2022 GUIDE FEATURING 78 NEW GUITARS, AMPS & EFFECTS
PLUS GEAR TRENDS & GUITAR TONE INNOVATION

Guitarist

Issue 483

APRIL 2022

THE NEW

GEAR

EDITION

INTERVIEWS

JOE SATRIANI

WARREN HAYNES

MOLLY TUTTLE

BILLY BRAGG

& MORE

PLUS

DUMBLE AMPLIFIERS TRIBUTE FEATURE

EPIPHONE '61 SG REVIEW

VINTAGE GOLDTOPS

FUTURE

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Old & New

This month's cover feature on 2022's GAS-inducing crop of new guitars reminded me of a recent experience that taught me something. With an acoustic EP to record, I bought myself a Martin DR Centennial, an Adirondack spruce-topped limited-edition dreadnought the Pennsylvania company made for just one year in 2016. Happy with my new purchase – which sounded and played just as I'd hoped – I decided to sell on my longtime workhorse dreadnought, a Yamaha LL16. I'd had it for well over a decade and it had mellowed nicely. In a quiet way, it was probably the guitar I played the most at home. All the same, I put it up for sale and soon enough a young chap asked if he could pop round to try it. "Of course," I said. I told him I'd also be happy to put a new set of phosphor bronzes on it in his favourite gauge, too.

Later that week, the young gent came round with his girlfriend, excited to try the Yam. I must admit to a pang of regret when I played the guitar with its new strings on, however: it sounded fabulous, rich and full of time-mellowed tone. But the young man was a great player and clearly fell in love with the guitar while he was testing it out. I knew instinctively my old Yam had found the right new home – and I sold it to him, both buyer and seller satisfied.

The lesson? Well, the Martin has raised my fingerstyle game and it sounds every inch a classic dread. I'm the proudest of new owners. But I must admit, I'd underappreciated the Yamaha, so familiar that it became mundane – and yet a super guitar. So when you buy new gear, don't forget what trusty old friends still have to offer. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Gold Standard
Rod Brakes examines the gilded history of Gibson's early Lesters via a stunning pair of rare 1956 & 1957 Goldtops on **p132**

Eric Krasno
His chops combine BB with Grant Green – while his songwriting is soulful and sharp. Meet LA's hottest R&B picker on **p52**

Molly Tuttle
The new album from one of the world's premier flatpickers is a richly rewarding listen. Hear how the sessions unfolded on **p32**

IMAGES ABOVE: GOLDTOPS PHOTO BY PAIGE DAVIDSON; ERIC KRASNO PHOTO BY LELAND HAYWARD; MOLLY TUTTLE PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

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- Mark Lettieri

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Neil Godwin

COVER FEATURE

THE NEW GEAR EDITION

56 Feast your eyes on 78 of this year's hottest guitars, amps and effects as we dive into the big gear trends, discover the latest innovations in tone, and welcome a new age for British guitar manufacturing

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EPIPHONE 1961 LES PAUL SG STANDARD
£749

WHAT IS IT? Affordable take on Gibson's pointy-horned replacement to its original solidbody single-cut

Horns Of Plenty

Another new Epiphone model enters the fray, promising the looks, sound and playability of its USA Gibson cousin at a fraction of the price

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

The Gibson SG, perhaps rather like Fender's Jazzmaster, the Rickenbacker 330 or even Gretsch's 6120, is one of those guitars that most of us think, "I really should get one of those." Yet as often than not these fine instruments stay languishing on the shelf in favour of another Strat, Tele or Les Paul. Well, if Epiphone's recent form continues with this incarnation of the mother brand's pointy-horned wonder, perhaps now might be the time for that to change.

The SG's entry to the market was somewhat controversial, since initially it bore Les Paul's moniker, but the legendary musician, electronics genius and inventor didn't like the guitar. He thought it was too flimsy and demanded Gibson remove his name. Hence the birth of the 'Solid Guitar' (SG) in 1961. But by the time of Les's request quite a few 'SG' Les Pauls had been shipped and the model's rarity has made it sought after and collectible. Now, the Epiphone-badged remake at just £749, including a brown 'Lifton' style case, brings the model's many charms to the masses at a fraction of the cost of an original, or even a Gibson Custom Shop version.

Utilising identical electronics and hardware to the outgoing guitar, the SG-style Les Paul's looks (we'll simply call it SG from now on) were so radically different that it was to all intents and purposes a completely different

RHYTHM
TREBLE
VOLUME
VOLUME
TONE
TONE

1. The small 60s-style Epiphone headstock is far more akin to Gibson's and so works well here

2. Attractively grained Indian laurel is a great rosewood alternative. Note the pearloid trapezoid inlays

3. The SG's control cover shows the longtime kinship between the two great companies

4. The pickup rings' end sections are a noticeable smidgen wider than on standard surrounds. Note the neck join

instrument. Gibson created a striking, heavily chamfered 31mm (1.25-inch) mahogany body and mated it to a mahogany neck that joined the body at the last of its 22 frets. On the originals, the body and neck were each one piece of Honduran mahogany, now a restricted species, so our Epiphone has a two-piece body of unspecified mahogany, while the neck is a single piece of the same. The fingerboard is Indian laurel, a most attractive rosewood alternative and rather nicer than the indifferent 'ginger' stuff so often found on instruments these days.

Les did have a point about the SG's sturdiness, or lack of it. Even though the guitar features a long tenon that runs deep into the body, the routing for the neck pickup removes much of it, leaving the instrument vulnerable at that point – just as it is at the headstock, that other notorious danger area. However, this very lightness of construction made it a stunningly playable guitar, and lent it a set of tones quite distinct from that of its heftier forbear.

The SG Standard also carried over the bound 22-fret fingerboard with trapezoid inlays in faux pearl, just as we find here. Epiphone has retained the beautifully

Epiphone has gone to town on the SG's hardware and electronics

dimensioned medium C-profile neck, and our guitar is also faithful to the original with its small pickguard – later 60s versions, such as Angus Young's, featured the larger one that covered much of the body and offered cheaper production since the pickups were mounted on it. Due to the guitar's pointed top horn it was not practical to mount the strap button there, so instead we find it on the back, by the heel. This has always made the guitar's balance on a strap something of a compromise and, with the unusual 22nd-fret neck join, helped to push the fingerboard off to the player's left (on right-handed instruments). However, we've never heard Angus, Pete Townshend, Eric Clapton or any other famous SG player complain about it; they simply worked around the problem and got on with playing.

As we've seen with several of the Epiphones we've looked at recently – notably the superb Joe Bonamassa 'Lazarus' Les Paul and BB King 'Lucille' models – Epiphone has gone to town on the SG's hardware and electronics. Our bridge is the excellent LockTone tune-o-matic that stays in place with or without string tension and is said to offer better tone transfer to the body and pickups. Tuners are Epiphone Deluxe, based on the Kluson 'keystone' tuners found on the originals. Pickups are the excellent Burstbuckers, a 2 at the neck and the slightly beefier 3 in bridge position. These are controlled by CTS tone and volume pots, and Mallory capacitors, while the output jack is by Switchcraft.

4

The SG bears the usual Gibson-style control layout of two volumes, two tones and three-way pickup switch

The guitar is available in two colours: the Aged Sixties Cherry you see here and which more or less typifies the SG; and the rarer Aged Classic White, which was more often seen on Custom versions but did make its way onto Standards, too. The term 'aged' really just means a slightly matt look, and of course these Chinese-made guitars are finished in polyester rather than the traditional nitrocellulose of Gibsons vintage and modern. They both look great, though, and at this price it would be unfair to get picky – especially when you factor in the premium hardware and electronics.

A couple of final points. The SG carries the excellent 60s 'small' headstock design that's so much more elegant than the previous rather lumpy outline. All plastic ware is black, and the bell-style truss rod features the famous 'Les Paul' script. One tiny thing, though: the pickup surrounds' end pieces (where the mounting and height adjustment screws sit) seem a touch wider than on original vintage SGs of the era and almost every other guitar fitted with humbuckers. It could just be a perceived difference, however – we'd need to take a ruler to an original '61 to be sure.

Feel & Sounds

As mentioned, the SG's 22nd-fret neck join offers total access to the fingerboard. The standard 43mm nut width and medium C-section profile – with a depth of just over 18mm at the 1st fret and 20mm at the 12th – is a wonderland for exploration.

Quality hardware and electrics: Gibson Burstbuckers and Epi's LockTone bridge and tailpiece

Perfectly fretted with medium jumbo wire, it's a completely freeing experience. If you've never played an SG, you might find it slightly daunting at first since the 15th fret seems to be where the 12th used to be. But give it a few minutes and its open and unrestricting nature will have you playing dusty-end licks you'd long since consigned to posterity.

Fortunately, we had two great guitars on hand as sonic comparators: a Tom Murphy aged '57 Les Paul and a Custom Shop '63 reissue ES-335. Preconceptions tell us that the SG should sit somewhere between the two, and with our Blues Junior warmed up there's never been a better time to test the well-worn theory.

Well, without another two pages available to go into specifics, the Epiphone acquits itself remarkably well. It's a little louder and more mid-focused than the ES-335 but not as poised and balanced as the Les Paul, although it does share similarities. Neither has much of the 'honk' that some humbucking guitars exhibit, but both offer rich, clear sounds on any pickup setting – the SG a little more 'quacky' with both Burstbuckers on. While none of the guitars is flabby in the neck position, the Epiphone perhaps comes out as the softest. Whether such comparisons have any merit at all, who knows? All we can say with some certainty is that it would take a vampire bat or a barn owl (the two animals with the best hearing according to Dr Google) to separate them in a recording or stage mix. That said, things we don't spot at review volume can, of course, materialise when playing at stage levels. Overall, though, Epiphone's latest solidbody is unlikely to disappoint.

Epiphone has nailed it again: phenomenal value and it plays extremely well

Verdict

At the risk of sounding like the record's stuck, Epiphone has nailed it again. No, it's not a nitro finish; yes, we're bemused at those visually awkward pickup surrounds; and, of course, it exhibits the playing compromises and advantages of any other SG. But it represents phenomenal value, plays extremely well and stands up sonically to a pair of Gibsons that together outrank it a dozen-fold, price-wise.

There's little more to say apart from, if the idea of an SG has tickled your fancy in the past but you've resisted for one reason or another, make an appointment with your local Epiphone dealer and audition one. Do it in a demo room, make sure you try it on a strap, and if the shop has a full-length posing mirror, check yourself out – that will probably tick the final box! G

EPIPHONE 1961 LES PAUL SG STANDARD

PRICE: £749 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Solid mahogany (two-piece)
NECK: Mahogany, 'medium C' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian laurel, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, Kluson-style vintage tuners – nickel plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson Burstbucker 2 (neck) and Burstbucker 3 (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector, 2x volumes, 2x tones (CTS pots/ Mallory capacitors)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.61/6.75
OPTIONS: No
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Aged Sixties Cherry (as reviewed), Aged Classic White – Aged Gloss

Epiphone
www.epiphone.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Looks, finish, playability, value and Gibson SG attitude; another budget guitar from Epiphone that gives Custom Shop Gibsons a run for their money

CONS Some might struggle with balance and the offset neck position; the pickup rings seem slightly oversized

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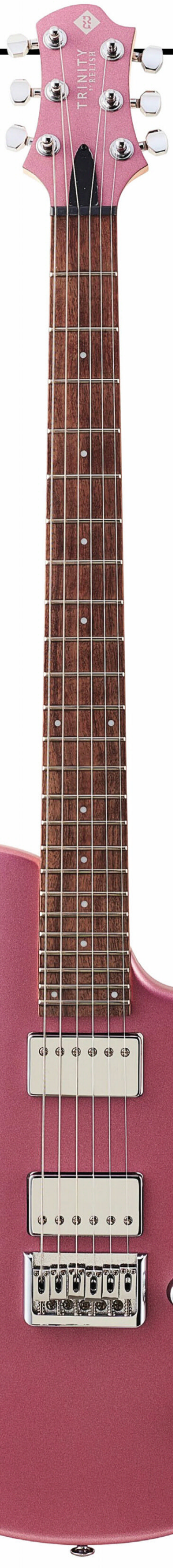
TRINITY BY RELISH
£599

WHAT IS IT? The second version of Relish's Cor-Tek-made pickup-swapping platform in hugely affordable guise

Born Again

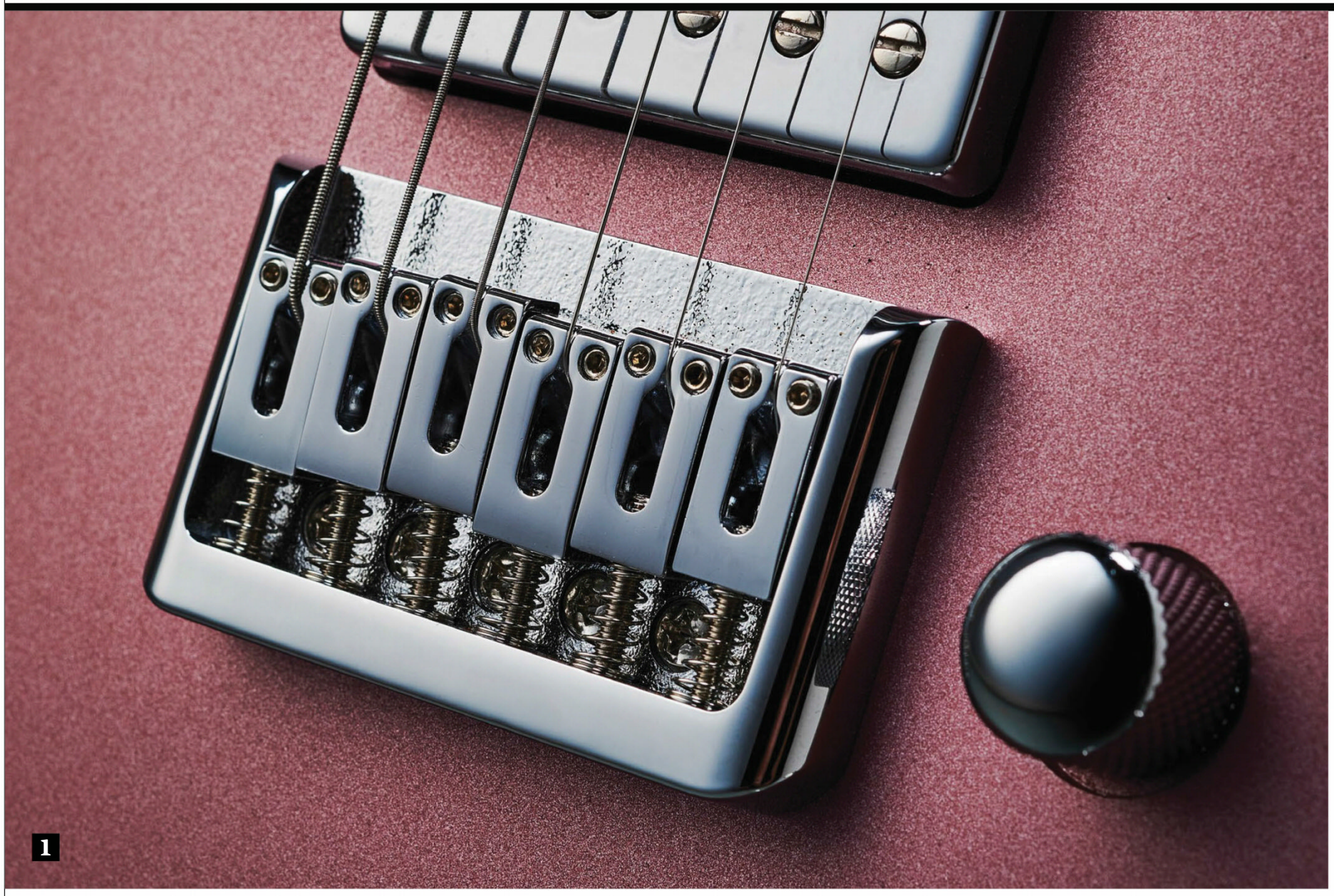
While the majority of guitar makers plunder the past, Relish continues to look forwards. We take the wraps off its most affordable guitar to date

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis



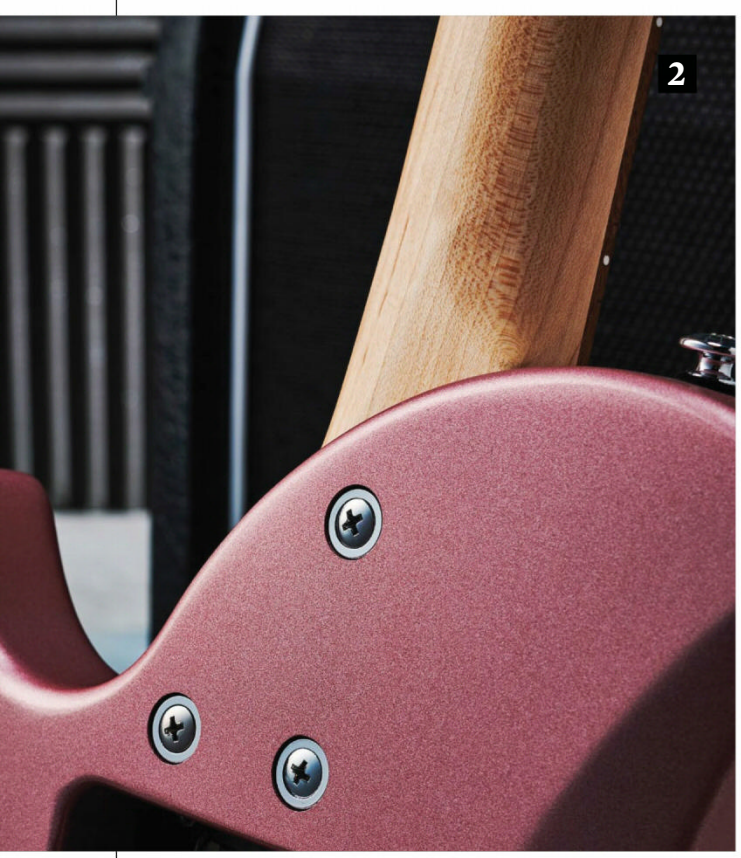
Back at the start of 2021, the only way to experience Relish's patented pickup-swapping feature was to buy the original Trinity by Relish guitar (made in Indonesia by Cor-Tek). This retailed at approximately £1,500 and came with a second set of pickups, or you could move up to one of Relish's Swiss-built guitars that start at around £3k. Sound Affects owner Tim Lobley liked the pickup-swapping concept but was less sure about the saleability of Relish's modern design – and that kickstarted the Cream T Guitar company with pickup-swapping licensed from Relish (see Wishlist, page 26). Meanwhile, Relish itself was working hard on a more affordable version of the Trinity and here it is.

Priced at just £599 (and including a decent gigbag), it's available in a choice of four classy satin colours as opposed to the three gloss colours of the original. And, unlike the earlier version, the new Trinity doesn't come with any additional pickups so you need to budget for those. But apart from that and the satin finish, there's very little difference here. Even taking into account the price of an extra set of pickups, it looks to us like this new guitar is around half the price of the original. Game on!



1. This version of the Trinity uses a slightly larger-footprint bridge with zinc as opposed to stainless-steel saddles. It's a strings-through-body design, like a Telecaster

2. Yes, it's a bolt-on, but it uses only three screws in recessed metal collars. The neck itself is rift-sawn maple; the fingerboard is laurel and the 24 frets are stainless steel



The Trinity remains a straightforward instrument that pays little homage to the usual benchmarks: "If only it was shaped like a Telecaster," we hear you cry. But that's not the way of Relish. In fact, like the high-end Swiss-made guitars we've tested, this lowly Trinity, which retains the brand's distinctive outline with its pointed upper horn, comes across as a blank canvas.

The design centres around a 650mm (25.59-inch) scale maple neck that has a diagonal rift-sawn grain and spliced headstock, and which is topped with a light-coloured laurel fingerboard with 24 well-installed stainless-steel frets and simple small dot inlays. The basswood body has a light camber from side to side, simple rounded edges and a belly-cut on the rear. The controls are rear-mounted so there's no scratchplate, and all the hardware is chrome-plated, including the walled strings-through-body six-saddle bridge and the decent tuners on the relatively small back-angled three-a-side headstock. Simplicity is the key here.

Aside from the finish, what else is different this time? Very little, with the exception of a new version of the walled bridge design we saw initially. "This new bridge has a larger contact area with the top," says Relish's Cédric Leclerc, "and zinc saddles instead of stainless steel, providing a warmer, more pleasant tone and better sustain than any other bridge we have tested, including the previous one."

But clearly that doesn't account for the considerably reduced price of version two: "It's a combination of multiple factors," say Cédric. "Most importantly, we are producing on a much larger scale than before, so the product cost per unit is significantly lower and we are passing on the savings to our customers. The satin finishes have a significantly higher yield than high gloss, further reducing the cost of the product, while being a lot more modern and aligned with our brand image.

> "The new bridge provides a warmer tone and better sustain" ***Cédric Leclerc***

"That new bridge, while offering better performance than our previous bridge, is actually more affordable because it's a standard bridge, while the previous one was custom made. Obviously, not including a second set of pickups directly with the guitar, as you noted, is also providing us with quite significant savings.

"Finally, we have also adapted our internal cost structure to allow us to price our products more competitively by limiting fixed costs and preventing margin dilution. All this put together allows us to sell our product at a much more competitive price."

HOT TO SWAP

It might be the most affordable way to experience Relish's neat pickup swapping, but there's nothing included to swap. What are your choices?

Offering a guitar with the ability to swap pickups but not providing anything to swap it with is a little odd, isn't it? But this concept is well timed because you no longer have to go to Relish directly to order additional pickups.

At the tail end of 2021 and under the umbrella of Sound Affects, Cream T launched its Aurora guitar here in the UK, which also uses Relish's pickup-swapping technology, and you can now buy a number of brands' pickups (including Cream T's, of course) that will drop right into your Trinity by Relish guitar. For example, the cheapest offered at the time of writing is a set of uncovered Seymour Duncan units, such as the JB/Jazz combo at £239. A set of nickel-covered Pearly Gates would cost £329. But if you want a taste of truer BFG tone, Cream T's nickel-covered BFG Bangers cost the same and there are more options from that range.

If you prefer, you could build your collection slowly with single pickup purchases. An obvious choice would be Cream T's single coil The Duchess (£199), scanned from a 1960 Gibson ES-330, available for neck or bridge position. But the beauty of the Relish backplate is you can quickly adjust the height of the pickup to easily fit a 'neck' pickup into bridge position – a handy thing when you're recording, for example.

Tim Lobley tells us Cream T's Thomas Nilsen is working on other single-coil pickups in a humbucking size (possibly available by the time you read this), plus we can expect other premium USA brands to be offered 'Relish housed' shortly, too.

> You can quickly adjust the height of the pickup to easily fit a 'neck' pickup into bridge position

If you're handy with a soldering iron, you can also buy the Relish pickup-swapping backplates (£35 for one, £59 for a set) and fit and wire your own pickups. Once the pickup is mounted it can, of course, swap in and out of the guitar in seconds. Sound Affects also offers a service where the company will fit the backplate for you, to any standard humbucking-sized pickups. This costs £99 for a set or £59 for one, and includes return postage within the UK.

Relish also offers other brands' pickups (including Bare Knuckle) along with free shipping to Switzerland, EU countries and the UK. However, it does state that while "deliveries to Switzerland and EU countries are inclusive of import taxes, duties and VAT, deliveries outside of Switzerland and the European Union do not include import taxes, duties and VAT", so that's something to bear in mind. **[DB]**

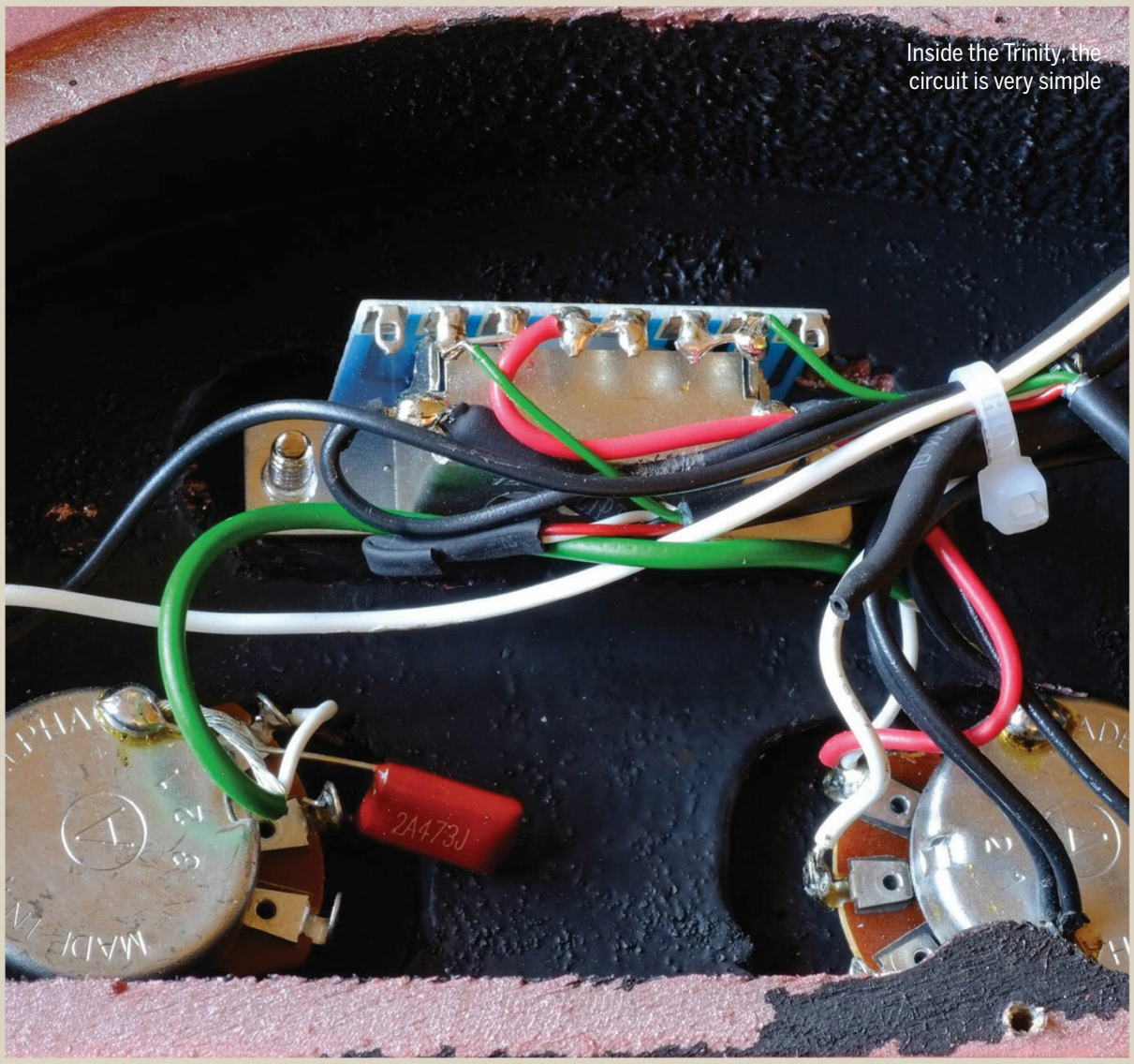
Visit www.creamtpickupsdirect.com for more info or call Sound Affects on 01695 570023

There's no back cover over the large pickup cavities – they're held in place by small magnets, so simply pull out the pickups and push new ones in

UNDER THE HOOD

There's innovation on the outside, but what's inside?

The seemingly oversized rear cavity – nicely screened like the coverplate – is necessary to take the hook-up wires to the central area between the two pickup routs. Despite the innovation in terms of the pickup swapping, the circuit is very standard with 500k ohm Alpha 'Made in Korea' pots and a single 473 code 0.047 microfarads tone capacitor, all wired modern style, and a basic three-way block pickup selector switch. It's not a particularly deep cavity, but there's just enough depth to install a pull-push switched tone pot, for example, to coil-split the four-conductor pickups. You could also easily add a treble bleed capacitor (with or without a resistor) on the volume pot. Simple mods that would extend the sounds from any suitable pickup.



Inside the Trinity, the circuit is very simple

3. The Trinity comes with Relish's XX humbuckers. Both apparently use Alnico V magnets and have measured DCRs of 6.67kohms (neck) and 14.57k (bridge)

Feel & Sounds

As you'd expect, this is a lightweight guitar. It's 2.86kg (6.3lb) and is very comfy when playing seated, although it is slightly neck-heavy when strapped on (but a textured strap cures that). The neck back is untinted satin and has what Relish calls a 'Modern C' profile, which measures 21mm at the 1st fret, filling out to 25mm by the 12th.

Nut width is regular at 41.7mm, with a string spacing of 34.5mm, and a modern string spacing at the bridge of 52.5mm. The fingerboard edges are lightly rolled, the face has a PRS-like 254mm (10-inch) camber and the frets fall into the 'medium jumbo' category, measuring approximately 2.7mm wide with a good height of 1.14mm. There's very slight relief and a string height of 1.5mm on both the high and low E measured at the 12th fret. There are no surprises, but it's very good craft nonetheless.

Unplugged, the Trinity has a pretty lively response with a nice rise to the sustain tail. It comes with a set of Relish XX pickups, wound by Cor-Tek's pickup division, PSE. They certainly deliver, with a nod in the direction of Seymour Duncan's JB at the bridge, and with powerful but not over-egged midrange. The highs are rounder than a lower-output, more classic PAF style, but this is a pickup that will get you right into anything from classic rock onwards.

The neck is well balanced, a little more vintage-y with a vocal-like body and just enough clarity. We could do with a little more sparkle in the mixed pickup position, and you can't help thinking a treble bleed circuit on the volume (and even a pull-push switch on the tone control to split the pickups) would barely increase the price but substantially increase the versatility.

Nothing fancy here, just master volume and tone with a three-way lever pickup selector. The Tele-style control knobs are cleanly recessed into the lightly cambered top

It's worth checking the pickup heights, too. Ours were a little low, but that's easily sorted via that large brass bolt on the back of each pickup's mounting base. Even before we consider the pickup-swapping feature, the Trinity comes across as a very rock-centred everyman guitar.

But swapping the Relish pickups for Cream T's The Duchess at the neck and Original Banger in the bridge position illustrates the potential: jangle with Fender-y bite from the Banger, and jazzy blues from The Duchess. Hey, swap 'em around and there's more Tele-like tone from the Banger now at the neck and, with a little grit, The Duchess produces a rootsy Les Paul Special at the bridge. A sonic Jekyll and Hyde-style transformation in seconds.

Verdict

Step outside the mainstream and into the 'here's something a little different' territory and it's never easy to sum up. Let's have a go. First, Cor-Tek is making some fine and affordable guitars and those are the ones we know about, not least PRS's recent SE Silver Sky, Manson, Strandberg and, of course, its own brand, Cort. You can add this Trinity V2 to the list. While Relish's modernism is likely to scare off the traditionalists, the colours are classy – and we don't all live in the 50s and 60s, do we? Well...

> Even before we consider the pickup-swapping feature, the Trinity comes across as a very rock-centred everyman guitar

The pickup swapping needs some thought, too, but it's there if you need it. Relish's own pickups are certainly on par with the price tag, although it's a shame you can't choose your flavour at purchase from its broad range. Many of us don't think twice about buying a guitar at this price point with the sole purpose of swapping its pickups; here, you can do the swap in seconds without even detuning, let alone faffing around with a soldering iron. Something to consider, particularly if you're into recording.

Cream T's entry into the guitar market with its pickup-swapping Aurora range, and new instruments in development, also gives you further options. Aside from there now being a great service in 'Relish housed' pickups to swap, you can consider trying one of these Cream T models then keeping your extra pickups if you want to upgrade.

The bottom line is that it's a very neat and affordable guitar with serious potential.

TRINITY BY **RELISH**

PRICE: £599 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, modern 'C' shape, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.59")
NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/41.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Laurel, pearloid dot markers, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 24, medium jumbo stainless steel
HARDWARE: Hard-tail 6-saddle bridge w/ through body stringing, enclosed tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Relish XX humbuckers, 3-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone.
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.86/6.3
OPTIONS: None aside from additional pickups (see website for prices)
RANGE OPTIONS: The Swiss-made models also feature the pickup swap concept with a completely different construction. Prices start with Mary at CHF 3,499; the Jane starts at CHF 3,999
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Rose (reviewed), Silver, Ice Blue and Olive Green metallics. Satin body, natural satin neck

Sound Affects
01695 570023
www.relishguitars.ch

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Smart, tidy, simplistic; new bridge, colours and improved price; opens pickup-swapping potential to a wider audience

CONS The trim price means no additional pickups are included so buying extra pickups involves quite an outlay; it'd be nice to see a coil-split switch

VOX BOBCAT S66 & V90 WITH BIGSBY
From £1,414

WHAT IS IT? Stylish Bigsby-equipped versions of Vox's most recent semi-hollows in Black and Blue finishes

Black & Blue

No sooner had we finished testing Vox's Bobcats in 2021, and there's now a pair with Bigsby vibratos and a moodier vibe

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. Aside from the Bigsby additions, different hardware and plastic colours, these Bobcats follow the style of the initial releases, which feature trapeze tailpieces

2. Both guitars feature a weight-relieved spruce centre block, which helps to keep the weight trim for the style, particularly with the vibratos onboard

3. The single-coil pickups here are made by Korean giant G&B and designed by the US G-Rok team headed by legendary designer, Rich Lasner

4. A smart take on a classic outline, the Vox logos are vivid. Although the plating on the tuners is colour-dependent, they're rather good open-back Grovers

5. The knurled-edge knobs on the Bigsby models are black-plated. On the S66 we also get function legends (easily removed) for the three individual pickup volume controls and master tone. The two-pickup V90 has a standard four-control setup

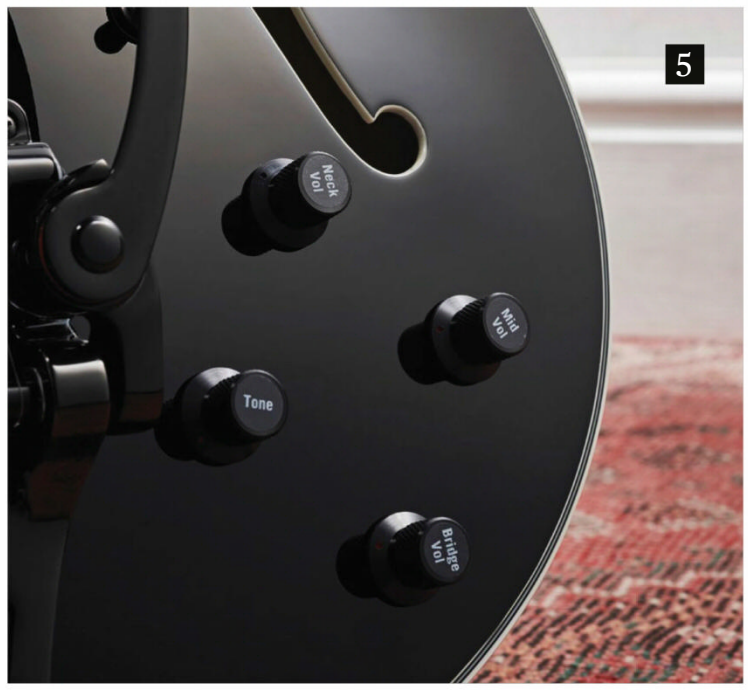
Outwardly, the contemporary Vox Bobcat (based on the Italian-made Vox original from the mid-60s) looks like any other Gibson thinline clone. But, as we discovered back in issue 469, it's a different take on that hallowed design. It retains the 416mm (16.38-inch) width of that classic style, but the scale length is increased to 635mm (25-inch) and the weight-relieved centre block swaps to spruce, narrower under the pickups and fuller widthed from the tune-o-matic bridge to the base and at the neck joint.

While that helped keep those original versions around the 3.2kg (7lb) mark, the addition of a Bigsby only marginally ups the weight and slightly changes the seated balance. The craft is faultless, if a little generic, with both bodies fully bound, including the f-holes – likewise, with the Indonesian ebony fingerboards and the classic-style headstocks.

The other differences are purely cosmetic: both colours come with flashier deeply coloured abalone-like block inlays and headstock logos, while the pickup covers and pickguards change from bright white to black. The Sapphire Blue finish retains the chromed hardware – the Bigsby in its traditional polished-aluminium finish – although the neat knurled aluminium knobs change to a black finish. On the Jet Black version all the hardware, including the Bigsby, change to black.

The three single coils of the S66 make for quite the semi. There's a volume control for each pickup, and a master tone, but only a three-way toggle pickup selector. In effect, it functions like a two-pickup guitar and you just roll in the middle pickup to any of the switch selections. Cross a Strat with an ES-335 and you get the picture. There are some cool sounds and lovely sparkle with the middle pickup added or more direct without. The addition of the Bigsby adds perfect shimmer – and if you live for blues or rockabilly, you'll be at home.

The V90 appears more standard, except the pickups feature rod magnets rather than the usual adjustable poles of the soapbar style. It's a more direct drive, too; it has a slightly brighter, more percussive note attack married with a little more width. Like the S66 it really suits the Bigsby addition. These might look like anyone else's thinline clones, but it's the sounds that give them their own place. Our only quandary is which one we prefer!



VOX BOBCAT S66 & V90 WITH BIGSBY

PRICE: £1,514 (in Jet Black inc case); £1,414 (in Sapphire Blue inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double-cutaway centre-blocked thinline semi-hollow electric
BODY: Laminated maple w/ weight-relieved spruce centre-block
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/42.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Indonesian ebony, block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic style bridge with Bigsby B70 (Blue) or B700 (Black), Grover open-back tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: (S66) 3x Vox S66 single coils, individual pickup volume controls and master tone; (V90) 2x Vox V90 soapbar single coils, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): (S66) 3.42/7.5; (V90) 3.52/7.75
OPTIONS: With trapeze tailpiece from £1,214
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Jet Black (as reviewed, S66); Sapphire Blue (as reviewed, V90)

Vox Amplification Ltd
01908 304600
www.voxamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Lightweight, very tidy build, pickup style and voicing

CONS No hum-cancelling in mixed pickup positions; plenty of competition in style, often at trimmer prices

ORANGE
THE GUITAR BUTLER
£329

WHAT IS IT? A versatile two-channel preamp for stage and studio, providing a replacement for your amp's front-end with that unmistakable Orange sound

At Your Service

"Your tone is served," says Orange as the renowned British amp builder presents a juicy new preamp

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. The Guitar Butler's versatile design includes a built-in series effects loop and a balanced direct output on XLR, featuring a ground lift and speaker emulation, for easy hook-ups to mixing consoles for live or studio work

2. These high-brightness LEDs are easily visible in bright sunlight. Every function has a different colour so it's easy to see the preamp status at a glance

3. The Guitar Butler offers two footswitchable channels, with two footswitchable master volumes on the Overdrive channel. The controls are straightforward but use Orange's traditional 'pics only' graphics, so a little light reading of the manual might be helpful to understand the functions

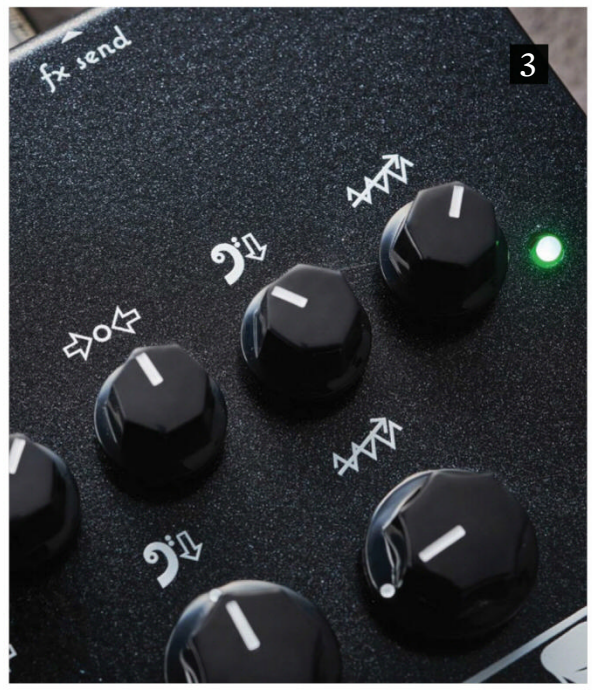
Orange has been turning out consistently great-sounding and innovative products for over 50 years, with a history that goes back to the early days of British blues and rock. Back then, the emphasis was on big, heavy 100-watt heads and 4x12 cabinets. Today, things have changed and many guitarists choose pedals to shape their sound, using amplification purely for making things louder. Consequently, self-contained preamps are increasingly popular and Orange has just released the new Guitar Butler, following on from its popular Bass Butler preamp introduced a couple of years ago.

The Guitar Butler is a full Orange front-end, squeezed into a compact, pedalboard-friendly enclosure and built to Orange's typically high standards. Inside the alloy box the electronics are all held on one large circuit board, excluding switches and sockets, which are directly mounted to the box and neatly hand-wired into the circuit. The dimensions make it an easy fit on most freestanding pedalboards, with rear-mounted sockets to keep wiring neat. Power comes from an 18-volt DC wall wart, so if you want to use a multi-outlet power supply then make sure it has this option.

The Guitar Butler features footswitchable Clean and Overdrive channels, both with gain controls and a passive three-band EQ. The Overdrive channel also includes a Presence control and two footswitchable master volumes, so you can pre-set one level for rhythm and a louder one for lead. On the back panel, there's a buffered series effects loop, an amp output on mono jack, and a balanced output on XLR, with a ground lift and cabinet simulation.

We tried out The Guitar Butler with a valve head and a 2x12 Celestion V30-loaded cab. Right from the start, the Clean channel added an expansive vintage-voiced tonality that enhanced single coils and humbuckers, while the JFET-powered lead channel has plenty of overdrive to cater for any taste, from vintage blues to full-on Britpop roar, very typical of the 'Orange sound'. Hiss and hum levels are impressively low, making this ideal for recording as well as live use.

Aimed at pro players and serious amateurs, Orange's Guitar Butler seems to tick all the boxes. If you're looking for a pedalboard-friendly preamp that gives you a wide range of classic British tone at a reasonable price, The Guitar Butler should be top of your list. G



ORANGE THE GUITAR BUTLER

PRICE: £329
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: 2-channel preamp
VALVES: N/A
DIMENSIONS: 177 (w) x 155 (h) x 67mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.3/2.87
CASE: Aluminium alloy
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Clean Channel: Gain, 3-band EQ; Dirty Channel: Gain, 3-band EQ, Volume 1, Volume 2, Presence
FOOTSWITCH: 1x Solo level 1/Solo Level 2, 1x Clean/dirty channel
CONNECTIONS: ¼" input jack socket, buffered FX loop. Amp out: ¼" output jack socket with no cab sim, XLR balanced out with cab sim
POWER: 18V DC adaptor (supplied)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Orange The Bass Butler (£329)

Orange Amplification
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Great range of clean and overdrive sounds; the excellent low-noise performance is ideal for recording purposes

CONS The 18V DC power requirement may need some thought when integrating the Guitar Butler into a pedalboard with a multi-outlet power supply

the Wishlist

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

Cream T Aurora BFGT1PS £3,999

CONTACT **Cream T Guitars** PHONE **+44 (0)1695 570023** WEB **www.creamtguitars.com** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

For regular readers who have been following the development of Cream T's Aurora guitars, you'll be keen to know this top-of-the-line model completes the range. Primarily co-designed by Cream T pickup maker Thomas Nilsen and Billy F Gibbons, the BFGT1PS, made at PJD in York, has a limited run of just 25 guitars – 10 of which will be signed by Billy.

