



## SOUND OF SURF

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## ALL SHOOK UP!

The new Elvis SJ-200 is full of Memphis magic



## JACK WHITE'S GEAR

The alt-rock icon opens up his tone-packed guitar collection

# Guitarist

Issue 486

JULY 2022

PINK  
FLOYD

RECREATING SYD  
BARRETT'S SELMER  
OVERDRIVE TONE

Page 114

# ERIC GALES

**MANY RIVALS.  
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## Peak Performance



This month's cover feature interview with Eric Gales captures an artist at one of those rare, special moments when they reach their peak potential – all the years of blood, sweat and tears suddenly crystallise into an album that has impact and art that goes beyond anything they did before, no matter how high that bar was already set. Sometimes these 'high-water mark' albums are worked on for years before release, like a slow train coming over the horizon towards brilliant fruition. Other times, they just seem to represent a moment when the camera shutter (musically speaking) snapped shut on an artist in full flow, on the form of a lifetime – you might say that BB King's famous *Live At The Regal* was a fine example of that. Other times, as with Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland*, a masterpiece resulted from meticulous studio work – something that people often missed about Hendrix, assuming him to be so much a child of the psychedelic 60s that the incredible sonics of his albums were down to drug-inspired experimentation, rather than a meticulously realised vision, as was really the case.

But whether in-the-moment or ahead of their time, such albums tend to end up being different kinds of timepieces, records that stand tall in the landscape of music down the decades. Gales' *Crown* is such a one and captures the bitter and the beautiful experiences of his storied life with incredible power – and the guitar work is off the dial. Such records serve to remind us that, however useful it is to work on our tone or technique, those things are just means to the end of moving listeners with what we play and have to say, making them feel something that enriches their life. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

## Editor's Highlights



**Interstellar Drive**  
Pink Floyd's early-era guitar sound is sometimes overlooked, but a new pedal by ThorpyFX aims to capture Syd's Selmer **p114**



**Call The Police**  
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# Guitarist

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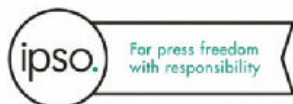
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*Olly Curtis*

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## FIRST PLAY



**CREAM T CROSSFIRE**  
From £1,799

**WHAT IS IT?** UK-made lightweight and downsized offset solidbody featuring pickup swapping

# Crossfire Hurricane

The second design from Cream T's well-received guitar venture shows off a different direction with some offset style, pickup swapping and an aggressive starting price. Let's take it for a spin

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

**W**e documented the development and launch of Cream T's first guitar, the Aurora, last year and now we have another: the Crossfire. Unlike the more Gibson-esque construction style of the Aurora, the Crossfire is much more 'Fender', a straightforward bolt-on with a nod to the fashionable offset style.

Uniquely, the Crossfire Skeleton model, which kicks off the mini-range at £1,799, comes without pickups. What? Well, the Crossfire only uses the Relish pickup swapping system, which is optional on the Aurora, and part of the design concept is to appeal to those customers that may have already purchased a pickup-swapping Aurora, so you can swap its pickups onto the altogether different Crossfire chassis. Next up is the Crossfire Standard at £2,199, which comes with three pickups; both come with a gigbag and a choice of six standard open-pore finishes. The top-tier model is the Crossfire SRT-6 (£2,799) and includes a cream Hiscox hard case and four pickups, with a choice of three flashier satin metallic colours and optional racing stripes in silver or gold at no extra cost.











1

1. Like the PJD Guitars, Cream T's Crossfire uses a through-strung Gotoh bridge with block steel saddles. Pickups are by Cream T; here, the Crossfire is loaded with a Whiskerbucker

2. The simple style shows off high-quality woods, such as the quarter-sawn roasted maple used for the neck and fingerboard. The nut is finely cut bone

With an Original Banger at the bridge, the character changes to a rootsy snarl – quite possibly the best 'Broadcaster' voice imaginable

Made in the UK by manufacturing hub UK Guitar Builders (UKGB), which also makes PJD Guitars and the soon-to-be-released Seth Baccus Shoreline models, the Crossfire has plenty in common with PJD's Standard models, not least the offset St John. But aside from a different and downsized offset outline, the Crossfire, which retains a long Fender scale length, is all-solid (not chambered) and uses lightweight obeche for its body that's finished here in a very light, open-grained nitrocellulose.

There are plenty more similarities to be found, too, including the quarter-sawn roasted maple neck with its separate fingerboard of the same material (rosewood is optional) that uses PJD's well-received 254mm to 305mm (10- to 12-inch) compound radius. Crucially, like PJD, the neck uses proper bolts that sit in recessed holes on the small contoured heel, but the headstock is frankly a little more Fender-like, despite the laser-cut Cream T logo, along with simple black dots for position markers. Elsewhere, you'll find the same high-quality Gotoh tuners and six-saddle through-strung bridge, strap buttons, metal jackplate and even the Gibson-style control knobs, not to mention the excellently cut bone nut and superb fretwork.

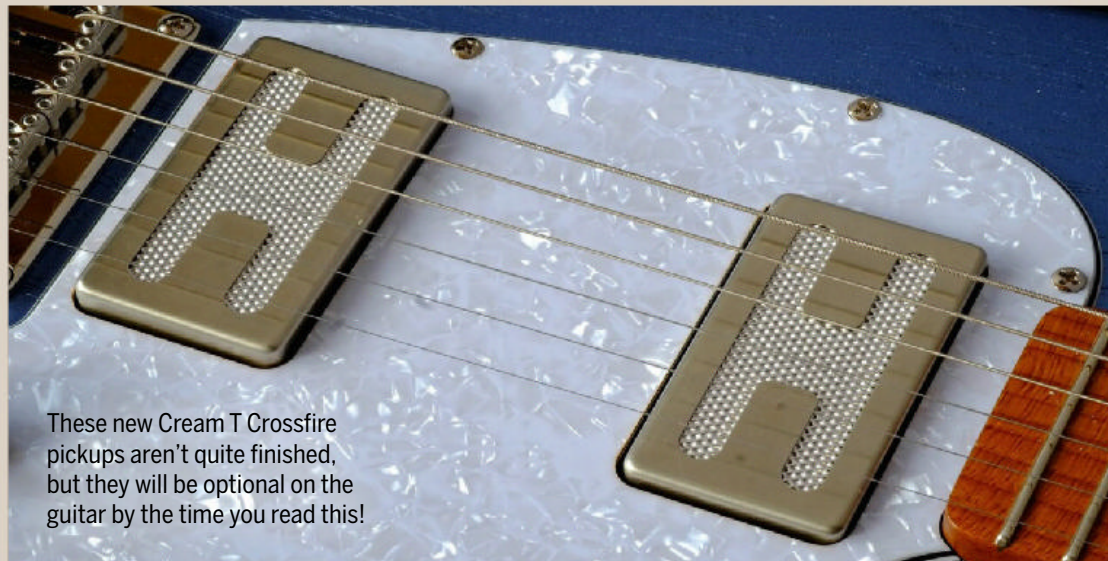
The main difference is that the Crossfire uses the Relish pickup-swapping system, which you won't get on a PJD. And unlike the Aurora where you have the option of either pickup swapping or standard pickup mounting, the Crossfire is only available with this innovative technology. Flip the guitar over and there are two open holes on the back that allow you to pull out the pickup and load in new ones in an instant.

Onto controls and we have a simple master volume and tone. What looks like a standard three-way lever switch pickup selector is actually the Free-Way six-position lever switch. This has three basic positions as you'd expect for bridge, both, and neck, but the lever actually rocks from side to side selecting full humbucking when it's pushed down and single coil (voicing the outer coils of each humbucker) when it's pulled upwards. There's no need for extra pull-switches, the Free-Way does it all – it's easily the fastest way to coil-split.

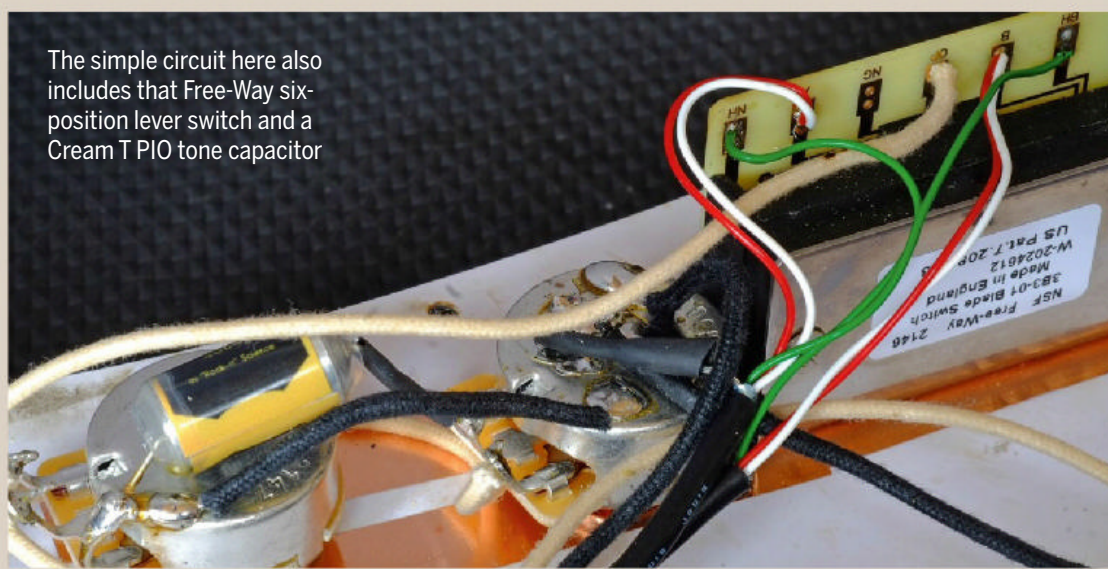
### Feel & Sounds

The combination of the downsized offset outline and use of obeche creates a beautifully weighted guitar. At 2.95kg (6.49lb) it's actually slightly heavier than our reference PJD Carey Standard – a chambered design that weighs 2.63kg





These new Cream T Crossfire pickups aren't quite finished, but they will be optional on the guitar by the time you read this!



The simple circuit here also includes that Free-Way six-position lever switch and a Cream T PIO tone capacitor

## UNDER THE HOOD

What's going on inside the Crossfire's engine?

One advantage of the pickup swapping and scratchplate setup here is that you can remove the pickups then unscrew the scratchplate and pull it off the guitar without even slackening your strings. What we see is pretty standard stuff all joined up modern style with old-style cloth-covered wire. Both pots are CTS 500k, while the large tone cap (a Cream T paper-in-oil type) is valued at .022 microfarads. The Free-Way 3B3-01 switch is all enclosed with the wiring lugs easily accessible. There are no tricks like a treble bleed circuit, which, as we said, is something that would be worth trying just to retain a little clarity as the volume control is reduced.

Cream T is working on a Crossfire pickup set, too. These units will feature a cool-looking H-shaped cover with silver 'foil' over the coils (as pictured), and Tim Lobley tells us these will be hotter in output than the Whiskerbuckers, giving yet another sonic flavour.

(5.79lb) – but like that guitar it feels effortlessly comfortable strapped on or played seated. The necks, too, outwardly seem very similar, but the shapes are different. The Crossfire is slimmer in depth (20.85mm at the 1st fret, 21.6mm at the 12th) and in its width at the nut (42.74mm), and it has what we'd call a shallow 'C' profile. Like the PJD, however, it's very stable and the setup is very mainstream. Our only slight criticism is that those pesky height screws on the block saddles stick up a little. We'd be tempted to add a thin neck shim to cure that, but we've never done that with this proper bolt-on neck join, to be honest.

The response of the guitar is very lively and it's an effortless player, the neck feels so good and actually manages to feel bigger in the hand than those dimensions suggest. The fretwork is superb, the edges of the 'board are lightly rolled, and throughout our test we barely touched the tuners.

When you order your Crossfire, you will be able to select the Cream T pickups you want from a drop-down menu, although the key designs that will be offered are the Whiskerbuckers and Duchess P-90, which are what we used for our test along with an Original Banger. Mind you, for many players a set of Whiskerbuckers might simply be job done. These are replicas of

the actual pickups in Billy Gibbons' 'Pearly Gates' and here on a pretty vibrant, punchy Fender-like platform the lines get blurred between old Les Paul and Telecaster.

Still, the bolt-on recipe suggests more focus on single coils, and this is where the whole pickup-swapping thing comes into its own. Swap the Whiskerbuckers for the Duchess P-90 at the neck and this writer's go-to Cream T pickup, the Original Banger, at the bridge, and the character changes to

a rootsy snarl at the bridge – quite possibly the best 'Broadcaster' voice imaginable – with a thick single-coil texture from the neck. Both pickups are single coils so the Free-Way switch doesn't coil-split. Not quite doing it for you? Put the Whiskbucker back at the bridge and keep the Duchess at the neck for a very boutique-style combo, or put that Original Banger in the neck position (simply pull down its height via the large bolt on the back of the pickup frame).







## CREATING THE CROSSFIRE

We catch up with co-conspirator Leigh Dovey to uncover how this new model came about

**W**orking as founder of PJD Guitars and the newly formed guitar manufacturing hub UKGB, Leigh Dovey has had a busy year. In addition to his own brand, Leigh oversees the production of Cream T Guitars and the imminent Seth Baccus range.

**After the Cream T Aurora guitars, originally conceived by Billy F Gibbons and Thomas Nilsen, the Crossfire seems a more straightforward, cheaper-to-make design, correct?**

“Yes, this was a lot easier in terms of design and build for obvious reasons. Firstly, of course, it’s a bolt-on slab-body guitar, plus we’re now a lot more comfortable using the Relish pickup-swapping [system] after developing the Aurora. So the design was basically me and Tim Loble [Sound Affects owner and co-founder of Cream T Guitars] getting our heads together on this one. Tim knew he needed a guitar to follow the Aurora – he certainly doesn’t want Cream T Guitars to be a one-trick pony – so we had to follow it up with something different.

“The design brief was ‘offset guitar’, and after throwing a few ideas around I started sketching some stuff up. It was always going to be quite a stripped-back style of guitar, no frills. There’s no backplate [to cover the holes in the body to accept the pickup swapping] or fancy glossed maple tops. To hit this sort of price point for a high-quality British-made guitar, you have to cut back on some elements. I don’t think it’s about being a ‘cheaper’ guitar, but I do think it was very much about creating a different style. We’ve done the

fancy, shiny Cream T Aurora models, and you could say they are aimed at the ‘Gibson’ market. The Crossfire is obviously aimed at the ‘Fender’ market. So, yes, it had to be at a lower start price, but that wasn’t what drove the project.”

**Are we right in saying this is the first time you’ve used obeche for the body?**

“I was introduced to obeche by Seth Baccus, and this is the first UKGB guitar to use it outside of Seth’s guitars. Personally, I love it. I’m always quite hesitant to use stuff that – if you’ll pardon the pun – goes against the grain, but with Seth’s previous experience with this wood I thought, ‘Well, that’s all the confidence I need to start experimenting with it outside of Seth’s project with us.’ Will we use it on PJD Guitars? Yes, probably in the Standard ranges, and maybe a slightly more contoured version of the Carey and St John.”

**Presumably this type of open-grain satin finish, as you use on the PJD Standard models, is one area where time and money can be saved?**

“I’m really happy with the finish over the open grain. I agree, it’s a very PJD style of finish that

“The design brief was ‘offset guitar’... It was always going to be stripped-back, no frills” **Leigh Dovey**

we’ve seen on the Standards. There’s no grain filler, just sealer coats then a very, very thin satin nitro for the top coats. It’s not cut back or buffed – there is a cutting-back process during the application but not at the end. There’s no final buffing. It’s very different from the Aurora Customs with their full gloss tops and bound headstock, all the bells and whistles, which, of course, adds time and money to the build. To be honest, this type of finish came from my skill level at the time when I started the company [PJD]. Funnily enough, though, I keep seeing other guitar companies coming out with open-grain low-gloss finishes – and I mean high-end makers. I’m not saying they’re copying us, but this type of finish seems to be more popular than it was before, certainly at higher levels. It’s not as easy to do as it looks, though.”

**The Free-Way switch is another example of British ingenuity. Whose idea was it to include that here?**

“The Free-Way switch was Tim’s idea. He loves to throw something extra into the mix. I’m always having a go at him: just keep it simple! But in all honesty I think it’s good. He’ll say, ‘I’ve been thinking about this...’ and I think, ‘Oh no, what now?’ And when he suggested the Free-Way switch I thought, ‘Great, our tech guys are going to love you!’ It’s not just a normal blade switch; all the coil-splitting is done on the one switch so you don’t need pull switches on the tone control, for example. I really like it. I think it’s a great little addition and 100 per cent Tim’s idea.” [DB]



There’s no backplate to remove: to swap the pickups you just pull them out and load in new ones



The drive is simple, but the surprise is the six-way Free-Way pickup selector that offers instant coil-splits with no further switches needed





One of the few 'bolt-ons' that actually uses bolts instead of screws to hold the neck very firmly to the obeche body

As we said, getting used to that six-way Free-Way switch takes seconds and it is so fast to use. The volume and tone controls, although closely spaced, fall right under your hand for subtle volume dips, and with it lose a little edge – very handy on gainer brighter amp voicings. Personally, we'd try a treble bleed circuit because with a Whiskerbucker at the neck things can get a little undefined as you pull back your volume, and the tone takes a little while to actually roll off the highs, which you sort of need just to lose a little spike, especially from the bridge coil-split.

### Verdict

Beautifully crafted in a simple style, the Crossfire is an exceptional electric guitar. On paper it may be just another bolt-on, but the material choice, high-level construction and superb playability elevate it into the big league. As tested with the Whiskerbuckers, the Crossfire comes

## The materials, high-level construction and superb playability elevate this bolt-on into the big league

across as a classic-style do-it-all drive: vintage voicing with contrasting single-coil splits all accessed in super-fast style from the Free-Way switch. To be honest, you might not need, or want, anything else, but the pickup swapping means you can reshape the sounds and character in seconds. And to broaden your palette, that single coil Original Banger and the Duchess really expand the voices. Of course, Sound Affects is offering some classic Seymour Duncan pickups Relish-mounted, too, and we understand other brands will be added very soon. If this is the future, count us in! 



### CREAM T CROSSFIRE

**PRICE:** From £1,799 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** UK

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, offset solidbody electric

**BODY:** Obeche

**NECK:** Quarter-sawn roasted figured maple, C profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.74mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Quarter-sawn roasted figured maple, black dot inlays, compound 254-305mm (10-12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium (Jescar FW55090)

**HARDWARE:** Gotoh hardtail bridge w/ block steel saddles and through-body stringing, vintage-style split-post tuners – nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm

**ELECTRICS:** 6-way Free-Way lever pickup selector switch (3B3-01), master volume and tone controls

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.95/6.49

**OPTIONS:** Rosewood 'board.

Skeleton (£1,799) without pickups; Standard (£2,199) 3x pickups

(Whiskerbucker set and Duchess neck); SRT-6 (£2,799, our review model) 2x pickup sets, satin metallic colours, optional racing stripes, case

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Aurora Standard 2 (£2,499); maple-topped Custom (£2,999) – both pickup-swapping

**FINISHES:** Aero Blue Pearl (as reviewed), Graphite Metallic, Inferno Red – thin satin nitrocellulose to body and neck

**Cream T Guitars**

**01695 570023**

**www.creamtguitars.com**



**PROS** Simple style; high-quality build, materials, parts; Cream T humbuckers and pickup swapping

**CONS** Its downsized offset body might be too 'dinky' for some; an offset-style vibrato would be cool!



## FIRST PLAY



**FURCH YELLOW  
DELUXE GC-CR**  
€2,758

**WHAT IS IT?** A cutaway Grand Concert acoustic with a cedar top, rosewood back and sides, and a very lively, colourful performance

# Rainbow Rebel

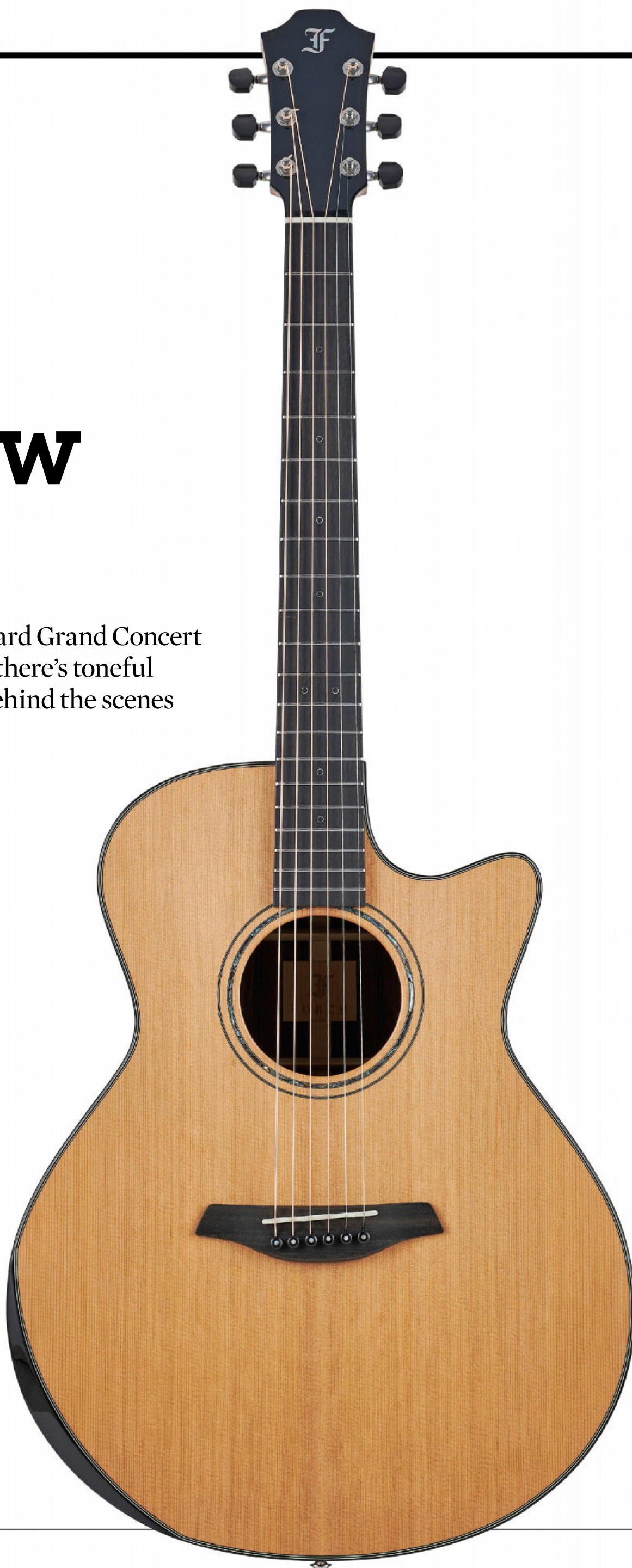
It may look like a straightforward Grand Concert cutaway from the outside, but there's toneful innovation aplenty going on behind the scenes

**Words** David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

**H**ailing from the Czech Republic, Petr Furch's guitar company has been one that we've had our eyes – and ears – on for quite a while. While Furch is hardly a new name in acoustic guitars, in fact it's celebrating its 40th anniversary, it has been something of a best-kept secret among players who want exquisite quality and tone without necessarily knocking on the doors of the more established makers like Taylor or Martin. And when we say 'players' we're including artists here such as Al Di Meola, Suzanne Vega and Glen Hansard, alongside many more.

It might seem a bold statement to make this early on in a review, but we can honestly say that we've never played a bad Furch guitar since the brand first appeared on our radar many years ago. So when we had the opportunity to take a close-up look at an instrument that the company itself says is "one of our most technologically advanced guitars" we could hardly wait. But where's the innovation?

Well, we'll get to that in a minute, but, for now, a little explanation as to the Yellow Deluxe's somewhat colourful name. The fact is that Furch's extensive range of instruments is identified by the colours of the rainbow.











1

So there are Red, Orange, Violet, Indigo – and so on – ranges from which to pick and choose. We’re sure you see where they’re going with this. These different ranges within the catalogue are full of varying body sizes, shapes and timber choices, and there’s something there for practically every budget.

As far as our Yellow Deluxe is concerned, it fits into the Furch stable as one of the more up-range models, but still comes in at a non-astronomical price point. And whereas €2.7k might still seem a stretch, at the time of writing this represents about £2.4k and we’ve seen them below the £2k mark from some dealers in this country.

## This model would suit someone who wants to walk a more contemporary acoustic path

This places Furch in a highly competitive area, cheaper than the big league but standing side by side with quality acoustics from overseas that we’re currently seeing. We’re saying all this in advance in the interest of scene setting, because this guitar really is something rather special and we want to make sure that everyone is aware of where it sits in the marketplace before we zoom in for a closer look. And it’s probably time that we did just that and so let’s run a quick eye down the Yellow Deluxe’s spec sheet as a kind of appetiser.

The GC-CR designation in the guitar’s name translates into Grand Concert (the body shape) and cedar/rosewood, summing up the timbers used in the body. It’s triple-A grade Western red cedar for the top, a great wood for a softer and articulate fingerstyle approach, with Indian rosewood for the back and sides. To quote the Tonewood Database, Indian rosewood “takes the sonic thumbprint of mahogany and expands it in both directions”. We couldn’t have put it better ourselves, but for our half pennyworth, rosewood adds



2

1. An abalone rosette and a transparent scratchplate adorn the GC-CR’s high-grade cedar top

2. The neck is mahogany with slightly unusual tubular position markers down the side of the ebony fingerboard





3. Another slightly unusual feature is the bevel on the back of the guitar, similar to a Stratocaster's belly cut

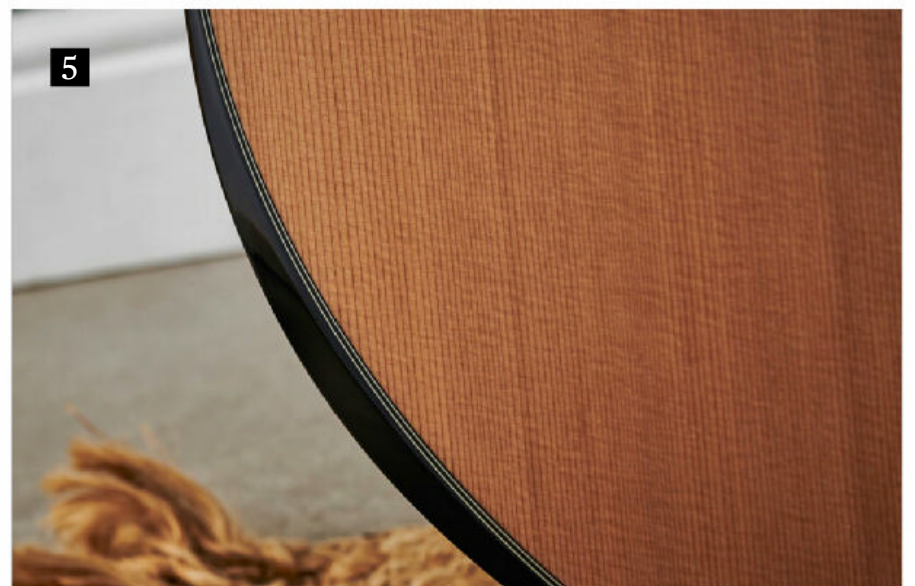
4. A set of Gotoh 510 Silver Patina tuners with polished ebony buttons and a 1:21 gear ration ensures tuning is stable

5. There is a bevel to the lower bout of the guitar for forearm comfort. Both bevels present here are the result of Furch's new and innovative 3D printing technique

'air' and resonance into an acoustic guitar's tone. At best, it's like you have a built-in reverb unit, such is the sustain and ambient characteristics of this particular tonewood.

Where other appointments are concerned, the Yellow Deluxe's neck is mahogany, with an ebony fingerboard, transparent scratchplate, abalone rosette and pearl position markers and so on. Pretty standard fare so far, so what about these innovations? Well, for one thing we have both a forearm bevel and one to the back of the instrument, too – think Strat belly cut – and whereas there's nothing particularly unusual about this, the way it's made certainly is. Furch uses 3D printing to make the bevels, which not only cuts cost but improves precision. And if they hadn't told us, we'd have sworn blind that the bevels here were ebony or some other dark wood.

Then there's the guitar tops, which are all tap-toned and braced to bring out the best possible tonal response, something that is arguably more common to find on bespoke top-end instruments, plus an ultra-thin finish to ensure that the vibration characteristics of the woods are not compromised. Furch's CNR System (Composite Neck Reinforcement) sees the guitar's truss rod encased in a carbon casing that the company claims "has 90 per cent higher resistance to deformations caused



by string tension and changes in humidity compared [with] traditional neck designs". It also means that the stabilising features you would normally find on an acoustic here – a neck block, for instance – aren't necessary, allowing the top to vibrate more freely. Interesting, indeed, but does it make that much of a difference? Time to shut up and play the guitar...

### Feel & Sounds

The Yellow Deluxe certainly feels good in the hands. The shape of the neck is an incredibly comfortable but at the same time very subtle V. It's far from being a clubby 50s Tele or Strat, but feels substantial and





An ebony bridge with a fully compensated Tusq saddle and faux tortoise pins complete the GC-CR's body furnishings

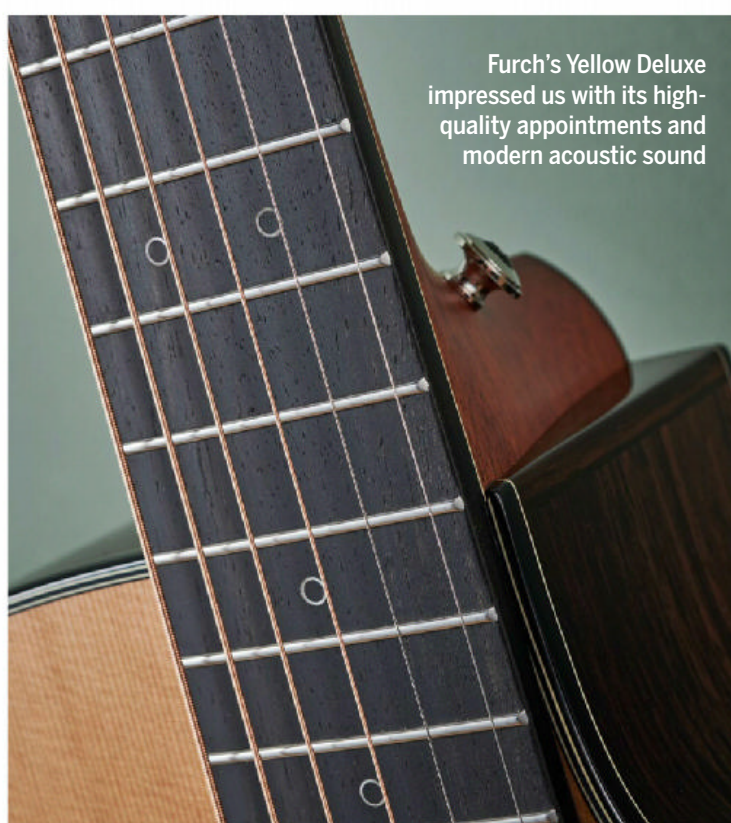
somehow satisfying at the same time. Furch tells us that the company can accommodate different neck widths from 43mm to 48mm, but here it sits in between at 45mm, widening out to 57mm at the 14th fret.

It's only when you actually play a guitar with a forearm bevel that you realise why they're becoming so popular. You might barely notice their presence, but they certainly enhance the playing experience, particularly if you're looking at a long evening's set of material. On the Yellow Deluxe the bevel to the back is a nice addition, too, particularly if your playing position veers more towards the more 'tucked in' variation.

But what about the tone? We were surprised how broad the tonal spectrum is here with snappy and lively basses, a responsive and unmuddy midrange and singing trebles. It's a more modern sound than that of the more traditional Martin or Taylor – think more Andy McKee than, say, Bert Jansch, for instance – with a very clean-sounding tone overall that responds well to varying picking dynamics. There's enough volume to fill a room, and for live use, while our review sample came without a pickup, we're told that Furch offers a range of options on this front, including the trusty LR Baggs Anthem or Element systems.

## Verdict

You've probably gathered that we like the Yellow Deluxe a lot. The under-the-bonnet innovations can be considered in line with what Martin has done with the Modern Deluxe Series, with a traditional outward appearance with some contemporary features running quietly in the background.



Furch's Yellow Deluxe impressed us with its high-quality appointments and modern acoustic sound

In terms of playability it ticks all the boxes, although sound-wise it could just deter the die-hard traditionalist who is after the tones of yore. But what is here would suit someone who wants to walk a more contemporary acoustic path as it's a very good vehicle for acolytes of Andy McKee or even Mike Dawes.

In a marketplace where premium quality and tone often come at a king's ransom, the Furch stands out as being an upper-end instrument that would not drain the resources of a player serious about their sound. Seek one out and see what you think. But remember, if you don't like what you find here, Furch has literally a whole spectrum of other options available in its catalogue. **G**



## FURCH YELLOW DELUXE GC-CR

**PRICE:** €2,758 (inc hardcase)

**ORIGIN:** Czech Republic

**TYPE:** Grand Concert

**TOP:** Western red cedar

**BACK/SIDES:** Indian rosewood

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 115mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 394mm

**NECK:** African mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm

**TUNERS:** Gotoh 510 Silver Patina

**NUT/WIDTH:** 45mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony

**FRETS:** 20

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony/55mm

**WEIGHT (LB/KG):** 4.5/2.04

**OPTIONS:** Custom orders have a range of options available including nut width from 43mm-48mm: see website for details

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Furch's Yellow range includes the Yellow CR (€2,300), Yellow SR (€2,355), Yellow Master's Choice (€2,728) and the Yellow Deluxe SR (€2,810)

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not on this model

**FINISH:** Full pore gloss

**Furch Guitars**

**+420 519 417 285**

**[www.furchguitars.com](http://www.furchguitars.com)**



**PROS** Quality build with a distinctive, contemporary sound

**CONS** Some traditionalists may be put off by the above



A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark green long-sleeved shirt, is seated and playing a white PRS Fiore electric guitar. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

# *Fiore*



## **PLAY IN FULL BLOOM**

**MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL**

*"All guitarists have a sound in their head – a sound that evolves and grows as they progress, discovering all of the beautiful idiosyncrasies that define their individual voice. To facilitate this process, players need a vibrant, dynamic guitar that becomes a free space in which their personality can unfold. PRS and I designed Fiore to be this guitar."*

**- Mark Lettieri**



## FIRST PLAY



### **SHEERAN BY LOWDEN EQUALS EDITION** £995

**WHAT IS IT?** A well-balanced acoustic based on Ed Sheeran's 610mm Wee Lowden – purpose-built for stage and studio



1

2



# Another Hit

To celebrate Ed Sheeran's mega-selling *Equals* album, his guitar company has come up with this wee wonder

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis

1. The only differences from the standard W-04 are the '=' inlay at the 7th fret, subtle laser-cut butterfly motifs on the truss rod cover and heel cap, plus a unique inner label
2. The stripped-back construction mixes this solid Sitka spruce top with five-ply laminate back and sides and quarter-sawn mahogany neck – often using reclaimed stock
3. Although cheaper, these guitars use the same finishing process as the high-end Lowden instruments, where a gloss finish is cut back to a super-smooth silky satin
4. The LR Baggs Element pickup system uses a thin film sensor under the saddle to reduce 'piezo quack'. It also features volume and tone rotary controls, and built-in low-frequency compression
5. The minimalist style is reflected by the ebony faced headstock, even though the generic die-cast tuners do seem a little oversized for the diminutive style

While the collaboration between George Lowden and Ed Sheeran – one of the acoustic world's guitar-making giants and one of the planet's biggest-selling artists – is known to most people, nothing quite prepares you for the actual experience of playing one of these exquisitely designed and simplistically constructed guitars made at Lowden's HQ in County Down, Northern Ireland.

Based on the 610mm (24-inch) scale Wee Lowden, originally designed for Sheeran, the small shape is one of two offered in the Sheeran By Lowden range. And while this model may be one of a 3,000-only run, aside from a few additional motifs, it's essentially the same as the top-line W-04.

All the Sheeran by Lowden guitars have a price point below £1k and, as such, are pared down to the essentials, yet they feel sturdy and road-ready. There's no binding around the solid Sitka spruce top or figured walnut sides, for example – the latter a five-piece walnut/mahogany/walnut/mahogany/walnut lamination. The quarter-sawn mahogany neck, a single piece with a separate heel stack, is beautifully shaped with a full 'C' profile that actually feels quite electric-guitar-like. Despite the short scale, there's plenty of air in the playability with a nut width of 43.6mm (and string spacing of 36mm) opening out to 54.5mm at the bridge. The bridge, fingerboard and headstock facing are all ebony, too – a dark brown rather than jet black – which suits the style. The craft appears faultless throughout, not least the excellent fretwork from a medium-gauge wire on the 406mm (16-inch) radius fingerboard. Everything is clean and crisp, reflecting Lowden's hard-earned reputation for its craft.

But does small body mean small sound? Well, you don't get the colossal low-end of a good dreadnought, but there's surprising depth that creates a balanced voice – purpose-built for both stage and recording. The short scale gives less perceived tension to the 0.012 to 0.053-gauge strings, too, so bends are fluid and, again, we're struck by how electric-like the Sheeran feels. It may come across as the perfect sofa noodler or travel guitar, but when amplified those trimmer basses clean up the voice for a big, projecting sound, with quite a broad tonal range from the soundhole-placed tone control. If you've not tried one of these, especially if you mainly play electric, we recommend you do. **G**



## SHEERAN BY LOWDEN EQUALS EDITION

**PRICE:** £995 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Northern Ireland

**TYPE:** Wee Lowden-style electro-acoustic

**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** Figured walnut 5-piece laminate

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 96mm (tapering to 86mm by the heel)

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 335mm

**NECK:** Mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 610mm (24")

**TUNERS:** Enclosed die-cast, chrome

**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Tusq/43.6mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, '=' inlay at 7th fret, 406mm (16") radius

**FRETS:** 21, medium

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony w/ compensated Tusq saddle/54.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** LR Baggs EAS VTC

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.84/4

**OPTIONS:** No, but the non-Equals W-04 costs £905

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Sheeran by Lowden guitars start with the W-01 (£655); the slightly larger-sized S Series models start at £770

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not yet

**FINISH:** Natural satin

Sheeran by Lowden Guitars

02844 619161

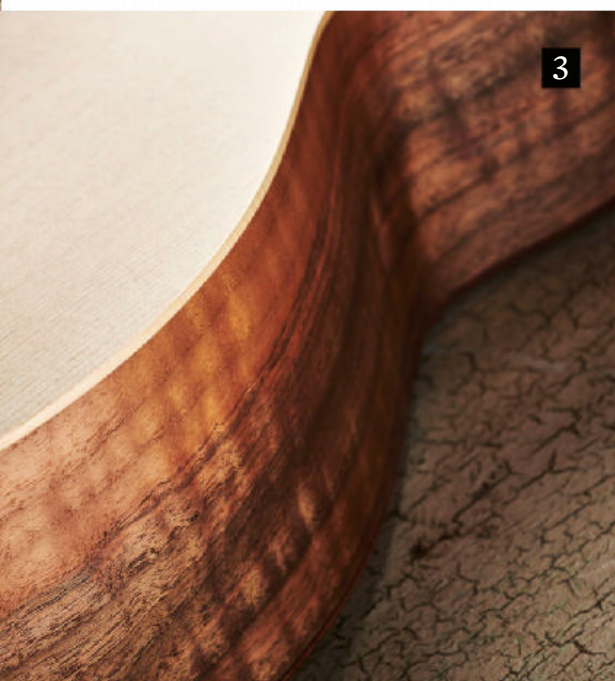
[www.sheeranguitars.com](http://www.sheeranguitars.com)



9/10

**PROS** Clean build; excellent specification for the cost and build location; balanced acoustic voice; big amplified tone with quite electric-like playability

**CONS** You might not be a Sheeran fan, but forget that – this is the pared-down essence of Lowden







# theWishlist

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

## Gibson Elvis SJ-200 £4,399

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB [www.gibson.com](http://www.gibson.com) WORDS **Neville Marten** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

**E**lvis Presley received his 1968 ebony SJ-200 as a gift at a 60s recording session and, according to his guitarist Scotty Moore, first used it on stage in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on 1 March at the start of his 1974 tour. Presley had been an SJ-200 convert since obtaining his original 1956 model, and its massive size and opulent appointments could not have been more suited to the king of rock 'n' roll.

