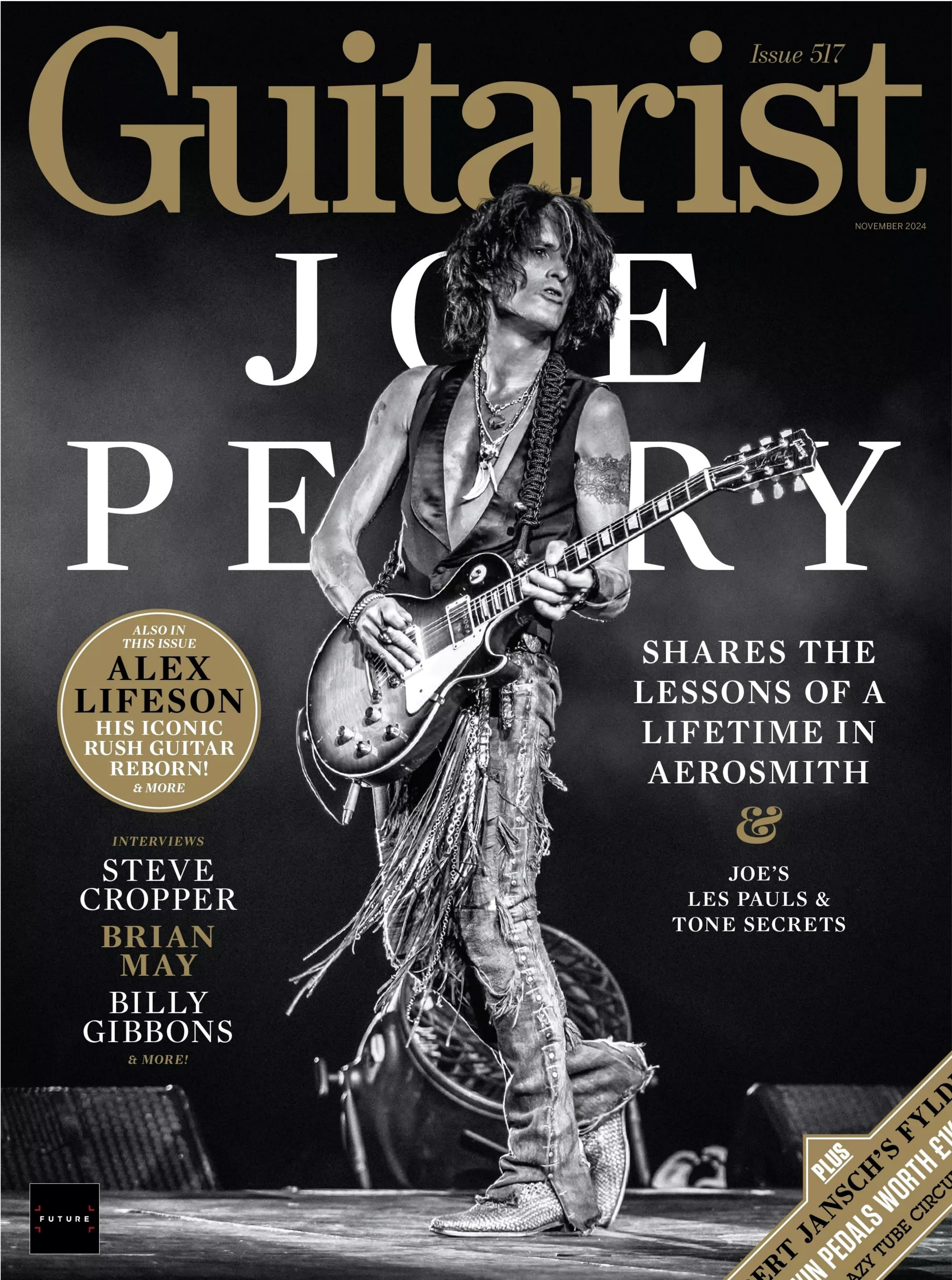




Guitarist

Issue 517

NOVEMBER 2024

JOE PERRY

ALSO IN
THIS ISSUE
ALEX LIFESON
HIS ICONIC
RUSH GUITAR
REBORN!
& MORE

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LIFETIME IN
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Live & Learn



This month's cover feature with Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry (see page 60) and our look back on Tull's classic 1971 album, *Aqualung*, with guitarist Martin Barre (see page 52) speak to the value of both experience... and inexperience. Martin Barre in particular is wise, I think, to recognise the value of naivety and the 'mistakes' you make when finding your feet creatively. Who these days would go into the studio still teaching the bass player the basics of playing the instrument? And yet the fact that Tull trusted each other to explore, grow and make mistakes within the band enabled them to craft a totally unique sound – and one of the great albums of the prog-rock canon was the result. More hits followed.

Martin also notes that permitting yourself to find your way by instinct in the beginning sharpens those instincts in the process, meaning that youth, open-mindedness and willingness to try things slowly start to crystallise into skill, poise and confidence – but also an awareness that trying to control things too much can choke off some of the most magical elements of the creative process. The record labels used to let bands have at least three albums to discover all this, as Scott Gorham noted back in issue 513. I wonder if they are anything like so willing to nurture bands along that path today?

Joe Perry makes a connected point in his interview, where he explains how he deliberately chose a kind of 'ugly' guitar tone for the solo to *Janie's Got A Gun* – using a guitar that wouldn't normally be top of anyone's list for that kind of task. Most of us would probably have reached for a Les Paul and a nice overdrive and called it good. But Joe understood something that lesser players might not: the song is trying to express a specific emotion. The only correct tool to use in that instance is one that helps get that emotion across – not the thing you're 'supposed' to use. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Plane Jane

Furch's ingenious Little Jane acoustic is a first for us – a travel acoustic that doesn't sacrifice anything tonally to be carry-on capable **p14**



Wonderful Watkins

Huw Price reveals why the venerable Watkins Westminster MK II will give vintage Marshalls a serious run for their money **p120**



Bert & Gordon

Acoustic master Gordon Giltrap had a treat for us this month when he brought in Bert Jansch's old Fylde acoustic to look at on **p74**



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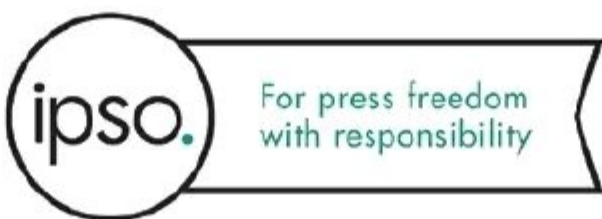
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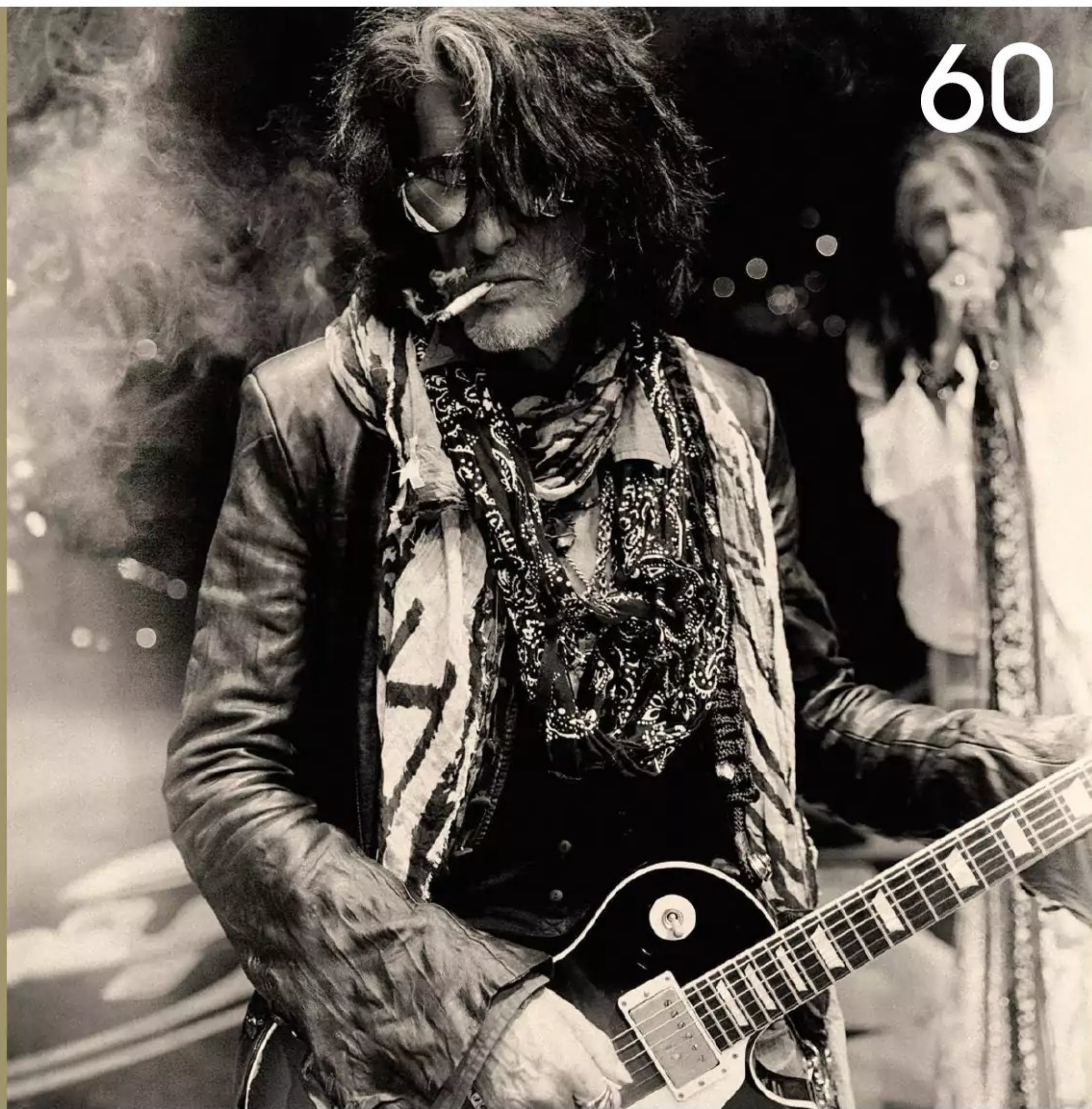


PHOTO BY ZACK WHITFORD

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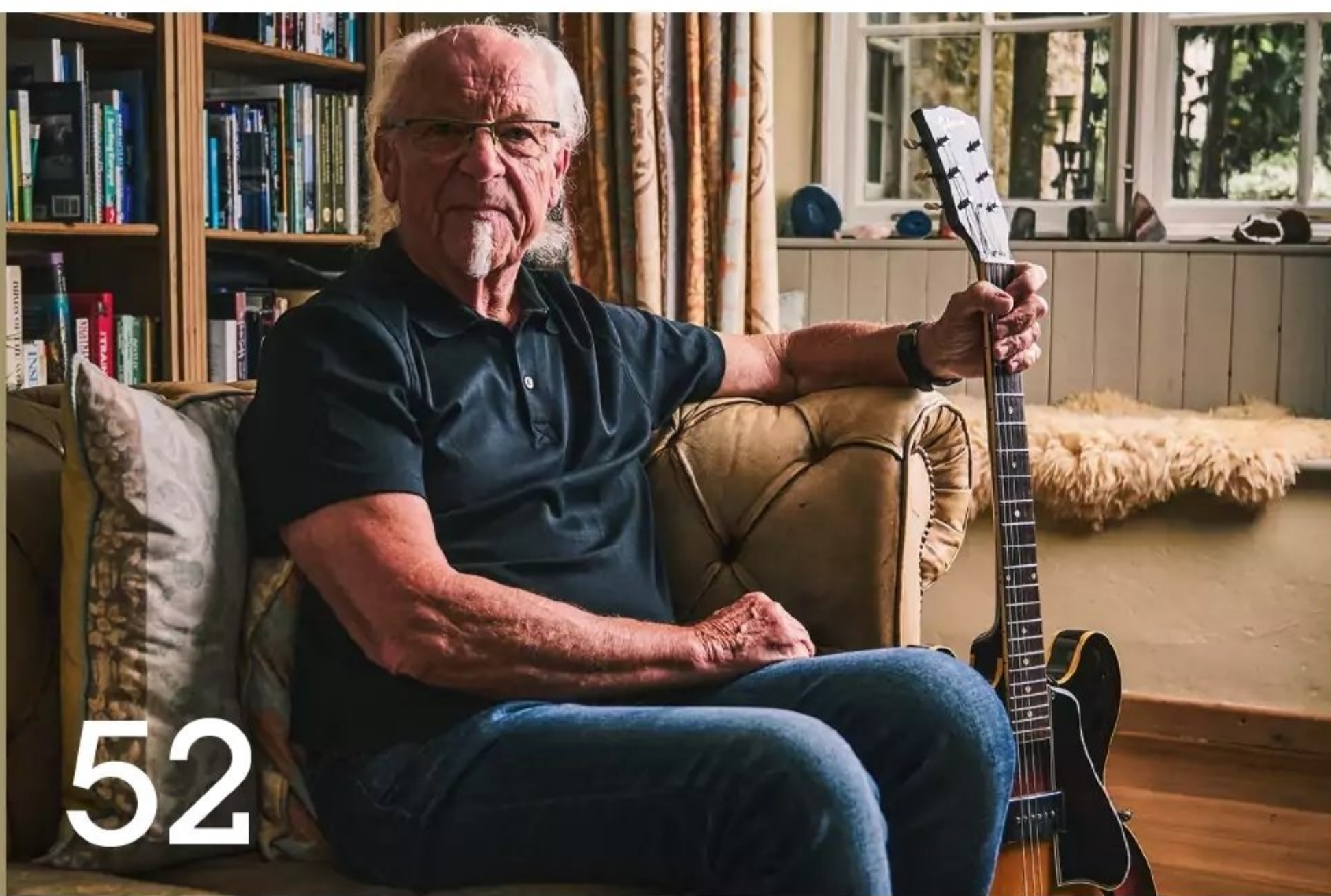


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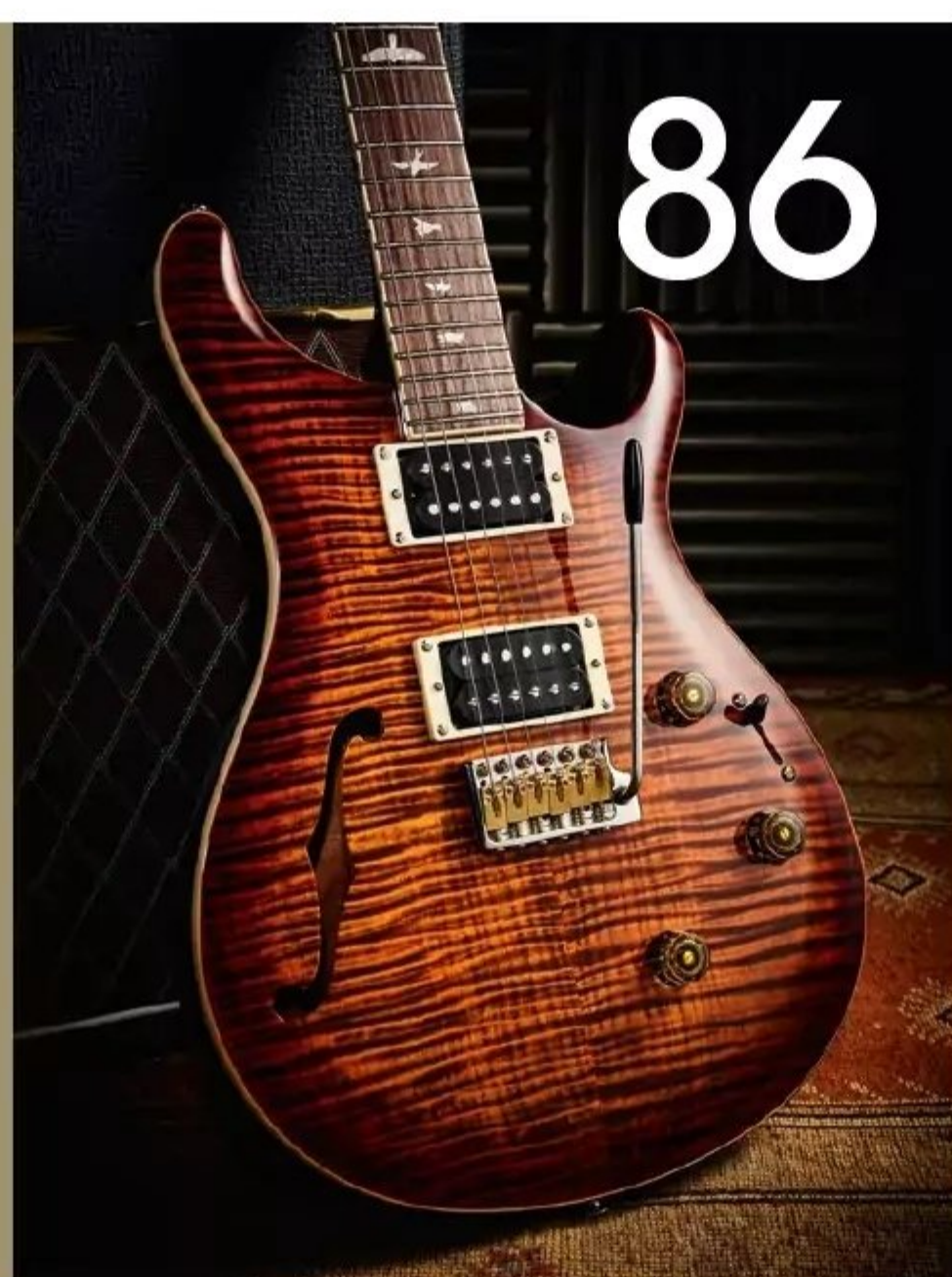


PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

VIDEO & AUDIO

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FIRST PLAY



DANIELS GRAVITAS
£3,999

WHAT IS IT? UK-made, vintage-influenced through-neck solidbody with original offset shape and Mojo pickups

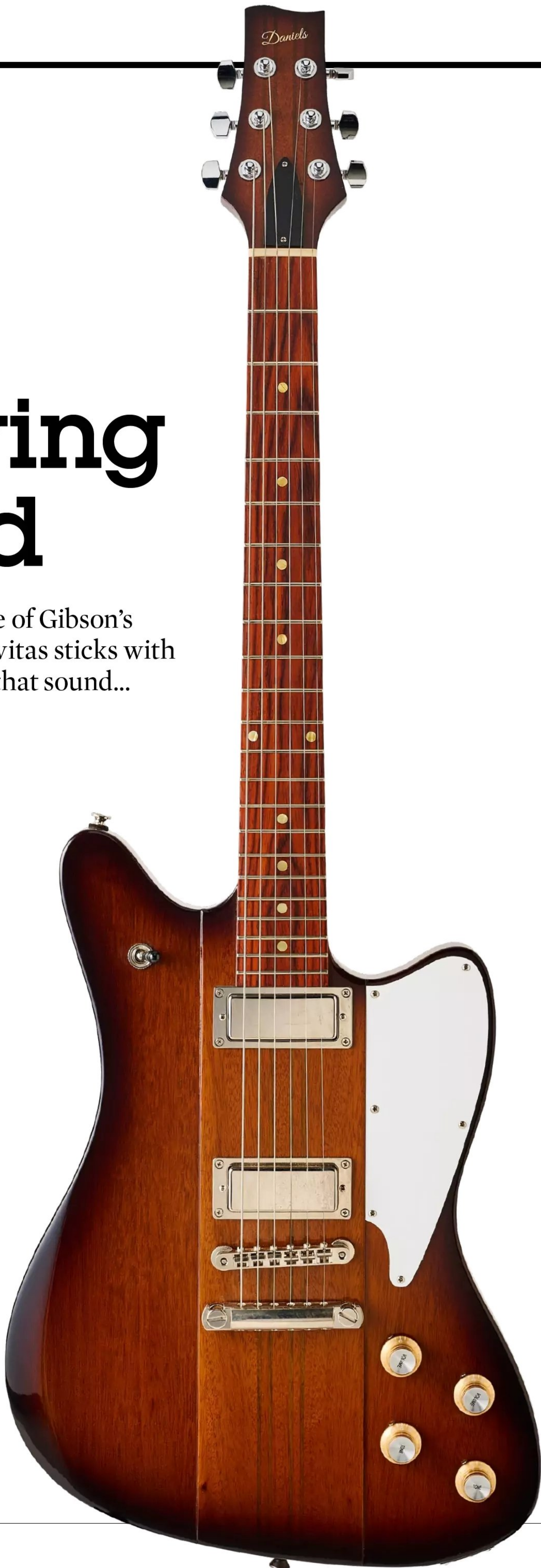
Redrawing The 'Bird

A fascinating reimagining of one of Gibson's more out-there designs, the Gravitas sticks with vintage vibe and mojo. Oh, and that sound...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

A guitar design that was championed by a mere handful of players – Johnny Winter and Mike Campbell to name but two – the Gibson Firebird is a bona fide classic that far fewer of us own compared with the good ol' Les Paul. Why? Because it's huge! Great for big stages, but for most of today's musicians, well, good luck. It's exactly the experience of Darren Horton, the solo Brit-builder behind Daniels Guitars: "I made a Firebird I[-inspired model] for someone last year. I loved the sound of it: it blew me away. But then it's about 10ft long and I just thought, no."

Darren dropped off his latest guitar with us in a rather old-looking tweed case, and you can't help but do a double take when you open it. Is this an old Gibson that we've never seen before? Of course not, but while the offset shape – which loosely emulates a downsized Jazzmaster but with a more defined upper horn – is very different from either the original 'reverse' or the later mid-60s 'non-reverse' Firebird outlines. And along with its Daniels logo'd back-angled and three-a-side headstock, the actual construction, pickups and controls are an obvious homage to that first-series Firebird of old. "It's a slightly bigger offset than my Pugilist that you featured before [The Wishlist, issue 503] as I wanted to be







1. Alongside the slightly hotter bridge pickup, the hardware is by Faber, one of the top choices for high-quality but vintage style

2. There might be plenty of vintage-informed detail in this build, but the Daniels headstock is more contemporary. The Hipshot tuners are rear-locking, and the unbleached bone nut is perfectly cut

able to load it with different vibratos and bigger pickups. I approached the design as purely a bit of fun.”

Construction mirrors the Firebird’s nine-piece mahogany/walnut neck-through laminate, introduced by Gibson in 1963. It forms the centre of the body, around 105mm wide, to which the pickups bridge and tailpiece are mounted and is a couple of millimetres thicker than the 36mm body ‘wings’, plus there’s a subtle ribcage contour on the back of the bass side and equally subtle forearm chamfer on the

front. The ‘old Gibson’ illusion is certainly enhanced by the nitrocellulose darkburst finish that somehow manages to look a little used and older than it actually is.

The neck, of course, is made from that same laminate, and the heel area is beautifully sculptured, while the cocobolo fingerboard – peppered with old-looking mother-of-pearl dots – is a vivid deep, dark red/brown that ties in perfectly with the finish itself.

As ever, the Faber hardware is superb. The tune-o-matic is very low to the body, while the tuners are Hipshot’s Grip-Lock style; once we’d tuned to pitch we barely touched them. It’s a very stable guitar.

Feel & Sounds

While Darren is becoming known for his lightweight builds, typically using obeche and Spanish cedar, the mahogany here – probably 100 years old, reckons Darren, from a reclaimed Liverpool bar-top – contributes to a weight of 3.58kg (7.88lb) that’s far from heavy. The guitar sits perfectly on your lap and feels exceptional on a strap: a Firebird, this isn’t! The neck shape is equally good, boasting Darren’s preferred ‘soft V’ with nicely relaxed shoulders and a depth of just over 22mm

3. Although technically the scale length here is 628.65mm (24.75 inches), the fret positions are calculated using the archaic rule of 18 still used by Gibson in Nashville today – not the contemporary rule of 17.817. That’s why if you measure from the nut to the 12th fret and times it by two, the actual scale length measures closer to 624mm (24.57 inches)

4. Daniels exclusively uses UK-made Mojo pickups and its Firebird humbucker is the obvious choice here. “[They’re] wound with vintage-correct 42 AWG plain enamel wire,” says Marc Ransley, “and use Alnico V magnets, along with reflector plates over and under the coils, just like the old ones.” Our neck pickup has a DCR of 6.22kohms; at the bridge it’s 6.54k

5. The build might be vintage informed, but it’s comfort-led using a rear ribcage cutaway and this sleek sculpted heel





The guitar is so full of subtlety when you start using the controls, especially at the bridge

at the 1st fret that fills out to a shade under 25mm by the 12th, which sounds bigger than it feels. There's some light edge rolling to the fingerboard, the fretwire has plenty of height but is relatively narrow, and there's a good airiness to the setup and string height – you encounter a bit of fight when you want to dig in.

Mojo's Firebird pickups are an obvious choice here and maker Marc Ransley states that "the Firebirds have vertical bar magnets within the coil that act as the polepieces. In a sense, this is more like a Fender pickup and it adds brightness and clarity." That's pretty much what we hear – a rather evocative hybrid that seems to sit between our reference Telecaster and Les Paul Classic with its Burstbucker 1 and 2 combo. There's a little more fullness compared with the former, and a little more 'single coil' compared with the latter.



Like the original Gibson Firebird III and V, we get individual pickup volume and tones wired vintage style using CTS 500k pots and quite large Russian PIO .022µF capacitors

A humbucker that sounds like a good single coil? Well, that's what we hear. There's definitely single-coil-like clarity and bite at the bridge, with a neck pickup that cleans up the mud of a humbucker but retains some Fender-y edge. You have to hear these sounds, not least the mix that has a very musical depth to the bouncy,

This compact take on the ol' 'Bird not only removes the physical bulk but seems to enhance the voice, too

wider Tele-like voicing. Then, of course, you have the classic individual pickup volume and tone controls – wired vintage style – that allow plenty of shading, not least in that middle position. Through any decent amp, you can move from almost acoustic-like clarity with the volume and tone pulled back to Townshend-like 60s punch at the bridge and that clear but full

Fender-y neck voice with simple control adjustment. We're generalising because the guitar is so full of subtlety when you start using those controls, especially at the bridge. It's quite brightly voiced with less of that Gibson-like mahogany/P-90 grind, but the chime, jangle and depth are truly wonderful.

Verdict

Not for the first time we got completely lost in a guitar we're supposed to be writing about. Somehow this sensible, compact take on the ol' 'Bird not only removes the physical bulk but seems to enhance the voice, too, and while strapped on or seated nothing gets in the way. It doesn't feel new, although there's no relicing here; it just feels like a vintage classic that never was.

It's true that plenty of makers large and small have used the Firebird style, but this one is totally a one-off and you can choose exactly the specification you want, including a more regular glued-in neck. Just like every other Daniels guitar we've played, whatever you go for, it'll be a world-class, vintage-informed instrument like this Gravitas. When you're ready, give Darren a call. 



DANIELS GRAVITAS

PRICE: £3,999 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Offset-shaped solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany wings

NECK: 9-ply mahogany/walnut through-neck

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75") (rule of 18)

NUT/WIDTH: Unbleached bone/43.23mm

FINGERBOARD: Cocobolo, m-o-p dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo (Jescar 47095)

HARDWARE: Faber ABR-'59 tune-o-matic-style bridge with TP-'59 lightweight stud tailpiece, Hipshot Grip-Lock rear-lock tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Mojo Firebird humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.58/7.88

OPTIONS: Just ask!

RANGE OPTIONS: Daniels offers 2 other styles: offset Pugilist (from £2,999) and more classic single-cut Royale (from £4,999). Like the Gravitas, these styles can be used as the basis for your custom dream

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISHES: Vintage Tobacco Burst (as reviewed) – gloss nitro

Daniels Guitars

www.danielsguitars.co.uk



9/10

PROS Beautifully crafted through-neck style; original, very practical shape; one of the best necks you'll get your hand around; superb voicing from the Mojo pickups and vintage-style controls

CONS Not cheap, but then why should it be? Craft such as this costs

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FIRST PLAY



FURCH LJ 10-SM
€1,693

WHAT IS IT? A specially designed travel acoustic that disassembles and stows away in its own custom backpack

Ramble On

Furch's travel guitar folds down so you can transport it in its own custom backpack and, the company claims, it returns to pitch when you reassemble it. Innovation or gimmick?

Words David Mead **Photography** Adam Gasson

Here at *Guitarist* we're used to instruments arriving at our door in guitar-shaped cases. And so when Furch's Little Jane turned up in something that closely resembled a hiker's backpack it became the talking point of the afternoon. A guitar that folds down into three separate parts? It sounded a little like a dark 'some assembly required' nightmare. As it happens, we were in for a pleasant surprise.

Travel guitars are far from being a new concept. Possibly the first commercially successful model was Martin's Backpacker, which appeared on the radar in the early 1990s and enjoyed a trip to space on NASA's Space Shuttle in 1994, as well as subsequently journeying up Mount Everest – and you can't get any more well travelled than that. The only downside to the Backpacker was its unusual shape, resembling a lacrosse racket more than a regular acoustic, and it's quite possible that this aesthetic limited its appeal for some. A travel-friendly alternative, of course, would be the many mini guitars on today's market, such as the Wee Lowden, Baby Taylor and the Little Martin – easy to take on a camping trip or hiking around the Lake District but still a tad bulkier than it would need to be to qualify for the holiday essentials list.







1. Freshly released from its custom backpack, Furch's Little Jane is in three pieces: headstock, neck and body, with its strings still attached

2. Furch's own locking tuners help keep the LJ 10-SM tuned to pitch both while the guitar is in transit or assembled and ready to play

On the face of it, Furch's Little Jane manages to combine the portability of a Martin Backpacker with the charm of a mini acoustic, and goes one stage further in that it comes with its own set of luggage.

Our review model is kitted out with a Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides, but if that isn't to your liking the Little Jane is available in all-mahogany, Sitka and rosewood, cedar and mahogany, and a special edition made with Sitka and cocobolo. Quite a lot of choice, then.

Naturally, the elephant in this particular room is the fact that the guitar comes with its own DIY element and so the first thing to do here is to offer some clarification on how everything fits together.

Fundamentally speaking, the guitar arrives in three pieces, comprising the body, the neck and the headstock. The neck is stored inside the guitar's body through a port in the upper bout and secured via a plastic slot into which it fits snugly. The headstock, with the strings pre-attached, fits into a separate compartment inside the backpack. In order to keep the strings in position, the nut has the strings threaded through it, as opposed to over the top, and the string height is governed by a zero fret. If all this sounds very complicated so far, bear with us because it really is simpler than it sounds.

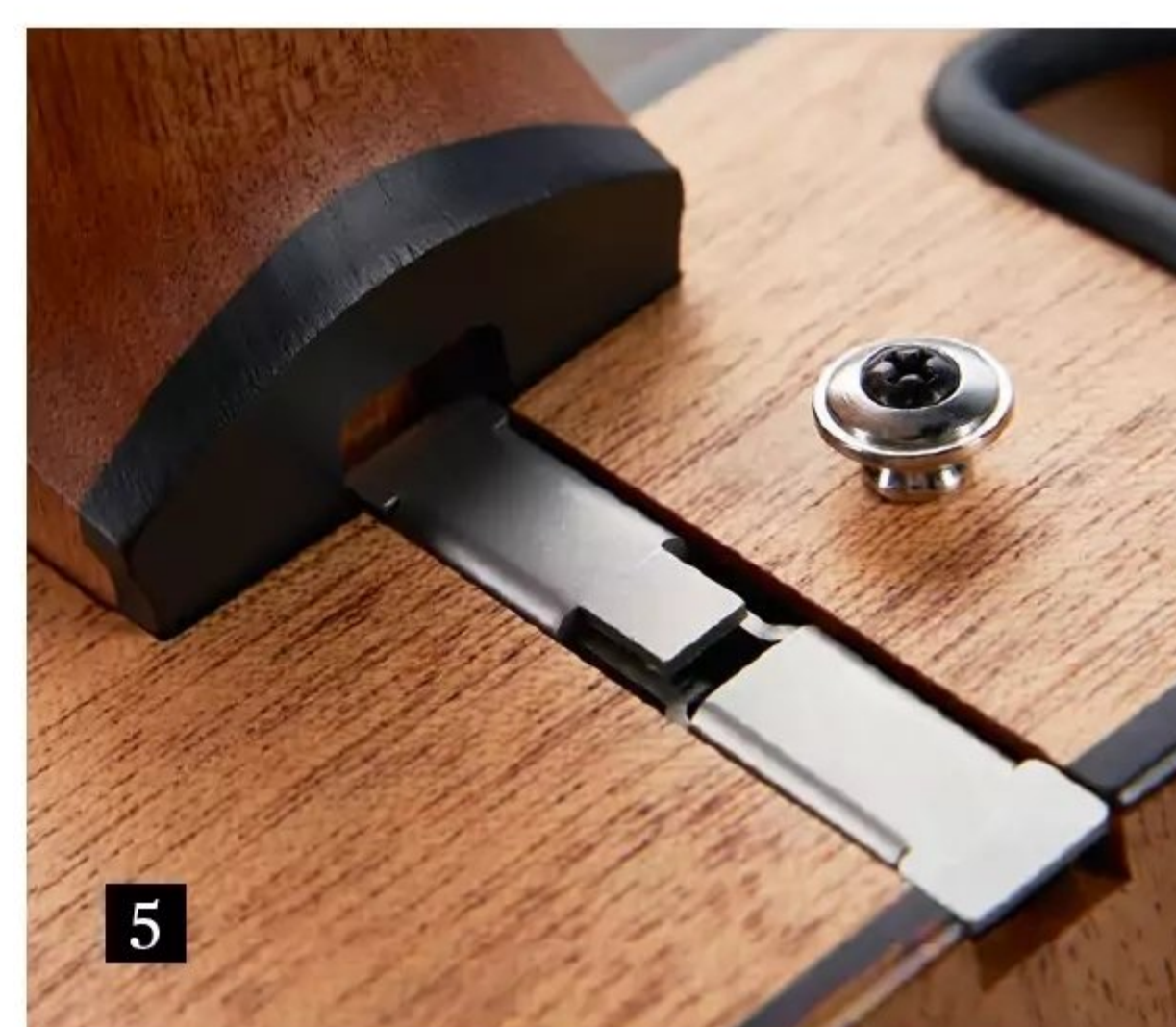
We found assembly to be quite straightforward. The headstock attaches to the top of the fretboard just before the 1st fret and is secured by two metal posts to keep it in position. Once assembled, string tension makes sure it stays put, and the joint between headstock and fretboard is so subtle you really have to look for it once everything is in place.

3. The neck stows away in a special compartment inside the guitar's soundhole, held securely in place by a plastic retainer, ready for travel

4. The strings are threaded through the guitar's nut in order to keep them in place while on the move

5. Securing the neck to the body is done via this spring-loaded clip that attaches to a special receptacle on the heel





Joining the neck to the body is quite a smooth operation, too. Once you slip the neck into the slot in the guitar's body, there is a metal clip where the heel would normally sit that catches the back of the neck and, once you've clipped it in place, assembly is complete. We managed to fit everything together without looking at any instructions and so it really is a quick, intuitive and simple process.

Furch tells us that when the guitar is assembled it should come back in tune, and amazingly this was our experience. In view of the fact that the guitar had travelled to us from Eastern Europe, this is no mean feat. In order to confirm our findings in this respect, we disassembled the guitar again, left it for a number of days, and repeated the experiment. This time one string needed a quick tweak, but that was it. In any case, it seems that it's possible to fit the guitar together from its constituent parts without the faff of tuning from totally slack strings every time.

As we've said, the back, sides and neck are all African mahogany, the body bound with faux tortoiseshell. The Sitka top lives up to its AA-grade status, with

Once assembled, the headstock/fretboard joint is so subtle you really have to look for it

an ebony bridge, black and white two-ring rosette, plastic string pins and an all-but-invisible pickguard just under the soundhole as furniture. At the other end of the guitar there are Furch's own locking tuners, which we gather are present in order to keep tuning even more stable when constructing and deconstructing the guitar.

The open-pore finish has a sleek look of its own, and the ebony 'board with its 45mm nut width adds to our first impressions – this is a very nice-looking, well-constructed mini guitar.

With everything complete, it's time to look at Little Jane from the point of view of its prowess as a musical instrument. After all, ingenuity is all very well, but if the end result is disappointing, all is pretty much lost.

Feel & Sounds

We've commented on the feel of Furch's neck carves on instruments we've reviewed before and the Little Jane falls straight into line with what the company refers to as a "soft V", but it's so subtle – especially here – that if someone had told us that the neck profile was of the full C category we wouldn't have questioned it. In any case, it's supremely comfortable in the hand, that open-pore finish adding something of its own in that it has an almost played in feel to it.

One minor niggle that becomes immediately apparent is that the action is slightly higher than we'd like. We're only talking a couple of millimetres, and lowering the action on an acoustic is a straightforward job in the right hands – and, yes, we're well aware that action height is very subjective and what's perfect for us might be too low for some... Which is why we're not going to make too much of a fuss about it.

When it comes to sound, the Little Jane has a secret to tell: it's enormous! We're aware that the vent for neck storage in the guitar's body has now taken on secondary duties as a side port and so a lot of the



All packed up and ready for the road, the Little Jane fits snugly inside its specially designed backpack



FURCH LITTLE JANE LJ 10-SM

PRICE: €1,693 (around £1,428)
inc backpack

ORIGIN: Czech Republic

TYPE: Travel guitar

TOP: AA-grade Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: AA-grade African mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 100mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 303mm

NECK: African mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 615mm (24.2")

TUNERS: Furch string-lock chrome: gear ratio 1:15

NUT/WIDTH: Specially designed synthetic/45mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

FRETS: 18

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/55mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.46/3.24

OPTIONS: LR Baggs EAS-VTC (€187)

RANGE OPTIONS: Other models in the Little Jane range include the LJ-10 CM (€1,499), the LJ-10 MM (€1,606) and the special-edition LJ-11 SC (€2,590)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Natural open pore

Furch

www.furchguitars.com

+420 910 902 139



9/10

PROS Superbly well thought-out travel guitar that combines easy assembly and storage with some great sounds

CONS Some may be put off by the Ikea-like self-assembly, but we'd urge you to give it a try

sound is being projected back at us. But even allowing for that, it's a very loud guitar – much more so than you'd expect from such a trim body. Furch tells us that the bracing inside the guitar has been specially voiced, and we'd applaud this as a complete success because the sound is not only huge but toneful at the same time. This is something that calls upon true craft from a luthier's point of view and Furch is to be congratulated for hitting the tone-target dead centre.

One of the options offered with the Little Jane range is an LR Baggs EAS-VTC pickup – alas not fitted on our review sample – but it occurred to us that should you choose to take advantage of this option, the Little Jane would make an almost perfect busking guitar. With a fine set of tones onboard and an easy-to-transport facility into the bargain, it would be a no brainer. What's more, the backpack would easily fit inside an aeroplane's overhead storage locker, giving the instrument another strand of useful portability. This whole package really has been very well thought out.

The sound is not only huge but toneful at the same time – something that calls upon true craft

Verdict

We have to admit that we were dubious at first. After all, how good is a guitar that breaks down into three separate component parts going to sound? We expected a compromise, but instead found a mini instrument that is worthy in the tonal stakes before you even begin to consider its merits as a readily transportable companion on your travels. Okay, so we might have a very slight issue with string height, but even that wouldn't blur our impression that the Little Jane is an innovative and extremely well thought-through package. It might be getting a little late in the year for planning a vacation, but if you can't leave home without a six-string buddy by your side, add the Furch to the top of your holiday shopping list! **G**

Ibanez

The Alternative
Acoustic



Dare to be different

FIRST PLAY



LINE 6 CATALYST CX 60
£249

WHAT IS IT? 60-watt 1x12 combo amp featuring Helix digital modelling with 12 amp voices

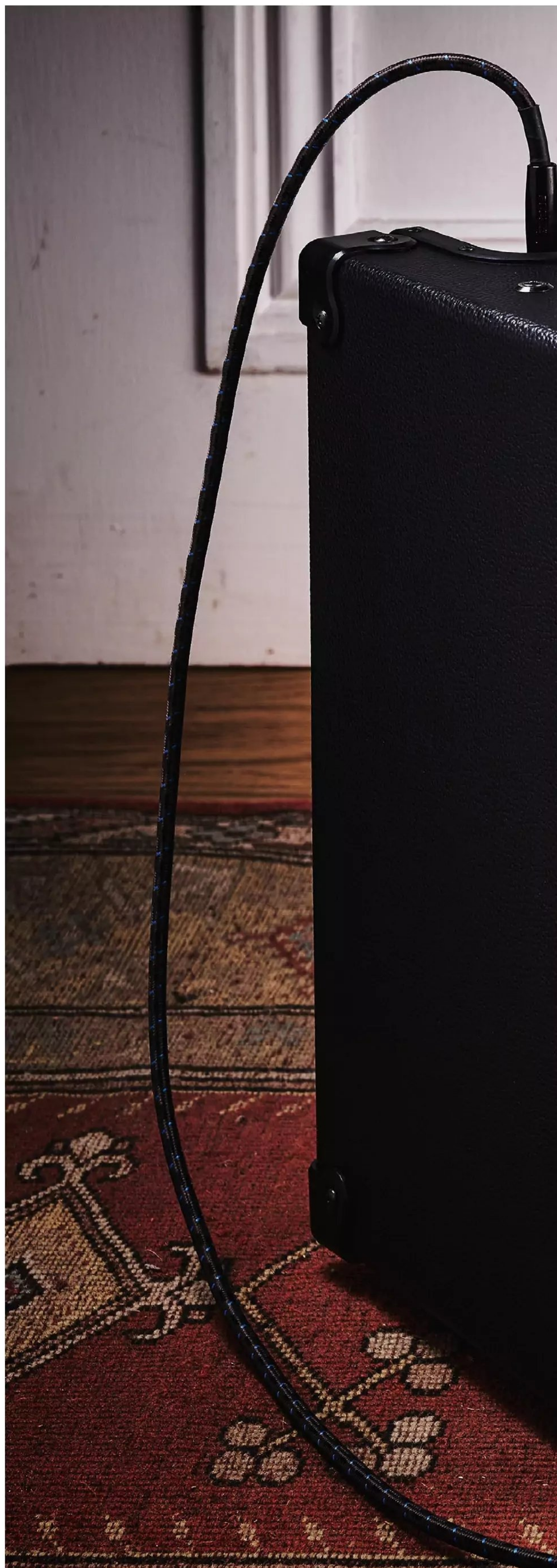
Tradition Revisited

Line 6 refreshes its Helix-based modelling amp range by doubling the number of available amp voicings – and more

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

You may have seen the Line 6 Catalyst amp range before, which features combos with modelled sounds derived from the company's Helix (HX) range. The company has now introduced three new models: the 200-watt Catalyst CX 200 2x12, the 100-watt Catalyst CX 100 1x12, and the baby of the bunch that we're taking a look at here, the 60-watt Catalyst CX 60 1x12. Whereas the older models featured six Helix amp voicings, these new models double that to 12 and also have the ability to load any of the 24 onboard effects into either of the two dedicated effects slots. (Incidentally, a firmware update for the older models will bring them up to this specification.)

The CX 60 is a solidly built combo amp that's reasonably easy to carry, the bulk of its weight most likely coming from the 12-inch Line 6 HC60 speaker. There's a single guitar input on the top panel next to the controls, but round the back you get more socketry for various functions. This includes: a footswitch socket; an XLR direct output to route the signal to a PA, mixer or audio interface; a headphone socket for





silent practice; and an auxiliary input for playing music (unprocessed) through the amp's speaker. There's also an effects loop for connecting external effects that comes with a switch to determine whether it's used as a standard effects loop or whether the return signal is routed straight to the power amp so you can use the combo as a power amp/speaker, perhaps for a floorboard amp modeller.

