

Guitarist

Issue 513

AUGUST 2024

GIBSON

130 Years Of Iconic Guitars



SCOTT GORHAM
ON THE EARLY YEARS
& HIS 'SECRET' ART



ERIC CLAPTON'S
'WONDERFUL TONIGHT'
MARTIN 000-28

Features & Reviews

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The Arc Of History



Our cover feature celebrating 130 years of Gibson guitars made me realise how profoundly the landscape of music-making is shaped by fashions that, a few years later, are all but forgotten. In the case of Gibson, the quest for projection and volume in the pre-amplifier era of the 1920s in part bequeathed us the punchy archtop acoustic. The banjo bands and raucous string ensembles of the Roaring Twenties may have faded into history like musical ghosts, but we're still appreciating and enjoying the contoured semi-hollow guitars that lineage of guitar-making gave us. Likewise, when we spoke to Fred Gretsch about the company's guitar-making efforts in the 1950s, he pointed out that, at the time, the main focus was on accordions as these were overwhelmingly popular. Gretsch probably doesn't lose much sleep over them these days.

All of the above gives you a rather spooky feeling that however famous and unassailably relevant something can seem today, it can, in a few short years, become a footnote of history and almost completely forgotten. Sometimes, it's only if we listen carefully that we can hear echoes of giant musical movements that lived, became world-famous and then disappeared from the zeitgeist within a lifetime. For example, Hawaiian steel guitar and ukulele music was massively popular in the 1920s – but most guitarists now experience the influence of those beautiful melodies only at one remove, in BB King's recordings: the late blues master told us a few years ago that his famous vibrato was inspired by those Hawaiian steel guitar players and their wavering, otherworldly sound.

I suppose there's a cautionary tale in all this for guitarists. If we take it for granted that the instrument is centrally important to music making and become hidebound about how it is 'supposed' to be used and played, we risk becoming one of those casualties of time as well, as a musical movement. Personally, I think the adaptability of the guitar gives it much better odds of staying centre stage, relatively speaking, than the banjo, for example. And, after all, there are still plenty of bluegrass and Americana musicians tearing it up on those, too. Nonetheless, if we want to enjoy the beautiful continuity of guitar music, evidenced in Gibson's guitars and long history, we also need to be continuously alive to its future possibilities. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Junior Marvin

What an accolade it is to be sought after by not one but two legends – Bob Marley and Stevie Wonder. Junior Marvin tells us all about it on **p50**



A Rebel's Farewell

Duane Eddy was a true godfather to rock 'n' roll guitar and a player of huge distinction yet remained humble to the end **p44**



Eric's Martin

Clapton may be best known for toting a Strat, but it was his '74 Martin 000-28 that became his closest companion through the 1970s. We check it out on **p80**

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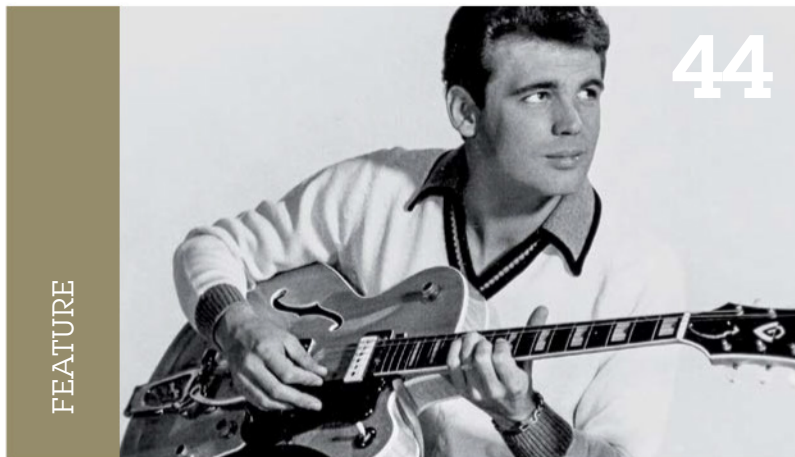
Contents

COVER FEATURE



56

FEATURE



44

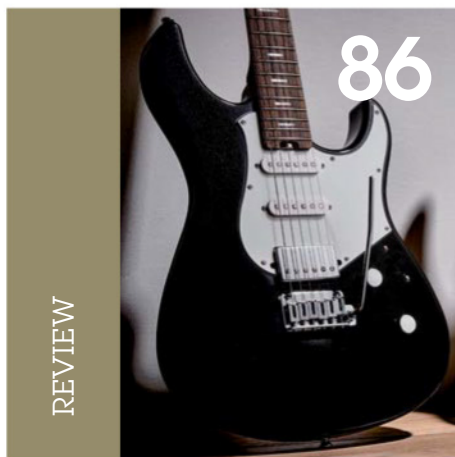
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REVIEW



86

REGULARS

- 028 Gas Supply
- 030 Fretbuzz
- 032 New Music
- 034 Tones Behind The Tracks
- 036 Opinion
- 040 Substitute
- 042 Feedback
- 108 Subscribe
- 112 Longterm Test
- 114 Bought & Sold
- 116 The Mod Squad
- 120 Nitty Gritty
- 124 Vintage Icons
- 130 Next Month

FEATURES

- 044 Obituary: Duane Eddy
- 050 Junior Marvin
- 056 130 Years Of Gibson
- 080 Eric Clapton's *Wonderful Tonight*
1974 Martin 000-28

NEW GEAR

- 008 Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom
1963 Les Paul SG Custom with
Maestro Vibrola & 1959 ES-355
- 014 PRS SE NF3
- 020 PJD St John Apprentice
- 024 ThorpyFX Electric Lightning
- 026 Beetronics Wannabee Beelateral Buzz
- 086 Yamaha Professional PACP12 &
Standard Plus PACS+12M
- 096 McNally S-32
- 104 Line 6 HX One

TECHNIQUES

- 126 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio':
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FIRST PLAY



**EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY
GIBSON CUSTOM 1963
LES PAUL SG CUSTOM
WITH MAESTRO VIBROLA**
£1,379

WHAT IS IT? The latest historic Gibson SG recreated in the Epiphone line with a trio of Gibson USA Custombuckers



**EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY
GIBSON CUSTOM
1959 ES-355**
£1,199

WHAT IS IT? A Holy Grail guitar, again with Gibson USA Custombuckers and at a price for all to enjoy

Pearly Kings

Epiphone's collaborations with the Gibson Custom Shop continue unabated, this time with two of the latter's most prized top-end models but built in Qingdao, China

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Phil Barker

When it comes to impressive-looking guitars, it's hard to imagine anything more sensational looking (save perhaps for Gretsch's White Falcon) than a three-pickup, white Gibson SG Custom with Vibrola, and a Cherry Red ES-355.

When released, both instruments sat at the top of their respective family trees and boasted pretty much every flashy element that Gibson had at its disposal. Thus it was ebony rather than rosewood fingerboards, gold instead of nickel plating, and real mother-of-pearl over the swirly celluloid found on SG Standard and ES-335 models. In the SG's case, it also added a third pickup and when finished in white and with a big gold vibrato (did they pinch the idea from Gretsch?) looked spectacular. In line with





its recent collaborations with the Gibson Custom Shop, Epiphone has released its own take on these illustrious models. So let's dive in...

As you'd imagine, these guitars are as close as possible to the original spec, given today's production methods, availability of materials and so on. Hence in the SG's case we see a centre-joined spread of mahogany for the body (not a single slab as on the originals), a one-piece long-tenon mahogany neck that joins at the 22nd fret, and a single-bound ebony fingerboard with real mother-of-pearl block markers. The headstock bears the striking 'split H' inlay of all Les Paul Customs and features the usual multiple edge binding.

In the ES-355's case it's a laminated maple and poplar body with solid spruce centre block, and again a one-piece mahogany neck (20th-fret join this time), plus bound ebony 'board. At first we thought Epiphone had chosen pearloid for the 355's inlays, as it looked less reflective. However, further investigation revealed it to be the real thing.

One thing that is a little bemusing about this pair is Epiphone's choice of VOS polyurethane finish. VOS stands for 'vintage original sheen', but vintage guitars don't go matt in this way, neither were they satin lacquered at creation. So we'd have preferred the no-nonsense gloss.

While in critical mode (and that's very unusual for Epiphones these days), the ES-355's heel is lopsided, the left corner being nicely rounded but the right definitely more pointed. We've looked online and the heels on all the other guitars have been correct, in other words symmetrical. Clearly, this is an aberration, but not one we expect from the Qingdao facility.

On a much more positive note, pickups, hardware and innards are all first grade,

One thing that is a little bemusing about this pair is Epiphone's choice of VOS polyurethane finish

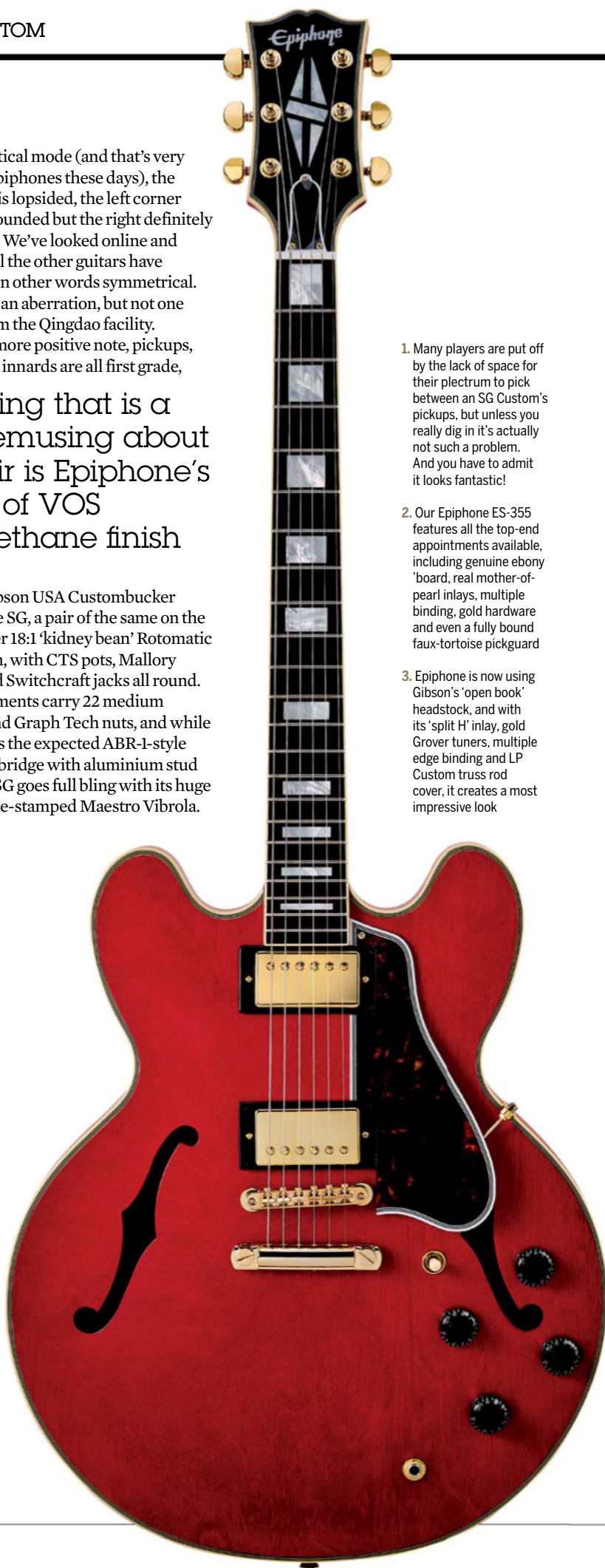
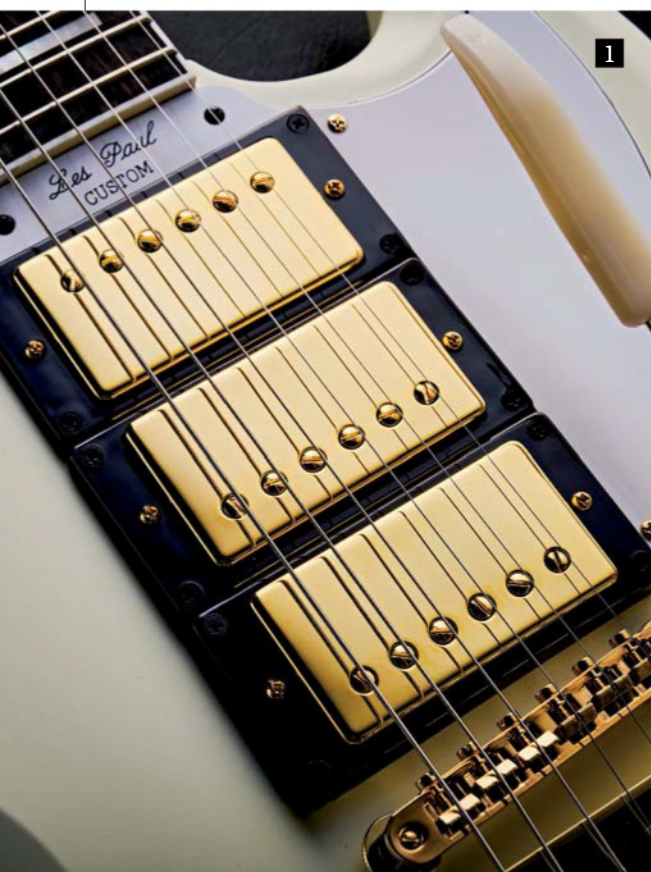
with triple Gibson USA Custombucker pickups on the SG, a pair of the same on the ES-355, Grover 18:1 'kidney bean' Rotomatic tuners on both, with CTS pots, Mallory capacitors and Switchcraft jacks all round.

Both instruments carry 22 medium jumbo frets and Graph Tech nuts, and while the ES-355 has the expected ABR-1-style tune-o-matic bridge with aluminium stud tailpiece, the SG goes full bling with its huge gold, Epiphone-stamped Maestro Vibrola.

1. Many players are put off by the lack of space for their plectrum to pick between an SG Custom's pickups, but unless you really dig in it's actually not such a problem. And you have to admit it looks fantastic!

2. Our Epiphone ES-355 features all the top-end appointments available, including genuine ebony 'board, real mother-of-pearl inlays, multiple binding, gold hardware and even a fully bound faux-tortoise pickguard

3. Epiphone is now using Gibson's 'open book' headstock, and with its 'split H' inlay, gold Grover tuners, multiple edge binding and LP Custom truss rod cover, it creates a most impressive look

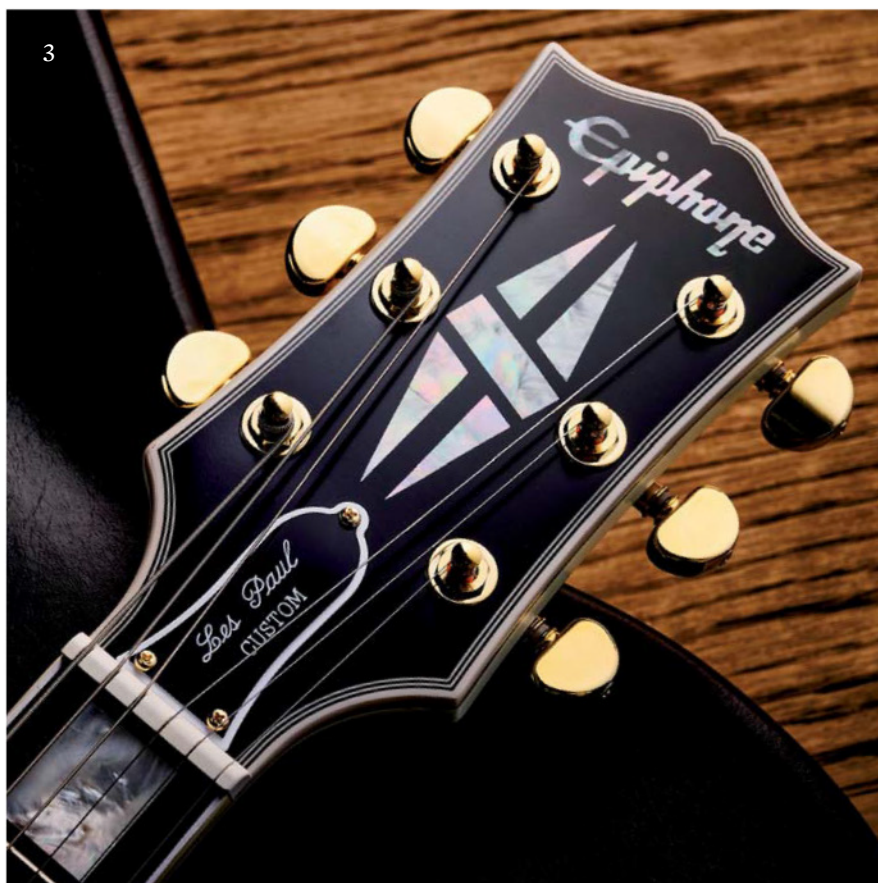




Feel & Sounds

There's another criticism we have to level, this time only at the SG. On any guitar where the colour is sprayed all over then scraped away from binding and so on, or even previously masked up, a ridge is inevitably formed. This is usually filled in by multiple coats of clear lacquer then sanded flush. It's a common criticism on Gibsons where nitrocellulose shrinks back to reveal this ridge. But here on the Epiphone SG Custom's neck it's pretty prominent and really shouldn't be given that these are finished in polyurethane. The temptation is to gently sand it back with ultra-fine wet-or-dry paper, but the danger is always to sand through (so don't try it, folks!), and on satin finishes it's all but impossible to exactly replicate the factory sheen.

Other than that it's positivity all the way. Although Epiphone describes it as 'SlimTaper', our SG Custom's neck is a healthy handful and the action, although not overly low, suits the 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius and medium jumbo frets well. Fretboard access is total, and while you do have to get used to everything about a three-humbucker SG with a big vibrato system, a little rejigging of your playing position soon reveals a guitar that's great fun to play (especially standing up,





4. We didn't like the tactile ridge that the binding scraping has created on the SG's neck, and we also weren't sure about the VOS finish – but we can't fault Epiphone's otherwise superb recreation of this classic top-end Gibson

looking in a mirror!). The Vibrola happily handles gentle wobbles or even quite manic wanging without question.

Moving onto the ES-355, its medium rounded 50s neck profile is again a friendly place to be. We felt instantly at home, and while those top frets aren't quite so available, it's no struggle to play shape 1 A minor pentatonic at the 17th fret. Everything that applies to the SG does here, too, except that standing up to play is a far more familiar experience.

The ES-355's charms respond to tone, pickup selection and volume settings to reveal a brilliantly usable set of tones

5. As you can see from the photo, our ES-355's heel is lopsided. It should be symmetrical, with rounded shoulders both sides – this will surely be addressed as production of the model progresses

Sonically, while both instruments bear Gibson's brilliant Custombuckers, their size, weight and construction reveal markedly different voices. Where the SG is a straight-down-the-line grunt machine, the ES-355 offers a tad more subtlety. While the solidbody is dark, the thinline is lighter, with noticeably more treble on hand. Not to say it won't spit fire when required. Both clean up superbly in their slightly different ways, and each responds superbly to the gain channel of our Laney Lionheart 20. Again, the SG packs the less subtle punch, and the ES-355's charms respond to tone,





pickup selection and volume settings to reveal a brilliantly usable set of tones.

A note about the SG's centre toggle switch position. While the resulting sound of bridge and middle pickup together is sometimes incorrectly described as 'out of phase', in fact it's merely the proximity of one 'bucker to the other that supplies the slightly nasal tone. Both necks will respond to personal playing preferences with a tweak here and there so either of these would make a super playing companion, depending on your taste and style.

Verdict

It's extremely rare these days that we take Epiphone to task over build quality or attention to detail. And while the niggles we've uncovered will surely be ironed out as production progresses, they did take us a little by surprise.

However, behind this lie two guitars that are immensely rewarding to play, with characters that shine through both visually and from a sound perspective. And while we're not keen on the VOS finish, nevertheless these instruments still make an incredibly bold visual statement. Plus their use of the highest quality pickups and wiring means they deliver proper, grown-up tones that wouldn't disappoint even the most critical ear. And look at those SRPs: that's a ton of guitar (niggles notwithstanding) for the price. **G**

6. Epiphone has chosen not to include the vote-splitting Varitone switch, instead opting for the classic layout of two volumes, two tones and a three-way toggle switch pickup selector



EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON CUSTOM 1963 LES PAUL SG CUSTOM WITH MAESTRO VIBROLA

PRICE: £1,379 (inc case)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: 2-piece mahogany with chamfered edges

NECK: 1-piece slim-taper mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Single-bound ebony, mother-of-pearl block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Epiphone tune-o-matic bridge and Epiphone branded Maestro Vibrola vibrato/tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic 'kidney bean' tuners, gold finish

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 3x Gibson

Custombuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch (centre position bridge and middle pickups together), 2x volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.8/8.7

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Classic White

Epiphone

www.epiphone.com

8/10

PROS A visual statement almost unparalleled in guitar circles; fabulous if not infinite range of beefy tones that match the instrument perfectly; real ebony 'board and top-quality electrics

CONS It's a shame about the neck binding's noticeable ridge; we would have preferred full gloss finish, rather than VOS satin



EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON CUSTOM 1959 ES-355

PRICE: £1,199 (inc case)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway, thinline semi-solid electric

BODY: Maple and poplar laminate with solid spruce centre block

NECK: 1-piece slim-taper mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Single-bound ebony, mother-of-pearl block inlays, 304.8mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Gibson tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stud tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic 'kidney bean' tuners, gold

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson

Custombuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup (no Varitone control)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.8/8.6

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Cherry (as reviewed), Classic White, Ebony VOS

8/10

PROS Great looks; stunning range of dynamically potent tones; excellent value for money – top-class pickups, hardware and general materials

CONS Again, gloss would have made for a more impressive-looking finish; the wonky heel also came as a surprise (and is surely something of an aberration?)

FIRST PLAY



PRS SE NF3
\$979

WHAT IS IT? PRS's own-style take on the S-style that looks back to the very early 90s for some inspiration

Bolt-On Beauty

This new SE-exclusive NF3 uses a similar bolt-on platform to John Mayer's Silver Sky model – but is a very different guitar. How so? Let's find out

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Has PRS gone a little bolt-on mad? Well, certainly in the Indonesian-made SE line, it's bolt-ons that have been the recent trend in terms of new releases. Only a little while back we saw the SE CE 24 and Swamp Ash Special, both based on historic PRS designs, then earlier this year the superb stripped-down (both in style and price) SE CE 24 Standard Satin, which added to the bolt-on choice behind the more established SE Silver Sky. Typically for PRS, those new bolt-ons are all twin-humbucking guitars (although the Swamp Ash Special does add a mid-placed single coil), but this new NF3 introduces a trio of hum-cancelling Narrowfield DD 'S' pickups, Indonesian-made interpretations of those units used on the more T-style NF 53 that launched in 2023.

There's a familiarity about the NF3 that recalls PRS's first attempt to crack the Stratocaster-style market, the first-series EG 3 (SSS) and EG 4 (HSS), which appeared briefly back in 1990 before they were redesigned into the more PRS-like EG II series, which lasted until 1995. The EG did reappear, again briefly, in the SE range back in 2004 but as a three-single-coil, all-mahogany set-neck with stoptail or vibrato, and then an HSS variant.







1. As with the whole design, the NF3 is a very PRS guitar using the standard all-steel six-screw vibrato that's used throughout the SE range and on the USA S2 and CE 24, as opposed to the two-post vibrato of the Silver Sky

It's not even the first PRS to use the NF3 name. Another short-lived bolt-on, the original NF3 was produced from 2011 to 2013 and used three 57/08 Narrowfield humbuckers, with a 641mm (25.25-inch) scale, maple fingerboard and a korina body.

Despite these attempts to 'do a Fender' – and there have been a few others, such as the alder-bodied DC3 and even the Brent Mason signature – it was, of course, the Silver Sky and John Mayer that finally nailed the job. Thing is, plenty of people



2. Unlike the Silver Sky, the headstock employs the standard PRS outline. As with the other SE bolt-ons, the maple is slab-sawn and the headstock is scarf-jointed. Tuners are non-locking and we have the standard black friction-reducing nut

3. Plenty of PRS designs use some tricky wiring but not here. Unlike the more Strat-style layout of the Silver Sky, we get just master volume and tone, with the five-way switch giving us the usual Strat-style selections



(ourselves included) think the very successful Silver Sky is, by design, rather derivative; this new SE NF3 most definitely isn't. For example, while it shares the same body wood (poplar) as the SE Silver Sky, that's about where any similarities end. It does have a similar outline and contouring, but there's that original EG-like chamfer to the top horn and the output jack moves to the body edge. The headstock is standard PRS, not reversed, the scale length is PRS's standard 635mm (25-inch), not the longer Fender scale of the Silver Sky, and the fingerboard radius is standard PRS at 254mm (10 inches), not the 216mm (8.5 inches) of the SE John Mayer design. The SE NF3 uses the standard PRS-designed SE vibrato, too, not the two-post version used on the USA and SE Silver Sky. Then the controls revert to master volume and tone with the five-way pickup selector with its proprietary switch tip, offering the standard Stratocaster combinations.

At launch, we get four pretty classy colour options and a choice of either rosewood or maple bird-inlaid fingerboards.

Feel & Sounds

Even though we're primed by previous experience of PRS's SE bolt-ons to expect a very tidy guitar, pulling the NF3 out of its gigbag surprises us. It's a very fit-for-business weight of 3.35kg (7.37lb), neither

UNDER THE HOOD We found a few surprises here ...

When you remove the seven-screw scratchplate, you can see that rather than a 'swimming pool' cavity there are individual pickup routs – the neck and bridge of which are certainly large enough for a full-size humbucker.

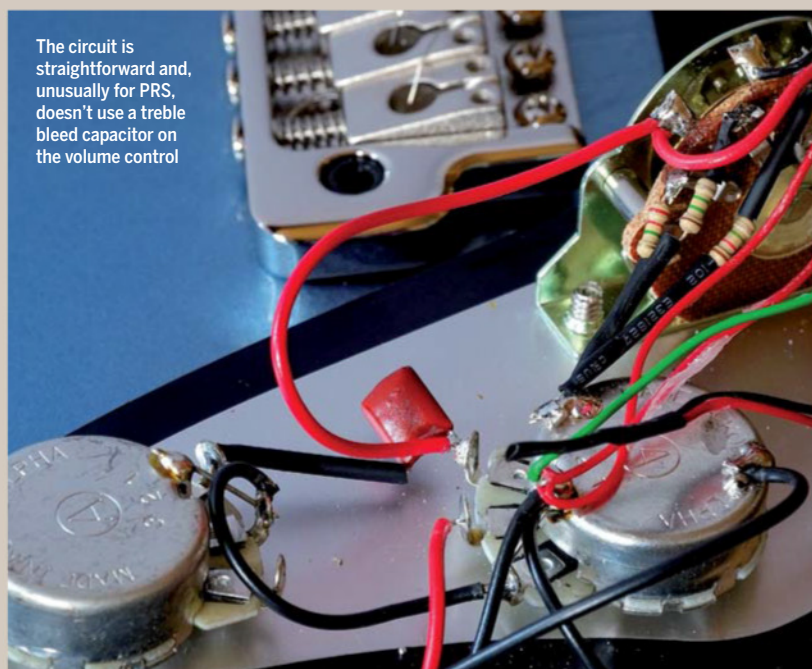
The circuit uses two Alpha 'Made in Korea' pots, with a simple .022µF (223J) tone capacitor and a standard five-way lever selector switch. As you'd expect, it's wired modern style and, perhaps surprisingly for PRS, there's no treble bleed capacitor on the volume control. However, what we do get are three resistors connected – individually

to each pickup position – from the output side of the five-way switch to ground. These specifically tune the value of the single coils and a humbucker are installed on an HSS guitar with a single volume control.

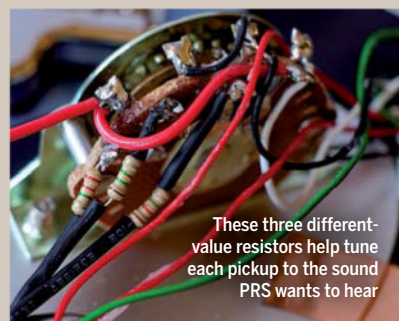
Here, the volume pot is rated at 1meg-ohm with an audio taper, although ours measured a little under that at 939k; the tone control is rated at 500k, again audio taper, and measures 490k. In conjunction with those resistors of 1.2meg-ohm (bridge), 1.5meg-ohm (middle) and 2.2meg-ohm (neck), this means that the pickups are

effectively 'seeing' 526.7k, 577.5k and 658.5k respectively. This is typical of PRS's TCI procedure: they really are listening and tuning the pickups and circuit to sound exactly how they want it to.

These new Narrowfield DD 'S' pickups are cleanly made, too, and have thick fibre-like bases. The neck/middle are to the same spec based on the rear logos; the bridge has a bit more power, which results in a very balanced output overall. Measured at output, the bridge pickup has a DCR of 8.76k, and the middle and neck are virtually identical at 7.87k.



The circuit is straightforward and, unusually for PRS, doesn't use a treble bleed capacitor on the volume control



These three different-value resistors help tune each pickup to the sound PRS wants to hear



From the label and DCR measurements, the bridge pickup is wound a little hotter than the middle and neck Narrowfields

feather-light nor over-heavy for the style. The neck back is a very lightly tinted satin that will typically burnish up with use; our reference SE Silver Sky's neck back certainly has.

The Wide Thin neck profile here is a PRS classic. The nut width is just over 43mm (with 36mm string spacing), and it has a depth of 21mm at the 1st fret, increasing to a shade under 23mm by the 12th. The SE Silver Sky is slightly narrower at the nut at 41.8mm (with 35mm string spacing) with a similar 1st-fret depth and slightly deeper by the 12th at 24.3mm. The neck back is beautifully shaped, a classic 'C' with no hint of a flat back or over-big shoulders.

Sharp fingerboard edges and fret ends? Not here. The fingerboard edges are nicely rolled; the fretwork from the standard SE medium jumbo stock is faultlessly installed

This SE NF3 comes across as very much a PRS guitar, not a retooling of someone else's design

and finished. After some basic new string stretching, the SE NF3, which ships with 10s, is perfectly in tune, and even with some pretty vigorous vibrato wrangling it stays that way.

While Fender players might feel more at home with the Silver Sky, PRS players will definitely feel a little more comfortable here. Part of that, of course, is the slightly shorter scale length and the fingerboard radius, but the voicing is very PRS-like,

too, in that although we have the standard Stratocaster selections, aside from being fully hum-cancelling, it comes across as a fuller, less thin voice that will certainly appeal if you can't get on with single coils and/or need a little more body. Pulling back the tone and volume certainly moves to a more traditional humbucking voicing. And that's key to the versatility: with that volume pulled back you'd swear you're hearing something more like an SG; pull the controls full up and we're back to that fuller Fender-like voicing, not least with positions 2 and 4 on the five-way.

As PRS does so well, the blurring of the lines between humbucker and single coil is not only versatile but very musical. Used with a basic pedalboard, the SE NF3 is the perfect driver moving from full-sounding, clear but far from sharp-edged 'single

CREATING CLASSICS

We catch up with PRS's COO, Jack Higginbotham, to get the lowdown on this second version of the NF3

Looking at the NF3, us old-timers might be reminded of that original 1990 EG. What was your involvement in that EG design and did you have that in mind when developing the SE NF3?

"Good eye and good memory! The original EG was my first 'project management' job at PRS after having run the woodshop for a couple of years. I put together a small crew and managed the woodshop, finish and assembly at night. That was also the first night-shift at PRS, so we learned a lot on many fronts. That being the case, that [EG] guitar has always had a special place in my heart and there are a few folks here that share the attraction to the spirit of that instrument.

"The new NF3 was actually originally going to go down the EG road. We were working on single coils, building on what we learned with the SE Silver Sky, but at the same time we were deep in developing the Narrowfield pickups for the NF53. Paul [Reed Smith] was in my office, saw the prototype and made a comment about putting NF pickups in it. That made complete sense to me and the team because the Narrowfields offer a similar tone, with the benefits of 'no hum' sound while carrying more PRS DNA. So then we changed directions."

Would you agree that the Silver Sky was John Mayer's design and the SE NF3 is PRS's own take on the S-style?

"I would say that the Silver Sky would not have happened without John and some very key elements of the guitar are all him. Reversing the

headstock, resizing the bird inlays, dialling in the exact sound he wanted, getting the neck to feel just right for him. But the execution of the guitar was all PRS: figuring out exactly how to get at what John wanted in a way that maximised the essence of the guitar.

"The NF3, to me, is not our take on a S-style: it is its own thing. If you recall, when the original NF3 was released, the DC3 was introduced at the same time. The DC3 was much more of a S-style guitar. I understand how it may be perceived by the market as being our answer to the Stratocaster, but that's not my intention with this guitar."

The pickups here seem modelled on those on the NF53. It must have been a lengthy and costly job to replicate those. How close would you say these are to the USA pickups?

"Very close in concept, very different in execution. Again, building on how we did the Silver Sky pickup and then the SE Silver Sky, we borrowed from our research and testing and came up with an 'SE way' to achieve great results using more

available and affordable parts. [Director of New Products Engineering] Rob Carhart and [senior project engineer] Jon Wasserman also took the opportunity to redesign the moulds for easier assembly. The end result is shockingly close, but how we got there was different."

What is the actual purpose of the extra steel slugs, and why go for this layout rather than the more standard slugs of the original (and still current) Narrowfield?

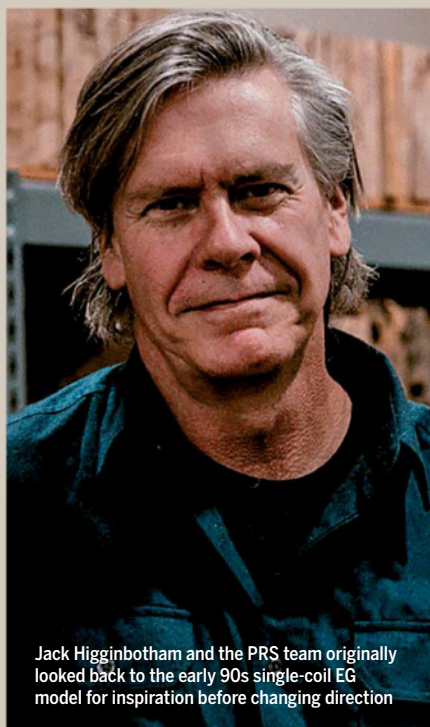
"Well, those middle slugs are all about Paul's foray into TCI. It is very similar to how we are achieving the results in the NF53, pretty much the same methodology."

Were you not tempted to add this guitar to the USA Bolt-On line-up? And are there any plans to do so?

"That's a great question with a murky answer! I think at the very beginning of this, we'd thought of this guitar being in our Bolt-On category, but as it morphed to an EG platform, which was something I was enthusiastic about and had a lot of passion around, it shifted to SE. Also, the beginning of this development was around the launch of the SE Silver Sky, so we had just worked out a lot of processes with bolt-on guitars at PT Cort [PRS's manufacturing partner in Indonesia] so that made sense. Ultimately, it made great sense to make this an SE guitar and, as of now, there is no plan to bring it into the USA line-up." [DB]

"The NF3 is not our answer to the Stratocaster: it is its own thing"

Jack Higginbotham



Jack Higginbotham and the PRS team originally looked back to the early 90s single-coil EG model for inspiration before changing direction



These new-design Narrowfield DD 'S' have their origins in the pickups used on the T-inspired NF53. However, they are the first of this style to be manufactured in Indonesia and are hum-cancelling



As we've seen with the recent SE bolt-ons and unlike previous models such as the CE and that original EG, the neck join here is more Fender-like and the cutaways more incurving

coil' that has more than enough body in the voicing to rattle your cages with some high-gain distortion. Aside from being hum-cancelling, these Narrowfields on this platform are genuine genre hoppers. It's a real all-rounder.

Verdict

Despite the huge success of both the USA and SE Silver Sky, this new SE NF3 comes across as very much a PRS guitar, not a retooling of someone else's design. From the more PRS-like body style, to the scale length and pickups, it's a very credible introduction and it is perhaps a little surprising that it's solely in the SE line when it could quite comfortably sit alongside the Silver Sky and Fiore, not to mention the NF 53, in the USA Bolt-On range. But it's testament to the quality of the build, and the design of these hum-cancelling pickups, that you don't feel in any way short-changed, irrespective of its origin or price. It's a very full-sounding 'Stratocaster'-type but with huge stylistic potential.

If we were to be picky, then the simple 'seven-sound' mod would expand your choices, not least allowing you to voice the neck and bridge pickups together. Indeed, installing that simple mod and a set of the SE locking tuners would really bring the NF3 dangerously close to the USA guitars. It really is that good.

The blurring of the lines between humbucker and single coil is versatile and very musical

What's next, then? An SE version of the more T-inspired NF 53? Or the SE NF4 with a standard humbucker at the bridge? How about that thin satin finish we've seen on the SE CE 24? Who knows what the future holds, but this is a platform with plenty of legs. Long live the EG! **G**



PRS SE NF3

PRICE: £979 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric, bolt-on

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Slab-sawn maple (w/ scarfed headstock), Wide Thin profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/43.1mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'old school' pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: PRS patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed non-locking tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 3x PRS-designed Narrowfield DD 'S' humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.35/7.37

OPTIONS: Maple fingerboard (with grey pearloid bird inlays)

RANGE OPTIONS: Other SE bolt-ons are the Silver Sky (£979), CE 24 (£695), Swamp Ash Special (£979) and CE Standard Satin (£499)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model, though a lefty SE Silver Sky has been announced for autumn 2024 release

FINISHES: Ice Blue Metallic (as reviewed), Gun Metal Gray, Metallic Orange, Pearl White – gloss body finish, satin neck back

PRS Europe

01223 874301

www.prsguitars.com



9/10

PROS Hard-to-fault build; perfect playability and setup; great vibrato; hum-cancelling DD 'S' Narrowfields sit between classic single coil and low-output humbuckers; very versatile

CONS Bit pricey for a non-signature SE; a pull switch on the tone control would introduce the T-style bridge and neck pickup combination

FIRST PLAY



PJD GUITARS
ST JOHN APPRENTICE
£899

WHAT IS IT? UK-made, direct-only, single-pickup proper bolt-on offset including full Plek setup and gigbag. For how much?

Learning To Fly

There's no shortage of great-quality UK-made guitars, but at £899 PJD's new Apprentice model is leading the charge in terms of quality and cost

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Whatever the reasons, we could suggest there's a bit of a trend emerging: the stripped-down, high-quality guitar that's far from hard on your income. It was the theme of our last cover story and, working on that, we got wind of a new entry, PJD's new Apprentice. We say 'new' because the brand released some small runs of single-soapbar-pickup models back in 2022, with lightly reliced gloss nitro finishes, which were the first to introduce the gold decal logos now standard for all its models. Those guitars were very special, but nudging £2k, they were hardly impulse buys. This new version very nearly is. We're not saying £899 is pocket change, but for a UK-made, quality-led, satin-finished, obeche-bodied single-pickup guitar with a hand-wound humbucker... Well, we rest our case.

