

Guitarist

Issue 505

SEPTEMBER 2023

GRETSCH

140TH ANNIVERSARY

Featuring

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RICHARD HAWLEY
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**FRED GRETSCH ON
TONE & HISTORY**

VINTAGE ELECTRICS
AND RARITIES

& More!

THE PLAYERS

FEATURING

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As the years roll by us it seems that there is a landmark occasion for us to celebrate almost every month, and this issue is a case in point. Gretsch is celebrating its 140th year in business and we couldn't resist joining in with all the fun. As we began our research we came across an exciting museum in Savannah, attached to Georgia State University, that is playing host to some very special Gretsch guitars. Fred Gretsch and his wife, Dinah, have been involved in music education there for many years and when a new exhibition space opened up they decided to donate a wealth of instruments and other Gretsch memorabilia. We talk to the coordinator and the curator of the museum – who are still busy cataloguing everything – on page 60 and it sounds like an essential visit if you ever find yourself in that area of the USA.

We have also collected and photographed a range of beautiful Gretsch guitars to peruse throughout the articles. Once the word was out that we were putting together a feature, everyone wanted to contribute, and we would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, Gardiner Houlgate Auctioneers in Corsham and Vintage 'n' Rare in Bath for knocking it out of the park with their willingness to supply these instruments.

Elsewhere in the issue we hear from the ambassador of English folk, Martin Simpson, whose new album tracks down some almost-forgotten gems of the tradition that had found their way to the Appalachian Mountains of the USA. You can read the full story on page 50.

All this has left us wondering what the next milestone will be. You can be sure that we'll be checking the calendar regularly, but meanwhile, enjoy the issue and we'll see you next month...

David Mead **Deputy Editor**

Editor's Highlights



Spirit Of 96

The latest creation from the workshop of Patrick James Eggle is an absolute stunner. Good looks, great sounds: it's a PJE masterpiece! **p84**



The Voice

Ex-Yes man Trevor Rabin has released his first vocal album for many years and you can find out what he took into the studio on **p36**



Ageing Nicely

We talk to Tom Murphy about Gibson's new range of Murphy Lab acoustics. Just what does it take to turn new to 'old'? Find out on **p108**



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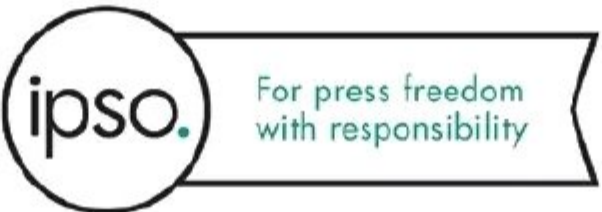
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A man in a black jacket and white pants is playing a pink electric guitar while standing on a Blackstar amplifier. He is positioned on a red bus stop bench. An elderly woman in a purple coat and a man in a blue jacket and cap are watching him. The bus stop has a red frame and a sign that says "3705 0382". A "NO SMOKING" sign is also visible. The background shows green trees and a red bus.

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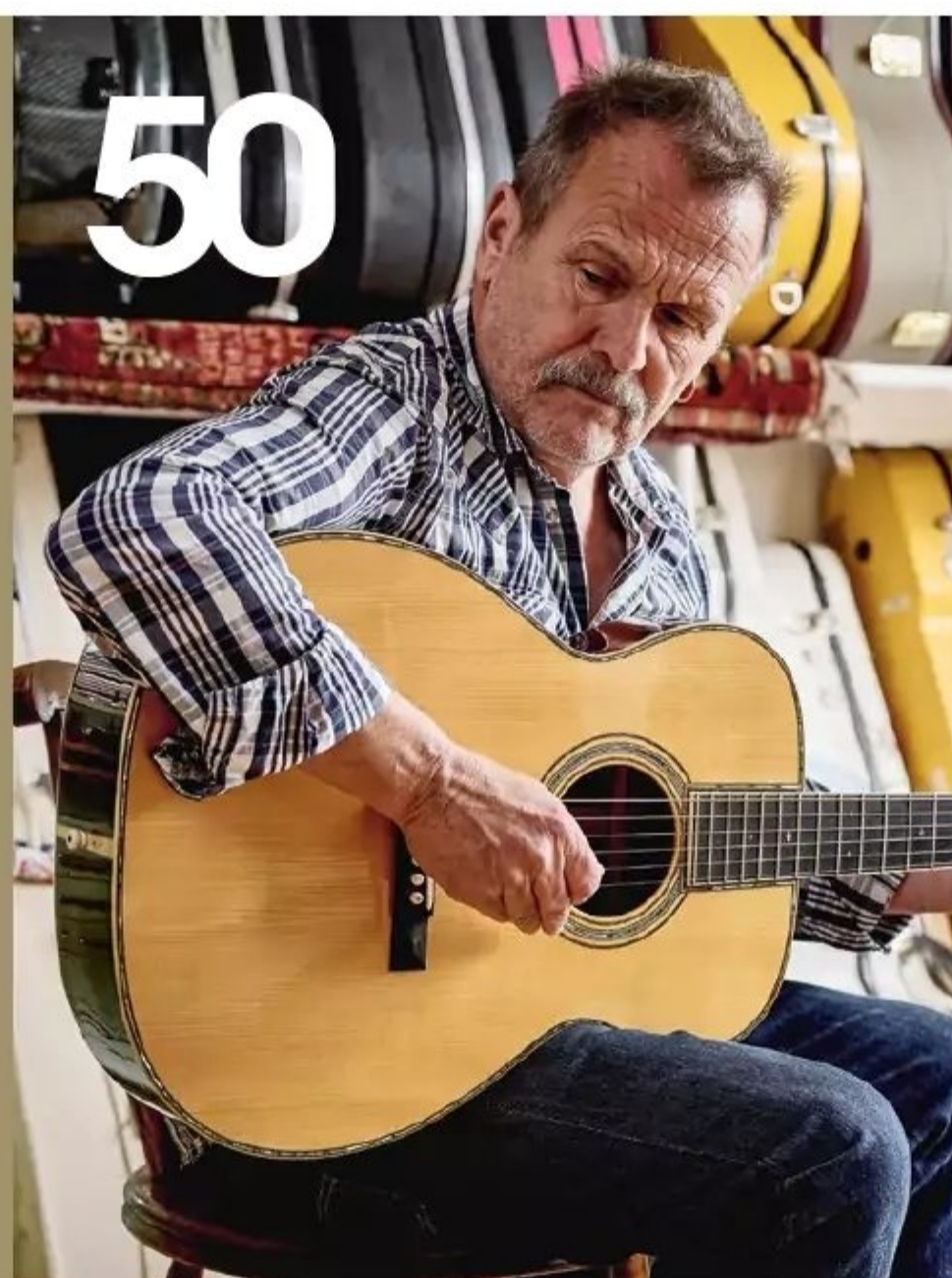
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See p106 for details

A man with dark hair and a slight smile is playing a white PRS Fiore electric guitar. He is wearing a dark, short-sleeved button-down shirt. The background is dark and out of focus. The guitar is white with a maple neck and a dark fretboard. The PRS logo is visible on the headstock.

Fiore



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

- Mark Lettieri

FIRST PLAY



SQUIER PARANORMAL JAZZMASTER XII £385

WHAT IS IT? Electric 12-string Jazzmaster at a price point that makes it a realistic purchase



SQUIER PARANORMAL CUSTOM NASHVILLE STRATOCASTER £369

WHAT IS IT? A Stratocaster body, loaded with Telecaster features, three pickups and seven voices

Paranormal Activity

Leave your preconceptions at the door because some of the most interesting guitars to come out of the Fender stable in 2023 could well say Squier on the headstock

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Olly Curtis

If there's one thing that has changed at the more affordable end of guitar brands' offerings over the last decade or so, it's choice. Formerly the reserve of those willing – or maybe even at times begrudgingly – to pay more in order to get closer to the spec they wanted, the import guitar boom has well and truly busted down the door, behind which sit countless options.

That's a space occupied by Squier's Paranormal series. Since its introduction, it has not only given us affordable versions of Fender's more leftfield designs, but it's also created its own reimagined, mashed-up and experimental guitars. For some players, the Squier name holds certain preconceptions, but for others it's a well-priced vehicle to more sounds and greater versatility, and the two guitars we've selected for review here represent that ethos in a completely contradictory nutshell.





1. The Jazzmaster XII's hardtail bridge is described as a 'hybrid' due to the fact that the bass strings are fitted through the body. Meanwhile, the corresponding treble strings are threaded and anchored top-mount style through the bridge's surface holes

2. There are three voices on offer via a traditional three-way switch, giving us neck/middle/bridge. They're all usable, too, with chiming scoop coming from the neck, wider, more vintage from the bridge, and a lush blend of the two in the middle position

First up is the Paranormal Jazzmaster XII. Yes, you read that correctly, it's an offset 12-string electric, which, at any other price, would likely epitomise the word 'niche', but here it sees itself flung back in contention thanks to the sort of price tag that will take a guitar of this ilk from 'I can't justify it' to 'Worth a punt!'

Next, at the other end of the spectrum, is the Paranormal Nashville Stratocaster, which takes the familiar Strat outline and populates it with features from everyone's favourite 'versatile guitar', the Telecaster. Two very different beasts, indeed. However, there are some constants across the entire Paranormal range when it comes to the base platform these guitars are built on. For example, there's the poplar body – a softer wood that is often overlooked thanks to its lack of visual appeal, although burlled poplar does appear on some higher-end guitars – and the maple neck/laurel fingerboard combination with a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, a 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius, 21 medium-tall frets and Fender-designed pickups.

Feel & Sounds

Now, this isn't the first time a Fender-owned brand has put its name to a 12-string electric, not least an offset one. The Electric XII launched in 1965, complete with an offset body as well as that (large enough to make your Starcaster blush) 'hockey stick' headstock, also seen on Fender's Villager acoustics. The Electric XII was

3. This Paranormal model harks back slightly to Fender's iconic Electric XII, which has been played by many-a-legend since its short life in the 60s. The offset body tips its hat to the original, as does the 'hockey stick' headstock

If you've never played a 12-string before, Squier's Jazzmaster XII is going to be something of a revelation

only in production until 1969, but that didn't stop it from finding its way into the hands of the likes of Jimmy Page (yes, you can hear it on *Stairway...*), Jeff Beck and Pete Townshend. Eric Clapton even got in on the action during his Cream days, and it just about passed the test of 12-string obsessives The Byrds, then signed to CBS, when a pre-tambourine/harmonica-





touting Gene Clark used one for the band's performance of *Mr Tambourine Man* on TV show *Hullabaloo*.

The Squier Jazzmaster XII is a model in its own right, though, with Alnico Jazzmaster pickups replacing the split single coils and a simplified three-position toggle switch serving up the expected neck/both/bridge configuration. Talking of the bridge, Squier has used a hybrid of through-body stringing for the bass strings and top-loaded anchoring for their accompanying trebles. Intonation is handled in pairs, but there are adjustment screws to alter the individual string heights. Ours arrived nicely set up and buzz-free, without any adjustment required.

If you've never played a 12-string before, this guitar is going to be something of a revelation. Everything you've heard about sweet, chiming, natural chorus is true, and it's an effect that really needs to be experienced to fully grasp. This translates in the neck position with hi-fi like clarity, all bass and highs, that's addictive when played clean. Flip to the bridge position,

however, and it's a bit like going back in time with mid-rich, 60s-style tones that poke through with a bit of crunch and take on a swampy Americana vibe with a bit of added gain. Nevertheless, it's the middle position where we found the most jangle, with the blended pickups seemingly introducing even more of the most organic chorusing you can get. Unusually, it's almost an entirely plug 'n' play guitar, with very little need to adjust the controls once you've selected your pickup.

The Nashville Stratocaster isn't the first time we've seen Fender hybridise Leo's two most popular designs, either. While the Player Plus series saw the concept introduced with a Tele shape, here, the Squier designers have opted to go with the Strat outline, except it's double-bound, just like a Custom Telecaster. Sticking with that theme, there's no belly carve and no forearm contour. It's got a Strat headstock, but beyond that it's swaying more towards the Telecaster side of its DNA with a Tele scratchplate, three-saddle bridge and that all-familiar Tele control plate.

Is it a Strat? Is it a Tele? The headstock and outline say 'Strat', but it's populated with loads of Telecaster features – a highly versatile mix of two of the most popular guitars of all time





4. The three-saddle bridge, scratchplate, control plate and internally mounted barrel jack socket all show off the Nashville's Tele chromosomes, not to mention the double-binding and contour-less slab body

That is, until you reach for the selector switch. The lever has five positions like you'll find on a Stratocaster, giving you: bridge; middle and bridge; middle; middle and neck; and neck-only positions. But it doesn't stop there because there's a pull-switch on the tone control that engages the neck pickup in positions 1 and 2, totalling seven selectable voicings.

The three main positions perform as you might expect, just not how you might

clean. Then the neck pickup is back in Tele-firma, more open, more bite and a lot of twang. But that's to be expected.

What was most surprising was engaging the neck pickup in positions alongside the bridge single coil. It introduces a similar response as a well-set compressor, culminating in a stronger attack and squashier feel that bizarrely gives the impression of increased string tension. With the switch engaged, it feels like you

5. Along with the unusual pickup array, the master volume and tone are joined by a pull-switch on that tone control, which engages the neck pickup in positions 1 and 2 for seven voices

The Strat is a triumphant display of repurposing. A 'do-most-things' guitar with an expansive vocabulary

have heard in this combination. The neck pickup delivers a thick, thumpy low-end coupled with a snappy attack at the top that we found to be home for everything from Jimi-style rhythm to Texas lead, and with a bit of a bump in the gain we're firmly in Tom Morello riff territory. The middle position (a Strat pickup) obviously removes the deep, woody sound and swaps it for a bit more of a honk, which works great for vintage soul rhythm sounds when played





6

can hit the strings harder with a more controlled sound. It's here that it truly lives up to its name, pumping out biting picked notes that country and funk players will love, without becoming shrill.

Verdict

With so many brands applying their names to East Asian-made instruments, we think the perception of Squier – much like rival Epiphone – has probably changed in recent years. It's no longer the 'entry-level one', and guitars such as these are the proof. Asking guitar designers to come up with something different could result in a dog's dinner of ideas that don't work, but here Squier has made a stew that people are likely to want to eat.

The Jazzmaster XII is unlikely to be anyone's all-day guitar, but it solves a problem and gives access to a world of fun tones that may otherwise not be discovered by many players who don't want to risk forking out. Meanwhile, the Custom Nashville Stratocaster model is a triumphant display of repurposing. Is it a do-it-all guitar? 'Do-most-things' more like, and if you're playing R&B, blues, country or funk in any combination, it's got an expansive vocabulary. **G**

6. Two Tele pickups flank a Strat single coil in the middle position, and the lever is a five- not three-position switch



SQUIER PARANORMAL JAZZMASTER XII

PRICE: £385
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: 12-string solidbody electric
BODY: Poplar
NECK: Graphite reinforced maple, C-shape profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Laurel, pearloid dot inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 21, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated, string-through-body/top-loaded bridge, split-post vintage-style tuners – nickel/chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender-designed Alnico Jazzmaster single coils, 3-way toggle selector switch, master volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8.16
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: Other offsets in the Paranormal range include the Offset Telecaster (£365), Offset Telecaster SH (from £399), Super-Sonic (£409) and Cyclone (£409)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Olympic White (as reviewed), Lake Placid Blue – all gloss polyurethane

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
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PROS A great-quality specialist guitar at a price point that will remove a lot of the 'justification' hurdles for many

CONS You'll have someone's eye out with the headstock; restringing/tuning will now take twice as long!



SQUIER PARANORMAL CUSTOM NASHVILLE STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £369
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solidbody Telecaster/Stratocaster hybrid
BODY: Poplar, double-bound Stratocaster outline
NECK: Maple, C-shape profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Laurel, pearloid dot inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 21, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated, string-through-body Telecaster three-saddle bridge, vintage-style tuners – nickel/chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Fender-designed Alnico single coils: T-style (neck and bridge) and S-style (middle). 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull-switch to add neck pickup to positions 1 and 2 of the pickup selector)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.95
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: The other different Strat in the Paranormal range is the Strat-o-Sonic (£369). There are also more Tele-shapes: single-pickup Esquire Deluxe (£369), Cabronita Telecaster Thinline (£395) and Baritone Cabronita Tele (£399)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Aztec Gold (as reviewed), Chocolate 2-Color Sunburst



PROS A very versatile 'hybrid' design that will have you covered for many different styles outside of hard rock and metal

CONS Some might prefer a more comfortable body; there could be a bit of a learning curve with the seven switch combinations



FIRST PLAY



LANEY IRF-LEADTOP
£169

WHAT IS IT? 60-watt solid-state single-channel head with boost function and wide range voicing



LANEY IRF-DUALTOP
£259

WHAT IS IT? 60-watt expanded dual-channel version with additional features

Miniature Metal

Laney adds a pair of compact solid-state heads to its popular Ironheart Foundry range with switchable power and all the connectivity you need for stage, recording and practice

Words Nick Guppy Photography Phil Barker

The small and portable amp trend continues apace, with most manufacturers featuring at least one pedalboard amp or micro-head in their catalogues. Following on from the success of its highly acclaimed Ironheart Foundry Loudpedal, which was introduced at this year's rescheduled spring NAMM Show, Laney has now added two new solid-state heads that borrow from the Loudpedal's design: the single-channel Ironheart Foundry Leadtop and the more feature-rich Ironheart Foundry Dualtop.

The Leadtop and Dualtop are built to Laney's typically high standards, with heavy duty black vinyl over MDF sleeves and recessed grab handles for easy carrying. They look smart, too, with a silver Laney badge mounted on a tough front-facing steel grille that's backlit with deep red LEDs. Both heads use an external 24-volt laptop-style adaptor for power, making them very portable as there are no heavy transformers.

The Leadtop is a stripped-down single-channel design but with some clever options that add unexpected versatility. There's a

stompbox-style footswitchable boost circuit that sits at the very front of the signal chain, with its own level control. This feeds a preamp that can be preset to run in Clean or Lead modes, with Gain and Volume controls and a conventional three-band passive EQ, augmented with a three-position voicing switch, which offers Bright, Flat and Dark options. In Lead mode, the Gain and Volume controls are both active; switching to Clean mode bypasses the Gain control for increased headroom.

On the rear panel there's a cabinet-emulated headphones jack and an aux in on 3.5mm jacks, with full-sized 6.4mm sockets for the Leadtop's transformer-buffered series effects loop, with a send outlet that can double as a line out. The jack socket accepts a single-button footswitch to remotely control the boost function and a single speaker jack, with a small toggle switch that drops the Leadtop's 60 watts of power down to one watt for home use.

The slightly larger Dualtop is more of a straight reimagining of the IRF Loudpedal. Again, there's a footswitchable

boost up front but this time feeding two channels, each with Gain and Volume controls. A three-way toggle switch on Channel 1 offers a choice of symmetrical or asymmetrical clipping, plus a clean option, with Bright, Flat or Dark voicing options on Channel 2, the Dualtop's dedicated lead channel. Both channels feed a passive three-band EQ, and the Dualtop's digital reverb, which is based on Laney's excellent Black Country Custom Secret Path reverb pedal.

Laney makes full use of the Dualtop's wider rear panel, adding a balanced DI output on XLR, with a ground lift and a slider switch that selects two custom IRs with a bypass option. Like the Leadtop, the Dualtop also features 3.5mm jacks for headphones and aux in, with full-sized jacks for the series effects loop and a single speaker outlet with switchable power levels. The Dualtop's footswitch jack takes a two-button switch that toggles the channels and boost function.

Both amps look ready to rock, with smart, easily read control panels and LED indicators for boost and channel status. Our only minor gripe is the lack of cable security to prevent the DC power plug from being accidentally pulled out: it's a snug fit, but a small cleat to loop the cable around would give extra peace of mind.

Feel & Sounds

Both amps start up smoothly without any thumps; there's very little hum or hiss, too, thanks to the separate PSU and high-quality components on the circuit boards. The Leadtop's reduced control layout is deceptively simple. In practice, there's a wealth of great tone that's easily accessed once you've got a handle on how the knobs interact. Fat Tweed-inspired cleans at



1. Featured on both heads, the footswitchable boost function is like a built-in stompbox, with its own level control. It's active in Clean and Lead modes, adding considerable versatility and quasi dual-channel operation on the Leadtop. There's a helpful indicator LED to show the status



2. Both heads benefit from a smooth interactive passive EQ network, with Bright, Flat and Dark voicing options that make dialling in any guitar a piece of cake. This simple yet highly effective feature makes both heads far more versatile than you'd think

3. Each head comes with an aux in, cabinet-emulated headphones jack and a transformer-isolated effects loop, where the send jack can double as a line out

lower gain levels transition to a scorching high-gain lead voice that's somewhere between USA and British tones, which is great for metal and modern rock and easily dialled in for humbuckers or single coils using the voicing switch.

While there's no channel-changing facility available, the footswitchable boost gets you most of the way there. We found an ideal setup with our Strat when used with a low-ish gain lead mode setting for clean/crunch rhythm and kicking in the boost for leads.

The extra versatility of the Dualtop's twin channels means less compromise between rhythm and lead duty; Channel 1 delivers

The heads possess valve-like dynamics [and the] punchy 60-watt power stage will cope with any gig

the same punchy cleans together with a choice of symmetrical or asymmetrical clipping types. Usually, this refers to the number of diodes used in the clipping circuit, with even numbers for symmetrical and odd numbers for asymmetrical. The two clipping types have different responses, with asymmetrical coming across as being looser and more touch-sensitive, while symmetrical produces a harder, more compressed vibe.

The Dualtop's lead channel is the same as the Leadtop's, with thick, multi-layered distortion that's easily tamed via the voicing switch to suit single coils or humbuckers. The Dualtop benefits from reverb to add depth and ambience, and while you can only adjust the effect level, it's a decent overall sound. The DI output is more or less noise-free, with two built-in IRs to approximate 4x12 and 1x12 cabinets, plus there's a dry option if you want to use other IR loaders.

Verdict

If you're after a compact, lightweight head with enough punch to handle live gigs, then Laney's new additions are definitely worth a look. They're compact and very





portable, and, despite the metal bias, both heads offer a wide range of tones that fit many different genres. The pricing is highly competitive, too, making both the Leadtop and Dualtop ideal as ‘first serious amp’ choices. They might be solid-state, but they don’t sound it because they possess valve-like dynamics helped by a punchy 60-watt power stage that will easily cope with any size of gig, and all the connectivity you might need, especially on the DI-equipped Dualtop. Aimed at players of all levels, from beginner to pro, the new Leadtop and Dualtop are great value for money and could turn out to be bestsellers in the solid-state market. **G**

4. The slightly larger Dualtop head features an XLR balanced DI output with a ground lift and two custom Laney IRs based on 1x12 and 4x12 enclosures with a bypass

5. The Dualtop also benefits from an integral digital reverb, borrowed from Laney’s acclaimed Black Country Custom Secret Path boutique reverb pedal



LANEY IRF-LEADTOP AMP HEAD

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state preamp and power amp
VALVES: None
OUTPUT: 60W RMS, switchable to approx 1W RMS
DIMENSIONS: 292 (w) x 184 (d) x 163mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8
CABINET: MDF sleeve
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Boost level, boost on/off switch, clean/lead gain switch, bright/natural/dark preset voicing switch, gain, volume, bass, middle and treble. Output power select (on rear panel)
FOOTSWITCH: Single-button footswitch (not supplied) toggles boost function
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Transformer-isolated series effects loop (effects send doubles as line out), 60W/1W power switching, aux in, headphones out
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: 2-channel Dualtop (see right). There’s currently a bundle deal on the Leadtop and matching GS212FE speaker cabinet for £479

Laney Amplification
0121 508 6666
www.laney.co.uk

8/10

PROS Very compact; affordable; highly usable tones behind a deceptively simple control panel; good looks for plenty of metal cred at a budget price

CONS Not quite as versatile as we’d hoped, but for just £169 we can’t complain too loudly



LANEY IRF-DUALTOP AMP HEAD

PRICE: £259
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state preamp and power amp
VALVES: None
OUTPUT: 60W RMS, switchable to approx 1W RMS
DIMENSIONS: 377 (w) x 184 (d) x 178mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 5.7/10.3
CABINET: MDF sleeve
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Boost level, boost on/off switch, Channel 1 gain, volume, sym/clean/asym clip switch, Channel 2 gain, volume, bright/natural/dark preset voicing switch, bass, middle, treble, reverb level. Ground lift switch, IR select switch, output power select (on rear panel)
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch (not supplied) toggles channels and boost function
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Transformer-isolated series effects loop, XLR DI out with ground lift and 2x custom IRs plus bypass, 60W/1W power switching, aux in, headphones out
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Single-channel Leadtop (see left). There’s currently a bundle deal on the Dualtop head and matching GS112FE cabinet for £349



9/10

PROS Great-sounding, compact and affordable head with a wide range of highly usable tones that cover a lot more than just metal

CONS One tiny niggle is the lack of restraint for the detachable DC power lead, to prevent it being inadvertently pulled out

FIRST PLAY



**SHERGOLD TELSTAR
STANDARD ST14**
£379

.....
WHAT IS IT? Very affordable,
simple but classy T-inspired
bolt-on designed by
Patrick James Eggle

Satellite Of Love

It's been a while since we've heard from Shergold, but now the brand is back with a smartly dressed solidbody that also introduces a new, more affordable range. Let's go!

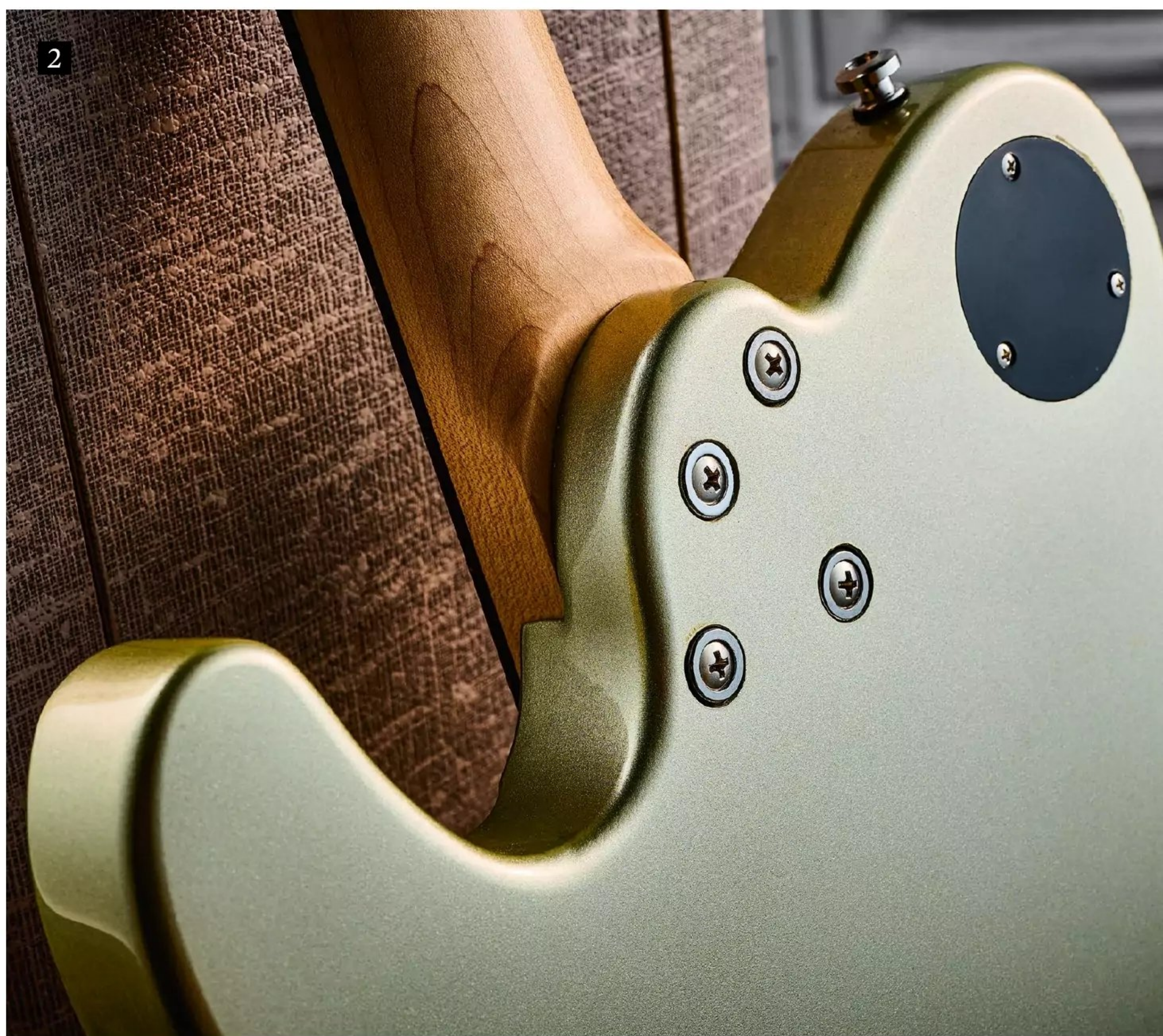
Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

Back in 2017, British distributor Barnes & Mullins took the wraps off the new Shergold Masquerader, the first guitar to bear that brand and name for many a decade. Barnes & Mullins had already had considerable success with its own acoustic brand, Faith, designed by Patrick James Eggle, and once again turned to Patrick to recreate the Masquerader. There was little resemblance to the original model, which had first popped up in the mid-70s, but its boutique-style spec included a rosewood neck and Seymour Duncan pickups in various configurations. Another new design named the Provocateur turned up in 2019 and continued the style, although this one was a single-cut.

Four years is a long time in the cut and thrust of the guitar world and, if we're honest, Shergold had dropped off our radar until this new model, the Telstar, was announced unexpectedly in mid-August. As the 'Standard' in its full name references, the Telstar is the first of a new wave of more affordable Shergolds: the Provocateur Standard will join the Telstar imminently at a similar price, and we're told there's more to follow.







1. This is the first new SherGold with a six-a-side headstock that's colour matched to the body finish. Those tuners are rather generic and we're not sure we really need that string tree on the G and D strings

2. No clunky square-edge Tele-style heel here. This one is well shaped and provides easy access to the top of the fingerboard

We don't get too excited by a sub-£400 Chinese-made solidbody, simply because the majority are clones of the classics, but this Telstar has a little more going on. Yes, it retains the SherGold name and striped logo, but that's about all the new guitar has in common with the previous (and ongoing) Masquerader and Provocateur designs, which are made in Indonesia and are now called the Custom Series. Patrick James Eggle is again behind the design and the name Telstar, of course, isn't very far away from 'Tele-style' – and that, in Cabronita-style, is pretty much what we have here.

This humbucking guitar laps up pedals and gain, whereas a more standard T-style can veer towards over-bright and noisy

Its centre-raised poplar body references the Gibson Firebird, which is becoming a motif for many designers. For example, in our last issue we looked at the centre-raised Joe Doe by Vintage Gas Jockey, and Eastman's fabulous Juliet is another example, as is Reverend's Greg Koch Gristlemaster. Here in the UK, rising star Neil Ivison's Dakota employs the same trick.

On the Telstar, that 90mm centre raised section is 42mm deep, and the outer wings are more SG-like in depth at 38mm.

Then you'll notice the outline is subtly offset: the base and waist lean forwards, enhancing what is clearly a T-style basis into something a little classier. Again, it's far from new if you think of Yamaha's Pacifica Mike Stern model, Trev Wilkinson's Fret-King Country Squire or indeed PRS's NF53. But that's a classy headstock outline, isn't it? The heel, too, is well-rounded and the screws sit in recessed cupped washers, all of which subtly improves upper-position access and comfort over the good ol' Tele.

There is no rosewood or mahogany for the neck as we've seen on the Custom SherGolds. Here, we get a satin-finished, slab-sawn maple but with very well-rounded fingerboard edges and clean fretwork. And although the laurel 'board appears quite thick in depth, it's a deep chocolate colour and peppered with what appear to be abalone dots (obviously a laminate). The online spec sheet says the fingerboard radius is 400mm (16 inches), but that's a typo; it measures 305mm (12 inches).

The walled bridge is another neat touch. "It's a lovely design, but it's based on a Hipshot bridge," Patrick tells us, "a cool design that was simply available to the

3. It might be a generic version of a Hipshot design, but the through-strung bridge works well here. Note that the bridge pickup sits some way from the bridge, which helps with a slightly smoother-sounding output

4. These direct-mount mini-humbuckers ape the Filter'Tron style but are more standard narrow-aperture humbuckers. The neck's DCR measures 7.52kohms at output, while the bridge reads 11.73k: very different from actual Filter'Trons



3



4

manufacturers for the right money. We could have gone with a more traditional chopped T-style bridge, but these bridges are great – they look good and are pretty solid.” The tuners are a little more generic in both looks and feel, but it’s important to keep reminding ourselves of the price.

Which brings us to the two Gretsch Filter’Tron-style Page FilterSonics. “Obviously, at this price point they’re not hand-wound in England,” says Patrick. “I do know they use Alnico V magnets, not ceramic. And [as for] Page? I think Barnes & Mullins just needed a name for them.”

Feel & Sounds

It might be lowly in price, but the neck here feels pretty good. Fender in width with a good enough slim ‘C’ profile, it measures 20.8mm deep at the 1st fret and 23.6mm by the 12th. It certainly doesn’t feel skinny, while the 305mm (12-inch) radius and quite wide, not overly high fretwire (2.7mm by 1.14mm) give a slightly modern vibe that’s all well set up and ready to rock from its box. It’s a good light weight, too, though it feels far from insubstantial.

The pickups’ Filter’Tron-style appearance suggests a certain sound: bright with a little sparkle. And irrespective of what’s actually under the covers here, on this platform

BUSINESS MATTERS

Just what is involved in bringing a boutique guitar design to market at a bargain price? Let's find out

Once a 'Made in the UK' guitar brand, Shergold's reboot in 2017 combined UK design with some pretty boutique-style Indonesian manufacturing, USA-made pickups and new-design hardware. But the new Standard Series Telstar always had a different aim. "I'm very proud of the Custom Series," says Barnes & Mullins' owner and MD, Brian Cleary, whose idea it was to bring back Shergold. "I think they still represent very good value for money, but we were competing at a very difficult price point. To achieve more mass appeal, it was obvious we needed to look at a lower price. It was a good year and half ago that we started the conversation with Patrick [James Eggle] to get the design going."

"I read some story once – I have no idea if it's true – about how the Fender Jazz Bass followed the Precision," says Patrick when we ask him about the origins of the design. "There was something in the Fender factory, sort of like a mould, in the outline shape of the P-Bass but made out of thick rubber. So you could literally grab it by the waist and move either side up or down, just literally offset it. It's probably not true, but I've always remembered it! So it was actually an idea for something I wanted to do for myself: taking a fairly classic shape and offsetting it to a degree that it wasn't quite the same shape as before. And I've always liked that kind of stepped top, which obviously derives from a completely different manufacturer."

Brian continues: "Over the many years of working with Patrick on Faith and Shergold, the

very first thing, the foundation of everything, is to give Patrick the time to come up with the *right* product. When he's done his design work, then my job becomes to make sure we get it to the right manufacturing partners. In this case, we needed to find a new source that could make guitars that we would be happy with quality-wise but at the price we needed.

"We had to kiss a few frogs," he adds. "It was the third one we kissed that provided the things we needed. We were familiar with the Chinese factory, but we'd never worked with them before."

"To achieve this price point you really have to use off-the-shelf hardware and components"

Brian Cleary

So, is the name a clever reworking of 'Tele-style' then? "No, it wasn't quite that," laughs Brian. "Obviously, when you look at a single-cut design like that the T-word springs to mind. But Telstar was simply a name that came to me: it has a ring of that 60s vibe and I just thought it would be a great name."

Speaking of names, is there actually a pickup company called Page? "At one time it was going to be a name I wanted to use on a range

of expensive electric guitars, which we never moved forward with. So when we were developing this guitar, we felt the pickups needed to have an identity; I remembered the name Page and thought now is the time to apply it.

"You see, to achieve a guitar at this price point you really have to use off-the-shelf hardware and components. When we produced the 2017 Masquerader there were things that Patrick designed, like the bridge, and we had to tool up to make that, which was exclusive to us but very expensive. Then there were the Seymour Duncan pickups. So much of the cost in those is actually the shipping from the USA to Indonesia and the import charges – it can really load the price of those components. So we really have to keep an eye on those aspects to achieve the price point we're aiming for.

Any chance we'll see an upmarket Patrick James Eggle version of the Telstar? "Well, we do have our Oz," Patrick reminds us, "which is more faithful to the original shape and we do that as a 'onesie', with one pickup at the bridge, and we've done that using a Filter'tron with that Cabronita-style pickguard. It's never been the main thrust of what we do with the Oz, but I do have a design in mind that I've wanted to do, which has been bubbling away for two to three years. And that incorporates that step in the body, but it's not like the Telstar. To be honest, I need to do something for my own sanity that is a lot less derivative in our stable of PJE instruments. So that's your answer: no!" Well, we can but dream...



Barnes & Mullins MD, Brian Cleary (top), and luthier Patrick James Eggle (above) brought the Shergold name back in 2017 with the Masquerader models (right)





Mounted on an original P-Bass-style control plate, there's nothing fancy under the hood, just master volume and tone. The tricks are up to you!



SHERGOLD TELSTAR STANDARD ST14

PRICE: £379

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/41.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Laurel, abalone laminate dots, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Through-strung hardtail bridge w/ 6x block saddles, die-cast enclosed tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Page FilterSonic direct-mount humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.21/7.1

OPTIONS: Shergold gigbag costs £97

RANGE OPTIONS: The Custom Series double-cut Masquerader range starts at £765 in various pickup configurations.

The single-cut Provocateur (£829) has HH or H/P-90 pickup configurations. All models use Seymour Duncan pickups

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Champagne Gold (as reviewed), Pastel Blue – high gloss body, satin natural neck with colour-matched gloss headstock

Barnes & Mullins

01691 652449

www.shergoldguitars.com



9/10

PROS Classy boutique-style design; crisp, competent build; perfectly good neck; well set up; usable sounds

CONS Only two colours; no left-handers; Filter'Tron-sized direct-mount pickups limit aftermarket choice

these FilterSonics nod in that direction and produce three strong sounds that veer more towards a fairly typical, narrow-aperture pickup such as a mini-humbucker. The bridge has a bit of gnarly poke, the neck is a little more Les Paul Deluxe with a clean but not overly crisp attack, while the mix is a rather good combination with bounce and depth and a slightly restrained sparkle to the high-end.

With just master volume and tone and that three-way shoulder-placed toggle, the drive is fast and there are no tricks. The pots are 500k audio-taper mini pots and the tone uses a .047µf green mylar cap. Pulled back, the volume does round the highs and, to be honest, we kept the tone full-up. Any modder out there might be tempted to simply fit a treble bleed to retain some highs as the volume is reduced and perhaps consider a no-load tone control. But, overall, the voicing is pretty smart and this humbucking guitar laps up pedals and gain, whereas a more standard T-style can easily veer towards the over-bright and noisy.

With just master volume, tone and the three-way toggle, the drive is fast and there are no tricks

Verdict

Thankfully, this isn't just another T-style with the wrong name on the headstock. It might not be the first lightly offset Tele out there, nor the first to recycle that stepped body, but it's a classy combo whose style could easily be a part of any high-end boutique guitar line. But at this price point, is it all style over substance? Absolutely not. Not only is this very tidily executed, but the pickups do a pretty good no-hum 'single coil' sound that can twang and jangle or provide quite edgy and textured rhythm sounds with enough (though not excessive) bite for hotter Tele-style voicings. Hugely affordable, it's a little gem in a sea of similarity. **G**

FIRST PLAY



WARM AUDIO ODD BOX V1
& MUTATION PHASOR II
£109 & £144

WHAT IS IT? Overdrive and
phaser pedals inspired by
discontinued classics



Revival Time

Warm Audio brings some pedalboard favourites back to life with a new overdrive and phaser

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. The ODD Box can run from a nine-volt battery as well as a nine-volt adaptor. To get to the battery compartment, loosen the four knurled thumbscrews just enough to separate the base from the top surface
2. You can access to two different flavours of drive on the ODD Box via this UK/US switch, which toggles between the sounds of a British and American amp. Be careful if you flick the switch, though, as the UK side is louder
3. While an Electro-Harmonix Small Stone, for example, has a Color switch to add a fixed amount of feedback, here on the Phasor II you can dial it in yourself via a rotary Feedback knob

Warm Audio is an American company founded on the principle of building sonically high-end recording products that are affordable to the everyday musician and recording engineer. It basically produces new versions of vintage classics and, while much of its output has been in the studio world, the brand has moved into pedals with its own takes on the Klon Centaur, Hermida Zendrive, Roland Jet Phaser and Foxx Tone Machine. Warm Audio's latest duo is based on the recently discontinued Fulltone OCD and the Mu-Tron Phasor II, a rare 1970s-era phaser.

ODD Box V1

The Fulltone OCD is a hard-clipping op-amp-based overdrive that has graced the stages of a host of well-known players. And while it's no longer being manufactured, demand still continues. The ODD Box aims to satiate that demand by providing a brand-new stompbox for less than the cost of a used OCD. What you get is a touch-sensitive pedal that offers rich valve-amp-style drive in two flavours; a UK/US switch provides gainier mid-forward Marshall sound or you can opt for the more scooped, tighter raunch of a Tweed-era Fender. Both sound great and the trio of knobs offers plenty of clean to filthy/warm to bright versatility. Bargain!

Mutation Phasor II

The Mutation Phasor II is said to offer a true-to-spec recreation of the 70s electro-optical circuit using premium components, including RC4558P op-amps and vintage-style diodes. Warm Audio has also opted to stick to the vintage form factor with a solidly built enclosure that looks suitably retro, but that does mean it will take up a fair bit of pedalboard space. The pedal delivers airy and spacey six-stage phasing and there's a massive range via the Rate knob – we loved this at its slowest, where it'll take a languid 10 seconds get a full phaser sweep for a subtle otherworldly shift in your sound. Juxtaposition of Rate and Depth will give you a tour through some classic 70s phasing, and you can also bring in the Feedback knob to feed wet signal back into the input for a more intense effect, adding a 'wow wow' vocal quality at some settings.

Verdict

We like that Warm Audio is reviving long-gone classic pedals at reasonable prices and are pleased to see these two added to the roster: a viable OCD substitute for anyone mourning the original's demise and the 1970s phaser you didn't know you wanted... until now! **G**



THE RIVALS

As an alternative to the ODD Box V1, there are two pedals based on the Fulltone OCD that are available for less outlay: Joyo's JF-02 Ultimate Drive (£32) and the EHX Glove (£69). As for the Mutation Phasor II, Warm Audio isn't the only one cloning Mu-Tron pedals. Behringer's Dual Phase (£139) is a recreation of Mu-Tron's lauded Bi-Phase, featuring two phasers in one chassis that can run in series or parallel. Mu-Tron still exists, too, and its Phasor III Vintage Silver (£279) is described as a "compact, modernised and affordable version" of the Phasor II.