A USB port has several functions. Besides connecting to a computer that can run the Catalyst Edit app, it also offers a four-channel audio interface and facilitates MIDI control in the absence of a dedicated MIDI In socket, as found on the two larger combos. Also on the rear panel is a knob that sets the overall power amp output

There's something for everyone – from the ultra-cleans of the Clarity to the high-gain stylings of the Badonk

power from the full 60 watts, to half power at 30 watts, 0.5 watts for some quiet practice, or muted completely – which you may wish to use for recording or when using headphones.

In Use

Starting off, you're presented with three small buttons: Channel A, Channel B or Manual. Manual mode is what you get directly from the knob positions, but you still have to choose your amp model from the Selector, a six-way rotary switch with an associated LED ring that indicates which amp you've selected. The 12 amps consist of two each in the categories Clean,



Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic and Hi Gain. Once you've selected one of these types, you can select your choice of its two amps by pressing the Channel A and B buttons simultaneously.

Each modelled amp comes with an associated Boost type, switched in by a button above the Boost knob that sets its level. Beyond that you get Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence and Channel Volume knobs to adjust your amp sound, plus two knobs (Effect 1 and Effect 2) to add in some effect sound. The two effects can be chosen from any of the six models each in the Delay, Modulation, Pitch/Filter or Reverb categories, although the same effect

category can't be used simultaneously by both Effect 1 and Effect 2.

The effect can be selected from the front panel by various button presses and use of the Selector. However, you'll likely need to look in the user manual to check what colour on the effect-button LED represents which category, and which of its six effects corresponds to which position on the Selector's LED ring, until you're totally familiar with it all.

While there is a tap tempo button on the front panel there are some deeper effect parameters you can only get into via the editing app, which really is the quickest and easiest way to set up the amp.





The line-level XLR direct output offers a choice of simulated 112, 212 or 412 cabinets mic'd with a selection of 16 different microphones, all set up from the software editor

Selecting the Channel A and Channel B buttons (rather than Manual mode) gives you access to preset sounds, albeit ones you can still tweak on the fly with the knobs and save whenever you want to. There are six banks of presets, each of which contains a Channel A and a Channel B. If you hold the Manual channel button, you can scroll through the six banks with the selector. In each preset you can have different amps assigned to Channel A and Channel B, or maybe the same amp with different parameter settings; adding the Line 6 LFS2 dual footswitch will provide onstage switching between Channels A and B, as well as effects on/off.

Our impression is that there's really something for everyone here, from the ultra-cleans of the Clarity model, to the huge high-gain stylings of the Badonk at the other extreme, with plenty of variety among the other 10 in between – all very playable and coupled with boost types that really complement the basic tone. Most are Line 6's own original amp voicings, but there are some real amps represented, such as the Dumble-style Grammatico GSG model and the Marshall-based 2204 Mod. Likewise, the effects cover plenty of options with a practical array of delay and reverb types, modulation (including chorus, tremolo, flanger, phaser, vibe and rotary), plus some neat pitch shifting and even an octave fuzz.



Run the Catalyst Edit software on your computer for quick and easy setting up of the amp. The app also features parameters that are not available on the hardware panel

Verdict

There are so many ways to amplify your guitar these days with floorboard amp modellers, pedalboard amps and the like, but using a combo amp is arguably the most practical way to approach band practices and gigging. The Catalyst CX 60 fits the requirements perfectly with an easily transportable form factor and enough power to make itself heard. Of course, the choice for anyone buying a small combo is whether to go the traditional analogue amp route or for something that features digital modelling. Each player will have their own preference, but this amp's capability as an all-round asset that can provide a practical range of different sounds and effects, and also function as a flexible practice and direct recording tool, makes it very persuasive. **G**



LINE 6 CATALYST CX 60

- PRICE:** £249
- ORIGIN:** Malaysia
- TYPE:** 60W 1x12 modelling combo amplifier
- VALVES:** N/A
- DIMENSIONS:** 262 (d) x 503 (w) x 444mm (h)
- WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 11.8/25.9
- CABINET:** Open-backed combo with 12-inch speaker
- CHANNELS:** 2
- CONTROLS:** Channel A button, Channel B button, Manual button, Selector, Boost, Boost on/off button, Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence, Channel Volume, Effect 1, Effect 2, Effect 1 on/off button, Effect 2 on/off button, Tap Tempo button, Master Volume, Output power switch, FX loop mode switch, ground lift switch, power on/off switch
- FOOTSWITCH:** Dual footswitch capability (footswitch is an optional extra)
- ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Onboard effects, tap tempo, tuner, software editor, USB audio interface capability, MIDI control, aux input, headphones output, XLR direct output, noise gate
- OPTIONS:** LFS2 footswitch (£39) and amp cover (£29)
- RANGE OPTIONS:** Catalyst CX100 (£339) and Catalyst CX 200 (£449)

Yamaha UK
www.line6.com



PROS Nicely portable; affordable; various power options from very quiet to loud; selection of amp types to suit most players; onboard effects

CONS Setting up effects and selecting amps from the front panel isn't as intuitive as we'd like

FIRST PLAY



**ELECTRO-HARMONIX
LIZARD KING OCTAVE/
DISTORTION**
£119

.....
WHAT IS IT? An octave fuzz pedal
that builds on the company's
previous Lizard Queen release



Reptile Royalty

From Queen to King – there's another Electro-Harmonix royal vying for the crown of octave distortion

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. The Blend knob mixes from 100 per cent clean to 100 per cent effect, so you can blend your normal sound with some fuzz or octave fuzz
2. With this switch set to Sun, the octave fuzz is boosted with a more driving midrange. The clean tone accessed by the Blend knob has enhanced treble and bass frequencies. When the switch is set to Shadow, the clean tone is unchanged and the fuzz tone is tighter
3. When the Octave knob is fully anti-clockwise there is no octave, but turning the knob builds in the effect exactly to the point you need it

Last year Electro-Harmonix debuted the Lizard Queen octave fuzz pedal, which was based on an imagined vintage EHX design. Since the brand never made an octave fuzz back in the day, it got together with Josh Scott of JHS Pedals and came up with the sort of pedal that Electro-Harmonix *could* have made in the 1970s – but didn't. Moving on a year or so, the company has added another octave fuzz to its roster with the Lizard King, which starts with the circuitry from the Lizard Queen but adds new twists, optimising it for bass and, in doing so, building in extra flexibility that six-stringers may also find useful.

The Lizard King retains the Volume and Octave knobs from the Queen but eschews the knob that morphed between Sun and Shadow for a two-way toggle switch. It adds a Tone knob, too, which applies a low-pass filter to the fuzz, rolling off high frequencies as it traverses back from its fully clockwise position for a less spiky, smoother fuzz. There's also the Blend knob that sets a balance between your normal tone and the effect, running from a fully dry sound to full fuzz.

In the absence of a gain knob, the amount of fuzz/distortion is fixed – it's gainy, thick and squidgy, and you can add an upper octave to it with the Octave control. The range here goes from no octave through some classic-sounding tones, right to the point that the octave dominates for some scratchy messed-up mayhem. The Volume knob output level has plenty of leeway beyond its noon position should you wish to build in a boost.

Incidentally, keeping the Blend knob fully left lets you use the pedal as a clean boost with or without a tonal shift, dependent on the Sun/Shadow switch; the Sun position gives the clean tone enhanced treble and bass, as well as a spittier, raucous midrange to the fuzz. Those two voices, combined with the Tone knob and variable octave, give you plenty to play with, dialling in some very playable fuzz tones. But the Blend knob adds another dimension, especially when combining breaking-up amp tones with elements of fuzz.

Verdict

The earlier Lizard Queen is a fine example of octave fuzz, but the Lizard King aims to cater to a different set of needs, which may just tally with your own, especially if you want to add fuzz in proportion to your core sound. **G**



ELECTRO-HARMONIX LIZARD KING OCTAVE/DISTORTION

PRICE: £119

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Octave fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Octave, Blend, Tone, Sun/Shadow switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 8mA

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com



PROS Compact size; solidly usable fuzz sound; dry/effected blend; adjustable octave; cool snakeskin graphics

CONS With all those knobs, it might take a while to dial in your sweet spot



THE RIVALS

If the extra bits don't interest you, the Lizard Queen (£95) is a little less expensive. And if the budget won't stretch that far, then try the Fender Hammertone Fuzz (£65) with its switchable octave. A toggle-switched octave was a feature of the vintage Foxx Tone Machine and that circuit has been revived as the Danelectro 3699 (£199), which features a separately footswitchable octave, plus added Mid Boost switch. If you want to blend your octave in with a knob, like on the Lizard King, try Orange Amps' Fur Coat (right, £109), which has a separate footswitch to bring the octave in.



FIRST PLAY



DIRTY BOY PREAMP £264

WHAT IS IT? Pedal-sized fully analogue amplifier simulator with or without speaker emulation



Pure Filth

This all-analogue preamp pedal based on Blues Saraceno's amp is a flexible powerhouse with a variety of roles

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. This chap has appeared on all previous Dirty Boy pedals in various guises
2. You can adjust voltage levels using the Variac knob to expand the available palette of sounds
3. The Emulated output delivers the sound with speaker simulation based on a 4x12 Celestion Greenback cab

The Dirty Boy name has been around for quite a while, but this new preamp pedal represents a new chapter for the boutique gear company whose founder, Alex Saraceno (father of the Kingdom Come and ex-Poison guitarist Blues Saraceno), has now retired. The brand has been acquired by musician and product designer Danny Gomez, who is known for his proprietary TAE (Tube Amp Emulation) technology. The Dirty Boy Preamp is the first product under the new regime and is based on an amplifier designed by Alex Saraceno. What you get is a fully analogue amp simulator in pedal form that can be used in a number of ways.

The pedal features two outputs. One delivers the raw sound of the preamp for use with a power amp and speaker setup, maybe plugged into the effects return of a conventional guitar amp. Alternatively, it can be used as a conventional boost/drive stompbox in front of an amp. The other output has nicely authentic speaker emulation based on a 4x12 Celestion Greenback cabinet so can be used straight into a mixing desk or PA for live use, or to send a signal to a DAW for recording.

The Gain, Tone and Volume array allows the dialling in of some powerful amp tones from cleanish through to full-on raunch, which work great however you use the pedal – all nicely responsive to playing dynamics with smooth volume knob clean-up. Extra variation is provided by a Variac knob, as found on the original amp, which allows voltage levels to be adjusted, effectively starving the amp of power. Roll it back too far and you'll get sputtery gated sounds, but before that there's the opportunity for some cool variations on the core sound; our particular sweet spot had an edgier crunch and a leaner midrange.

Verdict

A multi-use asset that is its own thing but is still firmly in the ballpark of familiar rock tones, the Dirty Boy preamp delivers an impressive driven valve-amp sound without valves. It can transform your amp by being a different voice driving its power section, but it's equally adept as a boost and drive into the front-end. It's also an easily portable backup for an amp, or the key component of a fly-rig compact pedalboard. **G**



DIRTY BOY PREAMP

PRICE: £264

ORIGIN: Spain

TYPE: Preamp pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, Variac simulator, Speaker emulated output (closed-back w/ 4x12 'Greenback')

CONTROLS: Variac, Gain, Tone, Volume, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard preamp output, standard emulated output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 90 (w) x 120 (d) x 50mm (h)

Dirty Boy
info@dirtyboy.co
www.dirtyboy.co



PROS Compact size; excellent sound quality; speaker emulated output; useful variations via the Variac knob

CONS DIY stickers for the knobs may peel off in time



THE RIVALS

The Guitar Butler by Orange (right, £249) is a dual-channel guitar preamp with clean and dirty channels, and features an effects loop, a standard output to your amp, and a balanced XLR output with cab sim. Elsewhere, the DSM & Humboldt Simplifier X (£439) is a more complex pedal with two preamps, stereo reverb, sends and returns, and cab sims; it is designed to deliver Vox, Marshall and Fender sounds. For less outlay, look to the TC Electronic Ampworx series of dual-channel guitar preamps (£129) in various amp flavours, which feature cab-sim-equipped headphone and DI outputs, plus standard input and output.





the Wishlist

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

Godin Lerxst Limelight £5,149

John Hornby Skewes PHONE 0113 286 5381 WEB www.lerxstamps.com WORDS Stuart Williams PHOTOGRAPHY Olly Curtis

Picture an Alex Lifeson signature model and a Floyd-equipped Les Paul will likely spring to mind. However, prior to recording Rush's *Moving Pictures* album, which was released in 1981, Alex commissioned the build of his Hentor Sportscaster. We'll go for a potted history: the Sportscaster was Alex's take on an HSS S-type guitar, the main specs of which included a Warmoth body and neck, ebony fingerboard, DiMarzio FS-1/Bill Lawrence L500 pickups, Schaller locking tuners, and a Floyd Rose vibrato. Now, Alex has teamed up with fellow Canadians Godin to recreate (with evolutionary tweaks) his beloved double-cut.

Released under his Lerxst brand, the Limelight is a high-end nod to his 80s-era guitar. As with the Sportscaster, it's based on an S-type body, this time cut from swamp ash. The maple neck follows tradition with its 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length but bucks it with 22 stainless-steel frets and a 305mm (12-inch) radius. Like the original, we're dancing on a beautifully even slice of ebony, and to the rear it's finished in a silky satin.

Tuning is taken care of by Godin's 18:1 locking staggered tuners with a Graph Tech nut. At the other end it's fitted with a Vega-Trem, but completists can spec a Floyd Rose instead. Electronically, it's a different animal from a regular S-type, too, with Alex's Mojotone

Lerxst Limelight set in HSS configuration. They're wired to a three-way toggle and master volume/tone pots.

We'd use one word to describe the playability of the Limelight: smooth. The medium action could probably go a bit lower, but it's set to a comfortable ballpark height. Elsewhere, the ebony 'board and stainless-steel frets combine for a glassy feel when traversing the neck and bending strings; when you get to the summit you'll appreciate the rounded heel shape. If you're on the heavier-handed end of the picking scale, you'll find the strings hold firm under attack without the inevitable pitch-bend when played open, particularly on a guitar fitted with a vibrato. Ours is set to float, giving us drop and pull-up response. Divebombs, gargles and fluttering vibratos are all on offer, with the Vega-Trem working incredibly smoothly to seamlessly return to pitch.

Tonal preferences are incredibly personal and sometimes an HSS guitar can leave you two-thirds full. Not so here. Mojotone delivers quintessential references for the three positions: Hendrix-y neck tones; pecky, squashy pluck in the middle; and a complex bridge humbucker that's bursting with clarity and note separation. You don't need to be a Rush fan to appreciate this guitar, which might be making a play for one of this year's most versatile electrics. **G**

1. The Mojotone Lerxst Limelight Alnico V humbucker delivers in spades, but even better is the fact that it's joined by two equally inspiring single coils. Each one fulfils its promised brief with laser-focused reference tones

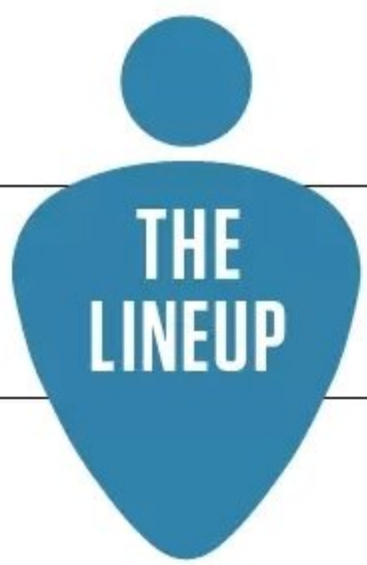
2. The Limelight comes with Godin locking tuners (Vega-Trem model only). Those who prefer their signature gear to be more anonymous will appreciate the rear placement of Mr Lifeson's John Hancock

3. If you haven't tried a Vega-Trem, you need to. The response of the bar is fantastic, with locking or 'free-range' positioning available. Regardless of how you set it, it returns to pitch, even with our aggressive attempts to throw it out





4. As easy as XYZ, the pickups are wired to a three-way switch and master controls for volume and tone. Our only minor gripe is that the placement of the switch means you're likely to knock it when playing seated
5. If you like the sound of those pickups but can't stretch to the full guitar, you could consider the Mojotone Lerxst Limelight pre-loaded scratchplate, which offers a drop-in solution for fitting the set in your own S-type guitar
6. The Limelight's S-style jack socket has been inverted and attached to the body. It sits proud, but we didn't experience any difference in comfort or playability



Gas Supply

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

Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom Jimi Hendrix 'Love Drops' Flying V £1,499

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 44427661** WEB www.epiphone.com

JARGON CRUNCHING Maestro Vibrola

The Maestro Vibrola is an early vibrato design and works by leveraging a bent steel plate – which also terminates the strings – via the vibrato's arm. When the arm is depressed, it rocks the rounded plate, creating the vibrato effect. While we wouldn't go full Vai on a Maestro, it's great for gentle fluctuations.

Move over, Rover! Is that what I think it is?

If you're thinking of an official Jimi Hendrix Flying V – then yes, that's exactly what we've got our hands on! To state its full name, this is the Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom Jimi Hendrix 'Love Drops' Flying V.

Rolls off the tongue... What's this all about?

Do a Google search of Jimi Hendrix and you're likely to find pictures of him playing two flavours of guitar. We all know about the single-coil one, but less common is the guitar he leaned towards later in his life: the Gibson Flying V. As you'll already be aware, the Flying V was launched as a vision of the future in 1958. It re-entered the catalogue in 1967, and given that nobody has quite taken the electric guitar to the places Jimi did, it seems fitting that he gravitated to it.

Okay, tell us more.

For a start, it's an Epiphone. But it comes as part of the brand's Inspired By Gibson Custom range. First up, it's based on Jimi's customised V that started life with a

sunburst finish. Hendrix had it refinished in ebony, then picked up some nail polish and adorned it with a display of impressive, psychedelic graphics, which (as you can see below) have been approximated here.

Wow, so they've matched his painting?

Sort of. What you see on this Epiphone isn't a like-for-like recreation, more a faithful cover version. You see, according to the New York Metropolitan Museum – where the guitar was previously displayed – Jimi gave the guitar to Mick Cox of Eire Apparent in 1969. Cox had it refinished, which removed Jimi's 'Love Drops' design. But back in the 90s the guitar was acquired by David Brewis (of Kane Gang and Prefab Sprout). Brewis told *Chronicle Live* in 2021 that he identified the guitar from photos, later getting it verified by Sotheby's. From here, he painstakingly recreated Jimi's original artwork himself, referencing life-size blow-ups of photos. What's more, Noel Redding confirmed to Brewis that Jimi had used the V to record his 1968 cover of *All Along The Watchtower*.

FINISH

The 'Love Drops' pattern was originally created by Hendrix himself using nail polish, and Epiphone has recreated it. Don't worry, though, it's safely under the lacquer!

HENDRIX SIGNATURE

Based on Jimi's 1967 Flying V, this model comes with a recreation of the great man's signature on the rear of the headstock, plus it ships in a hardshell case

'INSPIRED BY'

As part of the Inspired By Gibson Custom range, the 'Love Drops' V is equipped with premium electronics: Gibson USA pickups, CTS pots, a Mallory capacitor, and Switchcraft selector/socket

LEFT? DAMN RIGHT!

Epiphone is producing these guitars as both right- and left-handed models. An you won't pay a penny more for the southpaw version





Yeah, but this is still an Epiphone. So what's been left out?

As we said, this is an 'Inspired By' model, so it sits at the top of the non-US Epiphone tree. Jimi's V was a new 1967 model and, as such, we get a mahogany body with the classic symmetrical 'wings'. The neck is a one-piece construction, also made of mahogany, and in keeping with Epiphone tradition it uses laurel as a rosewood substitute. There's a Maestro Vibrola vibrato (as per Jimi's model), and being a signature model you'll also find a copy of his signature on the rear of the headstock.

You haven't mentioned the electronics yet.

How about a pair of USA Gibson Custombuckers, CTS pots and a Mallory capacitor for the tone circuit? The selector switch and output jack from Switchcraft.

V-shaped guitars are a nightmare for cases. Do I have to buy one for it?

Nope, it comes in an Epiphone hardshell case. And before you ask – there is, of course, a left-handed version! [SW]



ALSO OUT NOW...

NEURAL DSP NANOCORTEX €569

Neural DSP's Quad Cortex has taken the modelling/direct recording and performance world by storm, and now the Finnish brand has unveiled the Nano Cortex. This cut-down version of the QC comes complete with 25 Neural Captures in its library, along with five effects slots, audio interface, and MIDI and Bluetooth support. Notably, the Nano Cortex also features Neural's Capture connection, allowing you to create a digital facsimile of any amp, pedal or cab you connect to it. Internally, there are 64 preset slots for saving patches, but thanks to the Neural Cortex Cloud app, users have access to thousands of Captures for free. It features the same encoder/footswitch controls as the Quad, and is available now.

www.neuraldsp.com



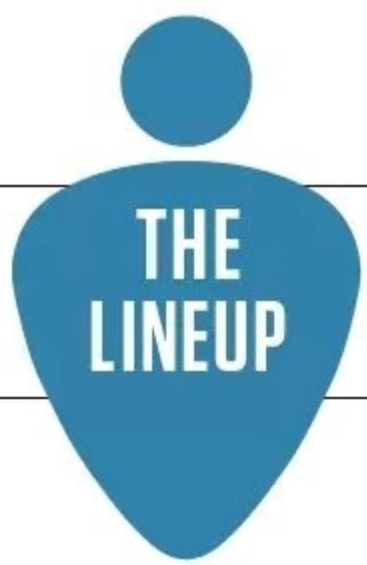
BOSS SDE-3 DUAL DIGITAL DELAY £169

Boss's 1983 SDE-3000 rackmount delay has become something of an echo legend thanks to its adoption by the likes of Van Halen, Lukather, Clapton and more. While the sounds of this iconic delay are reproduced in the larger floor-pedal SDE-3000D, the company



has now distilled this early digital delay into a compact pedal with the SDE-3. Promising to deliver the "iconic character" of the original, it does so with a modulation circuit, as well as an Offset control that creates a secondary delay line. The pedal works in full stereo, with a socket for two footswitches or an expression pedal, as well as MIDI control via TRS jacks.

www.boss.info



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: Seb Wesson

Album: *The Man From The Moon* (Gentlemen Recordings)



The Man From The Moon is Seb Wesson's first full-length endeavour as a solo recording artist, previously working in bands
www.sebwesson.com

Hertfordshire-based Seb Wesson's new *Man From The Moon* album is his first full-length solo release, following his 2017 *Tigers* EP. Cutting his teeth in indie-rock band Munkster, Seb started playing solo and session music after the group's demise, as well as providing lead guitar licks for alternative-rock outfit Captain. It's a busy musical life, and there's really one man to thank. "I started playing when I was seven or eight and I was really into Queen," Seb begins. "I had their greatest hits on vinyl and cassette, and I was a Brian May obsessive. I had the 'Star Licks' video and had learned it all by the time I was 14."

Moving Forward

When listening to Seb's solo music now, the Queen link seems surprising. "I got into songwriting, so the incredibly bombastic lead rock guitar first got me hooked and then I got into songwriters," he explains. "Dire Straits followed Queen – Mark Knopfler was another big influence – then there was James Taylor, Damien Rice and Elliott Smith. I got into appreciating well-written songs and began attempting to do similar things. I wrote a bit in the band [Munkster], but it was more of a four-way thing and lyrics were more of a

collaborative effort in a way. So after that I started trying to get good at writing songs as a one-man setup."

Creative Flow

After Munkster split, Seb kept busy playing in a function band, writing some solo songs and also working with R&B singer Lemar, with whom he toured and made two albums as a session player. "Although session stuff can be creative, I wasn't writing much around then," he says. "But by the time I quit the function band, the creative force came knocking and I started working on songs again and did the EP [*Tigers*] in 2017. It was a great exercise and it opened the floodgates. It was that simple thing of coming up with a set of chords for a verse and a middle eight and then creating a melody, recording it and enjoying what you hear. That was the shift."

Simple Pleasures

Seb's debut album is a confident-sounding 10-track record, arranged with a lightness of touch and a keen ear for melody and space. "Everything was written and recorded on my Martin D-28," he says. "That was a big part of it because it's my dream acoustic and the songs come out of that. The other key thing was simple techniques – all of it was tracked on a Shure SM7B [mic]. I used an old '68 Fender Pro Reverb amp [rescued from the trash outside a London guitar shop!] panned the acoustics and quadruple-tracked the vocals. I wanted a timeless, organic-sounding record. There wasn't going to be any fancy modern stuff."

Mark My Words

The album's sound never feels overstuffed, which is a discerning move that gives Seb's writing room to breathe. "When I was doing my band stuff, lyrics were such an afterthought," he tells us. "As long as it had a great set of chords and a hooky element, I could almost fill in the lyrics with some nonsense. Now, I think a big part of being good at writing is having something interesting to say; it makes you more enthusiastic when there's a topic. Every song on the album has a core subject: *The Wave* is about a Japanese tsunami, and *The Festival* is about a time I forgot to go and see Elliott Smith – I was too young and stupid and I really regretted it afterwards..." [GK]

Standout track: *The Wave*

For fans of: Damien Rice, José González, Nick Mulvey

Eyes to the sky: Seb has set his sights on melody and connection, with influences from Queen to Elliott Smith guiding his songwriting career so far

PHOTO BY RENE OONK

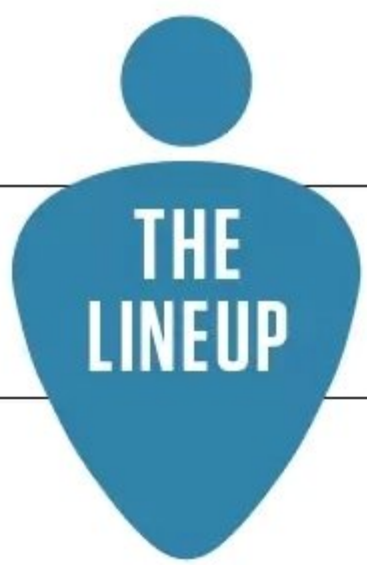


BUILDING BLOCKS

Seb's journey as a guitarist saw him trying his hand at lutherie

Seb's earlier instruments were slightly less flash than his "dream" Martin D-28, but then he did make them himself... "I've still got the first one," he laughs. "It's a bit ramshackle – we didn't use moulds, just got the shape in and cinched it with string and let it set after hand-steaming it. I wouldn't describe it as a guitar I would use, but it was a great experiment. I built some Selmer-style guitars afterwards with a mate of mine and they were much better. They were called W&W, and there's still probably four or five out there in the wild..."

"A big part of being good at writing is having something interesting to say; it makes you more enthusiastic"



Albums

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

Myles Kennedy sets the tone for the future of mainstream rock on his third studio album



PHOTO BY CHUCK BRUECKMANN

Myles Kennedy The Art Of Letting Go

Napalm Records (available 11 October)



Muscular, propulsive rock done right

Rock music is at something of a crossroads. Legacy acts with a famous back catalogue, such as Def Leppard or Deep Purple, still draw big crowds, but that generation of rock mega-acts is undeniably on their victory lap, not their first blazing 100-yard dash through the zeitgeist. Grunge, once seen as a scuzzy, punkish counterweight to the polished bombast of stadium rock, has been fully absorbed into the mainstream itself. No person's trajectory embodies that more than that of Dave Grohl, who went from total obscurity to cult fame and then mainstream megastardom in Nirvana, then carved out a second career in the top echelon of music with Foo Fighters and their more clean-cut, heroic vision of contemporary rock.

So when an album comes along that skilfully fuses together the strongest elements of all of the above, it grabs the attention. Such is *The Art Of Letting Go* by Myles Kennedy, best known as the frontman of Alter Bridge. With Mark Tremonti providing most of the fireworks on guitar in that outfit, it's really revelatory to hear afresh what a great player Myles is himself in this album's power trio line-up – for *The Art Of Letting Go* has all the fire and momentum of an Alter Bridge record but with a slightly more organic, classic feel and absolutely stonking hard-rock energy. Second track, *Say What You Will*, is a surging power-anthem with smokily Eastern overtones, while *Mr Downside* channels Pearl Jam in its irresistible energy.

The production is taut and explosive, the performances impeccable – even if you don't like this genre of slick modern rock, you can't deny its relentless energy. Exhilarating from first to last, *The Art Of Letting Go* shows the way forward for mainstream rock. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Mr Downside*

For fans of: Alter Bridge, Pearl Jam, Foo Fighters, Guns N' Roses

Black Country Communion

V

J&R Adventures (available now)



JoBo is in shred mode with his fellow Communioneers

Joe Bonamassa is back rocking with Glenn Hughes, Derek Sherinian and Jason Bonham, and this 10-track album is firing on all cylinders. Opener, *Enlighten*, swaggers with rhythmic intensity, reminiscent of a few Led Zeppelin stompers, and *Stay Free* brings a funky ZZ Top-meets Wild Cherry groove, albeit with a broader dynamic range and tougher rock stance. Drop C# pounder *Red Sun* is euphoric and relentless, a perfect stadium rocker, which contrasts with the slow-tempo blueser, *Restless*, which sees Bonamassa take a tasty intro and a screaming main solo later. *Letting Go* displays the influence that Eric Clapton and Johnson have had on the Les Paul-favouring fretter – the solo has their trademark vibrato and blazing pentatonic phrases all over it. And if anyone wasn't aware of Black Country Communion's ability to rock, *Love And Faith* walks the talk with a fat riff and pounding drums that would drive this straight through any venue. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Love And Faith*

For fans of: Led Zeppelin, ZZ Top

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young Live At The Fillmore East, 1969

Rhino Records (available 25 October)

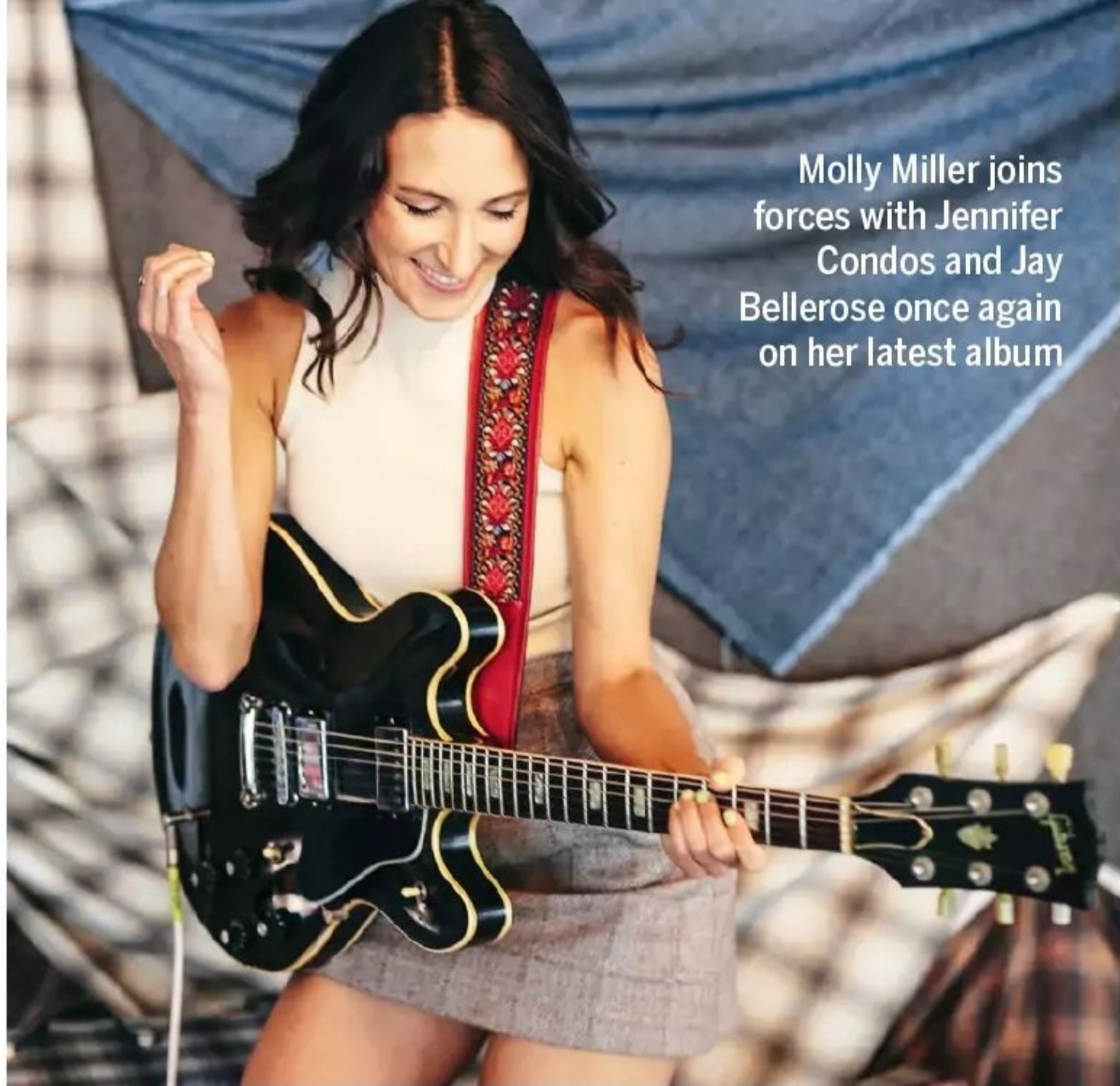


Pristine record of a unique band in their prime

Recorded just a month after the band's second ever gig at the infamous Woodstock Festival, the recently discovered multi-tracks of this September 1969 concert find CSN&Y on excellent form. Here, the band sounds fresh and vibrant, and it's in direct contrast to the other live album from the same period, *4 Way Street*, which was recorded a year later – by which time inner turbulence and disharmony had already begun to show, with reports of some epic dressing room battles. Somehow, the recording quality here exceeds that of *4 Way Street*, too. Vocal harmonies on tracks such as *Guinnevere*, *Helplessly Hoping* and the album's opener, *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*, are simply marvellous. And when the band goes electric, tracks like *Wooden Ships* bring to mind what a powerful force this quartet was as the 1960s came to a close. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Lady Of The Island*

For fans of: James Taylor, Joni Mitchell

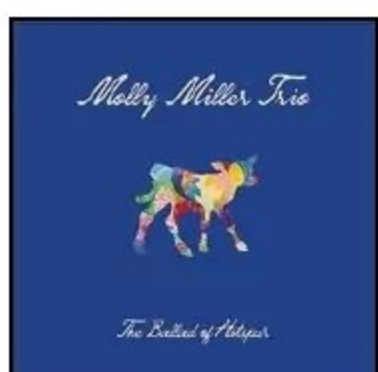


Molly Miller joins forces with Jennifer Condos and Jay Bellerose once again on her latest album

Molly Miller Trio

The Ballad Of Hotspur

Molly Miller Music (available now)



Jazz trio bristles with fire and melodic invention

Molly Miller wears several hats from side musician (Jason Mraz, Black Eyed Peas), to educator (Los Angeles College Of Music), to leader of her own band. *The Ballad Of Hotspur* is her third album with the trio and the 12 instrumentals here are dynamic and richly arranged, with intensity and space in equal measures. Her tone is largely focused on rich humbucker/pushed clean with a little ambience and tremolo/phaser added, providing clarity for chords and sustain for single-note phrasing, and the music itself is broad, reflecting her Americana and jazz leanings. *Cine* is the husky, moody opener – think Link Wray meets Ennio Morricone via a Quentin Tarantino film. You can almost feel the hazy midday sun during *Orchids And Cowboys*, as the band rhythmically shimmers with guitar chords and melodies on top. For sure, this band packs an admirable wallop of tasteful musicality. **[JS]**

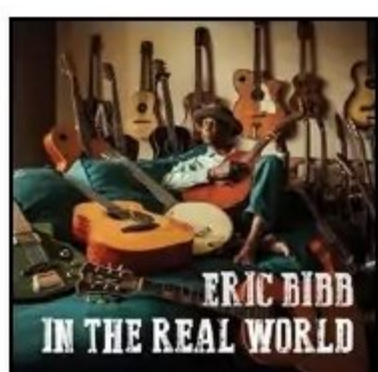
Standout track: *In The End*

For fans of: Emily Remler, Pat Metheny

Eric Bibb

In The Real World

Stony Plain Records (available 18 October)



Deluxe blues-derived songscapes from a master craftsman

"There's a wholeness about *In The Real World* that deeply moves me," says blues journeyman Eric Bibb about his new album. "Musically, the album feels like a self-portrait because it truly represents my influences." And those influences range from Mississippi-flavoured acoustic blues to gospel, roots, Americana and beyond. The album's 15 songs are superbly crafted, with Eric's acoustic taking its rightful place at the centre of the soundstage. But there's also some atmospheric electric – and slide – guitar, played by the excellent Robbie McIntosh, who can be seen accompanying superstar John Mayer in much the same fashion. Songs such as *Judgement Day*, *King Of The Castle* and *Make A Change* wash over the listener with such powerful narrative that they demand repeated listening. Make no mistake, this album is a marvel and possibly one of the best in the Grammy nominated singer-songwriter's career. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Walk Steady On*

For fans of: Taj Mahal, Robert Cray



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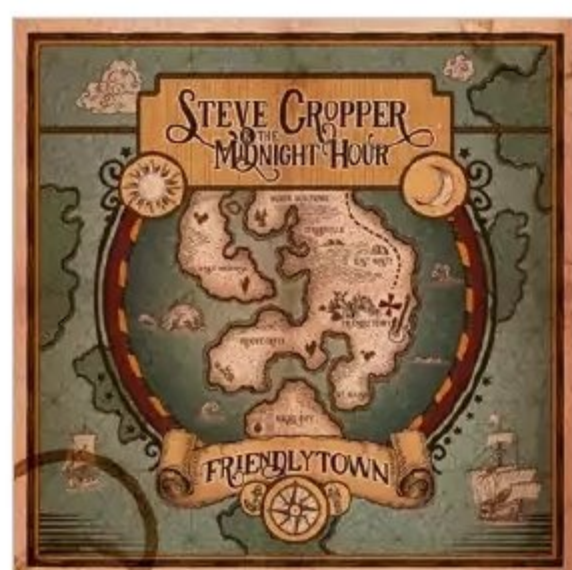


Tones Behind The Tracks

For the latest record from **Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour**, the Stax icon enlists two equally legendary players

Artist: Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour

Album: Friendlytown (Mascot Label Group/Provogue)



Friendlytown is the follow-up to Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour's debut album, *Fire It Up*

Steve Cropper's Midnight Hour band comprises (left to right): co-producer and bassist Jon Tiven, lead vocalist Roger C Reale, and drummer and percussionist Nioshi Jackson, with Billy Gibbons on lead guitar. Eddie Gore (far right) contributed organ and engineered the record

With respected producer Jon Tiven at the helm, the session icon is back again with *Friendlytown*, the follow-up to *Fire It Up*, the critically acclaimed debut album from his quintet Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour. But this time, he's called in some larger-than-life pals, Billy Gibbons and Brian May, to spice things up. In celebration, *Guitarist* checked in with the trio of guitar masters to break down their relationship in and out of the studio.

Steve, tell us about the origins of your new album, *Friendlytown*. What kicked this off?

Steve Cropper: "Well, I think Mascot got us going, especially after getting a Grammy nomination last time [with *Fire It Up*]. Once the budget came in for this one, I started writing right away."

Billy, how did you become involved?

Billy Gibbons: "Having been acquainted with Steve from way back in the Memphis days, fast forward to the present by a chance exchange on the street with record producer Jon Tiven, whispering the name 'Steve Cropper'. Needless to say, we got fired up!"

And where did you come in, Brian?

Brian May: "It was a roundabout way through Jon Tiven, like Billy said, the producer of the record. Jon

is a very old friend of mine and we'd kept in touch over the years. He's a very interesting spirit and great at getting spontaneity."

This appears to be the first time the three of you have worked together, a phrase we use loosely, seeing as the way records are made these days doesn't always involve an in-person experience.

Brian: "I met Steve properly at a concert we did as a tribute to Elvis's guitarist James Burton. We did this wonderful tribute and I had the time of my life because James was such a hero of mine. But my other great hero, Steve Cropper, was there. We had an amazing time; I'll never forget it."

Brian, given your styles are so different, people probably don't realise the impact of Steve's playing on you.

Brian: "Yes! I'm a little nervous when I meet my heroes; I'm not really relaxed. I'm not quite sure what I said to him, but it was great. I supposed the actual playing together was a deal. When you hear the guy on the other side of the stage and you hear your guitars together, it's an amazing feeling and such a privilege for someone like me."

Billy, when did you first meet Steve?

Billy: "We both were residing in Memphis during the heyday making records that jolted a range of artists into international prominence. And, like so many, I was magnetised with what Steve was doing with his guitar and production sounds."

"And now, 'fast-backward' to a fateful encounter with Steve at the infamous Molly's Mexican Casita down Madison Avenue between John Fry's Ardent Records and Steve's Trans-Maximus Studios. From that point forward, it's remained our mutual admiration of the mystique of guitars, guitars and more guitars."

Was he a big influence on you as he was with Brian?

Billy: "Yeah, man. Steve is legendarily low-keyed, with an upfront passion for tastefulness and tone. When seeing what is possible with the straightforwardness of a bare-naked Fender slab-body straight into a Fender Tweed amp, it is better to stand back for the attack."



PHOTO BY STACIE HUCKEBA



“Steve is legendarily low-keyed, with an upfront passion for tastefulness and tone... [he maintains] impact through simplicity” **Billy Gibbons**

What does your songwriting process look like now, and how has that changed from your early days recording for Stax?

Steve: “Songwriting has always been easy for me, like water off a duck’s back. But I can’t write by myself, I’m too critical. I love having someone there to say, ‘That was good, do that again.’ I usually put down titles first, then see what’s good for that day.”

Has that changed much since your early days with Stax in the 60s or doing sessions in the 70s?

Steve: “No, it’s pretty much the same. I’ve always loved co-writing. There are only one or two songs out there with just my name on them, like [Booker T & The MG’s] *Soul Dressing* with The Mar-Keys.”

What was the first song you wrote for new record, *Friendlytown*?

Steve: “The first time Billy Gibbons came in, we worked on the song *Friendlytown*. I love one or two-word titles. ‘Friendlytown’ sounded good to me, so we decided to name the album that.”

Billy, once you got rolling, what was the process like working with Steve on riffs and songwriting?

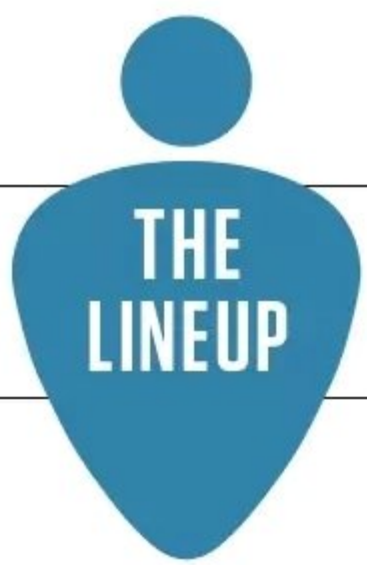
Billy: “One word when working beside Steve is ‘acceleration’. The adrenaline works overtime, which ironically is balanced when creating laid-back guitar figures. The title track, current to this behind-the-scenes view with Steve’s disc, *Friendlytown*, slips a bluesy six-string smoothness throughout, which paves the way for absorbing the record’s feel.

“There exists a mutual awareness of the challenge of maintaining impact through simplicity. It might be fair to say Steve wrote the book on economy while staying focused on ferociousness.”

