Fender PLAYER PLUS TELE & STRAT ON TEST!

Guitarist

Issue 478

NOVEMBER 2021

WILD THINGS

IN SEARCH OF JIMI'S STRATS

JOHN MAYER

A MODERN MASTER ON THE TONES BEHIND HIS NEW ALBUM *SOB ROCK*

PAGE 74

INTERVIEWS

Carlos SANTANA

Jimmie VAUGHAN

Steve HOWE

+

REVIEWED

GIBSON'S GENERATION ACOUSTICS

PLUS

PAUL REED SMITH ON GUITAR DESIGN

THE IBANEZ JEM STORY

LANEY AMPS

FUTURE

BORN TO PLAY

Sheeran BY Lowden

MADE IN BY Lowden IRELAND

SheeranGuitars.com

Guitarist

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

Lost Music

Our cover feature this month deals with a question that all of us have pondered at one time or another: what happens to the guitars that pass out of our lives, either sold, stolen or misplaced? The fate of instruments used by iconic players such as Jimi Hendrix is of special interest (see feature, page 62), but every player can lay claim to at least one story of guitars lost and regretted ever after. Some, including Whitesnake veteran Bernie Marsden, have suggested that guitars should come with a logbook like a car – providing a record of who has owned them. But perhaps it's better that mystery accompanies guitars that come into our lives without provenance. Like a stray cat that climbs in through the window one day and makes itself at home, we can only guess their past history, and their future is an empty book in which we may write a few lines of music before the page is turned once again.

But while instruments can always be replaced, people cannot. It was with great sadness that we learned this month that *Guitarist* contributor Roger Newell had passed away. A gifted bassist, Roger wrote for *Guitarist* for many years on everything from four-string tone to his favourite topic, The Shadows, about whom he was an acknowledged expert. A life-long musician, Roger played the great stages of the world with Rick Wakeman and, in later years, toured extensively with rock 'n' roll legend Marty Wilde. To those who knew him best he was the most loyal and supportive of friends and his loss will be felt keenly by all at *Guitarist*. If you'd like to join us in remembering Roger's eventful life in music, turn to page 36 to read bandmate Neville Marten's moving tribute.

Stay safe and see you next month.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Jimmie Vaughan
A lifetime of blues wisdom is condensed into Jimmie Vaughan's candid and wide-reaching interview. Turn to **p56** to read it

Paul Reed Smith
The master luthier behind the PRS brand shares with us his insights on staying in tune through better design on **p42**

Laney Lionhearts
A British amp brand with maximum commitment to tone, Laney explains how it put the roar into its Lionheart series on **p112**

COVER IMAGE CREDITS: JIMI HENDRIX PHOTO BY AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO **IMAGES ABOVE:** JIMMIE VAUGHAN PHOTO BY MATTHEW STURTEVANT

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA11UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor-In-Chief
Jamie Dickson
jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor
Dave Burrluck
dave@daveburrluck.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

Content Director, Music
Scott Rowley
scott.rowley@futurenet.com

Senior Music Editor
Jason Sidwell
jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

Contributors
Richard Barrett, Richard Bienstock, Alex Bishop, Rod Brakes, Trevor Curwen, David Davidson, Stefan Fast, Adam Goldsmith, Nick Guppy, Martin Holmes, Richard Hood, Rob Laing, Neville Marten, Matt Owen, Davina Rungasamy, Gary Stuckey, Stuart Williams, Henry Yates

In-House Photography
Phil Barker, Joseph Branston, Olly Curtis, Neil Godwin

ADVERTISING
MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST
CHIEF REVENUE DIRECTOR Zack Sullivan zack.sullivan@futurenet.com
UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Alison Watson alison.watson@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Guy Meredith guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING
MAGAZINE MARKETING DIRECTOR Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ACQUISITIONS Helen Harding helen.harding@futurenet.com
ACQUISITIONS CAMPAIGN MANAGER Faith Wardle faith.wardle@futurenet.com
ACQUISITIONS MARKETING EXECUTIVE Sally Sebesta sally.sebesta@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION PROJECT MANAGER Clare Scott clare.scott@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentyman frances.twentyman@futurenet.com
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS CONTROLLER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION
GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. TO FIND OUR MORE CONTACT US AT LICENSING@FUTURENET.COM OR VIEW OUR AVAILABLE CONTENT AT WWW.FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF NEWSTRADE Tim Mathers

MANAGEMENT
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER Aaron Asadi aaron.asadi@futurenet.com
BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com
COMMERCIAL FINANCE DIRECTOR Dan Jotcham dan.jotcham@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com
HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Graham Dalzell graham.dalzell@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES
APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com

ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

FUTURE Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

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

Chief Executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Rachel Addison**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2021 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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

Designed for Sound

SE®

PRS HYBRID BRACING

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

www.prsguitars.com/se_acoustics

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS®

Contents

COVER FEATURE

JIMI HENDRIX'S STRATOCASTERS

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
AF archive / Alamy Stock Photo

62 Hendrix used many different guitars during his tragically short career, but he will always be associated with Stratocasters. Tony Bacon tracks down the instruments that survived those whirlwind gigs…

Contents

ISSUE 478 NOVEMBER 2021

PHOTO BY GRANGER HISTORICAL PICTURE ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

REGULARS

028.....Gas Supply
030.....The Lineup
032.....New Music
034.....Tones Behind The Tracks
038.....Opinion
044.....Substitute
046.....Feedback
102.....Subscribe
110.....Tonal Teamwork
118.....Longtermers
120.....Bought & Sold
122.....Dazed & Confused
124.....The Mod Squad
130.....Classic Gear
132.....Vintage Icons
138.....Next Month

SUBSCRIBE TO **GUITARIST** AND **FOR 6 MONTHS** & GET A **FREE** BLACKSTAR FLY 3 MINI AMP **WORTH £65!**

See p102 for details

FEATURES

036.....Obituary: Roger Newell
050 ..... Carlos Santana
056 ..... Jimmie Vaughan
062 ..... Jimi Hendrix Stratocasters
074 ..... John Mayer
112 ..... Blueprint: Laney

NEW GEAR

010.....**PJD** Woodford Standard & St John Standard
016.....**Juketone** Rival Son 1x12 Combo
022.....**Faith** Blue Moon Venus
024.....**Thermion** Zero Dynamic Hybrid Amplifier
026.....**Turnstone** TD Acoustic
082.....**Fender** Player Plus Telecaster & Stratocaster
092.....**Gibson** Generation G-00, G-45, G-Writer EC & G-200 EC
104.....**Seymour Duncan** Vapor Trail Deluxe
106.....**Hamstead Soundworks** Comet Interstellar Driver
108.....**Ashdown** Pro-FX Two-Band Boost, Pro-FX Retro Drive and Pro-FX Vintage Fuzz

TECHNIQUES

134.....Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio':
http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

INSEPA

WWW.THOMANN.DE

RABLE

th•mann

PJD WOODFORD STANDARD
£1,250

WHAT IS IT? Quality build, pickups and hardware make this a lot of Strat-style for the money

PJD ST JOHN STANDARD
£1,899

WHAT IS IT? A slightly downsized offset with chambered construction and a huge sound

Putting On The Style

The most affordable guitar yet from PJD Guitars plus the company's take on the classic offset: two new shapes from a new maker, proudly crafted in the UK

Words David Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Regular *Guitarist* readers will be aware of York-based guitar maker Leigh Dovey and his PJD team. If you caught our last issue, you'll also know he's busy preparing production of a new Cream T guitar co-designed with none other than Billy F Gibbons and, without letting any cats out of the bag, there are more collaborations in the pipeline. In the past 12 months since we last reviewed a PJD, the company has taken on more staff – which now number 12 – and is producing nearly 40 instruments per month. It all seems a long time away from playing an early PJD Woodford, nearly four years ago, which we featured in issue 438. Promise isn't always fulfilled, but in this case it most definitely has been.

Aside from that original Woodford, we've mainly focused on the Carey, the central model in the PJD range, but earlier this year PJD announced a paired-back Woodford

1. PJD has been using Bare Knuckle pickups for some time and Leigh is a big fan of the more affordable Boot Camp range featured here. These are the lowest-output Old Guards with measured DCRs of 7kohms (bridge), 6.17k (middle) and 6.15k (neck)

VOLUME
TONE
VOLUME
TONE

2

3

4

Standard conceived as a "hand-built guitar that won't break the bank". Our other review model here is the latest design, the St John Standard offset – also available in Elite and Limited versions – which joined the line in 2020.

While the Carey mixes up its Les Paul-meets-Telecaster influences, both the Woodford and the St John have more direct (and obvious) inspiration, although the St John especially is noticeably downsized from Fender's original offset blueprint. "Yes, the body is quite a bit smaller than a Fender," says PJD's founder Leigh Dovey. "I never really got on with the larger body on those offsets. I felt there was too much bulk, which is why I downsized it. Not everyone likes a single-cut guitar like the Carey, and offsets are quite flavour of the month and we've seen that in sales: they've been doing incredibly well."

But whatever the style, it's PJD's quality and efficient build that really means you're getting a lot of guitar for your money. Even so, bringing the Woodford Standard in at its planned price of just under a grand proved impossible. "We had to raise the price," says Leigh. "The original plan of starting at £999 was killing us, basically. It was too low. [So] we've gone for regular American ash, not the lighter swamp ash, which helps us achieve that lower price point."

Whatever the style, it's PJD's quality and efficient build that mean you get a lot of guitar for your money

Both guitars use a two-piece centre-joined construction and have a body depth of 41mm. The Woodford Standard is also solid with light contouring in the usual places but far from heavy at 3.57kg (7.85lb), while the slab-bodied St John – like the other PJDs we've played – is chambered, primarily on the bass side, and comes in at 3.18kg (7lb). It's heavier than our reference Carey Standard, which has slightly more chambering and weighs just 2.63kg (5.79lb).

Both guitars have PJD's quarter-sawn roasted maple necks; the only difference is a slightly different finish. Both are a satin-y nitro, but as Leigh explains, "because the Woodford has to meet a lower price point we just have a thin nitro, four or five coats, so it leaves an almost open-grain type feel. Whereas the St John Standard actually has quite a few more processes, sealer coats and stuff, so it gives you a more even finish, but it obviously takes longer." The difference is subtle at best: both necks feel superb.

Gotoh is the hardware of choice and then we get Bare Knuckle Boot Camp on our Woodford, and those or optional Cream T pickups on our St John – you choose. You don't get a gigbag or case with the start-up Woodford, but a PJD logo'd Hiscox case is standard with the St John.

It's not just the quality of the component parts that's impressive, either. There's a very detailed build here. The neck join, for example, uses Allen key bolts that thread into inserts in the maple neck. There's no neckplate and the heels are nicely rounded on the treble side. The satin body finish is also nitro. "It's a cellulose paint but a very thin mix of paint and lacquer. Then there's a satin nitro on top of that," explains Leigh. The characterful stripped grain of the ash is clearly visible and feel-able, and you can't help thinking – even with the solidbody Woodford, and especially the chambered St John – that it all helps to promote a very lively resonance.

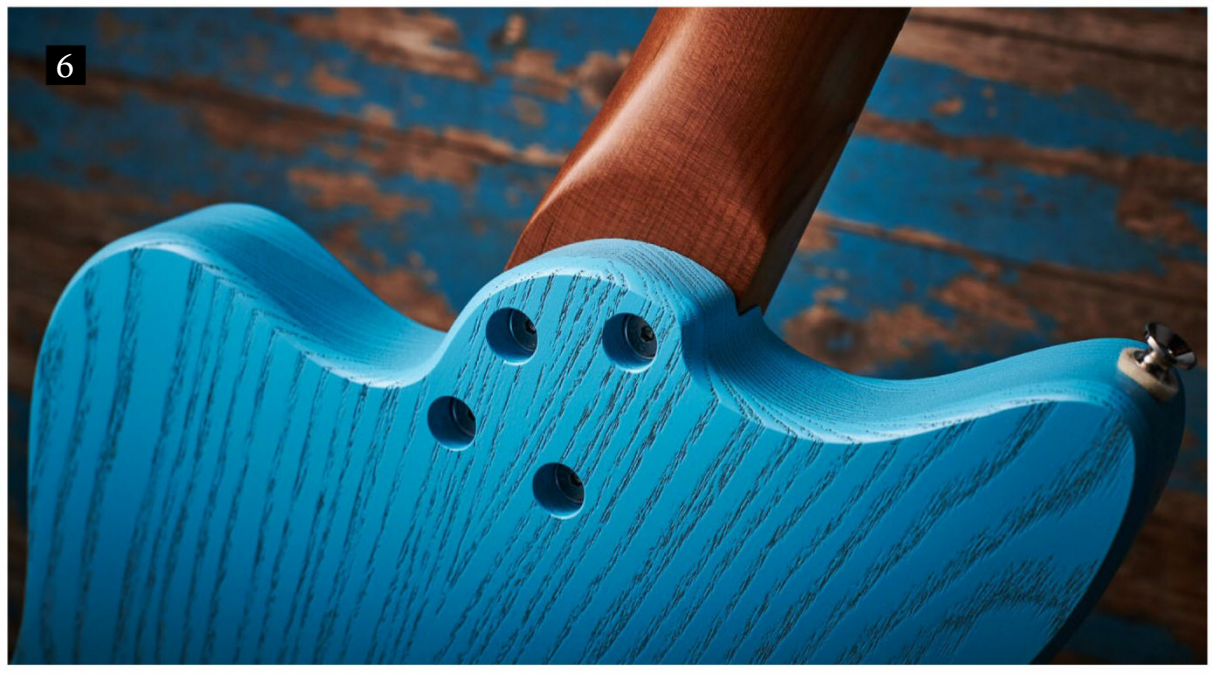
2. Messing with the Fender headstock isn't always successful. PJD's Tele-inspired outline is easy on the eye, though, and its branded-style logo is actually laser cut

3. PJD likes to keep its control circuits simple. Here we have a vintage Strat setup with no tone for the bridge pickup. Not everyone will get those Gibson-style knobs on a Fender-style build

4. This side-mounted metal 'football' jack-plate is featured on all PJD models: it might be a little generic in style but is very functional, especially for the gigging musician

5. You can order your St John with either Bare Knuckle or Cream T pickups (as here). This soapbar P-90 was scanned from an early 60s Gibson thinline

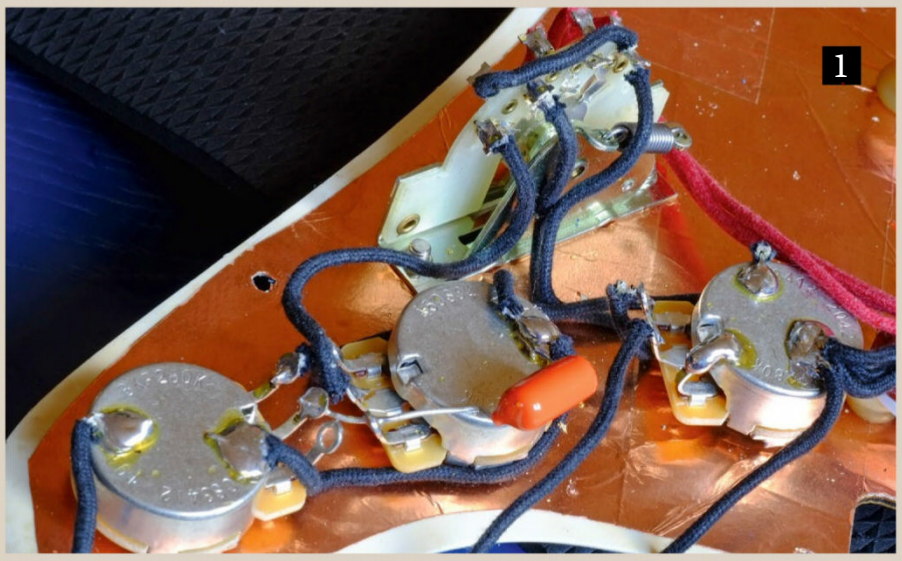
6. With recessed bolts, not screws, the round-nosed heel doesn't need a custom-shaped neckplate. Typically functional design!

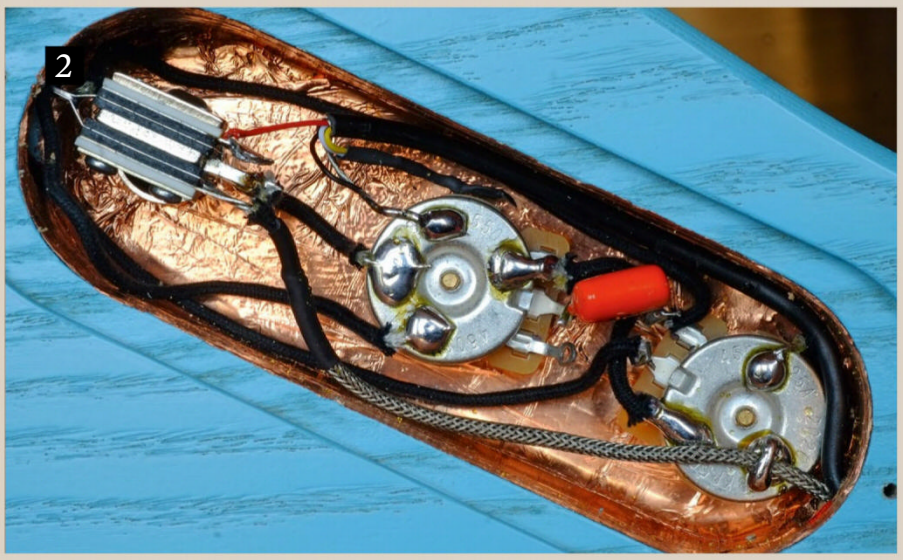


Now, there are plenty of players who won't get the hardtail bridge, not least, of course, that both the inspirations here typically have vibratos. "I've always been a massive fan of hardtail Strats," says Leigh. "I've owned a couple and I've always screwed down the vibrato if it has one. I just think for simplicity it works better. That's not to say we won't be offering a vibrato version in the future, but I didn't want to put it on this guitar. I'd very much like to bring a vibrato to the St John, like the Mastery-style – definitely one of those as opposed to the standard Fender-style, which is not exactly reliable. We've had requests for vibratos, including Bigsbys for the Carey Elite, and we will be adding them in the future. It'll definitely happen, but I can't say when at this stage."

Both our guitars have cream scratchplates, but because the plastic parts are made in-house you can spec whatever you want. "We offer cream, white, black, tortoiseshell and a pearlescent white. It's quite a nice

UNDER THE HOOD Clean on the outside, but what's inside? We find out





The inside of the Woodford is extremely neat and tidy. The scratchplate is backed with copper foil, pots are CTS 280kohms, there's a quality USA CRL five-way lever switch and the Orange Drop cap value is .022 microfarads (223F). All the wiring is cloth-covered and long leads are tidied with plastic cable ties. The wiring is like the original Strat (albeit it hum-cancelling in mix positions) with tones for neck and middle, not bridge – but it's simple to alter that. The body is routed for HSS if you prefer that setup.

The St John's rear-mounted controls sit in a pretty cramped cavity, again copper-foil screened including the wooden cavity cover. It's the same quality components, wired modern-style, including the same value capacitor, but here the pot values are 500k and we have a toggle (not lever) pickup selector switch. The bridge humbucker is four-conductor so adding a coil-split to the tone pot via a pull-push, for example, would be easy enough.

The Eliminator, part of the Cream T BFG Whisker series, is not a scan of a famous pickup; it chases a hotter PAF-style. Like all Cream T humbuckers, it's lightly potted with Thomas Nilsen's special sauce. Our multimeter read 10kohms, reflecting the intended style. The P-90 (aka 'The Duke') measures 6.12k at output and was scanned from an early 60s Gibson thinline.

1. Under the hood you can see the Woodford's cleanly wired controls
2. The St John's cavity is small, but it's neatly wired again
3. Removing the neck on the Woodford shows it's a proper bolt-on

thing for a dealer who can offer something different for their shop. We've had quite a few requests for mismatched pickguard and pickup rings, too."

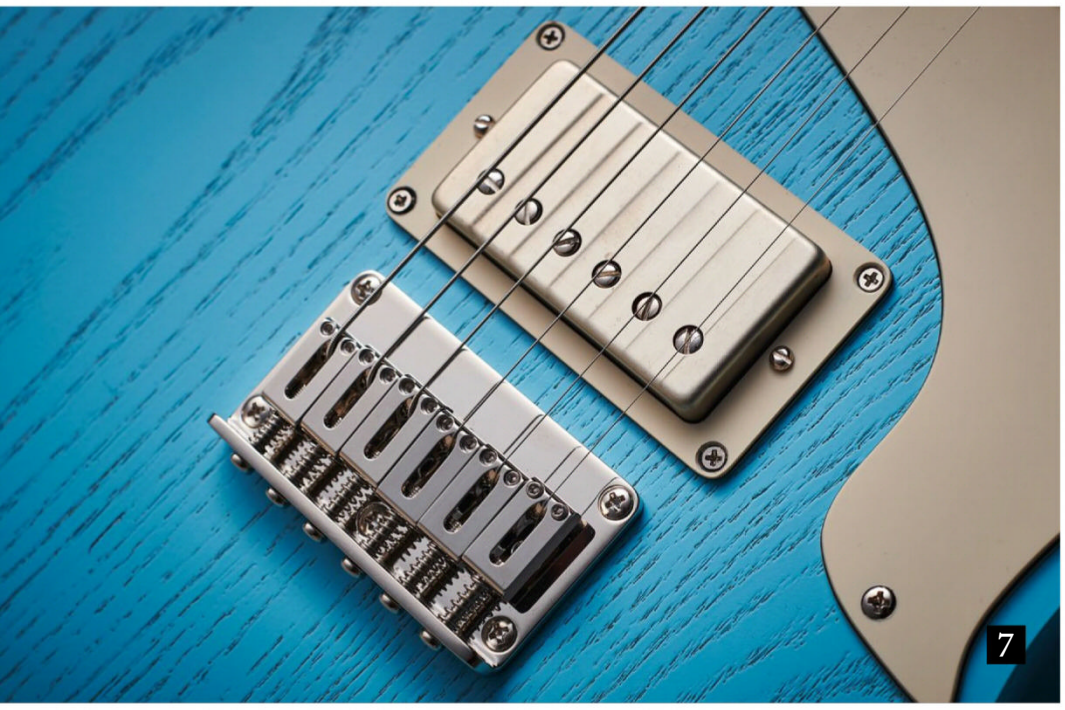
Feel & Sounds

PJD's necks are one pretty major reason why these guitars have impressed us so far. They look quite vintage-y but actually play hard and fast with the classics. The fingerboard radius, for example, is lightly compound – 254mm to 305mm (10 to 12 inches) PRS-to-Gibson, if you like – and the Jescar frets are well chosen to provide plenty of height for clean bends, plus the quality of the fretwork, the way the ends are almost burnished, is really first class. Depth-wise, we go from 21.5mm at the 1st fret to just over 22mm at the 12th. It's a great shape that is pretty mainstream yet doesn't feel generic – there's a character here and the feel of the necks, as we say, is a major reason to try a PJD. Setups on both reflect the detailed build: 1.6mm on the top E and 1.8mm on the low E at the 12th. The bone nuts are beautifully cut, too.

Of course, the functional presentation might well be a bit too utility for some, but having lived and recorded with a Carey Standard during those endless lockdown months and finally been able to gig it, there's little doubt these are players' guitars, pure and simple. That strong vibrant acoustic voice is just lapped up by the Woodford's Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard single coils – this is classy 'Strat' that happily sits alongside modern bolt-on royalty, such as PRS's Silver Sky, for example, despite it being virtually half the price. It's the quality of the sound that is so impressive, with woody depth at the neck, plenty of smash in terms of the attack but certainly not overly bright. There is, then, quite a contrast at the bridge, which without a tone control might be very vintage-y but does veer on the thin side. Then there's the middle pickup, which has a definite third character, and neither mix disappoints. As we say, no bells or whistles, but this really is a quality voice.

The St John obviously has a different character, but it's still underpinned by this lively build and, like our Carey Standard, proves extremely versatile-sounding with the minimum of fuss. Leigh's not a fan of coil-splits on humbuckers so you don't get one here, but that's a simple DIY mod as the Cream T Eliminator has a four-conductor hook-up cable (see Under The Hood). As we've noted before, the neck P-90 and this construction easily recalls a jazz-style semi – use your volume and tone to shade that and players working in those classic jazz/blues territories might need little else. But the humbucker here provides viable contrast taking us from a clean, quite bright and a little honky hot PAF to driven classic rock and rootsy Americana rhythm sounds and bright-edged leads. But the resonance adds to the sense of power if you need it; it sounds fractionally more 'solid' than our Carey Standard, a little more direct with a touch more sizzle from its bridge pickup.

The only negative we can find is the low-contrast translucent white side-dots whereas our Carey Standard reference has black dots, which we prefer.



7

8

Verdict

Neither guitar here is quite as original as PJD's Carey, and their inspirations are hardly unique in today's market. The palette of sounds from the Woodford is very familiar – more so than the original twin-P-90 version or the new Elite – but when it's done with this quality-to-price ratio it's perfectly valid. We've played many boutique 'Strats' that cost an awful lot more and bring little extra to the table. The St John jumps on the offset trend, but the combination of the lightweight build and hugely viable pickup combo don't limit the guitar in the least; it's a different-shaped take on the Carey recipe. The necks on both are superb, mixing the flatter Gibson/PRS fingerboard radius with a Fender-y feel, and are frankly real boutique in quality.

Is British craft important to you? That's personal choice, but when it's this good with world-class sounds, these are just very good guitars that purposely mix up influences to create a very valid and lively, vibrant voice. Not tried one? We strongly suggest you do. G

7. The Cream T Eliminator at the bridge is a little hotter than the Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard 'bucker option. There's no coil-split, but it's a simple DIY mod to fit a pull-push tone as the Eliminator has a four-conductor output

8. Nothing like the offset it references, the controls on the St John are simple: master volume, tone and a three-way toggle pickup selector. A simple drive for a surprisingly versatile guitar

PJD WOODFORD STANDARD

PRICE: £1,250
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody hardtail electric
BODY: 2-piece American ash
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted figured maple, standard C profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple, rectangular black acrylic inlays, compound 254-305mm (10-12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar FW55090)
HARDWARE: Gotoh SB-5115-001 Strat-style hardtail bridge with block steel saddles and through-body stringing, Gotoh SD-91 vintage-style split-post tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard single coils, 5-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.57/7.85
OPTIONS: PJD Hiscox hard case costs £160. HSS option. Scratchplate colour
RANGE OPTIONS: PJD's core guitar is the Carey in Standard (£1,899), Elite (from £2,399), Ltd Ed (from £2,699) and Custom (from £3,299) styles
LEFT-HANDERS: To order, same price
FINISHES: Peacock Blue from 11-colour choice – thin satin nitrocellulose to both body and neck

PJD Guitars
01904 947288
www.pjdguitars.com

8/10

PROS Crisp build; excellent hardware and pickups; quality voice; the price

CONS No vibrato option as yet; yes, it's another Strat-alike

PJD ST JOHN STANDARD

PRICE: £1,899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway, offset chambered body hardtail electric
BODY: 2-piece American ash (chambered)
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted figured maple, standard C profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple, rectangular black acrylic inlays, compound 254-305mm (10-12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar FW55090)
HARDWARE: Gotoh SB-5115-001 Strat-style hardtail bridge with block steel saddles and through-body stringing, Gotoh SD-91 vintage-style split-post tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Cream T Eliminator humbucker (bridge) and P-90 soapbar single coil (neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.18/7
OPTIONS: F-hole, Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbucker/P-90. Choice of pickguard and pickup mounting ring colours
RANGE OPTIONS: St John Elite (£2,399) adds figured (quilt/flame) maple top with a range of top colours over natural back and sides. St John Ltd (£2,699) adds chambered mahogany back to the Elite – both with Bare Knuckle/Cream T pickups
LEFT-HANDERS: To order, same price
FINISHES: Trans Bright Blue (as reviewed), Trans Black, Trans White, Natural, Candy Floss Pink – thin satin nitrocellulose to both body and neck

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Chambered lightweight build; hardware and pickups; wide versatile voice; great neck and playability

CONS Not everyone will like the satin-only finish; no vibrato

JUKETONE RIVAL SON 1X12 COMBO
£445

WHAT IS IT? A very affordable middleweight combo with built-in tremolo and spring reverb

Need For Tweed

This 15-watt all-valve combo from tweed specialists Juketone offers vintage vibes with onboard effects on a budget

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

The tweed-covered guitar combo is one of music's most enduring product formats, dating right back to the original amps made by Fender in the mid-1950s. Other features of those groundbreaking early Fenders included a pine cabinet with hand-wired eyelet board electronics inside a chromed steel chassis, Jensen Alnico loudspeakers, white lettering, and chickenhead knobs that went all the way to 12 (which Spinal Tap fans know is one more than 11 and two more than 10!).

Ever since, the looks, if not the electronics, have been repeatedly plundered by manufacturers looking to impart some vintage mojo to their designs, not least Fender itself, who mashed several different styles together including tweed for its 1990s Blues amps, which preceded the popular Hot Rod series. Other notable tweed entries over the years include Peavey's long-running Classic amp series, while cult brands such as Carvin turned out some pretty neat designs, too, namely the Nomad and Belair combos.

JUKETONE
RIVAL SON
JUKETONE
amplified soul

1. The Rival Son's controls serve up a wide range of authentic valve tones, from clean to medium overdrive. The effects are suitably vintage, with built-in tremolo and a real spring reverb

The dynamics are friendly and the amp responds as you dig in for a rewarding playing experience that's great fun

At the top end of the market, boutique replicas from builders such as 633 Engineering, Lazy J and Victoria combine hand-wired individuality with high-class joinery and meticulous attention to detail. While some of these can cost thousands of pounds, happily there are affordable alternatives if you're after tweed on a budget – and one of the most popular is Juketone, with an interesting range of amps based on classic designs, including this month's Rival Son 1x12 combo.

Housed in a handsome tweed-covered plywood cabinet, Juketone's Rival Son is a capable 15-watt combo with a pair of Ruby EL84 valves driving a Celestion Seventy-80 12-inch loudspeaker. Normal and Bright input jacks feed simple Volume and Tone knobs, with Speed and Intensity controls for the amp's bias tremolo effect, and a level control for the old-school spring reverb.

Inside the chrome steel chassis you'll find two single-sided printed circuit boards connected by ribbon cables. The main board holds most of the electronics, including the front-panel controls, with a smaller second board for the EL84s and two 12AX7 preamp valves, which plug into porcelain sockets. Both boards are supported on solid brass standoffs, with neat, minimal wiring helping keep noise to a minimum. Overall, it's a decent standard combo for the money and built to last, particularly that ply cabinet when most of the close rivals use particle board.

Feel & Sounds

We checked out the Juketone with our regular Les Paul Standard fitted with old PAFs and a Strat loaded with Duncan Alnico Pros. The Rival Son's tones sit roughly in the middle of the Atlantic, producing

2

3

4

2. The amp uses a genuine Celestion Seventy-80 loudspeaker. One of Celestion's more affordable drivers, it's a popular OEM choice and sounds great when teamed with the right amp, often eclipsing more expensive loudspeakers

a tweed vibe that's flavoured with more than a hint of AC15. The simple one-knob Tone control is surprisingly versatile, and in combination with the Volume there's a wide range of clean and not-so-clean tones that work really well with brighter PAF-alike humbuckers or single coils.

In common with many vintage amps, there's no boost function or gain control, so if you want to hear overdrive you'll either need to turn up the amp or use a pedal or attenuator if you want to stay on speaking terms with your neighbours.

Because the Juketone's core sound is fairly transparent, it's an easy fit with many different musical genres, sounding best with blues, pop and classic rock. Use a Strat bridge pickup and pick over the neck pickup, holding the vibrato arm with your little finger, and you can get a convincing Hank B Marvin, while adding tremolo and pushing the volume harder is very much on the Link Wray *Rumble* target. Max things out with the Les Paul and you're good for Texas Blues in the style of early *Tres Hombres*-era ZZ Top.

The dynamics are friendly and the amp responds as you dig in for a rewarding playing experience that's great fun once things are dialled in. There's a cool sweet spot with Volume and Tone controls both a little below halfway, where the amp begins to bare its teeth yet cleans up easily by backing off on the guitar's Volume control.

The built-in effects are an interesting anachronism. Tremolo was never an option on Fender's original tweed amps, making its debut at the end of the 1950s in the short-lived brown-panel and blonde amps, while spring reverb was only available in a separate box until 1963 and the arrival of the Vibroverb, which was joined a year

3. A tough ply cabinet is neatly finished in proper tweed cloth, with an oxblood grille cloth and enamel logo plate for vintage-approved looks. The speaker baffle is angled back slightly to help projection

4. You have a choice of Normal and Bright input jacks, which add a little extra tonal variation, with slightly more gain from the Bright input

In an era when younger players may only know spring reverb from digital plug-ins and pedals, the Rival Son features a real reverb spring effect. A transducer is fed with audio from an amplifier stage, causing the spring to vibrate. A pickup at the other end of the spring converts the oscillations back into an audio signal, which is then mixed with the dry guitar feed using this level control

later by the all-conquering black-panel amps, including the Super Reverb and Twin Reverb.

Both the Juketone's effects sound suitably vintage; there's a wide range of speeds on the tremolo and plenty of level from the op-amp powered reverb, which goes from ambient warmth to a crashy, splashy surf at higher levels. Neither effect can be footswitched, which is fine for home use but maybe less so for live, where you'd probably want to toggle the tremolo on and off. In keeping with most vintage amps equipped with reverb and tremolo, the reverb comes first, sitting at the end of the preamp, while the tremolo circuit operates in the power stage by modulating bias, so you can hear the reverb tail being tremolo'd along with your guitar signal. Despite being the reverse of what would be considered logical, the 'reverb first, tremolo second' effects order sounds great and has a suitably vintage vibe.

> The 'reverb first, tremolo second' effects order sounds great and has a suitably vintage vibe

Verdict

Juketone's Rival Son is a great-sounding, compact all-valve combo with a wide range of tones from a deceptively simple control layout, and we reckon it's brilliant value for money, coming direct from the distributor. It's plenty loud enough for smaller gigs, too, despite the modest 15-watt output. This is thanks partly to the resonant ply cabinet and the punchy upper mids of the G12 Seventy-80, one of Celestion's best budget speakers, which is sometimes fitted to top-drawer boutique products in preference to other more expensive drivers. At lower volume levels, the Rival Son's clarity and headroom also make it a useful pedal platform if that's important to your playing.

Ideal for beginners, enthusiastic amateurs and weekend warriors, the amp's all-valve tones and dynamics are great for home, studio and stage alike. G

JUKETONE RIVAL SON 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £445
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp
OUTPUT: 15W
VALVES: 2x 12AX7, 2x EL84
DIMENSIONS: 415mm (h) x 475mm (w) x 260mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 14/31
CABINET: Plywood
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x Celestion 12" Seventy-80
CHANNELS: 1 with Normal and Bright inputs
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, tremolo speed and intensity, reverb level
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in tremolo and spring reverb
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Juketone range includes the Trailblazer lunchbox head (£249), Royal Blood combo (from £305), True Blood tweed Champ replica (£300) and Blue Blood tweed Deluxe clone (£749)

Juketone
0843 289 8090
www.juketone.co.uk

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Proper valve sounds from a deceptively simple control panel; great for home use or smaller gigs; brilliant value for money, with free shipping to the UK

CONS It would be nice if there were a footswitch for the tremolo, but at this price it's easy to forgive

Fender
PLAYER PLUS
A NEW KIND OF PLAYER
NOVA TWINS PLAYS THE STRATOCASTER® HSS IN BELAIR BLUE
©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. FENDER (standard and in stylized form), STRATOCASTER, STRAT and the distinctive headstock shapes commonly found on the FENDER instruments are trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and/or its affiliates, registered in the U.S. and other countries.

FAITH BLUE MOON VENUS
£1,112

WHAT IS IT? An OM/Auditorium electro-acoustic made from solid figured Java mango with a Fishman INK3 pickup system

1

2

3

Moody Blue

Faith extends its Venus range to include this OM/Auditorium style electro-acoustic made from glorious figured mango

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The Faith's Macassan ebony fingerboard is devoid of position markers to its face, save for a stylised 'F' at the 12th fret
2. Subtle figuring reminiscent of high-grade maple peeks out from behind the dark-blue finish on the top, back and sides
3. Macassan ebony forms not only the bridge but also the abalone dotted string pins
4. Fishman's INK3 pickup and preamp system gives you an illuminated tuner plus controls for volume, treble, middle and bass
5. Faith's distinctively shaped headstock plays host to a set of Grover Rotomatic tuners

Way back in the spring of 2020 (issue 456) we looked at a Faith Blue Moon Neptune, declaring at the time that it had a "shelf-load of virtues" in the tonal stakes. With this guitar we've travelled a few planets closer to the sun, but the basic concept is really very similar. The Neptune introduced us to figured mango as a body wood, a theme that is continued here. Obviously this is a new voice in the acoustic field and, tone being a desperately subjective thing to describe, we'll turn to Faith's official voice on the matter. "It is not as loud and punchy as rosewood nor as straightforwardly mellow as mahogany, yet it bears its own distinctive warmth... the overall tone could be described as dark and moody."

We'd certainly agree that the deep-blue hue of the Venus hits the dark and moody criteria on the nose, with the wild figuring of the mango wood underneath just managing to show through – a subtle statement as opposed to a bold one. It's a good-looking guitar, without the decorative clout of some of the exotic woods we've encountered, but it has a great deal of charm, nonetheless. The body's flamed maple binding acts as a good contrast to the darkness of the top, back and sides, as does the abalone rosette.

When we leave the confines of the guitar's body, things return more to a standard theme in the construction department. The neck is mahogany, the fingerboard Macassan ebony – but you're probably as curious about the instrument's tone as we were and so here goes...

There's certainly no lack of volume here and there's also a good balance between treble and bass, albeit sonically on the dark side as Faith has promised. A 43mm nut means the guitar will appeal more to the bold strummer as opposed to fingerstyle gymnast, and the neck feels quite substantial in the hand. More of a vintage vibe than a contemporary thin 'n' skinny situation, if you see what we mean.

Stage readiness is taken care of by Fishman's very stylish INK3 under-saddle pickup and preamp combo. Flush volume, treble, middle and bass controls will help you dial in your sound while the onboard – very brightly illuminated – tuner will help keep you in tune in even the darkest environment. Bottom line? Another habitable planet in Faith's solar system. G

4

5

FAITH BLUE MOON VENUS

PRICE: £1,112 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: OM/Auditorium cutaway
BODY: Figured Java mango
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassan ebony
MAX BODY WIDTH: 385mm
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
FRETS: 20
TUNERS: Grover Rotomatics
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman INK3
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.4/5.2
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Faith's Venus-style acoustic range currently extends to 12 models, including the FVHG3 (£1,215), FKV (£609), FECV (£903), FKVCD (£639) and FKVMG (£705). See website for more details
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss

Barnes & Mullins
01691 652449
www.faithguitars.com

8/10

PROS Unusual but visually appealing acoustic with a sound very much its own

CONS Dark and moody might not be everyone's cup of tea

THERMION ZERO DYNAMIC HYBRID AMPLIFIER
£549

WHAT IS IT? A smart pedalboard-ready stereo amp with digital reverb, effects loop and speaker-emulated XLR direct outs

Get On 'Board

Spanish pedal wizard Thermion has cooked up a compact stereo power amp that lets you enjoy your pedals anywhere

CONTACT **First Line Distribution** WEB **www.thermion.eu** PHONE **01626 832410**
Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. The Zero has a small footprint of just 250 by 80 by 160mm so will fit nicely on most pedalboards

2. The preamp has a three-position Bright switch and three modes for the digital reverb

3. A pair of speaker jacks provide a healthy 40 watts per channel into a minimum load of eight ohms

Compact, portable and good-looking, Thermion's Zero Dynamic Hybrid Amplifier is the company's solution to the 'how do I amplify my pedals without a big heavy combo?' predicament. The robust 2mm steel case is filled with all the goodies any pedal player could ask for, including a stereo 40 watts per channel Class D output stage, a pair of stereo balanced speaker-emulated outputs and a headphones socket, with a separate level control. There's a built-in analogue 'overdrive pedal friendly' clean preamp, too, with Bass, Middle and Treble knobs, plus a three-way Bright switch and a digital reverb with short, medium and long modes.

The Zero benefits from two loops: a mono 'preamp loop' that allows players to replace the Zero's built-in preamp, and a mono-send/stereo-return effects loop. Both loops are footswitchable, along with the reverb.

The build quality is excellent, with exceptionally neat hand soldering, and the unit itself is small enough to fit comfortably on most average pedalboards, with an integrated go-anywhere mains power supply, so no wall-warts to trip over. In use, it's impressively transparent, with hiss and hum levels low enough not to intrude, while the clean preamp EQ is smooth and predictable, making it easy to dial in any guitar.

We tried out the Zero using a Zoom MultiStomp as an alternative preamp, plus a Korg G4 rotary speaker simulator in the effects loop. Plugged into a stereo 2x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion V30s, the Zero has plenty of power available, sounding refreshingly 'real' with valve-like dynamics and punch.

Stereo is great. Many modulation effects can run in stereo and while our venerable G4 sounds good in mono, the three-dimensional spatial swirling makes a huge difference, especially with the analogue speaker-emulated outputs hooked up to a PA. There's a small temperature-controlled fan, which is mostly off but can cut in to aid ventilation under more extreme conditions.

Teamed with a pair of lightweight 1x12s, Thermion's Zero will turn your pedalboard into a highly portable stereo rig with all the bells and whistles you need for live performance, as well as recording and home practice. If your crucial tones are provided by pedals and you're looking for a more portable solution than a traditional backline, this could be just the ticket. G

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS High-quality valve-like sounds from a compact but robust package; stereo; good analogue speaker emulation; great value for money

CONS All-white footswitch LEDs could make it difficult to check status on a dark stage

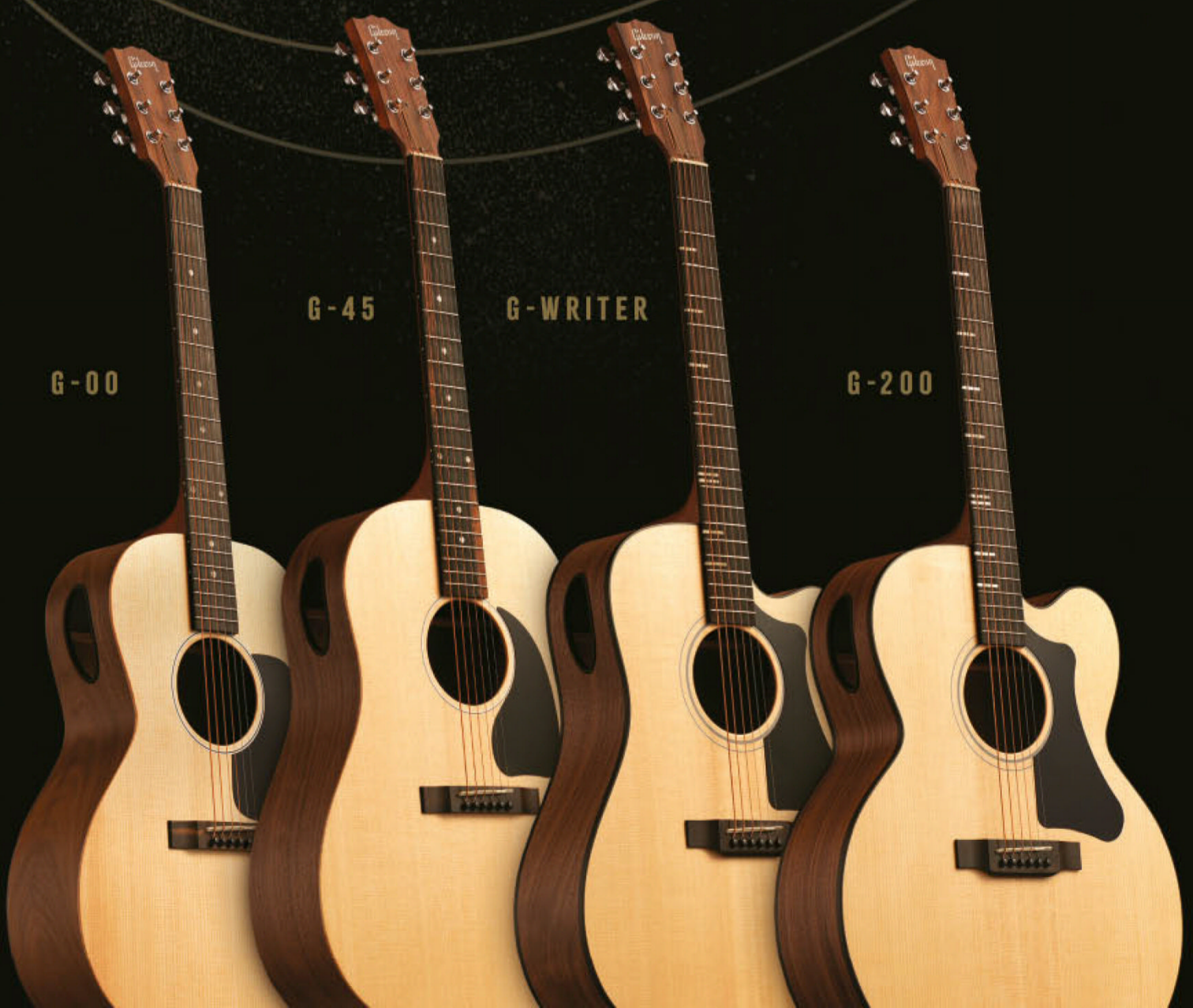
Gibson®

INTRODUCING THE

GENERATION COLLECTION

FEATURING THE EXCLUSIVE GIBSON PLAYER PORT™
FOR A MORE IMMERSIVE SONIC EXPERIENCE

GIBSON.COM/GENERATION



the Wishlist

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

Turnstone TD Acoustic £8,600

CONTACT **01342 545005** WEB **www.turnstoneguitar.co.uk** **Words** David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

A new model in Turnstone Guitars' roster of hand-built acoustics sees luthier and Turnstone founder Rosie Heydenrych introduce a dreadnought into her catalogue. The majority of her work is custom orders and this guitar is no exception. In fact, it was already sold by the time it reached us and so our time with it was regrettably short. However, even the initial act of plucking it from the confines of its case and tuning it up revealed that it was something truly exceptional. We heard all the bloom and thrust you'd expect from a dread but tempered with an amazing amount of sweetness and warmth. We were truly sorry to see it go!

The TD's top is moon spruce from the Swiss Alp region and the back and sides are Malaysian Blackwood. Moon spruce gets its name from a long-standing tradition that sees the timber harvested in the last quarter of the waning moon in wintertime when the tree has stopped growing. Malaysian Blackwood, meanwhile, is a relative newcomer on the tonewood spectrum that is gaining a deserved reputation as an excellent timber for guitars among luthiers worldwide.

