Straits

The Beach Boys

Feel Flows (The Sunflower & Surf's Up Sessions; 1969-1971)

Capitol

10/10



More good vibrations from 60s surf-rock sensations

For many, The Beach Boys are best remembered for two periods; the early surf-based songs (*Surfer Girl*, *Surfing USA*) and the 1966 album, *Pet Sounds*, which featured *Good Vibrations*. While these are important for the band's legacy, there is another period that is arguably as fruitful, with 1970's *Sunflower* and 1971's *Surf's Up* albums. The version here features five CDs and is a wealth of vibrant music. While there are too many songs to reference, highlights include Carl Wilson's vocals on *This Whole World* and *Our Sweet Love*, Bruce Johnston's *Tears In The Morning* and Dennis Wilson on his gorgeous *Forever*. For *Surf's Up*, Bruce is exquisite on *Disney Girls*, Carl on the trippily sweet *Feel Flows*, Brian on the floaty 'Til I Die and he and Carl on *Surf's Up*. As far as iconic everlasting commercial music is concerned, this release illuminates why The Beach Boys represent the absolute zenith of great pop music. An absolute sonic joy. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Surf's Up*

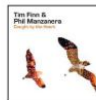
For fans of: The Beatles, The Everly Brothers

Tim Finn & Phil Manzanera

Caught By The Heart

Expression Records

8/10



Dreamlike Latin trip from Roxy's man

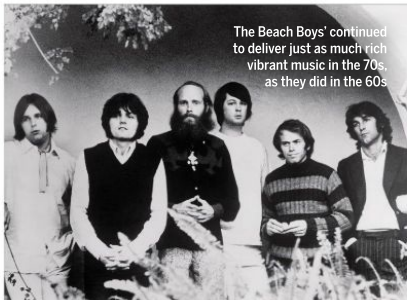
Phil Manzanera's impeccable melodic hooks made Roxy Music effortlessly danceable – but his latest solo album, with Tim Finn, formerly of Split Enz, is a richer, multi-layered affair that rewards repeat listening. There's a strong thread of Latin music throughout, from the sway and syncopation of opener *Mambo, Salsa, Guaguanco* to the almost literary melancholy of *La Ruleta De La Fortuna*. But, thanks to Finn's input there are further layers to unwrap. From the ecological warning of *The Cry Of The Earth* to the world music fantasia of *Galleon Of Stars*, the album is rich with dreamlike reflections on the state of the world. Manzanera's guitar work is never too much, never too little, impeccably tasteful. Out Aug 27, it's an album to lose yourself in on late-summer nights. **[JD]**

Standout track: *La Ruleta De La Fortuna*

For fans of: Roxy Music, Radio Tarifa, Thomas Dolby

The Lineup

PHOTO BY ICONIC ARTISTS GROUP LLC BROTHER RECORDS INC



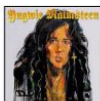
The Beach Boys' continued to deliver just as much rich vibrant music in the 70s, as they did in the 60s

Yngwie Malmsteen

Parabellum

Music Theories Recordings

8/10



The legend of shred prepares for war...

This, Malmsteen's 21st solo studio album, provides exactly what fans want – arresting hard-rock songs with plenty of riffs and blazing solos. Opener,

Wolves At The Door rips out of the gates with the musician's trademark Strat tone, arpeggio flurries and harmonic minor runs. *Presto Vivace in C# Minor* is an instrumental that evokes Paganini-style minor scalar runs and appealing sequential phrases, with band rhythms reminiscent of his iconic *Black Star* instrumental.

Relentless Fury features rock's trademark gallop rhythm. Yngwie's rousing vocals and a blazingly dynamic solo where he effortlessly switches between neck and bridge pickups for tonal contrast (a stylistic trademark). This guitar titan's fretting fury remains undiminished. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Relentless Fury*

For fans of: Racer X, Paul Gilbert

START ME UP

Will McNicol Miniatures

willmcnicol.co.uk

8/10



Deft acoustic mastery

This album began to take shape when award-winning acoustic guitarist Will became interested in short-form composition – musical snapshots with tales to tell. "I naively thought these would be easier to record as they're only short," he tells us. "Oh, how wrong I was. If anything, they ended up being more challenging!"

Will acted as composer, player, recording engineer and producer, and the attention to detail and quality here shows his efforts were thoroughly worthwhile. There are 13 solo compositions, plus three collaborations. The opener, *Cessna*, soundtracks an "exhilarating flight over the New Hampshire countryside," and *Two Days In November* recollects how Covid prevented Will from being present at the birth of his son. A beautiful collection. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Arthur's Lullaby*

For fans of: Clive Carroll, John Renbourn



“

THE PERFORMANCE 3 IS THE BEST GUITAR CAPO MONEY CAN BUY

MUSICRADAR, ROB LAING, OCTOBER 2019

The Capo Company



www.G7th.com

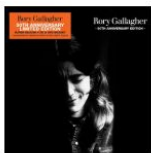


Tones Behind The Tracks

With Rory Gallagher's debut solo record hitting its 50th anniversary, bassist **Gerry McAvoy** recalls the sessions behind the historic album...

Artist: Rory Gallagher

Album: Rory Gallagher (1971)



How did you get the call to play on Rory's first solo album?

"I was in a band called Deep Joy and we'd opened for Taste [Rory's earlier band] at a lot of their shows in England and also Europe. Taste broke up in the October of 1970, actually in Belfast – and we headed back there, too. Deep Joy had kind of been on a starvation diet when we were living in London – you just couldn't keep on going, waiting for the big break that never actually came. So we split up ourselves on New Year's Eve 1970, going into 1971. The drummer with Deep Joy at the time was Wilgar Campbell, who went on to become the drummer in Rory's band as well.

"So I was back in Belfast in January '71 when I got a phone call. I thought it was Wilgar at first, because in those days you could tell as soon as you lifted up the phone if it was a long-distance call [from London]. But it was Rory and he said, 'Oh, hello, Gerry, how are you doing?' and we sort of exchanged some niceties. He said that Wilgar had given him my telephone number, hope I didn't mind – of course not – and then at the end of the conversation, he just said, 'Would you fancy coming to London to have a bit of a jam', and I said, 'Well, great'. So an airline ticket arrived in the post and I jumped on the plane.

"Rory's brother, Dónal, picked me up at Heathrow Airport and we headed down to Fulham Palace Road in West London to a little rehearsal room. Rory was already in there – AC30, Rangemaster and Stratocaster, ready to go. Wilgar was there with the drums set up and they had a little bass rig for me. So, you know, there were a few pleasantries and then we started playing together – and it was fantastic.

"It was a great feeling for me because I was a fan of both Taste Mk1 and Mk2 [the two lineups of Taste]. So to actually stand there at 19 years of age playing with Rory... and that was just the beginning."

What was your first impression of the material Rory put on the solo album, as compared to Taste?

"I think he was experimenting with everything with the folk side because he loved folk, he loved jazz, he loved blues... And there were some little pop elements that would creep in there as well. So I think he was sort of testing the water with that first album, to see what direction he would go in.

"We rehearsed for about four or five days prior to recording the album. We rehearsed most of the songs – in fact, the only song we didn't rehearse was *Laundromat*. Rory came in one day and said, 'Let's have a go at this...' He didn't explain what we would be playing but, because I played guitar before I played bass, I could read the chords [his hand was forming] and I knew what he was playing. Even in rehearsals he didn't say, 'This song is in the key of E' or 'This song is called...' He would just start playing and we'd just follow along. So that's how *Laundromat* started – he just opened up with a riff. I heard the riff and it floored me because I thought, 'Wow, what a riff, so unusual!'"

Were all the tracks recorded as live performances with no overdubs?

"It was completely live. All Rory's heroes, like Muddy Waters, probably recorded with two mics in Chicago – and everybody wanted to have that live performance feel. If there were any overdubs, it was maybe the odd rhythm guitar track or whatever, or a tambourine that would happen afterwards. But basically, the vocals would be put down live. What he was after was a great performance: in his mind's eye that's what created a great song.



Gerry McAvoy today, still busy as ever and delivering thunderous low-end chops



Photo by Bernie Westcott

"A lot of the other bands wouldn't have done it that way, you know? I mean, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin would have done it in a completely different way, maybe, and overdubbed the solos. But Rory wanted it to be as live as possible, which sometimes can be detrimental, sonically. But that's what Rory wanted and that's the way it was.

"When we came to record *Sinner Boy* on the album sessions it was done live, like the rest. So the intro is just Rory and the Telecaster. And it was [a case of guessing] 'When do I come in, when do I come in...' and then Rory kind of gave us a wink and a nod and the drums came in and my bass came in and off we went."

What guitar and bass gear did you use on the album?

"I had a Strampf amplifier, a German-made amp made by an old friend of ours called Peter Struven, and it was a 100-watt head and a 4x12. No pedals – that was a no-no, especially for a bass player then [laughs]. In the early days Rory only had the Rangemaster, the little treble booster, and the AC30. But on that session he did use a little Fender Champ, funnily enough. In fact *Laundromat* was recorded with the Fender Champ – though it sounds like a 100-watt Marshall, it's ridiculous. But then Eddie Offord was a fantastic engineer. So he could cope with all that, you know?"

Was it all first- or second-take recordings?

"No, there were a few takes. I mean, I know there were quite a few takes of *Laundromat*, for example, because we never rehearsed it. And the take that Rory actually picked, there's a bass mistake in it and it plagued me for the rest of my life [laughs].

"But the performance came first, performance always came first... You'd do four or five takes generally. It was exciting – because you're on the

edge and that creates the excitement because you're not 100 per cent certain of which way it's going to go, where you're going to go. Where's Rory going to go? Will we be able to follow it? So it did create that excitement."

How did working with Wilgar compare to the sound of Rory's subsequent drummer Rod De'Ath?

"Wilgar was a big jazz fan. So he brought that sort of big band thing to the table. I mean, Rod was the most un-drummer drummer ever, but he was so exciting. But Wilgar had his own excitement, you know. All the guys who came into Rory's band over the years gave something different."

"Rory was experimenting with everything – he loved folk, he loved jazz, he loved blues... And pop elements would creep in there as well"

Rory had been through the mill a bit with the breakup of Taste. What was the vibe while you were cutting his debut solo album?

"It was like the weight was lifted off Rory's shoulders. I mean, he smiled a lot. He was really enjoying it. I think he was enjoying being his own man, maybe being in command a little bit, you know? And enjoying the fact that he still had a record deal and he was making his own album." [GM]



The 50th Anniversary Box Set of Rory Gallagher's eponymous 1971 debut album will be released by UMC on September 3rd. For more info visit: www.rorygallagher.com



All together now

This issue **Adam Goldsmith** gets together with like-minds for some top-quality studio time

From left to right: Darren Williams, engineer; Ralph Salmins, drums; Jeff Leach, keys; Nick Shirm, writer; Rob Eckland (seated), keys, MD and writer; Steve Pearce, bass; Tommy Emmerton, guitar; Adam Goldsmith, guitar

It's increasingly rare that sessions happen where the whole rhythm section are in a top-quality studio together, recording original music with enough time to be creative and experimental with the material in question. I was lucky enough to experience this over the past few days, with an EP (remember those?) of music written by Rob Eckland. I've mostly worked for Rob in more commercial capacities, the most recent example being the ITV house band for Alan Carr, but happily he's decided to release some tracks of his own.

We went into north London's Livingston Studio 1 for two days to record five tracks. The lineup comprised Ralph Salmins on drums, Steve Pearce on bass, Jeff Leach on keys, Tommy Emmerton and myself on guitars, and Rob playing piano. The combined CVs of these musicians would take up several of these columns so I won't bother attempting to list them here...



"Playing in a studio environment is quite an art, and depends on not just the musicianship, but also a degree of personal chemistry"

Solo, below left, and with fellow guitarist Tommy Emmerton, below right: "A big part of playing with other guitar players in the studio is being able to remove your ego," Adam says

We were working to very well-produced demos that already featured the vocals. This made it easier to construct guitar parts in order to make more musical sense and complement the melody and song in general. The project had a kind of David Foster 80s/90s, pop/gospel kind of feel, so Tommy and I got to unleash the out-of-phase, chorus-y sounds much beloved of guitar players from that era, such as David Williams, Paul Jackson Jr and Michael Landau.

Playing with another guitar player in a studio environment is quite an art, and depends on not just the musicianship and guitar playing of all involved, but also a degree of personal chemistry, especially if it's a 'creative' project rather than two people playing specifically written parts that aren't open to much interpretation.

I've known Tommy for around twenty years or so but we haven't done a gig together in quite a few years. Fortunately for both of us, we seemed to have a pretty instant musical connection, and the unspoken musical ideas flowed freely without the need for too much discussion. A big part of playing with other guitar players in the studio is being able to remove your ego, and play however much or little the song requires, and not worry about how much you're featured.

One of my favourite quotes regarding recording guitars is from Larry Carlton – and, I may be paraphrasing a touch – but it's that one needs to 'think like a producer rather than a guitar player'. For example, if the other guitar player is playing a funky neck-pickup rhythm part made of mostly sixteenth notes, it might be all that is required is a repeated picky couple of notes in the out-of-phase position, every couple of bars, as a kind of answering phrase.

The guitars you use can also be complementary (or not, depending on the circumstances). For example conventional wisdom would suggest one guitar player might use a humbucker-equipped guitar, and the other single coils, but for a good percentage of this project we found ourselves both using Strat-style guitars. I found that using my Boss EQ pedal, or perhaps a mid-focused pedal such as a Tube Screamer or Klon-style overdrive, can make enough of a difference that two Strats can occupy quite different sonic space on the same track comfortably, especially when combined with judicious pickup choice. **G**





Lost & Found

Neville Marten shares the tales of three lost guitars miraculously returned by generous citizens who respected the musician's plight

Before the 2008 crash destroyed almost anything entrepreneur-ish, *Guitar Techniques'* Jason Sidwell and I used to run weekend guitar breaks. We'd get guys like Guthrie, Dave Kilminster, Phil Hilborne and co to come along and give their slant on improving the playing of our students. It was fun and we shared many a lightbulb moment with our cohorts.

One weekend, Jason and I were in the bar of our hotel waiting for Dave Kilminster, our co-tutor for the weekend, to arrive. Just after 11pm Dave rushed in, looking flustered. 'I've left my effing Tele at a gas station halfway between here and home,' he exclaimed, 'And need to drive back and see if it's still there...' It was his much beloved black '72.

Dave had stopped for fuel, opened the boot to locate a bag with his credit cards, and, in the process, removed his Tele's gigbag, leaning it against one of the pumps. After filling up, he simply drove off and raced down to Bath, where the event was to be held.

Miraculously, some honest soul had caught the whole sorry scene and handed the bag and its precious contents to the cashier. It was still there when Dave arrived almost two hours later. We had a great weekend, and it was during those two days that Dave learned he'd bagged the Roger Waters gig. Karma or what?

It's Comeback Time

Back in the 80s, I owned a 1967 ES-335 that had been my main instrument since I acquired it in 1971. I was in a pop band that had several gigs a week, helping to fund several Gibsons and Fenders that I would swap around at will. One day, I thought I'd pull out 'Old Red', and it was nowhere to be found. Not in the van, not under my bed, nowhere. I racked my brain trying to think what gigs we'd done, and where I might have left it, or who'd borrowed and not returned it. Nothing!

For years it was gone, sucked into that black hole where all the lost guitars go. Then, one day Marty Wilde's drummer, a guy I vaguely knew (this was before I joined the band) called me to ask, 'Do you remember the serial number of your 335?' As it happened I did, and reeled it off from memory. 'Well, I'm holding it right here,' he revealed.

It turns out we'd done an afternoon gig that wasn't on our list. I'd left it at the venue and they'd put it in a cupboard, presuming the idiot who'd left it would return and pick it up. Except the idiot didn't. Then one day the council informed the hall that they were inspecting the place, and could they please make sure everything was ship-shape. On emptying the cupboard they found this dusty old case and said, 'Does anyone play guitar?' And gave it to a young lady who said she'd like to try. The banjo-like tones of an unamplified semi were hardly inspiring to a neophyte plucker so, as she happened

to know someone who knew the drummer, my ES-335 made its long and winding way home.

Same band, a few years later. 'I think I'll use the Les Paul tonight,' I said to the singer who kept the van. 'It's not in there,' he advised me. 'Surely it is...' I cried. 'Nope!' he confirmed. This time I remembered: our last gig had been at a Norwich hotel. This was Thursday and the gig was last Saturday.

"The banjo-like tones of an unamplified semi weren't inspiring to a neophyte plucker, so my ES-335 made its long and winding way back home"

In a panic I called them. That morning was 'bin day' at the hotel, and when the dustmen turned up to remove the trash they noticed a guitar case standing forlorn against a wall. These kind and honest guys informed the hotel and saved the guitar, a Deluxe converted to a Standard.

Moral of the story? Take care of your precious guitars. If not, be sure they're found by the scrupulous and generous types who secured Dave's Tele and my two Gibsons. If you have any great lost-and-found stories that you'd like to share with us, do let us know. And I'll see you next month. **B**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Simply Red

What? Epiphone Inspired By Gibson ES-335

Where seen? PMOnline.co.uk

Price? £488

If my ES-335 story has you hankering after something of a semi-solid nature, look no further than this lovely ES-335 from Epiphone. We've been bowled over by the build and tone of Epi instruments recently, and this Cherry Red beauty, with the much prettier '60s Kalamazoo-style Epiphone headstock, is a very classy addition to the line. With a matched pair of Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, rounded 'C' profile neck and laminated maple body with solid centre block, it's a real steal for under £500. No matter what style you play, an ES-335 will seldom disappoint, so what are you waiting for? And Cherry Red surely is the colour!

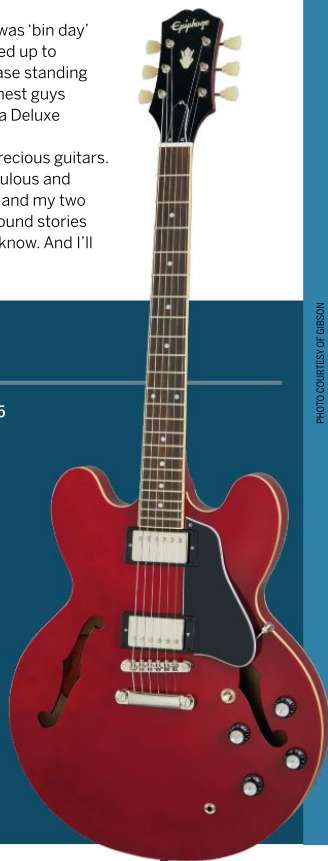


PHOTO COURTESY OF GIBSON



Gypsy Queen

Can **Alex Bishop** rise to the challenge of bringing a road-worn jazz guitar back to its former glory?

As any luthier will tell you, taking on repair work can provide quite an education in guitar building. Recently, a guitar came in through the door that is precisely the kind I relish: an instrument in which there is scope for many small improvements, but which should hopefully add up to quite a lot.

The guitar is a Gypsy-jazz style guitar, instantly bringing to mind vibrant campfire jazz jams associated with the Gypsy-infused music of Django Reinhardt. Deep grooves scar nearly every single fret along the fingerboard, showing all the signs of having enjoyed many blistering arpeggio runs and non-stop *la pompe*

“Deep grooves scar nearly every single fret along the fingerboard, showing all the signs of having enjoyed many blistering arpeggio runs”

rhythm playing for the last decade at least. I play a few minor 6th chords to see if some of that Manouche-infused mojo might rub off on me...

Back to the workshop and a brief appraisal reveals the strings are sitting higher above the frets on the treble side of the guitar than the bass side. The reverse is usually true, and, on closer inspection, it appears the floating archtop-style bridge has been put on back-to-front. This provides an easy fix that would be a good start to getting this guitar playing right, but some

TIP OF THE MONTH

Essential Tool Checklist

CROWNING FILE:

A lutherie-specific file with a concave groove along its edge, essential for profiling the tops of flat frets

MINIATURE CABINET

SCRAPER: A small piece of hardened steel with a burred edge, great for preparing wood surfaces in hard-to-reach areas

further investigation is necessary to get things playing perfectly. Once the old corroded strings are off, the poor condition of the fingerboard becomes apparent. Fortunately, I'm mostly looking at a build-up of dirt and grime so, armed with a pair of tough vinyl gloves, it's time to take out my miniature cabinet scraper and pare away the many years' worth of unidentifiable gloop.

A common way to restore the playability of a well-used guitar is to either refret it completely, or level the frets with a file. I opt for the latter, given that the wear to the frets is not too extreme in any one spot. Once complete, every fret is 'crowned' to ensure the string only sits on a single point at every location. Failure to do this results in a poor tone, as well as noticeably spoiling intonation as you fret notes. The filed surface of each fret has to be finely abraded to a mirror finish to ensure buttery-smooth playability. I daresay I'm now looking at a fingerboard that looks as new as the day it was made.

I restrung the guitar with a set of Gypsy-jazz 0.011 to 0.045s. Unlike the bronze acoustic strings with which most of us are more familiar, these silver-plated copper-wound strings are essential for applying the correct amount of tension to the longer scale length of the Gypsy-jazz style guitars, as well as achieving the best sound. Now that I'm working with the right strings and a corrected fingerboard, it's important to tweak the truss rod to (almost) straighten out the neck once everything is under tension.

Next, some subtle alterations are made at the bridge end and I'm ready to put the guitar through its paces one more time. I check every note sounds just right, ensuring the feel of the neck is balanced and the action is in the 'sweet spot' – not too high, not too low.

I then move the fret dots from the US-standard 9th fret to the 10th fret, as per the original 1940s Selmer guitars. This is tricky woodwork, but when it comes to hiding the repair, thankfully the ebony is forgiving. The finishing touch is a new handmade pair of quirky moustache ends, and stepping back it's hard not to feel as though this battle-hardened axe is smiling back at me in appreciation. **G**

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP



Alex's exemplary work on this Gypsy-style guitar included moving the fret dots and making the moustache ends

CreamT Pickups

What Billy says about his new pickups. 100% electronic reproductions of the pickups found in his famous '59 burst known as "Pearly Gates"

'One of the fiercest guitar tones in classic blues and rock 'n roll is here!.

From pure and simple warmth to the punch of vintage rawness, they are sure to satisfy. And now you can enjoy!' - BILLY F GIBBONS

9/10

Editors Choice
Guitarist
magazine

Guitarist
READERS

10% OFF

PROMO CODE: BFG10

CREAMPICKUPSDIRECT.COM

£30
per month

the pedal club

500+
PEDALS!

THE UK'S ONLY EFFECTS
PEDAL RENTAL SERVICE



RENT IT



PLAY IT



RETURN FOR MORE

WWW.THEPEDALCLUB.CO.UK



Diminished 7th chords

Richard Barrett explores the dissonant nature of the diminished 7th chord and shows how it can fit into a guitarist's musical vocabulary

Not as commonly seen 'in the field' as your more regularly featured 7ths, 9ths and 11ths and so on, the diminished 7th chord (Root-♭3-♭5-♭7: yes, that's double ♭7!) is still an essential part of diatonic harmony – or the chord scale, if you prefer. We have a set structure for the major scale – tone-tone-semitone-tone-tone-semitone (TTTSTS, for short) – there is a structure to how this is arranged in diatonic/chordal harmony: major-minor-minor-major-minor-minor-diminished (or m7-5)-major.

This is what Western ears are used to hearing and find harmonious. If you travel to India or the Middle East, you will find different structures and conventions at play. Cue a clumsy segue here into mentioning George Harrison, who did much to popularise Indian music in the late 60s. Coincidentally, he also loved using diminished chords in songs such as *Here Comes The Moon* (that's right, not the sun), *Got My Mind Set On You* and *My Sweet Lord*. The Dim7 chord is most often found linking chords chromatically, for example: C# dim7 Dm7 D# dim7 Em7. As with all chords and harmony, you are ultimately the boss, but hopefully this info will help you make good use of these often misunderstood chords! 🎸

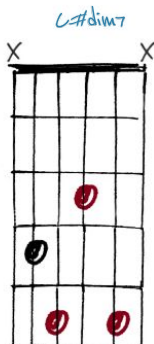


PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Right: George Harrison was influenced greatly by music from India, which uses different harmonic structures to the West

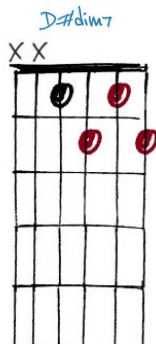
Example 1

Arranged to have the root note on the fifth string, this C#dim7 chord is what is known as an 'inside chord' because it doesn't use either E string. While it is possible to stack minor 3rds (for example, C E♭ G B♭ CE♭ and so on) to make a diminished chord on the piano, us guitarists tend to grab whatever notes we can! This stacks up as C# GB♭ E, or Root:5#7:3rd.



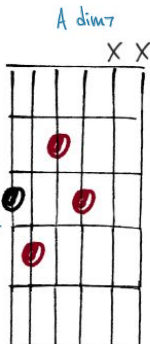
Example 2

This D#dim7 is the first diminished chord shape most guitarists learn. Like Example 1, it stacks up as Root:5#7:3rd. You could visualise this as a D7 chord with the root raised by a semitone, which helps some people understand what is going on without the 'double flat' thing being a distraction. Try resolving this to an F#maj for a gospel/soul vibe.



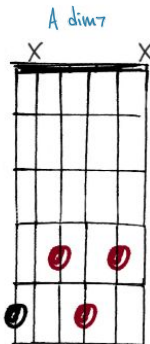
Example 3

This Adim7 has a much darker sound due to being played on the lower strings. It follows the same stacking of notes as the other examples but gives an alternative shape, which can be helpful in a musical context. This could resolve to an A major chord, similar to Michael Jackson's *She's Out Of My Life*, or change to B♭ for a more traditional VII-I progression.



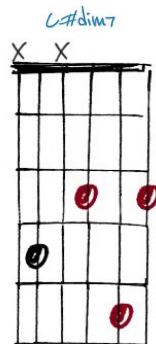
Example 4

Here is another version of the Adim7 with a more open sound due to a slightly different 'stacking' of notes: A G♭ CE♭, or Root:7:3rd:5. This resolves nicely to E♭ (especially with a B♭ root/3rd on the bottom) Take extra care to mute the fifth and first strings and this is a useful, movable version of the dim7.



Example 5

This C#dim7 stacks up as: C# B♭ E G, or Root:7:3rd:5. Again, watch the muting – you don't want to hear the sixth or fourth strings to keep this as a movable (or in most cases, usable!) chord. This resolves nicely to G (particularly over a D bass note) or a D chord, perhaps a B, if you're looking for a serious cadence!



GOOD TO GO

WHENEVER • WHEREVER

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.



GORE, Together, improving life, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, OPTIWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2009-2021 W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.

Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

SETTING THE TONE



Guitarist Eric Johnson is renowned for his ultra-fastidious approach to tone. If it inspires you, why not?

I recently learned that I am interested in tone! I know the sounds I like: the high-gain sound of humbuckers through a distortion pedal or dirty channel of a Mesa, the in-between quack of positions 2 and 4 on a Strat, or the sound of certain players or guitars. My taste in sound probably hasn't changed that much, but it's only in recent times that I've become more sensitive to the nuances of tone, and this has really fuelled a new pleasure in playing guitar.

It's not just about audible pleasure, my new awareness impacts my playing, making me more mindful of picking dynamics, use of volume and tone

controls, opting for lower gain settings on my drive pedal or amp in order to discover how picking a certain way can shift the response from clean to driven. I know that none of this is new, most readers may be shaking their heads at my late arrival to the party, but it's really opened up my guitar playing to new possibilities and new enjoyment.

There's something about tone, it's a little bit magical and can take you off into a new world.

Matt Jones, via email

Thanks Matt, and congratulations on furthering your journey into guitar. Taking care of tone is not about pretentious 'cork sniffing' as some cynics may think. The end goal is, ultimately, better music. If you create a good feedback loop between the sound coming out of your amp, your ears and your hands, you'll play better – relishing every note, coaxing out all that natural expressiveness.

Just as we may mindlessly chew down a tasteless sandwich, but take our time to savour a beautiful meal, good tone wakes up our musical hunger and our desire to make each note count. While most of us have had to put up with dodgy tone during a gig at one time or another, it's not what any player really enjoys. And if you're not enjoying it, it's less likely the audience will either. To help you start your tone-quest right, we're awarding you this month's Star Letter prize of a fantastic Korg tuner.



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

STRING THEORY

Having played acoustic and electric guitar for around 55 years (and been a teacher for 20 years) I've been fortunate to have played nearly every make and model of guitar. What I've found, not surprisingly, as they are made of a variable material (wood), is that they are all different. And these differences translate into how they feel and respond to different string gauges.

Historically, I was never happy with how my guitars played so I set out to learn how to set them up and tweak them to my personal preferences. Because I was an industrial chemist for many years, taking a structured approach to action, neck relief, pickup heights, intonation, etc, was a straightforward process. That said, even though I'd set up two guitars to the same specifications, they were not quite the same with regard to string tension. Clearly, there was another factor at play and logically it was to do with the wood they were made from.

By way of an example, I have a Mexican Telecaster set up identically to a Japanese Telecaster. The Mexican Tele with 0.009-0.042 strings feels very slinky and easy to play, while the Japanese Tele (which has slightly lower frets) is hard work with nines. Swapping the Japanese Tele to 0.008-0.038s transforms it completely – easy to play and with great response. A totally different guitar. A second example is a 2011 Gibson SG Junior I have. With 0.010-0.046 strings on, this guitar has beautiful sustain and resonance, but with nines it's lifeless by comparison.

So, from experience, I would say that as a guitarist you need to consider what's the optimum string gauge for your particular guitar. The balancing point is that you also have to consider what is the optimum string gauge for you.

Colin Berrido, via email

Thanks for those insights, Colin. They certainly chime with our experience. We once had an office Strat that felt a bit stiff and unyielding with a standard set of 0.010-0.046 strings on it. A set of Curt Mangan 0.009.5-0.044 strings arrived in the office and we fitted them more out of curiosity than anything else. Voila, the guitar played like the proverbial butter and sounded fantastic. So even a relatively small change in string type can yield a big difference.

It's certainly something we'd recommend being your first port of call if you're not quite happy with the feel and indeed the tone of your guitar, before making more expensive mods. And, as you rightly say, you have to find out what suits your specific instrument. Rules of thumb will help you guess what might work, but you won't know until you try different gauges and sets, and crack the code for that particular guitar.



Read our review of the new Fender Noventa series over on page 16

NINETIES INFLUENCE

Seeing the new Fender Noventa series made me smile, because of something I did to a couple of my guitars a few years back. After years of using humbucker-equipped guitars, in 2016 I changed musical direction and moved to 50s rhythm and blues and country, where single coils seemed more appropriate.

I've always treated my guitars as tools of the trade, so I had a look at what I owned. My Honey Blonde Highway One Telecaster seemed the best bet and it wasn't doing much at that time. While the body of the Highway One matched the vintage vibe, its sounds didn't. Luckily another Tele had a bridge pickup that sounded just right. And that's when I became a fan of Alnico II pickups, because it was a Seymour Duncan Alnico II Pro. That was the bridge sorted.

None of my selection of neck pickups were doing it for me. Some research indicated that P-90 pickups were big back in the 50s and, after much deliberation, I chose the Seymour Duncan Antiquity P90 soapbar mainly because the description of it met what I was looking for, and it has Alnico II magnets.

Once that was done, and sounding good, I wanted a backup guitar to give me the same sounds, so this time I attacked a Blacktop Strat that wasn't going to get much use with its two humbuckers.

My 'Noventa' Tele has two pickups but the P-90 is in the wrong position. At least my Strat has one P-90 in the correct position at the neck, but then fails miserably on the bridge pickup. The thing is I'm getting exactly the sounds I want with the unexpected side effect of me being completely converted to a single-coil sound.

Peter Cooper, via email



Thanks Peter, the guitars look great. There's some truth in the saying there's nothing new under the sun – most things have been tried at one time or another – but P-90s seem to be enjoying a real resurgence. They're ballsy enough to really drive amps but that single-coil clarity is still there in good examples. Interviewing Mark Knopfler for this magazine a few years ago, he told us he's always felt "P-90s just have more tone in them, don't they?" and who are we to disagree?

MEASURE BY MEASURE

Over the years I have witnessed the resolution of many guitar-related misapprehensions. These have included learning the correct name for the 'wiggly thing' on some tailpieces, which we now know to be a 'vibrato' rather than a 'tremolo', and finally accepting that the first electric guitar was not made by Fender. One misapprehension that still persists though was repeated in both the PRS and the Epiphone reviews in issue 475, and it concerns scale length.

We know Fender often uses a slightly longer scale-length than Gibson, but both use other lengths too. So why continue to refer to 25.5-inch as a 'full Fender scale-length' or even as a 'Martin scale-length'? If anything, the latter is probably more appropriate. The Californian country players who took part in Fender's user acceptability testing in 1949 were familiar with Martin dreadnoughts and Gibson archtops. All had 25.5-inch scale-lengths (give or take a tenth of an inch) and so the same was chosen for the Broadcaster. Until then, scale length had been a function of body size. All Gibsons over 17-inch wide used 25.5-inch, the same with Strombergs and Epiphones and so on. Gretsch, ever looking for an advantage, used 26-inch. It was a matter of proportion. Larger bodies meant longer scale lengths and vice versa. Guitar makers used whichever scale length worked best and it was not a matter of identity. Isn't it time to drop the proprietary names for scale lengths?

Patrick Hopkinson, via email

Hi Patrick, we hear you – and thank you for adding important historical perspective to the question of why certain scale lengths were used on one model but not on others. The reason we often quote, say, a 25.5-inch scale with reference to Fender or Martin is just to provide easy, widely familiar reference points. Most of us have played a Strat or a D-28 at one time or another, while fewer players have played an L5 CES or a White Falcon. But we agree it's not helpful to always reduce things to caricatures of a more complex picture – so the point is well taken.



Reader Patrick Hopkinson wrote in to question using scale lengths in reference to Fender or Martin, when talking about models such as the 25.5-inch scale Gretsch White Falcon, shown above

Left: Peter Cooper's Teles get the pickup treatment

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

TROY REDFERN

A musical awakening courtesy of that famous sequence in *Back To The Future* led to a lifelong interest in country blues, National Resonators and gnarly, fuzzed-up slide guitar...

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtiss

As the world slowly opens up to live music once more, few people are more eager to get back on the road than Troy Redfern. With a new album, *The Fire Cosmic!*, in the shops and an autumn tour with fellow bluesers Robert Jon & The Wreck, plus some summer festival appearances under his belt, his enthusiasm is infectious.

Like so many musicians before him, Troy's interest in music started early. "When I was six years old I discovered Queen through one of my older brothers and kind of became obsessed," he tells us, as we settle down in the *Guitarist* studios. "I got *A Night At The Opera* and would listen to that incessantly, and then *Sheer Heart Attack*..."

But it was courtesy of Michael J Fox's guitar-wielding exploits in Spielberg's time-travelling fantasy, *Back To The Future*, and then later on an introduction to country blues by a friend, that really sealed the deal. "I would have been about nine, and I saw the famous *Johnny B. Goode* scene, and I thought, 'That's what I want to do.' Then a friend lent me a Son House album when I was about 13 and he was just completely different to anything I'd ever heard – just his raw, authentic approach. The thing is with those early guitar guys, you can hear that it's them coming through the strings."

When did you get your first guitar?

"After watching *Back To The Future*, I convinced my parents to get me a guitar, quite a cheap electric, an Encore I think it was, and I began teaching myself. I had maybe 10 lessons, but found it hard learning the way the guy was teaching me. So I decided to just learn from records. I think I was about 16 years old when someone showed me how to open tune a guitar and from then on I just carried on experimenting with that."

And then you began playing with local bands?

"Yes, I played in cover bands when I left school. I was in a band with a guy called Joe Gooch, who was in Ten Years After for a while. We grew up together and we had various bands, and then he moved on to do the Ten Years After thing. So I was writing and gigging original material, but it was a funny time – it was the 2000s and there wasn't much of a scene. We were quite rural where we were based, so we didn't have any contacts at all, sort of living in the middle of nowhere and visiting cities like Worcester or Cheltenham and knew no-one. You'd do your gig, you'd go home. We didn't even understand about hanging around and talking to people or anything, you know, just do the gig, go home. So it was quite tricky."

And then you eventually begin touring under your own name?