In the flesh, there's nothing cut-price in this cleanly presented St John offset (PJD's most popular body shape). It's not unique to PJD, of course, but its take on the theme exudes some style, not least in the moody Nato Olive finish (a vintage Porsche colour, we're told). Full-scale offsets can





The six-block saddle Gotoh through-strung bridge is a feature from the first PJD we evaluated – and it's hard to beat. There are no tricks with that single volume control, either



1

1. PJD is winding all its pickups in-house: the direct-mounted Wadfather humbucker combines heat and sauce, a great-sounding hot-vintage style

be weighty: not here. Yes, it's a big slab body, but it's slightly downsized from the original Fender outline and looks and feels pretty contemporary with that forearm chamfer but without a rear ribcage cut. The same level of Gotoh hardware that's used on PJD's Standard and Custom Shop models features here and it's lightly reliced, the fingerboard edges are nicely worn in, the neck back is low gloss with a light tint. Fretwork has never been an issue on any

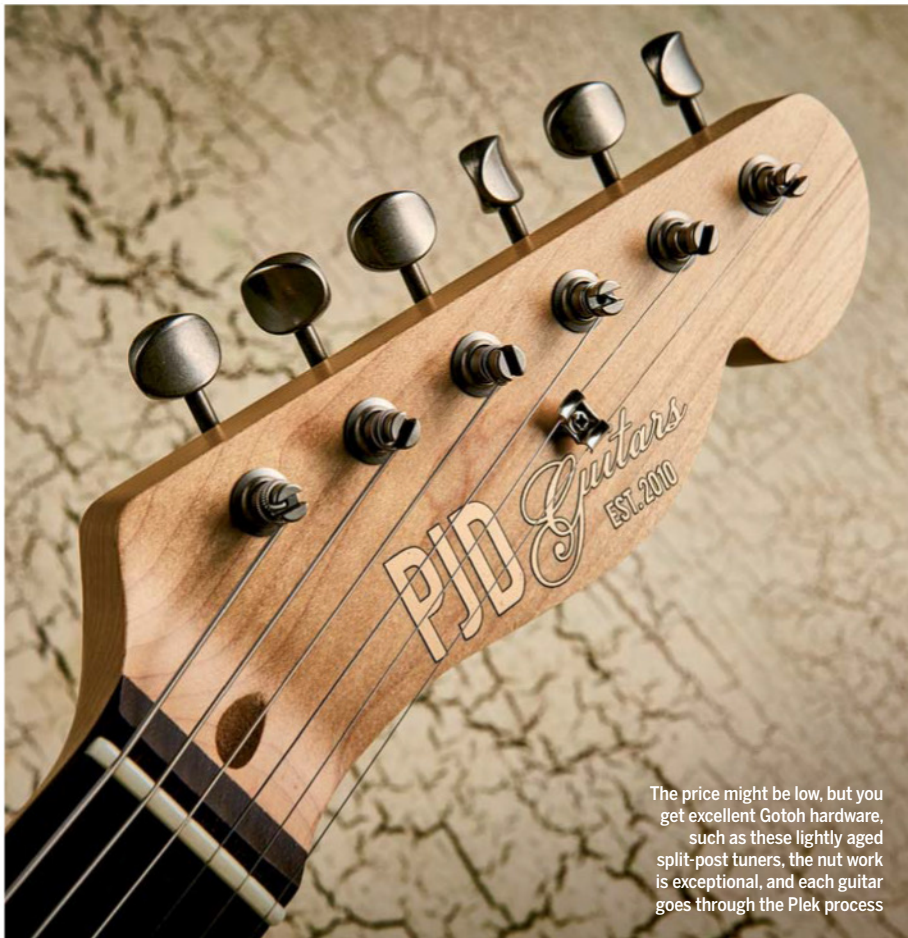
With basically just one sound, any Junior-style guitar has to deliver from the off – and the flavour here is beefy hot-rod PAF

2. PJD is one of the relatively few makers who use proper bolts (not screws) to secure the neck to the body. Despite the attractively low price, the heel here is nicely contoured, too

PJD we've had in our hands, and with the company having only recently installed a Plek setup machine, things just seem to be subtly smoother.

As the name implies, the Junior style means a single pickup: a direct-mounted PJD Wadfather humbucker, which uses 43 AWG coil wire and an Alnico V magnet with a DCR reading of around 13.52kohms. It has an open-topped cover, 12 adjustable screw poles, with the coils hidden under a





The price might be low, but you get excellent Gotoh hardware, such as these lightly aged split-post tuners, the nut work is exceptional, and each guitar goes through the Plek process

tortoiseshell plastic plate, which is a proper celluloid acetate sourced from Italy. It gives the design a centre point, not to mention a retro-modern motif. And to keep with the stripped-down style, there's just a single volume control. No tricks.

Feel & Sounds

With basically just one sound, any Junior-style guitar has to deliver from the off – and the flavour here is beefy hot-rod PAF. The whole guitar feels very alive in your hands. In that regard, it certainly references a good Les Paul Junior. There's punch and power, but it's not overthick, and there's a grainy detail to the big voice, while pulling back the volume nudges down the high-end, subtly producing strong, strident jangle.

Unlike a good Les Paul Junior, there's no tone control, nor that old-school circuit, but the rear cavity is purposely routed for PJD's standard two-control (volume and tone) setup, so you could easily add a tone control, perhaps with a coil-split via a pull-pot and even a simple treble bypass circuit – all are simple mods. But, as is, this is a big, solid-sounding rock voice and would make a superb slide guitar, too.

We don't know whether it's the light ageing, but the neck here feels more like

a good, well-played vintage Fender, with a nut width of 42mm (plus a perfectly cut bone nut), a depth at the 1st fret of just over 21mm and just under 23mm by the 12th, with a quite full 'C' profile. Like the Standard models, we get Jescar 55090 fretwire, medium with a good height, on the single radius 254mm (10-inch) rosewood fingerboard. With the perfect fretwork and that Plek setup, it makes for a really engaging player. But, really, this isn't a guitar where you want to sweat the specs and details. It just needs a stage.

Verdict

Stripped-down guitars like this might well be a sign of the times, but, as ever, done well that simplicity is refreshingly liberating. And while PJD's original Apprentice certainly didn't disappoint, this new version distils the concept further and, of course, pulls the price down to a point where you wonder if it's actually viable. These will be limited, only available direct from PJD, and on this evidence if you've got any kind of rock 'n' roll heart then we'd strongly suggest you place your order. An antidote for the complex modern world, it certainly reminds us why we got into this whole lark in the first place. Superb stuff. **G**



PJD GUITARS ST JOHN APPRENTICE

PRICE: £899 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Offset-shaped solidbody electric

BODY: Obeche

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, rectangular white acrylic inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium (Jescar 55090)

HARDWARE: Gotoh string-through 6-block saddle bridge, Gotoh vintage-style SD91 split-post tuners – light aged nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Direct-mount PJD Wadfather w/ open cover, master volume

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.79/6.15

OPTIONS: Colour only

RANGE OPTIONS: Expect a similar-spec Carey Apprentice later this year. PJD's Carey, York, St John and Woodford start in the new Standard spec at £1,299; all come with Bigsby vibratos as the Standard Plus (the Woodford uses a synchronised vibrato) and are priced at £1,499. PJD also now offers a custom service (£POA)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISHES: Nato Olive (as reviewed) – low-gloss open-pore nitro body; satin nitro neck back

PJD Guitars

07791 236 353

www.pjdguitars.com



9/10

PROS Superb pared-down, high-level craft; quality hardware; light weight; mainstream neck profile; first-class playability; hot-vintage single humbucker

CONS Junior fans might miss a tone control and that old-style circuit

FIRST PLAY



**THORPYFX
ELECTRIC LIGHTNING**
£429

WHAT IS IT? Signature valve overdrive and boost pedal for Cardinal Black guitarist Chris Buck



Buck's Fizz

Thorpy creates a valve-powered drive and boost pedal for Welsh powerhouse Chris Buck

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Neil Godwin

1. We're used to seeing these holes on the knob-protecting side panels on Thorpy pedals, but the Electric Lightning has some extra ones in the chassis to supply ventilation for the valve
2. Two knobs control the boost section: the Boost knob determines the amount of boost or cut, while the Lows knob sets the amount of bottom-end
3. Because it incorporates a valve, the Electric Lightning requires 12-volt power from the supplied adaptor. The inrush current can be as high as 700mA settling to 280mA to 300mA during use – something to be aware of if you wish to use a different 12-volt supply

Anyone who watches Chris Buck's always entertaining *Friday Fretworks* videos on his YouTube channel will have already heard this ThorpyFX pedal as it's been on his 'board for quite some time now, albeit in disguised form, making it the subject of much speculation. Now revealed as the Electric Lightning, it is, in fact, the Cardinal Black guitarist's signature pedal.

The brief for the pedal was to create an overdrive with an independent clean boost so that Chris had a one-box solution to deliver his own sound, no matter what backline he had access to. To achieve this, Thorpy has come up with a valve-based overdrive circuit with a three-knob EQ similar to a Marshall tone-stack, and combined that with a high-headroom clean boost. Both are independently footswitched, with the boost feeding into the drive.

The boost side of the pedal is capable of attenuation or boost. With unity gain at around one o'clock on the dial there's plenty of scope for both. The associated Lows knob keeps your bottom-end intact at its fully-clockwise position, but as you wind it back it gradually rolls bass off for something leaner and tighter, and more of a treble boost functionality. We liked it with a touch of boost dialled in, Lows knob set accordingly, enhancing the sound of a clean amp. As such, you may just want to leave it on all the time, although its performance capability as a kicked-in asset is without doubt, not least when taking the Drive section to another level with a richer sound.

The Drive section's Treble, Mid and Bass knobs offer loads of scope for finding the sweet spot to suit the guitar and amp that you're using, including a Marshall-like glassiness in the top-end that you can embrace or dial back. The Drive runs from a just-beyond-clean crunch right through to full-on heavy raunch – but always with crisp string articulation. What's more, the pedal's dynamic response is excellent, cleaning up with guitar volume and reacting sympathetically to touch, letting you coax out the cleaner sounds with softer strokes while digging in for the dirt.

Verdict

Breaking the £400 barrier, Thorpy's Electric Lightning represents a sizable investment, but it is a very flexible pedal that is perfectly suited for pairing with just about any clean amp to deliver all the drive sounds you'll need. **G**



THORPYFX ELECTRIC LIGHTNING

PRICE: £429

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Drive and boost pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Treble, Mids, Gain, Bass, Boost, Lows, Drive footswitch, Boost footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: Supplied 12V DC adaptor

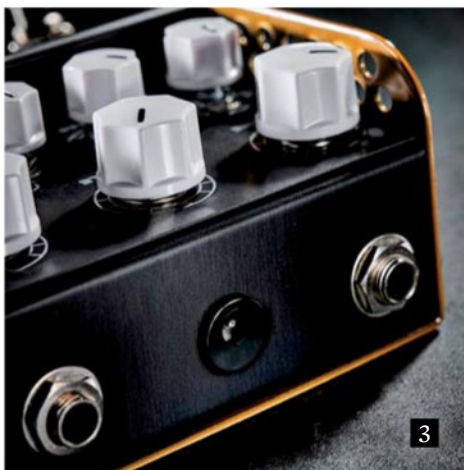
DIMENSIONS: 108 (w) x 130 (d) x 55mm (h)

ThorpyFX
www.thorpyfx.com



PROS Usual solid ThorpyFX build quality; compact for a twin-footswitch pedal; wide range of boost and drive tones; touch-responsive

CONS There's nothing we don't like, but some may find the 12-volt power inconvenient



THE RIVALS

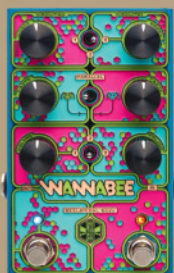
There are plenty of dual drive and boost pedals around. If you like the idea of valves but are on a tighter budget, Fender has two pedals that feature valve-based drive and an independent boost with their own Level and Boost controls: the MTG (£145) and MTG LA (£179) are both based around a NOS US-made 6205 preamp valve.

Away from valves, the CopperSound Foxcatcher (£219) is an overdrive pedal that is inspired by the Bluesbreaker and features an independent boost. MXR says that its Custom Audio Electronics Boost/Overdrive MC402 (£170) combines the Boost/Line Driver circuit with "a punchy, dynamic overdrive circuit".



MXR's compact MC402 combines boost and overdrive circuits

FIRST PLAY



**BEETRONICS WANNABEE
BEELATERAL BUZZ**
£315

.....
WHAT IS IT? Two famous
flavours of drive in one pedal



Twin Stinger

Beetronics moves away from its usual original circuit designs and delivers double drive with Klon and Bluesbreaker flavours

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. The routing switch in the middle of the pedal selects the order of the two drive circuits: to the left, #1 feeds #0; to the right, #0 feeds #1. In the centre, both run in parallel and can be blended with the Volume knobs
2. The top switch is circuit #1's 'flavor' switch, which adds differing amounts of clean blend: either no clean blend, medium clean blend or full clean blend...
3. ...while circuit #0's 'flavor' switch at the bottom of the pedal offers different tonal profiles for the circuit: a flat response, a mid boost or a low-end boost

We have become so used to seeing Beetronics come up with a series of original fuzz pedals that its latest stompbox is something of a surprise: the aptly named Wannabee is a double-drive pedal with drive circuits that, while no doubt having Beetronics' own slant on things, are based on the familiar and perennially popular Klon and Bluesbreaker pedals.

The Bluesbreaker inspiration is to the left and is called circuit #0, while the Klon-style is to the right and is called circuit #1. Both sides of the pedal are independently footswitchable so can be used individually or combined: a three-way toggle switch determines which will come first in a serial order or, alternatively, the two being used together in parallel, opening up a whole new scenario of sonic blends. Each side has the same knob functions, namely gain (Honey), tone (Taste) and Volume, but there is another pair of three-way toggle switches – one to tweak each circuit.

The Bluesbreaker has a choice of selectable boosts besides its flat sound, one in the low-end offering full-fat warmth, the other in the midrange delivering cut-through presence. For the Klon there are three distinct options including the choice of mixing in two different amounts of clean sound (the original Klon featured a degree of clean sound in the mix). Both drives definitely reside in the ballpark of what you'd expect from the pedals that they're based on, and either can be called upon to be used individually, both being capable of running from mild boost and enhancement through to fully driven sounds with practical top-end adjustment via the Taste knobs.

Beyond individual use, things get really interesting with both pedals interacting. Combining them in serial order you can push things into some particularly choice, throaty distortion. But perhaps the pedal's most intriguing attraction is the parallel mode. This not only opens up a whole new range of edgy dual textures to be explored but also offers a completely natural way to stack drives, perhaps running the Klon as an always-on tone conditioner and bringing the Bluesbreaker in for some occasional extra whomp.

Verdict

Beetronics has taken what are undoubtedly two of the most favoured drive flavours out there, tweaked and combined them into something greater than the sum of their parts, creating a stalwart pedal with a ton of functionality. **G**



BEETRONICS WANNABEE BEELATERAL BUZZ

PRICE: £315

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Dual-drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Honey (#0, #1), Taste (#0, #1), Volume (#0, #1), Circuit flavors switch (#0, #1), routing switch, Bypass footswitches (#0, #1)

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

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

DIMENSIONS: 83 (w) x 140 (d) x 70mm (h)

FACE bvba

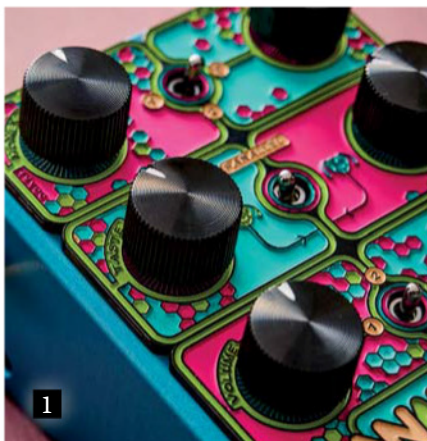
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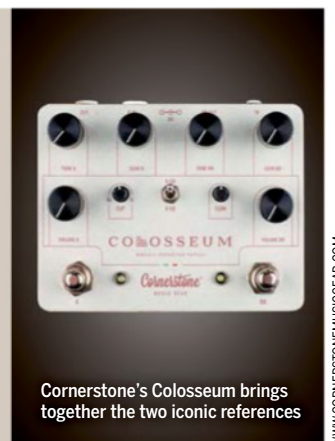
PROS Two classic drive circuits in one pedal; useful range of switchable tonal options; flexible routing, including a Parallel mode; fancy graphics

CONS Side-mounted jacks won't be everybody's preference



THE RIVALS

These examples of dual-drive pedals put together Klon and Bluesbreaker circuitry, allowing the two to be used individually or stacked together serially in either order but not in parallel. Ceriatone's Horsebreaker (£249) features the company's Centura and BB pedal circuits, while Cornerstone's Colosseum (£303) has a Klon side with a choice of germanium or silicon diodes or a 'clip blender', and the Bluesbreaker side gets a Clean blend knob. The Nordvang '83 Drive (£409) has a choice of diodes on the Klon side and switchable bass response and clipping options for the Bluesbreaker. NUX's Queen Of Tone (£99) is your budget option.



Cornerstone's Colosseum brings together the two iconic references

WWW.CORNERSTONEMUSICGEAR.COM



Gas Supply

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

Boss Katana Gen 3 amps From £293 to £691

CONTACT **Roland UK** WEB www.boss.info

New Katana amps? It feels like Boss only just launched them!

Really? Get ready for a shock, then, because you might not believe us when we tell you that Boss's Katana range was first launched (gulp) eight years ago. Thanks to a steady stream of additions and updates, though, the Katana amplifiers have never been far from the spotlight. And it's just as well because, being based around modelling and techy features, there's plenty of competition out there from the likes of Blackstar, Line 6 and Positive Grid. So, fresh from the recent release of the Katana:Go headphone amp comes the refreshed, third-generation line-up of new Katana amps.

Have they just made it slimmer and lighter?

Actually, no. First, there are seven models in the range: five combos and two heads. That might seem excessive, but the idea here is that, whichever way you turn, there's a Katana to suit your needs. It starts with the 'standard' Katana Gen 3 models: Katana-50, Katana-100 1x12 and Katana-100/212 (2x12) combos. These are joined by the 100-watt Katana Head, but in addition to these are the expanded Katana- 50 EX combo, and a pair of flagship Katana Artist models (100-watt Head and combo). The features change as you move through the range, but across the board Boss has made some tonal improvements, including the all-new Pushed model.

SEVEN MODELS

From the entry-level Katana-50 through to the Katana Artist models, there are no fewer than seven amps in the Katana Gen 3 range

NEW 'CHARACTER'

Boss has been working on the all new Pushed amp 'character', which promises dynamic response similar to a clean valve combo being driven into harmonic saturation

TONE SHAPING

The Katana Head and Katana Artist amps feature a Bloom control for shifting the amp's response, and the same models also have Cab Resonance and EQ Contour controls

CONNECTIVITY

Every amp except for the Katana-50 is compatible with Boss's GAFC/ GAFC-EX, plus they all include a USB C socket for recording into a computer or editing your sounds with the Boss Tone Studio app



JARGON CRUNCHING

Bluetooth Connectivity

As with other Boss products, the Gen 3 Katana amps offer wireless Bluetooth connectivity. However, this is perhaps better described as 'Bluetooth-ready' because in order to connect you'll need to attach the Boss Bluetooth Audio MIDI Adaptor. It's an extra purchase (£49), but unlocks audio streaming and sound-editing from your iOS or Android device.



I already own a Katana - is this any different?

The changes are more incremental improvements, rather than a full-blown overhaul. Each model is equipped with six (previously five) amp models, and Boss has also tweaked its popular Brown Amp Type. Those six models also have a variation, so you've got 12 amps to jump between. As before, there are effects, too, split into five categories but offering over 60 individual effects via the newly updated Boss Tone Studio desktop (Mac/Windows) app. All of which is pushed through Boss's Tube Logic technology and Class AB all-analogue power amp (complete with dial-able output power) that we've seen on previous models.

What's the difference between the 50 and the 50 EX models?

They're both combos, but the 50 EX is compatible with Boss's GAFC/GAFC-EX footswitches, making it the perfect choice if you're looking for an all-rounder that will still be convenient for live use. As well as this, it has an upgraded speaker, an impulse response-loaded line output, stereo-expansion capability and a snazzy grey grille cloth.

As we progress through the range, we gain output power, an effects loop, improved speakers and more

What about the others?

As we progress through the range, we gain output power, plus features such as an effects loop, global compatibility for the footswitches mentioned earlier, and improved speakers (the 100-watt Head includes a five-inch 'practice' speaker so you can use it without a cab).

Where do the Artist models fit in?

Boss describes the Katana Artist models as the "ultimate Katana experience". The Artist combo has a custom 12-inch Waza speaker, with refined cabinet tuning, expanded control set and an additional Solo section, offering a boost and delay circuit. Both Artist models and the 100-watt Katana Head also feature the Bloom setting to further shape the dynamic response of the amp.

Tell me how much...

The prices start at £293 for the Katana-50, with the Katana Artist combo topping the range at £691. The Boss Bluetooth Audio MIDI Adaptor costs £49, and the GA-FC-EX is priced at £138. [SW]

ALSO RELEASED

EPIPHONE USA CORONET £1,599



Before the SG took the symmetrical double-cut crown, Epiphone gave us a softer view of the future with the Coronet. Now, Epiphone is continuing its homage to yesteryear with the addition of the USA Collection Epiphone Coronet. Made in Nashville, the mahogany-bodied straightforward rocker is fitted with a single P-90 in the bridge, and some vintage touches include the 'Bikini' headstock badge and original-era scratchplate. Epiphone has widened things at the nut, fitted a SlimTaper neck and slimmed the body depth to make this a retro-meets-modern take on its classic. You can get the USA Coronet in Vintage Cherry or Ebony, and it comes complete with a hard case.

www.epiphone.com



PRS DGT 15 £995

With all of this talk of 'amp-less rigs', you'd be forgiven for thinking that the good ol' valve amp has had its day. Not so, says David Grissom and PRS, who have announced the DGT 15. Based on Grissom's DGT Custom 30, it's a versatile lunchbox designed to excel in the studio and on stage, offering pristine cleans to saturated drive. This 15-watter is driven by three 12AX7s and a 12AT7 in the preamp, plus a pair of EL84s in the power stage. Key to its versatility are the many tone-shaping additions. Joining the Bass, Mid and Treble controls are a three-position Bright switch, Boost and Top Cut, plus tremolo and reverb circuits. To the back are speaker outputs, a footswitch socket and bias jacks for easy maintenance – and the whole lot is covered in a vintage-styled Blonde Tolex.

www.prguitars.com



Fretbuzz

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

Artist: Conchúr White

Album: *Swirling Violets* (Bella Union)



Conchúr White previously played with indie-rockers Silences before setting out on his own. *Swirling Violets* is his debut solo LP www.conchurwhite.com

Conchúr White, a singer-songwriter hailing from County Armagh in Northern Ireland, released his debut album in January. The appropriately titled *Swirling Violets* contains the signature woozy Bella Union sound but with plenty of Conchúr's own character running through it. "It feels totally new because it's my first album," he says. "I've been in bands before, without going through that album process, so every facet of this is novel and exciting. It's great to have the experience."

Solo Vs Band

As Conchúr mentions, before striking out as a solo artist, he was more involved in bands, so this relatively new guise is one he found himself in almost unwittingly. "I never really thought about being a solo musician and using my name, to be honest," he admits. "With the bands before, like Silences, I would write the music and the words and then my friends in the band would all add their parts. I do miss that camaraderie, but I think the nature of writing by myself – and initially recording by myself – meant it made sense to be solo. So I do miss the social aspect, but I like the flexibility, and when I go on tour the budget means it would be near impossible with a band and I would have to turn it down."

Pictured with a McNally acoustic, Conchúr has known luthier Ciaran McNally since his teens in County Armagh



Self-Satisfaction

There is a certain shedding of preconceptions to his writing as a solo artist, as Conchúr explains: "There are certainly things that are liberating about [this setup]. People talk about authenticity in music and sometimes I'm not quite sure what that means, but when I write something now, the only person I need to satisfy is myself. Of course, it helps if people like it, but when I was in Silences, I was conscious of the guys liking it and now I just go ahead, which is freeing. But I do miss the feeling when I'm on stage with people. I love that collective work ethic when you're moving towards something. It's like sport in a way; there's nothing better than working together to achieve something."

Musical Cohesion

Conchúr's main achievement as a musician so far is his debut album, *Swirling Violets*, a Bella Union release that is a delicate balance of the label's dreamlike sound and Conchúr's own style. "I wanted it to sound very cohesive," he says. "In the past I've gone through phases, so I'd use a lot of synths and then I'd use piano, so with this I wanted that cohesion." The album also has accompaniments to frame Conchúr's songs. "I'm always conscious of overproduction," he says, "and songs that rely on it wouldn't come across well with just me playing them. For me, if you can play a song on the piano or guitar and make people feel something then that's great. It has to be successful in that sense – and if it doesn't pass that test, then it's not good enough."

The Stage Dynamic

Conchúr currently plays solo mainly on acoustic guitar, so he pays attention to a way of playing that embellishes his songs enough. "I predominantly use a style of fingerpicking," he tells us. "I'm not the most technical guitar player, but I'm aware of the dynamic of moving from fingerpicking to chords. Because it's just me, it's one of the only things I can control to make my set diverse. And I don't use many tunings. On the album I only used standard tuning and DADGAE, which is the tuning *Rivers* is in. So I'm aware of the diversity in my playing, which is why, with the percussive element, the acoustic guitar is best for me when playing live." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Deadwood*

For fans of: Father John Misty, Sharon Van Etten, Henry Parker

"When I write now,
the only person I need
to satisfy is myself...
I just go ahead,
which is freeing"

LOCAL HERO

Conchúr's connection with Northern Ireland's McNally Guitars goes way back

Although Conchúr finds electric guitars as interesting as acoustics ("I love my Stratocaster, it's so reliable, but I really want a Gretsch..."), his main instrument is a McNally OM, built by his friend Ciaran McNally (whom you'll also find on page 96 of this issue). "We've known each other since we were 13," Conchúr explains. "When I was in Silences he said he would build me a guitar – and it was great, but it was such an early one for him and he got so much better. So he said he had one for me to try and I loved it. I've been using it since. Even though it wasn't custom-built for me, it's perfect."

Albums

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

Paul Weller is in a reflective mood here, embracing a slower pace with the passing years



PHOTO BY NICOLE NODLAND

Paul Weller

66

Polydor (available now)

9/10



Meditative 17th solo album from influential songwriter

It's probably true to say that you never really know exactly what you're going to get when Paul Weller releases an album. You can be guaranteed some top-shelf songwriting that straddles pop and soul genres, but it's always difficult to pin the man down and find a focal point. The same is true with 66, which was released on the eve of Weller's 66th birthday at the end of May.

Recorded over a period of three years at Weller's Black Barn Studios, the album enlists some star-studded collaborations along its 12-song complement, with Suggs, Noel Gallagher, Steve Brooks, Max Beesley and Richard Hawley all throwing their respective hats into the ring. The album was produced by Weller, with the exception of two tracks (*My Best Friend's Coat* and *A Glimpse of You*) where French producer and recording artist Christophe Vaillant took his turn behind the mixing desk. Album credits also reveal production teamwork with White Label and Charles Rees (*In Full Flight* and *Burn Out* respectively).

So what do we find here? Well, 66 reveals the ex-Jam man in a reflective mood with lush strings and orchestrations (by Hannah Peel) on many of the moody, inward-gazing songs – *Rise Up Singing* and *A Glimpse Of You* being prime examples. There's the occasional reference to the heady days of the new wave era with *Soul Wandering*, but it's rare that Weller's guitar takes centre stage here. Indeed, as he reaches his mid-60s the songwriting emphasis leans towards the moody and atmospheric. A great listen! **[DM]**

Standout track: *A Glimpse Of You*

For fans of: The Jam, The Style Council

Al Di Meola

Twentyfour

EarMusic (release date: 19 July)

8/10



Jazz fusioneer produces nylon-string enchantment

Completed over a four-year period, the 15 tracks on *Twentyfour* explore flamenco-infused jazz with Al Di Meola playing mostly nylon-string guitars. With orchestra, percussion and bass, the playing is very articulate, which is only to be expected from one of the world's greatest pickers. Particularly noticeable, especially on slower pieces such as *Tears Of Hope* and *For Only You*, is his ability to get a rich and round tone with nylon strings and beautiful finger vibrato on sustained single notes. If you're a fan of his adept syncopated mastery, *Capriccio Suite* is recommended; with light percussion, his chords, strums and lines dart around the beat with a mastery honed over decades of playing. *Ava's Dance In The Moonlight* is very pretty with guitar overdubs, percussion and orchestra enrichment, while the nylon and electric lines on *Genetic* will appeal to 70s fusion fans. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Ava's Dance In The Moonlight*

For fans of: Return To Forever, John McLaughlin

Julian Lage

Speak To Me

Blue Note Records (available now)

10/10



Intriguing solo album from top jazz

Like previous generations of open-minded jazzers (John Scofield and Bill Frisell spring readily to mind), Julian Lage's new album illuminates his embrace of rich music, regardless of its apparent genre. Sure, he's a sophisticated and able jazzier, but with stylistic straddling that ranges from gospel hymns to blues, rock to jazz, his rootsy guitar tone features him in various scenarios. From trio to quintet setting of sax, piano, drums and bass via a larger ensemble with woodwinds and keyboards, *Speak To Me* is a vibrant and fun listen. Opener, *Hymnal*, is an free exploration with lovely acoustic playing, the grunty 'Southern rock meets jazz blues' of *Northern Shuffle* is a highlight, full of rhythmic energy, while the songlike *Omission* has strumming acoustic guitar with melodic moments – almost a reflective Californian vibe. And if you hanker for Lage's take on beautiful noir-esque music, then the rich dynamics *Serenade* are a must. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Northern Shuffle*

For fans of: John Scofield, Joe Pass



Slash joins forces with big-name artists on this album of blues tunes

Slash

Orgy Of The Damned

Gibson Records (available now)

8/10



Blues turned up to 11 from seasoned rocker

It might come across as something of an oddity, the top-hatted rocker renowned for cooking up a storm on stage with

Guns N' Roses producing a blues album. Not only that, but a quick scan down the tracklist reveals this is serious blues heartland stuff with covers of *Crossroads*, *Hoochie Coochie Man*, *Key To The Highway* and *Born Under A Bad Sign* appearing among the tracks. Slash has employed a roster of guest stars, too: Billy Gibbons, Gary Clark Jr and Iggy Pop all provide their services. From the start it's fairly obvious that this is blues through the prism of rock, and so tracks like Fleetwood Mac's *Oh Well* and the staples mentioned above all have the wick turned up, guitar-wise. But, you know what? It works. A rocking romp that blows the Delta dust from some hoary old blues classics with some fine playing from the man himself. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Stormy Monday*

For fans of: Cream, Guns N' Roses

Mark Egan

Cross Currents

Wavetone Records (available now)

9/10



Multiple influences abound on bassist's solo outing

Bassist Mark Egan, Shawn Pelton on drums and soul-rock guitarist Shane

Theriot come together here for an

interesting 11-track instrumental album. With pop/jazz talents fused, the album has an appealingly broad spectrum that travels from Ry Cooder to Joni Mitchell, Larry Carlton to Billy Joel. Egan's fretless and fretted bass blends well with Theriot's acoustic and electric playing pieces, driven by colourful rhythms, tasty chord progressions and plenty of space for fills and solos. Opener is *Big Sky*, curated like 'late Police/early Sting meets mid-period Carlton' with a well-paced acoustic solo. There are tasty Steely Dan/Joni Mitchell changes dipped in Indian raga on *Eastern Blue* where Egan's fretless melody is followed by a chill-pushed clean Strat solo, and the funk comes to roost on *Homebrew*, from the twisting low riff and snappy Henderson-esque blues phrasing to the deep pocket groove that makes up the chorus sections. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Homebrew*

For fans of: Larry Carlton, Allen Hinds



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Tones Behind The Tracks

Freshly off the road after a long tour, **Joanne Shaw Taylor** joins us from her Nashville home to talk about her brand-new album

Artist: Joanne Shaw Taylor

Album: *Heavy Soul* (Journeyman Records)



Joanne's new album fuses razor-sharp guitar playing with soulful vocals

It was busyness as usual when we Zoom-called Joanne Shaw Taylor. With her faithful hound, Hank (a miniature Dachshund, aka 'The Psychosausage'), by her side she was already in the middle of a writing session for the follow-up album to *Heavy Soul*. "Well, I'm trying to write, if Hank will let me," she says. "He keeps barking at everything and he has a rabies vaccination this afternoon. It's all very rock 'n' roll and unglamorous over here!"

A period of intense touring had preceded today's interview and, with the new album poised for release into the world, she was eager to detail her recording experience, which included working once again with legendary producer Kevin Shirley.

Did you take your regular touring band into the studio with you?

"I didn't, no; we used studio musicians. Well, we used other musicians, they don't just work in a studio. But, to be honest, I've always really liked that. The main reason being is I have a fantastic band and I love them dearly as musicians and people, but there's something nice about going into the studio with musicians who don't know me as well. So they don't think as much about

what I would want for the song and [they think] more about what's actually right for the song. I'm sure the guys in my band are probably sick of me after a tour and glad I'm going off for three weeks to do something else without them!"

What was it like to work with Kevin Shirley as a producer?

"I love working with Kevin. It's 50 per cent that he's a fantastic producer who absolutely knows what he's doing – in that he knows my genre of music – but we're also really, really great friends, and to have that level of trust with someone who knows who the songs are written about and what you're going through personally, I think that's a really nice, comforting thing to have. I think it really helps the songs."

We've heard he runs quite a tight ship in the studio. Would you say that's true?

"Definitely. He likes to get things done quickly and I do like the fact that it gives you a bit of discipline – not to overthink things. Having ADHD, if I give myself too much time I'll spend most of that time procrastinating and then do the work when I'm really panicking. So there is a sense of, 'Okay, we've got to get this done in 10 days, right? That's four takes of this, that's good enough. We don't need to do 20 takes.' We're doing things pretty much live in the studio and it's quite an organic genre of music. So there's no need to overthink it too much, I suppose."

Do you enjoy working in the studio?

"I love it. As a songwriter, hearing your songs come to life is really fulfilling. To go from the demo stages up to hearing it live with the band and then in post-production, mixing and mastering, I really enjoy that. After 10 days, I'm about ready to be done. It's not ever going to be for me that I would want to do it day in, day out."

Heavy Soul features a couple of covers, alongside your own material: Joan Armatrading's *All The Way From America* and Van Morrison's *Someone Like You*. Are these favourites of yours?

"To be honest, Kevin selected them. He's really brilliant at bringing interesting covers to the table. I'm happy to admit I'm not very good at picking covers. That's why I always kind of lean towards teaching myself to write

Rockin' out live on stage with 'Junior', a '66 Fender Esquire



"I have a fantastic band... but there's something nice about going into the studio with musicians who don't know me as well"

songs. The Van Morrison one was probably the one I was most worried about because I love that song. It's hard to do Van Morrison justice, he's such an incredible singer. And also my real fear was that it's so attached to the *Bridget Jones...* movie. But Kevin had a good point in that my audience probably doesn't watch *Bridget Jones*. But I thought it turned out really well and I loved it when I really got into it and got into the lyrics. It's such a heartfelt song, it's really beautiful. Hopefully, Van Morrison never hears it [laughs].

"And I love the idea of the Joan Armatrading song because I'm a big fan of hers, and also, both [growing up in] the same area of the UK [West Midlands] – and women – it's nice to have a little nod to her. That one was a bit more of a challenge. It's not vocally anything I've ever done before, so, I approached it with, 'Okay, Kevin, I'm gonna give this a good go, but don't hate me if this sucks.' But, fortunately, I thought we did quite a good job on it."

How many guitars did you take into the studio with you?

"I took two guitars into the studio because I'm lazy and I don't like carrying around lots of heavy guitars. That's the most honest answer I can probably give you. Also, where we recorded, at RCA Studios, where Dave Cobb [is producer-in-residence of Studio A], he's got a brilliant collection of amps and guitars and everything you could need, which is always helpful in a studio setting. So I took 'Junior', the '66 Esquire, and a Custom Shop Paul from 2008. That was a random Reverb purchase many years ago that I adore."

What attracted you to the Les Paul?

"I mean, I'm still predominantly a Tele player, but around 2012 I was doing my third album [*Almost Always Never*], and I felt like my guitar playing had got a bit stale. So I went through a lot of practice, trying to reboot it, and I decided to switch guitars. I also switched guitar picks and moved to [Dunlop] Jazz IIIs, which are a lot smaller, just to try and tidy up my right-hand technique. I think it was one of those things where you spend every day on the same instrument and you tend to form lazy habits. Maybe I felt like a different paintbrush, or whatever, would make me think a bit more outside of my usual comfort zone.

"I switched to a Les Paul for about a year and I think it did the trick; it did help tidy up a lot of my playing



The guitar tones on *Heavy Soul* were mainly via a '62 Fender Bassman

and help me grow a bit as a player. But it was nice then to revert back to my signature tone and apply what I'd learned to the old workhorse."

Out of all the amps that were at the studio, did you use a selection or did you bond with just one?

"We just used a '62 Piggyback Bassman and I think I had a Tube Screamer 808 if I needed a bit of a boost. That wasn't too often because the lovely thing about being in the studio is there's a soundproof amp room so you can crank things up more than you're able to sometimes live."

Have you been playing the new material on the road?

"Yeah, we've added about four or five numbers now because, unlike previous albums, every song on this one has been released as a single. So it's rare for me because I don't really like to go into a tour and play new material from an album that people haven't heard.

"It's okay to do a number or two, but if you're playing half your set of songs that people don't know, it's not really my favourite thing to do. But this has been nice because the album wasn't out yet, but they've had a chance to hear a few numbers." [DM]



Joanne Shaw Taylor's latest album, *Heavy Soul*, is out now on Journeyman Records

www.joanneshawtaylor.com

PHOTO BY LAURENCE HARVEY



'Big Col'

Neville Marten recalls the Tele Custom he should have bought, only for it to be snapped up by Colin Pincott, who passed away in May

I first encountered Colin Pincott – Jim Diamond and Mammoth's guitarist – in the Fender Soundhouse in Tottenham Court Road around 1974. Living up the road in Essex, it was an easy jaunt on the train and tube to nip down and ogle guitars, and this musical superstore was a revelation. With two floors plus an upper mezzanine that housed a coffee bar, and with free drum and guitar lessons each Saturday, Ivor Arbiter's brainchild was lightyears ahead in terms of retail sophistication.

"I was mesmerised by a giant of a man with a Gibson L-5 perched on his mighty chest, pulling out jaw-dropping jazz chords, runs and licks"

Anyway, on this particular visit I spied a giant of a man with a Gibson L-5 perched on his mighty chest, pulling out jaw-dropping jazz chords, runs and licks. Mesmerised, I followed him sheepishly around the floor. After a while he clocked his 'stalker' and came up and asked if he could help, as it transpired he actually worked there. I mumbled something like, "I have no idea what you're doing, but can you show me, please?" It was then he explained that he was on duty and that if I bought *Mickey Baker's Complete Course In Jazz Guitar* it contained all I needed to know. He asked if I needed further assistance; I explained I was only browsing and that was that.

But 'Big Col' stuck in my mind, and when I saw Jim Diamond performing his big hit *I Should Have Known Better* on TV years later, there he was playing an ultra-rare, bound-bodied Telecaster Custom in light green metallic. It was a double jolt, as I'd never seen another one in that colour and had missed the self-same thing by minutes a couple of years before our encounter in the Fender Soundhouse.

You see, I'd gone to London with my brother Shaun to find a white rosewood-'board Strat. Sadly, that particular cupboard was bare, but one shop did have this beautiful 1959 to '62 metallic green Tele Custom. I was instantly besotted. I had the cash in my pocket, too, but since I already had a black '67 Telecaster it seemed somewhat frivolous. I told the assistant we'd go for a bite to eat, I'd think about it and come back in an hour.

Over lunch, which included the largest bluebottle I've ever seen – dead, in my brother's noodles – I decided to go for it. You know where this is going, don't you? Sure enough, when we got back 'my' Tele was gone. Some bugger had snaffled it.

Years after watching Jim Diamond on telly I bumped into Colin again and we got to reminiscing. I quizzed him about his Tele (which could have been Sage Green or faded Inca Silver, like Robert Cray's old Strat), and we narrowed down the timeline virtually to the day. Sure enough, it was Colin that had bought it. Of all the guitars I've missed, that one sits at the top of my regrets list.

Mammoth Man

In a 1975 story in *International Musician & Recording World* magazine about the Fender Soundhouse, manager Rod Alexander said of Colin: "He can outplay 98 per cent of the guitarists in Great Britain." That could well have been true, and in that regard I've always put him alongside players like Danny Gatton, whose abilities were unnatural but who never quite made it to where they should have.

