

Guitarist

Issue 488

SUMMER 2022

ROBERT

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AL DI
MEOLA

ON HIS LEGENDARY
GIGS WITH PACO
& McLAUGHLIN

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REVIEWS

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FUTURE



= EDITION

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The Only Golden Rule



This month's exclusive cover story with one of the most artistically fearless guitarists of our time, Robert Fripp (see interview, page 60), is a reminder of what can sometimes be lost in the world of guitar. There are so many great musical traditions, from blues to metal, to learn from. And each of them has its standard licks, hallmark techniques and heroes to emulate. In that sense, we all stand on the shoulders of giants when we play guitar in those styles, and their legacy vastly enriches us. But there's a reverse to that coin, too. In learning the classic foundations of modern rock and pop guitar, it can be easy to settle into a standard way of doing things or fall prey to the creatively damaging illusion that those traditions represent the *only* ways that guitar should be played.

Though Fripp rose to prominence in the late 60s, many of his recordings still sound startlingly fresh and original today. And that's partly because he always approached the guitar as a blank slate – an open-ended means of converting his musical ideas into sound, free of limitations or pre-existing templates. He didn't play it like a standard rock guitarist and instead pursued his own course into uncharted seas. And we are the richer for that approach to guitar, too.

To paraphrase Laney's Simon Fraser-Clark (see Blueprint, page 110), the only golden rule is that there is no golden rule when it comes to expressing yourself on guitar. And as rewarding as it is to emulate the playing of one's heroes, it's always worth remembering that most of them were considered disruptive innovators when they first broke through into the limelight. So never be afraid to be original and go where your ears want to take you, even if it is far off the trodden path. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Tom Bukacina
The American session ace is a player of rare taste and versatility – and his eclectic guitar collection reflects the breadth of his talent **p52**



Strat Evolution
Huw Price's survey of the early evolution of the Strat shines a revealing light on the incremental changes that made it an icon **p76**



Al Di Meola
The fiery fusion master looks back on one of the most influential unplugged tours of all time, with Paco de Lucía and John McLaughlin **p32**



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<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

FIRST PLAY



GUILD SURFLINER \$595

WHAT IS IT? Original-design
retro-style solidbody bolt-on

All Aboard

While Guild's Newark St Collection features numerous repros of past models, the latest bolt-on Surfliner is an all-new creation. What's going on?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis

Presumably named after the Pacific Surfliner train service that runs down the California coast from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, this new electric is quite a departure for Guild. First off, it undercuts the previous Newark St start-up model, the Jetstar, and is nearly half the price of the long-running \$100 Polara. It shares the Jetstar's longer 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length but is the only bolt-on in the current range. Guild did produce various bolt-ons to try to stay current in the 80s, but those were more 'SuperStrat'-like; the style here seems more retro. And while technically an offset, as in its waist and curved bass-side base, the Surfliner doesn't look – or feel – like any Guild guitar this writer has ever seen or played before.

"[It's] an entirely new solidbody platform that crosses subtle offset styling with the vintage lines of 1960s and 1970s Guilds," we're told. Those horns look like they've come from the Jetstar, likewise the light chamfering on the top edges, plus we have a regular ribcage cut-out on the back. Through the translucent blue gloss finish (one of three offered) you can easily see the four pieces of poplar that







1. Recalling plenty of two- or three-pickup guitars from the 60s, these modern mini-rocker switches simply turn each pickup on or off, providing seven selections and the ability to totally mute the output

2. Whatever your thoughts on this oversized headstock, it offers straight string pull from the nut to the tuners and is back-angled, meaning you don't need string trees. The split-post tuners are perfectly functional, and it's very stable, tuning-wise

3. Guild's owner, the Cordoba Music Group, also owns the DeArmond brand and already produces a modern version of the Dynasonic as used on the X-175 Manhattan Special. These new Aerosonics are the only Fender-style single coils used on the Newark ST guitars. They have a measured DCR of 6.57kohms (middle) and 6.31k (neck)

make up the body spread, and there's a little striped grain poking through, too.

The distinctive back-angled headstock is spliced on at the 2nd fret and is already featured on the Jetstar, along with the Starfire I Jet 90 – the only other three-pickup Guild electric in the current range – and apparently the Guild logo here is resurrected from the 1980s. To be honest,

The neat little on/off 'rocker' pickup selector switches throw a curveball

the head looks a bit oversized, and that logo a little lonely on the expanse of plain maple, not helped by the bright white truss rod cover. Another oddity is that we have 23 frets – pretty unusual for any electric, old or new.

While the actual name might come from a train, the surf bit suggests a vibrato, which is missing here in favour of a tune-o-matic bridge and strings that pass through the body and are anchored in recessed ferrules on the back. It's the sort of setup you see on much more progressive-style guitars (see the Manson ORYX, for example, later on in this issue). The HSS pickup complement is more modern, too, even though Guild pairs its original small-footprint LB-1 humbucker (a design that dates back to the early 60s) at the bridge with two new-design DeArmond



Aerosonic single coils in their partial metal covers. Because the tune-o-matic sits quite high on the body, all three pickups have to be raised some way from the scratchplate.

We're on safer ground with the rear-mounted volume, tone and output jack, which are standard stuff, as are the 'G' logo Guild knobs, but the pickup selector switches throw another curveball. These are neat little on/off 'rocker' switches, one for each pickup, and the sort of thing you might see on a modern table lamp. As well as the ability to completely mute the guitar you get the standard Strat-like selections, plus bridge and neck and all-three together – seven combinations in total.

4. Part of the Newark ST range since 2013, the contemporary LB-1 'Little Bucker' revisits the original Guild humbucker that first appeared in the early 60s. It uses an Alnico V magnet with a measured DCR of 5.03kohms and is a good match, output-wise, for the single-coil Aerosonics



UNDER THE HOOD

Aside from those rocker switches, what else is happening here?

All three pickups are made by BHK (Booheung Precision Co Ltd, Korea). The LB-1 at the bridge, which uses an Alnico V magnet, will be pretty familiar to any Guild Newark St fans, while the flush pole (Alnico V) single coils look fairly regular, except for their partial covers, which will help to reduce hum pick-up. Aside from selecting the solo bridge humbucker,

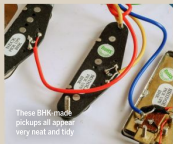
the neck and middle combined, and all three-on are hum-cancelling.

Underneath the scratchplate there's an open 'swimming pool' rout. This means if you wanted to go HH, HSH or SSS, so long as you could fabricate a scratchplate, no additional routing of the body would be necessary. Maybe Guild has some different pickup configurations in mind for the future?

The volume and tone controls are 500k Alpha 'Made in Korea' types, the tone cap rated at .033 microfarads (333J) and wired modern style. It's standard stuff with no treble bleed circuit or anything remotely fancy. Those mini-rocker switches appear to be a simple press-fit onto the scratchplate, unlike the sturdier mechanical mounting of a standard mini-toggle switch.



Plenty of more expensive guitars feature these good-quality Alpha pots



These BHK-made pickups all appear very neat and tidy



Under the scratchplate is this 'swimming pool' rout

Feel & Sounds

The slightly oddball design elements don't distract from a guitar that is light in weight, hangs well on a strap and feels more than comfortable seated. The heel position and that treble cutaway allow easy access to the upper frets, and it doesn't feel too bad at all out of the box, though it does ship with 0.011-gauge strings, which simply might be too tough for its target audience. The 254mm (10-inch) 'board radius is the same as PRS, marginally flatter than modern Fender, and sports 'narrow jumbo' frets, which aren't either, particularly, measuring approximately 2.7mm wide by 1.1mm high. They could do with a bit of a polish to avoid that slightly scratchy feeling as you bend, and the string slots are left a little high on the Gibson-style composite nut. It certainly doesn't match the smart detail of PRS's SE Silver Sky – which also sports a poplar body – but then again without a gigbag it does cost over 50 per cent less.

The neck shape might be classed by Guild as a 'C', but it feels fuller in the hand than the dimensions suggest (the 1st fret depth is 20.5mm and it's 23.4mm at the 12th, with a 42.6mm nut width) as the shoulders feel pretty big and there's a slightly flatter back.

Now, we could carp about the relatively minor setup issues, or we could fix 'em with some 20 minutes' work. For example, there's an unnecessary neck shim that, when removed, means we can sit the tune-o-matic (and pickups) lower. The nut slots





The 'G' cut-out on the neckplate echoes other Guild hardware such as the 'Guildsby' vibrato or harp trapeze tailpieces found on numerous other models in the Newark St range

simply need to be lowered, and both the 2nd and 4th frets are slightly high on the treble side, again a simple job to spot-level, reprofile and buff up.

Sonically, what do you think a guitar like this will sound like? You're right, a Fender! While not every Guild aficionado enjoys the LB-1 bridge pickup, here it's very well matched both in output and style; it's a lighter, brighter 'bucker, for sure, with a gritty edge but one that provides some

However, the rocker switch idea is nowhere near as fast to use as a good ol' five-way lever switch, which we'd prefer with a simple pull-switch on the tone to achieve the 'seven sound' mod. As it is, to move from neck and middle combined to bridge you have to mute each of the single coils then switch on the bridge pickup. And, c'mon, any guitar that you can accidentally totally mute in the heat of battle is a no-no for any gigging musician, isn't it?

Verdict

Clearly an attempt to broaden the audience for its electric guitars in both style and price, this now start-up Surfliner is going to polarise opinion. It's all a little oddball but somehow manages to come together to produce some good Fender-based old-school sounds, which certainly match the 'was it designed in the past?' vibe.

While our sample did need a little tweaking, and we have to question what exactly those mini-rocker switches are bringing to the table, particularly for the gigging musician, this is a very affordable, lightweight and stable instrument, and we have to say we're swayed by the sounds. Something a little different? Definitely. ■

It's all a little oddball but comes together to produce some good Fender-based old-school sounds

welcome girth. It can certainly jangle on clean amp tones and has enough clarity to work very well with a pedalboard, but it also works very well with fuzzier gains that you can easily file under late 60s Stones-y garage-rock. It also plays well with the Aerosonics, which might have a slightly too-crip edge and relatively trimmed low-end – but, again, they sound pretty authentic if you're chasing more retro single-coil voices.



GUILD SURFLINER

PRICE: £395

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Maple, 'C' profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Composite/42.6mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dots (5mm), 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 23, narrow jumbo

HARDWARE: Guild tuneomatic bridge with through-body stringing, Kluson-style vintage

tuners – chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:

51.5mm

ELECTRICS: Guild LB-1 humbucker (bridge), 2x DeArmond Aerosonic single coils (middle/neck), 3x on/off pickup selector 'rocker' switches, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.06/6.73

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: The Newark St electrics above the Surfliner start with the Jetstar (approx. £560)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Catalina Blue (as reviewed), White Sage, Sunset Orange – gloss body, satin neck

Selectron UK Ltd

01795 419460

www.guildguitars.com

8/10

PROS Price; acceptable build quality; lightweight, stable and resonant with some retro-y voices, notably the LB-1 bridge 'bucker

CONS The on/off rocker switches aren't as fast to use as a standard five-way selector, which could produce the same seven selections with a simple pull-switch; our sample needed a little basic setup attention

FROM THE
GARAGE
TO THE **ARENA**

THE CRESTWOOD, WILSHIRE, AND CORONET

The Epiphone Crestwood debuted in 1958 as Epiphone's first original solid-body electric guitar and was the foundation for the Wilshire™ and Coronet models that followed in 1959. Now all three are back, with features inspired by those early versions, including symmetrical double-cutaway mahogany bodies with glued-in medium C profile mahogany necks, Indian laurel fretboards with 22 medium jumbo frets, and Kalamazoo headstocks with Epiphone Bikini badges. These essential, no-nonsense rockers are perfect for every stage and ready to take you from the garage to the arena. **Available now at Epiphone.com**

Epiphone
FOR EVERY STAGE



FIRST PLAY



**BLACKSTAR ST JAMES 50
EL34 COMBO**
£1,099

WHAT IS IT? Significant new release from Blackstar combining innovative features and modern cabinet emulation

Light Fantastic

Blackstar claims its latest release is “the lightest 50-watt all-valve combo in the world”. Is this really the future for valve amplification? Time to plug in

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis

Blackstar's history goes back to 2004, when a gang of four guitar-playing mates left secure employment with a major amplification manufacturer to spend the next two and a half years developing their own range of amps, from the somewhat more dubious security of a shed in Northampton.

Blackstar Amplification made its debut in 2007 at Frankfurt's Musikmesse trade show – and the rest we know. Today, it's one of the top amplification brands in every niche, from hand-wired pure valve designs to cost-effective digital modelling, all presented with the typically down-to-earth pragmatic attitude that's a reflection of the company founders and the city Blackstar comes from. So perhaps it's apt that Blackstar chose to pay tribute to its hometown with one of its most important launches yet: the St James range.

St James is the Northampton district that's home to the Saints Rugby Union Premiership club and the skyline-dominating National Lift Tower, and the St James amplifiers have a lot to live up to – and that's before we peer inside the design – as Blackstar is proudly calling them “the future of valve amplification”. There are actually two different flavours on offer within the range, both available in combo and head format, one being a high-gain 6L6-powered circuit aimed at modern rock and metal, while the one we're looking at here is the lower-gain, pedal-friendly EL34 version.

The St James amps are billed as the lightest 50-watt valve amps in the world, with a number of innovations making that possible, the most obvious being the lack of heavy mains transformer. Instead, we have a patent-pending switched-mode

1



1. Weighing in at just shy of 13kg (28lb) thanks to a switched-mode power supply, Celestion G12Z-70 Zephyr driver and candlenut plywood cab, the St James is extremely portable – and yet it still manages to pack in 50 watts of valve power

2. The combo's rear-panel connections point downwards, so thankfully there's a clearly marked info panel to help hook up your connections, including a series effects loop, XLR and TRS DI outputs, USB and a choice of impedance loudspeaker sockets

power supply piggybacked on the top of the main chassis, which is carefully folded for improved rigidity. Inside, miniature SMD components cohabit with heavy duty power resistors and capacitors on high-quality printed circuit boards. There are separate PCBs for the front and rear controls, the valve bases and a smaller board for Blackstar's Cab Rig digital speaker emulation, all securely supported and joined by ribbon cables, terminated with robust Molex connectors.

There are a few cool features. In the middle of the main board there's a reactive load device, which mimics the loudspeaker's response for realistic silent recording. LED indicators next to the preset pots for output valve bias and balance take away the guesswork, although high voltages and the complex nature of the St James's layout mean bias adjustment is best left to the pros – it's not really a DIY task.

Tucked away inside the candlenut plywood semi-closed back enclosure

The low-noise floor, reactive load and Cab Rig emulation make it a perfect recording partner



is a single Celestion Zephyr 12-inch loudspeaker, a lightweight driver that's exclusive to Blackstar and marries the cone characteristics of the legendary Vintage 30 with a unique hi-tech ferrite (not neodymium) motor.

The St James is a two-channel design, featuring a high-headroom USA-flavoured clean channel that's teamed with a low-to-medium gain overdrive channel based on classic early 60s British designs. There's a volume control for the clean channel, and volume and gain controls for the overdrive channel, with a level control for the digital reverb and an overall master volume.

Behind the three EQ knobs, you'll find dual-gang potentiometers controlling separate circuits for both channels. The clean channel EQ is a regular passive array, while the overdrive channel has

passive interactive bass and treble controls with an active midrange that operates independently from the bass and treble, cutting or boosting frequencies. The overdrive channel also includes a footswitchable boost, with an alternative toggle switch on the control panel. Another toggle switch changes channels, while a third gives you a choice of power output settings, with a studio-friendly two-watt option or a full-on 50 watts for stage use. In between there's a third choice called Sag, which is 50 watts but with a modified dynamic response to imitate a power supply being driven hard.

Rear-panel options (which point downward because of the top-facing control panel) include a series effects loop with switchable levels and a choice of extension loudspeaker sockets. There's also



a balanced XLR and TRS jack/headphones output for the St James's integrated reactive load and Cab Rig speaker emulation, together with a USB socket for uploading Cab Rig presets and direct recording. A three-way switch accesses three onboard Cab Rig presets, with a practically infinite range of choices from Blackstar's Architect app ready to edit and upload.

Overall, the St James looks the business, and boasts typically robust build quality, plus cool 60s-inspired boutique features including radiogram-style control knobs and an illuminated logo.

Feel & Sounds

We tried out the St James combo with a variety of guitars, including our regular Strat and a fabulous borrowed 1972 Les Paul Custom, with the original embossed-cover



3. The St James amps have four power options, with a choice of 50 watts or two watts, and a clever 50-watt Sag option that imitates a small power supply pushed to the limit. The fourth option is to switch the amp into Standby mode, disconnecting the loudspeaker but leaving the amp's reactive load and Cab Rig outputs on, perfect for recording and quiet stage environments

4. The cool boutique-inspired styling here takes its cues from some classic 60s amplifiers, topped off by the illuminated logo plate that also serves as a 'power on' indicator



pickups. As well as a studio audition, we used the St James for two gigs, including a three-hour 'Saturday night special' at a very busy town pub.

With the premium TAD Redbase EL34s warmed up, there's practically no background noise, partly due to the lack of a conventional mains transformer. Both the Les Paul and the Strat were dialled in within seconds, and while the St James sounds

great with single coils, it really comes alive with the mid-rich tones of the Les Paul's humbuckers. The black-panel influenced clean channel has the sweet treble and scooped mids needed to get that buttery 'both pickups on' rhythm tone, while the drive channel sits somewhere between JTM45 and AC30 and can be coaxed in either direction for truly stunning classic rock and blues sounds.

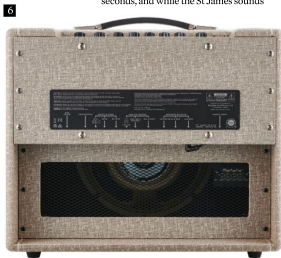
The drive channel is very touch-sensitive, cleaning up if you back off a little, or barking like a Doberman if you hit the strings hard. Activating the drive channel's boost function adds a healthy 10dB of gain. However, Strat owners with low-ish output pickups might find themselves wishing for a couple of decibels more.

The digital reverb adds a cool ambience that can be as subtle or forward as you like, while the Cab Rig simulated speaker outputs deliver authentic mic'd up sounds direct into a desk for studio or live use. There's a choice of three presets on the amp, meanwhile the Architect partner software

5. The range features channel switching and an overdrive boost, controlled either from small toggle switches on the top panel or from the two-button footswitch

6. You might be expecting a neodymium-magnet speaker in such a lightweight amp, but Blackstar worked closely with Celestion to develop a ferrite speaker that maintained the characteristics of the much-loved Vintage 30

7. Special dual-gang potentiometers control two entirely separate EQ networks for clean and overdrive channels. The USA-flavoured clean channel has regular passive controls that interact, while the overdrive channel features an active midrange that cuts and boosts frequencies



The St James really comes alive with the mid-rich tones of the Les Paul's humbuckers



BLACKSTAR ST JAMES 50 EL34 COMBO

PRICE: £1,099

ORIGIN: Designed in UK, made under licence in China

TYPE: Valve preamp, valve power amp
OUTPUT: 50W RMS, switchable to 2W with silent recording option

VALVES: 2x 12AX7, 2x EL34

DIMENSIONS: 535 (w) x 259 (d) x 462mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 12.8/28

CABINET: Lightweight plywood

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x 12" Celestion

G12Z-70 Zephyr

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Volume 1, Gain 2, Volume 2, bass, middle (active cut/boost),

treble, reverb level, master volume,

channel switch, Channel 2 boost

switch, 50-watt/Sag/2W power switch

FOOTSWITCH: FS-19 footswitch

(supplied) toggles channels, boost

on Channel 2

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series

effects loop, digital reverb, integrated

Cab Rig cabinet simulation with mono

balanced XLR and stereo TRS line/

headphones outputs, integrated

reactive load, USB audio/Cab Rig editing

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: EL34 head (£999);

high-gain 'modern preamp' St James

6L6 combo (£1,099) and head (£999).

Zephyr-loaded 2x12 cabs (£499)

Blackstar Amplification Ltd

01604 817817

www.blackstaramps.com



9/10

PROS Compact and very portable;

USA-inspired clean channel; superb

vintage overdrive channel; Cab Rig

gigs beyond standard IRs; power to

spare for live gigs; superb loudspeaker

CONS Hardware output level control

for Cab Rig outputs would've been a

bonus, as would an offline menu in

the Architect app; somewhat pricey

gives you a practically infinite choice of combinations, which can be uploaded to the St James or saved and stored offline. We like the Architect app's clean, minimalist page design, which includes a live bias status display for the St James's output valves. At the moment, the app only works when it's connected to an amp, which may be a slight annoyance for some as it stops you from browsing features, for which you don't always need an amp hooked up.

The St James handled our live gigs with ease sat next to a large enthusiastically played drum kit that one felt as well as heard. There was plenty of power to spare, with the master volume staying well below the halfway mark. We also used the Sag power amp setting, which adds a subtle but effective dynamic compression to the output; single notes and chords breathe and bloom a little more.

In the studio the two-watt setting is perfect and you can combine real microphones with the Cab Rig virtual mic'd environments for extra versatility. Turning the standby switch to 'off' disconnects the loudspeaker. However, the entire amp signal is still routed through the St James's reactive load and the Cab Rig emulation, making the Blackstar ideal for quiet stage environments as well as loud ones.

Verdict

Blackstar is calling the St James the future of valve guitar amplification, and while that's somewhat reliant on the uncertain future of valves, there are significant innovations underneath that smart fawn vinyl covering. The sounds are superb, nailing British 70s classic rock tones and ideal for pedal users, while the low-noise floor, built-in reactive load and Cab Rig emulation make it a perfect partner for recording and quiet gigs.

Super-portable guitar amplification is very popular right now, with all kinds of solutions vying for your cash. However, the St James stands out with 50 watts of full-on valve power in a 1x12-inch enclosure that weighs about the same as a typical 20-watt solid-state practice combo. Indeed, there were a few moments while testing it with our '72 Les Paul Custom when the guitar felt as though it might weigh more than the amp!

While the St James isn't the cheapest all-valve offering out there, you get what you pay for – and the weight saving alone will be a serious temptation for many of us. We reckon it's great value for money. For professional players and serious amateurs who are after a compact and portable all-valve combo that doesn't compromise on tone, it's a superb choice. **A**

FIRST PLAY



**HARLEY BENTON
MR-MODERN
£295**

WHAT IS IT? Budget Mostrite-style offset double-cut from Thomann's in-house brand



1

2

Surf's Up

The latest range from Harley Benton is based on the rare Mosrite brand. A viable cheapie or a clone too far?

Words Dave Burriluck Photography Olly Curtis



HARLEY BENTON MR-MODERN

PRICE: £295
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.1mm
FINISH: Macassar ebony, pearl dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo Blacksmith stainless steel
HARDWARE: Wilkinson VS-50 II vibrato, Kluson-style Wilkinson locking tuners – chrome-plating
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Artec AHC-90 soapbar-sized Alnico-5 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone (w/ pull-switch coil-split) controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.01/8.8
OPTIONS: Not this model
RANGE OPTIONS: MR-Classic (£209) has standard frets, hardtail wrapover bridge, 2x P-90 style single coils, basswood body, roasted jatoba 'board; the baritone version (£295) has a 686mm (27") scale length
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, in both the MR-Classic (£209) and MR-Modern spec (£295)
FINISH: Candy Apple Red (as reviewed), Black, 3-Tone Sunburst, Pearl White and Metallic Blue – colour matched headstock with satin natural neck back

Harley Benton
<https://harleybenton.com>
www.thomann.de

8/10

PROS The build is pretty tidy for the price, with good hardware and acceptable pickups and circuit

CONS Fairly weighty; might need a setup tweak; firmer foam under the bridge pickup would raise it

1. Artec is a Korean-based manufacturer, but pickup info is scant, aside from their use of Alnico V magnets. The humbucker/single coil DCRs measure 10.96k/5.33k ohms at the bridge and a more vintage-y 7.58k/3.86k at the neck. In single-coil mode the outer coils are voiced

2. The Wilkinson vibrato, nicely cut Graph Tech nut and 'HB' logo'd rear lock tuners mean that (after the usual string stretching) this is a rather good light-travel vibrato system

3. It's hard to argue with the big stainless-steel frets on a Macassar ebony 'board at this price. The neck profile is an okay 'D' shape (20mm deep at the 1st fret, 22.7mm by the 12th) and the neck seems very rigid

4. The basic circuit has a simple master volume and tone and three-way toggle, but the wiring is neat and uses a .047 microfarads (473J) tone cap and an Alpha Korean large volume pot. Ken modders could upgrade easily, plus you can unscrew the scratchplate without even detuning your strings

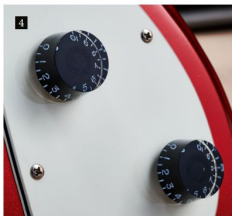
Fast becoming the place to find a bargain, Harley Benton – a house brand of online giant Thomann – seems to release new models on a monthly basis. The latest is a dual-level MR (as in Mosrite) range with hardtail 'Classic' models at £209 and this rather more pimped 'Modern' version at a lofty £295. And when we say pimped, we get jumbo stainless-steel frets on a Macassar ebony fingerboard, a Wilkinson VS-50 II vibrato, Graph Tech nut, rear locking tuners, and a pair of coil-splittable Artec humbucking soapbars.

We're probably not alone in saying we've only played an original Mosrite for moments. To be honest, it's likely the same for Harley Benton's designers. Yes, the MR-Modern sort of apes the reverse body style, but it's noticeably more bulky – not least the over-large treble horn – than this writer's Eastwood Sidejack that's awaiting a makeover in The Mod Squad. As a result, this chunky chap weighs in at 4.01kg (8.8lb), the 45mm thick alder body completely hidden by the well-applied and very glossy Candy Apple Red finish, one of five offered.

The neck feels pretty generic, the colour-matched headstock is spliced under the 2nd fret, and the neck back is a pretty smooth-feeling satin. But the craft is tidy, those big, tall stainless-steel frets are well installed, and the ebony is a deep chocolate colour. Barring a slight setup tweak, it plays well. The neck actually feels a bit bigger in your hand than its more Fender-like dimensions suggest, but it's a big ringing sound, particularly with a little waggle from the excellent Wilkinson VS50, which needs little introduction.

While the 'Classic' model uses standard single-coil soapbars, these Artec pickups retain the footprint but are conventional humbuckers. They certainly support the punk/surf lineage of the original brand, although the bridge pickup actually seems a little under-powered and could do with a firmer foam support to allow you to raise it closer to the strings. But kick in some dirt and the voicing isn't bad, retaining a little more 'single coil' than balsy humbucker. The neck voice is fuller with a little woody chop, while the coil-splits get you into surf territory, especially with some dollops of reverb and slapback echo.

This is quite a Fender-rooted instrument that's very tidy for the money, even though that shape does seem a little bulky. An affordable offset with a difference and plenty of modding potential. **B**



Silent Service

Vox's noise-cancelling headphones have acoustic tricks up their sleeve for guitarists who want to shut it all out during practice

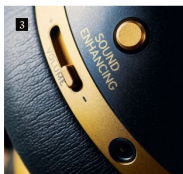
Words Jamie Dickson Photography Olly Curtis

FIRST PLAY



VOX VH-Q1 HEADPHONES
£249

WHAT IS IT? High-quality noise-cancelling headphones with a unique 'Silent Session' feature



1. Sleekly styled, the VH-Q1 headphones are built to last and you can also take calls on them when paired with a mobile, thanks to integral mics

2. You pair the headphones with Bluetooth-enabled mobile devices by holding down the power button for five seconds

3. The Sound Enhancing button cycles between EQ settings when using the Ambient Sound Monitoring mode

Headphones really have to earn their crust these days. Not only is great audio quality expected but wireless connectivity with your devices is pretty much standard today. Vox's VH-Q1 headphones are all of the above but also feature noise-cancelling technology that suppresses intrusive sounds from outside, such as engine noise on a long haul flight.

Pairing the VH-Q1s with a device is pretty simple; you just hold down the power button for five seconds, after which they should be discoverable on Bluetooth-enabled phones or tablets. Once paired, the sound quality is impressive, balancing warmth and detail very pleasantly via the high-grade film diaphragms. The pillowy earpads are very comfortable and, at a little over 300g, the headphones are light enough to wear for long periods without

discomfort, despite their robust metal frame. The VH-Q1s also pause playback when you lay them down, meaning you'll miss nothing if you have to slip the headphones off for a moment.

To test the noise-cancelling abilities of the VH-Q1s, we played the sound of a crowded room through studio monitors while we listened to a jazz trio on the headphones. With the Active Noise Cancelling at its highest setting and the streamed music at a moderate volume, we could hear very little of our simulated crowd, even when it was turned up to 'lively party' levels – impressive.

The unique selling point of the VH-Q1s, however, is the Ambient Sound Monitoring mode. The idea is that microphones in the headset amplify the sound of your acoustic (or quietly played electric) to a level that's at parity with streaming audio, thus letting you

jam along to music in the headphones without having to play loud in the room. We did find that the resulting guitar sounds were quite strongly filtered, depending on which mic/EQ mode was selected, and the mics did pick up some ambient noise, too. As there is no in-built amp modelling, this Silent Session feature does seem a bit niche – but if you view the VH-Q1s as a set of high-quality, noise-cancelling headphones with some perks for musos, rather than a practice tool *per se*, then they really shine. **B**

8/10

PROS Lovely sound quality and build; very comfortable to wear with effective noise cancelling and useful extras for musicians on the move

CONS Though not quite a 'solution looking for a problem', the Ambient Sound Monitoring tech is a bit niche – though suits acoustic players well

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt, is seated and playing a white PRS electric guitar. He is looking down at the fretboard with a focused expression. The background is dark and moody, with some light reflecting off the guitar's body and the man's shirt. The overall tone is artistic and professional.

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



theWishlist

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

Rock N Roll Relics Heartbreaker Goldtop £4,520

CONTACT Music Street PHONE 01480 431222 WEB www.rocknrollrelics.net WORDS Neville Marten PHOTOGRAPHY Ollly Curtis

Billy Rowe founded Rock N Roll Relics in 2005. After years treading the boards and skirting fame with his band Jetboy, rubbing shoulders with Guns N' Roses, Poison and the other burgeoning rock and metal bands of the time, Billy decided to pour his knowledge of what made a great guitar into building them. He now runs a small team of dedicated creators of these brand-new musical 'artefacts'.

The company's range of instruments are inspired by legendary models of the 50s and 60s. The guitar here is a Heartbreaker Goldtop, Billy's take on the world's most famous single-cut archtop solidbody, and it comes in an array of finishes, with pickup types and other options readily available. While the guitar's influence is plain to behold, it's not a slavish copy, with the convex curve of the upper bout flattened off, the lower horn less prominent, and the headstock devoid of that famous 'cleft'. Using African mahogany for the body back and neck, a cap of maple and a 304.8mm (12-inch) radius Indian rosewood fingerboard, the basic bones are all in place as a platform for big rock and blues tones.

Pickups on this particular model are by revered boutique maker ThroBak. Here, we see the Michigan

company's SLE-101 PAF-style humbuckers, whose slug coils are wound on Gibson's own original winder, while the screw coils use a Leeson 101 machine. Between them they create some of the finest toned double-coils we've heard, with none of the bottom-end flab that often blights modern humbuckers. P-90s are also available should you prefer that look or sound.

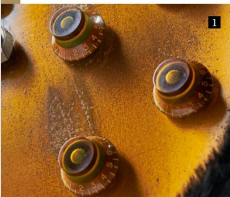
Rock N Roll Relics' finishes – always nitrocellulose – are available in various levels of distress, from light to this extra-heavy version. The work is done painstakingly well, and ours really does look like it's been gigged five nights a week for over 50 years!

We had the chance to plug the guitar into an Orange Rockerverb 50 MKIII, and boy did it rock. Clean tones are what Gibson used to call 'bell-like', inasmuch as they ring clearly and sustain sweetly. Such clarity is a great platform for creating the very dirtiest of sounds, and our Rockerverb was happy to oblige, kicking out anything from Eric through Slash, Zakk Wylde and beyond. So, if the name on the headstock is not an issue (and you don't mind saving a cool £5,000), while this one might not completely bust the bank, it could just break your heart! **G**

1. You can clearly see where the fictitious 'owner' of the guitar for the past five decades or so has worn the gold from around the controls, and there's even a tell-tale pressure crack where the top of the tone knob has been whacked

2. The Heartbreaker's peghead is stylish, only hinting at its forebear. Around the back it bears a 'stinger' (where the rear is painted black and tapers to a point behind the nut, as Gibson does on its L-5 and others)

3. Super-sounding ThroBak pickups, locking bridge and aluminium tailpiece are all plated in aged nickel. Plasticware is all cream but not overly aged, and the guitar is fitted with D'Addario 0.010-gauge strings



4. The Heartbreaker comes in a beautiful white hardshell case, trimmed and lined in black, with the company logo emblazoned on the front. It's a thing of beauty in itself!