"Yes, I decided to go out under my own name and just get different players in to play with me. That's when things started moving a bit more because I'd go to blues festivals and meet people. When I first started The Troy Redfern Band it took four years to get onto the main stages at blues festivals. And, at the same time, I was meeting other people who were doing the same sort of thing and they were doing gigs in the Czech Republic and Russia. So they would put me on to the promoter so I could then get gigs out there. It's kind of worked like that, really. But it's taken a long, long time. I put it down to just being so far away from everything and knowing no-one. The internet's really helped that. You know, pre-internet days, forget about it! But at least now you can find out what's going on and what scenes are happening."



Troy Redfern: "I decided to go out under my own name – that's when things started moving a bit more"

1. Troy bought his National Style O last year and it has already seen some action at a few festivals during this summer
2. This elder statesman of the blues, Troy's National Triolian, looks pretty much how it sounds – old and gnarled but brimming with mojo
3. An early 60s Silvertone Jupiter that looks and sounds the part when it joins Troy on stage
4. This Fender Partscaster comprises a Deluxe body with a 12-inch radius neck and is a standard tuned backup for Troy's Les Paul

Was it Son House that began your interest in slide guitar?

"It would have been Son House, yeah. But RL Burnside, all the hill country guys, basically. Fred McDowell, especially. I just find that playing so honest, you know? On the other hand, I like John McLaughlin, John Scofield and Bill Frisell. I love that music, but there's just something raw and primal about that hill country style. Not so much Chicago, when it got slick, that doesn't really interest me as much because that's more like showband material. But those early guys, that's where it's at for me."

When did you get your Nationals?

"For years I had a Michael Messer Resonator because I researched and found that those are the ones to go for if you're not getting an actual National. His attention to detail of the originals was the way forward. So I stuck with that one for a long time. Then I bought a Duolian, from Vintage 'n' Rare [Guitars] in Bath. That was

amazing, that one. Unfortunately, I had to let that one go, which was an absolute killer, and then I got the Triolian about three years ago, and then the Style O last year. So those are fairly recent."

What's the current line-up of your band?

"It's a three-piece at the moment. I'd like to get another guitar in, really, just to fill space. Four-piece bands seem to have a lot more air and everyone can relax a bit more. With a three-piece, you have to fill a lot of sound with one guitar. On the album I had Darby Todd on drums, who's played with Robben Ford and those guys, and is an excellent drummer, and Dave Marks on bass, who has worked with Hans Zimmer. They're just very good guys. The plan is to go out and do some dates with those guys because they're such amazing players."

"I did a festival three weeks ago, and there was some issue. I had to give Darby a call to see if he could fill in and he got Lee Pomeroy to play bass, and that was amazing. He's such a lovely guy and such a monster player. There was no rehearsal, so it was the first gig in 18 months, no rehearsals, and I was playing with those guys. That was a by-the-seat-of-the-pants kind of tightrope-walking stuff. But they were absolutely on it."

How were you able to get Ron Thal (aka Bumblefoot) to play on your album?

"I was playing at a festival in Poland and they do a press conference and they get the Polish guitar magazine there and all that kind of stuff. I sat next to Ron at the press conference and he seemed like a lovely guy. He's got a super sharp sense of humour, but very self-deprecating and no ego at all. We got on really well and kind of hung out a bit in the day. Anthony Gomes was headlining that night and we were in the foyer in the evening time and Ron said to me, 'Are you coming to the jam?' And I was like, 'I've not heard anything about a jam, so probably not.' And he said, 'No, come.'"

"RL Burnside, all the hill country guys. Fred McDowell, especially. I just find that playing so honest, you know?"

"So we went to the side stage and it's a pretty well organised festival – there were a few thousand people surging in the theatre. He goes out and plays *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* because he was in Guns N' Roses, so I think that was a connection to that. They come off and Bumblefoot says to Anthony, 'One more, one more.' Anthony was done. He'd finished his encore. He was done, but he couldn't say no because it was Bumblefoot. So he said, 'Okay,' and Bumblefoot hands me his guitar and sends me out. He'd done that just to get me to play. A lovely, generous guy."

"When I was driving back, I thought, I'm not sure of the etiquette of that kind of thing, but shall I give him a shout and say, 'Do you fancy putting a solo on a track?'"



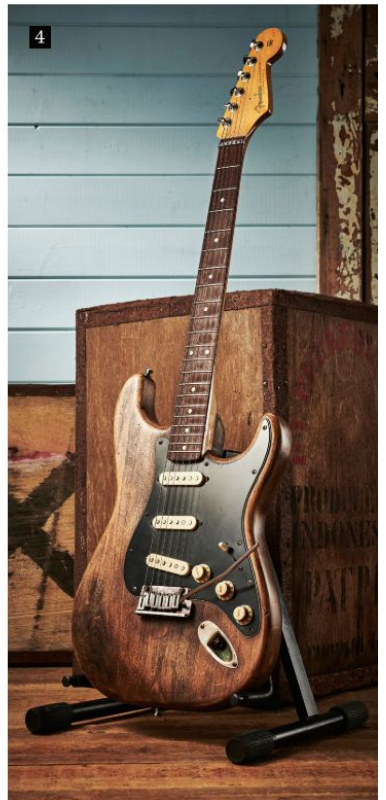
2



3



4





5



6

5. A National Triolian, a 1964 Vox AC30 and an array of pedals form part of Troy's touring gear – although his Peavey Classic 50 also shares the stage with him on occasion

6. Troy is taking to the stage later this year when he goes out on tour with brothers in blues, Robert Jon & The Wreck

So I messaged him and he said, 'Yeah, just send me the track and I'm happy to do that.' I sent it over and within a day, two days tops, he sent me an absolutely crazy solo, amazing and really creative, especially in that genre."

What kind of rig do you use when you play live?

"Generally, I take out my Peavey Classic 50, which has been all around Europe. The 30s are quite well known and respected; not so many people know about the 50s. But, to me, they're just a great workhorse especially just using the clean channel. It's a great platform for pedals.

"Guitar wise, I take out six or seven because I've written so many different songs in different tunings. You'll have something in open E and something in low C suspended, so you can't tune a guitar between songs. I'll take out the National Triolian; that's the one that comes out with me. I'll be touring with that later in the year because pretty much everything's written on that one.

"To me, the Peavey Classic 50s are great workhorses, especially just using the clean channel. It's a great platform for pedals"

"I'll take out my Silvertone Jupiter. The last couple of albums I've written most of the stuff on that, so that's an important one. I've got a Les Paul Historic that I take out for standard [tuning], and as a backup I have a Strat that is a Partscaster – a Deluxe body and a 12-inch radius neck.

"Two overdrives: I use an '88 ProCo Rat for a basic drive, quite light; I don't get it too crunchy. And then on top of that for boost I use a Hermida Distortion, and that's got that kind of classic tone. It's like a Zendrive but with more gain. I've had that for maybe eight years or something and it's been my go-to pedal. I use an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Plus for reverb, and a [Boss] DD-7 for a shallow type delay. And also an Akai Head Rush for looping and for tap delay.

"Then for modulation it's quite a simple setup. I use a vintage script MXR Phase 45, and that's going into a classic standard wah-wah into a Frantone [Vibutron] tremolo pedal. So it is a basic setup, very simple for operating live. There's not too much tap dancing."

NATIONAL TRUST

Take a close-up look at Troy's gear...

When Troy came down to the Guitarist studios in July, we took the opportunity to film him giving us a guided tour through his gear and a listen to his treasured Nationals in action. To access the video, visit bit.ly/guitaristextra and follow the instructions on the page.



Troy Redfern's latest album, *The Fire Cosmicl*, is available now via his website

www.troyredfern.com



Marshall



Marshall
AMPLIFICATION

SHOW YOUR PASSION

**DISCOVER OUR RANGE OF MERCH
AND JOIN THE FAMILY.**

Recognisable around the world, the Marshall logo has been seen on countless stages, in almost every studio, and in rehearsal spots since 1962. Kick back with iconic music and iconic designs.

MARSHALL.COM

60sG





Its sharp horns seemed to belong to the Devil's orchestra, not the polite jazz scene of the early 60s. As a statement of intent, the SG's radical styling succeeded – but maybe not as first intended. The design was swiftly disowned by Les Paul, though it was supposed to be his signature instrument. Rejected by its patron, the SG grew up in the shadow of its iconic sibling, the Les Paul Standard, becoming the anti-hero's tool of choice from Angus and Iommi onwards...

Words Jamie Dickson Photo Neil Godwin

There is no exquisite beauty without some strangeness in the proportion, Edgar Allan Poe once wrote. He wasn't writing about guitars, to be sure, but those words seem made for Gibson's SG...

The guitars' devilish horns arrest your attention straight away, but it takes a while to notice that the body is subtly offset, too. The carve on the top of the body is wider and more sensuous than the lower edge of the instrument. Everywhere on the SG you find asymmetry, contradictions. For example, the vibrato unit that was originally fitted to it was infamous for not working properly and yet the guitar's balance isn't

quite right without it, because the SG was designed to have a counterweight to its long neck behind the bridge. Oddities like this didn't stop players becoming loyal to the SG over the years, though, from Robbie Krieger of The Doors to Derek Trucks.

Perhaps its resistance to being easily categorised is really the secret to the SG's longevity, for what can't quite be pinned down can never truly go out of style. Want a guitar that wails like a Les Paul but weighs less than a Strat? Want to play everything from blues to metal on one guitar? The SG can handle it all. Like a black leather jacket, the SG fits in everywhere yet always retains a touch of renegade spirit. This is its story.

GIBSON SG HISTORY: THE FIRST TWO DECADES

At the tail-end of the 1950s, Fender's Stratocaster was reigning supreme over the electric-guitar market while sales of Gibson's single-cut Les Paul were heading south. Kalamazoo needed to fight back. And in 1961, the double-horned beast was born, supplanting Lester's original and leaving a legacy all of its own... Words Tony Bacon

1. With sales of the single cut Les Paul in decline, Gibson decided a rethink was in order and so the model was reborn in the guise shown here – a Gibson Les Paul Standard from 1961

The Gibson SG design, officially launched in 1961, was a radical departure for the solidbody guitar, almost as if a sculptor had been at work rather than a guitar maker. The body was a stylish blend of bevels and points and angles, and the relatively lightweight instrument invited players to reach its topmost frets with ease and speed thanks to a pair of pointy cutaways. It was unlike anything any company had produced before – even if the shadow of Fender was evident across some of its ideas.

Gibson's motivation to introduce this new design seems almost beyond belief in retrospect. The idea was to replace the original single-cutaway Les Paul. That's correct. Managers at the firm saw sales dipping, so to them the solution was obvious: ditch the earlier Les Paul design completely and bring in a new Les Paul design. And that's correct, too: a new *Les Paul* design. Because at first, most SGs were called Les Pauls. Confusing, isn't it?

We've hit on a major headache for anybody interested in the story of the early SG, so let's get it out of the way

"Gibson's motivation to introduce this new design seems almost beyond belief in retrospect. The idea was to replace the original single-cutaway Les Paul"

before we proceed. The fact is that, despite the big switch to an almost entirely different guitar, Gibson kept the Les Paul name for the first few years on many of the new SG-design models. To understand how this unfolded, we have to consider the three broad changes leading up to the introduction of the new SG design.

First, the budget Les Pauls were changed from their original single-cut style to a rounded-double-cut style (not the SG shape). The Les Paul Junior and TV moved in '58, the Special in '59.

Second, Gibson gradually renamed 'Les Paul' models as 'SG' models. The company started removing Les Paul's name from guitars in 1959 because it felt the association had become less valuable commercially. So the rounded-double-cut Les Paul TV and Les Paul Special were renamed the SG TV and SG Special in '59.

Finally, there was a shift of all the Les Paul models to the new SG shape: the Les Paul Standard late in 1960, the Les Paul Custom, Les Paul Junior, SG TV and SG Special in '61.

It's hardly surprising that players and collectors have since tried to simplify this information. It's become easier to call a Les Paul-shape guitar a Les Paul



2. XTC guitarist Dave Gregory's 1961 Gibson SG Special guitar is loaded with two soapbar P-90 pickups

3. Despite the confusion over the naming convention, we can confirm that this is a 1961 Les Paul Custom!



and an SG-shape guitar an SG. And an SG-shape guitar with the Les Paul name somewhere on it – which means one made between late 1960 and late 1963 – is usually called an SG/Les Paul (or Les Paul/SG). Got all that? However, towards the end of 1963, thank goodness, the new SG-shape Les Paul Junior, Les Paul Standard and Les Paul Custom were renamed the SG Junior, SG Standard and SG Custom. Headache over, once and for all. Hopefully.

THINNER & DOUBLE-CUT

Several trends of the late 50s at Gibson fed into the new solidbody intended to take the 60s by storm. That launch of a new rounded-double-cutaway body for the budget Les Pauls, for example, was a practical and apparently humble design change, made because it was becoming apparent to Gibson how useful double-cutaways were.

The ES-335 was a major launch in 1958, a development of a stylistic change in the hollowbody electric lines that had started a few years earlier with the Byrdland, ES-225T and ES-350T. They had a new slimmer 'Thin Body' style that aimed to be more comfortable than the existing deep-body cutaway electrics, combining solidbody leanness with hollowbody tradition. Also, the Byrdland and 350T had slimmer necks, and that idea began to spread to a few other models, including the revised single-cut Les Paul Standard, which since '58 was finished in Sunburst and during 1960 shifted to a slimmer neck profile.

The 335 is mentioned in guitar histories mostly for its revolutionary centre-block body, but it had another notable feature. "It's a double-cutaway," said Gibson in '58, "for nothing less than complete accessibility to the fingerboard." And the same year, for that new rounded-

double-cut body on the low-end Les Pauls, Gibson said this provided "maximum access to all 22 frets. This is a feature every guitarist desires – to reach full chords down the entire length of the neck. All music becomes easy and effortless with the new double-cutaway."

Beyond the Gibson factory, some guitar fans started to wonder if the brand was falling behind the times. Those mavericks at Fender over on the West Coast were selling more and more of their bright, modern Stratocaster. There was a growing impression that Fender had the style and attitude needed to make the guitars of the moment.

Gibson wanted to compete, but its first attempts, the oddly shaped "Modernistic" Flying V and Explorer of '58, famously failed to grab guitarists at the time. The firm was still searching for a solidbody design to rival Fender's contoured, body-hugging Strat. In 1960, with Les Paul sales

American gospel singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915 – 1973) performs at a Blues And Gospel Caravan Tour in the UK, 1964, using a Les Paul/SG Custom



flagging despite the changes, Gibson's managers got together and decided to stop messing around and instead devise a completely new solidbody design.

A SOLID GUITAR IS BORN

There's no evidence to tell us who chose the new name to replace 'Les Paul', but whoever it was, they went for simplicity. The new name was 'SG'. It stood, modestly enough, for 'Solid Guitar'. Maybe it was Larry Allers, who supervised and co-ordinated the work on the new design? He'd worked at Gibson since the 1930s and was made chief engineer in woodworking after the success of the Les Paul Goldtop in 1952.

For this project, the team took on several of the recent trends at Gibson, including thinner and double-cutaway bodies, new finishes, slimmer-profile necks with full access to the highest frets, and humbucking pickups. Also, they leaned on some of Gibson's established features and methods. Eventually, a finished prototype appeared. It was tested by a few guitar-playing employees, and Gibson's sales people were consulted, too.

The official announcement of the first two new models, the Les Paul Standard and the Les Paul Custom, came in 1961, although the new Standard had started to roll off the line at the very end of 1960. By the time the July '61 NAMM trade show was held in Chicago, Gibson had its full set of brand-new SG-style solidbodies to show off: the Les Paul Junior, Standard and Custom, and the SG TV and Special.

The firm's price list noted the Junior, Junior Three-Quarter and TV each at



\$142.50, the Special at \$195, the Standard at \$265, and the Custom at \$395. Gibson had dropped the original-style single-cut Les Pauls – the Sunburst Standard and Black Custom – as well as the rounded-double-cut Cherry Les Paul Junior and Junior Three-Quarter, and the rounded-double-cut 'lited' SG TV, Cherry or Cream SG Special, and Cherry SG Special Three-Quarter.

FEATURES & SPECS

The Les Paul Standard in its thoroughly new SG guise was an attractive addition to Gibson's catalogue. The Cherry-finish body was a solid piece of mahogany fashioned into a slim, handsome shape. There was a large cutaway on the bass side and a slightly smaller one on the treble, and the horns were shaped to graceful points. It made for a lighter guitar than a single-cut Les Paul.

The edges of the body had bevels (aka scarfs or facets) of around 22 degrees –

"There's no evidence to tell us who chose the name, but whoever it was, they went for simplicity. The new name was 'SG'. It stood, modestly enough, for 'Solid Guitar'"

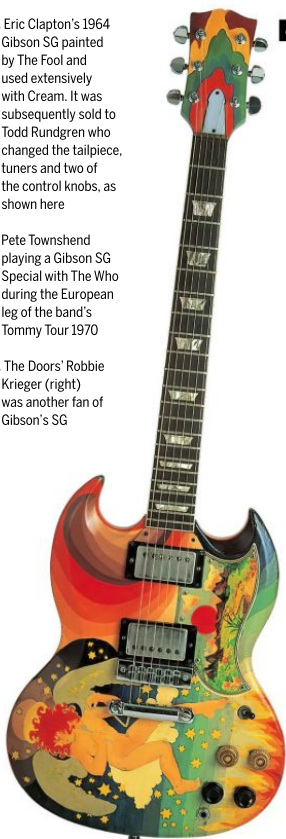
4. It growls, it snarls...
A 1961 SG-shape Les Paul Junior sporting a dog-ear P-90 pickup

5. A 1962 Gibson Les Paul Standard complete with Vibrola and ebony block at the base of the tailpiece

6. Eric Clapton's 1964 Gibson SG painted by The Fool and used extensively with Cream. It was subsequently sold to Todd Rundgren who changed the tailpiece, tuners and two of the control knobs, as shown here

7. Pete Townshend playing a Gibson SG Special with The Who during the European leg of the band's Tommy Tour 1970

8. The Doors' Robbie Krieger (right) was another fan of Gibson's SG



6

PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



7

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

along the edge of the bass side, front and back; the same inside both cutaways; and along the forward part of the edge of the treble side, front and back, following the line of the pickguard. The bevels, which made the body seem even thinner than it was, formed a recognisable, useful and attractive feature of the SG design.

The thin neck was also mahogany, but the position of the neck-pickup rout and the thinness of the body meant there was little of the neck tenon to secure, and this proved a weakness, with cracks and breakages around the neck joint relatively common. Gibson

"The bevels, which made the body seem even thinner than it was, formed a recognisable, useful and attractive feature of the SG design"

tried to remedy this as the 60s wore on, the efforts visible where the neck met the body at the back: sometimes the joint was relatively smooth; more often there was an evident step. Another weak area on early models centred on the output jack behind the control knobs, where there was little wood to support it, and cracks had a habit of appearing around here, too.

There was a separate vibrato tailpiece, which Gibson called a Vibrola and everyone else called a sideways vibrato (or, very often, something much less polite). A Gibson catalogue said it "operates in direction of pick stroke; swings out of way for rhythm playing".

A foldable arm was connected to a mechanism (under a cover with handsome deco-style ornamentation – one of the nicest things about this Vibrola) where the strings fastened to slots at the top. When the arm was rocked sideways, rather than the usual up-and-down vibrato action, two large springs moved the string anchor.

The Vibrola's shortcomings soon became apparent, mainly that it often failed to return the strings to correct pitch. The foldable arm turned out to be a useful feature, though, because



8

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MONTFORT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

after some initial stumbling, many players folded it out of the way and left the vibrato untouched.

The Standard's new high-end neighbour, the Les Paul Custom, kept the upper-crust qualities that had always marked it out as something exceptional in earlier single-cut days. Now it had a gleaming white finish (including the neck), gold-plated metalwork (including the arm and cover of the sideways vibrato), and three of those lovely humbuckers.

The Custom's pickguard matched the white finish, and, like the Standard, it had a little strip between the neck pickup and neck. The Standard had the Les Paul name on its headstock, but the Custom had it on this strip. Gibson's customary indications of a top-end model were present: a split-diamond inlay at the headstock; an ebony fingerboard with block pearloid markers; and Grover Rotomatic tuners with metal kidney-bean buttons.

"Double-neck SGs followed in 1962, replacing the thinline hollowbody models first offered in '58. Like those, they were custom-order only, and very few were ever made"

The Custom looked as if it had the same four controls and selector switch as the Standard, but this was a three-pickup guitar. Looking down as you played, the three-way selector offered neck pickup alone (switch left), bridge and middle pickup together (centre), or bridge pickup alone (right). The two nearest knobs were for neck pickup (volume on the left, tone to the right), and the two below for bridge or bridge-and-middle, depending on the selector position (and again, volume on the left, tone to the right). Like some other three-pickup guitars that co-opted a two-pickup control layout, it was something of a compromise, but once you got your head around the combinations it worked reasonably well.

The new-shape Special, Junior and TV sat at the lower end of the SG-style list, with one (Junior, TV) or two (Special) P-90 single-coils. At first, all three came stock with Gibson's wrapover stopbar, an angled bar-shape combined bridge-and-tailpiece, but an optional version was offered with a separate six-saddle bridge and vibrato tailpiece. At first, this vibrato was Gibson's simple Maestro Vibrola, with a rounded rectangular frame, curved string mount and, usually, a nameplate.

Double-neck SGs followed in 1962, replacing the thinline hollowbody models first offered in '58. Like those, they were custom-order only, and very few were ever made. There were three variations, with the EDS-1275 Double 12 having a six-string and 12-string neck. While, the EMS-1235 Double Mandolin had a regular six-string neck plus a short-scale neck with eight strings in four courses, like a mandolin. Although a few had a short neck with six strings tuned an octave higher than a guitar, supposedly to mimic the sound of a mandolin.

Lastly, the EBSF-1250 or EBS-1250 Double Bass paired a regular six-string with a four-string bass neck (and, unlike the other two models, there had been no equivalent in the earlier hollowbody line). At first, the EBSF variant came with a built-in Maestro Fuzz-Tone.

1966 GIBSON SG CUSTOM

(SONGBIRD COLLECTION)

9. The SG Custom featured a split diamond inlay on the headstock, an ebony 'board and block inlays

10. The cherry finish on this 1966 SG Custom makes it a pretty rare bird among Customs

11. Gibson's Maestro Vibrola unit had evolved into a fairly serviceable design by the mid-1960s

12. The controls for the Custom's three pickups took some getting used to...



AMENDING THE TEMPLATES

Gibson made some alterations to the SG-style models following their launch at the start of the 60s. There were moves to try to overcome the problems associated with the sideways vibrato originally fitted to the Standard and Custom. A few guitars around '62 had a 'short' Vibrola, with regular up-and-down vibrato action and an inlaid black ebony block attached under the base of the tailpiece. A few others from that time came with a Bigsby B5 tailpiece (the short horseshoe-shape variety).

During '63, Gibson settled on the Deluxe Vibrola (or 'long' Vibrola) for the Custom and Standard. It was more or less the same as the short Vibrola, but with a long metal plate rather than the smaller ebony block. The plate was decorated with a lyre-and-leaves motif and a Gibson logo.

As we've seen, the Special and Junior/TV started life as standard with a

single wrapover stopbar (combined bridge-and-tailpiece) or an optional Maestro Vibrola, but that soon shifted to a short Vibrola (without block) plus bridge, which became the standard fitting for those models around '65.

There was also a continuing effort to improve the strength and stability of that rather weak neck joint. The changes had worked reasonably well, and by 1966 the neck joint was the strongest so far, with a distinctly higher overlap of the body wood at the rear.

Also at that time came a major visual change with the arrival of a much larger pickguard – which, in hindsight, proves useful to identify original instruments from this later-60s period. Until the change, the pickguard had been a relatively small one that sat, in traditional fashion, between the pickups and the lower edge of the body (sometimes called an 'angel-wing' pickguard). the shape.

13. Angus Young on stage with his trademark Gibson SG at the Cow Palace in San Francisco February, 1982

14. Among the Vibrola-branded vibratos fitted to the SG the 'Long' Deluxe model, seen on this mid-60s SG, was arguably the best

15. Micky Jones of Welsh rockers Man used this 1961 SG/Les Paul, which suffered no fewer than three neck breaks in its lifetime

16. Marcus Bonfanti of Ten Years After used this 1974 SG on his solo work. The slightly cruder contours show how the SG morphed into a more aggressive, heavyset beast

The new pickguard of '66 completely surrounded the pickups, sitting either side of them, in the process disposing of the small separate strip that some models had between the neck pickup and the end of the neck. The new big 'guard is often called a 'batwing', again for the shape.

The large pickguard was fitted to all four SG models: Custom, Standard, Special and Junior/TV. Also, for the Custom and the Standard the factory now usually made a larger all-purpose rout in the body with space for up to three pickups – a sizeable hole usefully hidden by the new batwing.

"After a peak in SG sales in '65 and then a pretty sharp decline, there was a surge in '69 and '70, with 6,677 SG Standards shipped in that latter year"

There was a move in the later 60s to chrome plating, plus a small decrease in the nut width, and the addition of a volute, a triangular lump just below the point where the neck rear becomes the headstock, designed to reinforce another notoriously weak spot. A slight decrease was made in the angle at which the headstock tipped back from the neck, aiming to minimise problems in the same area. Such practical changes did nothing to enhance Gibson's reputation among those who had started to think that older guitars might be a better bet than the firm's current offerings.

70S STYLES

After a peak in SG sales in '65 and then a pretty sharp decline, mirroring the industry's general woes, there was a surge in '69 and '70, with 6,677 SG Standards shipped in that latter year. This was almost as many as the previous four years combined, and a figure that would remain unmatched for the rest of the 70s.

Gibson, owned since 1969 by Norlin, made big changes to the SG line in the 70s. In '71, the company stopped using the Standard and Special names, although it kept the Custom name. For the Pro (a revised and renamed Special), Deluxe (revised and renamed Standard) and Custom, the most obvious visual ID was a move to a semi-circular plate on which the controls and jack were mounted. The big pickguard of '66 was replaced by a regular-size guard slightly raised from the body. The bevels had gone from the inside of the cutaways and the headstock was slightly larger.



Gibson boasted the new models had three-piece laminated mahogany necks, a volute, and what it called “90 degree neck pitch” – meaning the plane of the neck was parallel to the plane of the body, rather than the earlier style where the neck leaned back slightly, and the fingerboard was higher off the body. The neck had been shifted further into the body and the bridge was shifted a little further down. It all added up to a different and sometimes awkward feel.

In 1972, the SG Special and Standard names reappeared, and by '73 the line had settled into a new-look Special, Standard and Custom, dropping the parallel neck construction and the semi-circular control plate and returning the bevels in the cutaways, providing a rather more traditional feel and look. The Special would be dropped in '77, which left the Standard and the Custom as the sole mainstream SG models in the Gibson line in the remaining years of the 70s.

ONWARD WITH THE SG

It wasn't until the 80s and 90s that Gibson began to acknowledge the greatness of the original SG design through the release of reissues and vintage-vibe recreations, and SGs started to regain their position in the Gibson line as strong solidbodies alongside the Les Pauls, which had been back in the Gibson catalogue since 1968.

In 1961, when Gibson introduced its dealers to what the company called the “completely redesigned” Les Paul/SG models, it summed up the attractions of the new guitars. It said the Standard was “now offered with completely new styling... thinner, lighter in weight, and custom contoured. A wonderfully designed solid body, perfectly balanced for playing in a standing position.”

And for the Custom, too, Gibson's pride was evident: “A new, revolutionary body design, exquisite craftsmanship and deluxe features,” ran the blurb, “ultra thin, hand contoured, delicately balanced design ... Players rave about the extra slim neck with the low, smooth frets that is such a joy to play – the action is so easy, players also refer to it as the ‘Fretless Wonder.’”

Throughout its long eventful life, the SG has almost always had to contend with the dark shadow cast over it by the Les Paul. Of course, it's impossible to think about the SG as just one guitar. Today, there's a whole range of contemporary feature combinations and vintage periods to choose from. Just cast aside any notions of the SG as some kind of also-ran. Long live the Solid Guitar! **G**



17



18

17. Black Sabbath's early sound was personified by Tony Iommi's use of a mid-60s SG Special, pictured here in replica form – note modified John Birch pickups and one-piece bridge

18. Another player who is rarely seen without an SG in his hands is Derek Trucks, who Gibson honoured with his own signature model back in 2012

SOLID HITS

60TH ANNIVERSARY 1961 LES PAUL SG
FROM THE GIBSON CUSTOM SHOP

SG STANDARD
WITH SIDEWAYS VIBROLA
CHERRY RED



SG CUSTOM
WITH SIDEWAYS VIBROLA
POLARIS WHITE



NOW AVAILABLE ON [GIBSON.COM](https://www.gibson.com)

Gibson
CUSTOM



SG ANNIVERSARY: CELEBRATING IN STYLE

To commemorate 60 years of its longest-running solidbody, Gibson started from scratch to recreate the first two Les Paul SG models. We speak to Gibson's Head of Product Development, Mat Koehler to find out more **Words Dave Burrluck**

1. "The SG was always designed to have that side-pull vibrato, so the guitar's balance is fantastic with it, but the SG became more popular with just the stopbar tailpiece, and then you see a little bit of neck dive. The original design with that vibrato helps to balance the guitar," explains Mat



2. The middle pickup is out-of-phase with the neck and bridge on the original Customs, but not here. "When customers want an out-of-phase sound, it's often on a Lemon Burst Les Paul that may or may not resemble Peter Green's..." says Mat

3. The redesign of the SG retained the individual volume and tone controls for each pickup, although they are more closely spaced, and the toggle selector switch was moved to join them



When it comes to modern Gibson guitars, you'll often hear vintage-guitar aficionados using the phrase, 'they don't make 'em like they used to'. Yet slowly, over a period of decades, Gibson has got closer and closer to recreating the 'real thing'. However, it is modern technology that is paving the way for a new level of accuracy, not least in Gibson's ability to digitally scan original instruments down to the smallest detail.

"We got this technology about three years ago and it was instantly a game-changer," explains Mat Koehler, Gibson's Head of Product Development. "Before that, it might take six to eight hours to simply scan a neck with the laser process we used. And that data wasn't always easily transferable as opposed to scanning it in 3D and already having it in a CAD format. So it was huge. All the process

really requires is waving a wand over the instrument, front and back; the whole process takes around 30 to 40 minutes and you have all of the geometry, which we then clean up and streamline to make sense for production.

"I usually tell people it's an 'easy' 900-step process..." he continues. "In reality it was probably a little over a year working on this project before we had the pilot run ready, and there were many twists and turns along the way. Obviously, recreating the sizeable Sideways Vibrola had its challenges because, well, the original design had its challenges!"

"There were many twists and turns along the way – recreating the sizeable Sideways Vibrola had its challenges because, well, the original design had its challenges!"

Let's face it, history hasn't been kind to that original vibrato – and even Gibson engineer at the time, Jim Hutchins, is quoted as saying, 'We called it the Sidewinder. It never worked.'

"Well, I'm not sure I agree with that," says Mat. "I'm a vintage guitar enthusiast – I used to have a vintage guitar shop – and I've probably handled 2,000 early SGs, and have them in my personal collection. But my take has always been if you use that vibrato correctly they were great: that's the critical point, it's a *side-pull* vibrato. The second you start using it like a Bigsby or a Fender vibrato, it'll throw the whole thing out of whack. If you pull sideways, as intended, it achieves the correct result.

"Basically, the new scanning process revealed that the side-pull tremolos we had used at Gibson USA, which were supposedly exact recreations, would literally not fit on the surface of the historically scanned body geometry. So, yes, we had to redevelop this vibrato from scratch again, just for these models. It was pretty much the biggest of those twist and turns of this model's introduction."

Both the Standard and Custom use the exclusive Custom Shop Custombuckers, which are, "in the same ballpark as the Burstbuckers but developed separately."

4. These all-mahogany 60th Anniversary Les Paul SGs are the most accurate reproductions of Gibson's longest-running solidbodies. Along with the Sideways Vibrola, both feature an 'Authentic '61' thin-profile neck, Kluson tuners, an ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, two custombucker pickups, CTS vintage-taper pots and 'Black Beauty' capacitors. True to style, the Cherry Standard has a bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with aged cellulose nitrate trapezoid inlays and aged nickel hardware. The Polaris White Custom differs with its bound ebony fingerboard and block mother-of-pearl inlays with aged gold-plated hardware. The 60th Anniversary 1961 Les Paul SG Standard With Sideways Vibrola in Cherry Red VOS costs £4,399, the three pickup Custom, in Polaris White VOS, is £5,899

5. The case candy includes a repro of the original advert: 'Solid Hit: The Les Paul Guitar' featuring, of course, Les Paul and Mary Ford. The description includes the words: 'Beauty in gleaming white or cherry red that must be seen. Wonderfully clear bell-like tone that must be heard. Fast action that should be tried... soon'



Mat continues, "The Burstbuckers were designed with unbalanced coils, various magnet types: a PAF-style pickup. But, Custombuckers were originally developed for the Jimmy Page Les Paul. We did all sorts of sonic testing for that guitar and listened to a variety of PAF pickups, which was when we learned they had any number of different Alnico magnets – it was almost the luck of the draw.

"We found Alnico 4, some Alnico 5 and some Alnico 2. Then, when we were doing the sonic testing, we were drawn to Alnico 3. This was a bit of a surprise, but when you consider how modern magnets are probably more efficient than old magnets, it kinda makes sense. So we all agreed on Alnico 3. We actually just repeated our tests recently to make sure we still all liked Alnico 3 the best. So, for us, it seems to be the one that captures that 'bloom' and sound of the original PAFs.

"One of the very cool things about this project is that, finally, we got to pay homage to the creator of the SG – and who also happens to have been the creator of the Les Paul: Larry Allers. He was a Gibson foreman and engineer at Kalamazoo [for most of the 50s and 60s] and he rarely gets credit for these designs, but he was definitely the man behind them." ■

THE MODERN SG: SOLID CHOICES

With nearly 30 SGs currently offered by Gibson, we pull out six top picks designed to suit your budget with plenty of features, hardware and original vintage looks on offer Words Dave Burrluck



GIBSON SG TRIBUTE £999

This is the entry-level Gibson USA SG and it certainly gives more than a flavour of the classic design. It's available in either Cherry or Natural Walnut satin nitro, over an all-mahogany body and neck with dot-inlaid rosewood fingerboard. The full-face 'batwing' pickguard emulates the larger design that appeared in 1966 from which the open-coil 490R and 490T Alnico II humbuckers are suspended. Hardware is nickel-plated and includes Vintage Deluxe tuners with keystone buttons, a Nashville tune-o-matic bridge and aluminium stopbar tailpiece.



GIBSON SG JUNIOR £1,249

If you've never plugged in an SG Jr, you're missing out. Next up the ladder in terms of price and part of Gibson's Original collection, there are no frills, but the gloss-nitro finish over the all-mahogany build (in Cherry only), with the brutally simple wrapover bridge and dog-ear P-90 single coil gets to the essence of the lightweight SG and the Junior style. Like the other Original Collection guitars, you get hand-wired CTS pots that open up the key to the Junior's sound. It's raw rock 'n' roll and a vicious slide guitar.



GIBSON SG STANDARD '61 £1,599

Currently the second best-selling Gibson SG behind the 'batwing' SG Standard, the Original Collection's '61 comes with either the original Sideways vibrato, the later Maestro vibrato (both £1,799), or hard-tail with stopbar tailpiece. The '61 goes for a bound fingerboard with acrylic trapezoid inlays and covered 61R and T Burstbucker humbuckers. "People always ask me why isn't it called a reissue," says Gibson's Mat Koehler, "and that's simply because it's been called a '61 since, like, 1987. It's a consistent favourite."


GIBSON KIRK DOUGLAS SIGNATURE SG £2,199

Nestling alongside the Jimi Hendrix 1967 SG Custom and Brian Ray '62 SG Junior signatures, the Kirk Douglas Signature, in Inverness Green with nickel hardware or Black with gold hardware, kicks off the three in terms of price. The three Burstbuckers here are wired in a very non-Gibson style – each having its own volume control with a pull-switch to engage a coil-split. The middle pickup can be blended in with either neck, bridge or both, plus there's a master volume on the batwing pickguard.