The model has undergone constant change since its introduction in 1937, so Presley's 'Las Vegas' era instrument was also naturally of its time. As such, it featured a three-piece maple back, an adjustable 'closed moustache' bridge with hourglass and teardrop pearl inlays, rosewood fingerboard with graduated pearl 'crown' inlays on a two-piece maple neck, plus a set of gold-plated Kluson 'waffleback' tuners.

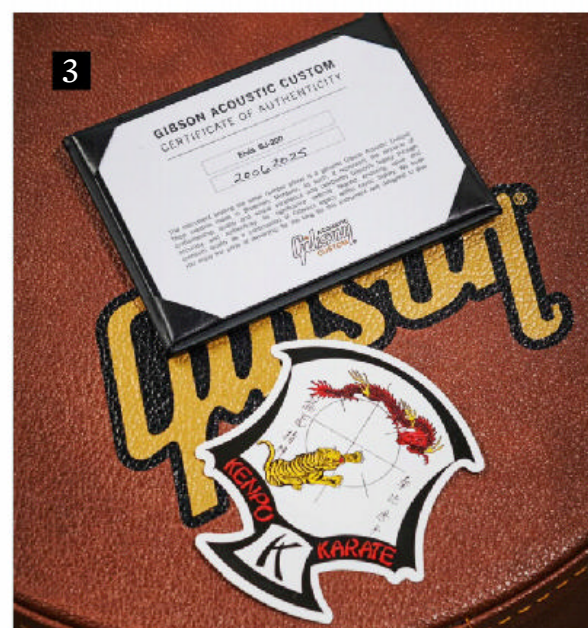
Our guitar has the unpopular 'tone sucking' adjustable bridge saddle replaced with a traditional bone 'set' version, the tuners are Grovers with the same 'tulip' buttons, and the rosewood 'board and bridge are exceptionally dark compared with the redder timbers on the King's guitar. An instrument that's designed to be used on stage, ours also comes with LR Baggs's

natural-sounding VTC system, with discreet soundhole tone and volume controls. Other appointments include the beautifully applied ebony nitro finish, compound dovetail neck-to-body joint, multiple body and single neck and headstock bindings, and 20 vintage-style frets on the 305mm (12inch) radius fingerboard. It's a real looker!

Often referred to as the 'Whispering Giant', this model is surprisingly not the loudest of guitars. But ours is beautifully balanced across its range with spritely trebles, punchy mids and a bass-end that vibrates through the ribcage. The SJ-200 is a great recording guitar, too – legendary performances include The Who's *Pinball Wizard*, The Beatles' *Here Comes The Sun*, and Jimmy Page's gloriously fingerpicked *Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You*.

It won't be made in huge numbers, so the Elvis SJ-200 might appeal to collectors rather than players. And that's sad, since it's one of the most handsome stage guitars ever, the Baggs pickup only adding to its usability. So, why not grab yourself a 'Big Hunk Of Love' while you can, or you might end up in 'Heartbreak Hotel' or, worse, 'Crying In The Chapel'... **G**

1. The controls to the LR Baggs VTC pickup and preamp system are hidden just inside the soundhole, with its multiple black and white purfling rings
2. In case you weren't quite sure to whom this guitar is dedicated, Gibson's 'bell' truss rod cover should leave you in no doubt
3. Elvis was a big fan of Kenpo Karate and put a sticker for the society on both of his black Gibson acoustics (Dove and SJ-200). You'll find one, along with a certificate of authenticity and all the usual candy, in the brown hard case with plush red lining





4. Gibson has made many changes to the SJ-200's bridge since the guitar's inception in 1937. Elvis's 1968 model featured the 'closed' moustache bridge in rosewood, with hourglass and teardrop mother-of-pearl inlays

5. The bound fingerboard is rosewood and comes with graduated pearl 'crown' inlays. Note how its beautifully sculpted end mirrors the tip of the headstock. Gibson did this on high-end guitars such as L-5s and Super 400s, too

6. The SJ-200's cosmetic appointments, including hand-painted faux-tortoiseshell pickguard, combine to make it one of the handsomest acoustics ever built







# Gas Supply

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

## Epiphone Jerry Cantrell 'Wino' Les Paul Custom & Les Paul Custom Prophecy £749 & £1,049

CONTACT **Epiphone** WEBSITE [www.epiphone.com](http://www.epiphone.com)

### JARGON CRUNCHING Ultra Modern Weight Relief

While the 'Wino' model features the traditional nine-hole weight relief, Jerry's Les Paul Custom Prophecy opts for an 'Ultra Modern' approach, retaining more wood than a chambered guitar via "elliptical chambers", while keeping the solid core of the centre of the body intact for that classic Les Paul sound.

### Even more limited-edition expensive guitars?

*Au contraire!* You might recognise one of these guitars as the 'Wino' Les Paul Custom, which made an appearance last year as a highly limited, megabucks run of Murphy-aged Gibsons. But now, like all of us, Alice In Chains' Jerry Cantrell has GAS prices on his mind. He's offering two Les Pauls at the more affordable end of the spectrum with Epiphone, in the form of the Jerry Cantrell 'Wino' Les Paul Custom and Jerry Cantrell Les Paul Custom Prophecy.

### Why are there two?

Because these aren't just two different finishes; Jerry and Epiphone have created two distinct signature models here. The 'Wino' is the more traditional of the two, while

the Prophecy adds some modern features. Starting with the 'Wino', which is based on one of four Les Pauls Cantrell acquired in the 90s, this model is named after the finish of Jerry's original and comes in the same fairly traditional Trans Wine Red. Wood-wise, it's business as usual with a maple-topped mahogany body, mahogany neck (shaped to a Custom Cantrell taper), and ebony fingerboard. But that body has undergone the Gibson/Epiphone nine-hole weight-relief process to make things more manageable. This being a Custom, we also get Pearloid block inlays, and a split-diamond on the headstock. Hardware is gold with an Epiphone LockTone Tune-O-Matic and stop bar, plus a set of Grover Rotomatics taking care of the tuning.

### LES PAUL CUSTOM PROPHECY

The Epiphone Jerry Cantrell Les Paul Custom Prophecy offers a more modern take on the most rocking of all single-cuts with 24 frets, custom inlays and an icy Bone White finish

### FEATURES

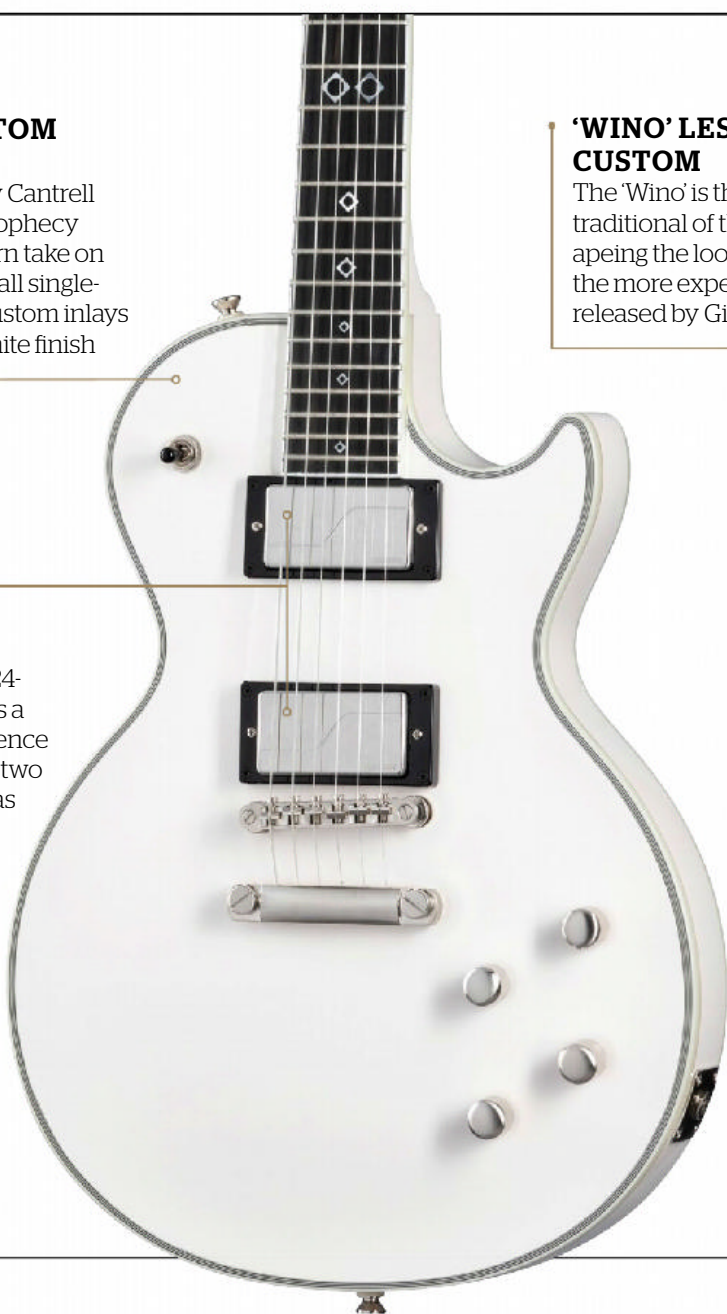
Adding to the modernisation is a 24-fret fingerboard, plus a pair of Fishman Fluence pickups, which give two humbucker voices as well as coil-splits

### 'WINO' LES PAUL CUSTOM

The 'Wino' is the more traditional of the two guitars, apeing the look and feel of the more expensive version released by Gibson in 2021

### PICKUPS

As well as some LP Custom staples, such as the fretboard blocks and Split Diamond inlays, the Epiphone 'Wino' gives us a more traditional two-humbucker/four-control configuration





Bling is the thing: the 'Wino' has gold hardware and pearloid inlays culminating in a split diamond at the headstock



### Didn't the Murphy 'Wino' have some slightly strange electronics?

Yes, it did, but in this iteration things are kept to a standard two-humbucker/two-volume/two-tone format and a three-way switch configuration. Jerry's 490R and 498T pickups from the Murphy version are replicated with an Alnico Classic Pro and 98T Pro in the neck and bridge positions respectively.

### What's the deal with the Prophecy?

While the construction starts similarly with a mahogany/maple body and mahogany neck (again with the Custom Cantrell carve) and ebony 'board, that's about where the similarities end. First up, the Prophecy's body has

The 'Wino' is the more traditional of the two, while the Prophecy adds some modern features

additional weight relief using the Ultra Modern pattern, which removes significantly more wood from around the entire body. Then there's the fact that this version is a 24-fret (medium jumbo) Les Paul – good news if you're loitering with intent around the upper register.

### They look like different pickups, too.

Correct. As you might be gathering, the Prophecy is an altogether more contemporary Les Paul Custom, and, as such, there's a pair of contemporary pickups courtesy of the Fishman Fluences. As we're used to seeing, these have plenty of voicing options with PAF-style tones, a hotter, more modern humbucker voice, plus coil-splits for both, all of which are selected via the push-pull switches.

### Anything else?

A lot of the other details are visual – the Prophecy is only available in the Bone White finish shown, and it's set off with some stylish-looking brushed nickel hardware. Adding to the more modern design are the 'Circle in Diamond' fretboard inlays. To the untrained eye, the only things denoting these as signature guitars are the Jerry Cantrell truss rod covers, and he's also added a JJ logo to the reverse of the headstock. Both guitars come with custom hardshell cases and are priced at £749 ('Wino') and £1,049 (Prophecy). [SW]

## ALSO OUT NOW...

**FENDER NILE RODGERS HITMAKER STRATOCASTER** £2,499



Money can't buy you happiness, but it can secure *Good Times*... at least that's what Fender is intending with its latest signature, a replica of Nile Rodgers' Hitmaker Strat. Famously, Nile has racked up millions of sales on his Hitmaker, and the signature version includes many of the same features. There's an alder body with a smaller outline and additional contours, chrome-plated brass scratchplate and a fixed bridge, plus a custom '59 'C-shaped maple neck with 241mm (9.5-inch) maple 'board. These are joined by a trio of Nile Rodgers Hitmaker signature pickups and a set of Sperzel locking tuners, and Fender has even matched the Olympic White finish to Nile's custom spray job. Signature touches include a Nile Rodgers squiggle on the front of the headstock, a Hitmaker stamp on the neckplate, plus a Nile Rodgers & Chic logo on the rear of the headstock. The included case is also embroidered with a Hitmaker interior. [www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)

### DIGITECH LIVES!



Following a period of inactivity (and apparent discontinuation) from DigiTech/DOD, Cor-Tek (parent company of Cort) has announced that it has entered into an agreement to purchase the renowned effects brand. A statement from Cor-Tek president Jun Park says that Cor-Tek is set to acquire the "DigiTech/DOD brand, including all DigiTech/DOD intellectual property and assets". What does this mean

for our pedal hunger? A reissue of the Space Station? OD 250? Perhaps a grunge pedal?! Well, there's no news on specific products yet, but the statement continues: "We look forward to continuing the manufacturing and selling of the iconic product, as well as investing in new features and products." Given Cort's manufacturing capabilities and scale, we're hoping to see some staples continue and possibly even some out-of-production classics revived alongside new designs. Watch this space! [www.cortguitars.com](http://www.cortguitars.com)





# Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

## Artist: Bill Orcutt

Album: *Made Out Of Sound* (Palilalia Records)



*Made Out Of Sound* from Bill Orcutt and drummer Chris Corsano was released last year after being recorded cross-country in San Francisco and Ithaca, New York [www.palilalia.com](http://www.palilalia.com)

**I**t's difficult to pigeonhole Bill Orcutt's inimitable, improvised, skeletal style of music, which sees him disregard the A and D strings on his guitar. His current album, *Made Out Of Sound*, with drummer Chris Corsano, has been described as "not-not-jazz", whereas his solo acoustic work has veered more towards the blues, albeit in abstract. In the 90s, when he played as one of noise-trio Harry Pussy, his electric playing was full on and aggressive, while more recent records, after a decade-long hiatus, have demonstrated a more reserved side (for Bill), with moments of space and quiet interspersed with slashes of manic picking and howling.

### Back On The Horse

When we speak to Bill, it's the morning after a live solo show in San Francisco, his first in three years. "I certainly learned that I'd forgotten how to put on a show," Bill laughs. "But then I haven't played out since 2019. I've been recording at home, but that's a completely different thing to getting up in front of an audience. But it was good. And I realise that this is the process; you have to get back into it to make it happen again."

### Four Strings & The Truth

"My style has changed a lot if you track it," Bill tells us. "I started playing with four strings in the 80s in

a band called Watt [with Tim Koffley], before I started doing Harry Pussy [in 1992] with Adris [Hoyos], but I think the common thread is that I like emotional guitar playing. I love the blues and folk and I like things that are rough hewn." He stops a moment and laughs. "I hate to use the word 'authentic', but I like music that feels like an expression of the person, rather than something that's technically correct."

### Feeling Deep

Bill's flat-picked strings are often accompanied by a non-syllabic moaning or howling, evoking plenty of emotion and a sense of spontaneity. "There was no plan behind the four-string thing. My Telecaster, for whatever reason, was missing the A and D strings, so I just started writing songs around that configuration, with nothing in mind other than, 'This is what I have to work with and I'm going to do it for fun.' Removing those two strings cuts out a lot of middle frequencies. It also strips the complexity from certain chords and creates a sound that is harmonically much more spare and stark. The isolated low E string can be a drone or I'll use it in a percussive way as a kind of kick drum, playing it against a pattern on the top strings."

### Hot Strummer

A simple setup drives the music and is centred around either a beat-up Kay jumbo acoustic with a fragile neck or a blonde Telecaster. "I haven't been playing much acoustic lately," Bill says, "although I'm currently recording something in my living room on the acoustic to sell on tour. But the challenge with acoustic, for me, is playing live – because you're at the mercy of the system. With the electric, you have your own amplification and you can control your own sound. I actually came to the Tele via the Stratocaster. My first real guitar was a Strat because I loved Hendrix. But then I went to college and saw Joe Strummer in [1980 film] *Rude Boy*. Seeing him playing that chunk of wood made me realise it was the guitar I had to have. So I traded the Strat for a Tele – which I still have, although it badly needs refretting. The blonde reissue is just something I bought mail-order from Sweetwater so I could have a guitar that I didn't love just to take on tour." **[GK]**

**Standout track:** *Man Carrying Thing*

**For fans of:** Derek Bailey, Tashi Dorji, Lightnin' Hopkins

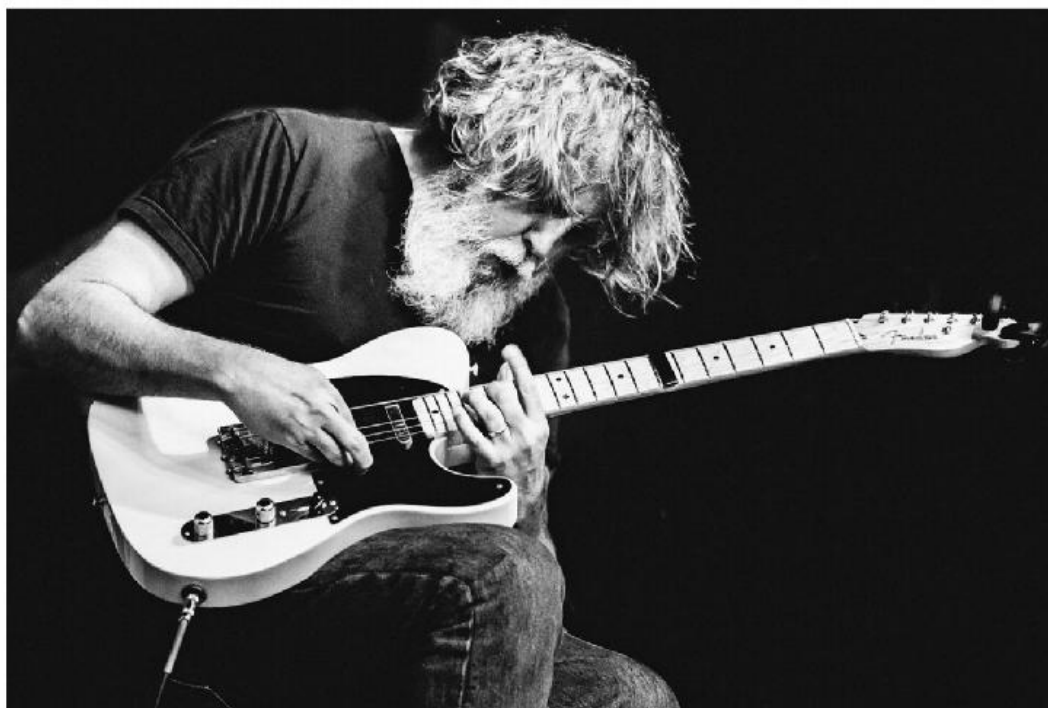


PHOTO BY R ORCUTT



“I like limitations that force you into making creative decisions that wouldn’t come about otherwise”

## OBSTACLE RACE

Bill uses the challenge of “unique gear” to his advantage

Don’t be deceived by the somewhat ramshackle look of Bill’s setup; he’s rather particular about his gear. “I do have a preference for unique gear,” he smiles. “But you never want to perform with something that doesn’t work, so if the guitar doesn’t stay in tune or has some functional issue then it’s not gonna fly. So I don’t want it to be broken, but I like unique characteristics – I play with four strings, which says a lot. I like limitations that force you into making creative decisions that wouldn’t come about otherwise.”

PHOTO BY JIM HENSLEY





# Albums

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

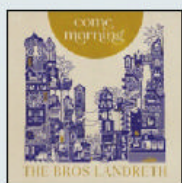
The Bros: David (left) and Joey



## The Bros Landreth Come Morning

**Birthday Cake (available now)**

10/10



### Blissful seventh album from soulful collective

Hankering for new songs that blend Americana and soul? Well, this might be the album of the year for you, then, as The Bros Landreth are back with 10 songs rich in atmosphere, taste and craftsmanship.

For the uninitiated, the band is led by singer/guitarist Joey Landreth with brother David on bass, and this is their seventh album to date. While the songs have a classic evergreen vibe to them, the production is still savvy to modern trends – there's an intimate dryness for many instruments, like you're in the room with the band. Joey's tasteful guitar work is worth highlighting, too. He favours open C tuning and a slide on his fourth finger, inspiring soulful and rootsy playing. He also has a cool pedal collection that creates plenty of colours in his sound; his looping for ambient harmonic settings is very creative, too.

As for the songs, many stand out. Opener, *Stay*, has a super-dry sound and is catchy enough to take up residence in your head for a good while. *What In The World* is emotive and the guitar arrangement is rich. *Drive All Night* demands to be a strong single, while *Shame* is beautifully rootsy. *You Don't Know Me* is very intimate with that lovely C tuning taking centre stage, and *Don't Feel Like Crying* is another single contender with beautiful vocals. The rhythmic drag of *Corduoy*, with its sparse chord changes and the ambient piano, contextualise Joey's vocals exquisitely. In short, this is a corker of an album that will be on rotation around these parts for quite some time to come. **[JS]**

**Standout track:** *You Don't Know Me*

**For fans of:** Ariel Posen, Devon Allman

### Envy Of None

Envy Of None

**Kscope (available now)**

8/10



### Ex-Rush man produces synth-rock driven album

Envy Of None is Alex Lifeson's first project since Rush ended their prog career after the death of drummer Neil Peart. Alongside Lifeson are Andy Curran (bass/vocals), Alf Annibalini (guitar/keys) and Maiah Wynne (vocals), and their 11-track album has an alternative-pop meets synth-rock vibe (think Garbage meets Depeche Mode). Opener, *Never Said I Love You*, would be an ideal single with pulsing synth-rock drive and rich harmonised vocal lines. *Shadow* is more minimalistic with electronic drums and smooth acoustic-guitar interjections, while *Liar* is a dark grunge-rocker with ambient and energised guitar parts. *Old Strings* blends synths, ambient guitars and vocals with much creativity, and the laid-back, acoustic guitar-driven instrumental *Western Sunset* is a very beautiful addition. It may be a new musical avenue, but Alex and co sound most appealing. **[JS]**

**Standout track:** *Western Sunset*

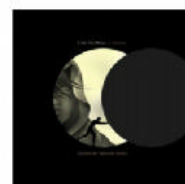
**For fans of:** Rush, Depeche Mode

### Tedeschi Trucks

*I Am The Moon I: Crescent*

**Fantasy Records (release date: 3 June 2022)**

8/10



### Part one of a bold quartet of releases

As projects go, this is one of the most ambitious we've come across in ages. *I Am The Moon* is a collection of 24 original songs that will be released over four albums, each spaced one month apart (the first in June, second in July and so on) and each part will be accompanied by a short film. Inspired by the very same Persian tale of love and loss that influenced Clapton's landmark *Layla* album, the collection will total over two hours of music. The first part, *I Am The Moon I: Crescent*, comprises five songs with all the drive and fervour we've come to expect from Derek Trucks' and Susan Tedeschi's 12-piece band. The title track is a beautiful ballad, while *Circles 'Round The Sun* has a piledriver groove with Trucks' slide guitar dancing on top. As a whole, it's a bite-size overture to the forthcoming parts – and we can hardly wait. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *I Am The Moon*

**For fans of:** The Allman Brothers, Doyle Bramhall II





Joanne Shaw Taylor  
takes *Blues From The Heart* to the stage

**Joanne Shaw Taylor**  
*Blues From The Heart Live*  
KTBA Records (release date: 10 June)

8/10



**An explosive live outing with plenty of soul and a few guests, too**

Available as a DVD/CD or Blu-ray/CD package, this album captures Joanne Shaw Taylor setting the live stage alight as only she can. Audiences who witnessed JST on her recent UK tour will attest to the fact that this is very much her home turf as she pounds her way through 16 tracks of controlled blues-rock mayhem. Joe Bonamassa and Kenny Wayne Shepherd guest on a handful of numbers during the album's course, adding a turbocharger to the already frenzied proceedings. Tracks such as *Can't You See What You're Doing To Me* explode through the speakers as JST and KWS playfully joust guitar licks, whereas *I've Been Loving You Too Long* finds Joanne in slow blues mode, complete with fiery, emotive solo. Great stuff! [DM]

**Standout track:** *Summertime*

**For fans of:** Albert Collins, Joe Bonamassa

**The Aristocrats With Primuz Chamber Orchestra**  
*Boing!*

Boing Music (release date: 3 June)

9/10



**Fascinating curio from the fusion power trio**

It's quite possible that The Aristocrats would be the last band you'd ever conceive of performing their slightly off-the-wall material with an orchestra. "This project began when we randomly stumbled upon a YouTube video of Poland's Primuz Chamber Orchestra performing one of our songs, as reimagined by composer/arranger Wojtek Lemański," an Aristocrat spokesperson tells us. "Their flawless execution of a highly challenging arrangement inspired us to reach out and propose a collaboration." The result is a selection of tracks from the band's repertoire that are remixed and transformed with added orchestral accompaniment – and it works. Tracks as diverse as *Dance Of The Aristocrats* and *Culture Clash* take on an entirely new dimension that remains faithful to the original compositions while simultaneously bristling with a new inventiveness. [DM]

**Standout track:** *All Said And Done*

**For fans of:** Guthrie Govan, Joe Satriani



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# Tones Behind The Tracks

Bluesman **Larry McCray** tells us how his career reignited after his music was played on Joe Bonamassa's radio show and he sent Joe a text...

## Artist: Larry McCray

Album: Blues Without You (KTBA Records)



The album was recorded at Sunset Boulevard's EastWest Studio

**I** have some friends that used to tell me that Joe Bonamassa would play my music on his radio programme. So, of course, I didn't believe it. And those same friends had been telling me, 'Why don't you reach out to Joe?' The same friends that told me to reach out put me in touch with musician Larry Mitchell, who had a direct contact to Joe. I got the contact and sent Joe a text saying, 'Joe, this is bluesman Larry McCray, just reaching out to see if there are any opportunities that we might be able to do something together?' I know he had just done a record with Joanna Connor the year before, so I knew there was a possibility that it might be something. So when I texted him, he got back to me within the first hour. I got a text back and he said, 'We'd love to do a record.'

"It was probably nine or 10 months before I heard back again, so I thought maybe he'd thought about it and didn't want to do it. And then he called me and said, 'Hey, where do you live?' And I said, 'I'm based in Michigan,' and he said, 'We'll be there tomorrow,' at my place. I was like, 'Oh my God, they're coming to the house.' I still didn't quite believe that they would come until they showed up. But then the next day they came right to my house and we sat down and we started playing music. I started showing them tunes and it just took off from there."

**There are many influences on the album. On *Arkansas* and *Mr Easy* your vocals sound like BB King. Was BB an influence?**

"My sister Clara passed me the guitar when I was 11, turning 12 and I went to stay with her for summer vacations in school. That's when I got involved with music. That's when I started playing because she had guys that used to come to her house and we'd set up right in the living room and have an all-day jam session. So BB King was the most influential on my music because, at that time, BB was the most popular bluesman, and I really loved his music. So that's why I started right there."

**What other influences were there?**

"I had a theory that Freddie King was the power of the blues; I called him 'Freddie The Freight Train'. I called Albert Collins 'The Razor' because his guitar could slash and cut like no other bluesman at the time. BB King was the elegance and the class of the blues, and Albert King made the guitar weep. Out of those four individuals, I had a lot to draw from and I tried to find my own style somewhere in between the four of them."

**Where was the new album recorded?**

"It was recorded in Los Angeles at the EastWest Studio on Sunset Boulevard – Studio B, which is supposed to be the magic room. I guess it holds true to its reputation, you know. I feel that we got a little magic going in the studio, and it was a really fun session."

**There's a Flying V on the cover of your album. Is that one of the guitars you used on the record?**

"Yes, that particular Flying V was a limited-edition called a Les Paul V because it has the headstock



PHOTO BY PEGGY SMITH





PHOTO BY ARNIE GOODMAN

markers and the block inlays of a Les Paul Custom, and it has the same neck as the Les Paul Custom mounted to a V body. So the neck and everything is Les Paul and the body is a Flying V. They made three of them at the time, so I played all three and I chose that one because it felt the way that I like a guitar to feel.”

### **You’ve had quite a long association with the Flying V, haven’t you?**

“Well, my first experience on the big stage was with Gary Moore in ’91. When I came to the UK back then, I came with a Stratocaster with Lace Sensor pickups and I was playing through a Fender Twin. When I saw Gary’s live show and saw what he used and heard the sound that he was getting, I was like, ‘Man, I’ve got to rethink this thing. I’ve got to come up with something a bit more powerful...’ When I came home, I wanted to get a humbucker guitar, but I’ve never liked to have things the same as everybody else.

“There was a Flying V hanging up in the music store and I quite like to play on the upper register of the guitar sometimes, and when I played the Flying V the neck was just totally accessible from the lowest note to the highest note. It had a heavier sound than my Stratocaster did, too. Also, I was sold on the fact that Albert King had played one and it was like I was paying tribute to him.”

“When I saw Gary Moore’s live show and heard the sound he was getting, I was like, ‘Man, I’ve got to come up with something a bit more powerful...’”

### **Was that the primary guitar that you used on the album?**

“Well, to be honest with you, I used a variety of different things on the album. I live in Michigan and I flew [to LA] and only carried one guitar, a Les Paul Deluxe, because it has mini-humbuckers and it’s quite diverse – it can sound like humbuckers, but it can also sound like a heavy single-coil guitar. Other than that I used Joe’s guitars, so I used one of his 355s, one of his Flying Vs and I also used one of his Stratocasters.”

### **What about amplifiers?**

“Well, Joe has an array of Dumble amplifiers. I used one of those on a couple of tracks, and other than that it was a cross between Tweed and [black-panel] Fender. I’ll give you an example: *Blues Without You (For Paul)* was played on Joe’s 355 and a Dumble – straight into the amp, I didn’t use any effects. On *Roadhouse Blues* I used my Deluxe Les Paul with a [Fulltone] OCD into a Tweed. So one or two of the tracks were cut with the OCD. That’s my choice for overdrive because it is not so saturated, but it penetrates and it’s got the right amount of bite for me.”

The Gibson Flying V’s fretboard accessibility was a winner for Larry, and in choosing this model he was also paying tribute to one of his favourite players, Albert King



## The Lineup



PHOTO BY ARNIE GOODMAN

McCray is relishing in releasing new music since his career reignited. "I'm having a ball," he says. "It's nice to have new material to play for the people"

### Let's talk a little bit about songwriting. Where do you draw your inspiration from?

"Life events, real things that happened in life, but I try to make it relatable. During the pandemic I had a lot of time to think about things. I had been on the road for three or four years with no break. And when the pandemic came around, it actually saved my life because I had run myself down so low. I was so tired from having to be out there all the time. So I took this downtime, I had a lot to think about. I had been thinking about these things forever, and I finally had a chance to get something on paper."

"When Joe and I got into the studio it was one of the best times that I ever had. It was so easy. He was very graceful and just let do my own thing"

### What's it like touring the new material?

"I'm having a ball. It's really nice to have new material to play for the people. With this project, I finally got somebody to help me produce the music that I was writing. I feel endeared by it, you know? With that being said, it was not work at all. It wasn't hard for me to do this. It's just music that I hear in my head,

you know? So it was really nice to have someone to help me produce it and finally make it come to life. That was a special thing for me."

### What's Joe like to work with in the studio?

"I had never got a chance to spend a whole lot of time with Joe. We had met years and years ago, and I had probably met him three or four times before going to the studio but only brief encounters. I felt that maybe it would be a little bit more stiff than what it was, you know? Joe seems to be a kind of a no-nonsense type of guy and I'm a big bullshitter; I like to have fun, I like to joke around. But when we got into the studio it was one of the best times that I ever had. It was so easy. He was very graceful and he was not a tyrant. He didn't try to say, 'Well, you need to do this and you need to do that,' he just kind of let me do my thing and tried to make me comfortable. I really enjoyed the session with him and, since then, I have had some time to spend with him socially and get to know him. I just love the guy, he's a cool young man, and I love that, I really do." [DM]



Larry McCray's new album, *Blues Without You*, is available now via KTBA Records. For more info, visit <http://larrymccraylive.com>



## Acoustic Guitars



22679 - Adam Black O-3 - Left Hand  
22680 - Adam Black S-2 - Natural Left Hand  
20599 - Art & Luthierie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue  
23012 - Atkin D37 Dreadnought Acoustic Sunburst  
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic  
23183 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Secondhand  
23184 - Atkin Historic Series The White Rice  
18703 - Atkin OM37 Relic Handmade Acoustic  
18340 - Atkin The Forty-Three J43, Aged Finish  
22873 - Blueridge Dreadnought (GP52201)  
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)  
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings  
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural  
13906 - Cort AD810-OPAD Series Acoustic Guitar  
23114 - Cort AD810E AD Black  
22106 - The Cort AF510M Mahogany  
23279 - Downa Master Series Custom Made, Used  
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury  
23127 - Faith FKM Mercury, Pre-Owned  
19662 - Faith FKNCD - Naked Neptune  
23293 - Faith FS Natural Saturn Dreadnought  
23422 - JWJ Dreadnought Guitar  
23423 - JWJ Orchestra Cutaway Guitar  
23424 - JWJ Orchestra Redwood Guitar  
23425 - JWJ Orchestra Standard Guitar  
23426 - JWJ Slope Shoulder Dreadnought  
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar  
21494 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel  
23092 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel  
23186 - Levin LA45F Acoustic Folk Guitar  
23188 - Levin LA65D Acoustic Dreadnought Guitar  
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought  
16760 - Martin D28  
22749 - Martin D28L Left-handed Acoustic Guitar  
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural  
5013 - Martin D41 Dreadnought, Natural  
23203 - Martin D42 Acoustic Guitar  
21788 - Martin D45  
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin  
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural  
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined  
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic  
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic  
13824 - Martin 00028 EC Eric Clapton, Natural  
18418 - Seagull S6 Original QIT  
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O  
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW Discovery Exotic  
22894 - Tanglewood TWOT2 Super Folk Acoustic  
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic  
13290 - Tanglewood TWJDS Dreadnought Acoustic  
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar  
4329 - Taylor 310 Acoustic Guitar in Natural  
23167 - Taylor Academy 12 Left-Handed Secondhand  
23057 - Terada Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand

## Electro Acoustic Guitars



18278 - Faith FVMBB Blood Moon Venus, Used  
21838 - Faith PJE Legacy Earth Cut/Electro FG1 HCE  
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst  
23107 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Surf Green  
23108 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Shell Pink  
20373 - Fender Newporter Player, Champagne  
23053 - Fender Newporter Player, Pink  
19259 - Fender Newporter Player, Ice Blue Satin  
21122 - Fender Nylon Competition Stripe Strap Silver  
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze  
23247 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst, Used  
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG  
22914 - Godin Multiac Nylon Encore Natural SG  
23365 - Gretsch G5022CWE Rancher Falcon  
15986 - Gretsch G5024E Rancher™ Dreadnought  
23036 - Guild M-240E Concert Shaped Electro, Nat  
22761 - Guild OM-140 LCE Natural Left Handed  
23037 - Guild OM-240E Orchestra Electro, Nat  
23027 - Guild OM-260CE Deluxe Burl Electro  
23424 - JWJ Orchestra Redwood Guitar  
23425 - JWJ Orchestra Standard Guitar  
19601 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar  
19069 - Kios F\_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic  
19065 - Kios T\_AE Electro Acoustic Travel  
19064 - Kios F\_AE Electro Acoustic  
22027 - LAG T118 ACE BROWN SHADOW  
19691 - Larrivee D03 Electro Acoustic  
22969 - Larrivee L03 Mahogany Recording Series  
23094 - Larrivee OM40 Koa Special Legacy Ltd  
22937 - Larrivee OMV40R Legacy Series  
22987 - Larrivee OMO3M/HM Recording Series  
23093 - Larrivee P03E Electro Acoustic Parlour  
23185 - Levin LA25TE Junior Jumbo with Fishman  
23187 - Levin LA45FCE Electro Acoustic  
23189 - Levin LA65DCE Electro Acoustic  
23191 - Levin LA85DCE Electro Acoustic Guitar  
23190 - Levin LA85FCE Electro Acoustic Guitar  
0000 - Maestro - 11 Models In Stock Now  
23198 - Martin 00012E Koa Electro Acoustic  
22752 - Martin 000CJR10EL Left-handed  
22477 - Martin 000-X2E Electro Acoustic Guitar  
23200 - Martin 00X2E Electro Acoustic Guitar  
16261 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior  
22577 - Martin D12E Koa Dreadnought Electro  
23115 - Martin D12E Sapele Dreadnought Electro  
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar  
22745 - Martin D16E Mahogany Electro Acoustic  
22746 - Martin D16E Ovalglo Electro Acoustic  
22748 - Martin D18E Electro Acoustic w/ Fishman  
21587 - Martin DC-X2E Rosewood Guitar  
22742 - Martin D-X1E Mahogany Guitar  
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic  
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Mahogany Guitar  
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar  
18517 - Martin OMC15ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar  
22751 - Martin 00012EL Koa Electro Acoustic Lefty  
22857 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic electro  
22747 - Martin 00017E Whiskey Sunset Electro  
23134 - Martin SC10E Electro Acoustic Guitar  
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar  
23197 - Martin SC-13E Guitar Special Burst  
23196 - Martin SC-13E Guitar Special  
21974 - Northwood M70 14 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic  
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway Acoustic  
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic  
19339 - Ovation 1771VH1 GC Glen Campbell Legend  
19341 - Ovation 2771STR-MB Main Street  
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite  
22952 - Ovation CE4412 12-String Mid-Depth Black  
23046 - Ovation CE44LX Lefty Celebrity Elite Plus  
23233 - Ovation Celeb Trad Plus E CS24P-FMYR  
19338 - Ovation 1771STG-ES  
22360 - Ozark Hawaiian Guitar  
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic  
20163 - D'Addario Planet Waves 10FT Guitar Lead  
19554 - RainSong APSE  
20594 - RainSong B4DR1000N2 Black Ice Series  
10094 - RainSong BI-OMH1000N2 Black Ice Graphite  
10038 - RainSong BHWS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite  
0000 - RainSong - 11 Models In Stock Now  
23135 - Rick Turner Renaissance Deuce Deluxe  
22934 - Seagull Coastline Spruce QIT, Used  
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty  
0000 - Tanglewood - 21 Models In Stock Now  
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon  
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.  
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone  
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS  
23169 - Yamaha CPX700 II 12-String Electro Used  
23435 - Yamaha FGC-TA TransAcoustic Cutaway, BS  
19602 - Yamaha LLTA TransAcoustic Vintage Tint  
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon  
15519 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar, Natural

## Classical Guitars



4965 - Asturias Standard Model  
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE  
23100 - Cordoba C5-CE Lefty  
22771 - Cordoba Protégé C1M 1/2 Size Size Classical  
22769 - Cordoba C1M Full Size Classical Guitar  
21880 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar  
20441 - Fishman AGX094 Passive Undersaddle  
20440 - Fishman AGX125 Passive Undersaddle  
17847 - Hiscoc LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical  
17846 - Hiscoc LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case  
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical  
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar  
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar  
23306 - Lag CC88CE Oodania Classical Cutaway  
0000 - Mendota - 24 Models In Stock Now  
22738 - Raimundo 146 Classical Guitar  
22754 - Raimundo 660 E Electro Acoustic Classical  
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top  
22062 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Spruce Top  
15239 - Ramirez 2N0WE Classical Guitar  
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar  
6914 - Ramirez Estudio 1 Classical Guitar  
22060 - Ramirez Estudio 2 Classical Guitar  
22061 - Ramirez Estudio 3 Classical Guitar  
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar  
22063 - Ramirez SFR Classical Guitar with Case  
0000 - Stagg - 13 Models In Stock Now  
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural  
22785 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon  
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon  
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

## Ukuleles



19699 - Aloha Concert with Engraved Soundhole  
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert In Mahogany  
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Uke (GR35048B)  
20533 - Ashbury AU-10 Concert Resonator Ukulele  
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano  
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag  
14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBU1 Banjo Ukulele  
19675 - B & M UBU2 Banjo Uke Open Back  
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele  
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele  
22887 - Baton Rouge VX1/B8 Eight String Baritone  
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke  
19915 - Elvis Hanauna Mahogany Soprano Uke  
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Uke In Mahog.  
23292 - Enya Nova U Pro Tenor Ukulele, Black  
23294 - Enya Nova U Pro Tenor Ukulele, White  
0000 - Factory Prototype - 5 Models In Stock Now  
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black  
20438 - Fishman AG0UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)  
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele Spruce Top  
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Uke Banjo In Amethyst  
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia  
19306 - Kai KS10 10 Series Sop Ukulele, Mahogany  
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano  
18524 - Kiwaya KSU1 Long Neck Soprano Uke  
22721 - Kiwaya KTU1 Mahogany Student Tenor Uke  
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE\_A)  
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE\_DAE)  
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE\_AE)  
22456 - Kios Full Carbon Electro Acoustic Uke  
22310 - Kios Full Carbon Uke  
0000 - Levin - 30 Models In Stock Now  
16835 - Maestro Island Series Concert Uke  
22386 - Maestro Island Tenor Ukulele UT-KO-CSB-K  
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass  
23431 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Blue  
23432 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Green  
23429 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Light Blue  
23248 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Red  
23430 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Yellow  
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag  
12224 - Martin C1K Koa Concert Ukulele  
23450 - Martin M600 Soprano/Concert Uke Strings  
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele  
19884 - Martin Romas MRD1F Soprano Uke With Bag  
19896 - Martin Romas MRD2F Concert Uke With Bag  
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag  
23195 - Martin T1 Uke Street Master Tenor Uke  
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele  
19892 - No Name Concert Ukulele In Mahog. Inc Bag  
13679 - Nukulele "Abbotts Dig" Bottle Ukulele  
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele  
23449 - Octopus Academy Soprano Uke UK205-DB  
0000 - + Huge Stock Of Ohana, Risa & Tanglewood

## 12 Strings



18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String  
22845 - Eko Ranger XII VR EQ Natural 12  
22846 - Eko Ranger XII VR Honey Burst 12-String  
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String  
23151 - Gretsch G5422G-12 Electromatic  
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar  
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String  
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String  
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural  
23169 - Yamaha CPX700 II 12. Electro Used

## Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"  
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"  
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk4  
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8"  
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60  
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"  
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8"  
22776 - AER Compact Slope 60.4  
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"  
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp  
22788 - Acus One For Strings 5T  
22871 - Acus One For Strings 8  
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp  
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp  
22851 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT Acoustic Amp  
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp  
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo  
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"  
19481 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30  
20163 - D'Addario Planet Waves 10FT Guitar Lead  
4976 - Roland AC3330W - 1x5"  
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood  
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier  
14371 - MOBILEAC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp  
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)  
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

## Travel Guitars



21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel  
21122 - Fender Nylon Competition Stripe Strap Silver  
21125 - Fender Weightless Monogram Strap White  
19065 - Kios T\_AE Electro Acoustic Travel  
22025 - LAG Travel KAE Travel Guitar  
16261 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior  
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin  
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar  
18366 - Tanglewood TWE Mini Koa  
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

## Electro Acoustic Guitars



19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024  
21766 - Breedlove Arista Concert Nat Shadow CE  
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina  
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert  
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel  
15886 - Breedlove Stage Black Magic Concert Used  
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar  
23263 - Cort GA-MY Bevel Electro Acoustic Guitar  
23262 - Cort SFX-Myrtlewood Brown Gbss  
23261 - Cort SFX-Myrtlewood Natural  
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used  
22850 - Eko Ranger VI VR Acoustic 6-String, Nat  
22848 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String  
22849 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String  
10868 - Epiphone Hummingbird Pro, Faded Cherry  
22733 - Faith FECVL Eclipse Venus Electro Lefty  
16599 - Faith FKSE Naked Saturn Electro Acoustic  
12358 - Faith FKV/Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro  
22507 - Faith FNCEBMB Blood Moon Neptune  
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Electro Cognac  
22728 - Faith FPVOG Nexus Venus Cut/E Cognac  
22726 - Faith FPVCKL Nexus Venus Cop Black Lefty  
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Cutaway  
16783 - Faith FVMBB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway

## Tenor & Baritone Guitars



20534 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar, Spruce Top  
8851 - Ashbury AT-24 Tenor Guitar  
20688 - D'Addario EJ66 Tenor Guitar Strings  
18950 - Yairi YBR2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar  
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone





# Back To School

This month, **Adam Goldsmith** gets a short-notice gig in a less-practised genre – it's time to do some homework and get seriously cramming...

