

Guitarist

Issue 489

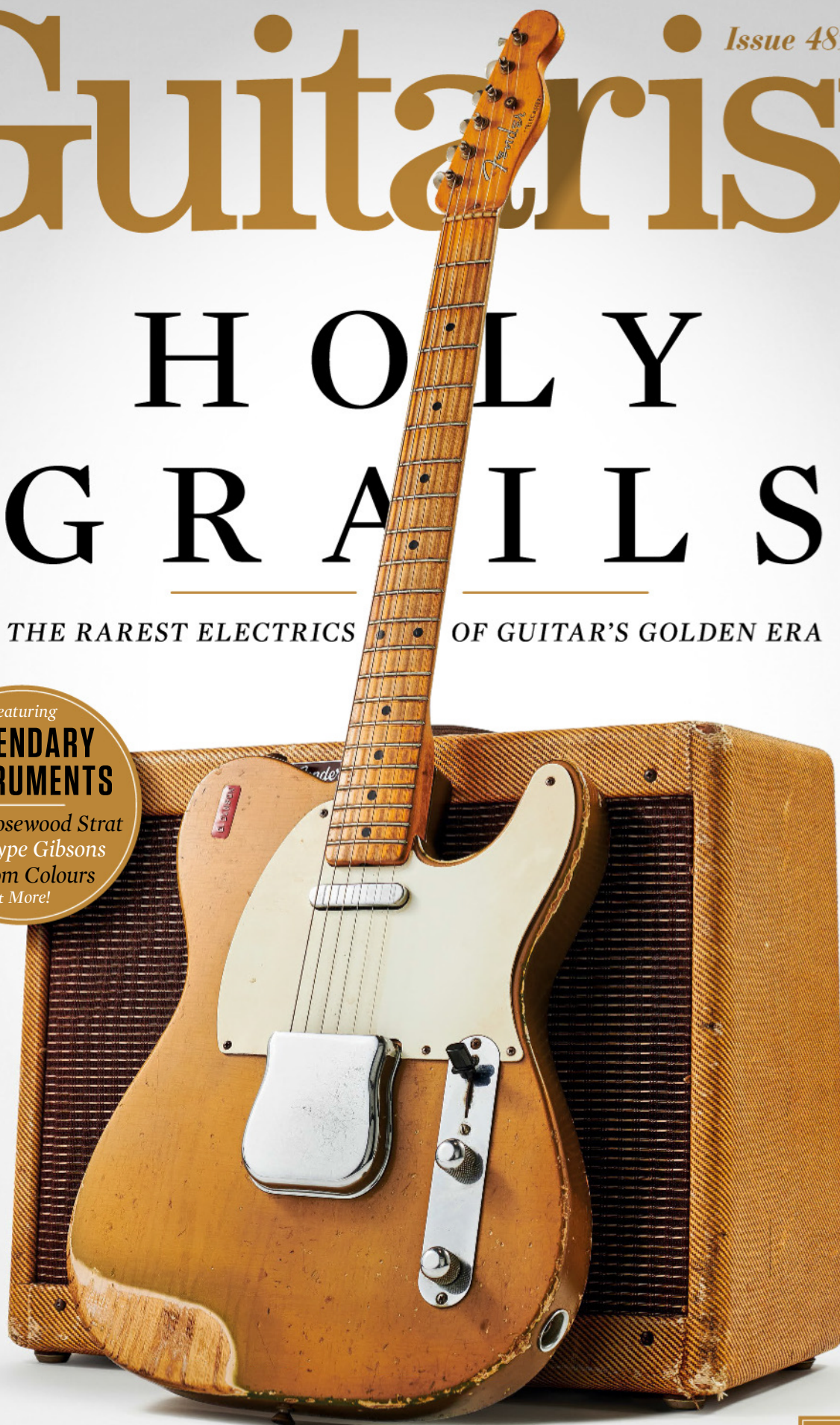
SEPTEMBER 2022

HOLY GRAILS

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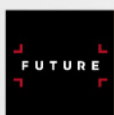


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Changing Customs



Looking at some of the amazing vintage electrics at Well Strung Guitars (see cover feature, page 60), you get a vivid impression of how these guitars must have glowed with modernity when they were first taken out of their case by the original owner. And, the first time they were dinged, that person probably cursed their own clumsiness and wished they hadn't just marred the perfection of the thing. They might have been surprised to learn, 60 years on, that people pay a premium to have wear-marks put on their guitars...

Another twist of history that the guitar buyer of the 1960s might have been surprised by is how custom colours have become so sought after. Custom colour guitars were always relatively scarce and David Davidson of Well Strung Guitars theorises that the most popular ones – various shades of red, white and blue – predominated because they echoed the colours of the American flag. Meanwhile, ostensibly 'feminine' pastel colours, such as Shell Pink or Kerry Green went too far beyond the lines for many young guys of the era. These days, thankfully, colour doesn't cause such hue and cry and Gibson's recent Custom Shop reissues of 60s Firebirds were a riot – with ultra-rare colours such as Heather Poly recreated for a present-day audience intrigued by all things rare and vintage.

Is there any meaning to these contradictory turns of history? Well, perhaps they show there are few really bad ideas in guitar design – but some concepts have to wait a while for their moment in the spotlight. So, the next time you see a new guitar that's too radical for your tastes, remember that even the Tele was 'too different' for traditionalists once upon a time. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Fairport Convention

Still going strong decades on, founder member Simon Nicol joins us to remember the band's early years on the 60s folk-rock scene **p76**



Tele Twang

Huw Price takes a deep dive into the evocative sound of Tele pickups, from magnets to baseplates on **p126**



Speaker Tweaker

Paul Gough of Zilla cabs shows you how to make the most overlooked of tone mods – changing the speaker in your amplifier **p130**

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BY FENDER

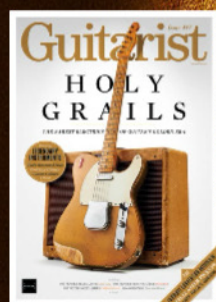
THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

GOLD EDITION

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Olly Curtis

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HOLY GRAILS

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FIRST PLAY



PJD CAREY APPRENTICE
£1,950

WHAT IS IT? If Leo Fender was asked to make a Les Paul Junior, it might have turned out just like this...

Start Me Up

Why don't more makers just focus on simplicity, playability and sound? Well, here's a boutique level Junior-style guitar that does exactly that. Fasten your seat belts, you're in for a ride!

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

What is it about Gibson's Les Paul Junior that – some 68 years on – continues to inspire both guitar makers and guitar players? For that matter, the good ol' Fender Esquire shares an equally blue-collar appeal and vibe. Pared down with just a single pickup, both designs can be huge tone machines with a very seat-of-your-pants drive.

We've seen plenty of contemporary makers focusing on either of these benchmark designs, but combining the two is what's at play with PJD's latest electric, the Carey Apprentice – a special run of just 12 pieces in either 3 Tone Tear Drop Burst, as here, or Butterscotch. For this fast-rising UK maker, the Carey was the design that put the company on the map. While that guitar features twin pickups, typically a humbucker at the bridge with a P-90 single coil at neck, the Apprentice strips that down to one soapbar single coil. So what?

Well, anyone who's been lucky enough to get their hands on a Carey will know that PJD's recipe is a little unique, combining the scale length of a Fender with a Les Paul-style single-cut slab body that's chambered and can be ordered with or without an f-hole. The ones we've played, not least







1. This new Cream T Apprentice P90 single coil is a slightly hotter version of The Duke soapbar with a measured DCR of 7.78kohms. As ever, it's an easy job to swap to any other P-90-style pickup – and there's a lot of choice out there, not least from other UK winders

the start-up Carey Standard, combine light weight with plenty of character and depth. The Carey range starts with that Standard model, which includes a logo'd Hiscox case and Cream T pickups, and is priced the same as this special run.

However, the Apprentice signals a few firsts for PJD Guitars. It's the brand's first single-pickup guitar and the first of its models to use obeche – solid, not chambered. There's a new Cream T soapbar on display here, too, and the hardware,

While the body finish and that P-90 might nod to the Junior, there's a real old Tele feel at play

2. Typically PJD uses a laser-cut logo, but here it's silk-screened in gold. The face is also gloss nitro, while the wood is quarter-sawn AAA flamed maple

untypically, is aged. But perhaps the biggest difference comes with the gloss nitro-finished body and headstock face, using a formula that's cracked, and will continue to do so, to emulate age. Unusually, too, both the front *and* back have this black through red to yellow sunbursting – more Fender in colour than Gibson Junior. So it's not a relic, but with a satin feel to the neck back and fingerboard face it feels and looks like an instrument that's been around the block a few times. And we'd swear there are more cracks in the finish than when it arrived...



UNDER THE HOOD

What's inside the neat foil-lined cavity?

The basic circuit centres around CTS pots, measured at 271kohms for the volume and 258k for the tone. The tone cap is a paper-in-oil type with a .022 microfarads rating, and the cloth-covered wire is hooked up modern-style.

There is another difference in that we also have a Mars-Tronic Treblemaker: a variable treble bleed circuit designed in the UK by Ben Marshall. It's the smaller of

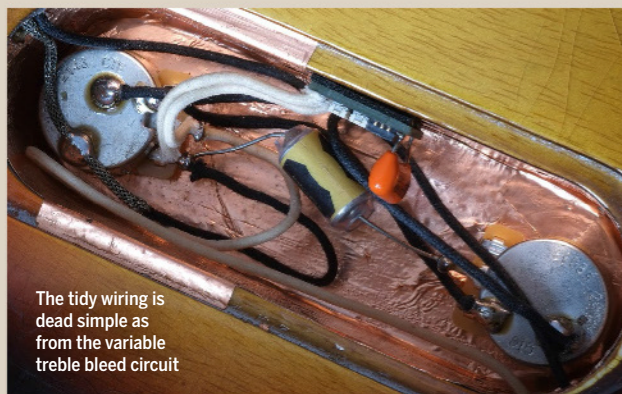
two circuits that Ben has designed. "[The larger version has] push-fit terminals and I send that out with six different capacitors so you can switch and change caps quite easily," he explains.

Here, however, the treble bleed capacitor value is fixed (.001 microfarads, though you can easily resolder whatever value you prefer), but you can experiment by adding a parallel resistor and/or a series resistor

– or switch them both out. Each resistor is 10kohms, but it's wired in series with an adjustable trim pot (with a nominal value of 500k), meaning you can set the value of each resistor between those extremes. You can experiment with it or simply leave that parallel resistor engaged, as is. To maximise the tweakability, the mounting of the circuit board could be better, but, hey, this is the point of a prototype, isn't it?



The Mars-Tronic circuit means you can easily experiment or leave it as supplied



The tidy wiring is dead simple as from the variable treble bleed circuit

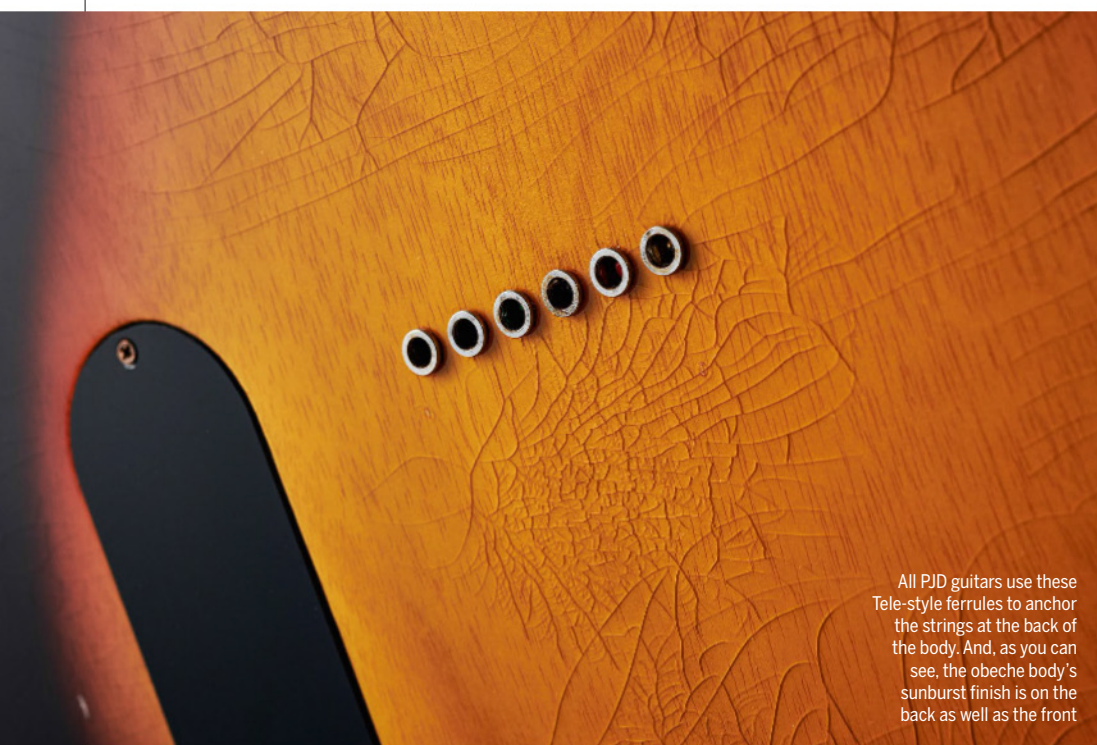


PJD uses proper Allen-keyed bolts that thread into inserts in the neck to secure the neck to the body – this is a no-screw zone

Feel & Sounds

The Apprentice is a very vivid example of the PJD recipe, stripped back to its simple ingredients. It centres on a lightweight platform that, just like the chambered Carey Standard, has a big and ringing unplugged response. The guitar feels very alive as if the stiff, rather big neck is driving the body. The neck has very little taper dimensionally: at the 1st fret its depth is 22.3mm and at the 12th it's only marginally deeper at 22.9mm, although it obviously feels bigger as the neck widens out. There's quite a full feel to the 'C' shape and – combined with that subtly compound 254mm to 305mm (10- to 12-inch) radius fingerboard, medium gauge frets with a good height, not to mention the satin nitro finish on the back and face – it feels like a slightly modernised vintage Tele.

The response is subtly different from the Carey Standard, even though the character is very similar. Its modern-style wiring (see Under The Hood, above) is very familiar and direct, though it doesn't match our '57 Les Paul Junior; A/B'ing the guitars, well, they're certainly different in response. But even in quite a dense track the PJD sounds – perceived or actually – a little more mid-scooped, as opposed to the throatier mid-pushed voice of the Junior. And yet that's the point. While the body finish and that P-90 might nod to the Junior,



All PJD guitars use these Tele-style ferrules to anchor the strings at the back of the body. And, as you can see, the obeche body's sunburst finish is on the back as well as the front

It's a faultlessly constructed, simple recipe that uses high-grade material and components

as we've said, there's a real old Tele feel at play here but with a thicker, more powerful and slightly smoother voice without losing that string separation. It's very responsive and yet very balanced, sound-wise.

There's nothing one-dimensional here, which is reflected by just how well it works across the styles: stinging and snappy old-style blues at one extreme, with big cleans that drive your pedalboard at the other, and a vibrant roots rock rhythm machine in between.

Verdict

Messing with the classics will always have the purists up in arms, but when it's done as well as this it's hard to argue with. It's a simple recipe that uses high-grade material and components, and is faultlessly constructed. The light weight and neck feel really chase a vintage vibe – enhanced by the cracked nitro finish – but with none of the issues of older instruments. Sound-wise, like its appearance, it's a real Esquire-meets-Junior hybrid. A very stable working instrument and another great example of the stellar guitar craft we have here in the UK. **G**



The Gotoh hardware is aged in-house and is the same that's used on all the PJD guitars: vintage-style tuners and a steel block-saddle bridge



PJD CAREY APPRENTICE

PRICE: £1,950 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Single-cut, solidbody electric

BODY: Obeche

NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted 3A figured maple, standard C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Quarter-sawn roasted 3A figured maple, rectangular acrylic inlays, compound 254-305mm (10-12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar FW55090)

HARDWARE: Gotoh Strat-style hardtail bridge with block steel saddles and through-body stringing, vintage-style split-post tuners – aged nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Cream T Apprentice 59 P90 soapbar single coil, volume with Mars-Tronic Treblemaker and tone control

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.88/6.34

OPTIONS: Finish only

RANGE OPTIONS: Carey Standard (£1,950), Carey Elite (£2,399) and Carey Limited (£2,699)

LEFT-HANDERS: To order, £1,950

FINISHES: 3 Tone Tear Drop Burst (as reviewed), Butterscotch Blonde – high-gloss aged nitro to body and headstock face; satin nitro to neck back

PJD Guitars

01904 947288

www.pjdguitars.com



PROS Simple high-quality build; light weight; neck shape and feel; expansive voicing from pickup; tweakable treble bleed circuit

CONS It's a limited edition...

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

Fiore



PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

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

- Mark Lettieri

FIRST PLAY



BARONI AFK150 HEAD
£549

WHAT IS IT? Affordable, super-portable 150-watt head, with vintage Italian styling complementing its hybrid design

Small Wonder

From the cult Foxgear pedal brand comes Baroni's latest innovation – a micro head that could just be the most portable amp out there

Words Nick Guppy Photography Phil Barker

Italy's contribution to the guitar universe is bigger than many people realise, with many famous brands including Eko, Binson and Meazzi, from Sicily, playing pivotal roles in the development of some of the biggest names in rock and pop. Today, Italy's amp and pedal scene continues to flourish. Here, we're looking at the new AFK150 compact pedalboard head from Ugo Baroni, a well-known amp and pedal designer from northern Italy, currently producing a range of Chinese-manufactured pedals under the Foxgear Distribution umbrella brand, which also includes Gurus – another well-known Italian amp and pedal builder.

The Baroni AFK150 is a hybrid design with a 12AX7-based preamp feeding a Class D output stage that's capable of delivering a respectable 150 watts RMS into a four-ohm load. Power comes from a universal switched mode supply that will accept anything between 100 and 240 volts AC, so you can plug the AFK150 into the wall anywhere in the world. Slightly unusually for a mains-powered device, there's no on/off power switch or external fuse access.

The electronics fit into a sturdy cast alloy tray with the control panel forming the lid, secured by four Allen screws.

The backlit acrylic control-panel graphics pay a subtle tribute to Binson's classic Echorec spinning disk delays, made in Milan and famously used by Pink Floyd in the late 60s and early 70s, most visibly in the *Live At Pompeii* film. As well as making things much easier to see in low-light conditions, it's a cool feature with plenty of vintage mojo. On our sample the backlighting was a little uneven – somewhat dimmer on the lower half of the panel and on some of the connection labels along the top edge.

The 12AX7 valve that powers the AFK150's preamp is horizontally mounted and visible through a Perspex window, while the rest of the electronics are miniature components on densely packed PCBs. There are two ventilation slots in the front and rear sides, with all the connections at the back. Pressing the red standby switch on the rear panel puts the AFK150 in play mode, activating coloured LEDs on the tone controls, which light up







1. The Baroni's backlit EQ knobs tell you the amp is in play mode and also change to let you know which channel is active, blue for clean and orange for mean. The passive EQs are tweaked differently for each channel, producing Fender-ish cleans and Marshall-ish leads

to show you which channel is active: blue for the clean channel and orange for the drive channel, while the 12AX7 valve gets its own blue LED to complement the red glow of the heater filaments.

It's a proper two-channel design and has separate gain, volume and EQ controls for its clean and drive channels. There's also a global master volume and presence knob to quickly tweak the amp for live use. The bass, mid and treble controls are traditional passive networks, with different frequency centres for a Fender-ish clean and a Marshall-ish drive. There are three small toggle switches between the two sets of EQ controls. The first is a ground lift for the unbalanced line output, while the second selects the AFK150's integrated cabinet simulation or bypasses it, if you prefer to use a separate solution. The third toggle switches the amp's effects loop between series and parallel operation, with parallel being the preferred choice for delays and modulation effects.

Besides the loop send and return sockets, other rear-panel connections include a single input jack, the fixed-level unbalanced line out, and a remote footswitch socket, which toggles the AFK150's channels if you prefer to use the head on top of a speaker cabinet. Additionally, for pedalboard use, there's a single footswitch on the control panel's bottom right, safely distanced from other knobs and switches.

There are two speaker output jacks wired in parallel for a minimum load of four ohms,

2. The backlit control panel and graphic design are reminiscent of the vintage Binson Echorec delay, made in Italy in the 1960s and 70s and used by many artists, most notably Pink Floyd. The 12AX7 valve is displayed behind a clear Perspex window

The valve-based preamp of this lightweight package delivers heavyweight tone





3

3. The rear-panel connections include two speaker outlets highlighted in red, with sockets for the line out and effects loop. There's a single input jack and a remote footswitch jack if you want to use the head on top of a speaker cab. The red button puts the amp into standby mode, muting the speakers but keeping the valve warm

as well as the standby switch, which mutes the speakers but leaves power connected to the valve to reduce warm-up time. Like many pedal amps on the market right now, the AFK150 can be used without speakers, meaning that you can connect the line out to a console or DAW for silent recording or quiet stage environments.

Overall, the AFK150 is a good-looking pedal, with very compact dimensions that should fit easily on most 'boards, tipping the scales at just under 1kg (2lb).

Feel & Sounds

We tried out Baroni's AFK150 with our regular guitars: a Stratocaster fitted with Duncan Alnico Pro single coils and an old Les Paul loaded with PAFs. To check out the effects loop, we also used a Zoom MultiStomp that was running chorus and delay models. Whatever equipment you use, especially when gigging, it's good practice to always use proper mains protection. We use an APC surge protector in the wall mains supply, which has its own power switch, so the Baroni's lack of one wasn't an issue for us.

The AFK150's USA-inspired clean channel is very sweet, with plenty of headroom and an impressively smooth EQ that's equally flattering to humbuckers and single coils. There's just enough gain to push this channel into a gentle overdrive that sounds great for blues and country, while adding a touch of chorus from the parallel loop makes a great rhythm tone. There's no loop mix control, so you have to turn off the dry signal in the effect and vary the effect volume to taste.

There's an impressive reserve of gain on tap with the lead channel, more than enough to make the weediest of single coils sing and sustain. However, unlike some

4. There are separate gain and volume controls for the clean and drive channels, and for convenience there's also a global master volume and presence control, so you can quickly fine-tune your sound to suit the venue



4

The Baroni features an unbalanced fixed level line out that has a useful ground lift, and there's also a cabinet simulation that's tuned to imitate the sound of an open-back 2x12 cab loaded with Celestion Vintage 30s. The third toggle switch changes the effects loop from series to parallel, which is better suited to modulation effects such as chorus



BARONI AFK150 HEAD

PRICE: £549

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Valve/solid-state preamp, solid-state power amp.

OUTPUT: 150W RMS into 4 ohms, 75W RMS into 8 ohms

VALVES: 1x 12AX7

DIMENSIONS: 220 (w) x 125 (d) x 50mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.9/2

CABINET: Cast alloy

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Clean Channel: volume, gain, bass, mid, treble. Drive channel: volume, gain, bass, mid, treble. FX loop series/parallel switch, cab sim in/out switch, ground lift switch, channel footswitch. Global master volume, presence

FOOTSWITCH: Standard latching footswitch (not supplied) toggles channels

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series/parallel effects loop, unbalanced line out with switchable cab simulation option and ground lift

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

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high-gain preamps, the lower-gain settings are just as rewarding to use, convincingly emulating vintage Brit stack sounds of the late 60s and early 70s. Meanwhile, swapping to humbuckers and turning up the gain puts you into fully-saturated 'Tweed on steroids' MTV-era ZZ Top territory. There's plenty of volume to get your point over – 150 watts RMS into four ohms means the AFK150 is properly loud when needed. Even when producing roughly 75 watts into an eight-ohm cab, it's still more than enough to handle most pub gigs, with a clarity and definition most older solid-state output stages can't match.

Verdict

Traditions are often hard to shake off. Many of us are used to guitar amplifiers being large heavy boxes, frequently transported in even larger and heavier boxes to protect their fragile valve-powered circuits – and it's been like that since the dawn of rock 'n' roll. However, thanks to recent improvements in Class D amplification, switched-mode power supplies and sub-miniature electronics, it doesn't have to be that way any more.

Unlike some high-gain preamps, the lower-gain settings are just as rewarding to use

The package may be light, but the AFK150's valve-based preamp delivers heavyweight tone that easily covers a wide range of playing styles, from jazz to classic and modern rock, with smooth interactive EQs to suit any guitar. We'd like to have seen a second footswitch button to bypass the effects loop, especially as Baroni has gone to the trouble of providing a parallel option, but at this price that's really all we can grumble about.

Compared to the competition, we think the AFK150 is really good value for money. Aimed at serious amateurs and pro players, it's a great choice if you're looking to build a super-portable rig for local gigs or touring. Products such as Baroni's AFK150 make a compelling case for change: if you can have an amp the size and weight of a paperback novel that's capable of filling a concert hall with ease, why wouldn't you want one? **G**

8/10

PROS Compact, very portable; warm USA-inspired clean channel; Brit-inspired vintage overdrive channel; low noise levels for recording; plenty of power for live

CONS No mains on/off switch or externally replaceable fuse (we'd recommend using a switchable power strip); second footswitch button to bypass the effects loop would've been a welcome extra



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FIRST PLAY



CÓRDOBA STAGE
£625

WHAT IS IT? Thinline electro nylon-string with new pickup system developed with Fishman

Treading The Boards

Classed by Córdoba as its “first nylon-string electric”, the Stage breaks all the rules but not your wallet. Does it sound as good as it looks?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Amplifying any acoustic guitar, if you can't use microphones, can be fraught with difficulties, not least for those of us who have to cart our own PAs to gigs while acting as guitarist, roadie *and* sound engineer. And although acoustic pickup technology is now hugely refined, battling with onstage feedback from your acoustic box – especially if you're a part of a band – can certainly be difficult to manage.

Creating a thin-bodied electro is far from a new idea, but it does answer some questions, offering a stage-aimed instrument with a much smaller soundbox – and, therefore, much less acoustic volume – that can work in many environments. Like many large-scale makers, Córdoba already has that style covered, with guitars such as its affordable thinline C5-CET or the upper-tier 55FCE Negra. The new Stage takes the concept further. Not only is this model a thinline electro, it also has a narrower-than-classical neck width, with a 406mm (16-inch) 'board radius, and instead of a conventional soundhole we have three small ports on the upper bout – in the style of Córdoba's 'arches' logo, inspired by the Mezquita Cathedral in Córdoba, Spain. In complementary fashion, three rotary controls for the electro system are mounted on the face of the guitar. You can see why Córdoba feels this is its first 'electric' nylon-string.







1

As we've reported before, Córdoba is the Spanish-sounding brand (founded in 1997 in Santa Monica, California, and created by the Córdoba Music Group, who also owns Guild) for what is now a huge range of nylon-strings catering for beginners up to pretty serious-level classical and flamenco players. Its instruments are made in various locations, from China to Spain, and although

The plugged-in voicing really captures the quick, bright-edged attack – something we always look for in a nylon-string

our Stage has no country of origin indication – simply “Designed in California, USA” – the UK distributor confirms that it's China.

With its far from lofty price in mind (which includes a very good gigbag made from recycled nylon), what we see here is pretty impressive craft. The single-cut slab-body design nods to Taylor's steel-string T5z, and here the two-piece mahogany back

is extensively chambered. It's topped with a solid spruce braced front and faced with an attractive flamed maple veneer in a pretty moody Edge Burst, while the back, sides and neck have a vibrant, slightly orange-y light brown clear finish. There's a light ribcage contour on the back, and the slightly rounded neck heel actually looks like it was inspired by PRS's Singlecut.

The neck has a single-piece heel stack and the slotted headstock is cleverly and virtually invisibly spliced on, one of the few elements that recall a classical's design, along with that tie-block bridge. It also uses a two-way truss rod, adjustable behind the nut like many more modern electro nylon-strings.

According to Córdoba's launch PR, the Stage's pickup system was co-developed with Fishman and uses both a body sensor (actually two small dot sensors stuck to the top just behind the bridge) and an under-saddle transducer; the lower of the three rotary controls, Body Blend, lets you blend the body sensor in with the transducer. The front control is volume and the middle EQ control moves from 'flat' to mid-scooped, emphasising the treble and bass.

1. Matching the fingerboard and bridge, the cleverly spliced headstock is faced with pau ferro. The nut is bone and, like many modern nylon-strings, there's a two-way truss rod

CUT TO SIZE

How does the Stage compare with a more regular nylon-string electro?

Córdoba's GK Pro is typical of the modern electro-cutaway, while retaining much classical style, such as its 12-fret-to-the-body neck and a flat uncambered 'board. Both models use the same classical standard 650mm (25.6-inch) scale length, while the Stage's neck is only slightly narrower and less deep.

(All dimensions in mm)

Neck width at nut
String spacing at nut
Neck width at 12th fret
String spacing at bridge
Neck depth at 1st fret
Neck depth at 9th fret
Body depth at rim
Body width
Weight (kg/lb)



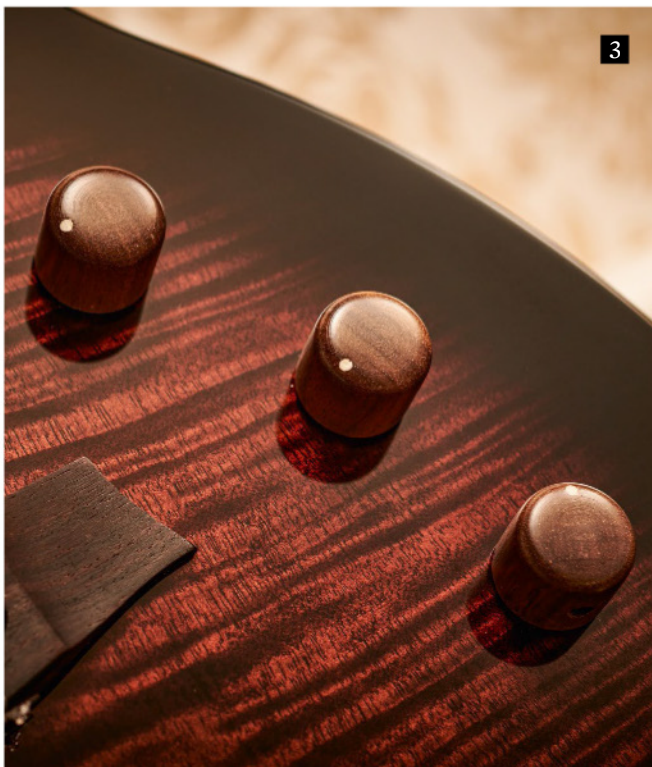
CÓRDOBA STAGE

CÓRDOBA GK PRO

48.9	49.74
38.5	41
59.67	60.21
57.5	59.5
20.4	21.5
23.5	24.5
41.7	90.37
352	370
2.32/5.1	1.58/3.48



2



3

Feel & Sounds

With its solidbody depth and overall size, the Stage feels considerably more compact played seated than the much deeper body of a standard electro, such as the Córdoba GK Pro we used as a reference. Our dimensions table above illustrates the relatively small difference in the necks, both in width and depth, although in the hand the GK Pro's neck certainly feels bigger. There's less difference in the all-important string spacing but enough to make the Stage initially feel slightly cramped for traditional players – less so for those of us coming from a steel-string acoustic or electric.

This crossover style means you can use a pick, not just your fingers. The Stage feels particularly good for jazzier or Latin styles, and its 14-frets-to-the-body neck join is more steel-string like. The strap button is placed on the upper shoulder to augment the button on the base, while the output jack is side-mounted, again a very electric-guitar-like feature. Strapped on, it feels light but not insubstantial, and it balances well.

2. Reflecting its 'electric' status, this neck joint and slightly rounded heel look like a PRS Singlecut to us!

3. Instead of the more usual side-mounted preamp, the controls here are face-mounted and very fast in use. We get volume, EQ and the all-important Body Blend control, which adds the two top sensors to the under-saddle pickup



This slightly modernised tie-block bridge features a lightly compensated bone saddle. As ever, if you're new to nylon-strings then you'll need to learn how to attach the strings, but it's actually a very easy process

By design, there's a little acoustic volume but enough for solo practice, and while there's a lot less body to the voice than our GK Pro, there's a nice quick and bright-edged attack – something that this writer always looks for in any nylon-string.

Overall, it's a good player. However, like many lower-priced nylon-strings, the fret tops are left a little rough – something that could easily be fixed with some polishing.

An affordable stage-aimed guitar with a neck that's much more manageable for the crossover player

You won't be bending like a steel-string, of course, but it's just good craft.

The actual voicing when plugged in really captures that note attack, and the under-saddle sounds crisp and clear. This is especially true with the Body Blend control fully anti-clockwise, with none of the body sensors being voiced and the EQ turned in a similar direction to the flat position. 'Body' is accurate as that's what it adds

to the sound; the top becomes a tap plate, and the EQ control appears to add subtle crispness and low-end lift with a slight dip in the mids. It's actually a very realistic, almost mic'd-sounding classical voice, perhaps aimed towards the more percussive flamenco, rather than the somewhat clichéd rounded nylon voice. You might get more adjustment via a side-panel band EQ, but the front-placed controls are very fast to use and a lot less fiddly. The Stage also records direct into a DAW really well, not least with those body sensors adding considerable realism to the under-saddle sound.

