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Guitarist

Issue 519

JANUARY 2025

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ARISTOCRAT
& MORE

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Making The Difference



Back in the 1950s and 1960s, guitar makers took their lead from the car industry in offering annual model upgrades, which were all about presenting progressive new features to the consumer. While cars might have boasted of new, more powerful engines or smoother suspension, companies such as Gretsch offered new features that they thought might help open up creative horizons. Some, such as complicated muting systems and stereo outputs, proved evolutionary dead ends, but they were still aimed at giving players new tones and capabilities to make music with.

As the guitar industry became more preoccupied with its own past, following the resurgence of Fender in the 1980s (which was achieved partly through making accurate reissues of Golden Era models), that sense of guitars needing to offer fresh advances in terms of completely new features became a little forgotten. I can't help feeling that's starting to change once again, though; certainly in the realm of amps, digital tech has been transformational in terms of the powerful, periodically updateable functionality we can build into products.

But even in the world of guitars, it seems like innovation is becoming less of a taboo – from guitars without direct vintage precedent such as the Powers Electric A-Type (see Prestige Guitars, page 68) to Fender's Acoustasonic range, the industry is beginning to dream again about what players could do with new designs, where music could go in these vehicles of sonic inspiration. And that can only be good for the relevance and visibility of guitars in the world of music, something dear to all of us. So let's embrace this new wave of progress.

On a more sombre note, *Guitarist* was saddened to learn, as we went to press, of the passing of veteran luthier Bill Puplett. Look out for a full tribute to him next month. Until then, take care and enjoy the issue.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Phil Manzanera
One of the most affable men in rock, Phil Manzanera is also the most mercurial of hit-makers. We meet him and his guitars on **p86**



Orianthi
Sparky, hard-hitting and continuously at the sharp edge of rock, the Aussie guitarist talks tone, inspiration and more **p54**



Studio Upgrades
The Les Paul Studio is one of the most popular and attainable Les Pauls of all time. We review the latest updated version on **p98**

COVER IMAGE: OLLY CURTIS ABOVE: PHIL MANZANERA PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON ORIANTHI PHOTO BY ALEX BROWN GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

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CREAM T ASTRA CUSTOM 'DECADES'
£2,499

WHAT IS IT? Reimagining of a modern T-style with dual-control circuits, pickup swapping and a passive boost

Breaking The Mould

The Astra 'Decades' aims to stand apart from the generic T-style. So if you want more sounds, not to mention pickup swapping, you just might fall for its charms
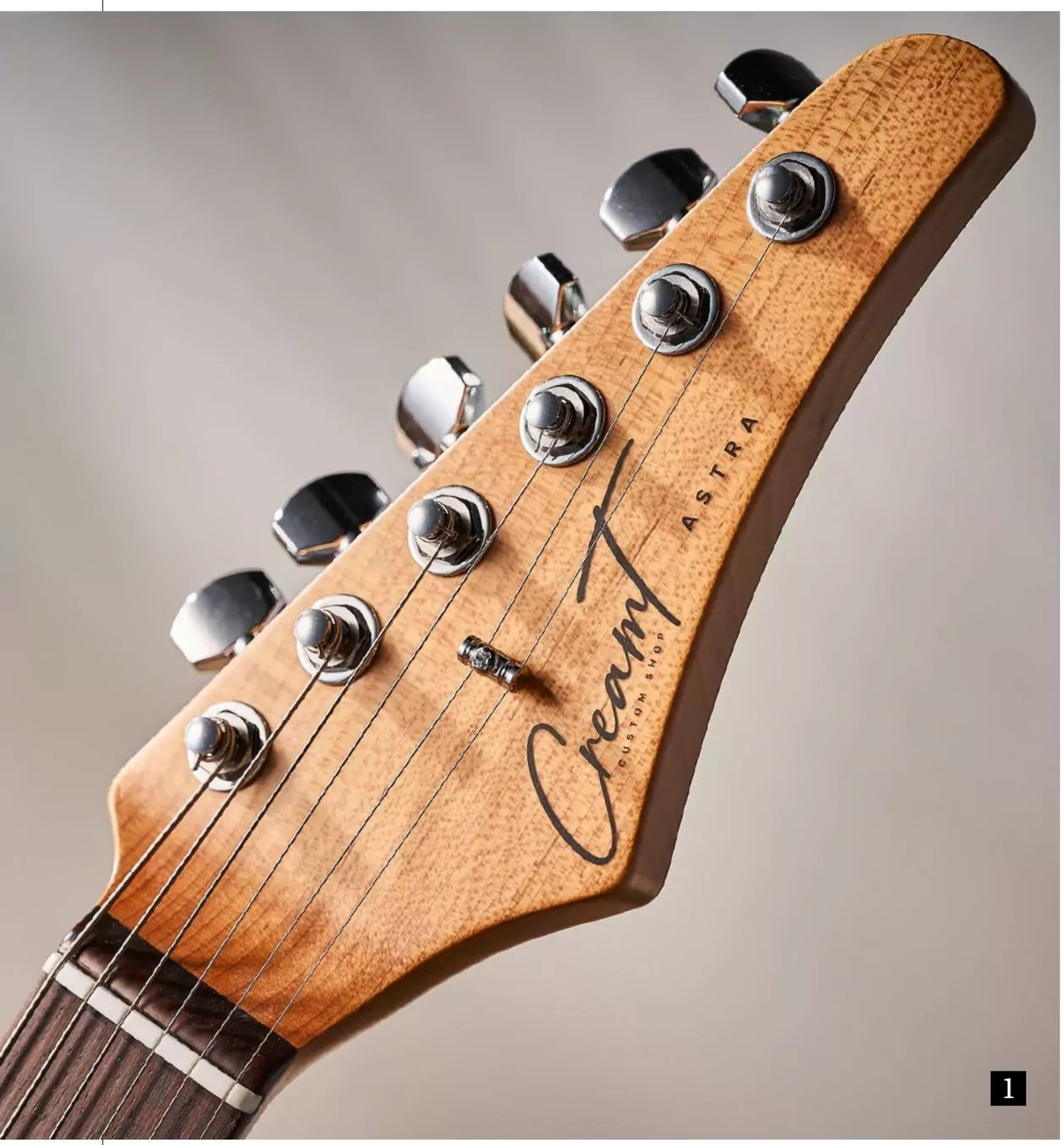
Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

When Cream T owner, Tim Lobley, told us he was working on a 'modern' T-style guitar earlier in 2024, we can't say we were overexcited. Plenty of makers have done that and we shudder to think how many mucked-about-with 'Telecasters' there are out there across the price points. In truth, Tim was thinking along the same lines: what could Cream T bring to the 'posh' T-style table? It turns out that "quite a lot" would be the answer.
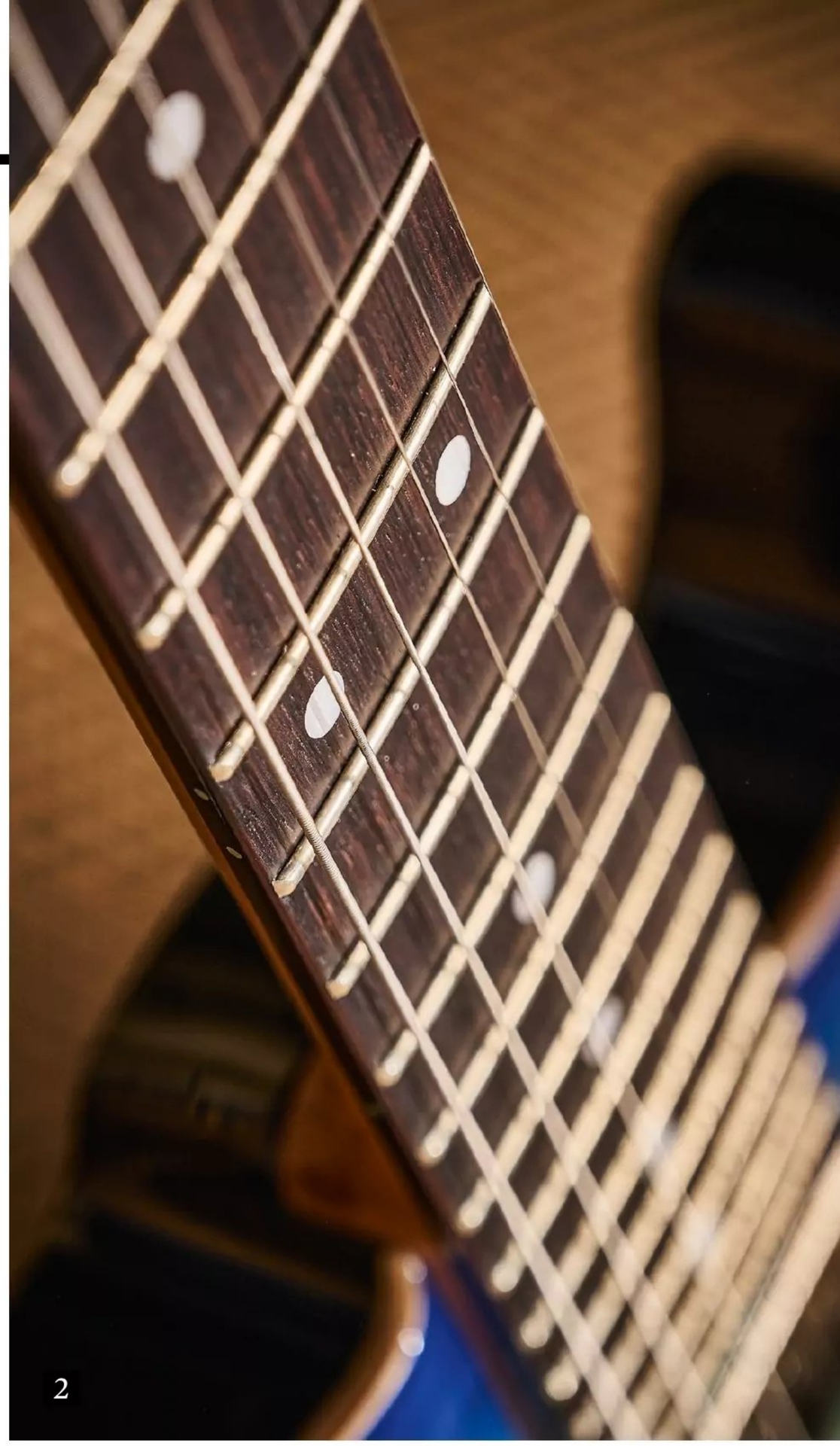
As you can see, the Astra certainly looks the part and its outline isn't just a redraw around a Fender, with a shorter treble horn and slightly wider cutaway. We get a forearm curve and deep ribcage contour, too, and in terms of specification it follows the posh S-style Polaris that Cream T launched at the tail end of 2023. So there's the lightweight obeche body capped with a thin AAA figured maple cap to which a rather fine roasted and flamed quarter-sawn maple neck is screwed on. The modern elements continue with a nicely contoured round-nosed heel, its inset aged aluminium neckplate etched with the serial number and brand logo, not to mention the absence of a Telecaster-style pickguard




Laney



1



2

1. Like on the Cream T Polaris, we have this modern-style headstock that houses a set of Gotoh rear-locking tuners and well-cut Tusq nut. Truss rod adjustment is at the other end of the neck

2. The neck here is figured roasted maple (again like on the Polaris) with a deep caramel colouration. We get the same relatively subtle compound radius and sensible medium jumbo frets, all impeccably installed

3. With this launch-edition Astra you get a Cream T Cream Of The Crop humbucker, plus a non-magnetic 'Dumbucker' to (in theory) recreate the feel of a single-pickup guitar

leaving that maple figuring in a choice of four pretty modern-looking 'burst colours. As with the Polaris, these colours are only over the maple top, while the rest of the body (including on our Sirius Blue review model) is a gloss opaque black. Similarities with the Polaris model continue with a dot-inlaid rosewood (as here) or maple compound radius fingerboard, well-fitted and polished pretty big frets, and blue Luminlay glow-in-the-dark side dots.

That Gotoh bridge plate with its trio of 'In Tune' compensated saddles shouts Telecaster, as do the chromed, knurled control knobs. But what on earth is going on with those two three-way lever switches and that mini-toggle switch?

Quite uniquely, in our experience, there are two different circuits and that centrally placed mini-toggle switches between them. With that switch in the down position we have a circuit that's in the style of the original single-pickup Esquire. It only uses the bridge single coil, and in position 1 only the volume is engaged. In the middle position, we have the tone control in circuit, and in position 3 again it's only the volume that is in circuit but with a pre-set treble roll-off originally intended to sound bass-guitar-like.

Flick that mini-toggle upwards and the second circuit is engaged – what most of us know as the modern Tele setup of bridge, both and neck pickups, with the volume and tone functional in all positions. In this circuit, a pull switch on the volume splits the neck humbucker.

But there's more: pull up the tone control in either circuit and you introduce

4. Scanned from a 1957 Telecaster, the bridge single coil is well voiced. The Gotoh walled bridge, meanwhile, features the very popular 'In Tune' compensated brass saddles



3

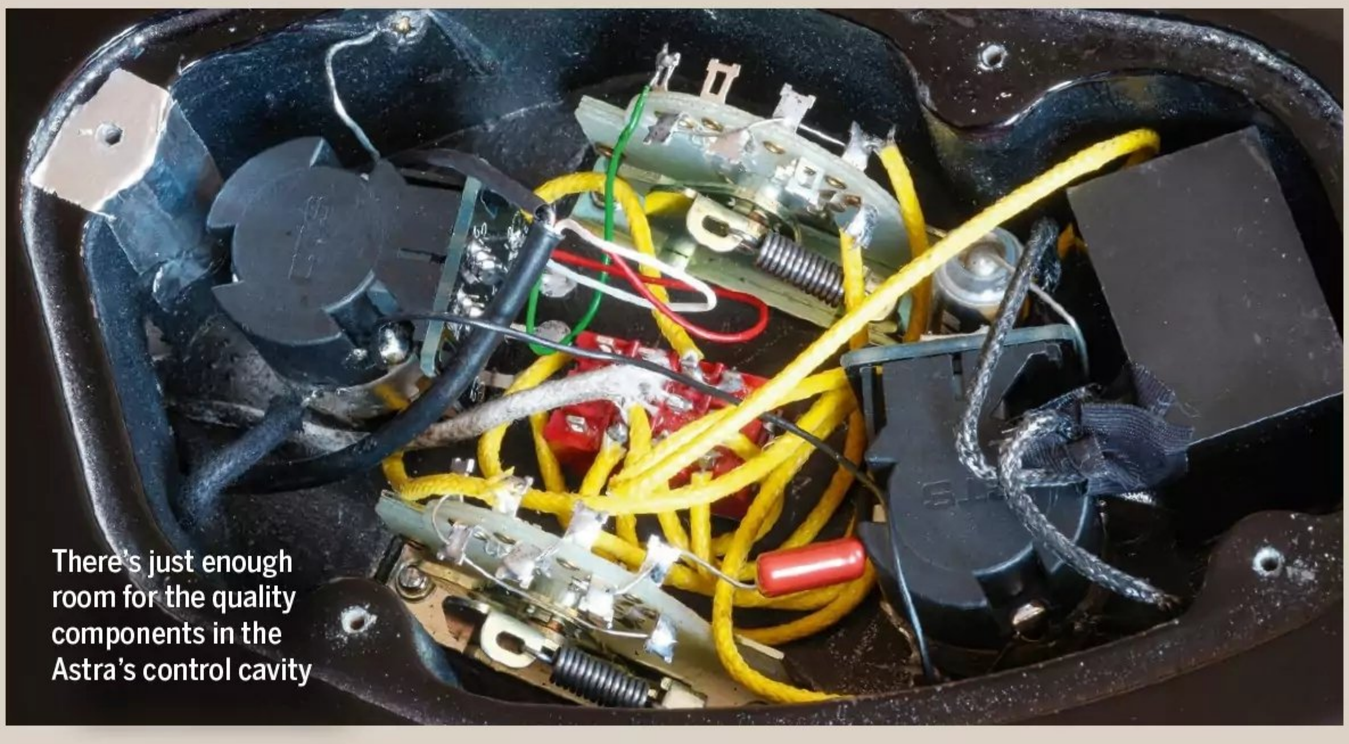
UNDER THE HOOD

With two control circuits, there's a lot to cram into the Astra's control cavity!

Removing the backplate, there's certainly plenty crammed into the Astra's screened cavity. The basic volume and tone are both the modern-style CTS pull-switch pots, which are rated at 250kohms. The standard tone control uses a .022µF Cream T PIO capacitor, and next to that control is the black block Black Ice Boost. The 50s circuit uses a .0047µF (472J) capacitor from the switch output to ground to achieve the dark bass-like sound in the 'neck' position. The modern circuit is very standard and there's no treble bleed capacitor. A four-pole mini-switch is used to select either circuit.

The active Cream Of The Crop humbucker has a measured DCR of 6.92k at output (suggesting it's slightly underwound to play nicely with the single-coil bridge pickup) and uses 42 AWG plain enamel wire, asymmetric windings, an Alnico IV magnet and coil-potting only. When the coil-split is engaged, the inner slug coil is voiced with a DCR of 3.41k.

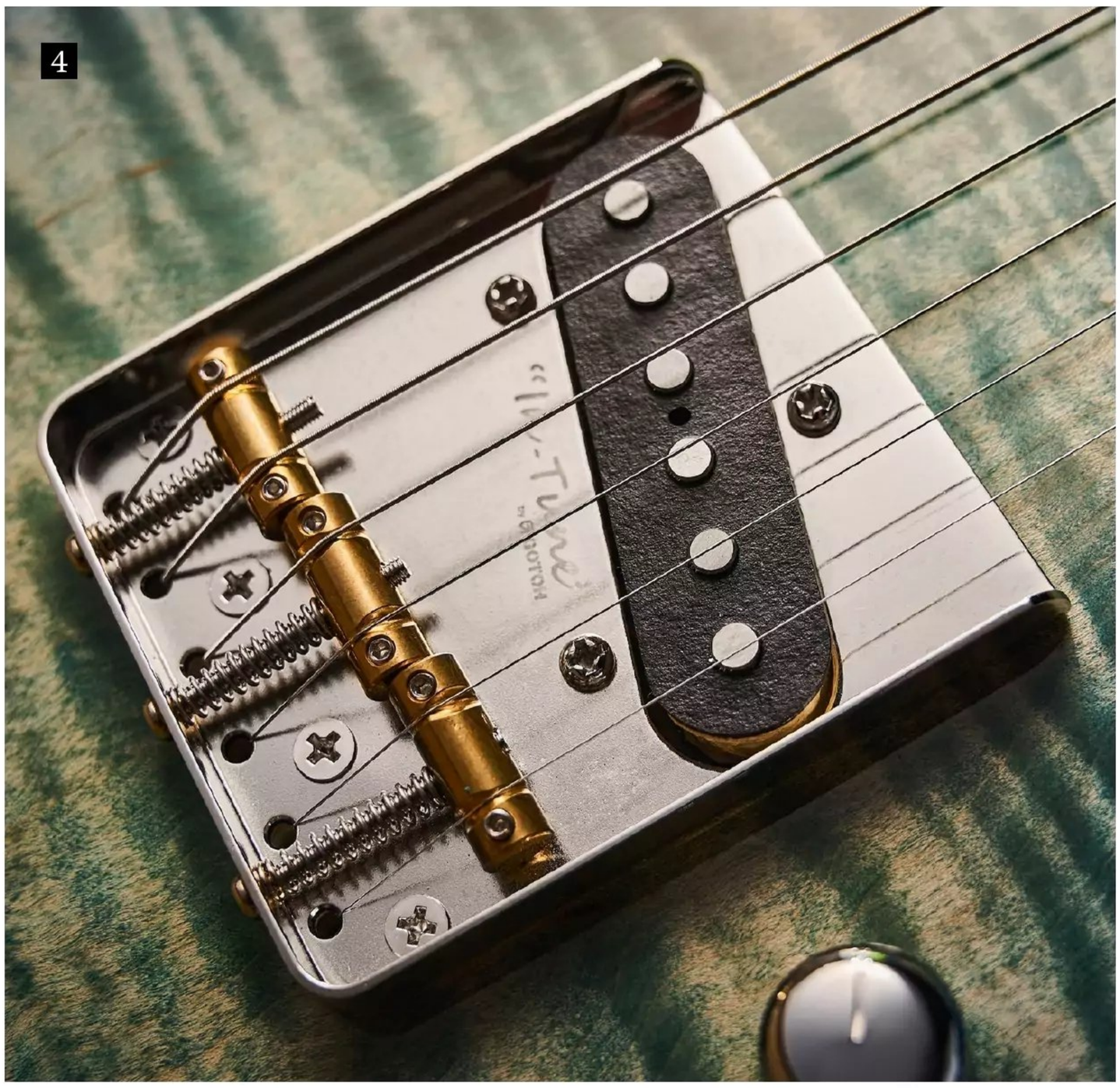
"The bridge pickup is scanned from a 1957 Telecaster," explains Tim Lobley, and has a DCR of 8.31k measured at output.



There's just enough room for the quality components in the Astra's control cavity

"We already have some scans of older Telecasters, but this is quite special: it's a 1957 Telecaster that has essentially not been played since 1958. It was the purest 50s Telecaster we could find, so we used our scanning technology on that to replicate that specific pickup."

Cream T's production manager, Richard Whitney, adds: "The final Astra pickup does differ a bit from what's on your model, as I switched from 43 AWG to 42 AWG plain enamel shortly after the pickup you have there. The turn count is the same so the output hasn't changed, but I just wanted to bring the treble up a bit more with the thicker wire, so we've landed at about 6.4k with Alnico V magnets. I've also put in a slight stagger on the D and G strings and wrapped it in black string to match the original a bit more."



the passive Black Ice Boost for some noticeable thickening. The neck pickup uses the Guitar-X pickup-swapping mount so any humbucking-sized pickup can be loaded in instantly. Cream T has provided its Cream Of The Crop humbucker here to play with the bridge single coil, which was scanned from a 1957 Telecaster, we're told.

Pull up the tone control to introduce the Black Ice Boost for some noticeable thickening

Now, going back to that single-pickup Esquire, some believe the absence of a neck pickup means there's less magnetic pull on the strings and therefore that this is part of that guitar's magic. So, after chatting with Adrian Thorpe of ThorpyFX, Cream T has also included a 'Dumbucker' dummy neck pickup with no magnet, if you want to experience the single-pickup Esquire drive but not have an open hole where the neck pickup should be.


5

5. Yup, two three-way lever controls – one for each circuit, which is selected by the central mini-toggle switch. Pull up the tone control to engage the Black Ice Boost and the volume to coil-split the humbucker. Not as complex as it looks!

Feel & Sounds

The Astra is lightweight at just 3.02kg (6.64lb), and its subtly altered shape and those contours help it feel very comfortable and less plank-like than the original Fender. The neck feel is also in the modern camp, a well-shaped "medium C", says Cream T, and we'd agree, although as is quite often the case that flatter fingerboard does give the impression of the neck being a little thinner than it actually is. It's essentially the same neck you'll find on the Cream T Polaris as it's dimensionally very similar with a nut width of 42.5mm (with 36mm string spacing) and a depth of 21.1mm at the 1st fret and 22.3mm by the 12th. There's zero neck flex, and overall tuning stability is really good, along with a pretty vibrant, lively acoustic response.


6

6. Along with the Cream Of The Crop humbucker we also get a non-magnetic 'Dumbucker' (which comes in a bespoke leather holster) for the true Esquire-style drive using Circuit 1

Initially, the control circuits take a bit of thought, though it all becomes intuitive very quickly. On Circuit 1 in position 1 we have the brightest voicing of the bridge single coil, while the added tone control in position 2 just pulls back those sharp highs a little, plus you can pull the tone back to round the highs further. Position 3 brings in that pre-set treble roll-off, which isn't quite as woolly as rolling the tone fully off and is a pretty usable thick rhythm or quite fruity lead voice, especially with a little crunchy gain.

Circuit 2 brings in the neck humbucker, a pretty classic 'balanced' PAF-alike that splits well enough, although it voices the slug coil whereas voicing the neck-facing screw coil might be a little more Tele-like. The pickup mix, then, doesn't quite have the width of a classic Tele, particularly in



There's a hole in my guitar! This is what you see with the pickup and the magnetically attached backplate both removed



CREAM T ASTRA CUSTOM 'DECADES'

PRICE: £2,499 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Obeche with thin AAA maple top
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted maple, medium C profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 6mm white dot inlays (w/ blue Luminlay side dots), 254- 356mm (10-14") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Gotoh BS-TC1S bridge, Gotoh SG381 MG 07 rear-locking tuners – chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Cream T T-style single coil (bridge). Master volume (with coil-spit pull-switch for Circuit 2 neck humbucker) and tone (with pull switch for passive Black Ice Boost), Circuit selector mini-toggle switch. Circuit 1: bridge pickup only, 3-way lever pickup selector. Non-magnetic 'Dumbucker' supplied for neck position. Circuit 2: Adds Cream T Cream Of The Crop humbucker at neck with 3-way lever pickup selector, coil-split (via pull switch on volume)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.02/6.64
OPTIONS: Maple fingerboard; custom-spec via Crème de la Crème option (£POA)
RANGE OPTIONS: Polaris has various pickup formats from £2,499, as does Aurora Custom
LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently
FINISHES: Sirius Blue (as reviewed), Terra Burst, Black Hole Burst, Antares Red – gloss body; satin neck

Cream T Custom Shop
01695 570023
www.creamtcustomshop.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Another finely made and crisply detailed guitar; great neck and playability; good weight; expansive sounds from the unique control setup and passive Black Ice Boost

CONS Not everyone will get the dual-circuit concept or the 'Dumbucker'

On the one hand it's a modern clean machine, but there are plenty of twists to create a powerful rock machine

coil-split mode. Position 1 here duplicates position 2 of Circuit 1: bridge pickup with both volume and tone in play.

Mike Christian's Black Ice Boost can be engaged in any position on either circuit. When adding it to position 3 of Circuit 1 (already a treble roll-off), things do get a little too thick and indistinct to our ears. But adding it to the bridge (with or without the tone) works extremely well: sonic cornflour that creates a rich and thicker sauce. The 'Dumbucker' with Circuit 1 is possibly a tweak too far, and while the science might be sound, the sonic effect is subtle at best and many might prefer a second humbucker – perhaps the more Tele-like Banger & Mash – to be included in the package (not least if it was wired to voice the neck-facing coil when split).

While the control cavity is pretty stuffed, you can't help thinking a treble bleed might be handy to retain some clarity as you pull back the volume. And in this hum/single-coil setup, a phase switch can work well – just ask Andy Summers. Maybe both of those could be internally switchable, which could add to the tweakery?

Overall, though, this is another superb-sounding guitar from the Cream T stable. On the one hand it's a modern clean machine, but there are plenty of twists to create a clear and powerful rock machine, especially with some heavier gain. It's hard to put down.

Verdict

Tele traditionalists probably won't have got this far and will have scuttled back to *Total Blackguard* magazine. You can't blame 'em. In this launch 'Decades' version, the Astra is feature-led and by design not that standard T-style. But not only is there a superb guitar here with its altered outline and comfort contours, the dual circuits, passive boost and neck-only Guitar-X pickup swapping turn what could have been another rerun into a unique and frankly inspiring instrument. A brand to watch and a guitar to try! G



GODIN RADIUM
£1,299

WHAT IS IT? Canadian-made HSH set-neck with choice of three blue-collar matt finishes. A gigging guitar if ever we saw one!