I've always felt the biggest musical gains are to be made when a player finds themselves slightly out of their comfort zone... And to a certain extent, that's what happened to me this past week, as I found myself in the unexpected position of standing in (or 'depping', as it's colloquially known) for the legendary Paul Jackson Jr for a run of gigs at Soho's PizzaExpress Jazz Club. Having tested positive for Covid, Paul was unable to fly to London, but the gig was originally billed as a double header with the equally legendary Eric Marienthal on saxophone. So it ended up being Eric and myself, with Phil Mulford on bass guitar, Jack Pollitt on drums and Neil Angille on keyboard completing the rhythm section.

These guys are all very comfortable playing jazz, and although I've definitely got jazz influences, I wouldn't think of myself as a specialist jazz soloist. In my opinion, if you really want to be good at jazz on guitar, you have to completely dedicate yourself to that particular art and do little else. There are the odd exceptions, of course – Brent Mason, Larry Carlton and, obviously,

"In my opinion, if you really want to be good at jazz on guitar, you have to completely dedicate yourself to that particular art and do little else"

Paul Jackson Jr himself spring to mind – but, for me, there's enough to concentrate on being a commercial session musician who plays a multitude of styles, rather than being an expert in one genre.

Anyway, here I was, with three days' notice, alongside one of the finest jazz saxophone exponents from the past 30 years. Eric shared mp3 recordings of the original album versions of the tunes along with the charts, and I got down to doing some homework...

## Study Time

The best way for me to learn things quickly in this kind of situation is to first listen to the music in conjunction with the charts, making sure not to pick up the guitar straight away. The temptation to noodle over the top is too great, and you end up missing potentially essential musical details. Only after I've listened along with the charts a couple of times will I pick up the guitar.

If time is of the essence, as it was in this situation, I'll make notes as to which tunes require the most attention, which in this case involved a couple of tricky melodies on guitar. I'll also note important solo sections with any potentially hazardous chord changes. I often find a good strategy is to import the mp3 recordings into Logic or Pro Tools, and put any tricky sections on loop, then play them till I'm bored and they are internalised as much as possible. Luckily, all I had on this week was my West End evening shows of *The Drifters Girl*, so I had a decent amount of time to concentrate on this process.

I then set about putting a little 'gig' pedalboard together for the occasion, as the only one I currently have set up is an enormous studio 'board, which would have taken up too much room. The sounds I needed were really only variations on gain and a touch of delay. My Analog Man King Of Tone overdrive is my go-to pedal for most things, but one side of the pedal has stopped working so I had to look elsewhere.

I have loads of drive pedals, but I decided to take a punt on a new Fulltone Full-Drive3, which I tried in the shop and it immediately felt good. For this type of work, I like to have the volume pedal after the overdrive and before the delays, so I can alter the intensity of the drive while I'm playing, instead of just turning the volume down on an already overdriven sound. I then placed a Boss GE-7, purely used as a solo and midrange boost, before my Boss DD-200 delay and that was it, all on a Pedaltrain Jr in a gig-friendly soft case.

This is all based around the concept that gain and volume can be altered for various sections of a song without having to take my hands off the guitar or bend down mid-tune. It seems to have worked well so far, and we have three nights left to play. For now, I'm off to do more practice... **G**

Watch and learn:  
Adam follows the lead  
of the legendary Eric  
Marienthal on sax



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM GOLDSMITH





# All That Jazz

**Neville Marten's** conversion to unexpected gear continues, with a guitar that goes in and out of fashion but has never been more popular

**T**here's something about certain guitars that represents ultimate cool. Yet often their use seems to be confined to genre-specific styles and looks. Witness the glorious 'rockabilly' Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman and White Falcon. And another instrument I'll get to in a minute.

It's always been my totally unscientific contention that rock and blues guitarists never turned onto these stunning-looking instruments because their complicated controls might lead to confusion in the heat of the action. You can even turn some guitars completely off with the idle moving of a switch, and that's a no-no to the player at the apex of their show-stopping solo. And changing a broken string on a Bigsby, mid-gig? Hence those ergonomic Gibsons and Fenders ruling the blues-rock roost for so long.

I remember criticising a PRS Singlecut in a *Guitarist* review, since Paul had decided the Gibson four-way control layout could be bettered by revolving it so the two neck-pickup controls were at the front and the bridge pair at the back, rather than Gibson's decades-old method of neck knobs on top and bridge below. Yes, it may be more visually logical, but guitarists have been intuitively switching the Gibson way since time immemorial, so 'improving' it will only confuse.

I'm pretty sure I recall a Gary Moore video where he sported a fabulous White Falcon (or was it the even more bonkers Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster?). But I don't think I ever saw him playing it live. Likewise Pete Townshend, whose fabulous open A chord in The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again* was played on a Gretsch 6120 through a Fender Bandmaster amp. What? Surely it was Les Paul and Hi-Watt? No, it wasn't. To be fair, Pete did dally with the 6120 and indeed Duo-Jet live. So perhaps it's down to publications such as this to rid Gretsch guitars of their 'rockabilly only' stigma.

And we can overcome their idiosyncrasies. Fender once kindly longterm loaned me a glorious Gretsch 6120 in classic orange. I used it for two full Marty Wilde tours and adored it, once I got used to it. In fact, a shot of me playing it live is one of the rare personal pics that I like.

## Offset Attraction

And now to that 'other' guitar. Actually, it's two, but for my purposes just the one. Yes, I'm talking about Fender's staggering-looking Jazzmaster (and Jaguar). Since selling my Murphy Goldtop the cash has been burning a hole in my pocket, and the 'worm' of a custom colour Jazz has been burrowing away in my feeble, GAS-fuelled brain.

The Jazz and Jag fall in and out of favour with astonishing regularity – witness surf music, indie, grunge and so on – but have never figured in the

mainstream. These days, though, their radical offset outline is the basis for so many 'tribute' models. Just yesterday I purchased an unused Lake Placid Blue one with white 'guard and a Harrier jump jet's worth of switches and controls. It was a custom-ordered Closet Classic and also has the upgraded Mastery bridge, since these guitars are notorious for tuning issues and strings popping out of their saddles. We have another Marty tour starting as you read this, and this will be my electric mainstay. The band will be playing *Diamonds*, Jet Harris and Tony Meehan's post-Shadows chart-

"Since selling my Murphy Goldtop, the 'worm' of a custom colour Jazz has been burrowing away in my feeble, GAS-fuelled brain"

topper (with Jimmy Page on acoustic). It's in D and Jet played it on a Fender Bass VI, but we do it in E and I reckon the Jazz's neck pickup should have that perfect combination of plummy and twang. I'm picking it up soon, so wish me luck!

On a final note, this month I semi-retire as *Guitar Techniques* mag's editor. I'll stay working behind the scenes for *GT* and may well be doing even more for *Guitarist*, the magazine that's been dear to my heart since I began working on it as staff writer just a year after its launch, in 1985. As Larry Carlton once played, it's like *It Was Only Yesterday*... See you next month. 

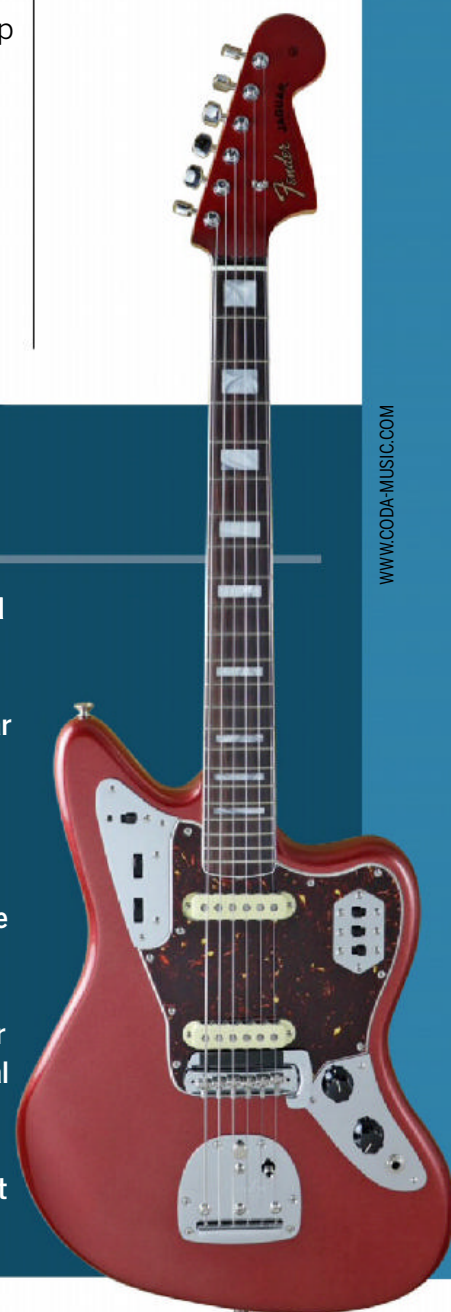
## GAS OF THE MONTH

Ultimate offset?

**What?** Fender 60th Anniversary Jaguar, Mystic Dakota Red

**Where seen?** [www.coda-music.com](http://www.coda-music.com) **Price?** £2,449

Here's that 'other' Fender offset. Doesn't it look spectacular in this new custom colour? The Jaguar – with its shorter 610mm (24-inch) scale length, extra metal plate for those 'auxiliary' rhythm tones, and in this iteration bound neck with pearloid block inlays on a round-lam rosewood 'board – looks jaw-dropping. This one (like my Jazz) has the matching painted headstock, and at its launch in 1962 was Fender's premium offering. Several dealers have these in stock, but Coda currently boasts a fabulous array of Fender offsets, so if this one didn't float your boat there are several that might. These guitars don't come cheap, and several of Coda's sit way north of four grand. But cripes, they do look stunning and sound very different to the omnipresent Strat and Tele. And a change, as they say, is as good as a rest.







# Family Tree

This month **Alex Bishop** celebrates the variety and beauty of walnut, his favourite tonewood

Without a doubt, one of the great privileges of being a guitar maker is having the opportunity to work with many of the best woods in the world. Given the limitations of exporting tropical hardwoods in recent years, the guitar market now accepts a much broader range of tonewoods than ever before, offering up the promise of a host of new sounds and exciting possibilities.

The great benefit of running a small workshop is getting to spend longer with each instrument than you ever would in a large production facility. This really gives the luthier time to work with a particular timber and to become well acquainted with it. Working with

“The pleasing aroma of black walnut takes me back to my days at university when I was planing the sides of my first acoustic guitars”

predominantly hand tools gives the maker a tactile connection with the wood, nurturing a bond that a machine or power tool rarely promotes.

As an advocate of alternative tonewoods, the storage racks in my workshop are stuffed with a curious variety of timbers: cherry, yellow cedar, bog oak, zebrano and pear to name a few. Those who have been reading my words here for some time will know that I have been collecting wood to represent (in guitar form) the Tree Council's top 50 trees in the UK. As a result I have boards of sequoia, cedar of Lebanon and yew ready in

The beautiful figured grain of walnut has a striking visual impact and the timber itself is a versatile material, both as a body and neck wood

the wings for future projects. Blessed with this array of interesting lumber I am often asked: what is my favourite wood?

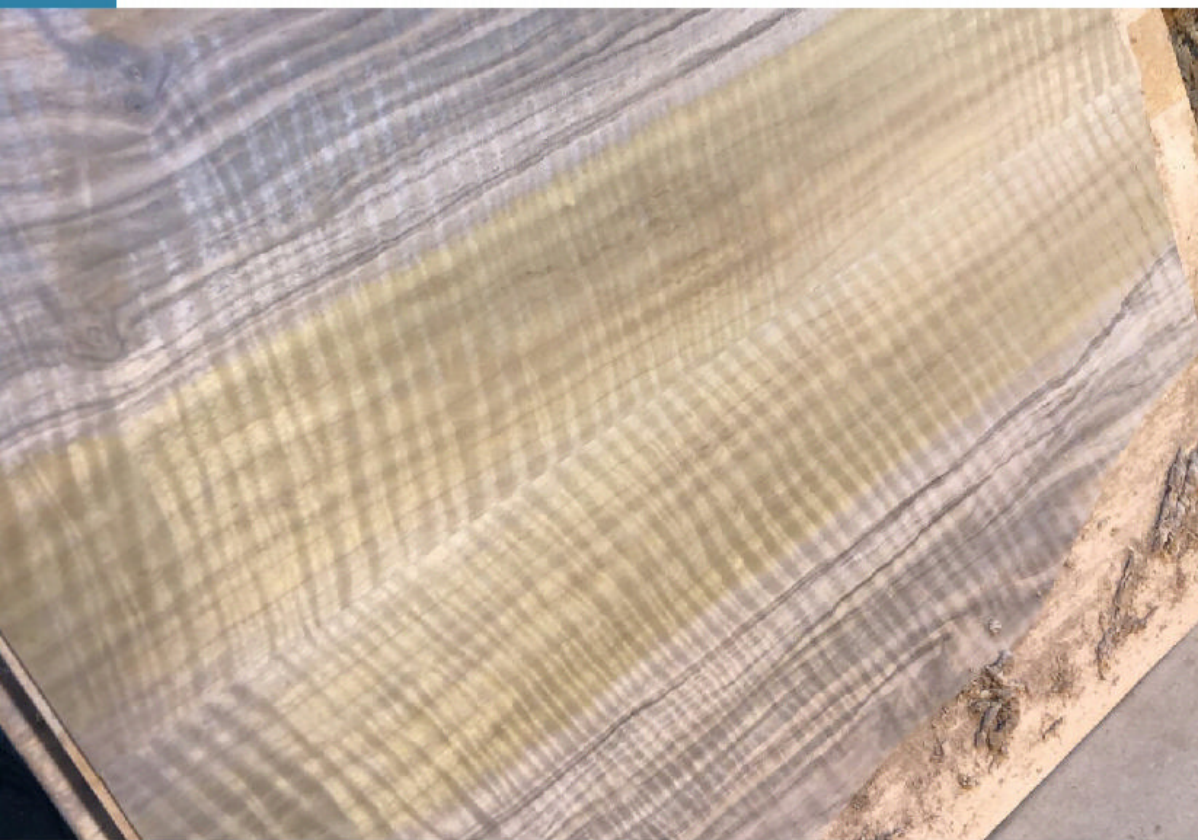
For me, there's no competition, it has to be walnut. With at least three varieties – English, black and claro – walnut has firmly secured its place as a favourite tonewood among luthiers and players alike for not just the back and sides of a guitar but also necks, binding, fingerboards, and even the occasional soundboard. George Lowden is probably more responsible than any other luthier for bringing walnut into the spotlight, though I imagine most guitar makers have been drawn in by its beauty and versatility at some point. It can take on a striking three-dimensional appearance with stunningly figured grain, or grow straight and unassuming. The colours range between deep browns, mossy greens, vibrant reds and purples.

It is also a very compliant timber to work with so I often recommend it to my guitar building students as an excellent choice for a first guitar. It readily planes, scrapes and sands to a velvety smooth finish without difficulty, and at the right thickness bends without protest. It glues readily and takes finish well; even an amateur French polisher will discover that they can achieve a deep mirrored finish quickly, and it looks (and feels) sublime under a simple coat of oil. To this day, the pleasing aroma of black walnut takes me back to my days at university when I was planing the sides of my first acoustic guitars.

## Sweet Spot

My own experience of the sound of walnut guitars is that they tend to occupy the sweet spot in the middle of the typical traditional guitar woods. Never quite as glassy-clear as rosewood, walnut nonetheless possesses some of the woody, bluesy 'grit' that mahogany guitars tend to project. It's an earthy sound that's versatile enough to be in use for everything from Gypsy jazz to pop music. The availability of straight-grain sections also makes it a great neck wood, stable enough to hold up under the tension of the strings while offering up something visually different to the usual mahogany or maple favourites.

So it is with much anticipation that I embark on two new walnut guitar builds this week. One is an OM-size acoustic with a flawless Western red cedar top, a tried and tested combination of UK-grown tonewoods that never disappoints. The other is a fanned-fret Gypsy jazz guitar pairing a figured set of English walnut with a cedar of Lebanon soundboard and neck, and forming an official start to my '50 Trees' project. With a little bit of luck I'm confident these two instruments will celebrate the unparalleled natural beauty of this impressive tonewood. **G**





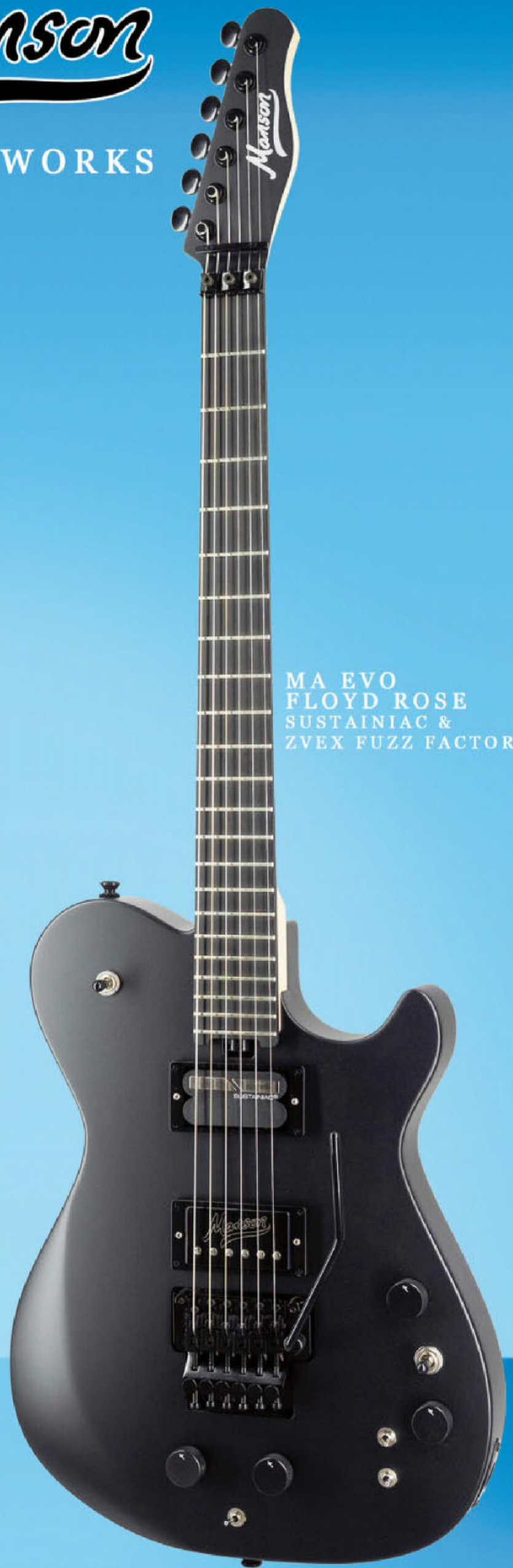
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# Time To Change Pickups?

You don't like your tone... but will new pickups help? **Jamie Dickson** asks Bare Knuckle Pickups' Tim Mills how to find a set that hits the spot

**I**n some ways, it's surprising that so many players reach for new pickups when it's time for a tone upgrade. For example, it's tricky to audition different pickups to see which you like best before you buy, and this can make buying pickups a bit of a stab in the dark – good ones ain't cheap and you aren't guaranteed to like the end result if you do 'upgrade'.

So, is there anything you can do to ensure that all-important upgrade is a success? Who better to ask than Tim Mills, founder of highly respected British pickup maker Bare Knuckle Pickups. Tim has decades of experience voicing pickups to suit everyone from old-time blues guitarists to bleeding-edge metal artists, so he's perfectly placed to offer good advice on this score.

"When is the time to change pickups? Well, the simple answer is 'when you want to,'" Tim says, with a chuckle. "But it's not something that you generally *have* to do. Changing pickups is one of the quickest ways you

can alter the tone of your guitar without buying a new instrument, so it's nearly always the first port of call that people make when they're dissatisfied with the sound of their guitar. They want to see if they can change it in some way, rather than changing other parts of their rig – without buying pedals or changing their amp. They want to change the core sound before it hits any of that, and that's going to be the pickup."

A common story is that a player buys a new guitar with the pickups that were fitted at the factory. They play it for a while, enjoy it, but eventually start wondering if they could squeeze just a little more sonic performance from it. For while factory-fitted pickups are generally decent, by their very nature they tend to be mass-produced, machine-wound items that are built to a spec that keeps the guitar competitively priced. That's not to say such pickups are bad, but fairly often there's room for improvement or customisation to better suit the player's needs. Tim Mills is a huge advocate of the benefits of hand-wound pickups – but what advantages do they really offer, in his view?

"What is the difference between bog-standard machine-wound, OEM mass-produced pickups and hand-wounds? Well, hand-wound coils will always have a

Hand-wound pickups, such of those made by Bare Knuckle, offer a clearer, more dynamic alternative to mass-produced units, says Tim Mills

"When is the time to change pickups? Well, the simple answer is 'when you want to' – it's not something that you generally *have* to do"







more dynamic feel. They will always sound clearer, too, and more defined. Some people say there's more air in it. I tend to think of 'air' as relating to dynamic feel, which is kind of a headroom thing. The more headroom you have in the pickup, the more dynamic it will feel – which means if you pick hard, the volume increases; if you ease off, it cleans it up. So, you know, you can really control what you're saying through your pickups. So that would be the biggest thing."

### Feel The Noise

While a general increase in expressiveness is always welcome, most people have specific tonal goals in mind when they upgrade their pickups, which usually involve altering how much output their pickups produce.

"When most people want to change pickups it boils down to an output issue, such as, 'The pickups are too weak. I can't seem to get enough out of them,'" Tim says, "Or, at the other end of the spectrum, 'These are just way too hot for me. Everything seems to be very compressed and I've got no dynamic range or very little dynamic range in there... I can't get the clarity and depth of tone I want.' The first port of call is to deal with the output issue and then try to ascertain exactly where that player's coming from. What are they looking for?"

Tim continues: "I would conjecture that in at least two-thirds of situations, people are looking for more output. The majority of guitars that are marketed... guitar companies will put a pickup in there that will do

"The more headroom you have in the pickup, the more dynamic it will feel – you pick hard, the volume increases, you ease off, it cleans it up"

During his career as a session guitarist, Tim Mills experienced first-hand the wide range of tones necessary to cover a spectrum of playing styles. This breadth of experience informed his approach with Bare Knuckle, a company that takes pride in its handmade pickups

most things well. It has to be very much a middle-ground pickup, and so they'll err on the cautious side when it comes to output."

Tim explains that once this key question of output is settled, you are ready to make choices regarding the sound and feel you want from your new pickups.

"We've ascertained that, in this situation, we're looking for more output from the pickups. Then it's a case of what you're actually going to play. What are the applications? You can be a country player and want more output, and you can be a rock player and want more output. Those two applications translate into different voicings on pickups. That's where we really start to dial down into the nitty-gritty – and that's where the choice comes in, the wire choice, the type of pickup even. Because it could be you have humbuckers on your guitar, but you're actually looking for more of a single-coil type tone. It's possible to wire humbuckers in different ways in parallel so they sound more single-coil-like. But you could also make a change to a humbucker-sized P-90, which is, of course, a single coil and is a good halfway-house between a Strat/Tele single coil and a humbucker. There are different routes there as well. There's a lot to be explored."





Don't let preconceptions or hasty first impressions cloud your judgement – you might be surprised at what a seemingly unlikely pickup match may offer your sound

Here, however, lies a classic problem that's often encountered when choosing new pickups. You can read all the reviews, forum posts and marketing material you like, but how can you be sure you are headed towards the right set of pickups? Tim advises, if possible, to get in touch with the pickup maker. Talk to them about what you want – their experience and knowledge really can make all the difference, and many firms will be generous with their advice if they can spare the time.

"The most important thing is to build up an interaction with the pickup company you're interested in or talk to a range of different companies and see who you relate to best in terms of their understanding of what you're looking for," Tim says. "It's important to supply them with as much information as you can, and not just about the guitar – you should get across what the guitar is made of, what bridge it has, the scale length, what tuning you use, and what string gauge you tend to prefer. Also, make sure you tell them a little bit about the rest of your rig – what's being plugged into? It's also useful to describe what type of music you play and the sorts of tones you reference in your playing. All this information gives the person on the other side a better chance of diagnosing the situation and recommending pickups that will achieve your tonal goals."

"There's a lot to be had by getting out of the comfort zone. When I talk about pickups to customers, I try not to say, 'This is the one for you'"

## Outside The Box

At this point, Tim offers an important piece of advice. Before talking to the pickup maker, he urges players not to develop preconceptions about what will work best for them. Sometimes, he says, the pickup that will work best for you won't turn out to be that 'low-wind PAF replica' you envisaged, for example. And you might just get a pleasant surprise if you branch out a bit.

"There's a lot to be had by getting out of the comfort zone," Tim says. "So whenever I talk about pickups to customers, I try not to say, 'This is the one for you.' I try to present alternatives and sometimes suggest something they might not have considered before."

"I remember one player I did some work for many years ago had a Les Paul that he swore blind had an old PAF in it," he continues. "It had a particular tone he was used to and loved and would I be able to replicate it? This was in my early days, and before said pickup arrived I had a chance to play the guitar it was in – and I must admit it didn't feel like any PAF I'd ever played. So the pickup arrived and I popped it open, and it wasn't a PAF at all. It was a three-output ceramic-powered humbucker! But I could see exactly why this player was enjoying it – it did produce a very flattering sort of pick-dynamic. But it certainly wasn't what he thought it was."

Tim adds that the highly individual way we all play and use the guitar means assumptions about what pickup might suit us best can be thrown out of kilter by the practical realities of how each of us makes music. Consider whether you play with your fingers or a pick,





and how the use of complex effects rigs to control pedals and amp channels could affect your choices.

"Some players are big volume-pot players, so they get clean tones through loading back the pickup with the pots," he says. "They'll be rolling the pot down, getting to an edge-of-break-up sort of tone, and then when they solo, they wind the wick up and let that extra output hit the amp and drive it that way. That's a different playing technique to people who don't ever touch their volume and do everything through patch changes. So that's another thing you need to get inside: how do you play? Because you will need different pickups to get that feel out of the guitar."

Again, Tim says a trusted relationship with a pickup maker can help players navigate the maze and get to exactly the sound and performance that suits their style best. Before we leave, I ask Tim if there are any pickups in the Bare Knuckle product line that have the potential to defy expectations and end up being loved by guitarists very different to their intended market?

"A pickup that constantly surprises people is the ubiquitous Nailbomb," Tim says. "Its name sounds like it's just going to be thrash-metal heaven. But it does this really stacked, chewy sort of blues-rock tone as well. If you can get people past the name and get them to try it, they'll come back and go, 'Damn, that's just an absolutely incredible pickup.' That's the first one that comes to mind. I have other more esoteric examples, but that one typifies it. I voiced that pickup around a very organic, heavy metal tone. But into the right amp and with the right players, it will do a lot, lot more than just that." 

Unsure whether a particular pickup will give you the sound you're after? Talk to the experts. The pickup makers should be able guide your choices with the help of info on your rig, playing style and preferred music

## THREE TO GET READY

A trio of surprising, impressive pickups



### Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbucker From £89.99

Tim Mills introduced the Boot Camp series of pickups for players who want all the stellar tone and hand-wound performance you're used to from Bare Knuckle but in an affordable 'off-the-peg' range. The PAF-like Old Guards are classic mid-output 'buckers with vintage roots and they sounded absolutely cracking in a PJD Carey Elite we reviewed. No frills here – but no compromises, either.



### Cream T Billy F Gibbons Whiskerbuckers £399 (per set)

Using a proprietary scanning technique to map the tonal characteristics of the PAFs on Billy Gibbons' legendary 'Pearly Gates' 1959 Les Paul, Thomas Nilsen of Cream T has created an extraordinary set of pickups that he says captures the sonics of the famous originals with unprecedented accuracy. They sounded jaw-droppingly good fitted to (an admittedly also superb) Patrick James Eggle Macon Single Cut we reviewed not long ago. No snakeoil here, just stunning tone.



### Lollar Pickups P-90 Dogear \$110

Perhaps more so than other pickups, P-90s can either be a ticket to tone heaven or blocky-sounding mediocrity. The hardest thing for a good P-90 to achieve is to balance warmth and fullness with poise and definition. Lollar's Dogear P-90s (which we enjoyed tremendously when we reviewed Eastman's Casino-like T64/V-GB, which was fitted with them) proved crisp yet warm, with that broad, ear-pleasing usability that seems built into all the Lollars we've tried.





# Cluster Chords

**Richard Barrett** explains how to apply consecutive scale tones to six strings in a real-world scenario

A cluster is the name of a chord that contains at least three consecutive scale tones, and these may well be dissonant – a semitone apart, for example. As you may expect, there are many ways to approach this concept and they involve a systematic approach to harmonised three-note triads. This is great on piano, but on a non-linear instrument such as the guitar, these methods of study – useful though they are – can leave you wondering how to apply the concepts in a ‘real world’ scenario.

That’s where these chords come in. I have included examples with as little as four and up to all six strings. Admittedly, the open strings have played a large part here, as I wanted the chords to sound complete without any other accompaniment. However, as with so many chord shapes, omitting the root or avoiding open strings can render shapes movable to any key – but that’s a subject for another time. I hope you enjoy these chords and that they inspire a new idea or two! **G**

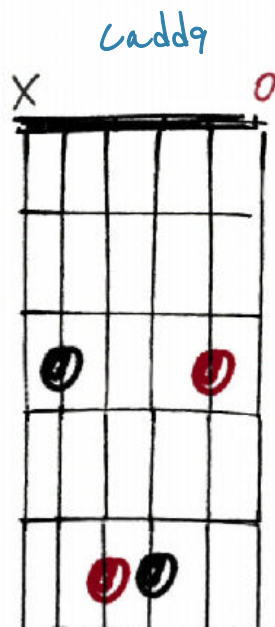
**Right:** Steve Hackett often used cluster chords on acoustic guitar with Genesis in the early 70s



PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON/GETTY IMAGES

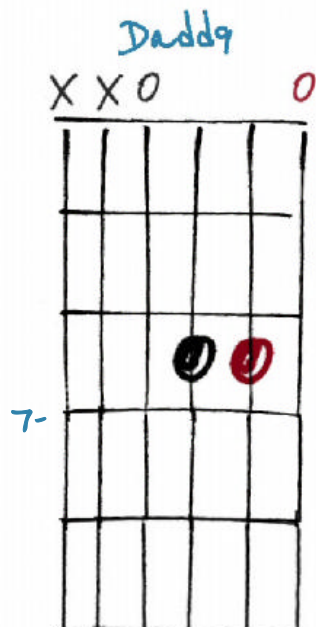
## Example 1

This Cadd9 lays the three consecutive C major scale tones out very clearly in ascending order on the third, second and first strings. The root and 5th are where you would find them in any powerchord, on the A and D strings respectively. Not the most immediately comfortable shape but well worth the effort.



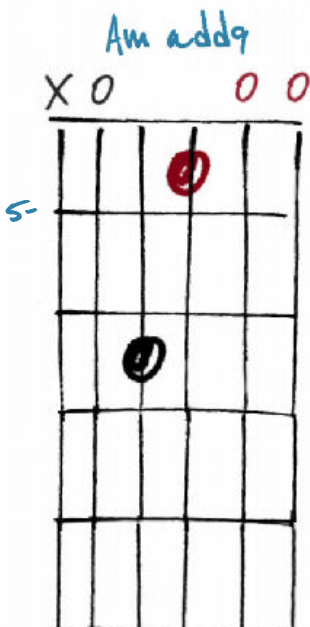
## Example 2

This Dadd9 features the three D major scale tones out of sequence as you rake across the top three strings: the third string gives us the root (D) at the 7th fret, with the 2nd (E – the add9 in the context of the chord) on the open first string. The 7th fret on the B string gives us the major 3rd (F#), while the open 4th string gives us another root (D).



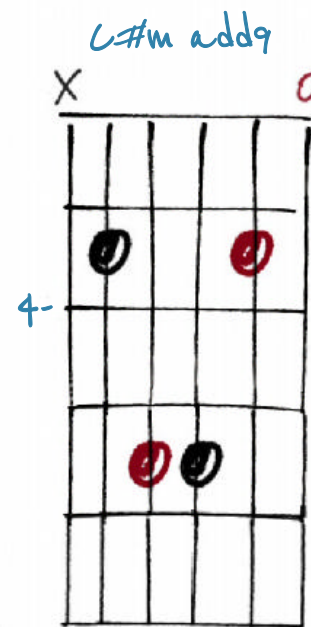
## Example 3

This Amin add9 juggles the order of the consecutive A minor scale tones (like Ex 2). This doesn't mean they're no longer consecutive in terms of intervals, but as you rake across the string they appear out of scale sequence. Pick the fifth, fourth, second and third strings in that order to hear the notes rearranged back into scale order!



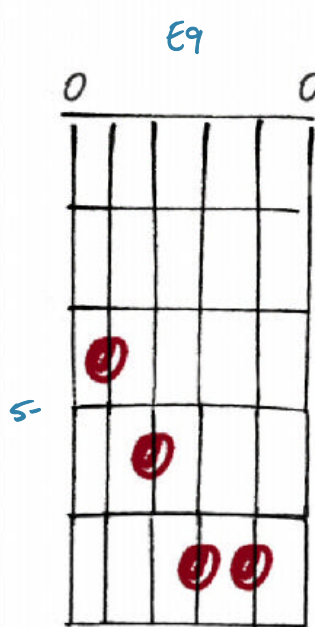
## Example 4

This C#min add9 is a stretch, but we get the three consecutive C# minor scale tones in ascending order on the third, second and first strings in that order. You can approximate ‘Nashville’-tuned arpeggios/overdubs such as Pink Floyd’s *Hey You* with shapes like this, plus some early Genesis-style prog.



## Example 5

This E9 chord features D, E and F# on the third, first and second strings in that order – out of scale sequence as you rake across the strings. Some might call this a fragment of the E Mixolydian scale (E F# G# A B C# D E), but you could think of them as the first three notes of the D major scale, too – just a hint at how you might be inspired to try some other wacky harmonies!





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# Feedback

**Your letters** to the *Guitarist* editor.

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## STAR LETTER

### LOCAL HEROES



I live in a small rural village outside Chester and play in a covers band locally. Our last gig was for a small beer festival, raising money for the local primary school in the village community centre. We had a crowd of 200-plus and ended the night with calls for an encore, happy punters and great feedback.

There are a number of similar villages nearby, each with their own band, playing to a local crowd for their own particular good causes. Our band, The Warning Flower, formed around eight years ago when a bunch of parents got together to 'do it ourselves' when the fundraising ball could not afford to hire someone to play. We decided to dust off our instruments (my guitar had been gathering dust for 10 years) and have a go. We soon had a setlist together, got our heads down and, with the support of a close-knit community, realised we could entertain the troops and have a great time to boot. Since then we've been asked to play at many local events and even have a small following. I cannot vouch for the scene in towns and cities, but there is a thriving scene in the local communities up and down the country.

If any of your readers are vaguely curious, then I'd recommend gathering up some like-minded people, finding a good cause and making your own local scene. You'd be surprised how people respond, it's great for the community and can raise money for good causes, too.

**Steve Scott, via email**

Thanks, Steve, and bravo for getting a gang together to entertain your local community and raise a bit of cash for a good cause. With all the fascinating aspects of guitar, from tone-honing to vintage instruments, it's easy to forget that the best part of playing guitar is sharing music with others. During lockdown, it was also easy to forget performing to an audience is more than just passive consumption of music – at its best, it's a wonderful two-way street where the crowd enjoying the music brings out the best in the musicians and everyone comes away happy. That special interaction is a little bit likelier to happen in close-knit communities, too, where there's no ice to be broken and there's every incentive to make the most of musical entertainment that's often hard to come by in out-of-the-way villages and the like.

We love your initiative and agree that it's something lots of community bands can get involved in, whether it's to mark a special occasion or just to get people dancing on a Friday night. Congrats on being this month's Star Letter winner.

### LEAD ROLE

Thank you for the interesting article on cables in issue 485. Personally, I have three main requirements a cable needs to address: reliability, permanent low noise, and tonal preservation. I have used both co-ax and Shielded Twisted Pair (STP) cables for guitar and find STP designs far better at meeting my key requirements. They last an incredibly long time (mine are all more than 15 years old) and are consequently very positive for the bank balance and environment. In today's world Greta seems far more important than Jimi or Leo.

**Neil Ramsden, via email**

Thanks, Neil – interesting to hear what you've had your fave results with, though STP cable is unorthodox in this role. Reliability is rightly at the top of your list, however, as there's nothing more annoying than a cable that either crackles or, worse, cuts out unexpectedly during a gig. One extra thing we'd add to your list is a cable's resistance to tangling. Orange, the amp maker, released an excellent cable a few years back that had a braided sheath of non-stick synthetic material as its outermost layer and it never once got in rubbery knots in our gigbag – a big plus.