The guitar's neck is Honduran mahogany with an ebony fingerboard that sports 21 gold-coloured Evo frets. Neck profile is a very hand-friendly shallow (21mm) C, and the generous 44.5mm nut width will be welcomed by fingerstylists everywhere.

Staying up at the headstock end we find a set of gold Gotoh 510 black buttoned tuners with the unique carving at the top representing the outstretched wings of the bird after which the company is named.

Whereas some might say that the traditional shape of the dreadnought is not the most attractive body size out there, here the curves of the body seem somehow more sensuous and soft. In fact, the whole guitar has been very artfully created – there's nothing unduly brash about the design at all.

The 'Art Deco' patterning at the 12th fret (pictured below) is part of this particular custom order and is reflected in the guitar's rosette and end graft around the strap peg on the guitar's base.

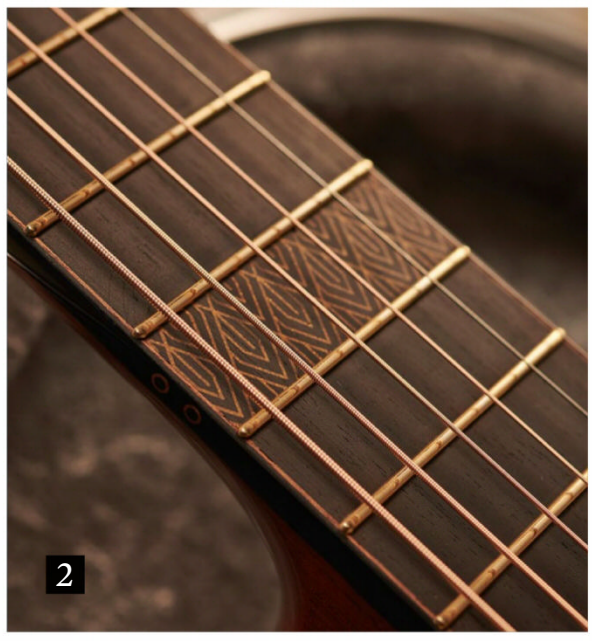
Then there's the sound. As we've said, our time with the TD was limited as, quite understandably, its new owner was anxious to take possession. But what we heard we enjoyed a lot. Like the overall design of the guitar, the sound was both refined and sweet, while there was nothing lacking in the volume department. We're excited to see more from Rosie soon! G

1. The attractive mitred back join, visible through the TD's soundhole, is a feature of Rosie's Turnstone acoustics

2. This custom 'Art Deco' pattern at the 12th fret is reflected in the guitar's rosette and the graft down by the end pin

3. The headstock has a Malaysian Blackwood veneer to its front and back. Note the carving at the top, representing the wings of a turnstone – it's a feature on all of Rosie's instruments

1


2

3

4. The TD's neck is Honduran mahogany with an ebony fingerboard and copper side markers

5. A transparent pickguard goes virtually unnoticed on the guitar's fine Swiss moon spruce top

6. Another subtle feature on the new Turnstone TD is the arm rest, which is known as 'Rosie's Roll-Over' at the company's Newchapel-based workshop

7. It's ebony for the bridge and string pins with a cattle bone saddle

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

.strandberg NX Concept €2,199-€2,699

CONTACT **GuitarGuitar** PHONE **0800 4561959** WEBSITE **https://strandbergguitars.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Finishing Moves
In the case of flame/quilted maple top models (Original, Prog and Fusion), the Boden NX is offered in two finishes designed to make each flavour of maple pop. The Classic models also feature maple tops (albeit less fancy) and are offered in two solid finishes: Malta Blue with maple fingerboard or Viridian Green with Indian rosewood 'board. Likewise, the Metal NX guitars are maple-topped, and available in any colour you want... as long as it's Charcoal Black

Uh oh! Has someone had an accident with their headstock?

Nope – you might have noticed a resurgence in headless guitars over the past decade or so, and this is in no small part owing to German firm .strandberg's dedication to the cause. Here, we see the newly redesigned NX Concept model, which has undergone an overhaul across the board, culminating in all-new Boden NX Original (€2,399), Prog (€2,499), Fusion (€2,699), Metal (€2,199) and Classic (€2,199) iterations.

So, there are five new models?

Technically, there are five 'base' designs in the Boden NX range, but the Boden NX Original and Metal designs are available in six-, seven- and eight-string versions, with Prog available as a six-string or seven-string, too. The extended-range guitars cost €100 extra per string.

What's it all about, then?

The big news is that the whole Boden line has been given a visual facelift with not only brand-new finishes but a new application method (that .strandberg isn't detailing just yet) to give the guitars a sophisticated new look with popping colours. Add in the colour-matched foil logos and hand-scraped outline binding, and they're immediately looking like some extremely posh guitars.

New finishes, great. What else?

The next big development is the re-imagined heel design, requested by artists and customers of the brand. The Boden NX features a more rounded, softer curve, meaning access to the top-end of the 'board is greatly improved. As well as this, .strandberg has added an arm contour to the back of the body so that you can sit back, relax and keep the blood flow to your arm moving as you take flight!

PICKUPS
The Boden NX series is equipped with either Suhr or Fishman pickups across the range with HH, HSH and HSS configurations all on offer

HARDWARE
.strandberg has upgraded its EGS Rev7 bridge to be more stable, easier to maintain and they say it even sounds better! It's offered in fixed or vibrato versions

BODEN NX UPGRADES
The headless warrior has undergone a number of updates to improve the visuals, playability, performance and tone, with plenty of options available

FINISHES
With 10 different versions and a choice of flamed or quilted maple tops governing your colours on Original (below), Fusion or Prog (above) models, .strandberg has gone to town on its new finishes

The Classic NX, here in Viridian Green, offers an HSS solution complete with vibrato

I thought you said this was a big overhaul?

Slow down! It is – and the upgrades continue with the hardware. The EGS Rev 7 is similar in look to the previous version, but there are a number of improvements geared towards stability, tone and maintenance. .strandberg has added a self-locking mechanism to its Rev 7 bridge that now grips a beefed-up hex saddle, which the brand says allows for greater transfer of energy between the string and body, and all Bodens now come with an NX multi-tool for adjusting the action and making string changes faster. At the other end, the string lock has been revised, with a one-piece assembly now locking all strings at once, and the new extended string guides mean the clipped ends of your strings are kept safely covered: no fish-hooking here!

What about the construction?

Take a deep breath. The Boden Original and Prog models will feature sassafras bodies for the first run, before reverting to swamp ash thereafter. Meanwhile, Boden Metal guitars feature American basswood bodies, and the Classic and Fusion lines are made from alder. Then there's the fingerboards, which are made of birdseye maple on the Original, rosewood on the Fusion, a finish-dependent choice of birdseye maple or Indian rosewood for the Classic, and consistent composite Richlite on the Prog and Metal lines.

Tell us about the pickups and hardware...

With so many variations, the specs are sort of intertwined. So, the Original and Metal series come in an HH configuration with Suhr SSV/SSH+, and both feature a fixed bridge. The Fusion is also HH but this time using Suhr Aldrich humbuckers and it has a vibrato rather than fixed bridge. The HSH Prog features the same humbuckers, with the addition of a Suhr V60LP single coil in the middle, and is fitted with a vibrato, while the vibrato-equipped Classic offers HSS from a pair of Suhr V60LPs and a Suhr Thornbucker in the bridge. All seven- and eight-string models are HH, fitted with Fishman Fluence Modern humbuckers and fixed bridges.

Anything else?

Take a look at Jargon Crunching (above left) to better understand the finishes. Finally, all Boden NX models ship with .strandberg's new Venture gigbag and the aforementioned multi-tool. They're available now. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

BOSS 200 SERIES PEDALS £351 & £307

Boss has expanded its 200 Series pedals with the IR-200 Amp and IR Cabinet simulator (£351) and SY-200 Synthesiser (£307). The IR-200 pedalboard amp solution allows you to send a fully crafted tone direct into any PA system, recording setup, headphones or powered cab. Onboard, there are eight guitar amp models and three bass amps, dual EQs per patch, and ambience, plus 144 Boss and 10 Celestion speaker cab impulse responses. As well as hardware inputs/outputs, there's an effects loop for integrating your other pedals, and a USB audio interface for direct, speaker-emulated recording.

The polyphonic SY-200 gives you 12 analogue-inspired synthesiser models, 128 memories for saving your patches, three assignable controls for real-time tweaking, an effects loop and MIDI I/O via 3.5mm jacks on the back of the unit. www.boss.info

ORANGE SUPER CRUSH 100 £429 & £599

Orange's Crush amps have made a sturdy name for themselves in the solid-state market, and now the brand has added to the value of its affordable line with the Super Crush 100. Available as a 100-watt head (£429) or 1x12 combo (£599), the Super Crush builds on the success of the Crush Pro and is designed to ape the sound of Orange's revered Rockerverb. With a two-channel JFET preamp voiced to give you vintage, powerful clean headroom and a four-stage Orange assault on the dirty channel, plus the same 100-watt Class A/B power section found in Orange's Pedal Baby, the amp also includes a 24-bit digital reverb, series effects loop and Orange's CabSim, complete with a Cab Back switch to select open- or closed-back cab emulations. Available now. https://orangeamps.com

THE LINEUP

The Players

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

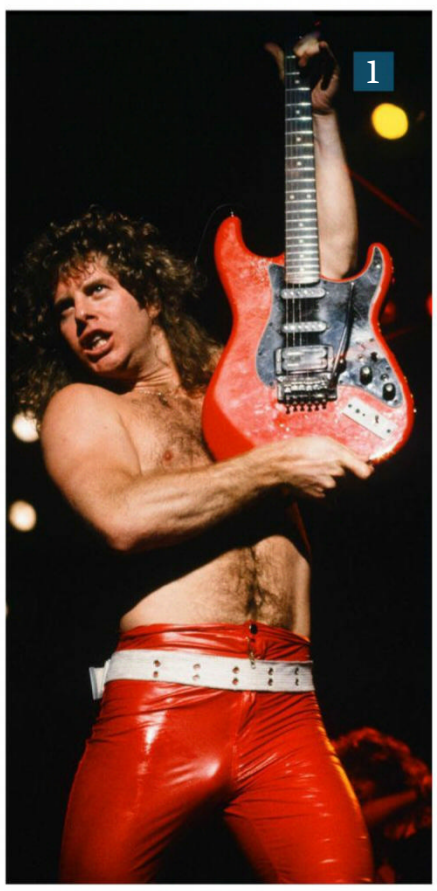


PHOTO BY KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY KEVIN AND KING

1. Think Floyd

Night Ranger guitarist claims he was the first to use one

Lifeson or Schon: who was first to fit a Floyd Rose on their Les Paul? Neither, according to Night Ranger's Brad Gillis. "I was the first," he claimed to *The Jeremy White Podcast*. "Floyd just came out with them and I wanted to put one on my Les Paul, and no-one had ever done it before. When I took it to Stars Guitars, they said, 'Hey Brad, we've never seen or done this before.' I had to get hold of Floyd and he had to send me the right size nut. Floyd had to send me a newly finished schematic for installing in a Les Paul. I got it back and it was great – then everybody else did it."

2. Michael Chapman 1941-2021

Revered British folk musician dies, aged 80

Leeds-born guitarist and singer-songwriter Michael Chapman passed away on 10 September at the age of 80. His cult status over a 50-year career found fans in Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, Ryley Walker, Kurt Vile and Lucinda Williams with guitarist Steve Gunn producing Chapman's 2017 album, *50*, with the two working on his final album, 2019's *North*.

3. Farewell Effects

Why Samantha Fish freed herself of pedals

"I did away with pedals, probably about five years ago," Samantha Fish admitted to MusicRadar.com in a recent interview as she unveils new album, *Faster*. "I wasn't using anything, just going straight into an amp. Before that, I had this massive pedalboard, but I realised I was using it as a crutch rather than finding good tone in my hands."

Though she's now added a few effects back to her pedalboard, the experience of cutting back reaped rewards: "It made me a better guitar player," the Kansas City musician added, "and it made me think you really should be able to do both [playing with pedals and without]. Shit does happen! Sometimes, you get to a festival and you get up there and nothing is working, and you've just got to get up there anyway!"

4. 'Baby Blues

The Edge reflects on his darkest musical moment

The Edge recently reflected with Tom Morello for the latter's *Maximum Firepower* podcast on the recording of U2's classic album *Achtung Baby* 30 years ago, and its dark, traumatic closing song, *Love Is Blindness*. "That song was huge for me, personally. And as an artist that's kind of the price of admission," he revealed, explaining how he was channelling the emotions of the breakdown of his first marriage in the song's guitar solos. "I know Bono's gone there on numerous occasions with his lyrics and vocals," The Edge added. "It's big and if it's not, why do it? Music is life and death to us. And so if it doesn't have that sense about it, we sort of can't fake it. We can't do it if it's just entertainment, it has to mean more."

5. Going, Going... Klon?

The first Klon Centaur might be up for sale

Klon designer Bill Finnegan is open to the idea of selling his #001 Klon Centaur overdrive pedal. "It's not here because I necessarily want to sell it," he explained as he revealed the pedal on his debut live stream. "But I've got expensive house repairs in my future. And so if anyone wants to get all crazy and make a play for #001, you can email me and we'll figure it out." Any takers?

Cream T Pickups

9/10 Editors Choice Guitarist Magazine

Guitarist READERS
10% OFF
BILLY F GIBBONS 'WHISKERBUCKER' PICKUPS
PROMO CODE: BFG10

BFG

CREAMTPICKUPSDIRECT.COM

£30
per month

CHASEBLISS AUDIO

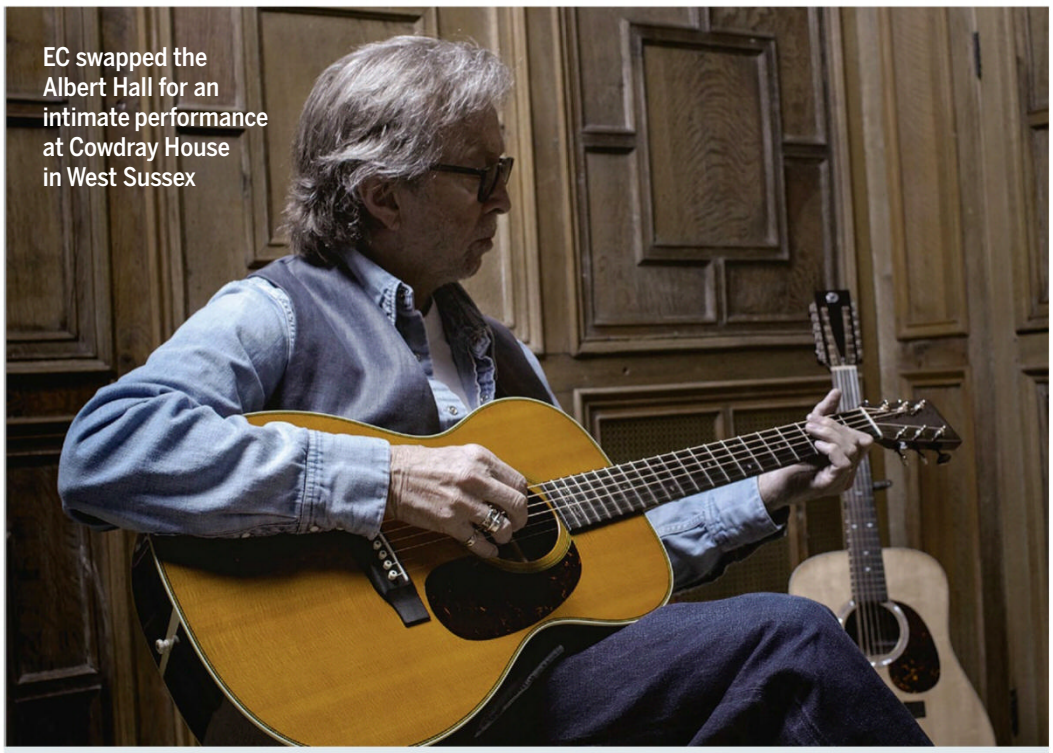
the pedal club

WWW.THEPEDALCLUB.CO.UK

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



EC swapped the Albert Hall for an intimate performance at Cowdray House in West Sussex

PHOTO BY DAVID TREE

Eric Clapton
The Lady In The Balcony: Lockdown Sessions

Mercury Studios — **8/10**

A multi-format outing finds Clapton in acoustic mode

"This one's for Peter..." Clapton announces as he launches into an acoustic version of Peter Green's *Black Magic Woman* on this 17-track lockdown album. It was recorded at Cowdray House, West Sussex last year, after EC's Albert Hall concerts were cancelled due to the pandemic. Clapton may have courted controversy recently owing to his stance on vaccinations, but here he's back doing what he does best in the company of Steve Gadd (drums), Chris Stainton (keyboards) and Nathan East (bass and vocals).

In essence, the album could be seen as a sort of *Unplugged II* as most of the tracks are acoustic, save for three. Many of the songs will be familiar to fans – *Bell Bottom Blues*, *Key To The Highway*, *Tears In Heaven* and *Layla* to name a few – but here they're given a new lease on life as intimate, laid-back acoustic outings. As such, *River Of Tears* assumes a new poignancy, while the more blues-orientated tracks such as *Got My Mojo Working* and *Long Distance Call* find Eric getting his groove on.

While it may be nothing particularly new, the musical excellence that glows in every track makes it a very worthwhile listening and viewing experience (there's video footage on Blu-ray and DVD, too). If you're curious about the title, it came about because Eric's wife, Melia, was the album's only spectator, apart from the film and sound crew. **[DM]**

Standout track: *River Of Tears*
For fans of: The Band, Derek And The Dominos, Delaney & Bonnie

Steve Hackett
Surrender Of Silence

Inside Out Music — **10/10**

Ex-Genesis man polishes his prog credentials

While Steve is known to many as an ex-member of Genesis, his solo career has been both longer and arguably more fruitful. Certainly, it features well-arranged and often lavishly epic music with numerous guitar highlights. That's the case with *Surrender Of Silence*, an 11-track album brimming with great band interplay and symphonic flair. Opening instrumental *The Obliterati* is quite a showcase for Steve's guitar chops, which run the gamut of blazing legato phrases, doom riffs and exotic string bending. *Relaxation Music For Sharks (Featuring Feeding Frenzy)* is both ambient and powerful – a soft dreamy opener morphs into a huge groove, which features Steve flying around the fretboard. As for his nylon playing, closer *Esperanza* is short and beautiful. Make no mistake, Steve remains as vital to prog today as he did all the way back in the 70s. A master. **[JS]**

Standout track: *The Obliterati*
For fans of: Genesis, Yes, Asia

Jerry Cantrell
Brighten

Jerry Cantrell — **9/10**

Alice In Chains man delivers powerful solo album

"I've been in the band for almost 34 years now," Cantrell tells us. "It's always my first and foremost commitment, but it's nice to explore different things and add another chapter to a growing body of work." And so it was that after the last Alice In Chains tour wound up, JC fixed his sights on taking this solo flight. Stylistically, *Brighten* never wanders too far from the guitar-heavy, anthemic and occasionally doomy fare for which Cantrell's band is famous, the title track being a case in point. On the first single and album opener, *Atone*, he channels his fondness for Ennio Morricone movies, telling us, "It's got a bit of that outlaw vibe..." *Black Hearts And Evil Done* is splendidly dark and menacing, and *Siren Song* is emotive and powerful – there is so much here for AIC fans to enjoy. A helter-skelter of an album. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Black Hearts And Evil Done*
For fans of: Alice In Chains, Foo Fighters

The Lineup

Jerry Cantrell releases his first solo album in almost 20 years

Mark Lettieri

Deep: The Baritone Sessions Vol 2

Delta Music

10/10

Funky grooves on the low-down

Mark Lettieri is not only a primary guitarist in groove bands Snarky Puppy and The Fearless Flyers, but he's also a new endorsee of PRS guitars – his signature Fiore is quite something – and a solo artist, too. One aspect of Mark's funky style is his exploration of the baritone guitar, set clean or crunchy and drop-tuned to B – he brings a fresh perspective to an instrument that has achieved more of a niche status among his peers. The nine instrumental tracks will satisfy funk and groove fans, drawing on a well of 70s and 80s funk/soul/pop inspirations (Prince, Jeff Beck and Steve Wonder influences shine through), and show that Mark knows how to be both muso and infectiously mainstream. Mark plays a mean rock solo on *Pulsar*, while Steve Lukather guests on *Star Catchers*, a head-bobbing 12/8 groover with big horns, tight groove guitars and some tasty rock licks. Recommended! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Pulsar*
For fans of: Snarky Puppy, The Fearless Flyers

Lindsey Buckingham

Lindsey Buckingham

7/10

Crystalline post-Fleetwood guitar pop

Lindsey Buckingham added a quirky, enigmatic edge to Fleetwood Mac that was an essential part of the band's success. Here, however, the starkness of Buckingham's musical vision is presented raw and freshly sliced – and it's quite an odd flavour. Opener *Scream* juxtaposes campfire chords with a lyrical strand straight out of the Id: "I love you when you scream," Buckingham intones, cheerfully, to unsettling effect. Balmier, lighter breezes waft through *I Don't Mind*, while *Swan Song* shows why Buckingham should be regarded as one of the truly great melodic rock guitarists, with its fusillade of deft, propulsive soloing. Overall, there's an obsessive, jeweller's precision to the songcraft that is impressive but, at times, a little inhuman, too. It adds up to an oddly conflicted album: by turns generous in spirit and resentful, soulful yet synthetic. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Swan Song*
For fans of: Fleetwood Mac, King Crimson

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Joachim Cooder, son of slide-guitar legend Ry Cooder, has a new album that reimagines the folk-blues of 1920s banjo king Uncle Dave Macon

Artist: Joachim Cooder

Album: Over That Road I'm Bound (Nonesuch)

The fog of time settles quickly upon the heroes of yesteryear. Uncle Dave Macon was a star of 1920s and 30s music, playing wild-spirited folk songs on banjo, which he had learned from the ordinary people of backwoods America, but today he's a largely forgotten figure. However, Joachim Cooder has resurrected Macon's entrancing songs, enlisting the help of guitar luminaries such as Vieux Farka Touré, son of the great Ali Farka Touré, to accompany his own gently percussive playing on the mbira (thumb piano). The result is an immersive album that transcends time and cultural boundaries.

On the eve of a British tour, Joachim tells us how he gathered up half-forgotten strands of America's musical traditions to make this superb long-player – with a little help from his three-year-old daughter.

Who was Uncle Dave Macon – and how did you first encounter his music?

"When I first heard Uncle Dave Macon's music, I didn't know anything about him. My dad would play the banjo around the house all the time when I was little and I sort of got transfixed by this one song called *Morning Blues* – that was a song of Uncle Dave Macon's that my dad would play. I have two kids of my own now, all these years later, and I was hearing my dad play the song again for them on the banjo and I said, 'What is that? What's that song you're playing?' And he said, '*Morning Blues* by Uncle Dave Macon, you used to love that one' – or something like that. And I could see that my kids were just sitting there staring and listening to it, too. And so I thought, 'Hey, there's something to this song.' So I started working it out on my mbira [thumb piano] and then I started to learn more about Uncle Dave's life.

"He was born in the late 1800s in Tennessee and, basically, as well as being this incredible showman and banjo player, he was kind of a collector of music and went around finding songs that were popular at the time, which would have been minstrel music, medicine show, folk blues, black blues... music he heard coming through town or stuff he heard on back porches. And he repopularised all that music for a completely new generation in the 1920s and 1930s, becoming the first superstar of the Grand Ole Opry. And so he kept all this music from the late 1800s from falling into obscurity – music that the [then] younger generation had no idea about.

"In a way, he was an Alan Lomax kind of figure, but he was also a pretty wild character who would swing his banjo from side to side and make jokes as he performed. But I had no idea about any of that when I first heard his music – I just was responding to the songs themselves."

PHOTO BY ABBY ROSS

After playing one of Uncle Dave Macon's tracks live, Joachim became inspired to record an entire album when people started requesting to hear more

How did you get the idea to do a whole album of reinterpreted songs by him?

"Well, first off I started learning that song that I mentioned, *Morning Blues*. My dad was playing it sitting there and I didn't have my mbira. And something about the way he was playing it just made me think... I could put in some different kinds of chords or imply a different feel because Uncle Dave was a sort of hard-charging banjo player and everything kind of went that way. But I do everything on my mbira, which sort of puts you in a bit of a meditative state, almost like a lullaby. It just leads you that way. And so I started learning the one song and I started playing it live in my

PHOTO BY ABBY ROSS

show, and after a couple of shows, there would be like a line of people coming up to me and I thought, 'Oh, yeah, maybe they want an autograph?' But all they wanted to talk about was this *Morning Blues* song, like, 'What's that song? Is that your song? Did you write that? What is that?' And I was like, 'Oh, okay, that must really work.'

"And so then there's a record label out of Germany called Bear Family Records, who make these definitive, gigantic 12-disc boxsets. And I got the Uncle Dave one and began playing it around the house. And my daughter, who was probably three years old at the time, became obsessed with listening to Uncle Dave Macon all morning, all day, all night. It was like this kind of crazy thing...

"Pretty soon I had worked up 10 songs or however many are on the record, and I thought, 'I should just start recording these.' But I wasn't thinking, 'I'm going to put these out.' It was very much a fun project that I was doing with my daughter; she was sort of my little curator of Uncle Dave songs."

There are some really beautiful guitar, mandolin and banjo parts on the album – who's playing?

"Well, my dad plays banjo on it. At the time, we were living next door to my parents and my daughter was going to this school five minutes away. So we had everybody come to this little studio that my parents have in their yard. And that way, I could drop my daughter off, come back down and start recording. My dad would be in his house and kind of wander over and listen and peek his head in the door and say, 'Oh, I think I'll play a little mandolin on that right there.' And then he'd play something. Then my wife would come over and she sings all the harmony. So we had a little communal thing going...

"And then we got Vieux Farka Touré, who is Ali Farka Touré's son, when he came through town. So we had him come in a little bit earlier and recorded him playing over some tracks I had made. Then I took the guitar he played over these other tracks and just put them right on top of this Uncle Dave one I was working on, and it was as if we were in the room together, but it was from two different times."

What's your best recording tip?

"I find that when I go into studios with an engineer I don't know, often what happens is you start off by trying to get sounds [you're happy with]. But that's when somebody usually does the greatest thing of the day – without thinking about it. And then they're like, 'Oh, wait, it's time to do the take,' and by that point, you've kind of already done the unexpected thing because you weren't thinking about it, and then you just kind of go into the mode of playing by rote. But, then, the magical thing already happened...

"So I always say just roll tape or press record on the computer the moment people start coming into the studio, even if mic placement isn't perfect at first. I think that's the smartest thing." **[JD]**

> "It was very much a fun project that I was doing with my three-year-old daughter; she was sort of my little curator of Uncle Dave songs"

Joachim often finds the magic in studio warm-up time: "I always say just roll tape or press record on the computer the moment people start coming into the studio. I think that's the smartest thing"

Over That Road I'm Bound by Joachim Cooder is out now on Nonesuch, and he will be touring it in the UK from 11 to 21 November. Book tickets at: ***http://serious.org.uk/Cooder***

Roger Newell

1948 – 2021

Neville Marten remembers a dear friend and bandmate of over 30 years who played bass with a number of A-list artists during his career and shared his expertise with our magazine readers the world over

Last week, I lost a bandmate, a close personal friend and a work colleague of 35 years. *Guitarist* asked if I'd like to give over my column to write his obituary. But rather than some sterile list of facts, I'd rather just tell you a bit about my mate.

Roger Newell joined Marty Wilde's Wildcats when I'd been with them for three years. I knew something of his musical heritage from Eddie Allen (ex-*Guitarist* editor and later Fender's product specialist), with whom he played in their local rock band, Trux, and whom I'd already conscripted into Marty's outfit.

Roger had joined Rick Wakeman after the legendary Yes keysman had jammed with his band in the local pub. Rog's first gig as a member of what became known as The English Rock Ensemble was at the Royal Festival Hall. When the curtain went up, he saw the audience was peppered with stars who'd come to see Rick in his new 'solo' guise. If I say this cohort numbered at least one Beatle, you'll get the measure of what Roger had got himself into.

Rog played on all of Rick's platinum-selling albums during his 70s tenure with the Ensemble, which only ended when Wakeman was enticed back to Yes. They toured the world and Rog lived the proper rockstar lifestyle. Gigs included New York's Madison Square Garden, The Budokan in Tokyo, mega-selling South American stadiums and every major venue on the planet. He was also there for the iconic *King Arthur On Ice* show, often fondly cited as the most ludicrous gig ever. So demanding was the music that Rog had a triple-necked bass specially built by Wal (no, it wasn't made for Chris Squire!). What's more, he also had to handle a set of Moog bass pedals, often while playing one of his strange bass's three necks. It was a serious gig, and Rog was a serious musician.

When our magazines were based in Ely, Cambridgeshire we launched *Bassist*, and Roger was soon writing instrument reviews and making himself a real name in the music industry. He handled many of *Bassist*'s interviews, too; I recall standing next to him while he was on the phone to Paul McCartney. He ended up as deputy editor, and then dep ed on *Guitarist* when *Bassist* was closed.

Although he 'retired' at this time, Rog continued writing for the magazines, doing album reviews for *Guitarist* and *Guitar Techniques*, and occasional interviews. He also took on a part-time role dealing with the logistics of the review stock for the mags – booking in all the equipment and returning it when it was done with. He was a stickler for detail and woe betide anyone who took as much as a pedal without letting him know.

Rog, myself and Mick Taylor (*Guitarist* and *That Pedal Show*) formed a local band called Deluxe, and peddled our kind of pub rock around the venues of the South West. It was a great group and we excelled at vocal harmonies – Rog had a powerful voice and understood harmony intrinsically. He cited these gigs among the most fun he'd ever had playing live.

As we lived quite near each other, we travelled to and from gigs together, just the two of us against the world. We must have driven a million miles and formed a strange kind of 'marriage' during that time. We never spoke about things on which we disagreed, and since we were of similar age and with similar musical upbringings, there was way more in common than not.

Roger was a massive Shadows fan. He became friends with Hank, Bruce and, most of all, his first idol Jet Harris. He got Jet an artist deal with Fender, and we backed Jet on two big tours. One moment I recall was on Marty Wilde's 50th anniversary tour. We were at the London Palladium and Shads drummer Brian Bennett and rhythm guitarist Bruce Welch were already on stage, Marty having called them up. I'd set up Rog's red Strat with Hank's gauge of strings and we enticed him on stage to play *Move It*. Eddie and I stepped down, but the look on Rog's face when it dawned on him that he was playing bass in The Shadows, with Marty on vocals, was priceless.

I'll remember Rog as a funny, clever, talented, grumpy old sod who was my musical buddy for literally half our lives. He leaves a huge hole in the band and the lives of all who knew him well. As the cliché goes, heaven's band just got a whole lot better! Safe travels, my friend. G

Photos by Ian Dickson / Getty

BEST BRANDS · EVERY GUITAR SETUP IN STORE · BEST PRICES · GREAT SERVICE

V12 Retail Finance

musicstreet

10 CHEQUIERS COURT · HUNTINGDON · CAMBRIDGESHIRE · PE29 3LJ

Apple Pay · Google Pay · PayPal · VISA · MasterCard · American Express

PRS Paul Reed Smith Guitars

Possibly the most PRS guitars under one roof in the UK always around 70+ models From SE to Private Stock and hand picked Wood Library & Core Models

Patrick James Eggle

These have to be some of the most beautiful guitars we've had in. Patrick picks the lightest, most resonant tonewoods and handwound pickups to create these stunning instruments

Collings Guitars

AUSTIN TEXAS

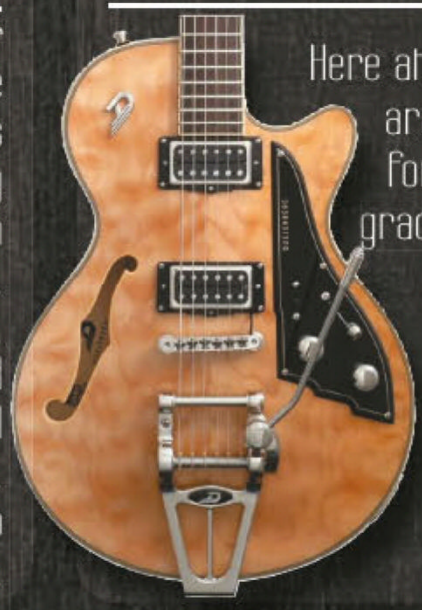
We have in store some of the finest built guitars ever made .Collings guitars are exquisitely.hand crafted in Texas USA without compromise

Featured 360 Custom

YAMAHA

As one of the UK's major stockists of Japanese Yamaha instruments we keep nearly every model in stock or on order at all times, including SA, SG, Revstar and signature model electric & basses. plus their superb Acoustic guitars.

Duesenberg



Here at Musicstreet we are the UK Flagship for these Premium grade stylish guitars from Germany. Joe Walsh, Elvis Costello, John Mayer all play Duesy's

H.S. Anderson

Every HS Anderson Madcat guitar is handbuilt in the original Moridaira factory by Japanese craftsmen. We are the UK's exclusiive dealer for Madcat

£2579

Lowden

We are honoured to be one of the handful of UK Authorised dealers for Lowden Guitars. Each collection in the Lowden Range features distinctive appointments with a selection of tone woods and custom options

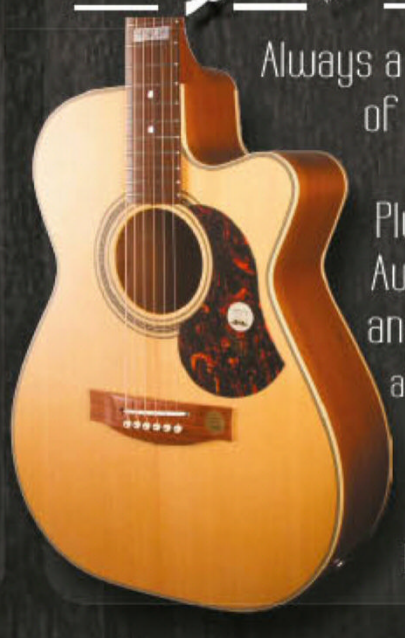
Eastman

Beautiful, Affordable Handcrafted Archtops, Thinline Semi's, and LP Style Guitars

Featured is the new uniquely designed Romeo LA

Maton

MADE IN AUSTRALIA



Always a great selection of Maton in store.

Plug one of these Aussie beauties in and find out what all the fuss is about

Featured Tommy Emmanuel EBG808CE-TE £2299

REAL-TIME STOCK ONLINE | PART EXCHANGE WELCOME | NEXT DAY DELIIVERY

sign up to our newsletter online for exclusive deals and priority notification of workshops & masterclasses

WWW.MUSICSTREET.CO.UK - TELEPHONE 01480 431222

Rickenbacker · Orange · Line 6 · CHarvel · Seagull · Jackson · Kemper Profiler · Marshall · Martin & Co Est. 1833 · Gretsch · Blackstar · Music Man · Ibanez

SESSION DIARY

Sights & Sounds

Fresh from the studio and the stage for different assignments, **Adam Goldsmith** discusses the importance of sight-reading

One of the questions I frequently get asked is 'how important is sight-reading if I want to be a freelance guitar player?' I've mentioned the subject of sight-reading once or twice here over the past few years, but two gigs I've recently been involved in provided good examples of contrasting situations and uses for this skill, which I hope will be of help to anyone interested.

The first was an album of Celtic-style instrumental music for composer Jody Jenkins via the production music company Audio Network, while the second was an orchestral concert playing music by Queen, ABBA and a few other bits and pieces at Henley Festival, for musical director Steve Sidwell.

In my humble opinion, sight-reading is a fantastically useful skill for a working musician and it will more than double your chances of making a decent living. But, it is in no way essential for making good music for music's sake, and it can also be quite limited – in this case exemplified perfectly via the music of Queen, and specifically Brian May's legendary guitar parts.

"Sight-reading is a fantastically useful skill for a working musician to have... but is in no way essential for making good music"

The first Queen song in the set was *We Will Rock You*. If a guitar player had somehow managed to avoid ever hearing this song, and was also a fantastic sight-reader, there is still zero chance they would end up sounding anything like Brian May just by reading the music in front of them. As we all know, Brian's sound, equipment, touch, feel and – as someone who has previously played guitar next to him at a gig, I can attest to – ear-crushing volume all contribute much more than the notes alone. So, before this concert for the festival, I spent a week brushing up and properly learning the Queen repertoire in the set.

This contrasted sharply with the Celtic album recording session. Aside from the obvious difference of one gig being live and the other being a recording session with just the composer, producer and myself in the studio, these two gigs couldn't have been more different in terms of the ability to sight-read. It won't come as any huge surprise that studio work is generally much better paid than live work, either, so this is another reason to brush up on your skills as a working musician.

Jody Jenkins and Frank Gallagher, the composers, come from a mostly orchestral background and, as such, rightly expect things to be done quickly and efficiently. This project mostly involved acoustic guitar, with doubles on mandolin, bouzouki, nylon-string and Nashville-tuned acoustic guitar. It therefore also involved the ability to sight-read on all these instruments, often doubling fairly complicated Irish fiddle lines on mandolin.

In order to facilitate ease of reading, I admit to adjusting the mandolin and bouzouki to guitar tuning. I'm not sure I know any jobbing session players that can sight-read efficiently in the traditional tuning of these instruments – and, to be frank, for the most part it makes absolutely no difference in a commercial music setting. We recorded an entire album in one day, and not only was it a very rewarding musical and social experience, but it paid my bills for a couple of months. After Covid, this is obviously a welcome day's work for a musician and another example of why, in the age of necessary skills diversification, sight-reading is a great skill to learn.

Above right: the studio setup featuring mandolin and bouzouki
Below: rehearsed and ready to rock at Henley Festival

MEET YOUR
OTHER HALF
YAMAHA
Make Waves
Discover more at uk.yamaha.com

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Come Together

As **Alex Bishop** begins the restoration of an iconic piece of bass guitar history, getting to the root of the problem is as important as the repair

When I'm not building guitars on commission and teaching lutherie, I take great pleasure in restoring and repairing stringed instruments for my customers. Most frequently this takes the form of straightforward setup work; I might be tweaking action or truss rods, perhaps levelling and replacing frets. However, every so often a more extensive project lands on my bench and this month it was an all-original mid-60s Hofner violin bass, a tantalising and beautiful instrument albeit in need of some love and attention.

"The challenge is being able to take the neck out in the first place, and with all the guitar and bass designs out there one has to tread carefully"

The body of the instrument was in good condition given its age, but the old lacquer finish had checked so badly it was peeling away from the wood in several places, particularly at the headstock. The heel of the neck was detaching from the body, and had pulled away some of the binding from the body at a point where a brass hook had been installed as a crude strap button. Most importantly, the neck join had collapsed completely, with the cantilevered portion of the fretboard actually making contact with the body, the only thing preventing it from popping out altogether. With the strings sitting far too high along the fingerboard, the instrument was totally unplayable. Given the heavily corroded condition of its three remaining strings, no doubt the bass had been in this sorry state for some time.

Any restoration project can be a daunting task, especially for the uninitiated. Normally, when appraising an instrument, I try to figure out the root of any particular problem, and this is the key to understanding the process required to repair it – it is all too easy to 'fix' a problem by doing the wrong (yet often easiest) repair. Clearly, in this instance, a neck reset was required, but what had caused it to fail in the first place?

Before addressing the problem of the neck, the very first thing to do was to stabilise the finish to avoid further damage to the peeling flakes of lacquer. Unlike many modern finishes, nitrocellulose has the ability to be reactivated using various chemicals. With careful application by a paintbrush, I was able to reattach the finish to the wood at its vulnerable edges, preserving the patination of the original finish.

PHOTOS BY ALEX BISHOP

The neck of this bass guitar was at an incorrect angle, which required Alex to remove it. No mean feat...

Pain In The Neck

Then it was time to remove the neck. The purpose of a neck reset is to restore the correct geometry of the strings, resulting in the perfect action when the bridge is set at the middle of its adjustable height. Part of the challenge is being able to take the neck out in the first place, and with the plethora of guitar and bass designs out there one has to tread carefully.

This time, a quick search on the internet showed me that the neck itself simply slots directly into a mortise (or slot) in the body. No fancy dovetails or complicated joinery here, thankfully. Also with such a small amount of surface area to hold the neck in place, it is perhaps no surprise that the join failed, and I wouldn't be surprised if there are a lot of similar violin basses out there that met this same fate.

My preferred approach was to gently warm up the neck join area with a heat gun (taking care not to blister the finish), injecting water into the join and inserting a sharpened pallet knife between the neck and the body, levering the neck from beneath the heel. Thankfully, the join had been considerately fixed into place with an animal glue, which surrenders to this approach with relative ease. After quite a bit of jostling there is a certain satisfaction that comes from finally releasing the neck from the body and seeing inside the join for the first time. The next step will be to reinstall the neck at the correct angle, undoubtedly the most crucial stage in any restoration or guitar build. I can only hope that it will all 'come together' in the end. G

GOOD TO GO

WHENEVER · WHEREVER

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

Elixir® STRINGS

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

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

RAISING THE TONE

Saddle Up

Paul Reed Smith tells **Jamie Dickson** why even the most carefully built electrics benefit from the ability to adjust intonation at the bridge

Last issue, we looked at why scale lengths vary between different models of guitar. As we discovered, the relationship between string gauge and scale length determines the tension of your guitar's strings at a given tuning pitch. This in turn influences how the guitar plays and sounds, so guitar makers will try to select a scale length that gives an instrument desirable performance characteristics when used with typical string gauges in standard tuning. Generally speaking, most electric guitars have a scale length somewhere between 622mm (24.5 inches) and 648mm (25.5 inches.) As mentioned last issue, scale length is usually defined as the distance from the nut to the 12th fret multiplied by two, a figure that equates (roughly) to the overall distance between the top nut and the saddles down at the bridge.

Saddles are not all set at exactly the same place because each string requires its own degree of compensation for correct intonation

So, why do we not simply measure the distance from the nut to the saddles and just call that the scale length? The answer is that to place the frets accurately on the fretboard we need a highly precise figure to work to – but a quick look at any guitar bridge shows the practical reality of making the strings sit in tune is more messy. You'll notice that some of the saddles are adjusted to sit further back than others, which is confusing given that a guitar is supposed to have a fixed, uniform scale length. So, what gives? Paul Reed Smith explains.

"It's because the string is stiff at the beginning of where it starts to vibrate, and you have to make it longer to get it to play in tune at the second harmonic at the 12th fret."

Let's unpack that, starting with the basics. A heavy-gauge string such as the low E is much thicker and stiffer than the high E string. In fact, the end-sections of a heavy string (right next to the nut, or fret, and saddle) are so stiff that it isn't able to vibrate much at all in those rigid zones. So, even if you measure the string's overall length between nut and saddle as being precisely 648mm, the area of the string that can actively vibrate is shorter than that. Add in, too, the fact that the string sits above the fingerboard and is slightly sharpened as you depress it, and that's why you usually have to shift the saddle further away from the nut to increase the string length and flatten the actual note.

"Why don't we just say that [the low E string] has a scale length that's a quarter-inch longer?" Paul reflects. "Well, in a way it does, but only because you're adjusting it [to achieve correct] intonation."

When intonating a guitar, you have to take into account that parts of the string are so stiff that their ability to vibrate is limited

The lighter-gauge strings don't have as large a dead zone at either end, but even so they will each require a certain amount of saddle adjustment in order to be intonated accurately – which is achieved when a note fretted at the 12th fret has exactly the same pitch as the natural harmonic at the 12th fret. Get that right on all six strings and the guitar should play perfectly in tune. Hence the varying positions of saddles on a typical six-saddle bridge – they're not all set at exactly the same place because each string requires its own degree of compensation for correct intonation. Note that on acoustic guitars, where you won't typically find individually adjustable saddles, the one-piece saddle is usually angled – and on many that saddle is specifically notched for each string – so the thicker strings are slightly longer than the thinner strings. This may not allow user adjustments to be made for each string, but it still serves the same basic purpose of helping the guitar be properly intonated. Of course, intonation is a hugely complicated subject, but we'll leave it there for the moment.

Paul On 'Pauls

Next, our conversation with Paul turns to his findings about Gibson's scale length. Historically, Gibson has quoted the Les Paul as having a scale length of 628.65mm (24.75 inches). But anyone who has ever measured the scale length of golden-era (or indeed contemporary) Gibsons will know it's shorter than that.

"We measured it 20 times and it was *not* 24 ¾ of an inch [628.65mm] and it was *not* 24 ⅝ of an inch [625.48mm]. It was 24.594 inches [624.68mm]. But we argued and argued and argued about it because the nuts were all over the place. On our old Les Paul made in '53, the nut was in the right place. But by the time the '61 SG-shape Les Paul arrived the nut was in the wrong place. So the nut was moving all over the place, which made it hard to measure – but 24.594 inches *is* the scale."

The result was the superb McCarty 594, which our own gear editor, Dave Burluck, described as "dynamic, expressive – it purrs, it roars..." Despite the 594's continued success (which is certainly not just down to its re-measured version of the traditional Gibson scale), the majority of PRS guitars made since 1985, such as the Custom 24, McCarty and the original Singlecut, utilise a 'halfway house' 635mm (25-inch) scale that sits in between the 648mm scale of Fender's Strat and that shorter scale of old Les Pauls. It's a scale length that was – and still is – used by Danelectro and National. So, why did Paul plump for this on his flagship electrics?

"Well, a low E string on a set of nines didn't go too sharp," Paul says, highlighting the fact that if you hit the bottom string of a Gibson Les Paul that is strung with nines really hard, its pitch can flare sharp. Increasing the scale length slightly to 25 inches [635mm] reduces that tendency by increasing string tension. The main benefit of the 25-inch [635mm] scale, though, lies in making the guitar feel comfortable and playable to a very wide range of players.

"If you played a Strat on some of your tunes and a Les Paul on some of your tunes, it sat right in the middle in a good spot... the 25-inch scale just made people comfortable," Paul concludes, which is a classic PRS answer. As always, let's not forget that the aim of so much careful design is to make the guitar 'disappear' in your hands so you are focused only on the music you want to make, not your gear. G

Paul and the PRS team found that the scale length of golden-era Gibson Les Pauls was 24.594 inches – which inspired the company's own McCarty 594

THREE TO GET READY

A trio of interesting string sets

Ernie Ball Burly Slinky £5.90

If you like to detune to E♭ like Jimi but still want to have a nice, taut feel to your guitar's playability, why not fit a heavyweight set of strings – such as the Ernie Ball Burly Slinkys, which run from 0.011 to 0.052, with nickel-steel wound strings (E, A and D) and tin-plated plain steel strings from the 0.018-gauge G string upwards.

Rotosound R8 Roto Greens £4.95

Crave a light and loose feel for ultra slippery, lightning-fast runs or touch-sensitive bends? Look no further than this gossamer fine 0.008 to 0.038-gauge nickel wound strings from revered British maker Rotosound. Billy Gibbons and BB King are two famous users of very light gauges and there ain't much wrong with their tone...

