

'58 FLYING V

HANDS ON WITH AN ICONIC GIBSON



JTM STUDIO

1960s MARSHALL CLASSIC IS REBORN



Guitarist

Issue 502

SEPTEMBER 2023

Epiphone®

150TH ANNIVERSARY

THE PLAYERS

JARED JAMES NICHOLS
MATTEO MANCUSO
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Time Changes Everything



This month's celebration of a century-and-a-half of Epiphone guitars really shows the seismic changes that can happen to guitar brands as the decades fly by. Epiphone started as Gibson's keenest competitor, before being bought by Gibson (or, rather, parent company CMI) and subsequently marketed as Kalamazoo's most upmarket product line, outshining Gibson's own guitars in both cachet and price tag – something that's often forgotten today. Then, in a complete about-face, Epiphone became a Japanese-built budget brand before settling into a long period of being known as a maker of decent, affordable copies of classic Gibson designs. Today, the pendulum seems to be swinging back the other way, thanks to small but tangible improvements in quality throughout the Epiphone line and a stronger, more confident sense of its own identity and heritage. But old habits – and attitudes – die hard...

When we reviewed two of Epiphone's new top-tier, US-built guitars, recently (a USA Casino and a lovely Frontier dreadnought built in Bozeman, Montana), some of the viewers of our YouTube video demo asked why anyone would pay Gibson prices for an Epiphone – seemingly not realising that Epiphone was merely reclaiming a shard of its own history as a premium US maker.

So what will it take to erase ingrained perceptions of Epiphone as a budget brand? While the current US-made Epis are great, it's the uptick in the quality of the more affordable 'Inspired By Gibson' guitars made overseas that will do most to persuade players to look at Epiphone in a new light. Epiphone is never quite going to be to Gibson what Squier is to Fender – the relationship is a little more complicated than that – but for years it has been regarded as such by consumers. But Epiphone started as a company with its own distinct verve and mojo, and nobody will complain if the brand continues on its current trajectory towards becoming so again. Enjoy the issue and see you next month.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

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Born To Be Fylde
 We look back at five decades of top-notch luthiery from one of Britain's most revered and idiosyncratic acoustic makers on **p104**

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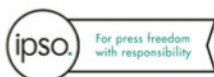
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A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt, is seated and playing a white PRS Fiore electric guitar. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The background is dark and moody, with some light reflecting off the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

Fiore



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MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

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- Mark Lettieri

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Neil Godwin





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FIRST PLAY



**MARSHALL STUDIO
JTM HEAD**
£1,075

WHAT IS IT? Lower-powered, more portable version of the classic JTM45 MkII

Back To The Source

Marshall adds another amp to its popular Studio collection, alongside compact recreations of classic designs such as the 25/50 Silver Jubilee, JCM800 and 1959SLP

Words Nick Guppy Photography Phil Barker

While there will always be a place for the traditional 100-watt head and 4x12 stack, those places have become more scarce in recent years. At the professional end of the market, advances in digital modelling, PA systems and in-ear monitoring have made it possible for guitarists to leave their treasured valve amps at home and take advantage of the reliability and convenience of digital solutions – although for many players the sound and feel of valves remains an essential part of their rig. For those who want the proper valve Marshall experience in a more compact and neighbour-friendly package, the company's Studio amplifiers have proved to be a popular choice. Now there's a new and long-anticipated addition to the range: the Studio JTM.

Like Marshall's other Studio amplifiers, the Studio JTM is a lower-powered and more portable version of a full-sized classic Marshall head, in this case the original Hanwell-manufactured JTM45 MkII, which was largely responsible for shaping the sounds of the mid-60s British blues-rock movement and everything that followed.

The cosmetics are spot on, featuring a silver control panel, non-offset black and fawn vinyl-covered plywood sleeve, thin dark gold piping and a reproduction of the 'coffin badge' nameplate (so-called because it was sourced from a funeral casket hardware supplier), used on early products made prior to 1965.

Inside the steel chassis, most of the JTM's electronics sit on a large high-quality printed circuit board, including the bases for its three 12AX7s and two 5881 power valves. Smaller boards support the front- and rear-panel components, with neat wiring and Molex connectors joining everything together. Most of the weight saving comes from smaller transformers, which are around half the size of the higher-powered originals.

The JTM's front panel features include two pairs of high- and low-gain input jack sockets feeding separate Normal and High Treble Loudness controls, and a shared EQ with knobs for Presence, Bass, Middle and Treble. The preamp channels are permanently on and can't be footswitched, but they can be jumpered using a short

1. The High Treble and Normal Loudness controls can be used separately, but jumpering the input jacks with a short patch lead lets you use both at the same time for a wider tonal range and a little extra gain

patch lead to connect the jack sockets. In this mode, both volume knobs are active and act as the amp's primary tone controls, besides adding a little more gain. The Standby switch is now a three-way affair, delivering a full 20 watts of power in the High position and a more manageable five watts in the Low position, with standby in the centre.

Those classic blues/rock tones of the late 60s are reproduced with unerring accuracy, especially partnered with a Les Paul

2. Early Marshalls with this nameplate have become known as 'coffin badge' models because the dark red enamel-filled badge was sourced from a funeral casket hardware supplier. Following Marshall's move to its first factory in Hayes, the cosmetics were updated in 1965 to the more familiar black vinyl and gold 'Plexi' control panel, with the now iconic script logo

3. A rear panel DI output jack is included with speaker emulation for direct connection to your audio interface or console. There's no built-in dummy load, however, so the speaker needs to remain connected at all times

4. The series effects loop on the rear panel is the ideal place to patch in your delay, modulation or reverb effects, with a Bypass switch if you don't want to use it. It's a fixed level loop and should work okay with most stompbox-type effects

Around the back there are a few modern extras, including a series effects loop with a Bypass switch and a speaker-emulated line out. There's also a full complement of speaker output jacks to handle 16, eight and four-ohm loads. While the Studio JTM looks authentically vintage, under the skin it's a typical modern Marshall product, built to a very high standard and more than capable of handling pro touring use. The early cosmetic styling may not be as instantly recognisable as the later black/gold 'Plexi' livery and script logo. However, credibility with Marshall cognoscenti will definitely be assured.

Feel & Sounds

The Studio JTM warms up smoothly and quietly with practically zero hiss or hum. The two preamplifier channels are permanently on, so you simply plug into whichever one sounds best, although the third option of joining both channels with a short patch lead between the unused input jack sockets provides the most versatile solution. Most ears will hear the High Treble input as slightly too sharp and the Normal input as a little too warm, but with both channels on you can quickly



find an ideal balance by blending the two volume controls and then fine-tuning with the JTM's passive EQ.

As most people know, the original Marshall JTM45 was inspired by Fender's Tweed-era 4x10 Bassman, which was also powered by a pair of 5881 valves. The 5881 was developed by Tung-Sol Electric as a high-quality ruggedised version of the 6L6GB and proved ideal for guitar amp use. Early JTM45 models used the same

5. The Studio JTM's three-way standby switch has two On options, offering a choice of 20 or five watts for home or studio use, with Standby in the centre



MARSHALL STUDIO JTM HEAD

PRICE: £1,075

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All valve pre and power amp
VALVES: 3x 12AX7 preamp, 2x 5881 power amp

OUTPUT: 20W RMS into 16 or 8 ohms, switchable to 5W

DIMENSIONS: 500 (w) x 230 (d) x 240mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 9.5/21

CABINET: Plywood

CHANNELS: 2, non-switching

CONTROLS: Normal Loudness, High Treble Loudness, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence

FOOTSWITCH: None

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Speaker-emulated line out, fixed level series effects loop with defeat switch, High/Low power switching (20/5 watts)

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Studio JTM is also available as a 1x12 combo (£1,279), with a matching 1x12 cab (£565) and a vertical slanted 2x12 cab (£765), both loaded with the Celestion G12M-65 Creamback

Marshall Amplification

01908 375411

www.marshall.com



9/10

PROS Compact and portable; nearly as loud as the JTM45 and doesn't sacrifice any tone; great for classic Brit blues/rock when cranked; ideal pedal platform when clean; useful series loop

CONS Non-master volume design means you have to crank it up; there's a DI recording output with speaker emulation but no dummy load, so the speaker has to stay connected; no remote footswitching option

valve, but 5881s weren't readily available in 1960s Europe, so Marshall experimented with alternatives, changing to M-OV's KT66 for a short time before finally settling on the EL34.

The Studio JTM has a different feel to the 'Plexi' version with a warmer and less aggressive vibe that's partly down to the 5881's frequency response and power curves. Those classic blues/rock tones of the late 60s are reproduced with unerring accuracy, especially when the amp is partnered with a Les Paul. Add treble boost or fuzz between the guitar and amp, and the results are even more convincing.

Used on the 20-watt setting, there's plenty of power and headroom to handle the average unmic'd pub gig, although no master volume control means you have to wind up the loudness to experience the JTM's rich overdrive character, or add a suitable distortion pedal. Switching down to the five-watt setting makes it easier to drive the JTM into clipping while retaining plenty of dynamic punch. Alternatively, cleaner settings emphasise the 5881's smooth frequency response and clarity, making the Studio JTM a great pedal platform, with the advantage of a series

loop to bring the best out of reverb, delay and modulation effects.

The speaker-emulated DI works well, offering a consistency that's difficult to achieve with microphones and sending a clean low noise signal into your console. However, with no dummy load you need to keep the JTM connected to a speaker cabinet, so there's no easy silent recording option for late-night home users.

Verdict

Marshall's Studio JTM is an essential addition to the Studio series, nailing the classic British blues/rock sound while satisfying the trending demand for lighter and more portable amplification. Visually, the Studio JTM looks the part, too, especially when teamed with a matching 1x12 or 2x12 extension cab, and at just under 10kg it's an easy single-handed lift, unlike its 1960s ancestors.

For a British-built Marshall, it's fairly priced and we reckon it's good value for money compared to the competition, offering classic tones and cool vintage looks to match. It's great to see Marshall back in these pages and we're sure there's more to come. Stay tuned! **G**

FIRST PLAY



FRET-KING ECLAT
CUSTOM PAUL ROSE
SIGNATURE MODEL
£899

WHAT IS IT? Signature Goldtop version of Fret-King's innovative and long-running take on the single-cut, named after a car

Road Runner

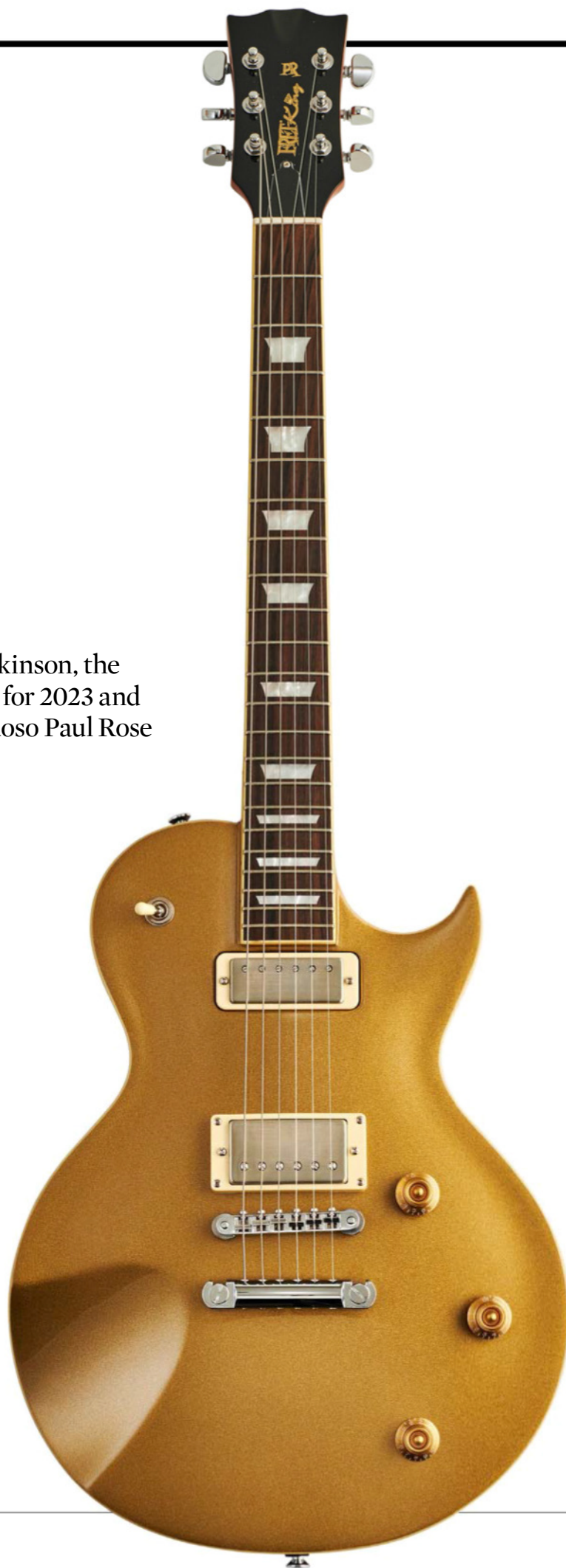
Originally designed by Trev Wilkinson, the Eclat single-cut gets a makeover for 2023 and a signature tie-up with Brit virtuoso Paul Rose

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

In one of those ‘where the heck does time go?’ moments, we realise that next year it will be the 30th anniversary of Fret-King’s launch at the 1994 NAMM Show. In fact, 30 years ago the original designer, Trev Wilkinson – who sold the brand to JHS in 2007 but still provides the pickups here – was putting his ideas into practice as he prepared for that launch.

Fret-King has had quite a history since then. We’ve seen models made in the UK, Europe, Korea and most recently India where the latest 2023 collection is made, and, from this writer’s perspective at least, relative affordability has always been key to the range, which playfully adapts the classics – the epitome of inspired-by, not copycat design. Back in issue 491 we took a look at one of our favourite Fret-King designs, the Elise, alongside another stalwart the Country Squire. Now it’s time to reacquaint ourselves with the long-running Eclat, which also introduces a tie-up with UK guitarist Paul Rose.

While its inspiration is obvious, there are plenty of tweaks. Take the elegant curved line from the upper shoulder into the treble







1. This un-logo'd Wilkinson Focusfield appears to be a pretty classic mini-humbucker, which is mounted just like those on Gibson's original Les Paul Deluxe

cutaway with its thinned horn, for example, and the oh-so-classic headstock that deviates from Gibson outline with a single domed top and that lightly dished indent. That feature is amplified on the body where a concave scoop is cut out in the forearm area of the body, through the maple top and into the mahogany back wood. To our eyes, that can look a little odd in a sunburst finish, for example, but here the sparkly Goldtop finish – which is exclusive to this signature

Daring to be different isn't easy in today's lower-priced market, but this is a rather good single-cut for the quality it presents

model – almost enhances the curved lines, even though the edge binding probably causes a few headaches in the factory! But the fit and finish are very good overall. Yes, the actual finish is rather high-gloss poly standard, but you can't knock the tidy execution, not least where the binding and slight edge of the Goldtop finish is fitted really smartly into the treble cutaway.

While the hardware, not to mention the fingerboard inlays, all shout someone else's brand, unlike the non-signature Eclat custom where we get two Focusfield mini-humbuckers, here the bridge pickup is a



2. Via a push-push switch, the volume control doubles as a mute/kill switch. The middle tone control has a push-push out-of-phase switch. The lower control is Wilkinson's Varicoil to single coil Varicoil control

full-size humbucker. Plus, instead of the classic four-control layout, we get three controls with typical twists. The volume closest to the bridge is actually a push-push switched pot that introduces a kill-switch mute when pushed up (we'll get to that later); the lower control is Wilkinson's Varicoil, which moves both humbuckers from full-humbucking to single coil. Last but not least, the middle-placed tone control also has a push-push switch that introduces an out-of-phase option when both pickups are selected from the shoulder-placed three-way toggle switch.

UNDER THE HOOD

There's plenty going on here. Let's take a look...

There's a sizeable (unshielded) rear cavity for the three controls, which are pretty simple.

That lower Varicoil is a double-ganged 250kohms pot; the volume and tone are 500k Alpha Korea push-push pots, the volume with a linear 'B' taper, the tone with a logarithmic (audio) 'A' taper. The Mylar capacitor is a 223J code, .022µf.

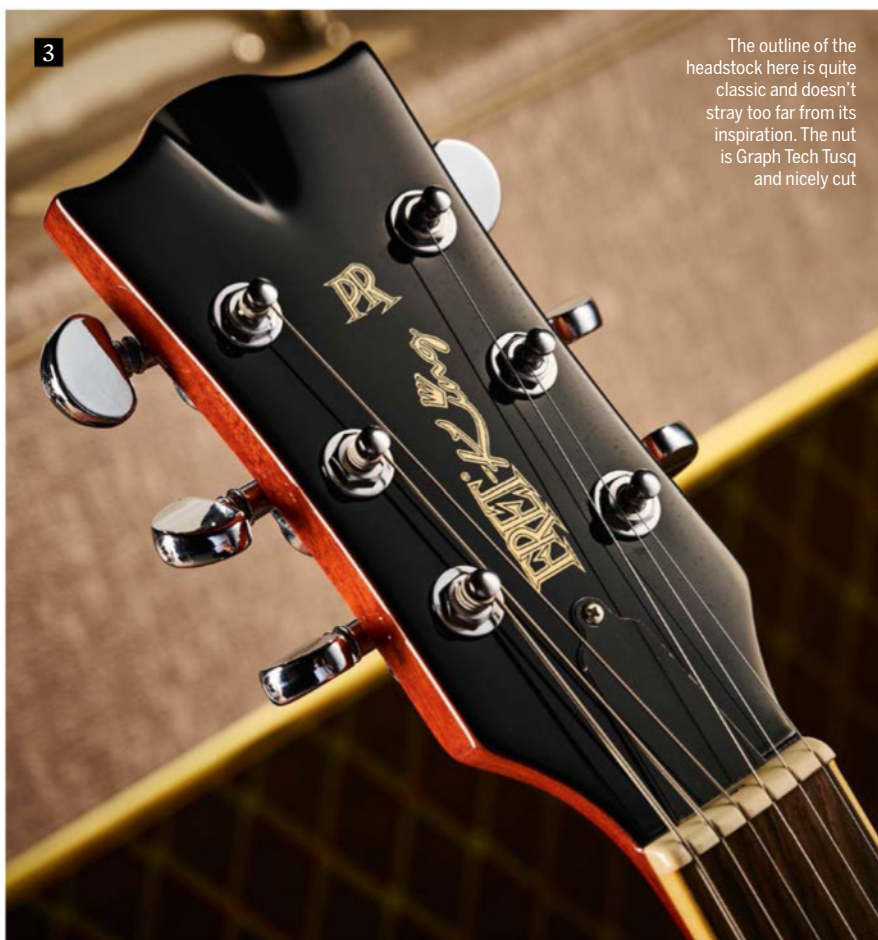
Using a multimeter across the output with the bridge pickup selected and the volume full up, you can read the DCR, which measures 8.25kohms. Moving the Varicoil down to 5, it's barely dropped to 8.19k, and even on 2 it still reads 7.95k. It's between 1 and ½ on the control that it drops to 4.41k and, fully clockwise on 0, it's 4.21k. This far-from-gradual transition from dual to single coil backs up what we hear.

The Fifty-Five humbucker here is much more classic sounding than the hotter 14.2k version that was (wrongly?) fitted on the Elise Custom we looked at back in issue 491, and like the Focusfield it uses an Alnico V magnet and 42-gauge wire (type unspecified). Both pickups have "potted coils", too, says Fret-King. There's no pickup ID on the neck mini-humbucker and just 'Wilkinson' engraved into the nickel-silver baseplate of the Fifty-Five. That neck mini-humbucker is mounted Les Paul Deluxe style, but, as supplied, it was very loose; we added some firm foam underneath.



This oversized cavity holds the three dual-function controls

3



The outline of the headstock here is quite classic and doesn't stray too far from its inspiration. The nut is Graph Tech Tusq and nicely cut

Feel & Sounds

Despite the described changes to the recipe, the Eclat remains a chunky single-cut with an overall body depth of 60mm and a weight of 4.74kg (10.43lb); in other words, it's heavy for the style. Played seated or high on a strap, you do notice the additional comfort that the forearm scoop brings. Obviously, strapped low down and all rock 'n' roll, it won't impact on the feel at all.

The neck profile certainly doesn't let the side down. It's a good relaxed C that feels like a half-way house between Gibson's larger 50s profile and the thinner 60s SlimTaper, measuring 21.3mm at the 1st fret and 23.3mm by the 12th, with a 44.5mm nut width (although string spacing of only 34.5mm). There's little to moan about with the setup or fretwork, not least the incurve to the fingerboard binding. As supplied, the string height was a little low on the bass side for our taste, but that's easily fixed by the thumbwheel height adjustment for the tune-o-matic-style bridge.

The core humbucking sounds here are very good. We have a soft spot for this pickup combination where the lighter-sounding mini-humbucker is very clean and unmuddy, while the bridge has more thickness and kick. It's classic blues/rock, but there's much more scope here; it's a very well-balanced set. The tone control is good, too. In that full-off it's more 'woman'



Along with the finish, it's this full size Wilkinson Fifty-Five humbucker that differentiates this signature model from the standard Eclat Custom, which has two mini-humbuckers

The pickups are classic blues/rock, but there's much more scope here; it's a very well-balanced set

tone than muffled tone, while the master volume creates a fast drive.

And while many of us might just enjoy these sounds, the three controls here all have a dual function. Push down on that volume knob and it mutes your sound. You can achieve a degree of staccato effect by very lightly pushing on the knob so it pulls in the signal, but it's all too easy to latch the switch so you're back to full-on. The tone control has the same push switch, but with both pickups selected they're fully out-of-phase, which produces a very thin

and nasally sound with a lower output. Unlike a guitar with *two* volumes, you can't offset the phase to produce that more Peter Green-like fullness but with just a touch of the nasally out-of-phase character. That said, in humbucker mode and rolling back the tone, it gets pretty close.

Finally, with the Varicoil control fully anti-clockwise, it voices the humbucking mode of each pickup. The idea is as you turn it down, the sound moves to single coil, but in reality there's a little sweet spot right at the lower end of the travel where you hear the transition. It's hardly a gradual sweep, something that's backed up by our multimeter. But the single-coil voices, the screw coils, are perfectly usable, expanding the guitar's considerable range.

Verdict

Daring to be different isn't easy in the cut-and-thrust of today's lower-priced market. Overall, although it's far from lightweight, this is a rather good and well-priced single-cut for the quality it presents – it's a good player and very well detailed in terms of its construction, detail and setup. But the polarising feature remains that forearm scoop, which, while practical for some, may just look too far from classic for most. Then, while the core sounds here are very good, we're not sure that the dual functions are quite as useful as they might appear on paper. To be honest, though, wiring changes are simple and the signature artist is happy. All good. In a world of copycat designs, this is something a little different with a core sound that is pretty impressive. **G**



FRET-KING ECLAT CUSTOM PAUL ROSE SIGNATURE

PRICE: £899 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: India

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: 2-piece, centre-joined mahogany with carved maple cap

NECK: 1 piece mahogany, 'soft C' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian rosewood, trapezoid pearloid inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge, stud tailpiece, Grover 102C enclosed tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: Wilkinson Focusfield mini-humbucker (neck) and Fifty-Five humbucker (bridge), master volume (w/ push-push kill switch), master tone (w/ push-push out-of-phase switch), Varicoil

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.74/10.43

RANGE OPTIONS: The slab-bodied all-mahogany Eclat Standard (£779) features dual Soapstack humbucking pickups, wrapover bridge plus kill switch. The non-signature Eclat Custom (£829) features dual Focusfield mini-humbuckers and the same wiring as the Paul Rose

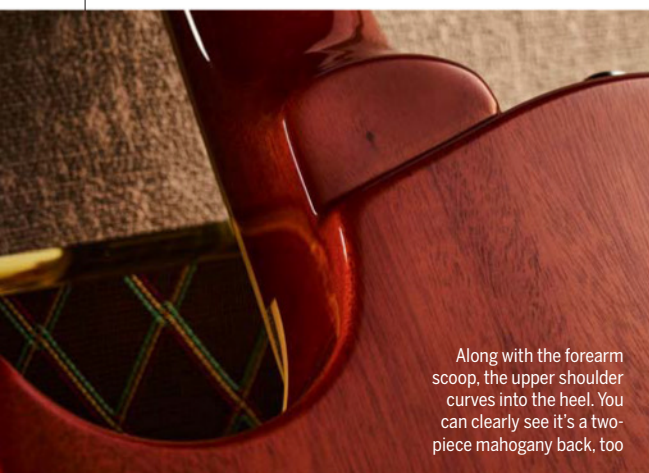
LEFT-HANDERS: Not listed

FINISHES: Goldtop with natural back and sides (as reviewed) – gloss polyester

8/10

PROS Nice build with very detailed features; good hardware and pickup choice; a wide range of mostly good, quite classic sounds

CONS The push-push switching options might not be useful for everyone; the Varicoil is far from gradual; it's a heavy single-cut



Along with the forearm scoop, the upper shoulder curves into the heel. You can clearly see it's a two-piece mahogany back, too

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FIRST PLAY



**EVH 5150 ICONIC
15W 1X10 COMBO**
£639

WHAT IS IT? A portable, valve-powered 15-watt 1x10 combo with footswitchable Clean and Lead channels



Modern Icon

EVH adds a compact newcomer to the affordable Iconic series with this 15-watt 1x10 combo

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis

1. The cab is available in black or ivory vinyl, with an easy-to-read brushed aluminium control panel. Inside, a special baffle arrangement maximises the loudspeaker's low-end response, creating the illusion that you're playing a much bigger rig
2. A pair of 12AX7 preamp valves and a single 6L6 power valve add plenty of authentic valve overdrive effects, with the benefit of improved control and consistency from the hybrid solid-state preamp
3. The Iconic's Clean and Lead channels have independent boost functions called Overdrive and Burn. You can change channels either from a button switch on the control panel, or a single-button footswitch that plugs into a socket on the rear panel
4. The DI/headphones jack features analogue speaker emulation, based on the 5150 4x12. It's a clean, low-noise output, great for live and recording console hook-up. Plugging into this socket mutes the power amp and loudspeaker, for silent recording/practice

Edie Van Halen's search for sonic perfection drove him to experiment with everything in his rig, from the fabled 'Frankenstein' guitars to his hot-rodged Marshall heads, generating countless myths and speculation about how to get 'that tone'. His modded instruments eventually coalesced into the EVH brand, including the 5150 range of amplifiers, which proved so popular in the modern rock genre that they've become an industry standard. Now, under Fender's wing, the 5150 range was recently expanded to include the affordable Iconic series, to which EVH has just added this new 15-watt 1x10 combo.

Designed by amp guru James Brown, the Iconic 1x10's footswitchable Clean and Lead channels have boost functions, respectively called Overdrive and Burn, that are accessed from small push-button switches, with a third switch to change channels. An LED channel indicator glows green for Clean/Overdrive and red for Lead/Burn. The brushed aluminium control panel has two pairs of gain and master volume chickenhead knobs, feeding a shared three-band EQ augmented with Presence and Resonance knobs to tune the output stage's response. There's also a level control for the Iconic's digital reverb. Connection options include a series effects loop, speaker-emulated headphone/DI out and aux in jacks, together with an extension speaker socket and a handy quarter power switch. Plugging into the DI jack mutes the power amp and speaker for silent practice or recording.

In use, the Iconic 1x10 delivers all the 5150 tones we've come to know and love, from warm high-headroom cleans and fat touch-sensitive crunch to those huge, almost out of control lead sounds that Van Halen made his own, with endless edge of the pick harmonics and so much gain you can get strings to feed back at conversation volume levels. The Resonance control is key to dialling in the Iconic's low-end response and making this small combo sound much bigger than it is, while the analogue speaker-emulated DI does a great job of squeezing all that tone into a console for recording or live use. The Iconic's digital spring reverb is a minor disappointment; we'd have gone for a warmer hall model.

While it may not be the lightest and most compact 1x10 amp out there, the Iconic's huge tone more than makes up for it. Overall, EVH's new Iconic 1x10 combo is a worthy addition to the 5150 range, producing all the sounds that Van Halen fans chase after at a very affordable price. **G**



EVH 5150 ICONIC 15W 1X10 COMBO

PRICE: £639

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Hybrid valve/solid-state preamp, single-ended Class A power amp

VALVES: 2x 12AX7 preamp, 1x 6L6 power amp

OUTPUT: 15W RMS

DIMENSIONS: 500 (w) x 260 (d) x 470mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 17.3/38.2

CABINET: MDF with ply baffle

CHANNELS: 2

CONTROLS: Channel 1 Gain, Channel 2 Gain, Low, Mid, High, Channel 1 master volume, Channel 2 master volume, global Reverb, Resonance and Presence. Switches for Clean/Overdrive and Lead/Burn boost functions

FOOTSWITCH: Single-button switch (supplied) toggles channels

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Digital reverb, series effects loop, DI/headphones out with analog speaker emulation, aux in, ¼ power output switch, extension cabinet jack with impedance switch

OPTIONS: Available in black or ivory vinyl

RANGE OPTIONS: Other Iconic combos include a 40W 1x12 (£799) and a 60W 2x12 (£969)

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01342 331700

www.evhgear.com



PROS Relatively compact and portable; does a good impression of a full 4x12 stack; excellent speaker; clever baffle design; all the great Van Halen sounds

CONS Digital spring reverb model is very pingy and somewhat disappointing – we'd prefer a warm hall model for more authentic stadium tone



FIRST PLAY



**ELECTRO-HARMONIX
SLAP-BACK ECHO**
£79

WHAT IS IT? An analogue pedal reissue for short delays and boosts



Slap Happy

Electro-Harmonix resurrects a rare pedal from 1978 and puts it into a modern, 'board-friendly format

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. With unity gain at the knob's zero position, there's 20dB of gain to be dialled in here to boost your amp's input
2. The Blend knob brings in the echo and runs from a totally dry signal that's useful if you just want to use the pedal as a boost, through to a fully wet echo-only sound
3. This switch gives you three different delay times (100ms, 65ms and 45ms), from true slapback to more of a tone thickener

Our last issue saw us review the Electro-Harmonix Lizard Queen, a reimagining of a pedal the company had never actually made in its 1970s prime. Here, however, we have a revamped version of a pedal that the company *did* make, back in 1978, but in such small quantities that it has become an expensive collector's item. This new 2023 version takes the original ethos of the Slap-Back Echo and puts it in a pedalboard-friendly, pico-size enclosure with modern accoutrements such as a status LED, nine-volt power supply and true bypass.

While ostensibly what you're getting here is an all-analogue (BBD) delay pedal that specialises in short delays with a single repeat, you also have something that can boost your signal to a goodly degree as there's 20dB of it available from the Gain knob. This controls the input signal before the echo input so can be combined with the echo, but should you wish to use it purely as a boost, you can set the Blend knob (which dials in the sound of the repeat all the way to fully wet) to zero for a completely dry sound. This is not a transparent boost: when kicked in, there's a thickening effect, fattening up the lower midrange while keeping the top-end intact.

As for the delay, a toggle switch calls up three different delay times – 100ms, 65ms and 45ms. It's the 100ms setting that offers the true slapback that's instantly recognisable as *the* rockabilly guitar sound. Set a blend that sits the echo just right with your dry guitar and get rocking, especially with a bit of palm-muting to bring out the rhythmic aspect. The other two delay times offer a different vibe. At 65ms, the delay gives you a nice degree of ambience without the obvious 'extra' note of the 100ms setting, while the 45ms, with a lower setting on the Blend knob, is a great thickener and particularly effective with some boost also dialled in.

Verdict

With plenty of flexibility from the various combinations of boost and echo, the Slap-Back Echo is a practical boost and fatterer, but it's also a no-brainer if you want instant vintage rock 'n' roll slap without messing with delay times, and is something you can stick on your pedalboard to free up your standard delay pedal from slapback duties. **G**



ELECTRO-HARMONIX SLAP-BACK ECHO

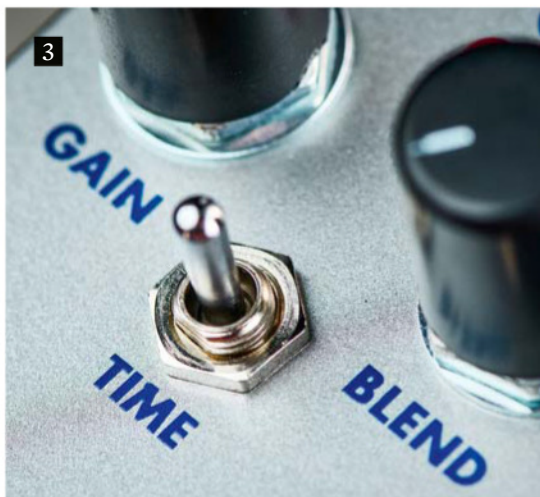
PRICE: £79
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, 3x set delay times: 100ms, 65ms & 45ms
CONTROLS: Gain, Blend, Time switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 15mA
DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 92 (d) x 45mm (h)

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com



PROS Very compact; substantial boost available; instant slapback sound; sound thickening qualities

CONS A knob for variable delay time (rather than toggle-switched) would have been more flexible



THE RIVALS

For all of these, you'd need a bit more money to spend: The Milkman (£175) from JHS is described as a "perfect combo of slap delay and clean boost". There are separate footswitches for each and the delay (up to 250ms) is controlled by Mix, Repeat and EQ knobs. The USP of the Thermion Outlaw (£179) is boosted delay for solos and you get up to 500ms of delay. With no boost but plenty of slap capability, the Keeley Memphis Sun (£169) is said to be designed for those studio sounds of the 1950s and described as a Lo-Fi Reverb, Echo and Double-Tracker.



Thermion Outlaw's solo-boosting delay helps you cut through a mix

FIRST PLAY



**WALRUS AUDIO CANVAS
PASSIVE RE-AMP**
£149

.....
WHAT IS IT? A box that
converts line-level signals
so they can be fed naturally
into pedals or amps



Track Mate

It's not a pedal, but the latest from Walrus Audio can still help change the sound of your guitar

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. You can send signal into the box through either of these balanced line-level inputs – XLR and standard jack are both available to match your cables
2. The HPF (High Pass Filter) switch on the side of the unit can be engaged if you'd like to reduce the low-end. It offers a gentle roll-off below 200Hz
3. The Mute switch mutes the sound at the output, letting you easily turn it off while adjusting mics or adding pedals and without having to turn off track playback at your DAW

Walrus Audio is well-known for its pedals, but the company also has a small line of related accessories that includes the Canvas series. Besides the two Line Isolator/Direct Injection boxes already available, there's now a third unit that's dedicated to reamping. Using a custom-wound transformer to do the necessary impedance conversion, the Canvas Passive Re-Amp is designed to take line-level signals and optimise them so that they can be fed directly into pedals or amps.

You can feed your line level signal via either a balanced XLR input or a balanced jack. It's sent out at the correct impedance for your pedal and/or amp rig with a Volume knob to control the signal level. Besides these, there's an array of switches for taking care of some basic tasks if needed, such as lifting the ground to reduce hum or inverting the phase. There's also a high-pass filter to roll-off any unwanted rumble bottom-end, and a switch to mute the output.

The most common use of the unit would be in changing the sound of any recorded guitar tracks. While recording the exact amplified guitar sound you think you might need for a song, it's good practice to simultaneously record a second track of dry guitar to keep your sonic options open at the mix. Alternatively, you could simply record a single dry track, that's possibly monitored through an amp-sim plug-in, with the intention of creating the final definitive sound later.

While plug-ins such as IK's AmpliTube and others could be applied to that dry track, this box gives you a natural alternative by letting you send it through your pedals, amp or both to be recorded onto another track in your DAW. Bear in mind that the process also works for *any* recorded tracks, so if you'd like to put drums, bass, keyboards or voice through your pedalboard, you'll be able to do it. Using the unit is a doddle and we got great sonic results when sending a guitar track from our DAW out through pedals and amp for re-recording, with the Volume knob offering plenty of scope for setting up the optimum level.

Verdict

Well, the Canvas Re-Amp is a widget, but it's an extremely useful one since it provides flexibility for anyone who wants to integrate their pedal collection and/or amps into their recording setup. **G**



WALRUS AUDIO CANVAS PASSIVE RE-AMP

PRICE: £149

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reamping box

FEATURES: Flat frequency response (20Hz-20kHz), ground lift, phase inversion

CONTROLS: Volume, ground lift switch, mute switch, phase inversion switch, HPF switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, XLR input

POWER: Passive

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 122 (d) x 40 mm (h)

FACE bvba

+32 3 844 67 97

www.walrusaudio.com



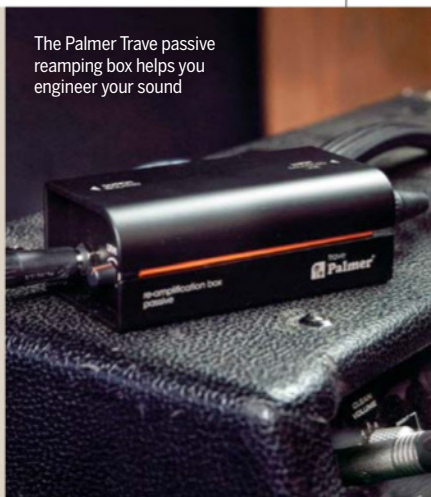
PROS Needs no power; simple to use; XLR and jack inputs; useful range of extra facilities

CONS We'd have liked it even more if it cost a little less!