WARM AUDIO ODD BOX V1

PRICE: £109

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Drive, Tone, UK/US switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9-18V DC adaptor (not supplied) 5.5mA

DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)



WARM AUDIO MUTATION PHASOR II

PRICE: £144

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Phaser pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Rate, Depth, Feedback, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 150mA

DIMENSIONS: 90 (w) x 170 (d) x 66mm (h)

Warm Audio

www.warmaudio.com.com



9/10

PROS Sonically accurate revival of some old favourites; decent build quality; reasonably priced

CONS While we like the Mutation Phasor II's vintage-accurate looks, others may prefer a compact version for the modern pedalboard

FIRST PLAY



THORPYFX ER-2 UNI-VIBE
£299

WHAT IS IT? UK-designed and made take on the Uni-Vibe pedal, in a compact enclosure and with additional sound-tailoring options



Take Flight

Over five decades since Jimi Hendrix famously used one at Woodstock, ThorpyFX creates its dream Uni-Vibe

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. In case you were wondering, this modified Uni-Vibe is named after Lockheed Martin and NASA's high-altitude, earth-observing plane, which is basically the successor to the U-2 aircraft
2. This Offset knob changes how the internal lamp ramps up between its light and dark phases, effectively adjusting the perceived 'shape' of the effect
3. The central red LED flashes in time with the Speed knob. The one to the left corresponds to the Vib/Cho footswitch and illuminates when the Vibe sound is selected. The right LED corresponds to the On/Off footswitch and lights when the effect is active

The Uni-Vibe is arguably the most iconic modulation pedal of all. Its sound is still much sought after by players, long after its 1960s debut and subsequent discontinuation, leading to many pedal manufacturers creating their own take on the design. The latest is ThorpyFX, who tells us that its aim with the new ER-2 has been to create its dream Uni-Vibe.

Following the same solid and compact form factor of previous Thorpy pedals, the ER-2 has an easy to operate four-knob user interface. Besides the standard bypass footswitch, there's added flexibility via a second (Vib/Cho) that changes between Uni-Vibe Chorus and Vibrato (wet signal only) modes. A Volume knob sets the output level, running from zero with unity gain close to midday on the dial, so there's ample available to give a useful boost, rather than merely setting a level that stops the sound disappearing. Kicked in, the overall sound actually gets a useful enhancement with a sweet top-end that offers plenty of clarity to aid note articulation. While Intensity and Speed knobs are as you'd expect, Thorpy adds a twist with an Offset knob for further tweaking.

The key to true Uni-Vibe sound is the use of optical circuitry (the original utilised four light-dependent resistors reacting to a lightbulb's changes in brightness) and Thorpy's adjunct to that methodology adjusts how the internal lamp ramps up, basically controlling the transitions between the light and dark phases. Somewhat like the sort of waveform adjustment you might find on a tremolo pedal, and interactive with the Intensity knob, it affects the symmetry of the sound, going from a really rounded pulse at minimum to more of a lopsided chop, allowing for loads of subtle variations on that phasey swirl, pulse and throb that the Uni-Vibe is famous for.

That familiar sound is all here in spades with both Chorus and Vibrato modes sounding very musical right across the wide speed range. While the effects really lend themselves to clean sounds, the pedal also works brilliantly in the classic rock context it may be best known for – taking a fuzz pedal in front really well and sounding great into a drive pedal or driven amp.

Verdict

ThorpyFX has cracked it with this reimagining of a classic for modern pedalboards. The ER-2 delivers a fine range of Uni-Vibe sounds and beyond, all wrapped up in a package that offers real practicality. **G**



THORPYFX ER-2 UNI-VIBE

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Uni-Vibe pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Intensity, Speed, Offset, Volume, Vib/Cho footswitch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 150 mA

DIMENSIONS: 108 (w) x 128 (d) x 55mm (h)

ThorpyFX

www.thorpyfx.com



PROS Build quality; compact size; ease of use; authentic Uni-Vibe sound with thoughtfully added variations; Vib/Cho footswitch

CONS No expression pedal input to recreate the actions of an original Uni-Vibe's foot treadle



THE RIVALS

There are other 'Vibe-style pedals out there that have evolved the original design: the DryBell Vibe Machine V3 (£259) has an expression pedal input and offers a three-way input impedance switch, plus six set-and-forget side trimmers; Jam Pedals' RetroVibe Mk3 (£279) has expression pedal speed control and an internal trimmer for intensity, and the Dawner Prince Vibrator (£255) features stereo output and has a knob to control waveform shape. If you like the idea of a valve-driven 'Vibe pedal, there's the Effectrode Tube-Vibe (from £379), and for spring reverb in the same enclosure check out J Rockett's Uni-Verb (£435).



J Rockett's recent Uni-Verb release also features onboard spring reverb emulation



theWishlist

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

PRS Private Stock John McLaughlin £14,995

CONTACT PRS Europe WEB www.prsguitars.com WORDS Dave Burrluck PHOTOGRAPHY Phil Barker

Neither John McLaughlin nor PRS's Private Stock division need any introduction. Both are masters of their crafts and the only thing we ask is, what took so long for the collaboration? The 2023 Limited Edition – just 200 pieces worldwide – is beautifully understated in its immaculate Charcoal Phoenix with Smoke Black gloss nitro. There is some decoration from that blue Bello Opal Private Stock headstock eagle, while some highly detailed 'Celtic Knots' fingerboard inlays replace the ubiquitous birds.

"All of the woods were specially chosen by Paul Reed Smith for their tone, figure and weight," we're told, including the lightweight African mahogany back and highly figured, violin-carved maple top. Unusually, the Pattern profile neck is hormigo ("[a hard] tonewood used on marimbas for sound-producing tines," says PRS) and uses a clear grain filler for a smooth 'unfinished' feel. The African blackwood 'board looks like a very dark rosewood. Each guitar is signed by Paul and director of Private Stock, Paul Miles, on the headstock back; each backplate is signed by the artist.

We've seen the small, almost mini-humbucking-size TCI humbuckers most recently on the Modern Eagle V, but here the zebra coils match the aesthetic perfectly,

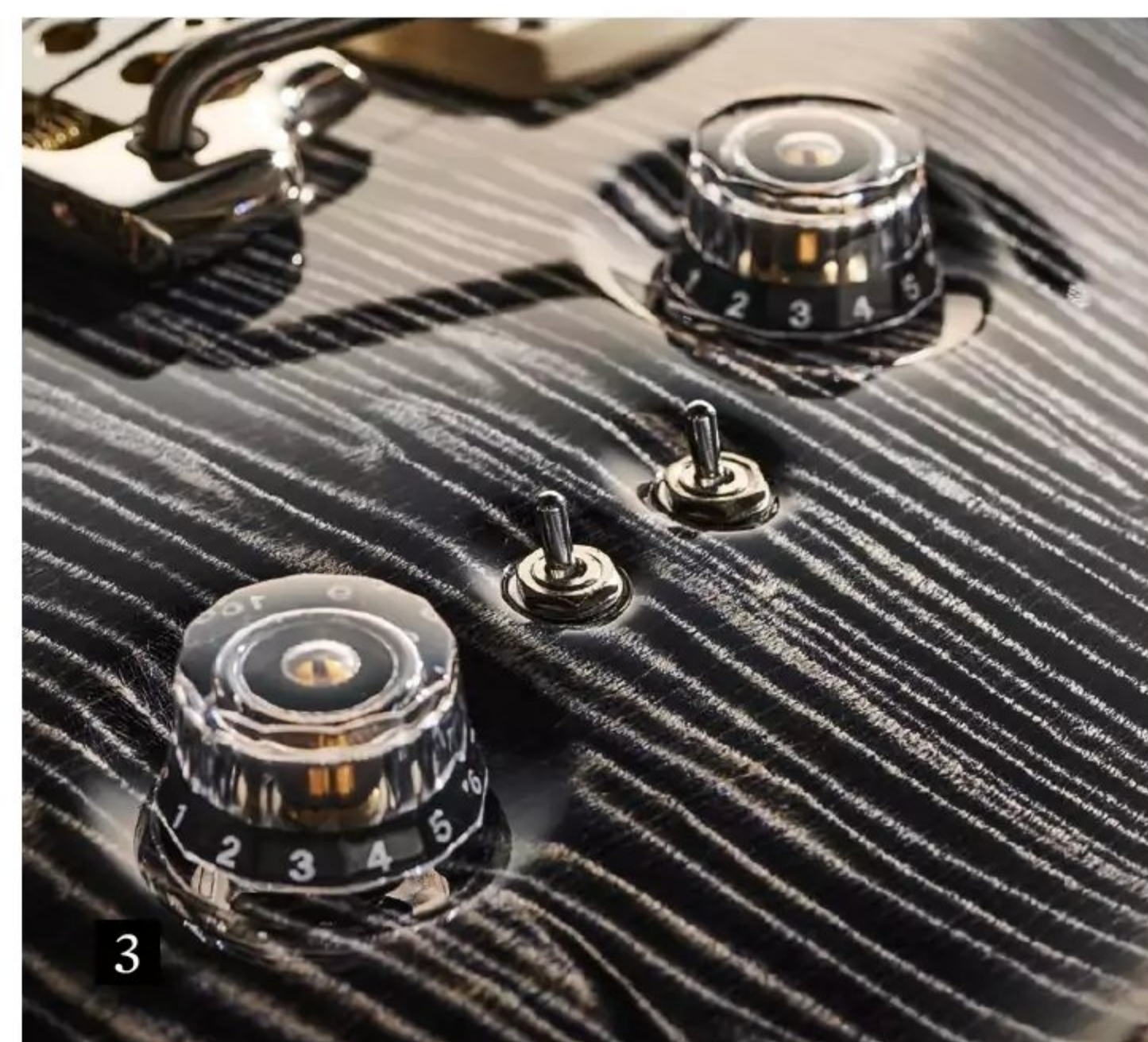
with their proprietary shaped light ivory coloured mounting rings. The two small-lever mini-toggle switches introduce a new feature to the PRS canon. Instead of engaging partial or true single-coil-splits, these are "EQ" switches, which subtly reduce the level and lightly thin the sound via a simple capacitor and resistor circuit for a more single-coil-like voice, although they remain fully humbucking in both modes.

This is a guitar with two distinct, diverse voices. With the EQ switches off, the neck pickup's vocal sustain-for-days tone is very much a hallmark of Paul's own-style guitars, sounding simultaneously woody and percussive, and smooth and clear. The bridge has thickness and beef – clear but with no sharp highs or honky mids. With a super-responsive control circuit, the guitar handles anything you can muster, clean or gained. Yet with the additional EQ switches engaged, things clean up a little and there's a less full voice, single-coil-like but without the hum. Of course, you can mix one with the other; those switches are fast in use.

For most, it's more than we'd ever pay for a new guitar, but if a musician of John McLaughlin's standing played violin then he'd be paying thousands more for his daily working instrument. We're just saying... **G**

1. The famous eagle inlay is only used on PRS's Private Stock guitars, although it did feature on many early, pre-production guitars made by Paul Reed Smith. If we remember correctly, he copied the eagle design from a T-shirt!

2. These Celtic knots have been used before on Private Stock runs, but they remain a rarity compared with those birds. Here, the intricate inlays comprise an abalone knot with holly spikes and a Bello Opal (a lab-grown synthetic stone) oval that almost glows under light. Like the first PRS guitars, the scale length here is 635mm (25 inches) and the radius of the unbound fingerboard is 254mm (10 inches). Frets are PRS's DGT/Santana jumbo size

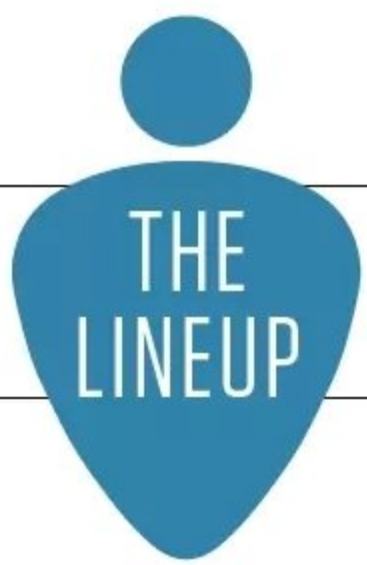


3. Used on numerous PRS guitars, this pair of mini-toggle switches is used to split each humbucker. Here, PRS calls them EQ switches: “tuned high-pass filters when engaged (in the up position), removing shelved low-end and allowing the high frequencies through for more clarity and musical highs”

4. It might be Private Stock level, but you’ll find the same ‘hybrid’ hardware, with its mix of nickel and gold plating, on the Core level models: the Gen III PRS vibrato and open-backed Phase III top-locking tuners here with large cream faux bone buttons. Mind you, the Private Stock paisley covered case is a work of art, too

5. “It’s a vibrato-Paul’s Guitar on triple steroids with extraordinary inlays and materials. They’re jaw-droppingly gorgeous and they sound ridiculous,” offers Paul Reed Smith. “They have a completely different kind of ‘single coil’ sound. The switches on the guitar are completely different and hum-cancelling – it works like God unless you plug into something like a Fuzz Face, which has a weird input impedance. But if the input impedance is standard, oh, do they sound like single coils. John said to me, ‘Don’t you dare change that wiring!’ He’s one of our geniuses, he’s extraordinary”





Gas Supply

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

Fender Tone Master Pro £1,649

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

It's a bit different from Fender's usual offerings.

Fender's Tone Master line-up is the brand's answer to high-end digital modelling, taking the form of classic combos but without the valves (or weight). We've reviewed Tone Master versions of the Twin Reverb, Deluxe Reverb and, most recently, the Princeton. But now Fender has revealed its newest addition, the Tone Master Pro.

It doesn't look like an amp...

That's because it takes the Tone Master concept way past the softly, softly approach of digital guts inside an 'analogue' skin. Fender describes the Tone Master Pro as a "no-compromise multi-effects guitar workstation"; this is the company's response to the likes of Fractal's Axe-Fx, Line 6's Helix, the Neural Quad Cortex et al.



CONTROL

The seven-inch colour touchscreen, digital scribble strips and illuminated footswitches mean that you can see exactly how your Tone Master Pro patch is configured

FOOTSWITCHES

These aren't just your regular push-button stompers. Each of the footswitches has rotary control built in for making parameter adjustments

MODELS

There are over 100 modelled amps and effects onboard, including the first ever official recreation of an EVH 5150 III Stealth

CONNECTIVITY

There's comprehensive connectivity with mic/line and instrument inputs, two pairs of stereo outputs, four hardware effects loops, a 4x4 USB audio interface, MIDI I/O and more!

JARGON CRUNCHING

FRFR
Full range, flat response (FRFR) speakers are designed as a powered do-it-all speaker cab for electric guitars, acoustic guitars and bass. They typically feature at least one driver, with an additional high-frequency speaker (tweeter) – and, much like your studio monitors, they aim to deliver a flat, accurate reproduction of the signal they're amplifying.

ALSO OUT NOW...

EPIPHONE JOE BONAMASSA
1963 SG CUSTOM £1,399



So far, Joe Bonamassa's collaborations with Epiphone have been nothing short of stunning. Next up for replication is the guitarist's 1963 Gibson SG Custom, finished in a rare-for-the-era cherry finish named Dark Wine Red. This three-pickup beauty features a smooth heel joint, a Maestro Vibrola vibrato, and a trio of Epiphone ProBucker pickups. It also comes in a custom hard case adorned with Joe's Nerdville graphics and a certificate of authenticity. Meanwhile, Seymour Duncan has also launched a signature Custom Shop Bonamassa Alnico II Nocaster set featuring a PAF-style 'bucker and Tele bridge pickup, modelled on Joe's 1951 Nocaster, affectionately known as The Bludgeon.

www.epiphone.com

BOSS KATANA-AIR EX £539

Boss's Katana series amps have established themselves as a main contender in the modelling amp market. Now, Boss has updated the wireless Katana-Air (launched in 2018) with the Katana-Air EX. The Katana-Air EX features larger five-inch speakers, 35 watts of power and a beefed-up wooden cabinet. As well as this, the company has added tuned bass ports, and there's now a bass voice added to the acoustic preamp model. In total, there's access to 60 Boss effects, and thanks to the onboard Bluetooth you can connect to the Boss Tone Studio for deeper, wire-free editing of your sounds.

www.boss.info



So, what's it got?

What hasn't it got? Starting with sounds, there are over 100 amp models and effects inside, including all of the current Tone Master models, plus an EVH 5150 III Stealth model (the first official approximation). It's loaded with over 6,000 speaker cab impulse responses, all of which can be mixed-and-matched with any of the unit's amp models, and, of course, there are options for microphone type and placement, too.

I've got plug-ins that do that - anything else?

We're only just getting started. Fender has kitted out the Tone Master Pro with a seven-inch colour touchscreen to make navigating and tweaking your presets easy, and above each of the 10 footswitches sit the digital scribble strips. Talking of footswitches, they're colour-coded with illuminated surrounds, but they also serve as rotary encoders. As you can see, there are no tiny switches or buttons to get lost in.

I can't see an expression pedal, though.

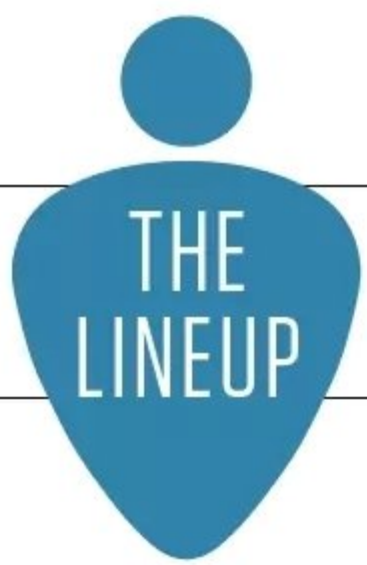
Don't worry, there's the facility for that and a whole lot more. Take a look at the back of the unit (below left) and you'll see it's home to more sockets than Elon Musk's garage. We get a mic/line combi XLR/jack input, a regular 'instrument' input, two pairs of stereo outputs (with options for jacks or XLR on the first pair). There are no fewer than four hardware effects loops for integrating your other pedals, two expression pedal inputs (compatible with the Mission SP1-TMP Expression Pedal, £159) and two further foot controllers, plus MIDI in and out/thru, and SD card slot and USB C.

What's the USB for?

That'll be the 4x4 channel audio interface. You can also hook up the Tone Master Pro to your computer for editing via Fender's Tone Master Pro Control desktop app.

Is it designed to be used through a PA or something?

You certainly can, or as a recording interface in the studio. But Fender has also announced the release of its FR-10 (£469) and FR-12 (£519) FRFR cabs. These look like classic Fender combos and will work with any modeller/preamp or direct signal from an electric, acoustic or bass guitar. Both are shipping now and we'll be taking a detailed look next month. [SW]



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: Christina Martin

Album: *Storm* (Come Undone Records)



Storm, Christina Martin's eighth album, is a musical journey that follows her path as a songwriter
www.christinamartin.net

Christina's Duesenberg Nordic Blue Caribou and Black Sparkle Starplayer TV (opposite) are her two main guitars

Singer-songwriter Christina Martin was raised on the East Coast of Canada but found her musical feet when she moved to Austin, Texas, in 1999 and picked up a guitar. Her career was confirmed by a 2002 support slot for Wilco and the release of her debut album, *Pretty Things*. "Austin was where I discovered singer-songwriters and wanted to be like them," she says. "It was also where I discovered my own gift, which needed a lot of work!"

'Storm' A-Coming

Jet forward to today and Christina has just released *Storm*, her eighth studio album and one that was many years in the making. "This album wasn't intentional," she states. "I didn't know whether these songs would fit together on an album – I approached it by making each song as good as it could be. But when I looked at it as a body, I organised the songs chronologically as events that affected me in my life. Then it really felt like the story of my life as a creator and how magical that is. But there's also childhood trauma, awakening to a place like Austin, and the things we go through in life with loss and relationships and figuring out how we heal ourselves."

Scaling Down

To tour the album, Christina is going with a stripped-down setup, playing as a duo with her husband, Dale Murray, playing lead guitar to her rhythm. "I'm mainly the rhythm guitarist and he's playing melodies," she explains. "He has a full on setup, with pedals that simulate string sections and stuff. I have, like, two pedals! We don't bring other instruments as such, but we have different guitars, like a Duesenberg lap steel and a Duesenberg 12-string mandolin, but we don't bring keyboards and other things. I don't want to bring other things, it stresses me out! Two pedals and a tuner pedal is enough. I get that other guitar players want all the toys, but that's just not me."

Dreaming Big

Having her husband with her on tour with a more expansive guitar setup is useful when considering *Storm*, with many of the songs drenched in strings. But Christina is looking to produce the album's spirit more organically in the future. "Some of those songs, like *Stay With Me*, are such emotional tunes and I had dreams about the sound and strings were always there," she tells us. "I have also been striving to do symphony orchestra performances. It made sense to do the album now and then some day I can have strings live in the performance. It's something different because I've never had string players with me before... These are all aspirations, right? Which I don't know if I can pull off. But the dream is to represent the album live."

The Fundamentals

With eight albums under her belt, Christina has had much practice in putting them together and experimenting with sound, but she began with the basics, which she still tries to incorporate into her shows. "In the beginning, I played solo for many years and developed a big, warm rhythmic sound, but I never aspired to learn how to bend strings or perform solos," she says. "My voice is my main instrument and the guitar was merely a tool for writing songs and being able to perform them independently. I still love that idea of a solo singer-songwriter being able to communicate with just their guitar and vocal, and I try to always build those moments into the shows, even if it's a full-band show – because it's where I started out." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Storm*

For fans of: Sheryl Crow, The Bangles, Fiona Apple



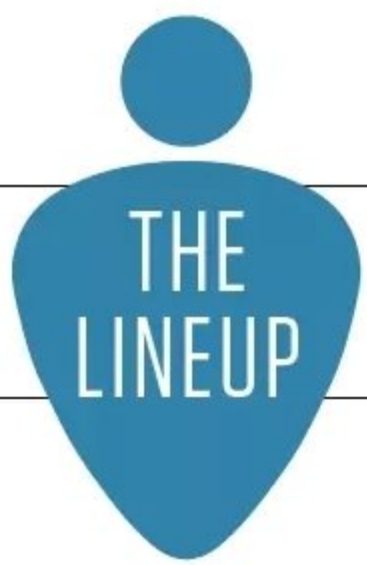
PHOTO BY SEAN SISK



DIS FOR DUESENBERG

Christina readies her favourite instruments for her upcoming European and UK tour

"I'm currently contemplating which to bring to the UK," Christina tells us, referring to her album tour that hits our shores in February 2024. "I play the Caribou and the Starplayer; I also have the prototype for the limited-edition Stardust series. I'm not an expert on this, but the Duesenbergs have a real big sound, but they're clear and cut through the mix. Plus they're very easy to play, so for somebody like me who's not a guitar hero, they're reliable when you're using a capo or the tremolo. I used to just go for the cheapest Gretsches, but these guitars are great."



Albums

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



Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram

Live In London

Alligator Records (available now)

10/10



Blues guitar hero in waiting captured on the live stage

Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram is receiving some well-deserved time in the spotlight lately, not just for his grasp on authentic blues styles (Three Kings, Buddy Guy, Muddy...) but also his embracing of more modern greats such as Gary Moore and Eric Gales. On top of that, he's into R&B and gospel/neo soul music, too, making for a really appealing range of elements. That magic has now been captured live – and it's a joy to hear.

Take *She Calls Me Kingfish*, the album's opener – here's a tight band nailing a tasty arrangement complete with a rock gospel intro evocative of bands such as Mint Condition. On this track, Christone solos with real authority and his vocals have a richness beyond his years. *Fresh Out* is a slow burner, with drums and bass locked solid as he sings and wails. *Another Life Goes By* is almost a nod to the minor key vibe of *The Thrill Is Gone* but takes fresh turns and ups the chord changes. Onto *Hard Times* and you'll hear a funk blues where Christone switches to the bridge pickup to get his guitar really screaming. As for the instrumental, *Mississippi Night*, he pulls out some killer BB King meets Gary Moore licks, working his sustained notes with rich finger vibrato and teasing bends. And don't miss *Midnight Heat*, which offers up a real groove and vibe!

For sure, there are plenty of great blues-orientated artists around, but Christone – with his Chicago blues meets 70s funk meets gospel leanings – demonstrates he's got the goods to be a modern-day legend. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Midnight Heat*

For fans of: SRV, Albert King, Eric Gales

The Rolling Stones

Hackney Diamonds

Polydor (available now)

8/10



The boys are back in town!

Whether you love 'em or hate 'em, you have to award The Stones merit points for sheer endurance alone. It's been a long wait for new material: 2016 saw the release of their 'back to the blues' album, *Blue & Lonesome*, but the last album of original material was way back in 2005 with *A Bigger Bang*. It's also the first release since the death of Charlie Watts. A guest-star studded album, *Hackney Diamonds* sees the band joined by Lady Gaga, Elton John, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder and original bassist Bill Wyman, and kicks off with the power and pomp of *Angry*. Ronnie and Keef push things along with Mick proving that his vocal prowess is still as strong as ever, despite reaching the grand old age of 80 this year. *Depending On You* is a typical Stones mid-paced ballad, while *Mess It Up* shows that the boys can still rock harder than most. Diamonds indeed! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Bite My Head Off*

For fans of: Aerosmith, The Who

Various Artists

The Alligator Records

Christmas Collection

Alligator Records (available now)

8/10



One for the forthcoming festivities...

Originally released in 1992, this new vinyl and CD release features songs with plenty of guitar licks and rollicking rhythms, deeply embedded with blues vibes and old-school authenticity. *Merry, Merry Christmas* opens with Koko Taylor singing with gusto and tasty clean licks, à la Buddy Guy et al. The funky riffing on *Santa Claus Wants Some Lovin'* is pretty infectious with the smooth vocals of Tinsley Ellis on top, while jazzy guitar tones slip and slide within the arrangement of Charles Brown singing *Boogie Woogie Santa Claus*. Son Seals features on *Lonesome Christmas* with some of the album's most bluesy guitar flurries and phrases (think Albert King meets Buddy Guy), and *Christmas On The Bayou*, featuring Lonnie Brooks, is a storming blues rocker, with rhythmic guitar hooks aplenty. The instrumental rendering of *The Little Drummer Boy* is nicely poignant with some great guitar from Elvin Bishop, too. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Christmas On The Bayou*

For fans of: Lonnie Brooks, Buddy Guy



Warren Haynes on stage with country music star Eric Church

Warren Haynes

The Benefit Concert Vol 20

Evil Teen/Mascot Label (release date: 8 December)

9/10



A rich and varied banquet of high-class rock

This live multi-CD, DVD and vinyl collection documents Warren Haynes' annual benefit jam, from Asheville, North Carolina on 7 and 8 December 2018. It features a host of superstar collaborators and covers a wide breadth of musical styles, held together by a distinct sense of occasion. With a line-up that includes Dave Grohl, Gov't Mule, Joe Bonamassa, Jim James and many more, the concert weaves a rich tapestry of talent with some truly memorable performances throughout. Jamey Johnson's *In Color* is quietly beautiful, Mike Gordon's cover of Aerosmith's *Sweet Emotion* challenges the original for intensity, and Bonamassa's fusing of Led Zeppelin's *Tea For One* with *I Can't Quit You Baby* contains some simply blistering guitar. Warren's band, Gov't Mule, wraps up the concert with three Pink Floyd tracks: *Us And Them*, *Any Colour You Like* and *Comfortably Numb* complete with emotion-drenched solos. What's not to like? **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Weight* (Eric Church)

For fans of: JoBo, Gov't Mule, The Allman Brothers

Scary Goldings

Scary Goldings Live

Featuring John Scofield

Pockets Inc (available now)

9/10



Musical collective with added groove

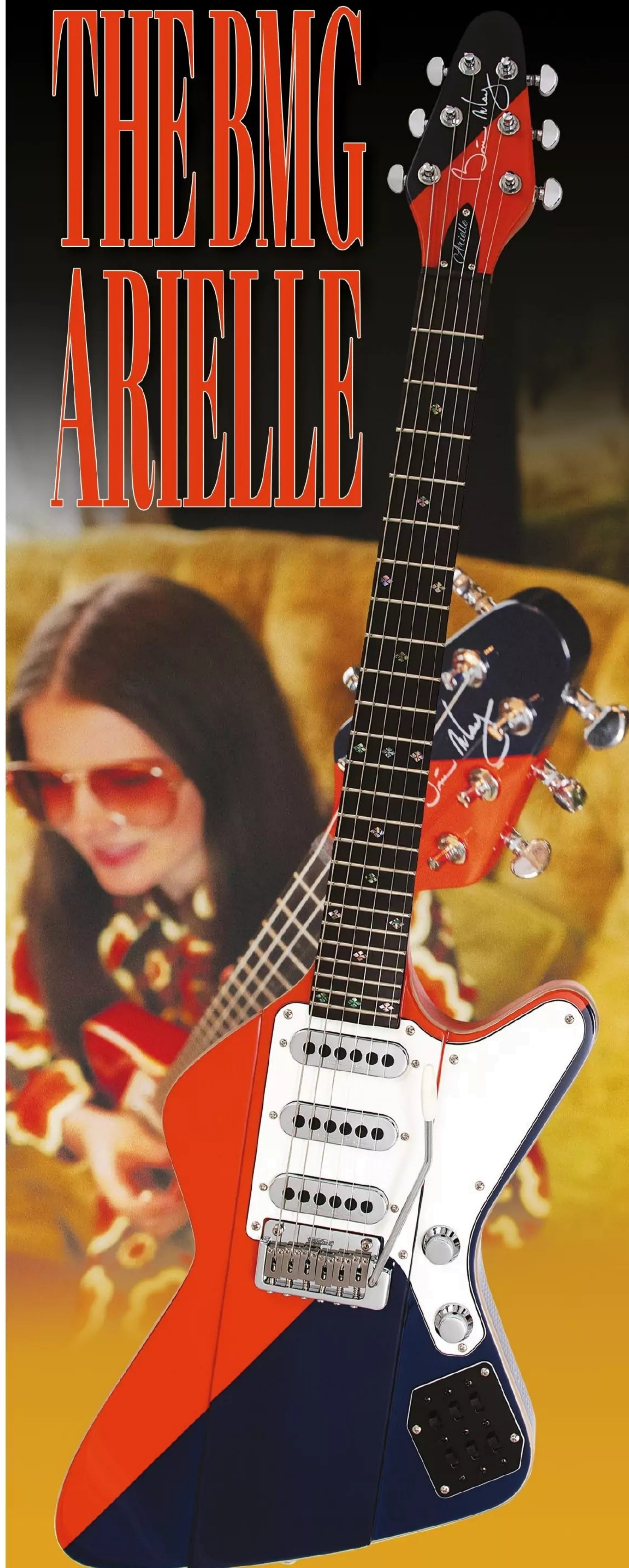
Scary Goldings is an LA-based collaboration between the revered keyboardist Larry Goldings and the band Scary Pockets, fronted by Jack Conte on keys and Ryan Lerman on guitar. Added to the equation here is John Scofield, renowned for some of the best phrasing in modern jazz guitar as well as a deep appreciation of R&B music. In opener *We Come In Peace*, chords and melodic themes are passed around the band, while *The Shakes* is a hybrid of groove and jazz-rock with strong syncopations and soaring lines, very much a modern sound with punchy bass and some killer Sco soloing. *Professor Vicarious* has a tasty chordal guitar opener and some of the album's best solos. Good time music with great vibes and considerable craftsmanship – it takes a lot of experience to sound this cool! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Disco Pills*

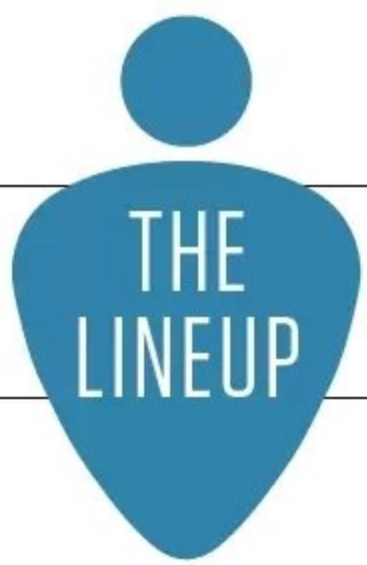
For fans of: Frequent Flyers, Snarky Puppy

NEW FROM BRIAN MAY GUITARS

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Tones Behind The Tracks

Ex-Yes multi-instrumentalist and film composer **Trevor Rabin** releases his first vocal-based solo album in 30 years

Artist: Trevor Rabin

Album: *Rio* (InsideOutMusic)



After so many years composing for films, Trevor was keen to bring his guitar work and voice to the fore on *Rio*

Despite a career that started at the age of 17, with work as a session musician in his native South Africa and stints in SA bands such as Conglomeration and Rabbitt, Trevor Rabin is probably best known for taking over guitar duties in Yes during the mid-80s. He was also responsible for the band's biggest hit *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and much of the writing on Yes's chart-storming *90125* album. You may even have seen his name on the soundtracks of films such as *Armageddon*, *Bad Boys II* and *National Treasure*.

A multi-instrumentalist by nature but perhaps a guitarist by choice, he was last seen brandishing his old faithful beaten-up Strat when Yes offshoot Anderson, Rabin and Wakeman toured the UK in 2016 and '17. Since then there's been more film work, but recently Rabin began work on *Rio*, a new solo project that finds the musician taking centre stage playing most of the instruments himself, while also taking on the role of lead vocalist – something he hasn't done for 30 years.

Listening to the album it becomes obvious that while you can take the man out of prog, remnants of the genre will always remain inside the man...

Would you agree there is a prog influence aboard the new album?

"Definitely. I mean, there was no 'I'm going to do *this* kind of record or *that* kind of record.' And demographically I went all over the place and just visited [different sounds]. So there's definitely prog influence on it."

We thought we heard a touch of Toto in the arrangements, too?

"Well, that's very possible. One of my close friends is Luke [Steve Lukather]. In fact, Joe Bonamassa played at the Hollywood Bowl with an orchestra the other night and I did a bunch of orchestrations for the show and I saw Luke there. I hadn't seen him for a while."

There's a huge orchestral sound in the arrangements all through the album.

"I studied orchestration when I was 19 with a remarkable professor in South Africa who's not with us any more. And that's one of the reasons I wanted to get into film composing because I thought, 'What better platform to make a bit of a living?' Having done, I don't know, 50 movies or more, I think that infiltrated the palette, if you like."

When did the writing begin for *Rio*?

"A lot of it started a long time ago. After I'd finished touring with Jon and Rick [as Yes Featuring Jon Anderson, Trevor Rabin, Rick Wakeman], I realised I wasn't really in the frame of mind to get into a whole bunch of even more movies. There was a time I was doing six or seven a year; it was ridiculous. I certainly wasn't going to do that. Then I decided, 'You know what? I'm going to get into the album and I'm not going to stop until it's done.' I just got into it. I had a lot of the ideas percolating and ready to go, so it really didn't take too much time from when I started the album to finishing it."

How does a composition start for you?

"I come up with all these ideas. And I don't just throw them up in the air and hope they land somewhere good. Sometimes I'll kind of pre-edit, literally getting in saying, 'Well, this works...' and I might take something that has worked from a place that was initially thought to be pertinent for something else and then join them up. It's a matter of editing the ideas, but ultimately, once the song starts taking shape, I get on a flow and I'm not sure where it comes from or what comes first. For example, on *Oklahoma* the lyrics came first and then it just snowballed."

You recorded *Rio* in your own studio. How self-disciplined are you when recording?

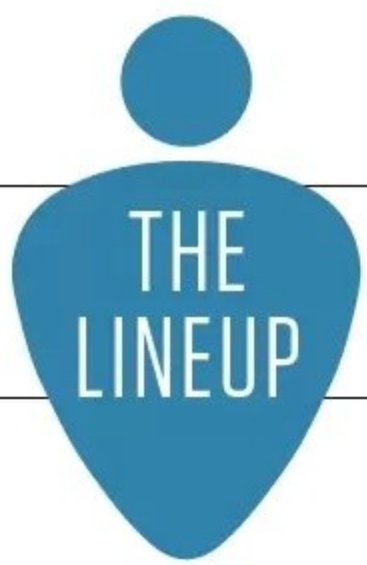
"Well, you know, my studio is in a building next to my house, pretty much on the premises, actually, and so



PHOTO BY HRISTO SHINDOV



“There was no ‘I’m going to do this kind of record or that kind of record.’ Demographically, I went all over the place... there’s definitely prog influence on it”



I've just really got to go downstairs in my pyjamas a lot of the time [laughs]. But I never use the crutches that are available. For example, vocal tuning; it kind of creeps me out the thought that you're singing and it's not quite good enough so you [auto-]tune it. And then, well, is it your voice? If there's a mistake on guitar, or if my vocals are out of tune, I just do it again. I try to stay away from manipulating things just because it's available."

Having made mainly instrumental albums over the past 30 years or so, when did you decide to record with vocals?

"It was something I always intended and wanted to do. But, quite frankly, when I started writing for film, in '95 or '96, I didn't comprehend how busy it would make me. I had some luck with it and had some great clients, so I was busy all the time. The main thing was I thought, 'Why am I making an album? I haven't for 30 years. It had better be something I really want to say.'

"One of the main things was that I really wanted to sing, and I really wanted to play, as opposed to films where I would do the orchestrations and so on – the playing there was almost kind of peripheral."

Let's talk about the gear you used in the recording studio.

"I have one of those Fractal Axe-Fx units. I used that a lot. I have hundreds of sounds, you know, which I can just go to. I have microphones set up, digitally, in certain ways – certain microphones and so I can zone in on those sounds. And then thereafter, if I still want to change them, I can manipulate them further. But then there's some really old units, which I still use to this day. I don't know if you remember the Korg A3 [multi-effects]? There's certain sounds I get on that I still use and like, but I'd say the Fractal was one of the main units I used."

What about guitars? Are you still using the old faithful Strat you used with Yes?

"Yeah, that's still the main guitar. I did a signature model with Westone, which then became Alvarez. I don't know, business-wise, what the deal was with that, but I did a signature model that is a [Westone] Pantera basically. I still use that quite a lot. Most of the acoustic is a Martin. I don't remember the model number, but it's a beautiful guitar."

With all your studio experience, as well as film composing and recording, has the studio itself become another instrument?

"Yes, absolutely. It's become part and parcel of writing, having the studio set up in the way I have it set up. So it's a definite plus. And the old argument between analogue sound, analogue recording and digital. I mean, [digital] just allows for such flexibility from a player's point of view. I would never want to use digital like the Cher song *Believe* with the voice jumping all over the place because of the [auto-]tuning thing, which was attractive on one song. But to use it to just to bring down a sharp note... Just bloody sing it again!"



PHOTO BY HRISTO SHINOV

Trevor's main guitar is this '62 Strat, which he played on the solo of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* with Yes. It started life with a red finish, like Hank Marvin's, but over the years Rabin added his own style, with the help of friend and early member of Rabbitt, Selwyn Schneider

Were all the effects on the album from the Fractal or did you use any outboard gear?

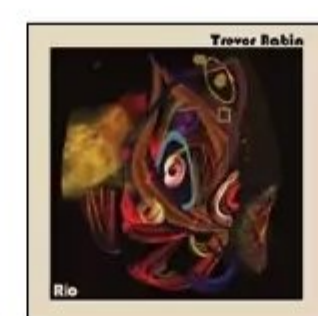
"A lot of them were through the Fractal. I use a Pro Tools system, but the front-end is a Digital Performer by MOTU, so some of the effects I use are from that: digital delay, things like that. Quirky digital delays that are encompassed in the bundle, or whatever they call it. Then some Pro Tools compression, and in the Performer there are some nice compressors, too, which I use."

Are there any plans to tour the album?

"The desire is definitely to play it. It's so new and such a new experience having not done a vocal album for so long... I mean, my last solo album was an instrumental album in 2012. And we didn't tour that because I was in the middle of films and it would have been a large project to put together. But on this one, I think it should be played. And I love touring. But nothing specific has been talked about yet because there's been so much emphasis on doing other things to support the album, at this point."

Meanwhile, do you have any other projects on at the moment?

"There's not that much. Because I decided, once I started making *Rio*, film was going to become something I'd still do at some point, but I didn't want to take on a project and compromise the album. So I've basically told my agents that I'm not going to be available for film for a little while. I've already started thinking about and writing for another album, so I guess that's my focus right now." [DM]



Trevor Rabin's new album, *Rio*, is available now via InsideOutMusic
<https://trevorrabin.net>

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Pickup The Pieces

Like most of us, **Neville Marten** is a sucker for upgrades to his equipment. But he would never put new pickups on a Custom Shop Strat, would he?

Well, I didn't think I was going to. However, some of you may have read my review of Fender's Vintera II Strat and Nocaster in last issue's *Guitarist*. In it I mentioned that I own two Stratocasters and they sound very different from one another. But hearing a desk recording of a recent Marty Wilde gig, my red Strat, which I know is anything but plinky... sounded plinky! Actually, it turned out not

"I duly fitted my new loaded pickguard and... Wow! My traditional-looking 50s twanger is now a big, bold bruiser that could take on all comers"

to be the Strat rather the recording, but of course the seed was sown and I don't need to tell you the rest, do I? Even though I'm going to.

I wouldn't amend the red Strat in any way that meant I couldn't return it exactly to how it was when the Custom Shop built it for me. People often ask if mine's a Gary Moore Limited Edition one. No, it's not, but by complete fluke the CS were building mine at exactly the same time as they were creating those! My '56 two-tone Relic, however, is a John Cruz Master Design

(not Master Built) and, while it's a stonker of a guitar, is not precious in the same way. So I decided to see if I could give it a bit more oomph.

I spoke to my friend Tim Mills down at Bare Knuckle Pickups to take advantage of his bottomless pit of knowledge about windings, magnets, polepieces and so on. "Tim, I want my Strat to sound like it's got P-90s in it, but still look like a stock Fender with single coils." He thought for a minute and said, "What about the Rabea Massaad Triptych set? They're like a souped-up SRV sound but with a bit more besides."

Now, I'd actually watched Rabea's inspiring demo of his Triptych pickups on the Bare Knuckle site, as well as that of the company's own excellent demonstrator. And while they sounded amazing, they were not quite where my head was. I never go for that Stevie Ray-type sound myself, but was thinking more of a souped-up Rory, or *Voodoo Chile* solo type of tone. I've always been a bridge pickup kind of guy anyway, and everyone it seems now uses that same old neck pickup setting.

So I told Tim that I'd also watched the demo of his Trilogy pickups – the Malmsteen set – and believe it or not, preferred the sound of those. "Okay, I'll build you a set but put a zinc-plated steel plate on the bridge pickup to add even more grunt [I'm paraphrasing here!]. I'll wire them to top-quality pots, caps and so on, and mount it all on a plain white pickguard so you'll only need to solder two joints." Now, that sounds like my kind of upgrade!

Fattest Strat

Having received the set from Tim and his crew, wonderfully made and beautifully boxed, of course, I duly fitted my new loaded pickguard and took the guitar to a gig that weekend. Wow! It was exactly what I wanted. My traditional-looking 50s twanger is now a big, bold bruiser of a guitar that could take on all comers. Funnily enough, several of the pickup positions I used to use are now swapped for the bridge, or bridge and middle, as it sounds so fantastically huge in those positions.

As an aside, I'm still using the brilliant Blackstar Amped 2 for my rock 'n' roll show performances and it's through that that I tried these new pickups. I love it, but I am intrigued by Fender's new Tone Master Pro pedal (see this issue's Gas Supply on page 30). I've got one to try one out, hopefully with a powered Fender cabinet, and I'm sure to let you know how I get on.