As far as tones, what gear did you use when recording *Friendlytown*, and did you consider what Steve used in order to create contrasting textures?

Billy: “Knowing Steve’s prowess playing stridently Cropper-like on just about anything, we waited for Crop’s arrival in order to spy out which axe of his many would be favoured for session ignition. Lo and behold, Steve, in fine fashion, strolled in, having a

PHOTO BY STACIE HUCKEBA



look around and, of course, grabbed the studio's classic, 1960 Fender Esquire!

"Pearly Gates [Gibbons' 1959 Les Paul Standard] was immediately put into service as a complementary tonal companion. Steve held back his twin-pickup Telecaster for extra sass. Fender and Magnatone amplification made the collection of sounds blend together handily."

Brian, let's talk about your track, *Too Much Stress*. That song originates from an email to Jon Tiven, where you initially declined to participate, right?

Brian: "So Jon emails me one day, saying, 'Look, I'm producing this record for Steve Cropper. Do you want to play on it?' I said, 'Oh, I'd really love to, but I'm in

"Guitar playing, for all of us, is the voice; it's how you feel. If your guitar can express that feeling, you've done your job" **Brian May**

the middle of all this stuff at the moment, including being on tour. I'd really love to, but right now there's too much stress in my life. My apologies.' I said, 'Maybe I can do it another time, but at the moment, there's too much stress.'

"Two days later, an email comes back from Jon, saying, 'Okay, I hear your email. I've written a song about your email. It's called *Too Much Stress*. Do you want to play on this for Steve?' I had to say yes! He sent me the track and it was just full of life and fun. It made me smile."

A chance encounter between Jon Tiven and Billy Gibbons at a grocery store led to Tiven bringing the guitarist into the Midnight Hour fold



PHOTO BY STACIE HUCKEBA

Of note, you and Billy share the solo on *Too Much Stress*. Can you tell us a bit about how that came about?

Brian: "That was an interesting situation because Billy had already played half a solo. Jon said to me, 'Can you play the other half?' I said, 'Jon, look, can't you give him a whole solo and me a whole solo?' Jon said, 'No, this is the way it's going to be.' I said, 'Oh God, all right.' But I listened and thought, 'Actually, this probably does make sense.'

"Billy, of course, is the coolest guitar player on the planet. He plays so little, but it counts so much. It's just very, very cool. He's not showing off or trying to prove a point. He's just playing from his heart – so I did the same thing. I took over where he left off and did my half of the solo, and it was a very rare thing. My wife loves it. She doesn't love anything I do, generally, but she loves this track. She said, 'This is what you should be doing. Going out on tour with these guys and being on this record.' [Laughs]"

Did you stick with the Red Special in your beloved Vox AC30?

Brian: "Nothing different from that – that setup is really an extension of me. The Vox and that guitar, along with a copy of the [Dallas] Rangemaster Treble Booster that's slightly souped up. That's basically what it is. It's the sound of Rory Gallagher, though my sound ends up different."

Billy, what was your perspective on sharing space within *Too Much Stress* with Brian?

Billy: "It was quite obvious we both were enamoured with the opportunity to keep the invitation front and centre. Ain't no doubt the joint enthusiasm accompanied the performances to a satisfying sense of 'Steve-approved' style."

Steve - Billy and Brian have dug into their gear a bit, but what's the secret to harnessing the coveted Cropper tone?

Steve: "I don't switch much. The first guitar I played for 14 years was just a regular run-off-the-shelf Telecaster model. The second one I've been playing for 10 years and I might retire it soon. I've had two custom guitars made up, but they've got to feel right, you know?"

"I've been using a Victoria amp made in Chicago. It's a handmade [Fender] Twin [clone], and I've been using it for years. People like Bonnie Raitt and Buddy Guy have played it, too. I just stick with what works for me. So, there's no magic. If it's comfortable, that's what matters to me."

And when you take a solo, how do you approach things?

Steve: "The guitars stayed the same for me. I prefer not to hear something before I work on it; I like reacting to it fresh. It's not always the first take, but I keep at it until it's perfect. My solos are more lyrical, kind of vocal-like. I always try to play the melody, like in *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay*, where I tried to mimic the sound of seagulls. I stick to that formula – it's worked so far."



***Friendlytown* is unique - if only because it features three contemporaries who have impacted each other and shaped the sound of guitar over the past 50-plus years.**

Billy: "We positioned a sizable studio corner to allow that elusive element of providing a sense of space for everybody to enjoy a slice within each song. Steve's direction was invaluable, indicating moments within each arrangement where a slight sonic stab might be enough, still leaving room for everyone on the session. Brian May's injection dug in right, keeping the three-lane avenue wide open, joining three parts together as one."

Brian: "What we have in common is that we don't shred for the sake of it. In my case, it's because I can't! [Laughs] But guitar playing, for all of us, is the voice; it's how you feel. If your guitar can express that feeling, you've done your job. We have that in common. Nobody is showing off or zooming up and down the fretboard. Everyone is playing what feels right, and there's passion in it. There's an incredible sense of integrity that Steve helped to create."

Steve: "[Jon] Tiven ran into Billy and told him about the record. Billy said, 'Can I be on it?' That meant a lot to me. But other than Billy being a superstar with ZZ Top and playing his butt off - our styles are pretty similar! [Laughs] And I have always been impressed with Brian's vocal harmonies. I'm just glad we were able to mix everything and figure out where it all should fit [on the record]. Thank goodness! Beyond that, I wouldn't break it down; listen for yourself!"

Which of these tracks best represents the connections you made on this record?

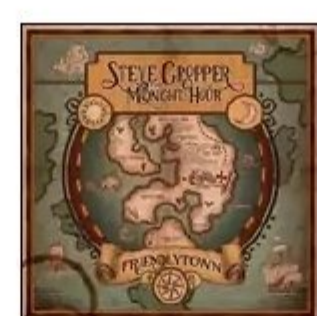
Steve: "Aside from *Too Much Stress*, I'd say *There's Always A Catch*. It's the most R&B track, it's unlike anything I've played before. The track is funky and sticks with you."

What does this experience mean to you all?

Billy: "Just another day in Groovesville. Kinda tops it off in soothing the soul. If you need further reassurance of the depths of Steve's importance, just take it from that well-known shout-out in the hit with Sam & Dave's *Soul Man*. 'Play it, Steve!' says it all."

Brian: "With Steve, there's a form of unbroken coolness. That's the beauty of a collaboration like that. The perk of doing what I do is playing with fantastic people; I'm so lucky. Steve's guitar playing moves people, but it's not just notes, there's structure. Steve sees the whole picture - he co-wrote (*Sittin' On*) *The Dock Of The Bay*, he didn't just put some guitar on. His playing is colossal and immortal. So yeah, he doesn't feel like a contemporary... he feels like an icon to me."

Steve: "I just hope to be remembered as a nice guy. That's all I care about, so I don't think about what's next. I just focus on what I'm doing at the moment." **[AD]**



The new album from Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour, *Friendlytown*, is available now on Mascot Label Group/Provogue
<https://playitsteve.com>

Jon Tiven, Billy Gibbons and Steve Cropper in the studio with country-rock singer-songwriter and guitarist Tim Montana, who can be heard on *You Can't Refuse*

PHOTO BY STACIE HUCKEBA



Hit List

Neville Marten highlights the incredible Larry Knechtel, who boasted an almost unsurpassable list of credits on multiple instruments

Toto session legend Steve Lukather was recently posed a question that went: 'Do you play another instrument well enough to do so in a band and, if so, have you ever done it?' His response was: "I played bass on Michael Jackson's *Beat It*..."

Steve's immense solos have flattered many great songs, including Randy Crawford's *You Might Need Somebody*, *Running With The Night* by Lionel Richie, and Don Henley's *Dirty Laundry*, along with a thousand

"Larry played Hammond organ on *God Only Knows* and *Good Vibrations*, bass on Elvis's 'Comeback Special', and piano on *9 To 5*..."

others, including also devising the stonking guitar riff to *Beat It*. Then there's his own band's amazing tracks: *Hold The Line*, the beautiful *I Won't Hold You Back*, and the jaw-dropping end solo on *Rosanna*. As great a resumé as any musician could want, you'd think. But, not to lessen Steve's stellar work (and who am I to do so?), there's also Larry Knechtel.

Born in 1940 in Bell, California, a largely self-taught musician, Larry grew up studying electronics. But hearing the blues and R&B on the crystal radio he'd built, he turned his attention to a career in music. Within not much more than a decade Larry had supplied bass for The Byrds' *Mr Tambourine Man*, piano for The Mamas & The Papas' *Monday Monday* and Duane Eddy's *Rebel Rouser* (he was in Duane's band at age 19), and lead guitar on Bread's *The Guitar Man* – several session guys had failed to achieve what David Gates wanted, so Larry said, "Can I have a go?" and nailed it, first take. He also played piano on The

Ronettes' legendary *A Christmas Gift For You* album, and bass on The Doors' *Light My Fire*. But there's another nugget or three, would you believe... Larry also played Hammond organ on The Beach Boys' *God Only Knows* and *Good Vibrations*, bass on Elvis Presley's 1968 'Comeback Special', and piano on Mason Williams' *Classical Gas* and Dolly Parton's *9 To 5*.

Larry devised and played the piano part that adorns Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, for which he bagged a Grammy. When playing live Paul Simon would go off and leave Larry and Art to perform the song. Later on, when things became strained between the duo this rankled somewhat. Paul shared, "...I'd be sitting off to the side, Larry Knechtel would be playing piano and Artie would be singing *Bridge*. People would stomp and cheer when it was over, and I would think, 'That's my song, man...'"

There are hundreds of other great Knechtel moments. But while great session musicians have peppered thousands of tracks with their specific instrument, such as drummer Hal Blaine, bassist Carol Kaye, guitarists Tommy Tedesco, Reggie Young, Johnny Smith and Glen Campbell, I can't recall a multi-instrumentalist as prolific as Larry Knechtel.

Crew Cats

Larry was part of The Wrecking Crew, the band of musicians that worked LA's studios during the 1960s and 70s, backing stars such as Sinatra, Streisand and Nat King Cole, The Monkees, The Partridge Family and John Denver, even Batman and The Munsters. They were the go-to house band for Phil Spector and Brian Wilson, too, and, as such, supplied much of the music for Spector's 'Wall Of Sound' productions, and many of The Beach Boys' wondrous works.

Apart from the aforementioned Blaine, Kaye, Campbell and Tedesco, jazz-guitar giant Barney Kessel was also a regular Wrecking Crew member, as was Jim Horn (sax), Joe Osborn (bass) and Leon Russell (piano). Campbell and Russell went on to become stars, but session players and ensembles remained largely behind the scenes.

I wish there was space to talk about Stax and Booker T & The MG's, Motown's Funk Brothers, or one of my favourite bands of session stars, The Section, with Danny Kortchmar, David Lindley and Waddy Wachtel (guitars), Leland Sklar (bass) and Russ Kunkel (drums). This gang, occasionally with various pre-Eagles members or Joni Mitchell, worked on albums by James Taylor, Carole King, Linda Ronstadt, Jackson Browne and others of their 70s ilk. The music they produced was largely self-written and pure class.

Do you have any favourite session musicians – some Brits, maybe? If so, do let us know. **G**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Low Down & Dirty!

What? Fender Player II Precision Bass

Where seen? guitarguitar.co.uk

Price? £763

In the spirit of multi-instrumentalism, every guitarist should play a bit of bass, and here's one that evokes Motown's unsurpassable low-ender James Jamerson. With its alder body, 864mm (34-inch) scale maple neck and genuine 'rolled edge' slab rosewood fingerboard, 20 jumbo frets, a powerful Alnico V split-coil pickup (just roll it back for a more vintage tone), and upgraded classic-style bridge and 'elephant-ear' tuners, it's all you could want to start your own session career.





Breaking The Mould

Alex Bishop attempts to conjure up the Mediterranean climate of Spain from his rainy workshop in Bristol, UK

For anyone who is beginning to explore the possibility of building their own acoustic guitar, you may have realised that there are two ways of doing so. I would describe these as the 'external mould' method and the 'Spanish' method.

I was taught to build a guitar using an external mould to build the body, and then build the neck separately. The key moment in this process occurs when the neck is grafted onto the body, and bringing those two components together gives us the familiar shape of a guitar. It's the way the majority of luthiers build their instruments today.

However, when we picture guitar making, we probably visualise the stereotypical Spanish luthier's workshop: guitar-shaped parts hanging up in a hot dusty workshop, the aroma of red wine, and the seductive sounds of nearby flamenco music. Not exactly the typical scene at Alex Bishop Guitars (imagine heavy rain on the window, abandoned cups of tea scattered about, and The Beatles on the stereo).

By contrast, the 'Spanish' method of guitar building involves making the whole instrument around the neck, which extends a full three or four inches inside the body. The guitar is built face down on a work board called a *solera*, which sets the all-important neck angle and height of the bridge. The soundboard is the first thing to be glued to the neck, followed by the sides, and then the back is fixed before the instrument is taken off the *solera* in the final stages of construction.

Spanish Style

This year I was challenged by one of my students to help them build a guitar using this highly efficient yet (for me) unfamiliar process. We set about building a copy of a guitar made by legendary Spanish master luthier Antonio Torres. So to follow any other process simply wouldn't have been right, and – given that the neck join is an important element in the transfer of vibrations from the top – could have detrimental implications on the sound.

Therefore, getting the *solera* right would be the first crucial part when building a guitar in this way. The centre of the board had to be gently dished to give the soundboard a curve (not easy to do accurately), and the board beneath the neck needed to project at the correct angle to result in precisely the right bridge height. Getting any of this wrong at this early stage would spell disaster by the end, so we checked our measurements over and over ('Measure twice, cut once', as the saying goes) before moving onto the heel end of the neck.

Here, things get pretty tricky. After an extended period of deliberation and excessive tea consumption, we resolved to cutting the slots into the side of the neck

to accept the sides; the width of these is required to match the thickness of our sides precisely to ensure a tight fit (unless a pair of wedges are used to do the hard work of closing the gap). Once cut, the carving work either side of this line wasn't easy to discern from our plan drawings. With barely a perpendicular edge to be found, we carefully pared the wood until we beheld a finished neck.

"The 'Spanish' method involves making the instrument around the neck, which extends three or four inches inside the body"

Within a surprisingly short amount of time the key components (front, neck, sides and back) were then glued together and a guitar was released from its mooring on the *solera*. I was impressed at the speed of the build, noting that by being able to avoid the time-consuming process of neck fitting, we had really sped things up. We ended our lutherie session just as the sun was starting to break through the clouds, and on the stereo one of Paco De Lucía's blistering runs was coming to a climactic finale.

Exploring this new method of guitar building was something of an exciting revelation. As I locked up the workshop I had a final thought: maybe for dinner it would only be right to pick up a bottle of Jerez and knock up a tortilla... **G**

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

Alex created a *solera* – a Spanish-style work board – to build the guitar





Stacked With Tone

Jamie Dickson enlists Adrian Emsley of Orange to explain how he personally dials in amps to get a stellar sound

There can be few brands as committed to the glorious sound of valves doing what they do best than Orange. And that's due, in no small part, to the efforts of the company's amp design guru Adrian Emsley, a man who has analogue guitar tone running in his veins, so to speak. Here at *Guitarist*, we've become big fans of his 70s-style single-channel OR30 head, which doesn't seem to have a bad tone in it and works impeccably for classic rock.

Adrian's also a master of high-gain designs such as the Dual Dark 100 and, perhaps less obviously, he's also given the world a brilliant clean amp in the TremLord combo. So there can be few people more qualified than he to dispense advice on getting great tone out of your amp at home and on stage. For starters, we ask how Adrian approaches dialling in an amp he's never tried before.

"I'll probably just see what it does both ways," Adrian offers. "So I'll check out what it's got in the preamp, try to get a decent sound at low volume. See what it's got; see what it does. See what you've got to do to the tone stack [EQ and gain controls] to get a good sound. I try to design stuff so that it sounds good [with all the dials set] at 12 o'clock because then people can easily adjust to taste. So that's probably where I'll start. Obviously, someone else's amp might be different. But I would check that out first," he says.

Orange Amps' high-gain Dual Dark 100 heads have two 12AX7 valves per channel in the preamp and four EL34s

"Next, I'll back the gain off and then find the threshold of where it starts hitting the power amp," he says, referring to the part of the amp that houses the larger, more complex power valves that do the heavy lifting of getting the speakers moving. Though the power stage of an amp is typically designed to provide relatively clean amplification of the signal before it hits the output transformer, in practice power valves can and do distort as the amp is pushed harder and harder, providing a more three-dimensional and chunky-sounding distortion than the small, triode valves in the preamp stage can provide alone. This means it's important to know at what volume level an amp's power valves start to saturate.

"I want to know where that [power-stage break-up point] is volume-wise because it could be at 7, it could be at 8, it could be at 9," Adrian continues. "You've got to find that so you know where it is. So I'll find the threshold of where you start getting into power amp [clipping] and then I'll check out the feedback content. The way I'll do that is I'll back the gain off, get the volume right up and see at what point I can get each note to go into feedback while the amp is still clean. Blonde Fenders are great at that because you can get controlled feedback while the amp's still totally clean – because you're pushing that much air.

"That is something that gets missed out when people try to recreate vintage tones. If you listen to *Sixty Years* by Brian Setzer, you'll see what I'm saying. His guitar's not got that much sustain, right? I mean, it's a Gretsch Hollow Body with Filter'Trons in it, you know? The magnet's stronger, the windings are less, and there's a fair bit of pull on the strings. So the guitar is not going to sustain quite as much as a Les Paul because the construction's different. But the note goes into perfect feedback in time with the track – that's what I listen out for. Trainwreck [amps] are really good for that. If you get a good Express or a good Liverpool [models of Trainwreck amp], those will both do it."

Wreck Diving

The reference to Trainwreck is telling as Ken Fischer's amps – and those that continue to be built under that name following his death in 2006 – remain a paragon of crystalline crunch and singing gain tones for many players, with hand-built examples of his AC30-inspired Liverpool model from the 80s fetching tens of thousands of pounds today.

"What Ken Fischer did was take the vintage Fender topology – the tone stack's shoehorned in between the first and second stage, so it's acting as a shaper, it's never acting as a filter," Adrian explains. "From the get-go, it's shaping how tight the amp is and the amount of mid and treble that's smashing into the power amp. So it's that topology with an extra stage added after





it. It's a three-stage, and that third stage is where the majority of distortion's happening: at the power amp. So a Trainwreck would be the worst amp to try to add an effects loop to because all the distortion's happening after where you'd put that effects loop – most of it's still happening in the power amp."

As previously mentioned, this kind of power-stage clipping tends to be more chunky and three-dimensional than distortion generated by the preamp valves alone. Taking the idea further, if you're using a transistor-based

Blonde Fenders, such as this Piggyback Bassman, are great at going into feedback while the amp is still clean, says Adrian

"I'll find the threshold of where you start getting into power amp [clipping] and then I'll check out the feedback content"

overdrive pedal to provide most of your distortion before the signal even hits the amp, while the amp itself is set to run totally clean, you may be in for disappointing tones, Adrian says.

"A lot of people get things like Super OverDrives, Tube Screemers, Klons and use them into a clean amp and wonder why they sound terrible [laughs]. Whereas the obvious thing is to get some hair [slight break-up] on the amp first, and then those kinds of pedals will give you a lot more of what the amp's doing – and that's how to use them, you know?" Adrian grins. 

THREE TO GET READY

Amps for classic rock and drive pedals



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Orange OR30 £1,699

It's a regular in *Guitarist's* demo studio as the girthy, chewy tones this vintage-voiced 30-watt head produces are reliably great. While it's a single-channel design, it's not without tweakability, boasting a footswitchable boost for solos and a three-way Bright switch, letting you tailor the voicing to suit the rest of your rig. It's built (to last) in the UK, too.



PHOTO: MARSHALL

Marshall JTM45 2245 Vintage Reissue Head £1,429

The daddy of all low-gain rock amps is still going strong and there's a reason for that – its sound has yet to be beaten for singing lead sounds and glassy crunch, AC/DC style. Marshall's current 30-watt reissue gets its mumbo from a pair of 5881 valves, which are basically ruggedised 6L6s. Expect chimy, chunky cleans that saturate into smooth, supple drive if you crank the volume and hit them with a drive or boost pedal. Magic.



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

PRS HDRX 20 £799

Based, we are told, on one of the Marshall 'Plexis' used by Hendrix at Woodstock, this sharp-looking and great-sounding head scales down what people like about 'Plexis' running at full chat and makes that sound more accessible. PRS says: "The PRS HDRX 20 features a two-way Bright switch, High-Mid Gain switch and Presence controls. These features mirror the historic amp and give players flexibility and increased control of their tone."

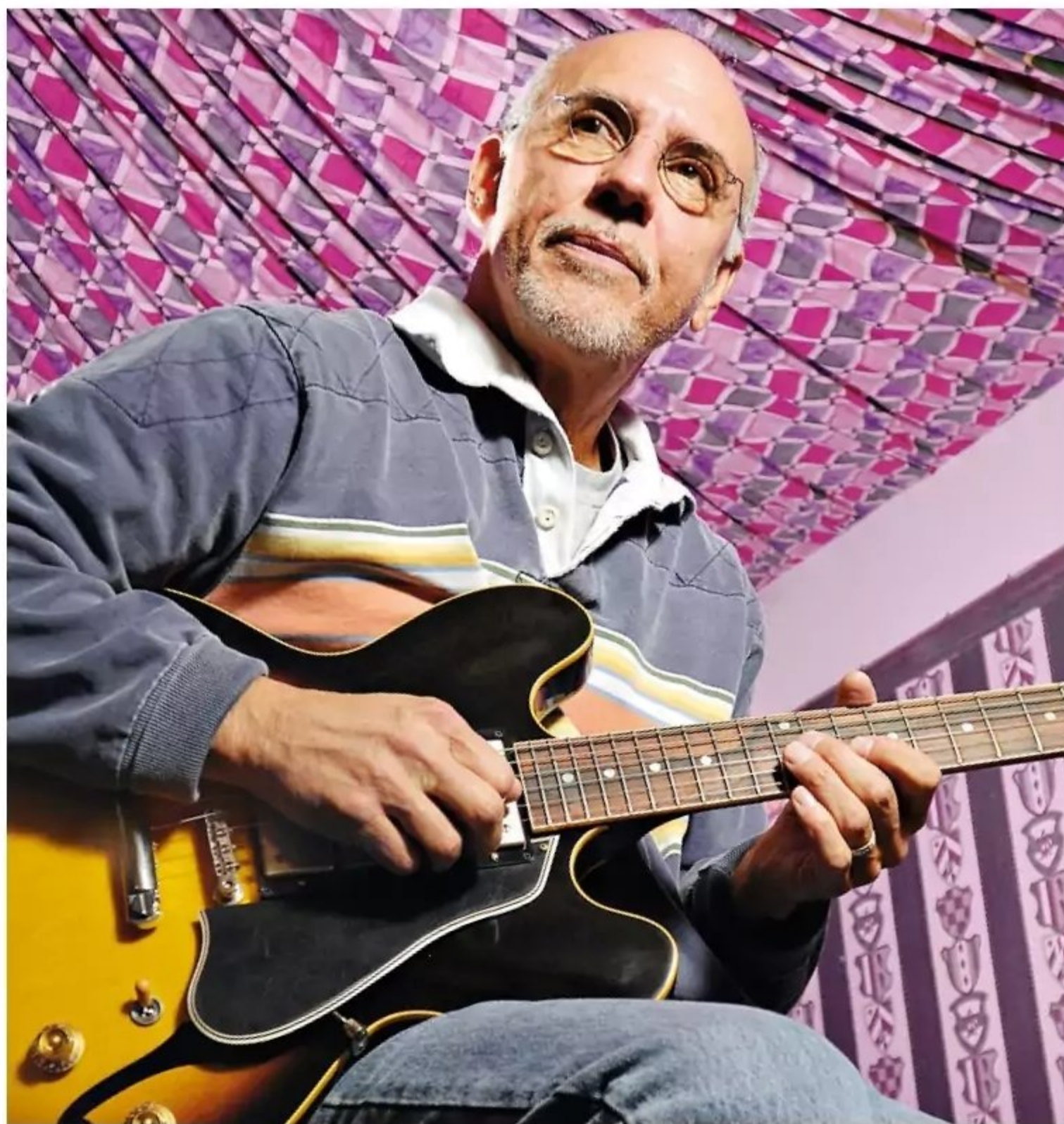


Extended Harmony

Richard Barrett clarifies the difference between polychords and slash chords to give you further insight into harmony

Chords, scales and harmony are subjects you could spend your whole life studying – and perhaps that complexity and sense of infinite possibilities is what keeps most of us hooked. There are various ways in which we can approach any one aspect of chords and their extensions, but for this feature I've chosen to highlight polychords and slash chords, clarifying what each term means – and what the difference is between them.

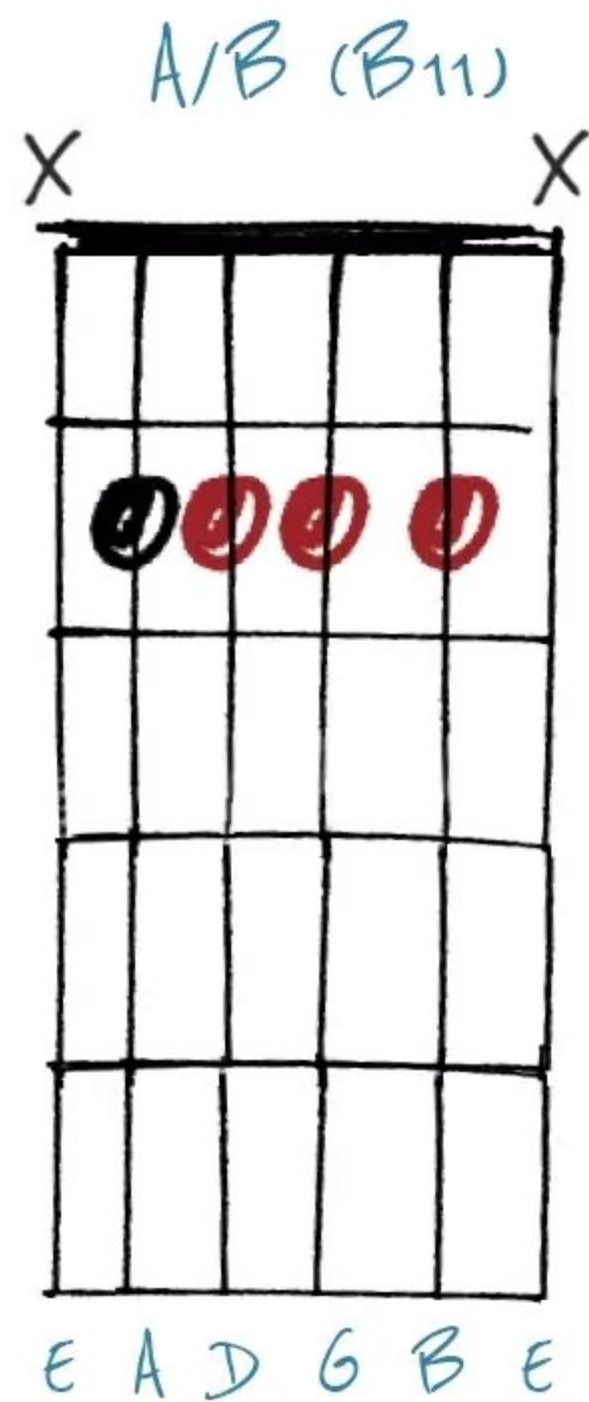
A slash chord such as A/B features a triad over a non-root bass note. In this case, an A major with a B in the bass (check out Examples 1 and 2 below). A polychord contains two complete triads played together. This isn't always easy on the guitar, but the Em/maj9 (E minor and B major combined) in Example 5 is a great example. The reason for such experimentation isn't purely academic; hearing and recognising what's going on in chords such as this can give us a different insight into harmony than counting through scales to name extensions. **G**



Larry Carlton uses polychords in his playing as a basis for improvisation

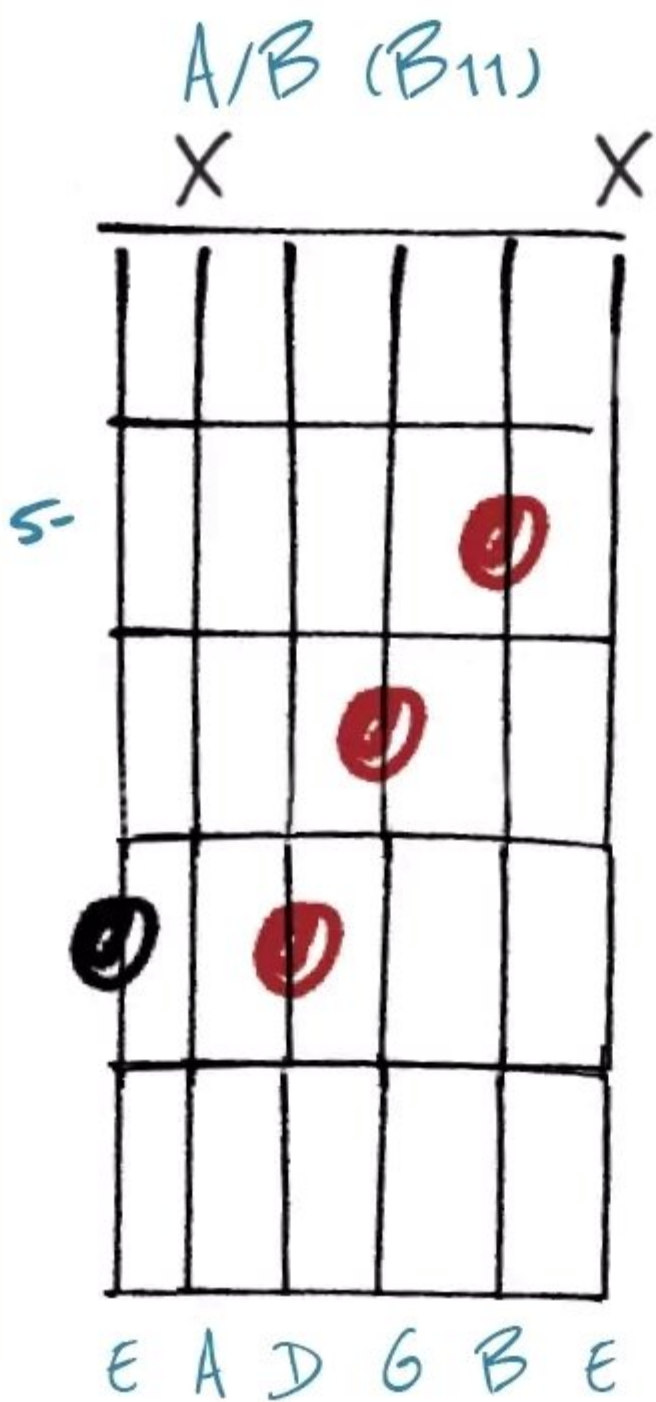
Example 1

You'll notice this A/B could also be correctly named B11. Why? Well, if we take the B as our root, the A, C# and E become the 7th, 9th and 11th. In some contexts it could make sense to call this a B11, but calling it A/B gives us more of an insight into what's actually going on harmonically – and this is a good thing.



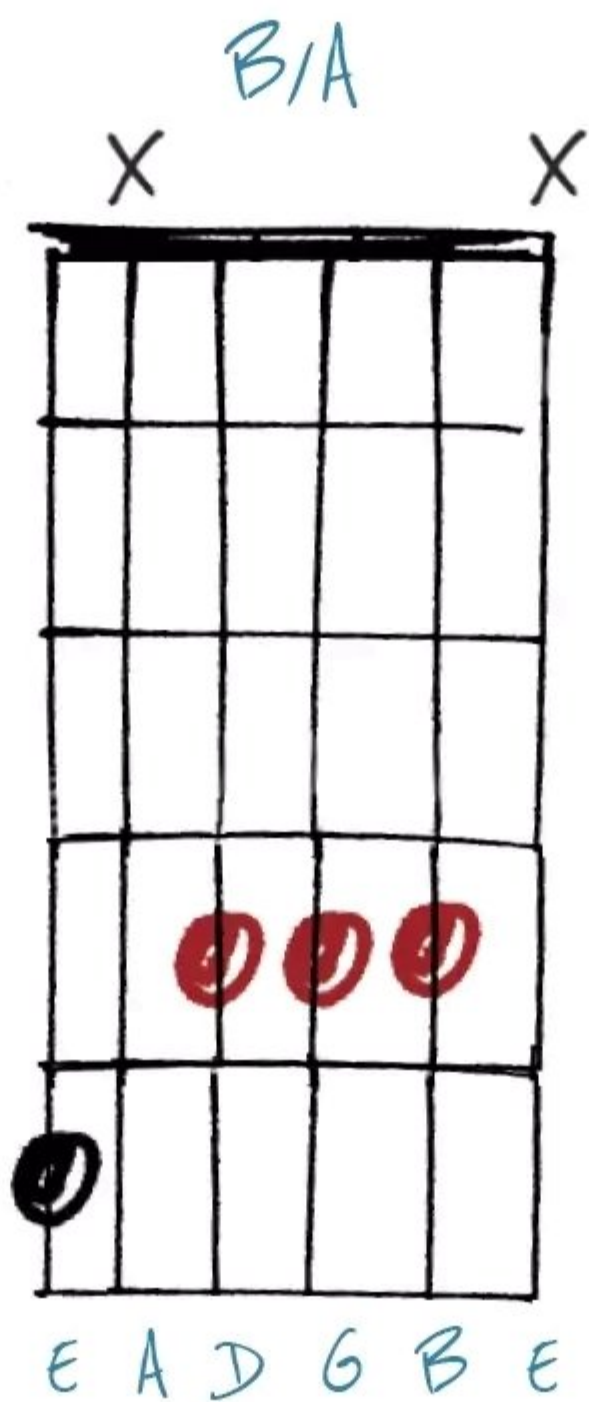
Example 2

Here's another A/B. The same applies as Example 1: unless there's a strong contextual reason to call this B11, it makes sense to use the more intuitive slash chord name. You can solo using A major or F#m pentatonic, B Mixolydian or A Lydian modes over this chord. Why not give each of these a try?



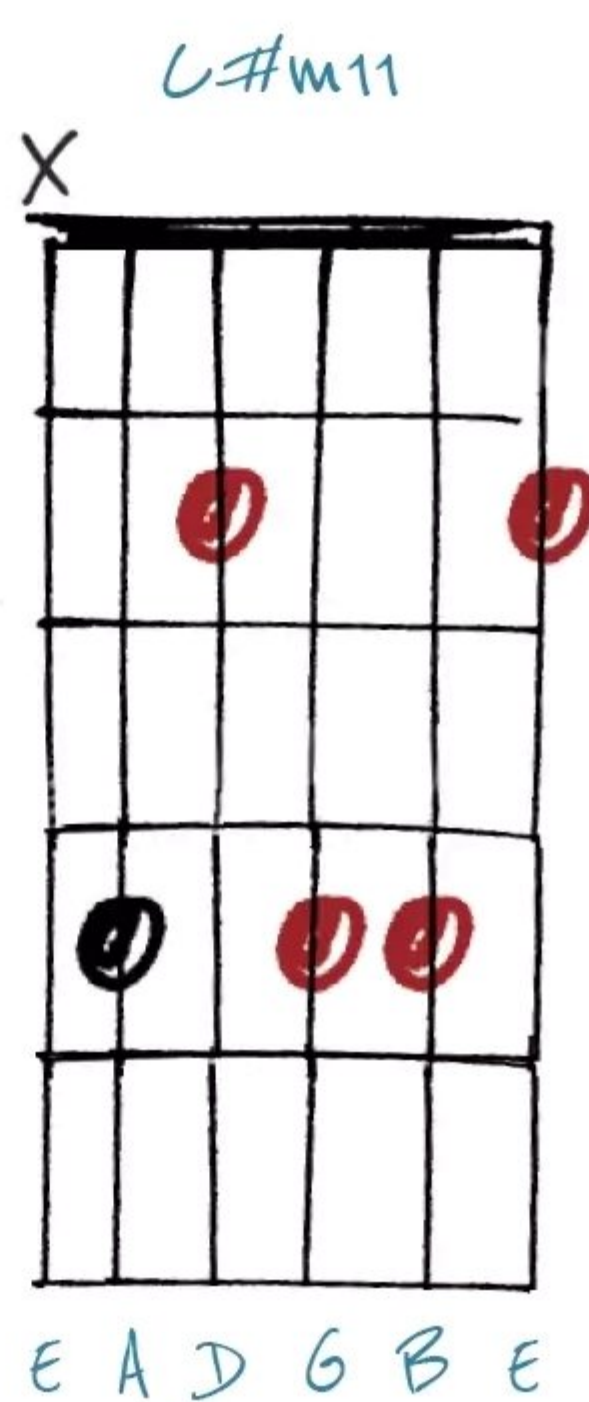
Example 3

If we reverse the order of chord and bass notes from Examples 1 and 2, we get B/A – a B major triad with an A at the bottom. A is actually the 7th that gives B7 its name, but it has a far stronger effect at the bottom like this, which warrants the different name.



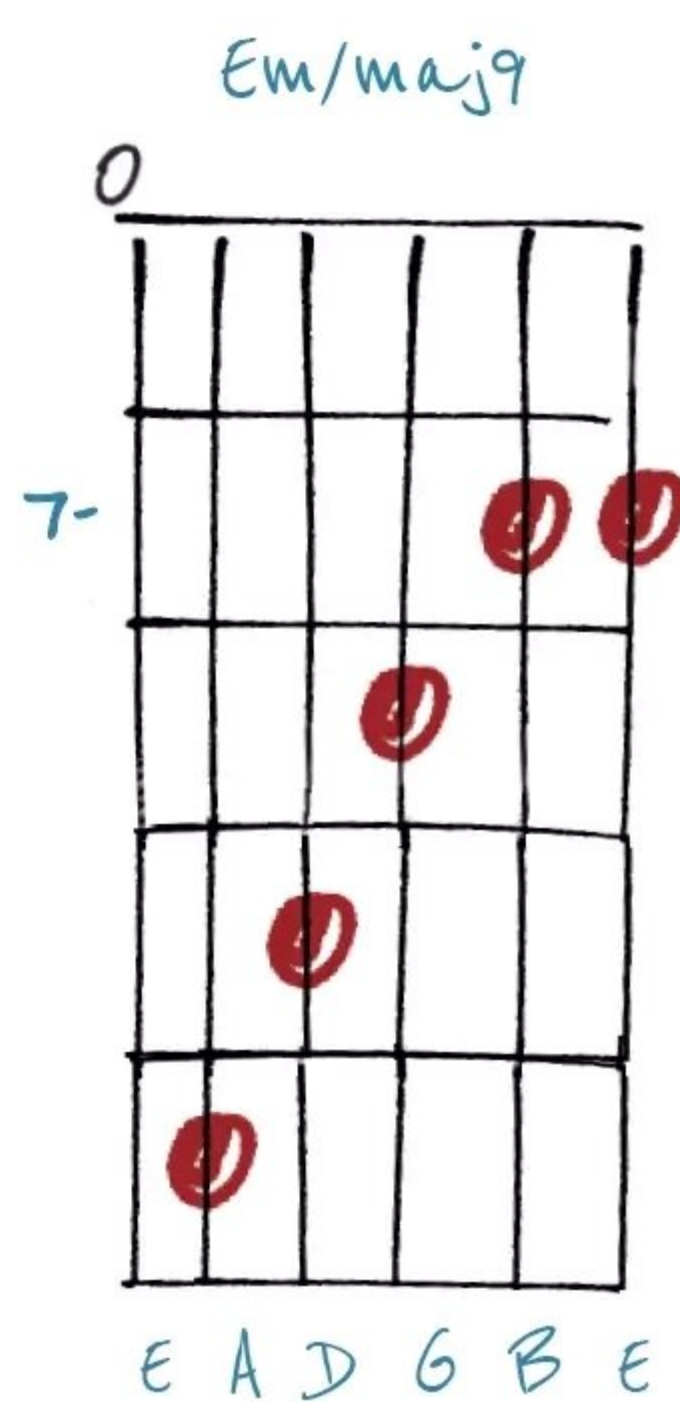
Example 4

This C#m11 has the root (C#) at the bottom, so it isn't a slash chord. However, if we look at the two lowest notes, C# and E, we have the root and 3rd, which set this up as some kind of C# minor. The B, D# and F# on the top three strings are the 7th, 9th and 11th, which happen to form a B major triad. We're getting into polychord territory here...



Example 5

This Em/maj9 is named according to the usual conventions of extended chords (from low to high): Root-3rd-5th-maj7th-9th-5th. This is the renowned 'Bond theme' chord, with a B on the top. If we look at the lowest three strings, we find E-G-B, an E minor triad. And the top three, B-D#-F#, make a B major triad.



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STAR LETTER

DAD'S GUITAR



I wanted to share something with you that happened to me recently that came totally out of the blue. A gentleman named David Williams had placed an advert in the *Thurrock Gazette*, a local paper in the Essex area I'm originally from. He was searching for the children of my late father in order to pass back to the family a bass guitar that had belonged to him.

David had been friends with my dad, Terry Bushell, back in the early 70s, bonding over after-work drinks and a love of music having both been in different bands; in my dad's case it was local band 'The Rockin' Devils'. David was interested in moving from the drums to other instruments and, as my dad was no longer gigging, he loaned him his Shaftesbury bass guitar so that he could learn on it. As often happens in life, people move away, change jobs or whatever and friends lose touch with each other.

Fast forward to the 80s and David was attending a party in the garden of some friends' back in Thurrock when my dad's face appeared over the fence – he was coincidentally living next door. The two made plans to meet up and David mentioned still having the guitar to give back to my dad. Sadly, it was not to be as within weeks my dad was killed in a motorcycle accident.

Fast forward again to this year and David's advert put us in touch and we met up, coincidentally, on Father's Day. It was great to spend a few hours talking with someone who knew my father and to hear stories about what he was like. Obviously, it was a very emotional moment to see the guitar; my sister and I don't really have many things that belonged to my dad, and with me being a guitarist as well it has provided a direct connection to him, right down to its 70s strings.

I am forever grateful to David for making the effort to get in touch and return the guitar to the family. I really can't thank him enough.