THE RIVALS

Radial Engineering has a range of reamping boxes to choose from: the fairly basic passive ProRMP (£118) with XLR input; the better-equipped Reamp JCR (£222), which is also passive but has a feature set closer to the Walrus with separate XLR and standard jack input connectors, variable output level plus a three-position filter; and the active X-Amp (£229). The Palmer Trave (£77) is a passive box with an XLR input and adjustable output level. Going beyond a single mono signal, the ART Dual RDB (£80) can handle reamping for stereo or dual line level signals.



The Palmer Trave passive reamping box helps you engineer your sound

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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the Wishlist

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

Yamaha FG9M FROM £3,299

CONTACT Yamaha PHONE 0344 811 1116 WEB <http://uk.yamaha.com> WORDS David Mead PHOTOGRAPHY Oilly Curtis

Yamaha's FG Series has been around since the mid-60s and has secured a reputation as a range of modestly priced acoustic guitars that don't wander too far north of the £500 price point. Until now, that is. Readers who are used to thinking that FGs are beginners' instruments might have raised an eyebrow or two looking at the price of the FG9M. But there's a twist to the tale as Yamaha has upped the spec here to a pretty significant degree.

To begin with, the FG9M is hand-built in Yamaha's Japanese facility and the spec is something you'd expect from a boutique builder. For instance, it's solid woods all the way with a wide-grained Adirondack spruce top and African mahogany back and sides. And for those who prefer rosewood for their back and sides, Yamaha has provided that as an alternative on the FG9R. The neck is mahogany with an ebony board measuring in with a flat-ish 400mm (15.75-inch) radius and a 44mm nut. Tuners are open-backed Gotoh SXN510s in 'Cosmos Black' and the bridge is ebony with a bone saddle and ebony bridge pins.

In terms of finish, Yamaha has gone for nitrocellulose for the body and polyurethane for the neck. Why the mix? Well, technically the body is the tone generator

and popular wisdom decrees that a thin nitro finish is what you need to optimise vibration and, hence, sound quality. Whereas the neck has to be more hard-wearing. It makes a lot of sense when you think about it.

Despite the 'FG', or 'folk guitar', designation, we're talking about a dreadnought that measures a chunky 412mm at the widest point of the top, with a maximum depth of 125mm.

In terms of decorative assets, there's a mix of ebony and what Yamaha refers to as "rope binding" – very similar to herringbone – around the perimeter of the guitar's top, and this is mirrored in the soundhole inlay.

Turning the guitar over, the mahogany back has a white wood strip running down the centre and there's an 'FG' inlay to the heel cap. The neck has some very modern-looking position markers that are both stylish and understated.

As to what the guitar sounds like, with a marriage of punchy Adirondack spruce and mahogany this is no lightweight, sonically speaking. The sound is rich and dynamic with sparkly trebles and boisterous basses with the mids well represented. It has all the volume you'll ever need and it sustains for days. All in all, it's a magnificent addition to Yamaha's FG range. **G**

1. The FG9M's mahogany neck is topped off with some open-backed Gotoh SXN510 tuners in what Yamaha refers to as "Cosmos Black". They're certainly very stylish!

2. The back is solid African mahogany, but if that doesn't light up your acoustic world then be aware that Yamaha also provides a rosewood version, aptly entitled the FG9R

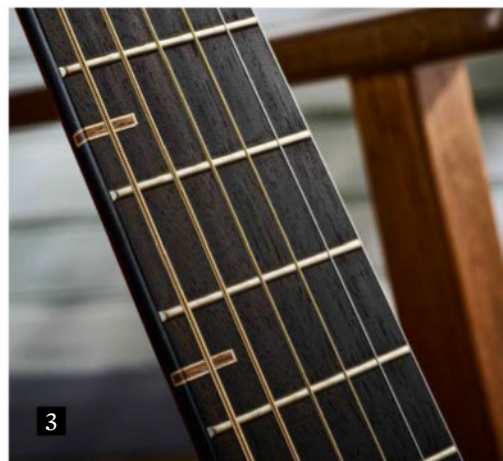
3. The guitar's ebony 'board is set off by these unusual-looking position markers, which are a very nice touch, lending the instrument a modern edge



1



2



3

4. The solid Adirondack top adds an extra gear to the FG9M's performance, producing a tight, dynamic response with all the volume and sustain you could ask for

5. Yamaha refers to the guitar's pick guard as "tortoise pattern" and it sets the otherwise austere looking top off perfectly

6. A mix of ebony and rope binding decorates the FG9M's top and sits perfectly with the inlay around the guitar's soundhole. It's a tremendously elegant-looking guitar





Gas Supply

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

TUNING

As well as convenient truss rod adjustment from a body-end thumbwheel, EVH has included the D-Tuna to make drop D tuning available in a flash

STRIPPED FINISH

There's no mistaking the legally trademarked EVH stripes. But if you've ever wondered what a Frankenstein wears to the office, here's your answer



PICKUPS

Ignore that dummy pickup in the neck position. The bridge Wolfgang humbucker is a versatile magnet that we've tried plenty of times

EVH Frankenstein Relic £1,479

CONTACT **Fender** PHONE 0333 200 8765 WEB www.fender.com

JARGON CRUNCHING Floyd Rose Foible

In 2016, Eddie told us why his Floyd Rose doesn't have an up-pull. The answer has nothing to do with tuning and everything to do with sustain. "All flush to the body," he said. "Everything needs to be connected. I even like my [speaker] cabinets on wood, not on wheels. Everything needs to be solidly connected. The more connection, the more sustain and resonance."

I know this guitar, but something's missing...

That's right, consider this the horse to the regular Frankenstein's zebra. EVH has produced the Frankenstein Relic sans stripes, stripping the guitar back to three base colours, just as they would have been before Eddie got busy with the tape and spray paint.

So this is essentially a stripe-less Stripe Series Frankenstein?

Well, not really, no. You might remember the Frankie model from 2020, which built on the success of the more affordable Stripe Series guitars to bring us a closer recreation of the Frankenstein. The Frankenstein Relic is cast more in the mould of that guitar with an aged finish and all the same steampunk-style appointments: the dummy neck pickup, dummy five-way switch and cut-off scratchplate.

Wait, the neck pickup doesn't do anything?

Nope, and neither does the switch because there's nothing to select. Remember, this isn't an exact replica

of Eddie's most famous model, but it has been designed to mirror the Frankenstein's vibe as closely as possible at real-world prices. So the dummy electronics remain as a nod to Eddie's tinkering.

Fair enough. What about the bridge pickup?

That is a Wolfgang humbucker, which is the same tried-and-tested pickup that EVH has used across the board in its Frankenstein replica models. Eddie's original humbucker was a PAF from an ES-335 that he wax-potted and mounted directly to the guitar's body. Here, it's attached in the same way.

It looks fairly heavily relic'd, too.

The clue is definitely in the name. The body is made of basswood, and in each case has some large areas of finish 'rub' in the obvious places, along with more general 'roadwear'. It extends to the neck, too, which is made of quarter-sawn maple with a modified C shape and a dry-as-a-bone finish on the back. The fingerboard is also maple, with 22 jumbo frets and a compound radius.



NECK

EVH says this guitar is "born to shred", with a compound radius (305mm to 381mm/12- to 16-inch) maple fingerboard, jumbo frets and a Floyd Rose

As you can see, there's a pretty convincing attempt to make it look like it was around for some of Diamond Dave's high kicks.

What's that on the Floyd Rose?

Fans of Eddie will know that he had a hand in the development of the Floyd Rose, and also that he preferred his Floyd flush-mounted to the body (so he could push but not pull; see 'Jargon Crunching', left). But Eddie also wanted to play the same guitar in drop D without the hassle of unlocking the strings to do so, and so he used the D-Tuna to give him an instant one-tone drop from standard. This guitar comes with the D-Tuna fitted, so you can do the same.

I'm a massive Eddie fan. How much and when can I get one?

The EVH Frankenstein Relic comes in three colours: Black, White and Red (as pictured above). Each guitar costs £1,479 and they will be available to buy in stores from September. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...

ELECTRO-HARMONIX ANDY SUMMERS WALKING ON THE MOON £129



Think of Andy Summers and chorus (and choruses) will spring to mind, except The Police guitarist actually coaxed those classic tones out of a flanger. In a move that will stomp years of anticipation, EHX has announced the Andy Summers Walking On The Moon

Flanger/Filter Matrix. It has regular flanger controls that you'll be familiar with (Rate, Range and Color), but the Filter Matrix part removes the LFO from the circuit for a 'fixed filter' sound, plus you can output your dry and wet signals independently. Elsewhere, the pedal is decorated with Artist Edition graphics (including Andy's signature) and it comes with a *Walking On The Moon* poster designed by artist Laura Josephson. Message in a bottle? More like modulation in a pedal.

www.ehx.com



PRS PRIVATE STOCK JOHN MCLAUGHLIN £14,995

When you're a groundbreaking fusion guitarist, chances are you're going to require a pretty special instrument to boot. PRS has honoured John McLaughlin with a limited-edition Private Stock signature model (as revealed by Paul Reed Smith in our interview last issue). Featuring woods that are spec'd out by Paul Reed Smith himself, PRS says it's kept things "straightforward" with African mahogany capped with maple for the body. The neck, meanwhile, is made from hormigo (a tonewood also used on marimbas for sound-producing tines) and the fretboard is African blackwood.

The details, according to PRS, come from the nitro finish, unfinished neck and TCI pickups, with the latter wired to a pair of mini-toggles that engage studio-style high-pass filters. Only 200 are being made, and at £14,995, we hope you're getting paid by the note.

www.prsguitars.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: Ashley Sherlock

Album: *Just A Name* (Ruf Records)



Ashley Sherlock's debut album, *Just A Name*, is available now from www.ashleysherlock.com

This is a big year for Manchester-based Ashley Sherlock and his band, with the release of this summer's debut album, *Just A Name*, and his popularity soaring. With hooks, tight writing and a solid trio band, things look set for Ashley. "It's great to finally get around to doing the album," he says. "When you're a kid, it's the thing you think about and you always wonder if anyone would actually buy it. We had some success with some EPs, but with an album on a label, you're competing with bigger people. And now it's like, 'Shit! It's all getting real.'"

Space For Sound

Despite Ashley's apprehension, the album is confident and the band felt no need to clutter things with multi-tracked guitar parts or unnecessary sounds. "The single *Dear Elizabeth* is one of my favourite tracks," Ashley tells us. "We all managed to encompass what I was feeling and Charlie [Rachael Kay, bass] and Danny [Rigg, drums] really got the memo. It's very stripped back and there's no other guitar underneath the solo. We really wanted to make it like this and the label said, 'Keep it simple, don't throw the kitchen sink at it,' which was great. If you go all bells and whistles on album one, it makes number two

pretty tough... We want to keep the songs honest but also [have] that steady progression, too."

The Power Of Three

A key part of the band's sound is its trio setup, something that helps the songs to breathe. "When you take everything away and keep [the song] in its basic form, you allow the listener to get involved without much to distract from the message of the song," Ashley explains. "We recorded everything as a trio and we're basically a family. We talked about adding keys and whatnot, but then you're in danger of sounding like everybody else. We wanted to keep it as a trio and hone that sound."

Shaping The Song

When you see one singing guitarist in a trio setup, you may think they have to shoulder a lot of responsibility. But Ashley is immediately modest about his role: "All of my songs are the same chords with different capos, basically," he laughs. "I don't try to think too much about what I'm playing. I remember listening to Chris Stapleton and seeing how he did it, from a songwriter's perspective; it's all about the lyrics and the melody, so it means on certain songs I'm effectively playing the electric guitar like an acoustic, with a capo. The progression would give me a handful of bars for a solo before we went back into it. Using the capo so much as an electric player isn't that common, but playing the songs without it wouldn't give me the sound I'm looking for."

Seeing Red

An interesting member of Ashley's gear collection is a sunburst Stelfox custom S-type. "It was made by a man called Will Stelfox, who I met at a jam night in Manchester," says Ashley. "He'd heard about me and we discussed having a guitar made. It's a beautiful guitar; I have a friend who has a 70s Strat and mine just smokes it! It used to be Fiesta Red – I'm a huge Mark Knopfler fan, so it had to be red – but the paint wasn't ageing that well and it was looking a bit scruffy through wear and tear. So I rang up Will and said, 'You're going to hate me, but can we strip it and do it sunburst like Rory Gallagher or John Frusciante?' He just said no problem. He'd never done a sunburst before, but he nailed it." [GK]

Standout track: *I Think She Knows*

For fans of: The Black Crowes, Chris Stapleton, The Cadillac Three, Led Zeppelin

Ashley's custom S-type was made by Will Stelfox, and refinished in sunburst after starting its life in a Knopfler-style Fiesta Red

PHOTO BY GEOFF OULFIELD



GO-TO GIBSONS

Ashley talks us through his single- and double-cut faves

"I became a Gibson artist in 2019 and my go-to recording guitar is a 2018 Anniversary edition Gibson Les Paul Custom '68 reissue [pictured] – it's all over our new record. It comes stock with the '68 Custom 'buckers. It's a real tone machine and it cleans up really well.

"I also play a black ES-345. I got into the ES-style guitars because of that scene in *Back To The Future*! This one is wired mono, rather than the usual stereo. It's a really great, comfortable guitar, it feels like home. It has MHS II pickups and a vintage-spec'd Varitone – which is great for recording, but I never use it live!"



Albums

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



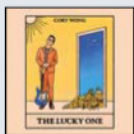
PHOTO BY GALEN HIGGINS

Fans of funk luck out with Cory Wong's fourth studio album

Cory Wong The Lucky One

Roundworld Media (available now)

9/10



The man with the amazing rhythm chops is back!

The smiling dude with a Fender Strat is known for laying down some of the tightest 16th note patterns since legendary rhythm-ers Nile Rodgers, David Williams and Paul Jackson Jr. With *The Lucky One* being his fourth studio album, Cory is well on his way to cementing himself as the next funk master. But he's very happy to surround himself with great musicians and take a back seat when necessary.

Intro track, *Look At Me* is super funky in an 80/90s mix but you have to listen hard to detect the guitarist's staccato style. *Hiding On The Moon* has some lovely sustaining guitar but little of his 16th note chops. Then comes *Call Me Wild* – this is more Wong with tight and dry instruments driven by thick drums and bass and Cory's guitar strobe spitting deep within. *The Grid Generation* implies DAW recording practice – with singer/drummer Louis Cole on board, tightness and dynamics is well to the fore and a corker of an animated rock guitar solo. The instrumental *Separado* has great chord work and lead melodies while the ballad-esque *Acceptance* has a broad palette from clean violining guitar through to Prince-esque rocking leads. As for rhythms and chords, *Brooklyn Bop* is almost like a missing track off George Benson's *Give Me The Night* album, produced by Quincy Jones. Cory's 16ths are so tight and so focused it makes you want to get down with a metronome and do some serious woodshedding! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Acceptance*

For fans of: 70s funk, Chic, Nile Rogers

Gov't Mule

Peace... Like A River

Fantasy Records (available now)

9/10



Southern rockers' 12th album is pure blues-rock dynamite!

Warren Haynes can rock, riff and roar with real passion as is evident on Gov't Mule's 12th studio release, which comes after their 2021 Grammy-nominated *Heavy Load Blues*.

Opener, *Same As It Ever Was* is rich with organ, acoustic and electric guitars and a dynamic vocal performance. *Shake Our Way Out* features ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons as a guest adding his superb Les Paul tones to the punchy blues-rock groove. Warren's guitar tones are warm and crunchy throughout, never over-saturated but with enough sustain to make solos sing – think of a blend of early Billy, Peter Green and Gary Rossington with a dash of Mayall-period Clapton.

The late night trip-rock of *The River Only Flows One Way* features actor/musician Billy Bob Thornton and is a standout track among the 12 gems. It's up there with the very best of The Mule's output. **[JS]**

Standout track: *The River Only Flows One Way*

For fans of: The Allman Brothers, The Dead, ZZ Top

Robin Trower

Twice Removed From Yesterday (50th Anniversary Edition)

Chrysalis (available now)

8/10



Embellished edition of legend's first solo release

Originally released in 1973, just two years after he left Procol Harum, Robin Trower's first solo album adds fuel to the power-trio fire that began with bands such as Cream, Taste, Mountain and The Jimi Hendrix Experience. On *Twice Removed From Yesterday* Robin has built upon the foundations of the burgeoning blues-rock scene and his signature guitar sound is in evidence right from track one.

With a Strat, a Marshall amp at full tilt and a Uni-Vibe washing the shores of his sound, *I Can't Wait Much Longer* introduces the band in time-honoured fashion. Aided by drummer Reg Isidore and bassist/vocalist James Dewar, Robin's guitar races into the limelight on tracks like *Hannah* and *Ballerina*. The album has certainly stood the test of time and there are extra tracks and John Peel sessions to add to the fun. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Ballerina*

For fans of: Jimi Hendrix, Mountain



Setzer takes it back to the 1950s with *The Devil Always Collects*

Brian Setzer

The Devil Always Collects

Surfdog Records (available September 15)

8/10



The devil, it seems, has the best tunes...

The thing about a new Brian Setzer album is that you always think you know what you're going to get – the borderlines of rockabilly are pretty well defined, after all – but somehow he still manages to surprise you, every time. This, of course, is in no small part due to the virtuosity on display and it's the same story here.

Right from the opening track, *Rock Boys Rock*, you're hooked into a world of drive-ins, diners and hot-rods. The album continues with riff-laden rockers like *Black Leather Jacket* and *Girl On The Billboard* with Setzer's lightning-fast soloing well to the fore. *Play That Fast Thing (One More Time)* is a joyful tribute to the spirit of a 1950s jukebox-driven night out and the solo doesn't disappoint. It all adds up to one heck of a rockabilly romp! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Girl On The Billboard*

For fans of: Stray Cats, Imelda May, Darrel Higham

Martin Simpson & Thomm Jutz

Nothing But Green Willow

Topic Records (available September 29)

9/10



Sublime British folk-songs rescued from time in Appalachia

In the early 20th century, many of Britain's folk-songs were dying out. But in the mountains of Appalachia in America, where British settlers had laid down roots, these songs still survived. They were noted in 1916 by English folklorist Cecil Sharp and his assistant Maud Karpeles in the roadless regions of North Carolina and Tennessee. Together they gathered folksongs, notably from singers Jane Hicks Gentry and Mary Bullman Sands.

13 of these achingly beautiful songs have been arranged and performed here by Martin Simpson and Thomm Jutz (fittingly both American and British musicians) and what gems these tracks are, from the serene, soul-wrenching melancholy of *Pretty Saro*, sung by Odessa Settles, to the lyrical beauty of *Come All You Fair And Tender Ladies*, sung by Cara Dillon. Simpson's guitar work is as graceful as ever and, along with co-producer Jutz, they have achieved a record of rare power and significance. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Come All You Fair And Tender Ladies*

For fans of: Seth Lakeman, Anaïs Mitchell



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Tones Behind The Tracks

From playing shock-rock with Alice Cooper to landing an explosive second solo album, **Nita Strauss** talks us through her shred-heavy sound

Artist: Nita Strauss

Album: *The Call Of The Void* (Sumerian)



New album, *The Call Of The Void*, pushed Nita's playing skills and pulled her away from the more solitary 'one-person army' experience of her debut LP

Nita's Ibanez Jiva signature is built for speed: "It feels like driving a race car down a flat speedway," she says

Nita Strauss has been touring with Alice Cooper's band for almost 10 years. In 2018 she released her first solo album, *Controlled Chaos*, and the enforced time off from the road that occurred as a result of the pandemic gave her the time to write and record the guest-vocalist-laden follow-up, *The Call Of The Void*. We catch up with her during the US promotional tour for the new album.

A lot of artists say that recording a solo album is a learning experience and that they push what they learn onto their next project. Was this the case for you?

"I think that probably the biggest thing I learned from doing my first record – producing it myself, engineering everything myself – is that no one person is an army. And I think the approach on the second record, working with different people, whether it's engineers, producers, songwriters, writing partners or other guest artists, really helped me make a more complete, mature-sounding album, rather than just holding onto everything myself.

"I really wanted to approach this album as not only a more well-rounded songwriter but a more well-rounded guitar player, and so I utilised a lot of techniques that were maybe a bit out of my comfort zone. More of the quick hammer-ons, alternate picking type of stuff that

I historically go more for, like the legato and sweeps and that sort of thing. I spent some time honing those chops and I'm excited that it came out as well as it did. Overall, it was a great growing experience."

What about the writing process? Did it come easily or was it a case of blood, sweat and tears all the way through?

"A little of both, honestly. Writing the instrumental stuff, for me, is the easy part. Writing instrumental guitar tracks, they sort of flow like water; it's very organic for me, you know? Whereas writing the songs for the guest vocalists was definitely more of a challenge because you have these new structural elements that you don't have within an instrumental guitar track. You're really having to be respectful of the tempo of the song so the syllables aren't too fast or too slow for the singer to sing. The key of the song and the amount of syllables in each line and the rhyme scheme and all that kind of stuff. Definitely a big challenge there. Something that I wasn't used to."

Did you write specifically for the vocalists you'd invited onto the album?

"Sometimes. For example, the Alice Cooper song was specifically crafted for him, nobody else would have made sense singing *Winner Takes All*. And then on some other songs we said, 'Hey, we're gonna write something for a powerful female vocal...' whether that be someone like Lzzy Hale or Dorothy, or Lilith Czar or Alissa White-Gluz. Once the song took shape a little bit more, then we locked down the right person for it."

Did you use your signature Ibanez for most of the album or did you take a number of guitars into the studio with you?

"I would say that the Jiva X, the newest model, was used for about 85 per cent of the album. When I was designing the Jiva, I sort of went back to the early days where, in a recording studio, you bring one guitar for rhythm, one guitar for leads and one guitar for different types of solos. I just thought, 'Why is there not one guitar to rule them all?' So the name of the game when we designed the Jiva was versatility and I really find that it is the most versatile guitar that I've ever owned. The pickups and the tonewoods can do anything you need them to. Otherwise, we used an Ibanez with an EverTune bridge for some of the very low chunky



rhythms, just to make sure that the tuning was pristine. And then we used a seven-string for some parts of some of the songs – obviously there's no Jiva seven-string, so we couldn't use that there. But other than that the Jiva was by far the workhorse on the album."

Can you talk us through the spec of your signature guitar?

"The Jiva X has an African mahogany body, quilted maple top, my signature DiMarzio Pandemonium pickups, ebony fretboard and a five-piece Super Wizard neck. So very fast, very flat. It feels like driving a race car down a flat speedway. For me, it's perfect."

"I think the [collaborative] approach on the second record really helped me make a more complete, mature-sounding album"

How did you go about developing the pickups with DiMarzio?

"The original idea was if a DiMarzio D Activator and a DiMarzio Evolution had a baby... and it's sort of built from there. The DiMarzio D Activator almost has that active pickup quality where it has a lot of attack, but it's very quiet between notes. You can have a very hot pickup without it ringing out or being noisy between notes. And then I wanted to have that very vocal quality of the Steve Vai Evolution where you get a ton of sustain out of it. But the trade-off with the Evo is it can be quite noisy during quiet parts. So I felt like our pickup was a perfect cross between the two."

Which amplifiers did you take with you into the studio this time?

"Actually, in the studio I tend to record everything direct just for ease because I'm typically travelling all the time. I find recording direct and then reamping the signal later has been the way to go for me."

What's your feeling on digital amps and effects modelling?

"I was a very early adopter of digital modelling stuff, whether it's floorboard or rack-mounted gear. My very first pedal was a Zoom 505, so since day one I've really been a very, very big proponent of digital stuff. But I have some incredible amps – Marshalls, Bogners, stuff like that – that will never be replaced."

Nita's live shows with Alice Cooper allow her to throw some shapes on stage, but the complexity of her solo guitarwork makes for a rather more focused experience!



PHOTO BY ANA MASSARD

In terms of actual external pedals, there wasn't a lot just because the majority of sessions I would add stuff like delay and reverb later on; it's not recorded directly. That's just so you can adjust it later in the mix – if you need a slightly faster delay rate or anything like that, you're not married to it in the take. The outboard gear really was just a wah pedal and a Whammy pedal that were used on a couple of solos."

How does the rig you used for this album's recording compare to the gear you use with Alice Cooper?

"It's pretty similar to be honest with you. I profiled my Marshall amps many years ago so we seamlessly transitioned from live amps to Kempers with Alice a couple of years ago, and you can't hear the difference at all – you're still getting that classic Marshall tone. It's just a bit easier to transport now. And so when we did the reamp for the record, we reamped using my live tones."

How does performing your solo material in a live setting compare with being on stage with Alice Cooper?

"Oh, it's very different. My songs are really hard, so playing the Alice stuff is a bit more straightforward and it gives me a little more room to perform. Whereas the solo stuff I do have to focus on playing a lot more because there are a lot more notes!" **[DM]**



Nita Strauss's second album, *The Call Of The Void*, is available now on Sumerian Records

www.nitastrauss.com



Tinker, Taylor

Neville Marten recalls getting his first Taylor guitar, and how the recent surprise gift of another marked a special moment in his musical life

Back in 1994 I was on tour in English rock 'n' roll legend Marty Wilde's band. Marty was topping the bill and we had Joe Brown and others on the show, too. It was a 65-date roustabout and gave me a bit of spare cash. I was editing *Guitarist* at the time, and my bosses kindly allowed me to also be a gigging musician. And have done ever since.

Anyway, with that extra financial liquidity came my usual desire to populate the guitar collection

"While not strictly to mark my four decades as a Wildcat, more a gift to an old buddy, I like to think of this Taylor 915 as a bit of both"

with something new. Taylor was making big waves in the acoustic world at the time. We'd checked out a couple for the mag and they'd received rave reviews. So, I nipped over to see my old mate Gavin at Sound Technology in Hertfordshire, who imported them at the time, and he took me to the racked shelving system and we began auditioning a few.

Now, I'm sure you all will have had something like this happen in a guitar shop, but after about the fourth or fifth box – and we were looking for no particular model, I just fancied a Taylor – Gavin opened another and the guitar was instantly 'the one'. We both knew it. It was so much better. Plus, it looked a million bucks!

It was a 912C, a Grand Concert model, with a dark Indian rosewood cutaway body and beautiful wooden bindings with a red 'coach' stripe in stained maple (I think). However, the crowning glory of this guitar was a stunning floral abalone inlay running along most of the ebony fretboard. I had to have it, so we negotiated a deal and I left, proudly clutching its classy plush-lined case in my mitt.

We had a gig that night at Guildford Civic Hall, and as the entire cast assembled in our communal green room I whipped out the instrument to the gaze of all and sundry. Joe, his brilliant guitarist the late Neil Gauntlett, Marty, Eddie Allen, our band's other six-stringer, and anyone else who plucked a bit, were totally in awe. Mr Wilde couldn't believe how superbly it played, fell in love with the abalone inlay work, and immediately wanted a Taylor guitar himself.

He being 6ft 4in and me only 5ft 8in, my little Grand Concert looked a bit silly on him. Plus he doesn't like cutaways on acoustics and so asked me if Taylor did something J-200 sized. The Taylor brand was still relatively new to the UK, so I honestly didn't know. Luckily, Marty lives close to Sound Technology's headquarters in Herts, so we arranged a visit for him. Long story short, a special order was made for a 915 – the huge jumbo size he wanted, no cutaway, and with the same gorgeous floral pearl array.

Wilde Thing

Marty had his 915 fitted with a quality pickup/preamp system and used it on stage for quite a while. Then, as these things often do, it took a back seat and became one of the sofa noodlers in his man cave at home.

Cut to 2023 and I reached a monumental milestone of years playing with Marty. He'd been threatening for a while to give me a guitar and, visiting his house to rehearse for a very special private gig (which I won't divulge) two days later, he handed me the big 915. No big fuss, just a lovely gesture. And while not strictly to mark my four decades as a Wildcat, more a gift to an old buddy, I like to think of it as a bit of both.

I went home, cleaned, set up and restrung the guitar, and when Marty arrived at our special gig it was there gleaming on my guitar stand. "I want that back!" he joked. We had a lovely night at a delightful event, and I'm touched to have received such an amazing gift from one of our legends of rock 'n' roll. Thank you, Marty. This one's going nowhere! **G**



GAS OF THE MONTH

Dream A Little Dream...

What? Taylor American Dream AD17 Blacktop

Where seen? www.gear4music.com **Price?** £1,359

Looking just as cool but rather more understated than my pearl-encrusted 912, Taylor's Grand Pacific AD17 is stunning in Blacktop guise. Simply finished, not glossy, but in many ways all the better for it, the American Dream series came about when Taylor was struggling for timbers during lockdown. "So let's cook with what we have in the fridge," said chief designer Andy Powers. The resulting recipe features a solid ovankol body, spruce top, mahogany neck, and eucalyptus fingerboard and bridge. Sonically, it's warm and woody, and, of course, it plays superbly. The 'e' version is a few hundred quid more and makes this super round-shouldered dreadnought stage ready. American Dream? You bet!

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Hammer It Home

Alex Bishop tries to curb an unhealthy tool-buying addiction and inadvertently connects with a distant ancestor along the way...

If you thought it was bad enough having GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome), the internet is an even more dangerous place if you combine that affliction with a TAD (Tool Acquisition Disorder). Having recently ended a self-enforced three-year ban on purchasing new workshop gear, I have perhaps been a little over-enthusiastic placing orders with my favourite woodworking retailers. Yet with every ring of the doorbell and subsequent shiny new tool comes a dopamine rush that keeps me wanting more.

“Loose change gets tossed straight into the tonewood kitty, a universe of infinite expenditure where every purchase is justifiable”

Can a guitar maker's tool collection ever be complete? Not as far as Alex is concerned...

Whether it's tools or guitar gear, it's a problem I'm sure many of you will be able to relate to. Just as the perfect number of guitars always equals ' $n+1$ ' (where n is the number of guitars you currently own), the perfect number of tools is maybe more like ' $n+x$ ',

where x is the number of days until the next pay day. It's an affliction known to crush bank balances before Monday has even rolled around, but I tell myself, "Perhaps the next guitar I make will be even better than the last if I just had *that* jig".

The proceeds that luthiers generate from the sales of their instruments tend to get rapidly diverted to one of three streams of expenditure: hand tools, power tools and wood. For me, I have a specific problem with chisels. I adore the simplicity of the humble chisel, and yet the sheer range of applications for which it is appropriate call for many different styles: flat, mortice, gouge, s-form, dovetail, to name a few. These are tools that can be picked up relatively cheaply at car boot sales and old tool shops, but planes, saws and measuring tools can quickly send that shopping basket soaring into triple figures.

In one instance, I spent months tracking down a triple-hinged solid brass ruler that my great-great-great grandfather was rumoured to have made at his workshop in Birmingham, sometime around 1860. It cost me £120 (remember, this is just a ruler), it's in inches (I use millimetres) and it's inaccurate (not exactly ideal for precision guitar making), but I just couldn't help it: it's such a beautiful object.

Out Of Hand

I am one of the lucky ones, though. My making style is very much based around a hand-tool approach, prioritising processes that favour planes and chisels over expensive equipment like routers or CNC. But those with a penchant for power tools face bigger bills, not just for the machinery itself but also the space to house it and parts to maintain it. While it might seem like there are only so many pieces of large machinery a guitar maker might want or need, there is *always* the prospect of upgrading to the next model up for extra power and the latest fancy new features.

Finally, all that remains after a supermarket sweep-style dash along the digital aisles of woodworking websites is a bit of loose change that gets tossed straight into the tonewood kitty, a universe of infinite expenditure where every purchase is justifiable. Sometimes the opportunity to purchase some timber with a story is too good to let go (perhaps it's a set of 'Lost Tunnel 13' redwood, or mahogany from 'The Tree'), or maybe it's just the appeal of trying something new that just might unlock the Holy Grail of guitar tone. In any case, there is nothing like a rack of a dozen or more unmade guitar backs and fronts to guarantee the cost of the numerous new tools that will inevitably be required to bring those projects to fruition. Thus, the cycle continues. And I love it. **G**

TOOL OF THE MONTH

The String Spacing Rule

A classic example of a tool you didn't know you needed: the string spacing rule by StewMac is an essential for those looking to slot a new nut or notch a set of unmarked saddles. Rather than measuring a fixed distance between the centres of the strings, the graduated markings on the edge of the rule help ensure that the distance between the outsides of neighbouring strings remains consistent, creating the perfect setup for fingerstyle or plectrum players alike.





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Skinted Or Minted?

Pro guitarist Stuart Ryan owns both a cheap 90s Epiphone and a high-end Gibson 'Murphy Lab' ES-335. 'But which is better?' asks **Jamie Dickson**

Stuart Ryan is a familiar face around these parts. A well-known educator and pro guitarist, he's contributed many superb demos and lessons to *Guitarist*. We're huge fans of his agile, articulate playing, which spans everything from Americana to acoustic fingerstyle. We'll also freely admit to having envied his guitar collection over the years, which has included some of the very best instruments money can buy, from Froggy Bottom acoustics to Custom Shop unobtainium, vintage flat-tops and more. But a recent A/B comparison video Stuart posted on social media gave us pause for thought.

In the video, Stuart played a modded 30-year-old Epiphone Sheraton alongside a 1959-spec Gibson 'Murphy Lab' ES-335 worth around £5,000. While a keen ear could detect subtle differences, it's fair to say that the Epiphone gave as good as it got. Given that we were making this Epiphone anniversary issue as the video was posted, the time seemed right to get to the bottom of whether it really is worth making the extra investment to get a Custom Shop semi when an old Korean Epiphone can come so tantalisingly close to matching Murphy Lab performance with a few judicious mods. Intrigued, we gave Stuart a call to find out more, starting with how he came by the Epiphone in the first place.

"That Epiphone was my 18th birthday present, nearly 30 years ago," he recalls. "I found it under my parents' bed, two days before my 18th birthday. I kind of knew I was getting it, but when I found it, I thought, 'I'm going to open this now and have a strum.' And yeah, it just felt great. Those Epiphones from that era, they're amazing, absolutely amazing. About 10 years ago, I had a '63 Custom Shop 335 and I ended up preferring that

particular Epiphone, to be honest. So the 335 went – and that was even prior to the upgrades I've since made to the Epiphone.

"With those upgrades, it's become a fantastic guitar and very interesting [when compared] against the Murphy Lab," Stuart continues. "I'm not gonna lie, I bought the Murphy Lab with some trepidation because I'm thinking, 'The Epiphone's great.' But as I think I said in the video, it's more in the room and in the hands that you start to feel the difference between the two instruments. But plugged in, there's not five grand's worth of difference or anything," Stuart admits.

As mentioned, the Epiphone isn't completely stock, as Stuart explains: "So, the upgrade was really simple. It's got Radioshop PAF Plus pickups and the only reason I went for those is that I was in Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars [Bath-based guitar shop] where I happened to have a credit note for about £300. Usually when people do these gear changes, it's like a massive mission researching Bare Knuckles or Seymour Duncans or something – but on this occasion it was just, 'What do you have for about £300?' To be honest, the PAF Pluses are a hot pickup and maybe a little bit too hot in 335-style guitars, to my mind, because I think you lose a little of the 'air' in them. But I went with them and then the guitar went off to Ryan Taylor [luthier at Deadmill Guitars].

"We had a really long, detailed conversation about what needed to be done and I was going to strip off all the hardware and everything, but he said that the machineheads were fine and the bridge was absolutely fine, saddles are fine. So in the end, it was just a pickup swap and wiring – I think he put a new loom and different capacitors in. I mean, as good as those Epiphones are, the standard volume controls are basically on or off. Now they have a proper sweep on them."

Britpop Tones

These simple mods achieved, Stuart says the already capable 90s Epiphone – possibly made by Samick – really is ready for any of his professional gigs, though it lends itself to heavier rock styles particularly well.

"I absolutely love the Epiphone and I think if I was going to do an Oasis tribute band or something like that, I would use the Epiphone in a heartbeat."

As he is clearly happy with the Sheraton, we ask Stuart why he felt compelled to invest in a high-end 335 as well?

"One of the reasons I bought the Murphy Lab is that I do a Hammond-organ-trio gig quite regularly in town," Stuart explains, "and I've been doing it with a Telecaster through a Lazy J combo, which sounds great. But then one night I thought, 'You know, I'm going to take the Epiphone.' The Epiphone is a bit of a cumbersome guitar because it's not the lightest. But all of a sudden I could get that Wes Montgomery/Grant Green sound."

Doublecut dilemma:
Stuart with his 1959-spec
Murphy Lab ES-335, left,
and his trusty Sheraton –
also pictured below right





This led Stuart to consider upgrading to a semi that could really nail that classic 50s jazz tone more faithfully while offering more lightweight handling, plus the flexibility to cover blues and rock if needed. He took a trip down to Coda Music in Stevenage and found just what he was looking for hanging on the wall – a reissue 1959-spec ES-335.