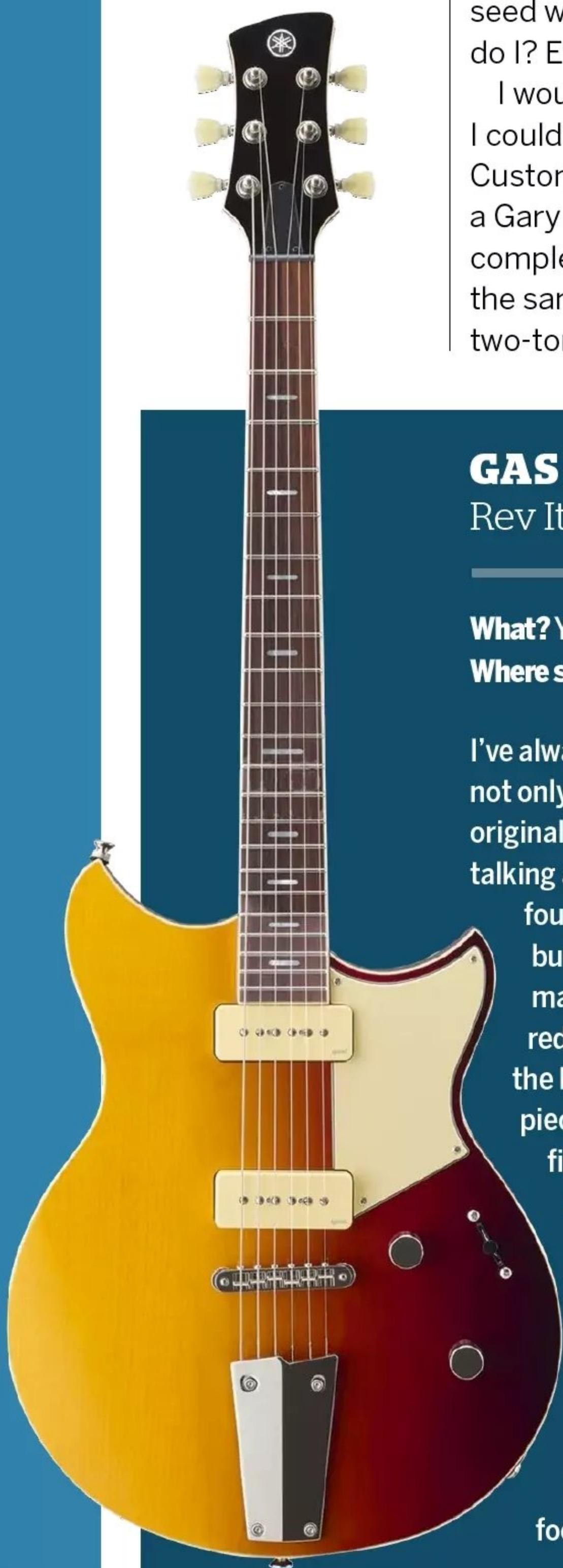
In the meantime, if I've inspired you to upgrade some piece of kit or other in your arsenal, my apologies to your bank account. And if you've any interesting stories of your own on the subject, do let me know. See you next time. **G**

GAS OF THE MONTH

Rev It Up!

What? Yamaha RSS02T Revstar Standard, Sunset Burst
Where seen? gak.co.uk **Price?** £679

I've always thought that Yamaha's excellent Revstar is not only a great-looking guitar but one of the best new original designs to come along in ages. And since I was talking about the sound of P-90s, I trawled around and found this. I don't usually go for the graduated finish, but this looks really great. Along with its chambered mahogany body, said to increase resonance while reducing weight and improving playing balance, the Revstar also features a carbon-reinforced three-piece mahogany neck, on top of which is a rosewood fingerboard with 22 jumbo frets. Along with its set of twin Alnico P-90 pickups, the guitar also features a passive Focus 'boost' switch, which lends a sort of 'overwound' sound. We all know how well Yamaha builds its guitars, and when they also look this good there should be a place in everyone's collection for one. Don't fancy Sunset Burst? Then other finishes include Black, Hot Merlot and Swift Blue. So be 'swift' and 'hot' foot it down to your friendly dealer today!



Mia Bettin plays the 70s Jaguar® in Black



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Screen Time

Alex Bishop discovers the joys of starting a YouTube channel – while simultaneously trying to run a guitar-making business

My face is furrowed with lines of concentration as I pick up the tool. A slow-motion sharpened block plane glides into focus, the gossamer-thin ribbon of a freshly cut wood shaving effortlessly unfurling from the surface like fresh apple peel. Motes of dust sparkle through the air like stars scattered through a night sky.

Unfortunately, though – forgetting that I’m actually building a proper instrument – I’ve also just planed far too much off the edge of a fingerboard, which means what I’m working on is now going to look better on a ukulele than a full-size guitar. I mutter a few swear

“I suppose years of practising jazz improvisation and loose stage banter does prepare you for waffling in front of a camera for half an hour”

words, switch off the camera and make a mental note to edit that last part out. Such is the life of a guitar-making YouTuber.

I’ve been very fortunate over the past 12 years of my guitar-making career to have dodged any proper engagement with much of social media. My half-hearted Instagram posts and irregular Facebook updates never really showed much of my personality or what went on behind the scenes at Alex Bishop Guitars, or its teaching arm Bristol Guitar Making School. Much of my commission work and sales spread through word of mouth and engagement with guitar enthusiasts

While Alex can expertly navigate a tonewood with his chisel and plane, getting to grips with video editing is a whole new adventure for the luthier

on the ground at music festivals. As the business has grown, the reality of my need to engage with the world online has finally dawned. I bit the bullet last week and bought a camera.

I realised I didn’t know what I was doing, as I sat staring at my new device, the battery pack flashing an ominous red in my eyes as it charged up for the first time. What am I going to say to the camera? Do people actually watch videos of other people sanding bits of exotic hardwood? (Turns out they do.) Does anybody want to listen to the disturbingly intimate sounds of my breathing while chiselling? (Absolutely, it’s a thing.) I decided not to overthink it and just go with the flow.

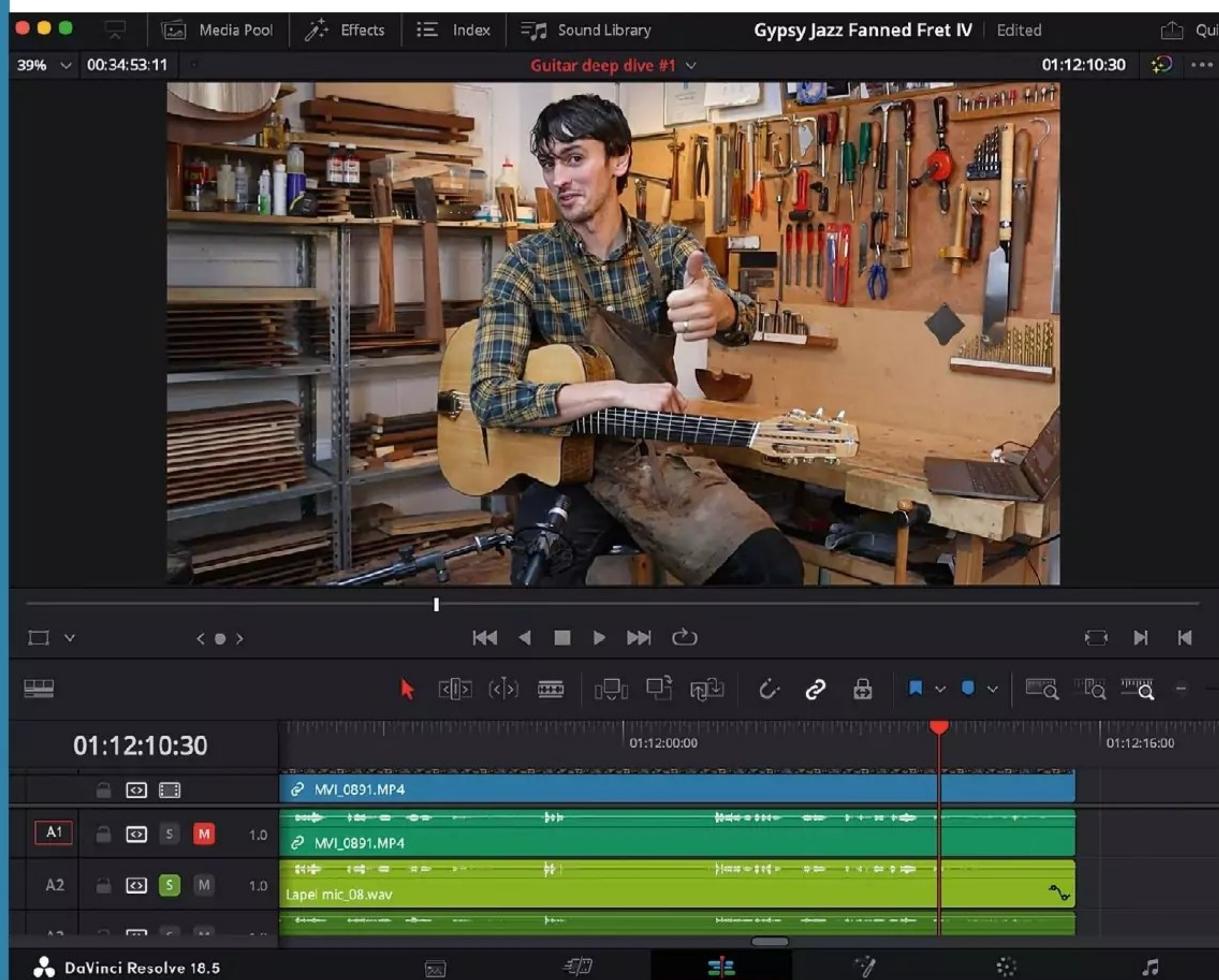
On the plus side, my inner audiophile was definitely ready to dig around in a dusty box in the corner of the workshop to pull out a bunch of old microphones that I collected years ago. Nothing stimulates a music geek like comparing the frequency response of some midrange condenser microphones on a line-up of fancy handmade acoustic guitars. Less enthusiastically, I fumbled with some awkward lighting gear and wrestled with a tripod for half an hour. Eventually, though, equipped with a lapel mic and my SE electronics mic, I set about recording a deep dive into my latest instrument.

Point Of View

It seemed to go pretty well, but it’s hard to say when you’re riffing in front of a completely empty room. I suppose years of practising jazz improvisation and loose stage banter does something to prepare you for waffling in front of a camera for half an hour. What I wasn’t braced for was the crushing awkwardness of listening to my own voice repeatedly during the arduous editing process. Completely unfamiliar with the new software, I set about getting my head around the opaque world of cutting clips, frame rates and aspect ratios. Warily repetitious, at one point my long-suffering wife walked in and asked if I’d like a cup of tea, and then enquired why I wasn’t able to properly say, “What’s up, internet?” Cringe.

But hey – just like guitar playing (and making), things that are worth getting good at always take time, so I’m prepared to put the hours in and sling my videos out into the digital ether. As I finally hit the upload button and watch the progress bar slink along the bottom of my screen, I start to wonder whether the 36 subscribers to my YouTube channel are likely to troll me for my controversial opinions on the best tonewoods, or whether vintage guitars are worth the money. In any case, I’m ready to don my luthier’s armour and ride into the battle in the comments section. It can’t be that bad... can it?

www.youtube.com/@alexbishopguitars



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Alive & Unplugged

To get your acoustic sounding its best, stringing up properly and identifying saddle and pin problems can work wonders, says **Huw Price**

Tinkering has always been rife among electric guitar players. In contrast, most acoustic players seem less inclined to alter their guitars. For some reason, we'd often rather accept them for what they are or simply upgrade just as soon as we can afford a better one. This got me thinking about easy and cost-effective acoustic guitar upgrades, so let's start by focusing on bridge and saddle issues.

The saddle's function is to transfer energy from vibrating strings into the soundboard, which in turn generates sound waves. For the system to operate properly, the transfer of energy has to be as efficient as possible and none of the string energy can be wasted. The first thing to check is that the saddle is a good fit for the bridge slot. With the strings at full tension, take a close look at the saddle – or saddles if there's a separate one for the top E and B strings – and try to determine if there's a forwards or backwards lean.

In extreme cases, it can be quite obvious, but more subtle angles can be detected if there's a visible gap between the saddle and the edge of the saddle slot on one side. This is important because there needs to be full contact between the flat surfaces on the underside of the saddle and the bottom of the saddle slot. If the saddle is leaning, the bridge and saddle will only be making minimal contact along one edge and that compromises energy transfer.

A loose saddle that's leaning in one direction can negatively affect energy transfer from the strings into your guitar's soundboard. So make sure it's a nice snug fit

With the strings off, try wiggling the saddle back and forth and lifting it out of the slot. The saddle should fit snugly into the slot and require a bit of effort to pull free. If you feel any looseness or it's quite easy to pull out of the slot, your guitar will almost certainly benefit from a new saddle.

So long as you have some sandpaper, a flat surface and some files, you can carve your own saddle. Allparts UK offers a range of saddles that require minimal work to install, but it shouldn't cost too much if you'd prefer to get a professional to do it. It might be an opportunity to upgrade to bone for better tone, or maybe a compensated saddle for improved intonation.

Pin Balls

There is more to stringing up an acoustic guitar than you might realise. The key is to ensure that the ball-end of the string is contacting the bridge plate so that it is properly anchored. When passing the ball-end through the bridge and inserting a pin, it's important to pull the string back out until you can feel it making contact with the bridge plate before you press the pin firmly into the bridge.

Most acoustics are fitted with slotted bridge pins that are sort of squared off at the bottom, and the ball-ends can snag on the pins and pull them away from the plate. If you've ever found that it takes a new set of strings ages to settle down and stay in tune, it could be that the pins have wedged the strings against the sides of the pin holes and tuning will only stabilise once the ball ends finally pull through sufficiently to reach the plate.

Some guitar builders carve a curve into their pins on the slotted side so they terminate in a finer point. This helps to prevent the ball-end from snagging on the pin and allows it to slide along the pin towards the plate a little easier. It's something that's easy to do yourself using a file and some sandpaper.

In The Groove

For those of us who are predominantly electric guitar players, acoustic guitars always feel that much harder to play. This is because action tends to be higher and acoustic strings are usually heavier. Leaving the truss rod and nut aside for now (because that's a whole different article), the solution to high action is to lower saddle height. That's easy to accomplish on conventional electric guitars, but for acoustics it usually means shaving material from the top or bottom of the saddle. Consequently, it's very common to see acoustics with lowered action that have very little string break angle over the saddle.

An inadequate break angle will reduce the efficiency of energy transfer from strings to soundboard. In extreme cases, the string may not ring cleanly and may even slide across the top of the saddle when you bend strings. Fortunately, there is a way to enjoy lower action without compromising your tone.





“When stringing up an acoustic, ensure that the ball-end of the string is contacting the bridge plate so that it is properly anchored”

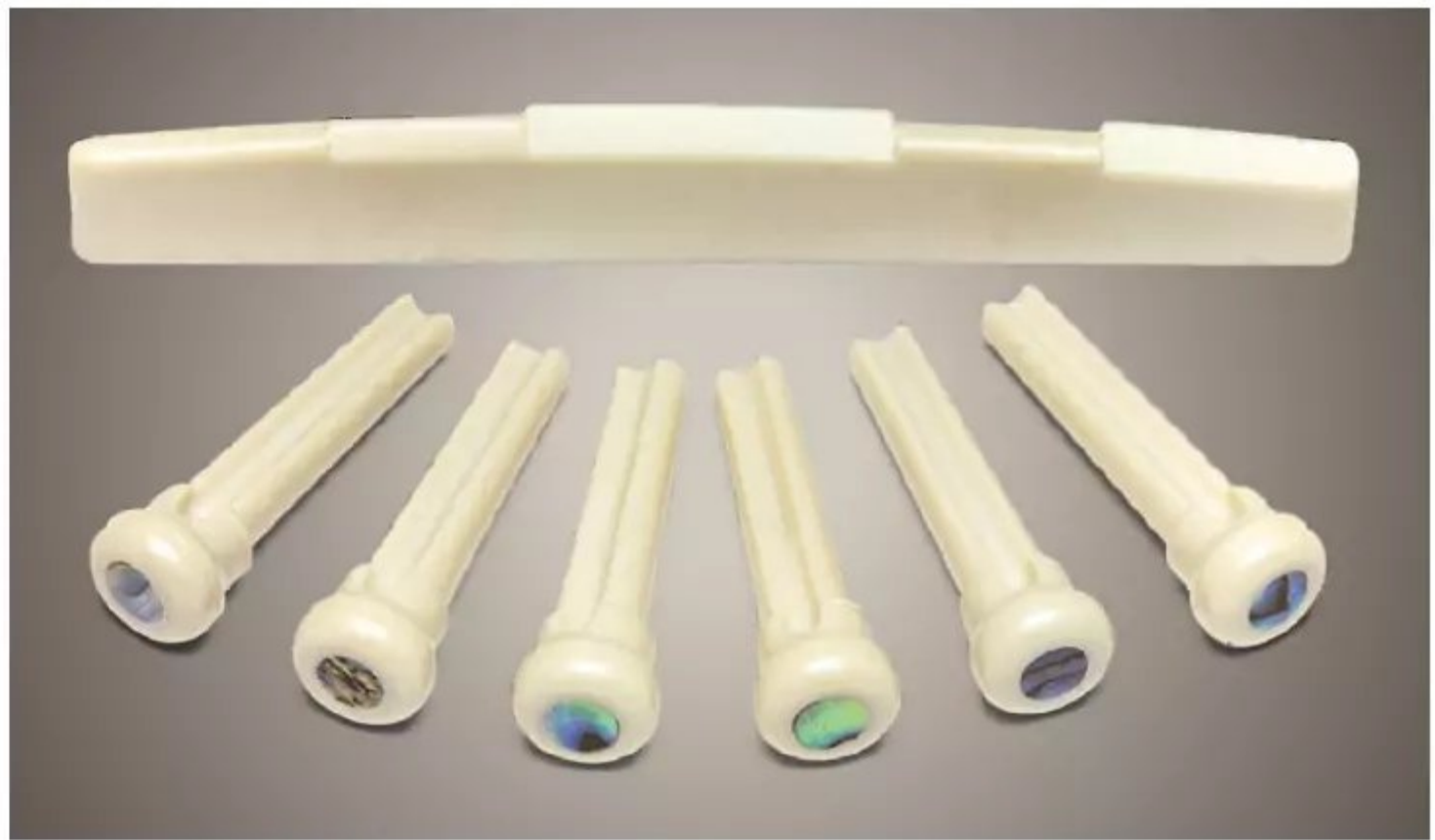
With bolt-on neck electric guitars, one workaround is to alter the neck angle using shims, but the complicating factor with acoustics is that the neck angle is effectively fixed. There is a solution that’s pretty old-school, but is enjoying a bit of a comeback. In a nutshell it’s using unslotted bridge pins. Clearly the string has to go somewhere, so rather than resting in the pin groove, a string slot is cut into the bridge for each pin hole. A keyhole saw is perfect for the job because it’s small enough to get inside the pin holes. Rounding over the tops of the newly cut string slots brings them closer to the saddle, which increases the string break angle. This procedure does veer into bona fide lutherie so it would be understandable if you didn’t want to attempt this for yourself. But for any competent guitar tech this is a routine procedure and really shouldn’t be expensive.

You can carry on using your original bridge pins by spinning them around by 180-degrees, but since the pin holes may need a bit of reaming to optimise the fit, consider upgrading the pins at the same time. Whether they’re brass, bone, Tusq, wood or plastic, all pins have a unique sound and a change may bring you closer to your perfect acoustic tone. **G**

Your bridge pins’ material – be in bone, wood, plastic or otherwise – can affect the tone of your acoustic. These diminutive parts of your acoustic can also be used to tweak the break angle with the bridge, too

THREE TO GET READY

Simple acoustic upgrades



Graph Tech Tusq Supercharger Saddle/Bridge Kit £39.99

Graph Tech’s Tusq material checks the boxes for immediate tone improvement by transferring vibrations better than, say, a cheaper plastic saddle. You’ll get boosted harmonic content and resonance without any dead spots, plus it’s ethically sound. If you fancy upgrading your saddle and bridge pins at the same time, check out Graph Tech’s Supercharger kits, which include TUSQ versions of both.



Dunlop Acoustic Pick Variety Pack £7.50

Just as your choice of strings can shape the response of your acoustic, so can the plectrums you use to play it with. You may have settled on a single brand, gauge and material, but with choices of celluloid, nylon, wood, metal, synthetic bone and more available, it’s worth experimenting. What’s more, it’s one of the most affordable tone changes/upgrades you’ll make!



LR Baggs Anthem £364

Once you’ve got your acoustic sounding tip-top, you might want to transfer that sound to performance-level volumes. LR Baggs’ Anthem system combines Tru-Mic technology with an under-saddle piezo, and it all runs through the Anthem preamp for a stellar retrofit blend system. Some drilling is required, so if you’re not confident doing it yourself, we’d suggest taking your guitar to a pro luthier for installation.



Shapes & Inversions

Richard Barrett explores alternative chord shapes to help bring fresh interest to your solos

While scales are without doubt an essential part of understanding how music and melodies work, they can sometimes leave us with unanswered questions about harmony and melody. For example, trying to come up with a mean and moody guitar solo using the major scale would be a challenge! Many of us search for new ideas while our fingers habitually reach for patterns that, while useful, don't help us expand our boundaries.

Doing this in a methodical way can seem like a daunting task – but if it were that easy, everyone would be at it! There are tangible benefits to finding alternative chord shapes (commonly referred to as 'inversions') all over the fretboard and there are practical steps you can take that will guarantee progress if you go with the flow and keep an open mind. If you're playing rock/blues solos, an approach like this may seem counterintuitive. But while you could spend this time on your technique, this activity also offers more interesting lines to play. 🎸

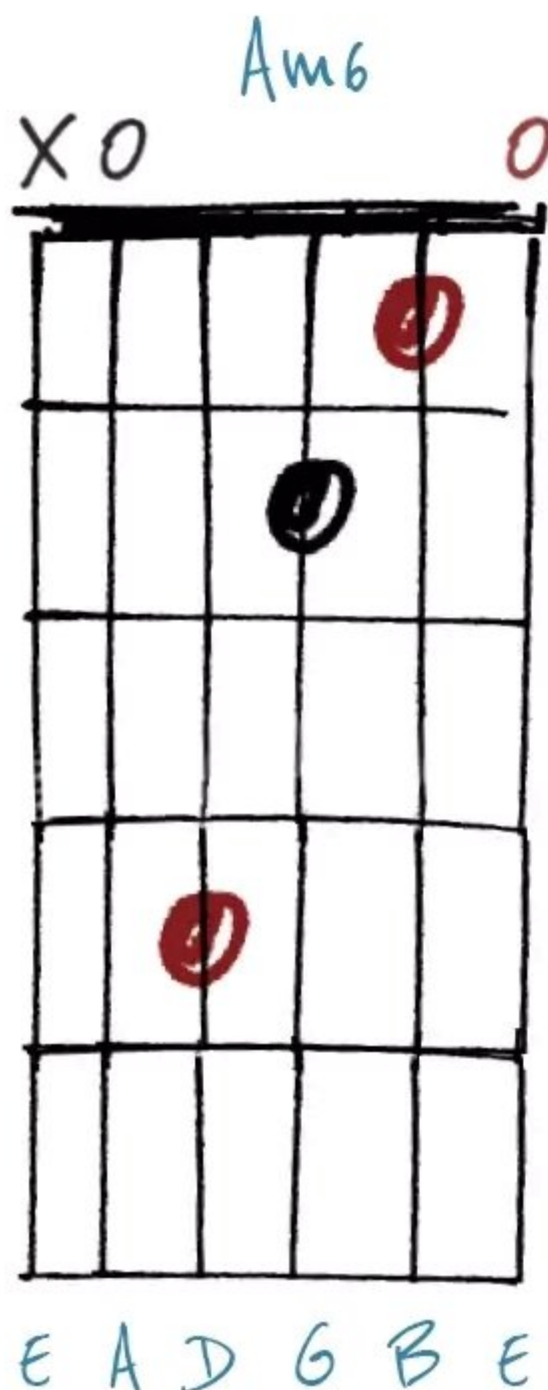


PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

Look and listen and you'll notice that Mark Knopfler uses lots of shapes and inversions in his soloing

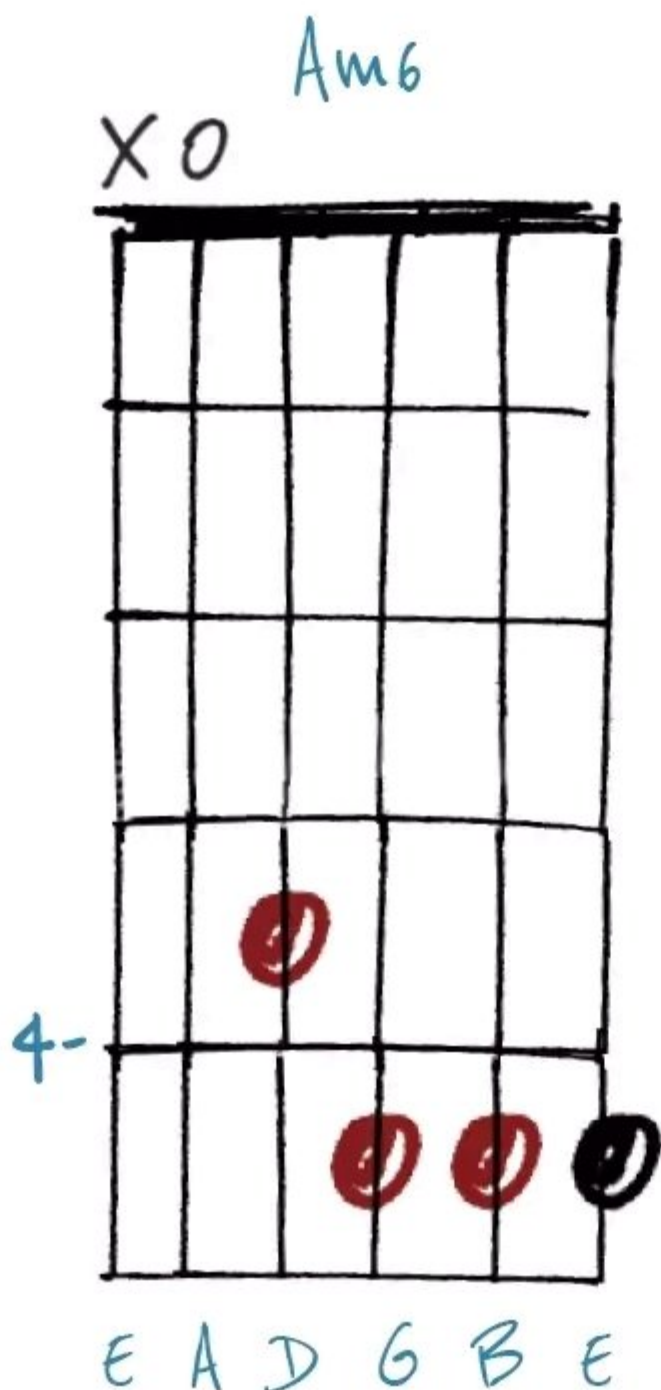
Example 1

This is an open voicing of Am6. The 6 in question is an F# on the fourth string, which adds a bit of drama to an A minor chord and is great for adding interest to melodic lines. Understanding the specific notes in a chord is hugely helpful, too – no need to be a theory genius, just look for the shapes!



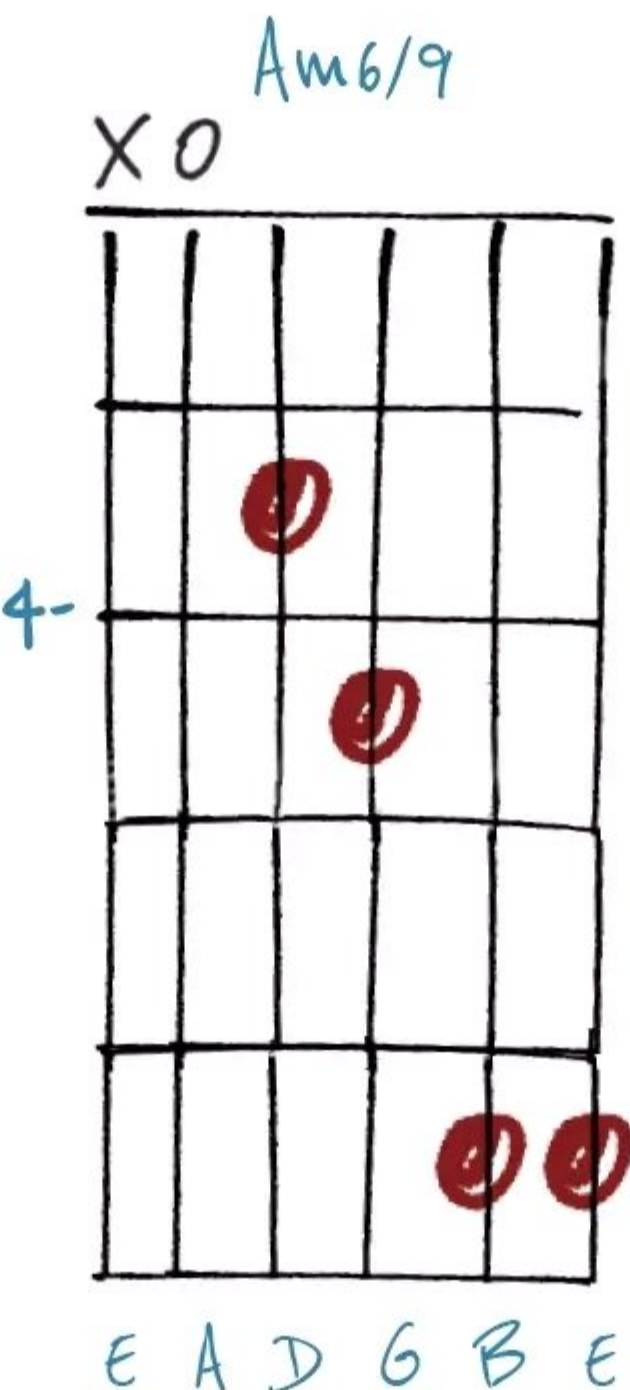
Example 2

This Am6 is more of a 'Django' voicing, though you can also see how all these notes (apart from the F#, of course) fall within the A minor pentatonic. The F# is the same one as in Example 1 on the fourth string but with all the other notes arranged or 'stacked' on top.



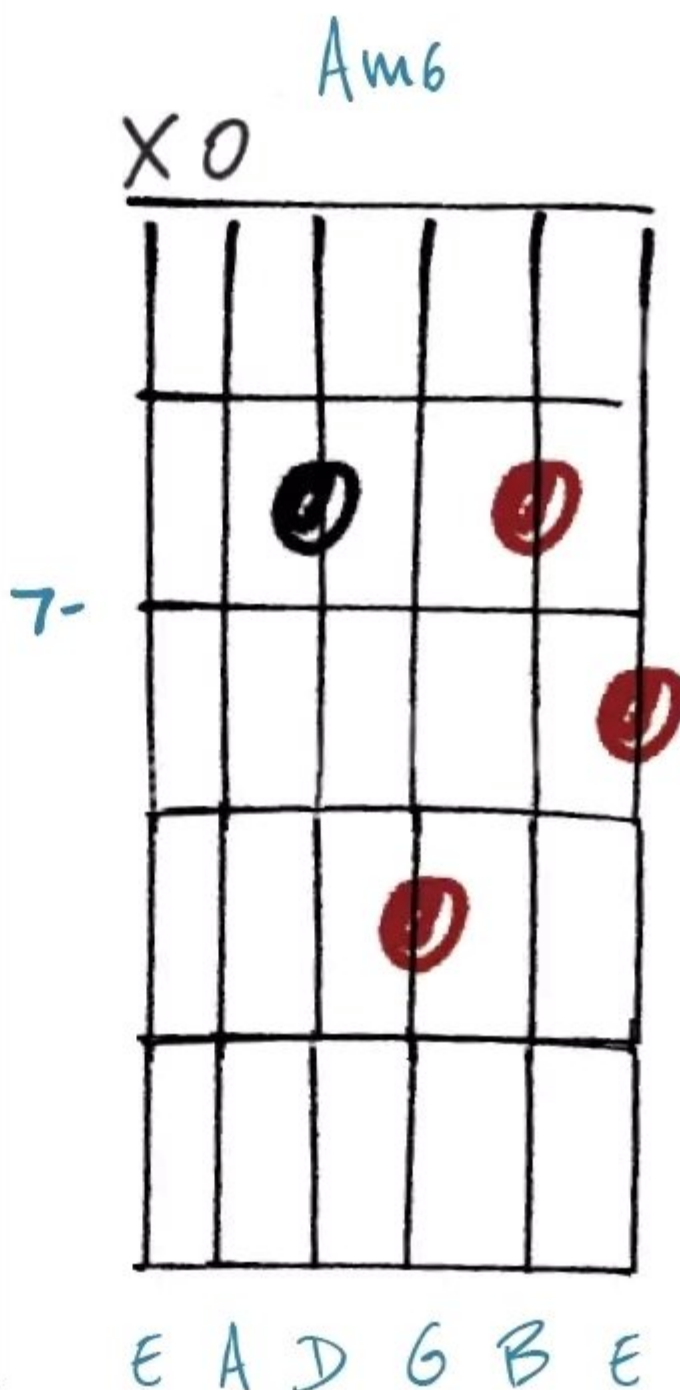
Example 3

While we're in that register, let's check out a slightly more detailed Am6/9. The 9th comes courtesy of the B on the first string. Don't feel you should have new ideas jumping forth from your fingers just yet, but putting your fingers in these perhaps unfamiliar places will have benefits.



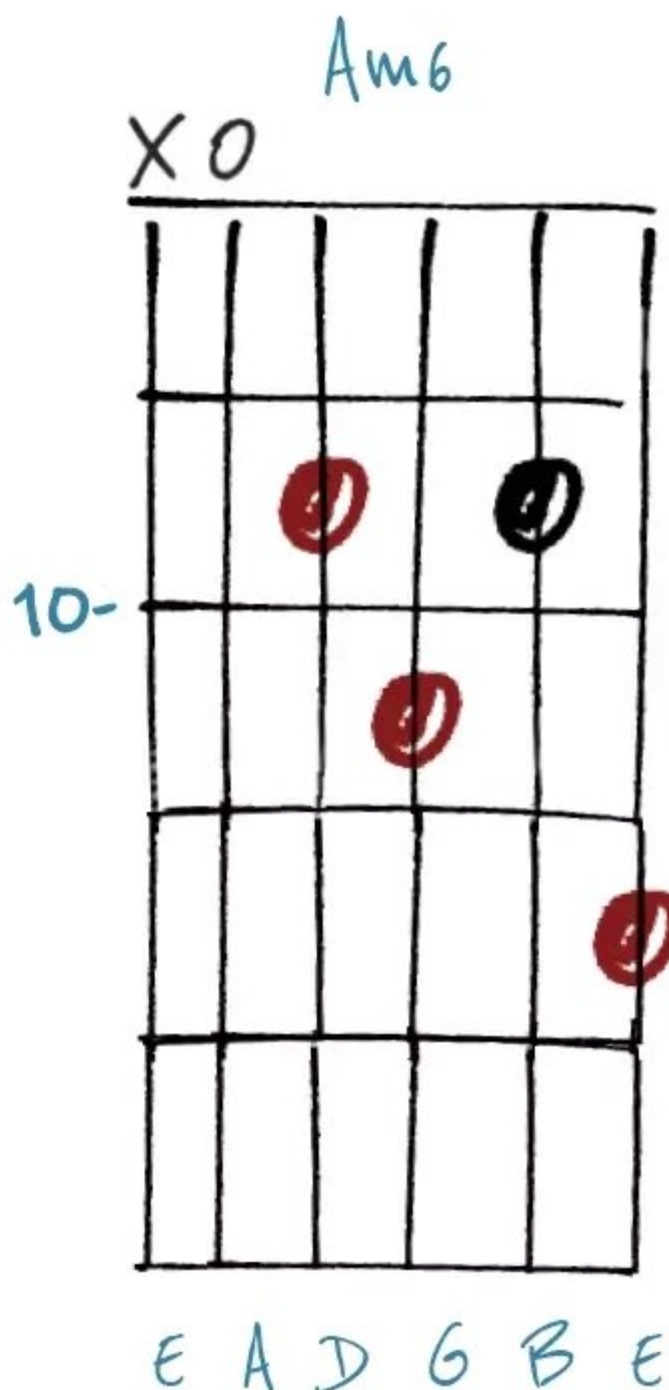
Example 4

Moving upwards, this Am6 features notes from shape 4 of the A minor pentatonic, plus the F# at the 7th fret of the second string. It's worth experimenting with some single-note lines incorporating this shape, perhaps raking across as part of a melodic line, Mark Knopfler-style.



Example 5

This final Am6 takes us up to the 12th fret, beyond which all the shapes repeat as much as space (and intonation settings!) allow. See if you can identify each note and relate it to where else we have played it in the other examples. We still get to keep all our favourite patterns and can add these, too.



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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

A NEW VOICE

I've been playing guitar and bass for a number of years and have no exceptional skills, but I have found great joy in playing with a wide range of musicians in a number of settings. Since what remains of my hair is very grey and I can't hack the late-night finishes from playing in a Home Counties barn dance band, the great majority of my playing is now in my local church as one of the worship bands. If anything, this setting gives the greatest challenge as a musician – but also the greatest accomplishment. Many express their anger or politics (sometimes both) in their music, but I would advocate expressing one's faith in the music...

So much for the background, now for the nitty gritty! I have never been a foreground singer, very much backing vocals and choruses, but that added to the sense of music and participation. Earlier this summer, I was diagnosed with mouth cancer and have now undergone the required operation, which has not left me speechless, but has definitely brought my singing to a close. The instrument in my hands is now my voice in worship, and if anything has intensified my involvement with the music. I cannot recommend this as a way to find a musical voice, but it has been surprising quite what I have found even this early on my new journey.

I sincerely hope that none of your readers find themselves in such a situation, but take heart and know that you are not alone. Whatever you need to express in your music, do that to your fullest extent, even if it involves finding a 'new normal'. Music takes on a therapeutic aspect; embrace it wholeheartedly.

James Smith

We were shocked, saddened, but then uplifted by your letter, James. It must have been a terrible ordeal to face a diagnosis and subsequent surgery that would have such a devastating effect on your musical endeavours. But you're totally right about how the guitar itself can speak and embody the same sort of emotional power as the human voice and how it can also intensify the experience of making music. The whole *Guitarist* team passes on our sincere wishes for a total recovery and the continued enrichment of your musical life.



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

www.voxamps.com

BEGINNER ACOUSTIC?

I started reading *Beat Instrumental* as a 14-year-old and now enjoy every issue of *Guitarist*! Quick question: I have £1,000 to buy an acoustic guitar for my son and wondered what your view would be. It needs to have a nice action, unlike my first acoustic, which was virtually unplayable beyond the first three frets. I'm not so bothered about the name on the headstock, more the playability and the sound. My son is just passing the beginner stage.

George Allan

Once upon a time in the UK it was virtually impossible to find a budget acoustic guitar on these shores that was kind to both the wallet and the fingers. Tales of mile high playing action and punishing playing experiences abounded. These days, however, it's a different story. We have seen many sub-£1k acoustics pass through our hands that were amazing instruments. Check out Eastman, Yamaha, Cort, Epiphone, Faith and Martin for starters, but the real test is for you and your son to go along to a reputable acoustic guitar specialist to sit and try as many as you can. Your fingers – and ears – will tell you which one is the winner.

MAKING WAVES

I have a new angle on guitar amplifiers that no-one has thought of. I was building a three-valve short wave radio using battery valves, but couldn't get it to work.



Eastman's AC 122-2CE, among others, is a great starting point for under £1k

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



So I decided to make it into a guitar amplifier and was amazed at the sustain and power you could get from this arrangement. The amplifier works using two DF96 valves running into a DL96, giving about a quarter watt of power. When using a 10-inch speaker it gives room-filling quality with a 45-volt HT battery made up of PP3 batteries in series. Okay, it's no Marshall stack, but it is something no-one else has thought of doing.

Andrew Redding

Straight down to the patents office then, Andrew? We'll admit first and foremost that not all of us are technical wizards regarding all things valve-oriented, but we can imagine the satisfaction you must have experienced from making your own amplifier. A quarter of a watt is enough for practice and home use – maybe you'll end up hungry for more power and using the knowledge you have gained to experiment further. Next stop 50 watts?

We're used to hearing from readers who have built their own guitars, but has anyone else built their own amp? Let us know, send us pictures and we'll share the news.

LIFE IS GOOD

Thought I would like to tell you about my musical life. I took interest in playing guitar at the age of 13, inspired by Buddy Holly and many others at that time. Formed a band, made my pink-and-black guitar and played rock 'n' roll at a local dance hall. I later played professionally with our band 'The Coronets' and I destroyed the value of my 1963 Stratocaster by spray-painting it white, but years later had it restored beautifully to its original sunburst. Music brings so much joy to people's lives as I have sung, played and entertained over many years. Now, at the age of 79, I have a fine collection of instruments that I enjoy playing daily: I say, 'Thank you for the music'!

Incidentally, may I just mention how beautiful your magazine front covers are? I feel as though I could frame each and every one – simply outstanding.

Robert Kenney

We must admit the part about spraying a 1963 Strat white made us wince a bit, but, by the look of the picture you sent us [shown above], it has been restored to its former glory and is doubtless worth far more than you paid for it all those years ago! We have interviewed many artists in these pages whose musical career began after hearing Buddy Holly and who have gone on to have a long and industrious life in the music industry. They also tell us of the joy they have felt in the simple act of entertaining people and how music seems to be an international language that goes way beyond geographical borders. And many thanks for your comments about our covers, designed by art editor extraordinaire, Darren, too!



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MARTIN SIMPSON

Folk guitar maestro Martin Simpson's latest record, *Nothing But Green Willow*, is a stunningly beautiful collection of folk songs passed down by the people of America's Appalachian Mountains. We join Martin to discover how he and some of the world's best folk musicians brought the songs to life once again

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

If you take an interest in folk, blues and other traditional styles of guitar music, you may have encountered a puzzling phenomenon when you try to understand where the styles come from. You can trace them back easily enough to the pre-war years of the 1930s and maybe a little before. But all too often, as one delves back further into the past, the trail becomes harder to follow...

Part of the reason is that the deepest roots of modern music derive from folk song, which was passed down orally from mother to daughter, from father to son. During England's industrial revolution, many of these centuries-old musical traditions died out, as people moved from field to factory and the pattern of their lives changed utterly. These sweeping changes might have meant extinction for some of England's most beautiful and haunting folk-melodies – except for the fact that earlier English migrants to America took those songs with them. Like a plant uprooted from its native soil but replanted in fertile land far away, these songs survived and even flourished in the mountains of Kentucky and South Carolina.

Eventually, in the early 20th century, Cecil Sharp – an influential chronicler of folk music – learned about these surviving fragments of musical history and, aided by his indefatigable assistant Maud Karpeles, he ventured up into the trackless woods of the Appalachians and faithfully notated the songs people sang to him there. Now, more than a century later, folk guitarist Martin

Simpson and producer Thomm Jutz have brought together a stellar line-up of English and American folk musicians to perform some of the poignant and powerful songs Sharp collected during his travels. We join Martin in his Sheffield home to find out more – and try some of his delectable collection of vintage and custom acoustic guitars...