Colin did have success with rock band Mammoth (a great group whose members were all big chaps), and recorded albums with Joan Armatrading, Eric Burdon and Jim Capaldi among others. In Mammoth, his melodic solos, with just enough chops to excite but with tons left in the tank, put me in mind of The Tubes with Steve Lukather on guitar.

Finally, a couple of issues ago I mentioned *Guitar Techniques* contributor and stunning fretsman Steve Laney. Steve actually took lessons with Colin, and whenever we meet we talk about this giant man with a giant talent, who got the plaudits but deserved way more success than he received.

Safe travels, Big Col. I hope you find another gorgeous green Tele wherever you're going. And I don't care who you gazump to get it! See you next time. **G**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Little Green

What? Fender 2023 Collection Made in Japan Traditional '60s Telecaster, Aged Sherwood Green Metallic **Where seen?** www.absolutemusic.co.uk **Price?** £1,199

Almost like the Tele I missed and that Big Col bought, but sans binding, this is nevertheless a stunner. Fender Japan is way up there in build quality and often releases models that we otherwise don't see. The Traditional '60s Tele has a basswood body with aged gloss finish, there are 21 vintage-style frets on the slab rosewood fingerboard, a 241mm (9.5-inch) radius U-shape maple neck, vintage-style Tele bridge and classic single-coil pickups. A mint green three-ply pickguard completes this most attractive picture, and at this price the guitar is ripe for upgrading should you feel it's necessary.



This MJ Tele is very similar to the one Nev narrowly missed out on in the 70s



Making The Cut

Can **Alex Bishop** build an electric guitar with all the sensibilities of an acoustic guitar? Let's find out...

I've spent the majority of my evenings last month lit up like a ghost, the pale glare of a laptop screen the only source of light as I ponder my next project. Unfortunately, guitar making can tend to stay on the brain; while others are fast asleep, my best bet for a good night's sleep is to solve the complicated neck join that's been in the back of my mind all day. And so I've prescribed myself a couple of hours of CAD drawing before bed to put my mind at ease.

The guitar in question is a solidbody electric, yet its many demands require the mindset of an acoustic guitar builder. With a softwood body, hardwood neck, adjustable D-tube neck reinforcement and body contouring, there is plenty here to challenge even a veteran woodworker. After a couple of in-depth chats with the client to tighten up the design, the first treat of this guitar project was the opportunity to work with some really special bits of wood. In recent years I've noticed it's not uncommon for my clients to supply timber for the project; the fact that players want to be an active part in the guitar-making process is brilliant, and really helps to sharpen my vision for the build.

Not all wood may be suitable for a project, but I think it's great to be challenged as a maker to try out something new. Laying across my bench last week was a decades-old slab of kingwood (*Dalbergia cearensis*), a delicious-looking timber with pinkish-purple heartwood and black grain lines that highlight the exotic nature of this precious hardwood. Perhaps unusually, this wood is for the neck of the guitar, rather than the body or fingerboard. Unfortunately, kingwood trees are not particularly big, so yielding quarter-sawn

blanks for neck construction is not easy, and this piece was riddled with deep splits and voids close to the sapwood. I did my best to work out which section would have the highest probability of working out okay, and took it to the bandsaw.

It is important to harness the full potential of your power tools, even if you're a hand-tool maniac like me. My floor-standing bandsaw has become indispensable for this job as it has the capacity for a much larger blade and therefore the ability to cut straight through even the hardest of timbers. Keeping the cuts parallel is

Below left: This purple hue belongs to the kingwood (*Dalbergia cearensis*), a hardwood supplied by Alex's client for their electric guitar build

"It's not uncommon for my clients to supply timber... I think it's great to be challenged as a maker to try out something new"

essential for reducing waste, but undulating wood grain often has other ideas. Perversely, I find that so-called 'softwoods' are the most problematic. In this case, a western red cedar core makes up the body, sandwiched between two caps of redwood, dauntingly both of which require some heavy duty machining to get what I need from the original billets.

Drawing Blanks

The 'Lost Tunnel' redwood making up the front and back was originally supporting beams that were hauled out from abandoned railway tunnels somewhere north of California (the location is kept secret), from virgin redwoods probably cut down about 150 years ago. This is authentic 'old-growth' timber from slow growing trees, resulting in what I hope will be the very best-sounding instruments. Once I had cut the blanks down into the required thicknesses for the body, it was time to joint them: a process of taking two pairs of redwood for the front and back, and glueing them edge to edge to create a symmetrical effect, doubling up the best wood in the process.

There is no pickguard on this guitar, so the internal routing requires that channels for the pickup cabling and output were cut before the top was glued into place. These channels join up at the control cavity, which will be routed from the back beneath a near-invisible backplate made of matching wood. I just have to trust my design skills and know that everything will line up once I close the top, but so far so good. It will be interesting to see how this new instrument takes shape as the weeks progress. Hopefully those sleepless nights of design work and problem-solving avoid any bumps in the road, otherwise it'll be back to the drawing board for some more late-night lutherie... 

Alex runs guitar making and repair courses at Bristol Guitar Making School www.guitarmakingschool.co.uk





Some Neck

Editor **Jamie Dickson** gets a latter-day Alnico V staple pickup fitted to his Telecaster, with a little help from his friends

Testing first on a dummy setup, luthier Pete Lewis used a CNC machine to rout out a precisely measured cavity for Jamie's new staple pickup

Regular readers will recall that, last issue, I decided to beef up the neck-pickup sound of my '52 Tele reissue by fitting another 50s design to it – an Alnico V 'staple' pickup, albeit a latter-day version made by Sunbear Pickups. While I don't dislike traditional Tele neck pickups as some do, I absolutely fell in love with the huge, rounded clean tone of the staple pickups I'd tried in the past. Fully committed, I ordered a humbucker-size Sunbear SB-Staple V pickup and, not long later, received the finished item in a beautifully presented box. Opening it, I found the pickup nestling in a bed of dark-blue paper straw, and was soon admiring the subtle ageing Sunbear founder Stuart Robson had applied to the tortoiseshell cover and elsewhere.

With the pickup delivered, it still remained to get it fitted. Happily, I knew I had an excellent luthier in my local area who was up for the job. Pete Lewis of Lewis Guitar Works makes some beautifully turned-out, great-sounding guitars that mash up the best of tradition and boutique-grade modern hardware. The ideal man for the job, then, and I was really happy that he could fit the job in around his slick-looking original builds, such as his pithily named 'Pequeño Bastardo' (Little Bastard) solidbody that blends Strat and Tele DNA in an attractive single-cut design. If you're looking for something classic – but also a little different – I recommend checking his builds out.

Arriving at Pete's he put the kettle on and we discussed what I wanted. I'd seen someone fit one of these to a very similar Telecaster on Instagram, but they'd used a pickup ring to mount the Alnico V. To my eye, it looked a bit clunky, spoiling the clean lines of the Tele and not really setting the pickup off to its best advantage. Pete suggested we could easily have the pickup mounted without a ring – just rising up through the pickguard – but retain a degree of height-adjustability via two screws either side. As we waved goodbye, Pete told me he'd have it ready by the end of the week or not long after.

Take Five

True to his word, a few days later it was all ready to collect. "I've only tried through the workshop amp, currently, but I love the pickup!" he said, encouragingly, adding: "Big, rounded, works great with the volume pot." It was hard to contain my haste, then, as I made the return trip to his workshop.

Stepping inside, Pete proudly handed me the guitar. Firstly, I was very happy with how it looked. It was totally the right decision to mount the pickup without a ring, and the torty cover looked spot on. As I admired the neat job Pete had done, he explained how he'd mapped out where the pickup should be placed and meticulously set up the CNC machine to rout out everything precisely in place, testing it first on dummy wood and sheet plastic to make sure the routing would work perfectly when applied to my guitar.

Standing back with the prerequisite cup of tea, Pete looked on as I put the guitar through its paces. First, I tried the new neck pickup on its own – and was delighted with what I heard. Big, plummy, with plenty of bloom: all the things you'd look for in a good P-90 but with a bit of extra clarity and poise. Interestingly, shifting to neck and bridge on together, I found the tonal contrast from the neck pickup alone to be relatively subtle – a little crisper, a little airier. Certainly very usable but more a useful shift in emphasis than night-and-day contrast.

Pulling up the push-pull tone knob, I engaged both pickups in series and was rewarded with a fuller, hotter voice. Again, it felt very usable and I felt instantly 'at home' with the sounds on offer. Finally, I engaged the





PHOTO BY PETE LEWIS

“For once, a modding idea of mine had worked out exactly as intended, thanks to Pete’s skill and that of everyone else who had contributed”

Lollar Special T bridge pickup on its own to see how it balanced with the new neck pickup and found the volume difference to be minimal. That was great news as lumpy hikes in volume can be the bane of beefed-up Tele neck-pickup mods. I beamed at Pete – for once, a modding idea of mine had worked out exactly as intended, thanks to his skill and that of everyone else who had contributed earlier mods to the Tele.

So, what did I learn along the way? Firstly, mods should make you enjoy playing the guitar more. Otherwise, what’s the point? I definitely feel the mods I’ve made to this Tele – given that it was a bit of a mutt to begin with – have improved it. It’s both a very different Tele and one I much prefer. But it’s also built on a very good, original Fender chassis and I like that too.

I think it’s probably good to stagger modifications to your guitar, as I did, so you have time to really assess the impact of each change before trying anything else. And, beyond that, I can only really recommend trying an Alnico V pickup yourself; offering big, warm clean tones and fat, singing driven tones, it really has been a revelation. Sunbear’s one is fabulous, but other great makers produce them, too. So what’s stopping you? Time to get the stapler out... **G**

Jamie opted to have his new Sunbear SB-Staple V mounted without a pickup ring to maintain the clean lines of the Tele

THREE TO GET READY

A trio of Teles with beefier neck pickups



Fender American Performer Telecaster Hum £1,419

Taking its place in the cheapest US-made range of guitars Fender produces is the Telecaster Hum. It has a punchy Yosemite bridge pickup and Double Tap neck pickup, wired up with Fender’s handy Greasebucket tone system that lets you roll off treble without a perceived hike in woolly bass. It comes in cool colours, too, and streets closer to £1.2k.



Fender American Vintage II 1977 Telecaster Custom £2,059

The original, Keef-approved ‘beefed-up’ Telecaster and, for the first time since the originals were made, this reissue has proper Cunife magnets in its Wide Range neck pickup, offering a noticeably clearer and peppier tone than standard humbuckers might.



Squier Limited Classic Vibe '60s Telecaster SH £419

Sherwood Green finish with a matching headstock, you say? For us, that’s worth the very modest price of admission alone, but the Fender-designed Alnico pickups provide beef at the neck and bite at the bridge as they should. Meanwhile, the 241mm (9.5-inch) radius laurel fingerboard offers a bend-friendly playing experience. Nice.



Alternative Voicings (Part 1)

Richard Barrett demonstrates the depth and interest you can generate from making changes to standard chord shapes

There's absolutely nothing wrong with a good 'straight up' major or minor chord, particularly on acoustic guitar, but with a few little adjustments such as lifting a finger off or moving a note up or down a semitone, you'll find that there are lots of other sounds available to you. It's true to say that a good song will often stand up on solo acoustic guitar (though I have yet to attempt any Squarepusher...), but that's no reason for us to rest on our laurels. Players such as David Bowie, Pete Townshend, Joni Mitchell and Andy Summers have all created ideas that could be played with simple chords – but some depth and interest would be lost.

The five examples below are played in regular tuning and use a lot of open strings, but that isn't necessarily an essential feature in this approach. Some of these variations are easy to play, while others require a few more fretting-hand gymnastics, but all of them are well worth your time. Watch this space for more in future!

David Bowie used quite a few interesting alternatives to regular chords in his Ziggy Stardust era

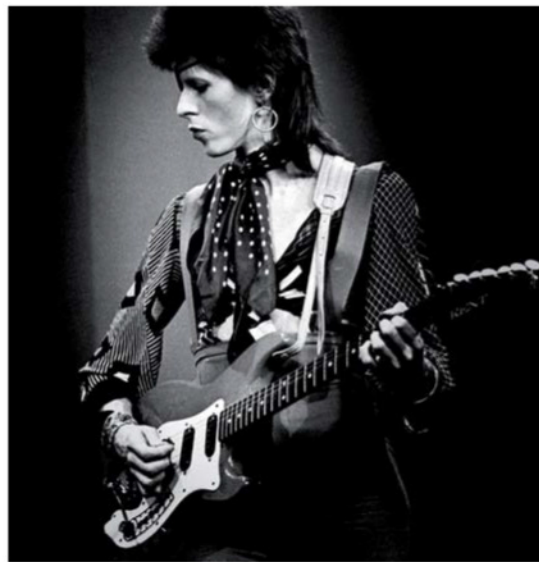
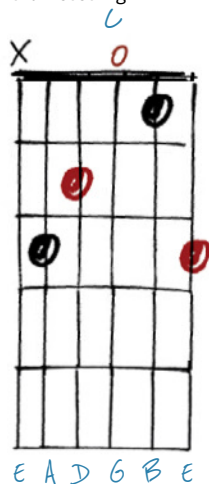


PHOTO BY GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

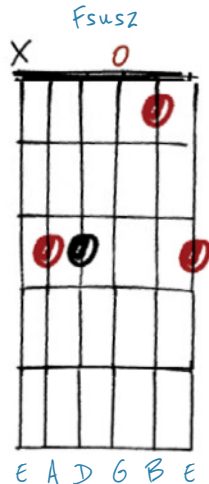
Example 1

This C major chord is an easy way to shift the focus more on to the jangly high strings. The name doesn't change, as the G we've added on the first string is part of the C triad (C-E-G) anyway. You could experiment by combining this with the more regular version that has the first string open (E). It also combines well with other chords that have a G on the first string.



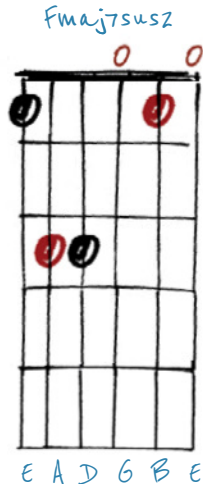
Example 2

This Fsus2 has the G on the first string as suggested in Example 1. This is our sus2, which replaces the major 3rd (A) in this case. Combined with the open third string (also a G), we have the sus2 appearing in two octaves. This isn't really by design, but it gives a nice alternative to a regular F major chord.



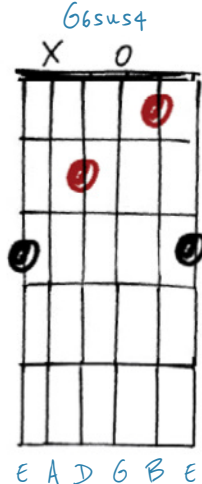
Example 3

This Fmaj7sus2 is another alternative to F major; it avoids the 1st fret barre, but it's tricky in its own way. The root (F) at the 1st fret of the sixth string requires the fretting hand thumb or particularly nimble fingers. Neither will be comfortable at first, so keep an open mind. Our money is on the thumb...



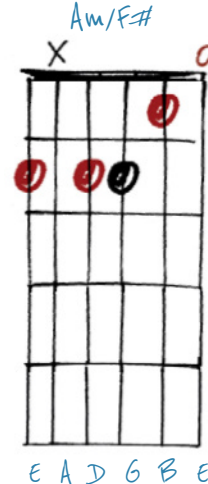
Example 4

I've called this a G6sus4. It could also correctly be called a C/G chord, but the context I'm imagining it in is resolving to a G major by removing the E (6th) and C (sus4) on the fourth and second strings. The fifth string remains muted. Bowie's *John, I'm Only Dancing* and the Eagles' *Take It Easy* both feature this chord.



Example 5

Change the bass/root note of Am to an F# and you get Am/F#. You could also correctly call this F#m7b5, but the basic shape is so clearly an Am that it seems a bit silly not to go with the first option. Having said that, this resolves nicely to an Fmaj7 – or better still, the Fmaj7sus2 from Example 3!



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STAR LETTER

PEDAL POWER



I must admit to being amazed at the number of effects pedals reviewed in the magazine these days, and also at the price of some of the pedals for a single effect. The vast majority are digital, and the preamp type pedals, which are very expensive, tend to use digital modelling as a basis. Original classic analogue pedals that cost a fortune have also been reviewed and compared, including the recent Boss anniversary supplement.

So where am I going with this? Back in 1988 I purchased, and still have, what was probably the first multi-effects pedal, the Boss ME-5. At the time this was considered a massive breakthrough as now you could have your popular effects all in one box and you could programme them for individual songs, etc. And the effects were the same analogue circuits as the individual pedals. Expensive at the time (£550) but not when compared to the flexibility and portability it offered.

These multi-effects units have improved greatly, and most now also include a preamp section with modelling features as well. I am therefore at a loss to understand why these are not considered, reviewed and discussed more often. I was also very surprised that in the Boss anniversary supplement there was not even a mention of the multi-effects pedals that they have produced. Lots of these units are available secondhand for very little, including analogue ones, which are a real bargain.

Eric Brown

The pedal market has positively exploded in recent years. It truly is a major growth industry within the gear field. And, yes, multi-effects units were looked upon as modern-day miracles when they first appeared long before the days of custom 'boards the size of a car park. Maybe that's the thing; perhaps now it's all about building your own effects array instead of buying off the peg. We do try to keep up with all of the major releases in that quarter, but become quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of units that come to market each month. The ME-5 was a great multi-effect in the day (and indeed Boss's first) and, by the sounds of things, is still working hard for you today.



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

www.voxamps.com

LOOP THE LOOP

The survey results detailed in issue 511 made for some interesting reading. I noted the 37 per cent of respondents who cited 'keeping motivation high' as a barrier to practice/progress.

I'm in my early 40s and have gone through the usual peaks and troughs of a guitar player in terms of being utterly obsessed and playing daily, to having periods of apathy where I've no real desire to pick up a guitar. One tip I can offer is for every guitarist to pick up a loop pedal. Recently, this reignited my obsession as laying some simple tracks to craft songs or simply noodle away over becomes addictive, especially if you are just a guitar hobbyist or are in between bands.

As your article notes, there are always a myriad of reasons that get in the way of the pastimes we love, so it's important to create some that inspire us to dedicate more time to them!

Brian Riordan

Great advice, Brian. A looper isn't just for Ed Sheeran covers but can be used as a cunning way to reinvigorate your playing by providing homegrown backing tracks for practising.

THE PLAIN TRUTH

I enjoyed reading Jamie Dickson's article 'Low Side Of The High Road' (issue 512). I was considering exactly that conundrum back in 2021 when choosing a Les Paul. I opted for a Gibson LP Tribute and continue to be very happy with that decision, but it is true that the Tribute's top is rather plain compared with the veneer of the Epiphone LP tops.

I was struck by a sentence in the article: "...a soup of strong, subjective feelings with some chunks of rational argument floating around in it." Whether that is a J Dickson original, or a phrase he borrowed from somewhere, it's brilliant and fits well with many other topics besides guitars.

Chris Johnson

As we often find ourselves saying, "The finest wine comes with the plainest labels" and this sounds true of your Les Paul Tribute. Oh, and we checked with Jamie about the quote and he confirms that it is indeed a Dickson original!

DESIGN FOR LIFE

Bearing in mind oft-repeated laments about lack of originality in new guitar design, I thought you would like to see my latest design/build. It is named a Duodeca 3 [pictured above, far left] and is number three in a series of my 12-sided design.

Feedback

Bob Bale's new Duodeca 3 joins previous builds, 2 (centre) and 1 (right), that he completed in 2022



The body is one-piece mahogany, 50mm in thickness, almost completely hollowed out, and the top is 8mm two-piece centre-joined flamed maple. The neck is also flamed maple with a black ebony fretboard fitted with medium jumbo stainless-steel frets. The electrics comprise an EMG 57/66TW active humbucker pickup set with single-coil selection on the push/pull volume pots, plus two passive tone pots. Pickup selection is by a standard Gibson-style switch. All the finish spraying was, of necessity, done in the back garden.

I hope you like my effort at making something a little different.

Bob Bale

They look fabulous, Bob. In fact, they remind us very slightly of some of the guitars that were built for Dave Hill of Slade in the good ol' glam days of the 1970s. Great work. Keep it up!

SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

The comment in the article about the late, great Bernie Marsden's PRS guitars smelling nice when you open the cases (issue 512) made me smile and brought back a very happy memory. In 1993 I was the lucky winner of a *Guitarist* competition for a USA-made Hamer Diablo. I collected my prize from David Mead at the Wembley Arena Guitar Show. When he opened the case to show me the guitar, I was greeted by a marvellous smell of mint wafting into the air. I still have the guitar, but alas, the minty scent is no longer with us. I wonder if there is a gap in the market for guitar case odourisers?

Rob Hensley

David Mead replies: "I remember that! Not the minty aroma particularly, but definitely handing the prize over to you. It looks like it's still in great condition and I hope it continues to serve you well!"



That's mint: Rob's 90s competition prize had a surprising scent!

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

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DUANE EDDY

1938-2024

The good-humoured architect of twang died on 30 April, but his legacy is a guitar tone for the ages, forever evoking greasers, flick knives and hot-rods

Words Henry Yates



DUANE EDDY

April 1938 – April 2024

Second only to writing the perfect song, it is perhaps the ultimate goal of any guitarist to forge a sound that is theirs alone. Duane Eddy, who died of cancer in April at the age of 86, certainly accomplished that. And while the tag given to his methodology – ‘twang’ – had lightweight and frivolous connotations, the sound itself was anything but. “It’s a silly name,” the guitarist once said, “for a non-silly thing.”

The low-slung, mysterious, otherworldly tone – played on the bass strings of his giant Gretsch archtop, clad in reverb and given a shiver by his Bigsby vibrato bar – made the US guitarist’s ocean-crossing instrumentals of the late-50s so evocative that even life in suburban Britain felt like a classic American movie.

As the essayist Michael Hill wrote when, decades later, Eddy was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame: “Twang came to represent a walk on the wild side... the sound of revved-up hot-rods, of rebels with or without a cause, an echo of the Wild West on the frontier of rock ‘n’ roll.”

Yet that illicit sound began with a flash of pure childhood innocence. Born in 1938 in Corning, New York, Eddy caught sight of the instrument for the first time at five years old when the family moved house.



By 1960, Duane Eddy had already released three Top 10 studio albums and was still only in his early 20s

PHOTO BY GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

“You hear two notes and you know who it is. What a unique thing he created. Without singing a note in his entire life – what a voice” **RICHARD HAWLEY**

“We were down in the cellar and up against the wall was leaning a guitar,” he told this writer in 2010. “My dad showed me a few chords he’d used for courting my mother. And I just fell in love with it.”

Playing along with country records on the radio, then swerving into rock ‘n’ roll after the epiphany of an Elvis concert, Eddy realised that “in some way, I’d have to do that”. His high school years in Arizona were a parallel existence, with Eddy studying by day then gigging the local clubs by night. But, at the age of 16, he bet the house on a music career, and shortly after came into the orbit of the established DJ, music publisher and songwriter Lee Hazlewood, who impressed Eddy with the fact he had co-written and produced Sanford Clark’s 1956 hit *The Fool*.

Together, the pair wrote and recorded 1958’s *Moovin’ And Groovin’*: an irrepressible dancefloor-ready stomper, with Eddy’s seismic pluck already in place, thanks to his philosophy that “the low strings were more meaty-sounding”, the use of a modded Magnatone and the recent acquisition of a Gretsch Chet Atkins 6120.

“I started out with a Gibson Goldtop in 1954,” Eddy told *Total Guitar* in 2011. “But it didn’t have a Bigsby vibrato, so I walked into a music store one day and the guy showed me a \$450 Gretsch. It just nestled in my arms perfectly. The neck was a dream and it had a Bigsby. The guy gave me \$65 for my Gibson and let me walk away with the Gretsch, even though I wasn’t old enough to sign the papers for the loan. Those were the days!”

Think Tank

Just as important was Hazlewood’s production masterstroke. In those early years, with echo chambers still a rarity outside the major cities, the veteran took a novel approach to the limitations of Phoenix’s Audio Recorders. “Our echo chamber was actually a 2,000-gallon water tank,” Eddy told *Guitarist* in 2019. “We went down to a Salt River junkyard and yelled into tanks that might work as a reverb chamber. Lee would go, ‘Whoop!’ and he got an echo out of them. He finally found one that he yelled into and he liked the echo, so they bought it for a couple of hundred bucks and trucked it up to the back of the studio.”

Eddy credited Elvis Presley for opening the door – “He came along and showed us how to do it” – but the guitarist followed him through in the late 50s with a markedly different approach. Eschewing vocals in order to stand out from the pack, Eddy’s album titles set out his *modus operandi*, often by way of a slightly laboured pun. *Have ‘Twangy’ Guitar Will Travel* (1958). *The “Twangs” The “Thang”* (1959). *\$1,000,000 Worth Of Twang* (1960).

DUANE EDDY

April 1938 – April 2024

Eddy's final studio album, *Road Trip*, was released in 2011, more than two decades after its predecessor, 1987's *Duane Eddy & The Rebels*

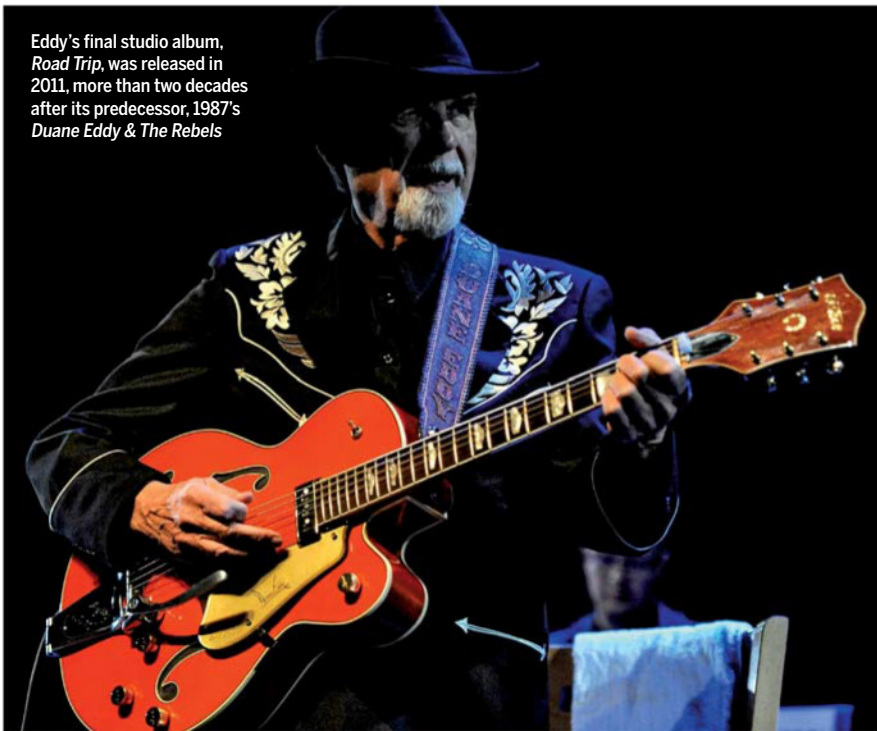


PHOTO BY BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

“HE WAS THERE AT THE BIRTH OF ROCK ‘N’ ROLL...”

Late-period collaborator Richard Hawley on working with Duane Eddy

The album I worked on with Duane [2011's *Road Trip*], I'm so proud of that and will be until the minute I die. There was no budget, no-one got paid – we all did it because of love. We all stepped up to the plate, and it took 13 days and everybody chipped in. We all just piled in with all our creative powers to help the master. And that was the first record he'd made for 25 years.

“Think about any musician on Earth. And I'm not just talking about guitar players. I'm on about musicians, where you hear two notes and you know who it is. What a unique thing he created. Without singing a note in his entire life – what a voice. When you actually played his rig, he had these tiny little picks and his strings were like baby hair. And you'd just think, 'What?' Because when he plays it sounds like the strings are made of bull rope and it's just thunderous.

“Duane was so generous with his time and knowledge. I mean, we haven't just lost a guitar player, we've lost a library. No matter what track I would find – whether it was rockabilly

or country or just something really odd or obscure from that era – he'd know who it was and who played on it: 'Oh yeah, I remember going for a beer with him...' His encyclopaedic knowledge of his art was phenomenal.

“I've kept every message we exchanged over the years. I remember asking him about Sanford Clark, and he got back to me with this voluminous email. And, actually, his writing – the way that he would explain music – was beautiful. I used to nag him. I'd say to him, 'Duane, you've got to write a book'. And without him being in any way arrogant, he said, 'I don't think I can fit everything that's in my head into one book'. Just the knowledge that one human mind could contain, you know?

“What an honour to have known him. He was there at the birth of the revolution of rock 'n' roll, when it really had teeth. When people were afraid of it. When it wasn't just something that presidents and prime ministers could hire. When it was dangerous shit. And he was there at the very birth of that – with that fucking booming guitar.”

Twistin' 'N' Twangin' (1962). “*Twangin' Up A Storm!*” (1963). *The Biggest Twang Of All* (1966).

Drop the needle on these records and the song formats were often similar, with Eddy's wiry lick typically kicking things off before a jangled acoustic rhythm guitar, handclaps and howling brass enter the fray. “I kept those melodies simple,” he told *Classic Rock* magazine. “A guy can pick up a guitar and play the first notes of *Rebel-Rouser* or *Peter Gunn*. Then you're encouraged to go, ‘I might be able to do this.’”

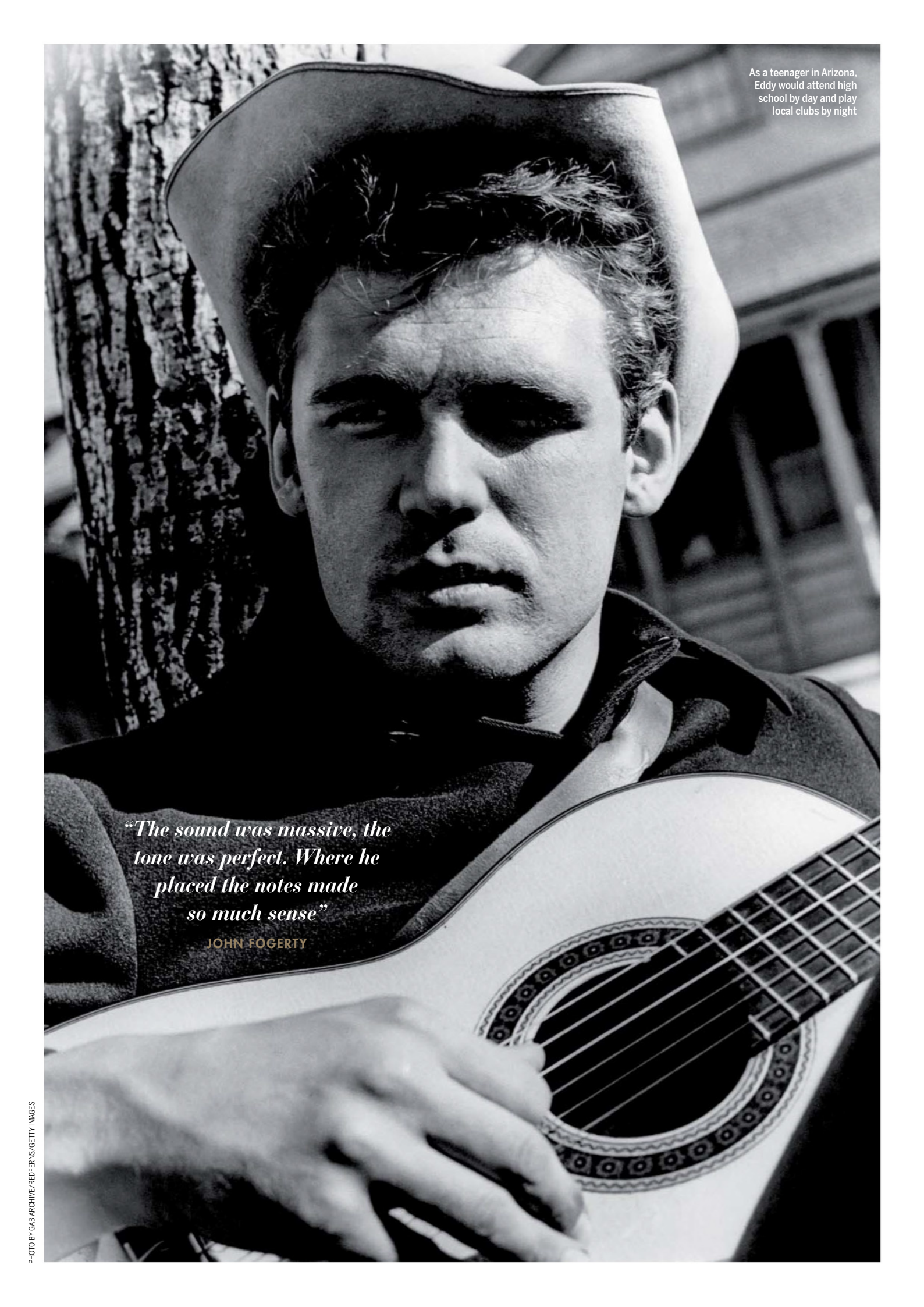
On both sides of the Atlantic, many future greats did just that. “When I was 12, I remember hearing *Moovin' And Groovin'*,” Creedence Clearwater Revival's John Fogerty told *Rolling Stone*. “It was unlike any other guitar I'd ever heard. It had this wonderful, huge, big sound, then he started twanging the strings. The sound was massive, the tone was perfect. Where he placed the notes made so much sense.”

“He was my first guitar idol with songs like *Rebel-Rouser*, *Shazam!* and *Some Kinda Earthquake*,” added Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore upon the news of Eddy's death. “I would always rush out and buy his long-playing records. My favourite all-time tune from him was *The Lonely One*. He was a brilliant guitarist in his own right. He was the first guitar player with that deep bass sound, which I loved.”

Top Gunn

At the turn of the decade, Eddy seemed unassailable. *NME* crowned the American as World Musical Personality and *Melody Maker* declared him “the first real guitar superstar of the rock 'n' roll age”, while he was notable as the first rock 'n' roller honoured with a signature model, in the form of the Guild DE-400 and DE-500. Between 1958 and 1963, no fewer than 16 of Eddy's singles charted in the Top 40, including the aforementioned *Rebel-Rouser* and *Shazam!*, plus *Ramrod*, *Cannonball*, *Forty Miles Of Bad Road*, *Because They're Young* and, perhaps most famous, 1959's *Peter Gunn*, his loping interpretation of Henry Mancini's detective-show theme tune.

“We had 11 songs and Lee came out of the booth and said, ‘Well, what are we going to do for the 12th?’” Eddy recalled in *Classic Rock*. “So we did *Peter Gunn* – and it got to rocking. We finished this one take and we were breathing hard. We were playing so hard, just driving the stuffings out of it.”

A black and white photograph of a young man, Eddy Mercurio, wearing a cowboy hat and playing an acoustic guitar. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing a tree trunk on the left and a wooden structure on the right.

As a teenager in Arizona,
Eddy would attend high
school by day and play
local clubs by night

*"The sound was massive, the
tone was perfect. Where he
placed the notes made
so much sense"*

JOHN FOGERTY

DUANE EDDY

April 1938 – April 2024

All the while, Eddy's work left its mark on the guitarists who followed on his heels. Revisit the languid phrases of Hank Marvin in The Shadows, or the brittle riff that opens The Beatles' *Day Tripper*, then move onward through Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run*, Blondie's *Atomic*, Chris Isaak's *Wicked Game* and even the fathoms-deep pulse of Angelo Badalamenti's *Twin Peaks* theme. Eddy's approach – with its ghostly shimmer and acres of space – looms over them all.

A more litigious songwriter might have angled for royalties. Yet Eddy was sanguine about hearing his influence ("This is not a competition," he shrugged. "We help each other") and gracious when another act borrowed a little too brazenly. He insisted the heavily indebted Marvin "did it in his own way", and even endorsed The Beach Boys' lift of his *Moovin' And Groovin'* lick

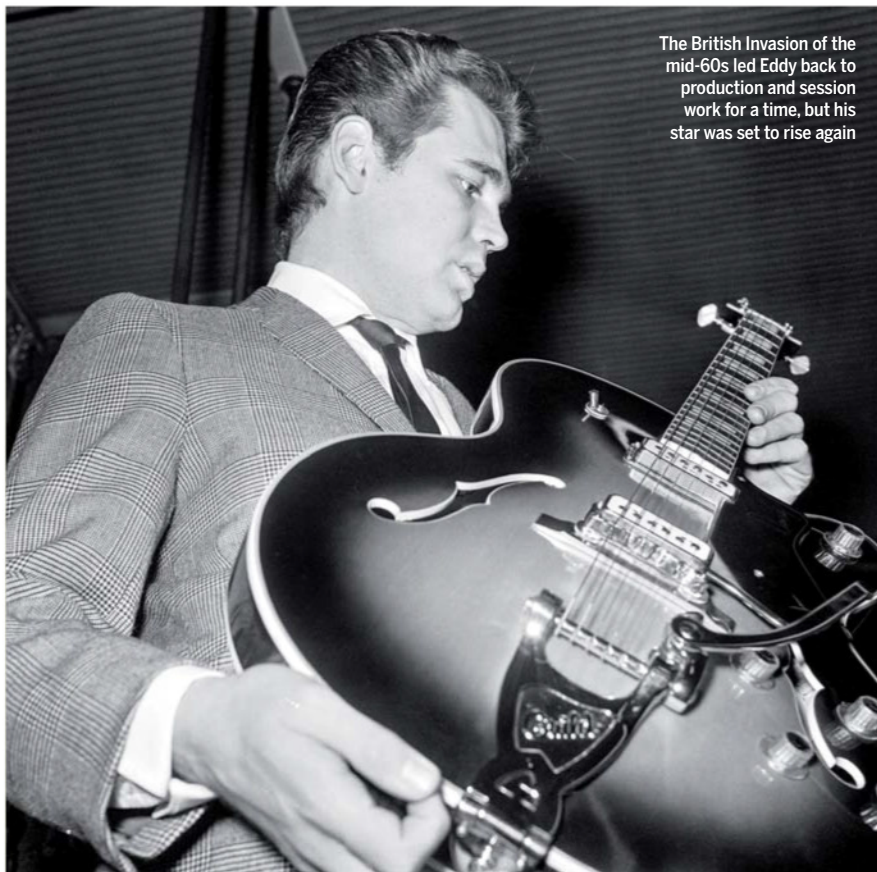
"He was my first guitar idol... I would always rush out and buy his long-playing records"

RITCHIE BLACKMORE

for 1963's *Surfin' USA*. "I was honoured and glad they borrowed it," Eddy told *Total Guitar*. "It was like, 'You wanna borrow this jacket for your show? Go ahead!'"

Yet the new wave of bands who revered Eddy also inadvertently sounded his career death knell (at least for now). "In 1960, the charts in England were 95 per cent American, five per cent British," he told *Classic Rock*. "I went back at the end of '63, and it was the opposite. And I thought, 'Well, they're getting their own back.' When The Beatles hit here, it died off for me. I'd had my five-year run, and I didn't get upset about it. I thought, 'Well, they can take it from here...'"

By the late 60s, Eddy had stepped back – or perhaps been pushed – from frontline action and worked more commonly on production or session work. But the 70s rockabilly revival led listeners back to his classic material, before his 1986 collaboration with synth group Art Of Noise birthed a UK Top 10 and Grammy-winning reboot of *Peter Gunn*. "I was worried that all my old fans, the 'purists', would hate the record," Eddy told *Blitz*, "but they've taken to it like a duck to water."



The British Invasion of the mid-60s led Eddy back to production and session work for a time, but his star was set to rise again

One Of A Kind

In the 90s, Eddy's songs were regulars on movie soundtracks, with *Rebel-Rouser* featured as a carful of greasers try to plough down Forrest Gump, and his dust-blown Ravi Shankar collaboration, *The Trembler*, heard in video-nasty *Natural Born Killers*. The guitarist rode that renewed profile all the way to the end. In 2017, The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach invited Eddy to guest on his *Waiting On A Song* album, and when this avowed Anglophile returned to the UK in 2018 to play three rare dates, Richard Hawley led the backup band.

"Duane sold 200 million albums, and he was the coolest guy," said the Sheffield guitarist, who also co-produced Eddy's final studio release, 2011's *Road Trip* (see box on page 46). "He was gentle and kind and all the things that you should be as a human being."