Simon Bushell

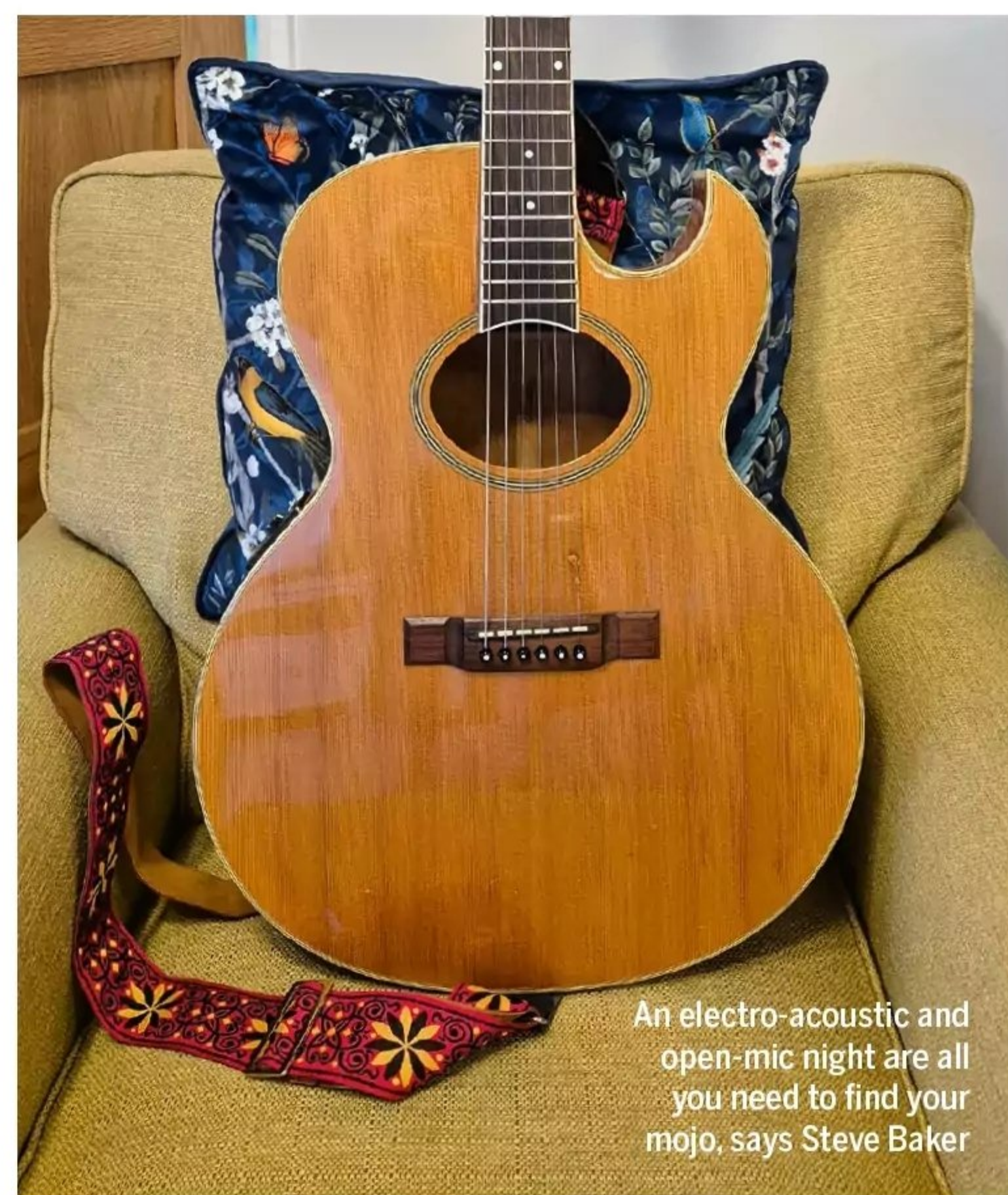
What a heart-warming story, Simon, thanks for sharing it with us – and kudos to David Williams, who took such trouble to reconnect you to memories of your father and his love of music. Guitars can be more than tools at times, they can be fragments of the past. Like a traveller returning home, this guitar is now back where it belongs, with your family, thanks to a generous gesture from an old friend.

OPEN INVITATION

I'd just like to add to Brian Riordan's letter in issue 513, about how to keep your motivation up for playing, practising and progressing. Keeping motivation high is clearly a major talking point, with 37 per cent of respondents in your recent survey saying this was an issue for them. Like Brian, I, too, have gone through peaks and troughs including spells of not playing for months at a time. Now in my late 50s, I enjoy playing as much as I ever did. There are a couple of reasons for this, which might be helpful for others.

Firstly, let the next guitar be an electro-acoustic. I bought an old Washburn a few months ago that puts a smile on my face whenever I pick it up. Electro-acoustics are great value, there's no faff with them, they're so easy to have around the house unplugged to pick up whenever you feel like it, even for a few minutes – and there's also a buoyant secondhand market.

Next, go along to your local open-mic night. Just going along may rekindle the inner mojo. If your singing is terrible, like mine, go along and team up with someone who can sing for the next time. A friend of mine collaborates with a poet he met at our local open-mic night and puts music to her prose. Another lady plays along with a saw with a bow. There's a chap with a harmonica who'll join in with anybody, who's actually quite good. Have a go, you'll get nothing but



An electro-acoustic and open-mic night are all you need to find your mojo, says Steve Baker



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

www.voxamps.com

support and encouragement and a whole heap of enjoyment. It will also make you want to practise for the next one, and put effort into learning things to the best of your ability and figure things out, so you start to progress. That's my experience, anyway.

If you're around Northchurch (next to Berkhamsted) on the first Thursday of the month, come along to the George & Dragon for their excellent open-mic night. It's well supported with all sorts of people and talents. You never know, you too may be annoying the hell out of the other half within a few weeks, like I am, with your constant practising. Maybe see you there.

Steve Baker

The quickest way to improve, as we've touched on a few times in recent issues, is to just get out there and play. We speak less often, though, about how playing live is also the best motivator to do it all over again. Like fitness, it gets easier the more you do it and more fun. And we salute you for just getting stuck in with whoever's up for making a tune or two – brilliant fun and a great way to meet new friends as well. Those open-mic nights are still the backbone of everyday music making in this country.

THE OL' SWITCHEROO

Many years ago, in the 1980s, I traded my nameless Wine Red SG copy for a genuine USA off-white Standard Strat: master volume and tone controls and the third tone position swapped for a jack socket, and knife edge tremolo (which broke)... But it was a *real* guitar. Once the trem fractured due to metal fatigue, the guitar was packed away and gradually left yellowing in a cupboard for decades.

I met Nile Rodgers at a book festival and heard of his many adventures with the Hitmaker. Sometime later, a lightbulb moment: I'll make a Nile tribute. After all, in certain light it's the same colour. Some eBay parts and a pickup rewind by Aaron at Armstrong Pickups and everything was set in stone... or was it?

Browsing the internet recently I discovered the 10-way Strat blade switch, the Free-Way, available from NSF Controls Ltd. I'm thinking of converting all my S-types with this switch – it's a revelation.

Graham Tait

Wonderful, thanks so much for sharing your Nile-inspired creation, Graham, and congratulations on a job well done. Our very own Mod Squad commander Dave Burrluck is a big fan of the Free-Way himself, so if you're embarking on your own Strat build at home and value ultimate versatility, it's well worth a look.



ON SONG

Jamie Dickson's superbly written profile of Richard Hawley and his new album in issue 514 – in particular the mentions of a 'magpie' approach to songwriting, hitting the bullseye without aiming for it and writing songs that can be so deceptive in their simplicity – resonated with me in a rare and powerful way. Songwriting is indeed the soundtrack of one's own experiences and accumulated wisdom as one moves from their 20s or 30s into their 60s and well beyond, and doing so is indeed a highly rewarding and recommended form of therapy. Keep the good inspirations and influences coming!

Jan Zverina

Thanks for the kind words, Jan. It's sometimes easy to forget that the real magic in guitars is what we do with them. And the audience isn't necessarily out in front of the stage – sometimes it's just the player themselves, trying to make sense of life through sounds conjured from the fretboard and words jotted on a pad. One thing we can promise is that time spent in sincere pursuit of a song stuck somewhere inside us is never wasted.

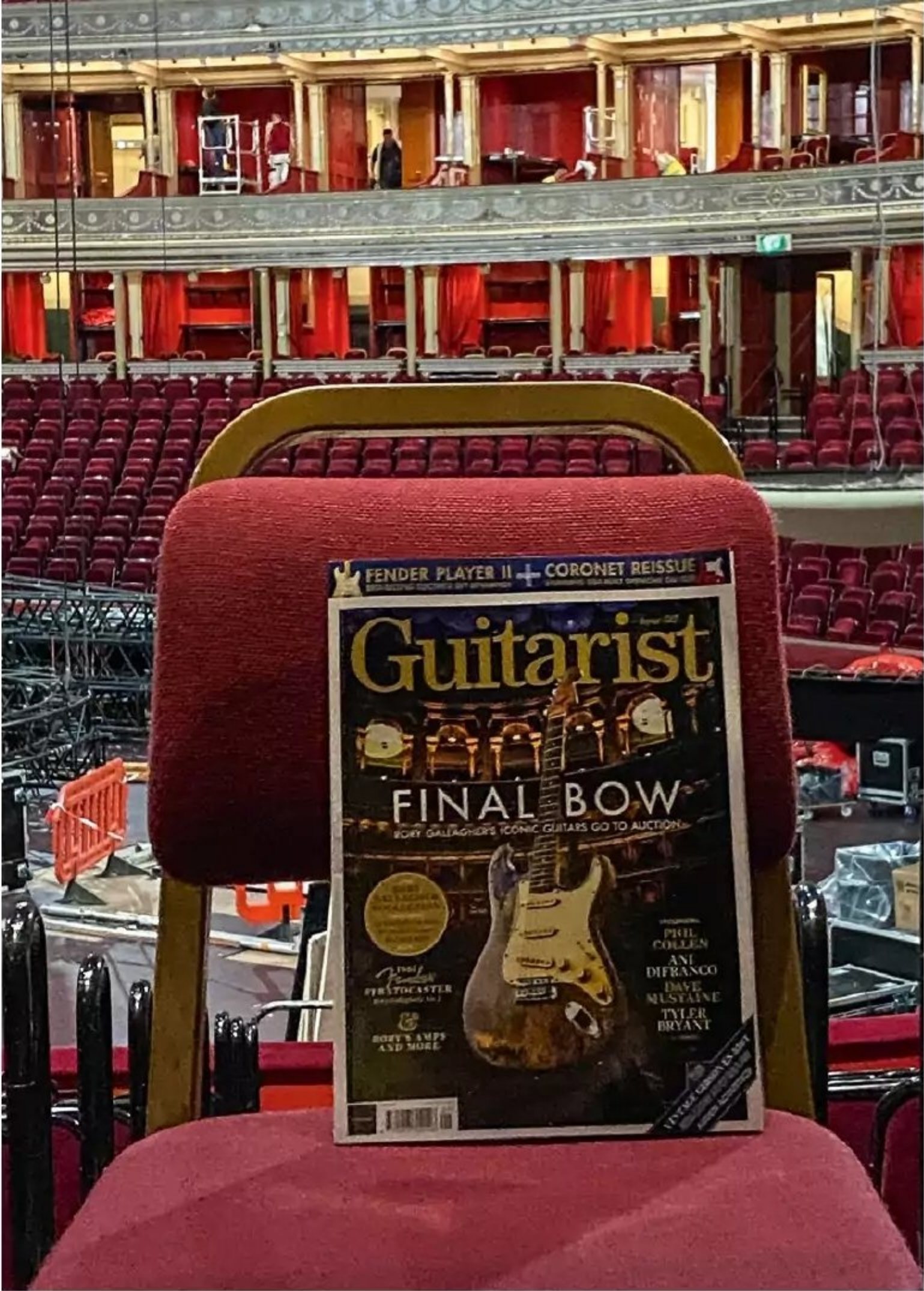
ALL THUMBS

Enjoyed Bob Wooton's article on the Gibson ES-330T (issue 515) – great pics, too, Phil Barker. Bob notes a factory quirk, namely that some 330s left the factory with two knurled thumbwheels per bridge post, one for height adjustment and one at the base of the post. He hypothesised that these may have been fitted in order to help tone transfer and to stabilise the posts. While this may be true, a cynical luthier might conclude that these were more likely installed to conceal a previous aborted attempt to drill the post-holes; there is no tolerance in the distance between the posts, so one tiny slip with the drill bit and the bridge won't fit.

Graham Tait's tribute to Nile Rodgers' famous Hitmaker went one step further by including a Free-Way 10-position blade switch. C'est Chic!



Reader Austen Farrow warmed our cockles when he sent through this pic of issue 515, situated pride of place in the Royal Albert Hall



This would be akin to the plastic or rubber ‘goober-covers’ found on other models. (I’ve never had to resort to this, of course, a friend told me all about it.) Great excuse, though, if it’s ever necessary to fit extra wheels; one could tell the customer it was deliberate!

Andrew Lines (Lines Guitars)

Ah, the wily ways of the luthier... Making guitars is flippin’ difficult so perhaps we’ll excuse the odd factory bodge and the ingenious methods that makers might use to cover it. What you don’t know about can’t harm you, as the saying goes. But such things certainly give one a greater respect for the role of CNC machines in making those parts of a guitar that rely on absolute precision. We did hear of one famous American firm whose neck joints weren’t always absolutely bang on if done on a Friday because some of the staff used to enjoy a Martini at lunchtime! But that’s a tale for another day...

NAME OF THE ROSE

I was flicking through the Summer 2024 edition [issue 514] and my eye caught the article by Neville Marten on George Harrison’s Rosewood Telecaster. It interested me because I had just finished building a partscaster Strat with an all-rosewood neck myself.

My Strat build was inspired by a photo I’d seen of a Fender Custom Shop ‘57 Strat with a two-tone sunburst finish, an all-rosewood neck and a gold anodised pickguard. The price of such a unique Custom Shop creation? \$6,000.

Knowing that this was completely out of my league, I was determined to reproduce some of that guitar charisma on a smaller budget. After a few weeks I’d managed to lay hands on the parts I needed – some of which I already had in various drawers and cupboards.

The body was originally the centrepiece of a made-in-China Squier Classic Vibe 50s Strat; the neck was a Fender-licensed WD all-rosewood 50s-type neck; and the gold pickguard came from another Squier Strat (an Indonesian Classic Vibe 50s). I put Tonerider City Limits single coils in there and sourced road-worn plastics and hardware online – all finished off with a beautiful new hand-wired harness and Mexican-spec vintage bridge/tremolo.

The completed build cost around £350 altogether. Now, I’m not saying it’s in the same league as the Custom Shop model, but it was a joy to put together, sounds and plays beautifully, and, in my opinion, looks pretty close to the Strat that inspired it in the first place. Well, in a low-lit, smoke-filled blues club at 3am it does... and that’s all that matters in the end!

Jon Wells

Thanks for sharing your rosewood beauty, Jon – this is becoming a bit of a welcome trend in our letters pages. Readers have used real savvy to put together some partscasters that punch well above their weight in terms of the cost of construction. Maybe we should do a comp for Britain’s best partscaster! In the meantime, enjoy your fabulous Custom Shop-inspired guitar.

PHOTO FINISH

Hope you like this photo I took today. I’ve been working at the Albert Hall since 1986, doing flooring, and thought you might like it!

Austen Farrow

You have made our day with this, Austen! I think it’s a first that a reader has recreated one of our covers, using the actual cover, in the very venue where it was shot – and the RAH no less! Take a bow yourself...

Jon Wells put together this rather splendid recreation of a Custom Shop Strat, complete with all-rosewood 50s-style neck, for a fraction of its inspiration’s price



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



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MARTIN BARRE

A signature-shifting collision of bucolic folk and frayed-edge rock, Jethro Tull's *Aqualung* stands among the most daring records of the 70s. Martin Barre takes us back to those fabled sessions, from winging his parts to snubbing Jimmy Page

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photography Phil Barker

As Martin Barre reflects with a wry smile, the late 60s were a glorious time to be a square peg. Formed in Blackpool as reluctant blues-boomers, under the de facto leadership of frontman Ian Anderson, Jethro Tull soon outgrew those roots, turning heads across London with their splice of classical, folk and chirruping flute. Defying both the strictures of genre and the pleas of their record label, by 1971 the band had released *Aqualung*, the classic fourth album that stands as a monument to a time when artists, not their paymasters, held the creative reins.

"We were lucky because we were left to our own devices," considers the Birmingham-born guitarist, now a wry and tack-sharp 77 year old who pulls each memory from *Aqualung*'s long-distant sessions as if it were yesterday. "I don't know if that will ever happen again. It was a whole different dynamic back then, a whole different game. I'm really proud of having been through that era, and survived it, and got so much from it."

Where did Jethro Tull find yourselves when the band started work on *Aqualung*?

"*Stand Up* [1969, the follow-up to debut album, *This Was*] had been the breakthrough album, and then *Benefit*

[1970] was a little easier, knowing we had the formula right. Coming back to England to record *Aqualung* after playing all around the world, we were road-toughened. So I would say the first three albums, we were just finding ourselves. I think *Aqualung* was the turning point where the music became intricate, more detailed, and needed more input from everybody. But like all albums, we didn't know what was going to happen. It developed from nothing, from real basics."

How were the band members feeling each other out at that point?

"I think we were all developing, learning how to play. We certainly were during *Stand Up* and *Benefit*. The music was so naive in those days, and you listen to the original recordings and go, 'Whoa, I could play that solo a lot better now.' But that's not the point. It's a little moment in history and it's important it stays that way, with all the crunches and beeps. We were just finding our way through music. Jeffrey [Hammond] joined the band for *Aqualung* – and when I met him, he didn't know which end of the guitar you picked up. He literally had never played an instrument in his life. So me and Ian taught him to play bass while we were learning these songs."



**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Martin talk in depth
about his roots as a guitarist,
plus more info on his gear
and classic Tull sessions
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra



1. Arguably the greatest spec and year of 335 you could wish for – Martin’s stunning 1961 ES-335TDC, as featured in AR Duchossoir’s reference book *Gibson Electrics: The Classic Years*

2. Martin’s absolutely mint 1959 Gibson ES-330T. He says he bought it in Yakima, Washington, in the USA from the original owner’s son – who explained that it had been virtually unplayed since new

Despite that, the whole band sounds so locked in on the *Aqualung* recording.

“To me, that’s what music is about. There’s sympathetic interaction and that was always part of our makeup. There were no stars in Jethro Tull. I mean, Ian was the frontman – but, musically, there was nobody imposing their attitude at all. There was room for everybody. That’s what music is. And if you don’t do that, it shows.”

The title track is such a great guitar moment. There’s that ominous six-note intro riff, then your solo...

“Well, it was Ian’s riff. The solo was all done on the fly. I think it was take two – and if I hadn’t got it in two then it would have been a flute solo. But that’s when Jimmy Page, who was recording with Led Zeppelin in the basement of Basing Street Studios, came up to say hello. He was in the control room window, waving madly. I was in the middle of the solo, and I thought, ‘Sorry, but I can’t stop.’ And I didn’t. I just turned my back. Which was a bit rude. But that was the solo on *Aqualung*.”

The lead playing on the track *Cross-Eyed Mary* is really striking, too.

“It’s music that other bands don’t play, and the chords are sort of oddball, they’re not quite predictable. It’s simple – but it isn’t.”

Another iconic moment is the intro to *Locomotive Breath*, with the dance between piano and guitar.

How did that unfold?

“Nothing was planned. John [Evan, piano] had written that introduction, some really nice chords and voicings in there. I just played pentatonic blues, squeezing in phrases where there was space. Me and John recorded that live.”

And the solo on *My God* is another highlight.

“Well, all these things happened in a couple of takes. There wasn’t the luxury of doing 30 takes or changing a note or whatever. Which is why they’re never perfect, but they’re full of enthusiasm. Even when I record now, that energy starts diminishing. I like that freshness, that excitement. Maybe, again, it’s naivety – you’re not quite sure where you’re going to go. You know the structure and chords, and you know you’ve got to acknowledge the changes, but sometimes you just hear the notes and go for it. I think it was Steve Vai who said, ‘Go where your ear tells you.’”

Tull always had non-standard time signatures.

“[Laughs] That’s one way of putting it! ‘Stupid’, ‘crazy’, ‘pointless’, ‘why?’ I think we just made it like that so people could not dance to it, ever. To me, all the Tull

“‘Aqualung’ was the turning point where the music became intricate, more detailed... But we didn’t know what was going to happen”

stuff comes naturally: you could conjure up a song off *Songs From The Wood* [1977] or *Heavy Horses* [1978], and I can probably play it. And within a half an hour, I can play anything because I can remember what I did. But in my band now, they’ll learn the music at home – it’s like their homework. We might have an afternoon’s rehearsal before the first show, we’ll run all the songs and they’re like, ‘This music is a nightmare, it’s so difficult.’ I guess that passes me by. To me, it’s normal.”

What had inspired you as a guitar player, before you joined Tull?

“Just everything. I left uni and joined this soul band in Bognor Regis – the only way I could get in was playing saxophone. Then we went to R&B, Tamla – we changed as the musical tastes dictated, just to get work. Until the Blues Train hit England. All these amazing artists – Buddy Guy, Freddie King, Sister Rosetta Tharpe – they’d get out of the train and play, every week on TV. It hit like a ton of bricks. That was what opened the door for the blues boom, but it’s not what I wanted to do. All the guitar players in the UK, they were playing Albert King and BB King licks but really badly, and I thought, ‘I don’t want to be one of those.’ I acknowledged it, soaked it in, but wanted to do something different. So I was listening to jazz, classical, blues. And that’s been Tull’s ticket, really. We just listen to everything.”

What do you remember about your earliest days in Tull?

“They’d taken a huge plunge into the unknown getting me onboard as a guitar player. Tull were a blues band





and Ian didn't see that going the distance. He was quite clever, looking ahead with the music. So he took a big risk having me there. When I started back in 1969, I was truly terrified because in the first few months I was on the same stage as every one of my heroes: Mike Bloomfield, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix. I was really in at the deep end. So I see those first years as building up an identity. I wouldn't have called myself a musician until quite a way down the line."

What was the setup in the Basing Street Studios while you were making *Aqualung*?

"I would say that 80 per cent was live, then me and Ian added some overdubs. I remember the solo in *Hymn 43*. Terry Ellis [producer] came in and wanted to be part of the music. And we didn't want him to be because we were quite insular and didn't need any outside information. There was a horrible moment: I'd recorded a solo for *Hymn 43* and Terry didn't like it. He said, 'I think you should do another one.' I said, 'No, I'm happy

with that.' So I had to go around everybody and ask, 'What do you think?' They all voted for it, so it stayed. But it was uncomfortable."

With a band, there's always the question of how much outside guidance you need?

"Well, with Jethro Tull, you don't need anything at all. It sounds glib and pretentious if we say, 'We know what we're doing.' We probably don't – but we know what we want. And the only times we had outside interference, it went wrong. We did a Christmas song in 7/4 – *Ring Out, Solstice Bells* – and the record company said, 'It's got to be in 4/4.' So we got a producer in to record it in 4/4. It was horrible. We didn't want to be there. The poor guy knew we didn't want to be there. The song sounded stupid. You know, you can't add a beat to every bar to music that's already written. In the end, it was released in 7/4.

"The other time, I think we were having a dip in sales and this record company whizz-kid turned up in

"Sympathetic interaction was always part of our makeup. There were no stars in Jethro Tull. There was room for everybody"

the studio with a pile of albums: 'I want you to listen to these.' One was Fleetwood Mac, The Moody Blues, maybe the Eagles. He said, 'These are the top-selling albums of the year. Go and listen to them – that's what I want from you.' No. That's not how it works. Maybe with selling cornflakes, but that's not how it works with music. The independence in Jethro Tull has been vital. And we've kept it throughout all these years."

What was in your arsenal of guitars during the *Aqualung* period?

"Not much of an arsenal [laughs]. I'd met Leslie West after *Benefit*. We'd toured America with Mountain as our support band and I ended up buying a Les Paul Junior, like everyone else who met him did. I had a really old ropey Fender Strat, but basically it was all recorded on the Les Paul Junior. For amps, it was a Hiwatt with this horrible treble booster: when you looked inside, it was just a couple of capacitors and wires. But the Hiwatts didn't have that front-end overdrive, so it needed a bit of a kick. For *Cross-Eyed Mary*, I used this tiny little amp that I bought for £2 off a guy in Birmingham. It doesn't even have a make on it, but it just sounds like nothing else. And I had a Fender Super that I used for *My God*."

As your career in Tull went on, did you get the chance on the road to find guitars?

"Well, they found us. There were these college kids who'd follow all the bands around. They'd go around the pawn shops and bring a selection of vintage guitars to sell. Paul Hamer was one, when he was just a kid, who was almost annoying. He'd turn up at the stage door and you'd be like, 'Go on then, show it to me, but I've only got 10 minutes.' I was quite offhand with him, but our relationship developed and now we're best friends. They'd bring sunbursts, old Strats – you could buy

PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



3. Tull in action at the Royal Albert Hall in 1970. The following year would see them release their most enduringly popular LP *Aqualung*, which proved a springboard for further musical evolution

4. This 1962 Dallas Tuxedo/Fenton-Weill Dualtone is exactly the same model as Martin's first electric guitar, he explains, which he bought in 1963 but later sold, to his lasting regret. After years of searching he bought this example in 2020

5. This beautiful Goldtop is in fact one of the aged replicas made by Terry Morgan – and is fitted with Bare Knuckle pickups to "blow the roof off"





6. This very special PRS P22 was built for Martin by Paul Reed Smith himself in honour of Martin's long-time association with the company's guitars. A sword inlay on the fretboard is a nod to Martin's involvement in the Celtic rock opera *Excalibur* in the 90s

7. Martin at home with that gorgeous ES-330. He says he loves the character of vintage guitars but that modern PRS guitars offer him the stability and reliability he needs night after night on tour

anything. On the other hand, most players would only have two or three guitars because that's all you could play on a gig. Having a 'collection' was, like, 'Why?'"

You play Soldano amps these days. When did that relationship start?

"30 years ago, at least. I used Hiwatts in the first few years, then went to Marshalls because they had better overdrive. No effects, just straight in. The Marshalls didn't survive very well in America – they often blew up, God bless 'em. I had about 10 of them and at any one time, two might be working and the rest our boffin had in pieces backstage. But Soldanos became [my choice]. The reliability, the sound, they just work for me, in every possible way. I love them to bits."

In your music-making today, which guitars are the touchstones for you?

"Well, the tools of my trade would be the Soldano and the PRS. I went through lots of different manufacturers: Hamer, Manson, Ibanez, Fender – I had a relationship

with all the builders. But PRS, I bought them and they were just so reliable. They just do exactly what you want them to do, every night, no deviation. And in the end, I just wanted to turn up at the gig, fire up the amp, plug in the guitar – 'Okay, what time do we start?' The Gibsons and Fenders, the mandolins, bouzoukis, mandolas and all the others, they add to your arsenal of sound. But essentially, the core of what I do is the PRS."

Some guitarists specialise in just one discipline, but you've always seemed interested in every aspect of music. How did that come about?

"Yeah, I like to write music on mandolin, acoustic, electric – you're going through a different door to get where you want to go. It's that 'jack of all trades' thing. I'm never going to be the whizz-kid guitar player, but I don't really want to be. I always think George Harrison is such a great musician and he's my role model: tasteful, melodic, great songwriter, great band member. That's what I take pleasure in. In some of my other projects, I like sitting at the back and being part of an ensemble.

"With Jethro Tull, you don't need [any outside guidance] at all... The independence has been vital. And we've kept it all these years"

"There's a lot more in music than being tied to one direction. I play two or three hours every day. I don't even count. But I diversify. So I play electric for an hour. Then I play my flute for an hour. I think music has a lot to offer, in different colours. What's next? I want to record a new solo album. I want to get back on the road as an electric band. I love playing. I love performing. It's almost an addiction."

You sound like you're still reaching for something?

"It's an infinite thing, music. I'll never stop learning. I'll never stop being inspired. I never, ever think I'm good enough. You know, I hate myself sometimes. I play and I go, 'That was really awful.' And that's the reality of music. Perfection doesn't exist. And I'm sure it doesn't even for the players where you think, 'Wow, they're amazing.' I'm sure they torment themselves, wanting to play better and improve."

Looking back on *Aqualung*, where do you place it within your body of work?

"I recognise its importance. At the time, it wasn't fun to make because we had problems with the performance. We struggled with the studio breaking down. So we didn't finish the album and go, 'Well done, guys. Let's go round the pub.' It wasn't a feel-good album. But whatever that formula was – Ian's great songs, the lyrics, the dynamics of having acoustic songs and electric songs – that sort of kickstarted our ability to switch from one extreme to another. In retrospect, it's a really important album, but we didn't intend it to be." 

Martin Barre brings the A Brief History of Tull tour to the UK in November. See the website for more info

<https://martinbarre.com>



6





JOE PERRY

For five decades, his raw, instinctive guitar lines have helped Aerosmith become the kind of rock act whose songs an entire generation can sing. But as the band grew from funk-fired upstarts into megastars, Joe Perry made sure never to lose one vital thing: curiosity. As Aerosmith call time on their stellar 50-year touring career, Joe joins us to reflect on what he's learned about guitar along the way...

Words Andrew Daly

Leading up to August of this year, Joe Perry was busy preparing for a tour. Not just any tour – he was saddling up for what was to be Aerosmith's rebooted Peace Out tour. The same one that came to a screeching halt after a performance at the UBS Arena in Elmont, Long Island, on 9 September 2023, when normally evergreen vocalist Steven Tyler suffered an injury during the show and fractured his larynx.

But all that changed just weeks ago on 2 August when Aerosmith issued a joint statement informing the world that there would be no second chance at 'Peacing Out'.

"It has been the honor of our lives to have our music become part of yours..." said the statement that ran across all Aero-related social media. "Steven's voice is an instrument like no other. He has spent months tirelessly working on getting his voice to where it was before his injury. We've seen him struggling despite having

the best medical team by his side. Sadly, it is clear that a full recovery from his vocal injury is not possible. We have made a heartbreaking and difficult, but necessary, decision – as a band of brothers – to retire from the touring stage."

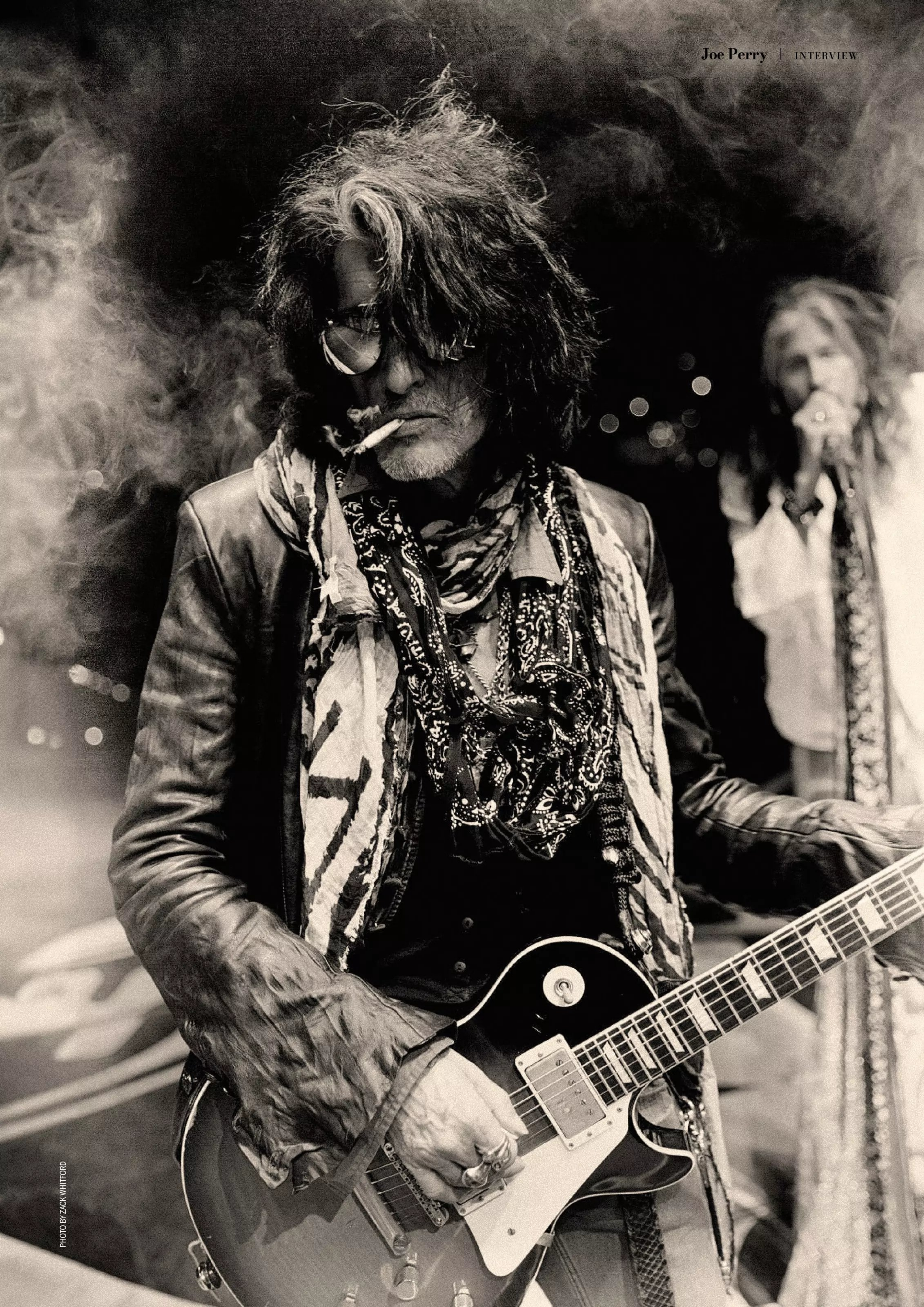
Just like that, Aerosmith, as a touring entity, was gone. Joe Perry, of course, was left reeling to think about what might have been. It's understandable as he had spent over 50 years, save for a few lost years between 1979 and 1984, devoted to the Aerosmith machine. The idea that he and his bandmates couldn't say goodbye on their terms is heartbreaking.

For these reasons and about a million others, when Joe dialled in with *Guitarist* in mid-August of 2024, he politely informed us that he wasn't ready to talk about Aerosmith's end. And who could blame him? Facing one's musical mortality unexpectedly is one thing, but there's also the matter of family – which his bandmates in Aerosmith, and the band itself, should be likened to.

In short, Aerosmith's being forced off the road in such fashion leaves the band with a heavy grief. As such, Perry needs time to mourn. But, thankfully, he was still up for talking guitars, gear and how today's landscape is being shaped by all of it.

This brings us to an important question on the tip of five generations of guitar players' tongues: why is Joe important in 2024? To start, it's not about farewell tours or classic albums, nor is it strictly about Aerosmith. The answer is far more multi-layered than you can imagine. But for starters, few so-called 'classic-rock guitar players' boast Perry's idiosyncratic legacy.

You can rattle off names like Jimmy Page, David Gilmour and Brian May. And, of course, all of them are truly genius-level when it comes to their greatness. Page was a studio savant, and Gilmour a master of time and space. And then there's May, a titan of melodicism and Vox-laden tone. All essential, all quintessential. All decidedly 'classic rock'.



So what makes Joe Perry – a self-taught rocker out of New England who once wanted to be a marine biologist, who grew up with undiagnosed ADHD, and who powered through break-ups, make-ups and shake-ups to strut his stuff – akin to a giant striding across the Earth? Well, everything, really.

With Joe, it's about feel, vibe and a certain *je ne sais quoi*. And you better believe it's swirling all around the man's orbit every time he takes the stage. That is to say – it's real. "If you spend all your time learning technique, scales and all that," Perry says, "you're not really going to write something new and interesting."

'Interesting' is the magic word when it comes to Joe. He refuses to stagnate or be boiled down in an age of clickbait, oversaturation, social media wars and a landscape often featuring rehashes of things too often seen but featuring little substance. Not many know it, but he's not a simple Les Paul-slinger or run-of-the-mill Strat devotee. Two minutes spent with him chopping it up about valve amps, speaker changes, weirdo guitars and pedal accumulation will tell you that.

To that end, Joe is a mad scientist with an array – and ever-



changing – pile of stompboxes at his feet, who will remind you as often as you'll listen that "there are no bad tones". And looking back on his career, he's always been that way. It's a way of thinking about life, and playing guitar, that can't be taught. You've either got it or you don't. And Joe's got it in spades. "You have to teach yourself to break away," he says. "Technique is a way to get somewhere, and in and of itself, it's fine. Fucking go for it if you want, but if you want to play the kind of rock 'n' roll that I like,

1. Aerosmith were tearing up stages right from the start – here, Steven Tyler and Joe Perry are pictured in 1973, the year the band's eponymous debut was released

there's more to it. There's infinite numbers of chords that can help you, but it's really what you want to do with the guitar."

Joe knew that from the jump, feeling his way through the world as a New England kid with a guitar in hand, and a dream he was instinctively prepared to lay it all on the line for. There have been a lot of kids who were like that, but Joe was different. He felt a kinship with his instrument and understood its place. "The guitar was a weapon of rebellion," he explains. "People were afraid of that music. They called it 'the Devil's music. They called it all kinds of things. It was too sexy, but it was just three chords and a nasty feel. If you walked down the street with a guitar case, it was a guarantee that somebody would go, 'Wow, you play guitar?' It was a chick magnet [laughs]."

But it's not like that any more, not for Perry or anyone else. "It's just so mainstream now," Perry says. "And it's great – it's such a great instrument. It's adaptable

***"If I start feeling like the guitar isn't doing it, I go back and listen to the shit that got me [into it] in the beginning"* JOE PERRY**



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

HANNAH WICKLUND

"As a singer, I love Aerosmith for the soaring melodies and challenging range that Steven Tyler embodies. And, as a guitarist, it's not only the massive riffs and thoughtful leads but the phenomenal and flat-out fun rhythm parts that define that band to me. Truly iconic guitar performances supported by a rhythm section any frontwoman would dream of.

"The bassline in *Sweet Emotion* is one of the most compelling and propelling to exist. That was the first Aerosmith song in my band, The Steppin Stones, and I learned to play when I was 11 or so. I had been wanting to add more songs with a talk box to the setlist, but digging into this song truly pushed us as young musicians.

"Each part of the song requires a totally different touch and approach – but needing a consistent slinky yet intense energy and the ability to change it up on a dime. This song was pivotal for us as a band, which led to us covering *Dream On* next, which was

a great undertaking as a guitar player and singer equally.

"I truly believe covering those two songs tightened up my playing individually and ours as a band like no other songs had up to that point. I learned a tremendous amount from Aerosmith, the largest of lessons perhaps being to learn the deeper meaning of lyrics before you sing them.

"I will never forget being an 11 year old learning to play *Pink* and having my mother walk in, wide eyed and speechless (but only for a moment). This was the only time my mother, a visual artist, said 'no' to a song. It took me a few years, but when I finally understood the lyrics, I can't say I blamed her.

"Thank you to Aerosmith for teaching me and the boys how to play like a band. I am grateful for the legacy you have left for myself and others to look to and the ever-present reminder to *Dream On*." [AD]

to many things, but I think the era of the guitar hero is kind of... There will still be guitar heroes, and there will still be people on the cover of *Guitar World*, but it certainly isn't going to be... I'm hearing a lot of great rock 'n' roll, but it's not guitar-centric."

Losing Aerosmith doesn't help that. The final words of the band's internet-breaking statement are still ringing in our ears in place of Perry's sleazy riffs and blues-blistering solos: "We are grateful beyond words for everyone who was pumped to get on the road with us one last time," the band's statement said in closing. "A final thank you to you – the best fans on planet Earth. Play our music loud, now and always. Dream On. You've made our dreams come true."

With more rock giants falling off each year, the scene is changing. KISS hung it up in December of 2023, REO Speedwagon announced their end in September



PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

2024, dozens of farewell tours are afoot, and Aerosmith is gone now, too. But Joe Perry isn't. He's got more to do – and he damn well plans to do it.

In fact, he's got plenty to say about the current trends in guitar. "You might have a guitar solo in there," he says, "but it's not the basis of the song. Guitar has just become so accepted; it isn't a symbol of rebellion any more. For better or worse, it's just another instrument."

But don't get it twisted; Perry doesn't feel the guitar has been relegated. If anything, its appeal is broader than ever. "It's an amazing thing that's happened over the last 70 years," he smiles. "Guitar is global. It's a global market. I keep my eye on it, but I certainly don't sweat it or worry about staying relevant."

With Aerosmith in his rearview mirror and more than seven decades under his studded leather

"The straight-up rock 'n' roll energy Aerosmith produced on that stage in 1974 was about as cool as it gets" ANGELA PETRILLI

2. 1976 saw the release of fourth album, *Rocks*, a record that would kickstart a love of rock for an entire generation of guitarists that followed

belt, Joe has learned a lot. He's lived dozens of lives, and even though his contemporaries are dropping like flies, Joe Perry forges ahead. Aerosmith might be over, but Joe Perry is just getting started. And as always, he'll do it as classic rock's ultimate chameleon. "I stick to what I do best, you know? I'm sure I'll be doing something, whatever, down the road. But who knows, really? One thing I know for sure that will stay the same is that everything is going to change."

"Anybody that goes to Berklee and learned all the techniques and all that stuff, that's great," he says. "But what are you going to do with it? That's what it's

all about – what you do with it. Do you want to write songs, or do you want to impress people with how skilled you are? There's a market for both, you know, if you want to try to make a living playing guitar."

Was there a lightning bolt moment as you were coming up that led to your growth as a guitarist?

"That's a big question. I guess realising at the very start that it was pretty much about getting a guitar that felt right in your hands. It's a weird thing because, like any guitar player, I can plug into another player's rig, fiddle with the knobs, and end up sounding like that person."

So, it's not so much about the rig but how you use it?

"Not so much the rig, it's how you hear the sound – and adjust to it. If it's louder, softer and where

your picking hand is, like if it's close to the bridge or closer to the neck, so much is dependent on getting to know the sound you want. And over the years, the equipment choices just exploded."

You're something of a mad scientist when it comes to guitar pedals and gear. Was that always the case for you?

"When I started, I think you had to search around for a fuzz pedal, you know? I mean, I look in the guitar magazines and there's probably a dozen new fuzz pedals every month now, so it all comes down to really dialling it in. You can be stuck someplace, but you can still get a sound that's usable. It's up to what it sounds like to your ear. There's no other magic to it than that."

As a self-taught player with a deeply distinctive and successful style, do theory and theatrics mean much in the grand scheme?

"Well, I have a learning disability [ADHD]; it's tough for me to focus. But if you can get some of that stuff, along with whatever you're learning by listening to other players, that's great. If you can get some theory and technical knowledge, it can only help. The problem is not getting too hung up on it."

Do you think there's a lot of that happening in recent years?

"There was a video going around, and maybe you've seen it, but there's this player [Phil Taylor], who was the fastest on the planet and playing *Flight Of The Bumblebee*. He starts as fast as you think a human can do it, and then he bumps it up and up. It's blinding, and you can't even see his hands."

"It's incredible technically, but it's a mechanical thing, though there's skill there and he put in the time. But if you can write a song that's as catchy as *Flight Of The Bumblebee*, that would be something. Learning theory can be a huge help, and if you want to do it, more power to you. But I wanted to play the music people wanted to hear and be in a band that entertains people."