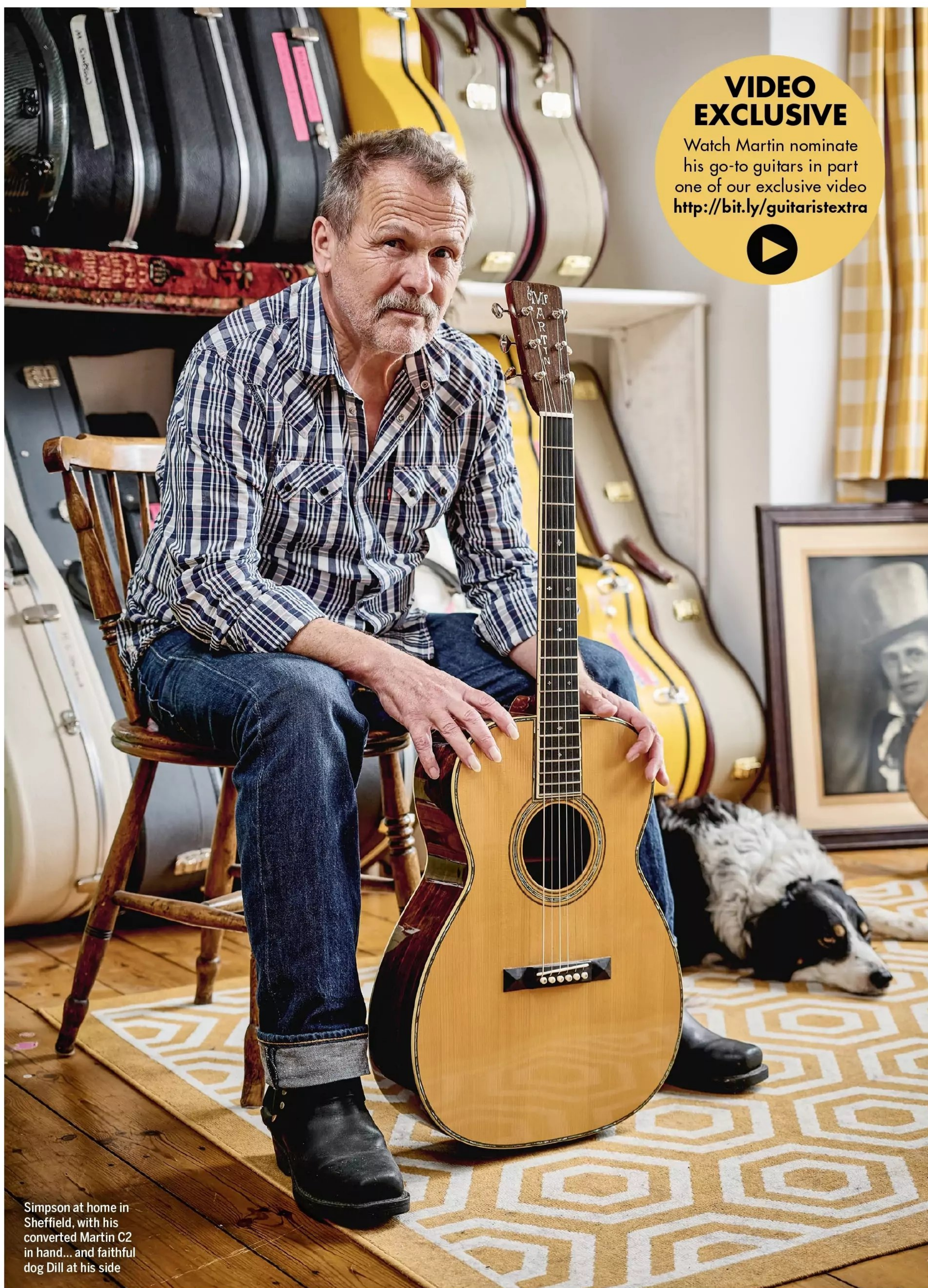
What's the story behind *Nothing But Green Willow*? Where do the songs come from?

"The premise is actually [from] this big book here – *English Folk Songs From The Southern Appalachians*, collected by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles in 1916 and 1918. Cecil Sharp is renowned for being the main folk song collector in England and a lot of what we now know about English folk music goes back to Cecil Sharp's collecting. He started in the early years of the 20th century and he was not a modern man – he wasn't a young man when he started, either. Some of his ideas were a bit sketchy and a bit unpleasant, but he did amass an incredible collection of songs.

"He became known in the States and he was asked to go to America to contribute music to a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in New York. While he was there, American song collectors and folklorists told him there was this extraordinary repository of English songs in the southern Appalachians, in North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee, because the place was full of English immigrants. And so he went and collected them."

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE

Watch Martin nominate
his go-to guitars in part
one of our exclusive video
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



Simpson at home in
Sheffield, with his
converted Martin C2
in hand... and faithful
dog Dill at his side

Reading the liner notes, the story of how Cecil and Maud crawled across bridges and tree trunks to reach remote villages is like something from a Coen Brothers movie...

“Well, yes [laughs]. Cecil used to bicycle around England, but you couldn’t bicycle around North Carolina then, there were no roads. So the thought of him and Maud Karpeles – who was an upper-middle-class lady – crossing trees across rivers... it was just phenomenal.”

The *Nothing But Green Willow* project was done in partnership with German musician and producer Thomm Jutz. How did you come to work with him on this project?

“Thomm Jutz is fantastic, he’s a fascinating character. He grew up in Bavaria and when he was six – he told me this just the other day – he was watching television and there was a singer called Bobby Bare, who was [singing a song called] *Tequila Sheila* and Thomm went, ‘That’s it. That’s what I want to do when I grow up.’

“Thomm is a professor at Belmont University in Nashville, he teaches songwriting. He’s constantly nominated for Grammys and for IBMA awards, and he’s a great guitar player, really good singer, really good producer. He’s worked with everybody and their dog!

“He had this idea that we should make a record based on the songs [Sharp and Karpeles collected from] two women in particular, Jane Gentry and Mary Sands, who were from Hot Springs, North Carolina. That’s in Madison County, which is renowned for being the site of absolutely brutal American Civil War stuff, horrific stuff.

“Thomm Jutz is a fascinating character... he’s a great guitar player, really good singer, really good producer”

“So I had a Zoom call with Thomm, talked about it, and said, ‘It’d be great to keep it simple – we should each pick six songs, and five other singers apart from ourselves.’ Every time I say this, it just makes me laugh. Because it’s such a risky premise, you know? You pick the songs, you pick the singers, you assign the songs to the singers.

And then – what could possibly go wrong? [laughs] – we have to record them.

“I was in the States in July 2022 doing Richard Thompson’s guitar workshop, and then I flew down to Nashville [to meet] Thomm, who I hadn’t met before; we’d never played together. He picked me up at the airport, took me to my hotel and said, ‘Come over to my place, and let’s sit down and see what we can do.’

“The first thing he did was play his version of *The Gypsy Laddie*, which is on the record. He’s a beautiful, beautiful guitar player, and he plays in standard tuning with a flat pick. It was great because it meant we were inhabiting different parts of the instrument in lots of ways. So we then sat down and I started to play along – within five minutes, we went, ‘Yeah, it’s gonna work.’ So that was the first track we recorded, we just nailed the guitar part.”

There are some extraordinary vocal performances on the album, which your and Thomm’s guitar work frames beautifully. Tell us about the challenges of getting each track to work with a range of British and American singers.

“*Pretty Saro*, which was sung by Odessa Settles, was one of the most interesting tracks to do... Her father [Walter Settles] was in the Fairfield Four – a massively successful and influential American gospel group. She’s a gospel singer and she was also the advisor for African American talent on the Baz Luhrmann *Elvis* movie, which is full of great performances by Black artists. Odessa sang on the soundtrack as well. So she came into the studio and we said, ‘What key would you like this in?’ And she said, ‘I don’t know.’ So we moved around a bit [trying to find the best key]. Because of the way I tune the guitar, I might have to completely change the tuning in order to cope with it. For instance, if somebody wants to sing in G, I’m probably going to use a G tuning. If it’s in E, I’m probably not [laughs].

“So we got there in a couple of minutes of going, ‘Oh, that’s it, that’s where we go,’ and then we did maybe two run-throughs and recorded it. And it was done. There was no strict time [signature] at the beginning of that performance at all. The only time you felt, ‘Oh, wait, that’s in 3/4’ was on one of the instrumental verses. We were listening to her intake of breath to know when the line was gonna start, stuff like that. And it’s just bliss. I mean, what a fantastic thing to do? It’s how music should be – and it so rarely is.

“I’m very proud of this record because none of the tracks took longer than two hours... There are only two tracks on there that I actually did overdubs on – one of them was Sierra Hull’s version of *Geordie*. Thomm couldn’t get Sierra or Dale Ann Bradley [on *Jacob’s Ladder*] to be there when I was there, so he recorded those and I did overdubs on them.”

1. Martin’s connection with award-winning producer and musician Thomm Jutz started life over Zoom. “He’s worked with everybody and their dog,” says Martin



PRE-WAR MARTIN C2 CONVERSION

At first glance this beautiful vintage Martin could be taken for an OM-42, but it is in fact a very skilful conversion of a pre-war Martin C2 archtop. The C2, in original archtop form, was sonically a bit of a dud (as pre-war Martins go) and the model has largely been forgotten. However, this one has been rebuilt to create a more desirable and usable flat-top OM spec, while retaining genuine pre-war Martin pedigree in its body woods, including Brazilian rosewood back and sides that still bear faint tooling marks from Martin's 1930s workshop.

Martin Simpson says: "This is a TJ Thompson conversion of a C2 and it manages to be one of the best guitars I've ever played, despite the fact it's kind of rebuilt. Honestly, if this was what it is now, in its original form, there's no way on Earth I could afford to get it... but the fact it's a conversion and the headstock [had to be re-attached after a break] meant I could buy it. But it has this peculiar element to it – because it was originally designed as an archtop the back's designed differently and [its sound] is very piano-like."





TURNSTONE TM MODEL

“This is made by Rosie Heydenrych down in Surrey,” says Martin of this beautiful and sonorous TM Model with a cutaway. “Rosie uses a lot of native British timbers, so this features sycamore and spalted beech, while the binding is made of bog oak that’s four or five thousand years old. The body, though, is not a British wood – it’s reclaimed mahogany and it’s just exquisite timber. The way she uses wood is exemplary. This guitar is articulate, it has fantastic sustain and it can be very percussive, too. It’s a beautiful guitar and that line there [points at the gracefully sculpted heel of the neck] is just a work of art. If you look at the way Rosie has made the heel, it gives you better access to the cutaway.”

Like Martin’s other guitars, the Turnstone TM has tremendous dynamics, sounding breathy and detailed when played quiet but retaining its composure and punch when played hard. “Dynamic range in a guitar is so important,” Martin says. “I realised that playing [Stefan] Sobell’s guitars. You can keep hitting a Sobell harder and harder and it will not overload.”

Was it challenging to get the overdubs to feel natural given the ‘in the room’ feeling you’d achieved with the other recordings?

“Well, it was funny because Sierra Hull is a godlike mandolin player. She is one of the young generation of mind-bogglingly great musicians, great players. Her husband, Justin Moses, was also playing on the track [and when I told people] they immediately went, ‘Oh is he playing dobro? Or is he playing banjo? Or is he playing guitar?’ And I said, ‘Well, no, he’s playing fiddle!’ It’s like, ‘Well, he plays them all equally well...’ So I had to sit there and listen to this track, which is just so beautiful. But Thomm, who was producing us, said, ‘I really want you to play clawhammer banjo on this track.’ Which is like overdubbing with Einstein or something! [laughs] Completely insane. But I did it and I’m very proud of it.”

“So, anyway, we did five tracks in the States. Then we came [to the UK] and shifted gears a bit because we weren’t in one studio. We started down in Frome and recorded Cara Dillon [singing *Come All You Fair And Tender Ladies*] with Sam Lakeman. Then the next day, we had Seth Lakeman come in, and again we only did three takes of *Edward*. Basically, we could have recorded it in the kitchen the first time we played it through and it would have been like it is. To actually catch a performance like that is really interesting. If you listen to Seth’s track, his voice is almost shot because he came to the studio straight from a festival gig... But you know what? It doesn’t matter. If anything, it makes it more real, it makes it more of a performance that you’ve caught.”

You arranged these songs beautifully for guitar, but they wouldn’t have been accompanied by guitar originally, we’re guessing?

“No, they were almost all unaccompanied. And likewise, in the States the singers that Sharp collected were mostly singing unaccompanied. But – and this is the thing that fascinates me about American folk music – there was a complete change in the way people performed those songs. A lot of it came from the fact there was huge input from African American musicians. Take, for example, *The Wagoner’s Lad*, the song I recorded on *Nothing But*

MUIDERMAN CUSTOM

This sonically stunning and highly advanced acoustic is the latest addition to Martin Simpson's collection. It was built by Kevin Muiderman, a former plastic surgeon based in North Dakota who specialised in treating catastrophic injuries. Now retired, Muiderman has turned his intricate surgical skills to lutherie, building guitars that are as advanced in design as they are richly resonant.

"The parallel evolution between this guitar and the Taran is really interesting," Martin says. "This guitar [body] is made of aberrant Brazilian rosewood, which would not be stable enough to make a guitar so it was laminated with mahogany for the back and sides. The top is Sitka spruce and obviously Kevin does like wood! The 'bearclaw' [figuring] on the Sitka is like nothing I've ever seen."

The guitar has advanced graphite composite bracing, a very strong material that permits the use of an extra-light soundboard. "It has the lightest top you can imagine," Martin says, "In fact, the entire guitar is built to support that top – and you can hear how articulate and responsive the top is."



Green Willow. I knew that song because it was recorded by a man called Buell Kazee, who is one of the gods of American folk music, as far as I'm concerned. He made recordings in 1927 and I thought that was kind of the end of it. So I was so shocked to find a film of him in the 1960s playing the banjo and demonstrating his technique. He was a phenomenal singer with this outrageous banjo

“As a kid, I became fascinated: blues, banjo playing, all the different things, English traditional music, Scots music”

playing, which I kind of made reference to in the way I played the accompaniment of that song.

“[In the early 20th century you had accompaniment] from the banjo and fiddle, and the mandolin as well. But the guitar in old-timey music is not necessarily that interesting. But as it develops, and as it takes more African American influence onboard, it becomes more and more

interesting. Then you get to the point where you've got Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley playing songs that have these floating verses from Old English traditional songs, which Buell Kazee called 'vagrant stanzas' – one of my favourite expressions, which I've used for an album title [in 2013]. So it is a constant cross-fertilisation, as far as I'm concerned.

“When I was a kid, I was listening to all these different strands and the more I became fascinated, the more I would absorb different strands: blues, banjo playing, all the different things, English traditional music, Scots music and batting it back and forth all the time. I even used to joke and say I invented American folk music doing this [laughs].”

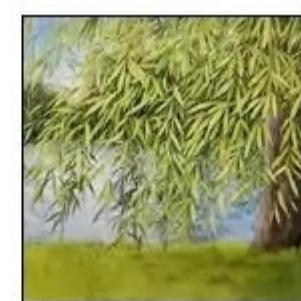
2. Martin says he looks for good dynamics, sustain and percussive qualities in his guitars. In other words: all of the good stuff, all of the time!

What guitars did you use to record *Nothing But Green Willow*?

‘I played two guitars on the album. One was, to my great surprise, a [Martin] Norman Blake 000-18 signature model, which was a very simple guitar based on the regular modern [laughs]... 1930 body shape, 14-fret neck. Except [US bluegrass musician] Norman Blake had them make it a 12-fret neck simply by moving the bridge down. And, boy, did that work! It's a great guitar. I mean, if I could find one – they hardly made any – I would certainly have one of those. The other guitar I used is my Taran [pictured, right], which I now use on stage exclusively because it's just... everything about it works on stage. I mean, the pickup system is insane.”

You have such a diverse and extraordinary collection of vintage and custom acoustics. What's the common thread? What qualities do you look for in an acoustic?

“I'm looking to have variety, but for the guitars to also be articulate, pianistic... that's what I'm looking for. Occasionally, you find yourself in a position where you might want to make a sound like a particular old recording. I spend a lot of time utilising open strings, rather than [traditional barre chords], and I always joke when I'm teaching people, ‘When you make that chord shape [plays an F], it's obvious why it's called the ‘F’ chord!’ Why would you want to do that? [laughs]” **G**



Nothing But Green Willow: The Songs Of Mary Sands And Jane Gentry is out now on Proper Music
<https://martinsimpson.com>



TARAN THIRGA MHOR

The Scots Gaelic name of this guitar apparently translates as 'shit hot', Martin tells us! And it certainly lives up to it. The instrument is the fruit of years of development work by Martin Simpson and Taran luthier Rory Dowling. Based in Pittenweem in Scotland, Dowling's guitars are informed by the work of Stefan Sobell (whose guitars Martin also uses) but also innovate in very distinctive ways.

The Thirga Mhor's design and voice was inspired by a visit to Martin Simpson. "[Rory] played a vintage 1931 000-18 that I owned at the time," Martin recalls. "It was a ridiculous guitar – really quite astonishing. And we talked about the idea of building a 12-fret guitar, inspired by a very vintage instrument. And what fascinates me about this guitar is you would not think to look at it, hear it or play it, that anything about it was inspired by 1931 000-18! Because it's very modern, it's very avant garde, in some ways – the bracing is outrageous."

The Thirga Mhor is now Martin's main stage-performance guitar, quite an accomplishment in this company.



GRETSCH ***140***



It's almost impossible to sum up the sound of Gretsch guitars. Think about it. On the one hand you have the clean-cut country sound of Chet Atkins, or the lowdown twang of Duane Eddy, or perhaps the pop stylings of George Harrison, or even the rockabilly riffing of Eddie Cochran. But hang on a minute, what about Billy Duffy raising the roof with his White Falcon in The Cult? Or Malcolm Young's '63 Jet Firebird tearing it up with AC/DC? The further you look into it, the more diverse things become, defying categorisation with every flick of the plectrum.

An overview is long overdue and so, celebrating a milestone in the company's long history, we look back over the years with the help of the Gretsch museum in Savannah, Georgia, which houses some of the earliest instruments the original Brooklyn-based company produced. Then we hear from Fred Gretsch himself, outlining the dynastic arc of the family business that was established in the 19th century. Coming up to date we talk to the players who have found a home in the Gretsch sound, be it modern rock or museum grade rock 'n' roll. Let the festivities begin...

Guitarist would like to express thanks to ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, Gardiner & Houlgate in Corsham and Vintage 'n' Rare in Bath for allowing us access to the fabulous Gretsch instruments in this month's issue

Photography Neil Godwin, Olly Curtis & Phil Barker



(1992)

GRETSCH BLACK FALCON G7594BK

Gretsch was sold to Baldwin Pianos in 1967 and production was moved to Arkansas in 1969. The company struggled throughout the 70s, and by 1984 Baldwin was bankrupt. In 1985, Fred W Gretsch brought the company back into family ownership and production of Gretsch guitars resumed in 1989. Even vintage Gretsch die-hards would have to concede that the new guitars from the Terada factory in Japan were better made and more consistent than many vintage ones – despite the electronics needing improvement. This Black Falcon from '92 features a Chet Atkins wire Bigsby handle and exemplifies the relaunched Gretsch company's policy of introducing new models that honoured the classic Gretsch aesthetic.

GUITAR COURTESY OF GARDINER HOU LGATEAUCTIONEERS



THAT GREAT GRETSCH SOUND!

Georgia Southern University in Savannah is home to an exciting project, in association with Fred and Dinah Gretsch, to preserve the Gretsch company's rich heritage in the form of a very special museum... We join the museum's experts to find out more

Words David Mead

Apart from funding music education at the university itself, Fred and Dinah Gretsch have donated some historic Gretsch guitars and other artefacts to a museum overseen by the university in Georgia. Situated at the Plant Riverside District in Savannah, it tells the story of the development of Gretsch as a major force in the guitar marketplace and contains some of the brand's most prized vintage instruments. We join coordinator Aaron Phillips and curator Dr Matthew Hill to find out more.

How did the museum come about?

Aaron Phillips: "Fred and Dinah Gretsch have been in the Savannah area now for over 30 years and they have always had partnerships with Georgia Southern – they've had a scholarship in our School of Music, another one in our business programme – so they've always had a vested interest in the university. They approached our new president, Dr Kyle Marrero, about making a large gift to the university. It all really started with them wanting to fund our School

of Music, because if you know Fred and Dinah at all, especially Dinah, her life's work is in music education. She's worked with the Georgia Music Foundation here in the state of Georgia for over 25 years. With that financial donation and the partnership with the School of Music, they also decided to donate their entire personal collection of instruments, artefacts, personal records and a lot of company stuff relating to artists."

"Gretsch started as a general musical instrument manufacturer. They didn't specialise originally"

DR MATTHEW HILL, CURATOR

And the museum itself is housed in downtown Savannah?

Aaron: "Our current president had the idea to partner with Richard Kessler, who runs the Kessler Collection here in Georgia; he's got a series of hotels and resorts around the world. They had just built a new downtown district in Savannah and they were adding on a new building to an existing



Aaron Phillips, coordinator of the Fred and Dinah Gretsch Instrument and Artifact Collection at Georgia Southern University

hotel. They bought an old power plant that sits on the Savannah River, this historic building, and renovated it. That building in and of itself as well is kind of a museum, too, dedicated to natural resources and natural history from around the coastal plains.

"They wanted to do something similar with that new building and our president happened to be having lunch with Richard Kessler, two or three days after we had just signed the contracts with Fred and Dinah. He said, 'Well, Georgia Southern is about to be getting this huge collection of historic rock 'n' roll instruments and all this other stuff. So maybe we could do a rock 'n' roll museum?' It's called District Live, which is partnered with Live Nation and they have a concert venue there. So Richard Kessler said, 'Yeah, sounds good!'"

How big is the exhibition?

Aaron: "We've got over 100 guitars on display down there, some drum sets and in addition to the instruments, Fred and Dinah essentially let us come into their offices and go through them for

Savannah's new entertainment district, the Plant Riverside, houses a permanent display of Gretsch music memorabilia



historical artefacts – anything that we thought would not only contribute to this exhibit but would contribute to a robust artefact collection to be housed at the university as well. So we've got some really, really cool stuff: everything all the way back to the late 19th century, early 20th century band instruments, you know? A lot of people don't know that Gretsch produced and sold brass and woodwind instruments for school bands back in the day. So we've got a bunch of those."

So the museum delves right back into Gretsch's history?

Dr Matthew Hill: "To expand a little bit on what Aaron was saying about the company, people know that Gretsch is an old company, but I think they have a misunderstanding of what the company was then as opposed to now. Originally, they started off as very much a general musical instrument manufacturer that specialised in drums. Back in those days, because of the way musical instruments were sold, literally by travelling salesmen going to music stores, they would try to sell the music store everything. They didn't have specialisation like they do now."

"So even though the company specialised in making drums and percussion instruments, they had other things that they sold because that's what companies did if they wanted to be successful. So they started off making drums and they segued into banjos, because basically a banjo is just a drum with a neck on it. Then, if you take the neck off the banjo you're almost there all the way to a guitar. And so they went into guitars. I mean, that's greatly oversimplified, but that's essentially what happened. And, of course, when the electric



guitar thing came out in the early 50s, they're like, 'Oh, yeah, we should make these.'"

What instruments would you say represent the highlights of the museum's collection?

Aaron: "We don't necessarily have the greatest idea of everything we have still. We're just through the first phase of cataloguing all of our guitars in conjunction with a few grad students that we have here at the university. But what we can tell you is we've got probably two dozen Chet Atkins Country Gentlemen, the highlight guitar for their catalogue over the years. We've got several White Falcons that I think everyone



Dr Matthew Hill, curator of Fred and Dinah Gretsch Instrument and Artifact Collection at Georgia Southern University

(c. early 1930s)

GRETSCH AMERICAN TENOR ACOUSTIC

(c. 1936)

GRETSCH ORCHESTRA MODEL NO. 150

"These two instruments are some of the first acoustic archtop guitars that were featured in Gretsch's expansive catalogue between 1933 and 1936," curator Aaron Phillips tells us. "While we cannot 100 per cent confirm the production date of the four-string Tenor Acoustic, it is likely one of the six guitars found in the 1934 Gretsch catalogue – the first year that Gretsch produced guitars for public consumption. The Orchestra Model 150 guitar is a fantastic example of the ornate styling that Gretsch incorporated into their early guitars, featuring a hand-carved and bookmatched solid spruce top, solid maple neck, engraved ebony pickguard/fingerboard, and mother-of-pearl headstock and fingerboard inlays."



(2009)

**GRETSCH 6121
ROUNDUP CUSTOM**

“The 6121 Roundup, produced at Gretsch’s celebrated factory in Terada, Japan, is one of the most unique instruments in the entire Gretsch catalogue,” says the museum. “Its orange finish, G-branded chambered archtop body, tooled leather trim, steer and cactus engraved inlays, and buffalo-branded headstock are callbacks to the original 6120 Gretsch produced for country music legend Chet Atkins in 1954. These unique features can best be seen as the Brooklyn-based company’s attempt to appeal to the country western aesthetic of Nashville musicians in the mid-1950s. Despite Atkins’ request to remove most of this iconography for the first edition Country Gentleman, produced in 1957, fans and artists alike continue to celebrate the 1954 model as one of Gretsch’s finest creations.”

(1996)

**GRETSCH DUANE EDDY
SIGNATURE 6120**

This Duane Eddy Signature 6120 from the year the model was introduced features brass hardware, twin Dynasonic pickups and a Bigsby vibrato. “This signature model perfectly replicates the unmistakable sounds of the ‘King of Twang,’” says the museum.

(1962)

**GRETSCH CHET ATKINS
COUNTRY GENTLEMAN**

“[This model] will forever be enshrined in rock ‘n’ roll history as the guitar that George Harrison played during The Beatles’ live performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964,” says the museum. “Its large three-ply maple top with simulated f-holes, gold ‘G-Arrow’ control knobs, and iconic gold pickguard and Bigsby vibrato distinguished the Country Classic from other instruments of early British Invasion era.”

would recognise, but probably the coolest guitars that we have, though, are the 6130 Roundup guitars. Matthew and I are absolutely obsessed with those! They were the smaller solidbody electric guitars that Gretsch made to continue to appeal to the Chet Atkins audience and the country and western audience. And one of the coolest stories about the Chet Atkins guitar is how on the very first one that Gretsch made for him in 1954, they put all of that country and western iconography on it because they were a Brooklyn manufacturing company who is all of a sudden partnered with a Southern country artist...”

Matthew: “And they basically assumed that because he’s in Nashville, he must be into steers and cacti and guns and old fence posts and round-ups and chuck wagons because, of course!

Whereas in real life Chet Atkins is the kind of guy who goes, ‘No, I like my martinis dry.’ You know what I mean? The best thing is they actually got a branding iron and branded a huge G on the top of the guitar. You’ve got to remember that these were incredibly expensive guitars. A Roundup, which is essentially pretty much identical to a Duo Jet but cost almost twice as much, was more expensive than a Les Paul Custom.”

What sort of form does the museum take?

Aaron: “We have guitars that really run the gamut. Some of our earliest go back to the early 1930s. There are two sections [to the exhibition]. The first section is where we put up the best of the best because it’s what everyone sees first. So those are our biggest and flashiest: White Falcons, we’ve got our Duane Eddy

“Gretsch assumed, because he’s in Nashville, Chet Atkins must be into steers and cacti and round-ups...”

DR MATTHEW HILL, CURATOR

there, Brian Setzer Custom, the Malcolm Young guitars, Bo Diddley – all the real iconic ones. But then what we did in the second room, which is the concert venue – it’s basically just a big square room with the stage at one end – we have three walls to work with. So I started at one corner and went around the room in chronological order, so you could see the evolution of Gretsch guitars over the years. If you start on one end and walk around the room, you begin with our earliest guitar, an early 1930s tenor acoustic.” 
<https://cah.georgiasouthern.edu/gretsch-museum>

INTRODUCING

Touchstone Series

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Bourgeois
Guitars



GOLDEN YEARS

The 1950s and 60s were decades of innovation and rapid technical development at Gretsch – spearheaded by guitarist, demonstrator and designer Jimmie Webster – that resulted in the design aesthetic and sonic character that continue to define the brand...

Words Huw Price **Photography** Olly Curtis & Phil Barker

If the record-buying public had warmed to Jimmie Webster's 'Touch System' two-handed tapping technique, then the Gretsch brand that we know today might never have existed. Webster was an accomplished guitarist who played for Woody Herman and Count Basie during the 1930s, and who also tuned pianos when he wasn't travelling the US and appearing on TV to demonstrate Gretsch guitars. His role at Gretsch had similarities with Ted McCarthy's at Gibson and Leo Fender's at his namesake brand. He was pivotal in establishing the post-war Gretsch aesthetic and was a driving force behind Gretsch's most iconic models. He also developed hardware, pickups and wiring harnesses.

Like his contemporaries, Webster observed trends in the automobile industry and the way car manufacturers maintained demand for older models by introducing new features and colours every year. With Fender revolutionising guitar design and rock 'n' roll driving the market, Webster

probably understood that Gretsch guitars were still essentially pre-war archtops and radical thinking was needed to stay in the game.

The 1950s and 60s were decades of change and innovation at Gretsch. Webster's contributions range from the iconic and wildly successful to borderline bonkers, and we'll be discussing them all throughout this feature as we take a deep dive into the technical development of Gretsch Guitars throughout the vintage era.

Electric Experiments

The first Gretsch Electromatic appeared back in 1939 and it featured a non-cutaway body with multi-coloured binding, a single 'neck' pickup and two Bakelite control knobs. These Electromatics were actually manufactured for Gretsch by Kay, and the quality doesn't look that good.

Gretsch production was put on hold when the US joined World War II, and Gretsch players who wanted to go electric were more likely to retrofit aftermarket 'floating' pickups. The famous photo of Django Reinhart

1. A 1955 Gretsch 6196 Country Club in Cadillac Green with two DeArmond Dynasonic pickups

playing a Gretsch shows a blonde Synchronic archtop, most likely fitted with a Leutone pickup.

Meanwhile, out in Ohio, a company called the Fox Sound Equipment Corporation had started making pickups for guitars. An accomplished local guitarist called Harry DeArmond had been taken on as a design consultant during the 1930s and the company's name was soon changed to Rowe Industries.

With its power, brightness and clarity, the Dynasonic is often associated with the greatest Gretsch tones of the vintage era

DeArmond Dynasonic

Gretsch production was ramping back up by 1949, when the company introduced a new 6185 Electromatic model featuring a single pickup named after its inventor Harry DeArmond. The DeArmond Dynasonic or 'Fidelatone', as it was sometimes called, would remain Gretsch's pickup of choice until 1958.

The Dynasonic had six individually adjustable magnets and typically read about 14kohms. But they were wound with relatively thin 44 AWG plain enamel wire, so they're not as hot as that figure suggests. Gretsch also used celluloid shims to balance out bridge and neck pickups. With its power, brightness and clarity, the Dynasonic is often associated with the greatest Gretsch tones of the vintage era. But Chet Atkins – who was Gretsch's highest profile endorser – never liked them. He struggled with hum and found it difficult to achieve a balanced response. He also felt the strong magnets compromised sustain by exerting excessive pull on the strings.

2. The DeArmond Dynasonic was Gretsch's pickup of choice until the Filter'Tron and HiLo'Tron were introduced into the company's range

GUITAR COURTESY OF ATB GUITARS



Filter'Trons

Chet got to know Ray Butts when he bought one of his Echosonic amplifiers, and he had made Ray aware of the issues he was experiencing with Dynasonics. A while later, Ray showed Chet a prototype pickup loaded in his test guitar and asked him, "How would you like a pickup that doesn't hum?" According to Ray, that happened in 1954, and by September 1956 Chet was playing the Grand Ole Opry with a set of Ray's humbuckers installed in his black 6120 prototype. Chet suggested to Gretsch that they should consider using Ray's pickups.

Gretsch wasn't pleased about Rowe Industries' new production

deal with Chuck Rubovits of Harmony Guitars, so it was agreed that Ray and Jimmie Webster would collaborate to develop a production version of Ray's pickup. Gretsch would manufacture them in-house and in return Ray would receive royalties.

In 1957, the 'Filter'Tron Electronic Guitar Head' was launched at the same trade show as the Gibson PAF. The production version had small transparent nylon bobbins with space for the 42 AWG magnet wire. Vintage Filter'Trons typically read in the 4k to 5k range, so thicker Alnico V magnets were used to strengthen the magnetic field and increase inductance, which boosted midrange and output.



(1961)

GRETSCH CHET ATKINS 6120 SINGLE CUT

Arguably the most iconic Gretsch model of all, the 6120 underwent many changes between 1955 and 1961. ATB's all-original final-year example here was the first 6120 imported to Ireland. It features a side screw mortice and tenon neck joint, Filter'Tron humbucking pickups, a 'mud switch' and Gretsch's specially designed B6C Bigsby vibrato. At 2.25 inches, the 1961 model had the thinnest single-cutaway body, and the revised neck joint enhances sustain in the upper registers. Consequently, many players find this version of the 6120 the easiest to handle. The painted 'MG' initials stand for Michael Gilligan, who bought this guitar brand-new and played it until very recently.

HiLo'Tron

Since the Filter'Tron was the only pickup the brand made, Gretsch fitted them to every guitar. Some customers must have been happy to forgo fretboard and f-hole binding when they were getting exactly the same tone at a far lower price. Maybe that's why Gretsch decided to create a new single-coil pickup that could be mounted directly onto the body. From mid-1960 onwards, lower-end models such as the Tennessean and Anniversary were reconfigured for this new pickup.

The HiLo'Tron wasn't really half a Filter'Tron. Although they had the same bobbin, HiLo'Trons were wound with thinner wire and had smaller pole screws. With a bar magnet mounted on an angled steel plate and a vertical steel magnet keeper on one side of the magnet, the construction was quite different. Bridge HiLo'Trons also had wood spacers to position them closer to the strings. Lower in treble and output than a Filter'Tron, HiLo'Trons produce a warm, mellow and clear tone that is especially popular with players who are into 1960s tones.

Super'Tron

Introduced in 1964, the Super'Tron was a variation on the Filter'Tron, with laminated blades, rather than adjustable pole screws. Aficionados praise its refined treble, high output and full-bodied tone. This pickup featured on various Gretsch models, including the Viking, Monkees, Roc Jet, Astro Jet and Streamliner.

Wiring

Dual-pickup Gretsches made prior to 1958 typically have a three-way pickup selector and four control knobs. There's a volume for each pickup, plus a master volume located by the cutaway. The fourth knob served as a master tone and potentiometer values were 1 megohm. Between approximately 1955 and 1957 many Gretsches were fitted with unusual stacked tone potentiometers and two capacitors. Designed to be set about halfway for a 'neutral' tone, the control could roll off treble or bass, depending on which direction it was turned.

To coincide with the new Filter'Trons, 1958 saw the introduction of the infamous three-way 'mud switch' in place of a tone control. Bypassed in the middle position, the switch offered two levels of preset treble roll-off. It was a good idea badly executed due to unsuitable capacitor values. Years later, Gretsch expert Tom 'TV' Jones talked Gretsch into replacing the vintage 0.1µF and 0.047µF capacitors with 0.012µF and 0.0039µF, and the mud switch finally emerged from the swamp.

The mud switch circuit featured 500k pots, but the way they're wired in parallel with the master volume results in a 250k impedance. This possibly explains why the single-pickup/single-volume Anniversary model sounds brighter than the two-pickup version. Gretsch's final innovation was an on/off switch that appeared around 1961.

Bodies & Bracing

Until the mid-50s, Gretsch's big archtops were constructed in a conventional way. Most tops and backs were formed from pressed plywood and supported with parallel top bracing. As a friend and admirer of Les Paul, Chet Atkins was keenly aware of the design's sustain shortcomings and lobbied hard for something closer to Les's log concept.

A compromise was reached when Gretsch developed a 'trestle bracing' system and started fitting it in late 1957 to coincide with the introduction of Filter'Trons.

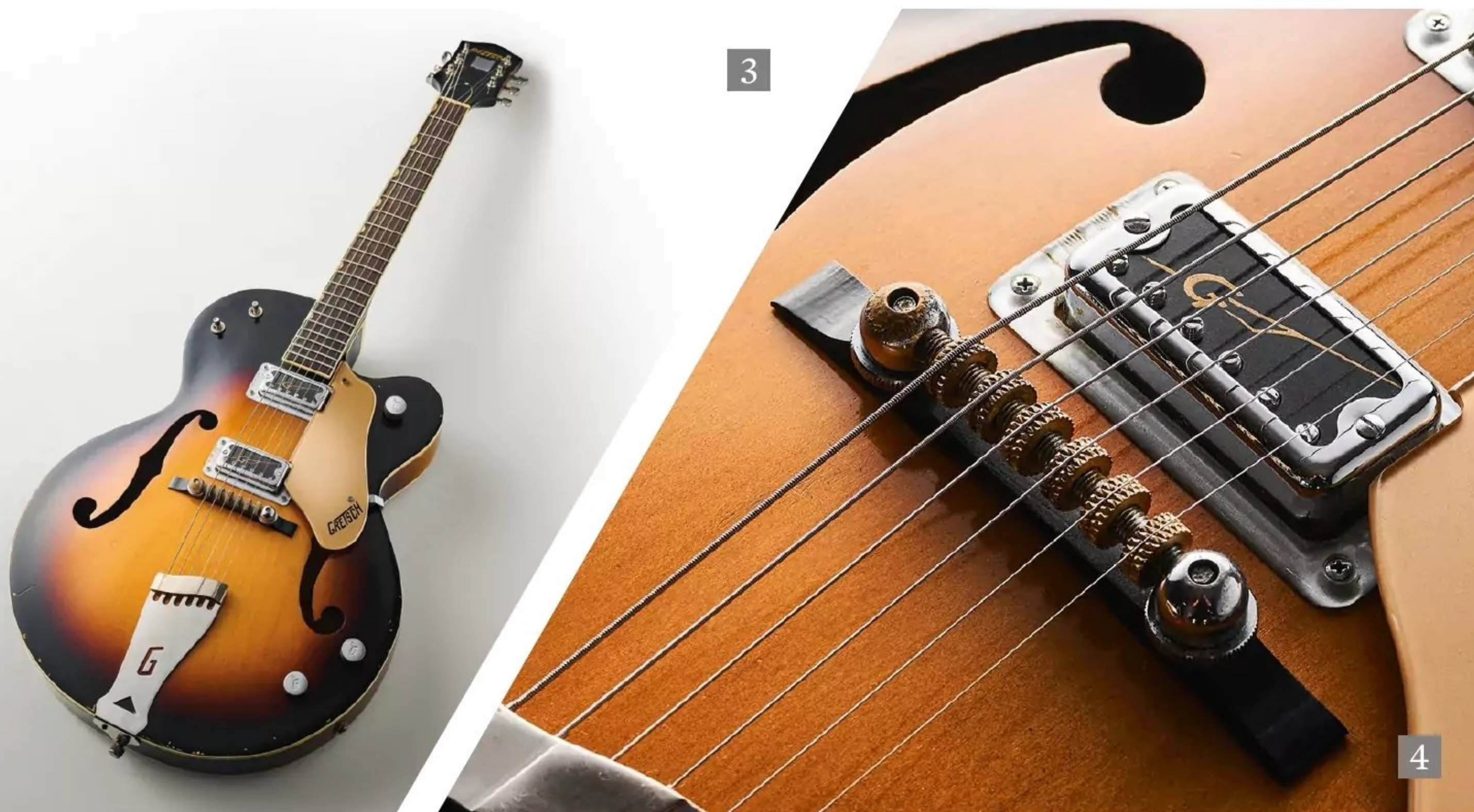
Responding to Gibson's Les Paul, Gretsch introduced small 'solidbody' models in 1953 – including the Duo Jet and the top of the line Roundup

The idea was to physically couple the top and back to make the body structure more rigid and stable. The first version, which is known as the 'heavy trestle', involved parallel braces on the top and back, with the pine trestles glued along the length of the top braces between the neck block and the bridge. Legs protruded downwards at each end and were glued to the rear braces. Finally, another block of pine was glued between the rearmost legs, spanning the area beneath the bridge. A 'light trestle' design followed in 1959, without the back braces and the bridge block. The trestles were joined to the back via small 'feet'. Like Brian Setzer, most Gretsch players consider the light trestle to be the best sounding.

As the 1950s played out, single-cutaway Gretsch archtop bodies gradually became thinner. For instance, the 6120 model started out 2.75 inches deep and was 2.25 inches by 1961. Introduced in late 1957, the Country Gentleman had a wider 17-inch body with a two-inch depth. The Country Gentleman also had fake f-holes, which was a return to Chet Atkins's preferred specs when Gretsch built the first 6120 prototypes. Fake f-holes were later fitted to the HiLo'Tron Tennessean model and post-'61 6120s, as Gretsch started to introduce thinner double-cutaway bodies.

3. A Gretsch 1962 Double Anniversary 6117 with a pair of HiLo'Tron pickups

4. The HiLo'Tron was a single-coil pickup that took its name from Gretsch declaring that it gave "brilliant highs and mellow lows"



Responding to Gibson's Les Paul, Gretsch introduced small 'solidbody' models in 1953. These included the Duo Jet and the top of the line Roundup, with the Jet Firebird following up in 1954. In reality, all were small-bodied archtops with heavily chambered mahogany bodies that became double-cutaways in 1961. Gretsch's first true solidbody was the Corvette of 1961. It started out like a cruder version of a double-cutaway Les Paul Junior or Special, but by 1963 the body edges had acquired SG-like sculpting. With an all-mahogany set-neck construction, the model was available with one or two HiLo'Tron pickups. The Burns vibrato and bar bridge didn't do it any favours, but if you drop in a P90 (like Rory Gallagher), a Filter'Tron or a mini-humbucker, they can sound amazing.

Neck Joints

Gretsch archtop necks were fitted using a traditional 'dovetail' joint, but they were not cut with the accuracy of manufacturers such as Gibson and Martin. Gretsch often relied on unusually thick wooden shims, and sometimes cardboard, to close the gaps. It's fair to say that if a vintage Gretsch hasn't had a neck reset, it probably needs one.

Prior to 1961, Gretsch drove a wood screw through the heel and into the neck block, and a circular plug was used to conceal the recessed screw head. This screw doesn't actually strengthen the joint and may well have been deployed to hold necks steady while glue dried and to simplify the clamping.

Towards the later 1950s and early 60s, Gretsch began using a mortise and tenon joint. The



(1963)

GRETSCH 6129 DUO JET CHAMPAGNE SPARKLE

Although Gretsch's smaller Jet and Duo Jet models are often assumed to have solid bodies, they are actually heavily chambered. In 1961 Gretsch reconfigured the body for a double-cutaway shape, much like Gibson's redesign of the Les Paul Junior and Special models. While Duo Jets are not uncommon, ATB's 6129 has the rare Champagne Sparkle top. Unlike Fender's sprayed metal flake finishes, Gretsch's tops were actually covered with sheets of Nitron Plastic, which Gretsch had long used to wrap drum shells. Other colour options included Gold, Tangerine, Burgundy and the more common Silver. This 1963 example features a 'mud switch' circuit with an on/off switch, a Space Control bridge and a Burns Vibrato.

inaccuracy and need for oversized shims remained, but the securing screw was shifted to either the cutaway side or the back of the body. So whenever a vintage Gretsch is undergoing a neck reset, the plug and screw must first be removed.

Finishes

For the most part, Gretsch guitars were sprayed with traditional nitrocellulose lacquer. However, it must be remembered that Gretsch also manufactured drums. Jimmie Webster realised that the 'Nitron' plastic wrap that Gretsch used for plywood shells could also be applied to guitar bodies using a vacuum press. This finish can be seen on Duo Jets, Jet Firebirds and, most spectacularly, on the metallic Silver Jet and Champagne Sparkle Jet. The Nitron is so tough that it's common to see vintage Gretsches with heavily worn backs and sides and tarnished hardware that retain pristine tops.

Bridges & Tailpieces

Gretsch was one of the first companies to offer a bridge with individually adjustable string intonation. Designed by Sebastiano (Johnny) Melita, the Synchro Sonic was made by Melita and first featured on the Electro II around 1951. Soon after, Melita bridges were adopted for all premium Gretsch electrics, with carved rosewood preferred for lesser models. However, Bigsby-equipped guitars were

paired with Bigsby's compensated aluminium tailpiece.

Later in 1958, Webster's Space Control bridge appeared, which was basically a threaded bar that was bent into a radius and fitted with six grooved thumbwheels. The idea was to allow players to adjust the thumbwheels to achieve their preferred string spacing. Gretsch also began fitting its own rudimentary but fine-sounding bar bridge by 1958. The shape

Guitar makers from Boston such as Stromberg, and New York's D'Angelico and Gretsch were not averse to Jazz Age razzmatazz

and dimensions varied, but it was a bent and plated brass bar with milled string grooves.