5. Although the inspiration is evident all round, care has been taken to avoid the slavish copy tag. Notice the shorter cutaway horn and how the curve above the three-way toggle switch and its cream surround has been flattened off – it doesn't ruin the classic look, either.

6. All the ageing has been thoughtfully carried out, and you can imagine how the wear might have been created on a real vintage instrument: from fingers working the controls to forehead 'slaps' or a forearm gradually pulling the finish away. Very cool!

With thanks to Music Street for the loan of this guitar.
www.musicstreet.co.uk



Gas Supply

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

Summer NAMM Round-Up

The NAMM Show was back as an in-person event this year for the first time since 2020, making summer the new winter for many brands' big-release schedules. Here, we're rounding up a cross section of some of the

best and most interesting new gear from those who were there – and even those who weren't! Here are the guitars, pedals and amps you can expect to see hitting the shelves in the months ahead. **[SW]**



EVH STRIPED SERIES 78 ERUPTION £1,269

In contrast to the super-limited version that was released a few years ago, EVH has unveiled a production version of the '78 Eruption in its Striped Series. This guitar features many of the same appointments we've come to love about EVH guitars – such as a graphite-reinforced satin maple neck with a 304.8 to 406.4mm (12- to 16-inch) compound radius, EVH Wolfgang humbucker, and EVH Bourns low-friction pot with a treble bleed circuit – but for this version, it's fitted with a six-saddle Strat bridge and vibrato, and the White with Black Stripes finish (the original decor of the Frankenstein guitar) has been lightly reliced. It'll be arriving in September.

www.evhgear.com



FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC ALL-MAHOGANY SERIES £1,749

The Acoustasonic is one of the best hybrid guitar designs of the past few years, and for 2022 Fender has added two all-mahogany versions. It comes in Telecaster and Jazzmaster formats, both following the same sonic path as their (still available) US predecessors with a three-pickup system. There's an under-saddle piezo and body sensor in both, while the Tele houses an N4 magnetic pickup and the Jazzmaster once again features the specifically designed Acoustasonic Shawbucker. But the big clue is in the title: they both feature full mahogany bodies, tops and necks with ebony 'boards. They're coming your way at the end of summer.

www.fender.com



KEELEY HALO ANDY TIMMONS DUAL ECHO £315

If virtuosic playing and cascading delay sounds switch your lights on, then say Halo to Keeley's latest release – in collaboration with none other than Andy Timmons himself. The Halo performs double duty as two delay pedals in one with its A and B sides offering up to 1,400ms of delay time each, with five delay 'rhythms' to choose from (quarter-note, dotted eighth-note, Halo, bucket brigade and multi-head tape). There are also four memory slots per side, plus an 'infinite hold' mode along with standard delay controls and tap tempo. The whole lot can run in stereo, too.

www.robertkeeley.com



EPIPHONE BB KING LUCILLE IN BONE WHITE £849

Hot on the heels of Epiphone's 2021 revamp of BB King's Lucille comes this limited-edition Europe-only version in Bone White. It still features all the Lucille hallmarks – the non-f-holed layered maple top, Varitone filter switch, Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, LockTone Tune-O-Matic bridge with TP-6 stopbar and micro-tuners and gold hardware – but it's made even slicker looking with that crisp gloss white finish.

www.epiphone.com



EASTMAN JULIET £1,499

We're big fans of Eastman's excellent archtop Romeo models here at *Guitarist*, and in the interests of avoiding a modern six-string tragedy Eastman has now released a solidbody counterpart called – you guessed it – Juliet. There are three versions of this model, each based around an okume body and neck (22-fret, 304.8mm/12-inch radius, 648mm/25.5-inch scale ebony fingerboard), with the former featuring an apparently sustain-boosting raised centre block. The Vintage Red P-90-VR model (pictured) comes equipped with Bare Knuckle Old Guard P-90s, the Pomona Blonde PB version is fitted with Old Guard humbuckers and a Gotthard tune-o-matic bridge/stoptail, and the Antique Black Varnish Juliet/v-BK (£1,850) has Old Guard humbuckers and a USA Bigsby B5.

www.eastmanguitars.com



BLUGUITAR AMPX £726

It's been a long while coming since first being announced at NAMM 2020, but Thomas Blug has finally released the Bluguitar AMPX – the new flagship of the Bluguitar floor-based amp line-up. The unit is powered by Bluguitar's Neural (not that one) Analog Amp design, which it describes as a "virtual soldering iron", and Bluguitar reckons it's cracked the ability to mix and match (and recall) analogue component combinations to recreate entire amp designs. It's also equipped with a whole host of analogue and digital 'Pedal' and 'Post' effects, an effects loop, multiple speaker outputs and MIDI, plus everything runs through a 100-watt NanoTube-driven power stage.

www.bluguitar.com

ALSO OUT NOW...

IBANEZ TOM QUAYLE TQMSI-CTB £2,649



What would you expect from an Ibanez signature model in 2022 for one of the greatest technical players the UK has produced in recent times? Probably not a T-style guitar with retro curves, a mini-humbucker and non-locking vibrato... but that's what Tom Quayle has opted for. It's got an alder body and bound maple top, coupled with a roasted maple neck with rosewood fretboard and stainless-steel frets. Magnets are courtesy of Seymour Duncan with a Magic Touch-mini in the neck and Alnico Pro Custom single coil in the bridge, plus it's fitted with Ibanez's dyna-MIX5/Alter Switch system. The vibrato and locking tuners are from Gotthard, and it's available in the very nice indeed Celeste Blue finish.

www.ibanez.com

PRS MYLES KENNEDY MYSTERY MACHINE!

Tom's not the only one looking forward to T-time, as Alter Bridge/Slash pipesman and guitar slinger Myles Kennedy caused a stir recently by flaunting a brand-new (for PRS, at least) body shape on stage in Germany while the NAMM Show (not attended by PRS) was taking place. Details are sparse beyond it featuring a maple 'board, dual humbuckers, a single volume/single tone control and what looks like a three-way paddle. Now for the bad news: it seems that there are no immediate plans for this to see the light of day as a production model, with PRS telling us, "Like many artist guitars, it is simply a custom build that we did for Myles to fulfil some of his needs on this tour and in support of his latest solo album." But that's not a definite no, either!

www.prsguitars.com



Myles Kennedy's custom PRS has an intriguing new body shape for the brand

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: Jon Wilks

Album: *Up The Cut* (independent)



Up The Cut is Jon's third album release and celebrates traditional songs from the Midlands, including some from a collection of street ballads from the late folk scholar Roy Palmer
www.jonwilks.online/
www.tradfolk.co

Jon Wilks is a folk singer from the Black Country, whose most recent album, *Up The Cut*, takes traditional songs from his native land and arranges them for acoustic guitar. Minimalist maybe, but Jon's playing can be complex, fleshing out the song's melody with technical flourishes, as he demonstrated on his most recent tour. "The live arrangements haven't changed much from the album," he tells us, "but the more you play songs, the more confidence you have to mess around with them. You get used to where your fingers are going and you're more comfortable finding something different."

Keeping With Tradition

The songs on *Up The Cut* were arranged and recorded quickly, a method Jon is changing for his next release. "Some of the stuff that I'm going to record on the next album has been floating around for eight or nine months, so I know it well," he explains. "But what it comes down to is trying to find what's best to serve the song. I know everybody says that kind of thing and I am a guitarist, but first and foremost I'm interested in the traditional song and I want the style of guitar playing to suit that. I've done three albums now and I've certainly developed a way of accompanying songs that I didn't have five years ago... Essentially, I'm just ripping off Martin Carthy."

Speaking Of Influence

Jon's music is far from an emulation of others, but he is aware of the importance of some players. "Carthy is an obvious influence in terms of how to approach a traditional song," he says. "For pulse, following the melody and being pared down, I find him very interesting. Bert Jansch was also huge for me, and Martin Simpson and Nic Jones, both of whom are more technical and more florid in their style." He pauses a moment: "But I grew up listening to people like Graham Coxon and Johnny Marr, so I think there are elements of that in my stuff. I think the Marr influence is there in trying to find melodic lines instead of strumming. It's similar to Martin Simpson; you're not just banging out chords, you're looking for melodies to trip off your fingers and glisten."

The Right Tools

Jon's career has seen him use several different acoustic guitars, depending on what the song and guitar part need, with a different instrument for each album. "On the first record I was playing a Taylor 114e," he says. "I still go back to it occasionally because it has this really nice full-bodied sound. But when I did [previous album] *Midlife* I wanted something to hold the lower tunings better and a friend of mine showed me this Yamaha LL16 ARE, which has a very nice passive pickup and a lovely warm tone. It turned out that the initial guitar they modelled it on was the one that Bert Jansch played, so I knew it would hold those tunings."

Magic C

"*Up The Cut* is mainly in CGCGCD [Csus2 tuning], which I first became aware of through Nic Jones's *Penguin Eggs* album. The other one on there is DADGAD, which is very much a Bert Jansch thing, but since the tour I've been using CGDGCD, which gives you a couple of extra drone opportunities. I'm really snobby about it," he grins. "If I find myself going anywhere near a standard tuning these days I rap myself on the knuckles and ask myself what I think I'm doing." **[GK]**

Standout track: *The Lover's Ghost*

For Fans of: Bert Jansch, Martin Simpson, Martin Carthy, Nick Drake, Nic Jones



PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN WELLS

Jon's style has been influenced by artists as diverse as Martin Carthy and Bert Jansch, to Johnny Marr and Graham Coxon

GOING OM

Jon found new love in a hand-crafted Atkin model

On Jon's most recent tour, he took out a beautifully pared-down Atkin OM 28. "I recorded *Up The Cut* on the Yamaha [LL16 ARE], but I'd always wanted a nice luthier-built guitar," he says, "so I went down to Guitar Village and got them to line up a selection of Martins and Atkins. I was surprised by how well the Atkins came out – and I ended up getting one. It's lovely, but I've had to spend a good six months getting used to the neck, which is quite thin, and when you've been playing a [jumbo body] for a long time, you realise the strings aren't quite where you want them to be. The tour I've just done was the first time I played it in public and I fell in love with it."

Albums

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

Through ups and downs, Walter Trout has now reached his 30th solo album



PHOTO BY ALICE GOLDA

Walter Trout

Ride

Provogue Records (release date: 19 August)

9/10



30th solo album landmark for blues veteran par excellence

Possessing the fortitude to produce 30 albums during your career is one heck of a thing. And with plenty of ups and downs in his life – including life-threatening illness a few years ago – Walter Trout has produced music that has been infused with an emotion and colour that is unique to him. What's more, an almost constant and relentless touring schedule has won him dedicated fans across the globe. His particular brand of uniqueness is most evident on this new album, where he digs deep into his past to create new songs and stories.

With 12 tracks in the line-up, there's plenty of variety here. Opener, Ghosts, has a big beat, strong band arrangement and vibrant vocal performance, not to mention some great singing string bends in the solos, too. The title track is up-tempo with an 'Allman Brothers meets Steely Dan' vibe filled with melodic lead phrases. The ballad Follow You Back Home demonstrates how well Walter can sing softly when he's not belting out a rocker, and the guitar solo here is spine-tingling, too. Meanwhile, the blues groove of High Is Low is slinky with a rousing vocal delivery and rasping harmonica. A slow blues à la Peter Green is a staple for many and Walter sure knows how to craft one: Waiting For The Dawn is nothing short of exquisite – we're talking serious chills here. Finally, the album's closer, Destiny, is a beautiful 70s-esque soul song with his longest and most emotive soloing on the album. **[JS]**

Standout track: Waiting For The Dawn

For fans of: Peter Green, John Mayall, Coco Montoya

Glenn Jones

Vade Mecum

Thrill Jockey (available now)

8/10



A fine set of acoustic instrumentals from seasoned fingerstylist

After the progressive rock of his band Cul-de-Sac, Glenn Jones began a solo career in line with the Takoma school of instrumental acoustic-guitar picking, basing his music around unique tunings and the use of partial capos. His eighth album proper, Vade Mecum, sees him use a Lowden F32C Fan Fret for most of these 10 beautifully picked mini-narratives, which again establish him as flag-bearer of the genre. Each Crystal Pane Of Glass is probably the album's most complex piece, bringing to mind career highlights such as Like A Sick Eagle Looking At The Sky from his My Garden State album back in 2013. Other standouts to listen out for on this record are Forsythia, with its hints of contemplative melancholy, and the quietly optimistic John Jackson Of Fairfax, Virginia. The banjo appears twice on the album, including on a gorgeous duet with fiddler Ruthie Dorfman, but this is really a celebration of modestly dynamic acoustic guitar music. **[GK]**

Standout track: Forsythia

For fans of: Leo Kottke, John Fahey

Snowy White

Driving On The 44

Soulfood (available now)

8/10



Floyd sideman steps into the solo spotlight

Snowy White is possibly one of the most underrated guitarists in the UK today. He was David Gilmour's understudy on 1977's *Animals*, playing a solo on the eight-track cassette of that Floyd album, which is now something of a collector's item. He's toured with Roger Waters and he contributed to Peter Green's solo career, too. Not many players can boast these credentials, but Snowy's own solo career is a very underplayed affair, something that this album seeks to set right. *Driving On The 44* is a very laidback and bluesy collection of songs, with some lovely moments, especially on the title track and on Blues 22's extended solo. We enjoyed the hard edge to Ain't No Secret and the soulful groove to Slinky Too. A great album that deserves checking out. **[DM]**

Standout track: Blues 22

For fans of: David Gilmour, Chris Rea



Kenny Aronoff,
Kris Barras and
Fabrizio Grossi

Supersonic Blues Machine

Voodoo Nation

Provogue Records (available now)

8/10



Lean, mean blues trio come together with stellar guest stars

An album featuring a great band alongside an array of revered guests will always have a lot of appeal. And this

new studio release from Supersonic Blues Machine definitely doesn't disappoint. With the trio of Fabrizio Grossi (bass), Kenny Aronoff (drums) and UK singer/guitarist Kris Barras as the foundation, the additional guests are impressive – from Kirk Fletcher to Sonny Landreth, Eric Gales to Josh Smith. The album leans more towards the modern zone of blues with quite a lot of rock (distorted blazing guitars, big drums) to drive the songs. The first three tracks of 12 set the scene as the trio take centre stage, then *You And Me* sees King Solomon Hicks in fine form with lyrical phrasing, while *Ball Lucy* has Sonny Landreth presenting a masterclass of slide-playing with singing and agile licks, and Kirk Fletcher's tasteful pentatonics on *I Will Let Go* enhance the shuffle-vibed slow-burner. [JS]

Standout track: *You And Me*

For fans of: Eric Gales, Josh Smith, Kris Barras

Dan Reed Network

Let's Hear It For The King

Drakkar Entertainment (available now)

8/10



Funky grooves abound on DRN's latest upbeat offering

Funk-rock has been embraced by many bands over the years, so it's great to see Dan Reed Network – a band renowned

for this approach – release their sixth studio album with *Let's Hear It For The King*. This is very much upbeat groove music, perfect for long car journeys, with big production values and strong guitar playing from Brion James throughout. *Pretty Karma* is a perfect opener, with big drums, multi-layered riffing guitars, insistent synth stabs and stacked vocals that make for a memorable song. *The Ghost Inside* borders on hard rock with the guitar-dense arrangement – a good marriage of 80s sensibilities with today's cinematic production style. And the punky funk of *Starlight* is most infectious, with some tasty lead licks, too. Don't miss the soloing on *Supernova* – it's some of the best on the album. [JS]

Standout track: *Pretty Karma*

For fans of: Earth, Wind & Fire, Thunder

10% discount code GTRST477

PINEGROVE
L E A T H E R

Tones Behind The Tracks

Al Di Meola on how a legendary live session with Paco de Lucía and John McLaughlin came to light after 40 years...

Artist: Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucía, John McLaughlin

Album: Saturday Night In San Francisco (earMUSIC)



This follow-up to the seminal *Friday Night In San Francisco* recordings captures the 1980 tour finale: "We were really on fire, the audience was electric," says Al Di Meola

The coming together of three giants of flamenco and jazz-fusion guitar on the 1981 live album *Friday Night In San Francisco* was an era-defining moment. Al Di Meola was one of the hottest players in the world of jazz fusion, while John McLaughlin was already an established master. With flamenco firebrand Paco de Lucía to complete the triangle, it was no wonder the trio's acoustic odyssey became a hit record. Few knew, however, that a second recording was made the following night, capturing yet more of the intensity and fire of their extraordinary meeting. Now, those recordings finally have been released, so we joined Al Di Meola to learn how it all went down...

How did these recordings get discovered after 40 years?

"We finished our tour back in 1980. It was a two-month tour, the initial one, and we finished in San Francisco. We felt like the last two shows were the hottest. We were really on fire, the audience was electric, and we wound up – for some reason that I don't know – mixing the record in White Plains, New York, which is north of New York City. In fact, for me, it is right across the river.

"So we were mixing at the studio, and we had all of the two-inch reel from the beginning of the tour. We taped a lot of the shows, almost all of them, with a truck [mobile studio] – I mean, professionally – so

by baking. There is a baking process to bring out the quality of the tapes – or not – but it worked. So I called John [McLaughlin]. I said, 'John, first of all, how are you doing?' because everybody was freaking out about Covid at the time. I said, 'Look, I have got these tapes and I may have mentioned it a few times over the last 40 years, but we really should give these a listen. So I took it upon myself to bake them and I would like to send you some.'

"I sent him one or two tracks initially and he was knocked out. He said, 'My God, this sounds great.' I said, 'Well, I have found other material, too. I have even found a *Meeting Of The Spirits* from Mahavishnu that we did. I found a Paco piece that we almost forgot about, and a number of other pieces that did not appear on *Friday Night*.

"So he says, 'Well, I'm game.' We got in touch with Paco's family, we got the okay, and we wound up

"The tapes were sitting in my basement's tape room for over 40 years... At my own dime, I had them professionally restored by baking"

I have all of the German tapes, I have Belgian, I know I have Paris and almost all of the shows. Then also LA. So the guys asked me, 'What do we do with all the tapes now?' Everybody looked at one another. So I said, 'Well, if you want, you could just have them all brought over to my house because I have a lot of storage room here.'

"The tapes were sitting in my basement's tape room for over 40 years... It wasn't until 2020, when the whole pandemic thing started to hit, that I thought, 'Well, this is getting a little scary – God knows what is going to happen. I had better get these tapes restored.' At my own dime, I had them professionally restored

Spurred on by the then-unknown threat of the pandemic, Al Di Meola worked to preserve the long-abandoned tapes from the trio's triumphant tour



PHOTO BY ALEXANDER METSCH



making a deal to finish the editing and mixing of the record, which I had to do. I would have loved for John to be there, but he couldn't travel. So I had the responsibility, the nervous responsibility, to edit down a lot of the pieces to meet the size of the vinyl because there are only so many minutes you can put on a vinyl. I had to get a 24-minute version of *Meeting Of The Spirits* down to 14 minutes without John hitting the roof! There were a lot of executive decisions I had to make to get this done."

Can you remember what gear you were using back then?

"We used microphones. We all had microphones... I don't know, John was using a guitar that gave you the option of a plug-in, I just forget now. But for me, for sure, it was a combination of plug-in and microphone. Paco was always only microphone. Overall, I just think the microphone adds a little bit more of the warmth of the instrument... Actually, my microphone went out on the first song, so whatever the engineer did to try to make up the difference of that, it wasn't easy to do, but it was only on that first song."

Why did you opt to play the Ovation guitar for those shows?

"Well, it was like a step towards a nylon [string]. It was in between an electric and, let's say, a nylon

guitar in terms of technicality and how I can handle the instrument. It was the best of both worlds... it was like an electric feel, almost. But I built my reputation on the Ovation, as well, at the same time, so it was the instrument that was suited for that trio in a way because there was more distinction between the players. Let's say I had used the guitar I use now, a Conde Hermanos nylon; well, that is what Paco uses. So if you heard the trio playing with the same type of guitar, you would have had less distinction [between the three players]."

How did you guys meet in the first place and decide to form a trio?

"I first heard about Paco on my first tour of *Return To Forever* in Europe back in 1974. I was 19 at the time and I remember Chick [Corea] started talking about this young new guitar phenomenon named Paco de Lucía. We heard mostly about him in Spain when we got there to do our shows. The talk was something like, 'Oh man, you have got to check out this guy. He is doing some things that people have never heard before.' So great."

"So I went to their version of Harrods – I think it was called El Corte Inglés department store – in Madrid, and I bought a few of his records. When I got back to the States and I played them, immediately I was just blown away at the fact that what I knew of flamenco... this was another level of velocity, of clarity,

Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucía joined forces and made the history books with their exemplary acoustic output

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN ROSE/CASTANZA



PHOTO BY ALEXANDER MEYER

"[Paco gave flamenco] another level of velocity, of clarity, of articulation, of ideas, the blending of percussion instruments... It knocked my socks off"

of articulation, of ideas, the blending of percussion instruments... There was something about it that just knocked my socks off.

"Fast-forward to 1976 or 1977 and I was about to start making arrangements for my second record [*Elegant Gypsy*] and who was going to be on it. So I went to my product manager at CBS and I said, 'Look, I would love to have Paco come over from Spain, for us to do a duet.' They contacted RCA, which was Paco's label in Spain, and they flew him over because they knew of my popularity, and they thought it would be good for Paco to get exposure."

How did that work out?

"Actually, it was the totally right thing to do because he was totally unknown here. In the States no-one knew of Paco except for Spanish people – they knew about the buzz, but the fusion of jazz and rock crowd, they had never heard of him but were blown away. Although that was later.

"When he came to New York, he arrived, he didn't speak a word of English, and he had a friend of his meet us at the recording studio. This friend of Paco's, who is now a friend of mine, he was interpreting for Paco. He really felt he was a little afraid and he was out of his comfort zone, out of his flamenco comfort zone.

"I remember the first day, he just couldn't relax. There were a bunch of takes that didn't happen. Then this friend of Paco comes up to me and goes, 'Look, Paco is a little nervous. Is there any way that we could find him some weed? He needs weed to relax.' I said, 'Well, I don't smoke, but my friend in the other room...' This friend is the guy that got me the gig with Chick Corea. He said, 'I am the guy. I will get Paco his weed.'

"So he gets him a bag of weed, we started the next day, and we got the first take. That is the one that wound up on the record and it became a hit single – an actual hit single – on the radio constantly in Spain, in France and in Germany. It was a phenomenon, sold millions, and so everyone in the world knows this song, *Mediterranean Sundance*, and it is [now] one of those songs that I can't leave out of a set.

"That led to our discussions about possibly playing together sometime in the future. There was a man in London who recognised that fact, and he is now [Paul] McCartney's agent and agent for Elton John. His name is Barrie Marshall of Marshall Arts. That was the beginning of his career, and he put the trio together. He brought in John, it was his baby, and he organised a whole world tour – and, yes, *Friday Night*, we knew, was the pinnacle of that first two-month tour, and the record went on to sell seven million [copies]." **[DM/JD]**

The unenviable task of editing the recordings down to an acceptable length for vinyl fell on Di Meola. He says: "I had to get a 24-minute version of *Meeting Of The Spirits* down to 14 minutes without John hitting the roof!"



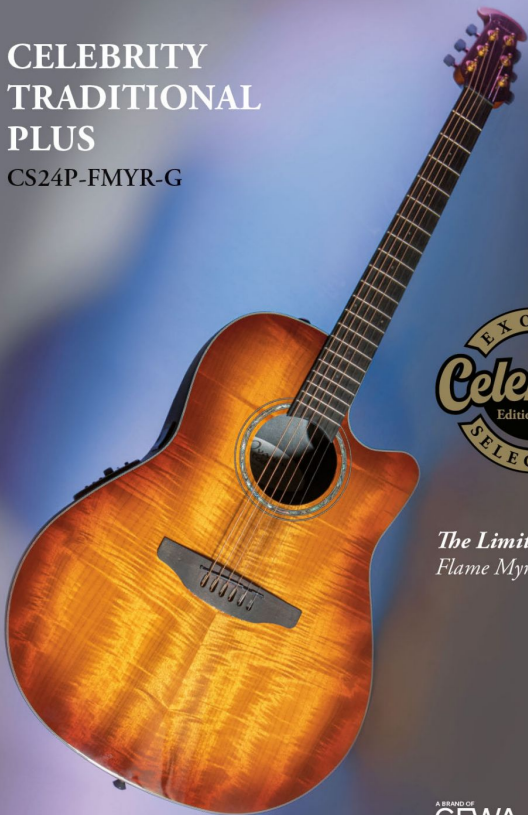
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Session Complete

As **Adam Goldsmith** writes his final column, he reflects on the industry – then and now – with session supremo Mitch Dalton

When I was first asked to write this column several years ago, my inspiration was Tommy Tedesco's 'Studio Log' column in *Guitar Player* magazine. Here he would describe a day's work recording a movie, TV show or album, the special challenges each job posed and how he solved them, what instruments he used, and how much money he made on the job. I think it's fitting, therefore, for my last effort for a while in this magazine, to speak to someone who many would regard as the UK's answer to Tommy, and someone who was very much an inspiration to me in my formative years – Mitch Dalton.

It's a well-worn cliché to say: "While you may not have heard of 'X', you've certainly heard their playing!", but this is definitely true of Mitch. He's probably the UK's most-recorded guitar player to date, having worked with everyone from Herbie Hancock to Ella Fitzgerald, via Robbie Williams and a myriad of film and TV score recordings. Here's what he had to say...

I've worked with icons – Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Hank Mancini – and played on hit records. *Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life* being my fave"

How did you get started in the studio scene?

"The simple answer is pure luck. There was a vibrant recording scene back then, providing employment to hundreds of musicians in a wee cottage industry. The busiest guys (they were all guys, with the exception of an occasional harp player) would be performing on three three-hour sessions per day, often at different locations. One-hour commercials would be slotted in frequently at 8am to accommodate the standard 10am start to the working day. And there were even engagements slotted in at night when necessary called.

"There were contractors that 'fixed' musicians and it was not uncommon to be working seven days a week for such individuals. Consequently, my evaluation of this niche of the music profession led me to believe that if I worked extremely hard, possessed a modicum of ability and met one or two individuals that recommended me along the way, there was a chance for me in this sub-niche of Show Business. I entered this world – eventually – via a patchwork quilt of dance-band functions, strip-club gigs, support for down-and-going cabaret artists, as well as theatre depts and pop/rock one-nighters. This is how you paid your dues.

"I may have a framed LRAM diploma gathering dust in the attic, but two years of playing in the resident band at The Dorchester Hotel's Terrace Restaurant – from 8pm until 1am, six nights per week – is where I really went to college."

How does your experience differ from an aspiring freelance guitar player's today?

"I have to say it would not necessarily [compare with] today's vastly changed computer-driven, sampling-infested home-recording landscape. There are but a handful of conventional studios remaining in London today, whereas once there were dozens. You would also have observed numerous orchestras engaged in light entertainment shows, frequently live. By which, I would add, I'm describing a TV screen filled with brass, strings and rhythm section plus backing singers. I remember guitarist Paul Keogh telling me one January sometime in the 80s that David Katz had called and filled Paul's diary with more than a 100 dates playing with The Alyn Ainsworth Orchestra at London Weekend Studios, spread over the rest of the year.

"By now you'll get the general thrust of my synopsis. Perhaps you'll also empathise with my all-too-frequently raised eyebrow when I hear axe-wielders who have played on one demo commercial plus a cruise liner backing track in a month, and then describe themselves as busy session musicians..."

On the subject of modern developments, how do you feel about digital amp modellers?

"I'm no Luddite with regard to developments in music tech. And I readily appreciate that inventions such as amp modellers like the Kemper or Line 6 Helix have their place, especially for programmable convenience. If it's okay with everyone else, I'll stick to replicating the tone of a valve amplifier using, er... valves."

What are your final thoughts on the modern music business?

"The change in the music business between 'then' and 'now' is marked, but I would suggest multi-factorial. I think it can be largely explained by a combination of digital technology and computing power leading to a different method of recording music, sampling, ultra-sophisticated keyboard synthesisers and reduced budgets accompanying a dramatic decline in record sales. What's not to love? If you're an accountant.

"It's been a 'journey' as today's whippersnappers describe anything from a world tour to a visit to the chippie. Along the way I've worked with some true icons (Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Hank Mancini and countless others), played on a few hit records (*Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life* being my fave) and been tolerated by geniuses such as Paul Hart and David 'Mr Strictly' Arch. I also once fit in six commercials in six different studios in one day. Don't ask. In addition I have achieved (what is, in retrospect, less than a rarity) falling out with both Van Morrison (violently) and Art Garfunkel (psychiatrically). How we laughed..."

As our contributor Adam Goldsmith plays out his last gig* for *Guitarist*, he hands the encore over to Mitch Dalton, pictured below, for the final word



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Decisions, Decisions...

Neville Marten has another big band gig to play, and with his Les Paul gone is wondering how to cover the humbucking side of things...

You may recall that earlier this year a mate of mine and I did a gig to 'launch' our respective albums. It was great fun, hugely rewarding but as stressful as anything I'd ever done – my hands were literally shaking with nerves. So guess what? We're only doing it again, this time in Essex, nearer to where most of the band members live.

But I'm not using my column as a cheap ad. I'm genuinely in a turmoil over what guitars to use. Last time it was my red Strat, Les Paul Goldtop and Martin OM. Of course, I've sold the Les Paul to Mick Taylor and, as he's taking over from Richard Barrett who has

"I used the amp's onboard reverb, which is valve-driven and very juicy, and I can honestly say it was one of the best guitar tones I'd ever heard"

a Tony Hadley show that he can't blow out, the guitar isn't available to borrow any more because Mick will probably use it that night himself.

So, Plan B. I have a 1963 reissue ES-335 and that may well be a good replacement. As it happens, Mick has a '59 reissue and we are both considering pickup replacements in the form of Lollar Imperial 'Low Winds', which it appears are perfect for these instruments.

We'll do it at That Pedal Show headquarters and Mick says they'll film it – which could be comical since semis are notoriously fiddly to work on inside. So that's one idea.

Another is that I trade my poor unused Jazzmaster for an SG – either a Special or a Junior (I know I said I'd get a classical guitar, but, hey, a fellow can change his mind). I love the look of those guitars, the Junior for its utter simplicity, and the Special (like the one Townshend demolished at Woodstock) with its pair of soapbar P-90s making it such a versatile beast. Either could fill the Les Paul's shoes tonally, and I've had a thing for them ever since I saw a matching Cherry Red Custom, Standard and Special in the window of Sound City in London, in about 1970.

Another thought is that I go a different way entirely, ditch everything and use my Telecaster for the whole show. I only played two acoustic songs last time, and we've scrapped one of those for this one, so removing the stress of guitar changes altogether might be a simpler way to go. Yes, I do realise I'm essentially thinking out loud here!

Lightning Strikes Twice

Speaking of that Telecaster, it's a quite heavily relic'd '53 blackguard reissue. And it has a monster tone. In fact, before the pandemic closed everything down I did a gig with a local band in Bristol. It's all original stuff, written by the singer, and I suppose you'd call it 'heavy Americana', with lots of guitar solos. For this gig I'd usually use a Blues Junior as it copes perfectly at the kind of volume we play, but this time I took my Matchless, at the time a red-and-white SC30 (like a DC30 but with a single 12-inch speaker). I also made the rather bold decision to use just the Telecaster and a cable. Not a pedal in sight.

I set the amp so it was dirty and sustaining with the Tele on full volume, and turned the guitar down to get various levels of clean and crunch. I also used the amp's onboard reverb, which is valve-driven and very juicy, and I can honestly say it was one of the best guitar tones I'd ever heard. From anyone. It made me play so much better than usual, too. And that brings me back to our gig...