Indeed, while Eddy's music will be his chief legacy, it should also be noted what a decent, modest and good-humoured man he was. This writer remembers gaping as the trailblazing musician dismissed his career milestones as a "series of

accidents", and joked that he had managed only "10 per cent" of Elvis's record sales. Far from believing the column inches proclaiming him a pioneer, Eddy once insisted his greatest contribution to music had been "not singing".

In 2018 came the first hints of trouble, as Eddy spoke of "overcoming a couple of medical issues". Even then, the guitarist insisted he couldn't "get my mind around" entering his ninth decade, and his youthful demeanour meant it was a jolt to learn of his passing at Tennessee's Williamson Health Hospital, just days after his 86th birthday. "I'm in shock," wrote Dave Davies of The Kinks. "Duane Eddy was one of my most important influences. I thought he'd live forever."

The 50s' originators are almost gone now, and we will not see their like again. Yet while that mighty Gretsch might have fallen silent, the acolytes of the Sultan of Twang will carry his sound forever onward. "Rest in peace, Duane Eddy," wrote Joe Bonamassa, alongside a photo of the master's signature model. "A true pioneer and bona fide legend." **G**

*"Up against the wall was leaning a
guitar. My dad showed me a few chords
he'd used for courting my mother.
And I just fell in love with it"*

DUANE EDDY



Duane Eddy photographed with
his signature Gretsch G6120DE
for *Guitarist* in June 2010

JUNIOR MARVIN

Junior Marvin's time with Bob Marley & The Wailers helped shape his career. Here, he tells us how Hendrix gave him his direction, about his near miss with Jeff Beck, why he turned down Stevie Wonder, and what working with the reggae icon was really like

Words Andrew Daly

Junior Marvin might not have been with Bob Marley at the beginning of his legendary career, but he was there for its height and the reggae icon's untimely end. But before that, Marvin – born Donald Hanson Marvin Kerr Richards Jr – was a dyed-in-the-wool Beatles and Jimi Hendrix fan, who had renounced an early education in classical piano and formed an obsession with British rock. This led him into a hearty session career before forming his band, Hanson.

Hanson didn't stick, but Marvin's reputation as a capable six-stringer did, leading to an unexpected call from Stevie Wonder on Valentine's Day 1977. This turned out to be the very same day he was set to match wits in person with Bob Marley, leading to his initiation into The Wailers and contributing to some of Marley's most well-known records: *Exodus*, *Kaya* and *Survival* in the late 70s, and early 80s records *Uprising* and *Confrontation*, the last of which was released after Marley's death in 1981.

Marvin has accomplished a lot in his career, but it's his time alongside Marley that means the most, even though some of his former bandmates – and Marley cohorts – seem to throw shade the fallen vocalist's way. "The funny thing is, if you ask me about this stuff, the answers just come out as they do because it's the truth," Marvin tells *Guitarist*. As for what Bob Marley meant to him, Marvin is emphatic, saying: "Bob was a workaholic to the man, but it was good

for all of us. We got into the same mode and never had to think about it. We just did it. And when we were done, we slept well because we'd learned so much. We learned things we never thought we would to where it was like out of body, you know?

"That was one of the gifts Bob gave me," he reflects. "I learned from Bob that it's always better to give than to receive. When you give someone even a small gift, the feeling is better than anything. I carry that with me in everything I do, and I have Bob to thank for it."

Going back to the beginning, what gravitated you toward music?

"Most of my family played the keyboard, and my great-aunt graduated from the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica, and was a piano professor. Her job was also to teach all her siblings, as her father couldn't afford to send more than one kid to college. So my father was her protégé and he imparted classical and jazz piano to me. My father tried to teach me piano and, although he was great, he wasn't a good teacher and I didn't like it. He started me off when I was only a few years old, and I'd get hit by one of those old round canes whenever I'd hit a wrong note! I'd hear that cane coming, and I knew the pain was about to hit me, so I didn't like the piano much.

"As for the guitar, I ended up in England with my mother after my parents were forced to split up, and I wanted to play soccer and do gymnastics – anything but

piano. I'd sit for hours with my friends and play in the street and, eventually, I saw Elvis and The Beatles on television, which got me into guitar. Finally, my family said, 'We're not going to try to teach you piano any more.' I said, 'Okay, thank you!'"

Elvis and The Beatles aside, who were your greatest influences?

"I was already familiar with jazz, R&B and all the West Indian stuff. After that, I got into Hank Marvin from The Shadows, Duane Eddy, Chuck Berry and T-Bone Walker, who I worked with when I was young. Then I got more and more into rock. I loved Little Richard, who was a significant influence on The Beatles but with a different vibe. I did love The Beatles and how they told stories with songs like *Eleanor Rigby* and *All You Need Is Love*. I also loved The Animals, but then Jimi Hendrix came to town, and I was like, 'Wow... where did this come from?'"

"When Hendrix came to my area in England, I remember he'd play clubs and speakeasies at midnight, and all the musicians would hang out there. I was underage, but my manager at the time would get me in for free to watch, though I couldn't drink any alcohol. One night, I was there and Jimi came in to jam at around two o'clock in the morning. I can still remember the audience being filled with people like Rod Stewart, The Beatles, members of the Small Faces – all of them were silent when Jimi was done."



Was seeing Hendrix in that setting a defining moment?

“Yes. I said to myself, ‘Now there’s a guitar player. I want to play guitar like that.’ I went right up after he was done, met him and shook his hand. But Jimi was so shy and wouldn’t even look at me to say hello. It was crazy: here was this guy who was just up on stage playing guitar behind his neck and barely even talking to me. He was like two different people. But I got to shake Jimi Hendrix’s hand; I was very proud of that.”

Eventually, you became a sought-after session guitar player. What allowed you such versatility?

“I liked the idea of playing a little bit of everything. I have a very varied background and like a lot of music, so it made sense. Music is like another language to me, a universal language, so the ability to play a lot of different styles was fun, and I took to that very quickly.”

Is it true that you auditioned for Jeff Beck’s band?

“Yes, I was with Cozy Powell on drums, Max Middleton on piano, Clive Chaman on bass, and Bobby Tench on vocals. When I went out for the audition, I took those guys because they were my friends. In the end, Jeff pulled me aside and said, ‘I’ll take your

mates, but I can’t take you.’ I said, ‘Why not?’ He said, ‘You need to form your own band.’

“I was kind of mad because I took those guys there to support me, not support him! But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I formed a band called White Rabbit with a lady named Linda Lewis, a famous British vocalist. We took the name from the Jefferson Airplane song of the same name, did some club dates and ended up breaking up.”

Is that when you formed Hanson?

“Yes. It was a rock band, also when I changed my name. I was born Donald Hanson Marvin Kerr Richards Jr, but I was going by Junior Hanson by then. I wanted my initials to be JH like Jimi Hendrix, but eventually, as we know, I began to go by Junior Marvin. I wanted to play rock, though, not reggae. I was proud that I could sign with Manticore Records and make two albums, *Now Hear This* and *Magic Dragon*.”

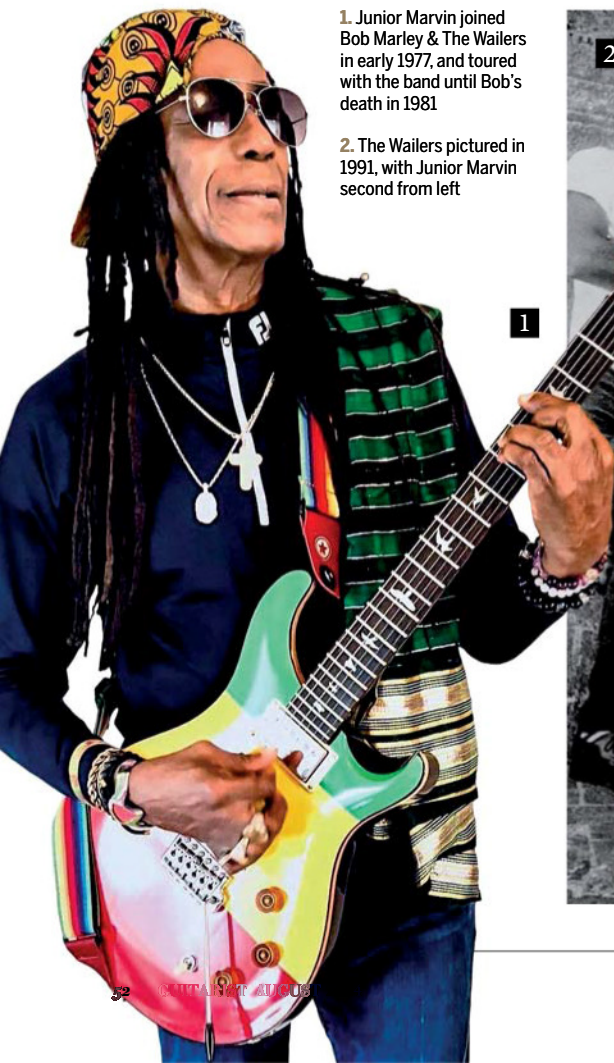
Fast forward a few years and you were faced with either joining Stevie Wonder or Bob Marley...

“I had done some session work with Steve Winwood, and producer Chris Blackwell had heard it, liked it and thought it was Steve playing. He said to Steve, ‘Hey, you changed your playing style; I really like it.’

“Music is like another language to me, so the ability to play a lot of different styles [as a session player] was fun”

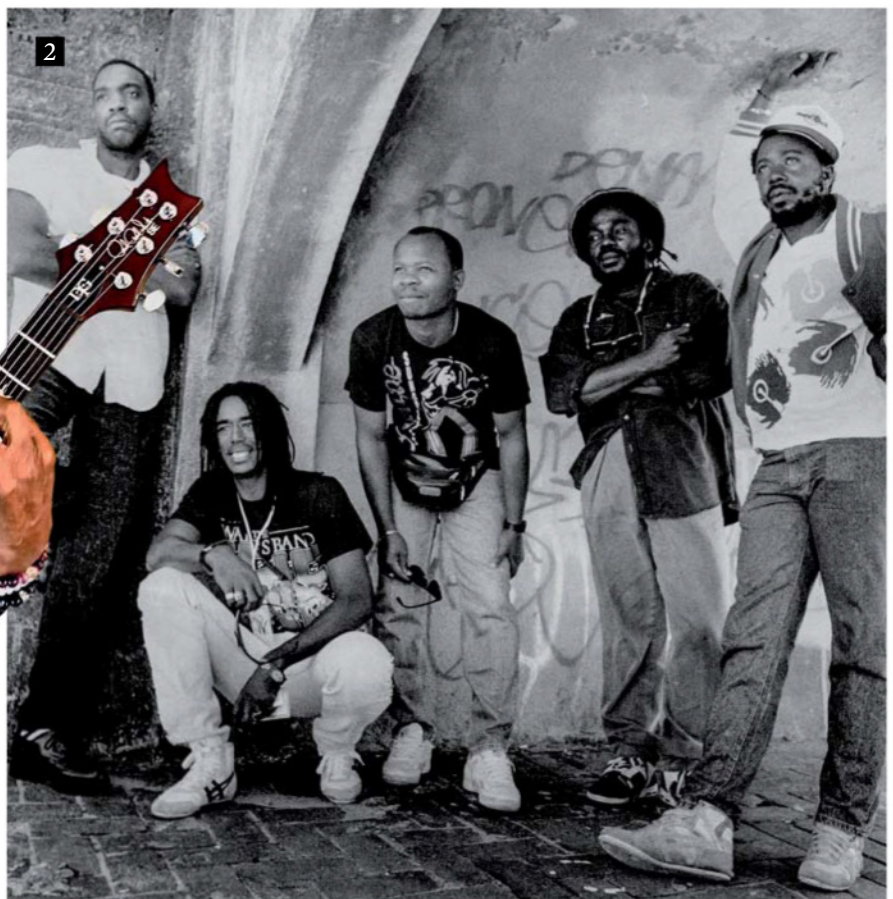
Steve said, ‘Oh, that’s not me. It’s this guy named Junior Marvin, who is this little guy from Jamaica.’ So Chris Blackwell came looking for me, we talked and then he said, ‘I want you to meet somebody...’ He wouldn’t tell me who it was he wanted me to meet, but I agreed.

“So it’s Valentine’s Day in 1977 and I’m in England again as I was taking time off from playing. Just before Chris picks me up, I get a call from Stevie Wonder at my house. Stevie’s guitarist couldn’t do the tour, so Stevie needed a guitarist. Stevie had heard I was a good player and might be interested, which I would have been as I’m a big Stevie Wonder fan. But when I picked up the phone, I said, ‘Are you sure you’re Stevie Wonder?’ because I had difficulty believing he’d be calling. He said, ‘I’ve heard your albums and I like your feel.’ I said, ‘Okay...’ and then he said, ‘I’d like you to join my band, but if you do, I need you to sign a 10-year contract.’



1. Junior Marvin joined Bob Marley & The Wailers in early 1977, and toured with the band until Bob’s death in 1981

2. The Wailers pictured in 1991, with Junior Marvin second from left



"I thought, 'Wow. If I do that, I'll become a household name,' which gave me goosebumps; it was crazy. But as I was thinking about it, Chris Blackwell knocked on my door to pick me up to meet 'somebody'. I told Stevie, 'Can I think about it? 10 years is a long time. I'll call you back in a couple of hours.' Stevie said, 'Okay, no problem,' and off I went in Chris Blackwell's Rolls-Royce with my guitar."

Is it safe to assume that 'somebody' was Bob Marley?

"Yes. Chris takes me to this fashionable area and this big Edwardian house. We go in and I see from behind this little guy with dreadlocks who had this aura about him. I'd heard about auras, but I'd never seen one before – this guy had that. He turns around and it's Bob Marley. He walked right up to me, and I'm like, 'Holy shit,' and he slaps me five and says, 'Welcome to The Wailers, man.'"

"I said, 'Don't you want me to play some guitar?' He said, 'Yeah, you can, but we want you to join, man. We like the way you play.' I pinched myself, like, 'Wait a minute: something is so weird here. I'm getting calls from Stevie Wonder and being asked to join Bob Marley?' Anyway, I jammed with Bob on a couple of songs for about an hour, stuff like *Exodus*, *Waiting In Vain*,

"Bob was a workaholic to the man, but it was good for all of us... We learned things we never thought we would"

and then I remembered, 'Shit. I've got to call Stevie Wonder.'

"Chris was already talking about recording sessions and starting rehearsals. I said, 'Man, these guys don't even know me...' Chris stopped me, saying, 'Yeah, we do. We've been studying you for over a year. You're who we want.' They knew what type of person I was and that I was balanced. So, I said, 'I want to make the right decision. Can I get right back to you?' He said yes and took me back home."

History reveals that you joined Bob...

"Before I left, Bob handed me five records, saying, 'Study these overnight and be here tomorrow.' I grabbed them, said, 'I gotta go,' got home, called Stevie and said, 'I'm so sorry, but I've just been offered a job with Bob Marley.' He said, 'Oh, I met Bob a month ago in Jamaica. He was great!' They had jammed and people loved it, so he wasn't upset; he liked Bob. Stevie said,

'Take the job with Bob and if in a year you're unhappy, leave anytime and you'll have a job with me.' It was crazy as there were a lot of guitar players out there, but for some reason, both Stevie and Bob wanted me. Anyway, as they say, the rest is history."

What did you bring to Bob's band that other players like Peter Tosh and Al Anderson didn't?

"I was very into Hendrix and loved rock, so there was that. Peter was Jamaican and Al was a guy from America, so their sensibilities were different. They couldn't escape those influences, you know? That's

not a bad thing – it was just different. Bob also had a guy called Donald Kinsey, who was very blues-based and a protégé of Albert King, so I was very different from those guys.

"I listened to a lot of different music, so when I hear a new song, I have a massive library or arsenal to draw up. My father always told me, 'Don't overplay; less is more,' so I'm a team player. I never wanted to show off or fill space with all kinds of sounds and technical stuff. My goal was to enhance the song and add icing on the cake. That's what the other guitarists in Bob's band maybe didn't have."

Junior's experience as a session artist helped him bring a "massive library" of music and styles to his work with Bob Marley, he says



Can you remember the intent behind your first record with Bob, *Exodus*?

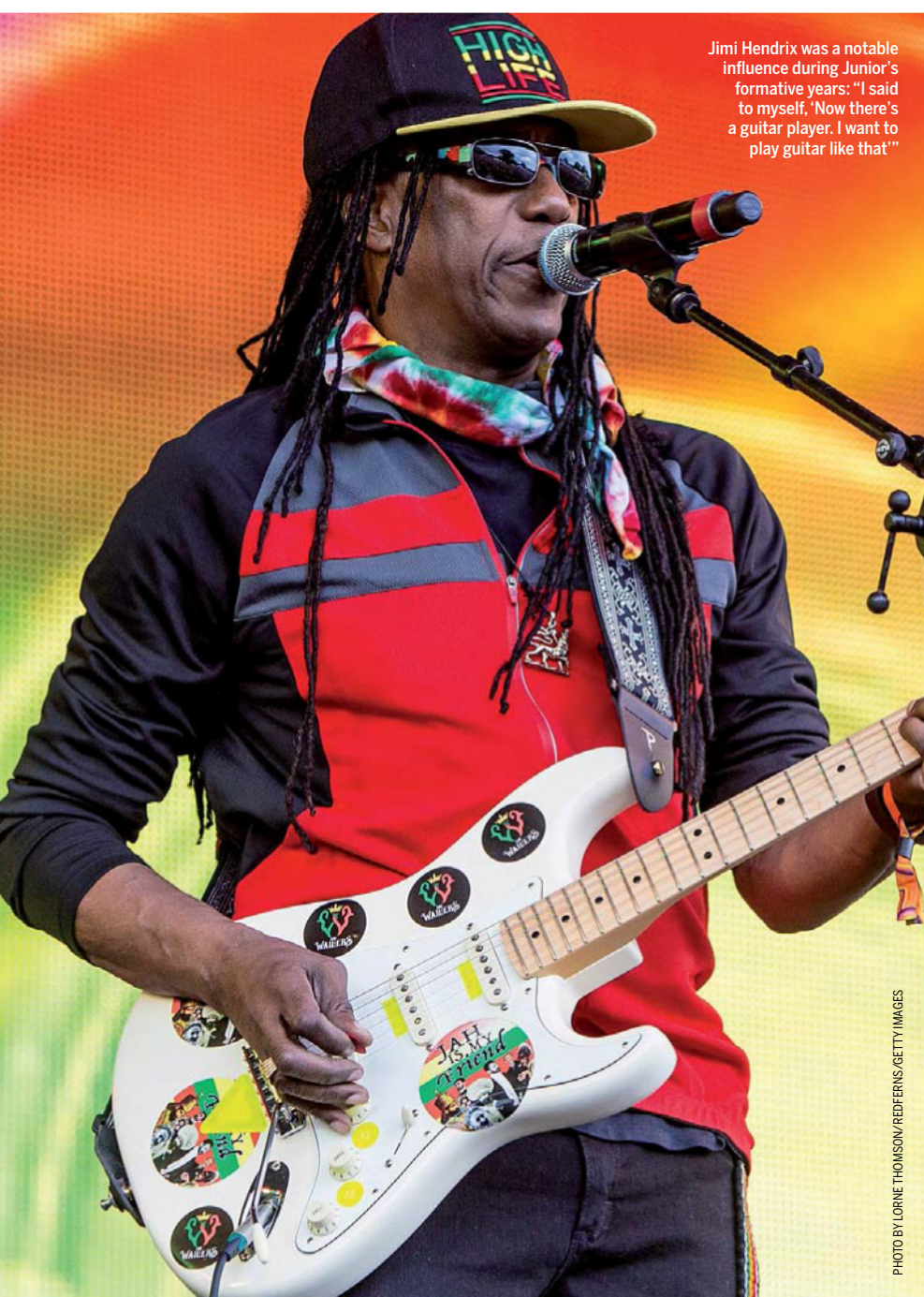
"*Exodus* was like a miracle for the movement of people it was speaking to. In other words, the album is like the movement of God's people. The lyrics are about people fighting and then they see the light and everything is all right. When we made that album, we understood the idea that life is a gift for everyone on Earth and that the idea of putting people in jail or making slaves out of them ruins that gift. That music is about freedom, redemption, fighting for resources, and feeding the world, rather than going to war."

It sounds as if your connection with Bob ran far deeper than only guitar.

"It did. I resonated with Bob because we had similar feelings about life and how people should be treated. We prayed for everyone to be educated, fed and have roofs over their heads. These are basic things in life; no-one should be starving or hungry, so we and our music were all about that. The Earth belongs to all of us, as did that music. Anyone can make music, but to sing about suffering and make that music in a language that we spoke together is what finding common ground and learning are all about. You don't just listen; you feel it."

What gear did you lean on most with Bob?

"The secret weapon was some of the fuzz boxes that Hendrix used in the late 60s – and even Keith Richards on songs like (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction*. Those pedals and inventions were essential and they shaped the sound. Other than that, I used Les Pauls, Strats and all sorts of things depending on what the song called for. Often, it was more about the feeling than the gear. But we didn't always have much money for that stuff anyway, which was fine because Bob was a rebel and wasn't really into money. He couldn't be influenced in that way."



Jimi Hendrix was a notable influence during Junior's formative years: "I said to myself, 'Now there's a guitar player. I want to play guitar like that'"

PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"The secret weapon was some of the fuzz boxes that Hendrix used in the late 60s. Those pedals shaped the sound"**You've done an outstanding job carrying on his legacy with *The Legendary Wailers*.**

"Before Bob died, he said, 'Play the music. But if you can't meet the standard we've set – don't fucking play it at all.' He didn't want us to play it the same way but to make it better, or at least keep trying to. Bob was a perfectionist and a workaholic. So that's the standard I hold myself to."

With all the folklore surrounding Bob, the picture of who he really was becomes a bit blurry. Who, from your perspective, was Bob Marley?

"Who Bob really was? Bob never cared about money. He helped a lot of people go to college, start businesses and even helped gang guys who tried to intimidate him with a gun. These were guys who played around with guns, would ask for money and committed serious crimes. But Bob said, 'Okay, here's \$20,000, go start a business. Don't kill anyone else. Go start a business and be a good person.'"

"That's who Bob really was. It meant a lot to him to save someone, rather than turn them away and let them kill more people. He grew up with many guys like that and, in the end, they all looked up to him because he was successful. I don't know what else I can say besides that he was spiritual and believed in the Rastafari father of creation. Bob was a gift, as was working with him and the music he left behind. That's how I remember him." **G**



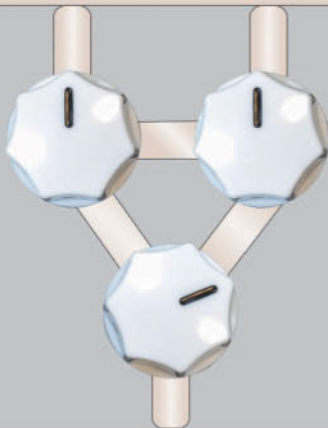
Junior Marvin's album, *Happy Family*, is available via Flatiron Recordings

<https://juniormarvinthelegendarywailer.com>

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Valve Overdrive and
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130TH
Gibson
ANNIVERSARY

CURVED AIR

Words Jamie Dickson

This year Gibson celebrates its 130th anniversary – all the more remarkable because many of the core features that made the company's guitars popular a century ago can still be found on gleaming new Les Pauls, 335s and the like today. Unbeknownst to him at the time, Orville Gibson's chisel, patiently chipping curls of wood shavings from a slab of walnut, was shaping the future. And that shape was an elegant arch that itself drew upon violin-making traditions stretching back centuries.

So when we look at the cello-like curves of an ES-335 now, we see a modern guitar that is completely relevant and useful today as a musical tool. But its familiar shape also leads us on a duck-walk through the roaring stadiums of 60s rock 'n' roll, the smoky confines of 50s blues clubs and on back to the gramophone days of the 1920s when Gibson's hourglass-shaped L-5 gave jazz a vibrant new voice. All these things are connected by an arch – that distinctive curved top that Orville Gibson patiently summoned from blank wood – and its contours match those of 20th century music itself.

Join us, then, as we look back on the watershed moments in Gibson's history and celebrate the curious mixture of innovation and continuity that defines the company's iconic guitars to this day.

Guitarist would like to thank ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, and Gardiner Houlgate auction house for the loan of the exceptional instruments photographed for this feature, many of which are for sale. For more information visit www.atbguitars.com, www.vintageandrareguitars.com and www.gardinerhoulgate.co.uk







130TH
Gibson
ANNIVERSARY

MAKING HISTORY

From its mandolin-making origins to today's status as one of the most iconic guitar brands in the world, Gibson has seen its fair share of brave new shapes, sounds and technologies, alongside the rise and fall of its fortunes, over the past 130 years. Here, we highlight 20 of the company's most defining moments

Words Tony Bacon

1902: Birth of the Gibson company

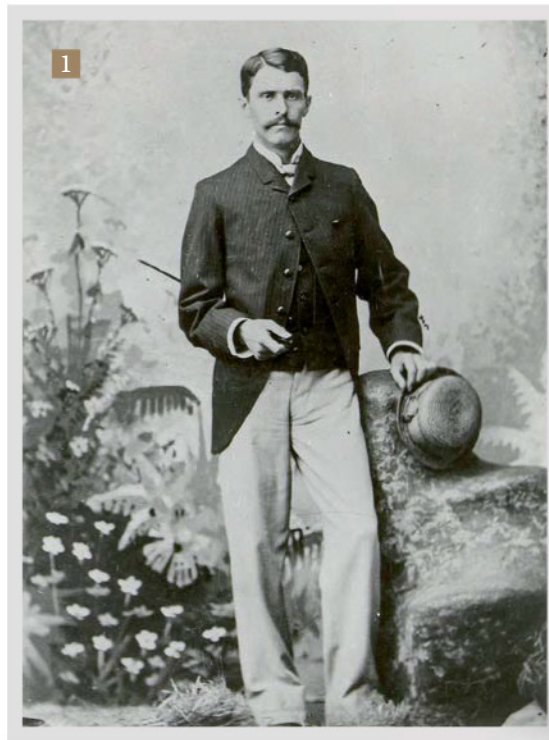
Around 1880, Orville Gibson moved from his native New York State to Kalamazoo, Michigan. He developed an unconventional mix of ideas and methods to make his mandolin-family instruments and guitars, starting in the mid-1890s – with the company today marking 1894 as the year of its inception. He did not use internal bracing. Instead, he would carve his tops and backs, and rather than the usual heated-and-bent sides he'd saw the sides from solid wood. In 1902, Orville sold out to a group of five businessmen who formed the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Manufacturing Company. Orville left soon afterwards, receiving a regular royalty for five years and then a monthly cheque for \$41.66 until his death in 1918.

1922: L-5 archtop introduced

Gibson had shifted from Orville's idiosyncratic creations to produce reliable models such as the L-4 archtop (1912) and the Nick Lucas flat-top (1927), although at first the company's emphasis was on mandolins and then banjos, for a time the most popular stringed instruments. Lloyd Loar's Master Series L-5 guitar of 1922 defined the contemporary archtop, apparently more akin to violins than guitars. The L-5 had a carved arched top, two f-holes instead of a single round soundhole, a floating height-adjustable bridge with strings fastened to a separate metal tailpiece, and a neck-strengthening truss rod.

1934: Guitars take centre stage

The growing popularity of the guitar made it the focus of Gibson's efforts during the 30s, leading inevitably to bigger, louder, improved instruments. There were two key introductions in 1934: the Jumbo flat-top, which together with the Advanced Jumbo (1936) and the J-45 (1942) established Gibson's slope-shouldered style; and the Super 400, the brand's impressive top-of-the-line acoustic archtop that was the biggest and flashiest of its kind at launch. Meanwhile, the J-200 (1938) would become



1. The company's namesake, Orville Gibson, set up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the late 1800s, manufacturing fretted stringed instruments, and sold on the company just a few years later in 1902

2. A Gibson-built mandolin from 1898 made using walnut, spruce and ebony. Notable is its arched top – something that was to become an enduring hallmark of Gibson instruments

another long-lived Gibson flat-top, introducing the narrow-waist style often known by the 200's original name, Super Jumbo. By now, Gibson was the market leader among American guitar makers.

1935/'36: First electric models

At the end of '35 the Kalamazoo firm introduced the EH-150 steel and amp set, its first foray into electric instruments. The ES-150 followed late in '36, marking the start of Gibson's remarkable history of electric guitars. It was also the beginning of the company's long-running ES series, the letters standing for Electric Spanish – with 'Spanish' referring

PHOTO BY: SEPIA TIMES/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES



to a guitar played in what we now consider regular style, as opposed to the on-the-lap Hawaiian steel style. The budget ES-100 appeared in '38, fitted a couple of years later with a new pickup with adjustable polepieces, and in 1940 Gibson launched its most expensive pre-war electric model, the ES-300, with an angled pickup that accentuated bass and treble.

1944: CMI acquires Gibson

Maurice Berlin's Chicago Musical Instrument Company acquired a controlling interest in Gibson, with the manufacturing base staying at the original factory in Kalamazoo, roughly equidistant between

ELECTRIC SPANISH GUITAR

ES-150 MODEL

Another quite article by Gibson – a true, undistorted tone amplified by electricity.

The guitar itself is a full-sized Gibson – you hold it, tune it and play it just as you would any guitar, and so experience it in its entirety – but unlike the average guitar and you have a tone that can be amplified to any volume you desire. Adjust the tone control and you choose the kind of tone – a rich tone to a brilliant treble.

The pickup unit is built inside the guitar and partially adjusted at the Gibson factory for balanced tone.

PICK-UP UNIT

With the exception of the attractively bound coil and tone and volume controls, the entire unit is built inside the guitar body – these steel pickups which give the maximum in power and long life – the super-sensitive pickup is distance pickup – tone and volume controls conveniently placed for instant regulation.

It has standard steel with built-in attached pickup and spring protection – detaches from guitar when not in use.

INSTRUMENT

Great medium-sized body – carved spruce top – northern maple back and rim – mahogany neck and fretboard – three-bound – chrome-plated brass with golden accents – white enamel binding on top and bottom of body – elegant adjustable bridge – four-pointed bridge – individual nickel machine heads with white buttons – exclusive Gibson A.D. machine head – 25 fret neck – 13 frets.

PRICE: Instrument and 15 fret cord \$75.00

CASE: No. 514 Heavy Facets construction – waterproof interior lined with velvet – price \$25.00

NO. 514 American guitar carrying case – heavy construction – padded interior – \$25.00

CASE COVER: Ten Tones waterproof cover – leather bindings – neck hangers. \$10.00

AMPLIFIER: The ES-150 is designed to be used with the ES-150 amplifier (described on page 25, Price: \$75.00).

(98)

ELECTRIC TENOR GUITAR

STYLE EST-150

Same as ES-150 but with Four String Tenor Neck and Fingertone

PRICE: Instrument and 15 fret cord \$77.50



This stunning pre-war Gibson SJ-200 represented the state of the art in flat-top acoustic design when it was built. Featuring rosewood (not maple) back and sides and an expansive body, it offered another way to be heard over the other stringed instruments of the era. Gibson's flat-top production (above) output expanded and diversified over time



Chicago and Detroit. Gibson's sales and admin departments were moved to CMI headquarters in Lincolnwood, a suburb of Chicago. As Gibson gradually increased instrument manufacturing after the deprivations of World War II, the electric guitar would become a vital part of its reactivated business. Musicians and other guitar makers took serious note of what the market leader was up to, and Gibson's firm commitment to the future of the electric instrument marked an important step in its wider acceptance and technical development.

1952: Les Paul Model launched

Fender's activities over on the West Coast with a new-fangled solidbody electric were not lost on the bosses at Gibson HQ. Soon, company president, Ted McCarty, was negotiating with Les Paul, probably the most famous guitarist in America thanks to big hit records, and a plan emerged for Les to endorse Gibson's first solidbody Spanish. The Les Paul Model was introduced in 1952. With its carved top and fancy gold finish, it was designed to reflect Gibson's craft heritage, in contrast to Fender's straightforward, unpretentious approach. Three models would complete the Les Paul line – Custom, Junior (both 1954) and Special (1955) – and the Goldtop famously switched to a sunburst finish (1958 to '60).

The Les Paul Model, with its carved top and fancy gold finish, was designed to reflect Gibson's craft heritage

1953: Debut of the Tune-o-matic bridge

The Tune-o-matic was Gibson's first fully adjustable bridge, introduced in '53 on high-end electric archtops and the following year on the new Les Paul Custom. Fitted in conjunction with a bar-shaped tailpiece, the bridge had two adjustment wheels for overall height adjustment, and six brass saddles with screws that, for the first time on a Gibson, offered individual adjustment of string length, improving intonation.



4. An original 1952 Les Paul Model – shot at the Gardiner Houlgate auction rooms in Corsham – bears evidence that Gibson's conversion to solidbody production was in its infancy. The wrap-under tailpiece would soon be gone and the neck geometry changed

Ted McCarty's name appeared on the patent, assigned to Gibson – though that doesn't necessarily mean he was the sole designer of the bridge, which more likely was devised by various members of the Gibson team.

1957: PAF humbucking pickup introduced

In Gibson's electronics department, run by Walt Fuller, Seth Lover came up with a new pickup model. For Gibson's take on the humbucking idea, Seth wired together two coils, with opposite magnetic polarity, connected in reverse so the current travelled clockwise around one coil and anti-clockwise around the other. The coils were out of phase, the magnets were out of phase, and the resulting pickup was in phase, but any 60-cycle hum was out of phase and cancelled. Starting in the early months of '57, Gibson began to put the new humbuckers in place of its P-90 single coils on many models, including the Les Paul Goldtop and the Custom, which was promoted from two P-90s to three humbuckers.

1957: Gibson acquires Epiphone

Epiphone had been Gibson's nearest rival in American guitars in the 30s and 40s, but by the late 50s Epi was in trouble. Gibson bought the brand in 1957, relocating the operation to its Kalamazoo base. By '59 Gibson was shipping its new Epiphones, made in the Kalamazoo factory to the same quality as Gibsons but as an independent brand with its own dealer network and a line that in part filled gaps in the Gibson range. The differences were mainly down to pickup types, tailpieces and vibratos, and decorative styles. By 1969, Epiphone production would be switched to Japan, and the brand's identity as Gibson's important second marque only grew in the following decades.

1958: Explorer & Flying V, ahead of their time

Until the Flying V and Explorer, electric guitars were supposed to look... like guitars. You know, a strongly curvaceous outline and a sense of historical heritage. Gibson turned conventional design upside



The ornate features of this 1962 Super 400 show that as the rock 'n' roll era bloomed, the company lost none of its traditional skills nor its connection to the still vitally important jazz market. Hollowbody guitars were labour- and skill-intensive to make (above) but Gibson persevered



down by using straight lines and angular body shapes, changing the way electrics could look and, in the process, creating a rare set of future collectibles. Famously, the new guitars were not a success – for now, at least. “Try one of these ‘new look’ instruments,” the original publicity insisted. “Either is a sure-fire hit with guitarists of today!” That, however, was not the case. It would be the guitar players and guitar designers of tomorrow who would make them a hit.

1958: The fabulous hybrid 335

Gibson’s most revolutionary guitar design, the ES-335 was a true first for the company: a double-cutaway thinline semi-solid electric guitar. Sales of its solidbody models had slipped a little, so the idea was that a guitar with the benefits of a solidbody in a hollowbody-like package might prove more appealing to wavering players. The secret was hidden inside the 335, namely a solid block of wood running through the inside of the otherwise hollow body. Guitarists have crowded around ever since to taste the 335’s attractively different flavours. Gibson again developed a line from the core model with the addition of three more: the high-end ES-355, stereo ES-345 and fully hollow ES-330.

1960: New folkie flat-tops

Not only did these attractive new flat-tops sit well with the resounding folk boom of the era, but they lined up as the first Gibson acoustics to compare closely, shape-wise, to Martin’s venerable dreadnoughts. That’s why in later years these models would often be grouped together as “square shoulder” types, in contrast to Gibson’s existing “slope shoulder” style, like the J-45. The Hummingbird appeared first (1960), with 24.75-inch scale and mahogany back and sides, followed by the Dove (1962), with 25.5-inch scale and maple body. They looked the part, too, especially those engraved pickguards with cute little birdies fluttering among the greenery. Songbirds, indeed.

1960: Move over Les Paul, here’s the SG

The new SG solidbody design was a radical amalgam of bevels and points and angles, inviting players to reach the topmost frets with ease and speed. Gibson had decided the original single-cut Les Paul design was old hat and the SG would replace it. Luckily for us, both would survive longterm. The first two SGs – for now still named the Les Paul Standard and the Les Paul Custom – were announced in the early months of 1961, though

Gibson turned conventional design upside down by using straight lines and angular body shapes

production of the Standard started late in ’60. In 1963, Gibson finally dropped the remaining Les Paul names, establishing the new line as the SG TV, SG Junior, SG Special, SG Standard and SG Custom.

1963: Firebirds take off in reverse

Gibson called on a retired automobile designer, Ray Dietrich, to style the new Firebirds launched in ’63. The I, III, V and VII each had different appointments but followed the same design and build. Rather than Gibson’s customary glued-in set neck, they had a through-neck construction. Standard finish was sunburst, but Gibson went further than simply adopting Fender-like shapes for the new line and borrowed its rival’s custom finishes idea, offering Cardinal Red, Frost Blue, Inverness Green metallic and more. Production hiccups would lead to a redesign in ’65, with a noticeably different body shape (known as ‘non-reverse’, rather than the earlier ‘reverse’ style) and a regular set neck.

5. Ted McCarty led Gibson through its golden era – but nearly ended up in the confectionary trade

FIGHTING SPIRIT

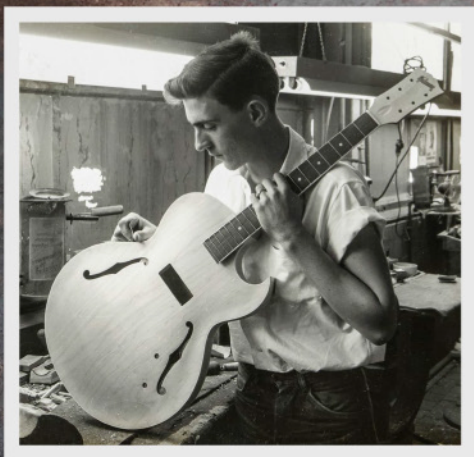
VP of product, Mat Koehler, on the pugilist’s tenacity that helped Ted McCarty make Gibson a success

Ted McCarty was a massively important figure in Gibson’s history. He spent the early part of his career at Wurlitzer before joining Gibson in 1948, becoming vice president of Gibson in 1949, then president in 1950. Under his leadership, the company introduced iconic guitar models including the Les Paul, ES-335, Firebird and SG and oversaw development of the Tune-o-matic bridge, the PAF and many more crucial innovations, all while increasing production from 5,000 guitars per year to over 100,000.

“Ted first had a job offer from Brach’s, a maker of candy corn – a classic American candy popular around our Thanksgiving holiday time of year,” explains Mat Koehler. “I think he was initially conflicted by whether to go to the candy company or to Gibson where he wasn’t going to be leading right away because [the decision whether to give him a top managerial role] was to be based on his results, but the board had said, ‘Hey, if you can turn this thing around, we’ll give you the keys to the car.’ Fortunately, he was able to do that.

“The other thing about Ted is that he was actually a boxer. A friend of mine sent me his college yearbook for the University of Cincinnati; there’s a whole page with a painting of Ted as a boxer, which just speaks to his tenacious behaviour because I think that’s what it is. It’s like this laid-back thing, he’s everybody’s friend, but he’s always thinking about growth and what’s the next thing? Where else can we be? Where is our blind spot? He was always asking those questions.” [JD]





Thinline semis such as this beautiful 1961 ES-335, courtesy of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, gave Gibson a way to bridge the gap between its heritage and the high-volume demands of the rock 'n' roll era. They still required many of the same complex manufacturing techniques as the older jazz boxes



1969: Gibson under Norlin management

Norlin Industries was formed in 1969 with the merger of Gibson's parent company, CMI, and an Ecuadorian brewery, ECL – 'Norlin' came from the combined names of Norton Stevens, ECL's chairman, and Maurice Berlin, CMI's founder. The takeover would be formalised in '74, and Berlin was shifted away from running the company. Norlin favoured cost-cutting and simplified production, and changes were made to some Gibsons built into the 70s. A new Gibson factory in Nashville opened in '74, and the original Kalamazoo plant was closed 10 years later. Some guitarists felt that these changes converged to create a dip in Gibson quality and innovation.

