PHIL MANZANERA

Roxy Music's pioneering guitar man on his best recording tips

BILLY GIBBONS

An exclusive look at his new Brit-built electric guitar line

MARK TREMONTI

The Alter Bridge hero's tips on buying guitars and amps

Guitarist

Issue 477

OCTOBER 2021

THE FIRST *Les Paul*

INSIDER EXCLUSIVE REPORT

BRIAN SETZER

THE KING OF ROCKABILLY ON GRETSCHES, GUITAR HEROES AND HIS HOT NEW ALBUM

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THE UNTOLD STORY OF HOW A LEGEND WAS BORN

FEATURING

Les Paul's Role In The Electric Guitar Revolution 1930-1952

PLUS

NEW GRETSCH STREAMLINER SEMIS

JEFF 'SKUNK' BAXTER

JOE ROBINSON

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The Man In The Moon

The artist Pablo Picasso once said, “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.” He might have been writing about Les Paul (see cover feature, page 56) who never stopped working, hardly even to sleep. These days, people tend to think of Les Paul as an inventor who was also a talented musician. But as his son, producer Gene Paul, told us, this is absolutely the wrong way round. He was an inventor because he was driven, as few people are, to unlock the full potential of the guitar as a music-making device. Making better music was a goal he pursued relentlessly – and so when inspiration visited Les (which happened often) it would inevitably find him working. His diligence in making the best music he could, by any means at his disposal, was rewarded with more than 50 hit singles, three Grammy Awards and four Grammy nominations.

So, if the words ‘Les Paul’ have only ever conjured up the mental image of a flame-topped guitar, maybe it’s time to make room for the idea that those words were synonymous with musical brilliance long before 1952. How high the moon? Who knows – but the question wouldn’t have daunted Les because he was always aiming higher in the name of music, and nothing seemed impossible to him. Which brings to mind another Picasso quote: “He can who thinks he can, and he can’t who thinks he can’t...” It’s amazing how far such an attitude can take you. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor’s Highlights

Brian Setzer
The king of rockabilly is back with his first solo album in ages and it’s a good one. We get ready to hit the highway with him on **p76**

Phil Manzanera
Roxy Music’s guitar man spent lockdown on an inner journey that yielded up a stunning new album. Learn his hard-won studio tips on **p48**

Joe Robinson
If you haven’t checked out the jaw-dropping talents of this Aussie fingerstyle wizard, do so without delay on **p32**

Guitarist

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Justin Borucki

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ASHDOWN AGM-484H HEAD
£999

WHAT IS IT? A powerful, compact pro-quality head with proper all-valve tone from four EL84s

Magnify Your Tone

Ashdown's Guitar Magnifier head features a deceptively simple preamp that delivers a wide range of tones into the classic quartet of EL84 output valves – all at real-world prices

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

Ashdown Music is well known all over the world as an industry standard in bass amplification, with a huge user-list that reads like a who's who of the world's greatest bass players. It's such a strong reputation that Ashdown's equally impressive guitar products sometimes tend to be a little unfairly overshadowed.

Launched back in 2020, Ashdown's Guitar Magnifier heads and combos take their inspiration from the best-selling Bass Magnifier range. Designed by amp guru Dave Green and made in the UK at Ashdown's Essex Custom Shop, the AGM collection promises great tone and real-world versatility at affordable prices. We looked at the AGM-5C combo back in February, now it's time to zero in on the AGM-484H head.

Ashdown's ultra-compact AGM-484H isn't that much bigger than a box of cornflakes, but it's considerably heftier, of course, thanks to a pair of generously sized mains and output transformers feeding four JJ 12AX7 preamp valves and a quartet of JJ EL84s inside. The 484H is presented in typical Ashdown fashion, with a satin-black steel cabinet and smart brushed gold control panel featuring the company's trademark illuminated VU meter at the far right. A heavy-duty leather strap handle is bolted to one end of the cabinet and enables easier carrying.

The electronics live on two high-quality printed circuit boards: a large one near the front holds the preamp components, while a second board in the middle of the chassis accommodates the power stage components, including the valves, which sit horizontally in a gap between the AGM-484H's transformers. The wiring is all neatly routed and the soldering is clean and bright, with short flying leads to the front-panel controls and switches for improved reliability and ease of servicing. There's generous ventilation to keep things cool thanks to the large slotted grilles on the top and bottom of the cabinet and a small permanently-on fan on the rear panel.

ERNIE BALL
BOOST
CLIP
GAIN
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
PRES
VOLUME
BOOST VOL
RETURN
FX LOOP
SEND
AGM -484H-
Ashdown Guitar Magnifier
INSTRUMENT INPUT
BOOST
BOOST
VU
Ashdown Engineering
Ashdown Engineering

1

The AGM-484H is essentially a single-channel head, with a switchable boost stage that has its own gain and master volume. There's a non-boosted gain and master volume as well, together with bass, mid, treble and presence EQ controls. The gain stages are cascaded, so with the boost engaged both gain controls are active. The boost can be activated remotely with a footswitch or from the front panel. Meanwhile, a second toggle called Clip changes the gain structure for more tonal variation. Near the VU meter, there's a pair of sockets for the amp's series effects loop, which is valve-driven and valve-recovered.

Rear-panel features include a pair of 16-ohm and eight-ohm speaker outlets and a footswitch jack on the far right, plus an integrated mains socket, fuse tray and power switch at the other end. Overall, the AGM-484H exudes the typical Ashdown vibe of solid reliability and classy styling, with military-spec components and tough construction ready to handle the rough and tumble of regular gigging and touring. Having said that, paint finishes on steel cabinets are easily scratched and we'd recommend investing in a padded cover to keep your AGM-484H looking pristine.

2

Feel & Sounds

The Ashdown purrs into life with a gentle whirring from the rear-mounted cooling fan. We tried out the AGM-484H with our usual Les Paul and Strat test guitars, which are fitted with regular output pickups: a pair of PAFs and a trio of Duncan Alnico Pro single coils. The AGM's Brit-flavoured voice is a heady blend of Vox and early Marshall, with a hint of Fender Tweed, for versatile lead and rhythm sounds

1. The AGM-484H's controls are deceptively simple, producing a wide range of tones, especially in Boost mode when both gain controls are active. Ashdown's illuminated VU meter is an internationally famous trademark, appearing on most of its high-end bass rigs as well as the AGM series. Besides telling you how loud you're playing (not that you would necessarily want to check), it's a useful power on indicator

2. Lots of valves mean lots of heat: in addition to generous ventilation grilles, the AGM-484H's fan is permanently on to help you keep a cool head on the hottest stages

3

4

An ideal choice for the working guitar player – easy to transport and fit on the smallest of stages

that work well across a wide range of genres. Used unboosted, you can go from spanky funk and reggae cleans to chiming AC-inspired jangle and a slightly gnarlier pushed crunch, which sounds great for blues and country.

There's no favouritism for guitars; humbuckers and single coils both sound great thanks to a smooth, predictable passive EQ. With a little practice, it's easy to dial in any instrument; there are no annoying midrange peaks or treble fizz.

Flipping the Boost switch adds a significant chunk of filth, going from crunch up to screaming leads with both gain controls maxed out. Engaging Boost mode keeps both gain knobs active as the signal cascades from one stage into the next, generating subtle shifts in colour and dynamic response as the controls are tweaked relative to each other. Meanwhile, the Clip switch alters the gain structure for more versatility, tightening up the low-end and adding upper-mid harmonics.

3. The Boost switch cascades extra gain stages into the preamp for a singing, sustained overdrive that's very responsive to player input. With both gain controls active, you can find all kinds of distortion and dynamic effects. The Clip switch changes the gain structure for a tighter, more controlled tone with less low-end

4. The AGM-484H sounds especially good through its matching cabinet, which is loaded with a premium Celestion Creamback G12M-65 speaker and features a semi-open-back construction for a tight bass response. There's a choice of 1x12, 2x10 or 2x12 enclosures

This amp sounds great with pedals: the series effects loop is valve-driven and valve-recovered, bringing out the best of your time-based effects, such as chorus, delay or reverb

With a respectable 30 watts of power behind it and a pair of heavy duty transformers to deliver it, there's no shortage of headroom, making the AGM-484H a great platform for pedal users. That said, it's particularly rewarding to use with just a guitar and a lead, where the dual master volume arrangement makes it easy to balance overdrive and clean sounds.

To deliver the decibels, we hooked the AGM-484H up to one of Ashdown's AGM-112 cabinets, which is loaded with Celestion's excellent G12M-65 Creamback driver. This proved to be an ideal partner, with a resonant woody midrange and sweet treble combined with a tight bass, emphasised by the semi-open-back lightweight ply construction.

Verdict

As live music makes a tentative return, so does the need for amplification that delivers great tone at proper gig volume levels. Ashdown's AGM-484H is an ideal choice for the working guitar player, with compact dimensions that make it easy to transport and fit on the smallest of stages.

Humbuckers and single coils both sound great thanks to a smooth, predictable passive EQ

There's plenty of volume to handle the average un-mic'd pub gig with ease.

However, the slightly elevated background noise levels mean this head is perhaps less well-suited to home use and recording. An on/off switch for the fan might be useful, too, although in fairness the 484H is clearly designed to be turned up, at which point all you'll hear are great guitar sounds that flatter any style – with the punch and dynamic response that only comes from a premium all-valve circuit.

Aimed at serious amateurs and pro users, Ashdown's AGM-484H has the tone and power to get your point over on any stage. And for a product that's handmade in Ashdown's UK Custom Shop, we think it's very good value for money. Why not magnify your tone and hear the difference? G

ASHDOWN AGM-484H HEAD

PRICE: £999
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp
OUTPUT: 30W
VALVES: 4x 12AX7, 4x EL84
DIMENSIONS: 80 (h) x 400 (w) x 220mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 12/26
CABINET: Steel
CHANNELS: 1, with footswitchable boost
CONTROLS: Boost, gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, volume, boost volume. Boost on/off switch, clip switch
FOOTSWITCH: Single-button latching footswitch toggles boost function, not supplied
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series effects loop, footswitchable boost
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Ashdown's Guitar Magnifier collection includes: AGM-5C combo (£749), AGM-30 Offset head (£1,099), 45W AGM-684C combo (£1,599) and 15W AGM-284C combo (£999). Matching speaker cabinets include the AGM-112 featured here (£349), AGM-210 and AGM-212 (both £599)

Ashdown Music
01621 857853
www.ashdownmusic.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A great-sounding, compact and portable all-valve head with plenty of punch; ideal with effects pedals; built to last

CONS The fully enclosed steel chassis makes quick valve replacement difficult; it'd be nice to have an on/off switch for the fan

AZS2200F STB

AZS2209H PBM

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AZS SERIES

Building off of the highly successful AZ series, the AZS takes some of the most popular elements of the AZ and combines them with a modernized take on a classic single-cut design. Within the series are tremolo and hardtail designs and both of them utilize a metal mounting plate for the bridge pickup preserving the quintessential clear, fat, and twangy tones for which this type of guitar is known.

Roasted 1pc Maple Neck and Fretboard/Alder Body
Seymour Duncan® Magic Touch-mini™ pickup
Seymour Duncan® Alnico II Pro™ Custom pickup

Ibanez.com

FRAMUS PRO SERIES IDOLMAKER
£2,519

WHAT IS IT? German-made original shape with unique construction style and versatile voicing from its Seymour Duncan classic humbuckers

The X Factor

Framus, that funky brand from the 60s, produces modern German-made guitars that use innovative high-tech production methods – and should be on your radar

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

You don't need us to tell you that there's a rich seam of very high-quality guitar makers throughout Europe that, if we're honest, we often overlook. Framus, owned by Warwick, certainly falls into that category – and visiting its factory a few years ago was like dropping into an otherworldly futuristic dream. Nobody that we're aware of makes guitars (or world-class basses) quite like Warwick.

That said, the modern Framus instruments that we've played over the past few years have an almost organic quality – obviously imbued by the spirit of Warwick – and from the moment we pull it out of its sturdy Rockbag gigbag, our Idolmaker sample feels very luthier-made. Exactly the origin of the Idomaker design we're not sure, but we'd wager the good old reverse Firebird was there in the inspiration. One of the many clever things about this design, however, is that it doesn't feel huge – like Gibson's big ol' 'bird – and it's no boat anchor, either.

The mahogany body is actually quite sculptural. Both top and back are curved, while the centre maple section is raised approximately 4.5mm above the mahogany – at its thickest point by the neck join it's actually 20mm thick dropping slightly by the base, closer to 18mm. The body is also a lot thinner by the bass-side lower bout,

around 12.6mm at the thinnest rim, and on the treble side it's thicker at 32mm, while the thickness rises to 46.5mm at the centre of the body. Not only is that inset maple highly unusual, combined with the different thicknesses, we'd say it's unique, and the contrast is enhanced by the gloss finish of the maple and a more satin open-grain opaque black to the mahogany, including the neck back.

There's certainly some 'SG' in the design, too, not least the fact that the neck joins the body at the 19th fret with a minimal curved heel. The compact back-angled headstock helps to avoid any neck dive, too, as well as providing nearly straight string-pull over the Graph Tech nut.

In contrast to the unique quality of the design, the hardware, pickups and electrics are more generic but far from lacking. The TonePros 'Nashville'-style bridge and stud tailpiece lock to their posts, the wide-diameter bridge posts are slotted, and fine height adjustments are dead simple. The Graph Tech Ratio tuners have rear locks and also different gear ratios: from 12:1 to 39:1. As Graph Tech explains: "One turn is about one tone change on all strings, making tuning, retuning and open tunings easier, quicker and more intuitive." Whatever the science, they're very positive and firm in use, and this is one very stable guitar, tuning-wise, with minimal neck flex despite its length.

The dual covered humbuckers are Seymour Duncan's best-selling pair with a simple circuit that takes zero adjustment. They're a bit of an obvious choice, and you'll find these pickups on many instruments at a much lower price point, but it's hard to argue with the no-frills proposition.

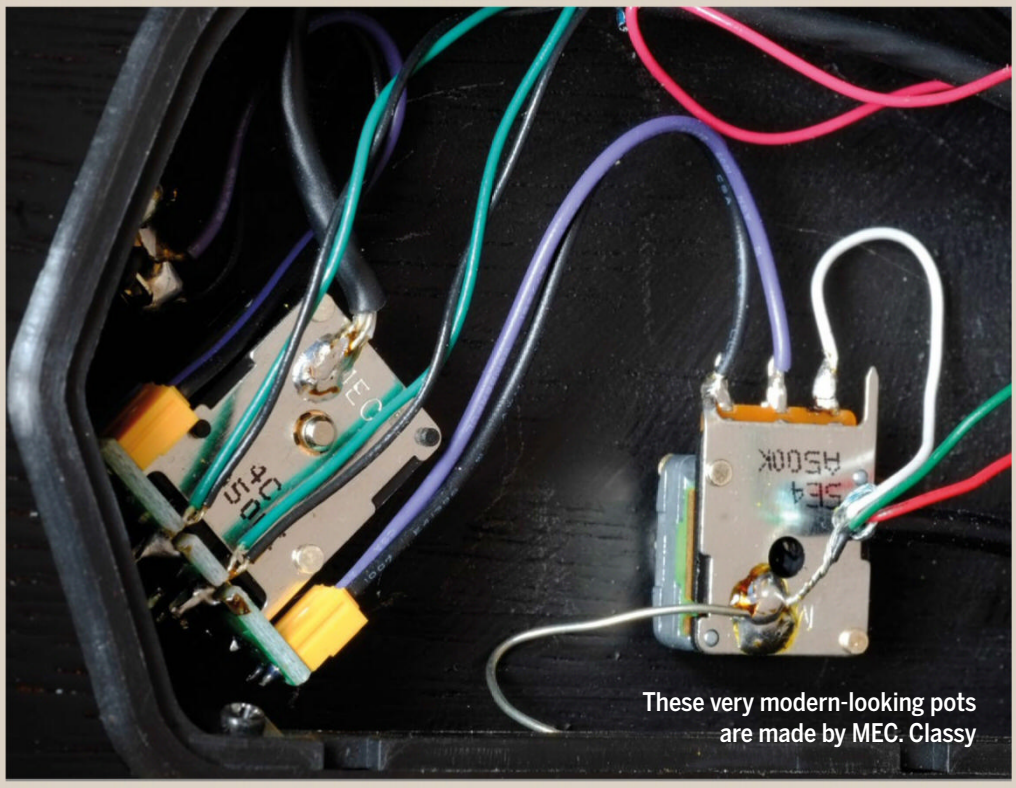
Feel & Sounds

Plugged in, we're reminded once more of the SG in terms of the mid-focused response here, particularly with the JB at the bridge, which really kicks in the midrange with slightly less width than our reference Les Paul Classic – it has a more trimmed bass response and rounded top-end – and a lot more power. The tone control's coil-split switch voices the screw coil of each humbucker and is very valid on the JB, producing a really usable and edgy hot single-coil voice. The '59 at the neck pulls back the bluster for a pretty classic neck voice, and whereas on a brighter-sounding chassis it can be a little too crisp, here it really suits. Again, the coil-split can be over-bright, too, but not on this platform,

1. The curved maple centre section, in its gloss finish, is in strong contrast to the mahogany of the rest of the body and neck, which has an open-grain textured feel to the satin finish

2. Part of the Wilfer family empire, Framus was a large producer of guitars post-war and up until the 70s. Founder Fred Wilfer's son, Hans-Peter, started Warwick basses in 1982 and brought Framus back to the market some years later

3. Seymour Duncan's '59 (neck) and JB (bridge) need no introduction. The '59 uses an Alnico V magnet with a DCR of 7.34k ohm (3.66k when split), while the JB also uses an Alnico V magnet but with a higher DCR of 15.95k ohms (8.11k when split)



These very modern-looking pots are made by MEC. Classy

UNDER THE HOOD

A simple no-frills guitar with a modern twist

The black plastic rear cavity cover sits slightly proud of the back, but it's another unique Warwick 'registered for patent' design that just clips into the moulded top edge. Two little push clips allow you to remove it, rather like a battery compartment fixture – no screwdriver needed. Inside the cavity it's pretty modern and minimalist-looking with a rectangular volume pot (500k audio) from German audio electronics specialist MEC – used throughout the Warwick line, too, we believe. There's no treble bleed on the volume, while the similar-shaped tone control, again 500k audio, is a switched pot that attaches to a small PCB, although there's no ID on the capacitor so we can't describe a value.

More quality comes from the TonePros duo here. Both pieces lock to their posts, and those slot-head posts on the bridge mean height adjustment is dead easy

These Graph Tech Ratio tuners use different gear ratios to give a very smooth, balanced feel. They're rear locking, too, and contribute to a very stable guitar in terms of tuning

and mixed with the JB's split adds some welcome funk and bounce. Not for the first time, we spent a lot of time in this split mode.

The volume control is very well tapered and sweetens the high-end of that split JB very nicely. Conversely, in full coil mode we'd be tempted to add a treble bleed. The simple volume, tone and three-way selector means changes are fast, and it's far from a one-trick pony.

That said, the pretty large jumbo frets (approximately 2.9mm by 1.2mm) do suggest a more modern aim, but in combination with an excellent neck shape (20.5mm in depth at the 1st fret and filling out to 23.5mm by the 12th) it's not dissimilar to Gibson's '60s profile , for example, and it feels a little rounder and fuller than previous modern Framus guitars we've had in our hands. It's the sort of shape that 'disappears', likewise the classic 305mm (12-inch) radius fingerboard. For us, it's the mark of a good guitar design: the features don't get in the way.

As we said, the weight is good and, strapped on, the neck extends more than a Les Paul or Strat, but it doesn't feel overlong like an SG. Unlike many 'shapes', the Idolmaker has very little to adjust to.

Unlike other forward-looking designs, the Framus feels a lot more classic than its outline suggests

Verdict

Framus might have some way to go to build its brand, certainly here in the UK anyway, but you can't knock the quality and the reassuring sense of a very well-built, stable guitar that's a definite stage friend. The actual body and construction with its sculptural style is unique, but unlike many other forward-looking designs it feels a lot more classic than its outline suggests. There's no lack of rock power here if you want it, thanks to the bridge-placed Seymour Duncan JB – still so valid after all these years – yet there's surprisingly subtlety to the guitar in the split mode that extends its repertoire.

You could actually see the Idolmaker in a host of more retro-y finishes – even a non-reverse style – but as is it's a welcome slice of unique style in an increasingly me-too market. G

FRAMUS PRO SERIES IDOLMAKER

PRICE: £2,519 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Germany
TYPE: Original offset shape, solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with inset AAA figured maple
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Black Tusq/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Tiger-stripe ebony, small oval abalone inlays, illuminated side-dots, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: TonePros locking 'Nashville'-style bridge and stud tailpiece, Graph Tech Ratio real-lock tuners – chrome plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm
ELECTRICS: Chrome covered Seymour Duncan '59 at neck, JB at bridge, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone control (with pull switch coil-split)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.67/8.1
OPTIONS: No, but check out the Framus Custom Shop (£POA)
RANGE OPTIONS: The Idolmaker also appears in the Chinese-made D-Series at £782
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, £POA
FINISHES: Nirvana Black transparent high polish (as reviewed), Solid Black high polish, Burgundy Blackburst Transparent high polish, and Vintage Sunburst Transparent high polish with Nirvana Black Transparent satin b/s

High Tech Distribution
01722 410 002
https://warwick.de/en/

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Innovative body design and construction; tidy build; excellent neck shape; playability; rock-ready sounds but with coil-split subtlety

CONS Not a classic shape and only comes with a gigbag

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

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ORANGE ACOUSTIC PEDAL
£139

WHAT IS IT? A transparent set-and-forget acoustic preamp and DI pedal with simple but comprehensive onboard EQ and a buffered effects loop

Orange Aid

Renowned amp manufacturer ventures into the acoustic realm to provide an all-in-one DI and EQ solution for live performance

CONTACT **OMEC 020 8905 2828** WEB **https://orangeamps.com** **Words** David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. The control fascia might take a little while to get used to, but once you're suitably orientated, the pedal's a breeze to use

2. Basic controls for treble and bass are accompanied by a trio of rotaries named Middle, Notch and Q that allow pinpoint accuracy over your guitar's midrange

3. The button in between the treble and bass controls is a handy phase switch for the XLR output

Amp legend Orange takes another step into the acoustic field with its Acoustic Pedal, which is essentially a DI box with frills... and what frills they are. As you can imagine, anything coming from such a renowned stable is not only going to follow through on its promises but do so with great user-friendly functionality and transparency in use. That is, if the traditionally reserved acoustic crowd can get past the somewhat psychedelic artwork on the pedal itself!

So, what exactly is on offer? For starters, there is basic volume, plus treble and bass EQ, which, we're told, benefits from a single-ended design for an ultra-low noise floor. Then there's a notch filter that operates over the 68Hz to 1.2kHz range and works hand-in-hand with the midrange rotary to offer control over feedback issues. The Q knob determines whether the midrange frequency band you select is wide or narrow – useful for pinpointing troublesome resonant peaks in your acoustic guitar's range. Add to this a buffered effects loop so you can line up your favourite acoustic pedals and invite them to the Orange party. Another handy asset is a choice of an unbalanced jack output for connection to an amp or a balanced XLR, complete with its own phase switch to tame prospective feedback issues even more. It's all controlled via an 18-volt power supply (that Orange has thoughtfully included) for the extra headroom needed for the unit's smooth, trouble-free performance.

Once you see past the swirly artwork and get used to the control layout, everything is simple to understand and a real doddle to use. We hooked it up to our AER Compact 60, turned the volume up and listened hard. The claim that the pedal operates at an extremely low noise level is spot on; we couldn't detect any additional hiss creeping into our signal. Our test guitar was a Fylde Goodfellow with no onboard preamp controls and so this was a perfect companion. Bass and treble did exactly what you'd expect with transparent clarity, and the notch-filter and Q controls were easy to dial in, too. It took us a matter of moments to come up with a fully usable sound and from thereon in we could forget about the pedal and get on with the job in hand. Bravo, Orange! G

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Simple and effective to use with an extremely low noise floor; a few minutes of orienteering and you're all set

CONS The artwork makes the controls a little difficult to read; on a dark stage you might fumble

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

Anderson Guitarworks Icon Classic £3,865

CONTACT **Renegade Guitar Co** PHONE **0333 050 9553** WEB **www.andersonguitarworks.com** **Words** Neville Marten **Photography** Phil Barker

We didn't know what to expect on unzipping the Super Deluxe gigbag. After all, this is a reliced guitar built by a maker that wasn't around when the models we mostly see given the treatment were built. So it's either going to be bonkers or totally brilliant. What we do know is that, whatever Tom Anderson does, he does with panache.

The Icon Classic is patterned after Leo's most famous creation. This one comes in aged Arctic White over an alder body with a solid Indian rosewood neck inspired by that of a favourite 1962 Strat. Rosewood is the fingerboard material, with a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, 43mm (1.6875-inch) nut width and 22 medium-jumbo stainless steel frets, and like all Andersons it features the Buzz Feiten Tuning System. The body is distressed gloss; the neck is friction-free satin.

Pickup-wise, things are a bit OTT as if someone has spent years thinking about how to get the max out of their guitar. So we see a trio of wildly different-looking pickups: in the neck sits a PH1, P-90-style single coil in an aged nickel surround; there's an SA2 Strat-style unit in the middle; and a nickel covered HC3 + humbucker is at the bridge. The outside pickups are split by a push-push pot on the far tone control, while, with the switch in the middle position, another push-push selects middle pickup or neck and bridge – Strat or Tele, if you like. Almost every sonic option is here.

The rest of the hardware comprises Anderson's own vibrato system with push-in arm, top-mounted jack, and a set of locking tuners with chunky 'bean' buttons. A torty-style pickguard and matching Arctic White headstock complete the cosmetic picture. Everything about the guitar is top-notch, and plugging into our Blues Junior test amp doesn't disappoint.

The bridge humbucker is hot and fat, and becomes slimmer and sweeter when you split it. Positions 2 and 4 both remain split, so you get those funky, vowel-like sounds. Meanwhile, the P-90-style single coil in the neck is big and fat when unsplit, and Tele-like and articulate with its push-push pot up.

Whether reliced guitars are your thing, or you prefer to string a garland of garlic around your neck to fend them off, the fact is that many owners would be terrified of pranging a pristine Anderson. Therefore this distressed version is an eminently usable guitar that offers all the tones you'd ever need. That aged patina somehow feels right, and – like all Andersons – it plays like a peach. Job done! G

1. The switching is clever and simple. The push-push tone pot nearest the jack splits either bridge humbucker or neck P-90, while the middle pot selects middle pickup or the two outside units

2. Anderson's headstock design is one of the few non-Fender six-a-sides that really works. It's both elegant and practical, like the gorgeous, aged nickel locking tuners with 'bean' style buttons

3. If there's a cleverer screw-on neck system, we'd like to see it. It has just two recessed bolts and a delicious joint that's immovable once the bolts are tightened

1

2

3

4. The Icon Classic's entire neck is solid rosewood, with a glued-on slab of the same timber on top. 22 medium jumbo frets make the slender neck a peach to play, even with the 0.011-gauge strings with which the guitar came strung

5. Although the three pickups couldn't be more visually dissimilar, they work brilliantly with the switching system to provide a huge range of great tones

6. Anderson's own 'Vintage Tremolo' vibrato uses a two-point pivot and the arm is a push-in design that's tension-adjustable via a small hex screw. With a well cut and lubricated nut and locking tuners, tuning stability shouldn't be an issue

7. While the relic treatment divides opinion, Tom Anderson has done a great job on the Icon Classic's Arctic White finish. With its visual mismatch of pickups on a faux tortoiseshell pickguard, it sure looks like it means business

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Fender J Mascis Telecaster & Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang £1,299 & £1,249

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments Europe Ltd** PHONE **0333 200 8765** WEBSITE **www.fender.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Top-Loader

No, it's not a reference to that cover of *Dancing In The Moonlight*. Fender's top-loader Tele bridge simply refers to the stringing method. Rather than a through-body design, the strings are anchored through the back edge of the bridge plate. The result is a slinkier feel to the strings and less punch to the attack of the note. Clearly, it works for J Mascis, so we're not opening any cans of sustain worms here.

A Telecaster and an offset. What's the story of the new models here, then?

You're looking at two of the latest signature models to come out of the Fender stable, this time a tip of the hat to two alternative guitar icons in J Mascis and Kurt Cobain. The Tele is a brand-new signature for the Dinosaur Jr man, while the offset is actually a reissue of the Cobain-designed Jag-Stang, which was first released in 1994.

J Mascis? I always thought the 'J' stood for Jazzmaster!

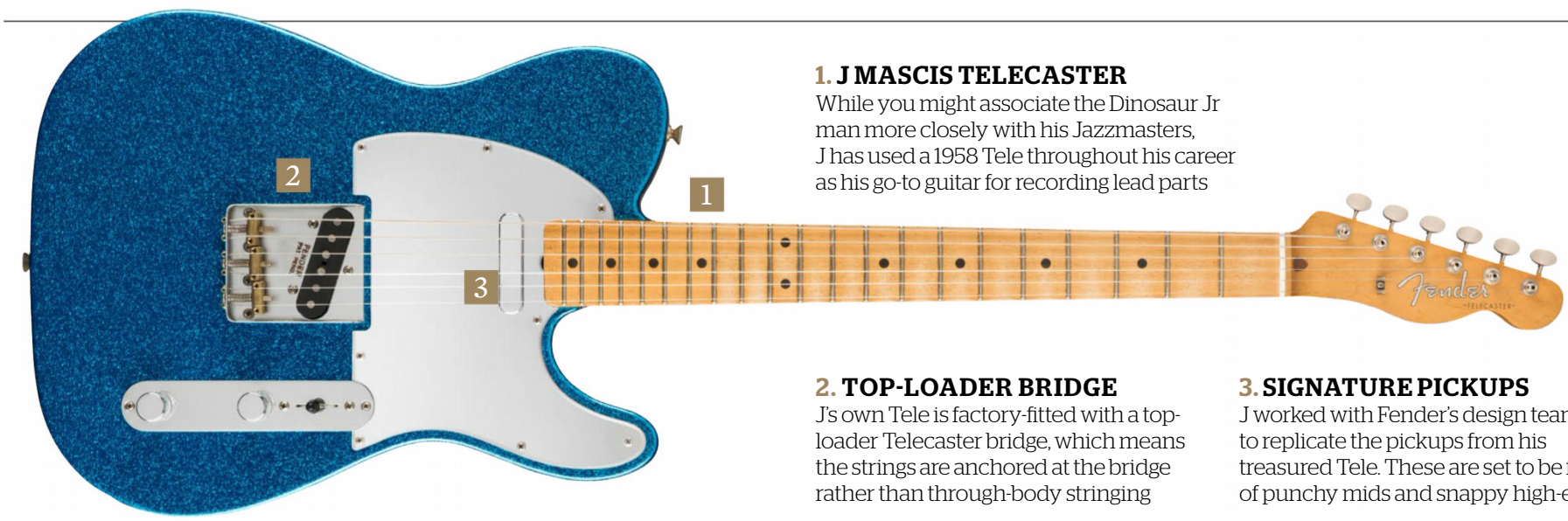
We wouldn't blame you, either, as J has long been associated with Jazzmasters, having released Fender and Squier versions of his signature model. But here the guitarist has turned his attention to the guitar that he has used most often for lead work in the studio.

Oh, right. What's special about this one, then?

It's based on J's 1958 Tele, which features a top-loader bridge and, just like J's, the production model is finished in a very nice looking Bottle Rocket Blue Flake paint job (as shown below). The visuals are completed with a mirrored chrome scratchplate, and Fender has come up with some brand-new signature J Mascis Telecaster pickups derived from the magnets in J's own guitar. The Big F is promising the same "snappy highs and snarly mids that set J's amp on fire". Hot!

That neck looks aged...

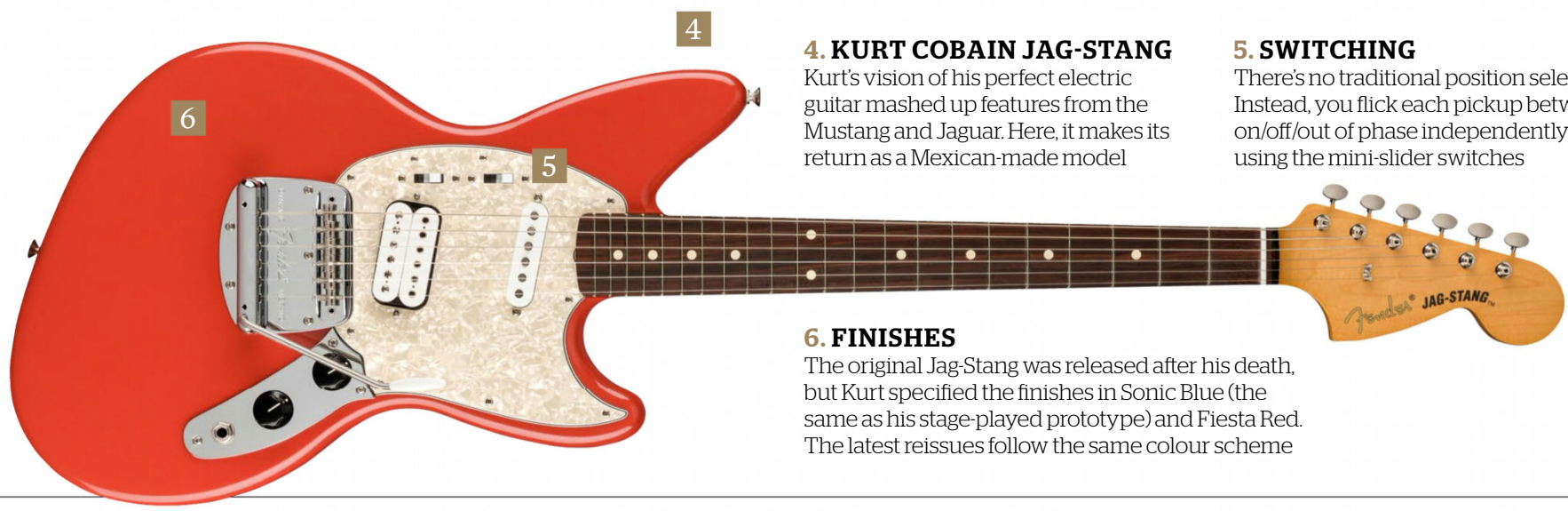
Yep, if you've had the pleasure of checking out any of the relicing that has come out of Fender's Mexican factory, you'll know that there's no other brand doing it this well at this price. J's Tele neck has undergone the Road Worn treatment to a noticable-yet-subtle



1. J MASCIS TELECASTER
While you might associate the Dinosaur Jr man more closely with his Jazzmasters, J has used a 1958 Tele throughout his career as his go-to guitar for recording lead parts

2. TOP-LOADER BRIDGE
J's own Tele is factory-fitted with a top-loader Telecaster bridge, which means the strings are anchored at the bridge rather than through-body stringing

3. SIGNATURE PICKUPS
J worked with Fender's design team to replicate the pickups from his treasured Tele. These are set to be full of punchy mids and snappy high-end



4. KURT COBAIN JAG-STANG
Kurt's vision of his perfect electric guitar mashed up features from the Mustang and Jaguar. Here, it makes its return as a Mexican-made model

5. SWITCHING
There's no traditional position selector. Instead, you flick each pickup between on/off/out of phase independently using the mini-slider switches

6. FINISHES
The original Jag-Stang was released after his death, but Kurt specified the finishes in Sonic Blue (the same as his stage-played prototype) and Fiesta Red. The latest reissues follow the same colour scheme

Fender's latest Jag-Stang commemorates the 30th anniversary of Nirvana's *Nevermind*

degree with wear to the lacquered maple fingerboard and back of the neck. As well as this, it's been carved to a custom J-approved version of a C-shape profile, and the frets are jumbo.

Tell us about the Jag-Stang...

When Nirvana catapulted their way to success, Kurt Cobain was most often seen playing Fender guitars, and he would usually reach for his heavily modded 1965 Jaguar or one of a number of Mustangs. The opportunity to collaborate with Fender came up, and Cobain famously merged photos of a Jaguar and Mustang as his brainchild for what would become known as the Jag-Stang.

In 1993, Cobain received and used a Custom Shop-built prototype of the Jag-Stang live, but he took his own life before the guitar made its way into production in 1994. The original series was made in Japan, but these new models are coming out of Fender's Mexican factory, offered in the same finish options as the original: Sonic Blue (pictured above) or Fiesta Red (below left).

What's it got, then?

Well, it really is a mash-up of the Jaguar and Mustang. The larger lower bout and top horn of that alder body give it more of the Jaguar outline, while the scratchplate, switching and bridge/vibrato are from the Mustang. Obviously, both guitars use Fender's shorter scale length, so you get a 610mm (24-inch) scale, 184.1mm (7.25-inch) radius rosewood fingerboard on the maple neck. As you can see, there's a Jag-Stang single-coil pickup in the neck position, and a humbucker at the bridge – both are tilted.

There's no toggle switch, though, so how does the switching work?

It's actually quite simple. Those slider switches are both three-position jobs, and there's one for each pickup. You have on, off and out-of-phase selections for each pickup, giving you four settings in total for each.

So, what's the damage, then?

The Fender J Mascis Telecaser costs £1,299, while the Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang comes in at £1,249. Both come with Deluxe gig bags and, of course, the Jag-Stang is available as a lefty at no extra cost. **[SW]**

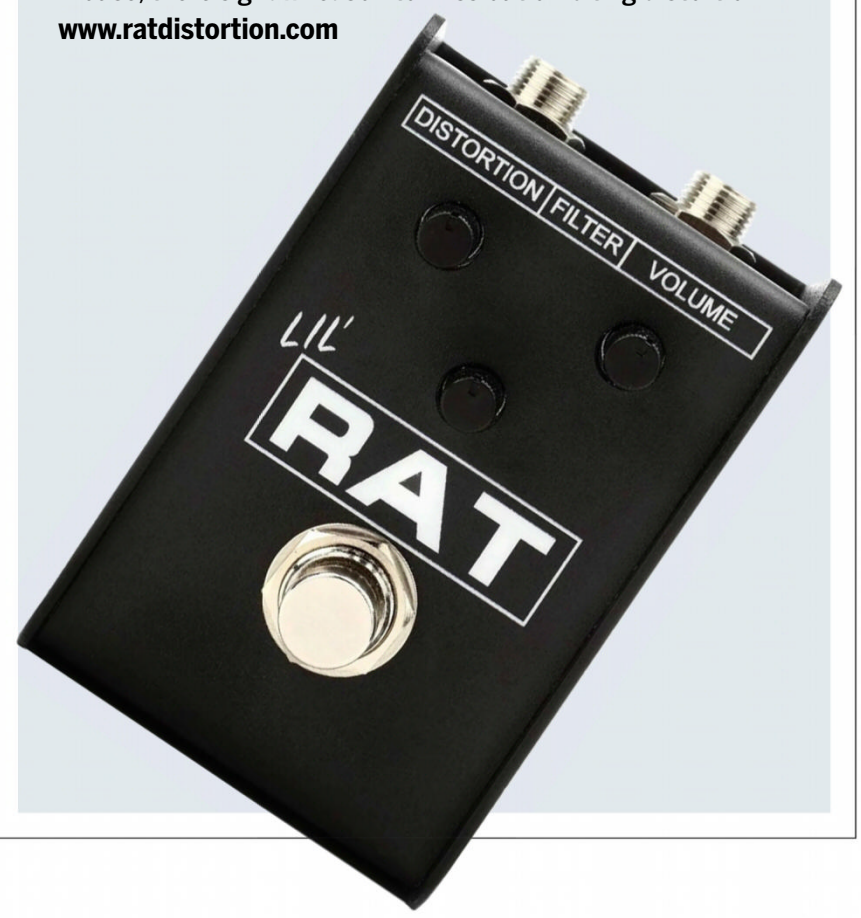
ALSO OUT NOW...