Last time I employed the super pedalboard that Daniel Steinhilber built for me, with my little Matchless Lightning 15 Reverb. The tones were thunderous, even out of that tiny wattage beast. So that's not going to change. It's just a matter of the guitar, and writing this has made me more confused than ever. The gig is on 11 August at Colchester Arts Centre, so I have a little time to decide. Perhaps you'd like to come along to find out what I finally settled on. Sorry... couldn't resist it! 🎸

GAS OF THE MONTH

Viva Bobby Joe

What? Epiphone Joe Bonamassa Black Beauty Les Paul
Where seen? [Reverb.com](#)
Price? £1,200

If seeing Robert Fripp's two gorgeous 1959 Les Paul Customs this month, you fancy the idea but not the eye-watering price tag (and don't mind a Joe Bonamassa connection), then this might be right up your street. Joe and Epiphone have a great history together, and Joe really knows his onions when it comes to this style of instrument – this is based on the 1959 three-pickup Custom in his own vast collection – so you're in safe hands. These are going for considerably more than the original asking price, as they all sold out, but it seems they are becoming collectable. Every Epiphone we've looked at in the past few years has been a winner. The ProBucker pickups sound great, the electrics are CTS and Switchcraft, and it's an all-mahogany body with a '59-profile neck and ebony fingerboard. It's as close as you can get to the real deal and it looks killer. What's not to like!



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Crossing The Bridge

As **Alex Bishop's** students ready their builds for completion, he looks at the importance of a well-designed guitar bridge...

There is an atmosphere of nervous anticipation at the Alex Bishop Guitars workshop this week, as a handful of my guitar-making students edge into the final phase of their instrument builds. From an assortment of rough wooden billets have emerged elegant guitar-shaped creations, the timber now tamed into unmistakable objects of beauty and sonic potential.

I do my best to remind my students that there is still a long road ahead if they wish to master the art of French polishing these fine acoustic creations (although an easy oil finish "will do"). However, there is one last woodworking challenge to overcome, and that is designing and carving the bridge.

"Before making a bridge, any fledgling luthier needs to understand its role in transforming the energy of the vibrating strings into music"

Before making a guitar bridge, any fledgling luthier needs to fully understand its role in transforming the energy of the vibrating strings into music. The bridge usually accommodates a saddle, the recognisable strip of bone or plastic over which the strings are stretched. Typically they run into holes in the body of the guitar and are anchored into place with bridge pins. It is the angle at which the taut strings pass over the saddle that provides a constant downward pressure into the guitar's soundboard. Any vibrational energy as a result

of plucking a string is instantly transferred, boosting the sound of the string with the all-important volume and tone the guitar's body provides. It is this coupling between the strings and the soundboard that lends the bridge its name. It also highlights the importance of the design of the bridge in producing a desirable tone.

Once a maker begins to look at bridge designs it quickly becomes apparent that there are many options to consider. There are pinless varieties that discard the familiar tapered bridge pins in favour of anchoring the ball-ends against the back edge of the bridge. It is worth considering that the full load of the strings is being unleashed on the glue joint between the bridge and the top, so this design only works where the maker can be fully confident of their ability to create a perfect joint between the sole of the bridge and the awkwardly curved surface of the soundboard. Oily exotic woods such as cocobolo have an unusual resistance to the best wood glues so require careful preparation. If successful, though, the result is a guitar that is much easier to restring and will greatly reduce the all-too-familiar panic that accompanies a mid-gig string break.

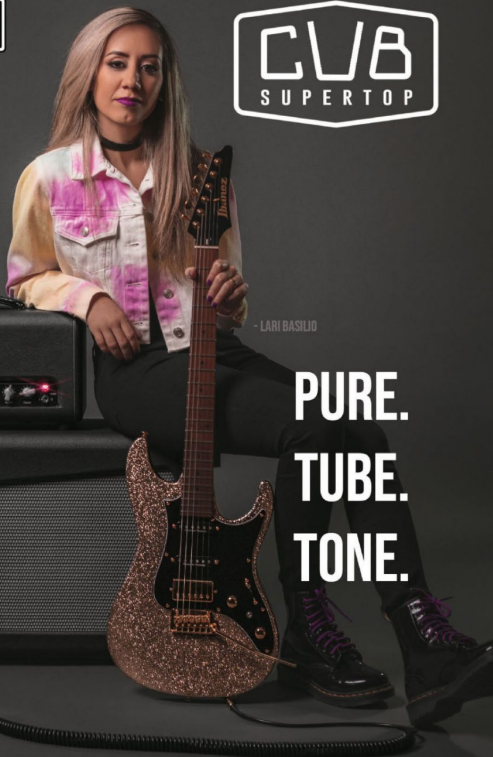
Structural Considerations

I'm not the only one who is an advocate of pinless bridges, as a cursory glance at the electric guitar world will attest. Through-body ferrules, tailpieces and ashtray bridges all provide alternative ways of holding down the strings without fuss. Granted, most styles of electric guitar bridge require a hefty block of wood to screw into... However, the concept of a separate bridge and tailpiece is not exclusive to solidbody electrics. Archtops and Gypsy jazz guitars both depend on a simple floating bridge setup, with the strings anchored to a tailpiece attached to the bottom of the guitar. It is worth considering the forces acting on a floating bridge, as this design requires a complete rethink of the internal structure of the guitar body. On a fixed bridge there is a rotational effect whereby the strings pull across the guitar bridge producing a tendency for it to pull up at the back and dip at the front. By anchoring the strings onto a tailpiece, however, a floating bridge is subject to a force that pushes directly into the top. This explains the inherently stiff domed tops of archtop and Gypsy jazz guitars, in turn producing the dark tone that makes them ideal for playing jazz.

Function aside, carving a guitar bridge from a block of ebony or rosewood presents an opportunity for the craftsman to show off their technical skill. The finish line might be tantalisingly close for my students, but it's no time for compromise. Like the jewel in a crown, the humble guitar bridge can elevate a guitar with its dazzling mother-of-pearl inlays, tasteful outline and seductive curves. **B**

This attractive 'pyramid' fixed bridge demonstrates both technical skill and artistic flair





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Finding The Right One (Part 2)

Jamie Dickson takes the plunge and chooses what he hopes will be a lifetime acoustic companion. But there's a surprise in store...

Last issue, I travelled down to specialist trader Glenn's Guitars in London to try a varied selection of acoustic guitars, both new and vintage, in search of the perfect instrument for an album of acoustic instrumentals I'd like to record this year. As previously mentioned, I traded in a very good Martin DR Centennial dreadnought, which was a bit too much of a cannon for fingerstyle, to find something more subtle and mellow.

So, what did I buy in the end? Well, before we get to that part, I'd like to pass on one or two (hopefully useful) personal observations from my year-long quest to find a 'keeper' acoustic guitar. The first tip, which I also mentioned last month, is to always try before you buy if you can – there really is no substitute for playing an acoustic guitar at length, in a good listening environment, before deciding if it's really for you. If buying from a friend, then I'd even recommend seeing if it's possible to borrow the guitar for a week or so before deciding. The better acquainted you can get before purchase, the surer you'll be that the guitar will be right for you and your playing style. With an acoustic, there's nothing but air, wood, steel plus your own ability to produce the music with, so you'd better get on really well with your chosen instrument.

This 1974 Gibson J-45 defied forum lore and shone for both strumming and fingerstyle playing

Secondly, make time to try a few guitars that don't seem like 'your type' – guitars are full of surprises. Try old guitars, new guitars, jumbos and parlours. Try makes you haven't come across previously and guitars built of woods you haven't encountered before. Try guitars that are cheaper than your target budget, too. I've found excellent acoustics that outperformed guitars two or three times their price. They tend to be outliers, but it happens more often than you'd think. So keep an open mind.

The Contenders

Anyway, enough sermonising. Which guitar did I choose in the end? If you read last month's column, you'll know I tried and liked a Martin SWOM GT, a Martin Custom Shop O-18 and a beautiful, well-aged 1930s Kalamazoo KG-11. And the answer is [drumroll]... that I bought none of those guitars in the end! On my return to Glenn's I found that the KG-11 had been sold to someone else – you snooze, you lose, as they say. The Martins were both still available, but when I played the Custom Shop O-18 a second time, I felt it was just a little too light on bass for my DADGAD material. So that, regrettably, got set to one side. The SWOM GT was really great, as before, and I very nearly bought it then and there. Don't let the non-traditional choice of cherry wood for the back and sides fool you; it's a great guitar with thoroughbred Martin DNA and criminally overlooked.

However, while I was trying the SWOM, out of pure curiosity I asked Glenn to bring out something else I'd spotted at his place – a 1974 Gibson J-45. Now, Norlin-era square-shoulder J-45s don't get a lot of love in the court of popular opinion, so I was surprised to find this particular one was a really sweet-toned, airy, age-mellowed instrument, very playable and subtler in voice than the DR Centennial. The bad press Norlin-era J-45s have received was probably justified by some of the guitars coming out of Gibson back then; the 70s was patchy for a lot of US makers. But this particular one didn't get the memo, apparently. Sitting in a pool of sunlight on a comfy leather sofa it voiced a big open G chord just as you'd hope: with sweetness and detail, and warmth to back it up.

My attention was now well and truly grabbed, so I decided to A/B the '74 against a round-shouldered Gibson Custom Shop 'Brown Top' J-45 from 2014 that Glenn had in stock. Interestingly, while I thought the Brown Top was good, there was no mistaking what age had brought to the '74 – a sonority and openness of timbre that the newer guitar had, to my ears, yet to fully develop.

For further comparison, Glenn also brought out a '74 Southern Jumbo, which was longer-sustaining but just a tad less full-bodied in tone than the J-45, though there wasn't much in it. Something about the J-45 kept drawing me back to it, even after I tried an interesting (and possibly one-off) 12-fret Fyde Othello, a crisply built modern Larivière LV-09, and a nice signature-model Tommy





Emmanuel Maton, which was oh-so playable and as comfortable as the proverbial old tennis shoes.

At a slight deadlock, I asked to try a capo on the J-45. I placed it on the 2nd fret and... voila. A new breathier voice leapt out, almost like a dainty OM, not a dreadnought. At that point I knew the J-45 was 'the one', as I really like to play fingerstyle with a capo on the 2nd fret. The fact the Gibson was also pretty much the same age as me was just another thing we had in common.

This Martin Custom Shop 0-18 was high on the list of acoustics that Jamie wanted to try a second time before making a final decision to buy

"I seriously recommend trying gear that isn't usually thought to be a classic year or model... you just might find the exception"

The Keeper

To summarise, I originally set out to buy an OM or parlour-sized fingerpicking guitar and came back with... an unfancied 1970s dreadnought. But like the late, great American songsmith Guy Clark once sang: "Somedays you write the song, someday the song writes you..."

That leads me to the final important lesson of this whole experience. I seriously recommend trying gear that isn't usually thought to be a classic year or model – especially when it comes to vintage guitars – because you just might find the exception. This J-45 from a 'bad' era of Gibson lutherie proved to be a really lovely acoustic. All bets are off with old guitars until you have them in your hands. You just don't know what you're going to like until you do, and reputation (good or bad) can be an unreliable guide. Neither price, brand, age nor hype can absolutely guarantee something is a good guitar – nor a bad one.

I'm now looking forward to recording with my good 'ol brand-new J-45 and seeing what other surprises it might have in store. **W**

THREE TO GET READY

American acoustics inspired by the past



Epiphone FT110 Frontier £3,619

This maple-bodied Sitka-topped beauty from Epiphone's golden era is not to be confused with cheaper offshore-built guitars from Epiphone. Built in the same Bozeman, Montana, workshop as Gibson's high-end US acoustics, the FT110 recreates an original late-50s Frontier, complete with cactus-and-lariat Western-inspired scratchplate. Sounds are rich, crisp and vibrant, and the guitar is a real looker, too. A classic that's a little different.



Gibson Generation G-45 £1,099

Gibson says its new soundport-equipped Generation G-45 was inspired by a Ted McCarty design concept from the 1960s. Be that as it may, what you have here is a walnut-bodied J-45 that's been stripped of frills but plays very nicely and features what Gibson calls a 'Player Port' (a kind of secondary soundhole) in the top edge of the body to give a greater sense of being enveloped in the sound of the guitar. It works well, at a tempting price.



Martin Reimagined Standard Series OM-28 £3,899

In creating the Reimagined Standard Series Martin took heed of the custom-order requests it most commonly received and built them into the updated yet thoughtfully retro-inspired Reimagined Standard series. The OM-28 is the pick of a great litter – the herringbone purfling, abalone diamond-and-squares fret markers and open-gear tuners are pleasingly retro touches, but the High Performance neck plate grants this OM precise, modern playability. An icon, reborn.



Augmented Chords

Richard Barrett explains how to create the sound of suspense by using a raised 5th in your chord choices

An augmented chord is what we call a major chord with a raised (or sharp) 5th. You'll hear it whenever the composer wants to set up a state of suspense, whether at the beginning of a song, as part of a chord progression, or in film scores to add a sense of foreboding at key moments. As with many other aspects of music theory, there are actually a couple of different names that can be correctly used. I've already mentioned 'sharp 5', often notated as +5 in jazz chord charts, in the same school of shorthand as a minus sign being used for minor and a small circle for diminished. Check out a copy of the jazz 'bible' *The Real Book* to see these symbols in use.

Like any other chord, we can alter augmented to feature extensions such as the 7th. For example, Aaug7, or A7 (+5), which arguably makes things a bit clearer. It also gives you the essential harmony, plus any extensions in a format that might make reading a jazz chord chart on the fly less stressful! **E**

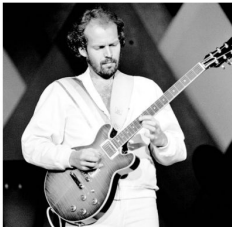
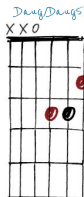


PHOTO BY GUS STEVENS/REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES

Right: Lasse Wellander, touring guitarist with ABBA. Notably, the band used an augmented chord in the opener of their hit track *Mamma Mia*

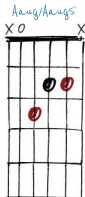
Example 1

This chord could correctly be referred to as D augmented, D^{aug}5 or D (+5). The A# on the third string replaces the usual A, giving a sense of suspense not present in a regular D major. You could also alternate D major and D (+5), thereby recreating the intro to ABBA's *Mamma Mia*.



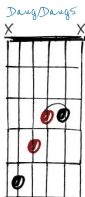
Example 2

Taking a regular open-position A major chord and raising the 5th (E) to F# on the fourth string gives an A augmented, aka A^{aug}5 or A (+5). For a little extra spice in the high-end, you could allow the open top E string to ring, giving a non-augmented 5th. I suppose we could call that an A+add5...



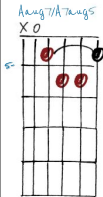
Example 3

Let's just call this D^{aug}5. It's a lower, darker voicing but is technically the same chord as Example 1 and therefore interchangeable. Inversions such as these can be useful for creating chord/melody arrangements, or simply for adding a bit of variety when providing accompaniment to a soloist or singer.



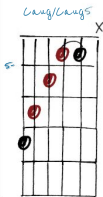
Example 4

Adding in a dominant 7th to this A (+5) chord gives us A7^{aug}5. The aforementioned naming conventions remain correct, but rather than saying A^{aug}7, A7^{aug}5 makes it clear what is going on harmonically – namely, that we're sharpening/augmenting the 5th, and not the 7th.



Example 5

This C^{aug}5 is the lowest, darkest-sounding inversion, using the five lowest strings. It's a bit of a stretch if you're not used to it, but well worth the effort as it trains your fourth finger to be precise. Never a bad thing! You may also find this shape useful for ominous-sounding arpeggiated parts.



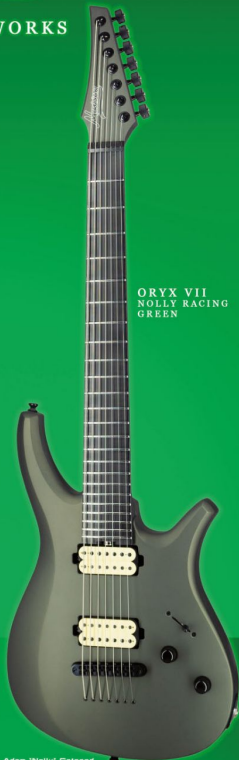
Manson

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Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
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STAR LETTER

HOLIDAY HOARD



I couldn't help but relate to the story of Royal Albert in the *Iconic Guitars* special edition. Joe Bonamassa's remarks about "buying stories" really resonated with me as I realised a few of my own guitars have a story.

Take 'Cornish', for example. I'd been after a clean example of a 90s Les Paul Standard for some time, having played one some years back to see what the fuss was all about. Fast-forward to the summer of 2020, when we were all wondering if we would ever leave lockdown. I'd taken a punt on our regular family Cornish holiday destination opening in St Ives, and a truly memorable week ensued with the usual mixture of Atlantic weather giving birth to some showery afternoons. On one such afternoon

my wife and daughters went to the Tate St Ives, while I decided to head out for some guitar window-shopping. There aren't many shops in the locale, but one in nearby Trevedad looked promising.

On arrival, social-distancing measures meant I was left alone to browse and my heart positively leapt when I saw a great-looking Lester on the wall. I could tell from several feet away it was right, regardless of decade. On enquiry about its provenance I was told that the shop was selling it on behalf of its owner who had bought it new in 1993. The chap then played it at home for a year with the Marshall he bought at the same time, before moving to the Middle East for 14 years. The guitar was left, quite literally, in the case under his bed. When he returned he became a model enthusiast and collector (cars or trains) and had decided to sell it as he now no longer played.

Plugging in and playing it I had the epiphany that many speak about. The thing was talking to me: resonant, comfortable, right weight and smelling like candy floss (yes, I smelled it. Doesn't everyone?). I knew it was leaving with me that afternoon. It was my Royal Albert moment.

Rob, via email

Wow, Rob. That was a holiday you won't forget in a hurry. As Frank Zappa once said, if a guitar leaps into your arms and says, 'Take me, I'm yours,' then it's definitely the right one for you. It looks like an absolute stunner, too. To add to your good fortune, have a pair of Vox headphones to go along with your Cornish treasure.



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

As a self-confessed guitar geek of the senior variety, one of my pleasures watching Glastonbury this year was clocking which guitars were most prevalent. Guitar fashion seems to work in two ways: first, players seeking to emulate their heroes, hence the existence of so many signature models; and second, players, mostly younger ones, wishing to play something different to the accepted mainstream models.

I noticed several outliers, mainly retro-type guitars, which was interesting, but there are definitely other trends going on. The once-ubiquitous Strats and Les Pauls were quite thin on the ground, whereas the Telecaster was everywhere in the hands of both younger and older players. The Fender Jazzmaster was also much in evidence having not been so favoured since surf music was a thing.

While my observations are far from scientific, it seems to indicate a generational shift with younger musicians not wanting to play 'dad' guitars. Does this mean the likes of Gibson should be worried? For my generation, many of us are still wedded to our 50s and 60s classic models. But what's going to happen when we hang up our picks?

Graham Osborne, via email

As far as trends on our side of the industry are concerned, we're seeing a lot of antiquing coming from companies other than the big league, indicating that relics are still a favourite. From what we hear, there's a lot of action in the vintage marketplace, too, but with the usual suspects reaching mortgage levels on their price tags, it's models such as Gibson Les Paul Specials and Juniors, as well as Melody Makers, taking up the slack. Vintage Fender Duo-Sonics and the like are finding their way into younger players' hands as well. It's always difficult to predict these things, but doubtless there will be new musical icons to follow in the coming years that will encourage new six-string trends.



Courtney Barnett with her Fender Jaguar at this year's Glasto

PHOTO BY JAMISONNETT IMAGES



The lesser known
Kawai Rock 'n' Roll Star

MODS & (PUNK) ROCKERS

Having read, in issue 487, Dave Burrluck's Mod Squad Mystery Man article about his oddball Kawai guitar, a strange coincidence occurred. A February 1986 snippet of Public Image Ltd performing *Rise on Top Of The Pops* popped up on my Facebook page. Being a fan of all things weird and wonderful in the world of guitars, thanks to Dave I was able to identify the guitar Kevin Armstrong was enthusiastically miming on. At least I have assumed it was Kevin Armstrong as he is listed on Wikipedia as the PIL lead player from February to March 1986. The hat and dark glasses make it a little difficult to be certain, but the guitar was definitely a Rock 'n' Roll Star identical to Dave's, except for the knobs.

Coincidentally, I was born and raised in Southend, which is where Dave mentions the guitar may have originally been purchased.

Greg Owen, via email

Well spotted, Greg. And, as you say, one heck of a coincidence. It's good to know that even the weirdest, wackiest guitar designs were put to good use at some point in their lifespan.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

I was interested to read the letter from Joe Swann [issue 487], as we've had a thriving village-hall scene on the south coast for many years. Some of the county councils run schemes whereby they contribute 50 per cent of the cost of an act, which could be a band, comedian, touring theatre company, etc, as long as all profits are used for the upkeep of the venue. The council arts department selects the acts they want to work with, and promotes them through their website. As a result, the venues can be pretty assured of a good-quality show.

The Hampshire scheme was/is called Hog The Limelight. My band first got onto that around 2000 and have been included two or three times since then. The bookings included, in addition to village halls, local arts centres and theatres. Off the back of our Hog



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appearances we obtained further bookings from the venues outside of the scheme. We also worked with similar schemes in Wiltshire, South Somerset and Devon. All these gigs were well-attended and great fun. Attendees have paid to see the band and are determined to enjoy themselves, which they invariably do – as do we!

Over the past 10 years or so, the council funding for these projects has fallen away somewhat, on the basis that they simply do not have the funds to support it in the way they previously did. However, the schemes still continue, even if on a smaller scale. It's definitely worth checking to see whether your local council has such a scheme.

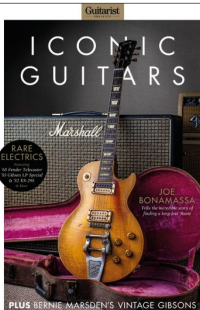
John Holmes, via email

Thanks for the heads up, John. Grassroots venues have taken a big hit since the lockdown and these schemes sound like the kind of thing that could kickstart local live music and offer up that all-important live experience that bands starting out so desperately need. Is there a similar scheme in other readers' areas? If so, let us know and we'll give it a mention.

OLD WOOD

The supplement to the current issue [*Iconic Guitars*, 487] was full of skanky sweaty old instruments. We are supposed to gasp, but to me they are no better than firewood. If the likes of Fender and Martin have made

Mark Watson's ride-or-die rigs are ready for any musical eventuality



millions of guitars, then why do they continue to make new ones? Aren't we all hankering after the heap of old sweaty skanky ones out there?

Andrew Redding, via email

Interesting perspective, Andrew. That would be some very expensive fuel for the fire! As for your question about why Martin and co continue to make new instruments when there are so many already out there in existence, David Higgins may well have the answer to that on page 50 of the issue in question...

GEARING UP

I have been very much enjoying Jamie's [Longtermers] column about recording guitar at home [last seen in issue 484], so I thought I'd share my experience and a couple of pictures of my home rigs [shown left].

I have a selection of small amps (from top to bottom [far left]): an original Orange Tiny Terror, an excellent and hugely versatile Mesa Transatlantic TA-15, and the always astounding THD UniValve. These go individually through the remarkable Two-Notes Captor X, into two stereo channels of a small Behringer 802a mixer, then into the wonderful Roland UA-1610 to be recorded in Cubase Artist.

My other rig goes the other way, with my incredibly robust and very stage-worthy Fractal AX8 [near left], again into two stereo channels of the 802a, and then into the UA-1610. All the patches on the AX8 have been tweaked for years, and sound truly magical in any mix.

Finally, I can also take the speaker out from the Captor X (or any amp) into an excellent Mesa 1x12 cab [with [Celestion] Black Shadow 12-inch speaker] and mic that up with a variety of different microphones. However, I have found I do that less and less these days. It's too loud for reasonable use – even with 15-watt amps – and, frankly, I really don't think it sounds any better than either modelling rig.

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

Could it all be upgraded? Of course. I am very sure I could get a much better mixer, and the AX8 is now quite elderly, but I think the ADCs in the UA-1610 do the job very well indeed, and the preamps in the Behringer are reasonably transparent to my ear. Buried in a mix, or even up front in a solo, after post-production, processing, mixing and mastering, I'd be happy to bet the majority of listeners would not be able to tell what the guitars were recorded with!

Perhaps the key point is I am very familiar with these rigs, and the setup is incredibly easy to use and versatile enough that I can cover pretty much anything I'm asked to deliver, sound-wise. My advice is spend as much time as you can with what you already have and really get to know it all. And then, no matter what, make your recording environment as simple to use as you possibly can.

Mark Watson, via email

That's really good advice, Mark. If you go into any top professional studio, you're likely to find an engineer who is almost telepathically linked to the equipment they use – to the extent that any wiring configuration or soundscape their customers request falls under their fingers almost immediately... For the rest of us, however, it's a case of 'read the flippin' manual'.

REQUESTS...

Want to see something in the mag?
Tell us at guitarist@futurenet.com

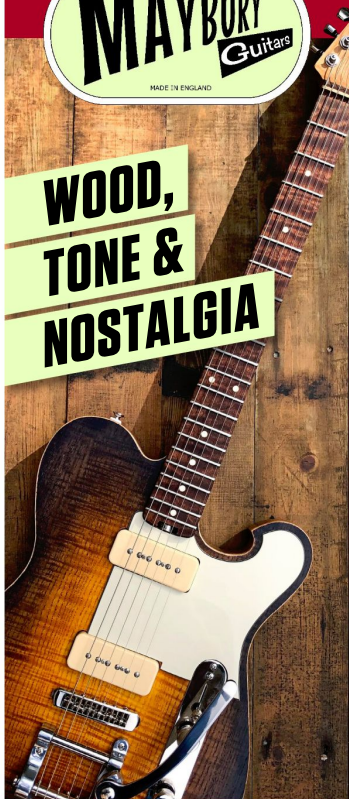
Acoustic Blues As we have no dedicated UK acoustic magazine, could *Guitarist* have a section similar to [the previous] *Pedalboard* [section] devoted to all things acoustic? I'm sure sufficient content could be used to fill a few pages. I do subscribe to the American publication *Acoustic Guitar*, but the price has doubled due to postage. I think quite a number of your readers would find such a section of interest.

Colin Bentham, via email

That's an interesting suggestion, thanks Colin. Indeed, acoustic guitars are very close to our editor's heart as he plays them a lot these days, and he's also working on an album of acoustic instrumentals. It might well be possible. Watch this space!



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KELLY JOE PHELPS

1959 – 2022

The much-loved multi-instrumentalist and master of slide guitar has died at his home in Iowa at the age of 62

Words Glenn Kimpton

KELLY JOE PHELPS

3 October 1939 – 31 May 2022

On 31 May, Kelly Joe Phelps' friend and collaborator Steve Dawson announced the passing of the blues guitarist via an appropriately low-key message on social media. A close friend of Phelps, Dawson understood the modesty of his character and his music, which was rich with emotion and skill: "His ideas flowed out of him so fluently it was mind-boggling," he said.

Although known predominantly for his outstanding lap and slide guitar playing, Phelps' musical journey started with an immersion into free jazz techniques primarily through the bass guitar, looking to musicians such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane for inspiration. He moved onto guitar through players like Robert Johnson, but his relationship with the slide began later, at around the age of 30, with Mississippi Fred McDowell the main



"He was some kind of shaman... a communicator of the divine. He could pick up a guitar and put us in touch with something much bigger than ourselves" JOHN SMITH

influence: "There was something about his playing that touched me in a very deep place," Phelps said. "I still don't understand what that place is, necessarily. The sound of the slide guitar opened up for me..."

Phelps released albums between 1994 and 2012, with his debut, *Lead Me On*, a sparsely produced blend of original tunes, and gospel and pre-war blues performed on fingerpicked and slide guitar, signalling the landing of a significant talent. Around this time and for his second album, *Roll Away The Stone*, he was primarily using a Gibson FJN (Folk Jumbo Natural) guitar on his lap, a model Gibson designed with a wider fingerboard for both steel and nylon strings, but one Phelps decided was well suited for lap playing. Although he apparently always had a pretty decent collection of instruments lined up, a couple of choice highlights are a National Style 0, a Gibson J-60 (which he converted for lap playing after accidentally putting his first through the FJN) and a Martin HD-28.

Phelps was a hugely talented and diverse musician, adept at bass guitar, double bass and banjo alongside his versions of six-string guitar, but he was also one who struggled with artistic satisfaction among other

things. He felt at times, and more keenly towards the latter end of his career, that the limitations of the lap slide were becoming more apparent and switched to bottleneck guitar accompanying his fingerstyle playing, a style he found broader and more rewarding: "It is very freeing to be able to fret things," he once explained. "To change chord voicings or fret notes behind the slide while holding the slide on the strings... Another thing I like about it is that there are fewer slide notes so they have a chance to stand out more. It gives me a chance to really bring out the sense that the slide notes are the melody notes – they're being sung."

Phelps' discography is full of great records, with the inspired *Shine Eyed Mister Zen*, containing songs recorded in just one take, being a highlight, but the 2009 instrumental release, *Western Bell*, is probably his most quietly controversial. A solo album of controlled, hushed beauty, this one most clearly displayed the influence of players such as Leo Kottke and, more specifically here, John Fahey. As a set of longer tracks, Phelps had mixed feelings about the record, telling *No Depression* that he had "spent all this time learning improvisational music combined with

some sort of fascination with or attraction to folk-based music forms. The melodies that showed up on *Western Bell* were very pure, but the handling of it is really skewed." A tricky album, perhaps, and one that gathered mixed responses, *Western Bell* is still a fine example of the richness and diversity of Phelps' creative mind and remains a fascinating and rewarding addition to his catalogue.

2012 saw the release of Phelps' final album, *Brother Sinner And The Whale*, a mono recording containing just his guitar and voice. The set was warmly received, and listeners were grateful for the honesty in the writing and guitar sound, which was produced and mastered by Steve Dawson, himself a formidable player.

There were to be no more albums, and a hand injury in 2013 stopped Phelps playing guitar for around seven months. But he recovered well and was touring again by the autumn, albeit only for a short time, taking a hiatus in 2014 and not returning to the road, instead choosing to temporarily break from music. Few thought that it would spell the end of Kelly Joe Phelps' creative output and it would seem like a body of work that was cut short, much like his life. "He was some kind of shaman," said acoustic guitarist John Smith in tribute. "I think he was a communicator of the divine. He could pick up a guitar and put us in touch with something much bigger than ourselves." A hugely gifted and thoughtful musician, Kelly Joe Phelps will be sorely missed, while his music lives on. **✪**



Kelly Joe Phelps, live in Louisville, Kentucky, 2012



TOM BUKOVAC

With more than 700 albums to his credit – including his Dean DeLeo project, Trip The Witch – Nashville session ace Tom Bukovac is one of the world's busiest guitarists. Here he shares some of the guitars behind Music Row's biggest records

Words Joe Bosso Photography Eleanor Jane

Since arriving in Nashville in the early 90s, guitarist Tom Bukovac has performed on more than 700 albums by a veritable who's who of the music industry's upper elite. Just a cursory glance at his credits reveals names such as Taylor Swift, Stevie Nicks, Vince Gill, Sheryl Crow, Don Henley, Carrie Underwood, Keith Urban, Faith Hill, Reba McEntire and Blake Shelton. And that doesn't even take into account the numerous jingles, TV and film projects and various other projects he's performed on.

"It kind of boggles my mind," Bukovac admits. "The sessions I get called for are so wide-ranging. In a two-day period, I could go from playing heavy rock to 70s LA studio jazz. I love the variety of the music that's coming out of this town. One minute I'm playing some nasty gut-bucket blues, and then I'm doing something crazy and spacey. For a guy like me who loves to play lots of different genres of music, it's a never-ending source of inspiration."

For five years straight, from 2005 to 2009, Bukovac won *MusicRow* magazine's Session Guitarist of the Year Award, and he's been the recipient of multiple Top Guitarist nominations from the Academy of Country Music, winning three times. Asked if he can point to one reason for his success, he lets out a laugh. "I wish I knew," he offers. "Maybe it's because I don't have just one card to play." Which is another way of saying he's no one-trick pony. Rather, he's a complete guitarist, able to suss out in minutes just what a track needs to shine. Ask him to burn a free-form rock solo, and he'll turn in a stone-cold, melodic gem bursting with hooks, heart and individuality. But he's just as comfortable laying back and luxuriating in a rhythm pocket, like he's just another member of the band.

"I'm the first to admit that I'm no expert on anything," Bukovac says, "but I can fake it. Most of the session players around here are like that. You have to be that versatile to get lots of gigs. I'm not a hardcore jazzier, but I can make you think that I am. I'm not a legit country-and-western swing guy, but I can give you feeling and evoke the right emotion. If you're a schooled player, you can connect spiritually to what's in front of you and get the message across." He pauses, then adds: "As long as you have your muse."