"I've always wanted a '59-spec 335 because I think they feel and sound quite different to the 60s spec. I always think the 60s spec is more rock 'n' roll, whereas the '59 will do the archtop thing as well. As I was playing it, I was having a conversation in my head, thinking, 'Is it that different to the Epiphone?' And it *is* because acoustically it's quite a different guitar."

This difference in the fundamental acoustic qualities of the guitar, unplugged, translates into its amplified tone, too, says Stuart.

"When I listen to the comparison video I did, I can now hear the contrast between those two guitars," Stuart explains. "In some places those differences are really pronounced and in other places they aren't. Really, it's the acoustic nature of the two instruments coming through: the Murphy Lab has got incredible clarity and a snap to it, whereas the Epiphone has got a bit more of a 'heft' to it. So I would say if I'm doing a Britpop kind of thing, or a trashy, bluesy thing, the Epiphone's great. The Murphy Lab is just like a more sophisticated version of that sound, really."

"It's more in the room and in the hands that you feel the difference between the two. But plugged in, there's not five grand's difference"

Air Apparent

So, as we've observed in the past, it's small but collectively significant refinements in the build of high-quality guitars that set them apart. In the case of the '59 Murphy Lab ES-335 there's a certain lightness and finesse to its sound that speaks to its hand-built origins, though to be sure its Custombucker Alnico 3 pickups play their part, too.

"I've come to the realisation that with instruments like 335s, if you spend money on them, you're basically buying air," Stuart reflects. "And what I mean is that you're buying the craftsmanship that goes into a higher-spec semi-hollow guitar, which makes them breathe and snap a lot more."

Once again, the road of tonal nirvana has led us to the land of diminishing returns. For Stuart, having both a muscular 'rock' semi-acoustic and a high-end counterpart with a jazzier voice is worth the expense. But the Epiphone's enduring place in his collection – when far more expensive guitars have come and gone long ago – provides a salutary lesson: we should judge and use guitars on their own merits, not on their supposed cachet or pricetag. On that level, Stuart freely admits, the Epiphone has provided more smiles per mile than any guitar he's owned. **G**

Constant companion: Stuart Ryan's Sheraton II has been with him since his 18th birthday and he still uses it for pro gigs

THREE TO GET READY

Reasonably priced, capable semis



Epiphone Joe Bonamassa 1962 ES-335 £1,149

We were very impressed by this shrewdly upgraded Epiphone 335, which is based on an original '62 Gibson that Joe bought back in the 90s and used on his debut album. It boasts genuine Gibson USA Burstbuckers, an evocative Maestro Vibrola, plus Switchcraft and CTS parts for pro-grade reliability. Hard to argue with.



Ibanez Artstar AS113 £1,079

Ibanez semi-acoustics are always so well turned out and the AS113 is no exception. With a Macassar ebony fretboard and a thinline, flamed maple body, it's certainly a looker, while refinements such as Artstar fret-edge treatment and tone-expanding Tri-sound switch make it poised and musically flexible, too. Streets closer to £800 in many stores.



Eastman Romeo LA £1,499

If you're looking for a semi that's just a little offbeat and cool, we really recommend the Romeo LA. Unlike its peers, it features not humbuckers but a pair of Seymour Duncan Radiator Phat Cat P-90 pickups. We loved its slinky playability and lithe tones, while its elegant Göldo vibrato is stunningly good for atmospheric shimmers. You only get one colour option, Celestine Blue, but it's a good one.



Superimposed Arpeggios

Richard Barrett introduces the concept of polychords, where two triads collide to open up interesting harmonic and melodic ideas

There are many ways to analyse the possibilities of diatonic harmony. Chord scales and modes are two popular choices that spring to mind. Another, often cited by Larry Carlton, is the principle of superimposing an alternative triad or arpeggio over a chord. Try, for example, a D major triad or arpeggio over an E minor chord. The combination of these would imply an E minor 11th, even though no single instrument is playing that specific chord.

While this seems as if it should take advanced theoretical knowledge, you can go a long way towards expanding both your rhythm and solo vocabulary by trial and error. However, understanding the concept of extended and polychords is a huge advantage, so don't keep yourself in the dark on these matters...

Our featured chords outline the harmonic possibilities as 'standalone' examples, but it's perfectly possible to play a D major triad or arpeggio over a regular C major chord and get interesting results. **G**

Larry Carlton is no stranger to exploring the possibilities of superimposing chords

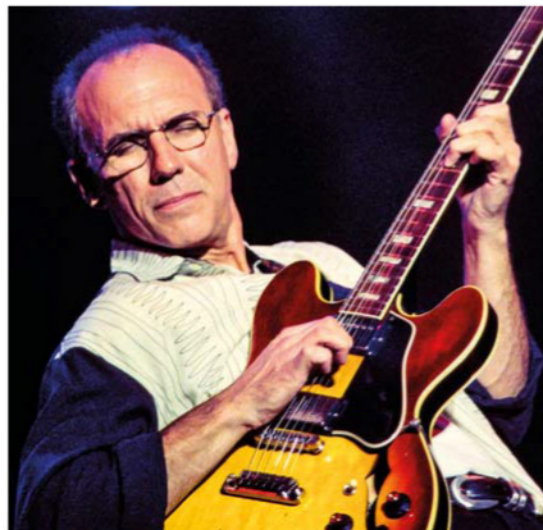
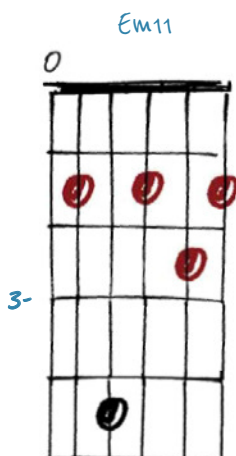


PHOTO BY ANDREW LEPPLEY / GETTY

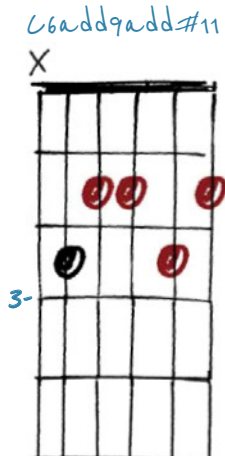
Example 1

This Em11 chord contains elements of E minor – root (E), 5th (B) and 3rd (G) – on the three bass strings. However, the three treble strings give us a D major triad (A D F# on the third, second and first strings), which, when combined with, or superimposed on, the Em give us Em11. So you don't need to wait for an Em11 chord – you can create this harmony over a regular Em chord.



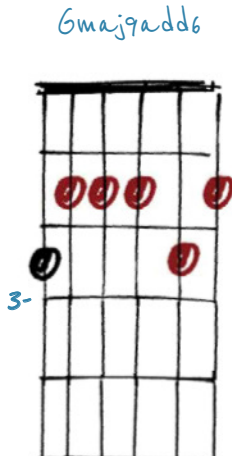
Example 2

Theoretically this is a C6add9add#11. But look and listen carefully: it's the bottom two notes of a C major chord: root (C) and 3rd (E). The top three notes form the same D major triad featured in Example 1. A D major triad fits over this or a regular C major chord. Chord-naming conventions are important, but this is another way of viewing the harmony.



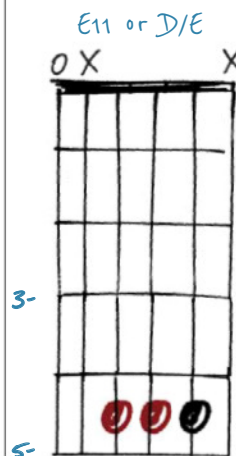
Example 3

What we have here is a G6 chord on the sixth, fifth and fourth strings (G B E, respectively), with the same D major triad on top. This gives us what I will call a Gmaj9add6 chord. Whatever the name, this tells us that we can add all or part of the D major arpeggio to our repertoire of 'licks that fit over a G major chord'!



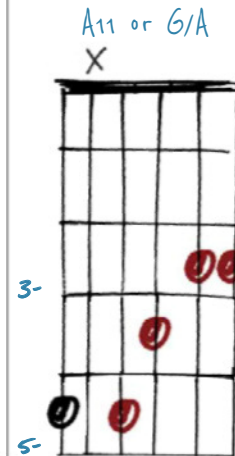
Example 4

In theoretical terms, this is the simplest example: a D major triad on the second, third and fourth strings, over an E bass note. This could correctly be named E11, or a D/E 'slash' chord. Either way, this tells us that you can play a D major triad or arpeggio over an E major chord as well as E minor.



Example 5

We're pushing the boundaries here with this G/A or A11 chord. Yes, a D major arpeggio or triad will fit, but what about an E minor triad or arpeggio? E is the 5th in an A chord, so there is an existing relationship, but would that work? There's only one way to find out...



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STAR LETTER

GETTING IT OUT THERE



Busking is a great way to get your music heard (and sold)

I fell in love with the guitar back in the 60s, initially influenced, like many, by The Shadows. Having learned to play on a Spanish guitar given to our family by my grandad, I've had a number of electric guitars before moving on to a Kimbara 12-string acoustic. This was similar in appearance, if not value, to the Guild guitar used by John Denver and I still enjoy its company today.

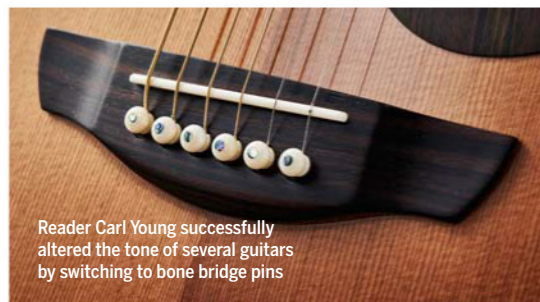
My son kindly purchased a 'proper' made-in-Mexico Fender Stratocaster for me some years ago that was being used for demonstration purposes in a music shop on the Isle of Man. This

renewed my interest in electric guitars and was certainly the best I had owned to date. Previously, I had written a number of guitar tunes, which I revisited and updated and made some basic demos of using a drum machine, Washburn bass, my 12-string for the rhythm and Fender for the solo part. I realise that submitting tunes direct to record labels is virtually impossible but would welcome any advice on ways of getting material out there.

Kelvin Littleworth

Hi Kelvin, there's no more satisfying pursuit than creating music on guitar for others to enjoy. And, in a way, there's no better time than today to get your music heard. For sure we've lost some important things with the death of the traditional record industry – by that, we mean the 1970s-style career path of getting signed to a label that cultivated and promoted your talents until you reached your full potential as a musician. What's replaced that, however, is a myriad of ways in which musicians can find and grow an audience by themselves. Many independent musicians swear by Bandcamp, a website where you can upload and sell your music digitally with what most consider to be a fair distribution of the proceeds between the musician and the host, Bandcamp.

It's also still valid to start gigging or busking your music locally and selling CDs and vinyl records (pressed professionally for a fee) as merchandise. If you don't fancy pressing hard copies, you can use gigs to direct audiences to where they can buy your music online. Lastly, if you just want to be heard, try posting on YouTube or social media channels such as Instagram or TikTok as a way to share snippets of your music, especially if you play solo instrumental pieces that can be performed straight to your phone.



Reader Carl Young successfully altered the tone of several guitars by switching to bone bridge pins

THEM BONES

In issue 492 Neville Martin recommended using bone bridge pins on acoustic guitars. This was followed up by a letter from Jim Breece in Issue 496 who agreed, and I'd like to join the bone club, too. After spending an age messing around with and swapping out bone/Tusq saddles – which seems to be the perceived wisdom of the internet on improving your tone – I eventually tried bone pins and, my, what a difference.

One thing I would add, though, is that all bone doesn't appear to be equal. I bought a number of sets of cheap bone pins and saddles because I was experimenting and didn't want to spend much on experiments that had every chance of failure. None of these pins (and saddles) made a great deal of difference. Eventually, I stumbled across cattle-bone bridge pins made by Japanese company Hosco, which were still relatively inexpensive at about £20. When I fitted these to my Furch Vintage 2 D-SR, the difference was quite a shock. An already loud guitar was even louder and the tone filled out beautifully. I could actually feel the top vibrate as I played.

I then proceeded to fit them on my Vintage 2 OOM with a similar outcome, and also to an Auden Maple Chester – again, a similar result. This appears to be an extremely good upgrade that guitarists should be aware of and, like Jim Breece, I'm curious as to why bone pins aren't fitted as standard. Is it just down to cost? Just like Jim, I tried brass pins (again, something the internet suggests), which were frankly awful. Tusq bridge pins worked quite well for me; if you have a muddy or bass heavy guitar I'd recommend these as they give a good boost to the top-end. I've also tried buffalo bone saddles, which seemed to add loads of treble but stole all the bass.

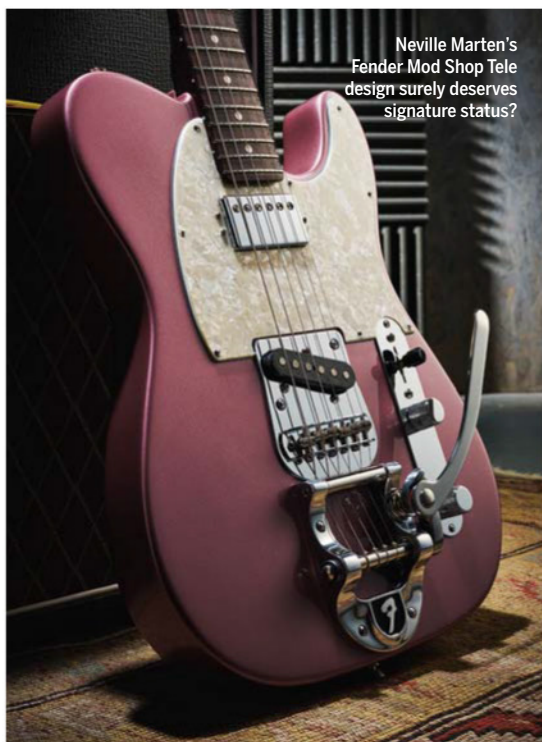
In a nutshell the only change that made any desirable improvement has been good-quality bone bridge pins. I wonder if Alex Bishop has any thoughts or could shed more light on the subject of improving your acoustic guitar tone?

Carl Young



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



Neville Marten's Fender Mod Shop Tele design surely deserves signature status?

Thanks for sharing your trial-and-error findings, Carl. Like strings or other easily interchangeable components, there's loads of potential to chop and change bridge pins until you find the right match for a particular guitar. And therein lies the important point: every guitar is different and each player will have their own idea of what sounds best. So things like strings and bridge pins can be used to nudge an acoustic guitar's tone and general performance one way or the other by a few per cent – and sometimes the results of a switch are quite dramatic. Needless to say, of course, that what works (or doesn't work) on one guitar may give totally different results on a different instrument. So we'd say always experiment, with good quality bone being a very reliable place to look first for optimal tone.

THE MARTENCASTER?

I think we've all had the scenario where a 'signature' guitar comes out from one of the top makers and we go, 'Who?'. Well, now Fender surely has the opportunity to celebrate a true English legend with his own signature Tele? Nev's Mod Shop invention is utterly gorgeous (sorry, Jamie and David) and I think not only will Rob Tew be loving his prize, but that the Fender Mod Shop will receive a glut of orders from *Guitarist* readers requesting exactly the same spec. It would only seem right, therefore, to honour the man by making this a 'Neville Marten Signature Telecaster'! Who knows what the 'case candy' might consist of, but it would certainly be interesting. Get the petition started, guys...

Meanwhile, speaking of Ultimate Strats, I was on holiday in Jersey in my teens, when, at a bar with my cousin, we saw a duo whose guitarist had this amazing-sounding Strat. At the end of the gig he asked me if I wanted to try it, explaining it was a '63 model. It was sublime – played like butter, sounded like a Strat from the gods (and no '2' or '4' pickup selector positions, of course). Having already tried many Strats by that time, I remember thinking: "So *this* is what all the fuss is about..."

Steve Broadhead

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PHOTO BY GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Be-Bop Deluxe's Bill Nelson (right) with the band's bassist, the late Charlie Tumahai

Thanks, Steve. We passed your kind words on to Nev, who sent this reply: "Haha! Blimey. What a thing. I do agree it looked fantastic, and I bet Fender will indeed get a few orders at least partly based on it. An NM Signature? Hmm..." So, the ball's in your court, Fender! We should note, however, that some of the parts that are selectable in the Mod Shop configurator are a bit like guest ales at a pub – available for limited periods only, as with the solid rosewood neck on Nev's Tele design. So if you like something you see there and it's listed as a 'Limited' option, best get in there quick!

UNSUNG SOLOS

To my mind, there is no better solo than the sublime *Crying To The Sky* from the album *Sunburst Finish* by Be Bop Deluxe. This is Bill Nelson at his absolute best. Uncomplicated, melodic, romantic, quite simply gorgeous. Oh and *Dance Of The Uncle Sam Humanoids* from *Modern Music* a close second. These masterpieces of music recorded in the early to mid-70s only go to show just how ahead of their time Be Bop Deluxe were, and just what a talented and influential guitarist Bill is.

Rob Leeder

Sorry for coming to this a bit late – you asked readers for suggestions for best underappreciated solos. How

about: Steve Hackett's solo on *Every Day* from his *Spectral Mornings* album; Frank Marino on *I'm A King Bee, Baby* on the Mahogany Rush *Live* album; and the intro solo to *Satellite Of Love* on *Lou Reed Live* (either Steve Hunter or Dick Wagner).

Paul Milstead

What are some of the best lesser-known solos? Frank Zappa, *What's New in Baltimore?* on *Does Humor Belong In Music?*, from 2:30. A (very) young Per Gessle with a (very) young Mats Persson on Gyllene Tider's *Teena* – the B-side of *Ljudet Av Ett Annat Hjärta*, from 3:00. Robbie Robertson, *Unbound* on *Contact From The Underworld Of Redboy*, from 4:15. Listen to 'em, and weep.

Steinar Saevig

Thanks for these, guys, it's particularly nice to be reminded of Bill Nelson's stellar abilities on the guitar – we should definitely see if we can get him back in the mag sometime in the not too distant. Any readers got any more solos to share that deserve better recognition than they currently enjoy? To get the ball rolling (again) we'd also recommend Eric Clapton's ecstatic slide solo at the end of his turn with Howlin' Wolf on the track *Highway 49* from the 1971 *London Sessions* album. It's just a short section in the outro, but, boy, does it blow the cobwebs away! Keep 'em coming.

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

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MATTEO MANCUSO

Steve Vai has called him ‘the evolution of the guitar’ while Al Di Meola said his playing was ‘light years ahead’. Is it something they put in the water in Sicily, we ask, as we meet the young guitarist redefining virtuosity

Words Henry Yates Photography Paolo Terlizzi, SixHats Studios

He starts with a disclaimer (“I apologise in advance for my English...”). But Matteo Mancuso needn’t worry. The 26-year-old Sicilian is sharp, witty and rarely lost in translation – we can only imagine how much fun he’d be if you could loosen his mother tongue over a few drinks. And besides, who needs words when you have Mancuso’s lyrical touch on guitar? Debuting with a Hendrix cover at a local festival aged 12, fusing boundless influences into his peerless/pickless jazz-shred style, notching up 158k followers on YouTube and feted by the instrumental super-league, his debut album, *The Journey*, feels like the dawning of a new world order.

Are you pleased with how *The Journey* turned out?

“I took four years to record this album, so some of the songs sound old to me, but I’m really happy with the result. Am I a better player now than when I started? Maybe, yeah. I’ve learnt different ways to compose. When I was younger,

I’d tend to write riff-based songs. For example, *Drop D* is one of the first compositions I wrote for the album, and it sounds like a teenage song to me. But that’s why I like the album. All the songs are very different.”

What inspired you to give *Drop D* that title?

“Actually, it’s not really a title, it’s more of a reminder. I’d always play that song live, and I often forgot to tune my guitar in drop D, so I called it that so I’d remember. But also, I love rock as much as jazz. My first influences were Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix – he was the first to make me pick up a guitar. *Drop D* feels like a tribute to all those groups combined, from the rock era to prog-rock like

“On an instrumental song, you can think about love, happiness, sadness. There’s no language barrier. Instrumental music, it’s universal”

Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Yes and Dream Theater. I almost called it *Stormchaser* because I’m a big fan of disaster movies. When the Earth is in danger, like a big asteroid or hurricane, I’m happy. When I wrote that song, I imagined a giant tornado following an old truck!”

What’s your own favourite guitar moment on *The Journey*?

“The solo on *Blues For John* I think is good because it’s a mix of Eric Johnson with a Bonamassa kind of blues feel. At the same time, there’s a lot of jazz elements. John’ is John McLaughlin – it’s dedicated to him.”

Can you tell us about your setup for the album?

“For most of the songs, I used my custom Yamaha Revstar and I played a Yamaha Pacifica on *Silkroad*. But then I borrowed a few guitars from my dad [Vincenzo Mancuso] for some of the rhythm parts – he hoards guitars at home so I could choose whatever I want. His best guitar is probably this really beautiful Heavy Relic Sunburst Strat. He’s got one or two stories for every guitar.”



"I'm not a shredder and I'm not a jazz player – I listen to a lot of different stuff and I wanted it all in my music... You need to be open-minded"

Your father, Vincenzo Mancuso, is a former session ace. He must have made a very big impression on you?

"Yeah, he was an inspiration from the start. I consider him one of the best players in the world, not because he's my father but because he's capable of doing the right thing, at the right time, on every song. He's a producer as well as a player: he worked with many Italian singers from the 90s. He was more of a listening guide than just a teacher.

"I started listening to traditional jazz stuff thanks to him, got to know Wes Montgomery, Barney Kessel, Django Reinhardt, a lot of these jazz cats. I have to thank my father because I never thought there was so much music in the world. When I was 12, I played live for the first time with my father. We did two Hendrix songs – *Little Wing* and *Voodoo Child* – at one of the biggest festivals in Sicily."

Who were the other players that put you on this path?

"The first inspirations were Ritchie Blackmore and Jimmy Page. One of the first solos I learnt was *Heartbreaker*. Later on, I discovered Eddie Van Halen and that was a game-changer – I started to dig into the tapping

technique. Eric Johnson is a really big influence, and when I was around 16 I was listening to Frank Gambale and Robben Ford. Allan Holdsworth is one of my biggest heroes. I think Guthrie Govan is the epitome of the modern player, y'know? Steve Vai, of course. Yngwie Malmsteen. Joe Satriani. John Petrucci. All these guys are heroes for me. I'd love to play in a G3 someday. There are also a lot of sax and piano players I listened to, especially when I was studying at the conservatory in Palermo. One of my favourites was Michael Brecker. Piano players like Oscar Peterson. Jazz guitarists like Joe Pass."

Why do you think there are so many great players of Italian descent – Vai, Satriani, Petrucci and so on?

"I don't know – maybe it's the food! As a young player in Sicily,

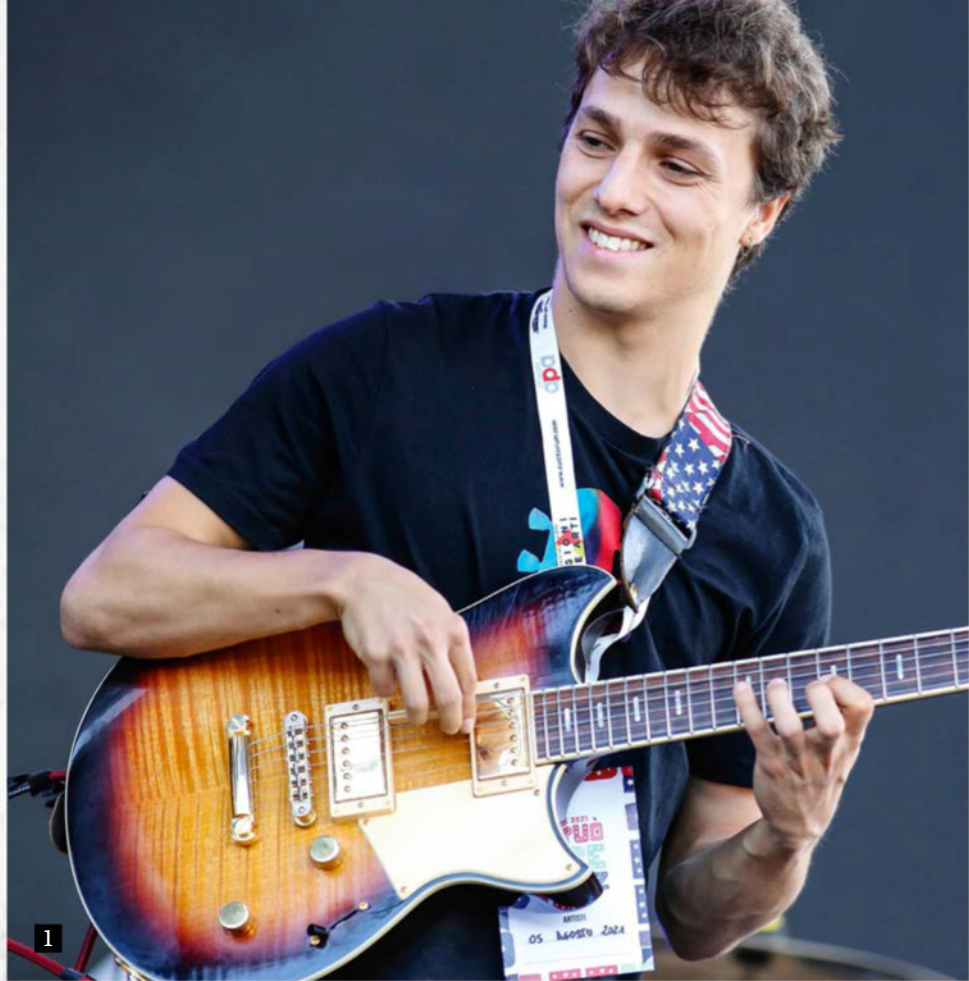
"Sicilian people, we always try to take it easy... that's why it took me four years to make an album!"

I already knew there wasn't much instrumental music, so to go out and play, you really have to learn a lot of styles. If you know blues, jazz, rock, pop – you get more gigs.

"Can I hear my roots in my playing? I think the Sicilian influence is more on my lifestyle than my music. Sicilian people, we always try to take it easy, take our time... that's why it took me four years to make an album! We are a really lazy people in general, especially people from Palermo, and I think the quality of life is better if you take it slowly. I always try to take it easy, be late, eat a lot – that's the Sicilian in me. Also, of course, the music – we don't take it too seriously. I don't consider myself forced to do this. It's what I love and when you love your job, you don't work a day in your life."

To return to your gear – do you modify those Yamahas?

"The Pacifica is always stock. My custom Revstar is really similar to the Revstar Professional, but it has some modifications. For example, the fretboard wood is called pau ferro. It's a substitute for rosewood, very similar in sound



1. Matteo's custom Yamaha Revstar appears across the new album and features a pau ferro 'board, Lollar pickups and a five-way (instead of three-way) switch for additional splitting opportunities

but more resistant to temperature changes. My Revstar also has Lollar Imperial humbuckers and a five-way switch so I can split them."

The Pacifica is known as the king of budget guitars. Can a cheap model still cut it at the professional level?

"Yes, especially Yamaha ones. That's their strong point: they can really make cheap guitars sound professional. Of course, there are better Strat [-style instruments] out there. I'm not saying the Pacifica is the GOAT of Strat [styles]. What Yamaha can do well is make a low-priced guitar sound great. But I think they still have to build a really good Strat [style]. Because the Pacifica, it's good for the price, but it's not good if you compare it to a Custom Shop Strat or something. Not because Yamaha can't do it, but they don't have [anything in that price range] yet."

We don't see many physical amps in your backline?

"No, with amps, I only use digital simulations. First of all, because I'm a lazy guy, I don't like to mic amps and do all the analogue work. So my first choice was digital because I think it's more reliable in a recording setting: you always have the same sound every day.

With an analogue amp, you have mic'ing, you have the tubes, you have the distance from the mic to the cab – there are a lot of aspects you can't really control. 90 per cent of the sounds you hear on this record are from the Line 6 Helix. I used various amp models but mostly 'Matchstick Ch2' [Matchless] for my lead sounds and 'US Deluxe Nrm' [Fender Twin] for clean.

"Live, my pedalboard goes straight to the PA. I get everything from the Helix – digital delay, reverb, chorus. It's amazing."

Where do you stand on the whole digital debate?

"People tend to think digital sounds worse than analogue. But that's only because you have to work on it. The analogue starting point is better, but the moment when you realise how the pedalboard works and how you achieve a particular sound, you can achieve basically anything you ever wanted. Digital pedalboards are limitless."

Are you playing a sitar on Falcon Flight?

"Actually, it's my father's old Roland VG-88 pedal. I mounted a piezo pickup on my Revstar to get that sound. It's a strange sound, but it was worth it."

PHOTO BY LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES

What's the secret to creating mood or telling a story without using words?

"I always composed without lyrics, so it was second nature to me. I think instrumental music is more personal. If you listen to a vocal song, you're influenced by the words. If it talks about love, you immediately think about love. On an instrumental song, you can think about love, happiness, sadness. There's no language barrier. Instrumental music, it's universal. You can listen to *Europa* by Santana and you don't have to be Spanish to understand it."

Some people say you're a shredder, others that you're a jazz player – what do you think you are?

"I'm not a shredder and I'm not a jazz player [laughs]. As much as I love shredding, I don't want that to be the focus point. At the same time, I don't consider myself a pure jazz player. I've played a lot of jazz standards in my life, especially at high school and the conservatory. But I listen to a lot of different stuff and I wanted it all in my music. To play this kind of music, you need to be very open-minded. I consider myself mainly a rock player with some jazz influence. My inspirations are people like Frank Gambale, Allan Holdsworth – all players that listened to a lot of jazz, but there's a rock or rock-blues element to their playing. So that's how I picture myself."

"People tend to think digital sounds worse than analogue. But that's only because you have to work on it"

Everyone says your technique is unique – what are you doing differently, do you think?

"I think the unusual thing for other players is that I play electric guitar with fingers, but I don't think what I'm doing is unique. Basically, I mainly use two positions for my right hand: one is a bass-like technique and the other one is more like classical technique. There are advantages and disadvantages. For example, playing on the same string is way easier with a pick because it's a simpler movement. But playing with fingers, you basically have



2

four different picks, so it's better for string-skipping and you can choose the combination of the arpeggio better than if you had a pick."

Did you try a plectrum and not like it?

"I went straight to fingers, but that was really because I saw my father playing classical guitar at home. He was always playing with fingers, so I thought every guitar was meant to be played like that. Later on, I discovered the pick, of course, but I was already used to playing with fingers. I did play with a pick sometimes, but it felt unnatural, I don't know why. It didn't feel right."

What's the secret to standing out as a guitarist on YouTube?

"I think you have to be original with your material. You can't just do popular covers. Back in the day, I did a cover of Eric Johnson's *Cliffs Of Dover*, but then I switched to improvising over backing tracks or doing covers that are really personal, like my own arrangement of Larry Carlton's *Room 335*. And

actually, the pandemic helped me do more videos because I was always at home. That's when people like Steve Vai and Al Di Meola talked about me because I was uploading a lot of videos and finally getting a bit of attention. I don't consider myself a very good content creator. As I say, I can be a lazy guy, so I'd do one video per month and, of course, for today's standards, that's not enough. I want to play live as my first activity – and making videos as the second or third activity."

Do you find that people still call you a guitar prodigy?

"I'm too old for that now – I'm 26! I don't consider myself as talented as people think. And that's because I know my musical skills are not really from talent, they're from hard work. People sometimes overestimate talent..."

2. They say it's all in the fingers – and it always has been for Matteo, who didn't experiment with with a guitar pick until later into his playing life. Needless to say, the plectrum wasn't for him!



The Journey is available now on Mascot/The Players Club www.matteomancuso.net

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SOUND OF THE SOUL

John McLaughlin said of Debashish Bhattacharya that “he has no equal” on slide guitar. High praise indeed but fully justified by his 28-album career of serenely virtuosic guitar. We meet the master himself to talk about the hard road he took to pioneer Indian classical music on guitar, the deep spiritual connections between American blues and the *rāgas*, and his sublime new album, *The Sound Of The Soul*

Words Jamie Dickson

Debashish Bhattacharya is one of those rare artists whose talent transcends continents and cultures. One of the most respected slide guitarists in the world, he has collaborated with many Western guitar greats, such as John McLaughlin, Derek Trucks and Jerry Douglas. But the foundation of his sound is Indian classical music. Now, with his new album, *The Sound Of The Soul*, Debashish has come full circle to pay tribute to the music that first inspired him to pick up the guitar at the tender age of two. We meet him to discuss the enduring influence of the music of master sarod player Ali Akbar Khan and learn how slide guitar speaks to all of us with a voice straight from the soul.

Who was Ali Akbar Khan – and why have you chosen to dedicate your new album, *The Sound Of The Soul*, to his memory?

“Within Indian classical music, which has maybe 150 to 200 years of development, Ali Akbar Khan is one of the rare gems... he sits

in the centre of everybody else. And why so? Because he plays a sarod, a gliding fretless instrument, and he’s the son of the legend of Indian classical music Baba Allauddin Khan, who was also a guru of Ravi Shankar, whom the West knows very well.

“My first experience of watching Ustad Ali Akbar Khan play was at a night-long concert in Kolkata in 1965. We were sitting at the very end of the *pandal* [a festival marquee] and the *pandal* was huge, with 3,000 or 4,000 people inside. On winter nights, people used to come from all over the neighbouring districts and states to

“At two years old, I [first] saw Ali Akbar Khan play and that image never faded in my mind. His music [represented] a kind of peace, a kind of joy”

the *pandal*. And if they couldn’t have a place inside they used to sit outside on the grass or even on the main city avenue all night with a quilt, sitting and listening to the music – that was [the custom of] that generation. So, at two years old, I saw Ustad Ali Akbar Khan play at first-hand – and that image somehow never faded in my mind. As I grew, I heard him on the radio and the more I heard, the more I felt like he and his music [represented] a kind of peace, a kind of joy, an emotional pull... This relationship was pretty one-way till I met him in 1992.

“Between 1965 and 1992 he was always in my background. When I was playing, I wanted to hear him through my own music. And that one-sided, total unconditional surrender to a legend always made me humble, and made me quiet, and made me go deep into myself and not to care so much about the rest of the world. Because his principle of life was to create his [own] fashion. In fact, ‘no fashion’ was his fashion. So that helped me because I didn’t play sitar or sarod or any Hindustani



instrument, which would have at least had a lineage [that I could have learned from] – whereas, whatever I have, I started playing from scratch.

“Also, I wasn’t a singer, I was purely an instrumentalist. So I’m already a ‘second grade’ musician; I’m supposed to play slide with singers. Good money, good life, good tours, everything is in a jackpot. But I never had it. And later, I started trusting myself better: I thought, ‘No, that is not my way.’ So I took my one-way path and it was very hard.

“But Ali Akbar Khan was always in my mind and also his father Baba Allauddin Khan, the great master of Indian classical music. So that’s why, as I travelled through life, I always thought I should do something [to honour Ali Akbar Khan], and this is the best time because his centennial is going on. It’s my best time, too, because I am now 60 and he is 100, so this 40 years of difference should come close [to making my interpretation of his music timely and valid] and make some nice, humble statement.”

How did you start playing guitar?

“My father got a Hawaiian guitar from his office colleague who was transferred to other places. He didn’t want to take this guitar, or maybe the guitar was too fragile to be transported in a truck or something, so he gave it to my father and my father had it in our small humble home. There were tambouras, a harmonium and tablas in the house, so he kept a guitar as well. At the age of two, my mom and dad showed me the ‘do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do’ and how to play it

“In between two notes is the music – it’s as if you had a beautiful picture, but you need a wall to hang it on and the wall needs two pillars to exist”

[with a tone bar on the guitar]. They knew somehow... I fell in love with the guitar and we are together for 58 years now. The longest relationship I’ve ever had with somebody, after my parents.”

How does Indian classical music differ in its fundamentals when compared with Western musical traditions?

“Indian classical music has so many differences from the Western concept of music. Because in the West, music started from people singing in choirs and then [ensemble] strings and wind accompanying those voices together. But in Indian classical music, the sound was already inside – one simply had to feel it and then open the mouth and sing: ‘Ahhhhhhh’. So, if that ‘Ah’ is a C, from the Western point of view, then there are 13 notes from that C to the upper octave C [inclusive]. And all these notes he or she starts hearing while singing that note, moving between the notes with different timings...

“So it is modal music that doesn’t have two notes played together [as harmony]. The whole song is played or sung for



Debashish had his Gibson Super 400 archtop modified with extra drone strings to facilitate his unique slide guitar style

30 minutes and the musician and the melody and the ambience all become one. And the purpose of the music was to praise and please Gods and Goddesses, so that they can receive the blessings. It was the same way in the West also, but the mood was different.”

How about the use of microtonal intervals?