"I learned that some of the best riffs are the simplest. The ones that people can sing to are the ones. I'm a fan first. I went on the road with John McLaughlin with Aerosmith in the early 70s and – holy shit, man – those guys

***"I learned that some of the best riffs are the simplest. The ones that people can sing to are the ones. I'm a fan first"* JOE PERRY**

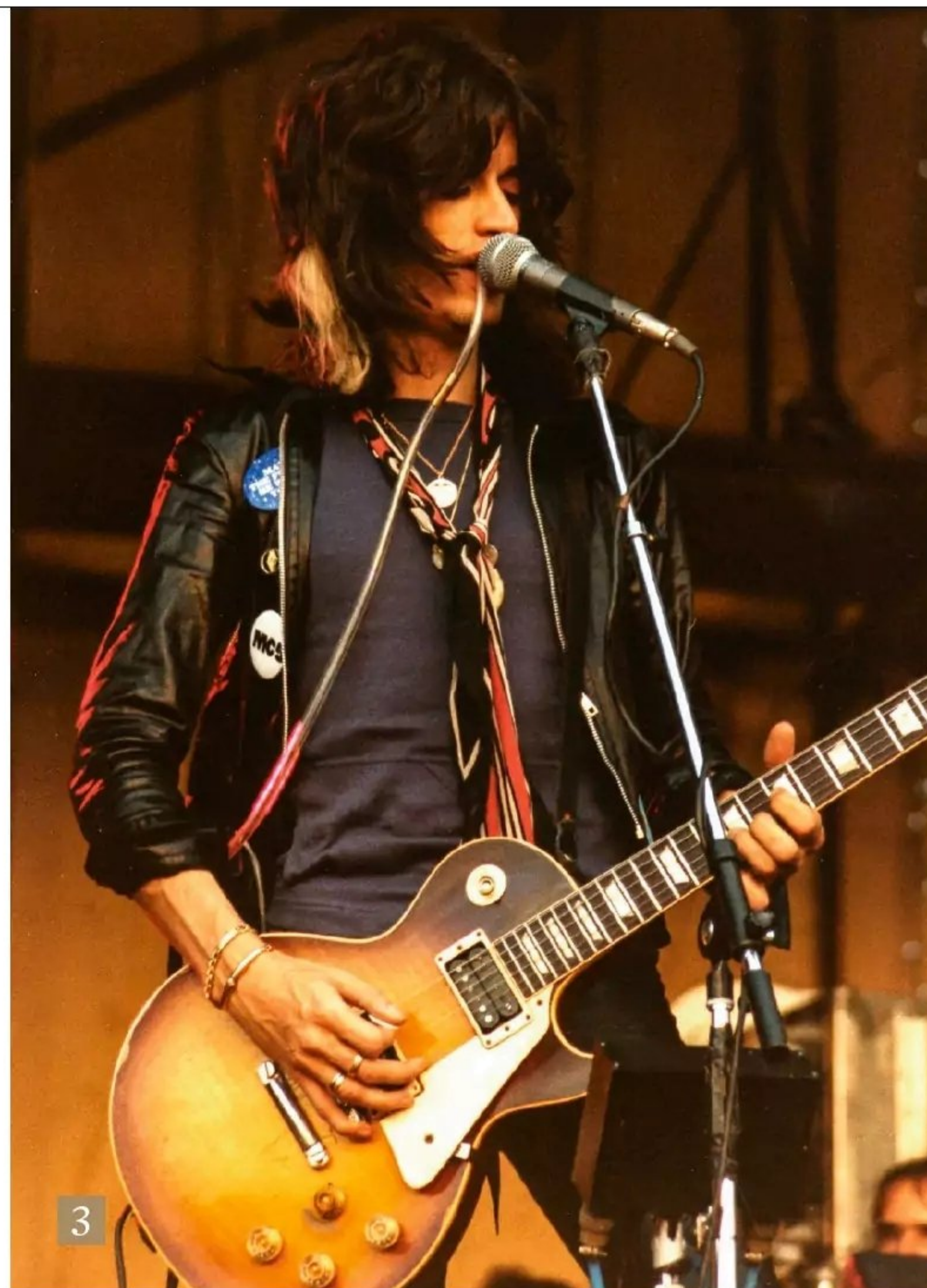


PHOTO BY PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

3. On stage at Reading Festival in 1977: the Gibson Les Paul was the basis of Joe's collection, but a host of "funky, weird guitars" would find their way to him over the years

could play. But you couldn't dance to it. I have total respect for that kind of talent, but it kind of left me cold."

Since you've never leaned on theory, did unlocking the fretboard come easy for you?

"I was just listening to what other people were playing and trying to copy that. I was never very good at it, but figuring out where they were putting their hands and trying not to sound like anybody else was important. And I wasn't skilled enough to have something to replace it with; it took me a while to get my own voice. But I think anybody that's self-taught breaks the mould."

"You know, sometimes I'll try to learn a riff just to see if I can do it. I don't know if it's going to help me, but sometimes it will. So many times, the best riffs have come when I pick up a guitar that I've never played before because it sounds a little different. I'll play some riff that's just out of hand, and all of a sudden it sounds different and I've got the basis of a song. You've got to keep your ears open."

Your open-mindedness regarding gear is something that's not championed enough. People often assume it's all Les Pauls and Strats, but you have a 600-guitar collection of oddballs. "I was never hung up on getting



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

ANGELA PETRILLI

"Classic rock was the soundtrack of my childhood. My parents had no shortage of great albums being played all the time. One day, as I was shuffling through my mom's CD collection, I was drawn to the cover of *Toys In The Attic*. Its whimsical art was warm and welcoming with a touch of mischievous mystery. Intrigued, I put it in the CD player. I had no idea what I was in for when I pressed play. The title track kickstarted my heart with its driving guitars, bass and drums locked together in a blood-pumping rhythm. *Uncle Salty* followed next with its cool vibes and nuanced riffs, driving forward to the fast-talking *Walk This Way*, and then shifting gears to *Big Ten Inch Record* (I got the joke later on).

"Next, the atmospheric rock journey of *Sweet Emotion*. I had never heard anything like this record. There was playfulness, heart and in-your-face, take-no-prisoners rock 'n' roll.

And I was hooked. A year or so later, as I began my journey as a guitar player, my teacher Jimmy Scott introduced me to *The Midnight Special*. I remember the first time I watched Aerosmith's performance of Tiny Bradshaw's *Train Kept-A Rollin'*. The straight-up rock 'n' roll energy Aerosmith produced on that stage in 1974 was about as cool as it gets. Steven Tyler's vocals were commanding and electrifying; his swagger, range and feeling were fixating. Joe Perry's scratchy and sultry Strat tone on that song still gives me chills to this day."

"The music of Aerosmith will always have a special place in my heart. Their unique blend of blues and rock with heavy riffs and soaring vocals continues to captivate and inspire me. Thank you, Aerosmith, for showing all of us how it's done and for gifting the world with your timeless music." [AD]

“It all comes down to really dialling it in. You can be stuck someplace, but you can still get a sound that’s usable” JOE PERRY

This 2013 Gibson Custom Joe Perry '59 Les Paul Standard VOS – courtesy of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath – is one of a 150-run of reproductions of Perry's 'Dark Burst' model. Its single-piece mahogany body with two-piece maple top holds dual Custombuckers with Alnico III magnets, wound to replicate the originals, and the one-piece mahogany neck is a rounded C with an Indian rosewood 'board

PHOTO BY AARON PERRY



one sound and going, ‘That’s it,’ you know? From the very beginning, almost everybody I knew had one guitar, maybe two. If you wanted a different guitar, you traded sideways. I listen to a lot of guitar [being] played and there are so many different sounds; it’s really inspiring.

“Take a song like *Back In The Saddle*; I wrote that riff on the

“Aerosmith’s music has always had funk and swing elements... That sets them apart from many other rock bands” VINNIE MOORE

Fender six-string bass. The only reason I knew about the six-string bass was because I used to see Peter Green with Fleetwood Mac, and during one of their jams, he would pick one up. I thought, ‘When I get a little money, I’m gonna get one.’ So I got one, started messing around with it, and suddenly this riff came out. The whole introduction to *Back In The Saddle* and all those riffs just fell into place. It wasn’t like I said, ‘I’m gonna write a song with this’ – it was just this riff that was suddenly there. I grabbed it, recorded it, showed it to the band and there it was.”

4. Slide in hand, Joe displays his soulful side on a recent tour

5. Throughout the years, Joe has reached for various guitars – such as the Tele shown here in Germany in ’77 – each bringing a different flavour to his playing

And events like that only ended up fuelling your guitar-collecting habits, right?

“Yeah, that’s why half of the guitars in my collection are funky, weird guitars. When I started collecting guitars, it was this Les Paul or that Strat, but I was looking under the dust and finding these \$100 or \$200 guitars with no names on them that I’d never heard of, but they had a funky sound. I ended up with a collection of those kinds of guitars. I still go back and pick them up. And when I do, I make sure I have a tape recorder nearby.”

Were you ever hung up on new gear versus vintage gear?

“No, but I might have bought something new once I got a little money. I remember being in the Record Plant when Aerosmith was recording the second record [*Get Your Wings*, released in 1974] and I needed a Strat. My one was probably from ’68 or ’69 and it was stolen. I sent my tech down to Mannys Music and said, ‘I need a Strat – just make sure it’s black’ [laughs]. It was probably a 1973 Strat, but it worked and was fine. That’s probably the same Strat I played the solos from *Sweet Emotion* and all those songs on.”



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

BRUCE KULICK

“Aerosmith has my respect on every level. Great songs, superlative guitar playing supported by a solid in-the-pocket rhythm section, all fronted by a special kind of Superman with great vocals and performance prowess. Steven Tyler’s commanding voice, superlative songwriting skills and ability to dazzle a crowd make Aerosmith one of the giants of American bands.

“Joe Perry and Brad Whitford’s guitar parts make every song shine. Perry, like Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, played the perfect foil

on stage and in photos with Tyler. His slinky solos, played with plenty of swagger, made his leads memorable. But we all should know that Brad Whitford created many important parts that solidified this dual-lead-guitar team in a powerful way.

“Hit radio songs, deep tracks, great production, huge ballads and exciting stage shows all rolled into a winning combination. Aerosmith is over but not in the hearts and minds of the rock world. Their music and legacy will live on forever.” [AD]

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You've often said, "There are no bad tones." That's important as it's easy to get hung up on one tone and reject others as 'wrong' or 'bad'.

"With effects and pedals that create tones, it's about how you use them. Even something that sounds broken might be just *the* thing. There's an old joke, but it's pretty much true, and it's that a Marshall sounded best probably when it was 15 minutes away from blowing up [laughs]. That's when the tubes were running hot, and maybe the preamp was driving the power amp too much and the transformer was overheating. But you'd get this sweet sound and, sure enough, it would start smoking.

"It's tough to get an amp to blow up now. They've made them so bulletproof. I mean... nobody wants to have their amp fry in the middle of a show, and nobody wants to return their amp after they bought it, but I think everybody's got a favourite tone or a working tone. I mean, you can use something that's absolutely ratty.



PHOTO BY AARON PERRY

"The solo from *Janie's Got a Gun*, that was a pretty 'bad' ratty sound. I had a Chet Atkins signature guitar, which was meant to be an almost acoustic-sounding guitar with an early piezo pickup. The nature of it was, if you turned it up, it would sound very 'not acoustic' [laughs]. I plugged into a 15-watt Marshall practice amp – a transistor amp with a tube – and when I started cranking it, it sounded pretty

6. In the pink: the dual-guitar team that is Joe Perry and Brad Whitford on stage

nasty. I turned everything all the way up, played it and the producer said, 'It sounds terrible. That's never going to work.' I said, 'Listen, just run the track, and let me give it a try.'

"Technique is a way to get somewhere. But there's more to playing the kind of rock 'n' roll that I like" JOE PERRY



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

MARTY FRIEDMAN

"*Rocks* is one of my all-time favourite albums. In my junior high, among the potheads, there was a strict rule that you were either on the dark and distorted Black Sabbath/KISS side or the hippie flower child Led Zeppelin/Aerosmith side. This divide was actually a thing; the two cliques loathed each other and rarely had friends in common. Both sides constantly bickered about who was 'better' and who 'sucked'. This ever-important topic was the source of good times and very heated words on long bus rides home. I was deep into the KISS/Sabbath side, but when *Rocks* came out, it was so impressive, aggressively heavy and well done that none of my 'Aerosmith sucks!' arguments held up any more.

"I played the album constantly and stared at the inner sleeve collage of band photos with a magnifying glass. These guys were real 'human' rock stars, maybe the first I had ever seen. Without the bombs, kabuki make-up or fire breathing of KISS, or the demonic lyrics, scary pseudo-religious images and low-tuned heaviness of Black Sabbath, Aerosmith were just five long-haired dudes

that defined what rock stars should look and sound like. Just by looking at them you could envision the reckless debauchery that happens backstage or on their tour bus.

"Fast forward several albums to *Get A Grip*. I was in Megadeth at the time, and we were touring North America with them. In this biz, occasionally, you cross paths with – or better yet, get to work with – the guys you idolised from your childhood. It is a unique and surreal experience that I wish I could explain to non-musicians, but I just can't find the perfect words. Aerosmith played great on that tour, but by that time they were on the straight and narrow, with wives, baby strollers, nannies, AA counsellors and other decidedly un-rock things in tow. What?! No groupies? No over-the-top partying?

"Megadeth was about the same at that time, so what could have been the raging party tour of the century most definitely wasn't. That image threw a soggy wet blanket over my junior high rock 'n' roll fantasies for sure – but was doubtlessly responsible for extending Aerosmith's long and rich career." [AD]

"And it sounded like what I wanted it to sound like. I wanted it to sound nasty and angry. I wouldn't use that guitar sound on too many other things, but it's an example of taking a sound that most people would turn their nose up at, but it worked for that track."

You mentioned 'working tones' before. What's the secret to the quintessential Joe Perry working tone?

"Not too much distortion: I don't like too much distortion because it takes away from the actual tone of the guitar. I don't want to squash the sound. I'm really conscious of really getting clean tones. But if you're striving for really distorted sounds, you're gonna lose the tone of the guitar. If you pile overdrive on, it's all gonna sound the same no matter what guitar you use. But if that's what you want for your style and what works, go for it. I like a sound with some definition and some of the guitar's tone. I lean toward a cleaner sound."

“I don’t like too much distortion – it takes away from the actual tone of the guitar. I don’t want to squash the sound” **JOE PERRY**

Joe’s Boneyard Signature Les Paul was released by Gibson’s Custom Shop in the early Noughties with this show-stopping Green Tiger finish. It features a solid mahogany body with AAA figured maple top, and a single-piece mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard. The guitar is loaded with a Burstbucker 3 pickup in the bridge, while the neck-position Burstbucker 2 has reversed polarity for an out-of-phase tone in the middle position, says Vintage ‘n’ Rare, where the guitar is currently on sale



I was holding on too tight. You never know... sometimes it takes a word or a lick, and a lightbulb will come on."

When you look at the modern guitar scene, what are your thoughts on what you see?

"I think there's a lot that's still going to happen. I kind of doubt that there's going to be another Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page or Eddie Van Halen; that was a time and an era. Those were standout guys who turned the world upside down and changed the way people heard guitar in our little world. But it's not going to be like that any more.

"They used to call Alvin Lee 'the fastest guitar player in the world'. He was ripping it up, but he played the pentatonic blues scale faster than anybody else for those five minutes. But it was a one-trick pony and, really, it doesn't matter who is the fastest. Like that *Flight Of The Bumblebee*

Many people don't realise you're a big pedal guy. Do you have any always-on pedals, with the knowledge that you're very into clean tones?

"I like a little bit more compression – not so much added distortion but getting that grind from the actual preamp pushing a bit. So maybe I'll have a boost pedal, but lately, over the last 10 years, I've been using a compressor. It's like an always-on thing. I can get more sustain [that way] without having to get as much distortion."

Through all that exploration, have you ever found yourself at a point where there were too many guitars, too many amps and too many pedals to where you felt lost?

"My objective is to play songs in a band, you know? If I start feeling like the guitar isn't doing it, I go back and listen to the shit that got me to like guitar in the beginning. When I'm not feeling it, my wife always goes, 'Just go down and play some blues.' I'll go and put an old John Lee Hooker or Muddy Waters record on, and I don't know... some of the early stuff just brings me back to the basics. But it's not so much the guitar that I hit walls with; it's coming up with the inspiration to write songs."

Is there anything on guitar you can't do but wish you could – and have you found a workaround for that?

"I found that when I get on stage, I tend to want to squeeze the neck and tighten up. I didn't realise that, but I found myself really getting excited and I'd stiffen up and make it so I couldn't play as fluid as I was, say, 15 minutes before in the dressing room. I'm not sure what it was... but I read an interview with Keith [Richards] in 1980 or something, and he said, 'Play with a light touch.' That's when I realised

7. Aerosmith may have been forced to hang up their touring hats, but there's more to come from Perry. "I stick to what I do best, you know?" he says

"I was never hung up on getting one sound and going, 'That's it.' There are so many different, inspiring sounds" JOE PERRY



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

VINNIE MOORE

"I first heard Aerosmith when I was 11 years old and my friend played me their first album; *Mama Kin* and *Dream On* were my favourites on that one. I remember looking at the album cover and thinking, 'Man, these guys are so cool.' I immediately became a big fan and have pretty much followed them ever since.

"My favourite albums have always been *Get Your Wings*, *Toys In The Attic* and *Rocks*. I started playing guitar two or three years after *Toys* came out, and *Walk This Way* was, of course, on the radio constantly. I loved that song, and the opening riff – as well as the middle and end solos – was a highlight for me. I was in awe when an older friend could play the intro riff, and I thought, 'Man, one day I'm going to be able to play that, too.' It seemed almost impossible at the time, though.

"*Toys* was one of the very first albums I ever owned and was in steady rotation on my turntable. It's such a classic record. Soon after, *Rocks* came out, and I heard *Last Child* on the radio and thought it was just beyond

awesome. That's still one of my favourite songs ever, and when it comes on the radio in the car, I always have to crank it.

"Aerosmith's music has always had funk and swing elements and, to me, that sets them apart from many other rock bands. *Last Child* is one of the ones that has that funkiness. *Nobody's Fault* was another of my favourites on *Rocks*, and I liked their version of *Train Kept-A Rollin'* so much that we covered it live on the 'Meltdown' tour. I loved the solos in that so much that I copied them note for note.

"I can't really say much more than that. These guys have been a really big influence on me since even before I started playing guitar. I have always been a huge fan, and it's hard to imagine a world without Aerosmith – but, unfortunately, here we are. Thanks for your music and inspiration, guys. What you achieved is incredible and has influenced millions, including this guy. Fortunately, we still have the music they created and so the Aerosmith legacy will always live on." [AD]



PHOTO BY RON POWNALL/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

guy, you go, ‘Wow, that’s pretty cool,’ but he’s not gonna draw crowds like Taylor Swift.”

So, what’s the guitar’s place in modern popular music?

“The thing is there’s so many people out there now. The population has increased from, what – five billion [in 1987] to eight billion? There’s room for more kinds of music to be successful, which is really good for people who want to make a living. As far as guitar, there’s always going to be advances in new things, and there’s always going to be those who carry on the tradition. It’s just a different thing.”

As an older artist, do you find it difficult to stay relevant?

“It’s been a long time since I worried about that. I still listen to music, I still like music, and I still listen to all the same stuff. It’s funny, the first taste of what you’re talking about was in the

70s when disco slammed into us. Frankly, I liked *a lot* of it. There was some pretty funky stuff and great songs, but the press was like, ‘Rock ’n’ roll is dead. Disco is king.’

“And then there was punk. All the punk guys were saying, ‘Oh, fuck The Rolling Stones. They suck.’ They had to throw out the old to have something new. You start seeing a lot of stuff that was pushed by record companies because they want the newest, latest thing. And then there was the MTV thing, which fucking blew the roof off the business.”

It sounds like you’ve always been fearless in the face of genre change or just okay with riding it out...

“That’s really it. When Nirvana and Pearl Jam came out, suddenly that was the ‘new’ rock ’n’ roll to me. I just put it next to AC/DC or the next Aerosmith record. It all sounded like rock ’n’ roll to me. But the record companies made

8. The eye-catching doubleneck from BC Rich – and its Bich brethren – would become associated with the guitarist. And yet, he tells us, “for all the notoriety, it’s probably the least-played guitar of the ones people know”

a big deal out of it and singled out every band from Seattle, which was nothing new, either. The record companies try to make you think it’s something new, but if you listen to all the alternative guys, the only thing different is they weren’t wearing Spandex [laughs].”

“The best riffs have come when I pick up a guitar that I’ve never played... You’ve got to keep your ears open” **JOE PERRY**

As you said, there probably won’t be another Hendrix, Page or Van Halen. But the fact is that there probably won’t be another Joe Perry, either. You’ve influenced and innovated sounds, gear and people. Have you reached a point where you can reflect on your journey and impact as a guitarist over the past 50 years?

“Oh, I don’t know. I don’t really

spend much time thinking about that. Obviously, when somebody comes up and says, ‘When I first heard *Rocks*, or *Walk This Way* with Run-DMC, I discovered Aerosmith,’ I say, ‘Well, thank you very much.’ I mean... that’s what we set out to do. But other than that, I’m still puzzled.

“I remember this poll that came out on Billboard, where they wanted to ask a bunch of other guitar players about the most iconic guitars of the last however-many years. Everybody, I guess, voted and my name made the list, which was kind of nice. They listed three of my guitars, and one of them was the 10-string [BC] Rich Bich. And for all the notoriety, it’s probably the least-played guitar of the ones people know.”

So why do you think it’s so often singled out?

“I mean... there was a picture of me holding it up on the *Live! Bootleg* record, but it’s funny

“It doesn’t matter who is the fastest player. You can go, ‘Wow,’ but [it’s] not gonna draw crowds like Taylor Swift” JOE PERRY

when I run into guitar players now and they always ask me about that guitar. It’s like, ‘I probably used it on a bunch of songs on my first solo album [*Let The Music Do The Talking*, 1980]’. It’s one of those guitars that works really good for certain things, but it’s funny they didn’t mention any of my Strats or whatever.”

Is there anything you’re experimenting with at this stage that might significantly impact you going forward?

“I have a 12-watt Silktone amp, and I’ve been messing with speakers a lot. I think speakers have become a bit too ironclad. One of the things about those early amps is that when you push them to the edge, they have a sound that isn’t distorted but just a certain sound. I have a friend named Jack Donahue [veteran audio engineer], who sent me some eight-inch Bogen



9. Perry and Tyler share a rare and special musical relationship, having spent over five decades together in Aerosmith

speakers that he re-coned with really thin paper to make them more like the old ones.

“Jack is in Boston, and the re-cone made that Silktone sound great. So I’ve been experimenting a lot with speakers. I had some speaker cabs made by Marco Moir, my old guitar tech, with a variety of size baffles, watt-ratings, et cetera. It’s amazing how different speakers can be made with the same amp.”

Do you have a favourite or go-to speaker at the moment?

“My favourite right now... There’s a lot out there, it’s a matter of taste. The 10-inch Alessandro Custom 1959, 20-watt rated and made by Eminence, is probably my favourite. They do a 12-inch that’s got a little higher rating. If you’re gonna use one, just be careful of how much power you pump into it! But Weber makes great ones, and Vox ‘blue stacks’ are great. I like vintage Jensens because I like lower-watt-rated speakers. It’s a tone, not a volume, thing.”

Would you single out any one guitar as most associated with your legacy?

“Well, my favourite guitar is the one I call the ‘Burned Strat’. It looks all burned up and has Seymour Duncan [P-Rails] pickups that combine a Strat pickup and a P-90 in a humbucker slot. That’s my favourite guitar. But it’s kind of hard because I’ve played a bunch of different guitars over the years, so it’s funny that the Rich Bich is the one that’s been chosen to attach to my legacy [laughs].

“You just have to chuckle. That’s all, you know? I mean, all that stuff is out of my hands. And that’s the other thing that you learn pretty early on: if you can deal with all that stuff, you can deal with the rest of it. You can just let it go. Otherwise, you’ll spend all your time freaking out.”

<https://joeperry.com>



GUITARISTS ON AEROSMITH

CHARLIE STARR

“Aerosmith was the first band that tickled my loud-guitar fancy. When I was about 10 years old, my best friend and I were out riding our bikes at a huge mudhole where the older kids would bring their trucks and ATVs and whatnot to be drunk and wild. There was an overturned truck abandoned from the previous night’s action... spilled out around were beer cans, lighters and cassettes.

“I picked one [of the cassettes] up and wiped the mud off to see that it said Aerosmith’s *Rocks*. I took it home, put it in my sister’s stereo and promptly had my life changed by *Back In The Saddle*, *Get The Lead Out*, *Last Child* and *Nobody’s Fault*.

The absolute bluesy swagger of the guitars and the fearless abandon of Steven Tyler’s vocals hit me like a ton of fucking bricks. I have never recovered.

“Not long after, I saw the video of the Run-DMC and Aerosmith collab on *Walk This Way* and realised, ‘Oh, shit, there they are, there’s that badass guitar player.’ I have such a deep love for so many bands, so many genres, and so many catalogues. But, for me, Aerosmith will always be my favourite American band. I still get goosebumps sometimes listening to *Rocks* or *Draw The Line* on headphones and soaking up the Perry/Whitford magic. Thanks for it all, guys.”



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Jimi Hendrix & Noel Redding
talk strings with Rotosound's
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BERT JANSCH'S FYLDE ACOUSTIC

Gordon Giltrap tells how an instrument made for folk legend Bert Jansch in the early 70s now takes pride of place in his own collection

Words David Mead Photography Adam Gasson

Back in the early 1970s, acoustic guitarist and songwriter Bert Jansch was already a legend. His albums became inspirational reference points for a whole generation of instrumental players, and his name was readily associated with the likes of other acoustic pioneers such as Davey Graham and John Renbourn. At the time, premium-quality acoustic guitars were quite the rarity in these isles and dedicated builders not as plentiful as they are today. Word of mouth was often the starting point that matched a player to such an instrument – and this was the case when Gordon Giltrap first met Bert and recommended that he commission a build from Roger Bucknall, at the time when Roger's enterprise, Fylde Guitars, was in start-up mode.

Although Bert never really settled with his Fylde, becoming more associated with Yamaha instruments over the years, the guitar lived on and by a very circuitous route found its way back into the hands of Gordon. "The first time I saw Bert play was in Les Cousins," he remembers. "John Renbourn had just got married

•
Jansch's albums became inspirational reference points for a whole generation of instrumental players
•

and Bert was his best man. So Bert turned up at Les Cousins wearing his wedding suit, knitted tie, suede shoes. He came on stage and he was so cool, so relaxed, and he had this John Bailey guitar. It was unbelievable. He did all the stuff that I loved, like *Tinker's Blues*. Blew me away."

Would you say that Bert was a significant influence on your own playing?

"That first album [*Bert Jansch*, 1965] changed my life. It made me realise what can be done with one man and one guitar. But not only that, that album was a work of genius. And I know I've said this many times in interviews, but it's like you put the album on and the atmosphere in the

room changed, somehow. It was magical. When you make an album like that, you then have to follow it – what do you follow it with? Because it was a very, very high benchmark in terms of creativity: the songs, the guitar playing, the originality of it... It wasn't perfect, but somehow the imperfection was what made it special. It was recorded in Bill Leader's flat in Camden Town, probably on a ReVox [reel-to-reel tape recorder] or whatever he may have had back then. But it's all live. It's just amazing."

Did you get to play together with Bert at any point?

"Not really, no. I think I joined in with him in a jam session once, but we never actually played together. He [did play] on an album of mine. I'd recorded – or tried to record – a version of his classic *Chambertin* [*Under This Blue Sky*, 2002], but it never sounded quite the same as when Bert did it, mainly because it's a proper fingerstyle guitar piece. The way I was playing, with a pick, my sound was a bit too clean for it. But he added a second part to it, which was lovely."

Gordon Giltrap with the
Fylde guitar that was
originally made for Bert
Jansch in the early 1970s

*“That first album [‘Bert
Jansch’, 1965] changed
my life. It made me realise
what can be done with one
man and one guitar”*

Can you share the story behind Bert and his Fylde guitar?

"Well, I met Roger Bucknall way, way back when he was a student. It was in a folk club, I think in Southampton, and he just turned up and said, 'I make guitars, would you like to see one?' and he took it out of the case. I just fell in love with it.

"I was looking for a guitar that would be the equal of my John Bailey and this guitar turned out to be it and, like everyone, if I come across something out there that's good I want to tell my friends about it. I was trying to spread the word about this great young guitar maker, and I think the first person that really took to Roger's

guitars was Martin Carthy. I thought I wanted to get as many name players to play Roger's guitars and help him develop a reputation. So I mentioned it to Bert and he said, 'Okay, get him to make me one.' And, lo and behold, Roger made this very instrument."

But Bert didn't keep the guitar for too long, did he?

"He kept it for a number of years. But the next thing I heard was that he had a roadie and at the end of a tour Bert said to him, 'Do you want a guitar? Take your pick.' And the guy said, 'Well, I'd like that one [the Fylde]'. And that's how this guitar

came into the hands of this guy, who I think had it for about 20 years. Then someone got in touch with Roger and said, 'I've got a guitar here that used to belong to Bert Jansch,' and it came into my hands.

"I think Roger basically wanted me to have it because I was part of its creation, not physically, but in terms of getting it to Bert. And he felt that it really should come home to me."

It's in very fine shape for an instrument that's more than 50 years old. Did Roger do any work on it before you collected it?

"Yeah, he did. I don't know what he did to it – because it plays beautifully now –

"I think Roger wanted me to have [the guitar] because I was part of its creation... it should come home to me"

but when I first picked it up, after it had been through his hands in the workshop to make sure it was all sound, the action was a little high for me. He said, 'Leave it with me, I'll see what I can do.' And he did.

"He worked his magic on it without doing anything major in terms of construction because that would take away from the history of the guitar. And now it plays beautifully and I love it."

You mentioned earlier that you've changed the tuners?

"That's the only thing I changed on it. It had the original Schaller machineheads on it – the old 70s Schallers that we all remember with great fondness. But things have moved on in terms of machineheads now, and I know Roger favours the Gotohs, which I love. They're very close-g geared machineheads, which makes tuning quicker and more accurate. So I got a set of those and put those on and then I got some separate black ebony buttons. So I think they set it off beautifully."

Has the guitar given you any tunes yet?

"Yes, I've already started writing a bit. There's a piece called *The Fox At Dawn*, which I composed on that guitar. I just cannot put it down and it brings back so many memories of the first time I played a Roger Bucknall guitar. They have their own unique sound and it [revived] all those memories of when I was teaching and I would get him to send guitars down from his workshop in Kirkham



Despite the arrival of the Fylde, Bert went on to favour Yamaha acoustics for most of his career

The model that Roger Bucknall built for Bert was to become known as the Oberon and remained a staple in the Fylde catalogue for many years



Making History Fylde's Roger Bucknall MBE on building Bert Jansch's guitar

Bert Jansch's guitar came about just as Fylde Guitars was taking its first steps into the world of instrument building in the very early 1970s. Roger Bucknall tells us what he recalls about the initial build and, latterly, the stages taken before the guitar was passed on to Gordon Giltrap. "Bert's guitar is one of the first ever Fylde's," he tells us. "The serial number is 118, but here's a little secret – I didn't start at zero. It's Indian rosewood and German spruce, with a laminated mahogany neck that is immensely strong and stiff but rather chunky. It's one of the few Fylde guitars that didn't have a zero fret – that came soon after."

Gordon mentions that the guitar didn't stay with Bert for very long.

"The guitar never did suit Bert. At much the same time as Gordon delivered it, Bert had taken delivery of a new Yamaha, which suited him far better and he remained largely a Yamaha player for the rest of his life. I soon realised that Bert wasn't using the guitar, then I heard that he had passed it on to his roadie, who had then sold it to a friend. When that chap passed away his wife asked me to find a good home for the guitar."

Was there a lot of interest from buyers when the guitar became available?

"I had offers from several people over several continents, but I wasn't at all happy that the guitar would be valued or treated properly. It has suffered quite a bit over the years and I didn't think it would work in a modern environment. It was very lightly braced and I was very tempted to rebuild it; I've done that a number of times with very early Fylde's and it's worked out well. I spent a lot of time tweaking various things, stabilising the soundboard and getting a little bit of relief into the neck. It's quite gratifying when you can make such a difference to a guitar by making a number of small changes."

We hear that the guitar caused something of a stir among some contemporary acoustic players.

"I had several players make short recordings on it before we did all the work: John Smith, Clive Carroll, Will McNicol – they are all online if you want to listen. I showed it to Gordon and began about 10 months of discussion with him. Bit by bit, it became clear that he was the ideal new owner. Gordon played it, but it was still a bit of a handful; he wanted it, but it was clear



PHOTO BY MIKE ENGLISH

the guitar as it stood would restrict his style. I took it back to work and had a good think about it.

"Because the neck isn't adjustable, the only way to change anything was to work on the nut, frets and saddle. It's been a long time since we had made a guitar that way and getting the neck right required digging up old memories. But it worked. Gordon could barely believe the difference when I sent it to him. It's worked so well that I am a little tempted to make guitars like that again. I'll just have to leave them settling for 50 years before I sell them!"

www.fyldeguitars.com

to sell to some of my students. About two or three guitars would arrive at a time and I'd unpack them and some would be all-maple guitars, and there'd be mahogany or rosewood ones, too.

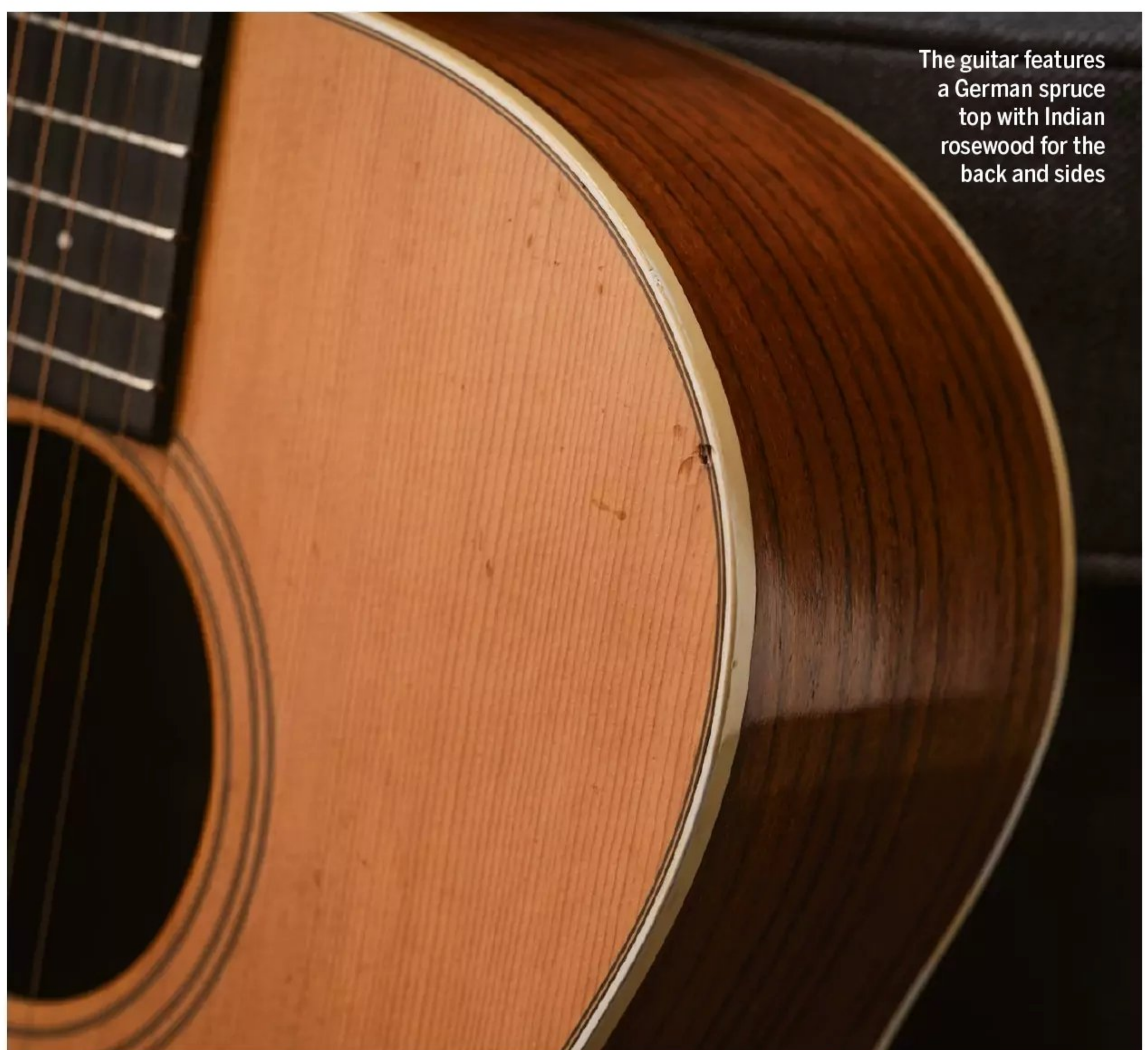
"This one has an almost triangular neck. I think I said to Roger, 'I don't like the neck,' and he said, 'Well, that's the way I'm making them,' because he was very stubborn, and he still is, to a degree – he's entitled to be because he's Roger Bucknall! I love it. I love that neck. It just feels great."

Do you think you're going to record with it and use it live?

"Definitely. Roger's fitted a K&K pickup in it, which is a nice, very pure-sounding thing. So yeah, I'll be using it live. It is very precious to me, so I need to look after it and keep it by my side at all times. I've yet to record with it, but I think it's gonna record beautifully. It has its own mojo, which you only get with a guitar that's that old.

"Ironically, the top is spruce and I favour cedar these days, but this is a spruce top and Indian rosewood back and sides. But Roger will tell you all the details, what he used and his thought process..."

www.giltrap.co.uk



The guitar features a German spruce top with Indian rosewood for the back and sides

1. Despite the guitar being out in the wild for around 50 years, Roger Bucknall was able to tweak and fettle it to suit Gordon's playing style

2. Since acquiring Bert's Fylde, Gordon has composed at least one new instrumental on it and intends to record with it in the studio soon

3. The Fylde logo on the headstock was an early one, ingeniously taken from a sheet of headed notepaper and used in lieu of a proper transfer!

"I said to Roger, 'I don't like the neck,' and he said, 'Well, that's the way I'm making them...' [But now] I love that neck. It just feels great"

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JIM WEIDER

Woodstock native Jim Weider got a chance to prove his mettle in the mid-80s when he stepped up to replace Robbie Robertson in The Band. Here, he tells us his story – and how a '52 Tele came along for the ride

Words Andrew Daly

After moving from Woodstock to Santa Barbara to Nashville, then to Atlanta and back to Woodstock again, few things in Jim Weider's life were stable but for his beloved '52 Fender Telecaster. He was something of a rover – a nomad, if you will. Even though he could play with the best, Weider could never make a gig stick.

But that all changed when his old pals from The Band – whom Weider had befriended in Woodstock, New York, back in the 60s – came calling in 1985 with an invitation. Not just any old invitation but one to join a rebooted version of The Band as Robbie Robertson's replacement.

If that sounds unenviable, know that Weider disagrees. "It was exciting because I grew up with that music," he tells *Guitarist*. "And I was in pretty tough shape after playing four sets a night for months on end for years in clubs. My playing was in good shape, I felt comfortable, and they said, 'Just do it.' But it was a big step for me going from bars to big stages like that."

Weider's toughness was immediately put to the test, as piano player Richard Manuel died by suicide after a show in Florida. Making matters worse, despite Weider's rosy outlook, the fact is that The Band – who went out grandly with 1978's *The Last Waltz* – faced an uphill battle without Robertson as they toiled away in clubs and small theatres.

Regardless, Weider stuck it out and by 1993 his era of The Band had signed with Pyramid Records, which proved to be another bruising decision as their financial and in-house difficulties led to 1993's *Jericho* – The Band's first record since '78 – going all but unnoticed. "I thought that record came out great," Weider says. "It could have done better if we had the powers that be back it more."

Surprisingly, as the 90s rolled on, things got better for The Band. They kept on making albums and were even on hand for memorable moments alongside Roger Waters and the Grateful Dead, for whom they

opened during their final shows at Soldier Field in '95. And the good times probably would have kept rolling had bassist Rick Danko not passed away in December 1999, ending The Band once and for all.

In the 24 years since The Band called it a day, Weider has kept at it, releasing solo records and celebrating the music of The Band with The Weight Band, who dropped its last record, *Shines Like Gold*, in 2022. Since then, he's laid low, though he still plays his beloved '52 Tele daily.

Thinking about what the guitar that's come to define his career has meant to him, Weider pauses, turns around, grabs the curio and smiles, explaining: "I don't know what it is... the shape and the feel of the neck, the clarity of the pickups, all of it... You really have to play a Telecaster. It doesn't come easy."

"It kind of makes you your own man playing it," he continues. "You gotta figure it out. Somebody will hear if you make a mistake or go out of pitch. I've always liked that, which is probably why I've played them my entire life."

Weider's Tele means the world to him. As does the now 72-year-old six-stringer's legacy with The Band. He knows that he didn't start it, and he never endeavoured to be Robbie Robertson, but he's damn proud of finishing it.

"It means a lot to me to carry The Band's music on," he says. "Joining the band, replacing Robbie Robertson, carrying on the roots of the music and being able to write songs, that meant a lot because that's what the Woodstock sound was to me."

"The Band was combining that sound, that roots-rock, with songs about the common man and his trials and tribulations. And then there were songs about the mountains and where we lived. To me, that combination of folk music, blues, rock 'n' roll and rockabilly – that's what I grew up on. Those songs are about places around here. I'm proud to have helped keep that tradition going."

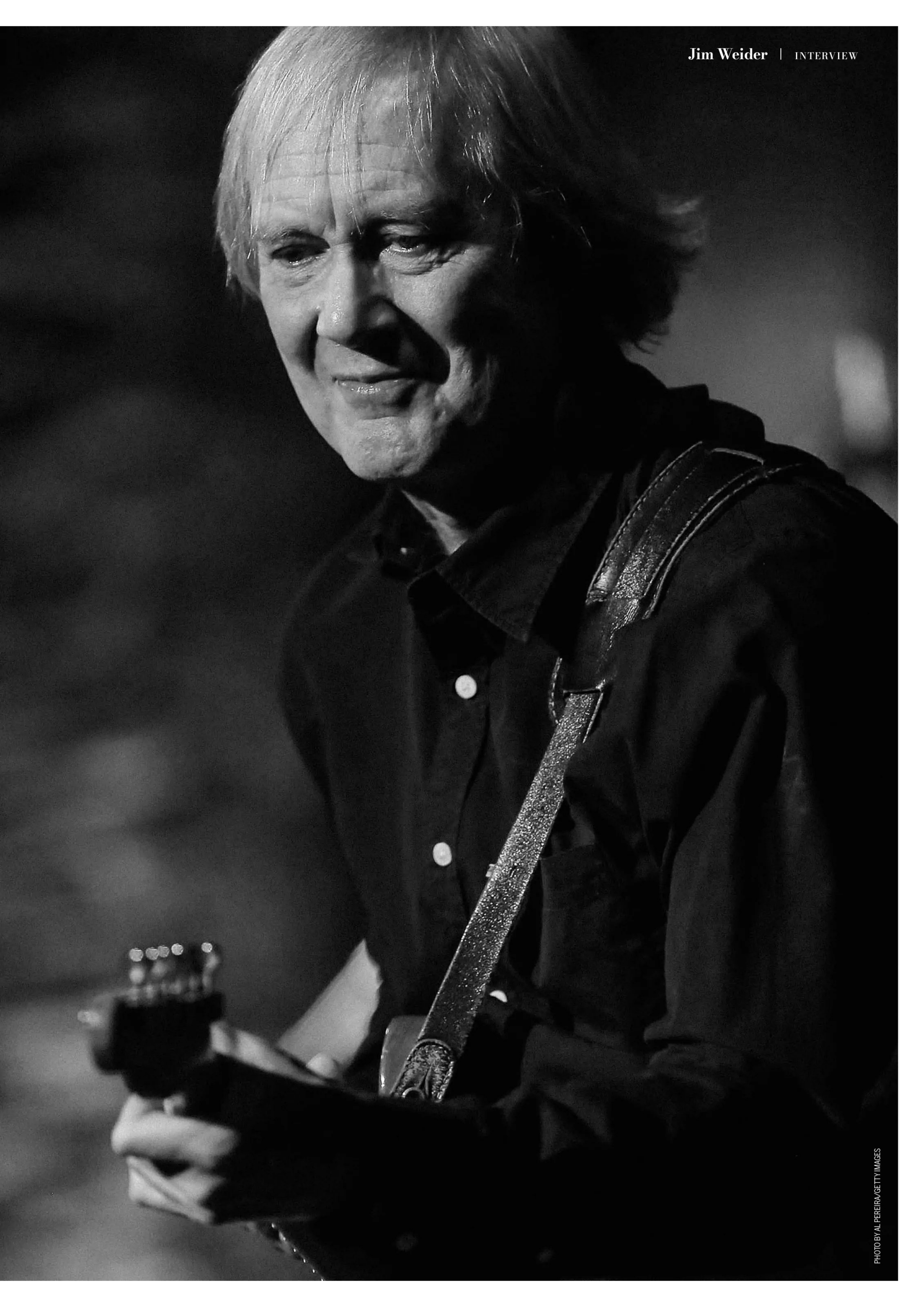




PHOTO BY GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

Going back to the start, what inspired you to pick up the guitar?