Verdict

This nylon electro is well named, clearly designed to give a live performer a rather good and quite authentic nylon-string voice with complete absence of feedback in all but high-volume settings. Aside from rather scratchy fret tops, it's well made and good looking without the bulk of a full acoustic body; the neck is much more manageable for the crossover player, too. All in, a great and pretty affordable stage-aimed guitar that's no slouch when it comes to home recording; perfect to add some Latin vibes to those dance tracks. **G**



CORDOBA STAGE

PRICE: £625 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Thinline cutaway-electro nylon-string

TOP: Solid spruce with flame maple veneer facing

BACK: Chambered mahogany

NECK: Mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")

TUNERS: Gold classical style with black buttons and rollers

NUT: Bone

FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro, 406mm (16") radius with side dot markers

FRETS: 19 (plus 3 partial), medium/small

BRIDGE: Pau ferro with bone saddle

ELECTRICS: Fishman/Córdoba Stage pickup system with under-saddle and body (top) sensors, volume, EQ and Body Blend rotary controls

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Córdoba's C5-CET (£399) is a more classic-looking thinline electro and is available with various options. Other thinline electros include the Spanish-made 55FCE (£1,649), as used by the Gipsy Kings

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Edge Burst (as reviewed) – gloss polyurethane

Selectron UK Ltd

01795 419460

www.cordobaguitars.com



9/10

PROS Neat, compact thinline design; tidy build; excellent playability; very good amplified sounds, especially at this price

CONS Our model had rough fret tops, though there is an easy fix

PJD

Guitars

EST.2010

Guitarist
GEAR
OF THE
YEAR



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

FIRST PLAY



GRETSCH G5700 LAP STEEL £495

WHAT IS IT? Solid mahogany-bodied 28-fret lap steel with 'low noise' single-coil pickup



Slide Show

A newly refreshed lap steel from Gretsch, with bags of style

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis

1. As its most basic, a lap steel is an easy DIY project, but Gretsch has piled on the style here. The 'fingerboard' is a thin piece of plastic screwed to the body; the fret position markers are simply a guide

2. Like any single-pickup guitar, volume and tone are all you need. Here, the controls are wired vintage style using 500k mini pots, and a .047 microfarads (473J) tone cap. It's basic stuff that could easily be upgraded and/or modified

3. Aside from calling it a 'low noise' single coil, there's little info about what's under the chromed metal cover. It's direct-mounted to the body but does have height-adjustable poles and sits in a cavity that measures 90mm by 38.7mm, pretty much the size of a P-90 if you fancy a swap

4. The nut is spec'd as being aluminium, but it looks like the same plated metal of the bridge, which is hidden under that rather over-high cover. Like a Tele, the strings are anchored on the back of the body – and you don't need intonation adjustment as the strings aren't being pushed down onto the fingerboard

Back in the 1930s, the 'electric Hawaiian' guitar pretty much beat the 'electric Spanish' instrument to market. Post-war, the Spanish style began its ascendancy and the lap steel became more niche. It differs from the later pedal steel in numerous ways, not least that it doesn't have any pedals. As its name suggests, it's simply played on your lap (table or keyboard stand), and while console steels – one or more necks in different tunings with legs – had their day, the lap steel remains devilishly simple for today's musician.

It can be tuned in numerous ways and used for clean country or Hawaiian styles, or played dirty through your pedalboard. You don't need metal finger picks or a metal bar to voice the notes, either: any slide will do, as will standard pick and fingers. It's a true punk of an electric guitar.

Gretsch's G5700 (apparently based on the 1963 Electromatic Mainliner) has been in the catalogue for some years. This year, it's refreshed in new colours and provides a solidbody option to the acoustic G9210 Boxcar and G9230 Bobtail square-neck resonators. Its classy, almost moulded-looking form recalls the Art Deco style of many original (quite collectable) lap steels. The nut is quoted as aluminium but looks like a nickel-plated metal part, likewise the bridge, with the strings anchoring through the body. The metal coverplate over the bridge actually sits quite high – we removed it to carry out our sound test.

The 'low noise' single coil has a measured DCR of 5.42kohms and is in a neat logo'd chromed cover, the volume and tone controls under a plastic control plate with the usual Gretsch 'arrow' knobs. The string spacing does seem cramped compared with our old UK-made Bennett lap steel, which has a string spread of 46mm at the nut and 55mm at the bridge compared with the Gretsch's 35mm/52.5mm spacing – more like a conventional electric. The output jack is side mounted and feels a little loose. As shipped, the 0.012 to 0.052-gauge strings feel pretty slack when tuned to open G, particularly on the short 572mm (22.5-inch) scale. With raised tunings such as open A or E things will feel stiffer, but we'd definitely raise the gauge here.

It might be basic, but it captures a pretty throaty single-coil sound that suits pseudo pedal-steel cleans, especially with outboard compression and reverb, and a volume pedal to add the swells. Kick in some overdrive and a small amp, and it can sound really vicious. It's a great asset for any recording musician, too – you don't have to have your slide chops down to get some useful sounds. 



GRETSCH G5700 LAP STEEL

PRICE: £495

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solidbody lap steel

BODY & NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 572mm (22.5")

NUT/STRING SPACING: Plated metal/35mm

FINGERBOARD: Plastic with fret and position markers

FRET MARKERS: 28

HARDWARE: Strings-through metal bar bridge with cover, enclosed tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 'Low noise' single coil, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.49/5.478

OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Tahiti Red (as reviewed), Broadway Neck, Vintage White, Tobacco

Fender Musical Instruments

EMEA

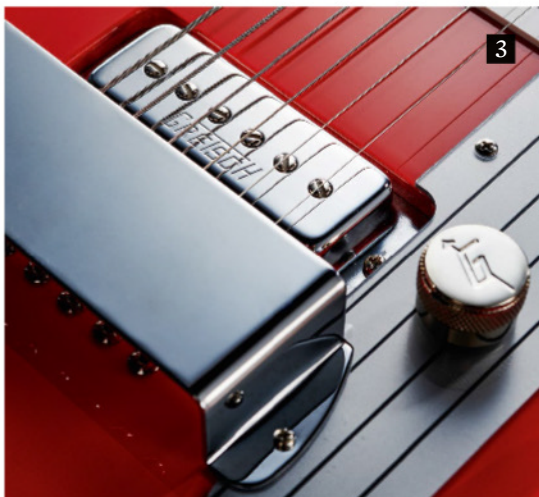
01342 331700

www.gretschguitars.com

8/10

PROS Perfectly good retro-style lap steel; voicing suits both clean and dirty slide styles

CONS The string spacing is slightly cramped



FIRST PLAY



**WALRUS AUDIO LORE
REVERSE SOUNDSCAPE
GENERATOR**
£285

WHAT IS IT? A pedal for creating ambient soundscapes using combinations of delay and reverb



Inside Story

Walrus Audio takes you on an ambient adventure with five programs that mix reverbs and delays

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker



WALRUS AUDIO LORE REVERSE SOUNDSCAPE GENERATOR

PRICE: £285

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Ambience pedal

FEATURES: Buffered Bypass, switchable Trails mode, tap tempo, Dive/Rise effect

CONTROLS: Feedback, Regen, Mod, Mix, X, Time, Tone, Program selector, Bypass footswitch, Tap/Dive/Rise footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

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

DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x 121 (d) x 57mm (h)

FACE bvba

+32 3 844 67 97

www.walrusaudio.com

1. The X knob's function is determined by which program is selected: it controls how reversed the delay trails are in program 1, the decay time of the reverb in programs 2, 3 and 4, and the order of the 4th, 5th and octave intervals that the pitch delay steps through

2. You can access the usual tap tempo here; hold it down for the Dive/Rise effect. A green LED will indicate that Rise is set and a blue LED will indicate that Dive is set

3. The Mod knob controls the amount of modulation added to the wet signal. When Bypass is held down it will also adjust the modulation rate

Complementing the reverb and delay effects already in the Walrus Audio roster, the Lore focuses on building complex ambiances—“an ambient creation machine built around reverse delay and reverbs”, says Walrus. Basically, it's a pedal that has two DSP chips running in series, each with its own analogue feedback path, allowing for various combos of delay and reverb, with plenty of interaction between the effects.

Your starting point is the five numbered programs: reverse delay into reverse reverb; reverse delay into octave-up reverb; reverse delay into octave-down reverb; reverse reverb into forward reverb; and pitch delay into pitch delay. An array of knobs take things from here. The Mod knob always adds modulation and Mix runs from fully dry to fully wet. But each of the others has a slightly different function depending on what program you have selected. While the manual explains it all, it takes a bit of experimentation to understand how everything interacts in order to dial in some sounds that will work for you.

All of the programs have something interesting to offer – mainly on the theme of creating an ambient backdrop to your sound. It's a spacious sound, for sure, and you can dial in ethereal floating and shifting pads of ambience. We particularly liked Program 4 for its conjunction of sparkly reverbs, with the Regen knob easing in a bit of upper octave shimmer. For performance, tap tempo is available for all delays and time-stretching for Program 4's reverb, but you can also press and hold the footswitch to momentarily shift the clock rate of the pedal down or up, throwing in a quick pitch shift – it's a quirky effect but we'd rather have the flexibility of an expression pedal.

Verdict

There are plenty of esoteric sounds to be explored among the five programs. But this is a machine that's crying out for memory storage – it won't be easy recalling the exact juxtaposition of the controls if you want to go back to a favourite sound you've discovered, especially if you're using it on stage and want different settings for individual songs. If that, the lack of stereo operation and no expression pedal capability is not an issue for you in a pedal at this price, you'll find the Lore to be a fine source of unique ambient sounds. **G**

THE RIVALS

The Lore might offer its own unique take on ambience, but so do others such as Eventide's Blackhole (£299), which the company describes as “a reverb as big as the cosmos”. It features a Gravity control to custom-tailor the reverb tail in two realms: normal or inverse decay.

The Old Blood Noise Endeavors Minim (£209) is designed for infinitely modulating soundscapes and features reversed sound put together with a modulated reverb fed into a modulated delay.

A pedal offering plentiful combinations of reverb and delay is the Source Audio Collider (£329), which features two completely independent signal processors allowing delay/reverb, delay/delay, or reverb/reverb combinations.



You can tailor the reverb tail in Eventide's Blackhole pedal

8/10

PROS Capable of a range of unusual ambient sounds; tap tempo

CONS Mono only; no preset storage; no expression pedal facility

FIRST PLAY



**THORPYFX SCARLET
TUNIC**
£264

WHAT IS IT? A vintage Selmer
amp emulation for early Pink
Floyd sound and beyond



Saucerful Of Syd

One man's quest for early Pink Floyd sound resulted in this stompbox emulation of a long-forgotten 1960s British amp

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. The Deep and Bright switches alter the bass and treble content of the sound – centre position offers the most neutral sound, up is the next level, while down offers the most bass and treble
2. Thorpy says this Sens switch is like having Hi and Lo inputs on an amp – centre offers the least gain, up is intermediate, and down is the gainiest
3. Use the Presence knob to tweak the upper-mids for a real influence on the overall sonic character

It may not enjoy the same kudos as an AC30, Plexi or HiWatt DR103, but the Selmer TruVoice Treble-N-Bass 50 was another fine British valve amp from the 1960s. This was the amp of choice of original Pink Floyd guitarist Syd Barrett, and can be heard on the opening notes of *Interstellar Overdrive* from the band's 1967 debut album, *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*. Roll on 55 years from that album and Lee Harris, guitarist with Nick Mason's Saucerful of Secrets band, wanted to recreate the exact tones and looked to Adrian Thorpe for help – the result is the Scarlet Tunic Analog Amp Emulator.

The pedal is designed to integrate into your rig and give you those Selmer tones through your own amp. It has Master output and Gain knobs plus three knobs for tonal shading – Bass, Presence and Treble. To complement those is an array of three-way toggle switches that adjust various aspects of the tone: the Deep switch changes the bass characteristics, the Bright switch offers three different variations on the high-end, and the Sens switch alters the gain character, like having three different levels of input attenuation.

With so many controls all interacting there are plenty of sonics to explore, but the first impression is of a real sizzly top-end and a nicely percussive attack to the notes, offering chime-y definition when you dial in a clean sound or a bit of early break-up. And the pedal will actually cover from those tones up to full-on throaty raunch. It delivers particularly potent sound with all the switches in the down position, and if you crank up the gain there's an edge to it that's simultaneously fuzzy and glassy. There's great dynamics and clean-up characteristics, and the pedal reacts brilliantly to a treble booster in front of it – just as a vintage Brit amp should...

Verdict

If you're looking for that Selmer sound or want to recreate early Floyd, then ThorpyFX's latest pedal nails it. What's more, it'll get you into AC30 and HiWatt territory, too – just give that influential Presence knob a whirl to dial it in. This may be named an amp emulator, but think of it as an overdrive with a unique character. Gnarly and sparkly, it could offer an alternative yet complementary flavouring to your amp tone. **G**

THE RIVALS

There's no other specific Selmer-emulating pedal, although you could get an amp: a vintage Treble-N-Bass 50 or the modern US-made Balthazar Film Noir 50 tribute to it. Pedal-wise, Origin Effects' RevivalDrive (£495) can deliver a wide range of vintage amp flavours via a set of controls to zero in on intricate detail.

Options for specific Brit 1960s amp sounds include the UAFX Ruby (£355, see page 102), which may just be the most accurate emulation of an AC30 we've heard to date. And for something more obscure, the Aclam Dr Robert (£299) does a great emulation of a Vox UL730 heard on mid-60s Beatles recordings.

The RevivalDrive from Origin Effects offers up a spectrum of vintage amp tones



THORPYFX SCARLET TUNIC

PRICE: £264

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Analog Amp Emulator pedal

FEATURES: True Bypass, internal voltage jump to 18V, internal transformer

CONTROLS: Master, Presence, Gain, Bass, Treble, Deep switch, Bright switch, Sens switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 30mA

DIMENSIONS: 106 (w) x 130 (d) x 54mm (h)

ThorpyFX

www.thorpyfx.com



9/10

PROS Solid build quality; welcome revival of a vintage amp; comprehensive control array

CONS Silver legging on a silver background is hard to read



the Wishlist

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

PRS McCarty 594 Singlecut Joe Walsh Limited Edition £6,850

CONTACT PRS Guitars WEB www.prsguitars.com WORDS Dave Burrluck PHOTOGRAPHY Olly Curtis

Around 18 months ago an excited Paul Reed Smith was keen to share a video of him playing his latest creation. "I sent Joe Walsh this short video of me playing the guitar and he says he wants to play it!" A little while later, we heard more: "We shipped Joe the guitar and he said, 'I want *this* guitar. This is not a new guitar, this is an old guitar. I want it.'"

On 27 April 2021, PRS officially announced this Joe Walsh limited-edition McCarty 594 Singlecut. We immediately put in our order, and just over a year later – partly due to PRS's backlog, plus the necessary CITES certification to account for the Brazilian rosewood fingerboard – we finally opened the case.

This is not an entirely new guitar. The McCarty 594 Singlecut (named after its 24.594-inch scale length) has been a part of PRS's Core line since 2017, but that model doesn't have this Brazilian rosewood 'board or the more vintage-sized stainless frets. Neither does it have Paul's actual signature on the headstock nor Joe's on the backplate. There's no colour choice on Joe's model; its McCarty Sunburst has a 'Vintage Nitro' finish, featuring a formula that intentionally cracks and

ages with time. This 10-top only, 200-piece run (with 56 heading for the UK/Europe) is all made on the standard Core line (not by PRS's exclusive Private Stock team), illustrating just how high the bar is set in Maryland.

PRS has been making its Singlecut for the best part of two decades and it has evolved from a pretty chunky-sounding 'rock' single-cut to this beautifully nuanced, hugely musical instrument. Aside from the green ripple abalone 'old-school' bird inlays, it has no more bling than the guitars that inspired it, and the feel and sounds are exceptional. It's a great weight, too, at 3.82kg (8.4lb); the rear ribcage cut and rounded heel reduce the bulk of the original.

Setup, intonation and in-tuneness are superb, but it's the relatively low-output pickups that really impress, never feeling underpowered and moving from creamy and clear at the neck through more biting at the bridge. Like the guitar itself, there are no sharp edges: the note attack is musical and the sustain hangs around for days. The partial splits sound far from thin and provide yet more options. Our only gripe is that it's a limited model: this should be an unlimited Core model. Now! **G**

1. The anodised aluminium 'Joe Walsh Ltd' truss rod cover is unique, and that's Paul Reed Smith's signature on the unfaced headstock. Like the standard McCarty 594, the vintage-style non-locking tuners use unplated brass posts

2. With an orange hue, the Brazilian rosewood 'board (used by PRS in its early years) is rare and needs CITES certification. The stainless-steel frets are unique to a Core model

3. Joe was keen to put his name to the guitar: he'd signed all 200 backplates before PRS had finished the prototypes. "He said, 'You can put my name on it: it's done. We're finished. Let's go!'" Paul told us last year



4. Here, we have the Pattern Vintage neck profile, about which PRS says: "[It] has the same width measurements as the Pattern neck but is slightly thicker front to back, and features an asymmetrical curve with a little less meat on the bass side of the neck toward the nut end and a little less meat on the treble side of the neck from the 12th fret to the heel"

5. The more vintage-style 58/15 humbuckers come in various flavours. The LT+ (as in Low Turns) means both bridge and neck are pretty similar in output, measuring approximately 8kohms. The pickups are constantly tweaked; the '+' suffix means they're tuned specifically for the single-cutaway design

6. While the original Singlecut altered the layout of the classic four controls, the 594 went back to Gibson style. The tone controls have a pull-switch for partial coil-splits that primarily voice the slug coils of each humbucker

4

5

6



Gas Supply

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



SATIN FINISHES
The ML2 currently comes in a choice of the very stylish River Styx Black and Azure Blue satin finishes over a flamed maple veneer

PICKUPS
Seymour Duncan Sentient (neck) and Pegasus (bridge) pickups are aimed at heavier players who want to maintain clarity

Chapman ML2 Pro £1,049

CONTACT **Chapman Guitars** EMAIL contact@chapmanguitars.co.uk WEB www.chapmanguitars.com

Chapman? That's the bloke off YouTube isn't it?

Technically, yes, but there's quite a lot more to it than just a name. Obviously, the brand began as Rob Chapman's own platform for collaborative design, but as you might already know, Chapman the brand has gone from strength to strength since its inception, with involvement from Lee Anderton and chief guitar designer Dave Hollingworth.

Is this another Les Paul copy, then?

This ML2 Pro sees Chapman's single-cut shape (which ceased production in 2018) revived and redesigned with a pretty substantial overhaul. While it clearly has some similarities to Gibson's flagship model, this is pitched firmly in the 'now' camp, rather than nodding to tradition.

What's different about it?

You probably clocked the satin finishes first. They're called River Styx Black and Azure Blue and they adorn a flamed-maple veneer, which, in turn, sits over a carved maple top that's capping a mahogany body. That body has had its outline tweaked from the original ML2 shape. It's more squat, with refined contouring and a wider, stubbier-looking carve to the cutaway that improves upper-fret access.

The headstock looks different...

Well spotted. The headstock shape helps move things away even further from G-style symmetry, but that's not the only thing to talk about. The set-through neck joins the trend for roasted maple and, continuing the 'contemporary' vibe, is also satin finish. To the front, it's fitted with a Macassar rolled ebony fingerboard, and unlike a Les Paul it's got 24 frets, which – you guessed it – are stainless steel. Another step away from single-cut tradition is the Fender-style 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, making this a prime candidate for those who want a little extra road, and possibly even down-tuning.

Where are the fret markers?

We're guessing Chapman was aiming for modernist styling here, so that ebony 'board is left pristine, bar the pearl Infinity logo at the 12th fret. But don't worry, glow-in-the-dark positional markers serve as your sat-nav.

What magnets does it have?

The pickups are a pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers, and are definitely on the more modern end of the scale, with SD pitching them at progressive/metal players. In the neck position there's a Sentient,

JARGON CRUNCHING

Roasted maple
No, it doesn't taste better, but roasted, baked and caramelised maple is becoming more common in guitar-neck design. That's because this process helps remove more moisture from the neck, making it less susceptible to movement and improving stability

The River Styx Black satin finish adorns the ML2 Pro's flamed-maple veneer



CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

The thin body meets a roasted-maple neck, 24 stainless-steel frets and a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length for a 2022 take on the single-cut format

and in the bridge is a Pegasus. They're both medium-output Alnico V models aimed at articulation as well as higher-gain aggression.

The controls look sparse - are they just straight humbucker sounds?

One person's 'sparse' is another's 'efficient' – and here Chapman has opted for master volume and tone controls, wired to (as you'd probably expect) a three-way selector. But there's a little added control via the push-pull coil-split on the tone pot.

What about hardware?

The tuning is handled by a set of Hipshot Grip-Lock tuners, which, as the name suggests, are locked by thumbwheels to make for speedy string changes. There's a Graph Tech TUSQ XL nut and, at the other end, the strings are anchored by a Chapman string-through-body six-saddle hardtail bridge.

What's the damage?

The ML2 Pro is currently the only ML2 shape on offer from Chapman. It'll set you back £1,049 and is available now. To find a dealer, head to the Chapman website. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...



GUILD STARFIRE I-12 £569

The chiming sound of a 12-string is irresistible, but unless you're Roger McGuinn it's likely to be a secondary instrument to your main guitar. Guild is clearly aware of this with the introduction of its Starfire I-12, the company's most affordable 12-string electric yet. It has a semi-hollow, arched all-mahogany body with a mahogany centre block. There's a 628.25mm (24.7-inch) scale length, and a pair of coil-splittable Guild HB-2 humbuckers has you covered for eight single-coil/humbucker configurations. It's shipping now.

www.guildguitars.com



J ROCKETT UNI-VERB £465

What do you get when you cross one of the most revered modulation pedals of all time with a retro-inspired reverb circuit? The answer, as pictured above, comes courtesy of J Rockett's Uni-Verb. With the swirling, watery chorus/vibrato sounds of the original, the Uni-Verb also features an effects loop, which enables you to place the modulation part of the pedal before your overdrive. This leaves the added 50-second spring tank-inspired reverb to be positioned at the end of your chain, giving you the best of both sounds. Available now.

www.rockettpedals.com



Fretbuzz

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

Artist: Laura Veirs

Album: *Found Light* (Bella Union)



Found Light is Laura Veirs' 12th album, with 14 tracks that explore life after divorce from her former husband and producer www.lauraveirs.com

The albums from Portland, Oregon-based singer-songwriter Laura Veirs are always rewarding listens, showcasing her skills as both a guitarist and sharp lyricist, and taking in influences from country blues to punk. *Found Light* is her 12th release and the first she's co-produced, but as well as this prolific recording career, which started in 1999 with her eponymous debut, Laura has also written a children's book, *Libba: The Magnificent Musical Life Of Elizabeth Cotten*, launched a podcast called *Midnight Lightning*, which explores juggling a music career with parenthood, and taught songwriting. It's a full resume, and her latest album is a standout addition.

Riot Punk Roots

Found Light includes songs such as lead single, *Winter Windows*, that lean on punk styles from the 90s. "I started playing guitar when I was about 18, but didn't really take to writing or being a musician in bands until college in Minnesota," she tells us. "There I found the riot grrrl punk scene, which I knew nothing about before. This was pre-internet, so it was underground, DIY stuff, finding out stuff through magazines and posters on the streets. I discovered Bikini Kill and Team Dresch, and Brooklyn punk bands; I wrote them letters, made friends with them, then played electric guitar and wrote songs in my own all-girl punk band."



Laura's Goya nylon-string is part of her family heritage and has provided the soundtrack to all her recordings so far

Stylistic Shift

Far from being punk music, Laura's sound is diverse, with folk and fingerstyle guitar underpinning much of her work. "When I moved to Seattle, I started getting into people like Mississippi John Hurt and Elizabeth Cotten and the old-school country blues stuff," she says. "I think my own style pendulums between the punky, overdriven electric sound, with Sleater-Kinney-style pick work, and intricate fingerstyle playing, like Nick Drake, with a bit of Brazilian music influencing it, too. But country blues stuff is what I mostly do now."

Multi-Tasking

As well as being co-producer of her new album, another significant detail is it being the first work that Laura has recorded with her simultaneously singing and playing guitar, a very deliberate move. "I was listening to artists like Adrianne Lenker [of Big Thief] singing and playing live and really enjoying that sound," Laura says. "I wanted to see if I could do that because my ex [Tucker Martine] was my producer for years and he liked to keep things more controlled [in the studio]. It was really cool to know I could sing and play at the level I needed to get this music across how I wanted it." The argument for control and precision over immediacy in the studio is age old, but for Laura, this approach worked for the album. "It isn't perfect," she smiles, "but it has this really good energy and it feels alive. It's musical in a way that I wasn't familiar with before, in terms of recording. We did a couple of takes and not a lot of edits; some of the songs don't have any edits. It was nice. My old records are very fussed over."

Minimal Toolbox

When it comes to an arsenal of instruments, Laura is a musician who likes to keep it to a minimum and doesn't seem to favour flash gear. "I only have three guitars," she says. "I have a Goya nylon-string, which my dad bought in the 60s in Chicago. It's my favourite guitar; it was the family guitar around the house growing up and the one I write and record all of my albums with. I do also have a Les Paul electric and a Martin steel-string, but that's it – and the Goya is the one I use the most and tour with." [GK]

Standout track: *Seaside Haiku*

For fans of: Sleater-Kinney, Big Thief, Joni Mitchell

CONFIDENCE MATTERS

How Laura helps give songwriters a boost

Laura's working life extends beyond creating music, having authored a book, and created a podcast. Teaching songwriting is also important to her: "It's busy, but I like to do different things," she says. "I'm doing this cool online workshop called the School Of Song, where they do classes with songwriters of renown. I feel like I have some skill sets to offer, especially helping people grow in confidence. That can really ail writers; they so often feel like they don't have what it takes to write a song. I really like to help give them those tools to do something creative to get that confidence boost."



Albums

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



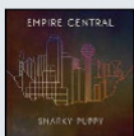
Michael League leads the way for Snarky Puppy's latest live release

Snarky Puppy

Empire Central

Groundup Music (release date 30 September)

9/10



Rock, jazz, funk and fusion – these pups have it covered...

There are underground bands, bands with a cult following, and then there's Snarky Puppy. They've stacked up four Grammys during their 18-year career and boast a core of 25 members from which founder member, leader and bassist Michael League will draw. 19 members are present on this album.

So how exactly do you describe Snarky Puppy's music? *Rolling Stone* magazine quote the band as being "religiously unclassifiable" and they're absolutely right. There are elements of classic jazz, 70s funk, big band, electro-pop, rock and even some shades of Zappa during his *Grand Wazoo* era. This means the answer to the casual question, 'What sort of music do they play?' isn't a short one by any means.

Empire Central was recorded in front of a live audience over eight nights in Dallas and finds the band paying its respects to the city that spawned it, with various members of Snarky Puppy being alumni of the jazz course at the University Of North Texas. Comprising no less than three guitarists, four keyboard players, a host of percussionists and brass players, a violinist and Michael League's bass, the album scurries through 16 tracks and comprises some of the tightest ensemble playing we've heard in a very long time.

Guitarist Mark Lettieri authors the track *Trinity*, but his lead lines are heard snaking through various cuts on the album, never one for the outrageous standalone rock solo, seemingly content to be a voice within the undefinable output of the band. It's fascinating, eminently moreish, ingenious music. Indulge in some Puppy love! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Free Fall*

For fans of: Miles Davis, Zappa, Jacob Collier

Joni Mitchell

The Asylum Albums (1972-1975)
Rhino (release date 23 September)

10/10



Songwriting perfection in four acts...

Fresh from her surprise return to the stage at this year's Newport Folk Festival comes another reminder of the genius of Joni Mitchell. After the album *Blue* vaulted her to new heights and consolidated her position as a major artist, Joni left Reprise to join the newly formed Asylum label. It was during the following years that she produced some of her finest work. Moving away from the trappings of the folk circuit, the albums that followed – *For The Roses*, *Court And Spark*, *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* and the double live album *Miles Of Aisles* – showed a newer jazzier side to her work.

All the aforementioned albums have received a remastering makeover here under the supervision of Joni herself, and songs such as *Just Like This Train*, *In France They Kiss On Main Street* and *Edith And The Kingpin* shine like never before. **[DM]**

Standout Track: *Don't Interrupt The Sorrow*
For fans of: James Taylor, Carole King

Julian Lage

View With A Room

Blue Note Records (release date 16 September)

10/10



Jazz virtuosos join forces on exciting new release

This new release sees Julian playing with his trio (bassist Jorge Roeder and drummer Dave King) with the addition of guitarist Bill Frisell. With 10 new compositions featured, the breadth of dynamics is impressive, mirroring Julian's interest in chamber-like compositions with lush arrangements and organic improvisation. And while he works under the banner of jazz, there's much that will resonate for non-jazz fans; the warmth of his Collings guitar and elements of soul, R'n'B and pop will draw in a broader fanbase for sure.

Tracks like *Auditorium* are a perfect showcase for the new quartet – the guitars shimmer above the soft rhythmic pulses formed by the rhythm section. *Echo* is exquisitely ambient with lots of space and yet, within that, are phenomenal levels of band empathy and colour. Virtuosity and vibrancy at the highest of levels, stunning indeed! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Tributary*

For fans of: John Scofield, Pat Metheny



Discover more about
Julian Lage's latest
album on page 40

Joe Hollick

Rest Lessness

Cardinal Fuzz (available now)

9/10



Lone wolf wanders acoustic wilds

Guitarist has long admired psychedelic rock outfit Wolf People. Sadly the band went on indefinite hiatus in 2020, but guitarist Joe Hollick – who had the fire

and invention of a young Jimmy Page when we saw Wolf People play live in Bristol a few years ago – has this meditative solo album to offer. The acoustic instrumental pieces here have an ethereal, esoteric edge that recalls Jansch or John Martyn in nocturnal mood but with sympathetic, tasteful washes of synth to add a new expansiveness.

Standout tracks, such as *Human Hand* sound ancient and timeless at the same time, with their slow, tectonic chord changes and lyrical electric melody lines. The overall effect could be likened to riding across a sombre moorland of sound in which a hidden magic abides. Spellbinding stuff. [JD]

Standout Track: *Human Hand*

For fans of: Bert Jansch, Wolf People, John Martyn, John Renbourn

Marcus King

Young Blood

Snakefarm (release date 26 August)

8/10



Retro rock solo album from the Grammy nominee

Already hailed as a rising guitar star, Marcus King's former solo album, *El Dorado*, received rave reviews, not

to mention a nod from the Grammys. This time the blues rocker teams up once again with producer Dan Auerbach to produce the type of rock album rarely heard these days. "I wanted to create a record with a big arena rock sound... tunes that were as big as the rooms we wanted to play in," he tells us.

Armed with his father's 'dusty old amp and a '59 Les Paul' Marcus took inspiration from the rock trios of yore, citing Cream and The Jimi Hendrix Experience as blueprints from which to draw. Riff-laden tracks like *Aim High* and *Pain* bear this out recalling bands such as Ten Years After, Free and Rory Gallagher's trio work on occasion. The guitar is fiery, the vocals raw, the production punchy – what more can we ask for? [DM]

Standout track: *Good And Gone*

For fans of: Free, Cream



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Tones Behind The Tracks

Julian Lage's new album is full of his signature virtuoso-level guitar playing with splashes of colour provided by special guest Bill Frisell

Artist: Julian Lage

Album: *View With A Room* (Blue Note)



Julian's second album for the Blue Note label features celebrated left field jazz guitarist Bill Frisell

We spoke to Julian Lage while he was on tour in Italy, performing material from his forthcoming second album for Blue Note, *View With A Room*. Accompanying Julian on the album is regular bassist Jorge Roeder and drummer Dave King, but this time the trio has been augmented by Bill Frisell, who appears on several tracks. "Bill's the absolute master of masters," Julian says. "So we feel very privileged to expand the group to include him. It was a really fun record for us to make."

How did you meet Bill Frisell?

"I went up to him at Newport Jazz Festival when I was probably around 17 years old. I was there with Gary Burton's band. I was a lover of Bill's music since I got into jazz guitar. He's a hero to me, so I said hello to him and he so graciously said, 'I think I've heard about you. I heard you on the radio with Gary.'"

"In the last five years or so, we started playing duo concerts together; we did a short tour in the United States. Anyway, our worlds have been kind of intermingling for many years now, and upon writing

this record I was pretty sensitive to the fact that I wanted Bill to be a part of the band in the capacity of playing rhythm guitar, adding sonic architecture."

What's your process for writing music?

"I write using pencil and paper with a guitar, that process is relatively consistent thus far. My approach is, in a way, quantity over quality. I write so many songs. Even for this record there were 35 to 40 songs and you just whittle it down – the record we made is 16 songs. And the ones that didn't make it to *View With A Room* will be released as a separate project. I like having an abundance of material, but I don't have any one approach to it other than throw it against the wall, and see what sticks. I feel very lucky, because in this case, I was afforded space and time to wake up every day, write and show the songs to my partner in crime, Margaret Glaspy, who produced the record. She is also my dearest friend and wife – I show it to her and get thumbs up, thumbs down, that kind of thing."

In the past you've mentioned you're very aware of the legacy of jazz guitar players from previous generations?

"Well, the electric guitar as we know it has had so many iterations. My personal obsession, as a fan of the guitar, tends to be directed towards the mid-1930s, to mid-40s, even into the early 50s. A time when the electric guitar, at least on recordings, appears to have a kind of a brightness, a volatility, but is also very warm. I wouldn't say that it's without effect, because the effect of the recording process is adding compression, adding distortion. It's being affected, but the way it's being affected is essentially appealing to me."

"In making a guitar-trio record that's now expanded to two guitars, bass and drums, it was important that my sound consistently reflects those qualities, from song to song. Almost the way a tenor sax player in a jazz band has the same tenor sax for the whole record. Typically, it's kind of a unifying factor, whereas Bill's role shows a little bit more of the evolution of the history of the guitar. There are times where [he's playing] a Jazzmaster with tremolo and reverb. And that has implications to the lineage of surf guitar and rock guitar and all that. There are times where his role is baritone Telecaster, which has more in common with stuff you would hear in Bob Dylan's groups with T Bone



Now aged 34, Lage was considered a child prodigy and played guitar at the Grammy Awards when he was just 12 years old



PHOTO © SHERVIN LANEZ

Burnett. And then there are times when we're closer together, and we have this thing where we're rolling around each other on a song like *Auditorium*. I like the singularity of tone because then I can just keep changing the content. And I think Bill is a player who deeply connects to that as well."

Were there intensive rehearsals before you went into the studio to record?

"We did two days of rehearsal where I taught the band the music. I'd sent Bill the music weeks before so he was familiar with it. I'd made 'micro-demos' where I played a short acoustic guitar performance of every song: 'Here's the melody and here's how it ends.' We all lived with that for a little bit, and a lot of what you hear on the record is first or second take. I particularly like the tape to be rolling when you're learning the music because I think there's a certain sense of discovery. You know, it's not like you've played it a million times and this is definitive. You just kind of see if you capture something cool and, if you don't, you try it again. So, the rehearsal, in a way, was very close to the recording itself. There's not a big difference."