Rock Of Ages

Along with making guitars for Alex Lifeson, Godin's standard electric range has plenty to offer. We take this pared-down roots-rocker for a long overdue spin

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

It's never been easy to pigeonhole Godin, the long-running Canadian maker, which turns its expansive hands to everything from affordable steel- and nylon-string acoustics to £5k-plus signature electric models. If there is a theme, it's practicality: good, solid craft that's always very fit for purpose.

This Radium is case in point. It was actually introduced at the start of 2020, in Carbon Black and Winchester Brown, just before Covid caused its havoc, while the Matte Green version you see here was announced in 2021. A change in distribution meant reviews were on hold, and while we managed to get our hands on the higher-end Radium-X with its LR Baggs X-Bridge back in issue 495, this base model slipped through the net.

"Presenting a new breed of single-cut guitars, which combines all the best elements of the Radiator and the Stadium into one: the Radium!" said Godin at its launch. It's a pretty close cousin to that same-shaped Godin Stadium (T-style bridge, two single coils, long scale and six-in-a-line headstock) and the Radiator (wrapover bridge, two humbuckers, short scale and three-a-side headstock). This is a straightforward design centring on

All mounted on an elongated T-style control plate, the circuit is simple with an angled five-way pickup selector switch, volume and tone (with a pull switch to split the humbuckers)



1

1. The Godin-logo'd humbuckers are made in Korea by G&B who supplies plenty of big brands. The covered middle single coil (with a DCR of 5.89k) looks like a Tele-neck style, although it has a large (ceramic?) magnet under the coil. Meanwhile, this tidy bridge with wide-diameter slotted studs uses a Gibson-style raised intonation ridge, and overall intonation adjustment is via those two protruding bolts

a Gibson 'short'-scale mahogany neck glued into a solid Canadian Laurentian basswood body, and is available in a trio of demure finishes. The apparent slab-body elongated T-style design actually has a rear ribcage cutaway and rounding to the back of that bass-side horn – but little truck with any other comfort contours.

The trio of HSH pickups is direct-mounted, although the middle Tele-neck-style covered single coil and the bridge humbucker sit quite high out of the body as the bridge is a chunky wrapover type with stepped intonation ridge and overall intonation adjustment. Also top-mounted are the controls and output jack. These both sit on a lightly aged and similarly elongated T-style control plate, with the angled five-way lever pickup selector at the front, the output at the base, and wide-spaced volume and tone controls placed in between – the latter with a pull switch to simultaneously split those outer zebra 'buckers.

A very appealing smooth, sustaining acoustic response is married to that classic feel… It feels like an old friend

Feel & Sounds

Strapped on or seated, the Radium certainly feels familiar and fairly Tele-like. Overall weight is trim at 3.24kg (7.13lb) and the satin-finish neck feels special: a medium-depth C with quite sloping shoulders – 21.4mm in depth at the 1st fret and 23.5mm by the 12th. The classic feel is enhanced by well-installed medium-gauge frets on the 305mm (12-inch) radiused unbound rosewood fingerboard with a nice classic incurve to the edges.

2. Following the retro style of the Godin Radiator, the headplate is a plastic laminate. The nicely cut nut is Tusq, and also from the Graph Tech stable are the Godin-logo'd Ratio tuners, which have quite a fine-tuning feel, especially on the treble side

3. Pulling out the pickups confirms the origin and each has a 'Ferrite' bridge or neck ID sticker confirming its ceramic magnetic style. Reflecting what we hear, the bridge has a DCR of approximately 15.26k and the neck pickup measures 8.78k (7.98k and 4.36k respectively when split)





2



3

There's a very appealing smooth, sustaining acoustic response that's married to that classic feel, making the Radium feel like an old friend, rather than a new guitar you're taking on a first date. Sound-wise, there's nothing that's going to upset, either, with a big, thick, overwound voice at the bridge and a more vintage-y sound at the neck. Thanks to the five-way lever switch, we drop into more Strat-like voicings in positions 2 and 4 and a slightly muted centre single coil. With that tone control switch pulled up (which voices only the screw coils of the humbuckers), it's a very usable hardtail S-style, while both humbuckers are cleaner and brighter – but not overly so. We might be tempted to add a treble bleed to the volume control just to maximise the clarity with reduced settings, especially if you use a less gained amp voice. But, overall, it does exactly what it says on the tin.

Verdict

If the Radium displays quite a mash-up of style with an almost T-style vibe married to its 'Gibson' scale-length set neck and wrapover bridge, it certainly covers some ground, sound-wise. There's the beefy rock-aimed 'buckers that split well, and with that middle single coil in play it dips into a Strat's sonic palette.

Our sample was ready for action from the off with a great-feeling neck, good setup and no tuning issues, and it really exemplifies that fit-for-purpose Godin proposition. Now, it ain't hip, but it's pretty fairly priced for a North American-made guitar, not least compared to Gibson USA's start-up models. It's an instrument this writer would happily head off to a gig with, no hesitation. Godin isn't every player's first choice, but for anyone looking for that slightly different vibe, you'll find it here in spades with excellent quality to match. G



GODIN RADIUM

PRICE: £1,299 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Canadian Laurentian basswood
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/43.45mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Adjustable wraparound bridge, Graph Tech Ratio tuners (18:1 on bass side, 26:1 on treble side) – nickel/chrome-plated
STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Godin Custom zebra humbucker (bridge and neck), Custom Cajun (covered, middle), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull switch coil-split for both humbuckers)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.24/7.13
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: The Radium-X (£2,599) has a longer 648mm (25.5") scale length with dual Bare Knuckle/Seymour Duncan humbuckers and LR Baggs X-Bridge vibrato
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Matte Green (as reviewed), Carbon Black, Winchester Brown – matt body finish and satin neck back

JHS
0113 286 5381
www.godinguitars.com

8/10

PROS Very competently made in stripped-down style; excellent neck shape and playability; good weight; pretty expansive sounds

CONS Bridge and middle pickup sit quite high from the body face; that screw-on plastic headstock might be a retro detail too far

FIRST PLAY



ATKIN DUST BOWL 0012S
£3,499

WHAT IS IT? 12-fret-to-body, slotted-headstock, all-mahogany 00 acoustic with an aged nitro finish, fashioned after the Depression-era instruments of the 1930s



ATKIN DUST BOWL 00014
£3,349

WHAT IS IT? Triple-0 all-mahogany acoustic with an aged nitro finish, aimed at recreating the look of Depression-era instruments

Bowled Over

Alister Atkin's UK workshop pays homage to the stripped-back, no-frills instruments that were available in the USA nearly a century ago when money was tight but roots music was blooming

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker



It's amazing to think that a guitar that was born in an era of great financial hardship and social distress could be so revered by players almost 100 years later. But such is the case with the so-called 'Depression-era' acoustics: essentially stripped-down, no-frills instruments that were aimed at the musicians of the day, themselves enduring the full clout of the famous financial bottoming in the USA during the 1930s.

Recently, we've seen Martin answer the call with its Streetmaster acoustics, which were reliced to reflect the rough and tumble of the years, looking like they'd done their time in the juke joints and barrel houses of the Deep South. And,



of course, Martin's all-mahogany models have been more and more visible in its catalogue in recent years, too. It seems that modern day players have found themselves attracted to the warmth and rounded tones that an all-mahogany instrument can deliver. The idea might have been born out of a threadbare necessity, but it's enjoying a richer contemporary life under the fingers of blues pickers and singer-songwriters everywhere.

Canterbury-based Atkin Guitars, under the helm of luthier Alister Atkin, has also answered the call to produce a range of mahogany instruments under the banner 'Dust Bowl' and it seems that it was customer demand that energised the series in the first place. "We'd made a few for people when they'd asked," Alister tells us, "and I saw it as a bit of an opportunity to get into making something really nice and vintage feeling for those people out there. Weirdly, more people out there than you would imagine want a guitar like that."

Alister's Dust Bowl Series comprises seven models, including an 0, 00 and 000 in the 14-fret-to-the-body series and the same body sizes in the slotted-head 12-fretters. Completing the line-up, there's also a parlour model. We have one from each of the two main series – a 0012 and a 00014 – in front of us today and so let's fire up our best acoustic blues licks and zoom on in.

Those crazy paving cracks to beautiful dark chocolate finish add to the story that these guitars belong to a much earlier age

Just as with house hunting, there's a lot to be said with regards to kerb appeal. In this instance, that equates to that first look upon opening the case. With this brace of Atkins, there was a sharp intake of breath as they are both beautiful in their simplicity, and the crazed finish on both encourages us to think that we're looking at some true vintage pieces. If they sound as good as they look, we're in for a treat...

You've probably already guessed that the construction details here are pretty straightforward. And, of course, they're common to both guitars, apart from the differences in physical size and neck/body joints. To summarise, then, we have African mahogany bodies and necks with



1. It's mahogany all the way for the Dust Bowl acoustics – with aged nitro finishes that enhance resonance and add some vintage chic, too

2. The stripped-back look to the tops includes a plain and simple Indian rosewood bridge and a mock tortoise pickguard

3. Atkin celebrated its 25th year of production in 2020 as the label inside proudly declares, and next year will mark the company's 30th year in business



2

Indian rosewood fingerboards, bridges and headstock facias. Tuners on both guitars are by Gotoh. On the 14 these are open-back with a realistic vintage sheen to them, and on the 12 they are the three-a-side 'classical style' to complement the slotted headstock.

One thing that struck us as slightly unusual is that both guitars have ebony nuts, instead of the more usual real or synthetic bone. "That's what they used back in the day," says Alister. "A lot of those guitars had ebony on them and I think it works well. It looks really cool." From just a casual look at the nuts on both guitars you would be sure that the material involved was some sort of synthetic material. But up close, it's possible to see that it is, in fact, wood that has been polished to a shine – and cut to perfection at that. We were curious as to the effect that ebony, as opposed to bone, would have on tone. "Difficult to know, isn't it?" Alister agrees. "I think there may be a slight difference, and you could conceivably imagine that there is a slightly more muted feel. I don't know, but I think mainly it's aesthetic and keeping it vintage style."

Both the guitars have received a very dark stain to the mahogany, accentuating the vintage vibe, and, as we've said, the



3



4

lacquer is nitrocellulose that has been crazed to give an overall impression that these guitars might have a few virtual decades under their belts but have been well cared for in the process.

A mahogany top is hardly a revolutionary idea these days, but it's surprising that a timber that we don't regard as being cheap, in a contemporary sense, should be used almost a century ago on what was essentially a budget instrument. Was it just that there was a lot of mahogany to hand back in the 1930s and that its status and cost has merely evolved and risen over the years? Alister: "I'm pretty sure that must have been what it was. The supply was good and it was just the way things used to sit back then." And on his impressions as far as using mahogany as a top wood instead of the more familiar Sitka spruce: "The top would typically be a little bit thinner than Sitka, depending on the size of the instrument," says Alister. "If you go down to our parlours, we'd be getting down to 2.2 to 2.5mm thick. But I've used mahogany for many years before this and, tonally, I've found that it ended up sounding pretty similar if you treated it like a Sitka spruce top. There's a little bit of variation but not a great deal."

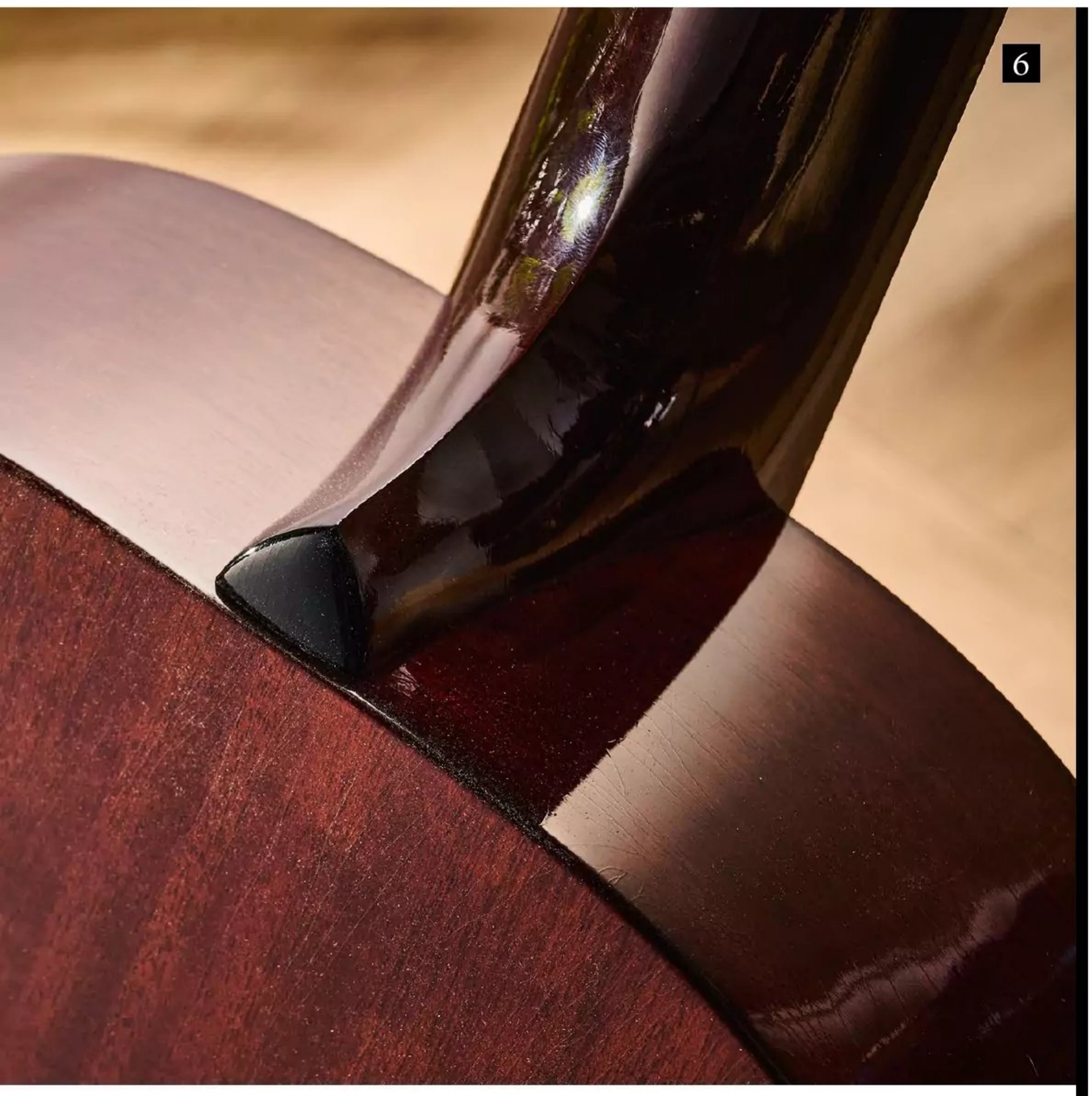


5

Feel & Sounds

The first thing you notice on plucking this pair from their cases is how light they both are. And the finish is a beautiful dark chocolate colour with those crazy paving cracks to the lacquer that add to the story that these instruments belong to a much earlier age. Once again, they share many characteristics in terms of feel as well as, somewhat surprisingly, sound – despite the difference in body sizes. The 0012's neck is chubby but not anywhere near unmanageable, and its light weight and trim dimensions makes it a very sociable sofa companion. Then there's the sound: plentiful bass, well rounded trebles, bags of toneful volume... there's really not much more you could ask for.

Switching to the 00014 the story is pretty much the same, only the bass has more presence and maybe there's a tad more volume but not as much as



you'd think with the bigger body. Both guitars took everything we threw at them from lazy, bluesy picking to animated strumming, meaning that these guitars would suit many different styles of player. We've certainly no complaints.

4. The sound from both guitars is big and bold with lashings of bass response – even the smaller-bodied 0012S has heaps of low-end

5. Open-back Gotoh tuners set off the 00014's headstock nicely – note the unusual but effective ebony nut

Verdict

Alister's reputation as a fine craftsman, working together with a hand-picked team of luthiers, is well deserved as all of the guitars we've seen coming from the workshop (including his electric models) have left us seriously impressed in the past. These two instruments are no exception. We've said before in these pages that any review instrument that we spend far longer with than usual is a very good sign that we're dealing with top of the range guitars that have been crafted to an exceptional level. It certainly has been one of those experiences here where everything comes together – tone and playability – combined with that elusive mojo that is the hallmark of a great instrument. Seek them out! G

Plentiful bass, well rounded trebles, bags of toneful volume... there's really not much more you could ask for

6. As we've come to expect from Alister and his team, workmanship on both instruments is absolutely top-class



ATKIN DUST BOWL 0012S

PRICE: £3,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Slotted headstock 00
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 362mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Gotoh antique three-a-side classical style
NUT/WIDTH: Ebony/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Indian rosewood w/ compensated bone saddle/58mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.55/3.42
OPTIONS: Available with slotted or standard headstock to order
RANGE OPTIONS: The Atkin Dust Bowl 12 range currently includes 2 other body sizes, an 0 and 000 (both £3,499)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra cost
FINISH: Aged nitrocellulose

Atkin Guitars
01227 719933
www.atkinguitars.com

Guitarist GOLD 10/10

PROS Excellent instrument with a rich sound and bags of volume, too; very lap-friendly

CONS Nothing to see here



ATKIN DUST BOWL 00014

PRICE: £3,349 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: 000 acoustic
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 514mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Gotoh antique open back
NUT/WIDTH: Ebony/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Indian rosewood w/ compensated bone saddle/58mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.59/3.52
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Atkin's 14 range is available in 2 other body sizes: 0 and 00 (both £3,349)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra cost
FINISH: Aged nitrocellulose

Guitarist GOLD 10/10

PROS Depth of tone and a great playing experience – it looks fabulous, too!

CONS Again, nothing to confess



ORIGIN EFFECTS HALCYON BLUE OVERDRIVE
£249

WHAT IS IT? Brit-made overdrive pedal that focuses in on the classic Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal

Break' Point

Origin Effects expands its range of Halcyon drive pedals with its take on the Marshall Bluesbreaker

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker



1. The Voice switch offers two different takes on the sound: BB is standard Bluesbreaker voicing; Mod provides a gainier sound

2. Set the Adapt switch to off (0) and the pedal effectively acts like an original Bluesbreaker. It can also give you two different strengths of the Adaptive behaviour (I and II), which alters tonal content with guitar volume or dynamics

3. The Dry knob lets you set your preferred level of dry signal as an integral component of the tone. It's like a classic Bluesbreaker midway, but you can turn it anti-clockwise for a slightly harder-edged tone, or turn clockwise to enhance clarity

Origin Effects has completed a trilogy of what are arguably the three most cloned and modified drive pedals. First, we saw the Halcyon Green Overdrive based on a Tube Screamer, then came the Klon-based Halcyon Gold Overdrive, and now here's the Halcyon Blue Overdrive, inspired by the early 90s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal. However, these aren't mere clones. In fact, Origin has expanded the tonal options with a toggle-switched choice of an authentic original voicing or a modified one, plus a user-variable amount of dry sound as a component of the signal, and the company's Adaptive Circuitry with its neat trick of automatically adjusting voicing in response to pick attack and volume changes.

Setting the pedal to its BB voicing and utilising the Level, Drive and Tone knobs as found on the original Bluesbreaker yields a range of tones that completely matches the original's, with a nice lift in the midrange, delivering enhanced 'beyond clean' boosts right through to a lovely textured drive. For variation, we have the Dry knob, which is not a control that mixes your dry signal in proportion to the drive; it actually sets the amount of passed-through unaffected dry signal that's always been a component part of Bluesbreaker circuitry. At its noon position, the knob mimics the Bluesbreaker entirely, but you can use it to increase the amount of dry signal or reduce/remove it from the signal. It's a subtle control, but it does make a difference. We particularly like the dynamic feel and the touch of extra clarity that comes with a bit more dry sound.

A less subtle deviation from the classic BB sound – although still in the same ballpark – is the Mod voicing, which offers a different diode clipping characteristic with more gain and a fatter sound. All of this can be delivered via the Adapt Circuitry, which cleans up your tone by reducing midrange emphasis when playing more softly or with your guitar volume knob turned down. The tonal differences between the Off setting and the two levels of Adaptive behaviour are there to be exploited – find which best suits you.

Verdict

The Halcyon Blue is a more sophisticated version of a Bluesbreaker pedal. So if you like that sound but want it delivered with practical variations and enhancements in a compact, solidly engineered pedal, then this is for you. G

ORIGIN EFFECTS HALCYON BLUE OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £249
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Drive, Dry, Tone, Adapt switch (0/I/II), Voice Switch (BB/Mod), Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 200mA
DIMENSIONS: 58 (w) x 124 (d) x 64mm (h)

Origin Effects
www.origineffects.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Excellent build quality; compact size; accurate BB tone; advanced dynamic response and clean-up characteristics; two voicings; adjustable dry sound; practical tone control

CONS Only that it's at a price point that won't be accessible to all



THE RIVALS

If you want to go back to the source, Marshall recently reissued the Bluesbreaker (£149) in its original form. It's less expensive but is a bigger pedal and doesn't have the versatility of the Halcyon Blue. There are plenty of pedals based on a modified Bluesbreaker, and perhaps the most lauded is the Analog Man King Of Tone (from $325). If you want to eschew from the six-year waiting list, however, look to the MXR version, the Duke Of Tone (£169). Elsewhere, the Keeley Blues Disorder (£199), released in 2024, combines two completely different overdrive and distortion circuits to create four drives in one box.



FIRST PLAY



MXR M307 LAYERS
£249

WHAT IS IT? A pedal that can add layers of sustained sound with effects

Deep Dive

The latest pedal from MXR can enhance your sound with layered-in ambient sustain for expansive soundscapes

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. The Sub Oct button transposes new layers down an octave; previously created layers will not be affected. You can set this so that the sub-octave effect is only applied to the lowest frequencies of a layer

2. Limit the sustain effect to a single layer with the aptly named Single knob. By default, there are three simultaneous layers that overlap with each other indicated by the three white LEDs

3. The CTR jack can be used to connect an expression pedal or external footswitch, or to send a dry output signal when using Dry/Wet Split mode

4. You can increase sensitivity to note attack with the Trig knob. Fully anti-clockwise, the function is turned off. When on, the LED is red, but it turns green when a layer has been triggered

MXR's Layers pedal can freeze and sustain a note or chord, creating a sustained 'layer' that can be used to enhance and bolster notes or act as a pad that you can play over. Pressing the footswitch takes a sample of your playing at that point, which will sustain until you release the footswitch. Alternatively, there's auto-triggering via playing dynamics, with the Trig knob setting a threshold above which a layer can be triggered. A Mix knob sets the level of the layer in relation to your dry sound, and you also get knobs to set the Attack (fade-in time) of the layer, and the Decay, which can be turned up full for infinite sustain.

The pedal supports three simultaneous layers that overlap with each other and their status is indicated by three glowing LEDs that fade in and out. Each subsequent layer replaces the oldest after the third layer has been captured. A press of the Single button, however, keeps things simpler by limiting the sustain effect to a single layer – this mode works great in conjunction with the Trig knob to add an underlying or parallel layer of interest to each note you pick.

At its most basic, the pedal sustains your straight sound, but you can transform the sustained sound with its onboard effects, all accessed as secondary knob functions while pressing and holding the Single or Sub Oct buttons. You can set up delay, modulation (chorus, tremolo or a blend) and a diffusion amount that adds texture to the layer(s). There's also the possibility of adding a sub-octave to either the whole layer or just to its lowest frequencies for more clarity. All of this offers plenty of scope for building ethereal, ambient pads or delivering a creative twist to those single notes.

Besides standard mono you can run the pedal in stereo with three layers panned left, centre and right, or you can have a Dry/Wet split. You can also connect external switches to trigger layers, or an expression pedal to blend between two setting configurations.

Verdict

Whether you wish to thicken single notes or create drones and ambient textures (perhaps with three-note chords that your fingers could never stretch to), MXR's claim that Layers will "extend the creative potential of your instrument" is absolutely right. G



MXR M307 LAYERS

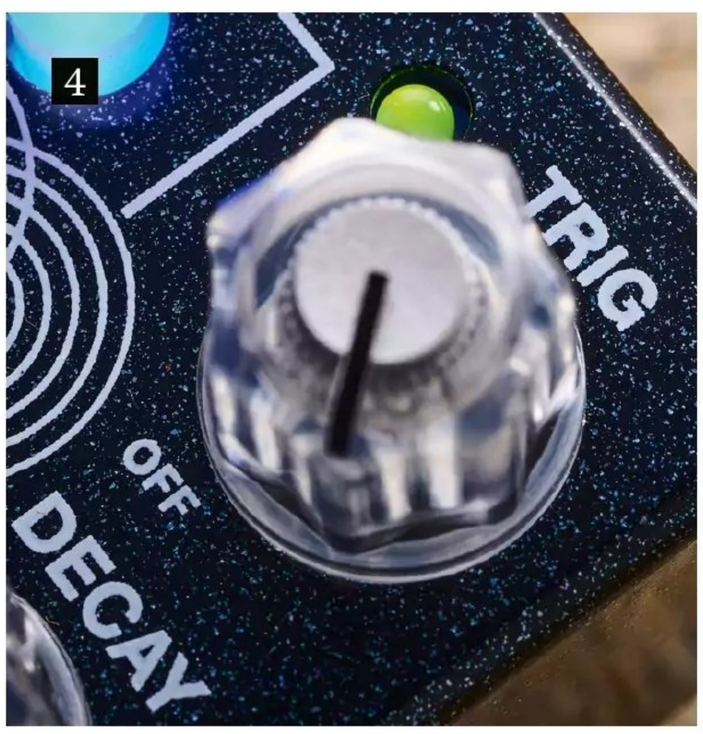
PRICE: £249
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Sustain pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, tap tempo, dry kill, mono or stereo operation, dry/wet split, sub-octave, FX
CONTROLS: Mix, Trig, Attack, Decay, Single button, Sub Oct button, Tap/Exp-CTR-Audio switch, internal mono/stereo switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, CTR input
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 110 (d) x 47mm (h)

Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.jimdunlop.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; easy operation; onboard effects; sub octave facility; external control

CONS Accessing secondary functions can be a bit of a faff



THE RIVALS

The Gamechanger Audio Plus Pedal (£315) looks more like a piano's sustain pedal than a regular stompbox, but it allows you to sustain selected notes and chords. Electro-Harmonix has several pedals that can sample and sustain a portion of your sound: there's the Freeze Sound Retainer (£115), Pico Deep Freeze (£179), Superego (£205) and the Superego+ (£225). Also check out the TC Electronic Infinite Sample Sustainer (£129). On a slightly different tack, Walrus Audio has several pedals for creating background ambiences such as the Slö Multi Texture Reverb (£199) and the Lore Reverse Soundscape Generator (£299).





the Wishlist

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

Gibson BB King 'Rumble In The Jungle' 1974 ES-355 £8,999

Gibson PHONE **00800 44427661** WEB **www.gibson.com** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

Think of the late, great BB King and a picture of his famous 'Lucille'-model Gibson with its ES Artist-type sealed body will likely come to mind, although these didn't actually appear in Standard and Custom versions until 1980. Before then, BB had long plied his high-profile trade, invariably with a standard ES model and typically the 355. Currently, Gibson Custom has a Lucille Legacy and 'Live at the Regal' ES-335 in the catalogue, and now this latest historic homage from 1974 has joined the ranks.