Curt Mangan Fusion Matched Strings 9.5-46 £9.99

We've been seriously impressed with the quality and feel of Curt Mangan's US-made strings, which have been championed by the likes of Matt Schofield and other luminaries. This 'half-gauge' set is lovely and can be the 'goldilocks' just-right solution for Fender players who want a slightly looser feel without sacrificing tonal heft.

SUBSTITUTE

AUDIO ▶http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

Jazz Made Easy

Inspired by Django Reinhardt's ingenuity, **Richard Barrett** explores three-note chords that produce authentic Gypsy jazz voicings

It may be a cliché to say that necessity is the mother of invention, but that doesn't make it any less true. A great example of this is how Django Reinhardt managed to reinvent his playing after his fretting hand was badly damaged in a fire. All but losing the use of his third and fourth fingers led him to favour voicings that are now staples in what has become known as Gypsy jazz. In fact, it's common to see a jazz guitarist vamping on chords that seem to somehow outline complex harmony but without using painful stretches and energetic leaps around the fretboard.

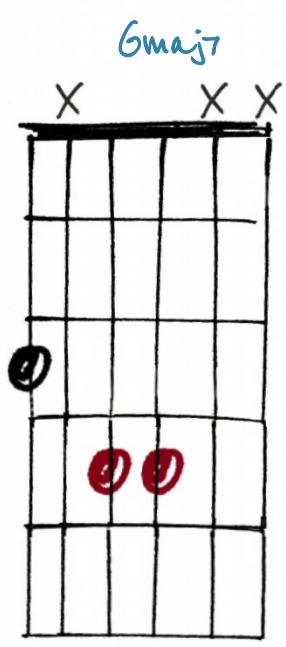
While it isn't possible to dispel the mysteries of jazz harmony in a couple of hundred words, it is realistic to gain an insight from the kind of chord vocabulary and movements these players use. So, no complex, hand-twisting extended voicings or ringing open chords here this time. But hopefully a very useful approach that can open the door to more authentic jazz (or Gypsy jazz) 'vamping'. Nice! G

PHOTO BY WILLIAM GOTTLIEB / GETTY

Right: Django Reinhardt reinvented the way he played, and the style gave rise to Gypsy jazz

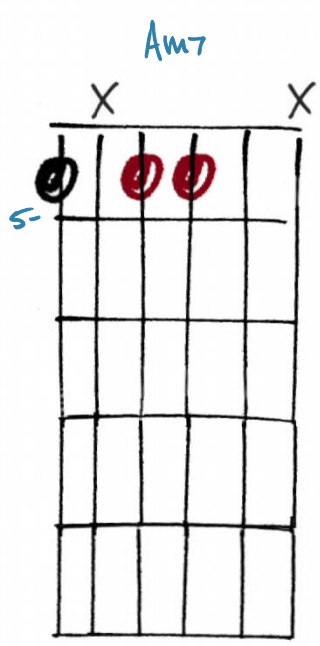
Example 1

This G major 7th is as minimal as it comes. From low to high: G (root), F# (major 7th), B (3rd). No 5th, which is often omitted in jazz through choice – though don't mix this up with the fifth string, which is confusingly where the 5th (D) would be fretted. You may find it helpful to mute it with the side of a finger, so it can't get in on the act and spoil things!



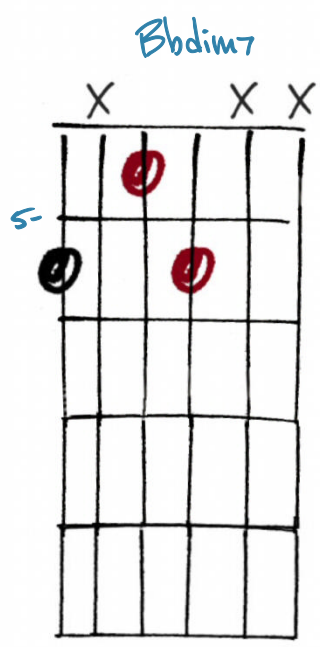
Example 2

This A minor 7th takes the same approach regarding the 5th – and the fifth string! From low to high we have: A (root), G (minor 7th), C (minor 3rd). There is a nice option to turn this into a D7/A by moving the G down a semitone to the 4th fret, giving us an F# (3rd).



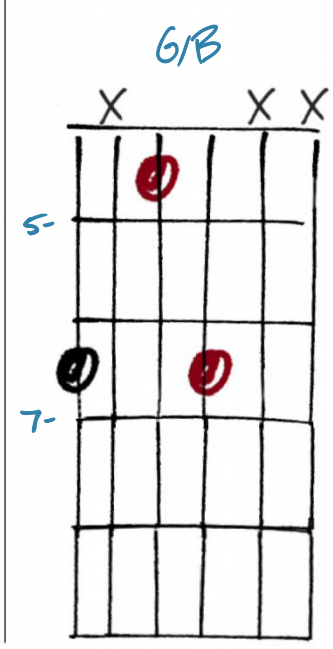
Example 3

Diminished chords can be named in different ways, but we'll call this B♭ diminished due to the presence of B♭ as its lowest note. From low to high: B♭ (root), G (♭♭7th), D♭ (minor 3rd). Strum rhythmically while moving this shape chromatically up and down to follow in Django's footsteps.



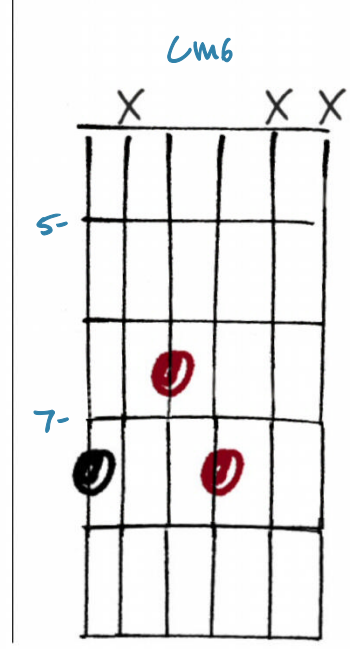
Example 4

Raising the B♭ and D♭ by a semitone gives us this G/B chord. The 3rd (B) is on the bottom, so if you want to make this a G minor/B♭, just drop it down to the 6th fret again. In isolation, this is probably the least 'jazzy' sounding of our chords here, but it's all about context.



Example 5

This C minor 6th is a great demonstration of minimalist fingerings creating complex chords. Here, we have the root (C) on the sixth string, and then the minor 6th (A) on the fourth. Finally, the minor 3rd (E♭) is found at the 8th fret of the third string. Don't forget to keep the fifth string firmly muted!



Ashdown Engineering

Ashdown Guitar Magnifiers

ALL VALVE TONE

MADE IN ENGLAND

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

FOR MORE INFO:

WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM

FEEDBACK

Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

I found Neville Marten's column in issue 475 regarding how many guitars we need very interesting. I always considered myself very minimalistic, unlike some of my colleagues with 40-odd guitars. For 20 years I gigged the same Strat with a Yamaha Pacifica as a backup. I managed to get all the sounds I needed from the Strat, despite covering the majority of styles. It did – and still does – have two single coils and a humbucker with a coil-split.

However, on my 50th birthday a few years back I was lucky enough to be gifted a Music Man Luke III [pictured] and an Ibanez semi from my wife and a playing colleague. Now I never know what to take to the gig – so many lovely guitars! I have always used a Yamaha APX for acoustic work, but now have gained a Cort Luxe (Frank Gambale Series) acoustic strung really lightly, which is great for rock covers on an acoustic. A great addition with so many gigs being smaller affairs due to the obvious recently. A Yamaha nylon-string for Latin stuff is essential and I use a Yamaha bass for recording rather than sampling. Just think I need a jazz box with flat-wounds on it now!
Barry Kitchin, via email

Hi Barry, thanks for your commonsense and helpful perspective on the question of how many guitars one really 'needs'. Of course, if you're Tommy Emmanuel, you could make do with just one – and we always liked the story told to us by a friend of how the late Bert Jansch left for a support slot on a Neil Young world tour with just one acoustic in a gigbag. That's what you can do when you have huge experience, confidence and ability – plus a very clearly defined musical mission.

It's a little harder, as you say, for players who have to cover a lot of ground. On the electric side, an HSS Strat or similar is probably king in terms of pure versatility with a standard Strat, Tele or 335 (or variations thereof) not far behind in most players' estimation. Of course, there's no upper limit on how many guitars one should own, but there's something about knowing a few guitars really well that encourages us to focus on the music rather than restless experimentation.

KORG

Each issue's Star Letter wins a Korg Pitchblack Custom – a smart pedal tuner with ultra-high +/-0.1 precision for sharp visibility and pinpoint accuracy right at your feet.
www.korg.co.uk

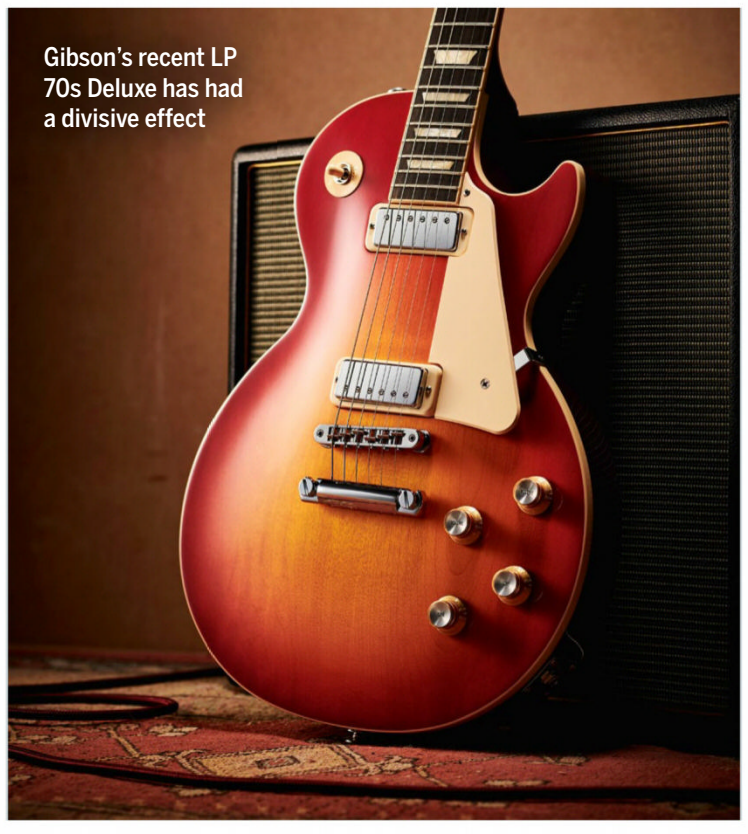
DELUXE TREATMENT

Shortly after attending my first big gig, watching Thin Lizzy at the Hammersmith Odeon, I bought a Japanese Shaftesbury LP Deluxe Goldtop and loved the sound the mini-humbuckers gave me. I sold it, regretted it and then spent 10 times as much on a 30th anniversary reissue Deluxe Goldtop 20 years later... only to hunt down and recover my old flame in 2019. (There's another story there, trust me).

To the point. When I saw Dave Burrluck's review of the latest Deluxe offering in issue 476, my hopes went skyward. At last, a Deluxe being manufactured as a regular production model in what history may consider a 'good' Gibson period. They've used a one-piece neck, a one-piece body, lush-looking plain top, smaller headstock, slightly rounded heel (hallelujah!) and great hardware. I could barely contain the credit card.

However, as I read on, a familiar sense of missed opportunity started to envelop me. The body isn't weight relieved, the neck profile is a generic 50s, and there's the irritating sloping front pickup you'll always notice. I can't help thinking that with more imagination and a little extra attention to detail, Gibson could have made a capable guitar into a really noteworthy offering. The return to original specs compared to models from the 70s are laudable, but why does the Les Paul Deluxe always get the also-ran treatment by Gibson? There's a sense they still haven't given it their full attention here.

I enjoyed Richard Barrett's video demo during which he expertly displayed its ability for mid-gain grit and



Gibson's recent LP 70s Deluxe has had a divisive effect

eastmanguitars.com

EASTMAN

SB55/v SOLID BODY

RAW REFINEMENT.

the snap of the mini-humbuckers. For me, though, the Deluxe's real strength lies in its ability to produce wonderfully rounded crisp clean tones, with more girth than a Telecaster but without the harshness of P-90s. Perhaps more time spent reviewing these tones with a dusting of delay and chorus could convince a lot of single-coil players to consider it as an alternative?
Rob Connor, via email

Thanks for the interesting reflections on the underrated Deluxe, Rob. The new Deluxe is an interesting one as, having made the (probably correct) decision not to pursue an accurate warts-and-all reissue format for the revamped Deluxe, Gibson had a relatively free hand, design-wise. The guitar we reviewed wasn't a featherweight to be sure, but it wasn't a 'boat anchor', either – so weight relief would, for us, have been a nice-to-have rather than a must. The pickup tilt you mention was less welcome. As for the neck choice, we confess we liked the extra girth of the 50s profile.

Really, all this demonstrates that when one moves away from an accurate reissue towards a guitar that is merely built in the spirit of an older design, the success of what emerges is often down to somewhat nebulous questions of taste and tonality. Does a given feature depart from the template too far to be credible? Does the instrument evoke enough of the sound and character of the original to warrant bearing the same name? In sonic terms, we really enjoyed the mini-humbucker bite you so rightly admire – and those cleans really are a hidden ace up the sleeve. Pickup issue aside, we think the guitar is a well-priced and toneful workhorse that's just a little different, and so on balance we'd say they didn't go all that far wrong here.

NEO TWEED

What's this now? An old Fender Tweed Deluxe or something? Nope, it's a Super Champ X2 transplanted into a bigger cabinet in order to utilise a 12-inch speaker, with its controls facing backwards and using yellow hessian fabric instead of the expensive Fender tweed material [see image, above]. Looks suitably old and tatty – quite chuffed with myself. It sounds great, with a big sound from the 40-watt speaker in the open-back cabinet. It gives good approximations of the Deluxe Reverb, Princeton and Tweed amps with tweaks from the Fender Fuse software and judicious use of the gain control. I originally had the speaker facing forward, but I think it's neater and more vintage-looking this way. Now I know it works, I really should do it again in a less amateur way!
Al Murison, via email

Nice work, Al. There's a lot of fun to be had re-housing amps in new enclosures provided one is savvy about electrical risks involved in handling an unprotected amp chassis – for instance, some large capacitors can hold dangerous levels of charge even when power supply is off, so even inadvertent contact can be dangerous. On the whole, though, such work should be within the reach of most practically minded players with some knowledge of amp design.

If you don't feel up to the challenge, however, companies such as Zilla Cabs down in Cornwall will re-cover or build a new enclosure and cab for your treasured amp, and they'll also tackle things like Kemper heads and modelling gear just as happily. As long as you're not bothered about the amp staying original, it can be a great way to unlock new potential from your amp and a great new look.

Reader Al Murison pimped his Super Champ X2 with a 12-inch speaker. Don't try this at home unless you're sure you can handle an unprotected amp chassis safely!

ALT-ROCK PLAYLIST

Please have a listen to Black Midi, both their debut and new album, and do a feature on them. Strange avant-garde, jazz-rock oddness with amazing musicians – and the guitar work is very interesting. Another band you really should feature is Glasgow's Mogwai, without doubt the best live guitar band in the world. Also, Johnny Marr has a new album out soon; he's always worth listening to, both music-wise and in interviews.
Dave Poustie, via email

Thanks, Dave. Such leftfield suggestions are always welcome – we'll look forward to checking out Black Midi – and, of course, Mogwai have been a force to be reckoned with in post-rock guitar for many years. Have any other readers got any artists or bands they're dying to see in these pages? Do you want to see more left-of-centre or alternative artists in the mag? Let us know and we'll do our best to oblige.

AND THE WINNER IS...

In anticipation of a full feature next issue, we would like to congratulate the winner and runner-up of our Britain's Best Amateur Guitar Builder competition, Nigel Greening and Richard Fletcher respectively. Prepare to see stunning photography of the winning instruments, hear from the builders themselves on how their builds came to life, and find out from the judges at StewMac why these impressive guitars were selected as the final winners.

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

Laney

CVB SUPERTOP

- LARI BASILIO

PURE.

TUBE.

TONE.

CUB-SUPERTOP, CUB-212

WWW.LANEY.CO.UK

PHOTOGRAPHY: EDUARDO ORELHA

@LANEYAMPLIFICATION

According to Carlos Santana, "purity and innocence are the best components for any kind of music"

CARLOS SANTANA

As the guitar god returns with a new all-star collaboration album, *Blessings And Miracles*, he joins us to talk about Strats, snakes, improv and acid...

Words Henry Yates

As an interviewee, Carlos Santana operates on a higher plane. Not for him the oily talk of truss rods and trim pots, nor analysis of such earthly tangibles as scales and modes. For the famously spiritual Mexican guitar god, music is a thunderbolt from the cosmos, the guitar a magical lightning rod, and his fingers the emissaries of some higher power. He can't explain how he does it, other than via some of the most extravagant metaphors ever uttered by a rock star. "Every day, when I play guitar," he muses, "I'm a kid with a first-class ticket to Disneyland, and I can go on any ride I want."

As one of the star turns at 1969's Woodstock festival, Santana is a glorious product of those peace-and-love times. But that's not to say the 74 year old hasn't moved with them. Following three decades of genre-busting, jazz-tinged output, Santana exploded into the mainstream with 1999's all-star *Supernatural* album, and this year's *Blessings And Miracles* is a sequel of sorts, corralling everyone from Kirk Hammett to Steve Winwood. "What message do I want to spread with this album?" ponders Santana. "Hope and courage."

Are you pleased with *Blessings And Miracles*?
"Yes, I'm very grateful. It was divine intelligence that orchestrated all of these wonderful artists, writers and musicians to align themselves to be part of my life. It's pretty crazy because about 60 per cent of them, I have yet to meet in person. We did a lot of it by Zoom. But once you close your eyes and use your imagination, they're right next to you anyway."

What emotions do you feel when you walk into the studio to play guitar?
"It's stimulating. Intoxicating. Inspiring. Elevating. I don't find it a challenge any more. It's very natural to trust in the unpredictable and know that what you're bringing to the song will complement it."

Do you use a framework or fly by the seat of your pants?
"Yeah, by the seat of my pants. Miles Davis used to say, 'Play like you don't know how to play.' Purity and innocence are the best components for any kind of music."

The guitar instrumental *Santana Celebration* is like an explosion. What emotions were going through you while recording that?
"Woodstock, Tito Puente, BB King... I feel all of them on that track. A track like that, you just have to do it on the spot. Say your piece. I feel it is important to tell my mind to shut up. Because the mind always wants to criticise and analyse everything. I don't want to give my mind any room for disturbing what I'm doing. When you create a CD like *Abraxas* [1970], *Supernatural* [1999] or *Blessings And Miracles*, literally, it's like giving birth to a baby. And you don't want your mind to disturb the baby. So you tell it to get the hell out of the room."

It takes balls to improvise like that, doesn't it?
"Well, take someone like John McLaughlin, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker. Look at the way they improvise. It makes you feel like you should venture into discovering something you also have in you: the language of light that can bring clarity to darkness. You have to trust that your fingers will know what to do, where to do it, how to do it, with how much feeling, passion and emotion."

How about your guitar work on the first single, *Move*, with Matchbox Twenty's Rob Thomas?
"I felt like a child going on a waterslide. Some people

PHOTO BY JAY BLAKESBERG

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

get in trouble because they have a mother who doesn't like to clean the floor after you splash water out of the bath. To me, it's like, I keep splashing – and it's okay. Rob trusts me. I trust him. We're like surfers, waiting for the seventh wave."

Do you think about things like scales and modes?
"No, I left all that in junior high school. A friend of mine, he says, 'Some people use pentatonics. Some people use hair tonic. I drink gin and tonic...'"

What are your memories of recording *America For Sale* with Kirk Hammett?
"That one, we did play in the same room. Kirk was stood right next to me, and I said the same thing to him that I said to Eric Clapton once: 'Look, man, we don't need to do the duelling banjos thing. Why don't we just have a nice conversation?' Kirk has a vast vocabulary as a guitar player and gunslinger. And he's in the most important band in the world."

What's the secret to collaborating successfully with another guitarist?
"I utilise fear as fuel. Not to scare me but to dare me."

Did Kirk bring along the Greeny Les Paul?
"Yes, he did – and he let me touch it. It was like the first day I ever touched it. Because when Peter Green was getting ready to leave Fleetwood Mac, he would catch a plane, show up at a Santana concert, hang out with us – and I would invite him to play. So he let me touch Greeny then, too. And it was like, 'Whoa.' It's like the Holy Grail, or Merlin's magic wand."

Did it hit you hard when we lost Peter?
"Yes. He was my brother, my friend. I played Peter Green every night when I played *Black Magic Woman*. I remember the first time I ever played that song, in a Frisco parking lot, when we were doing a soundcheck. I said to myself, 'Okay, this is Peter Green's song, but I have to reach out to Wes Montgomery and Otis Rush, and play that.'"

Carlos with his gold-leaf PRS Private Stock single-cut. "Under any weather or any condition, that guitar delivers whatever is needed," he states

PHOTO BY MARYLÈNE EYTIER

"I try a lot of different things, but I always go back to just my fingers, a Cry Baby wah-wah and the amplifier"

What guitars did you use to record *Blessings And Miracles*?
"I used my gold Paul Reed [Smith] single-cut [gold-leaf Private Stock model]. Under any weather or any condition, that guitar delivers whatever is needed. I don't know what pickups I've got in there; I'll have to ask Paul Reed. All I know is that they sound really good. This is the first album that I did not use Mesa/Boogie amplifiers on. We have parted ways. I used Dumble amplifiers, the 100-watt Overdrive Reverb. Dumble is the sound of flesh against flesh. I also used the Bludotone 100-watt Universal Tone: it's an amplifier that's made in Colorado. I try a lot of different things, but I always go back to just my fingers, a Cry Baby wah-wah and the amplifier."

How has the design of your PRS signature evolved since the 90s?
"Paul Reed is very committed, like I am, to expand and grow and glow. Y'know, don't be stuck with just one thing. I love that he has a pursuit for developing the way the guitar looks but especially the way it sounds. So he's working with pickups to make it sing, like a violin with the longest bow. It's a natural development. The guitar evolves like a spirit. I am always looking for a guitar tone that sounds bigger than life."

The SE models have been successful, too...
"It took me almost 20 years to convince him to make student models. The guitars that I play – young people in high school, they can't afford them, unless they have rich parents. And they have become a very profitable and lucrative endeavour. I take the student models on the road. Because I don't want to take the *crème de la crème*. They have earned the right to stay in a special place, here in our vault. So I take a student model because they're very reliable. They stay in tune and they sound great."

Do you think you could you make a $100 guitar sound like you?
"Absolutely. I can make any guitar sound like me."

Have you found you've ever been tempted by other guitars?
"For five or seven years, I played a Strat a lot – not so much on stage but in the studio. I recorded three or four albums just with a Stratocaster. That was the last 10 years, until this album, which is purely Paul Reed, in the studio and on stage. But before that, I was using this funky old Strat I found in Chicago. A really beat-up one. I wanted to get a gnarly, scratchy, cheap-guitar sound. But I'm done with that."

PHOTO BY ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"The guitar evolves like a spirit. I am always looking for a guitar tone that sounds bigger than life"

Pictured here in Palo Alto, California, in 1982 performing as a guest of Eric Clapton's band, Carlos has been bringing his exuberance to the stage all his life

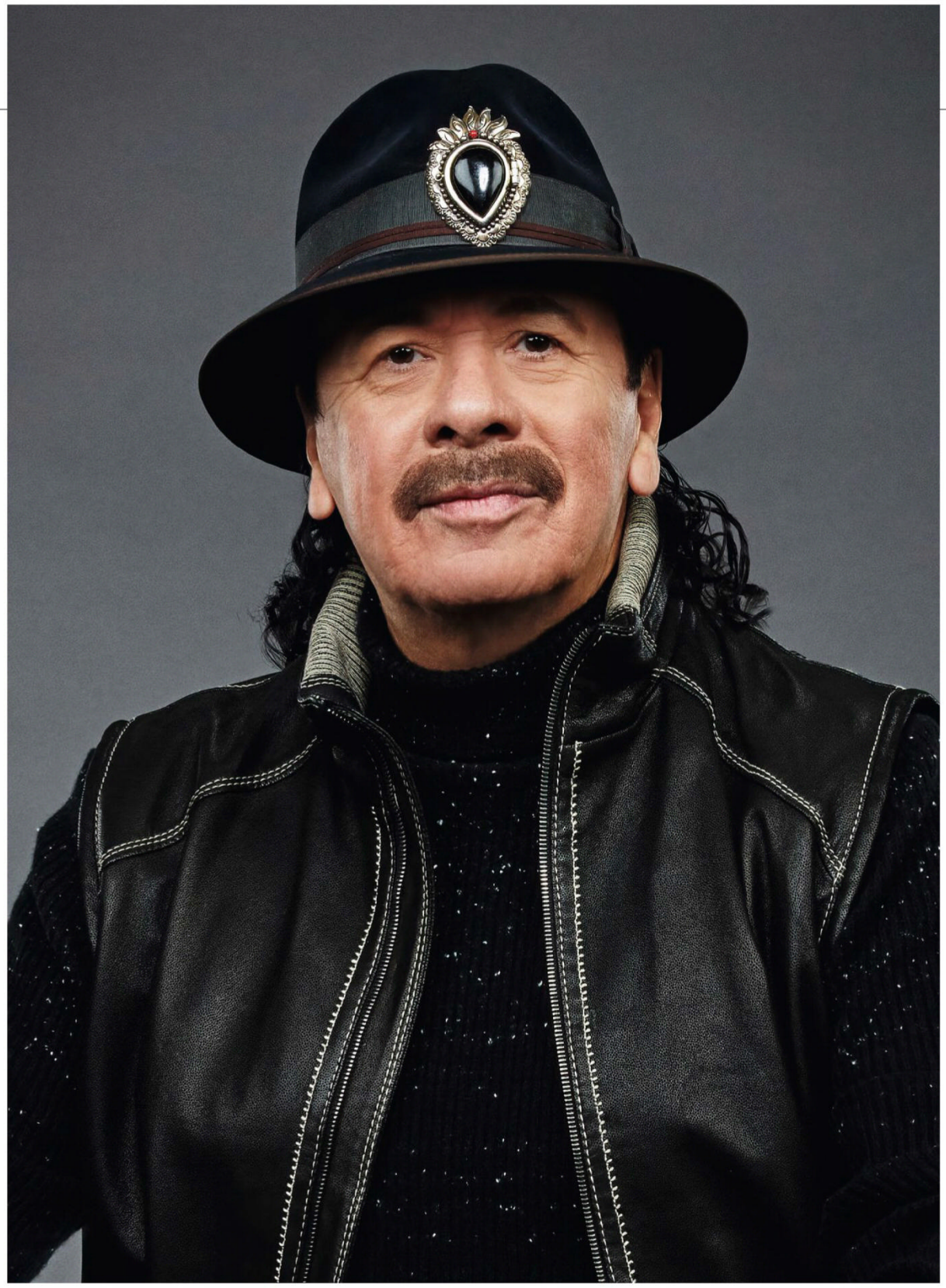


PHOTO BY MARYANNE BILHAM

"Music reminds people that we are divine. No matter what your mind says or what the media says"

What's happened to your old SG?
"I'm sorry to tell you I threw it against a brick wall and it became a bunch of toothpicks. Because it wouldn't stay in tune. That's why, at Woodstock, I said that I was wrestling a snake – because the SG wouldn't stay in tune."

You once said rock 'n' roll is a swimming pool, jazz is an ocean and you hang out on a lake: is that still how you view it?
"Pretty much, yes. An ocean is Charlie Parker, Coltrane, Miles, Wayne Shorter and John McLaughlin. It's a different form of supreme improvisation."

And do you feel like you can you drop into that world quite naturally?
"Y'know, what comes more naturally to me is making a melody come true."

Could you ever go in the other direction – play with a punk band, say?
"Oh, yes. Absolutely. I would love to do an album that's just heavy metal. Because I love AC/DC, Metallica, Led Zeppelin, Cream, Jimi Hendrix. The original Fleetwood Mac, with *The Green Manalishi* and *Oh Well* – that was heavy metal before heavy metal."

Do you ever worry we'll eventually run out of original guitar parts?
"No, I don't – because it's a language that will always develop, like living water. I think it was Tony Bennett that said, 'If you take from one person, it's called stealing. But if you take from many, it's called research.'"

Do you feel your influence on the guitar scene?
"I was kind of curious, so I looked, and there's, like, 70 Santana tribute bands, all over the world. There's people who make their living playing Santana music. I've watched them, here and there."

What advice would you give a Santana tribute band?
"I would just say, 'You were born with your own fingerprints. You were born with your own sound, uniqueness, authenticity, individuality. I'm grateful and it's a compliment that you play my music. But I would invite you to find your own because you're going to be happiest when you create music that is totally you, by you.'"

Which guitarists are you listening to lately?
"What really excites me lately is Sonny Sharrock. I love how he became a living hurricane and tornado. He can play a melody, but you know that he's just going to burn, on a whole other level that's between Jimi Hendrix and Coltrane. I love Gábor Szabó – he was a Gypsy guitar player from Budapest. At home, I put on my guitar and I take my fingers for a walk with Gábor Szabó. I play a lot of Marvin Gaye, too. Why? Because they're really sexy guys. Their whole thing is romance and S.E.X. And I need that in my life. I need to have romance and sex to keep me feeling young and vibrant."

Do you think guitarists can keep evolving – or do you think you reach a certain point where you're as good as you'll ever be?
"They're both one. You'll be as good as you'll ever be every time you get out of the way and let your spirit play. But there's always room for more Mona Lisas, more Picassos, more Stravinskys. There's always room to discover the unknown and unpredictable."

Are there any guitar techniques you'd still like to perfect?
"I don't want to perfect a technique. I'd rather develop innocence and purity."

Do you think the music and messages of the 60s still resonate today?
"Yes. When I close my eyes and I play, I always think of The Doors, which is one of my favourite bands. I love The Doors more than anyone or anything. There's something about The Doors and *Light My Fire* and Robbie Krieger... I guess he was listening to Ali Akbar Khan and also Ravi Shankar. But The Doors is the ultimate garage band."

Does music still have the power to make the world a better place?
"Yes, absolutely. If they played more music by The Doors or John Coltrane in elevators, shopping malls, radio. Music reminds people that we are divine. No matter what your mind says or what the media says. A 'media mind' is not necessarily good for you.

Carlos on the passion of playing: "At home, I put on my guitar and I take my fingers for a walk with Gábor Szabó. I play a lot of Marvin Gaye, too. Why? Because they're really sexy guys"

PHOTO BY ROBERTO FINIZIO

Sometimes you turn off the TV and you can hear the clouds moving, the birds chirping, children laughing."

When you listen back to 1969's self-titled debut album, can you recognise yourself as a player?
"The last time I saw my friend Joe Cocker, I said to him, 'Hey Joe! We used to be charcoal and now we're diamonds.' He looked at me – he was putting on his pants – and he goes, 'Did you just come up with that?' I said, 'Yes.' I love Joe Cocker, and I love what we did with *Little Wing*. But anyway, he agreed, and when I listen to that music from '68 or '69, it's kind of like charcoal, but it has become more like diamonds now."

Do you have any favourite memories of that debut album?
"It was funny to be, one minute, in high school and then, next minute, we're in the studio, and then we're hanging around Miles and Herbie, and then it's Woodstock and Jimi Hendrix. It was a little daunting to go from washing dishes and dreaming you could be onstage with BB King and Peter Frampton. And then – you are!"

You partnered with John McLaughlin on 1973's *Love Devotion Surrender*. Would you ever consider working with him again?
"Yes. We were talking about it. I think we made a lot of people angry with that album. Which is a good thing. When you make someone angry, at least they're paying attention. They all jumped onboard 20 or 30 years later, but when they first heard that album, it was like, 'How dare you?' And I was like, 'That's a good word. Because we dare.'"

Why do you think there was criticism of that album?
"Because people who are intellectually living in their minds, they couldn't conceive of John McLaughlin and I desecrating John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. But I knew it was great because the one person that meant the most was Alice Coltrane – and she loved it."

How have you coped mentally with the lockdown?
"I was doing time in paradise. Some people do time in San Quentin or some kind of correctional institution. I was in Kauai. So my lifestyle was rainbows and waterfalls. Beauty and grace. And being with my wife, Cindy, we've learned to crystallise our intentions, motives and purpose, and we have become better human beings. More spiritual, powerful warriors."

Did you find yourself reaching for the guitar during lockdown?
"I put it away – knowing that any time I grabbed it, I could still find the G spot."

Were you worried about catching Covid?
"No. I don't think about it. I did take the shot, the injection. But I don't succumb to fear and worry. I trust that when the time comes for me to transcend into another realm, I will. But right now, I got some things to do, so Coronavirus, fear and worry – I dismiss them."

Finally, would you ever take LSD again to see how it affects your guitar playing?
"You got some...?" G

Carlos Santana's new album, *Blessings And Miracles*, is available now via BMG
www.santana.com

J.V.

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

He's the Texas tornado who braved the honky tonks, traded gear with Hendrix and cut heads with his blues heroes. As Jimmie Vaughan releases a new career-spanning boxset, we take a walk with the 70-year-old through first guitars, broken bones and the agony of losing his kid brother

Words Henry Yates

The Blues Came Calling

"I was a total blues nut. I had all the Chess records. I'd save my lunch money at school and go buy Chuck Berry's new hit. Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, Freddie King – I had all those records. We had great radio stations at the time, too. Like, there was a station in Dallas called WRR, and they would play blues from 10 till midnight. Then there was Wolfman Jack, WLAC out of Nashville... and that wasn't even the local stations. Popular music was amazing back then."

Lucky Break

"This friend at school said, 'If you want a girlfriend, you're gonna have to play football.' I really didn't want to. I remember, the football coach said to me, 'Okay, run up for a pass and let's see what you can do.' I caught the pass, the other players tackled me, all piled onto me and broke my collarbone. So for the next three months, I didn't have to go to school. So I was glad about that. My father said, 'I don't know what we're gonna do with you, so, here, just take this guitar and stay out of trouble.' And I've been playing ever since."

Four Play

"My first guitar was an acoustic with four strings. I finally got all six then I started learning Chuck Berry, Jimmy Reed, things like that. Everybody had to be able to play *Hide Away* by Freddie King. Everybody did that song. The hillbillies did it, the country guys did it, the black radio stations played it. Learning *Hide Away* was just something you had to do."

Home Schooling

"When I started out, there was guitar players everywhere. My father was an asbestos worker and a lot of musicians did that job because it was easy to come back to it if you needed money. So they would come over to our house, play dominoes, bring their wives, and there was a couple of guys who'd sit in the living room and play guitar, everything from country and western to blues and rock 'n' roll. There was one guy named Leonard: he had a big blonde Gibson with his name in the neck, in pearl. He'd show me how to play Jimmy Reed, Chuck Berry, John Lee Hooker. He'd say, 'Sit down, kid. What do ya like?' And I'd say, 'Well, I like blues.' And he'd go, 'You mean like this?' And he'd play Jimmy Reed and everyone. He pretty much laid it out. So that was one of my biggest lessons, just watching that guy."

"I remember first hearing Clapton... I was like, 'Wow, that's like BB King on acid or something'"

Finding God

"American music is where I grew up, but I'll always remember hearing Eric Clapton when he first came out. A friend of mine called me up and told me his dad had gone to England, and he'd brought back a Clapton record. So my friend played it for me down the phone, and I was like, 'Wow, that's like BB King on acid or something.' It's always great to play with Eric. I still can't believe that

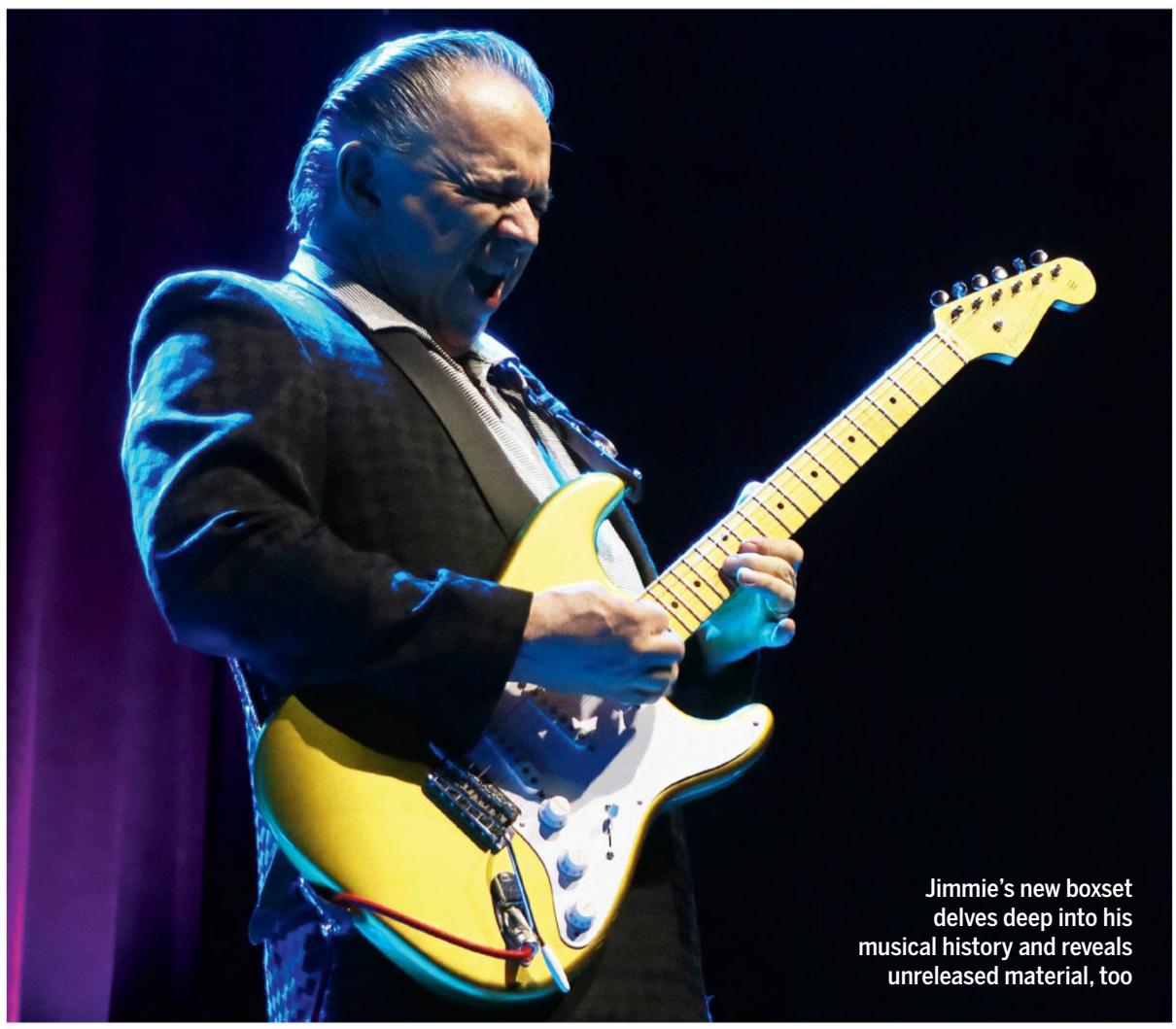
PHOTO BY MATTHEW STURTEVANT

"[Kim Wilson] came in and I said, 'Here's my number.' Next thing, we started a band – The Fabulous Thunderbirds – and I was with them for 15 years"

Jimmie on stage with The Fabulous Thunderbirds as Kim Wilson lends a helping hand

PHOTO BY TRACY ANNE HART

"There's nothing as cool as a Stratocaster. It's like the coolest car you've ever seen"



Jimmie's new boxset delves deep into his musical history and reveals unreleased material, too

PHOTO BY TODD WOLFSON

I ever got to meet him, but he's actually a friend now and it's a trip. If you had been a hillbilly kid from Fort Worth, you would have never dreamed that you would meet all your heroes and make records and go tour. The whole thing is a fantasy come true."

Gearing Up

"I have a lot of ES-350s. I have several big-box jazz guitars. I have one of those T-Bone Walker blonde Gibsons with three pickups. I love all that stuff. But there's nothing as cool as a Stratocaster. You don't know if it's a rocket ship or a lamp, y'know? It's like the coolest car you've ever seen. As for amps, when I started, my dad bought me a Silvertone piggyback with six 10-inch speakers. For the time, it was really big, and I liked that. I was in a band from about 12, and my dad used to take me to my first gigs. He'd put our amps in the back of the pickup and take us down there. Then he would hang out."

Austin Power

"Soon after that, I got into a band called The Chessmen. They were all 21 and I was only 14, but I got in the van. We used to play at fraternity parties over in Austin, and it was incredibly exciting to go out at the weekend and not have to come home. Y'know, just to be a kid, feeling like you're getting away with something. You didn't even care about if you had a record deal, or a career, or anything like that. I just remember being a young guitar player and how happy I was. My parents didn't like it at first, but I was making pretty good money. When I got into The Chessmen, I got two Superbeetles, then I got some Marshalls, and I would hook up different stuff. Like, I would get a Bassman and hook it up with the Superbeetles. We tried everything."

Feet First

"What makes a great guitar part? Oh man, that's a deep question. It's very mysterious, but it's like a paragraph. You have a beginning, a middle and an end, and then you have a punchline somewhere. It's like, if you throw a cat off the roof, it's gonna land on its feet, probably. So you can play a lot of weird stuff in the middle, but you gotta land on your feet somehow. The reason why the blues is so great is because, in the middle, you can do anything you can get away with. So, in that way, it's almost like jazz."

Mob Rules

"When you're 18, you don't know what you're doing. You're just feeling everything out. There was a drag between Fort Worth and Dallas called Jacksboro Highway that had about 20 honky tonks in a row. You just went out and played in them, every day. But you had to be careful. There was one place where they would let us in and out the back. It was easy to get your ass kicked if you weren't careful. There'd be a line of motorcycle guys outside..."

In At The Deep End

"If you listen back to some of the live stuff from early on, you can tell when you drank too much, or you were playing good, or you were playing calm, or you were playing a little frantic and pushing it. Y'know, all that stuff happens. Playing live as a young guitar player is like jumping in a big swimming pool when you don't know how to swim, right? That's the way it still is, but you just keep trying."

Good Company

"My band backed up Freddie King in Austin when he came back in the 60s with a new record deal. I played rhythm guitar for him. And I used to play in one place in Dallas where he lived a couple of streets over, and he'd come up on Sundays and sit in, stand there at the bar and watch you play. He was a huge guy, y'know? That was a real trip.

"Another time, we opened for Jimi Hendrix. I had a brand-new Vox wah and his old DeArmond pedal didn't work very good. It was Saturday night and you couldn't go to the music store – so he bought my pedal for 50 bucks and gave me his old one. No problem, y'know? And I've still got that DeArmond pedal today."

Taking Flight

"I was playing in another band when Kim Wilson came through town on the day we had a jam session. He came and sat in, we talked and I said, 'Okay, well, here's my number.' Next thing, we started a new band called The Fabulous Thunderbirds and I was with them for 15 years. We had four people in the band, but Kim sang and played harmonica – so it was really more like a power trio, with bass, guitar and drums. We were doing the trio thing where you can play any song with different arrangements. Our first records didn't sell much, but we were on the road in a van, playing 300 shows a year, living the dream."

Find Your Voice

"As a guitar player, you have to play what you feel. You gotta figure out what that is and you gotta boil it down, right? It's easy

Jimmie doing it his way in Houston, Texas, 1983: "You learn the technique when you're young and muscular"

PHOTO BY TRACY ANNE HART

to learn a bunch of licks and throw them all in there, like Scrabble or something. But that doesn't sound right. You have to make it into something. The goal is to talk. It's really about trying to have your own voice, so they can tell you from the other ones, y'know, and you're not just copying people. But you can't really think about all that when you're playing. You just have to play the guitar, right?"

Riding With The King

"I used to get in a cab and ride over to see BB King long before I ever knew him. Later, he was always super nice to me, and very encouraging – all the things that you wouldn't expect from a great star like that. We appeared together in the *Blues Brothers 2000* movie, but that wasn't really my favourite thing. It wasn't the real deal. It was a spoof, wasn't it? That doesn't fall into the serious music category. But it was a good chance to go see a lot of your friends and have a party."

Brothers In Arms

"We have some stuff on the new boxset from the *Family Style* album that I made with my brother Stevie in 1990. I mean, Stevie was such a huge part of the whole thing. I'm four years older. He was my little brother. When we used to go to school, it was my job to get him there and back. It was my job to get him to the bus stop, to get him home and make sure he

"Play every day. Your overall approach to ad-libbing gets better as you get older. That's just life"

was okay. I started playing guitar and he watched me learn then I'd put it down and he'd pick it up. He died 31 years ago. What in the world do you say about that?"

New Generation

"Gary Clark Jr is fantastic. He's a great songwriter, a fabulous singer; he can play so many things. I first met him when he was 14. He came down to the Antone's club in Austin – his parents brought him there, got him in – and then Clifford [Antone, owner] said, 'There's this kid here, he's supposed to be really good.' We were like, 'Get him up!' And that was Gary Clark, before he got tall, y'know? You heard it immediately. You just knew – this kid's got it."

Getting Better All The Time

"I think you get better and better with your approach on guitar. You learn the technique when you're young and muscular, but the best thing is just to keep doing it. Play every day. I think your overall approach to ad-libbing gets better as you get older. That's just life."

My Back Pages

"I'm really happy this new boxset is coming out. Records are neat, aren't they? That's what I started out with and I still have a jukebox in my living room. There's just something about having music that's not digital. I don't know how to explain it. It's like, I love cars from the 30s, 40s and 50s. I'm 70 years old and I'm fortunate that I just do what I want. A lot of times, I don't pay a lot of attention to what everyone else is doing."