What gear did you take into the studio with you for this album?

"I brought a lot of guitars, but I only used one for the majority, which is a Collings 470 JL. It's a signature model that I've been playing for a while and I just love it. A big feature of the guitar is it's hollow but with no f-holes, and also the centrepiece is its Ron Ellis pickups. I've been using Ron Ellis pickups for many years and, to me, they're perfection. So Ron

"I particularly like the tape to be rolling when you're learning the music because I think there's a certain sense of discovery"

made what he calls ElliSonics, basically centred around the design of the old Dynasonic pickups, with certain modifications that we both feel are for the benefit of the sound.

"I also brought in a '54 Tele, a '55 Gold Top Les Paul that I love, but I just played the Collings; it just sounded so great. It's going through a Magic Amplifiers Vibro Deluxe, which is by a gentleman named Mike Moody, in California, whose amplifiers I absolutely love. He makes really, really great-sounding amps. So it's similar to my conception about the history of guitar; I feel like he embodies the history of amplification. It's everything you want, and nothing you don't.

"As for effects, I pretty religiously use something called a [Shin-ei] B1G 1, which is essentially a clean boost and it's always on. It just gives a little more top-end. It doesn't seem to obscure the sound, it just opens up the higher range of frequencies so that they're a little more, to my ears, seductive and less pingy. And then I use a Strymon Flint reverb and Divine Noise cables, which I've been using forever. I just think they're wonderful, very reliable. So, you know, it's nothing terribly diverse, but it's what I like." [DM]

Back to basics: "I write [my songs] using pencil and paper with a guitar, that process is relatively consistent thus far"



View With A Room is released on 16 September on the Blue Note label

www.julianlage.com



Past Glories

Neville Marten casts his mind back to star products that have made an impression during his decades of writing about them

One criticism that we occasionally get at *Guitarist* is, "You never give anything a bad review." Well, that's true to an extent, but only because we rarely see anything that falls below par. But we also like to sort the wheat from the chaff so we can point you in the direction of the good stuff. Having given Patrick Eggle's brilliant Macon Single-Cut a *Guitarist* Gold Award this month, I started thinking about other products that left a mark, due to pushing boundaries of quality, innovation, or just plain, "God, I want it!"

"And the first Collings. Another 'bloody hell' moment. This thing roared like a cannon and looked like it had been milled out of stainless steel"

The first was an early PRS Custom 24. Remember the poster and full-page ad with three of them together, in red, blue and the famous vintage yellow? Well, it was just like the yellow one and we'd never seen guitar craftsmanship like it. On the back of my review Paul offered to build me one, so Geoff Whitehorn and I sat down and ordered essentially the same instrument, on the same day, at one of our *Guitarist* shows. That was 1989 and I kept mine until only recently.

Another one that bowled us over was a sonic blue, 'Made in Japan' Fender Strat. We opened the box in the office, back then in Ely, Cambridgeshire, and were astonished. We put it on the cover with a Vox AC30, in case that jogs your memory.

Then there was our first Taylor. I mentioned in last month's 724ce Koa review that Martyn Booth had done the story; he was staggered at how an acoustic guitar builder could make something so darned perfect. It was a revelation, and caused (as did PRS) an industry resting on past glories, to sit up and take notice.

And the first Collings. Oh dear. Another 'bloody hell' moment. This thing roared like a cannon, but again looked like it had been milled out of stainless steel, such was the accuracy of build, inside and out. I ordered one but it proved 'too good' for my meagre picking so I traded it.

Match Made In Heaven

Oh yes, the first Matchless. I'd read the infamous *Guitar Player* mega-test that called the DC30 "the finest amp in the world". A sucker for that great Vox tone, around which the Matchless sound was built, I called into Mansons in Exeter, the importer and only dealer at the time, to try one. I was on tour and took my stage guitar, a Custom Shop '59 Les Paul, in to try it. Good grief! They had an almost new green one – 'almost new' because they'd lent it to Hank Marvin for a TV show. I bought it on the spot. They gave me a VHS of Hank's performance, too! That was 1994 and I used it until only a couple of years ago when it became just too unwieldy to carry. Best amp I've ever owned, though.

And Eggle again. Our first Berlin model was a corker. David Mead reminds me that it was a 'Big Jim Sullivan' signature, which is great on two levels since Jim was Marty Wilde's first guitarist, and I'm one of his current two – along with Eddie Allen who, vintage readers will remember, worked alongside David and me on the mag.

Another staggeringly good guitar was the first Music Man EVH. Ours had a gorgeous quilted maple top, was also finished in vintage yellow, and was the first guitar we'd played whose neck was finished in gunstock oil – like our Eggle Macon this month.

There are many others, such as the Mesa/Boogie Triaxis preamp (which again I bought), and a *Guitar Techniques* cover guitar that I borrowed from Fender. It was a John Cruz Master Built, and I instantly fell in love. I offered to buy it but made a jocular suggestion that it would be my perfect 'signature' guitar, so how about it? The response I got was (equally lighthearted): "The only signature we want from you, mate, is the one on the bloody cheque!" My quest for posterity well and truly scuppered! See you next time. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

"We're all going on a..."

What? Journey OF660 (Blue) **Where seen?** thomann.de **Price?** £1,111

Yes, it's that time of year again and our mate, Bath busker extraordinaire Ben Powell has just bought one of these for his travels. It's made from carbon fibre, has a detachable neck that's easy to remove and reattach, and most airlines accept it as onboard luggage. It's a 'stylised' 000 shape and size, with a 1.75 (44mm) nut, passive under-saddle pickup, compensated bone saddle and Grover tuners. It comes in a 'TSA compliant' gigbag, and I think it looks pretty smart with its curvaceous top bout soundhole and 'moulded in' pseudo cutaway. And being carbon fibre it won't crack, shrink or warp in that Mediterranean sun. What are you waiting for?



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Wood For The Trees

This month **Alex Bishop** finally makes progress on his '50 trees' passion project with a cedar of Lebanon guitar

Regular readers of this column may remember I recently undertook a project to build 50 guitars to represent the UK's 'jubilee trees'. These trees were spotlighted in 2002 and make up some of the finest and most interesting trees in our landscape. My furniture-maker friend Danny and I have spent the past few years investigating quaint English villages and dark corners of obscure ancient woodlands to find and document these magnificent trees. To date, we've checked off about 11 from the list, but it was only last year that we casually challenged one another to represent each of them in our own crafted wooden form.

"The tree to which this instrument pays homage is a Cedar of Lebanon that grows in Oxfordshire; the first of its kind to be planted on UK soil"

It's taken me a little while to carve out the time, but my first contribution – a fanned-fret gypsy-jazz guitar – is at last making significant progress this week. The tree to which this instrument pays homage is a Cedar of Lebanon that grows in Childrey, Oxfordshire; the first of its kind to be planted on UK soil, brought back from its home country as a seed by the rector of the village in 1642. It seems fitting that this guitar is another first,

A striped rosette of padauk, cedar and walnut. The slant is a nod to the wonky fretwork that will adorn the fingerboard

and starts a series of instruments that is likely to take a lifetime to complete: a blink of an eye compared to the lifespans of these mystical old trees.

Naturally, I've opted to use copious amounts of cedar of Lebanon in this build, including the soundboard, neck and headstock veneer. It's hard not to choose a dazzling back and sides to pair the top with, so I gave in completely to a stunningly figured English walnut set. In order to draw the eye back to the top, I decided to inlay a striped oval rosette of alternating padauk, cedar and walnut. This inlay runs at a slant, a nod to the wonky fretwork that will adorn the fingerboard when I get to that point. I've also echoed the striped pattern down the centre of the headstock veneer, a rare opportunity to create a visual connection between the soundboard and the headstock using the same materials.

While fanned-fret guitars can put some players off, the idea of shortening the scale length of the higher strings to improve playability makes a lot of sense, banishing preconceptions that this sort of instrument is harder to play. Not only do the frets on the higher strings inch closer together, but for a typical set of strings, the tension will be slightly less, sneakily taking some of the effort out of solos in the higher register. No one even has to know...

Real Cedar

This project also presents an opportunity for me to get to know a wood that is rarely used in musical-instrument making. While western red cedar and yellow cedar are commonly associated with guitar making, neither of these are true cedars (both are essentially from the family of cypress trees). Cedar of Lebanon, on the other hand, appears to be denser and stiffer, with pronounced winter and summer growth. Maybe because of this I have found the soundboard to be comparatively heavy, so I took a fair bit of extra weight out of it during the thicknessing stage than I would for a spruce top. The neck is reassuringly dense for a softwood, so its strength should compare favourably with similar neck hardwoods, yet keeping the weight down – a particular bugbear of mine is a top-heavy guitar. My conclusion is if you can get straight-enough pieces, Cedar of Lebanon makes for an ideal neck material.

At the time of writing, I'm still negotiating the twisted geometry of the neck, which is made all the more complicated by angling the scarf joint that accommodates the skewed nut. There has to be quite a bit more chin-stroking before I'm ready to pick up the chisel and pare away wood to reveal the final shape of the neck, but it's in there somewhere. Yet I can give this project plenty of time: after all the tree has been waiting for long enough... 



PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

Manson

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Light Headed

This month, editor **Jamie Dickson** ponders the ultimate lightweight gigging setup...

Years ago I bought a 90s Marshall Bluesbreaker reissue at auction. Nice amp, great sounds, plenty of welly in terms of volume and, of course, an iconic look. I sold it less than six months later, for one reason. It weighed an absolute ton – well, 31kg to be precise – and had but one woefully inadequate carrying handle on the top. It was like trying to lift a suitcase filled with lead blocks. It had to go.

Currently, my main gigging amp is a Dr Z Jaz 20/40 combo, which is right on the limit weight-wise. But because I love its sounds so much, I'm prepared to put up with its bulk for festival shows or larger gigs. But what about those nights when you're just going to sit in on somebody's set or join a blues jam in a little bar? I'd say there's a strong case for having a 'B' rig that's optimised for just such occasions. For example, when my friend and ex-guitarist for Robert Plant, Innes Sibun, invited me to

sit in on his set a while back, I took along just the bare essentials – a Marshall Class 5 combo, my guitar and a Hudson Electronics Broadcast pedal for an overdrive.

That setup actually worked really well on the night – I don't think we even needed to mic up the Marshall as it is deceptively loud for a 5-watt amp. That said, that setup would only really do for a rowdy blues set – the amp was cranked as far as it would go, didn't have any reverb and, in that state, would only do one sound – wide open, small-combo wailing – which fortunately suited the occasion. If I had needed more headroom, dynamics or flexibility, it wouldn't have sufficed. So what are some lightweight alternatives that might offer a more capable all-round solution for not much more weight?

First of all, Blackstar's innovative 50-watt St James amp range (£1,099 as reviewed in issue 488), with its specially designed lightweight Celestion 'Zephyr' speakers, candlenut ply cabinet and switched-mode power transformer, was a bit of a revelation. The St James combos offer 50 watts of really ear-pleasing tone in a very lightweight (12.8kg), compact package that comes in both EL34 and 6L6 versions. I'd very much recommend trying out a St James if you're looking to put together a highly portable, punchy rig, especially as it has some great cab-sim tech on board for silent recording when you're back in the home studio.

But it's still possible to go lighter and more compact, and do so for less money, too. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, the Laney Cub-Super is an amazing little amp for the money (£419 for the 1x12 combo), while the head-and-cab version lets you carry one part in each hand to balance out your load when lugging gear between car and venue. It has 15 watts of EL84 tone aboard, plus reverb and an in-built boost – in other words all the essentials – and sounds cracking. The 1x12 combo version weighs just over 11kg, too. So if you want a very capable, light amp for not much cash, you should definitely try one.

Out To Lunch

This brings me to my final suggestion. Lunchbox heads, of the type popularised by Victory and other makers in recent years, are a great shout for building a lightweight gigging rig. In the past, I've enjoyed using Victory's powerful little 6L6 40-watt V30 Countess head designed for Guthrie Govan, and found it had loads of clarity, punch and headroom for such a compact and light head. In MKII form (£1,149), it's been renamed The Jack (jack of all trades) and re-valved with EL34s in a new three-channel / two-voicing design and weighs just 8kg.

Now here's the kicker – if you were to pair that with an ultra-lightweight 1x10 'Upsetter' cabinet from Barefaced Audio (£449), which weighs only 6kg and produces an eerily room-filling sound from a single Celestion G10 Vintage (thanks to highly innovative cabinet design),

Pairing a lunchbox head, such as this MK1 Victory V30, with a tiny cab, such as the Barefaced Audio Upsetter below, offers bags of capability in a very small package indeed





you'd have a potent stage rig smaller than many 1x12 combos that weigh in at a total of 14kg. Again, using a separate head and cab means carrying and storing the individual elements of the rig can be easier and you can always trial a different head if your tastes change. If you then went a step further and paired the Upsetter with a Laney Cub-Supertop head (£349, 7.5kg) you'd have an even lighter rig that costs under £800. Want to go lighter still and get even more power? The head version of the St James amps weighs just 6kg... so together with an Upsetter cab, that would be just 12kg in total for 50 watts of all-valve output. Impressive.

Blackstar's new St James amps have raised the bar for what can be achieved in a lightweight amp. The head version weighs around just 6kg

"Lunchbox heads, of the type popularised by Victory and other makers in recent years, are a great shout for a lightweight gigging rig"

Four To The Floor

Now of course, you could just buy a modelling multi-effects that does everything digitally and weighs even less, and run that straight into the PA – but that's a different kettle of fish and I'm traditional enough to still enjoy gigging with valve amps, so we'll stick with those for now. However, you might want to consider so-called floor-amps that bridge the divide between valve amp and effects pedal, such as the BluGuitar AMP1, Victory's own range of V4 amp pedals and others like them. If you paired a V4 Jack amp pedal, which uses small military-spec valves in the preamp stage, with the Upsetter cabinet by Barefaced, you'd end up with a rig that weighed 7.7kg – though you would have to find a suitable 4-ohm, 10-inch driver for the Upsetter, which might be tricky. Still, good things come in small packages. **G**

THREE TO GET READY

Get lightweight (in the best possible way)



PHOTO BY WWW.ROBERTKEELEY.COM

Keeley DDR £189

If you've put together a really compact, lightweight amp rig to carry into grab-and-go gigs, why not pair it with this super little pedal from Keeley, which contains (as the acronym suggests) all the effects essentials – Drive, Delay and Reverb. The pedal has two channels – Drive and Wet. On the drive side, you can choose between Crunch or Lead drive tones and on the time-based Wet side, you can choose between vintage or modern voicings of delay and reverb. As Keeley itself says of this versatile stompbox, 'One pedal. Every gig'.



Tom Anderson Hollow Drop Top Classic circa £2,500

Tom Anderson's superbly crafted electrics never have a hair out of place, and, in our experience, are buttery playable and flawlessly finished. You can now add 'featherweight' to that list of qualities, with this Strat-style electric built around a hollowed-out alder body with a centreblock and flamed maple cap, which weighs just 2.9kg.



Line 6 Helix HX Stomp £499

If you can't beat them, join them. If you do want to go the modelling multi-effects route, the HX Stomp offers more than 300 effects and amp models from Helix, M-Series, and legacy Line 6 products including "up to six simultaneous amp, cab and effect blocks including a looper and IR loading". Weighing less than a kilo and measuring just 17.8 x 12.6cm this tonal powerhouse will fit on most pedalboards – but you'll need some form of powered external speaker or line into the PA, too, if you want to gig it.



Stackings & 6ths

This issue **Richard Barrett** experiments with note arrangements within chords for some diverse sounds

In this context, the word 'stacking' refers to how we arrange the notes in a chord from the lowest to the highest – and imagine how this might appear on a musical staff (whether you actually read music or not isn't necessarily an issue). This is an effective approach in any context, such as a string or brass arrangement, a whole orchestra, or even solo piano or guitar. Of all these, the guitar especially requires ingenuity, as we are working with just the six strings, giving a comparatively limited choice of notes, plus the disadvantage of any finger stretches that might be necessary to realise wider intervals. Check out any video of Allan Holdsworth playing chords if you need that clarified!

The second part of the title here refers to 6ths, in this context adding the 6th note of a major scale to the existing Root, 3rd and 5th. This gives an extra note to play around with and hints at quite a few different genres. **G**

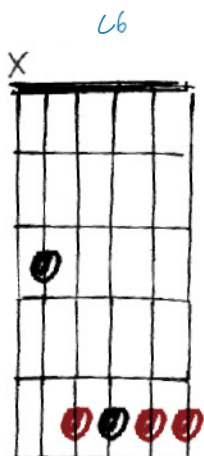
Right: Stevie Ray Vaughan in 1983. His use of stacking can be heard extensively on the track *Lenny*



PHOTO BY EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

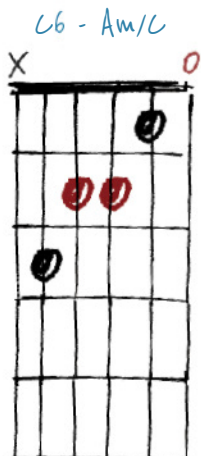
Example 1

This C6 takes a very straightforward approach, adding the 6th (A) on the top. Some may say this has a 'Hawaiian' sound to it. The tuning of both a ukulele (GCEA, basically a C6 chord) and lap steel (one of the most popular tunings is C6 – CEGACE) would certainly bear this out.



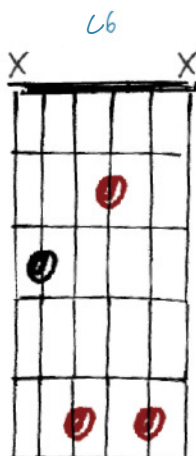
Example 2

This C6 features the 6th (A) buried within the chord, rather than at the top. While this isn't worlds apart from the first example, it is different enough to warrant the potential alternative name of Am/C – and I'm sure you can see why. Both names are correct, but context does come into it. For example, was the preceding chord an A minor?



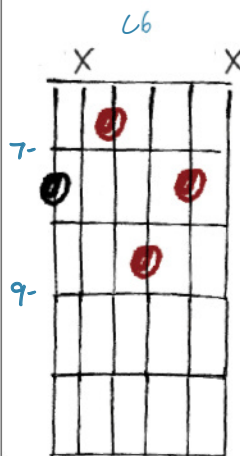
Example 3

Another C6, this time stacked as C G A E. Having the 5th (G) and the 6th (A) appearing as adjacent notes in the chord gives us yet another flavour. Many would say this voicing is more suitable for a jazz arrangement and has less of the aforementioned 'Hawaiian' feel.



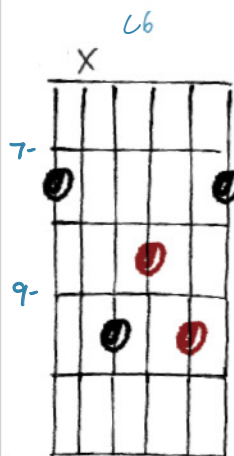
Example 4

Stacked as Root-6th-3rd-5th, this voicing of C6 was favoured very much by SRV. Check out the instrumental *Lenny* to hear him using it extensively. Note that the fifth string is muted; even if it was possible to make use of it (namely, if you had six fingers!), there would be no need.



Example 5

We're muting the fifth string again in our final example. Again, the use of the fifth string wouldn't really add anything essential. In fact, it may take away from the clarity of the chord. Playing in a band context, you might choose not to bother with the bass note on the sixth string, either.



Acoustic Guitars



22679 - Adam Black O-3 - Left Hand
22680 - Adam Black S-2 - Natural Left Hand
20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlor, D. Blue
23012 - Atkin D37 Dreadnought Acoustic Sunburst
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
23183 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Secondhand
18703 - Atkin OM37 Pelic Handmade Acoustic
18340 - Atkin The Forty-Three J43, Aged Finish
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
18269 - Breedlove Guitars Acoustic Strings
21922 - Brunswick BFL200 Left Handed Natural
13906 - Cort AD81 O-PAD Series Acoustic Guitar
23114 - Cort AD81 OE AD Black
23279 - Dowina Master Series Custom Made, Used
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6 in Black, Reissue
23494 - Enya Nova Go Black Carbon Fibre Guitar
19662 - Faith FNCD - Naked Neptune
23293 - Faith FS Natural Satin Dreadnought Guitar
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze
23422 - JWW Dreadnought Guitar
23423 - JWW Orchestra Cutaway Guitar
23424 - JWW Orchestra Redwood Guitar
23425 - JWW Orchestra Standard Guitar
23427 - JWW Slope Shoulder Dreadnought
18950 - Yairi YBF2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
21494 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
23092 - Larrivee C-03R-TE Tommy Emmanuel
23186 - Levin LA45F Acoustic Folk Guitar
23188 - Levin LA65D Acoustic Dreadnought Guitar
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought
16760 - Martin D28
22749 - Martin D28L Left-handed Acoustic Guitar
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5013 - Martin D41 Dreadnought, Natural
23203 - Martin D42 Acoustic Guitar
21788 - Martin D45
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
23485 - Millman Orchestra Model Acoustic Guitar
18418 - Seagull S6 Original QIT
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW - Discovery Exotic
22894 - Tanglewood TW OT 2 Super Folk Acoustic
4195 - Tanglewood TW15ASM, Solid Mahogany
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic
13290 - Tanglewood TWJDS Dreadnought Acoustic
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlor Acoustic Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars



23629 - Fender Newporter Player, Olive Satin
16872 - Fender PM1 Standard Dreadnought, Used
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
22914 - Godin Multic Nylon Encore Natural SG
23365 - Gretsch G6022CWFE Rancher Falcon
15986 - Gretsch G6024E Rancher™ Dreadnought
23484 - Guild Jumbo Junior Reserve Maple
23483 - Guild M-25E California Burst
22761 - Guild OM-140 LCE Natural Left Handed
23027 - Guild OM-260CE Deluxe Built Electro
23424 - JWW Orchestra Redwood Guitar
23425 - JWW Orchestra Standard Guitar
23427 - JWW Slope Shoulder Dreadnought
19801 - Yairi BM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
20227 - LAG T118 ACE BROWN SHADOW
19691 - Larrivee D03 Electro Acoustic
22969 - Larrivee L03 Mahogany Recording Series
23094 - Larrivee OM40 Koa Special Legacy Ltd
22937 - Larrivee OMV-40R Legacy Series
22967 - Larrivee OMV03-MHM Recording Series
23093 - Larrivee P03E Electro Acoustic Parlor
23185 - Levin LA25TE Junior Jumbo with Fishman
23187 - Levin LA45FCE Electro Acoustic
23189 - Levin LA65DCE Electro Acoustic
23191 - Levin LA85DCE Electro Acoustic Guitar
23190 - Levin LA85FCE Electro Acoustic Guitar
0000 - Maestro - 10 Models In Stock Now
23198 - Martin 00012E Koa Electro Acoustic
22752 - Martin 000CJR10EL Left-handed
19714 - Martin 000CJR10E, Cherry Stain B&S
22477 - Martin 000-X2E Electro Acoustic Guitar
23200 - Martin 00X2E Electro Acoustic Guitar
22577 - Martin D12E Koa Dreadnought Electro
23115 - Martin D12E Sepele Dreadnought Electro
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar
22745 - Martin D16E Mahogany Electro Acoustic
22746 - Martin D16E Orange Electro Acoustic
22748 - Martin D18E Electro Acoustic w/ Fishman
21587 - Martin DC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19489 - Martin D-10E, Jnr Electro Acoustic
22742 - Martin D-X1E Mahogany Guitar
19050 - Martin GPC11E Electro Acoustic
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1 FE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMCI 5ME Electro Acoustic Guitar
22751 - Martin 00012EL Koa Electro Acoustic Lefty
22857 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic electro
22747 - Martin 00017E Whiskey Sunset Electro
23134 - Martin SC10E Electro Acoustic Guitar
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
23197 - Martin SC-13E Guitar Special Burst
23196 - Martin SC-13E Guitar Special
21974 - Northwood M70 14 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar
19339 - Ovalion 1771VH1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovalion 2771STR-MB Main Street
19347 - Ovalion C2078AXP-KOA Exoticwood Elite
19343 - Ovalion C2078AXP2-PB Exoticwood Elite
22952 - Ovalion CE4412 12-String Mid-Depth Black
23046 - Ovalion CE44LX Lefty Celebrity Elite Plus
22323 - Ovalion Celeb Trad Plus E CS24P-FMYR
19338 - Ovalion 1771STG-ES
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
19554 - RainSong APSE
20594 - RainSong BHDR1000N2 Black Ice Series
10094 - RainSong BIOM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BHSW1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
17659 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2 Concert Series
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - RainSong CO-OM1000N2
20595 - RainSong CO-PA1000NS
19557 - RainSong Co-WS1000N2 NstM, Secondhand
19555 - RainSong N-JM1000N2X
4812 - RainSong OM1000N1 Electro Acoustic Used
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor, Green, Secondhand
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural
7974 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
23135 - Rick Turner Renaissance Deuce Deluxe
19671 - Seagull S6 Cedar Original Slim QIT
23560 - Seagull S6 Classic Black A/E Electro
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
0000 - Tanglewood - 22 Models In Stock Now
23495 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
23543 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon MH
18789 - Vintage LVECS01N Dreadnought, Satin Nat
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS
23580 - Yamaha FSC-TA Trans Acoustic Cutaway
19602 - Yamaha LLTA Trans Acoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat

Classical Guitars



4965 - Asturias Standard Model Classical Guitar
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
23101 - Cordoba C5-CE Right Handed
23100 - Cordoba C5-CE Lefty
22771 - Cordoba Protégé C1M 1/2 Size Classical
22769 - Cordoba C1M Full Size Classical Guitar
21880 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar
20441 - Fishman AGX094 Passive Undersaddle
20440 - Fishman AGX125 Passive Undersaddle
17847 - Hiscok LA-GCL-L-B/S Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscok LA-GCL-MB/S Medium Hard Case
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18947 - Yairi YC6 NS Classical Guitar
23306 - Lag OC88CE Oclaria Classical Cutaway
21034 - Mandi 000C12-16E Nylon Guitar
0000 - Mandiata - 25 Models In Stock Now
22738 - Raimundo 146 Classical Guitar
22754 - Raimundo 680E Electro Acoustic Classical
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top
22062 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Spruce Top
23587 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar, Secondhand
15239 - Ramirez 2NWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2NE Classical Guitar
6914 - Ramirez Estudio 1 Classical Guitar
22060 - Ramirez Estudio 2 Classical Guitar
22061 - Ramirez Estudio 3 Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
22063 - Ramirez SPR Classical Guitar with Case
0000 - Stagg - 11 Models In Stock Now
23543 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon MH
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Ukuleles



19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele Engraved Soundhole
19901 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Ukulele Mahogany
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Ukulele (GR35048B)
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano Uke
19672 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Barjo Ukulele
19675 - B & M UBJ2 Barjo Uke Open Back
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
23567 - Baton Rouge V2T8E Sun 8 String Tenor Uke
22887 - Baton Rouge VK1B8 Eight String Baritone
18975 - Breedlove Luluau Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
23631 - Clearwater Tenor Ukulele Tele-Style Used
19915 - Elvis Hanauma Mahogany Soprano Uke
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Uke
23292 - Enya Nova U Pro Tenor Ukulele, Black
23294 - Enya Nova U Pro Tenor Ukulele, White
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Uke
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Uke
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert, Layered Headstock
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert Uke
19897 - Factory Prototype Reverse Headstock Concert
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
20348 - Fishman AGO-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19669 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele Spruce Top
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Uke Barjo in Amethyst
19306 - Kail KS10 10 Series Soprano Uke Mahogany
18524 - Kiwaya KSU11 Long Neck Soprano Uke
22721 - Kiwaya KTU1 Mahogany Student Tenor Uke
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
22310 - Kios Full Carbon Uke
0000 - Levin - Many Models In Stock Now
16835 - Maestro Island Series Uke UC-IR-SB-C
22386 - Maestro Island Tenor Ukulele UT-KO-CSB-K
10955 - Magic Fluke M20 Nat Fluke Tenor Uke Used
22718 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Ash
23566 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Cherry
18195 - Mahalo - 6 Models In Stock Now
19885 - Malibu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin - 8 Models In Stock now
19892 - No Name Concert Ukulele In Mahogany
13679 - Nukulele "Abbotts Dig" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
19005 - Ohana BK70M Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
19003 - Ohana Bass with Fretless Marks OBU-22FLM
21599 - Ohana CK-1500EL Concert Ukulele
21576 - Ohana CK-35GCE-LH Left-Hand Concert Uke
21566 - Ohana CK14E Concert Ukulele
19016 - Ohana CK14E Concert Mahogany Concert Uke
21589 - Ohana CK15WG Willow Gloss Concert Uke
0000 - Plus Huge Stock Of Ohana & Tanglewood

12 Strings



22845 - Eko Ranger XII VR EQ Natural 12
22846 - Eko Ranger XII VR Honey Burst
9075 - Faith Eclipse Venus Electro, Black
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X, Natural
23509 - Tanglewood TW40 12 SD AN E

Electro Acoustic Guitars



23562 - Art & Lutherie Americana Nat EQ 050703
23563 - Art & Lutherie Legacy Natural EQ (050710)
23561 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Natural EQ
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Sign Concertina
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Concert
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
15886 - Breedlove Stage Black Magic Concert Used
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
23263 - Cort GA-MY Bevel Electro Acoustic Guitar
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
22850 - Eko Ranger VI VR Acoustic 6-String, Nat
22848 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String
22849 - Eko Ranger VI VR Eq Electro Acoustic 6-String
23494 - Enya Nova Go Black Carbon Fibre Guitar
22733 - Faith FECVL, Eclipse Venus Electro Lefty
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Cognac
22726 - Faith FPVQL Nexus Venus Cop Black Lefty
21881 - Faith FVBUM Blue Moon Venus Cutaway
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18278 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus, Used
23524 - Fender Acoustasonic Player Tele B Blonde
23523 - Fender Acoustasonic Player Tele ShadBst
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
23107 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Surf Green
23108 - Fender FSR Malibu Player, Shell Pink
20373 - Fender Newporter Player, Champaign
23053 - Fender Newporter Player, Pink
19259 - Fender Newporter Player, Ice Blue Satin

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
22776 - AER Compact Slope 60 4
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
22871 - Acus One For Strings 8
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
22851 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT Acoustic Amp
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
13956 - Marshall AS500 - 50W, 2x8"
19481 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30
20163 - D'Addario Planet Waves 10FT Guitar Lead
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
23578 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amp, Used
14371 - MOBILEAC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5518 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
10837 - Yamaha THRFA Acoustic Amp

Travel Guitars



21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
23486 - Cort AD Mini 3/4 Size Guitar Mahogany
23494 - Enya Nova Go Black Carbon Fibre Guitar
23484 - Guild Jumbo Junior Reserve Maple
22025 - LAG Travel KAE Travel Guitar
23185 - Levin LA25TE Junior Jumbo with Fishman
22752 - Martin 000CJR10EL Left-handed
19489 - Martin D-10E Jnr Electro Acoustic
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
23495 - Traveler Guitar Pro Series
23543 - Traveler Guitars Ultra Light Nylon MH
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Tenor & Baritone Guitars



20688 - D'Addario EJ66 Tenor Guitar Strings
23462 - Guild BT-258E Deluxe 8-string Baritone
18950 - Yairi YBF2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
18790 - Vintage VGE800N Gemini P. Brett Baritone



Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

CUSTOM CELEBRATION



All my life I have been an enthusiastic guitarist; my sister being my biggest fan. She was always there to listen and comment on my musings from our early childhood through to our adult lives. Sadly, she recently passed away from breast cancer at the age of 55. I decided to

celebrate her life and create a lasting memorial by having a custom guitar made. I designed this in conjunction with Guy Harrison, a local luthier. I wanted a simple guitar with the breast cancer ribbon at the 12th fret, pink dot inlays and her name on the headstock. It's built from korina with an ebony fingerboard and features a little Seymour Duncan '59 humbucker with split coil. I'm sure you agree the guitar has turned out to be pretty stunning. A guitar can be so much more than just an instrument.

Alan Singleton, via email

So sorry for your loss Alan, but the guitar is a wonderful way to remember your sister – instruments are among the most personal of possessions, our connection with them is emotional and on a deeper level than with other material things we can acquire in life. Nice to see korina being used, too, a choice with roots in tradition but still a pretty rare bird in custom builds. Thanks for sharing this with us – we hope you'll enjoy using it with this month's Star Letter prize.



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

FATHER'S DAY

This is the guitar my son presented me with on my 70th birthday (see below). He printed out the body in six sections, bolted them together, then completed the project with (by his own admission) the cheapest components he could find on t'internet. There's a push switch on the back which, when activated, gives it that extra *kerraang*! Apart from the emotional connection I have with it, it's one helluva great instrument, loads of sustain and plays brilliantly. This is his first build.

Dave Cooper, via email

That really does make a statement, Dave – a proper show-stealer – a Flying V with the lights on! As unidentified flying objects go, we reckon it's a winner and you certainly won't lose it on a darkened stage. It was a great gesture from your son to build it for you, too. Interesting, you mention he printed the body sections – 3D printing, we assume? Has anyone else had any interesting experiences using 3D printing in homebuilds? If so, let us know and we'll share the best responses with readers here.





Reader Tony Lloyd picked up this tempting Squier for just a tenner

BARGAIN HUNTER

With reference to the article in issue 487 – Fender Squier 40th Anniversary – I thought you may be interested in the Squier Stratocaster I recently bought. I saw it advertised on a well-known site, so I took a chance and bought it not knowing if it was genuine. It had on the headstock 'Made in Korea' with the number 'S1015104'. I asked the seller if the logo was real or a transfer and he said it was real and so I bought it for the huge sum of £10! I have since sold it for a bit more, and used some of the money to buy an Epiphone Les Paul Special for £40.

Tony Lloyd, via email

What a bargain, Tony, congratulations – a Strat for the price of a London pint! Joking aside, it's good to know that serviceable instruments aren't beyond budgets even in these straitened times and that you can trade upwards, too, even with such a small initial outlay. Have any readers got a bargain-buy story to beat it? If so, send it in and we'll print the best...