The guitar closely follows the design of the other models but is the only single-pickup instrument in the range. Key to the design is the pickup-swapping feature, and aside from the BFG Whiskerbucker, three other Cream T pickups are included in the price. But this modernism is paired with what seems like a perfect marriage between an old Les Paul Goldtop and a Les Paul Junior with a little Tele thrown in for good measure.

The BFGT strand of the range (which includes two other twin-pickup Custom models, with and without pickup swapping) focuses on BFG style: the twin-pickup guitars don't feature a pickup selector, just individual pickup volume controls and a master tone. They also feature a single-piece wrapover bridge and BFGT signature chambering under the flat maple top, which is finished in an aged Aztek Gold nitro finish here.

Yes, the fingerboard inlays shout 'Gibson' and we have a slightly longer 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length and 43.4mm nut width, but the neck and fretwork are superb – not least the way the binding is rolled between the medium jumbo frets, each with their 'hot dog' ends.

The neck profile is classed as a '59 LP Style', but the C shaping is relatively slim in the lower positions, just under 21mm at the 1st fret and filling out by the 12th fret to 24mm. Like the back and sides of the two-piece mahogany body, the neck here has a lightly natural finish, which means you can really feel the wood. Thanks to the chambering and wood selection, the guitar also has a great weight of 3.6kg (7.92lb).

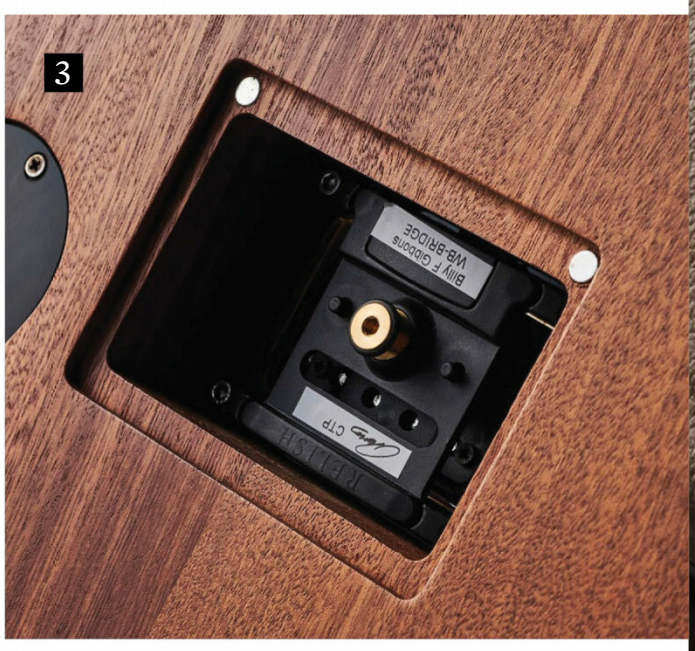
With the Whiskerbucker installed, our sound-test notes simply say "old Les Paul", although here the voice is a little leaner, which suits the 'double Tele' Banger & Mash and the single-coil Original Banger – both of which move us to a more Gibson/Fender hybrid. The Duchess humbucking-sized P-90 chases a more Junior style and is a great foil to the Whiskerbucker.

For lovers of the Junior style, it doesn't come better than this and, thanks to the pickup swapping, it's at least three guitars in one. Tempted? You'd better hurry... G

1. This Music City 'wrapover' or 'wrap-around' bridge cures many of the problems of wrap-arounds found on vintage Les Paul Junior and Special guitars, particularly with its intonated saddle ridge

2. The old-school acoustic-style headstock here is ebony faced with a bound edge and inlaid Cream T logo. The Gotoh open-backed SXB510 tuners add to the vibe with their oval, amber-like plastic buttons

3. With the magnetically attached back cover removed, the pickup can be swapped for another in seconds. The mounting frame and backplate are licensed from Relish, a patented design



4. Four pickups from the Cream T range are included in this package. The BFG Whiskerbucker is scanned from Billy Gibbons' Pearly Gates, while the Banger & Mash was originally wound for Keith Richards. The single-coil The Duchess and Original Banger complete the deal. The humbuckers can also be split via a CTS switched pot used for the volume control

5. The BFGT signature chambering in the body's lower portion is unique to these BFGT models and was suggested by Cream T's Tim Lobley: "We know Billy likes his guitar on the light side and I thought it would be cool to design the chambering so it spells Billy's initials with a 'T' for Thomas added in. So, although you can't see it, under the hood Billy's and Thomas's initials are in there"

THE LINEUP

The Players

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

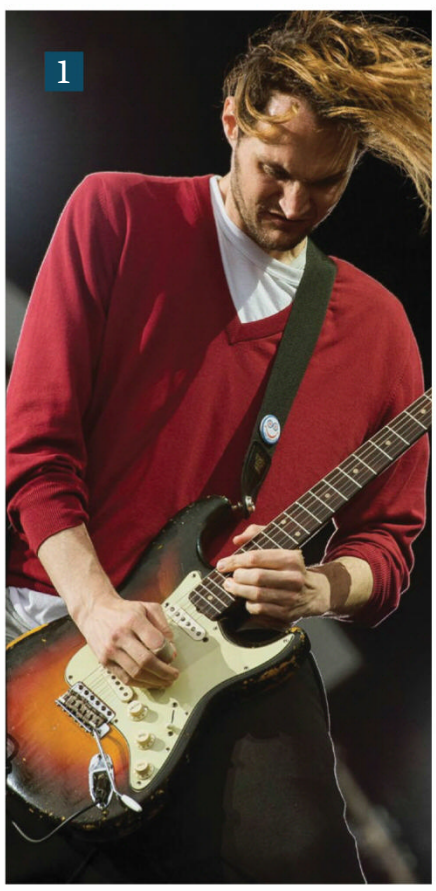


PHOTO BY CARRIE DAVENPORT/REDFERNS

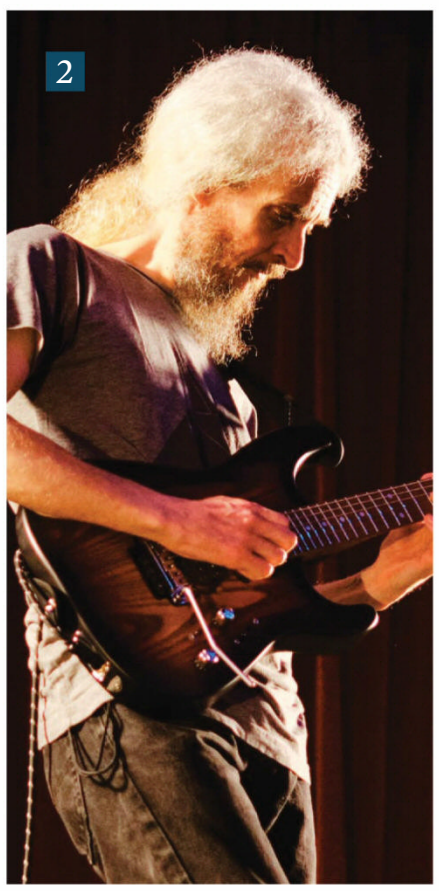


PHOTO BY SAM SHAW

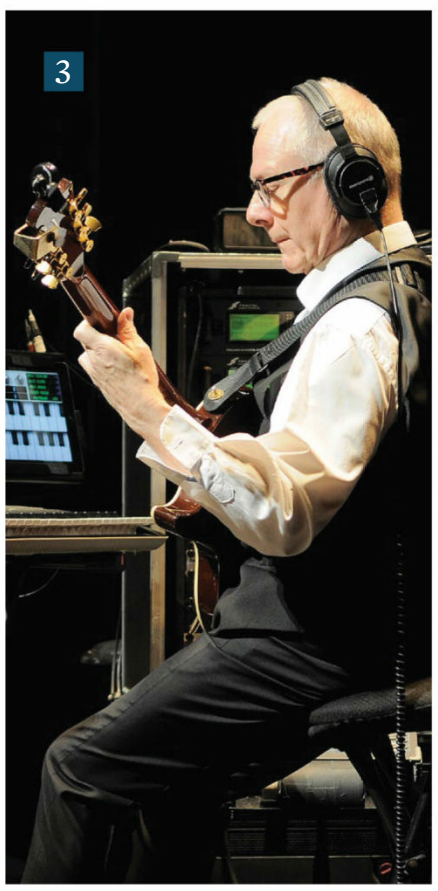


PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS

1. Unlimited Inspiration

Frusciante reflects on his return to RHCP

Following Red Hot Chili Peppers' return with John Frusciante and new song *Black Summer* (ahead of the new album, *Love Unlimited*, set for release on 1 April), the guitarist revealed how the band got its groove back: "When we started writing material, we began by playing old songs by people like Johnny 'Guitar' Watson, The Kinks, New York Dolls, Richard Barrett and others," says Frusciante. "Ever so gradually, we started bringing in new ideas and turning jams into songs, and after a couple of months the new stuff was all we were playing... The feeling of effortless fun we had playing songs by other people stayed with us the whole time we were writing and, for me, this record represents our love for and faith in each other."

2. Invisible Advantage

Guthrie Govan on his new signature model

Guthrie's new Japanese MJ San Dimas SD24 CM signature is a carefully considered mix of quality and versatility like the previous US-made versions. But there are a couple of new tweaks to his forthcoming model – and yet "you can't even see them," he revealed: "When you hit a chord really hard then mute it suddenly and you have the world's most overdriven amp setting, sometimes you can hear the springs ringing out sympathetically," Guthrie explained in a Charvel video introducing the new model. "I talked to the Charvel guys and they said, 'What you need is some foam and we have the perfect foam for you. We will inset it between the spring cavity and the springs, and your sympathetic spring ringing problems will be over.'" Read more on page 58.

3. Long Live The King

King Crimson then and now

New documentary *In The Court Of The Crimson King* – named after the band's 1969 debut album – features King Crimson members past and present offering insight into the influential prog act's 54-year history. Directed by UK filmmaker Toby Amies, the documentary will debut in March at South By Southwest in Austin, Texas, and includes footage from the band's 2018 and 2019 tours, along with interviews featuring members from throughout their long career, including Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew. "When I came back from making some of that music, my hair had fallen out," jokes the latter in a trailer, which is available to view online now. "It is the dream band viewed from outside," drummer Bill Bruford sums up in the trailer. "It's the band you could do anything you wanted to in it."

4. A New Cure

Asato gets back to music

After taking a year's break away from music, guitarist Mateus Asato has returned with new composition *The Cure* and opened up on his time away and his hopes for the future: "I don't wanna be the one who keeps saying, 'I can't wait to show my new music' or 'New album coming 2022!' but I do wanna say that I've been in a good place, happy with most of things I've learned this past year," he wrote on YouTube. "Keeping it up with the essence of 'why I make music' could be hard and it faces brutal vulnerability, especially during these weird seasons we live [in] now. But I feel great after this time off – and I hope my music could transmit that at its purest. Thank you so much once again for staying with me in this virtual platform. I will see you soon, hopefully sooner than we expect." **[RL]**

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THE LINEUP

Albums

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

PHOTO BY ABBY ROSS

Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder reunite after 60 years to bring on the spirit of the blues

Ry Cooder & Taj Mahal

Get On Board: The Songs Of Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee

10/10

Nonesuch

60-year collaborative rematch for blues roots superstars

If anyone was going to take on the back catalogue of bluesmen Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, there's no better than Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal. Mahal said of Terry and McGhee, "They were so solid. They meant what they said, they did what they did... Here's two guys, a guitar player and a harmonica player, and they could make it sound like a whole orchestra." To which Cooder adds, "It was perfect. What else can you say?"

It's been an unbelievable 60 years since Cooder and Mahal last teamed up, and their reunion is a glorious one with Mahal on harmonica, guitar, piano and vocals, and Cooder contributing vocals, guitar, mandolin and banjo. And, apart from occasional drums and bass provided by Cooder's son Joachim, that's the stripped-down accompaniment you find here.

In the spirit of the originals, the music is engagingly loose with no 21st century technology adding unnecessary glitz. Tracks such as *Hooray Hooray* and the blues staple *Pick A Bale Of Cotton* are allowed to breathe freely, while Taj Mahal's gravelly vocal is a perfect foil on songs such as *Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee*. The groove that the pair cook up serves the material well – and it's never better than on *What A Beautiful City* – and we're treated to some superb slide guitar on *Pawn Shop Blues*.

But, for now, we'll leave the final words to the exceptional Taj Mahal: "We're now the guys that we aspired toward when we were starting out. Here we are now... old timers. What a great opportunity to really come full circle." Amen to that. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Packing Up Getting Ready To Go*
For fans of: Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie

Mike Campbell & The Dirty Knobs

External Combustion

8/10

BMG

Former Tom Petty axeman produces blistering rock 'n' roll

Despite having formed over two decades ago, this is only the second album from Mike Campbell's acclaimed side-project band. Originally, The Dirty Knobs were put together as something fun to do when Tom Petty's band was off the road. But, two years ago, the band went into the studio to produce their debut, *Wreckless Abandon*, and the album was very well received. This time around, Mike decided to repeat the process to "prove that the first album's success wasn't a fluke". With 11 tracks of mainly raw 60s- and 70s-inspired rock, the album stuns from the outset. Rockers such as the album's opener *Wicked Mind* contrast with the more ballad-esque *State Of Mind*, complete with sublime guest vocals from Margo Price. Guitar raunch is provided by Mike's treasured vintage Les Paul, which leaps into the spotlight with some tasteful solos throughout. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Brigitte Bardot*
For fans of: Tom Petty, Keith Richards

John McLaughlin

The Montreux Years

9/10

BMG

Fusion guitar master curates jazz festival magic

Without John McLaughlin, jazz-rock guitar wouldn't be what we know it today. Furthermore, his creation of the formidable Mahavishnu Orchestra in 1971 left an equally indelible mark on the music landscape. On this CD (double vinyl is also available) McLaughlin has taken a look back at his appearances at the venerated Montreux Jazz Festival and produced an audio catalogue of finest moments. He's present in many different collaborative formats, too: everything from the Mahavishnu Orchestra right through to acoustic duetting with the late Paco de Lucia (to whom he dedicates the album's closing track, *El Hombre Que Sabia*) and his recent outing with The 4th Dimension. The guitar playing is, as you'd expect, breathtaking – check out the virtually pentatonic-free *Sing Me Softly Of The Blues*. Staggering. **[DM]**

Standout track: *David*
For fans of: Mahavishnu Orchestra, Chick Corea

PHOTO BY JOHN MCMURTRIE

Kris Barras Band
Death Valley Paradise
Mascot Records

8/10

Anthemic new album from high-voltage band

Singer/guitarist Kris Barras sure knows how to produce stunning rock songs. As well as writing some of the 11 songs on *Death Valley Paradise* himself, he collaborated with other writers – and the results are dynamic and diverse. Then there's the guitar playing: it's obvious he's spent time on his chops with picking and vibrato elements reminiscent of shredders such as Zakk Wylde. With a thick modern overdrive and detuning, he's rhythmically precise and shines with a strong vibrato.

Opener *Dead Horses* sets the scene with huge drums, roaring minor riff and upfront vocals, while *Long Gone* is a bluesy anthem that blends acoustic and overdriven guitars perfectly. It's clear that protest song *My Parade* will do well live, and as for guitar solos, those on *Devil You Know*, *Wake Me When It's Over* and *Bury Me* stand out. It's sturdy, anthemic stuff that's sure to give the UK rockers yet another legion of loyal fans. **[JS]**

Standout track: *My Parade*
For fans of: Black Stone Cherry, Alter Bridge

Keb' Mo'
Good To Be...
Concord

9/10

A rich music mix from an accomplished master

There is always a vibrant consistency to albums by Keb' Mo' – great songs, lyrical depth and lovely guitar work. And while he has a blues-based foundation (the Delta Blues and BB King influences go deep), there are numerous stylistic strands to be heard in his music that can range from R&B to modern Nashville, soul to Americana. He continues this variety on *Good To Be...*, which is an album of 13 exquisite songs with tasty band arrangements and song-centred guitar playing. The fingerpicking and rhythmic feel on album opener *Good To Be (Home Again)* is lovely, the Orleans-esque swing on *So Easy* will encourage foot stomping aplenty, and *Sunny And Warm* glistens with a light groove and cool chords. The guitarist recently turned 70, but there seems no let-up in quality and vibrancy for Keb' – good indeed! **[JS]**

Standout track: *So Easy*
For fans of: Eric Bibb, Robert Cray

THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

The new album from flatpicker extraordinaire **Molly Tuttle** sees her exploring her influences with a stunning set of original tunes

Artist: Molly Tuttle

Album: Crooked Tree (Nonesuch Records)

Most of the *Crooked Tree* album was recorded with live vocals and guitar solos to retain the organic feel of the music: "I wanted to get the feeling of people jamming together"

Your previous album, *But I'd Rather Be With You*, was a covers album, but new album *Crooked Tree* feels more like you've gone back to your roots.

"I'd say so, yeah. The last album was such a cool experience – to record it in my house and work with [producer] Tony Berg. I think that record, to me, was pointing in a direction that I've been wanting to go and that I still want to go. But what came really naturally to me after that was when I started sitting down and writing these bluegrass songs, and I realised another dream of mine, which I haven't actually ever really chased after, was recording a bluegrass album of original songs. So when I made this album, it felt like I was being my complete artistic self."

Where did your love for bluegrass begin?

"I guess where it began was with my grandfather, who was a farmer in Illinois, and he played banjo. He fell in love with bluegrass music and early country music like Hank Williams, and he heard Flatt and Scruggs on the Grand Ole Opry. He played banjo, and my dad grew up playing with him and kind of had a family band thing on the farm. Then my dad moved out to California and started teaching bluegrass music in the Bay Area. So when I was a kid, all I listened to up to a certain age was bluegrass. I was probably 10 years old before I really started getting my own CD collection going. I wanted to play music really early on, and guitar was the thing that stuck with me. But I always had bluegrass jams to go to with my dad, and he had other students my age that I could play with, and we'd go to festivals together. Those early memories inspired this new album."

And you recorded a lot of the album live?

"Yeah, we did. Most of the vocals are live, everyone was taking live solos. It wasn't a strict rule, but I don't want to play bluegrass to a click. I don't want to overdub my vocals when I'm not playing guitar, it just doesn't feel natural. It's such an organic music and I wanted to get the feeling of people just jamming together. Obviously, it's different when you're in a studio – it's harder to have the same relaxed feeling as when you're just sitting out in lawn chairs at a festival. But I think my favourite bluegrass is the kind that's really just played as live as possible."

Is *Crooked Tree* the first album you've produced yourself?

"Yeah, it was really a cool experience getting to co-produce it with Jerry [Douglas]. He was so respectful and really leaned on me for a lot of the production ideas. I felt that, for the first time, I was really steering the ship, but I knew when to call on him for his expertise. It was a great experience."

How did you go about choosing the people who played with you on the album?

"I had a dream list of people for each instrument and almost everyone was available [including Sierra Hull, Billy Strings and Dan Tyminski]. One reason why I wanted to record it when I did – in the summer, in July – is because people were still not going out on the road. So I felt like we needed to take advantage of that and get them into the studio. Then Jerry had some ideas, too. It was a combination of me starting off with who I wanted and then him suggesting a couple of people as well."

When did you start writing for the album?

"I started writing about a year ago. Over the holidays of 2021, I remember beginning to write what became

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

This album of original songs realises a dream of Molly's and pays tribute to the bluegrass music she grew up surrounded by

San Francisco Blues. That was probably the first song for the album, except *Over The Line*, which I wrote a couple of years ago. I've actually performed that one live but had never recorded it. That was the only one from my older songs that seemed to fit with this new batch. The rest I wrote last spring and last winter."

Which instruments did you take into the studio with you?

"Oh, I just took one guitar. I took my Pre-War Guitars guitar and it's like this Brazilian rosewood one they made for me a couple of years ago, and that's been my go-to tour instrument, so I was the most used to playing it. I wanted to be really comfortable with the feel of it, and I love how it sounds."

A lot of the songs on the new album have a very strong narrative. *Dooley's Farm*, for instance, can you tell us about that?

"Yeah, I grew up listening to The Dillards, and they have a song about a moonshiner named Dooley. I wrote that one with [Old Crow Medicine Show's] Ketch Secor. We thought it would be fun to kind of update Dooley and make him a weed farmer this time around, because in the South it's mostly still illegal to grow weed. So that's our current-day outlaw. We talked about that idea a bunch and tried to write it a couple of times, but nothing really materialised. And then, the last time we tried it flowed really naturally. But it had been an idea that we were kicking around for a while."

Are there any other songs on the album that you're particularly pleased with?

"I think *Grass Valley* is the song that's the most autobiographical. I was saying how I started off playing music with my dad and going to bluegrass festivals and jams. So I started thinking, well, the first festival that I went to was in Grass Valley, California, and I really liked it. It's called the Father's Day Bluegrass Festival, but a lot of people just call it 'Grass Valley'. I went there when I was 10 years old with my dad, and I since wrote the song based on personal experience because I have gone back to that festival as an adult. And then, when we were recording it, I was like, 'We should send this to my dad to sing on.' So it was really special to get his vocal on the harmony part. You can hear him singing in the chorus with me. I think he was really excited. Unfortunately, he wasn't available to fly out to Nashville to do his part in person, but he has a studio in California where we recorded a lot when I was a kid. It's just really simple – he has a couple of microphones and a little interface – so he did this part out there in the studio where we used to record our stuff."

> "My grandfather, who was a farmer in Illinois, played banjo, and my dad grew up playing with him and kind of had a family band on the farm"

Are you looking forward to taking this material out on the road?

"Yeah, I've put together a bluegrass band that's kind of like my touring band. It's different from the people who played on the record. When I was asking people to come into the studio, I was just thinking who were the heroes that I grew up listening to and I asked a bunch of people to play on the record. But a lot of them are in full-time bands. So it was like working backwards from there. I'm like, 'Who might be fun to be in my band?' and the band I ended up putting together for touring is so exciting and so fun. It's like a dream bluegrass band. We just finished our first tour last week and we were trying out a bunch of the new material and giving people a preview of the album. And then, once it comes out, we have a ton of festivals and a lot more touring to come." **[DM]**

Molly's third album, *Crooked Tree* is out on 1 April. For more details and to pre-order the album, visit ***www.mollytuttlemusic.com***

Molly's go-to tour instrument is an acoustic from North Carolina's Pre-War Guitars

PHOTO BY JEFF HAHNE/GETTY IMAGES

SESSION DIARY

In The Comfort Zone

This issue **Adam Goldsmith** enjoys knowing what's what with his guitar parts, fellow musicians and a tried-and-tested secret weapon

With January being a traditionally quieter month for professional musicians, it was good to spend a few days at Abbey Road's famous Studio Two recording the cast album for the West End show I'm currently doing – *The Drifters Girl*, starring Beverly Knight. The main difference between this and other sessions I've done is that obviously we've all played the music before, having done the show for the past three months. For me personally, the most stressful part of any typical session is the moment you open the pad of music in front of you – it could potentially be anything from an easy pop rhythm part to a fast classical-style film part, and all points in between via banjo and mandolin doubles.

Keeping it traditional, Adam's bandmate Phil Mulford takes his Hofner bass to Abbey Road

"The moment you open the music, it could be anything from easy pop to a fast classical style, and all points in between via banjo and mandolin"

However, this was an especially enjoyable few days as we could really concentrate on the smaller details of groove and individual parts, while also enjoying being in one of the world's great studios without the vague terror of not knowing if you're about to be confronted with a thick pad of music that you can't play immediately. After the past nearly two years of the pandemic, it felt much more relaxed and enjoyable than anything has for a while.

In keeping with the 'band' vibe of the sessions, we were all together in the main room (with the exception of the vocalists, who were in vocal booths to avoid mic spill), with bass and guitar amps covered by acoustic blankets and surrounded by baffles. Phil Mulford is our bass player, and it was great to hear his McCartney-style Hofner bass in the room where The Beatles recorded many years ago. Neal Wilkinson set up his vintage 50s Gretsch drum kit up near the honky tonk *Lady Madonna* piano and the sense of history in this room was palpable. Gear-wise, I also kept it traditional, with my main '64 'Frankenstrat', a Gibson 335 and a refinished Fender Telecaster both from 1967, along with a 2014 '59 reissue Gibson 175. I've never altered anything on that particular guitar and it's been one of the best guitar purchases I've ever made, paying for itself many times over since I bought it seven years ago.

Ego Tricks

Amp-wise, I used my reissue hand-wired Fender Deluxe for all the tracks. A not-so-secret weapon, which I highly recommend is the Wampler Ego Compressor. Compression is such a great studio tool, especially when used subtly to help your clean parts sit well in a mix. The Blend control on this pedal is incredibly useful – you can keep the compression so it's not in any way obvious or too 'squishy', but you get all the benefits for recording purposes. I'd say, outside of drive pedals, compression would be my most go-to effect for studio work. I've had a few clients remark that my parts sit really well in their music without them having to alter the sound too much in the mix, and I'd say judicious use of compression has a lot to do with this. The Wampler is so far my favourite, mainly as a result of the aforementioned Blend control.

At the start of the pandemic, I saw Abbey Road – and indeed some other big studios – having to adapt quickly. At the beginning of the easing of the lockdown restrictions, the garden and cafe at Abbey Road remained shut, and any musicians who were lucky enough to have work hardly interacted. String players, meanwhile, were masked, employed in half the numbers and two metres apart, and vocalists were required much less frequently, so it was great to feel everything was – finally – pretty much business as usual. G

Mondegreen Fingers

Neville Marten recounts a few amusing instances of lyrical mishearings, musical mix-ups and plain ignorance...

The first recollection I have of any kind of lyrical mishearing (also known as a 'mondegreen') comes from when I was at school in Great Baddow, Essex. To set the scene, I should mention there's a road in Great Baddow called Beehive Lane. In school assembly each morning, as well as singing the usual hymns, we'd have to recite the Lord's Prayer – 'Our Father, which art in heaven...' One day the head teacher stopped the assembly and asked what words we were intonating. It turned out that many of the kids were in fact reciting, "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hello *Beehive Lane*" (rather than 'be thy name'). If I ever go back there I can't drive up that road without a smile on my face.

Jumping forward to the 1980s, I was playing in American country singer Diane Solomon's band. The players included the brilliant late keyboardist Reg Webb. I was also briefly in his jazz-rock band, Fusion, until a superb young guitarist called Nick – now Nik – Kershaw replaced me. Anyway, Reg kindly suggested I'd be a great fit for Diane's band. She is a lovely, talented artist and it was a joy to play in such company. Her then-husband and manager was a high flyer in the 'biz' and would often talk to us musos about who he'd been working with. One day it was Pete Bellotte (pronounced 'Bellotti') and Giorgio Moroder, who'd had massive success bringing Donna Summer to the world with *I Feel Love*. When he said 'Bellotte' he pronounced it 'Bell*oddi*'. I confess that back then I didn't actually know who those guys were and thought Diane's husband was talking about working with Bill Oddie...

Dominants? Flat fives? What?

I have another story, also involving Reg, but it's more about not knowing something rather than not hearing it correctly. When I first joined Fusion, it was actually to play Reg's own songs, the idea being that we'd do the last few jazz-rock gigs then "get a deal" and go pro. Sadly, that never happened. But during my first run-through of his compositions, we'd been going for a while and he stopped me. I'd been playing 7th chords to end a verse or chorus, before coming back to the home chord. He said, "Nev, you'll find that most of my songs' dominant chords are 11ths." At 28 and a self-taught – dare I say – 'musician', I neither knew what a dominant chord was, nor an 11th. That was a steep learning curve. As it was, when we played the Stevie Wonder song *Blame It On The Sun* off-the-cuff at a gig, we quickly ran through it at soundcheck and in one part I played a minor 7 chord. "Er, Nev, that's a min7♭5." I'd never heard of that, either, but had enough nous to speedily work out where the 5th was and flatten it. Phew!

I'll finish with a story that concerns the time I worked for Selmer's repairing Gibson guitars. It sounds too good to be true, but fellow Gibson-ite Robbie Gladwell assures me it is. Selmer's had a delivery driver named Les Ball. Les would often be called to the Transport department over the slightly muffled Tannoy system: "Les Ball to Transport, Les Ball!" As we often had visitors come to leave or pick up their guitars, such a call would often go out while they were there: "Les Ball..." etc. Invariably our visitors – who occasionally included guitarists from famous bands – would say, "Les Paul? Is he really here?" Our well-practised retort was, "Yes, he cares so much about the guitars that he likes to deliver them himself." And you know what? They believed us, at least until the penny dropped.

> "When he said Bellotte and Moroder I confess I didn't know who those guys were, and thought he was talking about working with Bill Oddie..."

If you have any great mishearings or not-knowings of your own, do let us know. See you next month. G

PHOTO COURTESY OF GAS STATION GUITARS

GAS OF THE MONTH

No LP, No Cry

What? 2013 Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul Special, Cherry
Where seen? www.gasstationguitars.com **Price?** £2,495

While editing a lesson on Bob Marley's 'skank' rhythm style for *Guitar Techniques* I was reminded how much I love single-cut LP Specials. The twin P-90s work so well together and the single-cut looks much better with two than the double-cutaway version does. So I got online and spotted this Cherry Red beauty. It's immaculate and its rosewood fingerboard looks lovely. Built in 2013, it's almost a decade old but has clearly been cared for. The all-mahogany construction is sure to produce a luscious set of tones, and that intuitive layout will make it a joy to play. It's one of the most tempting guitars I've seen for ages and it's unlikely to hang around for long!

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

All That Jazz

The rediscovery of an old CD draws **Alex Bishop** back into the sound of 1930s Paris and the Selmer-Maccaferri guitar

It was during the summer of 2005 when I first heard the thunderous 'la pompe' rhythm of a Gypsy jazz band, an intoxicating sound that would derail the direction of my guitar playing and ultimately come to define the next 15 years of my life. I was living on campus at university studying for an engineering degree (never completed) when my housemate returned from Paris with a CD: *Dans Le Monde* by Les Doigts De L'Homme. Even more than the impossibly fast melody lines, I became addicted to the infectious rhythm guitar playing. Hours were spent with my Stagg acoustic, recklessly trying to emulate the sound of the guitars on that record, totally unaware that their Gypsy jazz guitars were altogether a completely different beast from mine.

"These guitars transmit vibrations from the strings in a different manner to our usual X-braced, round-hole acoustic guitars"

Sporting oval or d-hole soundholes and intriguing moustache-shaped bridges, these 'Selmer-Maccaferri' guitars embodied an entirely new musical universe, and since first becoming acquainted with the music of 'Gypsy jazz' (and eventually its originator, Django Reinhardt) I became obsessed with learning how to build one. Since then I have built 30 or so of them. So what, you might ask, makes them look – and sound – so different?

To answer this we need to understand that these guitars – first built in France by the Selmer factory in the 1930s – evolved from a heritage of late 19th century Italian lutherie. Luthier Mario Maccaferri drew up the design and oversaw construction, but his ideas carry the influence of his mentor Luigi Mozzani, whose innovations included the extraordinary 'lyre' guitars (a type of harp guitar), as well as a wealth of violins, classical guitars and Neapolitan mandolins (with which Gypsy jazz guitars share a lot of unusual characteristics). Maccaferri himself was a professional concert guitarist, so it was from first-hand experience, performing acoustically in large concert halls that he realised the importance of creating a guitar that would better project sound.

Fundamentally, these guitars transmit vibrations from the strings in a different manner to our usual X-braced, round-hole acoustic guitars. The strings are connected to the guitar by a tailpiece, rather than being secured to the bridge itself, so the tension in the strings causes the bridge to be pushed directly into the face of the guitar. There is a fold in the soundboard (known as the pliage), which offers up dome-like structure to support the top and ensures it doesn't collapse from the pressure. Coupled with ladder bracing on the underside of the soundboard, with struts placed horizontally across the top rather than in an 'X' configuration, the result maximises volume with a compressed and focused tone.

Maccaferri's innovative approach, however, didn't stop there. In his pursuit to maximise the output of his guitars, he devised an internal resonating chamber that fitted inside the instrument, running about an inch from the edge all the way up to the soundhole. A curve-shaped piece of wood attached to the rim of the soundhole (which, incidentally, helps give rise to the 'D' shaped hole) acts as a reflector that funnels the sound out of the guitar in the right direction. Essentially a guitar within a guitar, this concept was borne from the idea that the player's own body dampens the vibrations of the back of the guitar, an important sound-producing part of the instrument. The internal resonator effectively adds a free-floating back to the inside, which is free to vibrate.

In an attempt to capture the spirit of these offbeat instruments, my focus today is to continue evolving these guitars. I've experimented with lattice bracing, side soundports and arm bevels. I have tried different materials, such as ebony, pear or cherry for the back and sides, and even entire projects that make use of solely reclaimed materials. As I write this, I glance at my wood pile and realise my next Gypsy jazz guitar will have a curly sequoia top and fanned frets, part of a project to build a guitar to represent each one of Britain's 50 greatest trees. If I can hope to achieve anything, it's that my guitars eventually form a small part of the legacy started by those pioneering Italian luthiers almost 100 years ago.

Alex's obsession with Gypsy jazz style guitars began in 2005, and he's now focusing on evolving the concept in his own builds, with models including this one below, made using entirely reclaimed materials

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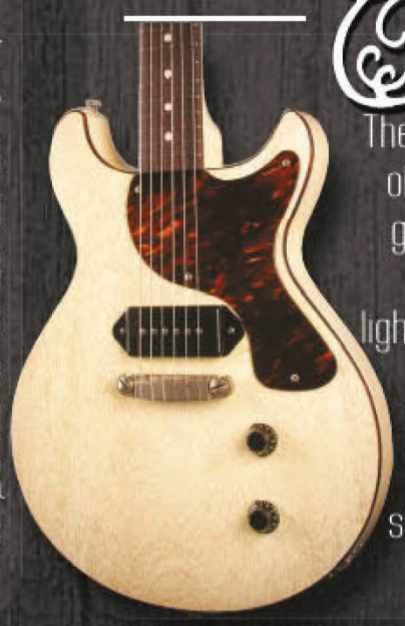

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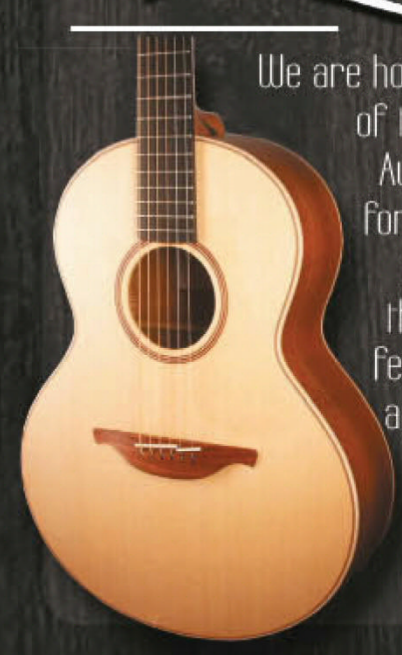

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RAISING THE TONE

Squashing The Squeaks

Jamie Dickson wants to know how to banish the rattle and squeak – and acoustic master Martin Simpson is only too happy to advise

Over the past few years I've spent more and more time playing fingerstyle acoustic. Finally, I've reached the stage where I've written and rehearsed enough material to record an EP of instrumental folk – with John Renbourn as my main influence and other fingerstyle masters, such as Pierre Bensusan and Sheffield's Martin Simpson, as ongoing sources of inspiration. So I have the studio booked, the material rehearsed and the guitars at the ready. But there's still one problem... In the course of rehearsing the pieces I want to record, I've discovered some of the songs involve sliding licks that, eight times out of 10, cause an intrusive squeak that's tolerable in the room but really jarring on a recording.

Engineer Martin Holmes and I chew the fat about the best way to cut down the squeaks, but, after much theorising on the subject, we conclude it might be an idea to ask someone who has incredible acoustic tone to weigh in with some specialist advice. With that in mind, I drop the ever-obliging Martin Simpson a line, who replies that he's "more than happy to offer his two penn'orth".

As I call, I wonder a little nervously if his answer will suggest a complete overhaul of my songs or fingering technique. But, as it turns out when we start chatting, Martin says there are two fairly straightforward things anyone can do to reduce intrusive handling noise on acoustic recordings.

"When I was a kid, I would change my strings almost as often as I do now," Martin says. "I bought the cheapest strings – I bought Red Dragons – but I would change them as often as I could, because if you don't, they go out of tune or they don't even play in tune, you know? And so one of the first things I would say about recording guitar is you want your guitar to sound as wonderful as it can possibly sound. But then you've got the question of, 'Well, but do you *like* the sound of absolutely new strings?' Which I do. I really like the sound of new strings.

"There's a tendency for new strings to be overly bright. I think most people feel that, but, actually, I honestly believe the new coated strings – particularly the D'Addarios, and also the new Elixir Nanoweb strings – that coating takes off a tiny bit of top-end. Now, I think maybe the people at D'Addario and Elixir would go, 'Oh, no they don't.' But I think they do – but, helpfully, it's the bit [of harsh top-end] that people don't like. And another thing about those coated strings is they massively reduce left-hand squeak."

So the first part of the answer is satisfyingly simple: give a fresh set of coated strings a try. But during my rehearsals for the recording I've also managed to find a few dodges, technique-wise, to avoid squeaks. The simplest dodge is to change the composition slightly to avoid slides that generate squeaks – but, of course, sometimes sliding licks are absolutely part of the character of the piece.

Where forced to keep such licks, I've tried a few things such as momentarily lifting off any fingers fretting wound strings and doing the slide only on notes fretted on unwound upper strings. That does a certain amount to quell squeaks, but I feel certain that Martin must have some more good technique tips to offer – and, of course, he does: "I always say the single best thing you can do in terms of the left-hand technique is be as close behind the fret as possible," he explains.

"To start with, it helps with your intonation because you're not having to press heavily on the string in order to make it fret. Because the closer behind the fret you are, the quicker your contact will be between string and fret, you know? By comparison, a hammer-on that's [fretted] further back away from the fret, in the direction of the nut, is liable to be buzzy and rattly. It will possibly not even play the note you want it to play. And when you eventually hit it, it's going to be sharp because you're having to press down so hard. So the fact of playing right behind the fret means you can apply a lot less pressure. Tonally, that has a huge effect. But the other thing about it is, when you're not pressing hard, you're more likely to get clean [squeak-free] slides."

So there is a deeper level to playing acoustic without squeaks and it involves taking care of the details of your technique. And that makes sense because with

Want to get going with squeak-free playing? Martin's advice is to start by paying "really close attention to where your fingers are landing"

an acoustic guitar there aren't as many ways to vary or enhance your sound – there's no flattering overdrive to step on, no pickup selector to flick for a change in timbre, for example. You have to do it all with your fingers, and your ear has to become attuned to small imperfections. Getting that right does require some discipline and commitment. But if that all sounds a tedious then I can happily say that the pursuit of cleaner technique has become one of the most satisfying elements of playing acoustic – for me, anyway – because the reward is sounding like a 'proper' acoustic guitarist.

> "With an acoustic guitar, there's no flattering overdrive to step on, no pickup selector to flick. You have to do it all with your fingers..."

"What it requires to start with is that you pay really close attention to where your fingers are landing," Martin says of good fretting technique. "And so you have to be conscious of it at the beginning. But now I'm at the point where I honestly look at my left hand sometimes and I just want to pat myself on the head [laughs]. But it's just that thing of going, 'Yeah, that's *exactly* what my hands should look like.' And that's why it sounds as good as it does, you know?" G

THREE TO GET READY

Long-life strings for great recordings

Elixir Nanoweb Phosphor Bronze 13-56 £17.99

Phosphor Bronze strings have a great balance of mellowness and detail. Elixir's Nanoweb coating adds longevity to the equation and claims to "capture the rich, expressive tone of the finest phosphor bronze strings and extend that tone three to five times longer than ordinary strings", thanks to its corrosion-resistant properties. As Martin mentioned, the coating is also good at suppressing finger-squeaks. Go with 13-56 for extra, piano-like tonal heft.

D'Addario XS Phosphor Bronze 12-53 £20.50

String-making giant D'Addario also has next-gen coated strings to offer. A lighter-gauge 12-53 set of Phosphor Bronze XS strings could be just the thing for the dextrous fingerstylist. D'Addario says this XS set offers an "ultra-thin film coating on every wound string and unique polymer treatment on the plain steels... our highest level of protection for maximum life with an uncommonly smooth feel".

Ernie Ball 2546 Everlast Phosphor Bronze 12-54 £15.29

If the latest coated sets from Elixir and D'Addario are a touch more than you'd care to pay, Ernie Ball has a very decent 'Everlast' coated set that lists at around £15 and streets cheaper. The company says its Everlast range "use[s] groundbreaking nanotechnology that repels unwanted moisture and oils that negatively impact your tone. Our proprietary treatment is applied to both the inner hex core and outer wrap wire to provide ultimate protection without compromising tone or feel."

Powerchord Alternatives

Richard Barrett explores voicings that go beyond the usual '5' chord for some impactful and harmonically interesting sounds

Nobody is trying to minimise the sheer joy of unleashing a powerchord, but in some situations you may wish for something a little more harmonically complex. The trick is to find voicings that expand upon the traditional '5' chord without becoming indistinguishable when played with drive. Players such as EVH, Steve Stevens, Ritchie Blackmore and Randy Rhoads have all managed this successfully in their rhythm parts and riffs – and the examples below will walk you through a few of their approaches.

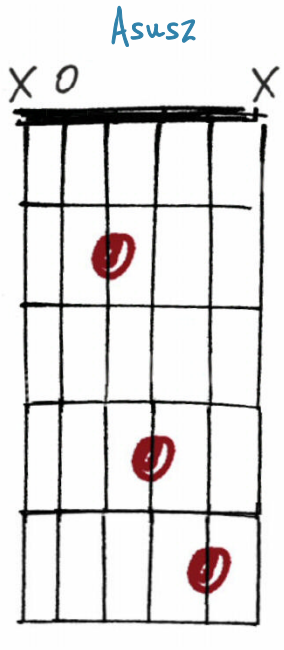
Before we get into the specifics, I'd like to talk in more general terms about tone. It has often been said that a good classic-rock rhythm tone isn't as distorted as many would presume. Often the sustain and impact can be down to sheer volume and/or EQ. If you think you could do with less gain on your rhythm tone (lead sounds are a different matter entirely!), try edging back the gain until it is a bit too 'clean' then going up a notch. This will sound clearer and punchier in a band mix.