The Next Chapter

"There's so much music on this boxset that I haven't had a chance to absorb it yet. It's just a trip to sit back and listen to all that stuff. But what I've got going on right now is what I'm thinking about. I've got some gigs coming up and I've got a great band. I just want to play and play and play. I want to make more albums and I want to write more songs. I don't see any reason to slow down. I'm going to keep playing until I can't play any more, I guess." G

Jimmie Vaughan's new boxset, *The Jimmie Vaughan Story*, is available now on Last Music Co

www.jimmievaughan.com

INTRODUCING

Virtuo

- Innovative Neck Design with 22 Fret Access
- Offset Acoustic Soundhole
- Two Fishman Fluence Humbuckers
- Graphtech Ghost Piezo Acoustic Pickup
- Fully Adjustable Acoustic Bridge
- Mono/Stereo 1/4 in Jack & 13 Pin Midi Connectivity

ACOUSTIC BODY ELECTRIC SOUL

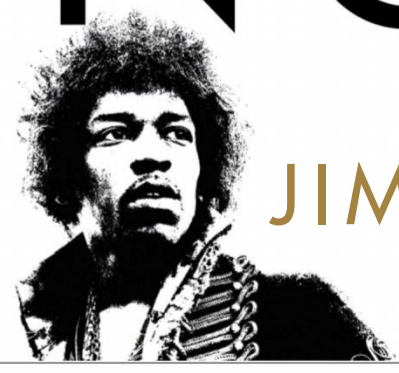
ERGONOMICALLY DESIGNED FOR COMFORT WITH A SLIM BODY THE VIRTUO IS AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR MADE SPECIFICALLY WITH THE ELECTRIC PLAYER IN MIND

FOR MORE INFORMATION
WWW.EMERALDGUITARS.COM

EMERALD GUITARS

WILD THINGS

IN SEARCH OF JIMI'S STRATS



Over five decades since his untimely death, Jimi Hendrix remains synonymous with the Fender Stratocaster, a guitar that he would set alight – both figuratively and literally – on stages across the world throughout the 60s. But what became of those fated instruments? And will we ever find out since so many were reduced to splinters in his onstage histrionics? We set out to track down the Strats that accompanied the legendary musician on his musical journey

Words Tony Bacon

Jimi Hendrix arrived in London from New York City in September 1966 with his new manager, Chas Chandler, the ex-bass player from The Animals. They soon put together Jimi's new band, the Experience, with Mitch Mitchell on drums and Noel Redding on bass, and by the middle of October that year they were playing their first proper gigs on a brief tour supporting Johnny Hallyday in France.

It's not clear if Jimi brought with him to London the guitar he was playing during those early months. It was an Olympic White finish Fender Stratocaster with a maple neck and rosewood fingerboard, made most likely between '63 and '65. Perhaps he bought it in London? It was unlikely that he or Chas had the cash to buy a new one – a brand new custom-colour Strat similar to this white one listed at £168 at the time. That's a lot of money for a musician still to prove himself. If he bought it secondhand in one of London's music shops in late '66, he'd have needed a more manageable sum, between about £60 and £90. The Selmer shop in Charing Cross Road, for example, advertised "Strats, all finishes, from £75" at the time.

Wherever it came from, Jimi's first white Strat served him well for a while, alongside a secondhand black one with rosewood 'board that he got around November. By February of the following year, things were looking up. The Experience had played the Marquee and the Saville Theatre in London and a number of other gigs in Britain, plus a few in Germany and France. Work on recording a follow-up single to *Hey Joe* had begun – and *Purple Haze* would go to No 3 in the UK. Reports suggest that, during February, Jimi had a black Strat stolen from a gig in Darlington and a white Strat from London's Roundhouse. He soon acquired at least one more white one and at least one sunburst model, all with rosewood 'boards.

Jimi was, of course, left-handed, and all his Strats were regular guitars that he would flip over and restring to accommodate that. It's a matter of debate how much difference this made to his sound – the reversed nut, the angled bridge pickup accentuating different strings than intended, the vibrato handled differently – but with the high volume levels at which he played, and his natural dexterity and playing skill, any differences were probably minimal. Less open to debate is that Jimi made more players aware of the Strat's tonal and musical possibilities than any musician before him.

At first, he would tune his Strats to regular concert pitch, but soon he favoured tuning them down a half step and sometimes a whole step. It meant less strain on his voice because he could sing in a slightly lower register, and also the newly lower-pitched strings were slightly slacker and therefore easier to bend. He liked the neck pickup's full tone, and occasionally he'd use the different tones from the two in-between positions of the three-way selector.

INSET PHOTOS OF JIMI HENDRIX BY AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

“WE USE THE SAME THING ANYONE ELSE WOULD, BUT WE USE IT WITH IMAGINATION AND COMMON SENSE”

JIMI HENDRIX

Jimi in mid-flight, photographed during a concert at Berkeley, California in 1970

PHOTO BY POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Burning ambition? A tech helps Jimi attend to his guitars before a performance in Germany, circa 1967

PHOTO BY ANDREW COWIE/PHOTOSHOT/GETTY IMAGES

The first ever guitar that Jimi Hendrix burnt on stage. This '65 Strat was set alight in March 1967 at the Finsbury Astoria before a bemused audience and a horrified fire officer

Electronics whizz Roger Mayer was Jimi's right-hand man for modifying pedals and guitars alike

ALIGHT AT THE ASTORIA

At the end of March '67, Jimi started a British tour on a bill with what we might call a varied line-up, alongside The Walker Brothers, Cat Stevens and Engelbert Humperdinck. The opening night in north London at the Finsbury Park Astoria (better known later as the Rainbow) saw the music press in attendance, and Jimi, Chas, road manager Gerry Stickells, and Keith Altham from the *New Musical Express* got together in the dressing room to come up with a stunt to get some coverage. Keith suggested, as something of a joke, that Jimi might burn a guitar. Chas smiled and sent Gerry out for some lighter fluid.

"The guitar went up about halfway through *Wild Thing*," Keith recalled later in *Q* magazine, "with Jimi straddling his Fender and applying several matches before the instrument caught alight. There was a pathetic little pile of used matches on the stage afterwards. It was not exactly a towering inferno, but Jimi made the most of it by whirling the guitar around his head and throwing in a touch of the mad axeman for good measure."

Unsurprisingly, the fire officer at the theatre was unimpressed, but Jimi still got his headlines. Chris Welch's story on the blazing event was on the front page of the following week's *Melody Maker*. "Jimi sustained a burned hand when his guitar accidentally burst into flames at the climax of his act," Chris wrote. "Hendrix was lying on stage playing the guitar with his teeth when it suddenly burst into flames. Jimi leapt backwards and ran off stage followed by his group. The guitar was left burning dangerously near the closed curtains, and compere Nick Jones ran and tried to pick it up, burning his hand in the attempt. An attendant rushed on stage with a fire extinguisher and put out the flames, which were leaping 10ft in the air."

STRAT CALCULATION

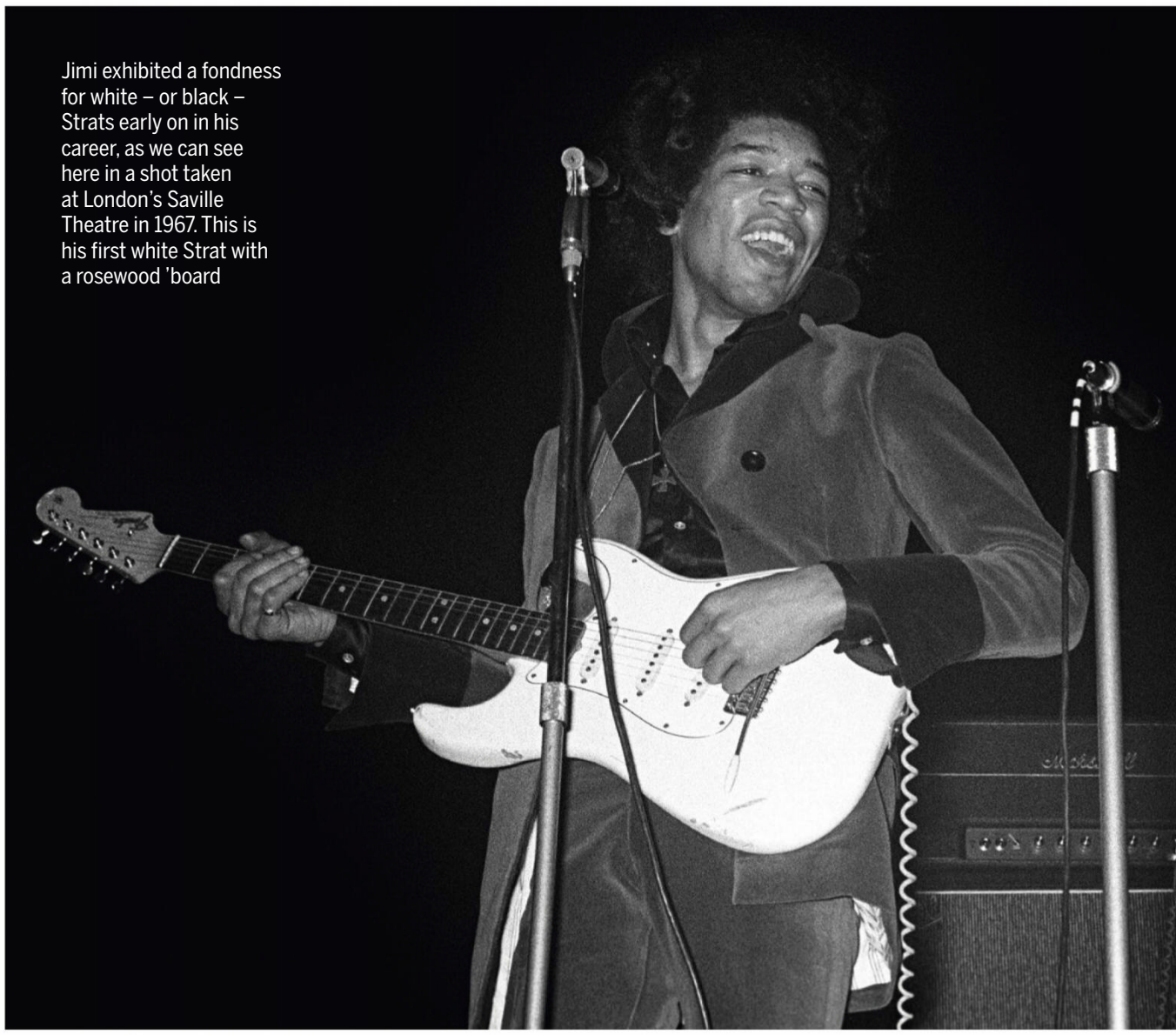
It took more than a fiery story in *Melody Maker*, but soon Jimi was making real ground. His first album, *Are You Experienced*, was released in Britain in May 1967 and streaked up the LP charts to No 2. He was playing more gigs than ever, and his wild onstage performances meant the Strats he used took a real beating – as did Jimi's teeth from his regular dental-picking routine.

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

Neville Marten remembers his brush with a possible Hendrix artefact... "In 1971 I saw Free on TV with Paul Kossoff playing a white Strat. Instant lust set in so I trawled the London shops but to no avail. Then, in the *Melody Maker* ads I spotted it: white Fender Stratocaster, rosewood neck, £115. I rang the number (Romford) and agreed to buy it. They would deliver it.

"On the day, two besuited gents turned up with the guitar. They'd said it was nearly new, but even then I knew a small headstock meant otherwise. Still, I bought it. It looked stunning. When I took it to bits I discovered the neck was a slab 'board, pre-'63, the neckplate was F-stamped with a 1966 serial number (which I still remember), and the pickups were different again; it had an extra strap button on the lower horn and the nut was loose in its slot, clear indications it had been used upside down.

"Who, at that time, could afford to make one Strat out of three and played a right-hander upside down? And who were those guys? I'll never know for sure, but odds on it was Jimi's. Sadly, it was a pretty poor guitar – probably the runt of the litter – and I sold it a year later. For £115. D'oh!"



Jimi exhibited a fondness for white – or black – Strats early on in his career, as we can see here in a shot taken at London's Saville Theatre in 1967. This is his first white Strat with a rosewood 'board

PHOTO BY CHRIS MORPHET/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

By May '67, he was playing at least one sunburst Strat with rosewood 'board, and for a *Top Of The Pops* TV performance of *Purple Haze* he mimed with what looked like a Fiesta Red finish Strat. Chas talked to Ray Jones at *Beat Instrumental* around this time and said that Jimi had already been through six Strats: two stolen (presumably the Aldershot black one and the Roundhouse white one), two others "fogged up on him" (surely a southerner's misquote of Chas's north-eastern accent), and two that Jimi "always carries on gigs".

Usually, Jimi reserved one of the two gigging guitars for his more extreme stage antics. Richard Green wrote in *Record Mirror*: "He kisses the guitar, sits on it and treads on it. Quite apart from belting it with his elbow and caressing the amplifier with it." The sequence where Jimi "caressed" the speaker cabinets with his Strat seemed to another observer more like aggressively "humping the amp". It did no favours to the poor instrument earmarked for such treatment, nor to those charged with keeping the guitars roadworthy.

The team would vary from time to time, but most often in mid-'67 there was Gerry Stickells (road manager) and Neville Chesters (roadie), and sometimes Roger Mayer (technical support). They were exploiting the Strat's screw-together construction and would strip and swap bodies, necks, pickguards, controls and more. This makes it especially difficult to determine, in hindsight, how many Strats Jimi used. We'll almost certainly never know for sure, but there were probably no more than 15 base instruments – regularly repurposed and chopped about, sometimes with the same neck appearing on several bodies – right up to the point in 1968 when, as we'll see, Jimi appeared to settle on two primary instruments.

SMASHED AT THE SAVILLE

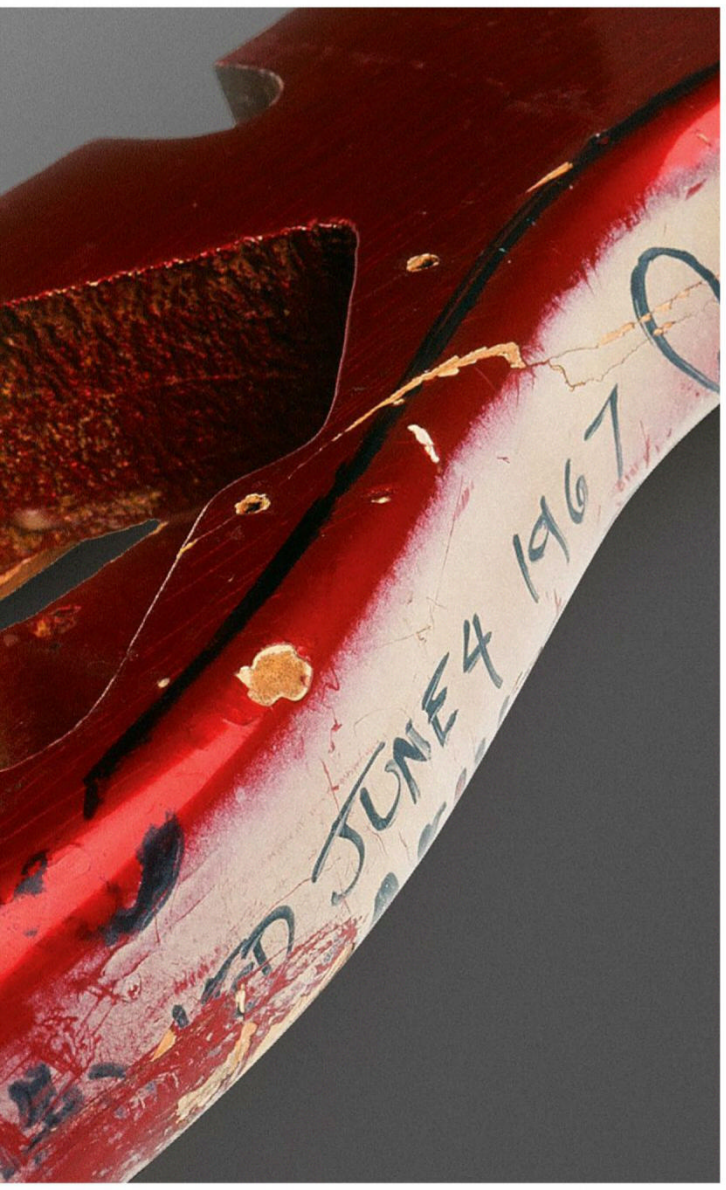
Roger Mayer recalls the changing nature of the Strats reserved for the rough treatment. "We called them the sacrificial guitar," he says with a smile. "It would be put together from all the scraps we had, just to make a guitar that worked for the end of the show, when Jimi was jumping on it and everything. Obviously, that wasn't one of the better ones. Maybe it would only have one working pickup, which we would wire directly – and there'd be no point for the volume control to work, because why would Jimi want to play on anything less than 10?"

One victim of the onstage frenzy was a Candy Apple Red model, with a rare sighting at this period for Jimi of a maple 'board. He used it through a European stint in May '67 when it was fitted with a procession of non-standard knobs and switch tips thanks to the hammering it took against the speakers and elsewhere.

Chas told *New Musical Express* later: "The smashing routine really began by accident. Jimi was pulled off stage by a few over-enthusiastic fans, and as he jumped back on the stage he threw his guitar on before him. When he picked it up he saw that it had cracked and several of the

> "WE CALLED THEM THE SACRIFICIAL GUITAR... PUT TOGETHER FROM ALL THE SCRAPS WE HAD, JUST TO MAKE A GUITAR THAT WORKED FOR THE END OF THE SHOW"
>
> **ROGER MAYER**

From the Saville gig with handwritten note: 'Died June 4 1967'. This model was originally Candy Apple Red with embellishments from Jimi himself, including a poem on the back (see final page of feature)



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE, SEATTLE, WA

strings were broken – he just went barmy and smashed everything in sight. The German audience loved it, and we decided to keep it in as part of the act."

By the end of May the guitar was in a sorry state, the crack developing from the bridge right back across the rear of the body. Jimi decided it was time for this one to go, but rather than consign it to the parts bin, he chose to give it a special send-off. Another show at the Saville Theatre loomed in early June, the last British gig before the Experience went off for Jimi's homecoming US tour that would last until August of that year.

He planned for this gig and this guitar to mark a kind of farewell. Jimi took his battered and cracked red Strat and painted the front with black and white swirling foliage and hearts. On the back he painted a white ground and then added flowers and a big message about the "universal gypsie queen of true, free expressed music", adding the date and location of the gig alongside.

Jimi and his Experience played their final Saville set, opening with a cover of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released a matter of days before, as a nod to Paul McCartney and George Harrison in the audience. He played a black/rosewood Strat throughout the gig, but as the band prepared to perform *Are You Experienced* for their finale, a roadie handed Jimi his painted Strat.

Hugh Nolan in *Disc And Music Echo* wrote that Jimi "proceeded to smash a beautifully-painted guitar and hurl the pieces into the clamouring crowd... a guitar he'd painted in glorious swirling colours and written a poem on the back dedicated to Britain and its audiences. Bathed in a flickering strobe light, he crashed the guitar about the stage and hurled what was left of it to eager souvenir-hunters in the audience."

IT HAPPENED IN MONTEREY

Later in June '67, Jimi and his Experience flew to the US for the long tour that saw him continue to play a black Strat, as well as a white/rosewood one, and also a white/rosewood Strat with a tortoiseshell pickguard. The first gig was at the Monterey Pop Festival, and again a plan was hatched to grab attention, not least because the event was being filmed by DA Pennebaker for a documentary movie. He would burn another guitar.

Jimi certainly wasn't going to ruin his black Strat, so upon arrival in San Francisco a sacrificial red Strat was acquired. As with the Saville guitar, Jimi sprayed it white and then decorated it, this time with vines and flowers and hearts. He went on stage later and played eight songs on the black Strat then changed to the prepared guitar. "I'm going to sacrifice something that I really

Moments before Jimi set fire to his guitar while performing at the Monterey International Pop Music Festival on 18 June 1967

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

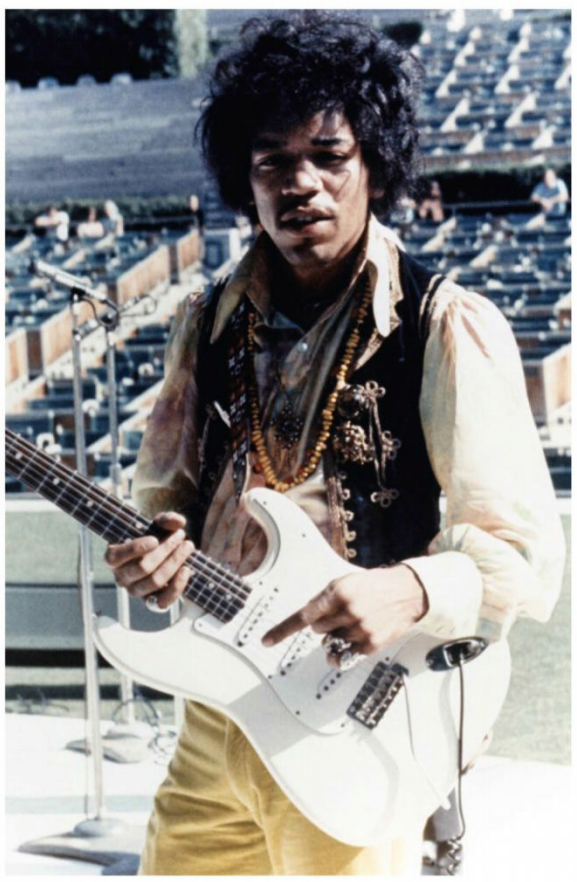


PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Jimi on stage during the soundcheck for his performance at the Hollywood Bowl on 18 August 1967 in Los Angeles, California, with most likely his fourth white/rosewood Strat

PHOTO BY PAUL RYAN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

DA Pennebaker's film of the Monterey Pop Festival went on to introduce the world to Jimi's occasional fiery Strat sacrifices; note the vines, flowers and hearts motif

love," he told the audience before the last song of the set. "Today I think it's the right thing, all right, so I'm not losing my mind. This is this, for everybody here, man. This is the only way I can do it. So we're going to do the English and American combined anthem together, okay?"

Jimi coaxed some feedback from the painted Strat for a while, toying with the vibrato arm, and then launched into *Wild Thing*. He ran through his stage tricks – playing on his knees, behind his back, up against the speaker cabs – and finally put the Strat down on the stage, squirted lighter fluid over it, kissed it goodbye, and struck a match to set it on fire. He watched the flames for a few seconds then snatched up the guitar and smashed it against the stage. He threw the pieces to the crowd then he walked off stage, knowing his black Strat was safe. The (red) Stratocaster was dead. Long live the (black) Stratocaster. And the (white) Stratocaster.

"I'M GOING TO SACRIFICE SOMETHING THAT I REALLY LOVE. TODAY I THINK IT'S THE RIGHT THING, ALL RIGHT, SO I'M NOT LOSING MY MIND"

JIMI HENDRIX AT MONTEREY

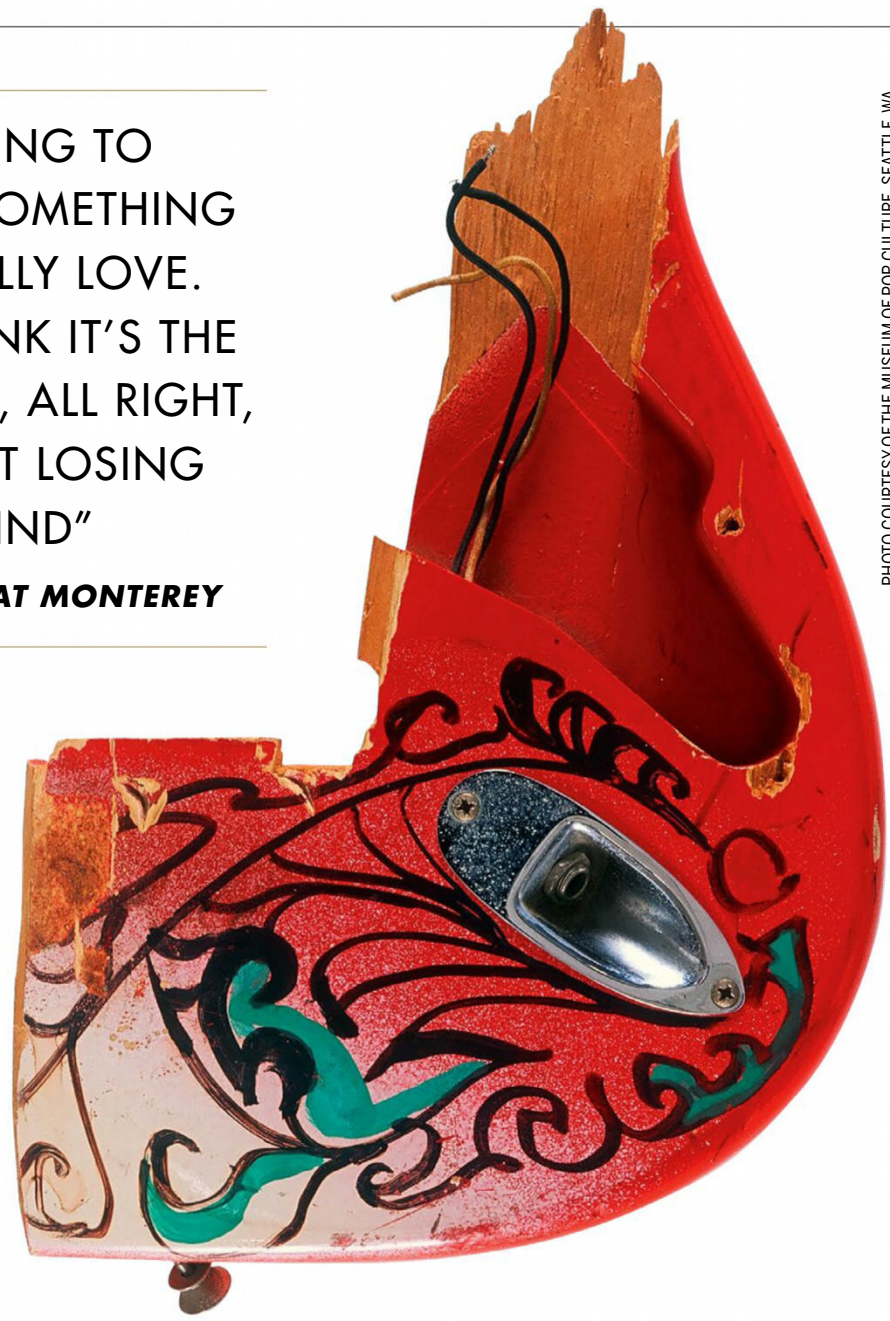


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE, SEATTLE, WA

Smash hits: a fragment of the Monterey Strat still exists at the Museum Of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington

Below: At the soundcheck before performing at the Saville Theatre in '67. Check out the mods to Jimi's Strat, courtesy of Roger Mayer

PHOTO BY HELMUT REISS/UNITED ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Jimi played a number of other guitars on stage aside from his Strats. Starting in summer '67, he would occasionally switch to a Gibson, mostly for blues numbers. First came a '67 Flying V that he painted with flamboyant decorations, then a '68 SG Custom, on next to another V, this time a sunburst '69, and finally a custom-ordered black left-handed '69 Flying V. And in March and April '68, he played a sunburst Fender Jazzmaster on stage at a few gigs.

MAKE DO & MEND

Back to London briefly for a few UK shows and TV appearances, the band was soon off again for a romp through Europe in September '67, with Jimi playing almost exclusively a white/rosewood Strat. Upon his return, he played another gig at the Saville and used a white Strat that on closer inspection had received some unusual mods. Roger Mayer did the work. He says the Strat in question had been "biffed up", another victim of Jimi's energetic stagecraft.

"It was broken pretty much along the glue joints," Roger recalls, "so we re-glued it and used long screws to hold it all together. I resurfaced the neck, with a lot of attention to the neck-body joint, to be sure we maintained the sustain." The controls had been ripped apart, and with Fender spares unavailable back then, Roger put on three black knobs and replaced the three-way switch with three mini-toggles.

"The three toggles turned each pickup off or on, which gives you seven combinations," he explains, "which was useful if you wanted to have bridge and neck, bridge and middle, all three – whatever. And those type of switches were pretty stage-proof. Jimi-proof! I mean, sometimes when he raked the amplifier with the neck of his guitar the violence was such that the wire-wound strings would be cut right through on each fret. Anyway, repairs done, we had the guitar repainted at my dad's firm, which did product finishing for the electronics industry. It was painted Old English White, a British Motor Corporation colour."

By the end of November, Jimi had three white/rosewood Strats on hand for at least one gig (in Blackpool), and he was by now in the habit of throwing one toward the back of the stage and past the amps as a performance flourish. Tough though Strats may be, this is not the kind of treatment they were designed for, and yet more lash-ups and running repairs were necessarily made.

CIRRUS

SPATIAL-TEMPORAL MODIFIER

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

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

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

KMA MACHINES BERLIN

www.kma-machines.com

Audio Distribution Group

Worldwide Distribution by Audio Distribution Group - **Building Brands Together**

sales@audiodistributiongroup.com

Another exhibit at the MoPOP museum – part of the sunburst Strat smashed at the Royal Albert Hall on 24 February 1969

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE, SEATTLE, WA

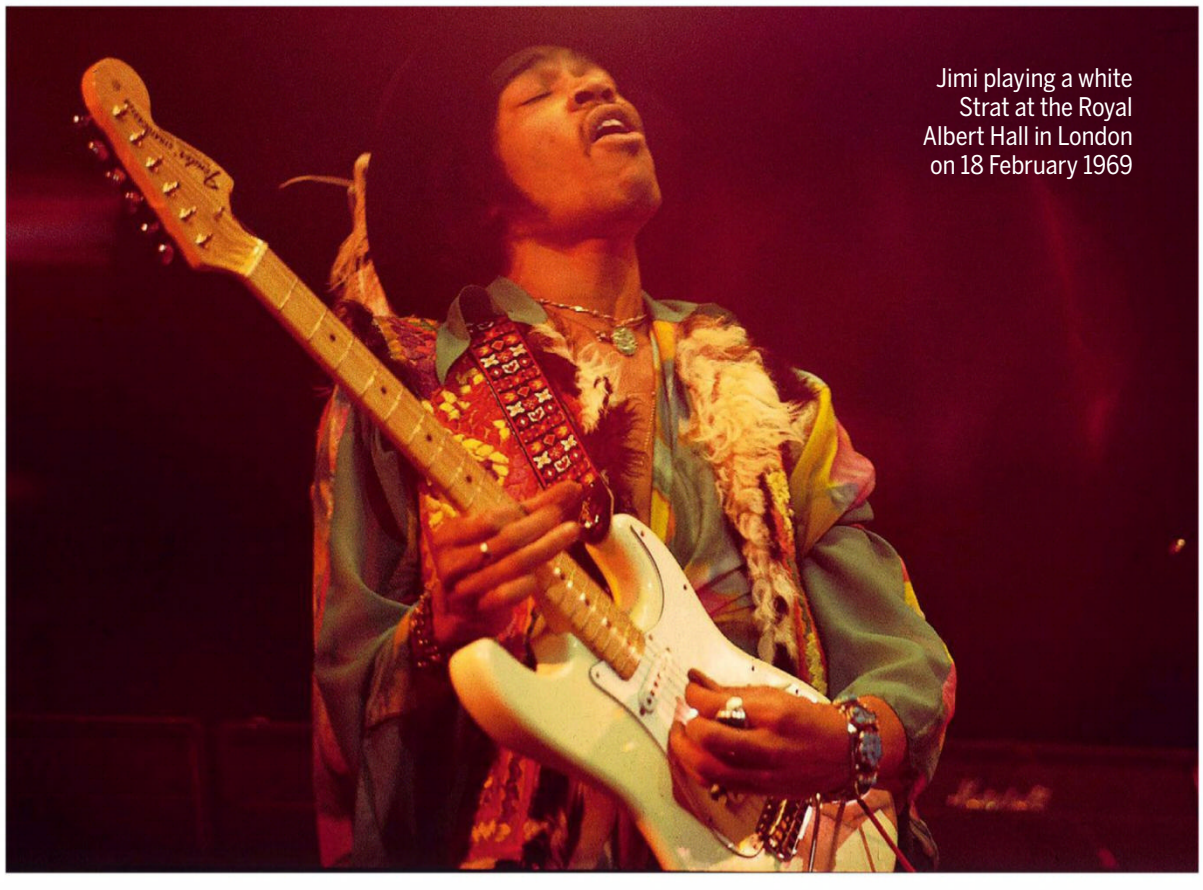
GOOD MORNING WOODSTOCK

From the start of February '68, the Experience shifted their attention from the UK and Europe and concentrated on playing across the pond in America. At first, Jimi continued to play white/rosewood Strats, although roadie Neville Chester bought what he called in his diary "another secondhand Strat" at Manny's music store in New York City early in March. A few days later Jimi was playing this sunburst/rosewood Strat alongside a white one. A blue Strat turned up at gigs around this time, too, apparently in Fender's Lake Placid Blue finish, but its headstock was split apart thanks to one of those flights to the back of the stage, and it limped on until retired in September.

From October, still gigging incessantly in the States, Jimi began using two new Strats, both with maple fingerboards, one in Olympic White (Mitch Mitchell said it was another Manny's purchase) and one in Black. They appear to have lasted Jimi until his death, just under two years later. For a European tour in January '69, he used a black/maple Strat exclusively, and at the Albert Hall in February he smashed a sacrificial sunburst/rosewood model.

From that time on, almost without exception, he would play a black and a white maple-'board Strat interchangeably. In May, a white one suffered some damage at the neck-headstock join, possibly a break, leading to a gig in June where he played a white Strat with a Telecaster neck temporarily attached. The most celebrated of Hendrix performances came early one morning at the Woodstock festival in August '69, with a new band he'd assembled after the Experience split, and he played a white/maple Strat.

Following a brief time fronting the Band Of Gypsys with Buddy Miles on drums and Billy Cox on bass, he put together an Experience with Mitch on drums and Billy on bass. For his final gig – in September 1970 at a festival on Fehmarn island in Germany, and just 12 days before his untimely death – he played both a black and a white maple-'board Strat.



Jimi playing a white Strat at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 18 February 1969

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Today, there are a few well-documented Stratocasters known to be instruments that Jimi played. There have also been a number of guitars offered for sale through the years that were less convincing, some laughably so. Talk to any professional involved in Hendrix-related auctions or museums or collections and the subject inevitably comes up. They will tell you that many of the "Hendrix Strats" put up for sale have questionable provenance. They will add – with raised eyebrows – that some of those have still managed to sell, and for big money. And they will conclude that some purported ex-Jimi Strats might actually be right, but that they lack enough supporting material to prove their authenticity.

Let's take a brief look at two of the best surviving Hendrix Stratocasters, both owned by MoPOP, the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington. The museum was established by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, who bought the white '68 Strat that Jimi played at Woodstock and other later-period gigs. Paul acquired it for around a million and a half dollars from Gabriele Ansaloni, aka Red Ronnie, an Italian radio and TV host, who had bid successfully for the instrument in London back in 1990 at a Sotheby's auction, where it was sold for its owner, Mitch Mitchell.

Gabriele paid £198,000, at the time a record price for a guitar, and he says he bought the Woodstock Strat because he's a Hendrix fan. "In a way," he recalls, "Jimi contacted me – that's a long, long story – and I had to buy that guitar. I had it for two years, and one day Mick Hucknall of Simply Red was staying at my house.

Far right: Italian radio and TV host Gabriele Ansaloni paid £198,000 for the Woodstock guitar in 1990 at a Sotheby's auction in London. He's pictured here (left) with Mitch Mitchell, who sold the guitar

Undoubtedly one of the most iconic instruments in rock history: the white Strat that Jimi played at the Woodstock Festival in 1969, sold at Sotheby's for £198k

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE, SEATTLE, WA

I showed him the guitar, and he said no-one is to play that guitar – it's like Van Gogh's brushes, no-one has to touch them. I had the idea to do a benefit show and ask Eric Clapton to play it, but after Mick said those things to me, I didn't do anything with that guitar."

He adds: "I knew I wasn't *the owner* of that guitar. In fact, Mitch Mitchell said I am not the owner – it's in my hands, but I am not the owner. So, one night in 1992 I asked Jimi Hendrix: 'I have no money, the bank wants money back, what do I have to do with that guitar?' And the day after, I had a phone call from Paul Allen's secretary telling me that he wanted to do a museum, asking me if I wanted to sell that guitar. And I said yes."

Peter Blecha was a full-time curator with Paul Allen from 1993 to 2001, helping to steer what began as a private collection to become a museum, which opened in 2000 as the Experience Music Project. He remembers, soon after the white Strat's acquisition, that rumours circulated questioning its authenticity. So he set about proving its use at Woodstock.

"I arranged for digital close-ups of the neck, so we could look at the grain on the fretboard or on the back of the neck or on the headstock," Peter says. "We got the highest quality Woodstock video footage we could and took stills of certain frames. Then we got the guitar out, lined them up, and they matched. We never had any doubt the guitar was real, but at that point we proved it, based on the wood-grain fingerprints."

PHOTO BY GABRIELE ANSALONI

Jacob McMurray, who is the current director of curatorial, collections & exhibits at MoPOP, says the Woodstock Strat sits at the very top of the Hendrix hierarchy among the museum's 6,000 Jimi-related artefacts. "And one of my favourites in the whole collection is the fragment of the guitar he smashed at

Below right: Jimi's final performance on 6 September 1970 on the Isle of Fehmarn in Germany

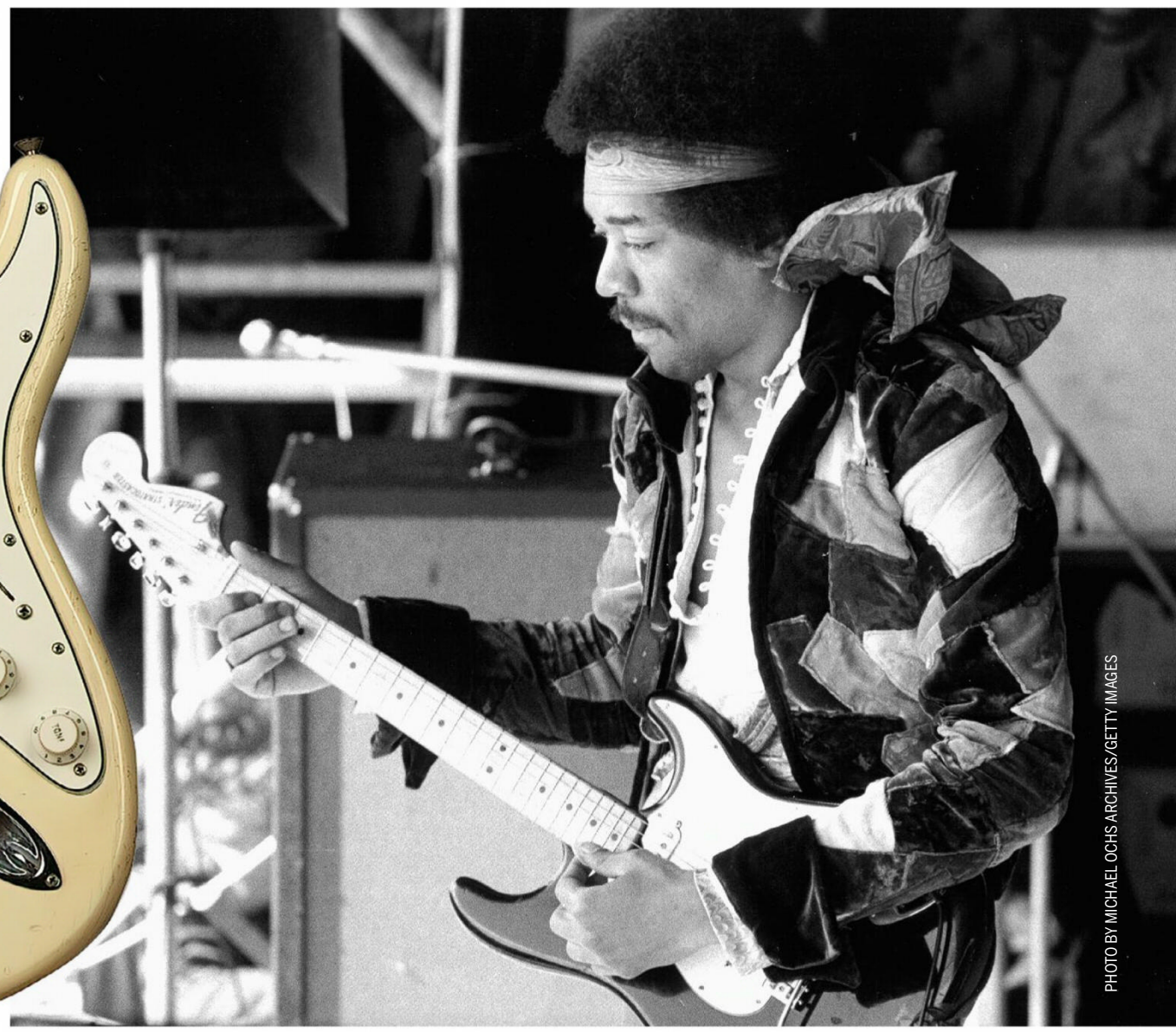
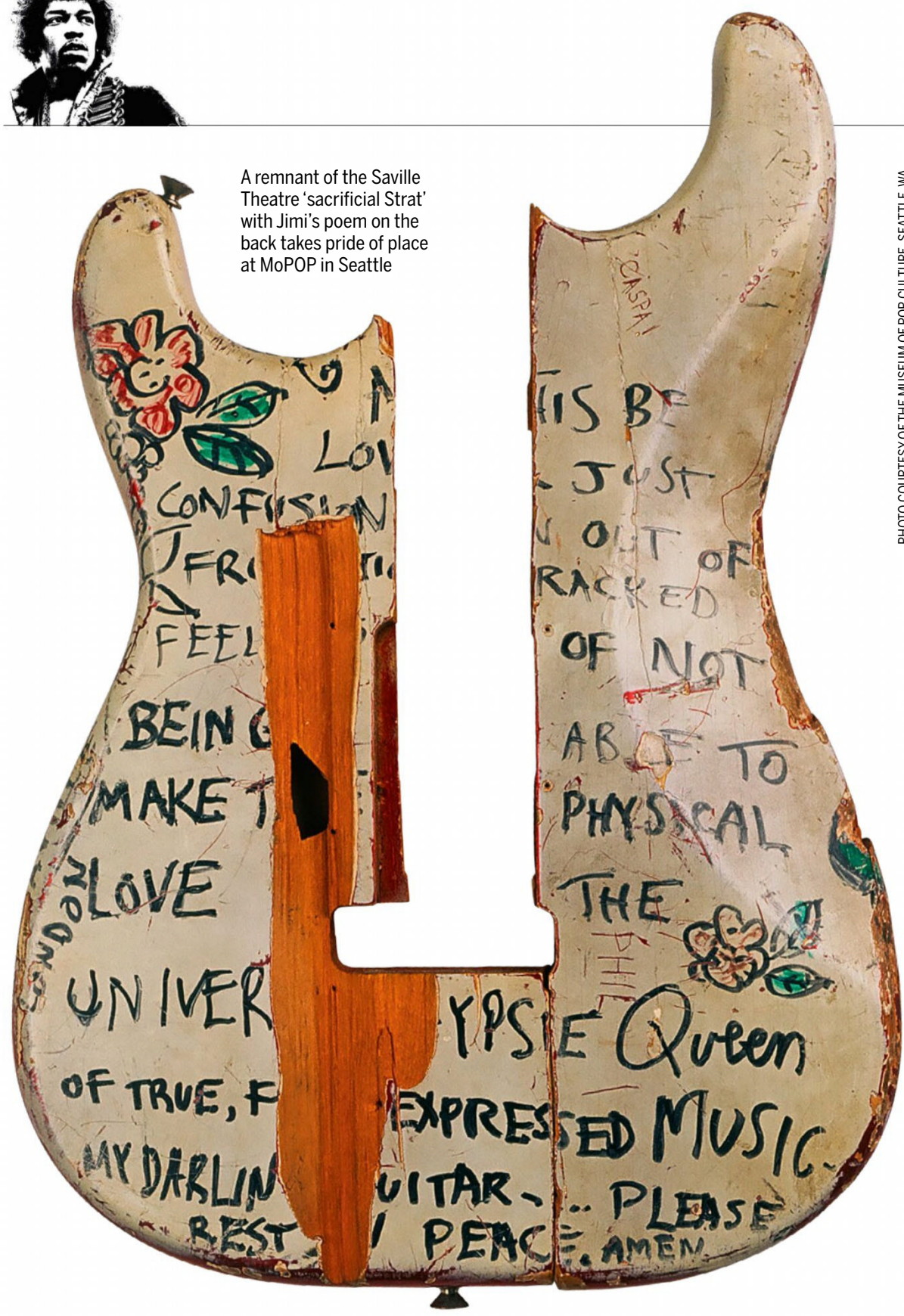


PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



A remnant of the Saville Theatre 'sacrificial Strat' with Jimi's poem on the back takes pride of place at MoPOP in Seattle

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE, SEATTLE, WA

the Saville Theatre," Jacob reports. The museum acquired these two broken body halves at another Sotheby's auction in London, in 1991, paying £29,700.

"I love the fact that when Jimi landed in London in late September '66 he was totally unknown, but nine months later he's on top of the British pop charts, and he plays this last show before he goes to appear at Monterey," Jacob says. "It's a few days after the release of *Sgt Pepper's*, and he comes out playing a cover of the title track almost as an homage to the scene that's allowed him prominence.

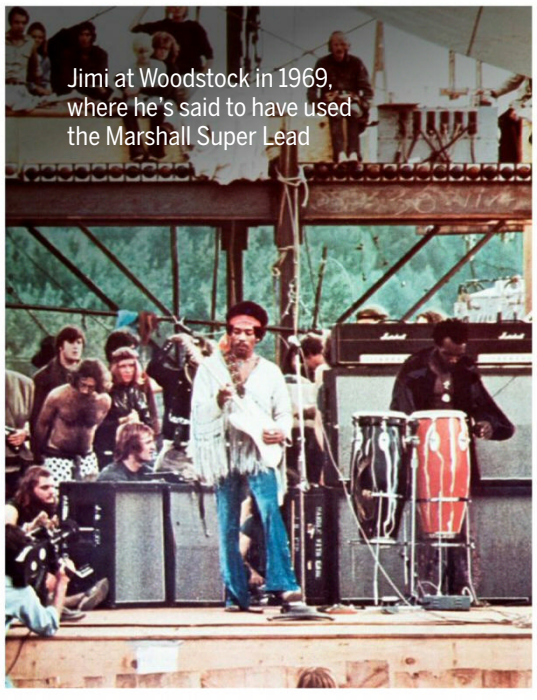
"And the guitar he smashes is so Jimi, with those psychedelic swirls and the *Love Or Confusion*-esque poem on the back. I did a Nirvana exhibit here at the museum, and while Kurt Cobain smashed a lot of guitars, he did so for very different reasons. For Kurt, it was a kind of punk-rock nihilism. Jimi, though, wrote on the back of that Strat, 'My darling guitar, rest in peace, amen.' For him," Jacob concludes, "it was a loving sacrifice to the musical gods."

> "JIMI WROTE ON THE BACK OF THAT [SAVILLE] STRAT, 'MY DARLING GUITAR, REST IN PEACE, AMEN.' FOR HIM, IT WAS A LOVING SACRIFICE TO THE MUSICAL GODS"
>
> ***JACOB McMURRAY, MoPOP***

An imposing monument stands in honour of Jimi at his gravesite at Greenwood Memorial Park in Renton, Washington. In the centre, on a plinth under a granite dome, stands a sculpted electric guitar. It is unmistakably a Fender Stratocaster. That mesmerising combination – Jimi Hendrix and his Fender Stratocaster – still haunts guitarists to this day. "We use the same thing anyone else would," he told *Guitar Player* in 1968, "but we use it with imagination and common sense." G

Tony Bacon would like to thank: Gabriele Ansaloni (Red Ronnie), Sid Bishop, Pete Blecha, Craig Bradley, Dave Brewis, Chas McCue, Jörg Düsedau, Mike Eldred, Craig Inciardi, Tony Magee, Perry Margouleff, Nev Marten, Stephen Maycock, Roger Mayer, and Jacob McMurray.