RHOADS WORKS

I suspect this isn't really a particularly original idea, but I came across a YouTube video recently commemorating the late, great Randy Rhoads and featuring his brother and sister. To my amazement, they not only had his iconic Karl Sandoval Polka Dot Flying V, but also one of his Marshall amp heads and even his infamous pedalboard, nicknamed the



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Right: The Karl Sandoval Polka Dot Flying V as played by Randy Rhoads

Far right: The Kawai Rock 'n' Roll Star might be a rare bird, but many readers have still spotted them

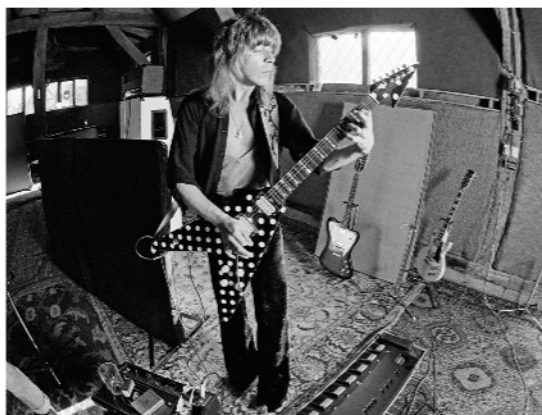


PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDPENS/GETTY IMAGES



'Chip Pan' because of its limited noise-cancelling qualities. They had Randy's entire rig and it struck me how amazing it would be to see someone play through it again and how rare that opportunity is. As you well know, it's not unheard of to see a legendary guitar in the hands of another player, but how much more unusual would it be to have the entire rig of a guitarist who is no longer with us?

Chris Taylor, via email

Thanks Chris – great idea. We'd love to do this, though the chances to do so tend to be rare for obvious reasons as, after musicians die, their collections are often auctioned off or put on public display. We did something a little similar with the late, great Gary Moore's gear collection, which was under the stewardship of his guitar tech Graham Lilley. We didn't do any video with the rigs though, so we shall certainly correct that if an opportunity of the same kind arises again. And, in the meanwhile, we'll approach artists still in the land of the living to see if they'll let us play through their rigs...

KAWAI – SLIGHT RETURN

As soon as I read Dave Burrluck's piece in Issue 487, I remembered a clip on *Top Of The Pops* in '75 of Dr Feelgood performing *Back In The Night* with the much-missed Lee Brilleaux playing slide on a Kawai Rock 'n' Roll Star. Same colour, same stars, same guitar. There can't have been many sold here. I know that when they toured, Lee used a Guild S90, which was an underrated guitar, provided you didn't catch your hand on the tailpiece!

John Herring, via email

Thanks John, we had a few letters about the Kawai from issue 487 – sadly we don't have room to print them all. But it seems, like a rare migratory bird, the guitar attracted the interest of quite a few guitar spotters among our readership (who also reported Public Image Limited and other acts as having used one on occasion). Thanks to all who sent in sightings of the elusive Kawai – even more camera-shy than a real celebrity, but which saw a bit of action in some surprisingly influential bands in its day.

REQUESTS...

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

During the late 50s and 60s, when pop music became really big in the UK, most young people wanted to be in a group. At that time there were import restrictions from the US, so we couldn't get any American guitars like Fender or Gibson; not that we could have afforded them anyway. The only way to get our hands on one was to import it privately, but that was even more expensive. So the only option for young aspiring pop stars was to buy European-made guitars, the most popular one, at the time, being Höfner, with the Colorama and Galaxie electrics and Congress, Senator and President archtops.

I wonder if you could write an article on the history of these guitars that us Boomers played during those times. I think it would bring back a lot of memories for your older readers and be interesting to the younger ones, too.

Richard Hollis, via email

That's a great idea Richard, and timely too as Höfners are slowly but steadily gaining in profile and popularity as practical vintage guitars to play and collect – especially as they offer vintage sounds for a relatively low outlay but can be beautifully crafted. The editor of this magazine owned a really pretty '61 Verithin with the earlier 'toaster' style pickups. It was a nice guitar with a beautifully figured back, the only downers being its tiny frets and rather unusual neck, which had the same cross-section as a canal-barge: kind of a hard U-shape. It was okay once you got used to it, but it wasn't among the classics, perhaps! But yes, we should do a roundup of beautiful vintage Höfners – the Presidents are especially attractive instruments and the history of Höfner is due a revisit, too. Watch this space.

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

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ERNIE BALL



HALESTORM

As the Pennsylvania rockers return, Lzzy Hale tells us about cult guitars, her identity crisis, the darkness behind new album, *Back From The Dead* – and the drinking session that sparked her purist-baiting signature Gibson Explorerbird



Words Henry Yates

Like all the best brainwaves, Lzzy Hale's new signature model started with a drinking session. It was NAMM 2020, and while the apocalypse rumbled in Eastern Asia, at the Anaheim Convention Center, the Halestorm guitarist was throwing back a few with the Gibson team.

Today, Hale insists her Explorerbird pitch was just the beer talking. "But you have to be careful what you say with my Gibson family. We'll be having a pint and you'll turn to someone and say, 'You know what'd be cool? An Explorer body with a Firebird headstock.' And then, a month later, something shows up at my door and it's like, 'Oh Jesus, I guess we're doing this, then?'"

They were, and while Covid shunted the Explorerbird down Gibson's itinerary, this inspired cut-and-shut of the luthier's two cult heroes was ready in time for the Pennsylvania hard-rockers' aptly titled fifth album, *Back From The Dead*. "I feel like whatever your poison is, this guitar can handle it," Hale tells us. "Especially considering the way we beat on our guitars."

Is that album title referring to the band or the human race as a whole?

"I think you can't help but feel the weight of the world nowadays. *Back From The Dead* started out as a very personal record, but now it's out in the world it seems more universal. I mean, for heaven's sake, there are already people that have the lyrics tattooed on them. It's like, 'Guys, the record just came out, maybe live with it a bit before you ink it?' But it's just a beautiful lesson that we were all going through those feelings. So *Back From The Dead* is this kind of rallying war cry. Like, 'You can't hold us down!'"

You've said that writing this music helped you get out of a "dark spot"...

"Yeah. I went through a weird time. I've been in this band since I was 13, so when everything shut down, I had to look at myself in the mirror and be like, 'Well, who am I? I'm no longer Lzzy Hale, getting up on stage in my high heels with my Explorer. Now, I'm Elizabeth Hale on the couch in her pyjamas for three days. And I don't know who this person is.'"

"I got reacquainted with the anxiety I hadn't felt since high school and went through a bout of depression. So I had to kick myself in the butt and say, 'What *can* you do?' Well, I can still sit down and write out my feelings. I remembered why I still write music as a form of therapy, the way I did when I was a teenager. Y'know, my dad gave me this little section in his garage for songwriting because it was getting too noisy. He would pop in when I would be writing these angry songs and he'd be like, 'Are you okay?' And I'd tell him, 'Yeah, I am now – because I got it out!'"

Do you think you became a better or worse player over lockdown?

"I believe I ended up getting worse as a player – and then I had to play catch-up as soon as we got back in the studio. There was a period where I couldn't even look at the guitar without feeling sad. You almost question your love of music. But then it was like, 'All right, stop pity-partying this. Just get your shit together and do something about it.'"



High-output '70s Tribute humbucking pickups power the Explorerbird. "This guitar screams a little harder," says Lzzy



Finished in Cardinal Red to match the body and with gold hardware, the non-reverse Firebird headstock features Grover Mini Rotomatics

What did you and Joe Hottinger want the guitars to sound like?

"We ended up building up the tracks around my vocal takes, basically trying to match the lyrics and attitude, which made it a bit of a mission when it came to the guitars. We went in with [producer] Nick Raskulinecz and he's a purist. We used real amps, real drums, real guitars... real people!"

This album also marks the studio debut of your Explorerbird.

"It's been a long time coming. We first talked about doing this at NAMM 2020, right before the world changed. While we've been working on it, I feel like they should have set up a little pup tent for me at the Gibson factory. I ended up using that prototype they sent me on a lot of this new record – specifically, *Back From The Dead* and *The Steeple* because they're both in drop C. There's something about the Explorerbird – it's probably because of the Firebird headstock – but it just stays in tune like a mother."

What makes the Firebird and Explorer such a good combination?

"In their own right, they both have this seat at the table of rock 'n' roll. Just those classic shapes and sounds. When somebody walks on stage with an Explorer, it's not going to be country. So the combining of the two forces felt more natural than it

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"Back From The Dead' started out as a very personal record, but now it's out in the world it seems more universal"
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should have been. At first, I was wondering, 'Is this the right thing to do?' When you see the Explorerbird on stage, it raises a lot of questions because you know there's something different about it.

"The response has been amazing. I really wasn't expecting that. I've put out signature things before and those went gangbusters, but this one was a little weird. I was nervous. I mean, 'Is anybody actually gonna like this but me?' It's the same thing with our merch. Our management ask me, 'Well, what would you wear?' And I'm like, 'Dude, anything I would wear, nobody will buy...'"

You've always been a fan of the Explorer model, haven't you?

"Yeah. My first one was just standard, off of Craigslist. We were making our first record in LA and this guy had put it up for sale. It was such a hard story to read. He was selling all

his guitars because of medical bills and was worried they weren't going to find a good home. So when I went to his house I told him, 'I'm in a band and she's gonna be loved.' We ended up keeping in touch, and he's so happy his guitars are out there. As a guitar owner, if you're going to sell something, you want to make sure it goes to someone who's actually going to play it, not just hang it on a wall or stick it under the bed."

The Explorer and Firebird are kind of cult heroes, aren't they?

"When it comes to Gibson, usually you're thinking of the SG and Les Paul, even the V. The Firebird and Explorer, they're definitely the outliers. But they have a very near and dear place, obviously, in my heart. I have both of them separately, and now I have one that's the best of both worlds."

Visually and spec-wise, it's quite a departure from your signature Explorer.

"Well, for my first two signature models, I ended up going with the '57 Classic pickups, which are the standard meat and potatoes. This time – in the spirit of 'the world is ending, go big or go home' – I ended up choosing the '70s Tributes. This guitar just screams a little harder. I had to adjust my tone accordingly because the '70s are definitely a little hot. I gotta roll down every now and then. It's like, 'Okay, I'm making a lot of noise!'"

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF GIBSON



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“The Explorer and Firebird both have this seat at the table of rock ‘n’ roll, [but] the response to the Explorerbird has been amazing”

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How did you go about choosing the Explorerbird’s tonewoods?

“Well, the mahogany body, it’s just a big hunk of wood, a beautiful coffee table [laughs]. I’ve already taken some chunks out of my particular model because I’m not necessarily super careful on tour. I’m running around, bumping into things. Obviously, there’s that Cardinal Red finish: you can see it from the back of the arena, man, and I feel cool when I wear it. And then, purely for aesthetic reasons, all the frets and hardware are gold because we wanted to be a little bit classier. Y’know, like, “She’s a classy bitch...””

And you’ve chosen Gibson’s SlimTaper neck profile...

“Well, it’s a comfort situation. The tapered neck, it’s for ease of performance and also it just feels like home. A guitar has to be an extension of you. You can’t be going out there thinking that this appendage isn’t yours. You’re gonna end up playing differently. As for the rosewood fingerboard, that was kind of a happy accident because the first prototype had ebony. But then the next few models had rosewood and it was beautiful, with these streaks of natural red wood grain. I couldn’t stop looking at it. It was a little mesmerising. I was like, ‘Did I have this idea or did you guys accidentally put rosewood on the fingerboard? Because I love this!’”

Lzzy’s mahogany-bodied Explorerbird combines the body shape of an Explorer with the non-reverse headstock of a Firebird



Halestorm: Lzzy back in her element on stage with guitarist Joe Hottinger, bassist Josh Smith and drummer Arejay Hale

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF GIBSON

What amps are you finding complement the Explorerbird?

“There’s always a quest for tone; that’s a never-ending chase. I find that when I start getting used to something, I’ll say, ‘Okay, we gotta do something different.’ When we were in the studio, we used an absolute wall of amps – some Bogners, some Diezels for certain layering techniques. But with the Explorerbird, because of the ’70s pickups and because it’s meaner-sounding, I found just using my JCM800 and this guitar sounded the best. I ended up just using the break-up I get from the amp – I literally plug in and play, roll up and roll down – because this particular guitar screams a little harder. Now, my other Explorers with the ’57 Classics, sometimes I just need a little extra juice, so I’ll usually end up using my Klon distortion.”

Do you have a more expansive pedalboard for your live shows?

“I’m pretty much a purist with what we take out live because I have such great equipment now. Now we’re on the other side of Covid and we’re out on tour, I’ve found myself digging into that simplicity and seeing how much I can get out of just the guitar and amplifier. Everything else is icing on the cake.

“As far as my pedalboard goes, I have [an Electro-Harmonix] POG octave pedal,

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“When I first started working with Gibson in 2012, it was like they were the one I was holding out for to ask me to the prom”

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my Klon distortion, an MXR [MC401 CAE Boost/] Line Booster, and I’m using a [Way Huge Smalls] Aqua-Puss right now for a little bit of a delay situation. We have these sections in our set where we do some improv. We’re like, ‘Key of A, let’s go!’ We jam together and we’re not quite sure how we’re going to wrap it up, so I have a few things in place like the Aqua-Puss in case we quieten it down. And, obviously, I’ve got my Boss tuner on there, which is my favourite pedal of all. You can have the greatest distortion in the world, but if the guitar’s out of tune...”

What made Gibson such a magical luthier for you as a young player?

“It’s the backdrop for rock ‘n’ roll. There’s Gibson and there’s Marshall and these are the tools my idols had used. When I first

started working with Gibson in 2012, I told them, ‘You guys are like the one I was holding out for to ask me to the prom,’ y’know? I’d been approached by a few different companies and none of it felt right, so when Gibson popped the question, it was like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is what I’ve been waiting for since I was 16 years old.”

What’s your own history playing Gibson?

“I’d already had a couple of used guitars. My first-ever was a BC Rich Mockingbird. But my first Gibson I ever got, I had saved up from being a terrible waitress and I ended up getting a used Tobacco Burst Les Paul Custom, a ’91. I still have it; it’s beautiful. I’ve broken the neck twice and for some reason it sounds better now than it did originally. I took it to an amazing luthier and he fixed it all up for me.

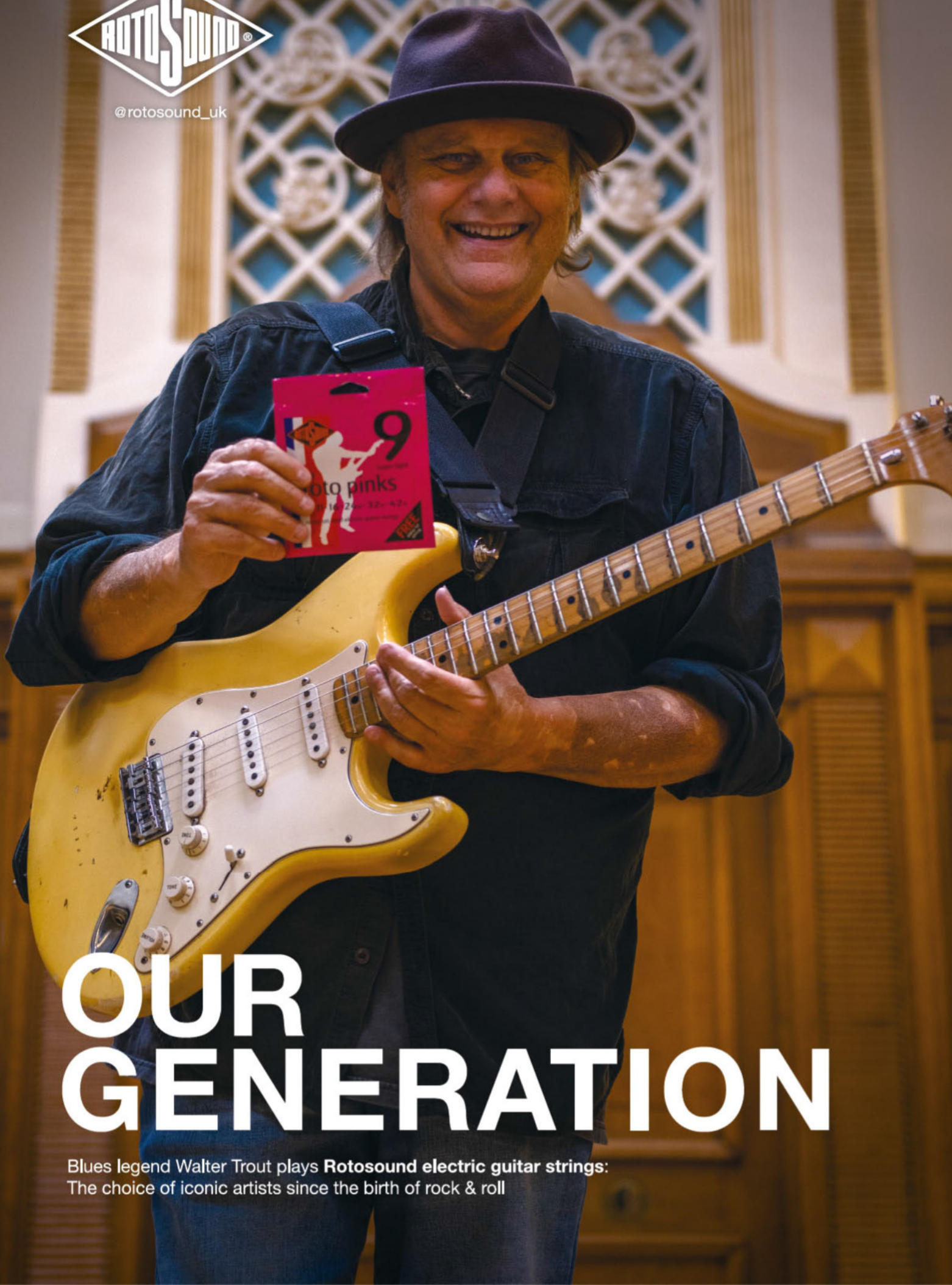
“When you get your first Gibson and you strap it on, it feels almost like it could play itself because there’s some kind of intangible magic. And it’s a huge step for a young player. Because it’s like, ‘Now I have the actual tools that my idols were using. Now I have a pass to become a rock star.’ And then, all hell broke loose!” 



Back From The Dead, is out now, and the Lzzy Hale Signature Explorerbird is available from Gibson dealers www.halestormrocks.com



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HOLY GRAILS

In a low-key store on a quiet city street in Long Island, you will find some of the rarest custom-colour and prototype guitars from Fender and Gibson's storied past. And each one has a fascinating tale to tell about guitar history. We ventured inside Well Strung Guitars, in company with owners David and Paige Davidson, to take a forensic look at the golden-era instruments that gave birth to legends. Here's what we discovered there...

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Olly Curtis

Call me last. Those three words have become David Davidson's calling card in the vintage guitar world and they catch you off guard, as perhaps they are supposed to. But what do they mean?

We're sitting in his office at Well Strung Guitars, the Long Island-based store that he co-owns with his daughter, Paige. It contains some of the most jaw-dropping instruments you'll ever see. A dozen 'Bursts hang on one wall. Across the room are more than 20 Blackguard Teles, Broadcasters and Esquires. In the middle are two 50s Flying Vs facing a wall of custom-colour Firebirds. All original, no refins, no reissues. If even a drop of guitar-loving blood flows in your veins, this place is a dreamland – an Area 51 of tone, where things you didn't even think existed hang right there on the wall, waiting to be played.

"Call me last" has been my tagline since I started this thing," David says,

leaning his elbows on his desk. "Go find out everything you want – talk to anyone you want to. But before you sell your guitar, call me last – don't make a mistake and sell it too cheap... that was always my thing."

David fell in love with vintage guitars at a young age and started trading them when he was barely into his teens. Over the years, he's been able to track down some of the rarest instruments in the world and has been known to pay a premium to acquire them. But he's also a committed steward of historic guitars and wants to raise awareness of America's guitar-making heritage. In 2017, he helped establish what was arguably the greatest exhibition of vintage guitars there's ever been – the Songbirds Museum in Chattanooga – donating scores of instruments from his own collection and involving A-list musicians from his contact book with the museum's work. To David's

astonishment, a film about Songbirds even won an Emmy this year.

The pandemic, however, brought changes to the museum's plans and Songbirds has since shifted its focus towards general pop-music history, with fewer guitars on show. Recently, David and Paige undertook the laborious task of returning a truckful of the rarest Songbirds instruments to Well Strung Guitars. Today, if you happen to be passing the store, you can walk in off the street and play a piece of history. In fact, the business has more custom and prototype electrics from the 50s and 60s than we've ever seen. Such instruments, by their very nature, were made in far fewer numbers than standard production guitars. But they also tended to be at the cutting edge of their era's lutherie. And that's why we're here: to learn what the rarest instruments from Fender and Gibson's golden age can teach us about guitar history.

1966 Inverness Green

GIBSON SG

"I originally thought this guitar was just a faded Pelham Blue until I found out all Inverness Green guitars were first painted Pelham Blue, after which Gibson applied a pre-tinted yellow coat on top [in order to produce the desired green in the factory]." David Davidson says. "Sometimes you will look at an Inverness guitar and you'll see hints of blue. I have an Inverness Green Firebird V that is true Inverness Green under the guard, in the control cavity and everywhere else. But at the top of the headstock, along the edge, it's more blue because they didn't spray a whole lot of tint there. So, all Inverness Green really started as Pelham Blue, and the tint-coat was added on top. Though Gibson will dispute this, I've seen so many... you're always going to look for the original colour where there was no chance for oxidation, like under a pickguard or inside the control cavity and that's where you'll see the true colour. So that's why we know on this particular guitar is Inverness not just a faded Pelham."



PAINTING LESSONS

One of the earliest ways electric guitar makers customised instruments was with paint. And paint can tell you a surprising amount about how things were done back in the day. The first guitar we examine at Well Strung Guitars is a case in point: a 1953 Fender Telecaster in Aztec Gold (see page opposite), which predates by three years a small batch of Aztec Gold Strats made by Fender.

“That guitar went around for a little while before I saw it,” David recalls. “And it’s a great example of the fear of the unknown: I know three or four dealers that have come to me since I bought that guitar and said, ‘Man, when I first saw that guitar, I just couldn’t believe it was real. I couldn’t buy it...’ I mean, I’ve got six Aztec Gold Stratocasters – they only made eight and I’ve got six of them,” David observes. “And that’s the only



1. A very early example of a custom colour Tele, this 1953 instrument has a round string-tree and a nicely yellowed tint to the maple neck

2. A small, embossed plastic nametag on the Tele’s body was put there by a former owner, Dewey Dunson

Telecaster I’ve seen in that same paint and it’s made three years before the run of Strats, which were all made in ’56 – except for one guitar, [guitarist and arranger] Eldon Shamblin’s ’54 Stratocaster, which is also Aztec Gold. It has the same green verdigris in the wear of the paint as this guitar does.”

David says that with very early custom colours there was no codified system of paint mixes, as there was later in the 60s. In this case, while you might class both the ’56 Strats and this earlier Tele as Aztec Gold, subtle differences can be seen, due to the haphazard way paints were bought and used by Fender then.

“When Fender needed to buy colours at that time, they would literally run down to the automotive supplier and say, ‘Go get me a can of metallic gold’”

“It’s a different paint formula than the Aztec Gold they went on to use in ’56,” David says. “So the only reason I said, ‘I’m going to take a chance on this guitar’ is because maybe three or four weeks before, I had held the Eldon Shamblin guitar and I’d studied the paint. When I saw this guitar, I said: ‘That’s from the same can.’ You have to realise that when Fender needed to buy colours at that time, they would literally run down to the automotive supplier and say, ‘Go get me a can of metallic gold.’ They’d buy a quart of paint,

3. Equal partners in the incredible enterprise that is Well Strung Guitars: Paige and David Davidson

1953 Aztec Gold

FENDER TELECASTER

As a very early custom colour Fender (see page opposite), this Tele is already incredibly special – but a small stuck-on name tag, which read: 'D Dunson' provided a further layer to its story. The initial 'D' stood for Alfred 'Dewey' Dunson, a former owner of the instrument. "The guy's just played the death out of it," David Davidson comments. "I mean, it's refretted and he wore it down to the wood! Usually when you strip a body with a chemical, the chemical is going to take the grain filler out of the wood too. So you don't often get to see something worn naturally [down to the grain filler] over all these years. So now I'm looking at the pore-filler in the wood and I'm taking macro pictures of this thing, because I need to have this on record. This is the only guitar I've ever seen that's worn to a point where I can see how they applied it."

"The guitar went around for a while before I saw it. Dealers have come to me since and said, 'Man, when I first saw that guitar, I just couldn't believe it was real'"



“When you have experience in 50s custom colours, you realise that everything was done differently than it was in the 60s”

say, then reduce it to usually a 50/50 mix with a lacquer thinner, which is the drying agent. So back in '53, they would buy a can of paint and get whatever they could out of it: they painted that Telecaster and they had enough paint left over to paint Eldon Shamblin's Stratocaster.”

The hue, oxidation and thickness of these small batches of thinned-down paints are almost like a fingerprint that helps vintage guitar traders such as David and Paige identify guitars as early, factory original customs. In this case, the close similarity to the paint used on the Tele to that of Eldon Shamblin's Aztec Gold '54 Strat provided one clue. A second clue was more interesting still, providing evidence that Fender was very much feeling its way in the brave new world of custom colours back in 1953.

“Fender was used to spraying super-thin paint in 1953,” David explains. “But they had a rude awakening when they started dealing with custom colours because the [gold metallic] paint shoots out of a spray-gun a lot thicker. If you take the neck off of this particular



4. Light playwear in the lower frets shows this guitar has performed its share of songs over the years



5. The single-ply scratchplate and plastics have a clean, white glow that screams '50s Strat'

6. Quite a view: a wide shot of Well Strung's Long Island showroom shows the breadth of history hanging on the wall. Two Flying Vs are hiding up front

Telecaster, the neck pocket is not painted, it's scraped right down to raw wood, which is going to make anybody say, 'Well, somebody messed with it, it's not original.' Except, when you have experience in 50s custom colours, you start to realise that absolutely *everything* was done differently than it was in the 60s – every production procedure. So that's how I approach guitars – I want to be in their heads. What made them do this? Why are certain things so different to what you might expect?

“So, I was thinking ‘You know what’s crazy? If this guitar had originally been blonde I would have seen some traces of it – especially in the scraped neck pocket – but there’s none’. So I measured the thickness of the paint with a light-refraction tool used by car collectors, then I measured the width of the neck pocket, and I found that if Fender had left that gold paint in the paint pocket they wouldn’t have been able to put the neck on the guitar. The paint was too thick and so the neck wouldn’t fit – they could have pounded it with a rubber hammer and they still wouldn’t have gotten it in there without the paint coming off and making a mess. So they scraped it instead, to make it fit.”

TAKEN AS RED

Early custom colours, such as Aztec Gold, pose one set of challenges to the vintage guitar expert, but even familiar finishes such as Fiesta Red have a rich story and their own twists. Reds in particular have a fascinating history at Fender and many early red finishes are often mislabelled ‘Fiesta Red’. By way of example, David points to a Fullerton Red '57 Strat on the showroom wall that has a somewhat similar hue to Fiesta but actually predates it (see page opposite).

“Fiesta starts in '59, right?” David says. “So any guitar made before the 1959 ‘Bill Carson’ Strat that we have is not Fiesta Red, it’s really just another red.”



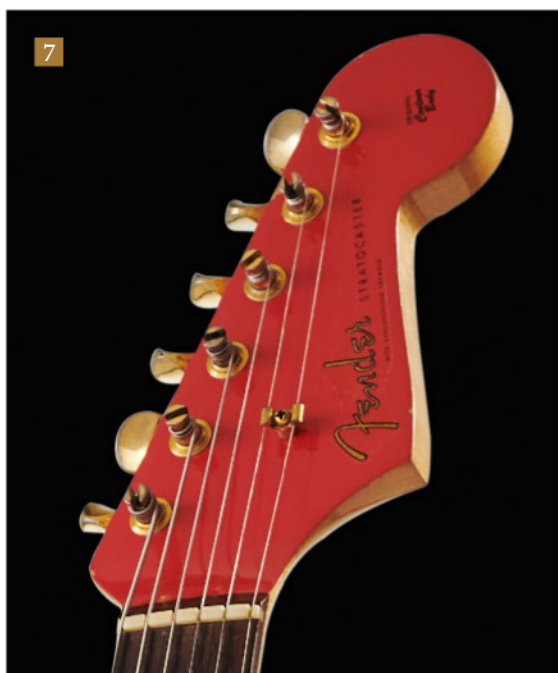
1957 Fullerton Red

FENDER STRATOCASTER

"The first red that Fender painted was Dakota. By 1958, there were at least four different reds in use at the company, including the colour of this guitar, which was called Fullerton Red, and there was also Roman Red and Mandan Red. And then it all culminates in them dumping most of those reds and going with Fiesta and Dakota, but not at the same time – Dakota goes away for years and doesn't resurface again until the Custom Colour chart of '61. However, Roman Red, which is a 1958 Corvette colour, hangs around for a couple of years [unofficially]. I have a Roman Red Bass VI made in '62 and was probably finished with leftover paint. So they were screwing around all the time, but Fiesta became their staple red colour," David Davidson says.

"Many early red finishes are often mislabelled 'Fiesta Red'. The Fullerton Red '57 Strat on the showroom wall has a similar hue to Fiesta but actually predates it"





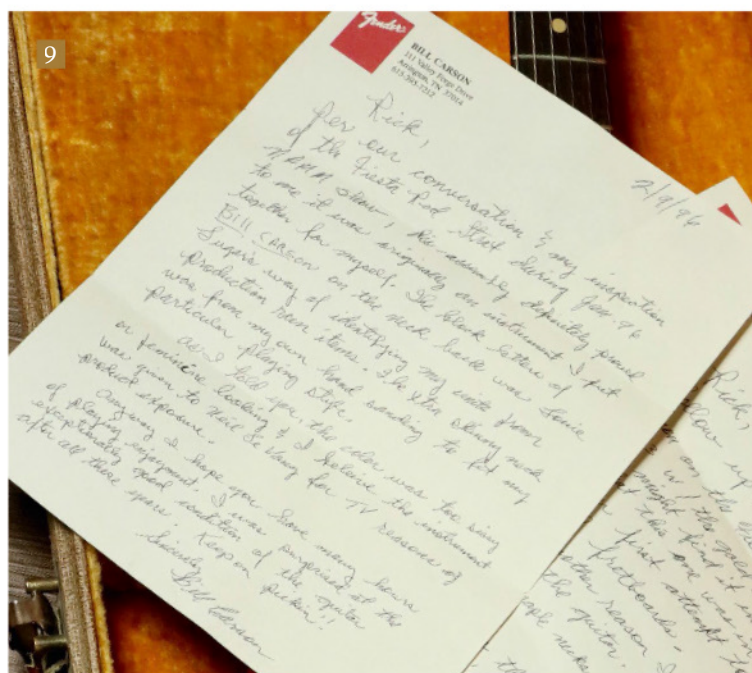
The 1959 Strat David refers to also tells a broader story about Fender history, because it was built for one of the architects of Fender's success, Bill Carson. David says: "Bill was a country music star and Fender's first signed [endorsee], but he would also work to build and engineer Fender Stratocasters with George Fullerton, Don Randall and Leo Fender. Many of the earlier prototypes, such as Strats with a narrow trem cavity and three springs, or leather pickguards and all kinds of other crazy things we've seen – those were

all guitars that were given to people like Bill to go out and play and give feedback on, so Fender could make improvements. We've discovered fairly recently that the first bodies for Fender Stratocasters were made in May of 1953, so that's a full year before regular production launches. Most of the early guitars were made as salesman samples and later came back to Fender to be reworked, right? Bill Carson had a lot to do with that reengineering. He was the person that went and said, 'Hey, these guitars aren't comfortable, if we put

"Just half a dropper of white could change the shade of Fiesta Red. That's why you'll see it looking anything from orange to salmon pink"

this big tummy cut in here, it's going to be more comfortable – and you should put an arm-cut in, too.'

"The 1959 Fiesta Red Strat we have [see page opposite] was made specially for Bill," David continues, "And it was part of a push towards standardised custom colours. Fiesta Red was a logical choice, because it was an extension of a colour that was called Fullerton Red that was produced in-house by Fender. That's why if you look at Fiesta Red and even Fullerton Red, the colour shading difference is so great. Because they started with a can of red paint and added a small amount of white to it. But just one extra dropper-full or even half of white could change the shade of the finished Fiesta Red batch dramatically. So that's why you'll see Fiesta Red guitars looking anything from orange to salmon pink."



7. Matching-colour headstock and gold hardware mark Bill Carson's Strat out as fancy indeed in 1959

8. The Fiesta Red finish indicates the start of a new era in Fender Custom colours, while the three-ply scratchplate shows the Strat evolving into its 60s form already

9. A letter from Bill Carson discusses the background to the guitar and why he parted company with it

BIRDS OF PARADISE

With Fender enjoying a huge growth in popularity throughout the 50s, Gibson was forced to try and beat Leo's company at its own game. In the early 60s, the Stratocaster hit what was arguably its peak as a design, with the classic

A 1959 Fender Fiesta Red Stratocaster guitar is the central focus, displayed on a clear acrylic stand. The guitar has a vibrant red finish, a white pickguard, and a dark wood neck with a matching headstock. The background is a wall of various other vintage guitars in different colors and styles, creating a rich, musical atmosphere.

1959 Fiesta Red

FENDER STRATOCASTER

"This 1959 Fiesta Red Strat was made especially for Bill Carson with the [narrow] 'A' neck he preferred and a matching-colour headstock. This was well in advance of when Fender first officially offered matching headstocks as an option in 1962. Bill was a country player and they liked fancy stage guitars – so this Strat not only has the custom colour with a matching headstock and gold hardware, it actually says 'For Bill Carson' in the neck pocket, too. Unfortunately, he didn't like the colour in the end – we have a letter written by him where he explains it felt a little too feminine for him, though he used a different word. There's nothing better than when the guy himself writes you a note and says, 'Well, this is how it happened'. That's one of the things that makes this guitar so special."