PHOTO BY ROB MONK

Right: Steve Stevens making it complex in more ways than one

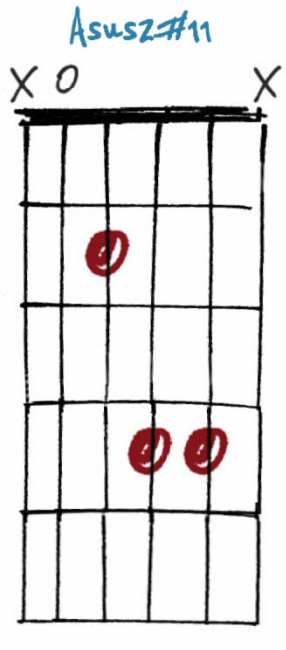
Example 1

Closely related to an A5 powerchord, this adds a B, which, in this context, would make it an Asus2. There is some dissonance, but you can still hear each note. I have also palm-muted to rake through the individual notes because this separates them to give extra clarity – similar to the way EVH does it in *Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love*.



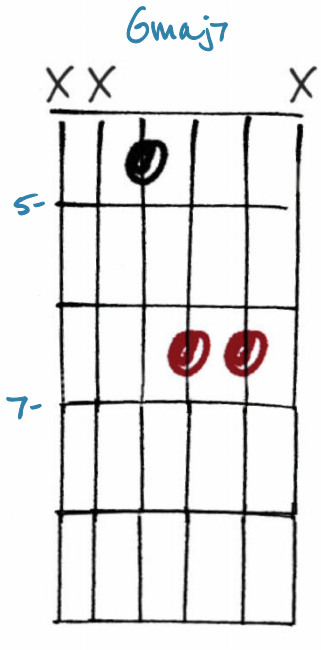
Example 2

A similar shape but with the highest note (E) flattened to give us an E♭. This is tricky to name as we now have a 5th (E) plus the ♭5th (E♭), as well as the 2nd (B). Perhaps it's better to call the ♭5th a #11th, giving us Asus2#11. Great chord, anyway!



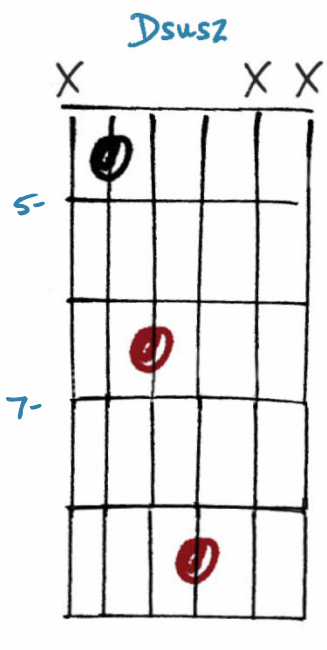
Example 3

Adding an F# as a top note over this G5 voicing on the third and fourth strings gives us a Gmaj7. Not a chord we associate with distorted guitars, but check out Steve Stevens' staccato chord playing on the verses of *Rebel Yell* and there it is! Going back to a regular G5 seems a bit flat in comparison.



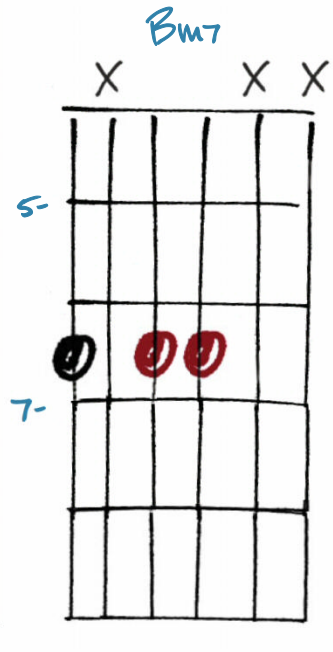
Example 4

This Dsus2 rings nice and evenly, even with distortion, because it doesn't mess with the harmonics in the way a major 3rd does. The 2nd on top adds an exotic edge to powerchord progressions, though it can be a bit of a stretch after a while, so bear this in mind before you write a 20-minute prog-metal song with it...



Example 5

This Bm7 requires the fifth string to be muted and is quite dissonant with all the notes ringing together. Players such as Randy Rhoads and Ritchie Blackmore got around this by not allowing them to ring together – namely, never play the bass note at the same time as the top notes. Check out Ozzy's *Crazy Train* or Deep Purple's *Burn*.



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STAR LETTER

UNSUNG HEROES?

The French Family Band

Over the years I have read some great articles about artists such as Khruangbin, Barney Kessel, Frank Zappa, Pat Martino and, of course, the amazing Steve Vai. But I think it would be nice to see something from an ordinary working band detailing the guitars and amps they use, how they actually cope with gigs and what preparation they employ to get those gigs. Back in the 60s there were a huge number of working bands and gigs, many were country and western bands who were great musicians but not greatly admired by a lot of people.

There is a working band online called The French Family Band. They are from New Zealand but work in the USA doing bars/pubs on a regular basis, as well as posting online/YouTube. They are amazing musicians using very ordinary guitars and obviously working very hard. I think they would have a lot to offer *Guitarist* readers and may even inspire some to revisit country and western music, which is still a very underrated art form.

So maybe an in-depth interview could inspire and reveal quite a bit to aspiring musicians. Of course, there are such bands in the UK, but I think The French Family Band is doing something special and unique.
Paul Kelly, via email

Thanks for your thoughts, Paul – they certainly resonate with us. Guitarists from famous bands may be the ones who inspire us to take up the guitar in the first place, but it's the inspirational players we see in the flesh, in pubs and clubs, who really convince us that we could be that guitarist, up on stage, bringing a crowded room to its feet. And they're often the ones, too, who take the time to talk to an enthusiastic beginner after the gig about the gear they use and how they learned to play like that. A debt is owed, therefore, to the talented, hard-working but often unsung heroes of backstreet bars and arts clubs. We'll certainly check out The French Family Band after reading your glowing report and maybe there's a regular feature – in these Feedback pages maybe? – showcasing readers' favourite guitar bands from down their way?

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SEEING DOUBLE

In issue 481, Neville Marten asked for any tales of famous guitar skirmishes. Mine, or should I say my guitar's, is told in the attached photo [shown opposite] – here we see Mike Starr from Alice In Chains holding a rather awesome Rickenbacker 4080, a guitar that is now sitting here beside me in Bristol. The photo came in the case with the guitar when I acquired it a few years ago. It isn't clear if Mike owned this guitar or if this is just a promo shot, but it's a nice little slice of history for the guitar itself. A candidate for a future appearance in Classic Gear/Vintage Icons, perhaps?
Steve Ghee, via email

A double-neck Ricky is a rare bird among rare birds for sure, Steve, and yours is something special in that finish and with that intriguing bit of 'case candy'. We also hope you've clocked the recent opus on the company's guitars by guitar historians Martin and Paul Kelly entitled *Rickenbacker Guitars: Out Of The Frying Pan And Into The Fireglo*. Do any other readers have any rare guitars with star provenance or intriguing historical connections? Send 'em in and we'll print the best in these pages.

GARAGE BAND

I built my first guitar with Martin Dixon in Otley in 2006 and have been at it in my garage ever since. I'd recommend anybody to have a go; you will make mistakes for sure, but it's all part of the learning process. There's a through-neck bass I made for a friend with active Seymour Duncans – the neck is laminated purpleheart and maple, the top is wenge; there's a double-cut with a flame maple top, sapele back and purpleheart neck, Bare Knuckle pickups and Schaller five-way megaswitch; and finally an HSH semi-hollow with maple top and sapele back and neck.
Dave Ryall, via email

Thanks for telling us about these beauties, Dave – we've seen the photos and the quality looks rock solid. Like many home builders, you've discovered the rewards of working with woods just a little off the beaten path, from wenge to purpleheart. We always love to hear about readers' self-built masterpieces, so keep sending them in.

TONE LAB

I'd like to tell you about the first guitar I ever built in 1973, when I was a poor 23-year-old lab tech working in a technical college (where I managed to scrounge all the bits). The body was cut and shaped from an old

Steve Ghee's Rickenbacker 4080 came with a bonus photo featuring the late Mike Starr

teak laboratory bench top after scraping off decades of varnish, using a jigsaw, spokeshave, hammer and chisel, and lots and lots of sandpaper.

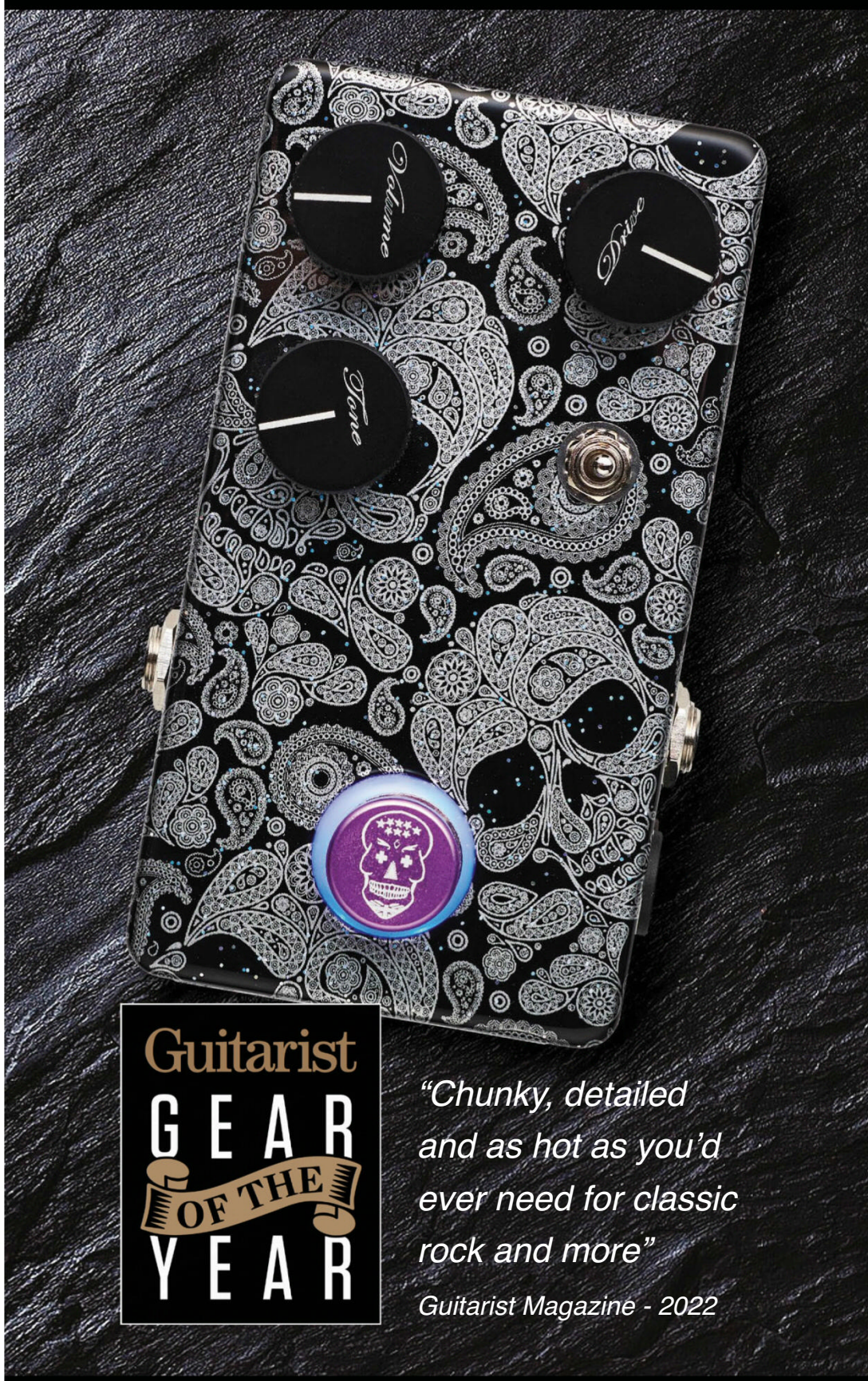
The pickups were hand-wound (as I couldn't afford real ones), mounted on thick rubber sheeting to reduce microphony, therefore low impedance and low output. So I built a preamp/tone control out of Veroboard – your original active system! I wish I had those germanium transistors now. It just goes to show that necessity really is the mother of invention, especially when you're skint!

Come 2021, it was time for an upgrade. The neck was one of three won in an auction war on a famous online auction site. The apparent mess on the woodwork is caused by a fungus attacking the timber. Thankfully, this does not cause any harm and in fact timber like this, called 'spalted', is actually sought out by woodworkers. Then there was a fair twist to the neck and fingerboard, so the next process was to straighten them up. Believe it or not, but a right-handed twist like this can be designed into the neck for a particular type of guitarist. Removal of the fingerboard (not easy) showed a crack across the last six frets, so that had to be fixed, too. I then refurbished the sticking truss rod (caused by its frayed plastic coating) by removing said plastic and simply wrapping with plumber's Teflon tape.

Next, it was time for some repairs to a few dented frets, reassembly and a nice coat of varnish to protect my lovely spalted neck. The fitting of the neck to the guitar body was accomplished by the judicious use of hammer and chisel. I made the tailpiece, bridge, neckplate and jack plate out of some scrap brass. The brass metalwork turned out really well, the bridge looking almost organic. It's amazing what you can do with basic hand tools, infinite patience and lots of elbow grease.

Flattley

Boutique Effects Pedals



Guitarist GEAR OF THE YEAR

"Chunky, detailed and as hot as you'd ever need for classic rock and more"

Guitarist Magazine - 2022

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Right: Rich Sharp captured this picture of his 1964 Gibson ES-335 TDC, alongside a 1969 Gibson J-50, in 1973

I'll admit routing the cutouts for the pickups was a bit scary. However, practising on some scrap timber gave me the confidence to go ahead and I am very pleased with the result.

Also, from the aforesaid auction site, I purchased a pair of P-90 pickups and had to face the dilemma of retaining the old scratchguard or having the plain-wood look. I opted for the former. I also tried out some brass control knobs to match the new brasswork. However, I preferred the original look so I adapted the scratchguard to fit the new pickups but shortened the brass fixing screws so just the heads were seen, and used double-sided tape in case I ever want to change my mind.

I also decided to keep the original knobs. As you can see they go up to 12, one better than Spinal Tap! I wired up the controls as a standard volume, neck tone and bridge tone, but wasn't happy with the sound, so I experimented and decided on a simple treble and bass setup (basically a treble bleed and bass bleed reverse wired on the potentiometers).

Gordon Stephen, via email

Thanks very much for sharing your work of many years with us, Gordon. We've plenty of time for kit-built guitars, but there's nothing quite so admirable as a guitar built from the ground up with hard work, ingenuity and simple materials as the principal ingredients. What's really fascinating is how committed you have been to refining your design and, it's clear from the pictures (below), that your original build was almost a rough sketch of what it has eventually become, with time and thought and refinement. Few people have completed such a long and fruitful journey with their self-built guitars – we take our hats off to you.

Below: Gordon's superb guitar has been years in the making, from its humble origins (right) to a star player (below)

READERS' RIGS

My home rig features a Mesa/Boogie Single Rectifier combo, Korg synth, Tannoy monitors and a rack with various units – mostly old-ish but they work perfectly! There are then two fab Strats – a 1988 American Standard and a 2007 Custom Shop American Standard. There are other guitars too: a 2017 CS blonde Black Guard Tele and a 1977 Wine Red Gibson LP Custom, a 1969 Gibson J-50, a pic [above] of which shows it in 1973, sitting alongside a 1964 Gibson ES-335 TDC, which I sold way back for £330, but I only paid £125 for it in 1969.

It would be interesting to run a 'Where Are They Now?' feature for guitars that readers sold some time ago. Unfortunately, I don't have the serial number for my old 335, but it's instantly recognisable by the top two pearl fingerboard markers because they had withered and shrunk – never seen that before.

Rich Sharp, via email

Your rig is packed full of top-notch classics and workhorses that will never let you down. Just the kind of setup we love and we bet that lot sounds fabulous, too. We love your 'Where Are They Now?' feature idea, too. Any readers care to set the ball rolling on that by sending in pics of lost guitar loves?

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

A lockdown clearout has left me with a pile of hundreds of copies of *Guitarist*. It seems a shame to take them to the recycling centre, so if any readers would like them then (and can pick them up) could you pass on my details, please?

Steve Hoggart, via email

Thanks Steve! If anyone wishes to take possession of Steve's trove of back issues, drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com and we'll be happy to connect you.

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

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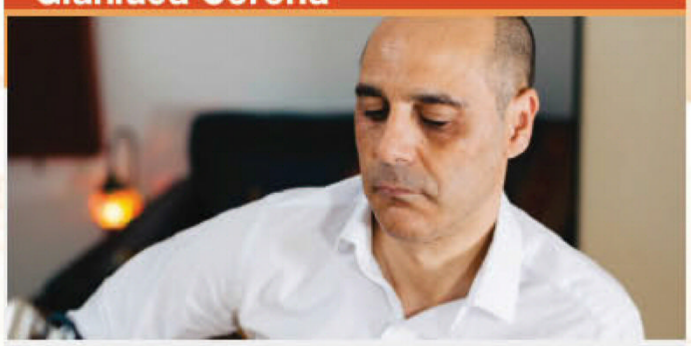
TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell

This course is for guitarists that are in bands or are planning to be in one; we will cover typical techniques & theories that will make you a better team player. From picking approaches to band relevant chord voicings.

MODERN BLUES with Gianluca Corona

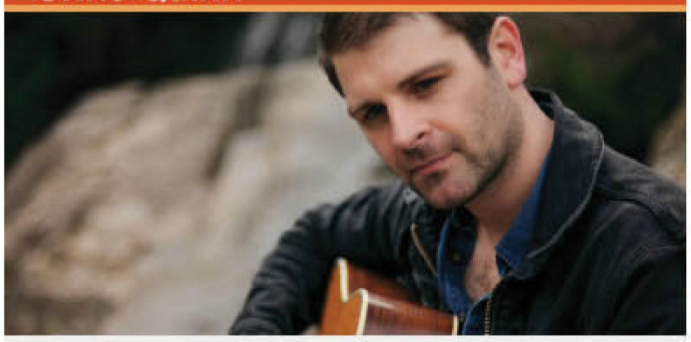


This will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention to the blues, as well as tips to hone your playing including a nod to the likes of Robben Ford, Larry Carlton and Gary Moore. Studying masters like these will help uncover a treasure trove of ideas for today's guitarists.

BLUES SONGS with Neville Marten

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

ACOUSTIC SONGS with Chris Quinn

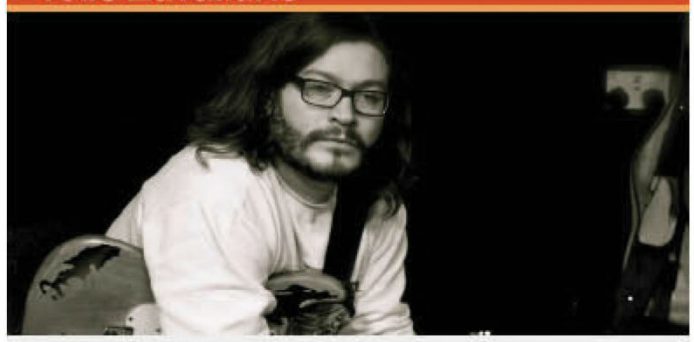


This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

'70S ROCK & INDIE ROCK with Jon Bishop

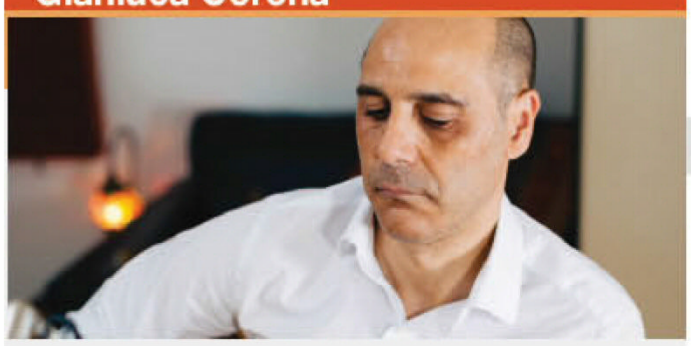
This course will cover many of the main components that guitarists use, ranging from scales and chord riffing through to string bending and use of harmonics. Lots of classic rock and indie riffs will be looked at with iconic songs.

MODERN ROCK with Tolis Zavaliaris



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

JAZZ with Gianluca Corona



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

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DUMBLE

Under The Hood

Following the death of Alexander Dumble in January, we take a deeper dive into the legendary designs that bear his name, and the gear and sounds that followed from his influence

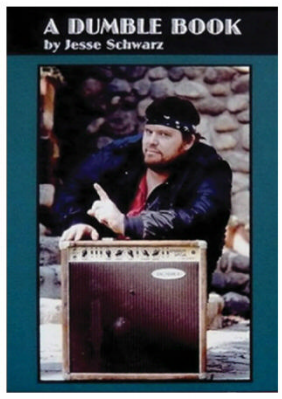
Words Nick Guppy

With a background in music and electronics, combined with a somewhat entrepreneurial tendency, Howard Alexander Dumble (who later asked to be known as Alexander) had a future in amplifier design that was almost preordained. Growing up in Bakersfield, California, Dumble sold homemade transistor radios to his school friends and built a 200-watt PA system for the local junior baseball team. As an epicentre of progressive rock and electric guitar development, California – particularly Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area – was driven by local bands including Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, The Byrds, Little Feat and Santana.

After leaving school, Dumble was introduced to the luthier Semie Moseley in Santa Cruz, who was looking for someone to design an amplifier to complement his Mosrite guitar range. Dumble built 10 or 11 Mosrite amps, but the deal went sour, with Dumble returning to build amps for himself, one at a time.

His first 'real' amp – often considered to be a prototype for the Overdrive Special – was called the Explosion. According to legend, Dumble's inspiration for the Overdrive Special came from seeing Robben Ford play through a 60s piggyback Fender Bassman head and cab. His circuit was loosely based on 60s Fender 'black-panel' designs, with a beefed-up power stage and a clean channel followed by a tone network, followed by a footswitchable overdrive section into which the clean preamp section cascaded.

The cascading gain concept had already been made popular by Mesa Engineering. But Dumble – who was an accomplished guitar and bass player – didn't care for Mesa's approach and changed the position of the overdrive section, moving it back after the tone controls. This allowed for a fatter, rounder overdrive tone that was further tweaked with toggle switches for Bright and Deep functions, as well as a Jazz/Rock switch that shifted the amp's character to a flatter EQ with less gain.



Those looking to indulge themselves further in the work of the master amp builder will do well to seek out Jesse Schwarz's rare and definitive *A Dumble Book*, published in 2009

One By One

Dumble wasn't interested in mass production; he was happy building his amps one at a time, each one individually tailored to the needs of the artist he was working with. Consequently, they're all different, with subtle (or not-so-subtle) changes to component values and positioning in order to bring out the desired characteristics. The nature of the preamp means there's an inherent compromise between clean and overdrive sounds because one drives the other with a shared EQ. So this is one area that Dumble would have varied depending on the customer's needs – we know some ODS models have clean channels that distort earlier, while others stay clean all the way up to 10.

The circuit was constantly updated and improved, Following the Fender-influenced early designs of the 70s, a different 'Skyline' EQ was added in the 80s. This was another modification that added a separate internal 'set and forget' EQ for the overdrive section – called the 'HRM' ('Hot Rod Marshall' or 'Hot Rubber Monkey', depending on whose books you read) – to address the shared EQ compromise.

For the Overdrive Specials, Dumble built everything from the aluminium chassis to the hand-drilled eyelet boards, giving him complete control over where the

Few have had their hands on a genuine Overdrive Special – this one is serial number 0128, made in 1986 and purchased for over $2,000 new

components should be placed. This is a fundamental part of the Dumble's unique tone and dynamic character. In more than one interview, Dumble himself said it wasn't just the schematic, and that the parts and layout were equally important, which explains why he began covering his preamp boards with epoxy resin 'goop' as his reputation grew.

Private Eye

Dumble was notoriously protective of his work and there are plenty of examples of the infamous contracts he made prospective clients sign. These documents meant people were forbidden to open the chassis, photograph the internal layout or even sell the amplifier on without his permission, although it's unlikely such stipulations were ever tested in court. Nevertheless, several examples have been 'de-gooped' and component values and layouts recorded for posterity, one of the most well documented being serial number 124. This writer was fortunate to peer inside a gooped example several years ago, revealing a layout and construction typical of many handmade one-off amplifiers, with a mixture of mostly New Old Stock components sitting on a hand-drilled formica eyelet board. It was clear each visible component and wire had been individually selected and precisely placed.

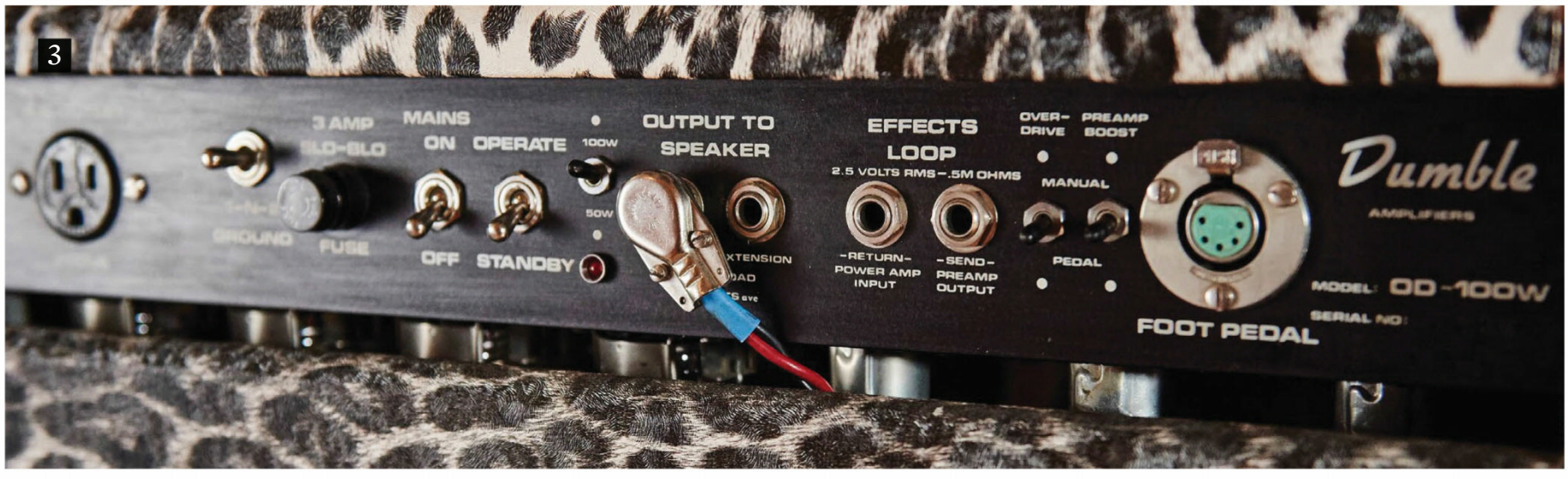
The ODS was a product of its time – built to last, intended for professional use on big stages, and calibrated to come into sonic focus at high volume. Dumble also built his own cabinets, mostly using semi-closed-back designs with carefully tuned oval ports to enhance the mids and upper mids, teamed with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, such as JBL D140s or

People were forbidden to open the chassis, photograph the layout or sell the amp without permission

Dumble's favourite, the Electro-Voice EVM12. Dumbles didn't have a proper effects loop; there was a pair of insert jacks between the preamp and power amp sections intended to be used with a standalone buffered effects loop circuit with variable send and return level controls, called the Dumbleator. Some later amps had the Dumbleator circuit built in. Most Overdrive Specials didn't include reverb, but a few were made and called Overdrive Reverbs.

Dumble used the 6L6 power valve for most of his amps, although later there was a run of EL34-powered ODSes, including serial number 183, which is another frequently copied design. Other famous Dumbles include Larry Carlton's 6V6-powered model, one of two owned by the LA session legend and commissioned for use in smaller clubs – and, of course, Robben Ford's celebrated serial number 102, possibly the most coveted of all Dumbles. Slightly less well-known perhaps, serial number 75 was owned by session guitarist Steve Farris of Mr Mister fame and is responsible for some of the best recorded examples of higher-gain Dumble tones, as heard on the 1985 album *Welcome To The Real World*.

1. Since Dumble amps didn't have a proper effects loop onboard, the Dumbleator – an external unit – was used for this function and included variable send and return level controls
2. The Electro-Voice EVM12 12-inch loudspeaker was a favourite of Alexander's – delivering 200 watts of power. Note the oval-ported back here, which was used to enhance mids and upper-mid frequencies
3. The ODS was built for the stage and this model offers a choice of 50- and 100-watt operation. The AC outlet on the left was once a common feature on guitar amps and is where you can plug in the aforementioned Dumbleator unit



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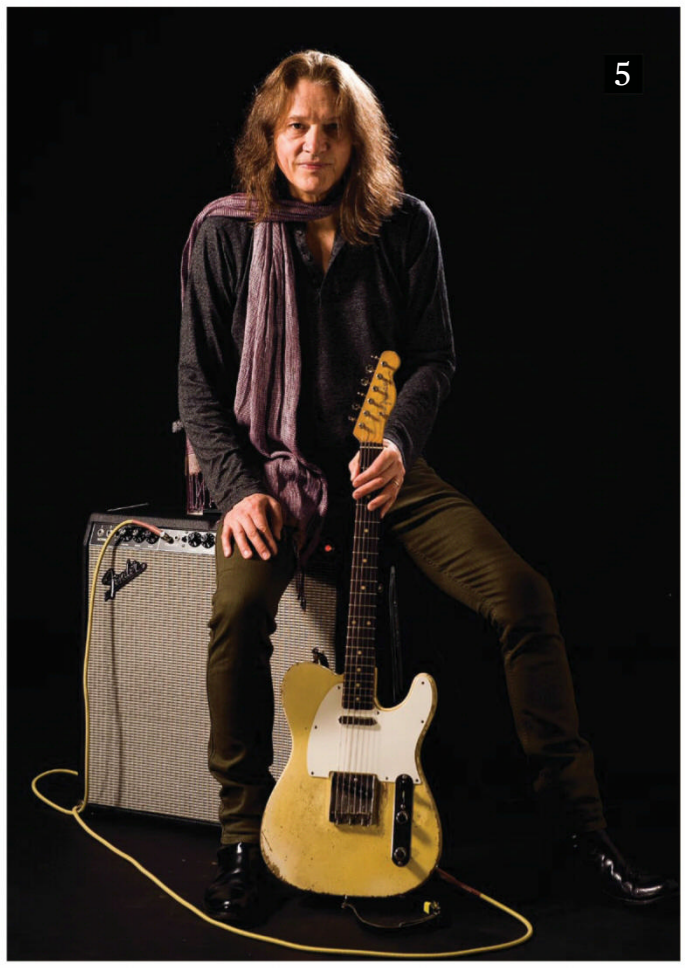
4. This Overdrive Special was purchased by Robben Ford around '93 and joined his tan-finished ODS from the previous decade

5. Robben Ford is said to have inspired the ODS in the early 70s when he played the Southern California circuit that Dumble frequented

6. The front panel offers up plenty of tone-tweaking options with Bright, Deep and Rock/Jazz (dirty/clean) switches

7. 6L6 power valves feature, as often chosen by Dumble, while the Signal Access sockets provide effect send and return sockets for use with a Dumblelator



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8. Kenny Wayne Shepherd was one of many players to pay tribute to Alexander Dumble when he passed away in January, citing Dumble as both an inspiration and a friend

9 & 10. Since so few players have been able to get near the Holy Grail of amps, pedals such as the Ethos Overdrive and Van Weelden's Royal Overdrive have sprung up, which aim to mimic the legendary Dumble tone on a more reasonable budget!

Of course, Dumble didn't just build Overdrive Specials. Alongside earlier designs including the Dumbleland and Winterland, his other most well-known design is the Steel String Singer, a single-channel high-headroom 100-watt head used by Stevie Ray Vaughan, John Mayer, Eric Johnson, Jackson Browne and David Lindley, to name just a few.

To our knowledge, SSS serial number 1 was commissioned and is still owned by avant-garde experimentalist Henry Kaiser, who owns several other Dumbles. SSS number 2 was commissioned by Jackson Browne and we believe currently lives with John Mayer, who also owns several other Dumbles.

Besides building his own designs from scratch, Dumble also modified several Fender and Marshall amps for various artists including Eric Clapton and Kenny Wayne Shepherd. There were customised tweed Deluxes he renamed 'Tweedle Dees' and, to our knowledge, a one-off based on a tweed Bassman called the 'Manzamp', which was commissioned and is presumably still owned by Bonnie Raitt.

D-Style Tone

With fewer than 300 real Dumble amps in circulation, supply will always be vastly outstripped by demand, so it's hardly surprising that many amp builders have tapped into this market. Some are similar to Dumble: small one- or two-person operations building high-quality replicas, often of specific ODS or SSS serial numbered amps. Bludotone's Brandon Montgomery is one such builder whose products have found their way into the rigs of users including Carlos Santana, Jon Herington and Larry Carlton. Other well-known

With fewer than 300 real Dumble amps in circulation, supply will always be vastly outstripped by demand

names in this category include Amplified Nation, Louis Electric and Jelle Welagen. Meanwhile, amp builders such as Fuchs Audio Technology, Two-Rock and 633 Amplification have taken the Dumble as their inspiration and extended its capabilities, producing new designs that are perhaps more relevant to today's demands.

For those of us on a budget who crave that Dumble tone, there are many pedals that can get you into the ballpark. Standout mentions would include the Ethos Overdrive, Van Weelden's Royal Overdrive and Wampler's Euphoria, while there are various kits available in the burgeoning DIY market, the most well known being Malaysia's Ceriatone.

With Dumble's departure, opportunities to see and hear the real thing may become even more limited as they're likely to spend more time in bank vaults than on stages. Though, thankfully, there are plenty of alternatives at all price points. While Alexander Dumble may have taken a lot of irreplaceable guitar amp knowledge with him, he's left behind a sonic legacy that will likely last forever. G

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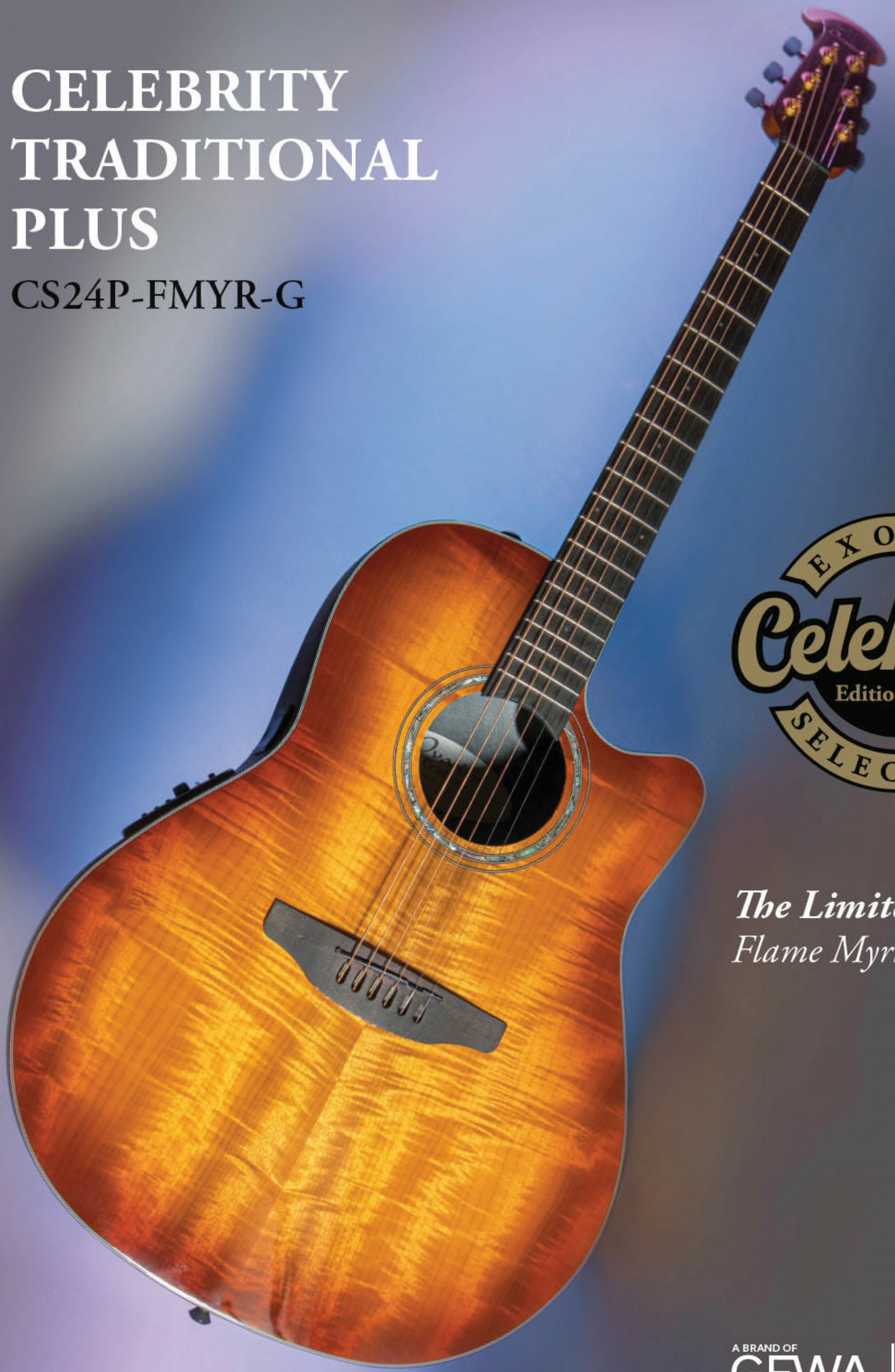

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ERIC KRASNO

Many guitarists would love to have the chops of BB King or Grant Green. Others would settle for being a great songwriter. But LA's Eric Krasno has both fretboard fire and a prolific pen, making him one of the most exciting R&B-vibed guitarists working today

Words Robin Davey **Portraits** Leland Hayward

If you peruse the artists signed to the Mascot Label Group, it reads like a list of the sharpest guitar players around: from Vai to Robben Ford, the level of musicianship is incredible. But one artist on the roster seemed a little more intriguing. Los Angeles resident Eric Krasno is one of those interesting musicians who is happy to sit on a tasteful, minimal groove all through one song only to burn like a latter-day Wes Montgomery on the next. Blending elements of Herbie Hancock and Curtis Mayfield in his writing with chops worthy of Grant Green, Krasno really is a subtle gem of a musician.

Krasno's broad-based approach may come from his background as a producer – and he has produced some of the biggest names in music, from rapper 50 Cent to Derek Trucks & Susan Tedeschi to soul legend Aaron Neville. And it also may be why his own records are studies in warm, understated funk with great-sounding arrangements. A veteran of the bands Lettuce and Soulive, he's now an established solo artist whose in-the-pocket new album, *Always*, walks in the footsteps of The Meters and Shuggie Otis. Intrigued, we swung by his home in Pasadena to find out more about this soulful, multi-faceted player.

What inspired you to pick up a guitar in the first place?

"My older brother was playing music, he's almost six years older, and my grandfather was also a musician and my dad, not professionally, but he played a lot of music, so it was in my house. When my brother started jamming with his friends in our basement, it was just something I wanted to be a part of. I had this record player that you could actually plug into, it had an input on it, so I could play along with records. My brother would let me borrow his guitar and I would play along with records and try to get good enough to the point where I could go jam with his friends.

"Some of those early Led Zeppelin records just blew my mind. My dad loved The Rolling Stones and The Beatles, and Van Halen was popular at the time, but Led Zeppelin just felt like it was mine. I loved my dad's music that he played, loved my brother's, but when I found Led Zeppelin, it was like *me*. Then guys like Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan blew my mind – and that was when I kind of took the dive."

"Some of those early Led Zeppelin records blew my mind. Van Halen was popular, but Led Zep felt like it was mine"

Your influences have a very bluesy foundation. With the music you're playing now, your guitar style is a little more funky. What led you that way?

"There were different points where I took different exits off the highway into different realms. It might have been around the same time I discovered James Brown, and the stuff they were doing blew my mind, too, that rhythm stuff. And The Meters, Leo Nocentelli, and the rhythm players that were doing such unique, interesting stuff with the guitar that was much more percussive. I was really into the Headhunters era of Herbie Hancock, Wah Wah Watson, and all those records. Compositionally, how he made funk music, but it was with jazz chord changes in there, and it was a lot of improvising and psychedelic elements.

"Then when we started the band Lettuce, the biggest influence really was that Herbie Hancock 70s era, and Tower Of Power. We were really into hip-hop. I was into Run-DMC back in the day, and the Beastie Boys. So that's when all of that started

1. The Analog Man King Of Tone overdrive and MXR Super Badass Variac Fuzz are key pedals for Eric

2. More MXR classics, in micro form, adorn Eric's grab-and-go pedalboard

3. A Gretsch G5260T Electromatic baritone electric offers some extra low-down grunt for Eric's warm and efficient grooves – a secret weapon many players have come to rely upon

4. A well-used Gibson EB-2 semi-acoustic bass reminds the visitor that much of Eric's career has been spent as a producer, slotting in hooks and basslines to tracks where needed

feeding into it. I was also really into Stevie Wonder and that was rooted in my dad playing Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder when I was a kid. I got really into the 70s era of Stevie Wonder, *Music Of My Mind* and *Fulfillingness' First Finale*, all those records. All of it seeped in as I got older and discovered more and more records."

Unlike many guitarists, you've done a lot of high-level production work in your career. How did you get into that world?

"When I was in college, I started to produce. I didn't even know that I was doing it, but I've always been interested in producing records, since back in the day, sitting with my dad's record collection and looking through the liner notes and wondering what each role was. I learned engineering just by plugging things in and figuring things out from the early days of my 4-track.

"When Soulive got signed and we got to work with all these amazing engineers and producers, I was always studying what they were doing. Then, on the side, I was producing for other singers, and some of those things got pretty successful. Before I even really knew what I was doing, I was getting jobs producing, and it's always been a sidebar to my career as an artist. It's often times been hard to juggle the two, or really focus on producing, because I've always had bands and tours going on. But it's something I'm very passionate about nonetheless."

You've worked with a pretty diverse set of artists over the years...

"Yeah, it's been all over the map. I produced Aaron Neville's record a few years ago. I produced for 50 Cent. A lot of hip-hop records, especially during that era. Then there was Norah Jones. I've also worked with members of the Grateful Dead, I've worked with Dave Matthews..."

How big a part does your guitar playing play when you're producing?