PIECES OF HISTORY



Jimi at Woodstock in 1969, where he's said to have used the Marshall Super Lead

PHOTO BY UNITED ARCHIVES GMBH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

In April of this year, two historic pieces of gear owned and played by Jimi Hendrix went up for sale at online retailer Reverb.com: a 1962 Fender Jazzmaster that Hendrix played with the Isley Brothers and Little Richard, and a heavily used Marshall Super Lead 100 that featured on stage throughout 1969. Both items were being sold by the LA-based Neil's Gear Bazaar.

The sunburst 1962-dated Jazzmaster was played throughout 1964 and carried an eye-watering price tag of $750,000. Elsewhere was a Marshall Super Lead 100 built in March 1969. Embossed with "J.H. EXP." spray paint, it was used at a number of high-profile Hendrix performances that year, including the Rainbow Bridge Vibratory Color Sound Experiment in July, Woodstock Music and Art Fair in August, plus Isle of Wight Festival in August 1970, and the Germany-based Open Air Love & Peace Festival in September 1970. The ultra-rare amp was listed at $350,000. [MO]

ERNIE BALL
POWER SLINKY
2220
MADE IN USA
REGULAR SLINKY
NOT EVEN SLINKY
2626
BEEFY SLINKY
PRIMO SLINKY
EXTRA SLINKY
SUPER SLINKY
2223
SKINNY TOP HEAVY BOTTOM
2215
MAMMOTH SLINKY
2214
MEGA SLINKY
2213
BURLY SLINKY
2226
ULTRA SLINKY
10
13
17
28
38
48
CUSTOM GAUGE NICKEL WOUND GUITAR STRINGS
2227

LOLVDE

On his new album, **John Mayer** lives out a very specific rock 'n' roll fantasy: "What if it's 1988 and I'd had a band in the late 60s through the 70s, and now I'm my age in the 80s and people are handing me these things called chorus pedals..." The result is *Sob Rock*, a highly polished, extra-"generous" studio offering that slyly channels the guitarist's high-school-days' guitar gods – including *Journeyman*-era Eric Clapton

Words Richard Bienstock **Photography** Carlos Serrao

Let's face it: 2020 was a helluva year. We all dealt with the global pandemic, the resulting lockdown and the general disruption and destruction of normal, everyday life in our own way. In John Mayer's case, he made a record.

And the record he made, *Sob Rock*, his eighth solo effort overall, is unlike any he has recorded previously. Its 10 tracks look to the past – specifically, the 80s music of Mayer's childhood – in an effort to conjure a sound that, he admits, brought him comfort in uncomfortable times. "I started making music that I would find really soothing," he says.

But the record also does something else. In revisiting the sounds of his youth, *Sob Rock* reconstitutes a sort of pop craftsmanship – tightly arranged, highly melodic, excessively hooky songs executed with session-player proficiency and finished with a big-budget studio sheen – that has been largely jettisoned in an era of bedroom computer-recording, flown-in tracks, autotuned vocals, digital cut-and-paste arrangements and earbud-attuned production styles.

Of course, as anyone who has followed Mayer's career over the past 20 years can attest, this is not the first time he has created music that sounds vaguely '80s'. But whereas other artists aiming to invoke the vibe of that decade might merely slather on some sparkly synths, break out a drum machine or rip a hot-rodded solo over a power ballad, Mayer's musical mind works in more nuanced ways. *Sob Rock* succeeds not because it references a sound from the past but because it does so with such remarkable specificity. It's an exercise in what the 43-year-old Mayer calls "wish fulfilment".

"I think everyone who makes music comes at it from a fantasy," he says, "but for me the fantasy this time was: what if it's 1988 and I'd had a band in the late 60s through the 70s, and now I'm my age in the 80s and people are handing me these things called chorus pedals, or people are going, 'Hey, you don't need a tube amp any more.' And I go, 'You don't? Okay. This sounds great...'"

The result is a record that recalls Eric Clapton and Fleetwood Mac, Toto and Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen and Steve Miller and various members of the Eagles – and also, precisely, the type of matured, occasionally mellowed-out music these seasoned artists were making in the 80s. Sounds unusually specific? It is.

"I don't want to say it's a costume, but it is an intention," Mayer says. "I'm using sonic colour-coding, like the sonic paint codes from the 80s, but I'm making new images with them. I told myself, 'Don't steer away from

it. If it brings you joy and it brings other people joy, what happens if you just do it?""

And Mayer did, in fact, do it. From the blooming, chorus-drenched guitar triads that define the ultra-hooky *Last Train Home*, to the laid-back rhythms and shimmering licks of *Wild Blue*, the Springsteen-esque (*Tunnel Of Love* era) swell of *Carry Me Away,* to the richly layered instrumentation of *Shot In The Dark," Sob Rock* is Mayer at, as he puts it, his most "generous", offering up an expertly written, beautifully recorded (courtesy of ace producer Don Was) and warm and tuneful listen.

"There is nothing in this record that has any sandpaper on it," Mayer says. "I went, 'Well, I'm just going to go for it. I'm just going to be as absolutely melodic and generous as I can be.' And I was just putting more and more and more melody on each and every one of these songs. That's the fun I had on this record."

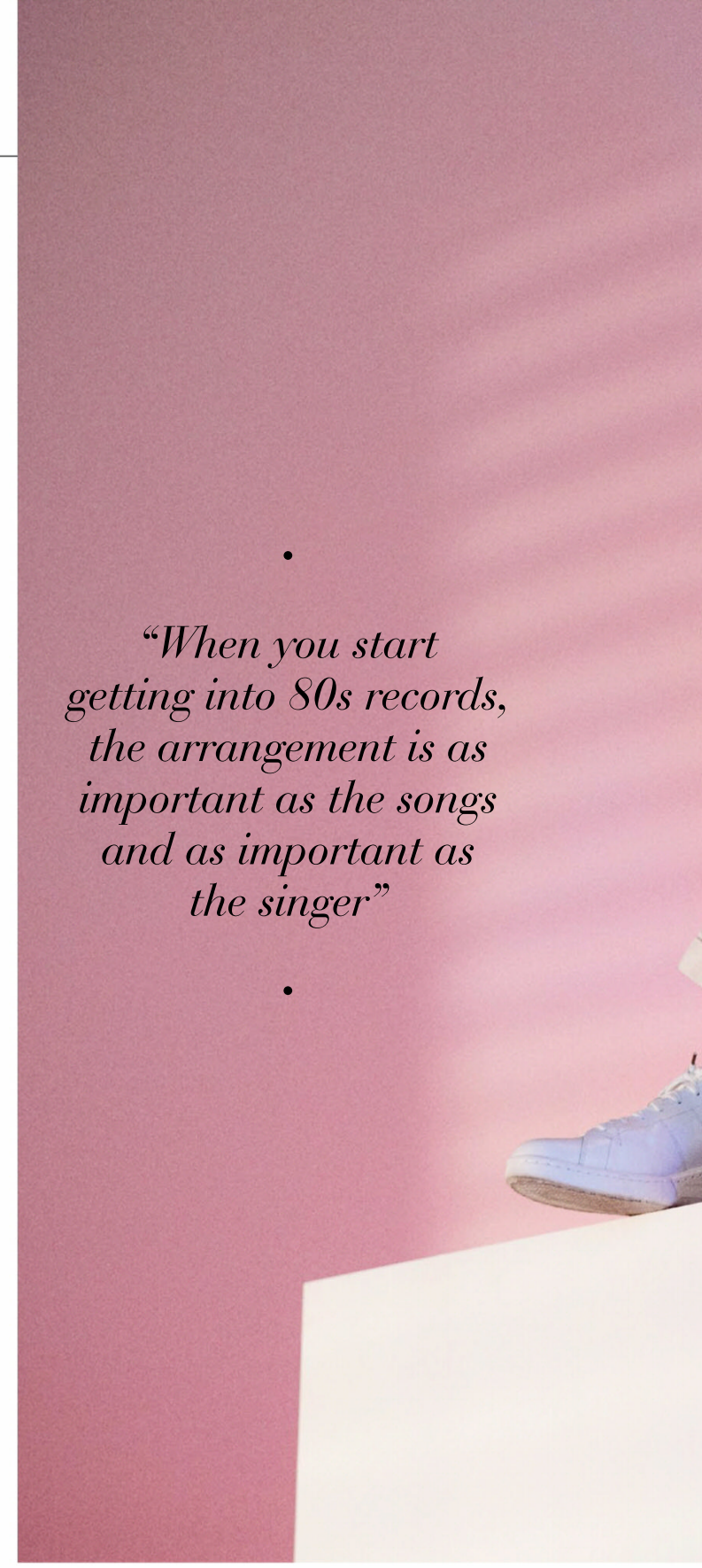
Which is not to say it came easy. "It took forever to work on these songs," he continues. "It was like, 'Here's the three-and-a-half minutes – how do you inject it with as many moments and layers as possible? How can you just keep jam-packing it with payoffs?' What we're really talking about is, what's so wrong about a guilty pleasure? Or, what's so guilty about someone making a record that goes, 'I'm setting out to please you as much as I possibly can with the art of melody.' Someone may not like that, but I'm proud to go down with that ship."

Here, Mayer discusses how he built, and steered, the *Sob Rock* ship, from the music he referenced to the gear he used and his approach to crafting solos. But before we dive into the nuts and bolts of the record, there's one thing to get out of the way...

In the video for the first single, *Last Train Home*, you're playing your signature PRS Silver Sky model in a never-before-seen pink finish. How did that come about?
"The fun of having Silver Sky as a project that I can always be working on is that I can test colours out on myself. And in the last couple of years I've fallen in love with the LA session-guitar concept. Like, the old Valley Arts guitars, they're all sort of these great shades of pink. And I just think there's something really cool about a pink guitar. So I thought, 'Well, why don't I do a pink one for this record?' To help tell a little more of a visual story of the music. It's really fun to just shoot a colour on a guitar and go, 'How does this make me feel?' I had no idea people would gravitate to it like they have."

People dig it.
"Actually, the pink guitar in the video is hot pink, and it's actually *too* hot. So we went with a cooler pink that I can use going forward [Roxy Pink]. That seems to be the magic slipper, colour-wise. I wouldn't have wanted to begin Silver Sky with a pink guitar, but we're enough years down the road that we can go a little 'out there', while still keeping the identity of the guitar intact.

"When you start getting into 80s records, the arrangement is as important as the songs and as important as the singer"



But I think it just aligns with this idea of making your own fun, and of having more fun than we've ever had before, and taking advantage of the life that's been handed back to us, hopefully not provisionally."

The Valley Arts session-musician pink guitar is a pretty specific association, but it's in line with what you're doing on *Sob Rock*. The record has a very particular 80s sound – the kind that artists like Eric Clapton, Fleetwood Mac, Peter Gabriel and Toto were playing. How did you home in on that so precisely?
"That's a good question. And it's a very flattering observation. I'm very detail-oriented and I believe the difference between people taking the magic carpet ride with you and not taking the magic carpet ride with you can sometimes come down to what most people would consider an infinitesimally small detail. But if we're talking about tricking your brain or tricking your heart, there are very, very subtle moves to get there. And especially when it comes to the idea of doing something that is certainly borrowing the intentionality of

Embracing 80s style: "I'm at the age now where I have the benefit of experience and having lived through that time," Mayer says

80s records. I mean, I could have slathered the record in chorus, could have slathered the record in a Jupiter-8 [synthesizer], and that would have certainly let everybody know what my intentions were..."

You went more granular.

"What I think is really interesting is I'm at the age now where I have the benefit of experience and having lived through that time. Like, I could never fully grasp the 60s because I wasn't there. And I would probably reduce it in my estimation of what it was. I would go to flower power. Woodstock. VW Beetles. But for someone who was alive and a teenager during the 60s, they can tell me so many things that didn't quite make it through the hoop historically and into a kind of common understanding of that era.

"So where a lot of people would think the 80s was all really goofy and neon-coloured, well, to me, there was a lot of earnestness. The 80s gave us Peter Gabriel. That's some of the coolest stuff in the world, you know? And what's interesting is that people now relate to that earnestness again in a real, non-ironic way. So what I set out to do on the record was be really sincere with it."

How did that translate to the music you ultimately created?

"The songs, compositionally, had to be strong on their own, no matter how you played them. The songs don't rely on the sounds, and that's really important. *Last Train Home* works on an acoustic guitar and a vocal, as well as it does behind the lens of this idea that, just for one record, I want to go back to what I might've sounded like in that era. But it's still a song of mine. I didn't change anything in the way that I write. So it's actually a pretty light touch in terms of it feeling like an old record. And it feels like an old record mostly because it's fully recorded by people together in a room. So all these songs, they're not fantastically complex. But where I had all the fun in the world was in the arrangements. I went deep into the brilliant arrangements of the 80s. And when you start getting into 80s records, the arrangement is as important as the songs and as important as the singer."

Where does the guitar fit into that?

"Everything on this record, you can hear each guitar. And I have been guilty in the past of assigning four guitar parts to do the job of what could have been one better guitar part from scratch. I think we all, as guitar players, have had this experience where we start to kind of duct-tape guitar-takes together, not linear-wise but in building a track. If one guitar track isn't right and you keep it, you add another guitar track to beef it up. Then you get diminishing returns and it gets smaller-sounding, so you tack on another one.

"But what's really great about the arrangements in the songs from this era is that each instrument is stating its case. It would get in, it was highly audible and it would get out. And it was laced with really, really beautiful melodic motifs. Intervallic, dramatic, melodic, strong, loud motifs. So the idea for me with the guitar and the songs was, make it melodic, make it hooky. I want to sing it before it's over. I want to have it stuck in my head before it's over."

When it came to laying down the sounds in the studio, did you change your gear to be era-appropriate?

"It's mostly the same gear. Although we certainly tried. Don Was said he wishes he could've sold tickets to the recording of this album, just for the guitar parts. Because some of them that never made it to the record, it was just so funny to hear that sound revived. There were times where I would take a Jackson and run it through a Rockman, which is as Def Leppard as you can get. It'd be a Jackson through a Rockman with, like, a [Marshall] JMP, and I'd start playing these kinds of *Hysteria* lines. But then you hear it back and you go, 'I get it, but that's not me. That was so much fun, but that's not convincing and that's not sincere.' So in the end it became this blend of my gear with the intentionality of the music of the past."

Does that mean, at base level, the Silver Sky through a variety of valve amps?

"We used different amps all the time, and amps are tricky for me – I think the same amp sounds different on two different days. So we sort of used three amps as one. It's like, what serves as the woofer, what serves as the crossover and what serves as the tweeter? It's really fun to build an amp sound that way. And interestingly enough, the Dumble really intersects with early 80s session work, right? Like, Stevie Ray Vaughan was kind of an anomaly in that Dumble world because almost everyone else using a Dumble was kind of doing really clean stuff. I mean, I know guys like Larry Carlton and Robben Ford were making it sing with distortion, but it was mostly clean tones you were hearing with that amp.

"And so it worked really, really well to take a Silver Sky, which is already kind of hi-fi, and run it through a Dumble and a direct, and then maybe an old Fender combo for the softness. Those old Fenders apologise really well for the notes. But for that kind of session-player, speed-of-note thing, that picking-response really comes from direct input or a Dumble amp, which, really, is a direct-input amplifier. Even though it's coming through a speaker, everything in those amps moves so fast, and in the best, cleanest way, that when you pick that single-note stuff, you're just in heaven because the notes are so crisp.

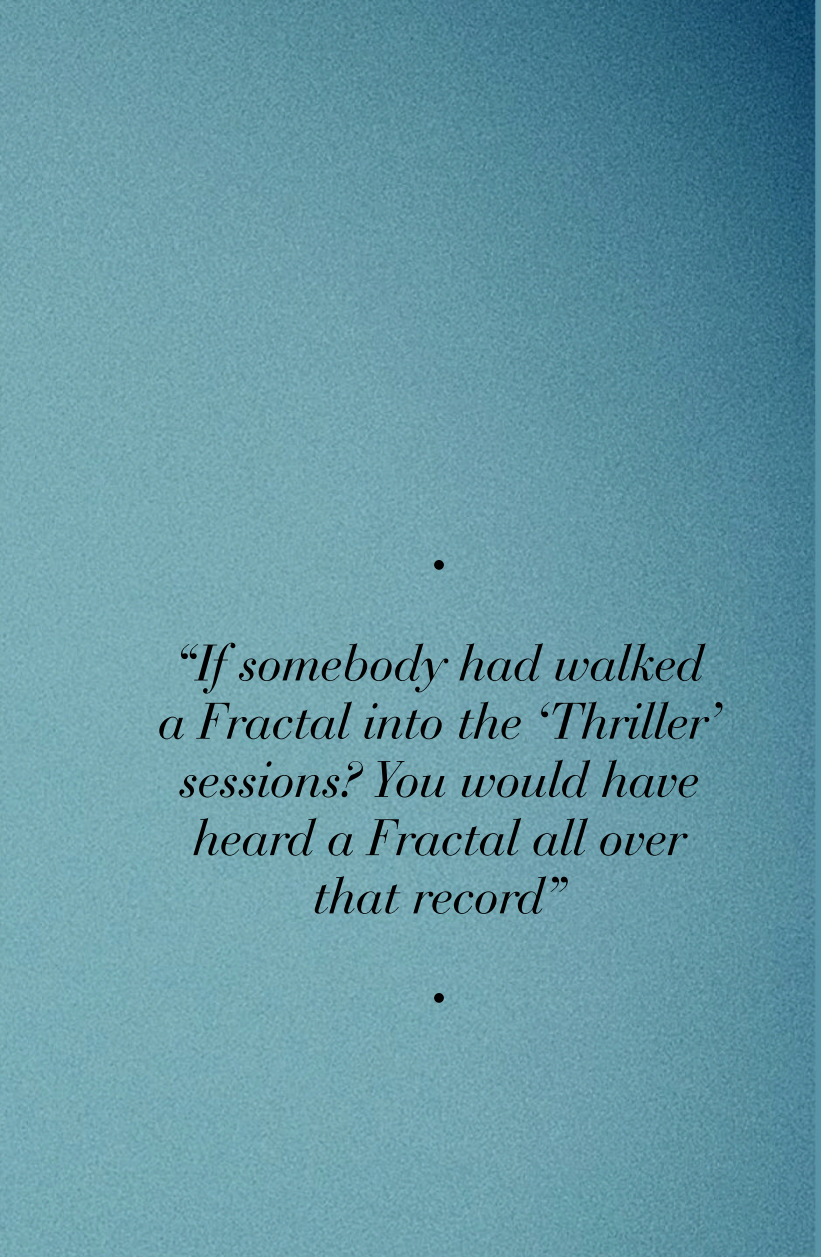
"And then we actually used a Fractal in some places, too. Because as much as I was thinking, 'What would I have done then?' I was also asking, 'What would *they* have done *now*?' And if somebody had walked a Fractal into the *Thriller* sessions? You would have heard a Fractal all over that record.

"And so that was the fun of it – bending and blending time and eras and influences. The exception was *Last Train Home*, which, I'm not going to play stupid; *Last Train Home* definitely trades on some very specific musical references. But the rest of the record, the influences are chopped up so fine that it's almost a powder. You can sort of get one thing or another thing. I mean, I've heard people say one band name and another person say another band name off the same song. It's almost like they're hearing what it reminds them of more than what it is."

So, what are we hearing on *Last Train Home*?

"That's a good question. And I have a deep dislike of dishonesty when it comes to creating, so I'll tell you: I always wished that I could have a song that was on Eric Clapton's *Journeyman* album. I loved him so

"If somebody had walked a Fractal into the 'Thriller' sessions? You would have heard a Fractal all over that record"



Though the sounds and vibe are distinctly 80s, Mayer used his modern line-up of gear on *Sob Rock*

much that I'm not afraid to go, 'I just want to feel what that's like...' Like, the experience of plugging a Strat with noiseless pickups into a Soldano with a chorus pedal. And to hear that back on your own song is funny, poignant, touching, exciting, titillating. I mean, it feels a little bit wrong. But the reason I'm okay telling you this is because Eric has always been someone who turned his test around and showed you his notes. Every single time: 'I got this from that person. I got this from him. I got this from her.' So I'm at an age where I'm looking back and I'm really joyously reminiscing about times in my life as a listener and as a music lover. And I'm going, 'Well, why can't I just ignite that spark on this one song?' And if somebody gets a kick out of it, whether they know why or not, wouldn't that be great?"

This may be the first time someone has said they wanted to sound like Eric Clapton playing *Pretending*...

"Oh, well, this is a great conversation. This speaks to what matters to you based on your age, right? This is the whole genesis of Van Halen discussions. It all has to do with how old you were when it hit you. And when

RAMP IT UP

Want to play perfect guitar solos? Start building a ramp, says Mayer...

At some point or another, most guitarists have debated what makes a 'perfect' guitar solo. But is there truly a formula for crafting a guitar lead that will achieve maximum impact with a listener? We asked John Mayer, as much a master of the superb, show-stopping solo as anyone playing the instrument today, for his opinion. And while he (not surprisingly) let out a laugh at the mere mention of a scientifically created perfect solo, he also acknowledged there's something to be said for approaching your leads with certain strategies in mind.

"I think pitch, repetition, motif, all these things have a lot to do with which parts of your emotional map a solo is hitting at any given time," Mayer says. "I mean, if you start high, there's nowhere left to go, right? So I see it as building a ramp."

One guitarist he views as a master of building that ramp is Jerry Garcia. "When I was really diving deep into the Jerry stuff, getting ready for Dead & Company, I realised he was just brilliant at it," Mayer says. "And another guy who's brilliant at it is Doyle Bramhall [II]. Doyle is the single best soloist, in my opinion, when it comes to getting you to lean in. It's a masterclass every single time. First he whispers at you with his guitar: 'Hey, I wanna tell you something...' And you go, 'What? What do you wanna tell me?' And he goes, 'I wanna tell you about this...' And you're in. He'll be on the third go-round before he's ever really pressed on the gas. He might do six go-rounds before he's even thought about his heart rate going up. If you or I did that, we'd be circling the runway the last three.

"I think about Doyle's playing a lot in that respect: when you're playing a solo, state your case. If you want to state it again, you will be embellishing that motif again. You have another thing you want to say? Well, maybe now, as you start to explain yourself, you have a little more emotion because you're amping yourself up in your argument." Mayer laughs. "And then maybe by the end you get to swear, if you want to swear."

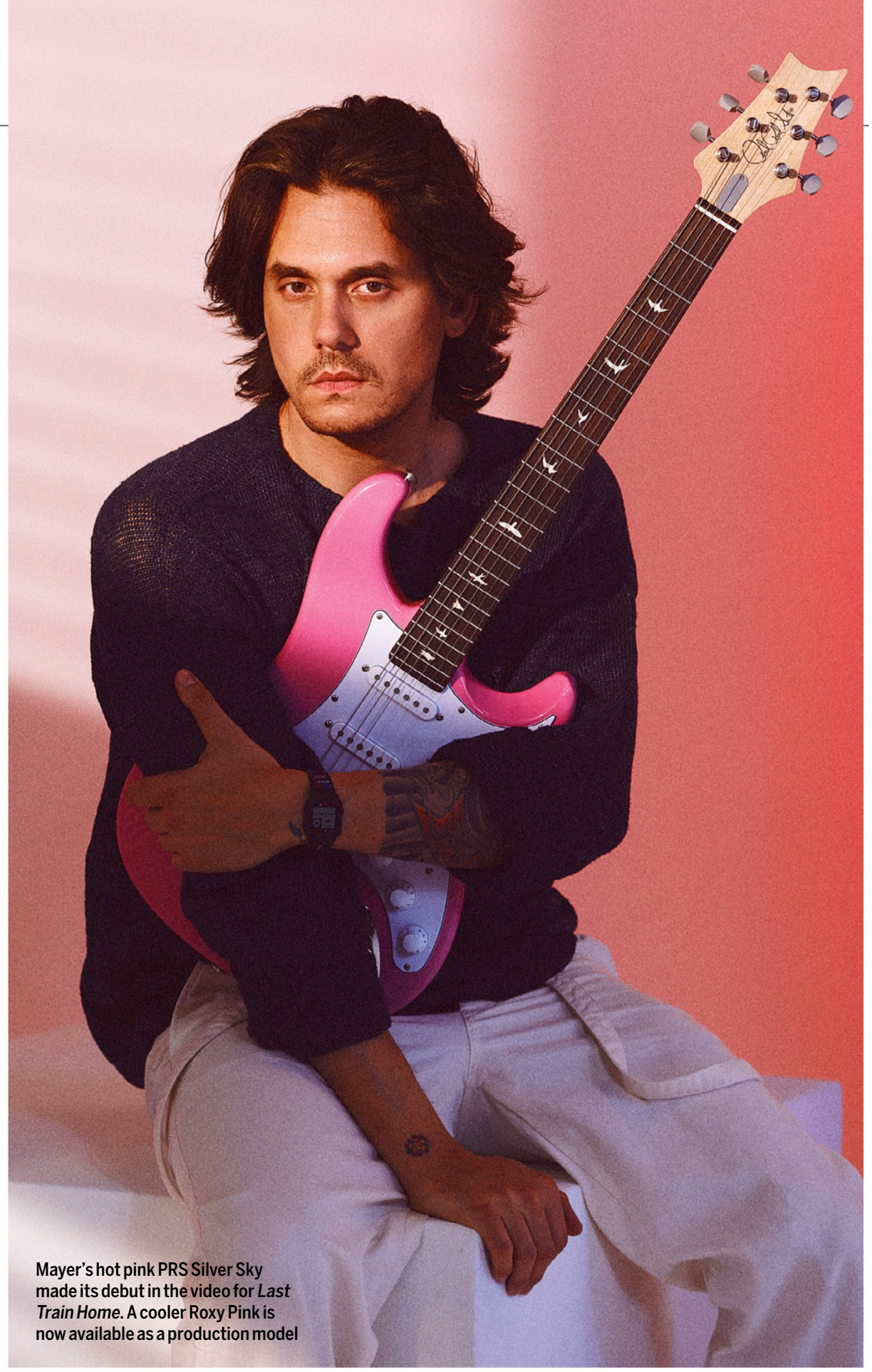
Regardless of how you build your solo, Mayer is quick to point out that it's essential to remember that your lead is not a standalone piece of music; the solo needs to function within, and, ideally, serve to elevate the larger song.

"The song has to pick back up after the solo, so you have to land the jump into the last chorus," he says. "Now, outros are different. You can build a ramp to the moon on the outro if you want, because you have a little something called the fade-out to save you. But otherwise, you have these two set ends. And that, to me, has always been a really interesting, and sometimes challenging, process of a solo. You have to build a rollercoaster that still ends flat so that you can get back into the song. And you have to get back into the song in a way that, when you hear the chorus again, you've done something with your addition of a solo that makes the chorus feel like it's saying something new. Well, that's a puzzle, man. That's a puzzle."

Ultimately, Mayer says, "Just have fun... but don't go crazy. It's like, 'Here, go tool around in this Ferrari, but don't bring it back crashed. Get it back into the garage so the song can keep going.' Because the song is the boss, and that's it. You have to always remember that."

PHOTO BY KEVIN KANE / GETTY

Mayer considers Doyle Bramhall II soloing royalty



Mayer's hot pink PRS Silver Sky made its debut in the video for *Last Train Home*. A cooler Roxy Pink is now available as a production model

"The idea of me playing electric guitar and showing people a little bit of what it breaks down to is my way of kind of saying, 'I'm not that different'"

I was in high school, it was *Pretending*. It was *Bad Love*. It was *Running On Faith*. If you liked guitar and you liked Eric Clapton, that's what he was playing if you went to go see him at the New Haven Coliseum. I remember seeing kids in school on a Monday showing off their Eric Clapton t-shirts – that was a cool thing. You can't expect someone who's 16 years old in 1990 to understand Cream. Not yet. So what finds you if you first pick up a guitar at that time? It's that record. That record has such a deep place in my heart."

You play a fair amount of lead on *Sob Rock*, but similar to Clapton in the 80s, you keep your solos brief. Which is also in line with how we would hear session guitarists on a record back then.

"You know, my ears and my hands are two very, very separate entities, and I let my ears rule. So while it's fun – just primally fun – to get more time to play a solo, I become *deeply* upset with myself when I start to hear myself thin out. It's almost like a fountain pen, and I can always tell when the writing gets thin as a guitar player. And I don't tolerate it in myself, even though the other side of myself just wants to let loose. So I'll let loose... and then I'll listen back. And the ear is the boss. And my ear goes, 'I will simply not tolerate a solo that's twice as long as it needs to be. I heard you lose your motifs. I heard you lose your lyricality. I heard you lose your phrasing.'

"That's why I don't really consider myself a blues guitar player – because my phrasing gives out after a certain period of time. And I love playing blues guitar. I mean, it's like constant downhill skiing. It's an endless water slide. But the ear rules. The ear is the producer of the record, and the ear is the one that has to call bullshit on every other part of you as a composer and a musician and a guitar player."

Recently you posted a video clip of you playing along to *Last Train Home* but with the lead guitar removed from the mix. And you invited people to solo over the track with you and add their own melodies.

"If I can offer a little support to people who love playing guitar then I'll do that. Because when we were coming up, we didn't have *anything* without a lead guitar, right? I had to play over BB King. I had to play on top of Stevie Ray Vaughan. The nerviest move you could ever make! And so if I can say to the mix engineer, 'Hey, will you give me one without the lead guitar?', I'll do it. And I'm going to do it for as many songs as I can. 'Hey, jump on in, play along with this.' It's not anything that's precious to me."

And it's not the only time you've done it – you've also posted videos demonstrating how to play your songs on TikTok. It's like you're saying, "You can do this, too."

"You know, I've never seen more people get more out of playing electric guitar than I have this past year. It is such a community. And it brings me back to my roots as a guitar player, as a guitar player alone in my house. So it's a way of saying that we're all in the same boat. We're all sitting down with an electric guitar alone in a room, hoping that maybe this time we're going to find something or trip over something that we'll never forget... You know, I have a guitar just like you have a guitar. And I have dreams just like you have dreams. And if you're interested in what made my dreams my dreams, well, here's how I did it. I don't see it as giving anything away that is proprietary.

"And so the idea of me playing electric guitar and showing people a little bit of what it breaks down to is my way of kind of saying, 'I'm not that different.' I still want to make a song that sounds like Eric Clapton, you know? I still want to wear a big black trench coat. I'm not gonna, but I still wanna. I won't let myself. But, man, wouldn't that be fun?" G

John Mayer's new album, *Sob Rock*, is available now on Columbia

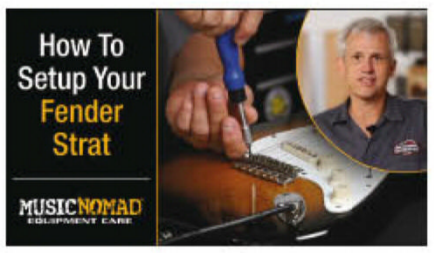
https://johnmayer.com

Learn How To Setup Your Guitar

KEEP IT SIMPLE, SETUP (KISS)™

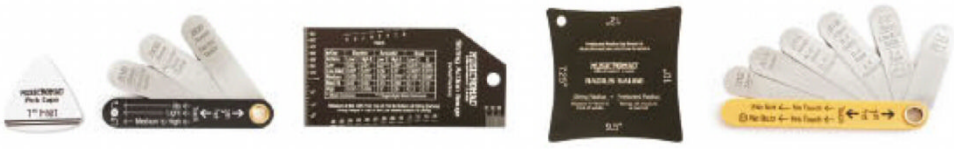
24 pg. Instructional Booklet
(Downloadable in 7 Languages)

+



How-To Videos

Precision Gauges



Truss Rod Gauge | String Action Gauge | Radius Gauge | Nut Height Gauge

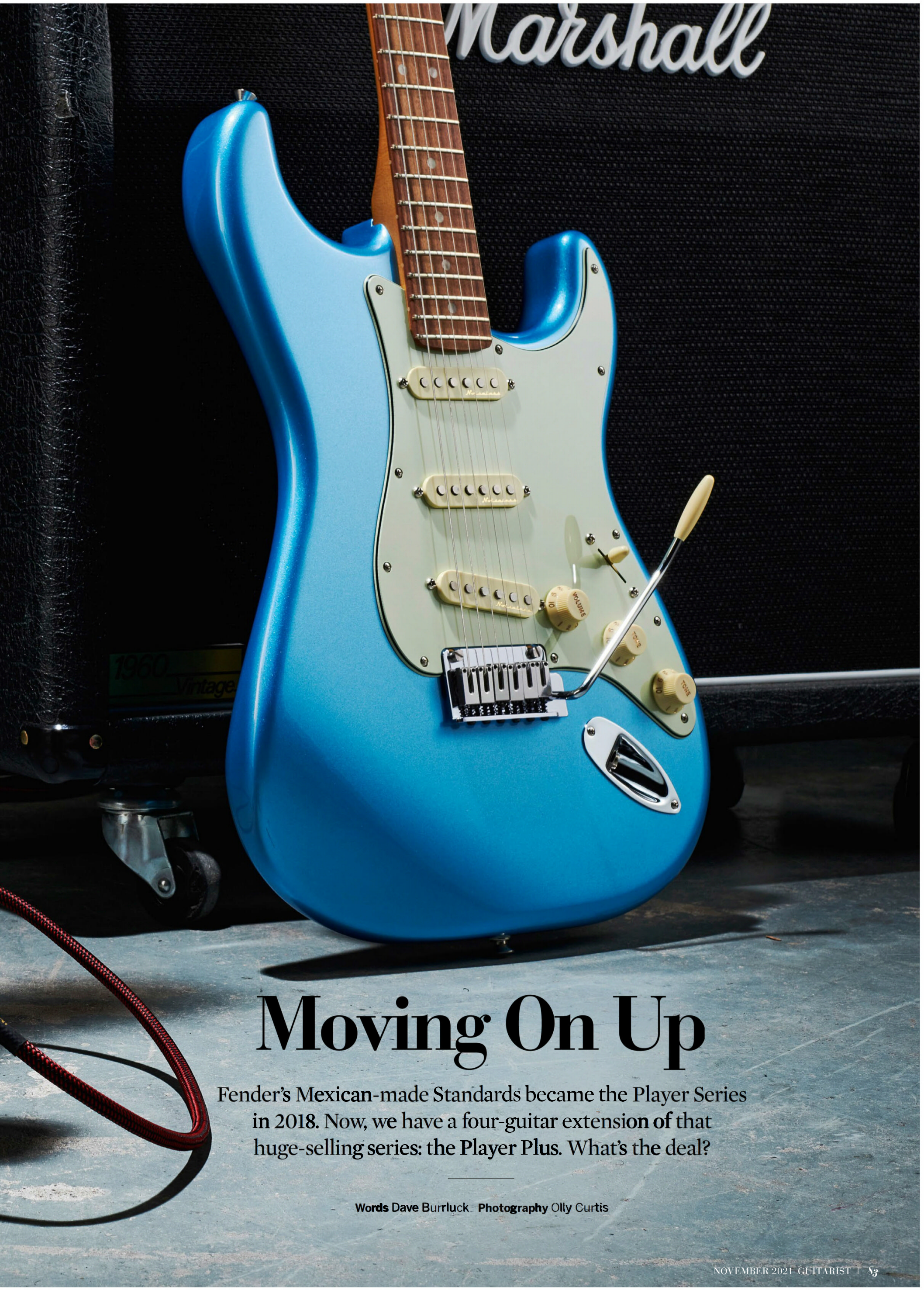
Truss Rod Wrench 11 pc Set | Screwdriver & Wrench 26 pc Set | Diamond Coated Nut File Set

Precision Tool Sets

LEARN MORE:
www.MusicNomadCare.com/Setup-Hub/

MUSICNOMAD™
EQUIPMENT CARE

Follow Us @MusicNomadCare



Moving On Up

Fender's Mexican-made Standards became the Player Series in 2018. Now, we have a four-guitar extension of that huge-selling series: the Player Plus. What's the deal?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

FENDER PLAYER PLUS TELECASTER & STRATOCASTER £939 EACH

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

What You Need To Know

1. **Not another refresh and price increase from Fender?**
No, the Player Plus models – four guitars and three basses – upgrade the big-selling Fender Player series models. They're an extension of that range, not a replacement. More expensive? Yes. But higher spec'd, too.

2. **Upgrades? For example?**
Well, hum-cancelling Noiseless pickups for one, with expanded control circuits. Then we have upgraded bridges with block saddles, not to mention rear-locking tuners. They're the most modern-style Mexican-made Fenders with a 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius, too. Think American Ultra… for considerably less money.

3. **Is Fender still using pau ferro for its 'rosewood' fingerboard option?**
Yes, after the recent (albeit now relaxed) export restrictions on certain rosewoods, pau ferro was chosen as a replacement on the more cost-effective Mexican-made models. Fender says it has no plans to reverse that in the near future.

If you keep up with your Fender guitars then in recent years you'll have become well accustomed to the seemingly quite short – typically four-year – life cycle before a series is refreshed and rejigged. It's all a part of modern manufacturing. And while some more cynical musos among us might see it as an excuse to raise prices, these new Player Plus models don't lack in terms of new features. They are additions, not replacements, and they're really quite modern in style, too: if you want a vintage-style Fender (perhaps to upgrade, as many of us do) then these might not be your fit.

Speaking of modernisms, there's plenty of that going on with the new raft of finishes, but as we pull our review pair from their adequate – if hardly rugged – included gigbags, there is some welcome style here. Our Strat is a classy muted metallic blue named Opal Spark; our Tele's more copper-coloured metallic is Aged Candy Apple Red. Both also come in a more traditional three-colour sunburst and, conversely, in some gradient-fade colours such as Tequila Sunrise and Silver Smoke. But it's not just about some new finishes…

Fender's softly, softly approach to innovation is certainly apparent here. Yet when you compare these with those hallowed blueprints from the 50s, you realise virtually everything – shapes aside – is different. So, we have alder bodies (we have no idea how many pieces are used for the body spreads as both our samples are opaque metallics), but aside from the finish quality the body contours are excellent. The Strat's big edge radius and well-curved forearm cutaway really reflect the 'moulded' appearance of those originals, only the rib-cage cutaway is slightly thicker on the bass-side edge. Flip the Telecaster over and you'll see a rib-cage contour, too, which isn't featured on the Player series model.

Unlike the contoured-edge body heels of the American Professional II and Ultra guitars, both heels here remain square-edged. The 'F' and 'Player Plus' logos on the neckplates tell us exactly what's what

> The Player Plus series are undoubtedly guitars that reflect how many people are playing today

and leave the vintage-y headstocks with those very classy dark 'chrome' metallic logos. There's also a nice amber tint to the finish over the maple, which adds another touch of class.

That said, our Strat's pau ferro fingerboard is very light, almost caramel-coloured with just a brushstroke of darker striping by the nut on the treble side. We're so accustomed to rosewood's darker hue that many might just see this as 'wrong'.

But the hardware on both is upgraded, primarily the tuners, which are now rear-

locking. While the block saddle bridge on the Tele appears similar to the Player, block saddles replace the more vintage-style pressed steel saddles on the Strat's two-post vibrato with its steel baseplate and die-cast deep-drilled block. The saddles on both are spec'd as steel, but they aren't magnetic – perhaps a sintered alloy that's smooth and presumably rust-free?

Our Tele comes with a four-ply tortoiseshell-like pickguard, and note that the neck pickup – unlike the original style – is suspended from the plastic, not screwed directly into the body, which makes any fine height adjustments dead easy. Our Strat's slightly yellowed plastic parts, including a three-ply scratchplate, look nice and vintage-y, too.

The inclusion of hum-cancelling Noiseless pickups, not to mention a flatter 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius (the Players use a 241mm/9.5-inch radius), certainly reference the specs of Fender's much more expensive American Ultra line. Meanwhile, the modded circuits (see Under The Hood), most recently seen on the American Pro II guitars, aren't breaking any new ground but they do increase your sonic options.

Feel & Sounds

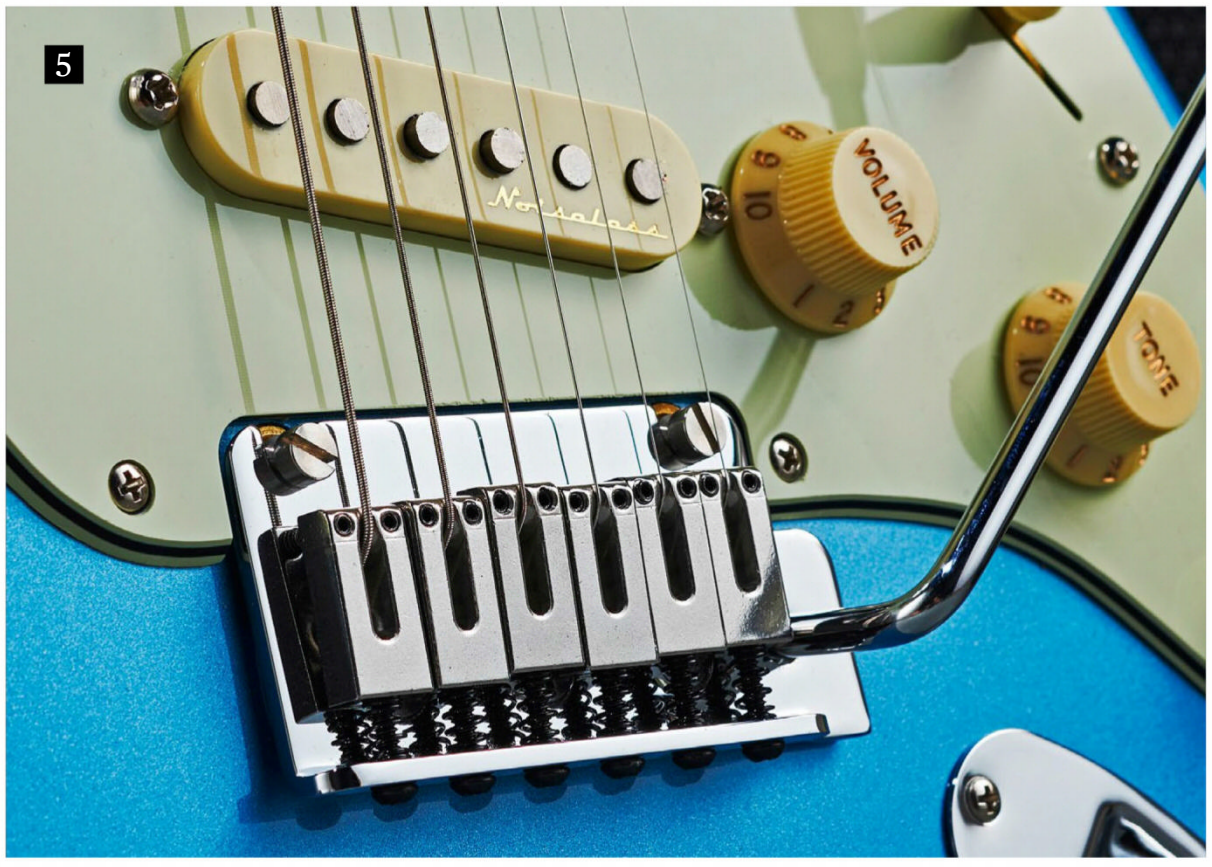
A combination of relatively small details such as the increased nut width and flatter fingerboard radius push the Player Plus into a 'modern' bolt-on category on paper, but neither guitar here feels remotely like a shred machine. The combination of well-rolled fingerboard edges (apparently a first for Fender's Mexican-made guitars), a satin neck back and face, and wide 'n' low fretwire (Fender-standard medium jumbo frets, measured at 2.6mm wide and just over 1mm high) simply make them great players. Both of our samples are very well set up with a low string height and near perfect nut work. Our only criticism is that the setup really might be *too* low and slinky, enhanced by the standard 0.009-gauge strings and virtually no relief. But the dual-action truss rod with its headstock adjustment is easy to tweak, as are those block saddles.

1. The Player Plus guitars all have extra sounds from the pull-push tone control. Pull up the switch on this Tele and the two pickups are joined in series

2. Very much the modern Fender, these headstock logos change from bright to dark chrome in different lights

3. The long block saddles mean that the height-adjustment screws are pretty much buried. Spec'd as steel, they appear to be a sintered alloy. All the Player Plus models use Noiseless pickups

4. Another upgrade over the Player Series is these rear-locking tuners, making string changing hassle-free and adding to the vibrato's excellent tuning stability



5. Like the Tele, the saddles here appear to be made of the same material, although the actual saddles are shorter. The baseplate is chromed steel and the arm screws into the die-cast but uncontoured block

Compared with those hallowed blueprints from the 50s, virtually everything – shapes aside – is different

The nut width spec is increased, but only fractionally, from 42mm (1.650 inches) to 42.8mm (1.685 inches) in line with the Performer and USA American Pro II and Ultra, and the flatter radius is probably more noticeable to those used to the smaller vintage-style radius – less so if you own and use a variety of guitars, not least Gibsons. Both our guitars actually measure the same 42.89mm at the nut and both have a pretty standard string spacing of 35mm. Both necks are on the slim side, depth-wise, too, classed as having a Modern 'C' Player Plus profile: 20.8mm at the 1st fret on our Strat and 22mm by the 12th. The Tele is very slightly thicker, which may be that finish over the maple fingerboard, at 21mm and 22.2mm – very mainstream indeed and with a profile that certainly in lower positions has a hint of a 'V'.

While many would use flush poles on a guitar with a flatter fingerboard radius, these are lightly staggered. Unlike the Noiseless pickups of the American Ultra, they have no ID or indeed any Fender logo on the covers

The first thing we notice when we plug in is the lack of hum pick-up. Now, we could start a long debate about single coils versus humbuckers and how the former are 'correct' and the latter never sound 'right'. But we're simply going to report what we hear. As ever, new strings on a new guitar will sound a little brighter so it's no surprise that we have bags of crisp clarity on our Strat with excellent bouncy, funky mixes and a pretty standard output – certainly not 'hot'. The extra bridge and neck, and all-three pickups together selections, add to the palette, and having a specific tone control for the bridge makes perfect sense here.

However, while those tone controls obviously pull back the highs, progressively darkening and softening what we hear, the master volume also plays a part in shaping your sound. For example, knock the control back from 10 to 9 and you really hear the high-end dip, almost like a no-load pot. For pristine cleans, then, you'll probably want that volume to be fully up, but using varying gains pulling back the volume a notch really helps 'thicken' what we hear. To be honest, aside from going up a string gauge and giving the setup a little more air, we'd take this on a gig no problem. A very enjoyable guitar.