1980: Les Paul Heritage and Gibson history

The value of Gibson's past began to dawn on the company, and the idea took hold that recreating earlier features and models might appeal to guitarists who were now paying increasingly large sums for 'vintage' instruments. A hint came with the ES-335 Pro (1979), the first 335 with dot markers since



6. The early 80s saw Gibson flex creative muscles that had lain somewhat dormant – creating an all-new type of electro-classical guitar for renowned player and producer Chet Atkins

The new owners seem today to be steering Gibson on a steady course after the choppy waters of earlier years

the change to blocks in '62, the first with a stop tailpiece since the trapeze of '65. The Les Paul Heritage (1980) marked the first proper attempt to emulate more of that past glory, with revised humbuckers and corrected neck material, body shape and top-carve shape. It wasn't perfect yet, but it paved the way for the far-reaching reissue programmes Gibson would develop in the decades that followed.

1982: Chet Atkins CEC introduced

The CEC marks a rarity in the more recent history of Gibson because it was a brand-new style of guitar: a semi-solid electric classical. Despite his reputation as an electric player, Chet Atkins was

by the 80s mostly playing nylon-string classical-style flat-tops, and he was on the hunt for a practical electric model. Amplifying acoustic classical guitars didn't work well for him, so he took his quest to Gibson. The result was the CEC, with a classical-like fingerboard width (there was a narrower version, the CE), a thin semi-solid body and a piezo bridge pickup, and it mostly looked and felt something like a classical guitar – only louder and without feedback tendencies.

1986: Norlin sells Gibson to new buyers

Norlin decided during the early 80s that it would sell Gibson. Sales had fallen by 30 per cent in 1982 to a total of \$19.5 million, against a high in '79 of \$35.5 million. The guitar market was in trouble, and most American makers were suffering in broadly similar ways – costs were high, economic circumstances and currency fluctuations were against them,

and Japanese competitors had an edge. In 1985, Norlin found a buyer. Three businessmen who had met while classmates at Harvard business school, with Henry Juskiewicz at the helm, completed their purchase of the Gibson operation in January '86 for \$5 million. It would at times be a bouncy ride.

1989: Shifting production sites

Among the changes that Juskiewicz and his team introduced – some welcome, some less well received – was the establishment of some new production facilities. Gibson acquired the Flatiron mandolin company of Bozeman, Montana, in 1987, and in '89 production of Gibson flat-tops moved to a new factory at the site. In 2000 Gibson opened another new factory, in Memphis. The Nashville factory was working at full capacity, so solidbody production stayed there, with the new building dedicated to ES models. However, the Memphis plant was closed in 2019 following Gibson's filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2018, and all electric guitar production was consolidated once again at Nashville.

2018: Another new owner for Gibson

Gibson emerged from its bankruptcy protection in November 2018, with KKR the new majority owner with controlling interest in the company. JC Curleigh was appointed president and CEO, joining Gibson from Levi Strauss & Co, with further appointments including Cesar Gueikian as CMO. Gueikian superseded Curleigh as president and CEO in 2023. The new owners seem today to be steering Gibson on a steady course after the choppy waters of earlier years. Successes include the creation of the Murphy Lab, a division of the Custom Shop headed by relic pioneer Tom Murphy to build historically accurate guitars, and a clarification of Gibson's lines into logical groupings, with electrics divided into Original and Modern, for example. Here's to another 130 years! **G**



Gibson
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MANDOLIN WIND

Gibson, perhaps more than any other guitar maker, has a history full of interesting nooks and corners – and unanswered questions. We join two of Gibson's top experts on the company's history to try to shine a light on some of the more interesting 'what ifs?' and behind-the-scenes moves that gave us the Gibson we know today

Words Jamie Dickson

There are guitar companies as old as Gibson but few who have made such a breadth of classic instruments – from mandolins and archtops to iconic solidbody electrics, debonair jazz guitars and sweet-strumming acoustics. So if you've ever struggled to get a handle on exactly how key events unfolded in over a century of guitar making by the company, you're not alone. Indeed, the guitar-playing public would never have been privy to many of the factors that shaped the company's evolution.

But decisions that got made in the boardrooms of the 50s and 60s and on the factory floor at Kalamazoo, and the personalities who shaped the company's fortunes, gave us the iconic guitars we know and love today just as much as famous musicians did. That's why we invited two of Gibson's most knowledgeable experts on its history – vice president of product, Mat Koehler, and director of product development and Gibson archives curator, Jason Davidson – to sit down with us so we could find out everything you wanted to know about Gibson but were afraid to ask...

Gibson began life as a mandolin company, essentially. In what ways did mandolin making influence how the company went on to make guitars in your view? Mat Koehler: "Orville Gibson came up in a time where mandolins were probably the most popular stringed instrument. So, for me, the mandolins are just fundamental to the history of Gibson of being there [to serve] every major genre that developed, especially in America. Orville Gibson was an actor, too, so this theme of adapting, improvising, was part of who he was and his identity."

Jason Davidson: "Yeah, and I think Orville was open not to just mandolins. I think Orville would have built any instrument that either came to his imagination or that was requested of him because, you know, there's mandolins and there's the lute that was famous on his early labels... there's the harp guitars, there's the traditional six-string



guitars that he built – all using the same principles."

Mat: "Yeah, supposedly the lute was actually a mandolin, but it was just shaped like a lute."

Gibson's trailblazing work with f-hole archtops in the 1920s was a hugely important step for the company. To what degree was Lloyd Loar responsible for that leap forward?

Mat: "I think Loar gets a lot of credit for what, ultimately, was putting f-holes on the guitar. I mean, that's definitely his legacy; he's 'Mr F-Hole' [laughs]. Which is not something that sounds that glamorous, but that lineage continues to this day, obviously, especially on our ES models,



"Gibson was working with musicians in the hub [cities] of jazz, so it got them a broader reach" **MAT KOEHLER**

1. Jason Davidson of Gibson says that the company's origins in mandolin-making were simply reflective of what musicians most wanted at the time

2. The Gibson shop floor in 1917. The carved-top guitar became key to growth

3. A 1929 banjo advert reminds us that guitar often took second place to other stringed instruments back then

the 335s, and so on. So it all kind of began with Lloyd Loar there and that fusion of violin-making mentality with what Orville created, which was this [concept of a] carved-top guitar, a lot of the time made from a single piece of wood.

"So, to me, that was Orville's greatest contribution: the carved approach to creating guitars. A lot of time he was using huge pieces of American walnut for that. He was all about trying to find the most resonant properties of a stringed instrument. Loar was definitely a scientist in his approach as well, and it just happened to be that the fusion of violin-making techniques and Orville's archtop design worked out beautifully."

Fender relied on country artists to help develop its sound – would it be fair to say that jazz guitarists played an equivalent role in the evolution of Gibson as a guitar maker?

Mat: "Yeah, broadly speaking, the most popular guitarists of the day were jazz guitarists, which is incredible to think about when we look at how small the audience size is for jazz music today. But, again, it goes along with innovation – these are hard bop, bebop guitarists like Tal Farlow or the Western Swing guitarists like Billy Byrd and Hank Garland – guitarists who really took the music to the next level with some virtuosity and new thinking.



Whereas I think Leo was doing something a little bit more local to that area [Fullerton], while Gibson was working with musicians in New York and Chicago and New Orleans and other hubs of jazz, so it kind of got them a little bit broader reach.”

We’ve spoken about Fender having its roots in West Coast country music and Gibson in the jazz scene – do you think that, during the 1950s, the customers for Fender and Gibson were different people as well? Or were they both competing for the same market?

Mat: “I think eventually they were [competing]. But, you know, with Gibson making guitars in Kalamazoo, [its development as a maker] was steeped in the techniques of immigrant furniture makers in the area. And it was a similar kind of thing with Gretsch in New York, where classic, old-school construction techniques met changes in popular music. And I think even Leo was emulating Paul Bigsby in a lot of what he did. So, again, he was just trying to take what was popular near him and make something of it – and not really knowing what would happen.

“But it just so happened that solidbody guitars became all the rage, firstly, because of the volume levels involved in the rock ‘n’ roll movement: early rock depended on that, and you can’t really use a big old archtop with a monkey-on-a-stick pickup to blast some rock ‘n’ roll! So it had to evolve and, fortunately, I think Gibson was right there, and clearly the deal with Les Paul in 1951... I mean, there was no bigger guitarist at the time. They really keyed into what was popular.”

When do you think Gibson reached full maturity as an electric guitar maker?

Jason: “Maturity? I would think the late 50s – 1957 to ‘58 – with all the new solidbody designs and the release of the humbucking pickup. That, I think, is the full maturity. There was still more to go, with the Firebird several years later and other solidbodies down the line, but that is where we reached the top of the mountain.”

“The fusion of [Lloyd Loar’s] violin-making techniques and Orville Gibson’s archtop design worked out beautifully”

MAT KOEHLER

Centuries-old violin-making skills inspired the design of this 1936 Gibson L-5, shot at ATB Guitars in Cheltenham. Yet the f-hole archtops of the 30s gave the company’s 50s-era semis such as the 335 their sonic DNA and styling cues



4. Gibson's reputation as a go-to maker for jazz guitarists wasn't restricted to the USA, as this pre-war ad shows – the British players mentioned may have largely sunk into history, but the archtop guitars they hold (or their descendents) are still widely used today

that there were new – what we would call CNC today – but just new carving capabilities that they wanted to show off with the SG. Also, if you think about it logically, it's definitely a departure in terms of looks, but also the body wasn't bound like a Les Paul, in that sharp cutaways are hard to bind, so maybe [binding] was presenting challenges in production [that Gibson wanted to dispense with].

"Gibson reached maturity in '57/'58 with its solidbody designs and the humbucking pickup" JASON DAVIDSON

Mat: "Yeah. We had more of a model-year mentality in those days because we were trying to find a good footing [in the solidbody market]. And at various stages of Gibson's more recent history, we've done the same. It's just, like, 'Let's try to develop more different styles and takes and variations, try to home in on what works and what's going to be the most relevant tool for artists.'"

Plenty's been said elsewhere, including previous issues of this magazine, about the development of the original single-cut Les Paul model in 1952. Les Paul himself helped guide the design process for that guitar, but less has been written about the inception of the SG, which was much more of a purely in-house effort from Gibson. What drove Gibson to make such a bold departure from the single-cut Les Paul, do you think?

Mat: "I was going to say it's part of that model-year mentality that I mentioned earlier where [it was seen as critically important to regularly] revise the portfolio. What else happened in 1960? All slim necks, so that was definitely sales feedback. That's the CMI team in Chicago and the sales network giving feedback of, 'We want faster-playing necks,' and so that clearly happened – and the SG style, I think, happened as a result of that.

"But it was also about showing off new capabilities – because, by that time, they had expanded the factory twice, there were three buildings now in 1960, and I know

5. It's not every day you see a line-up like this – three 1959 Les Paul Standards alongside a 1954 Goldtop. Yet despite the present-day supremacy of the 'Burst, it was Goldtops and Customs that Gibson brought back in 1968, possibly because of dealer requests for them

"So that's how I think about it today: what else was going on that maybe prompted this design? As we know, the best designs come about by necessity, and that's why the SG has had such a long run that continues today – they got it right the first time. Even the side-pull trem did a great job of balancing that body, and then later the Maestro tailpiece. I really think the in-house team spent some time on the SG; I don't think it was just a rough concept that made it into production. It was

clearly a very, very refined concept, and we attribute a lot of that to Larry Allers, who was one of the woodworking engineers at Gibson."

Do you think that the short production life of more radical designs such as 1958's Explorer and Flying V meant Gibson got cold feet about innovating at that time?

Jason: "No, I don't think it was getting cold feet. I think [those guitars] were viewed as experimental at the time. They may have sold even more guitars than they thought they would have initially. So I think it was a success in their mind. I don't think it was viewed as a flop. I think it was just showing what we could do."

By the middle of the 60s, you had Clapton and Bloomfield playing 'Bursts and literally kickstarting an interest in 'Bursts that continues to this day. So when Gibson relaunched production of single-cut Les Pauls in 1968, why did it go with black Les Paul Customs and Goldtops, rather than 'Burst reissues?

Mat: "I think it's because they were working with Les Paul, and he was like, 'I've never played a sunburst one' [laughs]. I think



"The SG has had such a long run that continues today because they got it right the first time"

MAT KOEHLER

A 1965 SG Junior in Polaris White sits alongside an equally stunning 1962 SG-shape Les Paul Custom at ATB Guitars. The crisp, shapely lines of the design were intended to show off Gibson's advances in wood shaping capabilities





6. The SG began life as a Les Paul signature model. According to his former tech Tom Doyle, Les accepted that the market wanted a lighter guitar and liked the SG shape's upper-fret access. He had doubts about its tuning stability, however

"But I would say in terms of the most hallowed and revered models – in the 50s and 60s anyway – were definitely archtops, and by the time you get to the 70s, it's the Les Paul Custom that's the most revered, because of, again, where music was going in the late 50s versus where it was going into the 70s. Very different mindsets, and young guitarists practising at home wanted very different things."

"By volume [sold], the lower-priced models were often the most popular – and that's true today, too" **MAT KOEHLER**

that's what it was. It was probably that simple. Jason, do you have any thoughts on that?"

Jason: "I don't really have a theory on it. I'd hope it wasn't because someone in R&D was tone-deaf to the music and the players at the time. It could simply have been that the dealers were asking for Les Paul Customs. Because I think that if dealers were asking for and ordering sunburst Les Paul Standards, Gibson probably would have responded, you know? Which they eventually did. But maybe they were scrambling at first and trying to get a sense of what they needed to build, and maybe the dealers that they initially talked to or the salespeople they were hearing back from were saying, 'Goldtops and Les Paul Customs'. So it could have been a result of that because it wasn't much longer after that that they started making sunburst models again. Albeit not to the specs of the 1959 Standards – but they were at least bringing something back."

What were Gibson's best-selling guitars through the 50s and 60s? Do you have a sense of that?

Mat: "By volume, it's going to be the more entry-level guitars. In the 50s, maybe the ES-125 – pretty humble guitars that are not the most identifiable today or the most famous today. Certainly, on the solidbody side, it'd be the Les Paul Junior. So if you're going to go by volume [number of units sold], the lower-priced models are often the ones that are the most popular – and that's true today, too."

7. While 'Bursts and the like may dominate the history books, it was the humbler, less expensive models that did the big numbers in terms of sales, such as the various versions of the Les Paul Junior

We've become used to Custom Colours on Gibsons, thanks to the present-day Custom Shop's work in popularising these originally rare instruments. How integral were custom finishes and other unique or limited-run orders to Gibson's guitar-making business back in the day?

Jason: "Well, I think Gibson's history of custom guitars goes all the way back to the beginning – it was a special-order instrument maker. And we've seen examples of special-order instruments dating all through Gibson's history."

Mat: "Yeah, I think there's a misconception that the Custom Shop as we know it was something that began in the 90s... To an extent, it was definitely formalised in '93 and '94, and became its own business unit within the company. But, like Jason said, not only was customisation possible from the very beginning, there was a dedicated space in Kalamazoo – I think it was the third floor – put aside for the special-order department. There would be a written correspondence with Gibson and you could request anything you wanted. If you wanted a Les Paul Special with the tenor neck, or you wanted your Les Paul black like the Les Paul Custom – but you couldn't afford a Les Paul Custom – you'd just get a quote back saying, 'Oh, that'll be \$5 more.'"

What are the most unusual 50s and 60s factory-built customs you've encountered over the years?

Jason: "I like... what was it, Mat? Torpedo Joe! That was an interesting one."

Mat: "Yeah, that was, what, '66?"

Jason: "Yeah, '66."

Mat: "This was a guitar in that dark period between when the [single-cut] Les Paul was discontinued and



when we started making it again in '68. So there was this... somewhat Les Paul-shaped solidbody guitar that they made for this musician, Torpedo Joe [laughs]. And then there's the guitar that Kent Westberry ordered. He was one of a few guys in '58/'59 who ordered a J-200 with a Bigsby-style, six-in-line headstock. So they just received the order and used an Explorer-style headstock in that instance. There were actually a few of those that went out in 1958 and 1959, and we used a different headstock style on pretty much every one of them [laughs]. There was not a lot of consistency. It was just whoever received the order: 'Okay, let's go down to the floor and see what we can make happen.' Those are obviously very unusual, but you'd see a lot of customer-name inlays in them."

We've spoken in the past how behind-the-scenes considerations shape the guitars that players eventually have in their hands – using up surplus stock of Epiphone mini-humbuckers in the Les Paul Deluxe of the early 70s is a good example. What other production-centric things have shaped iconic Gibson guitars over the years?

Mat: "To me, the first thing that comes to mind is just the fact that at Gibson we believe in set-neck construction. A lot of guitarists will look at a bolt-on neck guitar, like a Fender, the same way as a Gibson in terms of their capacity to be used to create music. And absolutely they're on par [in that respect]; it's just that the set-neck construction is so much a part of our identity. But it takes so much longer to do and to set, and the neck-setting process is a whole stage of the build process within the factory environment. So, to me, that's something that I think a lot of guitarists maybe take for granted – they forget all of the work that goes into making a set-neck guitar, especially in Gibsons. They're definitely crafted longer than any other major brand that I can think of."

Jason: "I would add the carved top on a Les Paul as well. A carved top is not necessary, but Gibson did it because Gibson was known for carved archtops and we could do it, and that was a differentiator back then."

"Gibson's history of custom guitars goes all the way back to the beginning – it was a special-order instrument maker"

JASON DAVIDSON

This elegant 1955 ES-350, shot at ATB Guitars, straddles the two epochs – the pre-war archtop days and the post-war rock 'n' roll era that followed. The use of a set-neck design unites nearly all Gibson's designs, however, to this day



Name a major ‘crossroads’ moment in Gibson’s history when the company could have taken a very different turn to what we know today.

Mat: “I was going to say Slash...”

Jason: “That’s a good one, yeah. If Slash had picked up a Strat or something, or stuck with his BC Rich...”

Mat: “Right, yeah. Him playing a Les Paul really changed the course of the company in the late 1980s.”

Jason: “It did. I was going to say, even just a few years earlier than that, I’ve heard stories that if Gibson wasn’t bought by the previous owners in the mid-80s, it could have just been broken apart and turned into an import brand. It looked pretty bad around ’84/’85. Times were tough. I mean, even post-bankruptcy Gibson from 2018 – I’ve been here a long time and Mat has, too – I’m thankful that KKR and the group that did buy Gibson came in and did that because it brought in the right leadership and the right change of direction for the company, product wise, structure-wise. It could have went another way, for sure. There were a lot of other interested parties.”



PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

“We’re making not only tools for artists – but the best tools that someone can possibly choose” **MAT KOEHLER**

Are there any unsung heroes in Gibson’s history that you think should be better acknowledged?

Jason: “Ward Arbanas. He was a great one. One of the things he did was he ran Epiphone when Gibson purchased it, but he was still with the company up through, roughly, 1990. He was with Gibson through the classic years, all the way up to the modern era pretty much, and was very active throughout – you see him throughout Gibson history in documentation, in photos. I think his last role was running the customer service department, which I ran at Gibson from the early 2000s through to just a few years ago. So I feel a connection with him.”

Mat: “Ward’s a great one. But I’m going to go with a modern-day hero. This individual started with

the company in the Norlin days in the early 1980s. Her name is Lynn Matthews and she was the first female engineer at Gibson, probably the first female engineer in the industry, as far as she knows. That’s an accomplishment on its own, but she still works for the company today. An incredible legacy and she was the right-hand person to Rick Gember at the Custom Shop.

“So, all of those engineering projects, all of the historic reissue projects and whatnot, all of that was Lynn. And she’s still doing all the behind-the-scenes build and materials stuff for the Custom Shop today. She’s also one of the two people responsible for saving a lot of the archival materials by recognising, ‘This is important and we need to save this.’ She and Keith Medley really did a good job of safeguarding all of our historic materials when no-one else did. So she’s who I think of.”

Tell us something we probably don’t know about Gibson...

Jason: “I would say one

misconception you may have heard, at least under the previous ownership, is about high turnover rates – that ‘nobody lasts very long at Gibson’. Well, I’ve been with Gibson for 26 years. We have employees that have been here close to 50 years, since the Nashville plant opened. And it’s not just one single person, either, but a number of people.”

Mat: “I would also say that another misconception is that we’re this [faceless] corporation. But I can tell you, on the inside, it does not feel that way. We are a family. We’re a family of people who are extremely passionate about guitars and music and making instruments. We just want to be the preferred choice of artists, you know? And we recognise that we’re making not only tools for artists – but the best tools that someone can possibly choose. So we feel a huge sense of responsibility to be providing that experience, and it’s palpable throughout the organisation, wherever you go.” **G**
www.gibson.com

8. Slash almost single-handedly repopularised the Les Paul in the 1990s, providing a huge boost for the company




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SCOTT GORHAM

Few bands harnessed the might of the Les Paul as powerfully as Thin Lizzy. Scott Gorham was the backbone of the band's sound, but, as he recently revealed, he secretly sketched artworks to stay sane on tour. From chaotic auditions to the Les Paul that landed him in court, this is the inside story of early Lizzy, as only Scott Gorham can tell it

Words Jamie Dickson
& Henry Yates

Scott Gorham is in his element. Holding court at London's Gibson Garage, surrounded by the tools of his half-century trade, with a wicked-uncle twinkle and an e-cigarette on the side that represents his last unkicked habit, the Thin Lizzy veteran remains the very best company in rock 'n' roll.

You sense it's a relief for Gorham to be back on home turf, having struggled in recent weeks with a nasty case of imposter syndrome. The official reason for our interview is the 73 year old's unveiling of his historic artwork (pictured on page 79): a series of wild, fantastical pencil sketches that he worked up while on tour with Lizzy, then hid under the bed for decades. But even after the successful launch of his collection

at the Karma Sanctum Soho Hotel in April, the guitarist still flinches at the 'A' word.

"I can't call myself an 'artist'," squirms Gorham. "I figure there's all these brilliant men and women who were at art college for years – and here comes some slob like myself and I just step right into it. I feel really guilty with that."

Music, though, he can talk about all day. The band that made his name in the mid-70s now moves at a more leisurely pace, eschewing studio albums since the death of talismanic frontman Phil Lynott in 1986, while touring sporadically with a patchwork quilt of members. But all it takes is the click of a dictaphone to send the guitarist rifling through his memory banks for the best war stories in the business.

"Robbo was just a great player, light years better than anybody I'd ever played with at the time"

You joined Thin Lizzy alongside Brian Robertson in 1974, making it a twin-guitar band for the first time. Thinking back, what was the audition like?

"I had no idea who Thin Lizzy was. I'd never seen a picture of these guys, never heard any of their music. But I was told they'd had a hit with *Whiskey In The Jar* [1972] and asked if I wanted to put my name forward. 'Hell, yeah. I got 30 more days left on my visa then I gotta go home.'

"The audition was at a dinner club. Phil stuck out that bear paw of his and shook my hand. We walk in and Phil says, 'Hey guys, this is Scott.' Robbo just looked up and went, 'Yeah, okay.' And I thought, 'Oh, let me warm my hands on that welcome.' But the reason they did that was because they'd already auditioned 25 guitar players. And here comes number 26, and guess what – he's a fucking Yank."

How did that first meeting with Robbo progress?

"Phil said, 'So, Robbo, teach Scott blah-blah-blah.' He'd flash these chords really quick, and I'd say, 'Could you slow it down a bit?'"

Then it was 1-2-3-4, and I'm looking at Robbo's hands and my changes were just a fraction later than his. Then he'd say, 'Now you take the lead.' It was chaos, really.

"But Robbo was just a great player, light years better than anybody I'd ever played with at the time. He just seemed to have his shit together. And, boy, he had the ego to go along with it: 'I always knew I was gonna be in Lizzy...'"

"Phil took my number, on this tiny little piece of paper. And I thought, 'Great, he's not gonna lose that, is he?' I'm thinking, 'I probably did pretty shitty.' But that night, Phil gave me a call and said, 'We've all been sitting around listening to the tapes.' I went, 'Tapes? What tapes?' They'd been recording [my audition] the whole time. I had no idea. Probably pretty good that they didn't say anything.

"And Phil said, 'We all agree that you're the guy. What do you say?' I couldn't get the word 'yes' out quick enough. Hearing how talented all these guys were, you'd be crazy not to want to get in this thing called Thin Lizzy."

How fast did you establish the guitar dynamic with Robbo?

"I can't remember it taking a long time. There were certain songs where we'd be like, 'Well, maybe you take the second lead.' Or, if it was a song that Robbo didn't like, he'd say, 'Yeah, you take the lead on that one.' So it worked out like that until we started to feel each other out. We started to hang out, go out for drinks, make each other laugh, all that. We became a lot looser and closer at the same time.

"Still, to this day, I love the guy. I was devastated when he got kicked out. I kept trying to get him back in the band, and I finally did talk Phil into it, and I said, 'Brian, for fuck's sake, just keep your goddamn mouth shut. Every time you open it, man, you get yourself in trouble.' He'd say, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' Then he'd do it again. But the great thing about Phil was that it was always my decision who was gonna be the next guy."

***Whiskey In The Jar* had been a hit, but success wasn't a done deal at that point, was it?**

"Yeah, we had nothing. Back then, you got your three-album deal, and



if you hadn't made an impression by that time, they're warming up the car for you. We knew the pressure was really on. Phil brought in this song, which at that point was just called *The Boy Is Back* or something. And the lyrics were great, but it was kind of a bland song, just chord after chord.

"When we were making up the list for the *Jailbreak* album [1976], it was like, 'Okay, these are the nine songs, and those over there we're not gonna do.' But one of the managers came down to hear what we'd done. And he said, 'How about *The Boys Are Back*? Why have you discarded that one? I think you oughta include it.'

"So that's when Brian and I went to town on it. Phil was going, 'You know, there's a huge gap in between these lyrics. We gotta do something musical in there.

1. Now admitting to wielding a pencil as well as a Les Paul, Scott Gorham is an artist in more ways than one



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL BARKER



Something like doo-dah-doo-dah.' And I was like, 'Really? Doo-dah-doo-dah?' And I was like, 'Well, how about [sings classic guitar refrain].' And Robbo put the harmony on. And it was just like, 'Wow.' All of a sudden, that song exploded. I wouldn't say it was one of our favourite songs, but now we could see it was worth something. And we did the ascending line kind of deal at the end – that was the icing on the cake."

Was it an easy decision to release *The Boys Are Back In Town* as the first single? Or were there other contenders in the running?

"With *Nightlife* [1974] and *Fighting* [1975], we picked the singles and they did shit. So this time we're going, 'Well, obviously, we're crap at picking the singles out, so we're gonna let anybody else do it.'

"We were on tour in America, and in Louisville, Kentucky, there were two disc jockeys that fell in love with *The Boys Are Back In Town* and played it to death, at least twice an hour. That song just spread all through America."

In the early years you played a Les Paul Deluxe with mini-humbuckers – something of a budget model.

"Well, it was because I had to buy my own guitars. And when you're only earning £30 a week, it gets kind of expensive, right? And I liked that guitar. I knew it didn't have the sound Robbo had because he's got the big humbuckers, all that sweet sustain. That Deluxe had a thinner sound. And I loved the feel of that guitar. The way it looked, the way it felt, the way it played – I just wish it had some more guts, a little more

bottom-end, some more sting. As soon as I was able to, I got my '57."

How did that '57 Les Paul come into the frame?

"Gary [Moore] was in the band, so it was probably '77 or '78. We were in Boston, and this vintage guitar dealer comes in and lays five cases down, flips all the lids. I went immediately to that one. It's the Holy Grail, right? He says, 'It's 2,300 bucks.' I'd never heard of a guitar being that expensive. So I play it, and it sounds great, feels great. I look at Phil and he's going, 'Yeah, man.' I got on the mic to our sound guy: 'Hey, Pete, what do you think?' And all he said was: 'Buy it.' So I had no negotiating room at all now. You wanted someone to go, 'Ah, I don't know.' But they were just saying, 'Buy it!' So I was kind of stuck on the \$2,300."

2. There are worse places to chat about guitars than the artist lounge above the Gibson Garage. Scott originally wanted a 'Burst like the Murphy Lab reissues on display as we talk, but the Deluxe became a live-wire element of his early sound

Gorham on stage in October 1976 with his Les Paul Deluxe. While its lower cost was the driving factor behind its purchase, "I loved the feel of that guitar," Scott tells us. "The way it looked, the way it felt, the way it played"

"Robbo put the harmony on [the lead part of *The Boys Are Back In Town*]. And it was just like, 'Wow.' All of a sudden, that song exploded"

PHOTO BY ERICA ECHENBERG/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

How did it work out with that guitar, then?

"I played that '57 for a month in the States. We get back to Heathrow and the customs guy has all our cases out, with the lids flipped up. And he went straight for that Les Paul. He says, 'What a beautiful guitar – how much did you pay for it?' I said, '\$2,300.' He goes, 'Really? On the carnet here it says \$600.' He closes the lid – whack! 'That's my guitar now.' So we had to go to court, right there at Heathrow. I didn't even know they had a court. A guy comes in, he's got the black robe on, and he goes, 'Well, Mr Gorham, we find you guilty – and the fine is the price of the guitar, plus £750 for breaking the law.'"

You're reticent about showcasing your art. In the early years of Lizzy, did you feel the same way about music?

"Oh no. I was all in. 'Let's make the album, do all the fucking interviews, get it out there.' If you're a wallflower, nothing's gonna happen. To be any kind of success, you have to be the guy that

"Nothing's gonna happen if you're a wallflower. You have to take three giant steps to the front of the stage"

takes three giant steps to the front of the stage. It sounds like an ego thing, but, to me, you have to think of yourself as an important cog in the machine, and that machine can't exist without you. Whether that's true or not is a whole other subject. But that's how you have to think."

And with music, everyone out there has an opinion...

"Right. And that's where you've gotta grow thick skin. That's why I stopped reading reviews decades ago. Because it'd be 'great, great, great, shit'. And it's the 'shit' you remember. And it destroys you. So I was like, 'I'm not even gonna read these. Just give me a quick overview...!'" 

DIFFERENT STROKES

Scott Gorham on the artistic talent he kept hidden for half a century



Pain (above) portrays Scott's brutal cluster headaches, while The Fanatic speaks to the 'religion' of being a true sports fan



How did the launch of your artwork go back in April?

"It went great. But man, I was scared to death sitting backstage. It's one thing to talk about guitars and your latest album when there's four other guys in the band you can shoulder the responsibility with. But with this thing, I'm the Lone Ranger, right? If everybody hates it, it's my fault. But as soon as I walked out there on stage and they handed me the mic, I was up and running. It seemed like the audience were really enjoying it. Hell, why not? All the booze was free."

What was your background in art?

"There was no background. I had one semester of art class in junior high when I was 14. The teacher, she was young, slim, long blonde hair and I think back now and wonder, 'Did I do it because I wanted to hang out with her?' I don't actually know if I remember anything I was taught in that classroom. But I'd taken typing before that and I thought to myself, 'Well, I'm not gonna be a fucking secretary.'"

Fast-forward to Thin Lizzy. How did you end up expressing yourself that way?

"You gotta remember, when you're out on tour, you're hanging round with the same bunch of guys and there's nights when you gotta break from the herd. Otherwise it's like, 'Oh my God, he's gonna tell that joke again.' I remember, we had a day off in Amsterdam. I just walked out of the hotel and went to look at the city. I walked by this art shop that just kinda drew me in. I had no intention of buying anything. But before I knew it, I had two wads of sketch paper and two tins of pencils."

But you never showed your artwork to the other guys in Lizzy?

"No. The most important thing was always the playing, the gigging, interviews, soundcheck, all of it. That was the absolute number one. But if someone knocked on my hotel room door, I would hide the drawings under my covers. I didn't really want to have to explain myself."

How did your artwork come to light again?

"My wife didn't even know I did it. We were watching a movie and it reminded me of one of the pictures I'd drawn. So I pulled it out from under the bed and said, 'What do you think of that?' She said, 'Hey, that's great, who did it?'"

"I would hide the drawings... I didn't really want to explain myself. My wife didn't even know I did it"

And I went, 'Well, I did.' She went, 'Fuck off!' So I showed her my whole portfolio – 40 pictures, something like that – and she was like, 'God, man, you gotta tell somebody about this.' I was like, 'Nah, this is just for me.' She kept banging on about it. It got to where whenever she would mention it, I would get up and walk out of the room. And it took her three and a half years of [nagging]. Finally, I went, 'Fuck, all right. What's your plan?'"

For more of Scott Gorham's artwork, see scottgorhamworld.com

*This guitar is emblematic
of more than just a hugely
important song. It became
a constant companion
in the early phase of
Clapton's solo career*

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch our video tour of the
unique features of this
historic guitar at
Bonham's auction house
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra



AFTER TONIGHT

Eric Clapton's *Wonderful Tonight* is one of the great love songs of our time. So when the guitar he wrote it on, a 1974 Martin 000-28, came up for auction in London, we didn't need a second invitation to go and take a closer look

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Adam Gasson



Steve Clarke, the vintage and collectible guitar expert who prepares guitars for sale for Bonham's, joined us to discuss the guitar prior to its auction

Behind many platinum-selling songs lies a simple acoustic guitar, one that is always close to the artist, at home or on the tour bus. One such guitar is Eric Clapton's 1974 000-28, the instrument upon which he wrote *Wonderful Tonight* – a love song inspired by his then-girlfriend Pattie Boyd that would become his best-selling single.

The guitar has been largely out of the public eye since it was sold at auction to a private collector in 1999 for \$173,000, with the proceeds going to Clapton's Crossroads Centre for rehabilitation from drug and alcohol addiction. That all changed earlier this year, however, when Bonham's auction house of Knightsbridge, London, announced that it would be presenting the guitar for sale on behalf of its current owner. Would we like to come down and take a look before it went under the hammer? Yes, we would, came the swift reply.

For this guitar is emblematic of more than just a hugely important song. Built in 1974, it became a constant

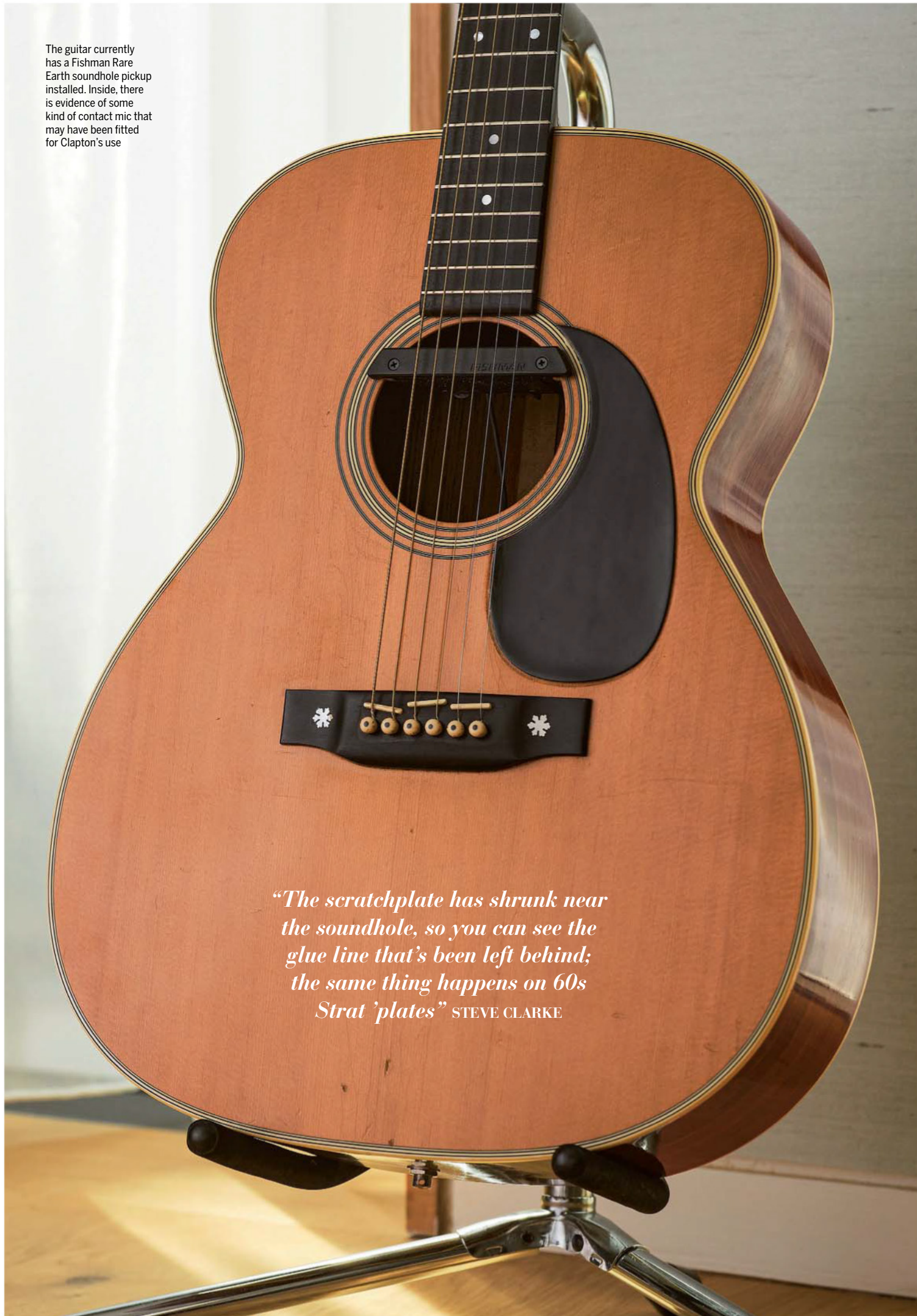
1. The guitar's bridge features snowflake inlays, non-standard on Style 28 guitars, as well as three staggered saddles, which may have been a later non-factory mod



1

The guitar currently has a Fishman Rare Earth soundhole pickup installed. Inside, there is evidence of some kind of contact mic that may have been fitted for Clapton's use

"The scratchplate has shrunk near the soundhole, so you can see the glue line that's been left behind; the same thing happens on 60s Strat 'plates" STEVE CLARKE



companion of Clapton in the early phase of his solo career after Derek And The Dominos disbanded. It also established a long-running connection between Clapton and Martin's 000-size acoustic, the shorter-scaled sibling to the OM-size guitars built by the company but sharing the OM's hourglass shape. This association reached its peak in January 1992 with the recording of Eric Clapton's *MTV Unplugged* performance, during which he used a vintage 1939 000-42 – the '42' part denoting the 'style' or level of ornamentation of the guitar. Clapton's longtime sideman Andy Fairweather Low, who accompanied him on the recording, which became the best-selling *Unplugged* album, played a 000-28 that had been upgraded to Style 45 appointments (see box, page 84).

The success of the *Unplugged* concert not only boosted the profile of Martin's '000' series of guitars but reinvigorated the fortunes of the whole company, making this one of the most significant artist/instrument associations in Martin's long history. But it was the humbler 000-28 that first fired up Clapton's love of Martin guitars, says Martin historian Dick Boak, adding that Clapton went on record to say that a film clip of Big Bill Broonzy playing *Hey Hey* on one such Martin inspired him to use the model – which leads us back to the *Wonderful Tonight* guitar.

"It's not been messed around with different machineheads or any kind of serious modifications in that way; or even refretted" STEVE CLARKE

In 1974, the year that particular guitar was made, the 000-28 model was being produced a little differently to the pre-war examples that first made it a classic, says Dick Boak: "To my knowledge, a mid-70s 000-28 would not have had scalloped braces," Dick says of the production techniques used to make Clapton's 1974 000-28. "The bindings would be Boltaron instead of ivoroid. The fingerboard inlays would probably be mother-of-pearl dots instead of the vintage diamond-and-square abalone position markers. And, of course, the back and sides would be East Indian rosewood instead of the Brazilian rosewood found on pre-1964 models."