GIBSON 1963 SG SPECIAL REISSUE £2,899

Moving into the Custom Shop, things get more detailed and historically accurate and this guitar – one of seven SGs in the current collection, including a double-neck – shouts Pete Townshend and early Carlos Santana with its pair of Custom soapbar P-90s. Its slightly weathered Cherry VOS nitro finish adds to the illusion of age and we get a long tenon neck joint, '63 medium C-shape neck profile and lightweight aluminium 'lightning bar' wraparound with its raised intonation ridge. Think vintage guitar without any issues.


GIBSON 1964 SG STANDARD WITH MAESTRO VIBROLA PELHAM BLUE LIGHT AGED £6,199

The Murphy Lab's newly developed nitro-cellulose lacquer is aged to create the look of a lightly or heavily worn original. The combination of this finish and its detailed ageing means these really chase the original vintage style. That doesn't come cheap, so do not play one unless you're prepared to fall for its charms. Lightweight mahogany construction, the fuller '64 medium C-shape neck profile and the more conventional Maestro Vibrola along with the unpotted Custombuckers make for a time-war drive.

THE SG ON RECORD: MUST-HEAR ALBUMS

Along with its cousin the Les Paul, as well as Fender's Strat and Tele, the Gibson SG arguably makes up the big four classic electric guitars. Here's a selection of albums across the decades that put it to good use Words Glenn Kimpton

Angus Young powered up with SG on stage in '76



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



AC/DC

High Voltage (1976)

AC/DC's first proper release also featured Angus Young's first SG, a 1970 model ('probably', says Angus himself) bought that same year. It was used exclusively throughout most of the 70s – and even on 2020's *Power Up*. *High Voltage* was famously slammed by *Rolling Stone* magazine, but it's hard to argue with its energy and the quality of material and performances.

Standout track: T.N.T.



THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

Hittin' The Note (2003)

Duane Allman is a crucial player in the SG canon, as is Derek Trucks, whose clear and precise blues sound is revered the world over. *Hittin' The Note* is especially notable here since it's the final Allman Brothers Band album and the only one to feature Trucks. His mellow juicy lines work well with Warren Haynes' guitar work on an enjoyable and solid record.

Standout track: Instrumental Illness

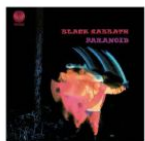


THE BEATLES

Revolver (1966)

The hints of experimentalism heard on the previous year's *Rubber Soul* went on to be further realised on 1966's *Revolver*. For the studio sessions, George Harrison relied heavily on his 1964 Gibson SG Standard, which he later gave to Pete Ham of Badfinger. The tone achieved on the track *She Said She Said* is just stunning.

Standout track: She Said She Said



BLACK SABBATH

Paranoid (1970)

Left-handed riff king Tony Iommi is responsible for many teens purchasing SG guitars (and rupturing their own eardrums). His band's second album continued the band's eponymous debut's theme of a dark and heavy low sound, and is considered a benchmark in heavy metal music. The title track is key, but *War Pigs* is a standout, too.

Standout track: War Pigs



CREAM

Disraeli Gears (1967)

Fair enough, Cream's second effort isn't considered the most consistent record, but when it got it right it absolutely shone – and Clapton's spellbinding playing on his 1964 'Fool' Gibson SG is all over it. Plus it also goes down in history for introducing Clapton's coveted 'woman' tone; just check out the opening riff to *Sunshine Of Your Love*.

Standout track: Sunshine Of Your Love

The Doors perform at The Scene nightclub, New York, 1967. By the time they released their last studio album in 1971, the band had come round full circle to their stripped-back 60s sound.



PHOTO BY DON PAUL/SEN MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



THE DOORS

L.A. Woman (1971)

The last studio album to feature Jim Morrison at the helm, the Doors' sixth studio release was also a return to a stripped-back, more bluesy sound for the Californian band – and what a resounding success it was too. Robby Krieger's 1968 SG Standard features throughout, but really starts hitting its stride when the cracking *Been Down So Long* kicks in.

Standout track: Been Down So Long



FRANK ZAPPA & THE MOTHERS

Roxy & Elsewhere (1974)

Zappa's 'Baby Snakes' SG of the late 70s was actually an obscure custom copy, but the 'Roxy' model he used for this album was a Gibson, albeit modified with various switches and preamps. His son Dweezil has since stated that Frank's tone is impossible to emulate; and even the briefest of listens to this rollercoaster album will back that claim.

Standout track: Cheepnis



HAIM

Days Are Gone (2013)

Danielle Haim has quickly become a modern icon for the SG, and this tightly performed, highly listenable, well-produced debut album from her LA band is chock-full of spikey, accomplished pop songs, with Danielle's jagged picking on her 2005 Cherry Red Standard a key element. Check out live footage of the band for the full experience.

Standout track: Falling



SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

Live In Paris 1964 (1988)

This remarkable guitarist has been cited as a key influence for many a star player over the years, including Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix. Later in her career, the good sister acquired her classic white early 60s SG model, bearing the 'Les Paul Custom' nameplate (which subsequently disappeared at the end of '63) and was showcased well in this live set.

Standout track: This Train



THE WHO

Live At Leeds (1970)

Live At Leeds is well up there with the best ever live rock albums, and it's also a cracking example of the power of the SG. Just hear Pete Townshend's fretboard-surfing during *My Generation* for unquestionable proof of its muscle. And talking of strength, the modified SG in question is also famous for surviving being smashed to smithereens on stage.

Standout track: My Generation

IN MY LIFE | *Joan Armatrading*



JOAN ARMATRADING

She's the Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter whose observational songs have struck a chord since '72. Now, as Joan Armatrading releases her 22nd studio album, *Consequences*, she tells us about pawn-shop guitars, disapproving parents and why human emotion still drives her songwriting

Words Jamie Dickson and Henry Yates

Out Of Reach

"My father played the guitar, but he wouldn't let me touch his. I think, because of that, I wanted to play it even more. That was the impetus, really: what is it about this thing that means I've got to stay away from it? I found my first guitar in a pawn shop. It cost three pounds and I said to my mum, 'Can I have it?' She said, 'Well, we haven't got the money, but if they'll swap these two prams for it, you can have it'. I've still got that guitar. It's a big-bodied, no-name guitar and I just started learning on that. And I'll tell you something else. My father used to hide his guitar on the top shelf down in the cellar, which had a really heavy iron door on it, like one of those doors you see on great big bank safes. When we moved, he left his guitar there. He forgot it!"

Ain't Nobody

"From there, I just started writing my own songs, either on the guitar or on the piano that my mother bought for the front room, which was a great piece of furniture. Everything I did back then was

self-taught. I wasn't buying any records and I wasn't going to any gigs. So there wasn't an 'anybody' playing the guitar to influence me – apart from my father, who didn't want me to play it! Later on, once I'd got into the guitar, then there were so many guitarists that I think are fantastic. I think Mark Knopfler is one of the best guitarists ever. I love Leslie West. Jimmy Page is great. You know, there are so many great guitarists – but none of them started me off. I just did my own thing and came to those guitarists much, much later."

*"You know, there
are so many great
guitarists – but none
of them started me off.
I just did my own thing"*

Stepping Out

"When I played my first gig at Birmingham University, aged 16, I didn't know anybody else's songs. I just wanted people to hear my songs – which hasn't really changed over the years. Being onstage isn't the be-all and end-all for me. I mean, I go onstage and I do really enjoy it, but what I'm enjoying is the audience's reaction to the songs, not 'Oh, look at Joan'. That connection with the songs is what I'm interested in. Like, if *Willow* comes up in the show, and somebody clutches the person they're stood next to – and maybe they're thinking, 'Oh, that's the song we fell in love or got married to' – that's great. Sometimes, you see a real connection when you look out at an audience... not that you can always see past the first few rows."

From Me To You

"I was asked the other day about my new album *Consequences*, and whether the album title is a confessional. No, it's not. Most of the songs I write are not about me. The lyrics to my songs are coming

*"When I write, my theme will always
be people and emotions. That's not
changed since day one"*

Throughout the decades Joan has refreshed her style to include rock and pop, with the guitar sounds following suit

from something real, it's just not always my life. That's just the way I write. With the songs on *Consequences*, it could be about whichever relationship you're in, whether that's a deep friendship, love, marriage. Once I've written a song, I hand it over to you. It's up to you to decide what you gain from that song and what your interpretation of it is. I can't sit by everybody and say, 'Okay, this is what it's supposed to be about'. Songs take on a life of their own. Look at the inventor of the electric lightbulb. He probably thought, 'Well, we'll just have it for this one room'. Little did he know that the whole world would be lit up, every night."

Character Studies

"When I write, my theme will always be people and emotions. That's not changed since day one. I write about how people interact and relate. The planet, with all its greenery and the flowers and the shrubbery – that's all wonderful. But really, I think we're here as humans to communicate with each other, to take care of each other and to comfort each other. As a writer, I'm trying to draw out the character of whatever person I'm writing about, whether they're a good person, whether they're a bad person, whether they're a stupid person. I'm just thinking about the character of that person and going into that."

Evolution Theory

"From 1972 until 2003, on every album I made, what I would do is this: if a pop song came into my head, then I'd write a pop song. If a jazz song came into my head after I've written that pop song, I'm going to write a jazz song. If a reggae song comes, I'll write a reggae song. That's how I would go about all those early albums. But in around 2003, I decided to change that up and be more specific about what I'm doing. I've always played every instrument on my demos, but on that year's *Lovers Speak*, I decided I would play everything myself. And then, in 2007, I decided I would do a trilogy of blues, rock and jazz albums. First, I did a blues album with *Into The Blues* [2007]. Then I did a rock album with *This Charming Life* [2010]. Then a jazz album with *Starlight* [2012]. Next, I did something more acoustic-sounding with *Not Too Far Away* [2018], and now, on *Consequences*, there's still guitar but it's very keyboard-heavy. I think 'challenge' is an overused word, but I want to make myself do different things. So on each album, I try to think, 'What do I want this album to do?'"



"Success for me is the success of my songs. It's not for me, I couldn't care less about that"

PHOTO © JOEL ANDERSON

The Song Decides

"For me, the piano and guitar are two very different instruments. The songs that I write on piano tend to be a lot more melodic. They're quite tuneful. They flow. They're very lyrical. Whereas the songs I write on guitar tend to be more rhythmic, more angular and sometimes more aggressive. I mean, I just mentioned the *Not Too Far Away* album, and that's played on guitar and it's very acoustic-sounding, very melodic and not angular at all – but most of the time, for me, the guitar is driving the song. My songs dictate what instrument they're going

to be played on. Most of the time, it's nothing to do with me. The song will say, 'Okay, I need to be a guitar song' and I just go with it."

The Right Ingredients

"I just know when a song is ready. And it's my job to know. But I couldn't write it down, and what that ingredient is that lets me know a song is done, I couldn't tell you. Is it after I play that last chord and the final tail of it stops after three beats? I've no idea. But it's my job as the creator to know, either, 'That's gone really well', or 'I need to change that'. Or, if I make a mistake, to know whether the mistake is actually the right thing and to stay with it. It's important to know that as well. You might want to hit a D chord, and by mistake you hit an F, and it's up to you to know that F is actually where you should go. I don't even know how I write songs. But you know when it's right. When Mark Knopfler wrote *Money For Nothing*, he knew that was a hit song. As the creator, if you don't know, then something's wrong with you and you need to do something different!"

"The songs I write on guitar tend to be more rhythmic, more angular and sometimes more aggressive"

“You start a song, and know something isn’t right. Then you swap for another guitar and it all falls into place”

The Big Time

“The success of *Love And Affection* in 1976 hasn’t changed my life. What it has done is allowed people to hear the songs, which is all I’m interested in. But that’s it. I’m only interested in people hearing the songs and connecting with them. I do want them to buy the songs, and the reason for that is because once they’ve bought a song, they’ll own it and they’ll listen to it. Very few people buy something then just put it on the back burner. You know, if they buy it, then they’ll listen to it at least once. So the success for me is the success of my songs. It’s not for me. I couldn’t care less about that.”

Choose Your Weapon

“If you’re writing a song, you’ve got to work out, ‘How should this song sound and what type of guitar does it need? Should it be electric or should it be acoustic? Should it be a jangly sound or should it be a crunch sound?’ A blues album is going to be electric guitar. And a rock album is definitely going to be all electric guitar. But it’s up to you as a writer to work out what will work for this song. You might start a song on one guitar, and you just know that something about it isn’t right. The lyrics are right, the melody is right, the rhythm is right – but the feel of it isn’t right. Then you swap for another guitar and it all just falls into place. You might start recording with a Gibson and think, ‘Ah, no, that doesn’t sound quite right’, so then you go to a Fender, and that works, so you stay with it. All of these things are very strange and intangible. They’re things you can’t put your finger on. You can’t say why. But that’s what happens.”

Swapping Sounds

“I play all kinds of guitars. I play Tom Anderson, I play Fender, I play Gibson, I play Ibanez. There’s Martin, of course. And I still play Ovations, as well. So it’s a varied thing. I suppose you can just stay with one guitar. But I find that swapping makes a difference. So I play whatever.



Joan at London’s Royal Albert Hall in 2005: “I go onstage and what I’m enjoying is the audience’s reaction to the song”

PHOTO BY LESLIE MCGHEE/REXUS/GETTY IMAGES

But my main electric guitar at the moment is the Line 6 Variax. That’s quite good, because it gives you the choice of a lot of different guitar sounds, and it’s got quite a nice feel as well. When I’m just playing, then I’ll tend to pick up a Fender. But when I’m serious or I’m working towards a livestreamed gig, I’ll go for the Variax.”

What Goes Around

“The album title of *Consequences* is about how with everything you do, there’s a consequence, good or bad. You might have a plan for the way your day is going to go. But then, along the way, something really stupid happens. The reference I use is making a cup of tea. You put the tea in the cup, pour the water in, then you get the milk – and drop the bottle. So now you’ve got to concentrate on clearing up the glass, not getting cut, wiping the floor, then going to the shop for more milk – and something else happens on the way. So this very simple act of making a cup of tea sends you off in a whole different direction. No matter how innocent it seems, the consequence of everything you do has a flipside. With this album, it’s somebody saying to somebody else, ‘Just remember the consequences of how we go about this relationship.’”

Original & Best

“Sometimes you’ll hear people do a cover of a song and you might think, ‘That version sounds really good’. But nine times out of ten, without the original version, it wouldn’t sound as good, you know what I’m saying? Like with my song *Think About Me*, that’s got the jangly guitars on there, and somebody else might do it on a piano and it would sound great. But the reference has to be the original.”

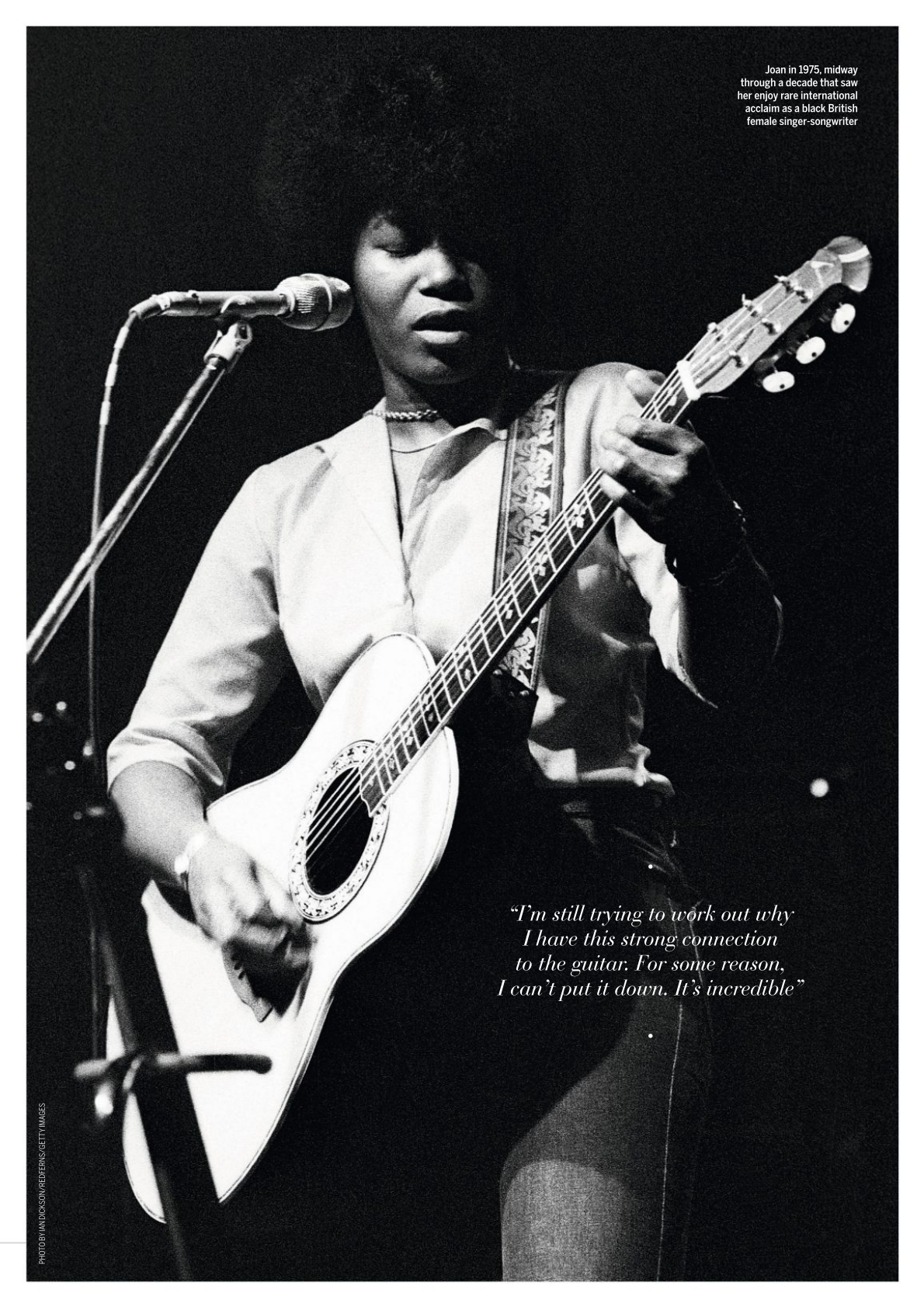
Love Of My Life

“I’ve always loved playing guitar – and I’ve been playing it a long time. But at the moment, I’m getting ready to do a livestream concert, and I’ve been playing the guitar for that, and it’s almost like I’m relearning the instrument. I’m still trying to work out why it is that I’m having this strong connection to the guitar at this time. For some reason, I can’t put it down. It’s incredible.” 



Joan Armatrading’s latest album, *Consequences*, is out now on BMG

www.joanarmatrading.com



Joan in 1975, midway through a decade that saw her enjoy rare international acclaim as a black British female singer-songwriter

*"I'm still trying to work out why
I have this strong connection
to the guitar. For some reason,
I can't put it down. It's incredible"*

TEENAGE



FANCLUB

AS GLASGOW'S FINEST RETURN WITH THEIR ELEVENTH ALBUM, *ENDLESS ARCADE*, WE ASK CO-FOUNDING GUITARISTS NORMAN BLAKE AND RAYMOND MCGINLEY ABOUT SONGWRITING, STOLEN GUITARS, CHANNELLING ROBERT FRIPP AND WHY THEIR WORKING RELATIONSHIP IS "LIKE THE CHUCKLE BROTHERS"...

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photos Donald Milne

Since their formation in 1989, the thumbnail sketch of Teenage Fanclub has been a band for the good times, trading in blissed-out, beatific, Byrdsian jangle, with vocal harmonies so close you couldn't fit a plectrum between them. But the Glaswegian group once dubbed "the best band in the world" by Kurt Cobain would never have sustained a three-decade career, nor commanded such a loyal army of fans, without the brains and bite that temper those innately optimistic chord voicings.

Tracked live at Hamburg's Clouds Hill Recordings, eleventh album, *Endless Arcade*, finds the band walking the same tightrope, with co-founding guitarists and songwriters Norman Blake and Raymond McGinley evoking autumn sunshine from their instruments, on songs that are touched by sorrow, loss and the hand of mortality. "You go through life," says McGinley, "and everything is going to fall apart. But it's not so bad."

***Endless Arcade* is such an evocative album title. What made you choose it?**

Norman Blake: "I just liked the sound of those two words together, and also the song *Endless Arcade*, by Raymond, which talks about our journey through life. I think we've always shied away from pretentious album titles. Even when we started the band, we were looking for the dumbest or least pretentious name we could come up with up. Ironically, none of us were teenagers when we started Teenage Fanclub. I think I was 22."

What themes came up for you on this album?

Raymond McGinley: "We just try to bring things out of ourselves. It isn't necessarily conscious, but the process of playing a guitar is meditative or contemplative, and you're trying to either zone out or tune into things inside yourself. A lot of Norman's songs on this record are dealing with things he's gone through in his life. My songs are more like me pulling things out of my subconscious, then trying to reverse-engineer something around it."

Norman: "Because we're in our late 50s, a lot of the songs are about us reflecting on our place in the world. As you grow older, you're going to start thinking about mortality – y'know, family members passing away – and looking back over the journey that's brought you to this point in your life. So, inevitably, that's going to come through in the lyrics. This album couldn't have been written by someone in their 20s."

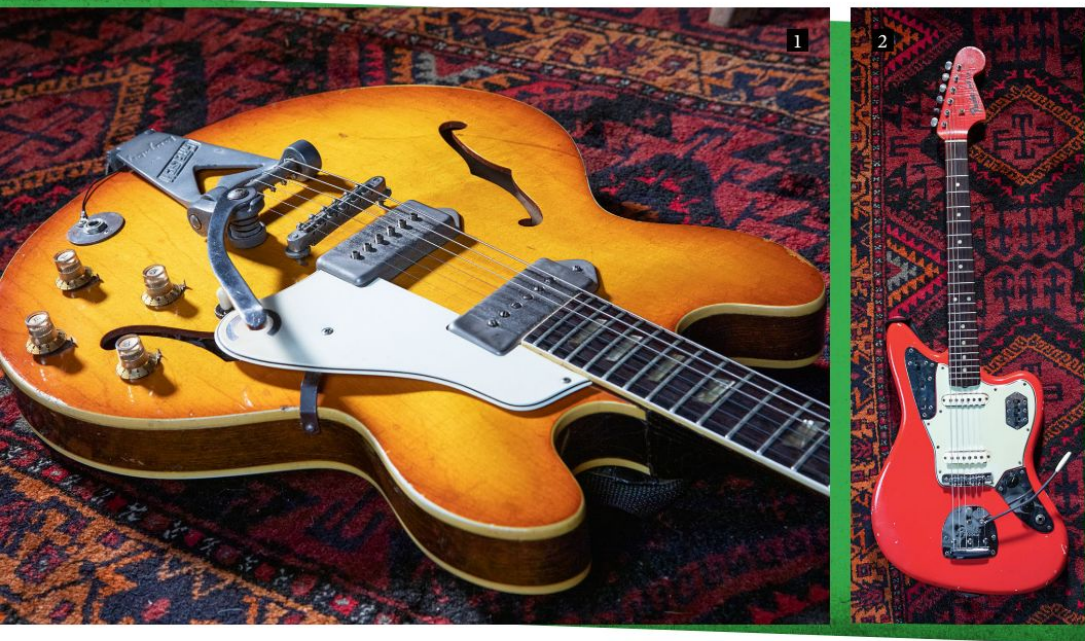
"A LOT OF THE SONGS ARE ABOUT US REFLECTING ON OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD... THIS ALBUM COULDN'T HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY SOMEONE IN THEIR 20S"

NORMAN BLAKE

PHOTO BY MARTIN GODDARD/GETTY IMAGES



From left to right, Raymond McGinley, Norman Blake and bassist Gerard Love on stage in 1992



1. Raymond's mainstay mid-60s Epiphone Casino was acquired in the 80s and has been a pillar of the band's sound ever since

2. Raymond's 1963 Fender Jaguar was the first serious instrument he bought – yet remains his favourite electric

Can you describe your dynamic as songwriters and guitar players?

Norman: “It’s like the Chuckle Brothers – ‘to me, to you.’ I think Raymond’s chord progressions are more unusual than mine, and I mean that in a positive way. Very often, a lot of Raymond’s songs are arpeggio-based, which kind of differentiates us as writers. Raymond will always come up with a twist. So he is absolutely the lead guitar player, and I take the odd solo, but when it comes to being creative and coming up with something interesting, we always turn to Raymond. He’ll always do something you’re not expecting. So he’s a great asset to have. And if I was doing a solo, it’d probably be a bit more bog-standard. So we’re lucky to have him.”

What were your go-to guitars for this album?

Raymond: “Over the years, I’ve had loads of guitars, but we keep coming back to the same ones. My first main guitar is a ‘63 Fender Jaguar. I bought that in 1983 when it was 20 years old or something. I wasn’t even a teenager at the time. And then a mid-60s Epiphone Casino: it’s a ‘66 or ‘67. Those guitars, I’ve had since the 80s. They’re the first guitars I got and they’ve turned out

to be the best guitars I’ve got. It’s great sometimes to see a picture of me and Norman – before Teenage Fanclub, say, in The Boy Hairdressers – and I’d be playing the Jaguar and Norman was playing the Casino.”

Norman: “Pretty much on every track, I’d start with the 335 that I’ve had since the early 90s. It’s a 1970, I think. I picked it up for \$300, somewhere in the Midwest. We were always looking in guitar stores in these little towns and this 335 was absolutely mint condition, hardly a mark on it. There was a little indentation where a guitar cable had been lying on the lacquer. Other than that, it was perfect.”

“We’ve got a lot of guitars. That’s partly because we’re old and we’ve been around forever. For the acoustic parts, we’ve got a Martin 000-18. Before that, I had a nice Taylor, and that was the only guitar I’ve ever had stolen, in Australia. After that, I bought this 000-18. People always told me, ‘Yeah, Martins get better with age.’ Well, blow me away – they do. This was 20 years ago and the more I use it, the better it sounds.”

Raymond, have you had any on-the-road guitar incidents you can share?

Raymond: “Once, we did a gig in London and our guitar tech came in to see me with a very worried look. And he said, ‘I’m really sorry, a taxi has just run over the case with your Epiphone Casino in it.’ I was like, ‘Was anyone hurt?’ And he’s like, ‘No, no. We haven’t looked in the case yet, but it doesn’t look too good.’ And I was like, ‘Well, I’ve had a good run on it. Whatever happens, don’t worry about it.’ And when I went and looked, the taxi hadn’t actually run over it, just kind of mangled the case, and the guitar was fine. But I had that moment of thinking, ‘I think that guitar is over.’”

“I BOUGHT THIS 000-18. PEOPLE ALWAYS TOLD ME, ‘YEAH, MARTINS GET BETTER WITH AGE.’ WELL, BLOW ME AWAY – THEY DO. THIS WAS 20 YEARS AGO AND THE MORE I USE IT, THE BETTER IT SOUNDS”
NORMAN BLAKE



What was your amp setup for this album?

Norman: "I was playing through a little Silverface Fender Champ. Again, from 1970 or thereabouts. One thing I've been using a lot is the Xotic EP Booster. I switch it on, but then turn the volume down to zero, so it's just going through the circuit, and it gives it a real richness. That was pretty much the signal path."

Raymond: "Mostly, the sound of the rhythm guitars is pretty much just off the amp. I've got a nice Fender Deluxe, a 50s one, that I've had for about 30 years. I was lucky to buy it when you could still buy things like that without being a stockbroker. So that amp sounds really pure and chiming when you want it to be. If you want to just turn it up, it gets your classic distortion. And you can get it all out of the amp by turning it up or down a bit. Sometimes just turning the amp up sounds better than trying to do it with a pedal."

You get a lot more audio information when it's just the amp, don't you?

Raymond: "Yeah, I think you get a lot more dynamic connection. Let's say with a Fender Deluxe: if you hit a bit harder, it breaks up; if you back off a little bit, the playing just sounds cleaner. It kind of responds to how you play. So you get something from that. Y'know, if you're hitting it a bit harder in the chorus, the sound changes. It's not like you have to turn on a pedal or something."

It's a lost art, isn't it, using the guitar's volume control and the amp's dynamics to get different sounds?

Raymond: "I was a bit of a purist when I first started off. The band that me and Norman were in before

Teenage Fancub – The Boy Hairdressers – I didn't have any pedals. I just kind of wanted to be old-school.

"I was using a Fender Jaguar that I still use now and I would just back off the volume then turn it up to do the lead. But I remember, I modified the capacitor on the volume dial. I can't remember which way round it was: maybe it got brighter when I turned it up, or maybe it got fatter and then a little brighter when I backed it off. Because when you back off the volume, sometimes it can get really dull and the treble is all rolled off. This is in the 80s, so I was trying to find out how to modify that."

What role does a solo play in relation to a good song, do you think?

Raymond: "A lot of times, we like the kind of short, structured instrumental sections. But then again, having said that, the first song on the album, *Home*, has got a four-minute guitar solo. It's your kind of classic, self-indulgent guitar solo. So yeah, both are nice."

Norman, you played the solo in *The Sun Won't Shine On Me*, with that unusual EBow-sounding effect. How did you achieve that?

Norman: "I was trying to make it sound like the guitar was going backwards... So I had to kind of push onto the notes to make it sound like that. It's probably a combination of six or seven different parts. A couple were just feedback parts while some of the others were playing melodic notes. When I put it together, I suppose I was channelling a bit of Robert Fripp and the things he did for David Bowie."

3. Vintage Fender gear covers things on the band's low end too, including this vibey block-inlay Jazz bass

4. Both Norman and Raymond are eclectic collectors of guitars and don't turn their noses up at student model guitars such as this single-pickup Musicmaster



PHOTO BY MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES

5. From left to right, Brendan O'Hare, Gerard Love, Raymond McGinley and Norman Blake in 1992, a year after the release of their now-classic third album *Bandwagonesque*

Because, of course, Fripp did that thing for *Heroes* where he found the spots on the studio floor where he got the best feedback and he stood on those...

Norman: "Ah, that makes sense. Without knowing that's how he had done that, I did a similar thing: finding the spot where the feedback sounded sweet and resonated at the right frequencies. That's amazing that that's how he did it. The *Heroes* sound is beautiful."

One of the things your solos do well – and which has perhaps been a little lost in guitar music – is that sense of pure melody. Where you're not just improvising on a scale but you've determined a melody...

Raymond: "Yeah. I hesitate to criticise any form of guitar playing, but I'd say, with the more freeform solo thing, Jimi Hendrix did it amazingly well, and with other people that have tried to do it – not as much. You're just never going to get there. But, yeah, for us, it's about the melodic structure of it, how it works against everything else. We think of it as an instrumental thing, rather than a solo. It just happens to be on guitar, but in another universe, it could be with other instrumentation."

Do you like to record with everyone in the room or build the record in layers?

Raymond: "On this record – and we've always done this – we just got into the room and picked our spots. So we were all in a circle, looking at each other. We're so comfortable with each other now that we can do it

"WE JUST START PLAYING. WE'RE NOT PICKING THINGS APART. AND THERE'S NO ONE SVENGALI TRYING TO BOSS EVERYTHING"

RAYMOND MCGINLEY

without too much chat. We just start playing. We're not picking things apart. And there's no one Svengali trying to boss everything. Over time, the band have maybe become more 'proper' musicians, too. Y'know, Dave [McGowan, bass] could give Paul McCartney a run for his money!"

Norman: "What we'll do if we're recording is set everything up in one room. Minimal separation. We're using small amplifiers and we'll baffle them off a bit, but we don't worry too much about spill. We're all about capturing the performance. On this album, there's a couple of songs where everything – other than the vocal – was recorded in the first take. Y'know, the guitar break is all done in the take. And that's something that gives us satisfaction."

What's the band's attitude to capturing sounds in the studio?

Norman: "We spend time getting the sounds, and that's where I think people are sometimes a bit too hasty – not tuning the drums properly, or making sure the tone of the guitar is exactly what they want. We want to be on the other side doing as little EQ-ing as we have to. There's always something. You might have to compress a vocal a little bit, add some reverb. But, really, in terms of the guitar sounds, I think we're always satisfied. We might have a high-pass filter to cut out some of the rumble at the bottom there. But other than that, if we can have a flat EQ for the final mix, we're really happy."

How do you feel the band has grown musically over time?

Raymond: "Our direction of travel, I would say, is not to be scared to do what instinctively we feel we want to do, whatever that is. And not to feel like we're conforming to any expectations of ourselves. Just to be comfortable in our skin. Sometimes, people say, 'Oh, I wish they'd make a record like such-and-such.' It's like, 'Well, we made that record 30 years ago.' If we tried to make the same record now, it would sound different."

Norman: "If you listen to our first LP [1990's *A Catholic Education*], it's a bit rough around the edges, and I hadn't found my own voice at that point. Because when you start a band, you really are the sum of your influences. Maybe in the past, we'd have thrown in everything, including the kitchen sink. Hopefully, we're just a bit better at putting those ideas across now. But we're fundamentally still the same band. It's still about songs." 📻



Teenage Fanclub's latest album, *Endless Arcade*, is out now on PeMa

www.teenagefanclub.com

THIRD MAN HARDWARE



Winner of **Gotta Stock It**
and **Companies to Watch**

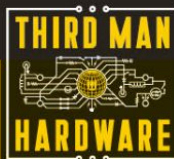
BEST IN SHOW AWARDS AT



Summer
NAMM



@thirdmanhardware



thirdmanstore.com

Vintage Vibe

Looking rather like something The Mod Squad might have cooked up, the ProShop Unique range from Vintage offers bashed-up and aged versions of those classics you can't afford

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin





VINTAGE PROSHOP V120 & V100 £999 & £1,499

CONTACT **John Hornby Skewes** PHONE **01132 865381** WEB **www.vintageguitarsrus.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 Relic'd copies! Whatever next?**
Vintage already has its Icon range where the models are relic'd in their factories of origin in China and Vietnam. These ProShop Unique guitars are one-offs that start with a standard Vintage model and are aged and modded here in the UK.
- 2 Do they offer custom orders?**
At the moment, these are almost concept guitars illustrating what the small team at John Hornby Skewes can create. They hope to offer a bespoke service in the near future, but you can put in a request via any Vintage dealer.
- 3 We don't usually see Bigsby's and Bare Knuckle pickups on a Vintage guitar...**
That's the point. A staple of retailers all over the world, Vintage is renowned for its affordability and obviously has to use hardware and pickups that don't break the bank. These ProShop guitars illustrate that a good chassis can really punch well above its weight when combined with some quality parts.

We last caught up with Vintage, the house brand of the large and long-running UK distributor John Hornby Skewes (JHS), back in issue 465 to celebrate its 25th Anniversary. Many players will be familiar with its legal copies of many classics, and the company was also quick to jump on the relic bandwagon with its Icon range, which started back in 2006 and currently features over 20 models aged at their source in the Eastern Asia.

The ProShop Unique guitars were launched just before the pandemic at Winter NAMM 2020. However, these instruments are created from standard Vintage Reissued or Icon models in Garforth, Leeds, at JHS's HQ. It's not really a range as much as a continuing collection of one-offs, often quite heavily distressed, using a selection of aftermarket parts.

Each guitar includes a Vintage-branded luxury gigbag, ProShop leather strap, pick tin, t-shirt and certificate of authenticity. Obviously, since all the modding and refinishing work is done here in the UK, these ProShop Unique models can easily double the prices (or more) of the regular Vintage models – and the builds so far start at £569 for a lightly relic'd standard Strat-inspired V6, up to £1,299 for a Bare Knuckle-equipped Keef-style V52 five-string named 'Brown Sugar'. We were asked to spec a couple of builds for this review. Here's what we got...

V120

Many people creating one-off relics like to imagine a backstory because that can really influence the choice of upgrades and relicing level. This one, for example, is based on this writer's experience of being asked to evaluate a Les Paul Junior some years back that a friend had been offered. Apparently a 50s Junior previously owned by a big-name player, it had been heavily, ahem, customised with a bright red refinish. It might have said Gibson on the headstock, but we couldn't find any part on the guitar that we could 100 per cent ID as being from a real Gibson. For all we knew, it could have been a copy with a faux Gibson headstock facing masquerading as a mucked-about real LP Junior.

No-one is going to mistake this V120 for the real thing. The headstock, with its fluted square top, might not be as graceful as some, and the V120 and our V100 share a similarly thinned and pointed horn on the treble side, plus a curved shaping to the top of the body that recalls an Aria Pro II more than a Gibson from the 50s.