GIBSON TONY IOMMI SG SPECIAL £2,149

Think of SG players and there's a good chance that Tony 'The Inventor Of Metal' Iommi will spring to mind. We profiled Gibson's Custom Shop recreation of Uncle Tone's 1964 Gibson 'Monkey' SG last year in issue 456, but in the anniversary year of Gibson's most unflappable mainstay comes the USA version. The Tony Iommi SG Special is based on the Monkey, coming in left- and right-handed versions. You get the classic all-mahogany body/neck and Indian rosewood fingerboard, a pair of chrome-covered P-90s, Graph Tech nut, Grover Rotomatic tuners, and of course, a replicated Monkey sticker (application optional). The whole lot comes in a custom case, and it's available now.
www.gibson.com

PROCO LIL' RAT £89

Cast your mind back to the start of the year and you might have spotted that ProCo – purveyor of the rodent-based, Gilmour-approved drive pedal – made rumblings of a mini-Rat pedal. We saw a demo video, but price and availability of the new unit remained quiet. Until now: because the Lil' Rat exists and is now shipping. Featuring the same circuit and Distortion/Filter/Volume controls as its full-sized sibling, the pedal is 100 per cent analogue and measures just 50mm (two inches) left to right. So if your 'board only has room for a mouse, there's gnaw reason to miss out on biting distortion...
www.ratdistortion.com



The Players

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

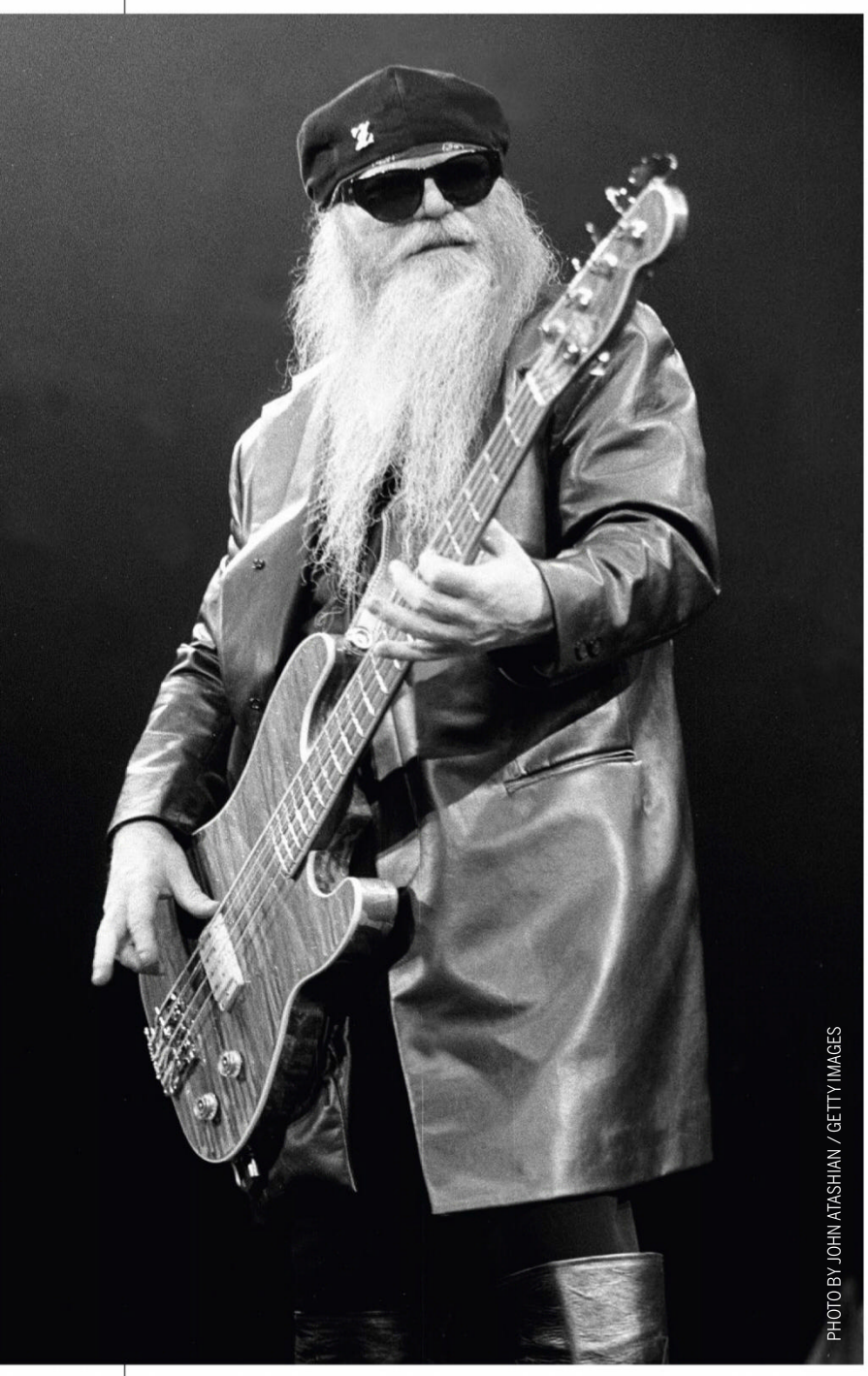


PHOTO BY JOHN ATASHIAN / GETTY IMAGES

DUSTY HILL 1949–2021

Guitarist was saddened to hear of the passing of ZZ Top bassist Dusty Hill on 28 July, aged 72. The Texan played with the legendary blues-rock trio for more than 50 years after joining in 1969. He previously played alongside his brother Rocky and future ZZ Top bandmate Frank Beard in the Warlocks, the Cellar Dwellers and American Blues.

Hill became an integral part of ZZ Top's sound, with both his bass playing and backing vocals. His keen sense of economy in the band's brand of boogie blues was very much by design after being influenced early on by the busier playing of Jack Bruce and Stanley Clark.

"When I started playing in a three-piece, I realised that you have to do the song, not your personal performance, so you have to be tasty with it and enjoy the playing," he told ForBassPlayersOnly.com in 2016. "Writing the song helps a lot. If I'm involved in the writing process, it comes to me... Sometimes you don't even notice the bass – I hate that in a way, but I love that in a way. That means you've filled in everything and it's right for the song, and you're not standing out where you don't need to."

The trio certainly needed Hill as they blazed a trail through Texas and further afield as a huge live draw. They struck blues-rock gold with breakout third album, *Tres Hombres*, in 1973 and 1975 follow-up, *Fandango!*, before their gamble with a streamlined, synth-incorporating sound paid off in the early 80s. It was an era that found Hill taking on keyboard duties, too. "The reaction was like when Dylan went electric," Dusty told *Texas Monthly* magazine in 1996 of the band's new approach.

"It's a cliché and sounds so simplistic, but it's down to the three of us genuinely enjoying playing together," the bassist once revealed to *Classic Rock*. And the secret to ZZ Top's same-lineup longevity? "We still love it and we still get a kick out of being on stage. We also have enough in common to maintain a bond between us but sufficient differences to keep our individuality."

As per Hill's wishes, the band will continue with tech Elwood Francis taking on bass. "We, along with legions of ZZ Top fans around the world, will miss your steadfast presence, your good nature and enduring commitment to providing that monumental bottom to the 'Top'," said Hill's surviving bandmates Billy Gibbons and Frank Beard in tribute. "You will be missed greatly, amigo."

NANCI GRIFFITH 1953–2021

American folk-country singer and songwriter Nanci Griffith passed away on 13 August, aged 68. The Texas-born musician released her debut album, live recording *There's A Light Beyond These Woods*, in 1978 and won a Grammy Award in 1994 for her record, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Griffith's final album, *Intersection*, was released in 2012.

While Griffith enjoyed success with her version of Bob Dylan's *Boots Of Spanish Leather* from her Grammy-winning 10th album, other artists charted highly with her songs. Kathy Mattea made the Top 10 of the country charts with Griffith's *Love At The Five And Dime*, and Suzy Bogguss had a Top 10 hit with *Outbound Plane* in 1991, a song Griffith had written with Tom Russell for her 1988 album, *Little Love Affairs*.

"My heart is aching," Bogguss wrote in tribute on Instagram. "A beautiful soul has left this earth. I feel blessed to have many memories of our times together, along with everything she ever recorded." **[RL]**

PHOTO BY JON SUPER/GETTY IMAGES

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THE LINEUP

Albums

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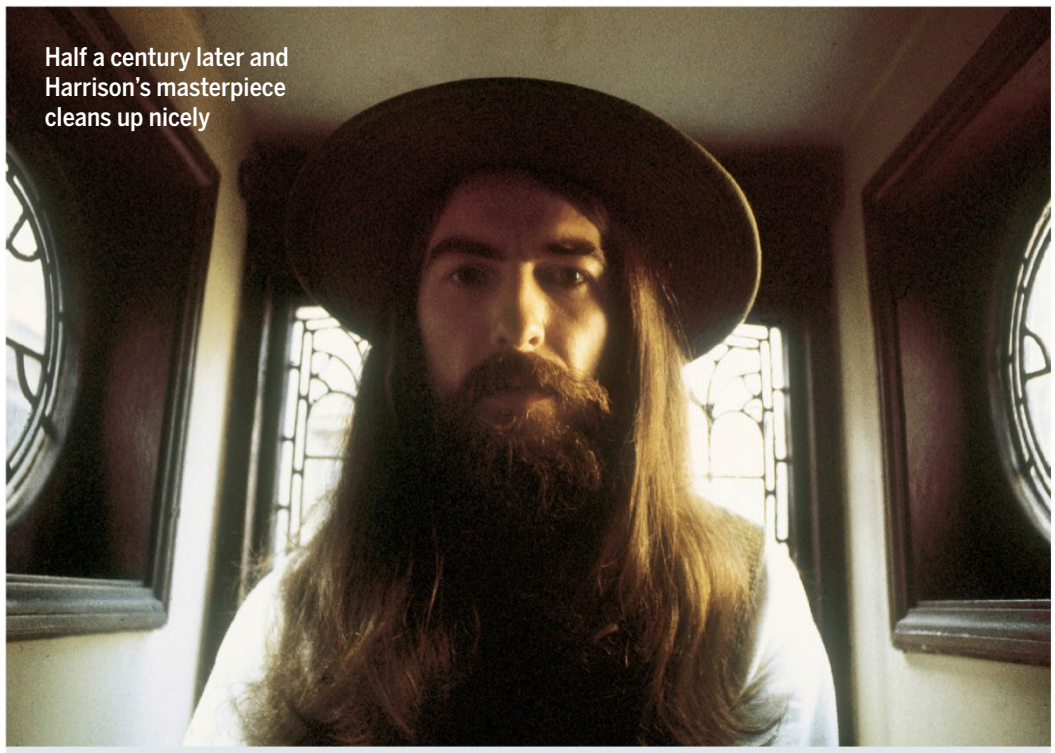

Half a century later and Harrison's masterpiece cleans up nicely

PHOTO BY BARRY FEINSTEIN

George Harrison
All Things Must Pass 50th Anniversary

Capitol — **9/10**

Timely revisit of Harrison's post-Beatle masterpiece

When The Beatles called it a day at the dawn of the 1970s, fans were still in a state of shock as George (aka 'The Quiet One') released a triple album boxset of his own just a few months later. These tracks had been previously turned down from his former band's LPs, but now it was like the cork shooting from a bottle of Champagne – where had all these songs been hiding?

Extra discs in the special edition of *Abbey Road* and audio from the *Let It Be* sessions revealed that some of the songs here were in fact rehearsed by The Beatles years beforehand, but they didn't see the light of day until *All Things Must Pass* was released in November 1970.

George's son Dhani takes the executive producer's chair for this remix of the original, which is available in various packages with multifarious extras in some of the more deluxe versions. Dhani is on record as saying he wanted to make his father's work sound more contemporary and generally give it a dust off and polish, and that's exactly what we find here.

Sensibly, Dhani hasn't changed too much – the vocals on *Isn't It A Pity*, for example, sound more plaintive to our ears during an A/B with the original mix – but there's nothing here that detracts from the brilliance of the original. The whole album merely sounds cleaner and crisper and it's a pure joy to listen to these recordings once again. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Beware Of Darkness*
For fans of: John, Paul, George and Ringo

Joanne Shaw Taylor
The Blues Album

KTBA Records — **9/10**

Joanne and JoBo team up for a belter of a blues album

If you're going to record a blues album with Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith producing and guesting, you're quite probably set for success. That's exactly what blues guitarist Joanne Shaw Taylor has done with *The Blues Album*, and it's a rare treat throughout. On songs originally recorded by blues/soul legends Albert King, Peter Green, Aretha Franklin and Little Milton, Joanne finds a new fire in her playing – the guitar on the opening track, Peter Green's *Stop Messin' Round*, is white hot, and the album doesn't disappoint from there on in. Vocals are smoky and soulful, especially on *If You Gotta Make A Fool Of Somebody* and JST's Albert Collins influence is obvious from both her choice of instrument – her 1966 Fender Esquire nicknamed 'Junior' – and her consummate, mature phrasing. It's a great album. More, please! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Let Me Down Easy*
For fans of: JoBo, Albert Collins, Albert King

Bernie Marsden
Kings

Conquest Music — **8/10**

The Beast is loose on Bernie's three Kings tribute!

Kings is Bernie Marsden's first solo album in seven years and represents the first of a series of albums paying tribute to the artists that inspired him along his career path. The first gives everything away with the title because here we're in the company of legends of the blues genre Freddie, Albert and BB King. Classic tracks from the repertoire (with its wonderful medium tempo funky treatment) include *Help The Poor* and *Don't You Lie To Me,* and roll off Bernie's fretboard with accustomed finesse, every note hitting its target. Bernie rounds the album off with a couple of self-penned instrumental tracks, the Freddie King-inspired *Runaway* and the downhome 'n' dirty *Uptown Train*. These tracks alone proving that, as far as blues players in this country are concerned, Bernie is up there with the best of the best. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Key To The Highway*
For fans of: Freddie, Albert & BB King

PHOTO BY CHRISTIE GOODWIN

Joanne Shaw Taylor gives it her all

Julian Lage

Squint

Blue Note

10/10

Jazz prodigy's Blue Note debut

Julian Lage has had a stunning career with the bands of Gary Burton and John Zorn, plus collaborations with Nels Cline and David Grisman. And then there are the numerous albums he has released under his own name. This debut Blue Note instrumental album is a unique mix; while a fully paid-up jazzer, the music is song-like with accessible melodies and grooves. For his guitar tone, it's rounded and slightly crunchy when digging in, but beautifully warm when played lightly. In short, a gorgeous marriage of touch and tone. Opener, *Etude*, is pretty – solo guitar-playing that is pianistic and harmonically a little Debussy-esque. His cover of Mandel/Mercer's *Emily* is exquisite, lyrical playing with a dynamic tone that sits and darts within the drums and bass. If you're into genre-blending, expressive dynamics and sophisticated virtuosity, Julian is nothing short of stunning. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Emily*
For fans of: Joe Pass, Martin Taylor

Eric Bibb

Dear America

Mascot

9/10

The rootsy fingerpicker impresses once again

With *Dear America*, guitarist Eric Bibb presents 13 excellent tracks that are both a love letter to America and a reflection on its highs and lows. Joining him are Ron Carter on bass, Steve Jordan on drums, Eric Gales on guitar and guest singers such as Shaneeka Simon. *Whole World's Got The Blues* has a sultry backbeat, solid bass, crisp acoustic picking to enjoy, and plenty of emotive single-coil soloing from Eric Gales. The fingerpicking chords on *Tell Yourself* interact well with Bibb's vocals, as does the slight crunchy melodic guitar solo. His acoustic picking is very colourful on *Along The Way* with bass notes and cascading higher notes, while *Talkin' 'Bout A Train Part 2* is straight up funky. If bluesy Americana is your thing, as ever, Eric is outstanding. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Along The Way*
For fans of: Taj Mahal, Keb' Mo'

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Australian **Joe Robinson**'s Chet Atkins-style playing needs to be heard to be believed. Here, he explains how he cut his latest album, *Borders*

Artist: Joe Robinson

Album: Borders (Joe's Garage)

Joe is lucky enough to count Tommy Emmanuel as one of his mentors: "He's just a constantly inspiring person," he says

Can you tell us how the album sessions for *Borders* unfolded?

"I recorded the album during lockdown, which was quite a fun experience, honestly. And I recorded it, start to finish, in 30 days. I knew I wanted to make an album of songs about missing my fiancée, who was in Canada [while I was in Nashville]. So, you know, the border has been closed for most of the year from Canada to the US. I was recently able to go and visit. But, before then, I couldn't see my fiancée for seven months or so.

"So I had a collection of songs about that experience saved up and I went into a studio with a great session drummer in Nashville, Nir Z, who played on John Mayer's debut album. He's a studio staple here in town. And Bernard Harris came in and played bass. Bernard and I had worked together a lot in the past and he's a great player. We cut the songs at Nir's studio, wearing masks and staying at a pretty spaced-out distance. And then I finished the tracks in my home studio.

"Since it came out, I've had a really wonderful response from the album. I've been playing weekly livestream concerts on YouTube and Facebook and hit the Top 10 livestream charts, which I didn't even know was a thing. I've had amazing support from some people out there. I'm looking forward to recording some more music here soon."

Photo by Kane Hibberd

Your fingerstyle playing on the album follows in the footsteps of Merle Travis and Chet Atkins and is incredibly dextrous. Why were you drawn to that style?

"The instrument becomes this little orchestra, you know? You have rhythm and melody and harmony, and it's fun to work with the limitations of having five fingers on each hand. And I use my pinky on my right hand for playing, too. I try to make the most of every finger, and there are so many great songs to arrange – I love writing for fingerstyle. I guess there's something that really appeals to me about this self-contained element of it."

How much of an influence has fellow Australian fingerstyle-wizard Tommy Emmanuel been on your playing?

"Tommy has been a great mentor... I first met [the late] Phil Emmanuel, who is Tommy's older brother, and they grew up playing as a duo in Australia. That's really how Tommy established a name in Australia, as one half of the Emmanuel Brothers. Phil took me under his wing and took me on tour with him. He ended up calling Tommy and said, 'I got this young guitarist and he needs to meet you. He needs to come over to Nashville.'

"I borrowed $10,000 from my grandparents, actually, and then my mother and I flew over from Australia to Nashville. We met Tommy and went around Nashville and played for anyone who'd listen. I ended up developing a lot of friendships and contacts and moving here when I was 18. So Tommy was really the conduit to that. Now I've performed shows in Asia and Europe and all across the States, but he's just a constantly inspiring person and a great friend and mentor."

Photo by Katie Kreiser

Trying it out every which way, Joe is not afraid to put in the work: "It's fun to work with the limitations of having five fingers on each hand"

How much of your sound on the album is thumbpick-based?

"I use a thumbpick a lot. I use a straight pick, too... but when playing solo guitar I'm pretty much always using a thumbpick. I definitely come from the same school as Tommy, which is influenced by Jerry Reed and Lenny Breau and Merle Travis and Chet Atkins. It requires a particular kind of position of the right hand, which is very different to classical playing – I don't use fingernails at all on my right hand. So that's kind of where my technique comes from."

Thumbpicks can be tricky to get to grips with – why did you decide to make the effort?

"I think they offer really nice articulation as opposed to using the bare flesh of a thumb. However, the bare flesh of a thumb can sound really warm. But I think the thumbpick is really worth persevering with to get that nice articulation. The place to start is learning really simple fingerstyle songs like *Windy & Warm* and *Freight Train* that Chet Atkins arranged for guitar. They sound simple, but they're deceptively difficult to play.

"Once you get the elementary mechanics of the right hand feeling somewhat comfortable, the world of fingerstyle can open up. It's a really versatile technique. I live in Nashville and I've been playing with Emmylou Harris in her band on and off. And I'm playing some of Albert Lee's guitar parts and I play them with the thumbpick and fingerstyle. I just find that you can really cover a lot of ground, and the thumbpick allows you to get a little more articulation and detail, as opposed to just using the fingers or even hybrid picking, which some people do where you have an extra finger with a thumbpick."

What was your go-to gear for the tracks?

"I have a 1958 Gretsch Country Club, which I believe was the only year they made the stereo pickup configuration: three polepieces on the neck pickup, which does the top three strings, and three on the bridge pickup, which goes to the lower three strings. You can route them to two separate amps and get a true stereo recording, which is pretty cool.

"I usually use a little Fender amp – in the studio I often use a Champ. I have a '65 Champ and I have a few other black-panel amps, a Bandmaster and a Showman. I use a 115 cab with those amps sometimes. For pedals, I keep it pretty simple – an overdrive and an echo, and that's pretty much it. Sometimes I play Strats and Teles, and I have a Music Man Valentine guitar that's really great. But my acoustic sound is really the Maton guitars, which are made in Australia. I have my own signature model that just came out this past year – it's called the JR Signature and it features unique Australian tonewoods, Tasmanian, on the back and sides. It's really a fantastic instrument." **[JD]**

"I definitely come from the same school as Tommy Emmanuel, which is influenced by Jerry Reed, Lenny Breau, Merle Travis and Chet Atkins"

Joe Robinson's fifth studio album, *Borders*, is out now via Joe's Garage. For more information and to buy the album, go to ***www.joerobinson.com***

SESSION DIARY

Lean & Mean

A weekly spot at Ronnie Scott's provides **Adam Goldsmith** with the welcome challenge of a stripped-back setup

Sometimes it's fun to be forced into a situation where you can only have minimal gear and potentially have to play any style known to man. If I have a big-budget studio session then it's an easy call to ask my roadie to simply bring everything, but sometimes it's fun – and necessary – to do everything on a minimal space and price basis.

I've experienced such a situation over the past few months with a regular Saturday brunch cabaret at Ronnie Scott's in London. We've been extremely lucky to have been performing fairly regularly throughout lockdown to various-sized audiences, and currently we're at full capacity with no Covid restrictions.

"We have an 8am rehearsal time – I've been in Ronnie Scott's at that time before, but only ever as an extension of the night before..."

The premise of the gig is that Olivier Award-winning actress and singer Cassidy Janson presents the show each week with a different guest who is mostly drawn from the world of West End theatre (rather than the more serious jazz acts that are traditionally associated with Ronnie Scott's). This has proved particularly popular, especially with fans of this genre while the big theatres were mostly closed.

The band consists of a four-piece rhythm section plus Cassidy and the guest artist. We have an 8am rehearsal time (having never seen nor heard the music before) and then an 11.15am concert for a duration of 90 minutes. It occurred to me more than once, that back in the 'old days' I've been in Ronnie Scott's at 8am before, but only ever as an extension of the night before... Both options are equally unpleasant, if I'm honest!

Sight-reading and trying to make things sound musical at that time of the morning can be particularly challenging, especially as I'm currently on a run of 10 shows a week for a Covid-inspired schedule in the orchestra at the London Palladium. And there's no way I want to bring my own amp into central London at that time of day (or anytime, for that matter), so I've opted to use one of the house amps.

It's a weekly lottery as to whether any of the amps will work, but there seems to be a fairly consistent Fender silver-panel Twin from the company's current range of '68 reissue amps. It seems to work well with pretty much any guitar and achieves its stated aim (via a "modified Bassman tone stack", whatever that means) of being more pedal-friendly. I've tried various overdrives through the Custom channel and all react equally well. It also has the benefit of having both the channels linked to the reverb and tremolo, unlike the originals (if my memory serves me well). Incidentally, Abbey Road Studios also has a Deluxe Reverb from this line that sounds fantastic, so I can without hesitation recommend this line of products (I have no commercial relationship with Fender, by the way).

I've also left a guitar and a couple of pedals at Ronnie's for convenience, and obviously needed to choose a pedalboard that wasn't the size of a spaceship, wouldn't cost me £10,000 if it got nicked, and could do every sound I might need. The choice was obvious: the Line 6 HX Effects, with the only addition being my trusty Analog Man King Of Tone overdrive in line before the Line 6 unit. In my experience, the HX Effects is 95 per cent as good as any boutique pedals for live purposes, certainly for the modulation effects and delays, if possibly not the overdrives.

I think there's satisfaction in looking down and seeing a bunch of expensive pedals through a true bypass looper, but in reality there's no way your audience will hear any difference during a live gig, and your money is probably better spent on guitar lessons if your aim is to ultimately make better music.

To the same end, I've also left a PRS DGT guitar at the club, which sounds good, is always in tune, and has both a coil-split and a vibrato, so I've got all bases covered there, too. Does it sound and play as well as my 60s Gibson and Fender guitars? Not quite, but those models are exceptional and this is an excellent and reliable compromise I know won't let me down – and it will perform consistently, week after week, in a professional environment.

With a regular brunch gig at Ronnie Scott's, Adam's early starts are a little jazzier than most

PHOTO BY OLI SCARFF/GETTY IMAGES

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NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Enjoy Responsibly

A recent meet-up with long-time musical friends was a joyous thing, says **Neville Marten**, until he recalled a truly mortifying gig...

Fairly recently I met with my old friend Robbie Gladwell (ex-Dr Robert of this parish) to do a charity gig in Suffolk. This is something he does annually to raise money, and because last year's was cancelled, this one felt extra-special for all concerned.

Robbie was also putting together his and Martyn Booth's old band, Swift, to do a couple of numbers. So, with Robbie, Martyn and me, it was a minor reunion of Gibson's UK repair squad, circa '76 to '82.

Training it up from Devon was our mutual friend, Mary Ann, who was in a band with another Gibson alumnus, Mark Willmott. She also ran Sudbury Folk Club back in the day, where Robbie and I had done a great duo gig. The memories were rosy, until that is, I drove past the pub that once hosted the club, which led me to recall my most embarrassing gig ever...

"I dredged up anything acoustic and practised like mad. Banter would help, and I pictured myself in front of an enraptured crowd..."

The event occured off the back of a successful duo evening, and Mary Ann asked if I fancied doing a solo gig there. "Oh no," I responded. "I don't really sing lead or have the songs or charisma to front such an evening." She beat me down with flattery until I acquiesced. It was months away anyway, so in my mind it would never really happen. Would it?

Come the week of my solo debut, and I dredged up anything acoustic I knew and practised like mad until I had enough material. Some hysterical banter and repartee would of course help things along, and I pictured myself in front of an enraptured crowd, the embodiment of 'Billy Connolly meets James Taylor'.

I spent the day of the gig refining my set. I restrung my Gibson J-40 and prepared to leave the house where I lived with my mother. She knew I was petrified, and gave me two anti-anxiety tablets (don't do this at home, folks), saying: "Only take one unless you *really* need more and, whatever you do, *do not drink*."

I downed one pill instantly, and then took the other once she was out of sight. Luckily, my mate was driving. We got there early, unpacked and set up. We then just hung around, as you do. My mother had said I wouldn't feel 'different', just lose my inhibitions a bit. True enough, everything felt quite normal, so when the barman opened up surely it would be fine to have a pint of Adnams? And perhaps another?

People eventually started filing in, including friends, and plenty more who'd heard about it. Martyn was there with other fine musicians and singers. When I finally stepped on stage for my moment of glory, not only could my fingers not find the strings, or frets, but my mouth had lost the ability to speak. I looked and sounded like the stereotype comedy drunk. I forgot words, and simple guitar parts were beyond me, while those at the top of my abilities didn't stand a chance. I started and stopped several songs, dribbled pathetic apologies and the evening stumbled to a humiliating halt. It remains my most embarrassing gig in nearly 50 years of playing. Strangely, the folk club closed for the last time that night!

I redeemed myself somewhat at the charity gig. Robbie and I did a couple of acoustic songs, and his and Martyn's band sounded great. I joined the backing group on my red Strat for the rest of the evening, and managed a couple of decent, Diet Coke-fuelled solos.

But back to that folk club: never being one to indulge in 'substances', it really was a disaster destined to happen. These days I love a glass of pre-gig wine and a bit of banter with the band. And that's all I need these days to get ready for the stage. G

PHOTO: DAVID LIBSON-HOCHENBERG/ATB

GAS OF THE MONTH

A 'Bird Without Wings'

What? Ivison Dakota **Where seen?** www.ivisonguitars.com **Price?** £3,495

There can't be many guitarists left who haven't lusted after a Gibson Firebird but then, upon playing one, discovered it to be so unwieldy that it almost required a total rethink of how to play guitar. Similarly a lover of such quirky instruments but with a designer's eye for ergonomic elegance, Neil Ivison, has devised this stunning instrument. Built from solid African mahogany with premium pickups, hardware and wiring, it's available in sunburst, aged Pelham blue and other custom colours. It's beautiful to behold and desirable in the extreme. Johnny Winter, Lynyrd Skynyrd ahoy!

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CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Recipe For Success

What defines the sound of a guitar? This issue, **Alex Bishop** cracks the secret of perfect tone once and for all

Lately I've been delivering quite a bit of lutherie tuition and I'm often asked what, above all else, makes guitars sound different, and why do some guitars appear to sound better than others? Is it some special, expensive tonewood? The type of strings? Perhaps the instrument was built in a ritualistic fashion according to the waxing and waning of the moon? I've heard every 'secret' of the sound of the guitar, no matter how bizarre. It's a timeless debate and a question for which every guitar maker ought to be armed and ready. Naturally, I'm always willing to launch myself into the fray, so here we go.

I've always broken down my response to the question of 'tone' into three categories. Let's address these in ascending order of importance. So starting in third place is – drum roll, please – *wood*.

"In the kitchen of lutherie, good ingredients only get you so far. With the skill of the head chef, wood choices turn into something truly special"

Finding that ideal guitar might be a little bit like going into your dream restaurant and eating your favourite ever meal. If you can indulge me for a moment with a tenuous food analogy, guitar tonewoods are like the ingredients that make up your dish. Every wood colours the sound of the guitar in its own (almost indescribable) way. There is no doubt that a softwood top gives a more balanced tone to an acoustic than a hardwood one, and that a solidbody electric with a heavy mahogany body has a fatter tone than a light and airy poplar one. Even saddle and nut materials are up for debate in the quest for 'tone', with cheap plastic cast aside in favour of hard, dense materials such as bone or brass.

In the kitchen of lutherie, however, good ingredients only get you so far. It's with the skill of the head chef that your wood choices can turn into something truly special. That's why the second most important item on my tally of tone is *craftsmanship*.

It's a little harder to see from the guitar player's perspective, but there is more than one way to build a guitar, and the multifarious methods one might employ in constructing a guitar give rise to wildly different sonic results. Better-known variations might include using a bolt-on neck instead of glued-in set neck, or a Spanish-style solera-based method instead of a mould-based one. Many manufacturers use cutting-edge computer-controlled machinery to accurately shape parts, whereas some hand-builders rely upon intuition and hand tools when carving critical components. These different production methods result in variations in the way the guitar comes together and ultimately affect the way it vibrates and produces sound. As a result, we tend to define our favourite guitar by *who* made it rather than *what* it is made from.

In my opinion, there is one factor even more important than materials and craftsmanship when it comes to defining the sound of your perfect guitar, and that is *design*. Body shapes, pickups, scale lengths, bracing patterns: all of these and more are fundamental to the sound of your instrument.

When building a guitar I am often surprised that, once finished, its tone is still familiar despite making use of unusual woods or alternative construction methods. I know that, despite my reservations, a fanned-fret, bubinga parlour guitar with three soundports will still sound more like a parlour guitar than a jumbo guitar ever will. Likewise, swapping out single-coil pickups for a pair of fiery hot humbuckers is going to have a more noticeable effect on its output than just about anything else. There are modes of vibration and characteristic sounds produced that are inescapable when one follows a particular design. Just compare the stark tonal differences between types of stringed musical instruments, such as the banjo or mandolin, and the importance of craftsmanship or materials soon fades into the background.

But, of course, we are missing one last ingredient in the production of perfect tone: the player. The subtlety (or otherwise) of our favourite guitarist's playing style can utterly transform the sound of an instrument, as our ears are drawn towards the human touch that injects so much personality into the perfect 'tone'. When it all comes down to it, the magic is in the music. G

PHOTO BY BARBARA CETLOVA

Alex custom-built this electric bass with an aim of capturing the sound of a double bass for its owner. Wood, craftsmanship and design were all key players in the build – but its final sound remained in the hands of its player

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RAISING THE TONE

A Question Of Scale

Scale length has a big influence on a guitar's performance, Paul Reed Smith tells **Jamie Dickson** – but string gauge and tuning are just as vital

Anyone who spends enough time around guitars will run into the term 'scale length' eventually. But what does it mean and how does it influence a guitar's performance?

To deal with the first question, scale length describes the theoretical length of the 'speaking' part of the string – the bit that vibrates when struck by a plectrum: in other words, the section that is stretched at high tension between the guitar's top nut and the saddle. We say theoretical because the scale length is simply used to calculate the position of the frets. The *actual* string length between the nut and saddle is longer and requires local adjustment for intonation otherwise the guitar wouldn't play in tune.

"Tuning and string gauge being equal, a guitar with a longer scale length will feel stiffer to play but will have more stable pitch when hit hard"

Scale length often varies between guitar models: most Fender electrics have a scale length of 25.5 inches (648mm), for example, while PRS Custom 22 and Custom 24 models have a scale length of 25 inches (635mm). Classic Gibson electrics such as the Les Paul are usually described as having an even shorter 24.75-inch (628.7mm) scale though, as we shall see, that figure is a little misleading.

The PRS Custom 24, pictured here in SE form, utilises a 25-inch scale

So, how do you measure scale length? Well, most measure the distance between the nut and the 12th fret and multiply that by two. That assumes the nut is in the correct position, of course, and some makers use compensation – the nut is brought forward very slightly (and sometimes is slightly angled) towards the 1st fret: PRS is a good example.

So, why does scale length matter? Put another way, how does a guitar with a longer scale length behave differently from a guitar with shorter scale length?

"It depends on the gauge of strings," says Paul Reed Smith, founder of PRS Guitars. "If you take a guitar with a Gibson scale and you put a set of nines on it, when you hit the low E hard, it goes almost up to F and then goes back down to E. But if you fit a set of nines to a guitar with a 25.5-inch scale and hit the low E, it doesn't go very sharp. So one of the things that happens when you increase the scale length is that the strings are tighter."

Tuning & String Gauge

This is the first thing to remember: tuning and string gauge being equal, a guitar with a longer scale length will feel stiffer to play but will have more stable pitch when hit hard than a guitar with a shorter scale. As the frets are spaced more widely on a longer-scale instrument, it will also feel a bit more of a stretch to play at times. Subtle stuff, it is true – but tangible and with real impacts on the sound, feel and playability of the guitar. And if you start altering the string gauge used on the guitar and its tuning as well, the picture becomes more complex, as Paul explains: "Here's an example for you – *Machine Gun* [by Jimi Hendrix] was played on a 25.5-inch scale guitar, strung with 10s but tuned down a whole step. When you do that – when you tune it down – it loosens the strings."

Listen to *Machine Gun*, as Paul recommends, and you'll hear that the classic Strat tone is still there but it's fatter and looser-sounding than if it had been played at standard pitch. The effect is subtle but noticeable and very cool.

The takeaway here is that if you want a looser feel from a guitar with a 25.5-inch scale *and* keep your nice, chunky 10s on it, you're going to have to tune the guitar down. However, if you want to stay at standard pitch *and* achieve a looser feel, you need to either select a guitar with a shorter scale-length or use lighter-gauge strings. Fitting lighter strings can make the guitar sound different, however, so choosing which way to go is not as simple as it might first appear. The main thing to understand here is that a guitar's scale length doesn't deliver a fixed set of characteristics all by itself – tuning pitch and string gauge also come into play. Why? Because all three things influence the

The PRS Mark Tremonti Baritone produces stunningly heavyweight sounds despite its relatively short (for a baritone) 25.5-inch scale

tension of the strings and, in so doing, interact with each other in a pretty complex way.

"Let me give you another example," Paul says. "You can take a 25.5-inch scale guitar and you can put really big strings on it and tune it down to C# and it's one of the best baritones you'll ever hear." He continues by saying, "We got given a hard time by the internet when we did the Mark Tremonti Baritone," referring to the fact that baritone electrics often feature something like a 29¾ inch (755.65mm) scale. According to forum lore, making a baritone with a mere 25.5-inch scale, as on the Tremonti, shouldn't work. But that wasn't what Paul and Mark found when they tried it. "He thought it sounded monstrous. I thought it sounded monstrous, but the internet said, 'Oh, you can't do that at that scale.' Well, yes, you can."

In this case, fitting heavy-gauge strings (0.014 to 0.068) to the Tremonti Baritone gave Paul the right feel and usable string tension when that 25.5-inch scale guitar was tuned down to C#. That's because the increase in string tension generated by using heavier-gauge strings balanced out the decrease in tension caused by dropping the tuning – permitting a relatively conventional 25.5-inch scale to be used. But, of course, a 25.5-inch scale *also* sounds great when tuned up one-and-a-half steps to standard E tuning with normal, light-gauge nines or 10s fitted. After all, that's what a Strat uses. So you can see that it's the interplay between all three factors – string gauge, scale length and tuning – that determines whether a guitar is suitable to be a baritone or a conventional electric tuned to plain old vanilla E. Adjust just one parameter slightly and you change the playing experience of the instrument; orchestrate all three intelligently and you enter the realm of advanced guitar design. "It's a very complicated but very beautiful little equation," Paul concedes.

Next month we rejoin Paul to discover why he chose a 25-inch scale for some of his most famous electrics, such as the Custom 24 – and learn why many people have misunderstood the correct scale length of vintage Les Pauls for years. G

THREE TO GET READY

Inspiring models that go to great lengths

PRS McCarty 594 £3,699

Utilising the 24.594-inch scale length accurately measured from classic vintage Les Pauls, the 594 is one of the most sonorous and inspiring PRS electrics around – and that's saying something. With double-cut playability and a pair of expressive 58/15 LT pickups, it's a hugely refined take on a classic rock staple.

Fender Player Duo-Sonic £589

The most elegant of Fender's student guitars looks gorgeous in Desert Sand in this affordable reissue that forms part of Fender's Mexican-built Player Series. The 24-inch scale and 9.5-inch fretboard radius make for a slinky, slippery playing experience that means this lightweight electric will be hard to put down.

Gretsch Billy Duffy Signature Falcon £3,589

Few guitars are as grand as a White Falcon, but Cult hero Billy Duffy's signature model, with Bigsby vibrato, adds a little extra rock to the model's undoubted roll. Unlike some 300-series Gibson semis, the scale length is 25.5 inches, like a Strat, so expect plenty of ring and shimmer from its custom-wound Blacktop Filter'Trons.

Name That Chord

This issue **Richard Barrett** debates the use of numbers and slashes in chord naming, and acknowledges that there's no correct answer...

Like all systems, chord theory occasionally struggles to itemise every single possibility in harmony. Just as mathematicians have no universally accepted way to write repeating decimals such as 0.333333, musicians often have various ways to describe a chord in our own language – all of which may be different but no less correct than each other.

In situations like this, it's useful to employ a bit of logical thinking. For example, in what context does the chord appear? An A/G chord (an A major triad over a G bass note) could be referred to was an A7 3rd inversion (7th on the bottom), but if this then resolves to a D/F# (D 1st inversion/3rd on the bottom), it seems logical to go with A/G and acknowledge the descending bass.

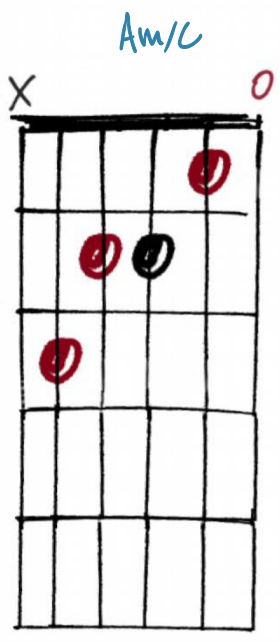
Listen to The Beatles' *Dear Prudence* for a nice example of descending bass notes creating a secondary melody within a chord progression. I have picked out what I feel are a few good examples here, so see if you agree with the names I've chosen!

PHOTO BY KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Right: The Beatles used descending bass notes to create a secondary melody on tracks such as *Dear Prudence*

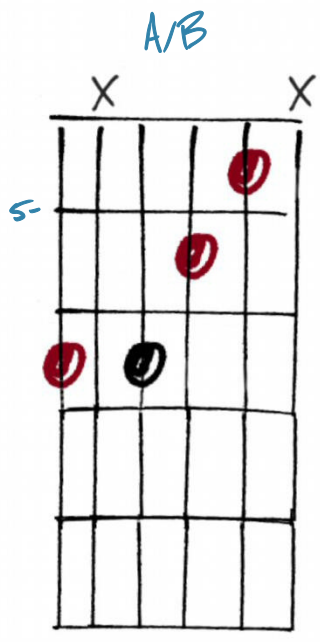
Example 1

I'm going with Am/C here because it is clearly an A minor shape, with the open fifth string root replaced with a C at the 3rd fret. However, there is also a really good case for naming this C6, especially if followed by a C7 chord for which we would only need to raise that A on the third string by one fret.



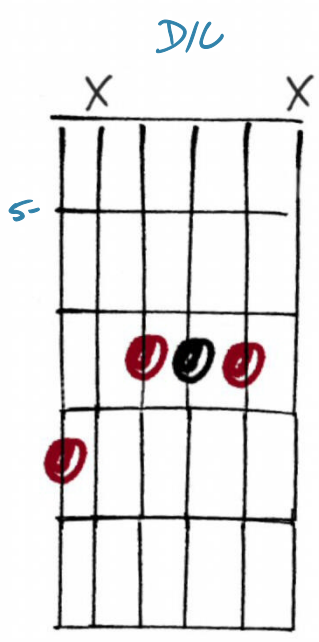
Example 2

A/B is my name for this chord, reflecting this 'stacking' of notes (low to high: B A C# E). However, it could also be called B11, taking B as our 'official' root, rather than an alternative bass note. In this context, we would have B as root, A as ♭7th, C# as 9th, and E as the 11th. However, note the lack of 3rd (D#) and 5th (F#), which are sometimes omitted in extended voicings.



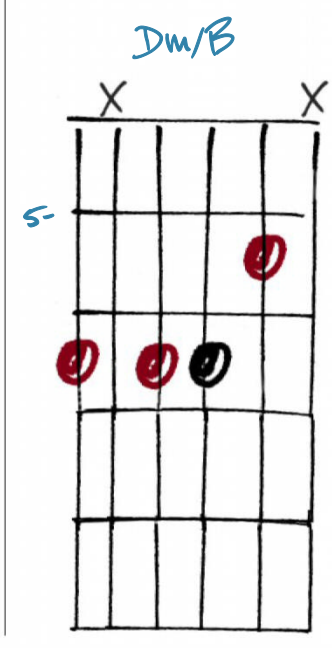
Example 3

It is most logical to call this D/C because it consists of a D major triad with a C (♭7th) in the bass. You would be correct to call this D7 3rd inversion, but as this type of chord often appears in the context of a descending (seldom ascending) bass line, it can help to refer specifically to the bass notes, rather than use 'classical' theoretical terms.



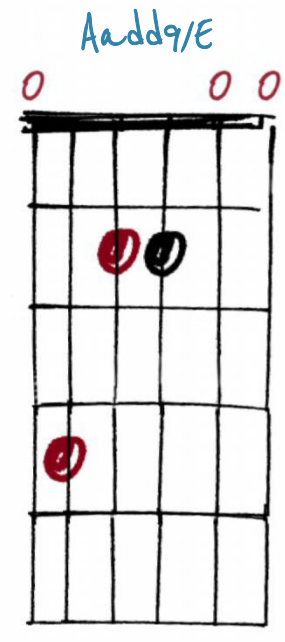
Example 4

This could be referred to as either B half diminished or B min7♭5. However, I am going with a third option here (also correct), which is D minor/B. This has more to do with the physical shape of the chord played than context or music theory – but it is worth making note of the relationship between the triad at the top and the underlying bass note for reference to other keys.