All of these features are very typical of in-period Martin acoustics – so for a closer look at the specifics of Clapton's 000-28, we turned to Steve Clarke, the vintage and collectible guitar expert who prepares guitars for sale for Bonham's. Here, he shares with us what he found.

What unique features did your inspection of Clapton's '74 000-28 turn up?

"One of the first things I could see was what they did with this bridge. I'm not sure if you spotted it, but that bridge has the two little snowflake inlays on either end – you'll see those on a Martin D-42 as well. But what was interesting was those three little offset saddles that are on the bridge: you can see evidence underneath that it had an original [single, horizontal saddle] slot cut out and you can just see where it's been filled in. It's been done very well, but under strong light you can actually see the channel that they then filled in and put these pieces on. It's quite a nice job – I don't know who did it. Maybe Martin did it, who knows. But it was a nice touch."

How about inside the guitar?

"I did have a root around inside the guitar. And another interesting point was there was a wire hanging down from underneath the bridge area near the bridge pins. I took an endoscope with me – always carry one of those! – and I saw that it was abruptly cut off, you know, this black wire. Now, to me, that was evidence of something like, say, a [contact mic] or bug-type pickup that will have had double-sided tape, or some kind of a glue or putty fastening it in place. And I've seen this before with guitar techs... it's the only way you can do it, really – there's no need for you to try and struggle to pull it out."

"But what I think might have happened is that someone, it might have been Clapton, decided to change pickups and they just cut the wire off [of the redundant contact mic] because once those things have stuck fast, after a period of time they become so difficult to shift. So I think they just left it there because it's awkward to get out – so you can just cut the wire off. It's not doing anybody any harm. I don't think it was [connected to] an under-saddle piezo-type pickup, you know? This was more like a bug-type pickup. So that's been left there."

"Previous to that there's a curious-looking picture from [Clapton's appearance on] the *Old Grey Whistle Test* where he's got this elongated kind of cream-coloured

2. The Grover tuners are factory original, as are the frets, the first two of which are worn slightly flat from Clapton's regular playing in this area of the fingerboard





REPRISE RECORDS/DUCK RECORDS

UNPLUGGED, UNPRECEDENTED



Clapton may have written some of his greatest 70s songs on his '74 000-28, but it was a rather grander 1939 000-42 that inspired a series of Martin signature models when Clapton recorded his MTV *Unplugged* session. Martin historian Dick Boak tells us the story.

How did Martin come to be involved in making a signature 000-42 guitar for Eric Clapton?

"On January 16, 1992, MTV *Unplugged* taped a special acoustic performance with Eric Clapton at Bray Film Studios in Windsor, England. For most of the songs, Eric played his 1939 000-42 Martin guitar. According to a 1976 interview with Stephen Stills, Stills indicates that he gifted the 000-42 Martin to Clapton. Eric's backup guitarist, Andy Fairweather Low, also played a 000-28 that had been modified by Mike Longworth with Style 45 abalone trim. The show brought Eric Clapton back into the popular spotlight, but, in the process, it also revitalised the mass appreciation for acoustic music, repopularised the smaller 000 body size, and gave a major boost to Martin and the entire acoustic guitar marketplace.

"It wasn't long before my phone started to ring off the hook. Everyone wanted to know exactly what model Eric was playing and whether the guitar was available. It seemed too obvious that a Clapton Signature Edition would be extremely well received. With Chris Martin's blessing, I prepared a brief but sensitive fax to Roger Forrester, Eric's manager, in his London office. A heartfelt and favourable response came back the next day."

Did Eric ever explain his preference for the 000-size guitars? What do you ascribe it to?

"Eric wasn't really a Dreadnought player. He much preferred the smaller body 000 size. I had always assumed that he preferred the 000 (24.9-inch short scale) over the OM (25.4-inch long scale) because the shorter scale length has less tension on the strings making the notes more bendable and perhaps more expressive. It is more likely that Eric simply loved the 000-42 because it was a great-sounding vintage Martin! Though it's interesting that Eric did warm up to Dreadnoughts several years later when giving them a second chance. He was surprised by their power."

pickup with a wire trailing from it going across the guitar. Having looked into this, there's no evidence anywhere that this [pickup] ever went into production, whatever that thing is. I've seen some rumours that it might have been a Barcus-Berry prototype. Nothing confirmed, though – it was definitely some kind of a one-off early experiment that didn't last very long.

"Again, whatever was sticking that down, I don't think it stayed on the guitar long because, on the surface of the guitar, there's no damage or marking to the lacquer, which you probably would get after a period of time. If you leave something like that with any sticky stuff underneath, that finish is gonna have an impression of some kind around it. So I don't think Clapton had that on too long. To be honest, I'd be surprised if it had been on as long as a year. The pickup that's on it now [visible in the soundhole] is a Fishman Rare Earth that was on the guitar when it was sold to the current owner."

Playwear on the guitar seems fairly light. What hints that Clapton used this guitar as a go-to songwriting tool did your inspection reveal?

"Well, it's got the divots on the first couple of frets that are quite deep because of the 'cowboys chords', so it's a little worn in that area. I took a fretwire measurement and the 1st and 2nd frets were a little bit flat on the top, again because he's playing a lot in those areas and not doing a lot of barre chords. So as you go further up to around the 4th or 5th fret you're getting the crown back. But that lower area is well played. Original frets, though, which is cool."

And you can also see the trademark cigarette burns on the headstock!

"Isn't that amazing? It was the first thing I spotted when I opened the case – it was facing my way and I thought, 'Oh yeah, must be his then!' [laughs]"

The guitar's now some 50 years old. What sort of typical marks of natural ageing can be seen on it today?

"The scratchplate's shrunk on it – that happens with those old 'plates. So just near the soundhole, particularly in that area, it's shrunk back so you can see the glue line that's been left behind; the same thing happens on 60s Strat 'plates. That's why that first screw by the neck pickup has more often than not got a crack in it. It's always that screw because there's a lot of tension there and the shrinking of the celluloid just pulls it apart."

It's obviously a very special guitar, due to its association with Clapton and with the song *Wonderful Tonight*, but it also seems a very honest, workmanlike instrument.

What did you like about it, in that regard?

"To me, it was the fact that it's still got the original Grover machineheads on it since Clapton had it. I mean, there's another nice thing – the fact it's not been messed around with different machineheads or any kind of serious modifications in that way, or even refretted... All those things. You think, 'Oh, that's cool.' I like to see that. But it was his go-to guitar, apparently. It's the one he took around with him – the one he went back to the hotel with, after gigs."

Clapton's 1974 000-28 went on sale at Bonham's, Knightsbridge in its Rock, Pop & Film sale on 12 June. For more info, see www.bonhams.com

PHOTO OF DICK BOAK BY JOHNSTERLINGRUTH.COM



3

3. Burn marks on the top edge of the headstock are reminiscent of those seen on Clapton's 'Blackie' Strat

4. The huge sticker bearing the slogan 'She's In Love With A Rodeo Man' is a homage to Clapton's love of American songwriter Don Williams

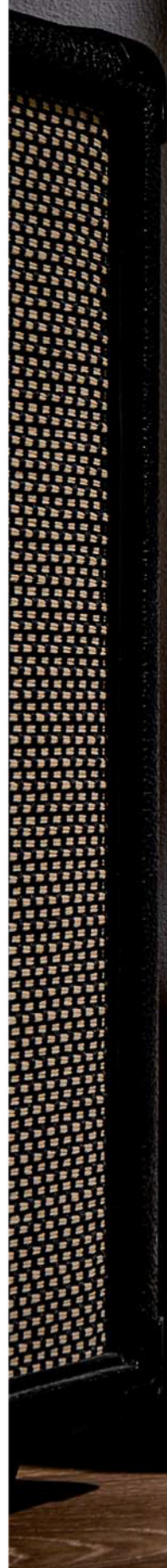
5. Clapton is said to have called this guitar his "best friend" as it went everywhere with him. Note the stencilled 'Eric Clapton Group' on the case



4



5





Slow Turning

The reboot of Yamaha's 30-something-year-old Pacifica has been a long time coming and centres on just two new guitars. Do they deliver? There's only one way to find out...

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker



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What You Need To Know

1 More generic 'SuperStrats', then!
Yamaha is far from the only brand splashing about in these well-swum waters. And while the HSS super-S is pretty much a generic recipe these days, Yamaha's take is very carefully considered and beautifully executed.

2 The two models look identical. What's the difference?
As we've seen with the recent Revstar II models, the Standard level are made in Yamaha's huge Indonesian factory; the Professional models are made in smaller numbers in Japan. There's an obvious cost difference there, but on paper – with the exception of the Professional's compound 'board radius compared with the Standard Plus's single camber – they do seem very similar.

3 What are Reflectone pickups?
They were co-developed with Rupert Neve Designs, a brand known for its pro audio products. But that's about all we know...

Improving on the design of the 70-year-old Stratocaster is a quest many makers – large and small – have undertaken over the years. From simple mods, such as plonking a humbucker in the bridge position to adding bigger frets and a wider travel vibrato, the so-called 'SuperStrat' is really the result of hot-rodding by both maker and player. From today's perspective, it's a classic recipe, with each version of the dish offering a subtly different flavour.

Developed in the very early 90s by Yamaha's fledgling Hollywood R&D centre, the original Pacifica models were an attempt to show the Japanese parent company what this US venture could create. As we reported back in issue 510's The Mod Squad, the Pacifica – not least the lowly 112 – went on to become one of the world's best-selling guitars. But it's been some time since Yamaha introduced any new models in the range (our research tells us the last ones came out in 2011), so when these new Professional and Standard Plus models were announced at the start of 2024, it was a welcome, if perhaps overdue, surprise.

The new models are offered in various snazzy and quite modern-looking finishes (see spec list), but as you can see, Yamaha shipped us a maple-'board Standard Plus

and a rosewood-'board Professional model, both in black finishes, the Pro's with a subtle metallic. There's a price difference of just under £1k and, fingerboard wood aside, we're initially struggling to tell the difference. Yes, the Standard Plus hails from Indonesia and the Professional comes from Japan, but running through the spec sheets, there's a lot of commonality. Both use solid alder bodies, slab-sawn bolt-on maple necks with a new and nicely contoured heel area,

If that classic, 'produced' clean Strat with a kick is your aim, both of these really deliver

plus the forearm contour here is a curved chamfer, rather than the straight-lined contour of the previous models. Both use stainless-steel frets, too. The all-Gotoh hardware is the same on both, as are the new-design pickups, the side-placed football output jack plates and the Revstar-style chromed and half-knurled control knobs. That Revstar influence extends to the cut-off scratchplates that hold the middle

THE RIVALS

There's no shortage of modern-style HSS bolt-ons, a style we'd wager is having quite a resurgence at the moment. Guitar-making giant Cort has its new Indonesian-made G250 SE (approx. £299), which is a great place to start. PRS's SE range is also made by Cor-Tek and, although it doesn't have a specific HSS model or stainless-steel frets, the new NF3 (£979, see page 14 for the review) uses the hum-cancelling Narrowfield DD 'S' pickups that blur the lines between traditional single coils and low-output humbuckers.

Fender, of course, has various HSS models, such as the Player Plus Strat HSS (£949) and the American Performer Strat HSS (£1,419), while Ibanez has the Japanese-made AZ2204N-BK Prestige with Seymour Duncan pickups, Gotoh hardware and stainless-steel frets, with hard case, at £1,499 in-store.

Even the Brits are at it: there's PJD Guitars' Woodford Standard Plus (£1,499), and Gordon Smith's new Geist (from £1,999) is a very valid super-S style, as is the more Tom Anderson-style Cream T Polaris (from £2,499). In short, whatever your budget, the Pacificas have considerable competition.

and neck single coils; the bridge humbucker is direct-mounted on both. There is a subtle difference in that the Professional uses a compound radius fingerboard, while the Standard Plus is single radius, and the Professional includes a hard case as opposed to the Standard Plus's gigbag – which is a good one, we must note.

Both guitars advertise gloss polyurethane body finishes with a satin polyurethane neck back, which is lightly tinted on the Professional where its headstock face is glossed. Another minor difference between the two here is that the Professional sports a silver logo whereas the Standard's logos are black, and the Standard's neck finish is a little more textured in feel, with the Pro's having a slinkier satin.

Although we get the famous tuning fork emblem on the tip of the headstock, there's no actual Yamaha logo on either guitar with the exception of a peel-off 'COO' and 'CE' sticker. In fact, the only brand logo is on the pickups' "developed with..." statement, and an 'R' signature squiggle referring to Rupert Neve Designs with whom Yamaha co-designed these all-new Reflectone single coils and bridge humbucker.

If the pickups are a very obvious new aspect to these designs, they also include some hidden technology in the form of

Yamaha's Acoustic Design technology (also used on the Revstar II designs), which the company states "produces balanced tone" and "utilises scientific processes such as 3D modelling to devise wood-routing techniques that increase body resonance and improve the transfer of vibrations between neck and body". The visible results, albeit under the scratchplate, are an almost F-shaped grouping of machined grooves approximately 10mm deep and 5mm in width to the treble side of the standard pickup routes, plus a reduced-height bar between the switch and rotary controls in the rear electronics cavity. Can we hear that? Well, the folk at Yamaha believe they can.

Then there's the Initial Response Acceleration (IRA) process that's employed on the Japanese model and has been used by Yamaha for many years. It involves a machine that physically vibrates the guitar at a certain frequency right at the end of the build (so it's fully assembled, strung and tuned) to simulate an older, well-used guitar. Smoke and mirrors? Again, Yamaha doesn't believe so: "Honestly, if it didn't make a difference that people can notice and appreciate we wouldn't do it – it adds time and cost to the guitars so it has to earn its keep," commented Julian Ward, global strategy manager for Yamaha Guitars.



1. There's no permanent Yamaha logo on either guitar: the Professional's headstock has a gloss front with silver coloured logos and the Yamaha tuning fork emblem

2. In line with many modern bolt-on electrics, the heel area here is nicely contoured, with the four screws sitting in recessed washers

Feel & Sounds

We're sure many readers will have had a Pacifica pass through their hands over the years, and these new models certainly embody that past – from their more open, airy cutaways to the almost delicate-feeling necks. But the build quality, the ultra-precise machining... just *everything* is pretty perfect. Neither guitar is overweight nor ultra-light for the style, either, and both arrived perfectly set up. Again, though, despite the slightly grainier feel to the Standard's



3. The new guitars boast a pair of Reflectone single coils in neck and middle positions with a covered bridge humbucker. Again, like many modern designs, the spoke-wheel truss rod adjustment is at the end of the fingerboard – ideal for quick tweaks if needed

neck back, there's little between them; the Professional's compound radius perhaps gives a less flat feel in the lower positions, but to our hands it's not chalk and cheese. There's a very inviting, lively response unplugged, which is similar on both models.

Pacificas are known for their relatively thin-width necks and, spec-wise, the necks here are slightly wider than previous – and indeed current – Pacifica models. Here, our Standard Plus measures 42.8mm at the nut and 52.75mm at the 12th fret; the Professional is very slightly slimmer at 42.4mm and 52.54mm. Depth-wise, the

These new models certainly embody their past – from their more open, airy cutaways to the almost delicate-feeling necks

Professional is slightly bigger: 20.2mm at the 1st fret and 22.6mm at the 12th, while the same measurements on the Standard read 20mm and 22.4mm. Both necks are very well shaped and a pretty classic 'C' – the Standard Plus has a little more shoulder, but it's very close again. Obviously, if you like big ol' baseball bat profiles or heavy Vs then these won't suit you, but the profiles here feel very much in line with the contemporary, considered design.

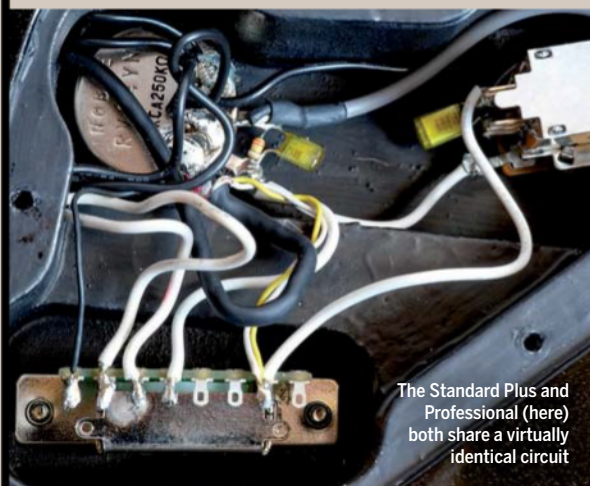
Both guitars sound very in tune, too, and once strings are stretched the vibrato doesn't break up the party, with about a

UNDER THE HOOD

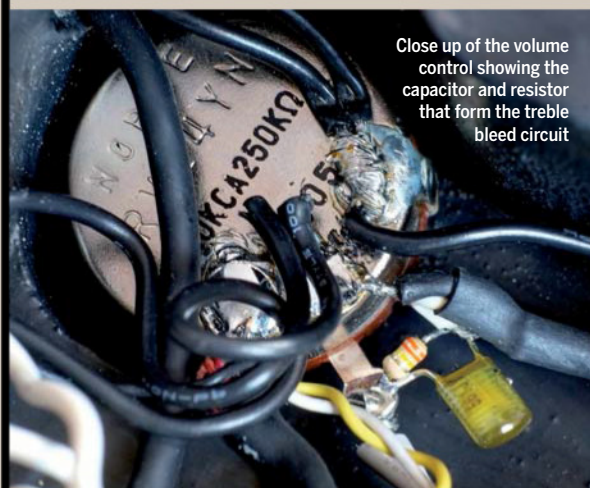
After the Revstar's tonal trickery, what do we have here?

Both models use the exact same circuit. The only visible difference is the smaller mini volume pot in the Standard Plus; the Professional's version is full-size, clearly labelled with 'Noble 250k'. We measured the pots on the Professional model – with the pickups removed from circuit – and that volume actually measures 255kohms, the pull-switch tone is 232k. The tone capacitor is rated at .022µF, while the volume has a treble bleed circuit: a 560pF capacitor and 220k resistor, wired in parallel across the input and output lugs as usual.

While Yamaha confirms that both the Reflectone single coils and humbucker – made in collaboration with Rupert Neve Designs – use Alnico V magnets; the brand won't be drawn on more specifics. Visually, there's little to see. The single coils look very standard, wound around what look like moulded plastic bobbins, and the covers easily pull off to reveal the bright copper windings. We get hum-cancelling in the mixed positions, too, though obviously not with any solo single coil selected or when the bridge humbucker is split and voiced on its own. The DCRs are pretty standard for the style: the bridge humbucker reads 7.61k (3.81k when split), the middle single coil is 6.73k and the neck is 6.49k.



The Standard Plus and Professional (here) both share a virtually identical circuit



Close up of the volume control showing the capacitor and resistor that form the treble bleed circuit



4

single tone up-bend on the G string, plenty of down-bend and excellent pitch stability.

It's little surprise, then, that these two different levels sound very similar. There is a subtle difference, but is that simply down to the fingerboard material? Well, if we had to go on record, then we'd say the maple Standard Plus has a little more push, a little more percussion; the Professional sounds very slightly more open, slightly clearer.

But, to be honest, you probably won't be thinking about that because, as Yamaha states, the overall voicing produces "clear and articulate tones with solid lows and sparkling highs". Frankly, the single coils sounds here are quite 'produced' compared with the more raw-sounding 'Strat' we hear from a few reference guitars, such as PRS's SE Silver Sky or our Fender Road Worn with its Bare Knuckle Triptych set. The Reflectone single coils are brightly voiced, scooped, with a lovely percussive smash to the highs, without sounding oversharpy, and with big basses, too. The perfect clean machine for pop and funk from the 80s to the present day? Definitely. The humbucker rounds that response a little with a fuller midrange, but it's not the huge solo boost that some HSS guitars go for. There's a bit more thickness and power but still with smooth, detailed clarity, despite the cover.

The volume controls' excellent treble bleed circuit (see Under The Hood, opposite) means that this clarity is retained as you pull the volume back, but it doesn't get too thin, meaning you can move from

jangle to grunt effortlessly. It works really well. The coil-split on its own, which voices the humbucker's slug coil, is perhaps our least favourite option, but it's still very usable, especially with a little outboard level boost and slight tone roll-off – it's certainly a leaner and cleaner alternative flavour.

So if that classic, 'produced' clean Strat with a kick is your aim, both of these really deliver. But the thing that really impressed us is just how well these guitars work with things like Line 6's Helix and other modelling and solid-state devices. We can't help thinking that was all part of the plan.

4. The bridge pickups are direct-mounted to the body, though they can be height adjusted. There's a pull switch on the tone control to split the humbucker, voicing the neck-facing slug coil. Gotoh's industry standard two-post 510 vibrato is used on plenty of modern guitars of this style. We also get Gotoh rear-lock tuners (and two barrel-style string trees); the hardware is the same on both guitars

PACIFICA RANGE

Meet the stablemates of these two models

A manufacturing motto for Yamaha could well be, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." As we mention, the majority of Yamaha's electric line-up is far from new, and the models in the Pacifica range are familiar ol' friends outside of the two new-for-2024 offerings.

The range starts with the lowly 012 (£228), the distillation of the 'SuperStrat' concept at a very student price. The alder-bodied 112J with full scratchplate comes in at £300, while the smaller-scratchplate 112V with Alnico V pickups is £368.

These HSS models then take on what Yamaha calls a more 'Custom Shop' vibe with

models such as the 311H (£500), which pairs a bridge humbucker with a soapbar single coil at the neck and a hardtail through-strung bridge. That's echoed with the 611 (£923), which is upgraded with Seymour Duncan pickups, plus a hardtail bridge with Graph Tech String Saver saddles.

At the top level of the existing range – below these two new models – are the fully loaded 612 HSS models, again with Seymour Duncan pickups (with coil-split for the bridge humbucker), Wilkinson VS50 vibrato and added Grover locking tuners, which edge towards the new Pacifica Standard Plus in price at around £1,129.



Verdict

Electric guitars are just a small part of the colossal Yamaha empire – which, on the guitar side, also includes Line 6 and most recently the sizeable Cordoba and Guild brands – so perhaps it's no surprise that, unlike the majority of large-scale guitar makers, the company doesn't push out new guitars every five minutes. Far from it. We did have the second wave of Revstars last year, but they came seven years after the design first appeared, and this new pair of Pacificas comes over a decade after any previous additions that we're aware of. Signature models? Just the one: the 28-year-old Mike Stern model. Limited editions? No. Recreations of historic guitars, of which Yamaha has plenty? No.

But have we ever played a Yamaha electric that isn't perfectly fit for purpose? Not that we can remember. And that's the overriding impression here. Hugely considered guitar making with stellar tones, perfect playability and ready for a stage at any level. These Pacificas do join plenty of options in the market and neither is a particularly cheap date, but with this quality and those sounds you'd be daft not to run either through their paces – both are seriously good Pacifica guitars. **G**

5. While the development of the pickups took a great deal of time and testing, aside from a treble bleed circuit on the volume control, there are no tricks – just standard volume, tone and a five-way lever pickup switch. It means both guitars are a fast and familiar drive



YAMAHA PACIFICA PACP12

PRICE: £2,166 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric, bolt-on

BODY: Alder

NECK: Slab-sawn maple, slim C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.4mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, bar inlays, 254-356mm (10-14") radius

FRETS: 22, medium stainless steel

HARDWARE: Gotoh 510T FE-1

vibrato, Gotoh locking tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Yamaha Reflectone HH7b humbucker (bridge),

Reflectone HS7 single coils (neck and middle), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull-switch coil-split for humbucker)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.92

OPTIONS: Maple fingerboard in Beach Blue Burst, Sparkle Blue, Ash Pink and Black Metallic

RANGE OPTIONS: See Pacifica Range boxout

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black Metallic (as reviewed), Desert Burst, Sparkle Blue, Shell White – gloss polyurethane body finish; satin polyurethane neck back



PROS Superbly detailed build; improved neck shape; stainless-steel frets; industry standard Gotoh hardware; excellent pickups

CONS For those who see the Pacifica as a more budget choice, this price (not to mention the similarity with the Standard Plus) might be difficult to justify



YAMAHA STANDARD PLUS PACS+12M

PRICE: £1,259 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric, bolt-on

BODY: Alder

NECK: Slab-sawn maple, slim C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, bar inlays, 350mm (13.75") radius

FRETS: 22, medium stainless steel

HARDWARE: Gotoh 510T FE-1

vibrato, Gotoh locking tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Yamaha Reflectone HH7b humbucker (bridge),

Reflectone HS7 single coils (neck and middle), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull-switch coil-split for humbucker)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.81/8.38

OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard in Sparkle Blue, Ash Pink, Shell White and Black

RANGE OPTIONS: See Pacifica Range boxout

LEFT-HANDERS: No

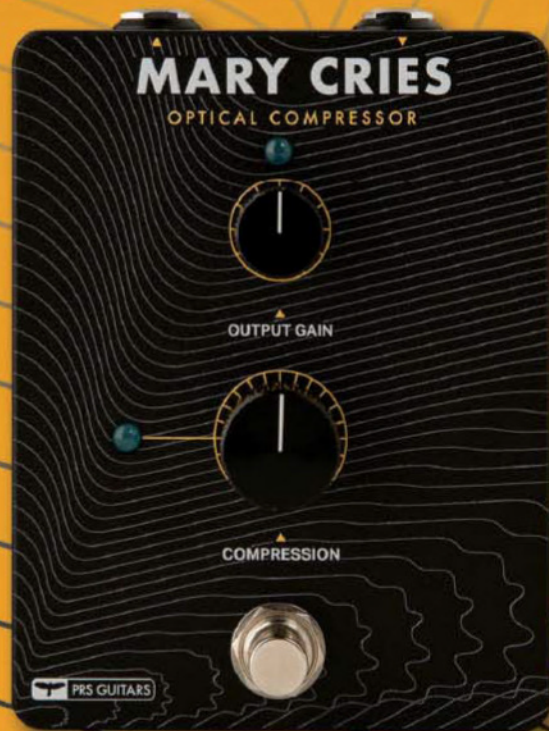
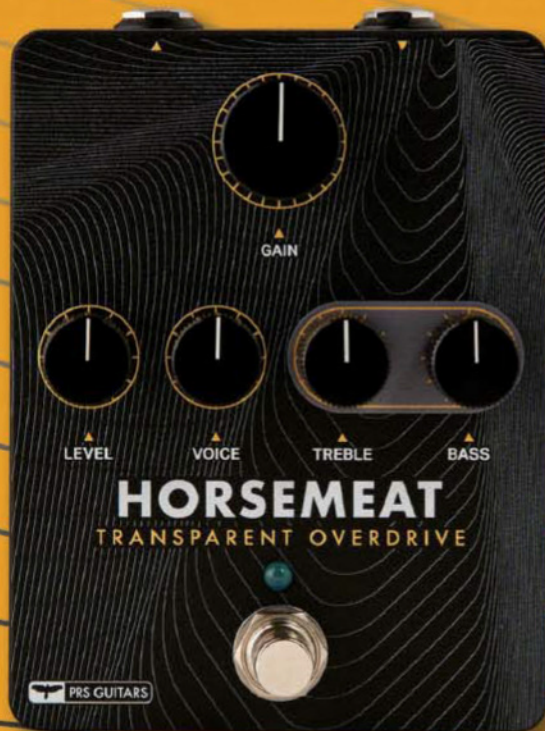
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Ash Pink, Sparkle Blue – gloss polyurethane body finish; satin polyurethane neck back



PROS Ditto the Professional version; superbly intelligent design that's considerably more affordable

CONS Very hard to fault

INTRODUCING...



FINDING "THAT" SOUND

"This whole concept started in my studio. When recording, the musicians were looking for tones and textures that we couldn't get straight from the guitar so I started collecting great sounding pedals. Then we started building devices with the help of some friends. That's how the first pedal prototypes were born. We believe the pedals we've created are highly usable, great-sounding pieces of professional gear. A magic pedal makes the pedal board. We're trying to design pedals that make the board and stay on it".

- Paul Reed Smith

PRS PAUL REED SMITH
GUITARS

Behind The Design

Yamaha's Yusuke Ota discusses some of the technology that helped bring the new 2024 Pacificas to life

Words Dave Burrluck

The original Pacifica design was first released in 1990 and was conceived as a high-end 'improved' Strat-style guitar by the small team at the just-opened Hollywood R&D centre. It's named after a city above San Francisco and was joined by a more Les Paul-inspired guitar, the Weddington, named after the street in which the facility was located. Ironically, the guitar's success, in terms of numbers, came a couple of years later with the huge-selling, lowly priced Pacifica 112.

The new Pacifica models, which have been sometime in development, retain the essence of that original design, and Yusuke Ota provides some insight to the process.

Yusuke, can you introduce yourself to our readers?

"I hold the position of electric guitar product owner at Yamaha. In this position, I played a central role in the design process of the new Pacifica guitars. My responsibilities included defining the target customers, articulating the unique benefits offered by the new Pacifica guitars to the customers, and meticulously specifying every aspect of their specifications.

"Additionally, I am tasked with crafting Yamaha's electric guitar strategy and overseeing the development and maintenance of the electric guitar/bass product roadmap throughout its lifecycle."

There appear to be some references to the Revstar design in these new Pacificas. Was that a fundamental part of the new Pacifica designs?

"Yes, the new Pacifica designs do incorporate elements from the Revstar design. One notable appearance aspect is the pickguard shape, which shares the same angled design towards the upper right corner, reflecting a consistent brand identity across models. Additionally, both the Pacifica and Revstar models embrace a similar Acoustic Design philosophy focused on controlling body stiffness and vibration to enhance sound quality and balance.

"Just an aside, the angle of the pickguard mirrors that of one of the tuning forks in the badge on the headstock, adding to the cohesive design language shared among the Pacifica, Revstar and BB bass series. This is one of the examples of how we think attention to detail is important for designing the product."

Could you give us some insight into that Acoustic Design technology? What exactly is it and how does that help to voice the acoustic response of the new Pacifica guitars?

"Yamaha's Acoustic Design is the process that uses advanced measurement, analysis and 3D modelling tools to design guitar

bodies to have target tonal and resonance characteristics. Through extensive acoustic analysis, we've discovered the importance of consistent and synchronous vibrations across the entire body and neck. If each component vibrates freely but inconsistently, the vibrations sacrifice each other and do not incorporate rich resonance from the guitar.

"For the new Pacificas, we implemented a unique routing pattern under the pickguard and added a brace inside the electronics cavity. These enhancements serve to

"The new Pacifica models incorporate elements from the Revstar design... [for] a consistent brand identity"

increase body resonance and balance its tone by precisely controlling the stiffness of the body. By decreasing stiffness under the pickguard and increasing it within the electronics cavity, we optimise vibrations for rich resonance and balanced tone. Even in one-piece bodies, where different vibrations occur, our Acoustic Design technology ensures consistency through meticulous tuning. This process heavily relies on 3D simulation to refine and perfect the acoustic characteristics of our guitars."

The Professional model goes through Yamaha's IRA process, too. Can you tell us what that involves and what Yamaha thinks it brings to the final guitar?

"Initial Response Acceleration is exclusively available on our Japanese-made guitars. The IRA process applies specific vibrations to finished instruments, removing stresses between components for a 'played-in' sound and feel. The optimum application is determined for each individual instrument. There is no preset process based on series, tier or model. We hear the results most clearly as increased sustain in mid and high frequencies."



As Yusuke Ota (left) tells us, changes in the body routing, like this brace in the rear control cavity, are part of Yamaha's Acoustic Design process

"A unique routing pattern under the pickguard... increase[s] body resonance and balance[s] its tone"



The routed channels to the treble side of the pickup cavities are used on both the Standard Plus and Professional models. This Acoustic Design process is just one aspect of the careful design; the Professional model also goes through Yamaha's IRA process

It is unusual for Yamaha to co-develop a pickup. When did you start working with Rupert Neve Designs – known for its studio technology, not pickup design – and what did the company bring to the project?

"As you may know, Yamaha has had a longstanding partnership with Rupert Neve Designs in the PA category. However, this is the first time working with them on guitars. RND is globally renowned in the audio engineering industry, with audio transformers serving as the cornerstone of their design philosophy, integral to virtually every RND product. Given that electric guitar pickups operate similar principles to audio transformers, we leveraged RND's deep expertise in our Reflectone pickup development and facilitated the transition to mass production in a consistent and repeatable manner, thanks to Yamaha's robust production and

quality management system. Through our collaboration, we meticulously designed pickup specifications tailored to the acoustic characteristics of the new Pacifica. These specifications include details such as polepiece material, coil-winding method, magnetisation technique, bobbin shape, and so on. However, specific information remains confidential.

"The collaboration began coincidentally when Yamaha visited one of the RND engineer's garages, where they found pickups on his workbench that he had wound as a hobby. These pickups were then brought back to Yamaha Japan as a reference pickup for the development. This engineer, Dennis Alichwer, known for his exceptional knowledge of audio transformers, played a pivotal role in the collaboration. He talks about this behind-the-scenes story in this video [<https://bit.ly/git513yamaha>]."

Can you tell us a little more about the Reflectone humbucker?

"The Reflectone humbucker is specifically tailored with the Reflectone single coils, providing a clear and wide range of tonal characteristics across all positions. Unlike typical HSS pickup configurations, where volume differences may be noticeable from position to position, the Reflectone pickups maintain consistent volume levels regardless of the selected position."

And the single coils?

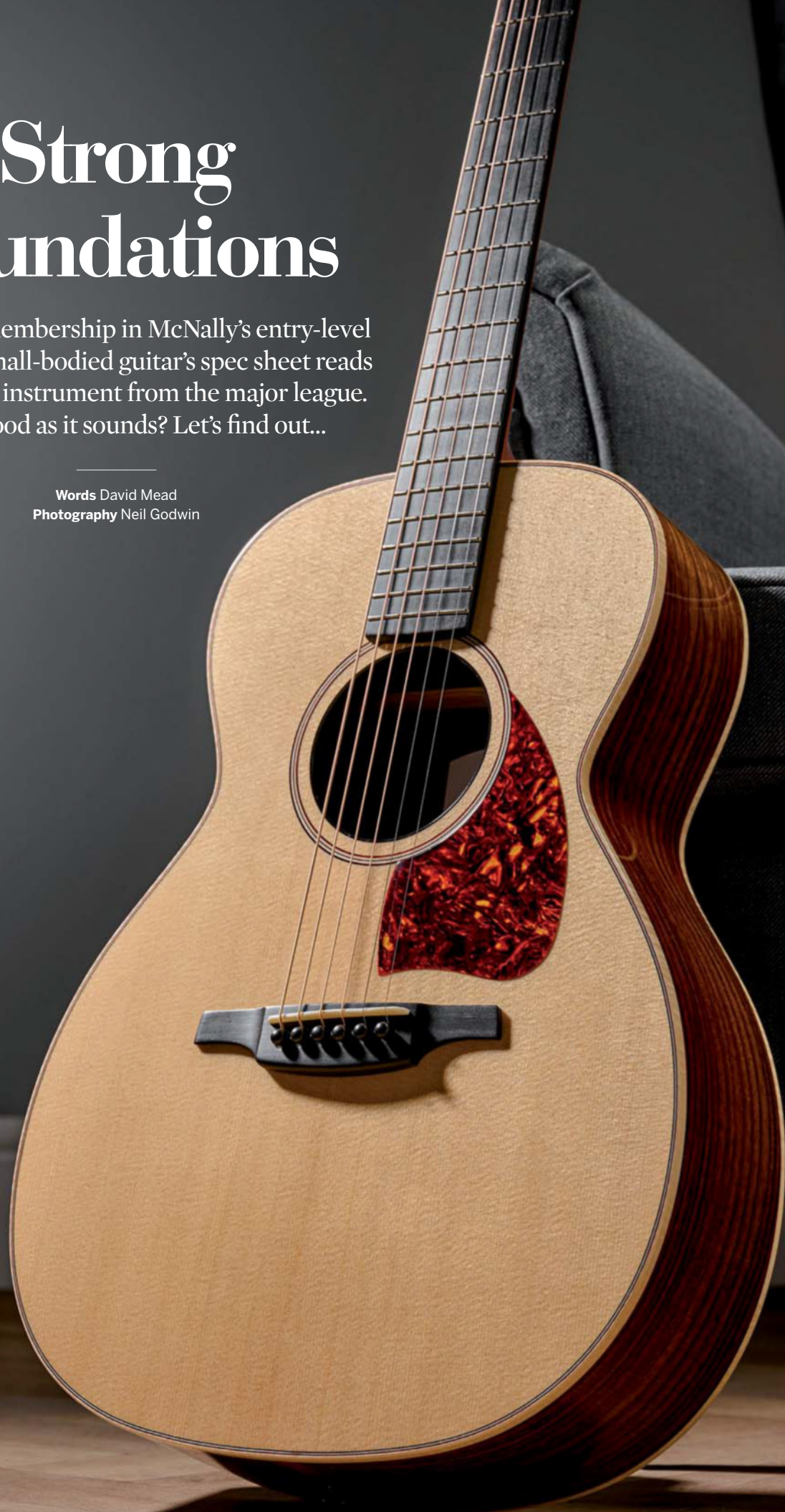
"Thanks to the collaboration with RND, the Reflectone single-coil pickup offers both powerful bass and sparkling treble, overcoming the typical trade-off between the power of the bass and the brightness of the treble found in traditional pickups. This makes the Reflectone pickups versatile enough to be suitable for a wide variety of musical styles in recent times." 

Strong Foundations

Despite its membership in McNally's entry-level range, this small-bodied guitar's spec sheet reads more like an instrument from the major league.

Is it as good as it sounds? Let's find out...

Words David Mead
Photography Neil Godwin





MCNALLY S-32 £3,999

CONTACT **McNally Guitars** PHONE **+44 (0) 2838349811** WEB <http://mcnallyguitars.com>

What You Need To Know

1 Ciaran McNally? The name sounds familiar...

Ciaran's been featured in these pages often in the past. For example, we reviewed his Shane Hennessy signature model back in issue 472. But if not then, you may well have come across his name from further back when he worked for both Lowden and Atkin Guitars.

2 What's the Foundation Series?

Basically, these are McNally's entry-level models that offer five different body shapes and a selected choice of body woods that all retail at £3,999. Despite the fact that Ciaran points out these are unfussy builds, as you can see from the S-32 we have here, these are serious instruments.

3 Does McNally take custom orders?

Most certainly. You can order a bespoke McNally guitar either through a dealer or directly from Ciaran himself. Simply decide on the body shape, tonewoods and extras and place your order with a 20 per cent deposit. Options and pricing details are all on his website.

If you're at all unfamiliar with this range of guitars, Ciaran McNally works out of Craigavon, Armagh in Northern Ireland. He previously studied lutherie in both Northern Ireland and London, moving on to work for Lowden as a senior craftsman and Atkin Guitars in Canterbury as the company's production manager. Since that time he's launched his own stable of handmade instruments that seek to "take the warmth and complexity of Celtic guitars and add some of the definition and fundamental qualities of American guitars", concluding that he feels that the result is a more versatile instrument.

Ciaran's Foundation range represents the most basic guitars he builds, the catalogue extending up to the more all-singing, all-dancing bespoke builds. But while the Foundation guitars may inhabit the lower rungs of the McNally ladder, that's not to say that corners have been cut or quality intentionally reduced in order to keep costs down. On the contrary, even the briefest glimpse around this S-32's real estate will confirm that it embodies a very high level of craft combined with some very fine-looking timbers.

As for the rest of the McNally ground floor, the Foundation instruments are a



The S-32's elegant bridge is ebony, with a bone saddle and ebony string pins

1. Back and sides on the McNally are fashioned from Indian rosewood with a fine-looking grain pattern, set off with some figured maple binding top and back

2. The complement of timbers here adds up to a tried-and-trusted formula for an acoustic guitar with a Sitka spruce top, mahogany neck and ebony 'board



1



2

quintet comprising a parlour (model P), the S (which stands for “small”), an OM, a dreadnought and a jumbo. Even here there is some flexibility in the range as you have a varied choice of tonewoods. For tops, for example, you can choose between mahogany, spruce or cedar; for backs, rosewood, mahogany or walnut. You can also choose between a standard 43mm nut width or the slightly more fingerstyle-friendly 45mm, and your preference for one of three types of finish: gloss, matt or satin. So it's very obvious right from the start that these start-up instruments offer a good degree of choice alongside the guarantee of a quality build. To make things even easier to navigate, each of the Foundation Series is available at the price of just under £4k and so ordering your guitar couldn't really be any more straightforward.