### FLYING THE FLAG

I really enjoyed the Marshall article in the latest *Guitarist* mag. I thought I would share a funny story. My band, St John's Wood Affair, played a gig at the Lexington in London a few years ago. Afterwards, a lady came up to me and said she worked for Marshall. She asked if my Marshall amp was from the Custom Shop, as it had the flag of the Union on the front. She was a little disappointed when I told her it was actually a tea towel I had stuck on there!

**Keith Smart, via email**



Keith Smart's Marshall amp flies the flag (or should we say towel) for UK music



Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!

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That's true British ingenuity there, Keith! Custom Shop eat your heart out. And if there's ever an unfortunate beer spillage on stage you have an instant solution to hand...

## A STRAT IS BORN

I have always been a tinkerer when it comes to guitars, but just before lockdown I suddenly had the urge to move to the next stage and build one from scratch. As a base, I bought a cheap (but solid) Chinese Strat for £30 off the net and, using online videos, taught myself how to fit a new set of frets. It took ages and I really wished that I had not chosen stainless steel for my first outing! Next, a set of Mexican pickups and a new scratchplate with upmarket pots. Some Wilkinson staggered tuners and a homemade solid-steel vibrato block finished things off. As the donor guitar was a bit tatty, I decided to do a bit more ageing with a set of keys. It is light, very playable, the body resonates, and I pick it up and play it more than my PRS Mira or Gibson hollowbody.

Can I encourage anyone who wishes to improve their guitar tech skills to buy a cheap guitar and have a go? I ended up with a great guitar and there is something very personal about it.

**Mike Warren, via email**

Thanks for sending in your pics of your home-crafted 'Relic', Mike! And thanks, too, for the useful suggestion of buying a very cheap electric as a low-risk way to get started in modding and upgrading. A quick trawl through Gumtree or eBay will yield up a suitable 'victim' for well under £100 in many cases, which is within the pockets of most players, even in these straitened times. After that, it's up to you if you upgrade in piecemeal fashion, bit by bit, or go for the big makeover.

StewMac is perhaps the best-known supplier of specialist tools for luthiers and it – and other firms like it – can often suggest a judicious purchase of a tool that will make more ambitious jobs like refretting that bit easier. But the good thing is that with an inexpensive 'beater' as your starting point, you're unlikely to go too far wrong and will learn a lot along the way, even if you make a few mistakes. That said, it doesn't look like you made too many with this fine creation.

## GOING FOR GOLD

I was inspired by a reader's letter in issue 485 ['Back In Black' from Dave Whitlam] talking about his Gilmour-inspired Stratocaster, so I thought I would show you a photo of my Joe Bonamassa-inspired Les Paul [shown over the page] that I built during lockdown. It's done to look like a Goldtop that Gibson built for him in about 2014. It started out as a kit guitar, but every piece of hardware has been upgraded,



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*Guitarist Magazine - 2022*

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Darren Beel's superb guitar recreates one of Joe Bonamassa's own, and it started life as a humble kit guitar

including the pickups, which are '59 PAF copies, and it was finished with nitro lacquer.

**Darren Beel, via email**

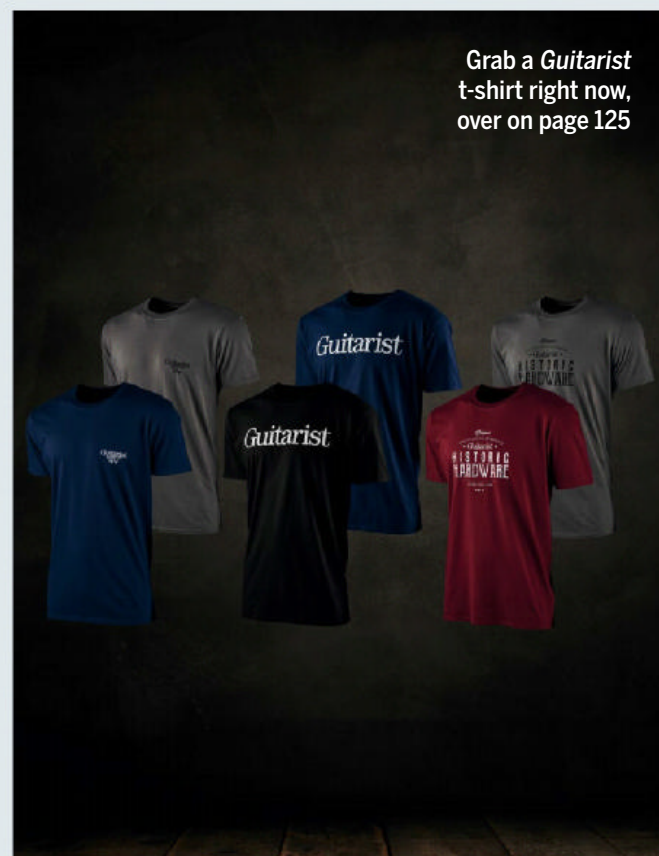
That's a beauty, Darren – thanks for sending it in. We think even JoBo himself wouldn't turn his nose up at that tribute to his black-and-gold beauty. We're impressed you made such a thorough job of recreating Joe's guitar, even down to the nitro.

### THE SHAPE OF THINGS

It's been interesting seeing the Theodore emerge from the vaults at Gibson HQ recently. Personally, I'm not a fan of that shape, but I do recall seeing it before. I remember when Tokai brought out the Talbo. Again, not something I liked but a very similar shape to the Theodore. This reminds me of the concurrent design phenomenon, where similar designs or inventions can happen remotely from each other. Clearly Gibson was first, but it will be interesting to see which of these two guitars goes down better with the public!

**Dave Leask, via email**

Hi Dave, thanks for writing in – you aren't the first to notice the Theodore's slight resemblance to the Tokai Talbo. Makes you wonder if this is simply a case of accidental resemblance or if some rumour of Ted's design slipped out of the Gibson vaults to the guitar making community at large in the past? It's certainly a striking concept that might polarise opinion to a degree, but once we got used to it we actually quite liked the frisson of classic Gibson finishes and pickups on an unexpected shape. As realised by the Custom Shop, it certainly seems to possess a Gibson 'soul' – it'll be interesting to see where they go with it in future.



## REQUESTS...

**Want to see something in the mag?  
Tell us at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)**

**Left Standing:** So there I was, all ready to buy myself a richly deserved present in the form of a new *Guitarist* t-shirt. As I already have the large-logo one, I thought I would throw my hard-earned down on one with a small logo... but, wait, what's this? They are apparently only offered in left-handed versions. How else could one explain why the logo is over the left breast, right where the guitar strap of a right-handed player would be? I suppose I should be happy for the often-overlooked lefties, but it feels a bit too much like the discrimination those guitarists have faced from manufacturers down the years. So I'm off down the barricades like it's 1968 all over again. What do we want? Right-handed shirts! When do we want 'em? Now!

**Anon, via email**

Thanks for the keen-eyed observation from one reader – whose name has been left mysteriously unsupplied. We'll definitely bear that in mind when we design the next additions to our t-shirt range. Anything else readers would like to see designed on a tee? Someone suggested a Mod Squad t-shirt for the avid tone-tinkerers among us, so that's one thing we might well do. Want to see branded caps or sweatshirts next? Write and let us know and we'll see what we can do...

**Your letters** to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)



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# WIN!

## An Epiphone ES-335 Figured

### Worth £549!

This Raspberry Tea Burst finished beauty could be yours

**F**ew guitars are as versatile or toneful as a 335, and Epiphone's 'Inspired By Gibson' ES-335 Figured adds drop-dead gorgeous looks to the equation, too, featuring a layered-maple top with AAA-grade figured veneer. The beauty is more than skin-deep, however, as this stunning homage to Gibson's enduring classic boasts a pair of Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers for a warm yet expressive tone plus CTS potentiometers for reliable, high-quality level and tone control. A Graph Tech NuBone nut and Epiphone Deluxe tuners keep things crisply in tune and resonating wonderfully, while small-block inlays on a 22-fret Indian laurel fingerboard combine classic styling with easygoing playability, making this head-turning semi-hollow a guitar you'll want to gig again and again – or just savour playing at home through your favourite amp and pedals.

The good folk at Epiphone have put one of these exciting instruments, finished in Raspberry Tea Burst, up for grabs for one lucky reader to take home. To be in with a chance of winning all you have to do is answer the multiple-choice question below correctly and enter online via the link above. Good luck!

**What year did Gibson's ES-335 make its debut?**

- A) 1952
- B) 1960
- C) 1958

*Competition closes at 23:59 GMT+1 on 21 July 2022. By taking part in this competition you agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and the Competition Rules: [www.futuretcs.com](http://www.futuretcs.com). Open to all UK residents aged 18 years or over. The winner will be drawn at random from all valid entries received, and shall be notified by email or telephone. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative.*









# ANDY SUMMERS

As a new Police Greatest Hits boxset is released, the guitarist reflects on the dire poverty of early days, being “too good” for punk and embracing the tension at the heart of the band

Words Henry Yates

At first sight in '77, you already knew The Police were too good to last. Virtuoso swans among punk's puddleducks, the power trio darted from the reggae chop of *Roxanne* to the cinematic sweep of *Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic*, and made conquering America look relatively easy. But if the band's frontman and principal writer, Sting, was a prolific talent and stone-cold star, then didn't he just know it. As the bassist's creative grip tightened, the tensions that drove the early chemistry with guitarist Andy Summers and drummer Stewart Copeland grew sour, and following 1983's *Synchronicity*, they pulled the plug at their peak.

Summers has worn many hats since those days on the force. A jazz cat, soundtrack king and occasional white-noise-maker, he's been a loquacious friend to *Guitarist* over the years, though only rarely drawn on the subject of his old band. Now, though, with a new Police Greatest Hits half-speed vinyl boxset to promote, Summers is happy to revisit those stadium-filling days.

**All these years later, which of your guitar parts from The Police do you find most interesting?**

“Well, my favourite has always been *Message In A Bottle*. It's the best guitar riff and there's a harmony part as well, which most people can't get. You've got to have the fingers for it.

*Roxanne. Can't Stand You Losing You. Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic. I like all of them.”*

**Did you have a philosophy when it came to your Police parts?**

“Very much so. Apart from all the sonics, I would never play things like big barre chords with major 3rds. One of my signature things was to make it harmonically neutral, so the songs didn't have this sort of 19th century romantic chord progression. We came from a modern place, which in my case was done by using not the major 3rd but the added 9th or the major 2nd, because that sounded hip and modern to me. It wasn't like tricky or extended jazz chords, and it wasn't like romantic 19th century harmonic progressions. It was something else.”

**Did you have different influences to other players on the scene?**

“Yeah, that was a big thing. Of course, probably the first thing I tried to play was *Apache*, but then you progress beyond that. I mean, I started out as a kid trying to copy Wes Montgomery. I could play the whole solo from *West Coast Blues* by the time I was 15. And that was back in the days when you slowed an LP down. Thousands of hours of doing that.

“So, for me, it was Wes Montgomery and Kenny Burrell. Jimmy Raney, who was I think the greatest in the bebop style. Very fluid, wonderful touch. My ear – my

Andy has explored many musical avenues since his time in The Police, but given the choice he'd still keep those “immortal” guitar parts the same today



interest, harmonically – went to the jazz guitarists and trying to figure out how you play over all the changes. And then, of course, I was into Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Later, I got into classical guitar and the big influence that has stayed with me all my life is Heitor Villa-Lobos, who wrote the greatest guitar music – I think – ever written.

“I’ve played those all my life, on and off. They’ve always been under my hands. I was influenced by all these things, trying to pull it into something that I felt expressed me. But one point of connection between me and Sting, right at the start, was that he’d had a very similar background. He’d grown up listening to jazz, been in a jazz-fusion group and he liked classical guitar, Bach and Villa-Lobos. Same as me.”

**The Police – and your playing – seemed different to the punk scene.**

“One of the reasons we became so popular was because we didn’t sound like anybody else. It was the unique chemistry of three particular individuals. One different [band member] and it would never have sounded like that. But it grew about organically, just through rehearsing. No-one would give us a gig because we weren’t pure punk. We were sort of... too good. So we got shut out until we came to the US. We did a lot of rehearsal in dank London basements, and that’s where it all started to come together. There

was no pressure. It was just, like, ‘Let’s find our music.’ Sting started to emerge as a songwriter. I was getting into effects pedals, and Stewart was finding his hi-hat rhythms. It just grew organically into this signature sound.”

**When the *Every Breath You Take* riff came off your fingers, were you aware of that being a special guitar part?**

“Well, I didn’t stand there and crow about it. It was more about keeping those other bastards happy. That song was going to be thrown out. Sting and Stewart could not agree on how the bass and drums were going to go. We were in the middle of *Synchronicity* and Sting says, ‘Well, go on then, go in there and make it your own.’ And I did it in one take. They all stood up and clapped. And, of course, the fucking thing went right round the world, straight to No 1 in America. And the riff has become a kind of immortal guitar part that all guitar players have to learn.”

**Where did the reggae flavour of songs such as *Walking On The Moon* originate from?**

“Well, that song came from a diabolical Christmas when we were freezing and starving. Stewart loaned Sting his Bob Marley records and I think what happened is that Sting kind of picked up on the convenience of the reggae bassline, so he could sing more and not have to play as

*“Judicious knob-twiddling was all we had at the beginning. I had a Phase 90 on the floor – it sounded like a 747 going over your house”*

much. Which is typical Sting – lazy motherfucker. So that’s what happened. And it worked.

“People would go, ‘Oh, you’re a reggae band.’ We weren’t a reggae band! I mean, of course, everybody loved Bob Marley, who was the greatest of all of them. But we had no pretensions to being a reggae band. It was just that the convenience of that bassline in the middle tempo was something we could do. It was lovely because it gave me space to put in those big chords like on *Walking On The Moon*.”

**You were noted for your distinctive use of chorus. What was the attraction to that?**

“It was a very simple idea that if we were going to be on stage for two hours a night, I needed to change the guitar parts or the sound. And I enjoyed doing that, y’know, combining various pedal effects and making each song have a different sonic character. The chorus thing wasn’t there at the beginning. But maybe two years in, suddenly it was this fantastic new sound for the guitar and everybody had to get it. In stereo, you could get this huge, shimmering sound coming out of a big PA system – pretty impressive. Instead of just a little Twin Reverb halfway back up the stage, honking away. Almost every player used chorus at that point. 20 years later, it does sound a bit dated. I don’t really do it any more because it sounds so much of that period.”

**How did your Police setup change over the band’s lifespan?**

“Judicious knob-twiddling, that’s all we had at the beginning. I started off with a single Phase 90 that was taped to the floor – which sounded like a 747 going over your house – and however I could set the controls on a Twin Reverb to get a sound I could work with. Then the chorus came about, and then I got into the Echoplex pedal, which was fabulous, and I could create these sort of 16th-note rhythms. So that started to open up the sound of the band.”

**1.** Ex-Police man: Andy’s solo career has included collaborations with Robert Fripp and John Etheridge

**2.** Andy reflects back on the early days: “No-one would give us a gig because we weren’t pure punk. We got shut out until we came to the US...”



PHOTO BY MOSUMERS





*"[We had a] unique chemistry... we were all pretty strong personalities. My classic phrase to describe it is the sound of tight compromise"*



*“[We went] from absolute  
dire poverty to having a few  
bob to spend on gear... but  
you’ve got to be a player.  
You cannot use gear to  
substitute for great playing”*



**You had a Pete Cornish pedalboard as well, didn't you?**

"Yeah. Suddenly, going from absolute dire poverty to having a few bob to spend on gear, I ended up getting a Pete Cornish 'board. It got more and more sophisticated over the years. Later on in the life of The Police – and certainly on the reunion tour – I had a very sophisticated 'board, which was operated offstage. I didn't even have a lead. I mean, all this takes a lot of money, but that's where you get to. But first of all, you've got to be a player. You cannot use gear to substitute for great playing."

**When we think of you in The Police era, we picture you with a Tele...**

"Well, the Telecaster is a marvellous instrument. It doesn't feed back, it's a solidbody, you can get a range of tones. I had a five-pickup switch, so on that original '61 Tele, I could get a marvellous out-of-phase tone that was very bluesy and distinct. Mine was completely hybrid – humbucker at the front, single coil by the bridge. I had an overdrive unit built into the back, which was powered by a nine-volt battery, and a different set of switches. Not standard Tele stuff. Y'know, it was half a Les Paul, half a Telecaster. Not a true Telecaster. But, of course, everybody loves it. It's been reproduced by Fender, and the guitar itself, I think, is more popular than me. It's a great guitar. I've still got it."

**What were your amplification choices through the Police years?**

"I started with a Twin Reverb, which is a classic standard amp. But as the concerts went on, of course, I had to have Marshalls. And then at one point I added in a Mesa/Boogie, which I could switch over to for solos. It was okay. I thought it was only semi-successful. I'm not a huge tech-nut. It's always about the playing. These things help you, of course. But I'm not a geek."

**How did you approach the recording process in The Police?**

"Well, the last two records were done in Montserrat [at AIR]. *Synchronicity* was just me, alone in the studio with



PHOTO BY MOSUMMERS

**3.** A pimped Tele is the look most associated with Andy in his Police days, but he boasts a vast collection of electrics and acoustics, including those from the likes of Godin, Klein and Steinberger

**4.** Andy's influences span a broad musical landscape, from The Shadows, through jazz and classical guitar. "I grew up being an improvising guitar player, not someone who just learnt to play 'pieces' as they were"

all my kit. Sting in the control room playing the bass through the Neve desk. And Stewart up in the room above the studio because of the acoustics and the separation that Hugh Padgham [producer] wanted. We played most of those tracks with earphones."

**Since The Police, you've explored so many different styles. If you were recording those classic parts today, would you play them differently?**

"Well, I would consider it. But those parts have become kind of immortal – I can't really dick around with them too much. They are what they are. But I never played any of those parts the same way, any night. I mean, I grew up being an improvising guitar player, not someone who just learnt to play 'pieces' as they were. I'm all over it. I like to play things in different positions, try different things, add little notes on top.

"We were always like that in The Police. Nothing was ever really set absolutely. The thing about the band was that we never really laboured over anything. It was all kind of fast, and some of the songs would be made up at soundchecks, and that was

the spirit of the band. We were very good at playing together. We weren't stymied or stuck for ideas. It was a pretty talented set of musicians. It worked. We were lucky that we found our thing early on and we just expanded on it. We could play anything, really."

**There's a theory that friction creates good music. Was that true of you, Sting and Stewart?**

"Yeah. Because we were all pretty strong personalities. It makes for tension. We didn't agree on everything. We had to fight it out. It was mostly about the music because offstage we'd all hang out together. But that friction – that tension – actually gives it a lot. And I think the audience picks up on that. My classic phrase to describe it is the sound of tight compromise. If you've got three very mellow guys who all agree, the music's probably going to sag a bit. We were very thrusting individuals. Each guy wanted to be at the front." 

*"The thing about the band was we never laboured over anything. It was kind of fast – some songs were made up at soundchecks"*



The Police: Greatest Hits (Half-Speed Remaster Double LP) is out now [www.andysummers.com](http://www.andysummers.com)







# DAWN STAR

Jack White is one of guitar's most mercurial figures, whose core influences span decades and embrace both Son House and Van Halen without apparent contradiction. With a new album, *Fear Of The Dawn*, out, we join him to explore his equally eclectic guitars

---

**Words** James Volpe Rotondi & Jamie Dickson\*

**Photography** Eleanor Jane

It says something about the way we unconsciously pigeonhole artists that it was a little shocking to see Jack White use a customised EVH Wolfgang guitar to perform the track *Lazaretto* on the US TV show *Saturday Night Live* in October 2020. Just like the movies, the world of guitar has its tropes and clichés, and one of these is that alt-rock guitarists should play painfully hip pawn-shop relics and turn their nose up at anything with the mark of shred upon it. White played the EVH partly as a gesture of tribute to the late master. “I won’t even insult the man’s talent by trying to play one of his songs tonight,” he said prior to the show. “[But] Eddie was very kind to me and saw to it that this guitar was made for me to my specs...”

And while some might be surprised to learn that indie-rock’s champion of primal blues lines and the late, lamented heavy rock virtuoso were so sympatico, it makes terrific sense on many levels. In addition to decades of knocking out album after album of wicked

riffs and potent solos, both players have displayed an almost obsessive pursuit of individualism and specialised design in the instruments they’ve played throughout their careers – never content with stock features and aesthetics, always pushing the envelope to make their own guitars more idiosyncratic, versatile and allied with their own approaches to both technique and tone.

As White and his band prepare for his first full tour in more than two years, James Rotondi of our sister magazine *Guitar Player* sat down with Jack to discuss the methods to the madness behind his creative and fluid approach to recording, writing and modifying both guitars and pedals – including his own Third Man line of effects, which includes the cool Bumble Buzz, Triplegraph and Mantic Flex – and how his tone has evolved from his early days with The White Stripes through his Raconteurs years (with co-frontman Brendan Benson), The Dead Weather, and his own unique and often-challenging solo albums.

\*This feature has been adapted from the July 2022 edition of *Guitar Player*





1. Jack was an early adopter of Fender's innovative Acoustasonic series of instruments but asked for his to have a deliberately restricted range of tones to include his favourite acoustic sound, an electric tone and finally a blend of both

2. As well as an Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, Jack has a Telecaster from the hybrid acoustic-electric range. Its striking, high-contrast blue sunburst finish was inspired by Fender's love-or-hate-them Antigua finishes of the 1970s

3. A delectable Fender Jazz bass in full chromed-up trim is also found among Jack's collection

**Let's start with the very unique blue-and-white Telecaster you're holding in the opening shot for this feature. It resembles the more copper/orange sparkle Tele you played with The Raconteurs, right?**

"This is sort of the next step on from that guitar, which Chip Ellis and I had started working on around The Raconteurs' last album, before the pandemic. We called it the Three-Wheel-Motion Low Rider Telecaster. We started with a B-Bender-equipped Telecaster that I received as a Christmas present a few years back, and we just started adding cool elements and features that I've been wanting to add based on my experience playing live over the past couple of solo tours I've been doing.

"The B-Bender Tele was a great present to get. I'd always wanted one, and we changed the colour of it to something more suitable for the colour scheme of The Raconteurs, with that orange sparkle finish. Then the thought was, 'Okay, as long as we're repainting it, let's put some new pickups in it.' At that moment in time, I was really into the Fender Lace Sensors for the bridge and then a P-90 in the middle position. And then we added a neck pickup that was on my brother's 1972 Fender Telecaster Thinline when I was a kid. I always thought that the bassy-sounding neck pickup on that was really creamy, so I wanted to have that in there.

*"I got to road-test the Acoustasonic heavily. And the first thing I asked was, 'Is there any way we can have fewer choices for sounds?'"*

And then eventually the bridge pickup changed from the Lace Sensor, as well.

"My wife, [Third Man singer/songwriter/guitarist and session player] Olivia Jean, had gotten a custom guitar from Fender and [pickup guru] Tim Shaw had made these outstanding Filter'Tron-style pickups for that. I love Filter'Trons and I've played Gretsch guitars quite a bit, so I really wanted those same types of pickups in my Telecaster. Sure, if you A/B most Filter'Trons against a lot of the higher-output pickups out there, they don't compete for gain, but whatever Tim did to make these balance with the output of my other pickups, they're just really furious Filter'Trons. Tons of bite. And we're even considering adding a coil-tap to it next. We did that with the humbucking





4. Jack White's 1964 'JB Hutto' Res-O-Glass Airline electric is the guitar most people think of when his name is mentioned, to this day. Its Valco pickups are humbucker-sized but are in fact single coil units, while the body is made of hollow fibreglass





5. An apparent variation on the Three-Wheel-Motion Low Rider Telecaster shown on page 62, this metallic blue Custom Shop creation features a “furious” take on Gretsch’s Filter’Tron humbucker at the bridge, which was designed by Tim Shaw

6. Custom hardware abounds on Jack’s heavily customised Telecaster and includes a highly adjustable trem arm

7. The guitar features a Mexican-built, pale-hued maple neck, an aesthetic touch Jack says he prefers over darker, aged-looking lacquer on maple

Lace Sensors I used on the last tour, and that was really interesting at times for adding a bit of extra treble when you need it.”

**You’ve been exploiting interrupter or kill switches for a while now, and most of your guitars have them. What inspired that?**

“My interrupters do a complete cut of the signal, but, I mean, Tom Morello was doing a similar thing back in the 90s by just turning on and off between two pickups. And, of course, people would do similar things with Les Pauls back in the day, where they’d have one of the pickup’s volumes down, so the pickup selector would act as a kind of kill switch. So it’s nothing new. All my White Stripes guitars had those sorts of on/off switches on them back in the day, and I enjoyed playing with them, but eventually I thought it would be much easier if we installed them as buttons. The inspiration for that way of doing it probably comes from when I was using the Fender EVH Wolfgang USA Eddie Van Halen Signature guitars, which have these momentary push-button switches. I’m tempted to put them on all my guitars now. And it’s not an issue for me with blending two pickups because I’ve never blended pickups on any guitar I’ve used, not ever. Even my Tele is just three positions, not five.

•  
*“The Three-Wheel-Motion Low Rider Telecaster started [out as] a B-Bender-equipped Tele and we added cool elements”*  
 •

“I’ve also got a V-neck on this Tele, made from the whitest maple we could find because I don’t like that sort of yellowy maple; I like it to be really white. I like the V-neck a lot. All the old Gibson acoustics I play, like my 1915 Gibson L-1 [aka the Robert Johnson model], are V-necks. I understand why people wouldn’t like it; it’s hard to play. But I think I like making things a little bit harder on myself, too. So there’s that...”

**Tell us about these customised Fender Tele- and Jazzmaster-style Acoustasonics you’re playing. They look rad with those cool blue finishes. But there’s more to your specs on these than just the finish, right?**

“Yeah, I made some recommendations regarding the range of sounds in them as well. Y’know, I first started





•

*“I understand why people wouldn’t like the V-neck; it’s hard to play. But I like making things a little bit harder on myself...”*

•

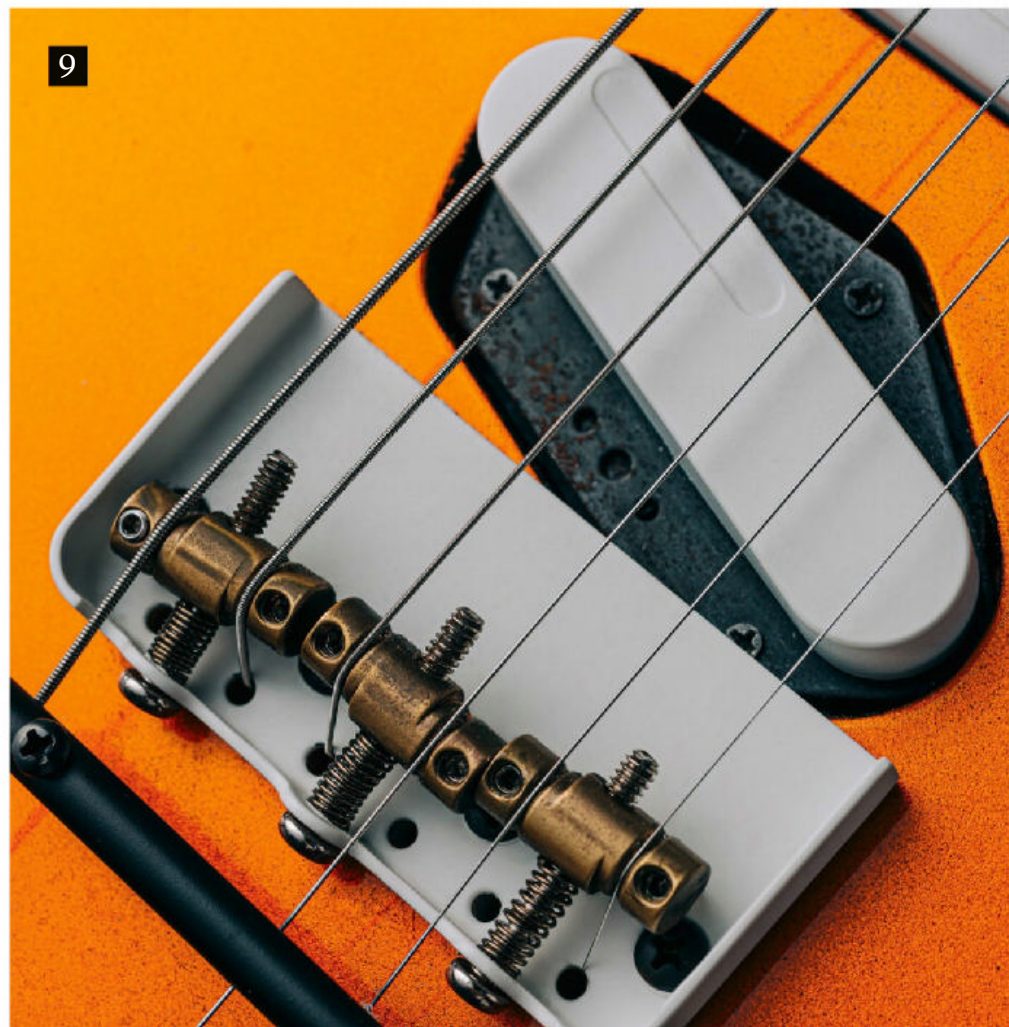
using an Acoustasonic for the last Raconteurs tour. Since we were going with an orange colour scheme for that tour, we borrowed the design idea from one of my Gretsch Rancher Falcon acoustics, the one I named after the actress Claudette Colbert, which has her face engraved on the back by a great tattoo artist in Cincinnati named Kore Flatmo. Along with the tribute to Claudette, my thought was to try to mix some of the design vibe from those interesting old Fender Antigua finishes from the 1970s but with the modern Acoustasonic guitars.

“As for the sounds, I was lucky enough to be one of the first people to get an Acoustasonic when they first came out, and I brought it straight out on tour with The Raconteurs, so I got to road-test it pretty heavily. And the first thing I asked them was, ‘Is there any way we can have fewer choices for sounds?’ I felt I only needed three sounds – one great electric, one great acoustic and then a sound with both together – because that solved a basic issue with how to play songs of mine that had acoustics and electrics, either in different sections of the same track or sometimes doubling the same parts. That came in real handy with The Raconteurs. Before that, I’d have to write acoustic sections with a long enough space at the end so I could switch back to electric.”

**This custom Jazzmaster electric you’ve got in process here looks cool. Any interesting mods on that one?**

“Oh, yeah. So, Dan Mancini, my brilliant guitar tech and mission man, has been working a lot on this one. A while back, I showed Dan a clip of a guy who had incorporated some sort of synth device into his guitar, and I thought, ‘That’s what I’ve been trying to do for years that I wish we could figure out!’ I remember speaking to Matt Bellamy of Muse about how he incorporated a Korg Kaoss Pad into his [custom Manson] guitar, and I always thought that was a great idea. So Dan and I began talking, and right now he’s in the process of installing







the guts of an Electro-Harmonix Pitchfork pedal into the back of this Jazzmaster. The intermittent switch can turn on the harmonies, but I can also use one of the pots to bend the pitch as well, just like with a Whammy Pedal. I think Tom Morello may end up getting jealous of this and have to put it on his guitar, too... I'll have to send him a clip of it and see what he thinks."

**Will that have a similar mix of Filter'Trons and P-90s like the Telecaster?**

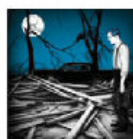
"It will have some of the same features as the Tele, but the pickups will be different. I own this incredible Gibson Fort Knox 'Skunk Baxter' Firebird that I played with The Raconteurs, and the mini-humbucker pickups on that, which Jim DeCola designed, are just so impressive. Honestly, it's almost a shock every time I play it. So Tim Shaw at Fender is working on his own version of that type of mini-humbucker to put into this Jazzmaster."

**From your well-documented 1964 JB Hutto Montgomery Ward Airline to your gorgeous Gretsch 'Triple Green Machine' to your 1950s Kay Hollowbody to your EVH Wolfgang guitars, you constantly seem to be exploring unusual choices in pursuit of both new sounds and new/old aesthetics. What do you think drives that for you?**

"I just think it's cool that there are these moments in your life where you might play through a certain

*"When you're a guitar player, you can really hear how pickup differences matter and how they influence your playing and tone"*

pickup or type of guitar, but maybe it's at the wrong moment in your life, and somehow you decide, 'Nah, that's not for me.' And then you revisit it 10 years later, and you're like, 'Oh my God, actually this is great. It just has its own kind of appeal.' Now, obviously this kind of experience only happens when you're really deep into the tone thing. Plenty of people wouldn't know the difference if you played them five different pickups in a row. They'd probably sound exactly the same to them. But when you're a guitar player, you can really hear how the differences matter and how they influence your playing and tone." 



Fear Of The Dawn by Jack White is out now on Third Man Records. For more information on tours and releases, visit Jack's website <https://jackwhiteiii.com>

8. Jack's Fender Three-Wheel-Motion Low Rider Telecaster is a creation of the Custom Shop and is converted from a Nashville Tele fitted with a B-Bender. Its trio of pickups includes a Lace Sensor single coil in the bridge position, a P-90 in the middle and, at the neck, a Wide Range humbucker

9. A close-up detail of the Low Rider Tele's bridge reveals compensated brass saddles

10. Given its rarity, you might assume this was a Gretsch Custom Shop creation, but it's an original 1957 G6199 Jupiter Thunderbird

11. Decades of play-wear is evident on the Thunderbird's controls

12. Jack's eclectic effects include the Coppersound Triplegraph octaver built with his design input

12





# GALES FORCE

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**Words** David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

ERIC GALES' NEW ALBUM 'CROWN' IS THE WORK OF AN ARTIST AT HIS APEX. THE CHOPS ARE STAGGERING, BUT IT'S THE SONGWRITING – WHICH DELVES DEEP INTO HIS PAINFUL EXPERIENCES OF PREJUDICE, DEMONS OF SELF-DOUBT AND ADDICTION – THAT HITS YOU IN THE GUT. IS THERE ANYONE TO BETTER HIM RIGHT NOW? WE JOINED HIM TO FIND OUT...







Anyone who has witnessed Eric Gales live will agree that he fully deserves his newfound status as blues-rock royalty. But his guitar vocabulary extends way beyond just those domains as it incorporates elements of jazz, funk, soul and gospel within its compass, all channelled into what he describes as his “upside-down and backwards” playing style. Touring to promote his new album, *Crown*, he recently wowed audiences across the UK with the unstoppable force of his live performance, a canny blend of showmanship and unbelievable chops. “Everybody is actually blown away, man,” he tells us as we settle down for a cuppa in the *Guitarist* studio. “And the response and the emotion that has been displayed by the audience receiving the material live has been awesome. Everybody’s been really enjoying it.”

Lyrically, the album explores areas that are at once both old and familiar and shockingly contemporary. “It’s inspirational to watch actually, to see the tears come in people’s eyes when I’m playing and singing these lyrics,” he continues. “Predominantly, a lot of people come to the shows to see the guitar playing, but at the end of it they are moved by the things that I have to say. It’s a one-two punch, doing everything that I can to try to help change the world.”

To say that *Crown*’s release was eagerly awaited would be an understatement. As with many recent projects it was stalled by the onset of the pandemic. “We made wise use of our time and we even delayed the record coming out for a year because I didn’t want it to be released and not being able to fully promote it and tour and everything,” Eric remembers. “So we held off until this year. It’s been anticipated for quite some time and I hope it was worth the wait.”

Unleashed to the world at the beginning of the year, the album has proven to be not only worth the wait but something of a game-changer for Gales with the prize finally in sight and a coronation imminent...



PHOTO BY CATHERINE MCGANN/GETTY IMAGES

“Cousins, aunts, uncles and everybody was playing – my mom and dad, all of them. It was everywhere, it was all over me”

**Would you say that *Crown* is very autobiographical in a lot of ways?**

“It’s very autobiographical. The writing was taken from the state the world is in and it’s been in for quite some time as it relates to race and equality and things like that. We felt like it was important to get that message across on this record.”

**What is the central message of the new album?**

“That we’re all here for a purpose. No-one is less than nobody – we’re all equal, we’ve all got parts to contribute. When the whole world can view it like that, then you can begin to be a better place.”

**What got you into playing guitar in the first place?**

“Man, music was inevitable. My brothers were already playing and I got to be turned on to Albert King and Muddy Waters and Hendrix and Stevie Ray and just a whole cast of different players. I was going to church every week because my mum and dad were heavily

religious, and so I was in the church and I began to play in the church. I was listening to blues and rock and everything. So that was basically what my household was like coming up: traditional gospel, blues, rock, funk... everything.”

**Are you actually left-handed?**

“I play left-handed, but I write right-handed. I just picked [the guitar] up and that was what was comfortable. I picked the guitar up when I was about four years old, so [I wasn’t even thinking] which way to play it. That’s what felt comfortable to me and, ironically, my brothers play the same way.”

**Did you inherit a guitar from your brothers?**

“Yeah, it was passed down. I’m the youngest of five brothers and it was passed down from my uncles to them. Cousins and aunts and uncles and everybody was playing, you know, my mom and dad and all of them. They had a gospel group, so it was like everywhere, it was all over me. That’s why I say music was inevitable, seeping into all of us in some kind of way. First thing I learnt to play was some Albert King stuff, you know, topped with gospel music, just basic church, praise and worship type of music and things like that. That was where the egg was hatched.”

1. The guitarist grew up surrounded by music, playing guitar as a child in church alongside his family and older brothers. By the age of 14 (as pictured above in New York City), he’d formed his first group, The Eric Gales Band





## SOUND ADVICE

Stuck in the woodshed and in need of a little encouragement? Heed the wise words of a master guitarist...

"Don't stop what you're doing. No matter the amount of frustration that comes to you, no matter how many days you end up frustrated, the days that you aren't frustrated are gonna outweigh them. Keep yourself surrounded by the right people, don't let the woes of this world suck you in, and try to stay inspired. With those things, I think you've got a winning chance. Keep doing what you're doing and, if all else fails, listen to *Crown!*"

Watch Eric demonstrate his signature gear and pedalboard and talk about his playing style in our exclusive videos at <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



“Blues is the world man’s [music] and gospel is a religious person’s blues... But musically, the effect emotionally, it’s exactly the same”

**When was the first Eric Gales Band formed?**

“Oh my, the first Eric Gales Band happened when I was 14 years old. But I did a battle of the bands around the town when I was like 11 in my brother’s band. So it started there. And then, when I was 14, my brother said, ‘Let’s turn this into The Eric Gales Band... and you’re going to be the frontman.’”

**What sort of material were you playing back then?**

“It was all original. The first two Eric Gales Band CDs were all originals, except we did a rendition of *I Want You (She’s So Heavy)* on the *Picture Of A Thousand Faces* record in ’93.”

**When did you first come across Hendrix?**

“Day one. I mean, my brother was hugely influenced by Hendrix, so he was definitely one of the ones I was introduced to. But I began to be more influenced by people that were influenced by Hendrix more than him. You know, you can’t get around him being the top of the tree, but there’s people ahead of him, such as Buddy Guy, Curtis Mayfield, Albert King, Lightnin’ Hopkins and Robert Johnson. It’s who you are influenced by that automatically makes you acquire who *they* were influenced by. It’s just evolution. So, Hendrix, you know, there’ll never be another him. I just do my best not to be the next him, and I just do my best to be the first me. And that is honouring him, by showing how his legacy made me be who I am.

“Hendrix is a huge part of everybody’s style and they’re lying if they say that he ain’t, but the object is – how does it help mould you into being the best in you? Because, at the end of the day, what’s going to stay and stick is your DNA. No-one has a DNA like yours. So what type of imprint are you leaving? Is it an imitation of an imprint of somebody you like, or is it your own? And that’s what matters.”



2. Eric faces off with Joe Bonamassa, performing together for the first time on the Keeping The Blues Alive Mediterranean Cruise in 2019. Bonamassa went on to co-produce *Crown*, alongside Josh Smith

3. Pictured here in 2008 at the Experience Hendrix Tour in Las Vegas, Eric Johnson has been one of Gales’ biggest influences since his formative days: “I got turned on to him at six or seven years old, and it completely changed my life”

PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

**As you progressed, these other influences started to come through. There’s a lot of jazz in your playing, particularly in your chord voicings. Who were you listening to at the time?**

“Wes Montgomery, George Benson, Herb Ellis, Kenny Burrell, Grant Green, Jonathan Butler... All of those guys, man, were people that my brother was hippping me on to. And I just took it in, it was amazing. There are plenty that I’m probably leaving out that contributed as well. But there are a lot of known and unknown musicians out there who contributed to the whole pot of inspiration. I was basically just at home and listening to their records. YouTube wasn’t even around back then, so it was just dropping the needle on the record and trying to pick it out.”