"It's always different. If I'm doing a hip-hop session, it may not be there. I produced a group called The London Souls, where I don't play guitar on the record, but I play bass. With Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi, I'll play on some things. There's other times, like Andy Frasco – I just produced his record – and I'm playing guitar on everything, and bass, and it's more prominent. It's different every time. Being a producer, it's whatever's needed in that moment."

"I've always been interested in producing records, since sitting with my dad's record collection and wondering what each role was"

Your latest record, *Always*, has a really distinctive sound, taut and sparse yet groovy. How did you arrive at that?

"During the pandemic, when it first hit, I met a guy online, Otis McDonald is his producer/artist name, and we met through a mutual friend – Will Blades, the keyboardist in my band. He was like, 'Oh, you got to work with this guy. He's amazing,' and we met via Instagram. He was like, 'Hey, I'm doing this compilation project for charity. Wanted to see if you might want to do a song.' At that time, I was just recording some demos of stuff here in my studio, I was messing around with this Bob Dylan song, *The Man In Me*, and I played acoustic and sang it. I sent it to him and he was like, 'Oh man, let me add some stuff to this.' So he produced it via satellite, added drums, bass, keys, background vocals. It was so stylistically right where I'm at. I was like, 'Hey, man, I have a bunch of other songs sitting around.'

"We did pretty much the whole record like that. We were both sitting in our studio and it really sounds live, but the record, it's [primarily] me and him. He's a great drummer and keyboard player, and a great engineer and great mixer."

When it came to the guitars, how did you approach the songs?

"John Mayer sent me one of his Silver Sky

"Being on the road and singing every night, that really informed how I wanted to write songs for me"

guitars and I loved it. It kind of got me back into the single-coil, like 'Strat' world, and a lot of the 'using the fuzz pedal' on stuff. That was the cool sound I used throughout the record. There's some acoustic guitar on there, but mostly I used either a Strat or the Silver Sky. I just started developing this new guitar with D'Angelico, so that's on the last couple of songs, which is also a single-coil vibe. I think I used my Ibanez model on the song called *Hold Tight*, but primarily I was in the Strat world."

What were your go-to amps?

"I was actually using a Supro Statesman head and this [Universal Audio] Ox. I used a Super Reverb with the Ox as well, so I went between those two. The Ox is an attenuator, but it also has a digital thing where it's a speaker emulator. I had been mic'ing the amps [previously], and then just out of convenience was using [the Ox]. I loved the tones I was getting, even more than mic'ing the amp."

"John Mayer sent me one of his Silver Sky guitars and I loved it. It kind of got me back into the single-coil 'Strat' world"

Are there any go-to overdrive and distortion pedals that shape your sound on the record?

"I use an [Analog Man] King Of Tone all the time and an MXR Super Badass Variac Fuzz. I have a lot of fuzz pedals, but I just became obsessed with this one. They sent me that right around the same time Mayer sent me that red Silver Sky – and when I plugged those in together, it was like a magic combination. It has this Variac function that changes the voltage or emulates the voltage, the battery dying, which is cool because it has this sputtering tone. Pretty much every solo on my record has that pedal on it."

At what point did you feel like you wanted to have something that had your name on it, a solo project?

"Well, I made a solo record many years ago called *Reminisce*, but it was a very different thing because it was in the realm of Soulive and Lettuce, melding those things together. Whereas when I made the record *Blood From A Stone*, I consider that my first solo record because it's the first record I was singing on.

"At that time, I was really into songwriting and lyric-writing, and I had been working with a lot of other artists, writing for them. I also had a group of songs I wanted to record and I called my friend Dave Gutter. At that point, a lot of the songs were instrumental and he's one of my favourite lyric writers. So we got together and, within a few days, we wrote a bunch of great songs and I sang them, initially thinking maybe these are demos and I'll get a bunch of great singers that I know to sing them. But the demos just felt right. I'd always sang backgrounds. I'd always had singers in my band, but at that point I was like, 'Okay, maybe it is time to just sing.'

"In 2015 or 2016, I formed a band around that record. It was really at that point that I started to figure it out because being on the road and singing every night, that really informed how I wanted to write songs for *me*. Just even physically – where does my voice work? Where does it fit? I had to start figuring out the right keys and, beyond that, what I wanted to say and stylistically how I could blend all these different things together. Because even just in our conversation so far, you can hear that I'm into so many different things. Which is great when you're a producer because you're bouncing between these different artists. But when you make a record, you can't go from trap music to psychedelic rock. If there's a way to drop all those influences in and create a unique sound, that is the magic and that's something I've been trying to get to." G

Always by Eric Krasno is out now on Mascot Records

www.erickrasno.com

THE BEST NEW

GEAR

FOR 2022

From a renaissance in British guitar making to next-gen digital modelling amps and tech-enhanced acoustics, the future of tone has arrived – and it's looking bright

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Neil Godwin

While most guitar makers are back to something like normal service again after the world was tipped upside down by the pandemic, it's true to say that 2022 is a changed landscape in terms of guitar gear. An influx of new and returning players has shaken up the market and, it's fair to say, lots of longterm guitarists have heavily reassessed their musical priorities during the past two years. As we explored in our New Wave issue of last year, global supply problems have reshaped how guitars are being designed – and what were, until recently, only seeds of change are now rapidly bearing fruit. For example, bottlenecks in the supply of once common parts and materials from overseas have helped give British guitar making a boost – and in the following pages we take a look at the fast-growing UK Guitar Builders group, which counts not only PJD guitars among its output but Cream T electrics made in collaboration with Billy Gibbons (see Wishlist, page 26) and now team-built electrics for high-end British luthier Seth Baccus.

Over in the USA, Taylor is turning to more easily available tonewoods like maple for new acoustic guitar designs such as its beautiful AD27e Flametop reviewed on page 98. Revered maker Martin, meanwhile, has found ingenious ways to embed tone-enhancing tech in some of its most classic models over on page 72. Also, there's no denying the future of tone will increasingly be shaped by digital amplifiers – not least because the mass production of vacuum tubes is under increasing threat, as Nick Guppy writes on page 75.

So, are we entering a brave new world or waving goodbye to a classic era? The reality may be a bit of both, but what is sure is that, as guitarists, we have more choice than ever, as the following pages aim to show...

Atkin
Cort
ATKIN

ELECTRICS

Words Dave Burrluck

1

2

1 ATKIN ELECTRIC SERIES

In a move that recalls Bob Dylan going electric, hugely respected UK acoustic guitar builder Alister Atkin has done the same. Like his vintage-inspired acoustic guitars before it, such as The Forty Three whose influence was found in Gibson's early 40s J-45, the electric range centres on Fender's finest with the T-style Fifty-Two (pictured), Fifty-Nine and Sixty-Eight, and the S-style Fifty-Four and Sixty-Three. The guitars feature aged nitrocellulose finishes and aged Gotoh vintage-style hardware, with a hint of modernism in the contoured heels, and a 254mm (10-inch) veneer fingerboard with rolled edges. Body woods include obeche and reclaimed pine.

Pickups are made in-house in Canterbury. "Typically, we use Alnico V magnets with a relatively low wind using Heavy Formvar enamelled wire, scatterwound onto our hand-assembled bobbins for an authentic vintage sonic result," we're told. Check out our full review in the next issue of *Guitarist*.

Price: **From £2,799** Website: **https://atkinguitars.com**

2 CHARVEL GUTHRIE GOVAN SIGNATURE MJ SAN DIMAS SD24 CM

This latest Guthrie Govan signature is made in Japan and loads in numerous modern twists on a classic-looking Three Tone Sunburst-finished basswood body with an ash top. The roasted maple neck is graphite reinforced with 24 jumbo stainless-steel frets on the compound radius (304.8 to 406.4mm/12- to 16-inch) 'board, which features Luminlay side dots. Like previous Guthrie signature models it's an HSH configuration with five-way switching and has a two-way mini-toggle switch to engage single-coil simulation in bridge and neck humbucker positions.

Price: **£2,449** Website: **www.charvel.com**

3 CORT G290 FAT II

As we're increasingly writing, Cor-Tek makes many of the world's electric guitars in Indonesia for a diverse range of brands, not least PRS SE, Manson, Strandberg and Relish (while many more brands prefer not to namecheck Cor-Tek as manufacturer). Cor-Tek's own brand, Cort, provides exceptional value for money, particularly considering the specifications. Its G290 FAT has received plenty of positive response and this year it's upgraded with a roasted maple neck and fingerboard (with 304.8 to 400mm/12- to 15.75-inch compound radius), black Tusq nut and Luminlay side dots. In terms of construction, the G290 Fat II features a sassafras body with a figured maple top, available in Antique Violin Burst and Bright Blue Burst plus a new-for-2022 colour, Trans Black Burst. Hardware includes rear lock tuners and back-routed two-post vibrato, and the Fat II is powered by a set of VTH-77 pickups with coil-splitting combinations via the five-way lever pickup selector.

While Cort has plenty more additions, not least in the progressive and multi-string style, the new G110 is a very classy starter guitar (and one with considerable modding appeal) at an impossibly low price of just £189 in a choice of three open-pore finishes. A very competent modern S-style with HSS pickup configuration and six-screw vibrato. When did low-end guitars get so good?

Price: **£639** Website: **www.cortguitars.com**

PRS SE SILVER SKY
This long-awaited launch (see issue 482 for the full review) has to be one of the big guitars for 2022. It might be a third of the price of the USA model, but it's far from a third of the guitar. John Mayer plus Paul Reed Smith in affordable SE style

CORT G290 FAT II
Cor-Tek makes many of the world's electric guitars – including the PRS SE range. Its own brand, Cort, might not be the trendiest, but it packs a big punch for the money. This one is upgraded for 2022 with a roasted maple neck and fingerboard. See the next issue of *Guitarist* for the full review

GREEN FINGERS

Words Jamie Dickson

British pickup maker Monty's has just launched a tonally exacting tribute to the unusual pickups in Peter Green's famous 'Greeny' Les Paul Standard. Matt Gleeson explains how the company's unique Bethnal Green set took shape

How did the Bethnal Green project start?
"It all started when I went over to a guy's house who was helping me out some other vintage stuff. He had been commissioned to try to sell the 'Greeny' guitar in the UK, but in the end he couldn't do it, so it went back to America. Then, of course, it ended up with Kirk Hammett. So he literally said to me, 'Matt, come and have a look at this...' and he got 'Greeny' out. I got to play it

"I took the DC resistance and Gauss readings as a starting point then went on a journey with them, tweaking until I got the goosebumps"

and hear it and then he let me take the control plate off, take some readings, all that kind of stuff – although I couldn't take the actual pickups apart, understandably.

"So the idea behind the Bethnal Green humbucker set was just trying to recreate the sound of those pickups. The thing that really jumped out at me when I inspected the Greeny pickups was that, because the neck pickup is so different from the bridge one, the out-of-phase sound [of both pickups combined] isn't as shrill and quiet as it might otherwise have been. On the original Greeny pickups, the wire gauge was the same but the wire *type* used on the neck pickup was Heavy Formvar, which is the same wire that you traditionally get on a Strat pickup – it's that really orange-y looking one. But the wire on the bridge pickup was plain enamel, which is the standard PAF wire, and although the coating is marginally thicker – we're talking like thousandths of a millimetre – using plain enamel wire results in a tighter, more compact coil. So even though the bridge winding, off the top of my head, was around 8.4k [DC resistance] and the neck pickup's reading is less, the coils on the neck pickup are physically really fat. You can't get any more copper on there, that's how big they are. Whereas [with the] bridge coils, you could still get another few thousand winds on."

How did that difference in wire spec and coil thickness influence the classic out-of-phase sound that 'Greeny' is known for?
"With true phase cancellation [between identical but out-of-phase signal sources] it's completely silent. But guitar pickups are positioned a short distance apart, reading slightly different parts of the string. And when those pickups are also constructed slightly differently to each other that makes a difference, too – and you're left with a sound that's less out of phase, if that makes sense. It's still out of phase, just less so than it could otherwise have been, which is the case with these pickups."

What was the design process like and how did you get your pickups as close to the sound of the originals as possible?
"I like to work from the sound. You can design these things strictly 'by the numbers' and make them to the readings like a pure technical exercise and nothing else, but I like to take the things I know about sonics and cross that with the technical data and then just tweak and tweak until, in my head, the sound I'm hearing is exactly like it was when I was in the room. For example, when looking at the original pickups I took the DC resistance and Gauss readings and whatnot – which, for example, revealed the magnets were quite weak in the original pickups – and then from that starting point I went on a journey with them, tweaking until I got the goosebumps."

The hand-crafted Bethnal Green pickups used measurements and readings collected from the 'Greeny' pickups firsthand

"These are a bit more like Tele pickups on super-steroids, rather than just standard PAF tone"

What kind of tonal performance can players expect to get from a set of Monty's Bethnal Green pickups?

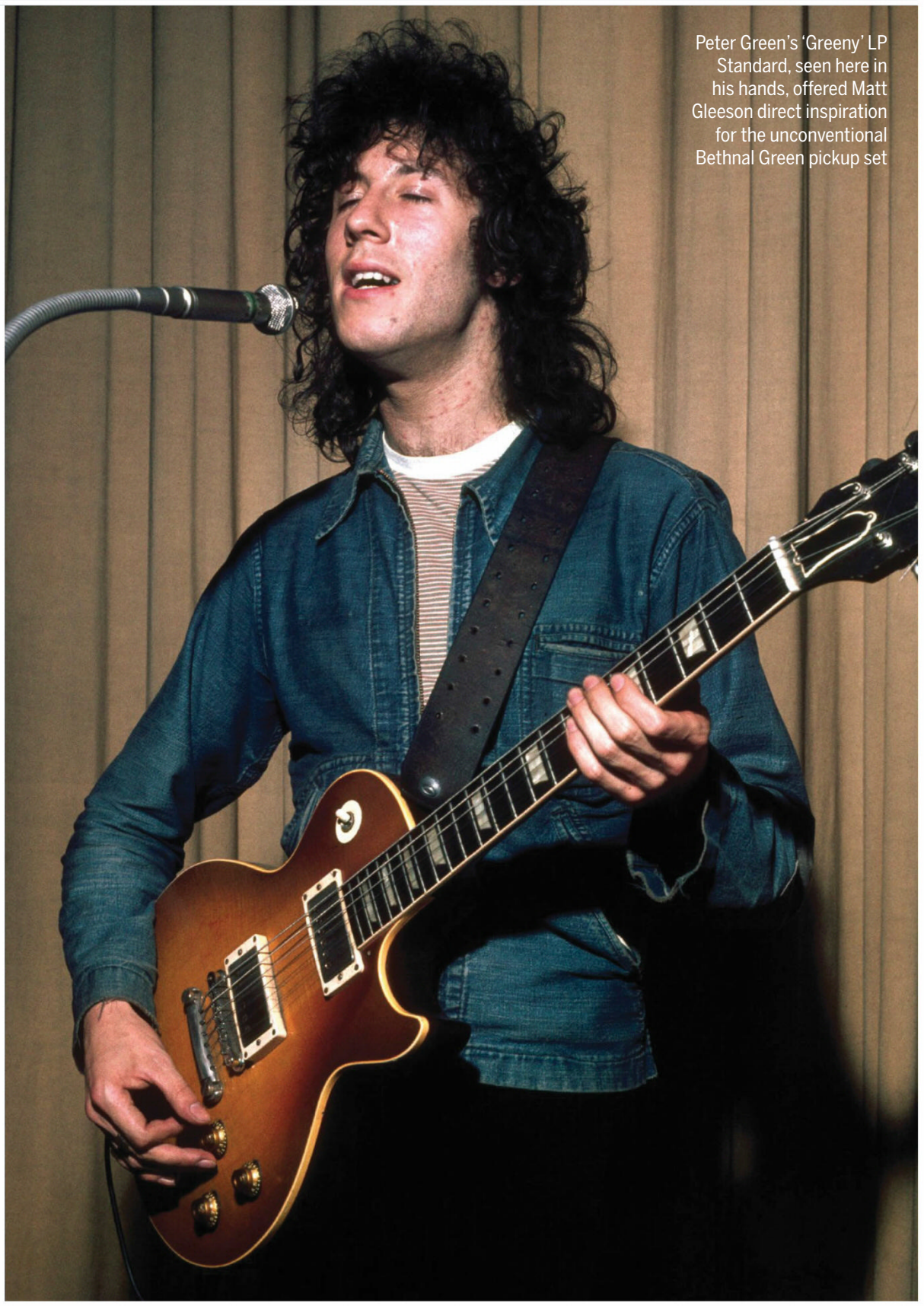
"The bridge pickup's got that sort of PAF/Tele 'cut' to it but with a little bit more mids and low-end push. But the neck pickup is a completely different beast – it doesn't sound like a standard PAF by any means. It's still got clarity, but it's got a bit more woodiness to it. Then when you put them together, they've got that really flutey kind of slightly nasal thing going on but not your full out-of-phase, horrible harshness.

"And then, obviously, when you roll one of the pickups back [in volume], because you're changing the frequency curve so much, they actually flip back into phase. When you do that, you get this really lush, chimey tone. I can't really think of any other description for it – it just sounds cool. It's got a really nice dynamic tone to it. Compared with our standard PAF pickups, if you were A/B'ing them next to each other, they are a little bit more throaty overall. These are a bit more like Tele pickups on super-steroids, rather than just standard PAF tone – these are full-on Arnie style!"

You went to quite a lot of trouble to make the Bethnal Greens look as well as sound the part. What kinds of authentic features did you try to replicate?

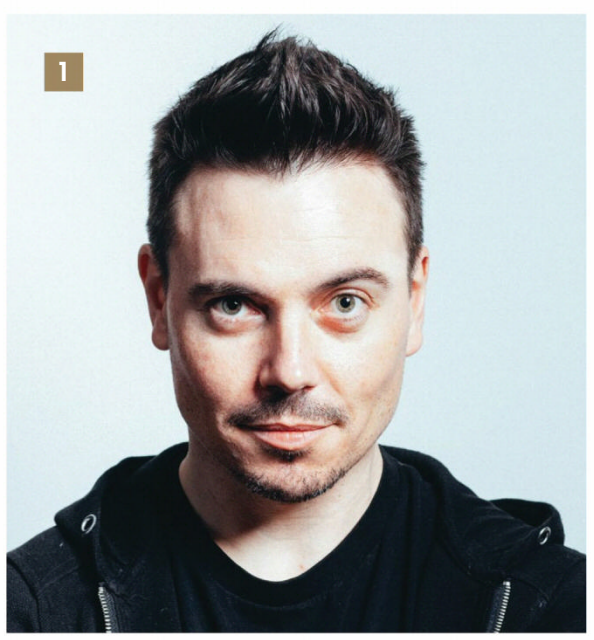
"For our standard PAFs and other standard humbuckers I use a very thin, high-quality nickel-silver cover, which is as tonally transparent as possible. But with these ones, I wanted them to be even more period-correct because the Bethnal Green humbuckers are a tribute to those pickups [in 'Greeny'], and I managed to find a guy who just does really small runs of perfect period-correct metal pickup covers; they're still nickel-silver, but they're a bit thicker and they've got exactly the right kind of 'TV face'. They're really hard to get, but really worth it. Everything else is about getting the details right – so it's got the proper Patent Applied For decal with the raised lettering like the original, and the baseplate is a complete replica of an original PAF with all right tooling marks and all that kind of thing."

www.montysguitars.com

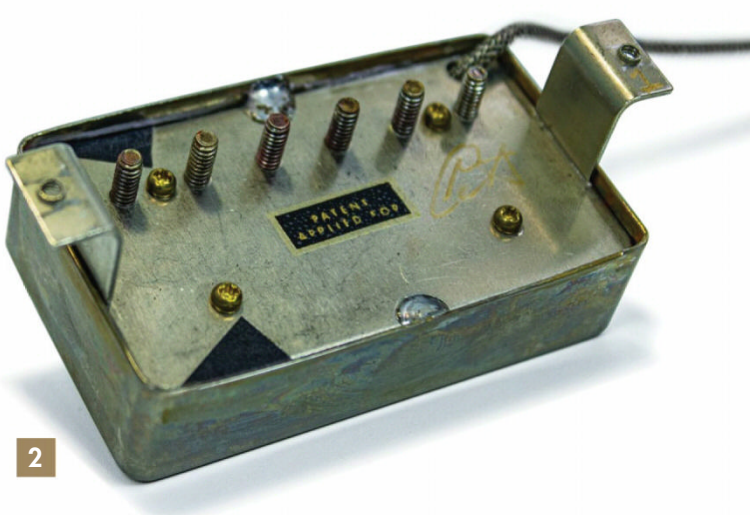


Peter Green's 'Greeny' LP Standard, seen here in his hands, offered Matt Gleeson direct inspiration for the unconventional Bethnal Green pickup set

PHOTO BY GEORGE WILKES/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



1. A chance encounter with 'Greeny' led Matt Gleeson to develop his own tribute to its pickups



2. Period-correct detail is observed in the 'Patent Applied For' decal and choice of metal covers

4 FENDER JV MODIFIED

Inspired by the original JV series of the early 80s, this four-strong Japanese-made range features modded basswood-bodied instruments, including a '60s Stratocaster (£1,249), a '50s Stratocaster HSS (£1,299, pictured), '60s Custom Telecaster (£1,299) and '50s Telecaster (£1,249, pictured). All have modified soft-V neck profiles, maple fingerboards (except the '60s Custom Tele, which is rosewood) and a 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius with medium jumbo frets. The Olympic White '60s Strat features modded wiring via a pull-push switched tone pot, while the 2-Colour Sunburst '50s Strat adds a "powerful" humbucker at the bridge with a coil-split. The bound-edge Firemist Gold Custom Tele and the White Blonde '50s Telecaster (with gold scratchplate) both feature a four-way switch offering a series combination of the two single coils, and a pull-push switch allows you to flip the phase.

In Limited Edition releases, six decades of the Jaguar is celebrated with two models: the 60th Anniversary Jaguar and 60th Anniversary American Ultra Luxe Jaguar – both at £2,499. The former is the vintage style with nitro-finished alder body in two colours, Mystic Dakota Red and Mystic Lake Placid Blue. The Ultra Luxe updates the style with a compound radius fingerboard with 22 stainless-steel frets, contoured heel, locking tuners and Custom Double Tap humbuckers.

Price: **From £1,249** Website: **www.fender.com**

5 GIBSON ARTIST MODELS

The new Slash Les Paul Standard Limited 4 Album Edition (£2,899) ties in with the guitarist's new record, *4* (featuring Myles Kennedy and The Conspirators), the first album to be released on Gibson Records. Limited to 250 pieces, its "unique case" has "a specially designed compartment [that] holds a copy of the vinyl album".

Along with costlier tributes to BB King and Johnny Winter (see opposite, £6,099 and £7,899 respectively), another new launch is the Dave Mustaine Flying V EXP (£2,499). It's a Flying V with an Explorer headstock, of course, and includes Mustaine's signature Seymour Duncan Thrash Factor pickups and black hardware.

Price: **£Various** Website: **www.gibson.com**

6 GRETSCH ADDITIONS

There's plenty of Gretsch action to start the year. In the low-end Streamliner range are the G2622 Center Block with V Stop-Tail (£509, pictured left) and G2655T Center Block Jr with Bigsby (£569), which follow the same style as the FideliSonic 90s versions launched last year but with standard Broad'Trons – both with six colour options. Another fave, the true solidbody G2215-P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club (£385) has some expanded colours, from the moody Havana Burst with black plastic parts to Shell Pink.

The Electromatic range gets a raft of additions with both Single-Cut (£1,059) and Double-Cut (£1,039, pictured right) Classic Hollowbodies. The guitars use "an all-new trestle block bracing to help reduce unwanted feedback", says Gretsch, and all-new FT-5E Filter'Tron pickups. There's also a 12-string Double-Cut at £1,039. The single-cut Jet series gets a baritone addition with V-Stoptail or Bigsby (£609 and £709 respectively), while the Jet BT (£609) adds Broad'Tron 'buckers. Oh, and there's the G5700 Electromatic Lap Steel (£495), a fine slice of retro available in five colours.

Price: **From £385** Website: **www.gretschguitars.com**

GIBSON BB KING LUCILLE LEGACY

Gibson is releasing quite a number of limited special editions, and they don't get bigger than this tribute to the King. This Custom Shop model rounds up numerous features from the great man's Lucille – the sealed semi-hollow body, TP-6 tailpiece with fine tuners plus Custombuckers, mono Varitone and Transparent Ebony nitrocellulose finish

GIBSON JOHNNY WINTER 1964 FIREBIRD V

Johnny Winter's association with the Firebird is well known and this aged V looks as though it's just finished a few tours with the late great electric bluesman. The ageing is done in Gibson's Murphy Lab and includes numerous details such as the plugged holes from the removed Maestro Vibrola, the faded Firebird logo and the missing reflector on the rhythm tone knob

7 IBANEZ ADDITIONS

As well as the razor-sharp new RGT electrics with poplar burl tops on the facing page, Ibanez has launched a bevy of attractive new blues, jazz and rock-focused semis, including the AS73G-PBM with a Linden-wood top, back and sides, and bound walnut fingerboard in an eye-catching Prussian Blue Metallic finish (£449), while a more affordable version of the enduringly popular Japanese AS2000 also joins the range in the form of the AS113-BS (£829), which features the same Super 58 pickups as the AS2000 as well and tone-expanding Tri-Sound circuitry and the dependable Quik Change III tailpiece.

Price: **From £449** Website: **www.ibanez.com**

8 KAUFFMANN COZY

Along with repros of the world's most popular trio of solidbodies, Kauffmann has a more original design in the bolt-on Cozy model – although its offset shape does bear quite a similarity to Novo's Serus. It's an expansive platform and comes with a choice of bridges (hardtail and vibrato) with either Kauffman's own-design pickups or the UK-made Cream Ts. The guitars are made in-house at Kauffmann's Guitar Store in the Netherlands. The bodies and necks are crafted locally and all the finishing, assembly and setups are handled by store founder Albert Deinum. We'll have a full review in our next issue, and in the meantime you can check them out at Sound Affects.

Price: **From £2k** Web: **www.kauffmannsguitarstore.com**

9 PRS SE STANDARD 24-08 & S2 CUSTOM 24-08

The SE Silver Sky might have grabbed all the headlines, but other PRS launches include this pair of 24-08s. The 24-fret SE Standard (£620, pictured left) features a shallow violin top carve, edge bound mahogany body (in Tobacco Sunburst and Translucent Blue) with a wide-thin maple neck and bound-edge rosewood fingerboard. Its open-coil TCI 'S' humbuckers can be switched via two mini-toggles to true single coil, giving a total of eight sound options along with the main three-way lever switch.

The USA S2 Custom 24-08 (£1,999, pictured right) joins the long-running S2 Custom 24. The all-mahogany model has a chamfered-edge maple top and Pattern Thin neck profile, plus 85/15 'S' humbuckers, again with the 24-08 switching, and it comes with six translucent colour choices.

Price: **£620 & £1,999** Website: **www.prsguitars.com**

10 VINTAGE V65 ICON DISTRESSED

This new V65 from Vintage jumps on both the offset and heavy-aged-relic bandwagons in very affordable style. It shoots for a boutique-like simplified Jazzmaster style with offset-style vibrato, a tune-o-matic-style bridge, two Wilkinson Soapbar single-coil pickups controlled by a three-way toggle selector, and master volume and tone controls. Body wood here is alder with a 254mm (10-inch) radius rosewood fingerboard on a maple bolt-on neck. Two colours – Distressed Black and Distressed Tobacco Sunburst – are available, although, as you can see above, there's not much paint left on the bodies!

As ever, Vintage guitars offer exceptional value for money and are perfect vehicles for any modders out there. Expect to see this one in The Mod Squad very shortly...

Price: **£449** Website: **https://vintageguitarsrus.com**

IBANEZ RGT1270PB-DTF PREMIUM
Fans of high-performance electrics should check out this new HSH model from Ibanez. With a seven-piece maple and walnut through-neck design, stability and upper-fret access is superb, while the poplar burl top on a basswood body yields a visually stunning instrument. From neck to bridge respectively DiMarzio Air Norton, True Velvet and The Tone Zone pickups round out a formidable package

IBANEZ RGT1220PB-ABS PREMIUM
With a similar neck/body spec to the RGT1270PB-DTF above, this model offers a simpler dual-humbucker spec of DiMarzio Air Norton and The Tone Zone humbuckers and a natural finish

RISING STARS

Words Dave Burrluck

The UK's guitar building sector gets a new manufacturing hub in the form of UKGB, founded by the experts at PJD Guitars and featuring some of the hottest names in homegrown talent. We find out more...

1. Seth Baccus is one of the most highly regarded UK guitar makers and his start-up guitars will now be made by UKGB

2. The first Seth Baccus/ UKGB guitars will include this Shoreline T with roasted flamed maple neck, obeche body and Bare Knuckle pickups

3. The quality of PJD's own guitars, such as the Woodford (left) and St John Standard, paved the way for the new enterprise

York is fast becoming the manufacturing centre of the British production guitar. Regular readers of *Guitarist* will be aware that it's the home of PJD Guitars, and it's this company's success that is driving a new venture: UKGB (UK Guitar Builders). Last year PJD was approached by Sound Affects owner, Tim Lobley, to consider making a guitar that incorporated Relish's pickup-swapping technology. But rather than that becoming a PJD model, it kickstarted Cream T Guitars.

PJD founder and UKGB co-founder, Leigh Dovey, explains more: "Within a month or two, Seth Baccus – who I'd spoken to over the years, I'd asked him tips and advice along the way – approached us. He said that he loved the guitars we were building, especially at the price we could build them at. He was looking for a 'team build' guitar for a reasonable price. It was then that Mike Dunn, who has been working on PJD for the past couple of years, and myself thought, 'Why don't we change from being just the makers of PJD guitars to being a manufacturing facility for other brands, too? So rather than PJD building Cream T and Seth Baccus guitars, which might seem a bit odd, why don't we start UKGB, building guitars for ourselves *and* other brands?'

"The beauty of UKGB is that it doesn't need any marketing," Leigh continues. "We're not promoting UK guitar building – that's down to the brands themselves to take care of. They're obviously not hiding the fact their guitars are built here in the UK. In fact, we've not advertised UKGB at all, but we've already had a number of brands approach us – some big ones, as well."

"It does seem Cream T Guitars was the catalyst for the whole thing, really," reflects Sounds Affects' Tim Lobley. "Leigh and Mike figured out that they could increase their manufacturing capability quicker than you can build a new guitar brand, so it makes sense for them to manufacture for multiple brands and let each one do their own thing with sales and marketing."

Behind the scenes, there were other considerations, as Leigh explains: "We did need an investor and [securing that] was a lot of time spent, mainly by Mike doing all the figures and costings. It was quite a big undertaking getting someone onboard. But the actual running of UKGB is down to Mike and myself. We have a general manger, Matt Slee, who does most of the day-to-day running of the building. And Seth Baccus is involved, too: he's a shareholder in the

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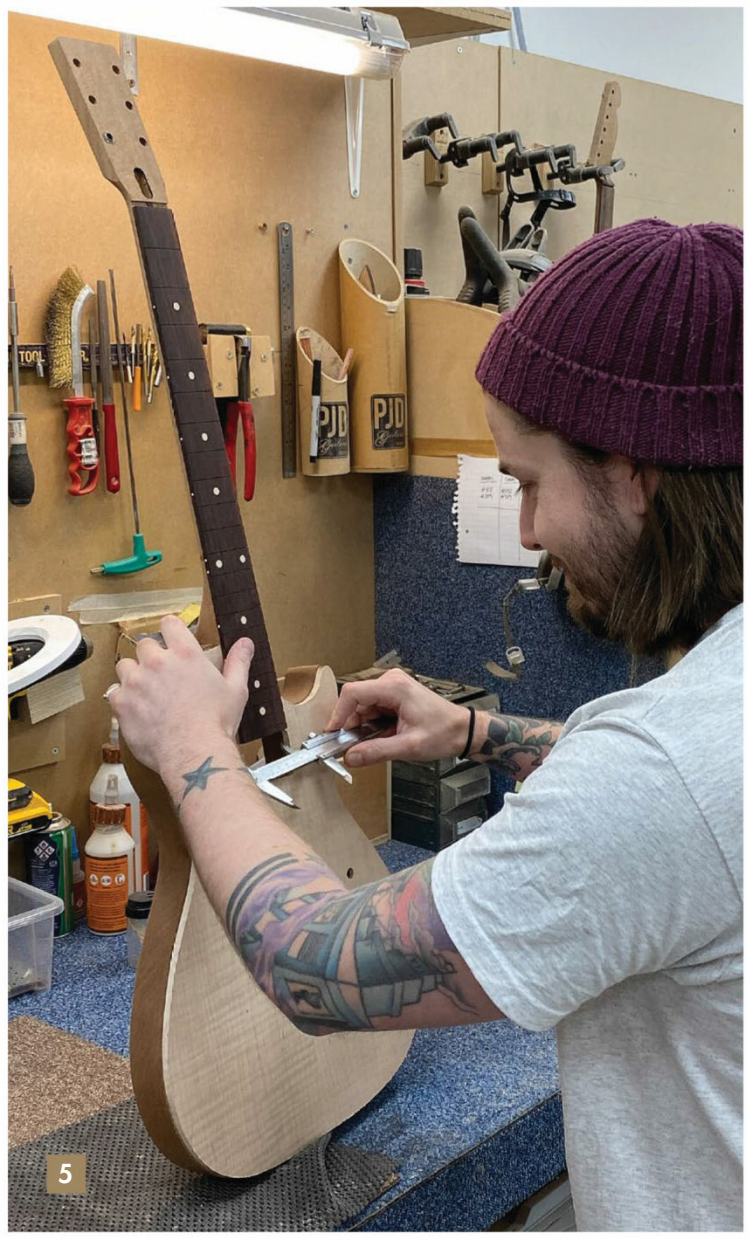
4. Cream T's new guitars were the first to roll of the UKGB production line. This Aurora Standard 2PS features instant pickup-swapping



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5. PJD and UKGB founder Leigh Dovey hard at work on a Cream T guitar – he'll certainly have his hands full from now on!

company. He's a lovely guy, he's got a very good name and brand behind him, and he is very, very knowledgeable. We thought he could not only be beneficial with all of his experience but also another sale point to any prospective company wanting us to build their guitars.

"We've now gone from 12 up to 26 staff," Leigh adds. "We've taken another unit on, so in one we have all the milling and sanding – all the dusty stuff – and the second unit, actually our original unit, will be spray, finish, assembly and quality control. We are looking at producing 1,500 guitars this year and then hopefully year-on-year increasing that, depending on demand. I really believe there's a market for UK-made production guitars. Yes, it's been tried before and didn't always work out that well, but I think we've got a really good shot at it this time."

The demand is certainly backed up by retail sales. "I think we'll see a real revival in production of British guitar brands," says retailer Lee Anderton. "We've already sold substantially more PJD guitars than I thought we would over the last eight to 10 weeks. It's a very promising start for a relatively new brand, and the reaction from guitar players has been very positive."

Impending launches of new UKGB-made guitars include a Cream T 'offset', the Crossfire, with pickup swapping. This will be offered without pickups from £1,799 for those who may already have a Relish or Cream T guitar with pickup swapping, and then with pickups (which you can choose at order) for £1,999.

The Seth Baccus range will centre on his Shoreline design in T, JM H90 and JM HH styles from £3,199. Seth explains that the UKGB-made guitars "are made to the exact same specs as I have been building the Shorelines with for the last few years, so it's a tried-and-tested formula. I expect the Shoreline S series will follow a few months down the line." Interestingly, both these Shoreline and Crossfire models use obeche for the bodies, also being used by Atkin on its new electrics. It's an intriguing glimpse into the future, certainly of the UK-made electric guitar, and there's much more to come.

"[PJD] could increase their manufacturing capability quicker than building a new guitar brand" **TIM LOBLEY**

ACOUSTICS

Words David Mead

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1 FENDER PARAMOUNT SERIES

Fender is enhancing its celebrated value-for-money Paramount acoustic range with a flurry of new models that includes dreadnought, parlour and orchestra body sizes, plus a resonator. The former trio offers the choice of either solid mahogany or spruce tops with mahogany backs and sides, and specially offset bracing to maximise response and tone. They come with a hardshell case and Fender- and Fishman-designed pickup systems that include a body sensor for added soundboard resonance when playing live. Finishes are Vintage Sunburst, Natural or Aged Cognac Burst, and the new line-up includes the PD-220E Dreadnought (£649), the PO-220E Orchestra (£649, pictured) and the PS-220E Parlour (£649). The PR-180E Resonator, which features all-mahogany construction and a Fishman Nashville pickup, retails at £549.

Price: **£549** Website: **www.fender.com**

2 FURCH YELLOW DELUXE & BLUE DELUXE

We've been keeping a close and admiring eye on the acoustics coming out of the Furch factory in the Czech Republic recently, and 2022 sees the release of two new models: the Yellow Deluxe (pictured) and Blue Deluxe. Both feature innovative front and rear player comfort bevels for those extended playing sessions. Why innovative? Because the bevels themselves have been created via the use of 3D printing: "We chose 3D printing mainly because of its accuracy and flexibility," Petr Furch, CEO of Furch Guitars told us. "Using a special high-resolution 3D printer, we are able to apply individually cured layers of UV-activated liquid in the desired shape with an accuracy of up to 15 thousandths of a millimetre."

Both guitars share Grand Auditorium body dimensions, the Yellow Deluxe is available with spruce (€2,810) or cedar (€2,758) tops and Indian rosewood backs and sides, whereas the Blue Deluxe features either spruce/walnut (€1,785) or cedar/mahogany (€1,600).

Price: **From €1,785** Website: **www.furchguitars.com**

3 LARRIVÉE LIMITED EDITIONS

The headlines from Larrivée include a new limited-run instrument added to its Legacy Series in the form of a 000-40 Custom with koa back and sides, moon spruce top and various other deluxe appointments including a decorated vine headstock and mother-of-pearl fretboard inlays. It will retail at £3,269 and the label in the guitar will be signed personally by Jean Larrivée himself – watch out for a review in our next issue when we put it through its paces.

Other new models from the brand include two walnut-backed instruments: the OM-03 (£2,499) and OM-40 (£2,349).

Price: **£3,269** Website: **www.larrivee.com**

LARRIVÉE 000-40 CUSTOM LEGACY SERIES
A limited-run model, this guitar features a moon spruce top (Alpine European spruce) with koa back and sides. The label inside is signed personally by Jean Larrivée

TAYLOR AD27E FLAMETOP
An addition to Taylor's back to basics American Dream series, the AD27e's build includes a flame maple top, back and sides and the brand's revolutionary V-Class bracing

4 LOWDEN S-23J & S-34J

Another company leading the charge where design and innovation are concerned, Northern Ireland's Lowden Guitars is seeking to extend its nylon-string jazz models (including the current S-25J, pictured) to the tune of two. Nicknamed the "Hybrid Models" by George Lowden, there will be an S-23J, featuring walnut back and sides, and the S-34J, with koa for its back and sides. Both guitars are so new that the first production models are still being finished in the workshops, but the minute they're completed we'll be ready to pounce and you'll be able to read all about them in these pages. As yet prices on the new models are TBA.

Price: **£TBA** Website: **www.lowdenguitars.com**

5 MARTIN SC-10E & SC-13E SPECIAL

It's not long since Martin set the acoustic world reeling with its very un-Martin-like and highly affordable SC Road Series guitar. Suddenly, a company that is the absolute embodiment of trad instrument building – it invented the steel-string guitar as we know it, after all – had produced something that was, again, revolutionary in both concept and execution. Furthermore, players seemed to be liking what they were seeing and hearing from the new design. Two new additions to the SC Road Series are forthcoming: the SC-10E ($1,299, pictured) with a Sitka spruce top and koa veneer to the back and sides, and the SC-13E Special ($1,799) with a Sitka and ziricote, available in either a plain or a sunburst top. We're looking forward to getting our hands on them – and you should be, too.

Price: **From $1,299** Website: **www.martinguitar.com**

6 TAKAMINE LTD2022

Players who have studied the headstocks of older Takamine acoustics will have noticed the words "Established 1962" proudly displayed thereon. This means that 2022 is the company's diamond anniversary and they're not going to let the moment pass without producing a very special instrument as part of the celebration. Enter the 60th Anniversary model, aptly named the LTD2022 (£2,450): "Everything from the shape of the body to the use of an updated version of the Brownie preamp makes the LTD2022 a nod to Takamine's humble beginnings, while showcasing the best qualities in a contemporary limited-run hand-crafted guitar," Tom Watters, director of product development for Takamine, tells us. Featuring a figured spruce top and koa for the back and sides with a CTF-2N preamp system (very similar to the company's original Brownie units), it's an absolute stunner and a fitting way to mark a very special occasion.

Price: **£2,450** Website: **www.takamine.com**

7 TAYLOR AMERICAN DREAM SERIES

Apart from the AD27e Flametop reviewed on page 98 and pictured here, Taylor is set to add to its no-frills American Dream series with a line-up of new models. Among these you'll find the Grand Concert AD22e (£1,955), featuring a mahogany top with sapele back and sides, a pairing the company says will produce a "dry, focused woody sound with a pleasing midrange punch". Master designer Andy Powers adds: "There's something about the combination of a hardwood top on a relatively compact body. They're fun to play, they're bluesy sounding, the controlled focus of the body makes it a super guitar to play fingerstyle music or jazz on, and they respond well to strumming chords, too." See Taylor's website for the full series.

Price: **From £1,619** Website: **www.taylorguitars.com**

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MODERN ROMANCE

Words Jamie Dickson

Martin's Modern Deluxe range, launched in 2019, aimed to combine traditional looks with progressive lutherie and luxury appointments. It was such a hit that 2022 sees no less than seven models added to this ultra-desirable series

Being a company with a long and revered history can be a double-edged sword. On the positive side, everyone knows and respects the heritage. On the downside, it can make introducing new guitars, especially those with cutting-edge features, a risky business. That's why Martin's Modern Deluxe range, launched in 2019, was such a well-judged effort. The idea was to launch a small range of guitars that looked classic on the outside but which boasted enhanced performance thanks to cutting-edge materials and advanced design. The latter improvements were visually unobtrusive and included bridge pins made of a special alloy that transferred energy to the soundboard more efficiently, giving a volume hike, and torrefied VTS (Vintage Tone System) spruce tops that mimicked the rich sound of 80-year-old vintage classics.

As well as claimed improvements in tone and volume, the Modern Deluxe range brings a touch of opulence to familiar guitars

That initial Modern Deluxe range was composed of established favourites such as the D-18 and the OM-28. Yet despite being priced well above Martin's Reimagined Standard Series, the Modern Deluxes proved a big hit and, with the pandemic now slowly waning, it's no surprise that Martin has proved keen to expand the range. It was a little more surprising, however, that no less than seven new high-end Modern Deluxe models were announced recently for 2022, including small-body and 12-fret designs plus the big daddy of the dreadnoughts, the D-45.