“In Indian classical music, it is absolutely true that when the existence of notes dissolves, the Muse starts growing. So in between two notes is the music – it’s as if you had a beautiful picture, but you need a wall to hang it on and the wall needs two pillars to exist. In between the two pillars, the wall can be created. So those two pillars are ‘do’ and ‘fa’ [as in the first and last notes of do-re-mi-fa, an interval of a 4th in this example], but the wall and the frame and the picture and your passion to hang it – your feeling in between those two pillars – are the music. This is the Indian philosophy of music.

“Between two notes, your carving of the melody is important. A bar [tone bar or slide] in your left hand, a bar moving on the



“The longing and sorrow and sharing the sound of ‘glide’ is what connects East and West through slide guitar”

Bhattacharya with his gandharvi, a 12- to 14-string guitar/veena/santoor/sarangi

string without buzzing a fret, is the ultimate freedom. Because you can use micro-notes. You can use undulation, you can use slower movement, you can use faster movement; it's all possible on a string with a slide, just as your voice can do those things.”

Your Chaturangui lap steel guitar features, among other things, two drone strings on the bass side. Tell us about the drone – it's one of the most distinctive sounds in Indian classical music. What is its role?

“The drone is a canvas. In Western harmony there is always a bass note. But in our case the drone is just a continuous flow of *do* [as in the root note of the *do-re-mi* sequence] in two octaves – middle octave and low octave – plus one low-octave 5th note or 4th note. And there is a resonance buzz the drone itself makes, which creates what I call ‘silent harmonies’. These are non-audible, but when you sing a note with a drone you can feel the harmony, although you cannot hear it. So, that is what the drone does in Indian music: it keeps you good company, like your beloved one. The drone is like a companion.”

Some Western slide guitarists, from Derek Trucks to Michael Messer here in the UK, have traced a special connection between the blues, as played on slide, and the deep spirituality of Indian classical music.

What's your take on that?

“Well, with all music, from wherever... if you have a clear vision you can see that any place where life is not full of abundance, the music from those places always has fewer notes because people stretch their minds, their passion, their hands longer to fulfil their life. So, blues also comes from a certain generation of people who had a deep cry in their heart. Mostly the blues is not really ‘happy-happy’. So, blues... when you cry, your cry can be prolonged, it can bend notes like a fall from one note to the other note. And that long transition has a lot of emotional pull. So whenever someone plays slide guitar – whether it is electric or acoustic, with overdrive or not – the blues has the feeling of a tearing heart, a broken heart. And the same applies to Indian classical music also.

“Sorrow is a huge part of our music. Now, this [current] generation will not agree

because they don't see sorrow any more. Because in their life, everything is granted. Everything is ready. Everything is in your hand. Everything is achievable. Everything is for free. But in the generation that we come from... it is believed that if life doesn't have sorrow, you don't know what is the value of happiness or joy. So your answer is that the longing and sorrow and sharing the sound of ‘glide’ is what connects East and West through slide guitar.”

Which slide guitarists from around the world do you admire?

“I really like Mike Auldridge, I really love his guitar playing. I am a big fan of Tau Moe [the late Hawaiian guitar master], whom I met in 2004 in Hawaii. He came to my city [Kolkata] in 1933 and I met him in 2004. That was a huge, huge thing for me as a slide guitar player. But I could not collaborate with him, he was 96 years old. And four months after I met him, he passed away. So there have been many, many great slide guitarists I have met. A few of them I have been really honoured to collaborate with.”

Debashish co-created the 25-string Pushpa Veena that blends “the classical and iconic sounds of folk music from India and Asia into one musical instrument”



Sooner or later, every serious musician faces a choice between playing what's popular and bankable or trying to say something new and unique on the instrument. You chose the second way, yet in the end it has led to you being regarded as one of the world's great slide players. What are your thoughts on that?

“The choice is ours. If I chose to do it the hard way, that it is my choice, nobody has asked me to do this. When my fingers were really fast and people could not see them [for speed], they thought, ‘Wow, what a great guitarist.’ But then they’d say, ‘But he plays Indian classical music. He doesn’t play like us. He doesn’t play rock, country, blues or jazz...’ On the other hand, the pure and authentic Indian classical music society never acknowledged my work because [although] they think I am a very good Indian classical musician, I’m a dark horse because I play it on slide guitar.

“So it was like being a match referee – both the sides are doing fouls and punching each other. And the ref is in the middle, you know? [laughs] So I have always had to move along a thin borderline between both sides, left and right.

“Since childhood, I [have] thought, ‘How can I play better music? And what can I acquire from watching miraculous and surprising performances by other musicians?’”

“And so, my answer is yes, that was my choice because I never wanted to put myself before slide guitar. I didn’t want to make slide guitar my ladder of success. Literally every day of my life, since my childhood, I always thought, ‘How can I play better music – or what I call music – tomorrow on the slide guitar? And how many different tones, colours, can I acquire from watching miraculous and surprising performances by other musicians? What can I learn and what can I gather?’

“Every two, three years, my approach to music changed. And these days, when I listen to my older recordings, I laugh and think, ‘I was so naive.’ I didn’t know much. I didn’t grow much. But if I live another 10, 20 years, maybe whatever I have recorded now I would laugh at, too.” 



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1958 GIBSON FLYING V

Gibson only made 98 Flying Vs during the 1950s, so when Wiltshire auctioneers Gardiner Houlgate told us it had a 1958 example, we dashed straight over

Words Huw Price Photography Phil Barker

Researching and authenticating guitars is clearly an enjoyable part of the job for Gardiner Houlgate's guitars and musical instruments auctioneer, Luke Hobbs, and it's clear that he got his teeth into a certain 1958 Flying V. "The guitar was purchased by the vendor in late 1990," he tells us, "and it had been imported from America to the UK in 1989 by a collector called Julian Marsh. He used to travel to the US with vintage Vox and Marshall amps and trade them for American guitars. This Flying V had come into a shop called the American Guitar Center in Washington [DC] that was run by a guy called John Sprung, and Julian got the guitar from him, along with some of the guitar's history.

"It was originally sold by a shop called the Thomas Piano Company in Newport News, Virginia," he continues. "Washington is sort of the closest big city, so the assumption is that it only travelled a short distance, but whether John Sprung got it from the original owner, we don't know.

"When he got the guitar back to the UK, Julian sold it on to Jed Johnson, another collector, but he only kept it for about six months. He contacted our seller and offered him the choice of two Flying Vs, the 1958 and a 1959 that also had some issues. After trying both, he chose the 1958 because he thought it sounded a lot better and it had its original case. But most of all he preferred the smaller neck profile."

Neck & Numbers

Mention of the neck leads us onto the most significant modification that has been made to the guitar. A previous owner decided to have the fretboard width reduced, and it now measures 40mm at the nut rather than the 42.8mm typical on Gibsons from this era. We'll refrain from commenting on the wisdom of this decision, but we can report that whoever performed the work had some skills.

Since there is no damage to the body and the skinny 1958 frets appear to be original, we'd suggest the fretboard may have been removed and ground along the edges. Once reattached, the neck shoulders were then recontoured to meet the narrower fretboard edges.

"We're assuming it was done in the care of whoever had it before John Sprung," Luke suggests. "The guitar has also been refinished twice at least, and was once green judging by traces of lacquer remaining in the control cavities.

*A previous owner had the
fretboard width reduced
– whoever performed the
work had some skills...*

"It also has a repair on the headstock, where one 'wing' was reglued using dowels. The factory serial number stamp has gone, but we believe they put the original '8-2685' serial number back on when the guitar was resprayed with clear lacquer. The font is wrong, but the number matches the 15th Flying V produced according to Gibson's ledger list, which also shows that the guitar was shipped to the Thomas Piano Company.

"We know that the current serial number was on the guitar when Julian Marsh bought it, and the number can be seen in photos taken in 1991 for Tony Bacon's *The Ultimate Guitar Book*. Gibson's ledger wasn't made public until *The Flying V: The Illustrated History Of This Modernistic Guitar* by Larry Meinert was published in 2001, so the serial number is either correct or an impossibly lucky guess."

Hardware & Electronics

All the original hardware and electronics are present. The potentiometers date to 1958 and although the capacitor isn't a type typically seen on late-1950s Gibsons, an identical capacitor can be seen in a YouTube video where Joe Bonamassa dismantles a 1958 Flying V.

Very little of the gold plating survives on the top of the PAF covers, but it can still be seen on the sides where the plastic rings have provided protection. All the tulip tuner buttons were shrinking when the current owner bought the guitar and they have since

*'The guitar has been refinished twice at least,
and was once green judging by traces of
lacquer remaining in the control cavities*

uctions
GARDINER HOULGATE

Gardiner Houlgate will
be putting this 1958
Gibson Flying V, which
it dubs "20 times rarer
than a 'Burst", up for
auction on 5 September





1

1. The neck and bridge pickups read 7.96kohm and 8.01k respectively, and both have steel bobbin screws

2. Plugged holes behind the brass string-through plate show that a 'horseshoe' Bigsby was fitted in the past

The tone impresses with a pair of fine-sounding and well-balanced PAFs



2

disintegrated. The debris was carefully bagged up and will be included in the sale. Fortunately, however, the switch tip and knobs have fared better.

Extreme yellowing of the nut suggests that it's made of bone, so it's likely the nylon original was discarded when the fretboard was modified. We photographed the guitar with its original but rattly ABR-1 bridge, but the owner's repro was fitted when we tried the guitar.

The threaded post on the treble side protrudes above the bridge. And while Luke has both the original posts, one is slightly shorter and he believes part of it has snapped off inside the body. Judging by three plugged holes in the top, and the extra one in the pickguard, a horseshoe Bigsby vibrato was probably installed at some point.

Classic Case

As scarce as 50s Vs are, the cases are even harder to find and this example comes with the rarest case of all, as Luke explains: "The lining is oxblood, but everywhere I've looked '58 and '59 Vs would have pink-lined cases. The reference books don't actually state the colour of the lining, but interestingly the *Vintage Guitar Price Guide* mentions the oxblood case specifically.

"I did find a couple of V photos showing oxblood-lined cases," he adds, "and one was claimed to be a prototype. So maybe only the very early ones had these cases, and that would tie in with this being the

15th Flying V. Of the last five or six 1950s Flying V transactions that I'm aware of, I've been led to believe that most didn't have original cases. So it is a huge selling point for this guitar."

V-Tone

Gardiner Houlgate let us loose with the V and a tweed Fender amp, and despite the neck modifications, the guitar plays pretty well and the E strings don't fall off the edge. The tone impresses, with a pair of fine-sounding and well-balanced PAFs, and the controls have the 1 to 10 operating range that characterises 1950s Gibsons and somehow eludes most modern pots.

While sharing sustain and note bloom characteristics with 'Bursts, this V has a more airy and transparent tone, with plenty of bite and wiry growl. The mids are slightly scooped, making it devoid of the thickness and dense harmonic content that you can get with some SGs. Korina definitely has its own dynamic and tonal characteristics, and it's quickly apparent why SRV was able to mimic his hero Albert King's 1958 Flying V tones using a Strat.

This writer has played one 50s Flying V prior to this example and remembers a full but soft D profile that was quite unlike 'Bursts and ES-335s from the era. It was nicely replicated on Joe Bonamassa's Epiphone Flying V, but, in truth, the neck profile on Gardiner Houlgate's V feels more like a late-1960s Melody Maker SG.

Fabled Vs

Original korina Vs are extremely collectible and seldom come up for sale, though there are some even rarer examples. When the Flying V failed to take off, Gibson quietly ceased production in 1959 – or so it is widely believed. However, it is now known that Gibson continued assembling Flying Vs and Explorers into the 1960s on a custom order basis using leftover 1950s necks and bodies.

Evidence that Gibson retained surplus bodies and necks appears in Gil Hembree's book *Gibson Guitars: Ted McCarty's Golden Era 1948-1966*. Long-time Gibson employee and Heritage co-founder Jim Deurloo remembers 25 Flying Vs and Explorers sitting "in a rack outside the office for literally years... they were all made of korina".

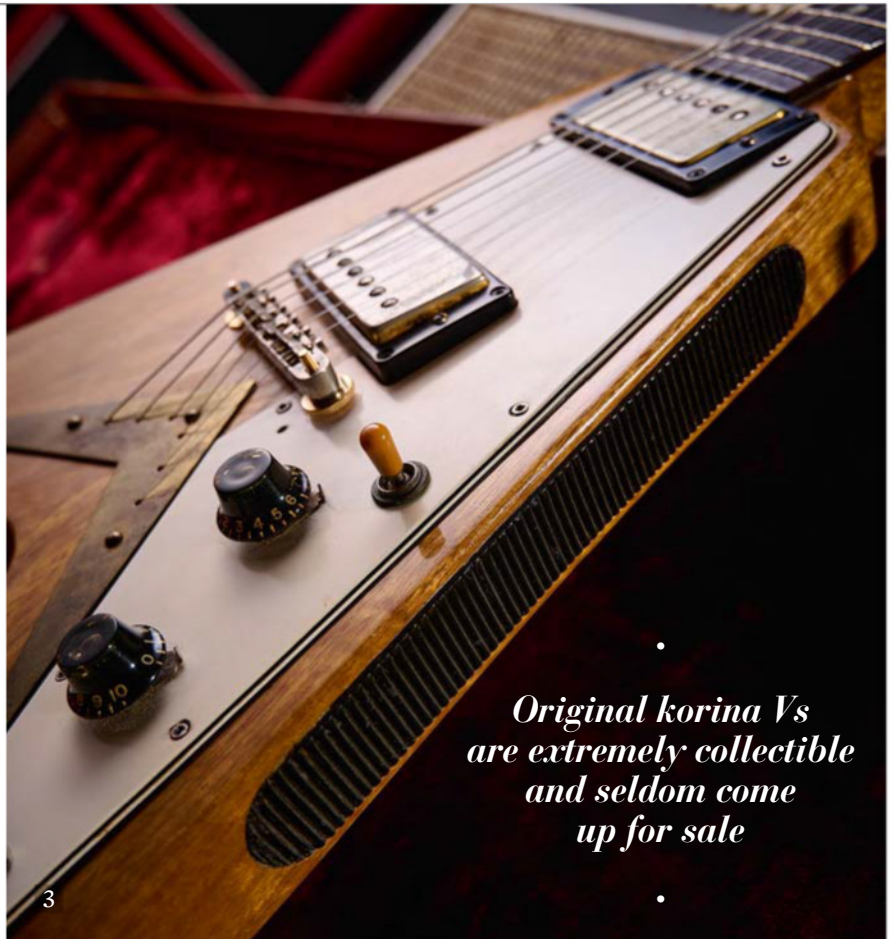
Those who have encountered early 1960s Flying Vs and Explorers report that Gibson used whatever parts were current. In which case, any genuine 1960s korina V should have double-ring tuner buttons, Patent Number humbuckers, wired bridges with nylon saddles and reflector knobs, and nickel-plated hardware.

V Revival

Interest in Gibson's discontinued 1950s solidbodies picked up through the 60s as a new crop of blues rockers discovered what these models could do through cranked-up Marshalls. The Les Paul returned to Gibson's product line in 1968, but it was actually preceded by the Flying V. Gibson produced two prototypes in 1966 and began production in 1967. Despite the clamour for the 50s guitars, Gibson went for redesigns, rather than reissues. The changes made sense from a production perspective, with mahogany replacing korina and new Sunburst, Sparkling Burgundy, Cherry and Walnut finish options.

The pickups, controls and jack socket were clustered together on a redesigned pickguard, which simplified the wiring, and the body acquired a regular stop tailpiece and softer shoulders around the neck joint. Despite the endorsement of a certain Mr Hendrix, Gibson only made 175 Flying Vs between 1966 and 1970. Limited numbers of Medallion Vs followed between 1971 and 1974, with V production gearing up again in 1975.

Gibson now manufactures a range of vintage reissues and Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa Flying V is an excellent and upgradeable option, if you can find one. They're not that comfortable to play sitting down, but hang a V from a strap and everything just falls into place. Gibson was well ahead of the curve in 1958 and, although it took a while, the Flying V is now widely recognised as a guitar design classic. 



Original korina Vs are extremely collectible and seldom come up for sale



3. Despite the refinishing and modifications, the hardware, plastics and rubber grip strip have all survived intact

4. The gold-plated Kluson tuners are original, but the buttons crumbled and had to be replaced. The serial number has also been restamped

5. The moulded logo that's used on the headstock also appears on 1950s Gibson amplifiers

6. Some 1950s Flying Vs had black pickguards, but the jack plates were almost always white

150

Years Of

EPIPHONE

Luxury archtop maker, budget brand, rock icon.

Epiphone has been so many things to so many people over the years that discovering its true soul as a guitar maker is a difficult task. That's why, as Epiphone celebrates a century-and-a-half in business, we've enlisted the help of vintage-guitar experts, leading artists and Gibson's own archivists to tell its harlequin history. For, when you look beneath the patinated surface of the brand's heritage, there is much that shines

Words Tony Bacon, Jamie Dickson





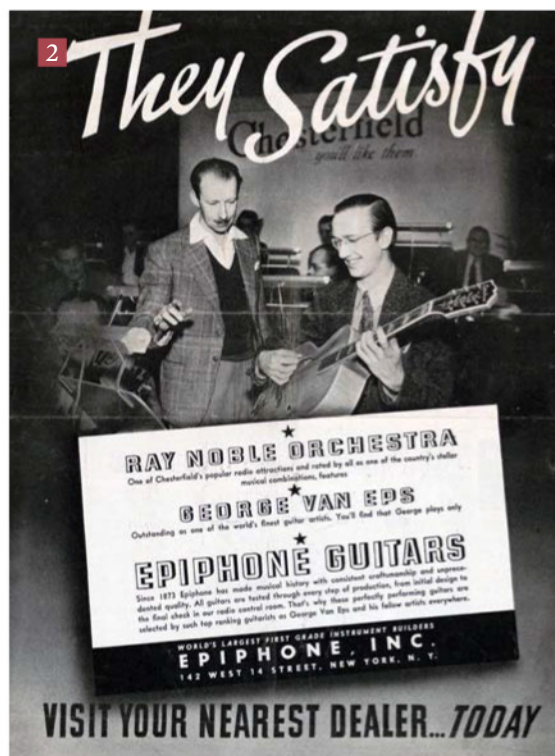


IMAGE COURTESY OF GIBSON

You'll know Epiphone today as Gibson's alter ego, with its line of well-priced alternatives to the senior brand, as well as reincarnations of some of its own historic models such as the Casino, Texan and Coronet. Epiphone's roots, though, go back further than you might think – all the way to Turkey in the 1890s, in fact, when Anastasios Stathopoulos began making lutes, violins and other instruments.

Anastasios emigrated with his family to the United States in 1903, in the process losing the final 's' of their surname, and he set up in business in New York City, successfully making mandolins, which were in vogue at the time, and also banjos, much favoured by early jazz players in the city and beyond.

When Anastasios died in the mid-1910s, his son Epaminondas began to run the business. He was known as Epi, and at first he renamed the firm as House Of Stathopoulos, introducing the Epiphone brand in 1924 and bringing in his brothers Orphie and Frixo. Again following instrumental fashion, as the guitar began to make its voice heard, Epi added the Recording line of carved-top and flat-top acoustics in 1928, some with a distinctive curved cutaway. In the same year, Epi again

1. It's sometimes easy to forget that much of Les Paul's pioneering work on developing an electric archtop that resisted feedback was done at Epiphone

2. Epiphone was very successful at persuading top artists to play their guitars

renamed the business, this time as the Epiphone Banjo Company.

In 1931, along came Epiphone's Masterbilt archtops: De Luxe, Broadway, Triumph, Royal and Zenith, plus a few years later the Tudor, Spartan and Regent. They competed directly with the market leader, Gibson, and in many ways were superior. The Masterbilts marked the start of a battle for leadership in the acoustic archtop market between the two American brands, with bigger sizes and bigger claims throughout the 1930s and into the 40s for models such as Gibson's Super 400 and Epi's Emperor.

As America entered World War II in 1942, Epiphone was neck and neck with Gibson as the biggest name in American guitars

Epiphone introduced electric guitars late in 1935, at first with the Electar brand, and the following year added its new F.T. flat-tops. Epi hired Herb Sunshine to develop the new-fangled electric instruments, and Herb in turn hired Nat Daniel, later of Danelectro fame, to create the necessary amplifiers. Sunshine designed a new pickup

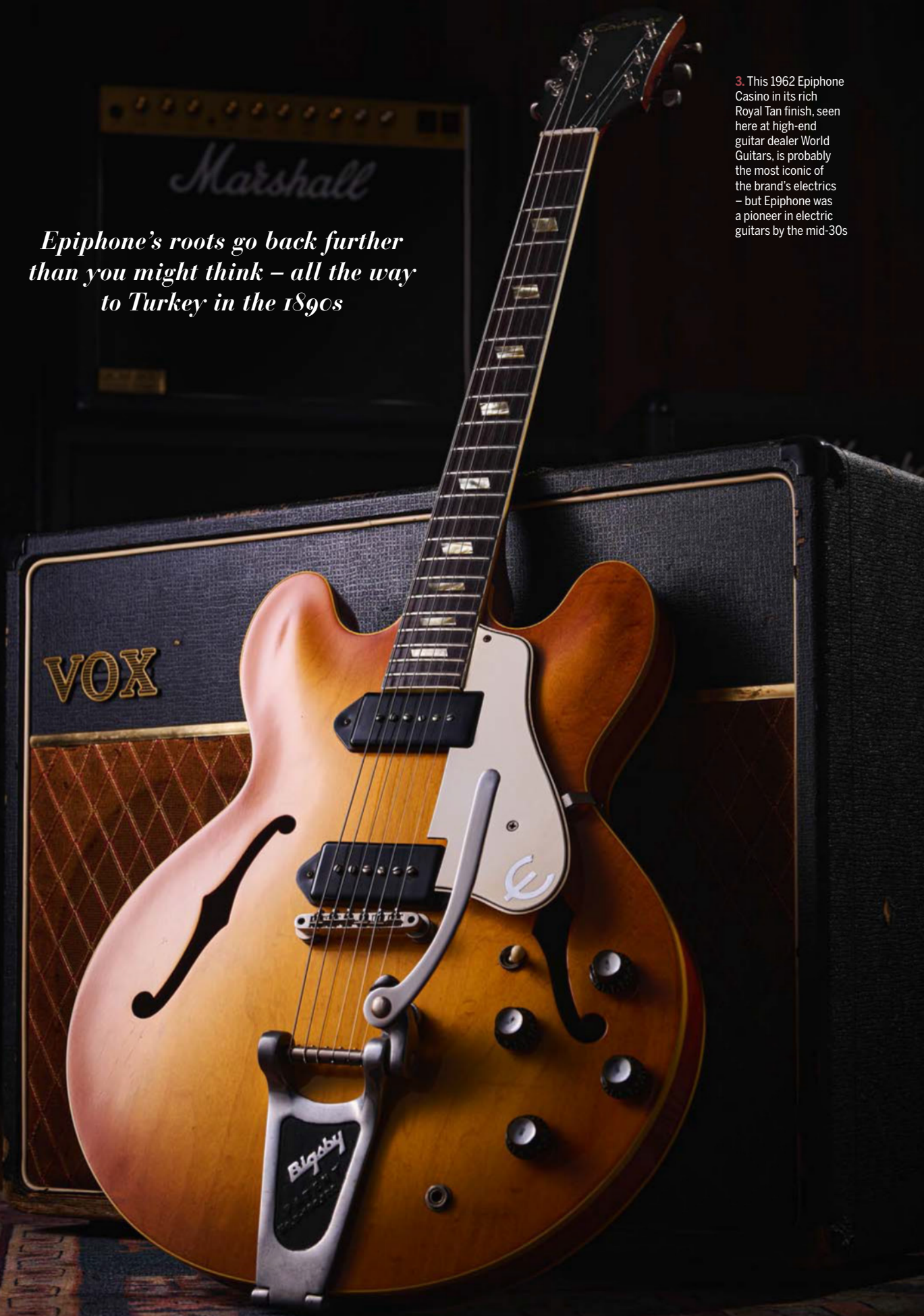
for Epiphone/Electar that was the first with screw polepieces, allowing height adjustment for individual string volume, and also Epiphone's distinctive twin-armed Frequensator tailpiece. Alongside Epi's late-30s electric instruments was the Rocco Tonexpressor volume and tone foot controller, the first ever guitar pedal.

As America entered World War II in 1942, Epiphone was neck and neck with Gibson as the biggest name in American guitars. By now, Epiphone boasted a packed catalogue with nine acoustic archtops, from the mighty Emperor to the small-body Olympic, four F.T.-series flat-tops, two classical models, four electric archtops (Zephyr De Luxe, Zephyr, Century and Coronet), plus electric steels, acoustic and electric mandolins, upright basses, acoustic and electric banjos, amplifiers and accessories.

In 1943, Epi Stathopoulos died at the age of just 49 and his brother Orphie took over the company. It had trouble regaining ground after the war ended in '45, despite a reasonably strong reputation – and an impressive new high-end electric archtop, the Zephyr Emperor Vari Tone. Introduced in 1950, it boasted three 'New York' pickups and six push-button

Epiphone's roots go back further than you might think – all the way to Turkey in the 1890s

3. This 1962 Epiphone Casino in its rich Royal Tan finish, seen here at high-end guitar dealer World Guitars, is probably the most iconic of the brand's electrics – but Epiphone was a pioneer in electric guitars by the mid-30s



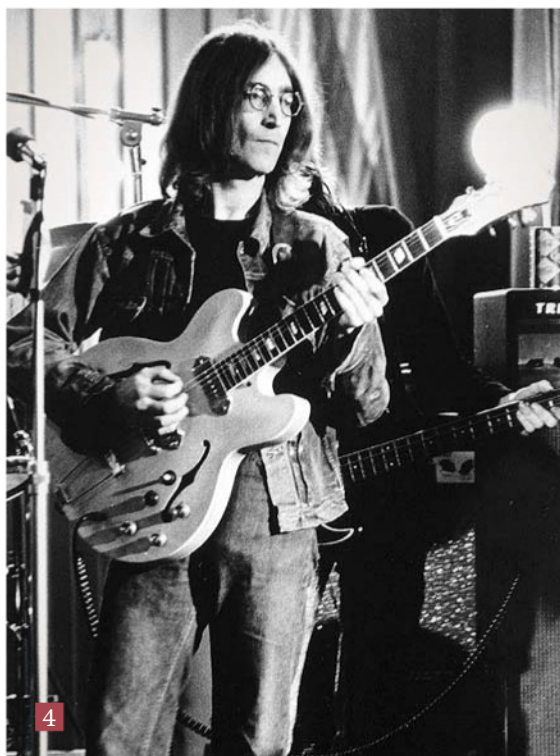


PHOTO BY ANDREW MACLEAR/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

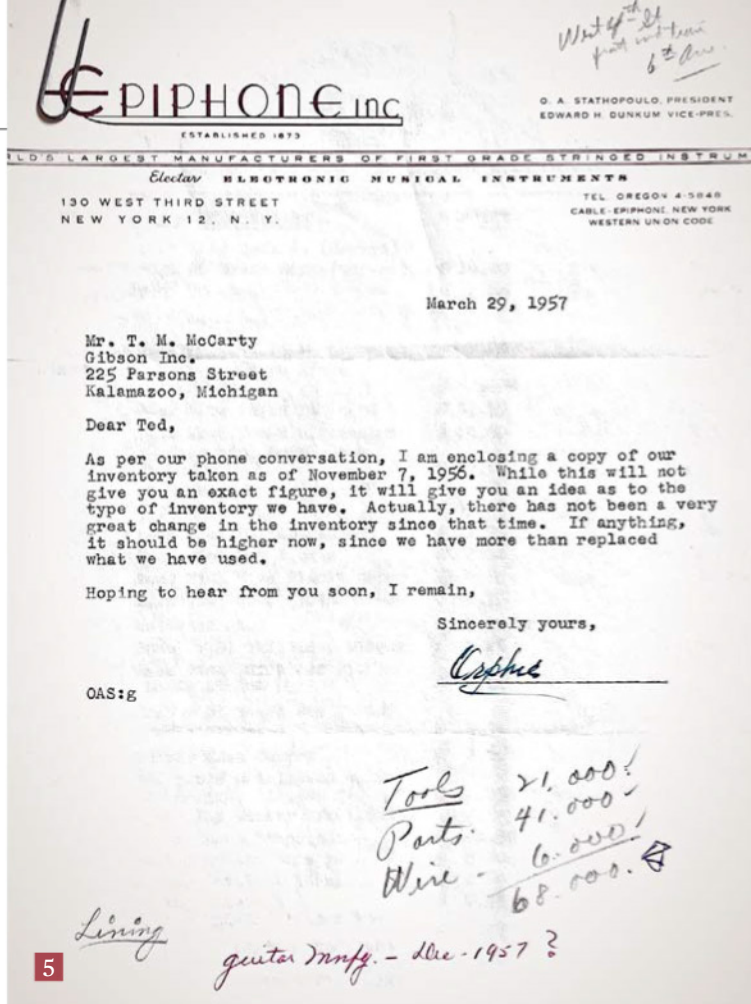


IMAGE COURTESY OF GIBSON

selectors, and was soon renamed the Zephyr Emperor Regent (and later simply the Zephyr Electric).

Following a strike in 1951 at its factory in New York City, Epiphone relocated to Philadelphia. Many of the discontented workers departed and helped to create the Guild company in New York. Epiphone's last new instrument of the era was introduced in 1955 – a budget signature electric archtop for the jazz guitarist Harry Volpe. It seemed like time was now running out for Epiphone. But waiting in the wings was the brand's old rival, Gibson.

Rival Turned Owner

Bosses at Gibson had seen their upright-bass manufacturing disappear following World War II – and they couldn't help but notice the problems over at Epiphone. In the early 90s this writer spoke to Ted McCarty, Gibson's boss of this era, and he remembered how those problems appeared to present an opportunity. However, it wasn't the guitars that attracted Gibson; it was Epiphone's upright basses.

"Our biggest competitor was Epiphone – and I bought Epiphone for Gibson in 1957," McCarty recalled. "By that time

"Within a few years we were doing about \$3m in Epiphone. Orphie was happy, and I had made a very fortuitous purchase" TED MCCARTY

we had overtaken Epiphone, and they were going under. Some people at Gibson wanted us to get back into the bass business. We couldn't find all of the forms and what-not to make the Gibson bass – they'd been thrown away during the war. So I told Orphie Stathopoulos that if he ever decided to sell his bass business, let me know. Later, Orphie called me, saying, 'Ted, I've got to sell out, I need money, and you once said you'd like the bass business. If you still want the bass business, it's yours.'"

McCarty talked it over with MH Berlin, his boss at CMI, which had owned Gibson since 1944. No doubt Stathopoulos's asking price of just \$20,000 was a significant part of that discussion. McCarty called Stathopoulos, told him it was a deal and said they would come over and collect all the relevant material.

"What we found out," McCarty continued, "was that we were buying the whole business. Not just the string-bass deal, but because they didn't know over in

Philadelphia, well... they put in all the forms and parts and what-not to make Epiphone guitars. We discovered all this when they shipped the whole thing back to us in a big furniture truck. I put Ward Arbanas in charge of it, and we set it all up to make Epiphone guitars."

McCarty's intention was to market Gibson and Epiphone separately. He said they knew plenty more stores beyond their core dealers who wanted to sell Gibson. "We wouldn't sell it to them," he recalled. "I said to Berlin, 'Look, now we have a recognised top-quality guitar that was always competitive with Gibson – now we've got two good lines to sell. We can't sell this other guy our Gibson, but we can sell him Epiphone, and we'll make it equal in quality and all the rest.' And within a few years we were doing about \$3 million in Epiphone. Orphie was happy to get the \$20,000, and I had made a very fortuitous purchase."

Gibson's new Epiphone upright basses didn't last much more than four years in the catalogue, but the guitars were a different story. Soon, Gibson had positioned Epiphone as an important "new" guitar brand, a brand that would become a valuable asset for Gibson – and a brand that is very much alive today.

4. From humble beginnings as a kind of accidental purchase in 1957, Epiphone was to sell 1,800 of its Casino model a decade later in 1967. This was partly due to the guitar's connection to the Beatles, and the bubble was to burst not long after...

5. A 1957 letter from Orphie Stathopoulos of Epiphone to Ted McCarty at Gibson, discussing the inventory of the company. A surprised McCarty was to get more than he was expecting from the \$20,000 deal

A Remodelled Brand

Gibson launched the revived Epiphone brand at the 1958 NAMM Show and early the following year it began to ship the new instruments from the Kalamazoo factory to a new network of Epiphone stores.

Alongside the relevant Gibson models of the day, there were 15 Epiphone archtop and flat-top acoustics, and hollowbody and solidbody electrics. Gibson cleverly decided not to simply extend the life of the existing Epiphone models but to adapt and create what amounted to a new line of models, many of which sat between Gibson's various models, rather than competing directly with them. The impression was that Epiphone guitars had a new identity. And as a bonus they were built in the same factory as Gibson and to the same standards.

Most of the differences between comparable Gibson guitars and the Epiphone models introduced in 1959 were down to distinctive Epi features. Pickups, for example, were at first the 'New York' single coils, as well as some P-90s and Melody Makers, and a little later mini-humbuckers. There was some specific Epiphone hardware, too, notably that Frequensator tailpiece, plus a new Tremotone vibrato, as well as individual decorative touches, not least the fancy inlay on some of Epiphone's fingerboards and headstocks.

Epi's new offering of four hollowbody electrics each came in Gibson's thinline body style. The single-cut Emperor was, as ever, top of the tree, still with the old model's three pickups but replacing the funky button selectors with a conventional three-way. There was no obvious model in Gibson's contemporary lines to compare to the Emperor.

The double-cut Sheraton was another impressive beast, with its centre-block body making it the only semi-solid in the new line, sitting somewhere between Gibson's ES-335 and 355. Two more models completed the hollowbody electrics for now: the two-pickup single-cut Zephyr and the non-cutaway single-pickup Century, again with no evident Gibson equivalents. There was

also an electric with a full-depth hollow body, the two-pickup single-cut Broadway.

Two new solidbody electrics opened up a category without precedent for Epiphone, a field where Gibson had some seven years of experience. The two-pickup Crestwood Custom and single-pickup Coronet were made in Gibson's regular set-neck style, their double-cut slab bodies finished in cherry red.

There was a perceptible hint of Les Paul Specials and Juniors about the Crestwood and Coronet, but despite their popularity, the Epiphones of this period never rivalled the sales punch of Gibsons. For example, the Coronet and Les Paul Junior listed at the same price, \$132, but the factory shipped 237 Coronets in 1959 and 221 the following year, while Gibson's equivalent Junior shipped 4,364 in 1959 and 2,513 in 1960.

6. It was sometimes hard to judge how far Epiphone models differed from their nearest Gibson equivalents – this 1963 Texan has some of the looks of a J-45 but its longer scale gave it a different sonic identity





The new-style Epiphone brand launched four flat-tops, headed by the Frontier, intended to compete with Martin's square-shouldered Dreadnoughts. It was joined by the round-shouldered Texan (calling to mind Gibson's jumbo J-45 and J-50), the smaller Cortez (like Gibson's LG-2), and the Cabellero (like an LG-0).

It wouldn't be Epiphone without archtop acoustics, and the four models that went on sale in 1959 ranged from the lofty Emperor (comparable to Gibson's Super 400), through two more single-cuts, the Deluxe (L-5C) and the Triumph (L-7C), and on to the non-cut Zenith (L-50).

Into The 60s

Gibson's apparent success with its transformation of the Epiphone brand meant that as the 60s rolled into view, more models were added to the lines. The range of acoustic flat-tops was widened considerably as the folk boom resonated around the guitar world. There were a few nylon-string classics, with the Seville model offered in an Electric version with a pickup.

The steel-string line expanded in 1963 to include the Excellente, El Dorado and Troubadour, followed by the small-body

The Beatles' use of Casinos throughout their final live dates appears to have had a tangible effect on the model's sales figures

7. This 1965 Epiphone Riviera E360TD was a quasi-counterpart to Gibson's 335. The model was first introduced in 1962

8. This 1962 Coronet is part of Johnny Marr's personal collection. Though not wildly popular at time of launch, vintage Coronets have found favour among savvy present-day musicians

9. This 1964 Casino is another gem from the collection of Johnny Marr. The Beatles connection is almost certainly responsible for the model's enduring place as Epiphone's best-loved vintage electric

Folkster (1966) and a couple of 12-strings, the Bard and Serenader (1962 and '63). But the main action was with Epi's electrics, and the thinlines proliferated. The Sorrento, with single pointed cutaway and two mini-humbuckers, was introduced in 1960, while the non-cutaway Granada (1962) had a Melody Maker pickup, with a single-cut version added three years later.

Epiphone's Casino (1961), offered at first with single as well as double P-90s, was similar to the double-cut hollow style of Gibson's ES-330, while the Riviera ('62), with two mini-humbuckers, was more like a 335, with the internal body block. A 12-string Riviera was added in '65.

More solidbody electrics began to fill Gibson's Epiphone lines. The Wilshire was like a Coronet fitted with two P-90s and suitable controls. It boasted the modified new-for-1960 body seen on all three solidbody models – Crestwood Custom, Wilshire, and Coronet – with rounded body

edges as opposed to the original square-edge style. Also that year, Epi launched a budget solidbody, the Olympic, in short-scale form with one pickup or full-scale with one or two.