**So all of these different guitar styles poured into your guitar playing, but blues was basically the core?**

“Yeah, it’s the main ingredient that is common in all of it. Everything else is just spices that’s thrown in sporadically with no rhyme or reason, no motive, no process. That’s totally a feeling thing. It’s very hard to dictate that.”

**You once said that there are a lot of similarities between gospel and the blues.**

“Absolutely, yeah. Music-wise, it’s the same sensation, the same emotion that you get. Just two different types

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS



"I just do my best not to be the next [Hendrix], and be the first me. And that is honouring him, by showing how his legacy made me be who I am"







PHOTO BY JIM ARBOGAST

of words, you know, blues and gospel, but musically, the effect emotionally, it's exactly the same. Gospel is the religious man's blues. That's what it is. I've never thought about that before, but that's exactly what it is. Gospel is a religious person's blues because it's pain, it's suffering, it's all kinds of things they spoke about in gospel, but it's the same. Because pain, suffering and all kinds of things are talked about in blues. So blues is the world man's [music] and gospel is a religious person's blues."

**What gear did you use when you were recording *Crown*?**

"In the studio I used my signature DV Mark Raw Dawg [amp] blended with a little bit of Dumble that was provided by Joe Bonamassa. I used the RawDawg Magneto [guitar] predominantly for the record and I used my pedalboard that has a Cry Baby wah, a DigiTech Whammy pedal, a Colossus fuzz made by Mojo Hand, a [EWS] Brute Drive made by Xotic Pedals, a Tech 21 [Boost] DLA, the Raw Dawg Boost Drive made by MXR and an Octavio MXR fuzz."

**When did you first discover Magneto guitars?**

"I would say it was about 13 or 14 years ago, and I've been liking them ever since. They kind of discovered me, man. I had a conversation with Chris [Hatstatt], president of Magneto Guitars, and he said, 'Man, I got something I think you'll like,' and I tried it out. At that time, I was going through some things and other companies really didn't want to deal with me – but he did and I never forgot that. We just continued to build our relationship, and I never will forget the fact that he was always in my corner."

4. Trimming the tone during the recording sessions for *Crown*. To get a close-up look at what's on Eric's pedalboard, check out our exclusive video

5. Eric has been working with Magneto Guitars for over a decade. The RawDawg II shown here is based on the company's Sonnet model, loaded with three custom single coils and featuring an alder body, maple neck and Indian rosewood 'board. The RawDawg III joined the Gales signature family at late last year, with a basswood body three-piece maple neck, rosewood 'board, and Gotoh vibrato and tuners





"Riding forward is getting some material together and just keep going forward, man, and trying to shape the world [with] every gig, every note that I can"





**What sort of features were you looking for on your signature model?**

“Oh, there’s the bells and whistles, being draped in gold and all this, but nothing different to the original one that I was playing: ‘Give me that, but let’s engrave my name in the neck...’ and stuff like that and putting my nickname, Raw Dawg, on the back of it. But I like the tone of the Jason Lollar pickups that were in them, they sounded great and we just dressed it up a little bit more to look flashy, like I like to be. I would have played it like it was, but he was like, ‘Let’s do a signature. What would you want to see?’ I told him and boom, boom, boom. Basically, we doctored up the Eric Gales model.”

**Just two controls – master volume and tone?**

“Yeah, a master tone with one tone knob that works on all three pickups in all positions. It’s just a little more convenient, to be honest with you. I mean, one tone knob working all three pickups is a little more convenient than mixing and blending two tone knobs on the traditional Strat. I’m not unaccustomed to working with that, it’s what I worked with for years.”

**Were you playing Strat-style guitars from the outset?**

“Oh yeah, I’ve always been more connected to a Strat style. I mean, I’ve had Les Pauls and I even have a



The S-type has always been part of Gales’ sound. “I’ve had Les Pauls and I even have a Flying V and SGs, Paul Reed Smiths”, he says, but he’s always come back to the Strat style

PHOTO BY WILL CARTER

Flying V and SGs, Paul Reed Smiths. But my particular preference is more of a Strat style.”

**How did you go about developing your signature DV Mark Raw Dawg amp?**

“Just basically had a conversation with Marco [De Virgiliis, DV Mark owner and amp designer] and told him I wanted something crystal clean and loud. I wanted it to be not too heavy and he made it all happen with the signature model. Treble, bass, midrange, volume and reverb, which I rarely use, but it’s there. As to the cabinet, I chose a cabinet with two neo [neodymium] 12-inch speakers in, I think they’re 60 watts. I used two generally, but I often like to run four cabinets as well. It’s not about the volume, it’s just about the dirt that it gives, you know? That’s a pretty well oiled machine for me with that combination of the pedalboard and the guitar, and I can take that anywhere and take care of business.”

**What does the immediate future hold for you?**

“A whole lot more touring, supporting this record, getting this message of *I Want My Crown* out to everybody. Meanwhile, riding forward is getting some material together and just keep going forward, man, and trying to shape the world [with] every gig, every note that I can.” **G**

**HEAR IT HERE****ERIC GALES  
CROWN**

Eric manages to coax so many shades of tone from his guitar on tracks such as *The Storm*, *Stand Up* and *Rattlin’ Change*, with particularly fine soloing throughout. Solo highlights include *The Storm*, *Survivor* (which channels both Eric Johnson and SRV), plus *Too Close To The Fire* and *My Own Best Friend*, with their *Little Wing*/Lenny influenced chordwork. Special mention should go to Eric’s wife and collaborator, LaDonna, for her outstanding vocals on *Take Me Just As I Am*.

Eric Gales’ new album, *Crown*, is out now via Provogue and a UK tour begins on 2 June [www.ericgales.com](http://www.ericgales.com)







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EC-1000T CTM EverTune Black

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# CROWN GLORY

**RICHARD BARRETT** ZEROS IN ON **ERIC GALES'** CAPTIVATING AND GENRE-MASHING GUITAR STYLE TO BRING YOU A SPECIAL TECHNIQUE LESSON THAT WILL CHALLENGE YOUR CHOPS – WITHOUT HAVING TO FLIP YOUR GUITAR!

**T**he objective of this article is to give you an insight into the style, sound and techniques of the great Eric Gales. To do this we'll be looking at extended chords, flowing pentatonic lines and some very specific picking techniques. But before we get into those details, perhaps we should deal with what many would agree separates Eric from the vast majority of his contemporaries.

Eric plays a right-handed guitar flipped over, but, as he explains in the preceding interview, he is actually right-handed, learning 'upside down and backwards' like this because it felt comfortable. Having the strings reversed like this gives a different perspective on chords and lead lines. We'll be paying particular attention to how it can also give an unusual twist to his fast and fluid economy

picked lines – and have a shot at emulating this without having to buy a left-handed guitar and flip it over!

Eric builds his tone on the foundation of a clean amp with a selection of carefully chosen drive and fuzz pedals, enabling him to cover the wide-ranging tonal bases he relies on for chords, crunchy rhythm parts and solos. Of course, it's not possible to cover every single aspect of a style as wide ranging as Eric's in this space; his chordal approach could likely take up a whole article, then there is his use of Phrygian mode for unexpected exotic melodic lines... Hopefully, these examples will give you a good overview of the way Eric approaches many key areas, which can be expanded upon at leisure. There is also a 16-bar solo, in which I aim to put some of these into a more 'real world' context. **G**

Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from [www.richardbarrettguitar.com](http://www.richardbarrettguitar.com)





## In the style of: Eric Gales

**Tutor** Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Fender Stratocaster, STL AmpHub & Logic Pro X

**Difficulty** ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

### EXAMPLE 1

**TAKING THE FIRST OF THE TWO CHORDS IN OUR EXAMPLE TRACK,** A minor, we have both the minor 11th (a particular favourite of Eric's) and the minor 9th, which is similar but less 'open'-sounding. These are arranged so that the top notes give a variety of melodic options, if you fancy some Wes Montgomery or Eric Johnson-style chord melodies – both of whom have been a big influence on Mr Gales.

### EXAMPLE 2

**THE OTHER CHORD IN THE DEMO TRACK IS E MINOR.** I have given this the same treatment as the Am9/11 chords in Example 1. Though these are played in a sequence, it doesn't have to be that way. A well-chosen extended chord goes a long way, especially mixed into a melodic line or two. This goes some way to explaining how Eric manages to fill so much musical space with one guitar!

### EXAMPLE 3

**THIS ASCENDING PENTATONIC LINE IS BROKEN UP INTO TWO HALVES** to walk you through what happens with Eric's picking hand as he crosses the strings. Though alternate picking certainly plays a part in his style, many of Eric's distinctive pentatonic lines are generated by raking across two strings with a single up- or downstroke. In this example, notice how this forms a pattern of three downstrokes followed by a single upstroke.



### ▶ EXAMPLE 4

**TAKING THINGS UP A GEAR, THIS EXAMPLE USES A SIMILAR PICKING APPROACH**, raking across the strings rather than adopting a strict alternate approach. This allows you to cross the strings far more quickly, though it can feel counterintuitive at first – a bit like sweep picking. We move through various triplet based groupings, finishing up with nine on each crotchet beat! This is advanced stuff, so don't feel that you should be able to master it quickly.

[illegible]

### EXAMPLE 5

**THIS SOLO TAKES A FEW OF ERIC'S FAVOURITE IDEAS** and combines them with the hope of emulating his style. Some clean extended chords are followed by a switch to a fuzz-type tone, mixing pentatonics with bluesy melodic lines and some fast runs using both alternate and economy picking. I've included detailed instructions of where to use up- and downstrokes, but it's an interesting exercise to try reversing these sometimes. Remember, Eric sees the strings – and his picking patterns – the other way up!



**Am9** **Em9**

7

**Am9** **Em9**

9

**Am9** **Em9**

11

**Am9**

13

**E9**

14

**Am9** **Em9**

15



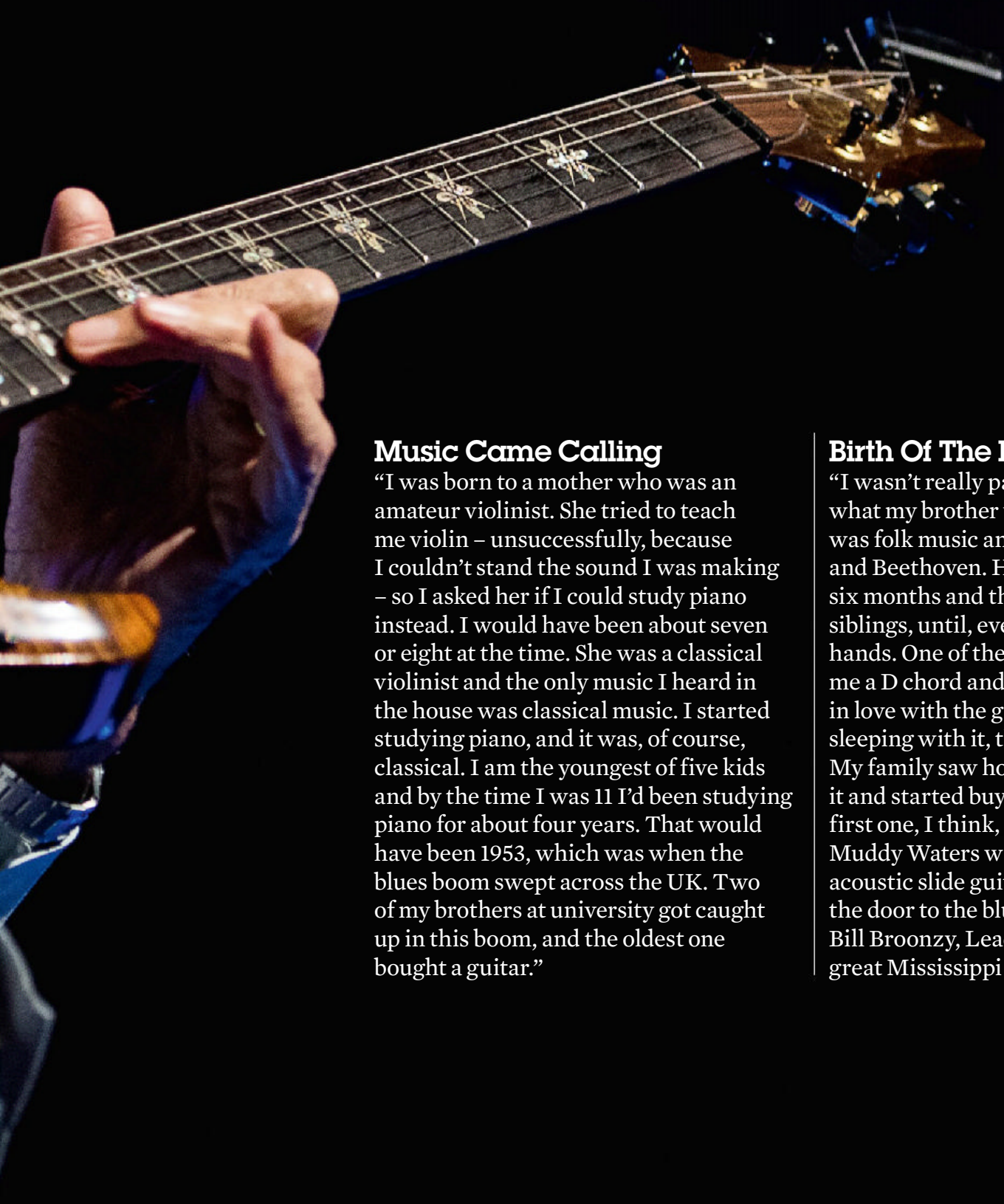




# JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

The jazz-fusion pioneer looks back on his early career and the events that led up to the formation of the legendary Mahavishnu Orchestra

Words David Mead



## Music Come Calling

"I was born to a mother who was an amateur violinist. She tried to teach me violin – unsuccessfully, because I couldn't stand the sound I was making – so I asked her if I could study piano instead. I would have been about seven or eight at the time. She was a classical violinist and the only music I heard in the house was classical music. I started studying piano, and it was, of course, classical. I am the youngest of five kids and by the time I was 11 I'd been studying piano for about four years. That would have been 1953, which was when the blues boom swept across the UK. Two of my brothers at university got caught up in this boom, and the oldest one bought a guitar."

## Birth Of The Blues

"I wasn't really paying any attention to what my brother was playing because it was folk music and I was playing Mozart and Beethoven. He got bored with it after six months and the guitar went to my siblings, until, eventually, it arrived in my hands. One of the other brothers showed me a D chord and it was a revelation. I fell in love with the guitar and even started sleeping with it, that's how much I loved it. My family saw how passionate I was about it and started buying me albums. The first one, I think, was a 1954 recording of Muddy Waters with Little Walter playing acoustic slide guitar, and this opened up the door to the blues. They brought in Big Bill Broonzy, Lead Belly, Son House, the great Mississippi blues players."



Throughout his career McLaughlin has constantly searched for new textures, including exploring the use of Roland and Synclavier guitar synthesizers

### The Melting Pot

“After about 18 months, [my family] brought home flamenco records, guitar records, of course, because they wanted to educate me. The impact of this manifested itself in this association I had with Paco de Lucia from 1978. From there they brought me albums by Django Reinhardt with Stephane Grappelli, the Hot Club de France, and then, when I was 16, I heard *Milestones* by Miles Davis. This music captured me. And, well, that’s really how I got into the guitar.

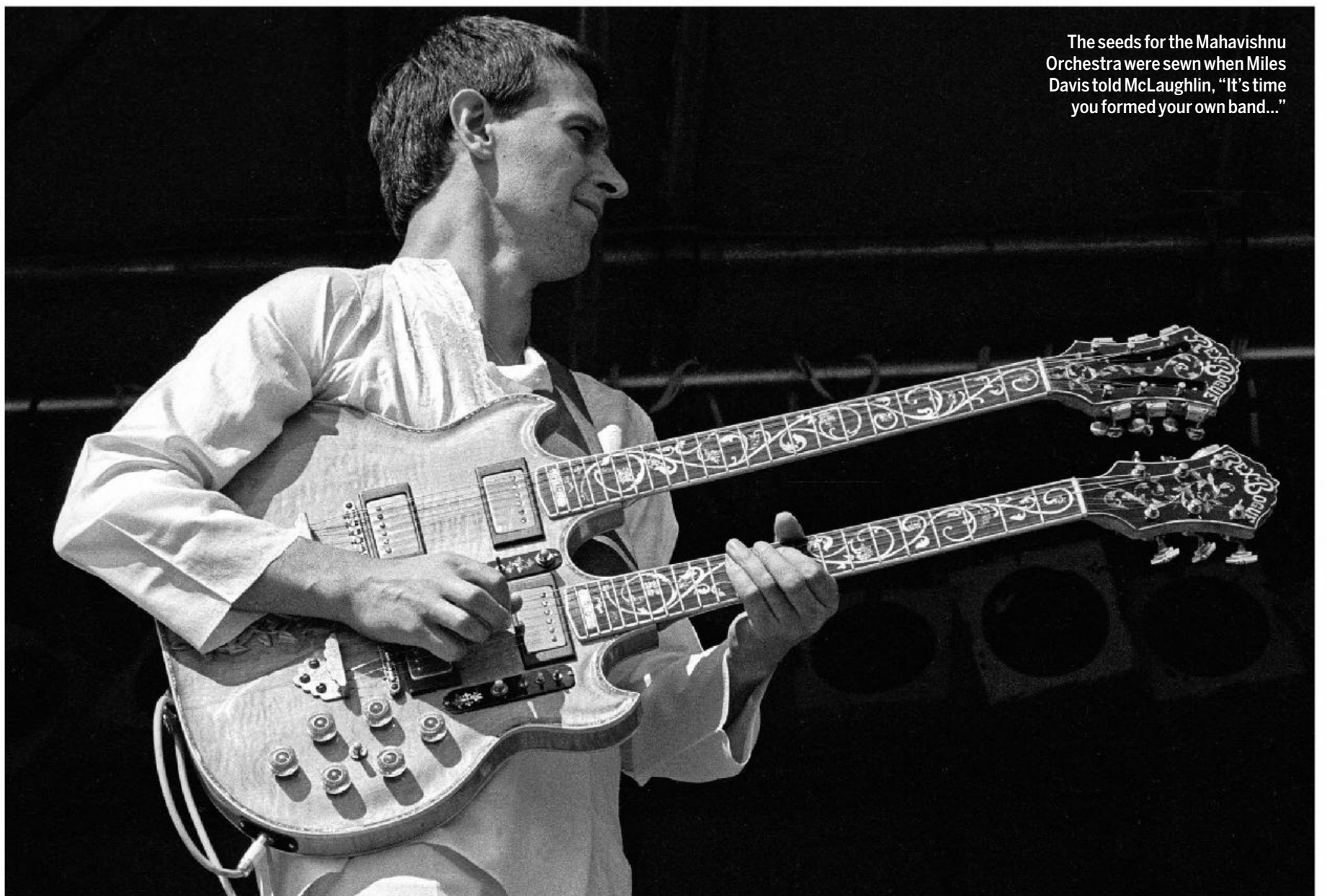
“By that time, all I wanted to do was play guitar. I was not very good at school because I was just playing the guitar all the time. I think I was 19 when I arrived in London, so in the early 60s, probably around 1962 to ’63, would be when I started playing with Georgie Fame & The Blue Flames at The Flamingo Club. That was a great gig because I loved Georgie.”

### The Mighty Organ

“The Blue Flames were the beginning of my association with the Hammond organ. In the 60s, the Hammond organ trio – which was Hammond organ, guitar, and drums, no bass – was extremely popular. A lot of great guitar players were in those bands. I’ll never forget hearing

*“All I wanted to do was play guitar. I was not very good at school because I was just playing the guitar all the time”*





The seeds for the Mahavishnu Orchestra were sewn when Miles Davis told McLaughlin, "It's time you formed your own band..."

PHOTO BY IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

George Benson in the mid-60s playing with Brother Jack McDuff. He is a great guitar player and he was playing great guitar already in the mid-60s. Then there was Grant Green playing with Larry Young, Wes Montgomery with Jimmy Smith... From Georgie Fame I moved to The Graham Bond Organisation where Graham's playing Hammond organ with Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce playing acoustic bass, and Ginger playing his homemade drums at the time. It was a very fertile period."

### Pretty Flamingo

"This iconic person known as Alexis Korner, who was a blues player, was a generation above all of us, but he loved to play with jazz musicians. He had everybody in this band, whether it was Mick Jagger or Charlie Watts or Ginger and Jack, me, and Cyril Davies playing great blues harp and Dick Heckstall-Smith on sax. That's where I first met Eric Clapton, after a late-night session. He came down with some other players to the Flamingo after midnight, but we didn't really get to know each other until many years later, probably in the early 70s. Subsequently, of course, he graciously invited me to some of those charity Crossroads Festivals."

### The Hendrix Factor

"I was very impressed when I heard Eric play and, to me, I think he had a very powerful impact on Jimi Hendrix when Jimi came over to Britain in the mid-60s. Then Jimi took it that one level higher. That was a real revelation for me, to hear this kind of guitar, because by the time I was playing with Graham and Ginger and Jack it was more intense, it was more raw. It was like raw R&B, but it was really a great pleasure to play with these guys, great players."

"I wasn't happy with the kind of classical jazz tone. It's not that I'm against it, but I was listening to Coltrane and sometimes he's playing two notes at the same time, almost in a distorted way. When I heard Jimi, I equated him with the work Coltrane was doing with the saxophone because the way Jimi used distortion was amazing. You only have to listen to *Star-Spangled Banner*. For me, it's a total work of art."

### Getting A Sound

"Then I got a bigger amp, and I'm trying to tweak it up. I want to get a richer sound. I want more harmonics in the tone. This is basically what distortion does – it gives you extra harmonics, if it's a good amp, of course. I had my own jazz group: John

Surman on saxophone, Dave Holland on bass, Tony Oxley on drums, who was also in the Gordon Beck Quartet. Then I spent about 18 to 20 months as a studio shark, and there were some nice recordings. I remember doing a live jazz trio recording with Danny Thompson from Pentangle, and Tony Robinson on saxophone; we did some live BBC recordings. I did one or two nice things as a studio shark, albums here and there. I did a movie score with Burt Bacharach and I started to make some money, but I was suffering musically. I was really suffering, and I just pulled out."

### Seeking Freedom

"I moved to Antwerp and started playing with this more freeform band, led by this German vibes player, Gunter Hampel. I became a little bit poor again, but I was happier, and I was touring around because from Belgium you can go into France, Germany, Holland. It was nice to feel that. I was hanging out with Dave Holland a lot when I would come back to London. One day he said, 'Jack DeJohnette is in town with Bill Evans, the piano player... I saw him last night and he wants to jam tomorrow.' So we went and there was just Jack playing drums, Dave on bass, and me, guitar. Jack recorded it on one of these 'Mission Impossible' machines that were



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*“Miles was calling me at least twice a week – can I just drop by his house and bring the guitar?”*

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around in the mid-60s. When he was back in New York, Tony Williams, who was drumming with Miles Davis, said he’s planning to leave Miles and wanted a trio, a Hammond organ trio, and does Jack know a guitar player? And Jack played him the tape.”

### Measured By Miles

“I ended up in New York at the invitation of Tony Williams, not Miles. But I met Miles the same day because Tony had to finish off a week’s work with him at the Baron club in Harlem. Miles came right up to me and said, ‘We’ve got a recording day tomorrow at CBS, bring your guitar,’ out of the blue. He’d been my hero since 1958, and the following day was the recording of *In A Silent Way*. Somehow I passed that baptism of fire. But on top of that, Miles was calling me at least twice a week – can I just drop by his house and bring the guitar? This went on for several months, where I really got to know him. He’d just done a decade of the most amazing jazz music, but he wanted to break out. He wanted more blues and he was looking at me with all the years of playing with R&B bands. In addition, in the 60s, I was playing with funk bands, soul bands... There was one band, The Peppermint Twisters. Oh, man [laughs].”

### Breaking Out

“James Brown was a revelation and Miles loved that. The result of that, of course, became *Bitches Brew*, which became a certified platinum album. Amazing, really. When I wasn’t playing with Tony, I was playing with Miles, or recording with him. It must have been around October or November at the latest, in 1970, after a gig in a club. It was just the two of us, and I hadn’t played good at all. I had a very difficult night – I couldn’t get it together. Out of the blue, Miles said, ‘It’s time you formed your own band.’ And I took him very seriously at that. So the ideas for the Mahavishnu Orchestra were already brewing for at least a year prior to it actually happening – because, with Tony, he really liked how I wrote music, the compositions.”



John McLaughlin  
with The Free Spirits  
at the Montreux  
Jazz Festival, 1995

PHOTO BY STUDIOEDOUARD CURCHOD

### Under Orders

“With Tony, I was very fortunate because he encouraged me to write music, and a lot of that Mahavishnu music came to me during this period playing with Tony. I’d just done one of Miles’s dates, it’s called *Jack Johnson*, which is basically a jam. This is where I met Billy Cobham, and we got really, really tight right after that session. I had started the jam, and I was using chords that eventually became *The Dance Of Maya*. I was already in that vein. In any event, about two months later I got a call from [bass player] Miroslav Vitouš. We’d become friends in 1967, I think, when he was in London with Stan Getz. Anyway, he called me up. He said, ‘I’m making a band with Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul called Weather Report, and we’d like you to be in it.’ And I said, ‘That sounds really great, but I’m under orders from Miles. I’ve got to put my band together.’”

### New Beginnings

“In any event I met Jan [Hammer], and Rick Laird came from when we were fellow musicians in the Brian Auger Band.

I wanted a violin player – that comes from my mother – I didn’t want a horn player. But I didn’t want a jazz violin player, I wanted an R&B player, and it took me a while to find Jerry Goodman. He was in this group out in Chicago called The Flock and I heard the album and said, ‘This is the guy.’ And we got together. Actually, we got together for *My Goal’s Beyond*. Not all of us: Billy’s on drums, Jerry’s on violin, Charlie Haden’s on bass, Badal Roy, who we just lost recently, tabla player, whom I introduced to Miles. He was in Miles’s band for a while.

“Anyway, Billy and I started rehearsing the music and then the other guys came in, and we opened up to John Lee Hooker in The Whiskey A Go-Go on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village. Every night was a sell-out. From there we went straight to the studio and recorded *The Inner Mounting Flame*. And the rest is history, isn’t it?” **G**



John McLaughlin’s latest release, *The Montreux Years*, is available now via BMG [www.johnmclaughlin.com](http://www.johnmclaughlin.com)





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# FENDER SPARKLE FINISHES

Few people in the world know more about Fender sparkle finishes than our resident vintage guitar veteran David Davidson. Here, he takes us through the oft-misunderstood history of Fullerton's most lustrous axes

Words Rod Brakes Photography Phil Barker, Joby Sessions, Olly Curtis

Sparkle finish guitars are among the rarest and most enigmatic of Fender instruments. Decked out in metallic paint and embellished with metal flake, these dazzling beauties, though striking in appearance, often carry a mysterious past. While they are considered a true Fender finish, for a long time these special paint jobs were tasked to third parties. As custom finishes in the realist sense they extended not only outside the boundaries of Fender's automotive-inspired custom colour chart but beyond the limits of the factory itself. Perfectly encapsulating the golden era of American guitars, cars and movies, these glittering vintage rarities are a jewel in California's cultural crown.

"It was mostly about the hot-rod culture in California," begins guitar guru David Davidson of Well Strung Guitars. "People associate sparkle finishes with surf, but it really wasn't the surf thing so much as it was about the car culture in Southern California. That really was a big deal at the time, and Fender was right there in the middle of hot-rod country.

"They were in Fullerton, California, and all that stuff was happening around them. So, naturally, the idea of painting your guitar to look like a hot-rod was a cool thing. There

were a lot of bands with hot-rod names, and groups were writing songs about cars. There was Ronny & The Daytonas, for example, and The Rip Chords who wrote *Hey Little Cobra* about the Shelby Cobra. Dick Dale wrote about cars. As did The Beach Boys. So having guitars that kind of resembled cars was a really big deal."

Fuelling the obsession were the movies of the time, which often featured cars decked out in colourful, glittering finishes. Before long, sparkle finish guitars were also appearing on the silver screen.

"There were a lot of car movies and beach movies made back in the late 50s and early 60s," explains David. "Typically, there's a scene where a guy pulls up in something blue sparkle or red metal flake, or green metal flake like the '62 Jaguar [pictured here on page 87]. So, as you can imagine,

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*These glittering  
vintage rarities are a  
jewel in California's  
cultural crown*  
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people started saying, 'Hey, I want my guitar painted like that!'

"It starts to hit a fever with Ann-Margret in [the 1963 feature film] *Bye Bye Birdie*. That movie features a highly customised Fender Jaguar. It's unbelievable. It's black with a gold pickguard and controls, and it has this big gold sparkle ribbon painted on that says 'Conrad Birdie'. They made several different guitars for the producers to look at and decide which guitar [protagonist] Conrad Birdie was going to play. One of them is a gold Jaguar with a black to gold sparkle sunburst pickguard and a matching headstock. I have that guitar here."

David's collection of Fender sparkle finish instruments is enviable. Having hunted down these rarities for many years he has built up a ton of knowledge on their unique idiosyncrasies. But how does he manage to navigate the minefield of the vintage market? After all, genuine sparkle finishes are notoriously difficult to authenticate.

"When I started to do the deep dive into sparkle guitars years ago, I got offered a lot of them," says David. "People knew I was buying them and I saw many. But I've got to tell you: more than 80 per cent of them were fake! Authenticating them is about using all your senses – sight, sound, touch, texture and even smell. It's based on experience.



*“Car culture was a big deal, and Fender was right there in the middle of hot-rod country”*

DAVID DAVIDSON

This 1963 Fender Stratocaster in Royal Blue sparkle finish is featured in Norman Harris's book *Norman's Rare Guitars*





- 1. This uber-rare sparkle finish Strat is currently being offered for sale by Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath
- 2. A veneer rosewood 'board with clay dots and mint green 'guard are the typical hallmarks of a Strat from this era
- 3. Tags displaying the instrument's serial number and specific automotive paint type – in this case, Royal Blue

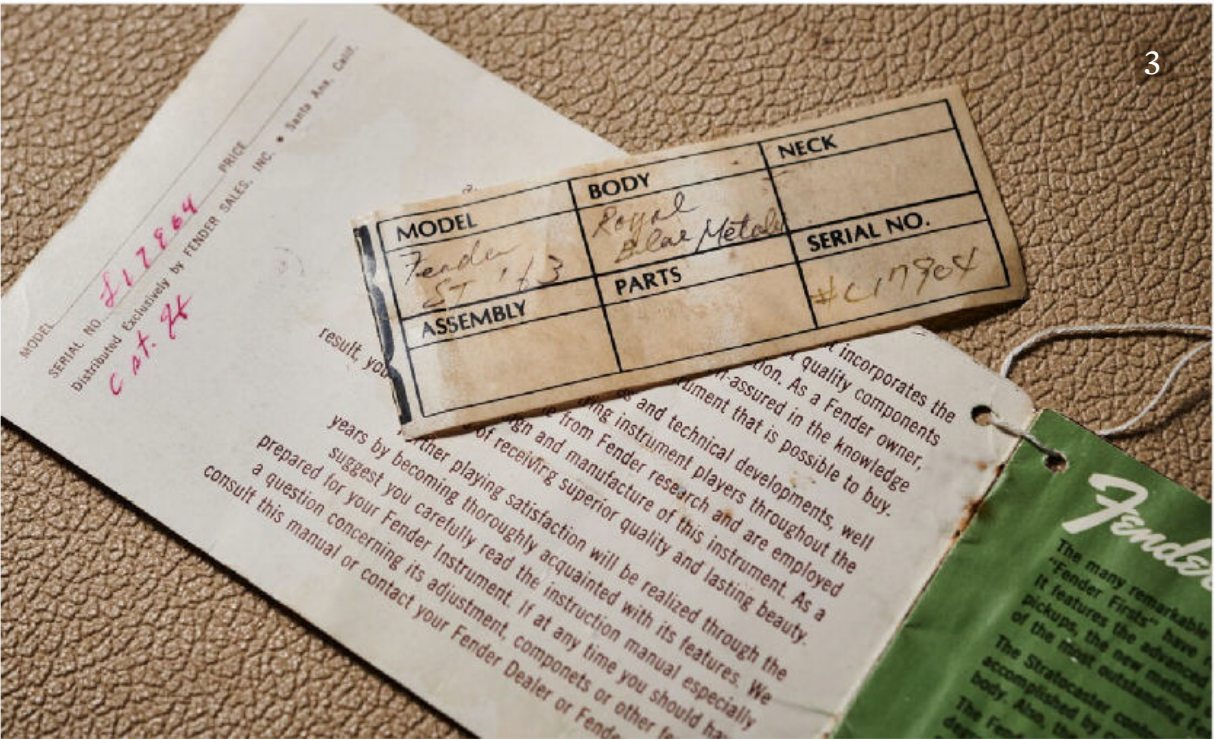
“There were different shops, each with their own painting techniques. Firstly, there is the blue-grey primer era. Then there is the rough era, followed by the smooth era. Also, when I look at a chip in the paint, I can see the stages of how the paint was applied. Knowing paint and being a guy who really loves automotive things and paint finishes, I’ve gotten a really good feel as to what it’s supposed to look like. Over time, you start to notice consistencies and inconsistencies that make you think, ‘Okay, this is the way that every one of these looks for that period.’ It took me going through about 80 sparkle finish Fenders to figure it out.”

According to David, Fender outsourced all sparkle finishes up to 1966, the reason being they were unequipped to complete such specialist work in-house. As ad hoc custom orders, one might reason it was uneconomical to invest in the necessary equipment and expertise to meet such relatively infrequent requests. After all, Leo Fender was all about streamlining manufacturing processes.

“This is the bottom line: before 1966, the Fender manufacturing facility never painted a guitar in a sparkle finish,” underscores David. “All sparkle finishes were subbed out to be done at local shops. Fender used a very common spray gun in that period

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*“Before 1966, all sparkle finishes were subbed out to be done at local shops”*

DAVID DAVIDSON



called a Binks Model 7. If you look at any old pictures where they’re spraying guitars, they’ll be using one of those. It’s a suction-style paint gun, meaning you fill a cup with paint, it gets sucked up a tube, mixed with air and then comes out of the main nozzle. On the other hand, area hot-rod shops used a downdraft paint gun where you put the material into a cup that is attached to the top. It’s gravitational, meaning the paint falls into the paint gun instead of getting sucked up.

“When Fender used a suction-style Binks Model 7, the suction was not strong enough to pull up that heavy metal flake. The downdraft paint guns were what was needed and that’s why they went to hot-rod shops to be begin with. However, by 1966 Fender had their own paint guns that were able to do this process.”

So, when did Fender start sending them out? The company didn’t publish its custom

colour chart until the early 60s, so any custom colour from the 50s is especially rare. But a 50s sparkle finish?

“First of all, they never used a regular custom colour for sparkle finishes,” highlights David. “It was a completely different colour – normally a hot-rod colour of some kind. Think about what people were driving and what colours they were painting the cars: it was gold, silver, red, white, blue and green. That was about it. Those are the Fender sparkle colours.

“The earliest true sparkle Fender guitar that I know of is actually a red ’55 Stratocaster,” David tells us. “It was made for Jimmy Bryant. But he did not originally get the guitar in sparkle; he gave it back to Fender who then had it repainted for him. I don’t know exactly when the finish was applied, but it has the typical blueish-grey undercoat of the first era of sparkle finishes from the 50s.





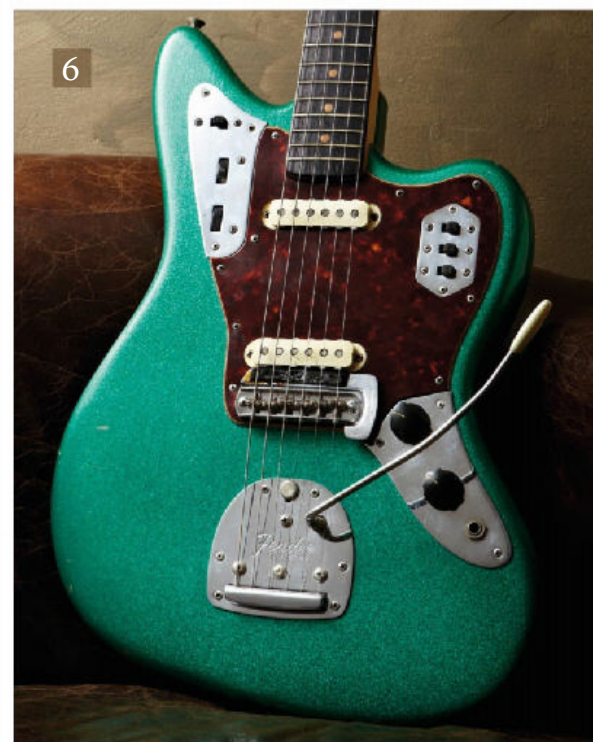
*“Authenticating [uses] all your senses – sight, sound, touch, texture, even smell”*

DAVID DAVIDSON

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**4.** This iconic-looking 1966 Fender Jazzmaster is the epitome of surf-rock. It features a bound rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays (block inlays appeared later in 1966)

**5.** Like some regular custom colour models of the early 60s, sparkle finish Fenders often feature matching headstocks (as per the three offset guitars pictured here)

**6.** This 1962 slab-'board Fender Jaguar is one the earliest of its type and was the star of the Songbirds Guitar Museum's surf guitar exhibition curated by David Davidson



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“The earliest instruments I’ve seen that were sold as new in a sparkle finish were made in 1957 as presentation pieces. And I have a 1957 blue sparkle Precision Bass that was owned by Lloyd Trotman who was the bass player for Ray Charles; it was also owned by Shifty Henry who played with Elvis. I also have a ’57 Stratocaster here with a blueish-grey undercoat that appears on early sparkle finishes. We surmise that they were all done by one person.”

According to David, other sparkle finishes from the late 50s he’s examined look very similar. However, by ’59, the undercoats and finish textures appear different.

“I have a ’59 that doesn’t actually have an undercoat,” he points out. “I think by that time they were using someone else to do them. Not all the names and places are on record, but we know a guy named Dennis Swiden did a lot of the beach guitars, including Dick Dale’s.

“The famous silver sparkle Buck Owens and Don Rich guitars [from the early 60s] were made from crushed glass, so the finish on them is very rough. It feels like rubbing your hand over pebbles. There were three of those guitars made: one was made for Buck, one was made for Don, and [Fender employee] George Fullerton kept one for

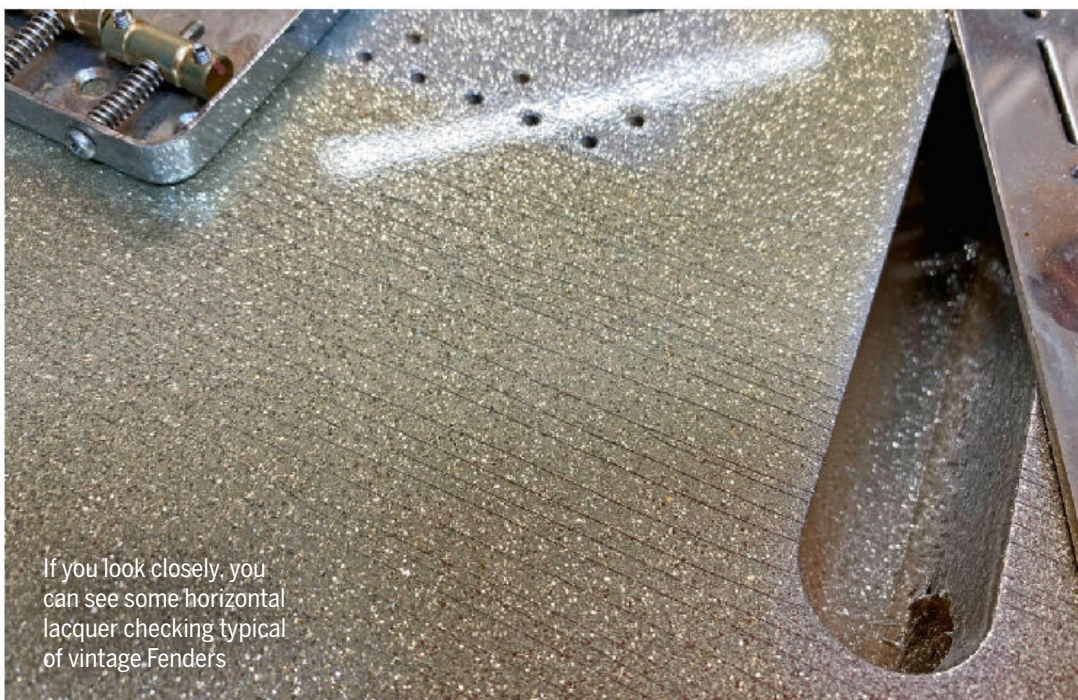
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*“Crushed glass [finishes] feel like rubbing your hand over pebbles”*

**DAVID DAVIDSON**

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7. A 1963 Fender VI in 'Pink Champagne' sparkle finish: "When I was first contacted about this guitar, I thought, 'It's not going to be real,'" recalls David

8. Introduced in 1961, the VI (often referred to as the 'Bass VI') featured three single-coil pickups with metal surrounds. In '63 the model adopted these Jaguar-style notched metal pickups

9. When David examined this guitar it was deemed to be original. It also happened to come with authentic publicity photos!

himself. I have that guitar here. They're all Custom Telecasters with rope binding on the front and the back. Interestingly, they were also the first maple cap [fretboard] guitars ever made. And they have matching headstocks too, so they're really, really cool.