The 'Rumble In The Jungle' pulls in another couple of heavyweights, George Foreman and Muhammad Ali, unquestionably rockstars of their day, and a mega-profile boxing match in Kinshasa, Zaire on 30 October 1974, known as one of the greatest sporting events of the 20th century. The fight was scheduled to happen on 25 September at the end of Zaire 74, a three-day music festival, but it was delayed due to Foreman injuring himself in a sparring session. The festival went ahead as planned, featuring BB King, James Brown, Miriam Makeba, Bill Withers, The Crusaders and more, and is documented in 2008's *Soul Power*, plus BB's *Live In Africa* film. It's the guitar BB King was playing back then that's replicated here.

As we very carefully pull this model from its accompanying case, you'd almost believe it was 50 years old with its light ageing. There are plenty of cracks to the body lacquer, which has an old-looking amber tint; this turns the edge binding nicotine yellow with the notable exception of the white binding around the tortoiseshell pickguard. There's also a little patina and ageing to the gold hardware.

These are big guitars, though this one is attractively manageable, with its relatively slim neck. It's not over-wide in lower positions, but it really fills out to quite a full-shouldered girth by the 12th fret. The light rolling to the 'board edge binding adds to the feeling of age, too.

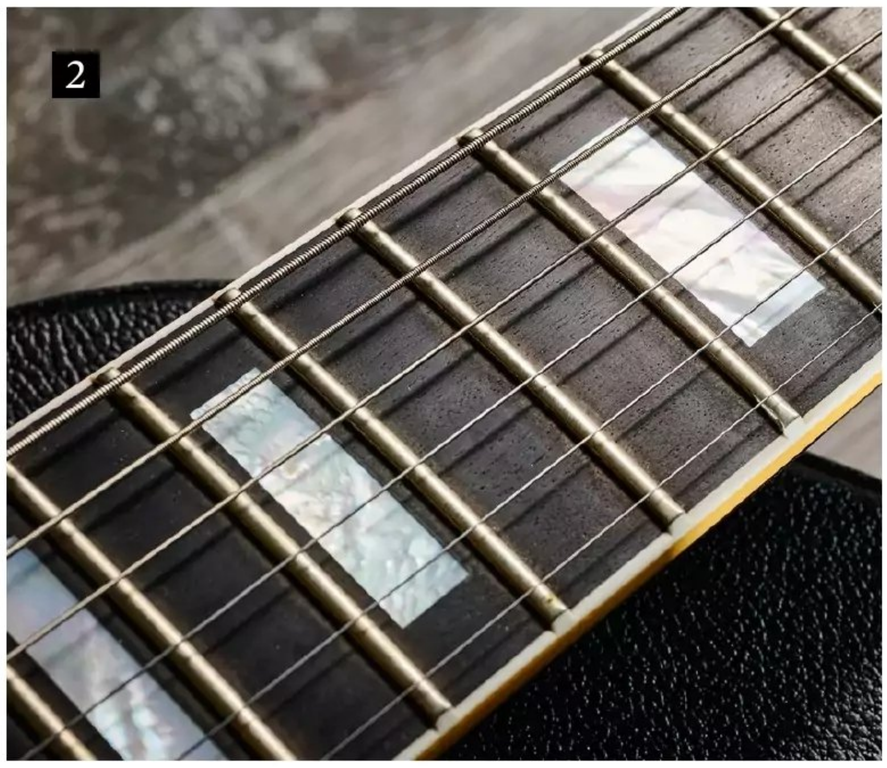
Despite the 'Stereo' truss rod cover, thankfully the output is mono here, and we have the additional five flavours of the Varitone, which get a little thinner and almost phasey-sounding as you play through them. The pickups seem only lightly potted (you get plenty of pick 'clonk' if you hit the covers), but these hybrid T-Types sound extremely sweet and yet have good articulation and quite widely contrasting voices between the bite at the bridge and the smoother, clear neck voice. You might want to play on the cleaner side of the tracks, but try cranking it up a little – it damn near takes off! G

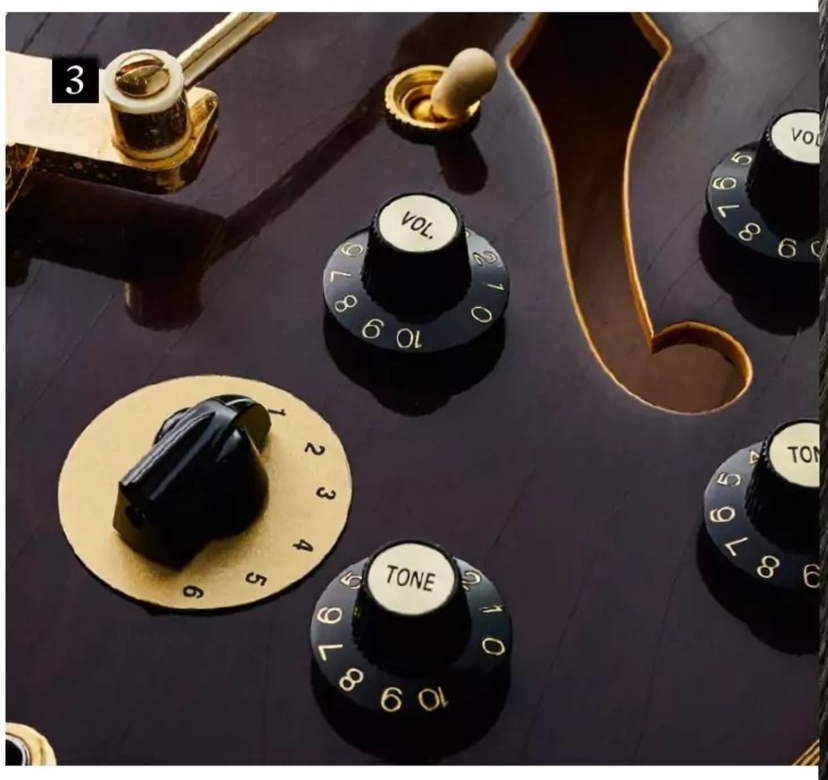
1. Dominated by its 'split diamond' headstock inlay, the tuners are Kluson 'Wafflebacks' – referring to their striped casings – and have subtly aged gold plating. You'll be pleased to know the guitar is mono, despite what the truss rod cover says, and it also features a large, somewhat polarising 'volute' behind the truss rod access area of the neck

2. Another identifier of ES-355 style is the block inlays, which are mother-of-pearl on a bound ebony fingerboard. Under the aged Walnut finish is a three-piece mahogany neck, the profile classed as 'Artist'. Along with the plain laminated maple body construction, the centre block is lightweight solid maple



1


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3. The 355 was officially released in 1959, with a handful of models being shipped the previous year, and as the decades rolled by there were relatively few major changes to the top-line model. These 'witch hat' or 'sombrero' knobs were one, along with the Maestro Vibrola, added in 1963, which replaced the earlier sideways design and also the often-used Bigsby B7 – gold plated, of course!

4. Limited to just 100 pieces worldwide, this very 70s-style ES-355 replicates one of BB King's most famously seen and heard instruments. The Murphy Lab light ageing captures its time-warp vibe, and along with its 'Zaire' hard case there's plenty of case candy – including a flag! Of course, its substantial cost means it won't be first choice for your local blues jam, although the current Dark Walnut ES-345 will get you close at a cooler £3,799, albeit without the Varitone or vibrato

5. While Gibson's good-sounding T-Type humbuckers feature on many recent and current ES models, here the pickups are advertised as T-Type Custombuckers, which use Alnico V magnets like the standard models. "These pickups are designed to sound like the original T-Tops, but they have some '59-spec parts that turn the pickup more into a hybrid. The end result is the tone of a T-Top," Gibson tells us. At output, ours measured 7.37kohms at the bridge and closer to 7k at the neck

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

New releases From £279

CONTACT **Various** WEB **See below**

Somehow we find ourselves reaching the end of the year already. While that can only mean two things for gearheads – it's Gear Of The Year time and the NAMM Show is just around the corner – we're already seeing a lot of brands already giving us a taste of new releases for winter. From acoustic innovations to birthday celebrations, the tail end of 2024 also delivers a couple of surprise signature models. And we're still over a month away from the Anaheim gear-fest! So we'll be back next issue with more wallet-relieving new products. **[SW]**



BLACKSTAR SERIES ONE MK II **£1,999**

It's hard to believe Blackstar's Series One is now in its adolescence, but to celebrate the Brit brand has given the range a complete overhaul with over 30 tweaks across the board. The Series One MK II 100-watt head has a power section fitted with 6L6 valves (rather than EL34s) and now includes dedicated gain controls for each of the four channels. There's a second EQ section, allowing for independent three-band control for Clean/Crunch and OD1/OD2, as well as full MIDI control. Blackstar's ISF (Infinite Shape Feature) and DPR (Dynamic Power Reduction) controls are also present. It's available now, along with the Series One 412 Pro B MK II cabinet.

www.blackstaramps.com



FENDER CHRIS SHIFLETT TELECASTER DELUXE **£2,599**

Foo Fighters guitarist and solo country-Americana artist Chris Shiflett has once again teamed up with Fender to deliver his take on the Telecaster Deluxe. Dubbed 'The Cleaver' thanks to its ability to cut through dense mixes, Shifty's latest is a production version of the Masterbuilt P-90-loaded guitar we've seen him playing on the Foos' world tour. This US-made version has Fender-designed Noiseless CS-90 pickups and a 21-fret rosewood 'board that's inlaid with pearloid blocks; the visuals are completed by a matching headstock. It comes in Dakota Red or Charcoal Frost, and will be on shelves by the time you read this.

www.fender.com



ORIGIN EFFECTS DELUXE55 **£279**

There's no shortage of 'amp-in-a-box' pedals on the market, but now Origin Effects – whose amp recreations already include the RevivalDrive and Magma57 – has turned its attention to Tweed with the new Deluxe55. It's an all-analogue pedal that looks to ape the tone and response of Fender's 1955 Tweed Deluxe amplifier, from the switchable preamp voicing (12AY7/12AX7) through to a recreation of the Deluxe's 6V6 power amp section. Origin says that it has recreated the entire valve amp signal path "in miniature", which can serve as your overdrive source, or, when paired with an IR loader or cab sim, it can even work as a complete direct solution.

www.origineffects.com



CHARVEL MJ DINKY **£2,349**

Shred fans will be no stranger to the fact that Charvel guitars were made in Japan during the late 80s. Now, the brand has expanded its MJ line-up with the MJ DK24 HSH 2PT, which has a mahogany body (optional maple top) and graphite-reinforced wenge neck, designed for modern players and maintaining Charvel's classic charm. It has a sculpted heel and is hand-rubbed with an oil finish, with a 304.8mm to 406.4mm (12 to 16-inch) compound radius wenge 'board. The pickups come courtesy of Seymour Duncan: Full Shred TB-10 (bridge), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 (middle) and Alnico II APH-1N (neck). Available in black (mahogany only), or Caribbean Burst and Antique Burst with maple top.

www.charvel.com



LR Baggs' new AEG-1 Acoustic Electric Guitar comes in a choice of three different tops



LR BAGGS AEG-1 **£2,099**

Guitar companies are seemingly on a mission to make playing an acoustic on stage more convenient. With recent offerings from Fender and its Acoustasonic, along with the Yamaha TransAcoustic TAG3, who better to join the party than acoustic-guitar electronics expert LR Baggs. Its new AEG-1 pairs a thin-bodied, feedback-busting design with Baggs' much-loved HiFi Duet sensor and mic system. Baggs says that the AEG-1's neck support system allows the guitar's top and back to be "liberated" when compared with similar thin-bodied designs, the result being greater sensitivity and dynamics, while also delivering greater vibration transfer to the guitar's top. This is then captured by the HiFi Duet's dual body sensors, plus the Silo Mic, which can be blended and balanced to taste via the onboard preamp. Construction-wise, the AEG-1 features a mahogany neck and rosewood 'board, and is built around a poplar ply frame with an Indian rosewood back. There are three available tops: Engelmann spruce, torrefied Sitka spruce or Sitka spruce finished in sunburst.

www.lrbaggs.com

ALSO OUT NOW...

PRS 40TH ANNIVERSARY FROM £6,999

PRS is kicking off 2025's 40th anniversary celebrations early with the release of some special-edition models that hark back to the company's formative years. The Private Stock 40th Anniversary McCarty Dragon pays homage to the original Dragon from 1992 (the guitar that gave birth to the McCarty model) and costs a tear under an eye-watering £20k at £18,995. Back down to earth and the 40th Anniversary Custom 24 comes in at £6,999. Limited to 400 pieces, the big news here is that it features all-new PRS DMO (Dynamic, Musical, Open) pickups. We also get 'Old School' bird inlays, a headstock-positioned eagle to boot, and it's available in Sub Zero Smokeburst and Tiger Eye finishes.

www.prsguitars.com



MARTIN JOHNNY MARR M6 & M7 £5,195

Think 'seven-string' and shredders or drop-tuned nu metal might come to mind. But Johnny Marr is looking to change that perception with his new signature from Martin, the M6 (six-string) and M7 (seven-string). The latter is no baritone; it's equipped with an octave-up G string, not the low-tuned B you might expect. Both use the Grand Auditorium body size, have mahogany necks, ebony 'boards and Sitka spruce top/rosewood backs and sides. They're also fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem system and come with a Martin case.

www.martinguitar.com




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The TAG3 C produces pro-quality effects that resonate naturally from within the body of the guitar with Reverb, Chorus and Delay.
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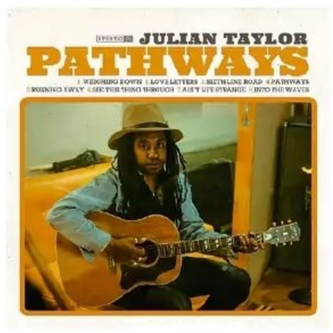
THE LINEUP

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: Julian Taylor

Album: Pathways (Howling Turtle, Inc)



Julian's guitar influences include a mix of James Taylor, Bob Dylan, Richie Havens and bluesman Robert Johnson
www.juliantaylormusic.ca

Julian marries his soulful vocals with bluesy folk guitar, bringing together a myriad of influences

Toronto based singer-songwriter and guitarist Julian Taylor has been making high-quality music for many years, his sound bringing in R&B, folk, country and soul influences. But it's only really been since 2020's *The Ridge*, an album that also focused on pan-Canadian roots music in part, that his momentum has gathered. Since then we've had *Beyond The Reservoir* in 2022 and now *Pathways*, another excellently crafted set of songs. This attention seems overdue. "My first official record came out in 2000," he tells us. "And before that there was an EP in '97, but I was a kid back then."

Making The Move

Julian has been playing music since the age of four and comes from a family of storytellers, so it feels apt that this is the right path for him. But why the guitar? "I started playing my cousin's classical guitar first and what grabbed me was it's an instrument I can move around with," he explains. "The songs were bad back then – who's to say they're good now? – but I liked going to people's homes and playing for them. I liked showing off what I'd been learning because I was self-taught."



PHOTO BY AL STEWART

The Players

When it comes to significant guitarists along the way who influenced Julian, he looked to both the acoustic and electric scenes. "Bob Dylan was a huge influence," he says immediately. "Also Richie Havens' style on the acoustic; when I saw that Woodstock video I was blown away, it was super cool. James Taylor was an influence, too, when it came to fingerpicking, and Robert Johnson was a big one. And then my grandmother bought me an electric guitar – and it was blues music I was listening to then, guys like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. But I also discovered open tunings on the electric because of The Rolling Stones and Keith Richards, and the slide playing of Elmore James. It opened up a whole new palette."

Julian's Jukebox

It quickly becomes clear that Julian's musical knowledge is very broad, but then it would need to be since he hosts a three-hour radio show every week, entitled *Julian Taylor's Jukebox*. "Yeah, it's long!" he laughs. "I spend a lot of time researching music and the reason I got into music in the first place was because I'm a fan. My favourite thing in the world is to be side- or backstage watching people I admire on stage because I'm lucky enough to be put on the bill. So I talk to a lot of people and I guess I've been an encyclopaedia of music knowledge for the last 30 years."

Holding Back

Pathways exemplifies Julian's far-reaching tastes, covering the sounds of folk, blues, country and rock. "I wanted to work with Colin Linden, who is a producer and guitar virtuoso," Julian tells us. "So I wasn't in the driver's seat this time and I had to let go a bit. It's a very sparse record compared with the others; Colin really wanted to make sure my voice was front and centre. There are still a lot of instruments on there and it's the first time the guitar takes a more instrumental lead role, which is great. So it's not as busy and he tried to coach me to edit myself and take a 'less is more' approach. It was difficult at first, but as time was trucking along I became used to it and it became a more comfortable space to be in. It was a lovely lesson to learn." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Weighing Down*
For fans of: James Taylor, Bill Callahan, Lenny Kravitz, John Mayer



"I spend a lot of time researching music. The reason I got into music in the first place was because I'm a fan"

THE BARNCASTER

Julian talks us through his custom pride and joy

Julian has a few guitars that are close to him, including the American Strat his grandmother bought for him, plus a Martin D-28 for live work. But it's a more unusual one that he first mentions. "I have a custom electric guitar called a 'Barncaster'," he tells us. "It looks like a Tele, but it's not. My friend Alastair Miller is a luthier down here [in Toronto] and my friends commissioned him to make this custom guitar. It's a one of a kind: it has a lipstick pickup and a Charlie Christian pickup, and I love it. And for amps, most of the time I use Fender; I like the Twin and Blues Junior. I also like Vox amps – I have a tiny eight-watt Vox that I run with the Blues Junior."

PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIAN TAYLOR

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



PHOTO BY MAX CRACE

The formidable trio of Satch, Johnson and Vai captured on their sold-out 2024 tour

Joe Satriani, Steve Vai & Eric Johnson

G3 Reunion Live

earMusic (release date: 31 January 2025)



Three of the best reassemble for twin-CD fretbuster

The original G3 concerts took place in 1996, when the guitar gymnastics display team of Steve Vai, Joe Satriani and Eric Johnson first united under a single flag to deliver some incendiary fretwork to the assembled populace. In those days, the instrumental guitar phenomenon was at its height and Vai, Satch and Johnson were the undisputed leaders of the pack. But that was then. Times might have changed – and today's music landscape is certainly very different from what it was back then – but nevertheless when the trio were reunited for an American tour in 2024, the gigs sold out and this twin-CD pack records the whole event for posterity.

Steve Vai kicks off the proceedings with a set that includes fan favourites such as *Tender Surrender* and *For The Love Of God* but tips a hat towards more recent material like *Teeth Of The Hydra* in his own inimitable fashion. In Vai's hands, the fretboard becomes a fluid stream of angular ideas taken to a virtuoso level, and that's definitely what's available for his opening set. Next is a change of pace in the super-melodic hands of Eric Johnson with *Land Of 1000 Dances*, followed by some characteristic fleet-of-fingers workouts including the wonderful *Desert Rose*, complete with Eric's superb vocals. Last, but definitely not least, Satch takes to the stage with a greatest hit set that includes *Surfing With The Alien*, *Satch Boogie* and *Always With Me, Always With You*, followed by the full cast in a furious fret-fest jam. Guitarmageddon! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Desert Rose*
For fans of: Vinnie Moore, Jeff Beck, Andy Timmons

Andy Fairweather Low

The Invisible Bluesman

The Last Music Company (release date: 4 February 2025)



Renowned sideman steps out of the shadows

After an early career as pop icon in Amen Corner and years as a sideman to players such as Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan and Roger Waters – to mention only the tip of a very significant iceberg – Andy Fairweather Low returns to his blues roots with a stunning new album. With a mix of tracks recorded live and in the studio, and switching from acoustic guitar to fuzzed out electric, Andy covers a wealth of traditional blues in his own style, including *Rollin' & Tumblin'*, originally made famous by Muddy Waters, *When Things Go Wrong*, which Andy will have played many times alongside Clapton, and *Lightnin's Boogie* by Lightnin' Hopkins. The album will be available only on vinyl or as a digital stream, with no scheduled CD release, and Andy will be touring the record in the UK beginning on 6 February. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Life Is Good*
For fans of: Eric Clapton, Muddy Waters

Innes Sibun

The Preacher

Sireena (available now)



Vibrantly alive blues with a jazz spirit

Regular readers may remember Innes as Robert Plant's former guitarist who has since matured into one of the most charismatic and soulful players on the British blues scene. His latest, *The Preacher*, marks a watershed in some ways but perhaps just the fruition of an element of his playing that has been evolving for some time: bringing a jazz sensibility to his blues, much as the revered American bluesman T-Bone Walker did back in the 1940s and 50s. We find engrossing evidence of this in his spirited cover of *Sunny*, which was a staple of Wes Montgomery's 60s work, to which Sibun brings an early Santana-like quality. On *Jump For Joy* we're greeted with a more Stevie Ray-style approach to a rollicking shuffle, with some lovely cascading licks tumbling over fine organ work from Anders Olinder. The album also features taut drumming from Clive Deamer (Get The Blessing) and other veteran players, and – like a great club gig – this LP takes risks, explores freely and delights the spirit. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Freya's Smile*
For fans of: Carlos Santana, Rory Gallagher, BB King

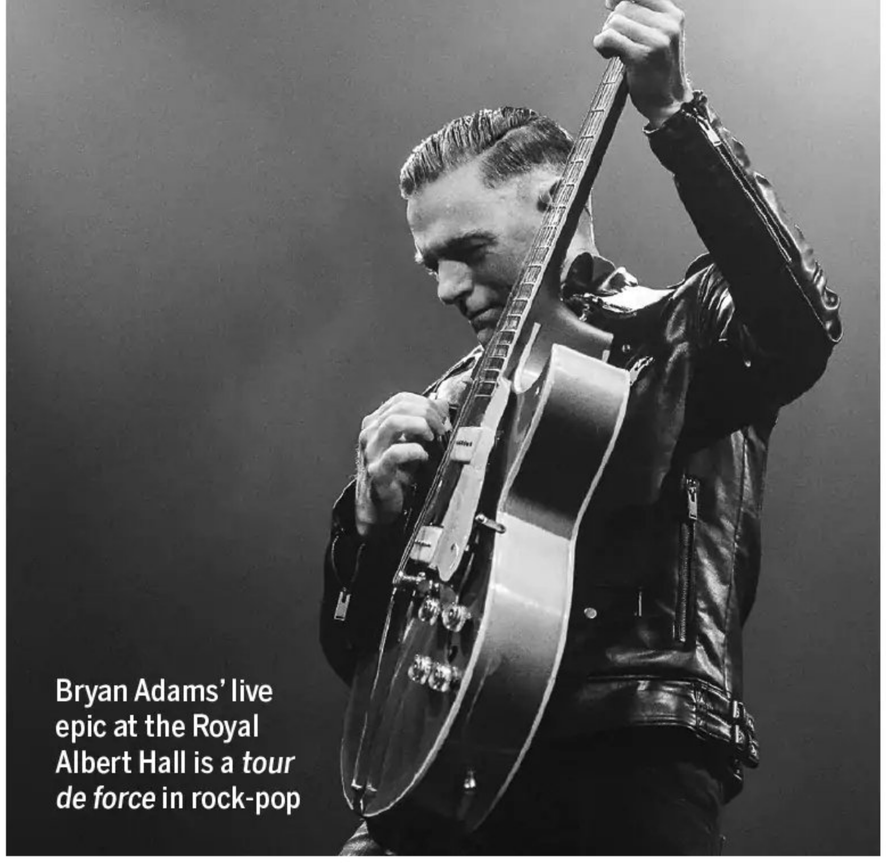


PHOTO BY SIMON ASCIUTTI

Bryan Adams' live epic at the Royal Albert Hall is a *tour de force* in rock-pop

Bryan Adams
Live At The Royal Albert Hall

Bad Records (available now)



Canadian rocker's three-night RAH residency faithfully documented

Back in May 2024, Bryan Adams rocked the room for three nights at London's Royal Albert Hall, playing a different complete album from his catalogue each night. These included 1984's *Reckless*, in honour of the album's 40th anniversary, 1996's *18 Til I Die*, and his most recent release, 2022's *So Happy It Hurts*. Everything was captured on three CDs (or four LPs) in this lush boxset that comes complete with a 32-page booklet of exclusive images. Furthermore, the whole event was filmed by Grammy Award-winning filmmaker Dick Carruthers and so the three separate gigs are also included here on Blu-ray. Quite the package, then! Needless to say, the performances are spotless, with great production and sound quality throughout. Keith Scott's guitar playing is firing on all cylinders, too; Bryan refers to his long-standing guitar sidekick as the most underrated player of all time – and we'd agree. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Summer Of '69*
For fans of: Bon Jovi, Foreigner

The Cure
Songs Of A Lost World

Fiction/Polydor (available now)

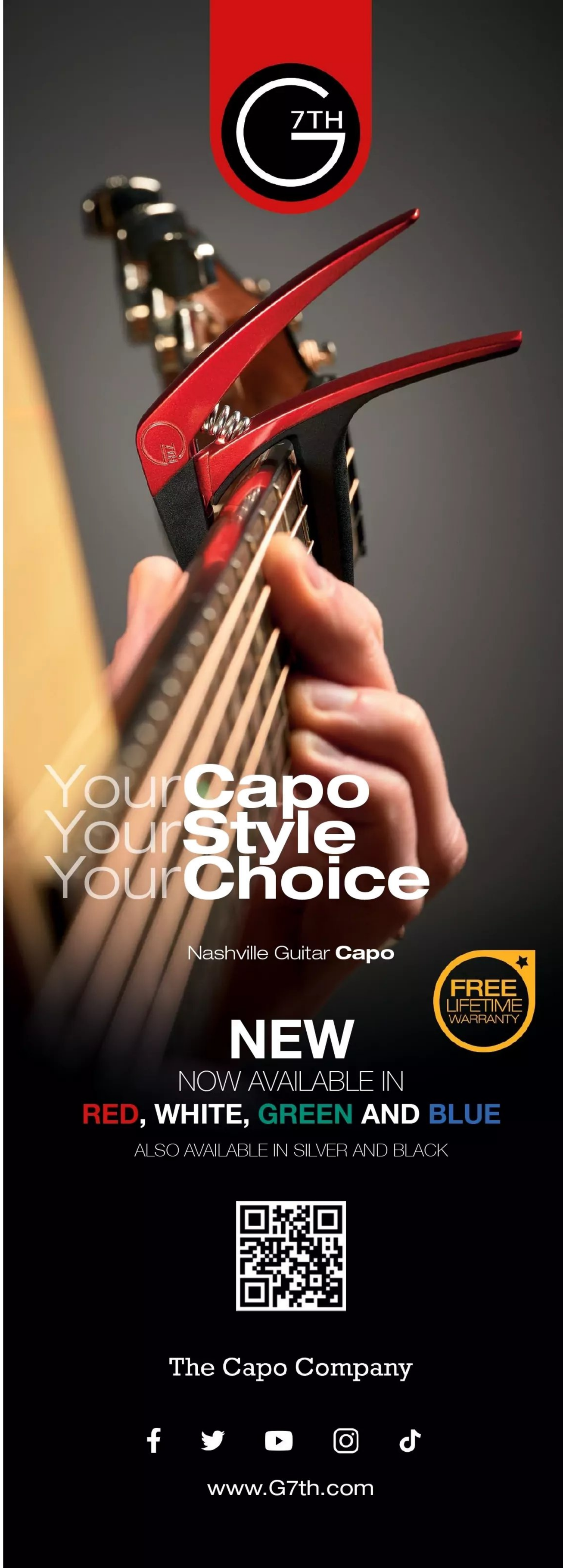
Guitarist CHOICE



Post-rock of bleak grandeur and beauty

The Cure's 14th studio album, *Songs Of A Lost World*, may feel like *terra incognita* to casual listeners who only know them from *The Lovecats* days, as it reveals a band painting on a much bigger and more sombre canvas, creating dark textures in sound with subtle skill. Perhaps that's excusable as it's also the band's first studio release in 16 years and the first to feature ex-Tin Machine guitarist Reeves Gabrels who has been a member of the band's live line-up for some 12 years. Opener, *Alone*, has the bleak grandeur of an eclipse in its sombre synth timbres and stark drums, while *And Nothing Is Forever* has a more hymnal quality, if that hymn were sung in echoing city streets, rather than a church. Guitars from Gabrels and frontman Robert Smith provide reverb-rich melodic hooks on dramatic, sweeping tracks such as *A Fragile Thing*. It adds up to a dark diamond of an album. **[JD]**

Standout track: *A Fragile Thing*
For fans of: Killing Joke, Sigur Ros, Nine Inch Nails



THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

It was a road laden with incidents and tragedy that led one-man band **Steve Hill** to record his album at Foo Fighters' legendary Studio 606

Artist: Steve Hill

Album: Hanging On A String (No Label Records)



Steve Hill's latest studio album, *Hanging On A String*, came together against all odds

Watching Steve Hill play live really is a wonder to behold. Through a contrivance of simple tech, including a drumstick attached to his headstock to clout the cymbals of his drum kit, Steve can play drums, bass and guitar simultaneously – the 21st century's answer to the traditional one-man band. His latest album, *Hanging On A String*, has just hit the streets, but the journey to its release was far from straightforward, as he explains.