"Early custom colours pose challenges to the vintage guitar expert, but even familiar finishes, such as Fiesta Red, have a rich story and their own twists"

1960 Prototype

GIBSON SG SPECIAL

This SG Special prototype is notable for having a slab body without the SG's familiar edge bevel. "When I first took it out of the case it was like when you haven't seen a friend in a while and there's something different about them, like maybe they shaved their beard," David Davidson says. "It's a '60 serial number, inked on. I always look at that guitar as kind of like the slab-body Fender Mustangs you saw early on. It was as if the people making the prototype were thinking 'Well, if we can make it cheaper, let's try', before the styling department said, 'No, you can't cut that corner.'" David adds that he's never seen any SG Standard prototypes without bevelled edges so, possibly, a simpler un-bevelled version was only considered for the cheaper SG Special in much the same way as the Les Paul Special did without the carved top of the LP Standard.

"When I first took it out of the case it was like when you haven't seen a friend in a while and there's something different about them..."





rosewood-board spec and a raft of custom colours available to order. Keen to come up with a product that echoed the Strat's sleek modern lines and versatile range of tones, Gibson hired car designer Ray Dietrich to design the reverse-shape Firebird – a difficult-to-construct guitar that didn't last long before being altered to a simpler, non-reverse design – making early Firebirds in Custom Colours some of the rarest electrics in existence.

“Car designer Ray Dietrich created the reverse-shape Firebird – in custom colours [these are] some of the rarest electrics in existence”

“First of all, they didn't make Firebirds in big numbers to start with,” David says. “Reverse Firebirds were a failed experiment that lost Gibson money on every guitar. The coloured ones were basically made to hide shoddy workmanship, at first, until they decided to compete with Fender and put out an official Custom Colour chart. I would say that their rarity, as opposed to that of a custom colour Fender, is dramatic. Especially pastel-colour Firebirds – because most custom-colour Firebirds are red, white or blue. Pastels were far less common, probably because young guys in the 60s were thinking: ‘Do I really want

10. Without its familiar edge-bevels this prototype SG Special has a more blocky look that was rejected in favour of continuity with the rest of the Gibson SG range – though the classic P-90 pickup configuration stayed



CONNECTING WITH HISTORY

Preserving the past requires an eye to the future, says Paige Davidson

As co-owner of Well Strung Guitars, Paige Davidson not only undertakes the detailed forensic work of authenticating guitars, she also helps guide customers to the instruments that will suit them perfectly. It's a hard task to stay objective as, like any player, she has personal favourites among the extraordinary vintage guitars that pass through her hands at Well Strung Guitars.

“Currently, my favourite guitar is a 1957 Stratocaster,” she says. “It's in an unbelievable [custom] blue metallic finish and there's also an Esquire in the same matching colour. When I look at that Strat, I feel like I can almost close my eyes and be there the day it was made.”

It's clear that these instruments have lost none of their power to beguile and yet, just as players of the past left their mark on these guitars in forearm wear and buckle-rash, Paige shares how the guitars themselves left indelible impressions on the lives of the people who owned them. And this endures down the decades too. She says, “We have a 1954 Stratocaster here – it's the one that your eye gets drawn to in the line [of sunburst

50s Strats]. It's very smoky and you can tell it's seen the inside of many bars. That piece has photographs of the original owner with it, from the time she played with an old-time, bandstand type of show, and we also have documents, such as her business card as a travelling musician.

“Her son reached out to us and we're connected to that family forever, no matter what happens with that guitar. We've had that guitar [at Well Strung Guitars] more than once in our time as a business, and her grandchildren are aware of us and aware that we have it – they are just so happy that we're keeping all of the records in one place. I really do believe that that's a big part of our duty here.”

But if this heritage is to be carried forward, it's essential for new generations to experience it, which as time goes by is going to be one of her key goals as proprietor.

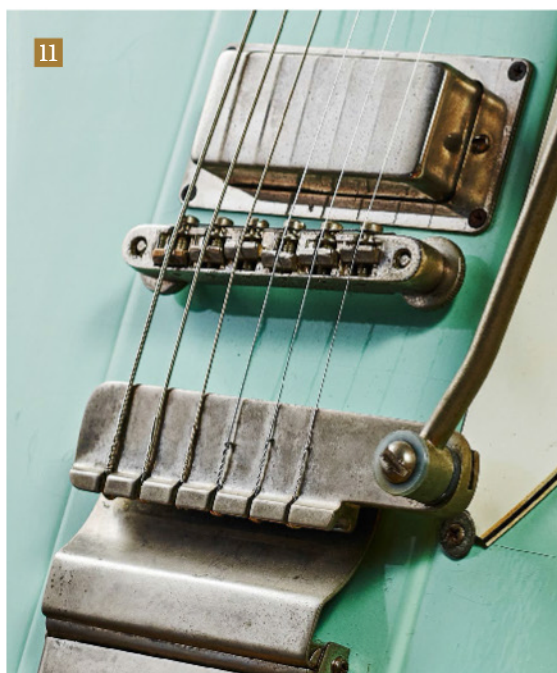
“I want more young people to be involved. In an ideal world, I'd love to see more women in this industry – as of now, there are not many. I just want to see the legacy that's been created here move forward. And what that looks like is yet to be determined.”

1964 Kerry Green

GIBSON FIREBIRD V

"Since Firebird production was low in the first place, when you're talking about a Kerry Green Firebird of any type: ones, threes, fives or sevens, you're talking about handfuls of a particular colour," David Davidson says. "I had virtually every model and every colour at Songbirds. The museum did not have a Kerry Green VII, though – and I don't know of a Kerry Green VII in existence, in fact. I have been right through the logs at Gibson and sometimes there's a [serial or order] number but no description next to it. So there *could* be a Kerry Green Firebird VII, but I've never seen a promotional picture that showed one and I've never seen one in the flesh."





to own a guitar that looks like my kid sister's bedroom?" They didn't really want those baby-green, baby-pink colours. So only a handful of guitars in colours like Kerry Green were made."

So were these scarce custom-colour guitars individually made to order? Or did Gibson ship a few out to selected dealers to see if they would prove popular? The answer was a bit of both, David says. "I think really what it was, is that a dealer was sent

11. The Kerry Green finish is rather minty, almost heading towards a Sonic Blue hue. The classic Firebird pickups remain a unique voice in electric guitars

"Gibson rep would insist you stock some guitars in those colours, because they wanted to promote this idea and get it out there"

the Custom Colour chart and a bulletin. Gibson was always putting out these typed bulletins. I've had many different ones and these bulletins might say: 'In response to customer demand, Gibson has decided to offer these 10 exciting new colours for our instruments.' And they would send an envelope with this little chart and a tri-fold and it would show a colour wheel of finishes. And sometimes a dealer would request these colours – other times the Gibson rep would insist that you would stock some guitars in those colours, because they wanted to promote this idea and get it out there."

12. As the 60s wore on and tastes became less conservative, more striking finishes, such as this California Coral hue, were trialled – but remained a niche in the guitar market of the day



1965 California Coral

EPIPHONE WILSHIRE

"This is the only Epiphone I've ever seen in this colour, although it was advertised – it was actually in their flyer with another called 'Pacific Yellow', and I've only seen one of those," David Davidson says. "So for whatever strange reason, they didn't seem to make many of these. And I don't really know why. This particular one that I got from a gentleman in Vermont, along with a couple of other Epiphones – I guess he was sort of a collector. And he had sourced it through his years of collecting, and I was lucky to get it when I did. I got it somewhere around 2007 or 2008, sold it, got it back. You know, we're big recyclers. We're very green!"



13. Under normal lights, the 'Ghost Finish' Telecaster appears to be an unremarkable, late-60s blonde colour



14. Switching on UV lights reveals a different story: the trippy floral patterns of the body are continued, in the form of dayglo stripes, up the fretboard to the headstock

FLOWER POWER

As the 60s became ever-more wild and psychedelic, Fender decided to see if prototype instruments in special finishes could help them tap into a market that had gone from all-American surf groups who thought custom colours were pretty far-out to LSD-taking hippies exploring the outer limits of the human psyche. Fender tried to rise to this almost metaphysical challenge by creating so-called 'Ghost Finish' guitars with psychedelic designs that showed up only under UV light. Vanishingly rare, David is only aware of the existence of two prototype Teles, one of which is at Well Strung Guitars (see page opposite) though photos exist of a 'Ghost Finish' bass, too.

An easier way to tap into pop-culture movements was to make guitars for famous artists, of course – and, as the 1970s approached, none were more famous than George Harrison of The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix. Most people know that Fender made a rosewood Telecaster for Harrison, but fewer people know that two rosewood Strats were also made, one of which was intended for Jimi Hendrix. Well Strung Guitars has one of those Strats to show us and it's likely the one made for Hendrix – though the story has some nuances, David explains.

"That guitar has a very long history and to get it all down might be difficult, but I'll tell you what I

know," he says. "When I was new to the guitar business, I was very fortunate to meet a guy – Philip Kubicki – who had a company that was making really expensive boutique basses. And Phil had formerly worked with Roger Rossmeisl over at Fender in their Special Projects workshop. Philip was charged with making a rosewood Telecaster to be presented to George Harrison, and he was also tasked with the job of making a rosewood Stratocaster for Jimi Hendrix.

"In fact, Philip was charged with making two Rosewood Stratocasters," David continues. "One is going to be just a prototype for Fender to keep [as a proof of concept] same as with

guitar were 1968 production, but they had problems with the Stratocaster because the rosewood they used emitted a tremendous amount of oil. Philip told me that they had to wipe it with alcohol and steam it and get the oil to flow and then wipe it again, and this procedure took months to complete on the Strat. So even though it started its production in '68, it really wasn't ready until 1970. By that point, in September of 1970, Hendrix had already passed and he never got the guitar," David says.

"So here comes the controversial part," he adds. "We know they made two rosewood Strats – and we know that the other one is in the wind: no one's seen it, no one knows anything about it, Philip had no idea [what happened to it] and now he's passed on, too. But while he was alive, Philip wrote more than one explanation of the guitar that survives, which we have here. This guitar had to have a special clearcoat formula – no other clear was bonding, it was just falling off the guitar – and that formula is written in the neck pocket. So there's one magazine article where Philip claims the Hendrix guitar had nothing written in the neck pocket, but he contradicts himself [in a different article] where he says that the Hendrix guitar had the clearcoat formula written in the neck pocket."

David shrugs and leans back in his chair. Supporting evidence, including documents from Fender

"We know they made two rosewood Strats – and we know the other one is in the wind: no one's seen it, no one knows anything about it..."

Harrison's Telecaster, and the other one is going to be gifted to Jimi who's going to come out to Fender and pick it up the next time he swings to the West coast – except he passes away before it's made."

One of the reasons Hendrix never got his hands on it, David adds, was that the rosewood used in its construction was unusually difficult to work with.

"The interesting thing is that both Harrison's guitar and Hendrix's

1968 'Ghost Finish'

FENDER TELECASTER

"Right after the '67 Summer of Love Fender decided they were going to go and buy into this hippie dream," David says. "So they come up with a few different designs for these 'ghost' or day-glo finishes that only show up under UV light. I know of only two different patterns [for six-string guitar] and there was only one of each one made. This is the 'Floral' pattern and there was another one called a 'Swirl'. The Swirl is like a bunch of horseshoes that go around the bridge cover in different colours, and when you blacklight it, it comes to life. That was also applied to a Telecaster that exists, but has non-original tuners and no day-glo patterns on the fretboard or headstock as this one does. The other 'Ghost Finish' guitar is a bass that has what looks like firework pinwheels painted on it, but I've only seen pictures of that one – I've never known it to actually be out there."

"The market had gone from all-American surf groups who thought custom colours were far-out to LSD-taking hippies exploring the outer limits of the human psyche"





and a car museum that formerly exhibited the Strat (see page opposite), suggest it is probably the one intended for Hendrix. But long experience has taught David that, with vintage guitars, some questions can never be completely resolved unless further evidence comes to light. But that's part of what makes vintage guitars so fascinating – like people, they all have secrets they may never give up. Some of these lost details don't matter, while others remain among the big unanswered questions of guitar history.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

In fact, history is impossible to avoid at Well Strung Guitars. Pick a Strat off the wall and you might just be holding something that belonged to one of the founding fathers of Fender. Yet, when all's said and done, it's a store and you can buy their guitars if you are fortunate enough to have the funds to do so. It's unusual for a retailer to have to consider the same questions of access and inclusivity as a museum might but, when you have guitars as exceptional as these on display, it happens.

15. The wide-flared headstock of the Rosewood Strat looks stunning up close

16. The instrument follows much the same styling scheme as George Harrison's famous Rosewood Tele

17. Paige and David encourage visitors in the store to play the historic guitars on show there. Paige says the guitars need to be experienced for their heritage to live on

“Putting these guitars in people's hands, letting them hear how it sounds with a vintage amp, it sets us apart”

“I think that it has to be made accessible,” Paige Davidson says. “To me, this stuff will have no future if people my age, 30 and younger, don't care. And they can't care unless they see what makes it different. Putting these guitars in people's hands, and letting them hear how it sounds through a vintage amp as well, gives them that full experience... I think it sets us apart.”

She's serious about that last point – if you visit, she'll hand you a 'Burst or a Broadcaster to try, if you take an interest in such things. For some visitors, though, the experience of playing a chunk of history can be daunting, she admits.

“I've had people where I'll go to hand them a guitar, and they'll put their hands up and take a step back and say ‘I could never...’ And I'll say ‘Why not? They want to be played. It's what they're here for. You might as well enjoy it’. This won't be anything if nobody else cares 20, 30 years down the road from now. I think that's the biggest thing for me: prolonging the stories, because each of these guitars has a life. They each have a story to tell.”

www.wellstrungguitars.com





1971 Rosewood 'Hendrix'

FENDER STRATOCASTER

The complex story of this 1-of-2 prototype, designed for Jimi Hendrix, is told in full on page 72, but the instrument had history well before coming to Well Strung Guitars. David says, "The guitar has travelled through several hands – it was in Fender's own museum where it was advertised as the guitar that was never presented to Hendrix – it was supposed to be, but he died before that could happen. We also have a letter from Fender, dating from the 1980s, stating that this was an experimental Fender guitar, plus a piece of published literature showing that the guitar was on display at the Petersen Automobile Museum for a 'cars and guitars' exhibit, where it was displayed as a guitar made by Philip Kubicki for Jimi Hendrix."

"In Fender's own museum, it was advertised as the guitar that was never presented to Hendrix – it was supposed to be, but he died before it could happen"

SIMON NICOL

This year sees the 55th anniversary of Fairport Convention, prime architects of the UK's folk-rock movement and a band that has left an indelible mark on British music. Here, founder member and guitarist Simon Nicol traces the band's origins from the perspective of his own musical journey

Words David Mead

Early Conventions

"There are many things in favour of the guitar. When you're a young chap it's portability, the fact you can have it around when you're at the beginning of the learning curve. Somebody can show you exactly what they're doing and you can try it yourself just by passing it over. That doesn't work with a piano. When you're a young lad growing up in the 60s, the guitar was kind of a token. You were part of some social experiment, but it seemed like a young person's instrument in the way that the violin or so forth couldn't possibly be. It was a cool thing to have."

Connecting Up

"A number of my peer group had guitars and we would play Beatles songs and the hits from the Mersey bands, and it was all done by ear. I didn't form a band or join a band until I got my way into Ashley Hutchings' little black book. I knew Ashley because he's about five years older than me and I came across him initially at the youth club in Muswell Hill, where he would occasionally turn up on a Friday night with a band. And he was clearly the leader as well as the bass player as he'd frequently be there with a different set of musicians playing a different kind of music the next week."

Summertime Dues

"I'd saved up enough money from a summer job to buy myself an acoustic 12-string guitar because I just really liked the look of it. I thought it was a cool thing to have. I couldn't play it in anything more than a basic rudimentary fashion. But I took it with me to the youth club, some nights, and so forth, and Ashley noticed it and he didn't have anybody in his circle with a 12-string. So that was my USP. His little black book was legendary and I found myself in it, and before long I found myself alongside him playing jug band music."

Humble Beginnings

"Richard Thompson was in the little black book, too. That's how Fairport started, really. The three of us became a little sub core at the centre of a number of different musical adventures and we took the name Fairport Convention and became professionals. So it all happened by accident, really: tiny steps, little, little choices, you make little forks in the road. I was accompanying Richard, really, rather than trying to muscle my way to the front of the stage. I got a lot of pleasure from being part of this background, which provided a platform for the songs and for his virtuosity to shine."

In The Clubs

"In the early days of Fairport we were interested in singer-songwriter and American rock music more than anything else. We'd all been exposed individually to folk music as part of our musical education background. In those days in North London, the three of us had overlapping manors. All of the Victorian pubs in those days had back rooms, or function rooms upstairs over the bars, where music would happen two or three nights a week. There'd be live music all over the place and it would have many forms. And they'd be quite often organised along club lines; you join for five shillings and you go and see a band for two or three bob."

Mixing It Up

"Because of all these venues, there were many, many bands to fill the spaces. The same pub would have perhaps two or three clubs running on different nights, and they'd have utterly different musical approaches. There'd be a folk club one night, a trad jazz club the next night, and there'd be a rock band or a blues outfit playing the third night. There was absolutely nothing unusual about this. You'd see all sorts of different music and I was just there as a sponge. I got to see lots of types of music and some of it

Simon performing
live at The Royal
Albert Hall, 2009

*"I was accompanying
rather than trying to
muscle my way to the front
of the stage. I got a lot of
pleasure from being part
of this background"*

wormed its way into my consciousness, so when we commenced moving into the incorporation of traditional songs it wasn't a totally alien form of music. I'd been exposed to it, even though I hadn't played it."

Song Lines

"I knew some Scottish ballads, but I didn't know I knew them. I'd heard them and I'd heard their American interpretations. A lot of singer-songwriters came over here and showed what one man and a guitar could do. I remember seeing Tom Paxton when I was about 15 and thinking, 'Oh, that's good. This guy's writing really perfect little story songs. And he's accompanying them beautifully, and it's all very accessible and original.' I thought, 'This is very nice.'"

Seminal Album

"When Sandy [Denny] joined the band [in 1968] after incarnation one of Fairport, we didn't have very much time to create a new repertoire, so we kind of met in the middle. She learned some of our existing repertoire, but we wanted to save her the onerous task of having to learn the whole two hours. She was able to bring in the same songs that she had been playing the previous week solo in a folk club, perching on a stool with a guitar of her own. And we would just find a way to accompany her performance. That, I suppose, was the beginning of the osmosis of folk music into the repertoire in its recognised form. Things really began to come together significantly with *Liege & Lief* [1969], I suppose."



Left to right: Richard Thompson, Sandy Denny, Simon Nicol with fiddle, Martin Lamble, Ashley Hutchings

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

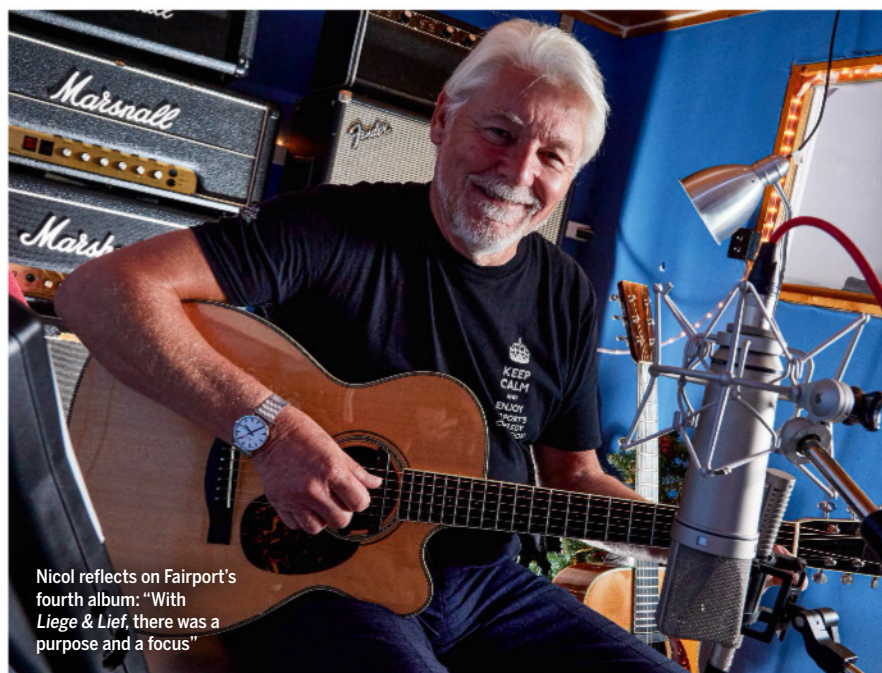
"Our mission was to create a record with traditional songs performed by a rock band and, at the same time, create new songs that sounded as if they were hundreds of years old"

On A Mission

"When we got together that summer of 1969 to plan the record and to get to know each other, we had to create an identity for the new line-up. And that is why *Liege...* was important on those different levels. Because as well as satisfying the need to create, we perceived that our mission statement was to create a record that included both traditional songs performed by a rock band and, at the same time, create new songs that sounded as if they could have been hundreds of years old. And to blur the lines between the two. That was the goal towards which we were moving."

Band Together

"Dave Swarbrick, who we knew just in passing, was a big star in the world of folk and he was obviously an astonishingly gifted musician. He knew his way around not just his instrument but the whole song cycle, the whole musical genre we were just beginning to dabble in. But also Dave Mattacks, who knew nobody before the audition, and didn't know anything about our previous history. We all had to get to know each other and so it was a crucible of focus. And, because we had this objective, it was very different from the way an album had been made up to that point, where you just sort of found songs that you could share and find your own musical way in. They would just move onto the next song, and there wasn't necessarily a connection between them. With *Liege & Lief*, there was a purpose and a focus."



Nicol reflects on Fairport's fourth album: "With *Liege & Lief*, there was a purpose and a focus"

PHOTO BY BEN NICHOLSON

•
*“A lot of singer-
songwriters came over
here and showed what
one man and a guitar
could do”*
•

At the age of 17, Simon helped
form Fairport Convention,
having worked with bassist
Ashley Hutchings “on and off
since I was 14 or so”

All Change

"We'd come down to a four-piece after Sandy and Ashley [Hutchings] left and we became a five-piece with Dave Pegg onboard. After a year or a year and a half, whatever it was, Richard decided he wanted to escape the chains of Fairport and free himself up to become a songwriter. He'd already written songs, obviously, like *Meet On The Ledge*, which was on the second album, so he wasn't really venturing into completely uncharted territory, but he really wanted to focus on that. He stopped coming to gigs, but he still lived in the house with us, and we were all still a little community. But he needed time to focus on his own personal development."

New Moves

"I found myself on an American tour thinking, 'Do I really want to do this anymore?' You must remember that I was 20 at that point. Effectively, I'd been working with Ashley on and off since I was 14 or so. So I'd been in the band for, like, half my life by the time I was 21. So I thought, 'Maybe I need to take some

•
*"Fairport is my life.
It's more than a job,
it's more than a career;
it's my life"*
•

time out, maybe I need to do something different.' I didn't want to leave music, but I just felt I'd been on this particular treadmill a bit too long. So, without really having a plan, I told the others. I didn't leave right there on that night because it would have been a bit inconvenient as we were supporting Traffic on an American tour. There was no way I could get home from Texas, anyway. Everybody was fine about it. It wasn't as if I was the first person to jump ship..."

Farewell, Farewell

"So I said goodbye in Dublin on 4 December 1971. But they were mates. We knew each other closer than family. Peggy and Swarb were closer than my own brothers and sisters, really. The next thing I knew was Ashley got in touch because while Fairport had been reinventing itself in his absence, of course, he'd gone straight from Fairport to create Steeleye Span. They'd made a couple of great albums and he got a lot of his lust



Left to right: Gerry Conway, Simon Nicol, Ric Sanders, Dave Pegg, Chris Leslie, in 2016 – a year before Fairport Convention's 50th anniversary

PHOTO BY BEN NICHOLSON

for really digging deep into the proper folk tradition. With Steeleye he had found a level, which he couldn't have found in Fairport any other way. So he called me up and proposed that we form a new band, which was the beginning of The Albion Band."

Rover's Return

"It was a bit tumultuous in my four-year sabbatical, there were a lot of changes from the *Rosie* record through to *Rising For The Moon*. During that period it was basically Swarb and Peggy that were keeping the band going. I didn't lose touch with the band, and Swarb, Peggy and myself even had a little acoustic trio on the QT, just doing gigs for cash and having fun. So when the band was making an album, which eventually came out as *Gottle O'Geer* in 1976, I was still so close with them that I got recruited to engineer that record – and the next thing I knew, I was on the other side of the glass as well, playing on a couple of tracks."

Lasting Legacy

"Fairport is my life. It's more than a job, it's more than a career; it's my life. My family home was called Fairport, which is why the band took its name. So born in Fairport, and the way things are going, I'm going to die here, too. I couldn't have possibly dreamed that we could still be a viable working act 55 years on, and that we're not our own tribute act. That's always been my fear. It's always about the next album, it's about stirring the pot. We've got a big repertoire, let's face it, and not all of those songs are going to be accessible, nor should all of them be made available. Some of them are well worth baring. But, you know, it's great to have a history. It's fantastic to have this long repertoire." 



Fairport Convention's latest album, *Shuffle And Go*, is available on the Matty Grooves label

www.fairportconvention.co.uk

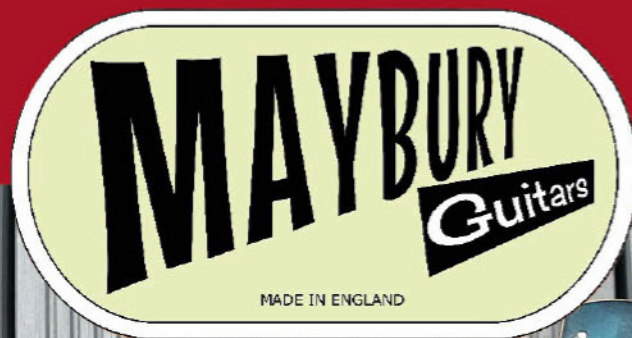
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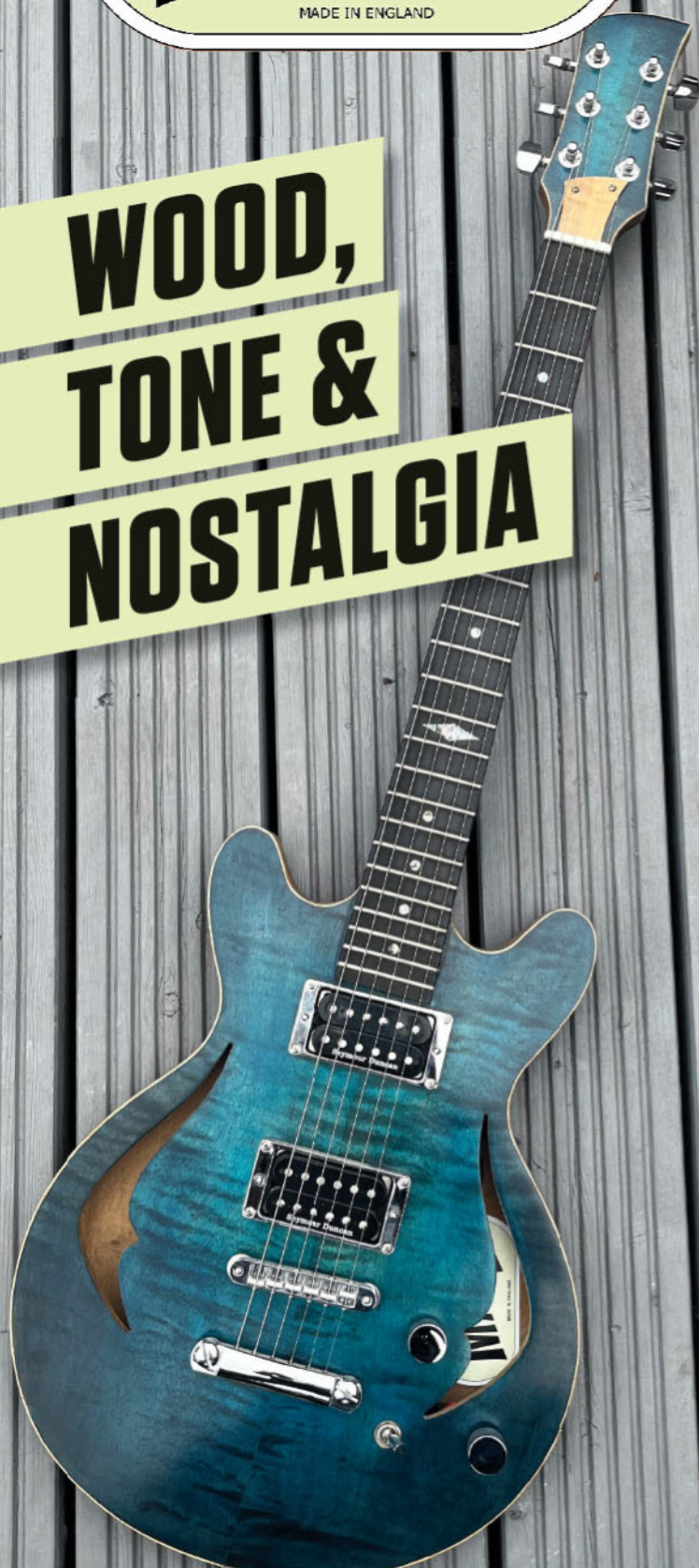
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Gold Star

Another single-cut from one of the UK's finest luthiers, but are dramatic timbers, classy hardware and thoughtful electrics enough to convince us there's gold in them there hills?

Words Neville Marten Photography Neil Godwin



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON SC GOLDTOP £5,440

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What You Need To Know

1

Do we need another solidbody single-cut?

Well, if a maker can enhance a well-worn design with build, sound or playability improvements then, yes, bring it on. Patrick James Eggle's instruments are put together with extreme attention to detail, exceptional woodworking skills, and clever pickup and hardware choices.

2

Santos rosewood – what's that?

Santos rosewood originated in São Paulo, Brazil, but is now more readily available from Bolivian timber stocks and is said to evoke the best properties of both ebony and Indian rosewood. You'll know it better by its other name, pau ferro. It's not the easiest timber to work with, but it's dense, hard, attractive, and its dramatic grain lends a natural beauty to any instrument.

3

What's a blower switch?

Sometimes a guitarist wants to go from a warm and gentle rhythm tone to a raucous and powerful lead one and back again, without having to reset volume and tone controls. Engaging the blower switch does just that, re-routing the guitar's signal so that the flat-out bridge pickup bypasses all the circuitry, and goes direct to the amp for that big solo. Push it in again and you're back on your warmer, quieter rhythm sound.

Patrick Eggle is one of the UK's highest profile guitar builders. Since bursting onto the scene with his PRS-alike Climaxe, which received its first review in this very publication back in 1991, he and his six-string creations have gone from strength to strength. It's not widely known, but Patrick spent time in America studying acoustic-guitar making with the builder of James Taylor's guitars, James Olson. He brought this knowledge, and a slew of his own ideas, to a range of high-end acoustics using exotic timbers and fancy inlays, and since returning to his first love – building fine electric instruments – has brought some of that to the table, too.

We've reviewed several Macon models in *Guitarist*, from double-cuts and Junior styles, to super-flamed or quilted maple-capped SCs. The guitar you see before you looks, at least superficially, like a pretty bog-standard single-cut of the goldtop variety, but delve deeper and it soon becomes apparent that there's more going on.

Once you've familiarised yourself with the bright greenish-yellow of the Aztec gold top (more commonly seen on Fenders), and the figured Santos rosewood fingerboard with its 'open' crown-style fret markers and flamed maple binding, then turn the instrument over. You'll now be greeted with more of





2

It's like a piece of fine sculpture rather than a regular neck joint

1. The bridge and tailpiece are made by ABM in Berlin and are machined from solid aluminium (and not diecast as cheaper units usually are). If you recognise the Aztec Gold finish, it's because it's a Fender custom colour

that exceptionally grained Santos on the neck, the beautiful mahogany body, dark stained to match the rosewood's general hue, and, most of all, that incredible piece of design work and joinery that defines the heel, neck joint area. It's like a piece of fine sculpture rather than a regular neck joint. Here's what Patrick has to say about it: "I tried to make it as ergonomic as possible without compromising strength. This joint relies on accurate machining but also has some hand-fettling once glued. There's no mortice – this is a 'slipper' joint, which is glued only – but it has a large surface area between the neck and body, so it's very strong."

The neck and body's back and sides are hand-burnished so they sit somewhere between satin and gloss

We also love the way the neck and the body's back and sides are hand-burnished so they sit somewhere between satin and gloss. Patrick continues: "The lacquer is sprayed as it normally would be for a gloss finish. We then flat that back by hand and finish with a fine steel-wool and wax. The neck is gunstock oil and steel-wool."

Patrick has found that rosewood has become a popular choice for his Macons' necks, so the choice of Santos instead of the more familiar mahogany – or indeed Indian rosewood, which PRS began introducing on certain models some time ago – was partly down to customer taste, but also due to issues with the Indian variety. "Yes, we keep being asked for rosewood necks on Macons," he affirms. "But Indian rosewood is difficult to procure in these sizes (although not impossible) due to CITES restrictions on shipping it as raw lumber."

While on the subject of timbers, the mahogany for our Macon's body is the

2. The mahogany of the body has been stained to match the nutty brown shade of the Santos rosewood neck. Also, notice the fingerboard's beautiful flamed maple binding, with ringed dot position markers



3



revered Honduran variety, as used on vintage Gibsons. Eggle said it's chosen for its natural lightness in weight, but he also chambers it in a very specific way. "Genuine Honduran mahogany is generally quite light anyway," he says, "but here it also has some honeycomb chambering. We can build with or without this, of course, but almost nobody goes for the completely solid option. Many small cavities, rather than fewer large ones, reduces the risk of scooping the mids, I reckon."