"I also have guitars from the early 60s that are not quite crushed glass like the Buck Owens and Don Rich guitars, but they do have very, very heavy metal flake finishes. What's interesting is that their texture changes depending on who painted them. But by 1966, when Fender start doing sparkle finishes in-house, the texture becomes very smooth. I think they were just sprayed with a very thick clearcoat, which they were then able to polish to a smoother finish. It was a refinement." 

**Guitarist would like to thank Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York, and Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath**

## BRIGHT SPARK

*Scott Cameron of Golden Era Aged Guitars is keeping the art of the sparkle finish alive in 2022*

With a new product dropping on its website at 7pm every Friday night, you never quite know what might be coming out of Scott Cameron's workshop at Golden Era Aged Guitars (previously SC Relics). Ranging from classic custom colours to metal flake finishes, Scott's skilfully aged Fender-style bodies and necks are works of art in themselves. We asked him about some of the ins and outs when it comes to the tricky business of sparkle finishes.

**Many people have found refinishing their own guitars to be a satisfying experience. Would you recommend DIY-ing a sparkle finish?**

"Sparkle finishes are pretty niche and I wouldn't recommend doing them in your garden shed. This isn't a case of buying an aerosol from Manchester Guitar Tech or Halfords for a weekend project."

**Run us through your process.**

"When I get the bare body, I put a sealer on it, which is clear, so that there is a flat surface and something for the metallic basecoat to adhere to. I'll spray that on thinly, let it dry very quickly, then it's ready to be hit with flake. I usually pour the dry flake into the clear lacquer and add a touch of thinner, which helps it all go through the gun a bit easier. But you've got to be careful it doesn't run. It takes a lot of twisting and turning to avoid any sagging or runs. After that, I'll hang it up overnight.

"The next day, I'll load up the clearcoat gun somewhere in the range of 80:20 lacquer to thinner. With a sparkle finish, you have to put on an excessive amount of clear. It's very laborious. It takes far more coats and sanding than a regular flat colour. You could probably do three or four flat finishes in the time it takes to do one sparkle finish.

Sparkle finishes have a bumpy texture early on in the process because of the flake. But if you start to sand it too early, you'll scuff the colour off the flakes – your nice gold flakes might end up with weird silver sanding marks. That's why you need to put more clearcoats on. You could probably get away with three or four clearcoats over Sonic Blue, Fiesta Red, Olympic White et cetera. But with sparkle finishes you're looking at 15 to 20 coats of clear lacquer over the top.

"Sparkle finishes are niche, they take a lot of work and they're hard to do. But they're totally worth it."

**What's the demand for sparkle finishes like at the moment?**

"The people who go for sparkle finishes tend to really love them. I find the Champagne, silver and gold sparkle finishes sell really well. Personally, I like the stronger colours like purple and teal. I love them; I just like to see some colour in life. When you're surrounded by a batch of sparkle finishes it's awesome. There's an amazing amount of colour and mess all over the place – my workshop looks like a unicorn has thrown up Skittles everywhere! – but when you look at a rack of sparkle finishes it just looks totally bitchin'."



# Master Stroke

One of our favourite signature guitars from one of our favourite guitar players gets a more affordable Japanese makeover. How does it stack up?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis





CHARVEL GUTHRIE GOVAN SIGNATURE MJ SAN DIMAS SD24 CM | REVIEW







## CHARVEL GUTHRIE GOVAN SIGNATURE MJ SAN DIMAS SD24 CM £2,449

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### What You Need To Know

- 1 Haven't we seen this guitar before in a different colour?**  
Yes and no! The main difference with this latest Guthrie Govan signature from Charvel is that it is manufactured in Japan, which recalls where the brand was actually made from 1986 to 1991.
- 2 So it's a copy of the USA model?**  
As Guthrie explains in our interview later on, this new model retains many of the US model's features and is currently his 'No 1'. It uses a basswood body with an ash veneer facing, and it's quite a bit cheaper than the USA models, too.
- 3 This is clearly a guitar for Guthrie wannabees only, then?**  
That's the interesting thing. Guthrie's wide-ranging style – is there anything he can't play? – means that he needs a guitar that can produce a very wide range of sounds, pristine cleans to very saturated and everything in between. His signature model is the epitome of workhorse.

**C**harvel has been owned by Fender Musical Instruments Corporation since 2002 and it's been a good fit, sitting between the more-rock aimed Jackson line and the modern fringes of Fender, such as the Ultra range. In fact, if you simply consider Charvel to be the 'modern' Fender, you're just about there. Another way to view the brand, particularly this latest Guthrie Govan signature, is a souped-up and pimped version of what once may have been a Stratocaster.

Whichever way you view it, the GG is built for pro-level use and, as Guthrie himself tells us, despite having another pair of US signatures, this more affordable Japanese-made model is actually his No 1 currently. If it's good enough for Guthrie...

The guitar centres around a standard Fender scale length, but it has a 24-fret neck that sits on a lightly chamfered heel with a palm scoop on the back underneath the treble cutaway. As with numerous Charvels instruments, including the US GG signatures, the neck is caramelised (aka roasted) maple, rift-sawn, with dual carbon graphite rods either side of the two-way truss rod with its spoke wheel adjuster at the base of the neck. Frets are stainless steel and they're big. There are numerous subtle changes compared with the existing USA

models, too: the nut, for example, is Tusq XL (not bone), the locking tuners are by Gotoh, not Sperzel, but still retain staggered height posts, and the fingerboard inlays are simple 'crème' dots. As ever, the side dots are those glow-in-the-dark Luminlay types; the same fluorescent material is used around the base of the control knobs to highlight the numbers.

The major change here, however, is not only the sunburst finish to the face but also that the body material is basswood topped with what Charvel calls an ash 'top'. On removing the neck, though, you can see in the cleanly-cut pocket that it's just a thin veneer – a visual effect, let's say – and the top face is also perfectly flat, unlike the current trend for more open-pore style finishes, especially those over ash. The edges are less radiused than you'd find on a vintage Stratocaster, the forearm and rib-cage contour less dished. But with a

This perfectly aimed working tool could just as easily be used for your jazz sit-in gig as your arena rock tour





The Korean-made pickups here have the same spec as the USA versions and were originally designed by ex-Fender guru Michael Frank-Braun

The solo pickup single-coil simulations are seamless and really balanced with the mixes



This unusual placement for the output jack means you can secure your lead easily through your strap. One of many performance-related tweaks in the design

## THE RIVALS

Fender's American Ultra Luxe Stratocaster Floyd Rose (£2,399) uses an HSS configuration and comes with a double-locking vibrato along with compound radius fingerboard and 22 jumbo stainless-steel frets. The Mexican-made Player Stratocaster HSH (£739) will get you into the Guthrie vibe with its two-post vibrato, standard 241mm (9.5-inch) radius fingerboard and Player series pickups.

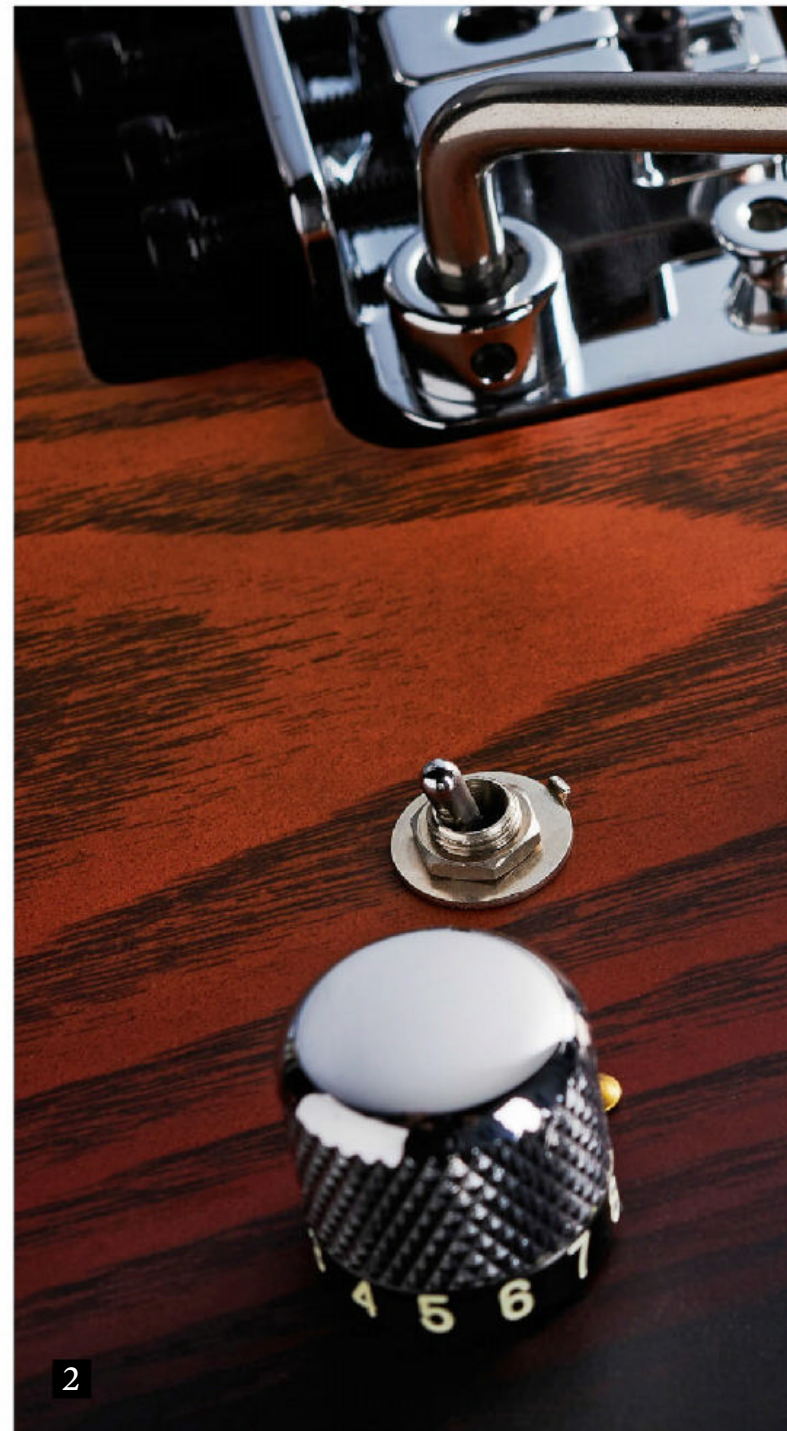
PRS's Fiore (£2,599) was designed with another hardworking guitarist, Mark Lettieri. This ash-bodied bolt-on also uses a two-post vibrato and some tricky series/parallel switching for the bridge humbucker.

Ibanez's RG range is packed with HSH models, but the AZ range has a more 'hot-rod' style. The AZ2402 (approx. £1,749) has some tricky Dyna-MIX9 switching system with Alter Switch from its dual Seymour Duncan Hyperion direct-mount humbuckers, and features a roasted neck with 24 stainless-steel frets. Another superb Japanese workhorse.





1. These Gotoh rear lock tuners replace the Sperzels on the USA models. Other subtle changes include a Tusq XL nut instead of bone



The return to pitch is superb, particularly with the vibrato's wide range... It's a very stable guitar

weight of 3.65kg (8.03lb) it feels perfect – purposeful, and certainly not feather-light.

Called a Charvel 'locking tremolo bridge', which we'd call a Floyd Rose without the fine tuners, the all-steel vibrato with its brass block is recessed into the body so the face of the baseplate is level with the face of the body. It's back-routed, too, although it gives a wide range from just about five semitones up on the G string down to pretty much slack. As we mentioned, the nut is standard style, not locking, yet the return to pitch is superb, particularly with that range. Irrespective of its vibrato, it's a very stable guitar, tuning-wise.

The pickups and circuit are, according to Guthrie, the same as his other signatures, but these pickups are Korean-made to the same specs as the USA pickups, and the bridge humbucker, while still direct-mounted, has some foam underneath to allow limited height adjustment. The circuit is simple in action: master volume and master tone with a five-way level switch that offers bridge humbucker in position 1; bridge inner single coil and middle single coil in position 2; bridge outer single coil

and neck outer single coil in position 3; middle single coil and neck outer single coil in position 4; and, finally, the neck humbucker in position 5. A small-tipped mini-toggle switch provides a simulated single-coil voice for either solo humbucker, too, and, by design, all selections are hum-cancelling. As with the previous signatures, the output jack plate is in the dished style of the Stratocaster, but it's placed on the treble side of the bottom strap button so you can easily thread your lead through your strap for some extra onstage security.

### Feel & Sounds

Despite those extra frets the GG obviously feels very familiar, both strapped on and seated. The neck is classed as having a 'speed' profile, which equates to its pretty flat 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) compound radius and what feels like a shallow C profile. It's very modern Charvel in style with similar depth (20mm at the 1st fret and 21.2mm at the 12th) to other models we've previously reviewed. Those frets are big (approximately 2.77mm wide by 1.45mm high) with plenty of height, but

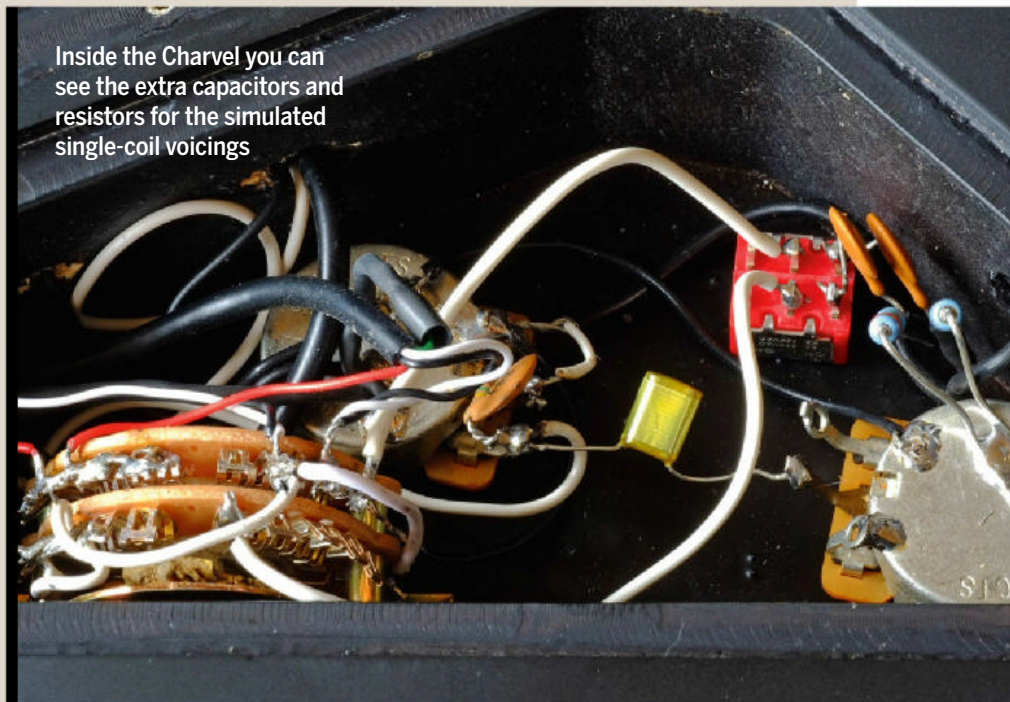




2. These Tele-style control knobs also have clear Luminlay numbers around the bases. The small toggle switch introduces simulated single-coil sounds, while the volume control features an effective treble bleed circuit that retains clarity as you drop the volume

the work is very good and that includes quite heavily rolled edges. In terms of setup, things are set pretty low, too (approximately 1.3mm on both treble and bass sides at the 12th fret), with minimal relief. Overall, straight out of the box, the playability is superb and, as we said, tuning-wise it's very stable. Once again we rarely touched the tuners during our sound test, which went on for a considerable time.

As we found when we looked at the previous GG signature, the sounds we hear and explore here are very diverse, and yet outside of the solo humbuckers every other sound is a combination of single coils: there's a little honk to the funk in positions 2 and 4, while in position 3 we welcome a Telecaster-style mix. The solo pickup single-coil simulations are seamless and really balanced with those mixes, with less volume drop than you might experience when faced with a standard coil-split. But if you want an altogether different voice then the full-coil humbuckers are there to provide it: the bridge has a snarly, punchy midrange clout, and the neck is thick but well balanced, a gear or two above hot



Inside the Charvel you can see the extra capacitors and resistors for the simulated single-coil voicings



With the rear cavity cover removed you'll see that foam under the three springs and the brass vibrato block

## UNDER THE HOOD

What clever tricks await us inside the new GG?

**T**he circuit here is a simple drive, and both volume and tone pots are 500k CTS. The tone cap is valued at .047 microfarads, while the volume control uses a 680 picofarads ceramic disc capacitor and a 150kohms resistor in parallel in the usual position across the first two lugs of the pot. A four-pole five-way lever switch provides the tricky coil selection and mixing of the single coils, while the single-coil simulations, switched simultaneously, are achieved by filtering the screw coil of the bridge pickup and the slug coil of the neck through a 0.1 microfarad capacitor with a 1.5k resistor in series to ground filtering, effectively a low-pass filter.

Aside from the fact that the HSH pickups were designed by ex-Fender guru Michael Frank-Braun and here are Korean-made, we really don't know any more about them, but the DCRs certainly reflect what we hear: 14.69kohms at output for the bridge humbucker and 9.81k for the neck.

And, as we discuss with Guthrie later on, you'll find – rather unusually – a strip of quite hard foam placed under the vibrato springs when you remove the rear cover, and you can clearly see the brass vibrato block.





3. This wide-travel vibrato, based on the Floyd Rose design, is recessed into the body and back-routed. It's an all-steel design with brass block and push-in, tension-adjustable arm



**CHARVEL GUTHRIE GOVAN SIGNATURE MJ SAN DIMAS SD24 CM**

- PRICE:** £2,449 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway San Dimas-shaped solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Basswood with ash veneer facing  
**NECK:** Caramelised flame maple with graphite reinforcement, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5-inch)  
**NUT:** Graph Tech Tusq XL/43.1mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Caramelized flame maple, Crème Dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") compound radius, Luminlay side dots  
**FRETS:** 24, Jumbo stainless steel  
**HARDWARE:** Recessed Charvel locking vibrato, Gotoh rear-locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 50.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Charvel Custom humbuckers (bridge and neck); Custom single coil (middle), 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (w/ knurled dome-style Luminlay numbered knobs), 2-position 'single coil' mini-switch (bridge and neck pickups only)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.65/8.03  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** There are 2 USA GG signatures (both £3,699), the USA Signature HSH Caramelized Ash and the USA Signature HSH Flame Maple. Other MJ Charvels are the HSS Rick Graham Signature MJ DK24 2PT CM (£2,549) and the HSH MJ DK24 HSH 2PT E Mahogany with Figured Walnut (£2,299)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Three-Tone Sunburst – satin body and neck, sunburst colour to top only, back and body sides are black



9/10

- PROS** Very fit-for-purpose working guitar; faultless build and very stable in terms of tuning, not least the non-locking vibrato; widely diverse sounds; fully hum-cancelling
- CONS** As good as it is, the GG faces some stiff competition – some different colours might broaden the appeal

There are some seriously big sounds here contrasted by quite shimmering single-coil voices

vintage. But the tricks don't stop there because with such a well-voiced treble bleed circuit on the volume control, pulling it back tames some of the bluster without dulling the attack. Certainly, if you drive this guitar with those controls full-up then it's cool, but you're missing a lot – especially when you're working with your pedalboard.

**Verdict**  
It's all right for big league guitar players to take out 10 or more guitars – they have roadies and techs to lug them around, restring and maintain them. Yet here is the antithesis of that: a perfectly aimed working tool that covers vast amounts of ground and could just as easily be used for your jazz sit-in gig as it could be on your arena rock tour. A decent gigbag and some spare strings and you're good to go, wherever your music takes you.

There are some seriously big sounds here contrasted by quite shimmering single-coil voices, and everything is hum-cancelling by design, so that's something else you don't have to worry about. For the performing musician or studying musician who doesn't want to limit the sounds they can produce from the one guitar, it's hard to fault. **G**



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# Family Values

Guthrie Govan finds time to chat guitars during his large-scale Hans Zimmer tour

Words Dave Burrluck

**To set the record straight, we believe your first Charvel signature actually dates back to 2014. We previously looked at the two-piece, centred-joined ‘caramelised’ ash version around four and a half years ago, so this new MJ model is signature number....?**

“A good question, and one which I had never considered before! I suppose the original 2014 model was the ‘Mk 1’ and then the ‘Mk 2’ version emerged several years later, incorporating additional innovations – such as the little switch to engage the single-coil emulation in each humbucker – and also offering two different body wood ‘flavours’. This latest MJ interpretation of the design is intended to complement the previous versions rather than to supersede them, so to call it the ‘Mk 3’ might be slightly misleading, but technically I guess it would nonetheless be accurate.”

“I think of this guitar simply as a new member of the GG signature family, not a ‘budget’ version”

**Currently, along with the new MJ model, there’s the ‘caramelised’ ash and the basswood/flame maple signatures – both USA-made. The new model uses a bit of both: basswood body with an ash veneer top. How do the different body wood combinations affect the character of the guitar?**

“Tonally, I’d say that the new model sounds closer to the basswood/maple version. The ash top doubtless contributes a little extra ‘shimmer’ to the tone, but mostly I’m hearing basswood characteristics in the MJ guitar. It’s pretty much neutral across all the frequencies, so it’s a good all-rounder.”

**Aside from the body wood change (and where it’s made and the lower cost), were there any other tweaks to the new model?**

“We actually discovered a couple of subtle ways to improve on the original design by incorporating some strategically placed foam [more on this later...], but in more

general terms I was keen to retain as many of the original US features as possible, so the functionality and quality of the guitar wouldn’t be compromised in any way. I think of this guitar simply as a new member of the GG signature family, rather than as a ‘budget’ version. To illustrate this, I may as well add that I’m currently out on the road with Hans Zimmer, and the MJ prototype actually turned out to be my No 1 guitar for the bulk of the set.”

**Aside from the stability that the graphite neck reinforcement brings, in your experience does it have any effect on the sound, and/or response of the guitar?**

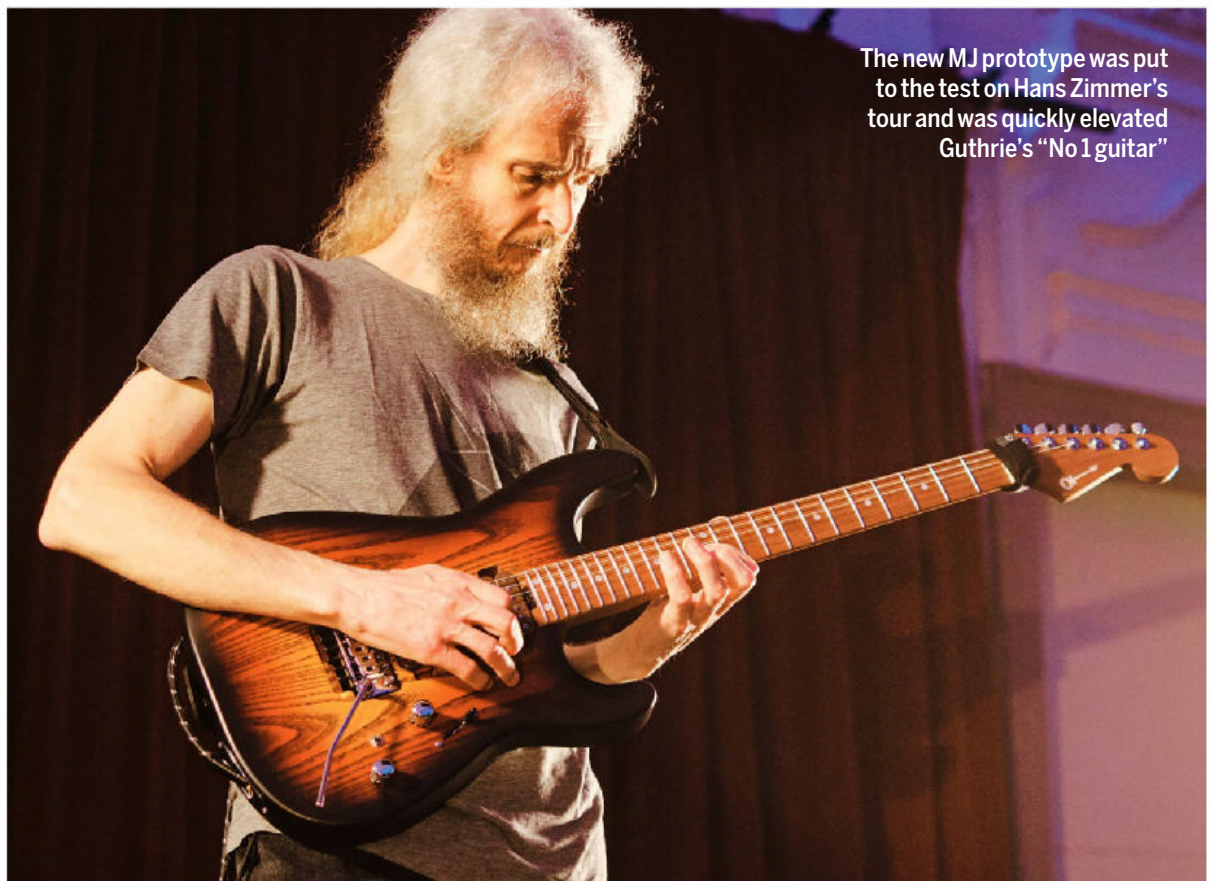
“Well, everything affects the tone of an instrument, so I’m sure the graphite is contributing something, perhaps a little extra ‘tightness’? In all honesty, though, it’s hard for me to describe exactly what the tonal difference might be because we never actually experimented with a non-graphite alternative during the initial development phase. Based on years of touring experience, I was just determined to go with the most stable possible option for the neck construction for this model, so I never really contemplated ruling out the graphite reinforcement.”

**What about the pickups – have there been any changes since 2014?**

“No, they’re the same. I believe the pickups on the MJ guitar are actually made in Korea, but the design is identical. When I received the MJ prototype, I didn’t notice any difference in the sound of the pickups and was genuinely surprised to learn that they had been manufactured elsewhere.”

**When you were originally voicing the guitar, did you refer to any favourite pickup in particular?**

“Not really. Michael Frank-Braun designed those pickups from scratch and our communications during the development process mostly focused on what we wanted the pickups to do in terms of retaining dynamic response and maximising their sensitivity to different playing techniques. In terms of output, I wanted the pickups to be hot enough to drive a relatively ‘vintage’ amp convincingly, while avoiding the loss of clarity and character that can result from making a pickup excessively hot. It was really helpful that Michael seemed to understand the requirements of my particular playing style and he had some pretty accurate instincts about what I was looking for.”



The new MJ prototype was put to the test on Hans Zimmer’s tour and was quickly elevated Guthrie’s “No 1 guitar”



Guthrie's latest signature holds onto many of the features of its US counterpart, though the Tremol-No is omitted from the recessed Charvel locking vibrato

**In your guitar's promo video you talk about foam, as you mentioned a little earlier. Tell us more about that.**

"We found two useful ways to incorporate foam into this design. Firstly, there's some foam in the vibrato cavity to prevent the springs from ringing out sympathetically – which really helps to clean up the gaps when you're playing staccato rhythms with a highly overdriven amp setting.

"Secondly, there's some additional magic foam behind the bridge pickup. The basic design of the GG guitars features pickups with a fixed height, so they're bolted down to the body wood. I think there are certain tonal benefits to doing things this way and I personally like the 'factory setup' balance between all the pickups, with the bridge humbucker a little hotter than all the other settings. But I realised that some players might prefer a little more consistency between the levels of each humbucker, so having that foam behind the bridge pickup keeps it stable while allowing for subtle height adjustments.

"The inspiration for this tweak actually came when I was playing around with a [Universal Audio] UAD Apollo interface and realised that the bridge humbucker seemed just that little bit too keen to push the signal into the red – a definite no-no when recording digitally."

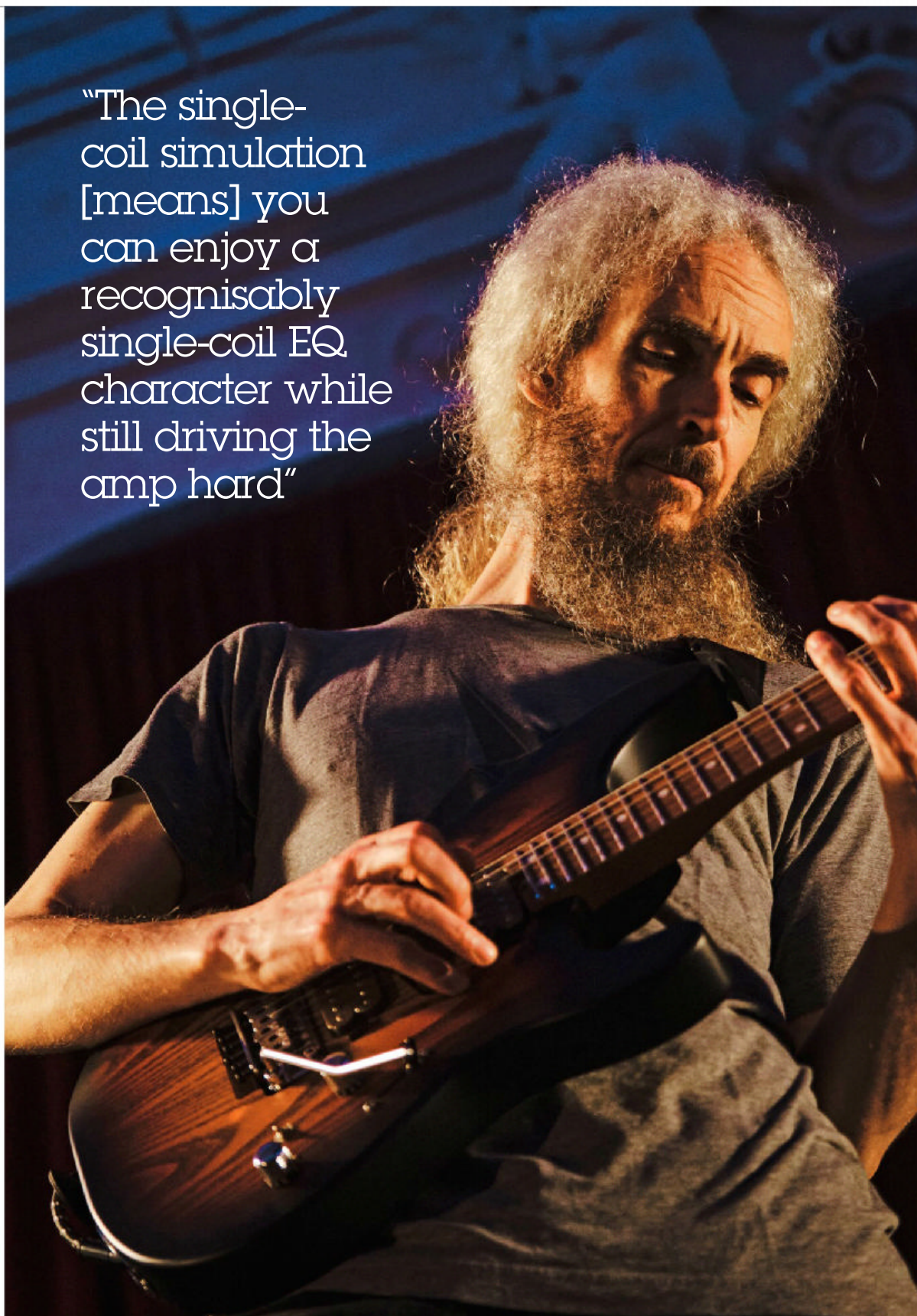
**There's no Tremol-No fitted to the new model. Why is that?**

"We wanted to retain as many of the cool US features as possible, but we were also keen to make this guitar more affordable without compromising any aspect of its quality – and the Tremol-No seemed like the one feature that could reasonably be removed on the grounds that, firstly, not every player would feel the need for such a device and, secondly, it would be easy enough to install one yourself if you felt the need for it."

**Most HSH guitars offer some kind of single-coil splits. You use the simulation, which is still hum-cancelling. Have you previously had problems with single-coil hum? How important to you is it that all the sounds are as hum-free as possible?**

"For me, it's pretty important, at least for touring applications, where I frequently

"The single-coil simulation [means] you can enjoy a recognisably single-coil EQ character while still driving the amp hard"



encounter unpredictable electrical supplies and such like. In those situations it's comforting to know that none of my pickup settings will add to the unavoidable issues of in-house buzz and interference. Incidentally, the other thing I really like about the single-coil simulation is that the output level pretty much matches that of the full humbucker setting, so you can enjoy a recognisably single-coil EQ character while still driving the amp hard."

**Do you have to do any maintenance on the road? We suspect you might be quite handy with a nut file! Do you have any general tips for anyone trying to keep a non-locking vibrato in tune?**

"I very rarely need to do any kind of mid-tour surgery on these guitars – they were very much designed with reliability in mind so, generally, everything just works. In terms of maximising tuning stability without resorting to the use of a locking nut, some of that is 'baked' into the design

of the guitar; the nut slots are well cut and the staggered height tuners ensure that the strings bend no more than is strictly necessary as they pass over the nut. In more general terms, I'm a big fan of using some kind of nut lubricant to reduce friction. Big Bends Nut Sauce always does the trick for me, but a couple of wise guitar techs have informed me that you can approximate at least some of those benefits with a humbler product such as a ChapStick!"

**Finally, why was Charvel the right partner to create your signature guitars?**

"When Charvel initially approached me, it became clear that they were genuinely interested in what I needed from a guitar and that they were willing to invest a lot of their time, energy and expertise into designing something that truly took all of my input into account. We spent a good couple of years refining the design, so these guitars really do feel like the result of a true collaborative effort." **G**



# History Repeating

Boss presents a pedal to truly recreate the sound of Roland's iconic tape echo unit

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis







## BOSS SPACE ECHO RE-202 £339

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

### What You Need To Know

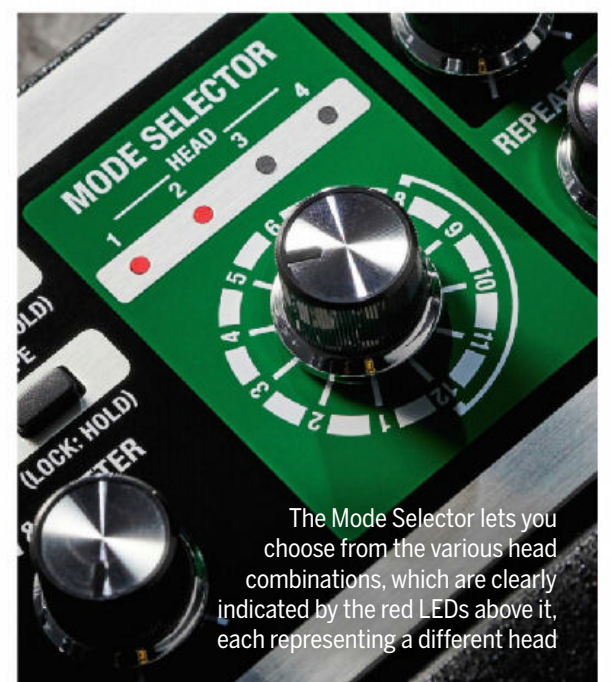
- 1 Space Echo? Now, that sounds familiar...**  
 Yes, Roland had a family of tape echo units, the most iconic of which was the RE-201 Space Echo. Boss revived the name with its RE-20 digital pedal and now that is superseded by two pedals that are said to be truer to the original, the RE-202 here and the RE-2 compact pedal.
- 2 Why would I want one of these rather than an original?**  
 Convenience and practicality are big factors. Vintage units are rather expensive, require regular maintenance and won't fit on your pedalboard (although a remote footswitch will).
- 3 Okay, fair point, but isn't it all about the sound?**  
 Yes, but if a digital recreation can closely match the rich character of the real thing, then we'll take it!

**T**he RE-201 Space Echo has become the stuff of legend – as our recent retrospective in issue 483's Classic Gear column on Roland's multi-head tape echo explored. The company knew that such an important machine deserved to be celebrated in a pedal and came up with the Boss RE-20 around 15 years ago. However, technology moves on and the time was ripe to revisit the Space Echo, with new advancements allowing a deeper delve into its complex non-linear behaviour.

Boss says that everything that influences the sound was carefully examined and recreated with new algorithms, the result being not one but two new pedals: the triple-footswitch RE-202 we have on test here, and the RE-2, which comes in standard Boss compact pedal form – still sonically potent but missing some of its sibling's features.

The RE-202 is about the size of two and a half Boss compact pedals set side by side and features a curvy chassis shape that gives a nod to the earliest Boss pedals, such as the CE-1, DM-1 and DB-5. Offering stereo as well as mono connection, the right side of the RE-202's control surface mirrors the exact knob layout of an RE-201 with a 12-position rotary mode selector to choose the head combinations.

This new version differs from the original, however, by having four virtual heads, rather than three. Where the modes on the RE-201 offered four different head options without reverb, seven with reverb and one reverb-only mode, this one provides seven modes offering all the various options for the first three heads singly and in combination, plus a further five modes that incorporate the fourth head. Reverb can be independently added to all 12 simply by turning up the Reverb Volume knob.



The Mode Selector lets you choose from the various head combinations, which are clearly indicated by the red LEDs above it, each representing a different head





1. The Tape button and the Saturation and Wow & Flutter controls let you dial in some distinct vintage tape echo characteristics, including the sound of less-than-pristine tape, pitch waver and saturation

2. You can connect an external expression pedal and assign it to one or more parameters for even greater performance versatility

By contrast, the smaller RE-2 only has three virtual heads and has 11 modes that match the RE-201's echo modes (with reverb on only modes 5 to 11). In its default Normal mode the RE-202 has the same Repeat Rate (delay time) range as an RE-201 and a maximum value for the tap tempo of one second, but there is a Long mode (with a two second tap tempo), and the extended delay time increases options beyond a purely vintage experience.

### Sounds

Part of the sonic profile of a tape echo is obviously due to the idiosyncrasies of the tape medium and its transport mechanism. The RE-202 gives you access to a range of parameters that mimic these, meaning

that certain sonic characteristics that you'd have little or no control over in an original machine can be zeroed in on here to get the exact sound you want with consistency. For example, you can set the RE-202 to sound like a machine where the tape is pristine or one where the tape is well used and exhibits duller tone. The waywardness of the sound is caused by small fluctuations in tape speed due to the state of the transport mechanism, and this can be adjusted with the Wow & Flutter knob, which adds a realistic characteristic swimminess, but it can get further into pitch modulation like a machine that's out of kilter, or just for effect.

The preamp in an original machine contributes to sonic character, particularly when driven hard, adding compression

The RE-202 has a range of parameters that mimic the idiosyncrasies of the tape medium







## THE RIVALS

Less expensive and smaller, the new Boss RE-2 (£199) has the same basic sound, although there are no presets, no Tape Age or Saturation controls and a single Tone knob. If it really has to be tape, besides buying a vintage unit, the Australian Echo Fix EF-X2 (£2,190) is a new-build three-head machine inspired by the Space Echo. It has the seven head combinations and reverb. Strymon's Volante Magnetic Echo Machine (£375) does a solid recreation of a multi-head tape echo, and not only does it recreate the sound of a machine with equidistant heads like the RE-201, it also has a knob that can vary the head spacing.



and distortion – and this is reproduced here by the Saturation knob, which is great for thickening and dirtying the repeats. You have the option of preamp emulation either being switched in with the echo effect or always on, contributing to your overall tone even when the echo is bypassed. In this case, the Saturation knob will turn up the juice on both the repeats and the dry sound. Besides these, the Bass and Treble knobs provide a practical range of adjustment, aiding sculpting the repeats to blend perfectly with your playing.