For Bukovac, that last line is no cast-off stray thought. Recalling his "hot period" between 2009 and 2015, he says, "I think I played on every record that came out of Nashville during those years. I was working six, seven days a week, 13 hours a day. It was just insane. And I couldn't connect to the super-computerised pop country. It all became too much. I got totally burned out and I damaged my muse. The desire to play music and the love of music are very precious things, and I totally lost both. I needed a break."

For the next three years, Bukovac took himself out of the game, refusing all session work while concentrating on 2nd Gear Used Music, a consignment shop he opened in the Berry Hill suburb of Nashville. He considered himself "basically retired", but it didn't stick. Little by little, he re-entered the recording fold – but on his terms. "I didn't work the crazy hours any more. I had a family, so that kind of schedule wouldn't work any more," he says. "I'm not smart enough to think that all I needed was some time away, but it did me a world of good. And when I came back, I came back strong. The muse is in great condition, and I love music again. I feel like I'm playing better than ever now because I'm not burned out."

1. You might not see a Tele – such as this 1960 Fender Telecaster Custom – in Bukovac's hands as much as some other Nashville sessioners, but he still considers it "one of the primary colours of guitar sound"

2. This S-style Senn Original has been with Bukovac for 20 years and played so much he's worn the finish off the neck. It features Lollar pickups and an ltrr noise cancelling system

3. All original (except for its frets), this 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard often joins Bukovac on the road, mostly to people's dismay! "I use it on everything," he says. "It's the best"

He notes that the studios in town are humming along at basically the same clip as they were pre-pandemic, but there was a brief shutdown in March 2020. On the first day of quarantine, a friend suggested that Bukovac film some videos – essentially, "Play some guitar and cheer people up." Which he did. Starting with *The Coolest Chord of All Time* (an "E₇ 6-9 scenario" in an open G), he began churning out videos one by one, breaking down his favourite licks and sounds, discussing gear and guitars while playing everything from reggae and "fake jazz" to "controlled hillbilly music" and deep blues.

The videos on Bukovac's Homeschoolin' YouTube channel (501chorusecho) now number in the hundreds, and they've amassed millions of views. "It's the craziest thing," he says. "As a session player, you're kind of anonymous. People have always said, 'You should brand yourself.' I never knew how, but through doing these videos, I've sort of put myself on the map. Now I have people say to me, 'Dude, come to this session. Can you do what you did in video so and so?' It's brought me a lot of new fans."

One such admirer was Stone Temple Pilots guitarist Dean DeLeo, who reached out to Bukovac by email and expressed his enthusiasm for the series. The two started corresponding, and before long decided to collaborate on a project called Trip The Witch. Their self-titled album is a stunning collection of 10 vibey,

mostly instrumental tracks that blend rock, blues, country and blissed-out psychedelia on which the two players engage in a seamless musical conversation. This was made despite the fact they've never even met – the entire record was done remotely. (The album's sole vocal tune, a cosmic wonder titled *Saturn We Miss You*, features Yes legend Jon Anderson, who beamed in his performance from his home studio.)

"Dean and I consider ourselves long-lost brothers," Bukovac says. "Making this record was one of the most satisfying experiences I've ever had. We would send ideas back and forth – we complemented each other beautifully." He adds with a laugh: "I'd love to meet Dean someday, but I don't know if I even need to."

Releasing a solo album was never high on Bukovac's bucket list, but last year, encouraged by the success of Homeschoolin', he gathered a bunch of session pals – namely producer Chris McHugh, bassist Steve Mackey, rhythm guitarist Jerry McPherson and drummer/engineer Shannon Forrest – to record *Plexi Soul* (available on bandcamp.com). To be sure, there are moments of bravura guitar playing throughout, but much in the same spirit of Trip The Witch, it's an entertaining mood record that touches on Pink Floydian spaciness, Steely Dan-esque lounge pop, sleek R&B grooves, and even some nods to British blues and Midwestern hard rock. "I made the record as sort of a documentation of some of my personal favourite loop

"If you're a schooled player, you can connect to what's in front of you and get the message across... As long as you have your muse"

jams from the video show," Bukovac says. "It was a blast to make. The whole thing was cut totally analogue on 24-track two-inch tape. We were pretty rehearsed as a band, so everything came together quickly with hardly any overdubs or fixes. The response has been more positive than I ever could have imagined. I'll do another one down the road."

Let's go back to when you started playing. You picked up the guitar at age eight, right?

"That's right. My older brother played a bit, and he showed me some things to get me going. I wasn't good at sports, but the guitar came very easily to me. I took lessons for a minute, but I didn't even bring my guitar to the lessons because all it was all theory."

Which bands or guitarists were you listening to as a young player?

"It was all Beatles for me. After them I discovered early Bowie and then I got into Genesis, Floyd, Yes, The Police, Steely Dan, The Cars... I liked The Stones and Zeppelin, but I wouldn't call them huge influences. Of all the guitarists, though, I have to single out David Gilmour. He's my favourite."



We understand you started playing in your mother's nightclub when you were just 13?

"Absolutely. The place was the Surfside Lounge, which is a title of one of the songs on the *Trip The Witch* album. It was a little shot-and-beer joint that my father originally owned. He died when I was really young and then my mom took over the place. I was playing there every weekend by the time I was 13. I sat in with older guys and we'd do Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers. They called me 'The Boy Wonder' because I could play the shit out of anything we did. I had no adult supervision – played till all hours of the morning. It was crazy."

How and why did you decide to leave Ohio and head for Nashville?

"As much as I loved Cleveland, I realised pretty quickly that my options were limited if I stayed there. I had to go to a real music city. I should have left when I was 19 or 20, but I wasted several years and didn't move to Nashville till I was 24, in 1992. In Cleveland, if you tell people you play guitar, they go, 'So what do you really do?' But in Nashville, musicians are taken seriously. The difference was night and day."

Were your playing abilities fully developed when you got to town?

"Pretty much, but I had a good ear. Even when I was a little kid, I could tell when something wasn't right. I would hear people playing songs, and I'd say, 'That's not the right chord.' I could figure out the right chord faster than anybody. I think that proved valuable when I made the move. All you had to do was play me a piece of music and I could tell what it needed."

Did you go to Nashville with the intention of being in a band, or did you want to be a session guy?

"I just wanted to do something professional. I didn't care what it was, as long as it wasn't playing in cover bands for 50 bucks a night. I went around and networked. I saw bands and talked to everybody. That's what you have to do – get yourself around. I found out fast that the only way to get gigs was through word of mouth. It took me a few months to get on the road with a real touring act – Wynonna Judd. Before then, I was doing low-budget gigs."

Very quickly, though, you transitioned to studio session work.

"Yeah. I noticed that the real players weren't doing road gigs; they were in the studio cutting records. I was like, 'Man, I wonder if I could be one of those guys.' I'd be at rehearsal places and I would see all the crazy rigs that people like Brent Mason owned. I thought, 'He must be good if he's got all that equipment.'"

Would you say that breaking in was similar to crashing an exclusive club?

"That's a good way of putting it. It was like a club, and it still is. The scene changes every few years as new guys come in and older guys retire, but for the most part it's a club with about 100 guys on various instruments. There's, like, 15 guitar players, 15 bass players and so on. We all know one another and we all speak the same language. Every session you do, it's a mix of those same 100 guys."



4. This 1963 Gibson Firebird V has been in the spotlight as Bukovac's main guitar on this summer's US Ann Wilson tour. "It's a great Nashville guitar because it's got the midrange that can cut through a big band," he says. "It's like a big giant Tele"

5. The custom-made PRS Cleveland pays tribute to Bukovac's hometown and features a lightweight, solid single-piece korina body, DiMarzio Super Distortion pickup, no fretboard inlays, and a treble bleed capacitor fitted on the volume control by Glaser Instruments in Nashville

6. This 1966 Mosrite Combo model joined Bukovac on a recent tour with Vince Gill. And while he admits it's a little too noisy, he can't deny that it has "tone for days"

7. Bukovac's 1978 BC Rich Eagle has also been making appearances on this year's Ann Wilson tour

It sounds like a much bigger and newer version of the Wrecking Crew.

"Kind of. These players all know how to work fast. You have to be quick to work here. It's very pro."

Can you point to a particular session that felt like your big break?

"It was kind of cumulative. I did a lot of crap sessions in the early days – demos and low-budget sessions. That's how you cut your teeth and get your name around, but it's also how you learn the way things work. You can't just jump in on a big session with a big artist – you'll choke. I did my time on the horrible demos and terrible sessions, but as I got better and better, my time came."

"I think it was around 2003 when Dann Huff started hiring me. He was already a huge guitarist in his own right before he started producing. All the other producers in town were looking at him and copying what he did. That's what really got me noticed. Once I was working with Dann, people called me. I became 'the guy'. I had so many gigs coming at me, I couldn't possibly do them all – lots of country but also rock. It was just overwhelming."

Dann's seal of approval really meant something to artists and other producers.

"Oh, definitely. In those days, he was doing things like Rascal Flatts, who were huge at the time. We did a lot

of those early records – Faith Hill and a ton of artists. I continue to work with Dann. In fact, I worked with him just the other day. He's still a dear friend of mine. He uses a lot of the younger guys now, but that's just a logical progression."

What kinds of guitars were you playing back in the early days?

"I've always been a big vintage freak. I bought my first vintage guitar when I was about 18, and since then I've always scrambled to find cooler guitars. I played a lot of old 335s in the early days. I was known as being a 335 guy, which is funny because I don't even own a 335 any more. Now everybody plays one, and that started with me. I stood out because I used that guitar."

Earlier, you said that you couldn't pinpoint exactly why people hired you...

"Well, there are probably a few things. I guess one thing that made me stand out was because I came from somewhere else, musically. I was into trippy rock atmosphere stuff – Radiohead and Pink Floyd. And in the country world, that music didn't exist. People were still chicken-picking on Teles. That's all anybody wanted. I mean, I can chicken-pick, but it's not my stock-in-trade. When people heard what I did, they started to shift toward cool atmospheric stuff with more of a rock edge."

"As a session player, you're kind of anonymous. But through doing these YouTube videos, I've sort of put myself on the map"

You were just doing what you heard in your head.

"Yeah, and people dug it. He's the guy! He can do all the trippy, crazy echo stuff. It was good timing for me. I wasn't smart enough to pre-conceive that's what I needed to do; I was just lucky because that's what I liked to do. Then it got to the point where I did so much of that, that I got tired of it. I've made several reinventions – you have to do it if you want to keep growing. For example, just recently I changed my gear around and switched to small combo amps. I try to keep it fresh and original. I don't want to be known for doing just one sound."

Has there been an artist or producer who really challenged you and pushed you out of your comfort zone?

"Matt Serletic. He's made a bunch of big records, and I played with him a lot in the old days. A lot of stuff I did on other sessions that people loved, he was like, 'Dude, we've got to get better than that. We've got to do something original.' What I was playing would've worked for most people – but not him. He was looking for something fresher. That's when you dig. You try things, new ways of playing, different pedals."







"Personally, as long as I know the person's a genius, I like to be challenged. If I did a session and everybody loves each note I play, it's like I don't have to try. That's when you know the record isn't going to be good because nobody's really trying. I think great records come from a little bit of tension."

Would you say you were generally a one-take guy or do you tend to work on things more?

"I can be, but I prefer to work on things for a long time. Left to my own devices, I could spend a whole day working on one song so I can make it sound amazing. Sure, I can do one take and it'll be fine. But it takes a little time to find those magic moments. Sometimes you're against the clock, but a lot of times you can find some wiggle room and perfect things a bit more."

Do you have any favourite studios in Nashville?

"Blackbird Studios. John McBride, who runs the place, he's one of my best friends. That studio is amazing. It's like one big playground for me – all the rooms and the microphones. He's got millions of dollars in mics alone. But I can basically work anywhere. As long as I've got a good engineer, I can get a nice sound. The first thing I do when I walk through the door of any studio, I ask, 'Who's engineering?' A bad engineer can ruin any session. Conversely, a great engineer can make an average session sound amazing."

"I've made several reinventions – you have to do it if you want to keep growing. I don't want to be known for doing just one sound"

How many guitars would you say you usually bring to a session?

"I have a cartage rig that gets delivered to every session, and inside is a coffin full of a dozen guitars. Every once in a while, you'll do a session where they don't want you to bring your cartage. That can be a bit rough because it limits your options. But you make do. If they just want you to bring a few things, I'll bring a humbucker guitar, a Strat, maybe a Tele or a hollowbody."

"My signature Duesenberg does it for me. It's like a Swiss Army knife. It's got a whammy bar, humbuckers and different tone options. If I'm going to bring just one guitar, it's super versatile."

You have a pretty sweet '58 'Burst – how often do you use it?

"I bought that a while ago and I bring that everywhere. People are like, 'I can't believe you bring that thing out of the house!' I use it on everything. It's the best."

Which Telecaster model do you bring with you – the 1960 Custom?

"Absolutely. Killer guitar, man. Whenever you need a Tele, there it is. I just recently bought back a '62 Strat

that I owned years ago. I should have never sold it in the first place. I've been using that a lot. There's a few things I'm missing that I don't have any more. I don't have a Gretsch and a 335, but I can get those sounds with other things."

And how about your Firebird? When does that tend to come out?

"Oh, man, I play it all the time. The Firebird is a great Nashville guitar because it's got the midrange that can cut through a big band. It's like a big giant Tele. It really works great for the kind of music that we're doing here. Actually, I would prefer that over the Tele. I was playing my Firebird today on a session. I've got one with P-90s, and I've got one with the regular mini-humbuckers. I use them both equally."

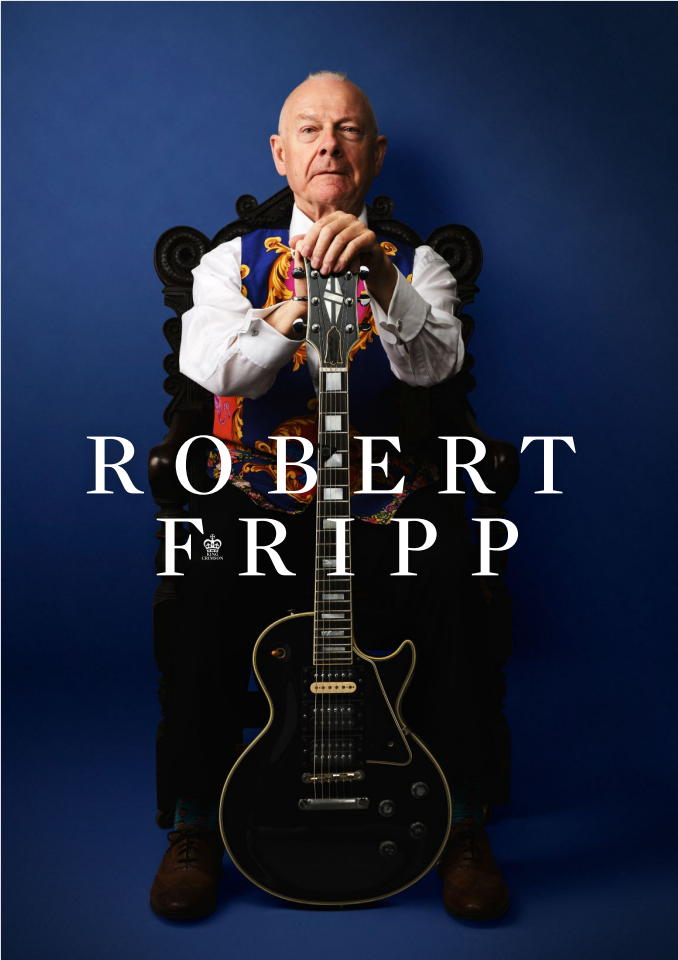
You said you've been using combo amps lately. Can you tell us more?

"Exactly. I've mostly been using an old Deluxe Reverb on pretty much everything. I've got a bunch of old Marshalls that I love, Plexis and things. I've got an AC30. I try to have all the classic stuff. I've got a tweed Bassman and some small amps. I try to have a little bit of everything, but I also like to go direct a lot. I'll go right off my pedalboard into the console. I was doing that yesterday, and it sounded amazing. If you have a great engineer, you're good to go." 

8. Duesenberg Tom Bukovac 'The Session Man' Signature: "I'm very proud of this one," Bukovac says. "It's the first natural-finish guitar Duesenberg ever made. No fretboard inlays or metal pickguard trim. Two humbuckers and a blendable piezo"

9. "I'm the first to admit that I'm no expert on anything," Bukovac says, "but I can fake it. Most of the session players around here are like that"



A full-body portrait of Robert Fripp against a solid blue background. He is seated in a dark, ornate chair, holding a black Gibson Les Paul electric guitar. He is dressed in a white long-sleeved shirt, a blue vest with elaborate gold and red embroidery, and a colorful patterned tie. He is wearing brown leather shoes and patterned socks. The text 'ROBERT' and 'FRIPP' is overlaid in large white serif font, with a small crown logo between the 'R' and 'I' of 'FRIPP'.

ROBERT FRIPP





WITH A **32-DISC BOXSET** OF HIS SOLO WORK DURING THE LATE 1970s ALREADY RELEASED INTO THE WILD AND A **GUITAR BOOK** COMING OUT IN EARLY AUTUMN, ROBERT SITS DOWN WITH US AT **FRIPP HQ** IN THE MIDDLE ENGLAND COUNTRYSIDE TO TALK ALL THINGS **KING CRIMSON**, AS WE TAKE AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT THE **INSTRUMENTS** THAT HAVE GIVEN VOICE TO SOME OF **PROG-ROCK'S FINEST MOMENTS**

Words David Mead Photography Adam Gasson

Interviews with 'That Awful Man', as Robert Fripp refers to himself these days, are rare, and until now he hasn't allowed his collection of guitars to be photographed, including the one pictured opposite that was used on so many classic Crimson albums. "I don't collect guitars," he tells us as we settle down to talk, "they are merely tools that I use in my work." However, we note that the famous '59 Les Paul Custom appears to be in almost pristine condition – in fact, it's still shiny even after years on the road. "One careful owner," he quips with a wry grin.

Anyone who wants to assess Fripp's skills as a guitarist need only check out *Fracture* from the King Crimson album *Starless And Bible Black*. The *Moto Perpetuo* from that piece is a legendary example of his crosspicking finesse. His guitar journey began with lessons that found him playing some challenging classical pieces with a plectrum, instead of the more conventional fingerstyle. This influence reached into the Crimson repertoire and is apparent in 1970's *Peace – A Theme from In The Wake Of Poseidon*. "Yes, Carcassi *Etude No 7*, the middle section," he tells us. "You probably wouldn't be able to see the

connection, but *Peace – A Theme* wouldn't have quite ended up that way unless I practised the Carcassi *Etudes* for fingerstyle, but with a pick because crosspicking was my speciality."

Now that Crimson has entered another hiatus, the rendition of *Starless* in Japan last December being regarded by all as the last we'll hear from the band, it's time to catch up with Crimson's only permanent member. And we start our conversation at the very beginning...

How did you become interested in music – and specifically the guitar – in the first place?

"My trajectory was at age 11 my sister and I bought two records, *Rock With The Caveman* by Tommy Steele and *Don't Be Cruel* by Elvis Presley. The guitarist on Tommy Steele I learnt later was Bert Weedon, on Elvis, Scotty Moore. There weren't any English rock musicians, they were all jazzers. Old men, basically. Old men who would come in and do the young character sessions. Mel Collins' [Crimson sax player] father would be doing the ripping tenor solos on [BBC music programme] *Six-Five Special* with Tubby Hayes and Ronnie Scott sitting next to him. They would be making derogatory

comments on these young rock artists who really weren't in the same musical ballpark as they were. In America it was entirely different. There was nothing demeaning about playing rock music and moving out of blues. Scotty Moore, Chuck Berry, the sheer power of Jerry Lee Lewis... That was me around 11 to 12.

"At 13 trad jazz came along. I would go down to the Winter Gardens in Bournemouth and see all the characters: Chris Barber, Acker Bilk, Monty Sunshine and just about everyone else that was working at the time. Memphis Slim I saw there, too – I think he was supporting Chris Barber. Wow, wow. At 15, hearing Mingus, *Extrapolation*. Max Roach, *Town Hall New York City*. Then, at 17, the more challenging aspects of what we call classic music. It segued into The Beatles and 1960s English rock instrumentals. I saw The Outlaws at a show in Poole when I was 17 with Ritchie Blackmore, he was then 18. He was phenomenal. He had all the moves. He had the music, he had the playing, it was astonishing.

"The Bournemouth scene was very hot. Working in the first League Of Gentlemen we would do lots of specialty vocals: Four Seasons, Beatles. We would also do the instrumental specialities, *Entry Of*

1. 1959 Les Paul Custom, serial number 9 1986. "Acquired from Orange Music, London in November 1968 for £380, I believe," Fripp tells us. "Used on all KC albums from 1969 to 1974, two Fripp & Eno albums, Bowie's *Heroes* and *Scary Monsters*, Eno's *Here Come The Warm Jets* (on *Baby's On Fire* and *Blank Frank*), *Frippertones* in Europe 1979, and *The League Of Gentlemen* in 1981." Fripp's triangular plectrums (shown here lodged in the bass strings) are custom made in Japan by Mr Hiroshi Iketani

2. At the photoshoot we remarked on the amazing condition of Fripp's '59 Custom. "One careful owner..." he quipped

3. Fripp lowers the middle pickup as far as it can go because he finds that otherwise it gets in the way of his picking



The Gladiators, which I didn't realise until I met him years later was Mick Jones of Foreigner. Then I went off to college to take A-levels to go onto university and take a degree in estate management.

"My musical interest went slightly to the side, and I went to the Majestic Dance Orchestra to pay my way through college. When that came to an end, there was Hendrix, *Sgt Pepper* and things shot off in a different direction, to the extent I could no longer continue. Going on to London where I'd been accepted for a place for three years to take a degree in estate management at the College of Estate Management in South Kensington, I had my digs booked in Acton; how awful that was. I said to my father, 'I can't continue,' and I turned professional on my 21st birthday."

What was the first guitar you had when you began playing?

"It was an Egnond Freres, an appalling instrument. The action at the 7th fret, you needed pliers to depress it. It was appalling. It required me to develop such strong muscles that I remember in 1971 practising to put less pressure into my left hand. I moved onto a cheap Rosetti guitar, which was not good. Then a Höfner; I believe it was a President, it was the cutaway version. It wasn't great, but at least it was an instrument."

"My first good guitar was my Gibson ES-345 Stereo, which I bought from Eddie Moors music shop in Boscombe where on a Saturday afternoon I would give guitar lessons. Young characters would come in and say, 'I'm interested in buying a guitar.' They'd say, 'We have an in-store guitar teacher who can give you lessons on Saturday afternoon.' I'd go around the corner to something like a village hall in Boscombe and give guitar lessons. Then in the evening I'd go on to Chewton Glen Hotel, this was when I was 17, and play in the Douglas Ward Trio. This was my first good guitar, and it was expensive, something like £350. That was the guitar with The League Of Gentlemen. That took me to London with Giles, Giles And Fripp, that guitar, which I used until 1968 when I got my first Les Paul. I only used the 345 again with Crimson on *In The Wake Of Poseidon* on Cat Food, and *Bolero* [from *Lizard*]."

Was there an influence on you musically from listening to classical music?

"I began listening to the Bartók String Quartet and Stravinsky's *Rite Of Spring*. The turning point in my musical, and I suppose personal, life was something like 'music is one'. I didn't hear separate categories, I heard music but as if it was one musician speaking in a variety of dialects. The crashing chords of *Rite Of Spring* or Bartók, where is that coming from? The opening bars of *Purple Haze* or *Day In The Life*, *I Am The Walrus*, it all had this incredible power as it reached over and pulled me towards it."

You're well known for your crosspicking ability on pieces such as *Fracture*. How did this skill begin to develop?

"It's what in Guitar Craft is called 'a point of seeing'. It's not the process of rational deduction of working out; you simply see something. I remember specifically the moment. I was at home in the first floor rear room where my sister and myself

"The question eventually became formulated for me as, 'What would Hendrix sound like playing the Bartók String Quartets?'"

would do homework. I was practising *Study In 3/4* by Dick Sadleir. My guitar teacher, Don Strike, gave me a very good technical foundation. In terms of current music, it was a little old-fashioned. It was kind of corny for a young character who enjoyed Scotty Moore. Instead of doing *bom-bish-bish bom-bish-bish*, I began crosspicking. The same shapes, the same notes but crosspicking it. Seeing that that was so obviously the way to go I continued to develop that as a speciality, including [Francisco] Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, which was a very challenging piece for the pick."

There's not a great deal of blues influence in your playing...

"Why didn't I become a blues guitarist? Probably because I wasn't a very good blues guitarist. The thing

4. The 1970s incarnation of King Crimson (left to right): Fripp, Bill Bruford, David Cross and the late John Wetton



"When Giles and McDonald left it was heartbreaking for me. Giles' contributions to the arrangements and direction were stunning"

is, a lot of young players and some established players have said to me, 'I only wanted to be like Clapton.' They didn't say it, but you knew it. That wasn't my aim. Stunning player, but... The question eventually became formulated for me as, 'What would Hendrix sound like playing the Bartók String Quartets?'

"In 1969 the major musical influences in Crimson were Ian McDonald and Michael Giles. I recognised they had a connection with music, which at the time I didn't have, but I could recognise in others. I'd known this probably since I was 17 or 18 working alongside and going to see the other young players in Bournemouth, stunning young players."

How did McDonald's and Giles' influence connect with you in Crimson's early days?

"In the studio recording *In The Court Of The Crimson King* they would make a comment, [and] I would adjust my response to sit in accord with theirs. Then when they left it was heartbreaking for me, because although Giles wasn't a writer his contributions to the arrangements and direction were stunning.

"My primary role for *In The Court...* in Crimson in 1969, as I saw it, was

5. At The Hit Factory NYC in 1978 during the early Frippertronics era, using his other 1959 Custom Les Paul: serial number 9 0993. "Bought privately in NYC around March 1978," he says. "This became my US guitar and was used on *Exposure*"



PHOTO: LISA TANNER

to come up with guitar parts that supported the writing. Although you could say that McDonald and [Peter] Sinfield were the main writers, you can't exclude Giles from that. You can't really exclude anyone from that, it was five people. *Moonchild* on that album, the music was 99 per cent Robert [Fripp, himself] with one suggestion from Ian McDonald to move a G to a G#, which we incorporated. This was Ian, he had a gift for the simple melodic phrase.

"That's what we went with. For the writing credit, which properly should have been Fripp/Sinfield, I decided to have all the names of the members because I felt that actually everyone was involved equally. How can you exclude anyone at that point? For me, Crimson has always been a co-operative, which it certainly was in 1969."

This led to some turbulence within the band, didn't it?

"My personal difficulties with any Crimson musician since have been if they favour themselves or see themselves as somehow coming ahead of the other players or the music. To put that positively within Crimson, the music comes first: principle one. Principle two: the band comes first. The interests of the band come ahead of the interests of the other players. Three: we share the money. Why do there seem to be personal difficulties? Look at those three principles and really that's the clue to anything that follows.

"If the music does come first, then all the names are there at the top. We shared the record royalties; we shared the publishing royalties. There is a legitimate concern that if you have one person who writes

6. Suited and booted, the 2018 Crimson line-up (left to right): the late Bill Bruford, Jakko Jakszyk, Pat Mastelotto, Fripp, Gavin Harrison, Tony Levin, Mel Collins and Jeremy Stacey



"How I experience and engage with music and other musicians is subtle. If I'm explaining it in bold terms, it falls under the heading of cosmic horse shit"



7. Gibson ES-345, serial number 100510. "Acquired 1963, and so probably 1962 manufacture. Used in the original League Of Gentlemen (1964/55) at The Majestic Hotel, [and with] Giles, Giles & Fripp. Not used much in KC other than on *Cat Food* and *Prince Rupert's Lament* (1970)"

8. It's unclear as to whether Fripp used Gibson's infamous Varitone switch much, and that extra piece of wire looks like it was employed to cure an earthing problem on the Bigsby

9. Fripp tells us that he receives a lot of communications from guitarists telling him that his string ends look untidy, but he insists that his method of restringing is both functional and thoroughly effective



"With Crimson it was an open form of engagement, which has always been complex, always problematic and always very demanding"

all the music, shouldn't they get a disproportionate part of the publishing? The answer is yes, they should. This was a legitimate concern for Adrian Belew.

"From 1994 onwards, we would look at essentially who had made the greatest contribution to writing this piece. Between 1970 and 1974 when Robert was the primary writer, even if Bill Bruford didn't play a note he would receive an equal share of the publishing income. Why? Firstly, because it exemplified the view that where there is an equal commitment there is an equitable distribution. Secondly, if Robert made a value judgement or recommendation that we go this way, there was never any question that my recommendation for either a musical or business direction favoured me. There was never a conflict of interests with Robert. If I said, 'Look, lads, I think we should do this.' It was because I thought we should do this. Why? Primarily for the music, then primarily the interest of the band and so on."

The recent release of the *Exposures* boxset features Steven Wilson remixes of your solo material. As with the *Crimson* remixes Steven has done, they're remarkably faithful to the originals.

10. *Crimson* in 1984 (left to right): Adrian Belew, Bill Bruford, Fripp and Tony Levin



"When I go in to mix something, I don't go in with a historic overview to mind. Steven's aim was very faithfully to reproduce the original but with modern technology. There had been the odd discussions. For example, with *Lizard* there were one or two things we didn't quite put in and so on. My view on occasion has been we actually didn't get it right the first time, so now is an opportunity. Then you say, 'What's right and what's wrong?' If it has been adopted and accepted by decades of listeners, then maybe that's what it is. Steven aims to get it exactly as. Me, I'd be very happy to go a different way."

"In terms of *Exposure* I went down and worked with Steven, I was very up for complete reimagining. Steven: 'No, this is a classic.' His brief, this is Steven, is to present this as the original. How can I put it?

That desk [pointing to an antique writing desk in the room in which we are sitting] is an 1830s desk. It's a classic of its kind. If I were designing a desk for today to use with modern things, such as having computers on the side, it wouldn't be designed like that. However, for me that is the classic and I'm not going to redesign it. That's Steven's point of view: this is the classic. The only innovation we had on *Exposure* was with [Dolby] Atmos mixing, which isn't, I suppose, entirely legitimate."

Revisiting *Exposure*, it is possible to see a stylistic link between the albums *Red* from the mid-70s and *Discipline* from the early 80s, with the two guitars playing offset then synchronous parts. Was this an idea forming in your mind during *Crimson*'s hiatus in the late 70s?

11. The original paperwork that came with the ES-345 opposite, including the instructions for using the guitar in stereo



"Was it Steve Reich? Was it Philip Glass? Was it Robert Fripp? Was it in the air? Was it world music? Anyway, all of this, my thinking, my academic interests and approach to music were in place in 1980, 1981, with the coming together of that form of King Crimson. I met Adrian [Belew] personally at The Bottom Line in New York when I went down to see Steve Reich. Bowie was there with Adrian. We went over and said hello and Adrian said, 'Let's get together for tea tomorrow,' so we did. That's how our personal connection began."

People might not be aware that you actually write these pieces out on manuscript paper.

"Yes, I do. I don't give the other players charts. I don't like the word

'bandleader' because I've never viewed myself as a bandleader. That's another endless wittering on. You have [Charles] Mingus. I understand that Mingus didn't give the other characters in the band charts. Why? Because it goes in through your eyes. You present the music you have and you say, 'If I'm playing this, what are you playing?' One of Bill's good quotes from the time was, 'It was as if Robert expected us to know what to play.' Of course. If I have to tell you what to play, why are we working together?"

"What I would aim to do is construct situations or conditions within which the talent of each of these players is given an opportunity to develop. To the extent that when Robert composed for Crimson it was writing specifically for these people

"I don't give the other players charts because it goes in through your eyes... If I have to tell you what to play, why are we working together?"

in this band to play. Not a generic piece that anyone could play, it was specifically for these people.

"There were two occasions when I presented *Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part Two* to that formation of Crimson. We had short rehearsals in Covent Garden and then we went to Richmond Athletic Club. I presented the defining *Larks'* rhythm and chords at Covent Garden and it wasn't heard, it went nowhere. Then I played it at Richmond Athletic Club and Bill and John [Wetton] leapt straight in. They had it; clicked, it worked. Most really good rock drummers in London at the time wouldn't have heard it because it wasn't written for them.