Based on the Vintage V120TB, which will cost you £339, the body and neck are spec'd as mahogany – we don't know any more than that – and you can certainly see that through the simulated wear-through of the red finish. While it's not the lightest Junior we've ever encountered, it's only marginally heavier than our original.

1. Not necessarily the name you want on the headstock, but this particular one shows some serious wear as well as lifted paint to those aged. You'll notice that

the crazing on the nitro over-spray is very fine

2. These original-style three-on-a-strip tuners are by Grover and are aged in-house at JHS



THE RIVALS

A number of high-end brands offer gig-worn relics – from Fender and Gibson, obviously, to boutique-level builders such as Rock N Roll Relics and Nash. Even 'posh' makers including Tom Anderson are relicing their instruments these days. And yet it's still rare to find this sort of treatment in the lower end of the market.

Vintage itself is one exception with its Icon models, which are factory aged: a V120 will cost you £339, while a 'lemon drop' V100 is £509 (although there are no Bigsby options).

We're seeing an increasing amount of makers that specialise in reliced guitars in the UK such as County Londonderry's SC Relics (from £1,600) and Relic Guitars UK in Essex, although most seem to specialise in bolt-ons. While setup work, fitting new pickups and so on are easily covered by most good makers and/or repairers, the cost of the parts won't break the bank. Refinishing, not to mention ageing of your guitar, will add considerably to your outlay.

The only other wood we can see, the fingerboard, is actually something called Lignum Rosa, a name created by experienced guitar designer Alan Entwistle (the man behind the Revelation brand) for this multi-layered wood construct, which is 'quarter-sawn' so the layers create a grain that's at a right-angle to the face. It actually looks like a rosewood, although the fingerboard here is much darker in colour than the V100's.

Aside from the aged refinish, then, upgrades over the standard Reissued model are extensive: Grover Deluxe strip tuners, Graph Tech's ResoMax intonated wrapover, and a Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard dog-ear P90. All the hardware and paint ageing is done in-house and each ProShop Unique also gets a pretty thorough setup, including a fret-level, recrown and polish, and noticeable work to the edges of the fingerboard. All in all, it's a pretty thorough makeover.

This is a continuing collection of one-offs, using a selection of aftermarket parts

V100

Based on the V100 Boulevard Black (over Gold) we saw in the current ProShop Unique collection, we simply asked for a lighter level of ageing and a pair of Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbuckers to augment the Bigsby, which is aged, as is the bridge with its lockdown roller saddles. The Grover Rotomatics look nicely old, too, and have rear locks, the top-hat knobs are mismatched in colour, and there's no collar around the toggle switch. Headstock and shape aside, this comes across as a Les Paul Standard of a certain age that's been modded and heavily gigged over the years.

While our V120's red-over-sunburst finish is pretty realistic in its wear and the red top-coat has a dulled gloss sheen and no cracking or crazing, it's more like a Gibson VOS finish with a few more dings, to be honest. The black body face of this V100, however, is noticeably crazed, which is mirrored more lightly on the headstock face, while the back, sides and neck back (pretty much the standard factory finish) appear like they were refinished back in the 70s with sandpaper and a spray can. The Vintage and fleur-de-lis headstock inlays look like they've been in a fight with the

UNDER THE HOOD

Does the vintage illusion continue to the control circuit? We find out...

The tidy work on the exterior of both of these guitars continues into the control cavities where we have 500k CTS pots across the board and 'posh' cloth-covered wire, all wired 50s or 'vintage' style. Metallised polypropylene film capacitors (223J) .022 microfarads caps are used on all three tone controls. Vintage hasn't gone down the expensive paper-in-oil boutique route; you can try that yourself. That said, the pot codes date to December 2002. "Can we call those vintage?" laughs Nathan Sharp, "They're actually from my own stash. We use cloth wiring just to try to match in looks some of the 'age' of the instrument."

Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp range offers all the great sound we've come to expect but in a no-options format, which allows them to be made more cost-effectively. We have the lowest-output Alnico II Old Guards in all positions, and the DCRs measure at output 9kohms (bridge) and 7.99k (neck) for the humbuckers, and 765kohms for the dog-ear P-90.



3. Tidy vintage-style wiring on our V120

4. Bare Knuckle Boot Camp pickups are used on both our ProShop models

5. There's plenty of wire packed into the V100, but it's a vintage-style circuit again



6. This locking roller saddle bridge is available as a retrofit from WD Music and StewMac. Taylor has long used it on its T3 guitars. There's plenty of wear to its chrome finish and authentic ageing to the Bigsby. We were tempted to give it a polish!

7. Hiding under the dog-ear cover is Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp Old Guard P90. The bridge, with its pre-set intonation ridge, "is made from our lightweight alloy designed to have your guitar bursting with harmonics", says Graph Tech. It also magnetically locks to the posts



chicken wire in front of the stage – and, of course, you know it's all make-believe, but you really can imagine the life and history of a guitar that ends up looking like this. The brass rear-cavity covers certainly recall the brass parts craze of the late 70s; the fact that they're actually hand-cut from old time-aged brass sheet just adds to the backstory. Numerous small details such as this really add to the illusion.

Like the V120, the only bare wood we can see is that man-made fingerboard, but according to the spec this is a mahogany body with a maple top. The thicker body, not to mention that Bigsby, add to the weight here, which edges just past the 4kg (9lb) mark. But that's not over-heavy and, frankly, if you can live with the fact it's got the wrong headstock and horn shape, what's not to like?

Feel & Sounds

It's pretty rare, to put it mildly, that we feel new review guitars need a clean up and restring before we test them. These don't, either, of course, but we can't shake the feeling that these are instruments we've just purchased off eBay – in which case,

You know it's all make-believe, but you can imagine the life of a guitar like this

the first thing we'd do is give them a clean up, restring and set them up. But no, you're good to go, certainly on the playability front.

On our V120, the fret ends don't quite have a boutique roundness to their ends – again, they feel and look like a competent refret from a few years ago. The fingerboard edges are nicely broken in, and here's a neck shape that sits between a bigger rounded 50s style and slimmer 60s. Extremely good. The V100's neck is fractionally smaller in width and depth, the neck back a little rougher and less smooth in feel.

Sound-wise, both our clones do the expected job with some panache. The V120 certainly doesn't harm the legacy of the guitar it's modelled on: that very direct, raw midrange voice is definitely here. No, it doesn't match the depth of the real thing nor its thumpy resonance, but it's in that ballpark; likewise, the range of the controls.

But even if you play with both controls full up, a Junior on full chat is quite something, as is this V120.

The V100 also has its own thing going on. The Old Guard Boot Camp units have to be one of the best pickup swaps you can make and drop us right into PAF-world with a bit of heat at the bridge. In combination with the construction, you'll struggle to get any ice-pick highs from the bridge pickup, while the Bigsby just seems to add a little more openness to the voice. Played pretty clean and loud, it's a very valid example of the style. Add some Marshall-y grit and things just get better; our reference Gibson Les Paul Classic now sounds a little underpowered with its Burstbucker 1 and 2 retrofitted 'buckers. There's a noticeable difference to the midrange too, with the Vintage being just a little more open; the real thing has a little more snarl. The Bigsby does get in the way of the neck pickup volume, but that's a trade-off we can live with. This is a hugely viable piece that not only feels a lot better in the hand than any standard V100s we've tried over the years but its sounds are on a completely different level, too. We'd take this on a gig as is with no hesitation.

COMING OF AGE

It's all in the details – as ProShop manager, Nathan Sharp, explains

“What I've tried to show you is the different techniques that we're doing here,” Nathan tells us. “The V120 was done by one of our technicians who does the kind of ‘rat’ styles – so that's an acrylic white under-coat and a red acrylic top-coat. Then it's stripped back and aged. All the parts are individually aged by us as well. It might have been a bit more aged than you were expecting, but we wanted to really show the original sunburst under the red.

“I tackled the V100 in a different manner. The original goldtop is over sprayed – as is the headstock face – in nitrocellulose, but we obviously do a little work on the neck back. We have to put the ProShop decal on, so we have to spray that in as well. To do the whole guitar would probably push the final retail price to a full respray cost. Obviously, that's a lot of money so we decided to concentrate on the main visual: the top of the body and the headstock.

“One thing we like to do is to make it look like an old guitar, so, for example, where I've plugged the tailpiece stud holes, usually over time – however carefully you plug them – the finish will sink. So I've purposely made it look like that. We're really trying to make these look like they are 40 or 50 years old with the sort of character you would see on those guitars.

“There's probably been about six hours of work that's gone into that V100, but there are quite a few things on there that I wouldn't normally do to put into production as a ProShop. As I said, I wanted to show you and your readers the range of stuff we can do, so you've got all the whistles and bells on there, although normally I wouldn't put all of those on the one guitar. And, of course, the spraying is all about waiting – the drying time. So while it might be six or so hours' work in total, that's over two to three weeks because it's taken a couple of weeks for the lacquer to dry before I can craze it. It's so unpredictable how the finish will crack, too. We use a heat and freeze technique – and I was really happy with the way that one went – but, yes, it can certainly be unpredictable. Although, again, that's something I like. It means that each guitar has its own uniqueness.

“Some of the simpler guitars might only take two to three hours – maybe just changing a pickguard or changing pickups, and a good-quality setup. At the other end, it might be where I've hand-scored the finish cracks, which can take around eight hours. We try to keep it within those boundaries; I wouldn't want us to be spending two or three full days, that's just not practical for us here.”

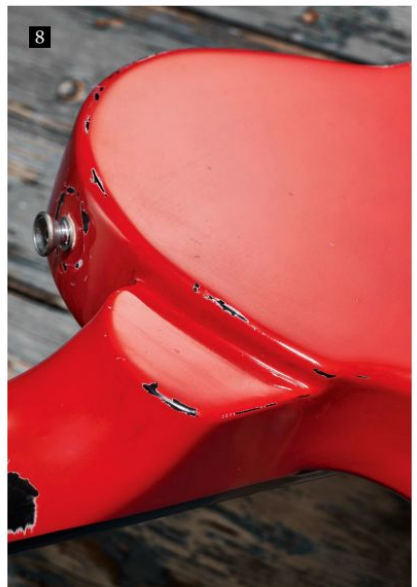


Nathan Sharp heads up a team of four that works on the ProShop models

7. ProShop's Nathan Sharp tell us that these backplates are handmade from "a piece of brass that must have been around for I don't know how long", he says. "It's not aged by us; it's just been aged over time. I cut them out and filed them to shape and, again, they just look in keeping with an instrument like this"



8. The curved body-line and offset heel are very different from Gibson's blueprint and make for a 'Junior' with improved top-fret access





These models reinforce how a lower-end guitar can really perform at a much higher level

Verdict

These are rather difficult guitars to evaluate. First off, they feel in a completely different league to any new Vintage guitar we've ever played and reinforce how a lower-end guitar, properly set up and revoiced, can really perform at a much higher level than its original price would suggest. Add in the comfort treatment for the necks, the great-sounding Bare Knuckle pickups and the vintage-y vibe created by the very believable ageing, and we're scratching our heads a little.

On the one hand, we've been conditioned that Vintage has lower-to-mid three-figure prices. Bearing in mind the work and parts cost, we're not saying these are overpriced – it's just that they seem expensive, don't they? Well, until you try to find an equivalent *new* guitar, that is. Or are we just badge snobs? Slaves to those classic brand names on our headstocks, answers on a postcard, please.

It's down to personal preference, really. But on the presented evidence, we'd be happy to take these on any stage and leave our perhaps-more-valuable instruments to stay cased. Beaters with huge vibe and sounds that are perfectly good enough? We can only say yes. **G**

9. There's a white under-coat here with that pillar-box red top-coat. Both are acrylic but have very convincing age and wear. The pickup guard is aged, too – only the pickup covers, on both, look a little new



VINTAGE PROSHOP V120

PRICE: £999 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: China/Vietnam
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone/43.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Lignum Rosa, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Graptech ResoMax Sonic 1 wrapover bridge, Grover V138N tuners - aged nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.4mm
ELECTRICS: Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard P-90 single coil w/ dog-ear cover, master volume and master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.55/7.81
OPTIONS: Check the Vintage website
RANGE OPTIONS: In the standard Vintage Reissued range, the V120 starts at £339; the aged Vintage Icon costs the same
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Aged Red over Sunburst – acrylic aged top-coats



PROS A crackin' Junior-style build with real-world aged refinish – definitely worth a punt

CONS It basically remains a copy and not everyone will want to pay this money for a pimped East Asian chassis



VINTAGE PROSHOP V100

PRICE: £1,499 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: China/Vietnam
TYPE: Single-cutaway, carved top solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with carved maple top
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/41.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Lignum Rosa, pearloid 'crown' inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Licensed Bigsby B70, locking roller-saddle bridge, Grover Roto-Grip Locking Rotomatic tuners – aged nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50.5mm
ELECTRICS: Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.22/9.28
OPTIONS: Check the Vintage website
RANGE OPTIONS: In the standard Vintage Reissued range, the V100 starts at £369; the aged Vintage Icon versions at £419
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, the Reissued V100 lefty is available in 3 versions from £439; there's a single Icon model, in Lemon Drop finish at £529
FINISHES: Aged Black over Goldtop – aged nitro-cellulose body top and headstock



PROS The best new Vintage guitar we've ever played: excellent vibe-y ageing and great sounds from those Bare Knuckle pickups

CONS Again, basically a pimped East Asian chassis that not everyone will want to pay this money for



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.

FOR MORE INFO:

WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM



Mods Like Us

One way to view these new ProShop guitars is as pre-modded Vintage models. So with our own Mod Squad experience in mind we grilled the team

Words Dave Burrluck

JHS MD Dennis Drumm:
"People are building
and modding their guitars,
it's really creative"



To say that the modding community has mushroomed in the past few years is an understatement, and it was certainly fuelled by the long months of lockdown. The desire to tweak and mod reflects the ever-increasing ranges of aftermarket parts, pickups, wiring looms, not to mention tools and finishing potions. It's definitely something that's on the radar at John Hornby Skewes.

"I do find it interesting the number of people there are now really focusing in on selling bits, like Northwest Guitars," says

JHS managing director, Dennis Drumm. "People like that who have great websites, great ideas. People are building and modding their guitars, it's really creative."

JHS also distributes many aftermarket bits itself – including Wilkinson, Graph Tech, Grover and Guitar Tech – and is the source of the now 26-year-old Vintage guitar brand, designed in the UK and made in factories in China and Vietnam. But the idea for an in-house modding centre wasn't conceived on home shores, as Dennis explains: "The ProShop concept

was started in the USA by our distributor for Vintage guitars, RBI Music in Fort Worth, Texas. They've got a couple of excellent guys out there – well, so have we here – but Kevin Easton is the guy [check out Easton's Guitar Shack-O-Rama].

"One of the owners of RBI is Brad Kirkpatrick. RBI stands for Rhythm Band Instruments, originally a company started by Tommy Moore who was the guy behind Jackson/Charvel in the beginning [as they moved to mass production], which were huge in the educator market. Brad goes

all the way back to Jackson/Charvel, too; I think he was the procurement manager at the time. So Tommy sold the company to Brad – they're still very active in that educator market – but because they're all mad like we are, and they love guitars, they decided to go into the guitar market and RBI became our US distributor for Vintage. They brought onboard Rick Taylor and he was instrumental in the ProShop concept and, well, here we are!"

While the ProShop line was officially announced at the Summer NAMM show back in 2018, it formally went public at the Winter NAMM Show in 2020.

"That's right. We thought it was a great idea," continues Dennis. "You see, when you sell a lot of guitars you inevitably have B-stock [often just cosmetically damaged, marked guitars that have been out on demo or review], which you can either sell off at a reduced price or, as Rick had said to Kevin, 'Can you do something with that?' It's genuine product with pickups swapped, tuners changed – all of that stuff – but it was one of the ways of doing something different with those B-stock guitars. That's how we started and our guys absolutely love doing it."

It's exactly what we do in The Mod Squad, we suggest. "Yes, you're absolutely

"It might not be how a guitar would age, so it almost becomes artwork... but it's still there to be played"

right. The funny thing is, you find out about staff you've been working with for 20 years. I mean, one of our team, Neil Robshaw, I had no idea his massive hobby was model making, so when we gave him that sort of stuff to do but with guitars he was like, 'Really? I get to come to work and do this?'"

ProShop manager, Nathan Sharp, explains that there are four employees, including himself, who make up the project's team: "My brother – aka 'our kid' – has actually worked at JHS for a year longer than me: he's the guitar technician. Then we have our electronics technician, Neil [Robshaw], who has also worked on guitars so he's no novice – he did the work on the V120 you have – and also has that background in model-making, as Dennis mentioned. Our kid is the same: he's a model maker and some of those techniques just lend themselves to what we're doing.

"Some of the heavier relics that were processed by Neil almost look like a cartoon version of a guitar," says Nathan. "They look



There is plenty of subtlety in the ageing of the V100. Here Nathan Sharp colour-tones the bare mahogany to make it look older and darker

phenomenal – they have a narrative to them. It might not be exactly how a guitar would really age, so it almost becomes an artwork guitar... but it's still there to be played." The team is completed by Joe Cross, the newest recruit to the ProShop team.

If you're imagining a Gibson Murphy Lab-like mod shop, think again. Vintage's take is more real-world.

"The ProShop workshop is our service-area space," says Dennis, "and we use other bits of space in the warehouse if we need to, like for the painting and spraying. The team organise themselves and come up with the ideas off their own backs. I might suggest a few things, Paul Smith [JHS's operations director] does, too, but we called them ProShop Unique, because the intention is that never, ever will we make *exactly* the same thing again."

As we explain, the ProShop isn't a full-blown custom shop. The guitars are based on the standard Vintage Reissued and factory-reliced Icon models. Vintage dealers

order ProShop from the ongoing examples built and posted online; as yet, the only way to order your own ProShop is through one of those many Vintage dealers.

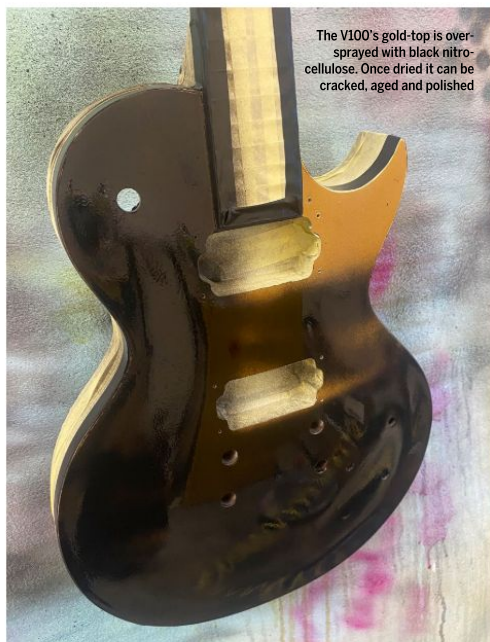
"There's always something in production," continues Dennis, "and we usually try to work in a small batch of perhaps four to six. Once they're finished, we put them up on the website and they get sold. We keep them on the website because, even though they're sold, someone might use one of those as a start-point: 'I'd like one like that, but could you just...'"

Lowly Beginnings

For the past 26 years Vintage has always aimed to offer very affordable versions of classic designs, and Trev Wilkinson has had a big part of the guitars they currently offer (although he's no longer a consultant to JHS). Neither Dennis nor Nathan have any illusions that these are boutique-level pieces, but the uptake around the world, not least in the US, has been considerable.



The back of the V100 is completed with the hand-cut, old-stock and naturally aged brass rear-cavity covers



The V100's gold-top is over-sprayed with black nitro-cellulose. Once dried it can be cracked, aged and polished

"Take our standard V52 Icon as an example," offers Dennis, a guitar that sells for £419 in the Icon range and £399 in the unrelaxed Reissued range. "Who's going to take a real one out when ours makes all the right noises and looks right? I only have to look at what's going on in Nashville, the number of people that really are playing V52s up and down Music Row and at the Opry. Wow! How good is that?"

Vintage has built its empire on affordability: not just final cost but on getting the best flavour from obviously low-cost ingredients. Many of those parts are designed by Trev Wilkinson to be highly affordable yet equally functional. But start adding UK labour cost, not to mention premium UK-made pickups such as Bare Knuckle, oh, and a cost-a-lot Bigsby, and isn't there a danger that Vintage's original USP gets lost in translation with these ProShop models?

"There is a limit to how much work we can do to an instrument that is in a certain price range, what people will pay for and what they will accept. Mind you, I would never say no to anything, so long as we've got the time and someone's willing to pay us for it," laughs Nathan. "Some people can be a bit snobbish: a certain guitar isn't worth doing anything to. But if you've got something with reasonable woods and reasonable construction, who's to say that spending £500 on something that you

"If you bash that V100 it might well take a fair bit of lacquer out... but it'll still look great"

enjoy, and is bespoke to you, isn't actually better than going out and paying an awful lot of money for that 'name' guitar?

"And the cost of some instruments today," Nathan adds. "I'm astounded that people can actually afford to buy them. I mean, is that all it's about these days, wall-hangers? People are buying a guitar as a collection piece, not as an instrument. With these ProShops, of course, we imagine they'll continue to age further because people are going to play them. I mean, if you bash that V100 it might well take a fair bit of lacquer out... but it'll still look great."

"It's like I go out and buy a Golf GTI," interjects Dennis. "I can drive it around all day or I can get under the hood and remap the engine, put on bigger wheels, bigger tyres, change the seats, a bigger stereo. So then it's not a cookie-cutter any more, it's something that someone has spent a lot of time, love and attention on – turning it into something else. So, yes, the chassis are the stock Vintage guitars, but in the ProShop they are completely reworked."

Not everyone will get the concept: our reviewed ProShops are the most expensive guitars with 'Vintage' on the headstock that we've ever played by a country mile. Now, us modders might be thinking, 'Well, we could buy one and do it ourselves.' Of course we could, but not everyone has those skills and it's important to compare like with like as these ProShops still have to be priced to include all the usual margins of the retail model. Time, as ever, means money.

So far, what has the reaction been to these one-offs? "Honestly? Really, really good," concludes Dennis. "I mean, one of the benchmarks is that we put up the finished guitars and they sell. We have to be a little careful because we could easily just drown ourselves. Although there are four guys involved in creating these, they have a lot of other work to do in the regular service department – this is all trying to get fitted in between times."

"Obviously, we'd have to look at the pricing structure of everything we do and also the time scale," says Nathan. "We're not Fender, we can't turn around and say, 'Yes, you can have one, but it's a five-year wait.' We have to see if we can fit it in with everything else we're doing. Right now, this is a new baby for us. There's a limit to what we can produce, but we'll always listen to ideas... and they might inspire a new build." 



eastmanguitars.com

EASTMAN

SB55/v SOLID BODY

RAW REFINEMENT.

Redefining Nylon

Back in 2009, Yamaha introduced its NCX and NTX nylon-string cutaway electro guitars, which helped redefine the modern electro-acoustic nylon-string. Just before the pandemic, the company introduced new, updated versions – and they are finally available in-store

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker





YAMAHA NCX5 & NTX5 BOTH £1,786

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

What You Need To Know

- 1 What's the deal here?**
Simple: Yamaha wanted to create a nylon-string guitar that really worked plugged in. The NX series plays hard and fast with the construction style of the traditional Spanish classical guitar – of which Yamaha has considerable history – resulting in the ‘crossover’ style of the NTX models and the more classical-inspired style of the NCX.
- 2 Aren't Rodrigo y Gabriela involved in these guitars?**
Yes, they were consultants on the original series – and use heavily customised versions of those guitars – and had considerable input on these new NTX5 and NCX5 models we see here. In fact, although they're not signature models, they do bear their signatures on the labels.
- 3 Has much changed?**
Yes, these new models retain the look and function of the originals but have gone through a major overhaul, which includes new bracing, woods and a new proprietary pickup system. The range is trimmed, too.

You sometimes hear an adage about old Gibson Les Pauls: “no two sound the same”. This can also be applied to the steel-string acoustic, and perhaps more so to the nylon-string classical guitar. It's one thing making a great-sounding *acoustic* guitar, but a whole different world when it comes to amplifying it to an audience. Creating a good sound in both environments, then, is challenging. But that's exactly the design brief of Yamaha's decade-old NX guitars. “With resolution of these problems firmly in mind, we set out to create a guitar that would satisfy in terms of design, playability and sound quality,” said Yamaha designer Kenta Hori.

But we're not talking *one* guitar. If the above wasn't enough to chew over, Yamaha created the NCX to appeal to a more classically trained (or aimed) player, while the NTX is for someone more used to a steel-string, a ‘crossover’ player.

The new models are closely based on those original designs with their two distinct styles. The NCX is a 12-frets-to-the-body ‘classical’-based nylon-string with a broad nut width of 52mm, a flat fingerboard and wider string spacing at the tie-block bridge. In contrast, that more ‘crossover’-style NTX is a 14-fret that's based on Yamaha's APX body shape, with a narrower nut width of 48mm, a lightly cambered (600mm) fingerboard, narrower string

spacing at the bridge, and slightly thinner than the NCX in depth. Both are cutaway nylon-string electros with similar aesthetic style, but the differences for the player are quite marked.

So, what's changed? Firstly, the model numbers move from a three- or four-digit suffix to a simple 1, 3 and 5 designation. The 1 and 3 levels are completely made in Yamaha's Chinese mega-factory. The 5 models that we have here are made in the same factory but are finished off in Japan, as we explain in our interview with Yamaha later in this feature.

Also something for you to decide is whether the additional £846 of the 5s is justified over the middle 3 level. Both have exactly the same specification with the exception of the tops: European spruce on the 5s, and Sitka or red cedar on the 3s; the nut/saddle material drops from bone to synthetic (urea); and the spec of the tuners is slightly lower. Our NTX5 also has 24 frets (the upper two are partial) as opposed to

It's a whole different world when it comes to amplifying an acoustic guitar to an audience



1

1. The NX series has its own distinctive look, as Yamaha explains: "The striking head design blends traditional design with contemporary cues and powerful imagery setting the NX Series apart from the rest"

Absolutely everything is considered, from the concept to the new battery holder. To say both guitars are well turned out is an understatement

the 22 of the NTX3 (and NTX1), while the NCX stays with 19 frets on all models. They certainly share more than not. The back/sides wood is walnut, the necks are African mahogany, the fingerboards are ebony, even the binding (mahogany with fine black/white purfling) and soundhole decoration (mahogany and paduk with abalone detailing) are the same.

You also get the same 'reinforced carrying bag' with both levels. If that sounds like a Bag For Life you might purchase at the supermarket, think again. It's Yamaha and it's a superbly rugged but light 'soft' case.

Of course, the new designs benefit from a decade's worth of player feedback and advancing technology. In the former regard, rather oddly, there's no mention of Rodrigo y Gabriela whose signatures grace the labels of the NTX5 and NCX5 respectively, reflecting their use of the original NX guitars – albeit heavily customised – and their involvement in these new designs. Rodrigo y Gabriela have also probably done more than any other artists to put the amplified nylon-string centre stage in the past decade.

Technology also moves on and Yamaha is hanging this new range around a new pickup system, the nylon-string version of the Atmosfeel system we originally saw on the Red Label FGs a couple of years back. It's pretty much the biggest area of

departure from the original designs with a move to a trio of more streamlined and low-profile rotary controls mounted on the bass-side shoulder above the waist and a trio of transducers: an under-saddle piezo, a new proprietary top sensor, and a mini microphone mounted on the internal PCB.

NCX vs NTX

Irrespective of price, Yamaha just doesn't allow anything remotely shoddy to bear its name – and you're not going to find a defect here. Absolutely everything is considered, from the concept to the new battery holder. To say both guitars are well turned out is an understatement. That said, the new construction on our NCX5 does lead to a slightly – but noticeable – heavier guitar compared with our reference original NCX2000R: 1.99kg (4.39lb) as opposed to 1.90kg (4.18lb). Our NTX5 is lighter at 1.86kg (4.09lb), while our other reference, a NCX900FM from the previous range, weighs even less at 1.58kg (3.48lb). The generally heavier build of the original NXes reflects the stage-aimed concept, and if you never plan to play out, neither of these designs would be our first choice for a home or studio nylon-string. Frankly, they're road-hogs – and that's the point.

But aside from the aforementioned differences, the design notably places the tie-block bridges in different places,



THE RIVALS

Back in issue 473 we illustrated the diversity of the mainstream electro-nylon market with Auden's York (£1,099) and Córdoba's Fusion 5 (£450). Córdoba's range of both acoustic and electro nylon-strings is vast and well worth checking out, particularly for guitars such as the GK Studio (approx. £639). We also name-checked Taylor's Academy Series 12e-N (approx. £679). Harder to find currently are Godin's more stylised Multiac models, although the Multiac Encore Nylon (approx. £1,100) is an excellent choice for the stage.

If you have a more specific classical style in mind, there are plenty of European makers to consider, many offering their own electro styles. The German-made Hanika brand, for example, now has its own UK website conceived by Devon-based retailer Classical Guitars Plus. Highly recommended.

2. The 12-fret NCX style uses a conventional round soundhole with its very woody decoration. It's designed for the stage so Yamaha also includes a rubber soundhole plug to alleviate feedback

3. Based on Yamaha's long-running APX design, the 14-fret NTX5 has this oval soundhole, albeit with the same style decoration as the NCX5. It comes with an oval soundhole plug, too

resulting in a fundamental difference in feel and sound, along with an approximate 10mm difference in body depth. Both use a similar steel-string-like dovetail neck join, and while both also have a pretty traditional and light fan bracing, the main cross bracings to both back and front seem a little heavier here than you might expect. Note the subtle additional rounding to the binding in the forearm area of the NCX, too, apparently suggested by Gabriela.

Feel & Sounds

A few hours' playing reveals plenty more differences, not only between the previous guitars but the different styles. Not surprisingly, it's the NCX that comes across as the bigger piece. Yet although the nut width is just over 52mm, the string spacing at the nut is 41mm and 58.5mm at the bridge. Meanwhile, the neck has what can best be described as a D-shaped profile with pretty full shoulders and a lightly flattened back. It measures 22mm at the 1st fret and 24.5mm by the 9th, before the neck moves into the classical-style boat-bow heel. Our old NCX200R has a very similar profile, but doesn't feel as big, measuring 21.3mm at the 1st fret and 23.7mm by the 9th. As ever, these small differences look almost irrelevant on paper, but they are very noticeable to your fretting hand.





4. There's little tradition here, and the heel of the NTX5 is snub-nosed and square – all part of its 'crossover' style

5. If you're crossing over from steel- to nylon-string, you'll have to get used to tying your strings on. The bridges here appear to be stained walnut with an ebony facing to the rear area. The bridges also house the under-saddle piezo pickup, one of three transducers used in the Atmosfeel system

The NTX's neck, while no skinny Fender style, is considerably different with its 48.3mm width and string spacing of 37mm at the nut with a spread of 53mm at the bridge. Here, the depth is similar – 21.5mm at the 1st and 23.7mm at the 10th – but the profile is more of a C, and the heel is notably flatter, more steel-string-like. In combination with the 14-fret joint, this means upper-fret playing is easier still. Plus, here we get position markers in the usual spacings from the 3rd to the 17th frets.

Sound-wise, there's noticeable difference when played unplugged, too, as you'd expect. The NCX's sense of size comes from a very balanced delivery – thick, strong basses that don't overshadow or aren't overshadowed by the trebles. It actually creates quite an intimate voice, a little more bossa nova than flamenco fire. The downside, however, is that the trebles can sound a little compressed when you hit hard; what you get back seems a little softer, with less snap, unlike a good Spanish-style guitar.

If anything, the NTX has a little more of that snap to its upper-string voicing, although the overall voice is trimmed somewhat in the bass response, giving this one a little more mid-focus. After playing the NCX, it really does seem a little cramped, but after spending time with the NTX then going back to the NCX, that now feels huge! The point is they have different characters both in their feel and their sound. Let's plug in.

It's fair to say that the amplified characters mirror the acoustic characters, but the 'size' of the NCX now seems greater with considerable lower midrange colour. On the NTX, that is clearer and the bass is tighter, giving more of the snappy character that this writer is certainly more used to working with. In fact, plugging in our old NCX2000R it sort of sits between the two: a lot clearer in that foggy lower midrange, the low bass a





little fuller than the new NTX, and overall a balanced clarity. Both of the new guitars have quite a bit more output, too.

Onboard mics, used sparingly, can add some realism, but they also increase handling noise and you have to watch your volume even more than you would do anyway. Both guitars come with soundhole bungs if you're playing above the feedback threshold and, while they dampen the response and volume, they can also save a gig. In truth, though, you have very little in terms of EQ control. There's only the 'treble' control, which Yamaha tells us is quite complex in what it actually does, but in use seems to really only colour the higher treble frequencies with a centre 'flat' notch on the control, and cut and boost either side.

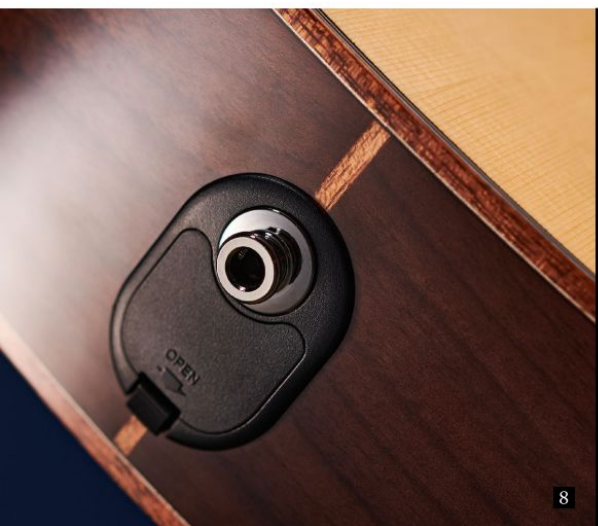
The NX's original pickup system used two Yamaha-designed contact transducers placed under the bridge on the treble and bass side. They have their own volume controls on the System 61 preamp, more like balance controls really, then we have three-band (bass, mid and treble) EQ sliders and a master volume. There's also a tuner, which, oddly, doesn't mute the guitar's output but has always proved handy if you're away from your pedalboard and you've left your headstock tuner behind. Real world backup, if you like. Sound aside, the new system is quite a departure, especially in terms of onboard control.



6. These three low-profile controls have no function legends but do come with a handy (and removable) clear plastic plate that tells you which control does what: master volume, treble EQ and mic blend

7. As its more classical style suggests, the heel on the NCX5 is a very traditional boat bow, like a conventional Spanish classical guitar

The NTX5 ticks all the boxes for that modern 'crossover', a nylon-string for steel-string players that is, to our hands, eyes and ears, pretty much state of the art



Pretty much every aspect of the design has been tweaked from the decade-old original models

Verdict

Yamaha's considered approach to guitar design is very evident here. Outwardly, these new guitars look very similar to the original decade-old models, but pretty much every aspect of the design has been tweaked. For the better?

Well, it's doubtful these redesigns will have any less appeal. The new pickup system with its simplistic control takes away the geekery of the previous preamp, and the three-pickup source of the Atmosfeel system adds to the available voicings, in theory. The NTX5 ticks all the boxes for that modern 'crossover', a nylon-string for steel-string players that is, to our hands, eyes and ears, pretty much state of the art. In isolation, the NCX5 is just as good, but the thicker voicing of our sample does seem to move it further away from its more classical style, and in this writer's live setup struggled to reproduce the lighter and cleaner voice of our original and well-gigged NCX2000R.