The newcomers are the 000-18 (£3,575), 00-28 (£4,195), 000-42 (£7,195), D-45 (£10,495), D-42 (£7,195), 0012-28 and 012-28 (both £4,395), bringing the entire Modern Deluxe range to 11 models, and while the new 000-18 is a fairly predictable addition to the line, smaller-bodied, slotted-headstock models such as the 012-28 are more intriguing. One of the main tonal perks of the original Modern Deluxe guitars was a hike in volume thanks to the use of a carbon composite bridge plate and the Liquidmetal bridge pins, which confer a boost in volume of a few decibels. This subtle but tangible effect was even more noticeable

1. Sitting somewhere between an OM and a parlour, the 00-28 Modern Deluxe is a fingerpicking and folk-oriented beauty

2. While none of the Modern Deluxes can be described as entry level, the mahogany bodied 000-18 lies at the more affordable end of the range

3. The diminutive 012-28 has vintage vibes but sounds bigger than it looks thanks to under-the-hood updates such as a carbon composite bridge plate

4. Traditional features such as the use of protein glue blend with modern touches such as a VTS top in the 0012-28, which also has tone that belies its size

5. The strikingly pretty 000-42 Modern Deluxe steps the bling up a gear with its torch inlay

6. Second only to the D-45 in ornamentation, the D-42 is nonetheless replete with ornate styling details such as abalone dots on the Liquidmetal bridge pins

7. European flamed maple binding, gold open-back tuners and that torch inlay make the new D-45 special

on live demos of the 012-28, which appeared to kick out a surprisingly big voice for a relatively modest body size. For those unfamiliar with Martin nomenclature, the 0 body type is a couple of steps down in size from the familiar OM and 000 guitars, while the '12' here indicates that the neck joins the body at the 12th fret, which places the bridge more in the centre of the soundboard; many believe this leads to a more sonorous, bigger-voiced sound. Martin's vice president of product management, Fred Greene, told us that the little 012-28 was a darling of the R&D team, who were especially impressed with how the Modern Deluxe spec brought out a larger-than-life character in this compact but sweet-toned 12-fretter.

As well as claimed improvements in tone and volume, the Modern Deluxe range is also about bringing a touch of opulence to familiar guitars. As always with Martin, there's a high premium to pay for upmarket styling details – but the payoff is that when they do it, it always looks so classy. The original Modern Deluxe models of 2019 boasted gold frets, an inlaid pearl logo on the headstock and other elegantly luxe appointments. Now, with a D-45 joining the range, the stops have been fully pulled out.

The little 012-28 was a darling of the R&D team... the new spec brought out a larger-than-life character in this compact 12-fretter

The D-45 has always been *the* top-of-the-line Martin dreadnought, complete with lavish abalone inlays, so it was hard to imagine how they could have taken it a notch higher for a Modern Deluxe version, which features "European flamed maple binding on the body, fingerboard and headplate, stylish gold frets, gold open-gear tuners, and an ornate torch logo inlaid in pearl on the headstock". You even get abalone dots inlaid in the high-tech bridge pins, and the combined effect, especially with the use of that lavish but classic 'torch' inlay, is striking. Fred Greene is keen to add, however, that the Modern Deluxe D-45 offers a subtly progressive, updated vision of what a D-45 can be, and it's clear that Martin isn't viewing it as a successor to the traditional D-45, more a very well-heeled, state-of-the-art sibling.

www.martinguitar.com

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AMPS & EFFECTS

Words Stuart Williams

1 FENDER HAMMERTONE SERIES PEDALS

Following 2021's release of its Dual pedals, Fender has further expanded its effects range with the Hammertone series, featuring no fewer than nine new stompboxes that are due to start shipping in April. Designed under the watchful eye of Fender Effects bod Stan Cotey, the Hammertone line-up gives us an affordable, well-rounded collection of pedals starting at £69.99. Included in the range are the Hammertone Overdrive (pictured), Distortion, Metal, Fuzz, Chorus, Flanger, Reverb, Delay and Space Delay.

While the Hammertone range might appear straightforward with its series-wide utilitarian box design (in a hammer-style grey paint finish) and funky custom-coloured 'F' controls, there's a little more going on than first meets the eye. The Distortion and Metal pedals feature four fairly standard controls with settings for Gain, Level and two-band EQ. The Overdrive gives us Gain, Level and Tone knobs, but uses the fourth pot for a pre-gain-stage mid control to help add some extra bite. The Fuzz loses a control knob in favour of a toggle switch, which activates an octave-up circuit. The remaining pedals all feature three controls and a pair of toggles, with the toggle switch function changing depending on the effect.

In the case of the Chorus, Reverb and Delay, you can switch between three types of the same effect using the left toggle, while it selects three resonance settings on the Flanger and three different delay patterns on the Space Delay. The second toggle offers tone shifts on the Chorus and Reverb, modulation on both delay pedals, and two effect types on the Flanger.

Price: **From £69.99** Website: **www.fender.com**

2 JACKSON AUDIO OPTIMIST OVERDRIVE

You might associate Vulfpeck/The Fearless Flyers' Cory Wong with snappy, punchy clean tones, but he's no stranger to a drive tone, either, as evidenced by his new Optimist Overdrive with Jackson Audio. Designed to give two drive sounds in one pedal, there's a mid-pushed Klon-style overdrive on OD 1, while OD 2 is a flat response. The two channels can be combined, giving you a combination of three sounds in total. But there's more – because as well as the tradition of triple controls (Gain, Tone and Level) for each side, there's also a switchable EQ that has been honed to complement single coils and humbuckers perfectly. In addition, every function of the Optimist is MIDI-controllable via a TRS jack socket (you'll need the appropriate cable).

Price: **£349** Website: **www.jackson.audio**

3 JAM PEDALS SEAGULL

Jam Pedals' Pink Flow multi-effect featured a number of Pink Floyd-inspired effects. But demand was high and not everyone wants or needs a seven-effect all-in-one unit. So Jam has now unveiled the Seagull part of that pedal as a standalone unit. As well as giving you Gilmour's Binson Echorec bird sounds from *Echoes*, the pedal has a second side with a cocked wah via the legendary red Fasel inductor. It's available now.

Price: **£179** Website: **www.jampedals.com**

4 KEMPER KABINET

We're still in the first quarter of 2022 and Kemper is sticking with its New Year goal of trimming the fat from its Kemper Kabinet. The new lightweight version of the passive cab for Kemper's range of powered Profiler units (PowerHead/PowerRack) features the same neodymium magnet-equipped, 12-inch Kemper Kone Neo speaker found on its amped-up Power Kabinet, meaning it weighs in at just 10.5kg (23lb). As well as the built-in tilt-back stand, there are 19 speaker imprints (which will switch to full-range impulses automatically when an appropriate amp profile is used) based on a host of classic conesmiths. They've even thrown in a dust cover, not that you should leave it stood still for long.

Price: **£375** Website: **www.kemper-amps.com**

5 LINE 6 CATALYST

Line 6 has lifted the lid on its new range of Catalyst amps: a trio of 60- (£342, pictured), 100- (£465) and 200-watt (£603) combos designed for stage and studio use. Each amp features six HX amp models – ranging from clean to high-gain – from Line 6's Original collection, plus there are dedicated boost and reverb sections, the former customised to each Original amp model, and the latter featuring six reverbs and 18 additional effects.

There's an effects loop onboard, too, and a power amp input allows you to use the Catalyst as a powered speaker. Meanwhile, the connectivity is bolstered further with the addition of a four-channel USB audio/MIDI interface as well as an XLR direct output. Line 6 has also produced the free Catalyst Edit software for making more detailed tweaks to your settings from a computer (Mac or Windows) or as an app on your mobile device (iOS and Android).

Price: **From £342** Website: **https://line6.com**

6 SUPRO ROYALE

Supro has unveiled the Royale combo, which it says represents a new chapter for the brand. Why's that? Well, it's the first time Supro has turned its attention to clean headroom. The Royale is available as a 1x12 (pictured) or 2x12

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configuration, based around a 5881 power stage, with both versions offering 35 watts in Class A mode or 50 watts when run in Class AB. As well as a preamp boost circuit, there's a valve-driven spring reverb and valve-buffered effects loop (all of which are foot-switchable) and master volume control, and the Royale is loaded with Supro's BD12 speakers. The whole thing is finished off with a black Scandia Tolex and hemp grille cloth. We're expecting prices to be £1,299 for the Royale 1x12 and £1,469 for the 2x12 version.

Price: **From £1,299** Website: **www.suprousa.com**

7 WALRUS AUDIO MAKO M1

Modulation is going through a huge resurgence, with some strong contenders from the likes of Universal Audio and IK Multimedia, both offering multi-mod pedals in the past 12 months. Walrus Audio has now joined the modulation party with the Mako M1 – a multi-mode pedal featuring analogue-inspired chorus, phaser, tremolo, vibrato, rotary and filter effects in one box. There are nine presets accessible from the pedal's controls, with 128 in total available over MIDI. As well as pristine modulation effects, you can add some grit with the Lo-Fi control, which promises to degrade, warp and space-out your swirls. The pedal is available now.

Price: **£319** Website: **www.walrusaudio.com**

7

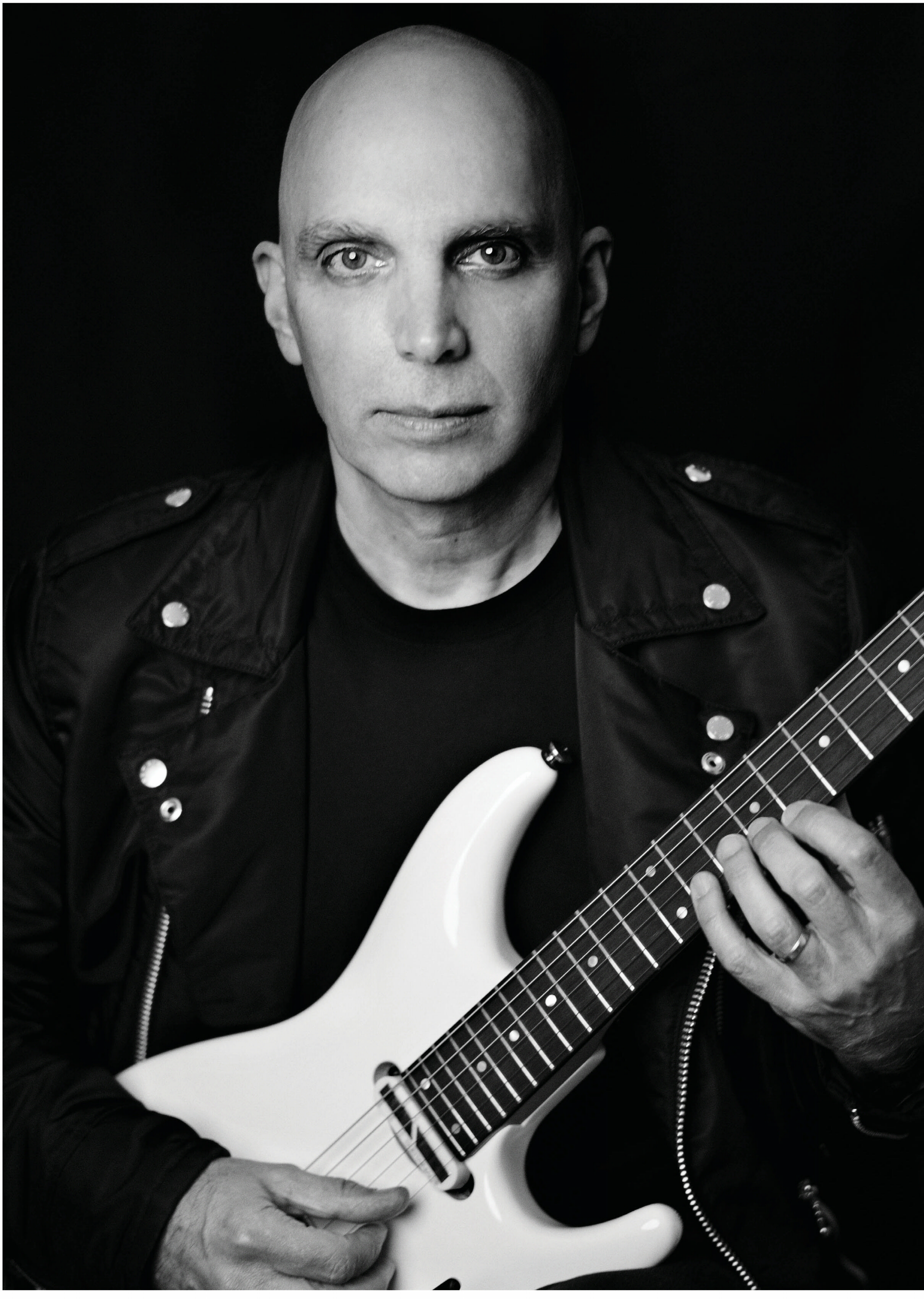
STATE OF THE TUBE

Valve expert Stewart Gebbie gives us a pro's perspective on the future of amp valves

Back in the 50s, if you needed to amplify an electric signal of any sort you used an electron valve (aka vacuum tube), and there were thousands of factories churning out millions of them every day, supplying the global post-war consumer electronics boom. Today, it's just guitar amps and some specialist hi-fi builders that remain doggedly allied to the glass tube. The manufacturing base has all but disappeared. In 2019 there were just three plants to fulfil world demand: New Sensor Corporation in Russia, JJ Electronic in Slovakia and Shuguang in China, the latter of which closed at the end of that year. At the time of writing, there's still no word on production restarting.

"The Chinese property market and the credit squeeze will make it very difficult to finance a new plant", says valve importer and industry expert Stewart Gebbie of ValveTubeGuitarAmps.com. "Live music and amplifier production was largely curtailed in 2020 because of the pandemic, which masked the effect of Shuguang's disappearance. Now amp manufacturing has returned, valve availability is increasingly an issue, compounded by some amp companies doubling up on orders to ensure supply continuity. Several price increases have already taken place. As importers, we're now looking at lead times of several weeks; we believe some retailers supplied direct by Shuguang have given up quoting lead times and stopped taking orders. For now, New Sensor is the only key player producing in any volume. However, valves aren't the only challenge to amp makers. Many other parts like transistors and zener diodes are on 40-plus week lead times".

To answer the obvious question – 'Why don't we just open up a new valve/tube factory here?' – there have already been several failed attempts in Europe and the USA. Old manufacturing machinery can be bought and repaired, but supply chains, production and materials expertise simply aren't there any more, making the running costs unsustainable. Guitarists replacing valves in their treasured amps aren't likely to experience immediate problems as there are many thousands on shelves as well as NOS (New Old Stock) from long-gone European and American producers. However, for amp manufacturers buying in volume, the future is somewhat uncertain, so it's hardly surprising to see a renewed focus on alternatives such as digital modelling.



JOE SATRIANI

Returning with new album, *The Elephants Of Mars*, the virtuoso king tells us about turning his back on amps, winging it on sitar and what he really thinks of Steve Vai's new triple-neck signature model

Words Henry Yates **Photography** Eduardo Peña Dolhun

Over lockdown, while the rest of mankind was dealing with earthly concerns, Joe Satriani was looking towards the stars. "Over the months, this story started to develop in my head," reflects the virtuoso. "It's in the future, Mars has been terraformed and Earth's corporations are raping the planet for raw materials. What they don't know is that there's a lifeform there, which is these 30ft elephants. And they're gonna fight, so Mars can retain its natural beauty..."

As concepts for rock 'n' roll records go, it's fair to say *The Elephants Of Mars* is bolder than the time-honoured cars and girls. Fortunately, for the first time in a pacy career that began with 1986's *Not Of This Earth*, Satriani had the breathing space to dream up instrumentals every bit as ambitious. "This album," he says, "was all about removing barriers from my creative impulses."

You've said you're not impressed by the instrumental guitar scene right now...

"I was misquoted on that! I'm not impressed with the state of *my* instrumental guitar playing recently. The last couple of albums, I leaned back in time. Especially with *Shapeshifting* [2020]. It was a down-to-earth record, not futuristic or even present-day sounding. I always felt sad that I missed the classic-rock era. I was too young to be a peer of Page, Beck, all those guys. So the *Extremist* [1992] was my homage to classic rock and my way of saying, 'If I were of that generation, this is the album I would make.'

"But a year ago, I thought, 'Okay, I'm finished with that.' I'm not trying to sell myself as a guitar technician. I'm not 16 years old any more. I don't have to go on Instagram and show people I can play faster than I did yesterday, or go on TikTok and say, 'Buy my guitar pick!' I write songs because I want them to become the soundtrack to people's lives. So with *The Elephants Of Mars*, I said, 'I'm not gonna limit myself. If I want to write something weirdly funky like *Night Scene* or devastatingly heartfelt like *Desolation*, I'm gonna do it.'"

You recorded this album remotely. How did that change the dynamic?

"It was interesting, the effect of having nobody in the room. It let more dynamic, truthful, creative performances come out. I'm a creature of live performance, which means if there's even one person there, I'm gonna perform to them. I've recorded albums where the band's all staring at each other, and at the end, I think, 'Why did I play it like that?'

"With *The Elephants Of Mars*, I kept it spontaneous but, out of 100 performances, I could choose the one that was the most truthful. And I passed that onto the other guys. Like, 'Take your time and don't be afraid to throw anything at me.'"

What imagery were you seeing with these instrumentals?
"Once in a while, I'll write a song like *Blue Foot Groovy*, which is just about a guy strutting his stuff. But I'm not afraid of taking on subjects that are deeper and more difficult. Y'know, a piece like *Desolation* or *Sahara*, which is about someone going through a total spiritual and emotional crisis. It helps guide my composition and, of course, the performances as well because I'm an emotional player. Sometimes I wish I was more professional... but I can't help it!"

How did the track *Desolation* translate to the guitar?
"I think Eric Caudieux [producer and keyboards] expected me to just do another solo over that. And that would be the smart thing to do, to play something that no-one else can play on top of it, right? Y'know, make a name for myself in the guitar world. But I wasn't moved to do that. I thought, 'No, this is a song about someone who knows they're dying and also the person who's sitting there saying goodbye.' It's two different perspectives.

"I honestly didn't know how to play it without making it all wrong. So I'd come in the studio, put it up and just improvise. Let myself be totally emotional about it. When it didn't work, I'd just turn off, come back the next day – until the moment happened."

You've said you tried some "crazy ideas" on this album. For example?
"Well, the craziest idea was something that goes against everything I've spent my whole career developing. Every guitar sound you hear was recorded direct and we used a SansAmp plug-in. That's insane. If you could see this room I'm in, it's filled with great amplifiers – and I didn't use any of them. I mean, we tried. But every time we put one against the other, the SansAmp version won. Luckily, I don't have a deal with Marshall any more, but I had to call my friends over at IK Multimedia and say, 'I'm really sorry, but that's just how it turned out...'"

How much of a departure was that?
"It's not the first time I've recorded without speaker bottoms – I did *Engines Of Creation* [2000] that way. But it was the first time I've used plug-ins. We had every intention of just reamping everything like we've done for the past 20 years. But it really surprised me. It's far more dynamic. I can't tell you how many times I've recorded a wonderful performance where you can literally hear my fingertip on the string – and then you go in the studio and either play it again through an amp or reamp it, and you feel let down. You sometimes feel there's a rule, like, you can't use a plug-in. But in the end, we went, 'Hey, this sounds better.' So we went with it."

"It was interesting, the effect of [recording with] nobody in the room. It let more dynamic, truthful, creative performances come out"

1. Satriani hasn't been shy about taking a more spiritual and emotional direction, with songs on *The Elephants Of Mars* that are "deeper and more difficult"

2. One of Satriani's "crazy ideas" for the album included recording the guitar direct and using a SansAmp plug-in

Does that mean you're done with regular amps?
"No. I've got a whole bunch of them and as I do every day, I'm gonna turn 'em up and practise for the tour that's hopefully coming. I love dealing with amps. But playing live with an amp has nothing to do with recording an album."

What do you think are the most striking guitar moments?
"Well, I never do that. Because I'm the worst person at guessing what is going to strike someone. A fan was once telling me about *The Extremist* and what my vibrato on this high note meant to them. I would never have picked that out – I'd have picked out the fastest bit or some screaming harmonic – so that reminded me that I'm the person who makes the music but not the one to tell people what to like. When I was recording my eponymous album in 1995, [producer] Glyn Johns said, 'Joseph, it's not your job to decide what people will like. It's your job to play your bloody guitar!' It was a great way of lifting all that anxiety off my shoulders."

Well, if you can't pick favourite tracks, can you choose favourite tones?
"I'm a guy who likes to take risks. So the long solo section in the title track – that's one take. I plugged into a Palmer signal splitter and an Electro-Harmonix Micro Q-Tron, and said, 'I'm gonna record in stereo all at once, just rock it out and see what happens.' And I just went for it. There were technical issues because the Q-Tron, even though you think it's gonna be 100 per cent effected, it gets confused, so every once in a while it turns itself off for a microsecond then back on again. But it was fun for everybody to react to the insanity of that guitar sound. It does sound like a herd of elephants."

Were there any new effects pedals on your 'board?
"Very few. I had the TC Sub 'N' Up, but I'm looking on the floor right now – I haven't cleaned up yet – and I didn't use any others besides my wah-wah. Delays, flangers and phasers

“I’m an emotional player.
Sometimes I wish I was more
professional… but I can’t help it!”

were all done with plug-ins, or Greg Koller [mixer and masterer] may have used outboard gear. He actually had Les Paul's very own 1176 limiter that he ran all my guitars through."

Your Ibanez obviously still does the business. But don't you miss going in guitar shops and browsing?
"I do. I used to spend two days a week at Bananas At Large across the Golden Gate Bridge. But in the last 15 years, I went from being an avid collector to finally realising I wasn't interested. I only have a few vintage pieces left and I rarely play them. It's a no-brainer because, technically, my JS has everything I like: the scale, access, frets, woods, electronics, pickups, bar. I still love an old Tele, Strat, Les Paul, all that. But I play them to step outside of my zone. If a track needs a Strat, I'll play it. But I know that's not really my instrument."

What do you want out of a humbucker now, and how has that changed?
"I think it's about what you're plugging into. When I started out, amps didn't have a lot of gain. I remember, I brought my '68 Tele into Charles LoBue's shop in Manhattan and met a young Larry DiMarzio, who was working for Charles and doing what everyone was calling the 'Staten Island' pickup. He put one in my Telecaster and that was the beginning of me starting down that road of supercharging the guitar to drive the amp.

"But then people realised we were missing a lot of the subtleties of the guitar because the pickup was too loud. Eventually, I said, 'Look, I just want the widest signal possible for what's happening on that fretboard.' So that's what got Larry to develop the Satchur8. I've found it to be the most versatile pickup.

"Right now, I'm looking at my signature Marshall JVM, a '71 Plexi, an original 5150, a new EL34 EVH amp, Fender Deluxes, Princetons... and when I plug my JS guitars into all those, the amps come through full-character. It's not making every amp sound like the pickup, y'know? So on this album, 99 per cent is just three JS guitars, and they all sound different – super clean and chimey, or super thick and crazy. But the main thing is that the pickup does not interfere with what's happening between my finger and the string."

3. Joe used three Ibanez JS guitars on the new album "and they all sound different – super clean and chimey, or super thick and crazy", he says

"I tried playing a sitar for years and just sitting on the ground cross-legged for an hour's practice was hard enough"

Your legato is fantastic as ever. What advice can you give?
"I have to practise a lot. I've always found that guitar playing is difficult for me. So I practise legato slowly and I practise faster than I can pull it off. But I also focus for shorter periods. So instead of practising for hours on the same thing, I'll do something for 20 minutes and not do it again until eight hours later. That's really helped me, with the body I'm dealing with. I'm tighter than I should be in general. When I was a young athletic person, it was difficult for me to stretch the way my teammates could. And as a young guitar player, I'd have tension issues. So I had to figure out how to absorb this mountain of knowledge, and practising in sections really helped."

Do you ever write things that prove impossible live?
"When you have a phrase, you have to investigate how many different ways you can play it. When we put out *Shockwave Supernova* [2015], I entered into a really bad phase of tension with the little finger of my fretting hand. It was because of that title song. When I was writing it, I figured out all the different places to play it and came up with one version that sounded unique – but my hand didn't want to do it live. It started to really hurt. That tour, I had to rewrite so many fingerings. I'd sit down before a show and figure out, like, which notes had to be legato or could I pick three of them instead? When I got off tour, my chiropractor discovered I was just tight and solved my issue in a week. Once in a while, you write something you probably shouldn't have written [laughs]."

Do you play *Surfing With The Alien* differently these days?
"Oh, I play it much better now. When I recorded that song, the main melody and the solo at the end were done very quickly, under duress. [I was] in a studio I was being told I had to vacate, with a Kramer that was going out of tune. I remember saying, 'Just give me two more minutes!' The solo section is far more precise now. The thing you can never really get better is anything to do with feedback or screaming notes. Those things are once in a lifetime."

Be honest: what do you think of Steve Vai's new triple-neck Hydra?
"Oh, it's so perfectly Steve. Just when you think Steve has reached the height of his insanity – which is directly related to his immense talent – he takes it one step further. Now we just gotta figure out how he can play it live without hurting his shoulder."

You play sitar on *Doors Of Perception*. Do you rate yourself?
"Yeah, that's a Jerry Jones electric sitar. I love the sound – but, boy, they really take over a track. I owned a 'real' sitar for many years. One of my students, his family owned an Indian restaurant and were getting rid of a sitar they had in the window. I tried playing that for years and just sitting cross-legged on the ground for an hour's practice was hard enough. So thank God for six-string sitar emulators."

Finally, do you believe there is life on Mars?
"I'm sure there is life on Mars, but it's probably nothing to do with what we think of as aliens. I think there's more chance that aliens look like elephants than ET...!" G

The Elephants of Mars is released worldwide on 8 April. Visit **www.ear-music.net** and **www.satriani.com**

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19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
17920 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki with Case
17928 - Ashbury Octave Guitar Mandola 32021
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
22793 - Ashbury Style E Celtic Cittern, 10 string
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
18799 - Blue Moon BB15E Electro Bouzouki
18225 - Breedlove Crossover FF NT Mando, Nat
20566 - D'Addario EJ80 Octave Mandolin
22797 - Kentucky Deluxe A Model Mandolin
22798 - Kentucky Deluxe A Model Mandolin
22796 - Kentucky Std F Model Mandolin
22834 - ResoVille MS12 Reso Mandolin Copper
22337 - ResoVille MS12 Reso Mandolin Nickel
22502 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Uke Dark
22340 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Reso Uke
22832 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Reso Uke
22831 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Reso Engraved
17926 - Sakis Model 2 Greek Bouzouki GX33011
18419 - Seagull S8 Mandolin Sunburst EQ
19670 - Seagull S8 Mandolin, Natural
23047 - The Loar LM500 F-Style Mando, Used

Tenor & Baritone Guitars

20534 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar, Spruce Top
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
20688 - D'Addario EJ66 Tenor Guitar Strings
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone

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

BILLY BRAGG

Billy Bragg started his career as a punk-powered agitator who laid bare the tattered soul of 80s England in his songs. Over time he's become a devoted historian of early rock 'n' roll, while his songcraft has embraced Americana influences, sparking a love affair with 1930s resonator guitars. We joined him to talk about his new album and discuss why Lonnie Donegan ain't no joke...

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

While some artists found it difficult to pick up a guitar during the national lockdowns of 2020, Billy Bragg was making his first album in eight years, entitled *The Million Things That Never Happened*. He's always been one of the most distinctive, unflinching yet compassionate voices in rock. Emerging from the busking scene, songs like *A New England* from his 1983 debut album, *Life's Riot With Spy Vs Spy*, confirmed him as a laureate of the London streets with an unvarnished 'chop and clang' style on guitar that matched the energy and honesty of his lyrics.

His main squeeze back then was a rare Burns Steer semi-acoustic that's still by his side today – along with a cherished collection of National Resonators and Gibson flat-tops that partly reflects Billy's interest in old-school country music and Americana, an influence that has grown like a wildwood flower in his music since the 1998 album with Wilco, *Mermaid Avenue*, which saw Bragg set previously unpublished Woody Guthrie lyrics to music for the first time. In fact, charting the connections between Americana, youth politics and the nascent British rock 'n' roll scene of the 50s became a bit of a mission for Billy, inspiring him to write the book *Roots, Radicals And Rockers: How Skiffle Changed The World*, published in 2017.

We joined Billy among his books and guitars to talk about his new album, go-to instruments and learn why, without Lonnie Donegan, there would have been no British Invasion of the 60s.

What spurred you to make *The Million Things That Never Happened*?

"Well, I got round to thinking about making an album. And after the second lockdown, I thought, 'Wow, this could just go on and on and on... I really need something to focus on here.' We'd been talking about making an album anyway, but I imagined I would spend a year on the road, trying out songs in soundchecks, which is my usual MO – but, of course, that didn't happen.

"So I got in touch with Romeo Stodart, and Dave Izumi who owns a studio down in Eastbourne [Echo Zoom Studios]. And in between the lockdowns I went to see them, and we sussed it out and it all looked great and everything. We booked some time in December – and, of course, that wasn't possible, either, but Dave and Romeo are in a bubble so they could work in the studio. So they said, 'Well, just send us some demos.' It's not a way I've ever worked before, but it was really interesting because I had wanted to work with them, because I really like how they arrange songs. I think after making records as long as I have, always in the back of your mind is a sort of dread about unconsciously repeating yourself.

"So I thought if I worked with them, then they could take my ideas and run with them. They would have done that anyway, but [ordinarily] I would have been sitting behind them in the control room raising an arched eyebrow when they put the third Mellotron on. Whereas, with my not being there, they just did it and sent it to me and I was like, 'Wow, that's amazing.

"After making records as long as I have, always in the back of your mind is a sort of dread about unconsciously repeating yourself"

Bragg found a new way of working for his latest album, letting the producers run with his ideas remotely, rather than "sitting behind them raising an eyebrow when they put the third Mellotron on"

1. Billy's vintage Gibson ES-125, its spec in keeping with the second iteration of the model, featuring a 20th fret instead of the 19 frets the model launched with in the 40s

2. A Dyson Tele-style 'Tone Deluxe TV' electric, originally purchased in Australia, that Billy values for its ruggedness and rock-solid tuning stability in all climes

3. Billy's rare Burns Steer from the early 80s, which is effectively a prototype that got sold into the trade by Jim Burns

4. The steel plate on the guitar's top is an integral part of its sound, Billy says. Later Burns London reissues featured a lighter plastic plate instead

5. The 'horns' of the steer and some unusual string guides to align the strings with the brass nut

6. The logos of rare, original Steers say only 'Burns', rather than 'Burns London'

I really like that, let's keep on going in that way,' and so it worked out from there.

"I finally did get to go to the studio in April, by which time I had written some more songs, so we did do some live songs. But, basically, it was me sending them very basic guitar vocal demos, literally played through this microphone [that I'm speaking on], on to this computer and they would send me back the finished track. I thought it was a really good way to work."

You mentioned that being on the road was previously a reliable way to develop new material...

"Yeah, I had a song once that I was writing on the way to a gig in Brighton. This was in the old days when I didn't have a phone to sing into – and I had to stop at two petrol stations to write down the lyrics. And when I got to the gig, I really needed a kip before the soundcheck. So I had a kip, but this song kept waking me up with more lyrics. I eventually got the song and I played it that night, but when I got back from the gig I went to bed, put my head on the pillow and it woke me up again with more lyrics – so I had to get out of bed and write it down. The song didn't let me go until it had said its last bit. Where does that come from? I have no idea how to evoke that or where that comes from, but when it happens, it's both brilliant and annoying at the same time. It's, like, 'Okay, I've got it, leave me alone...' But, you know, there is no one way to write a song – any way that gets the song written is a good way to write a song."

"Skiffle is crucial because it's the thing that introduced the guitar into British pop music"

There's a lovely strand of country music and American folk to your sound on the new album. Where did that come from?

"It's a very interesting one. I think it's where the craft of songwriting is still appreciated, so that's a good place for me to be. Obviously, my connection with Joe Henry brings me into that arena, but mostly I think it was *Mermaid Avenue* that pitched me out of what I was before and into what I have become since. At the time, that was more usually defined as 'old country', but now it's become Americana and that's great. The Americana Music Association has actually invited me to their awards a couple of times now. The first time I went, I was giving an award and the second time I went I was getting an award. But the first time, I said, 'Just so I know what we're talking about, what exactly is Americana?' And they explained it to me as being any music that's inspired or based on the roots music of America. And I was like, 'What, you mean like skiffle?' And they were all like, 'What's skiffle?'

"It was over dinner and we had this long conversation, and that's how I ended up writing a book about skiffle. I realised that there was a huge gap in knowledge about it – particularly for the Americans who loved The Beatles and all that. If they don't know about skiffle, they've kind of missed the [most important influence]. And skiffle is absolutely crucial because it's the thing that introduced the guitar into British pop music. Beforehand, no British singers played a guitar. But after that, the guitar became the symbol of why they were different from their parent's generation. It's a revolutionary culture, skiffle, because it took the means of production away from the big songwriting conglomerates, the Tin Pan Alley guys, and gave it to kids in the street who could then connect with someone like Lead Belly or Woody Guthrie and, from that, make their own music. It's a really, really crucial period and the guitar is absolutely dead centre in it."

So many iconic guitarists idolised Lonnie Donegan when they were growing up...

"Yes. Well, when I was interviewing people for the book, Van Morrison said to me, 'The thing was all those guys who wanted to be Elvis, but you can't be Elvis if you're from Britain.' Another thing that inspired me to write the book was when we played Glastonbury with The Blokes. The Stones were on later, so we rehearsed *Dead Flowers*. We really enjoyed doing it so we kept it in the set – our festival set, anyway – and I would introduce it by talking about how the Brits invented Americana, talking about Donegan, you know. When I said his name, every time I said it, wherever I was in the UK, there were audible sniggers from the audience and it really annoyed me. It really annoyed me. I thought, 'This is wrong because when you talk

BURNS

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COFFE

5

Burns

6

THE GAME Stuart Ray Clarke
THE SEARCH FOR LEE HARVEY OSWALD
GOIN' HOME THE UNCOMPROMISING LIFE AND MUSIC OF KEN COLYER
WATCHMEN ALAN MOORE DAVE GIBBONS
PALM TREES, SEÑORITAS....AND ROCKET SHIPS! Mark Makin
The Cradle of the Game Stuart Ray Clarke
THE HOMES OF FOOTBALL Stuart Ray Clarke
Thomas Paine CRAIG NELSON
BOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE Tony Palmer
BRITISH TELEVISION
THE CLASH · BEFORE & AFTER · PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNIE SMITH
THE BURNS BOOK BY PAUL DAY 1929
MOD A VERY BRITISH PHENOM
frans m
FURIOUS COOL
RUMI
MORE OF MR. TROGLEY'S BARKING
THE TERRIBLE RAIN
ALL AMONG THE BARLEY MELISSA HARRISON
KATE TEMPEST MR. TROGLEY'S BARKING
COFFEE
THE POWER
YEAH YEA
THE RESTLESS GENERATION PETE FRAME
33 REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE DORIAN LYNSKEY
WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING DELIA OWENS
Abbie Hoffman Steal This Urine Test
The Victory of Morality over Socialism
Burns

3

to someone like John Peel or Van Morrison, they'd tell you that something incredible happened to them when they heard *Rock Island Line*... So that's how I ended up banging out the book."

There was a kind of a feedback loop, wasn't there, between British teenagers listening to American blues records in the late 50s and early 60s, assimilating that sound into skiffle, before going on to make it big in the States themselves during the British Invasion...

"Exactly, it happened in a really weird way... One old guy who had been a skiffler said to me that the average skiffle kid [in 1950s Britain] felt they had more in common with African-American musicians than they did with their own dads. Which is amazing when you think about it, isn't it? Then when the BBC wouldn't play *Rock Around The Clock* the skifflers were like, 'You know, you've rationed everything. You've rationed food. You've rationed clothes. You've rationed sweets. You're not going to ration rock 'n' roll. If you won't play *Rock Around The Clock*, if you won't play this new music, we're going to play it ourselves.' So the numbers of shitty Czechoslovakian guitars that they sold in 1957 [as skiffle took off] went from 5,000 a year to 250,000 a year. Divide that by five and that's how many bands there were: 50,000 bands and nowhere to play because there were no clubs – so they were in school halls, they were in scout huts... but they were everywhere. It was a playground craze, you know? That invention of

"Thinking of the guitar as a percussion instrument... it's about punctuation, almost"

the teenager in the UK didn't come over [to Britain from somewhere else] – that was a watershed. That generation was a watershed generation. And we still live in their world, you know. We still live in the world that they created in the 60s, don't we, really?"

What are your go-to guitars at the moment?

"I have a Gibson LG-1 that I've had sitting in my office for a long time. I mean, that's been around for ages. I took it to the *Mermaid Avenue* sessions, actually, so that's what I'm playing on *Mermaid Avenue*. My son borrows that now – it kind of disappears off, so I've got a Gibson J-45 acoustic propped up against the chair over there. My partner bought me this stool with a little cutout in it, so it can actually function as a guitar stand as well. You can sit on it, play the gig and then put the guitar up against it. And she inscribed one of my lyrics around the top of it, which is even lovelier. So I have that over there in the corner at the moment with the Gibson."

You used to play a green Burns Steer a lot early in your career – do you still use that?

"Yes, I do. I take it out on the road with me sometimes. Before the lockdown, I was doing these three-night stands where I was playing songs from my first three albums... The Burns Steer really came into its own on that. I wasn't using it so much by the time of the second three albums – with *Workers Playtime* [1988], I was thinking more like I was a soul singer then, so I was using a really nice 1965 black Telecaster, which I've still got, but I don't really play any more – it needs setting up. But I still get the Burns out and it still takes everyone's head off when I do that!

"I was very lucky to get that guitar because I don't think they ever went into [mainstream] production. All the ones I've seen – and I've seen pictures of about eight or nine of them – are all different. A guy who used to work at Burns got in touch with me and told me he had made my guitar. He had sent it up to London with Jim Burns, to a [trade] fair, and thought he was going to get it back because he made it for himself, really – but it didn't come back. We worked out the timing of that and it was about a week before I saw it in a guitar shop in Hammersmith and bought it. It's definitely that one because it has the same serial number. So there aren't loads of them out there if I lose this one."

The Steer looks part-electric, part-acoustic in design. Is it chambered?

"It is chambered, yes – the soundhole has bits going off from it. It's not hollow-bodied, though, it's quite heavy, and I think a lot of it is to do with the metal plate across the front. That's a stainless-steel plate.

7. Billy's National Style 'O' resonator, in Variation 2 spec, serial no S788, which dates from 1930

8. Patina and playwear on the vintage National, which has loads of character

9. What appear to be clouds and palm fronds are still visible around the f-holes. Such designs varied tremendously in Nationals of the era, but the differences have been documented by historians and serve to pin down their exact age and type

7. Billy cradles his stunning Dobro Model 65 'French Scroll', made in 1928

"Most of my chord shapes are fists. It's just the way I play; I'm hanging on for dear life"

When they did the reissue they put a plastic plate on there instead and I'm not sure it was the same [sonically]. Burns London very kindly gave me one and I got a plate made up and put it on there just to give it that little bit more. Because there is something about the Burns originals that have that [steel plate] on the top there – it's not quite what they used to call 'Wild Dog', but it's a sound all of its own, you know? That's important because I don't use any pedals. All I have is an inline tuner. I'm a philistine in that sense, in that I believe it's all here [in the hands and guitar] rather than all down there... I understand why people use pedals and they amaze me, but when I come out at festivals and I've just got a tuner, roadies look at me like, 'Are you taking the piss?'"

So no effects – but do you use a lot of guitars on stage?

"I'm really basic when I go out on tour. I'm basically using two guitars in between an electric and an acoustic. My go-to acoustic is a Montana J-45 [Standard]. I'm not hugely precious about guitars on the road, though. I've got some lovely old 1930s Nationals, that's my fetish, I suppose you could say. I took one of them to the *Mermaid Avenue* sessions, but I don't take them out on the road.

"I've also got a really nice electric guitar made by a guy named Jim Dyson. He's an Australian guitar maker. He doesn't make guitars any more, but he made really, really great pickups. When I was touring with Billy Bragg & The Blokes, I had Lu Edmonds and Ben Mandelson with me who used to play in 3 Mustaphas 3. They played kind of world music instruments and they really liked Jim's pickups. So he came to a show in Melbourne with a load of pickups, but also he brought this guitar that he calls a Tone Deluxe TV.

"I'm not sure he made many of these, either, but it's quite light. It's like a Telecaster but with an extra click on it, an extra [pickup selector] position on it. But most importantly – and this is absolutely crucial for me – it stays in tune no matter what you do to it. My style has been referred to as 'chop and clang' and I quite like that. It comes from thinking of the guitar as a percussion instrument rather than as a purely melodic instrument... it's about punctuation, almost. The rhythm is going in my head and I'm trying to click it in there to fit around the words I'm singing at the same time. As a result of that I'm giving the guitar a lot of stick. Most of my chord shapes are fists. If you give me a lightly strung guitar I'm going to pull it out of tune all the time. It's just the way I play; I'm hanging on for dear life as we're going through the song. So I need something that's going to stay in tune – and the Dyson you can put it in a 747 back from Australia and it won't go out of tune in the hold, you know? That's the ideal Billy Bragg guitar." G

The Million Things That Never Happened by Billy Bragg is out now on Cooking Vinyl

www.billybragg.co.uk

Rock Solid

As the valve amplification world faces an uncertain fate, Boss's latest amp takes its offerings to the next level as it stakes a claim for a solid-state future

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

BOSS NEXTONE SPECIAL 1X12 COMBO £814

CONTACT **Roland UK Ltd** PHONE **01792 702701** WEB **www.boss.info**

What You Need To Know

1 What's this box of tricks, then?
Boss's Nextone Special combo is a new two-channel version of the Nextone Stage and Artist combos, with 80 watts of proper Class AB power and the acclaimed Boss Waza BW12 loudspeaker. A clever software editor lets you have all kinds of fun with different EQs and effects, as well as acting like a librarian for storing and recalling favourite patches.

2 Tell us about Tube Logic...
This proprietary Roland/Boss technology emulates every component in a classic valve amp circuit so accurately that the amp response can be tweaked to very fine detail – for example, by changing virtual bias and 'sag' settings. Tube Logic appears in a number of Boss and Roland amplifiers, including some of the popular Cube amps.

3 What about valve emulation?
The Nextone Special replicates the response and dynamics of four essential output valves: the EL34, 6L6, EL84 and 6V6, driving a powerful Class AB output stage that provides a modern, reliable alternative to the traditional glass bottle.

One of the big three Japanese digital music innovators, Roland has been a significant player in the electric guitar market for decades. Aside from its pioneering work in guitar synthesis, the legendary solid-state Jazz Chorus and Cube amplifiers have been with us since the 1970s, while practically every guitarist in the world will have plugged into a Boss pedal or multi-effects unit at some point.