Example 5

On the top four strings, we have what could be called an Asus2 chord. But by adding the C# (major 3rd) on the fifth string, we take it out of the 'sus' category, giving us Aadd9/C#. Going further to add the open sixth string (E), we relieve the C# of its responsibility as bass note, relegating it to major 3rd (at the lower end of the action). The logical name for this seems to be Aadd9/E!



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STAR LETTER

HERE I GO AGAIN

Here is a 'lost and found' tale inspired by Neville's recent column. A few years ago I was enjoying the annual Guitar Show in Birmingham with friends. I had a small fund allocated to buying a guitar in memory of my father, and was probably trying too hard to find a suitable purchase. So when I found a guitar I liked towards the end of the day, I wasn't thinking clearly.

The guitar was a PRS Bernie Marsden signature model, actually signed by the man himself. It looked lovely and I was beguiled by its feel and tone. However, for whatever reason, I walked away and didn't buy it. Regret kicked in almost immediately, but when I contacted the vendor to buy the guitar, it had gone. I had missed my chance.

Fast forward several years to this spring. I had since bought a different guitar in my dad's memory, and was taking it to Birmingham's wonderful Little Guitar Shop for a set-up. As I walked in, there was the exact same PRS sitting on a stand; I knew instinctively it was the same guitar and a few checks and a chat with the guys in the shop confirmed it. It was a strange feeling; here was the guitar I had connected with a few years before, apparently only having arrived in the shop the day before, and I was only in the shop because of my dad. I played the guitar, which felt great, and the fact that it was signed by Mr Marsden provided extra charm. The final delight was that my wife just looked at me and said, 'I'm going to buy that for you'. Sometimes the universe blesses us with a bit of magic.

Gavin Saunders, via email

Thanks for that wonderful story, Gavin. Sometimes the universe really does just drop things into our lap, from time to time. We took the liberty of telling your story to Mr Marsden himself, who was moved to hear his signature guitar played such a central role in your story. Now that you're reunited with the guitar that was clearly meant to be, it only seems fitting to cap it off with a quality Korg tuner, the award granted to every worthy winner of *Guitarist's* monthly Star Letter.

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THE PRICE IS RIGHT

In the acoustic supplement of the last edition of *Guitarist* you had a couple of pages devoted to affordable acoustics. Some folk are somewhat dismissive of lower-priced guitars, but there are indeed some really great instruments around at lower costs. It is great to have a collection of highly desirable instruments, but many people, myself included, cannot afford to splash out thousands of pounds on an expensive guitar.

Some years ago I wanted a Martin Dreadnought but the D-35s and D-18s were out of my price range, so I opted for a D-16GT. By adding a Fishman pickup and EQ unit I can get a really great sound through my Marshall Acoustic Combo amp. And then, last year I decided I really wanted a Gretsch and, again, their top models were out of my price range, so I opted for a Streamliner and what a super sound I can get with this guitar!

You should never dismiss lower-priced guitars from top manufacturers as there are some very good buys out there.

Dennis Homes, via email

As we've found ourselves saying a lot recently, Dennis, it is truly incredible what's available at the affordable end of the market at the moment. Your mention of the Gretsch Streamliners is apt as we have been consistently impressed with this range, including the P-90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club we reviewed a few issues back. This guitar was a pleasure to play and beautifully turned out for a street price south of £300. Epiphone's recent Coronet, Wilshire and Crestwood Custom electrics were also standout electrics in the sub-£500 bracket that wouldn't shame any collection. The editor of this mag also has a massive soft spot for Yamaha's poised and toneful Revstar 502T, which he happily uses for pro recording sessions as stock. While these guitars may not be as refined and rich in tone as the best Custom Shop gear, for several thousand pounds less outlay, they ain't as far behind as you might suppose. Not at all.

OUT WITH THE OLD?

Two comments in Issue 479 prompted this letter: "With 30 SGs offered by Gibson'' (The Modern SG) and "Does it do justice to the original Deluxe?" (Les Paul 70s Deluxe Edition). When Gibson is flooding the market with expensive reissues I have to ask, is it doing enough to advance its legacy? A quick look at its website reveals there are 65 LPs available and 25 ES models. The rest of Gibson's range (Firebird, Explorer and V) totals 19 guitars.

Reader John Rowe has discovered plenty to admire about Boss's super-light and versatile Katana combo

One would think that such a Titan of guitar-making would be busy innovating instead of raking through its back catalogue. Or maybe we consumers are the ones to blame? Would Gibson be resting on its laurels if players were not queuing up for the same-old same-old? The demand for not only new versions of old models, but vintage-looking (a heavy-aged 1959 Les Paul Standard comes in at $10,999), means Gibson is riding the relic train all the way to the bank. Woe is the boutique-guitar maker, having to market their design-led, high-engineered and innovative models to a nostalgic market that can't see past the weathered replica artefacts of 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years ago. It must be a thankless task putting your heart and soul into a guitar that doesn't hold its value because it wasn't played by Clapton at the Albert Hall in '68.

At some point, Gibson must decide what it wants to be remembered for – its status as a premier guitar maker that inspired a generation over 60 years ago, or curators of a legacy that is happy to conveyor-belt its heritage to players whose creativity stops when they buy a 'new' guitar.

Graeme Craig, via email

Thanks for your interesting and thought-provoking views, Graeme. To be fair, innovation is a tough thing to tackle for makers, such as Gibson or Martin, who have a long and much-loved heritage. In a sense they are in the unenviable position of being 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'. Gibson particularly will still be smarting from the experience of trying to convert guitarists to G-Force robo-tuners back in 2015. The company is under new management now, of course, who needn't feel too guilty about the sins of the fathers, but we can understand it charting a cautious course when it comes to innovation. That said, Gibson has been muttering recently about some more progressive designs, so watch this space. We don't think the company is quite done with innovation yet – but the skill with which it approaches it will be crucial if any new developments that emerge are to gain acceptance.

BIG BREAK

I broke my shoulder and wrist during lockdown, which was followed by two heart operations that have left me physically very weak. My Gibsons, Fenders and valve combo are now all too heavy to gig with, so a rethink was called for. The solution? A PRS Hollowbody SE II Piezo, weighing 6lb, and a Boss Katana combo, also super light.

The Katana's acoustic channel and built-in effects also mean I can leave my Taylor and pedalboard at home. My old setup is undoubtedly better sonically, but, in a typical pub gig, I doubt the average audience would hear any difference. The moral is if adversity strikes a guitar player, there is a solution out there.

John Rowe, via email

Thanks for your tips, John, and glad to hear you're back in the saddle with a lighter rig. Those Katana amps are quite something, especially for the money, and one of the less-talked-about advantages of emerging non-valve-based tech is that it makes lightweight but great-sounding amp tones much more feasible – whether that happens to be plugging a Helix into a PA or using one of Boss's impressive Katanas. If you're a stickler for valve tone, however, there's still plenty of good news – 'lunchbox' heads with lightweight enclosures, such as those made by Victory, combined with the best advanced, lightweight cabinets (Barefaced Audio make some incredible stuff in this field) will grant you a rig you can carry from the car with ease.

NAME CHECK

In response to your request in issue 475 for strange coincidences, I just wanted to share my own. For my son's 18th birthday I decided to get him a guitar that was 18 years old. I left it far too late to go hunting, so I resorted to eBay where I came across an Epiphone Casino that had no bidders and was ending soon. The seller said 'collection only', but I messaged them offering to pay for a courier and, as the guitar was in a hard case, I was fairly confident it would survive. The seller responded positively and a few days later the guitar arrived, securely packaged and in perfect condition. The seller included a fresh set of strings, all tags and, for the things he had upgraded (bridge, etc), the original parts and receipts. He had documented everything in a nice handwritten note, too. Until I received the note I had not seen his name, only the seller ID. It was from a Chris Green – my son is also called Chris Green. Freaked me out!

Ian Green, via email

As with our Star Letter this month, serendipity seems to have played a welcome part in the right guitar finding its way to the right owner. The name Casino seems apt given that the roulette wheel of life stopped on exactly the right number for you there! Hope your son is getting loads of fun out of it.

From one Chris Green to another, this splendid Epiphone Casino has found another delighted owner

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

THE SONIC SHAPE-SHIFTER

SOMETHING NEW AT EVERY TURN.

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

Postcards From NOWHERE

Phil Manzanera gave Roxy Music the taut riffs that made the band's hits irresistibly danceable – but his latest album, recorded with Tim Finn, is about travelling without moving. We joined him to discover why a Firebird and an Ox make a powerful combination in any home studio, and receive a masterclass in the recording techniques he's honed over 50 years of hits

Words Jamie Dickson

In Roxy Music, Phil Manzanera was the guitarist who put the addictive hooks into hits such as *Love Is The Drug* and *Angel Eyes*. A lifelong sonic innovator, Phil worked closely with Brian Eno to create Roxy Music's experimental pop classics of the 70s – but Roxy's albums also showed him to be a player of rare taste and poise. Phil's also produced albums as diverse as David Gilmour's *On An Island* and John Cale's *Fear* – but he's far from done making his own music. In fact, he's just completed a new album entitled *Caught By The Heart* with Tim Finn, formerly of Crowded House and Split Enz. A multi-layered melange of sound with a Latin heartbeat, it brims with soulful sounds from all corners of the world.

Despite its eclecticism, *Caught By The Heart* was recorded while both Phil and Tim were confined to their home studios, separated by thousands of miles, during lockdown. With the album now out and the music world slowly emerging from the long shadow of Covid, we joined Phil in the 'hut' that became his musical sanctuary to hear his perspectives on the art of recording, learn how he crafted Roxy's timeless guitar lines, and find out what guitar gear has captured his heart in recent times.

How did you first meet Tim Finn?

"Well, we first met in 1975 when we were on the first Roxy Music tour of Australia. We just arrived in Sydney after a humongous long journey. In those days, it seemed really like a huge adventure to go to Australia. And so I spent 24 hours or something in a plane, I got into my hotel room and collapsed on the bed, turned on the telly and the first people I see are Split Enz.

"And it wasn't what I was expecting. I don't know what I was expecting, actually, just some sort of weird folk music or something. And I thought, 'Who the hell are these freaks?' I found out later that they'd come over from New Zealand and that was their first appearance on the telly. And so I thought, 'Wow, that's great.' So then I go to the Hordern Pavilion, which is where we were going to play the next day, and they're our support act! Couldn't believe it...

"So I just watched them from the side on stage. Then, when they came off, I went past the dressing and said, 'Hey, guys, wow, that was great – anything I can do to help?' and a little head popped out and said, 'Will you produce our first album?' And I thought, 'Oh really? And how's that going to happen?' And, in fact, they did go on and record their first album in Sydney, I think.

Phil's lockdown creativity opened up from the confines of his home-studio hut

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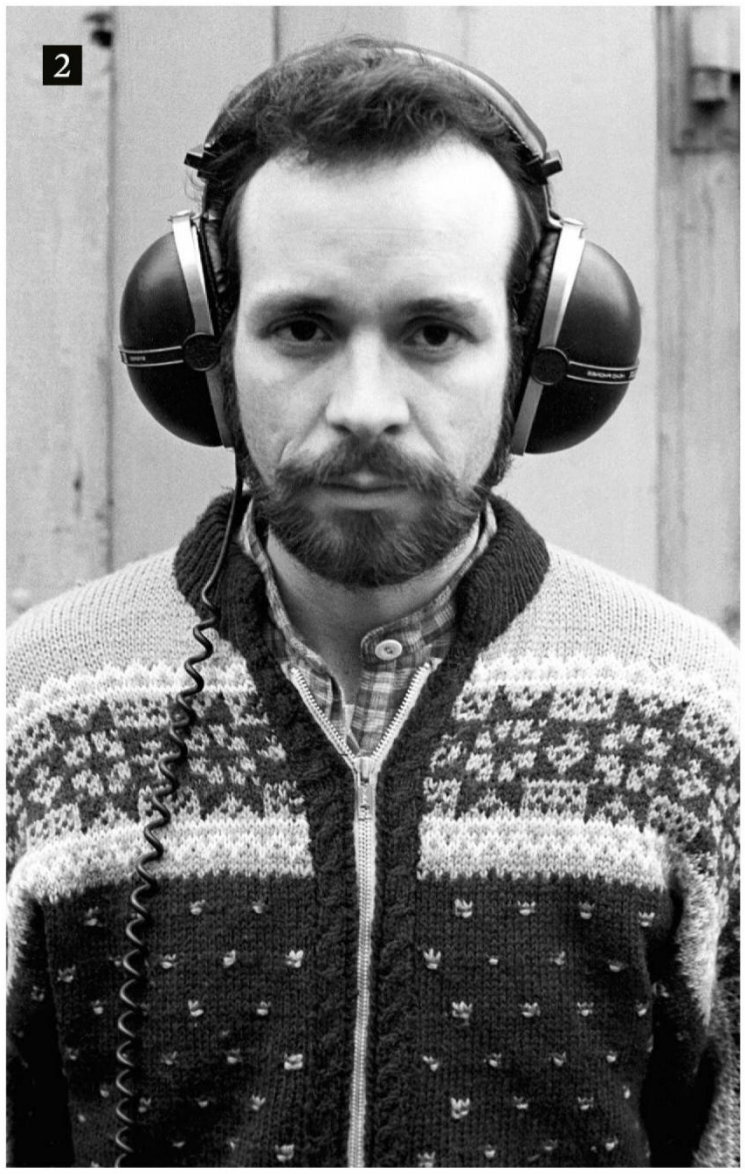


PHOTO © BRIAN COOKE/REDFERNS

1. Phil, interestingly, says this of virtuoso playing: "I like listening to people who have incredible technique, but I don't want to do that myself"

2. Phil working on his first solo album, 1975's *Diamond Head*, in comfort. The album featured vocals by Robert Wyatt and former bandmate Brian Eno

"All musicians think what they do is absolutely brilliant. But you need somebody to say, 'Hmm, could you try a bit harder?'"

But then, bizarrely, they came to England and we re-recorded it with some new tracks in Basing Street Studios in London in '76, I think it was."

How did you come to work on this album with Tim?

"I bumped into Tim's brother Neil at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame a couple of years ago when Roxy was being inducted, and we had our picture taken. I sent it to Tim and said, 'Look who I found in New York...' and then we started conversing over email and then suddenly, you know, lockdown happened. I'm in a little home studio an hour and a half from London, in West Sussex. I'm in this little hut and my screensaver is an island in the Pacific. And suddenly an email pops up from a guy [Tim] on an island in the Pacific saying, 'Have you got any slow Latin grooves that I can write stuff to?' And I was actually preparing an album, a Latin sort of album. So by complete happenstance, I said, 'Well, yes, I've got a whole bunch of stuff.'

"So I went through my Logic sessions and thought, 'Well, I wonder if this would be any good?' Then I'd send something to him and, because of the time difference, by the time I go to bed he's received what I sent him. He would then put stuff on it, send it back, then I'd wake up and marvel at what he'd done – because he really is incredibly good at songwriting and singing. I mean, literally, I'd send him a backing track and it'd come back the next day with singing and words on it. I've never been in a process like that before."

Almost sounds like a game of chess, where each player makes a move and then waits for the other to take their turn – what are your feelings about working that way?

"What was interesting this time was working with somebody who is on par with you because you're not going to get away with everything you might otherwise do. All musicians think that what they do is absolutely brilliant. But you need somebody to say, 'Hmm, could you try a little bit harder?' And, you know, occasionally Tim, in the nicest possible way, would say that to me and I'd think 'Oh, damn! I thought that was fine.' [Laughs] But, you know, he made me work a bit harder. He was always right, actually. So it was me and Tim sending stuff backwards and forwards.

"But there was also this other person, a proper engineer, who's on his computer in Greenwich or somewhere – and that was Mike Boddy, who is almost like the third person in this relationship. He really is very important because there's a lot of technical stuff that I create, which is a mess, quite frankly. And he has to then sort it out and he has to improve everything that me and Tim do sonically because he's got the most amazing plug-ins and stuff like that...

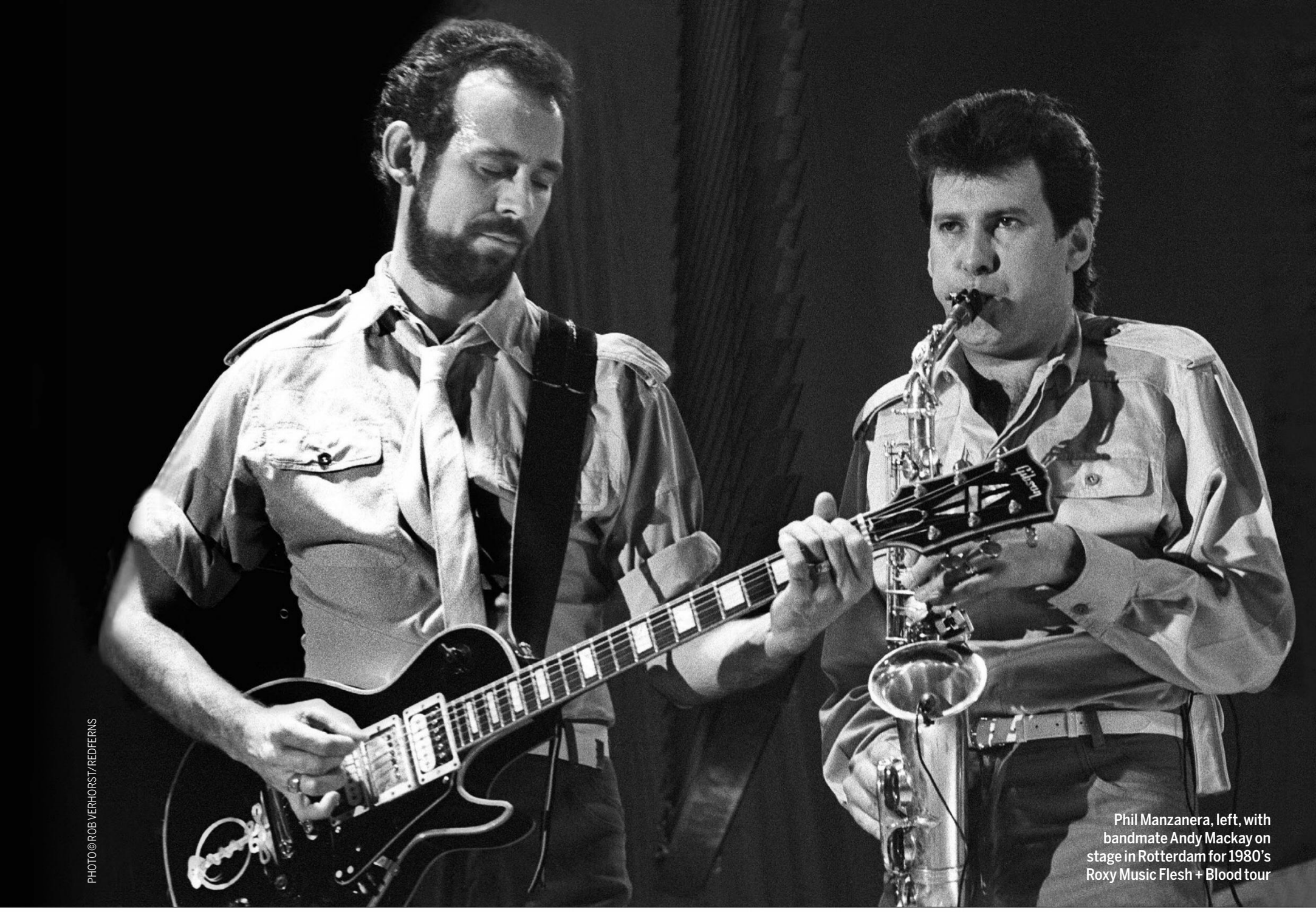


PHOTO © ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

Phil Manzanera, left, with bandmate Andy Mackay on stage in Rotterdam for 1980's Roxy Music Flesh + Blood tour

I never claimed to be a hands-on producer, tweaking the desk. I am definitely from the George Martin school of thinking conceptually 'what's this song about?' I don't want to be twiddling the knobs, although I've sort of had to, to a certain extent. But I've kept it very simple, my recording process here in my room, you know? I do have a studio in London – but I've only been there once in 18 months. I'm very happy in my little room."

Modern recording tech allows musicians to create really powerful studios in their own homes. Does this render the large studio approach obsolete, do you think?

"Well, I always thought that there is no one-stop solution to the whole recording process. Having gone from a time when everything was analogue to sitting in front of a computer with endless possibilities of tracks, I can say they've all got the good points and bad points. Roxy never really wrote a complete song and then performed it in the studio because we couldn't write like the [career] songwriters. So it was always: record backing tracks, get them overdubbed and then give it to Brian and he would try and write the top line for it. In some ways, it was very much like the modern way of doing stuff now.

"But if you've got a band and you've been together for some time, and you create something special by all playing together, then that is fantastic. But if there is a weak element in that band then that's a problem. If you're all playing together and you think, 'Oh, the drummer's not playing in time...' it's like, 'Oh, no, what are we going to do here?' Over the years I've done all sorts of crazy things trying to keep a drummer in time before they invented click tracks.

"So recording is very much an accumulation of all sorts of recording practices over the years. But at the end of the day, you're serving the song and you're trying to get across what the song is about so that it resonates with the listener."

Your guitar lines on the Roxy albums are masterpieces in terms of being instantly memorable, but never more than the song required. How did you develop that knack?

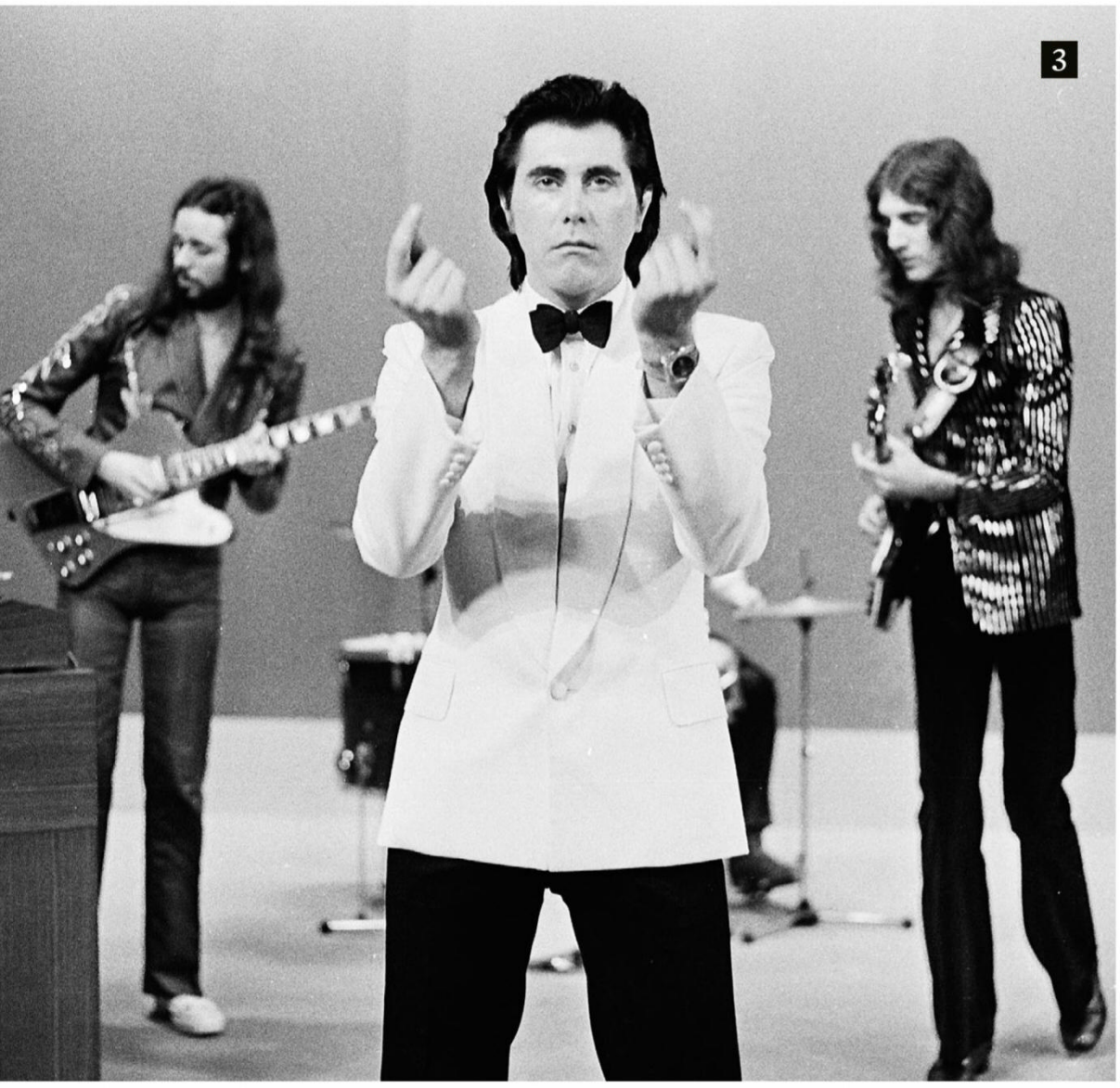
"I'll tell you what it is. If you've grown up loving George Harrison, The Beatles, you know that every single guitar part or almost every part on every Beatles song is absolutely the best one. And if you listen back to the different takes and different versions of the songs they went through until they reached the one that we all heard, it is amazing how they got there. They got the right sound and the right guitar part in the right place on each song.

"Well, I was very lucky to have Chris Thomas as a Roxy producer in 1973. Chris Thomas was the assistant producer with George Martin for The Beatles. So we sort of learned about part-playing, if you like, from Chris Thomas, which he learned from George Martin. The British tradition, Abbey Road style... on your first couple of times in the studio you had that drilled into you by the top person. It stays with you, you know? But then combine that with working with Brian Eno and you get a mixture of the traditional Beatles-type stuff and Eno, where it's like *anything* goes. Try the craziest thing, you know? I used to love Miles Davis as well – I loved the economy and the tone of what he was into. It's almost like an artist, just putting one dab of colour somewhere in the painting.

"And so context became important to me because Roxy was all about the musical context, the world that we created behind Brian Ferry for his weird voice. Also, I didn't have – and still don't have – incredible technique. I didn't really want an incredible technique: I thought that would impede my ability to enjoy music for the whole of my life. When I was like 17 or 18, I thought, 'I'm just going to spread it out.' So I really like listening to people who have got incredible technique, but I don't want to do that myself."

We've often said if you want your solos to be remembered, play fewer notes...

"Yeah, I think you're right. 'Less is more' is the phrase. It's like the choice of where you put the note, when, and with what sound



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3. Phil Manzanera (left) and Sal Maida (right), flank the attention-commanding Bryan Ferry as they perform live on Dutch TV in 1973

4. Phil doing his own thing at the launch of his 2015 solo album, *The Sound Of Blue*

"I've got, like, a fountain pen here, which tends to be my slide or for doing weird sounds and bouncing it off the strings or whatever"

can have a great resonance with people. They hear something that really gets to them sonically. And you have to sort of keep your nerve. To start with in Roxy I got a bit frustrated because people would say, 'Well, there's no guitar on this,' because I was doing that weird kind of guitar that had been treated by Brian Eno [laughs] and I was thinking, 'Hang on! I *am* playing guitar.' So I ended up thinking that I'd eventually have to play something flashy because I'm not getting any recognition here! So there was always that pull [towards flashy playing], but I think I sort of resisted it."

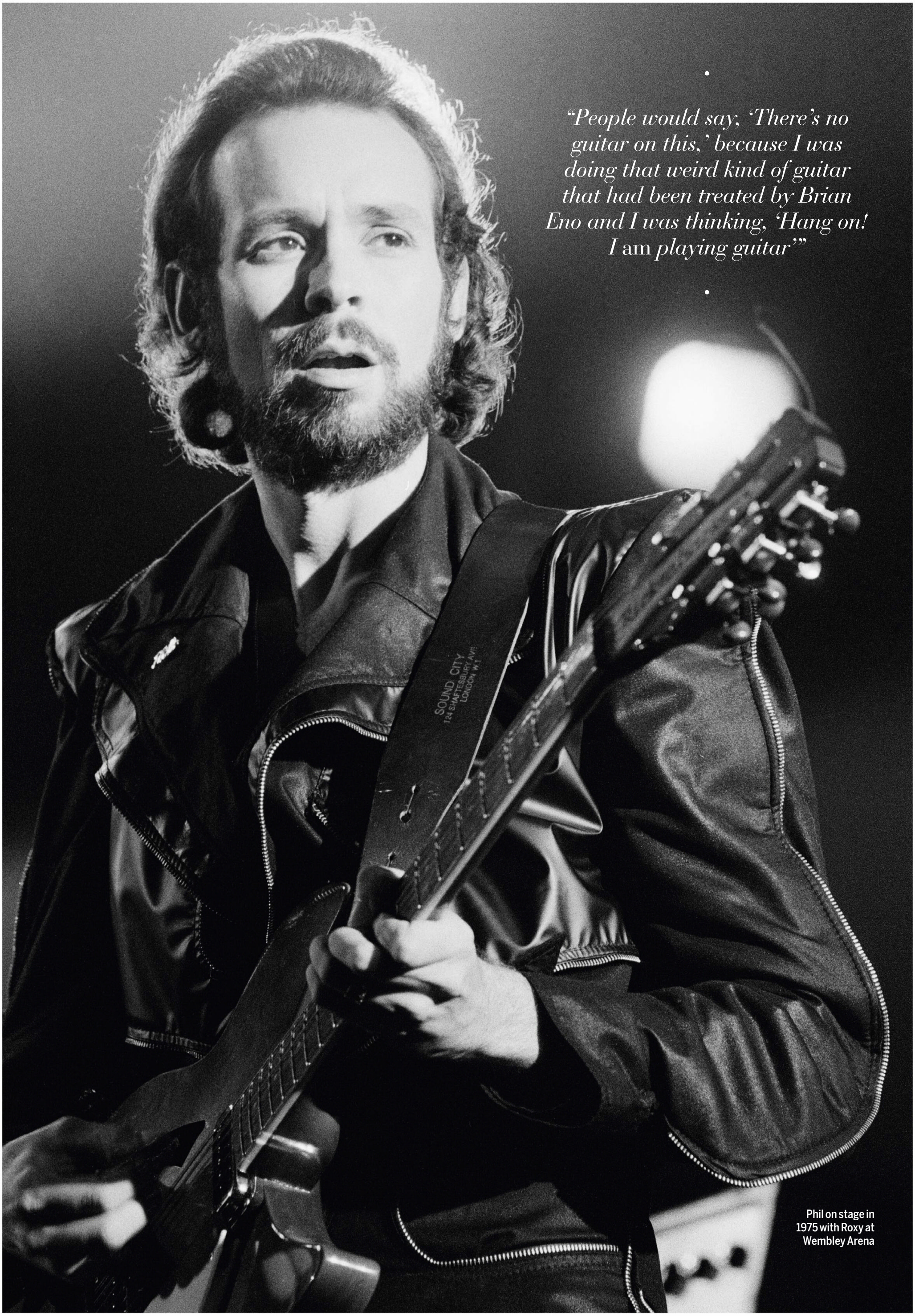
What was your recording rig for *Caught By The Heart*?

"I've got the studio up in London where I've got all the amps I've ever had, every fuzzbox you can imagine, delays – all that. But for this album and for everything I've done in the last 18 months, it's been one Shure SM57 microphone, six inches away from a little Fender Pro Junior amp, which is linked up to Universal Audio Ox [Amp Top Box, a reactive load box].

"I used four main guitars on the album: I've got my red 1965 Firebird, the one that I'm most identified with; I've got a '51 Telecaster; I've got a sort of 90s Strat; and I've got an Epiphone Flying V. And then I've also got a nice Spanish guitar and a Cuban guitar, which is the first guitar I ever learned guitar on in 1957 – a Spanish guitar from Cuba. That's all I used. What I found was that this simple setup using the Ox brought out the qualities of these guitars. They sounded better than they've ever sounded before. I remember times in the studio... taking hours with Hiwatt 4x12s and things, and using this or that amp... But this time, for some reason, I just plugged straight in [to the Ox] and they sound like they're meant to sound, these great guitars.

"What I would always do is record one track totally without anything on, clean. And then if I needed to have echoes or any other weirdness that I wanted, I would use the plug-ins on Logic on another track and then blend the two together. And it's forced me to try harder with just the basics and anything that's lying around. I've got, like, a fountain pen here, which tends to be my slide or for doing weird sounds and bouncing it off the strings or whatever with them.

"All my tricks that I've learned over the years are in these tracks. And if I did something and it wasn't quite right, Tim might say, 'Mmm, that's not quite the sound...' I'd try it again, however many times and eventually I'd get one and he'd say, 'Yeah, that's it.' Thank God! So it has simplified things a lot, if you like. It's actually been a lot more satisfying than the hours and hours I've spent not only in the studio trying to get sounds but also when



"People would say, 'There's no guitar on this,' because I was doing that weird kind of guitar that had been treated by Brian Eno and I was thinking, 'Hang on! I am *playing guitar'"*

Phil on stage in 1975 with Roxy at Wembley Arena

PHOTO © MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO © CLAIRE SINGER

5. In great company: "I used four main guitars on the album – my red 1965 Firebird, a '51 Telecaster; a sort of 90s Strat, and an Epiphone Flying V"

"I'll play intuitively… then pick out any bits that sound good, so I'm left with a patchwork quilt. That's the craft part of it"

I'm producing other people, where they would play a solo for a week or so [laughs]. I try not to do that. Also what I do is I will play intuitively. I'll put the track on and I'll play it 20 times. Then I will go through each take and just pick out any bits that sound good. So I'm left with this sort of patchwork quilt on the screen – and that's the craft part of it. But I'm very happy with the sound that I've got out of these few guitars."

The reverbs on the album are beautiful – what did you use?

"Well, I tell you what, on this Universal Ox, there are hundreds of different combinations of reverb and amps and mics and all sorts of things. So it's sort of a double process, really. You've got the initial sound, you've got the Ox sound and then I would use the whatever in Logic... and then Mike Boddy will use anything that he fancies if he thinks it needs a little tweak as well. He knows what I like. I mean, if I was up in my studio then I'd probably be using my Roland Space Echo that I've used on almost everything I've ever done. I've got my original ones there and I've got my original Revox that I used to get real tape-echo from.

"As technology developed since 1972, I've been there at the forefront, whether that was with Eno or whatever – I'd be using the new equipment as it came out and everything like that. But now I've sort of pared it down to the essentials. One thing is a great tube amp, a simple one, with maybe a 10- or 12-inch speaker and a cheap mic for the guitar. I mean, I've got a Neumann here, but I only use that on the Spanish guitar, not on the stuff coming out of the Fender. Actually, I also used a Carr amp to tell you the truth, which has been absolutely terrific: a Carr Mercury."

What's the best recording tip you've learned over the years?

"I would say when you approach a track, just play without thinking. Often, if somebody sends me a track I don't even listen to it before I plug in and play. I just put it on and then just react to whatever's there – because if you think about it too much you can just end up just playing your basic riffs that you have in your locker. So if someone asks me to play on something, I think, 'Great, send it to me.' I put it on, but I don't listen to it at first, I just get all my guitar stuff ready and everything. And the minute it comes on I start playing and I have to quickly find which key it's in or whatever. But sometimes that's great because you end up playing something you never thought you were going to play." G

Tim Finn and Phil Manzanera's new album, *Caught By The Heart*, is out now on Expression Records
www.manzanera.com

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THE FIRST Les Paul

The reason Gibson's iconic Les Paul exists is because of its namesake. A star of the 1940s airwaves, Les Paul was also a gifted inventor who strived for 30 years to make his dream of a solidbody electric a reality. As his son Gene Paul says, "This is the reason music changed and rock 'n' roll came to be... all because of this little guitar that sounded good." Here is the story of how that very guitar – the first of the breed – was created

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Justin Borucki

There are rare guitars and there are legends. Les Paul's cherished 'Number One' goldtop is the latter: truly a historic instrument, it is the first Gibson Les Paul electric that the man who gave it his name approved after two years of trial-and-error prototyping between 1950 and 1952, the year the guitar launched.

The fruit of nearly three decades of labour, it was Les's most cherished possession – but for years after his death in 2009 it dropped off the radar. Now, this iconic instrument is coming up for auction at Christie's in New York on 13 October. *Guitarist* was granted a rare opportunity to examine this unique – and uniquely historic guitar – in detail while it was in New York. We were also able to speak to those who knew Les best, including his son Gene, an award-winning producer who was in Les's band for many years, and Tom Doyle, Les's right-hand man and guitar tech for over 40 years, who gave us the inside story of the many, many mods that Les made to his 'Number One' over the years. We also spoke to Steely Dan guitarist Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter about his memories of "joyous" playing with Les Paul in the guitarist's latter years.

If you only ever think of an archtop electric when you hear the words 'Les Paul', we think the extraordinary story of the man who has been called 'Father of the Electric Guitar' may just change your perception of six-string history forever.

ELECTRIC DREAMS

Most people think the story of the iconic Les Paul model began in 1952, when Gibson launched the guitar to compete with upstart rivals Fender. But, as Les's son Gene explains, its evolution actually began at the dawn of the 30s, with a mysterious hand-written note that quietly changed the course of guitar history. Here, for the first time, is an intimate account of how Les Paul pushed past setbacks to become the 'Father of the Electric Guitar' **Words** Jamie Dickson

Les's son Gene Paul holding the 'Number One' Les Paul his father first showed to him around 1959

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

"The first time I saw that guitar, he wasn't playing it," Gene Paul recalls of his father Les Paul's most cherished possession. "He asked me to go downstairs and get a specific guitar. And when I brought it back upstairs, it was in its case. And he said, 'Put it right on the table there.' And he said, 'Open it up.' And I opened it up – and it was this gold magnificent guitar, simple... elegant.

"I was just so struck by it," Gene continues, "because I was used to the black Les Paul [Custom] guitar and the white one – the ones he usually used on stage and had in the control room. But he asked me to get this one and I brought it out. So I'm sitting there and looking at it and I asked him,'What's this?' And then he sat down and told me a story..."

"I don't think people understand what the hell this guy went through from getting that note at the barbecue stand till the time he finally got Gibson lit..."

The story was no less than a full account of how Les battled for years to make his dream of a solidbody electric guitar a reality. A guitar whose voice could rise above a full orchestra and that summoned up the pristine sounds that Les, a Grammy Award-winning master of the instrument, could not achieve with the acoustic archtops he started his career on, back in the 1930s. The guitar that the young Gene beheld in the case in 1959 was his father's fabled 'Number One' – the first approved production model Les Paul to be presented to Les prior to the model's launch in 1952.

To Les himself, this elegant guitar sitting in its plush case didn't represent the beginning of something – but the

Les at work in the studio with Mary Ford, using his 'Number One' Goldtop, the first prototype of the model that he approved

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

1. Les Paul, who was born in 1915, began performing professionally in venues around Wisconsin at the age of 13, singing and accompanying himself with harmonica and acoustic guitar. He soon needed more volume from the latter

2. Les Paul poses for a portrait with a Gibson electric guitar and amplifier, circa 1940. He always associated the brand with top-drawer quality

3. Gene Paul, left, played drums in the band of Les Paul and Mary Ford, who are here holding among the earliest Les Paul SGs to be built

4. The billboard of the New York Paramount theatre advertises an 'in person' appearance by Les Paul and Mary Ford in 1952

triumphant end of a near-30-year struggle to make a dream that he pursued "obsessively" finally come true. Now, for the first time, Gene Paul is ready to tell *Guitarist* the full story of how it all happened.

THE FIRST STAGE

To tell that story, Gene explains, it's necessary to go back to the beginning, when Gene was a child – when Les seemed, in some ways, not all that different to other dads. A trip to the theatre provided the first inkling that his guitar-loving father was, in fact, a major force in American music.

"My earliest memory of him playing guitar was in Chicago," Gene Paul recalls. "I was living with my mom and I was about eight years old. Dad came to town with Mary [Ford] and they were playing at the Chicago Theatre and he brought me down to the theatre with them and I saw him perform there. He invited me out on stage to take a bow and gave me one of his guitars to carry. And that was one of those moments when I really figured out who he was."

In the fame-obsessed era we now live in, it's hard to imagine how a little boy would be unaware that his father was one of the leading guitar stars of his day – but, in fact, it was only when Gene became an adolescent and started taking an interest in music himself that he began to realise the extent of his father's celebrity.

"I lived with my mom in Chicago until I was about 15, 16, around the late 50s," Gene remembers. "And then my mom and dad decided that, okay, I was interested in drums and I was interested in music so it was time to go live with dad. So that's when I went to stay with him on a permanent basis. I ended up on the road playing drums in the show. Until that time, I thought every father made his own guitars and had his own 8-track studio [laughs]... That was the environment I was living in, so I didn't think any different. But when I got on the road, that was really the time when I soaked it all in and figured out that it wasn't just a case of 'father knows best'... I realised this guy was doing something else.

"I was in the band with him. I was playing in the orchestra when 'Mary and Les' were on stage. And I really got a sense of: 'Wow, this is not my dad now,' you know? People were coming up and asking for autographs and I saw him in his element. And that's when I really started to appreciate the adventure of my dad's life."

PHOTO COURTESY OF GENE PAUL

"People were coming up and asking for autographs and I saw him in his element. And that's when I really started to appreciate the adventure of my dad's life"

Gene says that despite being a hugely gifted man who was as skilled at inventing audio equipment as he was at playing the guitar, Les didn't brag – and, in some ways, he was so unshowy that even his own family weren't fully aware of his achievements. Using the skills he learned in his father's studio, Gene grew up to be an award-winning engineer and producer himself. Joining Atlantic Records, Gene worked with legendary artists such as Aretha Franklin on many milestone albums. But, as he discovered one day, there were some classic records he knew nothing about, much closer to home.