You had a rough ride between this album and your last, didn't you?

"*Dear Illusion* came out in November 2022, and a week after the album was released, I was driving home from a gig and I fell asleep at the wheel five minutes before getting to my place. My van was a total wreck, but I somehow survived with nothing broken. All the gear was fine and for 24 hours I was like the luckiest guy on earth. Then the next day, my father died unexpectedly. I just pulled the plug on everything. I had to take some time off, you know?

"Later on, in April 2023, I had just finished a tour of the west coast of Canada and I stayed over at my tour manager's place in Calgary. I was leaving the next morning, so I was sleeping in the basement on a mat that really was not comfortable, but it saved my life because I couldn't sleep properly. I was dreaming of barbecue and when I opened my eyes there was smoke everywhere. The house was on fire. Long story, but we got out of there and I went to take my plane at the airport and every time I'm about to leave on a plane, I take a photo and post on social media. I wrote down, 'Woke up in a house on fire...' and that's the first line of the title track on the new album."



Steve is a modern-day one-man band, playing drums, bass and guitar simultaneously

PHOTO BY MATTIA CORBETTA/ JOHN OLIVER PHOTOGRAPHY

How did you end up recording at Foo Fighters' studio?

"It just happened that Brian Loudenslager, who's the guy behind Lauten Audio microphones, is a friend of mine. He's hired me to do the NAMM Show in the past. I do it with Darrell Thorp, who's the engineer and producer on the album. Darrell would be the star of the event, I'd be in a box playing, doing my one-man band thing, surrounded by Lauten Audio microphones. Since then, Brian would tell me, 'It'd be great if you'd come and record in LA,' but I'm up north, out in the woods in Canada, so going to record in LA is a great dream, but it didn't seem possible. He'd been telling me that for, like, seven years and I'm like, 'Sure, Brian, it'd be great.' But two weeks after seeing my post about waking up in a burning house he had booked the studio, hired Darrell, and paid for the whole thing.

"I had three months to write the album. So, basically, I do nine to five; I do my gigs on the weekend for three months, and I'd send the demos to Brian and Darrell. I was booked on August 26 2023, my buddy Johnny Pilgrim, who lives in LA, picks me up and 20 minutes later we get hit by a car. I got broken ribs. I tried to record the album, but every day, a new nerve would pinch and it was getting impossible, so they decided to postpone the recording to January."

After all that, did the recording experience turn out to be a good one?

"It was awesome. I mean, you can't rent the place unless you know the Foo Fighters or the engineers that work there. I think Darrell's made all of their



PHOTO BY JEFF LESCENE

records in the last 10 years and so it was awesome just to record on that Neve console from Sound City. That's the board of rock 'n' roll, you know? And recording on tape and recording with that team, and using the Foo Fighters' gear... I'm using Dave Grohl's bass drum and I'm using their amps. Chris Shiflett has this great AC30 from the 60s; that's the main amp on the album. That and a Princeton Reverb – until I blew it up and replaced it with a black-panel Deluxe. He probably doesn't know..."

Do you play all the instruments live in the studio the same as you do on stage?

"Yeah. I record everything live. I play all the instruments at the same time. I had six days to do it back in January, and I did it in five. We'd do three takes at the most. So they're all first, second or third takes and I'd do two songs a day. I'm really proud of this record."

Which guitars did you take into the studio with you?

"I had my '59 Junior TV Model that I've been playing on tour for years. I had a sunburst Strat and an Epiphone Flying V, and somehow I used the Epiphone on half the record. I had just acquired it, like a month or a month and a half before I went to California. It's really, really lightweight – like, 5.5lb – and as a one-man band that makes a huge difference. I'm always trying to find the lightest guitar possible. And it stayed in tune!

"The humbucker seemed to fit more with the sound on this album and, although it was not the best guitar of the bunch, it was the best for the occasion. I've bought a lot of Chinese guitars in the last couple of years. I was into Jazzmasters and before that I bought four Squiers and modified them a lot. I've got a '61 Jazzmaster, but I wouldn't put a drumstick holder on it, you know? I'm more comfortable doing all of these experiments on Epiphones and Squiers."

Cheating death from car crashes to house fires, Steve has lived to tell the tales via his new album

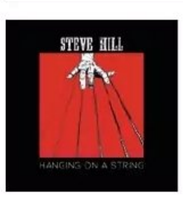
It sounds like there's quite a selection of fuzz and drive pedals on the new album, too?

"There's four pedals that I used. The first one is made by Madsen – that's a guy in the States [Maynard Madsen] – it's called the GE Boost. It's a treble booster, like a [Dallas] Rangemaster. The second one is made by RicoLabs and it's called They Call It Fuzz, and that's basically a [Colorsound] Tone Bender that they modified. Then I've got a Klon and then a Warmdrive by Warm Audio. And that's all I used: basically, I had the treble booster, the fuzz and the Klon on at all times and sometimes the Warm Audio."

> "I record everything live. I play the instruments at the same time. I had six days to do it in January, and I did it in five. We'd do three takes at the most"

Are you looking forward to getting out on the road and touring the album?

"Oh yeah. I'm packing my stuff today because I'm leaving for California. I've got some meetings there and we're shooting a video, and then I'm coming back at the end of the month. Hopefully I'll be able to come back to the UK in 2025. It has been way too long!" **[DM]**



Steve Hill's new album, *Hanging On A String*, is available now via No Label Records

www.stevehillmusic.com

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE



Give Me That Guitar!

Neville Marten recalls a soirée when a loud 'landed gentry' type grabbed a Taylor from Guthrie's hands and showed him "how to do it..."

You know the type: large, loud and Claret-cheeked, with brightly coloured corduroy trousers, cream shirt (with green-and-red stripes), khaki check-tweed waistcoat and big brown brogues. (Apologies to anyone wearing that exact get-up while reading this...) Well, many years ago Jason Sidwell of this parish, our good friend Damo and I used to run 'Guitar Breaks' teaching weekends. We'd book a nice hotel somewhere in the English countryside, arrange lunches, evening meals and so on, and would get 20 or so paying guests who'd come to up their playing game a bit. Jason was the 'professor', Damo did the organising, and I was the guy in the middle who helped Jase, added my ha'porth here and there, and played rhythm guitar or bass for the class.

"Dave rushed in, breathless and panicking, and said, 'I have to go back. I've left my Telecaster leaning up against a petrol pump, miles away...'"

Our ace in the hole was that we also hired one of *Guitar Techniques'* (RIP) top contributors as our star tutor. These included Dave Kilminster, Phil Hilborne, Jamie Humphries and Guthrie Govan. On one particular Guthrie weekend in Surrey, after the first day's tuition (where Mr Govan had enthralled everyone with his eloquence as a player and raconteur), our group was sitting in the hotel bar after dinner, relaxing with a drink. Someone had brought along a Taylor acoustic and, after it had been passed round to the few that dared to play in front of the great man, Guthrie began entertaining us with Stevie Wonder, Beatles and any pop or rock song that anyone called out or fancied singing.

Right in the middle of our jolly, an adjoining door swung open to where a rather posh wedding reception was happening. The aforementioned corduroy-clad character burst in, looked around, saw our motley crew in the corner and barged over. Grabbing the guitar from Guthrie's grasp he belted out at full Brian Blessed decibel levels, "I play the guitar, let me have a go," and proceeded to play and sing, 'Sweet Caroline... good times never seemed so good. I feel inclined...'

"There you are," he blurted, "that's how you do it..." and charged back through the door to rejoin his party. We sat there open-mouthed, but everyone saw the funny side and Guthrie continued where he'd left off.

Petrol Blues

Another time, Dave Kilminster came down to a hotel just outside Bath. He'd had a prior engagement so didn't arrive until 11pm, by which time we were all well ensconced in the establishment's watering hole. Dave rushed in, breathless and panicking, and said, "I have to go back. I've left my Telecaster leaning up against a petrol pump, miles away." He couldn't remember what fuel station it was and couldn't call them to check, so he simply had to retrace his steps and hope for the best. It was his lovely black 1972 Tele, and luckily it was still exactly where he'd left it. Talk about fortunate!

On that same weekend Dave told us he was awaiting a call from his manager, as he'd auditioned for a 'big name' artist and was on tenterhooks for a positive result. He wouldn't divulge who, but that artist turned out to be Pink Floyd's Roger Waters. Dave did indeed secure the gig and has been the bassist, singer and composer's guitarist ever since.

Like Guthrie, Dave was a funny, knowledgeable and inspirational tutor, and the students loved them both. But let's not forget Jason, whose musical expertise is vast, and who fielded the most technical questions, and wrote scales, modes and chords up on the board for people to photograph and take home for later digestion. We always tried to give our groups a few 'lightbulb' moments, and many times we received the plaudit, "That was the best weekend of my life."

Ian Edwards, ex of ACM in Guildford, now runs his own Guitar Breaks weekends, as does Tristan Seume, and Bridget and Milton Mermikides. Jason does his own occasional day courses in Bristol. Catch any of these if you can, as they're musically edifying, huge fun, plus you get to befriend other like-minded musicians. See you next time. G



NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH
Cheap & Very Cheerful

What? PRS SE NF3
Where seen? Peach Guitars **Price?** £799

Talking of Jason Sidwell, both he and Eddie Allen – who I play with in Marty Wilde's Wildcats – grabbed themselves one of these. They are stunning things with three Narrowfield pickups (from where the model derives its name), poplar body, bolt-on 635mm (25-inch) scale Wide Thin maple neck (with rosewood or maple 254mm/10-inch radius 'board) and, of course, PRS's renowned vibrato system. As with all SEs, the NF3 punches well above its weight, both build-wise and sonically. The slim humbucking pickups are crisply toned and the instruments play like butter. Jason got the metallic blue one (as here) and Eddie grabbed the metallic orange, both with rosewood 'boards. At this price, there's very little out there that comes close. Try one, I think you'll be shocked at how good it is.

AUDEN

Auden Maple series

Spruce top with flamed maple back and sides.
Models available: Chester, Emily Rose, and Grace

audenguitars.com +44 1933 391234

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER



Hands On

This month **Alex Bishop** ponders whether the robots will take over, or if they already have...

When I was considering a career as a guitar maker, one of the appealing aspects was the longevity of it. I could imagine a long life ahead of me still carving wood and building instruments well into my 'retirement'. If one manages to get by in an occupation that has already been rendered obsolete by technology, in my mind it's less likely anything new is going to come along to get in your way.

Of course, the challenge is to make that living in the first place. Why would anyone be interested in a product that took longer to make, if there is a cheaper alternative? Fortunately, guitars benefit from being made by hand in a carefully considered fashion. More sonic potential in the wood can be teased out, and the object is imbued with an almost supernatural aura when its story has been interwoven with the touch of a human hand. Consider how Jimi Hendrix's 1968 Fender Stratocaster sold for more than $1 million over 30 years after his legendary *Star-Spangled Banner* performance at 1969's Woodstock. Human hands put meaning into objects.

"What do we make of technology's slinking tentacles creeping their way into handmade guitar workshops around the world?"

What then, do we make of technology's slinking tentacles creeping their way into handmade guitar workshops around the world? With 3D printing and CNC machinery increasingly accessible to hobbyists (let alone full-time luthiers), I think opinions on the almost sacred status of hand tools among craftspeople could be starting to change. A recent reel I published of my latest guitar being bevelled with a chisel was watched thousands of times but not without viewers chiming in with something along the lines of "But WHY didn't you just use a router??".

I am part of a small lutherie collective that meets up twice a year or so to support each other and discuss the trials and tribulations of making it as a luthier. We were chatting frivolously over an indulgent burrito about whether it was possible to make a guitar using only a penknife when something struck me about our varied adoptions of technology. A couple of us admitted we would worship a sharpened chisel as the ultimate tool, whereas my talented buddy Ash would be more likely to offer his prayers to the CNC machine dominating his machine room. Most computer-led machines are being used to speed up a process or aid jig-making, but Ash's work is all about pushing the boundaries to pull off complex designs that my hand tools wouldn't even know where to start with.

Old Meets New

But it doesn't end with the raw woodwork, either. I've written before about my adoration of French polishing, a process developed centuries ago that uses natural resins secreted by insects living in trees to finish timber. Some, however, prefer modern finishes that are made up of synthetic polymers that harness industrial processes, require complex filtration systems, spray booths and more. When it comes to troubleshooting, the everyday luthier has to brush up on more than just their school chemistry lessons to be able to wrap their head around what's going on there.

When I look at my own lutherie journey, I guess it's been a slightly awkward marriage of convenience between old and new. I've used laser cutting to make templates and computer software to design my instruments, but I still depend heavily on my chisels and planes to pull it off. No longer do I hand-thickness every back and side, and instead prefer to use a powerful drum sander to get the majority of the work done – but I do finish the surface by hand with a sharpened cabinet scraper.

In lutherie there is always the economy of time to consider, but I've realised that when all is said and done, how I spend mine is most important to me: I will do things in the way that brings me most joy. What I love about guitar making is you can approach it in whatever way works for you. A stunning instrument can be crafted in any number of ways, but – just like Jimi Hendrix with his Strat – all that matters is that it is done with passion. G

Head to https://bit.ly/git518alex to watch Alex in action with his hand tools

Alex brings in a fine balance of both tech and tradition when creating his guitars



PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

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RAISING THE TONE



Double Vision

Jamie Dickson compares Gibson reissues of the hallowed '59 'Burst with boutique rivals and discovers just how different they can be

The VOS '59 Les Paul Standard and a brand-new Huber Orca '59 were both unimpeachably great guitars that scream 'high end'. But, mind-bogglingly, they were still the cheapest of the four we tried out by some margin, showing that cachet, cost and value are very much relative concepts, even at the rarified top end of the guitar market

This month former *Guitarist* editor Neville Marten and I ventured down to World Guitars in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire. A haven of high-end lutherie, the store is one of the most welcoming places to try top-drawer PRS, Gibson, Fender and Tom Anderson electrics, to name but a few premium brands it stocks. Intriguingly, the store also has quite a few Nik Huber electrics in at any one time, including – at the time of writing – three quite different examples of Nik's stunning Orca '59 model, which takes its inspiration, *quelle surprise*, from Gibson's celebrated 1959-spec Les Paul Standard. Nik Huber is no slavish copyist, however, but an extremely skilful and distinctive luthier, so the Orca '59 has various refinements and finessed details that the original never had – while keeping the main ingredients intact.

Gibson, for its part, is the only company who can make a '59 'Burst reissue with the right name on the headstock – and that's obviously a big deal if capturing the spirit of the originals is your aim. As you'd expect, the Custom Shop is the home of Gibson's highest-quality reissues, and World Guitars stocks many fine examples of its work, ranging from very mildly aged VOS 'Bursts to Collector's Choice exotica that mimics every scratch and wear mark of a specific, celebrated 'Burst that is known to aficionados as a particularly good surviving original example.



Intrigued, Nev and I thought we'd take the chance to sit down with both the modern, evolved take on the sound of 1959 Les Pauls – as interpreted by Nik Huber through his Orca '59s – and Gibson's own high-end reissues, which set the benchmark for complete fidelity to the originals. We had two examples of each: one 'merely' a high-end standard version of the model in question, and then one example that was really top of the tree in terms of craft, materials and cachet.

Killer Wails

Here's what we pulled down off the rack. On the Huber side, we grabbed a brand-new Nik Huber Orca '59 in Nitro Semi-Gloss Tobacco Sunburst, plus something rather special: a Nik Huber World Guitars 5th Anniversary Orca '59 Brazilian Limited, made back in 2014 to eponymously mark five years in business for World Guitars. Decked out with eye-popping amounts of the coveted Brazilian rosewood – right down to control knobs and switch tips – and all, of course, fully certificated, this guitar represents as high a spec in the world of boutique inspired-by-'Burst single-cuts as you can really get.

In the Gibson corner, we selected a '59 Les Paul Standard VOS (Vintage Original Sheen – Ed) Made 2 Measure Hand Selected Top. As our top-tier choice we picked out what Julian White of World Guitars said was one of the best-sounding single-cuts in the shop, a Collector's Choice #45A 1959 Aged Les Paul 'Danger 'Burst', created as an exact aged imitation of a specific surviving 'Burst that rejoices in that unusual moniker.

Which would our favourite be? Would the highest-tier guitars sound best? And would any of them match our mental template of what a '59 Les Paul should really be? Without further ado, we plugged into a Matchless SC30 head and also a Fender black-panel Deluxe Reverb reissue combo and began to compare and contrast.

Picking up the poshest of the already impeccably turned out Hubers, we A/B'd it with the more prestigious of the two Gibsons, the Collector's Choice replica of the improbably named 'Danger Burst', which we were told had its brace of Custombuckers wound hotter than usual to more closely imitate the specific guitar it is based on.

Sounds & Handling

Our first impressions were as follows. The Huber had abundant clarity, warmth and suppleness when played clean. Its expressive Häussel pickups were almost like playing a guitar with extra-fat, plummy single coils. From a tactile point of view, its impeccable satin finish and beautifully refined details – such as the sculpted neck joint, which permitted easier access to the higher frets – made it seem effortlessly comfortable to play. Turning to the 'Danger Burst', our impressions were also very enjoyable but quite different. Here, we found every scratch,



nick and ding of the character of a 70-year-old electric guitar faithfully replicated, compared with the Huber's silk-smooth sophistication. The clean tones were decidedly on the woody and vintage side, not as crisply defined or versatile, debatably, as the Huber 5th Anniversary but firmly rooted in a past where Peter Green played melodies of haunting beauty on a Lester.

Not for the first time, Nev and I were struck by how different two guitars made with broadly the same general ingredients can be. And that impression only grew stronger when we added a bit of overdrive to the equation

The Collector's Choice 'Danger 'Burst' carried authentic replication so far as to imitate a nitro top-coat blow-over that the original guitar it is based on had at some point

"Not for the first time, Nev and I were struck by how different two guitars made with broadly the same general ingredients can be"

– now the Gibson's woodier voice turned into beautiful splinters of jagged, vintage growl. That 60s British blues scene was just brought vividly and excitingly to life, exactly. The Huber, meanwhile, was more poised and composed and long-sustaining, almost Gilmourish. Boy, were these both great guitars. But we felt they would appeal to quite different players, or maybe the same player in quite different moods.

Time to pick up our 'less expensive' pair – though, of course, in this company, that was *very* much a relative term since the '59 Les Paul Standard VOS Made 2

See all four of these stunning guitars in action in an exclusive video demo filmed at World Guitars on the day by heading over to **www.bit.ly/guitaristextra**

THREE TO GET READY

Lesters For Less



Epiphone 1959 Les Paul Standard £1,199

The quality of Epiphone's revamped line of Gibson-inspired guitars has really impressed us, and you won't go far wrong with this deft interpretation of the 'Burst. It comes with Gibson Custombucker humbuckers, a nice figured veneer on its maple top, a one-piece mahogany neck with a fulsome '59 neck profile, plus that authentic Gibson-style 'open book' headstock shape.



Epiphone Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard £1,499

If you like Epi's 1959 Standard but crave something just a little bit different with Brit blues pedigree, we really liked the Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard. Unique to this model are details aping the celebrated original Greeny, including mismatched control knobs, Grover tuners and special USA-made Gibson Greenybucker pickups, with the neck unit, of course, reverse mounted with reverse polarity magnets. It sounds magnificent.



Epiphone Les Paul Classic £589

If you don't mind not having the Gibson-style headstock and a few more contemporary touches in the styling, the Epiphone Les Paul Classic is a very solid bet, streeting for around £500, with PAF-inspired uncovered Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, a very comfortable SlimTaper neck and nice hardware, including LockTone ABR bridge and Grover tuners.



Measure Hand Selected Top is currently on sale for just over £5k. We now pitted that against the brand-new Huber Orca '59, which may have lacked the Brazilian rosewood opulence of the 5th Anniversary model but lacked nothing in hand-crafted panache.

Plugging these in, we were greeted with some very interesting results. Firstly, the 'standard' Huber '59, built far more recently than the 5th Anniversary, seemed to occupy a Goldilocks-like 'just right' mid-point between the clarity and poise of the Huber 5th Anniversary and the vintage charm of the 'Danger Burst' reissue by Gibson Custom. It had loads of smooth, bell-like sustain but some juicy, old-fashioned chewiness, too. The Gibson '59 Les Paul Standard VOS, meanwhile, was just a delight. Perhaps not quite as woody as the 'Danger Burst', it just had bags of characterful edge and snarl. It felt like everything a really good Les Paul of any era should be: stinging, singing, ringing. And while, cosmetically, it didn't have the artful battle scars of the Collector's Choice, it felt as comfortable as a favourite pair of worn-in jeans and played beautifully.

Thoughts & Conclusions

So what real-world conclusions were we able to draw from this rather gentrified dust-up between modern interpretations of the fabled 1959 Les Paul Standard and the faithful reissues? Well, firstly, diminishing returns is a real thing. Some five grand or so separates the Gibson '59 Les Paul Standard VOS we tried, which is already a very high-end guitar, and the Collector's Choice 'Danger Burst'. For sure, the detailing on the latter is insane and so evocative, as is its incredible sound, especially when driven. But the VOS sounded just fabulous, too. It's hard to conceive of anyone feeling disappointed by its on-paper 'lower spec'.

The level of ornamentation and maxed-out specs on the 5th Anniversary '59 Orca by Huber puts it *way* into the realm of modern exotica.High-cachet details, opulent materials and impeccable craft define the upper reaches of the electric guitar market. But great sounds can be had at a more basic level, too

"Despite having the same classic sound as a template, the character of the Gibsons and the Hubers was distinctively different"

At this end of the market, top money buys forensically aged details, incredible craft and high-cachet extras, but you won't necessarily hear £5k's worth of difference in the sonic performance. I thought the 'Danger Burst' sounded best of the Gibsons, while Nev thought the VOS had the coolest tone. So any tonal differences between them are in the realm of subjectivity, not quantifiable 'better' or 'worse'.

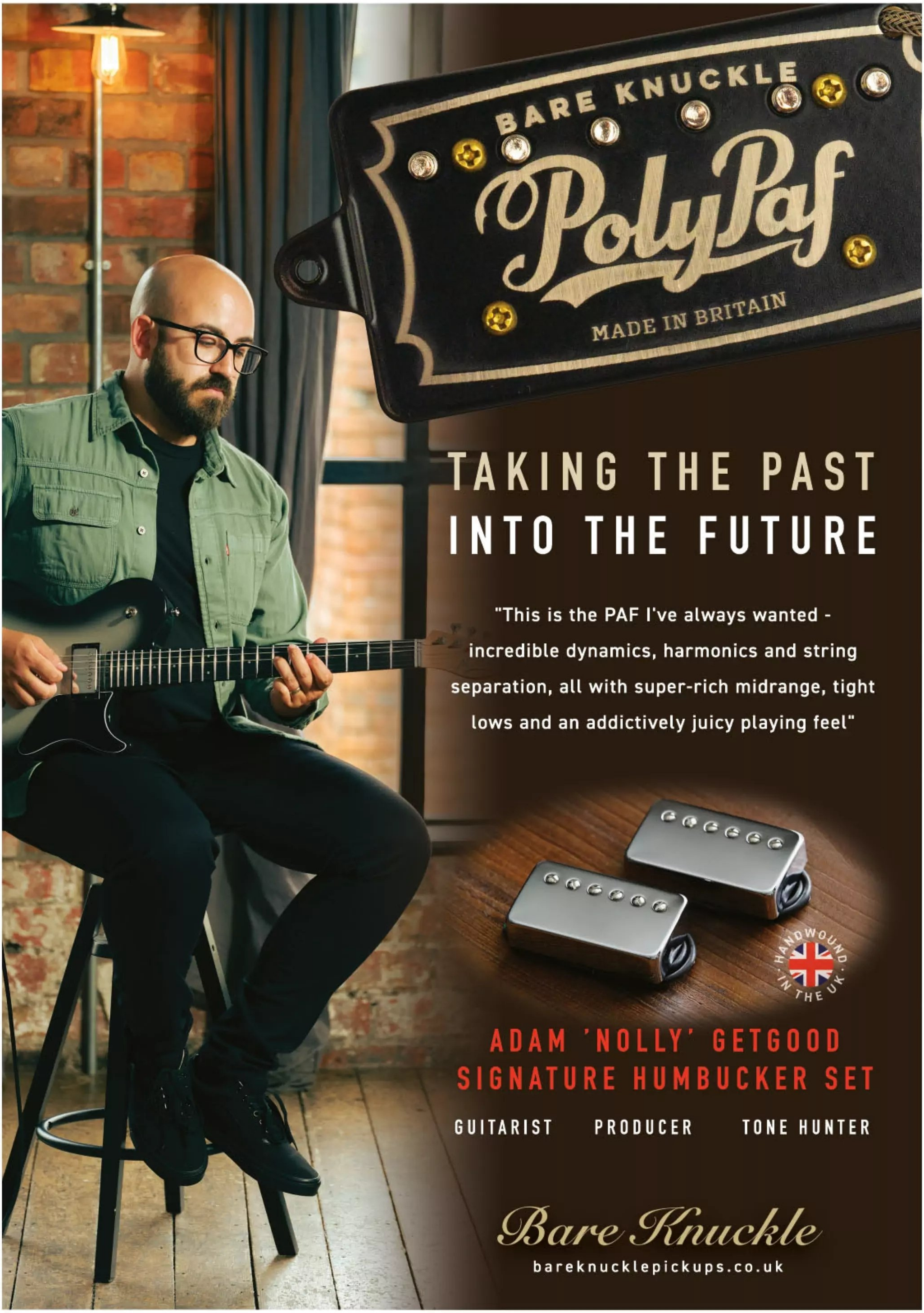
The same is true of the Orcas. Without any kind of disrespect to the frankly stunning 5th Anniversary, Nev and I probably enjoyed the standard, new Orca '59 just as much if not slightly more. We confess we don't know how much or little Harry Häussel has evolved the construction of his PAF-like pickups in the years between the 5th Anniversary being built and today, but we really felt the touch of extra vintage vibe in the sound of the newer, less pricey Orca '59 was welcome. But here's that reality check again – our 'less expensive' Orca is still £6,495! That's a gulp-inducing amount of dosh for a new electric guitar, though we have no compunction in adding that the level of craft and sonic performance it embodies is exceptional.