“Oh, man. Well, primarily, it was Scotty Moore on the Elvis Presley records. When I heard all those guitar riffs, like *Hound Dog*, and those great songs when I was a kid, that was it. That was some of the first lead stuff I heard, and then I got into The Ventures and early 60s instrumental stuff. After that came the British Invasion – The Yardbirds, Beatles and Stones.

“[Growing up around Woodstock, New York], what influenced me and everyone else around town was the phenomenal jazz-rock scene. I didn’t even know if there was a jazz-rock genre, but I heard that in the 60s and it really influenced us all to stretch out.”

And it was around that time that you first met Robbie Robertson, right?

“There were a lot of amazing guitar players back then, and yeah, Robbie was in The Band. He didn’t play around town much, but The Band was a big influence on me, of course. All of his guitar riffs that he did were great and created a really wild sound. All those kinds of guys were influences on my sound.”

At some point, you acquired a Telecaster, which would stick with you for your entire career.

“Once I heard Roy Buchanan and saw that he was playing a Tele, that was it. I got my first one at Mannys Music in New York, and it was my first really good guitar. I got it for, I think, \$100. Or maybe it was \$135, and it was without the case.”

But when did you get the ’52 Telecaster that would become your most trusted guitar?

“I had been playing the Telecaster since the 60s and wanted a ’52. I went across the country to do my California road trip in my Volkswagen, and along the

1. Having paid his dues during the 70s, touring and recording across the States, Jim Weider was invited to join The Band in 1985 for a tour with Crosby, Stills & Nash. He’s pictured here with Rick Danko in Belgium, June 1996

way I was looking for a Tele. I found one from the late-50s in Oklahoma, but it wasn’t quite right, so I sold it to Jim Messina. I think I paid \$100 or \$150.”

How did you finally find the ’52 Tele?

“I was broke and working in a car wash in Santa Barbara and saw an ad in the paper for a ’52 Telecaster. I went to the guy’s place – which turned out to be Norm from Norman’s Rare Guitars. He had a ’52 Tele

“To me, [The Band’s] combination of folk music, blues, rock ’n’ roll and rockabilly – that’s what I grew up on. I’m proud to have helped keep that tradition going”

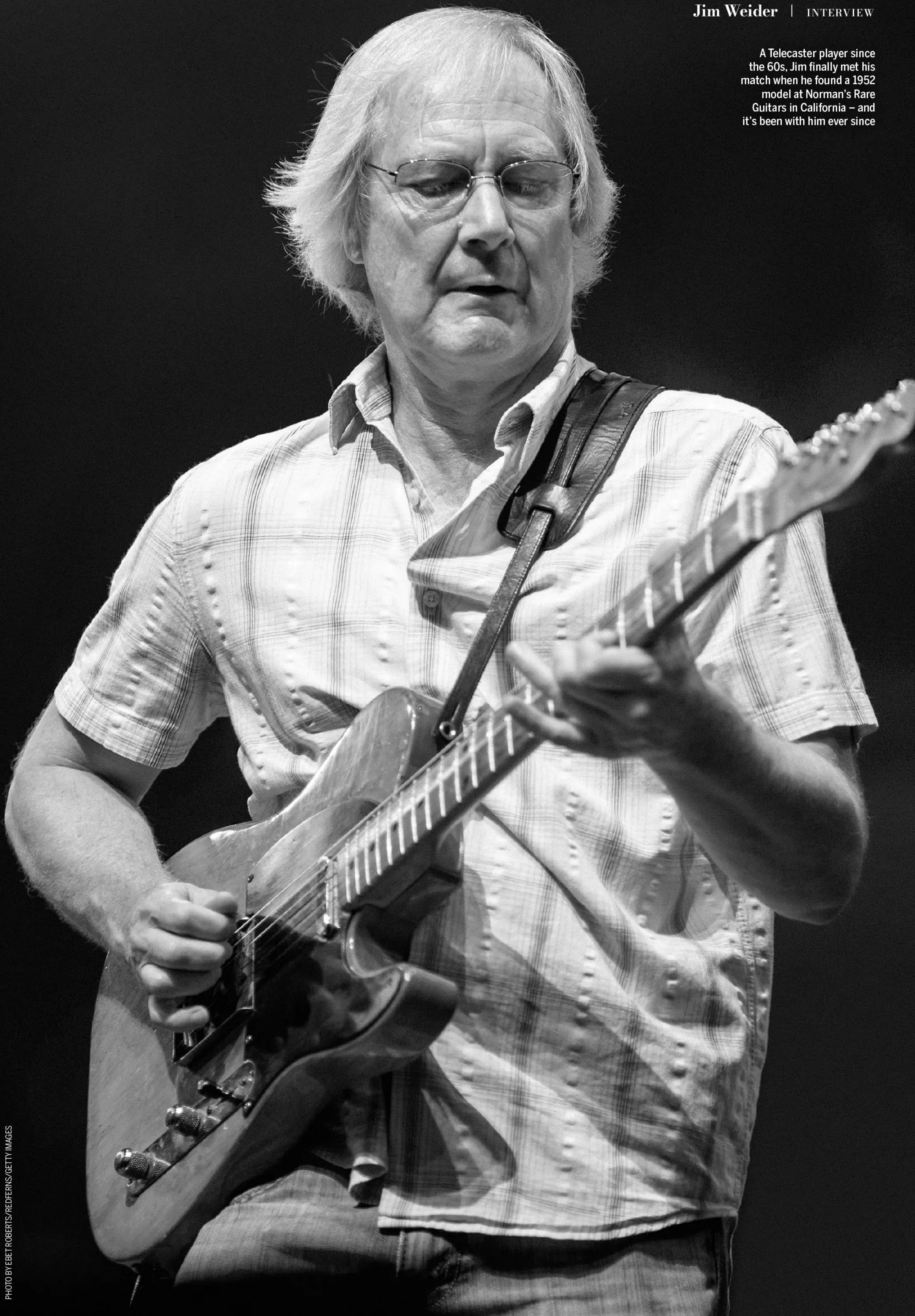
and an old Bassman amp. He wanted \$350. I said, ‘I’ve got \$345,’ and Norm said, ‘All right.’ I took it and said, ‘Well, I’m gonna play this guitar for the rest of my life.’ And thank God, I’ve been playing it ever since. It’s my main instrument.”

Not long after, you left California, went home to Woodstock and then headed to Nashville. Did the plan to get into session work?

“I had been working and recording a bit in Woodstock, and Ben Keith, a great pedal steel player, said, ‘I’m gonna go to Nashville. I’ve got a car, let’s go.’ I said, ‘I don’t know...’ but I was in my early 20s, and long story short, I got in the car and we went.

“I got a gig playing with Johnny Paycheck for a short period and it was crazy. I worked with some great singer-songwriters there, then moved back to LA for a bit before heading down to Atlanta. I moved around a lot back then. But that all changed after I got into The Band.”

A Telecaster player since the 60s, Jim finally met his match when he found a 1952 model at Norman's Rare Guitars in California – and it's been with him ever since



Can you recount how you joined The Band?

“It happened around 1985 when Garth [Hudson] moved back to Woodstock. Richard Manuel moved back, too. So Levon Helm called me up. I went down there and played a show with them at a local spot they always played at, and before I knew it, we were out on the road. At that point, they said, ‘We want to go out as a five-piece.’ That was the start of my playing with them for 15 years.”

Was it daunting filling Robbie Robertson’s shoes – especially after they’d gone out in such grand fashion with *The Last Waltz*?

“Well, my first real gig with them on the road was in front of about 25,000 people and we had no real rehearsal... We just flew out to Dallas and opened for Crosby, Stills & Nash, which turned into a whole three-month tour.”

Does that mean there was no directive from the band to play like Robbie?

“Those guys never told me what to do. They just left me alone to play the rhythm, and I kept it thick and strong and left the backbeat open. I felt like I should copy Robbie’s licks because he did a lot of the opening licks and primarily wrote a lot of the songs. Those were kind of trademark licks, so I had to have those intros and riffs down to play the tunes. But as far as soloing, they left it wide open for me.”

You mentioned that you started on big stages, but later in the 80s you guys were playing a lot of smaller shows. Was that because people struggled to accept that version of The Band?

“People loved it. The reception was strong. The band was strong and we did get to play a lot of big shows, too. And then, when we’d play bars, or wherever we played, like small theatres, people were wrapped around the building to come see us. It seemed like people were excited.”

“I don’t know what it is... the shape and the feel of the neck, the clarity of the pickups, all of it... You really have to play a Telecaster. It doesn’t come easy”

After one of those smaller gigs in Winter Park, Florida, in 1986, Richard Manuel died by suicide. That must have been extremely difficult.

“It wasn’t easy. It was... it was very... that was very tough. And if it was tough for me, it was 10 times tougher for the rest of the guys because they had spent so much time together. And then, after we lost Richard, we lost Stan Szelest, so it was a bunch of up and down stuff, but we kept going and eventually made records.”

But not until 1993’s *Jericho*, which remains a very underrated record. What gear did you use?

“It was. I had my usual Telecaster, which I played a lot back then in the 90s. And I had my [Fender] Deluxe Reverb, which was kind of hopped and tweaked up. I had a Vintage 30 in that, and pretty much I cranked it, and that was my main sound.”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

2. Jim plays on stage during Roger Water’s concert version of *The Wall*, in Berlin, July 1990

As good as it was, *Jericho* didn’t do much commercially.

“You know what I think? There were a lot of political problems. We were on this label called Pyramid, and there were political problems as far as money and a lot of other stuff. But I thought the record was really good; I was really excited that my song, *Remedy*, was on there. That was a big deal for me. To get those guys to do a tune of mine meant a lot.”

Of note, in the 90s your version of The Band was on hand for the Grateful Dead’s final shows in 1995.

“That was wild. I think we did the last couple of shows with them at Soldier Field in ’95. It was great. I got to see Jerry [Garcia], who I had first seen when they first came out. I had been a fan in the 60s, but I hadn’t seen Jerry in a long time. I watched how they ebbed and flowed with all their music from one song to the next, and that flow went through to the audience. Man, it was a trip.”

What did your live rig consist of during those shows with the ‘Dead?

“I had the Deluxe and this amp – a [black-panel] Fender Bass[man] that was kind of made into a Dumble. I got an overdrive channel [installed] and it was tweaked with vintage resistors and capacitors, so it had been tweaked a lot. That was what I was mainly using. I had a homemade cabinet and vintage speakers, which were old Jensens, and I got such a good overdrive sound.”

In recent years, you’ve done a great job keeping the music and vibe of The Band alive with The Weight Band.

“Yeah, we’ve done several albums – and I’ve made some solo albums [including 2009’s *Pulse*]. I really should come up with something new. I’d like to do something more atmospheric, you know, something totally left-brained. I’m thinking about it...”

<https://jimweider.com>

3. Weider would play with The Band for 15 years – including TV appearances, such as this slot on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* in 1994

4. Jims’ 1952 Tele, his mainstay instrument and one that always keeps him on his toes

5. Jim’s pedalboard features the Catalinbread Belle Epoch tape echo pedal, Menatone Red Snapper, Crazy Tube Circuits Stardust and ThorpyFX Fat General

PHOTO BY MARGARET NORTON/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES



3

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM WEIDER



4

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM WEIDER



5

KING OF TONE

A little known fact – Jim Weider was one of the developers of the famous Analog Man overdrive pedal

“That amp I used on all those Band records and when we’d play live was, like I said, this crazy modified Deluxe. I wanted the sound of the overdrive from my Deluxe in a pedal, and that’s kind of how it happened. I primarily just built it for me. When I first joined The Band in the 80s, I used to use an old Ibanez Tube Screamer, but what always bugged me about the Tube Screamer was eventually you’d lose your bottom. It was all mids; I missed the bottom-end. So, I said, ‘Let me get something more like this Deluxe and that has great break-up.’ That’s how it started, but I didn’t know it would be so popular.”





Master Of Many

As PRS begins celebrations for its 40th anniversary in 2025, its SE division continues to release models that push the quality to price ratio. This new Custom might well be the best yet – and it's piezo-loaded!

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis



PRS SE CUSTOM 24 SEMI-HOLLOW PIEZO £1,499

CONTACT **PRS Europe** WEB **01223 874301** WEB **www.prsguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

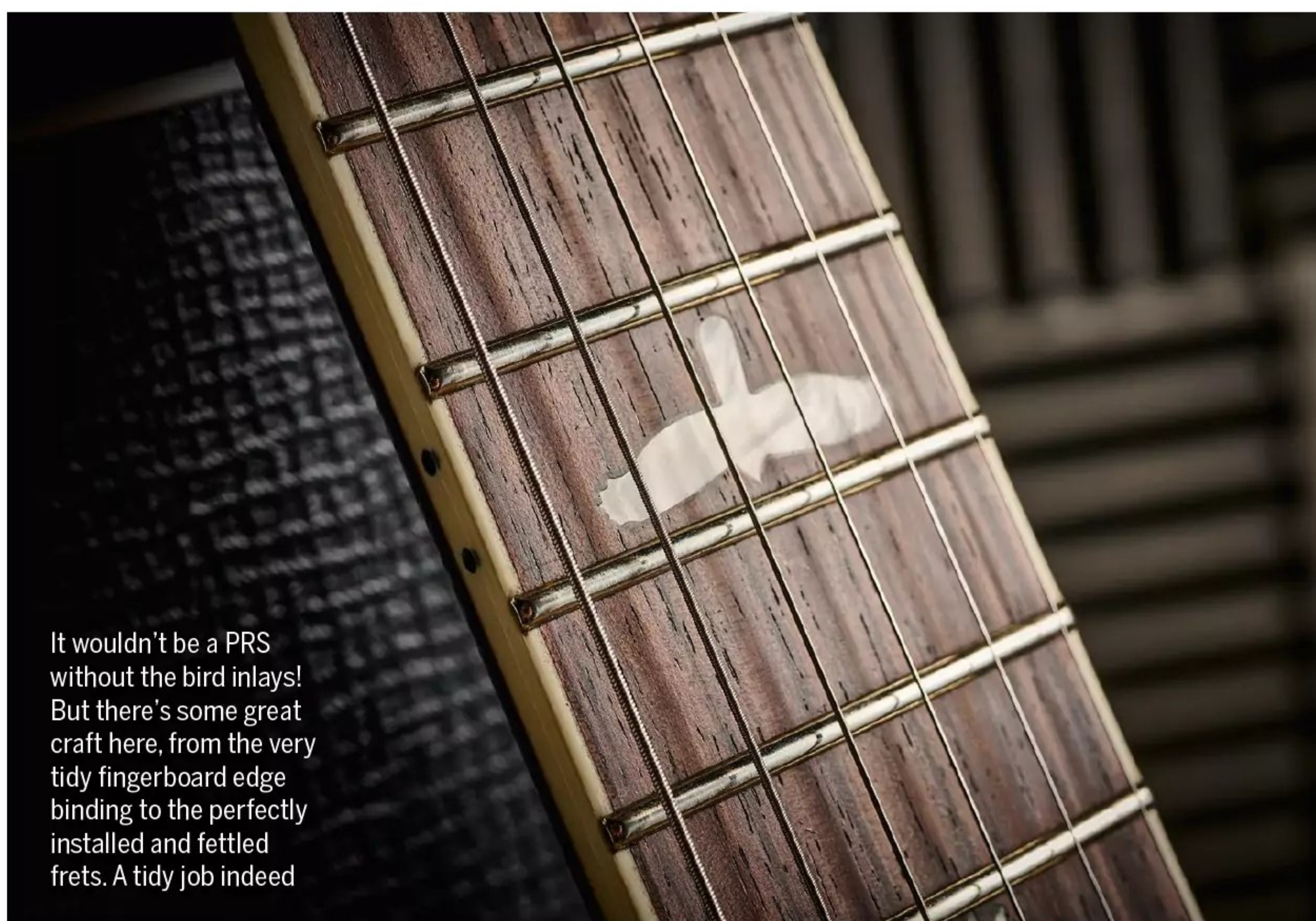
- 1 PRS seems to be one of the few big-name brands still offering piezo-equipped electric guitars.**
 Yes, this new-for-2025 model is the latest PRS guitar that uses a piezo acoustic system to augment the standard magnetic electric sounds. It's an evolved version of the LR Baggs/PRS piezo system originally fitted to the Hollowbody and Archtop from 1999.
- 2 Does PRS still make other piezo-equipped models?**
 Along with the current SE Hollowbody Piezo Standard and II models, there's also the USA-made Core Custom 24 Piezo and the Hollowbody II Piezo.
- 3 PRS doesn't seem to offer many Semi-Hollow guitars these days...**
 Although the SE Custom 22 Semi-Hollow was 'retired' at the start of 2024, the SE range first launched a Custom Semi-Hollow back in 2007, originally with a 'slash' soundhole and later a more traditional f-hole. Currently, then, aside from our new review model, the only other semi-hollow is the long-running SE Zach Myers. In the USA-made Bolt-On range there's the CE 24 Semi-Hollow, and in the S2 range are the Vela Semi-Hollow and Semi-Hollow Satin, while the Core range has the three-pickup Special Semi-Hollow.

It seems a blindingly obvious thing to say, but first and foremost PRS is a company that makes guitars. The craft has always been the foundation, and now – nearly 40 years since Paul Reed Smith and his small team started out in Annapolis – this new SE Custom 24 Semi-Hollow upholds everything that PRS has built its empire on: quality.

Our review sample has already travelled huge distances to get to us: from Indonesia (where it's made in partnership with CorTek), across the seas to PRS's USA HQ, and then back to PRS Europe's base in Cambridge before the relatively short UK courier drop-off. It'll have been QC'd and inspected leaving CorTek's factory, on

arrival in the USA, and then PRS Europe's Nick Fraser won't have let it out of the door until his and his team's experienced hands have checked it, too. Pulling the guitar from its gigbag, it needs just a quick tuning check and we're done – and if you can find a single hair out of place anywhere, well, we couldn't.

As we noted in our recent review of the 2024 SE NF3 (issue 513), the craft of the Indonesian CorTek factory just seems to get better, so much so that we commented on how close that bolt-on model is getting to the feel and detail of the USA models. That impression is very similar here. As the foundation of the brand, the Custom 24 just doesn't seem to age and it's one of



It wouldn't be a PRS without the bird inlays! But there's some great craft here, from the very tidy fingerboard edge binding to the perfectly installed and fettled frets. A tidy job indeed



1

the few new post-1965 designs that has become a genuine classic guitar. But what's different here?

In simple terms, it marks the return of the SE Custom in a semi-hollow style then adds a piezo circuit that's mounted on a vibrato, not the hardtail bridge of the current SE Hollowbody models. The SE recipe sticks close to the original PRS vision with the same body and headstock outline, and 24-fret 635mm (25-inch) scale length, although there are plenty of differences.

The piezo certainly adds a very acoustic-like character and texture to the magnetic voicing, creating hybrid sounds

The 'shallow violin' carve to the top is much less dished than the USA model. In fact, the top is pretty much flat with the exception of the outer edges' curved relief, and there are no indents for the control knobs, which contributes to an overall depth of 45mm. The top itself is a thin flamed maple veneer over the thicker solid maple underneath, while the body back is simply classed as mahogany. Here, of course, that back is routed away so that the bass-side half seems mainly hollow, while

there's extensive routing on the treble side, not least the enlarged control cavity, which has to take the circuit board for the piezo pickup. Neither the electronics nor the spring coverplates are recessed like the USA Core models, but the cream edge binding here is very crisp, and the glossed finish is perfect and comprises a very hard urethane base coat and topcoat finish very similar to what PRS was using in Maryland in the 1990s, we're told. While the top stain is a new SE colour, it's a classic dark 'burst but only on that top; the back, sides and neck back are all a dark brown opaque.

Typically for the SE models, the 24-fret guitars use a three-piece longitudinal neck laminate of maple, and the 254mm (10-inch) radius 'board has the essential solid pearloid bird inlays, while the frets sit over the clean edge binding that extends around the flame maple colour-matched headstock. The narrowing of the Core/SE models continues with the same style proprietary lampshade control knobs and shaped tip to the three-way lever switch – nice less-generic touches that feature on numerous SE models for 2025.

With the exception of the piezo saddles on the cast vibrato and the added piezo volume control (the lowest control on the body), the 85/15 'S' black bobbed uncovered humbuckers and that three-way pickup selector, master

1. These black bobbed open-coil humbuckers are based on the USA 85/15 humbuckers and made in Indonesia

2. The quite classic-looking f-hole here gives the semi-hollow game away. The guitar is quite extensively hollowed either side of the solid centre section

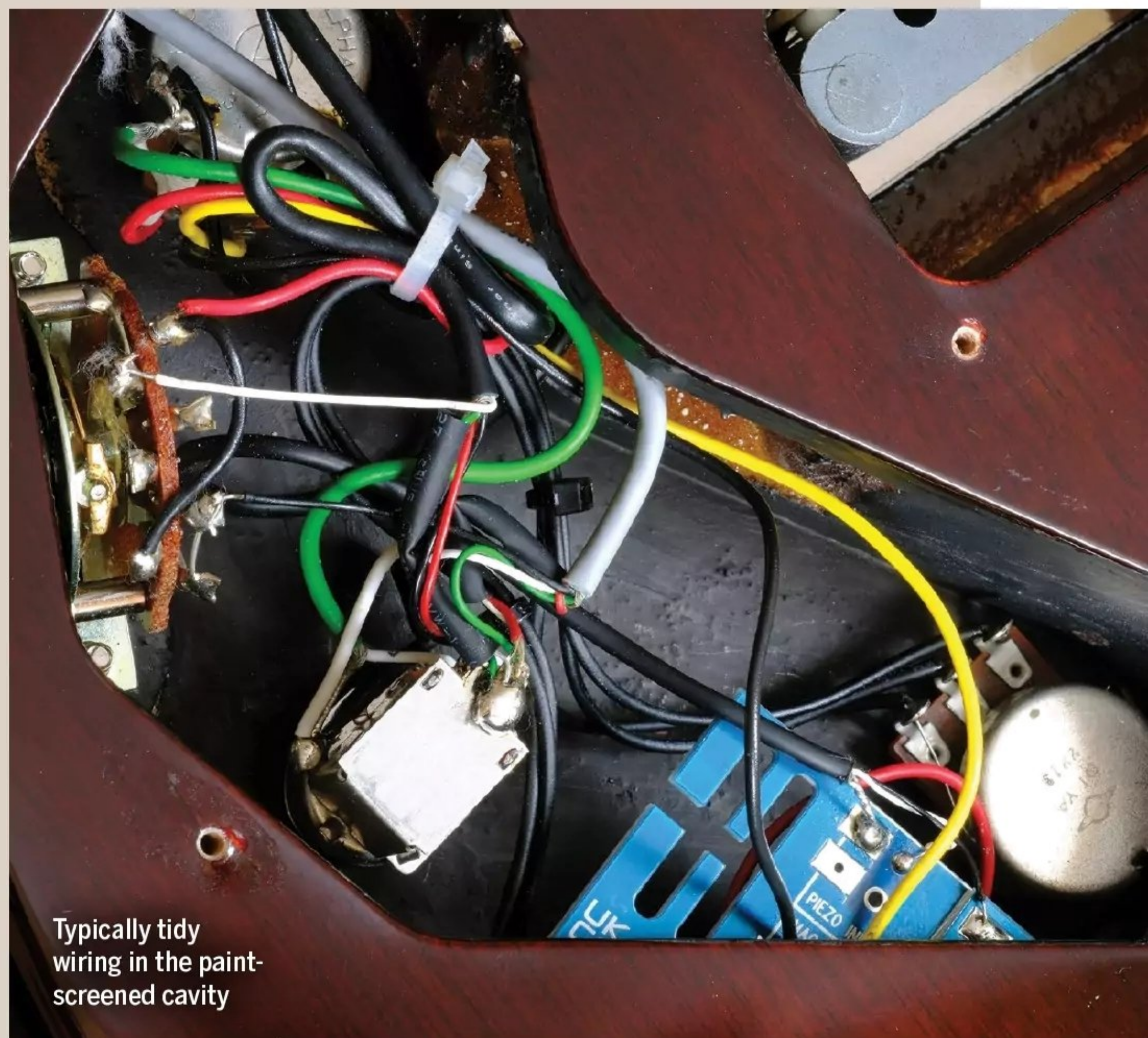
UNDER THE HOOD

Outwardly, the dual-pickup systems are simple and intuitive. But what's inside?

Within the oversized rear cavity there's plenty of wire, all tidily joined and soldered, but that makes it a little difficult to see what's what. The volume is a full-size Alpha 'Made in Korea' pot with a nominal value of 500kohms, though there's no treble bleed, unlike more recent SE Customs we've looked at. The mini-size tone pot (again 500k, with a 223J code/0.022µF tone capacitor) has a pull-switch that simultaneously dumps the screw coils to ground. On plenty of PRSes that use this switching there are two small resistors that allow some of the dumped coil to remain in circuit, creating a slightly fuller 'single coil' split – but they're not used here.

The piezo circuit starts with those six saddles, and the individual outputs are summed on a circuit board that's screwed to the front of the vibrato's steel block before the mono output passes to the rear-placed circuit board. The piezo volume is actually 25k with a linear (B) taper, and PRS points out that even if the necessary nine-volt battery to power the circuit fails, the magnetic circuit still works.

We've used the four-conductor 85/15 'S' humbuckers plenty of times and PRS states that they're "uncovered pickups designed to PRS's specifications with clarity and extended high- and low-end – perfect for modern applications". They're in pretty vintage humbucker range from the DCRs that measure 7.83k at the bridge and 7.46k at the neck. In single-coil mode, voicing the slug coils, they're pretty much half of that – 4k and 3.71k – as you'd expect without the partial-split resistors.



Typically tidy wiring in the paint-screened cavity



2

volume and tone control are the same as the standard SE Custom 24. But another difference, of course, is the side-mounted dual outputs, 'mag/piezo' and 'mag', plus the flip-top compartment that holds the necessary battery.

We're told that the piezo system was redesigned by LR Baggs for this model; it's not the same as the piezo-loaded vibrato of the current Core Custom 24. Note the hybrid hardware style where the saddles and their height and intonation screws are gold-coloured, contrasting the nickel of the vibrato unit's baseplate. "Yes, the vibrato itself differs from the one on the USA Core Custom 24 Piezo in some manufacturing processes and materials, most notably the material of the block," explains PRS's COO, Jack Higginbotham. "Additionally, the outputs of the piezo saddles are 'summed' similarly to the SE Hollowbody's Stoptail, which allows the omission of individual saddle output adjustments. It's the result of a lot of work on the part of Lloyd Baggs and his team. Lloyd has helped us develop all of our piezos, including the one used on the SE Hollowbody models. I personally called him saying I wanted to start thinking about putting the piezo on a vibrato bridge for the SE Series. He called me back a few days later with his initial thoughts, and we went from there."



3. PRS SE guitars always tell you exactly where the guitars are made and by whom. Unlike the USA models, we don't get locking tuners here, but they are available as drop-in replacements

4. Like the current SE Hollowbody Piezo models, the drive for the two circuits is simple with a volume for the piezo (the lowest control on the body), plus the standard master volume and tone, and a three-way selector switch for the magnetic pickups

5. The two-piece cast steel vibrato is the same one that's used across the SE range, as well as certain USA models such as the S2 range and the CEs. The difference here is that each saddle has its own piezo element, and note the hybrid gold/nickel plating

We might cheekily expect locking tuners on a high-level SE such as this, but while the tuners here are perfectly good, says Jack, "we have continued to make differentiations between the SE and USA guitars. Locking pegs is a place we have drawn that line."

Feel & Sounds

You could call the SE Custom a simplified version of the Core model, but that's of little surprise bearing in mind the considerable price difference. But considering the overall feel of this one, not to mention the added vibrancy that the semi-hollow construction brings, it really doesn't feel cut-price in the least. The construction helps to produce a lighter weight guitar at 3.31kg (7.28lb), though to be fair the most recent and all-solid SE Custom 24 Quilt we looked at back in issue 506 was only slightly heavier at 3.43kg (7.55lb).

We have the same Wide Thin profile neck here, too, that's very slightly deeper than that Quilt according to our callipers: 21.2mm at the 1st fret and 23.3mm by the 12th, with a nut width of just over 43mm (and string spacing of 36mm). Perhaps it's because we've played a few over the years, but in the hand it never feels over-wide or over-thin – it's a very well-shaped classic 'C' with nicely relaxed shoulders. As ever,





the setup is perfect, too, and the 12th fret string heights measure 1.5mm on the high E and 1.8mm on the low E, with only a whiff of neck relief. The fretwire gauge is medium jumbo with a width of around 2.7mm, a good enough measured height of 1.1mm, and virtually domed ends.

Unlike many 'hybrid' piezo/magnetic guitars we've played over the years (including the system on the Core piezo models), the drive here is a simple switch-free zone as on the SE Hollowbody piezo models. So plugging into a clean amp (using the mix/piezo output), you control your magnetic pickups as usual and then add in the completely independent piezo circuit, which is unaffected by the magnetics' master volume and tone. That's it.

Listening through various amps, including our AER Compact 60, the piezo-only voice is certainly acoustic-like with plenty of contemporary sheen, good depth and a minimum of that nastier piezo 'quack' that can plague many circuits of this type. No, it isn't like putting a good mic in front of a good dreadnought, but with a little outboard acoustic treatment – light compression and EQ – the acoustic illusion is certainly very present and very usable.

Onto the magnetic side and the 85/15 'S' are real all-rounders, very balanced designs that seem to pull back the honky

A little piezo added to the pulled-back neck pickup is the sort of sound that Pat Metheny could use for an entire album

midrange of a classic PAF with plenty of clarity and bite, especially at the bridge. The neck pickup has a very vocal voicing and cleans up the lows a little – partly due to its placement – and responds really well to a little volume reduction, which slightly rounds the highs for cleaner bluesier comping and demure leads, while the bridge has just enough rock kick without sounding overly pokey or compressed. The coil-splits, which voice the slug coils simultaneously, sound a little brighter and thinner compared with an SE Silver Sky, but they're perfectly usable, particularly with a few basic pedals in play and with that quite Strat-y dual-pickup mix. It's a fast drive, too, which is important for those of us who need to cover a lot of bases in that never-ending function set.

But it's the blend between the two systems that widens your options, which, frankly, are considerable. The obvious way

THE RIVALS

ESP's LTD EC-1000 Piezo (£1,359 in-store) is the brand's first hybrid style. The single-cut Eclipse shape houses a classic pair of Seymour Duncan magnetics (JB and '59), plus a piezo-equipped tune-o-matic-style Fishman Powerbridge. Dual outputs give you plenty of options.

Fender's Acoustasonic range offers plenty of ways to get acoustic and electric sounds from a hollow solidbody-sized guitar. The new FINNEAS Acoustasonic Player Telecaster (£1,199) is based on a Telecaster outline and uses a bridge-placed Fender Acoustasonic Shawbucker for the electric voices and a Fishman under-saddle transducer to create a selection of detailed acoustic-like sounds from the three-way lever switch and blend control. You don't have the ability to blend the two voices into two amps, but onboard chorus is available in two voice positions.

Godin's vibrato-loaded xtSA (£2,499) is a long-running three-voice solidbody that offers electric, acoustic-like and MIDI access. It allows you to blend acoustic and electric sounds, or send them out separately to two amps via dual outputs.



Using these two side-mounted output jacks, you can run the piezo and magnetics into two amps. The necessary nine-volt block battery is in its own flip-top compartment

to run the guitar is with two different amp destinations: the piezo direct into a PA or acoustic amp, and the magnetic side into your usual electric rig. This doubling has huge potential and control, but obviously involves more gear. Using the mixed output into a cleaner amp produces some real hybrid sounds. A little piezo added to the pulled-back neck pickup is the sort of contemporary jazz/fusion sound that Pat Metheny could use for an entire album. Just adding a little piezo into the magnetic voice adds a slightly stringier character that enhances some pretty big-sounding jangly voices, great for those strummier, more country-tinged rhythm parts, or to give a bit of edge to old-school rougher blues. Even the straight piezo in this situation works surprisingly well; it's less hi-fi than the acoustic amp/PA.

Acoustic voices with vibrato? No problem. And while there is a slight 'clonk' as you pull the arm fully up in piezo mode, we notice some foam rubber under the four rear springs, presumably just to damp things a little. All in, there's a tremendous range of sounds to explore and – to our ears – not a bad one among them.

Verdict

As we're seeing more and more, the SE line is not just 'Student Edition' versions of PRS's upper-tier Core line. Yes, those models do exist, but in the Semi-Hollow

Piezo format, this Custom is unique to the entire PRS range and could be the perfect one-stop all-rounder for any practising or gigging musician who needs to cover a lot of sounds with the minimum of fuss.

In isolation, the direct piezo sound doesn't sound like a well-recorded quality acoustic guitar, but it certainly adds a very acoustic-like character and texture to the magnetic voicing, creating hybrid sounds that you simply can't get from a

In the Semi-Hollow Piezo format, this Custom could be the perfect all-rounder for any musician

conventional electro-acoustic or electric. But even if you have no plans to take to a stage anytime soon, don't overlook the potential here for a spot of original songwriting and recording where it can cover the bases but also break the rules, not least when you start adding very unacoustic-like dirt pedals into your signal path.

The concept or technology might not be new, but the execution, in such a perfectly made guitar, takes some beating, particularly for any creative musician who's looking for new sounds. Where would you take it? **G**



PRS SE CUSTOM 24 SEMI-HOLLOW PIEZO

PRICE: £1,499 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany back w/ maple top (flame maple veneer facing) and shallow violin carve

NECK: Maple, Wide Thin profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/43.2mm

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

FRETS: 24, medium

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

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS 85/15 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers; 3-way lever pickup selector switch, piezo volume, magnetic volume and tone (w/ pull switch to coil-split both 'buckers)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.31/7.28

OPTIONS: Colour only

RANGE OPTIONS: SE Custom 24 (£999), SE Hollowbody Standard Piezo/II Piezo (£1,399/£1,555), SE Zach Myers (£999)

LEFT-HANDERS: SE Custom 'Lefty' (£1,029)

FINISHES: Orange Tiger Smokeburst (as reviewed) Charcoal Burst, Lake Blue, Vintage Sunburst – all gloss



PROS A perfect job: exceptional feel, playability and sounds, not least from the new piezo vibrato

CONS PRS's SE locking tuners would have been nice...

A pair of Auden acoustic guitars, one in the foreground and one slightly behind it, leaning against a dark brick wall. The guitars have a light-colored cedar top and a dark Indian rosewood back and sides. They are shorter-scale instruments. The background is a dark brick wall with a white geometric pattern in the top left corner.

A

AUDEN

"A pair of extremely well-made guitars with bags of character and great sound... both deserve plaudits aplenty on build quality and sound at this highly competitive price point."

Guitarist Magazine



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All Grown Up

PRS might well be 40 years old in 2025, but the SE guitars seem to be catching up – with a 25th anniversary celebration planned for 2026. Where does the time go?

Words Dave Burrluck

Creating a successful 40-year-old company is far from an easy thing to do, not least in the fickle, often fashion-led world of the electric guitar. But it won't be long before PRS's SE division hits its mid-20s, and in many ways it now seems like a guitar company within a guitar company – not least, of course, that the SEs have always been made 'offshore', originally in Korea and now primarily in Indonesia. The SE acoustics and Hollowbodies are made by Cor-Tek in China.

But when the SE line kicked off with a single-guitar introduction in 2001, plenty of people thought it was the beginning of the end, the 'race to the bottom' in terms

of price and probably quality, and the opposite of the high-level instruments that PRS had been producing in the USA since 1985. Even Paul Reed Smith was hesitant, and models with maple tops (albeit figured maple veneer over solid maple) weren't initially offered.

But 24 years on from the range's inception, the revenue that the SEs bring to PRS's total is now about 45 per cent, PRS's COO, Jack Higginbotham, tells us. "I'd say the two tides, if you like, have risen very equally between what we've done in the US and what we've done in SE," he says.

Bearing in mind the lower cost of the SE guitars (a quarter, often less, compared

with the USA models), presumably to meet those revenue figures, a lot more SE guitars are made annually. "Yes, by a factor of... a lot!" laughs Jack. "Something like seven or eight times as many, obviously because of the different price points. It's a lot of units! Until you get used to thinking about it, it's pretty overwhelming when you start talking about 8,000 of these and 9,000 of those. I remember a party we had back in the day [27 June 1986, The Night of The 1,000th Guitar]. It was a hard economical time in the world and we were like, 'Oh, this is a celebration of making 1,000 guitars. What are we going to do now?'"

Making It Work

What they did, of course, is to carry on making guitars. "The thing that's different is that we are guitar makers, and if we do it well we make money," considers Jack. "That's different from those that go to make money and, in the process of that, make guitars. We make guitars and then we make money. And whether we're successful or not isn't necessarily about how much money we're making; it's about how much impact we're having on the instrument, the market and the consumer. That's what wakes us up in the middle of the night, that's what gets us going. If we have a problem – and everyone has problems in production – we attack it

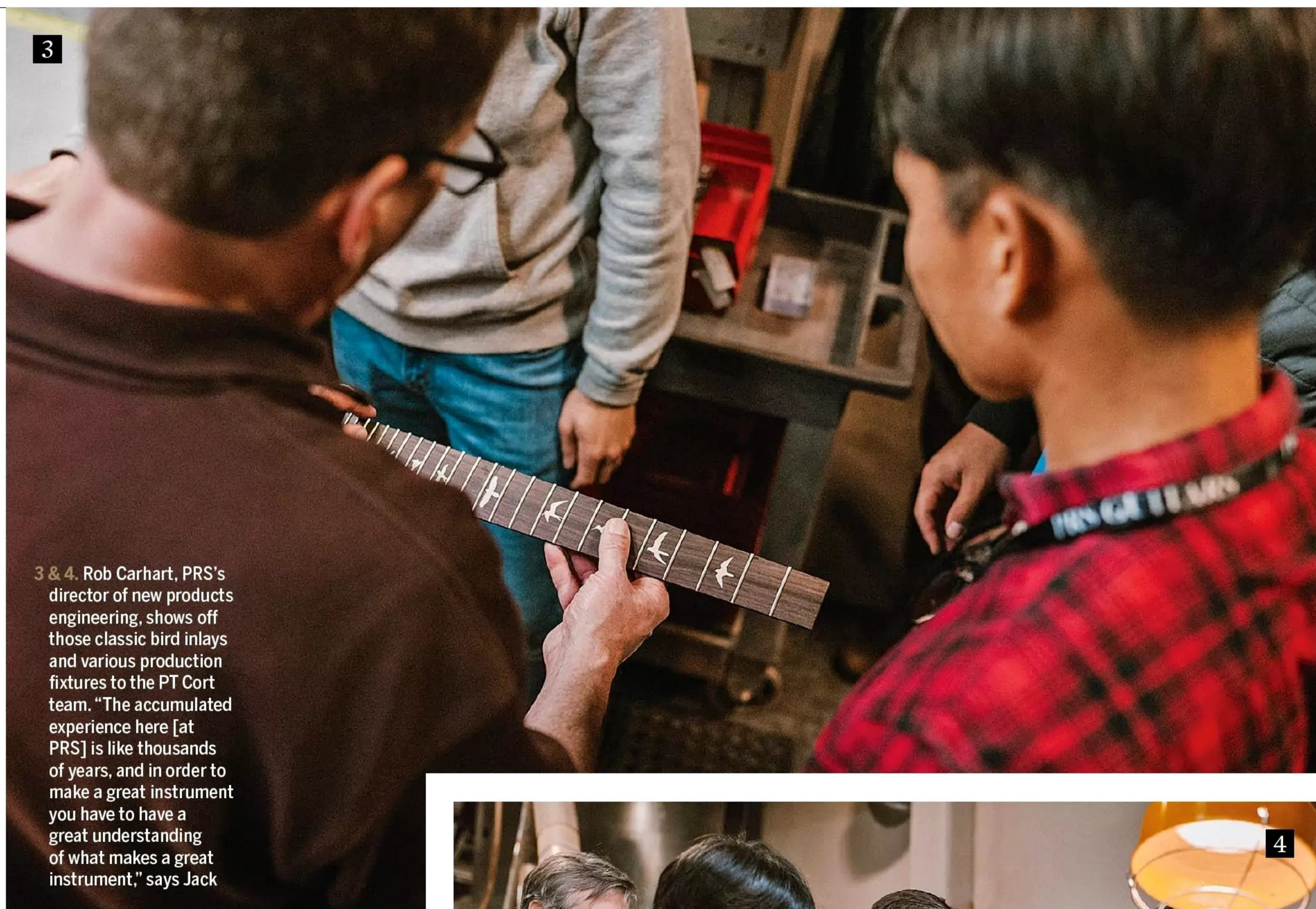


1. Along with PRS's regular visits to Indonesia, Cor-Tek's team also visit PRS HQ in Maryland as they did earlier this year. Here, Dan Davis, PRS's neck team manager, is discussing fingerboard details with Issac Kwon, head of R&D for the PRS SE factory at PT Cort Indonesia

2. PRS's COO, Jack Higginbotham, modelling the new SE Custom 24 Semi-Hollow Piezo



PHOTO BY HUNTER SELMAN



3 & 4. Rob Carhart, PRS's director of new products engineering, shows off those classic bird inlays and various production fixtures to the PT Cort team. "The accumulated experience here [at PRS] is like thousands of years, and in order to make a great instrument you have to have a great understanding of what makes a great instrument," says Jack

like a fire. We have no appetite for doing anything other than our best.

"On the more practical side, I now have virtually 40 years' experience of building guitars," he continues. "The accumulated experience here [at PRS] is like thousands of years, and in order to make a great instrument you have to have

"The two tides have risen very equally between the US and SE (builds)"

JACK HIGGINBOTHAM

a great understanding of what makes a great instrument. You have to understand – through trials and tribulations and mistakes – what to do and what not to do.

"It literally starts with the wood you select, how you dry it. It's the thing that not everyone thinks about. You can take a piece of wood that isn't cured correctly and turn it into the most incredible thing you've ever carved in your life, then in three months it'll be firewood because you didn't follow the fundamental steps correctly. What we have is a process that we acknowledge works. It works consistently, it makes the instrument stable. We're following the fundamentals of sound manufacturing guitar principles that allow us to not only make a guitar



like this SE Custom 24 Piezo – which technologically is an outstanding thing to me – but also the SE CE Standard bolt-on at \$499, which has all the same care and attention to it as this new guitar at \$1,599.

"We follow the same process, the same logic, the same mentality. We don't have two levels of acceptability for the different prices, it's all the same to me: they're guitars and they need to be right. \$499 is an incredibly high value for a guitar you can go and buy, and go and gig it. And that's what I want: it's not a toy, it's not for someone to stick in a closet and not use. It has a purpose and that purpose is to make music. And you can't do that unless you have the knowledge, the patience and the persistence to follow a proper process.

"Then you have to have the creative side to come up with hair-brained things like this SE Custom 24 Piezo – pushing the envelope. And then there are instruments like the relatively new SE NF3; again, it's pushing the envelope in terms of its unique pickup design and that's a good guitar. Actually, I love that guitar! It's our passion, it's our purpose."