The model we have here falls under the 'S' category – ‘small’ being a very trim maximum body width of 360mm (14.2 inches) with a depth of 105mm (4.2 inches). Combined with its short 632mm (24.9-inch) scale length, it could even be considered petite, from a certain point of view. As for the ‘32’ part, the ‘3’ tells us that it has an Indian rosewood back and sides

The big surprise comes with the first chord – it sounds enormous for a small-bodied guitar!

and the ‘2’ confirms that it has a Sitka spruce top. It's a classic combination of tonewoods that has featured on instruments going back to the very early years of steel-string design and has become known pretty much as an industry standard.

As we've already mentioned, the S-32's top is Sitka spruce with a straight grain and some outstanding cross-patterning when the light catches it. Ornamentation is minimal, with a wood rosette and a mock tortoiseshell pickguard. Back and sides are Indian rosewood, and once again the timber here looks absolutely top class, and the figured maple binding to the top and back keeps the simple understated but classy overall look. A quick peek inside reveals everything is shipshape there, too.

For the neck we have mahogany – with a smooth satin finish, as opposed to the rest

of the body's high gloss – and this has been finished to what you might call a generous C profile. It's not too chunky but not too thin at the same time. The headstock has an ebony laminate front and back, set off with gold-coloured three-a-side Gotoh 381 tuners with ebony buttons. And it's ebony once again for the fingerboard, which maintains the unfussy look of the guitar as a whole by being devoid of position markers on the front. But never fear, they are present along the edge in the form of tiny abalone dots.

Rounding off the S-32's fixtures and fittings we find a perfectly cut 45mm bone nut (as we've said, 43mm is an alternative) and at the other end of the string length there's an ebony bridge, bone saddle and ebony bridge pins.

Everything here is in proportion and the guitar lives up to its ‘small’ – but perfectly formed – designation in the McNally basic line. The next thing is to see, then, how the instrument performs...

Feel & Sounds

The first thing you notice on picking up this S-32 is that it's very light and its short scale makes it feel very compact and a perfect would-be companion for sofa-



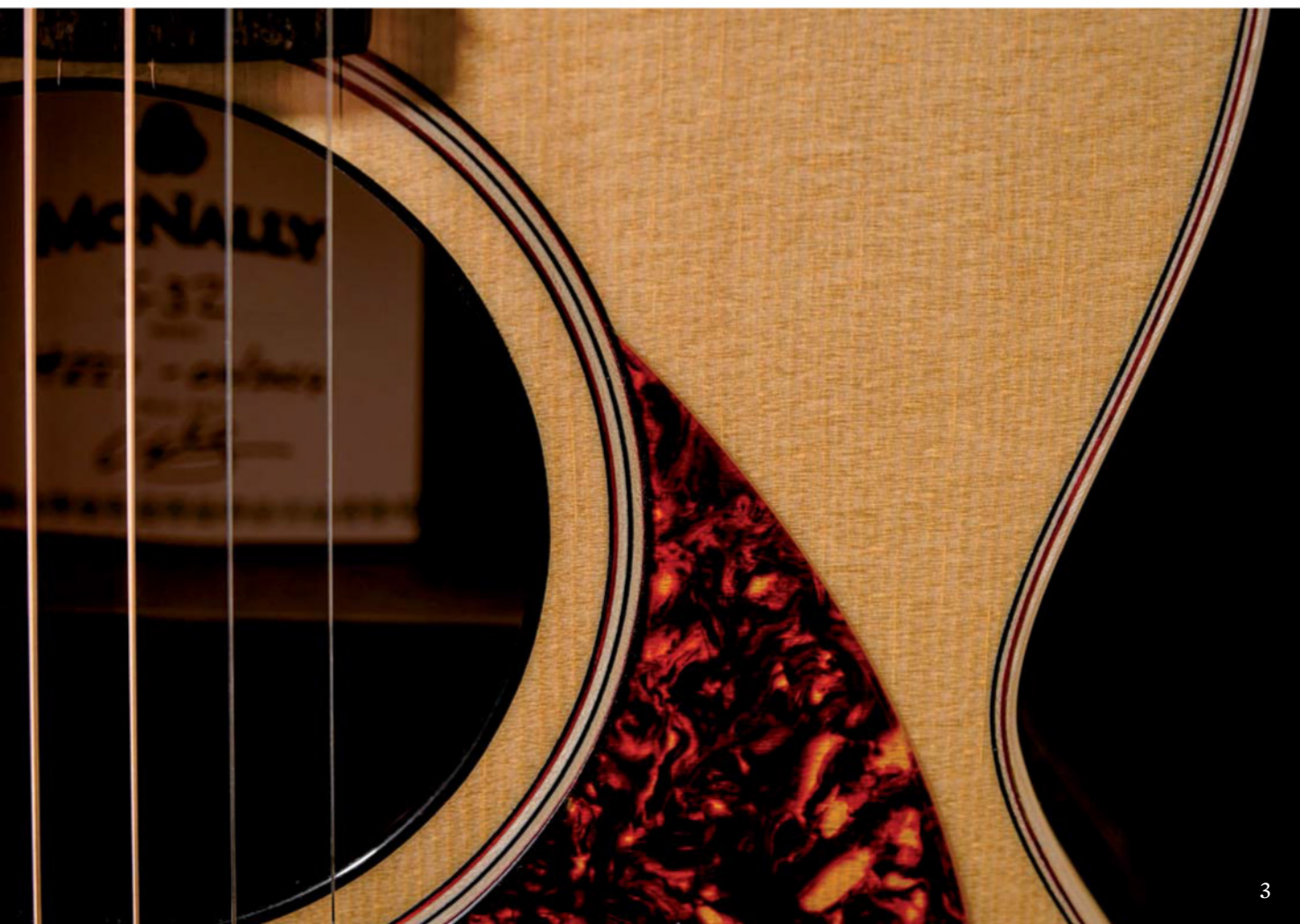
The ebony face on the headstock is accompanied by Gotoh 381 gold tuners with ebony buttons



THE RIVALS

As we're dealing with an instrument from a hand-builder we'll start off by looking at a couple of equivalents in the marketplace. If small is your kind of thing then Fylde Guitars offers the parlour-ish Ariel (£3,300) and the slightly larger Goodfellow (£3,100); meanwhile, Alister Atkin's 37 Range includes the quite diminutive 037 and 037s, plus 00 and 000 variations (prices vary – see website for details). Tom Sands is another builder with smaller models on the menu and once again the website will provide you with in-depth spec.

Bear in mind that bespoke lutherie generally comes with a waiting list that could extend from a few months to a number of years (Tom Sands is currently taking orders for delivery in 2027, for example), so if you can't wait then look to Martin's 0-18 (approx. £2,879), or the 000-18 scrapes by in the svelte arena at around the same price. Gibson's L-00 (approx. £2,649) has a small body but a mighty sound, too.



3. The Sitka spruce has some wonderful cross-patterning that shows up when the light hits it

4. A very subtle volute adds strength to this area of the one-piece mahogany neck

5. Ciaran tells us that he makes the S model slightly deeper – about the same depth as an OM – which accounts for its girthy chords

bound noodlings. That generous C neck profile sits well in the hand, and the satin finish here eases movement over the entire length of the neck.

All well and good, but the big surprise comes with the first chord – it sounds enormous! For a smaller-bodied guitar we wondered if there was some form of luthier's dark art at work here, but Ciaran assured us otherwise: "It's probably slightly deeper than your typical small guitar," he considers. "But it would be the same depth as a typical OM. So I've kind of shifted the depths of my guitars a bit so the OM that I do is deeper, but the S's depth is what most people would do on an OM. So it's probably very familiar in terms of depth but slightly larger for a small, short-scale guitar."

That would explain the extra resonance in the lower mid and bass frequency ranges, and quite probably the surprising amount of volume and projection that is evident, too. To illustrate further what we mean, Ciaran told us that he met a player from the US at a guitar show who told him that he was strictly a dreadnought player as he really liked to dig in when he played. However,





MCNALLY S-32

PRICE: £3,999 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: Folk-size acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 360mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Gotoh 381 with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/58mm
ELECTRICS: Not here, but offered as an optional extra – see website for details
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.53/3.38
OPTIONS: The Foundation Series offers a choice of bodywood combinations: mahogany, walnut or rosewood backs with cedar, Sitka spruce or mahogany tops. 43mm or 45mm nut width and finish options included in the base price
RANGE OPTIONS: The Foundation instruments include five body shapes: jumbo, dreadnought, OM, small and parlour with the wood combinations mentioned above, all at the same price of £3,999. Bespoke builds via special order – see website for details
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra charge
FINISH: Natural gloss AC lacquer to body with satin neck

the S models that Ciaran had on display at the show threw the guy a curveball – he was amazed that he could get the same sort of response out of a small body as he would expect from a dread.

Speaking of dynamic range, we found that the S-32 responded to everything from very gentle strumming to vigorous flailing, which is an added bonus and may well change a few more minds about the virtues of playing smaller-bodied guitars.

This depth and sheer musicality extends to single notes as well, nudging the S-32 over the all-rounder line nicely. Ciaran is to be congratulated that he has succeeded in his mission to combine the best of Celtic guitars with the voice and personality of the leading American instruments.

Verdict

Needless to say, we enjoyed our time with the McNally S-32 enormously. It's a very player-friendly instrument that has a multitude of tricks up its sleeve, tonally speaking. There's no pickup fitted to this particular guitar, although Ciaran tells us that he will fit one as an extra, preferring the LR Baggs Anthem because it's non-invasive

from the point of view that it requires no extra holes cut into the guitar's body. It would be interesting to hear what it's like as a stage companion as it really does tick practically all the boxes acoustically.

We have to say that despite its apparent position in the McNally pecking order as one of the littlest in the pack and an entry-level model to boot, there's nothing basic

Ciaran has succeeded in combining the best of Celtic guitars with the voice and personality of the leading US instruments

here at all. This is a model that has the build quality and voice of a fully fledged professional instrument. It's not often the case that lone builders supply models to dealers, but McNally does. So if you can track one down to audition yourself, you may find that you fall under its spell as much as we did. It really is the case here that small is beautiful. 

10/10

PROS Superbly built small-bodied guitar with a larger than life tonal personality

CONS Nope, we really can't think of a thing!

Bases Are Loaded

In order to delve deeper into the McNally Foundation Series guitars, we talk to the man behind the chisel and sawdust, Ciaran McNally...

Words David Mead



PHOTO BY JACK PELOW

Training in lutherie in London and Northern Ireland and then working for both Lowden and Atkin prepared Ciaran for his solo flight

Having been totally won over by the McNally S-32 with its top-shelf timbers and supreme workmanship, we were intrigued by the idea of a lone builder offering a base series of instruments – something we hadn't necessarily come across in the past. On the face of it, the idea of giving customers a range of body shapes and choice of woods at a single base price is a splendid way of entering the handmade acoustic guitar market and we were eager to hear how the idea came about.

What was the thinking behind the Foundation Series?

"The idea was to have some set models that would be a little bit more dealer friendly, which is maybe not something that most one-man luthier shops do. In my head I was always aware that there are guitar players who don't really want to start that whole

"The price is within reach if people were going [to a dealer] to buy something like a high-end Martin"

bespoke journey. Also, there are a lot of people who go into guitar shops and don't know that they're about to buy a guitar until they try it.

"So the Foundation Series represents nice, tried-and-tested wood combinations and also models that fully represent the base price, because I think that for a lot of luthier guitars, a base price seems like something that isn't even really available. It's like buying a car; they advertise it for 10,000 then you go in and it's 15,000 for anything that you'd actually want. But I wanted to do real guitars at that price and real guitars that people would want.

"I also thought it would be like a gateway drug for people into McNally guitars! It has happened. People go into a dealer, they've never heard of me and they're going to buy a Martin or something else and the dealer says, 'Why don't you try this?' I think the



1

1. McNally's Foundation Series offers a wide range of choice for customers looking for a luthier-built instrument

2. Ciaran's game plan is to combine the very best of Celtic guitar-making with the fundamentals of American styling



2

price is within reach if people were going in to buy something like a high-end Martin. A lot of the Foundation Series guitars would be the type of guitar I would personally have; something just a bit classic and maybe a little bit understated but very high quality."

There's a choice of body shapes within the Foundation Series. Can you talk us through those?

"Basically, what you have there for review is the S and, in terms of sizes, there's one below that, which is the parlour. It's actually the exact same body as the S, but it's got a 12th-fret neck join. So the neck is shifted down, the soundhole is lower and the bridge is lower as a result. So it just feels like a more compact thing. It still has the slightly shorter scale and it tends to sound a bit bluesy because it has that 12th-fret bridge placement.

"The S I think of as a smaller OM. It's not a tiny guitar, it still has good tone and projection and even with the short scale tends to hold up pretty well. Then in the middle you have the OM, which is the kind of everyman guitar and it has the regular 25.4-inch scale. It's slightly deeper than your typical American OM, just to get a little bit more bass response. Above that, we have

a very typical classic dreadnought. I tend to voice that a bit tighter so that it's a bit more flatpicking and strumming orientated.

"And then above that again, we have the jumbo, which is not very common because it's a properly big guitar and that tends to be more for people who are looking for a very rich, large fingerstyle voice. It's the same depth as the dreadnought, but the body is longer and bigger. Interestingly, the jumbo's footprint is much bigger, but if you sit down and play it versus the dreadnought, the jumbo feels smaller because the waist is tighter and falls further into your knee. So it actually feels smaller under the arm. Whereas the dreadnought, being so flat, you can feel like you've a box under your arm."

And there's also a choice of body woods?

"You can choose between three soundboards: you can have an all-mahogany guitar, a Sitka or cedar soundboard. And then you can choose mahogany, walnut or rosewood back and sides. So when you take those combinations with the five body shapes, I think there's something like 35 possible guitars thereabouts at the base price. Some are far more popular than others and they tend to sort of come and go. For a while, the dreadnought with Sitka/

"With the body wood and shapes, there's something like 35 possible guitars at the base price"

rosewood was really popular. And then the S with Sitka/mahogany was really popular a couple of years ago, and what you have there, the S with Sitka/rosewood, has been a favourite as well. But the OM Sitka/rosewood – the closest thing to a Martin OM-28 – has been just as popular."

How long is the waiting list for one of the Foundation Series?

"At the moment, I'm looking around December this year for new builds. But if somebody wanted something specific, you know, I might be able to look at the schedule and say, 'Oh, such-and-such dealer is getting that in September...' So things might align there. Or if they have a dealer near them, who has a slot set aside but hasn't decided what they want, they could probably access that slot to the dealer and get it sooner."  www.mcnallyguitars.com

One More

Line 6 puts all of the Helix effects into a box that will slot into any pedalboard

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker





LINE 6 HX ONE £299

CONTACT **Yamaha** PHONE **01908 366700** WEB **uk.line6.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 That's small for a Line 6 HX pedal.**
This latest in the HX line is designed to be an easy fit for any pedalboard.
- 2 Does it just do effects?**
Yes, there's no amp and speaker simulation onboard this one, but there's a comprehensive collection of Helix-quality effects covering all the genres you can think of – over 250 algorithms in all!
- 3 Can you chain effects together?**
No, this is strictly one effect at a time – it's that 'extra' pedal on the 'board that'll give you any effect you want at any time, complementing the rest of your pedals.

Besides its units with amp/speaker and effects simulation, Line 6 has a range of multi-effects pedals that put just the effects from those more complex units into a stompbox format. You could trace the lineage back some way – names such as the M13 and M9 come to mind. And while the HX One may have the same effects as the current HX Effects, it most readily resembles the diminutive M5; like that unit, you can only use one effect at a time.

Nevertheless, you get over 250 different algorithms to choose from, making the HX One a nicely compact source of any effect you may wish for. While your pedalboard may already have everything for your basic needs, it could be that at times you feel you're perhaps lacking a certain type of modulation pedal, a particular flavour of overdrive or an extra delay with a different delay time. The HX One is the pedal that can supply that.

In Use

The algorithms are neatly laid out in categories and can be scrolled through to find the one you want, but the key to using the pedal live would be to populate as many of the 128 presets with the effects you'll want to use, suitably tweaked to taste using the three soft knobs. The pedal has a preset mode you can enter by briefly pressing down on the two footswitches simultaneously, and you can then scroll to the next wanted preset with the Effect knob or by using the footswitches to scroll up or down. A quick press on the Effect knob, or the two footswitches together, will load said preset.

Now, there's a conundrum in that if you're using the pedal as a fuzz or wah, you may want it at the front of your chain – but if you're using it for delay or reverb you'd probably want it at the end of the chain or in an amp's effects loop. If you're using



1. Each soft knob adjusts the parameter shown directly above it in the display. The three main parameters are always shown when you change effects, but the cursors (Page buttons) will take you to the next page of parameters

2. This footswitch turns the effect on and off. It is always lit but glows brighter when the effect is engaged. The LED is colour-coded to signify the effect category: blue for modulation, green for delay and so on



3



4

the pedal in a mono or stereo chain, you have that choice to make (or maybe buy two pedals!). However, the right input and output double as a return and send respectively, so for full flexibility you can connect to the amp via the four-cable method and assign the effect in each preset to be either in front of the amp or in its effects loop. Neat.

A brilliant feature of the HX One is the Flux function, which can do expression-pedal-style tasks without the need for connecting an actual expression pedal. A press-and-hold on the tap tempo footswitch on the right toggles it between tap tempo and Flux. This function basically adjusts

multiple effect parameters simultaneously over a predetermined period of time with a footswitch press: this could mean an everyday task such as ramping the speed on a rotary speaker or ramping delay feedback up to the point of self-oscillation, or even something more complex involving several parameters moving together.

This is all easily set up in the menu on a per-preset basis. Minimum and maximum values can be set for each parameter – the first press on the footswitch ramping from minimum to maximum, the second press ramping down again. You can also set values for the ramp time and the shape of ramp (various curves or linear) separately for the ramp up and the ramp down. When you press the Flex footswitch, a directional line runs across the top of the display for the duration of the change while the Flux LED moves from dull to bright or visa versa.

Should you want to connect an expression pedal, there is provision: a socket provides the option of expression pedal, two assignable external footswitches, or one of each. There is also MIDI capability allowing the HX One to receive program change, continuous controller and other MIDI messages from external sources. A USB socket is provided for firmware updates but also to connect to a librarian

3. A press-and-hold on the Tap/Flux footswitch changes its function from tap tempo (red flashing LED) to Flux (pink LED), where you can use it to trigger automation of a parameter, with the LED glowing brighter as the automation is triggered from min to max values

4. The USB-C port is for firmware updates and use with the free HX One Librarian application

5. The Effect knob has a host of functions, not least scrolling through the effects or the presets (in preset mode)

THE RIVALS

The professional standard for one-effect-at-a-time multi-effects pedals is the Eventide H9 Max (£679), which has a full set of the brand's classy algorithms. For a more budget-friendly option that's also compact, there's the Zoom MS-50G+ MultiStomp (£149) with 100 onboard effects that you can either use singly or chained together (up to six at a time). If the Line 6 sounds float your boat but you want a box where you can use more than one effect at a time, the larger HX Effects (£619) will cover your needs, or you could audition the triple-footswitch TC Electronic Plethora X3 (£299), for example.



This is a fantastic augmentation pedal that can fill in the blanks on your pedalboard

application on your computer, which really makes easy work of any HX One setting up you need to do at home.

In sound terms, the HX One has just about every guitar effect known to mankind, with a good mixture of the bog-standard and the esoteric. Most players will have their favourite fuzz/drive/distortion boxes, and there's a massive amount of those nicely modelled here including three different Big Muff variations. The Flux effect can be very effective with these, not so much in ramping an effect over time but in providing an instant footswitchable jump between two levels of gain. In fact, with any effect you're using, Flux can give you two versions of it.

Modulations are well covered, as are all varieties of delays and reverbs, including some such as Ganymede and Particle Verb that cover the atmospheric/ambient field. Among the pitch effects there's a cool



Whammy effect complete with octave jump via the Flux, a passable 12-string emulation, and a Poly Capo that's great for instant lowered tunings.

While the various wahs have the most flexibility if you use an expression pedal, the Flux function can give a controlled consistent sweep that's easily foot-operable. There's also a range of analogue synth sounds and two loopers with a mono loop length of 60 seconds (30 in stereo) – the Simple looper and the intriguing Shuffle looper, which chops your loop into slices, ready for various treatments.

Verdict

The big deal with the HX One is that it gives you HX sounds in a pedal that can run from a standard power distributor and easily slot onto any 'board among conventional pedals. It is a fantastic augmentation pedal that can fill in the blanks on your pedalboard with the chameleon-like ability to be any colour you need. Want a Uni-Vibe, a ring modulator or a Whammy for use just once in your set? This pedal sorts it without the need to add the specific pedals or going the large-box multi-effects route. Add in the extra layer of expression and flexibility that the Flux footswitch provides and it looks like something of a no-brainer. **G**



LINE 6 HX ONE

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Multi-effects pedal

FEATURES: True or buffered DSP bypass, tuner, 128 presets, over 250 effect algorithms, tap tempo, Flux expression effects, noise gate, adjustable input impedance

CONTROLS: Soft knobs (1-3), Effect knob, Page buttons (L&R), Home button, Bypass footswitch, Tap/Flux footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L/Mono, Right/Return), standard outputs (L/Mono, R/Send), USB, MIDI In, MIDI Out/Thru, EXP and footswitch input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 500 mA

DIMENSIONS: 98 (w) x 125 (d) x 60mm (h)



PROS Compact size; massive range of quality effects; extra layer of expression with Flux; flexible connectivity

CONS If you don't have 'board space for the provided power adaptor, you'd better make sure your own power supply unit can provide 500mA

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New
From Laney
LOUDPEDAL
Amp Bliss In A
Pedalboard
Format



Pride & Glory

If you're a gigging guitarist who dreams of condensing a rig's worth of lush valve tones into something pedalboard-friendly, Laney has the answer with their new LOUDPEDAL amps. These compact pedal amps are packed with boutique amp artistry yet provide ultra-portable and recording-friendly solutions. Handcrafted in Laney's UK workshop, Black Country Customs.

Created in collaboration with two of the finest guitar players in the world – fusion legato legend Tom Quayle and virtuoso turned YouTube star Martin Miller – the Lionheart and Ironheart LOUDPEDALs capture the sound of Laney's acclaimed valve-amp ranges in two supremely versatile 60-watt pedal formats. But don't let the diminutive size fool you – these are far more than just amp modellers or preamp pedals...

The LOUDPEDAL is also an entire rig solution packed into one portable pedal. Martin says, "The way I use the LOUDPEDAL varies greatly depending on the types of gigs I play and the types of sessions that come up. So there's many uses, which is probably one of my favourite things about it..."

He continues, "The DI out is fantastic for recording direct, whether that's in a hotel room, on the road, in my studio or on a recording session... it also sounds really good just going straight DI out or straight into a loudspeaker with no bells and whistles. It sounds fantastic doing just that..."

Fully Featured

At its core, each LOUDPEDAL provides two footswitchable channels with three different voicing options (Bright, Dark, Flat) for radically shaping the core amp tone from sparkling cleans to saturated overdrive. An onboard boost captures the legendary

Black Country Customs Steelpark circuit for boosting into searing lead tones. There's also authentic digital reverb based on their acclaimed Secret Path spring algorithm.

"If you blind-A/B'd between the original amp and this, there's no way I could have told the difference," says Tom about the Lionheart version he collaborated on. "It sounds like hyperbole, but genuinely, it's almost impossible to tell."

"The independent EQ is cool because it's not something you see that often. It's very powerful"

TOM QUAYLE

What makes the LOUDPEDALs shine is the range of pro-routing options. In addition to a high-quality FX loop, there is USB-C recording output, balanced XLR DI out, and even MIDI capabilities for integrating with modern rigs. But the real game-changer is Laney's new Advanced Impulse Response (LAIR) technology, only previously seen in the company's flagship FRFR-powered 4x12 cab (the LFR-412).

"The USB-C out provides latency-free audio to your preferred DAW,

additionally providing access to LA.IR, our LOUDPEDAL app," says Laney product manager and chief tone-wizard, Simon Fraser-Clark. "This app allows ultimate control over the impulse responses in the amp, allowing you to switch out the pre-loaded IRs and tweak them with the powerful EQ-shaping capability."

Storing your impulse response inside the pedal itself opens up tonal possibilities previously only dreamed of. You can quickly swap out IR files to perfectly emulate any cabinet on a song-by-song basis while recording, instead of being chained to one microphone/cabinet setup. The LA.IR app even allows you to apply parametric EQ to the individual IRs to fine-tune the response.

"The independent EQ thing is really cool because it's not something you see that often," remarks Tom. "It's very powerful."

Despite being packed with high-end amp voicings and features, the LOUDPEDALs maintain an easy-to-use workflow with logically laid out controls on their compact enclosures. Their true appeal, though, is portability and convenience – especially when paired with the quiet headphone jack for silent practice.

Martin Miller says of the Ironheart he collaborated on: "If you haven't experienced a LOUDPEDAL, I urge you to check one out, plug it in and have your mind blown..."

Indeed, these could be the ideal all-in-one amp solution for the modern guitarist.



The Lionheart and Ironheart have a logical layout for clear and intuitive use; Martin Miller (below, left) and Tom Quayle collaborated with Laney to create the LOUDPEDALS



LOUDPEDAL SPECS

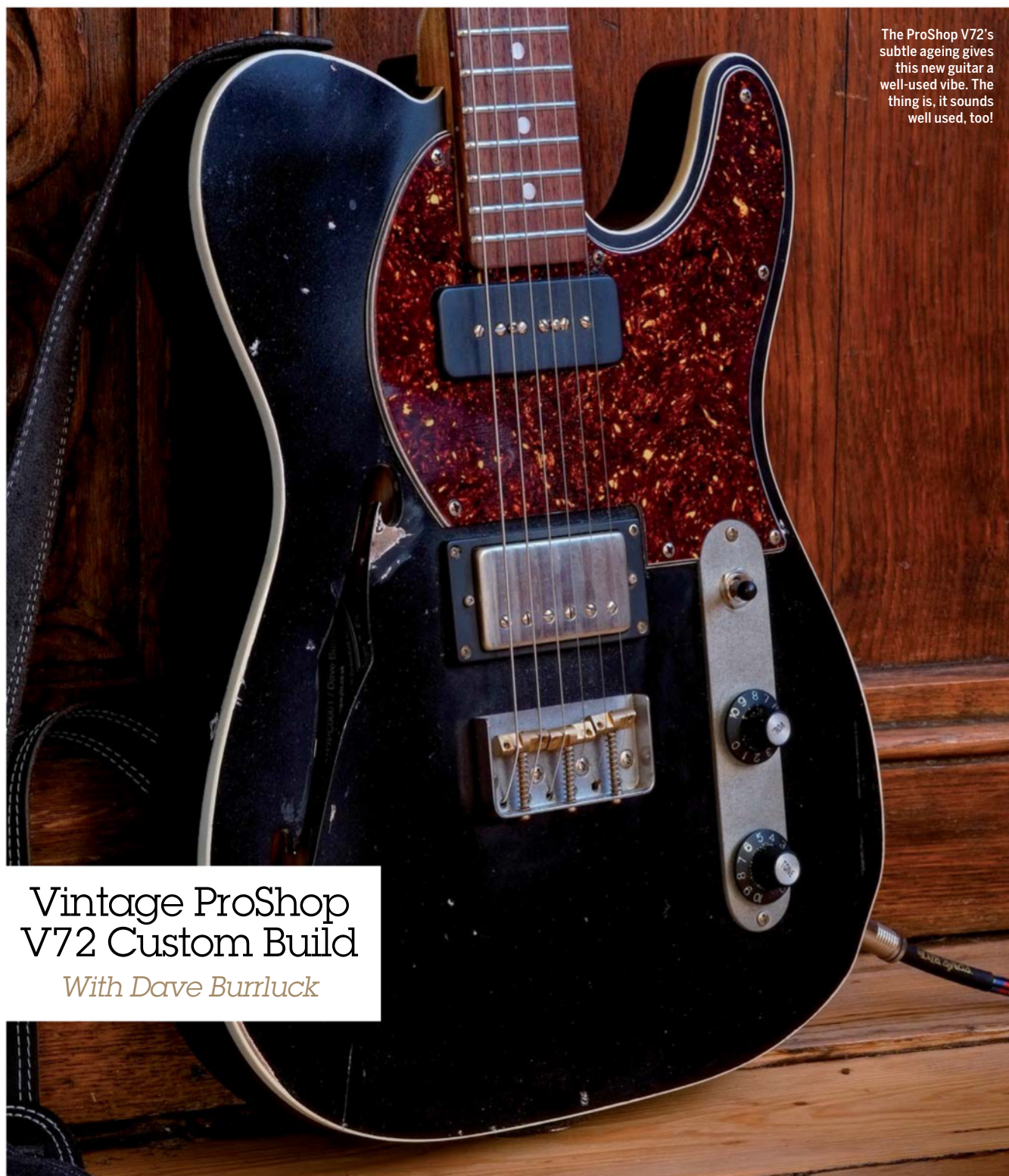
Both amps have a shared feature set, which includes:

- 60 watts
- Two channels
- USB-C audio out
- XLR out
- Footswitchable Boost
- Footswitchable Reverb
- LA.IR app compatibility



Longtermers

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



The ProShop V72's subtle ageing gives this new guitar a well-used vibe. The thing is, it sounds well used, too!

Vintage ProShop
V72 Custom Build

With Dave Burluck

Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist Gear Reviews Editor



With the custom-ordered ProShop guitar having already proved itself in rehearsal, our reviews editor introduces it to an audience...

Another weekend, another gig in a pub on a cramped 'stage'. All the gear has to go up (and down) stairs: where the heck are the road crew when you need them? My stage space is just enough to fit me and my diminutive pedalboard, which is obscured from the audience by the lone PA speaker. Still, environment and temperamental pedalboard aside, I'm looking forward to giving the custom-ordered Vintage ProShop V72 a bit of a workout.

To be honest, I'd say the guitar itself is a bit more prepared than its player. I'd restrung it with a set of 10 to 46 PRS Signature strings; it'd had a slight bit of nut fettling and lots of string-stretching, too. Unscientific as ever, I swear it's now fuller-sounding and firmer. And as our soundcheck turns into the opening number of our wide-ranging set,

"Suddenly the new V72 feels a little alien... or rather my shaky confidence has dropped"

tuning stability remains spot-on, as it should with a hardtail T-style guitar.

For once, the onstage sound is rather good and the V72's well-tuned circuit is giving what I need with a turn or two of the volume and tone and a flick of the toggle switch – just as it did in rehearsal. But then our bandleader calls a song that we haven't played in a while and the good-sounding comfort of our earlier numbers is thrown into disarray. Suddenly, the new V72 feels a little alien... Or rather my shaky confidence has dropped, and I reach for my well-gigged PJD Carey Standard, a safe haven in these now decidedly choppy seas. The small but appreciative audience perks up; we (specifically me) have raised our game and, not for the first time, the PJD sounds and feels gorgeous.

Reflecting on the well-received chaos post-gig, and bearing in mind my day job is to evaluate guitars, I'm trying to focus in on why I swapped a perfectly good guitar for another. By design, they're very similar: 648mm (25.5-inch) scale bolt-ons, the PJD



Manufactured less than 50 miles away from Vintage's Leeds HQ, this York-made PJD Carey has been this writer's go-to gigging guitar for the past couple of years. It's a hard act to follow

with its roasted all-maple neck, the Vintage with its well-fettled rosewood 'board. Both are lightweight semi-solid guitars, and both have pretty similar pickups – the PJD with its Cream T Spot humbucker at the bridge and Duke P-90 at the neck, and the Vintage with its classy Wilkinson R Series pairing of a pretty similar style.

Back at the same upstairs venue a couple of weeks later, I'm keen to give the Vintage another good play, and after a full set I have plenty to consider. This time the band sounds more confident and the Vintage doesn't disappoint, either. In fact, its marginally thicker voice is beginning to feel more like home, and with a bigger audience enjoying our diverse repertoire, the PJD stays in its gigbag for the first set until I swap it over at half time.

One thing I notice is the different volume control tapers on the two guitars. On a couple of songs I need to bow in an intro while our singer tells a story: the PJD's taper seems wider with more range; the Vintage doesn't

have such a smooth ramp-up and I struggle to smoothly bow in the chords. Realistically, I'm sure no-one noticed, but I did and that's the point. Like the PJD, the Vintage has a CTS pot, but I didn't specify a specific taper, something I make a note to check out back at the ranch. Then there's the subtly different feel, most notable in higher positions, which bearing in mind I'd set both up pretty similarly – or so I thought – might need a bit of investigation, too.

But, until then, we now have to lug all the gear back down those stairs we came up a few hours earlier. One thing's for sure, I doubt I'll ever go back to gigging (not to mention lugging) heavy guitars. At 2.63kg (5.79lb), the PJD is extremely light and, at 3.09kg (6.8lb), the Vintage doesn't really feel that much different. In such lightweight company, my pretty normal-weighted Chris George Custom slide guitar is feeling weighty at 3.77kg (8.3lb) with its solid alder single-cut body. Hmm, I might have to give the ProShop another call... 

Reviewed 508 **Price** £1,299 (inc gigbag) **On Test Since** Nov 2023 **Studio Session** Practice only **Gigged** Yes **Mods** Not yet www.vintageguitarsrus.com



DARREL HIGHAM

A stolen treasured Gretsch and an unexpected love/hate relationship with White Falcons are all part of this rock 'n' roller's story

As a dyed-in-the-wool Gretsch player, Darrel will buy and play acoustics – such as this Gibson jumbo – when they fit the bill, but he's not precious about them: "They come and go," he says

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

"The first guitar I bought was a Gretsch 6120. It was one of the first batch of the reissue guitars in the late 80s that was brought into the country. I sold my 1957 Ford Consul, which was my pride and joy at the time, and that enabled me to buy the guitar because it was a huge sum of money in 1989. I was 19 years old and it was the guitar of my dreams. It was delivered to where my mum worked at the time and she called me and they'd put it in the conference room on this really big long table. I walked over and I was just knocked out by the beauty of it; it was an astonishing-looking guitar.

"But then I quickly realised that it wasn't it wasn't 100 per cent accurate with regards to how they were in the 50s. It had a lot of things that I wasn't very happy with, but over the years I had it modified so that it looked more like Eddie Cochran's 6120, which was my reason for buying it in the first place. But, unfortunately, by the time I'd got the finishing touches done to it, it was stolen from a theatre in Melton Mowbray in '98.

"I've never forgotten the serial number: it was 898120W-40. It was the 40th made of the reissues – that's what that 40 denotes. It was a very special guitar to me and I used it exclusively for years, really. It arrived in early 1990, very early 1990 – because I had to wait for it to be delivered from America – and I used it on everything for eight years. I didn't even need to own another guitar, really. It was a complete joy and then it was stolen and that was the end of it."

What was the last guitar you bought?

"Very good question! I do tend to buy parlour guitars because they're great to hang on the wall. But the last guitar I bought was probably my Custom Shop Gretsch, which I had made by Stephen Stern. It was made to the dimensions of a White Falcon, so it's got the Falcon headstock, but I wanted it finished like a 6120. It was kind of a one-off, really, and I gave it the number 5170 because that's my date of birth. So I call it the 'Gretsch 5170' and I use that pretty much as my gigging guitar.

"Buy a guitar with the attitude that you're never going to sell it. [Then] you'll make it playable for you"

"I've bought the odd acoustic every now and then, but I don't really consider them to be guitars worth noting because they sort of come and go. And I've bought the odd sort of Strat copy and Telecaster copy just to have around the house, but, again, they come and go."

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

"It was a White Falcon. The White Falcon is a guitar of extreme beauty. I mean, there's just no other way of looking at it. You just see it and you think, 'That is the Cadillac of guitars.' It's just so over the top and I just thought I've got to have one. The first one was given to me, actually, when I first joined Gretsch, but I really couldn't get on with it because it had a very different neck from the 6120. I was so upset. I thought I couldn't





DARREL'S GO-TO RIG

"It's very, very simple. I use a Peavey Delta Blues amp with a 15-inch speaker. I've been using it for probably 20 years now, or maybe even longer than that, I'm not sure. I have the '5170' Falcon, which is my main gigging guitar, and I sometimes bring an Eddie Cochran signature 6120 that Gretsch gave to me a few years back, and I tend to take that guitar when I'm playing abroad; I won't take the '5170'.

"Pedal-wise, I use a Zoom G2 multi-effects pedal. I've been using Zoom for probably 25 years, maybe even longer than that – to be honest with you, simply because they're very inexpensive. The other thing that I use is an Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork, and that is a wonderful tool for me as a singer/guitarist because, with my three-piece, I've got my bass player and a drummer, so I'm playing lead, rhythm and singing. Certain songs I just can't sing in the keys that they're in, but with this pedal, I can drop the tuning down a whole tone."

justify just keeping it and not using it and so I eventually sold it – and then really regretted it because it's such an aesthetically pleasing guitar. And then when things started going with Imelda [May] I bought another one and had the same problem again, and I just thought, 'I should really learn from this!'"

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Well, a guitar's got to be robust. It's got to be able to deal with the rigours of constant gigging. But also it's got to be practical. There's things that you can do to make that happen anyway, once you've bought the guitar, but also I think the very important thing is to buy a guitar with the attitude that you're never going to sell it. Because that way you'll make it a guitar that is playable for you.

"It doesn't matter what happens when, if the time comes, you decide to sell it because hopefully you'll be customising it in such a way that it's a better guitar – because no guitar that comes from the factory is ever truly playable. I mean, it really isn't. You have to make it your guitar. But what you're going to do to that guitar is hopefully going to benefit another player if you do decide to sell it on.

"So I think you should always go in with the attitude that you're going to keep it. But it has to be a guitar that

you would feel comfortable playing in a pub, studio, in a concert hall or whatever."

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?

"It would always be a really good guitar because I would expect the guitar to sound great through whatever amp you're using. But also, playing a guitar is like playing a sport, you know? If you're confident in what you do, you're going to do well. And I think that when it comes to playing the guitar, the tone of the guitar is probably secondary to playability. If you feel that the guitar that you're playing is made for you, whenever you pick it up you just feel that you're playing to the very best of your ability. It inspires you to play brilliantly, or it brings out the greatness in you that you didn't think you had, which is what a guitar should do. Then you're not going to be too worried about the tone of it because you're always going to feel that you've played at your best." [DM]

To keep up with Darrel's touring schedule, check out his website at <https://darrelhigham.com>

Darrel's 'Falcon meets 6120' is a Gretsch Custom Shop model made by Stephen Stern. He gave it the title of '5170' – his birth date



CAN WE HELP?

This issue, we turn The Mod Squad over to a couple of helpful Q&As. As ever, Dave Burrluck does his best to answer your mod-related dilemmas

Q I'm after some advice on modding a 90s PRS. I bought the guitar (a '94 Custom) way back, used it a lot and then, well, I didn't, even though I loved the guitar – and still do! I never wanted to sell it, but reading about and trying out newer PRS guitars, I realise things have changed a lot since the 90s... I was wondering if I could (or should) bring the old model up to more modern specification: pickups, wiring and perhaps replace those old cam-locking tuners? **Stephen, via email**

A It's quite a dilemma, isn't it? You're right about all the changes over the years: a '94 PRS is *very* different from a current 2024 Core model in terms of its finish, hardware and, most obviously, its pickups and their control circuit.

PRS Guitars will celebrate its 40th anniversary next year; your '94, then, was made in year nine of its production history and obviously is now 30 years old. It would have also been made in the company's original Virginia Ave, Annapolis, factory before moving to its current location across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1995.