"When I went to Atlantic Records and my own life went on its road, I ended up in mastering. One day, a partner of mine came into the room and he's smiling and I'm looking at him like, 'Okay, what's funny?' He says, 'I got a project for you. It's your dad.' I said, 'Really? What is it?'

"Dad never played any of his early jazz records in the house... So he had his secrets. But this guitar happens to be the biggest one he ever had"

PHOTOS BY POPSIE RANDOLPH/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

He said, 'It's the early jazz recordings he did for Decca.' I said, 'Really? Never heard of that.' And he said, 'Yeah.'

"Now, Dad never played any of his early jazz stuff in the house, so I'm sitting there mastering this album, hearing it for the first time in my life," Gene recalls. "He played Django Reinhardt in the house, but he would never play his own early jazz stuff. And when I heard the album, I was just amazed. So he had his secrets. But this guitar happens to be the biggest one he ever had," Gene says, his mind returning to the day when his father told him to fetch him his 'Number One' Les Paul, the day when Gene saw the guitar for the first time and learned how it came to be.

A FATEFUL NOTE

"It was around 1959 when he first showed me that guitar," Gene recalls. "And when I first opened the case my dad said something that I didn't understand. 'The second time was the charm,' was what he said, and I was sitting there trying to figure out what he meant. So I asked him and he said, 'Well, you got to sit down and I'll tell you about it.'"

Gene explains that his father then told him the following story. One day, back in the 30s, when Les's career was just beginning, he played a gig at a barbecue stand. The gig itself was a workaday affair, but what happened afterwards changed Les's life – and guitar history – forever.

"My dad was the type of a kid who would make do with what he's got... he was perseverance personified. I mean, this guy was never defeated. The cup was always half full..."

"After my dad finished playing, this gentleman sent him a note," Gene remembers. "It said: 'I heard the voice great, I heard the harmonica great. But I couldn't hear the guitar.' And at that point in the story my dad stopped for a moment and said, 'If there's one regret I really, really wish I could fix, I wish I could have known who that guy was because that note is what made this guitar happen. Because after I got that note, I went home and started work.'

In fact, the note started Les on a 30-year quest to make his playing heard properly that ended with the creation of one of the most famous guitars of all time. Disarmingly, that mission didn't start with a direct approach to a major guitar maker – but with household appliances.

"Growing up, my dad was the type of a kid who would make do with what he's got," Gene says. "And his mother would let him do anything, so he felt free to do anything. He had a Sears and Roebuck guitar, which was his first guitar, and he wanted to amplify that a little bit to see if he could make people happy. So he got a hold of his mother's phone and his mother's radio and he figured out how to amplify the guitar a little bit. But he had something in his head telling him, 'This ain't it,' you know? So he and a buddy went out looking for something that would be more solid [than an acoustic guitar body] and change the sound from an acoustic guitar to something that was in his head. And often he talked about that: he had something in his head. He didn't know what it was, but he had a vision that he couldn't clarify.

"Anyway, they had a railroad track that went by the house and he and his buddy took a little wagon and went over to see if they could find something that was more solid than what his acoustic was made of. And they found a metal railroad track, a small piece, and they brought it back to the house and he rigged it so he could put his strings on it and then [connected it to] his mother's telephone. And it turned

Les Paul and then-wife Mary Ford with audio equipment engineer Wally Jones in the background. Les was always at the forefront of studio recording technology

PHOTO COURTESY OF GENE PAUL

PHOTO BY RON BURTON/KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

THE FIRST – OR JUST NUMBER ONE?

Les Paul's guitar tech, Tom Doyle, explains why 'Number One' was the first LP that Les signed off on

When news of the auction went public in August, some Les Paul aficionados questioned why, if the guitar was supposed to be "The very earliest approved production model of the famed Gibson Les Paul electric guitar", it featured binding on the neck, which was absent on the first production examples to hit stores in 1952. Tom Doyle, who was Les Paul's personal guitar tech and repair man for over 40 years, says this is a common misconception about 'Number One' that overlooks the exceptional treatment Les received from Gibson, as the star lending his name to the instrument who had also guided its development.

"It may be true that the early factory production models that were shipped to music stores did not have binding, but Les's Personal 'Number One' is not, and was not, a run-of-the-mill production model per se," Tom explains. "It was not meant for the retail market; it was a specially made 'one-off' made just for Les himself, at his request in order for him to evaluate, approve and ultimately sign off on. He did not like the first prototypes presented to him by Gibson. Les said to me so many times over the years when discussing the early chronology of his beloved 'Number One' that, 'A lot of what they sent me was just wrong... Gibson did not have their act together.' Those words still ring in my head to this day.

"This guitar – 'Number One' was made especially for Les Paul in early 1952, to his individual and very specific spec and tastes, and at his behest. This guitar was not the first prototype to be made by Gibson, which Les summarily rejected. 'Close, but no cigar!' Les said. It is, however, the one that Les Paul agreed with, and that satisfied him enough to 'green light' the whole project. Without this guitar meeting Les Paul's rigorous standards, he would not have agreed to endorse the guitar, would not have agreed to put his name on it, and thus there would have been no Gibson Les Paul guitar as we have come to know it. Of course, he approved and bonded with this guitar immediately... and that is why he called it his 'Number One' – the first one good enough to be called a Gibson Les Paul guitar. This guitar was Les's baby, the culmination of his lifelong dream for a solid-body electric guitar, it was his pride and joy, and the very first official Les Paul guitar approved by Les Paul himself."

Tom's explanation is further borne out by photographs from a 1952 press event at the Savoy Hotel in London, held to unveil the new guitar to the press. The image shows Les Paul and Mary Ford proudly holding aloft their brand-new Goldtops, though even by this early stage Les's 'Number One' has clearly already had its neck pickup modded with custom internals by Les (see page 70). Mary's does not have neck binding, as per the standard early production models – while Les's clearly has binding on the neck. Les's son Gene adds that Les was prevented from making more serious modifications by Gibson, who were understandably anxious to launch the guitar properly before Les's insatiable urge to tinker with things changed its appearance too radically.

"You got to realise the itchy fingers this guy's got when he got the 'Number One'," Gene recalls with a laugh. "He wanted to go in and change it because he already had new ideas for the guitar before they gave him the go-ahead. So they stopped him [from customising it further] because they had to do photo ops before he tore it apart and there were also concerts that he had to do. So he realised, 'Okay, I'll keep the chisel away for a while' – and for a while he did that."

out there really was a difference – and that was probably the next step in the evolution of this thing because he sat there and said, 'Well, this is different.'

"But now, of course, he had to electrify it because it didn't have any natural acoustics to it – it's a metal bar, you know? But the fact it kind of worked intrigued him so much that he carried on from there. After that, he tried stuffing his guitar with shorts, t-shirts, socks... anything he could find to deaden the response of the acoustic guitar. And that kind of did something, but not enough. Then he went to the next step, which was plaster of Paris, and he put that in his guitar and that was even better – but it didn't quite make it."

The crazed vision of Les Paul pouring plaster into his guitar shows how feverishly dedicated he was to developing a solidbody guitar of some kind. But it took until 1938 for Les to find the ideal laboratory for his experiments in electric guitar tone. Les had moved to New York by this point, Gene explains, and was looking around for a workshop in which to build his dream instrument. Handily, he came across a rising guitar maker that was willing to let him use its premises.

"He took The Log to a nightclub and nobody responded... So he put wings on it and it went great. He said, 'I learnt something tonight. I think they hear with their eyes...'"

"Epiphone was in New York at that time and they had a shop, and Dad talked his way into it and made friends with everybody," Gene recalls. "And so he started working with a four by four [plank]. And that became the guitar he called The Log. That was another real marker-point in his life because that was the first time he found something that didn't weigh a ton but did provide what he was looking for in a solid type of a platform. So he put a neck on it and put his strings on it. By that time, they had some pickups going and he used those, too."

With this crude but functional prototype up and running, Les decided to take The Log out to a gig – and there he made a discovery about guitar design that has held true from 1938 to the present day.

"He took The Log and he went to a nightclub and he played and nobody responded," Gene recalls. "So he came back to the house and mom was there and she asked him what happened. And she was expecting a great response, but he said, 'It didn't go well – they didn't respond.' But, again, Dad was perseverance personified. I mean, this guy was *never* defeated. The cup was always half full... So he said, 'Well, maybe it has to actually *look* like a guitar?'

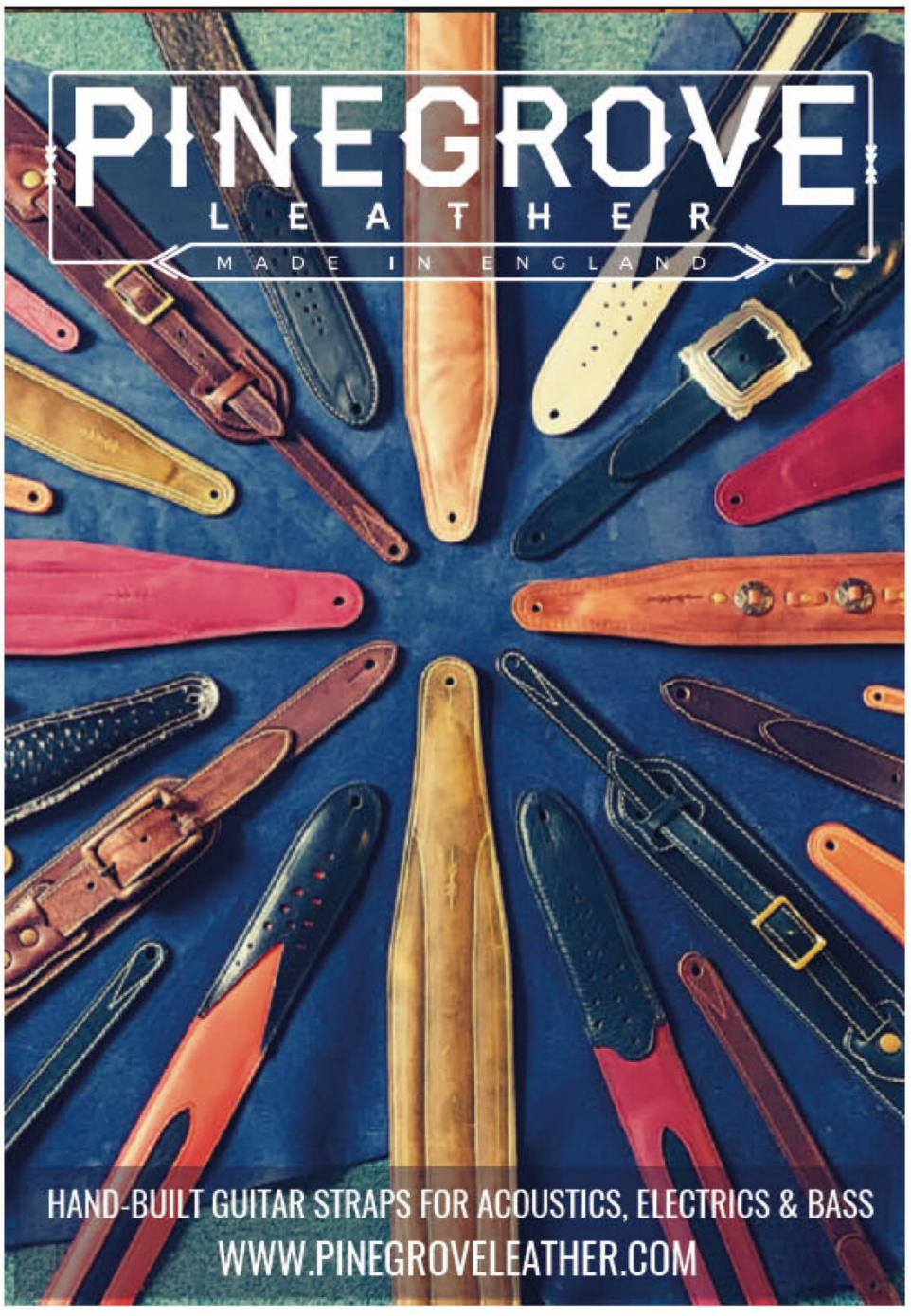
"So he went back to Epiphone and he put the wings on it," Gene says, referring to the addition of two curving sections of wood that were attached to the central 'plank' to lend The Log a regular jazz guitar's outline. "They didn't change the sound at all," Gene explains. "They just made it look like a guitar. So then he went back to the same club, same song, performed it again. Went home that night, mom asked him again and he said, 'It went *great,*' and she was so happy and he was really amazed by it, and he said to her, 'I think I learnt something tonight,' and she asked, 'What's that?' and he said, 'I think they hear with their eyes...'

Now that The Log had proven itself at its first gigs, Les decided the time was right to approach a major guitar maker – and he chose Gibson.

"Gibson was First Class," Gene observes. "I mean, they made not only guitars but they made mandolins. They

Les Paul and Mary Ford in 1955, at the height of the duo's fame

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



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Les Paul's historic 'Log' was his first giggable testbed for the concept of a semi-solid electric guitar. The 'wings' were purely for show – unlike the solid centre section

PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

made upright basses, they made cellos, violins. They had the whole nine yards covered. And Dad admired the woodcraft of the violins and all of those things. He really dug that. So he had his eyes on Gibson and he told me, 'I wanted to take it to Gibson. I was ready. I had something. The Log went to the club, it worked, it was accepted... Gibson is going to take this and run with it.' But, of course, they basically told him, 'Thanks, but no thanks – have a nice day,' you know," Gene laughs. "And privately they even called it 'the broom with pickups on it'. But Dad wasn't taken aback by that at all. Not at all. He thought, 'Okay, this is going to give me time to experiment some more, try some more ideas, and one day I'm going to put this guitar with Gibson and we're going to make it together. I don't care if it takes another 10 years, 20 years, I'll wait and keep going.' And that's what he did."

FAILURE, THEN BREAKTHROUGH

Buoyed by the success of The Log on the live stage but hungry to improve his solidbody guitar concept still further, Les soon had another idea for making a breakthrough.

"Dad said that his next adventure was quite interesting because in 1941, after he took The Log to Gibson, he had a flash [of inspiration] while he was performing with The Andrews Sisters," Gene says. "And the flash was: why not try aluminium? So he made an aluminium guitar and it was so innovative. It was great – and it was wonderfully odd-looking... everything was wonderful about it. It sounded good. So what could go wrong? Well, he's on stage and of course, when he took his solo, they'd put a spotlight on them. And the heat from the spotlight changed the tuning because of the conductivity of the metal. So the only time he could play the damn thing would be in the dark [laughs]. But he still kept it. And it was marvellous. But the story was better than the guitar!"

"[When Gibson told Les] 'Thanks, but no thanks...' he thought, 'I don't care if it takes another 10 years, 20 years, I'll wait and keep going.' And that's what he did"

Now several years into his quest, with some failures and a few successes to show for it, it would have been understandable if Les's enthusiasm for chasing his solidbody dream had waned. But giving up wasn't in his nature, Gene explains.

"I don't think people understand what the hell this guy went through from getting that note at the barbecue stand till the time he finally got Gibson lit... Because this was 24/7. I mean, he once said to me, 'Do you realise how many light bulbs Edison made before he found the one that worked?' He spent, what is it, close to 30 years on this before Gibson finally said, 'Hey, we ought to try it, you know?' So anyway, it's now 1941, and he's still sitting there thinking, 'Okay, they hear with their eyes. Maybe what I should do is get a stock Epiphone.' So he got a stock Epiphone and immediately put a metal plate in it. I mean, nothing was safe from him [laughs]. But he called this guitar 'The Clunker' and he made three of these guitars from '41 to '46... But this guitar turned out so good that he didn't touch it or modify it – and believe me, you had to put him in a straitjacket to get him not to modify a guitar because that was his whole being on the planet... But this guitar turned out so good it was the one that he used for *Jazz At The Philharmonic* and Bing Crosby. It was also the guitar he used on Les and Mary's long run of hit recordings with Capitol. So now it was like, 'Wow, I've really got something."

THE BIRTH OF 'NUMBER ONE'

After trying for so long to get the tiniest break, things now started to move fast. It was 1950 and Gibson had a new competitor in Fender, who brought the first solidbody electrics – the Esquire and Broadcaster – to market, confounding critics by scoring a hit with its new designs, which traditionalists had initially derided as 'canoe paddles'. Scenting change on the wind, the team at Gibson approached Les, Gene recalls, and this time they were all ears.

"Well, this is the time that Uncle Gibson knocks on his door and says, 'Oh, by the way, you know, seeing as you have all these hits and you're making all this noise with this electric guitar and Fender is getting hot on the heels... maybe we should talk. Are you interested?' And before they finished the sentence, Dad said, 'Let's go.'"

This was the moment Les had referred to cryptically at the start of the story he told Gene in 1959 – the second time was indeed the charm, except this time round Gibson was coming to him. The sense of validation and relief was huge, Gene says, and now Les could roll his sleeves up and embark on the work of creating something truly new with one of the greatest guitar makers in American history.

"Dad could finally take a breath and say he's at the door and they're not throwing him out," Gene reflects. "But it still took two years of going back and forth after that [to get the guitar right] – he said that he got some guitars for approval that he couldn't even play. He had big hands, so the regular neck wasn't right for him and he needed that changed. And they did the bridge wrong... this was wrong and that was wrong. He went back and forth with

Les Paul sits amid some of the first electric guitars he was really happy with: his modified Epiphone 'Clunkers'

"When he finally received a guitar that was right, he said, 'This is it... This is my Number One'. He had a bond with that guitar, without a doubt, more than any other"

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY BEN MARTIN/GETTY IMAGES

"He once said to me, 'Do you realise how many light bulbs Edison made before he found the one that worked?' He spent close to 30 years before Gibson finally said yes"

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

these guys and finally he received a guitar that was right. And when he was telling me this, he looked at me and he said, 'This is it...This is my Number One'. And he just had that little smile on his face and his eyes were wide open – he had a bond with that guitar, without a doubt, more than any other. And I'm not saying this because of the auction or any of that – as far as I'm concerned, my dedication is to his legacy. But this guitar was the one that meant quietly, personally, everything."

Gene says that Les was grateful to Gibson and knew that he couldn't have achieved his dream without their help – and willingness to listen to what he wanted from a solid electric guitar.

"He said to me, 'I was so pleased with the fact that Gibson allowed me to do it my way. Because it had to feel right to me when I played it.' And he was so pleased that Gibson allowed him to do that. And, of course, they had tremendous input with it, too – Dad never said 'I did it all'... For example, Dad mentioned that Maurice Berlin [founder of CMI, which owned a controlling stake in Gibson] was the one who came up with the idea of having an arched top like a violin. Maurice said, 'Would you be interested in that being on your guitar?' And Dad said,

5. Les Paul's original Ampex 300 tape machine, his recording tool of choice during his heyday, is also under the hammer – and appears in the framed original photo, below (enlarged on page 59)

6. Les and technician Wally Jones were dedicated to advancing studio technology – and Les pioneered multi-track recording devices

7. Detail from the Ampex 300 tape machine used by Les Paul

"He said, 'I was so pleased with the fact that Gibson allowed me to do it my way... it had to feel right when I played it.' He was honoured that Gibson believed in him enough"

'Oh, man, I didn't. know you could do that.' So Dad was really pleased with the combination of everybody involved with it. But he really was honoured by thefact that Gibson believed in him enough to let him really make it to where it felt good to him playing it. And that was his moment." G

Les Paul's 'Number One' – the first guitar bearing his name to be approved for production – is due to go under the hammer at The Exceptional Sale at Christie's New York on 13 October. For more information about the auction, see **www.christies.com**

8. The Lifton case that houses 'Number One' is itself evocative of a golden era at the dawn of the electric age. It too features in the Christie's auction

9. The stool that Les Paul sat on to perform at his customary haunt Fat Tuesdays bears the marks of many years' of music-making

10. An original photo of Les playing 'Number One' beside the Ampex 300 is also on sale

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

EXPLORING THE MODS & MYTHS OF 'NUMBER ONE'

Tom Doyle was recruited by Les Paul 57 years ago to make the master guitarist's ambitious modding projects come to life. He was even entrusted with the jewel in the crown: Les Paul's 'Number One' Goldtop. Here Tom talks us through the myriad mods of this historic instrument – and its "emotional" departure from his care

Words Jamie Dickson

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

Nobody alive knows more about Les Paul's 'Number One' 1952 Goldtop than Tom Doyle. After watching Tom, an accomplished guitarist and luthier, perform live in the mid-60s, Les invited him to become his personal tech. The term 'tech', however, falls somewhat short of describing what Les, with his tireless urge for tinkering, had Tom do for him.

"First of all, Les didn't like to sleep," Tom says. "I would be there until six o'clock in the morning working on guitars and I'd say, 'Les, I got to go home'. And he'd say, 'Okay, we'll work on this tomorrow.' I mean, it just never stopped. He just had so many ideas: he would think of them, dream of them constantly. And many, many times, he would tell me: 'Tom, this is all *supposed to be*, don't you know?' And I said, 'I guess I'm supposed to be here too.' And he'd say: 'Well, of course! That's why you're here.' It was such an honour to me – I idolised him since I was nine years old. And to have him ask me to work with him, well, forget it... That was my dream."

Tom says his initiation into the role of Les's right-hand man came when Les invited him round to assess some guitars that had fallen into disrepair. "It was the day after we'd met, when he'd come to see me play," Tom recalls. "He said, 'Tom, I want you up at the house tomorrow about three o'clock. Can you be there?' I said, 'Sure I can.' He said, 'I want to show you a few things...' So he took me down in the cellar underneath his kitchen and pointed to a row of guitars that were hanging on a sort of wire, with water dripping down on them. And I said, 'Les, this is terrible. These guitars are fantastic. You used these on your shows and Listerine commercials and all of that...' And he says: 'Well, that's why I'm having you look at them. You take that one, that one and that one home. I want to see what you can do.'"

> ***"I would be there until six o'clock in the morning working on guitars and I'd say 'Les, I got to go home'... He just had so many ideas: he would dream of them constantly"***

Tom passed this strange 'audition' for his guitar repair skills, returning the guitars to Les some weeks later, astonishing the guitarist with how perfectly he'd restored them. After that, it was game on for all Les's modding requests – with Tom as his 'Mr Fix It'. Tom says it wasn't long before Les brought his 'Number One' Goldtop to modify further.

"It was one of the early ones that I worked on, but he was still working with that guitar right up to the 70s. He was asking me to maintain it, put bigger

PHOTOS © CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2021

1. Gene Paul (left) with Tom Doyle holding 'Number One', which is to be auctioned at Christie's NY in October

2. The cold-rolled steel bridge of 'Number One' was custom made. Tom Doyle says, "Les didn't like the regular Gibson bridges, which couldn't be fitted to his ['52-spec] Goldtop because of the neck angle anyway. So he used a steel bridge with no saddles. He said: 'That's what I used on The Clunker [Les's earlier, modded Epiphone archtop].' This was a perfect way to get better sustain and also keep the action very low. It also presented a good angle for the tailpiece which was a Vibrola made by Kauffman"

"'Number One' was one of the early ones that I worked on, but Les was still working with that guitar right up to the 70s"

TOM DOYLE

Les Paul's 'Number One' in its case, much as it would have looked to a young Gene Paul in 1959 (see page 58), minus a few later mods!

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

18+

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3. The modded neck pickup was made by Les, Tom says. "They may be DeArmond magnets, but they were *not* DeArmond pickup windings – Les wound everything to be lower impedance"

4. The oversize pickguard was made and fitted to cover a large and crude bit of DIY pickup routing (see page 68) that Les, in a fit of innovative zeal, performed himself with 'a hot screwdriver'

5. Fitting the Kauffman Vibrola required some homegrown mods. Tom says, "The Vibrola had to have a plate added to extend it so it could be mounted on the guitar."

6. "Les initially liked heavy strings. So setting it up with 12 to 54 was common, but he slowly changed to a lot lighter gauge as he got older and it got tougher to hold down the strings"

7. The exact knobs fitted to the three-control layout (originally just two-control, Volume and Tone) would chop and change. The smallest knob selects between top or side output jacks

8. There are two jack sockets, the top one for high-impedance signal, the side for low. A large Cannon-type connector was fitted on top but Les changed it to a 1/4-inch jack later on

9. Like other early LPs from '52, the reverse of the headstock does not feature a serial number. Likewise, tuners appear to be single-ring 'Keystone' Kluson with no branding on the gear covers

10. Tom Doyle says he refretted 'Number One' three times with progressively larger frets. Interestingly, he adds that Les liked an unpolished surface to the fret crowns

11. The guitar's truss-rod cover is actually fitted slightly off the centreline. As with other early Les Pauls the dot of the 'i' in the Gibson logo is in contact with the 'G', not floating free

12. Evidence of Les's love for 'Number One' can be found on the highly worn fretboard, which "looks scalloped". The neck is bound, unlike early production models, a one-off custom feature

PHOTOS © CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2021

frets in it, change this, change that, make a pickguard that would fit the pickups when he moved them – all that kind of stuff."

Tom mentions that Les always kept updating the 'Number One' because of sound, above all else. "He loved the sound of this guitar. He loved the sustain on this guitar. So he didn't really move away from it. Essentially, he was really striving to get what he wanted out of it."

Some of the primary mods relate to getting low-impedance signal out of the guitar. Tom explains what Les was looking for when plugging straight into the board for recording. "He wanted clarity and sustain. Not the [compression-based] sustain that came later on with the Les Paul guitars, with amplifiers in overdrive – but resonant sustain. He used to say, 'Everything has resonance; just hit that table with your hand and you can feel it vibrating. That's what's happening on the guitar.' That's what he wanted to achieve.

"The pickups are mounted directly into the wood. Les chopped out wood to move the pickups to find out where the best positions would be," adds Tom.

Besides the huge route for pickup positioning, the guitar is also notable for its hum-cancelling phantom coils, which pre-date Seth Lover's PAF. Tom says, however, that it's a myth that Les Paul didn't like humbucking pickups, though he had some reservations about a side-by-side coil layout.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN BORUCKI

"Les loved the sound on this guitar... So he didn't really move away from it. Essentially he was really striving to get what he wanted from it"

"I think it's a major misconception that Les did not like humbuckers," Tom says. "He was using [the noise-reducing principle behind humbucking pickups] since the late 40s. He just didn't like humbuckers where the coils were side by side...he preferred humbuckers that were piggybacked [stacked], because it was clearer and there'd be no distortion. He also liked putting coils in different parts of the guitar – and using that method he could still get humbucking."

While we're on the subject of misconceptions, Tom is also keen to explain why Les didn't warm to the SG-shape Les Paul model that supplanted the singlecut Les Paul in 1961. "He didn't like it in the sense that the neck was very movable when you played. He had a lot of strength in his hands. And with an SG you can actually create vibrato with the neck moving back and forth, with the original neck tenon that they had on it. And so that part of it, he didn't like – but he loved the fact it had a very fast neck, no question about it. He could reach even

PHOTOS © CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2021

UNDER THE HOOD OF ‘NUMBER ONE’

LES'S FIRST APPROVED LP

13. Beneath the oversize modded pickguard is the infamous ‘swimming pool route’ that allowed Les to move the pickups’ position and house a hum-cancelling Q-coil to reduce noise

14. Heavily modded electronics included a small transformer to step up or step down output/impedance

15. A much-enlarged pickup-selector control cavity houses another ‘phantom’ humbucking coil. There was one coil for each pickup so both were hum-suppressing

further up the neck than on a regular Les Paul, too – you just couldn’t get the same kind of sound, resonance-wise because it was not the thickness of a Les Paul body and also it didn’t have a maple cap on it like his Goldtop. But, at first, he just thought, ‘Well, we’ve got to go with it because these changes are for reasons of economics and because people want a lighter guitar.’”

To Tom’s surprise, after many years of working together, Les Paul decided to give ‘Number One’ to the man who had helped him maintain and upgrade it for so long.

“I certainly get emotional with it,” Tom admits. “When he gave it to me, he said this is for you, Tom. You should have this guitar. You’re the one to take care of it. And I said, ‘Are you sure?’ and he said ‘I’m sure, or I wouldn’t be giving it to you. Here it is, take it.’ And nobody knew I had it. And I didn’t tell anybody either, because that was what I had with Les – confidence in one another, but confidentiality as well.

“I do feel very emotional about it, I really do. But it’s time for the world to see what Les was and what was most important to him. And we’re so proud to be able to present it to the world – Gene Paul and I are doing this, and it’s just amazing. But I have to say that it’s tough for me to let it go.” G

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

16. Les Paul wasn’t put off by the looks of the SG-style Les Paul and liked its neck access – but felt its neck design led to tuning instability

MASTER MUSICIAN

Steely Dan and Doobie Brothers legend Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter shares vivid memories of the "joyous" experience of playing alongside Les Paul **Words** Jamie Dickson

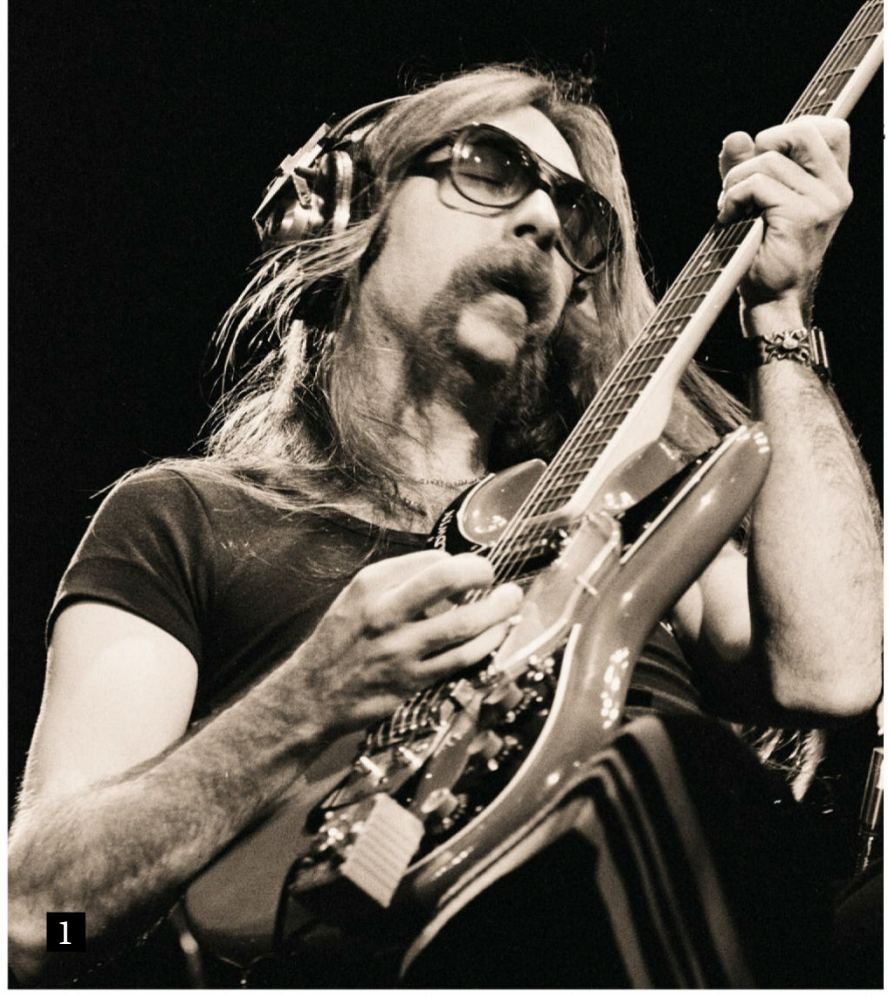


PHOTO BY KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

"There are guitar owners, there are guitar players, and then there are guitarists. Les was a guitarist. The man was the personification of excellence," Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter says, with some authority.

Jeff is one of the most respected players in the world, who was a founding member of Steely Dan and a session ace with a list of credits any player would envy. Indeed, his solos on tracks such as Steely Dan's *Bodhisattva* and *My Old School* gave the band a reputation for hot playing. But just as thousands of aspiring guitarists have looked up to Jeff's guitar work, so Jeff has always held special regard for a master of an earlier generation: Les Paul.

"I first met him when I was 13 or 14," Jeff recalls. "I was working at Dan Armstrong's guitar shop on 48th Street in New York, and Les wandered in. Everybody eventually came to Danny's shop because we were the only game – not just in town but pretty much anywhere – to get good custom electronics or for just customising your guitar. We met up occasionally after that. Then when I started to get more involved with Steely Dan, and The Doobie Brothers and stuff, there was a resurgence in interest in Les Paul, which was great.

> *"There was a lot of stuff for a human brain to decode [in Les's music], but, no matter what, the emotion and the joy always showed through all of that"*

"There were times when I would actually play with him and he even asked me to play bass one time because he said nobody knew any of the songs [he wanted to play]. I was an old-school kid, playing out of fake books when I was 14, 15 years old, so I knew all the standards and could play that stuff. Finally, he would invite me to come down and play as much as I could whenever I was in New York. After that, we'd stay in touch on the phone. We'd talk and spend as much time together as we could. A lot of mutual respect there, which was very kind of him."

As a top-flight guitarist who played alongside Les frequently, Jeff is in a unique position to evaluate what was so unique about Les's approach to playing.

"He had his own style, and his style was very much connected to his ability to record – and the technology that came along with it," Jeff says. "If you're using slap echo, the way you play leverages that effect and enhances your playing. Same with reverb, tremolo, anything that you do to affect the instrument. So Les's style of playing was not only brilliant as a guitarist but also brilliant as a person who could ride that technology wave and use it to enhance his playing."

Les's fusion of virtuoso technique with elaborate recording techniques could occasionally catch out those who aspired to play like him, Jeff recalls ruefully.

"One time we were playing *Lover*, one of his famous tunes, and there was a part where it was very high up on the fretboard and really fast. When I was a kid, I practised that over and over again to get it right. When we did the gig, I played it and he was laughing his ass off. I said, 'Les, what's up?' He said, 'I just want you to know, the part that you're playing, I played it at half speed and sped it up!' So I busted my ass to learn how to play it, which is fine. In fact, that was even better. Like, 'Okay, that means I improved my technique and my capability as a player, thanks to Les...'"

But however much technology Les used, it was always in service to what was happening on the fretboard – never a gimmick nor a blind to cover a lack of ideas. The music that lay beneath even his most inventive studio techniques always overflowed with creativity and elan.

"The one thing I will always remember about Les was the joy of his playing," Jeff reflects. "Every time we'd play, we'd spend half of our time laughing. There was just this joyous, wonderful... It's hard to describe. It's a nonverbal communication. I could play something, and Les would look at me and break out in laughter. That's one of the things about his music that was so appealing to me – because, yes, there was a lot of technology, there was a lot of stuff for a human brain to decode, but, no matter what, the emotion and the joy always showed through all of that. And that is the mark of an incredible musician." G

PHOTO BY JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES

1. Jeff, pictured here in 1979, first met Les Paul when he was just a teenager. And he remained not just a fan but also a friend from then on

2. Respect for Les and his contribution to the guitar was, and continues to be, widespread. Here, Les is pictured with (left to right): Stephen Stills, Slim Jim Phantom, Slash, Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter and Steve Vai in LA in 1998

HOP
UP

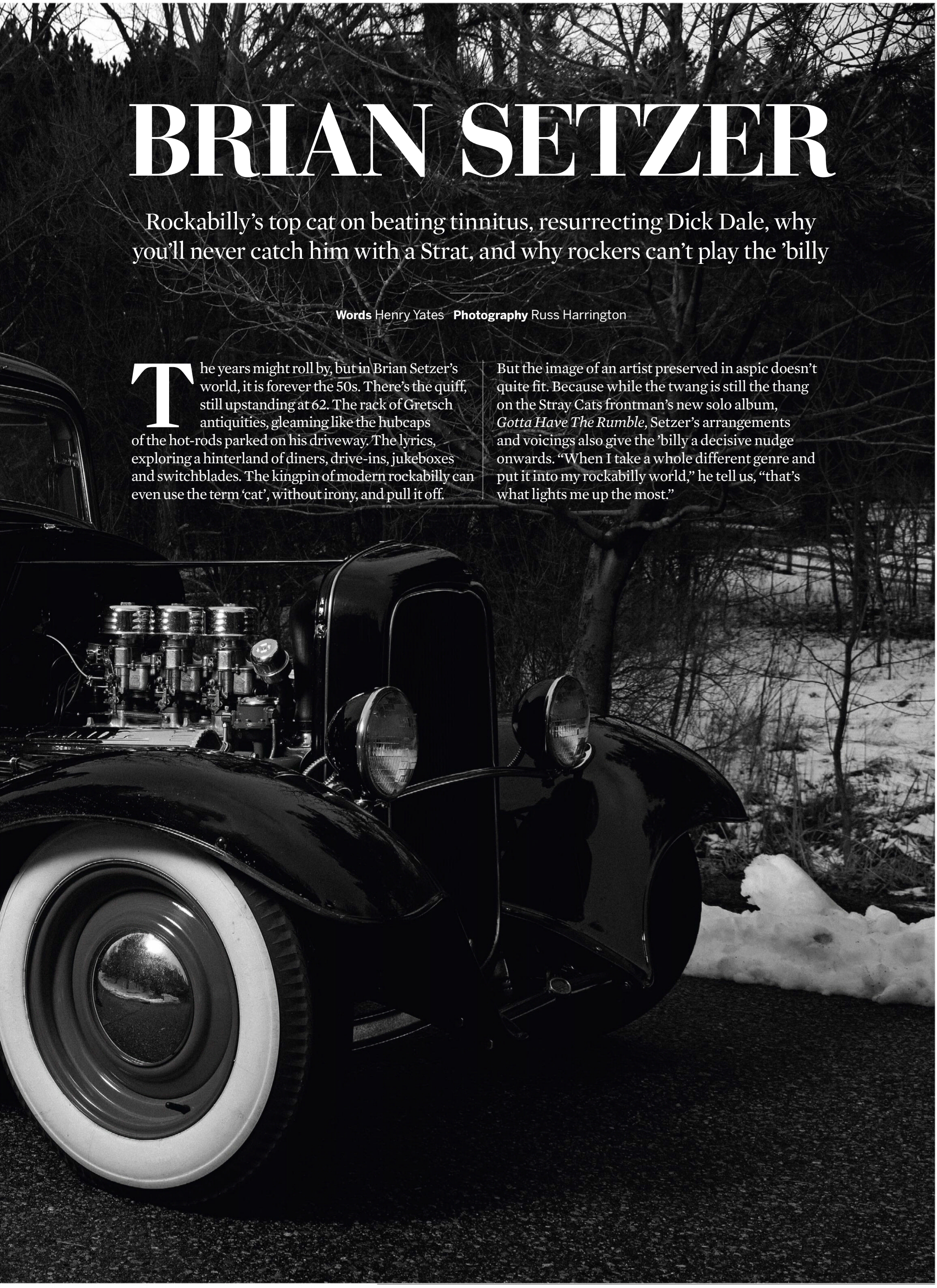
BRIAN SETZER

Rockabilly's top cat on beating tinnitus, resurrecting Dick Dale, why you'll never catch him with a Strat, and why rockers can't play the 'billy

Words Henry Yates **Photography** Russ Harrington

The years might roll by, but in Brian Setzer's world, it is forever the 50s. There's the quiff, still upstanding at 62. The rack of Gretsch antiquities, gleaming like the hubcaps of the hot-rods parked on his driveway. The lyrics, exploring a hinterland of diners, drive-ins, jukeboxes and switchblades. The kingpin of modern rockabilly can even use the term 'cat', without irony, and pull it off.

But the image of an artist preserved in aspic doesn't quite fit. Because while the twang is still the thang on the Stray Cats frontman's new solo album, *Gotta Have The Rumble*, Setzer's arrangements and voicings also give the 'billy a decisive nudge onwards. "When I take a whole different genre and put it into my rockabilly world," he tell us, "that's what lights me up the most."

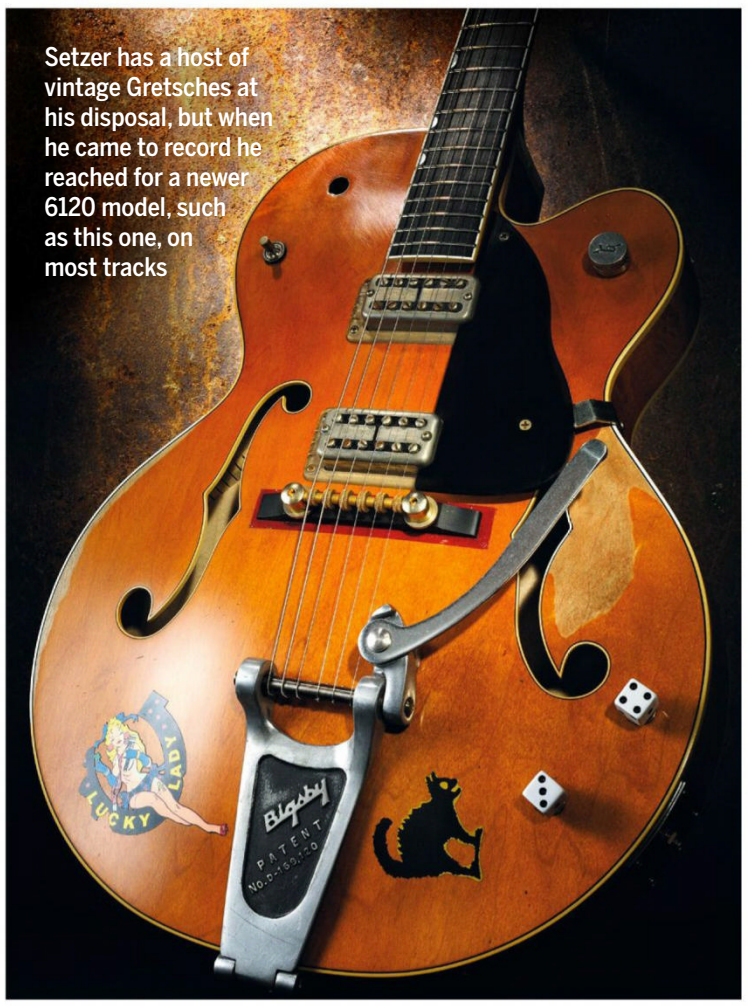


What's the significance of that album title, *Gotta Have The Rumble*?
"Of course, it's a reference to my motorcycles, which give me my peace and quiet, believe it or not. That's my meditation – I just hop on and ride. But then it became about the tinnitus I had going on and the bigger amps I had to use. So I thought, 'Well, *Gotta Have The Rumble*, that refers to both things.'"