"With Crimson it was an open form of engagement, which has always been complex, always problematic and always very demanding. If you would like a band to break up, have writing rehearsals. What you do when you hit that problem is you get on the road. Then you introduce an audience into the situation, music comes to life and you'll keep going. Not that Robert is a bandleader, but in terms of practical strategies for keeping the band together and working, you move from writing rehearsals as quickly as possible into live performance."

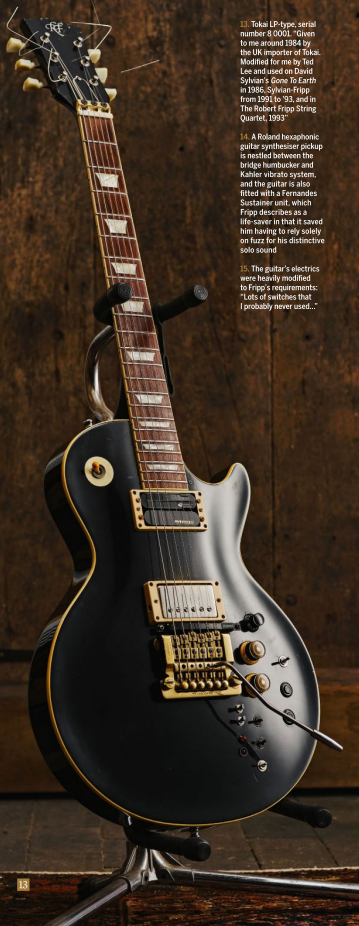
Can we talk a little about gear?

"You know I have no interest in that. I have no interest in gear at all. For example, whatever fuzzbox, whatever guitar, whatever amp I'm using I'll get my sound. Here's an example of this. I went to see Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea at Carnegie Hall: wow, breathtaking. Chick Corea is stage right, Herbie Hancock on the left. They changed places and played and their sounds went with them. I still don't understand that. How can that be? It cannot be that the sound of a piano changes. The sound of a piano is the sound of a piano, surely?"

"With Crimson I use Axe-Fx, which is very good. For basic work that I can carry myself without a team of engineers I use a Helix. Why? Because Jakko [Jakszyk] uses

12. Gibson J-45, serial number 122301. "Acquired around 1972 from Denmark Street. May have been used on *Larks' Tongues in Aspic* in 1973 but not otherwise on records"





13

13. Tokai LP-type, serial number 8 0001. "Given to me around 1984 by the UK importer of Tokai. Modified for me by Ted Lee and used on David Sylvian's *Gone To Earth* in 1986, Sylvian-Fripp from 1991 to '93, and in The Robert Fripp String Quartet, 1993"

14. A Roland hexaphonic guitar synthesiser pickup is nestled between the bridge humbucker and Kahler vibrato system, and the guitar is also fitted with a Fernandes Sustainer unit, which Fripp describes as a life-saver in that it saved him having to rely solely on fuzz for his distinctive solo sound

15. The guitar's electrics were heavily modified to Fripp's requirements: "Lots of switches that I probably never used..."



14



15



16. Fripp's current KC guitar is a Fernandes Gold Custom that has been equipped with a Seymour Duncan pickup and a Roland synth pickup in the bridge position, and a Fernandes Sustainer at the neck

17. Kahler vibrato systems are a staple on Fripp's current touring and studio guitars

18. A comprehensive switching system ensures that everything in Fripp's sonic arsenal falls directly under his control



17



18

"If you would like a band to break up, have writing rehearsals. What you do when you hit that problem is you get on the road"

a Helix and if you're working in a band with another character you aim for compatibility. The other thing is, he can tell me how to work it."

The rig you use for soundscaping hasn't changed too dramatically over the years, has it?

"It changed. I'm trying to think when it changed from the 'Solar Voyager' to the 'Sirius Probe'. It changed when I stopped using the [TC Electronic] TC2290, which I used to use for sampling. It developed high-level digital frizz. I started using the Eventide 8000s, which are astonishing things. You have 90-second samples that will repeat. You can leave them 24 hours, come back, no decay, no degeneration whatsoever. For sampling, that's astonishing. There is something irreplaceable in those early versions of the Eventides. I've no idea what the algorithms are, but wow. They shape the sound.

"In terms of the 8000s where I have bona fide quadraphonic sound, what I do is I work to ratios in delay. If you have four outputs, if a short loop is needed, one stereo pair will have 12 seconds on one side and 18 seconds on the other. You have a 3:2 ratio. On the next one I tend to have an offset of maybe 20.5 to 21 seconds.

19. The Kitchen, NYC, 1979: Fripp was using two ReVox A77 tape recorders to create intricate tape loops for a Frippertronics event, using his Stateside '59 Les Paul Custom



PHOTO BY ALLAN TANNENBAUM

20. King Crimson's latest thunderous line-up had three drummers up front

It's just essentially the same delay, which over a period of maybe half an hour will change. If I'm going for longform soundscapes it might be something like 42:49 or 42:63. On the other stereo pair to complete the quadraphonic might be 21:35 or 63:72. In other words, there are ratios within the time delays generally in terms of six or seven seconds, which lots of experience – including being booed constantly – has suggested to me this has resonance.

"I'll then go in and I have my defining programmes within the Eventide 3000s, which sends it shooting off in different directions. In terms of soundscape performances, I bypass all of that and through an Eventide Eclipse I have a solo sound. It gives me my solo voice. In the quiet moments the solo voice will come up with all of this, all in real-time.

I have had various suggestions, 'Bob, why don't you use Ableton Live?'

The answer is, when I'm doing a live performance soundscape with the rig I have, the Sirius Probe, all of the parameters I can change in real-time by hand as I am playing. I don't have to go to a computer and fiddle about. I don't have to look up here and see what's going on, I can do it all with one hand."

Are you still using the Roland GR-1?

"It's set up in my full Crimson rig. I haven't been using it recently, but I have used it certainly in 2015, probably using it for the first half of seven-, eight-piece Crimson. Why? Because it does two or three things that nothing else does. The same as the 3000s. The GR-1 has a fretless bass sound, that is breathtaking, which I would use to have fun with



Tony Levin. Tony would be doing some upright slides, I might slip in some fretless. Tony would look up wondering where the bass sound was coming from.

"It's also stunning in terms of low-end for soundscapes. It also has bell sounds, which in combination with an Eventide 3000 programme called 'In Six' makes astonishing sounds. It also has a piano sound, which I haven't really used since 2003, but which was astonishing. I used it a lot in all the Projekts."

Technology has come a long way since your early Frippertronics work.
"Yes, that's right. I've had these posts, 'Bring back the ReVox. Where is Frippertronics?' It's just not feasible. Why not? If you go back to when I used that technology you'd have to

fly it. What would happen if there was a bounce? Here's another one: you have it set up on the table, what would happen if someone walked by and bumped the table? The answer is, there would be a fluttering on the tape. You'd then have to shape the entire Frippertronics piece around the flutter. If, as in Madrid in May 1979, what happens if the ReVox the record company has brought in begins to catch fire? What do you do? These are practical examples. It's not feasible."

Would it be true to say that *The Guitar Circle* book you have coming out in September isn't what you might call a conventional guitar tutor?

"Correct. It's the attitude. It's less what you do, it's more how you do and why you do. We've now had

*"People who have a background in martial arts feel an immediate affinity with *Guitar Craft* – it's developing a personal discipline"*

guitar courses since March 1985 and the book is essentially a report on the history of *Guitar Craft* and the *Guitar Circle* to date. If you're looking for a book of guitar exercises, this is not the way to go.

"People who have a background in martial arts feel an immediate affinity with *Guitar Craft* in the *Guitar Circle*. One character said to a pal of mine it's like martial arts with a guitar. I've a little tai chi, some muay Thai. Here, your response is governed by the intentionality of the person with whom you're sparring. If you wait for them to make a move you're on the floor. What you respond to is their intention. How we respond to someone's intention before there's any movement at all is a subtle thing. How to explain that? That falls under the heading of 'cosmic horse shit'. The point is, it can very easily be experienced.

"*Guitar Craft* was basically developing a personal discipline with a guitar. The *Guitar Circle* is developing a personal discipline within others. We're learning to work with others and with oneself. In a sense it's a maturing and a development within a social context.

"One of the difficulties I've had doing interviews over a period of 53 years with guitar magazines is that just about everything that is real with me in terms of how I experience and engage with music and other musicians is subtle. If I'm explaining it in bold terms, it falls under the heading of cosmic horse shit. One of the important principles in this is 'accept nothing that someone is telling you, presenting you, judge by your own experience'. When someone comes into a *Guitar Circle*, don't take Robert's view of what might be happening for yourself, what is *your* experience?"

21. "I have no interest in gear at all..." Fripp sits in front of his latest King Crimson rig



Robert Fripp's 32-disc boxset, *Exposures*, is out now, via DGM/Panegyric. *The Guitar Circle* book will be released on 1 September via Panegyric Publishing in association with Discipline Global Mobile www.dgmlive.com

*"My personal difficulties
with any Crimson
musician have been
if they see themselves
as somehow coming
ahead of the other
players or the music"*



WIN! A 32-disc 'Exposures' boxset Worth £166!

A veritable plenitude of Fripp's solo material, both live and in the studio

After King Crimson ground to a temporary halt in the mid-70s, Fripp sought refuge in NYC, working with a whole raft of different artists including Daryl Hall and Peter Gabriel. The new boxset catalogues his time there and includes Steven Wilson and David Singleton remixes of the *Exposure*, *Under Heavy Manners*/*God Save The Queen* and *Let The Power Fall* albums, which are presented in stereo, quad and DTS 5.1 Surround Sound.

All of this, plus comprehensive notes and sundry memorabilia, could be yours by correctly answering the brain teaser below...

The process that powered Robert Fripp's 1970s solo concerts where he created loops using two ReVox tape recorders was nicknamed what?

- a) Frippertronics
- b) Elecfrillery
- c) Fripploops

Closing Date:

15 September 2022

MAKE SURE YOU ENTER AT

<https://bit.ly/git488fripp>
BEFORE THE CLOSING DATE

Good luck!



Terms and conditions: Competition closes at 23:59 GMT+1 on 15 September 2022. By taking part in this competition you agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and the Competition Rules: 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.

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EVOLUTION OF THE STRATOCASTER

It's often said that Leo Fender got it right the first time – but, actually, he got *most* of it right the first time and then figured out the rest as he went along. Join us as we examine how the Stratocaster evolved throughout the pre-CBS era

Words Huw Price Photography Olly Curtis & Joby Sessions

Pre-CBS Strats are commonly divided into 50s and 60s types, or maple-'board and rosewood-'board models, but there were plenty of variations within those categories. Vintage Strats can have a mix of features and parts, which don't always coincide with the 'official' specs for any given year. Even so, for this overview of the pre-CBS years, we're focusing on four years that mark key stages in the evolution of the Stratocaster: 1954, 1956, 1959 and 1962.

1954: The Story Begins

Like the earliest Broadcasters and Esquires, the very first Strats, made between March and May 1954, are often described as 'prototypes' – but, in comparison, they were fully formed. Fender sold a significant number before the 'official' launch in October, with a few minor changes having been made over the intervening months. 'Prototype' neck plates were blank because serial numbers were stamped into spring covers with circular string-access holes. There's often a notch on the bottom of the bridge pickup cavity to create clearance for the wires. They simply chiselled out the wood and the 'worm rout' came later.

At first, Strats had solid-shaft 100k potentiometers fitted with narrow skirted

control knobs. Made with marbled plastic, these 'tall boy' knobs were soon replaced by polystyrene versions in the shape we know today, and pots were changed to 250k units. Early switch tips were a different shape, too, and are called 'football' tips – American football, naturally. Pickup covers from this era tend to have round rather than square top corners, but they were brittle meaning many cracked apart.

1954 Stratocasters feature rounded-over headstock edges and the necks felt quite full, but the 'one-piece' construction with the rear truss-rod channel was unchanged from the Broadcaster's design.

The Strat featured the first Fender pickups with staggered slugs. These fixed magnets were cut to various lengths and arranged to optimise string-to-string balance. For the 1954 stagger, the G slug

was lower than the D slug. However, Fender soon realised that players were increasingly favouring a plain G and lengthened the G slug accordingly. 1954 Strats also had Alnico III magnets with a 0.2-inch diameter.

Although Fender's pre-1958 Sunbursts are generally classed as two-tone, the only genuine two-tone sunburst Strats were sprayed early on. Fender simplified the process by spraying the sides and the 'burst edges with tobacco brown and then covered the body with a clear topcoat. Over the years, these topcoats would darken from exposure to UV light and turn to a honey amber colour. By the latter part of 1954 Fender was spraying the fronts and backs yellow, but the topcoats still darkened to such an extent that the yellow may only be discernible under the pickguard. Late-'54 sunbursts can appear very similar to the earlier ones.

1956: Refined Changes

Although superficially similar to the '54 and '55 models, the Stratocaster had become far more refined by 1956. The changes Fender made focused on the neck profile and, more significantly, the body.

Getting a smooth and flat finish on ash is a time-consuming process, and nitrocellulose lacquer will soon sink into the grain. Most manufacturers seek to streamline

The very first Strats are often described as 'prototypes' – but they were fully formed

1954 pickups had Alnico III magnets, a low G slug and brittle covers with rounded top corners. The finish is a genuine tobacco brown/amber two-tone sunburst





1. The tone knobs on this '54 Strat are 'tall boys' with straighter sides and narrow skirts. The volume knob is a replacement, but the 'football' switch tip survives

2. The earliest Strats had rounded headstock edges and an elongated walnut truss-rod plug

3. Small round string-holes and a stamped serial number appear on this pre-September 1954 spring cover



3

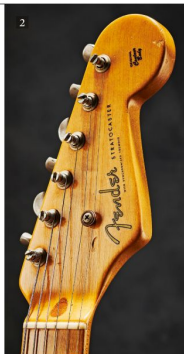
production, so later in 1956 Fender decided to transition from ash to alder, a wood that is easy to carve and doesn't have the open-grain structure of ash, which makes it easier – and therefore cheaper – to achieve a professional-quality finish. Of course, alder sounds different from ash, and players describe a fuller midrange with less of the bright highs, deep lows and lively dynamics that go with ash. While Fender did continue to use ash for Strat bodies, it reserved them for the white blonde finish.

Exaggerated body contours are another defining feature of this year. On a late-1956 body (as pictured on the opposite page), notice how the top contour tapers to an extremely thin edge. It's the same with the tummy tuck, and the overall effect enhances the Strat's already streamlined and sculpted look.

Also around this time, Fender began staining Strat bodies yellow rather than spraying yellow coats. The company also started using an alkyl resin sealer called Homoclad in order to reduce the quantity of expensive lacquer needed to achieve an even and glossy surface.

Sunburst Strats from this particular era were actually three-tone rather than two-tone. After applying the stain and Homoclad, Fender sprayed medium-brown around the edges. This subtle medium-brown shading smoothed the transition from the tobacco brown to the yellow in the centre. And with the 'burst sprayed, clear-gloss topcoats were applied.

1956 necks had a slimmer profile, with a soft V at the nut end that transitioned to a more rounded feel as they progressed



2

Exaggerated body contours are a defining feature of 1956. On a late-'56 body the top contour tapers to an extremely thin edge

towards the body. Many players find this profile the most comfortable of all the maple-board necks, although the rounded early ones and the fatter and harder V profile of 1957 also have their fans.

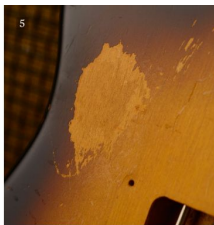
In this year's models, Fender had retained the late-1954 slug stagger, but the pickups featured Alnico V slugs with a 0.192-inch diameter. The potentiometers were Stackpole 250k units (manufacturer code: 304) with split shafts, and the pale-coloured 'phone book' tone capacitor remained the same.

Throughout most of 1956, Fender also retained the white polystyrene plastics, but the company began phasing in a different type of plastic towards the end of the year. Unlike the polystyrene parts, this plastic (possibly nylon) tended to yellow and darken with use. Consequently, some 1956 examples feature a mixture of plastic parts – typically early knobs with later pickup covers.

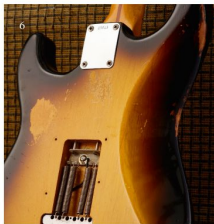
Other 1956 features can be seen on the headstock. Although Fender had been using Kluson tuners from the start, 1956 was the first year for the single line of lettering along



4



5



6



7



8

4. By late 1956 Fender was staining bodies yellow, and alder had replaced ash as the standard body wood

5. Fender sprayed medium-brown lacquer around the edges prior to the tobacco brown, so this finish is actually a three-tone sunburst

6. 1956 bodies are extremely contoured, with the top chamfer and tummy tuck terminating in a fine edge

7. The walnut plug is almost spherical, and this odd detail placement is occasionally seen during this period

8. The polystyrene plastic parts usually retain their white appearance – unlike the later Fender plastics



9. The red part of this three-tone 'burst' has almost faded out on the front

10. The walnut 'skunk stripe' disappeared with the introduction of the rosewood fretboard. Notice how the red lacquer is less faded

11. 'Clay' dots replaced the black dots, and the bottom of the slab fretguard is now completely flat

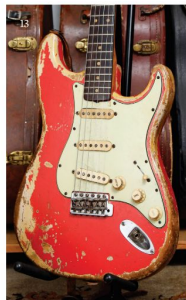




12

12. This very early slab 'board' example retains the one-ply white pickguard. Notice how the plastics have yellowed slightly

13. Green celluloid nitrate pickguards featured from 1959 to 1965, and this example has a typical crack by the neck pickup



the centre of the gear casing. You can tell if a set of 'single line' Klusons is correct for 1956 (and 1957) if they have the single line and a 'PAT APPLIED' stamp on the underside. Also look out for a small and rounded walnut truss-rod plug shaped much like a Dunlop Stubby Jazz Pick. These are installed so close to the nut that the maple directly above them often cracks. Lastly, Fender replaced the round string-retainer with the 'butterfly' version later in 1956.

1959: The Golden Years

To say 1959 was a golden vintage for Gibson, Gretsch and Fender would be an understatement. And it was during this year that the Strat acquired a couple of important features that would go on to become synonymous with the 1960s pre-CBS models.

In 1958, the Jazzmaster superseded the Stratocaster as Fender's premium electric guitar. Although the prototypes had necks with maple 'boards, the production models had Brazilian rosewood fretboards, and the Stratocaster was 'upgraded' around May 1959. This significant change involved a new approach to neck construction.

For 'one-piece' maple necks, Fender routed a curved truss-rod channel into the back. This also meant drilling through to the channel from the headstock to anchor the truss rod. Both the headstock hole and the truss-rod channel were filled with

walnut – quite an involved process. Having a separate rosewood fretboard that was glued onto the maple neck allowed Fender to rout the truss-rod channel from the front, so there was no need to drill through the headstock or make a super-accurate filler strip. And once the truss rod was installed, the fretboard covered everything up. To fit the new rosewood fretboards, the front of the neck was left flat rather than radiused, as the one-piece maple necks had been. This allowed flat rosewood fretboards to be glued on top, and the rosewood was then radiused and slotted for frets. Consequently, these are called 'slab 'board' necks.

We can only speculate as to Fender's reason for the switch to the rosewood. Perhaps it was an attempt to make the guitars look more upmarket in addition to streamlining the production process. Fender would also have been aware that lacquer was wearing off the maple fretboards with alarming speed, with the exposed wood darkening and appearing grubby. And although today's vintage guitar enthusiasts may appreciate that played-in patina, guitarists in the 1950s had different aesthetic values and would not have appreciated their expensive and relatively new guitars looking so scruffy. Fender didn't need to spray the new rosewood, and as a darker timber it didn't show the dirt in the same way.

Perhaps the '59 switch to rosewood 'boards was to make the guitars look more upmarket...

The black marker dots that Fender had been using up to that point wouldn't have been visible against the dark rosewood, so they swapped to 'clay dots' for the fretboard and side markers. There's no clear consensus on the exact material that Fender used, but it may have been some sort of epoxy resin – much like plumber's putty. It's easy to press into pre-drilled holes, sets fast and can be sanded flush with ease.

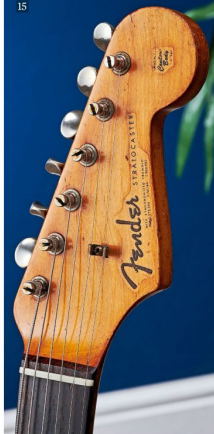
Although the earliest slab-'board' Strats retained the single-ply white pickguard, Fender soon introduced a three-ply pickguard made from celluloid nitrate, along with a full sized-aluminium shielding plate. The screw count went from eight to 11, with the body's control cavity acquiring a 'shoulder' adjacent to the switch to accommodate an extra screw in that area. These are the famous green 'guards, so-called because of their minty appearance. Period photos show

14. Chris Buck's refinished and heavily worn 1962 Strat features narrow diameter pickup slugs and heavily aged plastic parts

15. You can spot a veneer 'board' by the curve in the rosewood behind the nut. Slab 'boards' appear flat

16. By 1962, Fender was installing 'single line' Kluson tuners with a patent number on the underside

17. Fender introduced the veneer 'board' in July 1962, which makes this one of the very earliest examples





that they were green when new, although many have darkened considerably over the years. Another characteristic of this celluloid nitrate material is that it would shrink dramatically, which is why so many vintage pickguard screws will no longer go in straight. The celluloid was also prone to cracking – often adjacent to the neck pickup screw on the low-E side and pointed tip beneath the cutaway.

In 1958, Fender altered its sunburst finish to include a red layer between the dark brown and yellow areas. This continued through to 1959 and beyond, and it's common for most of the red to have faded out. The 1959 Strats also inherited the D profile of 1958, and it became progressively thinner through the years.

1962: Behind The Veneer

The last significant structural change occurred in July 1962 when Fender ceased production of slab rosewood fretboards, and began radiusing the maple and glueing a relatively thin layer of rosewood on top. This new type of construction is called the 'veneer board' and it coincided with a C-shaped profile that has remained very popular among players.

There has been much debate about Fender's move to veneer. The company itself claimed that some slab-board necks had twisted and that the veneer method would prove more stable. Given the usual

"The last significant change was in 1962 when Fender ceased production of slab rosewood fretboards"

stability of laminated timber and the huge numbers of slab-board necks that have remained straight for decades, this seems up there with 'heavy wood improves sustain' in the pantheon of spurious rationalisations. Perhaps Fender realised it could get two fretboards out of every Brazilian rosewood 'slab' by sawing them straight down the middle. And by radiusing the cheaper maple, they wouldn't have to turn significant quantities of expensive rosewood into sawdust.

Most timbers bend quite easily along the grain when they're cut thinly, and rosewood is no exception. The earlier veneer boards are slightly thicker, so maybe later ones were thinned to make them more pliable and minimise the chances of splitting. We can report that glueing and clamping rosewood veneer onto a 7.25-inch radius neck is relatively

easy, with no soaking or steaming necessary. We would assume Fender did it the same way, and the result is a neck that resonates more freely than the slab-board version.

Around mid-'62, Stratocaster pickups shifted to a slightly altered spec, with narrower 0.1875-inch slugs that focused the magnetic field more directly under the individual strings. Narrower slugs also created space for extra windings, so pickups from this era tend to be hotter than 1950s examples. Bare Knuckle Pickups' founder Tim Mills describes the tone as having a really woody snap, with a punchy but sweet response, real weight and a firmer and more controlled bass end – and the company's own Veneer Board set is made to these specs.

End Of An Era

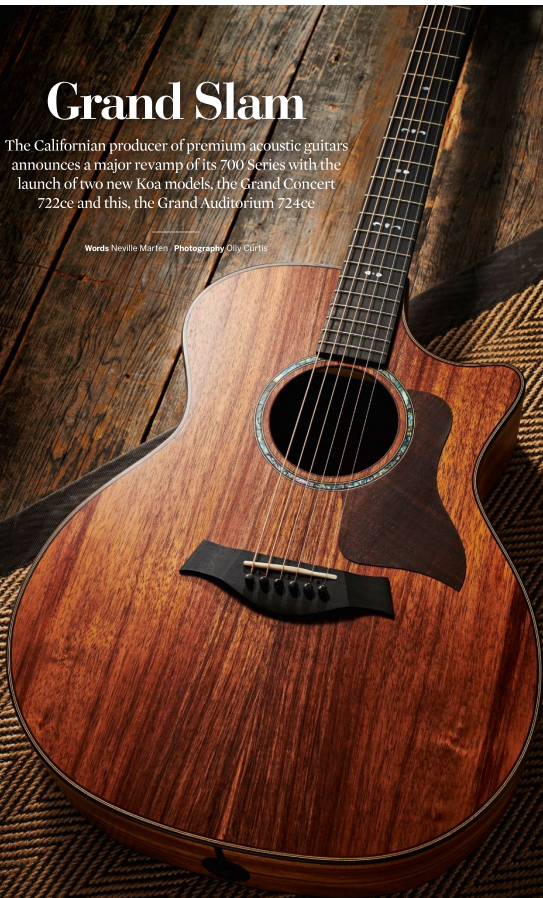
In closing we must reiterate that changes at Fender happened gradually and parts were never wasted. Consequently, totally original vintage Strats do show up with a mixture of parts that don't necessarily conform to the official specifications. Of course, the Stratocaster continued to evolve through the 1960s and into the early 70s, but that's another story... ☐

Guitarist would like to thank Andrew Raymond and Chris Buck for allowing us to photograph their 1956 and 1962 Strats respectively

Grand Slam

The Californian producer of premium acoustic guitars announces a major revamp of its 700 Series with the launch of two new Koa models, the Grand Concert 722ce and this, the Grand Auditorium 724ce

Words Neville Martin Photography Oily Curtis





TAYLOR 724CE KOA £3,799

CONTACT Taylor Guitars PHONE 0800 23750011 WEB www.taylorguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 Grand Concert, Grand Auditorium. What's the difference?

Taylor says the Grand Auditorium bears refined proportions that fall between a dreadnought and a Grand Concert. While the bigger dreadnought was considered a flatpicker's guitar, and the smaller Grand Concert catered to fingerstylists, the GA was designed to deliver on both fronts.

2 What type of wood is koa?

Acacia koa is a timber found in Hawaii. Taylor has always used koa for certain guitars but usually the highly figured variety. The koa used on the new 700 Series is not highly flamed yet is no less striking in its appearance. Ethically sourced, it's also said to have the punch of mahogany and a top-end akin to maple, making it a perfect all-round acoustic guitar timber.

3 What are the knobs on the body?

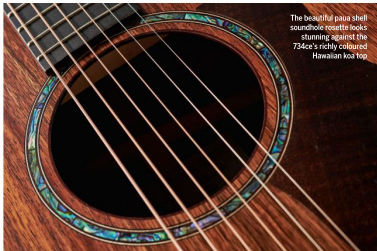
These are the controls for the Expression System 2 that replaced the original ES. That was thought to be rather low in output so the ES2 is 25 per cent hotter. The three black knobs are volume, treble and bass. The tone controls are active and when set to their centre positions are 'flat'. Turning them above this point adds treble or bass, which in turn affects how the mids respond.

The guitar industry has a lot to thank Taylor for. Since Bob and his partner Kurt Listug founded the company in 1974 it has strived to bring superlative build quality to an industry that was sitting on its laurels and, it could be said, living off past glories. The following decade saw PRS do exactly the same thing to the electric guitar world, and subsequently the quality of almost any instrument you pick up today is not only superb but owes at least something to these two innovators.

Of course, this was due in no small part to the introduction of modern technology such as CAD design, computer-controlled machinery and laser-cutting technology, all of which figure in the instrument we have here for review.

The 700 Series is one of Taylor's most important since it's based in the big-selling upper midrange of the company's output. It incorporates a range of body sizes and styles, and until recently used the tried-and-trusted rosewood and spruce construction formula. However, the company has just revamped the range with the introduction of two handsome new guitars, the 722ce Grand Concert and our magnificent-looking 724ce Grand Auditorium, both in Hawaiian koa wood.

Since master designer Andy Powers' arrival at the company (and his subsequent rise to the top), many small but shape-shifting changes have been made to Taylor's instruments – mainly inside, but here visually, too.



The beautiful paisley shell soundhole rosette looks stunning against the 724ce's richly coloured Hawaiian koa top



1

1. Taylor's curvaceous but pointy bridge, pickguard and headstock design work superbly well together, and are now as recognisable as those of older Gibson, Martin and even Fender guitars

2. The ebony fingerboard and its 20 medium-fine frets are beautifully finished, the simple mother-of-pearl inlays complementing the paua shell soundhole rosette. Koa doesn't require extra bling!

Taylor has worked closely with its timber-sourcing company in Hawaii, not only to initiate a koa sustainability programme, but also to use parts of the tree that don't contain the highly flamed grain used on the company's Koa Series, but which are nonetheless attractive in their own right. In fact, should you purchase one online, make sure the guitar you order is the one you actually receive, as each one can look radically different from the next.

Hewn from solid 'select koa' as Taylor calls this grade, the 724ce (cutaway electric) also features a mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and headstock overlay, Indian rosewood binding around the body and soundhole, plus a dark-stained maple pickguard. The soundhole purfling ring is of genuine paua shell, while the fingerboard 'fountain' and peghead inlays are real mother-of-pearl. It's a bonanza of natural materials that hangs together superbly well.



2

The Taylor 724ce features a bonanza of natural materials that hangs together superbly well

There's a lot going on inside the 724ce, too, and let's start with the bracing. Andy Powers' V-style pattern is intended to provide a range of benefits compared with the traditional X-style bracing that has been in use for a century or more. The V shape extends from each side of the soundhole, converging at a point down by the end block, with a central cross bar and a couple of extra struts fanning out from each side. The reinforcing bridge plate and slightly angled struts on the guitar's back complete the picture.

THE RIVALS

Takamine's EF508KC (£1,099) is a fine-looking cutaway electro, built for the stage. Its body is handcrafted in koa, with a mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, and sporting the excellent-sounding CT4BII CoolTube preamp.

Breedlove's equally fine Pursuit Exotic S Concert (£1,599) has an attractive cutaway body with sustainably sourced solid koa top and layered 'EcoToneWood' back and sides, with softer centre core and koa veneer on top. It also carries Fishman's acknowledged Presys 1 pickup and preamp, and has a mahogany neck and rosewood fingerboard.

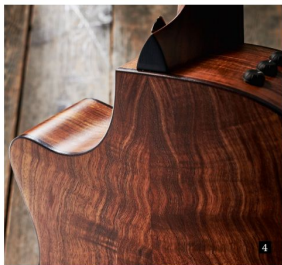
If you'd rather stay with a Taylor build and have a little more cash to spend, then take a look at the K24ce (£4,195), which sits in the company's Koa Series and comes with highly figured, gloss-finished koa top, back and rims. The West African ebony fingerboard on its mahogany neck features a pearl 'spring vine' inlay, plus the guitar comes with V bracing and the well-liked Expression 2 pickup and preamp system.

Powers says the V bracing stiffens the guitar body along its length, allowing the strings to vibrate for longer, thus increasing sustain while not impairing volume. This stiffness is also reported to largely eliminate extraneous vibrations or 'interference' that compromises the guitar's apparent 'in-tuneness'. It's a complicated balancing act that every bracing pattern has to overcome, but the V system is said to suit the koa construction particularly well.

The 724ce is coated in an ultra-thin, open-pore matt finish that looks fantastic; it doesn't reflect the light away from the almost glowing koa top, back and slides, and feels great to the touch, too. Brushed bronze tuners, easy-change battery compartment, black Tusq nut and white Tusq bridge saddle with inlaid ebony pins, all add to an instrument that certainly looks the business. But does it cut the mustard in the other departments? Let's see.

Feel & Sounds

One of Taylor's great strengths has always been the ease with which its necks play. There's something about their soft V-profile and easy action that makes for such a friendly playing experience. The action on our 724ce is low and slinky, and its 0.012-gauge Elixir strings feel tactile and unresisting under the fingertips. The neck's 44mm (1.74-inch) nut width is great for easy open chording and all those 'twiddly bits'



3. The new 700 Series koa guitars come with an ultra-thin matt finish that doesn't reflect light away from the beautiful wood. Note the dark-stained maple pickguard

4. The body's back is bound with rosewood, while the front's edging is a mix of rosewood and maple



5



6

we pickers love to throw in. Of course, with its attractive Venetian cutaway, top-end access – should you delve up the dusty end – is all but limitless.