So, there is some history, but is it 'vintage' – and does that matter? Now, if we were talking about a year nine Fender Stratocaster that was made in 1963, its original condition would be everything. If you were suggesting swapping out pickups, installing a new vibrato and so on, *everyone* would shout, 'No, don't do it!' Even maintenance, a refret for example, can affect value, likewise non-original pots or even a replacement selector switch.

While early production Customs (1985/'86) do seem to be pretty collectible, as the years progress they command less. Obviously, special or limited models will have more value, likewise 10-tops and bird inlays over moons. Then, as ever, there's condition to consider. So a 'player' from the 90s that might show plenty of wear, not least a standard model with a non-10-top, will command less. That said, PRS always made proper guitars – and still does – and, on paper, finding one that appeals and that you consider upgrading it isn't such a daft idea *if* you intend to use it.

So, since the mid-90s, as any long-time PRS fan will tell you, the company has changed pretty much everything in terms of hardware, pickups and parts. But it's not just that: new Core models use a different (nitro) finish, the neck shapes have been standardised – PRS even updated its strap buttons recently and introduced a new tuner button. On it goes!

To be honest, I've been – or rather still am – in the same situation as you. I've owned a Custom 22 since that time and used it for plenty of gigs back in the day, as well as a reference for my reviews. Originally, that one came with Dragon humbuckers, which I swapped for the covered Dragon II

"Since the mid-90s, PRS has changed [plenty] in terms of hardware, pickups and parts"

humbuckers some years back. However, I couldn't quite bring myself to ditch the five-way rotary pickup selector switch. And comparing that Custom 22 with contemporary Core models, like the Modern Eagle V, well, the ol' Custom now sounds like a rather good recording demo and the MEV a fully finished mastered recording – I can't think of any other way to describe it.

So, while your specific guitar might not be exactly vintage or particularly worth a great deal (£1,500-ish depending on condition), it does have some historic appeal and I'd think long and hard about fully upgrading it. Changing the pickups (obviously keep the Dragon I 'buckers, as they do seem to fetch quite a bit these days), however, a more contemporary PRS set might well help you engage with the guitar.

Even if you're not bothered by historic appeal, I'd suggest getting any work done by a pro. For example, an obvious change would be to replace the five-way rotary with a toggle-switch and install a pull-push switched pot for the tone control with PRS's partial split resistors. But swapping the five-way rotary will mean opening out the hole in the top to accept the larger diameter of the three-way toggle switch.

By the early 90s, that earlier rotary-switch circuit had settled on five distinct sounds: bridge humbucker, outer (screw) coils of each humbucker in parallel, inner coils of each humbucker in series, inner coils of each humbucker in parallel, neck humbucker. What then became known as the 'McCarty wiring' is still with us today: the three-way toggle replaced the rotary switch – bridge, both humbuckers and



The original-style cam-lock tuners are perfectly functional but often upgraded



These PRS Dragon II covered humbuckers are one of this '94 Custom 22's upgrades

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

This PRS Custom 22 from 1994 has seen plenty of action. Would you upgrade it?





Rough sanding starts with 120 grit and you move up the grades to ensure a smooth finish



neck, plus a simultaneous coil split of both humbuckers via a pull-switch tone control.

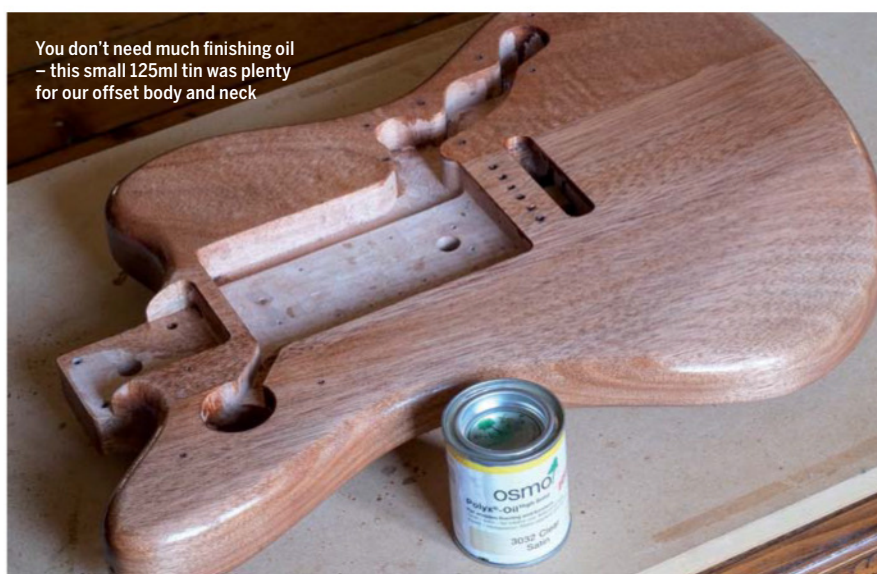
Official spare parts (and, occasionally, pickups) are available from PRS Europe, who can also provide help with the upgrades, while John Mann, who had plenty of design and manufacturing involvement in the original PRS hardware, offers a large resource of PRS-specific parts – and great service to boot. Go to www.johnmannsguitarvault.com. Think carefully, do it properly and do keep all the original parts. Good luck.

Q I'm building a Wilkinson T-style kit and I'm up to the finishing and have a question, which I keep getting different answers to... I'm finishing in Osmo Polyx-Oil, so what grit do I use to sand the body? I keep getting various options, but I know you did an offset build in *Guitarist* with Osmo and it looked great!
Ian, via email

A Hi Ian, looking back to that piece, I sanded through the grades up to 600 grit. Plenty of people will suggest up to 250/300 is fine, but it never feels right to me when you're doing a very thin finish – as opposed to a thicker polyester gloss, for example.

Certainly, that StewMac offset build looks pretty cool and has slightly darkened with age – all good! Like you, I'd never used Osmo Polyx before, so (with a bit of help from PJD's Leigh Dovey) here is a description of the process I took back in issue 493 of *Guitarist*...

I resanded the body up to 600 grit, then gave it a light wipe with a damp cloth. When fully dry, another sand with the same grit. It felt super smooth. Obviously, you need to consider how you're going to apply and then hold a body that's got a wet finish on it to dry for the quoted eight to 10 hours. I cut a couple of pieces of waste 2x1 so they'd fit in the spring cavity, which when laid on



You don't need much finishing oil – this small 125ml tin was plenty for our offset body and neck

“You need to consider how you're going to apply [your finish] and then hold a body to dry for hours”

their edges allowed me to lay the body on its back without touching my baseboard. Effectively, I could apply the finish, with a small brush, back first, lay the body on those ‘rests’ and apply the finish to the top and sides. The danger is in applying too much... and I think I did. It was late November (I daren't put the heating on!) and it took 24 hours to fully dry...

PJD's Leigh Dovey later told me that after applying that first quite wet coat I should wipe off the excess with a clean cloth – if you do that, the drying time will be much quicker. I thought I'd missed a couple of places, but it's more likely that's just how the finish had soaked into the perhaps softer, more absorbent areas. I lightly cut

back with 800 grit, brushed and wiped off any dust, and then applied a lighter second coat, this time with a piece of cloth; I used an old cotton sheet. Second time around it dried much quicker. Finally, I very lightly cut back the dry coat with a fine abrasive pad and applied some hard carnauba wax and hand-buffed with a microfibre cloth.

Update: Having sent the above process back to Ian, he'd made more progress with his T-style kit build and offered me some of his own advice with regards to tinting the neck. Some light stain had worked okay, but he had a better suggestion: “I had the same problem with the neck as you – the maple on the back was very white, which I'm not keen on. So I applied three light coats of Osmo Honey tint, then three of Osmo clear gloss, which gave a perfect colour and feel.”

I'll definitely give that a try. And Ian's response really sums up the springboard nature of The Mod Squad: great ideas, from wherever they come, are always more than welcome, so keep them coming! 

For more information on Osmo products, go to <https://osmouk.com>



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Huw Price's *Nitty*Gritty

Crucial to playing feel, radius applies to strings as well as fretboards

Radius

The earliest guitar-like instruments probably had flat fretboards, but these days pretty much every guitar has a curved 'board. We're not talking about an up-bow or back-bow, but rather the curve that joins both edges of the fretboard with its highest point all along the centre line of the neck.

If you're wondering why a fretboard radius is generally preferred, try forming an imaginary barre chord with your fretting hand and you'll probably see that your index finger is slightly curved. Now grab your guitar and try barring across all six strings using your index finger alone and you may notice that the D and G strings are the ones least likely to play cleanly.

Going back to our 'air' barre chord, place your thumb where the back of the neck would normally be and your index finger will probably straighten instinctively. The thumb's bolstering effect and the fretboard radius conforming to the natural curve of the index finger combine to make chord playing more comfortable and less fatiguing.

Even so, traditional classical guitars have flat fretboards to suit classical playing techniques and low-tension nylon strings. But nylon-strung guitars with slightly radiused fretboards – so-called 'hybrid' models – are now being made for steel-string acoustic and electric guitarists who are interested in crossing over without the need to adapt their playing style too much.

Most of the major manufacturers are associated with specific radiuses. For

instance, Martin has traditionally used 16-inch (406.5mm) radiuses, vintage Danelectros had 14 inches (355.5mm), and Fender was always associated with a measurement of 7.25 inches (184mm). In recent years 9.5-inch (241mm) radius Fender necks have become commonplace, while PRS favours 10 inches (254mm). Gibsons are widely assumed to have 12-inch (305mm) radius 'boards, but most of the electric guitars they built prior to the mid-60s measure closer to 9.5 inches or 10 inches.

During the halcyon days of 80s shredding, players began demanding flatter radiuses and companies such as Charvel, Jackson and Ibanez were offering 12-inch, 16-inch or even 20-inch (508mm) options. Raw speed and slinky bends were the priority and a flatter 'board can facilitate that, for reasons that will soon become clear.

String Radius

Radius considerations apply to strings as well as fretboards. If the fretboard is completely level, then the string height above the 'board can remain constant all the way along its length. And this applies regardless of whether the strings run parallel to one another or splay out between the nut and bridge.

Let's say the nut slots give the strings a 7.25-inch radius over a 7.25-inch radius 'board. With a 7.25-inch string radius at the bridge, a consistent string height above the 'board can only be achieved when the

strings run parallel to one another. But on most guitars, the strings spread out between the nut and the bridge and the fretboard widens accordingly. As the distance from the nut increases, so does the gap between the 'board and the outer string in particular, which results in higher action.

If the action is lowered to compensate, this means that, when bent, the top two strings can come into contact with higher frets, which causes 'choking' or 'fretting out'. It happens because the saddle height remains fixed, but the bent strings no longer angle upwards towards the saddle and instead level off or even angle downwards. This is why a fretboard with a flatter radius makes it easier to enjoy a low action with buzz-free bends.

Setting up guitars is a complex topic that's way beyond the scope of this article, but if you're interested in trying it yourself, a set of gauges can help. Full sets are available on well-known auction sites for under £10. If you're unsure of the 'board radius, you can quickly determine what it is, but remember to take measurements at both ends for reasons we'll explain later.

A fretboard with a flatter radius makes it easier to enjoy a low action with buzz-free bends

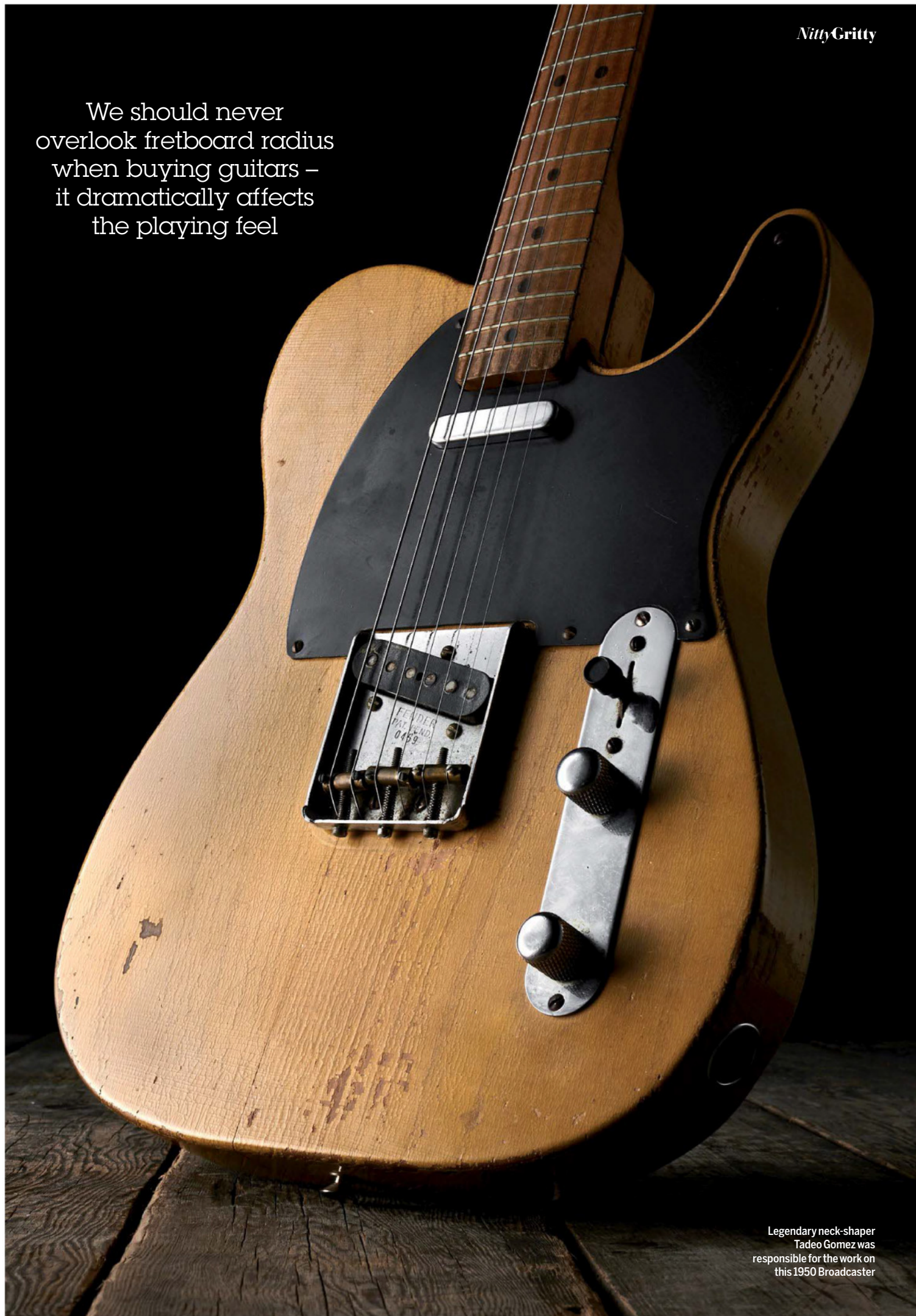
Gauges can also be used for setting saddle height to achieve your preferred string radius at the bridge. Some like to match the bridge and 'board radiuses, but others prefer a larger bridge radius, with maybe 9.5 inches for a 7.25-inch fretboard or 12 inches for a 9.5-inch 'board. Start by lowering the action of the top E string until you can bend it maybe a tone and a half without choking. Similarly, set the low E string height until you can hit it hard with no fretbuzz, or a degree of buzz that you can live with.

When placed across the E strings, gauges provide an accurate visual reference. We find it best to drop the saddle height of all four inside strings and then raise them until the strings just touch the gauge. So long as you don't adjust the E saddles, then



Martin's guitars are most associated with a 16-inch fretboard radius

We should never
overlook fretboard radius
when buying guitars –
it dramatically affects
the playing feel



Legendary neck-shaper
Tadeo Gomez was
responsible for the work on
this 1950 Broadcaster

it's quick and easy to try various bridge radiuses to determine which best suits your guitar and playing style. Clearly, this can only be done with bridges that have individually adjustable saddles. With tune-o-matic, wraptail and Gretsch-style bar bridges, the radius is always built in, so there's limited scope for fine tuning. This is also something worth bearing in mind if you're considering a bridge upgrade because its radius will need to be compatible with your fretboard.

When a bridge radius is too flat relative to the 'board, and when you set your preferred action for the outer strings, the middle strings may become too low and buzzy. The opposite may occur if the bridge is too curved because the middle strings will feel unnaturally high off the 'board. But some guitars, such as vintage Gretsches, have stock bridges that are mismatched and fitting an aftermarket bridge with a better radius match can improve playability as well as tone.

Compound Interests

Most fretboards retain a consistent radius along the entire length, but some don't. With many guitarists favouring a tighter curve for chordwork but a flatter radius for slinky string bending, you may wonder if you can have the best of both worlds. The answer is yes and the common term for these hybrid fretboards is 'compound radius'.

One way to visualise this is to consider a straight pipe. If you took an even slice off it lengthways, you'd have a constant radius all the way along. Now do the same to a cone and the result will be a radius that is tight at the narrow end but gradually becomes flatter as the cone widens. In essence, a compound radius fretboard is like a section of a cone and this minimises the gap increase between the 'board and the strings as they splay outwards over the upper frets.

Various manufacturers have claimed credit for 'inventing' the compound radius fretboard, but it's possible that some well-used guitars ended up with compound radius 'boards by accident. Some luthiers routinely sand fretboards as part of the refretting process, and years ago it was common practice to sand out divots – especially with rosewood and maple 'boards. Without radiused sanding blocks, this would have been done by eye, meaning areas with heavy wear may have ended up somewhat flatter, not least after several refrets. This is certainly what Stevie Ray Vaughan's tech René Martinez says about his 'Number One' Strat. Legendary luthier Dan Erlewine took measurements in 1989 and reported that the radius graduated towards somewhere between 9.5 and 10 inches.

No doubt techs and guitarists noticed that some guitars played a little easier after a refret – and many figured out the reason.

By the 1980s, compound radius necks were all the rage, particularly for 'SuperStrat' shredding, but they remain popular with a wide range of players.

Bender's Fret Dress

Having a compound radius is certainly appealing, but aggressively sanding the fretboards of vintage or high-end vintage replica guitars isn't advisable. This is especially true of maple- and veneer-'board necks. But there is another option.

Installing taller fretwire makes it possible to have a compound radius feel without damaging the fretboard. Called the 'string bender's fret dress', it involves filing the frets to achieve the desired radiuses, rather than sanding wood. It's a relatively straightforward procedure and any competent tech should be able to do this for you if you're struggling with higher action simply to prevent string choke out.

It works the other way around, too, as this writer recently discovered when asked to refret a mid-50s Fender Telecaster. The

When a bridge radius is too flat relative to the 'board, the middle strings may become too low and buzzy



Bar bridges, such as this Gretsch unit, mean that string height cannot be fine-tuned

all-original Tadeo Gomez neck had never felt quite right to the owner, and radius gauges quickly revealed that the fretboard radius started out at 7.24 inches but ended up closer to six inches above the 14th fret. In other words, it had a reverse compound. The 'board had never been sanded or refinished, so we'd have to assume that Tadeo was having an off day or someone else had radiused the 'board while Tadeo carved one of his typically great profiles. The only non-invasive solution in this scenario was to install tall wire and then dress the frets to achieve a consistent 7.25-inch radius.

Rounding Up

There are many things to consider when we're buying guitars, but we should never overlook fretboard radius. It dramatically affects the playing feel of a guitar, and a tight radius will limit how low the action can be set. Conversely, a flatter radius may become uncomfortable if your playing is mostly chordal, rather than lead-based. And unlike pickups, hardware and even a guitar's finish, modifying a fretboard radius may prove expensive and detrimental to the guitar's value. 

www.huwpriceguitar.com

Compound radius 'boards became fashionable during the 80s, and remain popular among a wide variety of players today

A compound radius fretboard minimises the gap increase between the 'board and the strings as they splay outwards





David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

The names Nick Lucas and Roy Smeck endure thanks to two early signature models

1936 & 1942 Gibson Signatures

I believe the Nick Lucas guitar was the first artist-endorsed model Gibson made. It was introduced in 1927 and they had a photograph of his face on the inside label. These days, the Nick Lucas model is more closely associated with Bob Dylan, who played a refinished one with a Guild bridge between 1963 and 1966.

“Over the course of the production run Gibson never quite settled on the specs. The first body shape is different and resembles the L-1 and L-3. The body shape changed in 1929, by which time the Nick Lucas had also acquired an inlaid headstock logo and a newly designed bridge.

“Although they started out with mahogany back and sides, Gibson went on to use rosewood and occasionally koa before settling on maple in 1934. Periodically, Gibson cancelled the Nick Lucas and then reinstated it, so it bounced in and out of the catalogue several times through the 1930s and early 1940s.

“The Nick Lucas we’re looking at here is from 1936 and the maple is quite curly. It has a *fleur-de-lis* on the headstock and beautifully pointed inlays. One of our high-profile clients plays a lot of vintage flat-top guitars and he’s a proponent of the maple-backed Nick Lucas model. He plays them on stage and in the studio, and they record very well. Gibson’s small-bodied guitars serve a big purpose in any genre from country to fingerstyle and strumming, and they seem to fit into any mould.

“For the body, Gibson combined a dreadnought depth with a 000 size and shape. They started out around four and a half inches and gradually became deeper, with some later examples measuring five inches or more. They produce a very big sound as a result. This example has a 14th-fret body join, but the earlier ones had a 12th-fret join and for a period around 1930 Gibson favoured a 13th-fret join.

“They also started fitting a trapeze tailpiece with a movable bridge, but this configuration put excessive downward pressure on the top. Many examples from this period have had pin bridges retrofitted, and Dylan’s 13-fret rosewood Nick Lucas was probably one of them.

“Sunburst was the standard finish, but I have owned a black one and apparently black was Nick Lucas’s favourite finish. It was probably a catalogue option and Gibson made a lot of black guitars during this time period.

“Introduced in 1934, the Roy Smeck Stage Deluxe has a J-35 slope-shouldered dreadnought body combined with a giant neck and a 12th-fret join. The vast majority were intended for lap-style Hawaiian playing, so they were built with square necks and are completely unusable for regular playing. The nuts are super wide and measure two and a quarter inches. There was also a Roy Smeck Radio Grande model with rosewood back and sides.



The 1936 Nick Lucas signature (top) was made for the popular jazz guitarist, while this 1942 Stage Deluxe bore the name of Roy Smeck also known as ‘the wizard of the strings’

“The Roy Smeck models were Gibson’s attempt to cash in on the Hawaiian music craze that swept America, but by the late 1930s it was all over and nobody wanted guitars with square necks. This 1942 Stage Deluxe is unusual because it has a round neck that’s original to the guitar. Apparently, some of these guitars left Gibson with rounded necks towards the end of the production run, shortly before the model was discontinued in 1943.

“Unless you’re specifically into playing Hawaiian music, you’re not going to be able

“Gibson’s small-bodied guitars serve a big purpose in any genre from country to fingerstyle... they seem to fit into any mould”

to use such a great guitar in modern music. Many Roy Smecks have had their necks reprofiled, reset or even replaced to make them usable, otherwise they’d wind up abandoned in attics or even the trash can. If this guitar had been re-necked, they would have optimised the neck angle at the same time. Instead, it still has a period-correct neck angle that isn’t exactly ideal. The bridge saddle is a little low, but it plays fine and it’s in exceptional condition.

“The accoutrements are super simple, with single-layer bindings and a three layer rosette. It has its original tiger flame pickguard, open gear three-on-a-tree plastic button tuners, regular dot inlays and mahogany back and sides. If you looked at it from the back you’d probably assume it was a 12-fret J-45.

“The Roy Smeck does sound a lot like a J-45, but the Nick Lucas has a very individual character. It’s unmistakably a Gibson sound, but it’s deeper and bassier than most, especially with the maple body. These signature models represent the beginning of a pattern that every guitar manufacturer subsequently adopted and continues to this day.” [HP]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com/
info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563



Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

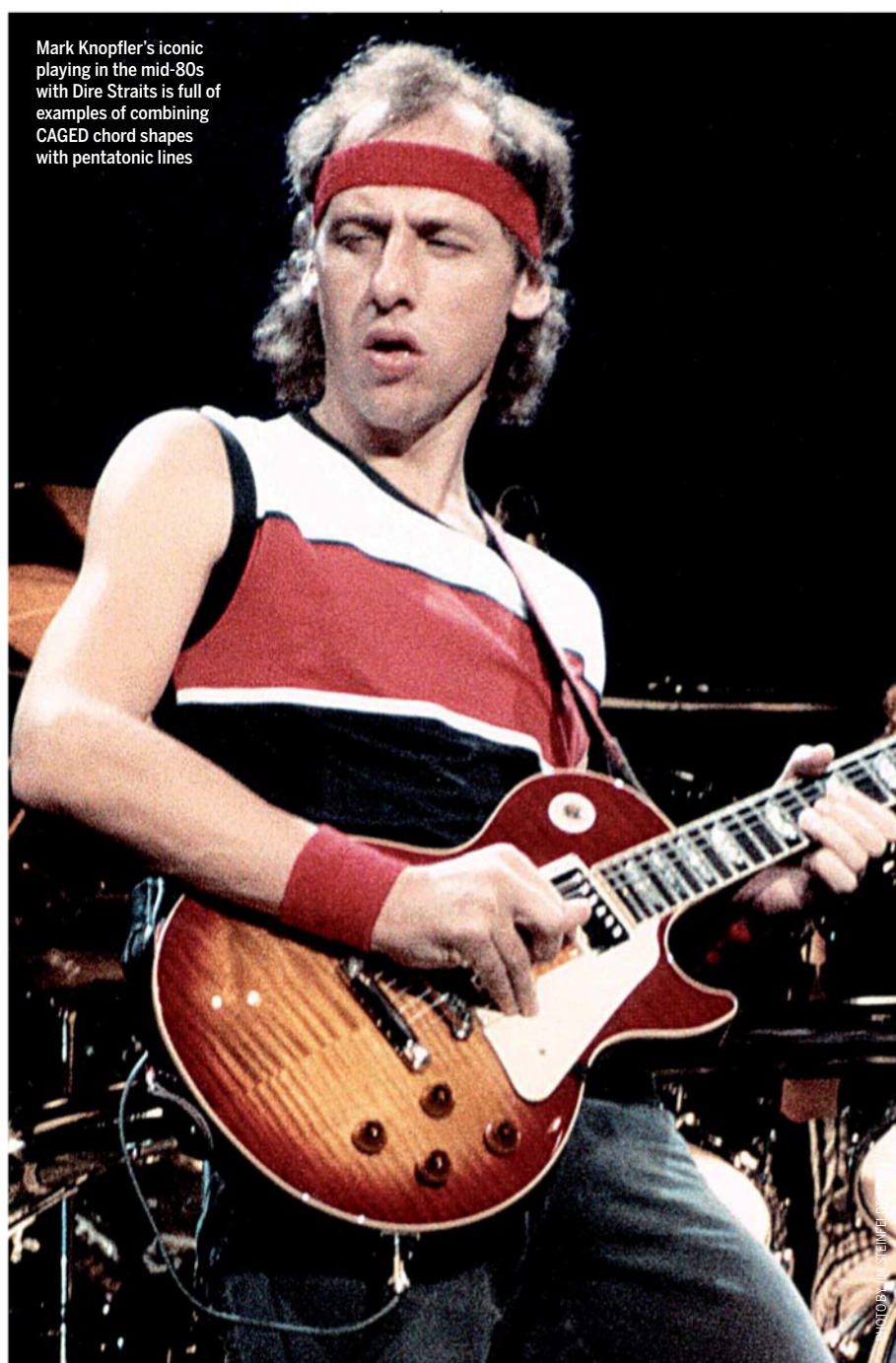


CAGED: A Practical Guide

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Fender '62 Reissue Stratocaster, Boss SD-1 (modded) & Vox AC15 C1

Difficulty ★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

Mark Knopfler's iconic playing in the mid-80s with Dire Straits is full of examples of combining CAGED chord shapes with pentatonic lines



THE CAGED CHORD SHAPES can be a great way of learning the geography of the fretboard. The shapes, both major and minor, occur in every position and key just like the pentatonic boxes. In fact, they form part of these very same patterns but in a far less linear 'two-notes-per-string' way. It's easy to fall into the trap of regarding the CAGED shapes purely as chords. After all, where would we be without our E- and A-shape barre chords?

But just as some pentatonic shapes fall more easily under the fingers, some chord shapes are easier to shift around than others. Once you move out of open position, the C and G shapes can become very impractical, with D running close behind! Generally, us guitarists accept that playing these as full chords isn't a great (or widely used) option. You wouldn't try to play every note in a scale simultaneously, so why not apply this attitude to the CAGED chord shapes and strip the C, G and D chords down to single notes, with the option to expand to intervals or triads? Things then become much more manageable, opening up possibilities for both chord inversions and soloing patterns. You may find it easiest to see the patterns by placing your fingers on the full chord for reference at first, but eventually this becomes unnecessary.

In the examples, I've attempted to demonstrate a few practical ways of using the CAGED shapes as single-note patterns in combination with the pentatonic boxes. It's all about getting a different perspective on note groupings and breaking out of habits that can limit us. Finally, note that though I've occasionally quoted whole arpeggios in the examples, the CAGED approach is often more subtle in everyday use. Enjoy these ideas and see you next time! **G**



Richard Barrett's album, **Colours** (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

Example 1

THIS EXAMPLE IS UNDENIABLY SHAPE 5 E MAJOR PENTATONIC, but try looking at it from the perspective of a G chord shape. If you barre at the 9th fret (treating the barre as the nut) and add the G shape, you will get an E major – and see different possibilities. For example, in bar 3 I've deviated from the pentatonic pattern because I'm thinking about how I might embellish a G chord, rather than playing notes from a scale.

Example 1 is a musical score in 4/4 time, key of E major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked **♩ = 101 Swung**. The score is divided into two systems, each with a guitar staff and a fretboard diagram.

System 1:

- Staff 1:** Treble clef. Bar 1: Rest. Bar 2: Quarter note G# (9th fret), eighth notes A (11th fret) and G# (9th fret), quarter note A (11th fret). Bar 3: Quarter note A (11th fret), eighth notes B (12th fret) and A (11th fret), quarter note B (12th fret). Bar 4: Quarter note B (12th fret), eighth notes C# (13th fret) and B (12th fret), quarter note C# (13th fret).
- Staff 2:** Bass clef. Bar 1: Rest. Bar 2: Quarter note G (9th fret), eighth notes A (11th fret) and G (9th fret), quarter note A (11th fret). Bar 3: Quarter note A (11th fret), eighth notes B (12th fret) and A (11th fret), quarter note B (12th fret). Bar 4: Quarter note B (12th fret), eighth notes C# (13th fret) and B (12th fret), quarter note C# (13th fret).
- Fretboard Diagram:** Shows the fretboard from the 9th fret to the 13th fret. The notes are: 9th fret (G, A), 10th fret (A, B), 11th fret (B, C#), 12th fret (C#, D), 13th fret (D, E).

System 2:

- Staff 1:** Treble clef. Bar 5: Quarter note D (12th fret), eighth notes E (13th fret) and D (12th fret), quarter note E (13th fret). Bar 6: Quarter note E (13th fret), eighth notes F# (14th fret) and E (13th fret), quarter note F# (14th fret). Bar 7: Quarter note F# (14th fret), eighth notes G# (15th fret) and F# (14th fret), quarter note G# (15th fret). Bar 8: Quarter note G# (15th fret), eighth notes A (16th fret) and G# (15th fret), quarter note A (16th fret).
- Staff 2:** Bass clef. Bar 5: Quarter note D (12th fret), eighth notes E (13th fret) and D (12th fret), quarter note E (13th fret). Bar 6: Quarter note E (13th fret), eighth notes F# (14th fret) and E (13th fret), quarter note F# (14th fret). Bar 7: Quarter note F# (14th fret), eighth notes G# (15th fret) and F# (14th fret), quarter note G# (15th fret). Bar 8: Quarter note G# (15th fret), eighth notes A (16th fret) and G# (15th fret), quarter note A (16th fret).
- Fretboard Diagram:** Shows the fretboard from the 12th fret to the 16th fret. The notes are: 12th fret (D, E), 13th fret (E, F#), 14th fret (F#, G#), 15th fret (G#, A), 16th fret (A, B).

Example 2

I'VE CHOSEN THE D SHAPE IN THE KEY OF A MAJOR here. First, I'm sliding up to those intervals that actually form part of the D shape, then playing around adding a sus4 and linking this with shapes 2 and 3 of the A major pentatonic. To reinforce what I'm trying to demonstrate here, I've returned to the D-shape A major chord. You'd probably want to do this more subtly in 'real life', but this is good stuff to know about.

Example 2 is a musical score in 4/4 time, key of A major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked **♩ = 101 Swung**. The score is divided into two systems, each with a guitar staff and a fretboard diagram.

System 1:

- Staff 1:** Treble clef. Bar 1: Rest. Bar 2: Quarter note D (7th fret), eighth notes E (9th fret) and D (7th fret), quarter note E (9th fret). Bar 3: Quarter note E (9th fret), eighth notes F# (10th fret) and E (9th fret), quarter note F# (10th fret). Bar 4: Quarter note F# (10th fret), eighth notes G# (11th fret) and F# (10th fret), quarter note G# (11th fret).
- Staff 2:** Bass clef. Bar 1: Rest. Bar 2: Quarter note D (7th fret), eighth notes E (9th fret) and D (7th fret), quarter note E (9th fret). Bar 3: Quarter note E (9th fret), eighth notes F# (10th fret) and E (9th fret), quarter note F# (10th fret). Bar 4: Quarter note F# (10th fret), eighth notes G# (11th fret) and F# (10th fret), quarter note G# (11th fret).
- Fretboard Diagram:** Shows the fretboard from the 7th fret to the 11th fret. The notes are: 7th fret (D, E), 8th fret (E, F#), 9th fret (F#, G#), 10th fret (G#, A), 11th fret (A, B).

System 2:

- Staff 1:** Treble clef. Bar 5: Quarter note A (12th fret), eighth notes B (13th fret) and A (12th fret), quarter note B (13th fret). Bar 6: Quarter note B (13th fret), eighth notes C# (14th fret) and B (13th fret), quarter note C# (14th fret). Bar 7: Quarter note C# (14th fret), eighth notes D (15th fret) and C# (14th fret), quarter note D (15th fret). Bar 8: Quarter note D (15th fret), eighth notes E (16th fret) and D (15th fret), quarter note E (16th fret).
- Staff 2:** Bass clef. Bar 5: Quarter note A (12th fret), eighth notes B (13th fret) and A (12th fret), quarter note B (13th fret). Bar 6: Quarter note B (13th fret), eighth notes C# (14th fret) and B (13th fret), quarter note C# (14th fret). Bar 7: Quarter note C# (14th fret), eighth notes D (15th fret) and C# (14th fret), quarter note D (15th fret). Bar 8: Quarter note D (15th fret), eighth notes E (16th fret) and D (15th fret), quarter note E (16th fret).
- Fretboard Diagram:** Shows the fretboard from the 12th fret to the 16th fret. The notes are: 12th fret (A, B), 13th fret (B, C#), 14th fret (C#, D), 15th fret (D, E), 16th fret (E, F#).

Example 3

USING THE C SHAPE, I'm doing little more than quoting B major and C major arpeggios here, reflecting the changing chords in the backing. If you look closely at these arpeggio/chord shapes and compare them to shape 3 of the major pentatonic scale, you'll see the shared notes. It's unlikely we'd come up with note groupings like this if we were viewing things from a pentatonic or even three-note-per-string perspective. We revert more to straight pentatonic to finish and give a more realistic context.

8va - B7 C7 B7

12 13 11 12 11 12 11 14 11 14 15 12 13 12 14 15 14 13 11 12 11

(8va) C7 B7

BU BD BU BU BD BU BD PB 14

14-(16) (14)(16) 14 (16) (14) 12 14 12 15-(17) (15) 12 14 (16)

Example 4

STARTING WITH AN E MAJOR TRIAD up at the 12th fret, things get a bit more pentatonic as this descends, only to quote an E chord shape directly as we ascend again. To finish, I'm getting back into a shape 5 E major pentatonic to demonstrate how these live in the same territory and how easy it is to switch from one to the other. It's not important to always be conscious of the shapes, as long as the ideas keep coming!

Example 5

THIS STARTS BY QUOTING FROM THE A SHAPE that occurs at the intersection of shapes 4 and 5 of the E major pentatonic. Once again, I'm being particularly blatant about including the whole shape/triad in these examples, so don't feel you need to do the same. This is about coming up with non-linear phrases, rather than quoting whole chords. The intervals that slide down to the final lick are certainly chord fragments, too, but I'm seeing this more as a traditional blues lick.

Hear It Here

MARK KNOPFLER

PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS



Mark is a master at combining the CAGED chord shapes with pentatonic lines as part of a rhythmic accompaniment or a melodic solo. On this *Best Of...* compilation, check out how he moves the triads around in *Sultans Of Swing* to create a melodic hook as well as a multitude of solo ideas. *Tunnel Of Love* takes a similar approach, using doublestops, chord fragments and melodic lines. Finally, check the main riff of *Money For Nothing* using a stripped-down D shape moved up to the key of G.

ROBBEN FORD

HANDFUL OF BLUES



Robben manages to combine pentatonic licks with chord tones, chromatic linking notes and triads in a natural, effortless-sounding way. Check out *Rugged Road*, *When I Leave Here* (where the licks that run through the whole tune are a nice example of using chord fragments) and *Top Of The Hill* with its blistering solo. You generally won't hear arpeggios or chord shapes stated in an obvious way, but this is where these non-pentatonic ideas are coming from.

ERIC JOHNSON

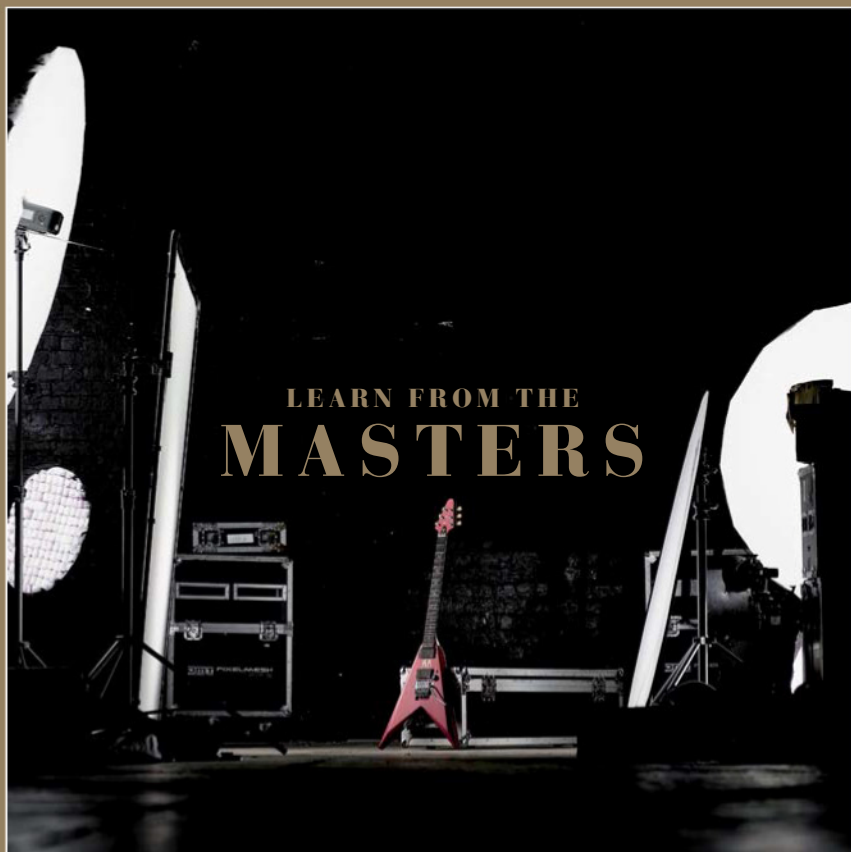
VENUS ISLE



Though Eric has taken the pentatonic scale to his own unique place, he has clearly absorbed every note ever played by Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck. Check out his solos on the title track, plus *All About You* and *Camel's Night Out* to hear a combination of rapid-fire pentatonics, arpeggiated chords, superimposed triads and his unusual chord inversions with that super-clean Strat tone. This is advanced stuff, but there are lots of accessible ideas to call on here.

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