How bad was the tinnitus?
"It was driving me mad. Everything was getting louder on stage. I'd say to [Stray Cats rhythm section, Slim] Jim [Phantom] and Lee [Rocker], 'Are you guys turning up?' 'Nah, we're just playin', man.' All of a sudden, it was like, 'Ah, it's the earplugs.' They'd gone bad. It's real and you have to address it. I saw an audiologist and I'm okay now, but for those people who don't have it, imagine a tea kettle going off in your head, 24/7. Like, 'Turn off the kettle!' 'It's already off!' Everything was starting to fall apart. The guitar, the amps and me had all pretty much fallen apart. We needed a break."

What emotions does that condition bring up for a guitar player?
"It's horrible. Nevermind thinking about playing music again. Playing was actually a relief because it would take your mind off it. It was the quieter times that drove you nuts, y'know, when you tried to sleep or just go for a peaceful walk. It goes on all the time. It's maddening, is all I can say. If I could recommend to all your readers – please wear some earplugs, now. Because we didn't wear 'em. Over the years, you didn't question anything. You're in the next town, there's your guitar – get up there and rock 'n' roll."

What guitars did you bring into the studio?
"It's pretty much all Gretsch. Because I find if I stray from my Gretsch arsenal, it doesn't sound like me. But here's the thing. I'm looking at three vintage Gretsch guitars right now. One doesn't play in tune. One has scratchy pickups. On the other, the Bigsby is broke, right? But when I get the itch and I want to go down to the studio, I don't want to mess around. So I have a newer black 6120 Setzer model – it's maybe four years old – and it plays so well. I picked up a '59, too, but when I plugged them both in, I preferred the new one. So I played that Setzer model on most of the tracks you hear. Some of them are a '59, and on *Turn You On, Turn Me On*, that's an old Duo Jet."



Setzer has a host of vintage Gretsches at his disposal, but when he came to record he reached for a newer 6120 model, such as this one, on most tracks

PHOTO BY JESSE WILD

Why does Gretsch cast such a spell over you?
"As a kid, listening to the radio, I felt like the most important thing was to have your own tone. At that time, I was hearing Eric Clapton, Creedence Clearwater Revival – and I knew those players right away because of the guitar tone. So even back then, I realised, I gotta get that together. A Gibson, to me, was too muddy; I didn't want that tone. And a Fender, to me, was too thin. But the Gretsch was right in-between them. It got the twang of the Fender and the fatness of the Gibson. It fit perfectly for me."

The Tele seems like it'd be great for rockabilly, too. Don't you like them?
"I do like Telecasters. But it's funny with guitars: I like the way other people play 'em. I've always been fascinated with the looks of a Stratocaster. I love the way they look. They're mid-century modern art. Y'know, it looks like an old 50s coffee table. But I can't play 'em. I don't like the scale. It's got the middle pickup and the volume knob right in the way. I love the way other people play 'em, I just can't get a sound out of 'em."

Are the Gretsches worth the feedback?
"I've never gotten a feedback out of 'em that I can't control. Part of the sound for me on the Gretsch is that I play with that extra gain. The sound comes back through the guitar, through the f-holes, so moving around the amp, you can play with sustain, you can play with overtones. That's why I never needed anything like an overdrive pedal. Because if I wanted a little more gain, I'd just stand closer to the amp. And then, if I wanted it to be more twangy, I'd just turn away from the amp. So I didn't need pedals."

How did the tinnitus affect your amp choice this time?
"I started out with smaller amps. But they just didn't have the rumble. So I went back to my tried-and-true '63 Bassmans. Those things are loud. And it was like, 'There it is!' I also used the vibrato on an old Fender Bandmaster, and a Deluxe Reverb for the rockabilly traditional. Those three amps pretty much knocked it on the head."

You're not alone in your obsession with cars and guitars; think Billy Gibbons and Jeff Beck. What's the appeal?
"Jeff can build those damn hot-rods from scratch. He almost cut off the tip of his finger once. I said to him, 'You've gotta remember what's most important here!' With the hot-rods, it's about individual expression. There's no two hot-rods the same. You're not just going out and buying a new Bentley. That only takes money. Hot-rods, you've got to create it and then you get to ride

around in that thing. It's like rolling art. For me, also, with the motorcycles and the cars, it's adrenaline. It's about going fast. It gives me that rush."

What role does the car play in rockabilly history?
"I think it started with the blues, people talking about their new car. Again, it's your personal expression. Especially with the rockabilly music, it goes with the whole lifestyle. Because if you've got the car, you got the guitar and you got the gal – you got the whole package. The only all-car album I can think of is The Beach Boys when they did *Little Deuce Coupe* [1963]. That entire album was about cars. I don't know if there's anything like that in rockabilly. But there's enough songs to pick and choose."

What's more impressive – your car collection or your guitar collection?
"Here's the thing. I don't have anything I don't use. I don't have wall-hanger guitars or closet guitars. I don't have, certainly, the money or the time for a big car collection. I can pretty much get by with what I work on, and that's my rule of thumb: if I don't play it or I don't ride it, I don't have it."

You've said the inspiration for *Smash Up On Highway One* was Dick Dale.
"Yeah, that's true. When the Stray Cats toured in 2019, I was playing *Misirlou*. I really liked the Eastern hook of

"With the hot-rods, it's about individual expression… It's like rolling art. For me, also, it's adrenaline. It gives me that rush"

The title of Setzer's new album, *Gotta Have The Rumble*, references his beloved motorcycles – but also battling tinnitus with bigger amps. Smaller amps "just didn't have the rumble", he says

that track. I thought, 'Man, I'd like to write something like that.' So I came up with that crazy lick. I don't know what scale it is, actually. It's a mode, but I don't think it's exact – it probably has a note or two changed. Maybe one of your readers can weigh in on that. The idea was to insert that into my sound, which is the rockabilly base. Then there's *The Cat With 9 Wives*: the note in that lick should be an E, but I play an E♭, which I thought was kinda clever. It's kind of a passing tone. That's how you keep the whole thing fresh – you keep inventing things."

Do you think there's a correlation between rockabilly and surf music?
"It's interesting you say that. I know a lot of rockabilly musicians and they're really influenced by the surf music. There does seem to be an overlap in the guitar tone, with the reverb. The Ventures' *Live In Japan '65* – my God, it's fantastic."

How did you get that amazing tone on *Stack My Money*?
"Isn't that a good sound? The hardest sound to get, for me, is a strong, clean tone, without it breaking up or being plunky. Back in the day, Chet Atkins was always after that – he wanted a clear sustain. We got that tone quite by accident. I used the Deluxe Reverb, an early 60s one, y'know, the blackface with the one speaker. And by accident, we left the vocal mic on. It was way distant, right? I came in and I played, and I was like, 'Wow, that's just what I'm looking for.' And the engineer said, 'Wait, I just gotta turn off the vocal mic.' When he turned off the vocal mic, the sound went away. It was like, 'Put that vocal mic back on!' – and it happened again. So, trial and error."

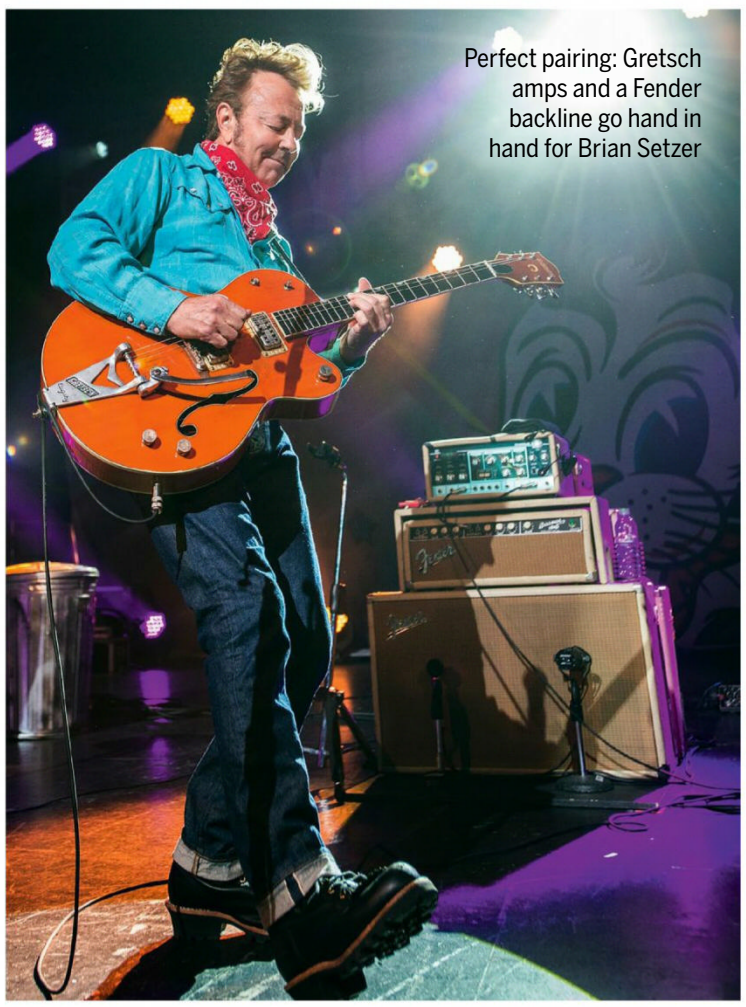
The arrangement of *The Wrong Side Of The Tracks* is really sophisticated.
"That ain't rockabilly. That could be a theme song from a 50s rockabilly movie, with the strings and chord changes. But there wouldn't be a blues or rockabilly musician who would have written that. That's more like something you would hear from Elmer Bernstein. I'm not comparing myself to one of those composers. But that's a soundtrack that I made into a rockabilly song. It's got sophisticated chordwork, but I made it fit into my world."

When you think about the architects of rockabilly guitar technique from the 40s and 50s, who do you regard most highly?
"For me, there's two guys – and then there's a hundred guys you've never heard of. Let me start with the hundred guys you've never heard of. Because the hundred guys who did a great guitar solo in the 50s, they came out of the hills, or they drove a truck for a living. And they had one song, and they drove to a little studio in Memphis or somewhere, and they made the song – and if it wasn't a hit, they were back driving the truck. And you'd go, 'Who was that?' Nobody knows. Like, who played the guitar solo on *Red Hot*? I know it was Roland Janes. But nobody knows who that is. Nobody really knows who the two popular guys who most affected me are – Scotty Moore and Cliff Gallup. I'm sure if you asked 90 per cent of today's guitar players, they might not know those two. But they were the most consistent guys, the two who kept coming up and hitting the ball out of the park."

If you could set the controls of a time machine to any city and scene, where would you go?
"I'd go back to Memphis in '56. You have to remember how conservative our societies were back then. To be making that music back then – to be really shaking it up – it must have been incredible."

Why does rockabilly have such an enduring appeal?
"Because it comes from the heart. It speaks to you. It's like the blues. But, to me, it's much more exciting than the blues. It's sexy. It has the whole musical package. It has the style. It has pizazz. It's not about combing your hair a certain way or wearing a certain outfit. It gets something going inside you. And for guitar players, it's the best music you can play. You can do anything with it. You can inject jazz, country, blues, into that style."

Do you think rockabilly players need a whole different skill set? Could a rock guitarist play this stuff?
"Well, let's just take two generic guys. If you take a generic rocker and tell him to play rockabilly, no. Because the rockabilly players are versed more in fingerpicking, which comes from Chet Atkins, and single-string solos, which come from people like Charlie Christian, they come from jazz. I guarantee you that 99 per cent of the rock guys could not play rockabilly. Could it go the other way? Yeah, I think it could. Because rock music is more based on chords, and single-string riffs that are based on a pentatonic scale. So without being a snob, I don't think the rock guys could do the 'billy." G

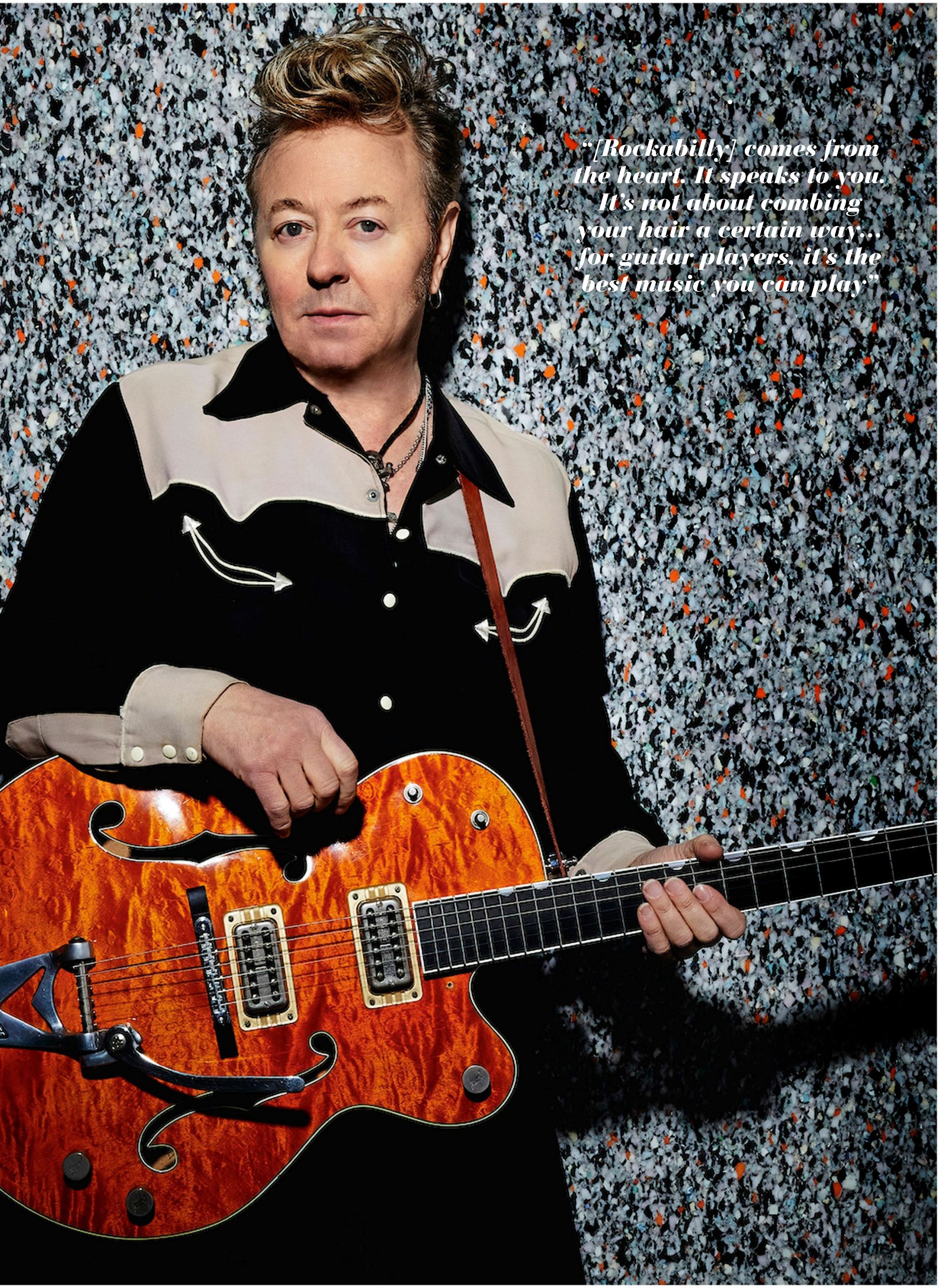


Perfect pairing: Gretsch amps and a Fender backline go hand in hand for Brian Setzer

PHOTO BY STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Brian Setzer's new album, *Gotta Have The Rumble*, is available now on Surfdog Records

www.briansetzer.com



"[Rockabilly] comes from the heart. It speaks to you. It's not about combing your hair a certain way... for guitar players, it's the best music you can play"

New Fidelity

The Streamliners might well be Gretsch's start-up range, but with numerous new 2021 models and an on-trend new pickup design, they're gathering quite a head of steam

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

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GRETSCH STREAMLINER G2622T-P90 & G2655T-P90 £609 EACH

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

What You Need To Know

1. **What's special about the pickups?** These are brand-new designs specially conceived for the 2021 Streamliner models. They're called FideliSonic 90s and are loosely based on the P-90 'staple' neck pickup of the original Gibson Les Paul Custom.

2. **But aren't these just cheaper versions of the Electromatics?** Yes, they're the entry-point into the world of Gretsch, but they also aim to broaden the appeal of these classic designs beyond the be-quiffed rockabilly rebels. For the money they're well conceived and built, too.

3. **Do all these Streamliners have centre blocks?** The new pickups are only available on these centre-blocked models (also without Bigsbys). Streamliners without centre blocks include the full-depth G2420T Hollow Body with Bigsby and the G2420 Hollow Body with Chromatic II tailpiece – both with Broad'Tron humbuckers.

Despite an aesthetic that takes us right back to the birth of rock 'n' roll, Gretsch is a surprisingly innovative guitar maker. What are we saying? Okay, the pictures of our review pair look pretty retro, but under the hood there's plenty going on to indicate that Gretsch is far from a backward-looking heritage brand just putting out reruns of its past glories. And these are the lowly Streamliners that, as Gretsch's product manager Adam Bowden-Smith explains, are "not just the entrance into the Gretsch world but also the Gretsch guitar for people who haven't thought of owning a Gretsch guitar before. They do the Gretsch sound, but also all the other sounds you might want out of that style of guitar." More from Adam later on.

Four of the new 2021 models – the Bigsby-equipped G2622T-P90 and G2655T-P90 that we have on review, which are also available with hardtail V-Stoptail options – feature a new pickup design, the FideliSonic 90 single coil, which outwardly looks like a 'staple' magnet P-90. These new pickups have nickel-plated covers with pretty large surrounding cream plastic 'bezels' (purely for looks) and give this foursome a different aesthetic to the more regular Gretsch Broad'Tron humbuckers, or the more standard P-90 single coils of other Streamliners.

> We've been big fans of the Streamliner range since its inception in 2016

Yet the fundamental difference of these guitars are their chambered centre blocks, which create a very different guitar from the original-style hollowbodies. They're installed in the larger 406.4mm (16-inch) wide 2622 and the smaller Junior-style 355.6mm (14-inch) wide 2655.

Now, the Streamliners are made in Indonesia and, as we only recently reported with our review of the G2215 P90 Streamliner Jr Jet (issue 473), the build is really very tidy. The finish does appear on the thick side and is a little too shiny, but the colour choice on both is good. The 2655 goes for a snappy two-tone style with three top colours: Mint Metallic, Sahara Metallic and our more muted Midnight Sapphire metallic, all with the same Vintage Mahogany Stain to the back, sides and neck. The 2622's options are all-over and rather

1

2

more dowdy colours: our lightly 'bursted Brownstone is joined by another brown, Forge Glow (both with black pickguards), while the third option is a dark grey-ish Gunmetal with a tortoise pickguard. These more muted colours seem to reinforce the different Streamliner style, which is less showy than classic Gretsch.

Size and colour aside, they share more than just their pickups. Unlike other Streamliners, they use laminated mahogany (actually sapele, confirms Adam), instead of maple, for the bodies, and on our larger G2622 it's noticeably striped, recalling the classic Guild Starfire semis. Through the unbound f-holes you can see the tidily kerfed linings of the quite traditional construction. That chambered centre block is spec'd as spruce, but looks more like the light-coloured nato that's also used for the necks (which have a spliced headstock), both with a dark laurel fingerboard with small oval inlays and single cream binding; it also extends around the large three-a-side headstock. Both bodies are bound, too, the top edges with an inner purfling strip.

Hardware is consistent across both models with those pretty generic enclosed tuners, a synthetic bone nut and an 'Adjusto-Matic' tune-o-matic bridge with

3

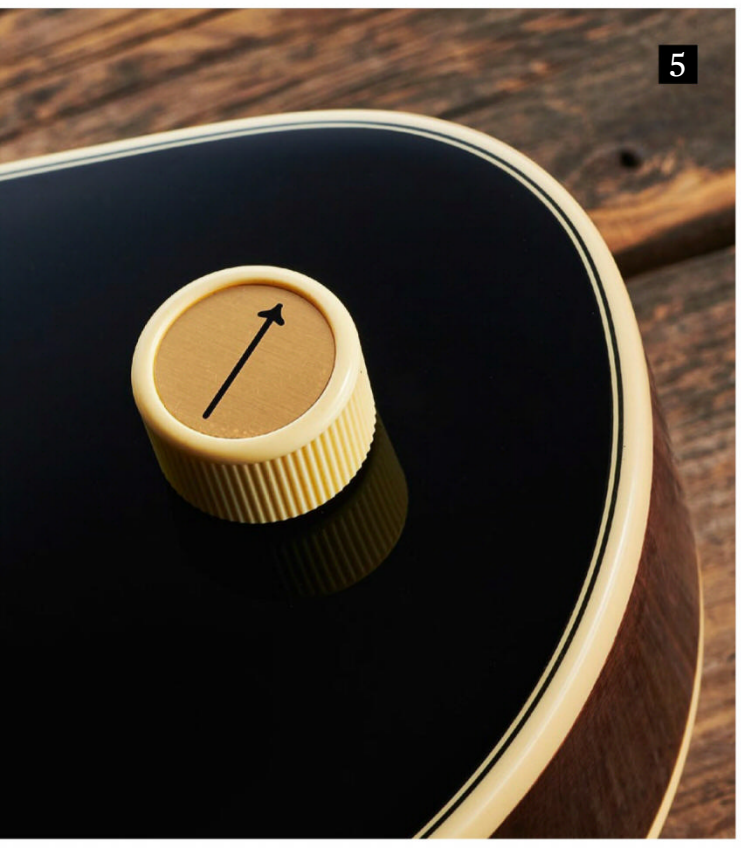
1. Very much a part of the classic Gretsch appeal, both our review models feature Bigsby vibratos. This is the larger B70 of the G2655T-P90

2. The fingerboards of these guitars are laurel, one of the many alternatives introduced after the recent CITES restrictions on rosewood

3. Another change to these guitars is the use of mahogany (technically sapele) for the body laminations. The previous Streamliners use laminated maple

4. These new 'staple' inspired FideliSonic 90s look like a repro of an old pickup rather than a new design. Unusual for a soapbar P-90 on which they're based are the nickel-plated metal covers

5. The control on the treble-side horn is a master volume (another throwback to the Gretsches of yesteryear) and with the individual pickup volumes and master tone makes up the 'Tone Pot' circuit



handy-for-height adjustment slot-head posts. Our smaller guitar features a 'horse-shoe' B50 licensed Bigsby; our larger guitar goes for the longer-tailed B70.

Should we get excited by control knobs? Well, we kind of do here. These all-new "radio arrow" knobs are perfectly named, the sort of things you'd use to tune in the BBC World Service back in the day.

Feel & Sounds

Classic-sized centre-blocked semis can be surprisingly heavy, but that's not's the case here with our larger 2622 coming in at 3.19kg (7.02lb) and our smaller 2655 obviously lighter at 2.85kg (6.27lb). The larger guitar has its upper strap button on the bass-side horn and feels very comfortable and balanced strapped on. The smaller G2655's upper strap button is on the base of the heel, which slightly tips the guitar forward, but, again, there's no neck dive with a lightly textured strap, and the more compact feel of the guitar makes it very manageable. Seated, it feels much more like a solidbody.

There's very little difference between the neck shapes: both are spec'd as having a "Thin U", which suggests a thin neck with quite square shoulders. In reality, both models have what we'd call a comfortable C profile. They are pretty much bang-on 43mm at the nut on with a depth of 21.3mm at the 1st fret filling out to 24.4mm by the 12th on the 2622 and slightly slimmer at 23.6mm on the 2655. The frets aren't over-high with a good width (approximately 2.64mm wide by 1mm high) and setups are nicely dialled in with a low string height at the 12th of 1.3mm on the high E and 1.5mm on the low E. Fret tops and ends are nicely fettled, and the nuts are properly cut, but we do have good ol' Bigsbys here. Both feel a little stiff, but after string stretching, tuning stability is pretty much spot on, with the usual caveat that these are designed for light shimmers. Both instruments have a lively, almost acoustic-y response enhanced by those vibratos, no doubt.

However, if these new FideliSonic 90 single coils suggest a brighter voicing than a more standard P-90 (certainly those used

The chambered centre blocks create a very different guitar from the original-style hollowbodies

UNDER THE HOOD

A closer look at Gretsch's new FideliSonic 90 pickups

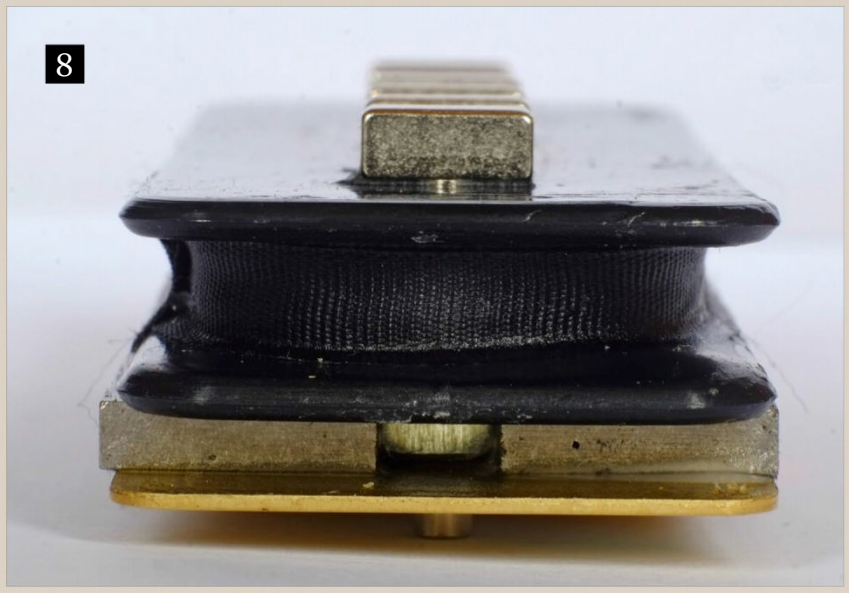
Removing the pickups you see that the centre block is far from solid [pic 6] – one reason for the lack of weight. Imagine two longitudinal bars running between the top and back (and connecting them) allowing the bridge and Bigsby to be firmly screwed but the actual centre is air. Small wooden blocks are necessary to mount the pickups on – with them unscrewed and removed, the control harness can be pulled through with ease. It's therefore pretty easy to investigate the controls, and we find Alpha 'Made in Korea' A500k pots, although there's no treble-bleed on the master volume.

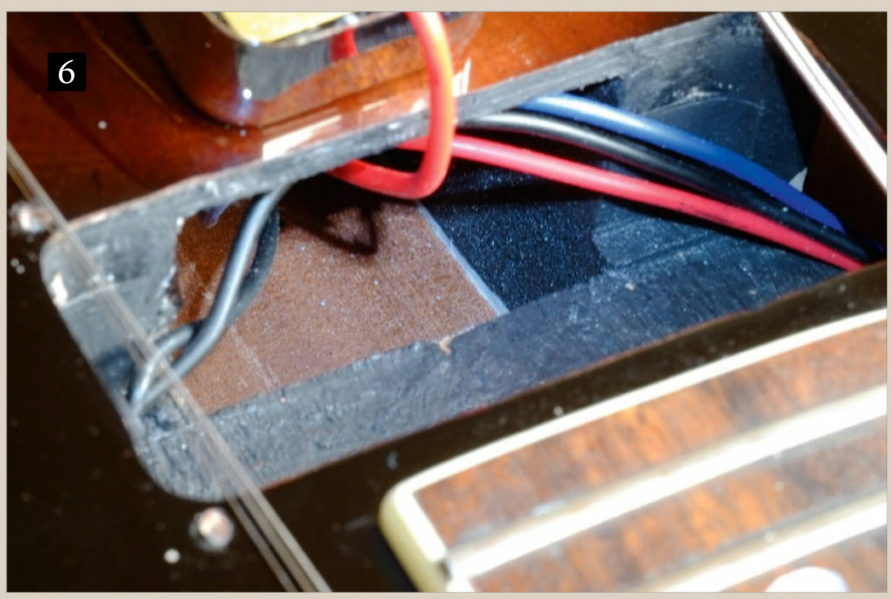
The original 'staple' P-90 used rectangular (height-adjustable) magnetic polepieces; these FideliSonics are different. The BHK label on the brass baseplate [pic 7] tells us they're made by Booheung, the giant Korean pickup maker. Removing the FideliSonic's cover, you also see there's no additional waxing – only the coil is potted like a standard P-90, which would normally have a plastic cover.

You can also clearly see that this is very much a standard P-90, its two bar magnets sitting under the coil and connecting to the central polepieces [pic 8]. Now, these are *not* magnetic poles like the originals or any contemporary replicas we've seen. The 'staples' are simply 3.2mm square section pieces, 7.95mm long, joined to 2.75mm diameter steel pins that pass through the coil and protrude out of the brass baseplate.

Polepieces aside, it's nearly identical to the standard BHK P-90 Gretsch uses [pic 9], but here the bobbin appears less full, accounting for the lower DCR, and the magnets under the coil are longer, too (63.5mm versus 57.7mm). We get readings of 7.9kohms (bridge) and 6.9k (neck); the standard BHK P-90 on the Gretsch Junior Jet at the neck, for example, measures 9kohms.

These differences all move the FideliSonic away from a standard P-90. Listening to the pickup without its cover in the neck position of our T-style [pic 10], with just master volume (and a treble bleed circuit) and tone, we'd definitely conclude that the cover is rounding the sound as we hear on our review guitars.





6. As you look through the neck pickup cavity you can see the hollow centre block
7. The base of the FideliSonic shows its BHK origin in Korea
8. This side view of the FideliSonic 90 shows the two bar magnets
9. Polepieces aside, the FideliSonic is very like a standard BHK P-90 unit (rear)
10. With its cover removed, we try the FideliSonic on our T-style reference

11. The 14-inch wide Junior-bodied G2655T-P90 appears a lot smaller than the 16-inch 2622. As a consequence, the smaller 'horse-shoe' Bigbsy B50 is used here

12. Both guitars feature these rather large pickup-surrounding cream plastic 'bezels'. They serve no function other than appearance and give a different look from other Gretsches

on other Streamliner models), that's not exactly what we hear. After warming up our test rig with both a Tele-style solidbody (with a Lollar staple P-90 at the neck) and a PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar with pretty standard BHK P-90s, we're wondering if our master tone control on either Gretsch is full up. It is...

One thing to bear in mind is the pickup placement: the bridge single coils on both are some distance from the bridge, which clearly softens the response. Conversely, the neck pickups sit slightly closer to the bridge due to those surrounding bezels and it also means the distance between the two pickups is relatively narrow, which informs what we hear with both pickups on.

These are not only smooth in the high-end, then, but quite rounded, too, and there's way less contrast to the bridge and neck compared with that T-style reference. Pulling back the volume, while obviously decreasing the output (which is easily compensated for with a slight clean boost) does thin the sound a little, and picking close to the bridge in particular begins to get us into more classic Gretsch-y ballpark. There's quite a midrange honk compared with either of our references; with a bit of slapback and a hint of hair the bridge is a pretty authentic rockabilly voice, less thick and with that smooth-nosed punch.

These FideliSonic 90s are hard to pin down... The guitars' sizes also inform what we hear

The mix is where the money lies for those bouncing rockabilly rhythms, of course, but, again, it's a little thicker than you might expect. The neck on its own sounds rounded and less raunchy than the bridge – it lightens up with volume reduction, while conversely with some overdrive its sounds become rather humbucking-like. Rather like many Gold Foils we've tried – both old and new – these FideliSonic 90s are hard to pin down: on the one hand they almost sound like a low-output humbucker with the tone rolled back a little, but the response is a little more single coil.

Adding a little more hair and a timed delay pushes us to rootsy Americana, that sort of Buddy Miller signature sound, and kicking in a gnarly Supro Drive we're definitely into 60s garage-rock grainy and fuzzy grime – a direction that really does seem to suit both guitars. The pickups are single coils, but pretty well behaved in terms of hum pickup, while the mix on both is hum-cancelling. The size of the guitars also informs what we hear. The bigger

guitar feels roomier, quite loose-sounding, the smaller body a little more focused, and not surprisingly the larger 2622 edges into feedback more quickly when pushed. Although the light weights suggest a hollowbody, the response is definitely more 'semi', but neither sound nor feel like a more solid ES-335-alike.

Both guitars are great players. We're more taken with the larger 2622 for a strapped-on gigging guitar, but, hey, that might be all that Gretsch conditioning over the past decades.

Verdict

We'll put our hands up and say we've been big fans of Gretsch's Streamliner range since its inception back in 2016. The combination of affordability, quality and (up to a point) broader appeal ticks all our boxes. Neither of these guitars changes that opinion, but we are a little surprised by their voicing. The larger body 2622 especially veers dangerously close to being too smooth and mellow and, for some, simply not bright enough.

Yet everywhere you look pickup makers are bringing back antiquated and often niche pickup designs – Gold Foils, Dynasonics and plenty more – and these FideliSonics might reference that short-lived Gibson P-90 staple style that's

STAPLE DIET

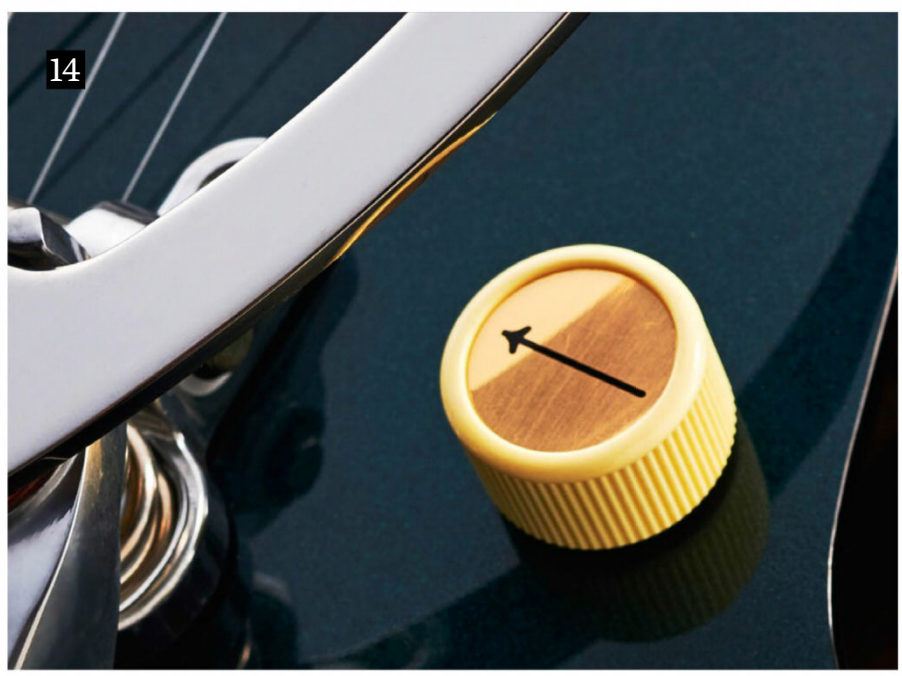
Don't know your staple from a paper clip? Here's a brief history of the staple P-90

What we call a 'staple' P-90 is also known as an 'Alnico' or 'Alnico V'. It was inspired by the Dynasonic – which was originally known as the Gretsch-DeArmond Fidelatone, whose magnets were cannibalised by Les Paul on the guitar we feature in this issue – although instead of using circular rod magnet polepieces it used rectangular-shaped Alnico V magnets that were height adjustable, like the Dynasonic.

The 'staple' appeared briefly on the first 1954 to '57 Gibson Les Paul Custom, after which it was replaced by a trio of the new-fangled Gibson humbuckers. Its Achilles' heel was that height-adjustable feature: many would raise the powerful magnets too close to the strings, affecting the vibration of the string and producing some odd warbling 'wolf' notes. Aside from the convoluted and costly mechanism necessary to raise and lower each magnet, this is one reason why most contemporary makers who offer a staple P-90 don't offer this function. Jason Lollar's staple P-90 is a good example, but here in the UK Mojo does offer both styles as well as a humbucking-sized staple.

Lollar states its staple P-90 "tone is midway between that splashy harmonic-laden Fender tone and the more liquid and woody sounding Gibson P-90 tone" with "a punchier attack with more clarity to the overtones than a typical P-90". Mojo simply states that its staple is "brighter than a standard P-90 but retains P-90 character".

Of the new staple-inspired FideliSonic 90s, Gretsch says: "These single-coil pickups retain the full warm tone of a traditional P-90 with a distinct top-end that is articulate and well defined."



13. Despite the shrunken size and smaller Bigsby, all the remaining hardware, pickups and electrics of the 2655 are the same as the larger 2622

14. Recalling the style of radio knobs from the dark ages, these "radio arrow" knobs are unique (so far, at least) to these Streamliners

15

They move effortlessly from jazzy sounding cleans to muscular bluesy, rootsy grit with overdrive

already been revived by a few makers. Nevertheless, they really have their own thing going on: the tone is round and smooth and quite rich, with a characterful midrange that works well with some grit and overdrive. Importantly, too, unlike some of those old-style pickups, these retain a regular P-90 footprint, which means pickup swaps are straightforward and adds to their modding appeal.

Would these be our first choice to nail those classic Gretsch tones of yesteryear? No, but you can get that in the Electromatic range. These very tidy-for-the-money lightweight thinlines move effortlessly from pretty jazzy sounding cleans to surprisingly muscular bluesy, rootsy grit with overdrive. Add in those Bigsbys and a little musical feedback and you're off. Huge potential from a far from huge outlay. G

15. This old-style Gretsch headstock looks nicely vintage and just features that classic gold logo. 'Streamliner' isn't mentioned anywhere on these guitars

GRETSCH STREAMLINER G2622T-P90

PRICE: £609
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Full-size double-cutaway centre-blocked semi electric
BODY: Laminated mahogany back, top and sides w/ spruce centre-block
NECK: Nato, Thin "U" profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, pearloid oval inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, small
HARDWARE: Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B70 vibrato, die-cast tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x FideliSonic 90 single coils, 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone, individual pickup volume controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.19/7.02
OPTIONS: Available with V-Stoptail tailpiece (£539)
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard G2622T with Broad'Tron humbuckers streets around £469
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Brownstone (as reviewed) and Forge Glow with black pickguards, and Gunmetal with tortoise pickguard

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Tidy build and classy style; the FideliSonic 90s bring a new voice to the Gretsch range; excellent supplied setup and playability; works well with lighter gains

CONS Might simply be too mellow-sounding for some, lacking a bit of that classic Gretsch bite and sparkle

GRETSCH STREAMLINER G2655T-P90

PRICE: £609
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Downsized double-cutaway centre-blocked semi electric
BODY: Laminated mahogany back, top and sides w/ spruce centre-block
NECK: Nato, Thin "U profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42.8mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound laurel, pearloid oval inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B50 vibrato, die-cast tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x FideliSonic 90 single coils, 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone, individual pickup volume controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.85/6.27
OPTIONS: Available with V-Stoptail tailpiece (£539)
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard G2655T with Broad'Tron humbuckers streets around £469
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: 3x gloss 2-tone colours with tortoise pickguards – Midnight Sapphire (as reviewed), Mint Metallic and Mint Metallic tops all with and Vintage Mahogany Stain back, sides and neck back

8/10

PROS Well built; classy two-tone colours; more compact, solidbody-like feel; similar voice to G2622 with a tighter low-end and little more focus

CONS Again, we found it a little dark-sounding; while it's certainly more compact, it does look rather small – or is that just us?

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Sonic Boom

Just another spin on existing models or a new voice to add to the Gretsch canon? We catch up with product manager Adam Bowden-Smith to chat about the new Streamliner additions

Words Dave Burrluck

Typically, a brand's lowest-cost models are little more than lookalike versions of the real thing. But from Gretsch's inception, the Streamliner series broke that mould, not least by introducing specific pickup designs, such as the Broad'Tron humbuckers – and now the new FideliSonic 90 single coils. "They were developed from the ground up by us for the guitars, not just an off-the-shelf pickup with our name on them," product manager Adam Bowden-Smith tells us.

"You can clearly see the FideliSonic 90s are influenced – or at least inspired by – the 'staple' P-90," Adam continues, "something we thought would be cool to get on what is a low-cost guitar. You don't usually see them at this price; they're usually on higher-end guitars. But they are not staple P-90s," he emphasises, referring to their different design. "They have the staple [rectanglar] polepieces, but are designed slightly differently.

1

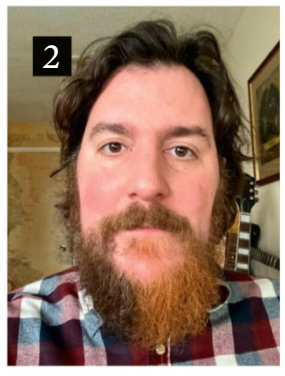
> "We were looking to that pawn-shop guitar vibe, that garage band rock 'n' roll dirtiness"

"The way we approached it was to be inspired by that concept, especially the sonic concept. We wanted that fat single-coil thing as well as that Gretsch signature thing going on. Trying to get both worlds: the P-90 kinda thing *and* the Gretsch kinda thing, which a staple sort of leans towards anyway. I think we were also looking to that pawn-shop guitar vibe, that garage-band rock 'n' roll dirtiness – the price point suits that as well."