Since all Eggle guitars are hand-built, mostly to order, customers can opt for an almost infinite variety of pickup, hardware, timber and finish options. But gold-finished guitars usually stay on the plainer side of things – although this Macon would look like a beast fitted with a long Bigsby! So a set of Cream T's nickel-plated 57 GT pickups, plus a standard tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece are the order of the day. We ask Patrick for more info: "Well, regarding the pickups, we have been using Cream T for a while now. GT

3. Check out the 'Patrick James Eggle' pearl inlaid logo, and how the truss-rod cover is handmade from Santos rosewood

4. The bridge pickup's tone control is also a push-pull 'blower' switch that routes its signal straight out to the amp for soloing

5. Pickups are by Cream T and tone matched to the humbuckers in Geoff Whitehorn's 1957 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop

6. A gold anodised metal plate hides the beautifully neat volume, and tone controls, plus blower switch wiring

4



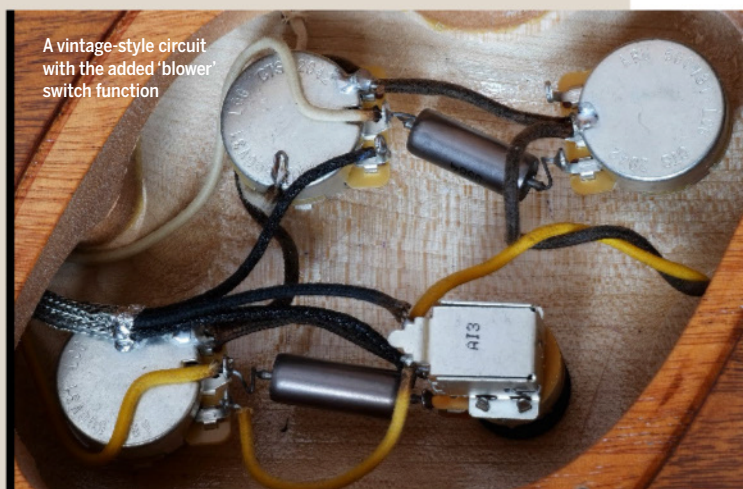


57s are based on, and accurately reproduce the sound of Geoff Whitehorn's 57 Goldtop, so we have a modern guitar here but with a vintage tone. Geoff says he's done some sound clips A/B'ing his original PAFs with the Cream Ts and he 'honestly can't hear a difference' – sorry if that sounds a bit 'salesy'. There's also a 'blower' switch fitted to the bridge pickup tone control," he says, more of which later.

Regarding that 'straightforward' bridge and tailpiece, even they have a story to tell. "They're made by ABM in Berlin and milled from solid aluminium, not die-cast," Patrick points out. "It's an expensive option for us, but they're definitely part of our guitars' feel and tone." Speaking of which...

Feel & Sounds

Patrick says the Macon's neck has no actual finish but is hand-rubbed to its beautiful sheen using gunstock oil and extremely fine steel-wool. It leaves the surface feeling silken to the touch and lends a



A vintage-style circuit with the added 'blower' switch function

UNDER THE HOOD

Is the control circuit as clean as the outside? What do you think...

Removing a control plate and taking a peek inside can tell you quite a bit about an instrument. With Patrick James Eggle's guitars, that impression is always about quality and you can rest assured the control cavity here is as clean as the rest of the build. The CTS log pots all have a nominal value of 500kohms, including the pull-push switched pot used for the 'blower' function, which routes the bridge pickup directly to the output and bypasses the volume and tone control when engaged. We also recognise those dark-grey Russian NOS K40Y-9 paper-in-oil capacitors rated at .033microfarads that are a favourite of Patrick's. Here, the wiring is '50s' or 'vintage' in style, so there's no treble bleed caps on either volume control, and like many boutique-level guitars of this style there's no additional cavity shielding, either.

The Cream T GT 57 humbuckers use vintage-style single conductor braided hook-up wire, so there's no possibility of coil-splits or the like. The measured DCR of the bridge pickup is 7.89kohms and 7.41k at the neck. These are on the low side for PAFs – and the lowest offered by Cream T – but you don't get the impression that they're unpowered in any way. As ever, Cream T's humbuckers are lightly potted.



THE PRICE OF LOVE

Patrick speaks honestly about the increases in costs

Since your small business doesn't have the advantage of economies of scale, how are you coping with the current situation due to the fuel crisis, Brexit, the Ukrainian war and so on?

"Almost all our costs have increased, just like any other business. We had a price review just recently, but already our margins are squeezed again. We're looking at ways to work smarter and not compromise the quality. I don't like to talk about it too much, but it's a fact of life."

Are there any specific costs that have risen dramatically? Woods, parts or 'behind the scenes' things we wouldn't see or reckon with?

"Everything! Energy, of course. Consumables. All our supplies. Even where the cost of parts hasn't increased, shipping has. Also, some suppliers are taking longer to deliver. We have good stocks of all our parts and wood, so we are insured to a degree."

American guitars have risen a great deal in price. Have you had to pass your escalating costs on as well?

"We had a price rise recently. It wasn't too great and, to be honest, hasn't kept up with costs. We shall probably have to review things again before the end of the year."

Anything else you'd like to say?

"We all need to pay for quality."



virtually drag-free playing experience. He describes its dimensions as 'fat C', but it's nowhere near as big as certain Gibsons we've played. In fact, it's a very comfortable palmful, feeling slick and stress-free to play. Top-end access is not as total as on an SG or ES-335, but then it's never going to be on a single-cut due to the upper top bout restricting the thumb's travels to those upper reaches. Most players won't complain, though, and Eggle's clever neck joint makes it easier to negotiate than its 55-year-old inspiration.

The medium-tall Jescar frets are nickel silver – Patrick has no particular view on this versus stainless steel – and the relatively flat Gibson-style flat 305mm (12-inch) radius makes for easy chording and slinky licks and bends. It's likely that players of any other guitar type would find it a welcoming experience.

It's always great to compare a guitar we're not familiar with, to one we know inside out. Without an actual Les Paul to



hand, a Gibson Custom Shop ES-335 was a good benchmark against which to test the Macon. This reviewer's preferred way of doing that is to play the known guitar for several minutes, refreshing one's memory of all those well-known voices. Quickly swapping instruments reveals differences such as output power, or noticeable thinness or fatness of tone.

As it happens, both instruments sit in similar sonic ballparks. The Gibson's neck and bridge pickups are well matched, and, through our Matchless Lightning, speak with clear authority. Flipping across to the Macon it's a similar speaking tone but with

The 'blower' switch routes the signal directly from the bridge pickup, bypassing all controls

even more weight. The bridge Cream T is mildly more pushy than the neck, nudging the little 15-watter (which is no pushover) into sweet overdrive that little bit earlier. But like the Gibson there's real clarity there, too, and knocking back the volume control on either or both pickups, cleans things up beautifully.

There are no surprises in the controls department, either, save for the 'blower' switch. This routes the signal directly from the bridge pickup, bypassing all the controls no matter how the two volumes, two tones and toggle switch are set. "That's correct," says Patrick. "It bypasses everything no matter where you are. But also, even if you are on the bridge pickup with everything wide open, there is a slight lift when blown." He's also right about that; it's a nice little 'kick' that will probably be more noticeable at stage levels, but we think the whole idea is so sensible that almost any guitar would benefit from it.

7. The Macon's heel and glued 'slipper' neck joint are not only beautiful to behold, but incredibly strong and stable. Also notice the waxed and satin-finished Honduras mahogany back

8. The guitar's playing action is perfectly set; low enough for easy fretting but with enough clearance for easy bends and finger vibrato

9. Santos rosewood is also used for the fingerboard with its handsome steel 'crown'-style position marker outlines

10. All the Macon's hardware is dulled nickel, including the jack socket. Every detail is perfectly done. You can just pick out the flecks in the Honduras grain of the body, with its multiple weight-relieving holes



Patrick names and numbers each guitar by hand. We love these open geared Hipshot tuners in dull nickel with brass screw cogs. This close-up highlights the neck's grain



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON SC

PRICE: £5,440 (inc hard case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Single-cutaway, chambered electric

BODY: Chambered mahogany with AA-grade maple cap

NECK: Santos rosewood, with 'Fat C' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 625.47mm (24.625")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Figured maple bound Santos

rosewood, 'frame' inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium/tall, Jescar 55090

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated, open-geared Hipshot Classic Open tuners, ABM tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x nickel-plated Cream T GT 57 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 2x volumes, 2x tones with push-pull 'blower' switch on bridge pickup tone pot

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.7/8.14

OPTIONS: The base price is £4,400. Options can be discussed. For example, our Santos rosewood neck adds £500, the fingerboard £200. The Cream T humbuckers add £100, ditto the Hipshot tuners, the Aztec Gold top finish adds £140

RANGE OPTIONS: Macon Double Cutaway is the double-cut version of our review model; Macon Junior – slab-bodied, simpler version

LEFT-HANDERS: To order (price depends on spec)

FINISH: Nitrocellulose Aztec gold gloss top, with dark-toned natural back in hand-burnished satin

Thanks to Sound Affects
for the loan of this guitar
www.soundaffects.com



10/10

PROS Beautifully designed, flawlessly constructed, plays uncompromisingly well, sounds fantastic and is delightful to behold

CONS Anything one doesn't like is down to personal taste, but there are generally no cons

Verdict

Like Nik Huber over in Germany, Patrick has made it his life's work to inject fanatical attention to detail into everything he does. Nothing is random; each part of the equation is chosen to absolutely suit its purpose. So, whether that's the carefully chosen timbers for the job, the beautifully hand-burnished finish of the guitar's back, sides and neck, the remarkable crafting of the neck to body join, or just the pickups and hardware perfectly matched to the instrument, you can see the artistry before you, and feel it in your hands.

The Macon SC Goldtop is beautifully designed, flawlessly constructed, plays uncompromisingly well, sounds fantastic and is delightful to behold. And remember, if you'd prefer a high-grade flamed maple top in dark tobacco sunburst, P-90 pickups or that long Bigsby referred to earlier, speak to your Eggle dealer and your wish is their command.

Nothing is random; each part of the equation is chosen to absolutely suit its purpose...

This is not a cheap guitar, but compare it with Murphy Lab Gibsons, PRS's Private Stock Range and those Nik Hubers just mentioned, and it looks like something of a bargain. The basic model, without Santos neck and other luxury appointments, is £4,400, pretty much the same price as a Core-level PRS 594 Singlecut, and these days Fender Custom Shop Teles are pushing that. So, for everything you get with a guitar like this, we'd say value for money is a given. As Patrick asserts: "We strive to build guitars that are inspirational and easy to live with." He's not wrong there! 📺



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Gold Rush

Taken by a goldtop finish? Here are some options...

Words Neville Marten & Dave Burrluck



EPIPHONE LES PAUL STANDARD 50S
METALLIC GOLD **£599**

Now with a more Gibson-style headstock, Epiphone's Les Pauls look better than ever. The Standard 50s comes in three finishes, including Metallic Gold, and features typical mahogany and maple construction, the neck with a rounded medium C neck profile. Add in Epiphone's LockTone bridge and tailpiece and well-received ProBucker 1 and 2 humbuckers, and this is good to go.

www.epiphone.com



EASTMAN SB56/N **£1,999**

Eastman guitars, built in China but using high-spec pickups and hardware, offer fabulous value, great build and sounds to rival the very best. The SB56/n Goldtop is built using the original's timbers and construction methods – not least one-piece mahogany body with a carved maple top, and a one-piece mahogany neck with single-action truss-rod – and comes with Lollar custom-wound soapbar single coils, Gotoh hardware and Truetone Vintage Gloss finish.

www.eastmanguitars.com



YAMAHA SG1802 ELECTRIC GUITAR **£2,834**

Yamaha's reinvention of the Les Paul goes back to the 70s, and while its double cutaway outline might suggest an SG, it's very much the full LP-style voice. In modern form, the construction is regular with unchambered mahogany back, maple top and chunky mahogany neck. This 1802 in Gold Top finish is powered by dual Seymour Duncan SP90 single coils and features TonePros hardware. These beautifully crafted Japanese-made models remain quite rare birds.

<https://uk.yamaha.com>



CREAM T AURORA BFGT1PS **£3,999**

Co-designed by Billy Gibbons, the Aurora BFGT1PS – a 25-only limited run – tops Cream T's recently introduced range of guitars, which start at £1,999. Not only does the outline suggest some Tele influence, the maple-topped slab mahogany body is lightly chambered, the top finished here (exclusively) in an Aztek Gold nitro finish. Meanwhile, the pickup-swapping feature allows you to switch from the BFG Whiskerbucker to three other Cream T pickups.

www.creamtgitars.com



PRS MCCARTY 594 SINGLECUT GOLDTOP
FROM **£4,000**

The McCarty 594 Singlecut is a beautifully built guitar that plays as good as it sounds. With unchambered mahogany body, solid maple cap and mahogany 'pattern vintage' neck, it follows the traditional blueprint adding 'bird' inlays on a rosewood fingerboard, and 58/15LT+ pickups with push-pull tone controls for split-coil sounds. A fine and versatile working guitar.

www.prsguitars.com



GIBSON MURPHY LAB 1957 LES PAUL GOLDTOP
ULTRA LIGHT AGED **£4,799**

We have to give a nod to the originator of the solidbody, carved-top single-cut, and Gibson's Murphy Lab 57 Les Paul Goldtop (available in ascending degrees of ageing, including this Ultra Light Aged model) is the company's current benchmark for this iconic instrument. With Custom Bucker pickups, aged nickel parts and huge vintage tone, it's as near to the real deal as you can get.

www.gibson.com



TAKAMINE LTD2022

THE DIAMOND IN YOUR COLLECTION



Introducing our LTD2022 model

In the early days of Takamine's 60 year history, a model made of Hawaiian koa adapted the classical body shape to an x-braced concert steel string with a cutaway.

Our LTD2022 takes inspiration from this historic model, featuring back and sides crafted from the finest Hawaiian koa, complimented by a solid Sitka spruce top.

The new CTF-2N preamplifier revives the legendary sound of our early FET preamp, adapted with modern features including a chromatic tuner and notch filter.

The twelfth fret is crowned with a diamond-shaped inlay, with vibrant abalone purfling and matching rosette completing this distinctive anniversary guitar.

Takamine



A Game Of Two Halves

A pair of contrasting all-solid wood electro-acoustics from Cort's Chinese workshop with a host of innovative features to their name. Better get cracking, then...

Words David Mead **Photography** Neil Godwin







CORT FLOW-OC & GOLD-A6 BOCOTE £1,149 & £959

CONTACT **Cort Guitars** PHONE +82 2 1800 6951 WEB www.cortguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 So, what's the common denominator with these two?

Apart from the fact both these guitars have sprung from the same factory and bear the Cort marque, there's very little similarity between them. They merely represent samples from the array of acoustics available in the company's current catalogue.

2 Bocote... that's a new one

This is true. Similar in appearance to ziricote, bocote hails from Central America and North Amazon regions. Tone-wise it shares some of the qualities of a good rosewood with dashes of tonal colour similar to that of African blackwood.

3 Is this another 'alternative' wood, then?

Yes. And why not? Despite the fact many independent luthiers and big companies have a good (and perfectly legal) stock of the more endangered woods, the search for more sustainable tonewoods that veer away from the practices of the past continues apace.

Regular readers will have spotted the Cort name cropping up quite frequently with its well-received electric models. But as you also may already know, the huge manufacturing machine behind the brand, Cor-Tek, also builds guitars for some of the world's leading brands, not least PRS's electrics (in Indonesia) and its acoustics and hollowbodies in China, as well as Manson's start-up models and many, many more.

Our two new models are representative of Cort's own extensive acoustic range – we counted 14 different series on the company's website, many of which have a number of different instruments on offer, adding up to a considerable list.

Aside from being new 2022, all-solid wood models, there's no theme linking the duo before us; both these guitars are standalone models and so we will be looking at them individually, and the Flow-OC seems a good place to start.



2

It's a good-looker, with considerable kerb appeal fresh out of the box

3

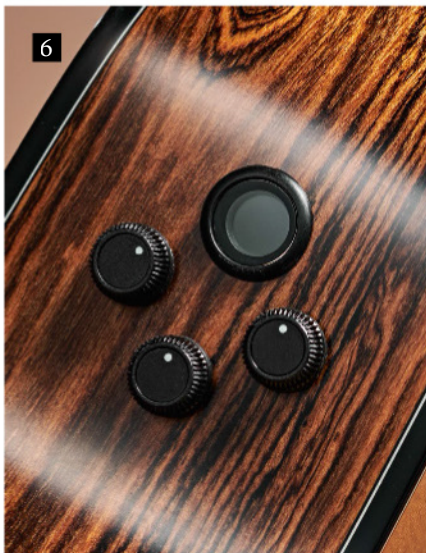
The OC is an OM-sized cutaway, fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup for live use. It's a good-looker, with considerable kerb appeal fresh out of the box. A closer look reveals a cedar top with mahogany back and sides, which is, of course, a fairly standard combo in acoustic guitars. Cedar is a favourite among fingerstylists. It's slightly more sedate than spruce, with a seductive warm tone, and doesn't really demonstrate a settling in or 'opening up' period. It will mature over the course of time, but won't change quite as much in tonal character as the various forms of spruce. Mahogany is part of royalty when it comes to guitar woods, bringing sweet highs, a punchy midrange and good rounded bass to the table.

So far so good, but it's in the profiling of the mahogany neck that we meet one of Cort's innovative features. If you cast your mind back to when Ernie Ball Music Man first introduced their Eddie Van Halen electric way back in the 1990s, you might remember that Eddie wanted the neck profile to feel 'worn in'. To this end, his signature guitar's neck was asymmetrical – there was almost an aircraft wing feel to it, with less roundedness on the treble side than on the bass. It's a similar idea with Cort's Ergo-A profiling, but the asymmetry changes as you proceed up the neck. This is a similar concept to compound radiusing

1. The Flow-OC is fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup with the controls tucked away in the guitar's soundhole
2. A beautifully crafted cedar top sits atop the OC's mahogany back and sides and the cutaway gives access to the guitar's upper frets
3. The neck's heel is slimmer and flatter than on many of the OC's contemporaries



4. Another touch of elegance is the OC's gold-coloured tuners with ebony buttons
5. The Flow-OC's bridge has a compensated Tusq saddle and ebony pins
6. The Gold-A6 Bocote's pickup system is a Fishman Flex Blend with upper bout mounted controls and a handy built-in tuner



THE RIVALS

If your budget is around the £1k mark for an electro-acoustic, then the field is pretty much wide open, although you're unlikely to find all-solid wood construction from the premier league hereabouts. Cort's own acoustic range, which is fairly expensive in its own right, ought to be your first stopping point, as we've seen enough product coming from that direction where the build quality is nothing short of superb.

Alternatives would include Eastman, whose E20M comes with a cedar top and sapele back and sides and retails at £599 without electronics – the cost of installing a pickup would probably bring it up to the same price as the Flow-OC reviewed here. The company has a range of Auditorium models, too, like the AC308CE, which combines spruce and mahogany plus an LR Baggs Element pickup for £1,019.

Furch's website is always worth scrutinising, with its Blue OM CM offering the cedar mahogany combo at £899, but, again, a pickup would be extra. Guild, Takamine, Auden and Yamaha are also websites worth investigating as a multitude of wood and body-shape options exist here.

where a fretboard's camber changes between the lower and upper parts of the 'board to facilitate easier bending. Only here, we're talking about the other side of the neck. Science aside, we'll see what difference this makes when we get a little more hands-on with the guitar, a bit later.

There's an ebony fretboard with hand-rolled edges – another feature that gives the fretting hand a more comfortable ride and makes the fretboard feel like it's already seen some action. Ebony is used for the Flow-OC's bridge, string pins and tuning buttons, while maple and walnut make up the subtle rosette.

Walnut makes another cameo appearance as part of the neck reinforcement. Invisible to the eye, two strips of the wood lay either side of the truss rod. Another nice detail.

Turning to the OC's partner in crime, the Auditorium-shaped Gold-A6 is another good looking. One feature that hits us immediately is the highly figured back and sides – unusual at the instrument's sub-£1k price ticket. The choice of timber is off the beaten path, too, as this is bocote, a wood found in Central America and North Amazon and from the same family as ziricote. Its use as a timber in guitar-making is relatively new, and a little bit of research on our part reveals bocote has a tap tone similar to rosewood and shares some of the tonal characteristics with that wood, too.



An ebony fretboard with hand-rolled edges makes it feel like it's already seen some action

Big basses, loads of power and good sustain is the general consensus. There's even a hint of similarity in tonal response to African blackwood – another highly sought after timber, revered for its tonal fingerprint.

The bocote has been paired with a torrefied Sitka spruce top, labelled by Cort as 'Aged To Vintage' (or ATV if acronyms are your thing). We're very familiar with the effects that heat treatment can bring to the sound picture of acoustic guitars, advancing as it does the opening-up period to produce a more played-in tone.

The top has also been treated with a very thin UV finish, which allows the wood to breathe and vibrate more freely. Obviously a lot of thought has gone into producing a guitar with great tonal potential here and we're looking forward to hearing it sing. Meanwhile, the rest of the construction details are a mahogany neck – again reinforced by strips of walnut inside – an ebony 'board with rolled edges and a C-neck profile, symmetrical this time.



7

8

7. The A6's Sitka spruce top has been heat-treated via Cort's ATV – Aged To Vintage – system to enhance the guitar's tonal response

8. The finish on the guitar is extra thin in order to let the wood breathe

9. Bocote is native to Central America and North Amazon and is very attractively figured

9



The Gold-A6's stage-readiness is embodied in the Fishman Flex Blend, which combines an under-saddle pickup with a microphone located inside the soundhole. Aside from the usual volume and tone controls, the Flex Blend also comes equipped with a tuner, phase control and blend rotary.

Feel & Sounds

Returning to the Flow-OC, its OM body immediately welcomes us. It's probably the default choice of fingerpickers – more manageable than a dreadnought and more projection than a parlour. It sits in that Goldilocks region: not too big, not too small. We can feel the asymmetrical neck immediately, but it only takes moments before we're comfortable with it and forget it's there.

Sound-wise, the balance between the three main tonal areas – basses, mids and trebles – is very good indeed, with no noticeable troughs or peaks in frequency. It's an easy guitar to play; passing it around the office gained nods of approval from all concerned – we were charmed, let's put it that way.

Switching to the Gold A-6, the bocote and spruce pairing – not to mention the slightly larger Auditorium body size – results in more volume than from the Flow-OC. It's a big sound, packed with sustain and a good



10

range of harmonics, completely different to its OM counterpart, but not in a bad way. If we were to compare the output of the two, we would say that the OM is polite, demure and generally well-behaved, the Gold-A6 is lively, extroverted and boisterous.

Both were subject to a similar workout – a bit of blues picking, some chordal strumming and a little melodic fingerstyle – and both had all boxes ticked. Their different pickups, the OM's LR Baggs and A6's Fishman, were easy to dial in and gave a good account of the acoustic nature of the individual guitars.

Verdict

As mentioned, we've been knocked for six by the guitars (and amp) we've recently seen bearing the Cort name, and these two acoustics are definitely an extra feather in an already festooned cap. If we were asked to do such a thing, it would be difficult to choose between the two, as they both multitask in their own way. In other words, they might display different tonal attributes, but both are equally able – they just handle things slightly differently. If pressed, we'd probably choose the Flow-OC but that would be down to personal preference in body size. If you're in the market for an acoustic guitar that might break your heart (without breaking the bank), don't overlook the Cort brand. You might be surprised at what you find. **G**

7. Open back tuners add a certain vintage chic to the Cort -A6 Bocote's very stylish appearance



CORT FLOW-OC

PRICE: £1,149 (inc soft case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: OM Cutaway electro-acoustic
TOP: Cedar
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 382mm
NECK: Mahogany with walnut reinforcement
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Gold die-cast with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with Tusq compensated saddle/58mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Anthem
WEIGHT (LB/KG): 3.22/1.46
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: This model is the only Cort Flow Series instrument so far. The company has an array of different acoustics – including the Core and Earth ranges – which feature many different body designs and wood choices. See website for more details
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural satin

440 Distribution
01943 818599
www.cortguitars.com



9/10

PROS Packed with player friendly features, affordable, with easy playability and good sound

CONS Very little to report!



CORT GOLD-A6 BOCOTE

PRICE: £959 (inc soft case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Auditorium Cutaway electro-acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Bocote
MAX RIM DEPTH: 117mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 405mm
NECK: Mahogany with walnut reinforcement
SCALE LENGTH: 643mm (25.3")
TUNERS: Vintage gold
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassar ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/54.5mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Flex Blend System
WEIGHT (LB/KG): 4.04/1.83
OPTIONS: The Gold AC is available with mahogany back and sides (£779)
RANGE OPTIONS: The 10-strong Gold Range includes the OC-6 Bocote (£959) and the auditorium size Gold-Edge (£1,499), with myrtlewood back and sides and comfort bevels.
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural glossy

8/10

PROS Similarly decked out with thoughtful features, loud 'n' proud sound. The bocote adds to the general aesthetic

CONS Shock of a different tone wood may deter traditionalists

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**FOR A PEDAL TO SOUND LIKE AN
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Dead Ringers

Universal Audio's UAFX range expands with these 'one amp per box' emulators that capture the sounds of the world's greatest vintage guitar amplifiers

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis





UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX AMP EMULATORS

£339 EACH

CONTACT **Universal Audio** PHONE +44 33 08080136 WEB www.uaudio.com

What You Need To Know

1 Doesn't Universal Audio specialise in plug-ins and studio gear?

Correct, but the company branched out into guitar pedals last year with the Golden Reverberator, Starlight Echo Station and Astra Modulation Machine units.

2 Are these more of the same, then?

They may look similar, but these are not effects pedals as such – they provide full-blown amp and speaker simulation. Each pedal represents one particular amp type.

3 Just one amp! There are usually multiple amps in these things...

Yes, but by dedicating all of its DSP to a single amp type, each pedal ought to be able to offer a really detailed and nuanced emulation of that amp and can also reproduce the exact same set of knobs the amp has for some familiar tweaking. So if it means increased sonic accuracy and playability, we'll take it!

1. The left-hand toggle switch scrolls through your speaker cab options – three with a red LED, three with a green one, and speaker cab emulation disabled (unlit LED)

Following last year's pedal debuts, Universal Audio's UAFX range continues to grow with these new Amp Emulators, which the company says emulate the best vintage guitar amps of all time. Each pedal represents one particular amp type: Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier is based on Fender tweed amps from the 50s; Dream '65 Reverb Amplifier represents the later black-panel Fenders with an emulation of the Deluxe Reverb; and Ruby '63 Top Boost Amplifier channels our homegrown Vox AC30.

Providing various stereo and mono options, each pedal offers the actual amp emulation plus a choice of six speaker cabinet emulations – you get three as shipped, but registering the pedal entitles you to another three. Each pedal also has three toggle-switched variations on the sound that only become active on turning the Boost switch from fully anticlockwise. A single preset can be instantly recalled with the right-hand footswitch, while the other footswitch accesses the Live mode, which gives you the sound determined by the current positions of knobs and switches. If you want to make a preset that is an instant snapshot of the knobs and switches, you do it with a simple flick of the Store switch.

There is another source of presets via the UAFX Control mobile app for iPhone and Android, which lets you beam a preset into the pedal. There are a bunch of them out there already with meticulously dialled-in sounds to suit a range of musical scenarios.

Some are factory presets, while some have been created by pro guitarists including Tim Pierce, Nels Cline and Cory Wong, among others. The app has other functions, too, like allowing you to configure different footswitch assignments, such as having a footswitch to turn vibrato on and off.

While the pedals are ideally placed to be a substitute for a real amp for recording or for sending a signal to FOH or an FRFR speaker for onstage use, they can also be used with your own amp. It's easy to disengage the cab simulation, and there's a setup that allows you to use the four-cable method whereby





2. Simply flick down this middle toggle switch to store your sound as a preset. On the Dream and Ruby pedals you can put it in the Alt position to access alternate parameters. On all three of the pedals, the right-hand toggle switch offers three variations on the sound with variable amounts of boost set by the Boost knob below. The circuits are bypassed when Boost is set to Off
3. This USB socket is purely for firmware updates, meaning direct-to-computer recording is not available. The Pair button on the right-hand side of the top panel is for pairing your phone via Bluetooth
4. The Room control, beneath the Speaker switch, adds room sounds, derived from UA's Ox Amp Top Box, to the Woodrow and Ruby. It's not available on the Dream '65 as it has emulated spring reverb

the pedal becomes an alternative preamp to your own amp – this lets you easily switch between your amp's preamp and two variations of the pedal's sound.

Playing through all three pedals is a revelation as they react organically with all of the push-and-pull response of the nominated amp, as well as delivering its sound with exceptional accuracy. They are the closest emulations to the real thing that this reviewer has experienced. Things never sound dry and sterile as the Dream '65 has a superb spring reverb emulation, while the other two non-reverb amps get a Room knob that puts air around the sound with ambience derived from the UA Ox Amp Top Box for an authentic sense of space.

THE RIVALS

Looking for a small pedal with amp and speaker simulation? The most obvious rival is the Strymon Iridium (£379), offering a small range of essential amps (Fender Deluxe, Vox AC30, Marshall Plexi) coupled with a choice of nine cabinet IRs and the chance to load your own. It also has a dedicated headphone output, MIDI control and an expression pedal input – all things that are lacking in the UA pedals.

Walrus Audio's Mako Series ACS1 Amp + Cab Simulator (£365) offers much the same sort of thing but features a dedicated boost footswitch and sports three onboard presets where the Strymon has one.

Need For Tweed

With no alternative functions for any of its knobs, the Woodrow has the simplest interface of the three pedals. It represents a two-channel amplifier so you get Instrument Volume and Mic Volume knobs that can be used individually or blended. EQ tasks are taken care of by a single Tone knob that tweaks the top-end, although prior to any of that, the choice of speaker has a massive influence on the tone on all three pedals. There's a choice of three types of boost: a stock clean preamp boost; one based on the preamp of a Korg SD3000 (beloved of The Edge); and that old favourite, the preamp from an Echoplex EP-3, which can really get things screaming. Yes, that Neil Young lead sound is entirely within your grasp.

These pedals not only sound exactly like the amp they are emulating but offer the tactile feel of playing through one

Brit Voice

Ruby '63 offers three channels, two of which are based on a '63 Top Boost amp. The Normal channel, however, is actually modelled on a non-TB '61 amp complete with a Rangemaster treble boost dialled in with the Boost knob in true Brian May and Rory Gallagher style, delivering some instantly familiar classic tones. Authentically for this channel, there's a Cut control for treble, but if you use either of the Top Boost channels you get the additional Treble and Bass knobs. The Brilliant channel comes with an EP-3 preamp to add some extra wallop, while the Vibrato channel gets clean boost and has Speed and Intensity controls for the tremolo to dial in some authentic vintage throb.

Dream Machine

The Dream '65 Reverb Amplifier is the Vibrato channel of a black-panel Deluxe Reverb in a box, so you get Volume, Bass, Treble and Reverb knobs plus Speed and Intensity for the tremolo as Alt parameters. There are some solid clean tones here that



make this an ideal partner for your pedals but plenty of targeted drive, too. The three options are for a stock amp with a clean preamp boost for the purists or a choice of two amp modifications. Lead offers more midrange warmth, and D-Tex, described as the SRV modification, is great if you want an extra bit of gain and singing midrange. The spring reverb really hits the spot here, and the speaker options are well chosen – we really liked the 4x10 option for a Fender Super vibe.

Verdict

These are excellent pedals that not only sound exactly like the amp they are emulating but offer the tactile feel of playing through one. While other pedals may offer more amps, concentrating the DSP power on a single amp is completely justified if it offers this much attention to detail. That approach also facilitates an interface that mimics the original amp and makes it easy to dial in exactly what you need without diving into menus.