But we must also say, in enjoying these incredible guitars, that it is not necessary to spend this much to get a nice Les Paul under your fingers. Epiphone's Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard sounded and played absolutely great when we reviewed it a while back, for example, and that streets for just over a grand. But if beautiful lutherie, exquisite details and small but significant incremental gains in performance are what you want, guitars at this level are where you'll get it – if you can afford it.

The second realisation we had is that, despite having the same classic sound as a template, the character of the Gibsons and the Hubers was distinctively different. The Gibsons really had that old-guitar vibe and mid-60s Blues Invasion sound. The Hubers had it, too, but in a subtly more contemporary and finely finessed guise. One might say they offered stellar performance with vintage roots. In other words, you really would have to try both to see which suited you best, especially at these prices. As you'd expect with instruments of this quality, there were no bad choices, only different kinds of great – but those differences could mean a lot to you as an individual player.

Above all, if you were lucky enough to be in the market for a guitar like one of these, we'd say it's essential to play all the guitars you like the look of plus a few you maybe weren't considering. That 'click' moment when you really take to a guitar only happens by playing it, not just admiring its looks or its spec from afar. G

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Altered & Extended Chords

Richard Barrett explains the theory behind these kinds of chords, and how you'll actually use them in practice

Terms such as 'altered' and 'extended' chords are relatively simple to explain. Extended chords add other notes from the scale to the existing Root-3rd-5th triad (for example, C-E-G), so if we add a 7th, we'd call this a major 7th chord (C-E-G-B). We can extend up to a 13th in this way by progressively adding in the non-chord tones of a scale – in theory, at least. In practice, Root-3rd-5th-7th-9th-11th-13th played simultaneously makes for a dense, almost dissonant voicing. On guitar we'd struggle because we only have six strings, plus a limited reach and number of fingers! So we tend to omit non-essential notes. The 5th is often the first to go, then the 11th gets the chop in 13th chords for clarity.

Altered chords contain non-diatonic notes – that is, notes that have been raised or lowered from their usual place in the scale. The examples below provide further explaination! G

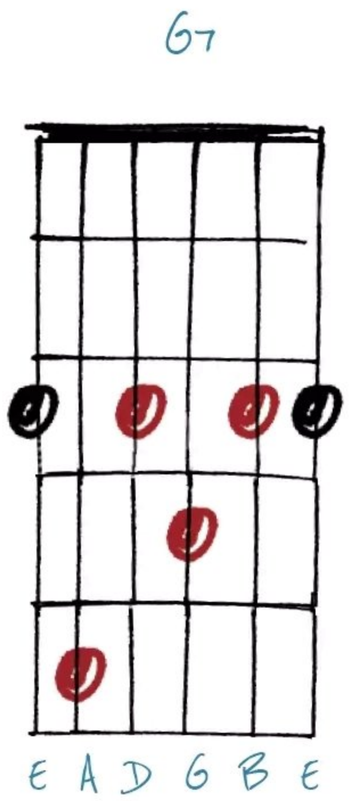


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Jimi Hendrix often used #9 chords, along with other interesting voicings

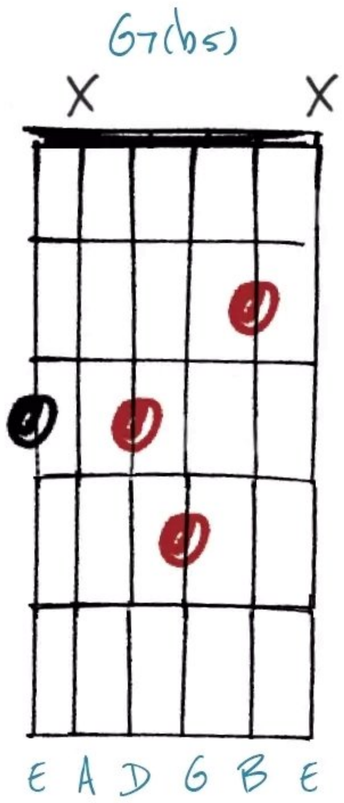
Example 1

As a reference point, here is a G7 chord. These contain a ♭7th, which is referred to as the dominant 7th (and not considered as 'altered' in the theoretical sense). From low to high, we have G-D-F-B-D-G. Two roots (G), one 3rd (B) one dominant 7th (F) and two 5ths (D). Try not to let the non-linear nature of the guitar distract you from music theory's basic principles.



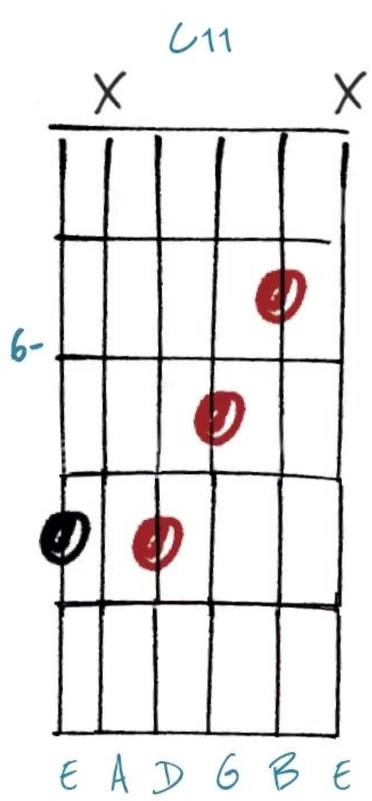
Example 2

An altered version of the G7 in Example 1 could be this, a G7(♭5). Let's talk it through from low to high: the Root (G) is at the bottom, followed by the muted fifth string, coincidentally where the 5th (D) would also appear. Next, we have the ♭7th (F) and the major 3rd (B). All fairly standard apart from the omitted 5th. The ♭5th (D♭) is where the alteration happens, on the second string.



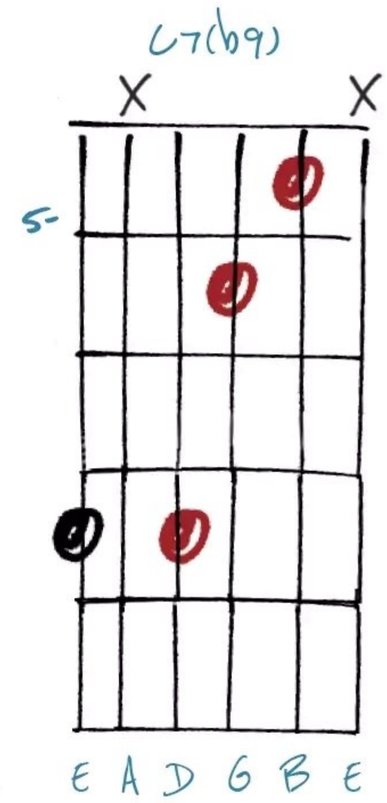
Example 3

Taking another chord as a reference, here's a C11. From low to high, we have: Root (C) - dominant 7th (B♭) - 9th (D) - 11th (F). Again, the 5th is omitted, which helps with fingering on the guitar, but it's also common practice to stop chords becoming too harmonically dense and hard for our brains to decipher!



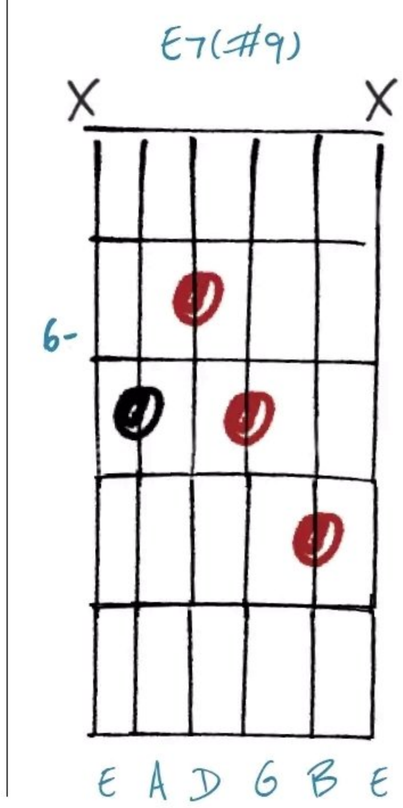
Example 4

An altered version of the C11 in Example 3 could be this, a C7(♭9). We've lost our 11th (F) by shifting it down to an E at the 5th fret of the second string. This becomes the major 3rd, so there's no need to name it separately. However, we do have a D♭ on the third string, a semitone below the 9th from the previous C11 chord. This is our altered note.



Example 5

The E7(#9) is a very well-known chord, but it's interesting to look at it from this perspective. If we take it from low to high, we see: Root (E) - major 3rd (G#) - dominant 7th (D) - #9th (G). If you take that G at the top down to F#, we're looking at a regular E9 chord.



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When it comes to the Gibson Les Paul Junior, the power of simplicity is not to be understated

JUNIOR HIGH

Thank you for your absolutely outstanding feature celebrating 70 years of the Gibson Les Paul Junior. I have to confess that I have ashamedly dismissed this guitar throughout my 35 years of playing, largely due to the fact that I had always felt that this particular style of Les Paul simply didn't look very nice. However, your article encouraged me to look beyond the aesthetics and to really appreciate what this fine instrument has to offer. Additionally, what this instrument has done to inspire the next generation to learn the guitar – supported, of course, by high-profile artists such as Billy Joe Armstrong and Joan Jett proudly taking them to the stage – is in itself a wondrous thing.

Perhaps most importantly, Barrie Cadogan's video demo of Rory Gallagher's gems beautifully presented how great these guitars can sound. Safe to say this feature has allowed me to set aside my shallow preconceptions and to give the Junior the respect it deserves.

Craig Isherwood

Thanks Craig, we're delighted we helped you see the light with Juniors! Their simplicity is deceptive as Barrie demonstrated so beautifully, and they really invite us to embrace great core sounds and focus on expressing ourselves. As many great players have observed, creativity thrives on the right kind of limitations; if we only have one exquisite tone to work with, that will still be more inspiring than 20 mediocre ones.

STAR LETTER

EASTERN PROMISE

I would like to suggest an article about the era of really good Japanese knock-offs. I started out as a guitar player in the late 80s and, like everybody else, I longed for real USA-made Gibsons and Fenders, although I had already heard rumours about Japanese Ibanez, Fender, Tokai and Fernandes copies that were at least as good. Over the years I've owned a 70s USA-made Les Paul Custom, an SG Standard, a 90s USA Fender Stratocaster and a heavily modified 70s Telecaster Deluxe. These guitars weren't all that good and are gone now.

I started collecting some Japanese copies that are at least as good as real ones: a really outstanding 1984 Squier JV Stratocaster that I bought cheap in 1991, a 1985 Yamaha Lord Player LP Standard copy that stays in tune far better than my old, real 70s LP and plays and sounds at least as nice, and a 1978 Custom Les Paul special with P-90s, set neck and mahogany body. All very well made and sounding guitars. Earlier this year I got myself a 90s Japanese Fender Telecaster. These copies are getting quite rare now and some have become really expensive, like the Squier JV series Strats and Teles or the Tokai Reborn LP copies. Maybe *Guitarist* could shed some light on the era of great Japanese copies of the 80s?

Peter Urbanus

Thanks Peter, you're in luck – we have a major feature on this subject coming very soon. We find Japanese guitars a fascinating subject, too, not least because the quality-to-price balance of these guitars has always been very attractive. There is also the mystique of the guitars made just for the Japanese market, the whole era of the 'Lawsuit' guitars, shred's pointed emergence and much more.



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

It was great reading the Star Letter from 11-year-old Declan Wells in last month's *Guitarist* and how he has such a great passion for guitars. I am an old man of 77 who started playing at the age of 14 and whose passion for the instrument is still as strong as ever.

I first began playing in bands in 1964 when amateur beat groups were such a big thing. Back then in London, and in many other big cities, loads of pubs would have beat groups playing each weekend. The money was pretty poor, but playing regularly for two or more hours was a great training ground for would-be musicians. In the late 60s and into the 70s I turned professional and was fortunate to play in bands that played support to some big acts of the day.

Now, after all these years, I still take my guitar along to small local folk clubs a couple of times a month and play. I also play banjo, mandolin and autoharp, and as much as I love these instruments they cannot be so readily adaptable to so many different genres of music as the guitar. Playing the guitar is indeed a most addictive yet pleasurable way of life.

Dennis Homes

Thanks Dennis, everything you've written is really the soul of what is most enjoyable and life-enhancing about guitar: 'making music with our friends', to paraphrase Willie Nelson. Even regular jam sessions with pals just give full purpose to the guitars we love and, as you say, it is a well of happiness we can draw upon for life.

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

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- **Gibson Vintage Original Instrument Cable (20ft)**
- **Handcrafted Wooden Stand**
- **The Montana strap**
- **Coated Phosphor Bronze Acoustic strings**
- **Vintage Reissue Electric guitar strings**
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- **Mobile Tech Tool Kit**

All you have to do in order to be in the running for the big prize is head to the link below and answer our brain teaser. It's as simple as that. Good luck!

Who was the inventor of Gibson's celebrated humbucking pickup?

A) Hugh Liker
B) Seth Lover
C) Chas Fonder

CLOSING DATE: 3 FEBRUARY 2025

Make sure you enter before the closing date at

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Terms and conditions: By taking part you agree to be bound by these terms and the competition rules at https://www.futureplc.com/competition-rules/. The opening date for entries is 00:00 (UK Time) on 30 November 2024 and will close at 23:59 (UK Time) on to 3 February 2025. The competition is free to enter and entries must be submitted via http://bit.ly/git519gibson. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Entries are limited to one per individual. Open to all UK residents aged 18 and over, except employees of Future Publishing Limited ("Future") and any party involved in the competition. There will be one winner entitled to the featured items and selected at random. The winner will be randomly drawn from all valid entries received and shall be notified by Future by email or telephone within 14 days of the closing date. Upon notification the winner will be required to supply details of a UK delivery address. If a winner has not responded after two weeks of being notified that they are a winner, an alternative winner will be drawn. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative.

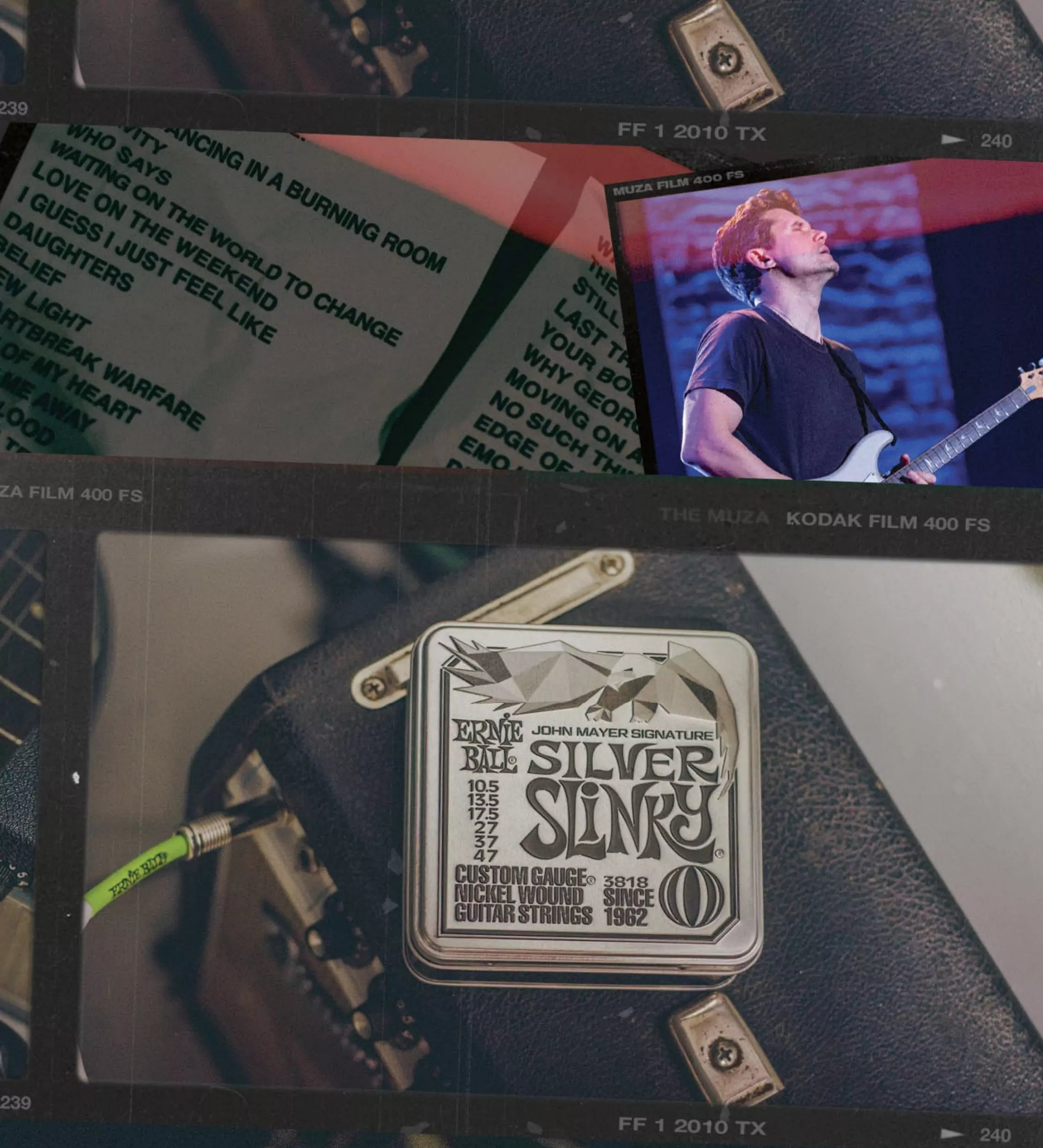

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PHOTO BY ALEX BROWN

Orianthi

The former guitarist for Michael Jackson and Alice Cooper has survived the trials and tribulations of the pop industry, emerging with a new energy and sound that honours her true inspirations and talents

Words Andrew Daly



Orianthi is busy as hell. She's riding high after her last two records – 2020's *O* and 2022's *Rock Candy* – showed the world that she's not only a great singer and performer but a rip-roarin' titan on guitar, too. It wasn't always that way, though, not that people knew any better. Had the music industry had its way, Orianthi – who had a massive pop hit with her 2009 single *According To You* – would have been chewed up and spat out. But that's not how it went down. And the best part is that now it's Ori's way or the highway.

"I've been through a lot in this industry," she tells *Guitarist*. "I really have [sighs]. I manage myself; I'm doing business 24/7. I have an incredible team around me, but, ultimately, I make the final decisions. In the beginning, being signed in such a big situation and having a whole circus around me... To be honest, as I've gotten older, I've realised that life is short, and every day when you wake up do something a little different."

Orianthi has gone from topping the pop charts to integrating herself deeply within the blues, rock and guitar spaces. From the outside looking in, her rise and subsequent pivot seemed easy – but it wasn't. "I hate the music business," she insists. "But I love music. God, I love it so much."

Which is why Ori is recording not one but two records. The first, a blues-rock-leaning affair produced by Kevin Shirley, and the second, an Eddie Kramer-produced jam-meets-psych record with drummer Cindy Blackman Santana and bassist Rhonda Smith; the latter album is another animal altogether.

As for how she balances it all, she says: "Gratitude is very important. So many successful people are miserable and, honestly, I wasn't enjoying myself at the beginning. I was very unhappy, alone and upset. I was constantly going, 'I'm not good enough. I need people to help me.'"

But it's not like that any more. "Everything we need is within ourselves," she says. "Taking the time to find it is part of your journey as a human. I'm very into the spiritual realm because everything has an energy around it that resonates. And when you hear it, that moves you."

Few have been able to wrench themselves from the clutches of pop stardom and pivot toward halcyon guitar infamy, but Orianthi has. And yet she's chill about it, aiming to be a positive force for others, rather than leading with an ego.

"You can be a [woman] in this industry and be successful," she says. "I learned from guys, but my whole thing is it doesn't matter if you love playing. You just play, right? If you dedicate your time to what you love, it doesn't matter if you're male or female. That's really important. It's about being your own person, going with it and being authentic."

1. Orianthi has recently hit the studio with two legendary producers, Kevin Shirley and Eddie Kramer, for forthcoming – and contrasting – album releases in 2025

2. The new signature Oriverb from Orange Amps is a twin-channel, dual-EL34 powered 2x12 valve combo, with lightweight neodymium Celestion Creamback speakers. It was designed in collaboration with Orange's Pat Foley

You've dialled in your sound over your last couple of records. What's been the key to that?
"I'm trying to get better. I've never stopped learning and want to be a better guitar player. I also want to be a better singer and songwriter because everyone has their own mind, fingerprint and journey. There were quite a few records where I was told the parameters, like, 'This is what you have to do. You have to make a heavy record,' or 'You have to make a pop record.'

"I was told what to do, but I wanted to play guitar. There's freedom in that. You learn that there's people out there that you'll find who think they own you... but the label I'm working with now [Woodward Avenue Records] truly believes in me as an artist."

Are your two latest tracks, *First Time Blues* and *Ghost*, indicators of where you're going?
"Yes. And soon we're putting out *Some Kind Of Feeling* [available now], which is quite different. I wrote *Some Kind Of Feeling* a while ago on acoustic and it's got a soul kind of feel. People might think it's quite a departure, but I figured, 'You know what? I put out enough heartbreak songs. Why not put out a happy song to manifest some good shit?'

"I don't want to be a person who only writes songs about a horrible relationship. This is about love, connection, what music does and what somebody can do when they come into your life. It can be love, a friend or a person... It's just about feeling good. Life is all about connections for me, and this song represents that. I really dig the new vibe... it's really different."

It's part of a larger album you're working on with Kevin Shirley. But you're also working on another album with Eddie Kramer.
"So [I] self-produced *First Time Blues* and *Ghost*; the rest of the album is produced by Kevin Shirley. He's a master, he's freakin' great. My solo album is coming out, and Kevin and I are producing it.

"The second record I'm doing is a side project, a supergroup with Cindy Blackman Santana and Rhonda Smith. It's a three-piece, like a Band Of Gypsys vibe but the tunes are commercial and we hope to reach a lot of people. We've moulded our own sound with Eddie Kramer. It's an honour to record with him and I'm excited for everyone to hear. We're nearly done with that record – so it's two."

How has Eddie impacted you as a guitarist?
"He's a legend, incredible, and he definitely has brought out something that other producers haven't with his energy alone. Eddie focuses on getting the right microphone placement and works his magic. He's always twiddling around with the knobs in the studio and getting the right compression and settings. It's very old-school and interesting. I love watching Eddie in the studio when he's panning and doing wild shit. We did a 25-minute jam, which will be on the record, and he had to mix that. He was sweating afterward! We go off on these tangents. I don't know... we're on some weird frequency where we cut it and it was just wild. And Eddie, because I'm such a huge Hendrix fan, I respect him so much. He suggests things like, 'Why don't you try this amplifier, this setting, this pedal or this guitar?' I'll try whatever he calls for, you know? My heart is open. Being in the studio with Eddie Kramer and Kevin is an honour."

How does working with Kevin Shirley compare?
"He gets such a great sound and incredible guitar tones. We'll do takes until I get it right, and it's just very inspiring. Kevin does things a different way. The way he mics things up and goes through things with me, like, 'Yeah, this guitar didn't work too bad,' or 'Maybe we'll try this at this part,' it's really wonderful. I'm grateful to have them both on these records coming out next year."

Is there a throughline between the two projects?
"With Eddie, I kind of got into the psychedelic realm of my childhood from when I was 14 or 15, when I was just sitting in my room, listening to Hendrix and experimenting. With Eddie, there's a lot more searching – and with Kevin, it's more structured in how I approach the solos. Is that intentional? Well, it's structured with both but wildly structured with Eddie. I want the sounds to be different. I don't want people



PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN GARCIA COURTESY OF ORANGE



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE

to go, 'Yeah, this group project sounds the same as her solo album,' you know? I don't want people to say, 'Oh, her guitar playing always sounds the same.' I want to be inspired differently, so the energy is different."

There's been significant progression across your records. Was there a moment when you felt you'd finally found yourself as a guitarist?

"We're constantly evolving as humans. I'm constantly evolving as a guitar player. I have a fingerprint of the way I play, which is maybe a mix of Carlos Santana meets Stevie Ray Vaughan meets Gary Moore and whatever else. I put all my influences in, but at the end of the day, I like to experiment. I don't consider myself to be just a singer, or just a guitarist, or just this or that, you know? It's all of those things. It's always evolving and I hope that when I'm much older, I can go, 'Man, that record, I'm really proud of that.'"

"Being a pop artist and having people say you're not good enough is pretty messed up... Being authentic is very important"

Are you getting that vibe from the music you're making now?

"These next two, honestly, I feel they're the best ones I've made in my career. It feels like there's more freedom and I'm putting less pressure on myself. I just want to be remembered as an artist who inspired people with every song. And I don't want to bore myself, either, because I get bored easily [laughs], so it's an open-minded approach."

Are there certain guitars that lead to that open-mindedness?

"Absolutely! I've gotten into a habit – or a good habit, depending on how you look at it – of buying vintage guitars. I love my '63 Strat, which I use a lot. I've got a '61 Tele, which I use a lot, and I have my 1962 ES-335, which I just got, and I've absolutely fallen in love with that guitar!

3. The new Oriverb looks to the sound of a rare Dumble amp that Orianthi had the pleasure of playing in the company of its creator, plus iconic Marshall and Fender-style tones. Meanwhile, her PRS signature remains by her side. "The sound of PRS is like a Ferrari," she says. "It's a smooth guitar and everything just works. They're pieces of art, too"

PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE

"I love older guitars because they hold different energy. They're all personalities and I like to surround myself with them. My house is literally crystals, guitars, amplifiers, Buddhas and cats. It's very eccentric there [laughs]. But yeah, vintage guitars can be like spiritual healers. It's so interesting."

What got you into vintage guitars?
"When you hit a chord on one, it's like a grand piano or something. I just love recording with them because you just hit a chord, like with this 1800s parlour guitar I have, it just sounds different. It's warmer, though tuning is a pain in the ass [laughs]. I don't like taking it on the road.

"I don't think that [vintage guitars] should be out on the road. They shouldn't be workhorses because they've already been workhorses for many, many years since they're vintage. So, for me, they're best used in the studio. But it's fun... I work really hard and spend my money on some guitars that I feel are right."

And the vintage gear is very different from your signature PRS model.
"PRS has been incredibly supportive since I was young. I have my signature models, the purple one, my main one, and now I have a white one, my second main one. I use those a lot because they have all the elements... the sound of PRS is like a Ferrari. It's a very smooth guitar and everything just works. It's sort of a combination of Fender and Gibson together, and they're pieces of art, too."

"We're constantly evolving as humans. I'm constantly evolving as a guitar player... I like to experiment"

Elsewhere, you've got a new signature amp with Orange, the Oriverb.
"That amp took a couple of years to make. Pat Foley, one of my very dear friends, and I designed it together. We went back and forth to dial it in. People think, 'Oh, it's just another Rockerverb combo, but it's white.' But we've changed a lot of things, from the speakers to the tubes to the reverb and the distortion. You can really push it like a vintage amp. It will be out soon, and for the price [it streets around £2,399], you can't find such a rich-sounding and full reverb."