Inspectors Assemble

As our reviews attest, not every guitar company feels the necessity to ship us guitars ready to rock. Admittedly, most need little more than a basic setup, but it's very rare that a PRS SE isn't anything but gig-ready straight from the box. What's the process?



5. John Walker (SE Series project manager, left), Jacob Koo (PT Cort production manager, centre) and Tom Walls (lead SE inspector) unbox SEs in Maryland

6. A big hit from the Indonesian factory has been John Mayer's SE Silver Sky, which is now available in a left-handed version, as pictured, for 2025

7. The long-running Zach Myers model is the only Singlecut Semi-Hollow in the entire PRS line-up and, again for 2025, now comes with a left-handed option



"We have a team of inspectors that do that job," Jack explains. "At the beginning there's Rob Carhart, our leading product engineer; he does Private Stock, too. Then we have Tom Walls who is our lead inspector; he's the supervisor of the inspection team. He's just done his third trip to Indonesia to train the builders in the factory to set up the guitars the same way we do here in the USA. He's training the 40 different assemblers there how to do the job, so when the guitars leave the factory they're closer to what we want them to be. We also have John Walker who literally goes to Indonesia three to four times a year – he's like my production manager. We have a list with elements we want to work on and we attack the list, and the guitars become better for it. I go to Cor-Tek a couple of times a year myself and do a similar thing.

"Then, of course, the guitar is shipped. Now, if wood is not dried correctly and

"We don't have two levels of acceptability for the different prices, it's all the same"

JACK HIGGINBOTHAM

it sits in a container, which gets up to 150 degrees [Fahrenheit], for two months... very bad things can happen during that journey. But we inspect every guitar coming into the US and Canada, and then the team at PRS Europe inspects every guitar coming into the UK and Europe. And our individual distributors are instructed to do the same. We now have PRS in Japan and they're doing the same thing. It all amounts to quite an incredible cost, but the price of *not* doing it is higher."

With the initial Covid years now behind us, how is PRS coping with the

new landscape? "Everyone acknowledges there was a feeding frenzy during Covid," states Jack. "We grew significantly, but more importantly we captured market share. If there was a good thing to say about Covid, I think a lot of people thought about playing guitar and picked up on PRS, and understood our mission statement of making a high-value instrument.

"The market today has definitely cooled off from those days, but our company has not significantly cooled off at all. We're still pushing the same numbers and going after the same things. I think it's harder to sell guitars in the world now than it was three years ago, but I believe that because we have continued to press as hard as we know how on quality and innovation, we're not getting as much of that [downturn] as many people are. Put it like this: I've heard reports and numbers of how much the guitar market is down – and we're not down by those numbers." **G**

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Return Of The Rack

A revered rackmount digital delay makes
a welcome comeback in pedal form

Words Trevor Curwen
Photography Olly Curtis



TC ELECTRONIC 2290 P DYNAMIC DIGITAL DELAY £299

CONTACT **TC Electronic** WEB www.tcelectronic.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 2290... isn't that a vintage rackmount unit?**
Spot on! And this is the 2290 P, a pedal version of that digital delay that was launched in the 1980s and became a vital component of the rigs of many prominent guitarists.
- 2 Is this exactly the same, then?**
Well, TC describes it as a recreation with added modern features, improved bits and pieces, and expanded selected effect parameter ranges, particularly with the guitar-playing experience in mind.
- 3 What's so special about it?**
It can deliver a wide range of delay and modulation effects – but it's particularly known for delays that react to playing dynamics.

When it comes to analogue delay pedals and echo, units there's plenty out there that deserve classic status such as the Echoplex, Space Echo, Memory Man and DM-2. But the list is arguably shorter for digital delay. One, though, whose name is sometimes spoken in hushed tones is the TC Electronic 2290. First seen in 1985 and in production for 20 years, the rackmount unit has been a staple in recording studios and found its way into the rigs of many pro guitarists including, of course, The Edge.

There were many factors that made the 2290 the unit of choice, and those live on in the new 2290 P pedal version, which TC Electronic tells us is a faithful recreation of the original with some choice extra features. This pedal is a source of intricate delays, with or without modulation, but perhaps it should really be defined as a time-based effect generator in that it also offers chorus, flanger, tremolo, vibrato, panning and more.

In Use

While a rackmount unit can be unwieldy, it seems that practicality is the watchword with this new version. For such a potent unit it is actually sized okay for pedalboards (about the width of three Boss compacts plugged in, side by side) and it can run off a standard nine-volt supply with a current draw that shouldn't tax today's power distributors.

The front panel of the rackmount unit, with its numerous buttons and display windows, has been recreated for the most part (the full keypad has been replaced by a single rotary encoder), making the

The rackmount unit was a staple in recording studios and the rigs of many pro guitarists



This is where you set up modulation for the delay, panning or dynamics. There's a choice of four waveforms, plus adjustment for speed and depth, and the threshold for the ENV or TRIG waveforms

pedal look a bit more complex than most. Nevertheless, it comes with a magnetic blanking plate that you can choose to lay across it for live use, so the displays are still visible but the buttons can't be inadvertently disturbed.

Editing from the front panel is actually very easy. You can typically hit a button to choose a parameter and then adjust it with the rotary Keyboard encoder, although this may not be the sort of thing you'd want to be doing all the time on a darkened stage. The best way to use the unit is to create your own presets for the 128 onboard slots in advance and recall them on stage using the footswitches.



1. The front panel is split into various sections. For example, you can set the amount of feedback and invert the phase of it here; plus select the High and Low filters to adjust the tone of the repeats. The Output section is where you set the mix of direct and delay sound, between a value of 0 and 99. Press the two buttons together to set left/right panning

2. This rear-panel switch changes the function of the second input/output from stereo operation to a send and return loop



THE RIVALS

Looking at pedal versions of revered rackmount units, the Boss SDE-3000D Dual Digital Delay (£329) puts two reproductions of the Roland SDE-3000 into a single pedal; it also comes in an EVH version (£399). While we’re talking Boss, let’s not forget the RE-202 (£319) pedal version of the Space Echo. Korg did a similar thing with its SDD-3000 that we reviewed several years ago. Unfortunately, it’s no longer available from new, but you may find one on eBay, Reverb and the like. Also check out Eventide – the H90 Harmonizer (£895) pedal offers a range of quality effects derived from units such as the H3000.

This is a tweaker’s paradise offering myriad effects, with exceptionally detailed fine-tuning of all parameters

repeat to infinite repeats – is to adjust the filters that can be applied to both the high and low frequencies for tonal changes across the trail of subsequent repeats. This way you can get the repeats to bed into your sound like some analogue delays do with a progressive reduction in top-end, bottom-end or both together. Beyond EQ, there are loads of modulations that can be applied including the standard practice of adding a touch of chorus to the repeats.

The clue is in the unit’s full name, but dynamics are another option and something the original 2290 was revered for. You can set up ducking delays for one of two finely adjustable outcomes: repeats that are subdued while you’re playing but become prominent at the end of phrases; or heavy delay during playing with the repeats all but disappearing when you stop.

If you can use the 2290 P in stereo there are some spacious soundscapes to be achieved via the use of panning, with a choice of it being applied to direct sound only, repeats only, or both together.

3. You turn on the Dynamic modulation with the Dyn Mod button; the Reverse button reverses its effect. The Pan Mod button turns on the autopanning for the delay, direct sound or both. Within the Delay section the visual display of delay time is also indicated by a flashing yellow LED. The Mod button activates modulation, while the Sub.D button selects tap tempo subdivision types (the Keyboard encoder sets the numerical subdivision)

4. A plate snaps easily to the frame with magnets, protecting the buttons and the display

5. The 2290 desktop app offers organisation of presets as well as setting up MIDI control and some general settings, such as bypass status for the 2290 P



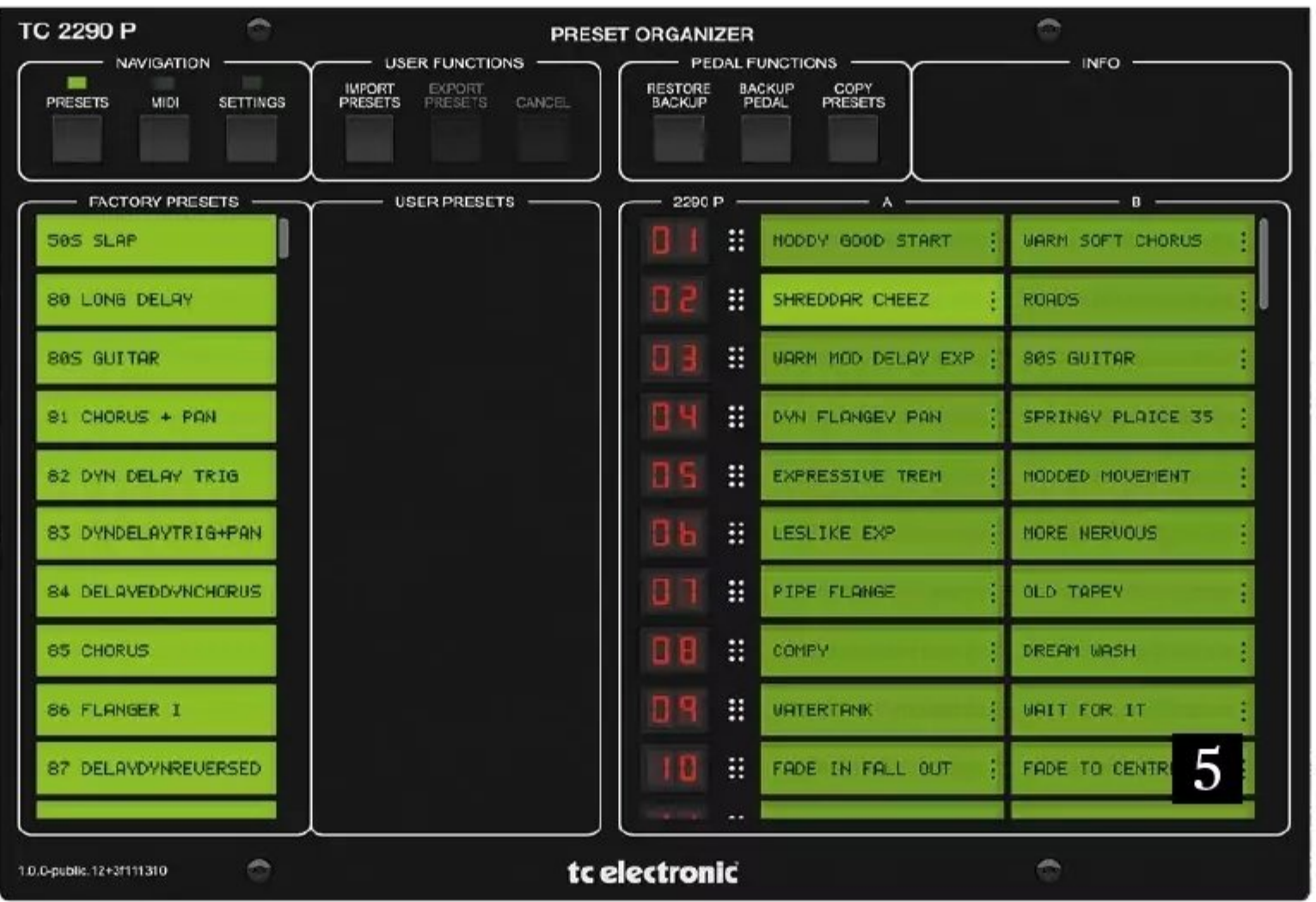
TC ELECTRONIC 2290 P DYNAMIC DIGITAL DELAY

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Digital delay
FEATURES: Selectable true or buffered bypass, 9.999 seconds delay time, 128 presets, dedicated library app, tap tempo, magnetic protective plate
CONTROLS: 19 function buttons, keyboard encoder, Stereo/FB Loop switch, A footswitch, B footswitch, Learn footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Mono, Stereo/Return), Standard Outputs (Mono, Stereo/Send), EXP, USB, MIDI In, MIDI Out/Thru
POWER: Supplied 9V adaptor 250mA
DIMENSIONS: 233 (w) x 137 (d) x 54mm (h)

However, not everyone can use stereo all the time, and the more common scenario is likely to be the 2290 P sitting on a player's 'board in a standard mono signal chain that allows the redundant input and output to be configured (via a rear-panel switch) as a send and return loop, so you can add other effects into the delay's feedback loop. A touch of overdrive for degraded repeats, perhaps?

All that we've mentioned up to now relates to delay-time lengths where you can hear repeats distinct from the dry sound. But considering you can set the exact delay time in 0.1-millisecond steps from 0.0 onwards, there's loads that can be achieved with shorter delay times: doubling, chorus and flanging – or even zero delay where you can use delay modulation without the dry sound for vibrato and tremolo. Dynamic control can also be a factor, with the effect intensity following picking strength.

There are 64 banks of two presets (A and B) that you can scroll through with a press of two footswitches simultaneously, leaving the A and B presets to be instantly accessed by their dedicated footswitches. A third footswitch operates tap tempo with a large variety of timing divisions available. Its labelling as a Learn footswitch is a throwback to the rackmount unit, but you



can assign functions to it, therefore it can operate on the active preset, loaded presets A+B, or globally. Beyond the onboard footswitches, you can add an expression pedal that can be set up to control up to three parameters simultaneously, and there's also full MIDI control available.

Verdict

The 2290 P is a tweaker's paradise offering myriad delays, modulation effects and comprehensive panning possibilities with exceptionally detailed fine-tuning of all parameters. It basically does what the rackmount unit did at a fraction of the price while being more practical for guitarists, making it a must-have if you've ever fancied a bit of 2290 action. **G**



PROS Accurate revival of a vintage classic; detailed fine-tuning of sounds; presets; tap tempo; send/return loop
CONS Direct effect parameter adjustment via the app would have been useful

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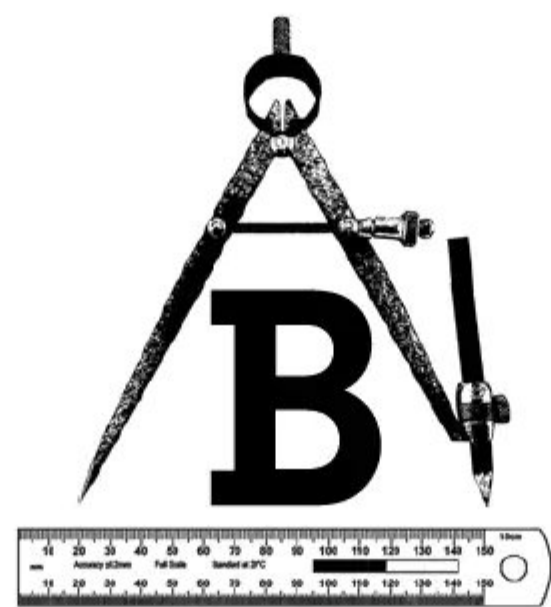
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STILL CRAZY

One of the most creative yet reliably great-sounding effects makers out there, Crazy Tube Circuits grew out of a fetish for old valve amps. We meet founder Christos Ntaifotis to find out more

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

Greece is, perhaps, not the very first country that comes to mind when you think of premier-grade effects. But some of the best pedals in the world right now are coming out of the Mediterranean country, not least from the workshops of Athens-based pedal maker Crazy Tube Circuits, whose whole design philosophy grew out of a love for vintage and classic valve amps. But despite this emphasis on tradition, CTC pedals stand out for their imaginative pairings of sought-after vintage sounds and clever methods to enhance the feature set of their multi-functional pedals. We catch up with the man behind the madness, Christos Ntaifotis, to get his take on making effects that are at once classic yet just a little different.

How did you get started in making effects – and how does the ‘tube circuits’ bit come in, as many of your pedals don’t feature valves?

“Okay, so, first of all I had a passion for New Old Stock tubes. I mean, I would try to source 12AX7s everywhere that I could in the local Greek market from the 60s, 70s, early 80s. I would try to find all the hardware stores or the service stores that would do all the radio repairs and ask them, ‘Do you have any tubes left?’ And I had some friends make fun of this – they would call me the ‘Crazy Tube Guy’, although in Greek. And besides that, I also collect tube amps.



Christos Ntaifotis says the sound of classic valve amps is still his biggest inspiration for new pedal designs

“So although most of the pedals don’t actually contain tubes, except for one – the Space Charged Overdrive – the whole idea is to make pedals that sound close to the real thing, to real tube amps, with the warmth that you would expect.”

What was the first pedal you put out as Crazy Tube Circuits?

“The first was the Black Magic, which was actually called Dr Boogie originally. As you can guess, it was based on a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier, and actually the schematic of that first version is going around on the do-it-yourself forums. And then I changed the name to Black Magic – it was a JFET emulation of that amp.”

What are the biggest challenges you face when you set out to design an effects pedal that sounds like a specific classic valve amp?

“Well, there are so many aspects because when we have an amp sound in mind [to emulate] we actually look at the whole amp: the internal circuits, the tubes, the transformers... You also have to listen to the cabinets, the speakers. So there are so many variables in that equation. The difficult thing is to make a pedal that would give the essence of that sound [when used] with any amp. The aim is to be able to use that pedal to make any relatively flat-sounding amp sound as close as possible to a ‘Plexi’ or a Dual Rectifier or a Deluxe or whatever the pedal is trying to replicate.”

Your Unobtanium pedal has been one of your most popular effects to date. It features both Klon-style and Dumble-voiced drive circuits in a single pedal. What inspired you to combine those two sounds in one box?

“As I said, I consider myself not so much a player as a gear collector, so my GAS is pretty high and I also have some friends that also collect things. I got a chance to reference an original Klon [Centaur] pedal, and I thought I could make a clone of that and get as close as possible. To be honest, I never had an actual Dumble amp to try out, but I had the chance to try many good [high-end replicas] of that. So the idea behind the Unobtanium pedal is

"The whole idea is to make pedals that sound close to real tube amps, with the warmth you'd expect"





the sounds that you cannot easily obtain because it's too pricey or too rare to find a Klon or Dumble."

How do the two sides of the pedal interact with each other when in use?

"I mean, without stooping down to change that toggle switch for the voicing, you have one sound [on the Klon side] and two voicings on the Dumble side that you can easily control with an external footswitch as well. So we have three sounds that way, and if you also combine them, you've got plenty more. They work really, really great. You can have, for example, the Klon 'always on' for a clean sound – and then add a lead tone with the Dumble side."

The Klon Centaur has been the subject of so much sonic folklore yet how hard can it really be to emulate an overdrive circuit that's been well understood for a while now? What's the secret to getting it really right?

"Okay, so the main circuit is nothing too fancy. I say that because we have known

"I consider myself not so much a player as a gear collector, so my GAS is pretty high"

the Klon circuit for more than a decade. The difficult part is to find diodes [for] the clipping section, and hand-match them so they're going to be at the same threshold as the original units. So the original units used the 1N34A germanium diodes that had a very specific spec. For example, if you just buy them from the factory, they would go from 0.25 up to one volt of forward voltage drop. So you have to hand-test them and find the diodes with approximately 0.3 volt voltage drop – because this is what the actual unit had.

"It's important to do this matching process. Otherwise, if you had two pedals [built identically except with different diode values] you would have very different clipping sounds and compression. For example, one of them would need the volume set around nine o'clock to get a certain sound, while the other would have to be set at one o'clock to achieve the same sound."

This writer is a big fan of your TI:ME delay pedal. Not only because it sounds good but because you seem to have squeezed all the features you need and none you don't into a very compact



1. The Unobtanium has proved a hit as it offers both Klon- and Dumble-style drive in one

2. The TI:ME delay pedal really is perfect for guitarists who like the chewy vibe of analogue delay but the precision of digital

pedal – tap tempo, modulation, delay note values and waves of self-oscillation triggered by a momentary footswitch...

"Thank you so much for your kind words – it really means a lot, to be honest, because I know there are so many delays out there that are strictly pure, clean digital delays or analogue or tape echo delays. But with the TI:ME pedal I wanted to [emulate] the very, very early digital delays that were of the mid-70s, the very first rack delay units. The technology was not so advanced then, so they were not purely clean. So I wanted to go for a delay that sounded a bit lo-fi and have modulation but with a tone knob also, so it will be musical whatever the setting would be.

"I also wanted to make a delay that you could use on your rhythmic pattern or on your solos and also a delay that would be great for players who experiment a bit more on stage. So I also added the feedback control on the tap tempo so when you press it down you get those self-oscillation sounds that we all love on our delays. So, yeah, that's it. I wanted to make a musical delay that stood out for not being a BDD-style analogue delay or purely clean, either."

Speaking of analogue sounds, your White Whale pedal uses genuine spring reverb and adds all-analogue tremolo. How did you make that work in a relatively small box?

"This is the second version of that pedal – the first came out in 2017. I wanted to see if it was possible to have a spring reverb and analogue tremolo in one box. I was inspired by another great pedal [Strymon Flint, we assume – Ed], but it is digital, so I wanted to make a pure analogue version of that in the smallest size possible; and this is how the first version came about.

"For the new version, I tried to upgrade the reverb section with a tube power amp driving the springs, so you got more headroom on the reverb section, plus you have a harmonic tremolo [mode] on the tremolo side now, too. You also get the added bonus of having the two effect sides purely independent, so you can place the tremolo side before the reverb, or vice versa. That is useful because, for example, when you get on the optical tremolo and tube-bias tremolo, you would probably prefer to have those *after* your reverb, and if you have harmonic tremolo, you would probably prefer to have that *before* your

"With the TI:ME pedal I wanted to [emulate] the very early digital delay units of the mid-70s"





3. Floyd fans should enjoy the combination of Hiwatt-style amp tones and Coloursound Power Boost drive in the Hi Power pedal



reverb effect. So I thought I would have to add these options in order to have a more complete package of a reverb and tremolo effect in a single box.”

How did you get spring reverb to sound warm, full and expansive with the shorter springs required by putting it in a pedal?

“I found a reverb tank that would [compensate] somewhat for the size, the length of the spring, and would sound kind of fuller. I mean, it’s physics – the longer the spring, the fuller the reverb will sound. But if you add some springs, the more springs you have, that will also make the reverb sound fuller, and there are other tricks you can use. Like I said, we used a valve power amp to drive the springs harder but in a cleaner way, without distorting, and this is also a way to get a fuller sound from a smaller spring reverb tank.”

When we caught up with American sideman and YouTube star Pete Thorn last year, he said your Starlight fuzz/distortion pedal was a mainstay of his live rig with *The Classic Rock Show*. Some fuzz pedals can be quite niche, but we got the impression he found it pretty versatile.

“Okay, so the Starlight actually is one of

the earliest Crazy Tube Circuits designs and it’s primarily based on the very first design that we discussed earlier – the Dr Boogie that became Black Magic. So it’s kind of voiced after the [Mesa/Boogie] Dual Rectifier but with a more vintage kind of vibe. It starts as an overdrive, then [as you turn up the gain] goes into distortion territory, and then all the way up into fuzz.

“I mean, I took what the Black Magic did and added some MOSFET clipping so the low mids and lower frequencies would compress and sag a bit more so you have a fuzzier sound. So it began with a modern sound, but I tried to enhance it, especially in the lower-mid frequencies, to get the vintage vibe that sounds great – especially on lead sounds.”

Do you do a more traditional pure fuzz pedal as well?

“Yeah, it’s called the Constellation. It’s based on traditional fuzz pedals. For example, you have a Fuzz Face[-style circuit]; Vox Tone Bender; Tone Bender 1.5; Tone Bender II; Rangemaster and a Rangemaster into a Fuzz Face. So it’s all analogue and I’ve used the switching circuit to move between them. Because if you look at the respective circuits of

“I still want to explore more amp-in-a-box designs and maybe dual overdrive”

those [classic fuzz pedals], they’re actually really close. For example, the Fuzz Face, Vox Tone Bender and Tone Bender I are all based on the same principle. You only change some capacitor values or resistor values, and you get a new pedal.”

A lot of your designs have taken classic sounds as a starting point, and you’ve made really interesting choices. What do you think is promising for the future? What sort of areas do you think you’d like to start moving into?

“To be honest, I still want to explore more amp-in-a-box designs and maybe dual overdrive. This is something that I really like working on and spending time on. Like I said, I do collect lots of amps and I would say it’s better than getting into drugs or something illegal or something like that. It’s a passion!” 

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Longtermers

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

Boss Cube Street II

With Jamie Dickson



Hitting the streets, a simple setup ready to entertain the people of Glastonbury High Street

Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist Editor-in-chief



With some busking prep under his belt, Jamie heads to London to take part in an arts event – with the battery-powered amp stowed as a backup

Regular readers will know that the last time I took the Boss Cube Street II out, I was in rehearsal for a debut gig in London. The slight twist was that I decided to rehearse on the streets of Glastonbury, by busking my way through my set over the course of several lunchtimes. After all, there's nothing like performing for an audience – even one composed of passing pedestrians – to sharpen up your playing fast.

Despite these preparations, as the night of the gig approached I started to feel a few butterflies. I was booked to play the Clerkenwell ArtsLab event at the Betsey Trotwood (do check it out, it's a regular fixture and always great) with a debut performance of songs from my fingerstyle acoustic album, *Withershins*, released in March of this year. I'd be sharing the bill with John Hegley, a poet and comedian I'd long admired, and some other fine London musicians, so I wanted to give a good account of myself.

"I hit the streets of Glastonbury again and was approached by a filmmaker..."

With a week to go, I was still making the odd slip that could have halted a song in its tracks. However, two hour-long stints busking on Glastonbury High Street passed without incident, so I began to feel the prep was paying off and that I might do okay on the night, especially as I had the excellent and highly experienced folk fiddle player Aaron Catlow of Sheelanagig to accompany me on stage.

My intention was to play through my Trace Elliot acoustic amp on the night, using a Boss GT-1000Core modelling multi-effects to provide reverb and delay in the effects loop. In fact, I could probably have just plugged the GT-1000Core straight into the PA, but I wasn't quite sure what the PA system would be like when I got there, so I decided I needed a conventional amp just in case. While the Trace Elliot got the nod for my main stage amp, the Cube Street II is so light and compact that I brought it along as a backup for Aaron to use



This extra piece of kit allowed Jamie to stream audio and control some functions of the Cube Street II from his phone

should he be unable to DI into the PA (as was his plan), or if my own main amp went down.

After an uneventful drive down to London, we were greeted and helped to set up by the lovely staff at the Betsey Trotwood. The audience soon filed in and got themselves sat down with drinks and the show began. Having enjoyed the warm-up acts with a Guinness in hand, it was showtime for me and Aaron, too, and, happily, everything went as planned. The audience gave us a warm reception and John Hegley came over to us and said some kind words about the set afterwards, which made my and Aaron's night as it transpired he was a big Hegley fan, too. The only downside of the evening was that an enormous AC/DC gig crowd was turning out of Wembley just as we were trying to leave London, meaning that we found ourselves in what felt like full-on rush-hour traffic, inching out of the city at walking pace, sometime around midnight.

App-y Ending

Although I didn't need to use the Cube Street II during the gig in the end, it had proved its value as a useful backup as well as a street performance tool. Now, with the gig behind me, I looked forward to testing out some of its other capabilities. Having got wind of my long-term test, the folk at Boss kindly sent me a couple of accessories to try with it – including a BT-Dual Bluetooth Audio MIDI Dual Adaptor that would enable me to stream backing tracks from my phone through the amp and control some of its functions via phone. They also sent an FS-6 Dual Footswitch to operate the built-in looper, but I decided to set that aside for the moment and have a go with the Cube Street II Editor app for iOS, which works in a very similar way to the Boss Tone Studio app used to deep-edit Boss's Katana amp range, in simplified form.

It's easy to pair up with the Cube Street II and, once connected, you can deep-edit the amp's effects, reverb and other functions for each channel. While you can use a knob on the top of the amp to select the amount of reverb you want, the app gives you access to many more functions and parameters. For example, you can use it to choose between Room, Plate and Hall reverb types, and fine-tailor those effects via a host of otherwise inaccessible controls for pre-delay, EQ and so on. If you're serious about maximising your acoustic tone while performing on the street, this is all handy – provided you don't mind the extra expense of buying the BT-Dual dongle (they cost around £45). Boss has taken some flak for not simply fitting these internally as standard, but it's not a feature everyone will need and given that the amp is under £300 anyway, it doesn't seem all *that* mean.

Musing on these matters, and with my technique already getting a bit rusty in the weeks after the gig, I decided to hit the streets of Glastonbury again. Heading out rather late in the day, I took up my usual spot outside the Abbey. There wasn't much foot traffic and I was about to pack up when I was approached by a woman doing some filming – she introduced herself as Swedish filmmaker Elisabet Kedziora, who explained she was making a film about Glastonbury and its sacred and esoteric traditions that was scheduled to be screened in town at the next Spring Equinox. She got the cameras rolling and asked me what I thought about magic and music in Glastonbury, and I did a little playing for her. Who knows if my ramblings will make the final cut, but if nothing else it proves that when you get out and about with the Cube Street II, little adventures are never far away. **G**

Reviewed N/A **Price** £299 **On Test Since** May 2024 **Studio Session** N/A **Gigged** Yes, if the High Street counts... **www.boss.info**



STEVE MORSE

A gearhead through and through, the Dixie Dregs and ex-Deep Purple guitarist reveals some of his follies and lessons learned along the way

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

"The first serious guitar I bought with my own money was a new sunburst Strat in 1967. I later took the neck off that one, put it on a Tele, and ended up with humbuckers and single-coil pickups – my 'FrankenTele'. The pickup layout became the starting point of my [Steve Morse signature] Music Man guitars."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought was a Godin classical. The reason was that my custom-made Buscarino classical guitar, with the Roland synth module built in, was stolen while we were on tour. I needed something quick to do the duets and nylon-string stuff – the quiet moments of the [Dixie] Dregs set. The Godin was a nice guitar, but I sold it to a fan as soon as I got my Buscarino back. And yes, I got it back, thanks to some people who worked with Joe Bonamassa. They somehow had contact with the guy and talked him into returning it anonymously."

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

"The most incredible find I've ever had was buying a handmade classical guitar in Miami in 1971. The builder needed money. I was a broke student, and with the warning that the finishing was not complete, I bought it. I also never finished it because I was too busy playing it every single day to learn my studies at the University of Miami. It has a cloudy hand-rubbed finish and one crack, I think, but it's a big part of my early history."

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

"The strongest case of buyer's remorse I ever had was when I traded an ES-335 for a 'Black Beauty' Les Paul. I couldn't grab the strings to bend since the frets were so low, as it was probably meant for jazz players. It sounded decent, but since I couldn't play it I traded it away in 1972. I didn't know I could've just had it refretted – I was a teenager. But ergonomically, the Les Paul setup didn't fit me anyway."

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

"The one guitar I've intensely regretted selling was a Ramírez, which I didn't like at the time due to tuning issues. Much later, I learned that there are ways of cutting the nut and bridge to lessen those issues, as well as trying different gauges of strings at the crossover point between plain and wound strings."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"My best guitar-buying tip is to make a deal that's good and fair to both parties. Basically, then you're starting your ownership on a good karma footing. Guitars are super important, but ultimately they are the least expensive thing you need to pay for if you count how many years they last. I'm not a collector, so I don't have any tips, except I love it when real collectors make a find that an elderly person has in their closet and offer them more than the owner wanted because they know how valuable the instrument is nowadays."

Steve's Ernie Ball Music Man signature follows the pickup layout of his 'FrankenTele' – his first serious guitar and one that he modded to his own spec



"A handmade classical guitar from 1971 is a big part of my early history"

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window or browsed online, and what were you looking at?

"The last time I was window shopping was really at the NAMM Show. Every year, somebody has a new type of accessory, guitar electronic, folding guitar or different body material. In particular, I'm always curious about folding guitars for minimalist travel practice."

"In reality, I designed my Music Man to fit in the overhead bin of small aircraft and be carried into a three-quarter-size gigbag, so it's very easy to carry aboard a plane, so I don't really need the folding guitar, but I love the ingenuity people have shown. Also, the adjusted frets to give better tuning temperament, the various tuning improving bridges, and so on. In the end, in order to know I've got the best compromise on my Music Man, I need to keep up with what's around to see the advantages and disadvantages of various mods."

STEVE'S GO-TO RIG

"It all starts with the guitar: my Music Man signature with four pickups – plus, usually, a Roland synth pickup GK-2. This guitar gives me control over volume and tone and allows me to bring down the gain and boost the high-end back up as I do so by selecting one of my single-coil pickups mounted further from the strings. The neck pickup is designed to be in the exact spot it's mounted, which keeps the guitar down to a 22-fret fingerboard – but there is that all-important fatness in the neck pickup as a result.

"I plug straight into a TC Electronic PolyTune Mini, and from that into my trusty Keeley Compressor. From there, it's straight back to my Engl 100-watt signature amp. Channel 1 is a beautiful clean channel that can be driven hard to warm up smoothly or, with normal gain, is clean enough to run my Buscarino electric classical guitar into it without distortion. Channel 2 is the bread-and-butter rock sound. Channel 3 has the most midrange control knobs and can be used to make a solo 'pop' out in the mix without having any more noticeable level on the VU meters on the mixing board."

Steve's rig also features the TC Electronic Mini Flashback, Hall Of Fame Reverb and Flashback Delay pedals, plus an Ernie Ball volume pedal and Roland 55 Guitar Synth Box

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?

"Man, that's a tough one, but the guitar wins. I need to have various tones coming straight from the instrument. The amp is a big part of things, but the guitar is the biggest. That is partly because some cheap amps sound like 80 per cent as good as a great amp. But most guitars that are cheap can't do anything like the range of sounds on my guitar."

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

"Humbuckers. They are versatile in that you can play with the series wiring and pick off a coil to give you that single-coil type of sound, too. The actual hum rejection part of the design helps me stay sane when I'm in buildings with real RF problems; I simply always park my setting on a humbucker during a quiet part, even if I use the single coils during the song. I prefer the basic single coil to the stacked single coils in my applications." [AD]

For the latest news, including info on Steve's new Engl Signature 20-watt valve amp, see <https://stevemorse.com>

"Guitars are ultimately the least expensive thing to pay for if you count how many years they last"



Steve works his sound around the 100-watt Engl E656 Signature (above), while the new 20-watt E658 (left) represents a compact and versatile alternative

QUICK CHANGE

As Gibson finally adds some Quick Connect pickups to its Pickup Shop line-up, Dave Burrluck revisits this simple no-solder method to mod your Modern guitar

It's hardly a "Hold the front page!" moment, but latest releases in Gibson's expansive aftermarket Pickup Shop collection include a pair of sets – the perennial '57 Classic and the back-to-the-70s Dirty Fingers hot humbuckers – that come with what many thought were the brand's 'forgotten' Quick Connect plugs. The what? Well, with these connectors attached to the four-conductor pickup lead, they're a push-fit into the relevant PCB-style Gibson control circuit that can give you some tricky additional sounds.

We last discussed these quick fixes about five years ago in *The Mod Squad* (issue 451) and, to be honest, we thought that Gibson – not least under its new management – had abandoned this simple and nifty idea, at least in terms of aftermarket retrofits.

However, chatting last year to Gibson USA's Jason Davidson, who looks after the Pickup Shop, he explained: "We still manufacture the Quick Connect [QC] stuff for Gibson USA. Gibson was actually using the QC stuff back as far as the late 70s on different models, but we started formalising it into Gibson USA production, on regular production models, around 2007. It was around 2012 to 2013 that we did start to sell a few models aftermarket with the QC plugs, like '57 Classics, the Angus Young model, the Dirty Fingers. We offered those with the QC system, but they didn't actually sell very well and were



The new Quick Connect '57 Classic (top) and Dirty Fingers humbuckers

discontinued shortly after. So, as I said, we still use Quick Connects at the factory, and since Jared Brandon – the Pickup Shop's product manager and designer – and myself have come onboard with the Pickup Shop we've received a lot of requests for the Quick Connect pickups. We haven't forgotten those customers because there are tens of thousands of guitars out there with the QC system."

Today, it's Gibson's Modern instruments that use the Quick Connect/PCB system,

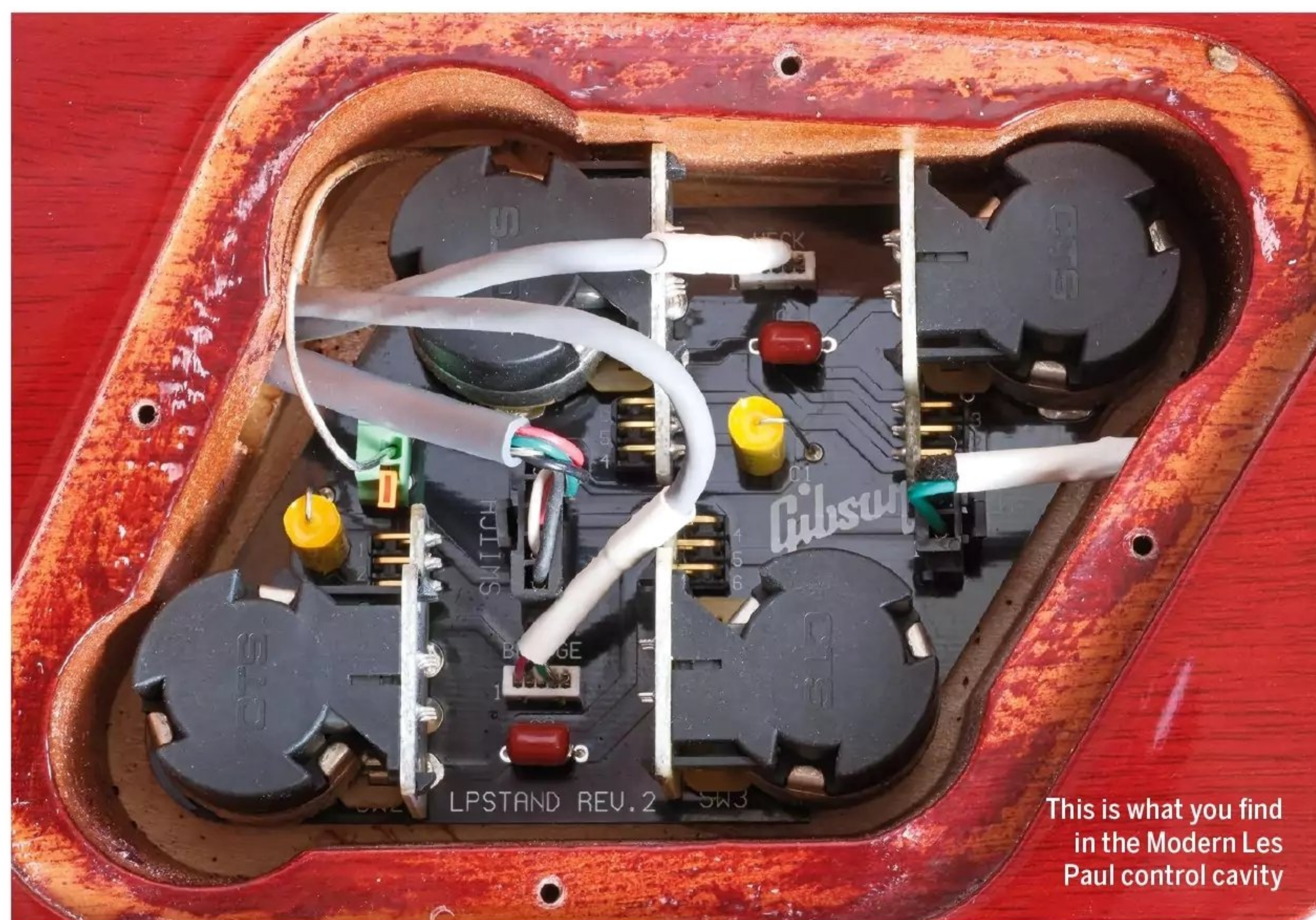
unlike the hand-wired circuits of the Original models. The key to the multi-switching system – which is employed on all the Modern Les Pauls (with the exception of the Modern Lite) – is that the relatively complex circuit is all mounted to a pre-wired circuit board. Each of the four pull-switches uses the same vintage taper pots that Gibson developed alongside CTS with (obviously) a switch attached to each.

Pull up the bridge pickup tone control and the bridge pickup is sent directly to

"On the multi-switching system, the relatively complex circuit is all mounted to a pre-wired circuit board"

the output, bypassing the volume and tone controls. Pull up the neck pickup tone (with the three-way toggle selecting both pickups) and we're out of phase with the ability to alter the pickup volumes to lessen the potentially over-thin sound.

The pull switches on each volume control are a little more unusual. Gibson calls them "coil taps", not to be confused with a single-coil pickup that is 'tapped' at a percentage of its winding to give a



This is what you find in the Modern Les Paul control cavity



Our Les Paul has turned into a 'rock tool' thanks to that Dirty Fingers and '57 Classic combo



1. With the stud tailpiece removed and that tune-o-matic taped up, we start by unscrewing the bridge pickup
2. The outgoing Burstbucker 2 was wound back in 2013
3. You need to load in the new pickups to the existing mounting rings, so be careful you don't lose those springs!
4. We screwed down the incoming '57 Classic at the neck before fitting the new Dirty Fingers

reduced output via a switch, as well as the full hotter output without the tap applied. Yes, one coil of the humbucker is 'tapped', but perhaps 'filtered' would be a better description because it passes through a capacitor. These coil-taps are also used on the SG Moderns, although without the direct out and out-of-phase tone control switches.

"Instead of a true coil-split, it's a coil tap," says Gibson master luthier Jim DeCola, who originated much of the design. "People might think of a single-coil pickup that's tapped at, say, 70 per cent, but in this case I'm using a tap between the two coils, basically filtering it out through a capacitor, which is a tuned capacitor, and the value of the capacitor determines the frequency response of the tap. So when you pull up the switch to tap it, it's scooping out some frequencies to give it that fat single-coil sound without the volume drop [of a normal coil-split]. It's hum-reducing; it's not fully hum-cancelling, but it's closer to a humbucker than a single coil – a lot quieter."



“Other components connect to the PCB with simple push-in connectors, so replacing pickups is a no-solder swap”

Now, if you fancy hand-wiring that lot, good luck! And that’s the genesis of the system. “[In production,] it’s more affordable,” says Jim. “If we had to do that in a hard-wired situation a lot could potentially go wrong. Using the PCB, it’s more affordable and more repeatable. There’s better shielding, too, so it’s quieter,” he concludes.

Quicker Connect

Another aspect of the system is that the other components – the output jack, toggle switch and four-conductor pickups – all connect to the PCB with simple push-in connectors. It means swapping or replacing pickups, so long as they have those Quick Connect connectors, is a simple no-solder swap.

So if you have a post-2011 PCB-equipped Gibson, you can swap out the pickups? Yes and no. It’s a yes if you fancy trying either of these new sets, but a little frustrating that, while the Pickup Shop makes other Quick Connect pickups, they’re only available with a guitar attached – for example, those used on the Les Paul Modern Studio (490R



and 498T), the Les Paul Modern Figured and Les Paul Supreme (Burstbucker Pro And Burstbucker Pro +) and the Les Paul Classic with its zebra-coiled 60s Burstbuckers (previously the ’61 Zebras).

Now, not everyone is a fan of this modernist system. Many have replaced the PCB with a traditional wiring loom and stated it sounds better. I can’t comment as I haven’t done that, but in using a 2019 Les Paul Classic for gigs and recording – where its expanded sounds have proved more than useful – and as a reference for reviews, I’m a fan.

But it does mean that you’ll find some QC/PCB pickups and parts on eBay and the like. You’ll also find Quick Connect adaptors (not official Gibson parts); for the more adventurous, these means you can wire in *any* four-conductor pickup, and so long as you get your wiring colour codes right you can still have all the four push-switch sounds.