The reverb here is an accurate simulation of the short spring found in an RE-201, but if you'd prefer something different from its somewhat boxy nature, then there are Hall, Room, Plate and Ambience options. With plenty of adjustable parameters, it's extremely useful to have four presets onboard to save favourite sounds, but the RE-202 actually supports 127 memories accessible via MIDI program change.

Given the 40-plus years of use our original RE-201 has clocked up and the inherent differences between electro-mechanical randomness and digital consistency, we weren't expecting the RE-202 to sound identical to it in an A/B test. But it actually nailed the sound – we were able reproduce *everything* the RE-201 was capable of, apart from the occasional random glitches,

**3.** Each footswitch has a standard switching function and a secondary function when held

**4.** Quick presses on this Memory button let you scroll around the four onboard presets and manual mode. Presses on the middle footswitch do exactly the same thing





The Volume controls set the level of echo repeats and the amount of reverb. You can set one of them to zero for echo or reverb alone

which presumably no-one would want, where the tape momentarily slowed down before catching up to speed (admittedly our RE-201 hasn't been serviced in a while!). The single-head echoes all do their job wonderfully, covering plenty of playing applications, such as slapback, but it's the combinations that make a multi-head machine special with the complexity of its rhythmic patterns. Those here sound great as the repeats bounce around and drift off naturally into the distance – and the fourth head is a real bonus, delivering patterns you wouldn't get using an RE-201. Mode 12, for example, with all four heads engaged (incidentally with altered head spacing), offers a certain dense ambience.

The RE-202 actually nailed the sound – we were able to reproduce everything the RE-201 was capable of

While the main functions of the three footswitches are for bypass, selecting presets and tap tempo, they each have a secondary performance function when pressed and held. The middle footswitch can be used to bring the reverb in and out within your active effect, while the other two offer similar effects to those you'd get by twisting knobs in real-time. The Twist effect is the equivalent of turning up the repeat rate, while the Warp effect is like turning the Intensity (feedback) up. Both ramp back down when you release the footswitch. They are fun, but for real performance versatility you can connect an expression pedal assigned to one or multiple parameters – for example, giving nuanced control over ramping up the feedback into self-oscillation.

### Verdict

Boss has got this just right: the RE-202 accurately reproduces Space Echo sound while going way beyond the capabilities of an original Roland RE-201. If you've ever wished to have a Space Echo in your rig but thought it impractical, now you can do it with total confidence. **G**



## BOSS SPACE ECHO RE-202

**PRICE:** £339

**ORIGIN:** Malaysia

**TYPE:** Delay pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, 12 modes, 127 memories plus manual, tap tempo, tails carry over, dry mute option

**CONTROLS:** Mode selector, Bass, Treble, Reverb Volume, Repeat Rate, Intensity, Echo Volume, Saturation, Wow & Flutter, Guitar/Line button, New/Aged Tape button, Memory button, Bypass footswitch, Memory footswitch, Tap footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard inputs (A/Mono, B), standard outputs (A/Mono, B), CTL/Exp pedal input, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB (for updates)

**POWER:** Supplied 9VDC Boss PSA adaptor 500mA (unit current draw: 140 mA)

**DIMENSIONS:** 192 (w) x 133 (d) x 52mm (h)



The Input button increases versatility, letting you use the RE-202 with line level equipment such as a mixer or synth



9/10

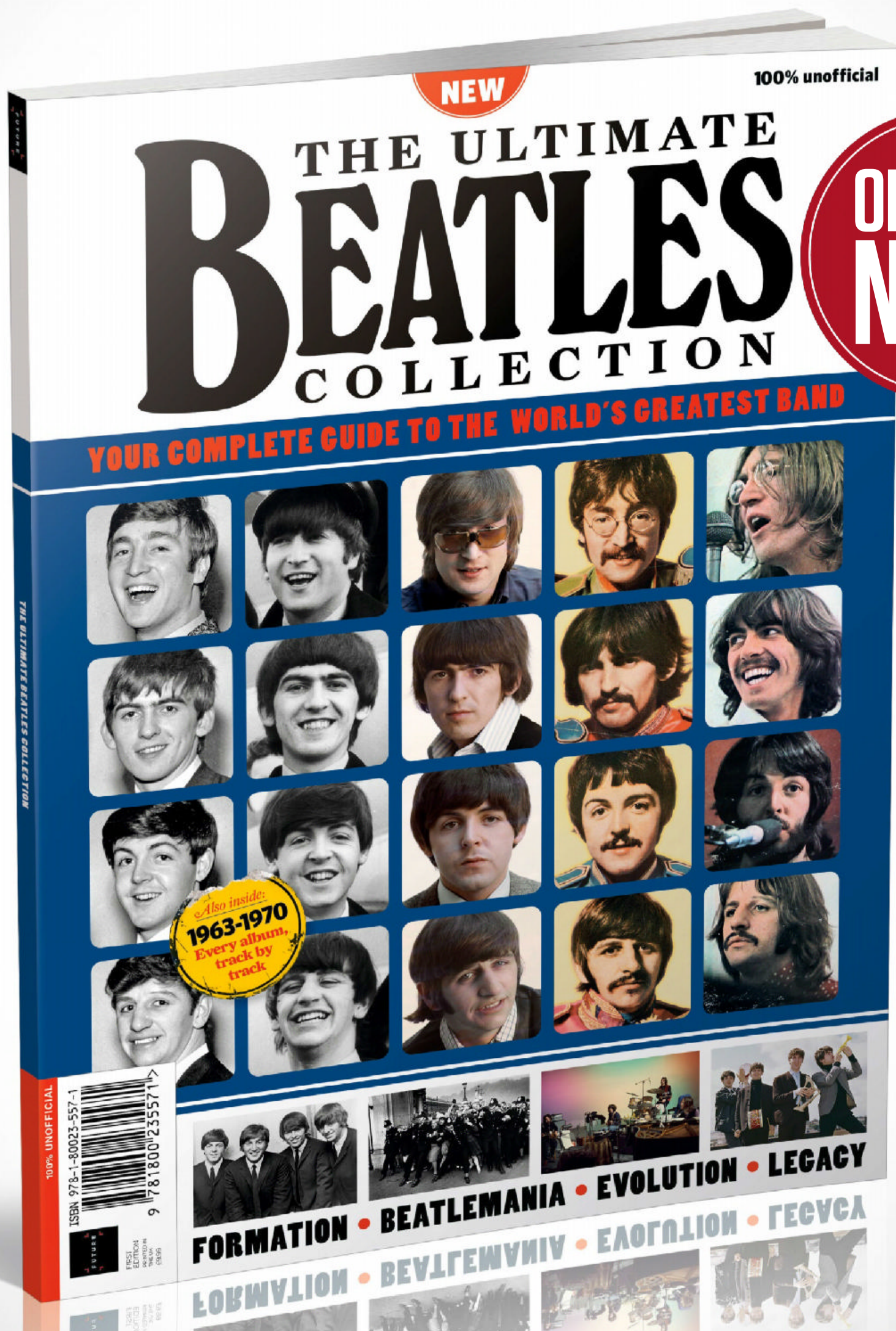
**PROS** Accurate recreation of RE-201 sound; fourth head; tap tempo, memories; flexible hands-on sound adjustment; expression pedal capability

**CONS** Certain global functions (such as dry sound mute, reverb type, tails and so on) are a little convoluted to set up



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THERMION

## Stone Age

Four flavours of fully-analogue fuzz in one pedal

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

We know that fuzz is fuzz, but there are plenty of different flavours out there and we all have our favourites among them. So what if we got the sounds of several of fuzzes in a single pedal? Okay, we've seen the digital modelling pedals that offer you the likes of Fuzz Face and Big Muff sounds in one place, but what about an analogue pedal that does a similar thing while retaining tradition by using transistors exactly like all classic fuzz pedals do?

That pedal is the Thermion Stone Age. Loaded with 10 silicon transistors, the pedal packs four different fuzz engines into its three-footswitch chassis. The fuzz type is chosen via a rotary switch. This means that only one fuzz is available at a time and that you can't stack them – but

there's actually loads of sonic flexibility by bringing those two extra footswitches into play. One adds adjustable amounts of octave to the fuzz, and the other does the same for clean sound. On top of that you also get a toggle switch to bring in high- and low-cut filters to shape the tone, all very useful in reducing low-end woofiness or adjusting the top-end to match your amplifier.

### SOUNDS

The four fuzz modes selected with a rotary switch are a Single Transistor fuzz, Maestro (based on the Maestro FZ-1), Face (no explanation needed!), and Thermion, which is a modified version of a four-transistor Big Muff. The fuzz is turned up by a Gain knob, and a Volume

knob sets the pedal's output with plenty available beyond unity gain for volume boost or to drive your amp.

First up, the Single Transistor has a bright crunchy vibe to it and, although it's a fuzz circuit, it can offer an array of broken up overdrive-like tones. Its nature makes it an obvious choice to use with some Clean Mix as you can basically set a high level of the clean sound and add in just a little dirt for a useful range of edge-of-break-up tones. With all four of the fuzz engines, though, the Clean Mix completely justifies its inclusion by building in an element of clarity and note definition.

We've recently seen Gibson revive its Maestro brand and put out a new version of the 'Satisfaction' fuzz, the FZ-1, and the one here has a similar raspy-edged



## 01. FUZZ ENGINE SELECTOR

This is your tonal starting point. Choose from the four different fuzzes on offer: Single Transistor, Maestro, Face and Thermion

## 02. EQ

The toggle switch brings in the EQ as determined by the High Cut and Low Cut knobs, which roll off top- and bottom-end respectively

## 03. ADD OCTAVE FOOTSWITCH

This will bring in octave fuzz. The amount added to the fuzz engine is set by the Octave Mix knob

## 04. ADD CLEAN FOOTSWITCH

This adds clean signal to the fuzz engine. The Clean Mix knob blends the clean sound with the fuzz sound

## 05. GAIN KNOB

Intensify the fuzz with this knob. Balance this against the Volume knob to set your overall output level



## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** Spain

**TYPE:** Fuzz pedal

**FEATURES:** True Bypass, 4x fuzz engines, Octave, Clean Mix, EQ

**CONTROLS:** High Cut, Low Cut, EQ In/Out switch, Octave Mix, Fuzz selector switch, Volume, Clean Mix, Gain, Add Octave footswitch, Add Clean footswitch, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor 140ma (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 150 (w) x 120 (d) x 60mm (h)

**Guitarist  
CHOICE**

**9/10**

disposition. It starts out relatively full-bodied, but the filters can thin things out for a leaner fuzz. If you want more gnarliness, you can introduce the octave. With all of the fuzz engines, low levels of the Octave Mix knob will bring in the extra upper harmonic, adding an enhancement to the sound that works particularly well with sustained notes in solos. However, higher levels offer a certain trebly raucousness that can add a more extreme edge. That works particularly well with the Maestro, but it also adds another dimension to the other engines, conferring a versatility that can take them beyond their normal operating envelope.

The Face setting is obviously designed to emulate a two-transistor Fuzz Face – and it succeeds admirably with a familiar

sound that cleans up wonderfully with your guitar's volume knob. If you're not averse to a bit of Hendrix tonality, this will get you there with added Octavia flavouring if needed.

The Thermion has plenty of Big Muff flavour, though the filters can't replicate the exact extremes of variation you'd get with a Muff's single wide-ranging Tone knob. In some ways, however, they offer more practical control. The basic tonal ballpark here is one that many would use, and being able to thin out any low-end murk or roll back a bit of top-end from it to best suit your rig is an invaluable asset.

## VERDICT

If you want a fuzz box and don't mind splashing the cash to get it, then we'd

definitely recommend taking a look at Thermion's Stone Age – it may just take care of all your fuzz needs. While the four fuzz engines onboard are tempting enough in their own right, it's the extra Octave and Clean Mix facilities that make this such a flexible proposition. Staying true to the original vintage sounds while bringing something new to the table, this is a true fuzz facilitator offering the widest range of fully analogue fuzz tones in a single pedal. **G**

**PROS** Four distinct fuzz engines in one chassis; footswitchable octave and clean blend; practical EQ section

**CONS** For those who are tight for 'board space, the side-mounted socketry adds to what's already a wide pedal





ROUND-UP

# Walrus Audio pedals

## Revamped delay and reverb pedals for boosted functionality

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

Walrus Audio is quite prolific when putting out new pedals, but the two we have here are effectively new versions of pedals that are relatively recent. The original D1, reviewed in issue 459, has been revamped into a V2 version whose new features include a USB port for future

upgrades – leading us to believe a V3 is likely to be delivered via software rather than having to buy a new physical pedal. The Slötvå, meanwhile, is based on the Slö pedal (reviewed in issue 447) and adds the ability to store presets. Both are surprisingly compact for twin-footswitch pedals.



WALRUS AUDIO

### Mako D1 V2 £319

The latest version of the D1 features five different delay types (Digital, Mod, Vintage, Dual and Reverse), each with three instantly accessible adjustable Tweak parameters including EQ and adding modulation. There's also a dedicated tap tempo footswitch and nine onboard preset slots – or a full 128 if you use MIDI, which also offers full parameter control.

The various mono and stereo connectivity options include a welcome addition to this second version, a stereo width control offering widening via a Haas Stereo Effect and the option of various degrees of autopanning. The original D1 delays always covered a practical range, but two have been revamped for this version: reverse can offer some freaky stuff, especially when just using the fully wet sound; and Vintage is said to be more authentic as a tape echo emulation, and it does sound good, with plenty of control over the sonic nature of the repeats available with EQ and saturation. The jewel in the crown for sculpting repeats, though, is the Attack knob, softening the attack for fade-ins. **G**

**VERDICT** The compact size, presets, tap tempo and hands-on parameter adjustment make this a very practical pedalboard delay



WALRUS AUDIO

### Slötvå Multi Texture Reverb £209

Designed to “create lush, modulated, sleepy and ambient soundscapes”, the Slötvå features three reverb algorithms: Dark adds a lower octave with adjustable level into the reverb trail; Rise offers reverb that swells in over a user-set amount of time; and Dream can deliver a constant pad of reverb. Each also has the option of integrating one of three types of modulation into the reverb tail: Sine, Warp or Sink. Combining these options with a range of adjustable parameters means that the pedal is capable of light atmospheric reverb to huge lingering, floaty soundscapes.

As there's so much to dial in, the new facility of being able to save and recall sounds (using both footswitches together) is invaluable, making the Slötvå a more practical onstage proposition than the Slö. The footswitches offer fine performance features, too – Bypass can be used in normal latching mode or to bring the effect in momentarily, while Sustain ramps up the decay time to maximum for both Dark and Rise modes while held but latches in Dream mode for freezing sound, which you can play over. **G**

**VERDICT** Musically useful altered mono reverbs delivered in a practical streamlined format



## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Delay pedal

**FEATURES:** 3x selectable bypass types (True bypass, DSP+True Bypass (trails), and DSP Bypass), 9x onboard presets, tap tempo, MIDI, 60ms to 2s delay time

**CONTROLS:** Program selector, Time, Repeats, Mix, Tweak, Attack, Tweak switch (Mod/Tone/Age), Bank switch (A/B/C), Division switch (quarter/8th/dotted 8th), Tap footswitch, Bypass footswitch

### EFFECTS PROGRAMS:

Digital, Mod, Vintage, Dual, Reverse

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard inputs (Left/Mono, Right), standard outputs (Left/Mono, Right), MIDI in, MIDI out

**POWER:** Supplied 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 300mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 73 (w) x 125 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist  
CHOICE

9/10



## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Reverb pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, selectable trails mode, 3x presets

**CONTROLS:** Decay, Filter, Mix, X, Depth, Dark/Rise/Dream switch, Bypass footswitch, Sustain footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 65 (w) x 124 (d) x 57mm (h)

Guitarist  
CHOICE

9/10



TC ELECTRONIC

# Impulse IR Loader

Instant impulse responses for your rig

Words

Trevor Curwen

Photography

Phil Barker

When it comes to cabinet emulation, impulse responses (IRs) provide digital snapshots of a real speaker, mic'd up in a real space. Having IRs at the appropriate point in your signal chain enables you to send realistic sound to front-of-house or for recording. TC's Impulse IR Loader – a tiny pedal the same size of the company's mini-pedals such as the Ditto looper – aims to simplify and facilitate that function. The pedal offers 25 built-in IRs alongside 74 empty slots for loading your own IRs of up to 200ms in length. It also has EQ in the form of low-shelf and high-frequency filters.

Operation is simple. There's a knob for setting the overall output level and a pair of backwards and forwards buttons to scroll through and select the IRs. If you want to utilise some EQ, just press both buttons together. The left one will then give you the Low EQ, the right the High, with the central knob setting the amount of boost or cut. The footswitch has two modes, toggled between by holding it down – it can be set as a bypass switch

or has an A/B mode to instantly toggle between two different IRs in real-time. 12 of the 25 onboard IRs are official Celestion speaker cab IRs covering a whole range of popular options from a single 10-inch speaker up to 4 x12s. The next eight are TC Electronic Pedal Platform IRs, which include amp simulation and work really well in converting your pedalboard to a DI-ready guitar rig. On top of those are five pleasant-sounding acoustic guitar IRs, designed to transform brittle piezo pickup sounds to more of a mic'd acoustic tone for direct connection to a mixing desk/PA or for recording. We particularly liked the one that gave our battered old Yamaha some of the sonic flavour of a Martin D-28. While the set of 25 offers you plenty to work with straight out of the box, a USB connection to a computer lets you drag and drop IR files to the pedal using TC's free dedicated IR organiser for PC and Mac.

**VERDICT**  
An affordable pedal for the storage and practical use of impulse responses. 



**PROS** Compact size; easy operation; classy IRs included; plenty of space to load your own; acoustic guitar treatments

**CONS** None really, but a headphone output would have been handy

ALSO TRY...



Radar

£170

A cabinet simulator in micro stompbox format, the Mooer Radar has models of 30 different cabs, 11 mics and four power amps, and can load impulse responses. It has 36 user presets and can be used with headphones.



Omni IR

£129

Offering cabinet emulation in a compact pedal, the Omni has 40 onboard IRs and the capacity to load your own. It features four-band EQ, 40 presets and has an Aux In and headphone output for use when practising and jamming.



Torpedo CAB M+

£239

A respected name in the cab simulator world, Two Notes has a range of products. This unit features clean amp tones matched with official Celestion, Victory, Revv and Engl virtual cabinets. There's a headphone output, too.





### Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Impulse  
response pedal

**FEATURES:** True Bypass

**CONTROLS:** Level,  
2x Navigation buttons,  
footswitch

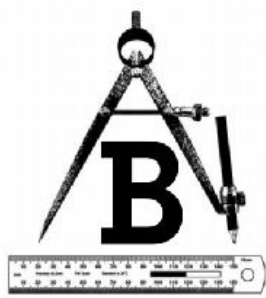
**CONNECTIONS:** Standard  
input, standard output, USB

**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor  
100 mA (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 50 (w) x 92  
(d) x 50mm (h)

8/10





« BLUEPRINT »

# INTERSTELLAR OVERDRIVE

British pedal maker ThorpyFX recently teamed up with Lee Harris of Pink Floyd splinter group Saucerful Of Secrets to make an overdrive that captures the sound of Syd's Selmer – the Scarlet Tunic

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Neil Godwin

**F**ew sounds in rock are as viscerally memorable as the growling twang of Syd Barrett's guitar in the opening notes of Pink Floyd's *Interstellar Overdrive* from the band's 1967 debut album, *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*. Unlike the stratospheric, soaring tones that characterised later-era Floyd tracks with David Gilmour on guitar, Syd Barrett's guitar sound is jagged, janky and wiry, somewhere between Vox and Marshall in voice.

The reason it's a bit hard for the ear to pin down is that Syd used Selmer amps, which are collectible vintage items these days but largely forgotten by mainstream guitarists. The Treble And Bass model that Syd played on Floyd's debut album is perhaps the best-known of Selmer's 60s creations, but, for many years, the only way to capture the distinctive sound of that amp was to buy an old one and get it running reliably. For Lee Harris, guitarist with Floyd spin-off project Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets, that wasn't really a viable option. With Nick himself on drums, the standard of sonic accuracy in the band, which performs songs from Floyd's early albums, had to be high. So Lee decided to approach British effects maker ThorpyFX to see if the elusive tone of the Treble And Bass could be conjured up in an effects pedal.



Adrian Thorpe says the big surprise of the Scarlet Tunic project was how tonally versatile it turned out to be

"I was using a Plexi-type pedal," Lee recalls, "but what was annoying for me was it just sounded like a generic sound of that period. I felt like I really needed to get the sound that Syd had on the album. I needed to honour that more because his two solo albums haven't got that distorted *Interstellar* sound on them and there isn't anything else of his out there [that sounds similar]. It's just *that* album with *that* sound on it. And I really wanted to honour it correctly, you know, so that's when I went to Thorpy and said, 'Is there any way to put a Selmer Treble And Bass into a pedal?' Dan Coggins [the effects designer behind

Lovetone and present-day ThorpyFX collaborator] has a late-1966 Treble And Bass 50-watt MKII. We don't know exactly what [version of the Treble And Bass] Syd had. We presume it was the same amp, though. He also had a Selmer Stereomaster. But it's the same tone stack, you know?"

The danger with pedals that emulate amps is, of course, that you conjure up the general flavour of the original but fail to capture the sonic soul of the valve-driven amp the effect is based on. But Lee says ThorpyFX was able to get an uncommonly good match to the sound of the original.

"We actually A/B'd the pedal and the original Selmer head, and the pedal won out because it was less noisy," Lee laughs. "Which was hilarious. I mean, in some cases, you want to hear all that buzz and fuss, but I don't particularly need it on stage. So that was amazing. The other thing I found with the Scarlet Tunic is that it really does sound like there's a tube inside it and it doesn't sound like other pedals that are a clone of an amp. This really does sound like the Selmer. It's crazy."

Adrian Thorpe, founder of ThorpyFX, chimes in at this point to explain that while the Scarlet Tunic achieves its stated goal of replicating the sound of Syd's Treble And Bass amp, he was also keen to broaden its tonal range so the pedal is useful to a much wider range of players than just early Floyd



"I went to Thorpy and said, 'Is there any way to put a Selmer Treble And Bass into a pedal?'"  
**Lee Harris**



Chiming British low-gain drive tones abound in the new Scarlet Tunic pedal from ThorpyFX

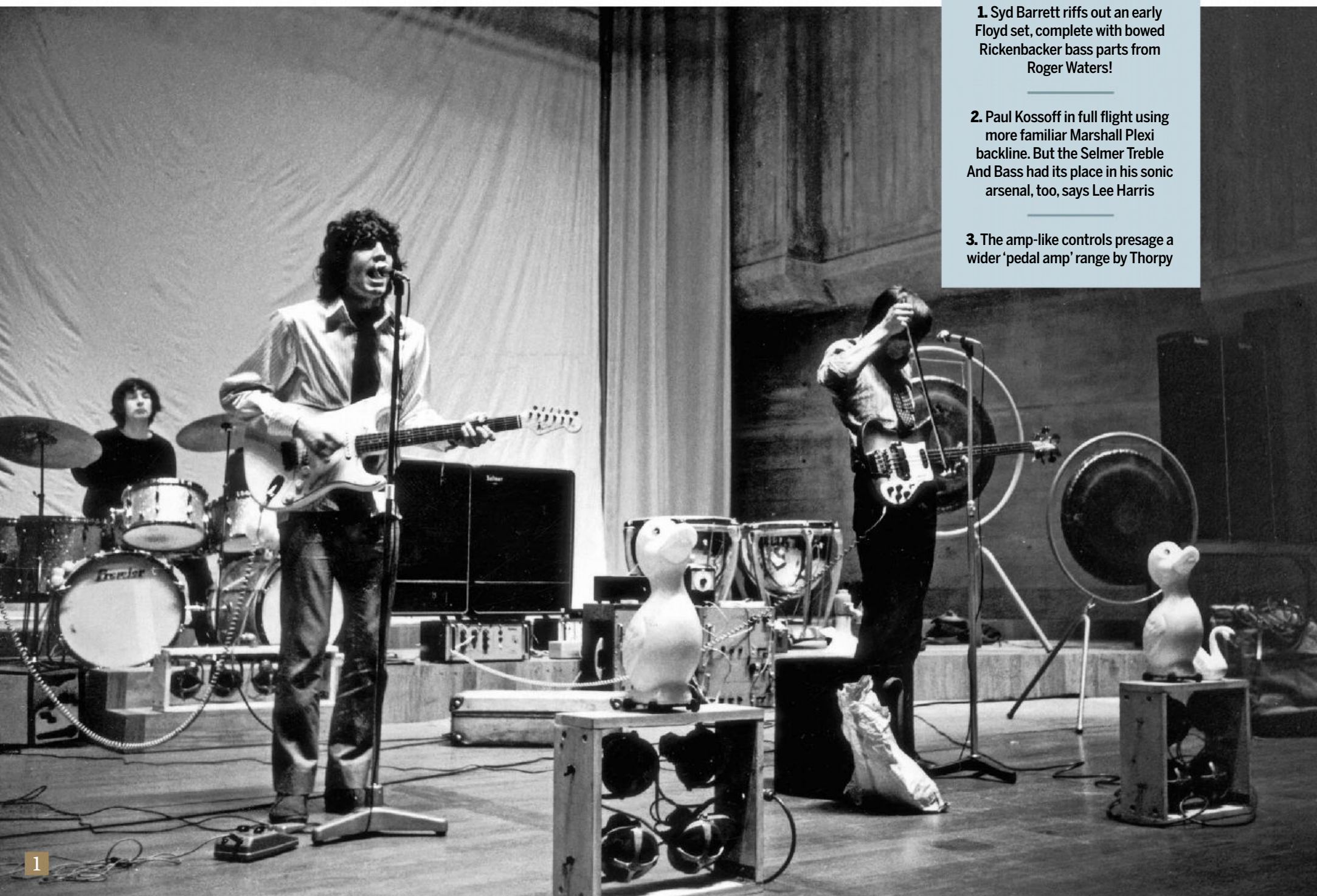




**1.** Syd Barrett riffs out an early Floyd set, complete with bowed Rickenbacker bass parts from Roger Waters!

**2.** Paul Kossoff in full flight using more familiar Marshall Plexi backline. But the Selmer Treble And Bass had its place in his sonic arsenal, too, says Lee Harris

**3.** The amp-like controls presage a wider 'pedal amp' range by Thorpy



fans. The end result was an overdrive that Adrian hopes will appeal to everyone from classic rockers to alt-rock guitarists.

“The Selmer Treble And Bass is quite a weird and wonderful amp for most people,” Adrian reflects. “Most people won’t have seen one. And while they might have heard one, they possibly won’t realise they’ve heard it. We’ve made the pedal so it spans pretty much what the amp can span [tonally], which is between a Hi-Watt and a Marshall. You can get Paul Kossoff *All Right Now* tones from it, for example. Obviously, you can get early Floyd, too, but it does much more than just those two sounds.”

Adrian adds that careful design has yielded a much more amp-like circuit than is the norm for solid-state pedals.

“It’s got an internal transformer; it clips and sags in the right way. You can have it so it feels ‘fast’ [rapidly responsive to touch], like a Two-Rock, or you can calm it down and have a little bit more gain and a little bit more sag. It’s a very cool little concept,” he says.

Lee Harris agrees, saying that although he originally only wanted the pedal to emulate

## “The Selmer Treble And Bass is quite a weird and wonderful amp”

**Adrian Thorpe**

Syd Barrett’s *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* guitar sounds, it ended up being far more versatile than he anticipated and he now uses it right across the Saucerful setlist and other projects, too.

“What Thorpy’s done is put a bit more gain on the Scarlet Tunic [than the original amp had]. So it’s not a one-trick pony. It’s not like you plug it in and you immediately sound like Syd Barrett – you’ve got to find the tone. For example, I heard that Paul Kossoff used a Selmer to do the *All Right Now* solo, and you can get those kinds of sounds from the pedal, too – so there’s a lot more going on with it than just the Syd stuff. Also, I’m not a massive lover of traditional fuzz pedals because impedance issues

always rear their head. But the Scarlet Tunic kind of gives me that *other* 60s fuzz sound that I really like – I suppose it’s more reminiscent of Vox AC30s and it hasn’t got the thinness of a [WEM/Rush] Pepbox... so I’m actually now using the Scarlet Tunic for more stuff than just the Syd material. And it’s not another bloody Tube Screamer! I think that’s a really cool thing, too. So I think it’s important that people realise it’s not just a way to get the Syd Barrett sound: there’s so much more to it.”

Returning to Adrian, we ask how he avoids the signature sound of the pedal being overpowered by the voice of the amp that it’s being plugged into.

“It’s difficult to have a pedal that will work with every single amp,” he admits. “Part of it is about trying to give the pedal enough of its own character to punch through. If you have too much gain from the front-end of the amp, what are you hearing? Are you hearing the pedal or the amp? There’s always a balance there. But we’ve got the Scarlet Tunic to the point where we’re happy and it gets *that* sound.”



“Broadly speaking, we’ve designed it so that if you’ve got a clean channel on an amp that you can make fairly flat, EQ-wise, it will work very well,” he continues, “and we make sure that the pedal has enough of the key frequencies [of the original Selmer and similar Hi-Watt and Marshall amps] that you can overcome some of the tonal character of the amp you’re using. And that’s good because it means the pedal’s sound becomes dominant when you want it to be.

“Now, what amps might it struggle with? Probably Vox AC30s – why? Because they’re quite close in sonics [to the Selmer] to begin with. Generally, if you have an amp-like pedal that has the same kind of sound as

“We A/B’d the pedal and the original Selmer, and the pedal won out!”

**Lee Harris**

the amp it’s going into – say, running a Marshall-style pedal into a real Marshall – it doesn’t sound that good. It’s like taking a shoe and putting it in another shoe [laughs]. But most of the time it will all work really well – and we have enough amps here to test our pedals through to know that they’re going to work [with a wide range of setups].”

In case you’re wondering about the pedal’s name, Adrian says that it’s a nod to the lyrics of the track *The Gnome* from *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*, which describe the clobber worn by the track’s eponymous hero. The pedal’s styling also nods to a different inspiration, however. Adrian served in the British Army for many years before going into effects making, and the tunic depicted on the front of the pedal is a stylised version of the dress uniform of the Grenadier Guards, which Adrian chose as a personal tribute to a member of that regiment who had been a mentor to him and was sadly killed in action.

### A Saucerful Of Sound

The Scarlet Tunic overdrive now forms the tonal centrepiece of Lee Harris’s live rig in the Saucerful Of Secrets band, but he’s got plenty of other sounds up his sleeve, he explains, though in recent months he’s whittled down his ‘board a bit for ease of use.

“What I’m using now is far simpler than what I had before,” Lee explains. “Part of the problem is that I live in France, but my [live rig] was being put together in England, so rather than buy pedals over here and then send them back, I was just buying stuff online and getting it sent to

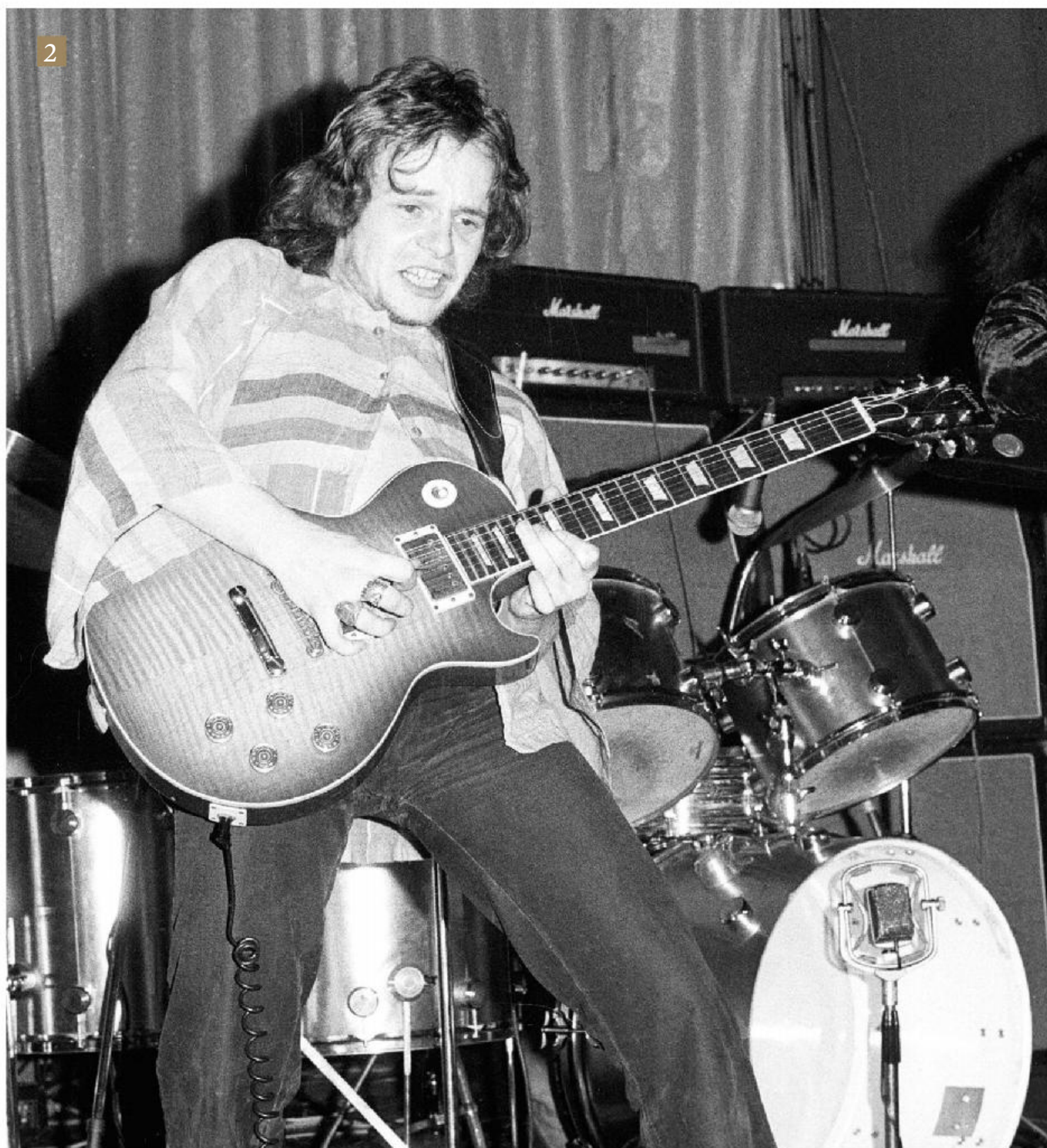


PHOTO BY NICK HALE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS





4. The rugged yet carefully engineered enclosure of the pedal is part of the signature style of ThorpyFX

5. A Grenadier Guards uniform is etched onto the pedal's face



England. So I was reading up about stuff online and thinking, ‘Well, this would do *that*, this would do the other...’ you know? And I ended up with 14 pedals on the ‘board – largely because I had about eight drives. That’s because one of my pet hates is kneeling down and changing settings [on individual drive pedals] while there’s an audience in front of me.

“But this time around what I’ve gone for is having a pedal with a hair of gain on it, a boost basically, plus some sort of medium-gain pedal as well. And then I’ve got a Big Muff and I’ve got the [Scarlet Tunic] Selmer and that’s it, really. That’s all I need, drive-wise. I’ve also got a compressor because if you’re wanting to play things like *Echoes*, you kind of need to have a compressor going, just to get that sound in certain parts. I’ve also got a phaser and a delay – a Free The Tone Future Factory – because it’s two delays in one box, so that means I don’t have to have two separate delay pedals on the ‘board. I’ve also got a Free The Tone EQ that I use very sparingly in a couple of places. As well as that, I’ve got a volume pedal and a wah-wah

“It’s not a one-trick pony... there’s a lot more going on than just the Syd stuff”

**Lee Harris**

that Analog Mike [Piera] has customised so it will produce the seagull sounds for *Echoes*,” he explains.

Lee’s mention of *Echoes* is timely because the band’s current tour focuses on that immersive yet under-rated track from 1971’s *Meddle* album – which sees Gilmour’s classic sound slowly taking shape.

“Well, it’s called the Echoes tour and I always thought *Echoes* was kind of like a bit of an elephant in the room if you didn’t do it, because it is certainly the one that sounds most like what the band went on to do. That said, Gary Kemp [frontman and co-guitarist for Saucerful Of Secrets] and I are in the very lucky position that we’re playing songs from the era when David hadn’t quite got his guitar style [nailed

down] yet. So we can actually muck around with it because they’re not sacrosanct, these pieces of lead that he’s playing on *Let There Be More Light*, for instance – and even, to a point, *Atom Heart Mother*... If you listen to *The Early Years* boxset or just any bootlegs from that time, David never played those solos the same from night to night, ever. It was always slightly different. He wasn’t yet into that realm of tracks like *Money*, which everyone wants to hear the same way every time it’s performed. So we’re recreating, we’re not copying, I suppose. What I’m trying to spit out is that in this era [of early Floyd] there are so many different styles of music: obviously you’ve got psychedelic stuff, you’ve got 60s pop, you’ve then got prog, you’ve got heavy rock with something like *The Nile Song*... You’ve got almost hymn-like classical things like *Saucerful Of Secrets* or *Celestial Voices* at the end of *A Saucerful Of Secrets*. There are so many different styles.” **G**

For more info on Saucerful Of Secrets’ upcoming tours see [www.thesaucerfulofsecrets.com](http://www.thesaucerfulofsecrets.com); for more on ThorpyFX, visit <https://thorpyfx.com>





# ★ CLASSIC ★ ROCK

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# CHRIS TURPIN

The Ida Mae guitarist on lost Teles, ugly SuperStrats and the gear treasure trove that is Norwich Cash Converters...

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

"It was a 1972 Telecaster Custom reissue. I bought it from Cash Converters in Norwich when I was 15, played my first shows with it, dropped it down the stairs, all sorts of shit. But it was a great guitar. I love that '72 Tele look, y'know, that black Keith Richards-esque guitar where it's got four knobs like a Gibson. I got some great shit out of that Cash Converters, like an old Paul Rivera Fender Twin and a JCM800 for, like, 300 quid!"

## ***What was the last guitar you bought and why?***

"I had this very old parlour guitar and I thought, 'I have to retire this, it's getting silly.' So I was looking around for

a new one, talking to my friends John Smith and Martin Simpson, and they turned me on to Fylde. Roger Bucknall is this crazy, wonderful Gandalf-type genius, and I have a custom-build parlour guitar by him called an Ariel. It has claro walnut back and sides, and a sinker redwood top. Basically, it's when a redwood tree falls into a bog and, God knows how many thousands of years later, they pull it out, cut up the tree and it makes this incredible tonewood."

## ***What's your best guitar-buying tip?***

"The biggest one for me is body resonance, especially with an electric. You put a bit of overdrive on, say, a Telecaster or a Les Paul-style guitar, turn the volume full up, then tap the body. Now, if you get that kind of resonant 'thunk'

Ida Mae's Chris Turpin:  
"I still get the same shiver  
when I walk into a guitar  
shop as I did as a kid..."

PHOTO BY VOLLY CURTIS

"Most guitars are good for something. Even bad guitars can be fantastic because they force you to play a different way"

coming out of the amplifier, there's a good sign that you've got a really 'alive'-sounding instrument. If you turn it up to a medium gain, but you don't hear much coming through the amp when you tap it – not for me!"

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

"I'm one of these terrible eBay people. But I think the coolest one was when we were on tour with Greta Van Fleet and we had a show in Canada. I picked up a 1960s [Silverstone model 1445] Speed Demon for \$300 – which is basically nothing – then just tuned it up and used it on stage that night. The crowd named the guitar 'Maple', too, which isn't the most inventive name – but it works."

## ***What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?***

"I don't get buyer's remorse too much because every time I've bought something I wasn't sure on I've just sold or swapped it. I did buy a Custom Shop Strat that someone had butchered and put really big frets in. It was Fiesta Red and really heavy. But I sold it for more than I bought it for, so not too much remorse there."

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

"I'd say that 1972 Telecaster I mentioned earlier, which is now owned by a good friend. I do occasionally get pangs to have that back. My friend gigs it, though, which makes it more awkward to ask for it back. I might send him this article, see if that works."





PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS



## CHRIS'S LIVE RIG

"We've been doing more fly dates, so I keep a pretty spartan rig. I'm actually carrying a silver-panel Fender Champ in my hand luggage on the plane. I was touring with a vintage 70s Champ for ages, but I tried a new one and I've been taking that out on the road a lot more. On my 'board, I have the Boss GT-1000Core, which is such a versatile pedal, and the Catalinbread Formula No 55. I used a Zvex Box Of Rock for about a thousand years, up until last week when I got some new drive pedals. There's an Archer Ikon, a Fulltone OCD and a Vemuram Jan Ray – that was about £350, which is a complete joke, but my God, it's good. I also have an old Voodoo Lab Proctavia. One of my main guitars is a 12-string National Reso-Phonic resonator, which is really special. I also have a new Players Edition White Falcon – super bling! That's one of the best guitars I've played. You can go from fingerpicking to really nasty Neil Young shit!"

### *Are there any common design features on electric guitars that are an instant turn-off for you when you're auditioning potential new guitars?*

"Most guitars are good for something. Even bad guitars can be fantastic because they force you to play a different way. But I don't get on with super-fast guitars with blade necks and sharp, pointy angles. Whammy bars, locking tuners – it's all a bit over the top for me. And those really horrible flame tops, like purple or neon green. If that's your bag, I apologise, but I can't get down with that. They look like they would drive too fast, and I'm not interested."

### *When was the last time you stopped to look in a guitar shop window and what did you spot?*

"I was outside Thunder Road Guitars in Seattle recently and they had a really cool single-pickup early Supro, kind of like a Dual-Tone. But I just couldn't justify it. I'd say I've got just shy of 20 guitars now. I don't know if that's a lot these days. I feel like Joe Bonamassa has bought everything – twice!"

### *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?*

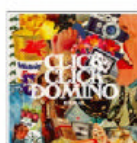
"Now, that's an impossible question. If we're talking a great 1952 Tele and a modern modelling amplifier, like a Fender Mustang, that would be amazing. Whereas a real cheap Encore or Squier going into a beautiful Twin Reverb, that wouldn't be so cool. But if it was a cool old Supro – which could be a cheap guitar – into that same Twin Reverb, that would be really cool as well."

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

"Definitely single coils. You can really load up single coils with overdrive and turn them almost humbucker-esque, but with a lot more nuance on the volume control. And I love the variety of single coils. I think the Gretsch Dynasonic – which no-one really talks about – is one of the greatest pickups ever designed. Then you've got Telecaster pickups, Strat pickups, and the options are endless when it comes to P-90s. Whereas, I find, if you have a muddy humbucker, there's nowhere to go with it to make it better."

### *What's your favourite guitar shop and why?*

"One would be Carter Vintage Guitars in Nashville because we lived out there for four-and-a-half years and they were lovely to us. They're a great shop with amazing stuff and they don't have any attitude; you can hang out and play with all sorts of people in there. The other would be Vintage 'n' Rare in Bath, where I used to work. Just a fantastic guitar shop. Last time I stepped in there, they had a 1960 'Burst, beautiful Fender Tweed amplifiers, really early 1920s Gibson acoustics. I still get the same shiver when I walk into a guitar shop as I did as a kid – it's pathetic!" [HY]



Ida Mae's album, *Click Click Domino*, is available now. Visit the website for more information

[www.idamaemusic.com](http://www.idamaemusic.com)

**Above left:** This early 60s blonde Silvertone model 1445 was built by Kay and was christened 'Maple' by the Ida Mae gig crowd

**Above:** Chris's all-time favourite pickup, the Gretsch Dynasonic



# PHASED & CONFUSED

Why don't more guitars come with different brands' pickups mixed and matched?  
What's the problem? Dave Burrluck has some answers...

**T**here's little doubt that most guitars made today stick with pickups from the same manufacturer, be that in-house designs or those from a third party such as Seymour Duncan. When was the last time you saw a new guitar for sale with two or three pickups from different makers? The last one I can remember was the Charvel Henrik Danhage signature, which pairs a full-size Seymour Duncan JB at the bridge with a single-coil-sized DiMarzio Area 67 at the neck, and I'd wager the 'different brand pickups on the same guitar' concept is pretty much exclusive to signature instruments.

There are obvious reasons – not least cost and a single purchasing source – that make most manufacturers go the one-brand route. But look at the guitars of your modding mates and you're more likely to find Duncans paired with DiMarzios, or any number of combinations of the vast selection out there. And you don't have to delve that deeply into the history of great guitar players and their instruments to find plenty of mixed brands and styles. So, are we missing a trick?

## Just A Phase

That said, pickup manufacturers don't exactly make it easy for us to swap sources. They invariably use different colour codes for their hook-up wires and there is no international protocol for magnet polarity and winding direction.

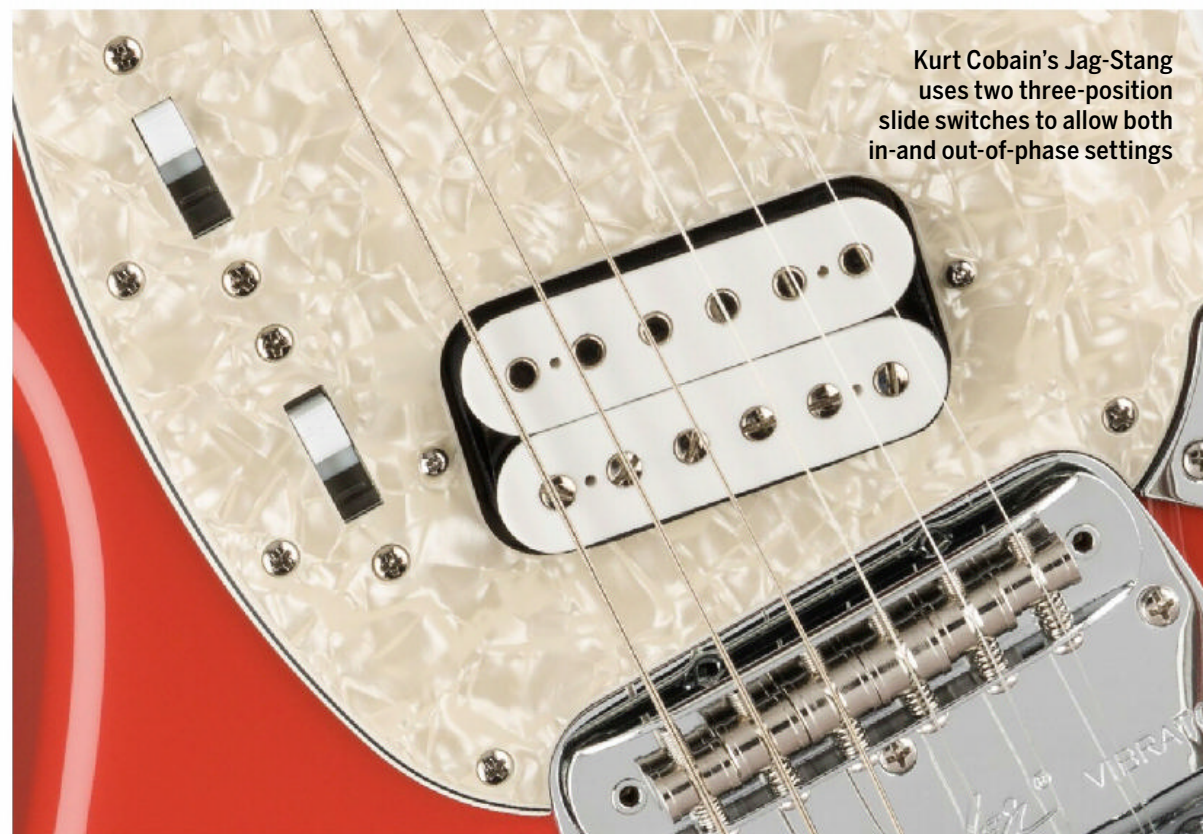


Charvel's Henrik Danhage signature is rare in that it combines pickups from both DiMarzio and Seymour Duncan

Now, we could get bogged down in the science, but rather like we all did back in the day, trial and error usually wins when combining different pickup brands. However, a major issue is whether or not the new pickup is in phase with the existing one. Depending on the magnet polarity and coil-winding direction, the two pickups will be normal (in phase) when you select both, or abnormal (out of phase) where your sound becomes thin and nasally.

It's a problem that veteran modder Alan Kirby encountered with his ongoing Gretsch Electromatic 5420 makeover.

"It just doesn't seem quite right! The combination of P-90 and T-Armond – when used together – is not balanced as well as I would like and seems a bit nasal. Also the pots don't function as they should but seem to alter volume/tone." The two pickups in question are: "a Lindy Fralin P-90 at the neck (-10 percent wind), which works well with the TV Jones T-Armond at the bridge, and is softer but clear", Alan explains. "It sits better than the TV Jones T-90, which I originally tried but is too modern-sounding for the setup, I think." As Alan rightly guessed, he had a phase



Kurt Cobain's Jag-Stang uses two three-position slide switches to allow both in-and out-of-phase settings

"We could get bogged down in science, but trial and error usually wins when combining pickups brands"

issue and cured it simply by swapping the hot and ground wires of, I believe, the Fralin in the circuit.

For some, then, when two pickups are combined and are out of phase, it's *wrong*. For others, and let's not forget a certain Mr Peter Green or Mr Jimmy Page, out of phase can be very *right*. Personally, I was always in the former camp until I started working with a recent Gibson Les Paul Classic. This is in the Modern strand of Gibson USA's current output and features the not-universally-liked circuit board





Each of the current Gibson Les Paul Classic's controls can be pulled up to engage another function, including out-of-phase for the two humbuckers

"For some, when two pickups are combined and are out of phase, it's wrong. For others, it's very right..."



and four pull-push pots. When pulled up, each volume control gives a sort of single-coil/P-90 emulation, certainly an option to the full humbucker sounds. When you pull up the bridge pickup's tone control, the bridge pickup is solo'd directly to the output, giving a slight treble lift, while the neck tone control acts as a phase switch when pulled up. So, with both pickups on and the centre mixed position selected on the pickup toggle switch, and with both volumes and tones wound fully up, you can switch from that classic, bouncy dual-pickup voice (in phase) to what Alan describes as a 'nasal' thin sound (out of phase).

But because we have a volume for each pickup (unlike on a Telecaster, for example), when you pull back the bridge pickup volume just a little, the phase relationship between the two pickups alters and some – but not all – of the thinness is restored, with only a slight nasal 'edge'. Think Peter Green and even BB King, which in my book makes this 'wrong' phase switch hugely valid.

It's not just tasteful blues that benefits from this 'wrong' sound. Try running it through a dirty cranked amp, preferably

**"Run the 'wrong' sound through a dirty amp with fuzz, and you've just reinvented grunge"**

with at least one distortion or maxed-out fuzz pedal engaged, and you've just reinvented grunge where that nasally attack sounds really nasty and punky. Plug in Fender's Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang with its hot humbucker/vintage single-coil pickup mismatch, hit the out-of-phase slider switch with both pickups on, and you'll get the idea.

Back in issue 468 I was on a bit of a Daniel Lanois/Neil Young quest in adding an Oil City Winterizer Firebird-style pickup to the bridge position of a Guild Aristocrat, leaving its Franz P-90 at the neck. With phase in mind, I'd ordered the Winterizer with a four-conductor hook-up cable, so if I ran into problems I could fix them. I've actually ended up with the pickups out of phase when combined because, like a Les Paul, there's a volume and tone for each pickup. By varying how much of each pickup is dialled in on the separate volumes, that out-of-phase sound becomes really usable, especially when tracking guitars. It adds a little honky attack that you can mix in with a straight Les Paul's



bridge pickup, for example. Ideally, when I get a spare moment, wiring in a pull switch to one of the tone controls, like that Les Paul Classic, would mean I have the choice of being in or out of phase.

### **Rules Of Thumb**

If you're combining two differently branded humbuckers, so long as one has four-conductor wiring then you'll be able to sort any phase issue as described. It's the same if you have a humbucker with more rarely two- or three-conductor wiring. If you have a pair of humbuckers with vintage-style single conductors and stranded ground you can't fix the phase without changing the polarity of one humbucker by flipping its magnet.

You can sort phase issues with single coils in a similar manner, although on a Tele's neck pickup, for example, the ground output of the pickup is soldered to the cover. This means you need to separate those and add a separate ground wire from the cover to the back of a pot, leaving you with the two output wires that connect to

each end of the coil, either of which can be hot or ground. But this can be problematic, as Fralin Pickups explains: "When we wind a Strat pickup, like our Vintage Hot, the first wraps of the coil directly contact the magnets. Now, it's true that coil wire has an insulation and, theoretically, that insulation will prevent the coil wire from making contact with the magnets, allowing you to reverse the leads. However, the insulation is only 1/10,000-inch thick and occasionally fails. In his wisdom, Leo Fender designed his pickups to have a fail-safe. If the insulation cracks and the coil wire does make contact with the polepieces, they instantly become grounded, instead of hot. Reversing the coil direction of a pickup that has shorted magnets will result in a plethora of noise you do not want."

Of course, if you want two single coils to be hum-cancelling when combined, one pickup needs to be reverse wound with reverse polarity (RW/RP). If that's important to you, buying from a solo source is really recommended, particularly when you can speak to the pickup maker. **G**



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# TUNING, A SLIGHT RETURN

More tuning woes... but don't blame the machineheads, offers Dave Burrluck



Tuners are rarely to blame when it comes to tuning stability, but some definitely feel better than others

PHOTO BY DAVE BURRLUCK

**Q** I'm confused! I bought a cheapo Strat-alike online a while back and most people's advice is that I'll need to change the machineheads, the tuners, as they'll be rubbish. Actually, now I have the guitar, they feel okay, as in smooth tuning, but I am having some tuning problems. My question is, are the tuners at fault and should I change them? Do I need locking types or am I missing something?  
**Ben, via email**

**A** Okay, I think we need to untangle that question a bit. Let's start with the actual tuner. In the day job of reviewing guitars I can't remember coming across a set of tuners – irrespective of the cost of the guitar – that didn't work or in any way impeded stable tuning. The caveat is that I've certainly come across tuners that *feel* better than others and, let's be honest, when we're writing about instruments that can span thousands of pounds in terms of price difference, the quality of the individual parts will vary considerably. So, for example, when I was writing about a Harley Benton T-style in our last issue, the split-post-style tuners felt tight and smooth in action and I had no tuning issues

at all. When I went to restring the guitar, however, I found that the hole in the string post, where you push in the string, simply wasn't deep enough to hold the string as you wound it around the post. But that guitar did cost £133, so was I really surprised?

You don't mention exactly what sort of tuning issues you're having, and without checking your guitar a precise diagnosis is difficult. However, odds on, those nagging tuning issues will come from not putting your strings on properly (too few or too many wraps around the post, for example), not stretching the strings properly, and nut slots that haven't been cut properly. Of course, if you use the vibrato a lot, then issues there can certainly cause tuning problems. Simply changing the tuners isn't going to change any of those issues, with perhaps the exception of locking tuners, which mean you'll have fewer problems with actually attaching your strings to the string post.

Like so many guitars, I'd guess it's the nut that needs a little TLC. I recently got around to replacing the nut on that Les Paul Classic I mentioned over the page. To be honest, the tuning stability was okay but not 100 per cent. Changing over to a bone nut,

however, was quite a revelation – though I should note that it's certainly not a job for the faint-hearted nor inexperienced. The tuning stability is now great and, to my ears, the whole guitar sounds better. But that's another story...

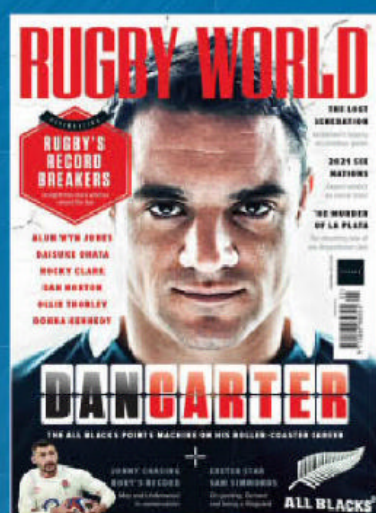
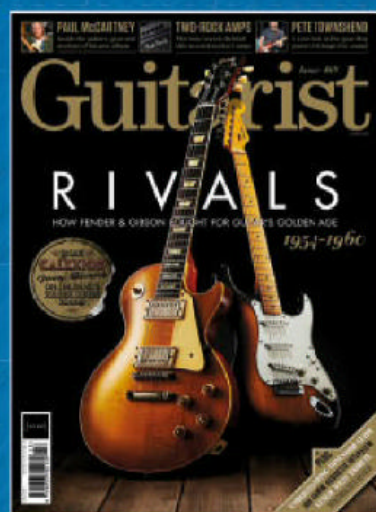
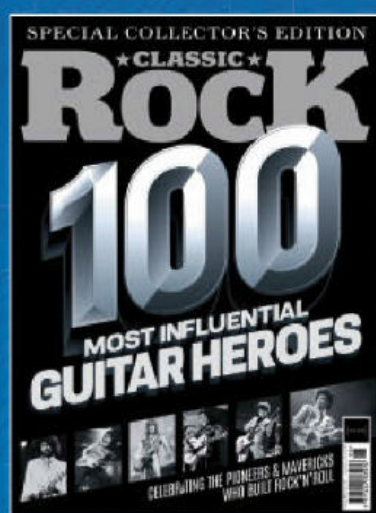
Tuning stability is also about the actual stability of the neck, primarily, something a new set of tuners or indeed a new nut will not cure, and you don't need me to tell you that the lower the cost of your purchase equals the lower the cost (and quality) of all of its component parts.

Getting your guitar to play and stay in tune is fundamental, but judging by the number of emails and questions we get on the topic, many still really struggle to achieve it. To generalise, part of the issue is buying 'cheap' online. While plenty of stores will set up or at least check over your guitar before they ship, plenty don't. I'd seek the advice of a knowledgeable mate or a professional and get their opinion. A good setup, which your guitar might not have ever had, not to mention a set of decent strings, would be where I'd spend my time and money, rather than the potentially random purchase of a new set of tuners that you really might not need. **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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# Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

Restoration expert Huw takes a deep dive into the world of these revered vibratos

## *Bigsby Vibratos*

**B**igsby vibratos were the must-have accessories for pioneering country pickers, rockabilly tearaways and 1960s psychedelic blues experimentalists. These days, they're as popular as ever with indie rockers and ambient noiseniks. That's quite remarkable for a product that has remained essentially unchanged since 1951 – but Bigsby vibratos simply work because they work simply.

There was clearly demand for a mechanical guitar vibrato device long before Paul Bigsby turned his attention to it, and if you were a pro player then that

probably meant a Kauffman Vibrola. Clayton Orr 'Doc' Kauffman came up with his design back during the 1930s when he worked for Rickenbacker, and he subsequently co-founded K&F Manufacturing Corporation with his close friend Leo Fender. Kauffman Vibrola users included Les Paul, Chet Atkins and Merle Travis, and it was Travis who first approached Paul Bigsby to repair the problematic Vibrola on his Gibson L-10. The repair wasn't a complete success, so Travis encouraged Bigsby to design and build his own vibrato device instead.

### How Bigsbys Work

Paul Bigsby was a 'fix anything, build anything' kind of guy and he started out designing and building parts for motorcycles. Much of his work involved casting and machining metal, and he was certainly influenced by Rickenbacker's aluminium 'frying pan' guitar. When Bigsby moved into instrument manufacturing, he combined figured maple with tooled aluminium components. His vibrato design was largely derived from his biking background, but it also incorporates some elements of traditional instrument making.

Paul Bigsby was a 'fix anything, build anything' guy who started out designing parts for motorcycles

Prior to the solidbody era, electric guitarists were still playing big-bodied archtops. Strings were typically anchored on a tailpiece that folded around the edge of the body and was secured against the tailblock. Bigsby replaced the tailpiece with a solid casting that attached in the same way but rested on top of the body, rather than floating above it. The Kauffman Vibrola rocked side to side, but Bigsby realised he could achieve a vibrato effect by allowing the string anchor points to rotate forwards and backwards. Of course, the ability to return to pitch accurately is a basic requirement for any vibrato system, and Bigsby employed a couple of common engineering components to achieve this.

He would have been more than familiar with bearings and springs from his work with motorcycles. Low friction is critical, so the main section of Bigsby's vibrato has two large holes drilled into the aluminium casting to accommodate a pair of roller bearings. A bar with string-securing pins slots through these bearings and is secured at one end by a circlip.

Bigsbys have a robust spring to counteract the string tension. The main moulding incorporates a small cup for the spring to sit in and a bracket, attached to the string bar with a grub screw, rotates forward to cover the top of the spring. With



The B6 Bigsby vibrato on this vintage Gibson hollowbody was rooted in 1940s motorcycle technology





Branded versions of the Bigsby vibrato were made for both Guild and Gretsch, as on this vintage White Falcon



the strings tuned up to pitch, the tension keeps the whole assembly pressed tightly against the guitar body and the bracket applies sufficient downwards pressure to hold the spring in place. The spring is calibrated to counteract string tension, while remaining soft enough to compress when the handle attached to the bracket is pressed downwards.

Ultimately, the Bigsby vibrato is a mechanical engineering solution to a musical problem. As such, it blazed a trail for many of the guitar hardware innovations that followed over the following decades.

## Model Variations

In the rapidly evolving electric guitar scene of the early 1950s, Paul Bigsby's 'one size fits all' approach soon became unsustainable. For smaller semi-solid archtops, such as the Gretsch Duo Jet, Bigsby introduced a shorter version of the B6 with a scaled-down hinge called the B3. For guitars with lower arches and flat tops, such as Les Pauls and various ES models, the B7 features

a front roller bar to increase the string break angle over the bridge, and it has to be screwed onto the top. The B5, nicknamed the 'Horseshoe Bigsby', also features a front roller but no hinge. Designed to be screwed onto the front of flat-topped guitars, it suits SGs, Telecasters, Juniors, Rickenbackers and Firebirds. Bigsby even designed a vibrato specifically for Telecasters. With integrated bridge pickup mounting and a cutout for a drop-in bridge, the B16 is impressive, but it's a big commitment and there are other options that preserve more of the authentic Tele tone and vibe.

During the 1960s, Bigsbys were so popular that production was farmed out to Selmer, who built them under licence in the UK. Bigsby also made branded versions for Gretsch and Guild. By 1965, health issues forced Paul Bigsby to sell his company to former Gibson president Ted McCarty. Fred W Gretsch purchased Bigsby in 1999 and two decades later Bigsby was acquired by its current owner, the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation.

## Modular Mods

The basic Bigsby design has remained unchanged, but as a modular system it's possible to swap some components in order to modify the feel and enhance playability. For example, Bigsbys have been offered with a variety of handles, which are very easy to swap. Simply slacken off the grub screw that's securing the bracket to the pin bar using an Allen key. Popular options include the Merle Travis, Chet Atkins/Wire Arm, Duane Eddy and vintage wide handles. Some players, including Darrel Higham, prefer the original non-swivel-style fixed handle, but it comes down to personal taste. You can also adjust the 'swivel-ability' of your handle by tightening or loosening its fixing screw. But if it's set too loose, the vibrato may feel less responsive and precise.

The spring's height and stiffness affect the feel of the vibrato and the height of the handle. Again, it's really a matter of taste, but some players prefer the softer feel of the Reverend spring. Bear in mind that

The basic design has remained unchanged, but it's possible to swap components to modify the feel

a softer spring may compress when you bend strings – just like a three-spring Strat setup. If you like the feel of your spring but would like your handle to be a bit higher, try placing a coin under the spring. It will need to be wider in diameter than the spring but narrower than the 'cup' that the spring sits in.

Owners sometimes struggle to hook strings onto the pins of Bigsby-equipped guitars. In recent years, 'pinless' Bigsbys have been introduced to allow through-bar stringing. You can remove the pins and drill out the bar for through-stringing, but it's safer and easier to retrofit a Callaham pinless bar or a Vibramate String Spoiler.

Elsewhere, some find that Bigsbys with front rollers have compromised sustain and frequency response. If you feel that way, check out the Callaham Front Roller upgrade kit. This direct replacement is made from stainless steel and is claimed to improve sustain and tuning stability. Front rollers can induce a very sharp break angle over the bridge, which may prevent the strings from sliding freely over it. The BiggsFix Tuning Stabilizer mounts into the existing roller holes, but it's raised up to soften the break angle and improve tuning stability.



The usefulness of the Bigsby vibrato extended into the era of rock music, as evidenced by the B7 on this 60s Gibson SG





British guitarist Barrie Cadogan's 50s Les Paul Black Beauty with a retro-fitted Bigsby installed

If you want to retrofit a Bigsby to a stop tailpiece guitar but you're reluctant to drill holes into the body, check out the Vibramate range of products. They offer non-destructive Bigsby-mounting systems for Les Pauls, SGs, ES models, Telecasters, Flying Vs and more besides.

Also investigate the Towner product range, which includes a Down Tension Bar that mounts onto stop tailpiece bushings and enables the use of B3 and B6 Bigsbys on guitars that would otherwise need a front roller Bigsby. It also offers a hinge-plate adaptor that allows solid fixing via the strap-button screw hole, plus spacer blocks for extra mounting options on various guitars, including Firebirds.

## Maintenance Tips

So long as you understand their limitations, Bigsbys are reliable and stable. If you do experience tuning issues when using one, you can usually trace the problems to

the bridge, bridge saddles, nut or tuners, rather than the Bigsby itself. You should also ensure the unit sits properly on top of the guitar and doesn't rock from side to side. The use of additional felt spacer pads may be needed if it does.

Very old Bigsbys can stiffen up due to congealed grease, dried-up oil and dirt accumulation. It usually takes years (or even decades) for these issues to manifest, though, and plenty of ancient Bigsbys still work perfectly. Next time you remove your strings, try turning the pin bar and front roller (if you have one) by hand. Both should spin freely with no resistance, but if that isn't the case, it's clean-up time. You'll need an Allen key to remove the grub screws securing the string pins, plus circlip pliers to release the pin bar.

With the circlip and grub screws now removed, the pins can be pushed out of the bar and the bar will slide out of the casting. You'll see roller bearings mounted

in the casting, and these should be flushed out with naphtha (aka lighter fluid – so don't forget to work in a well-ventilated area). Once they've dried off, apply fresh lithium grease to the bearings and wipe off any excess. The pin bar will most likely be sticky, too; if this is the case, you can clean it with naphtha or acetone. Follow up with some chrome polish in the areas where the bar contacts the bearings.

Front rollers are secured by a grub screw on the underside of the casting and you can use an Allen key to remove it. The central bar can be pulled out of the casting and separated from the roller tube, which has bearings at each end. Soak both parts in naphtha until all the old oil and grease can be removed, polish the bar and apply fresh grease to the bearings before reassembly. The whole process shouldn't take more than a couple of hours, and your Bigsby should be good for another decade or so. 

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# Neo Kid In Town

Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough explains how the advent of speakers using neodymium magnets enabled bigger sounds from lighter cabs

**R**emember when we all had a full stack? A 100-watt head on top of two 4x12s, crammed on the stage of the Dog & Duck? When guitar amplification first started, achieving high-enough power and having speakers that could actually handle that power were the limiting factors. All those extra speakers, larger chassis and bigger transformers came with a price – physical as well as monetary.

Regrettably, once higher powered amps became available, lower powered amps were often associated with lower quality, probably due to their more affordable cost. Although some of these attitudes still persist, in the early 2000s we started to see the growth in good-quality, low-powered amps, to the point where these days most amp manufacturers will have at least one high-quality amp producing up to around 15 to 20 watts. Let's face it, whether we play country, pop, rock or metal, there are now multiple small amps out there that sound great, don't weigh much and are still loud enough for the sound guy to tell you to turn it down.

Rightly or wrongly, many focus more on their amp than their cab, and we've just halved the size and weight of our amps...

so can we do the same with cabs? Yes, we can, but due to the laws of physics and personal tastes, there are limits.

Make a cab too small and you can lack the lower frequencies. A cab that's too light can result in a reduced low-end and things can sound too 'boxy'. A lot of us like to feel air hitting us when we play – it somehow feels more energetic and can give a certain kick on stage – so reducing the number or size of speakers isn't always the answer, either. Porting a cab can get around some of these factors, helping to produce a large, full tone in a smaller box, but this option can often lack ambience – and if the science is followed too closely and the art of real speaker design is ignored, they can lack some musicality.

So if we've established that size is something that shouldn't be messed with too much, and the weight of the materials used can result in too large a compromise considering the minimal weight saving, then we're left with the speakers. Luckily, we have a perfect solution in neo speakers. Neo is an abbreviation of neodymium, a rare-earth element that can form an alloy with iron and boron to produce neodymium magnets. As most people will find 'the why'

a not very interesting read, I'll skip to 'the what'... and that is a very high magnetic field strength, or a stronger magnet or – more simply put – that big heavy thing on the back of a speaker/driver. The magnet, doesn't need to be as big. In fact, it can be around a 10th of the size to produce the same effect.

Before you throw this magazine across the room shouting "Why didn't anyone do this sooner?!" The answer is simple: they were only invented about 40 years ago, they were expensive and they were originally only available on licence. As the price has come down, the viability of using them in guitar speakers has increased to the point where nearly all speaker manufacturers now produce at least one neo speaker, and they nearly all sound good to the point where we often use them for their tonal

**"Most neo speakers sound good to the point where we often use them for tonal characteristics alone"**



characteristics alone. As of yet, the tonal palette probably isn't as broad as what you'll find with standard ceramic magnet speakers, but these are early days and comparing Celestions' 4.7kg Vintage 30 to its 1.7kg Neo Creamback immediately shows a 3kg weight saving per speaker.

It's true that not everyone wants their 2x12 to sound like a 4x12, and a lot of people love the sound of 1x12 cabs. When this is the case, the size of the speaker cabinet tends not to be a problem because there are plenty of compact options on the market that will add to the sound, rather than detract from it. But when the ideal sounds are big, full tones, reminiscent of the full stack, we can't just jump down to a tiny cab as we'll often hear too much of a difference. In these cases, by using a lighter speaker instead of a smaller, lighter cab we'll end up hearing less of a compromise. **G**





Neodymium magnets entered the speaker market around 40 years ago, and as their price has come down, the viability of using them in guitar cabs has gone up





# Rod Brakes' *Classic* Gear

Gibson's first long-scale bass was the last classic design of Ted McCarty's golden era

## Gibson Thunderbird Basses

**A**nounced in spring 1963, the Gibson Thunderbird basses originally appeared as two distinct models: the single-pickup Thunderbird II and the dual-pickup Thunderbird IV. There were no I or III models, rather the II and IV designations conveniently sat betwixt their six-string siblings, the Firebirds (models I, III, V and VII). All six appeared together as a series intended to modernise Gibson's solidbody line. The firm had attempted something similar in 1958 with the release of the 'modernistic' Flying V and Explorer, though production was halted by the following year.

In the early 60s, Fender was leading the pack with its colourful, forward-thinking designs. The 34-inch scale Precision and Jazz Basses were unprecedented successes that had turned the music world on its head, while their automotive-influenced custom colour chart and less traditional forms spoke to the zeitgeist. Instrument builders overtly referenced the names, finishes and geometry of hot-rod culture. It was a phenomenon instantly identifiable in a booming electric guitar industry that stretched from coast to coast – notably Fender in the West and Gretsch in the East.

If Gibson were to keep up, it needed to respond. And what better way to return to the drawing board than with a bona fide automotive designer? Well, that was the thinking behind the first run of Firebird/Thunderbird designs anyway when Gibson hired Raymond Dietrich. As it turned out,

these so-called 'reverse' guitars proved especially difficult and costly to build. Indeed, Gibson still maintains the reverse 'Bird is one of the trickiest to produce. And while a laminated neck-through-body construction provides great stability and tone, reverse Thunderbirds are especially prone to headstock breaks (aka Firebird disease) – a problem exacerbated by the instruments' heavy Kluson tuners.

The reverse Thunderbirds, it seems, were doomed from the start. Sales were dire. And with Fender claiming a patent infringement of its Jazzmaster body styling, Gibson was further prompted to overhaul the entire range. Interestingly, however, the 'non-reverse' design that followed – a virtual

What better way for Gibson to keep up than return to the drawing board with an automotive designer?

mirror image of the reverse counterpart – appears much closer to the Fender offset with respect to body and headstock profile. It seems reasonable to presume that the Fullerton firm was distracted enough by its CBS takeover during 1965 not to interfere. Regardless, the revamped Thunderbirds arrived that year featuring glued-in necks. As before, the II and IV were structurally identical – the main difference being pickups and electronics (the IV sported an extra volume knob as per its second pickup).

From its inception back in '63, one of the range's main selling-points was Gibson's all-new custom colour chart, and these options extended into the latter half of the 60s. Taking inspiration from Fender, the finishes included Ember Red, Frost Blue, Polaris White, Cardinal Red, Heather, Pelham Blue, Golden Mist, Kerry Green, Silver Mist and Inverness Green. Exotic-sounding enough, but the regular, less expensive sunburst finish proved to be the most popular choice by far.

Alas, the Thunderbirds were not deemed popular enough to remain in production beyond the 60s, and with sales dropping off towards the end of the decade manufacturing ceased in 1969. 

### The Evolution of Gibson Thunderbirds

**Spring 1963**

Thunderbird II & IV announced (reverse)

**Late 1963**

Thunderbird II first shipped

**1964**

Thunderbird IV first shipped

**1965**

Non-reverse models

**1966**

Circa 500 shipped (II & IV)

**1967**

120 shipped (IV)

**1968**

Circa 100 shipped (II & IV)

**1969**

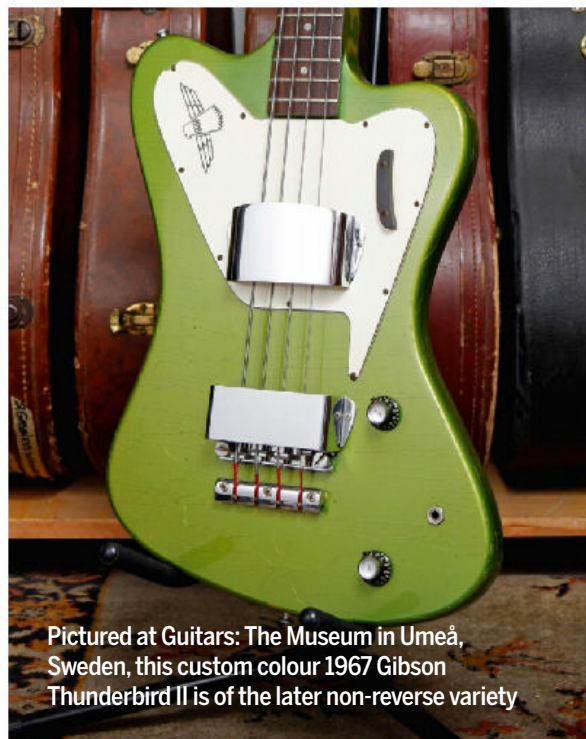
Discontinued

**1976**

Thunderbird '76 released; reverse; dual pickups; Sunburst, Natural Mahogany and Ebony finishes

**2022**

Gene Simmons G2 Thunderbird released; reverse; dual pickups; Ebony finish



Pictured at Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden, this custom colour 1967 Gibson Thunderbird II is of the later non-reverse variety





## 1964 Gibson Thunderbird II

### 1. SERIAL NUMBER

Six digits on rear of headstock

### 2. HEADSTOCK

Asymmetrical reverse design; tuners on bass side; raised middle section; black/natural finish

### 3. PLASTICS

Gold Gibson logo on black truss rod cover; three-ply (w/b/w) pickguard with bevelled edge and Firebird emblem; two metal cap/reflector knobs labelled Volume and Tone

### 4. HARDWARE

Nickel-plated: Kluson tuners with metal buttons; fully adjustable four-saddle bridge; stop tailpiece; bridge and pickup covers. Front-loading jack socket; two metal strap buttons; wooden tug bar

### 5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS

Single bespoke humbucker; two 500k pots (volume and tone controls)

### 6. BODY

Asymmetrical reverse design; 1½-inch depth; neck-through-body construction (two-piece mahogany); glued-on mahogany sides/wings; raised middle section; standard sunburst finish

### 7. NECK

Two-piece mahogany neck-through-body construction; unbound 20-fret Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays; 34-inch scale (often measured slightly longer)

**Guitarist would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham for showing us this '64 reverse Thunderbird II, and Guitars: The Museum in Sweden for allowing us to photograph the '67 non-reverse Thunderbird II**





# David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

The pinnacle of Gibson's craft in a mysterious custom colour finish

## 1964 Gibson Super 400CES



Unofficially dubbed 'Bahamian Blue', this finish has faded to a Foam Green-type colour

**T**his is not a regular Gibson custom colour. It's actually an unknown colour – a blue that's faded to green. There are a couple of small chips where you can see the blue. It's kind of a Foam Green now. That has a lot to do with the clear lacquer yellowing with age. It's got two initials on the bass bout written in old calligraphy style: 'E.M.' There's a backstory to that. It belonged to a Bahamian guy who was considered to be the 'Mozart of the Bahamas'. He played many instruments, and this was one of them.

"It's a cool piece, a very one-off kind of guitar. It's stereo and has a Varitone, so in that sense it's a Super 400CES-SV. It's from 1964 and has a solid spruce top with maple back and sides. Structurally, it's what you would expect from this era. And it has the standard issue gold hardware with the engraved tailpiece, reflector cap knobs and celluloid pickguard. But rather than a natural or sunburst finish it's been painted a unique colour. The neck profile is rather full. It plays very, very well. It's not a slim taper neck like a 60/'61; it's more of the full-size neck. The neck has also been painted blue. In fact, the whole thing is blue, aside from the holly [headstock] veneer and the [ebony] fingerboard, obviously.

"One thing I love about these higher-end archtops is that it appears only the best craftspeople were working on them. Years ago, during a conversation with [ex-Gibson employee] Mike McGuire, he told me that Gibson had only their best people working on these. The binding work was one of the most difficult parts of the process. They've got to do the front and back of the body, and it's multiple ply around the fretboard and

headstock, so it was a very labour-intensive process. There's also considerably more pearl work involved because of the [five-piece split diamond] headstock inlays and the large split-block fingerboard inlays.

"This is such an interesting colour – I think of it as 'Bahamian Blue'. I don't have a match for it using the paint charts and there is no record of the actual colour they used. It just says, 'Super 400 Varitone special', in the ledger. There are times when Gibson put no tint in the [clearcoat] lacquer, so it would have appeared clear. But it's cellulose, so just like old celluloid tape and old celluloid photo albums can turn yellow with age, so too does the clearcoat on old guitars. However,

**"The Super 400 was Gibson's top-of-the-line guitar... It was their pinnacle"**

on some colours, the clear was actually tinted to begin with in order to change the appearance of the basecoat. Inverness Green, for example, is really Pelham Blue with a [yellow-] tinted lacquer. It was certainly cheaper for Gibson to do it that way, rather than using different basecoats.

"You see the same kind of yellowing on old Lake Placid Blue Fender guitars. They often go green when they age because, although the colour was [acrylic/] Lucite, the clear was still nitrocellulose and so would be subject to the same kind of ageing – yellowing and so forth. As we know, Fender later went to a poly. And once they did, you didn't get that yellowing of the finish any

more. It might get smoke-stained, but it wouldn't yellow from UV light.

"In my opinion, the [pointed] Florentine cutaway is prettier than the [round] Venetian cutaway. [Super 400s changed to Florentine cutaways in 1960; the Venetian style returned in 1969.] The rumour has always been the Florentine Super 400s from the early 60s until the late 60s usually have a veneer back and sides – as opposed to the earlier Venetian cut guitar, which have a solid back and sides. I've seen veneer-back Super 400s from as early as 1961.

"The Florentine cutaway is a cool look that was inherited from the ES-175, which was always a veneer guitar. It just has that rockabilly style. A pointed cutaway on an ES-5 Switchmaster looks amazing, too. Elvis played a Super 400CES on the NBC '68 *Comeback Special* – he borrowed it from Scotty Moore. Many bandleaders played them. Back in the day, there were three 18-inch-wide guitars: the D'Angelico New Yorker, the Stromberg Master 400, and the Gibson Super 400. The big three. The D'Angelico was priced a little higher, and the Stromberg was priced way higher.

"The Super 400 was Gibson's top-of-the-line guitar – it was their most expensive and most difficult to make. It had the most accoutrement of any guitar. It was their pinnacle. You could argue the Citation was fancier, but really the Super 400 is the name that comes to mind when you think about the pinnacle of Gibson." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York  
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The building of high-end Gibson archtops such as this required expert craftspeople, in part due to the complexity of the binding and inlay processes

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON



# Guitarist

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