The Nextone Special uses up to 80 watts of Class AB power to drive the superb Waza BW12 loudspeaker, specially designed to emulate the rich harmonics of classic 'blue bell' loudspeakers from the 60s but with modern power handling and reliability

More recently, Roland took the logical step of using the Boss brand for amplification, introducing the award-winning Katana series of digital modelling amplifiers in 2016, alongside a new boutique amp under the Waza Craft brand. A couple of years later, Boss added the Nextone range – a different take on digital modelling using Roland's Tube Logic technology to mimic the behaviour of classic valve circuits right down to component level. With a proper Class AB output stage and comprehensive editing via the Nextone Editor app, the two Nextone amps have proved popular for players who like to get under the hood and tweak their tones. Now, there's a new addition that promises to take things to the next level – the Boss Nextone Special.

This latest amp has the same smart vintage-inspired styling as its stablemates, with a ply cabinet covered in heavy duty black vinyl, and a black and silver striped grille cloth. Around the back, there's a single BW12 Waza Craft loudspeaker, designed to emulate the sounds of classic Alnico 'blue bell' drivers from the 1960s.

Inside the steel tray chassis, the electronics look more like a computer than a guitar amplifier. One large PCB holds the power supply and output stage, with a substantial finned heatsink under the

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

1. The Nextone Special's front panel is a busy affair with around 30 knobs and switches to navigate. Thankfully, it's all logically laid out and most of the controls are duplicates for the separate Clean and Lead channels

The realistic power amp simulation and comprehensive EQ onboard mean you can get just about any amp tone

chassis keeping the power transistors cool. Another large board handles the sound generation, with more PCBs for front- and rear-panel controls. The Nextone's brain is Roland's own ESC2 digital signal processing chip, sat on the main board surrounded by hundreds of tiny SMD components.

Unlike the Nextone Artist and Stage models, the Special's control panel faces forwards, with two rows of ivory grey controls for clean and lead sounds. There are no less than 24 knobs, three rotary switches and 10 push-button switches (not including the channel presets). Thankfully, it's all clearly labelled. Nevertheless, the Nextone's manuals are essential reading if you want to get the best from it.

Both channels include conventional volume and three-band EQ controls, with an extra Gain control for the Lead channel. There are separate channel level controls for the onboard boost, delay and reverb effects, together with power stage EQ and a pair of selector switches that use Tube Logic technology to emulate 6V6, 6L6, EL84 and EL34 output valve types. On the far right, there are separate Clean and Lead channel Solo volume controls, an overall master volume and the output power selector, which can be used to switch the Nextone Special down from its maximum 80 watts to 60, 40, 20 or 0.5 watts, plus a Standby option.

On the rear panel, you'll find a choice of speaker outlet jacks, a pair of send and return jacks for the Nextone's effects loop, a headphones/recording output, and a separate balanced line output with a cabinet IR switch. Other rear-panel features include a USB 'B' socket for direct recording and accessing the amp with the Nextone Editor, with footswitch jacks and a MIDI in socket. Overall, it's a smart, robust amp that's ready for life both on stage and in the studio.

Feel & Sounds

While there's plenty of tweakability from the Nextone Special's expanded front panel, the Nextone Editor app is the key to unlocking all the features and flexibility. For example, both channels have Tone

2

switches; the Clean channel has a choice of fixed or variable level Bright options, while the Lead channel has a choice of two Fat options, again with fixed or variable level controls. The front-panel three-band EQ controls can be set to interact like British or USA amps, and the EQ expands in the Editor to a four-band affair, with shelving bass and treble, and a dual parametric midrange, including controls for frequency, level and Q – or, if you prefer, there's a 10-band graphic EQ instead. You can have an EQ in front of the preamp, after the preamp or both. There's also a separate EQ for shaping the output stage, and a separate global EQ. To combat hum and hiss there's a handy noise suppressor that has separate threshold and release controls.

There's far more to the Nextone's built-in effects than the front-panel Boost, Delay and Reverb controls suggest. There are 11 different boost types, going from a clean boost to a metal drive, together with a compressor. The delay section offers analogue and tape echo, plus an emulation of Roland's legendary SDE-3000 and a tremolo with speed, depth and LFO shape options. The digital reverb has a choice of plate, spring or hall models with time, pre-delay and separate EQ, while the effects loop can be configured to operate in series or parallel mode, pre or post reverb, with separate send and return level controls. Extra power amp functions include controls for bias and 'sag', while there are global input level and EQ options as well.

With the exception of output power and master volume settings, everything can be

3

2. There are 11 different boost types, including a clean boost, blues drive, metal drive and a simple compressor. Meanwhile, there's a choice of three different delays and three high-quality reverbs. What appear at first glance to be LED indicators are actually small illuminated button switches, mirrored in the Nextone's Editor app

3. The Nextone features a balanced line out with a choice of IR cabinet simulations that Boss calls Air Feel. It's normal practice to include a ground lift switch on line outs to avoid hum loops being caused – but there isn't one on this amp. Nevertheless, the Editor lets you access a very effective noise suppressor

The amp has separate valve-type selector switches for its Clean and Lead channels, adding increased versatility and tonal flexibility – for example, using a pair of 6L6s for a fat clean sound and a pair of EL84s for a heavily overdriven lead sound

saved into 100 user patches in the Editor app and three user slots on the amp. There's also a live 'WYSIWYG' panel option, which allows partial saves of non-front panel features. The Editor app itself is quick and easy to use, thanks to a sensible design that puts functionality first. However, there's no mobile version at the moment, which means connection is USB only.

In standard 'out of the box' trim, the Nextone Special's Clean channel sounds very Fender-ish, offering a sweet treble, slightly scooped midrange and a tight bass. Meanwhile, the Lead channel tone is more akin to a cranked tweed Champ or Deluxe, with a powerful mid-biased punch. Of course, the realistic power amp simulation and comprehensive EQ onboard mean you can get just about any amp tone you want from the Nextone Special. Without too much difficulty, we shifted the Lead channel from that bluesy 6V6 tweed to a huge mid-scooped EL34-powered thrash metal tone, complete with obligatory stadium delay and reverb.

> The Editor app is quick and easy to use, thanks to a sensible design that puts functionality first

For live use, there's plenty of volume on tap: the Special's 80 watts is more than enough to cope with an averagely loud un-mic'd pub gig yet it can be turned down to home practice levels with the output power switch, retaining those elusive cranked power stage dynamics. The Waza Craft speaker is superb, retaining crisp, bell-like highs and a focused midrange even at very high volume levels.

Verdict

As a demonstration platform for Roland's Tube Logic technology, the Boss Nextone Special is an impressive performer – and yet it's easy to be distracted with so many EQ options. Perhaps it would help make the Special more accessible if Boss filled up some of those user slots in the Editor with sample patches as starting points.

Aimed at professional players and serious amateurs alike, the Nextone Special is generally very good value for money considering what's on offer, although for live use the optional GA-FC foot-controller really is essential and should be included – or at least bundled at a discounted rate. That gripe aside, if you're ready to make the jump from valves to solid-state, the Nextone Special is a serious contender. G

BOSS NEXTONE SPECIAL 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £814
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Digital modelling preamp
OUTPUT: 80W into 4 ohms
DIMENSIONS: 530 (h) x 620 (w) x 246mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 18/40
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x Boss Waza BW12 12"
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Clean and Lead: volume, bass, middle, treble, boost level, delay level, reverb level, bottom, top, presence, valve type, solo level (all x2). Lead gain, master volume, master power control. Clean channel extra headroom switch, 2x tone switch, British/American EQ preset switch, tap tempo, boost on/off, reverb on/off, 2x solo on/off
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Effects loop configurable in Nextone Editor, USB connector, switchable output power levels from 80W to 0.5W. Balanced line out with Air Feel switch, recording/phones output, MIDI in, external speaker jacks
FOOTSWITCH: GA-FC foot-controller (optional, £101)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Nextone Artist combo (£651) and Nextone Stage combo (£465)

8/10

PROS Practically infinite tonal flexibility combined with a sensible choice of effects give the Nextone a 'pro' vibe; superb Waza speaker

CONS The packed front panel is not the most accessible design; number of EQ options can be intimidating; GA-FC not included

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Guitars

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Guitarist

GEAR OF THE YEAR

"Sounded exceptional... It's got it's own thing going on."

Valve-Free World

Solid-state and digital technology takes centre stage in these impressive live options

Words Nick Guppy

BOSS KATANA-100 MKII £329

The Katana's ease of use gives it an edge (excuse the pun) over many of its digital rivals. Still going strong, the MkII version features five different amp voicings: Clean, Crunch, Lead, Brown and Acoustic, each with an updated variation. There are five effects categories including Boost, Mod, FX, Delay and Reverb, with three variations per category and literally dozens of effects to choose from in the Katana's software app. A number of other clever features ensure the Katana remains one of the most popular modelling amps available.

www.boss.info

PEAVEY VYPYR X3 £399

The latest version of Peavey's popular Vypyr modelling amps packs in a dazzling range of features, with 36 amp models, 10 instrument models, and Bluetooth for streaming audio and accessing the amp through the iOS app. Peavey's TransTube technology has also been updated, promising more realistic valve-like overdrive tones than ever before. The Sanpera foot controller is an extra purchase and is necessary to access the Vypyr's looper. However, when you look at the amp's price, it's not such a bitter pill.

https://peavey.com

FENDER MUSTANG GTX100 £539

Fender's 'traditional' modelling amplifier is bang up to date in this GTX100 iteration and doesn't pull any punches with 200 presets onboard, Bluetooth editing capability and a unique built-in Wi-Fi access point for updates, storing of patches and much more. The mobile Tone app is now on Version 3 and looks superb on both Android and iOS devices. The seven-button foot controller unlocks the Mustang's 60-second looper and it's included in the price, making the Mustang a very tempting choice in the digital amp market.

www.fender.com

BLACKSTAR SILVERLINE DELUXE 100 COMBO £635

Blackstar's Silverline Deluxe uses the latest Sharc processor to provide impressive realism at a competitive price and features six preamp sounds, delay, modulation, reverb and six output valve emulations, including the elusive KT66 and KT88, which have their own special place in British rock guitar history. It's all wrapped up in a handsome cabinet that looks reassuringly vintage, while packing some of the most powerful digital tone ever put inside a guitar amp.

www.blackstaramps.com

HUGHES & KETTNER BLACK SPIRIT 200 FLOOR £899

Hughes & Kettner's Black Spirit 200 basically recreates its award-winning GrandMeister head using solid-state instead of valves. H&K's expertise is just as formidable in the solid-state arena and the Black Spirit 200 packs in the same four channels using programmable analogue solid-state circuits, hooked up to digital effects and a whopping 200-watt Class D output stage. It's available as a head, combo or powered floorboard (pictured), which integrates the MIDI foot controller.

http://hughes-and-kettner.com

FENDER TONE MASTER TWIN REVERB BLONDE £1,159

Fender's jaw-dropping Tone Master range dispenses with the typical multi-model choices, instead utilising the huge power of a cutting-edge DSP to recreate one amp – in this case the legendary 60s Twin Reverb. Using neodymium magnet loudspeakers (Celestion Neo Creambacks here), this amp weighs about half as much as the all-valve version and sounds so authentic we'd challenge anyone to tell the difference. If this is the future for Fender, we say bring it on...

www.fender.com

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State Of The Art

Non-valve amplification is far from new. Let's turn back the clock...

Words Nick Guppy

Wars typically speed up developments in technology and one goal throughout WWII was to find a replacement for the bulky, energy-hungry, fragile glass electron valve, more commonly known as the vacuum tube. The first working transistor was demonstrated by Bell Telephone Labs in 1947 and publicly announced in June 1948. Initially available only to the military, the first domestic products were hearing aids.

The arrival of the first transistor radio – the Regency TR-1 in 1954 – was viewed as a novelty, but its small size and portability was a sign of things to come. Over 100,000 TR1s were sold in its first year, but Sony's smaller and cheaper TR-63, introduced to the US in 1957, ended up selling in the millions. It was the success of these radios that led to transistors replacing valves as the dominant technology. Almost overnight, as transistor mass production ramped up, valve production disappeared.

Several pioneering manufacturers produced transistor-powered guitar amplifiers from the early 1960s. One of the earliest, wackiest and rarest was surely Höfner's Fledermaus or 'Bat' Guitar, which had a built-in transistor amplifier and speaker based on an early radio. Possibly scoring a double as the first guitar with active electronics, it's thought no more than a dozen were made. Other early UK examples included Vox's T60 bass amplifier, dating to around 1962 and used by Paul McCartney among others, while Fender introduced transistor versions of some amplifiers in 1966.

Early transistor amplifiers had a poor reputation for reliability. However, a new innovator from America would consign solid-state power and reliability issues to the past. In 1965, Hartley Peavey established the Peavey Electronics Corporation in Meridian, Mississippi, hand-building his first amps – the Musician and Dyna-Bass. While Peavey is also well-known for tube designs, its chief strength has always been solid-state, with the expertise gained from building reliable high-power PA amplification filtering back into guitar products.

By the early 1970s, transistors were more reliable and the MOSFET (Metal Oxide Semiconducting Field Effect Transistor) became the main workhorse for many PA and guitar amps. These transistors powered products such as WEM's Dominator 100 and Carlsbro's popular Stingray series, alongside designs from most major manufacturers, including Fender, Vox, Marshall, Yamaha, Roland and Music Man, who had significant success with their hybrid approach, combining solid-state preamps with valve power stages.

Another hybrid amp that threatened to make a big impression was Roland's Bolt 60, but it was its mighty Jazz Chorus 120 stereo combo from 1975 that broke the Fender Twin Reverb's dominance for big stage clean sounds. With built-in stereo chorus and indestructible build quality, the JC-120 quickly became a standard addition to festival and tour-equipment riders, and has been there ever since. For many musicians and industry watchers, the Jazz Chorus marked the moment solid-state guitar amplification properly arrived.

> For many, Roland's JC-120 marked the moment solid-state guitar amplification properly arrived

Meanwhile there was a digital revolution happening in audio production driven by the arrival of the desktop PC, as 24-track magnetic tape recorders were replaced by computer programs and special audio interface cards. Tracks could be cut, copied and pasted with a few mouse clicks and previously impossible digital effects could be added. Digital reverb replaced springs, plates and chambers in many studios, while sample-based synthesizers, such as the Synclavier, threatened to replace real instruments.

This was the era of the guitar-rack system, as pro guitarists took rack-mounted effects out of the studio and on to the stage in order to replicate their recorded tones. While most digital effects had a MIDI interface, most guitar amps didn't, so hooking everything together and controlling it from a convenient footswitch was new territory, pioneered by industry legends Paul Rivera

Left: The Sony TR-63 transistor radio produced in 1957
Above: Roland's indestructible JC-120 Jazz Chorus fast became the go-to amp for touring bands

PHOTO BY YOSHIKAZU TSUNO/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Custom controllers such as those built by Pete Cornish brought studio sounds to the stage via rack-mounted systems

The late 90s saw the release of Line 6's POD, which has evolved into many popular guises today

and Bob Bradshaw in the US, and Pete Cornish in the UK. Programmable guitar preamps weren't far off, though, and while several manufacturers built matching stereo valve power amps, their size and weight made solid-state a more compelling choice.

An early sign of things to come was PA:CE's impressively expensive and heavy Redmere Soloist introduced in 1979, with three analogue solid-state channels emulating Fender, Marshall and Vox amp sounds. The arrival of Line 6's AxSys digital modelling amplifier in 1996 was followed by the POD, using digital signal processing to emulate different well-known amplifier brands and effects. Two decades on from Line 6's revolutionary red bean-shaped gadget, digital modelling is now a firmly established technology, both as software and hardware, with most amp manufacturers having at least one digital range in their catalogue.

As processing power improves, so has the realism of digital amplifier models. Combined with the more recent innovation of Class D power amplifiers, which deliver valve-like dynamics from high-powered small and lightweight packages, it's looking increasingly like digital amp-modelling is ready to take over. And not before time.

> The outlook for non-valve guitar amps looks exciting, whether its analogue solid-state or digital

Expiration Date

Today, the future for valves is somewhat uncertain, but we should say, somewhat optimistically, that as long as there's a market it will be supplied. However, it's possible the 2020s could be the last decade of vacuum tube mass-production, which would affect bigger amp producers without viable non-valve alternatives. Smaller boutique builders should be able to carry on, though, and you'll still be able to buy replacements for your favourite valve amp for many years.

The outlook for non-valve guitar amplifiers, then, looks increasingly exciting, whether you choose analogue solid-state or digital. Truly spectacular offerings from several mainstream manufacturers in recent years have closed the gap to the point where even the die-hard valve supporters are beginning to admit there's no longer any difference. Given the choice, which would you go for?

Keeping valve amplifiers sounding at their best, especially older and vintage models, often turns into a war of attrition that's likely to become more expensive as valve prices go up. If you compare a 60-year-old heavy, unreliable valve combo with a modern digital equivalent that looks identical, sounds consistently great night after night with practically zero maintenance, weighs half as much and costs half the price, what's not to like? We think the future's already here. Bring it on! G

Heat Wave

"A voice that's unlike anything Taylor has previously offered" is the battle cry of this Grand Pacific dreadnought. Intrigued? So were we...

Words David Mead
Photography Olly Curtis

TAYLOR AD27E FLAMETOP £2,495

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars** PHONE **00800 23750011** WEB **www.taylorguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1 **Flame maple for an acoustic top?**
Okay, so it's perhaps an unusual choice, but in a time of serious supply chain issues Taylor took the initiative to "cook with what's in the pantry" and the company already had a good supply of flame maple. Experiments followed, a plan was formed and the AD27e Flametop was unleashed into the world.

2 **How does it affect the sound?**
If you're used to the established sound of a Taylor dread then prepare to have your eyebrows raised. There's a dose of very engaging earthy, woody tones on offer here.

3 **Is Taylor pursuing its V-Class bracing with this guitar?**
Indeed – and the result is a noticeable lack of boxiness and mud in the lower midrange, great playability and a very balanced output across the audio range.

You have to admit that it's quite a bold move for Taylor to proclaim proudly that its latest instrument "doesn't sound like a Taylor". But once you're made aware of the rationale behind the move, things become a little clearer. A lot of it has to do with supply chain issues caused by the previous two years and, in many cases, that are still ongoing.

Luthier-grade wood supplies have been affected by the fallout caused by the global pandemic as much as any other commercial commodity and so rather than allowing backorders to get to avalanche proportions, Taylor came out fighting. "Let's cook with what we have in the pantry" was the initiative that caused the company to re-examine the situation, and a survey of the timbers that they had in stock revealed that there was a plentiful supply of maple.

The rest was left up to the vision and ingenuity of master craftsman Andy Powers who reasoned that while maple was an unusual choice for a top wood, as opposed to the more ubiquitous spruce or cedar, for instance, there was no reason why it couldn't be called into action if it was given some specialist fettling and was able to prove its worth in the preliminary stages. Fine-tuning the maple presented its own set of challenges, as Andy describes in our interview that follow this review, where he elaborates as to why maple can be a little "squirrelly" when employed as a top wood.

Once the wood was tamed, however, it was found to produce a tone that was altogether different to Taylor's standard fare. Described as "dusky, woodier, grittier", it was leagues away from the more "high fidelity" sound for which Taylor guitars

1. The new AD27e takes its place in the ranks of Taylor's celebrated American Dream series

2. The fingerboard is eucalyptus, an ecologically sound, hard working timber and an able substitute for rosewood

3. It's flame maple for the back, sides and top of the AD27e, which, along with the V-Class bracing, gives it an earthier voice

have become known. In addition, the more they listened to what they had been able to produce, the more it seemed like a missing piece in the company's sonic portfolio. A husky, earthy sound that might just appeal to those players looking for an instrument that would embrace their roots, Americana or country blues ambitions. It also seemed to be a perfect fit for Taylor's slightly more leftfield American Dream series, which has been loudly applauded in these pages in the past.

And so, in short, what we have before us today is a brand-new Taylor with a slightly maverick topwood and the potential for a big surprise awaiting us in the tone department. Let's dive in...

The ethos behind this series is to provide more accessible pro-level instruments to the working musician

Feel & Sounds

The whole ethos behind Taylor's American Dream Series is to provide pro-level instruments that are more accessible to the working musician than, say, a top-of-range guitar festooned with bunting, whistles and bells. Stripped back and 100 per cent functional is the order of the day, and that's exactly what we find upon opening the AD27e's case. If your idea of flamed maple is framed by furniture finish tops, think again. Here, we find a darkish smokey sunburst that all but obscures the flame in the wood, the satin finish giving the impression of an instrument that has already travelled around the block a few times and is thoroughly street savvied. It's a workmanlike look, for sure, and we're already wondering if the AD27e has been dressed to suit the job it's expected to do.

As the use of maple is the elephant in the room here, it's worth taking a quick look at the sonic properties we can expect from it. In its more familiar guise as a back and sides tonewood, maple is known for its brightness and articulation with good

THE RIVALS

If you have set aside £2.5k to buy an acoustic guitar, the world is pretty much your oyster. Looking at the other contenders in the big-league makers, both Gibson and Martin serve up some stiff competition. We were impressed by Gibson's Generation range, all of which clock in at well below the AD27e's price point, but a standard J-45 costs around £2,399, with a Hummingbird Studio at the same price. If Martin is more your cup of tea, look no further than a D-18 for £2,499 or a souped-up D-28 Reimagined for slightly more at £2,999. If it has to be a Taylor, there is a whole stable of dreads on offer, a V-Class 327e Grand Pacific retailing at £1,929, for instance. Going bespoke, it's worth looking at makers such as Atkin, whose Essential D dreadnought can be found for £2,899. But if you're set on a flame maple top then your choices are going to be very limited indeed...

4. Taylor's Expression System 2 sits behind the guitar's bridge, ensuring an easy plug-in-and-go onstage personality

5. Designer Andy Powers recommends the use of nickel bronze strings to bring out the best tone from the AD27e

Playability overall is very, very good… There's a delightful dryness to the sound; it's woody and earthy

balance and projection. Taylor tells us that when they use maple for a guitar's back and sides, they voice the instrument to bring out its warmth, complexity and sustain. But what about using it as a top wood?

Here, the emphasis is on a "dry, midrange-centric tone" and promises a voice that, when combined with the company's V-Class bracing, will produce a "rustic, chunky sound". To illustrate just how far Andy Powers will go to squeeze every drop of his desired tone for the AD27e, the guitar has been strung with his recommended type of string – a set of D'Addario Nickel Bronze 0.012 to 0.053 gauge: "The strings have a unique response when you put them on an acoustic guitar – they're not dull sounding, but it's not the same vibrant presence you expect from a brand-new set of bronze strings," he tells us.

Completing the medley of woods present here, we have maple for the neck and eucalyptus for the fingerboard and bridge. Eucalyptus might be a bit of a new age traveller, too, but it's another wood that is in plentiful supply across the globe (so much so that in some areas it's regarded as invasive), is not in any way endangered and fits Taylor's ecological aspirations like a glove. Visually, it's incredibly similar to the look of rosewood, whereas tone wise it's known for strong mids and trebles with a balanced bass and so there's clearly a sonic picture emerging here with the AD27e.

In the hand, the instrument feels very good indeed; the satin-finished neck with its everyman C profile and 44.5mm nut width lays down the welcome mat before we've even played a note. When we do, we like what we hear. One thing we always listen out for with dreadnoughts is the midrange hump that sometimes happens around the F and F# on the fourth string.

Volume, treble and bass controls sit discreetly on the guitar's upper bout

This is where the mud usually resides with the lower mids cloying into a thick, cloudy stew. But that's decidedly not the case with the AD27e. We don't know if this is down to the choice of string, the maple top or the V-Class bracing (although the latter is the chief suspect), but everything rings clean and clear in this region.

In fact, playability overall is very, very good, with a very even response across the whole range, the various frequencies playing nicely together wherever you find yourself on the fretboard. It would be true to say that it might not have quite the girth of a D-28 in the basses, but we didn't detect anything lacking during our tests.

How do we sum up the sound? Well, if you put the sound of a Martin at one end of the spectrum and, say, a Gibson J-45 at the other, the AD27e leans more towards the Gibson end. There's a delightful dryness to the sound; it's woody and earthy and we very quickly found ourselves running through all our acoustic blues licks and favourite singer-songwriter chord progressions. No complaints here at all.

The AD27e is fitted with Taylor's tried and trusted Expression System 2 pickup and preamp set, should your playing ambitions include performing on stage, but is available pickup free at a lower cost. This is a system we've met many times in the past and is an absolute doddle to set up live and offers a no-fuss way of playing out there in the world.

> If you put a Martin at one end of the spectrum and a Gibson J-45 at the other, the AD27e leans more towards the Gibson end

Verdict

This is undoubtedly a very bold move from Taylor, but thanks to Andy Powers' skills as a designer and luthier we think it's paid off in full. As a standalone instrument, the AD27e is a very good acoustic guitar with a personality all its own. As part of the American Dream Series it's a perfect fit, too. Of course, there's very scant information as to how a maple top matures. We know that spruce opens up in time and so we can always leave a little room in our expectations accordingly when faced with a new spruce-topped instrument. Maple remains a bit of a mystery in this respect, but we suspect that the good sound already present here can only be built upon and enhanced in the future.

At just shy of £2.5k this acoustic is in a highly competitive market, but if you're looking for something that leaves the path well trod you'd be well advised to seek out the AD27e – we're pretty sure you'll be in for a pleasant surprise. G

TAYLOR AD27E FLAMETOP

PRICE: £2,495 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Grand Pacific dreadnought
TOP: Flame big leaf maple
BACK/SIDES: Big leaf maple
MAX RIM DEPTH: 117.5mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: Hard rock maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Taylor nickel
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/ 44.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Eucalyptus
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Eucalyptus/56mm
ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.83/4.04
OPTIONS: The AD27 is available with a mahogany top (£1,619) and as the AD27e (£1,835). There's also the smaller-bodied mahogany/ sapele Grand Concert AD22e (£1,955)
RANGE OPTIONS: Other instruments in Taylor's American Dream Series include the Natural top AD17 (£1,715) and AD17e (£1,835) and the Blacktop AD17 (£1,715) and AD17e (£1,919)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Satin

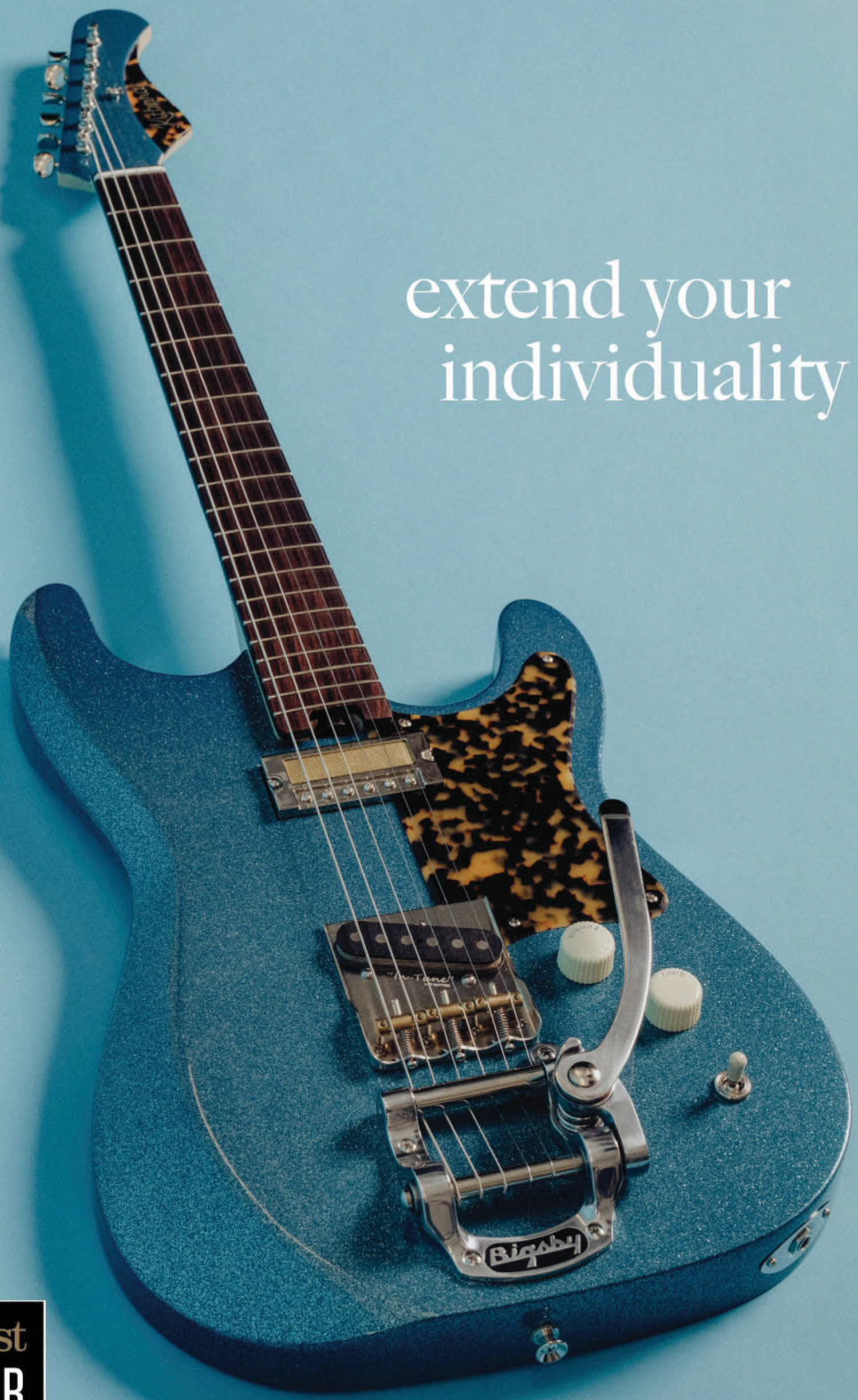
8/10

PROS A well-built, workmanlike dreadnought with an unusual edge and lot of tone and personality

CONS The price – and that maple top might deter the traditionalists

Kithara
GUITARS

extend your individuality



Guitarist
GEAR OF THE YEAR

Kithara Harland in Blue Sparkle

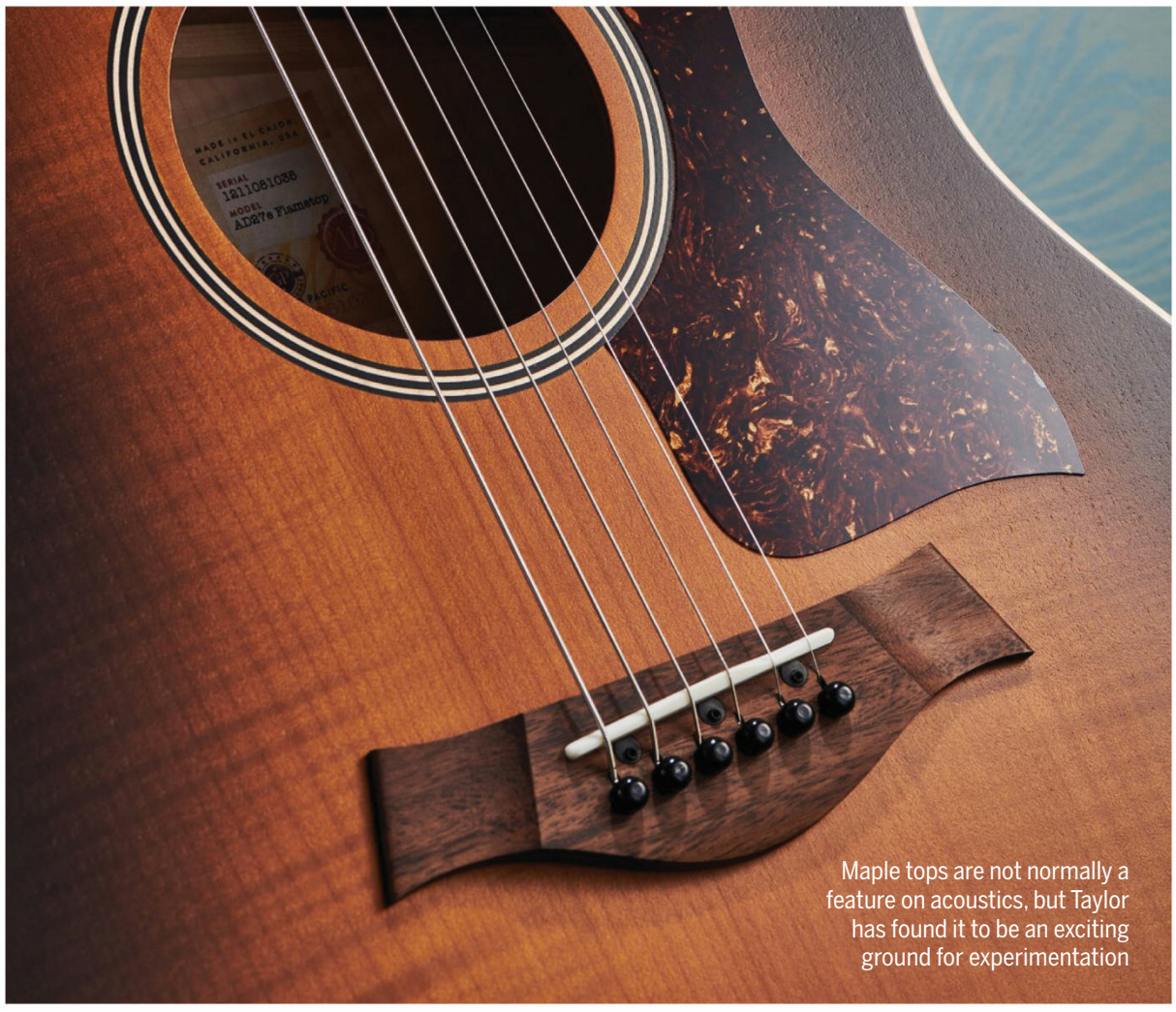
Living The Dream

The maple-topped AD27e is the latest addition to Taylor's American Dream series. Master guitar designer, Andy Powers, tells the story of the guitar that "doesn't sound like a Taylor"

Words David Mead

"To kind of help set the table, one of the things that I love most about playing music, and guitar specifically, is that we can choose what sounds we want to make. Like when you go to sing, you're given the voice that you're given. You can work with it a little bit, but you get what you get, right? But with guitar, you get to choose what kind of sound you want to make. And I love that. So when I look out at the broader guitar playing world and the musical landscape of all these different musicians, one of the things that strikes me is that there's a huge amount of diversity and a nearly infinite number of ways that a musician would approach the instrument – and they're all so good. It's a very inclusive environment where you have all of these different players making all kinds of different music.

"This almost 'dusty' sound … draws a different feeling from the musician"



Maple tops are not normally a feature on acoustics, but Taylor has found it to be an exciting ground for experimentation

"So one of my goals as a guitar maker is to be building a lot of different kinds of sounds. You build an instrument that leads a musician in different directions and complements that different direction. In the last 10 years, we've put a very deliberate effort towards creating different kinds of voices and guitars, whether it's a Grand Theater or the American Dream guitars like this new flame type version. All of these different choices are meant to build a wider variety of sounds for a wider diversity of musician."

It's a very bold move for any guitar company with such a reputation to say, 'Well, here's a Taylor that doesn't exactly sound like a Taylor...'

"Yeah, it is. Then you start asking yourself, 'Well, what is that Taylor sound?' Some people say, 'It's vibrant, it's brilliant, it's high-fidelity' and I love that. But that's not always the mood you want as a musician. Okay, well, if you could build anything you want, what would you build? And my response is I want to build all the flavours. I like them all. Like, in my personal collection, I don't want 10 of the same guitar. I need one that does *this* sound. But what about the other nine? Because sometimes I'm in the mood for this and sometimes I want to play like that. Or if I'm recording a song like this or writing a song like that, you want these different flavours. They tell different stories."

We like the expression that you're cooking with what's in the pantry, too.

"That's very much where the American Dream idea came from. At the outset of the pandemic I thought, 'Okay, I don't know what the future looks like right now, so let's take stock. Let's see what we have. What do we have to work with? What can I make? What suits the needs of a musician right now?' And in the ensuing weeks, months and now years, the original philosophy of that is still very appropriate: to think about what could draw creativity out of a musician. Sometimes it's like my cup of black coffee; it's going to get the job done. You know, sometimes there's no place for frills and filigree. Just play the song. That's kind of what those guitars are about."

You say that maple can be very "squirrelly" to work with. Would you define that for us?

"Yeah, that's a technical word [laughs]. Maple, especially with a figure in it, whether it's birdseye, curly, quilted or anything like that, it's actually a genetic component of a particular maple tree where the grain is growing in a wavy pattern or some other aberration. When you cut a slice through this thing – and because you're severing through those wavy wood fibres – that's what makes this visual pattern. But traditionally it does make the wood fairly difficult to work with because it can sometimes take on a mind of its own. So you have to be very careful with how it's dried and seasoned and prepared for use once it's ready.

Andy admits that this is not an acoustic guitar for the masses, but "it will fit some players and some songs better than any instrument that I could think of", he says

"There's a good reason why all the violins in the world get made with maple for the back and sides, and they have for centuries. Using maple as a top for a flat-top guitar, however, that is very unusual. The only times I'd ever worked with maple as a flat-top guitar top were for stage usage where you have a very high sound pressure level and you need feedback suppression. So you deliberately build a guitar that will be kind of feedback resistant, but that was in a more conventional sense with a bracing architecture. And once we started working with the V-Class architecture, well, that opens up a whole lot of possibilities that we didn't have available to us before.

"We started releasing that this gives us opportunities to develop the guitar into wider and wider directions because it's not as limited to one set of mechanical characteristics in a piece of wood. You have a lot of direct control of the strength of the top and the way it's going to resonate and how you voice it and how you can mix that with different materials to create their unique sounds. Using maple all the way around the guitar, a lot of people would think it's going to be a very bright guitar, and that's not necessarily the case. It's a very different sounding guitar."

We found it more earthy and gritty than what we'd generally expect from a Taylor.
"I can draw a parallel to the world of photography. Sometimes you want a technically perfect photograph; you want to focus the exposure so that the detail is ultra high-fidelity. Very, very clear. And sometimes the most compelling photograph isn't that. Maybe the focus is softer, the colours are saturated or it's got some motion in it. And yet somehow that conveys the story behind the scenes more accurately than if it had been technically perfect. That's kind of what this guitar sounds like, where you hear this almost 'dusty' sound and it draws a different feeling from the musician. It works well, but it's got this other component that just makes you play and listen in a different way."

Why are you recommending a specific set of nickel bronze strings for the AD27e?
"They're almost like a cross between a phosphor bronze string and a nickel wound electric guitar string. So if you took some of the harmonic content from that phosphor bronze set of strings but with the focus of a nickel wound string, it's a unique flavour because it's like it's halfway between the two. It is sparkly and there is brightness there, except that it has this sound that almost feels like there's more wood and less metal in the sound.

"This is not a guitar for every player. It's not going to fit every playing style. It's not going to fit every song. But it will fit some players and some songs better than any instrument that I could think of. And that's what's so exciting about creating an instrument like this." G

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Infinite Sample Sustainer

Freeze your sound for eternity – or just long enough to make music!

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

The TC Electronic Infinite Sample Sustainer is a pedal that captures a small snapshot of your playing – be that a single note, doublestop or chord – and then sustains it so you can use the result as a musical bed to play over. The concept isn't exactly a new one, but TC's team of designers has tried to make it as accessible as possible while providing a set of features for a versatile experience and a wide range of sound variation.

There's plenty available from the front panel as shipped, but as the pedal employs TC's TonePrint technology – "a unique signature preset of an effect" – the options expand massively if you hook it up to the TonePrint app where you can access TC's range of Factory and Artist TonePrints or opt to create your own.

IN USE

To use the pedal, you simply play your note or chord and hit the footswitch, and the pedal will then sample a portion of the sound and seamlessly loop it so it plays indefinitely. Best results are obtained by hitting the footswitch during the stable, sustained portion of what you played, and it's easy to get the hang of this. The footswitch can be set for latching or momentary. If you set it to momentary, your sampled section will be active as long as your foot is on the switch. If it's latching, a double-tap on the switch is needed to stop the sample section from playing and clear the memory, while a single press is used to add more sample layers.

There are seven modes available via the FX Type rotary switch. For the first three (L1, L2 and L3) you can keep adding layers, but each time you do that the oldest layer will disappear. L1 sustains a single sample that will be replaced by another one with a single footswitch press, while L2 and L3 let you stack samples. L2 allows for two layers to be sustained; L3 supports three layers. Infinite mode lets you stack layers ad infinitum, but newer layers can take preference with older layers reduced in volume for each new recording by a damping value you can set via the TonePrint app. The remaining three modes accessed by the rotary switch are for specific TonePrint settings (TP1, TP2 and TP3) that you can store in the pedal.

There are other factors that determine the nature of the sustained sample. The Fade In and Decay knobs vary the

1. FOOTSWITCH
The large footswitch can be set for latching or momentary operation by the toggle switch above it

2. FX TYPE ROTARY SWITCH
Here you can set the amount of sustained layers (1, 2, 3 or infinite) or access three different TonePrint settings

3. DECAY & FADE IN KNOBS
Envelope control for the sustained sound – this is very useful for creating a decay tail

4. DRY/VERB SWITCH
This switch determines whether the pedal's internal reverb is applied to the sound

5. SEND & RETURN SOCKETS
Connect another pedal (or pedals) here and they will be placed in the sustained part of the signal

6. LEVEL KNOB
Sets the output volume of the sample sustain to balance it with your guitar sound

7. TONEPRINT TECHNOLOGY
Carry out nuanced editing of all the pedal's parameters or simply download factory/user TonePrints from the web to load in

7

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Sustainer pedal
FEATURES: Selectable True or Buffered Bypass, latching or momentary footswitch action, software editing
CONTROLS: Decay, Level, Fade In, FX Type, Dry/Verb switch, Latch/Momentary switch, footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard send, standard return, USB
POWER: 9V DC adaptor 100mA (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 50mm (h)

8/10

envelope from instantaneous start and stop of the sustained sample with footswitch action to slow fade-ins and fade-outs of up to one second. There's also an external effects loop, meaning you can add other pedals to contribute to the sustained sound, perhaps to add distortion or delay.

The pedal also has an internal reverb processor based on the Hall Of Fame pedal, plus a toggle-switched choice of whether the sound is dry or has reverb applied to it. If you're using TonePrints, there's a huge opportunity for editing, including adding modulation to the sustained portion (flanging, vibrato and chorus are available), fine-tuning reverb and EQ settings, and options for functions such as always-on reverb for the direct sound so it blends nicely with the sustained sound – something TC has usefully included as the default setting for TP1.

At its most basic, you could simply use the pedal to sample a chord to practise over, but its full potential is realised in the huge ambient soundscape pads you can create both by stacking up layers and taking full advantage of the reverb engine and modulation block. These give you a really interesting foundation to improvise over, but you can also use the pedal simply for textural pads in a band performance, taking over a traditional keyboard player's role by using the dry-kill function and swelling in a new chord on each change – the factory setting for TP3, as shipped, has this auto-swell theme.