With the exception of the earliest fixed Melitas, vintage Gretsch floating bridges tend to be a bit too buoyant. Any enthusiastic player can send them sliding, with predictable consequences for tuning. Thankfully, though, modern Gretsches have pins to keep them stable.

Throughout the 50s, most Gretsches had either a Bigsby or a G cutout tailpiece. The tailpiece came in two versions – six inches long for archtops such as the Anniversary, Streamliner and Clipper, and five inches for the various Jet models. The White Falcon and Penguin had a tubular 'Cadillac' tailpiece design. Where Bigsby vibratos featured,

Gretsch bought them from the manufacturer; B3s were fitted to smaller bodies and B6s to the bigger archtops. But in 1960, the bespoke B3C and B6C vibratos appeared with a 'V' cutout and 'Gretsch By Bigsby' on the front plate. Gretsch also used an inferior Burns vibrato on Corvette and various Jet models from 1962.

Webster's Wonders

While Gibson had mostly pursued elegant craftsmanship, and Martin favoured an austere and near Shaker-like design aesthetic, guitar makers from Boston such as Stromberg, and New York's D'Angelico and Gretsch were not averse to Jazz Age razzmatazz. Jimmie Webster's more eye-catching efforts, like the Penguin, White Falcon and metallic green Country Club, came straight out of this tradition. Ditto the 'country' motifs that were first seen on the 1953 Roundup and would later appear on the 1956 6120.

These models are now regarded as iconic, but Webster innovations weren't always so successful. One such item was the Tone Twister, which was intended as a vibrato for Gretsches without Bigsbys. Clamping across the strings in the gap between the bridge and tailpiece, the Tone Twister is known in Gretsch circles as the 'String Snapper'.

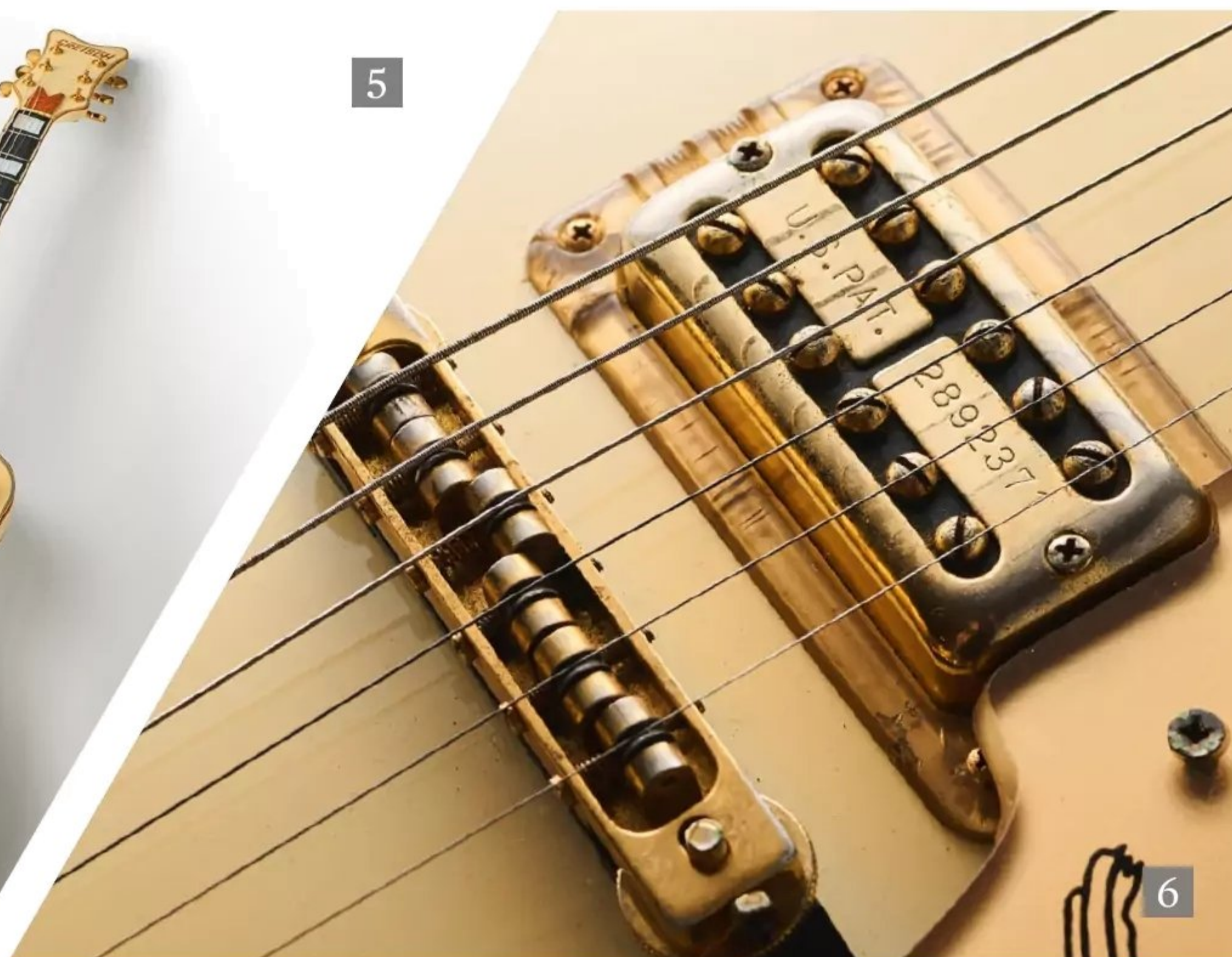
As a piano tuner, Webster was aware that pianos are 'stretch tuned', with the upper registers a tad sharp to sound sweeter. He decided to apply this idea to guitar by angling the upper frets. The result was T-Zone Tempered Treble that featured on the Gretsch Viking. It didn't catch on and Chet Atkins described the idea as "a little far-fetched". Meanwhile, Gretsch was persisting with non-intonatable bridges.

Access to the electronics, and Gretsch's somewhat agricultural string muffling mechanism, was improved when the brand began cutting a huge hole in the back of the body. To conceal the ugly cover plate, Webster devised a pop on pad that looks like cheap upholstery and provides all the sensuousness of damp leatherette.

Webster's 'Floating Sound Unit' was introduced in 1966.

5. A 1990 double-cut G7594 White Falcon fitted with a pair of Filter'Tron pickups

6. Ray Butts' noise-cancelling Filter'Tron made its debut in 1957 at the same trade show where Gibson unveiled its PAF



It involved a three-bar frame positioned in the bridge position, with a 440Hz tuning fork screwed onto the underside that passed through a hole into the body. The idea was to enhance sustain and harmonics, but if it isn't carefully set up, the tuning fork generates wolf tones and it's impossible to set intonation.

Maybe Webster was simply ahead of his time with his two-handed Touch System tapping technique. Such was his belief that he teamed up with Ray Butts to develop a stereo guitar and amplifier system specifically for his playing style. This 'Project-O-Sonic Stereo' setup involved reconfigured Filter'Tron

pickups that split the signals from the top three strings and the bottom three, and routed them to separate amplifiers. Gretsch models with Project-O-Sonic electronics included the White Falcon, Country Club and Anniversary, but it wasn't a commercial success.

Maybe some of Webster's inventions might have proved more successful if Gretsch had been able to provide the technical and engineering expertise to back him up. Even so, Webster's contribution to Gretsch and his wider influence on guitar design cannot be denied and many of the models he helped to design are still being made today. **G**



(2009)
GRETSCH G6120WCST
STEPHEN STERN
MASTERBUILT

Vintage Gretsches are rightly lauded for countless reasons, but build quality could be a bit hit and miss. Even ones that have managed to survive without any binding rot or loosened neck joints will probably need a lot of work to make them viable gigging guitars. For the ultimate in vintage vibe and build quality, the guitars produced by Stephen Stern's team at Gretsch's US Custom Shop are second to none. This 6120 was made there in 2009 and features pinstriping by renowned car hot-rod artist Junior Bo Huff. With a flat handle Bigsby, aged DeArmond pickups and an aluminium bridge that's compensated for a plain G string, it's almost a 50s fantasy Gretsch.



GRETSCH: A PERSONAL HISTORY

Fred W Gretsch started out in the business as the jazz years of the 1950s erupted into rock 'n' roll uproar in the 60s. Much later, he guided the company back to prosperity after the difficult Baldwin-owned years. Who better, then, to tell the inside story of how the company revolutionised guitar?

Words Jamie Dickson

WOMEN WERE THE MAKING OF GRETSCH

"The contribution of women to the business is seldom mentioned, but incredibly integral. My mother was a cheerleader for the business from 1942 to '64 and, certainly, one of the reasons that I was in the business. My grandmother Charlotte, if we go back to 1904, married into the Gretsch family. She passed away in 1928. Next week it's the 95th anniversary of her passing – unbelievable. In any case, she was engaged with the business for 24 years and she had three sons who were future leaders in the business.

"Without my mother's encouragement and if she hadn't kept the family in New York when dad died in '48 – she was from Missouri – I wouldn't have had a chance to visit the factory at 60 Broadway with my grandfather, as a young lad, and first experience Gretsch instrument production there.

"As I said, dad died in '48 and his older brother, Fred Jr – who was my mentor in the business and encouraged me to work –

took the bus from Forest Hills in Queens down Metropolitan Avenue, to the factory there, in Brooklyn. The bus fare was 15¢ back when I first took it in the 50s, and I worked there during the summer of '58 as an office boy. I started there [full-time] in '65. So, if it hadn't been for the women, us guys wouldn't be around."

GRETSCH WAS A LIFELONG CALLING

"A quick family sketch on the men: obviously the founder... his story is out there. I didn't know him, of course, since he died in 1895. But his eldest son, my grandfather, I did know – and he first took me to the business in 1950. He was 36 years old when they completed that [Gretsch] building at 60 Broadway.

"Of course, we built all the Gretsch instruments there from 1916 to 1969, when Baldwin moved the business to Arkansas. In any case, grandpa engaged in the business from 1895 to 1952, an incredible 57 years. His oldest son, Fred Jr, graduated from Cornell University in 1926 and his middle son – my dad, Bill

1. Fred Gretsch first started working full-time at the company in March 1965 and so is now in his 58th year with the business

2. Thanks to George Harrison playing one during The Beatles' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in February 1964, the Chet Atkins Country Gentleman became one of the most well-known models in the Gretsch catalogue. This model is from '63

– came into the business in '25 and worked until '48, until he passed away.

"So, 57 years with grandpa in the business, 45 years with Fred Jr, 23 years with my dad... That's the guys in the family story. I started in March of '65, so I'm finishing 58 years this year. We see it as a commitment to serving the worldwide community of musicians, music lovers, artists and fans. That's the Gretsch religion."

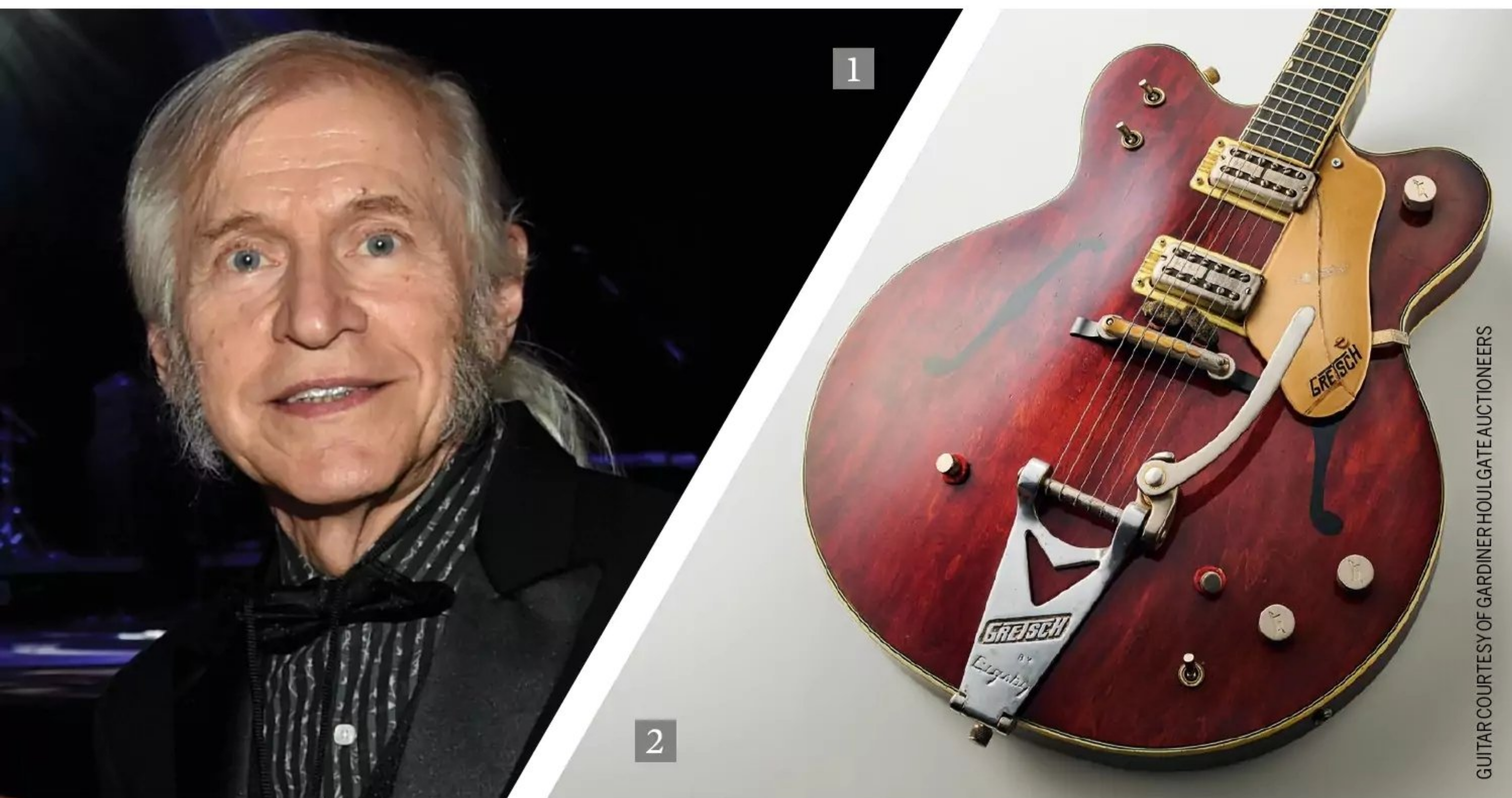
WEBSTER WAS A PRIME MOVER

"Jimmie Webster joined Gretsch before the war, I think, which means he would have been hired by Fred Jr. Jimmie Webster is a key figure in the Gretsch business. He was a piano player, piano tuner and inventor and, obviously, a guitar player. Fast forward to 1959, Chet Atkins produced a record,

"Serving the worldwide community of musicians, music lovers, artists and fans [is] the Gretsch religion"

FRED W GRETSCH

PHOTO BY RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES FOR OTIS REDDING 75TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



Webster's Un'a-bridged – it was in stereo, so he was a proponent of stereo guitar.

"In any case, in the early 50s, Jimmie was involved in [Gretsch] design, especially the forward-looking colours that we took from the auto industry and the changes in style that we got from the auto industry. The US auto industry, after a very plain era before the war with few automobiles of any colour at all, adopted all the colour changes and frequent model changes of the 50s – which became the style of the guitar business.

"When Les Paul was hired to do a guitar with Ted McCarty at Gibson, we knew we needed to find our own endorser and Jimmie

spent time with Chet Atkins and offered Chet a deal in 1953. Chet made a call to his friend Les to ask about the endorsement offer from Gretsch and, if anything, Les was positive about it. So the endorsement happened and the rest is history. The first Chet guitar was seen in 1954 and is still available and popular today. So many artists have played them, including Duane Eddy.”

CHET ATKINS & RAY BUTTS

“Chet was an innovator extraordinaire with his production of music and his instruments – we were on the instruments side, of course – and it was Chet who tried the Ray Butts Filter’Tron

pickup and recommended it to us and introduced Ray Butts to us. We purchased the patent and the rest is history.

“It wasn’t a matter of our working with Ray; it was Chet’s work with Ray on both amplifiers and on pickups, that he shared with his guitar-making partner, which was the Fred Gretsch Manufacturing Company, 60 Broadway, Brooklyn, New York.

“Ray was a glorious inventor, very successful, with some dark sides to his personality. In any case, he had some children whom we got to know over the years. His son passed on, but his daughters connected with TV Jones, who continues to innovate



(1990)
**GRETSCH WHITE
FALCON G6136T**

White Falcons are like Marmite – you either love them or grudgingly admit that they’re cool. Jimmie Webster pulled out all the stops for this model, with gold-plated hardware, gold sparkle plastics and binding, an ebony fretboard, and a specially designed ‘Cadillac’ tailpiece. The model started out with a Melita bridge and DeArmond pickups, but it acquired a Space Control bridge and Filter’Trons in 1958. This example was previously owned by Foo Fighters guitarist Pat Smear and was also used by Dave Grohl. Made in Japan in 1990, it has an original 1950s tailpiece that Smear found in a junk shop.

[while also undertaking] faithful reproductions of the early Ray Butts ideas, at the highest level of quality, which is TV Jones' stock-in-trade."

FENDER & 'PEAK ACCORDION'

"Fender wasn't [initially] regarded as a competitor because they made such an unusual guitar, the solidbody guitar, which was new at that point in time in the middle 50s. So Fender was unproven and rock 'n' roll music was new. The Gretsch company was selling drums and guitars, and all manners of band instruments, through the Brooklyn office and a distribution centre in Chicago. Who knew what the future held?"

"In fact, during the middle 50s, accordions were a key part of the Gretsch business. When I visited 60 Broadway in Brooklyn and worked there in the summer of '58, we had three or four technicians preparing accordions in addition to the drums and guitars we were making. The accordion business was very good in '58. In fact, in the United States, 1958 is the year the accordion business peaked to its highest level. Whereas rock 'n' roll was kind of just getting started.

"So the accordion people were feeling pretty good in '58. They were having their best year ever. Rock 'n' roll, they didn't respect, they didn't play. That was played with guitars at high volume levels. The accordion people thought that their business was going up and rock 'n' roll would go away. But it didn't work out that way."

GRETSCH GOES SOLID

"If we skip forward to the year 1960, Fred Jr was running the business at the time... so he would have been 55 years old, rock 'n' roll was coming on strong, but the British invasion hadn't happened yet. But shortly thereafter we had so much business that it was necessary to expand production.

"We only had so much room in the Gretsch building because we had other tenants and had to move the drum production to another building on the other side of the bridge. That's the time that we expanded the targets of our production, we moved our drum production to another facility, we initially moved the distribution business to that second location in Brooklyn, and eventually moved it entirely to Chicago.

"The Duo Jet was a natural [response to the rise of] the solidbody business. Fender was growing like a rocket by this point, so we wanted to do something [to compete] that was [still unmistakably] a Gretsch. We used the pickups that were important to Gretsch guitars, which at the time were DeArmond single-coil pickups. We created a new, unique body shape. Obviously, Cliff Gallup played one and Cliff was one of the people who Jeff Beck looked up to.

"The constantly evolving features on Gretsch guitars were a sign of the times – those things were happening in the marketplace for automobiles and for refrigerators and stoves and

washing machines. I know when Bo Diddley stopped in to see us at 60 Broadway and met Jimmie, Bo said he wanted to do something different and outrageous and Jimmie suggested, 'Let's do a rectangular guitar.' It's a legacy of innovation that we relish and enjoy today."

FAMILY OWNED ONCE AGAIN

"The deal [to take Gretsch back into family ownership under Fred Gretsch] was signed in '84 and I was in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the Baldwin office, then at 1801 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, at the point when Baldwin was just coming out of bankruptcy. The parent company was

"The business had come through tough times in the 80s, [but] there were strong guitar years ahead"

FRED W GRETSCH

3. The Gretsch G6128T-GH George Harrison Duo Jet "offers the distinctive appointments and modifications found on Harrison's original 1957 Gretsch Duo Jet, which he purchased secondhand in the early 1960s", says the company

4. George's signature on the truss rod cover of the G6128T-GH

bankrupt in '83 and they sold the music assets to the piano guys and the piano guys looked around for someone to buy the guitar and drum business and it was us.

"It was a nice day in [October], happy to sign it, we agreed that they would run it through the end of the year of '84 and we would take over the first day of January in '85, and the announcement wouldn't come until January. The announcement came on 1 January, then we were at the January NAMM Show, which was just a drum exhibit, and then at the Frankfurt Musikmesse a couple of months later, which was just a drum exhibit – and we're talking about January or perhaps February or March 1985 now.

"The assets that we acquired had to be brought back from Arkansas and from Mexico and stored in our facility in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Drums were being made in De Queen, Arkansas, along with pedal steel guitars, and later on that year we moved that production to Ridgeland, South Carolina, where it is still today."

GUITAR RENAISSANCE

"After restarting the guitar business from 1985, we didn't get it going until '88 and the first



guitars were available late of '89, so debuted at the Tokyo Show in October of '89 and then the NAMM Show January of 1990.

"I'm sure we were nervous: it involved a big investment in tooling and engineering to have the product re-emerge at the highest quality level. And we were only interested in doing it at the highest quality level. But the guitar business had come through tough times in the 80s, so by the time '89 came around and the 90s, we saw there were strong guitar years ahead.

"Brian Setzer visited us at the drum factory in the 80s when he was touring with the Stray Cats. We knew Brian from early

on and we cheered him on, as a proponent of Gretsch 6120 instruments, a meteor artist in rockabilly sound. Gretsch had an ownership in rockabilly going right back to Cliff Gallup – and Brian had grown up on Long Island.

"When the time came to begin production in Japan, we looked at all the options and we found the Terada family, who were building guitars the way we built them in Brooklyn and we had a good rapport with them. They have done an excellent job, over time, continuing the tradition of making Gretsch hollowbody and Duo Jet guitars and acoustic guitars, at the very highest quality level." **G**



(1968)
**GRETSCH 6117
ANNIVERSARY
STREAMLINER**

Gretsch revived the Streamliner as a double-cutaway with open f-holes and a nameplate on the headstock, and it was offered in sunburst or red, with the model designations 6102 and 6103 respectively. It featured two bladed Super'Tron pickups with the 'mud switch' control circuit and an on/off switch. The bound rosewood-'board markers were a curious combination of thumbnails and dots, and this '68 example has a Space Control bridge and 'G' tailpiece. As is common with vintage Gretsches, the paintwork is in excellent condition, but examine the edges and you'll see that binding rot has set in. The Streamliner got another facelift in '72 before production ceased in '75.



JET STREAM

Rockabilly king **Brian Setzer** talks about his lifelong love of Gretsch guitars and how his beloved Gretsch 6120 was usurped by a ‘Frankenstein’ Duo Jet on his latest album, *The Devil Always Collects*

Words Gary Graff

How did you first become a Gretsch guy, and what keeps you one today?

“Those things still bring me the most fun out of anything. Out of old motorcycles, old cars – it’s Gretsch guitars. I bought one [his 1959 orange 6120] in the late 1970s because I wanted to look like Eddie Cochran. I didn’t even know

1. Brian refers to this Blue Sparkle Duo Jet, which features on his latest album, as a “Frankenstein”, comprising a ‘57 body and ‘58 neck. It is the only Blue Sparkle Duo Jet Gretsch made

“You can control how much sustain you want, how much feedback – the whole thing shakes. You feel it. It’s the best thing in the world”

if they’d sound good. Back then, no-one knew who Eddie Cochran was, so I found it in the local paper for 100 bucks.

“It’s such a special sound. People who play solidbody guitars don’t have this happen, but the sound comes out of the amplifier, it goes back through the guitar, so you can control how much sustain you

2. This 2007 Gretsch Custom Shop Stephen Stern G6120-SSC Brian Setzer Tribute model features all the whistles and bells of Brian’s original!

want, how much feedback you want, and the whole thing shakes. You feel it. It’s the best thing in the world, for me.”

We hear that you used a Duo Jet on your latest album, *The Devil Always Collects*?

“I think the first song I wrote for [the album] was *Rock Boys Rock*. I wasn’t getting the sound I wanted out of the 6120; it just was not matching how frantic the song had become. So I plugged in this Duo Jet I’ve got – it’s a Frankenstein: a ‘57 [body], ‘58 [neck] Duo Jet – and I just turned it up a little bit louder than I normally would. Jason [Orris, studio engineer] and I looked at each other and were like, ‘Oh gosh, that’s it!’ Little things like that inspire you to keep writing, to keep moving in a certain direction. On the last record it was this old reverb unit that got me to write songs. On this record it was the Duo Jet.”

What’s the Duo Jet’s story?

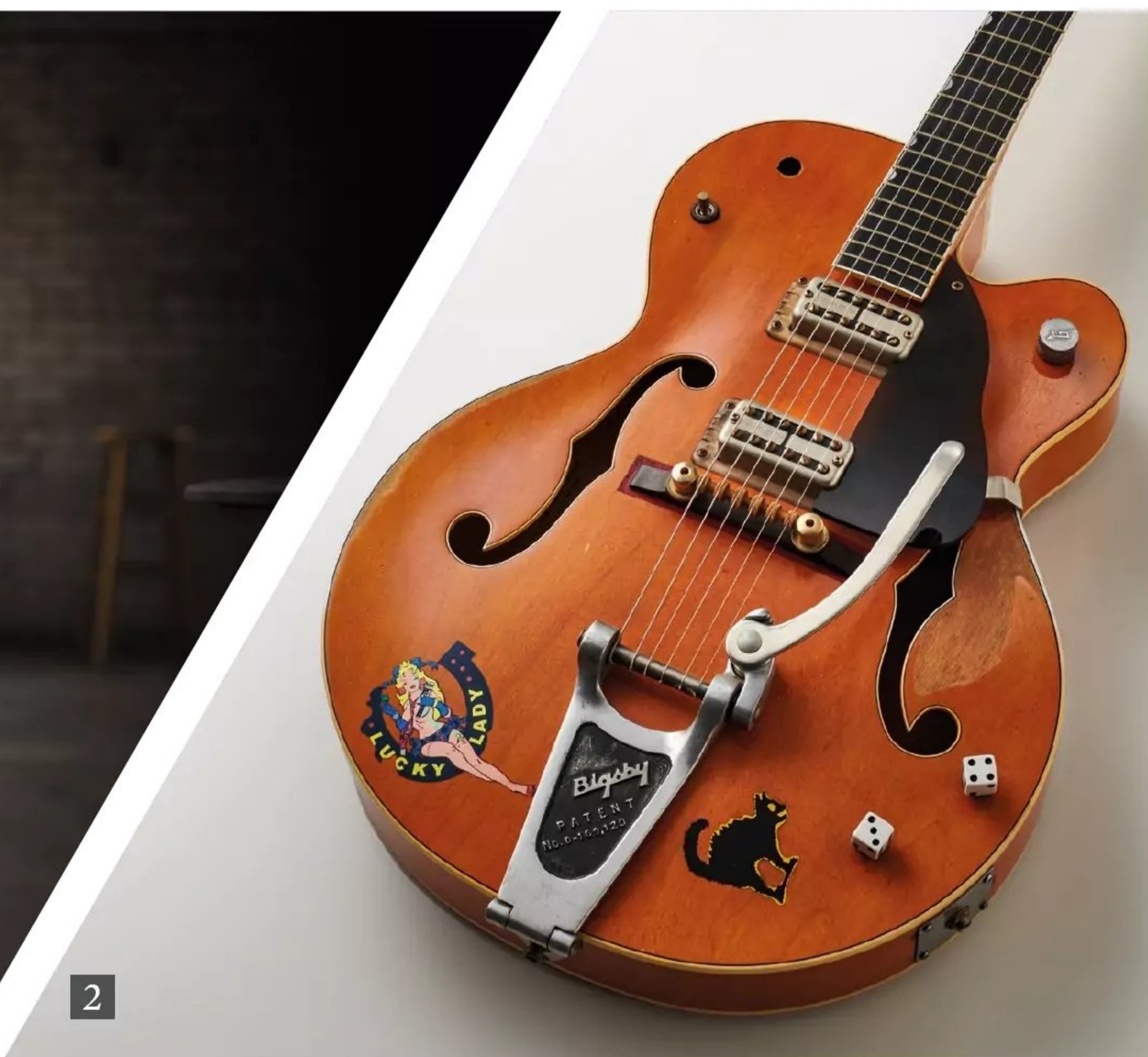
“I’ve had it for close to my entire life. I think it came from Canada originally, and it’s been worked on a lot; I’m not sure how much of a Duo Jet is really left in that guitar, really. I used it on my first *Rockabilly Riot* album [2005], when I did all the Sun [Records] sessions covers, and it sounded great ‘cos I wanted the old single-coil sound. But when I cranked it up a little more than I should this time, it became that kind of flange-monster thing. What a great-sounding guitar! I don’t know what it is about it. It’s almost Telecaster like but not as mellow. It’s got more twang to it. So I used it on most of the record, and this is my first record where I didn’t play the 6120 that much.” **G**



The Devil Always Collects is available now on Surfdog Records
www.briansetzer.com



PHOTO BY TONY NELSON



GUITAR COURTESY OF VINTAGE 'N' RARE GUITARS



MY LITTLE TREASURES

Award-winning singer-songwriter **Richard Hawley** talks about the mystique of the Gretsch brand and how it helps him achieve a very special sound on stage

Words David Mead

What first attracted you to Gretsch guitars?

“Eddie Cochran and Duane Eddy. Simple as that. When I was a kid, I saw pictures of Eddie and Duane playing and I listened to the records, joined the dots and realised that these incredibly beautiful-looking guitars actually sounded amazing as well. So if you’re a young guitar player who was into that kind of thing it just ticked every single box.”

Were you drawn to a particular model at the time?

“The semi acoustics, obviously, or the full acoustics. I only encountered the solidbodies years later. I love the 6120s, but it’s the Country Club that I love the most. I’ve got a 1954 blonde Country Club with DeArmond pickups on it... it’s to die for. The sound of that guitar and the way it plays, because it’s got a slab neck, you know, completely flat. A lot of guitars at that period

“Duane Eddy gave me one of his signature model 6120s after I toured with him. His serial number is 001 and mine is 002”

1. While Hawley adores his vintage models, he has “no qualms or snobbery about playing new or reissue guitars – it’s all about the sound and feel”. And this 2003 Country Club 6196CG certainly passes that test

2. This tan-finish model is just one of the 6120s in Hawley’s collection, a gift from Fred Gretsch

were like baseball bat necks – really fat. But this is really slim, the profile of it is lovely. I’ve still got my 6120s as well; I love those DeArmond pickups and the factory fitted Bigsby. They’re incredibly beautiful things. I’ve got two 1956 6120s and it’s a bit of a battle with them. It wasn’t at that stage where they’d quite got every single guitar to be absolutely brilliant, and it’s a bit of a battle to set them up.”

How many Gretsch guitars do you own?

“Probably about 30, I think. I’ve got a ’63 Country Gent, a couple of Tennesseans and Duane Eddy gave me one of his signature model 6120s. His serial number is 001 and mine is 002. He gave me that after

I toured with him. I was helping him put his guitars in the back of the car to take him to the airport. I put both of his 6120s in the car and he just said, ‘What are you doing with those?’ I said, ‘I’m just putting them in the car.’ And he said, ‘Oh, there’s only one going in there. The other is yours.’ So he gave it to me as a gift at the end of the tour.”

How do you deal with a hollowbody guitar playing at stage volume?

“The thing I’ve always loved about Gretsch guitars is the fact you can’t quite control them like you can a solidbody guitar. When you’re playing at high volume they’ll be all the notes that sustain and that’s one of the many aspects of Gretsches that I’ve always loved. You get these mad notes that sustain and feed back, you know?” **G**



Now Then: The Very Best Of Richard Hawley is available now via BMG

www.richardhawley.co.uk





THE COCHRAN CONNECTION

A lifelong Eddie Cochran fan who partnered Jeff Beck for a tour celebrating the music of Cliff Gallup, **Darrel Higham** tells us why he uses only Gretsch guitars

Words David Mead

What was your first encounter with Gretsch guitars?

"When I was about four or five years old I heard Elvis for the first time. The neighbours were playing his music very, very loud and it made a huge impression on me. It turned out that mum and dad had a couple of Elvis albums in their record collection, and then I discovered this Eddie Cochran album in there, *Singin' To My Baby*. The first thing that struck me about the album cover was there were two headshots of Eddie and in between there's this picture of him holding this beautiful red guitar. From that moment onwards, I basically wanted to be Eddie Cochran. And all these years later, not much has changed!"

When did you get your first Gretsch guitar?

"I bought my first 6120 in late '89. Sadly, it was stolen in '97 from a theatre in Melton Mowbray where, ironically, I was playing Eddie

"I discovered Eddie Cochran's 'Singin' To My Baby' as a child, and from that moment I wanted to be him. Not much has changed!"

1. Darrel's Eddie Cochran 6120 takes him one step closer to the sounds of his idol

2. As a Gretsch-only guy, Darrel can find all the tones he needs among the brand's collection. Here, he's holding the G6118T Players Edition Anniversary model

Cochran in this theatre show. But, fortunately, I went to see Eddie's mother and sister in '92 and I managed to get several pictures of my guitar sitting next to Eddie's. That was a dream come true."

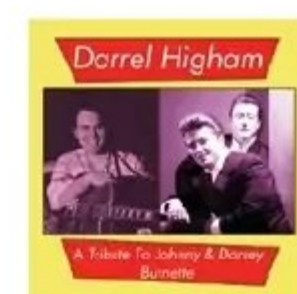
Have you acquired a collection of Gretsches since that time?

"Yes, I have a Duo Jet that is based on the Cliff Gallup model, a White Falcon that I bought when I was touring with Jeff Beck – and the very first gig I did with it, the bridge fell apart! I've got a 6120 Custom Shop that was built in 2008 by Stephen Stern. I saw that at Jeff Beck's house – I think they had sent it to him to see if he wanted to buy it, but he wasn't particularly interested so he let

me buy it instead. I've got a sort of hybrid, it's a cross between a Falcon and a 6120, which I had built in 2014 by Stephen Stern. It looks like a 6120, but it's the same dimensions as a White Falcon."

Can you sum up the magic of the Gretsch sound?

"They do have their own sound, there's no two ways about it. I've always found them to be extraordinarily versatile guitars; you can play any kind of music on them. So that's the reason why I just play Gretsches. When I worked with Imelda [May], I found them versatile enough to handle anything. I mean, her music was a very eclectic mix of roots music: it was rockabilly, blues, jazz, country... and the Gretsch handled all of that extraordinarily well." **G**



A Tribute To Johnny & Dorsey Burnette is out now – see musicking.co.uk for details
<https://darrelhigham.com>





THE JET SET

We pick some of our new favourites from Gretsch's expansive contemporary catalogue, which spans three distinct levels: Streamliner, Electromatic and Professional

Words Dave Burrluck



G2215-P90 STREAMLINER JUNIOR JET CLUB £399

Solidbody bolt-ons may not feature in Gretsch's early history, but this hugely affordable single-cut is definitely worth a look, using nato for its solid body and bolt-on neck. The roots-rocker's headstock is dead classy, the bridge is a simple compensated wrapover, and the guitar is powered by a Broad'Tron BT-2S humbucker at the bridge and a P90 Soap Bar single coil at the neck. Controls are super simple, too. "A grab-and-go axe that won't break the bank. Game on!" said our review.



G2622T-P90 STREAMLINER CENTER BLOCK DOUBLE-CUT P90 WITH BIGSBY £649

Another Streamliner, here with early 60s double-cut style, that won't break the bank. Its centre block gives it some solidity, but it's the pickups that are the twist here. Conceived back in 2021, these FideLiSonic 90s are soapbar single coils but loosely based on the P-90 'staple' neck pickup of the original Gibson Les Paul Custom. They'd not be our first choice for classic Gretsch cleans, but with some gnarly gain and fuzz, this guitar delivers admirably.



G6636T-RF RICHARD FORTUS SIGNATURE FALCON CENTER BLOCK WITH STRING-THRU BIGSBY £3,249

Who says Gretsches aren't for rockers? This signature from GNR's Richard Fortus is modelled on the 17-inch-wide double-cut Falcon with a centre block. Apart from a very usable string-through Bigsby and roller saddle bridge, the pickups (custom-wound by John Gaudesi) aim to marry a classic Filter'Tron with a PAF-style 'bucker, enabling traditional Gretsch cleans with the master volume reduced and more kick and midrange with the volume up. Superb.



G5232T ELECTROMATIC DOUBLE JET FT WITH BIGSBY £599

Moving into the Electromatic range, also made in Indonesia, things get a little more Gretsch-specific and, although quite a rarity in the modern range, the double-cut Jet has a lot to do with Malcom Young. Powering here is from Gretsch Black Top Broad'Tron humbuckers with a classic Gretsch 'tone-pot' circuit. The voicing is unmistakably Gretsch with plenty of sparkle and good midrange character. Add in some grit and crunch and here's a characterful, textured rock voice: quintessentially Gretsch!



G5420T ELECTROMATIC CLASSIC HOLLOW BODY SINGLE-CUT WITH BIGSBY £899

A timeless hollowbody, the G5420T comes in four colours including the classic 6120's evocative Orange Stain. It's made from laminated maple and uses all new trestle block bracing, while powering comes from the latest FT-5E Filter'Tron humbuckers. The tone-pot circuit includes a master volume with a treble bleed circuit, which really keeps things clear and clean with lower volume settings. These are becoming modding favourites, too.



G6120T-BSSMK BRIAN SETZER SIGNATURE NASHVILLE HOLLOW BODY '59 'SMOKE' WITH BIGSBY £3,499

He might have been the poster boy for a new rockabilly revival in the early 80s, but you could easily call Brian Setzer 'Mr Gretsch'. This beauty replicates his famous late-50s Stray Cats-era 6120 with numerous vintage-specific details, such as the 1959 trestle bracing and oversized f-holes, along with TV Jones' Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity Filter'Trons, a Bigsby B6CGH vibrato, slippery Delrin nut and Gotoh locking tuners. Rock this town!



HERMANOS GUTIÉRREZ

The blend of South American heritage with a flair for creating soundtracks to imaginary Westerns has made brothers Estevan and Alejandro Gutiérrez one of the most compelling guitar duos to emerge in years. We find out more about their musical DNA

Words Rob Laing & David Mead



Sometimes fate takes time to reveal itself. Born to a Swiss father and Ecuadorian mother and raised 30 minutes from Zurich, it wasn't until adulthood that brothers Estevan and Alejandro Gutiérrez realised they had a remarkable musical connection. But when they discovered it, their dynamic would prove prolific and remarkable.

"Alejandro moved away to Zurich and then we tried to reconnect through music," recalls Estevan of his brother, who is eight years his junior. "I remember in the beginning he called me and said, 'Why don't you come to Zurich

and bring your guitar? Maybe we can play a little bit.' And then we started to play, and he showed me an idea for his song. He said, 'Something is missing, maybe you can add something.'"

They jammed and the results were powerful enough to wow the first person to hear them play that night. "His roommate stepped into the room," remembers Estevan, "and he was like, 'Oh my God, which song is that? From which band?' We said, 'This is our music.' And he was the one that opened our eyes. He said, 'You have to record it. You have to play concerts. It's beautiful!' And so that evening was like the beginning: the birth of Hermanos Gutiérrez.

Also, we found the name Hermanos Gutiérrez in 10 seconds. It was clear from the beginning that we were the brothers and Gutiérrez is our mother's maiden name."

Five albums and eight years later, Hermanos Gutiérrez are selling out shows worldwide, with The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach as a fan, and producer for last year's acclaimed *El Bueno Y El Malo* at his Nashville Easy Eye Studio. With soul-stirring melodies, slapback delay and haunting slide guitar, the brothers paint lucid visions of desert vistas and the high mountain passes of their family homeland. We find out more about the influences and gear behind their sublime sounds.

When did you both first start playing guitar?

Estevan: “I started to play the classical guitar at the age of maybe 10 or 11, and started to play Argentinian folk music, which is called *milonga*, with fingerpicking. So I started on the nylon-string guitar until I was maybe 19 or 20. And I still play a lot of fingerpicking – I don’t use a plectrum.”

Alejandro: “I started when I was 16 years old and it was right then when my brother moved to Ecuador for a whole year. As a way of missing him, I guess, I started playing the guitar. I watched some YouTube tutorials for surf [singer-songwriter] music like Donavon Frankenreiter, Jack Johnson – where they were just using regular chords – and I just tried to learn those patterns and chords. That was my beginning.

I never went to classes, I taught myself the guitar. But my brother was my inspiration, that’s for sure.”

Aside from *milonga*, what other influences did you draw from the Latin music world?

Estevan: “I’m a huge fan of the salsa, and my brother is a big connoisseur and also an expert in *cumbia*. But we learned our Latin essence from our grandfather. He showed us the old school of music – the *boleros*, the *pasillos*. There’s one famous singer from the 40s and 50s whose name is Julio Jaramillo; our grandfather showed us this music and it was just incredible to feel how heartbroken he could be just from singing. Grandfather was the first one [we witnessed] who would cry when he was listening to a song because it touched him so much. And that

1. Brothers Estevan (left) and Alejandro use a minimal pedal setup to help shape their cinematic sound, which fuses Latin elements with inspirations from modern surf guitar. Here, Estevan plays his Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins hollowbody, while Alejandro has a 1963 Silvertone 1446

was a big inspiration to see, and if we wanted to do music, we also wanted to touch the hearts and the souls.”

Alejandro: “I think it was mainly how my brother played the guitar. He mentioned the fingerpicking, and I think having the background and the influence of that very classic Latin guitar style is very important to what we’re doing nowadays – even the rhythms and stuff. What I got inspiration from are the chords and chord progression of Latin music – A minor, D minor – all that kind of stuff that gives a certain melancholic style to music, which really resonates with us. So I think Latin music has been a big inspiration, for sure, on a very general level for our music.”

Listening to your music, there’s a very cinematic quality to it. To what extent do you think cinema has influenced you?

Alejandro: “We’re huge fans of cinema and movies and whenever there’s a great movie, there’s almost always a great score to that movie. For example, Alejandro Iñárritu, the Mexican filmmaker and director, worked with Argentinian musician Gustavo Alfredo Santaolalla. Just seeing how music and visuals work together has always been a big inspiration. I’m not sure if we really intend to make something cinematic, but once we’ve started, we always have those pictures of landscapes and images of life in front of us.

“So it was funny in a way that we got into that world of creating something that has this potential of being so cinematic, but I don’t think we sat down together as brothers and said, ‘Hey, you know what, let’s do something cinematic.’ It’s just happened in a very organic, natural way, which we think is magical and beautiful at the same point.”

What was it like working with Dan Auerbach on *El Bueno y El Malo*?

Estevan: “It was just incredible. We’d done four albums by ourselves and we always knew that, at the right moment with the right person, we would like to work with somebody else. We have the biggest respect for him – he’s so talented. Going to Nashville and seeing the studio and being able to record and to work with his entire team was just incredible. I mean, it’s a dream for every musician to do something like that. We’re so grateful to have this

**SIMPLE STRYMON***Minimalist 'boards with vital selections*

“It’s funny because in the beginning, for the first two albums, we just used amps,” remembers Estevan. “We had some people coming up after concerts asking us which pedals we use, because they wanted to create the same sound, and we would say, ‘Bro, this is just the amp.’ But then we started to use pedals, but we don’t use many.”

The Strymon El Capistan and Flint are key pedals for both brothers, but they use the former tape echo emulator differently. Estevan uses it for the rhythmic slap echo delay he calls his “horse riding sound”, which he says evokes Western films (and we agree). Alejandro tends to use the same pedal as a reverb with both

using the Flint for its tremolo side. “I also use a Boss [GE-7] equalizer because the sounds of my lap steel and my guitar are quite different,” notes Alejandro. “The lap steel is very sharp, very strong, very powerful, so I need a little boost with my Silvertone to just equalise the sound so I feel comfortable on stage.”