On a strap the guitar feels comfy. It's not a small box by any means, but the Grand Auditorium's body feels easier to throw around than, say, a dreadnought or jumbo. Of course, Taylor has always fitted a strap button on the heel's underside (the bolted-on neck prohibits heel cap positioning), so the instruments are stage ready from the get-go.

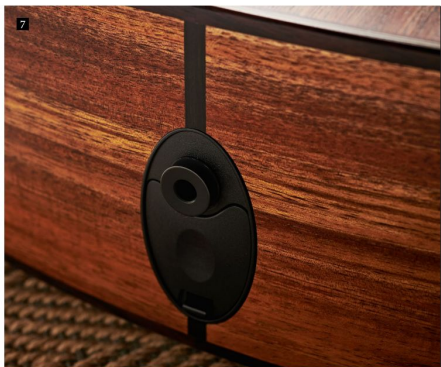
Acoustically, our koa Taylor has a strident but warm and welcoming voice. There's no thunderous bass evident, but more of a balanced lower-mid hum that ties in very musically with the musical upper-mids and sweet trebles that the guitar exhibits. Fingerpicked tones are crisp and direct, while strumming with a medium pick elicits a wash of finely tuned chords that makes the perfect bed to any vocal performance, but wouldn't be obtrusive in the context of other acoustic instruments. Not only that, it's a superb sofa-noodler, too.

Compared with a Gibson dreadnought and a Martin OM that we have to hand, it's a different voice entirely. Where the Martin sparkles and the Gibson bellows, the Taylor sits neatly in the middle, with a sound entirely its own (if anything, we detected a touch of the Lowden about it, and that's no bad thing at all).

5. Taylor's Expression System 2's volume, treble and bass controls are well-liked and intuitive to use

6. The 724ce's visual appointments include an elegant 'fountain' headstock inlay, and brushed bronze Schaller tuners

7. Taylor has always been about building user-friendly instruments. This goes for the easy-access flip-top battery compartment and combined strap-button/ input-jack socket



TAYLOR 724CE KOA

PRICE: £3,799 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway, electro-acoustic

BACK AND SIDES: Solid Hawaiian koa

TOP: Solid Hawaiian koa

NECK: Mahogany, with soft V profile

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm

FINGERBOARD: West African ebony

FRETS: 20, fine

HARDWARE: Taylor brushed-bronze enclosed tuners, strap button and endpin jack, flip-open battery compartment situated in endpin plate

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2 with professional audio grade preamp, body-mounted volume, treble and bass controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.1/4.6

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: Taylor 722ce Koa (£3,799) is the slightly smaller Grand Concert version carrying similar specs to the 724ce

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Very thin skin, clear matt

Although we were not able to plug the guitar into a PA or acoustic amp, the Expression System 2 pickup and preamp has been around for a while and is a tried-and-trusted affair. And, like all things Taylor, it's designed for ease of use. Three adjustable sensors sit on the top's underside and behind the saddle (not beneath it in its slot). This move was made to better reflect and transmit more of the instrument's natural sound. With simple volume, treble and bass knobs mounted on the top bout next to the neck heel, it's an intuitive system that you'll probably set once and then forget. And what's not to like about that?

Verdict

Without explicitly saying as such, Andy Powers has gradually been trying to rid Taylor's guitars of their 'very nice but slightly bland' sonic reputation. There's never been any doubt about their integrity of construction – examine our 724ce with a magnifying glass and we'd challenge you to find a flaw – but 'personality' is not a word that you'd often hear directed towards the Taylor tone. Well, that's all changing. We've played a range of Taylor guitars recently and each new model has proved to be both an enjoyable and musically rewarding experience.

Taylor itself, its dealers and players alike, will be very excited about these new koa instruments. Koa's tone is usually held to

The move towards this beautiful and sustainable timber must be applauded. It's a joy to behold

improve quickly with use, and if they start off sounding as good as this one, should blossom into something very special indeed.

Remembering *Guitarist's* first ever Taylor review by Martyn Booth many moons ago, we were flabbergasted by the build quality, the likes of which we'd never seen on an acoustic guitar. Nothing's changed there; if anything, it's got even better. And if Powers and his team continue to create instruments that look, play and sound as good as this one, then there'll be no stopping this company. We have to hand it to Bob and Kurt, too, for taking a back seat in the business and letting Andy get on with the task of taking Taylor on the next leg of its journey – albeit under their watchful eye!

The move towards this beautiful and sustainable timber, too, must be applauded. That it makes for stunning-looking and sounding instruments, all tied together with Taylor's unsurpassed build, is not only a joy to behold but to play and hear, too. These guitars aren't exactly cheap, but we think they'll gain a big following. **A**

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

PROS Virtually unmatched build, fit and finish; fantastic playability; organic and rewarding tones

CONS Slightly pricey, but the model streets at around £3,150, which is about right



A Taste Of Honey

Andy Powers discusses the character, clarity and 'chatoyance' of koa, the world-class tonewood of the Taylor 724ce

Words David Mead

We were obviously very impressed with the Taylor 724ce in our review, and a large part of its glorious tone has to be put down to the koa used in its construction. Koa is a honey-coloured wood that is indigenous to Hawaii and is known for its sweetness, warmth and clarity. Taylor has its own managed plantation in Hawaii and, as it turns out, this particular body wood seems to be a favourite for Taylor's new president and CEO Andy Powers...

"It's absolutely stunningly beautiful," he tells us. "Even as I walk toward a chunk of koa, before I can touch it, before I can hear it, before I can smell it, I can see it from a long distance away and it strikes me as one of the most beautiful of all woods. The colours, the variegation... it has this luminosity that wood needs refer to as 'chatoyance', kind of similar to the way we look at a seashell, this three-dimensional reflective quality. So there's that aspect."

"Get a little closer to it and I can feel it, touch it and hold it, it has a beautiful texture, it has what I think of as a Goldilocks range of wood," he continues. "It's not too hard, it's not too dense, but it's dense enough and it's hard enough, it's strong enough. It has all

the great working characteristics that make it a world-class tonewood. But what I think is even more interesting is that there's this innate musicality in the way that it shapes the midrange of a note. It ends up being this beautiful organic quality. You strike a note and it just sounds sweet; I always picture a

"You strike a note and it just sounds sweet; I always picture a piece of ripe fruit..."

piece of ripe fruit or something where it's just got this perfect shape to it and I love that quality. So by the time you put all those factors together it's pretty easy to see why any guitar maker or player loves it. It's a great wood to build guitars from."

Did you have a sound in mind when you thought of using koa for the new 700 Series instruments?

"With the new 700 Series guitars, that was a [slightly] different sound, even to the other koa guitars that we've made. We've been building koa guitars for years and we do a

lot of them. Typically, we lean on this almost burnished level of refinement to the sound. It's just so smooth. It sounds the same way it looks; it's a beautifully polished out guitar and the sound is equally polished."

"In this new 700 Series, for both the Grand Auditorium and the Grand Concert models, I wanted a little different flavour out of the koa where I'd describe it as a little more organic, more direct kind of a sound. Partly that's a result of the bracing architecture, partly it's the thickness of the wood, partly it's the finish that we're putting on that wood. So the combination of all those elements makes this a little more dynamic, it's a little more player-reflective. It has a less inherent damping factor, so all the overtone structure, all the touch-sensitivity of the player's fingertips – a lot of that aspect is clearer than it's ever been out of a koa guitar."

Compared to spruce, how does koa tend to mature as a wood over time?

"It's very similar, actually, there are a lot of parallels to it. With spruce you'll hear a dramatic change over what I like to think of as the first string change. You put a set of strings on a guitar, you start playing it and

it's exciting, it's fun, because it's a new guitar and that's great. You play it every day for a few days or a few weeks and then you go to change that initial set of strings and you put a fresh set on and, 'Whoa,' it's changed a lot. Because now you're hearing it fresh and new and you're hearing how much it's developed in those first few weeks.

"Koa is similar to that. In my opinion it takes a little longer in some cases, sometimes it's very similar to spruce, but the same effect is very much applicable here where, the first few weeks of playing that guitar, it opens up dramatically. And then, over the next two years, it will open up and warm up and become a ripper, sweeter sound – more touch-sensitive, more dynamic range, better volume... it just continues to get better and better at producing musical notes. The sharp corners kinda get rounded off the sound."

Could you tell us about Taylor's koa plantation in Hawaii?

"What we're doing is both reforestation and planting, as well as cleaning up older forest projects and using the wood that is suitable for guitars. And so it's kind of a multi-pronged transition effort. We think

"We're cleaning up [older] projects to make them more usable and sustainable"

of it as a wood farm. If farmers plant a field of wheat, they plant in the spring, they harvest in the fall – it's a two-and-a-half to three-season effort. You go from seed to maturity. For wood, it's decades long in order for that to happen and so if we start planting today, which we are, the trees we plant now won't be ready until my grandkids are building instruments.

"So what we're doing is transitioning because some efforts were started a long while ago, but those forests never took off because we've learned more than when we first started these projects. A lot of those efforts were culturally important, they were emotionally important, but they weren't supported with the type of scientific background to turn it into useful material. A lot of those materials are still difficult to work with and so we're cleaning up those projects to make them more usable as well as sustainable for the future.

"It's kind of this transition era. Let's see if we can work with what's already here and make this better at the same time. Let's start deliberately planting because we know the time is going to go by and in 50 years' time somebody is going to be glad that we did this work."



Koa is uniquely indigenous to Hawaii – is there anything else like it?

"It's an acacia species, so there are some other similar woods that are very closely related to koa. The blackwood that grows in Australia and Tasmania, that's also an acacia. That wood also grows here in Southern California and it was commonly planted in urban environments as a shade tree, so it's pretty to look at. So there's that wood, which is somewhat physically similar – it's got family resemblance. But acacia koa as a species, that is specifically a Hawaiian wood."

Can we expect further koa instruments from Taylor in the near future?

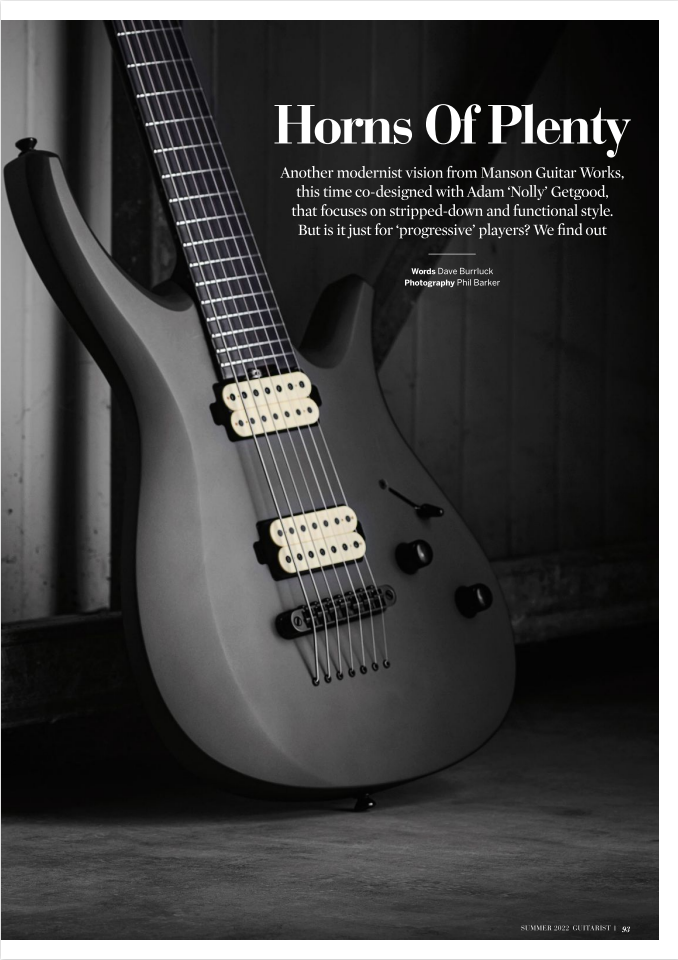
"Yeah. When you have a great material that is adaptable for different designs you should use it. There are a lot of different ways you can work with it. There are different styles of guitar, even now within the redesigned 700 Series – it's obviously a very different flavour and a very different sound that's coming out of the same basic shape of guitar in the same basic size, using the same basic material. So there are a lot of different ways you can go with it." ■

www.taylorguitars.com



Top: Planting a koa tree at the Hawaii plantation, where Taylor is "reforesting, planting and cleaning up older forest projects" for future instruments
Above: A two-year-old koa tree





Horns Of Plenty

Another modernist vision from Manson Guitar Works, this time co-designed with Adam 'Nolly' Getgood, that focuses on stripped-down and functional style. But is it just for 'progressive' players? We find out

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker



MANSON GUITAR WORKS ORYX VI £2,899

CONTACT **Manson Guitar Works** PHONE **01364 653751** WEB www.mansonguitarworks.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 So, is this a signature guitar?**
The ORYX is described as "an all-new range of Manson Guitars... designed and built in collaboration with Adam 'Nolly' Getgood of Periphery and GetGood Drums fame". So, no, as we'll learn, this model is very much a co-design.
- 2 It uses DiMarzios by the look of it...**
C'mon, this is a British endeavour and while the double-cream humbuckers might ape classic DiMarzio style these Polymath pickups have again been designed in collaboration with Nolly, this time by Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle Pickups. We discussed their development in our New Wave cover feature back in issue 479.
- 3 Any tricky switching?**
Manson worked with Free-Way to create a custom three-position lever pickup selector switch that offers its usual six pickup selections. But it allows you to instantly move from series humbucking to parallel humbucking without any additional mini-toggle or pull-switches.

Think of Manson guitars and you invariably imagine some tech-loaded instrument that satisfies the likes of Matt Bellamy. Of course, its designs are not all so expansive – or expensive – and, via a hook-up with Cort, instruments such as the Meta Series start around £569. Moving up from those, the MA Series is fabricated in the Czech Republic then assembled and finely set up at Manson Guitar Works HQ in Devon. Up until now, only a very limited number of special models have been made completely on these shores, but the new ORYX – which is available as six- and seven-string models – changes that as the first unlimited model to be made entirely in the UK. Here, we're looking at the final production prototype.

The new instrument is visually very different from the Manson guitars we've got to know over the past decades. The single-cutaway Tele-esque body with its extended shoulder of the MB Matt Bellamy models and the more conventional style of the MA guitars is switched here in favour of what seems like a very function-led *double-cut* design with a long upper horn that extends to just about the position of the 12th fret. A much smaller and slightly out-turning treble horn enables very easy access to the upper-position frets, helped by the cut-down heel.

It's effectively a simple slab body made from two-piece alder with quite large chamfers to the forearm area and a ribcage

cut on the back. The horns have similar-style chamfers, and the wood-working, not to mention the faultless satin black finish, is superbly done. It's one of those rare designs that really doesn't make you think of something that was designed before 1965. Which is all a part of the concept: it's a forward-looking guitar yet it comes across very much as a working tool.

That satin black finish also covers the neck back and headstock; there's no visible wood on the guitar at all. Although underneath you'll find a hard maple slab-sawn neck that's faced with a jet black Richlite fingerboard and superbly fretted with Jescar stainless-steel frets on the 305mm (12-inch) face. There are no visible fret tangs on the fingerboard edges, which have been smoothly rolled, and there are no face markers, either, just glow-in-the-dark side dots. Typically for a Manson design, the truss rod is adjustable via a spoke wheel at the body end of the neck.

Hardware is all black-plated and quite minimal in that there's no tailpiece. The strings anchor Tele-style in recessed cups at the back and gently slope up to the Tone Pros tune-o-matic. This is recessed into the body, giving a relatively low string height above it – just over 12mm from the top of the G string to the body face, for example. You begin to realise how every small detail has really been considered, something we discuss with Manson's head luthier, Tim Stark, in the pages that follow this review.

THE NAME GAME

Creating a new guitar is one thing, giving it a name is another...

"We discussed many options for the name," laughs Tim Stark. "First, we looked at bird names, specifically owls, but we couldn't settle on one. As the guitar progressed and we got into the intricate details of the design, the horns kept coming into our thoughts. We went through blade names, birds, Egyptian gods and, one day, Nolly said they reminded him of the horns of an Oryx, a type of antelope. We both loved that name, and it stuck. Nolly was keen to have a link to an animal of some kind, I think. We actually called it Project X when we first started, so it had that X sound, which we all really liked, too."



1

1. Despite discussing a glued-in neck and a neck-through design, Manson settled on a traditional bolt-on design here, although the heel is cut away to improve top-fret accessibility



2

The reverse headstock angles back so there's no need for any string trees. The strings pass in a straight line to the rear-lock Gotoh tuners – slightly recessed into the headstock face – which have been modded with knurled aluminium knobs and create a super-smooth, almost fine-tuning feel. Not that we used them much; this is a very stable guitar, tuning-wise. You'll also notice a soft-rubber string dampener directly behind the perfectly cut Graph Tech nut to remove any 'dead string' overtones, especially with high-gain playing, which is the primary aim of the design, of course.

A danger of many new designs is a

It's one of those rare designs that really doesn't make you think of something that was designed before 1965

plethora of bells and whistles on the switching front. But the ORYX feels very player-led with a simple master volume and tone setup (with knurled metal control knobs, a subtle tie-in with those custom tuner buttons and, again, slightly recessed into the top), meaning the trickery comes from the custom-designed three-position Free-Way blade selector switch, which rocks between series humbucking with the switch pushed away from you, and parallel humbucking with it moved upwards.

2. The classy reverse headstock is back angled and features Gotoh rear-lock tuners with oversized circular aluminium buttons. "They came from the first guitars Hugh Manson built for Matt Bellamy some 20 years ago," says Tim Stark. "They add to that modern industrial look"



3. Another seemingly subtle tweak is that the Tone Pros tune-o-matic-style bridge is recessed into the top so the strings sit closer to the body. The bridge Polymath differs considerably from the neck pickup and has a DCR that we measured at 13.69kohms

4. Another British design, the Free-Way switch is used here. This is a custom design, though, that allows you to switch the pickups from series to parallel humbucking – something you couldn't do on a standard Free-Way switch, until now!

Nolly's Bare Knuckle Polymath pickups are direct-mounted to the body, the bridge pickup with a little height adjustment, while the neck seems like it's been screwed down solidly.

On the one hand it seems like a very simple design, but that's a little deceptive as it really does seem extremely considered.

Feel & Sounds

The guitar is based on a full Fender scale, but that long upper horn means that the neck sits into your body a little more than, say, a Stratocaster and almost creates the feel of a shorter-scale guitar. Either way, it hangs superbly on a strap, too; it disappears, really, as any great design should. Manson describes the neck shape as a 'Modern D' and it's more Gibson-esque in width. Our sample measured slightly over 43mm at the nut with 35.5mm string spacing. The tune-o-matic has pretty standard 51.5mm spacing, so there's plenty of air without the neck feeling over-wide or the strings being too close to the edges. It's pretty skinny in depth (18.5mm at the 1st fret and just 19.7mm by the 12th) yet there's minimal flex and we suspect that the hard Richlite is playing its part in terms of rigidity. The D shape means there's very little shoulder and there's a slightly flat back, again to suit thumb-behind left-hand positions, not dissimilar to a classical guitar, which can often have a similar shaping.

The super-smooth frets measure approximately 2.75mm wide by 1.47mm high, which means there's plenty of height to really dig into the strings for bends, but they don't feel too big. While that neck





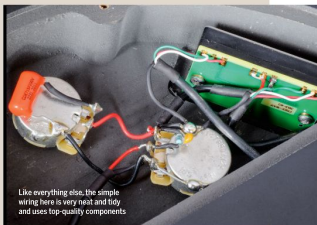
shape won't be to every player's taste, it is super fast, with a pretty low string height of 1.27mm on the treble side and 1.5mm on the bass with minimal, if any, relief.

The whole guitar is aimed at the contemporary high-gain rock-to-metal player; head over to YouTube to see Nolly illustrate that style with serious panache. But you'd be very wrong to pigeonhole the ORYX as a one-trick pony. We spent plenty of our test time with a pretty clean amp,

5. The neck and bridge Polymath pickups are actually quite different in design (more on that in *Under The Hood*, right). They also have quite different DCRs, the neck measuring 11.49k ohms on our meter

The uncompromising quality and experience-led design make it one of the most beguiling instruments we've played

and if big rounded cleans are your thing, we'd recommend these pickups, something that a player such as Mike Stern or Charlie Hunter could use. The highs are rounded but not indistinct, the bass end is certainly not overdone, while the midrange sounds broad without the sort of nasal peak of many medium or higher-output 'buckers – it's a rich, sonorous voice that loves a pedalboard. In parallel mode (a lesser used alternate function than, say, the usual



Like everything else, the simple wiring here is very neat and tidy and uses top-quality components

UNDER THE HOOD

The ORYX circuit and Polymath pickups explained

Removing the semi-translucent frosted cover you see quite a spacious cavity lined with conductive paint. It's a simple 'modern' circuit that features two CTS pots with an Orange Drop .022 microfarads (223J) tone cap and a treble bleed circuit on the volume control comprising a 220 picofarads cap and 100k resistor in parallel. The largest component is the block-style Free-Way 3B3-02 switch, designed with Manson, for the humbuckers' series/parallel wiring. "The first two guitars I think I built for Nolly just had a standard three-way lever switch," says Manson's Tim Stark. "Thinking back, we had two mini-toggles, or it might have been a push-pull switch, to create the series/parallel options that I'd suggested he try instead of the usual humbucker and single coil-split. Nolly loved the parallel wiring.

In parallel mode, not only are the pickups hum-cancelling but they move to a thicker single-coil-like voice

"We get our own custom taper pots from CTS," he adds, "which we've been using for the past four or five years. Nolly specified the little treble pass circuit."

As we discussed in detail with Tim Mills back in issue 479's New Wave article, the Polymath humbuckers were created for Nolly's exacting taste. The medium-output bridge, for example, uses unoriented Alnico, which Tim explained is "essentially slightly lower output or with less string pull if you like, than oriented Alnico V... [This gives us] a little bit more headroom, but it's not driving the bass so hard."

The neck pickup is a different design: "I'm using two different wire types, for starters," Tim told us. "There's a little trick that I've done with the inductance to make sure it's very articulate. It's got this lovely tubular neck tone, but it's very articulate. It's not super bloomy, if that makes any sense, like you would get with a traditional PAF-type neck [pickup]."

Head to www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk for more info



Although the Oryx started as a six-string, the launch edition also includes this seven-string variant to create an even bigger sound with its expanded range. It uses a slightly extended scale length of 660mm (26 inches), but otherwise has the same specs and colours as our reviewed Oryx VI



MANSON GUITAR WORKS ORYX VI

PRICE: £2,899 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cut bolt-on solidbody electric

NECK: American hard maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Black Graph Tech/43.24mm

FINGERBOARD: Richlite, 'hyper glow' side dots, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 24, Jescar stainless steel

HARDWARE: Tone Pros T3BT locking tune-o-matic bridge (recessed), Gotoh 510 Magnum Lock tuners with custom knurled metal buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Bare Knuckle Polymath humbuckers, Freeway/Manson 6-position pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.25/7.15

OPTIONS: The 7-string Oryx VII costs £2,999

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Dry Satin Black (as reviewed), Satin Metallic Green

coil-split), not only are the pickups hum-cancelling but they move to a thicker single-coil-like voice with a little drop in volume and slightly less body.

With various light and heavy gains, the Oryx excels. There's no hint of shrillness to the humbucker voices, they come across as big and vocal-sounding, while the parallel voices lighten the voice for slightly

when reduced. The tone cap (see Under The Hood on the previous page) is well voiced and pickup hum is no problem in any setting because both series and parallel modes are noise-cancelling.

Verdict

Hugh Manson may have retired from this guitar-making lark, but his legacy is very evident in this design. He taught his students well, and like any other high-level Manson instrument we've played it's very much function over style. It's a superb ringing and sustaining instrument that, when paired with these Polymath pickups, creates a package that might be aimed at progressive players yet easily slips into more classic rock with little more than a volume reduction. And, like we said, if big round cleans are your aim, you need to hear these pickups.

We do only get two colours in this launch edition for both this six-string and its seven-string partner. And it's far from a cheap date, either. But the uncompromising quality and experience-led design make it one of the most beguiling instruments we've had in our hands for some time. **B**

It's aimed at progressive players yet slips into more classic rock with little more than a volume reduction

more articulation, which works especially well to us on lower gains, adding some almost P-90-like texture. Combined with the super-fast, effortless playability, this is quite a revelation. Superb craft at a very high level.

Don't forget those volume and tone controls, though. Like every other facet of the guitar they're well considered. The volume is smoothly tapered and just subtly pulls back the highs without losing them

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Cohesive player-led design; exceptionally detailed and considered build; surprisingly versatile pickups, especially paired with the series/parallel Free-Way switch

CONS By design, it's aimed at the 'progressive' player; it's not cheap

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Look Sharp

Manson's ORYX is one of those seemingly rare guitar designs that doesn't reference a classic or two. Just how did they achieve it? Head luthier, Tim Stark, explains all

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis & Adam Gasson



1. Manson Guitar Works' head luthier, Tim Stark, was given free rein when it came to the body shape of the new ORYX, but "it was always going to be a double cutaway guitar," he says

2. Adam 'Nolly' Getgood was the co-conspirator in this ORYX guitar project. Handily, he'd also worked with Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle Pickups to develop the Polymath humbuckers

Manson Guitar Works evolved as an offshoot of the repair and custom work that had been a big part of the legendary Mansons Guitar Shop, founded by the equally legendary guitar maker, Hugh Manson. Some 20 years on the company is now based in Ashburton – after moving in August 2016 – where in-house finish spraying, pickup manufacturing and CNC processes all take place under the same roof. "We can now make between 100 and 150 guitars a year depending on the build specs," says head luthier, Tim Stark, "but we'd like to double or triple that over the next six to 12 months."

Back when the company started it was just Adrian Ashton (now Manson Guitar Works' MD) and Tim building a small number of instruments in a very traditional fashion. But the Manson guitars built for Matt Bellamy – who became a majority shareholder in the enterprise in 2019 – consistently pushed the electric guitar into new areas. Tim has been keen to expand the style of the guitars they build, and meeting up with Adam 'Nolly' Getgood provided just the opportunity.

How did you connect with Nolly?

"I've always wanted to do my own design, but it never seemed to come about because we have always been so busy doing the MA and MB stuff. We have a friend Pete Miles, who runs Middle Farm Studios just around the corner from us. He's friends with Nolly, who uses the studio to record a lot of his GetGood Drums. So Pete brought him around one day and we got on really well. He's such a nice guy and the whole thing started from there."

"I started work on the design with Nolly in early 2020, just as we went into lockdown. We literally started with a blank sheet of paper! There were a few things that Nolly specified that he liked, but it wasn't so much that he wanted it to look like this or that; he basically said these are the main features that I want. The first things were whether we'd go with a set neck, a through-neck or a bolt-on, which is what we settled on. This was before we got into the seven-string; we just started with the six-string. Then we decided the scale length and considered whether we wanted to go with a fixed bridge or vibrato."

Tell us about the design process behind the body shape.

"Once we'd got those basics done, we didn't actually have any outline shape in mind. Nolly basically gave me *carte blanche* on that. I had a few ideas and I really wanted to do something completely different from anything we'd done before. For example, it was always going to be a double-cutaway guitar. Obviously, I knew what sort of music Nolly was into and the people he'd worked with. I also wanted to do something modern – which fits with what we've done previously for Matt Bellamy. There are definitely influences I've had over the years, though. I remember growing up as a young teenager when the Parker Fly came out. The first time I saw one of those on *Later... With Jools Holland*, it completely blew me away. I thought, 'What the heck is this?' So there's definitely some of that in the design, where I was going with the angles on the body and the square edge lines. I remember Nolly and I talking about blades, too, like a stiletto,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MANSON GUITAR WORKS



3. While our review focused on the six-string ORYX, a seven-string is also available in this first launch edition. Aside from the moody satin black finish, both guitars are also available in Satin Metallic Green

different types of blades and knives – even though you’ve got a flat piece of metal, you get the angles, so that influence definitely came in on the horns of the guitar.

“I drew the first design like we used to do – old-school – on a piece of lining paper to create the body shape. In the past couple of years we’ve moved over to CAD, but back then it was hand-drawn. I sent Nolly some photographs and we went from there. It was pretty much that first drawing that we stuck with, the main shape was there.”

“There are definitely influences... The first time I saw the Parker Fly it completely blew me away”

The guitar seems like quite a pared-back working tool. Was that the intention?

“I know what you mean. I’m obviously used to a lot of our stuff being finished in that matt black – that’s sort of our standard thing – but when we started we said, ‘Let’s just get a pure-playing tone machine.’ It still looks cool, but it does come from a simplistic design concept. The main things are there: the neck plays nice, the fingerboard plays nice, and the tone was there.

“In fact, in terms of voicing the guitar we spent most of the time – after the first guitar was built – moving the bridge pickup around. Between the first two or three initial hand-built prototypes we did, we moved the bridge pickup two or three times, sometimes by as little as a millimetre. When Nolly first suggested that, I thought, ‘Really?’ But it made a huge difference to find the real sweet spot.

“Once that was done, we looked at refinements like getting the tune-o-matic bridge to sit down into the body; we really liked the sound and feel of that type of bridge, but we didn’t want a steep neck angle. We’d been doing a few similar things on a couple of Matt’s guitars – he liked the sound but didn’t want the strings to sit too high. Then things like where the waist

sits on your leg. Initially, that followed the chamfers of the horn, but we rounded it out so it sits more comfortably."

It's interesting to see you're using Richlite for the fingerboard.

"We initially talked about using ebony, but I'd been doing a fair bit of research into Richlite and I suggested using it to Nolly. He said he'd never tried it so we thought we'd give it a go. Both of us were pleasantly surprised by the outcome, the way it looks and the stiffness and rigidity it brings to the neck. That was one of my concerns, especially on the seven-string. It's quite a long neck – you don't get that extra bit of meat as you do on a Strat or Tele where the heel sticks out more – so I was a bit worried, especially as I knew many potential users would fit heavier gauge strings with different tunings. But I also wanted to try to avoid putting carbon or titanium rods in the neck; I wanted to keep as much wood in the neck as possible. Using Richlite almost gives you the same effect as putting carbon rods in the neck. It's very stiff and stable with none of the shrinkage that you can get with ebony. Plus it's a modern sustainable material as well, which is important to us.

"In fact, that's another reason we didn't go with more fancy wood tops – we wanted to make something that was more sustainable. Plenty of modern makers are looking in that direction and it's something we definitely want to do more of in the future."

"When voicing the guitar, we spent a lot of time moving the bridge pickup around to find the sweet spot"

You're also using a new Free-Way switch design. How did that come about?

"The first two guitars I built for Nolly just had a standard three-way lever switch. It just so happened that one day Adrian said the guys from Free-Way were in the area and wanted to come and have a chat. They showed us their switches – some of which I'd used before – and we discussed this guitar. I asked if it would be possible to create a three-way switch that allowed you to go from series to parallel humbucking. It's another unique thing about this guitar."

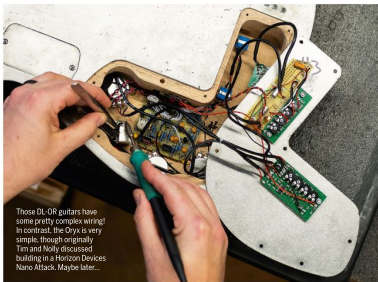
And it's another UK design...

"Yes, we have so many cool companies with great ideas in the UK. Bare Knuckle are just down the road and we do try to keep as much of it British as we can."

www.mansonguitarworks.com



When it comes to stage guitars loaded with effects and electronics, Manson Guitar Works have created some complex pieces. These DL-OR models replicate the original DL-01 built for Matt Bellamy in 2001 and feature built-in Zvex Fuzz Factory and MXR Phase 90 effects



Those DL-OR guitars have some pretty complex wiring! In contrast, the Oryx is very simple, though originally Tim and Nolly discussed building in a Horizon Devices Nano Attack. Maybe later...



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Mix 'n' Match

Nine pedals in one hit! Fender's sleek new effects range makes its debut with affordable price tags and 'board-friendly' footprints

Words: Trevor Curwen Photography: Olly Curtis



FENDER HAMMERTONE PEDALS £69 TO £84

CONTACT Fender Musical Instruments EMEA PHONE 0333 200 8765 WEB www.fender.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 HammerTone? What's that?**
It's a new range of pedals from Fender. The name probably comes from the textural paint finish, but the idea is for pedals that are affordable and easy to use.
- 2 Nothing too complex, then?**
No. Fender's rule for these was a WYSIWYG interface with a maximum of four knobs and two toggle switches, no hidden functions and no displays.
- 3 Is it a complete range?**
We don't know if there are more in the pipeline, but there's already plenty here to create a variety of complete pedalboards: four dirt pedals, two modulation pedals, two delays and a reverb.