In 1963, Epiphone again revised its solids, the asymmetrical body thinner and with a long upper horn and short lower horn, plus a cheekily Fender-like "batwing" shape headstock with tuners on one side. The high-end three-pickup Crestwood Deluxe also joined the line in '63, and three years later a Wilshire 12-string was added.

Gibson tested some new ideas in '62, safely away from the main brand, with the multiple-control Professional. There were two companion amps: the 35-watt EA8P with 15-inch speaker, or the 15-watt 12-inch EA7P. Each had just a single knob, but its main controls – seven switches and five knobs – were on the guitar itself. It was a short-lived experiment.

Epiphone introduced a couple of signature models, at first in '63 with the Caiola (later the Caiola Custom), for New York session guitarist Al Caiola. It was a sort of long-scale Sheraton with five tone switches on a curved control panel. A less fancy Caiola Standard, with P-90s, was added three years later.

Then in '64 came the Howard Roberts Standard, named for another top session player. Similar to Gibson's sharp-cutaway L-4CES, it added a long scale, oval soundhole and a floating mini-humbucker. The fancier Howard Roberts Custom followed in '65.

The Beatles Effect

By the mid-60s, almost a fifth of guitar shipments from Gibson's factory were Epiphones. And it was around this time that The Beatles picked up a few. Paul began the trend during his band's second US tour, in 1964, when he bought a Texan flat-top. It became a favourite recording and songwriting tool, but he also used it occasionally for TV performances of *Yesterday*. Later that year, he bought a '62 Casino with Bigsby tailpiece, restrung and flipped to accommodate his left-handed style.

In 1965, John and George each bought a new Casino, using them on the sessions for *Revolver*, as did Paul. George's came with a Bigsby, John's with the regular trapeze tailpiece, and the pair played them throughout the band's final live dates from June into August '66 in Germany, Japan, The Philippines and the USA. This appears to have had a tangible effect on the model's sales figures at that time.

The year before John and George's Epis were seen on those live dates, Gibson shipped 853 Casinos from the Kalamazoo factory. In '66, the year of those final Beatle tours, the number doubled, to 1,655 shipped, and for '67, the total nudged higher still, to 1,814. Impressive increases – but not necessarily thanks to the Beatles effect. In fact, guitar sales for all makers generally peaked and then fell around this time.

Following our example of the Casino, in 1968 its annual sales slumped to 468, dramatically down from that 1,800 of '67. In total, Gibson shipped a touch over 4,000 Epiphones in '68, a paltry 20 per cent or so of the peak a few years earlier – and the output continued to plummet in '69.

Gibson had its own business problem, and its president, Ted McCarty, who had steered the firm through its glory years, left in

1966. Gibson-brand sales dropped substantially in this period, but it was strong enough to weather the storm. Epiphone, however, was now in serious trouble – one indication was an absence of any new models since '66.

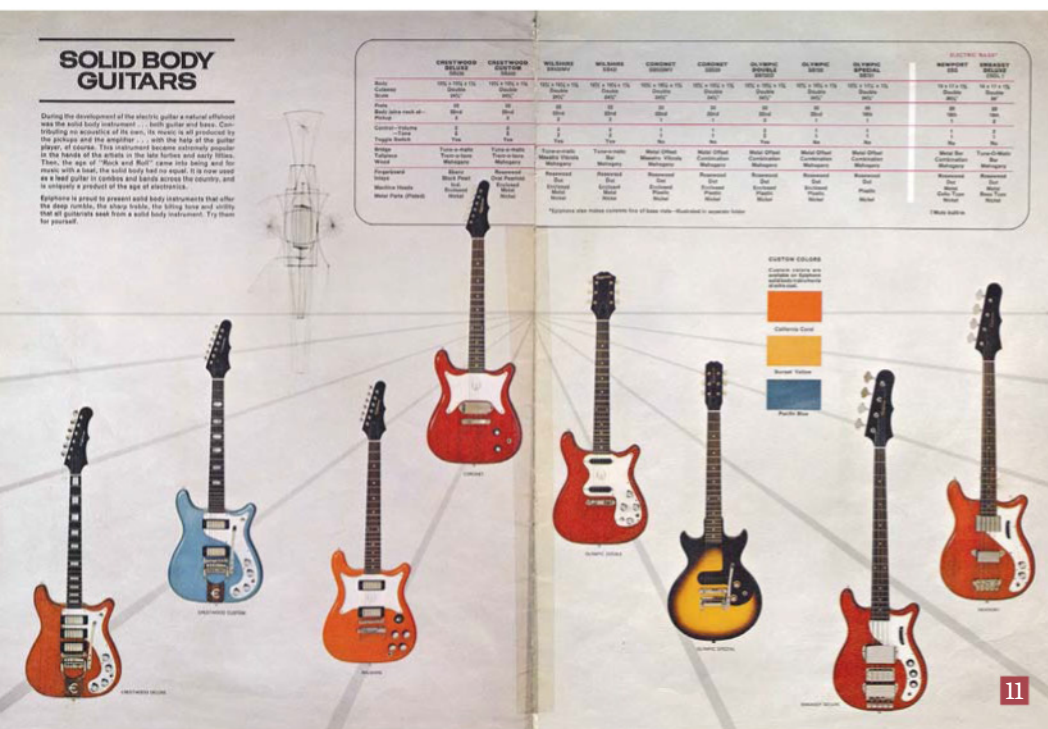
By the end of the decade, Gibson's parent company, CMI, was taken over by ECL, an Ecuadorian brewing firm, and the result was a new owner, Norlin. Amid these trying times, the decision was made to switch Epiphone production to Japan.

Made In Japan

A new, reduced line of Epiphones was made in Japan by Matsumoku, and by 1971 the catalogue offered just five Martin-like flat-tops, three classicals and a Fender-like solidbody plus similar bass. The only guitar at all reminiscent of earlier times was the double-cut thinline 5102T (plus matching bass), which on a good day

10. This impeccable 1995 Emperor Regent comes from an era when the brand was experiencing a renaissance in quality and a surer grasp of its own heritage after the wilderness years of the 70s





resembled a Casino. Other than that, there was not a hint of the 60s models that had given new life to Epiphone. Instead, guitarists were presented with what must have seemed like just another bunch of import guitars.

Gradually, the Japanese Epis gained more character, and a couple of Crestwood-like solids, the ET-275 and 278, were described as “original Epiphones”. A little later in the 70s there were SG copies and some flat-tops that recalled classic Gibson models. New designs began to appear, too, such as the Scroll and Genesis solidbodies and Nova flat-tops. By the end of the decade, however, further changes were in the air.

In the 80s, Gibson began to shift Epiphone’s identity, at first with the short-lived American series, made once again at Gibson’s Kalamazoo factory, and then, at last, some Japan-made reissues of the 60s thinline electrics – a Casino, of course, a Riviera and a Sheraton, plus an Emperor, also offered with full-depth body.

Another New Start

Norlin collapsed in 1984 amid these promising signs, and a new owner acquired Gibson and Epiphone two years later. Yet again, a new line of Epiphones was devised, this time made at Samick

“We’re celebrating our 150th Anniversary with limited editions of the most desirable and collectible models” MAT KOEHLER

11. This original 60s Epiphone catalogue shows off some of the vibrant colours now being revisited in Epiphone’s recent reissues (see review, page 82) including California Coral and Pacific Blue. Note the three-pickup Crestwood Deluxe, introduced in 1963, right around the time when Fender’s Strat was at its pre-CBS zenith as a design

12. Artist tie-ins seem to be an increasingly important part of the Epiphone equation. Interestingly, the recent Noel Gallagher Riviera is based on a Japanese-built Riviera that Noel used in Oasis, moving the reference point for cult reissues forward from the 60s to the Britpop era

in Korea. Mostly they were Strat-like solidbody variations, but there were also some lookalikes based on a Flying V and an Explorer. Just as Fender was doing with its new Squier brand at the time, Gibson stressed its relationship with a “Epiphone by Gibson” logo on the headstocks. This clear and obvious link – with Epi versions of famous Gibson designs, often with modern features – is still at the heart of Epiphone’s identity today, with manufacturing now primarily at Epiphone’s own factory in China.

A run of artist models has also strengthened Epi’s modern image, highlighting today’s lines with prestigious models such as Joe Bonamassa’s vintage-flavoured 335 and Alex Lifeson’s Floyd Rose-equipped Les Paul Custom Axxess.

Mat Koehler, vice president of product at Gibson Brands (who we interview further in the following pages), sums up Epiphone’s important role within today’s Gibson company, revived and sharpened since the newest owners took over in 2018. “Epiphone will always



IMAGE COURTESY OF GIBSON

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

be Gibson’s older brother, and its history is perhaps the most interesting of any guitar brand,” Koehler suggests.

He charts the past achievements – “Epiphone’s sonic dominance in the jazz era, Les Paul constructing his Log at the New York factory, Gibson’s acquisition and resurrection of the brand, and the Japan-made years with some still highly regarded instruments being used by professional musicians” – and then considers Epiphone today. “Epiphone USA Casinos are finding new audiences 60 years after The Beatles used them,” he says, “and the unique Epiphone Prophecy models take the brand into modern music and tastes.”

Epiphone is claiming 2023 as a key birthday in its long history. “We’re celebrating Epiphone’s 150th Anniversary year with a variety of limited-edition models representing the most desirable and collectible historic Epiphone models,” Koehler continues, “both archtop and solidbody, most of which we’ve never made since their original debut.”

It’s been a long, eventful and sometimes difficult history, but it’s hard not to conclude that Epiphone is in better shape today than it’s ever been. Epaminondas Stathopoulos would have been proud. **G**

*“Epiphone will always be Gibson’s
older brother and its history is
perhaps the most interesting
of any guitar brand”*

MAT KOEHLER



13. Alex Lifeson's slickly built Les Paul Custom Access highlights the brand's dual identity today. It makes increasingly high-quality versions of flagship Gibson models for a more modest outlay, but it also now makes authentic US-built reissues of heritage designs such as the Casino and Frontier



DOUBLE VISION

When Gibson acquired its rival Epiphone's guitar-making business, almost by accident, in 1957, it suddenly found itself with an unexpected problem – what to do with it.

*Vice president of product, **Mat Koehler**, explains how Epiphone forged its own designs while remaining a close cousin to Gibson*

Words Jamie Dickson

Epiphone has had a pretty rollercoaster existence. In the early 20th century it was a serious rival to Gibson. By the 60s it belonged to Gibson. Under Gibson ownership, it was an exclusive high-end brand at first, then became synonymous with affordable instruments. Now, having been revamped once again by Gibson, it's no longer a poor relation, acquiring its own Custom Shop and a slew of US and overseas-built models that exude a fresh confidence and quality. We ask Mat Koehler, a devoted historian of the two brands, who the heck Epiphone thinks it is...

In the decades before Gibson acquired Epiphone in 1957, how did the two brands stand in relation to one another?

"Gibson was very aware of Epiphone, especially because Epiphone was very much in competition for the bluegrass market with their banjos. Mandolins, too, to some degree, but Gibson was far and away the leader there and had the most premium mandolin options. But going into the big band era, the Jazz Age, Epiphone really became the artists' preference for archtops, which is ironic because Gibson kind of invented the archtop!

"But what Epiphone did really, really well was artist outreach: finding new artists, influential artists, and then getting Epiphone models into their hands. Some of these artists were playing Gibson previously, and some of these artists continued to play Gibson – but they appeared in Epiphone ads. So whatever the case, it must have driven the folks at Gibson nuts at the time. And I will say that, having owned many Epiphone archtops from the 30s, they are outstanding. I mean, they're really hard to beat, even though Gibson archtops are fantastic from that era as well."

As described elsewhere in this issue, when Gibson made an offer for Epiphone's upright bass business, it unexpectedly got the guitar business into the bargain. How did Gibson rationalise owning two guitar brands with such overlap?

"Ward Arbanas was the *de facto* leader of the Epiphone group, and Ward continued to work at Gibson

into the 90s. He ran the parts cage and worked with people that I work with today, which is pretty cool. Ward directed the portfolio for Epiphone, and in February 1958 had basically presented the final portfolio with prices. And this includes flat-top acoustics. I think it was 30-some instruments in all. So the strategy with all these instruments was to use up some of the Epiphone parts that they had inherited. Basically, there would need to be very little investment in the material cost. They would also be able to sell Epiphones to dealers that Gibson was not present in because of proximity or other reasons.

"So it was this entire other brand that Gibson – or its parent company, CMI, effectively – could use to sell [additional] products and into dealers. For example, if there was a Gibson dealer in Indianapolis and there was another guitar dealer a block away, you couldn't sell a Gibson in both shops, but now they had an option to sell Epiphone in one of the shops [and Gibson in the other]. So that's how they grew the brand. "

"Going into the big band era, the Jazz Age, Epiphone really became the artists' preference for archtops"

How did Gibson tackle the problem of making Epiphone guitars stand out in those early years?

"Epiphone piggybacked off of Gibson in some ways, but then pioneered other new things. For example, Epiphone was developing the double-cut design even before Gibson got into the double-cut Les Paul Specials, so the Coronet and Crestwood actually debuted slightly before the double-cut Les Pauls. Then, in terms of price points, Epiphone tended to sit a little higher than Gibson, so it was positioned more like a boutique offering. I think there was some concern that if they positioned Epiphone below Gibson then they were just competing against themselves. They purposely tried to position it just *above* in order to limit the volume [of orders for Epiphone guitars] since they were being handmade at the factory."



1. Opulent archtops, such as this beautiful 1962 Epiphone E252 Broadway, traded on the brand's jazz-era reputation for fine-quality hollowbodies

It's been reported that the best craftspeople at Kalamazoo were put on the Epiphone production line. Was there any rivalry, internally, between Gibson and Epiphone workers?

"I don't think there was brand competition, but I can tell you that there was a lot of dissent from the workforce, trying to understand why they were working on these Epiphone guitars as well. I think it was just perceived as, 'We're having to take on additional complexity. We don't understand what's in it for us here.' And so Ted McCarty actually sends out a letter to all of the supervisors in the whole factory. He says it was absolutely imperative that everyone's co-operation be given to [cultivating] the success of Epiphone guitars, paraphrasing it. It was clearly not a nice letter, it was basically like, 'You guys need to shape up or ship out because we need to ensure the success of the brand.'

"So that is very telling – clearly there was kind of a mindset of Epiphone not being as important or maybe even just not as easy to



work on as Gibson. Because some of the Epiphone models were more complex. For example, the Sheraton model has a lot more unique features than a 355 and it was priced *above* the Gibson 355. Likewise, the soft round-over on the [edges of] Epiphone solidbodies was kind of unique and unlike anything else Gibson was doing at that time. So just putting my factory hat on, I can see why there were kind of bad feelings about Epiphone at the time.”

Explain how the Epiphone electrics differed from their Gibson counterparts...

“The Casino and the 330 were identical to all intents and purposes, so the major changes there are the finish options and the specific type of trapeze. But functionally and playing-wise, they’re the exact same instrument. Even material-wise... same construction and everything. The headstock shape was obviously different on the Casino and that changes along with the rest of Epiphone in the

2. This 1959 Epiphone Coronet shows off the doublecut design that the brand pioneered. Note the slab sides that later became more rounded

3. This 1961 Wilshire features the older, shorter style of Epiphone headstock

“Epiphone was developing the double-cut design even before Gibson got into the double-cut Les Paul Specials”

4. This 1965 Riviera E360TD has the elongated headstock shape that was adopted to more clearly distinguish Epiphones from their sister brand, Gibson



early 60s. But the 355 and the Sheraton really were two different animals completely.

“Firstly, the 355 had an ebony ’board whereas the Sheraton had a rosewood ’board, with lots more multi-ply binding and then additional fingerboard inlay detail on the Sheraton... So I think, just visually, with that beautiful vine headstock inlay as well, the Sheraton really looks like a million bucks – though the

355 is really close behind it – and the Sheraton was priced higher than the 355. The Sheraton, I think, was supposed to be a continuation of the super-ornate guitars from the golden era of Epiphone archtops, the 30s and 40s. I think that sums it up other than the fact the pickups are different as well in the Sheraton,

which started with New York pickups and then went to mini-humbuckers. Whereas the 335 had full-size humbuckers.

“Meanwhile, the Riviera is one of the more versatile ES [guitars] that Kalamazoo ever made. Even when we make them today, they’re in the spirit of those Kalamazoo designs; we’ve made them in the USA previously, and we probably will again, but they have their own thing going on. So it’s the same construction as the 335, but those mini-humbuckers and that Frequensator tailpiece get a sound. Otis Rush is my go-to for that classic Riviera sound, where it’s just this haunting vocal, very sustaining tone, and that Frequensator tailpiece almost creates this built-in reverb... I can’t even really describe it, but it gets a different hollowbody sound.

“Rivieras have been – and continue to be – very successful. But I still think that they may be a little underappreciated in terms of people not quite understanding what the difference is between a 335 and a Riviera.”

"The 355 and the Sheraton were two different animals... The Sheraton model has a lot more unique features and was priced above the Gibson 355"

5. The complex vine-like inlay on the long headstock of Noel Gallagher's 60s-era Sheraton shows how the brand aimed to offer a touch of luxury

6. Noel Gallagher's Sheraton lacks the Frequensator tailpiece many Sheratons were factory fitted with during the 60s

The most obvious differentiator between Gibson and Epiphone, over the years, has been the headstock design. But that itself has changed over the years. Tell us about the evolution of Epiphone's headstocks. "Really, the major changes are that you go from the shorter headstock – which we call the 'Kalamazoo headstock' because it's the one that started in New York and then continued into Kalamazoo – and then when Gibson was changing and going to unique parts [for Epiphone guitars, after legacy parts ran out] that were made in-house, they elongated the headstock to give it even more of a distinct look compared with Gibson.

"It's a beautiful headstock shape as well, but it's longer, so I think it probably did pose a few problems with cases and whatnot. Otis Rush's Riviera, which had the long headstock, apparently didn't fit in a Gibson case, so he shaved the top off of the headstock. I don't know if you knew that? So that long headstock then kind of regressed back into the shorter headstock shape – maybe just because of case-fit issues – when Epiphone entered the Japanese-production era. Now, in the modern era, we're still using a combination of the Kalamazoo short-headstock and then the longer mid-60s style headstock."

The Epiphone range is really broad these days and seems split into contemporary guitars with a Gibson influence on one hand, and on the other hand authentic Epiphone designs from the past. How does that work?

"We've got the 'Inspired By Gibson' Epiphone logo, and then we've got the original Epiphone logo, so we're almost splitting Epiphone into two brands: [one is built around] Gibson-derived products, and the other is built around original Epiphone designs that were under the Epiphone brand originally. We'd actually like to take Epiphone Original into new territories of originality – guitars that are either inspired by Epiphones of the past, partially inspired by current Gibsons, or just new. That's an opportunity that we have not fully explored yet. But we kind of have permission to play here because we can [legitimately] call it an Epiphone Original design

"In terms of price, Epiphone tended to sit a little higher than Gibson [in the early years], so it was positioned more like a boutique offering"

This 1963 Epiphone FT-110N Frontier shows off unique styling details that were intended to set the brand's guitars apart from Gibson counterparts

because that's exactly what it will be when it comes out. So it really gives us a lot of flexibility.

"Also, we now have an 'Inspired By Gibson' Custom Shop range – the Korina guitars [such as the recent Explorer and Flying V reissues] are an example of that, where we're trying to hold nothing back and working closely with the [Gibson] Custom Shop team. I mean, we all work together, but we're not siloed at all. We all work here at HQ, next to each other, so we're all in this together and we're trying to do things like use what we learned while [3D] scanning a vintage Explorer [for the Gibson Custom Shop] and putting that work into new Epiphone models, which is really cool."

Are there any unsung or misunderstood models from Epiphone's past that deserve better recognition, do you think?

"On the acoustic side, one of the more beautiful designs ever to come out of Kalamazoo was the Excellente acoustic, just super, super cool, which was clearly positioned as the pinnacle flat-top that Gibson made, with Brazilian rosewood, back and sides, beautiful eagle inlay on the pickguard and lots of mother-of-pearl, and they only made I think 120, maybe 140 maximum in the 60s. Our reissue today is arguably better than those and it comes in at a thousand bucks, whereas even if you can find an original Excellente, you're looking at five figures. The ones we make today are really top-notch, and I'd put them up against anything. I own one, I play one. So that's definitely a personal favourite of mine.

"It's also worth noting that the Texan, which continues to be very popular because of Paul McCartney, is pretty different from the J-45. I think this is one of the biggest misconceptions there is about an Epiphone guitar: people assume the Texan is Epiphone's version of a J-45. But it's long-scale, so it's a completely different animal. It really has its own vocal, has its own kind of sustain and how the notes ping... so the scale length difference on the Texan really sets it apart. I own a Texan as well, so I'm practising what I preach here [laughs]." **G**



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SINGLE MINDED

American blues-rocker **Jared James Nichols** has got that rare, enviable combination of feel and paint-melting chops. He plays off-the-shelf, single-pickup Epiphone Les Pauls alongside original 1950s Gibsons and swears by both. We meet him to find out more...

Words Jamie Dickson

Tell us about your Epiphone signature models. You seem to have a few versions that bear your name...

"We are just about to launch my third signature [model Epiphone Les Paul] that is based off of the 'Old Glory', which is my single-pickup Les Paul Custom – basically a Les Paul Custom with a Les Paul Junior outfit. I'm playing ones that are right off the shelf, and I'm touring all over the world with them. Besides that, I've also been playing one of the new Epiphone Frontiers, which I love."

You use your signature Epiphone Les Pauls for much of your touring and studio work. In the past, Epiphone Les Pauls have been generally regarded as decent copies but not quite up to the Gibson USA standard. Is that still a fair reflection?

"I started playing guitar in about 2005. Back then, Epiphone was still perceived as [a guitar you bought] if you wanted to get your first Les Paul. But where we're at now, it's a totally different playing field. The brand has been elevated incredibly. For instance, when I was getting to know everyone at the company – this was in the old era, around 2017 – and I was messing around with Epiphone Les Paul Customs, ripping pickups out... and at that point the guitars were 'okay'. But the more I played them, the more random things would happen: I would have bridge posts pull [loose], I would have horrible fret jobs, just things that didn't work for playability."

"But now, especially in the past three years, it's like a different company. I can comfortably pick up an Epiphone anywhere I go in the world on tour. If it needs an adjustment, it's only going to be [a minor tweak to] the action. The way they sound, the way they feel, even the finishes – everything's really, really great. A lot of people will ask me, 'Hey, are those Gibson Custom Shop guitars with Epiphone headstocks?' And I'm like, 'No, that's ridiculous.' The ones I play are straight up the same guitar that you buy in the store. I love them. They're rock solid."

You're known for loving P-90 pickups. What do you look for in a good P-90?

"For me, the P-90 is that perfect in-between. I always look for the clarity, the percussiveness and the brightness of a single coil, like you would get on a Strat or a Telecaster. But I also want to retain that fat humbucker thing. Since I play with my fingers, what I noticed with P-90s was that I could get all of that chunkiness of a Gibson Les Paul tone, but then when I'd roll back, I could get kind of some of my Strat-y inflections, you know?"

"I also look for P-90s that are really well balanced. People think I'm crazy, but I'll sit with a P-90-pickup guitar, even these Epiphones, and I'll play an Asus2 chord, fully open, and I'll just listen to it. I'll wait until it dies out to see what notes retain clarity, and at all different settings on the amp. I think it's so important. When I'm playing, I want to know the resonance, not only of the guitar but of the pickup itself – because

"There's something challenging but awesome about playing single-pickup guitars. They have a beautiful simplicity"

they're all a little different. Yeah, they buzz, but there's something beautiful about the buzz that it doesn't restrict all of the frequency. But it's the clarity that I really want them to retain... what's the resonance of the pickup? That's what's important for me."

Why have you gone with the single-pickup format for your signature Epiphones?

"The original thing was that I was playing with my fingers. I was playing my first Les Paul, that I should have never gotten rid of, but I did, which was a '68 Custom; I got it really cheap. But that one had humbuckers and I remember when I was playing, how I would dig in and break my fingernails off and I'd be hitting that neck pickup. I was like, 'Man, I don't even use it.' Because, to me, when I was on neck pickups, especially humbuckers, it sounded so woolly. There was not a lot of clarity, at

this time, which was, like, eight or nine years ago. So I ripped it out and I was like, 'Man, I have all this space.'"

"At the same time, I was listening to Leslie West from Mountain, who's one of my biggest guitar heroes, who obviously played a Les Paul Junior. I was thinking a lot about all of the tones that I love and I started to experiment more with the volume and tone controls. I was like, 'Well, how can I manipulate my guitar [so] that when I want to get that 'woman' tone or when I want to get that neck pickup sound, I can just adjust where I pick?' Or so I could turn down my tone a little bit and get it there. So I went all in – and I'm really glad I did because it taught me a lot more about me as a player."

"Also, on another level, there's something that's really challenging but awesome about playing single-pickup guitars. It forces you to get all of the sounds. Everybody that plays them, even if they love them or hate them, you're going to have a certain sound because it's you. There's something beautiful about the simplicity." 

www.jaredjamesnichols.com



1. Jared's Gold Glory (pictured), the second iteration of his Epiphone Old Glory Les Paul Custom signature, is soon to be joined by a 'Blues Power' model in Aged Pelham Blue



WOLFE NOTES

Emily Wolfe's evocative music draws upon both Motown and Zeppelin but has a taut and soulful contemporary edge. We joined the Texan on tour to learn about her sound...

Words Jamie Dickson

Your music skillfully interweaves strong guitar hooks with emotive vocals.

How did you develop your sound?

“It’s been [through] a lot of touring, and trial and error on the road. For instance, this one time I was at the merch table after my show, and this guy said, ‘It’s so crazy how you harmonise your vocals with your guitar.’ And I was like, ‘I did that? I didn’t even remember that.’ From that point forward, I thought, ‘Well, maybe I could just *purposefully* do that?’ These bits of information I get, I carry with me.

“For the most part, I came from the foundation of Motown songwriting and classic rock guitar playing, because my mom loved Motown and Stax, and my dad would play Zeppelin and Creedence. When I got to college, I found my own way musically. I got into blues and Queens Of The Stone Age and ‘interesting rock,’ and that all came together.

“My mission with my career and style is to make the juxtaposition of art rock and singer-songwriter floaty vocals make sense. So that’s what I wanted to do. I love writing hooks and making sure things are ‘sticky’ with the listener. I’ve also had this overarching mission to make something no one’s heard before. That’s the goal.”

You have a new Epiphone signature model out. Tell us about it...

“I played a regular Sheraton for years. I love BB King and there’s just something about a semi-hollowbody that I love. It’s heavier [sonically], it feels like something to tackle and I like that when I’m playing live. So I played that Sheraton forever, but then I started working with Epiphone and thankfully they wanted to do a signature model. The first version, the Stealth model, was black and came out before this White Wolfe, but it’s essentially my take on a Sheraton. The headstock is smaller and there’s lightning-bolt inlays, a black matte finish and aged gold hardware. And it’s the perfect guitar for me – it’s simpler than the Sheraton, because it doesn’t have a four-knob control layout. And it just felt like something I could throw around and not damage, because I have done that [laughs], and it stayed intact.

“So this time around, Epiphone wanted to do another one and I decided to go with the aged bone-white finish. It’s essentially the same guitar, but just a different colour. I use both the Stealth and the White Wolfe guitars all over my new record that’s coming out in the fall. The guitar just sounds great live, too: the pickups are lower output, so it’s really good with fuzz, which I love. So, yeah, that’s kind of the story about the guitar and it’s just been such a milestone in my career. It’s just been really cool and I’m super grateful.”

You get really chunky, expressive guitar tones from your Sheraton – what do you plug it into?

“I like to get my tone from my pedals. It’s so interesting talking to other guitar players – some of them love looking at my pedalboard, and some say: ‘That’s insane. Why do you have such a big pedalboard?’ I’m like, ‘Because I love pedals...’

“The gain stage is fuzz, overdrive and then a clean kind of boost. So that’s the core sounds of the board,

“Tone is so important to me. I know whenever I go to a show and there’s good guitar sounds, I soak it in”

and there’s also delay, reverb tremolo and chorus, and I also have an octave-down pedal that I like to use. There’s also a [pedal] switcher that I love – the RJM Mastermind PBC/10. It’s big but it’s kind of changed everything when it comes to performing because it gives me seven [pre-selected groups of pedals that can be engaged with one footswitch]. It was hard, without that thing, to sing in tune, remember lyrics, perform and capture an audience and also step on the pedals. Getting there quicker changed my life.”

“For fuzz, I use a discontinued Earthquaker Devices pedal called a Dirt Transmitter. What I love about it is it’s kind of dark. Bright, high frequencies kill me, they rattle my brain – and fuzz that’s spitty and trebly coming out of monitors in a small club is awful for the audience. So I prefer to start dark, and then brighten it up with EQ. And then right before the Dirt



1. Emily’s sharply styled Stealth (above left) and White Wolfe Sheratons blend the power and warmth of traditional semis with an updated control layout and eclectic styling touches, such as Trini Lopez-style diamond f-holes

Transmitter is my favourite effect, which is called the Tentacle. There are no knobs: it’s just a footswitch and it’s basically the octave circuit of an Octo-fuzz but without the fuzz. So it sounds awful by itself, like so bad. But if you put it before a fuzz, it brings out this really insane high-octave that I’ve never heard before. It’s a really interesting sound.

“Then, for overdrive, I haven’t ever been able to get away from the Fulltone OCD – I love it, it’s how a drive should sound, to me. That said, I put an EQ pedal right after it to take out that insane low-end it has and pump the mids... and it’s perfect. There’s also an Origin Effects Cali 76 compressor at the top and that’s about it. I plug into a Fender DeVille 410, because I like amps that [are pretty clean] because, as I said, I like to get my sound from my pedals.

“Tone is so important to me. And sometimes people think it’s silly, but I know that whenever I go to a show and there’s good guitar sounds, I soak it in. I want to keep people at my show, so I have to make sure the tones sit in people’s ears just right.”

www.emilywolfemusic.com





Fab Four

A century and a half after the seeds of the Epiphone company were sown, we're looking at four milestone reissues from the company's heyday. And, best of all, they won't break the bank

Words Neville Marten Photography Phil Barker



EPIPHONE ZEPHYR DELUXE REGENT, SHERATON, CRESTWOOD CUSTOM & WILSHIRE

£1,429, £1,429, £1,049 & £899

CONTACT **Epiphone** PHONE 00800 444 27661 WEB www.epiphone.com

As you will have gleaned from Tony Bacon's excellent history of Epiphone on page 62, while the Stathopoulos musical-instrument-making dynasty took root in 1873, Epiphone didn't evolve into a bona fide guitar manufacturer until 1928. The four instruments you see here straddle what we might term the company's 'golden era', from the 40s to the 60s. They also mark the change from an independent builder of primarily archtop jazz guitars, to a purveyor of thinline and solidbody blues, pop and rock machines now under the auspices of guitar giant Gibson. And while the Sheraton is clearly a member of that company's fabled ES-300 family, the other three are purely Epiphone designs.

The Zephyr Deluxe Regent was an important product for Epiphone and – alongside models like its gigantic (470mm/18.5-inch) brother the Emperor Zephyr Regent, the Broadway and various Masterbilt models – was aimed directly at similar Gibson archtops at various size and price points.

The Indonesian-built 150th reissue faithfully celebrates the 1948 original, with its 444.5mm (17.5-inch) laminated maple body, five-piece mahogany and maple neck, ebony fingerboard with imposing mother-of-pearl 'cloud' inlays, all topped

off by a large headstock with delightful 'tree of life' decoration, also in pearl. Electronically, it's a far more intuitive affair than that aforementioned sibling with its triple pickups and mind-blowing array of switches, simply featuring twin Epiphone New York mini-humbuckers, two volume controls, two tones (both CTS), and a three-way Switchcraft pickup selector and output jack. The faux Bakelite knobs bring

a bit of Art Deco, their built-in 'pointers' showing where your controls are set. Those pickup surrounds, too, look like they've sat in jazz bars for hours soaking up cigar smoke to turn them a nicotine-stained dusky yellow.

Finished in lightly matted Aged Antique Natural and with a bound mock-tortoise pickguard, all gold-plated parts including a trapeze tailpiece and 'Historic' Epiphone





1. New York pickups, moulded dial pointer knobs, and a height-adjustable ebony bridge on an ebony 'foot' are just three of the Zephyr Regent's cool attributes

2. Note the 150th Anniversary emblem, and a set of authentic-looking 'Historic' Epiphone tuners on the multi-laminated mahogany/maple neck

3. The Zephyr Regent's finish is Aged Antique Natural stain. The ebony fingerboard's bold inlays are real mother-of-pearl, and the raised pickguard the classic archtop style



tuners (the bridge is adjustable ebony, on an ebony 'foot'), it adds up to a bold and impressive statement. The heel is a two-piece affair, but the excellent joinery pretty much obscures this. As is common on archtops, the sliver of mahogany that sits between the fingerboard's final few frets and the body is separate, too.

The Sheraton took shape alongside Gibson's ES-300 series of 1958, and probably ranks somewhere between the ES-345 and even more blingy 355. It was definitely an upper-crust model and was favoured by blues giants Otis Rush and John Lee Hooker. It features gold-plated hardware, a pair of Gibson mini-humbuckers, LockTone tune-o-matic bridge, the Tremotone vibrato tailpiece with 'E' inlaid Indian laurel insert, and kidney-button Grover Rotomatic tuners. It's a fabulous-looking instrument, here in very authentic-looking Cherry and with multiple body and peghead binding, bound Indian laurel fingerboard, pearl and abalone 'block and triangle' fret markers, and that pearl tree-of-life headstock inlay taking pride of place. It certainly doesn't hold back.

Next comes the legendary Crestwood Custom. The fancier-looking sister to the Coronet and Wilshire, it's based

on a body shape that first appeared in 1958. Here, too, we see the killer-looking 'batwing' headstock that was later usurped by the short Gibson-style version. The mahogany body and set neck are finished in attractive California Coral, and with a white-black-white pickguard, all nickel-plated hardware, including Gibson mini-humbuckers, Wilkinson six-on-a-plate tuners, a LockTone bridge and Tremotone vibrato, it looks a peach. The fingerboard is also Indian laurel, a timber that works exceptionally well as a rosewood replacement. Here, it's inlaid with bold oval celluloid (not pearl) position markers, just as the originals, to round off another classic Epiphone design. The fingerboard and laurel vibrato insert could do with a drink of lemon oil, but otherwise it's a fabulous-looking thing.

Although the cheapest of our quartet, the Wilshire is nonetheless a great-looking guitar. Here in Pacific Blue metallic with white-black-white pickguard and black batwing headstock with gold Epiphone logo, it makes a striking visual statement. While based on the same asymmetrical double-cutaway body shape, it's a simpler beast than the Crestwood Custom, but many will prefer it for that. From the headstock down it's those Wilkinson

THE RIVALS

In the pantheon of archtop builders, Guild is right up there. The X-175B Blonde (£1,379) features a pair of Franz dog-ear P-90s on a maple and spruce body with a mahogany and maple neck, rosewood fingerboard with block inlays, an adjustable jazz-style bridge and Guild-branded Bigsby vibrato.

Yamaha's SA2000 (£2,099) is a superb centre-block thinline. With laminated sycamore body, mahogany neck, pearl-inlaid ebony fingerboard, coil-splittable, Alnico V pickups and Gotoh hardware, it's a match for any thinline.

Gordon Smith's GS2 Heritage (£1,199) is a great 'junior'-style guitar, with a chunky mahogany neck and body, dot-inlaid ebony 'board and twin coil-tappable GS 'buckers, tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, plus brass nut. Great guitar, top value!

Danelectro's 59XT with vibrato is a semi-hollow shorthorn design with a solid centre block, bolt-on maple neck and rosewood 'board. Pickups are a 'large housing' single coil at the neck and dual humbucking 'lipstick tube' at the bridge. Quirky it may be, but ultra-cool it is, too.

4. The Sheraton's Cherry finish is very authentic, while the multiple body binding at the rear is redolent of Gibson's ES-345. Note the heel-mounted strap button



5. With its twin Gibson mini-humbuckers, Epiphone LockTone bridge and Tremotone vibrato tailpiece, the Sheraton is a striking-looking machine



6. Big, bold Grover tuners, genuine mother-of-pearl tree-of-life headstock inlay, and those impressive abalone-inlaid pearl position markers make a serious statement on this Epiphone Sheraton



six-on-a-plate tuners again, a dot-inlaid Indian laurel fingerboard (darker than that of the Crestwood), the ubiquitous Gibson mini-humbuckers, LockTone bridge and tailpiece, plus twin volume and tone controls laid out, as on the Crestwood, in a semi-circular bank with the neck pickup's pots to the fore and the bridge's sitting aft. Again, the body and set neck are mahogany.

So, four contrasting designs but each with much to commend it. Easy on the eye they may be, but let's see how they fare under the fingers and to our critical ears.