It's a little different with the Tele. Again, we have that abrupt treble roll-off on the volume control, and we're surprised to find that the series link of both single coils happens in all three positions on the selector switch when you pull up the tone control's switch. Typically, you'd wire that to be a series/parallel option with both pickups on as with the American Pro II Tele. That said, whatever pickup you're on with the switch down you can immediately access the bigger series voice. There's little doubt that it gives this Tele a beefier tonality that laps up rootsy

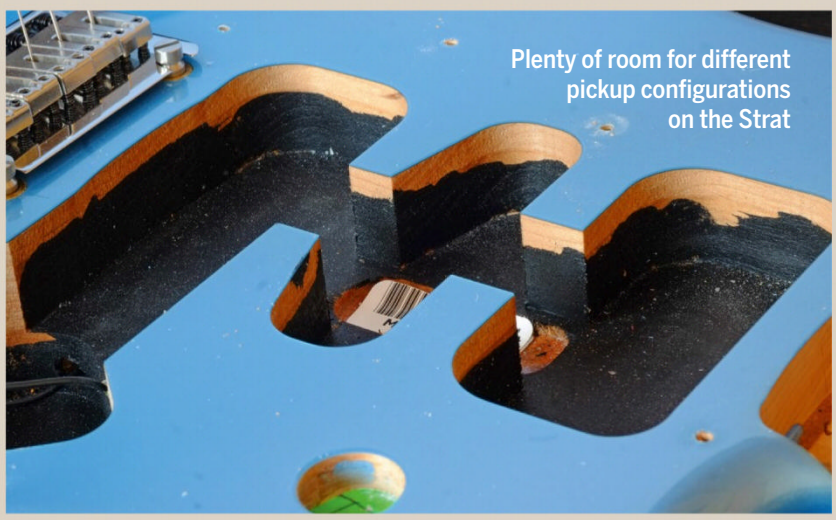
UNDER THE HOOD

What about the bits you can't see? We investigate…

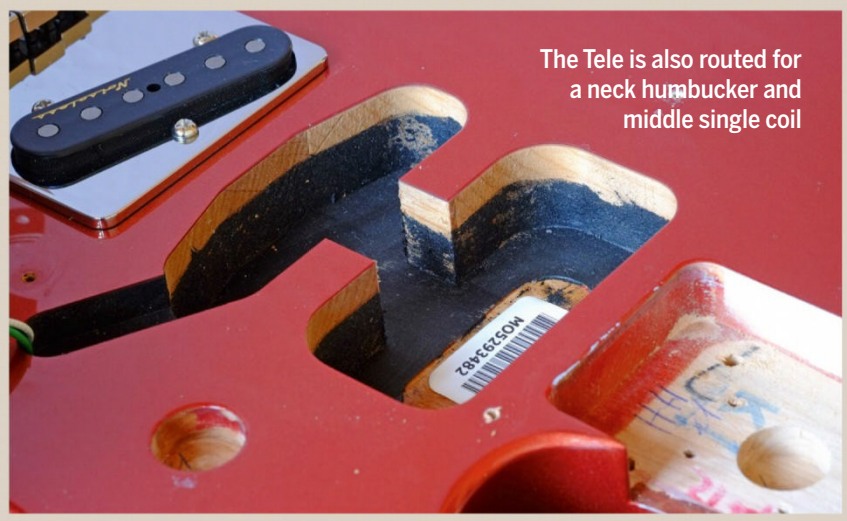
Both our review models here are very tidily routed for different pickup configurations, a one-size-fits-all production ploy reflecting the other models in this mini-range and the more expansive Player Series. So, removing the Tele's scratchplate, the body has a humbucking rout at the neck and another single coil rout in the middle position. Likewise, the Strat is routed for HSH so you could easily swap scratchplates down the road, too, and load in HSS, HSH, HH or even HS pickup configurations – good news for us modders. Both neck pockets are tight fitting, too, and neither neck has a shim.

The circuits on both are clearly designed to work with these new Noiseless pickups. The Strat uses 1meg-ohm audio taper pots with a single .022 microfarads tone cap, a four-pole lever switch and a pull-push switched pot. The treble-bleed circuit is a little unusual in that wired between the input and output lug of the volume control is a 47kohm resistor in series, which then passes to a parallel-linked 150k resistor and 470 picofarads capacitor. The Tele uses the same value pots, tone cap and treble-bleed circuit with a standard two-pole, three-way lever switch.

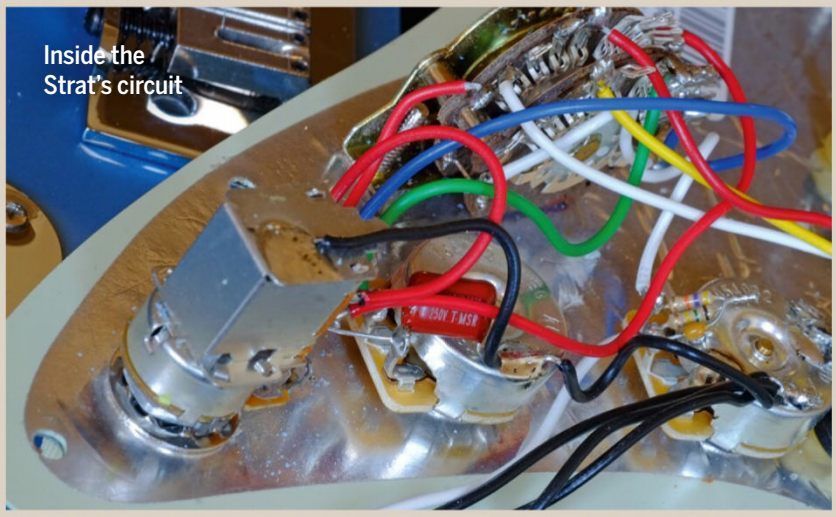
At launch, there's no detailed info on the pickups. The Strat's pickups use rod magnets, approximately 4.72mm in diameter, and in terms of their stagger the two middle poles are the highest; the low E, A and B are all slightly lower. The neck and middle have approximately 49.5mm spacing and the bridge is slightly wider at 52.4mm. The Tele's bridge pickup has flush magnet poles, and the neck, of course, is covered. There is no ID on the pickups on either guitar, but you can clearly see the two stacked coils of the humbucker design. DCRs here of the combined series linked coils are very different to single coils. So, measured at output, on the Strat we get 11.15kohms (bridge), 10.82k (middle) and 11.05k (neck), while the Tele's bridge measures 13.74k, the neck 12.38k while in series mode with the pull-switch up we get the same reading of 25.7k in all three positions. This is a very good example of how a DC reading simply tells us how much wire is used and is not an indicator of output.



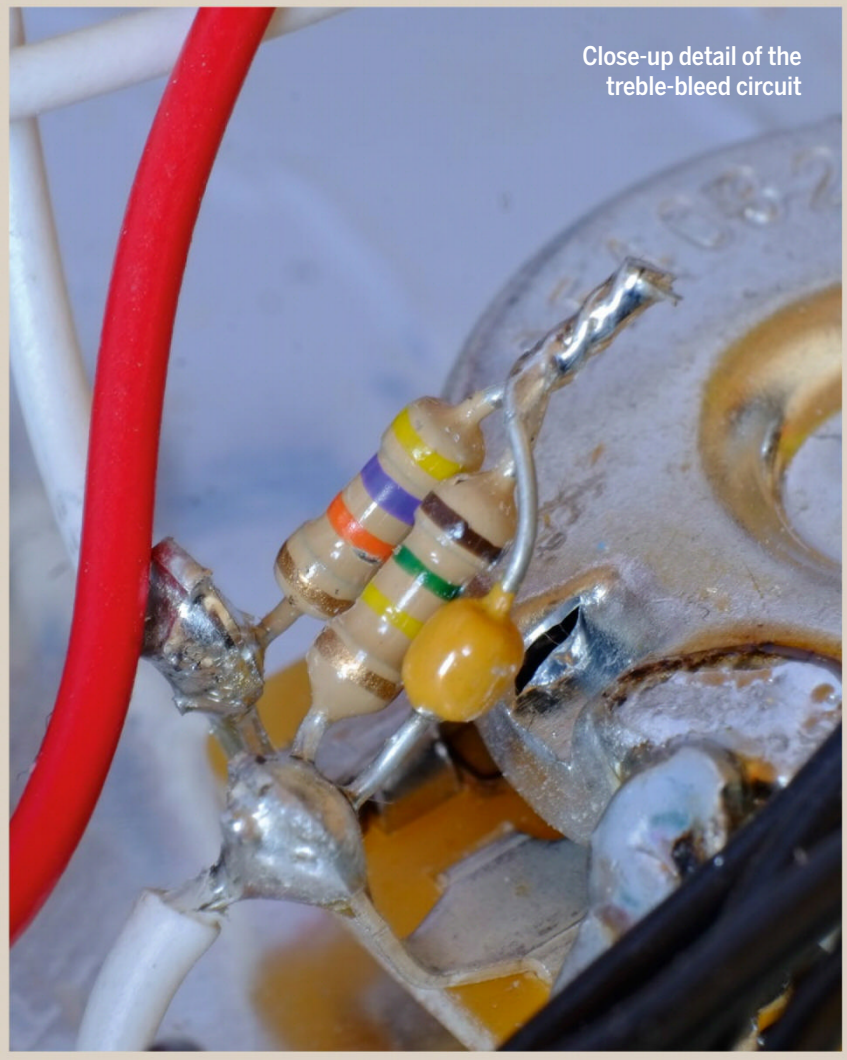
Plenty of room for different pickup configurations on the Strat



The Tele is also routed for a neck humbucker and middle single coil



Inside the Strat's circuit



Close-up detail of the treble-bleed circuit

The Noiseless Strat pickup with its stacked coils

6

(and more) gain. But does it still sound like a Tele? Of course, if you're veering on the more polite side until you pull that volume back and kick in a boost then there's a low-output humbucker vibe here, for sure. And the more we play and compare with other T-styles it comes across as less the sort of Tele you'd plug straight into a tweed amp and just go for it, and more one designed for a pretty basic pedalboard. Perhaps another indication of the intended player and a marked difference to the vintage-y Vinteras.

Verdict

Let's face it, 'modern' and Fender isn't always an easy mix. You might expect firms like Ibanez, Charvel or Suhr to modernise the classic platforms, but Fender? Except Fender *has* successfully done that with the American Pro II range and – more relevant here – the Ultra series. And the design brief of these Player Plus guitars is surely, how do we make an Ultra at under half the price in Mexico, isn't it?

These are undoubtedly guitars that reflect how many people are playing today. Not everyone is chasing those vintage tones, man, let alone playing dirty blues in gin-soaked bars. And, frankly, you should be shot if you can't make either of these sound like a Fender. But the modernism isn't that obvious – not least with colours of our review samples. Not for vintage cork-sniffers, then, but these guitars have mass appeal and we predict they'll sell in container loads: thought-through upgrades and worthy additions to an already huge-selling, improved platform. G

6. The switch on the lower tone control here adds the neck pickup to positions 1 and 2 on the five-way switch, so we get bridge and neck, and all three together, also known as the 'seven sound' mod

FENDER PLAYER PLUS TELECASTER

PRICE: £939 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, Modern 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42.89mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated strings-through-body 6 block saddle bridge, 'F' logo rear lock tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender Noiseless single coil-sized humbuckers, 3-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume and master tone (with pull-push switch for series link of pickups) with knurled knobs
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.63/7.97
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The other Tele, the Player Plus Telecaster Nashville (£979), adds a Strat-style Noiseless pickup in middle position. The Player Series Telecaster currently costs £679
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Aged Candy Apple Red (as reviewed), 3-Colour Sunburst, Cosmic Jade and Silver Smoke

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Smart build with numerous improvements over the standard Player series, not least the hum-cancelling pickups

CONS Very little to argue with here

FENDER PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £939 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, Modern 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42.89mm
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro, pearloid dot markers, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel/chrome-plated 2-point vibrato (with steel baseplate and die-cast block) and steel block saddles, 'F' logo rear lock tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Fender Noiseless single-coil sized humbuckers, 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck and middle), tone 2 (bridge) w/ pull-push which adds the neck pickup to position 1 bridge and 2 bridge and middle
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.8/8.36
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Player Plus Stratocaster HSS (£979) adds a Wide Range-style covered full-size humbucker at bridge. The Player Stratocaster currently costs £679
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Opal Spark (as reviewed), 3-Colour Sunburst, Olympic Pearl, Aged Candy Apple Red and Tequila Sunrise

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Ditto the Tele with its numerous improvements – this is a hugely usable upgraded Stratocaster

CONS The pau ferro fingerboard will look 'wrong' to some

PROMENADE MUSIC

01524 410 202
www.promenademusic.co.uk

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 Acousticl 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 00X1AE 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.

The Modern Fender

The Player Plus guitars are the latest to modernise the Fender guitar recipe. In fact, 'modern' is winning the battle against 'vintage'. Who'd have thought it?

Words Dave Burrluck

1

2

If these new Player Plus guitars up the spec over the standard Player Series models, they also reflect a seismic shift in how we play guitar today. "Player Plus is an extension of the Player Series, which was the most widely adopted Fender guitar series in 2020 and has sold more than 400k units since its 2018 debut," states Fender's launch PR. "Millions of new players began their learning journey during the pandemic, and for many, the Player Series provided a seamless entry into the Fender brand.

"As digital platforms like TikTok have opened up pathways for artists to find audiences," it continues, "Fender has designed Player Plus for the generation leading the charge: both online and as live music begins to roar back after its hiatus."

Indeed, in September Fender launched its own TikTok channel with the Player Plus series as its debut. We're told to expect "exclusive content, product demos and educational content, tailor-made for both passionate musicians and aspiring artists" on the app – with musicians such as bassist Blu DeTiger, country artist Hannah Dasher, NYC multi-instrumentalist Gabriel Garzón-Montano, California punk-rockers Destroy Boys and Brit duo Nova Twins making appearances as well.

Fender is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year and, of course, times change, as Justin Norvell, EVP Fender Products, said of the new guitars at the Player Plus launch: "Fender's balance – being 70-plus years old – is really about past, present and future, and we always want to make sure we're staying relevant and with the times. So while we love the vintage stuff that we do, we are always pressing it forward with instruments like the [American] Ultra that we have higher up in the range. But the idea to have a kind of Ultra 'light' instrument that's just above the Player series makes a lot of sense to us and helps to create a kind of stairway, or a ladder, to navigate the line and make sure there's something for everyone. So it's modern but we didn't saw the horns off 'em or anything – it's still a Stratocaster. It's still everything that people want it to be."

> "Fender has designed Player Plus for the generation leading the charge: online and live" ***Justin Norvell***

So, while the past is covered by the Mexican-made Vintera range and the American Original, the other main series have become a lot more contemporary or modern. Using the Stratocaster as our guide, what on earth are the differences between Player, Player Plus, American Performer, American Professional II and American Ultra series?

Perhaps the key series is the Corona-made American Professional II, more akin to a firmware upgrade to the previous American Professional series that replaced the long-running American Standard series in 2016. Notable changes here included the introduction of roasted pine as a replacement for the threatened American ash, a contoured heel with Micro-Tilt adjustment, 'smoother' satin back finish, coined "Super-Natural", and heavier rolling to the fingerboard edges, a new cold-rolled steel block for the two-post bridge, and updated mixed magnet V-Mod II pickups. Each American Pro II model also featured a new-to-Fender push-push switch on the tone control adding, on the three single-coil Strats, neck and bridge and all three together options, as we get on the Player Plus. The standard Stratocaster costs £1,749 including case. State-of-the-art USA Fender? Pretty much.

At A Glance

Specification details for the 'modern' Fender Stratocaster

PLAYER STRAT

PLAYER PLUS STRAT

AMERICAN PERFORMER STRAT

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II

AMERICAN ULTRA STRAT

Nut material/ width	Synthetic bone/ 42mm (1.650")	Synthetic bone/ 42.8mm (1.685")	Synthetic bone/ 42.8mm (1.685")	Bone./ 42.8mm (1.685")	Bone/42.8mm (1.685")
'Board radius	241mm (9.5")	305mm (12")	241mm (9.5")	241mm (9.5")	254-356mm (10-14")
Frets	Medium Jumbo .103 x .046"	Medium Jumbo .103 x .046"	Jumbo .110 x .055"	Jumbo Narrow .094 x .054"	Medium Jumbo .103 x .046
Neck profile	Modern C	Player Plus Modern C	Modern C	Modern Deep 'C'	Modern D
Neck depth 1st fret	20.83mm (.820")	20.83mm (.820")	20.83mm (.820")	20.83mm (.820")	20.83mm (.820")
Neck depth 12th	22.1mm (.870")	22.1mm (.870")	22.1mm (.870")	23.4mm (.920")	22.1mm (.870")
Pickups	Player Series Alnico 5	Player Plus Noiseless	Yosemite	V-Mod II	Ultra Noiseless Vintage Strat
Auxiliary sounds	None	Pull-push tone adds neck pickup to position 1 and 2	Pull-push tone adds neck pickup to position 1 and 2	Push-push tone control adds neck pickup to position 1 and 2	S-1 switch on volume control adds neck pickup to position 1 and 2

1. The 'standard' USA-made range is the American Professional II, a perfect mix of vintage and modern features
2. Combining USA-made necks and bodies with Mexican-level hardware, the American Performer series models are the entry point to the USA Fender range
3. Within the American Ultra range we have the most modern style of all the full Fender ranges – they're about as far from vintage as you can buy

However, a year earlier saw the launch of the American Ultra series, certainly the most modern vision of the Stratocaster (and part of the inspiration for the Player Plus). The Ultras come with new-generation Noiseless pickups, S1-switching on the volume control, locking tuners, that contoured heel (but no Micro-Tilt) with rear contouring, and it's the only Fender production range that offers a compound radius fingerboard. Appearing at the start of 2021 – although we haven't seen them yet – are an extension to that range, the American Ultra Luxe guitars, which push the envelope further with stainless-steel frets. The American Ultra Stratocaster costs £2,049 including a moulded case.

The modern Fender guitar might have been evolving, but costs were rising – which is where, in 2018, the Mexican-made Player series took over from the Standard. From what Fender has said, in terms of units it is the company's biggest-selling series. It currently includes some 18 models, with prices ranging from £589 for the Duo-Sonic and Mustang up to £879 for the Strat Floyd Rose. Coming back to our Stratocaster reference, which costs £675, we have alder-only bodies, a maple neck with satin back and glossed face and headstock, and Player Series Alnico 5 Strat single coils. But as you can see from our At A Glance specification table above, it has a narrow nut width and 'midway' 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius. It also features a two-point vibrato but with pressed-steel saddles and non-locking tuners. The Player Stratocaster will get you started and, if you know how, can be souped up considerably.

Which leaves the American Performer series that replaced – and expanded upon – the previous 'gateway' USA series, the American Special. Maple necks, with either maple or rosewood fingerboards, and alder-only bodies are made in Corona, but many parts, such as the Strats' vibratos, are Asian, as with the outgoing American Specials and typical Mexican-made guitars. But, again, these have their own thing going on with 70s-style headstocks, and Tim Shaw-designed Yosemite single coils (named after the National Park in California) and DoubleTap humbuckers. The Stratocaster here employs the 'seven sound' mod, plus the Greasebucket tone control on the bridge pickup. The American Performer Strat costs £1,199 with a gigbag and we suspect is rather overlooked.

The modern Fender is in the lead, but the key vintage-style American Originals date back to 2018. Can we expect a refresh next year? We might take a bet on that... G

The Next Generation

A quartet of brand-new Gibson acoustic guitars features a parlour, a couple of dreadnoughts and a jumbo, all with player ports that were inspired by a design idea from legendary company president, Ted McCarty, during the early 1960s. Intrigued? We were...

Words David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

GIBSON GENERATION G-00, G-45, G-WRITER EC & G-200 EC £899, £1,099, £1449 & £1,799

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB **www.gibson.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **So, what exactly is new here?** It's really a case of something old, something new. Gibson's famously innovative president, Ted McCarty, had the idea of putting a side port on a J-45 during the early 60s, but the concept never reached the production line. Until now.

2. **Does a side port really make a difference?** Yes, it does. A second soundhole facing the player means you hear a slightly different voice from the guitar when you're in the driving seat. Does it make a difference to those listening at a distance? Hmm...

3. **Walnut back and sides instead of rosewood or mahogany?** Why not? Walnut is a very capable timber and many manufacturers have succumbed to its charms. Furthermore, unlike rosewood and mahogany, the use of walnut is entirely non-controversial from an ethical or ecological perspective.

Back in issue 453 we had a foretaste of Gibson's Generation acoustic range in the form of the G-45 Studio and Standard models. We were impressed, too. Up until that point, the idea of owning an all-solid wood electro-acoustic guitar with Gibson on the headstock for around the £1k price point seemed unthinkable. And yet there they were – and they were made in Gibson's prestigious Bozeman, Montana, facility where the company's top range acoustics are produced.

Those models have now been stricken from Gibson's catalogue, despite being only a couple of years into their existence, and a new batch of Generation acoustics has entered the limelight comprising the same basic build as their forerunners – Sitka/walnut – and much of the same livery. These, too, are built in Bozeman. This time, though, instead of the dreadnought-only G-45s, we have a whole range of body sizes from the L-00 sized G-00 to the mighty G-200 EC jumbo.

One thing that hasn't changed is the price tags. Whereas the '45s came in at £869 for the Studio model and £1,149 for the Standard, here the prices go between £899 for the littl'un and £1,799 for the G-200. Let's just remind ourselves: all solid-wood acoustics with Gibson on the headstock for under £2k. Never thought we'd see the day.

The twist in this particular tale adds another level of curiosity to the G-Series as all the models here have a side port – or "player port" in Gibson's parlance – that takes the form of an extra soundhole on the upper bout topside facing the player. This is a trend in the acoustic market that we're beginning to see more and more. But it's usually the bespoke makers that go for it rather than production line based manufacturers. We'll be looking at how this affects the sound of the Generation acoustic team a little later on. But there's more...

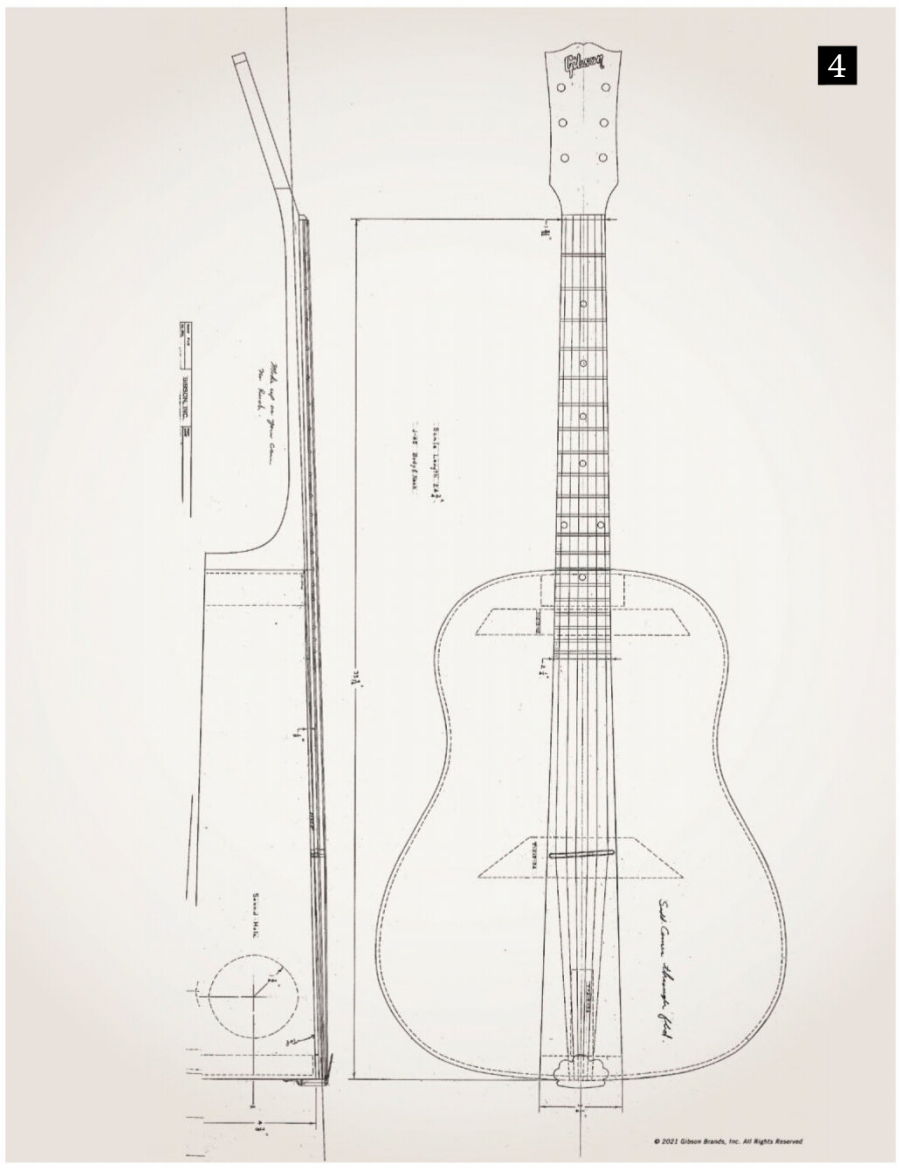
Gibson tells us that the idea of putting a player port on its acoustic guitars came from Ted McCarty way back in the early 1960s. McCarty is someone who needs no introduction as far as guitar design is concerned, having aided the development of

All four Generation instruments here have an open airiness with great definition and clarity

1

2

3



4

iconic models such as the Les Paul, ES-335, Explorer, Flying V and even the tune-o-matic bridge. You can see his blueprint for the 'Modern J-45' here on the left; the player port might have been in a different location back then, but the idea was certainly looked at, even if it didn't reach fruition the first time around. Mat Koehler, head of product development, Gibson Brands, told us this: "The Generation Collection brings something new to our acoustic guitars while staying connected to all the techniques and philosophies that make the originals so great. Each model offers artists and players of all levels an exciting new playing experience with the reliability, performance and iconic design you expect from Gibson."

So, not only are we looking at a new range of Gibson acoustics, we're also exploring the whole player port idea into the bargain. Innovation or novelty? Let's find out.

Build

First on the agenda, we'll review the construction details of the G-Range. As we've said before, they mirror the G-45s with the exception of the side port, and all models are the same except for body shape and, in the case of the Writer and 200, the LR Baggs pickups.

1. Construction details on the new G-Series follow those of the G-45 Standard and Studio models we reviewed a couple of years ago

2. These models are built in Gibson's Bozeman, Montana, facility where the company's top-range acoustics are made

3. The "player port" has the effect of delivering the guitar's sound directly to the performer, offering a totally new experience

4. Former company president Ted McCarty's original blueprint for a player port on a Gibson J-45 dates back to the early 1960s

© 2021 GIBSON BRANDS, INC.

5. The G-45 takes its cue from Gibson's famous 'workhorse' J-45

6. Fingerboards on all models are striped ebony, the actual striping being more obvious on our G-45

7. The G-Series offers a breadth of different body styles to suit most tastes: a parlour, a dreadnought, plus dread and jumbo cutaways

THE RIVALS

With four different body styles and the price differential here we're obviously covering a lot of ground. In the G-00's price range, and parlour or 00 body sizes in particular, you might start looking at Martin's 00L-X2E which streets at around £625 and Faith also have parlour models available, check out the Mercury range with prices from around £400 - £700, while Eastman's E10 00 pushes the price up to over a grand at £1,239. Of course, none of these models has the side port.

Moving up-range a little more to the dreadnought/jumbo region occupied by the G-45, G-Writer EC and G-200 EC there's quite a wide breadth of choice. Companies like Yamaha (A5R ARE VN, £1,290) , Auden (check out the Colton range which has models around the £1,299 mark), Eastman (E1 D, £1,239), Faith (Legacy Mars, £1,179) all have a selection of ably competitive dreadnoughts.

Jumbo-wise Auden's Grace (£1,364), Sigma's GJA-SG200 (£749) and Guild's F-40E (£1,549) all circle the area. But if the presence of a side port is a deal-breaker, your choices become all the more rarefied.

Tops are Sitka spruce with walnut backs and sides. The G-00's and G-45's tops and backs are both unbound whereas both the G-Writer and G-200 have what looks like mock tortoise binding in both locations. Necks are made from utile, also known as sipo, which is one of the family of mahogany-alike woods, sapele being another. The utile's grain patterning is indeed very similar to mahogany and we must admit that if no-one had told us...

Moving swiftly on, fingerboards are striped ebony, the striping being particularly noticeable on our G-45 while the other 'boards here are jet black at first glance with maybe a soft-brown background hue peeking through if looked at close up. All the guitars have a natural matt open-pore finish and look decidedly 'woody' to the eye.

As far as other accoutrements go, tuners are Grover Mini Rotomatics, nuts and saddles are Tusq, bridges are striped ebony, and that's just about it as far as uniform statistics go. The next thing is to take each guitar individually and explore its charms on a one-to-one basis.

Feel & Sounds

The smallest of the bunch but by no means the runt of the litter, the G-00 drew the same initial response from everyone who picked it up: it might be small but it packs quite a punch in the volume stakes. It's also a very comfortable guitar to sit with and

The G-45 moves up a notch from the G-00 with a bit of the old dreadnought thump and thunder

would make a perfect sofa buddy if you're on the lookout for one. Gibson describes all the G-Series as having an "Advanced Profile" neck shape, and this feels like a generous C to us. More (dare we say) Strat-y than Les Paul but with a high feel-good factor in the hand.

As for how it sounds, we've already commented on its loud and proud voice, but in addition to this chordwork has a great deal of definition, single notes shoot out like rockets and everything is very high definition, if you see what we mean. Crystal clear, well defined and with a good balance. There's also a fair amount of bass considering its body size.

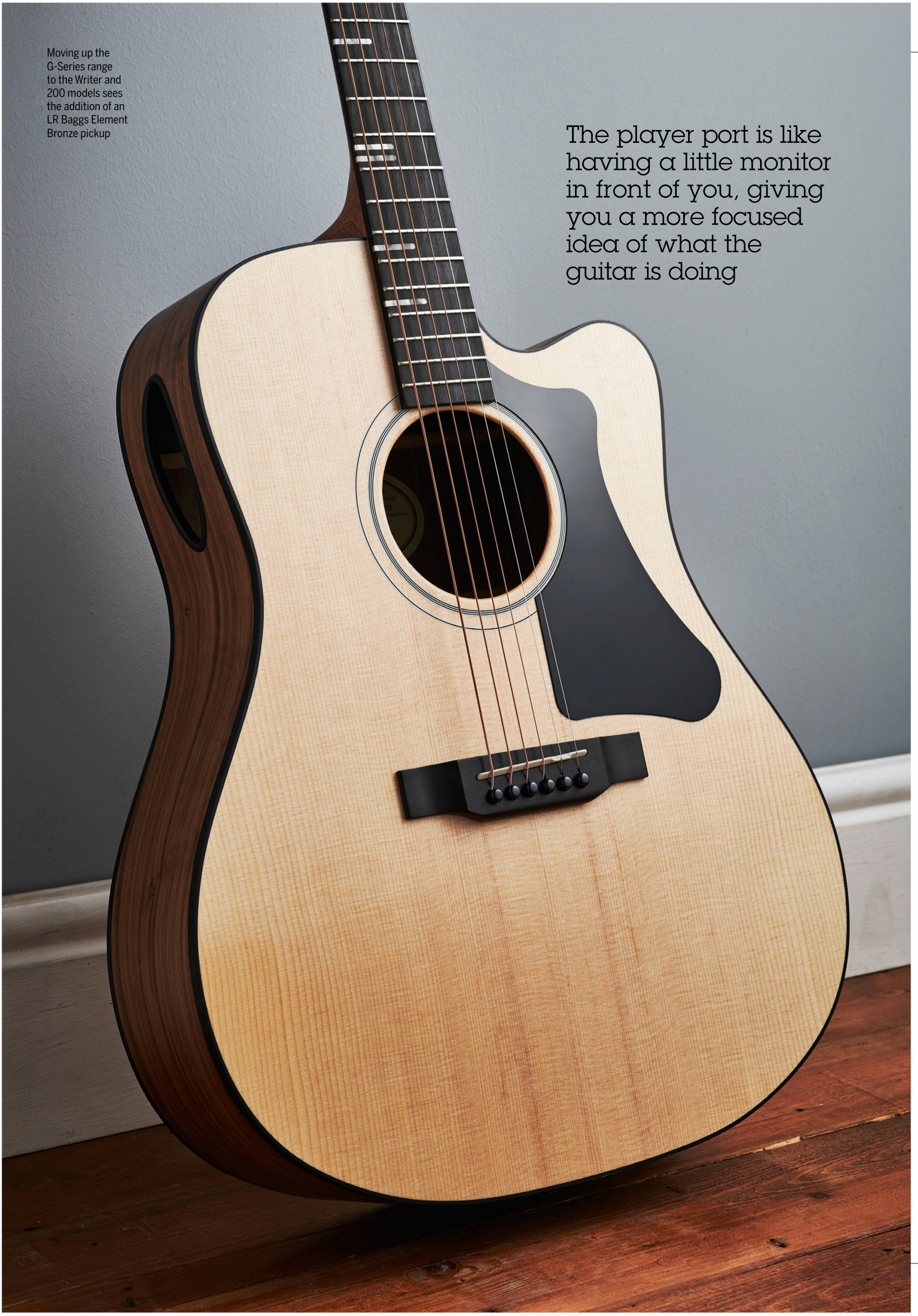
Based on Gibson's J-45 workhorse, at least in terms of general shape, the G-45 moves up a notch – and if a bit of the old dreadnought thump and thunder is what you're looking for then stay tuned. As we've already pointed out, construction details are the same throughout this quartet, and so it's no surprise that this guitar feels similar to its little brother. If pressed, we'd say that the

Thorpy FX

Would you say you're my DOPPELGANGER?

Phaser
Trem
Vibrato

www.thorpyfx.com



Moving up the G-Series range to the Writer and 200 models sees the addition of an LR Baggs Element Bronze pickup

The player port is like having a little monitor in front of you, giving you a more focused idea of what the guitar is doing

neck profile is very slightly deeper and the sound is definitely more 'big bodied'. While the clarity is still there, there's an extra helping of bass here that doesn't muddy up, even with some heavy-handed strumming. Just like its sibling, there's plenty of volume on hand, too.

If you're wondering what the inspiration for the G-Writer's particular body shape comes from, it's Gibson's Songwriter acoustic. What extras has moving up to the £1.5k price bracket given us? A cutaway for starters, fretboard position markers that Gibson calls "single bar", and also an LR Baggs Element Bronze pickup. This particular pickup comprises an under-saddle sensor that is, according to LR Baggs, "as thin as a human hair" and has a single volume control secreted in the bass side of the soundhole. The lack of a tone control here may mean that you'd need some outboard gear – a preamp or DI with added EQ controls – if you were intent on playing live. Alternatively, you could always rely on the front-of-house soundperson. Ahem.

The G-Writer lives up to its dreadnought personality with a fortified midrange and lashings of volume and presence. It might be our ears, but this one sounds a little more widescreen and slightly warmer than the 45 model. In any case, it was a sonic experience we'd be perfectly at home with and would happily enlist its services as a gigging companion.

Welcome to the jumbo! Based around Gibson's J-200 gentle giant acoustic, the G-200 has everything we've already seen on the G-Writer with a little more fire in its distended belly. But it's not just a case of turning up the bass and leaving it at that. Far from it. There's an airiness in this region with every note ringing out with authority in each chord you play. It's also surprisingly warm-sounding, too, and once the Sitka top has opened up a little, this is bound to become even more pronounced.

Despite its added girth, the G-200 is not a cumbersome beast to either sit or stand with. It's almost perfectly balanced both sonically and physically. We think we might have picked a favourite.

> The G-200 has everything we've seen on the G-Writer with a little more fire in its distended belly

8. Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners are common to all the acoustics in the new G-Series

9. Based on Gibson's mighty J-Series jumbo, the G-200 has all the fire its body size suggests but with a surprising amount of mellow sweetness, too

10. Another feature of the Writer and 200 models is the "single bar" fretboard position markers

If we had to pick a favourite, we'd say we couldn't ignore the jumbo in the room!

Verdict

What of the LR Baggs pickups? They are unobtrusive and businesslike, transferring the G-Writer's and G-200's sounds into our AER Compact 60 amp with no bother at all. But more to the point, do those player ports – the principal reason we're here, after all – have an effect on the sound of these guitars? To be honest, it's incredibly difficult to tell. All four instruments have an open airiness to them with great definition and clarity and, especially in the case of the little G-00, bags of volume. The more pronounced effect is from the player's perspective; it's like you have a little monitor right in front of you, giving you a more focused idea of what the guitar is doing. But we tried standing across the room and listening while someone else played the guitar and the consensus was that we can't determine whether that extra soundhole is contributing much to the guitars' overall sound. Having said that, though, we definitely liked what we heard and wouldn't hesitate in recommending Gibson's Generation Series to anyone in the market for a quality acoustic at a very realistic price. G

GIBSON GENERATION G-00

PRICE: £899 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Parlour/L-00 acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 104mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 373mm
NECK: Utile
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Grover Mini Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56mm
ELECTRICS: N/A
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.68/3.72
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Gibson's Generation Collection currently comprises the four models we have here on review
LEFT-HANDERS: Not as yet
FINISH: Natural gloss

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Superbly able little 00 acoustic with bags of character and loads of tonally-enhanced volume

CONS Maybe the addition of a pickup would seal the deal?

GIBSON GENERATION G-45

PRICE: £1,099 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Dreadnought (J-45) acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 103mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 460mm
NECK: Utile
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Grover Mini Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/51mm
ELECTRICS: N/A
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.42/3.14
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See G-00
LEFT-HANDERS: Not as yet
FINISH: Natural gloss

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Very nicely priced dreadnought, with Gibson's 45 body shape having bags of history attached to it

CONS As with the G-00, we'd quite like a pickup here, too

GIBSON GENERATION G-WRITER EC

PRICE: £1,449 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Cutaway dreadnought (Songwriter) electro-acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 407mm
NECK: Utile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Grover Mini Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/55mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element Bronze
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.04/4.50
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See G-00
LEFT-HANDERS: Not as yet
FINISH: Natural gloss

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS A superb little electro cutaway dread with stage readiness and oomph where it really counts

CONS Practically zero to declare – perhaps a hard case (not gigbag)?

GIBSON GENERATION G-200 EC

PRICE: £1,799 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Jumbo (J-200) electro-acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 103mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 429mm
NECK: Utile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Grover Mini Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/55mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element Bronze
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.14/4.72
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See G-00
LEFT-HANDERS: Not as yet
FINISH: Natural gloss

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Undoubtedly the pride of the fleet with all the power and glory of the J-200 without the hefty price tag

CONS Again, virtually nothing, but we would like a fitted hard case

KILIMANJARO PRESENTS

DREAM THEATER

TOP OF THE WORLD TOUR

UK SHOWS APRIL 2022

WEDNESDAY 20 **BELFAST THE SSE ARENA**

THURSDAY 21 **NEWCASTLE UTILITA ARENA**

SATURDAY 23 **LONDON THE SSE ARENA WEMBLEY**

MYTICKET.CO.UK | DREAMTHEATER.NET

A KILIMANJARO PRESENTATION

KILIMANJARO & AAA BY ARRANGEMENT WITH CAA PRESENT

JEFF BECK

MAY 2022

FRI 27	CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
SUN 29	SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
MON 30	LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
TUE 31	LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL

JUNE 2022

THU 02	GATESHEAD SAGE
FRI 03	GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
SAT 04	MANCHESTER O_2 APOLLO
MON 06	BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
TUE 07	YORK BARBICAN

JEFFBECK.COM

MYTICKET.CO.UK | BOOKINGSDIRECT.COM

Kingfish

PRESENTS

662

JUKE JOINT

Live

THU 27 JANUARY 2022

LONDON

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

MYTICKET.CO.UK

CHRISTONEKINGFISHINGRAM.COM

A KILIMANJARO PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH ICM

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT myticket.co.uk

The Perfect Christmas Gift

for just £25

plus

FREE BLACKSTAR FLY 3 MINI AMP

(CHOOSE BETWEEN BLACK OR VINTAGE)

WORTH £65

The FLY 3 is an innovative, cutting-edge three-watt mini amp

Combines two channels, tape delay and the Blackstar patented Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) to create the perfect compact and portable guitar amplifier

It packs a punch with big TONE, even at the lowest volumes

Terms and conditions: Offer closes 31st January 2022. Offer open to new UK subscribers only. All gift subscriptions will start post-Christmas with the next available issue. Please allow up to 6 weeks for delivery. Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. In the unlikely event that we run out of this gift, we promise to offer you an alternative gift of the same value. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries call 0330 333 1113. Lines are open Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm UK time, or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

Your special Christmas offer

- **FREE Blackstar FLY 3 mini amp worth £65**
- **Enjoy 6 months of *Guitarist* for just £25 – that's just £3.85 an issue!**
- **Receive every issue delivered direct to your door**
- **A thoughtful gift that keeps delivering throughout the year**

Upgrade to include digital for only £5

- **Instant access any time, anywhere**
- **Never miss an issue of *Guitarist***
- **Available on iOS or Android**

Order the gift that keeps on delivering

www.magazinesdirect.com/XMASGUI

or call **0330 333 1113** and quote **XM21b (Black) or XM21v (Vintage)**

MANUFACTURER
SEYMOUR DUNCAN

PRICE
£299

MODEL
VAPOR TRAIL DELUXE

CONTACT
ROSETTI 01376 550033 WWW.SEYMOURDUNCAN.COM

SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Vapor Trail Deluxe

The pickup maker's analogue delay pedal gets a deluxe revamp

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's been seven years since we took a look at Seymour Duncan's original Vapor Trail pedal – a compact pedalboard-friendly analogue delay with modulation and up to 600ms of delay time. The company has now given it the Deluxe treatment creating an altogether bigger twin-footswitch pedal with double the delay time and a host of extra features, notably tap tempo, presets and expression pedal control.

The Vapor Trail Deluxe is a digitally controlled analogue delay pedal that uses four BBD chips to give a maximum delay time of 1,200ms. It has the standard set of delay knobs of Mix, Repeats and Time, but you can also set the delay time via a tap tempo footswitch that can be linked to four different tap divisions – the standard quarter note, a dotted eighth note, eighth note or an eighth-note triplet. These timing divisions are selected using an eight-position Mode switch that also calls up four speciality delay modes: micro delay, pitch sequence, runaway and pitch bender. Modulation can be added to the repeats via Rate and Depth knobs, and the pedal supports three presets that are easily called up by a combination of footswitch presses.

You can plug an expression pedal in to control the parameters of a single knob (Mix, Repeats, Time, Depth/Multi, Rate) and there's also another socket that utilises a TRS jack for a range of functions. This can operate as an external effects loop so you can plug in an external pedal or a combination of pedals to change the sound of the repeats – say, a drive pedal to add a bit more crunch to them. You could also use a volume pedal here for direct control over the repeats level. In addition, the socket can be used for wet-only output so you could set up stereo operation.

SOUNDS

Operation as a standard delay pedal is pretty straightforward here. The repeats sound great, possessing a clarity that's not too far removed from the dry sound but with that analogue quality of melting away into the distance, so they sit well with your sound. The tap tempo does its job with the subdivision options offering flexibility, while the modulation will give you a bit of tape-style wobble or add effects from a touch of chorus to extreme wayward pitch vibrato. The generous 1,200ms of delay

01. MODE SWITCH
Selects between the four tap divisions (quarter note, dotted eighth note, eighth note, eighth-note triplet) or one of four special delay modes (Micro Delay, Pitch Sequence, Runaway, Pitch Bender)

02. PRESET INDICATOR LED
Solidly lit – indicates which preset (1, 2 or 3) is active or whether you are in Manual mode (M). Slow blinking indicates a parameter has been changed

03. LEFT FOOTSWITCH
The main Bypass footswitch can also be held down to give access to the presets (scrolled through with the other footswitch)

04. RIGHT FOOTSWITCH
Tap twice to set tap tempo or hold down to engage the effect when the Mode switch is set to one of the four Special modes

05. WET/ INSERT JACK
This TRS input with tip-send/ring-return allows you to use a Y cable to insert external pedals into the wet signal path

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Analogue delay pedal
FEATURES: True hard-wire bypass with selectable active-bypass trailing repeats mode, 3 presets, 1200ms max. delay time,
CONTROLS: Mix, Repeats, Time, Depth/Multi, Rate, Mode, Bypass footswitch, Tap/Hold footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Wet/Insert (TRS), expression pedal
POWER: 9V-18V adaptor, 150mA minimum (Not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 90 (w) x 128 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

time covers a host of playing needs, but if you're looking to use very short delays for doubling, slapback and so on, switching to one of the four Special modes, Micro Delay, offers more finesse in zeroing in on them as it offers delay times from 6ms to 300ms spread across the Time knob, rather than the usual range up to 1,200ms. What's more, there's a whole world of sounds to be explored around the knob's lower reaches where you can create cool modulation such as chorus, flanging and rotary speaker effects as well as dialling in some metallic resonances.

The other three Special modes are of less conventional use but offer some live performance curveballs and creative options. Runaway simply ramps up the feedback for as long as you hold down the Tap/Hold footswitch, so you can build up a runaway oscillation and then cut it back to the actual position of the Repeats knob. The time it takes to ramp up, however, is fixed, which makes it less flexible than it might have been. You may prefer to get more nuanced control by assigning the Repeats knob to an expression pedal or simply grabbing it and turning.

Pitch Bender lets you momentarily ramp the repeat's pitch up or down an octave and back with control over the time it takes to reach the new pitch, while Pitch Sequence introduces upper and lower octaves to the wet signal in a fixed pattern and can sound like a synth's sequencer in action or add an intriguing background ambient warble. You get a choice of eight different patterns and the modulation knobs can be used to set the number of steps in the sequence and the length of each step – tap tempo is your friend here if you want to stick some into a band gig.

VERDICT

If you like the sound of analogue delay, this pedal is an extremely practical iteration of it with a full set of features for traditionalists, plus extras for those who might like to add something a little more 'out there' to their performance. G

PROS *Analogue BBD delay sound; tap tempo; 1,200ms of delay time; Micro Delay mode; insert point; onboard presets; expression pedal control*
CONS *Selecting the eight different pitch sequence patterns can be a bit of a faff*

PEDALBOARD

MANUFACTURER
HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

MODEL
COMET INTERSTELLAR DRIVER

PRICE
£199

CONTACT
HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS 01223 208809 WWW.HAMSTEADSOUNDWORKS.COM

HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

Comet Interstellar Driver

A new drive pedal enters our orbit. Read on for the Comet's tale...

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

While Hamstead's previous drive pedals, the Odyssey and Subspace Intergalactic Drivers, both have three toggle switches (each with three options combining for a variety of sounds), the company's latest all-analogue design, the Comet Interstellar Driver, takes a more back-to-basics approach with just a single two-way toggle switch on its front panel and a standard setup of Level, Gain, Bass and Treble knobs.