1. Top-mounted jacks mean that the HammerTone pedals are real space-savers on your 'board

Fender got itself back into the pedal market in a big way a few short years ago when the company teamed up with designer Stan Cortey for what has turned into quite a large range covering all genres, sometimes twice over. Those pedals, though, are a little on the larger size in the great pedalboard scheme of things and not necessarily affordable to everyone who'd like to add some Fender mojo to their 'board.

These things have now been addressed with the release of the nine-strong HammerTone range of pedals – described by the company as an “accessible entry to the Fender Effects family”. These pedals are more compact and available at a price that isn't likely to scare off any potential punters: the Overdrive, Distortion, Metal and Fuzz are all £69.99, the remaining five cost £84.99. All are very pedalboard-friendly with top-mounted jacks and power input so you could have several pedals completely butted up, side by side, to make the most of your available space. With a uniform grey Hammerite finish, each pedal is distinct from the next courtesy of brightly coloured knobs and LEDs that light up in the same colour, which could be very welcome on a darkened stage. Power is via a nine-volt adaptor or a battery that's accessed by removing the baseplate via a single screw. Time to take a listen...

Play Dirty

First up, the Overdrive is an original Fender design with standard Gain and Level knobs, a Tone knob and the Pre-Mid Boost knob, which places a mid-boost before the drive section. Unity gain here starts at about 7 on the Level dial, so there's a little bit of extra for a volume boost. The range runs from low-level raunch to full-on drive with forward midrange and overall brightness





2. The Type switches on some pedals give you some variations on the effect. The right-hand toggle switches are two-way – bringing in a local shift, changing EQ, modulation, flanger polarity and octave fuzz

3. The knobs are styled on Fender's amp controls and its guitar custom colours. In most cases the knobs and LEDs are colour-co-ordinated. There's clear numbering around the knob skirts, and while it's not marked, the number at the 12 o'clock position indicates your setting

adjusted by the Tone knob, while that Pre-Mid Boost dials in upper-mid presence for extra poke. There's also an internal trim pot should you need to tweak the very high-end to suit your amp or pickups.

With Treble and Bass knobs to complement the Level and Gain, the Distortion pedal's sound is much more scooped in the midrange than the Overdrive, but it does have internal trim pots to tweak midrange and dial down super-high frequencies. It's not all about full on saturation, either (which it does rather well), as there's some nice gritty overdrive at low-gain settings.

Now, talk about giving a dog a bad name – calling a pedal Metal immediately pigeonholes it as being for a particular musical genre, and while it's true that you could use it to djent to your heart's content, it could actually fulfil a useful role in other musical styles (although maybe not cocktail jazz!). The overall vibe here is very similar to the Distortion, but there's more gain and a touch more high-frequency content. The Treble and Bass knobs have been renamed Hi and Lo and are complemented by the same internal trim pots.

The Fuzz pedal is powered by a pair of silicon diodes and cleans up nicely with

You could have several pedals butted up, side by side, to make the most of your available space

guitar volume. There's an internal trim pot to set your high-frequency preference, but, as shipped, it's full bodied and needs the Tone knob up beyond 7 to get a practical level of top-end presence. The switchable octave gives it an extra voice with a metallic edge and an aggression that works well for leads up the neck.

Modulation Matters

The Chorus has the expected Rate and Depth knobs, plus a Level knob that travels from totally dry to totally wet sound. You can select three different variations of chorus, and a Tone switch toggles the low-end content so there's a wide range of variation available; it's a far cry from the Boss CE-2 trick of simply setting the two knobs at 10 and two o'clock. There's plenty of wobbly seasick sounds here, if that's your thing, but that Level knob is

THE RIVALS

For a complete range of pedals, the Boss Compact series immediately comes to mind. Those, however, are generally more expensive, although the dirt pedals such as the SD-1 Super Overdrive (£59) and the DS-1 Distortion (£65) are directly comparable. Carl Martin has a nice range of pedals with a similar flat-sided/top-mounted jacks arrangement but are, again, more expensive starting at just south of £100. The JHS 3 Series are simple sub-£100 pedals from the boutique company. Anyone on a really tight budget may wish to look in the direction of Mooer, Joyo, Harley Benton and Behringer, among others.



the key to dialling in subtlety for the more classic, typical 1980s chorus sounds.

While the chorus is workmanlike, the Flanger goes beyond the call of duty, providing an excellent range of tones including all the metallic swoosh you'll need, faux rotary sounds and more, all dialled in via two distinct variations, three levels of resonance to let you set the intensity, and juxtaposition of the Rate, Depth and Manual knobs.

Ambience Anyone?

The first of the delays is the straightforward digital Delay with a generous maximum delay time of 950ms, allowing an array of musical delay applications from doubling through slapback upwards. You can choose three options for the nature of the repeats – there's the standard typically bright repeats that you may wish to use for rhythmic effects, plus two choices of less strident more subdued repeats that lend themselves to bedding in with your sound, not unlike a BBD or tape-based analogue delays. There's also modulation that can be switched in. As shipped, that is definitely OTT with quite deep pitch modulation going on, but there are internal set-and-forget trim pots for both Rate and

Depth that can either make things even more extreme or dial in our preference for spacious chorus or a more subtle wobble.

The other delay pedal, Space Delay, is designed to conjure up a more vintage sound. It has the same modulation and repeats that blend naturally. The main difference is that, besides the standard delay, you have a choice of two patterned delays – each with two repeats spaced like selecting two of the heads on a three-head tape echo.

Finally, the Reverb pedal is a practical source of conventional ambience. It offers Hall, Room and Plate reverbs with adjustable Decay Time and Level (Dry/Wet mix) plus adjustments for the tonal characteristics. The Tone switch is designed to dampen the high frequencies, making the reverb less prominent, but we preferred to use the Damping knob for its more gradual roll off of the highs, taking some of the splashiness away from the reverb and letting the tails blend in.

Verdict

A nice-looking and nicely affordable range of practical pedals, the Hammetone series delivers value for money, and you'll certainly be able to create a complete pedalboard using just some of these units. **B**



FENDER HAMMERTONE PEDALS

PRICE: £69.99 to £84.99

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Various

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: 4x knobs or 3x knobs and either 1x or 2x toggle switches, internal trim pots

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: All pedals will run from a 9V adaptor; a 9V battery can be used in the analogue Fuzz, Overdrive, Distortion and Metal

DIMENSIONS: 61 (w) x 115 (d) x 56mm (h)

FENDER OVERDRIVE METAL FUZZ CHORUS REVERB

8/10

FENDER DISTORTION FLANGER DELAY SPACE DELAY



9/10

PROS Compact chassis; solid build quality; top-mounted socketry; inexpensive; colour co-ordinated LEDs

CONS Delay modulations are set up badly as shipped; Reverb has no spring emulation; Distortion and Metal pedals are too similar



« BLUEPRINT »

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

British amp maker Laney has poured three eras of classic delay sounds into its new high-end pedal, The Difference Engine, which has attracted the interest of Brian May among many others

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Neil Godwin

Laney may be best known as a Brum-based amp maker with a rich backstory in British rock and metal, but its deftly designed and styled effects pedals are growing in number every year. Now, with the launch of a sophisticated delay pedal called The Difference Engine, the company has got a rack-quality echo machine that conjures up some of the most famous tones in rock – and Laney says it'll please everyone from plug-and-play newcomers to the most pedantic MIDI-obsessives out there.

Intrigued, we join Simon Fraser-Clark of Laney – whose keen ears shaped the pedal's wide palette of classic sounds – to learn why top-flight guitarists ranging from Brian May and Billy Duffy to Tom Quayle are getting involved with curating and creating the pedal's raft of iconic delay sounds.

How did the idea for The Difference Engine take shape?

"It started with making effects for Tony Iommi in relation to the amps that he used – a single-channel amp with not many features on it and not a lot of gain. It leads you down the route to what you need. So first, we made a boost pedal, a distortion pedal and a chorus pedal. But the missing link was the delay pedal. So now, with The Difference Engine, I think [the Laney effects range] allows players to get every sound that they would realistically want from a relatively compact pedalboard.



Simon Fraser-Clark of Laney: "It's not what you play, it's what happens next that's the important bit..."

"One of the things you come to realise is the fact that every note has been played. Every interval has been played, every chord has been played. So it's not what you play, it's what happens next that's the important bit. People like Brian May call that 'hot space': it's the bit between the notes that gives [meaning]... When you play a guitar note, it just gives you a pitch reference. It has no sense of space or sense of place. And that's really where delay effects come in. They give that note a sense of space, size [and ambience] and all that sort of stuff. So I think, for us, it was a case of, 'What's the difference between a good guitar part and a great guitar part?' Well, it's what happens next: it's the difference. And that's what this pedal is about, really."

What's special about it, from the point of view of sounds and capability?

"In reality, it covers three different eras of delay, all kind of shoehorned into a relatively compact two-button setup that has a screen on it. Now, a screen always intimidates people, but the screen is there purely because there are quite a lot of deep-dive editing options, so you need to be able to access that. But in common with all our other pedals, there's a whole load of surface controls that allow the player to quickly access the parameters that they need on a daily basis. So you can adjust the time quickly. You can adjust the number of repeats, the Mix, Colour, which is the modulation on the repeats, and Tone, which is the overall tonality of the delay.

"Basically, it's a two-button compact pedal that houses 100 presets. It is fully MIDI-compatible, so it has MIDI control numbers and MIDI programme change numbers. It has the ability to connect to an expression pedal straight off, which you can assign to do various different functions within the delays. But then, if you are using a MIDI expression pedal, you can control any parameter within the pedal."

You mentioned that some of the presets have been designed by well-known players...

"It's got 100 presets. It comes pre-loaded with 50 iconic player/iconic-delay-song settings. We've worked with guys such as Tom Quayle and Martin Miller to write particular presets. Brian May is going to



Delay, rather fittingly, took a while to join Laney's popular range of effects, but The Difference Engine is worth the wait.



write a preset, Billy Duffy of The Cult is going to write a preset. Brian's is called Brian Rocks, which is obviously a play on *Brighton Rock* – so it gives you that kind of classic sound with centre, right and left [in the stereo image] on different delay times. There's also loads of stuff [influenced by] The Edge. We want people to be able to hear iconic delay users and be able to get their sounds quite quickly."

Usually delay pedals have a particular hallmark sound. What is The Difference Engine aiming for?

"As I mentioned, the pedal covers three different eras of delay. It starts off with the tape era, based off the Roland Space Echo – the 501 Roland Space Chorus Echo, to be correct. And it takes all the features that everyone's come to love with tape echo, the high-end roll-off and tape flex, wow and flutter, all that sort of stuff, and packages it

"It functions on an intuitive level... but you can drill down. It is a very powerful tool in a simple box"

into a pedal that allows you to model that – but doesn't suffer from any of it. And then you move into the digital delay era, which is based off things like the Roland SDEs and the Korg SDD-3000s, which have ultra-clean, ultra-precise delays with features like Freeze. Then you move into the dynamic delay era, which is based off the more modern-style delays like the 2290s, which allow you to do clever things like ducking or modulation on the delays.

"But the clever thing is you can take any of those different features and apply them to a different 'era' of delay within the pedal. For example, with the tape delay, you could have the ability to use tap tempo, which you couldn't do on an original – or you could have the ability to freeze a note, which you couldn't do on the original. Basically, I've spent thousands of hours listening to Space Echoes and TC2290s and gone, 'Okay, what are the cool bits that we could use?' And then we've done that and they're super authentic. Guys like Tom Quayle, for example, sat down with one of the original versions of these and was like, 'Oh, my God. This is just phenomenal!'

"It models everything. But that was the idea: to give someone a compact unit that had all the benefits and nuances of different eras, and allow them to control those in minute detail in order to get some super-authentic sounds. It will do crazy



1. A screen display was required to help users unlock the full potential of this powerful delay pedal

2. Though highly configurable, The Difference Engine has intuitive surface-mounted controls that govern all the basics

stuff as well. You know, it does Leslie stuff and it does weird and wonderful, wacky modulation things. So it's a high-end product for a pedalboard."

The Difference Engine aims to offer both total precision through MIDI editing and intuitive control through the knobs on the front. That can be a tricky balancing act.

"That's exactly right. The fact that you have some common-or-garden surface controls means you can access the parameters that you need on a daily basis quickly. There is another control, underneath the screen, which is a rotary encoder and that has a dual function. As you turn it, it will increase the Time. If you then pressed it, it would select a different unit of delay time. But within the Menu format, it's also the way that you quickly access the different levels of the memory and after the parameter that you want.

"So it's a multi-function pot and encoder, which means you can have broad usability from a live point of view, but you can also [control it] down to the minutiae of the millisecond for a studio project. The fact that it's MIDI-controlled means you can automate it – if you have a session in Logic or something that has MIDI messages within it, CC controls, then obviously you can control the pedal completely remotely from a laptop setup.

"So it can function on a really simple intuitive level for those who literally want to plug and play. But then for those who are a little bit more demanding and want to go in and change the phase of one of the echoes in the 2290 model, then you can – you can drill down and you can do all that. It is a very, very powerful tool, but in a simple kind of box."

What are your personal favourite delay sounds on The Difference Engine?

"Anything that pans in stereo is amazing. Obviously The Difference Engine is a stereo pedal, but you can route it in a number of clever ways. You can route it in mono, you can route in stereo, you can route in crossfade, you can route it in wet/dry, so you can have it do different things depending on what you want. For example, it allows you to turn different delay times left and right. So anyone who grew up in the 80s listening to anything that has Steve Lukather on it, you would have heard this kind of delay that crosses from left to right – but randomly, a chaotic ping-pong sort of thing. For me, that's always been a pleasure to listen to.

"There's a patch on the pedal, I think it's Number 18, called 'Wraparound' that gives you that kind of an immersive delay effect. But, again, in order to benefit from a true stereo pedal, you have to run things





3. The unit is designed to make your most ambitious ideas for stereo sounds come to life, while MIDI and expression pedals offer unlimited creativity

in stereo, so obviously making sure you set things up in stereo is fantastic. But there are other things, too. There's a Leslie effect, which is absolutely superb, where if you use that in conjunction with a distortion pedal, you immediately can get the sound of Brian May playing *Hammer To Fall*.

"In reality, delays mean different things to different people. My fascination for pedals comes from the fact I always wanted to be someone who could sit with a guitar, a lead and an amp, and play and sound entertaining. But after about five minutes, I'd want to put a chorus on and then a 380 millisecond delay and then the distortion pedal [laughs].

"Effects are like colours. Some artists can draw in pencil and produce amazing works of art. Other artists use as many colours as they can possibly get. And I think as a guitar player, that's the way that effects pedals should be viewed: they are ways to colour what you produce. So pedals and effects and patches should be inspirational. They should push you in different ways to make your playing different and more interesting."

You mentioned setting up stereo rigs – any tips?

"With stereo rigs it's always good to have two amps that are pretty much the same

"Effects are like colours... Some artists use as many colours as they can possibly get"

because obviously there's a [common] tonality that you want to be represented left and right. But, really, it is just a case of appreciating the benefit of stereo. You know, guitar players are fundamentally 'mono' people. But when you move into the world of stereo, things become spatially more exciting. And if you want to go the whole hog you can try a wet/dry/wet setup, which this pedal allows you to do very nicely. With The Difference Engine you have the ability to run through a wet/dry/wet rig by using the internal mixer to turn down the dry signal to the left and right channels and just send wet signals to the left and right channels.

"When you start running wet/dry/wet, you enter a whole new world because in a stereo amplifier setup you have the delayed signal and the dry signal appearing in the same amp at the same time. That can be confusing to the amp. Whereas separating

it so one amp just produces the wet signal, left, and another amp just produces the wet signal, right, and then you have another amp in the middle, which just produces an uncluttered dry signal... All of a sudden you start to hear a much wider soundstage.

"When it comes to stereo, just try it. If you have the ability to plug the pedal into a DAW, then sitting down with a good pair of headphones and plugging the pedal into your DAW on an [effects] Send works absolutely fantastically. One of the clever things you can do there is the trick where you invert the phase of one side of the repeats, which moves you from stereo into an almost a 'wraparound' effect – and with a good set of headphones that's a really intriguing thing to play with.

"Really, the world is your oyster. I think when people talk about effects they look for some guidance and for some golden rules. But I've said many a time that the only golden rule about effects is: there is no golden rule. You basically set things up as you see fit, set them up in any order, make them do the things that you want them to do – because they're there for you to be creative with. Try the things that work for you. And try the crazy things because they may just work, too." ■

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JOHN PETRUCCI

Dream Theater's magus of the fretboard on the Les Paul copy that sparked his love of 'buckers and why he might give Django a run for his money...

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

"I bought an Aria Pro II guitar that had a whammy bar on it. It wasn't a Floyd Rose... it was a Kahler. It had visible wood grain and was red. I would say it was a rock guitar, for sure. I was a teenager at that point. I mean, I started when I was 12, it was probably a couple of years later when I was 14 or so. It's funny. I was playing with John Myung back then and we still play together in Dream Theater – he's the bass player – and we met each other when we were 12.

"I would just go jam with everybody in those days. There was one guy who was really into metal and old bands like The Scorpions and Sabbath, so we would jam on all that stuff. And then I had a bunch of guys that were totally into Hendrix and The Dead, so we would jam on that stuff. There was also a band that we called Centurion, and we would play covers, anything from Mötley Crüe to Rush, Iron Maiden... John Myung and I just learned every single Iron Maiden song there was, and every Rush song."

John Petrucci has been with Ernie Ball Music Man for two decades, and each one of his instruments has been designed to be a "performance machine"



PHOTO BY RAYAN RICHARDS

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"The most recent one was actually a few years ago. I started to get interested in Gypsy jazz, the whole Django style, which I don't know why I was never into before. Once my eyes opened up to it, I realised, 'Man, this is right down my alley. It's like shred guitar on acoustic.' Those players are so technically incredible. I then discovered Joscho Stephan from Germany, he's such a phenomenal player, and I started thinking, 'What guitar does he play?' There's this Selmer Maccaferri vibe guitar that he plays. I did some research and when Dream Theater was on tour we were fairly close to where the luthier's shop was. Me and my tech, Maddy [Matt Schieferstein], took a day trip and went to this small shop where I bought a guitar that smelled like cigarettes but played beautifully, and I brought that home. That's the last guitar that I bought."

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

"I feel like, if anything, I overpaid [laughs]. One of the things I got into for a while was Mesa/Boogie Mark IIC+ amps – obviously, they were made in the 80s and they don't make them any more. I have a pretty good collection of those, but they can get expensive. I don't know if I ever got a really good bargain where I was like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe I got this for this.' But then again, I'm not a vintage guy at all. I'm completely illiterate in the world of vintage guitars and Les Pauls and Strats and all that stuff. I have a really big collection of my own models, my Ernie Ball Music Man guitars, and lots of Mesa/Boogie amps, and racks through the years. But I never really got into buying. Some guys are super into it, like Bonamassa, but for some reason I never did that."

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

"It's usually with something that's cheap. I'm like, 'Oh, this will make a good practice amp.' Then I get it and it's like, 'Ah, there's a reason it was cheap!' [laughs] But every once in a while, that kind of thing works out..."

Have you ever sold something that you intensely regret letting go of?

"Actually, I think I have to change my first answer now that I remember this: I think the first guitar I bought was actually a Suzuki Les Paul imitation from a flea market. It had a vine down the neck and mother-of-pearl binding, and I think I traded it for the Aria. Looking back, I would rather have still had that first guitar from the flea market."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"The biggest thing I can relate to is the prototyping process with my guitars. I've been with Ernie Ball Music Man for 20 years now and the thing that I look for is performance. That's how these guitars originally started to get designed, whether I had an experience playing other guitars, whether it was a Strat or a Les Paul, typical guitar shapes.... And



JOHN'S GO-TO RIG

"Obviously, it's my Ernie Ball Music Man signature guitars, and they're mostly Majestys on this run. Six-string, seven-string and eight-string, which is brand-new, and then an Anniversary, the original JP bolt-on Anniversary model, plus my signature Mesa/Boogie JP-2C. Those run in stereo. The effects are from an Axe-Fx III – that's all the delays and stuff like that. I have a pedal drawer with a bunch of pedals in it that are fun for the front-end... Of course, there's my signature JP95 wah by Dunlop and my signature TC Electronic Dreamscape [chorus, flanger and vibrato] pedal. And then a Darkglass compressor pedal and a couple of Boss Waza Craft pedals: the [DC-2W] Dimension C and the CE-2[W] Chorus. I love Robert Keeley and what he comes up with, so there's also a Red Dirt pedal in there. And that's it."

I always had these ideas like, 'Why is this knob over here? It's getting in my way.' Or, 'Why is this part of the guitar sharp?' or 'Why does my hand hurt when I lean it on the bridge?' In the prototyping process, especially early on with Ernie Ball Music Man, it was about making a performance machine. I wanted it to be like driving a fast car, where everything's in the right spot and it's all ergonomic, and everything's comfortable.

"So if I were buying a new guitar, as opposed to designing a guitar, I would probably still look for those same things. When I pick up an instrument, I want to know: how does it feel? Not even just the typical things, like, 'Oh, the neck shape or the action.' But how does the physical instrument feel on your body? Is it weird? Is it awkward? Is it too big? Is there some weird sharp thing? Is its body too wide? Is it too small? I'm very tactile that way with instruments."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar-shop window or browse online?

"If there's some practical thing that I need, then I'll actively go and search it out. But, in general, if you just go on Instagram you get inundated with different things, pedals and amps, some cool finish on a guitar... It's kind of fun."

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

"I think it needs to start with the guitar, honestly, I really do. Because that's the part you're physically connecting with. It doesn't mean the guitar has to be ridiculously expensive; it just has to be right for you. But I know with a lot of young players, when they start out, and if they get something that's not great, it could just make the learning experience that much more difficult. It's a big learning curve with guitar – there's that physicality you have to develop – and if you're playing an instrument that's really getting in your way, it could make that process slower."

"Once I opened my eyes to [Django], I realised, 'Man, this is right down my alley. It's like shred guitar on acoustic'"

"On the second Dream Theater record, *Images And Words*, our most famous song on that album – actually the band's most famous song [outright] – is *Pull Me Under*. That was our only radio hit. Well, the song opens up with a clean guitar line that was recorded on a little practice thing by Zoom. Remember the little Zoom thing you could clip on? [Possibly the Zoom 9002 strap-mounted effects processor – Ed.] That's what that was recorded on. So if you know how to record and you have a good engineer, you can make a lot of things sound really good."

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

"Well, that's easy: humbuckers because that's all I use. Why? That's the sound that I got used to. Probably because, in the very beginning, that Suzuki Les Paul [copy] and that Aria Pro, and my first BC Rich ST-III that I bought, were all double-humbucker guitars. I never got into the single-coil thing. That said, I can get coil-split sounds on my guitars. I couldn't play any guitar that has a central single-coil pickup because of the way that I pick – it would just be hitting against the pickup. I need that space in the middle. [JD/DM]"

Petrucci has been playing guitar for over 40 years now, and he's been faithful to humbucker-loaded guitars the whole time



Dream Theater's latest album, *A View From The Top Of The World*, is available now on InsideOutMusic
<https://johnpetrucci.com>

LAZY BONES

Your main gigging guitar needs to be in top condition. This might seem obvious, but Dave Burrluck wonders if we're all as diligent as we should be...



Guitars, like cars, need regular maintenance otherwise they simply wouldn't be fit for work. Exactly how we guitar players let our instruments get in such a state always surprises me, but I'll put my hands up and say, 'Guilty as charged!' We don't have well-paid techs to look after our guitars so it's something that can be easily forgotten.

I pulled out my main guitar when I was setting up for a gig recently, only to realise I'd not wiped it down after the previous gig; the strings felt horrible and the action seemed to be considerably higher than before. Had I given the guitar a simple maintenance check before the gig I'd have spotted the problems. Instead, the two-hour show was less fun than it should have been. I was struggling and it was all my fault.

Nevertheless, I don't think I'm the only one. A friend who's been doing a lot of recording over the past couple of years had resurrected a song that his old band

"Had I given the guitar a check before the gig I'd have spotted the problems"

performed and thought it'd be nice to ask the original guitarist to come over and lay down his guitar parts. "How did it go?" I asked a couple of days later. "Terrible. He was out of tune and even though I've spent ages putting the parts through Melodyne, I'm not sure how much, if any, I can use." I asked why he hadn't offered his out-of-tune guitarist one of his guitars. "My mate's left-handed, so it was his guitar or nothing."

I offered to take a look at his guitar and when I eventually got to it – a mid-90s Epiphone Les Paul Custom – apart from a little fretwear in the lower positions, there was nothing wrong with the instrument. But the condition of the strings, and the way in which he'd attached them to the tuners, was pretty appalling. I could barely tune it; mid-position chords were out by quite a margin and it felt awful. Little more than 20 minutes later, I'd cut off the old strings, cleaned up the guitar, buffed the frets back to a smooth sheen, given the fingerboard a little rub with fingerboard oil, restrung, checked the truss rod, tweaked the action and intonation, and swiftly put the guitar back into its ancient gigbag. Simple stuff...

VINTAGE WORKHORSE

This now 'player's grade' 1969 Fender Telecaster has been a workhorse since the early 70s. It was used in anger during the punk and post-punk periods (which is when it lost its scratchplate and had its first refret). It was reinvented as a Keef-style five-string during the 90s loaded with a Seymour Duncan Quarter Pounder, which had replaced the original bridge pickup after it died in the 80s. Sid Poole refretted it properly and added compensated brass saddles, and it now has a set of Fender Custom Shop pickups. Aside from that, regular cleaning and the sort of simple maintenance I describe in this issue's column keep it gig-fit – just in case I get a call from The Stones!

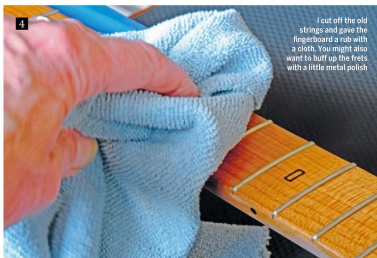




Rub contact cleaner up and down each string. Watch the dirt come off! Then you're ready to check the neck relief



Holding the G string at the 1st and last fret, check the relief. I set this guitar with around 0.008-inch relief



I cut off the old strings and gave the fingerboard a rub with a cloth. You might also want to buff up the frets with a little metal polish

Case Study: PJD Carey Standard

I've been using this particular guitar [pic 1] as my 'No 1' for many recent gigs, home recording and band practice sessions over the past few months, but when I last pulled it out of its gigbag, it was beginning to look like it's been on a long tour. Aside from string changes, I haven't touched a thing. For me, it's the epitome of 'workhorse' – it sounds and plays really well (at least it did!), it's lightweight, and it gets the job done with little fuss. The very light white nitro finish

"No guitar is ever going to play to its full potential if you don't get it fit for purpose and keep it there"

over the grained light ash body gets dirtier by the gig, and with no hard-shell protection the belt-buckle rash is now quite noticeable. But what's going on with the action?

Before I changed the strings I gave the neck a quick wipe down and cleaned up the strings with Servisol [pic 2] – a great 'quick fix' I learned from a studio producer some years ago. A quick check of the neck straightness revealed the problem: it had quite a forward bow with too much relief. A timely reminder that necks can move, even if they're quarter-sawn roasted maple such as this one. Thankfully, the truss-rod adjustment is behind the nut [pic 3], not vintage-style at the base of the neck, and a small tweak had the neck back to where it should be and back to normal. A quick plugged-in check that nothing else was wrong and I could remove the strings, give the neck and frets a bit of a buff with a microfibre cloth, dust off the bridge [pics 4 & 5] and it was ready to restring.

It's always worth checking the nut slots and – especially on an older guitar – whether there's any fretwear. In this case, all good. A quick check that any screws or nuts haven't loosened is worthwhile, too, and after restringing, string stretching [pic 6] and checking intonation, also check that those saddles haven't moved – a radius gauge is handy to for this purpose [pic 7].

Case Study 2: Any New Guitar!

Coming from another perspective, a brand-new guitar, especially of the budget type, is going to need a thorough check before you consider gigging it. "It's new, it should be perfect!" I hear you shout. Well, if you're lucky... but in reality no guitar – new, old or whatever – is ever going to play to its full potential if you don't get it fit for purpose and keep it there.

A brand-new or new-to-you guitar isn't necessarily going to feel 'right' straightaway. It might be a simple case of string gauge and setup, and while we have our go-tos, I've become a firm believer in letting the guitar dictate what it needs. You might think you need to change parts, pickups, pots and so on, before the guitar will be 'right'. But in many cases that's really not necessary. Personally, I start with my usual strings (that's 0.010s, irrespective of scale length), very slight relief and a string height

"Hopefully, your workhorse guitar will get a lot of use, but lengthy gigs can take their toll"

of around 1.6mm (a 16th-of-an-inch in old money). These references mean I can then play the guitar, get used to it, possibly go up or down a string gauge, and lower the action or raise it slightly on the bass side. If I'm hearing any random fretbuzz, I like to check the frets are level – easily done with a StewMac Fret Rocker or similar.

Simple adjustments, such as pickup height can have a dramatic effect, and even if it's a high-value instrument that's gone through a detailed check in the factory, you might want something slightly different. It's your guitar and you're going to have to play it.

Fix The Faults

Hopefully, your workhorse guitar will get a lot of use, but in turn lengthy gigs can take their toll. Lower-priced instruments can be especially vulnerable with their necessarily lower-cost pots and switches. So if you start getting crackles from switches and/or pots and the like, the first aid is a squirt of contact cleaner. If that doesn't fix it or the problem persists, don't think it'll go away on its own: fix it or get it fixed. Remember, irrespective of the quality of your instrument, its boutique pickups and convoluted finely tuned circuit, your guitar still needs care, especially if you're gigging regularly.

We're all busy with family and day jobs – unless you're lucky enough to do this music lark full-time – and treating your guitar to a bit of professional attention from time to time might be something to consider. In short, get any problems sorted and if you can't do it yourself, call in the pros. In fact, with a couple of guitars that really need a refret, I've recently done exactly that. Remember, just because you can put petrol in a car, fill up the oil and water and pump up the tyres, it doesn't make you a professional mechanic! **5**



A soft brush is always handy for removing dust over a bridge



It's time to stretch the new strings. Squeeze each one along its length while pushing it down in front of the saddle



Use the correct-radius gauge to check saddles like these haven't moved

MODERN HSS

Not everyone wants a big volume leap from the bridge humbucker. A reader asks for help...



A secondhand Seymour Duncan '59 loaded into a Squier Showmaster. A good place to start!

PHOTO: DAVID BURTON

Q “Dear Mod Squad, I’ve recently been gifted a SuperStrat. It’s not worth very much, but I’ve cleaned it up and restrung it. It’s got a humbucker by the Strat-style bridge and two single coils. It all works okay and it might have been a good sound back in the 80s, but I’m actually looking for something a bit more like a PAF instead of the high-output humbucker. I don’t think it warrants spending much money on it, but I was going to use it to learn a bit – it’ll be the first time I’ve changed pickups on a guitar. Any pointers very welcome?”

Tony, via email

A Hi Tony, it sounds as though you’ve got a perfect practice platform there (even though you don’t tell us precisely what it is!). From what you’ve told us, you’re exactly on the right path by giving it a clean-up and some new strings, and evaluating what you’ve got before you start ‘fixing’ things. Funny enough, I can almost hear that guitar: a high-output bridge pickup with little clarity or definition paired with okay-sounding single coils. I’ve certainly reviewed a few of those in my time!

In terms of mainstream availability, the HSS configuration was very ‘in’ during the 80s, quite often with its big lead sound from the bridge contrasted by those single coils (add studio-style compression and chorus, of course!). While many of us enjoyed that style, the modern HSS often uses a lower-output humbucker, as much to give a little more girth to the bridge as opposed to a huge leap in output – a fuller, slightly thicker version of a Strat’s usual bridge single coil. Mark Lettieri’s PRS Fire is more of that flavour, and the lowly Guild Surfline we review elsewhere in this issue is a more vivid example.