As we say in our introduction, though, your idea of the 'perfect' nylon-string sound might be different to ours, not to mention how you want to use it, the style of music you play and your amplification route. What's not in doubt is that these new NXes throw down another gauntlet: if you're in the market for an electro nylon-string, this is the place to start your search. **B**

8. The original NX models used a block battery mounted in a flip-top compartment on the upper shoulder – a very similar way to ID the original models. Here, the battery compartment moves to the output jack/strap button plate and it takes a pair of AA batteries



YAMAHA NCX5

PRICE: £1,786 (inc soft case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Classical cutaway nylon-string electro with 12-fret neck joint
TOP: Solid European spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 100mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Classical style 3-a-side with black rollers, gold-plated with black marble-like buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/52.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, flat, no position markers except side dots at 5th and 7th frets
FRETS: 19, medium/small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Stained walnut with ebony topped tie-block/58.5mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha Atmosfeel with under-saddle, contact sensor (top) and internal mic. Preamp with master volume, mic blend and treble EQ quick-release battery holder end-jack/strap button
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.99/4.38
OPTIONS: See NTX5
RANGE OPTIONS: The all-solid NCX3 (£940) is also available with a cedar top at the same price. The start-up NCX1 with solid Sitka spruce top and more traditional under-saddle pickup (with 3-band EQ and tuner) costs £423; again it's available with solid cedar top. Back are sides here are laminate and the NCX1FM (£518) uses flame maple as opposed to nato or okume
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural (as reviewed) – gloss with satin neck and headstock face

8/10

PROS Great contemporary design; superb build; easy-to-use, efficient preamp/pickup system

CONS Voicing is a little thick-sounding, needs more 'snap' for some players; NCX3 has similar specs and is much less expensive



YAMAHA NTX5

PRICE: £1,786 (inc soft case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Medium-bodied cutaway, nylon string electro with 14-fret neck joint
TOP: Solid European spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 90mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Classical style 3-a-side with black rollers, gold-plated with black marble-like buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/48.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 600mm (23.6") radius, no position markers except side dots at 5th and 7th frets
FRETS: 22, medium/small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Stained walnut with ebony topped tie-block/53mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha Atmosfeel with under-saddle, contact sensor (top) and internal mic. Preamp with master volume, mic blend and treble EQ quick-release battery holder end-jack/strap button
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.86/4.09
OPTIONS: See NCX5
RANGE OPTIONS: The NTX3 (in natural or brown sunburst) costs £940; the NTX1 (natural, brown sunburst, black) costs £423, again with different pickup/preamp and laminate back and sides
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural (as reviewed) – gloss with satin neck and headstock face



9/10

PROS Excellent contemporary design like the NCX5 and its 'crossover' style has more general appeal; hard to fault on any level

CONS Very little, although again the NTX3 has very similar specs and is considerably less expensive

CIRRUS

SPATIAL-TEMPORAL MODIFIER



Floating above your head, delicate and elusive, yet dreamy and sweeping.

Always in motion, until it dissolves and merges with the all immersive atmosphere around it.

Just close your eyes and let the KMA Machines' Cirrus Delay and Reverb carry you across the open sky, onto its sonic cloudscape.



www.kma-machines.com



Audio
Distribution
Group

Worldwide Distribution by Audio Distribution Group - Building Brands Together

sales@audiodistributiongroup.com



Shaping Sound

Few guitar companies have the kind of technology Yamaha boasts at their disposal when it comes to the acoustic. The redesigned NX series illustrates some complex electronics under the hood of these new nylon-strings

Words Dave Burrluck

While the great luthiers behind the classical guitar – the boutique builders of their day – had limited access to woods and made their instruments in small workshops completely by hand, today's classical and nylon-string guitars are a lot more likely to be made in very large factories in Asia, at least the ones we can afford. The new NX series, for example, is made at Yamaha's own factory in Hangzhou, China, which was established back in 2003. By 2009, when the wraps were taken off the original NX series, it was producing around 500,000 instruments a year. Clearly, what has been a good selling range for Yamaha – available all across the world – is not going to be changed in a heartbeat. But this is Yamaha and it's a company that rarely does things by half... or in a hurry.

According to Yamaha designer Yoshihiko 'Yoshi' Tambara, the first area to receive attention were the guitars' tops, specifically "to redesign the top fan-bracing using the Yamaha Acoustic Simulation technology", he told us at the launch of the new NX range back at the NAMM 2020 show, pre-pandemic. "The main aim was that we wanted to increase the acoustic volume with a warmer sound but also to keep the long-term stability of the guitar so the top won't move over the years."

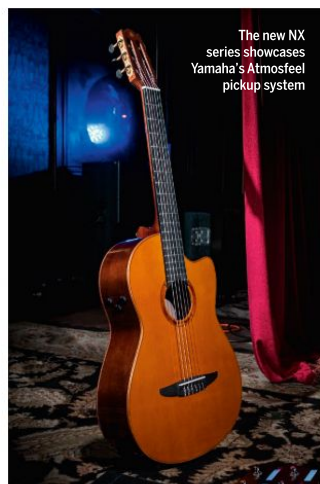
"The obvious thing to get more volume is to simply brace more lightly," added Yamaha's Julian Ward during the same

interview, "but we have a thing about the integrity and stability of an instrument over a long period of time."

Put another way, you won't see the undulating, deformed tops that you might on a more Spanish-style nylon-string here. But back to the technology at play: "Yamaha has developed proprietary simulation techniques for use in designing guitars that allow us to use a computer to control and design the sound of a guitar, virtually, before the first chisel touches any wood," we're told.

Transducer Tech

Another area that Yamaha has invested a serious amount of resource in is its proprietary pickup systems and preamps. Yoshi explained: "[In 2019], we launched the FG Red Label with the new Atmosfeel system, and this year we have modified it for the nylon-string sound. We developed a new pickup system. It has three elements. There's an under-saddle piezo, and a newly developed contact sensor [that sits under the top just behind the bass-side of the bridge], which we call a C-Sensor – it's very thin and lightweight and it captures the sensitivity and high-frequency range. Thirdly, there's a tiny microphone on the preamp PCB itself inside the guitar. Each model has individual voicing. We have a different EQ voicing design for each model, even the NCX3 with its cedar top – they are all different sounds.



The new NX series showcases Yamaha's Atmosfeel pickup system

PHOTO BY GREG VOROBIOV



Yamaha designer Yoshihiko 'Yoshi' Tambara and Julian Ward spoke to us at the product launch in 2020

"The piezo and contact sensor are pre-mixed and the user can then add the microphone sound to that," continued Yoshi of the simple three-control user interface, made up of Master Volume, Mic Blend and Treble. "The piezo pickup captures the lower frequency portion of the sound, the C-Sensor the higher frequency, more percussive sound, and the mic contributes a more airy sound of the body. Our goal is to reproduce a very natural acoustic sound."

So, along with the Master Volume and Mic Blend (which goes from bypassed to almost 50/50 per cent mic and pre-mixed piezo/C-sensor), the third control is the Treble EQ. "The preamp is actually digital here,"

Julian told us, "which is why we can voice it to the specific model. And that treble EQ, for example, isn't just a filter, it's morphing... We call it 'Treble EQ' because the way it sounds to your ear is that you're making it brighter, or not, but what is actually going on in there is a morphing multi-band EQ that affects the whole balance of all the frequencies. Basically, it's a very similar feel to the Atmosfeel system on the Red Label FG – which we actually labelled 'Bass EQ' because it basically trims or enhances the warmth, the lower end, which is what most people want from a steel-string. But here

"We have a different EQ voicing design for each model, even the cedar-top NCX3 they are all different sounds" **Yoshihiko Tambara**

we affect very different frequency bands. The nylon player might want to affect the brightness, or snap, more than the low-end.

"Think of the preamp as a mini-mixer," continued Julian, "and each input from the three sources has its own EQ – a sort of 'corrective' EQ – and then you have the creative output EQ on the knob and that's the stuff that we're talking about as being different on each model: the pickups are the same, but the response is different because the actual guitars are different. We also believe this system provides better feedback rejection."

Overall, there are fewer bells and whistles and Yoshi simply states "in talking to many professional players, they just want a great sound from the start – quickly and immediately – on stage. They don't want to have to fiddle with a three-band EQ and they either use a clip-on or stompbox tuner, so having one on the guitar is unnecessary. So, yes, we decided to keep things very simple."



Longtime Yamaha players Rodrigo y Gabriela (pictured here in 2016) co-designed the NX5 series models

That said, the original NX pickup/preamp system was pretty unique a decade ago, but, technology-wise, this new Atmosfeel system seems like a quantum leap forward.

"Yes, this has been a long time in development," Julian confirmed, "not least [that] the sheet sensor pickup is completely new proprietary technology that we've developed over five or six years. I believe I'm right to say that originally the sheet material was used in seismic sensors to detect earthquakes, so it's a hugely sensitive thin material. We tried it in lots of applications because we thought it would be useful as a pickup, but we weren't entirely sure how."

"After an awful lot of R&D and testing we found the best way to use it is to capture the high-end in conjunction with a piezo to capture the low- and midrange," Julian explained. "You get that combination of the directness and the snap of the piezo but without that horrible piezo top-end. So, yes, it's a big shift forwards."

"The simplified control system – there's no panel, just the three low-profile rotary controls – is good for the guitar as well: just three holes in the side. Plus this new preamp is very light compared with what we used on the previous NXes. There's a new battery box, too, by the base endpin jack, which uses just two AAs and provides 20 hours of continuous use."

Wood Moves

Another big change is the back and sides wood used on the 5- and 3-level NX models. "We don't have rosewood back and sides, we have walnut," said Julian. "It was an environmental decision, of course, influenced by the CITES restrictions on rosewood when the guitars were in development. So we chose walnut, which is more sustainable. It's a little more focused-sounding compared with rosewood, a little less low frequency. It's a little lighter in weight, which is good for the nylon-string. The strings, of course, have a lower tension than steel-strings, but the wood still needs to vibrate. China purchases the walnut from Africa and America, I believe."

And what about the Rodrigo y Gabriela connection? These aren't signature guitars, but the duo have had considerable input into these new guitars, building from the input they had in the original designs.

"Yes, the 5 series models were actually co-developed with Rodrigo y Gabriela," Julian continued. "As you rightly say, they are not signature models as such, but they do have their signatures inside. They are really close to their guitars – although the guitars they use are really specific and super high-end. Rodrigo's guitar is based on the NTX, Gabriela's on the NCX. So this new NCX5 has a few of her personal touches, like the binding under the forearm is slightly rounded. And on the NTX the

Yamaha's supplied 'reinforced carrying bag' is actually a rugged but light 'soft' case that does its job superbly



fingerboard extends two more frets than the 3 or 1. We wanted to capture as closely as we could their guitars – which actually have multiple outputs and for most people would be unusable or at least overkill – but we, and they, wanted to capture as much of their instruments but in a *production* guitar. So they are still using their highly customised models, but rather than doing signature models of those that aren't really connected to the rest of the line, for example, let's just make the 5 basically their model with some of their features on it.

"We actually felt that working with them as co-designers, rather than signature artists, was actually more meaningful. They're not just putting their name on something, they have actually worked with us on the NX – and, in fact, through the whole life of the line. And they certainly did a lot of work on these new models. A signature model can be a little tricky sometimes – it might be a great guitar, but the end-user might not enjoy the actual artist. We feel the guitar works for *any* musician, not just those that want to play like Rodrigo y Gabriela."

Modern Making

To conclude, the new range doesn't have some of the high-end features (or prices) of the original range. There's no Japanese hand-crafted model such as the NCX2000R and NCX2000FM with their

"[The manufacturing process] across all of our guitars [is] informed by the craft and development in Japan" **Julian Ward**

ARE [Acoustic Resonance Enhancement]-treated Japanese Hokkaido spruce tops.

"Correct, there's no ARE treatment on any of the new models, and the NX5 pair have a European spruce top – the 3 and 1 use Sitka spruce," said Julian. "ARE doesn't seem to do a lot for that – it actually works better, we've found, on Sitka."

"The NTX and NCX5es are also a combination of manufacturing," he continued. "The woodworking is done in China, but the assembly and setup is done in Japan. It's become one of the things we're looking at more and more: can we do some of the more fundamental work, say in China, and then ship those to Japan for final assembly or finishing? We've actually done it for quite a long time – the bridges, for example, on our high-end Japanese acoustic guitars are made in China. There is a discernible difference in guitars that are finished like this in Japan, even though parts of the woodwork are done in China."

"So, to be specific, what happens in Japan is the bridge attachment, the neck profile is checked, the nut and saddle are fitted – which are bone on the NX5es only – and the tuning pegs are attached. The actual finishing is done in China, but the top-coat buffing is done in Japan."

"A lot of the techniques and jigs we use have been developed by our luthiers in Japan, so although the instrument might be made in China they remain very consistent: it's not like we've got a flagship factory in Japan then China is a very different thing. It's a really consistent approach to manufacturing across all our guitars, all informed by the craft and development in Japan."

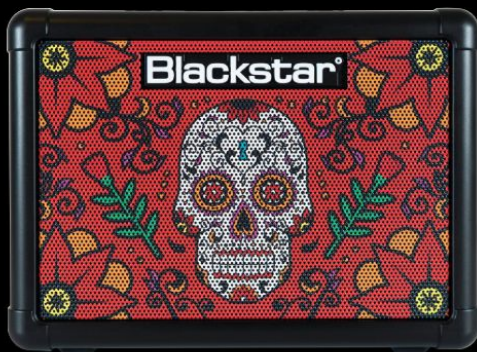
"It's something we've genuinely worked towards: to remove the country of origin. We just want to make stable, good-quality and consistent guitars – and we don't really care where they come from. But, of course, we're in an industry in which country of origin really matters to many people. It's a double-edged sword. I think it's really good that it's difficult to tell the higher-end Chinese guitars from those made in Japan; we're very proud of that. But it has some challenges in the marketplace where some people want to say, 'Oh, I only play the USA-made guitars or the Japanese ones.' The funny thing is, we really don't want that to matter, but we're aware there are elements of [country of origin] that do matter to the consumer." **B**

FREE!

Blackstar Fly 3 Mini Amp
worth £65 when you subscribe to

Guitarist

SAVE
UP TO
57%!



Choose between
Black, Vintage
or Skull design



Blackstar's FLY 3 is an innovative, cutting-edge three-watt mini amp that combines two channels, tape delay and the Blackstar patented Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) to create the perfect compact and portable guitar amplifier. It packs a punch with big tone, even at the lowest volumes.



WHY SUBSCRIBE?



- DELIVERY STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR
- SAVE MONEY ON THE SHOP PRICE
- YOU'RE IN CONTROL – MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ONLINE VIA OUR DEDICATED SELF-SERVICE SITE
- NEVER MISS AN ISSUE

PRINT
ONLY £53 FOR
12 MONTHS,
SAVING 37%



PRINT & DIGITAL
ONLY £58 FOR
12 MONTHS,
SAVING 57%



ORDERING IS EASY. TO ORDER ONLINE, VISIT
WWW.MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM/FLY3MINI
OR CALL 0330 333 1113 AND QUOTE
BK28 (BLACK), BL28 (VINTAGE) OR BM28 (SKULL)

OFFER ENDS: 17 SEPTEMBER 2021

Offer closes 17 September 2021. Offer open to new subscribers only. Direct Debit offer is available to UK subscribers only. *£53 (print) or £58 (bundle) payable by 12-monthly Direct Debit. This price is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts are only available to subscribers on the UK mainland (not with Digital-only subscriptions) and are subject to availability. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday - Friday 9am-5pm UK time. Or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



WALRUS AUDIO

Polychrome Analog Flanger

This colourful pedal delivers many shades of flange

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Philip Barker

Walrus Audio has several modulation pedals in its roster, notably the Julia chorus and Lillian phaser, which both share similarities with the Polychrome, the brand's new analogue flanger. In particular, all three pedals sport a Blend knob that moves from totally dry sound to 100 per cent wet. In this case, it's labelled D-F-V (Dry, Flange, Vibrato) with the most traditional flanger tones at the 50/50 mix, 12 o'clock position, lots of subtler shadings to the left and true vibrato fully clockwise.

IN USE

The overall tone of this pedal is warm and mellow, and its forte is quite a range of classy flanging and beyond. Before you even start messing with the knobs, there

are six different options available from combinations of the two-way Voice and the three-way Shape switches.

The Voice switch's lower position offers traditional full-frequency flanging, while Walrus says the other option delivers a more complex and notched flange effect. It can be quite a subtle difference with certain knob settings, but the main thrust of it is the upper position has a notably leaner sound with less bottom-end.

The Shape switch selects which shape of LFO wave you want to use to modulate the delay line. There are traditional sine and triangle choices offering some familiar flanging tones, but you also get a Random option delivering a more unpredictable effect for the adventurous as it varies the modulation in a less regimented fashion.

Rate does exactly the same as with any other modulation pedal and has a range from 0.1Hz to 8Hz, which effectively means it goes from flanging cycles that unfold over several seconds, up to a sweet warble like a Leslie speaker on fast speed.

The Depth knob here, in control of the width of the filter sweep, interacts with the Sweep knob, which shifts the frequency range of that sweep with plenty of nuanced changes available through their combination. This Sweep knob is at its most effective at lower-depth settings; in fact, with the Depth at minimum you can set a frequency and operate the pedal like a static filter. If you want a more intense effect, you can reach for the Feedback knob, which

01. SHAPE SWITCH

Choose to modulate the LFO with sine, triangle or random waveforms

02. VOICE SWITCH

This offers two voices: the lower setting offers full frequency flanging, while the upper position is most notable for having less low-end

03. D-F-V KNOB

This blender sets your effect, gradually moving from 100 per cent wet to 100 per cent dry with classic flanging tones around the 50/50 mid point

04. LEDS

The left LED shows whether the pedal is active or bypassed, while the right one flashes in sync with the speed

05. FOOTSWITCH

Press and hold for momentary effects or otherwise just use as a standard latching footswitch



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Flanger pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Sweep, Feedback, D-F-V blend, Shape switch, Voice Switch bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor, 30mA minimum (Not supplied)

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

8/10

feeds effected sound back through the circuit and can emphasise the sweep's swoosh and add a metallic sheen. Note, though, that it doesn't get quite as extreme as the metallic ice-picky flanging that you can coax from a vintage Electric Mistress.

SOUNDS

There's something about plugging into a flanger that makes us inevitably want to start playing *Message In A Bottle*, as well as get into classic rock territory, such as Van Halen's *Unchained* and Queen's *Keep Yourself Alive*. The pedal works really well with distortion in front of it for rich textured sound with a sense of movement about it.

Traditional flanging aside, though, this is a fine source of varied modulation that

include chorus-like tones, pitch vibrato and the aforementioned rotary speaker sounds. That D-F-V knob is your key to just how much effect you want. With total wet sound, there's some cool vibrato, but roll it back a bit and you'll find a whole range of hybrid modulation sounds to be explored. By the same token, there's plenty of mileage with the knob just a little north of totally dry, with just enough of a tonal shift to pique the interest without overwhelming your core sound.

There's no expression pedal control available here, but what is really cool is the smart footswitch that, besides its standard latching action, offers momentary activation of the effect with a press and hold – just step on it for flanged emphasis of selected notes, chords or passages.

VERDICT

To some players, modulation effects may seem a little interchangeable. It may be fair to say that unless you're trying to dial in a precise match from a vintage recording, it may not matter whether you're using chorus, flanging or phasing to add flavour or a sense of motion to your straight sound – and there are many multi-modulation pedals out there that will give a variety. However, if it is definitely flanging you want then the Polychrome is a class act: a veritable treasure trove of flanging sounds that will slot nicely onto your 'board. **G**

PROS Momentary operation; wide range of sounds; D-F-V knob to blend in your effect

CONS No expression pedal input; slight perceived volume loss on some settings

REDBEARD EFFECTS

Angry Rhubarb Paradynamic MKII

Give your tone its just desserts with this combination of drive and EQ

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

Redbeard Effects, a UK-based guitar effects company, is a collaboration between Adrian Thorpe, the driving force behind ThorpyFX pedals, and guitarist Mikey Demus from the band Skindred. The Angry Rhubarb is the brand's third pedal – following on from the Red Mist MKIV drive pedal and the Honey Badger Octave Fuzz – and is the direct result of pondering whether an overdrive circuit sounds better before or after EQ. Now a reality, it actually offers EQ sandwiched between two independent overdrive circuits.

The semi-parametric EQ here covers a frequency range of 80Hz to 4kHz with up to 6dB of boost or cut for the selected frequency. In front of the EQ is a low to medium drive controlled by the Pre Drive knob, while after the EQ, the Post Drive knob offers a gainier drive.

Simply using the pedal with both drive knobs at zero gives you plenty of options. With a flat EQ, unity gain on the Volume knob is at about 11 o'clock, so there's loads of knob travel left to dial in practical amounts of clean boost, from a tickle to a hefty slap, with or without targeted EQ.

Pre Drive takes you beyond clean, delivering increasing grit and break-up shaped by the EQ, perhaps some sparkly shading of the top-end or a dip in the midrange for some drive reminiscent of vintage Fender amp tone. The Post Drive control takes you further into dirt, and seems to have a slightly brighter voicing. But having the EQ in front of it lets you really hone in on the character of the drive coming out of the pedal, whether you're taming the top-end for a more mellow drive, building in a touch of throaty midrange presence to cut through the mix, or getting more extreme with the raucous bark of a packed wah.

VERDICT

Juxtaposition of the two drive knobs from a mild to a full-on drive and carefully applied EQ confers a versatility on this pedal that goes well beyond what most single drive pedals can do, making it a practical choice if it's your only drive pedal. However, it's also great for stacking because the tone-shaping plus that wide gain range give you plenty of options when combining with another drive.



PROS Plenty of versatility in a reasonably sized pedal; two drive stages; powerful semi-parametric EQ

CONS Nothing really – switchable Q values would increase versatility but also detract from the inherent simplicity

ALSO TRY...



J. PROCKETT

Rockaway Archer \$249

Developed for Billy Idol guitarist Steve Stevens as an all-in-one solution to his overdrive and EQ needs, this pedal features a six-band graphic EQ with 18dB of cut or boost at each frequency.



DR. SCIENTIST

The Elements £189

This is a dual-channel overdrive/distortion with a wide gain range and a full three-band equaliser. There are toggle switch options for clipping modes, bass cut frequencies and midrange frequencies.



COLE MUSIC

Paradrive \$189

The Paradrive is an FET-based overdrive pedal with parametric EQ, featuring up to 15dB of cut or boost in a range from 100Hz to 4kHz. It features two clipping options selected with a toggle switch.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Post

Drive, Pre Drive, Freq Gain,

Freq, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard

input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor

(not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x

125 (d) x 58mm (h)



9/10



ROUND-UP

Browne Amplification pedals

Two US pedals that may just provide all your 'board's dirt needs

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

Browne Amplification – a guitar, amplification and guitar effects company that operates out of Kansas City, Missouri – was set up with the aim of making high-quality, durable and dependable guitar products for the working musician. Its pedals are designed by David Brown, a long-time musician and guitar tech, with input from guitarist/producer Adam Sniegowski.

There are currently two pedals available in the roster. The Protein Dual Overdrive is the result of years of development and road-testing with the aim of creating a dual overdrive that would sound great with any backline. Meanwhile the latest offering, the T4 Fuzz, is the brand's take on a classic four-transistor fuzz. Let's take a look.



BROWNE

Protein Dual Overdrive £319

The Protein is based around modified versions of two well-respected drive pedal circuits: the 'Blue' side is based on a 1990's Marshall Bluesbreaker but has a tweaked tone control and extra output, while the 'Green' side takes its cue from that Nashville session favourite the Nobels ODR-1. That pedal typically sounds best at lower Gain knob positions, and this version is tweaked with less gain to give those usable settings over a wider sweep of the Gain knob. It also features a midrange tweak for more body but less woofiness. It certainly gives you all the low-gain, early breakup sounds you could wish for, and provides a very natural push to an amp. The Blue side offers tasty amp-like drive that compresses nicely.

Either side sounds great into an amp, but both working together increases the tonal options, especially in building fat, gainier lead sounds. By default, the Green side feeds into the Blue, but you can use a loop switcher with each in a different loop. **G**

VERDICT Two distinct sounds that can be used separately but complement each other when combined – a fine utility pedal indeed



BROWNE

T4 Fuzz £185

You might think that original manufacturer Electro-Harmonix has enough variants on the Big Muff to satisfy most needs, but boutique manufacturers have their own angles on what the perfect variation should be – and Browne's is the T4. Its take on the circuit is to give it a flattened EQ curve for extra mids over the typically scooped Muff, so that the sound doesn't get lost in the mix when you kick the pedal in.

Compared to our collection of Muffs, this one is closest in character to our favourite 'Ram's Head' model, but has a more focused midrange with less murk lower down and a sweet clarity in the top-end. That's reflected in the Tone knob's action, which runs from rounded and flute-y to searing treble, while still retaining presence – it cleans up nicely with guitar volume, too. Combine that with a Sustain knob that runs from a more sizzly fuzz at its lower reaches right through to typical Muff-style full saturation and massive sustain, and you have fuzz/distortion flexibility in a box. **G**

VERDICT A better Big Muff? We think so, but it retains all that Muff versatility from Gilmour to grunge

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Dual overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass,
green and blue LEDs

CONTROLS: (Blue side) Level, Gain, Tone,
Bypass footswitch; (Green side) Level, Drive,
Tone, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output (TRS sockets are used
to facilitate independent loop switcher
connection for each side)

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 124 (w) x 97 (d) x 50mm (h)



9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Level, Sustain, Tone,
Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,
standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 71 (w) x 126 (d) x 55mm (h)



9/10





Dream-Pop Tones

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone shares some ethereal soundscapes inspired by Cocteau Twins' meditative pop



When looking for new inspiration for sound designs and pedal combinations, I've always found it rewarding to dive into a very specific artist or genre. Using your ears to intently listen, analyse and decipher exactly what's going on, sound-wise, is an extremely satisfying exercise. I recently decided to practise that in one of my Tonal Teamwork videos on YouTube, as I dove into a very specific sound from one of my favourite bands, Cocteau Twins. I like to call the sound 'the dream-pop wash'. Dream-pop hit the airwaves sometime in the 1980s and is very often mentioned in the same breath as shoegaze, as they are both built on a rich, textural tapestry of hypnotic sounds. But where shoegaze tends to rely on a heavier and dense wall-of-sound, with copious use of fuzzy distortion, dream-pop is more focused on the delicate and airy side of things, utilising many lush and pristine modulated dreamscapes along the way.

Cocteau Twins (and guitarist Robin Guthrie) helped spearhead the genre

through their meditative pop songs and it was their song *Lazy Calm* that really got me into the genre. The tune opens with a delicately played chord that turns into a slowly blooming, cascading ocean of sound due to its copious use of delay and modulation. A sound that would become synonymous with dream-pop for me. So, let's learn how to make something like it.

1. MODULATION

Dream-pop without chorus would be like Calvin without Hobbes – it just wouldn't be the same. It's such an essential part of the genre's sound, and should be the first part of your signal chain. Any chorus pedal will do, although I tend to favour digital chorus pedals and the bright present sheen they have. A lot of the dream-pop bands were early adopters of digital effects and often used digital rack harmonisers or pitch-shift pedals set to a slight detune to get their chorus tones. But no matter if you go analogue or digital, it's important to go for a rich, slow setting (high depth, low speed/rate), in order

to get that iconic shimmering attack and huge dimensional tone.

Dream-pop bands such as Cocteau Twins, Slowdive and Chapterhouse were, in general, just fans of modulation and would often stack different types of modulation for extra movement and texture. If you want to take it a step further, try running a slow phaser or Uni-Vibe into the chorus for a more psychedelic sweeping sound, or use a vibrato in front for a more nostalgic sound, but just always leave that chorus on, okay?!

2. DELAY

Another pivotal ingredient of dream-pop is delay. The genre is known for its blooming reverberating tones, but a lot of this 'reverber' actually stems from several cascading delay lines. Robin Guthrie himself was known for preferring delay over reverb, since it resulted in a clearer atmospheric tone, and he has, at one point, used up to as many as 10 different cascading delays at the same time to nail the sounds in his head.



“Dream-pop bands were known for using both vintage tape echoes and modern digital rack and pedal delays”

In order to achieve those signature blooming delay cascades as heard on *Lazy Calm*, you need to stack a short pristine delay (around the 200 to 300ms mark) set to a couple of repeats, with a longer modulated dual delay with a decent number of repeats. You can experiment with the rhythmic subdivisions as you please, but as I've mentioned before, you'll never go wrong with a quarter and dotted eighth-note setting.

As mentioned earlier, dream-pop emerged right on the cusp of the digital effect revolution, so the bands were known for using both vintage tape echoes and modern digital rack and pedal delays. So, try to mix and match different delay flavours and find out what suits you the best. Personally, I like the short delay to be clean and digital and the dual delay to have a modulated tape vibe to it.



This creates a bright blooming attack, with a lush organic decay.

3. REVERB

I know I just said that delay played a bigger part than reverb... but, of course, reverb is also used in dream-pop. It was used a ton on vocals, synths and even drums as well as on guitar to glue together a sound. 100 per cent wet reverb guitar textures played a big part as well. But where I find reverb really useful in this context is when it comes to adding stereo width and dimension to the overall sound.

Cocoteau Twins' iconic guitar tones were created through using tons of overdubbing, with all the stacked and panned guitar tracks creating a wonderfully wide and moving stereo image. This is particularly hard to do with just a single guitar played live, but if we use a big ambient stereo reverb, mixed with some stereo delay, we can get really close to this tone in real-time. Go for a subtle mix with a long decay, and if your reverb has modulation options, go for it. The more swirl and twirl, the better.

HEAR IT HERE

Did this issue's column inspire you to dive into the sonic dream-pop waters? If so, hear these ideas and concepts in action in my video on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at <https://bit.ly/476TTdreampop>

Longtermers

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

Fender American
Acoustasonic Jazzmaster
with Dave Burluck



Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



Every time we mention this guitar we get mail. Our reviews editor continues exploring this divisive instrument, with additional viewpoints from a reader and a seasoned pro...

In the more sociable months of early summer, our borrowed Acoustasonic gets quite a lot of attention. "It's much better in the flesh... but it still looks wrong," offers one of my more traditional music mates. "Wow, it feels really good!" says a more open-minded pro musician whose world of work is only just beginning to look a little brighter.

I first encountered the modern Acoustasonic concept with the launch of the Telecaster version at Winter NAMM 2019. At Fender's pre-show bash, *Guitarist's* editor-in-chief, Jamie Dickson, and I were taken through the concept by key designer Tim Shaw as we listened intently and quaffed on a couple of Corona beers. A little while later, while power-walking to our next do and with perhaps jet-lag and those beers taking effect, we reckoned we'd found the guitar of the show before the event had even officially started. But bumping into a highly regarded UK dealer, he popped our balloon: "It's too expensive. No-one will pay that. It needs to be made in Mexico and half the price."

"There's a huge amount of R&D with the Acoustasonic and it's unique in the guitar world"

Regular *Guitarist* correspondent, Steve Broadhead, a keen gigging musician, picked up on the theme in reference to the first part of this Longtermers test back in issue 474, and we printed his full letter in Feedback, issue 475. Along with his observation that the Acoustasonic is "a classic opinion divider", he's also of the opinion that if it was significantly cheaper he suspects it would "immediately become a go-to tool for gigging and recording musicians at almost every level".

Well, I for one, would definitely buy a Ferrari if they made one for around the price of a knackered Ford Kia. Wouldn't we all?

There's a huge amount of costly R&D at the heart of the Acoustasonic and it's completely unique in the guitar world. Of course, Fender



Slade's Dave Hill had a change of heart about the Acoustasonic after reading the first part of our Longtermers in issue 474

PHOTO BY COLLY CURTIS

would sell more if it halved the price. But why do we see 'tech' as cheap and repeatable, where we'd happily expect to pay a lot more for a vintage-spec Telecaster from the Custom Shop, which aims to replicate 1950s wood craft and radio technology?

Steve hasn't actually had the chance to play an Acoustasonic, despite the fact he has some pretty strong opinions about it. He's not alone and even designer Tim Shaw was surprised by the considerable number of online and forum comments – quite often negative – after the original launch of the Telecaster version. Yet the Acoustasonic, for those that have actually got to play one, is proving highly valid.

"The original Telecaster vastly exceeded our expectations," said Tim Shaw. "I think one thing is that you give the Tele to three players and they'll all approach it differently. I think that's when we realised it was – it is – a legitimate platform: it's its own thing."

Via our amp guru, Nick Guppy, I get another missive from *Guitarist* reader and Slade legend Dave Hill, who has a dilemma. "My reason for contacting you is the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster. I've heard about this for some time, but couldn't get one to try. Then I noted your Longtermers write-up in *Guitarist*, which made me think again.

"My point in all of this is that for some of our songs, like *Far Far Away*, *Everyday*, *How Does It Feel* and *My Friend Stan*, it would be nice if I could use a guitar that could also be great as an acoustic. I don't want power chords, but would like to be able to handle some of the electric guitar licks that I played

on the records on my Gibson," Dave says. "So, in other words, do two jobs well. And no feedback."

Before I reply, I remind myself of those songs – beautifully executed songcraft – and I'm transported back in time. I grew up on Slade, Bowie, T.Rex and the rest, gods that I'd watch weekly on *Top Of The Pops*. Now they're asking for my advice?!

We email over the next few days and conclude, rightly or wrongly, that yes the Acoustasonic could probably do the job. But reminding Dave that it is an *acoustic* first and foremost with a wound third string, and that it is hollow so, depending on his stage environment (it doesn't sound like, live, they go down the quiet stage/in-ear monitor route), it might not be entirely feedback-free. And my experience of gigging the Acoustasonic Telecaster (as an electric) at pub-rock levels back in 2019 was quite a, ahem, lively ride.

Switching between sounds isn't instant, either – not least from position 5 to position 1, and then you may need to roll in a little gain from the Mod knob – unlike a solidbody electric with a piezo acoustic sound, for example. Then a dual amp setup might be the best way to authenticate the sounds on offer.

I promise to keep working on the Acoustasonic and get back to Dave with more thoughts. A divisive guitar and a fast studio tool, especially if you want to blur the acoustic and electric – but will it cut it as a stage-friendly 'hybrid'? Let's find out for our final instalment in a couple of issues' time. **18**



CHRIS BUCK

The Cardinal Black guitar maestro spins tales of a bargain '62 Strat and how the P-90 is criminally underrated...



PHOTO BY GUY CARTIS

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

"The first proper guitar I really remember aspiring to for a very long time was my Les Paul. I had a Squier Telecaster prior to that, then I graduated up to an Epiphone Les Paul that my old man very kindly bought me – and then it was the Les Paul.

"I was a huge Slash fan when I was growing up and so I was intent on getting a bona fide Gibson Les Paul at some point. It was sort of hovered over my head as an incentive to do well in my GCSE exams by my parents, as long as I met them half way on it. Of course, the first thing I did with it was play a gig at a club in Newport called TJs. I opened up the case to proudly show it to the rest of the band and stuck it through the ceiling in the venue, taking a big lump out of the corner of the headstock. I surreptitiously tried to cover it up with black masking tape so that my old man didn't notice..."

What was the last guitar that you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought was a bit of a strange one. It's a rare Gibson that they only made 150 of, which is a ES-355 signature model made for this guy called Shinichi Ubukata. He's in a couple of Japanese bands and obviously very well respected there, but doesn't seem to have much of a profile outside of his own country. Dave Grohl picked one up and there are rumours as to how heavily involved he was with the design of the guitar because it's quite similar to his own model – a kind of Trini Lopez thing with the diamond f-holes. I stumbled across a picture of one on Instagram a year or so, I guess, and I was really intrigued by it right away."

**"You can't beat
going secondhand
a lot of the time.
I've bought so few
new guitars in my life"**

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

"It would be the '62 Strat. I had no aspirations to own a pre-CBS Strat. I've had a lot of old Les Pauls, old 335s – generally older Gibsons, really, are the ones I've salivated over. I'd never played an old Strat that made me go weak at the knees. Then someone tagged me in a Facebook post asking me if I could confirm either way if the thing he saw in a video (from Pontypridd Auctions) was a Roland Space Echo. But I was more intrigued by the old-looking Strat that was leaning up against a wall behind it.

"The auction was the next day, so I thought, 'Right, I'm going to make a move, get up early, get over there and have a look at it,' and [guitar historian] Huw Price was kind enough to come with me, being infinitely more knowledgeable about this kind of stuff than I am. So we went in, had a look at it and it transpired it was what it initially looked like, but it needed a lot of work. The guy who owned it had obviously been a fan of tinkering, to say the least. It was a bit of a dog's dinner, to be honest, but there was a good guitar there. I'd never bid on anything outside of eBay in my life, but the eventual price was £1,950 – and the neck is worth more than that! It's a bit surreal, really; I've ended up with a pre-CBS Strat for less than a Custom Shop, all things being told."

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

"I've sold two guitars in my lifetime. I'm an absolute hoarder when it comes to guitars; I just can't let stuff go without this sense of impending doom. Prior to one I sold recently, the only guitar I'd ever sold was an old Charvel Model 4 from the mid-80s – Floyd Rose, ludicrously high-output pickups and a duotone paint job – and to this day I've still no idea why I bought it. I never played it. It was so outside my wheelhouse that I was never likely to use it, either. Then, literally as the guy who bought it was driving off down the street, it flashed through my mind, 'What if I need to join a Steel Panther tribute band at some point?'"