Did you model the Oriverb after vintage amps?
"Absolutely. I had the honour of sitting with Alexander Dumble long ago when he was alive. I went to his home, plugged into all his amps, and he let me play the first amp that he ever made. I never forgot the sound of that amp. So it's got a bit of Dumble sound mixed with an old Marshall and a Fender Twin. It's got a sound that cuts through and has high-end when you bring up the mids and the treble. But, ultimately, it's warm-sounding and well rounded."

When you reflect on your journey, from where you started to where you are now, what sticks out most?
"God... I don't know. I don't get proud of anything. Just standing up for myself more, saying, 'This is how I feel as an artist and this is what I want to do.' You get beaten down when you're in the pop world. I did that for many years. Being a pop artist and having people saying you're not good enough is pretty messed up. Half the shit that goes down, supposedly needing a songwriter, being told you can't write a hit song or you're not thin enough... It's crazy. You're never good enough, need media training, and are told all this crazy shit until you say, 'What the fuck?' We're all individuals who should be celebrated in different ways. Now, I've learned that being who you are and being authentic is very important."

You easily could have been swallowed up by the machine, but you weren't. That's also something to be proud of.
"It's not easy. When you come out as a pop artist and you go, 'I actually grew up listening to Hendrix, Santana and the blues,' people say, 'Wait a second... no, you're a pop singer.' They frown upon it – you know, the blues community, the purists, or whatever they call themselves. It's like, 'What's she doing here?'"

Do you feel more accepted now?
"The last couple of years, with the new sound, I've been more accepted where people say, 'Okay, cool. She's ventured off now.' As scary as that can be – because people expect a certain thing and you don't want to lose the audience. The main thing is to feel good and have a positive message. Life is colourful. I'm self-managed, so every day I wake up and deal with 101 things. It's a lot, but I work hard to pay my spiritual healers to keep myself sane in this business [laughs]."



4. Orianthi recently added this 1962 ES-335 to her growing collection of vintage guitars – and she's made an exception to her rule of keeping her vintage instruments strictly in the studio by taking this 'new' addition out on stage

PHOTO BY SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES



Orianthi's *Some Kind Of Feeling* single is available now via Woodward Avenue Records. For more news and info, head to the website **www.orianthi.me**

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GUITARS



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GEAR OF THE YEAR

The greatest tones from 12 months of testing and digesting all that's great in guitar in 2024

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis



It's been one of those years where you feel a shift in the tide of guitar culture. And tides don't generally change violently but simply flow or ebb until you turn round and realise a new vista has been revealed by the change in the waters. Over the past 12 months of reviewing gear in *Guitarist*, we've seen the past and the future united with more harmony than before in guitars such as the Powers Electric A-Type on this very page but also in deftly designed pedals such as the J Rockett Airchild that capture the spirit of classic gear in a sharp, compact and usable form.

As always, our Gear Of The Year contenders have been drawn from the ranks of guitars, amps and effects that won either a *Guitarist* Choice Award or the coveted 10/10 Gold Award. So if you find a piece of gear in the following pages, you know it's passed our most rigorous scrutiny and emerged a worthy winner in the tone stakes. From affordable entry-level electrics to must-have mods, we hope our victors in this year's *Guitarist* Gear Of The Year edition will bring new sounds and inspirations to your own music making. So, without further ado, it's time to name the champs...

BOSS
刀
EFFECTS
EQUALIZER
BANK
TONE SETTING
RESONANCE
PRESENCE
MASTER
SOLO
LINE OUT
GLOBAL EQ
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
VOLUME
POWERS
ELECTRIC
AIRCHILD
JADEKETT AUDIO DESIGNS

GEAR OF THE YEAR

MAINSTREAM ELECTRICS

A quartet of gig-ready workhorses that won't break the bank

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***



Vintage REVO Series Trio

While most brands seem to be introducing individual models and small collections, Vintage started the year with a whopping 15 new REVO Series designs. Among the diverse range, all designed by industry veteran Alan Entwistle (also behind the Rapier brand), is one of the more original T-inspired builds we've seen. We get a lightweight okoume body and, as the name suggests, three Entwistle J90A single coils with a pair of three-way lever pickup-selector switches – oh, and an offset vibrato! We said: "As a Jazzmaster in Tele dress, it's light in weight, has very evocative sounds and a super-smooth vibrato." Boutique in concept, bargain in price.

Price: ***£449*** *Website:* ***www.vintageguitarsrus.com***



PJD St John Apprentice

York-based maker PJD Guitars has built an enviable reputation for its highly competent yet very affordable Standard range models, which start at £1,200 – far from expensive for a UK-made instrument. The new 2024-spec Apprentice (available direct from PJD only) uses the same offset obeche body and maple bolt-on neck as the Standard version, but just comes hardtail with a single hand-wound PJD Wadfather humbucker and volume control. It's also available in the single-cut Carey outline: simply superb craft that includes a Plek setup. We said: "This isn't a guitar where you want to sweat the specs and details. It just needs a stage."

Price: ***£899*** *Website:* ***www.pjdguitars.com***



Chapman Law Maker Legacy

2024 saw a complete rejig of Chapman's expansive range and a move to the Harmony Musical Instrument factory in India. So what? Well, it's all about quality, and this Law Maker Legacy (also available as a baritone) features an Indian rosewood 'board and neck, plus the hardtail T-style also has a Seymour Duncan Alternative 8 Trembucker at the bridge and Little '59 humbucker at the neck. We said: "Sound-wise, it might be voiced for gain, but the split-coil options on the five-way add some cleaner-aimed sounds, and there are plenty of lower-powered pickups that can be easily swapped in. A pretty resonant, lively instrument that could be taken in numerous directions."

Price: ***£1,099*** *Website:* ***www.chapmanguitars.co.uk***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

UNEXPECTED DELAY *by Jamie Dickson*



"This year I finally completed my longstanding quest to find the perfect delay pedal for my 'board. I'm a fan of darker-sounding digital and chewy analogue delays – nothing too pristine for me. But I also really wanted a delay that could go into momentary self-oscillation (those crazy cascades of ever-more-intense repeats) and that had modulation, tap tempo and also let you set the note value of the delay. Oh, and I also wanted it to be the same size as a normal compact pedal!

"Well, I'm pleased to say I found a pedal that could do all that: the Crazy Tube Circuits TI:ME. It sounds and works exactly as I wanted – so well, in fact, that it took me ages to realise they'd omitted a dedicated knob for setting the time value. In other words you use the tap tempo for everything in that department. I actually find this totally fine. But could you live with that compromise to fit in all the other stuff? If not, what would you leave off instead? Either way, it's a fab pedal and I expect it to stay on the 'board for a very long time."



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

PRS SE CE 24 Standard Satin

With PRS just shy of its 40th anniversary in 2025, it's been the company's SE line that has grabbed the headlines this year. For over two decades now the SEs have been lauded as the 'affordable' PRS guitars, but this satin version of the only-just-released gloss SE CE 24 has to be under-priced in anyone's book. In PRS terminology, 'Standard' refers to an all-mahogany body, and that's what we have here, originally launched in three colours with three more metallic colours added recently, such as our pictured Ice Blue Metallic.

Crafted by PRS's manufacturing partner Cor-Tek in Indonesia, our original review sample was gig-ready from the off, complete with standard SE gigbag. Like the original CE – which dates back to PRS's very early years – we get a 24-fret, 635mm (25-inch) scale bolt-on maple neck, here with the Wide Thin profile. Meanwhile, the hardware is the same that's used on other SEs, and PRS's USA S2 and Bolt-On models, and includes the well tried-and-tested all-steel PRS-designed vibrato. It's a simple drive with dual PRS 85/15 'S' humbuckers that can be split via the pull-switch tone control.

We said: "For any player, at any level, needing to cover a lot of sounds, this really takes some beating: the pared-down essence of PRS, if you like, and a guitar we really can't fault."

Price: ***£499*** ***Website:*** ***www.prsguitars.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

MAINSTREAM ELECTRICS

Classic shapes upgraded for the modern musician

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***



Fender Vintera II ’50s Jazzmaster

Once upon a time, the Fender offset was a much-derided guitar, but you don’t need us to tell you it’s had quite a resurgence in popularity in recent years – and that’s an understatement! Refreshed at the end of 2023, the Mexican-made Vintera II line focuses on vintage specs, so expect a small-radius ’board and small-gauge fretwire. But with its vintage-style 50s single-coil Jazzmaster pickups, not to mention the original-style dual control circuits, this is a blast from the past that looks, plays and sounds the part without vintage issues or price. We said: “There’s a reason why this guitar has eventually become quite a classic.” And, for many, *that* vibrato is still the best!

Price: ***£1,099*** ***Website:*** ***www.fender.com***



Yamaha Pacifica Standard Plus PACS+12M

Hey, it’s Yamaha, a brand that won’t be hurried and certainly doesn’t introduce anything that isn’t pretty perfect. The long-running Pacifica – one of the world’s best-selling guitars ever – finally got a makeover for this year. But there wasn’t a huge new range, just two models: the Professional, made in Japan, and this knockout Indonesian version that’s virtually identical and pretty much £1k less expensive. With plenty of Yamaha hi-tech in its design, the body uses the brand’s Acoustic Design Technology, and there are also the superb-sounding Reflectone single coils designed in collaboration with Rupert Neve Designs. Yes, it’s a super-S but definitely one to try.

Price: ***£1,259*** ***Website:*** ***http://uk.yamaha.com***



Manson Verona Junior

The Manson brand goes back to the early days of the British guitar industry and is now co-owned by Muse main-man Matt Bellamy. And while the small Ashburton-based team builds plenty of other-worldly axes for Matt, this single-pickup Junior (also available in the single-cut MA outline) is aimed at no-nonsense rockers of any level. Aside from a superb ultra-lightweight build (solid obeche body and bolt-on maple neck) and pro-level setup and stability, the ‘hot PAF’ Manson Dirty Rascal (with its series/parallel ‘Mojo’ push-push switched volume control) is quite the rock all-rounder. It comes with a kill-switch, too, and a Mono gigbag. Stupidly good.

Price: ***£1,399*** ***Website:*** ***www.mansonguitarworks.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

POWER OF ONE *by David Mead*



“In the past 33 years of writing for guitar mags I must have interviewed dozens of players from the 60s and 70s who have all told me that the idea of having a ‘guitar collection’ as such was an absurdity back then. Very few players could afford more than, at best, a main guitar, perhaps a spare and maybe an acoustic, but that was it. Your guitar was *your instrument*, and if there was anything about it you didn’t get on with, you simply sold it and bought something else.

“I now know many players who have amassed quite an assemblage of guitars and I wonder whether a lot of the time it’s difficult to see the wood for the trees. There have been many days where option anxiety ruled the room and rather than adjust my technique I’ve spent way too long selecting ‘the right tool for the job’. Perhaps pouring all of our efforts into a single instrument and not convincing ourselves that ‘it would sound much better on my Les Paul’ would make us all more focused and, dare I say it, better players? Certainly food for thought.”



PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN

Gibson Les Paul Studio

Along with pulling in a constant stream of limited rockstar models, with prices to match, Gibson hasn't forgotten the practising and working musician. Earlier in the year, the wraps came off the new satin-finished Modern Studio, followed by the all-gloss, less expensive Studio that we have on review in this issue (see page 98). And before the year is out there will be a third sub-£2k Studio, too!

For many of us, the Studio was always the gateway Les Paul: good enough until you could afford the higher levels. Typically unbound (both body and neck), the Studio nonetheless always sounded the part and, of course, has become a modder's favourite. But this new 2024 model might change that: it's one of the most fit-for-purpose lower-end 'Pauls, not least that it employs proper cream binding to the neck and comes with a pair of covered Burstbucker Pros (with Gibson's coil-taps). Our sample was well weighted, too, thanks primarily to its Ultra Modern weight relief, and perfectly set up with excellent tuning stability.

It's a lot more guitar for the money than the thinner-bodied, all-mahogany Modern Lite, too, which is only £100 less expensive. The price includes the new Gibson soft-shell case and, seriously, if you want the *real* thing without taking out a mortgage, here it is!

***Price:* £1,599** ***Website:* www.gibson.com**

GEAR OF THE YEAR

MAINSTREAM ELECTRICS

Update your arsenal with one of these show-stopping six-strings

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***



Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom 1963 Firebird V

It's the sort of collaboration that warms the cockles of our (not exactly loaded) hearts. A pukka Gibson Custom 1963 Firebird V will cost you close to £6k, but this Epiphone version – which comes in either Ember Red or Frost Blue – sails close to that wind with its very well-detailed build, including that classic nine-ply mahogany/walnut through neck, banjo-style tuners, Maestro Vibrola and Gibson USA Firebird mini-humbuckers. Forget those cheapo Epis of old; we concluded this is "a fabulous beast". Our only dilemma is whether we should go with the single-pickup Firebird I or this twin-pickup beaut.

Price: ***£1,699*** ***Website:*** ***www.epiphone.com***



PRS S2 Vela Satin

The S2 models were first introduced in 2013, and while they're a little lost between PRS's Core-level USA builds and the getting-better-by-the-day Indonesian-made SE models, these guitars are made in PRS's US factory but use 'offshore' parts and a simplified production path. For this year, though, PRS has swapped out the 'S' series pickups for the USA-made versions, and with a DS-01 humbucker at the bridge and Narrowfield at the neck this unique offset design is a knockout. We said: "Any guitar maker anywhere in the world needs to check out the craft here. 40 years on, PRS is still setting standards that other brands would do well to study very closely."

Price: ***£1,925*** ***Website:*** ***www.prsguitars.com***



Fender 70th Anniversary American Professional II Stratocaster

Fair play to Fender. 70 years after the party started, the brand can still knock it out of the park with guitars like this. Not only did reviewer Neville Marten fall for its charms, in a special video comparison it held its own against opponents from the 50s, 60s and 70s, as well as from Fender's Custom Shop. Well-chosen upgrades include the two-post vibrato, position voiced V-Mod II single coils, the 'seven sound' mod, a 241mm (9.5-inch) radius 'board with tall narrow frets, and maple body cap. We said: "It's a refinement of Leo's original proposition in every respect... It sounds incredible, plays beautifully and looks a million dollars."
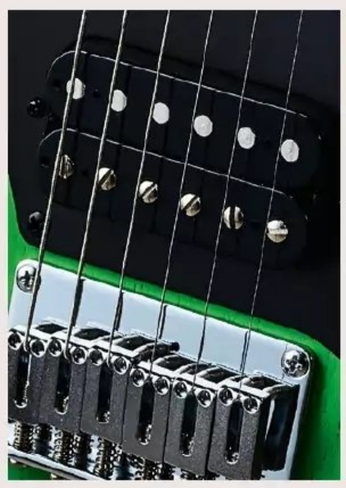
Price: ***£1,989*** ***Website:*** ***www.fender.com***

MOD SQUAD

MAKING MISCHIEF *by Dave Burrluck*



"What's the best humbucker of 2024? Now, that would be a long list. But one of my favourites comes from Devon-based Manson Guitar Works and was conceived for its start-up, UK-made Junior models (see page 64). The company's in-house-wound mini-range already includes the well-proven PF-1 Matt Bellamy Signature and the Benchmark PAF-alike, while the new Dirty Rascal sits in between, based on the classic PAF design but 'with an added little bit more of everything', says Manson. 'Our vintage-wiring, cast Alnico V magnets, US high-carbon steel slugs and screws give this pickup an extra bit of sparkle at the top-end, spikier mids and meatier lows, meaning its 9.5k output retains classiness but with some added fight.'



"But that Junior also comes with Manson's push-push switched Mojo volume control, which – instead of offering a standard coil-split – allows the pickup to run in standard series, *and* the overlooked parallel linkage for a cleaner, brighter but still hum-cancelling option. It's a great reminder of a very usable dual-voicing for any four-conductor humbucker: a Dirty Rascal, indeed!"

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Gordon Smith Grande

It might be Gordon Smith's 50th Anniversary year, but it's also probably been one of the company's busiest yet with a large-scale factory move, not to mention a number of new designs. And while we'll get to celebrate that significant anniversary properly next year, one of our 2024 highlights was this exquisite new Grande.

Original design is never an easy thing to pull off, but this latest solidbody achieves the familiar-but-original style that sums up Gordon Smith's recent introductions such as the offset Gatsby. There's a little family resemblance here, but in its Launch Edition specification the Grande is hardtail, with its short 625.5mm (24.625-inch) scale, solid obeche body, mahogany set-neck and 305mm (12-inch) radius ebony fingerboard. Powering comes from a pair of new design in-house Partingtone humbuckers (the original GS factory was in Partington, Greater Manchester) that give some pretty classic sounds, not least with the coil-splits. But it's far from a throwback with subtle modern features such as stainless-steel frets and that body-end spoke-wheel truss rod adjuster – it is 2024, after all! We said: "Not only is the Grande a smartly made model, it's got a lovely old-world charm about it. Its nicely rootsy jazz/blues voice works effortlessly for classic rock and beyond."

Price: ***£1,999*** ***Website:*** ***www.gordonsmithguitars.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

PRESTIGE ELECTRICS

This is the view from the top – and these fine examples deserve your attention

Words: ***Dave Burrluck***



PJD Carey Elite

Having rejigged its model line-up with the high-quality but very affordable Standard range, PJD Guitars opened the doors to its Custom Shop earlier in the year. Here, as founder Leigh Dovey put it, "we can have some fun". We guarantee you will, too, because this up-spec version of the Carey Standard model adds a little posh in the form of the strongly figured roasted maple neck and body cap while retaining the vibey light weight of the company's original models with a chambered 'old growth' mahogany body. The York-based brand is now also winding its pickups in-house, which give this Carey a real journeyman, classic and versatile voice. Don't miss these!

Price: ***£3,199*** ***Website:*** ***www.pjdguitars.com***



Nik Huber Krautster III

Not only is Nik Huber one of the founders of the modern boutique-level guitar-making world, but his designs have been hugely influential to other makers – and the Krautster is case in point. Originally offered only in a single-cut outline, the Krautster III puts the ingredients into Huber's own-design Dolphin shape, adding a little Tele-like style. It's perfectly crafted with a flamed maple neck to die for and crisp detailed sounds from the Häussel-made humbuckers. We said: "A superbly crafted, lightweight solidbody with a beautifully shaped 'big' neck, expansive sounds and very well-dialled-in control circuit, and a lived-in feel and appearance."

Price: ***£3,940*** ***Website:*** ***www.nikhuber-guitars.com***



Patrick James Eggle Rob Harris Signature

A big name in the elite high end of the guitar-making world, Patrick James Eggle needs little introduction. And although this signature collaboration with Jamiroquai guitarist Rob Harris took a little while to get to us, it was easily worth the wait. "The perfect all-rounder for any guitarist looking for a mix of killer single-coil and humbucker tones," we wrote in our review – and those pickups were wound by rising star Stuart Robson at Sunbear Pickups here in the UK. We said: "That it's built to a standard that few can come close to is the icing on a pretty formidable cake. And for a grand under a Fender Custom Shop Strat. C'mon!"

Price: ***£3,499*** ***Website:*** ***www.eggle.co.uk***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

PRS, Boogie, Taylor *by Neville Marten*



"For a while I'd been hankering for a PRS and found a River Blue, Wood Library, Custom 24 with a fabulous top and highly figured maple neck. It looked incredible. I took it home, used it on a couple of gigs, but I realised it just wasn't me. So I traded it back and I took a Boogie Mark I reissue with Mesa EV Thiele cabinet in part-ex. But the cab was heavy, so Paul at Zilla Cabs kindly built it into a Boogie-sized combo cabinet for me with a lightweight neodymium speaker, and covered it in vintage cream. Although I've yet to use it in anger, it's currently my review test amp and I love it.



"Finally, this year Marty Wilde gifted me a fabulous Taylor as my 'long service medal'. He specially ordered it in 1995 after seeing my 912c with its highly inlaid neck. He loved that, but it was way too small for his 6ft 4in frame. Inside, it simply says 'Jumbo Custom'. It's a lovely thing that sounds beautiful and looks stunning. Thank you, Marty!"

Powers Electric A-Type

When we saw that Taylor Guitars' master designer Andy Powers was moonlighting, we were intrigued. After we'd spent a few weeks with the A-Type, we were bowled over. In these days of inspired-by or frankly blatant copies constituting 'new' design, the A-Type stands out as a beacon of innovative thought.

Inspired by Andy's SoCal upbringing, the A-Type isn't just a different shape in some natty car colours. It's actually a 'trussed' hollowbody design – using an Urban ash back with braced solid maple top – with some complex geometry, and a glued-in one-piece mahogany neck with Honduran rosewood fingerboard. The light finish to the neck gives an almost acoustic-guitar-like feel, while virtually every piece of hardware (tuners excepted) have been crafted in-house. The Camtail vibrato turns a Bigbsy into a smooth-feeling, very in-tune unit, and the PF42 single coils – also inspired by Paul Bigsby – provide the well-tuned voicing of an extremely stable instrument.

We said: "The A-Type is one of the most detailed and considered new-design guitars we've had in our hands for a considerable time... First and foremost, [it's] a superb musical instrument that would sit just as well in a small Latin jazz combo as it clearly does on a much bigger rock-aimed concert stage."

Price: ***£3,899*** ***Website:*** ***www.powerselectricguitars.com***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

ACOUSTIC GUITARS

The best acoustic instruments that have tickled our fancy in the past year

Words: ***David Mead***



JWJ 'The Hog'

Shropshire-based luthier Rich Jones, aka JWJ Guitars, sent us into a bit of a spin when we set eyes upon his OM and Parlour guitars back in issue 499. And so expectations were high when we opened The Hog's case a few months later. We weren't disappointed, either, as the workmanship and sheer musicality that greeted us were enough to win a *Guitarist* Gold award. The Hog is an all-mahogany stunner that Rich has designated as being his entry-level model, but at this price and grade of quality it offers so much more. Hand-built instruments with this type of craft don't come along every day and so it's no wonder that The Hog has become something of a JWJ best-seller.

Price: ***£1,295*** ***Website:*** ***www.jwjguitars.co.uk***



Furch Little Jane LJ 10-SM

We've witnessed a considerable amount of innovation in these pages before now. But Furch's Little Jane was something above and beyond practically anything we'd seen before. A travel guitar that breaks down into three separate pieces that comes back in tune when you reassemble it from storage in its custom-designed backpack? Surely not. But that was precisely the case when we experienced this little wonder. Furthermore, once assembled, it gave a very good account of itself as a formidable music tool as well. Pack it away and it's aircraft overhead-locker friendly, so if you're off on your travels sometime soon and need a compact, tone-enriched companion, look no further.

Price: ***€1,693*** ***Website:*** ***www.furchguitars.com***



McNally S-32

Ciaran McNally built his first guitar on his kitchen table at the age of 16. Whizz forward a few years and he found himself holding the senior craftsman post at Lowden Guitars and subsequently that of production manager for Atkin Guitars. Next, he set up a workshop based in Craigavon, Armagh, and started building his own brand of acoustics that aim to recreate that golden era of American instruments, combined with a little bit of Irish magic on the side. And magic there was aplenty in the small-bodied S-32, leading us to remark that, despite its diminutive demeanour, this is a fully fledged pro instrument that would raise a few eyebrows in the noblest of company.

Price: ***£4,199*** ***Website:*** ***www.mcnallyguitars.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Ditch The Amp? *by Jamie Dickson*



"This year an old friend (and sometime *Guitarist* contributor) Adam Bradbury kindly asked me if I wanted to perform my acoustic album, *Withershins*, as part of his regular Clerkenwell ArtsLab event at the Betsey Trotwood venue in London. However, I'd never performed at the Betsey before and while I was assured there was 'a decent house PA', that broad description can cover an awful lot of highly variable terrain out there in venue-land from top-notch sound to barely functioning trainwreck of a PA emitting crackles and wisps of smoke!

"Therefore I took along a Trace Elliott acoustic amp with a Boss GT-1000Core providing pre-programmed reverb and delay and plugged it into the amp's effects loop. The gig went well, but I did experience a few niggling issues with levels and clean headroom and, actually, the PA was so good I'd probably have been better off – and travelled lighter – if I had simply enabled the GT-1000's acoustic amp model, plus the effects I'd programmed. The lesson? Maybe it's time to trust modelling and go amp-free, at least as far as acoustic work is concerned!"



PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN

Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom 1942 Banner J-45

Gibson's J-45 acoustic needs no introduction from us as its status as a reliable workhorse has echoed through all the decades that it has been in the guitar giant's catalogue. More recently, sibling manufacturer Epiphone has introduced its own well-received range of tribute models based on Gibson designs at bargain-basement price points.

But this particular guitar goes one echelon higher in that it is based on the J-45 from a particular era, is inspired by the custom end of Gibson's business, and is kitted out with vintage assets accordingly. As an example, the 'Banner' in the title refers to the old pre-war logo used by Gibson and many of the fixtures and fittings fall into line with much the same initiative, including a VOS (Vintage Original Sheen) finish that sets out to emulate a guitar that has seen plenty of yesteryear action.

A thermally aged spruce top and mahogany for the back and sides guarantees that old J-45 magic from a sonic perspective, which all adds up to a great-sounding blast from the past at a price that won't damage the wallet in the same way that an original vintage – or, for that matter, a Gibson Custom Shop model – most certainly would. Epiphone's J-45 sounds every bit as good as it looks, which inspired us to say in our original review: "All this for around £1.2k? Astounding."

***Price:* £1,199 *Website:* www.epiphone.com**

GEAR OF THE YEAR
YEAR IN GUITAR

HIDDEN BENEFITS

Today's guitars are performing better than ever – not that you'd notice from looking at them

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***

It's often been said that guitarists are resistant to change in guitar design. I think perhaps that's overstated, as our 40th Anniversary Reader Survey found that, on the whole, *Guitarist* readers were fairly open to new advances in gear, with 38 per cent of respondents identifying most with the statement "I love innovation in guitars, amps and effects," while the largest group – 51 per cent – agreed with the statement "Now and again an innovation grabs my imagination." Only 11 per cent of respondents said they had little or no interest in innovation in guitar gear.

So much for the infamous conservatism of guitarists. The nearest it gets to being true is when it comes to styling. We may like to have all the performance advantages of modern guitar making, but we don't necessarily want it to show on the outside. By and large, we still like the body shape of a guitar to be iconic, any tech to be discreetly hidden away, and the finish to be one of a relatively small range of established colours. Yes, there are always outliers and players who like to be flamboyantly different, but I'd bet the most popular guitar finish in the world is still tobacco sunburst and, if so, that says it all, really.

Guitar designers are wise to this, of course, and the days of flagship guitars sporting ostentatious tech are long gone – Gibson's ill-fated dalliance with robot tuners a decade ago was the final nail in that utopian coffin. Guitar makers now tend to hide their innovations under the surface, so you can feel the improvements when you play but not be aware of them with the naked eye.

One has only to look how many high-end acoustic guitar makers now favour some kind of non-traditional neck joint for an example of this. Some of these, such as the CNR System employed by Czech guitar maker Furch, are so finely engineered – using high-precision metal fittings and composite materials – that the once derogatory term 'bolt-on neck' simply doesn't do justice to what is simply a more precise, adjustable and stable way to attach a guitar neck to the body than a traditional glued-in neck joint. From the outside, the guitars look contemporary but still classic; inside, they're a clean break with much of the 19th century roots of modern acoustic making.