There are things that stop these scoring a solid 10, though – missed opportunities, mainly – but there are workarounds for them: the lack of a dedicated headphone feed can be addressed with a Y-cable, for instance. If you want a range of amps, then there are plenty of modellers around, but many guitarists rely on just one amp. So if your favoured type is represented here, one of these is absolutely the best way to get that sound and feel in a convenient box for studio, home and stage use. **G**



UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX WOODROW '55 INSTRUMENT AMPLIFIER

PRICE: £339

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Amp emulation pedal based on a tweed Fender amp

FEATURES: True analogue bypass

SPEAKER OPTIONS: 15W Celestion Blue, Jensen P12R, 25W Celestion Greenback, Marshall 4x12 with Celestion V30 speakers, Fender 4x10 Bassman cab with Jensen P10R speakers, Fender 1x12 cab with vintage JBL D-120F speaker

CONTROLS: Inst Vol, Mic Vol, Output, Room, Tone, Boost, Speaker switch, Store switch, Boost switch, Pair switch, Preset footswitch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), standard outputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), USB

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 400 mA

DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x 146 (d) x 63mm (h)



9/10

PROS Exemplary emulation of classic amp; practical range of complementary speaker cabs; flexible footswitching options; preset library

CONS No headphone output or balanced outputs; app needed to change presets; no MIDI



UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX RUBY '63 TOP BOOST AMPLIFIER

PRICE: £339

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Amp emulation pedal based on a Vox AC30

FEATURES: True analogue bypass

SPEAKER OPTIONS: 15W Celestion Silver Bulldog speakers, Celestion Blue Bulldog speakers, Modern Celestion G12Hs speakers, 1x12 AC15 cabinet with Blue Bulldog speaker, 2x12 Matchless cabinet with Celestion G12Hs, 2x12 Two-Rock cab with Celestion Golds

CONTROLS: Volume, Cut, Output, Bass (Room), Treble (Intensity), Boost (Speed), Speaker switch, Alt/Amp/Store switch, Channel switch, Pair switch, Preset footswitch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), standard outputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), USB

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 400 mA

DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x 146 (d) x 63mm (h)



9/10

PROS As Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier; Normal channel provides some instantly familiar classic tones

CONS As Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier



UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX DREAM '65 REVERB AMPLIFIER

PRICE: £339

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Amp emulation pedal based on a black-panel Fender amp

FEATURES: True analogue bypass

SPEAKER OPTIONS: Vintage Celestion Greenback, Oxford 12K5-6, 200W Electro-Voice EVM12L, Two-Rock 2x12 extension cab with Celestion G12-65s, Vintage 1966 4x10 Fender Super Reverb cab with original CTS speakers, Vintage 1968 2x12 Fender Twin Reverb cab w/original JBL D-120F speakers

CONTROLS: Volume, Reverb, Output, Bass, Treble (Intensity), Boost (Speed), Speaker switch, Alt/Amp/Store switch, Mod switch, Pair switch, Preset footswitch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), standard outputs (1/Mono, 2/Stereo), USB

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 400 mA

DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x 146 (d) x 63mm (h)



9/10

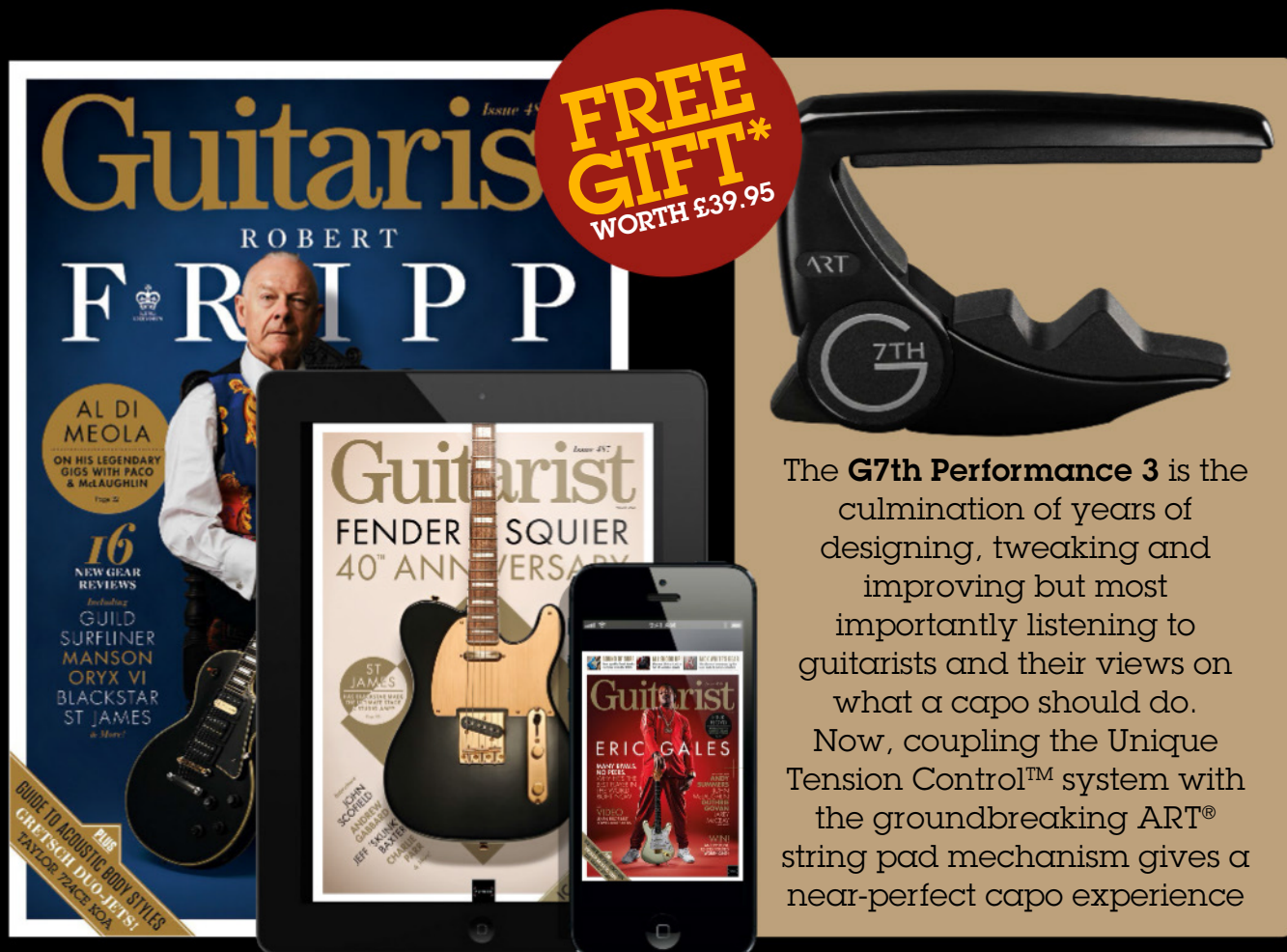
PROS As Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier; emulated spring reverb; clean tones make it an ideal pedal partner

CONS As Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier

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METEORIC SUCCESS

When we tested Fender's radically offset Player Plus Meteora HH recently, we were impressed by its biting yet expressive Fireball humbuckers – an instant favourite at *Guitarist*. Intrigued, we caught up with Fender's Allen Abbassi to talk pickups...

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

When it comes to pickups, it sometimes seems like Fender's Custom Shop gets all the adoration – and with some justification, because the pickups coming out of there (such as the Ancho Poblano Strat set), have been seriously impressive. But Fender's main production guitars are far from being slouches in the tone department and the R&D effort behind them is just as serious, if not more so, as these pickups are being designed for guitars that will sell in their tens of thousands and represent the Fender name and sound around the world.

Keen to learn more about how Fender's main-production pickups are devised, designed and made, we caught up with Allen Abbassi, Director of Product Management for guitars and bass, to find out how the magnetic appeal of mainline production pickups is kept strong at Fender...

Tell us about the development of the Fireball pickups for the Player Plus Meteora HH. What was the aim in terms of tone and performance?

"Great question! First, an overview... When we began the spec process for the Player Plus series, we were excited to create all-new pickup sets. Sometimes pickup sets are an evolution of existing designs, but in this case, we wanted a new and different result.



Allen Abbassi of Fender: "Our pickups represent some of the most innovative and revered designs of all time"

"Player Plus was conceived as an advanced player's platform with a modern attitude, so the pickups had to have a bit of variety – enough punch and swagger to serve rock and heavy sounds, but they had to have enough range to deliver clean sounds with enough sparkle for today's pop radio, recording sessions, live gigs and more. In essence, the pickups had to cover a lot of ground and do it with extraordinary tone and feel.

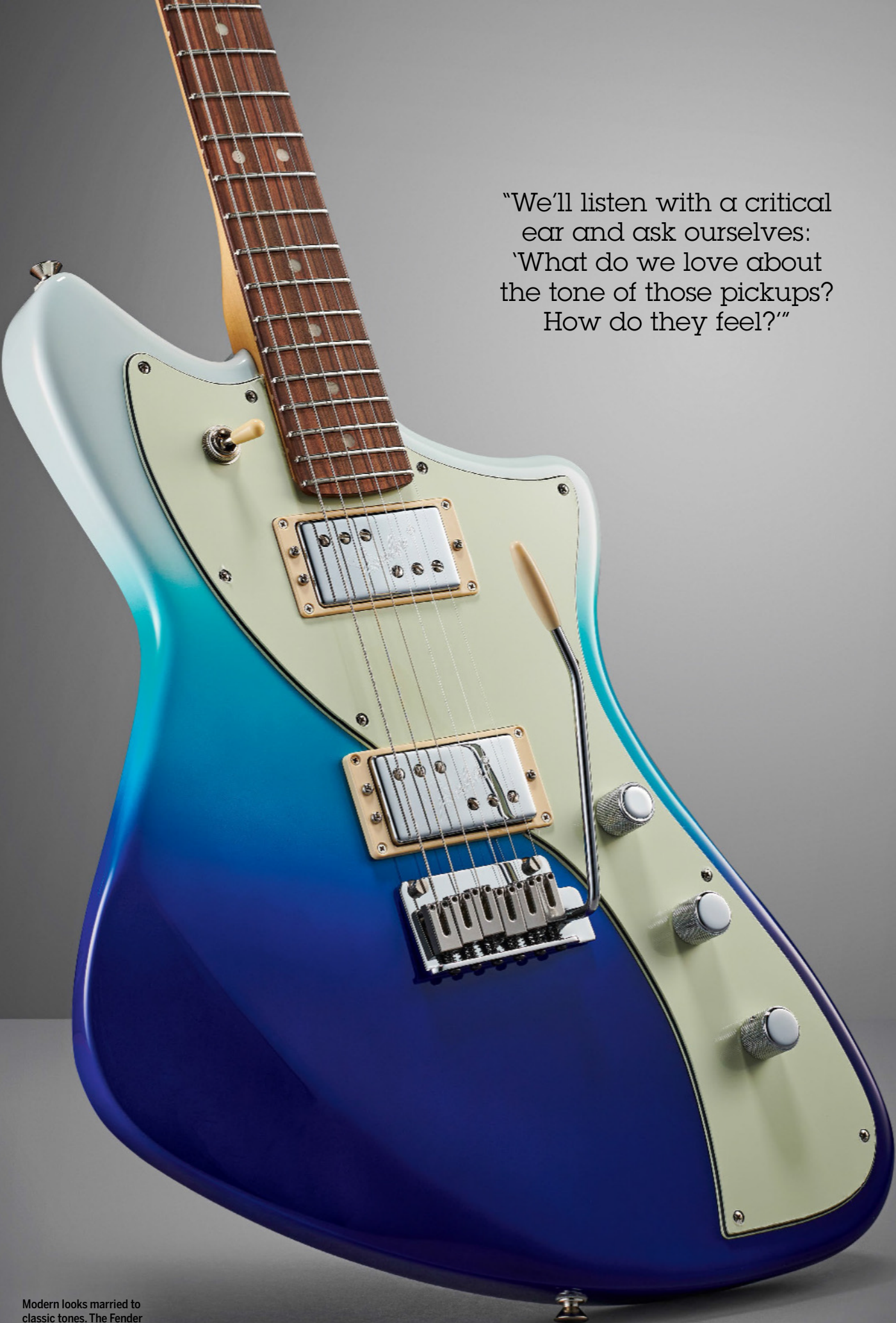
"In order to cover that ground, the Fireball Humbuckers on the Meteora are a vintage-plus wind with an Alnico 2 bar magnet and mismatched turns on the

coils. All pole pieces are screws (even the hidden ones), which reduces the overall output compared to slug pole pieces and, along with the mismatched coils, opens up the top end in a way that works nicely with the magnets.

"There's no foam pad between the cover and the pole pieces and the pickups are double potted, which both increases the output and lowers the resonant peak slightly. The result is a pickup that feels a bit like a 'hot humbucker', even though it's not a hot pickup and doesn't read hot on a meter. The neck pickup is wound to balance well with the bridge humbucker. Overall, the pickup set sounds great for a wide range of musical settings."

How does the pickup design process for a new guitar product typically unfold at Fender? Do you have a spec in mind at the start or do you experiment with many approaches until you get the right result?

"The starting point depends on the context. If we're developing pickup sets for the evolution of an existing series, the starting point is usually the pickups of the current series. We'll listen with a critical ear and ask ourselves: 'What do we love about the tone of those pickups? How do they feel? How do they respond through tube and digital amps and modellers?' By answering these questions, we begin to develop a point



"We'll listen with a critical ear and ask ourselves: 'What do we love about the tone of those pickups? How do they feel?'"

Modern looks married to classic tones. The Fender Player Plus Meteora HH



1. Despite their 'Fireball' moniker, these new humbuckers are moderate in output and sound nuanced and expressive

2. A blend of precision and hand-inspection helps make Fender pickups reliably good

3. Humbuckers are no longer outside the Fender canon for Strats, Teles and offsets



of view about the direction of the new pickups. We inevitably hear something that inspires us to push boundaries and reach for new sounds.

"If, however, we are developing a brand-new series, we take a broader view about what the pickups could or should be. For those types of projects, the pickups can be more experimental, and we stretch out a bit more with creative designs. Examples of that thinking are the Hot 50s gold foil Strat pickups on the Rarities Koa Top Strat and the pickups in the Parallel Universe II Tele Magico.

"We always experiment with various approaches until we get a spectacular result, regardless of any spec we may already have in mind. We often discover that the tone we want to achieve can be accomplished in completely new and innovative ways. Our American Performer pickups are a perfect example of this. They feature Alnico 4 magnets, which we haven't typically used in the past, and they are also the first HSS pickup sets to utilise our patented Double Tap humbucking technology."

"We always experiment with various approaches until we get a spectacular result"

What are your favourite design strategies when it comes to dealing with output-mismatched pickup configurations, such as HSS?

"For an HSS configuration, our favourite strategy is the aforementioned Double Tap technology. One way the system can be used is to start with a lower output humbucker, which already matches nicely with single coils.

"The issue with low-output humbuckers is that the split single coil is usually weaker than the neck and middle singles, creating a mismatch. The Double Tap system splits and simultaneously untaps a hotter wind on the active coil, matching the neck and middle pickups perfectly.

"Another example is the American Ultra Strat HSS. We addressed the potential mismatch by developing our Hot Noiseless neck and middle set, which were designed to calibrate with the hotter Ultra Double Tap Humbucker. In general, we'll experiment with any and all pickup elements – wire, bobbins, magnets and more – to get a balanced pickup set."

What are your favourite wiring/switching mods for classic Fender platforms, such as the Strat and Tele?

"We have been using treble-bleed mods for some time now. The ability to turn down your volume and still retain high end is a great feature and this mod appears on our American Professional II and American Ultra Series guitars. Each pickup set requires a different set of resistors and capacitors to dial in the bleed just right.

"Specifically for single-coil Strats, one of our favourite switching options is to allow adding the neck pickup into switch positions 1 and 2. This modification provides two extra, very useful tones: the

"Fender is committed to innovation, and we like to challenge the status quo more than follow it..."

bridge and neck pickup together, and all three pickups together. We use a variety of different switches with this mod, like our S-1 volume switch or a push/push tone pot.

"One of our latest and greatest modifications for a Strat HSS is our Double Tap technology which, as explained, uses a combination of tapping and splitting to yield a calibrated single-coil tone when splitting a humbucker. All our core American-made series feature this mod on the Strat HSS models.

"For Telecasters we utilise the parallel/series wiring option quite a bit. Whether via a 4-way switch, push/pull pot or S-1 switch, wiring the bridge and neck pickups on a Tele in series offers a nice beefy tone for a bit more grind or even a solo boost.

"Another cool Tele mod we are currently using on our JV Mod Telecasters from Japan is phase switching. A push/pull pot allows you to put the pickups out of phase with each other when they're both on. You can get some awesome and funky tones this way and it works well whether the pickups are wired in parallel or series."

What are your strategies for mass-producing good pickups successfully, so the resulting pickups don't sound 'mass produced' in a negative or mediocre sense?

"We go to great lengths to ensure that the intended tone and response of our pickup designs are consistently achieved in our Fender factories. We use pickup-winding machines calibrated to reproduce the precise turns, pitch and tension of our designs. Fender employees then perform the post-winding process, which includes wax, lacquer or shellac potting (if the design calls for it), assembly, inspection and final testing for tone and construction. The quality team inspects instruments constantly to ensure that the pickups remain consistent and true to the original design."

How well do you think your pickups stand up against the independent 'boutique' pickup makers out there?

"Fender has been making pickups for more than 75 years and our pickups represent some of the most innovative and revered designs of all time. We hold ourselves to the highest standard of quality and tone, and we work tirelessly to ensure that



Next-generation noiseless pickups on the American Ultra range embody Fender's progressive spirit

PHOTO BY LLYCURTIS

all our pickups are the best sounding in the world, bar none. When you plug in a Player Strat or an America Original 60s Jazzmaster or an American Ultra Precision Bass, you are going to get an authentic, inspiring Fender tone that is warm, clear, dynamic and expressive. That's what players demand and that's what we deliver. We keep our finger on the pulse of what's going on in the pickup world and there are some interesting things going on out there. But one of the things that continues to keep Fender vital for so many players is our commitment to innovation, and we like to challenge the status quo more than follow it."

How have trends in what players want from Fender pickups changed over the past five or so years?

"Players are using guitars and basses to paint broad sonic landscapes to create an atmosphere or to set a mood. New tapping styles have emerged, fresh finger styles are being used, players are banging out rhythms on the fretboard. Innovative

musicians turn to Fender to create their sounds – that's one trend that hasn't changed. Crystalline, touch sensitive, versatile and dynamic – these musical qualities are the essence of classic Fender tone, and that's why so many players gravitate to Fender. Simply put, Fender pickups inspire."

What are your favourite pickups that Fender makes and why?

"Tough question! I'm a Strat guy so I would have to say our Pure Vintage '59 Strat pickups from our American Original 50s Stratocaster are my favourite. To me they have that prototypical Strat quack and spank in every switch position. They are very well balanced, and they are low output, which I tend to prefer. They get that beautiful bell-like quality on the clean side, but they still work incredibly well with overdrive. They are bouncy and react well to finger technique nuances – they just 'feel' right!" 

To discover the full range of Fender pickups and more, visit www.fender.com

Longtermers

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

What's The Best Way
To Record Great Tone?

with Jamie Dickson



Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist, Editor-in-chief



This month, Jamie switches amps, ditches the mic and microphones and tries using a reactive loadbox to get the rich, glitch-free recorded tone he's been longing for...

I'd like to be able to say that in the world of *Guitarist* long-term tests, everything is run with the utmost professionalism in a gleaming studio with perfectly functioning test gear. Unfortunately that isn't quite the case, not in my home studio anyway. As regular readers may recall, I started my longterm quest in order to find the easiest means to record great electric guitar tone at home using a Shure Beta 57A mic and my Dr Z combo. Now, I love the Dr Z and it will always be my go-to live amp – it sounds and feels fabulous to play, it's got all the features I like and looks fab too. But, in the home studio, it has proven somewhat more 'challenging' to use. It caught fire on me once (a bit alarming) and the tremolo and reverb circuits, though gorgeous-sounding, are both quite noisy in terms of hum for recording purposes. I had the latter problem looked at by an amp tech, as, at one stage, it had got really bad. While some replacement components and all-round tweaking did

"For those who have never used a reactive load box before, it's pretty simple to set up"

alleviate the issue to a degree, the noise of those circuits is still a little intrusive on recordings where you're looking for a really clean mix, not vintage-style atmosphere.

In the last instalment of this test, I was thinking of redoing the mic'd parts I'd recorded on the Dr Z with noisy reverb and tremolo circuits switched off – a real shame, but necessary. However, coming back to the project with a fresh mind, I decide to switch to the other amp I have in the studio – a Laney Cub-Super head and 1x12 cab. Though inexpensive, this little 15-watter is so small I can sit it on my desktop, making it easier to adjust amp settings on the fly. It may not have quite the same vintage vibe as the Dr Z but it's no slouch at all in the tone department – and above all, it's quiet. Of course, that means I'll have to go back and re-record the mic'd up parts with this amp so it's a fair comparative test, but so be it – I didn't intend to keep the earlier parts I'd recorded with the Dr Z anyway.



The Torpedo Captor X's rear panel controls and outputs are simple but effective in use

Reactive Load Boxes

However, I can't quite bring myself to use this test just to redo mic'd parts again on the Laney – which might be a bit boring for you, dear reader, so I decide to make a start with the reactive load box I have on hand as an alternative to traditional mic-and-amp recording. It's a Torpedo Captor X by French company Two Notes, who make high-quality studio gear, pedals and the like. They specialise in reactive load boxes that provide an artificial 'load' so you can run the amp silently, with the speaker defeated, without the amp blowing up as a result – a big advantage when recording at home at night, particularly. The second thing they do is route signal direct from the back of your amp to your DAW via high-quality Impulse Responses (digital models) of popular cabinets and mics. This means no real mics are needed during recording. Whether you run your speaker as normal or mute it completely, the Captor X, which sits between the amp and the speaker cab in the signal path, syphons off signal to feed to your recording gear via high-quality emulations of classic mics and cabs.

By installing Two Notes' easy-to-use Torpedo Wireless Remote app on your phone or Bluetooth-enabled mobile device, you can choose between dozens of those virtual cabs

and mics and position them how you like in a virtual studio space, as well as add effects and EQ. If it works as advertised, this could solve all my minor annoyances with spaghetti junctions of XLR cables and awkward-to-adjust mic booms.

For those who have never used a reactive load box before, it's pretty simple to set up. You plug a cable from the amp's speaker output into the Captor X, then plug in another speaker cable to run from the Captor X to the speaker cabinet. Now the Captor X is sitting directly in the signal path between amp and speaker, which is where it needs to be. The Captor X needs power, which it gets from a supplied 12V PSU, so that needs to be plugged in, too.

You can configure the Captor X in various ways, but I adopted the simplest setup for home recording – I ran two XLR cables, left and right, from the stereo outputs of the Captor X into my audio interface, a PreSonus AudioBox iTwo. But before I started trying to get signal into the PreSonus Studio 1 DAW on my PC, I decided to test the Captor X's abilities as a straightforward attenuator. Switching the amp on, I hear sound coming out of the speaker as normal, with no apparent tone-impairment – a good start. Doing my usual thing of just fiddling with dials rather than reading the manual, I adjust the



The Torpedo Captor X is compact enough to sit on a desktop for convenient access to controls

Output Level knob, thinking it will govern how much attenuation (and, hence volume) from the speaker I hear. Wrong – that's handled by a three-way micro switch on the back of the Captor X, which offers three levels of audible output via the amp's speaker cabinet: silent, 'bedroom' level and normal. It's mildly disappointing you don't get more flexible control over attenuation levels, but that's a pretty small gripe, considering the Captor X is both smaller and quite a bit cheaper than rivals, such as the Universal Audio Ox or the Boss WAZA Tube Amp Expander, which do offer more control over attenuation. I would liked to have seen that control on the front panel though, not round the back, for ease of use. It all works very well in practice, though. Now to get some sounds into my DAW.

Phoning It In

I install the Wireless Remote app on my phone without difficulty and pairing it with the Captor X via Bluetooth is simple – the device is easily discoverable on my phone. And although you have to enter part of your Captor X's serial number as a security measure when you start it up for the first time, connecting the app and the device is easy.

Once connected, I don my Sennheiser HD280 Pro headphones, which are plugged into my audio interface, and have a listen.

"Could this be the perfect compromise between analogue authenticity and digital convenience?"

On my phone screen is what looks like a virtual 4x12 cabinet with a famous dynamic and condenser mic pairing in front of it. I give my Strat a few experimental strums... by golly, it sounds really blinkin' good! I don't know why I'm surprised – Two Notes make great gear and the tone, while running through a digital mic and cab sim, is ultimately coming from the glowing heart of my Laney valve amp... Could this be the perfect compromise between analogue authenticity and digital convenience?

Branching out a bit, I try some more virtual cabs and mics – everything from Fender-style combos to famous British 4x10 cabs is on offer here, plus IRs of ribbon mics, famous condenser mics, classic dynamic mics and more. It's fun to mix and match and the nice thing is you don't have to buy a fortune's worth of real vintage gear to be able to experiment like this – just swipe the screen to chop, change

and position your virtual rig in your preferred virtual room. The reverbs are nice and there's plenty of them too, while rackmount-style effects such as exciters and track doubling effects really help you dial in a juicy tone. Above all, it's all intuitive to use with minimal cabling needed – perfect for single-handed use in the home studio where space and uncluttered workflow count.

The other thing I like, as opposed to using a fully digital solution, such as a modelling multi-effects (Helix, Kemper, Quad Cortex etc) is that I'm still running everything through my normal pedalboard – so all my familiar overdrives, modulation effects and so on are right there, available to use, just as I normally would. Yes, you can run pedals in effects loops within a modelling multi-effect unit, but the fact that everything in my rig is exactly as I would normally have it, with minimal adaption required – is really a point in favour of the Captor X. I can just get on with using my familiar, favourite gear as I normally would, with a bit of help from the touchscreen app. Except now there's no bulky mic booms and cables to trip over, either. Nice.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as they say. Does the Captor X record better results than the same amp mic'd with a comparable setup? Join me next time around to see what happens when I try it out... **G**

Reviewed Issues 479 & 484 **Prices** £1,599 (Neural DSP Quad Cortex), £429 (Two Notes Torpedo Captor X), £124 (Shure Beta 57A) **Studio Sessions** Not yet



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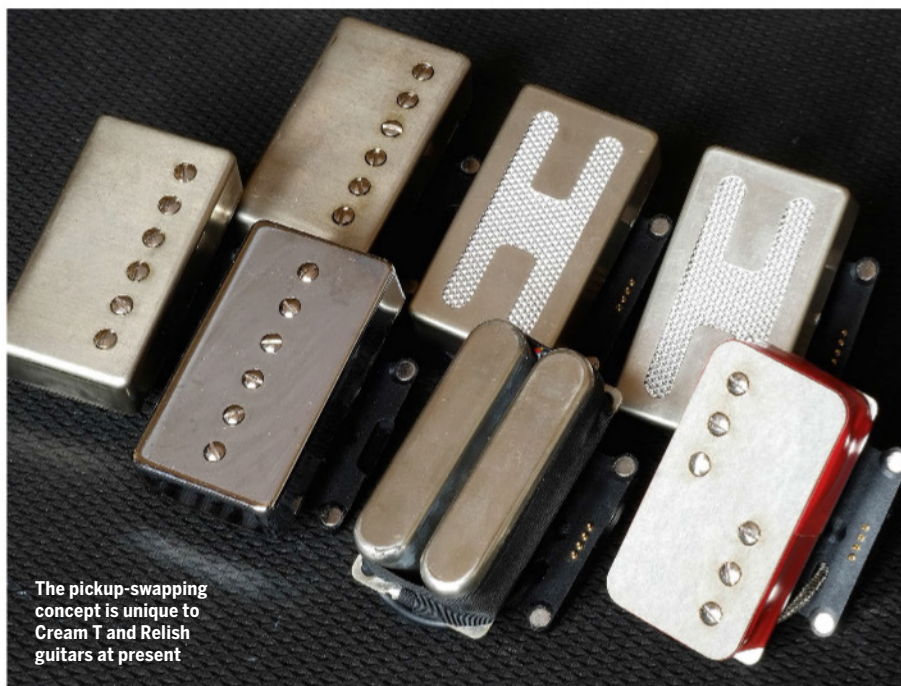
with Dave Burluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



Has the Aurora's pickup-swapping capability changed our reviews editor's world? And what about the guitar itself?



When I started this Longtermers test, I was focusing solely on the pickup-swapping ability of this guitar. Yup, it's great! A lot of fun with a pretty serious intent. But any innovation is only as good as the guitar it's on, right? I'm not sure I really explored that enough in the first part of this test in issue 487, so here goes...

For many, this is a top-dollar instrument and the question I asked myself is, 'Irrespective of the pickup swapping (which is totally unique to Cream T and Relish at the moment), how good is the actual guitar?' Back in issue 483, for example, we reviewed the Indonesian Cor-Tek-made Trinity by Relish, which offers the exact same pickup swapping but on a guitar that costs £599. It's far from a classic 'inspired by' design, but for the money it's quite a cracker, especially

world than it does in the mass-production world. I mentioned the rolled fingerboard edges, the great fretwork, the way the nut is cut so there are zero tuning issues – often not the case with three-a-side guitars from, erm, Nashville. But it's the inviting response, vibrant and ringing, that easily matches the price point here.

The wood quality appears exceptional, too. The body is one-piece quarter-sawn, like the neck, with a strongly flecked grain, and is lightly chambered. The rosewood fingerboard is a deep dark chocolate colour with those Gibson-style pearloid inlays that, combined with the Martin-style squared topped headstock, add a classicism to the design, albeit it in a rather 'inspired by' style. The flat maple top isn't overly flamed, more old Gibson than PRS, yet it has plenty of

up with science, but I do believe that a guitar takes a little while to, well, get used to being a guitar. The more it's played, the more I think you notice it, notably whether the wood is good. This Aurora is no different. With quite a few hours of playing in the bank, certainly unplugged, I'd swear I'm hearing more depth, less string and metal, more wood.

That maple top might fool you into thinking the Aurora is yet another take on a Les Paul. But sound-wise it has its own thing going on. Even with pretty similar pickups, our Burstbucker 1- and 2-equipped Les Paul Classic sounds a little 'bigger'. By design, the Aurora sort of sits between Les Paul and Telecaster, which reflects co-designer Billy Gibbons' taste, of course, and the leaner and lighter 3.67kg (8.1lb) guitar, with a set of Whiskerbuckers, sounds beautifully vintage-y. Plus, as I'm finding, it records really well.

The extended play time has other consequences, too. If you like your guitars in a pristine condition and want to keep them that way, the very thin finish to the mahogany isn't that durable. It will wear pretty quickly, especially after a few gigs. To be honest, there's quite a working guitar vibe here. The glossed, flame-y top does look a little posh, but the feel of the guitar – not least that thin neck finish – creates an instrument that seems older and more played-in than it actually is. It's something I like about the guitar, and the other PJD guitars I've tested and gigged. In fact, even if you're not remotely interested in pickup swapping, you can buy the same guitar with conventional humbucking mounts and Cream T Whiskerbuckers for £2,699. Attractive? **G**

"With quite a few hours of playing in the bank, I'd swear I'm hearing more depth, less string and metal, more wood"

if you want to get your head around the pickup-swapping concept without spending a lot. So, why would anyone spend £3k on this Cream T guitar?

It's not a straightforward answer, particularly if you're just looking at a spec sheet and flat image. But in your hands, the Aurora oozes quality. Take the woodworking, for instance: the thin satin natural finish to the back, sides and neck-back leaves nowhere to hide, and the 'worn through' feel of the neck sits much more in the boutique

character. It's a good build, matched with excellent Gotoh hardware and the Anomaly pickup rings (another British design) that give no hint of the pickup-swapping potential from the front. Compared with the early prototype No 2 that we received last year, this new Aurora feels like a finished, mastered recording as opposed to a good work-in-progress song demo.

Getting to spend a much longer time with a guitar than we possibly can on a review is very often quite revealing. I can't back this

Reviewed 480 (as the Standard 2PS) **Price** £2,999 (inc case) **On Test Since** May 2022 **Studio Sessions** Yes **Gigged** Yes www.creamtguitars.com

Long





NILI BROSH

She's played with Cirque du Soleil and toured with Paul Gilbert, Andy Timmons and Guthrie Govan – and demonstrates a fondness for sparkly Ibanez guitars...



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

"That would be a Charvel Model 4 that I bought on eBay in 2003. I think it was probably \$350, or something like that, and it was all the money that I could manage to save at that point. It was purple with sparkles that you see when you look really close up. In some lights it looked brown and in some lights dark purple.

"I was in high school, I had friends in school that I'd played with, but it was still in my very early days of learning to play guitar. I was starting to get into the instrumental guys and a lot of the Shrapnel players and I loved hair metal at the time. Anything that had heavy, driven, distorted guitar caught my attention and made me want to tackle it and figure out what it was all about."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"Would it be weird if it was only a year after the one we just talked about? I got a BC Rich ST-III, also from eBay, which was a green and yellow crackle finish. After that, in my later teenage years, I started my career in endorsements, I guess. So I think that was the last time that I actually bought a guitar. Right now, I've been playing guitars that are kind of from the same realm, the Ibanez Genesis Collection reissue of the RG550. That's my beloved

"For the weird sounds I've done for Danny Elfman I use the Strymon Mobius – the modulation effects really bastardise the signal"

yellow guitar that made me want to be an Ibanez artist. When they reissued it, I was all about it: 'Okay, now's the time, I have to have one!'"

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

"Oh, man, that's a good question. I'm sure there have been times. But I think, for lack of a better story, I've had musician friends that have had to move across the country or across the world or whatever, and they're getting rid of stuff that they couldn't move with and have given me a really good deal as a friend. I'm not a huge gear nerd when it comes to just owning stuff. So it's not like I've really been in the habit of looking for great deals or anything. I kind of go based on, 'What do I need at the moment?'"

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

"Probably that Charvel Model 4. I sold it to a fan and so I feel like it went to a good home. I kind of wish I had that

PHOTO BY CHRIS BRODY



NILI'S GO-TO RIG

"Other than the guitars I've mentioned, I have a few seven-strings that I used on some of my older stuff. I have an RG1527 and an RG2727, which is the dark grey Japan-only model. Then I've been using Mesa/Boogies for a little while now; I'm using the Triple Crown 100-watt head with a 2x12 cab.

"My 'board is usually pretty simple as I'm not super heavy on effects. I like amp tones and basic reverbs and delays, but it mostly depends on the gig. Recently, I've had to do more weird sounds and stuff like that for Danny Elfman, so I have a couple of pedals that were specific for that, like the Strymon Mobius – that definitely colours your sound entirely in a lot of ways. It's their modulation effects that really, really bastardise the signal. I have the DigiTech FreqOut, which, again, is a similar thing, to create harmonics in different ways and stuff like that.

"I have a tuner, a volume pedal and then I have the Xotic Effects EP Booster, which is my always-on making-the-tone-creamier kind of pedal, but it's a very simple rig. I'm very much like 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it, go buy what you need...'"

piece of my own history. But I guess going back to the gear thing, the other side of it is I haven't gotten rid of that much. Maybe that's why I'm whining about it, you know, maybe I just need to get rid of more."

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

"Um, it wasn't the piece of gear itself, it was more the timing of *when* I bought it because I bought a microphone that I really liked. I knew it was something that I needed and wanted and all that stuff, but I spent a good amount of money on it. And the very next year it just wasn't that pricey any more. I remember seeing that and just being like, 'I could have gotten two or three...' But I don't feel like I've regretted things that I really intentionally went for."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"For me, the playability is big, you know, it has to feel a certain way. And my fingers need to be able to move in a certain way. Obviously, it needs to be a solid instrument that can maintain tuning and intonation well. I like my setup a certain way, a certain tension, and I've also become partial to certain neck sizes and types.

"The best thing you can do is ask yourself what you're trying to accomplish with that instrument. What are you trying to play or what are you hoping to feel like? I don't think anybody's wish is to feel like the guitar is fighting them and everything is harder to play. You want to find an instrument that makes it easier and more comfortable [to play]. I think the more you know about what you're going for, the easier it's going to be to find that instrument."

"[When buying a guitar,] ask yourself what you're trying to accomplish with that instrument"

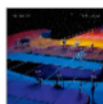
If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheaper amp or a cheap guitar and a really top-notch amp?

"I think I'd rather choose the guitar because it really does start with your fingers. And if you have an instrument that makes it easier for you to do what you do with your hands, then I feel like it's easier to get over the hurdle of the amp, versus the other way around. An instrument that's really, really difficult to play, or won't stay in tune or whatever, will not sound good, no matter how nice the amp is."

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

"It would probably be humbuckers. Only because if I think about what my guitar playing role ends up being, and most of the things that I do, I can get away with playing more of it through humbuckers than singles." **[DM]**

Nili's Genesis Collection reissue RG550, her "beloved yellow guitar", was the model that ignited her passion for becoming an Ibanez artist



Nili Brosh's latest album, *Spectrum*, is available now on the Hostile City label

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CALL THE PROS

There's plenty you can do yourself when it comes to modding, but the skill and experience of professional repairers should never be overlooked. Dave Burrluck gets some help!