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"You can't beat going secondhand a lot of the time. I've bought so few new guitars in my life. I just trawl through Reverb or eBay or Gumtree or whatever, and some of my favourite guitars I've ever purchased were second-hand, third-hand or fourth-hand. More often than not, it's easy to tell the good ones at a distance because someone will have at least played them and, if nothing else, the guitar feels played in when you get it. All the usual caveats apply: buyer beware, do your research before you get anything... I'm the worst in the world. Before pulling the trigger I want to know everything! I literally can about a guitar."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window (or browsed online) and what were you looking at?

"Online it was a Fender AVRI – the American Vintage Reissue series. Back in about 2012, I think, they did a 1964-spec Olympic White Telecaster with a slab rosewood 'board and someone I follow on Instagram plays one. Every time he posts a picture of him playing it I go slightly weak at the knees, and so that's another search that I've saved in Reverb just in case someone decides to list one. I've never actually played one, but they look like really good guitars: period appointments and all the correct paint types, and all that kinda stuff. So that is definitely on the agenda at the moment, should one actually become available at the right price."



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

"A great guitar and a cheap amp, any day of the week. You see a lot of this sort of thing floating around in discussion boards online as to where's the best place to spend your money – and you play the guitar at the end of the day, you don't play the amp. Well, I guess you do in the most literal sense, but if you have a guitar that is awkward to play or it's uncomfortable or it doesn't inspire you then it's irrelevant how good the amp is. It's only going to be amplifying noises that you're not fussed about. So I would categorically say, spend your money on a good guitar first and foremost."

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

"I'm going to extend 'single coils' to include P-90s – because technically they are single coils. I think P-90s are the most criminally underrated pickups, and it's still baffling to me why early PAFs command the prices that they do. I think I've read somewhere that [PAF inventor] Seth Lover was trying to capture the sound of a P-90 but without the hum and that's what the PAF is. The definition and the articulation and that top-end as well, it's all there with added grit and grunt but with a little extra noise, I guess. Yeah, P-90s: the best pickup ever made." [DM]

Chris '62 Strat was a chance spot that went from "dog's dinner" to veritable feast, worth well over the £1,950 he paid for it at auction



Chris Buck's band Cardinal Black has an eponymously titled EP available via

www.thecardinalblack.com

RICKENBACKER PICKUPS

Martin Kelly – author of *Rickenbacker Guitars 1931-1999: Out Of The Frying Pan Into The Fireglo* – straightens out the subject of Rickenbacker pickups

“**R**ickenbacker co-founder George Beauchamp invented the electric guitar pickup in 1931 but they didn’t start manufacturing electric instruments until late 1932,” says Martin. “His pickup design featured two large horseshoe-shaped magnets to boost the signal, necessary because the suitable amplification was yet to be developed, plus the original coil slugs were made from non-magnetised ferrous metal. Pioneering times!”

“The original application of the horseshoe pickup wasn’t just for ‘frying pan’ lap steels; Rickenbacker launched an electric Spanish guitar at exactly the same moment. Interestingly though, their very first ‘Electro Spanish’ featured

a revolutionary 17th fret neck joint. Beauchamp was clearly aware of the electric guitar’s potential from the outset as players could now solo up the dusty end and actually be heard!

“Although the horseshoe was well suited to lap steels, it was actually the thing that held Rickenbacker back. They were very slow in realising their design wasn’t suited for Spanish-style playing as its huge magnets cover the strings in the exact spot where the player needs access. Rickenbacker’s competitors, companies like Gibson and Vega, initially copied the horseshoe concept but quickly abandoned the idea and moved on to designs that sat under the strings, out of the way.” [RB]



PHOTOS BY PAUL KELLY

Rickenbacker Guitars: Out Of The Frying Pan Into The Fireglo by Martin Kelly is available to pre-order now via Phantom Books. phantombooks.com

1 HORSESHOE

“The horseshoe pickup definitely held up Rickenbacker’s progress in the electric-Spanish field, but they were having such success with their lap steels they probably weren’t too bothered. The horseshoe is incredible for steel playing; it has one of the best tones you could ever hope for in that regard.

“For a long time – during [co-founder] Adolph Rickenbacher’s reign – Rickenbacker weren’t equipped to build their own electric Spanish guitars; bodies and necks were outsourced from National and Kay. So, it wasn’t in their culture to design an electric guitar completely from the ground up. However, when F.C. Hall bought the company in 1953, he inherited a ton of horseshoe pickups, so it was only logical that he designed guitars to carry those. The first horseshoe solidbody Rickenbackers from that period – the model 600 and model 800 – came out in 1954. It wasn’t until 1956 that Rickenbacker introduced a guitar without the horseshoe.”

2 DEARMOND

“Rickenbacker were major players in the lap-steel market, which was huge back then, but, during the 30s and 40s, it was Epiphone and Gibson who were really pushing the design of the electric guitar forward. So, Rickenbacker sort of fell behind. The first Rick models with conventional single-coil units came in 1956 with the arrival of the 400 series ‘tulip’ guitars. The early tulips also used a radical design for the time, which featured a neck-through-body with wings literally bolted on to the sides.

“F.C. Hall had the pickup made by DeArmond (Rowe Industries). It didn’t have a model name as far as I know, and I’ve never seen it on another guitar. It’s pretty rare and only appeared for about a year or so between 1956 and 1957. In mid ’57, F.C. decided to design his own pickup that sat under the strings which is when the famous ‘toaster’ was developed.”

3 TOASTER

“The single coil ‘toaster’ pickup was introduced in September ’57 and would soon become a Rickenbacker classic. It’s called a ‘toaster’ because it looks like the top of an old-fashioned chrome toaster viewed from above. Compared to other pickups it has a fairly low output, but it has that particular chime and jangle we know Rickenbacker for today. It’s not everybody’s cup of tea, but it gave Rickenbacker instruments their unique, inherent sound.

“The toaster appeared on the tulip guitars first of all in ’57: the [single pickup] model 400 and twin pickup model 450. Then, during ’58, F.C. introduced the Roger Rossmoisl-designed Capri range and, from that point onwards, toasters became standard on everything aside from basses and steel guitars. The horseshoe suited basses well because it gave a trebly sound players really liked. Nevertheless, Rickenbacker replaced it in ’68 with a new Hi-gain unit with a plastic cover to imitate the original magnets.”

3 HI-GAIN

“By the late 60s, rock music was getting heavier, and musicians were demanding something else out of their guitars. Rickenbacker realised this and came out with the Hi-gain pickup. It is essentially the same pickup as the toaster, but with increased winding and exposed adjustable polepieces. The Hi-gain pickups were introduced on Rickenbacker guitars in early ’69 and they’re definitely a lot more versatile. They’ve got a fuller, bassier tone, but you can still get the classic Rickenbacker chime out of them. Peter Buck, Johnny Marr and Guy Picciotto [Fugazi] have put them to good use over the years.

“The Hi-gain is fitted to most standard Rickenbacker models today, but their vintage-style guitars feature toasters. In ’73, John Hall developed a Rickenbacker humbucker that has a great tone but aside from rare exceptions those were only really seen on the bass-shaped 481 guitar.”



CHEAP & UNIQUE

Most of our mods or even 'partscaster' self-builds are all based on a pretty small number of very familiar classics. But this time, Dave Burrluck decides enough is enough...

Unique is not a word many of us can use when describing the instruments we mod and create. Yes, you might have come up with some wonderful steampunk mash-up, but chances are it'll have a Tele, Strat or Les Paul-like outline. If you're lucky to have anything remotely resembling a workshop to create your own outline then it's a different matter, but I suspect for most of us our chances of creating a uniquely shaped guitar are slight.

Gretsch's G2215 P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club [1], however, is certainly pretty unique, isn't it? A bound slab-bodied Jet with a wrapover bridge, a humbucker/P-90 pickup complement, plus a lowly full retail of £370, which is even lower in-store. There are three colours, too: Sahara Metallic, Mint Metallic and our Single Barrel Stain. We looked at a sample back in issue 473 that was originally intended just for this feature but was so good for the money we ran a full review. If someone told you Gretsch had made this back in the day – a 'student' guitar – you might not be surprised: it has buckets of retro-Gretsch appeal.

We'd purposely asked Fender to ship it without going through the usual setup, and it's a testament to the quality that, in reality,

"All too soon we're pondering makeover ideas: 'Vintage Gretsch', 'Garage Rocker', 'Metal Machine'..."

it was pretty much ready to go. There was a rather too rigid foam pad under the neck P-90 that meant we couldn't lower it to match with the bridge, output-wise; that was easily sorted with some thinner foam.

Then there was an unusual value treble bleed capacitor on the volume control, and adding to its uniqueness, that volume is placed on the treble-side horn, the tone by the bridge and there's a shoulder toggle pickup selector switch – a layout that, even for Gretsch, is pretty bonkers.

Each of the three controls is rear-mounted, too, and sits in its own small circular cavity, meaning there's little space for any expansive electronic mods... and



The Gretsch G2215-P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club, a steal at just £370

rewiring the guitar, as I found, is a little more involved than usual.

But if we class our Jet Junior as unique in style, anyone can buy one, right – so it's really not that unique at all, is it? How can we personalise this good-for-the-money start-up guitar? One obvious route would be to fit a Bigsby and, while we're at it, maximise its style with a couple of TV Jones pickups. Pretty simple mods, in theory, but ones that will easily double our outlay. Down the road that might be something to consider, but with gigs back on the horizon I'm tempted to see if a more functional makeover can lift its style and sound without breaking the bank.

What's The Plan?

We're big fans of lists here in The Mod Squad, but all too soon we've filled a few pages of A4 and we're still pondering our makeover ideas: 'Vintage Gretsch', 'Garage Rocker', 'More Tele?', 'Metal Machine'... and more. Eventually, I decide to mix and merge a couple of themes, spurred on by Gretsch's G6131MY-CS Custom Shop Malcolm Young 'Salute' Jet [2]: 'Vintage Gretsch' meets 'Garage Rocker'. What if...?

But style without substance isn't necessarily going to create a guitar that you want in your hands during a gig. Writing recently about Gibson's Murphy

Our work-in-progress
Jet Junior mod.
Garage rock? You bet!



2



Gretsch's G6131MY-CS Custom Shop Malcom Young 'Salute' Jet was an inspiration for the mod



The lightly aged Gotoh wrapover with the original steel posts

3

Lab Les Paul Junior and then the Vintage V120 (which resides at the other end of the market) in this issue (page 82), gets me thinking. Let's face it, the Junior is all about simplicity. It's the same with Malcom Young's guitar: the anecdote to the 'perfect' modern guitar. It might look completely knackered, but it was an instrument that helped power one of the biggest rock bands ever. But unless there's something going on in the first place, you're not going to play it.

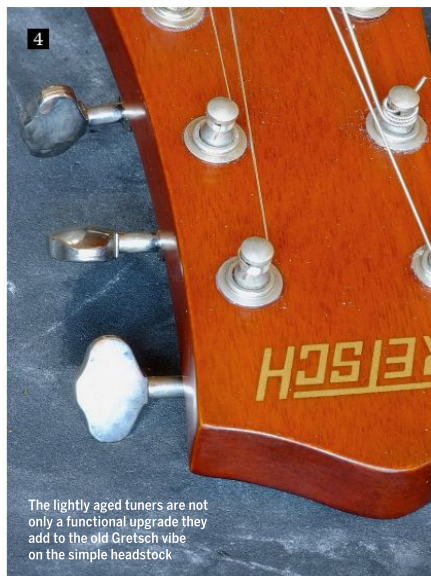
So, how would you not only give it some vibe – in both looks and sound – but make it perfectly gig-ready? Stable tuning is a must, the guitar needs to ring, and while we're not after numerous different sounds, the primary voice really needs to be good.

A Junior's one-piece wrapover bridge [3] is about as simple as it gets and, to me, it's the heart of the Junior. A lightweight aluminium wrapover won't cost much, and if you're going to seriously gig a guitar, treat yourself to some good tuners [4 & 5]. Add in a bone nut and we should have this Junior working at its best. As ever, we can't change the basic chassis.

Sound Thinking

Strung up, our Junior's new hardware and aged persona give it quite a different vibe that ticks our concepts wishlist nicely. The guitar plays well, and those tuners are super smooth and very stable. Without any pickups or controls, it

4



The lightly aged tuners are not only a functional upgrade they add to the old Gretsch vibe on the simple headstock

5



These Gotoh SE780 tuners are deceptively simple and use 'Rock Solid' string posts with a 1:15 gear ratio

certainly nods towards Malcom Young's Jet, and that inspires me to revoice the guitar, initially at least, with a single bridge pickup and simple circuit – the essence of a Junior and perfect for our garage-rock aim. I choose a couple of new CTS pots – I go for a 500k volume and 250k tone, wired vintage style, with a .022 microfarads cap, just like my own real '57 Junior. With these, I'm hopefully going to be able to replicate at least some of that guitar's versatility. I just need a pickup.

Malcom's guitar has a TV Jones Filter'Tron Classic at bridge, which will cost around £130, so that's off the cards for the time being. So I reinstall the Broad'Tron BT-2S and, while it's good, I'm

THE AGEING PROCESS

Relicing or refinishing might be a step too far for most of us, but here are some simple ways to make your brand-new cheapie look older – quickly

Aside from what it's actually made of, the big difference between our Gretsch and any evocative old instrument is its finish and condition. Keen modders might consider stripping the polyester finish and getting a nice respray in the sort of nitro that'll crack and craze. All good. Personally, I chose to just knock off the high-gloss sheen that shouts, 'Hey! I'm a new mass-produced guitar.'

After stripping and removing all the parts, I simply cut back the finish to a matt look with 600-grit wet and dry paper (see top right) lightly dampened with a little water and a small squirt of washing-up liquid. It doesn't take long, but you need to make sure there are no glossy areas left after wiping dry with a clean cloth. Repeat this process with 800-grit and finally 1000- or 1200-grit. The finish should now feel super smooth.

You can then hand-polish it with a burnishing cream or scratch remover (see middle right) – add lots of elbow grease – and finally a rub with a good guitar polish. Now, that oh-so-new sheen is replaced not with a relic, but a slightly dulled gloss that looks classier to me, like it's been used and is altogether less mass-produced.

Achieving the same results with the hardware is something you may or may not want to do. Again, I'm not looking for wear, just to knock off the nickel-plate's box-fresh gloss. There are plenty of ways to age hardware, but, personally, I use ferric chloride (etching fluid) diluted one-to-one with water. Just mix up a little in a small jam jar – the ones you get at a hotel breakfast with your jam in are perfect. Then, using a cotton bud, dab on the fluid and work it over the hardware; you'll see it go dull after a few seconds. Dip it immediately into a larger jar of water, then let dry (see bottom right). That's it, really. If you want a little more ageing, or you've missed a bit, just repeat the process.

Remember: nickel-plating isn't all the same. Some age more quickly. Personally, I don't like to drop the whole part of a tuner, for example, into the fluid. Doing it in the described fashion takes a little longer but is more controllable and, I think, more realistic to the wear you see on naturally aged nickel-plating.

Obviously, safety first: wear plastic gloves and protective eyewear, and when you're done flush all your jam jars with lots of water, rinse those cotton-buds and dispose.



Cutting back the gloss finish with wet and dry paper on a cork block



The next stage is to hand buff the flattening finish – here I use Farecla G3 scratch remover paste



After ageing, clean your parts with water and leave to dry

T-TOP TIME

We're all PAF-fixated but what's wrong with the Gibson humbucker that followed it?

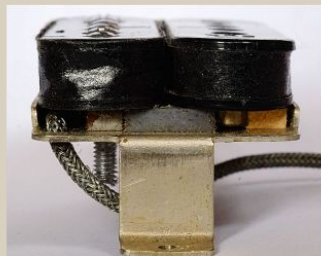
The original PAF era gradually ended over the early years of the 60s, as new winding machines gave more consistent turns that were also equally consistent from coil to coil. The plain enamel coil wire was changed around 1964 to a less expensive type with a polyurethane coating, suggest Mario Milan and James Finnerty in their 2018 book, *The Gibson "P.A.F." Humbucking Pickup: From Myth To Reality*.

Then, around 1965, we're told the moulding of the bobbins was altered, still of the same butyrate (which changed around '67 to ABS plastic) but with no square holes and a large 'T' embossed on each bobbin hence the T-top

nickname. Along with the 42-gauge poly wire, most sources state the early T-tops used short Alnico V magnets (although ThroBak uses Alnico II), which is one reason they're perceived as sounding brighter than the earlier PAF. As the years progressed there were other changes before the T logo bobbins were dropped (by 1980), the key period being the late 60s/early 70s.

The T-top was standard on pretty much any humbucker-spec Gibson electric during a rich time for music and guitar playing. It powered many a guitar great: BB King to Mick Ronson, Jimmy Page to James Williamson, oh, and Angus Young – just the tip of the T-berg.

With the combination of the different components and more consistent winding (which typically gives an average DCR of around 7.5kohms), the unpotted pickups sound "different to PAFs, but not as different as some people would have you believe", reckons Ash Scott-Lockyer at Oil City Pickups. "The chief difference is that both coils were wound with the same number of turns, unlike the rather erratically wound PAF. This, combined with the bright A5 magnet that most use, makes for a biting and aggressive-sounding pickup. True, low in output by modern standards – especially in the bridge position – but [they're] quite happy when used under heavy drive."



"Instead of removing the poles you can screw them down into the pickup. It's close, but then I make a couple of mistakes..."

taken back to a rather generic hot 'bucker sound, when I'm imagining something with a more clarity and character. But it's worth spending time with what you have – and inspired by Cream T's Original Banger [6], co-designed with Billy F Gibbons, I experiment with removing the screw poles – the lower three of the top coil, and the top three on the lower coil nearest the bridge [7]. For Gretsch tweakers, this is a common mod, and it certainly gives the Broad'Tron a little more 'single coil' and Gretsch-y bite and seems to pull back the output a little. To lessen the effect, instead of removing the poles you can screw them down into the pickup. It's close, but then I make a couple of mistakes...

First, I plug in the loaned '72 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe (see review page 22) with its vibey bridge humbucker voicing and realise I have a way to go. Second, I inherited a Gibson Patent Number

stickered T-top some years ago that I often use as a reference. Again, like those mini-humbuckers it has a low output (mine measures 7.25kohms; the Deluxe's bridge is 6.72k) and is unpotted.

I go through The Mod Squad's bits box, measuring various 'buckers, and find a 'bucker with a DCR of 7.5kohms and a chrome cover. While this is T-top in style, it looks strange on our aged Gretsch. Plus chrome, unlike nickel, is harder to age. Removing the cover, the pickup is potted. But on this platform, we're in the right ballpark. No, it's not a T-top – it sounds brighter than my (covered) reference with less midrange character – but it's a start, particularly with the old-style circuit, which gives a lot of variation so long as you're happy to use your volume and tone. But with deadlines to meet, it'll have to do! An old-school Gretsch Junior in progress? Definitely. 



Inspired by Cream T's Original Banger [6], the Gretsch Broad'Tron BT-25 [7] has half its screw slugs removed – the lower three of the top coil and the top three on the lower coil nearest the bridge

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.

PINEGROVE

LEATHER
MADE IN ENGLAND

HAND-BUILT GUITAR STRAPS FOR ACOUSTICS, ELECTRICS & BASS
WWW.PINEGROVELEATHER.COM

Learn How To Setup Your Guitar KEEP IT SIMPLE, SETUP (KISS)™



24 pg. Instructional Booklet
(Downloadable in 7 Languages)



How-To Videos

Precision Gauges



Truss Rod Gauge



String Action Gauge



Radius Gauge



Nut Height Gauge



Truss Rod Wrench
11 pc Set



Screwdriver & Wrench
26 pc Set



Diamond Coated
Nut File Set

Precision Tool Sets



LEARN MORE:
www.MusicNomadCare.com/Setup-Hub/

MUSICNOMAD™
EQUIPMENT CARE

Follow Us @MusicNomadCare



PICKUP LINES

Epiphone Slash Les Paul ProBuckers

As authentic clones, the pickups in these Epiphone signature guitars offer true Gibson tone

Last year, Gibson launched a new collection of Slash signature models, including the Slash Les Paul Standard, Slash 'Victoria' Les Paul Standard Goldtop and Slash J-45. Recently, sibling brand Epiphone followed suit, announcing the Guns N' Roses guitar-hero's full range as part of their Inspired by Gibson line-up. Sporting the same finish and model names as the Gibsons, these new Epiphone guitars are, in effect, clones. But how do they measure up in terms of sound? According to Gibson Brands' Senior Product Development Engineer, Richard Akers, and Product Manager, Aljon Go, these Epiphone ProBucker pickups are more or less identical to the custom Burstbuckers found in the Gibson Slash Les Pauls.

"From the materials to the dimensions and all aspects of the build, we put a lot of effort into our ProBucker series pickups to really refine what was being done," says Richard. "We've had the ProBuckers out for a little while now, and we've really gained traction in the market as far as the perception of what an Epiphone pickup is.

"In the past, granted, the thing to do was maybe buy an Epiphone and replace the

pickups immediately. But at this point in the game, that's not required. The ProBucker pickups that come stock are outstanding and can hang with anything. Pickups are very subjective. I get it. You want to change it out and put something else in? Totally understand. But you don't have to. It's a good-quality pickup coming stock in the guitars. I'll put them up against anything."

The 'buckers in Gibson's Slash Les Pauls were custom-designed with a higher output and the same blueprint has been used for the Epiphone variants. "These Alnico II ProBucker pickups being used in the Epiphone Slash guitars are identical in construction to the Alnico II Burstbuckers being used in the Gibson Slash models," explains Richard. "The neck and bridge pickups are different, as the bridge pickup is slightly hotter – like an overwound Burstbucker 3 in the bridge and an overwound Burstbucker 2 in the neck.

"As well as being a little overwound and hotter, the Epiphone Slash ProBucker pickups are unique because they have uneven coils. The bobbins are wound uneven, similar to the way the Gibson

Burstbuckers are done. It all originated from the history – the lack of precision in the windings in the late 50s. People found the pickups that have slightly uneven coils gave them a more desirable output – a little edgier bite. The 'Holy Grail' sets of pickups had a little bit of an uneven balance and were the most desirable tonally. So, that's what we did when we created the Burstbucker set at Gibson and then the ProBucker sets that we use at Epiphone."

Much like the Gibson Burstbuckers, the ProBuckers are lightly waxed in order

"Pickups with slightly uneven coils gave a more desirable output – a little edgier bite"

to strike a balance between controlling microphonics and allowing the pickup to retain enough 'air' and detail. "It's not a straitjacket – it's a sweater," Aljon says in reference to the wax covering. "We wanted to be authentic to the Gibson version, and that also included using orange drop caps and CTS pots in the circuit.

"There's a certain characteristic bloom that happens with those pickups that's magical. You can sprinkle more gain on, but it'll still have a very articulate voice. It'll have a certain punch which, married with the tonewoods and the strings, is the authentic sound. And I don't think there's been anything close to replicating that. It is what it is – no matter how you skin it and how you make it look different, at the heart of it is what Gibson introduced back in the day. And it's still going strong.

"People need to know: if you're a fan of the Gibson Slash Les Pauls you can get that experience with a very accessible Epiphone, which uses the same type of pickups. We were able to make a clone of that very same guitar in our overseas crafteries. And it's very, very close. It is the Boba Fett of Jango Fetts!" **[RB]**



The Epiphone Slash Collection guitars are authentic clones of the Gibson models of the same name

"There's a certain characteristic bloom that happens with those pickups that's magical"





ClassicGear

The Fender Stratocaster enjoys renewed success with a return to classic form...

1980s Fender Stratocasters

By the end of the 1970s, the Fender Stratocaster was a shadow of its former self in terms of design and build quality. Though the 1979 sales figures were encouraging, it soon became clear that if the Strat was to survive another decade, then serious change was needed. Indeed, if the 1980s are to be remembered for anything as far as the Stratocaster goes, it's for the multitude of permutations that arose in an increasingly competitive environment.

The original Stratocaster design had already spawned countless derivatives that were being sold by other companies, and these were increasingly becoming well-established alternatives. Coupled with a perceptible decline in Fender's quality throughout the 1970s, players began to look elsewhere for new Stratocaster-style guitars or scanned the ever-more popular vintage market for a tried-and-trusted instrument from Fender's 'golden era' of the 50s and 60s.

This demand for earlier pre-CBS guitars hadn't gone completely unnoticed at Fender, and the 25th Anniversary model Stratocaster released in 1979 had already demonstrated a couple of important concepts that would be key to the Strat's future success. First, it signalled Fender's willingness to deviate from the regular

Stratocaster model that was being marketed concurrently. Second, the design aspired to appeal to fans of Fender's earlier period of production by returning to a pre-CBS-style truss-rod adjustment (sans 'bullet') and four-bolt neck.

In 1980, a similar truss-rod/four-bolt neck layout was retained for Fender's new The Strat model (also sold alongside the regular Stratocaster), which additionally showcased a return to the smaller pre-CBS style headstock. Along with progressive features, such as brass hardware and expanded pickup selection options (parallel and series combinations), Fender simultaneously looked towards the future, while also paying homage to their ever-growing 'golden era' legacy. Also, around this time, the first artist-inspired model appeared in the form of a Jimi Hendrix-style Stratocaster, complete with reverse headstock, maple 'board, and Olympic White finish. However, this guitar did not go into full-scale production.

Clearly, change was afoot. But this trickle of new Stratocaster designs was merely the beginning of much greater change ahead, both at home in the US and overseas. With Fender continuously battling the flood of comparatively high-quality (and less expensive) Japanese imports, a joint venture named Fender Japan was officially announced in Spring 1982 in an effort to beat the copyists at their own game by officially licensing and manufacturing Fender guitars in Japan. Sticking to the theme of returning to its 'vintage' glory days, the new line-up comprised three guitar models: the '52 Telecaster, along with the '57 and '62 Stratocasters. While the concept of these vintage-style reissues was introduced via Fender's price list in '81, the first Japanese Fender and Squier-branded guitars emerged in '82, eventually followed by the US-made versions in '83.

This was all thanks to Fender's new management team who had been drafted in from Yamaha in order to turn things around. Among them was a marketing expert named Dan Smith whose influence on the regular Stratocaster's returning to form in '81 and subsequent input into the Vintage series was crucial. Ultimately, revisiting those seminal Stratocaster designs paved the way for Fender's renewed success and the development of their flagship model in 1986, the American Standard Stratocaster. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Fender Stratocaster 1980-1989

1980

The Strat; Jimi Hendrix-inspired prototype

1981

Walnut Strat; Gold Stratocaster; 'Dan Smith' Stratocaster specs: small headstock, 4-bolt neck

1982

Vintage series '57 and '62 Stratocasters (Japan)

1983

Vintage series '57 and '62 Stratocasters (USA); 'Standard' Stratocaster specs: 2 knobs, 90-degree jack

1984

Elite series: Walnut Elite, Gold Elite, and Elite Stratocasters; Stratocaster now Standard Stratocaster

1985

CBS sells Fender (FMIC new owners); Contemporary Stratocasters (Japan)

1986

American Standard Stratocaster developed

1987

Strat Plus; Eric Clapton and Yngwie Malmsteen signature model Stratocasters

1988

H.M. Strat

1989

Deluxe Strat Plus



After a sales downturn and quality concerns during the 70s, Fender's revitalisation of the Strat range culminated in the flagship of the line, the American Standard Stratocaster

1983 Fender Stratocaster in Black

1. SERIAL NUMBER

"E"-prefixed (Eighties)
6-digit 'serial number' decal
on front of headstock

2. HEADSTOCK

Small/pre-CBS-style profile;
truss-rod adjustment via recess
behind nut; silver/black-outlined
Fender logo, "Stratocaster/Made
in USA" decal

3. BODY

Alder; double-cutaway; rounded
edges; forearm and belly
contours; no back routing;
Black poly finish

4. PICKUPS

3x height-adjustable single-coil
'floating' pickups; 1x volume
pot; 1x tone pot; 5-way selector
switch; 90-degree front-loading
jack socket

5. HARDWARE

Top-loading Freeflyte vibrato
system with chrome-plated
push-in arm; neck plate and 6x
individual tuners all chrome-
plated and stamped "Fender";
2x metal string trees; 2x metal
strap buttons

6. PLASTICS

Single-layer white pickguard
with 12 screw holes; 3x white
pickup covers; 2x white control
knobs (1x 'volume' and 1x 'tone');
white switch tip

7. NECK

4-bolt; single-piece fretted
maple; 25½" scale length;
12-inch radius fingerboard; wide/
flat profile; 21-frets; black dot
markers; adjustable truss-rod;
natural poly finish



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Our resident vintage guitar veteran shows us the Holy Grail of acoustic guitars

1941 Martin D-45



Dubbed the 'Holy Grail of flat-tops' the pre-war Martin D-45 was originally in production from 1933 until 1942

I'm really lucky. At the moment I have a 1939 000-45 and a 1941 D-45. The D-45s first appeared in 1933 as 12-fret models (the first was made for Gene Autry) and then they went to the 14-fret design a little later. They are the pinnacle of Martin, but it was really just a very well-appointed D-28; they were similarly constructed using Brazilian rosewood for the back and sides, Adirondack spruce for the top, and they had an ebony fingerboard and bridge.

"When you talk about 'pre-war' guitars, people's definitions can sometimes overlap. A lot of people think of that term as pre-World War II. But that means different things to different countries. And if you're talking about the USA, we didn't enter the war until right after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 (whereas the UK declared war on Nazi Germany at the start in 1939). So, when I look at this D-45 from 1941, it's pre-war as far as the US is concerned, although some may stretch to calling it a 'wartime build'. At least that's how [Martin author and inlay artist] Mike Longworth explained it to me.

"By 1942, there were no more 45-series guitars being made because of the war effort, and they didn't come out again until 1968. That's when Martin rebooted the D-45. What's interesting about those Style 45 guitars from 1968-1970 is the fact they're still really great guitars, even though that's no longer the golden era. A lot of people really like the Sitka spruce top they were using then. They were using Brazilian rosewood until 1970 when Martin had the fire. That's when they lost a lot of their wood stock. It pretty much marked the end

of Brazilian rosewood, aside from some later special Custom Shop builds.

"When it comes to the debate between Brazilian and Indian rosewood, and tonewood, I think every guitar has its own merits. And the same could be said for electric guitars. I mean, you can have two '59 Les Pauls that sound completely different, even when the pickup outputs are close to the same. I think most of the sound of pre-war Martins has to do with the way they're constructed: the width of the bridge plate and the bracing, for example, rather than the fact it's made with Brazilian rosewood. Brazilian rosewood is beautiful

"Before, it sounded shallow, but now it has this huge sound like a baby grand piano"

to look at – that's the big difference. There are great Brazilian rosewood guitars I've played and not-so-great Brazilian rosewood guitars I've played. Same with Indian.

"A big part of what makes the pre-war D-45s so desirable is the fact there were so few made of course, but it's also to do with the seasoning and the ageing of the wood. If a guitar is played on a regular basis for many years, it'll tend to sound better than otherwise. Many years ago, I was given a tip: take your acoustic and put it next to your subwoofer stereo and let the vibrations go through the guitar. And I found it really made a difference! When I was selling new D-45s, I found the one we demoed in the

store that was played on a regular basis sounded much better than the one that just came out of the box. Guitars need to be opened up through being played. That's when the harmonics come through and the guitar starts to ring well.

"This D-45 had not been played much until about 15 years ago when it went to somebody who actually used it. Before that, it sounded rather shallow for a D-45, but now it has this huge sound like a baby grand piano. If you play a chord, there's no saturation; you can hear each note in the chord brilliantly. To me, that's always the sign of a great top on a guitar. Rosewood has a fuller, bassier tone than mahogany. The [mahogany] D-18, for example, is a naturally brighter guitar, and when you play it fingerstyle, it's powerful, but a rosewood guitar like a D-28 or D-45 is deeper sounding. And I think the rosewood back and sides has a lot to do with that.

"Like I said, the D-45 is really just a gussied-up D-28, but in the pre-war period you're talking about a herringbone D-28, which is also one of the most desirable flat-tops in the world. The D-45 is more or less the same: it's all accoutrement. I don't think there's any difference in tone. In fact, I have several pre-war Martins and the only one that stands up against the D-45 is a D-28 with a shaded top. That's got that baby grand piano thing going on too. But D-45s are the pinnacle of Martin flat-tops, they're incredible instruments to play." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York www.wellstrungguitars.com

Evolving from Martin's Style 42 guitars the first 45-series instruments appeared in 1904



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

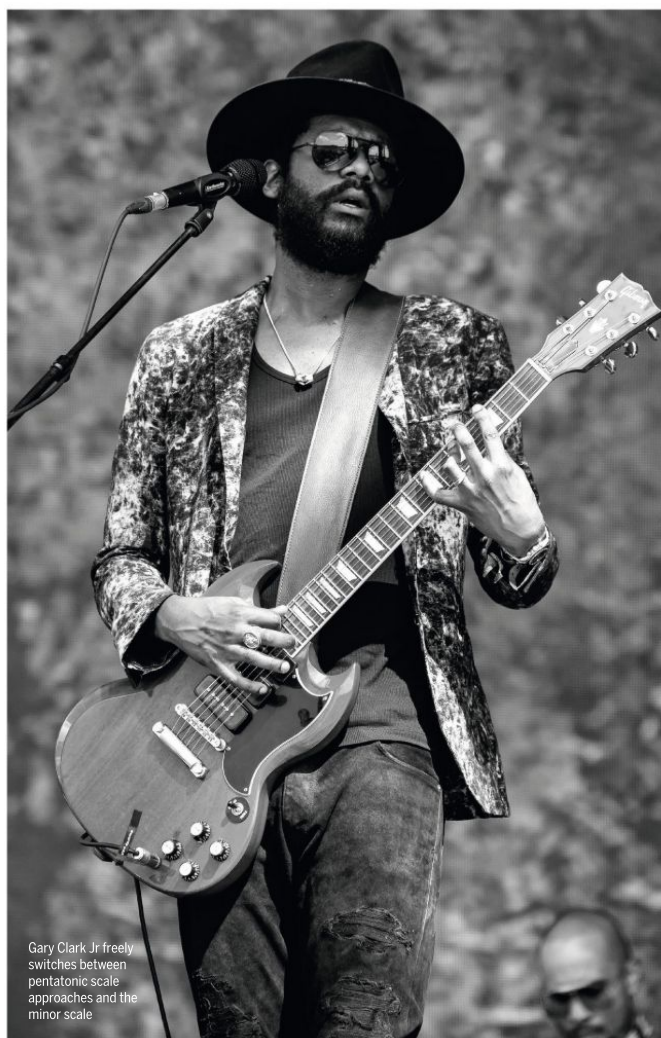
Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Soloing Without Pentatonics

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Kemper Profiler

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example



Gary Clark Jr freely switches between pentatonic scale approaches and the minor scale

IN THE NEVERENDING QUEST to push our playing in new and fresh directions, it's good to try new shapes, patterns and scales. In this solo, I'm forcing myself to explore different ideas by avoiding anything overtly pentatonic. Instead, I'm concentrating mainly on the E minor scale (E F# G A B C D E) and referencing, or quoting directly from, a couple of arpeggios related to the backing chords. I'll get more into the specifics of this later, but before that I'd like to admit that the title of this article is somewhat misleading: I'm not removing the pentatonic scale, simply enhancing it.

If we take the E minor pentatonic (E G A B D) and compare with the E minor scale mentioned earlier, you will see that there are just two extra notes: F# and C. These offer the possibility of more melodic variety, but bring an increased risk of 'wrong'-sounding notes. If you play the E minor scale over a static E minor chord, you will notice that the C really is a 'passing' note – nice in a melodic passage, but not a good place to land! The F# is far less volatile, though over a shifting chord progression this could change...

The backing track this issue is not a traditional blues chord progression (Em C G D). For starters, it's unapologetically minor – and blues very often makes a point of straddling the netherworld between major and minor with quarter-tone bends and trills between the major and minor 3rd. You can, of course, still play lots of blues-based licks, but the point here is to explore further options. Players such as Rory Gallagher, Gary Clark Jr and Joe Bonamassa have all successfully expanded their vocabulary to include ideas such as this, so it is most certainly worth a look. Hope you enjoy and see you next time!