“For my vibrato I use the Malekko Omicron on tour,” adds Estevan. “It’s a small yellow pedal that Dan Auerbach gave to me. Then I have a small [MXR Dynacomp] compressor and my Boss Loop Station, too – the RC-500. I record melodies and then I add some percussion over it.”



PHOTO © LARRY NIEHUES

opportunity, and we're so happy with our album. It's just beautiful. We're excited to do more – create more with him."

Alejandro: "It was a fascinating experience to be in that studio – at Easy Eye Sound in Nashville, in the first moments that we got into the room. And having Dan Auerbach on the project with so much experience and respect for what we're doing, it felt liberating in so many ways, and we never felt the pressure of creating something. It was always about creating something beautiful and honest."

"I think it's hard to find a producer like Dan and have that luck. There are so many languages you can speak creatively as an artist, and we got along with him from the first second. I think that's very special. Even now, we have such a passion for music and we share a lot. He's one of us – he's a brother for us, and that's very cool."

Do you have roles within the band – certain things that one of you will take care of – or is it whoever comes up with specific parts?

Estevan: "It depends. I mean, it's like a relationship – it wouldn't be possible to be this band with just the

one of us. So it always takes the two of us. It starts with the melodies, with the idea, or even with the vision that we have for the videos – just everything. It's just a manuscript. Hermanos Gutiérrez is, how do you say it? Help me out – [Alejandro] knows what I want to say..."

Alejandro: "Maybe I can just give a metaphor, which is: whenever one is coming up with a melody, we know that the other part is missing; it's not

"I need my brother to function as a musician in this project. Whenever he comes up with a melody, I know exactly what is missing"

complete. And the song has to be taught with two voices, like with two souls, and it's always both of us. So I think the music that we're doing, it's the essence of two brothers. It's at the bottom of it – it's what we need. I think people are resonating with it coming from two brothers, who are connected through blood, and they have an intense and beautiful relationship.

"I think we just need both of us: I need my brother to function and to

2. Estevan and Alejandro's musical relationship only developed in recent years, and since 2017 they have produced five albums together as Hermanos Gutiérrez

exist as a musician in that project. It's important. Whenever he comes up with a melody, I know exactly what is missing. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling, but I'm not taking it for granted. It's very special."

What are your main guitars and amps on the road?

Alejandro: "I use the Silvertone – a 1446 from '63 that was later called the Chris Isaak model because he used that guitar on one of his covers. It's an amazing guitar – I love it. I did some adjustments through Dan Johnson, who's the tech for The Black Keys, so now it's my baby. I usually work with a Fender Deluxe Reverb, it can be a reissue, but the best experiences I've had is when I use an original one. They're very cool."

Estevan: "I play usually also on the same amp – the Fender Deluxe. I have a Princeton Reverb at home, which I also love. But since last year, we have played on the Magnatone Panoramic Stereo model, which has vibrato on it. That was Dan's in his studio. But two months ago in Nashville we had a gig and I played a reissue Magnatone. This amp sounds like it's from another world."

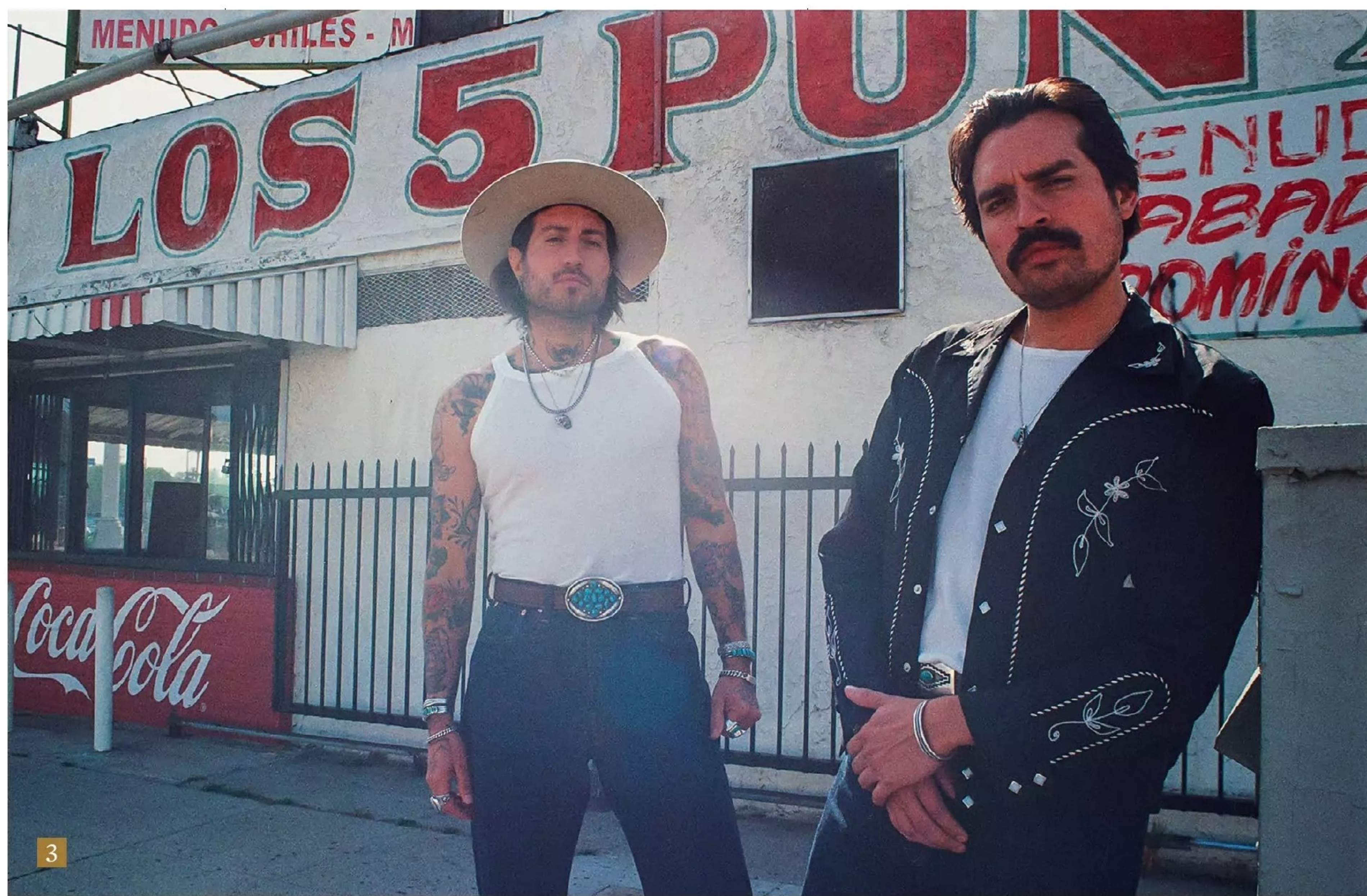


PHOTO © LARRY NIEHUES

“I have a Gretsch Chet Atkins 6120 and Dan has the same, but he has the original one from ’59 [called ‘Rudy’]. So on the last album he loaned me his guitar so I could play the album on it. I have the Japanese reissue myself, but I love it – amazing pickups. I fell in love with that guitar. I bought it just by watching YouTube videos. There was one video that was a guy playing Santo & Johnny in his room, and I just knew from the beginning, that’s the guitar and so I bought it. I love the colour and that’s my baby.”

What lap steel do you use, Alejandro?

Alejandro: “I have a Rickenbacker, it’s an NS 100 model from the late 40s. It has this steel body – I don’t know how they made them – a one-piece steel body out of chrome and they look stunning. It’s my favourite. I’ve played other versions of the guitar, but no-one ever gets this sound. It’s like a hollowbody metal thing, so it sounds pretty cool.”

What’s next for you in terms of musical projects?

Estevan: “We have exciting news, we’re gonna record a second album at Easy Eye soon. So we’re working now on the new album and it’s

“There are so many languages you can speak creatively as an artist, and we got along with Dan Auerbach from the first second”

gonna be amazing. We’re in the middle of songwriting and already mixing, finding melodies. It’s a very interesting process that we’re now in. We’re jamming to these new sounds so we’re excited about that.”

Alejandro: “We’re writing together, we’re digging for melodies and searching for good stuff. It’s always interesting to see what we can come up with and each album is like its own journey. It’s cool that we’re going to be back in Nashville recording with Dan Auerbach. We feel comfortable with that. Let’s see what happens in the studio – it’s always a special moment in the studio.”

Do you think instrumental music is having a bit of a renaissance at the moment?

Alejandro: “Yes, probably. I mean, I’m not a huge connoisseur of other instrumental bands, but it feels like we’re having the experience that it

can be enough. Even for concerts, people are there and they’re closing their eyes and it feels like they’re meditating, or they’re really going inwards. So it’s not just a very outward expression happening.”

Estevan: “I think maybe also after the pandemic, people kind of realised that not everything is just about a party. So maybe it’s also like a new way of, as my brother said, having an experience at a concert. Looking into each others’ souls and trying to have your own experience at a concert.”

Alejandro: “I think maybe people needed that kind of change or maybe it’s like a niche that’s getting recognition. But I’m not surprised because you can even go to a classical concert and sit down and have your experience. I see some similarities in that. Maybe we just need a little bit more of a modern touch – go to the concert and not feel so stiff, like a classical concert. But we’re happy that people are resonating with the instrumental element of our music.”

3. The band recorded their latest album, *El Bueno Y El Malo* (which references the 1966 Spaghetti Western *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*) at Dan Auerbach’s Easy Eye Studio in Nashville, where they will soon return to record another album



El Bueno Y El Malo is available now on Easy Eye Sound

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Coming of Age

Named after a state route in Georgia, the 96 is Patrick James Eggle's now quite long-running answer to the souped-up Stratocaster. How does it fit into the empire?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE 96 CONTOUR TOP £4,110

CONTACT **Patrick James Eggle** PHONE **01691 661777** WEB **www.eggle.co.uk**

What You Need To Know

- 1 Patrick Eggle has been making guitars for a while...**
 Yes! I think we can class him as a veteran having burst onto the scene in the early 90s with well-received guitars such as the Berlin. Famously, mass production wasn't for him and he left the operation in 1994. After a spell in the USA, where he continued to build, concentrating on acoustics, he returned to the UK a decade later where his acoustic instruments became highly regarded. In 2014 Patrick turned his back on acoustic making and switched to electrics.
- 2 Does he work on his own, then?**
 No. Currently, Patrick has eight guitar-making staff who produce approximately 28 guitars a month. To put that into perspective, a 'small' brand like PRS Guitars builds around 100 guitars a day in its USA facility.
- 3 Can they still be custom ordered?**
 Absolutely. You can order your dream on the PJE Guitars website then they'll hook you up with a dealer of your choice. Lead time is around seven to eight months.

When you think of Patrick James Eggle, it's quite possibly his exceptional single-cut Macon that springs to mind, but he's far from an only-Gibson-inspired maker. Patrick's Oz model, for example, applies stellar craft to the original production electric and the 96, here, interprets and modernises the Stratocaster platform as so many makers have done since the 80s heyday of what we loosely call the 'SuperStrat.'

But whatever the build, Patrick's guitars are unified by the craft, which is never short of exceptional. We hadn't seen a picture of the guitar prior to its arrival, so we got our first glimpses on opening the case. From the light weight and a neck shape to die for, you just know this one is no different. Okay, you might be thinking, this is just a modern HSS S-style that we've seen countless times before, but like any great musician taking on a well-known





1. Here's another well-designed six-in-a-line headstock. The beautifully cut nut is Graph Tech Tusq, and the tuners, with staggered-height string posts, are from Gotoh's SG range with rear Magnum locks and a PJE logo
2. These are standard single coils from Mojo's '60's' set but with non-staggered polepieces to match the flatter fingerboard radius
3. The heel is beautifully shaped, as is the contouring in the cutaways. The roasted maple neck and roasted ash body have a similar colouration, the latter is centre-joined and diagonally grain-matched



standard, it's all about the interpretation of that melody or the reharmonisation of the chord changes. And, of course, this is about much more than simply plonking a humbucker by the bridge.

Typically, the Strat's outline is adapted and slightly downsized with somewhat thinned and sharper horns. These are combined with the 'sharp' edge radius of the maple top, which is laid over the forearm contour, hence the 'Contour' in the name, a nod to Tom Anderson's Drop Top. Like so many before it, the design removes more of the Strat's iconography by not having a scratchplate: the pickups direct-mount to the body, the controls are rear-mounted, and the output jack moves to the side on a chromed metal plate. Little gets in the way of the blue-jean-stained flames of the bookmatched maple top, its edges left natural to create the faux 'binding'.

The back is only slightly less opulent with its striped lightweight ash, roasted to create its caramel colouring. It's centre-joined with the grain of the two pieces diagonally matched. The rift-sawn roasted maple neck is similar in colour, although the stripped flame gives a third

Like the build, the sounds we hear are superb – even unplugged the voice is crisp, instantly responsive and very alive

'flavour' of exotica after the top and body back. Again, pretty typically for the style, the rectangular heel of the inspiration is rounded, and both cutaways are chamfered on the back (as much for style as comfort we'd wager), while the gold-coloured anodised aluminium neckplate is recessed into the top, like the rear cavity cover. Only the vibrato spring cover sits unrecessed on the body back.

Gotoh's 510 two-post vibrato is another staple of the high-end 'SuperStrat', and here it's all-steel and floats parallel with the top. The nut is Graph Tech Tusq and the vibrato system is completed with classy rear-lock Gotoh tuners.

THE RIVALS

Suhr's Modern Plus (approx. £3.5k) features a maple-topped basswood body, HSH Suhr pickups, roasted maple neck with a compound radius, stainless-steel frets and plenty of order options. Classic 'super-S' makers like Tom Anderson and James Tyler have more limited availability in the UK. Tyler's Japanese-made Studio Elite is available from GuitarGuitar for around £3.5k; USA models will cost about twice that. Peach Guitars has an enviable selection of Tom Anderson models – the Drop Top is around £5.5k. PRS's swamp-ash bodied Fiore (£2,829) is built to uncompromising standards with PRS's two-point steel vibrato, HSS pickups, tricky wiring, maple 'board and four colour options.

Back to the UK and PJD's HSS Woodford Pioneer (£2,999), designed exclusively for Andertons, pairs a lightweight ash body and roasted maple neck with Gotoh and Wudtone hardware. Not currently in production but worth tracking down.



4. Perfectly set up, the all-steel Gotoh 510 vibrato allows a tone up-bend on the G string, plenty of down-bend, and impeccable tuning stability. There's a good reason this vibrato is such an industry standard. The Mojo bridge humbucker was created to PJE's specification

5. There's no faulting the neck on this 96. From the rich rosewood fingerboard and its shining, well-sized frets, to the immensely comfortable 'shallow C' profile, it's all good

Feel & Sounds

Many guitars at this price point almost seem too pristine, too perfect to touch, but that's not the experience here. Aside from the glossed top, every surface is a very silky smooth satin, not least the neck back with its oiled finish, which feels like it's already been played for years. As Patrick tells us in the interview that follows this review, the shallow C profile is one of two that are offered on the bolt-on guitars. It has a compound radius and richly coloured rosewood fingerboard with big (but not silly big) jumbo frets. It might all sound rather modern – indeed, we even get glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side markers – but in the hand it's just impossibly comfortable with rolled fingerboard edges, mirror-shining frets and a sensible setup. At 43mm wide at the nut with a 1st fret depth of 21.3mm filling out to 23.2mm by the 12th, the neck actually feels like a near perfect balance of thin and big.

Like the build, the sounds we hear are superb – even unplugged the voice is crisp, instantly responsive and very alive. Plugged in, both single coils sound very sweet and musical, but there's a detailed

UNDER THE HOOD

A masterclass in wiring

Patrick is a firm believer in matching the inside of his guitars to the outside; the circuit here looks like a work of art and the cavity and plastic cover plate are screened, too. The two Alpha pull-switch pots have a very positive feel and a nominal value of 500kohms. The volume control uses a pretty standard treble bleed circuit with a .001µf green Mylar capacitor wired in parallel with a 150k resistor. A little less standard is the large .022µf Hosco paper-in-oil capacitor on the tone control, over spec with a 630V DC rating. The majority of the wiring uses cloth-covered wire, all perfectly soldered.

With the pull-switches down, it's a very standard drive from the five-way pickup selector. Pull up the switch on the volume to send the bridge straight to output bypassing the controls. Pull the tone control switch up: position 1 is bridge and neck; position 2 is all three together; positions 3 and 4 are middle and neck; position 5 is just the neck. With neck and middle selected, we're hum-cancelling, but the other combos aren't (except the bridge humbucker).

"The bridge pickup is around 14k," says Mojo's Marc Ransley (ours actually measured 13.3k at output), "and wound with 43 AWG plain enamel with Alnico V magnets. I've been making these for Pat since 2015 and they are pretty much 100 per cent his spec, so I can't take too much credit."

"That clarity was definitely part of the idea," Patrick says. "I didn't want it to sound too compressed. I asked Marc to build it hotter but still quite chimey, not compressed and not too fat. I don't know how he does it."

"The single coils are the neck and middle from my '60's' set," adds Marc, "with the exception that they have non-staggered magnets to work with Pat's fretboard radius. They're wound with 42 AWG heavy Formvar, have Alnico V magnets and are roughly 5.8k at the neck and 6k in the middle."



The tidy screened cavity packs in quite a lot, including that large Hosco tone capacitor



With the master volume and master tone control in down positions, it's a straightforward drive from the five-way selector switch. The pull-switch on the volume sends the bridge pickup directly to the output; the pull-switch on the tone allows bridge and neck to be combined, plus all three pickups together

high-end clarity that no doubt goes hand in hand with the build; the single coils sound beautifully 'produced'. We're only half-way down the selector switch and the choppy neck and sweetened, almost delicate neck and middle are standout sounds. The middle is perfectly suited, too, a slightly chimier version of the neck with a very matched character. There's no automatic split for the bridge humbucker when

There's a crispness and articulation with some roomy depth, not to mention a very well-tuned circuit

combined with the middle, so the mix does sound a little thicker, but you could argue it's a little less clichéd, a little chewier, especially with some amp grit.

Jumping to the bridge humbucker and it's a louder contrast with greater thickness and yet it's not all midrange heat – there's a PAF-like response but with a kick rather than seeming like two completely different instruments, as many HSS guitars like this can. The circuit is very good, too, with little loss of highs as you pull back the volume.

And that tone sounds very musical: a slight reduction pulls back the presence, not least of the single coils, almost creating an older voice. There's a little high-end lift with the 'blower' switch pulled up, and the two extra sounds – bridge and neck, and all three together – are viable inclusions.

Verdict

A glance at the price makes it easy to dismiss a model such as this as just another 'posh' guitar. Until you play it, that is. Like so many instruments we've had through our hands from Patrick James Eggle over the past near-decade, the build is always very good, but we'd wager it actually seems to improve on each instrument we get. Okay, this is hardly bringing a new style to the table, but it actually *feels* like an old guitar – with no cracked lacquer let alone any relicing in sight, although both are options – and despite its modern neck specification, this is a major trick in the PJE cookbook. Like the build, there's a crispness and articulation to the sounds with some roomy depth, not to mention a very well-tuned circuit, that gives you, the player, the choice of what you want to hear. Astonishing craft married to stellar sounds with a feel that few can match and, importantly, an options list that lets you truly spec your dream. Wow! **G**



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE 96 CONTOUR TOP

PRICE: £4,110 (inc hard case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Roasted swamp ash with 4A grade maple top

NECK: Roasted maple with 'Shallow C' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.4")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, clay dot inlays, Luminlay side dots, 254-400mm (10-16") compound radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo, Jescar 57110

HARDWARE: Gotoh 510 2-post vibrato with block saddles, Gotoh Magnum lock tuners with ebony buttons – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Mojo HSS pickup set, master volume and tone. Push-pull 'blower' switch for bridge pickup on volume control. Tone pot: pull-switch on tone adds neck to bridge pickup, plus all 3 on together

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.1/6.75

OPTIONS: The base price here is £3,800.

Numerous options can be discussed at order. For example, our sample's vibrato and locking tuners add £200; the compound radius adds £100

RANGE OPTIONS: The 96 Vintage starts at £3,000 and the carved top version at £4,200. The T-style Oz kicks off at £2,900. The Macon range starts with the Junior from £3,000, the Carve Top is from £4,700 and the Semi Hollow starts at £5,200

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

FINISH: Threadbare Denim gloss top from choice of six standard colours; custom colours and metallics (plus £180) – natural back with worn natural neck back – all nitro



10/10

PROS Stellar build quality; light weight; excellent neck feel, setup and playability; strong, versatile sounds with clarity when you need it

CONS It's hardly a new original design, but the familiarity is part of the appeal



“

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Craft Matters

With new guitar-making ventures seemingly popping up on a daily basis, we check in with the style and craft of one of the industry's most experienced luthiers

Words Dave Burrluck

Next year, Patrick James Eggle will celebrate a decade of electric-guitar making, a period that has seen him and his team producing some of the most jaw-dropping electric guitars money can buy. "There are so many anniversaries because I've switched track so many times," says Patrick, "so next year, 2024, is the 10th anniversary of when we started building electric guitars again, in the UK at these premises in Oswestry. I was building electrics, of course, in the early 90s, then everything went west and I wandered around, went walkabout for a little while, ended up in America, came back and eventually started building electric guitars again – 10 years ago next year."

The electric focus put the brakes on Patrick's highly regarded acoustic instruments. Does he miss making those? "Not really, because I'm so busy doing what I'm doing now. I actually sold all the tooling I had for the acoustics and a few people said I shouldn't do that because they thought I might want to start again in the



With an important anniversary in the very near future and another *Guitarist* Gold award, Patrick James Eggle has plenty to smile about

"I've always been into roasted woods for sonic reasons – they sound older and a little richer"

future. But I said, 'No, I'm not going to build acoustic guitars ever again.' At the moment, that still stands. But who knows? In my 70s, pottering around in my shed, I might want to give it a go."

While it's the set-neck Macon that holds the No 1 spot in terms of orders, the bolt-on T-style Oz and the S-style 96 models remain popular and, like the Macon, each comes in various styles. "Yes, the 96 comes in three levels," explains Patrick. "Our order book is mainly for the 96 Vintage with either alder or swamp ash bodies. The Contour Top definitely falls second to that, which is probably down to price and perhaps because it's a bit more 'furniture', with the maple top, and less utilitarian." The 96 Carved Top takes that further and is

the upper level of the mini-series. But the combination of the three core models and their variants means that virtually every major style of electric guitar is covered in the PJE range.

"My first guitar was an SG copy and that's always come up with me as my go-to guitar as a player," Patrick tells us. "But as a guitar builder, you want to try everything, don't you? And I've built everything from bass guitars to mandolins over the years. You want to have a crack at everything and understand what's cool about that instrument and see if you can add anything to it or just faithfully reproduce what it is that people find good and useful."

"So most of the projects I embark upon are either a personal thing – I just want to do something for the hell of it – or they're the result of people asking me to do something. Or, more normally, a mix of the two."

Can he remember the start point of the 96? "No, I haven't got a clue," laughs Patrick.

Looking back over our reviews of PJE electrics, it was in 2016, issue 408, that we first got our hands on an early 96. A theme that runs through all the subsequent

reviews is the superb feel of the necks. "We do two basic necks for our bolt-ons, a 'soft V' profile with a 12-inch fingerboard radius and medium-tall frets. Then we do the one you have there, 'shallow C', the compound radius and jumbo frets," explains Patrick, "just because that one's a bit more 'metal'," he laughs. "I used to call it the 'fast' neck, but it doesn't help you play any faster, does it? So, really, it's just a different feel. And just to keep us all sane here when we're building, we don't mix those specs: it's one or the other. So there are two necks, but within that you can have different woods – all roasted maple, master grade or standard, or whatever. In truth, 90 per cent of orders are for the more vintage-style 'soft V' neck."

Specification aside, the 'worn through' neck back always feel superb. Is that a standard oil-and-wax finish? "We basically use [Birchwood Casey] Tru-Oil, a USA gun stock oil. It's actually easier to get that really smooth finish on roasted maple, something about what the process does to the wood. So, the neck is sanded to 600-grit paper, then after the headstock and heel are sprayed, after fret dressing and after



1. This Macon Single Cut earned a *Guitarist* Gold award from Neville Marten in issue 489
2. The Macon Jr DC – a rock 'n' roll masterpiece – has a Mojo P90 Dogear single coil and heat-aged gloss nitro finish
3. Another Gold winner, this 96 Carved Top (issue 416) has a patinated brass 'plate and open-pore matt black acrylic finish
4. Patrick's T-style model is called the Oz – here it has a Cream T Banger & Mash pickup at the neck designed for Keith Richards



we oil the fretboard, we go over the back of the neck again – in case any furriness has been introduced with handling the neck during those previous finishing processes. Then we give it a coat of gun stock oil, wipe the excess off, then leave it an hour to soak in. We give it a second coat, then leave that for three to four hours. Then we go over it with wire wool. Finally, we go over it with a secondary treatment – Birchwood Casey Stock Sheen and Conditioner – which gives it a more slippery, slick feel.”

Bake Off

As our review illustrates, with the exception of that thin maple top, the other woods are roasted. “When we started using roasted maple we were some of the only people using it,” says Patrick. “I remember we did some tests for the Faith acoustic guitars [that Patrick designed] where we had a few built with torrifed [aka roasted] spruce tops, and we A/B’d them with exactly the same model but with non-roasted spruce tops. The difference was really there. The roasted ones sounded older, with all the new edges knocked off, and a little richer sounding.

So I’ve always been into it for the sonic reasons, but also – in terms of the roasted maple necks – the feel. It seems a lot more prevalent today, a lot of people are using it. I guess it might drop out of fashion, but I don’t think it’ll ever disappear. I’ve noticed quite a few people using roasted maple for the tops, too, but the disadvantage is that you can only make it one colour – brown – after that. The good thing about standard maple on a top is that you can make them any colour.”

Our guitar’s light weight made us think it was probably chambered, but it’s actually very lightweight swamp ash, which is also roasted. “To be honest, largely I think it just looks nice [with a natural finish]. If it’s already a nice colour that goes with the colour we’re going to do the top, then that’s a whole process we don’t have to do in the spray room. [And because] it’s roasted, it’s also going to have a beneficial effect on the sound. I think it’s more stable, too, and as an added benefit it makes it resistant to termite infection,” he laughs.

Many makers have looked at alternatives to swamp ash because it was becoming

hard to source and therefore very expensive. “There were very bad floods in the south of the USA that were hampering the vehicles getting in to literally harvest the trees. There was also the emerald [ash] borer bug, and it was making it very difficult to source swamp ash. But then I think Fender stopped using it outside of the Custom Shop, that’s what I understand, and since then there’s not been any problem with the floods, either, so those two things have made it easier to get your hands on swamp ash: Fender not buying it and all the floods receding, I guess. Here and now it’s fine. Next year? Who knows.”

Speaking of next year, does Patrick have plans for any new designs in the near future? “It’s all in my head,” he laughs. “It’s about finding the time, which I intend to do very soon to put those ideas into something that’s a three-dimensional reality. But it will happen over the next year. I see people out there doing original designs and they seem to be doing okay, but I think it does take more getting used to by the guitar-buying public. The challenge is to build something new but that still feels comfortable to people.” **G**



Highway To Heaven

Following the success of Fender's Acoustasonic series come two somewhat more traditional-looking electros. Packed with Fender/Fishman innovation, could they be even cooler?

Words Neville Marten Photography Olly Curtis





FENDER HIGHWAY SERIES PARLOR & DREADNOUGHT £949 EACH

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

What You Need To Know

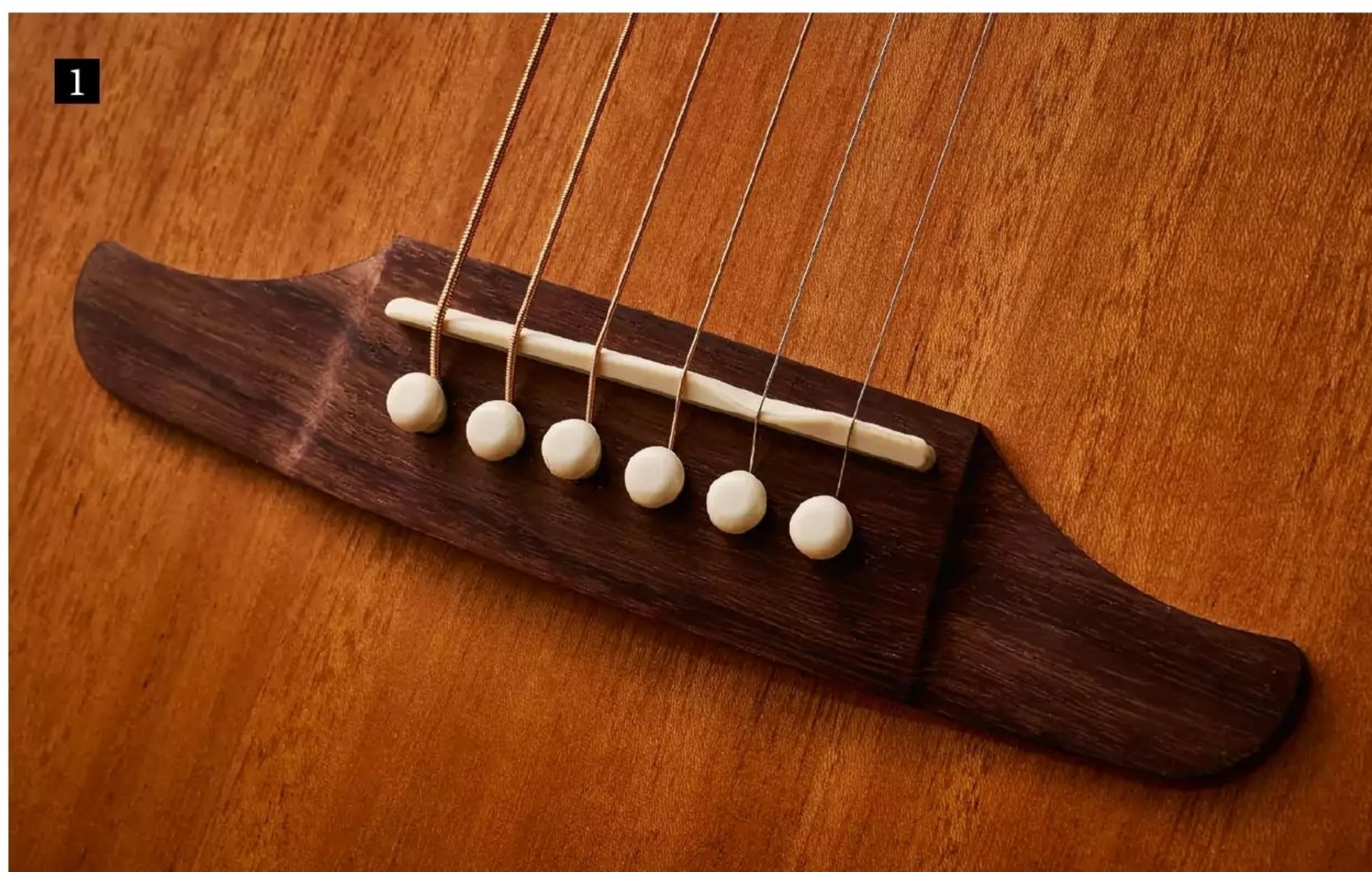
- 1 Is it weird to have a Strat-style headstock on an acoustic?**
 Not at all. Back in the 60s, Fender launched a range of Roger Rossmeisl-designed acoustics with bolt-on necks, almost all featuring Strat-style pegheads (only the 12-string Shenandoah and Villager deviated, with their 'hockey stick' headstocks). The range included such names as Kingman, Newporter, Malibu, Redondo and the wacky, stain-injected Wildwood models.
- 2 What's that curious curved pickup at the soundhole end?**
 It's a Fishman Fluence, designed by the legendary acoustic pickup manufacturer for this particular range. Wholly analogue (unlike the DSP used on the Acoustasonic models), it promises authentic and crystal clear acoustic tones.
- 3 Do these guitars sound like acoustics when unamplified?**
 Yes. While they'll never produce the tone, power and projection of something like a full-bodied Martin dreadnought, they have a satisfying unamplified voice that would work fine in a singalong, or just to accompany oneself at home on the sofa.

When Fender's American Acoustasonic Telecaster debuted at Winter NAMM in January 2019, it raised eyebrows with its eye-catching style and unique construction. Yet its immediate success surprised even Fender. The first year's production sold out from orders at that very first show and more models soon followed. It seems plenty of players wanted live acoustic (and electric) tones, but couldn't live with the faff that goes with using a full-size flat-top on stage. They probably fancied something a bit sexier looking, too.

With an eye on another potentially huge market, Fender reasoned that there was

another raft of players who would prefer something that – from the audience's viewpoint, at least – could pass for a regular acoustic. Enter the Highway Series, the first two models of which are the Ensenada-built Dreadnought and Parlor, each available with either mahogany or Sitka spruce tops. And while the bodies of both instruments are a mere 57.15mm (2.25 inches) deep, they are fully chambered, with what Fender calls 'tapered floating X bracing'.

While the guitars' construction is ultra-modern and radical, their materials couldn't be more traditional. So we find fully hollow bodies with sides and backs of mahogany, and necks made of the same





THE RIVALS

At the top comes Takamine's beautiful-looking TSP178ACKN Thinline FX (£2,299) with its cutaway body and arched Hawaiian koa top and back. It features a block-inlaid ebony fingerboard and Takamine's renowned Palathetic pickup and CT-N3 preamp.

Further down the price pecking order comes the cool-looking Ibanez AEWC400 (£569) in Amber Sunburst. With its swept-back Florentine cutaway, forearm chamfer on a nato body with flamed maple top and walnut fingerboard, it also boasts Fishman's simple but excellent Sonitone pickup.

If you want to keep the Fender name and fancy a more electric-like experience then the Acoustasonic Player Telecaster (£989) has a mahogany body with spruce top, Tim Shaw-designed electric pickup and Fender/Fishman acoustic sounds creating six blendable electric and acoustic voices: hugely versatile!

material. What makes each guitar look different (apart from its size) is this choice of either a spruce or mahogany top, and slightly different edge and soundhole purfling for each top type. Fingerboards are East Indian rosewood, the bodies are finished in a thin-skin satin polyester, and the three-bolt necks are coated with an open-pore satin urethane.

The minimalist appearance, with only simple cosmetic appointments – 'chequerboard' edge purfling and soundhole ring on the spruce versions, and dark and light stripes on the mahogany – echoes the simple aesthetic of Fender's electrics but with a big nod towards old-fashioned acoustic guitar design. And that six-a-side peghead? Bring it on! It goes so well with these guitars' looks, and the etched-in spaghetti logo screams vintage Fender, too. What's not to love?

Although cosmetic details are pretty similar on the differently timbered models, dimensionally their bodies are very different, the Dreadnought being 380mm (14.96 inches) across its lower bout and the Parlor significantly more diminutive at 370mm (14.57 inches) respectively.

Other details include a 305mm (12-inch) radius 20-fret fingerboard with a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length; a Tusq nut and a nut width of 42.86mm; recessed headstock truss adjustment with walnut skunk stripe; six-a-side vintage-style tuners; three-bolt neck join with Micro-Tilt and a 'modern Viking' rosewood bridge sporting white pins. Also, a quick-release battery

compartment sits within a black plate on the rear of each model.

A word about construction. The Highway models' backs, sides and heel block are actually hewn from a single piece of mahogany, with the separate top dropped in. This gives the guitars their light but chunky feel, and makes creating the comfy forearm and belly cuts more practical for

With help from the Fishman Fluence pickup, feedback is all but banished

Fender. It's probably also why the company describes the top's bracing system as 'floating'. This design, along with help from the Fishman Fluence pickup, means that feedback howl – the bane of the live acoustic guitarist's life – is all but banished.

And now to that all-important Fluence Acoustic Pickup System, which works identically on both models. Fender explains it as a dual-source pickup with two distinct tonalities: full-range at one end, for something like singer-songwriter fingerpicking where bass and treble are more pronounced, to reduced bass and pushed mids at the other, more for band or ensemble work. These sounds are accessed by the Contour knob, which sweeps between 'singer-songwriter' when fully anti-clockwise, and 'band' when wide open. Of course, the nature of a rotary control

1. The Highway Series guitars feature the attractive 'Viking'-style rosewood bridge with compensated saddle. There's no under-saddle pickup here, only the Fishman Fluence system mounted at the neck

2. The Highways' 20 frets are relatively chunky for an 'acoustic', and the slab-style rosewood fingerboards feature simple white dot inlays. The guitars come fitted with Fender Dura-Tone coated 0.011-52 strings

means you can find your perfect mix, or adjust things on the fly.

The further forward of the two knobs is a volume control. As someone who regularly plays acoustic in both band and singer-songwriter contexts, this reviewer knows how convenient it is to regain control of your mix from the well-meaning sound guy, who doesn't necessarily know what you want at every given moment. Let's take a listen.

Feel & Sounds

Since the Highway models' solid one-piece backs and sides are an in-built part of the construction, Fender has treated them just like a Strat or Tele, with the necks screwed in place so there's no big acoustic heel to get in the way of the fretting hand. Upper-fret access is therefore relatively unfettered – you can play E minor pentatonic at the 12th fret and even bend the top string if you so desire! The necks themselves are far more electric than acoustic in feel, their comfy C-shape nestling in the palm just as you want them to, and the open-pore satin urethane finish gliding under the fingers for a drag-free playing experience. The actions are set just right with 0.011-gauge strings, but you could always go

It's remarkable how convincing an acoustic tone one can produce using a valve amp

down to acoustic 10 or 10.5 sets for an even more slinky feel.

Played acoustically, the Highways really take you by surprise. Anyone that's tried an Acoustasonic knows it sounds okay unplugged but not exactly rewarding in the sofa-noodling sense. These, by contrast, jump out at you with a voice that's full and bright, and that word rewarding again. No, of course they won't compete with a £6,500 Collings, but they'll definitely hold their own jamming with a friend, in a singalong with other acoustic instruments, or back on that sofa keeping you musical company.

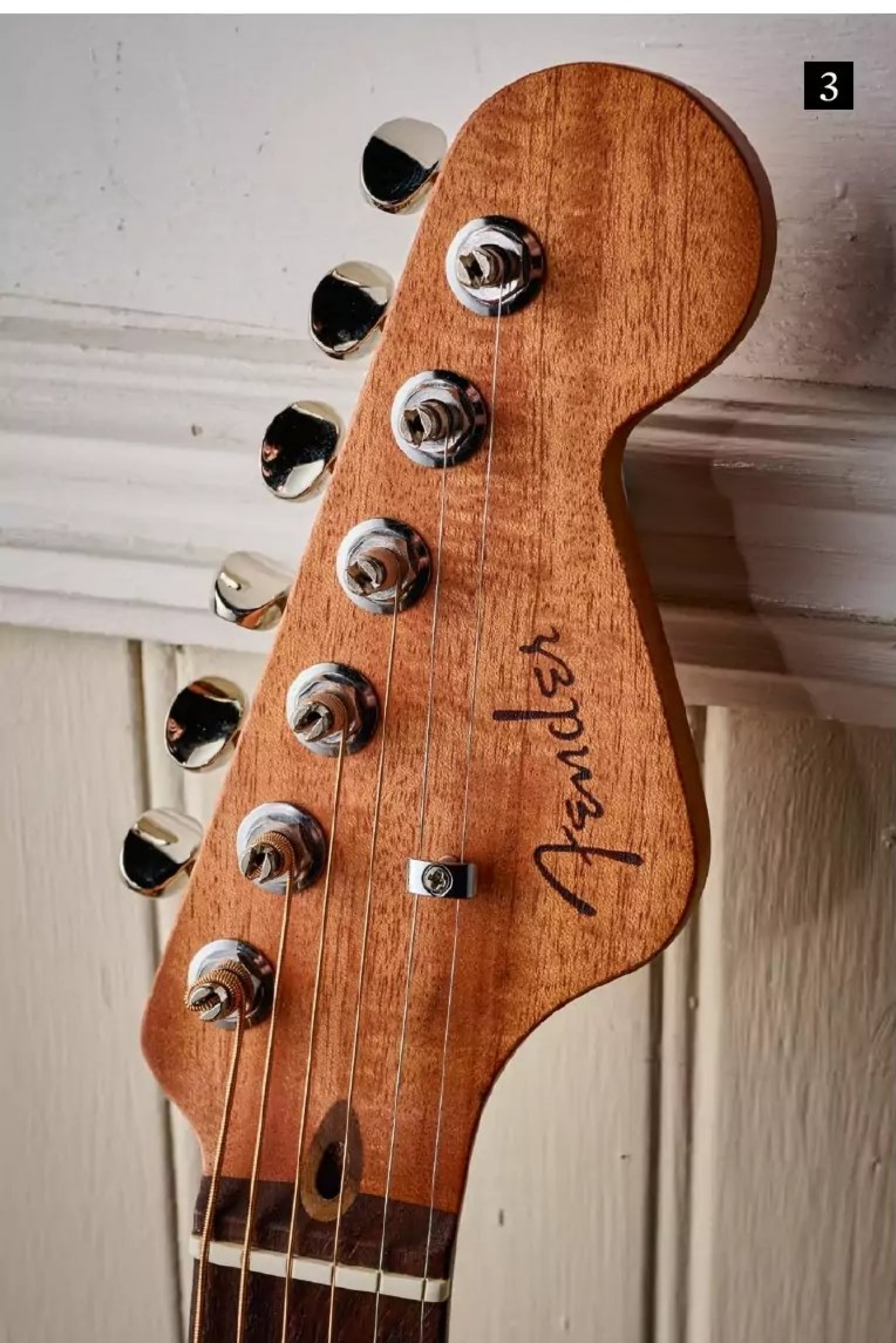
The Fishman Fluence is a totally analogue pickup. Mounted at the neck, and neatly curved to reflect the soundhole's form, it's both unobtrusive and attractive. Said to offer genuinely acoustic sounds, we couldn't wait to try the guitars through not

only a dedicated acoustic amp but also an everyday guitar combo, just to see how they perform in both scenarios (we think they might handle a bit of overdrive, too).

Since many guitarists are likely to plug a Highway into their regular rig's clean channel for a song or two, adding reverb, delay and chorus when required, we did the same. Our trusty Laney Lionheart 20 was the chosen vehicle and neither amp nor guitars disappointed. It's remarkable how convincing an acoustic tone one can produce using a valve amp with a 12-inch speaker, when all the books say you need a full-range PA or dedicated acoustic amp.

We expected both our Highways to perform exactly the same, but in reality they produced somewhat different results through the Laney. The Dreadnought was big and beefy, with lots of low-end grunt but plenty of clarity in the mids and trebles. Subtle is the word we'd use to describe the Contour's effect on the tone; while the tonal difference in the sweep is there – and just as Fender describes it – it's quite slight, so you may well find a setting you like and just leave it there.

Turning up the wick a notch or two on the Lionheart's Drive channel, the



3. The pointed tip on a Strat's headstock is rounded off here, but the etched-in Fender logo looks great. Note the vintage-style tuners and truss adjustment point



4. The solid spruce or mahogany tops are dropped into the solid, chambered mahogany body and feature what Fender calls a 'floating' bracing system



5

Dreadnought was comfortable to a point, but the mix of amp drive and enough volume to fill a big room did send it over the edge. Sadly, there were no stompboxes on hand, but logic tells us that pedal drive without the massive kick in volume would not make the guitars so reactive.