Other creative uses of the pedal include setting momentary footswitching, adjusting the Decay and Level just right, and bringing it in as an extra layer underneath long sustained notes for extra interest and emphasis.

VERDICT
This is a pedal you have to 'play' and it can be a lot of fun. It may not be an essential item for every 'board, but there's plenty of creativity to be unleashed, whether noodling around at home or throwing a curveball into a live show. G

PROS *Compact size; latching or momentary footswitch operation; send/return loop; TonePrint capability with practical reverb and modulation options*
CONS *Mono only; could do with a more informative manual*

MANUFACTURER
CARL MARTIN

MODEL
PANAMA, PURPLE MOON & OTTAWA

PRICE
FROM £97

CONTACT
SELECTRON 01795 419460
WWW.CARLMARTIN.COM

ROUND-UP

Carl Martin pedals

Take a trip with far-out sounds inspired by familiar tones

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

The last Carl Martin pedal we looked at in these pages was the PlexiRanger in issue 468. The long-established Danish brand had revamped some of its pedals back in 2018 with a new look involving some slick-looking anodized chassis.

The three pedals we're focusing on here continue that Chinese-made range and all look classy in their metallic colours. Each one runs with a standard nine-volt supply that connects on the top edge of the pedal, next to the input and output jacks. The sides are smooth and flat so the pedals can neatly butt up side by side, with their footswitches being a practical 60mm apart.

The Ottawa is a redesign of the Classic Optical Envelope, the Panama continues a long line of drives, while the Purple Moon, another redesign, is aimed at a particular classic rock sound: Carl Martin could equally have called it 'Dark Side Of The Haze'...

CARL MARTIN

Panama British Hot Modded OD £111

Carl Martin is known for some pretty decent drive pedals, in particular the Plexitone. The Panama's Brit tones probably owe a lot to that pedal, as well as to the classic amp that inspired it, of course. You get the standard Gain, Level and Tone knobs here, but the unique feature of this pedal is the Damping knob, which is designed to tighten up the sound. Basically, it works on the bottom-end, and turning it from its fully counterclockwise position will start to reduce any woofiness for an altogether leaner, more aggressive sound. There's a wide range of tones available here, from a clean boost through all levels of amp-like drive to high-gain with plenty of sustain. The Tone knob is very effective in matching the pedal's tone to your own amp and would make a fine complementary extra channel for a clean or driven amp, depending on where you set the Gain knob. G

VERDICT *Classic Brit drive that adjusts to take you from looser to tight and focused*

CARL MARTIN

Purple Moon Vintage Fuzz n' Vibe £97

Fuzz and Uni-Vibe go particularly well together, as Jimi Hendrix proved, and you can find the sound of these two effects in this pedal, which Carl Martin says takes its inspiration from Jimi, Robin Trower and David Gilmour. The fuzz is actually placed in the vibe circuit, so the vibe sound (set up by the three large white knobs) is perfectly clean unless you choose to bring in some fuzz via the tiny Fuzz Level knob. Incidentally, you can turn the vibe depth right down if you just want to hear fuzz, which will go from a touch of added background grit to full-on fat and sustain-y. It's not unlike a Fuzz Face and reacts really well to dynamics, cleaning up nicely with your volume knob. Things really come alive when you dial the two effects to mesh together perfectly and you get a phase-y, fuzzy swirl that will be instantly familiar from vintage recordings. G

VERDICT *Want* that *sound? Why use two pedals when one will do? Especially at this price*

CARL MARTIN

Ottawa Vintage Optical Envelope £119

Ottawa? We wondered why this pedal was named after a Canadian city until we said it out loud – 'Auto Wah'! Yes, this is an old-style envelope in the Mutron vein. The Level knob sets the output level, but the other three knobs define the effect's intensity and tonal quality: the Attack knob sets sensitivity to your pickups and playing dynamics; the Tone knob progressively filters out high frequencies affecting the tonal ballpark of the effect; and the Q knob adjusts the bandwidth from something soft and rounded to sharper and more dramatic, typically from a 'wah' to a more pronounced 'wow'. Filter type is selectable. Band Pass offers a more conventional wah, High Pass loses body for a scratchier funk sound, while Low Pass is warmer and fuller. Whether it's tight rhythmic wah or quacky/vowel-y single notes, it's all dialled in easily here. G

VERDICT *Classic auto-wah and envelope filter for clean sounds or feeding a dirt pedal*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Level, Damping, Tone, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 100mA
DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 115 (d) x 50mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Depth, Level, Speed, Fuzz, Fuzz Level, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 100mA
DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 115 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Envelope pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Tone, Attack, Q, Level, HP/BP/LP switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 30mA
DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 115 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER
FENDER

MODEL
DUEL PUGILIST &
DUAL MARINE LAYER

PRICE
£179 & £199

CONTACT
FENDER 01342 331700
WWW.FENDER.COM

ROUND-UP

Fender Dual pedals

The guitar giant doubles up on the distortion and reverb

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

We took a look at the original Fender Pugilist and Marine Layer pedals when they launched back in 2018. The company has now brought out Dual (or Duel in the case of the Pugilist) versions of them, each featuring two channels with switching options. Both have that Fender family look featuring LED-backlit knobs that let you see your control settings on a dark stage, and run from a nine-volt supply. These are quite large pedals but arguably need that much space for their three-footswitch operation, each with a global Bypass footswitch and two for functions relating to the twin channels.

FENDER

Duel Pugilist Distortion £179

This new version of the Pugilist pedal features the same Distortion A and Distortion B engines – B being more gainy and compressed than A – but it gives you more options. Each engine has its own Level, Tone and Gain knobs, while a global High and Low shelving EQ sets up the sound to suit your amp. Three modes determine how the two interact. Series mode stacks the channels like having two different pedals, so you can use them individually or together. Bypass mode lets you build a sound using the A and B channels (mixing them in proportion with the Blend knob) then switch the combined sound in and out with the Bypass knob. The cool thing here is that if you only have A or B active, rather than both, then the inactive channel passes clean sound, which you can then mix in with the active channel for a hybrid blend – maybe to add a touch of clarity to your distorted sound. We don't quite see the point of Mute mode, though; we'd much rather have seen a mode where you could toggle between A and B with one footswitch press. G

VERDICT *A nicely versatile drive pedal featuring some great drive and distortion sounds*

FENDER

Dual Marine Layer Reverb £199

The Dual Marine Layer features two independent reverb channels that you can toggle between with an A/B footswitch. There's a choice of three reverb types: the conventional Hall and Room, plus Shimmer for longer shifting ambiences. These are selected for both channels at the same time, so you can't have one set up for Hall and one for Room, for example. However, each channel has plenty of control over its sound with adjustable dry/wet mix (Volume), reverb decay time, very effective damping to alter the nature of the 'verb by attenuating high frequencies, and a modulation knob that adds texture with a chorus effect. There's plenty to create a contrast, then, so you can have two distinct stage-switchable sounds, whether that delivers a subtle increase in decay time or a wetter mix for playing solos or something more radical. A momentary Sustain footswitch overrides the Time knob settings and ramps the reverb time up higher when held down for added expressiveness on chosen notes, chords or phrases. G

VERDICT *This pedal's plus points are the simplicity of its hands-on setup and its ease of onstage use*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Distortion pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, LED markers on control knobs
CONTROLS: High, Low, Blend, Level A, Tone A, Gain A, Level B, Tone B, Gain B, Mode switch Mute/Series/Bypass, LED On/Off, Bypass footswitch, Distortion A footswitch, Distortion B footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 165mA
DIMENSIONS: 170 (w) x 125 (d) x 63mm (h)

8/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Reverb pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, LED markers on control knobs, 3 reverb algorithms
CONTROLS: Damping A, Time A, Mod A, Level A, Damping B, Time B, Mod B, Level B, Sustain, Type switch 1/2/3, LED On/Off, Bypass footswitch, Reverb A/B footswitch, Sustain footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 150mA
DIMENSIONS: 170 (w) x 125 (d) x 63mm (h)

8/10

Longtermers

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

Gretsch Streamliner G2622T-P90

with Dave Burrluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor

While we wait for gigs to restart (again), our reviews editor is still working hard on recordings... with a new buddy!

Dave addresses tuning stability by properly attaching and stretching the strings

While I can't speak for anyone else, so much about my guitar habits has changed in the past two years. I channelled myself into a considerable amount of home recording, and before I knew it I'd 'joined' a couple of bands. However, these bands have zero intention of ever playing live, let alone in the same room. Long rehearsals were replaced with hours of coming up with ideas (usually the easy bit) then trying to record them to an acceptable standard (the harder bit). One band has a rigorous schedule to release one track a month; the other is yet to release anything, falling foul of today's dilemma of not knowing when to stop!

Working on tracks for the former project I'm usually sent an often pretty dense track with the request of, "We just need a solo from bar 65." On occasion it's a "See what you can add. A bit of slide might be nice..." Either way, for me, it's a case of finding the sound style that suits then I'll work on the part.

"This G2622T-P90 certainly has its quirks and every time I use it I wonder if I can improve it, or would that lose its recording mojo?"

For this particular project, the brief is 60s style with a nod or four to Britpop: a no-blues zone, for sure. Early in lockdown I borrowed a mate's Rickenbacker 620, a guitar where I went from "Gawd, this is terrible!" to "It's the greatest recording guitar in the world!" I must remember to give it back...

Of course, recording is a pretty good way of evaluating the character of a guitar, certainly when we were all forbidden from live gigs, and the chance to hang onto this Gretsch Streamliner meant I could try it on a few tracks. Rather than being the primary guitar, it's had a fair bit of use to track parts. I wouldn't call it a classic Gretsch – its voicing is a little darker – but it's got a voice that sits nicely under a cleaner Fender, for example, or for adding a little twang and texture to a thicker Les Paul without the overdub being too contrasting. And in the world of direct recording, feedback isn't a big deal so using a pretty hollow guitar with more gain or fuzz than you'd ever get away with live just isn't an issue. Its Bigsby (while, as usual, a pain to restring) is not only informing what you hear, but those light shimmers can add considerable texture – a little manual modulation, if you like.

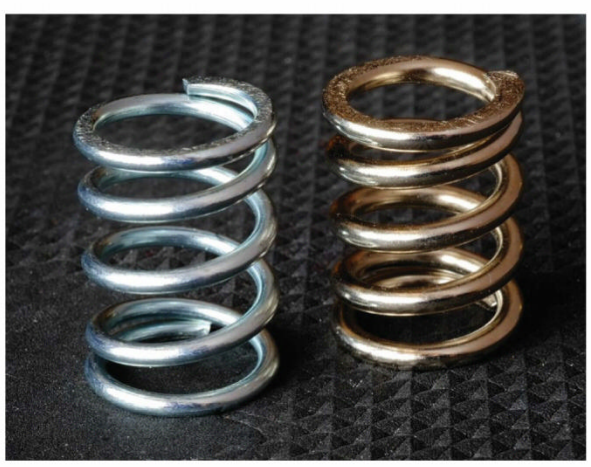
As I reported back in our review in issue 477, this G2622T-P90 certainly has its quirks and, every time I use it I wonder if I can improve it, or would that lose its recording mojo? Ha, what am I saying, a guitar either works or it doesn't, right?

The obvious issue is tuning stability, which isn't bad and just needs the usual TLC, to be honest. Nine times out of 10 it's the nut and bridge saddles and, of course, properly attaching the strings to the tuners and then properly stretching the strings. Use nut files to smooth those nut grooves and make sure the string returns perfectly to pitch after bending behind the nut. Same at the bridge: here, a little smoothing of the grooves using a fine round needle file on the bigger strings and nut files, or a fine V'd needle file on the thinner ones. Again, bend each string behind the bridge and when everything is coming back to pitch you should be okay. I usually add lube when I restring, too.

These tuners aren't my favourite, but unscrewing the button, removing the nylon washer then tightening them creates a more positive feel. And now those light shimmers come back to pitch perfectly, as do bigger string bends down near the nut.

The Bigsby feels a little stiffer than I'd like. A quick look on Google leads me to Reverend 'squishy' spring. It's a very easy mod: just pull up the arm (I'd suggest you detune your guitar a bit), pull out the old spring and push in the new one. Is it squishier? Yes. The arm also sits a bit lower as the squishy spring has a lower tension. And while that might be a problem with much heavier strings, it all feels rather good with a fresh set of nines. If only all mods were this simple.

"You free for a gig on the 11th?" texts the band leader of one of my non-virtual bands. This Gretsch is cutting it as a useful home studio guitar, but do I dare use it live? G



The Reverend squishy spring (left) next to the original it replaced

Reviewed *477* ***Price*** *£609* ***On Test Since*** *July 2021 to current* ***Studio Sessions*** *At home, yes, lots* ***Gigged*** *Not yet* ***Mods*** *Yes* *www.gretschguitars.com*

BOUGHT & SOLD

WARREN HAYNES

The Gov't Mule guitar-slinger tells the story of a freebie Danelectro and how humbuckers rule his sound

Warren's signature Les Paul is always nearby, but he's been spending more time on his acoustic sound lately: "I feel like I've worked my whole life on my electric sound, but my acoustic sound has always taken a back seat," he says

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

"I guess it would be a Gibson SG Junior, around 1974 when I was 14. I started playing in bars and clubs when I was 14, but it was very rare, I'd just play whenever I could. That was my third guitar. The first guitar I had was a Norma for $59 that my dad got at a hardware store, and the next one was a Lyle copy of an SG. I guess [the SG Junior] was still bought by my dad. The next one I got was a Gibson ES-150 that I paid for – it was $350 – and that was from saving up."

PHOTO BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"Hmm, let's see. The last electric guitar I bought would have been my '59 Les Paul, but I've bought a few acoustics since then: a McAlister acoustic that's really cool, some Rockbridge acoustics that are really nice...

"I don't buy a lot of guitars these days, actually, but when I do they're usually acoustic guitars because I feel like that's what's lacking most for me. I'm trying to work on my acoustic sound on stage for when I occasionally do solo gigs. I feel like I've worked my whole life on my electric sound, but my acoustic sound has always taken a back seat."

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

"I have a Danelectro that was given to me and if I had paid for it, it would have been quite the bargain because they sound so amazing for certain types of music. There were two particular Danelectros from the 50s that I've managed to record quite a bit, so I've definitely got my money's worth out of those. I used both of them on the new record [Gov't Mule's *Heavy Load Blues*], as well – I used the Pro 1 on *Blues Before Sunrise,* the opening track, and the 'Parts Guitar' (which is what I call it because it's a combination of several Danelectros put together), I used on *Make It Rain*."

> "If [a potential purchase] feels good and sounds good when it's not plugged in, chances are it's a really good guitar"

What's the worst case of buyer's remorse you've had after buying a piece of gear?

"Probably everything I bought during the 80s! Specifically a chorus pedal, back in the time when everybody was using chorus pedals – there were two or three that everybody was using – and to this day I have a hard time with that sound. That was certainly the worst $200 I ever spent."

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

"Only as a kid, y'know? I had a late-60s Gibson SG Custom – three pickups, gold hardware, ebony fingerboard and a Bigsby – and coincidentally it was exactly like the one I played on *Snatch It Back And Hold It* on the new record. That guitar belonged to Allen Woody and it's the spitting image of the guitar I had when I was a teenager. I sold it because I dropped it and the neck broke off and I had it reattached and it never was the same – I actually traded it for two PA speakers. I didn't have them very long, they

PHOTO BY JAY SANSONE

WARREN'S LIVE RIG

"I have a Bradshaw switching system to control effects. The effects are in a rack or in a drawer and not on the stage, and the series of effects loops allows you to not be running through an effect when you're not engaging it. That also allows me to use up to three different rigs together or separately. In the studio, I'll put a little amp as a third rig with my stage amps as rigs one and two. On stage one, the amp is set to be more of a Marshall-type sound – it could be a Marshall or a Soldano or a Paul Reed Smith – and the other amp is more of a Fender-y sound, usually a Homestead or a Díaz. On stage I switch back and forth and each has its own 4x12 cabinet. The Soldano or the Marshall runs through a higher wattage cabinet, like 75-watt Celestions, and the Homestead or the Díaz would be through Vintage 30s.

"For effects, there's a Klon Centaur, a Bradshaw Stereo Tremolo, a Chandler Analog Delay, a Boss Octaver, sometimes my Fender Spring Reverb Tank. Then there's a César Díaz pedal called a Texas Ranger, which is kinda based on the Vox Top Boost. I also have a Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere.

"The guitar is usually my signature Les Paul, which is a '58 body, '59 neck with Burstbucker pickups, and it has circuitry that allows you to maintain all the high-end at low volume. But I use a lot of different tunings and so it could be an ES-335 or a Firebird or an SG."

weren't very good and I wish I had the guitar now. But it was at a time when I only had two guitars and it had kinda lost its charm, so to speak."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Always start out playing it unplugged. If it feels good and sounds good when it's not plugged in, chances are it's a really good guitar. You can always change something about the electronics or the pickups or whatever, but if it has a good natural sound acoustically, that's usually how I judge a guitar, at least at the beginning. If it sounds good that way then I plug it in and see how that feels."

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

"Looking at the McAlister acoustic guitars and trying to determine which one I wanted to purchase. They're very beautiful instruments and that was probably the most recent shopping expedition for me. I usually like bigger acoustics – I recently got a Gibson J-200 that I like a lot – but some of the Rockbridge guitars that I have are smaller bodies. The small-bodied guitars have their own sort of personality; they're a little more throaty, a little more midrange-y and – especially for single-note stuff – they sound really good. I usually go for acoustic guitars that have nice midrange because if I'm going to play lead on the guitar at all I don't want it to be plinky and have a hollowed-out sound."

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

"If it was to perform with and record with, I'd probably go for the cheap guitar and top-notch amp. Cheap guitars tend to sound really good, but I also feel like sometimes cheap amplifiers sound really good as well. But I think I'll stick with my first answer. A lot of times the difference between a cheap guitar and an expensive guitar is the playability and the tunability of the instrument. Sometimes the sound on a cheap guitar is really, really good and inspiring."

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

"Humbuckers have always been the sound I have gravitated towards. All my life I've kinda been a humbucker guy. Having said that, in recent years I've tended to experiment a little more – hence the Danelectro with the lipstick-tube pickup. I love single coils in general, but that's not the norm for me. That's like the exception that I go to when I want a different sound." **[DM]**

Gov't Mule's latest album, *Heavy Load Blues*, is out now on the Fantasy Records label
http://mule.net

I'm with the band: Haynes (front) with fellow Gov't Mule members (left to right) Jorgen Carlsson, Matt Abts and Danny Louis

NITTY GRITTY

Understanding P-90s

This issue, we welcome guitarist and restoration expert Huw Price as he puts classic gear under the microscope each month. To kick off, the venerable P-90…

The P-90's lineage goes back to the 1930s, when Gibson's first electric guitar pickup appeared on the ES-150. It became so synonymous with the era's greatest jazz guitarist that the pickup became universally known as the 'Charlie Christian'. It pre-dated the development of Alnico magnets, and Gibson's pickup designers needed massive cobalt magnets to achieve the necessary gauss. The 'Charlie Christian' was wound with 38AWG magnet wire and weighed a hefty 2lb.

In 1940, Gibson came up with an unusual diagonally mounted pickup that stretched almost all the way from the neck to the bridge. This had evolved into a shorter version by 1941, with two Alnico bar magnets and a steel keeper bar positioned under the coil, adjustable pole screws and a plastic cover with rounded ends.

Walt Fuller, the head of Gibson's electronics department, developed a more compact pickup using Alnico magnets. With a rectangular metal cover and height adjustment screws at each end, the P13 measured 84mm long and 35mm wide. Introduced in 1940, the P13 was fitted to ES-100, ES-125 and ES-150 guitars, as well as lap steels. This highly regarded pickup continued to feature on Silvertone and Harmony guitars long after Gibson stopped using it, and it's a great-sounding vintage option for Tele neck conversions.

The P-90

Walt Fuller was soon back at work after WWII, and by 1946 he had combined features from the shorter diagonal pickup and the P13 to create the P-90. It featured adjustable polepieces, with a machine-wound coil of 42AWG plain enamel and a black styrene bobbin. Fuller positioned two 2.44-inch sandcast Alnico magnets below the bobbin, with a steel keeper bar separating them. Both south poles faced towards the central polepieces, so the magnetic field flowed through the centre of the coil and around its outer edges.

The magnets that Gibson used during the 1950s is a much-debated topic. While working as the head of Gibson's Custom Shop, Edwin Wilson had six bar magnets from vintage PAFs analysed. Despite company records showing that Gibson always ordered Alnico II, four of the magnets turned out to be Alnico III, along with one IV and a II.

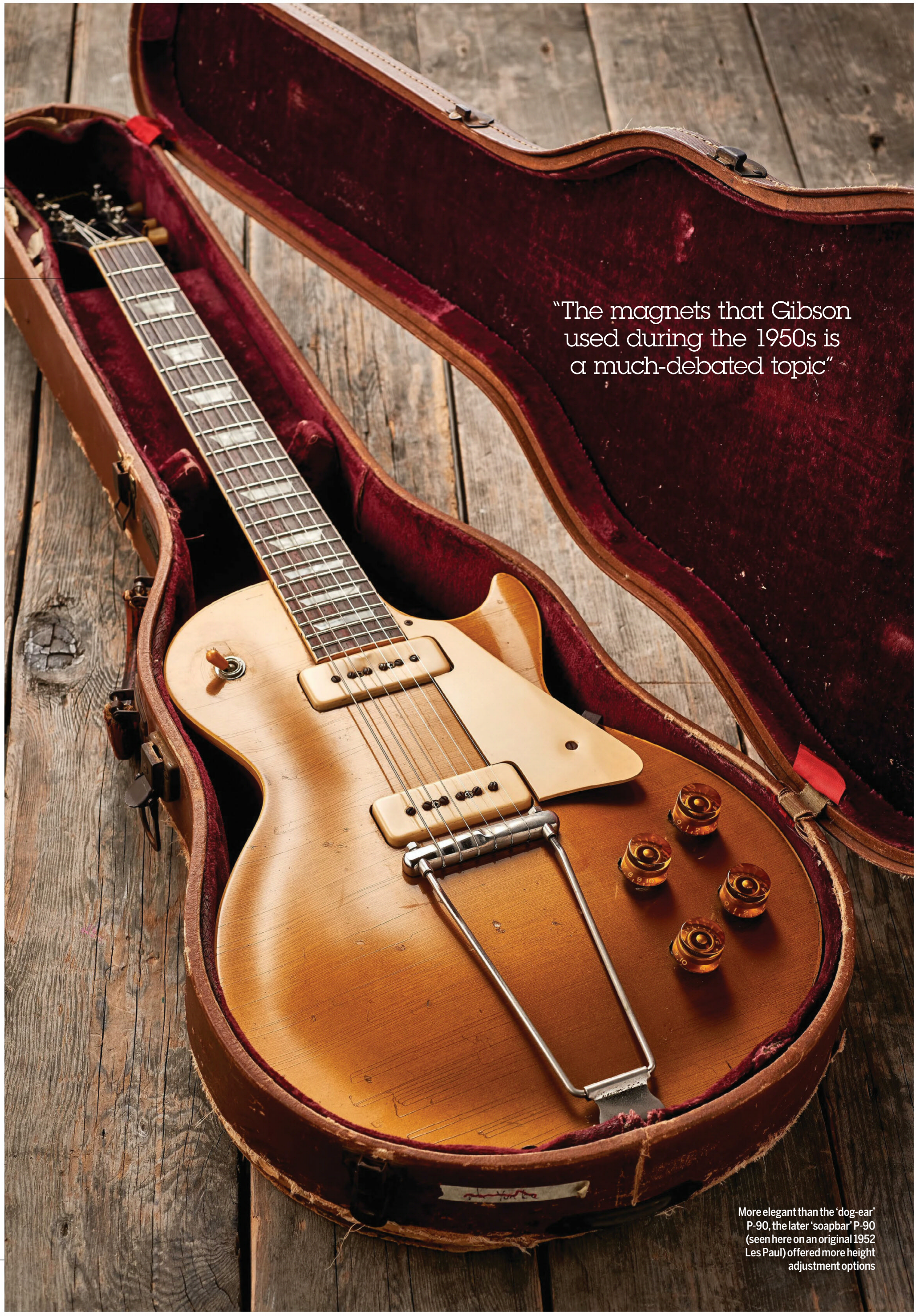
Matthew Bascetta of House Of Tone Pickups confirms that P-90s magnets also varied. "All the early ones were Alnico III," he explains, "but just like PAFs, as you get to the late 1950s, you'll get a mixture of Alnico II, III and occasionally IV and V. From about 1961, it was pretty much all V."

Vintage-era coils were never wax or lacquer potted, but they were wrapped with insulating tape. Two leadout wires protruded through the steel baseplate and were soldered to a braided single-core output wire. A metal retainer was screwed onto the baseplate to secure the braided wire. The cold connection was soldered to the braiding and Gibson used paper masking tape to insulate the hot wire connection.

The adjustable pole screws of the soapbar P-90 can be clearly seen on this 1954 Goldtop

"In 1940, Gibson came up with an unusual diagonally mounted pickup…"

There are two styles of baseplate. Those with protruding ends are fitted to Les Paul and SG Juniors, plus hollow-bodied models such as the ES-125, ES-225 and ES-330. The plastic covers have extensions at each end with screw holes to fully cover the baseplate and provide a means of securing the pickup to the body. These P-90s are called 'dog-ears' and shims are needed to adjust the height. P-90s intended for Les Paul Goldtops, Customs or Specials have two fixing screw holes positioned between the A and D polepieces and the G and B. The fixing screws go straight into the body and shims, foam or springs can be used for height adjustment. These P-90s are known as 'soapbars'.



"The magnets that Gibson used during the 1950s is a much-debated topic"

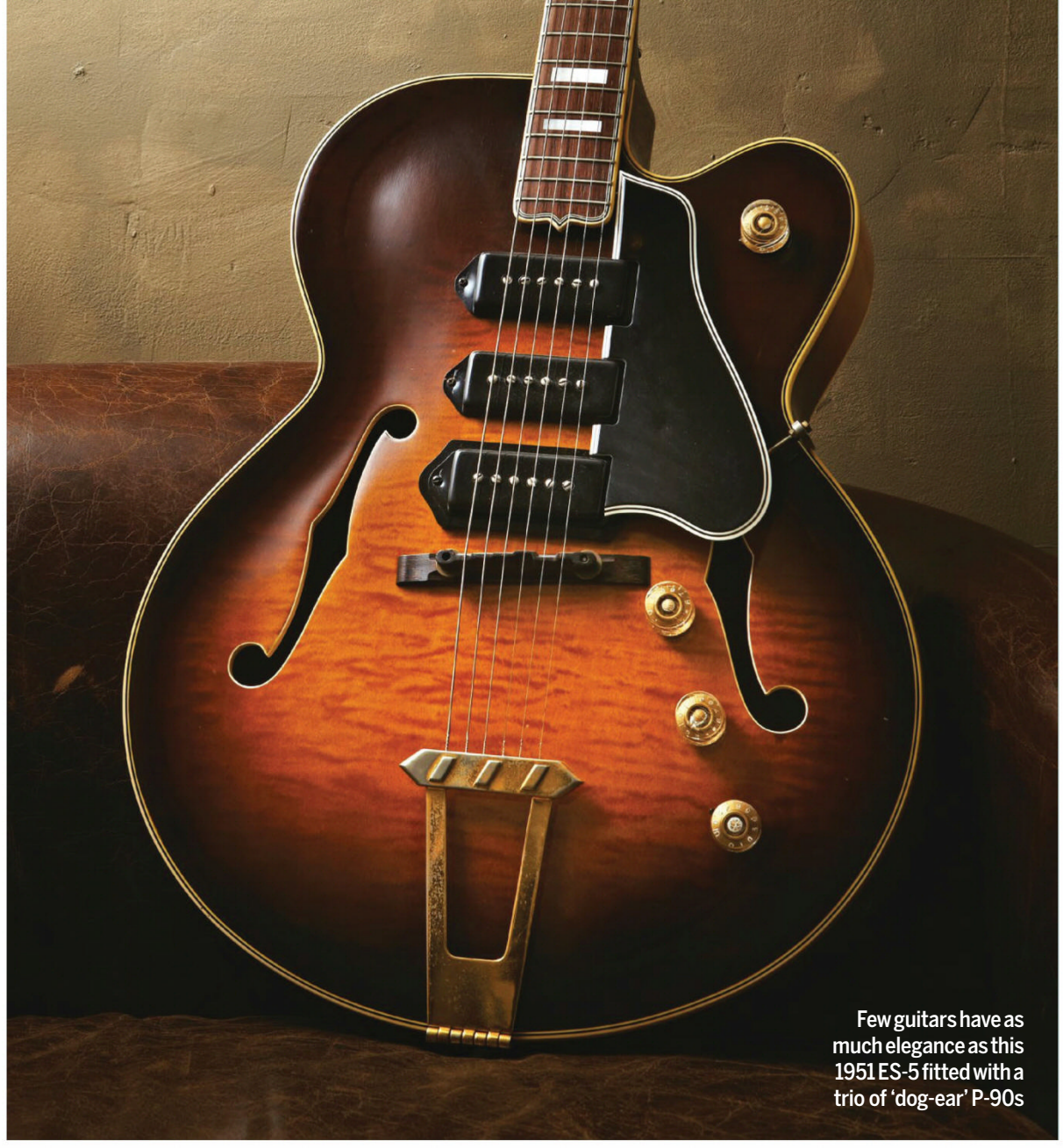
More elegant than the 'dog-ear' P-90, the later 'soapbar' P-90 (seen here on an original 1952 Les Paul) offered more height adjustment options

Variations In The Key Of P

In 1946, some P-90s with non-adjustable Alnico rod magnets were fitted to ES-125s. Then in 1952, bridge P-90s on the very earliest Les Paul Goldtops had fixing screws positioned in two corners. Gibson fitted a smaller version of the P-90 to electric mandolins and tenor guitars and, in the UK, techs affectionately refer to this version as 'the P45'.

The staple P-90's construction was significantly different, however. Permanent magnets with a rectangular cross section were used instead of bar magnets. With small screws for individual height adjustment, the design resembles the DeArmond Dynasonic favoured by Gretsch during that time.

It has been suggested that Les Paul preferred the DeArmond tone and fitted one in the neck position of his Number 1 Goldtop. Les's tech Tom Doyle disputes this, reporting that Les wound his own pickups using DeArmond magnets. Perhaps the staple P-90 was designed to get the DeArmond tone from a Gibson-branded pickup and keep Les sweet. Gibson installed them on various jazzboxes as well as pre-1957 Les Paul Customs.



Few guitars have as much elegance as this 1951 ES-5 fitted with a trio of 'dog-ear' P-90s

Shapes In Flux

P-90 coils are shorter and wider than most Fender pickup coils and Matthew Bascetta provides us with some more insights: "Coil shape influences the magnetic flux field's shape and how wide the field extends from the core at the polepiece screws," he says. "The P-90's coil and the use of dual bar magnets makes the field extremely wide.

"A wide magnetic aperture picks up more of the string oscillation and that enables P-90s to capture more bass and low mid frequencies," he adds. "It also provides a bit more sustain than a narrow Fender-style coil, which will have a sharper decay."

Jason Lollar describes inductance as "a measure of the physical property to induce a current". And since all pickups are current generators, higher inductance means higher output. Strong magnets raise inductance and by having two full sized magnets, P-90 inductance is high by single-coil standards.

Walt's Wonder

The P-90 was Gibson's premium pickup from 1946 until 1957, and it was installed on everything from the most exquisite jazz guitars to lowly student models such as the Les Paul Junior. If you bought a Gibson electric during that era, a P-90 or two was part of the deal. And that's why they've excelled in pretty much every genre of guitar music.

You could even make the case that the P-90 is the most versatile pickup ever made. We can't imagine playing death metal on a Tele, nailing an authentic jazz tone with a Strat or chicken pickin' with a humbucker, but we'd feel pretty confident about covering all those bases with a good P-90.

This 1965 Gibson ES-330 features the later nickel-plated P-90 pickup covers, themselves replaced by chrome shortly after

"The P-90 was installed on everything from exquisite jazz guitars to student models such as the Les Paul Junior"

Although Gibson's top models transitioned to humbuckers from 1957 onwards, if you compare early PAFs with P-90s from that time then the sonic similarities are more apparent than the differences. Seth Lover tends to get all the plaudits for designing Gibson's PAF humbucker, but Walt Fuller deserves equal recognition. P-90s literally set the tone – and they're probably more popular now than ever before. G

https://huwpriceguitar.com

TWEAKING TIPS

Everything you need to know – and more – about modifying your P-90s

P-90s are easy to modify. Changing the magnets and the pole screws can make a big difference; it's a lot cheaper than buying new set of pickups and you don't even need a soldering iron. Although stronger magnets produce higher output, it's not all about power. Each grade of Alnico has distinct qualities that contribute to the midrange voicing of a pickup. For instance, Alnico III has a similar midrange quality to low gauss Alnico V, but its tone is sweeter, softer and less aggressive. Alnico II can sound bright and clear, while Alnico IV may have a flat and fairly neutral frequency response.

Full gauss Alnico V will provide brightness, cut and grunt, and it's well suited to classic rock, heavy blues and punk tones. At the hottest end of the spectrum, Alnico VIII and ceramic magnets will give you the power and aggression you need for heavier rock and metal styles, but your clean tones may be compromised.

Swapping the magnets involves loosening the two baseplate screws, sliding out the magnets and sliding the new ones in. It's easier to replace one magnet at a time, and make sure both the south poles are facing the screws. While the pickup will sound the same with the north poles facing inwards, the modified pickup may end up being out of phase with the stock pickup.

It's important to note that P-90 magnets can slide out of alignment over time. This shift refocuses the magnetic field and it can affect the amount of midrange honk and quackiness. If you fancy a bit more vintage character, try loosening the baseplate slightly and carefully offsetting the magnets. You'll have to experiment to find the degree of offset you like best, and don't forget to retighten the baseplate screws.

> "If your P-90s sound too aggressive and bright then metal covers might help"

Steel is graded by its carbon content and this is another factor that affects tone. Jon Gundry of Throbak Electronics in Michigan reports vintage pole screws varying from 1006 to 1018. Try 1010 screws for a sweeter and more vintage tone with a softer attack. To emphasise upper mids, punch and output, go for 1018, 1020 or even 1022. This modification simply involves removing the old screws and screwing the replacements in. There's probably no need to take the pickups out of the guitar, but we recommend using an electric screwdriver rather than a manual one to save time. Replacement screws can be purchased from Sunbear Pickups here in the UK.

For a brighter and more open tone, try plastic rather than metal covers. But if your P-90s sound too aggressive and bright then metal covers might help. Changing the covers is also a good way to customise the look of your guitar.

Lastly, the fixing screws for soapbar P-90s were originally brass, but modern equivalents may be steel. Steel screws behave like two extra pole screws and can produce a bit more output and stronger mids. Brass screws may give you a more even string-to-string balance.

Plastic covers tend to promote a more open, bright tone than metal

The MOD SQUAD

A WEIGHTY MATTER

As he considers a partscaster build, Dave Burrluck discusses how the weight of its biggest part – the body – can affect the final guitar. Time to get on the scales…

The weight of a guitar can be an emotive subject. There are those who think it doesn't matter, while others won't touch an instrument if it's a few ounces 'overweight'. In every *Guitarist* review we weigh the guitars, so if we comment "it's a great weight", you know exactly what that weight is. Likewise, we might comment that the guitar is on the heavy side: again, you can see precisely what it weighs in the spec list.

Heaviness needs to be on your radar if you're buying a guitar body as the start of a partscaster build. Considering the weight might not directly be an indicator of the final sound of your build, but it can certainly affect your enjoyment of the finished instrument if it falls outside of an accepted weight range. Most guitar styles have a weight range, but, of course, we're talking about the overall weight of the instrument, not just the weight of a body – the heaviest lump of real estate in your build. But what percentage of the overall weight is that body? Well, using a Wilkinson S-type kit gives us an idea in that we can weigh the neck – which we'd presume is less likely to vary, weight wise, as much as the body – and even the parts, which are also pretty consistent in weight. So, with the neck at 0.56kg (1.23lb), which will be slightly lighter in practice as it has an as-yet-unshaped paddle headstock, and all the parts at 1.12kg (2.47lb), we have a total of 1.68kg (3.7lb). To bring an S-type guitar in at around 3.18kg (7lb), we'd need a body that's approximately 1.5kg (3.3lb). If we had a body around 1.8kg (3.96lb), we'd probably end up nearer 3.48kg (7.7lb). These are obviously ballpark figures, but you get the idea.

While alder is the most common body wood for bolt-ons, this Fender American Pro II Strat HSS has a roasted pine body and is at the heavier end of the weight spectrum

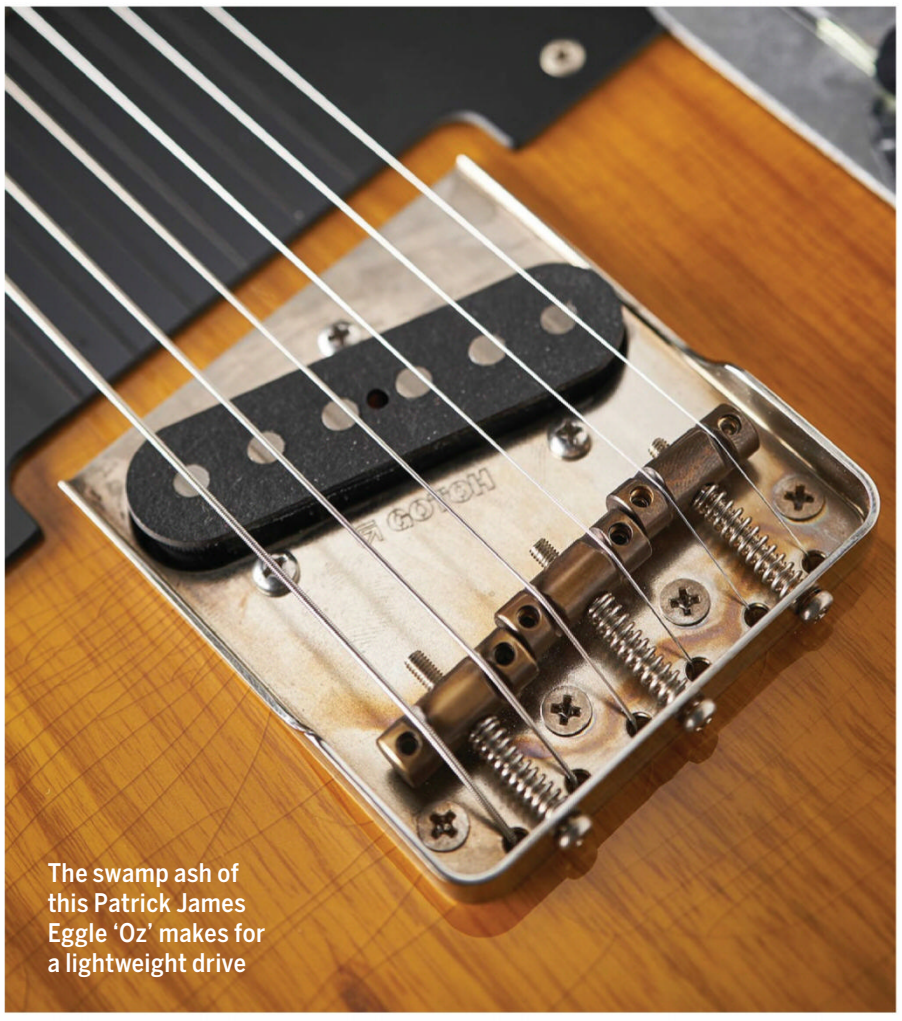
> "Weight might not indicate the sound, but it can affect your enjoyment of the finished instrument"

PRS's new SE Silver Sky clocks in at a slightly lighter weight (3.21kg/7.1lb) than its USA counterpart

For many players, light is best. But why? A super-light body can affect the balance of the guitar strapped on and, in extreme cases, cause neck dive. A heavier body will cure that and the guitar should feel more centred on the strap. For a lot of us, though, playing the guitar seated (most likely without a strap) can be just as important. Here, a heavier body can mean the guitar tends to slip off your right leg – something Les Paul owners will know about.

Sound? That's the hardest part to predict. We know the common name of the body wood and hopefully its weight, but we don't know the condition or how it's been dried (which can also affect the weight). And will the sound be affected by the fact the body spread is made from one, two, three or more pieces of the quoted timber? That's a harder aspect to quantify, but bear in mind that one-piece bodies will cost a fair bit more than multi-piece bodies. Not surprisingly, one-piece lightweight bodies usually cost a premium, too; heavier three-piece (or more) bodies, even of the same wood type, will usually be cheaper.

Weight contributes a large part to your playing experience and comfort, so it's an important consideration in any build



The swamp ash of this Patrick James Eggle 'Oz' makes for a lightweight drive

Nik Huber's light okoume-bodied Piet weighs just shy of 3kg (6.2lb), while this alder-bodied version is nearly half a kilo heavier

Assumptions about the sound of a piece of wood, such as a guitar's body, are far from definitive. Alder is probably the most common bolt-on wood and would be my recommendation as the preferred choice for your partscaster bolt-on build. Ash can look more interesting with its wavy strong grain, and, while that makes it a popular choice for translucent finishes, its weight can vary quite dramatically. As we've reported, however, American ash is becoming less easy to source and more expensive as a consequence. Light ash (or swamp ash) can cost a premium, too; heavier ash is frankly heading for boat-anchor territory. Other choices include the typically cheaper poplar, basswood and lesser used woods such as obeche, which can be very lightweight.

> "Can you hear the difference between a weight-relieved Les Paul and one that's all solid?"

Of course, you can always cross the tonal tracks by using a 'Gibson' wood, such as mahogany, with or without a flamey maple top. But beware of making too many assumptions here. Having made and played bolt-ons built from virtually everything imaginable, from hardboard and plywood to synthetic marble substitutes, I will say one thing: with those three single coils in place, it's gonna sound Strat-like.

There is history in semi-solid Tele-style bodies, Strat-types, too, and there's no fixed rule here, either. Semi-solid and chambered designs are used to lessen weight or indeed create a sometimes hard-to-quantify 'hollowness'. Can you hear the difference between a nine-hole weight-relieved Les Paul and one that's all solid? Discuss...

The whole 'sound of wood' debate is not something I want to get into here, but I'd suggest sticking to the recipe that, in simple terms, suggests a light ash body for a 50s-style build, typically with an all-maple neck, and an alder body for a 60s-style build with a rosewood fingerboard. That said, I put a partscaster together some years ago using a DiMarzio neck (maple with a rosewood fingerboard) and mainly mahogany body – a twin-humbucker 'rock' S-type that always sounded exceptional – and it was a good weight, too. The beauty of Fender's modular design means you can always swap a body, or a neck, down the line.