Richard Barrett's new album, *Colours*, is available now from

richardbarrettguitar.com

Example 1

THIS OPENING PHRASE uses a series of major and minor 6th intervals, played on the first and third strings, in a way you'll often hear in country music. The descending sequence follows the pattern of the E minor scale, starting with B then adding the (min6) above. Notice the F# at the cross into bar 2 and the C chord. This potential dissonance is 'resolved' by continuing the descent, landing on E, the major 3rd. It's worth knowing these details, but don't feel you have to be hyper-aware in the moment. Is the final phrase a bit of pentatonic sneaking in?

Example 2

THIS DESCENDING PHRASE using the E minor scale keeps moving, so the risk of clashes from passing notes is reduced, particularly when playing C, as mentioned earlier. Having landed on G nicely to coincide with the G chord on the backing track, we switch to a G major arpeggio pattern to ascend again, using the CAGED C major shape in the same position. The F# comes into its own at the end (sliding from the 9th to the 11th fret on the third string), also happily fitting over the underlying chord (D major) as the 3rd.

Example 3

HERE, WE'RE USING A FRAGMENT of the E minor scale to lead up to a slightly over-enthusiastic bend to B at the 17th fret (no auto-tune here!). The resulting frustration leads me to try some rapid alternate picking. Essentially, this descends then ascends the E minor scale, switching to a D major arpeggio idea as that chord comes around again in the backing track. F# is the point where the switch happens at beat 1 of bar 4.

[illegible]

Example 3 continued

Example 3 continued musical notation. The top staff shows a guitar melody in G major, starting with a G8va (octave) and featuring sixteenth-note triplets. The bottom staff shows the corresponding fretboard positions for the strings E, B, G, D, A, and E, with numbers indicating the frets.

Example 4

RETURNING TO THE DESCENDING 6THS idea we came in with, using triplets like this breaks up the phrasing to make a more unexpected and melodic pattern than straight eighth notes would give. Note the pointed inclusion of C as the melody note (over the C chord) in bar 2. The rest is pure E minor scale, though this, of course, fits over the G major chords as the relative minor, so the two are pretty much interchangeable.

Example 4 musical notation. The top staff shows a guitar melody in E minor, starting with an Em8va (octave) and featuring triplet eighth notes. The bottom staff shows the corresponding fretboard positions for the strings E, B, G, D, A, and E, with numbers indicating the frets.

Hear It Here

JOE BONAMASSA

REDEMPTION



Taking elements of the blues and putting them in a harder rock context with a bit of Americana thrown in is something Joe does well. Of course, this means lashings of pentatonic! However, on tracks such as *Molly O*, you can hear this also includes hints of minor scale. *Self-Inflicted Wounds* takes this further – and it's worth comparing it with Joe's approach on *Just Cos You Can...*, which is far more pentatonic, giving a more traditional blues feel.

RORY GALLAGHER

AGAINST THE GRAIN



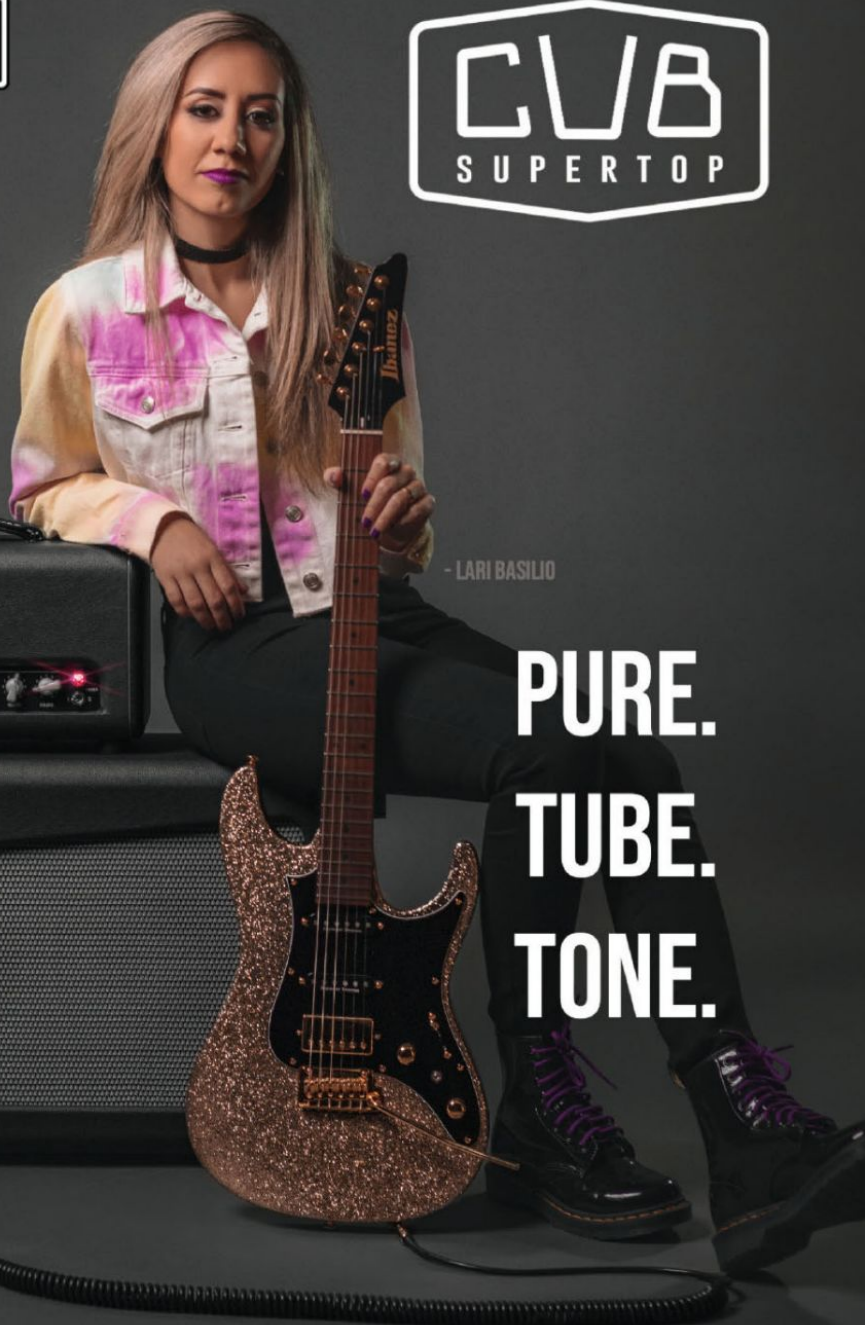
Rory Gallagher must be one of the most difficult players to explain or emulate. Undoubtedly inspired by the blues, Rory took it to so many other places. His solos/melodic lines on tracks such as *Ain't Too Good, Lost At Sea* and *At The Bottom* all expand on the pentatonic, in some cases completely departing from what many would call a blues approach at all. Definitely lots of food for thought when you check out the chord structures, too.

GARY CLARK JR

GARY CLARK JR LIVE



Gary switches freely between more trad blues/pentatonic scale approaches and the minor scale/melodic approach demonstrated in this month's solo. *When My Train Pulls In* is a good example. *If Trouble Was Money* treads a finer line, but there are some nice lines and bold note choices. *Bright Lights* takes a more pentatonic approach but remains in a minor key, highlighting a different approach than the pushed minor 3rds and major/minor ambiguity mentioned earlier.



- LARI BASILIO

PURE.
TUBE.
TONE.

CUB-SUPERTOP, CUB-212

WWW.LANEY.CO.UK

PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSICA BROWN

 @LANEYAMPLIFICATION

Guitarist

Nextmonth



◀ **PHIL MANZANERA**

The Roxy Music man on his new album collaboration with Tim Finn

TOM ANDERSON ICON CLASSIC

Renowned boutique builder continues to delight with his take on vintage designs

GRETSCH STREAMLINERS

The budget end of the mighty Gretsch range gains two intriguing models

*Next issue on sale
17 September 2021*



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to *Guitarist*?
Go digital from just £2.20 an issue!

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI



RABEA MASSAAD

S I G N A T U R E S I L O H U M B U C K E R S



'I need a pickup with the ability to create glassy, ambient leads and warm, clear chord tones. Equally I need it to sound crushingly heavy and aggressive. The Silo humbuckers give me everything I need and more. I couldn't be happier.'

Rabea

launch your tone into the ambient-sphere

Photo: Max Taylor-Grant

Bare Knuckle

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

STREAMLINER™

COLLECTION



EXPERIENCE FULL-WAVE FIDELITY

GRETSCH



ALL-NEW CENTER BLOCK P90s

GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Gretsch® and Streamliner™ are trademarks of Fred W. Gretsch Enterprises, Ltd. and used herein under license. Bigsby® is a registered trademark of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation.

Guitarist

• PRESENTS •

Acoustic

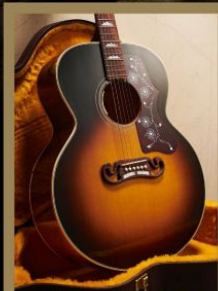
ACOUSTIC GUITAR
PLAYER'S GUIDE

David CROSBY

*The CSN Legend on his new album
and favourite guitars*

MASTER
PLAYING LIVE!

WITH TOMMY EMMANUEL,
JON GOMM, MIKE DAWES
& ANTONIO FORCIONE



ACOUSTIC SPECIAL

**NOEL
GALLAGHER
MODEL J-150**

PLUS

**'37 MARTIN
000-45**

BORN PLAY^{TO}

Sheeran
BY Lowden



SheeranGuitars.com

Guitarist
PRESENTS

Acoustic

*A celebration of the rich heritage and
exquisite sound of the acoustic guitar*



As the world begins to open up to live performances again, this special acoustic supplement to *Guitarist* magazine is designed to help you bring the magic of unplugged music to an audience near you – even if that audience is just family and friends at home.

At the top of the bill is David Mead's deep dive into how to get a top-flight acoustic sound on stage. It's not easy to get a natural, feedback-free tone when performing live, but, over on page 12, we talk to some of the world's greatest players and acoustic sound engineers who share how to sound incredible and keep

the sonic gremlins at bay. Of course, it helps to have the right kit, too, and that's why, from page 28, you'll find guides to the best acoustic guitars on the market, to suit all your musical and budgetary needs.

Over on page 22, we also explore a holy grail of vintage guitar tone in the form of a beautiful, pre-war Martin 000-45, the yardstick against which so many subsequent guitars have been measured. Rod Brakes uncovers the history of this extraordinary instrument and of Martin's opulent 'Style 45' grade of ornamentation and build, which is top of the tree among the guitars made by the revered Pennsylvania company.

But as much as we love beautiful and rare guitars, they only come to life in the hands of inspired musicians. So we also have interviews with some of the great unplugged talents of our time, including CSN legend David Crosby and KT Tunstall who share their songwriting wisdom inside. Enjoy the issue. 

Jamie

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

CONTENTS



04 NOEL GALLAGHER J-150

We take a close look at a new signature Gibson that replicates the Oasis man's indie workhorse

06 DAVID CROSBY

One of America's most iconic songsmiths reflects on his new album and a long life in music

12 GOING LIVE

Getting stunning acoustic tone on the live stage can be tricky – our panel of pros shows you how to sound great with pickups, EQ, amps and more



22 1937 MARTIN 000-45

Rod Brakes traces the history of a very special pre-war flat-top

28 HYBRID ROUND-UP

Best-buy guitars with both acoustic and electric tones on tap

30 BUDGET ROUND-UP

Toneful, great-quality acoustics that won't bust your wallet

32 WORKHORSE ROUND-UP

Our pick of pro-grade, do-it-all electro-acoustics for a fair price

34 KT TUNSTALL

We talk guitars and unplugged inspiration with the award-winning Scottish songsmith



theWishlist

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

Gibson Noel Gallagher J-150 £3,799

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB www.gibson.com Words David Mead Photography Phil Barker

The story of Noel Gallagher's association with the Gibson J-150 begins when he saw the instrument hanging on the wall in a music shop many songs ago. Taking it down, he played a single E major chord and said to the salesman, 'I'll take it!'

"I instantly fell in love with that guitar," Noel says. "When I think back now to the songs that I've written and the amount of time I've spent holding this guitar... there's just something about it."

Gibson originally produced the J-150 as a more affordable alternative to its prestigious J-200 and it first saw the light of day in 1999, the year Gibson springcleaned its jumbo range. Its 'parent model', the J-200, has been around since the 1930s and became a favourite with country singers, as well as the stars of popular cowboy movies of the era.

In keeping with the guitar's modest position in Gibson's acoustic hierarchy, the J-150 has the construction details of a no-nonsense workhorse. With AA-grade flame maple for the back and sides, the top is Sitka spruce with hand-scalloped X-bracing and a thin nitro VOS Vintage Sunburst finish. The neck is two-piece maple with a walnut 'stinger'. It has a 25.5-inch (647.7mm) scale length and the rosewood

fingerboard has a flat 20-inch radius, standard small crown frets and mother-of-pearl graduated crown inlays. Nut width is a very electric-guitar friendly 42.85mm (1.69 inch).

The J-150's bridge tips its hat to its higher ranking J-200 sibling with a two-bar rosewood 'moustache' affair and, at the other end, the tuners are gold Gotohs with green keystone buttons.

For amplification, the guitar comes fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup system, with controls for volume, mix, phase inversion, battery check and mic trim controls handily stowed away on the bass side of the soundhole.

Needless to say, this is a limited edition of only 200 models worldwide and so if you're expecting some case candy, you won't be disappointed – the custom case reveals a certificate, reproduced handwritten *Little By Little* lyric sheet and an Adidas sticker (as seen on Noel's original), as well as a label inside the guitar signed by the Oasis man himself.

It's a looker, for sure. But as for how close Gibson has managed to get to Noel's own treasured J-150, as heard on so many of his albums, we'll let him have the final word: "It sounds exactly like mine." **G**

1. The J-150 comes stage-ready with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup system with controls neatly stowed away inside the guitar's soundhole

2. The Kluson-style tuners are by Gotoh with age-typical green-tinted keystone buttons

3. The back and sides of the guitar feature AA-grade maple, exactly the same as you'd find on Noel's original

4. The maple theme continues with the J-150's neck, which is affixed to the body using a compound dovetail joint and hot hide glue



1



2



3



4



5



5. The J-150's fretboard is rosewood, adorned with 20 small crown frets and graduated crown inlays

6. Noel's original J-150 made its first appearance in the *Little By Little* video (2002), and a reproduced lyric sheet is included as part of the case candy

7. The 'moustache' bridge is a nod to the J-150's slightly more glamorous forebear, the J-200, which originated in the late 1930s. The J-150 is more of a newcomer to the range and was launched in 1999

7

FREE RADICAL

David Crosby, free-thinking founder of The Byrds and CSNY – and a legend in his own lifetime – has a new album out, *For Free*, named in honour of Joni Mitchell. As he turns 80, the musician joins us to reflect back on the decades

Words Neville Marten

David Crosby is one of the leaders of a musical revolution inspired both by British invasion bands of the 60s and the music of the American folk and blues minstrels. Alongside fellow singer-songwriters Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor, they melded their influences into a new kind of electro-acoustic folk-rock, using open tunings and introspective lyrics, often layered up with glorious vocal harmonies.

Crosby was at the heart of The Byrds and several iterations of the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young brand and has, until recently, continued to work with various members. This has included recording, gigging and doing sessions with Nash, as on David Gilmour's solo album *On An Island*, plus legendary Royal Albert Hall appearance *Remember That Night* (captured on the DVD). Crosby and Nash also sang on John Mayer's *Born And Raised*, and on tracks by Elton John, James Taylor and many others.

However, always interested in new singers and writers (who are even more interested in him), he has never stopped making musically relevant and highly listenable music, both on solo albums and as collaborations with a number of contemporary artists, including Snarky Puppy's Michael League. Crosby's latest album is aided by his musician-producer son James Raymond, and is part homage to Joni Mitchell, with the title-track cover of her ballad, *For Free*. The album also includes collaborations with Texan singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz, plus vocal additions from Doobie Brother Michael McDonald, and a long-awaited co-write with Steely Dan legend, Donald Fagen.

David joins us by phone from his California homestead to explain more...

You've made the new album *For Free* with your son James Raymond, who produced it, co-wrote some tracks and played piano on it.

"Yes. A wonderful cat, too, man. He's a really, really decent guy and he loves making music, and so we have a blast doing it. We have a record that we haven't even put out yet, and we are already recording the next one. It's a joy to work with him. He has just turned into the best record producer and the best writing partner that you could hope for."

In your work with bands, you could always recognise the Crosby songs. Is it a certain attitude that sets you apart?

"I think it has to do with the fact that I'm usually trying to tell a story of some sort, and I think it has to do musically with the fact that I like more complex chord structures and progressions. I did listen to a lot of jazz, and so I like dense, unusual chords. But if you try to shape it to what the pop taste is at the moment, you listen to everything that's succeeding and then you try to be just like that – it doesn't work for me."

"If you try to shape it to what the pop taste is at the moment, and then you try to be just like that – it doesn't work for me"

David Crosby: "I'm usually trying to tell a story of some sort"

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Did you play guitar on new album, *For Free*? And if so, what tunings did you use?

"Yes, I did. I used the tuning [EBDGAD] on the track I played the most on, which is *I Think*; I have a good guitar part on that. There are guitar parts on some of the others, but it hasn't been a major thing on this one."

In previous interviews, you've mentioned the difficulty you might have playing guitar because of your hands. How is that affecting your playing?

"I've lost a percentage, maybe 10 per cent, maybe 15 per cent. But I can still play, just not quite as well as I used to. It's heading in the wrong direction. There isn't anything anybody can do about it. It's tough, but whining isn't going to help anybody. All my guitars are set up as low as they will go. I can play, but I know in the long run I'm going to lose it."

From the very beginning, vocal harmonies have been integral to everything...

"Well yes, they are for me. I love them, and if there is a chance to do those dense chords

that I like, I always will. Most commonly, although we did it in every possible variation, Stephen would sing the melody, I would sing the middle, which is the hard one, and Nash would sing the top. All the harmonies in The Byrds are me. The Byrds is basically two-part, although sometimes Gene [Clark] was in there, too."

You emerged at a time and in a place where the music was spectacular...

"There was a plethora of really talented people really trying hard to make good music, and that was a wonderful thing."

CSNY, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor all released landmark albums in 1970, the year The Beatles broke up. The pendulum swung from British to American. You guys had the talent and were making all the moves.

"Thanks, man. I think Joni was a thing on her own. She is probably the best singer-songwriter that ever lived. But I think, yes, it did shift to the United States right then, but I'm sure it shifted before when Pink Floyd happened."

It must have made everybody raise their game because you had these friends putting out brilliant stuff?

"If I think about it, I knew that there were all these other people who were really good. People I was competing with were James Taylor and Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan and the singer-songwriters. Nobody could compete with The Beatles, but we did compete with the singer-songwriters and we generated a whole lot of really wonderful songs."

Above The Byrds in full 60s swing at the Whisky A Go Go, California

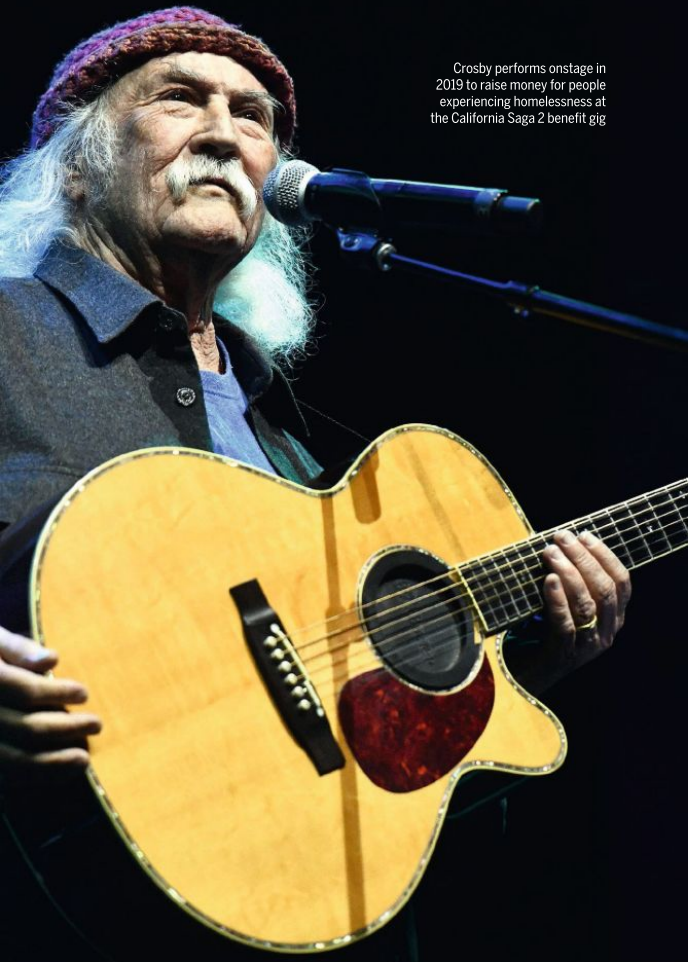
"Stephen would sing the melody, I would sing the middle, which is the hard one, and Nash would sing the top"

PHOTO BY SCOTT DUBELSON/GETTY IMAGES

From left to right: Stephen Stills, David Crosby, Graham Nash, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young at Wembley



PHOTO BY DAVID WARNER/ELLIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Crosby performs onstage in 2019 to raise money for people experiencing homelessness at the California Saga 2 benefit gig

There are some great collaborators on the new album, the instantly recognisable Michael McDonald helps out in the opener *River Rise*, for instance.

"I've been saying for a while that probably the two best singers in the United States are Stevie Wonder and Michael McDonald. Michael is the best singer I know. [Everybody] heard him on Steely Dan records and went, 'Holy shit!' And those hits with The Doobies, 'Holy shit!'"

There is some great guitar on the record from Shawn Tubbs, and from session legend Dean Parks.

"Shawn was an LA guy, but he moved to Texas. I sent a couple of things down to him and got him to play them. Dean is just a freaking genius. I just did another thing with him. It was so much fun I couldn't believe it."

On this album, when you recorded the tracks did you layer everything up or did you learn the songs as a band and put them down in the studio?

"We had to do it piecemeal because of the pandemic. So these were built piece by piece, but I always have done it the other way."

In a normal situation do you like to have control over what people play?

"No, no, I get really good musicians and then I listen to what they do, unless there is something more that I want I tell them. But the best thing is, see what they come up with because they are probably going to come up with something you didn't think of, which may be absolutely fucking wonderful. So don't close the door!"



From the Martin stand at the NAMM Show January, 2019, a D-16E features David Crosby and the United States Constitution, encouraging people to vote

Rodriguez For A Night has lyrics by Donald Fagen. That song really nails those Steely changes, doesn't it?

"Yes, we went for it, no question. We love Donald. We loved Steely Dan. *Aja* and *Gaucho* are both in my Top 10 for life, up there with *Blue* [Joni Mitchell], *Heavy Weather* [Weather Report], and *Kind Of Blue* [Miles Davis]. There's a handful of records, and two of theirs are in there."

The title track, *For Free*, is such a simple song, but you can't slavishly copy it. So how did you and Sarah Jarosz approach it?

"I had listened to her singing with Sara Watkins and Aoife O'Donovan in I'm With Her, their band together. They are fantastic. Then I listened to Sarah Jarosz's record, *Build Me Up From Bones*, a fantastic record. Then she put out *World On The Ground* and it was even better. I couldn't stand it. I got hold of her and I said, 'Listen, this is a stunning record. I really love your stuff and I'd like to sing something with you. I don't know what. I

don't know where. I don't know where we'd put it. I just want to do it because it's fun.'

"She said, 'I'd absolutely love to.' I said, 'Okay, let's figure out a song and we'll sing it. We are not trying to accomplish anything. We just want to have some fun. How about *'For Free'*?' She said, 'Oh, I love that song.' Then I went to James, and James did a piano track for it that is so evocative and so beautiful that it made me sing it better than I've ever sung it. I transcended myself.

"We sent it off to her and she sent it back with that harmony on it, which is like a lesson in how to do harmony. Just fucking perfect. I called her up and said, 'Listen. Can I put that on my record? It's just so good.' She said, 'Of course you can. I think it's fantastic.'"

James also plays a lovely piano part on *I Won't Stay For Long*. He wrote the song, too, even though it could be something autobiographical from you...

"He wrote it and it's the best thing on the record. He says that he wrote it off [the Greek legend of] Orpheus and Eurydice. Hmm-hmm."

Onto guitar, you were all playing Martin D-45s around the Woodstock era...

"Yes, And we loved them. I have three 1969 D-45s. But I have a bunch of really great guitars, man. I didn't buy famous people's guitars; that's what Nash did. I think he probably made more money on it than I did. But I bought guitars that played unbelievably well. I have probably the five best acoustic 12-strings in the world.

"I have a [Martin 12-string] that was converted from a D-18 that I bought in a store in Chicago. It's the best guitar

I've got. It's louder and more resonant with more overtones than anything else I've ever played.

"I'd always been drawn towards Martins until I ran into a guy right outside Seattle named Roy McAlister. I have five of his guitars. That should be everything you need to know right there."

You recently sold your publishing to help fund your life. That must have been a big burden lifted.

"We had two ways of making money: touring and records. Streaming doesn't pay us. It's like you did your job for a month and they gave you a nickel. You'd be pissed. That's why we are pissed – because they are making billions and not paying the people who are creating the music. So I'm trying to be grateful that I can still play live and pay the rent and take care of my family. But along comes Covid and I can't play live. That was it. Now I'm broke. I don't want to lose my home, man.

"We've got an old adobe house here in the middle of a cow pasture. It's just fucking wonderful. A beautiful, beautiful place in the middle of a bunch of trees. It's just lovely; it's not fancy and it's not rich and it's not big, but it's really right. We want to live here all our lives, so I sold my publishing."

People still want to hear new music from you – and not every musician from the era you came up in can say that.

"Nope. I guess I'd better keep trying..."



David Crosby's new album, *For Free*, is available now on Three Blind Mice

<https://davidcrosby.com>



THR30IIA WIRELESS

ACOUSTIC DESKTOP AMPLIFIER | BOUNDLESS TONE





PLAYING LIVE

Plug an acoustic guitar into an amp or a PA and it becomes a completely different animal. We gather together industry experts and top players to talk about how to get the best possible sound from your instrument on stage

Words David Mead Photo By Adam King

Playing an acoustic guitar in a live setting was once a precarious business. In the very beginning you were lucky to get heard in any venue that was bigger than your living room, and, even when microphones came to the rescue, it meant players had to remain static for fear of fading away completely.

Jump forward to the late 60s and members of the singer-songwriter boom were either content to stay put in front of mics or try taping electric guitar pickups into their guitar's soundholes – ironically turning their dreadnoughts into would-be electric guitars. But at least they could move around a little.

Later on saw the dawn of the transducer 'bug', which affixed to the guitar with a putty-like substance that resembled Blu Tack. At the time, they were welcomed as being cutting edge, but the sonic results were a long way from anything resembling high fidelity.

Now, of course, we take under-saddle piezo pickups for granted. In fact, as we'll see when we hear from four of the best acoustic players out there (page 15), some performers employ space-age technology to deliver their guitar sound to a concert audience. But first, we'll hear from the companies that took the acoustic player's plight to heart and offered an all-in-one solution to the problem of getting heard...

THE MAKERS



OVATION

While acoustic performers of yore continued to teeter on the brink of sonic mayhem on

stage, one company was quietly innovating. When Ovation brought out its first roundback plug-and-play acoustics in the early 70s, it was a huge leap forward for solo balladeers and band performers alike. Players such as Cat Stevens, Glen Campbell, Paul McCartney, Alex Lifeson and David Gilmour were quick to see the newcomer's potential. Instead of endless faff with gaffer tape and feedback-friendly soundhole pickups, suddenly you had an instrument that was truly stage ready.

We spoke to **THOMAS NEUHIEL**, Marketing Manager at Ovation, about those pioneering times and how the company continues to push its technology forward today.

Ovation was one of the pioneers of electro-acoustic guitar design, how does the company continue to innovate?

"Ovation is the inventor of the piezo-ceramic pickup. More than 50 years have passed since Charles Kaman brought forward his idea of a modern-era guitar to the global market. Inspired by traditional standards and blessed with an open mind, his initial profession as a helicopter manufacturer gave him an unusual edge. He dared to approach guitar-making in a way that is still polarising today.

"A specific, fibreglass composite (Lyrachord) combined with a semi-parabolic body shape (Roundback) were the ingredients for a completely new



PHOTO BY JARY SESSIONS

especially in different sound settings. We are also working on a new version of the famous OCP-1 – a slightly different shape and new materials should bring out an even better and clearer defined sound. The first samples were already very promising."

Do you still consider the Roundback as being key for a stage-ready acoustic?

"We are still 100 per cent convinced from the Roundback concept. It has proven it has a kind of speaker effect when a stringed music instrument is used purely acoustically; remember the old shell-shaped orchestra stages before there were PAs? Because it's made from one piece and there is no glue joint between the sides and the back, the guitar is more stable in its inner statics. If you compare it with the dome roofs of old cathedrals, here, too, a physical impact from the outside or even its own weight is much better diverted and spread by the semi-

Ovation guitars don't always feature a conventional soundhole. What are the benefits of the soundports as an alternative?

"Ovation broke with the use of a centre soundhole with the invention of the 'multiholes'. No doubt, the traditional centre soundhole still makes sense and is accepted today, even though it is actually placed on the top where most of the vibrations occur, and that was also the reason why the multiholes were moved to the edge. The top has a larger area to vibrate and the soundholes are closer to the player's ear and this is also the reason for soundports – a better monitor for the player, who hears himself better so that he plays better and more sensitively. We've already made guitars like that for Kaki King and Melissa Etheridge. Depending on what I want to use the guitar for, soundports definitely also make sense."

Is there such a thing as an all-rounder – an acoustic guitar that sounds great both acoustically and plugged into a PA or amplifier?

"For the reasons I have just explained, a Mid-depth would be a good choice, and we offer these in a wide variety of versions and colours. If you were to refer to the electronics alone, the OP Pro Studio with its three-band EQ exciter and compressor/limiter circuits would be at the top of the list, as it brings a smile of satisfaction to every soundman's face, especially at live shows on stage. A real top-seller, however, is a Super Shallow in Regal to Natural, but as we all know, the eye also 'eats' with us. I think everyone has to know what they want to use it for most, and then they should let themselves be guided by a gut feeling."

www.ovationguitars.com

"Inspired by traditional standards and blessed with an open mind, Charles' initial profession as a helicopter manufacturer gave him an unusual edge" **THOMAS NEUHIEL**

tonal experience on the well-populated acoustic-guitar market of its day. The final breakthrough was fuelled by the acoustic/electric version of the Ovation guitar. Again, Kaman's experiences from the aerospace industry were the trigger for this development. The result was the piezo-electric pickup, the first of its kind. It enabled acoustic guitar players to come to the forefront in a band arrangement or soloists to play in large open-air venues.

"We are currently working on a new preamp that is relatively small and very easy to use, but offers many different timbres,

parabolic shape. There is also no need for bracing on the back, which reduces weight. The idea of using piezo-ceramic crystals to pick up vibrations for a pickup was just one way. Charlie had already used these crystals for vibration measurements on helicopter chassis, and he also used them to optimise the vibration behaviour of the body-shape and tops of his guitars, and to optimise the materials used for the body. An example of this is the GS Body, which contains 30 per cent fibreglass and so-called micro-glass bubbles that reduce the weight and transmit vibrations better."



Despite the popularity of smaller body sizes, Makoto Terasaki says the day of the dreadnought is far from over



TAKAMINE

Another pioneer in the stage-ready guitar field is Japanese maker Takamine. The company's guitars have been seen in the hands of The Eagles, Garth Brooks, Bruce Springsteen and many more, providing sublime acoustic sound to stadium audiences worldwide. Takamine's chief designer, MAKOTO TERASAKI offers up a theory as to why many guitarists are reaching for smaller-bodied acoustics in today's market and gives some simple advice for regular maintenance.

Building a guitar that sounds as good acoustically as well as via a pickup system on stage is always a compromise from a construction point of view. How do you accommodate both when creating a guitar?

"Takamine's first products featured plywood tops, because some people believed that a plywood-body construction would reduce feedback. Shortly after, most of our guitars adopted a solid top. At present most Takamine guitars use solid tops and backs, and we don't do anything special for electro-acoustics.

"Feedback can occur for many reasons: a song's key, a specific pitch, frequency response characteristic of the PA, a venue's

shape... Nobody has the perfect method for guitar making to counter these variables. Our original Palathetic pickup had very few problems with feedback and current mixing consoles have better EQ, and so engineers can realise a beautiful acoustic guitar sound without feedback."

With improvements in pickup systems and PAs, we've noticed smaller guitar body sizes are becoming popular with players who perform live. Is the day of the mighty dreadnought nearing its end?

"Eric Clapton released *Unplugged* in 1992 and used a Martin 000-42, which has become his trademark. That was 30 years ago and smaller body sizes became more popular from this point and electro-acoustics have embraced the smaller body sizes since. Many professional musicians use smaller guitars not only on the concert stage, but also in a recording situation. Small guitars like the 000 and OM have a well-balanced sound and they are accommodating to current demand. Even with that, many guitar users will continue to like the big bass sound and rich overtones of a dreadnought. We don't think the dreadnought will disappear from the guitar market."

How can a performer maintain his guitar to keep it in perfect condition for the live stage?

"First, you should change the strings and use a new battery every time! A guitar tech will change the battery for every show. Then check the sliders and turn each of the control knobs [on the guitar's preamp] every so often to prevent noise. Finally, an L-shaped jack plug is better than a straight one as it relieves stress on the end pin socket."

www.takamine.com

Going Bespoke

What about the custom builder? We talked to Fylde Guitars' ROGER BUCKNALL about his philosophy on building a stage-ready acoustic guitar...



"There was a time when 'semi-acoustic' guitars were very popular. Generally, they were very heavily built, with great

playability and not prone to feedback, but the downside was the limitation in the acoustic sound. For a while the amplified acoustic guitar sound was a distinct experience, to the extent that audiences expected it, and stopped appreciating the pure acoustic sound. We tend to forget that volume is really a part of tone, no instrument sounds the same at high volumes as it does with no amplification. Our ears are not linear.

"Technology has changed a lot: notch filters and graphic equalisers to catch a troublesome frequency, phase inversion to deal with a difficult venue, and new pickups that don't turn the guitar into a microphone. There is a growing trend to have two pickup sources on the guitar, blended either on the guitar, or downline in a separate preamp. Plus, of course, a variety of pedals to shape the sound, each with an opportunity to sidestep many of grandad's problems..."

"When I discuss this with customers now, it's a different set of questions compared to 40 years ago. Newer pickup systems, better amplification and sound engineers and probably most of all, greater understanding from the artist. Sitting in the venue during a soundcheck with someone like John Smith, Martin Simpson or Eric Bibb, they can identify by ear a troublesome frequency and ask the desk to deal with it. So, in one way, not much has changed for me – I concentrate on making a guitar that the artist can use, and trust. It must be strong enough to withstand a little 'enthusiasm', and enable the player to produce his music. The amplified guitar is a tool, it needs to do its job."

www.fyldeguitars.com



Walnut short-scale 12-fret Leonardo

"Takamine's first products featured plywood tops, because some believed that would reduce feedback"

MAKOTO TERASAKI

SOUND ADVICE

Four of the best solo acoustic players on the live stage offer up advice on gear and how to overcome some of the perils and pitfalls of playing in front of an audience



TOMMY EMMANUEL, CGP
If playing acoustic is your thing then Tommy needs no introduction.

He's conquered stages worldwide with his amazing performances and unreal technique. Influenced by Chet Atkins, his concerts are a masterclass in dynamics and pacing – and he's renowned among front-of-house engineers for being very picky about his live sound...

"I'm using my signature Maton acoustics through an Udo Roesner Da Capo amp. I still use the AER Pocket Tools preamp as a direct signal into the PA, and then I go into the amp and then out of the amp and into the PA as well. So you get all the amp frequencies, all the direct frequencies and that way you can use your pickup and your microphone flat out. You get all that tone at that level with no feedback, because you cover the soundhole and crank the mic flat out.