Nevertheless, that toggle switch fully exploits the relationship between the pedal's Drive and EQ circuitry: set it one way and you'll get EQ after Drive, while the other option puts the EQ first. However, it's not *quite* that simple because it also changes the type of clipping and gain structure circuitry when you flip the switch. Keeping the Bass and Treble knobs in their detented null positions, you can immediately perceive that these are two distinct sounds. Drive before EQ offers a more open and transparent sound, while EQ before Drive gives you something gainier and denser in the midrange.

Starting off with Drive before EQ, you can tailor the sound at the output to your liking – the tone knobs cover a practical range that's useful for matching the drive to best complement your amp or perhaps to introduce a treble boost. Incidentally, if you feel that the top-end wasn't quite working for your rig, there's an internal Hi-Cut pot you can use to tweak things a little. This is a naturally dynamic drive with a gain range running from a cleanish boost right through to an amp with the valves running hot.

It's quite a different vibe when you run the pedal with EQ before the Drive circuit. In this scenario, you can use the Bass and Treble knobs to push the drive into different tonal areas, providing characterful, robust drive tones that can be further away from your core amp sound – and you'll even find somewhat fuzz-like tones at the extremes.

As it stands, this pedal can get pretty raucous, but it can actually go even further by using the internal switch to usher in a Hi Gain mode. This shifts everything up a gear and yields an increased level of saturation – great for those players who are looking to coax heavier distortions from their drive pedal.

VERDICT

Hamstead's Comet Instellar Driver is a class act of a pedal that delivers a wide range of tonal options without being overly complicated. G

PROS *Two distinct drive voices in one compact pedal; wide gain range; practical EQ options*

CONS *We would have preferred the Hi Gain switch to be external rather than internal*

ALSO TRY...

KMA MACHINES

Logan Transcend Drive £169

This drive pedal features a three-band EQ that includes a fully parametric mid-EQ with a separate on/off footswitch, plus the ability to place that mid-EQ before or after the main gain stage.

ORIGIN EFFECTS

RevivalDrive Compact & RD Compact Hot Rod £266 each

These classy British drives offer a valve-amp-style signal path with practical control, and tone-shaping Post-Drive EQ to suit what you're plugging into.

HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

Subspace £249

If you want a Hamstead drive pedal and can handle a more complex control surface, the Subspace has three rather than two clipping options and also allows you to mix your dry sound with the driven.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, optokick footswitch
CONTROLS: Level, Bass, Treble, Gain, EQ/Drive switch, internal global hi-cut trim pot, internal hi-gain switch, internal 'power up' mode switch, bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V-12V DC adaptor (not supplied) 65mA
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 130 (d) x 65 mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PEDALBOARD

MANUFACTURER
ASHDOWN ENGINEERING

MODEL
PRO-FX TWO-BAND BOOST, RETRO DRIVE & VINTAGE FUZZ

PRICE
£75, £79 & £75

CONTACT
ASHDOWN ENGINEERING 01621 857853
WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM

ROUND-UP

Ashdown Pro-FX pedals

Engineered in the UK, these pedals join the ranks among the firm's amps

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

Perhaps better known for all things bass, Ashdown also caters for us six-stringers with both amps (see issue 477) and these Pro-FX pedals, which are part of a group of six that also includes three optimised for bass players. Ashdown says it wanted "an affordable range of pedals distinctive in looks, but, most importantly, characterful in tone and features".

While the company has had a range of larger pedals powered at 18 volts, these are smaller with a more 'board-friendly footprint and are known as the 'Pro-FX 9 volt range' because all of them run from a nine-volt supply (though not from battery power), supporting most pedalboard power distributors. The pedals have been designed by Ashdown's Dave Green who was responsible for the Dr Green effects range launched back in 2013.

Our pedals sport a robust metal casing with four small rubber feet and feature a lit Ashdown logo when active. The front-facing connections facilitate close side-by-side pedalboard placement.

ASHDOWN ENGINEERING

Pro-FX Two-Band Boost £75

Looking very much like it has taken its legacy from Dr Green's 'Booster Shot' pedal, the Two-Band Boost offers both a treble boost and a full-band boost, each dialled in with its own knob. The idea here is that you can have one or the other separately or in combination.

The Full boost on its own starts to give an apparent volume boost upwards of one o'clock on the knob, and provides plenty to drive an amp as you turn it up. It adds a fat midrange in the process, albeit accompanied by a perception of a more subdued treble. The Treble Boost is actually a bit of a misnomer as the knob by itself offers no volume boost at all and little in the way of treble, although it does seem to offer a more scooped midrange. However, it does add some top-end to the Full Boost sound, so you can subtly tweak your overall boost with careful juxtaposition of the knobs. G

VERDICT *A boost pedal that will take your sound up a level with integral tonal shading*

ASHDOWN ENGINEERING

Pro-FX Retro Drive £79

Built to provide vintage Brit-style amp drive, the Retro Drive sports the expected Gain and Output knobs but also has a Tone knob that covers a very practical range of top-end presence, which can be used to dial in a sound that best complements your amp.

Starting off on the lowest settings of the Gain knob, you have to set the Output to about three o'clock for unity gain so there is a little leeway beyond that to dial in a bit of kicked-in clean(ish) boost if you want. Further on, the Gain knob takes you through all shades of driven amp crunch through to the full-on raunchiness and harmonics reminiscent of a vintage non-master volume Brit amp with its volume knob maxed. It works well with a clean amp that needs an extra driven channel to be switched in at will, but also has all the necessary ability to push an already driven amp that bit further. G

VERDICT *A very decent drive and price: this vintage amp flavour won't bust your budget*

ASHDOWN ENGINEERING

Pro-FX Vintage Fuzz £75

Does the world need another two-knob pedal offering vintage fuzz? The folk at Ashdown seem to think so and, as each fuzz can have its own particular flavour, they may just be right. This one has a range that runs from light drive to full-on fuzz, with plenty of extra welly available from the Output knob to give you a boost wherever you set the Fuzz level. A Tone knob would've added a touch more versatility, but the general voicing seems to be pitched about right, delivering a plentiful amount of top-end to cut through without being overbearing, plus with the right degree of low-end roll off to stop things getting muddy.

This is fuzz with a sandpapery edge to it, but there's plenty of squidgy sustain under your fingers as you dig in to play single-note leads, and it will respond to careful use of your volume knob if you want to dial it back. G

VERDICT *There's always room for one more fuzz, especially when it's this affordable*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Boost pedal
FEATURES: True Bypass
CONTROLS: Treble Boost, Full Boost, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50mA
DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 112 (d) x 58mm (h)

7/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: True Bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Output, Tone, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50mA
DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 112 (d) x 58mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True Bypass
CONTROLS: Fuzz, Output, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50mA
DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 112 (d) x 58mm (h)

8/10

Sinister Sounds

Trick or treat? **Stefan Fast** of YouTube channel ThePedalZone shows you how to coax some spine-chilling tones from your 'board

We all know that music and sounds hold immense emotional powers, and that also goes for the power to creep us all out like crazy. For instance, take horror movie soundtracks. Here, the music often acts as the monster much more than the on-screen monster itself as the soundscapes can hard-code tension, dread and drama into imagery that doesn't visually carry it. Taking one classic example, without its absolutely soul-crushing and ominous score by Wendy Carlos, the opening title scene for *The Shining* would just have been a stunningly beautiful drive through majestic forests and mountains. It's the eerie sounds that quickly tell us that danger is hidden beneath the beauty. So, I thought it could be fun to do a little 'Halloween Pedal Special' and check out some pedal combinations that'll let you scare the living daylights out of your neighbours.

Now, a pedal and its sound is rarely scary by itself, but it can really help augment the darkness you're trying to evoke through your composition. The true scariness often comes from the intervals and chords played, so make sure to feed the upcoming pedal combinations some minor 2nd intervals (you know, the *Jaws* interval), low sustaining drones, minor chord and diminished chord progressions.

1. TERRIFYING THEREMINS & DISTURBING DRONES

To me, pitch-shifting and modulation are cornerstones in scary sound designs because these effect categories hold really transformative abilities on guitar. For instance, try using a whammy-like pitch-shifter set to an octave up, selecting a dry/wet mix that 100 per cent favours the pitch-shifted signal. Now, mix that with a fast quivering vibrato and you can conjure some really eerie and convincing theremin-like sounds as you glide the pitch-shifted signal in – especially if you use something like an EBow to sustain the tone.

> "Pitch-shifting and modulation have transformative abilities and are cornerstones in scary sound designs"

You can also go the other way and set the pitch-shifter to an octave down, mixing that with an extremely slow and deep vibrato. If the vibrato has a random mode, that's even better. This can create some really dark, disturbing drones full of tension as you hear the pitch slowly rise, fall and randomly skip around. Mixing a 5th above with a super-slow flanger can also create some really alien and mysterious sci-fi textures.

2. DARK ATMOSPHERES

A good dose of delay and reverb will always make an atmosphere more haunting, but you already knew that, so let's get a bit weirder here than just adding delay and reverb to a scary progression. Sending a long modulated ambient reverb into the sample-

1

2

3

4

reducing magic of a bitcrusher can create some really brooding textures. I recommend placing the bitcrusher after the reverb as this allows you to slowly disintegrate your reverb pads in real-time by manipulating the sample rate on the fly.

You can also create some really terrifying tones by placing a ring-modulator after the reverb. If you run a high mix and explore the higher frequency areas of the ring-mod, you can create some spooky resonant tones reminiscent of apocalyptic gongs, sinister singing bowls and howling hurricanes. If you have a delay pedal with an effects loop then try using the ring-modulator there. This will create delay repeats with mysterious bell-like qualities, which can evoke some really eerie percussive landscapes, especially when used with high-delay feedback settings.

3. REVERSE IT!

We've all heard the stories about certain albums played backwards revealing dark messages. I don't know if there's any truth to these bits of folklore, but I do know that everything just sounds way cooler and more interesting in reverse. If you have a reverse delay then set it to the longest possible delay time with a healthy dose of feedback and you have a foundation for some really cool pseudo-looping samples. If you have a looper with onboard reverse and half-speed effects, that's a perfect tool for creating dark dronescapes, too. You don't even have to record musical notes. Pick scrapes, percussive taps or bell-like plucks behind the nut or bridge can all turn into a horrifying textural tapestry when reversed, slowed down and fed through some reverb.

4. MARCH OF THE MACHINES

When sounds become inorganic and borderline robotic, we humans tend to take a step back because we can no longer mirror our own being within them. For this reason, mechanical tones often have an uncanny effect on us. Mixing an octa-fuzz with a tremolo pedal can create some really dirty, stabby sequencer-esque sounds. Don't hold back on the gain on the fuzz, and make sure to use a square or sawtooth wave and max out depth on the tremolo to get those really synthetic choppy tones.

If you want to go even further along the spooky spectrum here then try throwing in a filter pedal, such as a phaser or envelope filter, between the fuzz and tremolo. This setup will give you some really aggressively sliced sweeps. G

HEAR IT HERE

I hope you find some of these ideas disturbing enough to try. You can hear some of them and get a good Halloween scare over on my ThePedalZone YouTube channel at **https://bit.ly/478TTsinister**

« BLUEPRINT »

HEART'S DESIRE

An institution of British tone, Laney is bringing production of its boutique-voiced Lionheart amps back to the UK. We caught up with the team to find out how they made these Lions roar even louder

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Joseph Branston

With the enforced closure of so many venues only now coming to an end, you'd think that the pandemic would have been pretty bleak for amp companies. But today James Laney, head of the iconic Birmingham amp brand that powered Tony Iommi's Sabbath sound, is pondering a more welcome problem: how to win over new players to the classic sound of valve amplifiers.

"In the last year or so there's been more playing at home than ever before," James says. "And we've seen this phenomenon where there actually seems to be more guitar players because of the pandemic rather than less. But quite a number of those are brand-new [not returning] guitar players."

New players want very different things from amps than previous generations of guitarists, James explains, partly because they are starting their playing careers in front rooms and bedroom studios rather than pubs and clubs. The traditional rite-of-passage of playing your first proper valve amp turned up loud in the Dog & Duck doesn't happen as often as it did – and certainly not during a pandemic – meaning that new players can be unaware of the magic of a cranked valve amp and turn to inexpensive digital modelling devices instead. For all the convenience of such digital solutions, James Laney remains passionately convinced that there's no substitute for the tonal authority of a high-quality valve amp. It doesn't necessarily have to be a big one, though, he argues.

"The sound of a cranked tube amp is just something that doesn't go away," James says. "But we've come full circle and realised that a tube amp doesn't need to be that loud [in terms of outright volume]."

Topically, 2021 sees the company's superb Lionheart valve amps return to UK production. Modest in wattage but dripping with boutique-grade tone, the Lionhearts first hit the market in 2007, garnering top reviews for their singing, nuanced tone and touch-sensitive dynamics. Now, with home recording more popular than ever, James says the Lionheart amps have evolved to combine the tone of a beautifully voiced Class A valve amp with easy connectivity to computer-based recording apps. Instead of going further down the digital route, James says players upgrading from entry-level modelling amps should try one of the latest Lionhearts in their home studio instead.

> "The sound of a cranked tube amp is just something that doesn't go away"
> ***James Laney***

"Something like the Lionheart L5 Studio is really the ideal thing," he says. "Especially if they are graduating from some kind of transistor amp or some kind of headphone-based bedroom scenario with no feel whatsoever. A 100-watt valve head and 4x12 would be alien to a lot of newcomers – but a smaller amp, like the L5 Studio, kind of slots right in. You can get a really good DI signal out of the amp by using the internal dummy load [meaning speakers don't have to be connected] or go straight out of the USB and into a DAW. That's all very suited to the here and now," James says.

Before anyone runs away with the idea that the Lionhearts are just for beginners, however, it's worth adding that they sound every inch a professional amp, matching many boutique brands for sonics. This is partly because they are built around a parallel single-ended, Class A power stage that yields gorgeous organic crunch tones and supple, warm cleans. As explained elsewhere in this feature, Class A amps do not generate as much outright power as Class A/B designs, but what they lack in muscle they make up for in sweet, rich tone. Part of the magic of that sound comes from the fact that the valves in the power stage are working really hard at relatively

Custom-designed for the tone-conscious modern player – the Laney L5 Studio is compact but full of advanced features

The usable power of the Lionheart series of amps is enhanced by parallel single-ended design that promotes organic tone

low volumes, adding their unique character to the sonic mix. It's a sound you can't get from just turning up the preamp gain alone, Laney's marketing manager, Simon Fraser-Clark, explains.

"As guitar players, if we talk about good guitar tone, you're talking about *Axis Bold As Love*, you're talking about AC/DC – those are all the sounds of amps turned up really loud. And if you think about the tone that you get from that, it's the result of the preamp, the power amp and the speaker all working hard together."

Back in the heady days of the 60s and 70s, where a powerful amp was needed to overcome the absence of a proper PA, the desired effect could be achieved by winding up a 50- or 100-watt valve amp up to full chat. Today, however, you'd be thrown out of most venues if you tried to dime a Plexi.

"Nowadays, if you rock up to a gig the first thing the sound engineer says is, 'Can you turn it down?'" Simon observes. "So your output stage isn't producing the tone it should be and your speaker is not moving. How do you rectify that? Well, that's really where the Lionheart idea came from: the ability to let guitarists harness the tone of output-stage distortion. You can still have as much preamp gain as you want, but with a small amp you can turn it right up, which means the output section starts to contribute to the tone, the speaker starts to move more and so on. We coined the term 'the dark arts' for that aspect of amp design because it's that little bit of magic that happens when you turn an amp right up. Having a small output section allows you to do that at practical volume levels."

> "It's that little bit of magic that happens when you turn an amp right up…'"
> ***Simon Fraser-Clark***

Time-Saving Tone

Warming to the theme of real valve tone that you can harness in the home studio, James Laney adds that the L5 Studio in particular can be dialled in more easily than a modelling device, which should help guitarists get the tone they want quickly.

"Maybe I'm a bit of a Luddite, but I don't get why you would want to spend your precious guitar-playing time programming things," he says. "I want to use the limited available time I have to actually play the guitar. So if you can plug straight into a real tube amp and get a good sound but still capture that sound easily [on a recording] without huge high volumes or [the hassle of] mic'ing things up then that's the ideal. Why would you want to make it more complicated?"

James also argues that, counter-intuitively, having unlimited freedom to choose between hundreds of sounds using plug-in software or modelling devices isn't necessarily liberating for the player from a creative point of view.

"It stifles creativity, having so many choices now," he contends. "It's kind of the antithesis of creativity. If you think about Keith Richards recording his guitar with a tape recorder – because that's all he had – that was infinitely more creative than someone who's got a Mac full of every possible sound. I don't want to sound like I'm 'anti-technology', but I think you have to try to find the sweet spot between the

"You have to find the sweet spot between the technology and the simplicity of the creative process"

James Laney

James Laney says small, intelligently designed valve amps can enhance creativity and excel tonally in the studio

PHOTO COURTESY OF LANEY AMPLIFICATION

Building Lionhearts in the UK brings together the best of boutique and mainstream construction

technology and the simplicity of the creative process. And I think that's dangerously at risk at times. Does anyone sound like themself any more, if all they ever do is try to pick the most perfect replication of something that already exists?"

Simon Fraser-Clark agrees, saying that anything that complicates the path between inspiration and actually creating a piece of music is unhelpful.

"It's about communication. It's about an individual having an idea and being able to translate that," he says. "Everything that we manufacture at Laney is the most important thing in the world to us. But ultimately, it's a means to an end. And it's the end that has to be the focus. So for us, as designers and builders of amps, we want to make our products as easy to use as we possibly can – so that when the musician comes up with an idea, they can get it out and communicate that to the public as easily as possible. Technology is good when it's transparent."

Pride Of Lions

While the L5 Studio amp is the best fit for a home recording scenario, the Lionheart range also extends into other areas, including gigging amps. James Laney walks us through the range, starting with the smallest and simplest Lionheart in the series.

"There's also the L5T combo, which is the smallest single-valve amp of the range – basically, it's the same preamp as the L5 Studio, just in a combo form, really. That's very much a kind of studio or home amp: five watts, single-ended Class A, with a good efficient speaker. It's still quite loud, but you're probably going to want to mic that up if you want to keep pace with a drummer. All the same, it's loud for its size and you wouldn't crank it up to full volume at home very often.

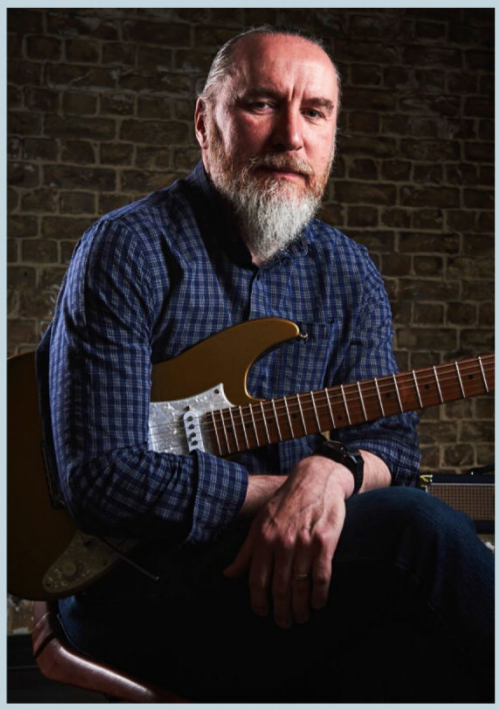
"The other models include the L20T 1x12 combo and a 2x12 combo version of that, plus a head version of that. The 20-watt Lionhearts are like [harnessing together] four five-watt amps in a row giving you 20 watts – and, again, 20 watts in that context is not the same as what it would mean in a linear hi-fi amplifier. It's a different thing. It's plenty loud enough for most gigging environments.

"The speaker complement is very similar across the range: it's the Celestion G12H

TOP OF THE CLASS

Simon Fraser-Clark of Laney explains the tonal differences between Class A amps and the more common Class A/B designs

"The main difference between a parallel single-ended Class A amp versus a Class A/B amp comes down to how hot the tubes are running. Basically, in a Class A amp, the tube is running at its maximum output the whole time," Simon explains, "so it's running hot. In Class A/B, because you split the output tubes into pairs or single units – one to amplify the positive side of the waveform, one to amplify the negative side of the waveform – then, in theory, when the positive side is working, the negative side is turned off and is cooling down. When you turn the negative side on, when it gets up to temperature you have an increase in a thing called crossover distortion, which as a guitar player you hear as mids, so you hear more pick attack. But if you think about a Class A amp... It's like a singer, when the singer is about to hit a note, they take a breath and then they release the note. That's the thing about a Class A amp: because it's running hot, it will compress naturally more than a Class A/B amp. So as you strike the string, the amplifier, for want of a better word, takes a breath and then sings. In Class A/B because it is a little more efficient and because the tube is starting from cold, it doesn't take as much of a breath, it's more instant, and because of this crossover distortion, there's more meat to it and it sounds a little brighter, too. But Class A has some very nice characteristics from a player's point of view. It just sings."



Celestion G12 H Anniversary speakers in a Lionheart 2x12 cab. The combo version has a mismatched set of drivers, however

PHOTO COURTESY OF LANEY AMPLIFICATION

Anniversary, except in the 2x12 combo where we were messing about and we ended up putting one of those G12 H anniversaries in and one Vintage 30 in as well beside it. The mismatch of the two speakers is really nice. And that 20T 2x12 combo is probably the one that most of our endorsers use."

James is also keen to stress that the aim of the Lionhearts is to deliver the tonal quality of high-end or boutique amps in an affordably priced package. That's central to the Laney philosophy, he says.

"I think we've always had a value-for-money proposition because we wanted people to buy our products. You get the word 'boutique amplification' bounced around a lot... but we are a mass-production company: we want to make a lot of things and sell them in 100 countries around the world. So how you balance 'boutique tone' with mass production is an interesting proposition. Sometimes I see amp brands and I think, 'Okay, you make 10 amps a month – that's boutique.' Good luck to those people: that's a very passion-based business, it's very interesting and some cool stuff is created that way.

> "The fun part about the Lionheart is we're making it in our UK facility"
> ***James Laney***

"But they are not buying their valves and their speakers and their transformers at the right price. So that's why it's called boutique – it doesn't necessarily mean the consumer is getting more value. They're getting something quite unique and special, and I've got lots of respect for that. But what we're trying to do is put a product across the world, across the market. And so we need to combine the boutique nature of what we do [in terms of tone] with the fact that we are manufacturing [at scale].

"The fun part about the Lionheart is we're making it in our UK facility," James adds. "It's a UK-made product and we're bringing together some of our mass-production skillset with the fact we're making the amps by hand in our own little British boutique facility, almost as a passion project.

"At the end of it, though, I still think we end up with a price for a product that is accessible. So it's a sort of hybrid of those two things: we still want people to be able to go, 'Well, not only is that product cool, but I can also afford it.' Because there are lots of £2,000, £3,000, £4,000 amps that you see advertised. I think that's pretty cool. But how many of them are actually attainable?"

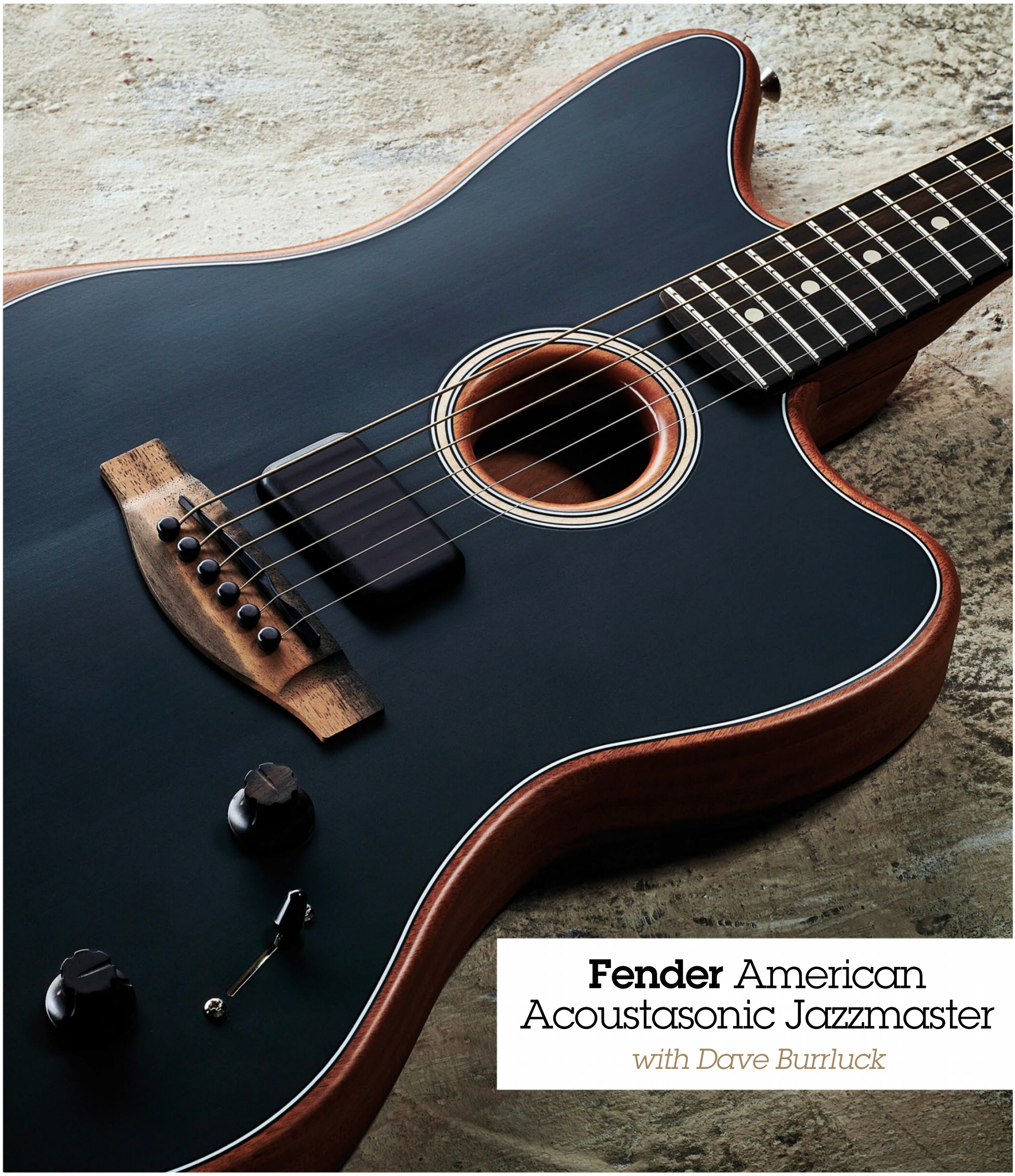
With admirable pragmatism, Laney says it will choose whatever amp design methodology suits the product in hand best, without being dogmatic about pursuing one style of construction over another.

"We've always maintained that tone is really important and we'll build an amp in the best way possible to generate that tone," concludes Simon Fraser-Clark. "If that happens to be hand-wired then we'll build hand-wired, but if it's circuit board, we'll build circuit board. Ultimately, it's about using the best materials and the best technology you can to produce an amp that gives you the reliability and the tone we're looking for. So, again, it's about making sure that everything is as good as it possibly can be." G

www.laney.co.uk

Longtermers

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



Fender American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster

with Dave Burrluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor

As he concludes his time with this Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, our gear reviews editor reminds us that, while Fender's series may divide opinion, it presents a unique proposition

While its shape and feel recall a solidbody electric, those acoustic strings are essential for the onboard sounds

Confusion just about sums up what many readers, rock stars and our mates think about this guitar. Is it an epic fail by Fender's marketing department, or is the Acoustasonic platform so forward-looking that no-one seems to be able to get their head around it?

Well, while the world is scratching its head, we've been quietly working away with this guitar and, with our loan time at an end, we need some kind of conclusion. Before that, however, I can't help thinking we need to reiterate what it *is* and what it *isn't*.

Despite its shape, the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster is an electro-acoustic guitar first and foremost. It's mainly hollow, it has a lightly braced spruce top, and, although it's not designed to match a Martin dreadnought in terms of unplugged volume and projection, it has a voice that's a lot more acoustic-like than any solidbody Jazzmaster you'll encounter. It's also designed for use with acoustic strings – that bridge is a giveaway – including a wound third. Yes, its neck shape and feel is pretty much identical to a current USA Fender Pro II, but those acoustic strings are

> *"This is a unique acoustic-based platform that blurs the lines between acoustic and electric"*

essential to maximise the sounds onboard. Why? Because the majority emulate sounds of various acoustic guitars. The voice pairs, A and B, are selected first by the five-way lever switch and second the Mod Knob. At either extreme, we have the two distinct sounds; as you move the control into its mid-position these are 'morphed' to create a third voice.

Now, the big ol' humbucker at the bridge provides, well, a pretty big ol' humbucker voice and here the Mod Knob introduces some gain. It can certainly make a clean amp – even an acoustic amp – sound as if you're running an electric solidbody through a crunchy amp or overdrive pedal. By the way, no other guitar we're aware of does exactly this. So, why the confusion? Simple: prior art.

We can trace the modern 'hybrid' guitar back to the early 90s. Anyone remember the Parker Fly? Well, despite its modernist 'out-there' design, it's one corner of the genre: a *solidbody* electric guitar that also offered a piezo acoustic sound. The guitar used standard electric strings and the two sounds could be voiced individually, or simultaneously, via a mixed mono output into one amp or via a 'stereo' output into two amps – or electric amp and PA.

Slightly beating the Fly to market was a pretty forgotten guitar: the Hamer DuoTone. Shaped like a double-cut Gibson Les Paul Special, it had a mainly hollow mahogany body with a spruce top and acoustic-style bridge. You used electric strings, the acoustic pickup was an Ovation-type (Hamer was owned at this point by Kaman, who conceived the Ovation concept), and it had a pair of open-coil Seymour Duncans and, if my memory is correct, two outputs. Rather like the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, this looked like an electric-sized 'acoustic' but it was designed to run both electric and acoustic sounds simultaneously, like the Fly.

These guitars opened a floodgate of designs – not to mention aftermarket piezo bridges and mixing circuits – and it's fair to say the Acoustasonic is part of that stream and, if we're honest, it's more of a nod to that Hamer (albeit with just one humbucker and many more acoustic sounds) than it is to the Parker Fly.

So, in today's market we have things such as PRS's Hollowbody, which is an electric guitar with an acoustic sound in concept. Last issue we looked at Emerald's Virtuo, an electro-acoustic guitar with added magnetic pickups *and* MIDI, a style that Godin has been offering for years.

Taylor's elegant T5 is, again, an acoustic guitar first and foremost but with a single magnetic electric pickup. Like the Acoustasonic (and unlike many other hybrids), you can't voice the electric *and* acoustic sounds simultaneously. Nevertheless, with a simple outboard switchbox you can send the different voices to a dual amp setup, and that's also the key to the potential of the Acoustasonic. And, of course, as with any 'hybrid', there's nothing stopping you running your acoustic sounds through overdrives and fuzz boxes to really blur the lines.

As David Mead's excellent feature in issue 476's acoustic supplement illustrated, if you think getting a good amplified acoustic sound on a live stage is easy, think again. While it's certainly easier if you have a front-of-house sound engineer, it can still be difficult, not least if you're using your acoustic with a loud electric band. Having a guitar that effortlessly slips from 'Les Paul' to 'Martin' is quite involved – effectively, you need two signal paths and, on occasion, two amps. Plus, there's a visual thought. If you're playing a Les Paul and suddenly you switch in the aftermarket piezo acoustic circuit, like your Fishman Powerbridge, don't be surprised if a canny audience will think you're miming. We hear with our eyes, don't we?

What we'll think of the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster in a couple of decades' time is anyone's guess. So, no, you can't voice the electric and acoustic sounds simultaneously, like Pete Townshend, for example, but the range and quality of the acoustic and electric voices – both for recording and amp'd – leave those earlier attempts way behind. As I said, this is a unique acoustic-based platform that blurs the lines between acoustic and electric. It's not for everyone, but there really isn't anything else like it. And unlike some more convoluted hybrids out there, it's just so fast and simple to use. A sonic toolbox. G

Reviewed *472* ***Price*** *£1,879 (inc gigbag)* ***On Test Since*** *Early 2021* ***Studio Sessions*** *At home, yes* ***Gigged*** *No* ***Mods*** *No* *www.fender.com*

STEVE HOWE

The Yes guitar legend reaffirms his love for his Gibson ES-175D, but reveals how he was nearly swayed by a costly 335…

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

"It would be the 1964 Gibson ES-175D. I yearned for that guitar. I wanted to start playing when I was 10 and I started when I was 12, and after a few years of playing Guyatone, Burns and things, just regular guitars, I had the courage to say to my mum and dad, 'I want a *really* good guitar; I want one of these 175D things…' So they said, 'Okay, we'll help you,' but I paid for it. My dad paid the deposit – I think it was £40 – and I paid all the instalments on the hire purchase from my hard-earned gig-money of the day.

"That guitar is not only my first and best investment, it's been my greatest guitar and I love it to pieces. I still have it, I still play it and it's featured on *The Quest* quite considerably. Basically, it's a really good guitar and it always has been. Nothing else has ever been able to truly compete."

What was the last guitar you bought?

"Most of the guitars I've bought were in the 70s, particularly from George Gruhn and Paul's Guitars in Minneapolis… I did my buying in that era, really. The most recent guitar is really hard to find. I waited 10 years, asking people, 'Can you look out for one of these?' It's a Fender six-string, two-pickup Stringmaster [steel guitar] – but a single-neck Stringmaster. It's like the doubleneck I've been using on stage for years with Yes and other groups, but that guitar is not in my possession; it's always being shipped or on tour or something.

"I always dreamed of having a single-neck and why I mentioned the two pickups is that I've always liked the sound of Santo & Johnny – that's the classic Fender sound. If you're going to play a steel and you want the Fender sound, get the one with two pickups. They're really hard to get because most of them have one: the Student Steel, the Champ Steel, they've got one horrible pickup. If you get the two-pickup models, like I'm raving about here, you get a control on the bridge so you can optimise which pickup you're using. The other thing is the portability of a single-neck steel of this quality."

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

"I remember in the 70s, Frank Zappa was quoted as saying, 'Never pay more than $500 for a guitar. They're not worth it!' My most incredible find I think is an Epiphone Howard Roberts. This guitar is a chocolate-brown colour with really thick binding and the 'Tree Of Life' on the headstock – so it's nothing like a Gibson Howard Roberts, I've gotta tell you. Nothing like that at all. The pickup is floating; it's a small mini-style pickup. And this is truly a wonderful guitar. I was on tour and one of the band had popped round the shops and said, 'D'ya know what? I saw this guitar down the road and it's got that cutaway like your guitar,' and I said, 'Oh, yeah?' So I went to have a look and I just walked in and bought it. I can see a gem. I've never seen one the same, as good as or anywhere near as beautiful."

Steve with his go-to guitar, a Gibson ES-175D – his "first and best investment" and a guitar that's had his heart since his teens

PHOTO BY GOTTLIEB BROS

> "The guitar's got to feel right to you and feel right in your hands. Feeling and instinctive sound-quality are the keepers"

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse that you've had when buying guitars?

"I had three [Gibson] L-5s: I had a 1946 acoustic non-cutaway, I had a '55 Alnico pickup and another one. Then I got a late-70s two-pickup L-5 and one of the things I love about early guitars is how light they are – and this was heavy. So I had three L-5s that were very light and beautiful to play, and this one was rather heavy. I think I might have regretted that."

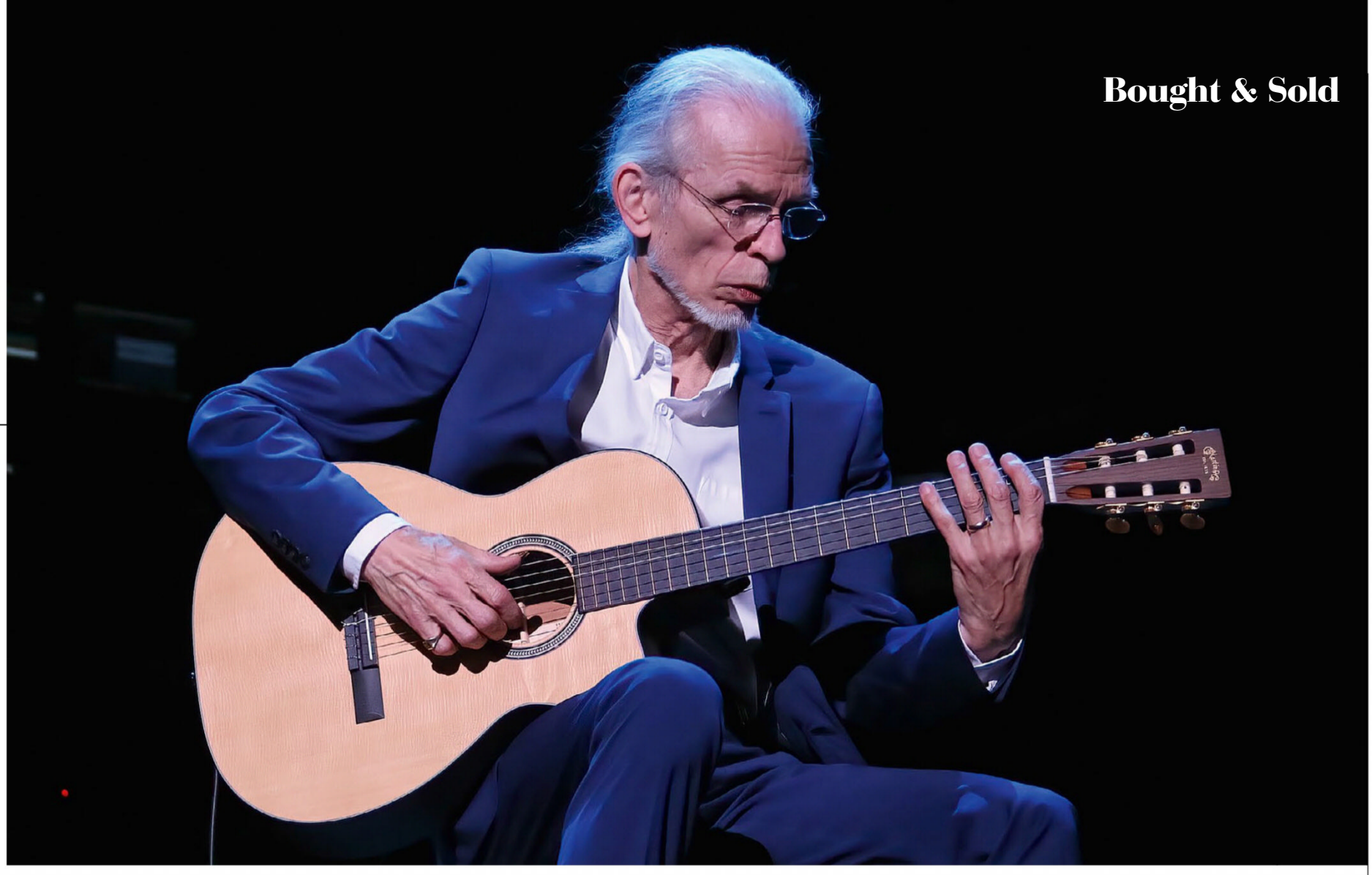


PHOTO BY GOTTLIEB BROS

Steve likes to keep his collection of guitars diverse and steers clear of owning many of the same model – aside from allowing himself to double up on some ES-175Ds and Martin acoustics

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

"In the most part, no. Because, usually, if I sell a guitar I might have had it for 10, 20, 30 years, you know? I've had my opportunities with it, I've taken my chances. Any guitar I've bought has been exciting at the time, but if, after 20, 30 years, it isn't exciting then sell it to someone who *is* excited. I think there's only one guitar I've sold a bit along those lines, which was when I sold a cream Gibson Les Paul Special TV model. That guitar was special because I had a [Bigsby] Palm Pedal put on and that actually appears on the song *Only Time Will Tell* on the first Asia album. The tuning was pretty horrendous, but guitars have their own distinct sound and that one was most probably worth keeping."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Probably the best tip is don't buy unseen. I suppose it depends if you want to be a versatile guitarist or if you don't. For most of my collection, with one or two exceptions, I don't buy multiples of the same guitar. I don't think there's much point in doing that. I need a few ES-175Ds and I need a few Martin acoustics and so I have allowed myself a little bit of indulgence there, but I don't buy them to hoard them; I buy them because I believe I need them.

"The other thing you should do before buying is think about the way you want the guitar to sound – it's all about the sound. We play and the music comes from us and the way that we play actually affects the sound. So play the guitar and look to feel at home. It's got to feel right to you and feel right in your hands. Feeling and instinctive sound-quality are the keepers."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window and what were you looking at?

"Back in 2018 I was on tour and I got to Cincinnati and I went to Gary's Guitars and it's a house. He's got rooms in his house that are dedicated to guitars, and so I went in there and said, 'Have you got any ES-335s?' So he pulled out a 1959 335 and I just gawped at it – and then I played it. Ah! It had everything and I wondered why I haven't bought lots of 335s. I've had a 12-string, I had the stereo... but I didn't do these enough. So I was yearning, but it was 50k, but I wasn't going to spend that. I could have got one for $100 in the 70s if I'd been smart enough. But I wasn't. So, basically, I almost bought the guitar, but the reason I didn't buy wasn't only the high price. I mean, it's a big investment. But the other thing was that I didn't want my 175 to miss out, because I think if I'd have started playing a 335 I'd have been playing it all the time, day after day."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a really top-notch amp?

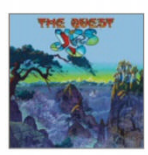
"I don't even have to think about this one – I'd buy a good guitar. A good guitar will most probably sound good in any amp, but the reverse certainly isn't true. Without any doubt: top guitar, the amp is less important."

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

"You know I'm a bit more of a Gibson guy, but I was actually really upset not to be included in one particular Fender book where they were talking about people who play Strats. Because I played Strats on the *Going For The One* album. In fact, I used Fenders on *Relayer* as well. I would probably choose a humbucker... but I would miss single coils."

What's your favourite guitar shop?

"My favourite shop is Mansons in Exeter. It's a nice quiet place, it's got a separate acoustic room and a separate bass room, they've got all the toys, all the guitars and they also do some secondhand [instruments]. That, to me, is a wonderful store, full of wonderful people who really know their stuff." **[DM]**



Yes's new album, *The Quest*, is available now via InsideOut Music

http://yesworld.com

DAZED & CONFUSED

MARSHALL AMPS

From JTMs to JMPs and JCMs, Marshall's product specialist, Steve Smith, tracks the evolution of these iconic amps

"The JMPs were born in the Plexi era – which is generally thought of as the period from the mid-60s up until the 70s when we were using Plexiglas plastic panels," Marshall's Steve Smith explains. "When Marshall first began building amps in the early 60s, we had the JTM45s. And then in the mid-60s, 50- and 100-watt amps appeared, which evolved from the JTM45 – the model 1987 being a 50-watt amp, and the 1959 model a 100-watt amp. Both of these models were originally available right up until 1981, although there aren't many of the later ones around because people weren't asking for them by then.

"There were so many variations of amps that it can get confusing. For example, the model 1992 – as used by Lemmy – was the bass version of the 1959, but from the front it just looked like a 1959 model. So on the back it would say Super Bass, whereas the 1959 was labelled Super Lead.

"Although people tend to think of the JMP amps as 70s models, the first time JMP actually appeared on an amp was in 1967. That's when you first saw JMP written on late-60s Plexis such as the 1987 and 1959. Essentially, they're the same as before, even though the name was different." **[RB]**

www.marshall.com

As Marshall's product specialist and demonstrator, Steve Smith knows his JMPs from his JCMs

1 JMP

"JMP stands for Jim Marshall Products – the amps that came before were labelled JTM, which stands for Jim and Terry Marshall. It was in 1975 when Marshall introduced the first 'master volume' amps. And those are often what people refer to as a JMP. Even though we had amps with JMP written on them before, it's more the 70s styling and look that people associate with the JMP name.

"When Marshall introduced the first master volume amps in '75, they used the 50-watt 1987 and 100-watt 1959 as the basis for the new 2204 and 2203 amps [respectively]. At the same time, the 1987 and the 1959 were available in the Standard series. In '76, the cosmetics changed at the request of the distributor, Rose Morris. And that's when the larger logo, white piping and illuminated rocker switches appeared. That lasted until 1981 when the JCM800 range came out."

2 JCM800

"By the 80s, everyone seemed to want a Marshall stack. JCM800s appeared in 1981 after Marshall's 15-year deal with Rose Morris ended, which Jim Marshall was very happy about as it meant that Marshall could distribute independently. Rose Morris had warehouses full of stock when the deal ended, so Marshall made all the JMPs obsolete by revising the look with the JCM800 line. JCM800 amp heads are recognisable by the full-width panel and cloth front, rather than the JMP-style vinyl front.

"There's not much difference between the JCM800 and JMP circuits, however. In fact, you could still get the 2204 and 2203 master volume models, and for a short while you could also get the 1987 and 1959. JCM stands for James Charles Marshall. There's no concrete answer as to where the '800' part came from, but he did have an old Jag with the license plate JCM 800."

3 SILVER JUBILEE

"The Silver Jubilee models came out in 1987 to commemorate 25 years of Marshall and 50 years of Jim Marshall being involved in the music industry. These anniversary amps were a limited run, but by popular demand we brought them back. They can be an acquired taste, but some well-known players use them, like John Frusciante, Joe Bonamassa and Slash. They're very comfortable amps to play, and the diode clipping means you can get saturation at a much lower volume. Rock players love them, but the clean is really nice, too. Wayne Krantz uses a Jubilee clean. Marshall clean tone is very much underrated – and it's great for pedals, too.

"This was the first time where you could attenuate the power output and there were two push-pulls on the panel: the Rhythm Clip turned the clean channel crunchy, and the other push-pull allowed you to change channel (also footswitchable)."

4 JCM900

"The JCM900 series evolved from the JCM800 series in 1990. Marshall realised that a lot of people were getting their amps modded as more and more came in for repair. Coming out of the late 80s it was all about more gain, and 900 series amps were popular in the grunge and indie scene. At that time, that's what people were chasing. The gain control goes to 20 on the 900s, the others go to 10.

"JCM900s don't have the same bottom-end and growl as the JCM800s and the 900s tend to sound brighter and more scooped as well. There were two main models available: the 2100 Hi Gain Master Volume MK III and the 4100 Hi Gain Dual Reverb. The 2100 is a single-channel amp with no reverb and two master volume controls. The 4100 was the more popular of the two. It has two channels – clean and overdrive – and a reverb for each."

PHOTO BY MATT YORK

1

2

3

PHOTO BY MATT YORK

4

PHOTO BY MATT YORK

The MOD SQUAD

READY OR NOT?