Furch has perhaps taken some inspiration from Taylor in that respect. The forward-thinking California firm was one of the first really major acoustic makers to champion a laser-precise bolt-on system with its NT Neck, introduced over 20 years ago, and in more recent years has dispensed with the previously almost universal X-bracing system developed by Martin in 1843 in favour of the Andy Powers-designed V-Class bracing (and some variations for smaller guitars), which Taylor says enhances volume, sustain and even intonation higher up the neck.

But even at Martin, where the firm's long heritage underpins its huge cachet as a brand, the design team has been able to bring in seriously progressive elements to its Modern Deluxe range, such as composite bridge plates, Liquidmetal bridge pins, and highly evolved torrification for the soundboard, without offending purists simply by hiding it all under a beautiful, classic exterior with only the subtlest visual cues that the guitar is a next-gen hot-rod.

So if you seek enhanced performance today, you can expect it to be invisible to the naked eye but to feel and hear it when you play. I had a similar experience recently, playing the Bare Knuckle PolyPaf humbucker set. The design brief was to take a classic vintage PAF sound but make it more widely usable for a range of modern applications from hot blues to moderate-gain metal playing. To achieve this, Tim Mills and producer/engineer Adam 'Nolly' Getgood used traditional materials in innovative configurations including "a custom wind offset of 42 AWG plain enamel wire, unoriented Alnico V rough-cast magnets and a unique combination of high carbon steel slugs under the wound strings". Having played a set at length in a PRS Modern Eagle II, I can confirm their performance is eye-opening. The classic sounds are there but without any wooliness, honk or quack, plus a more finely graduated response to touch sensitivity: dig in and you'll reliably find pinched harmonics exactly where you'd want them to leap out; back off and they behave like almost like fat, plummy single coils. Overall, they just feel more poised and more accessibly expressive than many previous PAF-style humbuckers we've tried.

"By and large, we like the body shape to be iconic, any tech to be discreet, and the finish to be a relatively established colour"

And that is what progress looks like in 2024. It looks traditional and sounds classic yet you can feel and hear refinements in all the ways a piece of gear performs. It's almost the opposite of the old cliché – innovation, today, is very much velvet beneath the iron glove. G



Furch uses composite materials and precision engineering in the CNR system that secures the necks of its guitars



Bare Knuckle Pickups' PolyPaf humbuckers – traditional to look at but thoughtfully evolved in performance and sounds

Furch's Green Dc-SR SPE Master's Choice acoustic. Outwardly, it looks like a classic contemporary cutaway electro, but Furch acoustically tunes the tops of all its guitars using an undisclosed tech-led process and makes extensive use of robotics for the most precise cutting tasks

GEAR OF THE YEAR

AMPLIFIERS

Vibey, accessible boutique valve tone – and its digital equivalent – has never been better

Words: ***Jamie Dickson***



Blackstar HT Club 40 MKIII

Blackstar's Club Series amps have really shown off the company's talent for developing an extremely effective, attainably priced amp line and improving it year after year until it punches not just above its weight but shines in any company. The 40-watt HT Club 40 MKIII's two channels give four characterful voicings: crisp contemporary tone and a warmer, Fender-like glassiness on the clean channel, while the dirty channel offers vintage crunch as one voicing and crucible-hot gain as the second. Consequently, this combo has an extraordinary range of nuanced, girthy tones, especially with Blackstar's unique ISF tone-sculpting control letting you set the US/UK tonal character.

Price: ***£899*** ***Website:*** ***www.blackstaramps.com***



PRS DGT 15 Head

David Grissom's signature model PRS electric has long enjoyed crossover appeal among players who don't normally lean towards PRS, just because the Texan player has such a keen ear for what working guitarists really need – and his new signature amp continues in the same desirable vein. Driven by a pair of EL84 power valves, this DGT head's useful 15-watt output delivers tones inspired by the sweet-spot sounds of vintage, mid-gain Plexi and Vox tones – plus maybe a hint of Fullerton Tweed – at an accessible volume. Throw in three-spring reverb and an evocative, valve-bias tremolo and it's a beautifully conceived, compact, boutique-vibed package at a fair price.

Price: ***£999*** ***Website:*** ***www.prsguitars.com***



Bad Cat Jet Black Head

In his final article for *Guitarist*, our late, much-missed amp reviewer Nick Guppy called this potent head "one of the best-sounding USA amplifiers currently available". The reason why can be found in the way Bad Cat has executed this classic-sounding head, which boasts so-usable core tones but also has hot-rod, high-gain sounds ready to be unlocked. Powered by four EL84 power valves, generating 38 watts RMS, the two-channel Jet Black has a buffered series effects loop, bias-modulated tremolo, studio-quality digital reverb, fixed level line out and other useful features, but its savage, viscerally exciting Channel 2 gain sounds are the jewel in this darkly charismatic crown.

Price: ***£1,999*** ***Website:*** ***www.badcatamps.com***

MOD SQUAD

Blue Wonder *by Huw Price*



"A 1964 Stratocaster arrived at my workshop with a dodgy Lake Placid Blue refinish. The owner loved the colour but wanted it refinished it to a higher standard with relicing. I don't know what prompted me, but before breaking out the paint stripper I decided to check under the overspray. I quickly discovered a very thick layer of beige undercoat/primer and beneath that was the original finish. To my absolute amazement, it was actually *factory* Lake Placid!

"We decided to take a chance, and several weeks of careful sanding gradually revealed a largely intact factory custom colour finish. What remained was vanishingly thin and semi-transparent in some areas, but the colour was absolutely glorious with metallic particles gleaming on the surface. With surface scratches visible and no possibility of polishing them out, we decided to apply flash coats to melt the scratches, followed by clear coats that I polished out to a high gloss. I'm not sure I'd put myself through it again, but I was delighted with the outcome."



PHOTO BY HUW PRICE

Boss Katana Artist Gen 3

The remarkable success of the Katana range of amps has seen Boss become, reportedly, the world's second-largest amp brand. This year's Gen 3 saw a root and branch upgrade in the already impressive quality of the signal processing and sound of the Katana range, which combines highly finessed digital replication of classic valve amp and Boss effects tones with a highly responsive analogue power stage.

Some new features are common to the whole Gen 3 range, such as the new 'Pushed' amp type, which emulates plummy, clean valve tone with a bit of 'hair' on it. But only the flagship Katana Artist Gen 3 model gets all the best features, old and new, which makes it well worth the sub-£700 asking price, by our reckoning. First is an excellent Custom Waza speaker closely based on a vintage Greenback rated to handle the Artist's 100-watt output, which can be notched down to 50 and 0.5 watts, giving both lower output and different playing feel and dynamics in each case. The Artist combo also gets a tuned cabinet design (also a feature of the cheaper Katana-50 EX), an analogue 'Bloom' power amp voicing circuit for those expansive, wide-open valve amp tones, and the most sophisticated line-out functions, including Boss's naturalistic Air Feel tech that emulates guitar tone captured through high-end stereo-mic setups.

Price: **£689** ***Website:*** ***www.boss.info***

GEAR OF THE YEAR

FLOOR AMPS & MODELLERS

The sounds you want are being delivered in increasing smaller packages

Words: ***Trevor Curwen***



Boss IR-2 Amp & Cabinet

A whole rig in a Boss Compact chassis, the IR-2 can supply the signature sound of 11 different amp types, each of which has an associated cab IR from Celestion Digital. You can also load alternative IRs into the pedal, add ambience with a choice of reverbs and use a send and return loop to bring other pedals into the signal path after the amp emulation. With its battery power, the IR-2 is a versatile go-anywhere problem solver for many scenarios: you can use it for headphone practice, USB recording or live work where the two channels (a different amp or the same amp with altered settings) toggled between with the footswitch confer a useful flexibility.

Price: ***£179*** ***Website:*** ***www.boss.info***



Line 6 HX One

A multi-effects pedal in the sense that there are many effects onboard, the HX One features all of Line 6's Helix effects, over 250 algorithms in all, standard and esoteric. They are, however, there to be used one at a time in this context, making it a practical augmentation pedal that can fill in the blanks on your 'board with the ability to be any effect you need, all with the help of a 'Flux' function for footswitch-triggered, expression-pedal-style tasks. If you need, say, a Uni-Vibe, a ring modulator or a Whammy for use just once in your set, this will sort it without the need to add the specific pedals or to go the large-box multi-effects route.

Price: ***£209*** ***Website:*** ***www.line6.com***



Neural DSP Nano Cortex

There's been a buzz about Neural's Quad Cortex since it was launched a couple of years ago as competition for the likes of Kemper, Fractal and Line 6's offerings in the world of hardware amp modelling units. And now we have the Nano Cortex, which puts the Cortex mojo into a more affordable, smaller footprint. Like its bigger sibling, the Nano is all about amp Captures and there's space for 256 onboard, all of which can be put into a signal chain with IRs, modulation, delay and reverb. We said: "If you want to integrate top-notch amp sounds, digital Captures and a whole lot more into a portable, hands-on pedalboard, this is going to top your list."

Price: ***£499*** ***Website:*** ***www.neuraldsp.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

Swap Shop *by Dave Burrluck*



"To put it bluntly, I've spent a lot of my year listening to pickups from the tsunami of winders out there. All good, but it also involves a lot of time fitting and soldering. The thing that's made my life easier – and a lot of fun! – is the Guitar-X (previously Relish) pickup-swapping technology offered originally by Cream T and now making its way to other brands, not least the UK-made Newman guitars.

"Apart from being able to instantly A/B any humbucking-sized pickups, the ability to revoice your guitar in seconds is a very different way to view an instrument. Combine this with some innovative new designs – such as Cream T's Astra (on review in this issue, see page 8) and ultra-lightweight Newman designs including the honeycomb-chambered Junior, a homage to the guitars played currently by Billy F Gibbons – and there's a strong whiff of futurism here: guitars that are pushing the envelope in terms of design and construction along with huge tonal flexibility. Yes, we love our vintage pieces. But, c'mon, we ain't living in the 50s. The revolution's here, and you know it's right..."

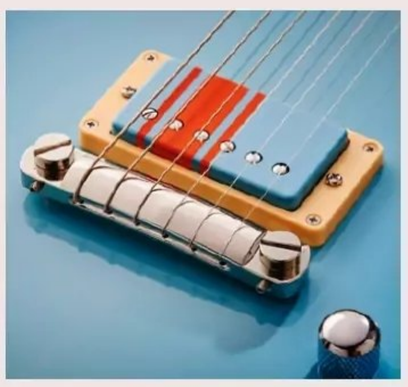


PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

IK Multimedia Tonex One

IK Multimedia describes its Tonex technology as an “ecosystem”. At its heart is a software application that uses AI Machine Modeling to capture the sound of rigs (Tone Models) comprising various combinations of amps, cabinets and drive pedals. But it finds its form for practical use as either the three-footswitch Tonex Pedal or the diminutive Tonex One we have here.

This micro-format pedal stores up to 20 Tone Models that you can load via USB. The included Tonex SE software offers instant access to 200 of these, while also giving you access online to ToneNET where there are unlimited Tone Models created and shared by other users. In the pedal’s Dual mode, the footswitch can toggle between two always-on Tone Models, which is most useful if both are amp-and-cab rig models and the pedal is feeding direct into the sound system, while Stomp mode has the footswitch working as a normal bypass, so you can use the Tonex One like any standard fuzz/distortion/drive pedal on your ’board.

Finally, a headphone socket and USB audio interface capability add even more functionality to this wallet-friendly workhorse for multiple scenarios – even as backup for your own usual amp-and-cab rig if you’ve used the Tonex software to capture it.

***Price:* £159 *Website:* www.ikmultimedia.com**

GEAR OF THE YEAR
YEAR IN GUITAR

COVETING CUSTOMS

How considering a custom build or order can get you want you really, really want

Words: **Dave Burrluck**

I don't know whether it's just me, but how often have you looked at a guitar and thought, "That's cool, but can I get one with a vibrato, a simple solid colour or a different set of pickups?" only to be met with a resounding no. We seem to be seeing more guitars yet with fewer options: what the manufacturer thinks we want, not what we *actually* want. In many cases, one of those relatively simple differences can mean you're shown the 'custom shop' door and a potential cost that's rather more than you can afford.

We've documented the well-priced Fender Mod Shop with its easy-to-spec and access online menu. There's an order-to-delivery window of about four to five months, but the options (though considerable) are based on standard formats with no ageing or relicing.

While I was eyeing up one of those 'customs', we were invited to participate in not one but two custom builds – a few months apart – with John Hornby Skewes' Vintage ProShop and York-based maker PJD's recently launched Custom Shop. The former rebuilds standard Vintage models and includes plenty of refinishing and relicing, while the latter is totally open-ended, but if you choose to pimp up one of its Standards the price is pretty attractive.

Incidentally, both builds centred on the good ol' T-style. The ProShop build was spec'd as a semi-hollow with a bass-side f-hole, lightly reliced finish, aged hardware with a cut-off bridge, and a custom-made control plate with three-way toggle switch and pickups from Wilkinson's posh R Series. The second build was based on PJD's original single-cut Carey shape, but it aimed to replicate (or imitate) Andy Summers' mucked about with Tele Custom: solid alder body, T-style bridge plate, PJD's hand-wound SH pickups, and a third control introducing an active boost made especially for the guitar by Ben Marshall at Mars-Tronic.

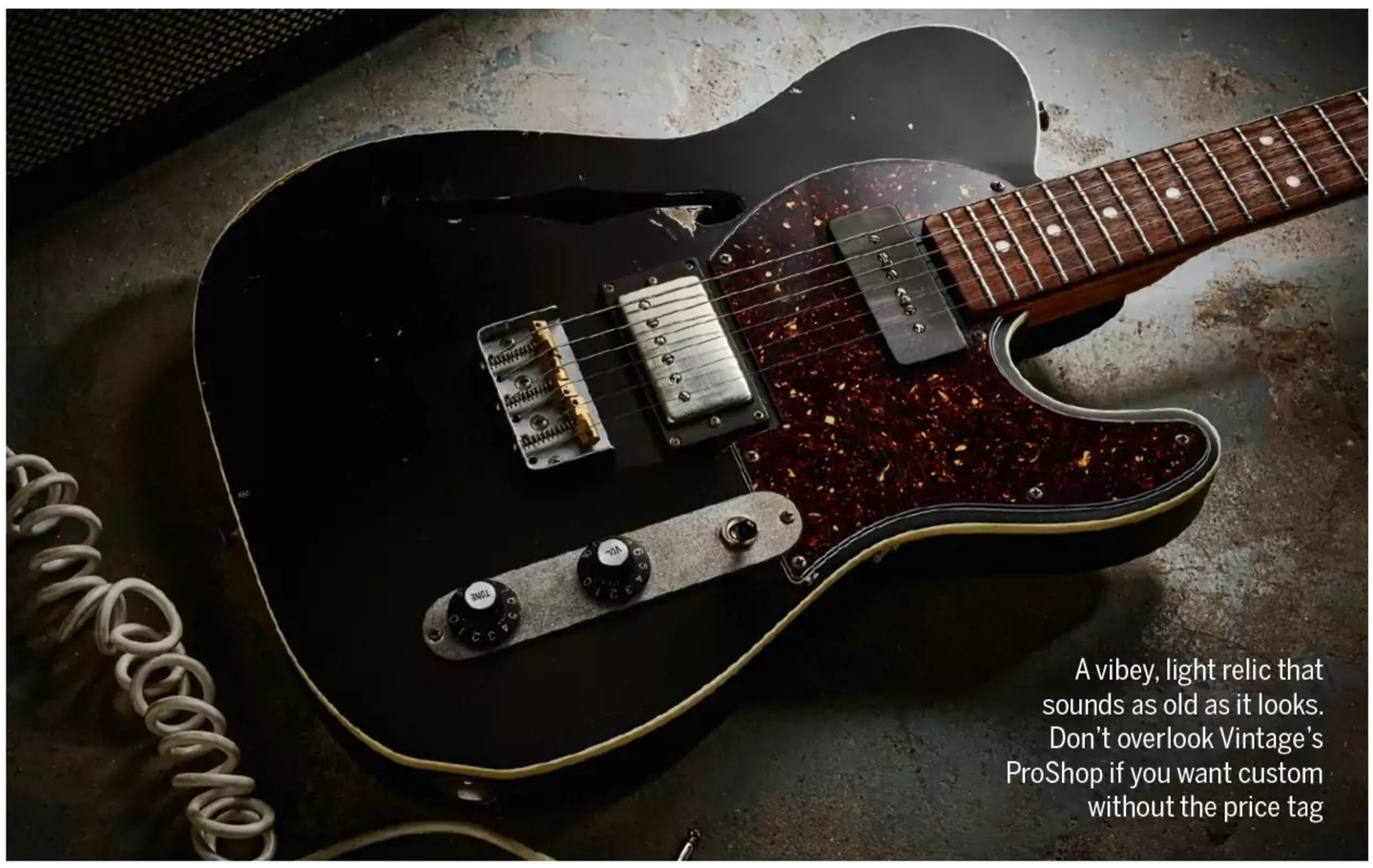
There's always a bit of a leap into the dark with any custom build. With the Vintage order, I'd played and tested plenty of the standard models, and some ProShop builds, so I was pretty confident the team would deliver. Based on the standard V72 (£489), the substantial makeover was quoted at £1,299 with a gigbag. Equally, as a PJD player for some years now, I knew the brand would translate my order into a very workable instrument, even though the price here was quite a leap from the Standard model (£1,299) at £2,699, including a Hiscox case.

The completed ProShop build doesn't aim to ape an old Tele, but it does have quite an antique vibe, which began to earn its stripes as a very old bluesy sounding standard-tuned slide guitar after quite a few gigs. On receipt, it was beautifully set up, and it's proven very stable on a gig, light in weight and with no sense of 'it's so posh I daren't play it'.

Distinctly different, the PJD Carey Custom was put to immediate use as I was depping for an absent guitarist at a sold out 'showcase' in a lively Camden club. After some hours of practice and a couple of days in a rehearsal room, the PJD performed superbly: a 'Fender' that looks like a Les Paul Junior and sounds huge – with some definite help from that onboard boost. I did the whole gig on the bridge pickup and have subsequently been exploring its more Andy Summers-style features, especially that pickup phase switch. It's also one of the most stable guitars I've had the pleasure of playing and is perfectly set up thanks to PJD's Plek machine.

While I'd never suggest taking the custom route unless you're pretty familiar with the maker, there's something special about the whole journey. Both JHS's ProShop manager, Nathan Sharp, and PJD's Josh Parkin were constantly in touch during the build process, checking on fine details and sending images of their progress.

> *"There's always a bit of a leap into the dark with any custom build... But I was pretty confident the teams would deliver"*



A vibey, light relic that sounds as old as it looks. Don't overlook Vintage's ProShop if you want custom without the price tag

I felt pretty humbled: surely they had more important clients to build for?

Opting for a custom guitar will cost you more than an off-the-peg model. But going down the routes we chose, both instruments are a fraction of the cost of the big boys' Custom Shops – yes, Fender, Gibson and PRS, we're talking about you. Our builds prove that if you want something a little different, that's unique to you, there's certainly another way to get there. And with what most report as a pretty stagnant new-guitar market, I can't help thinking that sensibly priced custom and indeed standard options might well be the way to engage us end users. Why should we have to put up with what the manufacturer *thinks* we want when, clearly, there's another way? G

It might look like a Les Paul Junior/ Telecaster mash-up, but this PJD Carey Custom emulates Andy Summers' fabled Tele with its onboard active boost, phase switch and top-level craft. A sonic revelation!

GEAR OF THE YEAR

DRIVE EFFECTS

This year's winning pedals revisit a broad range of classic vintage gear

Words: ***Trevor Curwen***



Crazy Tube Circuits Hi Power

Christos Ntaifotis, CTC's founder, hit on something when he started a range of pedals that pair historic amp sound with a classic drive pedal. The Hi Power offers sounds from Hiwatt amps with a recreation of the Colorsound Power Boost pedal – a combo strongly associated with David Gilmour around the time of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*. The two components are independently footswitchable and you can choose from two different versions of the Boost, plus emulations of 50- and 100-watt Hiwatts with Normal and Brilliant channels, or both together. With tones from clean to raucously fuzzy, it delivers two classic tonal flavours for your rig that are rare in pedal form.

Price: ***£235*** ***Website:*** ***www.crazytubecircuits.com***



J Rockett Airchild 660

Maybe not everybody gets it, but a decent compressor in your signal chain can do plenty to enhance your sound – and the Airchild lands squarely in this category. The pedal is inspired by the Fairchild 660 compressor, a behemoth packed full of valves and transformers that may just be the most highly regarded compressor ever made. J Rockett's offering is said to be a sonic interpretation of it – whether it's an accurate interpretation is open to question, but judged on its own merits the Airchild offers excellent signal conditioning opportunities for guitar via a combination of compression, boost and a very musical Tilt EQ, making it a pedal you simply won't want to turn off.

Price: ***£239*** ***Website:*** ***www.rockettpedals.com***



ThorpyFX Electric Lightning

This Chris Buck signature pedal features a valve-based overdrive circuit with a three-knob EQ similar to a Marshall tonestack that can be combined with a high-headroom clean boost, both independently footswitched. The boost section's Lows knob runs from keeping your bottom-end intact to rolling bass off for the leaner and tighter functionality of a treble boost, while the Drive section goes from a just-beyond-clean crunch right to full-on heavy raunch but always with crisp string articulation and excellent dynamic response. While none of this comes cheap, this very flexible pedal should deliver all the drive sounds you need when plugged into just about any clean amp.

Price: ***£429*** ***Website:*** ***www.thorpyfx.com***

I LEARNED FROM THAT

Pocket Power *by Trevor Curwen*



"As guitarists, we must all now be aware that plugging into an amp is not the only way to go. The writing has been on the wall ever since Line 6 introduced its Pod unit all those years ago with its selection of modelled amps, cabinets and effects. That early modelling may have left something to be desired, but technology moves on and these days – with improved modelling techniques, amp capture and the use of impulse responses – you now have the choice of getting the actual sound of a quality rig without having to hump amp and speaker(s) from A to B.



"But just how portable do we want our gear to be? Well, if this year's winners are an accurate reflection on this, we're liking it smaller and smaller. A compact version of Neural DSP Cortex technology makes the cut, but massive respect must go to Boss for cramming all that the IR-2 does into a compact series pedal, and to IK Multimedia whose tiny Tonex One puts amp capture into your pocket."

PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

Boss BP-1W Booster/Preamp

For some time guitarists have exploited the sonic characteristics of preamps found in certain vintage effects, in many cases with the actual effects bypassed. Two such units are the Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble and Roland's RE-201 Space Echo, both pioneering pedals from the mid-1970s that offered a desired enhancement of tone just by plugging in. All-analogue recreations of those preamps, along with a natural straight boost, can be found in Boss's compact Waza Craft BP-1W boost pedal, a worthy inclusion in the category this year.

Your boost type is chosen from a three-way toggle switch and delivered via Level and Gain knobs that let you mix a sufficient amount of volume with a dash of grit. The RE and CE settings have their own character in the top-end, but both add a little extra midrange compared with the Natural setting. All three are valid tonal choices, whether you want to kick in the pedal to take your amp up a level or use it always-on to generally enhance the sound of your signal chain. With the usual Boss compact robustness and practicality, the BP-1W is a quality tone conditioner to have in front of your amp.

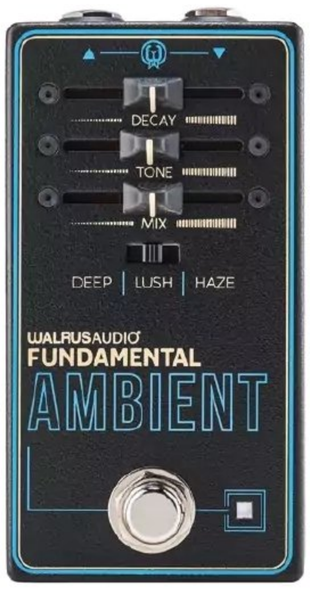
Price: **£139** ***Website:*** **www.boss.info**

GEAR OF THE YEAR

DELAY & MOD EFFECTS

A journey through 50s tremolo and 80s revivals to the latest digital reverb algorithms

Words: ***Trevor Curwen***



Walrus Audio Fundamental Ambient

The brand's Fundamental series comprises affordable pedals that each covers a specific effects type and is designed for ease of use with a control surface of three centre-detented sliders. Here, there's a choice of three atmospheric reverb algorithms – Deep, Lush and Haze – with control over Reverb Mix and Decay, plus a Tone knob that shifts the overall tonality of the reverb in a way specific to each algorithm. Through these you can quickly conjure up a wide range of expansive soundscapes and lingering background pads with long decay times. Walrus's great track record with these sorts of pedals is absolutely in evidence here – but with hands-on simplicity at a bargain price.

Price: ***£125*** *Website:* ***www.walrusaudio.com***



MXR M309 Joshua Ambient Echo

MXR has packed plenty into its standard small chassis with the Joshua, a digital delay designed to deliver the sort of iconic soundscapes of vintage rack-style processing. Straightforward to use on the surface, it has extended versatility from easily accessed secondary parameters, and it features rhythmic delays with an optional second echo, modulation, octave voicing on the repeats, and tap tempo. If you simply want the usual range of bread 'n' butter delays, the Joshua can certainly do that. But its special sauce lies in its range of multitap patterns that can be used as prominent U2-style rhythmic tempo-sync'd delays or as a diffuse trail of spacey ambience.

Price ***£249*** *Website:* ***www.jimdunlop.com***



TC Electronic 2290 P

Recent years have seen some classic gear from the 80s reimagined as stompboxes, and one of the most anticipated was this pedal, a reworking of the 2290 rackmount unit that was a staple in studios and used by The Edge, among others. Perhaps best defined as a time-based effect generator, besides delay the 2290P can deliver chorus, flanger, tremolo, vibrato, panning and more, all easily called up from 128 onboard preset slots. Back in the day, the 2290 would only have been affordable for a select few pro players, but in the sub-£300 bracket the 2290P offers the opportunity for many more players to get those sounds, all wrapped up in a very practical form factor.

Price: ***£299*** *Website:* ***www.tcelectronic.com***

MOD SQUAD

A Suite Strat Tone *by Neville Marten*



"Remember I was *definitely* going to buy a US Epiphone Casino and give it the Beatles treatment with Bigsby and nickel pickup covers? Well, it didn't happen, but I still have the bits so it could be on the cards again soon. What I did do, though, prompted by a recording of a gig where my sunburst Strat sounded thin and wimpy, was upgrade the pickups.

"Tim Mills from Bare Knuckle Pickups suggested his Triptych set. I checked out the demo, but the tone was a bit 'SRV' and I was after a 'Rory plus' sound. Looking at demos of other BK Strat pickups I alighted on the Trilogy Suite set, essentially for an Yngwie Malmsteen tone. Now, my playing is as far from the furious Swede's as the Wright Brothers were from the Falcon 9 spaceship. But it's not about playing, it's about sound, and there's a fat, almost P-90 girth to them that was just what I needed. Tim fitted them to a pre-wired 'guard and I swapped them over. Job done – and easily reversible, too."



Crazy Tube Circuits White Whale V2

With analogue technology gleaned from decades ago, clearly the “if it ain’t broke…” aphorism applies here. Guitarists loved spring reverb in the 1960s when it first appeared in Fender amps and they love it still, so when you can get the real thing – rather than a digital reproduction – in a form that will easily slot onto a pedalboard, it has to be a winner, especially when it comes with a side order of tremolo.