"When I'm playing solo I want to sound as big as a whole band – the thud of a bass drum, the roundness of a bass guitar, so

when you're in the audience it feels like your head is really close to my guitar. In order for me to get those frequencies I need to drive the electronics in the equipment so that it's delivering everything without compression, limiting or any of that stuff. My soundman, Steve, and I have everything flat and nothing is boosted: no boosted bass, no boosted highs, no fake high-end switch. You'll often see a 'tone switch' and if you press it you'll begin to sound like The Eagles – that smiley EQ. You don't want that when you're playing on your own because our ears like all the frequencies where the voice is – that's where the melody on the guitar is, it's all in the mids. So it's, 'How do I get

"When I'm playing solo I want to sound as big as a whole band – the thud of a bass drum, the roundness of a bass guitar"

TOMMY EMMANUEL, CGP

the good mids and have plenty of bass, some air around the top, but not glassy, cutting your ear off?"

"In most cases where we show up, we go into the hall, we plug in, we get a sound, we have dinner, we do the show, you need minimum fuss. You don't want to spend hours dealing with feedback and problems with the monitors – you don't want any of that stuff and you can eliminate all of it if you do it this way. Cover the soundhole, get the sound on stage the way you like it and put it out there.

"People think that I have to have the monitors right and that's all I care about, but that's completely wrong. What I care about is the PA and the sound I get out in the room, because that's my world. So we get that good and then Steve brings the monitors in. Basically, I have side fill – like a little PA in itself – facing me from the side and I have my guitar pretty loud and big in them. Then I have a little bit of guitar in the wedges in front, but mostly voice, so when I sing I can hear my voice well, but I've got the guitar sound in the side fills surrounding me."

www.tommyemmanuel.com





PHOTO BY ELIZABETH GOMM

PHOTO BY TOM MARTIN

**JON GOMM**

Ten years ago Jon set YouTube alight with his video for *Passionflower*, which

has had a phenomenal 18 million views to date. Armed with a signature Ibanez acoustic and a state-of-the-art pedalboard, his performances are literally jaw-dropping.

"It starts with the Ibanez guitar and a triple-source pickup system. I have a Fishman Rare Earth mic blend and a Fishman Power Tap, which is a bridge plate transducer and it's really great for the percussive stuff. Three pickups come out of the guitar through effectively three different outputs – there's a stereo output and a mono output – into my pedalboard, which has a little Bose Ultralight digital mixer on it, so I can EQ and compress the pickups. The magnetic pickup goes through a Zoom MultiStomp, which is a single footprint multi-effects and it's amazing. That's basically for special effects that I only want on the strings as opposed to the 'drums'. And then the whole thing

goes into a TC Helicon VoiceLive, which is a guitar and vocal multi-effects processor – I have different settings for every song, pretty much. That goes straight into the DIs to the house. I also have a Boss OC-5 octave pedal and my Blackstar Sonnet that I use for on-stage monitoring.

"My personal approach is not to produce the perfect sound of an acoustic guitar live. That's not what I'm about at all. I want to use the electronics creatively to get a different sound. For example, the humbucker is quite warm and what it does is provide the information – the note content – which sounds like a weird thing to say, but quite

"My approach is not to get the perfect sound of an acoustic guitar live. That's not what I'm about. I want to use electronics creatively to get a different sound"

JON GOMM

often I see people play and they have the most beautiful, perfect acoustic guitar sound that's really rich and loads of top sparkly treble, loads of nice bottom end, loads of breathy quality... but you can't actually hear the notes they're playing. The notes live in the midrange and they don't have a pickup in a guitar that is direct enough to communicate what notes they're playing to the audience. Once you're in the room and you've got the reverbs of the room and the acoustics of the PA and everything, things can get lost really quickly. The overall sound is nice, but you can't hear the tune."

"I monitor through my own little Blackstar amps and they're very close to what good onstage monitors would sound like at a nice venue. I don't have them up very loud, and sometimes I'll position them in weird places – right off to the sides, so basically I have the monitors pointing at my ears rather than up at my face. I don't like to have them in front of me. If you imagine a festival stage with a row of monitors on the front of the stage – that's a nightmare for acoustic guitar."

www.jongomm.com



CAPTURE » ENHANCE » CONNECT

The Voiceprint DI[®], paired with our AcousticLive™ app, is a new type of impulse response system that uses your iPhone® to capture your guitar's one-of-a-kind voice. In just a few simple steps and by leveraging the power of the phone, a Voiceprint is created, transforming your pickup into the most authentic sound we have engineered in our 40+ years.

Learn more at lrbaggs.com/voiceprint

L.R. Baggs





PHOTOS BY ADRI SESSONS



ANTONIO FORCIONE

Using a mixture of Yamaha and Fylde acoustics, Antonio has

been described as 'the Jimi Hendrix of the acoustic guitar'. Playing both solo and in trios or quartets, he has also mastered the use of the gentler nylon-string guitar on the live stage, with stunning results.

"I go from my guitar into a volume pedal. My cable is stereo because I have a mic [inside the guitar] and I always think it's best to have the pickup separate because I need to EQ them separately. From there I go to an LR Baggs preamp just to boost the volume of the guitar and I use a couple of effects, the Boss OC-3 octave pedal and a Strymon Big Sky reverb. From there, straight into an Acus Pre Stage 6 preamp, which is really state of the art, really good. So I have one signal, which is the pickup going to channel one, and channel two is the microphone. For the microphone

I don't go through any effects pedals, it goes straight from the guitar to the volume pedal and into the preamp, because the microphone doesn't need anything, only a bit of reverb. I take my own monitors. I'm the kind of guy who works really hard to get his own sound environment, and when I play I want exactly that environment. It took me ages to understand that and how to do it. For a while I had my sound engineer coming with me to every gig and I didn't take my monitor. But this monitor is fairly small and the volume is good enough to carry through the gig.

"I work hard to get my own sound environment, and when I play I want exactly that environment. It took me ages to understand that and how to do it"

ANTONIO FORCIONE

"The biggest challenge on stage is not finding your comfort zone. When you are playing at home you think you are God, then suddenly you are on stage and the sound is not there. I think if you're not happy, nobody's going to be happy. That's my main message: make sure you're monitoring right and take the monitoring with you. Monitors all sound different. You might be lucky one evening and have an amazing sound, but I've done so many gigs, believe me, 80 per cent of the time you're not happy with it.

"This Yamaha guitar I have is the best nylon string to get a sound with. I have more expensive Yamaha guitars, but my old GCX is my favourite. Acoustically it's not that great, but with the microphone and the pickup it just works perfectly. I think nylon string is more percussive and you've got to get a really good microphonic sound. On the steel string I use 70 per cent magnetic [pickup] from [pickup maker and inventor of the Rare Earth design] Mike Vanden and 30 per cent mic. The nylon is the opposite; 70 per cent mic sound and 30 per cent pickup."

www.antonioforcione.com

Explore the Elements.



An Ovation guitar is a hybrid of organic elements and ground-breaking technology. The original elliptical bowl design married with select tone woods and integrated, optimized electronics offers unmatched, time-tested live performance. Nature + Innovation = Ovation

GEWA
GUITARS

GEWA music GmbH.
Oelsnitzer Str. 58, 08626 Adorf
www.gewamusic.com

ovation guitars
@ovationguitarsofficial
ovation guitars
ovation guitars

Ovation
GUITARS
www.ovationguitars.com



PHOTO BY ADAM KING

**MIKE DAWES**

An accomplished acoustic soloist, Mike also plays in Justin Haywood's live band.

Mixing percussive techniques with sensitive melodic moments, his outboard gear has to be both versatile and accommodating.

"I plug my guitar's pickups straight into a mixing desk on stage, which at the moment is the Bose T8S. So I'm able to mix, EQ and gain stage all the pickups that are in my guitar correctly – add a bit of compression and things like that – and it also leaves me with some creative routing options for my guitar pedals.

"I have my magnetic pickup plugged into a channel on my mixer, I can then take the output from that channel, run that into, say, a distortion pedal and then run that pedal back into its own channel on the mixer. In the case of an octave pedal, for instance, it allows me to do things that are not on the pedal, like compression and noise gate.

"The final three pedals in my rig are stereo delay, stereo looper and stereo reverb, so everything else gets mixed down in the

mixer and sent out from there into the delay, looper and reverb and out left and right into front-of-house.

"I have four pickups: a piezo, mic and magnetic, and a 'kick drum pickup', which is essentially a little piezo under the saddle or bridge plate that will pick [percussive technique] up. This way I get to have extra control, so I can have a separate channel on my mixer, which has a kick-drum gate on it and lots of compression and low end, and I can send that out to its own channel at front-of-house, getting sent to the subs in the venue. It adds a bit of textural low end, but only when I hit it; it's purely percussive because the noise gate is turned up so much it doesn't pick up any of the guitar playing.

"The main challenge for me is twofold: first it's making the guitar sound like a guitar... The other thing would be understanding where your guitar peaks"

MIKE DAWES

"The main challenge for me is twofold: first it's making the guitar sound like a guitar. The solution for that would be combining pickup sources, though I'm able to create the microphonic quality of a studio recording a little bit with the internal mic. The acoustic guitar sound is actually coming from my transducer, which is not under the saddle, it's under the bridge plate inside the guitar. It's the K&K Trinity, the three little bugs that sit on the bridge plate, I prefer that to the under-saddle pickup, because it's a little bit further away from the ends of the strings and you get a little less of that quacky piezo sound. Then the DiMarzio Black Angel magnetic pickup I'm using for some extra warmth in the strings. So by blending those three sources you can get a pretty good acoustic-guitar sound.

"The other thing would be understanding where your guitar peaks. My Indian rosewood Cuntz model has quite a steep peak at about 196Hz – a sort of G or F#, fourth fret, fifth fret D string kinda thing – and it does cause problems at volume. So on my mixing desk I make sure I use a parametric EQ to scoop that right out and that helps a lot."

www.mikedawes.com

Takamine



BlueRose LTD2021

Every year, Takamine showcases their exquisite craftsmanship with their highly anticipated limited-edition LTD model.

This year, Takamine is proud to introduce the LTD2021 Blue Rose, a stunningly beautiful guitar that combines incredible handcrafted beauty with fantastic sound and smooth playability.

The LTD2021 Blue Rose offers delicate imagery of blue roses inlaid in its striped ebony fingerboard. These inlays are made with layered fabric, gently coloured by the *aizome* method, a traditional art form in Takamine's home in Gifu, Japan that uses natural indigo blue dye made from plants.





MARTIN STYLE 45

We take a close look at this stunning pre-war 000-45 and catch up with CF Martin & Co's museum and archives specialist, Jason Ahner, as he schools us on the history of Martin's flagship flat-tops

Words Rod Brakes Photography Adam Gasson

Few flat-tops command the reverence of a Martin 45. Emerging in the early part of the 20th century and few in number, they are now some of the most collectible acoustic guitars known. Among them are the D-45s. These Dreadnoughts are to Martin what the 'Burst is to Gibson: a Holy Grail guitar worth hundreds of thousands of pounds valued not only in terms of scarcity and looks, but also on its merits as a playing instrument.

When 'Burst/rare guitar collector Andrew Raymond happened to show us this 1937 Martin 000-45 on a recent shoot, we thought we'd take the opportunity to perform some close-up camerawork and bring our readers a little nearer to what Martin still considers to be the apex of flat-tops.

"A beautiful guitar both in tone and in appearance," reads the 000-45 entry in Martin's 1937 catalogue. While the website today, declares: "It's the perfect guitar for any discerning collector or musician. Nothing says you've arrived like a D-45." It seems the decades have done little to dampen the lustre of these artful instruments or quell the lust of collectors and players.

"We have a pre-war D-45 that's part of our museum collection," begins Martin's museum and archives specialist, Jason Ahner. "And on the plaque is written, 'The

Holy Grail of acoustic guitars.' I mean, it's an iconic guitar, and if you see one at auction you want to buy, you'd better have a few hundred thousand dollars to spend!"

Evolving from Style 42 instruments, Martin's first Style 45 flat-tops were registered in 1904 in the form of two 0-45s and one 00-45, followed by one 000-45 in 1906. It wasn't until 1933 that the first D-45 was built (at the behest of Gene Autry) after Martin began making Dreadnoughts branded under its own name in 1931.

"The 45-series has its origins in the 42-series," says Jason. "The 00-42S is really where the Style 45 developed from. In those days, 'S' meant it was a 'special order' instrument. A few of them were built in 1901, but the majority were made in 1902. From there, Martin went on to release Style 45 instruments in 1904."

"In many ways, the Martin D/Dreadnought design became the standard by which all other American flat-tops are judged"

In many ways, the Martin D/Dreadnought design became the standard by which all other American flat-tops are judged. Indeed, 0, 00 and 000 size acoustics are these days referred to as 'small-bodied'. And yet, at one point or another, each of the above claimed the title of Martin's largest flat-top.

"Martin's first X-braced guitar was made for Madame de Goñi in 1843, and it's a size 1 – the largest size Martin was building at the time," says Jason. "And then you see the larger size 0 first built in 1854, followed by the first 00 in 1858. But sales records don't mention the first 000 until 1902. From there, the 000 is the largest body size until the Dreadnought is built exclusively for Ditson [in 1916]. Ditson went out of business in 1930, and the following year Martin started building the Dreadnought model for all their dealers, although it didn't become a 14-fret neck model until 1934."

The evolution of Martin guitars from a 12- to a 14-fret neck via the OM/Orchestra Model instruments introduced in 1929 is considered a leap forward in flat-top design. Interestingly, the design stems from a special-order guitar requested by a banjo player.

"The Orchestra Models are directly related to a banjo player named Perry Bechtel," points out Jason. "He had been playing archtop guitars with longer necks, but he wanted a flat-top guitar with a longer

1937 Martin 000-45.
Along with the 'Holy Grail'
D-45, 45-series Martins
are among the most
desirable pre-war flat-top
acoustic guitars known



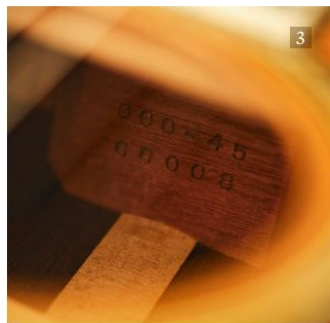


1. 1902 Martin 00-42S. This intricately inlaid special-order guitar with a mandolin-style pickguard is the progenitor of Martin's 45-series



2. In 1942, Martin's discontinued the 45-series, making this 1942 D-45 one of the last pre-war 'Holy Grail' instruments

3. If you peer inside the soundhole of a Martin guitar you will see the instrument's model name and serial number stamped into the neck block



neck, too, and at that time nobody built one. He happened to work for a Martin dealer in Atlanta, Georgia, called the Cable Piano Company, and so he started negotiating what he wanted. Eventually, Martin would build a guitar for him: the first OM-28. It's considered the first modern steel-string acoustic guitar with the longer, slimmer 14-fret neck."

The new OM-style 14-fret neck became so successful that, by 1934, Martin had switched a majority of its existing line over from the older 12-fret design, including the 45-series.

"Martin was building the OM from 1929 until 1934, and that's when they started building the 000 with a 14-fret neck also. At that point, the OM and the 000 were pretty much the same guitars, so they just discontinued the OM. There were no longer OM-18s, OM-28, or OM-45s: they just became 000-18, -28, and -45s [respectively]. For a few months, 000s were actually the same scale as the OMs. So, in 1934, you could find, say, a 000-28 and an OM-28 that were pretty much exactly the same guitar, except for the [model name] stamping on the neck. But then, later in the year, Martin decided to shorten the 000 scale from 25.4 inches to 24.9 inches."

While Hawaiian music reigned supreme in the 1920s, the guitar was still a little bit behind the mandolin and banjo in terms of popularity, and it is precisely

for these reasons that the flat-top continued to evolve in the way it did.

"Guitars were often just an instrument that would keep the rhythm in the background," explains Jason. "It wasn't really until the 1930s that it came more to the forefront as a lead instrument and to accompany vocals. If you look at the 00-42S [pictured, far left] it has that mandolin-style pickguard on it. Later on, Martin would switch to what we now consider to be a more traditional pickguard when it was ordered, but they didn't become standard until the OM/Orchestra Models appeared in 1929. Those were the first models to feature a pickguard as standard. Also, around that time during 1927/1928, steel strings become the standard and gut strings are on a special-order basis instead, which shows how music was developing.

"The more I look into it and the more I learn, the more I see how Hawaiian music influenced the way the guitar is played now. Hawaiian musicians were the first to put steel strings on a guitar. It was the gentlemen by the name of Joseph Kekuku [1874-1932] and Mekia Kealaka'i [1867-1944]. They were childhood friends. Martin built the pre-Dreadnought guitar for [Kealaka'i], and a couple of months later built the D-111 Dreadnought for Ditson [in 1916]. Then, in 1931, Martin's D-1 and D-2 came out. Because of the popularity of Hawaiian music, Hawaiian musicians were touring all over the States, and you can hear elements of their style in blues music and country – the pedal steel, for example. A lot of the early blues guitarists played slide. Take Robert Johnson: he would use a slide, and that could easily have come directly from Hawaiian music. I think the guitar wouldn't be played the same nowadays had it not been for Hawaiian musicians."

Although the pictured 1937 000-45 now resides in Wales, it spent many a year in the decidedly more tropical climes of Hawaii.

"It wouldn't have been that unusual for a 000-45 such as this to have been in Hawaii because there was always a big connection between Martin guitars and Hawaiian music," underlines Jason. "I mean the Royal Hawaiian Band would purchase Martin ukuleles and guitars, and The Bishop

"It wasn't really until the 1930s that the guitar came more to the forefront as a lead instrument and to accompany vocals"



4. From 1914, 45-series Martins featured inlays on frets 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15 and 17. By 1939, D-45s switched to hexagonal inlays, while other models kept the snowflake type

5. The C.F. Martin headstock logo was introduced on 45-series guitars in 1934 in recognition of Christian Frederick Martin who founded the company in 1833



Original documents show the guitar was purchased in 1938 in New York before making its way to Hawaii

Museum in Honolulu recently did an exhibition called '[Kaula Piko] The Source Of Strings'. We lent them a pre-war 00-40H, which was a Hawaiian model Martin built. So there's a big connection there and it goes back a long way.

"In the pre-war era, 45-style guitars were catalogued and remarked as Martin's flagship instruments. Martin was building some archtops at the time in the F-series, and they were pretty pricey models, too, but if you look at, say, an OM-45 De Luxe, that would have been Martin's most expensive model in 1930 [priced at \$225]. And then from there, typically the 000-45 or the D-45 would have been the most expensive flat-top model in the price list. In 1937, Martin built 18 000-45s [priced \$175]. Sales were pretty modest. The US was still going through the Great Depression and \$175 dollars was a costly sum back then. The production totals I have in front of me go up to 2005, and from the first 000-45 in 1906 up until then, Martin has only built 341 of them. So they're pretty rare if you consider we build about 3,000 D-28s a year now – compared with 341 in the span of 100 years! We don't build a 000-45 now – we build a 000-42 and an OM-42 – but the D-45 is currently available in our Standard Series."

As is the case with Martin's current top-of-the-line 42- and 45-series flat-tops, this 1937 000-45 was built using specially selected wood.



6. Style 45 guitars feature specially selected wood, as per the beautifully figured bookmatched two-piece Brazilian rosewood back of this 000-45

7. By 1934, 000-45s were listed with an OM-style 14-fret neck/body join, superseding the earlier 12-fret design

8. African Gabon ebony and can be seen on Martin guitars up until the 90s. Notice the pearl inlay pins of this 000-45



"It has premium Adirondack spruce for the top, along with premium Brazilian rosewood for the back and sides," highlights Jason. "It's the flagship model, so you're going to get the best of the best when it comes to the look of the wood. The ebony used for the fingerboard and bridge would have come from Africa – most likely it's Gabon ebony. Gabon usually has more of a uniform black colour, which is pretty much what you see exclusively until the 1990s.

"It has ivoroid binding and the nut and saddle are ivory. All of the pearl is abalone, which is much more colourful than just white mother-of-pearl. The fretboard inlays are what we call the long-pattern snowflake type. The Style 45 long-pattern snowflake fretboard inlays include the 1st and 3rd frets through to the 17th, as opposed to the Style 42 snowflakes that start at the 5th fret. Also, Style 45s have pearl inlay on the headplate, which 42s didn't. 45s changed over from the Martin torch inlay to the CF Martin block logo inlay – as seen on this guitar – in the 1930s. The finish is a nitrocellulose lacquer, which is connected to ukulele production. Martin was having such a hard time keeping up with production that in 1926 they brought in their first spraying equipment to do nitrocellulose lacquer."

While a majority of Martin's classic guitar design features were in place by the 1930s, further developments were necessary in order to reinforce the necks.

"Style 45s are the pinnacle of what a flat-top steel-string can be. And that's what makes them so valuable"

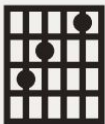
"In 1937, guitars such as this 000-45 were being made with a steel T-bar installed in the neck," Jason tells us. "I think Martin ordered them from a sled manufacturer! Originally, when they got into steel-strings, they were just using a strip of ebony to reinforce the neck, although at that point they were still using bar frets, so that acted as compression fretting to help keep the neck straight. But in 1934, Martin went to modern-style T-frets, and because they didn't have the same compression rate as bar frets, something stiffer was needed to reinforce the neck – which is when they brought the T-bar in. That was replaced by a square steel tube in the 1960s, before the adjustable truss-rod became standard in 1985."

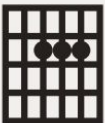
Due to the war effort and materials shortages, production of 45-style guitars ceased in 1942, shortly followed by 42-style guitars early the following year.

"1943 was the last year for all pearl-boarded guitars (six 000-42s built in February 1943)," says Jason. "Then there were no pearl-boarded models until 1968 when Martin reintroduced the D-45, followed by the 000-45 in 1970. So, until the D-35 was introduced [in 1966], the highest appointment level Martin offered was a 28 style. In the 60s, Martin saw the market growing for pre-war D-45s and they wanted to reintroduce it, so they brought [Martin author] Mike Longworth in to oversee the production because he was an excellent inlay artist and because of his reputation. He did work for Lester Flatt and Eric Clapton, including Clapton's 1966 000-28, which he converted to a Style 45 – the one he plays on the *MTV Unplugged* show, along with his 1939 000-42.

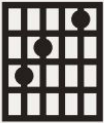
"When it comes to acoustic guitars, Style 45s are the pinnacle of what a flat-top steel-string can be. And that's what makes them so valuable. Not just because they're Martins. Martin has built great guitars since 1833, but 45s have really stood up to the test of time. Not only do they look great, but they sound great. If you pick up a Style 45 from the 1930s like this, you're going to get an amazing sound; you're going to get what you expect to hear from a Martin instrument." 

Guitarist would like to thank Andrew Raymond of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, UK

YOU   N'T

M  SS-

PRO  U  

 H  R   T  R

GUITARISTS GET IT.

Atkin Guitars
Canterbury, UK

Handcrafted since 1995
atkinguitars.com

Atkin

Hybrid Guitars

Acoustic guitars with 'electric' sounds, or maybe an electric guitar with 'acoustic' sounds? The technology is out there... **Words:** Dave Burrluck



GODIN A6 ULTRA
£899 (approx)

The long-running Canadian company has led the way in popularising the hybrid-guitar concept mixing piezo acoustic, magnetic electric and synth access on numerous acoustic and solidbody platforms. Currently in short supply, Music Street has the A6 Ultra on pre-order so you might be lucky. Expect an electric feel to the neck, paired with a chambered silver-leaf maple body with spruce top. With the magnetic sound provided by the neck-placed Godin humbucker and with dual acoustic and electric outputs you can easily run a two amp set-up.

www.musicstreet.co.uk



PRS SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO
£1,349

While PRS has long offered both solidbody and hollowbody 'hybrids' with onboard piezo acoustic sounds designed in conjunction with LR Baggs, its prices can be prohibitive for many. However, this SE version of the hollowbody is Chinese-made to PRS's exacting specs, and pairs a hollowbody design, with bridge block, and a pair of 58/15'S' humbuckers, plus a new PRS/LR Baggs piezo design. It's a laminate construction, like the classic ES-335, and is a great way to add some acoustic flavour into your electric work.

www.prsguitars.com



TAYLOR T5Z CLASSIC
£2,279

Another well-established hybrid, the T5Z Classic is the down-sized version – more electric-like – of the original T5. It's a thinline acoustic guitar first and foremost, and uses three pickups – a magnetic acoustic body sensor, a concealed neck humbucker, and a visible bridge humbucker – plus five-way switching and onboard tone control. Different versions using flamed koa, curly maple, spruce or mahogany – as here – tops are available. The guitar has a mixed mono output, so unlike other hybrids you can't run 'acoustic' and electric sounds simultaneously.

www.taylorguitars.com



**FENDER AMERICAN
ACOUSTASONIC TELECASTER**
£1,749

This American Acoustasonic Telecaster started a now three-string range, which includes Stratocaster and Jazzmaster versions. In basic terms, it's a small-bodied acoustic guitar (that feels like an electric) with a selection of Fishman-created digital-acoustic guitar recreations, plus a magnetic bridge pickup with its own tone-stack for a little grit. It's fast in use with a volume control and Blend control that can mix the five sound pairs selected by the five-way Voice Selector (offering 10 sounds in total).

www.fender.com



**EMERALD X10 ARTISAN
WOODY £3,300 (approx)**

Few guitars are as forward-thinking as Emerald's Irish-made carbon-graphite creations. Aside from the moulding materials, here's an acoustic guitar with a full 648mm (25.5") scale and 24 frets. It uses a Graph Tech Ghost Acoustic-Phonic system, which allows the piezo acoustic sound to be mixed with the magnetic humbucker at the neck and MIDI output to hook you up to a synth. Emerald offers a dizzyingly large range with plenty of options for custom order. A glimpse of the future, here, right now.

<https://emeraldguitars.com>



MUSIC MAN MAJESTY
£4,449

This hugely progressive guitar is, of course, one of four current Music Man John Petrucci signatures. It's a solidbody with a neck-through-body design, alder body wings and very figured maple top, but includes a piezo-loaded bridge (Fishman Powerbridge saddles) for acoustic-like sounds. The magnetic side is handled by DiMarzio Dreamcatcher and Rainmaker humbuckers, and includes some complex pickup switching, with mono or stereo outputs plus a 20dB gain boost. Oh, and if six strings aren't enough there's a seven-string version too!

www.music-man.com

Affordable Acoustics

Need to get your acoustic chops in order but don't have the budget for a high-line steel string? No worries, there's plenty to satisfy **Words:** Dave Burrluck



**FENDER CALIFORNIA SERIES
NEWPORTER PLAYER £309**

Who says acoustic guitars need to be all woody and cost a fortune? Not Fender. The California Player range includes the cutaway dreadnought Redondo, the small-body Malibu and this mid-size Newporter, all available in six top finishes from Natural and Sunburst to more classic Fender colours, such as Candy Apple Red. Tops are solid spruce with laminate mahogany back and sides, plus they come with a Fishman CD-1 pickup/preamp system. There is plenty of choice up for grabs in the other California ranges too.

www.fender.com



PRS SE P20 £419

PRS isn't known for its acoustic guitars but these small-bodied SEs have proved hugely successful. Along with the larger bodied Angelus and Tonare models, this parlour-sized Tonare is available in three satin finishes over the all-mahogany construction (solid top, laminated back and sides). Plus it uses PRS's own hybrid 'X'/classical bracing, which "locks down the back and sides, while allowing the top to freely vibrate," says PRS. The fingerboard and bridge are ebony, and we get a bone nut and saddle, as well as PRS's bird inlays of course, and the lowly price includes a gig-bag. The electro E version costs £499.

www.prsguitars.com



**CORT CORE-OC COLLECTION
£499-£525**

Here's an excellent mini range of all-solid OM acoustics made from different tonewoods – one is all-mahogany, the second has a spruce top with mahogany back and sides, and the third is an all-blackwood model. Nuts and saddles are bone and the X-bracing underneath the tops is hand-scalloped. They are all electros too, using Fishman Sonicon/Sonitone combo. "If these guitars all sat in the £750 bracket we wouldn't be too surprised," we said, "but the fact they circle the £500 point is very good indeed."

www.cortguitars.com



**YAMAHA FG-TA
TRANSACOUSTIC £549**

There's nothing new in acoustic world, right? Wrong. This intriguing design from Yamaha, coined 'TransAcoustic', allows players to dial in reverb and chorus on an *unplugged* acoustic without any outboard equipment. Of course, with Yamaha's SRT piezo system you can plug it in too, but the key thing is you can add 'space' while strumming on your sofa. "This technology is not a gimmick," we said back in issue 431. "The onboard reverb is especially inspiring, allowing you to dial in great room ambience and sustain anywhere you go."

<https://europe.yamaha.com>



**MARTIN X SERIES DX2E
£619 (approx)**

We might be in a time when the smaller bodied acoustic is more popular, but if you've never experienced the power and projection of a Martin dreadnought you could do worse than start here. The X Series guitars are built in Martin's Mexico factory and are an exercise in cost-effective production using HPL (High Pressure Laminate) back and sides, paired with an X-braced solid Sitka spruce top. The neck uses Martin's Performing Artist shape, while the electro side comes from Fishman's MX electronics. The price includes a soft gig-bag.

www.martinguitar.com



SHEERAN BY LOWDEN S03 £930

Right so, this isn't exactly low-cost, but, compared to a pukka Lowden, although still made in Ireland, it's positively bargain basement! And with Ed Sheeran's involvement it's a double plus. The S is the larger of two satin-finished shapes offered, and is the basic version of a Lowden S-Series electro (the other is the WL 'Wee Lowden' originally designed for Ed). The S03 features a Sitka spruce top, laminated Santos rosewood (aka pau ferro) back and sides; and ebony fingerboard and bridge. Meanwhile, powering is from LR Baggs' Element VTC. What's not to like?

<https://sheeranguitars.com>

Workhorse Electros

Need a buddy for some serious gig use? Here's some suggestions for a reliable electro **Words:** Dave Burrluck



AUDEN ARTIST MAHOGANY CHESTER SPRUCE CUTAWAY £1,349

Using a clever manufacturing method, Auden import the 'shell' from a small factory in China and do all the important stuff at its workshop in Northamptonshire. And so we have a wide range of carefully made guitars that don't break the bank. The Chester is a cutaway 000-style with mahogany back and sides, AAA spruce top, and ebony fingerboard. Other top features include the high-ratio Schertler tuners, bone nut and excellent-sounding Brad Clark Supernatural pickup/preamp system. Price includes a hard case.

www.audenguitars.com



TAKAMINE P5NC £1,499

Original road-warriors, Takamine, need no introduction for stage-aimed players. The only problem you might have is deciding which guitar suits you. Oh, and their impenetrable model-numbering system, of course. This P5NC is from the Pro Series and is a perfect choice for the singer-songwriter with its 'small jumbo' NEX shape and top spec X-braced spruce top, rosewood back and sides (all solid) with a deep cutaway. Takamine's proprietary CTP-3 Cool Tube preamp system and its Palathetic under-saddle pickup provide the powering with plenty of onboard EQ help. Hard case included.

www.takamine.com



YAMAHA AC5R ARE £1,560

This cutaway 'concert' shape is a fine example of a no-frills stage-aimed guitar and uses plenty of Yamaha's proprietary technology. The spruce top is 'aged' via its A.R.E system and features scalloped bracing along with solid rosewood back and sides. There's plenty of attention to the neck profile and its rolled fingerboard edges too, while powering is from the proprietary SRT2 System (which combines under-saddle and mic modelling). Add in Gotoh open-back tuners, Tusq nut and saddle, plus a hardcase and it's hard to argue with this Japanese-made electro.

<https://uk.yamaha.com>



MARTIN SC-13E £1,599 (approx)

This forward-looking electro is, by design, aimed at the non-traditional player. It features a 13-frets-to-the-body neck-join, offset 'S' body and heel-less neck joint, not to mention the subtler 'morphing' asymmetric neck profile, all aimed to create "a blurring of the line between traditional acoustic and more electric-like styles," says Martin. The Sure Align neck attachment does away with the traditional heel and improves upper-fret playability. Powering comes from Fishman's MX-T preamp with Sonotone under-saddle transducer (with soundhole-placed volume and tone), phase switch and tuner. Comes with gigbag.

www.martinguitar.com



TAYLOR GTE URBAN ASH £1,955

Here's another great example of the increasing popularity of the small-bodied acoustic, the GT – as in 'Grand Theatre' – is a "scaled-down body that echoes the jumbo curves of our Grand Orchestra shape," says Taylor. Its urban-ash back and sides tick the conservation box – and provides a wood that has a similar sonic quality to Honduran mahogany. While its top is Sitka spruce, the fingerboard is eucalyptus on a mahogany neck. There's the new C-class bracing, plus the Expression System 2 provides a big plugged-in sound. Includes Taylor's AeroCase.

www.taylorguitars.com



CORDOBA GK PRO £1,599

This is a cutaway flamenco-style nylon-string electro built in China, but very much in the traditional Spanish style. It's all solid wood with traditional cypress back and sides with a European spruce top, and is 12 frets to the body. The neck is slightly narrower (50mm at the nut) and edges into 'cross-over' style with a slightly thinner body depth. Powering comes from Fishman's Prefix ProBlend preamp with both under-saddle and an internal mic. The price includes an excellent humidified hard case. We've gigged ours plenty of times – perfect for those Latin styles.

www.cordobaguitars.com

Five Minutes With...

KT TUNSTALL

Since blowing away the nation on *Later... With Jools Holland* in 2004 as an unknown ex-busker, the Scottish songwriter has clocked up millions of album sales and a host of awards – and all as a self-confessed “scrappy guitarist”...

On The Streets

“Busking was the key factor in learning how to be a rhythm guitarist. I started to really appreciate those 50s and 60s players, like the Everly Brothers, Elvis and Eddie Cochran. They were going at acoustic guitar like they were playing electric guitar – but electric guitar didn’t really exist yet. When you listen to *Wake Up Little Susie*, that is just a masterclass in hardcore, precise acoustic rhythm guitar... Busking made me transfer over to steel-string with a pick.”

Times Change

“I still feel like a very scrappy guitarist. I think I err on the side of rhythm playing. Although age is a great factor in this. I feel like I might become more of a picker. I’m a huge Joni Mitchell and Nick Drake fan, and, actually, I maybe listen to Django Reinhardt more than anything else. I was actually in the car yesterday thinking, ‘Maybe I should become a bebop guitarist...’”

Tough Love

“I’m now on my third main [Gibson] Dove acoustic. I’m literally having to stop playing these guitars because I batter them apart. We try to look into putting some extra bracing inside and just giving them a bit more of a chance. But they’re inevitably cracked within a month.”

Behind Barres

“I have very skinny fingers and bony knuckles, so I basically can’t play barre chords... Finding open chords, and making up chords instead of barres, has become a really important

signature for me. Barre chords just never sound very inspiring to me. It’s the ‘straightness’. I’m always looking for the hanging note or the suspended note.”

Loopy For Effects

“I still really enjoy looping. Because I perform mostly solo, it’s important to keep myself on my toes. Working with Howe Gelb on *Invisible Empire* // *Crescent Moon* [2013] also introduced me to really experimenting with effects. That is absolutely staple for me now – to be able to put overdrive, tremolo and reverb onto my acoustic.”

Attitude Matters

“When I do my two-piece show, there’s this moment where we do some clever triggering and I play the lead line on *The River* [from *Wax*, 2018]. I fuck it up every time. Total mess. But it’s all about the attitude.”

Precious Little Ones

“I have a 60s Gibson parlour guitar, which is currently in the care of [US artist] Maggie Rogers. It’s a really beautiful storyteller of a guitar. I need to play big-body dreadnoughts live because I need that spectrum, especially if I’m playing solo; I need the breadth and width and depth. But, really, I love small-bodied guitars, like my little Taylor GS Mini. It’s so nice, having a little baby-sized guitar. It feels very intimate, like you’re in a cocoon.” **[HY]**



Drastic Fantastic:
Ultimate Edition is out
now on Universal.

www.kttunstall.com





“

THE **PERFORMANCE 3** IS THE BEST
GUITAR CAPO MONEY CAN BUY

MUSICRADAR, ROB LAING, OCTOBER 2019

The Capo Company



www.G7th.com

THE SONIC SHAPE- SHIFTER



AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC® JAZZMASTER®

An otherworldly guitar that combines iconic acoustic voicings and big electric tones with one powerful Blend Knob. Unlock an impossible range of sounds - no matter how you spin it.

Fender

CRAFTED IN CORONA, CALIFORNIA

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