Finally, I would suggest considering the pickup routing. If you go SSS and then want to try HSS, you'll need to rout the body – something that's not easy without the right tools. I've chosen an HSH rout for this ongoing build and, in theory, this should mean we can use any pickup configuration, with just a little modification, simply by swapping the scratchplate. G

WEIGHT RANGE

Using our database of reviewed and repair/setup instruments, here are some bolt-on weight examples from 'light' to 'heavy'

Guitar	Body wood	Weight (kg/lb)
Nik Huber Piet	Okoume	2.8/6.2
Patrick James Eggle 'Oz'	Swamp ash	2.95/6.5
Fender Telecaster (1952)	Ash	3.185/7
PRS SE Silver Sky	Poplar	3.21/7.1
Nik Huber Piet	Alder	3.24/7.14
Fender Custom Shop Vintage Custom '57 Strat	Ash	3.32/7.3
Fender Custom Shop Vintage Custom '62 Strat	Alder	3.4/7.49
PRS Silver Sky (USA)	Alder	3.44/7.58
Fender American Professional II Strat HSS	Roasted pine	3.67/8.1
Fender Player Plus Strat	Alder	3.8/8.38

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METAL MACHINES

A reader questions whether the use of metal scratchplates and the like can have a detrimental effect on an instrument

Q Over many years reading *Guitarist* magazine, I have seen numerous 'solid body' articles and references to what a great difference – and, indeed, benefit – having the right kind of timber for the guitar body can have on the unamplified tone and feel of the instrument. Having this right is such a real bonus.

I have therefore always been somewhat bewildered by metal-fronted solids made by guitar makers such as Zemaitis and, more recently, Robson Guitars (as featured recently in *Guitarist* issue 481). These guitars can indeed be wonderful works of art and I am sure that a great deal of thought and expertise goes into the design and planning of each instrument, but I can't believe that screwing a chunk of metal onto the face of a quality solid can have anything other than a negative effect on the timber's natural resonance.

Maybe it's the design of these rather 'unnatural' guitars that they are not intended to rely on any unamplified tonal quality, but it's still a puzzle as to why stunting the natural tonal vibrations and feel of any instrument should be desirable.

David, via email

Stunning engraving on the aluminium top of a Robson Edna-May. Looks great, but how does it sound?

A Hi David, thanks for a great letter. It might not seem an obvious topic for The Mod Squad, but it certainly falls into our world as we're constantly listening to the effect, or not, of upgrading parts and whether they have real impact on your instrument, either unamplified and/or plugged in.

While I agree that the unplugged *acoustic* sound emanating from your solid or semi-solid guitar can have a positive – or sometimes negative – effect on your engagement with a guitar, to believe that using materials other than wood is somehow tonally blasphemous isn't backed up, in some cases by science and certainly by experience.

For example, I was lucky enough to spend time last year with an Ampeg Dan Armstong guitar, which you'll know has a body made of solid acrylic plastic. It uses a maple neck, a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and, I'm led to believe, an ivory nut: the wood parts, then, are classic lutherie materials. Yes, the acoustic sound is less lively compared with a lightweight Fender from the 50s, for example, but plugged in... Wow! I don't think anyone could say it's not working correctly, be they Keith Richards, Joe Perry, Tom Petty, Dave Grohl... or me.

In the case of Tony Zemaitis, he was effectively using a full-face scratchplate made of aluminium (after his initial choice of silver was obviously way too costly). Fender had used anodized aluminium for scratchplates back in the 50s and occasionally still does today. Tony believed, rightly, that the scratchplate added improved screening for the electric circuit, and – back in the day – these were stage guitars used at ridiculously high volume by today's standards.

Would the scratchplate have affected the high-end response of its pickups? Possibly single coils, though I'd doubt humbuckers would have been affected. That said, more than one observer will attest to Tony's guitars, not least the metal fronts, having a specific or unique sound. But, then again, most have three-piece bodies and three-piece necks, and many back in the day also had a pretty primitive active gain boost.

So while it might seem that metal – or indeed plastic – might stunt the natural tonal vibrations, that's not necessarily backed up by experience. Exactly how the unamplified sound informs the plugged-in sound is more than worthy of debate, too, but we'd need a lot more space than we have here to discuss that. I've often written about how one guitar might have 'something going on' as opposed to another feeling like a lumpen boat anchor. Again, I've played Danelectro models that fall into the former category and also some high-end pieces created with exotic and figured woods that fall into the latter.

An ongoing theme in The Mod Squad is to trust your *own* judgement and experience. Attaching a sound, or the effect on sound, to a common name alone – be that a wood, metal or plastic – is spurious at best. Try telling BB King that his tone would have been better if he'd used a guitar made from proper 'tone' wood, not plywood. G

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

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TALKING LOUD

Back Talk

Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough presents the pros and cons of open- and closed-back cabinet designs – and the important influence they have on your tone

In the first two instalments of Talking Loud we looked at how mixing speakers can help create an interesting new tonal palette, some of my favourite mixes, and why looking at speakers is important, not to mention interesting. Now it's time to examine a few aspects of the cabinet into which the speakers are loaded.

It might seem self-indulgent for a cabinet designer to think anyone would care about the thickness of a baffle, how it's mounted or how an amplifier's need to displace heat leads to limitations in backboard design. But these are all aspects of a build that determine how an amplifier and cabinet will react when you plug into it. There are also a few useful signs that can help the initiated more easily shape or use a sound to their benefit.

Over the next few issues, we'll talk about backboard design. More simply put: open versus closed back. This straightforward aspect of a cabinet can often determine whether or not you'll like how it sounds or, more subtly, whether it will be suitable for the task you want it to perform. It's ironic that when choosing a cab we first look at the front, which in most cases tells us very little about the important features of that cab. It's the back we should look to first!

The crude difference between the two types of back is how they project sound. An open back projects soundwaves from both the front and rear of the cabinet, with the waves leaving the back usually bouncing off walls, reaching the player later and introducing slight phase differences. This tends to result in a more ambient, subtle and less-focused sound, lending itself well to cleaner players through to lower-gain rock. I like to think of open back as having a certain element of natural reverb with more nuance.

In contrast, the closed-back cab will kick the vast majority of its soundwaves out from the front of the cabinet, hitting the player more directly and seeming more focused, tighter but more directional. It's this focus and control – especially of the lower frequencies – that are favourable to heavier players who prefer higher levels of gain.

In all cabs, when the speaker cone has extended forward it must recoil, pushing air inside the cab away from the front. In the case of the open-back cab this will radiate out of the rear and bounce around the room, causing less air resistance on the cone during its return. In a closed-back cab these soundwaves will reflect off the inside rear of the cab, hitting the speaker.

Having a closed back also allows for the baffle to be braced against the backboard using a block of wood running adjacent to both the baffle and back, connecting the two. This stiffening of the baffle results in a more rigid cab and allows the energy converted into sound to more easily leave the front of the cab, again leading to a more focused, controlled sound. This effect is even more important in 4x12s with angled-top speakers as they're made using two pieces of wood joined at the centre, giving them an inherent weakness at this point. Without getting too technical, basically, the closed back inadvertently allows us to stiffen the cab and do more of what a closed back does: sound focused.

> "The crude difference between open- and closed-back cabinets is how they project sound"

Open-back designs, such as this Mesa Lone Star, project sound from both the front and rear

It's rare that we get the chance to play a cab in both open- and closed-back configurations, which is a shame because it's sometimes hard to hear exactly which you prefer. After all, it may be other aspects of the cabinet's construction that you like. Next time, we'll look at three-piece and oval-ported backs, as well as how the size of the panels makes a difference. We'll also take a look at what playing styles work best with which. So far this is just a rough guide to help you down the path in getting your sound, and the open/closed-back debate is a definite fork in the road. G

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"The closed back inadvertently allows us to stiffen the cab and do more of what a closed back does: sound focused"

Beyond the closed back of this Marshall 4x12 you can see the wood block that braces the baffle to the backboard

ClassicGear

The sounds of this tape delay and spring reverb unit echo through the decades

Roland RE-201 Space Echo

This year, Roland celebrates its 50th anniversary, having formed in 1972. Some of its earliest products include the AF-100 BeeBaa and AF-60 BeeGee fuzz pedals, and the AD-50 Double Beat fuzz/wah, and by the following year, the first Space Echo tape delay units had arrived in the form of the RE-100 and RE-200. These were quickly superseded by the RE-101 and the now-iconic RE-201 in 1974.

The magic produced by a Roland RE-201 Space Echo unit is hard to capture in words. But, as anyone who has had the pleasure of plugging into one of these vintage effects units knows, for sheer depth and complexity of tone it's hard to beat. Genuine spring reverb is often imitated but seldom bettered, while high-quality tape echo is still coveted for its colourful character and richness of sound. Add to this a particularly fat-sounding preamp and a smorgasbord of highly tweakable controls and you have a ticket to tape-echo Eden...

Present are the three standard controls we've come to expect on delay units: delay time (Repeat Rate), effectively a tape speed control; delay feedback (Intensity); and delay volume (Echo Volume). Furthermore, a set of tone controls (Bass and Treble) enables the user to really tweak the flavour of the mix to perfection. Augmented by a Reverb Volume and given the full gamut of selections for all three tape heads, it's easy to imagine why these flexible devices have been used to create music across multiple genres for nearly half a century.

The Roland RE-201 Space Echo features 12 modes, each selectable via a 12-position rotary knob. Labelled Repeat (without reverb), modes 1 to 3 engage tape heads 1 to 3 respectively, while mode 4 enables heads 2 and 3. Labelled Reverb Echo, modes 5 to 11 offer the full range of tape head combinations along with reverb. These options include single head (1, 2 or 3), dual head (1 & 2, 2 & 3 or 1 & 3), and triple head (1, 2 & 3) operation. The 12th mode is labelled Reverb Only.

As is often the case with any moving parts, the Roland RE-201 Space Echo needs to be regularly serviced to keep it in the best possible working condition. Having said that, many people actually find they enjoy the idiosyncrasies of an ageing tape, the subtle chorusing effect adding further spontaneity and depth to the sonic picture. Before long, however, the tape will need replacing and the mechanics will require servicing. Such is the nature of these devices.

Pump up the volume: the Space Echo brings plenty to the table via its hugely tweakable controls

> Many people find they enjoy the idiosyncrasies of an ageing tape, the subtle chorusing effect adding spontaneity…

For that reason, some consider the Roland RE-201 Space Echo to be a double-edged sword. Meanwhile, others are more than prepared to go the extra mile in pursuit of specific sounds that are otherwise difficult to capture. Current digital emulations offer something close (and are decidedly more pedalboard friendly) – but it's safe to say the RE-201 is ultimately unique.

"I love Roland equipment. I think it's got such a vibe about it," said Portishead guitarist Adrian Utley, whose very own Soundgas-serviced RE-201 Space Echo is pictured here. "They live in their own world. They created their own sound and, seriously, nothing sounds like them." **[RB]**

The Evolution of Roland Space Echo

1972
Roland Corporation founded; early pedals released including AF-100, AF-60 & AD-50

1973
RE-100 (no reverb) & RE-200 Space Echo units

1974
RE-101 (no reverb) & RE-201 Space Echo units

1977
RE-301 Chorus Echo unit; reverb, tape delay & chorus

1979
RE-150 Space Echo unit (no reverb)

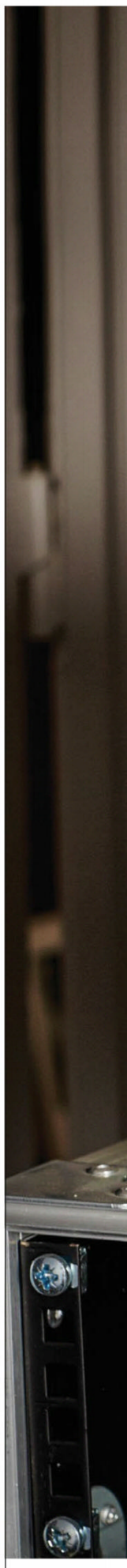
1982
RE-501 and SRE-555 (rackmount version) Chorus Echo units; reverb, tape delay & chorus

1988
RE-3 & RE-5 Digital Space Echo units

1990
RE-201 Space Echo discontinued

2007
Boss RE-20 Roland Space Echo RE-201; COSM technology

2022
?



Adrian Utley's Roland RE-201 Space Echo

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Model and six-digital serial number stamped on black/silver metal plate located on rear

2. CABINET
415mm wide by 275mm deep by 185mm high; detachable hinged top with one metal clasp; black vinyl cover; ventilation grille (underside); one black plastic carrying handle; four rubber feet on base; four rubber side feet; 9.5kg (21lb) total weight

3. FEATURES
Three channels (two microphone and one Instrument); tape loop with three selectable tape heads; adjustable delay time, feedback, volume and EQ; reverb (three springs) with adjustable volume; peak level meter; VU meter; power indicator

4. CONNECTIONS
¼-inch jacks: two mic inputs; one instrument input; one From PA input; one output; one echo cancel (footswitch)

5. CONTROLS
Power on/off toggle switch; Echo/Normal toggle switch (Instrument channel only); three-way output level slider switch (Low, Medium and High); 12-way Mode Selector rotary switch; nine knobs/pots; Mic Volume (x2); Instrument Volume; Repeat Rate; Intensity; Echo Volume; Bass; Treble; Reverb Volume

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This pair of rare Goldtops has been adorned with some extra-special bling

1956 & 1957 Gibson Les Paul Models

Both guitars have very rare original gold parts, including factory-fitted Bigsby vibratos

"While Fender seemed to hit it out of the park with the Esquire on its first run, it took Gibson several tries to get to its best guitar. The fact is the first Les Pauls with the trapeze tailpiece had several problems. The neck angle was bad and there was no way to palm[-mute] the strings. In other words, there was no way to play the guitar, well, the way *we* like to play it. The way Les liked to play was different, however; he was a jazz picker and he didn't really palm the strings. It didn't matter much to him. Consequently, the guitars from '52 [when the Les Paul Model/Goldtop was released] to early '53 are tougher to sell, and many people have used them for conversions to 'Bursts if they happen to have some nice maple underneath [the gold finish].

"One of the first things Gibson did as an attempt to improve the design was to incorporate a stud tailpiece in '53. But even though the stud tailpiece was much more operable than the trapeze, the company hadn't yet engineered a new [deeper] neck angle. So the guitars that were made through '53 and up to the early part of '54 are affected by that. The shallow angle makes the guitars more difficult to play.

"Gibson eventually worked out this problem with the neck angle and, by the first quarter of 1954, it started to make what became the first really usable solidbody electric Les Paul. It has a significantly deeper neck angle, and this means that the guitar can play all the way up the fretboard without choking. But Gibson was still addressing certain other things like weight and balance. It took a little while to iron it all out.

"The biggest change came in mid-'55 with the introduction of the ABR-1 [tune-o-matic] bridge. It meant you could now intonate the guitar properly. The guitars were originally sent out with 0.013-gauge strings with a wound G string, but the ABR-1 bridge accommodated a set of 12s with a plain G string. And that made a big difference to players as they could now bend the strings more easily, even though the frets were still a little on the small side.

"By '56, Gibson was nearly there with the Les Paul design. And, in the back room, Seth Lover was working on the humbucking pickup. He'd already made it by '56, but he wasn't able to get it into a guitar [until '57] because the pickup routs would need to be re-engineered to accommodate the different size. But the PAF humbucker was the big game-changer.

> "Les Pauls can do it all. They work well with either [humbucking or single-coil] pickups"

"The two Goldtops seen here are incredibly rare; they're the only Les Paul Models I've ever seen with gold hardware. The dual P-90 1956 guitar has original gold parts, including a factory-fitted Bigsby. The guitar player for the 1950s doo-wop band The Four Aces custom-ordered this guitar and found a playing card appliqué to put on the pickguard. Its sibling guitar is a PAF humbucker-loaded '57 model. It's a factory Bigsby guitar and it has the original sales receipt that is marked 'gold hw/gold Bigs'.

"They're both really neat guitars for those reasons, but the point is they also play amazingly well. The PAF was the shot heard round the world, but these Les Paul guitars also sound phenomenally good with P-90s. Some people are humbucking people, and some people are single-coil people. And Les Pauls can do it all. They work well with either type of pickup.

"When it comes to Gibson, it had enough money to make a few attempts and survive any fails, whereas Fender was a smaller company and needed to nail it right away. It didn't have the time to revisit the designs, make changes and retool. You have to think about the amount of engineering that goes into making these kinds of changes – all the processes involved in changing from a stud tailpiece to an ABR-1, for example.

"These people were a lot smarter than me! When your kids are in school and they're pissed off about having to do calculus and trigonometry, remind them that that kind of knowledge helped build things as cool as these two guitars. Engineering is hard work. But there's good, strong thinking behind these designs. I'm not one of those people, but there are those who can think this far out of the box.

"I mean, a lot of people can dream up guitars because all that stuff is already there. It's easy to take for granted. But I think it's worth remembering that it didn't always exist. Somebody invented all of this. And I think that's pretty remarkable." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

A 1956 Les Paul fitted with P-90s (left) stands next to a humbucker-loaded 1957 model

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

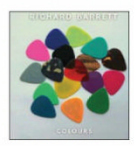
Let's Get Funky

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Keeley-modded Boss SD-1, Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example

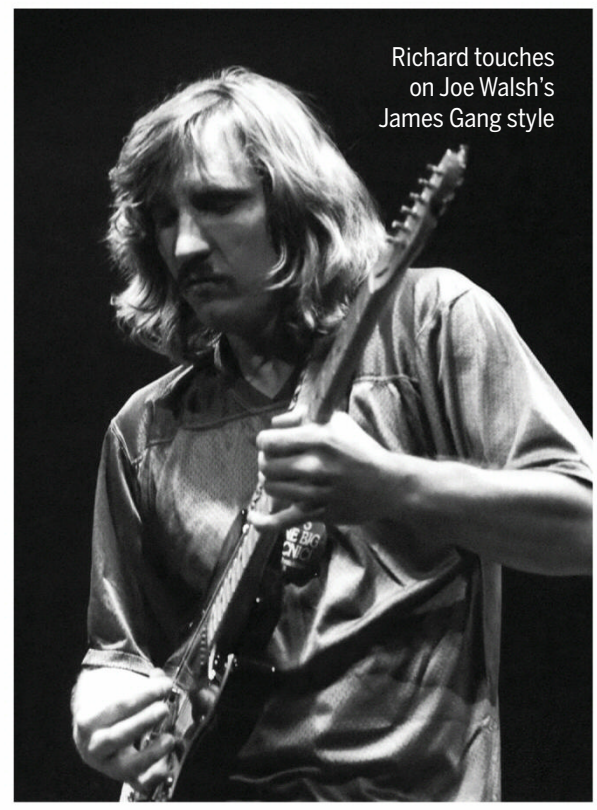
FOR THIS MONTH'S Blues Headlines I've gone with what is essentially a two-chord vamp (A7 and D), taking a blues-rock approach with nods to Joe Bonamassa, Gary Moore and a little bit of Joe Walsh. It is unashamedly pentatonic, with a few ♭5s to make it technically the 'blues scale' – plus a couple of brief triads and descending A Dorian run at the end. That said, I was not thinking in those terms as I played. The pentatonic and CAGED shapes exist within the same spaces on the fretboard, and, if you link the positions together, it's easy to find yourself playing a linear scale pattern like that last one. (Initially, I had felt this unimaginative and was going to go for another take, but then realised it's quite a good demo of that last point...)

Aside from the notes/patterns used, a major consideration is the rhythm. It would be perfectly possible to play an interesting line with just one or two notes – for a while, at least. Perhaps the boldest rhythmic contrast here is the use of short staccato passages and longer sustained notes side by side, though things do get a little more '70s cop show' in Example 2!

It isn't really until halfway through the solo that I start making use of the drive and sustain available with this kind of tone, with some held high notes/vibrato. You might want to consider what sort of vibrato works for you best: fast Paul Kossoff, introduced selectively like Gary Moore, or wide and aggressive like Zakk Wylde. The best way to assess these aspects of your own playing is to record and listen back. Enjoy! G



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

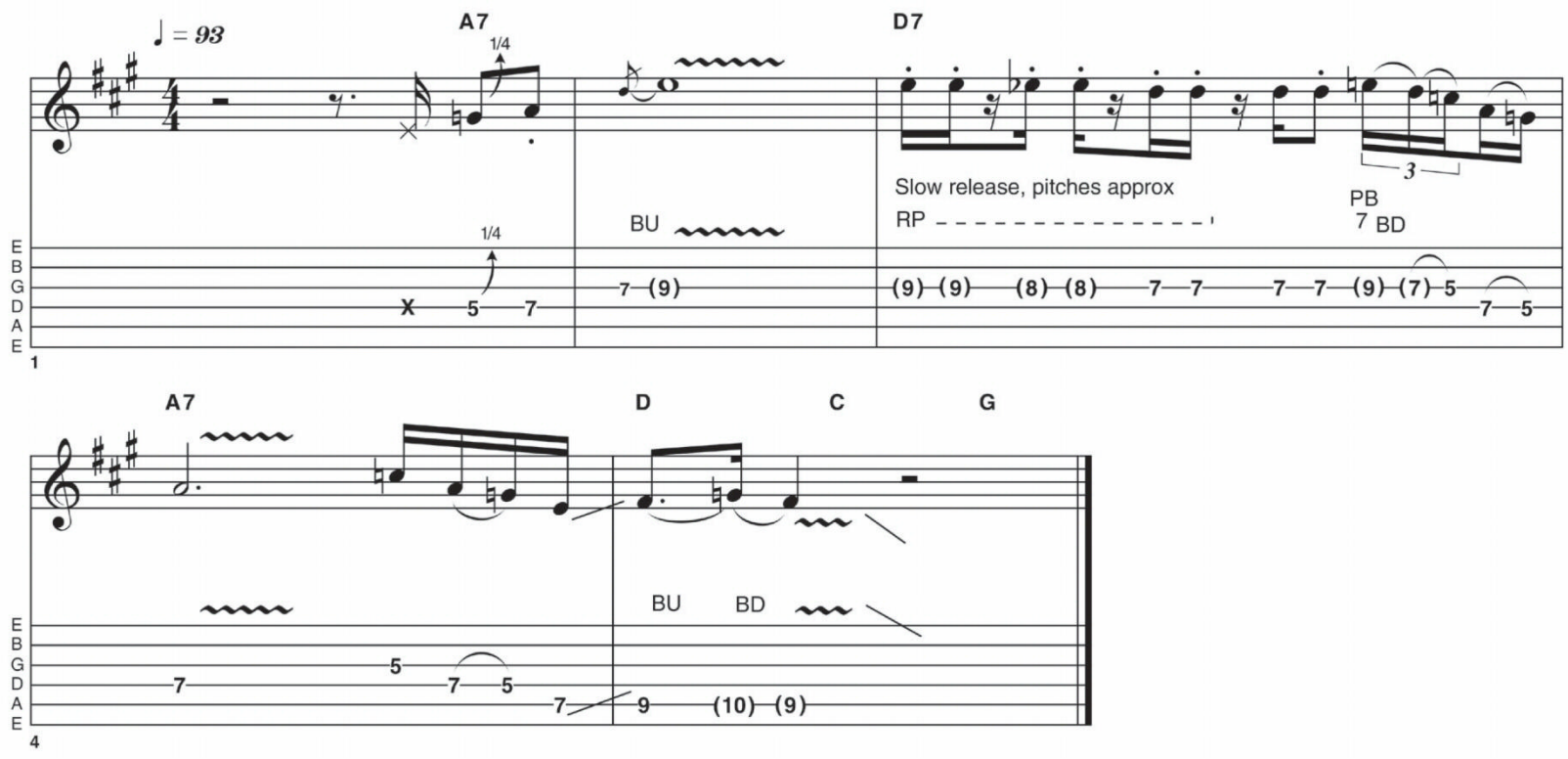


Richard touches on Joe Walsh's James Gang style

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

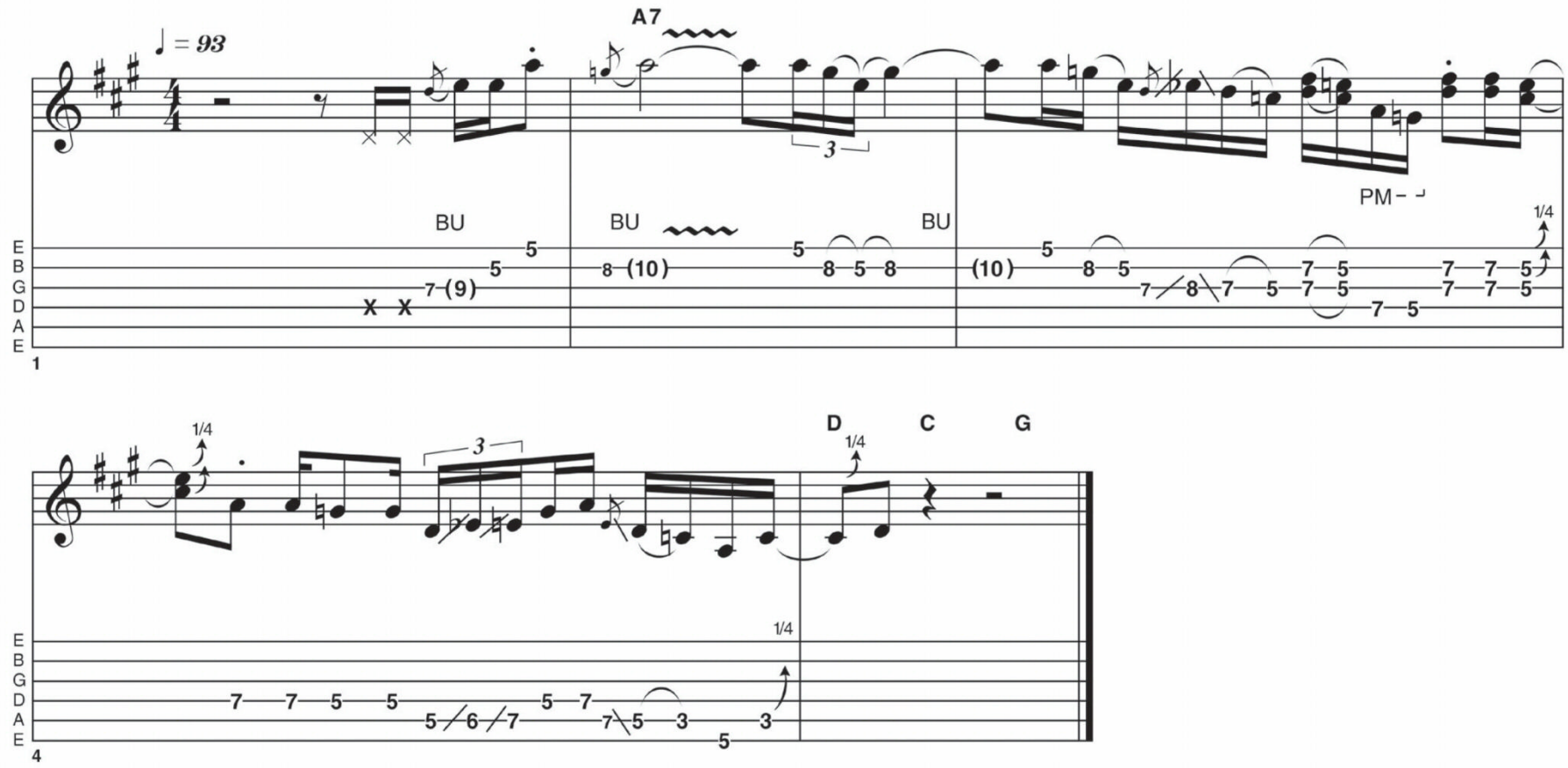
Example 1

INITIALLY, I WAS THINKING HERE OF JOE WALSH at the beginning of *Funk #49*. This is classic shape 1 A minor pentatonic, which fits okay over the A7 as long as you don't labour the C natural or bend it slightly sharp. At bar 4, I change position for the D major chord. Though I'm not playing the whole chord here, it is the lower part of the shape Hendrix uses in *Wind Cries Mary*. This happens again later, so don't worry if it isn't obvious.



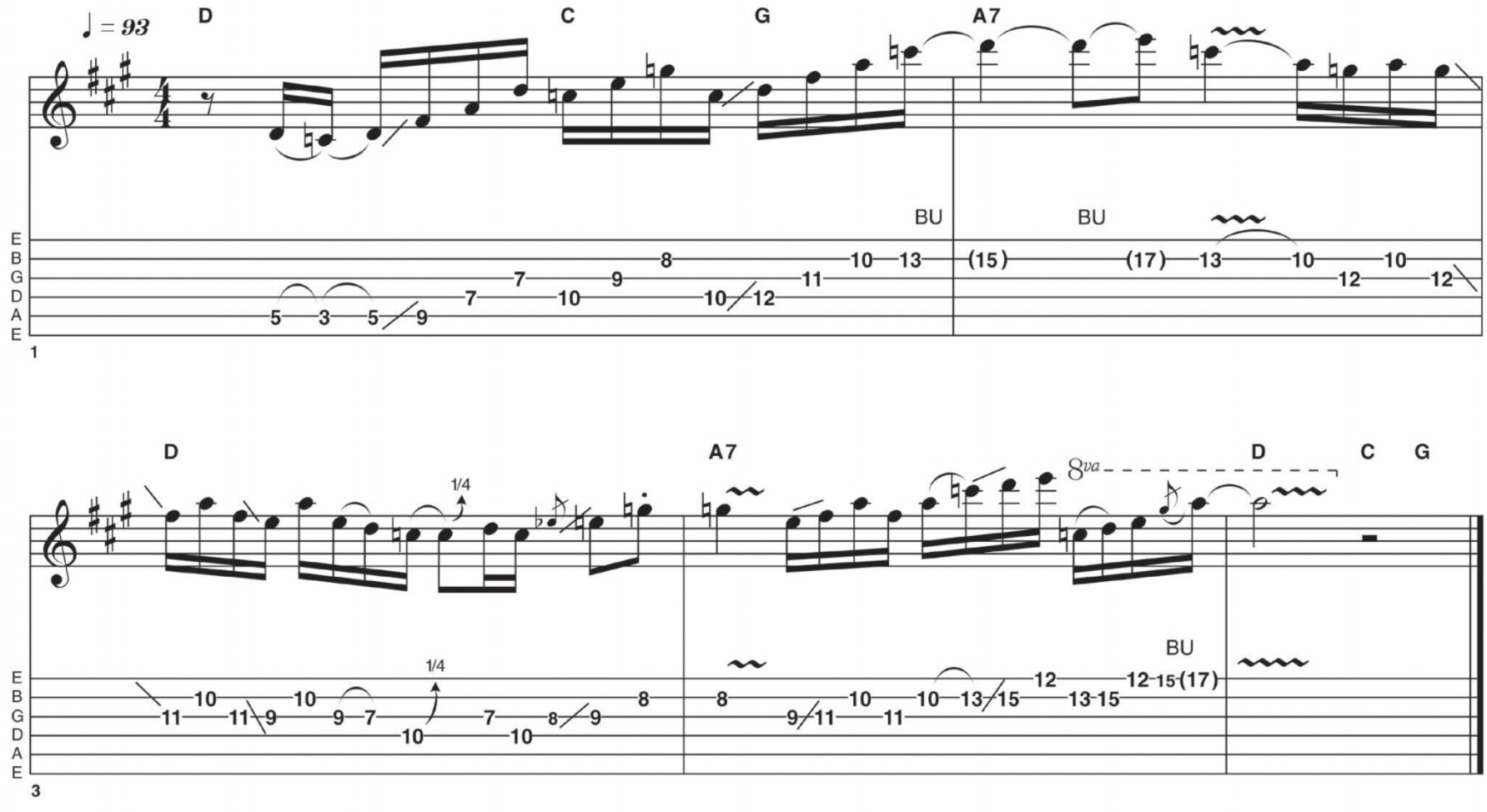
Example 2

BACK TO THE SHAPE 1 A MINOR PENTATONIC for some doublestops and staccato rhythms, sliding down to the adjacent shape 5 at the 3rd/5th frets. You may notice the chromatic slide in bar 3. To be honest, this wasn't really intentional, but that's how it's come out so that's what I've transcribed! Be sure to exaggerate/emphasise the staccato phrases for the full effect – and lose a little gain if necessary.



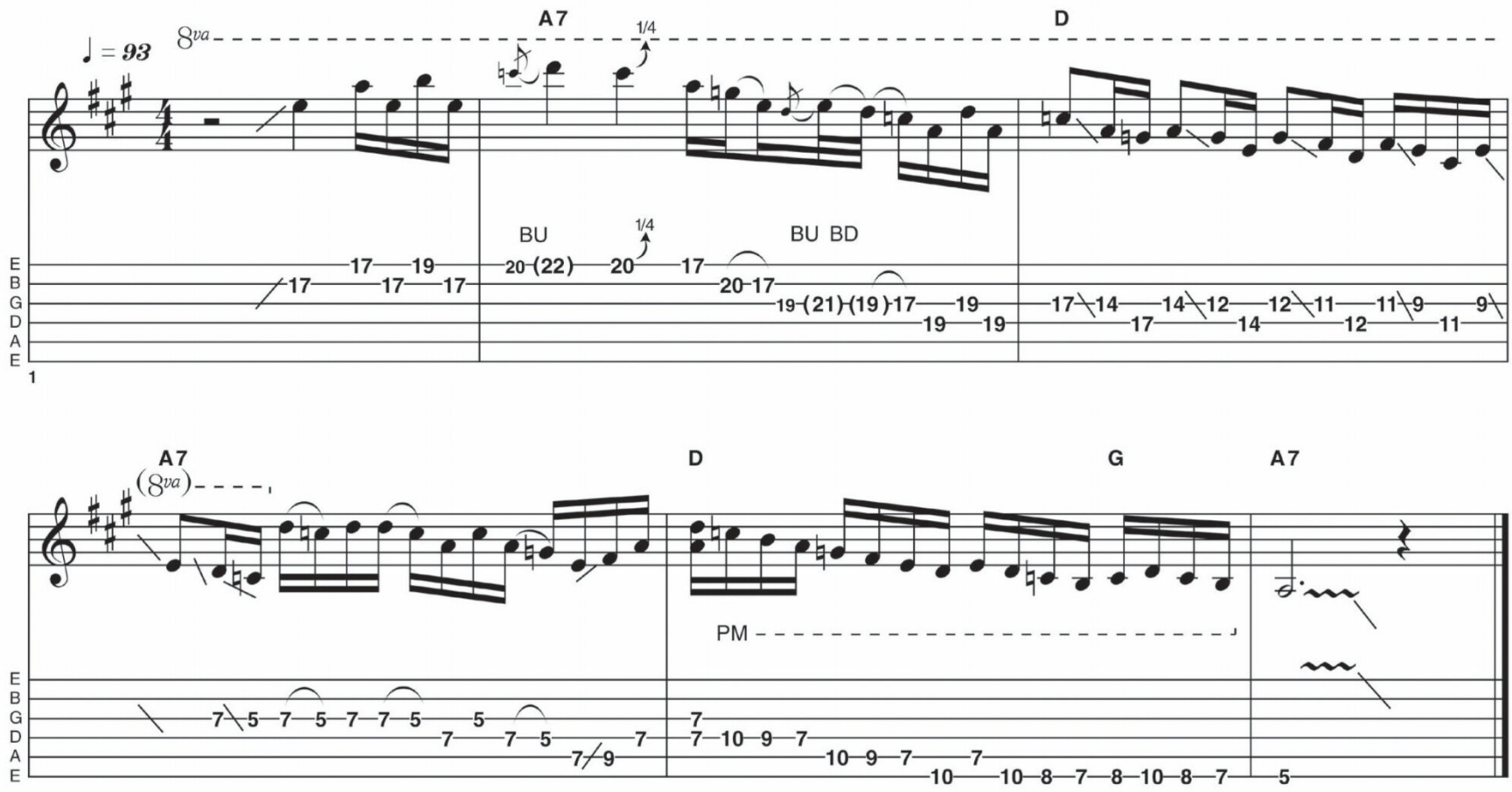
Example 3

ONCE YOU INTERNALISE THE PATTERNS, this kind of position shift isn't difficult. Starting from the shape 5 mentioned in Example 2, a bold slide up to the 9th fret leads to a restatement of the Jimi-style D chord I mentioned earlier. Knowing there is a brief C chord here, I've grabbed a nearby C major triad then, in the heat of the moment, a D major as a passing thing. From here, it's back to pentatonic with a series of slides and doublestops, for which you'll need to organise your fingers carefully.



Example 4

A BRIEF EXCURSION TO THE HIGHEST REGISTER before using the third and fourth strings to shift all the way back to where we started: the shape 1 A minor pentatonic. However, we don't stay there long, either. The palm-muted A Dorian run might not be the most melodic choice, but it does demonstrate another option at your disposal. This would also run neatly back into chord accompaniment in a band context.



Hear It Here

JAMES GANG
JAMES GANG RIDES AGAIN

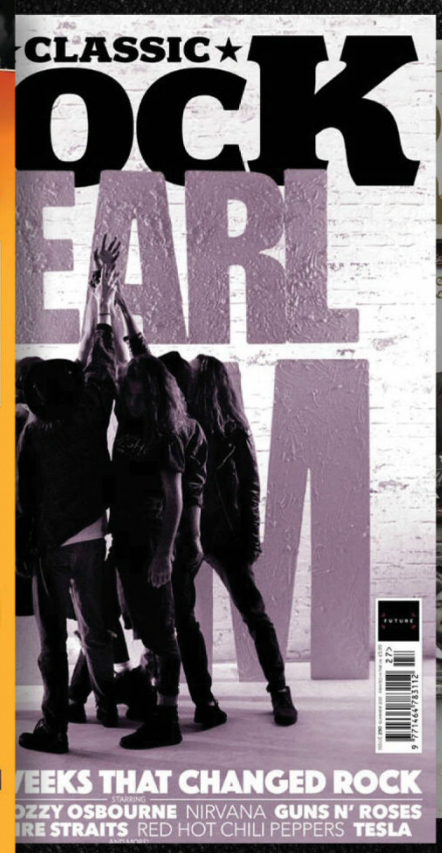
This 1970 classic from James Gang kicks off with *Funk #49*, from which I briefly borrow the repicked bend for the beginning of my own solo. It's also well worth checking out Joe Walsh's funky blues-rock riffing and solo phrasing on tracks such as *Asshton Park, Woman* and *Thanks*. Pay particular attention to the way certain chord inversions can integrate into the pentatonic-based riffs and phrases; there are very few 'straight' powerchords to be found.

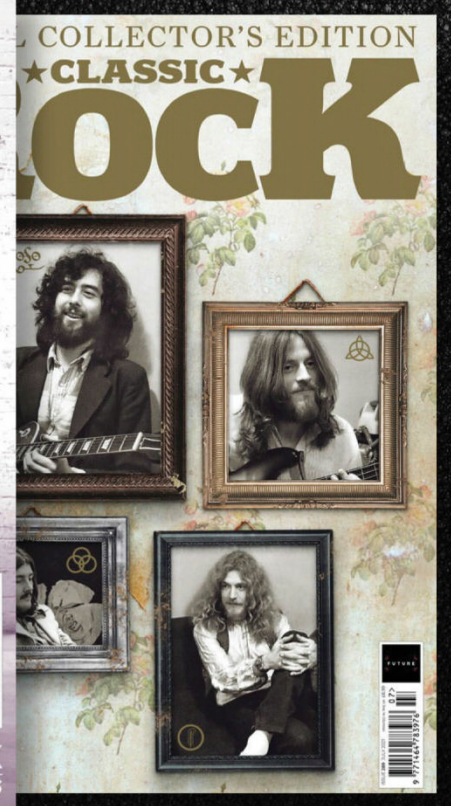
JOE BONAMASSA
DUST BOWL

Joe has always straddled the gap between British Invasion-style blues, and classic and modern rock. Check out the title track for blues with a soul/funk tinge, plus some atmospheric textures. Elsewhere, try *You Better Watch Yourself* for a more traditional blues shuffle – though, as ever, with lots of useful ideas worth lifting! Finally, check out *The Whale That Swallowed Jonah* to hear how Joe brings a blues sensibility to a less obviously 'blues-based' chord progression.

GARY MOORE
BLUES AND BEYOND

Gary Moore crops up fairly often in these pages – and always for good reason. His combination of rip-roaring technique and melodic awareness is unmatched, even in his 70s/fusion days, which saw him integrate jazz lines into his repertoire with the same flair. There's so much to enjoy in this collection: check out his fiery phrasing on *Stormy Monday*, some more soulful lines on *That's Why I Play the Blues*, and, finally, hear him bring a Jeff Beck vibe to *The Prophet*.





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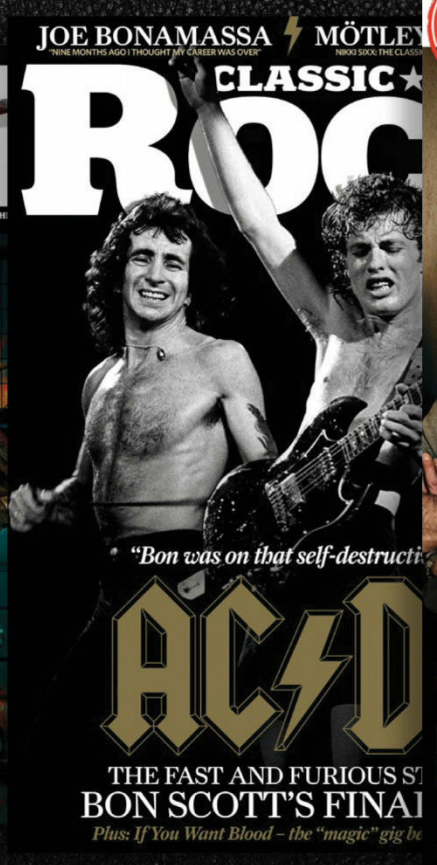

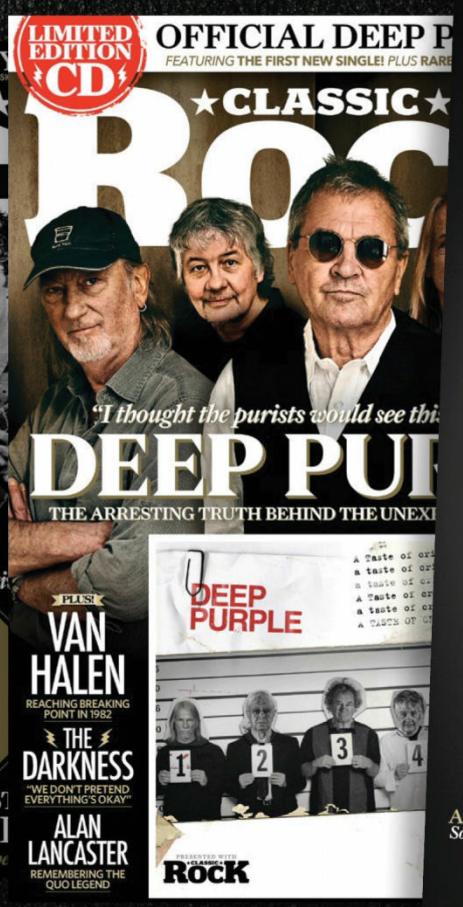

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