Plugging in the Parlor and expecting no difference to speak of, we were greeted with a lighter version of the Dread's voice but sweeter and perhaps more natural. Maybe the extra air and wood of the bigger guitar and its mahogany top are providing the additional low-end thump. The Parlor also fared marginally better in the overdriven feedback stakes, again probably for the same reasons. One is not better, and the next player may well prefer the Dreadnought in this regard, but through the valve combo the Parlor marginally takes it for your writer.

All that, of course, is using ostensibly the 'wrong' amp, so how about an AER Compact 60? Well, well, well. The books are right! Of course, straight into the acoustic world's staple combo the difference was immense. The tables were also turned, this time the Dreadnought's bigger dimensions and mahogany top provided everything you could want from an amplified acoustic guitar, and nothing you didn't. The sound is so natural and real, with a genuine acoustic tone that would please even the harshest of critics. Perhaps unsurprisingly the Contour seems more active through the AER, too.



6

A bit like its forbear, the Fishman Rare Earth, playing further up the neck does make the guitars' tones a little more 'electric' sounding, but for licks that might be just what you're after. Nevertheless, a great playing experience.

When we say the tables were turned, in reality what you get with the smaller instrument is the amplified sound of an acoustic parlour guitar, when compared with that of a real dreadnought. So obviously it's lighter and less bullish, with no less volume to speak of but a sweeter, brighter voice that may well favour fingerstyle,

5. Notice the Highway's rounded edges, which help make these guitars very comfortable to play. The neck heel is just like that of a Strat or Tele and is affixed with a three-bolt Micro-Tilt neckplate in black

6. Fishman's Fluence pickup is curved to match the soundhole's edge, and the rosewood fingerboard is also slightly recessed to accommodate it

although in reality both guitars sound superb strummed or picked. It was difficult to put the darned things down.

Verdict

There’s everything to love about these guitars, retailing for under a grand and mostly streeting just below £900 – we think they’ll fly. Acoustasonics are made in both the USA and Mexico, but so far only Fender’s Ensenada facility is producing the Highway Series. And while it might be nice

7. Although these are relatively simple guitars, we love the spruce-topped Parlor’s chequerboard binding and this neat diamond inlay above the endpin, where the two sides of the top come together

If you own an acoustic combo or have access to a PA and monitors, that’s where the Highways’ magic is revealed

to dream about Custom Shop versions as the ultimate stage electro, these are hard to fault as they are. They look great, play really well, are sensibly thought through and, most important of all, sound amazing! While they will work fine through your guitar amp for a few songs in the set, if you own an acoustic combo or have access to a PA and monitors, that’s where the Highway Series’ true magic is revealed.

So, which one would we buy? The jury’s still out, but either way it’s well done Fender. We want one! 



FENDER HIGHWAY SERIES PARLOR

PRICE: £949 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Non-cutaway thin-body parlour acoustic
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce with chequerboard purfling
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany (1-piece)
MAX RIM DEPTH: 57.15mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 370mm
NECK: Mahogany, C-section, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 628.65mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Vintage-style Fender 6-in-line
NUT/WIDTH: White Tusq/42.86mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, white dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 20 medium-jumbo
BRIDGE/SPACING: ‘Modern Viking’ style, rosewood with white compensated saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Fluence analogue pickup system with volume and contour controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.041/4.5
OPTIONS: Solid mahogany top (£949)
RANGE OPTIONS: Dreadnought in mahogany or spruce top (both £949)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Open-pore thin-skin polyester body, open-pore thin-skin urethane neck, natural finish



9/10

PROS Clever and exceptionally usable electro; super looks; great playability; crystal clear and authentic parlour or OO-style tones

CONS Be good to see some colour options like the Acoustasonics, and are these Highway Series models a little expensive in comparison?



FENDER HIGHWAY SERIES DREADNOUGHT

PRICE: £949 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Non-cutaway thin-body dreadnought acoustic
TOP: Solid mahogany with dark/light striped purfling
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany (1-piece)
MAX RIM DEPTH: 57.15mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: Mahogany, C-section, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 628.65mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Vintage-style Fender 6-in-line
NUT/WIDTH: White Tusq/42.86mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, white dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 20 medium-jumbo
BRIDGE/SPACING: ‘Modern viking’ style, rosewood with white compensated saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Fluence analogue pickup system with volume and contour controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.78/6.1
OPTIONS: Solid spruce top (£949)
RANGE OPTIONS: Parlor in mahogany or spruce top (both £949)
LEFT-HANDERS: NO
FINISH: Open-pore thin-skin polyester body, open-pore thin-skin urethane neck, natural finish



9/10

PROS Fantastic, well thought-out electro-acoustic; great looks; fine playability; big, bold and brilliantly authentic dreadnought-style tones

CONS As with the Parlor model, we’d like to see some colour options and we wonder whether these are on the high side, price-wise

Extended Family

At pretty much the same price as the new Highway electros, Fender's genre-defying Acoustasonic shares some similar electro-acoustic style. We compare the two

Words Dave Burrluck

As the Highway Series proves, not for the first time, Fender is not just the vintage-driven guitar company many might think. But there is prior art and that is clearly the Acoustasonic: the more tech-laden solidbody-sized electro acoustic with added electric sounds. So, what do the two series share and what are the differences?

The most obvious similarity is the necks. Although the Highway's headstock is larger and has vintage-style tuners as opposed to more modern enclosed types, they really are similar, particularly in size and their lightly finished 'open pore' satin feel. But the Highway is non-cutaway, has 20 frets and the neck joins the body at the 14th fret. Our Acoustasonic Player Jazzmaster, meanwhile, follows electric protocol: 22 frets, a cutaway, and nicely radiused heel so access to the full fingerboard is equally electric-like.

Shape aside, both seem to use a similar chambered body construction where the back and sides are cut from solid mahogany; the Highway is slighter deeper overall, measured at just under 58mm, while the Acoustasonic is more solidbody-like at 45mm. The Jazzmaster is the largest Acoustasonic body size and really isn't over-shadowed by the downsized 380mm

(14.96-inch) wide dreadnought. Weight-wise, too, the Highway checks in at 2.78kg (6.1lb), the Acoustasonic at 2.45kg (5.4lb), and strapped on both feel rather good, with the added body depth giving the Highway a bigger feel.

As we say in our review, the Highway has an unsurprisingly bigger acoustic voice that's louder but still relatively bass-light with quite a pronounced midrange. It lacks the depth of a similar-sized and traditionally built thinline electro-acoustic we had for comparison, not to mention that of an altogether bigger, deeper Martin dreadnought that was better balanced, sound-wise. But neither's primary aim is as an unamplified acoustic guitar: both are designed to plug in.

Power Games

The big difference lies with the pickup systems. The Acoustasonic Player is a slightly stripped-down version of the original USA model and gives us a more traditional acoustic-like under-saddle pickup *and* that modern-looking Acoustasonic Shawbucker magnetic humbucker – it is a dual-source system. The Highway is single source, with the curved Fluence Core pickup placed a long way from the bridge at the fingerboard end.

Both guitars offer similar top-mounted controls: volume and, in the Highway's case, a Contour control; the Acoustasonic's Blend knob isn't that different, allowing you to move between whichever of the three voice pairs are selected by the three-way Voice Selector lever switch. Clearly, the potential for more voices – six in total – is the Acoustasonic's calling card, not least the electric ones. You could say that the Highway has just one voice pair.

With the Acoustasonic's Voice Selector in the 'neck' position, it gives us a mahogany small-body short-scale guitar as Voice A and a rosewood dreadnought as Voice B. So you could also say we're not a million miles away from the Highway's more focused anti-clockwise voice and the subtly wider-sounding, mid-scooped sound at the other end, which has enhanced low-end.

In truth, these are *very* different sounds. If you've ever used Fishman's Rare Earth

The most obvious similarity is the necks... and the big difference lies with the pickup systems



The two series share similar-shaped headstocks, and their bodies have much in common, too, with chambered construction and a slim depth. The Acoustasonic's voices, however, are very different

soundhole pickup, you'll recognise some of that character in the Highway, notably in higher positions on the fingerboard where there's a more electric-like character, which you may simply prefer. It's bluesy and jazzy, good for slide, too, and more direct-sounding with less body or roomy resonance; in lower positions there's more 'acoustic' to the voice and good depth. Swapping over to the Acoustasonic, it's like we're now listening to a decent contemporary studio recording of a good acoustic guitar. For example, there's a lot more high-end sparkle and detail that enhances string noise but can be a little ear-wearing. The Highway, although less 'accurate', actually sounds a little sweeter. In higher positions, the Acoustasonic retains that studio-like pristineness – it's quite a contrast to the Highway. So, the same family, maybe, but very different characters! **G**

Gain Monster

The Dinosaural name makes a welcome return with all your boost and drive options in a single pedal

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis





DINOSAURAL COGMEISTER £299

CONTACT **Coggins Audio** PHONE **07733 016732** WEB **www.cogginsaudio.co.uk**

What You Need To Know

- 1

Dinosaural? Who are they?

Well, if you haven't heard of Dinosaural you will certainly have heard of Lovetone and ThorpyFX. Dan Coggins was the designer of the much-missed Lovetone pedals and more recently has been designing pedals for ThorpyFX, including the ER-2 reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Dinosaural is Dan's own brand.
- 2

What's the Cogmeister?

Dan describes it as "a trio of compatible booster effects designed for the electric guitar".
- 3

So, it's just like stacking boost and drive pedals together?

Yes, but all in one box with a drive circuit that's bookended with an input treble booster and an output midrange booster.

When it comes to choosing boost and drive pedals to work together in a signal chain, there are an awful lot of options out there and it can be a bit hit and miss putting some favourite individual pedals together on a 'board to see what works best. Take the case of using three pedals to build up your gain staging – perhaps for clean boost, crunch and lead, or maybe loud, louder and loudest. If that's your game, the Cogmeister may just provide everything you need in one place; it's a three-in-one gain pedal with individually footswitchable Push, Drive and Solo sections designed to perfectly complement each other.

The Cogmeister is the brainchild of Dan Coggins, the designer behind the Lovetone pedals that first started appearing in the

1990s and are now sought-after high-ticket collector's items. Dan founded Dinosaural in 2002, producing the Tube Bender, but took a break from pedal building in 2008, starting up again in 2012 with the likes of the OTC-201 Opti Compressor and OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp.

Around that time Dan met Adrian Thorpe, who was thinking of starting the ThorpyFX brand, and got involved with the project, eventually starting full-time work with Thorpy in 2020. That year was when Dan first put together a prototype of the Cogmeister and used it at gigs, making tweaks along the way before finally getting to the production version we have here. Initial runs were handmade by Dan on his kitchen table, but it was hard to keep up with demand. However, the Thorpy



1. This Peak knob offers increasing distortion with progressively higher gain but narrower bandwidth midrange boost



Three distinct midrange contours are available from the Shift switch. The graphic legending clearly shows you the differences between them

connection has proved very useful in the Cogmeister story as the pedals are now being made on a sub-contract basis by Thorpy and should be readily available – all are still individually tested by Dan who procures the parts for them.

In Use

The pedal is nicely laid out with the three gain sections clearly delineated. Each section has its gain or level controls located on the top row of chickenhead knobs, while the tonal shapers are all located on the bottom row – we include the Peak knob as one of those, although it actually adjusts both bandwidth and gain. On Dan's advice we initially set all the controls for 12 o'clock and just dived in, switching the various sections in and out. At these settings the unit is immediately impressive and reveals what it is capable of as each section interacts with the next, whetting the appetite for setting the controls to best suit your rig.

Starting in correct signal-chain order from right to left, the Push section is a late-60s-style single silicon transistor treble booster that basically excites the upper midrange and is designed to push anything that comes after it. One knob turns up the gain, and the Low knob adjusts the bandwidth – at its minimum position this is all treble booster, but advancing the knob brings in low frequencies until you get a full-range boost. It works great on its own, hitting the front-end of clean or dirty amps,

but it also builds in enhancement and extra gain to subsequent Cogmeister stages.

The next in line is the transistor-based Drive section at the heart of the pedal, which is actually a refined version of the Dinosaural Tube Bender circuit. Here, different tonal options are provided by a three-position Shift switch linked to the Tone knob that brings in three distinct midrange contours. There's a flat setting with a full midrange that's reminiscent of

All or selected sections can be used to build a composite sound – like a construction kit of dirt sounds

a 60s-vintage Marshall. Alternatively, you can have a midrange scoop with a distinct Fender amp flavour or a smaller midrange scoop that fits in somewhere between the two. All of these can be tweaked by the potent Tone knob that can dial in a perfect balance between low and high to suit your rig. There are some fine low-level drive tones to be found here, but beyond those the Sustain knob will run the whole gamut to the full-on throaty distortion you'd get from a driven valve amp; kicking in the Push can get this to really sing.

The two-knob Solo section, using Zener diode clipping, is last in the signal

THE RIVALS

There are some other triple-footswitch boost/drive pedals out there, but you may have to import them. The XTS Preamp (\$599) puts three of the company's circuits – the Atomic Overdrive, Precision Multi-Drive and Pegasus Boost – in one box. From Germany there's the Rodenberg Amplification SL-OD Steve Lukather Signature Overdrive (£199) with two ODs and a boost onboard. Available closer to home you'll find some versatile twin-footswitch contenders, notably the Keeley D&M Drive (£229) with its boost side and drive side, and Strymon's Sunset Dual Overdrive (£269), with two overdrives (each with a choice of three circuits).

chain and its Level knob acts as an overall output level for the whole pedal. It starts from zero volume, so you can use this section as a kill switch if desired. The Peak knob combines an increase in gain with midrange boost, offering sharpened emphasis in a crucial frequency range that gives the sound more presence and clarity. We really liked it on its own in front of an amp as a kicked-in boost to add extra pokiness and drive, but we'd happily use it as an always-on tone conditioner. It also works brilliantly as an adjunct to the Drive section by adding in that extra whomp needed to lift solos beyond your rhythm



2. In the Push section with the Low knob at minimum you'll get a classic 'treble booster', but advancing the knob will bring lower frequencies back into the equation

3. You use the Sus(tain) knob to determine the input gain range of the Drive section. When advanced, it increases the harmonics and speeds up the rise time of the distortion

4. The pedal needs a good quality nine-volt DC power supply (it's not happy with economy switch-mode types), or you can use a battery accessed by undoing the six baseplate screws



sound. Without the drive engaged, you can also conjure up some edgy crunch tones by combining the two boosts.

The prime use of the pedal would be for gigging, setting up each stage to work with the next to be used, singly and in combination when needed. It truly excels in that role, bringing in the different elements as and when required, and could quite likely provide all your gain needs for the stage. It's certainly a great buy if playing classic rock is your thing, but there's more to this pedal than that. All or selected sections can be used to build a composite sound; think of it like a construction kit of

dirt sounds – basically a gain powerhouse that's capable of a wide range of sounds including some vintage fuzz tones.

Verdict

The Cogmeister is an excellent pedal. While there are plenty of dual-drive pedals around, to put three gain sections into one pedal is inspired. Individually, these three will all work flawlessly with your amp, each bringing a different gain voice element to it, but in combination they can all slot together brilliantly, each stage complementing its neighbour(s) and taking the sound to the next level. **G**



DINOSAURAL COGMEISTER

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Boost/drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Push Gain, Push Low, Drive Volume, Drive Sustain, Drive Tone, EQ Shift switch, Solo Level, Solo Peak, Push footswitch, Drive footswitch, Solo footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V -12V DC adaptor 7-16mA

DIMENSIONS: 185 (w) x 118 (d) x 50mm (h)



10/10

PROS Great sound; easy to use control layout; three complementary effects in one box; just one power cable (or battery) needed for (effectively) three pedals

CONS Nothing

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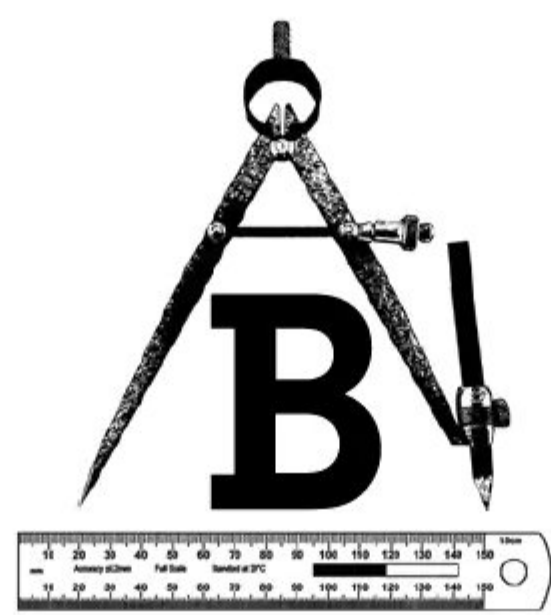
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« BLUEPRINT »

NEW AGE

Gibson's master artisan and Custom Shop veteran Tom Murphy has reinvented the process of guitar ageing. Now he's turned his eye and – perhaps, more importantly – his ear, to the firm's acoustic line

Words Matthew Parker & David Mead

In the space of a few decades, pre-aged guitars have gone from industry joke to high art. A large part of that turnaround has been down to the work of Tom Murphy, whose work has elevated what was once a (quite literally) scattergun process into something more akin to historical restoration.

Murphy operated independently for many years, but as of 2020 was chosen to head up Gibson's specially created Murphy Lab, sharing his innovative tools and techniques with a small crew of hand-picked employees. The Custom Shop instruments they finish have become revered for their convincingly vintage look and feel, and many players will swear they sound better for the treatment, too.

Now, in collaboration with Gibson's Bozeman, Montana "craftory", the Murphy Lab is expanding its sights to take in a range of five pre-aged, period-correct acoustic models, including a 1933 L-00 parlour guitar, 1942 Banner J-45 and Jumbo Vintage, a 1957 SJ-200 flat-top and a 1960 Hummingbird.

This time, though, it's not simply about perfecting the belt-buckle rash. As Murphy maintains, "we want all the attention paid to the sound".



Tom Murphy leads a hand-picked team of craftspeople in Gibson's Murphy Lab and has turned the act of artificially ageing guitars into something approaching high art

Could you provide some background on the work the Murphy Lab has been doing since it opened?

"Well, I've been doing some version of ageing to the finish of historic guitars for 25 years. As of 2020, when I came on full-time inside the Custom Shop, I developed a new method, which involves real checking of the lacquer, instead of the artificial checking I'd done for a long time. And it really just took the whole concept to another level, I was very excited about it.

"Gibson approached me about working with a group inside the factory, and the staff and I brought in that process. So my staff are craftsmen who I've taught methods of authentic arm wear, belt wear and distressing. Now there's no more 'Murphy aged', it's all Murphy Lab and there are four levels of ageing: ultra light, light, heavy and ultra heavy, and the distressing progresses through those levels. And, of course, now we have artist projects, where we copy the actual product: Greeny, the Kirk Hammett project [for instance]. So the Lab has become really convenient as a way to frame that concept of ageing. Even though my name's attached to it, I don't have to do every single guitar. I look at every guitar, I inspect every guitar, I approve them, but we work as a team. So that's the Murphy Lab."

What state are the guitars in when they arrive at the Murphy Lab? Are they made in order for you to age them?

"We have one very important element and that is our proprietary finish. That finish has to go on our instruments or we can't use them in the Lab. It allows us to execute the different procedures that make a guitar look old. It wears easily. We don't peel paint off any more – we sort of chip it off and rub it and burnish the edges.

After years of turning out realistically 'aged' electric guitars, the Murphy Lab has now turned its hand to relicing acoustics

"I look at every guitar,
I inspect every guitar,
I approve them, but
we work as a team.
That's the Murphy Lab"





“When I was finishing the first Greeny of this Brazilian run, I was standing over the guitar and I said to Cesar [Gueikian, Gibson president and CEO], ‘That’s the best work I’ve ever been involved in.’ Meaning, I didn’t do all the work: mother nature did a key part of it. So I’m super proud of what we’re able to do now.

“I appreciated getting to do what I did for all those years [before], but I knew for a fact every bit of it was artificial. I used to take a new guitar with a new finish and try to make it look old. Now I take a new guitar and put an old finish on it, because it responds like an old finish. It’s sort of fragile, but it feels great, feels old and allows us, in my estimation, much more authentic and realistic features that represent age.”

You’ve just unveiled the first Murphy Lab acoustics. What challenges did the acoustic line present compared with the electrics?

“It was thought early on [with the Murphy Lab], ‘Oh, we could do the acoustics!’ But in my mind, it was like, ‘Well, wait a minute. It’s not the same animal.’ Because some of the things we do to [an electric] guitar, I didn’t know if an acoustic guitar would really appreciate that!

“But a couple years ago, they sent down a few pieces from Montana [Gibson’s acoustic facility] and I sort of carefully painted them, applied the finish and did some distressing to a J-45. I will say this: every time we put a jam or a nick in a guitar, it weakens the finish, and the checking will sort of come out of there. So I did that to the J-45 and the wear looked great, but then people

“With that checked finish, the acoustic guitar – which is a box that vibrates – really rings”



started playing it and we realised how great it sounded. We determined, ‘Boy, with that checked finish, the acoustic guitar – which is a box that vibrates – *really* rings.’

“It encouraged us to more seriously pursue the idea. So now I’ve been to Montana twice. And an engineer has been down to the Lab twice. His name is Madison Swords and he’s really an asset to the company. He undertook the engineering of the Murphy Lab and learned specific stuff from me and the materials that we use.

“And, boy, these Montana acoustics coming from the Murphy Lab, they sound awesome. Does our finish make them sound awesome? Not really, but it lets them sound awesome. You can just feel the guitar vibrate. [That’s one of the reasons] we just have a light ageing treatment currently, because that’s not what it’s all about. On those guitars, it’s about the sound.”

Compared with a new model, vintage acoustics are a lot lighter, because all the moisture has gone out of the wood. Is there any attempt at Gibson to simulate that?

“Yeah, they’re torrefied. As we call it, we ‘bake the tops’ – the spruce. Wood, especially spruce, has sap. If you’ve ever felt the

sticky sap from a Christmas tree, well, you want that stuff out of the wood. They call it ‘hardening the cell walls’ – [essentially] drying out the moisture and the sap.

“You want to tap on a top you’re building a guitar with and make it feel and sound really brittle and bright. Our finish just lets the guitars sound great. The sound comes from their design and our finish doesn’t impede that at all. It actually helps with it, we feel.”

The other element that might alter the sound of a vintage model is the pickguard. The original pickguards would have been cellulose, correct?

“Yes, and they are on all the [Murphy Lab] pre-’50 guitars, including the J-45. In Montana, Madison, who I spoke of before, he’s just a brilliant guy. He found a way to make the pickguards himself and capture the features on, say, a J-200 ‘guard – the flowers and such. He pours the resin on top of a die that he has made himself from an original ‘guard and then they’re hand-painted and hand-buffed. It can make a difference when a ‘guard is really large and it’s stuck to the top of a guitar. But the materials that I see them using, they have no dampening effect that I can see.



1. The light ageing on a Murphy Lab 1957 SJ-200

2. Hardware receives the Murphy treatment, too, as shown here on a 1942 Banner J-45

3. A special finish is used to make the Lab's ageing look natural, as on this 1960 Hummingbird

4. The headstock of this 1942 Banner Southern Jumbo looks amazingly period correct

5. The earliest model in the Murphy Lab acoustic range, a Gibson 1933 L-00



3



4



5

"We are working on an adhesive at the moment, because a Hummingbird 'guard has three points on it and those points are hard to keep down. The old ones lift, too, but we're trying to eliminate that problem."

The range is currently limited to five models. Is there another acoustic that you have got your sights set on?

"Well, I happen to own an Advanced Jumbo with the treatment and it's really amazing. That guitar is known for its sound, with the rosewood back and the scale. That's from, like, '36 and that will be really a cool model to add to the line eventually. It was decided not to offer it yet, but it obviously would fit with the whole concept, for sure. So we'll see how that goes."

"I'm not involved in product development, so they will decide when and which ones to add, as well as maybe different ageing treatments. As I said, we wanted to minimise that right at the beginning, so people didn't think it was all about scratches and severe pick wear. It's not necessary."

"I think they're considering an Ultra Light offering, which we have in the Murphy Lab here, which has no damage, no chips and no scratches. It just has the checked finish

and the lightly aged hardware. I'd like to see that on the acoustic, because we want all the attention paid to the sound."

Do you think that acoustic guitar players tend to look after their guitars more than electric players do?

"Yeah. When people ask, 'What's the difference in ageing an acoustic, as opposed to an electric?' Well, the same things don't happen to acoustic that happen to an electric. The way they're played, standing up all the time with an electric – with a belt buckle, or blue jean rivets, or guitar stands, or microphone stands."

"On an acoustic, you'll see typical pick wear, because of the strumming, around the soundhole and you won't see severe damage to the back of the guitar as much, or the rims. They don't get bumped as much. I even say that about the ES models, because we have an ultra heavy ES-335 in our menu from the Lab, but I've never seen one that looks like that. I've seen pictures, but typically an ES-335 or 345 or 355, they were taken care of. They played rock 'n' roll on them, but not as much as with Les Pauls, and so on."

"Acoustic aficionados really appreciate what an acoustic guitar does, though, which

is its sound. It makes a different music and it does all the work. On electric guitar, you can plug it into pedals and amplifiers and so on, but an acoustic guitar, when one sounds great, it's just really lovely, and you tend to treat it a little bit nicer."

With the acoustics, if you add more relicing you'd have a Willie Nelson tribute!

"Yeah, that's unique! I mean, Willie's guitar is iconic and represents all of those nights of playing, and that's why he wants to keep playing that guitar. That's a gut-string guitar that's played with a pick and has a pickup on it. That's not typical. But, yes, everybody knows what Trigger looks like."

"I don't think we'll go that far. Although I saw a picture from Montana of a prototype of a 1947 J-50 that was a replica of Bob Dylan's natural J-50. And it was fantastic and very, very warm looking. That hasn't been offered yet. It was just done as a one-off, but it was very, very cool."

"But I'm excited about the acoustics, [especially] when you hear them. I've been saying recently, instead of me telling people [about them], 'Let me just hand you one, then you can tell me about it!'" **G**

www.gibson.com



HENRY JAMES SCHNEEKLUTH

Robert Jon & The Wreck's guitarist expresses a love for Firebirds and details a sorry experience with a Jimmy Page Telecaster

Henry's onstage slide guitar is a '61 reissue Gibson SG from 2004. His textured strap helps combat the inherent neck-dive of the model

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

"Let's see... probably my SG. I have a 2004 '61 reissue that I bought a couple of years ago. A couple of years before that I actually built my own Strat. So it would be one of those two – probably the Strat because that one was more of a labour-intensive thing.

"I bought the parts individually and a local luthier helped me put it together. It had a left-handed neck and a sunburst body that I got on the internet, and then I got

a custom pickguard from Warmoth. Originally, it had two Firebird pickups and then eventually I took those pickups out to put them in an actual Firebird. And now the guitar has a standard three-pickup setup with the reverse bridge pickup. So it's kind of a little Jimi Hendrix-ish tribute. Something about the reverse stuff balances out the sound a little better for me."

What was the last guitar you bought and why did you decide to buy it?

"The most recent guitar I bought was my Epiphone Firebird. I bought it in 2021. I changed the pickups out to Seymour Duncans and changed the bridge and the tailpiece, and it's my main touring guitar now. I am a big Lynyrd Skynyrd fan and I especially like Allen Collins. There was just a curiosity; I thought it was a really cool-looking guitar and the sound of it was attractive to me, so I thought I would try it out. It turned out that the first one I ever bought stood up to the test of the road. And so I continue to use it."

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

"The guitar I mentioned earlier, the SG. Knowing in the last couple of years how much the prices have gone up on used Gibsons and stuff like that, I got it for much cheaper than they're going for nowadays. I use it as my onstage slide guitar. I play open E tuning slide and it's my main guitar for that. They can have a tendency to neck-dive, and the one I have does neck-dive, but it's never been a huge problem for me as long as I have a strap that grips. I think if you have some source of friction in the right spot, it tends to negate it a little bit."

"I built my own Strat, a local luthier helped me – it's kind of a little Jimi Hendrix-ish tribute"

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

"I bought a Telecaster a couple of years ago – one of the Jimmy Page Dragon Telecasters – and I am currently in the process of trying to sell it. It just wasn't what I thought it was going to be. I've used it on recordings occasionally. But I barely play it; I just don't have an affinity for that guitar. I haven't found a Telecaster that I've really found an affinity for. I know I will eventually, but that one, I kind of bought it on an impulse and it just never clicked with me."



PHOTO BY MARK POWELL



HENRY'S GO-TO GEAR

"I'm on the road with only three guitars right now. It's the aforementioned Epiphone Firebird, the aforementioned Gibson SG, and I have an Eastman Juliet with P-90 pickups. Then basically I run my rig through two Supro amps: I have a Supro Titan and a Supro Black Magick. I run through a kind of a double pedalboard, where one 'board is an Xotic wah, a couple of fuzz pedals – a Walrus Audio Kangra and a Silktone – a Fulltone Deja'Vibe, a Wampler Plexi Drive, Wampler Tumnus, a JHS Solo Boost and Supro Tremolo. Then I have an ABY box that splits the signal, so that I can also use a stereo delay – an MXR Carbon Copy and a Boss Space Echo – and a Walrus Audio [Mako Series] R1 reverb. And then I have an expression pedal hooked up to the delay so that I can go through the parameters."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you instantly regretted letting go?

"No, I don't think so. I haven't really sold that many guitars – maybe one or two – and I don't think about them any more. They're all stuff that I'm glad to be free of and I'm happy I have what I have. Yeah, I can't say I have any seller's remorse."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Play it acoustically first and give yourself the time or the space to hear how it resonates. I can't speak on behalf of everyone else, but for me I usually have a sense of what guitar is going to feel good in my hands and what guitar I'm going to enjoy the most. So generally I can tell by feel what's going to be a winner for me. And if I don't get that buzz from it, then I just don't go for it."

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

"I'm always looking at Reverb for different stuff, different deals. I've recently been looking into Explorer-type guitars. I've been playing one recently that I've borrowed – that's been really great. But on my phone I'm always looking at a new pedal or Fender Tweed [amps] or different Firebird-style guitars, things like that."

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

"Ah, that's a really good question. I would probably have to

go with the latter because I feel like if you have an expensive amp, you can make any guitar sound good. And you can always upgrade a cheap guitar, as well. Case in point, I've got an Epiphone Firebird and it's constructed really well – neck-through [body], you know, like they did in the 60s. It's vintage-correct for all intents and purposes, but I upgraded it. So, yeah, I would rather probably get a cheaper guitar and a more expensive amp."

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

"Probably humbuckers. I just tend to find that with a good set of PAFs, lower output humbuckers, I don't really find myself missing too much out of them. A good set of humbuckers really can cover all my bases."

"I'm in possession of a 1962 ebony block SG – I didn't buy it, I'm just borrowing it – but it has this quality to it that seems to cover all the bases: the pickups, and the pots and all that stuff have this quality. When you roll the volume down, the pickups almost get this clarity, like a single coil. And that sound I just find is more relevant to the type of music I play." **[DM]**

As a big fan of Lynyrd Skynyrd's Allen Collins, Henry sought out an Epiphone Firebird and found it to be just the road warrior he was after



Robert Jon And The Wreck's latest album, *Ride Into The Light*, is available now via Journeyman Records

www.robertjonandthewreck.com

CHANGE YOUR TUNE

Over the past few issues we've been looking at and listening to pickups from serious heavyweights: Fender, Gibson, EMG and Bare Knuckle. Dave Burrluck fancies a change...

I've never owned a proper Gretsch guitar, but I've certainly played, tested, fixed, modded and gigged a few of them over the years. Like many I'm sure, I've sometimes been befuddled by the occasionally out-there circuitry, not to mention the 'creaky ship' build of many vintage originals. But they're damn cool-looking, aren't they? And there's nothing that quite sounds like a Filter'Tron.

The experience of playing a Custom Shop Fender La Cabronita Tele a few years back still sticks vividly in my memory. A simple Tele that sounded like a Gretsch with a roots-rock vibe and an easy drive. Now we're talking! Today, that now so-called 'Cabronita style', a masterstroke of the Custom Shop's Mike Eldred, is commonplace, though not exactly mainstream. For example, Fender doesn't make one and the current Squier version is a bit of an offshoot. That said, we did notice the Fender Custom Shop has just started a run of La Cabronita 2.0s. Dream on.

But when Shergold sent in a pair of its new Telstar models (as reviewed in this issue on page 18), that Cabronita longing returned. This model sports a pair of

Filter'Tron look-alikes, as our review reveals, but the Page FilterSonics sound more like mini-humbuckers. Still, at just £379, it's hard to feel short-changed and I couldn't help wondering where I could take one of these affordable guitars.

Do Your Prep

The two samples of the Telstar we received for evaluation have clearly gone through a basic setup on top of their pretty competent manufacturing. You get a sense of that from the very tidy machining of the body. For example, those open routs for the pickups are very clean, as is the neck pocket (with the neck removed); there's no finish, just bare wood. The raised centre might be seen as a designer's whimsy, but it certainly adds another level of detail that needs to be

"I have my eyes on a BearTron set that Stuart Robson graciously winds for this makeover"

carefully sanded and finished. It's not quite perfect, but it really is very neatly done.

The frets fall into the wide 'n' low category, which means anything more than the lightest of levelling, if necessary, isn't going to help anything. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Back to the setup and, oddly, both guitars' bridges are set with a pretty flat saddle radius. On the original spec, the 'board radius is stated at 406mm (16 inches), pretty similar to the light curve on those saddles. All good, except the actual 'board radius is 305mm (12 inches) (pic 1). The saddle height screws protrude above the saddles, so adding a veneer shim (pic 2) then resetting those saddles and the string height – after tightening the truss rods to give a pretty straight neck with minimal relief – gets both playing how they should have in the first place, perhaps.

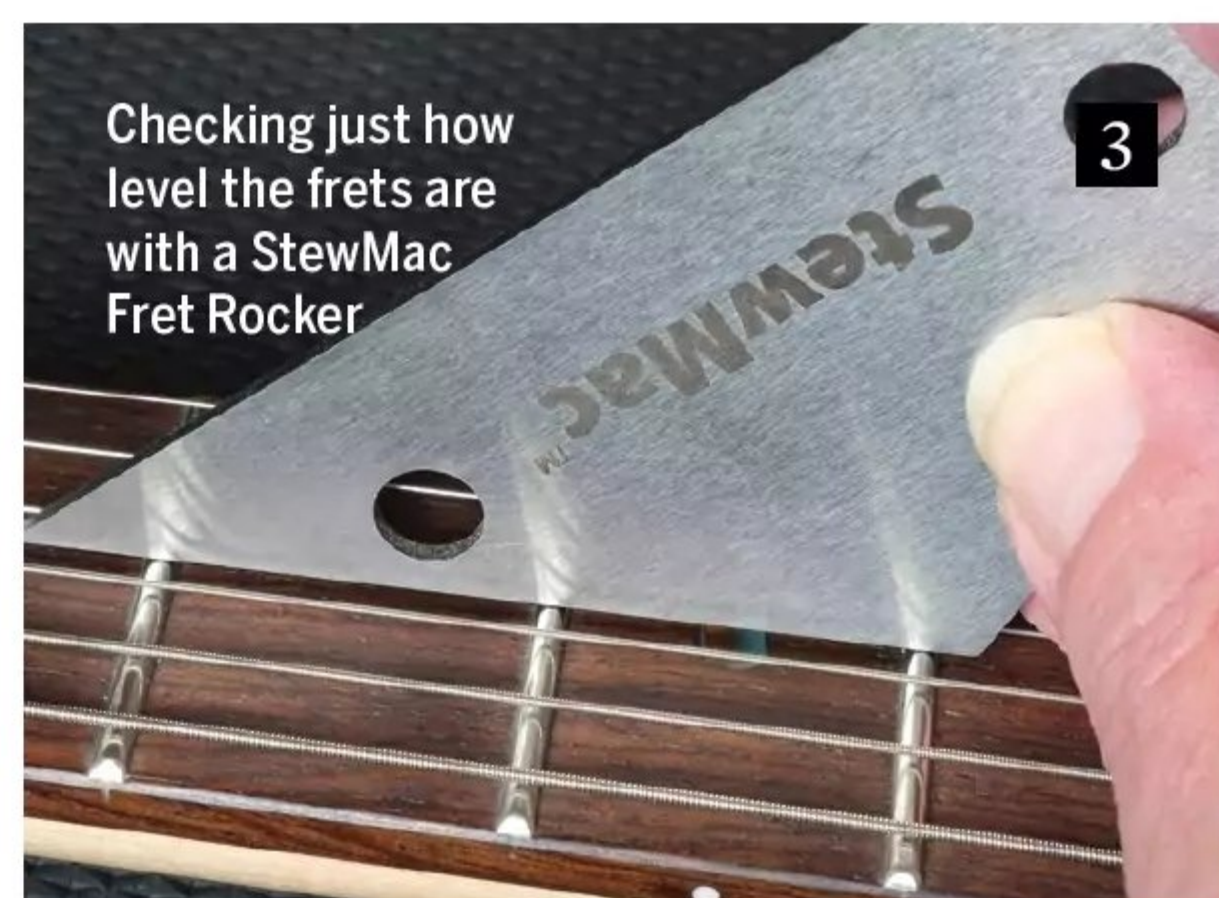
Going over both necks with a Fret Rocker from StewMac (pic 3), there are some slight inconsistencies but nothing that's causing any problems, certainly when played through an amp. To be honest, there's nothing offensive here, the fret ends are pretty tidy, the fingerboard edges lightly rolled... Let's move onto the fun bit.