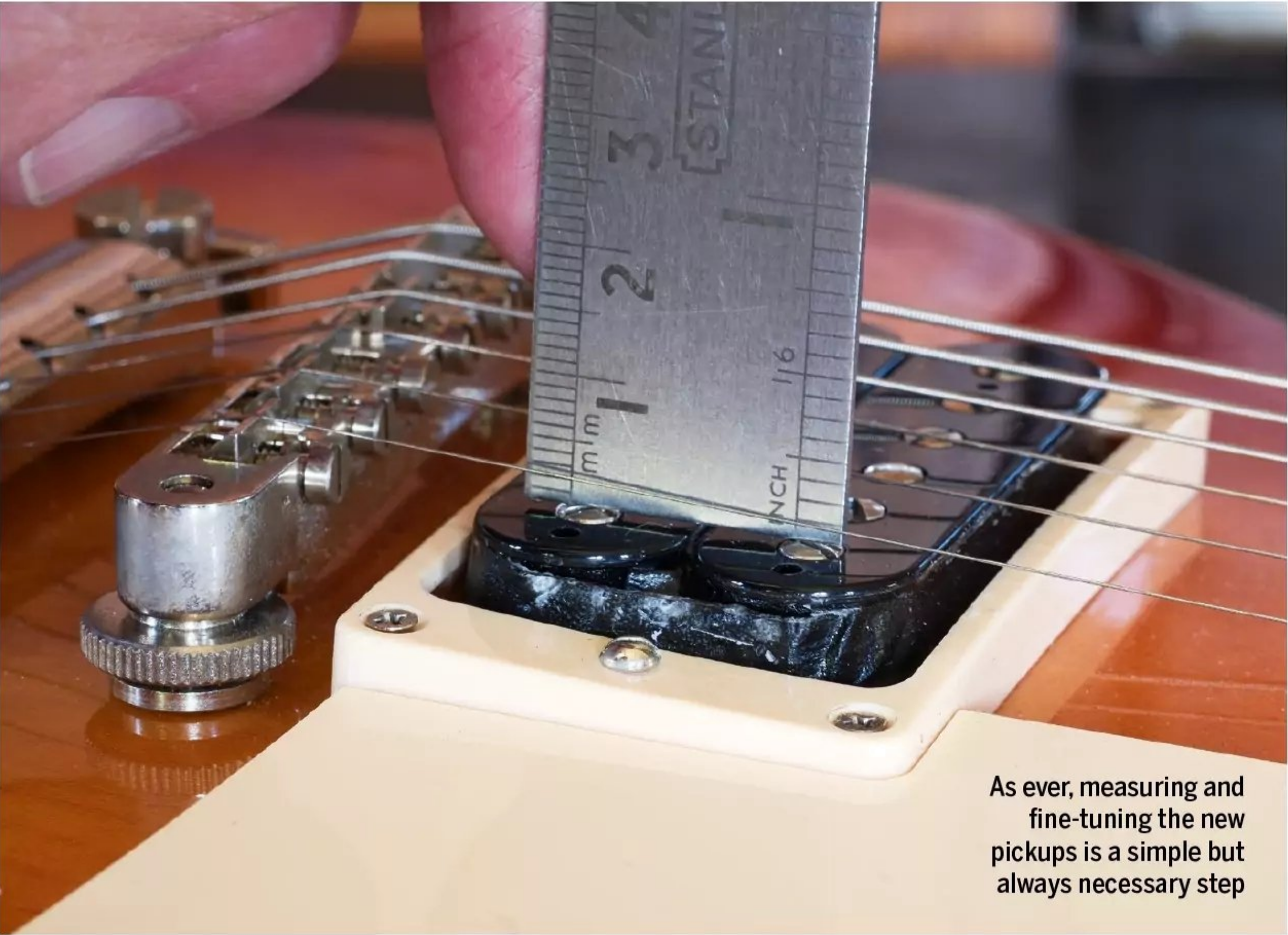
Some while back I swapped out the Les Paul Classic’s original ’61 Zebra Burstbuckers for an eBay-purchased Burstbucker 2 at the bridge and 1 at the neck. Jim DeCola arranged for a set of T-Types with Quick Connect plugs to be sent over from Gibson a while ago, too, so already the Les Paul Classic has had a couple of no-solder, fully reversible pickup swaps with zero problems.

Process & Sound

YouTube is your friend in terms of the procedure, but it’s a dead simple process, just like swapping pickups on any Les Paul, except you don’t need that soldering iron. It’s not as easy as the GuitarX (previously Relish) system that’s available on certain Cream T, Newman and Gordon Smith guitars, and we understand a new Maybach model, but none of those guitars has the Gibson pull-switch circuit, though most do have a simple coil-split.

So, while listening to a new pickup takes a little longer, you can tailor what you want to hear in the same way. Those original ’61 Zebras have a pretty crisp PAF-like tonality; the Burstbucker 1 and 2 combo are, to our ears, a little sweeter sounding, and are unpotted, too. But to illustrate the personalisation that’s





As ever, measuring and fine-tuning the new pickups is a simple but always necessary step

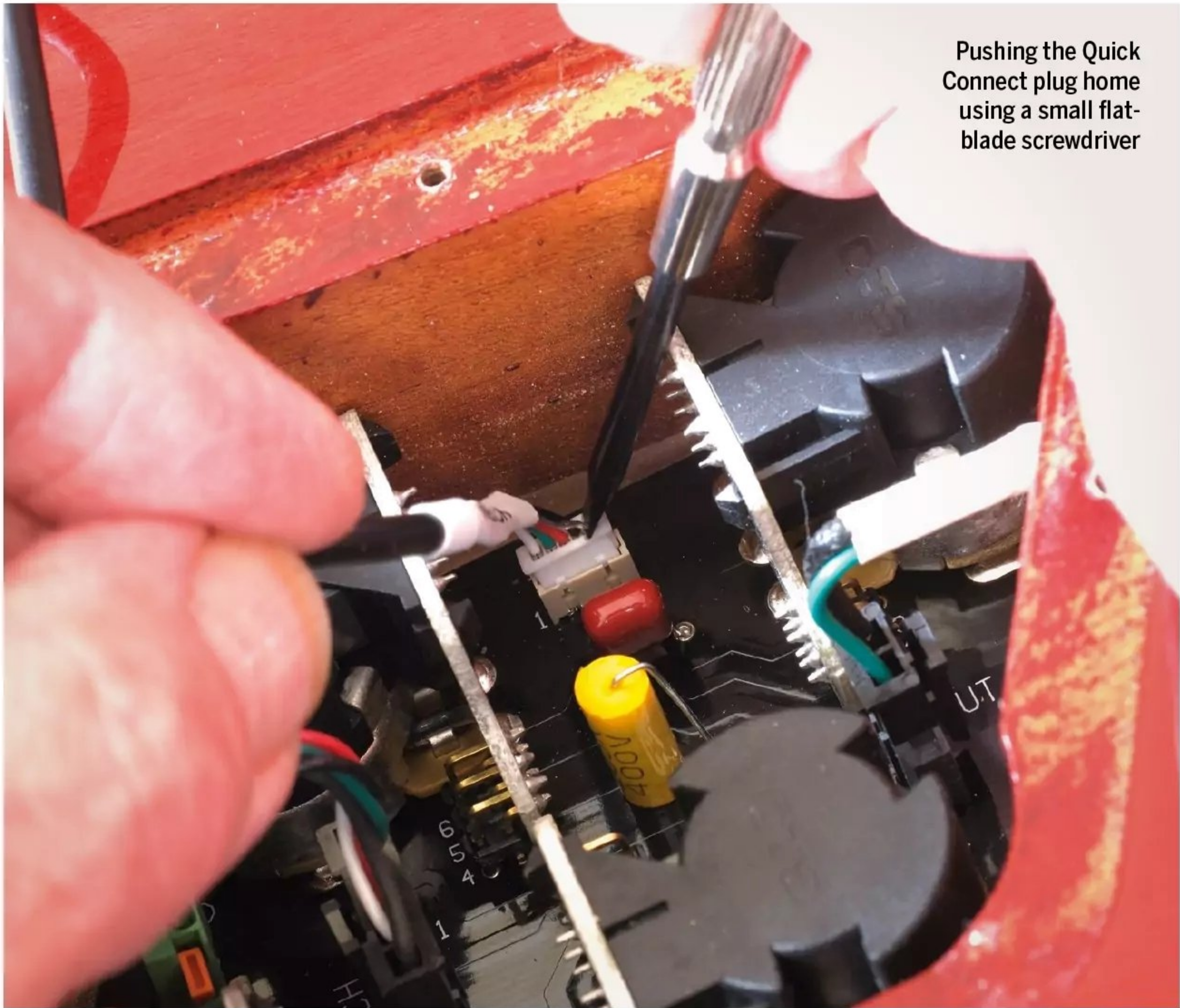
possible, we loaded in the new Dirty Fingers in the bridge position and the '57 Classic at the neck. With its three ceramic magnets and DCR of around 15kohms, the Dirty Fingers was obviously Gibson's answer to the new kid on the block Larry DiMarzio's Super Distortion and the like. It's a big change to our Les Paul Classic and yet you can't help but smile as you run it into a gainy amp: there's thickness, power and some biting clarity. The surprise is that coil-tap, which cleans

Character Building

Modding for dummies? Well, some of you more experienced guitar tinkerers might be having a chuckle, but this levels the playing field: anyone can revoice their instrument while retaining some pretty tricky wiring options from those four pull-switches. You also might simply prefer the open-coil or pickup covers to change the look of your guitar. Whatever, the combo of expanded sounds and aesthetics is just a Gibson Modern and a screwdriver away. No soldering necessary! **G**

“Anyone can revoice their instrument while retaining some pretty tricky wiring options”

things up a little but comes across as a rock-ready P-90. The covered Alnico II '57 Classic is very different – it's one of Gibson's best-selling pickups ever and is based on Seth Lover's classic formula with balanced (as opposed to randomly wound) coils that replicate original PAFs. There's a rounded thickness to the voice that sings beautifully for soaring lead lines in that gained environment. We'd prefer a little more clarity for more classic jazzy blues, but as our Les Paul is now more 'rock tool', it all works rather well, not least with the out-of-phase switch whereby using slightly unbalanced volume settings gives some very useful gnarly midrange.



Pushing the Quick Connect plug home using a small flat-blade screwdriver

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Gibson Dirty Fingers Quick Connect
PRICE: Treble and Rhythm £119 each
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: High-output uncovered humbucker
MOUNTING TYPE: Standard humbucking
POLE PIECE SPACING/STYLE: 49mm/dual screw coils
MAGNET TYPE: 3x ceramic
COIL WIRE/WIND: N/A
POTTING: Yes
DCR (KOHMS): 15 (Treble and Rhythm)
OPTIONS: Available with standard 4-conductor hook-up cable with zebra coils. New SM version uses single Ceramic 8 magnet

PRODUCT: Gibson '57 Classic Quick Connect
PRICE: Treble and Rhythm £149 each
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Classic-output covered humbucker
MOUNTING TYPE: Standard humbucking
POLE PIECE SPACING/STYLE: 49mm/screw and slug coils
MAGNET TYPE: 1x Alnico II
COIL WIRE/WIND: N/A
POTTING: Yes
DCR (K OHMS): 7.8 (Treble and Rhythm)
OPTIONS: Uncovered versions available including double classic white, plus underground versions all with vintage 2-conductor cable
www.gibson.com



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Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

A point-to-point amp that can sound like the best little Marshall you've never heard

Watkins Westminster Mk II

At the risk of offending Burns, Grimshaw and Shergold enthusiasts, British guitars of the vintage era have never been as highly regarded as the big American brands. In contrast, Vox and Marshall amplifiers always held their own, but some pieces still remain under the radar and are therefore surprisingly affordable.

Our recent interview and video with Richard Hawley featured a Watkins Scout, which is one of his favourite amplifiers. In the scheme of things, Watkins amplifiers are largely overlooked and their most famous product remains the Copicat tape echo. The only Watkins amplifier that does excite collectors and players is the V-front Dominator. This is hardly surprising given that some consider the Dominator to have 'inspired' Marshall's 18-watt models in much the same way that Fender's Tweed Bassman inspired the JTM45. Consequently, asking prices tend to be in the £1,500 to £2,000 range, depending on condition and originality. Granted, that isn't necessarily 'affordable', but around £500 might buy you a Watkins Westminster instead.

The Westminster

The Watkins Westminster was produced with various circuits, valve line-ups and cabinets before the Westminster MK II was introduced around 1963. The new combo cabinet featured a more aggressive-looking metal speaker grille

and silver faceplates with bold lettering and black and red graphics. But the circuit and construction style carried over from earlier versions with a single channel, volume and tone controls, and a tremolo with adjustable speed but fixed intensity.

These days, low-power valve amplifiers have become very popular for studio use, playing at home and gigging at venues with rigorously enforced volume limitations. One great-sounding channel is always preferable to a pair of mediocre channels, and some prefer the 'straight through' sonic qualities of single tone and volume knobs to comprehensive equalisation controls.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Westminster Mk II is that it features genuine point-to-point wiring. In contrast, many of the more 'high-end' Watkins amps were assembled on printed circuit boards. And when you check out the components, you'll usually see exactly the same carbon film resistors and 'mustard' signal capacitors that Marshall was using throughout the 'Plexi' era. Many of them still have their original Mullard valves.

The amplifier powered an Alnico Elac 10-inch speaker, which was the same as the one fitted in the Vox AC10. Just like the AC10, the WEM Westminster in its stock form has a lot of untapped potential. Let's take a closer look at the Westminster and discuss necessary maintenance procedures and some upgrades that can unleash the beast within.

The Circuit

The Westminster's EZ80 rectifier valve feeds a multi-stage filter capacitor. The first valve in the signal path is an ECC83, with one half providing gain and the other half used as a fairly conventional oscillator for tremolo. The following pair of valves are oddities in a guitar amp and were more commonly used in budget record player amplifiers. They look like EL84s, but they're actually ECL82s, and the glass enclosure contains a preamp style triode with fairly healthy gain along with a power amp pentode. The triode sections are used for phase splitting and driving the pentode sections that operate in push-pull to generate around 10 watts.

Initial Assessment

In stock form, the Westminster Mk II sounds somewhere between an edgy Vox and an undercooked low-powered Marshall. Like some of Fender's earlier Tweed amps, the volume and tone controls interact, and turning the tone up fully for minimum treble roll-off also increases volume and gain.

The Mk II sounds somewhere between an edgy Vox and an undercooked low-powered Marshall

The complicating factor is that the Westminster is bass-light, so you're almost obliged to roll the tone back in order to prevent the amp from sounding too thin and shrill. Consequently, you have to rely on the volume control for overdrive, and that alone doesn't release the Westminster's full potential. It's frustrating because the basic tone is impressive, but it's clear that the circuit has a lot more grunt to give.

Sensible Precautions

If you notice any capacitors labelled 'Hunts', don't bother to test them because they will almost certainly need replacing. Also replace both the 25µF electrolytic capacitors connected to the cathodes of the ECC83 and the ECL82s.

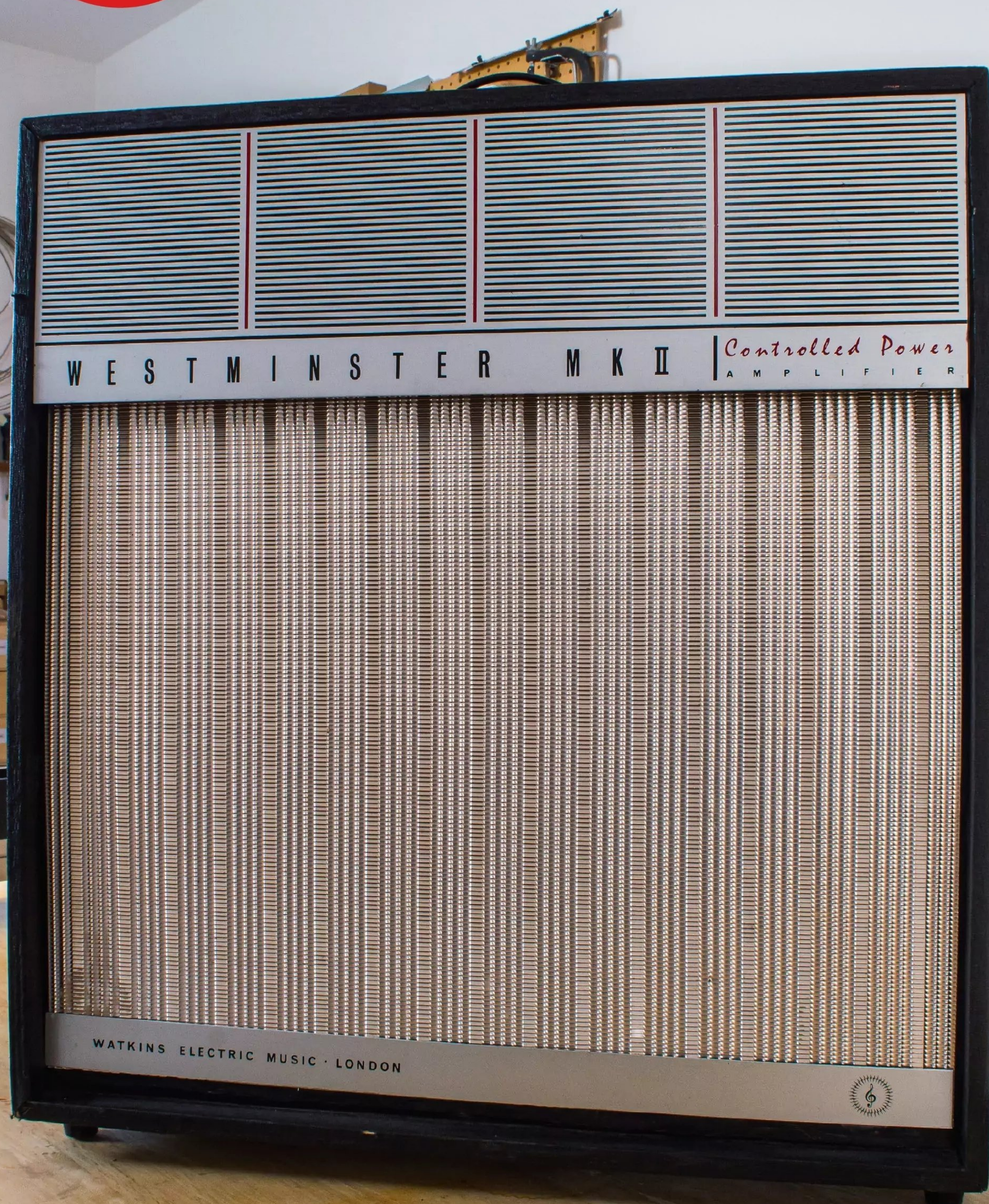


Produced for a short spell in the mid-1960s, the Watkins Westminster Mk II offers classic British rock tones at an affordable price – and it's easy to upgrade

WARNING

Working on valve amplifiers is dangerous and potentially lethal, so this feature is intended as an overview, rather than a step by step guide to maintaining and modifying.

If you're unsure how to make an amplifier safe to work on, please leave it to a qualified professional.



The schematic shows three 20 μ F filter capacitors in the power supply. All are contained in a canister and in this amp they are actually 16 μ F. These often function well despite their age, and so long as there are no signs of blistering or leakage, and the amp isn't humming, these may be left in situ.

Visually inspect all the components for signs of heat damage. Any resistors that are discoloured or look like they are disintegrating should be changed. The 2.2k resistor feeding the second grid of both ECL82s looked like it had endured a tough life, so it was also replaced. With the essential renovation work complete, capacitors tested for leakage, the bias checked and the key voltage readings verified, you can move onto the fun stuff.

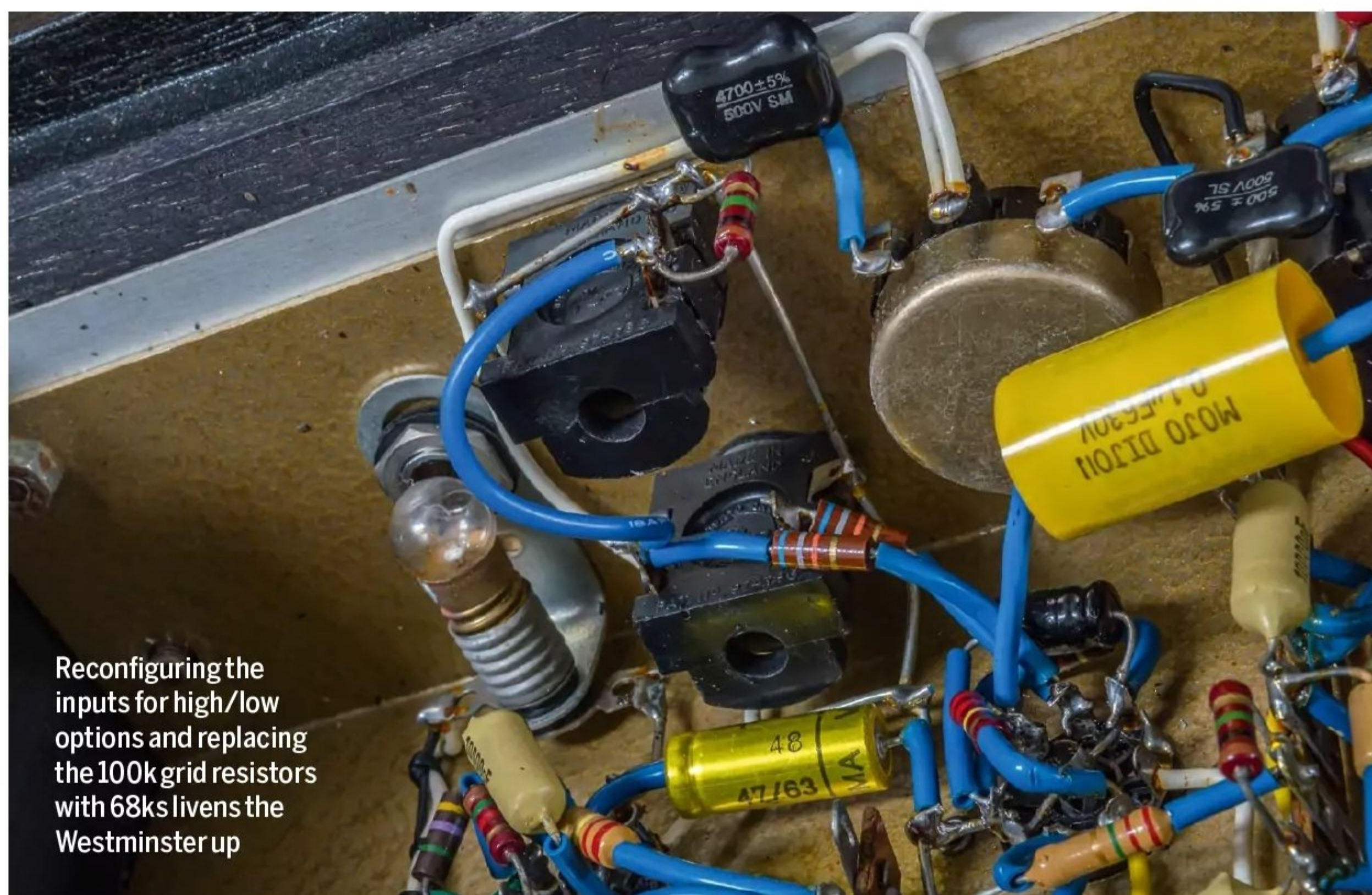
Input Mod

In the early days of instrument amplification, manufacturers often assumed that the amp would be used by two or more musicians simultaneously. That's the reason early Fender Tweed amps often have a microphone input and a couple of instrument inputs that are both equal in level. In effect, they were designed as mini PA systems.

Although microphone inputs on guitar amps soon disappeared, the 'mixer' input configuration that allowed two players to share the same amp at equal volume persisted on some entry-level or budget amps. You can see this on the Vox AC4 and AC10, as well as the WEM Westminster. When only one player is using it, half the guitar signal is dumped to ground before it even reaches the grid of the first valve stage. As a result, amps such as this are quieter than they should be and lack dynamics and gain.



This resistor shows clear evidence of heat damage and, despite the schematic showing a 2K2, we think this was a 2K7



Reconfiguring the inputs for high/low options and replacing the 100k grid resistors with 68ks livens the Westminster up

In other words, they sound a bit flat, but the solution here is simple because you can rewire the inputs to conventional high and low.

Rather than discuss it in detail, just do a Google search for 'cliff jack normal/bright' and you should find a clear diagram on Robin Robinette's website. While you're at it, you might also change the grid resistor values from 100k to 68k.

'More Bass' Mod

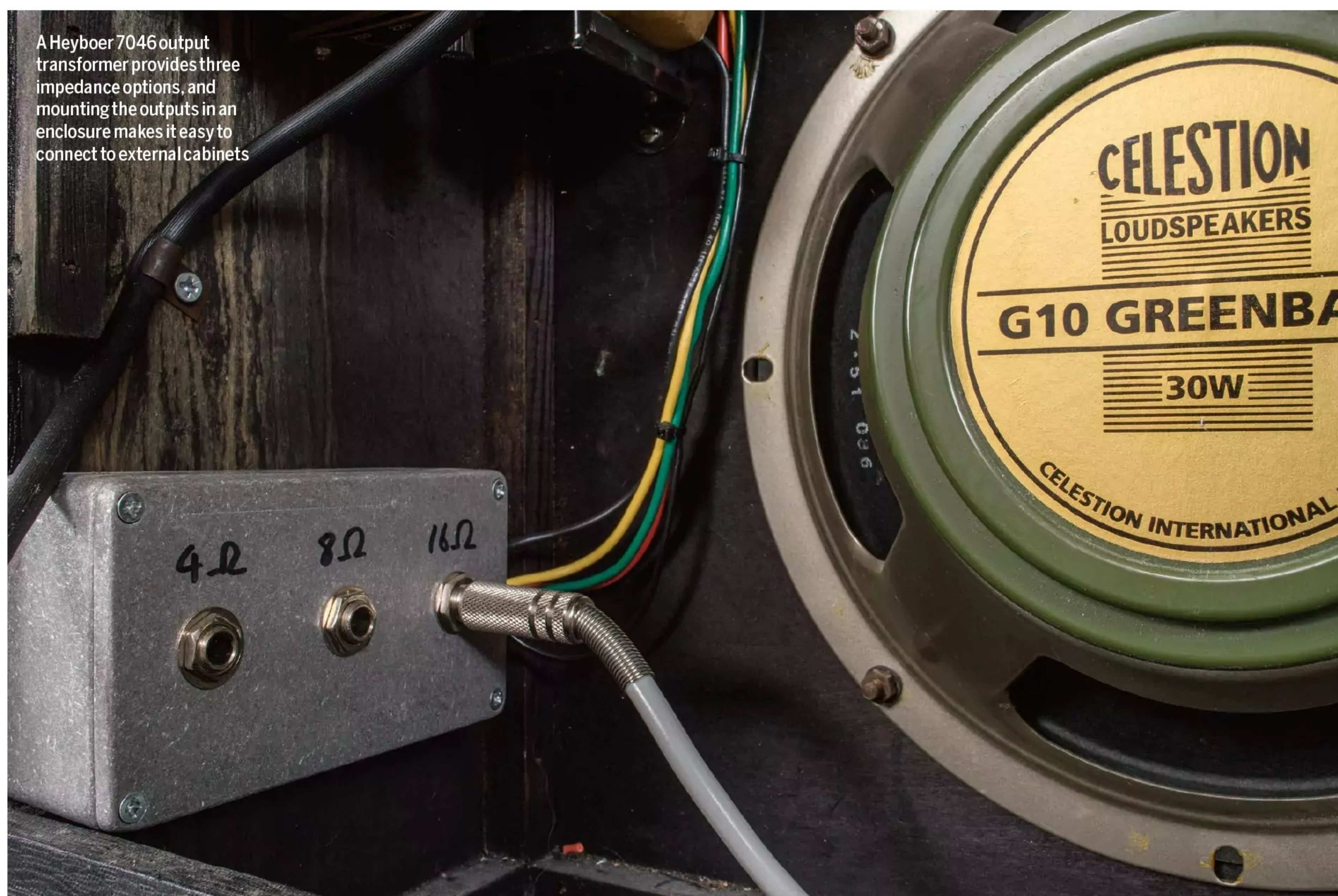
In stock form, the Westminster's narrow frequency range is mostly confined to the upper midrange. To allow low frequencies to pass through a circuit you need larger capacitors, and values of 0.022 μ F, 0.047 μ F and 0.1 μ F are common in guitar amps. You can fatten up the Westminster's tone by increasing capacitor values in the signal path.

There are two coupling capacitors wired in series between the anode of the first gain stage and the volume control – a 0.005 μ F and a 0.002 μ F – with a 220k resistor from the junction to ground. These are unusually low in value individually, but wired in series the combined capacitance is even lower. This restricts the amount of low-end reaching the phase inverter and by experimenting with different values you can extend the bass response to taste.

Much will depend on the speaker you're using, and the downside is that you will start to hear an intrusive thump when the tremolo is activated. We liked the tone best with the 220k resistor bypassed and a 0.1 μ F Mojo Dijon coupling the ECC83 directly to the volume control. This rendered the tremolo unusable, but the amp sounded so good we decided to do without it while we devise a solution.



The big yellow 0.1 μ F capacitor extends the low-end and the red 50pF one adds sparkle



A Heyboer 7046 output transformer provides three impedance options, and mounting the outputs in an enclosure makes it easy to connect to external cabinets

Using larger value capacitors between the phase inverter and the power valves may be another option, but it would be a fiddlier job.

Treble Mod

Even with the input modification, the newly configured 'high' input doesn't have the crystalline sparkle that makes so many of the classic Marshalls such amazing amps for clean tones. A key difference between the Normal and Brilliant channels on many Marshalls is the presence of a Bright capacitor wired across the volume control. You can experiment with values between 47pF and 250pF to decide what suits the circuit and speaker.

Marshall used ceramic capacitors, but modern builders often prefer silver mica types. This mod allows more high-frequency content through the signal path at lower volume settings, and you won't need to max out the tone control to get a bright tone and inadvertently push the amp into unwanted overdrive.

Speakers & Transformers

The stock Elac speakers can sound wonderful, and the one in this amp is a stellar example – it can handle maximum volume without creating the impression that it is about to disintegrate – but this

You can fatten up the Westminster's tone by increasing capacitor values in the signal path

is rarely the case. Elacs found in Watkins and Vox amplifiers often sound like they're long past their use by date, and finding people who can do a good job of re-coning them is becoming difficult.

Although there are plenty of 10-inch guitar speakers out there, the complicating factor is that the Westminster's output transformer expects to 'see' a four-ohm speaker. The overwhelming majority of aftermarket speakers, however, are rated at eight or 16 ohms.

There was no need to change the speaker in this Westminster, but I did decide to replace the tired speaker in my own Watkins Westminster. In order to do that, the output transformer had to be replaced, too.

Chris Fantana from Rift amps suggested any output transformer designed for push-pull EL84 guitar amps would be fine, and a Heyboer 7046 was ordered from Allparts UK. This transformer is highly regarded

by 18-watt amp builders and it provides four, eight and 16-ohm output taps.

The Westminster's stock output transformer is fairly small, and even after it has been disconnected there isn't sufficient space for the Heyboer on the chassis. Instead, it can be mounted onto the cabinet.

Rather than leave the unwanted taps redundant, you can connect the transformer wires to three separate output jacks mounted in a metal enclosure and mount that onto the side of the cabinet. This makes it straightforward to swap the onboard speaker or connect the Westminster to external speaker cabinets.

Crunch Time

Although the Westminster can sound louder with an upgraded output transformer and a more efficient speaker, it will never generate enough oomph to make your flares flap. Once modded, it can take you from delicately sparkling cleans to ferociously thrilling crunch at a level that should be sufficient for smaller gigs and sounds absolutely huge for recording. Best of all, it never loses its British accent.  www.huwpriceguitar.com

Thanks to Andrew Raymond and Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Maple-capped 'boards became available in 1965... for those who read the small print

1965 Fender Jazz Bass



Having a maple cap fretboard in 1965 may make this Jazz Bass a true one of a kind

They made them later on, but it's not something I've ever seen this early. I can't say for certain that it's the only maple-cap Jazz Bass Fender made in 1965, but we have asked around online with all the guitar-based communities and so far nobody has reported seeing another one.

"It has a regular alder body construction and inside everything is as it should be. There's a transition logo and the 'A' neck is on the narrow side, but it's very well balanced and doesn't dip at the headstock or lean into your body too much when you're playing it on a strap. It's in the mid-8lb range, so not super light or heavy by bass standards.

"I bought this from a dealer friend of mine last November and it's funny how things go – because when we acquire the only example of something, I usually expect it to sell right away. It's different with basses because a guitarist or guitar collector may have 10, 20 or even 100 guitars, but a bass player will usually just have their bass and most don't collect.

"There's always the hope that someone will want an instrument right away and sometimes I'll know who will buy it as soon as I get it. But the weird thing about the guitar business is that you might have an instrument for over a year and nobody will call, and then the very next day three people will be fighting over it.

"I don't mind having oddball pieces sticking around for a while so long as there's desirability. When I think about a Jazz Bass from the mid-1960s with a maple-cap neck, I know it's a piece that will probably sell to a bass player who comes into the shop, tries it and finds it incredibly cool.

"I had three of the prototype maple-cap Strats that were made for a NAMM Show. I sold the Fiesta Red one, but I still have the Olympic White and Ocean Turquoise ones and, again, it takes a certain type of person to understand what they are and what makes them sound different.

"With a maple cap, the wood is a little harder so the sound is that bit brighter than a regular Jazz Bass with a rosewood fretboard. But if you take both versions from the same era and compare them side by side, you'll find it's a subtle difference. I think it stands out more on guitars because for some reason the sound seems to bounce off maple 'boards a little more.

"With a maple cap, the wood is a little harder so the sound is that bit brighter"

It could have something to do with the frequency range.

"The maple-cap option goes back to Fender's 1964 catalogue where they included a tiny little blip to announce that maple fretboards were available. It's perhaps odd to think that they didn't go back to making one-piece maple necks with a skunk stripe, but when you're counting pennies it pays to have a separate 'board that you can attach to the stock production neck and decide on the spot whether it was going to be a maple or rosewood veneer.

"The earliest Fenders with maple caps I've seen are from October 1964 and they're always guitars, rather than basses.

These were probably prototypes, and maple-cap models went into production during 1965 with the most commonly ordered model being the Telecaster.

"Maybe Fender wanted to offer customers a choice and make people think of their best days in the 1950s. Nobody distinguished between one-piece and veneer necks, or concerned themselves with skunk stripes because those things were not considered important in those days.

"Fender always presented these options in a very low-key way in the catalogue, and it was just the same when they announced that custom colours were available in 1957. It was added in very small print in the corner of one page, almost as if they didn't really want to fulfil custom orders.

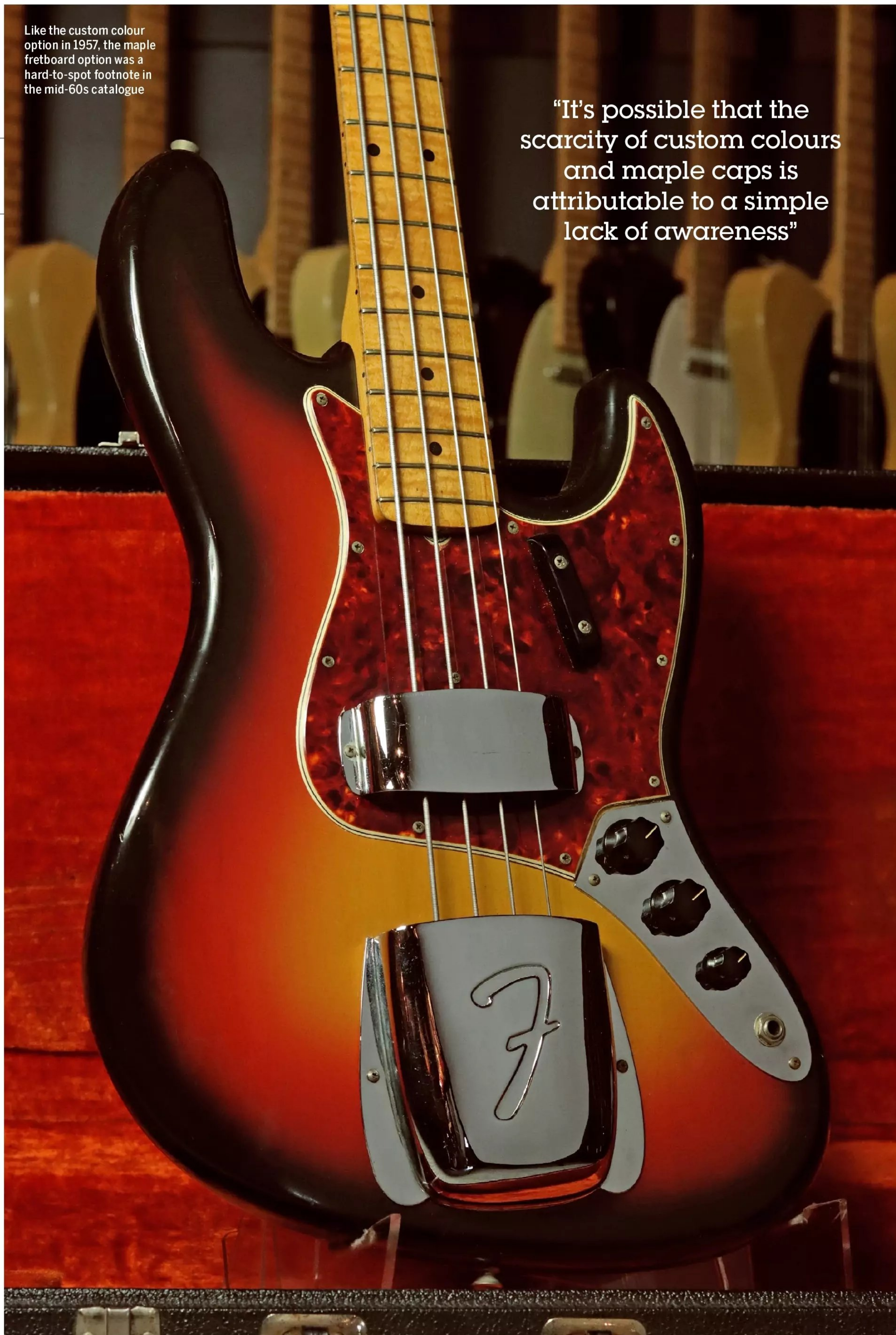
"Custom colours only cost an additional five per cent, which was just pennies back then. Surely lots of players would have gladly paid five per cent more to have something cool and different when virtually every Telecaster was blonde and every Stratocaster was sunburst?

"Customers would have known if they read the catalogue very closely, but the only way they could get hold of one was to write to Fender and request a copy. It's entirely possible that the scarcity of custom colours and the later maple caps is largely attributable to a simple lack of awareness among guitarists and poor advertising by Fender." [HP]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001(516) 221-0563

Like the custom colour option in 1957, the maple fretboard option was a hard-to-spot footnote in the mid-60s catalogue

“It’s possible that the scarcity of custom colours and maple caps is attributable to a simple lack of awareness”



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / WELL STRUNG GUITARS

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Sliding In Standard Tuning

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs SSC, Fender light brass slide & Vox AC15 C1

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

As Derek Trucks demonstrates, touch and control are just as important as setup when it comes to slide playing



WHEN PEOPLE TALK about playing slide, the conversation often progresses on to open tunings, heavier strings and a high action. It's true that these can make things easier and, in some cases such as traditional acoustic blues, give a more authentic result. But not everyone wants to carry an extra guitar with a different setup and tuning – and we know Derek Trucks sets his action low enough to play slide and non-slide on the same guitar. As well as this, he uses an 11-gauge for the first string – not way heavier than most of us, so at least some of the 'trick' to this is learning the right touch and control. Playing at high volume and/or a touch of compression can help, too.

While there are no promises of shortcuts here, there is the encouragement of knowing it isn't unrealistic to try with your usual setup, provided you're not using eights with a 1mm action... It's also perfectly possible to build a workable vocabulary in standard tuning. After all, we have a minor triad on the top three strings (G-B-E) and a major triad on the next three (D-G-B). We can play doublestops in 4ths using the first and second, third and fourth, or fourth and fifth strings, plus the low E and A strings at a push. We also get a major 3rd between the third and second strings (G and B), which can be made to work over minor chords by moving up three frets; for example, C major at the 5th fret, to C minor at the 8th.

Finally, I'm playing fingerstyle, which facilitates the muting of any unwanted strings, and using a light brass slide on the third finger of my fretting hand, which I felt gave the best control. Feel free to experiment, though. **G**



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

Example 1

AS YOU'LL HEAR from this first example, I've gone for quality over quantity. Besides, the backing track is quite rhythmic, so it felt appropriate to play something smoother and sustained, rather than add another layer of rhythm. I'm trying to hold the longer notes still (at least for a while!), instead of defaulting to vibrato, though it does feature here a couple of times. Perhaps the trickiest moment is at the end of bar 2, where there is a shift out of position for that B♭. The picking hand fingers are a great help with muting unwanted notes here.

Example 2

STARTING ON A SIMILAR THEME, this example also benefits from the extra muting facilitated by playing fingerstyle. Like Example 1, this is basically a pentatonic phrase with a couple of additions. Bar 3 serves as a nice demonstration of how the first and second strings give us a 4th doublestop to play with, which I use fairly randomly to finish off the phrase. I'm using a 10-gauge for the first string, so this takes quite a light touch.

Example 3

BUILDING FURTHER, this example shows how you can play in G minor by taking the doublestop up three frets. I'm now playing in the relative major: B♭. This is followed by some longer sustained notes based roughly around the B♭ major scale as we head into C, then incorporating some longer slides to use the bottleneck for maximum effect. Those final sliding doublestops use the 4th, which is available using the third and fourth strings.

Example 4

IN THIS FINAL PHRASE, I've headed for a higher register, where the margin for error is at its smallest! It's basically a pentatonic shape again, but it moves to use the B $\flat$ and C chords available on the 15th and 17th fret of the second, third and fourth strings. There's a hint of sus4 (albeit slightly flat) happening over the C chord, before returning to the pentatonic. This is slightly more 'choppy' and staccato in feel, aided greatly by muting from the picking hand.

1

Let ring

13 15 15 13 15 13 15 12

2

15 15 17 17 18 17 15 15 14 15 17

4

Hear It Here

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

AT FILLMORE EAST



Duane Allman will forever be associated with his slide playing at the end of Clapton's *Layla*, but this is only a fraction of his legacy. He usually played in open E tuning, but there are still quite a few licks to steal from the likes of *Statesboro Blues*, *Done Somebody Wrong* and *Trouble No More*. Listen to his non-slide playing on *In Memory Of Elizabeth Reed*, too. This is an important guitar album of the time.

ARIEL POSEN

HOW LONG



Ariel Posen mixes blues, country and pop with some great slide-guitar playing, predominantly using standard tuning (albeit in drop C). There's lots of smart non-slide playing on this album, too, as Ariel likes to mix both, wearing the slide on his fourth finger. Start by checking out *Things That I've Said*, *Fade* and – if you're ready for a challenge – check out how he integrates slide seamlessly into his fingerstyle playing on the short instrumental *Daybreak*.

THE DEREK TRUCKS BAND

ALREADY FREE



Anyone interested in slide guitar will likely have heard of this man. If not, check him out immediately! This is his final studio album before joining with the fabulous Susan Tedeschi to form the Tedeschi Trucks Band, which should also be on your radar. In the meantime, check out his playing on *Sweet Inspiration*, *Don't Miss Me* and *Down Don't Bother Me*. There's a lot more than this going on, though, so do check out the whole album if you can.

WALRUS AUDIO

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