Feel & Sounds

Starting with the Zephyr Deluxe Regent, it's obviously a big old beast that's best played sitting down. With a reasonably low action on its medium C profile neck, 43mm nut width and a spacious 56mm at the bridge, it's great for fingerstyle comping, chopped-out chords, flighty solos and pretty much anything else you can throw at it. With its generous cutaway, the higher frets (there are 20) are pretty accessible, even though on guitars such as this, top-end forays are hardly *de rigueur*. And while, of course, it's primarily a jazz box, it would sit really nicely in a jazz-blues combo doing Etta James or Nat King Cole numbers. The guitar oozes class, and looks and feels extremely authentic.

The Sheraton is a wholly different creature to play. It's by far the heaviest of our foursome, clocking in at a Les Paul-worthy 3.85kg (8.5lbs). Its SlimTaper neck, too, feels wide and thin, even with its not overly spacious 43mm nut. The guitar's action is a little low for this reviewer, but a tweak of the LockTone bridge's thumbwheel will easily cure that. Many players love a super-slinky action, though, so we're not complaining. Top-fret access is always excellent on thinline semis, and the Sheraton is no different; you could bend the 22nd fret up to the octave should you desire. Fret laying and finishing are very well done, with nicely rounded ends and well polished for slinky bends and vibrato. Speaking of which, the Sheraton's Tremotone works smoothly in the hand, providing gentle wobbles to chords, or Duane Eddy-style dips. Not surprisingly, divebombs are out, but the guitar does return to pitch well, more so than on some other similar units.

Our two solidbody models are identical dimensionally, with what Epiphone calls '1960s SlimTaper D shape' necks that join the asymmetrical bodies at the last of their 22 medium-profile frets. Access therefore is total, and on a strap the guitars balance superbly, their small, lightweight bodies tucking in really well for a virtually effortless playing experience. Of course, one

7. The white-black-white pickguard on the Crestwood's California Coral finish sets it off a treat. Bold oval pearloid markers look good, but that 'board is rather dry

8. It's a chrome fest! Tremotone vibrato tailpiece, LockTone bridge and twin Gibson mini-humbuckers make the Crestwood Custom a versatile solidbody

9. Epiphone's brilliantly sci-fi looking batwing headstock makes a welcome return on our Crestwood and Wilshire models, plus Wilkinson six-in-a-line tuners



major difference is the Crestwood Custom's Tremotone vibrato, which works just like that of the Sheraton for musical wobbles and vocal-like ends to your notes.

One thing worth noting with both guitars is their control layout. There's a volume and tone knob for each pickup, separated by the input jack, with the three-way selector mounted on the short lower horn. While not as ideal as, say, a Strat or Les Paul, this quirkiness takes only minutes before it feels quite natural (use an angled jack, though!).

Since all four guitars feature mini-humbuckers – Gibson in the solidbody and thinline guitars, and Epiphone's own New York models in the jazzier – we were hoping for a set of less obvious voices from our quartet. Luckily, each one stepped up to the plate to deliver the goods.

While the Wilshire and Crestwood Custom have much in common, the vibrato tailpiece on the latter guitar gives it a slightly less strident sound. The Wilshire is gutsy and bright but with a hefty middle thump, especially if you knock the tone control back a couple of notches. It loves that point where the amp suddenly wants to take it to the next level, with medium power amp drive but not much front-end gain. It's a 'sweet spot' kind of thing. The Crestwood is much the same but perhaps a little more scooped and open in the middle. All three

pickup selections are distinctive and usable, to the extent that if you forgot your Tele they'd do the job, if you mislaid your SG no problem, and even if you left your Gretsch at home, either of these would cope. But they do have their own voice, and you need to hear it to understand it – but think of Johnny Winter on his Firebird and that's not a bad ballpark.

With the same pickups fitted to the Sheraton, the family dialect is, of course, still there. But it's a beefy beast, very punchy and tough sounding, so your Otis Rush licks will stand out a treat. Set to the neck pickup and with a dollop of drive, this is the only guitar here that exhibited any 'Strat-iness', that well-worn 'flutey' adjective describing it perfectly. Set to the bridge, it kicks like a mule with the drive on but tames beautifully with the gain down and a little reverb added. Both pickups on is always a great sound on a thinline, but with these mini-humbuckers and that little bit of extra 'sprang' that this type of vibrato system seems to provide, it becomes very funky – think Motown's Funk Brothers, Cornell Dupree with Aretha, that kind of thing. It's a hugely versatile guitar that could quite possibly top a 335 in that regard.

We left the Zephyr Deluxe Regent until last because it's unique within this company. Acoustically, it speaks with

Since all four feature mini-humbuckers, we were hoping for less obvious voices. Luckily, each one delivered the goods

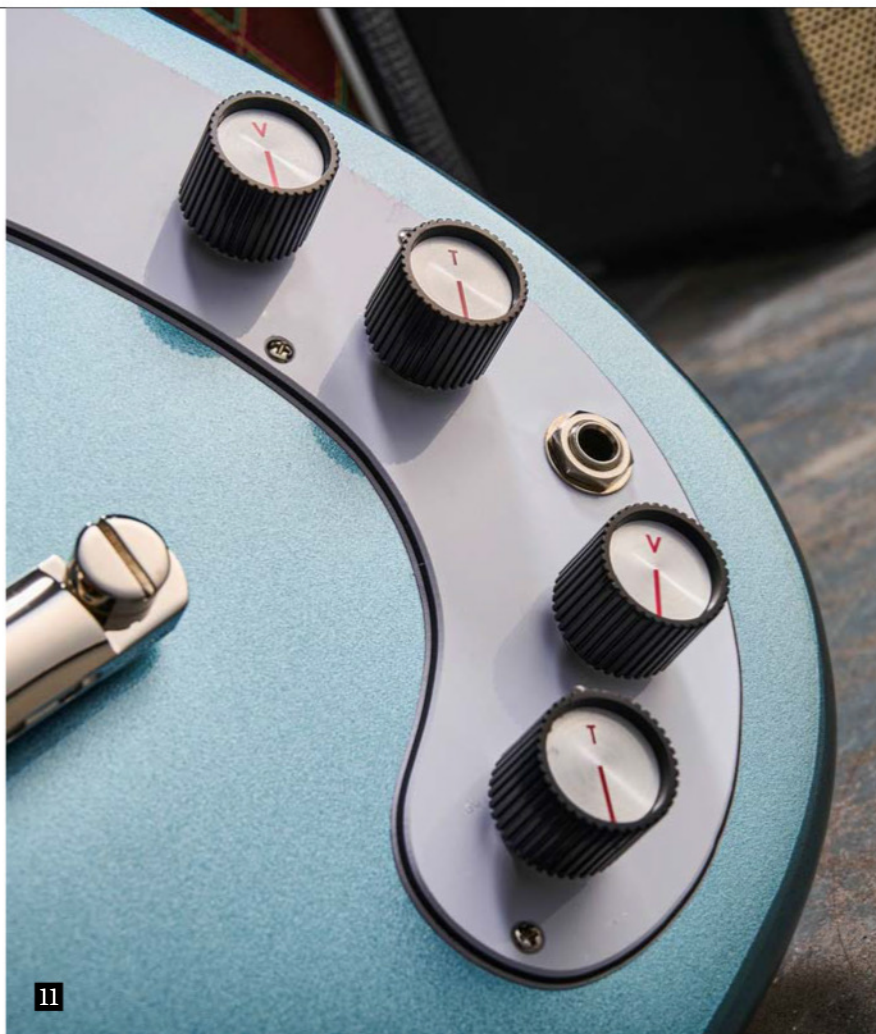
authority, its wooden bridge instantly adding the nuttiness you want in a guitar like this. It's quite loud, too, not held in like some f-hole archtops can be, especially laminated ones. Plugged into our small Marshall combo, that acoustic sound translates to the amplified tone, again the wooden bridge offering no hint of sharpness or 'quack'. And while clean neck pickup chords and licks sound sweet, especially with some tone backed off, the guitar does love to push itself into that blues-jazz area in which Kenny Burrell excelled – clean but with a slight edge. Though this style of instrument is rarely heard on the bridge pickup, it's actually great for arpeggio picking, and if you want to go a bit 'country gent', switch both pickups on for those Chet or Eddie Cochran moments. This is a much more versatile instrument than you might be forgiven for thinking it would be.

10. How cool is the Wilshire's Pacific Blue metallic finish? While the simplest and cheapest of our foursome, it's no shrinking violet, even in this esteemed company

11. The slightly odd jack socket positioning between the two sets of volume and tone controls takes no time to get used to. But an angled jack plug is vital!



10



11

These are original Epiphone designs, not recreations of LPs, SGs or ES-335s, so there should be no stigma about choosing one

Verdict

So, four 150th anniversary guitars and each one well worthy of its place in the Epiphone line-up. With top-quality electrics and hardware, including Gibson pickups on three of the four, Wilkinson tuners and CTS pots, all mated to well-built and keenly priced instruments, there's so much to like. They all come

in very attractive 150th Anniversary Historic cases, too, plush lined and with the Epiphone logo emblazoned on the outside. What's more, these are original Epiphone designs, not Epi recreations of Les Pauls, SGs or ES-335s, so there should be no stigma about choosing any of these as a playing companion.

The Zephyr Deluxe Regent looks brilliantly authentic, sounds and plays great and is many thousands of pounds less than a vintage model would be. Its cherry red thinline cousin is a different prospect; it's powerful and pokey, looks stunning in its posh livery, and with that mini-humbucker powertrain and very workable vibrato system is as versatile a guitar like this can be.

Our two solidbody guitars, the Wilshire and the slightly more upper-crust Crestwood Custom, have way more showroom presence than their relatively meagre price tags might suggest. They look special, play superbly, sound stonking and, even with the Crestwood's slightly dry fingerboard and vibrato inlay, we can't praise them highly enough.

The term 'punching above their weight' is somewhat overused, but it perfectly describes our Fab Four here. Do try them out. We think you'll be more than pleasantly surprised. **E**



Holy batwing! Yes it's here on the mighty Wilshire, too, along with quality six-line Wilkinson tuners and celebratory 150th Anniversary decal



EPIPHONE 150TH ANNIVERSARY ZEPHYR DELUXE REGENT

PRICE: £1,429 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Single-cutaway archtop hollowbody
BODY: Pressed laminated maple
NECK: 5-piece mahogany and maple laminate, bound headstock with tree-of-life headstock inlay in mother-of-pearl
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony with mother-of-pearl cloud inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 20, medium-fine
HARDWARE: Gold-plated trapeze tailpiece, ebony jazz-style bridge and 'foot', bound floating pickguard, Epiphone Historic tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm
ELECTRICS: Epiphone New York mini-humbuckers, 2x volumes, 2x tones with CTS pots, 3-way Switchcraft pickup selector and output jack
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.72/6
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: N/A
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Aged Antique Natural



10/10

PROS For the money, it's an incredible instrument; impressive and faithful looks; great playability; a broader range of tones than many archtops – a very desirable guitar

CONS There's really nothing to fault at this price



EPIPHONE 150TH ANNIVERSARY SHERATON

PRICE: £1,429 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-solid thinline electric
BODY: Pressed laminated maple
NECK: 1-piece, SlimTaper mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian laurel with pearl and abalone block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Gold-plated LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and Tremotone vibrato bridge with laurel inlay and 'E' logo; Grover Rotomatic tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson mini-humbuckers, 2x volumes, 2x tones (with CTS pots), Switchcraft 3-way selector and output jack
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.85/8.5
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: N/A
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Cherry



9/10

PROS A mightily handsome guitar with tons of presence; looks way more than the asking price; great range of tones and a musical vibrato system; extremely versatile

CONS Slightly low action as supplied; fingerboard needs some oil



EPIPHONE 150TH ANNIVERSARY CRESTWOOD CUSTOM

PRICE: £1,049 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: 1-piece mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian laurel 304mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated LockTone bridge and Tremotone vibrato, Wilkinson 6-a-side vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson mini-humbuckers, 2x volumes, 2x tones (with CTS pots), Switchcraft 3-way selector and output jack
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.58/5.7
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: N/A
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: California Coral



9/10

PROS Brilliant-looking guitar; a great set of tones and fine playability, and with its vibrato system an extremely versatile machine

CONS Dry fingerboard and wooden vibrato insert need attention, otherwise exceptional



EPIPHONE 150TH ANNIVERSARY WILSHIRE

PRICE: £899 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: 1-piece mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel 304mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated LockTone bridge and stud tailpiece, Wilkinson 6-a-side vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson mini-humbuckers, 2x volumes, 2x tones (with CTS pots), Switchcraft 3-way selector and output jack
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.49/5.5
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: N/A
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Pacific Blue



10/10

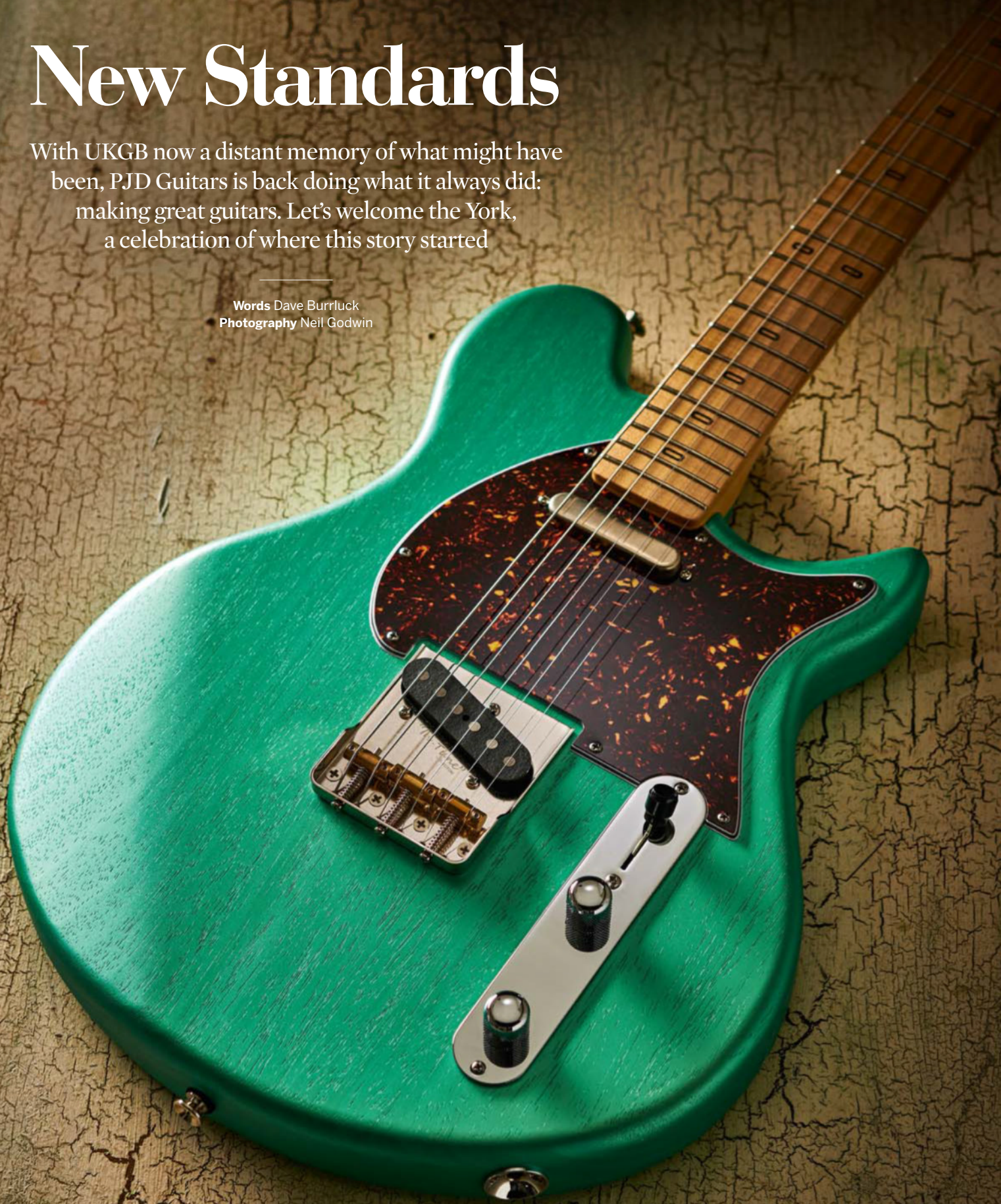
PROS A great-looking guitar packed with raunchy and versatile tones and ready to rock straight out of its posh grey case; plays superbly and rates highly on the cool-ometer!

CONS There's nothing to dispute at this price

New Standards

With UKGB now a distant memory of what might have been, PJD Guitars is back doing what it always did: making great guitars. Let's welcome the York, a celebration of where this story started

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Neil Godwin





PJD YORK STANDARD £1,299

CONTACT **PJD Guitars** PHONE **07791 236353** WEB www.pjdguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1

UKGB? What's that... did I miss something?

UK Guitar Builders was a spirited attempt to create a guitar-making hub, based in York, and set up and overseen by PJD founder, Leigh Dovey. Despite making well-received guitars for Cream T, Seth Baccus and Chapman (with more brands in the wings), sadly, the short-lived venture closed in early 2023.

2

Where does that leave those other brands?

As we discuss with Leigh and sales director Matt Dunn later on, PJD had to set up its workshop again from scratch and is now back building guitars with a staff of nine. We understand PJD will continue to build Chapman's UK guitars, while Seth Baccus has taken on one member of staff and is doing what he always did: making superb guitars in Cornwall. Cream T has hooked up with another maker and will continue with its Aurora and Crossfire, and is launching a new design, the Polaris, as well as a raft of new pickups.

3

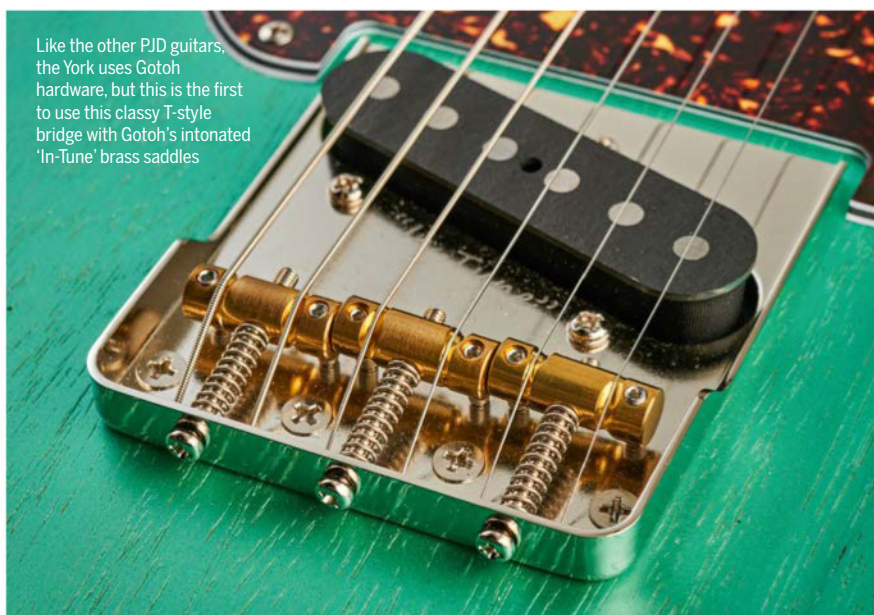
And there's a new PJD model?

Yes, the York is here along with an overhaul of the complete PJD range.

'Don't dwell on the past, look to the future' might well be the motto of PJD Guitars. We've been lucky enough to document the company's ascent via its smartly made small range of guitars. The Carey, St John and Woodford are now joined by the brand's latest vision, the York, the first new model since the last addition to the Carey family, the stripped-down solidbody, single-pickup Apprentice that launched a year ago. To be honest, that's no surprise because PJD's founder, Leigh Dovey, has been rather busy, as we discuss in our interview following this review. But with that imaginary motto in mind, what does this new addition bring to the table?

In its own way, PJD has so far loosely referenced four of the classics with those previous all-bolt-on models. The Carey, for example, has a single-cut outline, and the Apprentice nods to a single-cut Junior. The Woodford is more S-style, and the most successful St John embraces the offset trend. The York, then, looks to the Telecaster for sonic inspiration but typically puts it through the PJD mangle.

But along with this new introduction, PJD has reconfigured its range. The Standard has always been the start-up PJD, while the Elite models added maple tops and the like. These were both chambered designs from ash or mahogany. As of now, however,



Like the other PJD guitars, the York uses Gotoh hardware, but this is the first to use this classy T-style bridge with Gotoh's intonated 'In-Tune' brass saddles

1. PJD now hand-winds its own pickups in-house. These High Tea single coils don't mess with the classic recipe or sound
2. If you're familiar with your Telecasters, the York is a familiar drive with the simple three-way pickup selector switch, master volume and tone. Nothing new to get used to here!

The York isn't trying to be a vintage relic from yesteryear; it's far from precious in appearance and simply shouts, 'Get out there and play me'

the new Standards, such as our York, are slightly different, primarily swapping the chambered bodies of the previous Standards with a solid but still lightweight obeche that allows ribcage and forearm contouring, whereas the previous version didn't. The quarter-sawn roasted maple necks switch to a more classic style with a tinted plain maple that's flat-sawn (although the diagonal end grain here is what other makers would call rift-sawn), and the subtle 254mm to 305mm (10- to 12-inch) compound radius reverts to a non-compound 254mm (10 inches).

On paper, then, our new York model should be a very different guitar, compared with our well-used original Carey Standard reference. And while it might introduce a new pickup and bridge style, it certainly retains the same lightweight and very crisp, detailed construction that attracted us in the first place.

Obviously, any new guitar outline will generate plenty of discussion and here the upper shoulder of the classic Telecaster is turned into a *second* cutaway; the treble horn is more LP than T, the heel is very

THE RIVALS

The York is an original take on the Telecaster and, of course, Fender makes a few of those! Check out the industry standard American Professional II Tele (£1,789) and the American Performer (£1,259); a lightweight option is the Jim Adkins JA-90 Tele at £989, which mixes in a little 'Gibson' too.

Here in the UK, T-inspired designs are favourites among many of our quality makers. At the top end, Atkin's superb builds include the Fifty-Two, Fifty-Nine and Sixty-Eight T-styles (from £3,199). Elsewhere, Maybury Guitars offers its Upscaler Fish Hook T-style model, which uses recycled materials and parts, from around £950.

Gordon Smith has been flying the flag for Brit-made electrics for more years than we care to remember. Its Classic T doesn't mess with the recipe too much but can be custom-ordered with plenty of options. Prices start at £999.





2

nicely rounded, while the base is much more rounded than its sonic inspiration. Dimensionally, it's very slightly longer and wider than that guitar, too.

PJD's clean and functional style is very evident. The 44m thick obeche body is given a satin-y slightly open-pore nitro finish over perfectly sanded wood, and the generous edge radius is almost Nik Huber-esque in its faultless craft. While the neck wood does appear more regular and less boutique-y, it still fixes to the body with actual bolts – not screws – that thread into nuts sunk into the neck back, and there's now a more classic round access hole for the truss rod adjustment.

The hardware is by Gotoh, as usual for PJD, but it also differs from what was fitted to previous models. While the tuner choice is the superb split-post vintage-style SD91 set (instead of PJD's favoured six-saddle through-strung bridge), here we get a more T-style affair with relaxed side walls to the bridge plate and three compensated 'In Tune' brass saddles. In style, not least with the pickup complement, the York does appear to zone in on its inspiration a little more closely than any of the brands' other designs.

Another example of that is the Telecaster-copy control plate, which places the controls – a three-way lever pickup switch, master volume and tone – in the usual positions. But a new introduction here is PJD's pickups, which are made in-house: as standard, the York comes with the company's flush-pole High Tea single coils that look as you'd expect for the style.

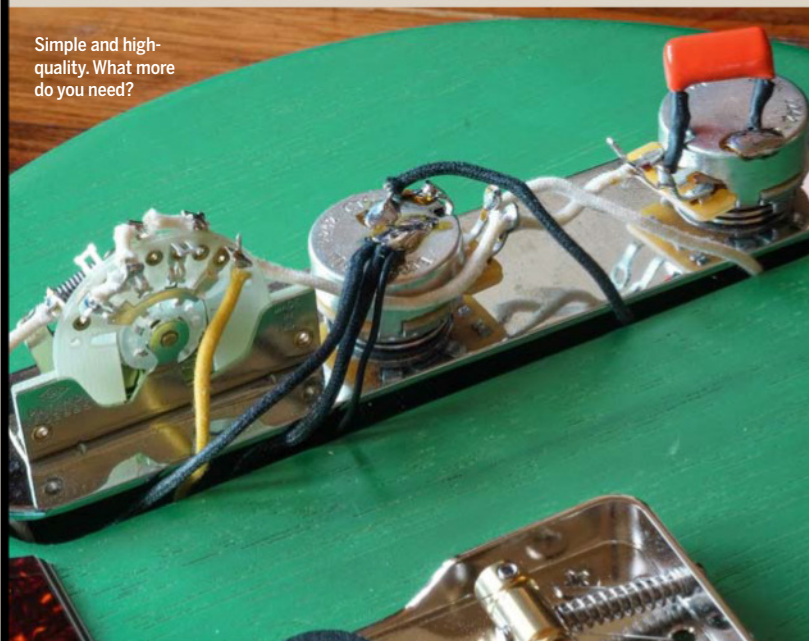
UNDER THE HOOD

The quality continues inside...

There are no tricks to the circuit here, but it's all nicely done with cloth-covered hook-up wire, CTS 250k pots, an Orange Drop 223k code .022µf capacitor and USA-made CRL three-way lever switch. The output jack is the Electrosocket-style, another departure for PJD over its usual metal football-style chassis plate.

As for the High Tea single coils, sales director Matt Dunn tells us that both use Alnico V magnets, the bridge uses 42-gauge plain enamel wire, and the neck 43-gauge, with measured DCRs of 7.09k ohms (neck) and 7.07k (bridge). Like all the new PJD pickups, they're "scatter hand-wound", says Matt.

Simple and high-quality. What more do you need?





3. The industry-standard sizes of PJD's High Tea units mean you can easily swap in your own favourite pickups, should you wish

4. PJD's headstock outline is certainly close to the much loved Telecaster: Leigh Dovey thought he'd create a guitar to go with it! Note the new round-hole truss rod access and finely fettled bone nut

Feel & Sounds

The first thing you notice is the very light weight. We thought the recent PRS Myles Kennedy, reviewed in issue 500, was light at 2.81kg (6.2lb), but this is lighter still, weighing in at 2.55kg (5.61lb) and just slightly lighter than the Atkin Boosh OS we looked at in issue 499, which tipped the scales at 2.59kg (5.7lb) and also uses a solid obeche body. Lightweight guitars are clearly becoming the new black!

As you'd also expect, we have a long Fender-style scale length here – like all the other PJD models – though the neck shape has slightly changed from the previous Standard profile. This neck has a pretty classic 'C' profile and is slightly thinner and more Fender-like in width: 42mm at the nut and a hair over 51mm by the 12th fret. The depth is slightly thinner, too: 20.8mm at the 1st fret and 22.5mm by the 12th. The Jescar FW55090 fretwire is sized at 2.28mm by 1.40mm and is the same across all the

With this pickup configuration, the clarity and note separation can apply to plenty of styles, just like its inspiration





As with all the previous PJD guitars, the neck is fixed to the body with proper bolts, not the usual screws. The solid obeche body means that not only the heel area can be contoured, but both rib-cage and forearm contours can be added

PJD guitars; the installation is very tidy, you have perfect domed fret ends, and the fingerboard edges are quite heavily rolled. Overall, as well as having a great setup and nut work, our York is coming across as a class act with a very positive, vibrant feel.

Differences aside, there's a distinct 'old Tele' feel overall to the guitar from that light weight and fast response. Plugged in, the High Tea pickups deliver pretty much what you'd expect and – unlike PRS's new NF 53 and Myles Kennedy signature we looked at in issue 500 – because these pickups are industry-standard sizes, you can easily swap in your own favourites. The combination of the construction, pickups and circuit delivers plenty of bright edge from the bridge pickup, with what sounds like a little scoop in the mids, slightly more acoustic-y than our reference '69 Tele. While that high-end does need a little taming from the tone control, it adds some sparkle to the full and balanced-sounding neck pickup and the typically wide pickup mix. There's an alive-sounding vibrancy to the guitar, though, that's very noticeable, especially with some crunch and gain.

While the High Tea set acquits itself well, we can't help thinking what a great platform this would be for other pickup

styles: a hotter wound P-90-style at bridge (with a cut-off bridge plate, of course) or, more simply, a T-style bridge pickup with a bit more girth. As is, though, it's the clarity and note separation that's most evident here, which can apply to plenty of styles, just like its inspiration.

Verdict

Pretty much every PJD we've had our hands on could be described as custom-shop quality but at production-level prices, and the York is no different: an age-old recipe presented in original style but with nothing to take away the flavours you'd expect. Although PJD does offer lightly aged finishes on certain models such as its Apprentice, there's no pretence here. The York isn't trying to be a vintage relic from yesteryear; it's far from precious in appearance, is very aggressively priced and simply shouts, 'Get out there and play me.' It's not trying to reinvent any wheels, either, but it obviously drops into consideration with probably hundreds of T-styles out there. All we can say when a guitar is built to such a quality standard, is here's another to add to your list: a slightly different take on a T-style that feels very alive in your hands and feather-light on your shoulder. **G**



PJD YORK STANDARD

PRICE: £1,299 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Obeche

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, rectangular black acrylic inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Gotoh BS-TC1S bridge with brass 'In-Tune' saddles and relaxed side w/ through-body stringing, Gotoh vintage-style SD91 split-post tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: PJD High Tea single coils, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.55/5.61

OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard. Also available with licensed Bigsby (£1,499)

RANGE: The other PJD models (Carey, St John and Woodford) start in the new Standard specification at £1,299. All come with Bigsby vibratos, except the Woodford, which will use a synchronised vibrato (all priced at £1,499). For details of the other levels and prices, check the website

LEFT-HANDERS: To order

FINISHES: Ocean Jade Metallic (as reviewed), TV Yellow, Firemist Gold, Candy Apple Red, Midnight Black, Aspen White and Three Colour Sunburst – low-gloss open-pore nitro body;



10/10

PROS Original take on a classic; crisp, clean and lightweight build with high-quality hardware, hand-wound pickups, vibrant sounds and superb price for the style

CONS New shapes aren't for everyone; sound-wise, it is yet another T-style with no new tricks

Guitarist would like to thank Wildwire Guitars for the loan of this guitar for review wildwireguitars.com

Future Moves

It's been a busy year so far for PJD Guitars, setting up a new workshop, designing and redesigning guitars, creating and winding in-house pickups... We drop in for a chat

Words Dave Burrluck

Hot on the heels of PRS's entry into the T-style market, PJD's new York model certainly wasn't inspired by that launch. "No, this has literally been a guitar outline on my computer for about six years," smiles Leigh Dovey, the driving force behind PJD Guitars. "It was one of those things I kept coming back to, tweaking it and thinking, 'That's it!' But then the next day I'd be going, 'No, I'm not happy with that.' I tried different pickup configurations, visually, and then finally I got to the stage where I realised I was going to have to make one and see what it looked like.

"I didn't want to do the same thing again with a Gotoh hardtail bridge [like the existing models in the PJD range] and just a different body shape," Leigh continues, "because I've done that with the Carey then the St John. This had to be

a different guitar. I hadn't done a T-style, but I've always liked them and I've owned a few. Quite a few people have said that our PJD headstock looks a bit like a T-style anyway and asked why we use that on the single-cut Carey. So I thought I'd build a body to match our headstock. I built one and loved the shape, how it looked, and how it felt really comfortable. I then needed some pickups.

"The first PJD pickups, the Dr Wallis set, were created for the Woodford Pioneer [an upmarket S-style made exclusively for Andertons], so the York's High Teas aren't the first. You might wonder why we'd bother with so many people making classic-style pickups out there. But I thought, 'Who knows our guitars better than us? Nobody.' So, now, when we build a new guitar we can build the pickups to match the guitar, its body wood, the neck,

everything. We have Josh Parkin with us who makes the pickups. He's an incredible guitar builder in his own right – a genius! – and really into making pickups."

"We can get there more quickly, too," adds Matt Dunn, PJD's sales director. "We can now make changes in a day. We can make three or four versions of the same pickup with slightly different windings, for example, or with flush magnets that we ended up with on the York. We can put different sets on guitars, then A/B them and see which ones we prefer. We don't have to place an order for a set of whoever's pickups; that can not only be expensive, but it also adds time, in some cases weeks. Making them in-house, we're using the best of everything, component-wise, and we can quickly make very effective changes. I think it's the best thing we've done for ages, tonally."



The Carey put PJD on the map: the Custom 10th Anniversary model (left) uses a swamp ash back with a ziricote top and 'board, while the previous-spec Standard (right) is lightweight ash with a roasted maple neck and 'board. Both are semi-solid designs

Starting Again

This hive of creativity has all taken place since the unfortunate closure of UKGB early in 2023. What went wrong? "Put simply, not enough orders came in," says Leigh. "UKGB was set up as a company to produce a certain number of guitars based on discussions we'd had with various brands. But things didn't happen in the timeline that was predicted. A business plan can only ever be a prediction, a forecast, and the orders that we needed didn't come in on time. At the end of it, unfortunately it came down to money; it was a big investment and things didn't pan out the way that had been planned.

"I had a chat with Seth [Baccus, one of the brands that UKGB made and also a technical adviser to the project] about a month ago and he said, 'I'm glad I did it [UKGB], but I now know it's not for me,'" Leigh tells us, "and now he's back to doing what he likes. To be honest, I feel the same. I thought I might like it to go that way, but actually it took me away from what I love. It was a little blip in what I hope will be a long career for everyone."

So, presumably, you had to start from scratch again? "Well, all through that me and Matt were still running PJD, although I was working on UKGB as well. Some



PJD founder, Leigh Dovey, checks the setup of a new-spec Standard in the company's latest facility



Although the new Standards use solid bodies, PJD is still making its semis, with or without f-holes, like this work-in-progress offset St John

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KNOW FILM

months before the end of UKGB we'd decided we needed some kind of premises for PJD where we could take our guitars out of the boxes, photograph them, QC them again just to make sure, and then put them back in the boxes and distribute them to our dealers. So we'd got an industrial unit just across the way from UKGB and we were setting that up when UKGB ended. Then we thought, 'Right, let's use that space to build a new workshop,' and that's what we did. We put up stud walls, built a spray booth and we did it in around three months. Now it's a properly functioning workshop in a great space. We have a fantastic team and we're back in control of our own destiny."

"We're aiming for around 400 guitars a year," adds Matt. "That's where we want to be. We've just appointed a distributor for New Zealand and he's got into Australia. We're talking to a big dealer in the USA, too, which would be really good for us."

"Weirdly enough, we've already sold a lot of guitars into America directly," says Leigh. "We hadn't pursued it already because we just haven't had time, we couldn't make enough guitars."

"There's a lot of interest in the British-made guitar in the USA, and in Europe, too," says Matt. "The hardest sell at times can actually be to a UK retailer or

consumer because they don't have the same reverence for a UK-made guitar as they do for a USA-made guitar."

New Styles

Not content with restarting their production, adding a new model and rejigging the PJD range, Leigh and Matt have also commenced work on two new brands: Rosa electrics and Dovey acoustics. The former are clones of the Les Paul and ES-335, with Leigh's twist being that the wood parts are pre-made in the USA.

"If we did it all in-house, the guitar would cost closer to £4k, which then puts you into a different world," Leigh says.

Then, PJD assembles, frets and nitro-finishes them in light relic style, and adds its own hand-wound pickups and a decent wiring loom. These will be direct-only (via Reverb.com) and pretty limited, but the intended cost is a rather attractive £1,600, including a case.

"Everybody loves these guitars and there are plenty on offer from a lot of different companies," he continues. "But in terms of the light relic thing, that usually tends to be at the higher custom shop end. I mean, has anyone really got 11 grand to spend on a guitar? So the idea is that you might have had your Epiphone or Squier, but this is

the next level up. It's less expensive than the obvious USA production models, but we believe it's the same quality. It's aged and looks cool. It's not a dipped-in-glass polyester finish, it's nitro, plus you get our hand-wound pickups and Gotoh hardware. It's quite low-key, it's not flashy – you're going to leave it on stage and not worry. If you ding it, you probably won't notice because we've already started that for you."

The acoustic project is rather different, as Leigh explains: "I love guitars and acoustic guitars have always intrigued me just because there's nothing to hide behind. To build a beautiful acoustic instrument that sounds amazing is something I've always

"Making [pickups] in-house, we're using the best components and we can make very effective changes quickly"

Matt Dunn

wanted to do. We're talking super-small scale, very limited numbers," with an intended starting price around £3k.

"There are a couple of makers that I aspire to, one of which is Michael Greenfield," he says. "He has an amazing video on YouTube – I must have watched it 15 or 20 times – of him making an acoustic guitar. It's beautifully shot, too. But it's a different thing entirely from what we – and indeed many other small-production makers – do. To just be able to craft an instrument that is so highly regarded is definitely something I aspire to. That's a long way in the future, of course, but building acoustic guitars is the starting point and, as with PJD, the idea is simplicity: satin nitro finishes, simple logo, nothing too fancy." 