1
Checking the 'board radius with a StewMac gauge, it's clearly 12 inches and not 16



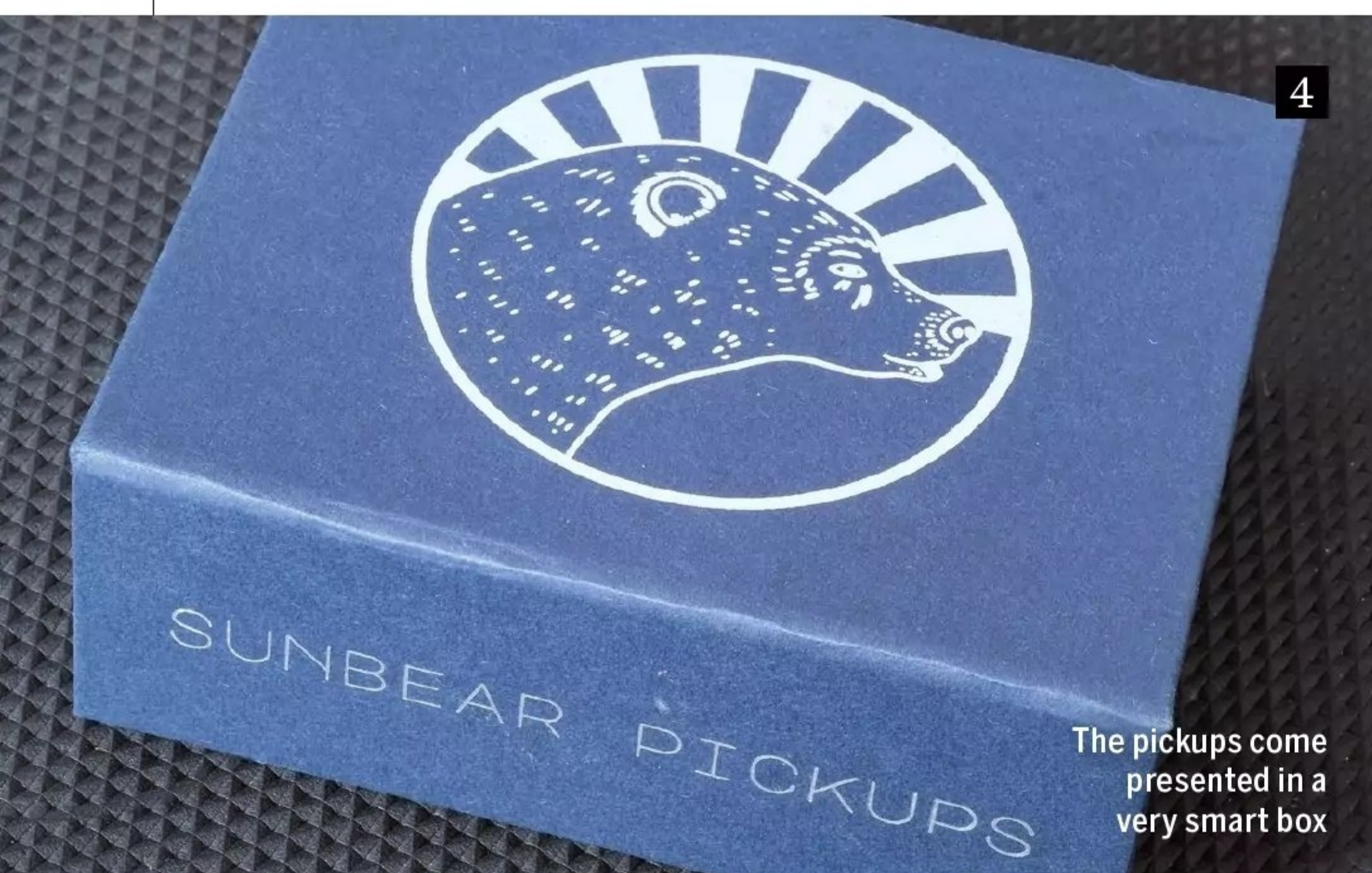
2
A simple veneer shim in the very cleanly machined neck pocket



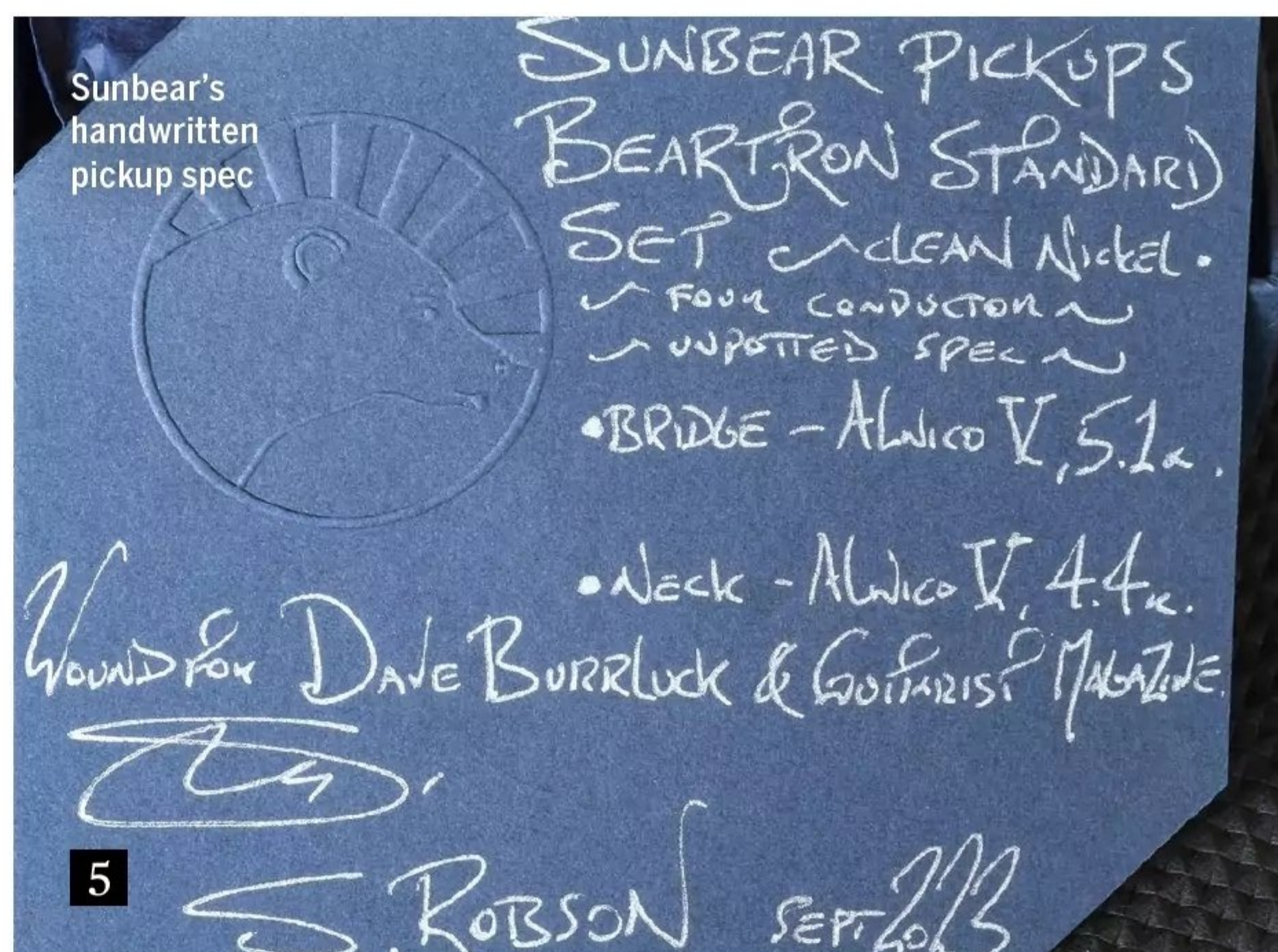
3
Checking just how level the frets are with a StewMac Fret Rocker

The first wave of the
Telstar makeover
and no-one would
know we've tweaked
the pickups... until
you plug in

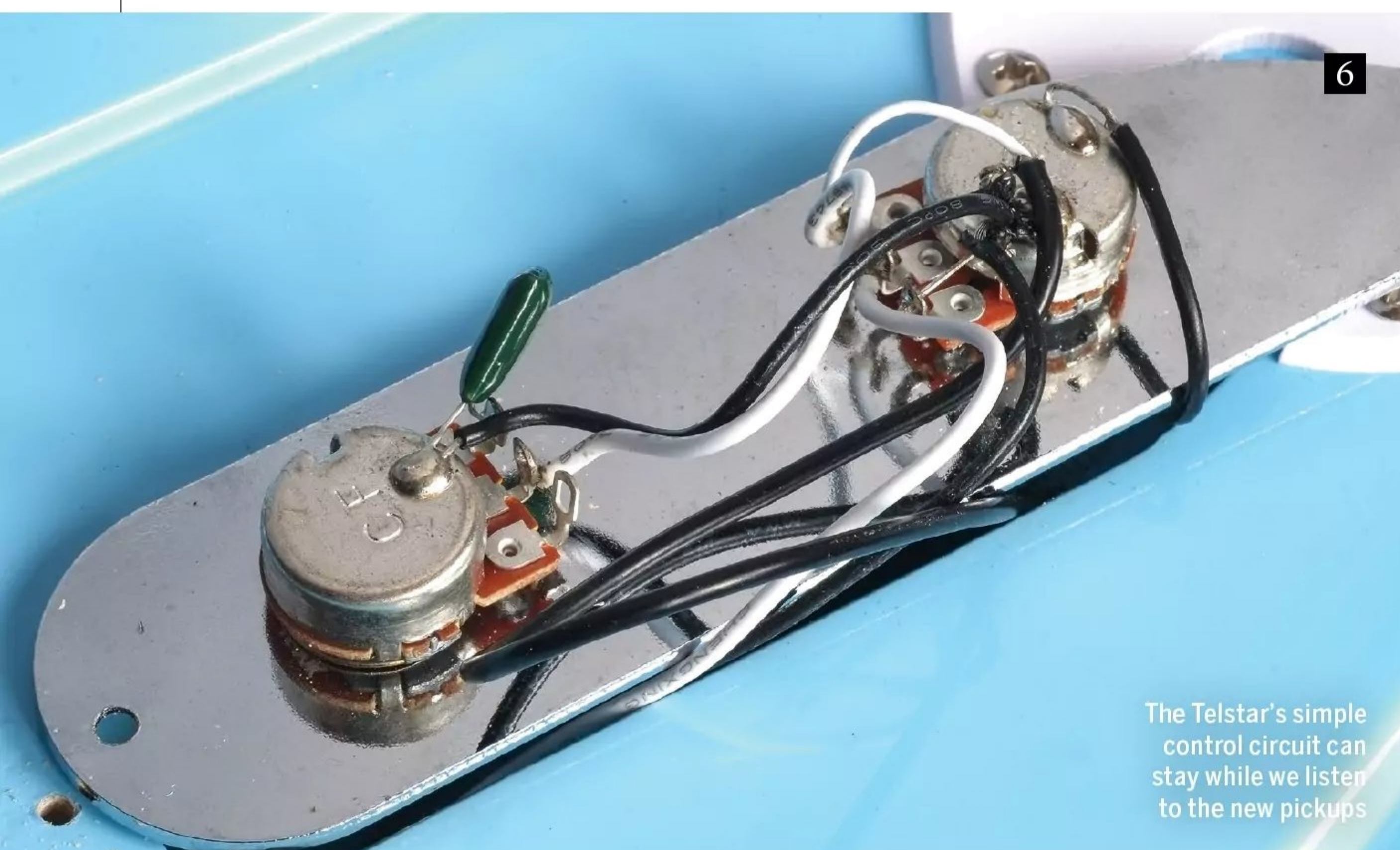




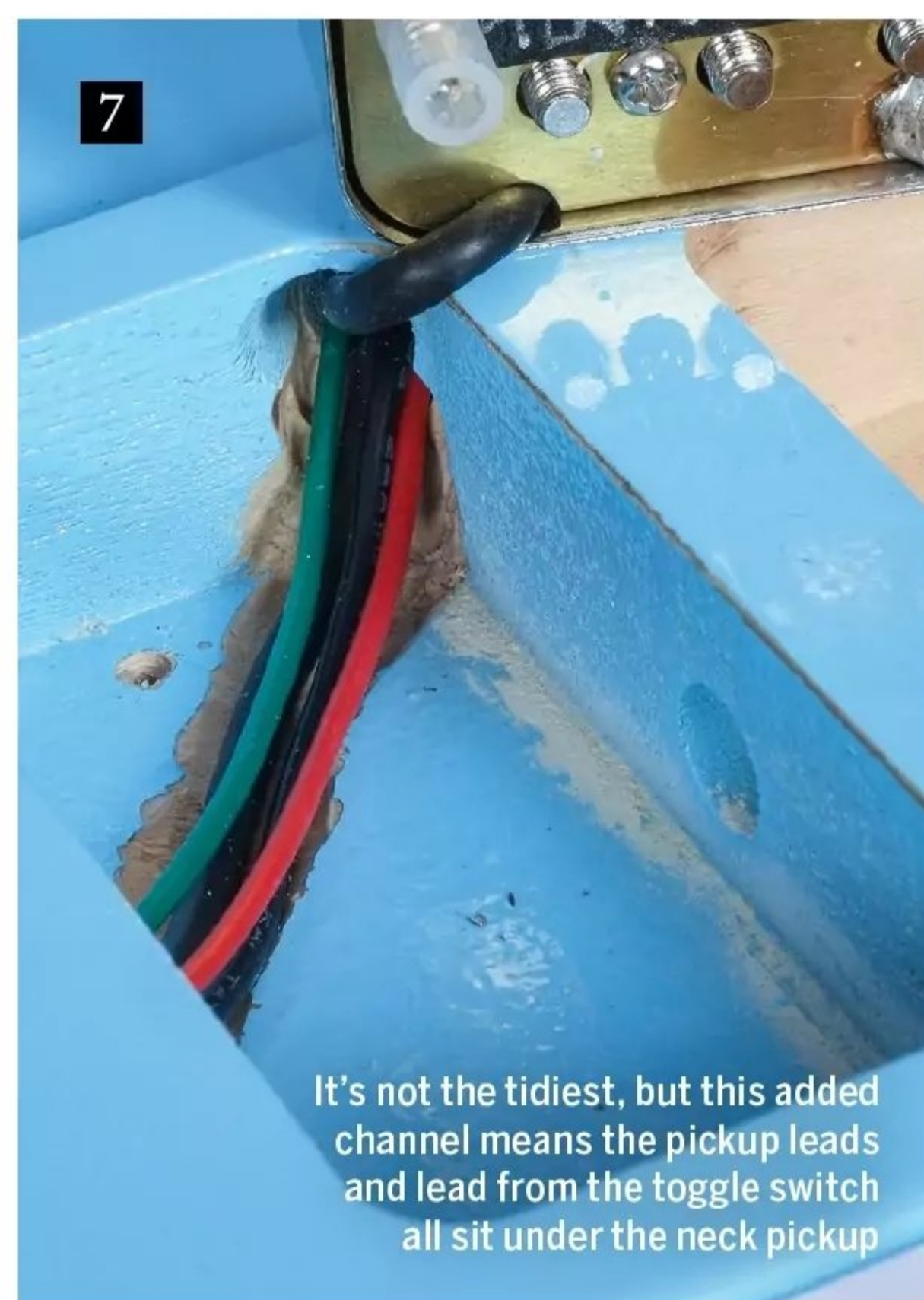
The pickups come presented in a very smart box



Sunbear's handwritten pickup spec



The Telstar's simple control circuit can stay while we listen to the new pickups



It's not the tidiest, but this added channel means the pickup leads and lead from the toggle switch all sit under the neck pickup

Finding Your 'Tron

It doesn't seem too long ago that pickups such as Filter'Trons were thin on the ground. That's not the case today, so it's very much a question of which one to go for. I'd been very impressed with the voice of a Maybury Cholla I'd looked at earlier in the year, in issue 497, and that featured Sunbear's BearTron (neck) and Grizzly BearTron (bridge). But imagining a more vintage-y sound experience I have my eyes on a standard BearTron set that Stuart Robson rather graciously offers to wind specially for this makeover. Stuart also suggests four-conductor wiring so I can experiment, and if we're going for such a high-dollar pickup set I obviously need to make sure the circuit matches.

This is easily one of the most beautifully packaged set of pickups I've ever received, so I'm slightly hesitant to actually unbox the pickups, which are gift-wrapped inside their flip-top box complete with Sunbear logo (pic 4). There's even a handwritten specification card (pic 5). None of the

"We have a rare chance of A/B'ing two pretty identical guitars, so I fit the Sunbears to just one"

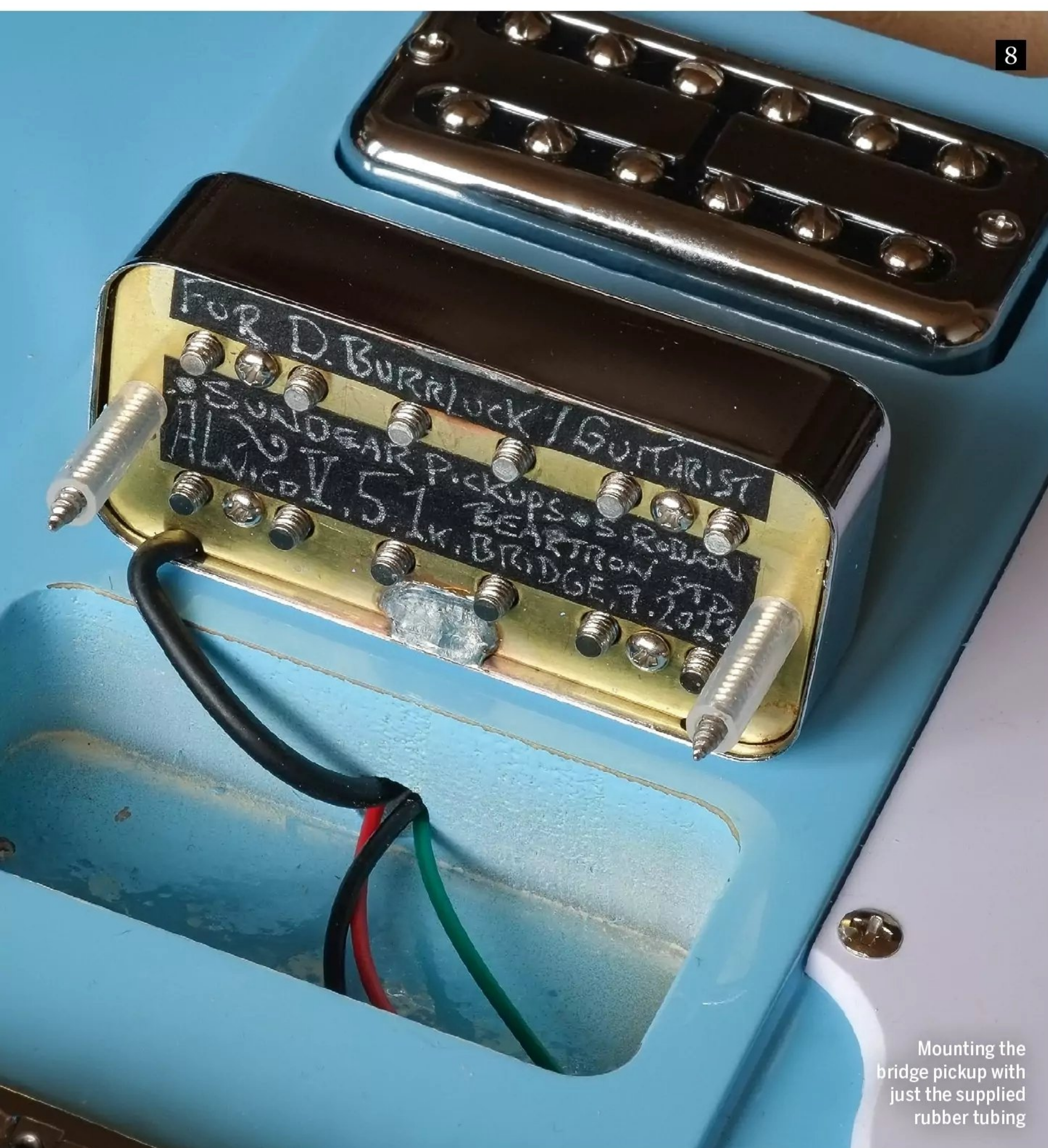
gorgeous packaging is going to make a difference to the sound, of course, but the attention to detail and personalisation is a little humbling

As we have a rare chance of A/B'ing two pretty identical guitars, I decide to fit the Sunbears to just one Telstar, with the same simple original circuit ('CF' logo'd mini pots with a nominal 500kohms rating) (pic 6). However, we're going to be limited by the small cavity under that original P-Bass style control plate. My idea of fitting a pair of pull-push pots isn't going to work because the cavity is only 26mm deep. Likewise, the circular cavity for the toggle switch is only 33.5mm in diameter,

just enough room for the positive-feeling block-style switch – but too small in diameter to accept my second idea of fitting a six-position Freeway toggle switch.

The pickup routs are tidy, but there's quite a bit of cable underneath the neck pickup – the pickups, of course, go to the toggle first then to the controls – and I notice the corner of the original neck pickup cover has been ground away, presumably to allow the wires to go to the cable hole while still allowing the pickup to sit into the cavity at the right depth. Using a small gouge, I add a rough cable channel in the base of the cavity (pic 7). I use the supplied rubber 'springs' cut down a little further for the neck pickup, as opposed to the bridge (pic 8), and everything fits. There's also just enough room in that toggle switch cavity to take the extra cable from the neck pickup, which I don't want to cut at this stage.

I set the pickup heights approximately the same, around 3mm on the treble side from string to cover (with the string fretting at the top fret) and 4mm on the bass side.



Mounting the bridge pickup with just the supplied rubber tubing



Fully installed, the BearTrons don't alter the aesthetic, just the sound

The screw poles of the Telstar's original Page FilterSonic pickups are screwed deeper into the coils; the Sunbears sit out slightly further. And while the Sunbears have a pole spacing of approximately 50mm for the bridge and 48mm for the neck, the Page units each have the same spacing, a shade under 50mm. The Sunbear screw poles are also slightly wider in diameter, too, at approximately 5.5mm, to the Pages' approximately 4.9mm. Will any of that minutiae result in any major sonic differences? Time to find out (pic 9).

Sounds

It's a rarity that any of us can compare two identical guitars with one exception: their pickups. Obviously, the Chinese made-to-a-price Page FilterSonics are totally eclipsed by the beautifully made and presented UK winds, right? Well, outwardly, they look pretty similar, but sonically they're quite different. Those Page FilterSonics really aren't bad, as we discuss in our Shergold review in this issue. They certainly sound

"A set of beautiful-sounding pickups can transform the perfectly good into a different league"

more mini-humbucking than Filter'Tron-esque, but as a fully paid-up member of the Les Paul Deluxe appreciation society, I'm not complaining.

There's another feature, which follows that original Fender, regarding the placement of the bridge pickup that seems some way from the actual bridge. You'd expect this to round the high-end response a little and increase the bass, whereas many boutique builds I've seen with this 'cut-off' style bridge will place a humbucker very close, having the reverse effect.

By their nature the Sunbear set sounds little more polite, detailed and defined and – because they're purposely not

potted – a little more lively. They also have that sparkle in all positions, whereas our FilterSonics are smoother, and you can hear the more 'single coil without the hum' intention of the original Filter'Tron. There's a little more thickness to the mids than with our reference Telecaster, a bit of a bark that adds a little throatiness with a crunchy amp. Overall, the BearTrons sound considerably more three-dimensional.

Final Thoughts

Not for the first time our modding intentions got a little waylaid. I had intended to upgrade the Telstar's generic tuners, cut a bone nut and generally give the fingerboard and even the neck back a little TLC, but the luxury of a set of beautiful-sounding pickups really illustrates how the perfectly good can be sonically transformed into a rather different league. A timely reminder, too, how one of the *great* pickups is in very good hands. I'll continue the makeover in the next issue. Meanwhile, there's some playing to do! 🎸

TALKING 'BEARS

Why is the Gretsch Filter'Tron such a unique-sounding pickup? Sunbear's Stuart Robson offers his view



Stuart Robson puts a personal touch on his Sunbear Pickups – each beautifully crafted pickup has the full spec handwritten on its baseplate (right)



STUART ROBSON PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNBEAR PICKUPS; PICKUP PHOTO BY DAVE BURRUCK

“A very big part is the larger, double height magnet – it’s actually not quite double the height, but that’s what they get referred to as,” Stuart tells us. “The standard Sunbear BearTrons that you have there, internally, have more modernised parts, but I keep the magnet the same as the vintage ones. (I also do a full replica version for the people that maybe need a pickup for a vintage Gretsch or they have a very vintage-spec Gretsch and want to keep it accurate down to the stamped covers and everything right under the hood.) It’s still rough-cast Alnico V that’s charged to the same degree as some vintage Filter'Trons I’ve had on my bench; it’s not quite a full charge, but it’s getting up there. So, because of that big magnet, the pickup has a higher inductance, bearing in mind its [relatively low] resistance reading.

“On top of that, the actual coils are quite small, there’s not an awful lot of space on the bobbin, and they’re a little bit taller than a PAF coil. I tend to think of it in a semi-linear way: taller coils have a lower resonant peak. So that kind of ‘flutiness’ you get out of a Strat single coil in the neck, which you don’t hear in a humbucker, is that lowered resonant peak from the taller coil.

“The combination of the Filter'Tron’s slightly taller and slightly smaller coils and the big magnet gives this really specific midrange out of the pickup, which almost

“My BearTrons are [like] a classic set of Filter'Trons wound with all the care that I can give them”

nothing else has. For me, that’s the joy of a 'Tron: it’s all in that midrange thing. Yes, they have chime and sparkle, but as a more bluesy/rock guy, that midrange thing is just so vocal. That’s what I love. I actually have a Patrick James Eggle Macon, one of the Junior styles, and I run a 'Tron at the bridge and a Firebird-style [Sunbird] at the neck and it’s one of the best pickup combinations I have in any guitar. It takes gain really well, but when you back off it has all that chime and high-end clarity, which you just don’t get from too many other pickups.

“I won’t state the standard BearTrons you have there replicate a specific vintage set. Actually, the vintage sets are way more consistent than equivalent-period PAFs, so once you know the resistance, the wire used and the general build, you’re in the ballpark providing you get turns-per-layer count right on the bobbins. Mine have a slightly bumped output for the bridge pickup, and it just smooths out that high-end a bit and makes the set a bit more usable for the

average player, day to day, particularly when they’re going into guitars like Cabronitas. The neck pickup is super traditional in character. So really my BearTrons are [like] a classic set of Filter'Trons wound with all the care that I can give them.

“My Grizzly BearTrons are slightly different and drive the whole pickup’s character closer to a PAF – but not to the point that it doesn’t sound like its own thing. It still sounds like a 'Tron, but it tapers that high-end off a little, lowers the resonant frequency, increases the inductance and the capacitance. A classic 'Tron can be a little too spiky for a lot of players. I use 42 AWG for both the Grizzly BearTrons and the BearTrons. I make them both with Formvar and Polysol coated wire – the ones you’ve got are Formvar because I prefer the sound a bit more.

“Also, the set you have are the unpotted versions. 'Trons are more prone to feedback, at least microphonics coming from movement of the covers. Basically, the covers are a bit like two tuning forks – they wobble around a bit – and at decent volume can produce quite a bit of microphonic feedback. Therefore, a lot of the 'Trons I make are potted. I love them without potting, though, because they are a little bit more unruly and difficult, but they just have so much character.”

www.sunbearpickups.com

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

In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

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Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

Whether you prefer a sprinkle or a soaking, reverb is the master of all musical effects

Reverb

Long before digital simulations became sophisticated enough to blur the lines between actual and artificial ambience, studio engineers and electric guitarists were obliged to use springs, specially built chambers and plates. The reverb characteristics these devices produced may have had technical shortcomings, but the characteristics were often so strong and sonically pleasing that they became integral to the sound of recorded music in the post-war era.

Room-inations

The terms echo and reverb were once used interchangeably. By and large, we associate echo with shouting a word into a large reflective space and hearing our voice bounce back at us multiple times, a second or so later. Reverb is created by multiple soundwaves bouncing off hard surfaces, so 'echo' isn't entirely incorrect. However, the reflections are so close together that they create continuous sound that gradually

dies away. When the time-lapse between the initial sound and the reflected sound is sufficient for both to be heard separately and distinctly, the accepted term is 'delay'.

Reverberant spaces tend to be those with hard surfaces that reflect soundwaves. You will have noticed how a bathroom with a tiled floor and walls sounds very different to a carpeted living room with lots of soft furnishings. If you haven't, then grab an acoustic guitar and try playing in both. Similarly, stairwells, churches, sports halls and cathedrals tend to be reverberant.

When designing concert halls, recording studios or public spaces, acoustic engineers consider the RT60. This is the amount of time it takes for the level to drop by 60dB, and it can be manipulated and controlled to optimise the acoustic environment for any specific purpose. In a lecture hall or a talk-radio studio, speech intelligibility is paramount and reverb is best kept to a minimum. But if you're singing or playing a musical instrument, a bone-dry acoustic

is uninspiring and unhelpful. This is why concert halls and venues generally retain some degree of ambience.

But recording a large number of musicians simultaneously in a single room is one of the great challenges of studio work. If the room is very reverberant it becomes even harder to achieve clarity, separation and a coherent stereo image because the microphones will be detecting reflected sound along with the direct sound. Also, if you record natural room reverb, you're stuck with it. This is why recording studios tend to have carefully controlled acoustics, and many engineers prefer to eliminate

UA's Bill Putnom is credited with the first use of a reverb chamber and it was the studio's bathroom

room ambience when recording and add reverb effects later in the mix.

Those of us who use computer-based DAW recording systems and effects pedals will also be aware of the range of reverb presets on offer. They are largely named after the old-school analogue devices upon which they're based, so let's take a look at some common types to learn more about their background and tonal characteristics.

Chambers

Long before electronic effects, studio designers found a way to add reverb by using ambient spaces that were acoustically isolated from the main recording area. In its simplest form, a speaker and a microphone could be set up in an echoey room and individual instruments could be routed out through the speaker, and the microphone signal could be returned to the mix. More sophisticated versions of this setup would have two speakers and a pair of carefully placed microphones for stereo reverb. These spaces enabled mixing engineers to balance the amount of reverb in a very precise way, and this send and return principle remains the same with modern digital reverbs and plug-ins.

These rooms became known as reverb chambers and were often carefully



designed and tuned in order to refine the ambience. Back in 1947, Universal Audio founder Bill Putnam is credited with the first use of a reverb chamber, and it was the studio's bathroom.

Other studios would follow suit during the 1950s and some, like Abbey Road and Capitol, became famous for their chambers. Producers would often book chamber-equipped studios specifically for their unique sounds. And if you have an echoey bathroom, a spare speaker and a microphone, you can try this at home. Alternatively, check out the numerous chamber plug-ins that are available for DAWs. Many of them are modelled on those world-famous chambers and live rooms that still survive.

Getting Tanked

Many of us will be familiar with spring reverb because it's the type that was used in guitar amps before onboard digital reverb became viable. Most vintage reissues and boutique valve amps still come with springs attached. A patent for a spring reverb device was granted to Laurens Hammond in 1939, and in 1961 Alan Young, an engineer at Hammond, designed a smaller spring reverb tank.

Onboard reverb soon began appearing in Gibson and Danelectro guitar amps, and the Ampeg Reverberocket is renowned for its reverb. Fender was slower on the uptake and initially developed a standalone reverb unit called the 6G15. The first Fender amp with reverb was the brown Vibroverb in 1963 and much of the Fender reverb sound comes from having the send post-tonestack. This scoops the midrange and emphasises those splashy treble frequencies.

Although amp reverb cannot be described as high fidelity, it shaped the sound of 60s instrumental groups, surf music and Spaghetti Western soundtracks. Some players, such as Freddie King, Roy Buchanan and Mike Bloomfield, would max out the reverb on their Fender amps.

Studio Springs

Not all spring reverbs are lo-fi devices and some are capable of smooth and sumptuous stereo reverb. AKG made some fantastic units, notably the BX15 and refrigerator-sized BX20, and it's a sound heard on

countless classic recordings. Schaller and Grampian also manufactured spring reverbs, and in recent years the Bandivie Great British Spring has proved popular. Some find spring reverbs a bit splashy for percussive instruments, but they can sound amazing on vocals, brass, strings and, of course, guitar.

Smashing Plates

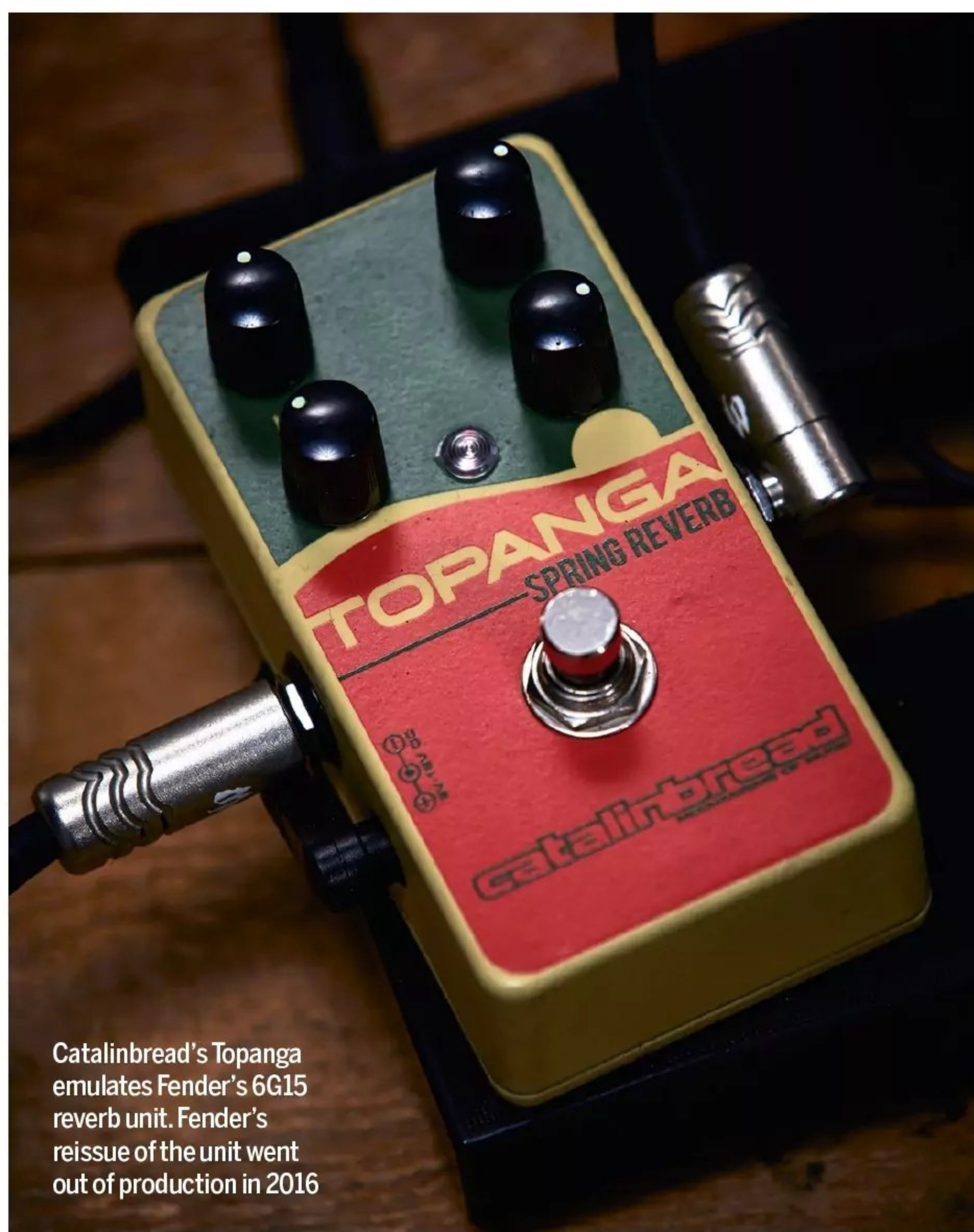
In 1957, a German company called EMT (Elektromesstechnik) released the EMT 140 Reverberation Unit. A small speaker-like motor would set a large metal plate into motion and a contact microphone sensed the vibrations and returned the signal to the mixer. The plate was carefully tensioned within a frame, and for stereo plates two contact microphones were deployed.

Reverb time could be adjusted using dampening pads and EMT made a special



Spring reverb was used in guitar amps before onboard digital reverb became viable

Early digital reverbs, such as the rack-mounted AMS RMX-16 pictured above, still hold pride of place in many studios, despite the ease and availability of plug-ins



Catalinbread's Topanga emulates Fender's 6G15 reverb unit. Fender's reissue of the unit went out of production in 2016



Strymon's BigSky is a do-it-all pro-quality pedal that features 12 reverb machines

remote controller. The reverb tone could be optimised using equalisation on the input channels and pre-delay could be added by running the auxiliary send through a tape delay or a digital delay set to a single repeat.

The first EMT plates had valve amplifier circuitry, but this later changed to transistor-based solid-state. Original EMT plates remained the industry standard until the 1980s and they are still the go-to

EMT plates are still the go-to analogue reverb for many as the tone is huge, lush, smooth and dense

analogue reverb for many mixers and producers as the reverb tone is huge, lush, smooth and dense. The main difficulty with using EMTs is resisting the temptation to put everything through them. They are also huge and heavy, which is why EMTs are largely confined to high-end professional studios these days. The EMT 144 was the world's first digital reverb when introduced in 1972 and it was followed by the 250 (aka The Dalek) in 1976. Fortunately, most DAWs and studio plug-in companies offer plate simulations and they can be extremely convincing.

Rack Reverbs

Although the technology might be regarded as primitive, some early digital reverbs have acquired legendary status. Typically seen in studio effects racks, some classics include the Ursa Major Space Station and Lexicon's 224, 448 and PCM models. The AMS RMX-16 was a staple of 80s mixing and its non-linear preset was almost ubiquitous on those exploding snare drums.

More commonly used by guitarists and lower-end studios, units like the Yamaha SPX90 and the MidiVerb and QuadraVerb by Alesis were multi-effects units. They all contained numerous reverb presets as well as delays and modulations. These are the devices to hunt down if you're into processed 80s pop and authentic shoegazer guitar tones. But for practical purposes, rackmount effects have largely been rendered obsolete by studio plug-ins and DSP stompboxes.

Bit Boxes

It's curious that so much cutting-edge technology has been devoted to recreating effects from the past, but we're not complaining, of course. Some pedals are modelled after specific devices, such as Catalinbread's Fender 6G15-emulating Topanga and Yamaha FX500-soundalike Soft Focus Reverb. Others, including the Strymon Big Sky and Night Sky, Boss RV-500 and Eventide Space combine multiple studio-quality presets with

front-panel controllability, MIDI in/out and USB connectivity.

If you must have real springs, there are various pedal/spring combinations with tanks that are built into the box or will stash under your pedalboard. Check out the Anasounds Element, Carl Martin HeadRoom, Demeter RRP-1 Reverbulator, VanAmps Reverbamate Sole-Mate and SurfyBear Reverb. As for standalone valve reverbs, Fender no longer makes the 6G15 reissue, but you can check out Dr Z's Z-Verb and the Victoria Reverberato.

User Tips

The amount of reverb you use is a matter of taste, but for styles like surf and rockabilly it's almost mandatory. If you're playing fast and heavy music that depends on precision and tightness, you should probably avoid reverb altogether. When playing live, try to gauge the amount of room ambience and set your reverb accordingly. If it's an echoey room, you may need to dial it down.

Onboard spring reverb has a specific sound and we may consider it integral to our tone. In recording scenarios, studio engineers will often ask us to kill the reverb so they can add some later in the mix. It won't sound the same so you may need to stand your ground – but also be prepared to compromise. Studio reverb can sound just as good or even better than spring reverb, and a bit of both often works. **G**

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FIND OUT MORE



Multiple Choice (PART 3)

Zilla Cabs' Paul Gough concludes his trio of columns on finding the right cab for you by focusing in on the all-important tech specs

Not the most sexy thing out there, perhaps, but technical specifications are important when finding your ideal cab. In the final part of our trilogy on buying the right guitar cab, we will focus on the tech specs that you'll want to look out for.

The three most important technical specs for me are power handling, impedance and speaker sensitivity, in that order. As their technical nature would suggest, these topics are complex so they could fill a few columns on their own, but I think a brief overview will be helpful here – as well as my opinion on where you can experience a little flexibility.

Power handling is effectively how much power the overall cabinet will take, and so you'll want to keep the overall power handling of the cab over the peak output of the amp. You'll see an amp referred to as 50 watts, 20 watts and so on, and this will often be incorporated into the amp's name – Dr Z Maz 18 or Two-Rock Studio Pro 35, for instance. In these cases, you'll need a single speaker cab to have a speaker equal to or over the maximum output of the amp, so taking the aforementioned amps

as examples, you would need over 18 watts for the Maz 18 and 35 watts or over for the Studio Pro 35. If you're using a 2x12, the individual speakers need to be over half the maximum output of the amp, making the total output of the cab over that of the amp. If you play particularly loud and push your amp hard, you may want to consider using a speaker with a higher rating than this, mostly for safety. Don't concern yourself too much with power rating, as long the cab is higher and you like how it sounds, you're good to go.

Impedance is a figure (nearly always four, eight or 16) that's expressed in ohms or the Greek letter Omega (Ω). It's often confused with resistance, but for plugging in your amp and rocking all we need to do here is match the correct impedance on the amp to the correct output on your amp. Most cabs have a fixed impedance, normally eight or 16 ohms for guitar, and most amps will give you the option of four, eight and 16 ohms, or a combination of two of these numbers. I would advise not to mismatch impedances here – all sorts of issues can occur if you do. So if you have an eight- and 16-ohm output on your amp (more common

on British amps), you can use a single eight- or 16-ohm cab. If you have a four- and eight-ohm output (more common on American amps), you can use a single four or eight-ohm cab. And if your amp has four-, eight- and 16-ohm outputs, then you're pretty much good to go with 99 per cent of the cabinets on the market.

Sensitivity rating is something that is applied to the speaker itself and can generally be ignored unless you're doing a deep dive! If you're playing the cab, this is the only one of the three specs that I would say you don't need to know much about, only that you like how it sounds. In general, however, a lower sensitivity rating means that for the same input, it will give a lower output, essentially not sounding as loud for

"The three most important technical specs for me are power handling, impedance and speaker sensitivity"



a given amp setting – namely, it's quieter. There are general trends such as that more vintage-sounding speakers will tend to have a lower sensitivity rating, but this is really just a trend, not something to consider too strongly. When mixing speakers, you'll want to take some notice, but in this case you'll probably be talking to a cab designer who will talk you through everything.

We have talked before about possible disadvantages in buying the 'off-the-shelf' matching cab to use with your amp, but when it comes to technical specs, it does introduce an element of safety, especially when buying secondhand. Buying the matching cab will nearly always result in you getting the technical bits right, so if this stuff intimidates you and you can't speak to a professional, there's nothing wrong with going for the matching cab, even though it may not be optimal for you as an individual. **G**

"As long the cab's power rating is higher than your amp's and you like how it sounds, you're good to go"

If you want to look beyond a brand's matching head and cabinet pairing, it's time to check in with the tech specs



Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Bernie Marsden

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC T, Keeley Boss SD-1 & Vox AC15 C1

Difficulty ★★☆☆☆ | 10 mins per example

WHEN BERNIE MARSDEN passed away in August, the guitar community lost a popular figure and respected ambassador, not to mention a friend of this magazine. A founding member of Whitesnake with David Coverdale in the latter 70s, Bernie was already an experienced player, having turned professional in 1972 with the band UFO.

He later worked alongside such luminaries as Cozy Powell and Paice Ashton Lord – he might even have become a member of Paul McCartney's Wings had Whitesnake not come along... Thanks to this twist of fate, we have such classics as *Fool For Your Loving*, *Ready An' Willing* and, of course, *Here I Go Again*.

Though Bernie's well known to rock fans, his first love was the blues. Eric Clapton and Peter Green were particular influences, but his wider knowledge of the genre was also notable and something that further cemented the friendship and collaboration with Coverdale. Bernie had an impressive, diverse guitar collection, including his own PRS signature model, but he was most associated with his '59 Gibson Les Paul, 'The Beast', which he acquired in 1974 and which featured heavily in Whitesnake. Courtesy of Bernie's generosity, it's also delighted many in the hands of Joe Bonamassa.

The example solo was played as a continuous take, but is broken up into four

sections. I've taken Bernie's time with Whitesnake as my main influence and assimilated his style and approach as best I can. It's played using several positions of the G minor pentatonic scale, venturing outside of this on only one occasion. Nevertheless, there is an awareness of how these notes interact with the changing chords underneath and judicious use of slides, bends and position changes. I hope you enjoy and see you next time. **G**



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

Example 1

START LOW, THEN GO HIGH... That's not always the route we should take, but it seems to suit what we're going for here. This first phrase stays within shape 1 of the G minor pentatonic, and the real 'devil in the detail' is the use of slides, bends and vibrato. Even though the G minor chord contains a B $\flat$, you'll see that there is a quarter-tone bend in bar 2. Things aren't always logical in the blues.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part (top) and a bass part (bottom), both in E major and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as 116 BPM. The guitar part features a Gm7 chord and a melodic line with a 1/4 note pickup. The bass part includes a C5 chord and a melodic line with a 1/4 note pickup. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system containing measures 1-3 and the second system containing measures 4-5. The guitar part is written in treble clef, and the bass part is written in bass clef. The guitar part includes a Gm7 chord and a melodic line with a 1/4 note pickup. The bass part includes a C5 chord and a melodic line with a 1/4 note pickup. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system containing measures 1-3 and the second system containing measures 4-5. The guitar part is written in treble clef, and the bass part is written in bass clef.

Example 2

WE CONTINUE THE UPWARD TRAJECTORY but not before a couple of rhythmic bursts in shape 1. From there, I'm continuing in a similar vein, except I'm using slides to shift between positions with the intention of landing on the root of the C minor chord that hits just before the start of bar 3. Being conversant with the pentatonic shapes gives you multiple options when creating phrases such as this that shift between registers. We stay with shape 3 for the time being, but are about to make a slide and jump...

Example 2 musical notation. It consists of two systems of guitar notation. The first system starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 116. The first staff shows a melodic line with a Gm7 chord indicated above it. The second staff shows the fretboard with fingerings and techniques: BU (bend up), BD (bend down), and a 1/4 note slide. The fret numbers are 5-(7)-(5)-3, 5-3-5, 3-5-3, 5/7, 7-6-7, 6-8, 6-8, 6-8, 8-11-(13), and 8-11-(13). The second system continues the melodic line with a Cm7 chord indicated above it. The fret numbers are 11-(13), 8-10, 11-8, and 11-8. The system ends with a wavy line indicating a sustained bend.

Example 3

HERE IS WHERE THAT JUMP LANDS: G minor pentatonic shape 1, 12 frets/one octave above where we began four bars ago. This shift gives us the chance to add some shrill sustained bends as the solo reaches its climax. Like all these phrases, it's all in the delivery – Gary Moore, Eric Clapton SRV, Paul Kossoff, and so on, have all made use of these same patterns. As Eric Johnson once said, it's more about the intent behind them!

Example 3 musical notation. It consists of two systems of guitar notation. The first system starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 116. The first staff shows a melodic line with a Gm7 chord indicated above it. The second staff shows the fretboard with fingerings and techniques: BU (bend up), BD (bend down), and a 1/4 note slide. The fret numbers are 17-(19), 15-15, 18-(20), 18-(20), 18-(20)-(18)-15, 18-(20), 18-(20), and 18. The second system continues the melodic line with a Cm7 chord indicated above it. The fret numbers are 17-(18)-(17)-15, 18-18-(20), (18)-15, and 17-17-(19). The system ends with a wavy line indicating a sustained bend.

Example 4

THIS FINAL EXAMPLE RELAXES A LITTLE from the peak we ascended to in Example 3. We remain in shape 1 almost exclusively until just before bar 3, where we shift to shape 5 for the final moments. Please excuse the slightly flat fifth string – I did try another take or two but none seemed to capture what I was looking for as well as this one did, and we’re not keen on ‘cheating’ with any auto-tuning!

$\text{♩} = 116$ 8^{va} Gm7

E
B
G
D
A
E

15 18-15 17 15 18-15 17-(19) (17)-15 17 15 17 15 17 15

1

Cm7 $\text{E}\flat$ F

E
B
G
D
A
E

13 15-(16) (15)-13 15 15 13

3

Hear It Here

WHITESNAKE LOVEHUNTER



Released in 1979, Whitesnake's second album shows the band finding their stride, in what many refer to as their classic line-up. *Walking In The Shadow Of The Blues*, co-written by Marsden/Coverdale, is classic blues-rock, with melodic touches alongside some Peter Green/Fleetwood Mac-style refrains and tasteful soloing. The title track has some traditional-sounding slide guitar mixed with some more contemporary *Trampled Under Foot* funk stylings. And have a listen to *Outlaw*, with Bernie on lead vocals.

WHITESNAKE READY AN' WILLING



By 1980, the band had refined further, with some neat twin-guitar work on the title track and a big hit in the form of *Fool For You Loving*, containing a solo that inspired some of the examples above. *Sweet Talker* combines melodic pop/rock/blues with some driving riffing that owes more to The Allman Brothers than the heavier rock that came later. As well as Jon Lord's deft keyboards, there is more intricate interplay between Bernie and fellow guitar player Micky Moody.

BERNIE MARSDEN WORKING MAN



Bernie's last recorded work, completed just weeks before his passing, will be released on 24 November 2023. At the time of writing, just one track was available to preview; *Being Famous* describes the touring lifestyle at its most lavish, something Bernie knew all about and gives a down-to-earth view of in the lyrics. Between the bluesy guitar riffing, Whitesnake-style organ and a solo that calls to mind the great Billy Gibbons at times, it's clear that Bernie remained on form to the very last.

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