When the Streamliner models launched in 2016 they also introduced the Broad'Trons. "[They were] full-sized humbuckers that definitely lean towards a classic PAF-style pickup," says Adam. "It's a little more familiar, if you like – sort of halfway between a Filter'Tron and a PAF.

1. Along with the centre-blocked models, the Streamliners also feature full-depth hollowbodies like this 2016 G2420T Single Cutaway

2. Gretsch product manager Adam Bowden-Smith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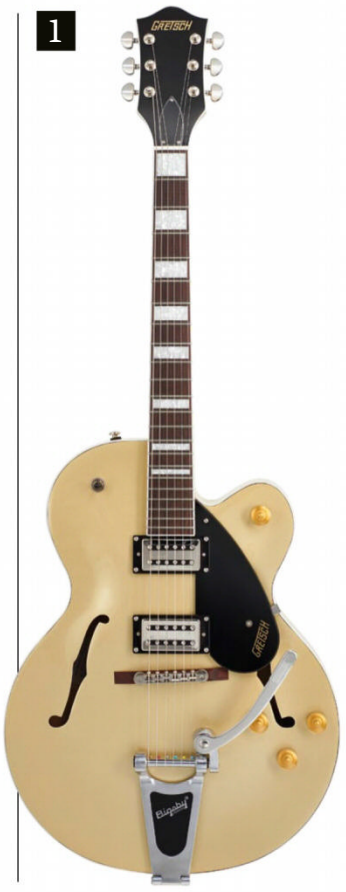
That familiarity to an absolute beginner in Gretsch terms is important. The Filter'Tron and indeed the Dynasonic – classic Gretsch pickups – might look and sound a little alien to someone who's used to a Strat single coil or a PAF-style humbucker. The Broad'Trons have been developed somewhat now, so we have the Electromatic and Pro Series versions.

"But as we've discovered, people like to mod these Streamliner guitars. Again, it's that sort of pawn-shop prize thing, something you can pick up and turn it into a rock 'n' roll machine, you can tweak this or that. That's why we added those new control knobs – it's all part of that pawn-shop garage-rock kinda thing."

How about the long-running Electromatic models? "Well, aside from the price point being right there for the working musician, the Electromatics are designed so that you've arrived at Gretsch: you've got proper Filter'Tron pickups,



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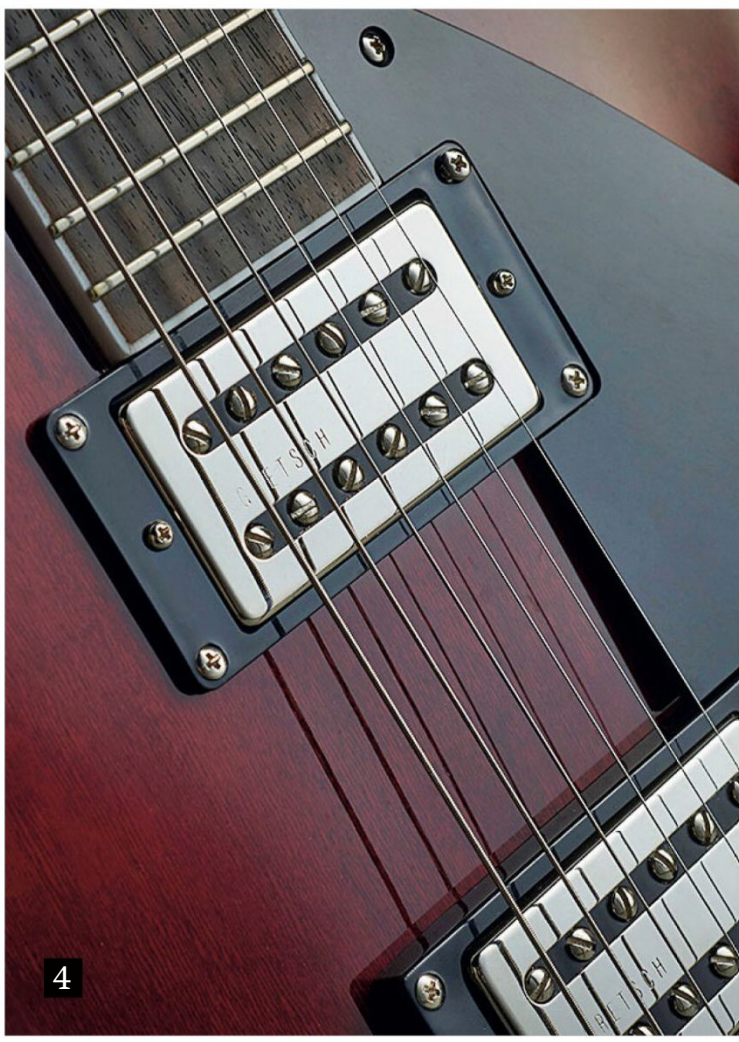
3. The Broad'Tron BT-2S humbuckers, as seen on this recent Junior Jet, were introduced at the start of 2019, and offered "better definition and a tighter bass tone, with a throaty mid-range, in keeping with modern tastes"

4. The original Broad'Tron simply featured a stamped 'Gretsch' on its cover



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you can get them in classic orange or white finishes, all those tweaks to make them a proper Gretsch, if you like. The Pro Series, of course, which are three grand or thereabouts, are almost custom shop. They are actually pretty exclusive and the waiting list is now quite long. For many players, then, once you have an Electromatic you've fully entered the Gretsch world."

One thing anyone entering that Gretsch world will have to get their head around is the model numbers, we offer. "Yes, in the Streamliner and Electromatic ranges we have tried to apply a bit more logic to those numbers," laughs Adam. "If you talk about the Pro Series, it's a bit different because most of those are legacy model numbers from the 50s when they did it by price point *and* colour. So, you had the 6118, the Anniversary, that was the cheapest one. The 6119 was your Tennessee Rose, or 'Tennessean' as it was called at the time, that was the second cheapest. Then the classic 6120 was your Chet Atkins. But then you had the 6117, which was just the Anniversary in a different colour. The 6136, the Falcon, which missed out quite a few numbers, was the flagship. Then you had the solidbodies, like the 6128 in between, also available as the 6129, the 6130 and the 6131. Crazy!"

Thankfully, the codes that identify the Streamliners and Electromatics are a little easier to understand. "The first digit is the series: 2 is Streamliner, 5 is Electromatic," says Adam. "The second digit is the construction style, if you like: so, 6 would be a centre block, 4 would be a hollowbody, and 2 would be a solidbody. The last two digits – and this is where it starts to get a little complicated – are essentially the cutaways. So 20 is a single-cutaway, 22 is a double-cutaway, but we've also got 55, which means it's a 14-inch Junior body.

"So the 5420 is an Electromatic single-cutaway hollowbody. The 2655 you have there is a Streamliner centre-block Junior, or you've got the 5220, an Electromatic solidbody single-cutaway. But then there's the *thinline* hollowbody, which we've recently added to the Streamliner range, the 2410. So we're using that third digit to indicate a variation on the general spec. The 2410 is the thinline single-cut hollowbody, and the 2420 is the full-depth single-cut hollowbody."

As we furiously take notes, Adam continues: "Then we've got the [letters] at the end: 'T' for tremolo, which we all know was Leo's mistake – it should have been vibrato. 'G' indicates gold hardware. 'LTD' means a limited model. But then there's the 'G' at the start of each number. I haven't had a definitive answer whether that means 'Gretsch' or 'guitar'. I think in the past we have done a B54-something, which was a bass guitar, but usually we put 'B' at the *end* to indicate a bass these days, so I imagine 'G' probably does mean Gretsch." G

Double Identity

Acoustic carbon-fibre guitar manufacturers Emerald take a bold step into the twin humbucker semi-acoustic market with one of the most versatile instruments we've encountered

Words David Mead
Photography Neil Godwin

EMERALD VIRTUO £2,625

CONTACT **Emerald Guitars** PHONE **00353 7491 48183** WEB **www.emeraldguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **Who is this guitar aimed at?**
That was the first question we asked ourselves upon opening the case. It's a brand-new model with a surprising array of features, and has the structural stability and light weight that carbon fibre has to offer. In those respects, it's kind of an open book.

2. **Is this an acoustic guitar with a foot in the electric camp or is it just a full-blown electric?**
And that was the second question we asked ourselves! We think the giveaway is that it arrived loaded with electric guitar strings and the unplugged acoustic voice is in the vicinity of an archtop. So we've marked it down as an electric with acoustic potential. Probably.

3. **Can carbon fibre mimic the feel of a traditionally built guitar?**
Once we began playing, we quickly forgot what the Virtuo is made from. There's very little difference in terms of feel between this and any other high-gloss guitar. After all, you don't actually feel the wood on a Gibson ES-175, do you?

The carbon-fibre guitar manufacturer Emerald is based in Donegal, Ireland, and has an immense range of instruments from straightforward acoustics to mighty harp guitars and beyond. We last looked at a guitar from Emerald – the X10 Artisan Woody, to be precise – back in issue 456, and were impressed by the fact it not only felt and sounded like a regular acoustic guitar, but it also had amazing stability, both in terms of construction and its immunity to variations in humidity. It also held its tuning like a champ during the time we spent with it.

Emerald combines founder Alistair Hay's interest in guitars and his background in polymer engineering, the latter seeing him forge a career making Formula One carbon-fibre racing boats before starting Emerald in 1999.

The X10 we looked at was basically an acoustic guitar that also had a humbucking pickup in the neck position, a Graph Tech Ghost piezo bridge and MIDI. This offered a vast blend of sounds that the player could employ in an acoustic performance should they choose. The point we're making here is that it was intrinsically an acoustic guitar. What we have before us today with the company's brand-new Virtuo is Emerald's step into the dual-humbucker electric-hollowbody market. Well, we say dual-humbucker, but there's a lot more to this instrument's sonic portfolio lurking under its redwood burl veneer.

> Is it for the electric player who wants some attributes of an acoustic or the other way around? Or both?

Feel & Sounds

We admit we were scratching our heads a bit when we first opened the Virtuo's plush Hiscox case. We wondered what kind of player the Virtuo is aimed at; an electric player who wants some of the attributes of an acoustic or the other way around? Or both? According to Emerald, the Virtuo has, "The body of an acoustic... the soul of an electric. The Virtuo is an acoustic guitar with all the features of both an electric and an acoustic guitar. Ergonomically designed for comfort with a slim body, the Virtuo is an acoustic guitar made specifically with the electric player in mind. The neck is slim and fast like an electric guitar and with its innovative neck-to-heel design it allows the player full 22-fret access to reach even those highest notes." Okay, but we're still not 100 per cent sure which way this particular coin lands.

To start with, there's the strings. Our office micrometer tells us the gauge is a

1. A pair of Fishman's Fluence humbuckers provide the Virtuo with the option for vintage or hot-rod personalities. They're coil-splittable, too, for extra texture

2. The Virtuo's body is a very trim 69.85mm thick and weighs in at only 1.36kg (3lb) meaning that it handles extremely well and won't tire you out during long sets

An acoustic player with a taste in heavier gauge strings could easily fix a beefier set

set of .009s and, with the scale length of 648mm (25.5 inches), you have an idea what the string tension is like. And, of course, they're electric guitar strings so the humbuckers can work at their optimum level. An acoustic player is going to find these a tad flimsy if they are used to the .012 or .013 gauge found on the average flat top. The actual acoustic – ie unplugged – sound of the guitar is on the light side as a result of both the above, too. If you can imagine a quality electric archtop's acoustic sound, you're in the ballpark. All this is just an observation, you understand; an acoustic player with a taste in heavier gauge strings could easily fix a beefier set. We're merely trying to clear up the mystery of where this instrument fits into the guitar landscape.

As far as the Virtuo's spec goes, most of it can be dealt with pretty quickly by saying the body, neck, fingerboard, etc are all carbon fibre. The 'board has 22 stainless-steel frets, the nut is Graph Tech and the string saddles are that same company's Ghost Piezo unit, comprising six individual fully adjustable saddles, each of which is a separate sensor. This means the acoustic output of the Virtuo is hexaphonic, which accounts for the MIDI facility, dealt with via its own independent volume control and 13-pin Hexpander output to the side of the guitar. For now, the MIDI side of the Virtuo will have to remain unexplored as we haven't the facility to test it. In order to take advantage of it, you'd have to have access to something like a Roland guitar synth or Boss SY-1000.

The humbuckers are Fishman Fluence with the dual identity of being switchable between vintage or hot-rod voices. They're coil-splittable, too. Internal power is provided by a 9V battery on the guitar's lower side.

If you're doing the same sort of mental arithmetic that we are, you can imagine how many combinations of voices you can get from the Virtuo, making this an extremely versatile instrument and an open book for someone with enough creative flair to take full advantage of its many personalities. But how does it measure up as a workstation, plain and simple?

Picking the guitar up, the first thing we notice is the slimness of the neck. It's not lolly-stick 80s Ibanez by any means, but it's definitely looking in that direction. It's about 20mm at the first fret and delivers the illusion that the nut is a lot wider than the 43mm mentioned in the guitar's spec. But no, it's 43mm (we measured) broadening

2

THE RIVALS

There's not too much on the current market that would be an exact rival for the Virtuo, especially in terms of pickup variety. If it's a twin humbucker semi you're after, then Eastman's T386 is around £1,000, Gibson's ES-335 around £2,500. A full Gibson archtop will cost considerably more, with even second-hand ES-175s coming in around the £2,000 mark. If it's the humbucker/piezo combination that appeals, then you could look in the PRS catalogue and go for the SE Hollowbody II Piezo for around £1,349. If a MIDI output is an essential, then take a peek over Godin's back fence and consider their Multivac range that will set you back around £1,500.

This is a versatile instrument for anyone creative enough to take advantage of its many personalities

3. 22 stainless-steel frets are set into the carbon-fibre fretboard

4. A set of Gotoh 510 tuners sit aside the Virtuo's headstock

5. The soundport on the guitar's upper bout makes sure that the player hears the unplugged nature of the guitar up close

to 62.28mm at the body end. The neck join means the hand is never going to be hampered by obstacles while engaged in playing, either.

Sitting or standing with the guitar is a comfortable experience – the guitar weighs a very trim 1.63kg (3lb) – lighter than our Admira nylon string – and won't cause any strain at all during a long set.

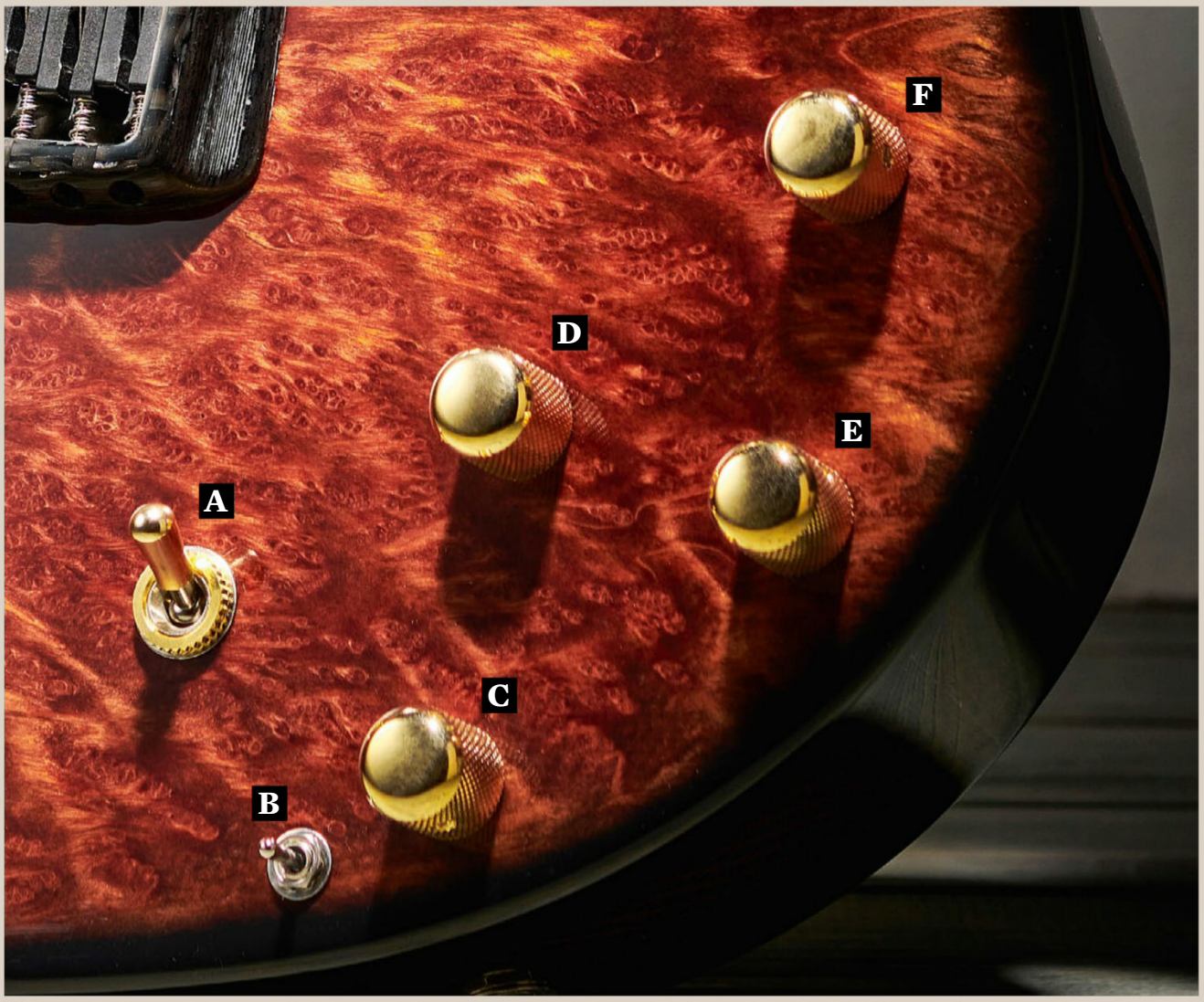
Testing the sound of the Virtuo meant hooking it up sequentially to an AER Compact 60 first, in order to test the Ghost piezo. If you've ever experienced a piezo pickup on an electric guitar before, you'll know the sound is thinner than it would be with fully fledged heavy-gauge phosphor-bronze strings. Having said that, it would be possible to use this as a solo voice with some attention paid to the EQ to fill out the sound a little. We did fire up the humbuckers to see what was on offer there with a mix of the voices (not at all unreasonable as many jazz players employ an AER) and the

Sitting or standing with the guitar is a comfortable experience and won't cause any strain at all

MISSION CONTROL

The control fascia of any piece of new kit always involves a little ‘shock of the new’ and takes time to get used to. Usually, after a few days of orientation, everything settles in and any problems you thought you’d have in operation evaporate into thin air. The controls on the Emerald may seem complex at first, but if you can work your way through the average smartphone app, you shouldn’t encounter any difficulty.

A. Humbucker selector
B. Piezo/humbucker selector (off/both/solo)
C. Humbuckers tone (pull to coil tap both)
D. Humbuckers volume (pull for vintage/hot-rod selection)
E. MIDI volume
F. Piezo volume



The saddles of the Graph Tech Ghost bridge are individually adjustable

piezo shone through, adding airiness and contour to the proceedings.

The control layout for the various sounds on offer takes a little getting used to (see Mission Control, on page 99), but after a few near misses, we found our feet and were blending sounds together with ease.

In order to assess the guitar's pure electric characteristics, we used a Blackstar combo and gave the humbuckers a spin in a more rock environment. We've been impressed with Fishman's Fluence pickups before and the same is true here. In vintage mode, the sounds are classic, but introduce a bit of fire under the bonnet and you're into semi-solid territory, complete with bite and snap. Swapping over to the hod-rod setting and there's even more sizzle to play with. The single-coil mode also gives some very usable sounds, especially with both neck and bridge engaged.

It was only after we'd packed our toys away that we realised we hadn't encountered the beast that is feedback during our tests. True to say we weren't playing at stadium levels, but we would have expected it to rear its head at least once.

> Introduce a bit of fire under the bonnet and you're into semi-solid territory, complete with bite and snap

Verdict

It's always going to be a challenge for anyone to assess a new instrument in such a short time. You'd need to spend a few weeks with the Virtuo in order to plumb its considerable depths. It's largely unexplored territory, after all, and if you dial in the MIDI option that land is expanded further.

We're still not entirely sure on which side of the acoustic/electric fence this guitar sits. It affects a compelling compromise between the two spheres of playing, for sure, but we feel an electric player might be more at home here than one whose mainstay is the acoustic. But if you're willing to make the journey, the results could be very rewarding indeed. G

EMERALD VIRTUO

PRICE: £2,625 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: Donegal, Ireland
TYPE: Electro-acoustic
TOP: Carbon fibre (with redwood burl veneer)
BACK/SIDES: Carbon fibre
MAX RIM DEPTH: 69.85mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 375mm
NECK: Carbon fibre
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Gotoh 510
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Carbon fibre, 305-406mm (12"-16") compound radius
FRETS: 22, stainless steel
BRIDGE/SPACING: Carbon fibre with Graph Tech Ghost saddles/52.7mm
ELECTRICS: Two Fishman Fluence pickups, Graph Tech Ghost Piezo and Hexpander MIDI output (via 13-pin socket)
WEIGHT (LB/KG): 3/1.36
OPTIONS: Basic model starts at £2,150. Various wood veneer tops and build variations. See website for details
RANGE OPTIONS: Emerald has an extended range of electro acoustics, double-necks, 12-strings and harp guitars. See website for details
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: High gloss

Emerald Guitars
00353 7491 48183
www.emeraldguitars.com

8/10

PROS Extremely versatile, with hundreds of sonic paths to explore

CONS The shock of the new and the fiddly nature of mixing voices and MIDI might deter some players

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Guitarist

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J ROCKETT

Clockwork Echo

J Rockett reimagines the Deluxe Memory Man concept

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Philip Barker

The Deluxe Memory Man is a revered analogue delay pedal. First seen in the late 1970s and famously used by The Edge to craft the early U2 sound, various revised versions of it are still available from original manufacturer Electro-Harmonix. Like many of the classics, though, that doesn't mean that others can't have a crack at creating an expanded or improved version, and J Rockett is the latest to take this on, with the advantage that it has original designer Howard Davis on its team. Four years in the making, the Clockwork Echo is now with us.

Now, while there's a general consensus that an original vintage Deluxe Memory Man sounds great, it does have certain operational aspects that might be considered shortcomings: it's a fairly big box for a start, it needs a 24-volt power supply, has no tap tempo, has wet and dry outputs rather than true stereo, and has rudimentary control over its modulation functions. J Rockett has addressed all of that and created a pedal that uses classic analogue bucket brigade (BBD) chips for authentic sound while incorporating a degree of digital control.

The Clockwork Echo has a very practical footprint, managing to fit its three footswitches into 133mm (slightly over five inches) of width. Besides the bypass footswitch, you get one for turning the modulation on and off and another for tap tempo. The pedal runs from a standard nine-volt supply so will work fine with all the usual pedalboard power distributors, but it has internal voltage conversion to 24 volts, maintaining the sonic integrity.

One thing that's not affected by footswitching is the pedal's Level knob, which is always active and capable of adding a permanent boost to your signal. Anything beyond its minimum position is a boost as the natural drive of the preamp makes a solid contribution to your tone. You can set the Mix knob (which sets the blend between dry and wet signal, running from completely dry to fully wet) fully left and use the Clockwork Echo purely for tonal conditioning if desired, but we really like the way that the repeats sound crustier with robust setting of the Level knob.

SOUNDS

The delay is set up by standard Time and Repeats knobs. The delay time runs from doubling through slapback up to a maximum delay time of 600ms so should

01. LEVEL KNOB
This knob is always active, regardless of whether the delay and modulation are switched in

02. TEMPO LED
This LED always flashes at the tempo of the delay time whether set up by the knob, the tap tempo footswitch or an expression pedal plugged into the pedal's RHS

03. SPEED & DEPTH KNOBS
These controls set up the sound of your modulation and can cover a wide range of possibilities

04. MIX KNOB
This sets the blend of dry and effected signal – it has a 50/50 mix around its noon position

05. LEFT & RIGHT OUTPUTS
Use one for a standard mono setup; if you use both for stereo, the effected signal in one is out of phase

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Mix, Level, Time, Repeats, Speed, Depth, bypass footswitch, Modulation footswitch, Tap Tempo footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard outputs (L & R), expression pedal (Repeats), expression pedal (Delay Time)
POWER: 9V adaptor, 30mA minimum (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 133 (w) x 121 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

cover most practical playing needs, the repeats blending naturally into your sound with a trail that dissipates smoothly. Since this is an analogue delay, the repeats will take off into oscillation at a certain point of the Repeats knob, but there's a sweet spot where you can set a really long trail of repeats before you reach that.

All the usual dub and sci-fi effects can be achieved by messing about with Time and Repeats knobs, but the pedal has a trick up its sleeve in that it can support the use of two expression pedals, one dedicated to each of those parameters – the Repeats one being particularly of use for taking things to the tipping point and pulling back.

Perhaps what really set the Deluxe Memory Man apart from other delays was its integral modulation – a choice of chorus or vibrato and single-knob adjustment. The Clockwork Echo, though, has much more nuanced control over it with dedicated Speed and Depth knobs, and the in/out footswitching, of course. If you set the delay time for a minimum amount, you can use the pedal purely for its modulation sounds, albeit with a touch of ambience unless the Mix knob is maxed.

There are some cool chorus, vibrato and rotary-style sounds available to be dialled in. But the magic lies where there's a melding of the delay *and* modulation creating an overall atmosphere – whether the repeats have just a bit of tape echo-style wobble on them, mild chorus or a more obviously out-there effect.

VERDICT

If you want BBD analogue sound rather than a digital approximation of it then J Rockett's Clockwork Echo is the real deal: that familiar vintage sound is right there, but it's also bolstered by modern accoutrements so you don't have to endure the limitations of vintage pedal design. Some may question the asking price for a delay pedal that does just one thing, but that one thing is quite glorious. The combination of analogue delay, preamp gain and modulation can deliver sounds that simply inspire you to play – and you can't put a price on that. G

PROS *An update on a classic; true analogue BBD sound; good preamp tone with boost options; tap tempo; stereo operation; expression pedal options; adjustable and footswitchable modulation*
CONS *The way the stereo output is configured won't suit everyone*

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ROUND-UP

Source Audio pedals

Three hi-tech pedals whose app support takes you even deeper

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Philip Barker

We reviewed the Collider in issue 456 and now it's time to look at the US company's One series pedals. Each supports both stereo and mono operation and features a Control Input jack for the Source Audio Dual Expression Pedal and a USB port. These digital pedals have 128 onboard preset slots and loads of capability, with knobs for tweaking, some of which have an alternate function initiated by a rear-panel switch.

To really dig deep, you need to take advantage of the Neuro graphical editing and librarian software: a mobile app for all iOS and Android devices (cabled connection) and a desktop version for Mac and Windows. As well as unlocking pedal features, it offers access to effect editing parameters, stereo routing options and advanced EQ control, plus pedal preset management (archiving your own and downloading factory and user community presets).

SOURCE AUDIO

EQ2 Programmable Equalizer £285

This is a combination graphic and parametric equalizer with 10 fully adjustable frequency bands. Each band can be moved to any point on the frequency spectrum from 20Hz to 20kHz and has up to +/-18dB of boost or cut available with adjustable bandwidth. There's also some shelving and high-pass options, noise gate, limiter and tuner.

The pedal has four presets instantly at hand, scrolled through via a front-panel button, although all 128 of them can be recalled directly from the pedal. Besides a small Output knob, there's just a rotary encoder knob with push and turn actions that works extremely well to quickly dial in an EQ curve on the fly. But with the Neuro app you can really get in and map out your EQ curve in detail. Whether you need to set your rig for a venue, have different EQ settings to suit particular guitars, or just kick it in as a frequency boost, it's all here. G

VERDICT *Highly detailed sound sculpting makes this a consummate stage tool*

SOURCE AUDIO

C4 Synth £249

The C4 pedal is basically a modular synth in a box with six of its 128 presets accessible from pedal switches and the rest via MIDI. You get front-panel control over the sound via an Input level knob, a Mix knob that sets a blend of your guitar sound and the synth voice, and two Control knobs that tweak parameters specific to each preset. On top of that you have Alt knob functions for envelope sensitivity and output volume.

The key to using this pedal is to set up your presets via the Neuro app – there are loads of parameters to edit, plus a wealth of presets to load. As with any guitar synth, we'd remind you to be careful with your technique to avoid glitches, but the tracking here is generally slick and excellent, and you can dial in all manner of recognisable out-and-out synth sounds or just blend in a touch of ear candy weirdness for your dry sound. G

VERDICT *A compact and comprehensive source of synth sounds and textures*

SOURCE AUDIO

Ultrawave Multiband Processor £265

Combining various sonic elements (overdrive and tremolo in particular) for a huge range of conventional and completely hatstand tones, the Ultrawave splits the frequency spectrum into multiple bands, each with its own array of parameters. Preset configuration is the same as the C4, and you can reassign the front-panel knob parameters on a per-preset basis.

Neuro's nuts and bolts of sound creation starts with separate drive and output levels for each band and 44 distortion types. An LFO adds in a comprehensive array of tremolo features, dual-channel compressor, noise gate, eight-band graphic EQ, and the facility to morph between sounds and to send different drive effects to each of the outputs. It delivers some great fuzz tones and outrageous distortions, but also octave up, ring mod and synth-style sequencer/arpeggiator effects. G

VERDICT *Want something different? Creative possibilities abound here*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Programmable EQ pedal
FEATURES: Selectable analog buffered or relay based true bypass, tuner, 128 presets, 10 band graphic equalizer, parametric equalization capabilities
CONTROLS: Encoder knob, Output, Select button, control input switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1 & 2), standard outputs (1 & 2), MIDI In, MIDI Thru, USB, control input
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 180 mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 114 (d) x 51mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Synthesizer pedal
FEATURES: Selectable analog buffered or relay based true bypass, 128 presets
CONTROLS: Input/Sense, Mix/Vol, Control 1, Control 2, Preset switch, control input switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1 & 2), standard outputs (1 & 2), USB, control input
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 165 mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 114 (d) x 51mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Multiband processor pedal
FEATURES: Selectable analog buffered or relay based true bypass, 128 presets, 37 band splitting options, 44 distortion types, dual channel compressor/expander
CONTROLS: Drive, Level, Sustain/Bass, Treble/Mid, preset switch, control input switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1 & 2), standard outputs (1 & 2), USB, control input
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 150 mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 114 (d) x 51mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER
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MODEL
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X3 MULTISTAGE OVERDRIVE

PRICE
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WWW.633AMP.COM

ROUND-UP

633 Engineering pedals

You've seen the amps – and here are the overdrive pedals...

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Philip Barker

We took a look at a pair of 633 Engineering's Dragonfly amps in issue 475 and now it's the turn of the 633 pedals, designed – like their stablemates – by Cliff Brown, formerly chief design engineer for Blackstar. The X2 and the X3 are overdrives with similar looks but different applications in terms of their gain range. Both pedals are extremely well put together and nicely laid out with a 633 logo that lights up when they're powered and a red LED to indicate active status. Both pedals run from standard nine-volt power, which is boosted internally to 18 volts for more headroom.

633 ENGINEERING

X2 Classic Overdrive £285

The X2 is a soft-clipping overdrive that offers different clipping options from a three-way toggle switch and has two tone knobs (Lows and Highs) to tailor your sound. Lows comes before the clipping and is useful for keeping your bottom-end under control – tighter and leaner – but it's also good for adding a bit of girth to bolster single-coil pickups. Highs comes after the clipping and covers a useful range for brightening the sound or toning it down.

This is a great pedal for low-gain break-up, the centre setting of the Clip switch offering the cleanest option, with the Gain knob running from clean (with decent amounts of clean boost available from about two o'clock on the Level knob) through to much raunchier crunch. Turn to the lower Clip switch setting and you'll find a subtly different vibe as the tone gets grittier with a touch more stridency. The dirtiest of the three, the upper position brings in asymmetrical clipping and with it a nice degree of compression. G

VERDICT *Three voices with practical tonal shading make this a versatile source of boost and drive tones to complement a good amp*

633 ENGINEERING

X3 Multistage Overdrive £285

On to the X3 and we have a pedal that combines hard and soft clipping in five gain stages with the same four-knob setup as the X2. One exception, though, is that the X2's Highs and Lows knobs have been replaced by the more emotively named Bite and Body here, tweaking low/low-mid and high-mid frequencies. There's extra help in the tonal shaping courtesy of the Pre Shape switch that engages a filter before the last gain stage, ushering in a reduction in mids and increase in the highs and lows. This helps match the pedal to any amp with a prominent midrange (you may wish to keep the mids for an already-scooped Fender).

Plugged in directly, a Buffer switch functions to retain brightness as you roll back guitar volume, stopping your tone getting muddy as it cleans up. If the X3 isn't the first pedal in the chain, it offers an all-round slightly brighter voicing. The gain range on tap is expansive, from 'just breaking up' through crunch to richly saturated driven amp sounds ideal for sustained leads and teased-out harmonics. G

VERDICT *A full range of driven tones to suit many rig scenarios, responsive to touch and retaining note clarity even at full throttle*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Highs, Low, Gain, Clip switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 40mA
DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Bite, Body, Drive, Pre Shape switch, Buffer switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 40mA
DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 94 (d) x 54mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Express Yourself

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone goes on a trip to the creative playground that is expression. Modern technology is taking it to the next level...

The joy of manipulating your tone hands-free in real-time was once reserved for treadle-based effects such as the wah and Whammy, or expensive rack-based effects. The world of pedals has come such a long way over the recent years, however, that it's more or less become the norm – rather than the rare unicorn-like exception it once was – for a pedal to have some sort of expressive capabilities either via 'expression control' or 'control voltage'. So, let's take a look at some of the different expression devices out there and how I like to use them. But first, I'll quickly break down the differences between Expression and Control Voltage...

1. EXPRESSION VS CONTROL VOLTAGE

You've probably encountered expression control before, but maybe the world of control voltage (aka CV) is new to you. Both are methods that allow you to control parameters on your pedals, but where all pedals with expressive capabilities can handle expression, not all can handle CV. The easiest way to clarify the difference between the two is to see expression as a passive control method and CV as an active control method.

A device such as an expression pedal receives a reference voltage from the effect pedal it's connected to, and then divides that voltage through the use of a resistor, which is the potentiometer inside the expression pedal. CV, on the other hand, actually sends alternating current directly to the pedal in order to control it. This means that if you're using CV with a pedal that's not designed to take this voltage, you can potentially fry it. So be careful out there! It's a wild sonic world.

This already creates a clear distinction between the possibilities and uses of the two. Expression leans more towards fluid and organic movements from minimum to maximum, whereas CV allows for extreme precision within the entire expression range due to its ability to send pin-point voltage values.

> "The joy of manipulating your tone hands-free in real-time was once reserved for treadle-based effects"

2. EXPRESSION PEDALS

I'm pretty sure most of us have dabbled with an expression pedal. I personally really like to use expression pedals to control filters, such as the Death By Audio Evil Filter, for slow synthy filter sweeps, or for maxing out the reverb mix on something like the EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run to go from a subtle intimate space to a swelling ambient landscape. It's also great for ramping up the speed on modulation pedals to add flair to specific lines and phrases.

Expression is also fun with high-end digital effects such as Meris or Empress since they give you expression control over every single parameter at the same time. This allows you to seamlessly morph between two completely different preset sounds on the fly.

1

2

3

4

3. CV SEQUENCERS

CV stems from the world of synthesis where a lot of synths and drum machines are able to receive CV, allowing sequencers to trigger them automatically. Within the world of effects, it can be used to create very specific step patterns. An affordable option to enter this world is something like the Korg SQ-1. If you want something that'll fit right in with the rest of your pedals then the Electro-Harmonix 8 Step Program or Empress Effects Zoia are solid solutions.

CV Sequencers are great for things like filters/phasers or pitch shifters/harmonizers. A CV sequencer set to control the frequency on a filter/phaser pedal like the KMA Machines Horizont will break the smooth LFO (low-frequency oscillation) and turn it into a bubbly and synthetic step filter. With a harmonizer such as the Meris Hedra, you can set the sequencer to jump between very specific pitch intervals, letting you create a multi-note sequence from a single guitar note, only limited by the amount of steps on your sequencer.

They are also great for getting random tape-like modulation if you set it to control the depth on a vibrato pedal such as the SolidGoldFX NU-33 and just have it quickly run through different depth settings.

4. DIGITALLY CONTROLLED EXPRESSION

A newer breed in the expressive world is digital LFO controlled expression, which, to me, is the perfect bridge between expression and CV. It's also perfect for people who don't want to mess with CV but still want the ability to produce more creative and precise expressive movements.

The latest addition to this category is the Old Blood Noise Endeavors Expression Ramper, which allows you to set two different expression points and then have either a triangle or square wave LFO automatically move between the two points. This allows for 100 per cent repeatable movements that can be much faster or much slower than anything a human could possibly produce with an expression pedal. It's really cool with tremolo, for instance, where the triangle LFO can create organic rising and falling speed changes, or you can set it to square for abrupt instant speed jumps.

You can also use a slow triangle LFO to move between two slightly offset delay times on a delay pedal. That way you can turn a pristine digital delay into a modulated, hazy tape-like echo. If you have a shimmer reverb with expression control over the mix, such as the EarthQuaker Devices Astral Destiny, then you can also create a unique shimmer tremolo by setting the square wave to quickly turn the mix up and down. G

HEAR IT HERE

If you want to know more about digitally controlled expression, check out my demo of the Old Blood Noise Endeavors Expression Ramper on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at **https://bit.ly/477TTexpress**. Go out there and get expressive, pedal people!

« BLUEPRINT »

FRESH CREAM

Another UK-made guitar brand is always welcome, but rarely are they conceived by a meeting of great minds that includes a grizzled USA rock icon and a 'mad scientist' pickup maker from Norway…

Words Dave Burrluck **Guitar photography** Neil Godwin

When we first heard rumblings of this project – the birth of a new guitar company – our interest was piqued, not least because of the names involved: Relish, PJD Guitars, Cream T pickups and the legendary Billy F Gibbons. This could be interesting!

The seed of the idea had actually started with the innovative and very different designs of the Swiss-based guitar company Relish. Tim Lobley, owner of Sound Affects in Ormskirk, takes us back: "I'm quite a fan of Relish's pickup-swapping system, but, as a retailer, had some reservations about the guitar they were using as a 'host' for this new technology. On a personal level, I like the design, and I own one, but they just don't sell in big numbers.

"In late 2020, I was talking to Silvan Kueng, the CEO and co-founder of Relish," Tim continues. "He explained that the most likely next step for Relish was to try to get guitar makers to use the pickup-swapping technology in their own guitars. I offered to ask around with some builders I knew to see if there was any interest. One of those conversations was with Leigh Dovey of PJD Guitars here in the UK, but he didn't think it fitted in with the strategy of their brand.

"I've got to know PJD well and really admire their work; I think Leigh is a real rising star in the UK. The conversation then quite quickly turned to the idea of using their production facility to build a guitar for me with the Relish pickup swapping in."

Tim Lobley of Sound Affects

"I've got to know PJD well and admire their work – Leigh is a real rising star"
Tim Lobley

It's certainly not unheard of for a retailer to market its own-name brand of guitars, quite often rebadged lookalikes, but Tim wears another hat as the sales and marketing director of Cream T Pickups, "a company I've been helping to build over the last couple of years", he explains. "Cream T make their pickups at my premises here in Ormskirk, and they are going from strength to strength. Billy F Gibbons has supported us immensely; we have several signature models bearing his name and he genuinely uses them and has done so for over a decade.

"So between Cream T and myself we decided to set up a new company, Cream T Guitars, using that Relish technology, PJD's building facility and our own sales channels. All we needed was a design..."

Starting Blocks

Cream T founder, Thomas Nilsen, has long harboured ideas to build guitars that show off his pickup designs. "Some people like my pickups but are hesitant to change the pickups they already have in their own guitars. Maybe I should have a guitar made as well, giving people an option to

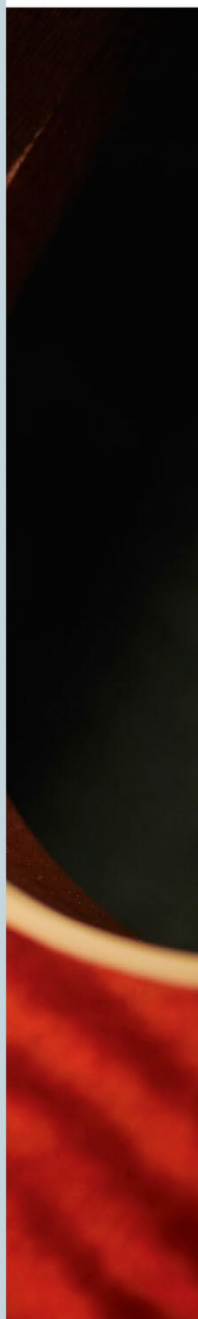
This is the #2 Cream T prototype, a collaboration between Billy Gibbons, Thomas Nilsen, PJD Guitars and Tim Lobley of Sound Affects

1. A Cream T guitar designed to show off its growing range of pickups. This Original Banger was one of the first Thomas Nilsen designed with Billy Gibbons. It was Billy's idea to use "the 'Gibson' gauge wire, 42AWG, halfway wrapped on the bobbin [then] married to a 'Fender' 43AWG to complete the wrap"

2. "My main contribution to the design was the chambering," says Tim Lobley. "Billy likes his guitar on the light side and I thought it would be cool to design the chambering so it had Billy's initials with a 'T' for Thomas added in. Hidden under the hood, the initials are in there"

3. The Relish pickup-swapping system is simple to use – pull out the pickup and push another one in

4. PJD founder, Leigh Dovey, at work on the first BFGT prototype with its dot inlays. It also featured a two-piece bridge, four controls and a toggle switch



"Billy was clear this was going to be a billyguitar to play as opposed to one that was all about show"
Tim Lobley

buy a guitar *and* my pickups? That was my initial thought many, many years back. I've talked to Billy about it, and many of the other artists I work with, but it's a big hassle because I don't have the tools and machinery and it would take too much [of an investment] to start that up."