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Universal Mind

The UAFX range gets expanded with a Space Echo emulation, reverb and delay in one pedal, and an all-encompassing compressor

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker





UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX PEDALS £325 EACH

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

What You Need To Know

- 1 More UAFX pedals?**
Yes, they seem to be released in batches of three. First came a reverb, a delay and a modulation pedal, followed by a trio of amp emulators.
- 2 Are these more of the same, then?**
Well, this latest offering is more in keeping with the first of the pedal releases, with a tape echo, a delay/reverb and a dual compressor.
- 3 Tell us more...**
The Max offers a solid range of compression options, the Del-Verb offers delay and reverb in a single pedal and actually uses some of the effects from the earlier Golden Reverberator and the Starlight Echo Station, while the Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb offers an emulation of the Roland RE-201 Space Echo.

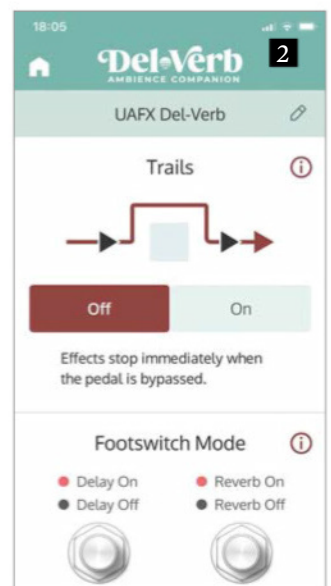
1. Usually used as a reverb bypass, the right-hand footswitch can be set for tap tempo; the other footswitch will then be the bypass for delay and reverb together

2. You'll need a smartphone or a tablet in order to access certain features on the pedals, such as changing the role of the footswitches

Following the first six pedals in the UAFX range, Universal Audio is introducing three more pedals based on the company's extensive plug-in range. The Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb, Del-Verb Ambience Companion and Max Preamp/Dual Compressor all have the same physical twin-footswitch format of previous models with options for mono and stereo usage. Each pedal has a USB socket for connection to a computer for firmware upgrades, but you'll need a smartphone or tablet running the UAFX Control app for basic housekeeping functions such as changing the footswitch functions and, in the case of the Del-Verb, loading in some tasty alternative tonal options.

Echo Emulation

Releasing a digital pedal that emulates the Space Echo after Roland/Boss has already nailed it so well with the RE-202 might seem like a strange move. But for some years UA has had a well-respected plug-in that takes on the task – and that has now found its way into a pedal that has the advantage of being smaller than the RE-202. The pedal features all of the head combinations of an original RE-201 and has double the total delay time available, so you can have longer delays than the vintage unit was capable of. The RE-201's spring reverb is also emulated with knobs for Reverb Volume and Dwell (adjusting the drive into the reverb tank, adding for a grungier lo-fi vibe).



THE RIVALS

The obvious rivals for the Galaxy '74 are the original manufacturer's modern Space Echo recreations – the Boss RE-202 (£299) and the compact RE-2 (£199). For quality delay and reverb in a single pedal, check out Source Audio's Collider (£369) with its seven reverb and five delay types. We haven't found another pedal with all the Max's options available, but individually you can still buy the MXR Dyna Comp (£89), while Origin Effects does 1176 emulations with its Cali76 models – Compact Deluxe (£299) and Stacked Edition (£345) – and covers the 610 with the DCX Boost (£259). Effectrode's PC-2A (£279) is this brand's valve-driven take on an LA-2A.



The tape echo sound is reproduced beautifully. An Input Volume knob adds a touch of RE-201 preamp colour into the proceedings and the delay/echo has the usual Volume, delay time (Echo Rate) and Feedback controls, plus a set of secondary parameters for the lower three knobs: Bass and Treble, and Tape Age can really sculpt the sound of the repeats. The second footswitch on the pedal offers tap tempo; you can also hold it to ramp up the feedback into self-oscillation. Alternatively, you can set the footswitches so they're separate bypasses for Echo and Reverb.

Only 'Verbs & Delays

Delay and reverb together is a great idea that should find favour with anyone wanting to maximise pedalboard space and minimise power connections. Of course, it only works if both components of the sound are equally good and that's not a problem with the Del-Verb as the pedal uses the tried-and-tested models from UA's previous pedals – and it sounds superb.

For the delay side, there's an EP-3 Echoplex tape delay, analogue BBD sounds based on a Deluxe Memory Man, and a pristine digital delay. For reverb, you get a Fender amp-style '65 spring, an emulation of the classic 140 plate, and a hall reverb from a Lexicon 224.

The Max has emulations of studio and classic guitar pedal compressors

Five out of the six adjustment knobs relate to the delay, with only the reverb's Level as a hands-on parameter. But there's more as the Del-Verb has a hidden feature accessible via the app that loads in alternative voicings, not just for the reverb but for the delay, massively opening up the potential tonal palette. There's plenty of delay variation with the Color and Mod knobs, which do different things depending on what delay type has been selected. They are, however, commensurate with how an original unit would behave, so all of the DMMs modulation options are ably represented.

The delay feeds into the reverb here and the default is that each is separately footswitchable. For those who like to use tap tempo for delay, the second footswitch can alternatively be set up for that, but it means your reverb is automatically switched in with the delay and not independent any more – not great for anyone who wants to keep reverb always on and bring delay in and out when needed, as is common practice for some players.

Comprehensive Compression

There are certain choices to make in the type of compressor you buy, but the Max has everything covered by giving you emulations of studio Opto and FET compressors, as well as the classic guitar pedal compressors respectively in the Teletronix LA-2A, Urei 1176, and Dyna Comp. Each of these can be assigned to the pedal's two completely independent stereo compressors (1 and 2), each with its own footswitch so you can use both together, either in parallel or stacked with compressor 1 feeding compressor 2. Alternatively, there's an Exclusive mode where you can only use one at a time.

You'll find plenty of control: all naturally have adjustable compression, while the 1176 gets ratio, attack and release, and the LA-2A gets just ratio and release. There's also an emulation of a UA 610 valve preamp, controlled by the red knob that has no effect when fully counterclockwise but can add a lovely grit and drive, with variations on the preamp EQ available from the Control app, all conspiring to make the pedal ideal as an always-on tonal conditioner with the second footswitch bringing in a boost when needed.

While the pedal is capable of covering a multitude of compression scenarios, whether it's the chicken-picking spank



3. This USB socket is purely for firmware updates, while the Pair button is used for pairing your phone via Bluetooth to use the UAFX Control app
4. These LEDs are not just for showing you that the effect is active; they change colour, from green to yellow to red, to indicate the strength of the compression
5. The Head Select switch scrolls through all of the head combinations available (1, 2, 3, 1 & 2, 2 & 3, 1 & 3, 1 & 2 & 3), indicated by which of the adjacent green LEDs are lit

of the Dyna or the controlled grittiness of the 1176, all that's missing from the Max is a knob to mix in a bit of dry signal for some parallel compression. However, there is a workaround of sorts by using 1 and 2 in parallel mode and having one compressor set for zero compression.

Verdict

There's no doubting the sound quality of these new pedals, and each is well thought out in terms of its clearly defined function. But there are issues with the practicality for some (but not all) users. For starters, it seems a bit limited to only be able to access certain functions via a mobile app; we think it would be so much better to do it direct from the pedal. Then there's the lack of any onboard presets or the possibility of MIDI control. If you demand a wide range of sounds from your pedals in a live set, then you may often find yourself on your knees rapidly manipulating knobs and switches between songs.

On the other hand, if you're a single-sound type who likes to set an optimum sound for a pedal and use it throughout (perhaps with minor tweaks), there is a certain hands-on 'set it and forget it' simplicity that, when coupled with so much scope for dialling in that optimum sound, makes these pedals very attractive. **A**



UNIVERSAL AUDIO GALAXY '74 TAPE ECHO & REVERB

PRICE: £325
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Digital recreation of a classic tape echo
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, analogue dry through, spillover/trails, stereo/dual mono operation
OPTIONS: 7x head combinations
CONTROLS: Echo Rate, Feedback, Echo Vol, Input Vol/Tape Age, Dwell/Bass, Reverb Vol/Treble, Head Select switch, Main/Alt switch, Bypass footswitch, Tap/Hold 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



UNIVERSAL AUDIO DEL-VERB AMBIENCE COMPANION

PRICE: £325
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Delay and reverb pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, analogue dry through, optional spillover/trails, stereo/dual mono operation
OPTIONS: Tape EP-III, Analog DMM, Precision, Spring '65, Plate 140, Hall 224
CONTROLS: Delay Time, Feedback, Mix, Color, Mod, Reverb, Delay switch, Reverb switch, Delay footswitch, Reverb/Tap 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



UNIVERSAL AUDIO MAX PREAMP/DUAL COMPRESSOR

PRICE: £325
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Dual compressor
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, two independent compressors stereo operation
OPTIONS: Dyna, Opto LA-2A, FET 1176
CONTROLS: Preamp, Comp, Output, Attack, Ratio, Release, Comp Select switch, Comp 1 switch, Comp 2 switch, Comp 1 footswitch, Comp 2 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 Excellent sound quality; defined roles; mono and stereo operation

CONS Mobile app needed to access some facilities; no onboard presets; no MIDI or expression pedal facility; no supplied adaptor and 400mA needed



« BLUEPRINT »

WALK ON THE FYLDE SIDE

Awarded an MBE for services to the music industry back in 2016, Roger Bucknall has cause for further celebration this year as Fylde Guitars reaches its momentous half-century milestone

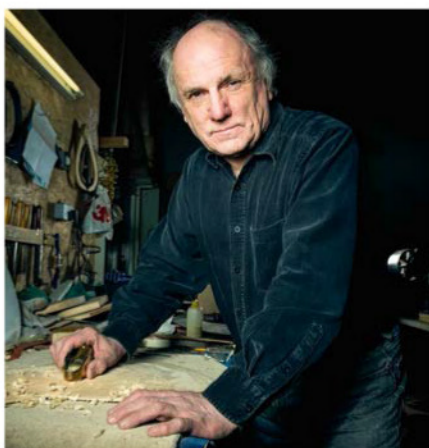
Words David Mead

It's remarkable to think that a modest workshop in the Lake District not only competes with some of the largest acoustic manufacturers in the world but quite often puts them squarely in the shade, too. Roger Bucknall's instruments have found their way into the hands of some of the biggest names in the acoustic world: Martin Carthy, Martin Simpson, Gordon Giltrap and Davey Graham have all made sonorous music with a Fylde instrument. And from the parallel universe of rock, Pete Townshend, Sting and Ritchie Blackmore have joined the throng of players who regard instruments that bear the Fylde marque as some of the finest on the planet.

Now, 50 years down the line, and with a documentary on Fylde history in the pipeline, it's time to go back to the beginning and consider how the ever-shifting sands of musical style have helped – and sometimes hindered – acoustic guitar design since Roger first picked up a chisel.

When did you begin building guitars?

"I made my first guitar – if you could call it that – when I was nine. It was made using plywood and hardboard and things, so I don't really count that, but nevertheless, it was there. And then I bought some guitars – cheap and nasty ones – and made myself a proper one when I was about 14.



Roger Bucknall MBE: celebrating 50 years as an instrument maker with some special guitars that will be on display at this year's Ullapool Festival in October

So that would have been 1964. Then I made another one, and then I started making them for friends and neighbours and musicians who I met, until I was almost forced into doing it full-time in 1973. By that time I'd made 10 or 20 guitars."

You have a background in engineering, don't you?

"Yes, a mechanical engineer by inclination and training. I have a technical background as well. I went to a technical school, did lots of short works courses at various manufacturing companies around the

Midlands, did a short course at the Southampton University in musical acoustics as well, which was while I was running a folk club and designing tape recorders – my only other real job was designing these recorders. Since then, I've just been enjoying myself."

You also diverted into making snooker cues at one point...

"That came after the first few years of Fylde Instruments Ltd, which was quite a big concern. We really went for it, making up to about 1,000 guitars a year, with about 15 people working for me. At one point we were making as many as Martin. Martin's production really slowed down and mine ramped up, and then in the early 80s everything changed. The music business changed, the economy changed, the pound versus the dollar changed. There was no more acoustic guitar music going on. Exports were impossible, so that all crashed.

"I started again, but decided I had to make my living by doing something that wasn't involving wood. So I started making snooker cue cases out of aluminium. I invented an extruded aluminium case. The snooker player Steve Davis crashed his car and had his very expensive cue in one of my cases and the cue survived. I showed that case to all the players and they loved it. But I also had a cue in there that I'd made



"We really went for it,
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as Martin"

and they all wanted to buy the cue. Dennis Taylor, Alex Higgins, Ray Reardon – all these people. So the business became a cue-making company. And I made a lot of cues – about 100,000 – and then eventually sold the business and put a lot of it back into guitar making. I hadn't stopped making guitars, but the snooker cue business made money and the guitar making did not."

Over the last 50 years you've seen different styles of music come and go. How did that feed into the way you were making guitars?

"In the early days, just before I turned professional, I was deeply involved in folk music. While I still lived in Birmingham, I used to go to the folk clubs, watching Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick in the early days. One of Paul Simon's first ever gigs was at that club in Birmingham. I was fascinated by acoustic guitar playing and I wanted to be on stage. I did try for a while, but the guitar making took over.

"When I started making full-time I was meeting all the young acoustic guitar players in this country. The timing was perfect – three or four years earlier would have been even more perfect – but Gordon Giltrap, Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch, Nic Jones, John James, a lot of the players became my customers and friends. And that was the basis of my business.

"I was involved in music, I was playing a bit on stage, I was helping to run a folk club. The artists stayed with me when they came

"I was fascinated by guitar playing and I wanted to be on stage. I did try for a while, but the guitar making took over"

and they became good friends. One or two of them connected me to rock music – with Pete Townshend, for instance – and we made contacts with people in the States. I was over there in New York in the studios with Al Di Meola and John Abercrombie. People like that all bought guitars from me at the end of the 70s, early 80s. But then that faded away and glam rock took over and nobody was playing acoustic guitars for a while. That's when I subsidised my guitar making by making snooker cues, which I enjoyed immensely."

Was the design and construction of your instruments influenced by all those early acoustic-guitar players?

"100 per cent. It started off with me



1. Special custom orders form another part of Fylde's output

2. Instrument tops awaiting bodies at the Penrith workshop

3. Roger shapes a guitar neck by hand at his workbench

4. A custom resonator guitar made for folk superstar Martin Simpson

5. Gordon Giltrap test drives his custom-made mini Fylde guitar



knowing nothing. There was no reference, there were no books, there was no YouTube or the internet. There was one book: *Make Your Own Spanish Guitar* [by AP Sharpe, published by Clifford Essex]. Making the guitars and trying to learn what wasn't working right and changing it, that's what I did. Only after the first few years did I start taking reference from American guitars because I wasn't able to take one apart. I had a lot of contact with Martin Carthy's [Martin] guitar because I was doing his repairs from 1971, so I learned a bit about Martin guitars that way and began to respect them.

"Then, bit by bit, the design had to change when I was concerned with the balance between playability and tone. First of all, it was all about tone; that's what the players wanted. They didn't mind struggling a bit with high action or heavy strings or strings that have been on the guitar for about a year – that was the way it was. But as things moved on, particularly when more influence came from the States, perhaps then people wanted to get guitars that played more easily. So we started making guitars that were more lightly built and with slimmer, adjustable necks. For the first few

years they were just solid, reinforced necks – you couldn't adjust them.

"We've changed over the years, somewhat, depending on the fashions of music, while making sure guitars could survive in the vicious environment of the folk clubs, for instance. Then moving to try to get them to respond more, make them more lively and then realising you might have gone too far and making them more heavy again. Then having problems with timber supply and having to adjust designs and processes to deal with new timbers that became available, when the old ones were no longer available. Things are changing all the time and they're still changing now."

You must have seen an awful lot of variation in timber supply over the last 50 years.

"Yeah, I've gone backwards and forwards a few times. In the early years I did try some timber that wouldn't have been recognised. The standards – maple, mahogany and rosewood – were all well known, but if you tried to use something else it wouldn't have been accepted as it is now. It's rather strange because newer makers are using English woods a lot, which is lovely in many ways, but it would have been



disregarded in the 1970s; nobody would consider that an English wood would make a soundboard. It would be frowned upon, to say the least.

“Instrument makers have spent centuries defining what a timber needs to be to make a guitar soundboard. So deciding that you can use a piece of cedar that has been grown in someone’s back garden in Essex, to my mind, is still rather frowned upon. I like to go back to the original source of the well-recognised tonewoods wherever I can.

“I love wood. If you think that the world’s rainforests are being depleted, well, part of it is my fault. I’ve got a lot of it here. Anybody that gets involved in wood falls in love with it and when you can make it into beautiful instruments, that gives it real purpose. The way new timbers become available now, it’s quite fascinating.

“What’s happened is the timber became more valuable. So the people out there looking for it can make a living doing it now, which they couldn’t have done 30 or 40 years ago. Nobody would have ever thought of making a guitar out of mango wood or Tasmanian blackwood. These things are popular now and relatively easy to get. Because they’re more valuable, it’s

worthwhile people seeking them out, cutting them down, drying them and supplying them to people like me. And because of that the more traditional timbers like Indian rosewood are under less threat – if it were not for the fact there’s a lot more guitars being made and sold nowadays.”

Do you think players are now more broad-minded when it comes to body woods?

“When I started, having one guitar was all you needed. But now everybody has to have a lot of guitars; it’s essential. You can’t play different tunes on one guitar, you have to have another guitar for that style of playing. So guitarists now have multiple guitars and it doesn’t make much sense to have them made from the same timber. If you have a guitar made from a different timber it will look and, to an extent, sound different as well. So that’s been a big part of the market – people being more acquisitive has driven the use of other timbers.”

What new trends are you noticing in terms of people requesting certain tonewoods?

“One that stands out is walnut. It’s really popular, both American and European

“Makers have spent centuries defining what a timber needs to be to make a guitar soundboard”

walnut. I hope it remains available because, of course, it’s a fruit tree. Walnuts are still eaten and so, while walnuts are still harvested, walnut timber will still be grown. So I’m hoping that will protect the walnut tree in general. Any tree that produces a fruit you can eat has to have more value than one that is just valuable for firewood.

“Rarer woods like ebony are now used for backs and sides, and ebony is far more rare than rosewood. African blackwood is far more rare than rosewood and yet it’s available. It’s not restricted. But it’s more difficult to get, cut and transport. What we like to call the ‘traditional woods’, such as mahogany, rosewood, maple and spruce, are still available.

“Some sources are not as readily available as they used to be; Adirondack spruce is becoming less available. There’s still a lot



6. A custom Fylde Goodfellow acoustic that was made for Squeeze man Chris Difford

7. Fylde instruments have found their way into the hands of some of the world's top acoustic players, including the legendary John Renbourn



IMAGE BY MIKE ENGLISH

of Sitka spruce if you go further north. Cedar is now taking over from spruce in some areas, but it's more difficult to use in a production environment.

"I'm fascinated by timber, I have the best part of 100 different hardwoods here. I have quite a lot of some of them, and one or two pieces of others. Things like Pernambuco, you know, it does exist in big enough pieces for making instruments, although not very often. Lignum vitae, or desert ironwood as it's sometimes called in the States, you can get in big enough pieces to make guitars... You get to a point, really, where the wood is too heavy, too dense, too difficult to glue, too difficult to bend. And you decide, well, I'll go back to rosewood."

Are there any tonewoods that are particularly difficult to work with?

"Figured maple. Fiddleback maple in particular because it cracks so easily. If you're bending it all the time and you have the system set up, and you have your bending device warmed up to temperature, and you've turned the phone off and locked the door, okay, you can bend figured maple quite nicely. But any distraction and you've ruined a set of wood in no time. And it's expensive. So I try to avoid that, which is a shame because it's white wood and so you go home covered in white dust instead black and brown dust for a change..."

"Other timbers that are hard? Well, it's not necessarily the timber itself, of course, that is the problem. It can be the way it's been dried or cut. If a wood has been kiln dried, it makes it more difficult to bend. If it's been cut at a very slight angle so it's cross-grained, it's impossible to bend, certainly without mechanical devices; you can't do it by hand. But if the quality of the wood is good, and it's been dried properly, then most timbers can be worked nicely."

Are there any special celebrations coming up for your 50th year?

"We wondered whether we could manage a big party like the one we had for my MBE celebrations. But that was a massive workload. The artists all fancy a party – getting together with a guitar and a beer, the idea goes down well, especially if there's free food involved! We thought about having a concert but I'd be disappointed if one person wasn't able to come because they're on tour or something. So we've tried all sorts of things."

"It was suggested that we film a video of 50 years of Fylde guitars – or *50 Shades Of Fylde* – where we get everybody we can to sit down with a guitar, talk about it, talk about what they think of Fylde guitars and all the different aspects to it. We're doing video clips of all of them and we're going to piece them together into

"I'm fascinated by timber, I have the best part of 100 different hardwoods here"

a sort of documentary. We have some videos done already: Pete Townshend, Martin Carthy, Gordon Giltrap and Megan Henwood. I spoke to Martin Simpson and it's all lined up. It's a massive project. Then someone's got to spend a lot of time editing it together."

Do you have any plans for special 50th anniversary instruments?

"All the guitars we're making this year have a '50 Years Of Fylde' label in them. We haven't made an anniversary guitar but we are making probably eight or 10 rather unusual, special guitars that we're going to take to the Ullapool Festival, which is the only place we display anything nowadays. They are made out of Brazilian rosewood and claro walnut, satinwood, figured maple and Cuban mahogany, things like that. Quite unusual guitars and just something to shout, 'Hey, you know, we make pretty guitars as well as workhorses.'" 

www.fyldeguitars.com

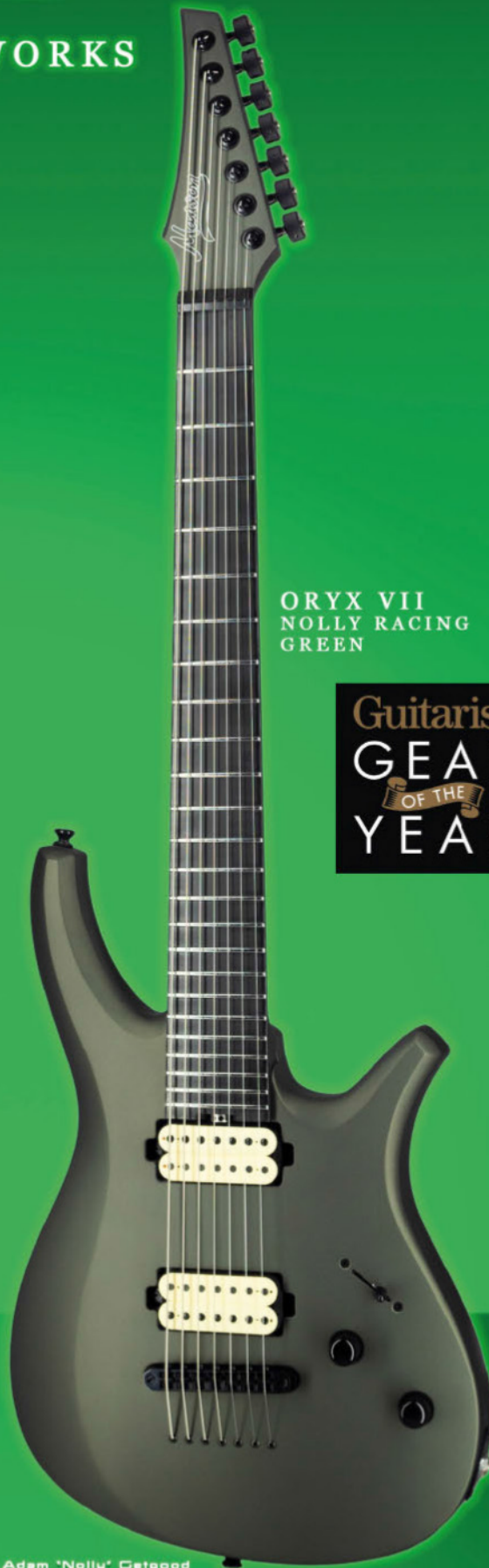
Manson

GUITAR WORKS

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ORYX VII
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Guitarist
GEAR
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ORYX



KAVUS TORABI

The frontman of psychedelic prog legends Gong and The Utopia Strong says he's 'pretty monogamous' when it comes to guitars but nonetheless he's owned an eclectic mix over the years...

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

"I was in a metal band [when I was a teenager] and I had this Kramer Focus, which was a one-pickup, slopey headstock thing with a Floyd Rose and a locking nut – but I never really liked it, I never really felt a connection with it. But it was my metal guitar because the bass player of the band didn't like the idea of me playing a Westone Spectrum before that! So he bought this guitar for me and wanted me to pay him back, though I never really responded to it.

"When that band was over, I suppose I was moving away from metal and I loved the idea of having a 335 or something like that – I was really into hollowbodies. I found another Westone – a Westone Rainbow – which is a

beautiful kind of birdseye maple guitar like a 335, although the horns are slightly pointier. It's a really beautiful guitar and it was secondhand in this music shop but I had no way of affording it because I was on the dole. So with the aid of a friend of mine, who was working for the Prince's Trust, I said I was going to need one of these guitars because I was going to start a new life as a guitar teacher. I put in the proposal and I got the funding for it. And so I got this beautiful Westone Rainbow, which I still have, and played that for about the next 10 years."

What was the last guitar that you bought (or acquired) and why?

"I have to say, as a caveat, I really don't need any more guitars. I have friends with lots, but I'm fairly monogamous when it comes to guitars [however] this is quite interesting... So Gong was playing at the Electric Ballroom last year, and after I came offstage, this guy called Alone Sage grabbed me and said, 'Hey, look, I'm from Israel. I have a boutique company called Coils that makes pickups.' And then he said, 'I've made this guitar... it's the best guitar I've ever made and I've been looking for someone to give it to. And after I saw you play, I wanted you to have it. Give me your address and I'll send it to you when I get back to Israel.' It was quite ridiculous and I was very, very flattered.

"I'm always happy to let people use my amp, but I've only once or twice let people use my guitar"

"So we exchanged addresses, and I was in London recording with Gong when I got a message from the shipping company saying I needed to pay import tax of over a thousand pounds. So I had to get back to Alone with a copy of this receipt and say, 'I'm so sorry, I can't pay for this guitar, I just don't have that money.' And he said, 'Oh, this is a mistake. You shouldn't have to pay a penny for it.' And he paid the tax on this thing! So it turned up and it's in this beautiful case, and it's made of a lovely piece of swamp ash and it doesn't look like any other guitar I've seen. It sort of sounds a bit like a Les Paul and it's got this lovely kind of Bigsby-style trem. It's called the 'Nilus', which apparently is the God of the Nile. The body looks a bit like a cross between a Les Paul and an Iceman. I feel extremely fortunate that this happened to me."

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

"Years ago, when I was playing in Mediaeval Baebees, I didn't have an acoustic and I was borrowing one. I needed one, so I went to Denmark Street. Now, I find guitar shops very intimidating – even then, when I was in my late 30s.

Kavus at home with the heavily modified Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster that is now his main gigging electric



PHOTO BY VILLY CURTIS

KAVUS'S PEDALBOARD

"At the front of [my 'board] I have a Free The Tone volume pedal. Next up, it's distortion. My favourite ever distortion was the Marshall Guv'nor, but now I've got this one called the Fender Duel Pugilist. What I love about it [is that it has two drive circuits in one box]. I need two – I need one for lead sound and one for rhythm sound.... I don't really like a super-saturated sound but I like that Duel Pugilist. It's really good. That goes into a Tokai flanger and then I also use a tremolo... I just want a severe, squarewave, on-and-off sound. So I ended up getting this one by Old Blood Noise Endeavours called the Whitecap. What else? I've got a fun pedal by Electro-Harmonix called the Ravish Sitar. It doesn't sound like a real sitar but it's great. I use it a lot in Gong and a massive amount in The Utopia Strong, particularly putting it through a tremolo – you can get these really synth-like sounds out of it. Oh, and the delay I use is a TC Electronic Flashback."

So I went to Denmark Street and didn't really know what I was looking for with an acoustic because I'd never had one before. There was this lovely looking one and I was kind of wowed by the inlays on it. It was a busy shop and I felt intimidated being there, so I had a quick play on it and thought, 'Yeah, this is great'. I think it was about 350 quid... I don't remember what the make was. But, yeah, I thought 'This is cool and it's got a pickup... but then I got it home and really, it wasn't a great guitar at all, you know? It didn't sound good, it didn't particularly record nicely.

"However, the good thing about it was I got to take it all around the world on tour and I wasn't that worried. I didn't have that anxiety about if I opened the case and the neck's snapped. It was just like: 'Meh! Well, you know... it's not that good, anyway.' But, later, when I bought myself a proper acoustic I spent a couple of hours trying out loads of them until I was happy. So I learned a lesson there. But yes, I don't miss that one at all. In fact, I haven't even thought about it until that question [laughs]."

Have you ever sold a guitar you now intensely regret selling?

"I've never really sold guitars, I've given them away. If people wanted to borrow them I might say, 'Oh, keep it, you know?' But no, I've never really sold them – I mean, just for the sort of sentimentality of it, my first-ever guitar, a crappy old Satellite, might be fun to still have because it was my first-ever guitar. But I think I gave it away."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Oh, God, I don't know. Because I sort of flippantly say: 'All guitars sound the same and go for whatever looks good.' But that's not really true [laughs]. Actually, it's so strange how even the same model of guitar will differ from one to another, as I found out when I bought my White Falcon – I tried a couple of the new Japanese ones in the early 2000s and one of them felt like 'mine' and the other didn't – I don't think it was just down to how they were set up.

"So the only tip I can think of is to really play any guitar you're thinking of buying and give yourself at least a good half-hour... It's almost like trying out a pair of speakers or monitors. Certainly with my current acoustic guitar, I went into the shop with about five pieces [ready prepared] that I would be playing on it live, to see how comfortable it felt."

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

"Oh, a really good guitar. Because in terms of amps, particularly when touring abroad, you're always at the mercy of whatever is being provided for you. But the guitar itself, that's always your instrument. I mean, I'm always happy to let people use my amp, you know, but I've



only once or twice let people use my guitar. I'm not exactly at Steve Howe levels of guardedness about my guitars [laughs] but still, I'd much rather have a nice guitar."

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

"I only got my first guitar with single coils – the Jazzmaster – in 2019. Prior to that I always had guitars with humbuckers and I got used to that sound. But I'm impressed with how punchy the single coils are. And apart from the hum that comes from them, I've really liked how creamy and direct they sound. If you'd asked me this question about five years ago, I would have just said, 'Well, humbuckers'. But from this point onwards, I think I'm on a journey into the world of single coils. I really, really like the sound of them." [JD]



Gong's current album *The Universe Also Collapses* is out now on Kscope. The Utopia Strong's current LP *International Treasure* is on Rocket Recordings <https://theutopiastrong.bandcamp.com>

Kavus on stage with his Gretsch White Falcon and one of the ever-evolving versions of his pedalboard

SWITCHED ON

Seymour Duncan's Bluetooth-controllable HyperSwitch moves pickup wiring and switching into the 21st century. Dave Burrluck wonders if he can keep up...

Traditionalists, please look away now and find a nice picture of a vintage guitar to drool over. The days of mucking around, burning your fingers (and occasionally your guitar) with your soldering iron are over. You want to change the wiring in your guitar? Easy, now all you need is your smartphone, a Bluetooth connection, and the new HyperSwitch from Seymour Duncan.

Launched earlier this year, once installed (typically on a two- or three-humbucking guitar) the HyperSwitch can electronically switch each of those humbuckers in numerous ways without even taking the backplate off your guitar. All your switching is done from your phone via an app and that Bluetooth connection: each solo pickup, or combination, can be saved into any position on the five-way switch as a 'patch'. Once you're happy with all five positions, you can then save your work as a 'preset', which can be recalled at a later stage. Importantly, once you've set up the sounds you want and saved them, you don't need to use the app again unless you want another fiddle.

The HyperSwitch is not much bigger than a four-pole 'mega' switch and the like, and it sort of bolts a circuit board and two screw-in terminal blocks to an enclosed five-way lever switch. So long as you've got space in your guitar and can accommodate the necessary nine-volt block battery that powers the Bluetooth fun, you're good to go.

It's not exactly a cheap date at around £200, and outwardly you don't get a huge amount of real estate for your money: there's the switch itself, with battery leads that are already connected, a black and white plastic switch tip and a small-blade screwdriver. Included instructions are minimal, too, but far more detailed pdfs

covering installation and use can be found on Seymour Duncan's website.

As mentioned, to maximise the potential of the HyperSwitch you really need something like an HH or HSH format guitar where the middle 'S' would typically be some kind of single-coil-sized stacked or side-by-side humbucker. Obviously, your host needs to have a slot for a three- or five-way lever switch (not a toggle), too. You don't need to use Seymour Duncan pickups and so long as you can identify the chassis ground, hot, ground and series link (typically the two wires you'd take to a mini-toggle or switched pot to achieve a standard coil-split) of any other-brand pickup, then you're all set. In Seymour Duncan humbucker protocol, for example, your colours would be black (hot), green (ground), white and red (series connection) and bare (chassis ground).

Without an HSH Super-S going spare, I thought I'd go down the HH route (although most of those options tend not to use a lever switch), and looking at the user guide there are plenty of options for each pickup. Along with voicing each humbucker in standard series wiring, each individual North or South coil can be voiced: the coil-winding direction of these can be reversed, too, for out-of-phase sounds when they're combined with another pickup. There are two other settings: 'RP' configures the humbucker's coils "out-of-phase in parallel – coil starts are hot", says Seymour Duncan,

"To maximise the potential, you really need an HH or HSH format guitar"

and 'PRP' has the coils "out-of-phase in parallel reversed – coil finishes as hot". Don't worry, I'm not entirely sure about those settings, either.

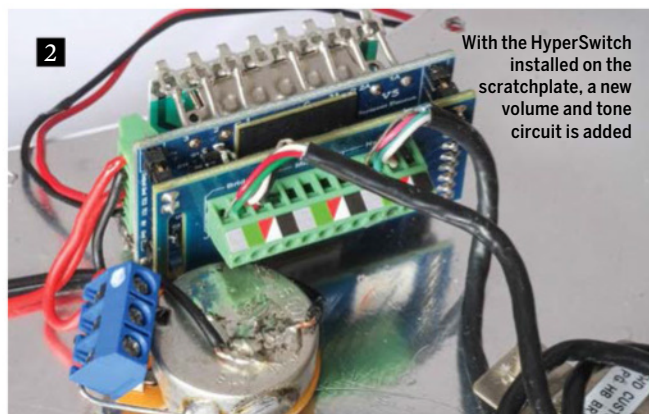
However, looking through the specifications, and noting that the series link of the two coils is wired into the terminal block as one connection, there doesn't seem to be any way you can switch your humbucker from series to parallel (in phase) – a good way of creating a more single-coil-like sound but without any hum. "That is correct," said Seymour Duncan after we'd double-checked. "You can only switch from series to split (either coil) or reversed-phase parallel. We are aware that true parallel is a desirable option, but it was not possible with the current hardware selection."

Along with a single volume control, two tone controls (as with a Stratocaster) can be linked into the HyperSwitch. Interestingly, the tones can be programmed on or off, and with an additional .027µf capacitor in series with whatever cap you already have on your tone control(s). For example, if you have a .047µf capacitor, the additional .027µf capacitor will bring the overall value down to .017µf, which is ideal if you want less roll-off on your neck pickup, for example.

Installation

I borrowed back a John Page Classic Ashburn that I'd previously used to test those natty locking saddles that Trev Wilkinson makes and are used by John Suhr. With two humbucker slots, master volume and tone – all mounted on a scratchplate – it seems like the perfect candidate with which to check out the HyperSwitch's potential.

Now, you will still need your soldering iron, either to remove the original five-way selector or, as in my case, to create a new





John Page's Ashburn HH was part of the Japanese-made Classic series that appeared a few years back – along with the T-inspired AJ, they were rather good. Currently, only the AJ is available and now the Classic series are made in the USA www.johnpageclassic.com

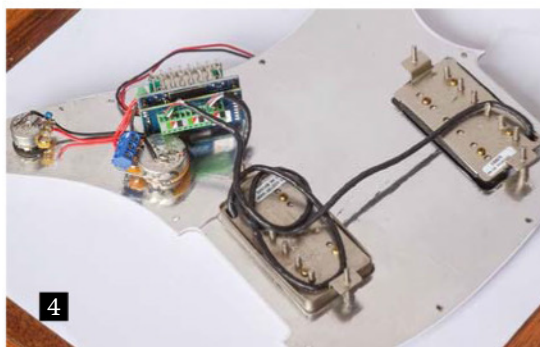
circuit. I have a simple 500k CTS pot with a three-screw terminal block to connect the output jack and ground that I'd purchased from Radioshop Pickups a while back, plus a simple 180 picofarads treble bleed cap and a tone control. For that I used a mini CTS 500k pot and the smallest .047µf cap I could find in my spares box. Why? Well, along with the sizable switch, I've got to fit a block battery in the Strat-sized cavity as well. I mounted the switch and pots first to check they'd fit in the cavity along with a battery and, for once, luck was with me – although tight, they fitted. Happy it was going to work, I soldered up the volume and tone.