Again, you don’t say what the control circuit is, but I’d wager you have a five-way selector switch, master volume and tone quite possibly rear-mounted as opposed to being on a scratchplate. The ‘problem’ with HSS is that ideally the humbucker needs to ‘see’ a 500kohm volume pot, and the single coils need to see a 250k pot to avoid them sounding too bright. There are numerous tricks you can use to achieve this, not least Fender’s double-ganged 250k/500k volume pot. However, the circuit used on that PRS Fire uses a 300k volume pot (with two 500k pull-switch tone pots), and simply

adding a 2.4meg-ohm resistor from the input lug of the volume to ground (on the back of the pot) brings the value of the pot down to approximately 268k. Handily, a few suppliers, such as WD Music, offer a CTS 275k pot, which is close enough without needing the extra resistor.

There’s no shortage of vintage or hotter vintage classic humbuckers out there, especially on the secondhand market. For this type of HSS, where you’re after a tone shift more than an output increase, I’d say that something like Seymour Duncan’s ‘59 works well, plus that 300k area volume pot (with or without the added resistor) subtly pulls back the potential brightness.

So, getting yourself a more classic-sounding bridge humbucker (with four-conductor wiring so you can change the phase, if necessary, and add a coil-split or parallel wiring at a later stage) and upgrading the pots and switch would be where I’d start. It might mean that those original single coils won’t sound too bad, and you can always play with them at a later stage, likewise adding any further wiring mods. Previous Mod Squad articles that might help are ‘Phased & Confused’ in issue 486 and ‘Perfect Mismatch’ in issue 481. **■**

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.



CAREY ELITE

Guitarist
CHOICE

9/10

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Huw Price's Nitty-Gritty

Do you know your 00 from your OM? Huw Price talks us through why size matters

Acoustic Guitar Shapes & Sizes

There is arguably more enthusiasm for innovation and experimentation in the acoustic guitar world than for electric guitars. Even so, most acoustics conform to a handful of shapes and sizes that have been around for a century or more. Many of these body styles were introduced by Martin Guitars, and its model designations are still widely used – irrespective of the manufacturer. As with solidbody electrics, when one or two brands dominate the market, smaller companies tend to copy their successful designs.

American-made guitars really began to diverge from the European tradition during the 1850s. Most 'classical' guitars began following the dimensions and fan-bracing pattern employed by the legendary Spanish luthier Antonio De Torres. Meanwhile, over in Pennsylvania, Christian Frederick Martin developed an X-shaped bracing pattern that proved equally influential.

Migrants brought their musical instruments and traditions to America,

and smaller gut-string guitars struggled to compete with the volume of fiddles and mandolins. These instruments often used metal strings, and steel guitar strings had pretty much supplanted gut strings by the 1920s. This development unlocked the sonic potential of Martin's X-brace, but also revealed structural weaknesses. With countless guitarists damaging their older guitars by fitting steel strings, Martin responded by beefing up the bracing to withstand the additional string pull.

It takes more energy to get heavily braced tops to move, which partly negates the volume gain from steel strings. One way around this is to increase the surface area of the soundboard, but larger tops require larger backs, and body depths began to increase, too. Several new and ever-increasing body sizes were introduced around the turn of the 20th century. Many of these designs still survive, so let's take a closer look at the main models and their sonic characteristics.

Parlour

The elongated 'figure-8' shape of parlour guitars harks back to multi-course guitars of the Renaissance. Designed for home use and travelling, parlours are sometimes called 'saddle guitars' and were carried by cowboys and soldiers during the American Civil War.

By the end of the 19th century, the United States had a thriving industry mass-producing parlour guitars of varying quality. Names such as Stella, Haynes, Bay State and Tilton have vanished, but Washburn survives and the Larson Brothers brand has recently been revived.

Martin's 1/4 model measured 8 15/16 inches across its lower bout, and model sizes increased in small increments, through to the 12-inch Size 2 and the 12 3/4-inch Size 1. These 'lap pianos', as they are sometimes referred to, can be surprisingly loud and very articulate. Don't expect deep bass, but trebles should sound sweet, and you can get a punchy and forward midrange with a slightly boxy honk. They produce eerily

Most acoustics conform to a handful of shapes/sizes that have been around for a century or more

authentic tones for early blues and ragtime picking, as well as bottleneck.

Many modern manufacturers, such as PRS, offer parlour-sized models, and vintage examples can be found on the usual online sources. Take care to establish that the woods are solid rather than laminated, and budget for a neck reset. Relatively few had sturdy enough X-braces or ladder braces to cope with steel strings, but if you buy wisely, this is the cheapest way to score a vintage Brazilian rosewood acoustic.

0/00

Martin's Size 0 was introduced in 1854, and at 13 1/2 inches wide, 19 1/8 inches long and 4 3/16 inches deep, it remained the largest guitar in the inventory for the next 23 years. Gibson's L-0 and L-1 flat-tops shared the same body width between 1926 and 1931. A Size 0 will have a fuller bass response than most parlour guitars, and they're excellent



The diminutive parlour found great success in the late 19th century, and there's still a place for its sweet trebles today, as this duo of Audens attests

Collings' Waterloo WL-14 is based on the 14 3/4-inch wide Gibson L-00 shape and was Bill Collings' take on the Depression-era Kalamazoo range of guitars



1. Taylor's 712ce 12-fret 'grand concert' shape acoustic sits somewhere between a 00 and 000 model in size
2. The ubiquitous dreadnought's story began in the early 1930s when Ditson's Harry Hunt suggested that Martin build a larger proportioned acoustic
3. Gibson's SJ-200 is the epitome of the 'jumbo' and became known as the 'king of the flat-tops'

for recording. We can't be certain that Robert Johnson played an L-1, but Gibson issued a signature model anyway, while Bob Dylan used an O-sized 'Nick Lucas' model for his *Another Side* and *Bringing It All Back Home* albums.

Introduced in 1877, Martin's 00 'Grand Concert' body measured around 14 1/8 inches wide. At 19 5/8 inches, the 00 was made slightly longer than a Size 0, but it was less deep. The top's increased surface area and the body's greater internal capacity combined to produce a louder and bassier guitar. Martin's 14-fret 00 was widened to 14 5/16 inches, and the Collings Waterloo model is a highly rated modern version.

000/OM

The 000 became Martin's largest model in 1902, measuring 15 inches across the lower bout. Like all standard Martin models up to that point, it had a slotted headstock and a neck that joined the body at the 12th fret. Musical tastes had changed and those players who needed sheer volume to play in jazz bands were more likely to buy an archtop than a flat-top. During the 1920s, banjos were more popular than guitars, but when the banjo craze started to fade, a famous banjo player called Perry Bechtel approached Martin with a special request that would change everything.

Bechtel was accustomed to an easy access banjo neck, so he asked for a guitar with an extra two frets clear of the body. Martin simply bent the shoulders of a regular 000 body a little tighter, so the shortened body met the neck at the 14th fret rather than the 12th. Martin also increased the scale length for Bechtel from 24 29/32 to 25 13/32 inches and called the new design the OM or 'Orchestral Model'. 14th-fret neck joints

Banjo player Perry Bechtel's special request to Martin [in the late 1920s] would change everything

quickly became standard across Martin's product line, and scale length is the only difference between a 14-fret 000 and an OM.

Many consider the 000 and OM models to be the best all-round acoustic guitars out there, and most manufacturers offer their own version – Taylor's equivalent, for instance, is called the Grand Concert. Fingerpickers like the deep but well controlled bass that's found with these models, along with their even frequency response and string-to-string balance. These acoustics also have more than enough projection and volume for rhythm duties, and they're comfortable to play to boot.

Dreadnought

Martin is widely credited for the first dreadnought-style guitar, but Lyon & Healy's 1912 catalogue included a Lakeside Jumbo steel-string that measured 16 1/4 inches across, 5 1/4 inches deep and 20 1/2 inches long. Ditson was one of Lyon & Healy's main dealers and had shops in Boston and New York. Harry L. Hunt, who managed the New York shop, suggested a similar design to Martin.

In 1916 Martin produced a big-shouldered, wide-waisted guitar exclusively for Ditson. Surviving examples are recognisably





dreadnoughts, but it took until 1931 for Martin to revisit the Ditson plans and begin making a Martin branded version. Initially called the D-1 and D-2, the designations were soon changed to D-18 and D-28. The dimensions of Martin's 12-fret dreadnought were 15 5/8 inches wide, 20 15/16 inches long and 4 3/4 inches deep.

The model lost its sloped shoulders and slotted headstock in 1934, when it also changed to a 14th-fret neck join. This second version had square shoulders and, although the width remained the same, the body was shortened to 20 inches, while the depth was increased to 4 7/8 inches. For those wondering, the dreadnought was named after a British battleship that was launched in 1906, and the shape is now the most copied of all acoustic guitar designs.

Dreadnoughts are characterised by powerful and sometimes boomy bass coupled with clear treble. Often exhibiting a scooped midrange, they are ideal for powerful rhythm duties and became the model of choice for bluegrass flatpickers such as Doc Watson and Clarence White. Fingerstylist Bert Jansch used dreadnoughts almost exclusively, especially in later years.

Gibson retained the sloped-shoulder look for J-45 and J-50 dreadnoughts, but

adopted the square-shouldered Martin style in 1958 for Epiphone models. Gibson dreadnoughts such as the Hummingbird and the Dove soon followed, with the J-45 and J-50 squaring off in 1969. Slope-shoulder dreads remain popular, with Taylor offering a contemporary version called the Grand Pacific.

Jumbo

Although Martin stuck with the dreadnought, other manufacturers pushed the flat-top even further. Between 1913 and 1917, Lyon & Healy offered a 22 1/4-inch wide 'Monster Bass' guitar, and during the 1930s the Larson brothers made a 21-inch wide Prairie State 'Big Boy' model. But for reputation rather than size alone, the Gibson SJ-200 exemplifies the 'jumbo' acoustic. Gibson had used the term 'Jumbo' for some of its larger dreadnoughts, so an 'S' for 'Super' prefix was added. After its introduction in 1938, the SJ-200 grew to a width of 17 inches and a 4 7/8-inch depth. Smaller jumbo models including the J-185 and Everly Brothers signature model followed, with a 16-inch lower bout.

Guild is also famous for jumbos including the 17-inch wide F-50 and the 16-inch wide F-40, Taylor offers the Grand Symphony,



and George Lowden has added his own twist to the formula. After numerous 30s and 40s Martin F-hole acoustics had been successfully converted to jumbo flat-tops, the company eventually introduced a 16-inch slim-bodied jumbo in 1977. The Size M was followed by the Size J in 1990, with a 4 7/8-inch depth.

While jumbos are usually loud guitars, the bass is well controlled and generally less boomy than a dreadnought. In short, they're outstanding for loud, clear and penetrating rhythm duties. Big Lowdens tick all those boxes, but they have a subtlety, balance and refinement that makes them fingerstyle favourites and well suited to drop tunings.

Size Isn't Everything

Body dimensions can provide some indication of the tone you might expect, but other factors exert a profound influence, too. Much depends on the tonewoods used to construct the body, and the shape, size and layout of the braces. And with today's vast choice of high-quality pickup systems, there is no necessity to buy a large acoustic simply to be heard. Visual appearance and physical comfort also influence our guitar preferences – these days, anything goes. **G**

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Twin Tweaks

Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough adds a Fender Twin Reverb to his collection for the first time, but can't quite keep his hands off the speakers...

Doing the job I do means I have a great excuse to play different amps and, if I'm lucky, get them for the studio. I feel it's important to understand how different amps work with different speakers and cabs, if for nothing else, to understand how various sounds are created.

It probably doesn't surprise you that as a cab builder I gravitate towards heads rather than combo amps. Though adding an extension cabinet to a combo can sound fantastic, be quite practical and offer oodles of versatility, it probably accounts for no more than five per cent of what I do, so it makes sense for me to focus on heads. After all, every head needs a cab. That said, I do absolutely love a combo.

With all the amps I've gained access to over the years I am almost ashamed to say I have never owned a Fender Twin Reverb. It's not that I didn't know how good they were, just that I had never owned one of my own. So when one came up locally I jumped at the chance.

This may seem odd, but one of the things I love about the Twin Reverb is how little I know about it, especially when it comes to speakers. This means I can jump into tinkering mode without any expectations of what will happen. It also means I have little knowledge of what speakers I should expect to see inside, other than a rough guess that they would be Jensens (a manufacturer favoured by Fender over the years). Imagine my surprise when, on first looking in the back, I see a nice big orange JBL, a speaker that came as an extra on the amp, next to a really dirty-looking Jensen. I played the amp and it sounded great, so I took it.

I smiled all the way home because every JBL speaker I've had in the workshop has sounded great – clear, punchy, powerful and



Paul was pleased to find the big orange JBL inside his Twin Reverb (right), but decided to experiment with different speakers, including this Eminence Alessandro GA-SC64

just lovely, but they're scarce enough to not come up that often. The internet did not serve me well when researching either of the two speakers, so I just used my ears and they both showed the amp in a very good light. But, doing what I do, I had to whip some different speakers in there.

While my knowledge of this amp was limited, I do know that I love the Celestion G12-65 as a replacement speaker. I've used these many times before when converting Twins to head-and-cab combinations and always had great results, so that was my first change. They didn't disappoint... but as this wasn't really new ground for me, they soon got changed out, too. Next up was a combination of Celestion Alnico Cream and H Greenback, a pairing that, technically (as with a few other speakers below), I should not have used due to the amp's higher power rating, but I wasn't playing loud and I was willing to suffer the consequences of a damaged speaker. The warmth of these two added a different flavour to the Twin, one that you wouldn't normally hear. It tamed the highs a little and seemed to make things seem a bit more squishy, less clear but really cool.

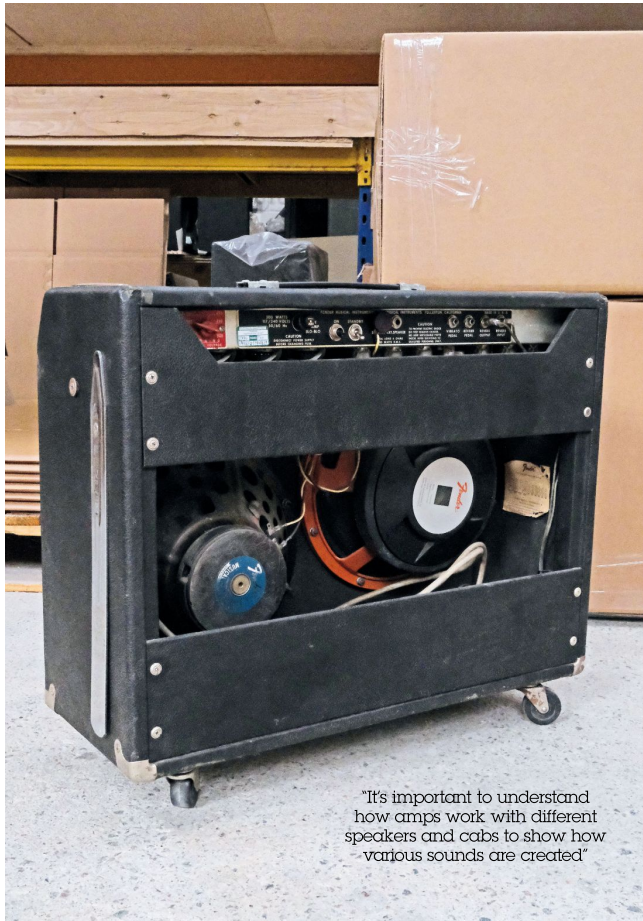
I went through several other changes. The Alnico Golds were very similar to the G12-65, gritty with plenty of bite, then the

Eminence Alessandro GA-SC64 darkened things up a little in a really interesting way, while a pair of Mesa/Boogie OEM EVM 12Ls sounded unbelievably clean with so much focus... but nearly broke my back with the extra weight. Which led me to the Celestion Neo Creamback.

Regular readers may have seen my piece on neodymium-magnet speakers in issue 486, but, in short, after adding around 9kg of weight to the combo with the EVs, I thought I would shave some off with the Neo Creambacks. I have to say, as with the Alnico Cream and H Greenback, the added warmth of the Neo was, at worst, a more than acceptable compromise for what the Fender did so well, and, at best, a different take on an iconic amp – and one that made a heavy amp just that bit more manageable.

For me, changing speakers in an amp such as this isn't about trying to better what Fender did in the first place – they absolutely got it right. It's about showing a fantastic amp in a new light, and maybe making it more functional for someone by reducing the weight, smoothing out the higher frequencies disliked by some, or even giving it more attack. I've always believed this amp has something for nearly everyone – but, damn, it's heavy! 📏

"Changing speakers is about showing an amp in a new light, and maybe making it more functional"



"It's important to understand how amps work with different speakers and cabs to show how various sounds are created"



Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

Taking cues from Fender and Gibson, Gretsch released its first solidbody in 1953

Gretsch 6128 Duo Jet

Back in the early 1950s, the concept of a solidbody electric guitar was beginning to catch on. Throughout the 30s and 40s, it was the finely crafted hollowbody archtops from the likes of Gibson and Epiphone that ruled the electric roost, but that began to change when Californian upstart Fender started making waves in the guitar world.

In 1950, Fender unveiled its revolutionary Esquire and Broadcaster models, attracting reactions from sceptics who criticised the now-iconic Telecaster blueprint for its utilitarian design. To some degree, there was a reluctance to accept the new kid on the block during this watershed period in guitar history. Indeed, Fred Gretsch Jr expressed surprise at his friend Ted McCarty's decision to hit back with a Gibson solidbody electric in the form of the Les Paul in 1952. Before long, however, Gretsch followed suit. The rampant success of Leo Fender's enviable Spanish electrics was just too difficult to ignore.

Gretsch launched its take on an electric solidbody with the Duo Jet in 1953. As per Gibson's Les Paul, the model featured dual single-coil pickups (hence 'Duo') and a single-cutaway mahogany body not dissimilar to its Kalamazoo cousin. But that's where the similarities end. Whereas the Gibson Goldtop was made from solid mahogany and featured a carved maple cap, it's arguable that the Duo Jet is in fact a solidbody guitar at all. Heavily routed to accommodate cables and components, its construction is more akin to a semi-hollowbody, though a glued-on arched top devoid of f-holes gives it the appearance of a solid guitar.

Sporting a black finish, the 6128 model Duo Jet was soon joined by a distinctly more vibrant-looking equivalent model, the 6129 Silver Jet. Adorned in a silver-sparkle covering inherited from Gretsch's popular drum line, the Silver Jet arrived in 1954 along with the stained-wood finish 6130 Round-Up. Featuring an abundance of Western-themed motifs, the swanky Round-Up served as the basis for the 6121 Chet Atkins Solid Body and appeared in Gretsch's 1955 colour catalogue, *Guitars For Moderns*, alongside the new Oriental Red-finish 6131 Jet Fire Bird.

Although Chet Atkins tended to eschew the 6121 in favour of his 6122 Country

Gretsch's seminal design was seen in the hands of the world's most groundbreaking guitar players

Gentlemen signature model, Gretsch's seminal solidbody design was regularly seen in the hands of some of the world's most groundbreaking guitar players. Rockabilly guitarist Cliff Gallup was an early proponent, and rock 'n' roll pioneer Bo Diddley appeared on the cover of his 1959 album, *Go Bo Diddley*, with a Jet Fire Bird. George Harrison famously used his 1957 Duo Jet to perform and record with The Beatles during the band's early days. He later appeared on the cover of his 1987 solo album, *Cloud Nine*, brandishing the same DeArmond Model 2000-equipped guitar (referred to as 'Dynasonic' pickups in Gretsch literature).

Ubiquitous across Gretsch's electric guitar line since the late 40s, these punchy high-output single coils were superseded by the company's own Filter'Tron humbuckers in 1958. Designed by Ray Butts (inventor of the EchoSonic tape echo-equipped guitar amp) in collaboration with Chet Atkins during the mid-50s, the Filter'Tron is a completely different beast and presented the greatest change to the Jets' sound to date. The most prominent design alteration came later in 1961 when the Jets transitioned to a double-cutaway body. ■

The Evolution of the Gretsch 6128 Duo Jet

1953

Black top; single cutaway; dual DeArmond Model 2000 pickups; block markers; script logo

1954

T-roof logo

1955

6134 White Penguin (rare)

1957

Hump block inlays; Cadillac Green finish w/ gold hardware (rare)

1958

Dual Filter'Tron pickups; 2x switches; 3x G/arrow knobs; Space Control bridge; Neo-Classic inlays

1959

Zero fret

1961

Double-cutaway; Burns vibratos replace Bigsby

1962

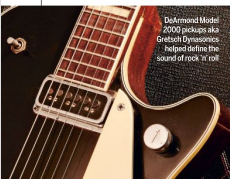
Gold-plated hardware

Late 60s

Super'Tron pickups; Bigsby vibratos return; single-cutaway Roc Jet (discontinued 1980)

1970

Discontinued



DeArmond Model 2000 pickups also Gretsch Dynasonic - helped define the sound of rock 'n' roll

1955 Gretsch 6128 Gretsch Duo Jet

1. SERIAL NUMBER

Five digits typically in the 12000 to 16000 range ink-stamped onto label located in control cavity

2. HEADSTOCK

'T-roof' Gretsch logo; single-bound

3. PLASTICS

Three-ply (w/b/w) pickguard; two-ply (b/w) truss-rod cover; white-plastic heel overlay

4. HARDWARE

Open-back tuners with metal buttons; Melita Synchro-Sonic bridge; 'G' tailpiece; four arrow knobs; three-way pickup selector switch; two thumbscrew strap buttons

5. PICKUPS

Two DeArmond Model 2000/ Dynasonic single coils; two independent pickup volume pots; one master volume pot (cutaway bout); one master tone pot; three-way pickup selector switch; side-mounted jack

6. BODY

13 1/4 inches wide; two inches deep; chambered mahogany with pressed laminated-maple arched top; single cutaway; three-ply (w/b/w) top binding; black-finish top; natural-finish back/sides

7. NECK

Glued-in mahogany; 24.6-inch scale length; single-bound rosewood fretboard, block inlays; 22 frets





David Davidson's Vintage Icons

The least expensive model in the line, a custom colour Firebird I is the rarest of all

1963 Gibson Firebird I



The Firebird insignia seen on the pickguard here was an introduction later in 1963

At the moment, we have custom-colour Firebird I, III, V and VII guitars, along with Thunderbird basses. This is a reverse 1963 Firebird I in Kerry Green. The earliest Firebirds from 1963 do not have a Firebird insignia on the pickguard; that starts a little later. Believe it or not, the Firebird I is one of the rarest models. Because there was a small price difference, the Firebird I is kind of got overlooked. But I happen to think they are the best out of all of them. I mean Clapton played a Firebird I. It's simplistic: a single pickup, no fretboard binding and dot inlays. Some have a stud tailpiece and some have a shorty Maestro Vibrola.

"[Gibson president] Ted McCarty hired a guy called Ray Dietrich – one of the artists in a Manhattan firm that assisted Chrysler and General Motors with body-design work – to help design the Firebird. Dietrich was one of the proponents of the tailfin design on classic cars and he incorporated that into the guitar. Along with that came a neck-through body construction. The first incarnation used a two-piece neck/body lamination with body wings either side. After Gibson decided the guitars needed more strength and stability, they started using a five-piece neck-through construction. So, plus the two wings, it became a seven-piece [lamination] altogether.

"Firebirds don't have many inherent problems. But the case was poor. The banjo tuners would sit right on the inside face of the case, so if it fell over there was a good chance of breaking the headstock. With the reverse design, the way the strings' length continues after the nut influences the sound tremendously. And that's something people like about the tone of these guitars.

"The mini-humbucker is unique to the Firebird and features blade magnets, rather than polepieces, underneath the solid cover. The pickup tends to be somewhat midrange-y, but they are really good blues and rock 'n' roll guitars. I've mostly heard them sounding their best through Marshall tube amps. I don't really love them through Fender amps, but I do like them through a Marshall. A lot of metal guys will play them through a Mesa/Boogie or something like that. If you overdrive them, they're super co-operative, and the playability is great. All the reverse guitars [manufactured from 1963 to 1965] have the wider neck width of 1 11/16-inch, and also a very full-depth profile. A lot of people prefer that. In fact,

"A Firebird I in a custom colour is very rare – this could be the only Kerry Green..."

it's about as close as you can get to the neck profile of a 1959 Les Paul Standard.

"Reverse Firebirds were very costly for Gibson to make. And they needed to be a lot more competitive with the cheaper Stratocaster, which forced them to go with the non-reverse design in mid-1965. The non-reverses were like the new Coke design; it was not a very good idea. Instead of a neck-through construction, the non-reverse Firebirds have a glued-in neck, and Gibson threw P-90 pickups into the mix. They still used mini-humbuckers for the V and VII models. But the reverse Firebird I has a single mini-humbucker, while a non-reverse model has two P-90s. And a reverse

Firebird III has two mini-humbuckers, while a non-reverse one has three P-90s. They continued in the catalogue until 1970, but very few were sold after 1967.

"People got more excited about Gibson custom colours on something like an SG or Les Paul, but a Firebird I in a custom colour is very rare. It's the equivalent of a custom colour Fender Esquire. They didn't make a lot of custom colour Esquires because it was the cheaper guitar. Same with the Firebird I. I've seen a Firebird I in Kerry Green (this one), a see-through Cherry, and a couple of Cardinal Reds. But that's all. I've seen every colour on Firebird III, V and VII guitars. This could be the only Kerry Green Firebird I Gibson ever made. I also have a III, a V and a VII in Kerry. But the Firebird I is the rare one. Which makes sense. People wouldn't normally spend the cash on a custom colour finish on a cheaper guitar. For that money, they're more likely to order a more upmarket model instead. Same with the Esquire; you could pay \$15 for the extra pickup, or you could pay \$15 and get it in a [custom] colour.

"Gibson offered a chart featuring 10 colours. But they also did some that weren't on the chart. Cherry, Cherry Sunburst and Black, for example, aren't on the chart. And we have all of those. The chart listed available colours, but not the special orders. It was standardised, just like Fender's early 60s chart. And it took some inspiration from that. I guess the Fender equivalent of Kerry Green would be Surf Green." [RB]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com/ / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563



The rare reverse Firebird I features a single bespoke mini-humbucker along with volume and tone controls

PHOTOS BY PAMELA DAWSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

As guitarist for Howlin' Wolf, Hubert Sumlin set the tone for electric guitar playing for those who followed, including Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page



PHOTO BY JAMES HANER/REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES



Traditional Electric Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | Gear used Knaggs SSC & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 10 mins per example

WHEN THE GUITAR 'WENT ELECTRIC', its potential as a solo or featured instrument – especially in a band context – blew wide open. A new breed of players, including John Lee Hooker, Hubert Sumlin and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, began to exploit these different possibilities and sounds, which were later built upon further by Chuck Berry, Buddy Guy and Jimi Hendrix. What I'm hoping to capture in these examples is a snapshot in time, when people first began to turn up their amps and discover just how raucous things could get!

As you'll see, I'm relying more on strident ringing open strings rather than single-note 'solos' per se, but the guitar is very much front and centre. With a little ingenuity,

it would be possible to incorporate bass notes and make these ideas stand without a backing track (see Example 1 for some hints on this), though that would arguably be harking back to the previous era as opposed to striding boldly ahead...

Going forwards, if we draw a rough timeline from tracks such as Howlin' Wolf's *Smokestack Lightnin'* (featuring Hubert Sumlin) to Jimi's *Voodoo Chile* and SRV's *Scuttle Buttin'*, you'll see how established this approach has become through the decades. Rather than play a full solo, I've opted for four examples that could nevertheless be assembled to make a complete piece, with Example 4 giving an alternative take over the last four bars.

I've chosen to use a pick for a strong attack, pushing the studio Vox AC15 into a bit of natural overdrive. However, using hybrid picking could also produce some expressive, albeit slightly softer-edged, results. Ultimately, from the standpoint of the present day, you can treat these ideas as 'vocabulary' and apply them to a wide variety of musical situations – the only limit, as they say, is your imagination.

Hope you enjoy exploring these ideas and see you next time! 🎸



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours* (complete with backing tracks), is available now from

www.richardbarrettguitar.com

Example 1

UNLIKE THE LATER EXAMPLES, this phrase could be played unaccompanied, courtesy of the support provided by those ringing bass notes. Sliding between positions 1 and 2 of the E minor pentatonic, I'm heavily featuring the open first and second strings – another way to fill out the sound for a solo guitar arrangement. There is also a hint of Chuck Berry/'50s rock 'n' roll in bar 3 with that doublestop, which also features the 6th (C#).

Example 1 musical notation. It shows a guitar phrase in E minor pentatonic, starting with a double stop on the open first and second strings (E and B) and moving up the neck. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 138 Swung. The phrase is divided into four measures, with a 'Let ring' instruction in the first measure. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as 'N.C.' (Natural Chord), '1/4' (quarter note), and '2/4' (eighth notes). The bass line is shown on a six-string guitar, with the open first and second strings (E and B) being the primary focus.

Example 2

MOVING TO THE IV CHORD (A), I'm using a voicing of A7, which is very popular in this style and means I can start the phrase strongly with an open fifth string as my root. As we'll see a bit later, this shape is movable if you have a bass player to fill out the low-end – and even if you don't, there are positions where this can be worked around. I'm finishing up with a few more vocabulary ideas from the open-position E minor pentatonic.

Example 2 musical notation. It shows a guitar phrase in A7, starting with a double stop on the open fifth string (A) and moving up the neck. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 138 Swung. The phrase is divided into four measures, with a 'Let ring' instruction in the first measure. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as 'N.C.' (Natural Chord), '1/4' (quarter note), and '2/4' (eighth notes). The bass line is shown on a six-string guitar, with the open fifth string (A) being the primary focus. A note in the fourth measure is marked 'Open 2nd sounded with pull-off'.

Example 3

STRAYING FURTHER UP THE FRETBOARD into 'lead' guitar territory, I feel this phrase demonstrates a platform on which many later styles have been built. You'll hear some characteristic quarter-tone bends (especially on the minor 3rd/G) and the characteristic 6th (C#) crops up, too. For the end of the phrase, I'm playing a run down on the third string, alternating with the open first and second to fill out the sound and push the guitar up front.

Example 4

AN ALTERNATIVE TAKE on the final phrase, I've opted to use the same '7th' voicing as Example 2, starting on B7 (the V chord) then shifting down two frets back to A (IV). The final phrase is inspired by a mixture of SRV and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, featuring some rapid chromatic hammer-ons (you could try sliding this, too) between shapes 1 and 2 of the E minor pentatonic, ending as we began on the open sixth string.

Hear It Here

HOWLIN' WOLF THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION



Right from the very first track, *Moanin' At Midnight*, you can hear Hubert Sumlin's edgy, slightly driven guitar using the kind of phrasing I've highlighted. *Smokestack Lightnin'* almost doesn't need discussing as it's such a classic – but it's always worth another listen. *Spoonful* demonstrates the guitar making a leap from chord-based licks and fills to outright solos. It's easy to see why Hubert Sumlin was such a great influence on the young Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck.

JOHN LEE HOOKER KING OF THE BOOGIE



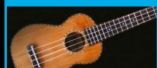
Another compilation, but this one gives a great overview of the development of John Lee Hooker's style, and of blues guitar playing in general. Sally Mae, backed with acoustic guitar (in what sounds like open G or A tuning with a capo), establishes a base line, developed further on *Stuttering Blues*, which steps squarely into the territory we've covered here. Finally, who could forget about Boom Boom? Very similar to *Smokestack Lightnin'* but in a more up-tempo context.

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE GOSPEL TRAIN



Though Sister Rosetta Tharpe was known primarily as a singer – and a formidable one at that – this album, released in 1956, contains many of what were the very latest styles and techniques. Check out her biting tone and harmonically savvy soloing on *Beams Of Heaven*, *Cain't No Grave Hold My Body Down*, and *99 1/2 Won't Do*. There is also some wonderful footage of her performing in the UK in the early 60s, which is worth searching for online.

Ukuleles

[illegible]

Travel Guitars



21763 - Breedlove PurePiano Custom CE Travel
23484 - Cordoba Meca 414 Class Guitar Melngrove
23494 - Erynn Nova Go Black Custom Fibre Guitar
23484 - Gals Jumbo Jono Resene Maple
22025 - LGS Travel/KAE Travel Guitar
23185 - Levin L25STE Jumbo with Fishman
12752 - Martin 00C1R10EL Lutho Acoustic
19489 - Martin DA-100 Jnr Buffalo
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7201 - Martin LXVE Electric Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LXVE Electric Acoustic Guitar
10306 - Tanglewood TW EM Mini Ho
15365 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
25543 - Traveler Guitar Ultra Light Nylon MH

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PHOTO BY OLIVIERETTE

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