But once the possibility was in place, Thomas knew exactly who to call. "I immediately got in touch with my friend Billy Gibbons and I told him about it: a solution to make guitars! He was very keen to do something. He really wanted to get onboard, and said, 'Why don't we sit down and design a guitar together?'

"We took it from there, maybe for six or seven months, going back and forward: he has some ideas, I have some ideas... So he emailed me a lot of drawings and wanted my feedback and he wanted to see the ideas I had. It was just trying to mix all of that together."

Tim picks up the story: "This was Billy the guitar designer not Billy the rock god that we all love," he says, but that's not as far-fetched as it might sound.

"The thing you have to remember," adds Thomas, "is that I've been working with Billy for well over two decades now and we've been over the sketch table designing pickups a lot of times. There are a lot of pickup designs that we haven't put into production yet after all these years: the look of a pickup, how to create some kind of new sound – without adding too much electronics or battery packs. So we have been working closely together already discussing design."

As the many fans of Billy F Gibbons will know, he plays and has commissioned some pretty out-there custom guitar designs, but the Cream T project was always intended to be something with broader appeal.

"Billy was quite clear in what he wanted," says Tim. "This was going to be very much a guitar for everyone to play as opposed to a way-out signature model that was all about show. It had to be high quality, eminently playable and accessible to the masses."

The months went by until we were shown a glimpse of the first prototype,

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which clearly adhered to the design brief: a far from out-there guitar with plenty of classic references.

"After all these years, you get to know a lot about guitars," reflects Thomas. "If you take a pen and draw a guitar that you might think is original, when you do some research I'll bet someone else has already made it! I think all the shapes are done [laughs]. It's *really* hard to come up with a brand-new thing. So when I reached out to Billy, we said, 'Why don't we take some elements from classic designs, mix them up and create something new but with historical roots?' So the design we've come up with has elements of Les Pauls, Telecasters and much more."

And what about the headstock style, we ask? "Billy did the headstock design," confirms Thomas. "He went to the table and drew that. I really like that Martin-esque headstock."

In Build

Tim explains what happened next: "With funding in place and contracts drawn up, Leigh set about producing the first prototype – and he got very close, first shot. This was in mid-May 2021. Billy gave us a lot of feedback from this prototype and quite a few things were changed: the controls, the tuners, chambering, the binding... Leigh then went on to produce the second prototype – the one you have. It's a great improvement on the first one, but there's still some work to do."

"Don't forget this is a collaboration between us and PJD," Thomas reminds us, "and they have never made a guitar like this before, so this is a test for them and a way for them to learn how to do it properly. That's good – and they've really risen to the challenge."

PJD's Leigh Dovey was ready to put his skills to the test: "I thought it was a fantastic opportunity, but I knew it wasn't going to be the easiest of guitars to design and build as it went quite far away from what we currently make at PJD.

"After a lot of discussion, drawings and emails sent back and forth, we finally had the idea, and it was my job to gather all of this into a fully working instrument!" No pressure, then...

"I personally love the design of the guitar," Leigh tells us. "Billy and Thomas had a great vision with it. It's a kind of Telecaster/Les Paul Junior mash-up with all the bells and whistles: full binding from top to bottom, pearl inlays and a stunning flame maple top. Getting the main CAD design work is always so crucial to a new build as it denotes how easy or hard the subsequent guitars will be to build.

"We had originally agreed on two prototypes before going into production," he continues, "but since completing the second prototype you have there, we all agreed that a third prototype is a must to iron out any little design features that we aren't fully happy with. It's a fairly complicated build, particularly that pickup swapping, so it's essential that it's perfect."

Full Range Vision

The design and prototyping process is complicated further by the fact that we're not just talking about *one* Cream T model.

5. The second prototype we feature here has moved on considerably with its different control circuit, no toggle switch and block inlays

6. Another change on the second prototype is this Schaller bridge, but the final version will feature an intonated wrapover by Music City Bridge. The Cream T pickup is the Billy Gibbons signature Whiskerbucker scanned from 'Pearly Gates'. The production version will use more regular-style mounting rings, too

7. Camera-shy Thomas Nilsen snapped at his workbench. Note the early headstock designs on the wall, which show options with a larger Cream T logo

8. The classic square-topped Martin-style headstock was drawn out by Billy Gibbons. The logo will be larger on the production models, while the truss rod cover will feature the model name

9. The mahogany neck is glued-in, rather than being the true bolt-on style used on PJD's production models, such as the Carey

"We decided early on that we had something with the design," says Tim, "so we wanted to offer it with both the Relish pickup-swapping technology but also with conventional fixed pickups. We also wanted to differentiate between the models for the everyday player and what Billy wanted to fulfil his own stage requirements.

"So we essentially have two variants to the overall range: first, the more regular Standards and Customs; and then, second, the BFGT Customs [as in Billy F Gibbons and Thomas]. These will vary from the regular models with BFGT signature chambering, a single-piece Joe Glaser Music City Bridge 'Stud Finder' intonated wrapover, and binding on the body, neck and headstock. Also, the BFGT models have no toggle-switch pickup selector, just a volume for each pickup and one master tone control."

Thomas explains the unusual control setup: "Billy mostly uses the bridge pickup and on his models he doesn't want the toggle switch, just the three controls. He does use the neck pickup, but it's so rare – that's why we went with the controls you see on the prototype."

The regular models will feature a pickup selector toggle switch but still have the dual-volume/master tone setup.

"When I meet up with the artists I've been working with, they are playing Les Pauls, Strats, Telecasters," says Thomas, "and they come back to me saying they love their guitars, but if they only did this or they only had that it would make their jobs a lot easier. You have to remember these artists are playing so many gigs – pre-pandemic, of course! – when they're in their normal touring mode and travelling all around the world. They have to deal with different temperatures, different humidities. One thing, though, a lot of Les Paul players really hate those four knobs! That's the feedback I get: we only need three knobs [individual pickup volumes and a master tone]. But they love the Gibson Les Paul, of course!"

From Sketch To Stage

The prototype pictured in our studio photography here arrived just in time for our first gig in 10 months. It certainly achieves its 'classic-looking' aim. It's a great weight (3.56kg/7.83lb) and feels like an old friend, though the non-toggle-switch style of the control layout won't suit everyone.

> "A lot of Les Paul players hate those four knobs! We only need three knobs"
>
> ***Thomas Nilsen***

"The guitar you currently have there is a kind of diamond in the rough," Leigh reminds us when we chat, post-gig. "It has the feel and aesthetic of what we are aiming for, but is in need of some subtle refinement... as I'm sure you agree!"

We send off a list of 'random thoughts' on the prototype to Tim and Thomas, most of which they're in agreement with and have already been noted for the third prototype. But, overall, it's that classic look and feel that impresses us – and unlike some of Billy's previous custom designs, this is a fur-free zone and doesn't spontaneously start to rotate mid-song!

"My dad said something similar," says Thomas. "He's a guitar player and if he's going to play a guitar it has to be an ES-335 shape, a Telecaster shape, a Strat or a Les Paul. He was very worried that I was going to be involved in designing a 'new' guitar. He said, 'Oh no, I will never buy it!' And that did inform the guitar we came up with. I told Billy the story and he said, 'Okay, let's take a classic design and tweak it a bit.'

"When we had the first prototype ready I took a picture of it and sent it off to my dad," Thomas continues. "His response? 'Wow, I want one!' He's a very conservative vintage-guitar man, but he actually likes this one. That was my test. I said, 'Do you think very conservative vintage guitar players will like this?' He said, 'Yes!' You still have this vintage design when you look at it – it's tweaked, but it's there." G

While you've been reading this, prototype #3 is already being evaluated. Cream T guitars are set to go into production in September 2021 and are expected to retail from £1,999 for the regular models and from £3,499 for the BFGT models. Of course, we'll bring you the exclusive first review... as soon as the paint is dry!

BOUGHT & SOLD

MARK TREMONTI

Join Alter Bridge's lead guitarist on his journey from buying his first guitar for $10 to hunting down Dumble amps costing considerably more…

Mark's signature PRS model provides the thunder behind Alter Bridge's rock anthems

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

"I bought a Les Paul imitation called a Tara and it cost me 10 bucks. I had a buddy in sixth or seventh grade who had the guitar and he was going to upgrade and so he said, 'I will sell you this guitar for 10 bucks if you join my band and I'll teach you to play.' We started a band called Wit's End. We did punk rock and heavy metal and Cheap Trick… lots of different things, whatever we could actually play. It wasn't very complicated stuff. I got into the more Mötley Crüe kinda stuff later on and I wanted to play Metallica and Slayer, of course, but the band couldn't handle that at the time."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"Jeez, I can't really remember to be honest with you. All my guitars nowadays are PRS, and they're nice enough to give me those [laughs]. Maybe it was a Telecaster that I bought last? I bought a limited-edition Fender Telecaster with custom artwork and they were nice enough to let me pick one up. Sometimes I'll use it just at home, but when I'm on stage I stick to the signature PRS model."

"When you're young you need to have a guitar that's capable of making you a better player"

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've had when buying gear?

"I don't know if you could call it a bargain, but I was playing with Paul Reed Smith at the NAMM convention and there was a bunch of amps on stage and I saw a Dumble up there. There must have been eight guitar players up there all racing to whatever amp they wanted to play and I plugged into the Dumble and fell in love with it.

"Ever since then I was obsessed with getting one of my own and the folks at Blackbird Studios in Nashville had bought two and I bought one of them. Everyone looked at me like I was nuts for buying it because it was so expensive, but it more than doubled in value over the 15 years that I had it. I ended up parting with it and getting different Dumbles, but when I think of any kind of gear I've bought and sold, that was the one I had the best deal on."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've experienced?

"It was a nice piece of gear that I just didn't vibe with. I can't say the name of it because I don't want to be a mean guy. It was an amp and everybody was talking

PHOTO BY SCOTT DIUSSA

about how great these amps were and how I just needed to get one. So I hunted it down and, when I got it, it just wasn't my thing, y'know? Not all amps are going to speak your language."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"There was a reissue Goldtop Les Paul that I used throughout the big Creed days and I sold it because there was a lawsuit between Gibson and PRS. I was just angry that my [PRS signature] guitar got taken off the shelves for all those years, and so I got rid of that Les Paul just out of anger. But I should have kept it because the folks who had made that Les Paul had nothing to do with the folks who caused the lawsuit. And the business has changed hands; there's new guys in charge who are doing great things. But that's one I wish I still had."

What's your best guitar buying tip?

"I think a lot of people want to spend $800 instead of the $2,000 that would be a lifelong guitar. When I was younger I spent a lot of money stepping up to guitars, spending four times as much as I needed to, instead of buying the right guitar in the first place. It's easier said than done as not everyone has that kind of money sitting aside to buy the nice guitar first. Especially when you're young, you need to have a guitar that's capable of making you a better player instead of one that frustrates you and makes you not want to play the guitar to begin with. My point is, don't look for the deal on paper. Pick that guitar up, put it in your hands, play it, be sure it's not frustrating you and that you can do what you want with it."

When was the last time you stopped to look in a guitar shop window (or browse online) and what were you looking at?

"It goes without saying that I see all these PRS guitars that I want, but, like I said, if I wait long enough and push hard enough they'll give them to me!"

If you were 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?

"Well, I'm an amp guy. So I reckon I would probably go with the expensive amp and a PRS SE Tremonti model. I think a ton of it comes from the way you play guitar, y'know? I see all these guys who do gear demos – and gear to gear to gear it all sounds the same because of the way they approach it. I think it has a lot to do with technique, how hard you play, how soft you play, what kind of pick you use... it's a lot to do with those hands and those fingers."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be and why?

"Humbuckers all the way. I love single coils, but humbuckers just have a bigger rhythm chunk to them and that's what I've used my whole life. I remember trying to play the song *Lenny* [by Stevie Ray Vaughan] for a long time and I just thought I was no good. I couldn't get it, but once I picked up a Stratocaster and played it I went, 'That's why I didn't get it, you cannot get that tone without these single coils.' I love them both, but if I have to go with something for the rest of my life, it would definitely be the humbucker."

What's your favourite guitar shop and why?

"It used to be Rudy's Music up in New York. I mean, every time I was there I would just spend all of my tour money. I haven't been there in a while because it's moved around so much – they have two locations and I haven't gotten the chance to go in recently. But they were one of my all-time favourites." **[DM]**

Mark Tremonti's solo album, *Marching In Time*, is out on 24 September via Napalm Records
www.marktremonti.com

The pickups on Mark's signature guitar were specially wound to give a higher output. "I love single coils, but humbuckers just have a bigger rhythm chunk to them..." he says

DAZED & CONFUSED

CBS FENDER TELECASTERS

Custom Telecaster or Telecaster Custom? We clear up the confusion on CBS-era Teles in this issue's Dazed & Confused

The Telecaster has appeared in many different guises since the basic design went to market in 1950. Fender's first solidbody electric guitar, the single (bridge) pickup Esquire, was introduced during spring 1950, while the odd dual-pickup Esquire was made that summer. Fender decided to launch these dual-pickup instruments separately as the Broadcaster in autumn 1950, though following a trademark disagreement with Gretsch they were rebranded Telecaster in early 1951. This landmark electric guitar is now celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The Telecaster continued to evolve throughout the 50s, transitioning away from the original Blackguard livery in 1954 with a lighter blonde finish and white pickguard. The model's greatest change would come in 1959 when rosewood fingerboards became standard across the Fender line. In June that year, the Esquire and Telecaster Custom models appeared, their bound bodies resplendent in a three-tone sunburst finish and topped with a three-ply (w/b/w) nitrate pickguard. These instruments marked Fender's first foray away from the traditional 'plain Jane' design.

As the 60s progressed, bigger changes were afoot at Fender as a whole, and by 1965 the brand was firmly in the hands of its new owners CBS. For better or worse, the corporate giant was less bound by tradition and soon began to take the humble Tele into areas previously unimagined. **[RB]**

***Guitarist* would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham and Adrian Hornbrook**

1 TELECASTER THINLINE

In 1962, pioneering guitar designer Roger Rossmeisl departed fellow Californian guitar builder Rickenbacker to join Fender. After helping launch the firm's acoustic guitar range in 1963, he moved on to develop the semi-hollowbody electric Coronado design in early 1966 before beginning work on a hollow Telecaster design the following year. With its non-contoured body, the Tele proved an ideal testbed for such experimentation, and by 1968 Rossmeisl and his assistant, Virgilio Simoni, had refined a method of construction for a new Telecaster model.

Launched in 1968, the Telecaster Thinline initially came in either a natural ash or mahogany finish; a three-tone sunburst option became available later in the year. In 1971, the standard Telecaster pickup configuration was superseded by dual Wide Range humbuckers designed by father of the Gibson PAF, Seth Lover. The model remained in production throughout the 1970s until it was pulled from the catalogue at the end of the decade.

2 PAISLEY RED & BLUE FLOWER TELECASTERS

Equally striking a departure from the traditional Telecaster design were the Paisley Red and Blue Flower Teles that appeared in limited numbers in 1968. With Fender hoping to connect with the zeitgeist of flower power, these two markedly psychedelic finishes were achieved by using a peel-and-stick product made by the Borden Chemical company called Cling-Foil. This aluminium foil (effectively a thick metallic wallpaper) was fixed to the wood before being blown over around the body edges and pickup routs.

"Paisley Red pulsates with every beat and swirls in a blinding carousel of colour forms and tones. Fender shines again," says an advert for the Paisley Red Telecaster. Its Blue Flower counterpart reads: "Blue Flower bursts forth in a dazzling array of subtle purple and green patterns. Never before has such an exciting profusion of colour been offered." Unfortunately, many of these rare Teles suffered from severe fading and checking.

3 TELECASTER CUSTOM

While the original dual-single-coil/sunburst Telecaster Custom was discontinued in 1972, that same year a radically overhauled design appeared. Advertised as the Telecaster Custom (though often referred to as the "Custom Telecaster"), the new model sported the unique configuration of a regular Tele-style single-coil bridge pickup along with a Wide Range humbucker in the neck position. Featuring Les Paul-style controls, including independent pickup volume and tone pots and a three-way switch on the upper bass bout, the newly designed 'version two' Telecaster Custom offered players a unique combination of sounds that covered both Gibson and Fender territory.

From 1973, with the introduction of the dual-'bucker Telecaster Deluxe, three out of four of Fender's Tele designs carried the new Wide Range pickup; only the standard Tele retained its existing dual single coils. This latter version of the Telecaster Custom was discontinued in 1981 (along with the Telecaster Deluxe).

4 TELECASTER DELUXE

As hard rock became more popular during the late 60s and early 70s, new Tele designs evolved in order to meet demand while existing models fell by the wayside. By 1970, both the Esquire and Esquire Custom guitars were discontinued, followed by the original/sunburst Telecaster Custom and the George Harrison-endorsed Rosewood Telecaster in '72. The Telecaster Deluxe made its debut soon after in '73, hoping to compete with Gibson's Les Paul Standard directly with a dual-humbucker-loaded guitar.

Like its contemporary Telecaster Custom model, the hybrid-design Telecaster Deluxe features Les Paul-style controls and a large scratchplate. In addition, it has a CBS-era Stratocaster-style wide headstock, "micro-neck-adjust" three-bolt neckplate system, and 'belly cut' rear contour. Early on, the Telecaster Deluxe was also offered with a Strat-style "tremolo" option. Larger frets and a 9.5-inch radius complete its unique feel. It remained at the top of the Telecaster price list throughout its production.

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The MOD SQUAD

TOM WEIGHTS

Gigs are back! Are we ready? Er… no. Some peculiar things are going on and Dave Burrluck needs to fix 'em

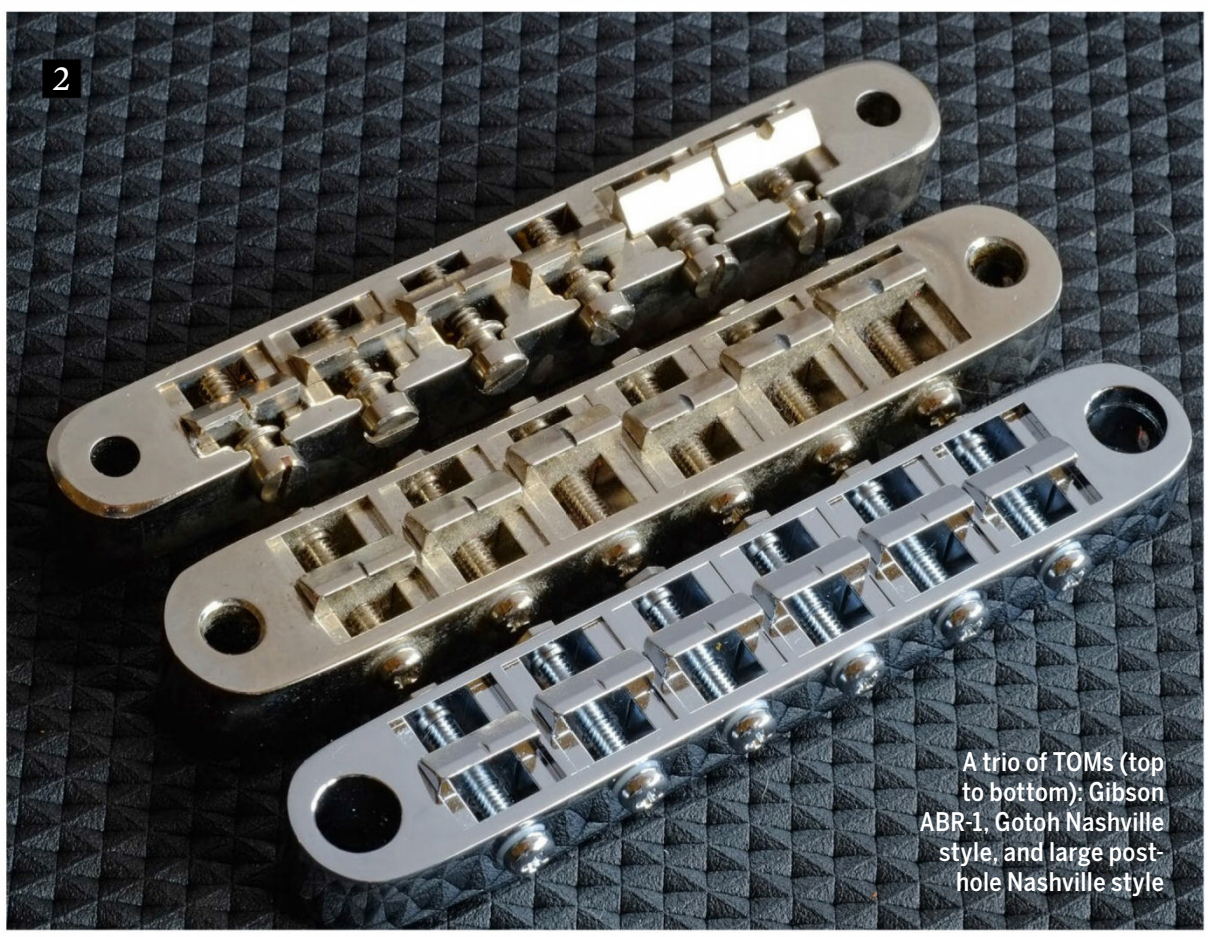
Getting ready for my return to playing live, I realise I need to spend a bit of time giving my gigging guitars some love. Now, it's not like I'm Dallas Schoo and I've got The Edge on the phone saying he needs his 20-something gigging guitars all restrung and in tip-top condition before five o'clock. Nope, I've just got the two: one for the main stuff, the other for slide. Simple.

That said, I'm a bit embarrassed when I pull out my slide guitar, which I haven't used since October 2020. Do strings corrode and fingerboards get gunkier just from a guitar being in a gigbag? Or did I forget to give it a wipe down after its last hurrah? My main guitar, a start-up ultra-basic-spec Knaggs Kenai, has had plenty of use over these past pandemic months as a reference for any relevant review I'm writing. And before that it had been a workhorse for a couple of years before gigs stopped. A bit of a clean-up, then, some new strings and I'll be done.

But then I notice something odd. The tune-o-matic-style bridge (aka TOM) has sunk – or collapsed, which seems a rather dramatic term. What I mean is that the top of the bridge, which should be straight, now shows a noticeable concave curve [pic 1]. It's not much, but it means that the saddle radius, which was 305mm (12 inches), is now a little flatter, the central strings are closer to the frets and, well, it doesn't feel quite as 'right' as I remember. The bridge is a pukka Gotoh part, and regular readers will know I'm a big fan of its wares. I can't quite believe what I'm seeing.

This tune-o-matic has sunk, which flattens the saddles' radius

"I notice something odd. The tune-o-matic-style bridge has sunk… its top has a concave curve"



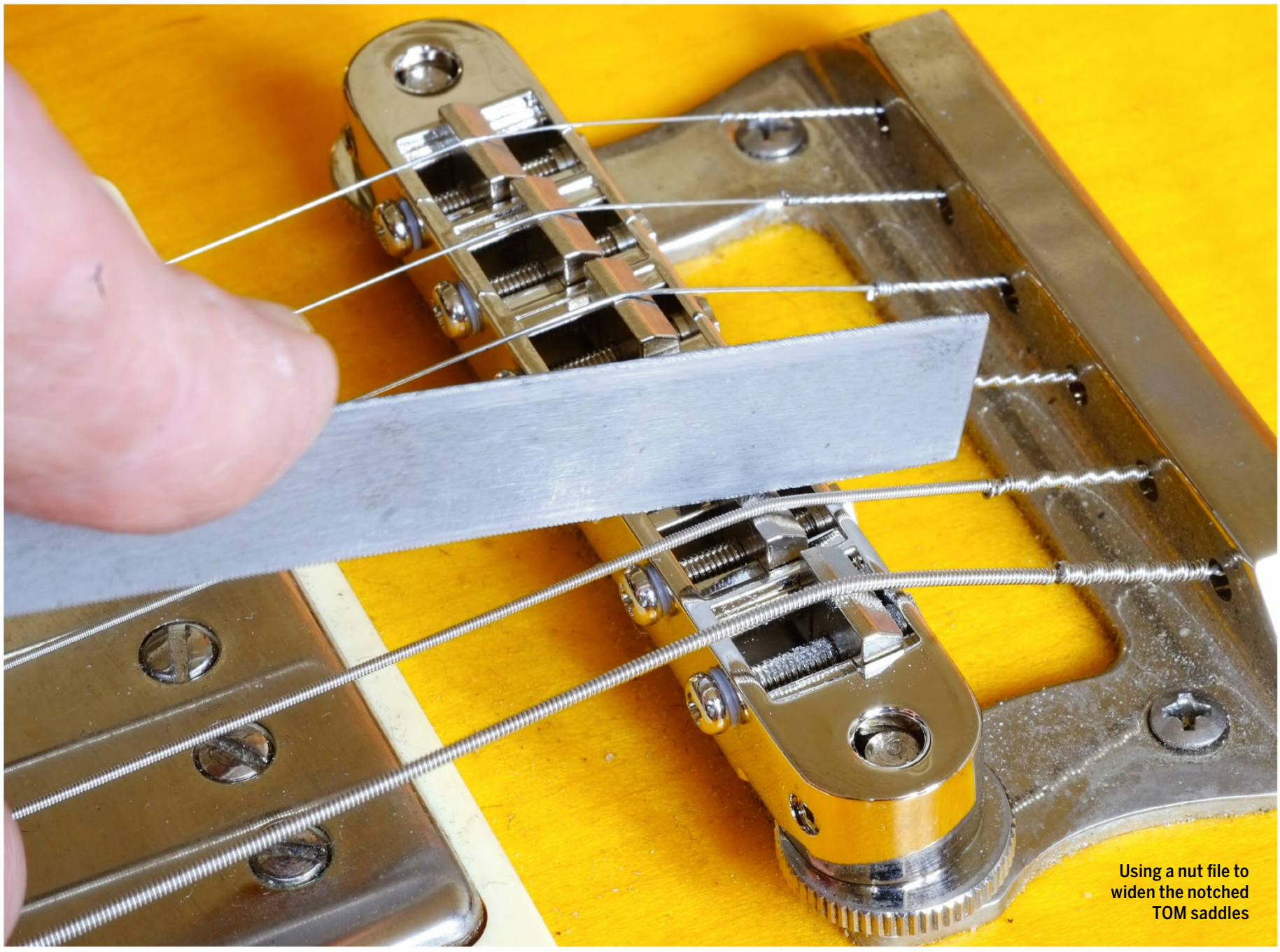
A trio of TOMs (top to bottom): Gibson ABR-1, Gotoh Nashville style, and large post-hole Nashville style

Now, tune-o-matics can have a tendency to sink like this over the years, but I've only experienced this once before on a low-end Tokai with its generic cheap TOM. 'Has the guitar been bashed?' suggests a mate (who's as long in the tooth as I am and has never experienced such an issue, either).

The Knaggs uses a proprietary Influence bridge setup where the anchor bar (which is not height-adjustable like a normal stud tailpiece) does pull the strings down at quite an angle, slightly sharper than a normal TOM/stud tailpiece setup. I drop Peter Wolf at Knaggs an email with a picture just to check if this has been an issue. He answers in the negative.

There's a good chance that you could straighten it by removing the saddles and clamping the bridge in a large bench vice with a hardwood or metal spacer placed on the underside, for example. You could also hammer the base with the top of the bridge (again, with saddles removed) on a flat piece of metal. Can't do any of that? You might have a mate who's better equipped. But there's also the chance that you could crack the bridge, too, which on anything remotely collectable or vintage is not what

The Knaggs Kenai back in tip-top playing condition. But can we remember the set?



Using a nut file to widen the notched TOM saddles

you want. To be honest, while I'll happily remove the saddles from that cheapo Tokai bridge and give it a bit of a bash – which successfully straightens it and proves it can be done – I decide to simply order up a replacement.

Which TOM?

This should be straightforward, but like pickups and other hardware parts there's quite a choice, not only in brands but in finding the right fit. I'm tempted simply to order the same bridge, but my hesitancy comes from two places: first, if it's failed once it might happen again; and, second, Knaggs has now moved over to TonePros. So I decide to look at that option first and keep it in the family.

There are basically two types of TOMs: the original 'narrow' ABR-1 style and the later, wider 'Nashville' style. By narrow, I mean around 10.7mm in width whereas the Nashville is wider at just under 14mm. This means there is more distance that each saddle can travel, so if the bridge posts are slightly off in terms of position, for example, then a Nashville's wider adjustment range might help you intonate the guitar correctly. The limited travel of the ABR-1 means the original placement of the bridge has to be that much more accurate.

> "All I wanted to do was to get ready for a gig and I'm now deep in the rabbit hole of materials"

The majority of TOMs have the same spacing of the two post holes (approximately 74mm or 2.913 inches) and typically the holes are a little larger than the diameter of the posts so there's a little wiggle room. However, there are three main post-hole diameters [pic 2], confounded, as usual, by metric and imperial sizes. Many import guitars use a large post, often with a very handy-to-adjust slot head: the diameter here is typically 6mm. The more vintage accurate TOMs have smaller-diameter threaded posts that, of course, screw directly into the top. This is, Tone Pros tell us, a 6/32 US thread (UNC) that has a specification diameter of 0.1380-inch (3.5mm), so you'll often find smaller-diameter holes (typically 3.75mm) on that style of ABR-1. Large-scale hardware makers such as Gotoh work in metric and, aside from that larger post-style option, seem to stick to 4mm diameter posts with a hole of around 4.4mm. There are some exceptions, notably the tune-o-matic used by large production maker Samick for many years, which had a post spacing of 71mm – but you can buy conversion posts from WD Music UK, for example, that'll solve that problem. If you can speak to a supplier or email them before you order, I'd recommend it.

Then we've got the material to think of: the body of the bridge and the saddles themselves. Unhelpfully, Gotoh doesn't tell us what its Nashville bridge is made of – the base or saddles are not magnetic so it's not steel and it's probably a zinc alloy known as Zamac, Zamak or Mazak. Now, Wikipedia tells me these are "a family of alloys with a base metal of zinc and alloying elements of aluminium, magnesium, and copper... part of the zinc aluminium alloy family[,] they are distinguished from the other ZA alloys because of their constant four per cent aluminium composition." Gawd. There are plenty of other options, not least machined zinc alloy, brass, aluminium and

Dialling in the intonation using the old bridge (right) as a guide

steel. Saddles can be made of that same alloy, or brass, steel, titanium, not forgetting nylon, and then there are the 'string saver' friction-reducing composite saddles made by Graph Tech. Gawd, again!

All I wanted to do was to get this guitar ready for a gig and I'm now deep in the rabbit hole of materials and their sounds. I have no problems with the guitar or the way it sounds. Will that change, though, maybe for the worse? When it comes to ordering the 'right' part, it's far from a simple decision. Ultimately, though, if Knaggs is using TonePros right now, that's good enough for me, so I simply go for the TonePros Locking US Fit tune-o-matic, small post, notched saddle with a code number T3BP-N. Got that?

Refitting The TOM

Depending on the bridge you buy, it may or may not be notched: each saddle has a slight groove in its centre that will stop the string from slipping sideways. Some notches are really quite extreme Vs – and I suggest you avoid these; like the nut, the string needs

"Things move, frets wear, tuners get slack… it all happens quicker on guitars you're playing live"

to sit on the saddle with only about 50 per cent of its diameter actually going into the saddle. So a lightly notched TOM means that you can precisely 'sit' each string [pic 3] with the same files you use for your nut. Just like a nut, each saddle groove needs a good exit and entry point. You can certainly do this with some fine needle files, and if you've got a Bigsby involved then you really need to smooth the slots carefully and apply some lube every time you restring.

If your saddles are unnotched, all the above applies, but you obviously need to make sure you centre each string slot on the saddle. A quick way to do this is to string up and get the strings all sitting correctly on the saddles. Then mark either side of each string with a fine Sharpie (or other similar marker pen). This will give you two lines and then you can notch each saddle in the centre with a fine 'V' needle file then open out each slot as above. Personally, I usually do this by eye, using the adjustment screw as the guide for that initial notch. And, of course, don't forget to reintonate your new TOM [pic 4]!

Final Clean & Tweak

It always surprises me how my gigging guitars take such a battering. I'm hardly throwing them around and probably play much less aggressively than I did a few decades ago. The thing is, you don't always notice the wear. Things move, be it necks or Fender saddles, frets wear, batteries go flat, tuners get slack, output jacks get loose – and it all happens a lot quicker on guitars you're playing live, often for extended sets in probably sweaty boozers.

So, if you're also in the process of getting back to gigging, now's the time to get your maintenance routines up to muster. Let us know how you get on! G

That should give you something to think about till our next issue.
In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

VIBRATO WOBBLES

Like many of us, one reader is experiencing some vibrato woes. Here's how we keep ours in check…

With a little care, most vibratos will play and stay in tune

Q I was reading your piece on the Squier Showmaster [Mod Squad, issue 475] and was amazed that you got the vibrato working properly and staying in tune. I've got a Mex Strat and a Gretsch Electromatic with a Bigsby and I can't get either of them to stay in tune. Any tips gratefully received.
Scott, via email

A I feel your pain, Scott. I've just spent the best part of a day trying to get a vibrato on a pretty high-end vintage-style guitar to work only to conclude that, frankly, it doesn't. You live and learn. We could fill pages on tips and tricks for getting Strat vibratos and Bigsbys to return to pitch in-tune, but in the space I have here there are some 'golden rules' that might help.

Always think of the vibrato as a complete system that includes not only the vibrato part but the saddles, or separate bridge, the nut, string trees if you have them and the tuners – more specifically how you attach your strings. If you're new to the world of guitar maintenance and modding, I'd seriously suggest you get your guitars set up professionally. So long as there are no major issues it won't cost a fortune. Ask the repair person what they did and what suggestions they might have. Listen and learn.

If the vibrato has been set up correctly, you still need to be a little studious when it comes to restringing. On a standard tuner you can lock the string at the post, and be careful not to have too many winds around the post. Locking tuners certainly help. Always add a little lube to the nut slots; soft pencil lead will help assuming your nut grooves have been properly cut. It's the same for the saddles.

The major thing is then to properly stretch your strings, including behind the nut (just bend each string a few times and retune) and any 'dead' string behind the saddle as some Bigsbys or Jazzmaster-style vibratos can be treated the same. If you've had your guitars set with a certain string gauge and you go up or down in gauge then you may have problems with strings sticking in their nut grooves. With lighter strings, the vibrato will sit flatter on a Strat, for example, which reduces up-bend, and you'll need to compensate by reducing the spring tension.

How you tune your guitar is also important. Tune your low E first then check the A string. If that's flat, tune it back to pitch then go back to the E and retune that then check the A again and onto the D, and so on. Every time you need to make an adjustment, go back to the previous strings and retweak them. The reason for this is that most vibratos are simply balanced systems (the string tension against the spring tension): as you raise the pitch of one string the others will go slightly flat.

It's important to be realistic, too. A standard vintage-style Strat vibrato – and certainly a Bigsby – are really designed for light shimmers, not extreme dive-bombing. Learning to 'centre' the vibrato after a bend is important, too. And don't expect any vibrato guitar (perhaps with the exception of a double-locking type) to stay perfectly in tune for a whole 45-minute set without some minor checking and adjustment.

Also consider how important the vibrato is to your style of playing. I once spent a considerable amount of time getting a troublesome Strat vibrato to stay in pitch only to be told by the player that it was still going out of tune. When I went to see him playing he didn't use the vibrato at all. It turned out that his tuning problems were coming from him pushing the slightly up-tilted vibrato down, and subsequently raising the pitch, when he palm-muted with his right hand. If you really barely use it, there's nothing stopping you decking or even blocking your Strat vibrato, and just fold that Bigsby arm back – I'll guarantee your tuning issues will improve instantly! Seriously, though, good intonation is down to the guitar *and* the player. G

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Acoustic Guitars

22679 - Adam Black O-3 - Left Hand
22680 - Adam Black S-2 - Natural Left Hand
20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
14197 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Lefthanded
18269 - Breedlove Guitarl Acoustic Strings
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural
13906 - Cort AD810-OP AD Series Acoustic Guitar
22106 - The Cort AF510M Mahogany
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury
19662 - Faith FKNCD - Naked Neptune
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
19267 - Fender CD-60 Dread V3 DS 0970110532
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
22030 - Fender Sonoran Mini All Mahogany Guitar
7090 - K Yairi New Yorker NY0021B, Natural
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
22459 - Klos Full Carbon Acoustic Travel Guitar
22020 - LAG Tramontane 88 T88A Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
21494 - Larrivée C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought
16760 - Martin D28
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
21788 - Martin D45
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
19459 - Martin LX1RE Acoustic Guitar
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
9342 - Northwood M80 12
22358 - Ozark High-Strung Guitar 33726 Nashville
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW Discovery Exotic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
18361 - Tanglewood TW2T Travel Size Guitar
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acosutic
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
21766 - Breedlove Artista Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
22519 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert CE
15886 - Breedlove Stage Black Magic Concert Used
19795 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Natural
13911 - Cort AF510ECOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
22507 - Faith FNCEBMB Blood Moon Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune, Cognac
22728 - Faith FPVCG Nexus Venus Cut/E Cognac
22727 - Faith FPVCK Nexus Venus Copper Black
22726 - Faith FPVCKL Nexus Venus Cop Black Lefty
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Cutaway
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus L-HAND
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
21838 - Faith PJE LegacyEarth Cut/Electro FG1HCE
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19575 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, USED
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat
18567 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, SGray
21577 - Fender Newporter Classic, Cognac Burst
22082 - Fender PM3CE Triple O Standard Guitar
19095 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19070 - Klos T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Klos F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic
19065 - Klos T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Klos F_AE Electro Acoustic

Electro Acoustic Guitars

21966 - LAG Hyvibe 30 THV30DCE Cutaway
22026 - LAG T118ACE Tramontane Cutaway, Black
21965 - LAG T270ASCE
22589 - Lag HyVibe THV20DCE Electro Acoustic
19691 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
0000 - Maestro - 17 Models In Stock Now
21798 - Martin 00012E Koa Electro Acoustic Guitar
21585 - Martin 000-13E Guitar
22477 - Martin 000-X2E Electro Acoustic Guitar
12225 - Martin 000X1AE Electro Acoustic, USED
19403 - Martin 00X1 AE Guitar
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar
22577 - Martin D12E Koa Dreadnought Electro
19489 - Martin DJr-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
22610 - Martin GPC-X2E 03 Macassar X-Series
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
22695 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar Used
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
21974 - Northwood M7014 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic
0000 - Ovation - 5 Models In Stock Now
22360 - Ozark Hawaiian Guitar
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
20594 - RainSong BI-DR1000N2 Black Ice Series
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
19557 - RainSong Co-WS1005NsM, Secondhand
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
19555 - RainSong N-JM1000N2X
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acoustic Used
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor, Green, Secondhand
19556 - RainSong V-DR1100N2 Acoustic
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
21562 - Rainsong V-WS1000N2X Vintage Series
19951 - Simon & Patrick Trek Parlour Electro Nat
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
22482 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE AEB Exotic Ebony
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
22161 - Tanglewood TW4E Antique Violin Burst
22160 - Tanglewood TW4 E BS Black Shadow
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 E WB LH, Lefthanded
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
18213 - Tanglewood TW4 E Koa Winterleaf
22157 - Tanglewood TW5 E BS Black Shadow Gloss
22723 - Tanglewood TW5E KOA Dreanought Cutaway
8293 - Tanglewood TW55NS, Nat, Secondhand
22153 - Tanglewood TWBB SFCE Smokestack Black
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
21937 - Yairi Rag 65VE Small Parlour Guitar
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS
4587 - Yamaha LL16, 12 String Dreadnought, Nat
19602 - Yamaha LLTA Trans Acoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

12 Strings

18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
16029 - Patrick James Eggle Saluda 12 String
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
4587 - Yamaha LL16, Dreadnought, Nat

Classical Guitars

9153 - Daniel Slaman II Duomo in Blonde
22602 - Admira Sombra Classical Guitar, Used
19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
21770 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Satin Bourbon
21769 - Breedlove Sob Concert Nylon CE
20441 - Fishman AGX094 Passive Undersaddle
20440 - Fishman AGX125 Passive Undersaddle
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
22019 - LAG TN70A Tramontaine Nylon Guitar
21034 - Martin 000C12-16E Nylon Guitar
19376 - Mendieta Artizan V Classical Guitar
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16035 - Mendieta Artizan X Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
8584 - Mendieta Conservatoire A Classical
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
6773 - Mendieta Flamenco LCE Electro Flamenco
8585 - Mendieta Professional Classica Guitar
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
12178 - Protection Racket Class Gtr Case Dlx
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top
22062 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Spruce Top
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar
6914 - Ramirez Estudio 1 Classical Guitar
22060 - Ramirez Estudio 2 Classical Guitar
22061 - Ramirez Estudio 3 Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
22063 - Ramirez SPR Classical Guitar with Case
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15291 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar Blue
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
17108 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GO, Dark Brown
20813 - Goodrich Pedal String Kit PK-01
20811 - Goodrich Pedal Foot Kit PK-02
20812 - Goodrich Pedal Mount Kit PK-03
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19483 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30, Black
19481 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Engraved Sound
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert In Mahogany
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Ukulele (GR35048B)
20533 - Ashbury AUR-10 Concert Resonator Ukulele
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19675 - B & M UBJ2 Banjo Uke Open Back
19698 - B&M Uke Bass Mahogany BMUKB1
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
19915 - Elvis Hanauma Mahogany Soprano
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Ukulele
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert, Layered Headstock
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Uke
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Uke
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert Uke
19897 - Factory Prototype Rev. (Headstock Damage)
21531 - Fender Fullerton Jazzmaster Uke Tidepool
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratocaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
21877 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Surf Green
20438 - Fishman AGO-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19886 - Flight Nus310 Blackbird Soprano Uke
19888 - Flight NUS310 Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19883 - Flight Nus350dc Dreamcatcher Soprano Uke
19877 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele, Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele, Spruce Top
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele, Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo, Amethyst
18289 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Clear
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19713 - KAI KTI-5000 Solid Acacia Tenor Ukulele
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_DAE)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
19306 - Kai KSI10 10 Series Soprano Uke, Mahogany
18522 - Kai KTI700 Tenor Uke
19391 - Kai KTI90 Tenor Ukulele
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
21584 - Kanile'a Islander MST-4 Tenor Uke, Used
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Soprano
18524 - Kiwaya KSU1L Long Neck Soprano Uke
22721 - Kiwaya KTU1 Mahogany Student Tenor Uke
22456 - Klos Full Carbon Electro Acoustic Uke
22310 - Klos Full Carbon Uke
22470 - Levin LA5G Sapele Top Guitarlele
22469 - Levin LA5G Spruce Top Guitarlele
22516 - Levin LU100B Mahogany Ukulele Bass
22170 - Levin LU10C Concert Sapele Ukulele
22150 - Levin LU10S Soprano Sapele Ukulele
22171 - Levin LU10T Tenor Sapele Ukulele
22167 - Levin LU20C Concert Walnut Ukulele
22166 - Levin LU20S Soprano Walnut Ukulele
22168 - Levin LU20T Tenor Walnut Ukulele
22173 - Levin LU30C Concert Angouma Ukulele
22172 - Levin LU30S Soprano Angouma Ukulele
22174 - Levin LU30T Tenor Angouma Ukulele
22176 - Levin LU40C Concert Ebony Ukulele
22175 - Levin LU40S Soprano Ebony Ukulele
22177 - Levin LU40T Tenor Ebony Ukulele
22179 - Levin LU50C Concert Spalted Maple Ukulele
22178 - Levin LU50S Soprano Spalted Maple Ukulele
22180 - Levin LU50T Tenor Spalted Maple Ukulele
22182 - Levin LU60C Concert Zebra Ukulele
22181 - Levin LU60S Soprano Zebra Ukulele
22183 - Levin LU60T Tenor Zebra Ukulele
22185 - Levin LU70C Concert Bamboo Ukulele
22184 - Levin LU70S Soprano Bamboo Ukulele
22186 - Levin LU70T Tenor Bamboo Ukulele
22188 - Levin LU80C Concert Koa Ukulele
22187 - Levin LU80S Soprano Koa Ukulele
22189 - Levin LU80T Tenor Koa Ukulele
22191 - Levin LU90C Concert Solid Mahogany Uke
22190 - Levin LU90S Soprano Solid Mahogany Uke
22192 - Levin LU90T Tenor Solid Mahogany Ukulele
16835 - Maestro Island Series Concert UC-IR-SB-C
22386 - Maestro Island Tenor Ukulele UT-KO-CSB-K
13084 - Magic Fluke M80 Maple Uke Banjo, H/wood
22718 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Ash
18203 - Mahalo MH2CE Electro Acoustic Concert Uke
18211 - Mahalo MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
18195 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19867 - Malibu 23s Concert Ukulele With Bag
0000 - Many more from Ohana, Risa & Tanglewood

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

PICKUP LINES

P-90 Revival

Bare Knuckle Pickups founder Tim Mills explains why so many of us are turning to this classic single coil

Originally produced by Gibson from 1946, P-90s were one of the first mass-produced single-coil guitar pickups and have remained in regular production to this day. Having been somewhat eclipsed by the PAF humbucker from the late 50s onwards, they have in recent years experienced a resurgence in popularity. We're curious to hear why, so we catch up with Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle to get his take on the revival of the P-90.