Caught unprepared to tweak another musician's guitar on a gig, Dave Burrluck considers his tool kit. Or lack of it…

"Have you got an Allen key?" asks our dep bass player who's gone a rather whiter shade of pale after checking over a loaned bass he'll be playing in a few minutes' time. To say it buzzes is an understatement. After a thorough rummage through my kit bag I could only answer in the negative and we set about raising the string height with a small cross-head screwdriver – the best I had – after slackening each string. It just about worked, although trying to set more accurate intonation with a headstock tuner in bright sunlight was less successful. At least we got through the gig. But I suspect both our dep bass player and myself won't venture out again without a little more thought about some tools.

The obvious thing is to always carry a multi-tool. One of the first I remember using was the Guitool [pic 1], a Swiss Army knife-like 'tool kit' that included a string cutter, large and small blade, and single cross-head screwdrivers, plus seven Allen keys (also known as hex keys or wrenches). Today, there are plenty of versions available such as Ibanez's excellent metric MTZ11 multi-tool [pic 2], with six hex wrenches (1.5mm, 2mm, 2.5mm, 3mm, 4mm, 5mm), a 7mm truss rod wrench, three types of screwdriver, and a 50mm ruler. Very neat.

Don't forget, if your guitar is USA-made it'll probably need imperial-sized Allen keys, and Gibson's multi-tool [pic 3] is another excellent device that offers both

The original Guitool. Why wasn't this in our gigbag? 1

A thoroughly modern Ibanez MTZ11 multi-tool 2

The very smart Gibson multi-tool. It's free with a new Les Paul! 3

> "You don't need a lot of tools to keep your instruments in top condition"

imperial and metric, including a 5/16-inch truss rod socket wrench, slot-head and two cross-head screwdrivers, and 1/8-inch, 1/16-inch, 0.05-inch, 1.5mm, 2mm, 2.5mm and 3mm Allen keys. There's even a pull-out lever with laser engraved (and very small!) reference marks (3/64-inch and 5/64-inch) for checking action at the 12th fret. There are a lot more of these tools out there, so, unlike my good self, it's easy to get one in your gigbag or leads bag.

So, while multi-tools could potentially be a gig-saver and should always stay in your gigbag, I'd also add in string winder and a decent set of wire-cutters to the list, a small torch (although most of us have those on our phones) and a headstock tuner. I don't need to mention strings, do I? Unless you're really unlucky, this small emergency kit should get you through.

The key to any performance success is preparation and I'm sure most of us don't have dedicated workshops – more likely, it's a bit of space on the kitchen table. But again, to get – and keep – your instruments in top condition you really don't need a lot of tools or specialist kit.

I've personally used CruzTools's Grovetech GTGTR1 tool kit [pics 4 & 5] for years. Aside from it being perfectly portable, I can tidy up, zip it up and throw it in my toolbox in time for dinner. While those multi-tools have their place, using proper ones that you don't have to fold out is a lot easier. This pre-packed kit includes a six-in-one screwdriver, which gives you large and small cross-head and flat-blade screwdriver bits that slot into a central wrench with 1/4-inch and 5/16-inch sockets on either end. That tool alone has seen some serious action, and not just on guitars.

Handily, the included Allen keys are colour-coded: black for the imperial sizes (0.050, 1/16, 5/64 (2mm), 3/32, 1/8*, 3/16-inch*) and gold for metric (1.5mm, 2.5mm, 3mm, 4mm*, 5mm*). The asterisks indicate the ball-end truss rod sizes. I've definitely added to those with smaller keys – the rule of thumb being if it's not there, add whatever new key you need and keep it in the pouch. To be honest, I also have a separate tin for truss rod socket wrenches – used for Gibson and PRS, for example – and another for various rarely used watchmakers screwdrivers.

Then there's what CruzTools call a "15-Blade Thickness Gauge", which we'd know as a set of feeler gauges. This is for when you want to measure neck relief or fret height,

Using Music Nomad's neck cradle and mat, we're ready to get to work on this Rickenbacker

for example, or you can use it to set the correct height for nut grooves. My original kit came with a handy LED torch, but the current kit replaces that with a stainless steel ruler with inch and metric scales. Then we have 120mm GrooveTech String Cutters, which have also seen plenty of action for fast string changes. And while you'll probably already have a capo and string winder, it's handy to have these in place with your tool kit. You even get a comprehensive Easy Set-up Guide booklet.

The GrooveTech's zip-up pouch is dead handy, too. It has a pocket at the rear where I store other tools such as my own Stanley steel rule with its very clear millimetre and 1/16-inch scales – my go-to tool for pickup heights and basic string heights as I'm a 1/16-inch guy on both treble and bass sides, at least to start with. Also crammed into that pocket is a StewMac Fretrocker and

"Unless you're really unlucky, a small emergency gig kit should suffice"

string action gauge, plus various lolly sticks for removing control knobs and so on, and things like an 1/8-inch thick wooden shim for vintage-style Strat setups.

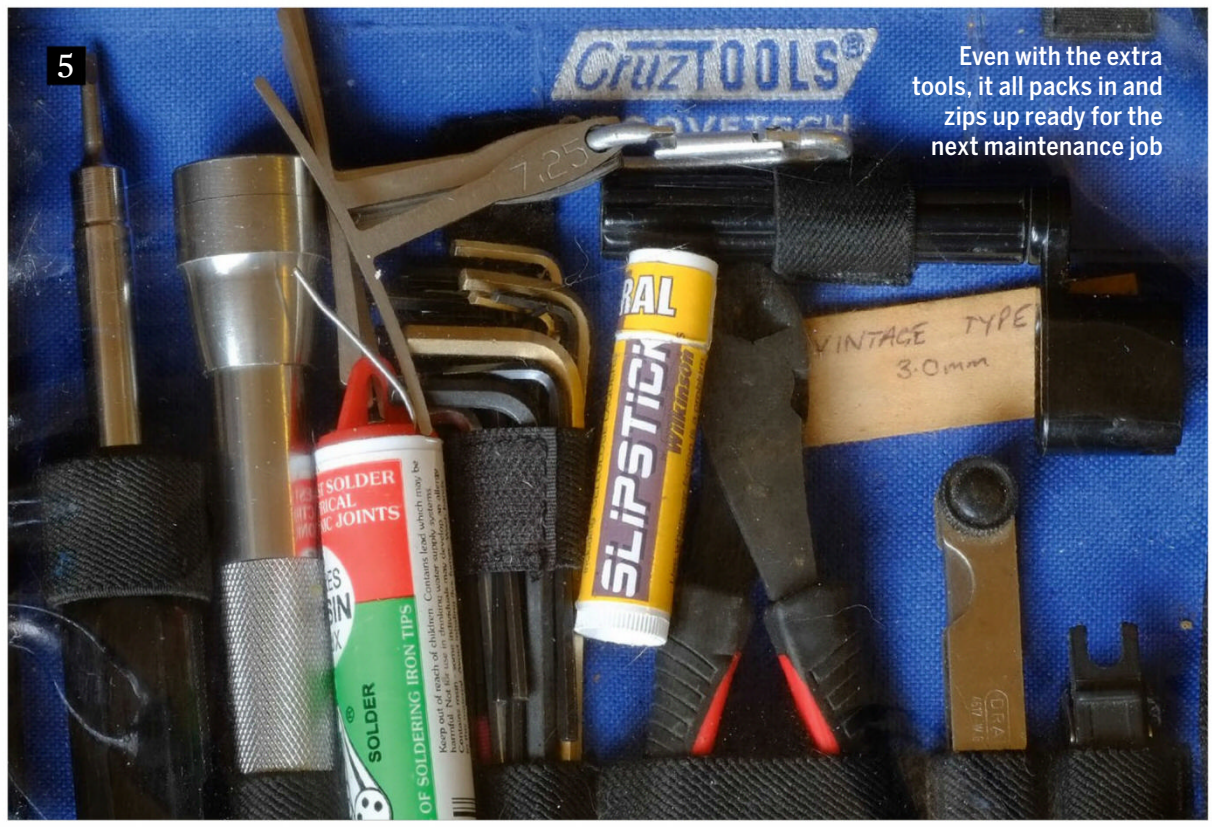
Wedged between the tools are under-string radius gauges (again StewMac), Wilkinson SlipStick and Ersin Multicore solder. And, yes, packed it might be, but it still zips up, nice and tidy. I have to admit my original kit was donated to the cause probably 15 years ago; they currently retail around £49, which is money well spent if you're starting out on this lark.

Of course, there are plenty of other tools and gizmos to aid your set-up work, not least a neck cradle and mat. Music Nomad donated one of its Premium Work Mats and 5-in-1 Cradle Cube neck supports (expect to pay around £40) as my old one was worn out. Again, this would be money well spent.

A good set of needle files is invaluable, particularly for nut and saddle work, and I still use just four nut files (for the low four strings) and an X-Acto razor saw for the top two strings [pic 6]. Pukka nut file sets can be very expensive, but the combination of these basic four files and the ability to roll them in the grooves, along with occasional help from round needle files, means you can do most common guitar gauges without issue.

I wouldn't say this kit is used daily, but it's pretty close – essential tools for very little outlay. Of course, there are plenty more in The Mod Squad's now rather crammed toolbox, but for general maintenance and setup this little collection is invaluable. G

Our well used and expanded CruzTools kit



Even with the extra tools, it all packs in and zips up ready for the next maintenance job

Needle files, nut files and a razor saw expand our minimal kit

LOVE TO PLAY GUITAR?

Guitar Techniques with moving tab synched to quality audio is available for iOS and Android

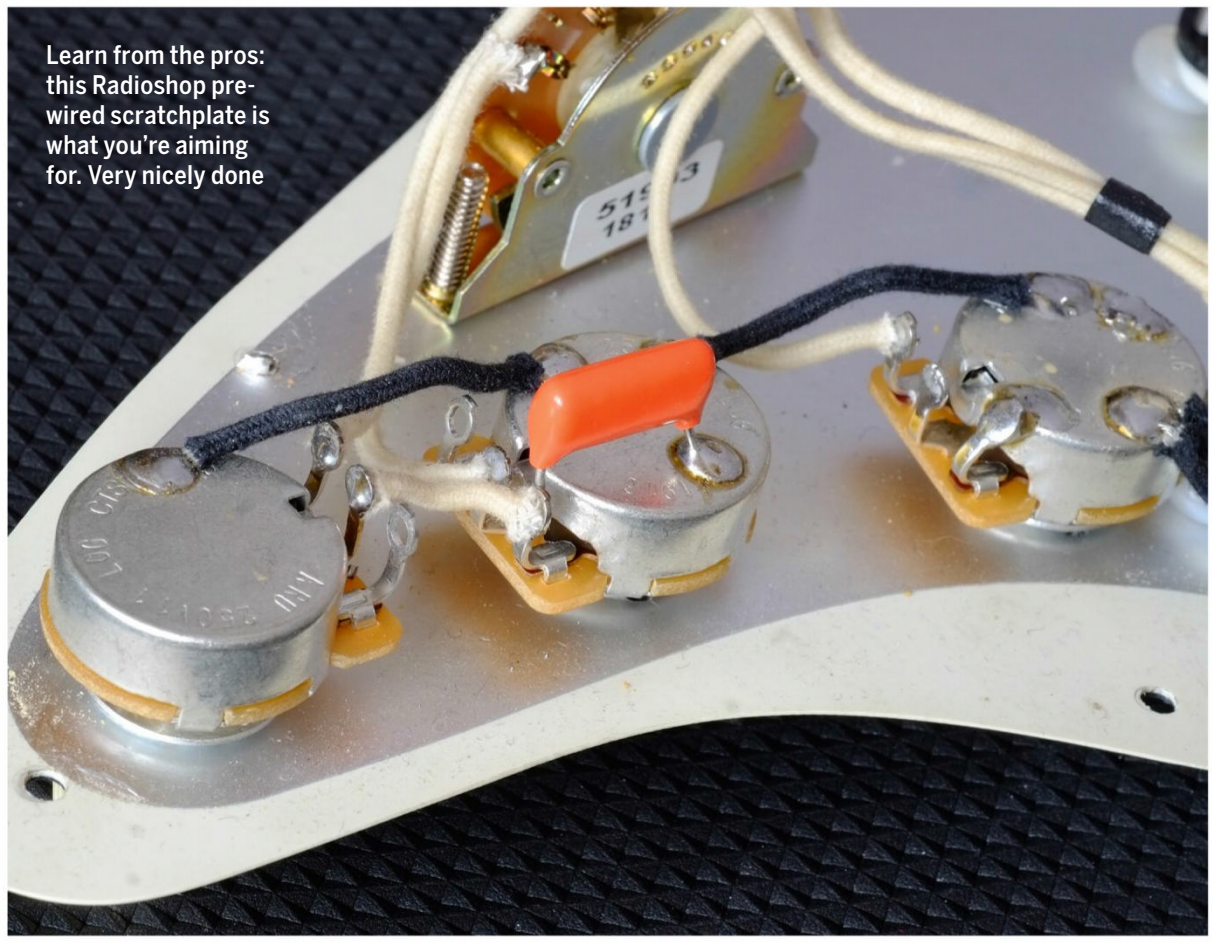
Then get properly serious with the world's finest tuition-only magazine. Every issue's packed with blues, rock, jazz, classical and folk lessons from the very best tutors, all with audio and backing tracks.

Print, digital and print/digital bundle offers at www.magazinesdirect.com

ON SALE NOW!

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Not sure how to get your solder flowing? Dave Burrluck has a few tips


Learn from the pros: this Radioshop pre-wired scratchplate is what you're aiming for. Very nicely done

Q Hello! I really love the mag and in particular... well, all of it really. So, I've got an old Strat and wanted to put some new pots on it and, actually, the five-way switch needed replacing, too, so I thought why not do the whole bit? Not as easy as I thought because after soldering, etc, I realised that my iron was shot and not hot enough. I'm usually not bad at soldering. Do you have a copy of the mag showing details of a rewire? I look at The Mod Squad hoping for some tips... maybe I just missed it? Thanks again.
Steve, via email

A Hi Steve. We took the decision when we started The Mod Squad to focus on themes and indeed the culture of guitar modding. It is not intended to be a step-by-step 'how-to-do-it' column. Why? Well, because there are plenty of those in videos and tutorials on the internet. It's the same with wiring diagrams: virtually every pickup maker has that resource covered, and many guitar makers, too.

The majority of soldering you'll do on a guitar is pretty basic stuff. Possibly the most tricky is soldering in a mini-toggle switch, especially one of those rather good CTS switched pots that have a small PCB-like connection board. If you're new to soldering, I'd advise you avoid those until you feel a bit more confident.

> "There's no right or wrong way really, but I like to follow the simple signal path"

As for soldering irons, I use two. For most connections, a small 25-watt soldering iron is all you'll need. For soldering an earth wire to the back of a pot, or resoldering a pickup cover onto a pickup, I use a larger 60-watt iron. Both are from RS Components.
To keep the soldering iron tips in good condition, occasionally wipe the ends with a damp cloth and apply some solder, which will 'tin' the tip.

As to hook-up wire, I always use the pre-tinned Gavitt vintage 22 gauge cloth-covered wire because, apart from its boutique-y style, it's really easy to work with. I'd recommend one colour for your hot signal path and another colour for your ground. Plastic-covered wire is fine, but you'll need to strip the insulation at the ends, twist the bare-wire and 'tin' it; that cloth covered wire is pre-tinned and you just pull back the cloth covering before you solder in place.

As for solder, well, that's a debate in itself, but personally I use Ersin Multicore. A tube of that will last for numerous projects and it's easier to use than the lead-free type, although that's your choice.

I like to start with new pots and switches, too, although obviously you can use functioning older parts. A Strat is pretty easy to wire up because you have everything mounted on the scratchplate. So, with your components loaded on, you can start work.

There's no right or wrong way really, but I like to follow the simple signal path: that's pickups to the switch, switch to volume and then the switch to the tone controls, and finally connect the ground wires from the back of the volume pot to the tone controls – and don't forget to solder the bridge grounding wire. If the wire isn't pre-tinned, like the pickup leads, you'll need to cut the ends neatly with some wire cutters then twist the strands. Hold the wire to the small iron for two seconds then apply the solder, which should immediately flow, and let it cool – don't blow on it. Place the wire into the switch or pot lug, heat, apply solder, which should flow, and let it cool. For those ground connections on the pot I usually apply some solder first to the back then sit the wire on that solder, and you might need to hold the wire while it cools with a small blade screwdriver or similar.

Once everything is working, simply connect a lead to the output jack and plug it into an amp then lightly tap each pickup with a small blade screwdriver. While you do that, check the volume and the tones are working. You'll probably need to tidy those pickup leads with a couple of small cable ties so they'll fit the body route – you can use small pieces of thinner wire to act as a cable tie if you don't have any.

Learning to solder is a valuable skill and, as ever, the more you do, the easier it becomes and you'll find your own process. Of course, there are plenty of suppliers of pre-wired circuits and complete scratchplates for your Strat, and we probably all have mates who might be handy with a soldering iron, or there's your local repair person who'll make swift work of all the above. 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.

Guitarist

Official Apparel Store

Premium Garments For Pickers

Wear your passion for six-strings with pride, with our new line of *Guitarist*-branded premium cotton tees – available in a range of cool colours and classic designs

https://bit.ly/guitaristmerch

ClassicGear

Japanese-made and US-inspired, this hot-rodded solidbody is a modern classic

Ibanez JEM

The Ibanez brand goes back a long way, specifically to late 19th century Spain with luthier Salvador Ibáñez (1854-1920). But it was the American guitar wizard Steve Vai who really put the name on the map with the launch of his now classic JEM signature solidbody at the NAMM Show in 1987. At the heart of it all is the Japanese Hoshino company who, in 1929, began importing Ibáñez classical guitars soon after the instrument became popular there. Unfortunately, the original Valencian Ibáñez workshop was destroyed in the late 1930s during the Spanish Civil War, at which point Hoshino began making acoustic guitars itself in Japan under the Ibanez brand.

From the late 50s, in the wake of rock 'n' roll, Hoshino began marketing electric guitars for export and the domestic market under a variety of names, outsourcing production to other Japanese factories in addition to manufacturing its own. Among these instruments were guitars branded Ibanez. In the mid-60s, Hoshino took the decision to outsource all guitar manufacturing, with the highly respected Fujigen Gakki factory in Matsumoto becoming its main source by the early 70s.

The pointed-profile Ibanez headstock of the JEM777 was a move away from the Gibson-inspired designs that came before it. Note the body-matching Loch Ness Green finish

At this point, many Ibanez guitars appeared as distinct copies of other brands' designs – a move that was encouraged by overseas distributors who saw the potential in high-quality, cheaper alternatives to more established builders such as Gibson and Fender. In 1972, Hoshino's Ibanez brand was officially trademarked in the United States while a joint venture ensued with American distributor Elger, enabling the firm's roots to spread where it mattered the most.

From the late 70s, Ibanez guitars were increasingly spotted in the hands of professional players such as Eddie Van Halen who played a heavily modded Ibanez Destroyer model (inspired by the late-50s Gibson Explorer), while Sylvain Sylvain appeared in the *Ibanez Golden Oldie Electric Guitar* catalogue playing a Rocket Roll Sr (a cheeky imitation of Gibson's Flying V). After Gibson's owners, Norlin, eventually acquired a trademark for their guitar headstock profiles in 1975, the situation became litigious and Elger ceased using Gibson-style headstock shapes and names. This move effectively encouraged more original Ibanez designs, including the striking Paul Stanley-endorsed Iceman solidbodies.

Ibanez expanded its influence as more artists came onboard, including George Benson, Bob Weir and Randy Scruggs who were all honoured with their own signature models. As the 80s progressed, guitar technique evolved, with Eddie Van Halen popularising the 'SuperStrat' style of guitar design synonymous with Kramer, Charvel and Jackson. Ibanez worked hard to keep up with the times, eventually approaching one of the hottest players in the world – Steve Vai – in order to collaborate on a brand-new signature model.

As a discerning guitarist with more than a passing interest in guitar design, Vai began working closely with the team at Ibanez. Before long, the Japanese craftspeople presented him with an instrument that surpassed the guitarist's expectations. Mysteriously shrouded in black and watched over by a security guard, Ibanez and Vai's dramatic launch of the JEM777 at the 1987 NAMM Show was met with rapturous applause as the now classic guitar design was unveiled. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Ibanez JEM

December 1986
Steve Vai & Ibanez collaborate

June 1987
Steve Vai signature JEM777 launched: Loch Ness Green, Desert Sun Yellow & Shocking Pink finishes

1988
JEM777 (Desert Sun Yellow, Black) & JEM77FP (Floral Pattern) versions with rosewood/vine inlay 'boards

1990
U77 Universe: 7-string Vai signature

1996
JEM10TH (10th anniversary): bound ebony/vine 'board, Black finish, engraved metal pickguard

1998
JEM90HAM (Hoshino 90th anniversary): ebony 'board, textured blue finish, mirrored scratchplate

2000
JEM2KDNA: rosewood/vine 'board, swirl finish made with Vai's blood

2003
JEM-JR aka JEM333: rosewood/dot 'board; budget model

2007
JEM20TH (20th anniversary): transparent acrylic body, LED lights, rosewood/vine 'board

2017
JEM777 (30th anniversary): reissue of original '87 model

1987 Ibanez JEM777LG

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Six-digits stamped onto neckplate; first two digits indicate year, eg 87XXXX = 1987; limited edition of 777 instruments hand-signed and numbered by Steve Vai

2. HEADSTOCK
Pointed profile; JEM script logo; bold black Ibanez 'tick' logo; matching Loch Ness Green finish

3. BODY
Stratocaster-style; basswood; offset double-cutaway; forearm, belly and neck joint contours; Monkey Grip handle hole; Lion's Claw vibrato cavity; Loch Ness Green finish

4. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS
DiMarzio: two DP151 PAF Pro humbuckers (bridge/neck) and DP150 custom single coil (middle); master volume and tone pots; five-way selector switch (positions 2 and 4 split humbucker with middle pickup); side-mounted jack

5. HARDWARE
Cosmo Black: six individual Gotoh tuners; single-bar string guide; Top Lok III locking nut; locking bridge two-point Edge vibrato system; two metal strap buttons

6. PLASTICS
Black truss rod cover; three-ply (b/w/b) scratchplate; pink switch tip; yellow knobs (marked 'volume' and 'tone'); two black rear control cavity covers

7. NECK
Single-piece maple; shallow profile (43mm nut width/19mm deep at 1st fret/21mm deep at 12th fret); 25½-inch scale; maple fretboard; 24 frets (21 to 24 scalloped); 6100 Jim Dunlop fretwire; Disappearing Pyramid coloured fretboard markers

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This trendsetter was one of the first Strats with a rosewood 'board and Fiesta Red finish

Bill Carson's '59 Fender Stratocaster

This 1959 model features experimental features such as a rosewood 'board and gold hardware

"Bill Carson [1926-2007] was a well-renowned guitarist who helped design the Stratocaster alongside Leo Fender. He was particularly involved with the guitar's body contouring. And this is a very special guitar. It's one of the first slab-'boards and one of the first Fiesta Red Strats Fender produced. It also has gold hardware and comes with handwritten letters from Bill Carson. He hand-shaped the neck himself and his name is written in block letters on the heel – they didn't want it to get mixed up with the other necks in the factory.

"Fiesta Red was a big colour in the UK because of the Hank Marvin connection, and this is one of the early salmon-y looking Fiesta Red guitars. Before Fiesta Red, red Fender custom colour guitars were generally Fullerton Red, which is a different colour. Unfortunately, Bill didn't really take to the colour as he thought it was too feminine for his liking.

"This guitar was fitted with gold hardware throughout, including the truss rod nut and backplate screws. The gold ashtray bridge cover is in the original 'burnt orange'-lined brown Fender case along with the two letters written by Bill Carson on Fender-headed paper dated February 1996. The first letter reads: 'Per our conversation, my inspection of the Fiesta Red Strat during the January '96 NAMM show, this assembly definitely proved to me it was originally an instrument I put together for myself... The extra-skinny neck was from my own hand-sanding to fit my particular playing style... I believe the instrument was given to Neil Levang for TV reasons and TV exposure.' (Neil Levang [1932-2015] was a Fender endorsee and famously played guitar on *The Lawrence Welk Show*.)

"The follow-up letter reads: 'I thought you might find it interesting to know that this one was in a batch of our first attempt to do rosewood fretboards. That was another reason I didn't particularly like the guitar. I've always preferred maple necks with a lacquer finish.'

"The neck is exceptionally thin. I spent a bit of time playing it and I thought I'd hate it, but after the first few minutes I said, 'Wow! This is really quite comfortable.' You get to play some intricate chords that way. Because it's a '59 it doesn't have a neck date, but if it was a later heel-stamped guitar [from '62 onwards] I would think it would have been marked as an 'A' neck. The nut is very narrow. 'B' is the common [1 5/8 inch] nut width. I've had about half a dozen wider [1 ¾ inch] 'C' necks in my life, and I've seen thinner [1 ½ inch] 'A' necks on a couple of Stratocasters before. They did offer an 'A' neck in the catalogue with a smaller nut width, but barely anyone ordered it.

> "Bill Carson hand-shaped the neck himself and his name is written on the heel"

"Red Fender guitars from the 50s are probably not Fiesta Red; Fullerton Red was the colour before [it]. I have several Fullerton Red guitars at the moment. It was named Fullerton Red because of George Fullerton and is more orange-looking than Fiesta Red.

"When I met Bill Carson years ago, he told me [Fender] mixed every batch of Fiesta Red in-house. It was basically white paint with red added, but only half a drop would make a tremendous difference to the end result. It varied greatly, as we all know. Fiesta can be all over the place. Eventually, they added more red to the mix. From '59 to '63, Fiesta Red was a pinker, more salmon-like colour. By '64 it's a completely different colour to how it looked between '59 and '63.

"Before Fiesta Red, Fender had the Fullerton Red and they also used Roman Red, which is a little deeper looking. There is some overlap as they occasionally used Roman Red up until at least '62 on guitars they sent out as Dakota Red. But it's plain as day which one's which because there's a huge difference between Roman Red and Dakota Red. Roman is lighter and brighter.

"Most of the time, Fiesta Red was shot over a Desert Sand-type of colour or white primer. There are also Fiesta Red guitars painted over sunburst finishes – both in the US and the UK, like the Selmer guitars. Sometimes, Fiesta Red is shot right over the Fullerplast [grain filler]. I think when production was high, they eliminated a step in order to get the guitars out as quickly as possible. They didn't always have time to undercoat custom colours. Occasionally, they didn't have time to clearcoat the top, either. That's why you sometimes see Olympic White guitars with no fade to yellow; the clearcoat is what turns yellow, not the colour coat.

"So, not only is this guitar one of the first Fiesta Reds but it's also one of the very first rosewood-'board Strats. This is truly an amazing guitar with some cool experimental features." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com

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

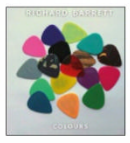
Getting Out Of The Box

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

IT WOULD BE MISLEADING to deny how useful the five pentatonic shapes are when mentally mapping out the fretboard. However, as with any shape or scale, there is a risk of feeling 'boxed' into a safe zone, both in terms of melody and the physical patterns we come to habitually play. When we've played the same licks to the point of over-familiarity (even though they most likely still sound great to others), it can be a good idea to take back the initiative and break some habits.

There are various ways we can approach this: adding in chord tones, extra notes from the major or minor scales, or referencing the CAGED chord/arpeggios that lurk within the pentatonic boxes. The option I'm predominantly taking in this solo is replacing the pentatonic 'box' approach with lots of linear movement up and down the fretboard, facilitated by long and short slides. To be clear, the solo does actually not deviate much from the pentatonic at all in terms of note content – it just uses more linear patterns along the strings.

This 'horizontal' approach leads you to think of phrasing and technique in a very different way. There are still some string bends, but with the legato feel coming from the slides, I felt less compelled to rely on bends as automatically as I would playing within the more constricted pentatonic 'box' shapes. Though I've made occasional use of the whammy bar, this isn't essential. I've gone with a hybrid approach on the picking hand, using fingers more often than a pick, but the reason for this is more to do with stepping outside my own personal habits than any necessity – though it is certainly handy for playing the doublestop phrases clearly. Hope you enjoy and see you next time!

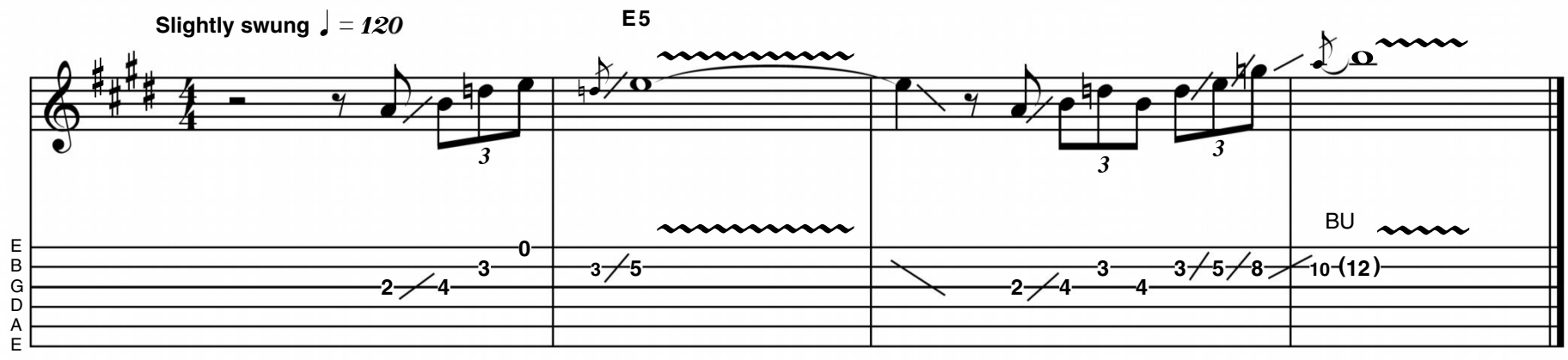


Richard Barrett's new album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

When it comes to playing the blues, Chris Buck takes the linear approach

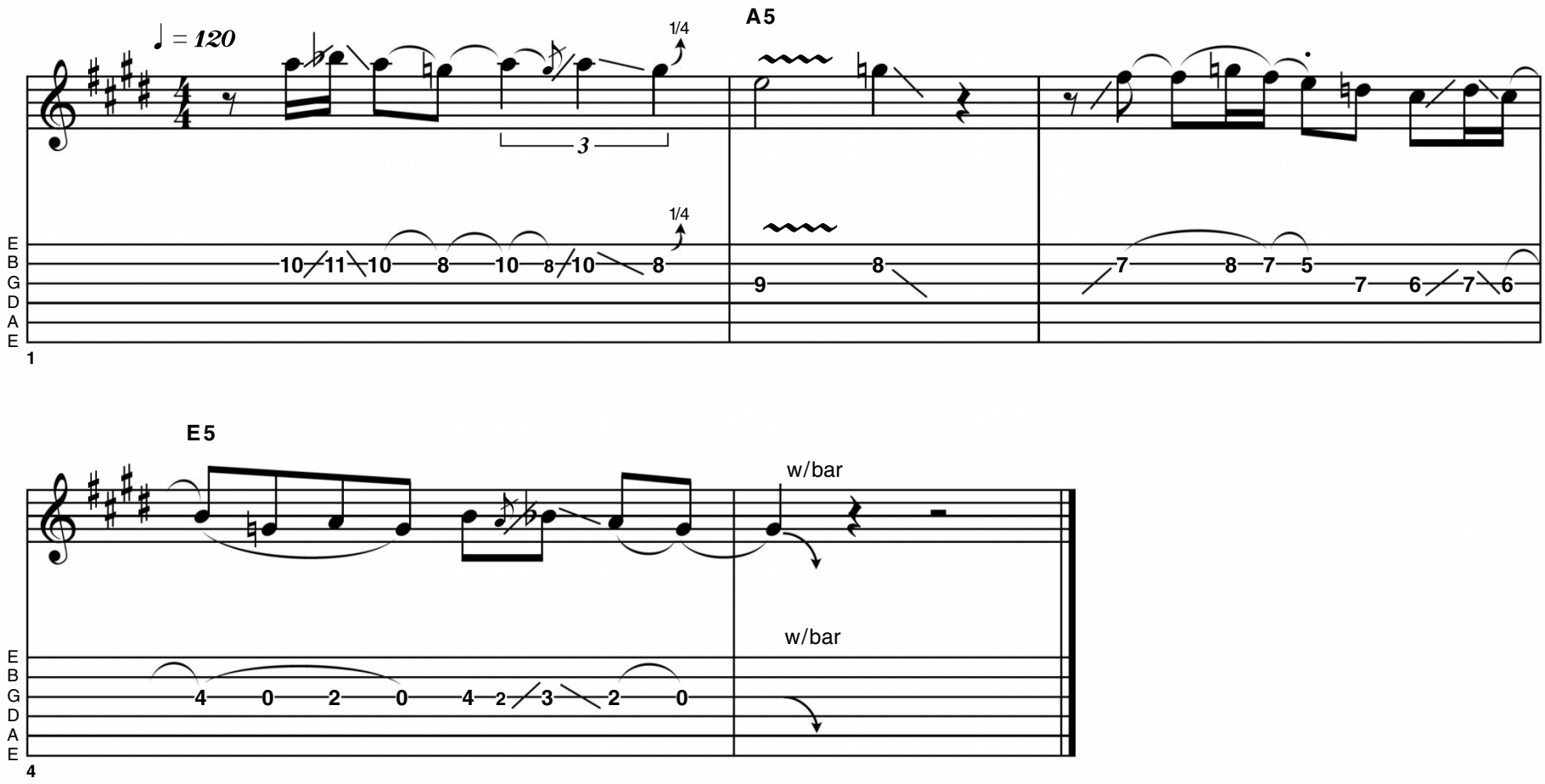
Example 1

STARTING WITH A FAIRLY CONVENTIONAL BLUES LICK, most of the melodic/pentatonic content is happening on the second string. It's pretty easy to spot shapes 1 and 2 of the E minor pentatonic here, but the shapes become less obvious in bar 2 where some more overt sliding action happens. We shift rapidly between shapes 1, 2, 3 then 4 where the final bend occurs. Definitely 'outside the box' in terms of phrasing, but they are still a useful reference.



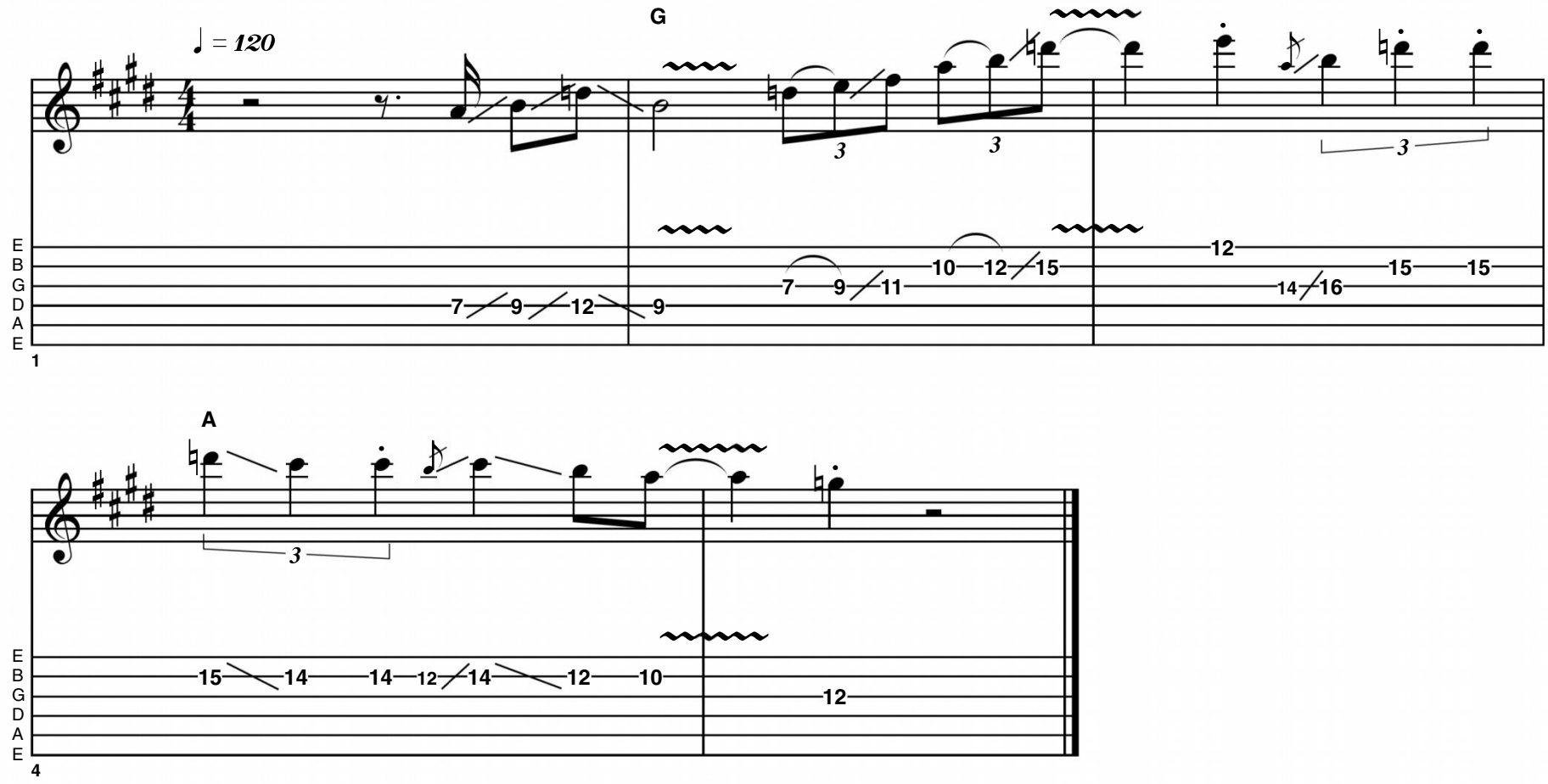
Example 2

SLIGHTLY MORE STATIC HERE BUT STILL AVOIDING conventional 'shape'-based playing overall. This is enhanced by using slides to achieve a legato effect instead of string bends. I'm making use of the third string to play a descending line at the end of the phrase, bringing the whammy bar into play for a not particularly subtle dive when I reach the lowest-/open-string note. On a fixed-bridge guitar, I would probably put some other kind of slide (up or down) here to finish off the phrase.



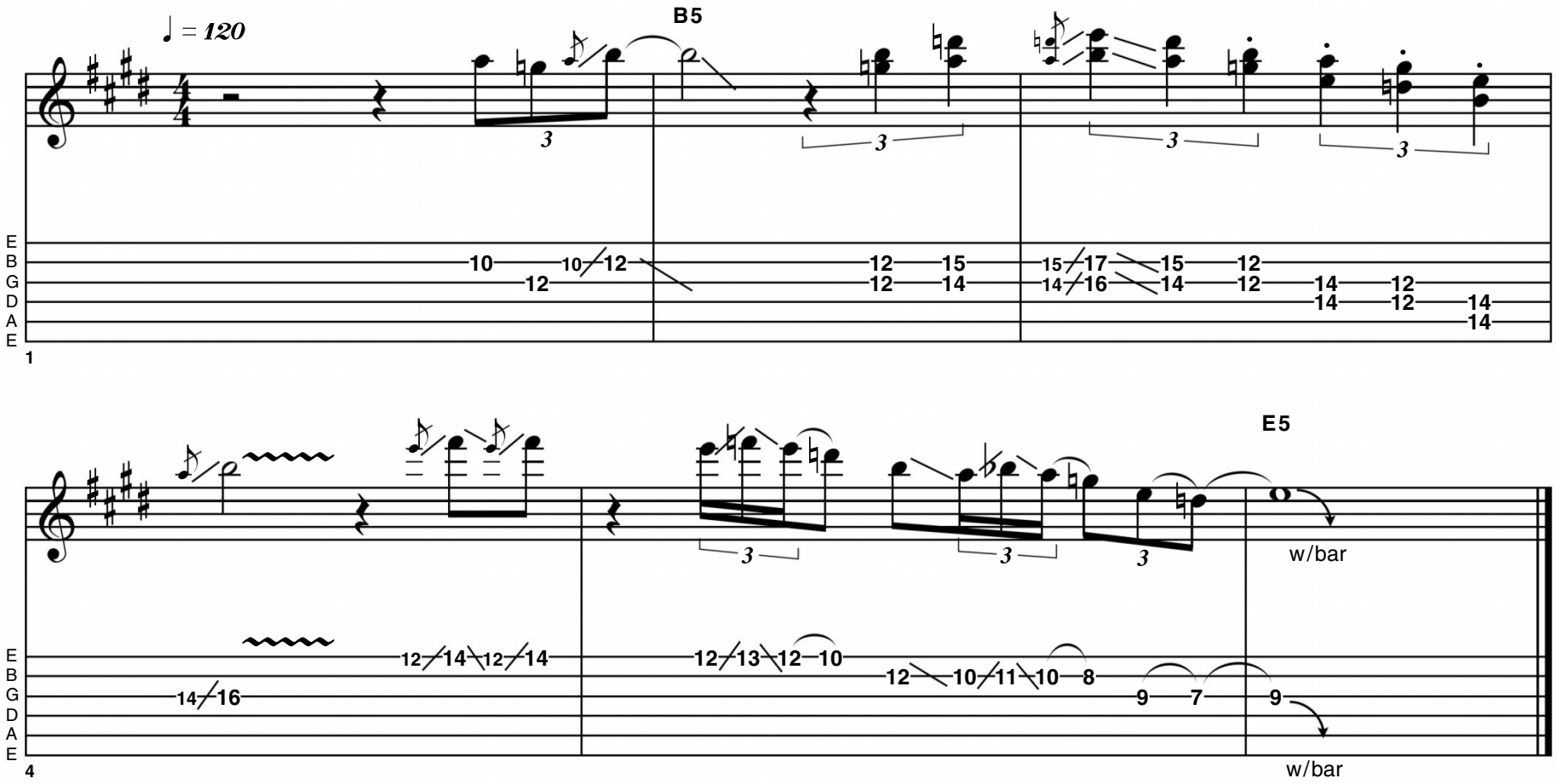
Example 3

I'M CLEARLY WARMING TO THE SUBJECT HERE, using slides up and down the fourth, then up the third and second strings to construct a line leading to the higher register, before lingering on the second string for a more melodic end to the phrase. This mirrors what I might have gone for by using a string bend in more conventional playing, but, as you can see, the same notes can be delivered very differently!



Example 4

THIS FINAL PHRASE BRINGS IN SOME DOUBLESTOPS, which amount to playing two notes of the pentatonic scale at once. Again, string bends are avoided as they can make changing positions quickly more difficult – and, as I said earlier, the slides take a bigger role in creating a slinky, legato feel here. This kind of horizontal approach to scales and/or shapes is often employed by jazz players, who generally use heavier, less compliant strings!



Hear It Here

ERIC JOHNSON
VENUS ISLE

Eric has always managed to put his own unique stamp on the pentatonic by using slides and unusual groupings of notes. This album is full of stunning playing, though the most obvious example is *When The Sun Meets The Sky*, which features a number of beautifully melodic linear solos. Elsewhere, be sure to check out the outro of *All About You*. And for a deep dive into just how far Eric can take this approach, also have a listen to *Camel's Night Out*.

BUCK & EVANS
WRITE A BETTER DAY

A rising star in the guitar world, Chris Buck creates characterful bluesy parts and solos without ever seeming to be 'stuck' in a pentatonic box. His contributions to *Common Ground*, *Ain't No Moonlight* and *Going Home* are all clear examples of what can be achieved by taking a linear approach along the strings. Still plenty of soulful bends, but these are another tool in the box rather than the default when creating smooth legato phrases.

WES MONTGOMERY & WYNTON KELLY TRIO
SMOKIN' AT THE HALF NOTE

As well as catering to the atmosphere of a jazz club in the mid-60s, this album showcases Wes Montgomery's unusual style, blending linear phrases – often using octaves – with amazing bursts of fluency. Note how he creates a legato feel without a single string-bend on tracks *No Blues*, *What's New* and *The Surrey With The Fringe On Top*. A stylistic shift from the other two albums I've cited, but many techniques in common!

SPORT

TECH

The Perfect Christmas Gift

from just £6

MUSIC

HOBBIES

SUBSCRIBE NOW

SAVE UP TO 41%

- *Give the gift that keeps on delivering*
- *Over 80 magazines to choose from*
- *Free delivery straight to your door*

www.magazinesdirect.com/xm21

Terms and conditions: Offer closes 31/12/2021. Savings are based on the newsstand cover price. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue in the UK, and up to 8 weeks for overseas. All gift subscriptions wil start post-Christmas with the next available issue. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. For fu terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enqui ies please email help@magazi nesdirect.com.

Guitarist

Nextmonth

PHOTO BY PATRICK BALLS AND MARTIN GRIFFIN

GENESIS

Is the current 'Last Domino?' tour really the final curtain call for the band? Mike Rutherford sheds some light

KK DOWNING

The release of new album, *Sermons Of The Sinner*, sees the ex-Judas Priest guitarist back in action

GORDON SMITH

The Gatsby is the company's first offset model in the Jazzmaster tradition. Does it measure up? We find out…

Next issue on sale 12 November 2021

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

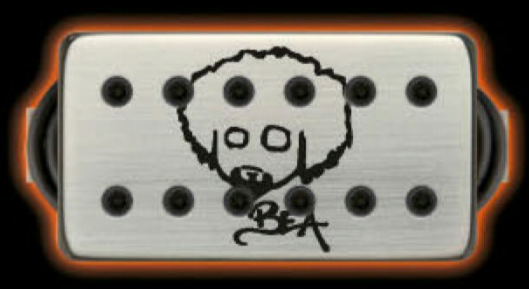
Want instant access to *Guitarist*?

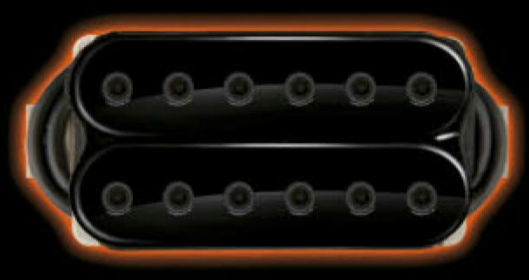
Go digital from just £2.20 an issue!

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI

RABEA MASSAAD

SIGNATURE SILO HUMBUCKERS





‘I need a pickup with the ability to create glassy, ambient leads and warm, clear chord tones. Equally I need it to sound crushingly heavy and aggressive. The Silo humbuckers give me everything I need and more. I couldn’t be happier.’

Rabea

launch your tone into the ambient-sphere

Photo: Max Taylor-Grant

Bare Knuckle

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

PURE GRETSCH

ELECTROMATIC®

1939

SOUND OF HONOR

G5622 ELECTROMATIC® CENTER BLOCK

GRETSCH

GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. Gretsch® and Electromatic® are trademarks of Fred W Gretsch Enterprises, LTD, and used herein under license. All rights reserved.

9001

9000