As I said, you don't need to use Seymour Duncan pickups, but I thought that was the best place to start and loaded in a '59 at the neck and a Custom Shop 'PG' Pearly Gates at the bridge. You might need to trim the pickup wires, strip the insulation and 'tin' each one, and though it's not entirely necessary to do the latter, it is good practice. With my soldering irons unplugged, the rest of the install is screw-in.

But before I screwed the scratchplate in place, I plugged in and fired up the HyperSwitch app. There was a sense of entering a brave new world here as I connected the app to the HyperSwitch

via the magic of Bluetooth, and started the simple first steps to configure the switch. I then tapped each pickup to see if they were working and made sure I'd told the app to connect that tone control. Rather surprisingly, everything worked first time – a first in itself!

This is when the fun starts and you can begin to listen to the different switching options voicing the full humbucker in position 1, the North single coil in position 2, the South in position 3, then the RP and PRP options in positions 4 and 5, for example. You can experiment with the different tone control cap values for each switch



3. The pickups, volume and tone simply screw into the HyperSwitch's two terminal blocks

4. With the pickups mounted, the scratchplate is ready to be loaded onto the Ashburn

5. Once you connect the HyperSwitch to the app, you can get to work listening to the various sound options

position, too; do the same with the neck pickup, then with both on, where you can listen to the Reverse out-of-phase option. Let's not underestimate the potential here. Instead of having to wire in push-pull pots or mini-switches, I can listen to these specific sounds, change their position on the five-way and connect or disconnect the tone control with a choice of that additional cap value. Once you have all five positions saved, you save those all as a preset. Then you can start again with a completely different setup. For someone who's spent far too many hours modding circuits and pickups over the years, this is really quite mind-boggling.

Final Thoughts

We did encounter one minor glitch whereby you need to 'wake up' the HyperSwitch by moving the switch lever a few times *before* you try to connect it to the app. Other than that, the app is easy to navigate and works seamlessly. There doesn't seem to be a way to name your HyperSwitch, though – it comes up as HYPERSWITCH # #7GJgTnhs – when it would be handy to personally

ID it, not least if you had more than one HyperSwitch-equipped guitar. But saving and recalling your presets is all dead easy.

As good as it all is, it's not quite delivering what many of us *actually* do when we wire up and/or split a humbucker conventionally. The inability to voice a humbucker in parallel is a miss. I'm not sure of the musical value of the RP and PRP sounds, although Seymour Duncan responded with the following: "Some of our artists found these sounds very useful for clean rhythm parts. They can be used very effectively in conjunction with one of the other pickups in full series mode. Standing alone, the output is low for most applications, and the RP and PRP sounds will be better with higher output pickups."

As we only have a master volume on this guitar, the out-of-phase combinations can sound typically thin. If only we could simply offset the output of one of the combined pickups, you'd get a fuller and more usable sound. There's no provision for changing the volume pot resistance, or achieving any kind of partial split, something we can

easily do with a couple of resistors. Indeed, if the system embraced the volume control, as it does the tone, a variable treble bleed might be useful or the ability to bypass the volume completely for a 'Blower switch' direct-to-output option.

With no idea of the actual limits to the technology at play here, I don't know whether some of the above are simple omissions or simply not yet possible. And as well as this all works right now, you just can't help thinking to the future when things such as being able to connect two single coils in series, Danelectro-style, would be a great addition, or simply offsetting those out-of-phase combinations with a simple capacitor and/or resistor to increase the musical potential.

Back to reality, though, and as good as this concept is, you could equally buy a very posh humbucker for the £200 this HyperSwitch costs you, or quite a few switches, pots, caps and resistors instead. All that said, we're looking at the first app-controlled switching system for our electric plank: a vision of the future, indeed! **📱**



MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Seymour Duncan HyperSwitch Bluetooth 5-Way Switch

PRICE: £209

SKILL LEVEL: Mainly screw-in install, though you'll still need a soldering iron to prepare the volume and tone(s), plus trim, strip and ideally 'tin' the wires going into the screw-in terminals
www.seymourduncan.com

PROS & CONS

PROS The concept is easily a 10/10: the first app-based, Bluetooth connecting pickup switch; relatively easily install and very well-designed app

CONS No parallel option for the humbucker; RP and PRP sounds aren't particularly usable; no provision to 'treat' or sweeten the single-coil sounds

8/10

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURR LUCK

BETTER CONTROL

One reader is curious about fixing a quirk of their Danelectro's stacked volume and tone knobs

Q Reading through a back issue of *Guitarist*, I was interested in the review of the Danelectro Blackout '59M NOS+ where the reviewer, Dave Burrluck, mentioned “we added a couple of small washers under the top knob of each stack, which means the volume and tones can move independently”.

I've owned a Danelectro for some years and quite like it, although, like you, when I go to move the volume, the tone moves as well. What did you actually do? Also, have you ever done any mods to Danos with those volume/tone stacks?

Dano fan, via email

A Greetings Dano fan, join the club! I've always been a big fan of Danelectros – there's just something about their utility build and the semi-solid construction that appeals to me and, as we've written, today's Danos are rather smartly made. My frustration has often been those dual concentric stacked volume and tone knobs because, effectively, it's like a Les Paul with a volume and tone for each pickup. But quite often when you simply want to pull back the tone on the bridge pickup – they don't lack in



Dave shares a hack to fix a common issue with Dano's dual concentric stacked volume and tone knobs

“As the top knob rests on the lower one, they can move together, not independently”

brightness, after all – I find myself pulling back the volume as well because the stacked knobs don't always move independently.

The actual knobs are simply nicely moulded plastic parts that push on: the larger outer knob, typically the volume, pushes on first and controls the lower of the double-ganged pots; then the smaller diameter knob, which controls the tone, pushes on to the upper part of the pot shaft and controls the upper pot. Depending on the model, these functions are sometimes reversed. For example, the current '59 Divine with its pointer knobs has the volume on the top and the tone on the bottom. The problem – as you've pointed out – is that the top knob rests on the

lower one, which can cause them to move together, not independently.

So, all I did was pull off the top knob and put in two or three M5 flat washers (which have an internal diameter of 5.3mm and outer diameter of just over 10mm), and then push the top knob back on. This raises the height of the top knob slightly so now the controls move as they should. I found the washers in one of those flat-washer kits (originally from Maplin), but they're also easy to find online.

You're now able to roll off some treble on the bridge pickup when it's voiced independently, or pull down the output of the neck while keeping the tone full up, with both pickups on – remember the pickups are voiced together in series. It's also easy to adjust either volume to emphasise the treble or bass within that bigger voice, for example, or simply voice each pickup individually while keeping the selector switch in middle position.

A word of warning. While most of the reissue Danos I've come across have knobs that are easy to pull off, I did recently

encounter one with very tight knobs that were very difficult to remove. The problem is compounded by the fact that the stacked pots use a single spline that goes through the top pot and controls the lower pot. It's easy to pull that out while trying to remove the top knob, ruining the whole pot. Getting replacements, certainly with the same Dano values (the volume is 100k linear taper; the tone is log taper 1-megohm) is very difficult.

As to mods, I've personally not experimented that much aside from swapping pickups (for Seymour Duncans) and simply wiring the guitar to have a master volume and master tone. That said, I really only use my Dano in the middle (series) position and have been considering losing the selector switch altogether and going with two pickup volumes and a master tone. That way I can tune each volume control and experiment with different pot values/tapers and tone caps. It's actually the same wiring that Cream T used on its Billy Gibbons co-designed Aurora BFGT. In short, look out for a future Dano-inspired Mod Squad! 

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.



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

In the quest for vintage tone, the question remains: what about the wood?

Torrefying Wood

Is the tone really in the wood and do old guitars really sound better because the wood has dried out? The answers are yes and no. Contrary to popular belief, the seasoned wood used for guitar building doesn't actually continue to dry out in the sense that all the moisture evaporates off. Even after kiln drying, the water content does vary to some extent, and it tends to fluctuate with atmospheric conditions.

Few would dispute that vintage and modern acoustic guitars tend to sound different. Different doesn't necessarily mean better, but for some players 'vintage' equates to tonal nirvana. Is there a way to build 'vintage' tone into brand-new guitars? Advocates of roasting or torrefying wood believe there is, and the science may back them up.

Setting electric guitars off to one side for the moment, if you compare a pre-war Martin with a newly built replica – or

even 10-year-old replica – there will be noticeable differences in sonic character. If it can be established that the woods, bracing pattern, glues and strings are all identical, it's reasonable to conclude that these perceived differences must be attributable to changes that have occurred to the wood in the intervening decades.

Typically, air or kiln drying reduces water content in the wood and the goal is to ensure that any potential for shrinking or warping in the future is eliminated during the process. However, this does not remove the timber's volatile elements that supposedly dampen resonance and slow down the wood's transient response.

In an interview with *Reverb*, Maine-based luthier Dana Bourgeois (who featured in our previous issue with the new Touchstone series) explains that freshly cut wood is mostly cellulose bound together with lignin and volatile elements including

"pitches, sugars, oils, and ... considerable water content". These are the volatiles that eventually vacate the wood as they oxidise and mineralise.

It's a slow chemical reaction that emits gas and leaves a mineral residue. The lignin also hardens to bind the cellulose together like glue. The end result would seem to be a win-win for acoustic guitar tone because timber that is lighter and stiffer can respond more quickly than unaged timber. This is great news if you're young and patient enough to wait several decades for your guitar to reach its peak, or rich enough to buy vintage guitars. For everyone else, there may be an 'oven ready' solution.

Log Roast

Variously called torrefaction, roasting, tempering, caramelisation and retification, the process involves the carefully controlled thermal decomposition of the wood at a

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of torrefied wood is the promise of vintage tone from the get-go

temperature between 200 and 300 degrees Celsius. The technical term is pyrolysis, which loosely translates as 'separating by heat'. Torrefaction is properly carried out in an oxygen-free environment, which prohibits burning, and it cooks off the volatiles that Bourgeois mentions to alter the cellular structure of wood. This results in the same changes that would normally occur over decades, and under a microscope, torrefied and naturally aged timber appear almost indistinguishable.

Although the widespread adoption of torrefied tonewoods is a relatively recent development in guitar making, the process probably goes back millennia. The Vikings were known to treat timber in this way for shipbuilding because it becomes more stable and moisture resistant, or hydrophobic. Taken to the limit, torrefying wood turns it into charcoal, which almost certainly pre-dates the Vikings. When burned, charcoal generates more heat than an equivalent-sized piece of untreated

The pine body of this Fender American Professional II Stratocaster HSS has undergone a roasting process that not only improves its resonance, it also deepens the colour for a more vintage look



wood, and its ability to resist moisture makes it far easier to store.

Wood with this property is described as 'non-hygroscopic' and because it no longer absorbs or releases moisture, it's less susceptible to atmospheric conditions. As such, it is far less likely to split or crack, which is advantageous from a guitar-building perspective.

The process also changes the wood's colour, which occurs due to chemical reactions between the wood's proteins and natural sugars, and the colour change permeates all through the timber. Roasted maple can range from soft amber to a deep reddish brown that is closer to cherry or even walnut. During the CITES rosewood ban, Gibson actually started using torrefied maple as a substitute for rosewood fretboards. You can observe similar colour changes with spruce, which can result in a very convincing vintage look under suitable lacquer.

Strong & Stable

Torrefied wood is also said to have the stiffness and tap tone response of decades-old wood, so it sounds more 'vintage'. Even so, it took a surprisingly long time before guitar manufacturers made the connection between timber treatment and tone. Rickenbacker has been using torrefied wood for decades – but for stability, rather than sound quality. The dark stripes in Rickenbacker's laminated necks are actually torrefied maple. Some scepticism remains about the tonal benefits of roasted wood, but nobody seems to question its advantages as a building material.

The moisture-resisting properties that the Vikings found so useful come about because torrefaction changes the wood's cell structure from open to closed. This prevents the wood from rehydrating, so the water content of torrefied wood remains fairly constant irrespective of atmospheric conditions. In contrast, the normal seasoning process dries wood out to the point where water content in the wood and the surrounding atmosphere more or less balance out. This is known as 'the equilibrium moisture content' and since the wood retains its open cell structure, it remains hygroscopic and will continue to release and absorb moisture as atmospheric conditions change for many decades.

Taylor's Builder's Edition 517e Grand Pacific features a torrefied Sitka spruce top for increased clarity across the frequency range



Absorbing moisture is slightly less concerning than releasing it because as wood dries out, it tends to shrink. Wood glue creates a bond that's stronger than wood fibres and, within sensible margins, it's not unduly affected by changes in atmospheric conditions. So, when wood gets too dry, something has to give, and it isn't the glue. That's when wood cracks and splits occur.

Careful owners often prefer to store non-laminated acoustic guitars in a case with a humidifier to keep them hydrated and prevent cracks occurring. A well-hydrated acoustic may not 'age' in the usual way, but many prefer a more modern tone, and by maintaining a consistent level of hydration, a guitar's tonal qualities should remain consistent, too.

Even the finest vintage acoustics are likely to have developed a few cracks and splits over the decades, but eventually things stabilise as the wood ages to become hydrophobic. The great advantage of building with torrefied timber is that the

Torrefied-wood guitars will be more durable, less likely to crack and more consistent in tone

wood has already reached that point before it is fashioned into a guitar. As a result, the guitar will be more durable, far less likely to crack and, like the hydrated guitar, more consistent in tone. Manufacturers will have far fewer warranty repairs, and owners don't have to pack their guitars away in the cases when they're not in use. But perhaps the most exciting aspect is the promise of vintage tone from the get-go.

On Toast

Some cynicism lingers on, but the consensus appears to be shifting towards an acceptance that roasting wood does make an audible difference. In recent years, it has gone from being an exotic option offered by a handful of specialist luthiers to an established feature for most major manufacturers. The likes of Martin, Taylor, Gibson, Atkin and Collings wouldn't be

using the stuff if there wasn't a demand for it and they didn't think it offered something different.

Everybody talks about the sound quality, but in our experience the roasted effect is also about dynamics. Torrefied tops and braces often equate to a quicker and freer feel that responds equally well to a strong strumming arm and a more delicate touch. You may also notice sweeter treble, a more open midrange and a lack of harmonic clutter in these instruments.

Clearly, acoustic guitar building is the most obvious application because the wood is all important, but interest in roasted tonewood has long since moved into the realm of electric guitars. Besides split-prone spruce, the component with the greatest requirement for stability is the neck. Pioneered by the likes of Music Man and Tom Anderson, roasted maple necks are now standard on many production guitars and are widely available as aftermarket items.

Having assembled several guitars with roasted maple necks, this writer can report that the tap tone is the most striking difference. Compared with non-roasted maple necks, the toasted types tend to ring with a purer note that sustains

longer. And it's not a subtle thing. Roasted ash, pine and alder bodies and body blanks are also being sold, which is an intriguing proposition for partscaster builders.

Oven Ready

But before you set your oven to gas mark 6 and reach for the baking tray, we need to point out that torrefying wood isn't really a DIY endeavour. The key thing is to create an oxygen-free environment to prevent the wood from catching fire. Some methods involve filling the oven or kiln with nitrogen or steam, but specialist equipment is required to do so.

Also, the ideal temperature and duration will vary from species to species, so by roasting your own you could end up ruining some expensive timber before you get the hang of it. Some have reported successful outcomes using kitchen ovens, but if you want to build your own guitar from roasted wood, it's safer to buy torrefied neck and body blanks. Acoustic kit suppliers such as StewMac even offer torrefied tops and braces. And if you still think this all sounds like the latest craze or marketing BS, go and try a torrefied guitar for yourself and let your ears be the judge. 📺

www.huwpriceguitar.com



Torrefied neck woods afford much greater stability, as is the case on this Charvel Pro-Mod DK22

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In The Mix

Mixing speakers is relatively common – but mixing speakers of different sizes is a different ballgame. Paul Gough of Zilla Cabs checks out the pros and cons

In the world of bass guitar, 10-inch and 15-inch speakers are the norm, whereas for guitar these days it's safe to say that 12s are the basis of most amps and cabs. At the risk of angering the bass lobby, guitarists tend to be more adventurous when it comes to changing speakers, but then bassists are far more likely to mix differently sized speakers – 10s, 15s and tweeters. Most bass companies offer (or have offered) 10- and 15-inch speakers in their cabs. But I'm hard pushed to think of a model of guitar amp that utilises a mix of speaker sizes.

Why is it so common in the bass world to mix different-sized speakers, then, and so rare for guitarists? Well, firstly, bassists have a lot of ground to cover. The deep lows often require a larger speaker to push out the longer wavelengths (and therefore lower frequencies), but these larger speakers aren't always as good with the higher frequencies that a bass can

produce, hence often smaller speakers are added. Guitarists generally don't need a lot of low-end (that's why we have bassists, right?), so we can dismiss 15s a little. We also have access to a vast tonal palette created from the many 12-inch guitar speakers out there, so maybe there are routes we aren't considering or maybe don't even know existed.

To help illustrate this a little, I recently had a conversation with a returning customer. He already had a variety of cabs to suit different occasions – a small light rig, a larger rig for heavier and bigger venues, and so on – but he had the concern that in going for a 2x15 cab he may have a rig that is a little too inflexible. I suggested a 12-inch and 15-inch cab; he was amazed. Despite owning numerous cabs, using each one for a different job, he had never considered mixing a 12 with a 15. He wasn't even sure it was possible.

Now, similarly to when we're mixing speakers, there are things you need to watch out for and these are emphasised further when mixing different sizes. First is the speaker's sensitivity rating, which is often denoted as a number around 97 to 100dB measured at 1W/1m (the number can be higher or lower). This is effectively how loud you hear a speaker, or at least a measure of comparing the effective loudness of different speakers. You ideally want to keep these numbers the same when selecting speakers of different sizes.

"Bassists are far more likely to mix differently sized speakers – 10s, 15s and tweeters"



A 15-inch Celestion Fullback paired with a 12-inch Vintage 30 gives you a range of frequencies to play with

As you'll find when mixing 12-inch speakers, there is some leeway in certain circumstances, but it's more important to keep the sensitivity numbers as close as possible when mixing differently sized speakers because there are other factors to their performance that don't always play nice if one speaker (often the large one) is more dominant. Also, remember that 10- and 15-inch vintage speakers are often designed for the vintage market, so consider this when looking for a more modern sound. You also need to ensure the impedances match, which is the same as with any speaker, so that goes without saying.

To round things up, it seems that although we may have been slightly pushed down the route of bassists wanting the low-end of a 15 and the highs of a solid bass 10-inch speaker and guitarists being spoiled for choice with what we can do with 12-inch speakers, we may also be a little guilty of dismissing both 10s and 15s, and especially mixing sizes. So if you're looking for a different sound, it's definitely worth considering what you can achieve with differently sized speakers. I'd describe the sound as 'really good fun' – and that's what it's all about. **G**



"You ideally want to keep sensitivity ratings the same when selecting speakers of different sizes"

This custom Zilla cab is a vertical angled model that houses 12- and 15-inch speakers



Rod Brakes' ClassicGear

Along with the Flying V, Gibson's "Modernistic" Explorer was light years ahead

Gibson Explorer

In 1958, a landmark year for Gibson, the company released a slew of now classic designs. Guitars included the ES-335 and ES-355 semi-hollow thinlines; the EB-2 thinline bass; the revamped sunburst Les Paul Standard; and the double-cutaway Les Paul TV and Junior models. Also joining the class of '58 was Gibson's new "Modernistic" solidbodies, the Flying V and Explorer. There was a third variant designed alongside them, the Moderne, although this guitar never made it into production until 1982.

As these futuristic-sounding model names suggest, Gibson's intention was to prove to the guitar world that they were able to compete with the likes of Fender when it came to adventurous, forward-thinking designs. With their new solidbodies, Gibson attempted to slough off their image as a staid guitar builder while leaning into the zeitgeist of 50s sci-fi and space exploration. Unfortunately, however, both the Flying V and Explorer proved immediately unsuccessful and were discontinued the year after their release. Shipping records show that only 98 Flying Vs were produced between 1958 and 1959, while the Explorer clocked up even fewer. Indeed, the mere 22 recorded shipped between 1958 and 1959 during its debut run make it one of the rarest – and now most coveted – vintage guitars Gibson has ever produced.

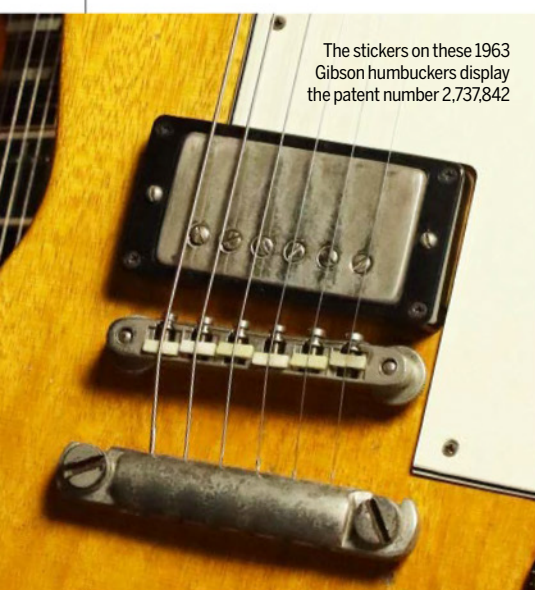
Along with the Flying V and Moderne, the Explorer's "ornamental design" patent was applied for in June 1957 and granted in January 1958. Originally dubbed the 'Futura', it is depicted as having a V-shaped headstock (as present on a prototype guitar during its unveiling at the July 1957 NAMM show) although this was later changed to the more familiar asymmetric 'scimitar' headstock shape. This period was also significant for Gibson on account of its new humbucking pickup design that began to appear on electric guitars from 1957. Subsequently, upon its release, the Explorer was fitted with a pair of PAF ("Patent Applied For") humbuckers augmented by three control knobs – comprising individual pickup volume along with a master tone – and a three-way selector switch.

Aside from some very early mahogany examples, the Explorer was made using Korina wood (a commercial name given to white limba) as per the Gibson Consolette steel and Skylark lap steel. Durable, good-looking and easy to work, Korina further enhanced the Explorer's unique appeal.

With their new solidbodies, Gibson attempted to slough off their image as a staid guitar builder

Appearing on the price list under the Modernistic Guitars section, both the Flying V and Explorer listed for \$247.50 – the same as a Les Paul Model/Goldtop. "The forward look," reads a feature in the April-May 1958 issue of the *Gibson Gazette*. "The extra narrow, fast action neck is of matching Korina with the Gibson adjustable truss rod. Rosewood fingerboard has attractive pearl dot inlays. Tune-o-matic bridge permits adjustment of string action...Metal parts are gold-plated, individual machine heads with deluxe buttons."

In the early 60s, Gibson used up the remaining Explorer bodies and necks (as shown here with this 1963 example) hence guitars from this period feature nickel- not gold-plated hardware as per the originals. And although the Explorer is now considered a classic, it wasn't until 1975 when Gibson started making it again. 📺



The Evolution of the Gibson Explorer

June 1957

Futura patent applied for; V-profile headstock

July 1957

Prototype displayed at NAMM show

1958

Patent granted; 'scimitar' headstock; gold-plated hardware; 19 guitars shipped

1959

3 guitars shipped; discontinued

Early 60s

Late 50s Korina bodies and necks; nickel-plated hardware

Mid-70s

Reintroduced; Ebony, Natural and White finishes

1979

Explorer II; walnut or maple top

1981

Heritage Series Explorer; Korina

1982

The Explorer; Antique Sunburst & Antique Cherry Sunburst finishes

Current

Various models available in Gibson's Original, Artist, Exclusives and Custom Shop ranges



1963 Gibson Explorer

1. SERIAL NUMBER

"8" (denoting 1958) followed by four digits on headstock rear

2. HEADSTOCK

Asymmetrical 'scimitar' profile; mother-of-pearl Gibson logo inlay; black nitrocellulose finish

3. PLASTICS

Oval white plastic tuner buttons; black truss-rod cover; two black pickup surrounds; multiple-layer (b/w) bevelled-edge pickguard; six nylon saddles; three black 'reflector' knobs; white switch tip; multiple-layer (b/w) jack plate

4. HARDWARE

Nickel-plated: strip tuners; two pickup covers; Tune-o-matic bridge; stop tailpiece; two strap buttons

5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS

Two humbuckers; three pots (individual volume and master tone); single tone capacitor; side-mounted jack

6. BODY

Korina; asymmetrical profile with extended upper-treble and lower-bass bouts; 1½-inch deep; clear nitrocellulose finish

7. NECK

Korina; 24¾-inch scale length; 22-fret rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot markers; clear nitrocellulose finish

Guitarist would like to thank Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York, for showing us this fantastic 1963 Gibson Explorer



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

This aureate beauty appears in the rarest of Fender's gilded finishes: Aztec Gold

1956 Fender Stratocaster in Aztec Gold



Aztec Gold was superseded by Shoreline Gold in the late 50s

Eldon Shamblin's [1954 Stratocaster] is the first Aztec Gold Strat, so it's earlier than this [1956] model. Aztec Gold is listed as a Ditzler 1953 colour, and non-specific regarding a car company. I've seen Oldsmobile, Buick and Cadillac listed, so it was mostly used for General Motors cars. I have a '53 Telecaster in Aztec Gold, which is the earliest example I've seen in that colour. In fact, it's the only Aztec Gold Tele I've seen.

"I have three Aztec Gold Stratocasters at the moment: this '56 and two '58s. This '56 is virtually in brand-new condition. And I have the sales receipt. It's dated 29 December 1956. A person by the name of Armand Veeda bought it. According to the receipt, they had 30 days to pay for it. It says: 'Fender gold Stratocaster' and 'Champ amplifier'. The total for the two was \$359. They gave a \$59 deposit and owed \$300 'on instalment'. So, it was originally purchased in a music store, as opposed to a direct factory order.

"Fender first mentioned custom colours in the catalogue in 1956, although they don't fully describe what colours were available. I have had many colours that have never been listed. Aztec Gold is rare, and with regards to Stratocasters, I've seen four – including the three I have here at Well Strung Guitars. Plus, there's Eldon Shamblin's famous guitar. I don't know if they made any more than five. I think they probably broke the seal on the can of paint in '53, starting with the Tele. They probably had a gallon of Aztec Gold paint, did as many guitars as they could with it, and that was it.

"Aztec Gold goes away in 1959 and is replaced by Shoreline Gold. Fender

"They probably had a gallon of Aztec Gold, and did as many guitars as they could"

standardised their custom colour chart in 1961 [advertising Shoreline Gold Metallic], but I've definitely seen '59 Shoreline Gold guitars. By the time the Strat is a rosewood 'board [from 1959] I've only seen them in Shoreline, not Aztec. Fender used up the last of the Shoreline Gold colour in early 1965, and then switched to Firemist Gold. Firemist Gold is darker and a little more orangey. Apart from those three gold finishes – Aztec, Shoreline and Firemist – I've never seen Fender use any other. I mean aside from some rare sparkle-finish guitars I've never seen anything else. Someone once showed me a picture of a Fender Electric XII and called it 'Harvest Gold', but it was clearly Firemist Gold. People make shit up all the time, like, 'I'm just gonna call it this.' Harvest Gold is what kitchen appliances looked like in the 70s. [Laughs]

"Such folkloric names are rife. If you look at the colour Tahitian Coral, that's really a Ford colour called Cameo Coral. I've never seen a receipt that says 'Tahitian Coral' on it. I've never been able to find an actual colour called Tahitian Coral in any paint ledger that even closely resembles it, but it is a dead ringer for Cameo Coral. So, whether Fender made up the name or it was a folklore thing, that's hard to say.

"While Fender was trying to develop their in-house Fiesta Red, if they added too much

white to the paint mix it would come up pink. So, instead of discarding that paint, they used it as an undercoat or a primer. You will see that on some Fiesta Red guitars when the finish wears through – you will occasionally hear people say, 'It's Fiesta Red over Tahitian Coral.' But it's not! It's just a bad paint mix, and they couldn't retail the guitar that way, so used it as an undercoat and painted the right colour on top.

"Remember, this was in the days before computerised paint mixing. Back then, you had a can of paint, took an eye dropper and added white to a can of Dakota [Red]. And that's how Fender got Fiesta [Red]. They had to mix it in-house, like four drops of white in a quart can of Dakota or Roman Red, and they would lighten it until they got the shade they wanted. That's why Fiesta varies so much. It's not like a body shop supplier mixed that paint up to the actual 1957 Fiesta Red that was used on the [Ford] Thunderbird. That is a completely different colour to what Fender called Fiesta Red. They got in the ballpark, but it changed constantly depending on how much white paint went in.

"Speaking of pink, it was highly unpopular as a colour. Shell Pink is an actual Duco colour, but it was considered a disaster and was removed from the chart by '63 [replaced by Candy Apple Red Metallic]. If there were a dozen Shell Pink Fender guitars made in total, I would be shocked." [RB]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
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Rare as they are, David Davidson owns three Aztec Gold Strats from the 1950s



PHOTOS BY PAGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Gary Moore

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Keeley-modded Boss SD-1 & Vox AC15 C1

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

IN A FEW SHORT YEARS, Eric Clapton went from playing small club gigs on Eel Pie Island to the legendary Royal Albert Hall. Arguably the pioneer of the 'Gibson Les Paul through a cranked Marshall' tone (and most certainly among the first to do so), Eric managed to create a sound that had seldom, if ever, been heard, while staying true to his original musical inspirations. He also helped revitalise the then-discontinued Gibson Les Paul model, which had been replaced by the SG. Funnily enough, Eric went on to use an SG while with Cream. And though Clapton would likely call himself a singer-songwriter as much as an instrumentalist, luminaries such as Jimi Hendrix, Eddie Van Halen and

Gary Moore have all cited him as a major influence on their playing.

The example solo here is inspired by Eric's playing during his tenure in the power trio/supergroup Cream, though when we look closely at his playing there are little characterisations that pre-date this (check out the then-recently recorded 'Beano' album) and some even crop up in his playing occasionally today. One example of this is the fleeting appearance of a major 3rd in a phrase where you might expect a minor 3rd if you were playing strictly within the minor pentatonic boxes (see Example 2). Another is the regular appearance of the 6th (F# in the example solo).

These and a few other subtle touches that I'll get into later highlight that though the pentatonic was – is and surely always will be – at the heart of Eric's playing and rock/blues soloing in general, it doesn't have to end there. A good approach might be to regard these patterns on the fretboard as the 'superstructure' with which other patterns and/or chord shapes can be combined to create something new. Hope you enjoy and see you next time! 



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

Example 1

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY A 6TH (F#) makes an appearance, which gives a different mood to the standard minor pentatonic. You could regard this fragment as a shape 5 A major pentatonic, or the F# minor pentatonic superimposed over an implied A major backing – all of which is sound reasoning. However, we soon make the change to shape 1 A minor pentatonic around the 5th fret with little embellishment aside from the ♭5 (E $\flat$) and a couple of string bends.

Example 1 musical notation showing guitar solo and bass chords.

Chords implied by bass

Staff 1: Treble clef, key of A major (two sharps). Bass line shows chords: A (wavy line), BU (B7), BD (B9), BU (B7). Fingering: 2-4, 2, 2, 2, 4, 2-4-(6), (4)-2, 4-2, 4, 2, 7, 5, 7.

Staff 2: Treble clef, key of A major. Bass line shows chords: BU (B7). Fingering: (9), 5, 5, 8, 5, 7-(9), 5, 5, 8, 5, 8, 7, 5, 7, 7, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7. Includes a 1/4 note bend and a 1/4 note string bend.

Example 2

CHANGING TO THE IV CHORD (D), we're safe to stay with the A minor pentatonic, but there is an opportunity to change with it, and that's what's happening here. The regular appearance of F# in the opening moments also hints at a D major arpeggio... Seeing as these shapes exist in the same register, why not consider it a combination of the two? You could also correctly say that this excerpt is based around shapes 2, 3 and 4 of the A minor pentatonic but with a cheeky major 3rd (C#) in the penultimate bar.

Example 3

CONTINUING THE ASCENT to a higher register (and the dynamic build associated with this), this example begins with some repeated unison bends, a technique Eric would often employ to add emphasis, especially in this 'power trio' environment. We're staying strictly minor pentatonic on this one: none of the more gentle-sounding 6ths or major 3rds here. Try comparing the earlier phrases and adding in these extra notes and you'll hear how much it changes the attitude!

8va A

BU BU BU BU

17 17 17 17 17 20 17 19 20 17 19 17 19 17 20 (22)

1

(8va)

BU

X 20 17 19 17 17 20 17 20 19 17 19 17

3

Example 4

IN THIS FINAL PHRASE, we're also staying with the relatively unadorned pentatonic for the reasons discussed in Example 3. Note the quarter-tone bends, which most commonly occur on the minor 3rd (C), taking us some of the way to the major 3rd (C#) but crucially not all the way. The final three bars trace a path back into a slightly lower register. This kind of move can be useful when making a smooth transition back to rhythm playing.

The musical notation for Example 4 is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three measures. The second system consists of two measures. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The solo is divided into two systems. The first system has three measures. The second system has two measures. The notation includes various guitar techniques such as bends (BU), quarter-tone bends (1/4), and triplets (3). The fretboard is indicated by numbers 10-22 on the strings.

Hear It Here

CREAM

FRESH CREAM



Their 1966 debut, recorded just a short time after the classic Bluesbreakers' 'Beano' album, really laid the groundwork for what was to come later. Check out Eric's playing on *Spoonful*, *I'm So Glad* and *Rollin' And Tumblin'*, which really showcase how he managed to put what must have been a shockingly modern spin on traditional blues. And the only way to get tones like that back then was to turn up to levels which many would struggle to control!

CREAM

WHEELS OF FIRE



Skipping a year (and an album), this was released in 1968 as a hybrid of live and studio recordings, containing one disc of each. The arrangements and production are more sophisticated, but the band's inspirations remain the same. *White Room* is full of Eric's trademark lines and features early use of a wah pedal. *Crossroads*, the inspiration for the example solo, is taken from the live disc, and there's also a great extended version of *Spoonful*.

CREAM

GOODBYE



Their final album, from 1969, also features a mix of studio and live recordings – a reflection of how much importance they put on live performance. Again, there is a progression in arrangements and production values, with Eric obviously keen to try new effects and techniques. Check out the Leslie cab on *Doing That Scrapyard Thing*, and *Badge*, which was co-written with George Harrison. Elsewhere, have a listen to the live versions of *I'm So Glad* and *Politician*.



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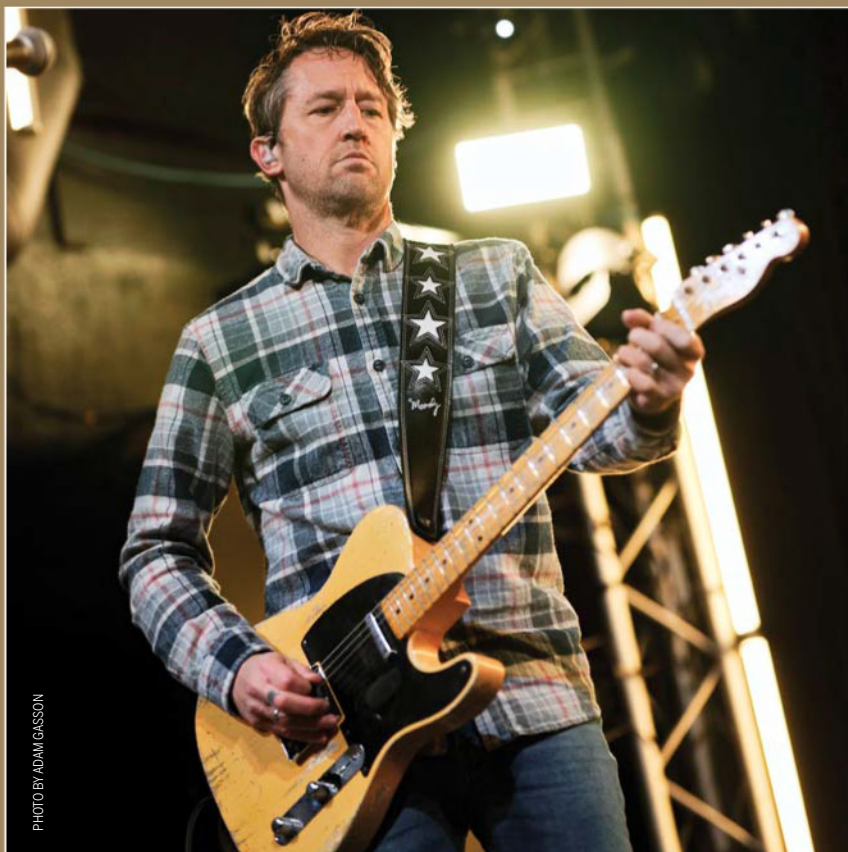


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