"P-90s are characterised by a very wide, squat coil," begins Tim. "They are traditionally wound with 42 [AWG] gauge plain enamel wire to around 10,000 turns. That's the classic spec for an authentic vintage-style P-90. The early ones are typically Alnico III or, more commonly, Alnico II. The coils were nearly always unpotted and were propped up on wooden spacers – used to heighten or lower the coil – in a nickel tray.

"The early P-90s were characterised by a very shallow butyrate cover that just about covered the top to protect it. As you get to the late 50s/early 60s you find Alnico V magnets starting to be used more commonly, which was the biggest tonal shift up to that point. Moving further into the 60s, you see poly wire and clear plastic bobbins starting to be used, which can be fragile and prone to fracture. And as you get into the 70s, Gibson moves back to the more traditional black coil former."

Prized for their dynamic sound, P-90s have found favour across a huge range of musical styles, as Tim explains.

"P-90s have quite a chunky, muscular wind on the coil," he says, "and they have two bar magnets driving them, so they're capable of producing quite a bit of output. There's this lovely wide frequency response, which is typical of a single coil. With a P-90 you've got depth – extension in the bass, and lots of clear highs, but there's this lovely drive in the midrange as well. There's no hollowness. It's a very strident sound. P-90s are extremely dynamic. They're very responsive to the volume and tone pots: you can make them as dirty as you want, and you can clean them up as much as you want. They're incredibly versatile."

In 1957, Gibson began introducing the PAF humbucker to its electric guitars and the new design soon began to overshadow the older P-90.

"P-90s are single coil, so there's no hum cancelling going on, which was a real problem back in the day," highlights Tim. "50/60 cycle hum was the enemy. As amplifiers got louder and more gain-y, mains and RF interference became more of an issue. But back then, electrics were nothing like as good as they are today. I use lots of single-coil pickups and I never have a problem with noise. Whether I'm recording at my computer, in a studio or at a gig.

"After the PAF came along, cutting-edge guitar music became louder and heavier. People often associated the sound – and sight! – of Gibson humbuckers with those players. So P-90s were maybe viewed as a bit old-fashioned by some. But now people have gone back and they are rediscovering the P-90s. Over the past 10 to 15 years, there has been a huge resurgence in their popularity across the board.

> "There's nothing quite like a P-90. They sit so well between Fender-style single coils and a humbucking tone"

"Early on at Bare Knuckle I was focusing on trying to make a P-90 that I could mount on a humbucker chassis because the biggest problem is the shape of them. So with the humbucker-sized P-90s we make you can get all of the P-90 tone in a humbucker shape. As long as you've got that wide, squat coil you can get that P-90 sound. Now, if you've got humbuckers and you want to get into P-90s, there's nothing stopping you. At all. Every regular-sized P-90 model I make I do in humbucker size as well. We do seven-string versions, too.

"There's nothing quite like a P-90. They sit so well between Fender-style single coils and a humbucking tone, but they also have their own vibe. To a certain extent they are the king of pickups." **[RB]**

www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk

These Bare Knuckle Supermassive 90 pickups (pictured here with custom grey covers) are a modern take on the classic P-90 design

PHOTOS BY BARE KNUCKLE PICKUPS

"With a P-90 you've got depth – extension in the bass, and lots of clear highs, but there's this lovely drive in the midrange as well"

Even with a single P-90 a vast array of tones are available to explore using the guitar's volume and tone controls

ClassicGear

This classic electric bass was Rickenbacker's bestseller of the 70s

Rickenbacker 4001

Following the release of Fender's game-changing Precision Bass in 1951, most American manufacturers had introduced an electric bass guitar to the market by the mid-50s, but it wasn't until 1957 that Rickenbacker introduced its own.

Although it was slow to arrive, the model 4000 ultimately became one of the most influential bass designs ever. It was the first of its kind to feature a neck-through-body construction and dual truss-rod system. This, along with its "extreme cut-away" body design and 'cresting wave' three-piece headstock profile, made the company's fledgling bass appear altogether different.

Upon its launch in 1957, the Rickenbacker 4000 cost $279.50, which was $60 more than the Precision Bass. Evidently, Rickenbacker's owner (and former business partner of Leo Fender) FC Hall was confident in the company's new arrival. Production remained limited at first, but slowly began to speed up as the instrument caught on. This was in part thanks to endorsees such as James Kirkland of Ricky Nelson fame. "Mr Hall gave me the bass in early 1958," he told Rickenbacker author Martin Kelly. "I was one of the first to get the Rickenbacker."

In 1960, Rickenbacker changed from using mahogany or walnut for the instrument's neck-through-body to maple, adding strength to the guitar, while also matching its glued-on maple body 'wings'. In 1961, guitar builder Roger Rossmeisl further enhanced the body design by enlarging the horns and altering their shape. At this point, he then set about making a 'deluxe' version featuring a bound top and fancier fretboard inlays.

The distinctive 'cresting wave' headstock, as seen here on a 1977 model 4001 (first launched in 1961), gave this bass guitar an aesthetic edge over its competitors

Inspired by his new creation, Rossmeisl went on to build the first model 4001 bass later that year. In addition to the existing 'horseshoe' pickup – the revolutionary device that launched the electric-guitar market in 1931 – a second bespoke-designed four-pole 'toaster' pickup was added in the neck position. Additional volume and tone controls, along with a three-way selector switch, expanded the bass's tonal range. A bound top (chequerboard or plain) and bound rosewood fretboard with large triangular inlays further set the 4001 apart as something special.

Following Rossmeisl's departure from Rickenbacker to join Fender in 1962, a series of changes were implemented by fellow craftsman Dick Burke. A cast aluminium bridge and tailpiece replaced the original covered sliding design, and the body depth was reduced from 1 5/8 inches to 1 ¼ inches, while the bass horn was also extended into the familiar 'cresting wave' profile.

By the late 60s, demand for Rickenbacker basses had grown considerably and the instruments continued to evolve. In 1968, the 4001 received a Ric-O-Sound stereo output alongside its regular mono jack, and the original 'horseshoe' pickup was replaced with a Hi-gain unit (although a chromed plastic cover was retained as a nod to its predecessor).

1973 saw a further series of changes to the 4001. The model's popular chequerboard binding was replaced by a plain white type, a new cast zinc tailpiece appeared, and the front/'toaster' pickup was supplanted with another Hi-gain unit. At the same time, the triangular inlays were shortened – a measure implemented in order to strengthen the neck (along with a walnut centre strip introduced earlier in 1972). By this stage, the 4001 was already a classic, becoming Rickenbacker's biggest seller of the decade. It was eventually dropped in 1986 while its successor, the 4003, became a Rickenbacker mainstay. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Rickenbacker 4001

1957
Model 4000 launched; single horseshoe pickup; dot inlays

1960
Changes from mahogany or walnut to maple neck-through-body

July 1961
Larger body horns

November 1961
First 'deluxe' model 4001: dual pickups; triangular inlays; plain or chequerboard top binding

1962
Cast aluminium tailpiece; thinner body (1¼"); longer bass horn

January 1964
First Rose Morris model 1999 basses (UK export 4001-style)

1968
Hi-gain replaces horseshoe pickup; Ric-O-Sound stereo jack

1970
Shorter headstock

1972
Walnut neck-through-body centre strip

1973
Hi-gain replaces toaster pickup; plain binding; cast zinc tailpiece

1986
Discontinued

1977 Rickenbacker 4001

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Stamped onto jack plate; two letters: 'Q' (1977) and 'I' (September); four-digit number

2. HEADSTOCK
Maple wings; 'cresting wave' profile; dual truss-rod nuts (under cover)

3. BODY
Neck-through-body (maple with walnut centre strip); contoured maple wings; 'cresting wave' horns; 1¼-inch depth; plain single-layer top binding; Jetglo (black) finish

4. PICKUPS
Dual Hi-gain pickups with individual tone and volume controls; three-way selector switch; Ric-O-Sound stereo jack; mono jack

5. HARDWARE
Chrome-plated cast zinc tailpiece; metal pickup surrounds (chrome-plated plastic cover removed from bridge pickup); four individual nickel-plated tuners (two-a-side)

6. PLASTICS
Single-layer, eight-hole white pickguard; single-layer white truss-rod cover embossed with Rickenbacker logo; reads 'Made in USA Model 4001'

7. NECK
Neck-through-body (maple with walnut centre strip); dual truss rod; single-bound 20-fret lacquered rosewood fingerboard with triangular resin inlays

Guitarist **would like to thank Andrew Raymond of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for showing us this fantastic instrument, along with Martin Kelly whose definitive book *Rickenbacker Guitars 1931-1999: Out Of The Frying Pan Into The Fireglo* is available to pre-order now at https://phantombooks.com**

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Our resident vintage guitar expert David Davidson on some of the earliest known Strats

Early Fender Stratocasters

David currently has this 1954 Fender Stratocaster 0194 in fine condition

"I've been fortunate enough to have handled and possessed several prototype Stratocasters that were made very early on. It's assumed the first 200 Stratocasters had [serial] numbers that appeared on the tremolo cover, starting with 0100. However, there are definitely prototype Stratocasters with earlier appointments made prior to this that were not serial numbered, some of which left the factory later. The first Strats that went out were sent to sales reps as demo guitars. They went all around the country and even up into Western Canada – one of the Strats I've had was a guitar that belonged to a dealer rep in Calgary.

"One of the earliest Stratocasters I've seen was at the Songbirds museum [in Chattanooga, Tennessee] and it had a January 1954 neck. The nut step was different – the part of the headstock face behind the nut. It was significantly longer than what Fender later settled on. Another prototype I had featured 'television-size' 1¾-inch potentiometers dated early 1952. Some of the 'trem cover' models, from the first 200, also have '52 pots, but they're the regular-size diameter. We also know the earliest Strat pickups have larger diameter polepieces, and the body routing and contouring are different.

"Other early Stratocasters were finished in sunburst using what people sometimes call 'furniture polish', but is really a furniture stain, before being cleared over. Fender tried different things during this time. They experimented quite a bit during '53. It appears Leo Fender's input to the Strat was limited to the development of the [Synchronized] Tremolo/vibrato unit, while others had input into the refinement of the Stratocaster's design, right up until the regular production models.

"I currently have Stratocasters 0102, 0103 and 0194. All three were demo guitars. 0102 is a completely original, beautiful instrument in fine condition. So is 0194. 0103 defines the true demonstrator guitar. It is a heavily worn instrument. It is also extremely heavy; it's 8lb 12oz. That is extraordinarily heavy for a Stratocaster. Ash can be heavy sometimes, and that guitar happens to be the heaviest one from that era I've ever touched. Early 50s Broadcasters can be heavy, too. To me, this was just a test mule guitar they sent out to a dealer/rep to be a demonstrator. The tuning pegs were changed once before the originals were put back on, so it's got some extra holes. The other two guitars, however – numbers 0102 and 0194 – remain completely intact and original. All three have their original 'poodle' cases. 0194 even has its original strap and cable.

> "I think there were possibly too many cooks in the kitchen at certain points…"

"I've had around 12 of these early guitars. All of the early guitars are between January and May of 1954, but I have seen pre-production Strats from May. There may have just been parts lying around the shop for a while and they said, 'We might as well put it together and get it out of the door!'

"The early Strats seem to have very tight neck pockets. Every time I've had to take one apart, the neck fights me coming off the guitar. It's just stuck with lacquer and the fact it's such a tight seal makes it difficult. I think by the time the Strats went into production, they made a bit more space so they could service the guitars without damaging the wood or finish. The back routing on the salesman samples is also sometimes done a bit differently.

"The guitar bearing the serial number 0100 [neck date January '54, body date April '54] was sold by Gruhn a few years ago. One of my regrets is finding out about that guitar the day before it went online. It was marked up at a price I thought was ambitious at the time, but would love to buy it now! Because it's really the first serial numbered Strat. Is it the first Stratocaster? No, it's not. Is it the first serial numbered Strat? Yes, it is.

"I've had 0102, 0103, 0112, 0117, 0108, 0158, 0168 and 0194. And I can tell you every one of those guitars is memorable. More memorable than the distinctions between one 'Burst and another. Each one is distinctly different. The neck shapes and edges are different. They're all cut the same, but the hand-finishing process seems to vary. I think there were possibly way too many cooks in the kitchen at certain points. They had a lot of local musicians working there like Bill Carson and Freddie Tavares, and they all had input.

"Leo wasn't a player and could only trust the advice of those around him. But, he was listening all the time. By September '54, the Stratocaster had evolved substantially. In my opinion, they were constantly trying to make a more perfect wheel." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com

The 1954 Strats 0102 (left) and 0103 (right) were both originally demo guitars for salesmen

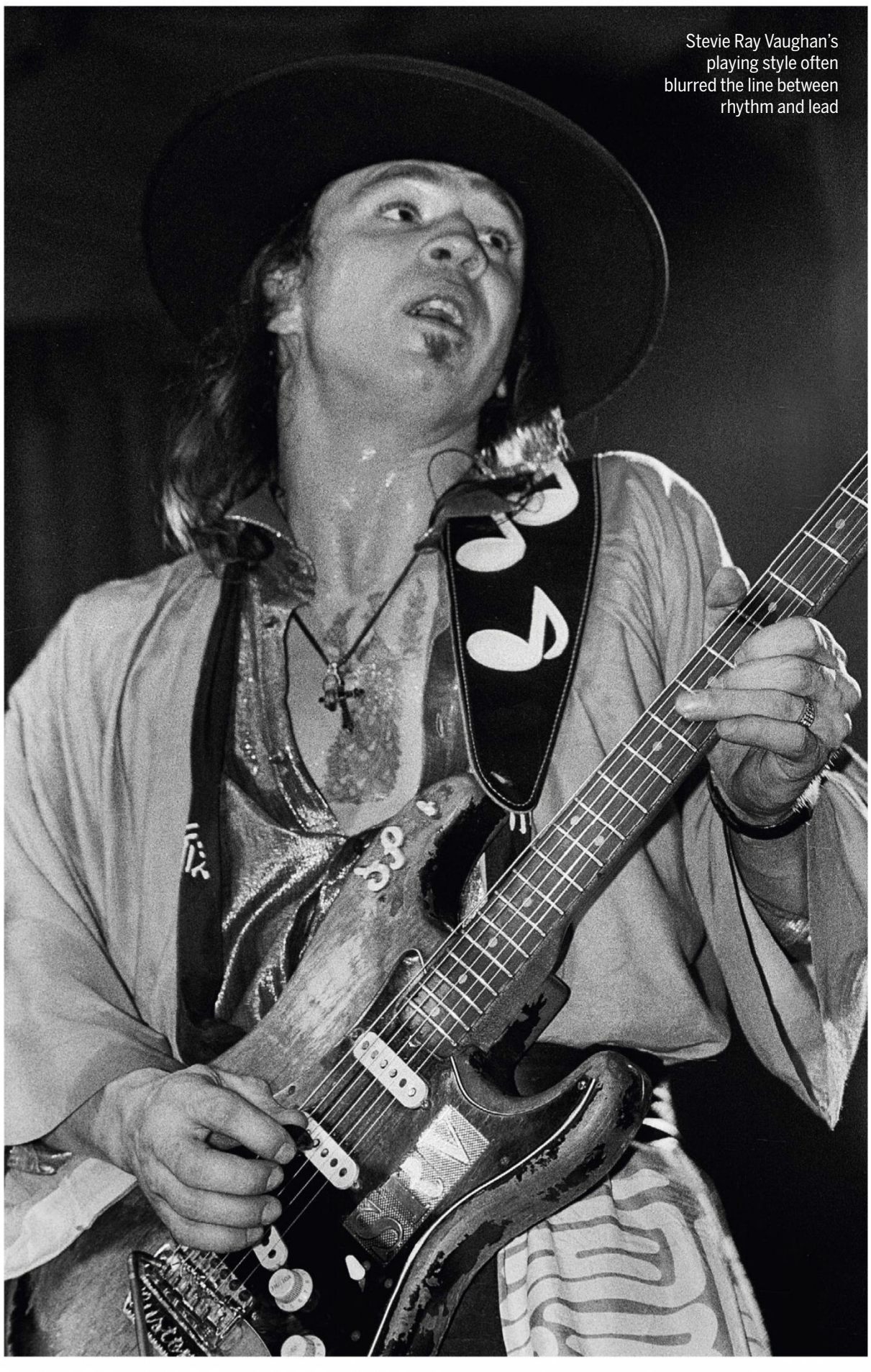
Photos by Paige Davidson/Well Strung Guitars

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Rhythm… and Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example



Stevie Ray Vaughan's playing style often blurred the line between rhythm and lead

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

THE DISTINCTION between 'lead' and 'rhythm' guitar has long been a very blurred line. In fact, guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix and SRV have managed to pretty much obliterate that line on many occasions. Having the ability to bridge the gap between those two ostensibly different worlds can really open up the fretboard in a way that remains useful even when staying within strict rhythm or lead boundaries.

For this piece, I've used a harmonically sparse but relatively busy bass and drums backing. This allows me to sit back on a more chordal approach or venture into single-note territory with relative freedom, including whether I want to emphasise a major or minor feel, if you check out the whole solo. As an overall dynamic, I've tried to set up an expectation of E7-A7-B7, with a B7#9 being very hard to resist at the turnaround – so I didn't!

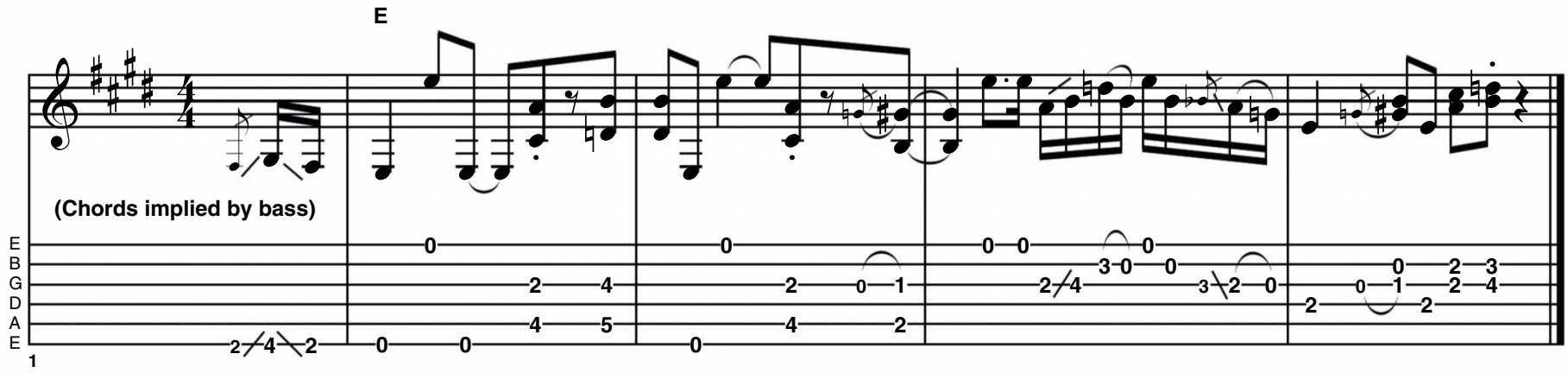
Initially using a mixture of doublestops, chord inversions and pentatonic shapes, I then move further into single-note territory as the piece goes on, coming back to state a full chord or a doublestop phrase here and there. This is partly about balancing things to avoid sounding sparse, but equally where convenient shapes and licks present themselves. It's always a good idea to have some 'stock' licks to work from – and to keep expanding that resource.

By the last few bars, I'm mostly playing single notes, though these lines could be said to contribute to the perceived harmonic content to an extent. If I had continued for another round, it might have been nice to drop down to some sparse chords and build up again, maybe using some more rhythmic patterns and space. Why not take these ideas as a template and use the backing track to develop further? Hope you enjoy and see you next time!

Richard Barrett's new album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

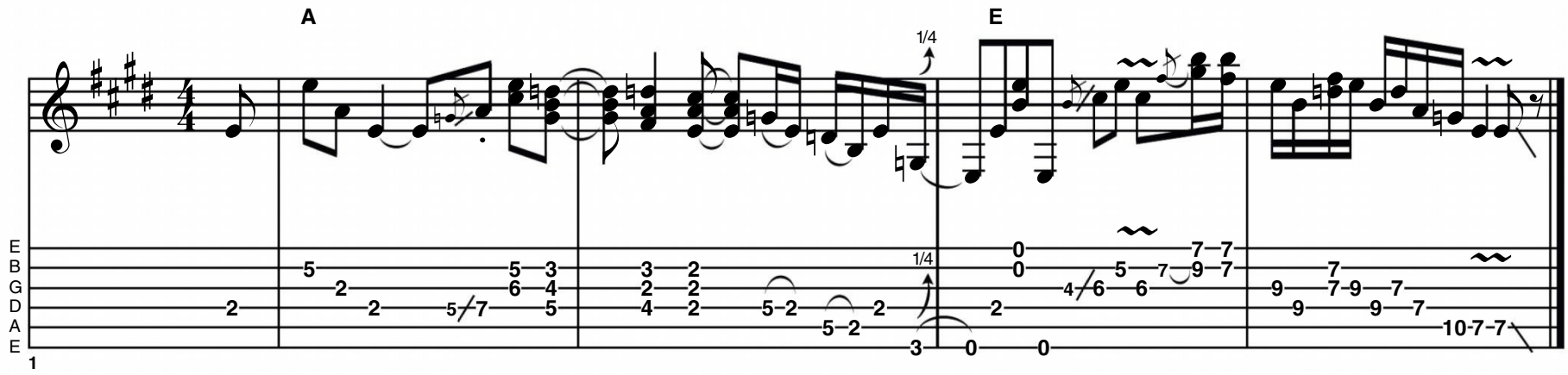
Example 1

BEGINNING WITH SOME CLASSIC 'BLUES' DOUBLESTOPS, mixed with some ringing open-position shape 1 pentatonic, this idea is about setting the stage and establishing a context. Even the least musically knowledgeable listener will appreciate being given a context, and in these early bars of the piece it might be best to 'keep your powder dry', until some collective momentum has been gathered! I'm trying to demonstrate several ideas here, but why not play very sparsely and see how that feels, too?



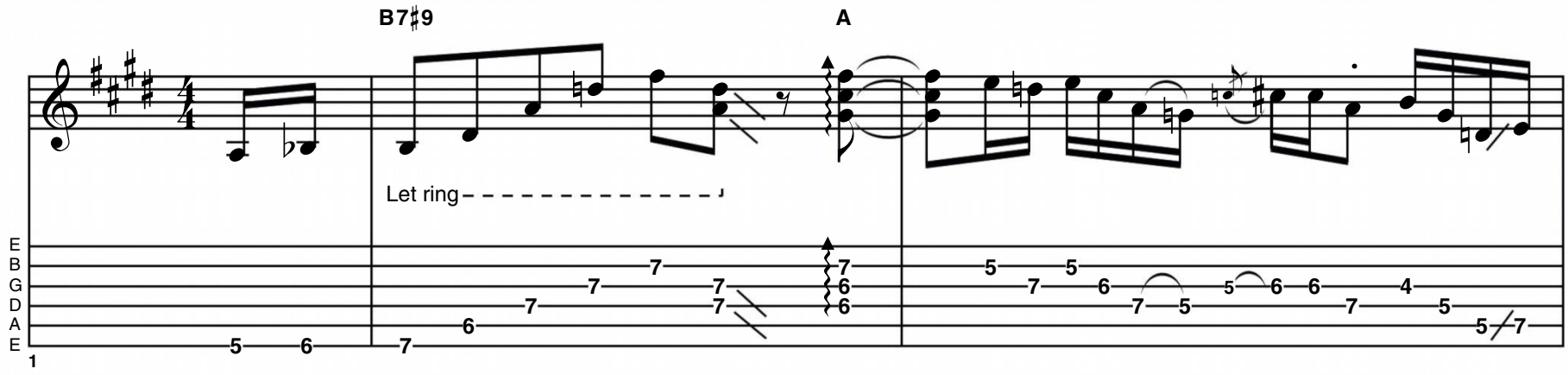
Example 2

IN THIS NEXT SECTION, we change to the IV chord (A), where I've taken the opportunity to superimpose some descending triads (A, G and D) on the second, third and fourth strings. You don't need to be a chord theory expert to do this: try transposing this idea and these shapes over the E and B chords, too. Under the cover of ringing open strings, I then shift up to around the 7th to 9th frets for some doublestops and a little run based around shape 4 of the E minor pentatonic.

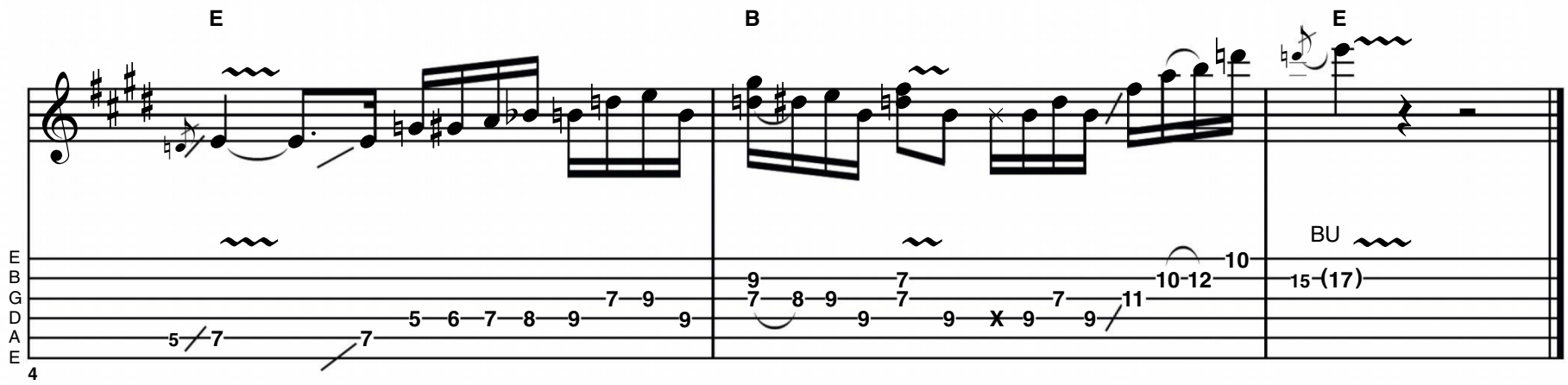


Example 3

I'VE CHOSEN TO UNDERLINE this first statement of the V (B) changing back to IV (A) with a jazzy B7#9 leading to an A13 then picking out some of the chord tones from A major and G major. To do this, I'm simply referencing the barre chords that live around the 5th then 3rd frets – camouflaged by the fact that I'm incorporating these notes into a pentatonic lick that then chromatically leads up to a fragmented B minor (trilling to major) chord and a horizontal grab for a high E to begin the next section!

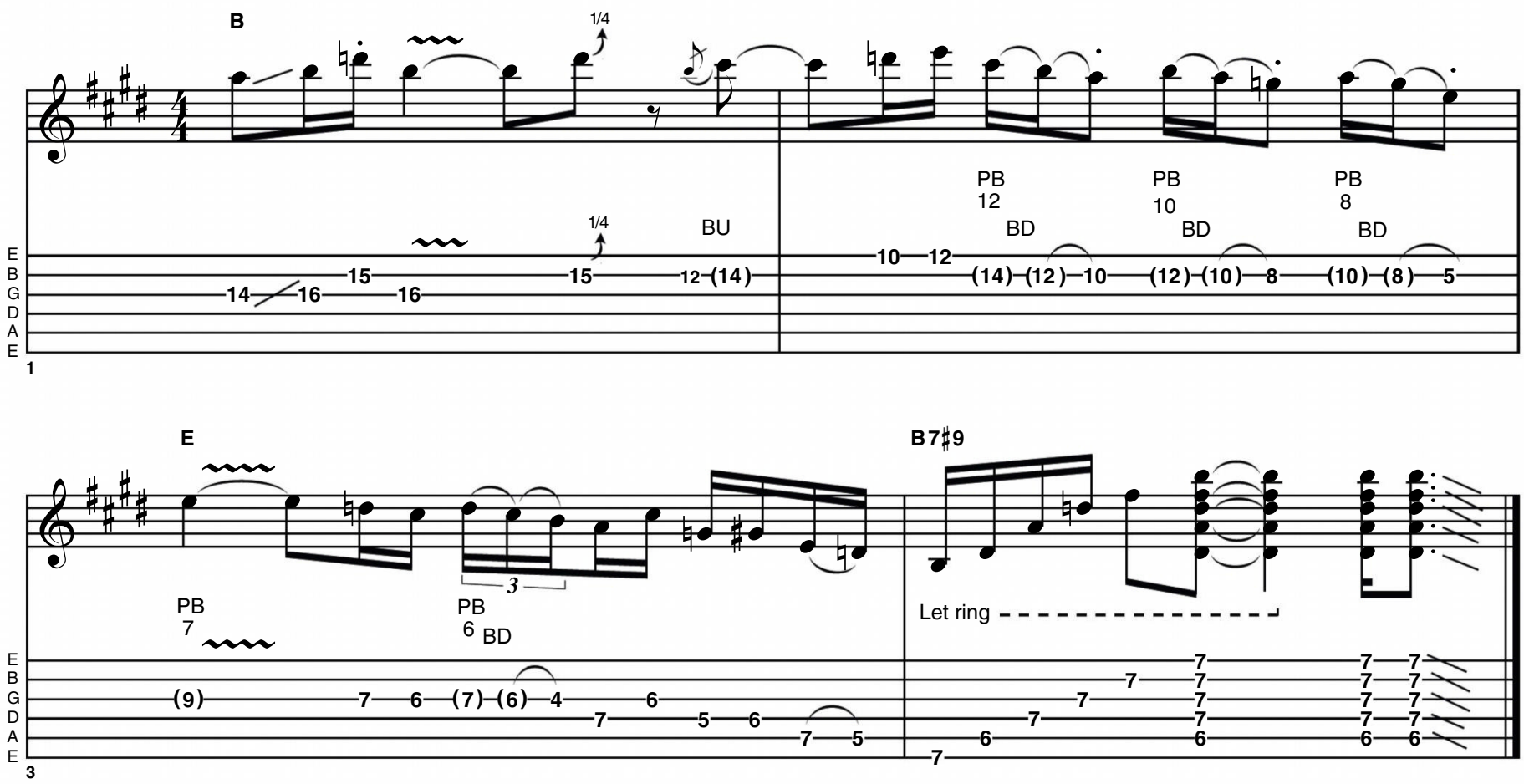


Example 3 cont.



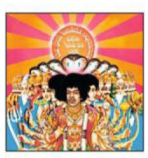
Example 4

SKIPPING TO THE FINAL SECTION, I've used the same string-bending idea as a repeated descending phrase over the implied A and G chords, before sticking around the shape 3 area of the E minor pentatonic (though I do incorporate a G# near the end of bar 3). This leads very comfortably to another B7#9 (I couldn't resist!) to finish. B minor pentatonic would also work well here, but I'm not sure it'd have the same impact – certainly worth bearing in mind for a longer solo, though.



Hear It Here

JIMI HENDRIX
AXIS: BOLD AS LOVE



Any of the tracks here are recommended – not just for the specific licks and chords but also for Jimi's overall approach as the main harmonic instrument in this three-piece format with a minimum of overdubs. The title track, while featuring a few overdubs later on, is a particularly great demonstration of this. *Little Wing* is worth revisiting, while *Wait Until Tomorrow* is a masterclass in creating harmonic and rhythmic interest.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
LIVE AT MONTREUX (1982 & 1985)

The first eight tracks, recorded in 1982, capture SRV at the moment he came to the attention of David Bowie and Jackson Browne. All the tracks give useful ideas, but going chronologically, starting with *Hide Away* and *Texas Flood* then skipping to 1985 with *Couldn't Stand The Weather*, these showcase a mixture of rhythm and lead, which at times fills the space of two guitars but could also maintain interest with comparatively simple, sparse lines.

MATT SCHOFIELD
HEADS, TAILS & ACES

Though Matt has the luxury of keyboards to fill any harmonic gaps here, there is definitely a lot to be gained by checking out his tone and phrasing in these songs, particularly on the minor blues of *War We Wage*, the slow blues of *Lay It Down,* and the harmonically savvy phrasing of *I Told Ya.* Matt also manages to get piercing phrases through the Hammond organ accompaniment without any harshness – an achievement in itself!

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Guitarist

Nextmonth

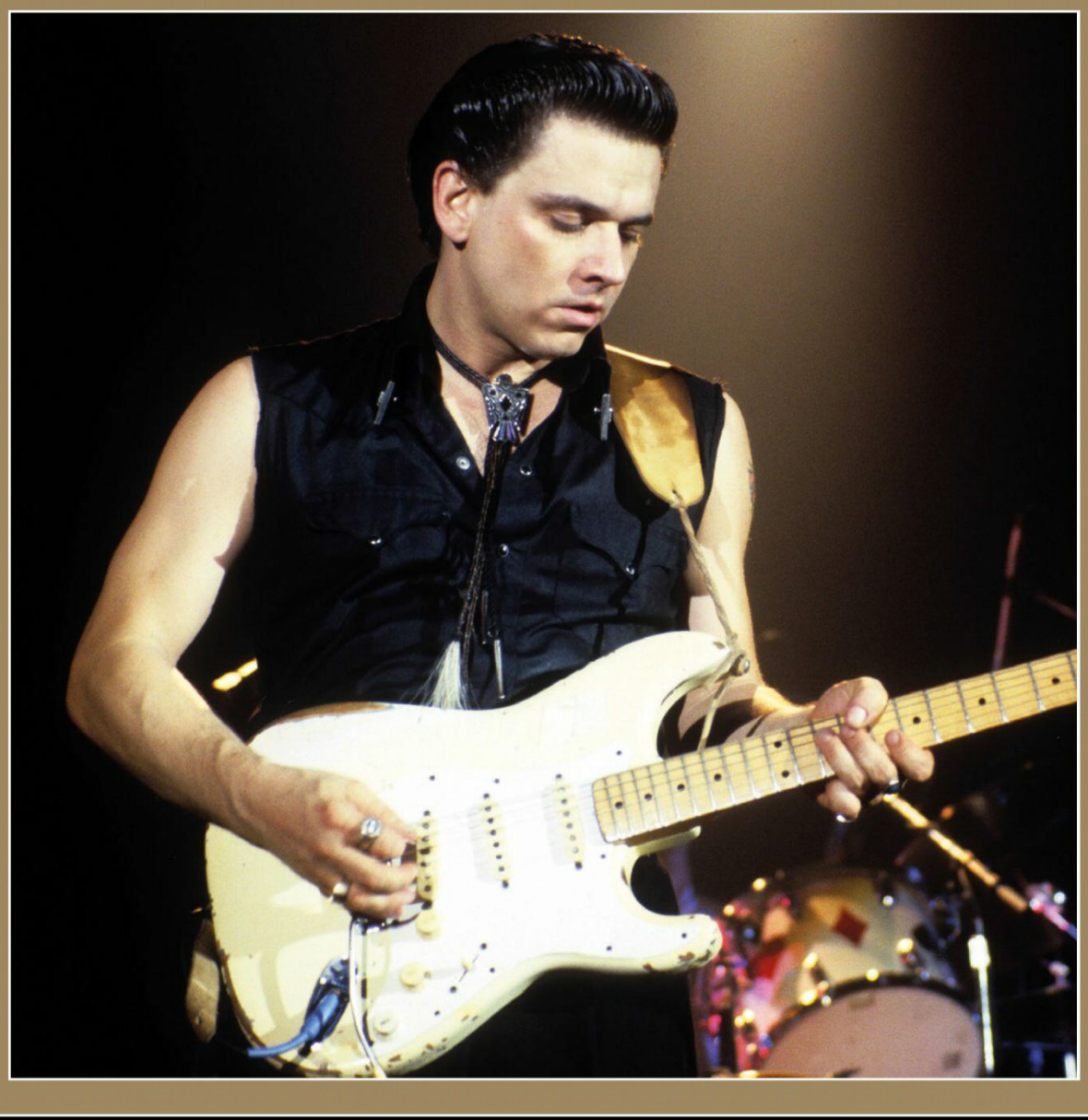

PHOTO BY JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

A career retrospective limited-edition boxset and thoughts about life, music and brother Stevie Ray

KK DOWNING

The release of new album *Sermons Of The Sinner* sees the ex-Judas Priest guitarist back in action

STUDIO TIPS

Laying down tracks at home? Read our guide for getting the very best from your recording gear

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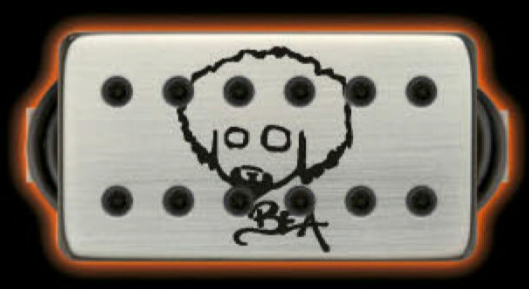

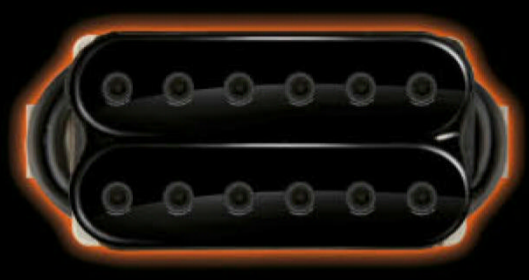

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