We last featured this 1972/'73 Les Paul Deluxe in issue 476 as a reference for Gibson's new 70s Deluxe. As I wrote, it was a guitar that I used to own but rather foolishly sold on to a friend – who, graciously, always lets me borrow the guitar, knowing that I usually give it a check over and some fresh strings. The thing is, ever since the early 80s that's all the work that's been done on the guitar, which was already 'player's grade' back when I bought it in the late 70s or early 80s.

There's a very solidly repaired headstock break for starters, which is still rock-solid today, even though the refinishing remains pretty rudimentary looking. But the guitar has never been refretted, and the original wide and low frets look as though they've been levelled and are showing plenty of wear, the lack of height precluding any further levelling and reprofiling. As a result, the fingerboard has become quite worn with noticeable divots in places.

When I last borrowed the guitar for that review I seriously suggested to my mate that we get it refretted properly, so that he (and I!) could continue to enjoy the guitar for years to come.

The Experts

Jonathan Law, founder of Feline Guitars, has been doing repairs and refrets for well over two decades, as well as making some rather fine and well-regarded electrics when time allows. Arriving at his workshop in Croydon, I immediately felt at home. It's a compact but very well-organised space in two working rooms with a couple



The old frets were very low and the fingerboard was worn

of co-workers: Tom Palmer, who's been with Feline for the past 12 years, and the newest recruit, Liam Mulford.

As Jonathan got to work assessing the Deluxe, he endorsed the need for a refret, and the first thing we discussed was the fretwire. Back in the day, repairers were much more constricted by the choice of wire available. Today, there's plenty so you need to do your research and consider what you want to achieve. For example, a common reason for a refret is that you might want bigger frets to improve on those ol' skinny ones that came on your Fender. But in the case of this Deluxe, more of a restoration than a repair, Jonathan suggested something of similar width but with a lower profile than you might get on a more modern guitar, not least that the

owner has long been used to very low frets. I really didn't want to dramatically change how the guitar would feel. And this is a good point to remind you that some careful thought and discussion with your repairer is essential. Maybe you have another guitar with frets that you like? Take that with you and let your repairer size the original frets and suggest something close. We settled on Dunlop 6155.

As Jonathan continued to examine the guitar, he checked the fingerboard radius, which seemed a little flatter in higher positions than its quoted 12 inches, and then he noticed the tune-o-matic had collapsed, so that needed replacing, too. Rather luckily, Feline Guitars is a stockist for the German Faber parts, so (aside from adding to the total cost) that's an easy



Checking the radius of the original 'board



Initial levelling of the fingerboard



Now fully restored, this early 70s Les Paul Deluxe is playing better than it has for decades



The fingerboard after levelling



You can still see a little wear left after levelling



The 'board is cleaned up and levelled, ready for the new frets



Each fret is cut to approximate size, the tang notched at both ends

"If you set up a guitar that's 40 or 50 years old, it might happily sit there for another 10 years" **Tom Palmer**

high-quality replacement. Jonathan then very sensibly suggested we keep the original should my mate want to sell the instrument in the future. It's a good point: always keep any original parts, pots and so on. Invariably, with new higher frets, you'll need a new nut, too, and Jonathan suggested bone, unbleached, so it'll look a little older.

Having evaluated the Deluxe and another guitar (a 1976 Guild S-90) I was having refretted at the same time (and then, of course, putting the guitar world to rights), I realised I'd taken up two hours of Jonathan's very valuable time. Bloomin' journalists! I left him to it.

The Process

Just under two weeks later I head back to the Feline workshop: the work is done and Jonathan sounds pleased. A quick play test and so am I. Both the Deluxe and the S-90 now play superbly but neither feels different, just a lot better. So what was involved? Well, quite a lot.

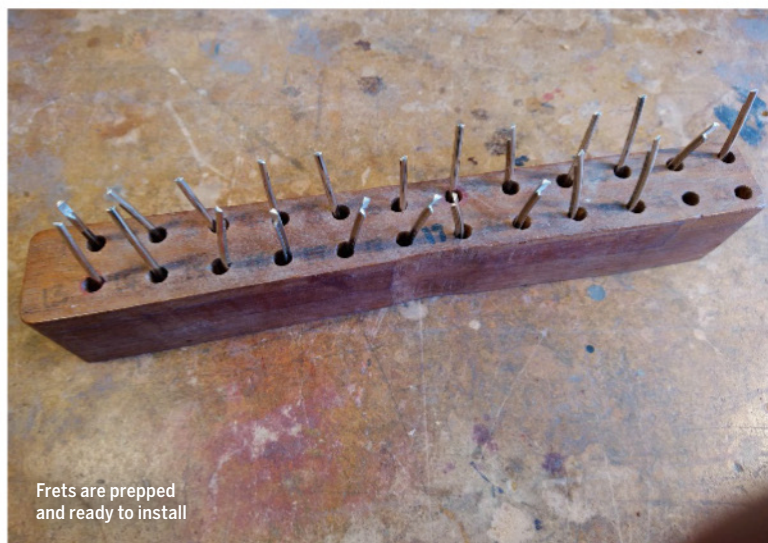
Tom, who carried out the work, walks us through the process: "First, I take off the strings and pull out the old frets using flush-ground pliers. We use a little heat, too, just to soften any glue that might have been used originally. We'll remove the nut then begin to clean up the 'board. We'll adjust the truss rod, just to get the neck back into a more neutral position. Each neck is different, but the levelling does allow us to straighten up any wonky necks, undulations or twists. I like to think you have more movement with a single-action truss rod, but only in one direction. With a two-way rod, it goes both ways, but I sometimes feel you can't crank them as much."

I notice that the obvious wear to the Deluxe's fingerboard is considerably lessened – it now looks used but not abused. "Generally, we don't try to completely remove any wear, unless that's what the customer wants," Tom explains. "What we're trying to do is true up the wood under the frets, so it's as level and as even as it can

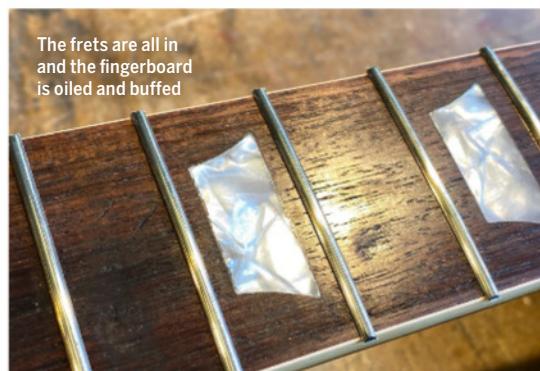
be. If you don't do that before you refret, you'll have to take out any unevenness on the frets themselves and that means you lose some of the height. If it's an old guitar that someone has played for 30 years then they're usually not worried about a few divots because that's wear that they've put in. If it's an old guitar but new to the customer, they're more likely to want a fingerboard that looks brand-new."

After the fret slots have been cleaned up it's time to prep the fretwire. "We cut to rough size, nip the tangs off so that they'll clear the binding, then just clean under the fret ends where we've removed the tang, just so that it sits level over the binding. We always use a press to push the frets in. They're glued in, too, and we use Super Glue. Not everyone one thinks that it's the best, but it works for us: the frets can easily be removed with a little heat, a touch of a soldering iron.

"With all the frets in, we trim the ends pretty flush to the fingerboard," he



Frets are prepped and ready to install



The frets are all in and the fingerboard is oiled and buffed



Using a press to push in the new frets



The new bone nut is the last thing today before restringing

continues. "Then we use files mounted in wooden blocks held at a particular angle to initially bevel the fret ends. People work in different ways. Some like to leave the fret end to last after the tops have been levelled. But I tend to dress the ends initially to get rid of any sharpness; it's nicer when you're handling the guitar while you continue to work. When we levelled the 'board earlier you sometimes get a sharp edge, so I'll go in and lightly round them. On older guitars with quite rounded fingerboard edges that's usually not necessary, but on a newer guitar it usually is.

"Then we cut a new nut and string up. We use a fret jig, which allows us to simulate the string tension with the strings off. That allows us to work on the frets as if the strings were there. Some necks do weird things under tension, pull up here and there, and there's nothing worse than doing all that work to level the fingerboard and frets only to find that under tension it still wants to move a little. The fret tops need to



This jig simulates the tension of the strings

be level, but nine times out of 10, so long as you've levelled the fingerboard and put the frets in well, you'll be pretty bang on."

Bearing in mind that these are instruments of a certain age, I wonder if either guitar has provided any problems. "Actually, working on older guitars we usually find they're more stable," considers Tom. "Setting up a new guitar for someone, you're probably going to see it again in a couple of years' time for another tweak. If you set up a guitar that's 40 or 50 years old, it might happily sit there for another 10 years without needing any adjustment to the truss rod. The neck has done most of its settling and it's used to being under all that tension."

Professional Fees

I'd been aware of the reputation of Jonathan and his team for many years, so it was an easy decision to trust them with these guitars, not to mention that they're relatively local to my London base. If you need work done, just ask around in person or on any of the numerous forums online. There's obviously the cash to consider, too. With the Deluxe costing just north of £400 including that new bridge, the owner was asking, "Won't he give you a discount?"

"People think 'I'll do the repair job myself.' But you'll spend much more to get the job done" **Jonathan Law**

Well, I didn't ask. We're paying for great craft and skill that's been gained from decades of experience.

I'm sure there are many readers who'll be thinking they could do this themselves. "The fretwork on my first guitar was terrible," laughs Tom – his work today is anything but. "Plenty of people think, 'I don't want to pay that [for a repair];'" Jonathan interjects. "They'll think, 'I'll go and buy the tools and do it myself. I'll show Mr Repairman I can do it.' The reality is you'll have spent much more to get the job done, and are you ever going to do it again?"

To say refretting a guitar to a high standard can be transformative isn't far from the truth. The dilapidated Deluxe is a great example – I've always believed it was a very good example of the breed in terms of sound and feel, let down by its playability. Its playability now matches my impressions of its sound: superb. Job done. 



The new frets and all the finished work



Final intonation check on the newly installed Faber bridge



On the bench for one last check

That should give you something to think about till our next issue.

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.



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Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

Huw Price journeys from twang to tinnitus, as he examines Leo's first guitar pickups

Vintage Telecaster Pickups

Whether you call it the Esquire, Broadcaster or Telecaster, Fender's T-type was not the company's first electric musical instrument. Leo Fender started making lap steels in 1946, with many of the design concepts carrying over to Fender's first 'electric Spanish' guitar. On Fender's famous red two-pickup prototype of 1949, it's clear to see that the neck pickup was taken straight out of a Champion lap steel – the giveaways being its shape and two mounting screws on the one side that tap straight into the body.

Fender would soon devise a completely different neck pickup, and the three mounting screws confirm that the company had already adapted the Champion unit to create a new bridge pickup. With only minor alterations, both these pickups have remained in production ever since.

Take It To The Bridge

Fender retained the coil dimensions of the Champion lap steel pickup, but added a larger bottom flat to accommodate three

fixing screws. With two at the back and one at the front, the pickup height could be adjusted at each end, along with the tilt angle. The pickup was also suspended beneath the metal bridge. Rather than tap into the lower vulcanised fibreboard flat, Fender attached a steel baseplate to the underside of the pickup. In addition to making it easy to mount the pickup, soldering the black leadout wire to the plate grounded the bridge.

The earliest T-type bridge pickups started out with Alnico III, but around 1954 Fender began using more powerful Alnico V slugs. Initially flush with the top, the slugs became staggered in 1955, just like the recently introduced Stratocaster pickups.

On A Plate

The steel baseplates were originally plated with zinc or copper to resist corrosion and make them easier to solder. Also known as induction plates, they have a ferromagnetic effect that stabilises and strengthens the magnetic field for higher

output. Only steel baseplates produce this electroferric effect. Copper, brass and steel baseplates all induce eddy current interference to boost the bass and low mids, and this electrodynamic effect can tame an otherwise shrill and trebly tone. Copper and brass plates will warm up a Tele bridge pickup without increasing overall output, and while steel does the same, it also raises the output, which is why adding an inductance plate to the bridge pickup has become a popular Stratocaster modification.

Wired For Sound

Esquire, Broadcaster and Telecaster pickups have traditionally been wound with plain enamel-coated magnet wire. There have been reports of vintage bridge pickups wound with heavy formvar wire, but these are extremely rare.

For the first year or so, Fender used 43 AWG magnet wire, but this was changed to thicker 42 AWG wire. The change roughly coincides with Fender adopting

The coils were wrapped using parcel string, a cheap and easy material to source

the 'Telecaster' model name. Thinner wire has a higher resistance, and it allows for more turns before the coil becomes full. Early pickups can read around 10kohms with a lowish inductance, and the tone can have a fullness and compression that is closer to a P-90. In contrast, later pickups with thicker wire ohm out around 7.5k and produce a more familiar Tele twang.

The coils themselves were wrapped for protection using parcel string, a cheap and easy material to source. This string was pale in colour, but it appeared black after the wax potting process.

In Your Lap

As we mentioned earlier, the bridge pickup was adapted from a design that Fender used on Champion lap steel instruments. Fender continued making them well into the 1950s and these units measure between



The slugs in the early Telecaster bridge pickups were flush, changing to staggered in 1955

Early Telecasters can have a bridge pickup with a fullness and compression similar to that of a P-90

classicgear



1. In contrast to the Telecaster's bridge pickup, which evolved over the years, the neck pickup has remained virtually unchanged

2. Renowned for its versatility, the Tele's bridge pickup can be heard in many music styles from country and pop to heavy rock

5.8kohm and 8k, depending on the magnet wire. Guitar tech Pierre de Beauport famously retrofits them to Keith Richards' Teles, and many Champions have had their pickups, potentiometers and control knobs pilfered as a result.

The flush fitted slugs are a fraction wider than those used for the guitars, but the specs are otherwise identical to the bridge pickups on many of the earliest Esquires, Broadcasters and Telecasters. Champion lap steels retain value even after they have had their vintage parts replaced, so buying, pilfering and reselling is a relatively affordable way into authentic 50s Tele tone. Retrofitting these pickups to a T-type requires the rectangular bottom flat to be trimmed and a metal baseplate must be attached.

Up To Your Neck

Of all the major electric guitar models of the vintage era, the Telecaster is the only one equipped with entirely different bridge and neck pickups. Rather than persevere with the lap steel pickup used in the red prototype, Fender designed a much smaller pickup with a narrower coil, a metal cover and screws at each end that went directly into the body.

In contrast to the bridge pickup, Tele neck pickup specs went largely unchanged. Fender retained the thinner 43 AWG copper wire with plain enamel coating, although 42 AWG was used for a brief period around 1952. The magnets began changing from Alnico III to Alnico V around 1954, but they have always been flush rather than staggered.

Dark Arts

Telecaster neck pickups divide opinions, meaning many Tele fans swap them out for a wide variety of other pickups. Dissatisfaction with the neck setting may be partly attributable to the way they're made, but Fender's early wiring schemes didn't do them any favours, either.

If you're lucky enough to get your hands on an early Broadcaster, switch positions 1 and 2 selected the bridge and neck pickups respectively, with a 'bass preset' in position 3. There was a volume control, and the second knob acted as a blender control for the bridge and neck pickups in position 1.

A tone control soon replaced the blender control, but the bass/neck/bridge switching was retained and that classic Telecaster tone with both pickups engaged

Tele neck pickups divide opinions, meaning many Tele fans swap them out for other pickups

wouldn't become a stock feature until 1967. Fender also swapped to a 0.1µF treble roll-off capacitor in 1952, making the 'bass setting' even darker.

Running pickups without tone controls eliminates the treble roll-off inherent with conventional control circuits. Since that was Fender's initial configuration, the darkening effect of the neck pickup's metal cover would have been somewhat alleviated. But as soon as the tone control was introduced, the cover's sonic influence became clearly audible. This compounds the sonic characteristics of the small and squat coil shape, which can result in pickups that sound muffled, weak and



2



indistinct – especially when compared with Tele bridge pickups.

That said, maybe detractors are more preoccupied with what Tele pickups are *not*, than what they are. And if you think all Tele neck pickups sound bad, we'd suggest you haven't heard a good one yet. Set close to the strings – but far enough away to avoid string pull and string contact – the best examples produce a surprisingly clear, warm and woody tone with a rounded transient attack.

It's worth remembering that most electric players were using hollow-bodied guitars when the Broadcaster was introduced, and that big jazzy tone is something Tele neck pickups can do extremely well. Check out Tim Lerch or Julian Lage's Blackguard Tele tones if you need convincing, because that's probably close to what Leo Fender was shooting for.

If you appreciate Strat neck pickup tones but think Teles are way cooler, you may feel inclined to modify your Telecaster by fitting a Strat pickup, rather than change guitars. Players have also been fitting humbuckers in the neck position since the late 50s, and it's an undeniably effective and practical move. For those who do try this, we suggest fitting a 500k volume potentiometer and wiring a 470k or 500k resistor between the

bridge pickup's hot connection and ground. You can do this on the switch itself and it will prevent the humbucker from sounding muddy with the stock 250k pot. The resistor ensures the bridge pickup 'sees' a nominal 250k so it doesn't sound too bright, and the middle position still sounds great.

Cover Versions

Before dropping a Strat pickup, humbucker, P-90, Goldfoil or Charlie Christian into your Telecaster, there are a couple of simple and affordable modifications you can try in order to improve a dull Tele neck pickup. Start by desoldering or snipping the little wire that connects the cover to negative leadout wire. The difference won't be dramatic, but it is audible. The downside here is a slight buzzing sound if you inadvertently touch the cover with your picking hand.

The metal that the cover is made from also makes a difference. To minimise treble roll-off, a thin nickel silver cover is preferable. Fender's thick brass covers can sound quite dull, so if your pickup has one, try fitting a nickel silver replacement instead. The cover can also be removed to open up the tone as much as possible. If that leaves exposed coils, get some pickup wrapping tape and cover the wire. While

that should protect the windings, if the pickup is set too close to the strings, the top and bottom E strings may get stuck under the top flat and damage your pickup so bear this in mind.

If you prefer the sound without the cover, try sourcing a plastic cover to replace the metal one. Fitting an open top cover will also eliminate the cover effect while protecting the coil, or you could even consider a replacement pickup wound with Formvar wire, such as the House Of Tone TS-42.

CBS Changes

Around 1964, Fender started using grey fibreboard for the bridge's bottom flats, and from around 1967, Telecaster pickup coils were potted in lacquer rather than wax, which can result in coils that are very solid outside and loose inside. If you play a Tele from this era with original pickups then you'll find that these units can sound very trebly and are prone to microphonic squeal. When used in combination with the 1 meg-ohm control pots that Fender adopted around the same time, the result can be challenging to the ear – a reminder that not all vintage Telecaster pickups were created equal. 

www.huwpriceguitar.com



Next Speaker, Please

Looking to enhance or tweak your tone? Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough grabs his tools and helps you switch out your speaker

So far we've talked about many different aspects of speakers and speaker cabs, so now it's time to get into the 'hands-on' stuff. This issue, I'll talk you through various aspects of changing a speaker in a combo and speaker cab. There are two main reasons for wanting to change a speaker: one is that the speaker is broken, and the second is to add a different flavour to your sound. Now, the first one can be tricky. Often a faulty speaker will just sound bad – weak, loss of low-end, little or no increase in volume as the amp volume is increased, and sometimes there's a bad smell (as well as other things). But these can also be signs of a faulty amp, so make sure you go to a qualified tech if you're in doubt.

If you're looking to change a speaker for tonal reasons it can be a bit of a minefield sifting through the sales pitches and internet advice. But remember, there are no rights or wrongs with speakers and often changing the speaker can be the missing link. For simplicity, I'll stick to talking about a single speaker, saving multiple-speaker situations for another month's article.

First, make sure the power rating is the same as or above that of the amp and (assuming the correct impedance speaker

was used in the first instance), you'll need to match the impedance of the replacement speaker with that of the original.

Now that we have a speaker with all the correct ratings, we're ready to get the tools out. Start by taking a few photos of the existing wiring, just to make sure everything goes back like for like (again, assuming it was correct in the first place). Next, place the cabinet or combo grille face down and remove the back panel(s). Usually these are wood screws and, although they can be done by hand, it's often easier (and safer) to use an electric drill driver. Before you remove the back panel, you may want to disconnect the jack socket (input) from its mounting plate. Combo speakers are usually connected to the amp with a cable comprising a jack input at one end and spade terminals at the other. You may also want to take the amp chassis from the case, although if you're careful, in a lot of cases you won't need to do this.

Now the back is off, you will be looking at the magnet side of the speaker. If the initial fault was a rattle in the cab, check to see if the speaker fixings are tight (or indeed missing). If so, tighten them up and this may solve the problem.

There are multiple ways to fix speakers in place but all involve either a fixed bolt and removable nut, a T-nut and machine screw or wood screw. Start by removing either the nut, machine screw or wood screws evenly around the speaker chassis (begin with half a turn on each fixing, working your way around the speaker). Remember, if the speaker has been in place a long time, fixings may seize a little. If extreme force is needed, this is often a signal to enlist the help of a professional since damage here can be quite hard to fix.

The speaker should now be ready to take out. Make sure to lift using the speaker chassis or magnet to avoid damaging the cone. We can now take the new speaker and reverse the process. Line the new speaker up with the existing T-nut holes, wood screw holes or fixed bolts, and replace the

"It can be a minefield sifting through sales pitches and internet advice – but there are no right or wrongs"



Lift the speaker out using the chassis or magnet to avoid damaging the cone

fixings. It's best to get things finger-tight (in place, but not tight) and then tighten a half-turn per fixing until, travelling in a circle, all four or eight fixings are tight. Be careful not to bend the speaker chassis by over-tightening. Reverse the additional steps, making sure all wiring is replaced in the correct location (in a 1x12, positive on the speaker will need to go to the tip of the jack connector) and replacing the back correctly. Now you should be ready to rock.

I'll finish with some tips to consider along the way. Make sure no screws or fittings are stuck to the speaker magnet, and always have a good-quality cable connecting the speaker to the jack, ensuring none of the cable is exposed. And finally, if needed, don't be scared to replace worn screws or fittings – just remember your amp may have metric or imperial sizes. 

www.zillacabs.com



"A faulty speaker will sound weak with loss of low-end and little or no increase in volume"



Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

This square-shouldered flat-top has been a Gibson staple since the early 60s

Gibson Hummingbird

The Hummingbird appeared in 1960 and is regarded as the first Martin-esque square-shouldered Gibson acoustic guitar (as opposed to the classic round-shouldered Jumbo design). But it wasn't the first square-shouldered dreadnought/D-style flat-top in production at the company's Kalamazoo factory. That honour goes to the Epiphone FT-110 Frontier manufactured from 1958. After the company was acquired in 1957, Gibson president Ted McCarty drew up a list of suggestions for Epiphone-branded instruments, and the "Flat-top Jumbo – Maple Back and Rim... Copy Martin D'nought size" Frontier he spoke of was one of them. The first Gibson-branded maple-bodied flat-top with square shoulders appeared in 1962 in the form of the Dove.

With fancy appointments – notably, their elaborately engraved pickguards – Doves and Hummingbirds were considered upmarket models and sat near the higher end of the flat-top price list. Although they shared similarities, such as body dimensions and double-parallelogram fretboard inlays, these ornately decorated acoustics fundamentally differed in construction.

Whereas the longer, 25½-inch scale length and maple body of a Dove produced a snappier, more strident tone, the shorter, 24¾-inch scale length and mahogany body of an early 60s Hummingbird had its own sound. Gibson attempted to describe it in their catalogue: "A fabulous new acoustical guitar – one of the finest ever made for voice accompaniment. The sound is big, and round, and full with the deep rumbling bass so prized by guitar players. There's

plenty of showmanship for the player in its wonderful resonant tone and carrying power, and in its striking beauty, too."

Notice how Gibson mentions the Hummingbird is for "voice accompaniment" in an effort to appeal to the maestros of the folk-boom era. The American folk music revival was in its heyday and Gibson was responding to demand. They shipped 156 Hummingbirds in 1960, followed by 595 and 503 in '61 and '62, respectively. In '63, sales tripled, and 1,364 sunbursts, along with 97 of the newly introduced natural finish guitars, were recorded as shipped. From that point forward, the Hummingbird remained a relatively popular pick from the Gibson catalogue and is one of a minority of models that has avoided discontinuation.

Far-reaching in its appeal and a staple of the Gibson catalogue, the Hummingbird still proves popular today

Hummingbirds have been spotted in the hands of many well-known performers over the years and have enjoyed high-profile exposure as an instrument of choice for some of the biggest names in music. To see and hear the Hummingbird in action, check out Jean-Luc Godard's 1968 Rolling Stones movie *Sympathy For The Devil*. In the film, Keith Richards and Mick Jagger can both be seen playing Hummingbirds while writing and recording at London's Olympic Studios. For another great example, watch Thom Yorke's live solo performance of *The Clock* from *The Henry Rollins Show*.

Far-reaching in its appeal and a staple of the Gibson catalogue throughout the decades, the Hummingbird still proves popular today. In fact, there are several iterations in Gibson's current lineup. These include the Modern series Hummingbird Standard and Hummingbird Studio Rosewood; the Original series Hummingbird Original; the Artist series Eric Church Hummingbird Dark; and the Custom Shop 1960 Hummingbird Fixed Bridge, Hummingbird Deluxe and Hummingbird Custom. 

The Evolution of the Gibson Hummingbird

1960

First shipped; 24¾" scale length; cherry sunburst finish

1962-1963

Some with Dove-style maple bodies and 25½" scale length

1963

Longer scale retained; natural finish optional

1965

Black-painted neck heel; narrower neck/nut; headstock angle reduced

1967-1968

Screw-on pickguards

1968

Change from top- to bottom-belly bridge

1969

Indian rosewood replaces Brazilian

1971

3-piece mahogany neck; double-x bracing; rectangular inlays; non-adjustable bridge

Mid-70s

3-piece maple neck; volute; serial number decal

1984

Made in Nashville; return to 1960s-style specs



This unusual screw-on pickguard was featured for around a year before returning to the regular glue-on 'guards



1968 Gibson Hummingbird

1. SERIAL NUMBER

Six digits ink-stamped onto orange oval soundhole label corresponding with six digits impressed into rear of headstock

2. HEADSTOCK

Shallow 14-degree angle; black-painted holly veneer with nitrocellulose clearcoat; Gibson logo and crown mother-of-pearl inlays

3. PLASTICS

Screw-on cellulose pickguard engraved with hummingbird, butterfly and flora; black truss-rod cover; six bridge pins

4. HARDWARE

Replacement tuners (gold-plated Kluson Deluxe with pearloid keystone buttons standard); below-belly rosewood bridge with adjustable rosewood saddle (ceramic saddle also standard)

5. BODY

Square shoulders; 15¹⁵/₁₆" wide; 4¹⁵/₁₆" deep; spruce top; mahogany back and sides; multiple-ply (b/w) top and back binding; multiple-ply (b/w) soundhole rings; cherry sunburst nitrocellulose finish

6. NECK

25¹/₂" scale length; one-piece mahogany; 14th fret body-join; single-bound 20-fret rosewood fingerboard with double-parallelgram mother-of-pearl inlays

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Shine On You Crazy Dorian

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank, Vox AC15 C1 and JHS AT

Difficulty ★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

FULL DISCLOSURE: my original intention was to play some Santana/Peter Green type licks demonstrating G Dorian (G A B $\flat$ C D E F G), but along the way it took on a far more Floyd-esque character. I guess a slow 12/8 blues in G minor can do that to a guitarist... but I think it still fulfils my original brief. The repeated G minor/C7 change in the backing track, plus the slow tempo allows an exploration of ideas that wouldn't be possible in a faster-moving piece with more chords – though experimentation such as this can inch us towards that, if that is your goal.

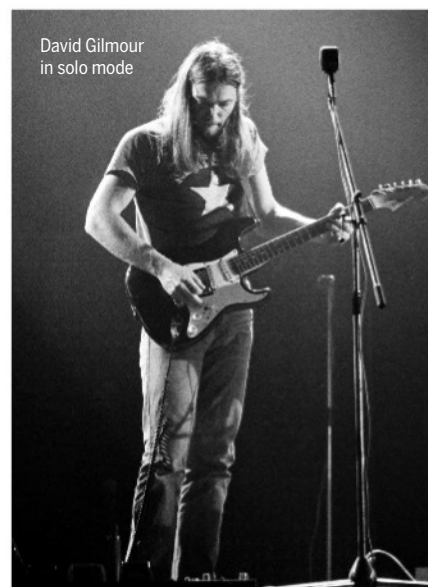
The obvious choice for most of us over a backing track like this is G minor pentatonic (G B $\flat$ C D F G). Comparing this to the G Dorian mentioned above, you'll see the only differences are the addition of A and E. So if we take for granted that any note from the minor pentatonic will work over this backing (and we can), we can then concentrate on

some of the possibilities the extra notes present. Playing an A over the G minor chord implies a Gmin9, which is potentially quite a Santana vibe. Over the C7, the relationship changes, as you are now playing a 6th; this works great for a soaring bend from G.

Perhaps a good first step is to play through the scale based around the G minor pentatonic shape 1, observing where the extra notes occur. Obviously, it will take time to assimilate this into different positions on the fretboard, but that is just nature taking its course. Have a look at the example solo where I've used several ideas that an awareness of the Dorian mode can suggest. Hope you enjoy and see you next time! **G**



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



David Gilmour in solo mode

PHOTO BY DAVID WARNER ELLIS/GETTY IMAGES

Example 1

SETTING UP WITH A G MINOR PENTATONIC PHRASE in bar 1, beat 1 of bar 2 is where we first hear the Dorian influence coming in. Landing squarely on an E implies a Gmin6, which I continue to toy with until bar 3. Here, we change to C7 and, as you'll see, I've stayed pretty pentatonic, using the same shape and scale position, but watch out for the sneaky A going into bar 4!

The musical notation for Example 1 is presented in two systems. The first system covers bars 1 and 2, and the second system covers bars 3 and 4. The guitar line is written on a single staff with a key signature of one flat and a 12/8 time signature. The bass line is written on a five-line staff with a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, bends (PB), and fret numbers. The guitar line starts with a G minor pentatonic phrase in bar 1, followed by a Dorian influence in bar 2, and continues with a C7 chord in bar 3. The bass line provides a steady accompaniment with a mix of single notes and chords. The notation is detailed, showing specific fret numbers and bends for the guitar line, and chord symbols and note values for the bass line.

Example 2

I'M LEADING INTO THIS PHRASE with an idea repeated from the end of Example 1 but played an octave higher. We're drifting into shape 2 of the G minor pentatonic here, though halfway through the first full bar, note the bend from G to A, implying a Gmin9. This holds over into the next bar where a pull-off down to E gives us a minor 6th – very Dorian! At the change to C7, I realise that a short slide means there is a C7 arpeggio, which exists with shape 3 of the G minor pentatonic once you've added an E...

Example 3

CLEARLY, THE C7 ARPEGGIO SPURRED ME ON to take things further. Leading into this example is a Gmin6 arpeggio (like a Gmin7 but using E, instead of F), which ends with a slide up to E for beat 1 of the first full bar. Now is a good time to back off a bit with a descending phrase. This is a conscious attempt to demonstrate some Dorian tones, before a brief arpeggio/shape 3 blues lick and a shift that highlights E being the minor 6th of G minor and the major 3rd of C7!

Example 4

ON A WHIM, I'VE CHANGED TO THE BRIDGE PICKUP and dug in – Gilmour's playing on *Shine On...* can be quite aggressive. Having surrendered to that idea, I wanted to give that a go, too! You'll recognise that I've started again at G minor pentatonic shape 1, working up through shapes 2 and 3. This is pure pentatonic, with no Dorian content until I switch back to the neck pickup for the final phrase, where there is briefly an A before resolving to the final G.

The musical notation for Example 4 consists of two systems of guitar tablature and standard notation. The first system is labeled 'Bridge pickup' and the second 'Neck pickup'. Both systems show a G minor pentatonic scale in 12/8 time, with various fret numbers and techniques like bends and vibrato indicated.

Bridge pickup system:

- Chords: C7, Gm
- Techniques: w/bar, BU, PB 5, BD, 1/4
- Fret numbers: 5, 3, 5, 5 (7), 3, 6, 5 (7), 3, (6) (5), 3, 5, 5, 3, 3/5, 3, 5, 5, 3, 5/7, 6, 8, 11, 8, 10

Neck pickup system:

- Chords: C7
- Techniques: w/bar, BU, BD, w/bar
- Fret numbers: 11 (13), 11, 8, 11, 10 (11), (10), 8, 10

Hear It Here

PINK FLOYD

WISH YOU WERE HERE



RATHER than suggesting three different tracks, I'm going to highlight David Gilmour's three solos on *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* (Parts 1-5).

At 2:09 the first solo is very much G minor pentatonic (as are all three), but you will spot A creeping in where the chords change to D minor then C minor. At 5:11, the second solo features a few variations from the pentatonic but particularly more A, implying Gmin9 with the arpeggio and organ chords playing a minor 6th (which features E). Finally, the solo at 7:33 is a great advert for the MXR Phase 90.

SANTANA

ULTIMATE SANTANA



Rather than zone in on any one of Santana's excellent albums, I wanted to cherry pick where his use of Dorian is most conspicuous. *Black Magic Woman* takes a Dorian approach on the organ intro and this carries through to the guitar solos and embellishments, too; watch for the arpeggio phrase he uses several times when changing from D minor to G minor. *Oye Como Va* is also particularly relevant, using an Aminor/D7 progression very similar to the example solo. Finally, check out *Evil Ways* using the chords G minor and C major.

LED ZEPPELIN

THE COMPLETE STUDIO ALBUMS



Jimmy Page can always be relied on to go to unexpected places, and on Zeppelin's first album, his acoustic-playing on *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You* does this throughout – though particularly relevant is his overdubbed Dorian phrasing during the breakdown before the last chorus. Elsewhere, check out his solos in *Heartbreaker* from *Led Zeppelin II*, *Since I've Been Loving You* from *Led Zeppelin III* and *No Quarter* from *Houses Of The Holy* for some nice Dorian moments, frequently but not always in the context of the pentatonic.

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