What you’re getting from V2 of Crazy Tube Circuits’ White Whale is a pedal with independently footswitched tremolo and reverb, which can be used individually or in combination. A Pre/Post switch determines whether the tremolo comes before or after the reverb, providing two different sonic outcomes. The reverb is based around a spring tank assembly featuring three springs and uses carefully tuned all-analogue tone-shaping to provide short, medium and long reverbs. For tremolo, you get a choice of bias, opto and harmonic types, with harmonic offering Hard and Soft variations. An array of control knobs, including the all-important Dwell for the reverb, delivers plenty of variation to add those classic vintage sounds to any amp that doesn’t have its own onboard reverb and tremolo – “this is the perfect remedy”, we said.

Price: ***£299*** ***Website:*** ***www.crazytubecircuits.com***

MODDING & UTILITY

Go the extra mile with these tone-enhancing solutions

Words: ***Dave Burrluck & Trevor Curwen***



Black Ice Boost

Think of onboard boosts and EQ, and you'd assume you need a battery to power them, right? Well, not if you're using old-school transformer technology. Like the Focus switch on Yamaha's Revstar II, the Black Ice Boost does just that, and the unobtrusive black box is small enough to fit in a pretty tight control cavity. It offers two levels of boost (which are switchable) or you can just run the one whose sound you like the best. Does it work? It sure does, with two levels of very usable thickening. It impressed the boffs at Cream T enough for them to fit the Boost into the latest Astra 'Decades' model (on review in this issue, see page 8). A no-battery zone!

Price: ***£89*** ***Website:*** ***www.blackiceoverdrive.com***



Radioshop Pickups Telecaster Wiring Mod

A couple of years ago we put together one of Trev Wilkinson's T-style kits, which has been the host to many mods, hardware changes and experiments. It ended up with the original 1950 to '52-era circuit (from CharlesGuitars.co.uk), which allows you to blend the Tele's two pickups together, a really roosty Keef sound but with no tone control to tame that bright-edged Tele tone. Then we got a call from Radioshop Pickups in Wales who had just released its hand-wired Telecaster Wiring Mod, which, via a dual concentric tone pot, gives the classic Tele selections, with volume and tone control, *plus* that pickup blend. On behalf of blend-lovers out there, thank you! Prayers have been answered.

Price: ***£140*** ***Website:*** ***www.radioshoppickups.com***



Two Notes Captor X SE

One thing that many of the YouTube channels focusing on guitar have in common is the Universal Audio Ox Amp Top Box sitting in the background, which may lead some to think that it's the only load box with speaker emulation in existence. Not so: Two Notes has been in that business for over 15 years now and it celebrated with the Captor X SE, a special edition of its reactive load box that takes input from amps up to 100 watts and connects to your mixer or audio interface via balanced XLR outputs. Its dynamic IR (DynIR) cabinets and effects, all easily edited in the included app, add digital flexibility and professional-studio sound quality to any valve amp.

Price: ***£499*** ***Website:*** ***www.two-notes.com***

MY YEAR IN GEAR

ANSWERING THE CULL *by David Mead*



"I think that the most significant event in terms of gear this year has not involved buying but selling – although I am poised to make a rather important purchase in the near future. But more of that in a minute... There comes a time in every guitarist's life when we have to admit to ourselves that there are instruments tucked away in a cupboard that 'might get used at some point', which haven't, in fact, left the confines of their cases for a very long time. This was me around springtime '24.

"And so it was that I decided to review my personal collection and take nine guitars, an amp and several effects pedals to the auction rooms and wave them a – slightly emotional – farewell. But there is a twist to this sorry tale as I have a significant birthday coming up soon and the funds gathered from the auction will be spent on something six-stringed and extra-special. Although, I must admit that option anxiety has taken over my life. Good problem to have, but...."

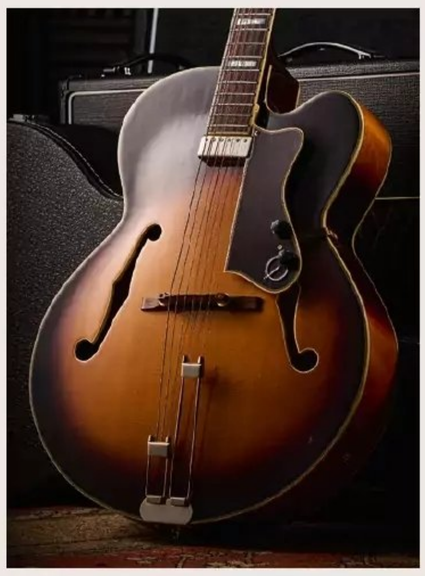


PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

Bare Knuckle Pickups Nomads Set

There are plenty of parts to upgrade on the good ol' Telecaster, not to mention circuits, but if those classic single coils aren't right, then neither is your Telecaster. In the hands and ears of Bare Knuckle's Tim Mills and guitarist Rabea Massaad, this new Nomads offering – like the Triptychs for S-styles before them – is a signature pickup set you need to hear. Using a similar magnet blend to the Triptychs, the Nomads feature Alnico III magnets in the bridge coil and Alnico V in the neck, and both are wound with 43 AWG plain enamel wire. As Tim explained, the bridge pickup uses "a much thicker 1950-style steel baseplate that alters the inductance of the coil, delivering more solid high-end response with plenty of weight behind each note, [while the neck] features a taller coil than normal and slightly narrower-diameter magnetic poles".

Like the Triptychs, these subtle blends produce a very well-balanced and behaved pickup set. We said: "Unlike on so many Teles we've wrestled with over the years, our right hand isn't constantly riding the tone control to pull back the sharp highs, and we're not wishing for more clarity at the neck. [It's] a T-style voice for sure, full of rootsy character but without the sharp 'n' dark bits... Anyone with a troublesome Tele, whatever style you play in, needs to hear these."

Price: ***From £261.60*** *Website:* ***www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk***

THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

PHIL MANZANERA

The Roxy Music guitarist invites us into his London studio to take a look at the guitars that he cut five decades of hits with. As he releases a mammoth boxset of his recordings with Eno, Gilmour and other luminaries, Phil also shares how a globe-trotting childhood led him to art-rock Shangri-La in 70s London

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Adam Gasson

There can be few guitarists who have roamed so widely through the landscape of pop music as Phil Manzanera. Born in England but raised in, variously, Cuba, Venezuela and Hawaii, his playing has always possessed a deep spirit of musical adventure. From era-defining avant-garde rock with Roxy Music to Latin-infused prog and dalliances with experimental synth in his early solo career, his vagabond muse has never settled down. His gift for playing just exactly the right phrase at the right time, combined with a leftfield sensibility that always results in work that's full of surprises, means that over the past five decades, his music has never lost its vitality.

As he releases a heavyweight 11-disc retrospective of his solo albums, we join the ever-affable guitarist in his London studio, where he has brought out one or two old guitars he thought we might like to see while we chat about his iconic recordings.

Your Cardinal Red Firebird VII has been a constant companion over the years – how did you get it and what did you use it for in your solo work and with Roxy Music?

"So this is a guitar that I found in the back of the *Melody Maker*. They used to have ads for guitars for sale in 1973 and I rang up, and it wasn't in a shop or anything, it was a private individual. So I went to this very posh house in Regent's Park in London, knocked on the door and this 16-year-old American kid held it up, and I said, 'It's a red guitar – I'll have it!' I didn't even plug it in. I think it was about 120 quid, but I needed something flash for my Roxy stint. I had a white Strat – they had insisted I have a white Strat, which is another story because that was a guitar I bought off Brian Eno, who bought it off his milkman for 30 quid! But as a youngster, I had bought a red Höfner Galaxy when I was 10. So I was used to having a flash red guitar.

"The Höfner Galaxy was from Bell Musical Instruments in Surbiton in the UK, where I had been sent from South America to a boarding school in South London. So anyway, I saw this red guitar and I thought, 'Wow, that is different. I've never seen anything like it before.' And it turned out that the boy's parents had come over from Kalamazoo and they'd bought it for him – in a custom colour red for his birthday. For some extraordinary reason, he didn't want it or maybe it was too unwieldy or he had given up guitar and taken up cricket or something. I don't know, but I said, 'Thank you very much – I'll have that!' It's become my signature guitar, and I first used it on the third Roxy Music album, *Stranded*, in particular on the track called *Amazona*.

"What's particularly good about this guitar is it's always been great for recording. The tuning aspect is not brilliant, but for recording purposes... it just likes going onto analogue tape. And so this was used in quite a lot of the Roxy songs – I'd use this for something on every album. I'd also use a '51 Telecaster and a Gibson Les Paul. But this one has appeared on every album I've done, including all my solo albums.

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!

Watch Phil play and discuss all the guitars in this feature, in an exclusive *Guitarist* video interview filmed at his studio

www.bit.ly/guitaristextra

Phil with the 'flash' Cardinal Red Gibson Firebird VII that has been his constant creative companion from Roxy Music days onwards

"Most of the *Diamond Head* album was done with this guitar, but I tend to use quite a lot of different guitars on the albums for different tracks or different bits of music – you use different sounds and you play in a different way with each guitar. It creates its own unique sound, and this one sort of plays itself in some ways. I came up with the riff that ended up being sampled on *No Church In The Wild* [by Jay-Z and Kanye West] – which was originally a riff on a track from one of my solo albums called *K-Scope* – when I was watching the telly and just messing about on this guitar. And that's what I came up with; it's particularly good to play that on this guitar. I wouldn't have come up with that on a Strat or a Telecaster or Les Paul or something. There's something quite tight about the width of the neck up here, and when you play an A chord it's got a very nice, tight sort of sound. So yeah, that's a very technical aspect of guitar-ing, I suppose. That's what makes this one come up with these riffs that sort of appear out of nowhere."

What was your backline gear back in the early days of Roxy Music's success?

"Well, what was considered the best thing to have in those days? You either had a Marshall or you had Hiwatt. And I had a Hiwatt 100 top, I think, but it had a special switch on the back so you could make it 30 [watts in output] to give it an extra poke [accessible natural overdrive] and a 4x12 cabinet, which had Celestion speakers in it. I also had a Fender Twin Reverb that I would use depending on what guitars I was using. That was the basic amplification.

"Then me and Eno worked together a lot on having my guitar signal as a sound source for him to treat through his EMS VCS3 synthesiser, and we also both had Revox tape recorders that we had modified by a very good company called Taylor Hutchinson at the time – and I only remember that name because the sticker is still on my Revox. It had something called Varipitch and Sel-Sync on it, which you could use to speed up and slow down the speed of the motor. Therefore if you were using it as an echo unit, you could speed up the echoes or slow them down and create interesting effects.

"These were the days when there were no pedals and things. There was maybe a fuzz box pedal and maybe an Echoplex or Watkins Copicat echo unit. So you had to use what I call the sort of 'Heath Robinson method' of trying to get weird sounds by doing different things – pimping machines to do things they're not meant to do, sticking sticky tape on the capstans of tape machines to create a flutter, a wobbly kind of sound.

"But we also had modified DeArmond volume pedals to control the slider on the Varipitch on the Revox tape recorder, which I still have. The combination of me sending a wobbly sort of signal to Eno, then him treating it and putting it out, along with my normal guitar created this unique sound, really. And then when he left the band, I had a special [EMS] VCS 3 guitar synth made that was controlled by these DeArmond volume pedals, which we still have and which we're trying to get repaired so that it still works.

"It created a unique sound – and the best example of that is on the track *Amazona*. You can hear the combination of the Revox tape recorder with this special guitar synth that was miles ahead of its time. We're talking about 1974 and it sounds like some strange underwater guitar. To be fair, I don't think it ever worked properly after that! But it was captured on that one track. So it is a unique thing."

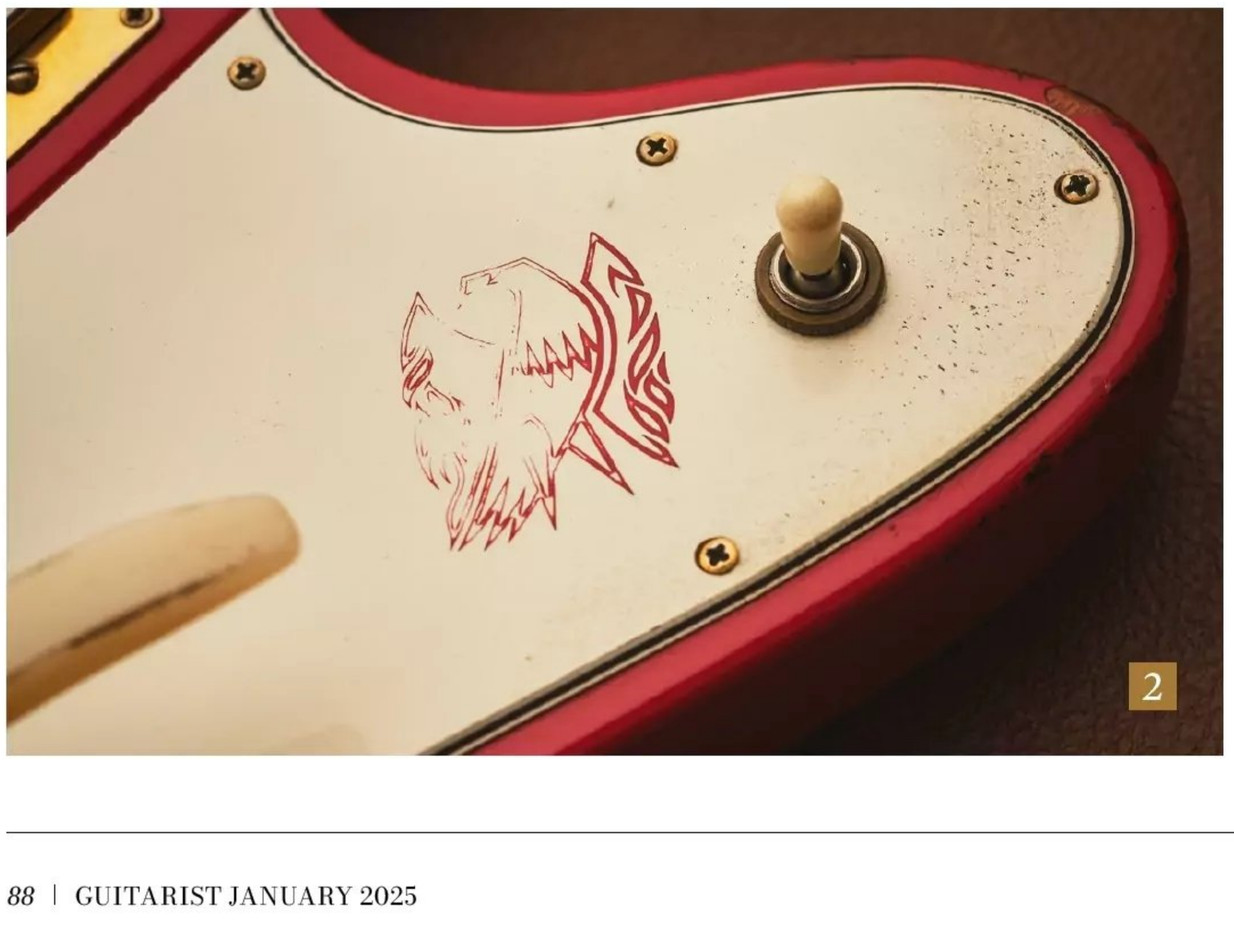
"We [got] weird sounds by doing different things – pimping machines, sticking sticky tape on the capstans of tape machines..."

How did your solo career get started? Because you were very much active with Roxy Music when it began.

"For a start, when I call it a solo career, there was really no intention of going solo. I had the opportunity because all the other guys in Roxy had done solo albums almost immediately after we started. I mean, Brian Ferry and I played on quite a few of them. So I put up my hand and said, 'Can I do a solo album?' They kind of said, 'Go away. Yes, you can do one.' I thought, right, I'm going to do music I couldn't do within Roxy and indulge myself in a kind of music, whether it's prog rock or Latin music or just anything I wanted, with my friends who weren't necessarily in Roxy. Although I did end up using everyone in Roxy, except for Brian Ferry because he was a singer, and I obviously didn't want [my work] to go anywhere near the unique Roxy sound.



1. With both gold hardware and a custom colour finish, this guitar – made circa 1965 – would be exceptionally rare and desirable even without its Roxy connections



2. The well-worn Firebird logo bears witness to over five decades of use in Phil's hands

“I found [the Firebird VII] in the back of the ‘Melody Maker’ and I think it was about 120 quid”

Phil says that the Firebird appears on almost all his Roxy and solo recordings, and that its vibrato is an essential part of its unique tone

"I then embarked on this so-called solo career of just having fun with my musician friends, making music. And, really, I'm not a songwriter, although I have written about 60 songs with words over the past 50 years. But really I consider myself a musician who just likes to try out lots of different musical genres, and I realised I had a lot of music in me that wouldn't just fit into one Roxy album, so I had to find another outlet. Which, to be fair, all the other people in Roxy were doing – and that continues to this day. Both the Brians are bringing out music that is their own kind of thing that wouldn't fit necessarily within a band-type format. Andy Mackay and Paul Thompson help on all of our stuff.

"I guess there was a lot of music within all the people in Roxy that had to find another outlet. Mine became this sort of solo thing and now I've put it all together in the *50 Years Of Music* boxset and it's 11 CDs' worth. So whether anyone's got the patience to listen to it all I don't know [laughs]... but I had to obviously go through it all to remaster it and get it onto the boxset. It covers a wide range and it really does reflect me outside of Roxy. I also brought out a book, a memoir, which really was me trying to make sense of the last 50 years and also beyond that, with my family, my South American heritage and everything.

"So this is another way of tidying up those sort of 50 years in a sort of musical form, putting it together in a boxset so I can say 'that was then' – now I can look forward to new stuff for the future. But it has also made me realise how important music has been for me since my mum started teaching me guitar in Cuba in 1957. It's been the constant thing that's gone through the whole of my life – it, and the guitar, has been my friend. And these guitars [in this feature] have been used and have been with me on this whole journey. It's kind of weird, but that's guitarists for you."

Tell us about your modded Tele – it's been almost a Fender counterpart to your Firebird in terms of the amount of Roxy tracks you've made with it.

"It says here that the serial number is 1443 – supposedly it's a 1951 Telecaster, which would in theory be worth a fortune. In practice, though, I rendered it valueless because a good friend of mine, Eric Stewart from 10cc and Lol Creme, in 1975 I think, said, 'We've got this great guitar guy up in Manchester called Ted Lee. Let him have a go with your Telecaster. He'll strip it down, revarnish it, put a humbucker on it, put Gibson frets on it...' and thus rendering it from a guitar that's probably worth six figures to probably zero [laughs]. However, it sounds fantastic and all I was interested in was having a guitar that was great to play.

"Back in the early 70s, nobody was particularly interested in the value of a guitar. The value was in the sound and the playability of it, you know? So this was used on pretty much every Roxy album from around 1974, which is when I think I got it. One of the most famous things I played on it was [the intro to] *More Than This*. And I'd forgotten this... but Rhett Davies, the co-producer on the album, was doing an interview

3. The now-familiar 50s-era 'Spaghetti' logo is a clue to this highly modded Tele's Golden Era origins

4. The visible serial number, stamped on the familiar 'ashtray' bridge, suggests an early 50s date of manufacture



3



4

"There was a lot of music within all the people in Roxy that had to find another outlet. Mine became this sort of solo thing"

the other day and he said that we were trying for ages to find a riff for the beginning of *More Than This*. Apparently, I was tuning up and they said, 'That's it!' I said, 'What?' And they said, 'Just keep playing that [riff] right through the thing.' [A simple fingerpicking pattern played on a powerchord shape, as when checking how 'in' a chord sounds when tuning up – Ed]. And that's how that ended up being that iconic riff, which is hilarious, really. It just shows you.

"I also played the riff from *Over You* on this Telecaster. I'd just got my original Gallery Studios and I was sitting at this little sort of bench thing behind the desk. Brian Ferry had come over to the studio and, Brian's not famous for playing the guitar, but there was a bass there and so he picked up the bass and I started doing that riff – that's the first thing we did in the studio. I started playing and he started playing a bit of bass, and from that we built the song *Over You*. So hooray: the first thing we did in that studio and we've got something that could be a single from something as simple as that... but it's just beautifully clean."

Your guitar parts always seem perfect for the song – they're never too much or too little. How did you develop that knack?

"I mean, one is always trying to start with something simple – especially once I joined Roxy. Before that,

"It's a 1951 Tele, which would in theory be worth a fortune. In practice, though, I rendered it valueless"

It may make vintage purists wince, but the mods made to Phil's Tele, notably the neck humbucker, do sound very nice in the flesh and he says it has seen as much studio use as the Firebird

I was playing kind of prog rock in 13/8 or something like that, you know [laughs]. That's what was interesting about Roxy stuff, and I guess I continued that method of working into all my solo stuff, which was to create the musical context first, then – if it was going to be a song – try to work with someone who could create a top line and discuss what the lyric might be...

"Or if it's going to be an instrumental, then the one thing about instrumentals is that you can give it any title you like, and now revisiting all those 100-odd tracks on the box, I see a lot of them have been named after certain moments in my life, like the track *Diamond Head*. Diamond Head is the name of the volcano at the end of Waikiki Beach. When I lived in Hawaii and went to school there, every day, I'd get on one of those American-type school buses and meet my mother at Waikiki Beach and go surfing, aged about eight or nine – and there was Diamond Head. So when it came to having a name for my first solo album, I called it *Diamond Head*. Now, I think there was a heavy metal band who called themselves that as well, but to me it was Hawaii."

How did you first become involved with Roxy Music?

"Well, I answered an ad in the *Melody Maker* and it said something like, 'guitarist wanted for avant-rock group'. I can't remember if it said 'no time wasters' or 'no wine tasters', which was the normal joke at the time. But I had heard the name Roxy Music because Richard Williams, who was a great journalist – still is – worked for the *Melody Maker*. He had this special column that you could send tapes in to and so Brian Ferry had sent in some of the embryonic Roxy demos.

"As it happened, the band I was in at the time, Quiet Sun, had also sent in tapes and [coverage on their respective demos] came out consecutive weeks. We looked at the Roxy one, and I thought, 'This is a lot more interesting than our one!' And then the bass player in Quiet Sun joined Robert Wyatt's group [Matching Mole], and so I was without a gig. Someone said, 'Well, why don't you try for that band, Roxy?' I went along to audition in a little working men's cottage that Brian and Andy were sharing in Battersea in London. At the time, Brian was teaching pottery at a girl's school in Hammersmith and Andy was teaching music. They were a bit older than me, and Eno was there, and I thought, 'These guys are weird and wonderful and different. I want to be a part of this.' So we talked and I played – and I failed the audition. So I thought, 'Oh, damn. These guys, I know they're going to make it; there's something unique about them.'

"Then, for one reason or another, it didn't work out with Dave O'List [Roxy's original pick for guitarist], so they called me back – supposedly to mix the sound – and I said, 'Well, I don't know the first thing about mixing the sound.' But they said, 'Don't worry, Eno will teach you because he's banned from being on stage because he makes everyone too nervous – so he's in the audience, mixing the sound.' Well, by 'the audience' I mean, we're talking about pubs that had about 20 or 30 people! And it's true, he was there because I saw a gig and everyone was coming up to him and saying, 'What does that do? What's that synth do?' And all this.

"This is a way of tidying up those 50 years, putting it together in a boxset so I can say 'that was then' – and look forward to new stuff"

"So I got to this derelict house near where we are today. It had electricity, and they said, 'Oh, there's a guitar there. Do you want to have a go?' I half knew this might happen, so I'd learnt the [Roxy Music] numbers secretly. They were playing a little bit of a game with me and so [going along with it] I said, 'Just show me once how to play it.' So they showed me and then it was, 'Right, let's play it.' And I played it. They did this about five times and they said, 'Wow, this guy's great!' [Laughs] 'Would you like to join?'

"I joined, I think two days after my 21st birthday – and a week later we signed the first record contract. Four gigs later, we were in the studio recording the first album. Three months later, it came out on the same day as *Ziggy Stardust*, we supported Bowie at a pub in Croydon the same week, and the album went Top 5. And here we are, 52 years later. I'm just in the right place at the right time – touch wood." G



5. This 2000 Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul Custom was made to replicate an original 1957 example that Manzanera borrowed from bassist and producer John Porter. Porter sold it in the mid-70s, but Phil borrowed the guitar from its new owner for a further 20 years! When it eventually had to be returned, Gibson made Phil this replacement – the iguana inlay was commissioned later by Phil himself



50 Years Of Music is out now on EMI/Virgin Records and covers Manzanera's fascinating solo work from 1975's *Diamond Head* to 2015's *The Sound Of Blue*
https://manzanera.com



Unashamedly modded before Phil bought it, this non-reverse Firebird was used on his critically lauded 801 project with Brian Eno, which lasted for just three live concerts but now enjoys cult status among fans

QUALITY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
★ Original ★
HISTORIC HARDWARE
100% GUARANTEED
★★★

GUILD M-75 ARISTOCRAT

This evocative downsized archtop appeared in mid-50s New York and would go on to delight jazz players and rootsy bluesers alike

Words Bob Wootton **Photography** Adam Gasson

Guild Guitars co-founder Alfred (real name Avram) Dronge was born in Poland in 1911 and emigrated to the US, via a two-year stay in Paris, in 1916, settling in New York City. As an accomplished musician, he was first a guitar teacher and club player, before opening a music store in the mid-1930s in Manhattan's Park Row. After some persuasion by friend and ex-Epiphone executive George Mann, Dronge and Mann founded Guild Guitars Inc in October 1952. It would be neither the first nor the last time a retailer or repairer saw opportunity in manufacture.

The workforce assembled in a 1,500-sq ft factory at 536 Pearl Street, comprising craftspeople displaced by leading archtop maker Epiphone, which had moved some operations to Philadelphia in the wake of union disputes. 18 months after its formation, in April 1954 the company would release its first catalogue and price list, referring to itself as "The Stradivari of Guitars" and boasting its first range, mostly constisting of the archtops that were popular at the time.

Among them was an anomalous newcomer, the M-75 Aristocrat, with the catalogue blurb calling it a "midget semi-solid". Like Gretsch's Duo Jet, it was surely spurred by Gibson's success with the Les Paul model that launched in 1952. Both companies' responses were as compact as the solid, heavy Les Paul – but lighter in contrast. The Duo Jet was chambered, whereas the M-75 was hollow, like Gibson's ES-175 or its short-lived contemporary the bantam ES-140T. It launched at $210 and was made until early 1963, costing $280 and pretty much tracking the original Les Paul's lifespan. No reliable manufacturing or shipping numbers exist, but it's a pretty rare bird. Most that do surface, including this writer's 1958 example pictured here, show some wear.

M-75s were offered mainly in a vintage sunburst, slightly yellower than Gibson's redder-brown of the time. This became cherry sunburst in '59, echoing the Les Paul. Some were made in Natural Blonde from 1959, which darkens with age, and there's one rarity with maple sides from 1957. A handful appeared in gold (imitating the Les Paul again) and a very few were introduced in cherry red in 1961, like the transparent '62 pictured over the page courtesy of a fellow collector. Sides and back were mahogany, but all have obvious straight-grained spruce tops, except the red, which is over mahogany.

Best Dressed

The 24 ¾-inch scale length aped Gibson's and was unusual for Guild, whose contemporary archtops were 25 ½ inches. Alongside preternaturally slim necks predating Gibson's from '60 to '61, this made for a comfortable, playable instrument. Headstocks carried Guild's evolving apex block logo throughout, though a few had the diagonal script logo given to some cheaper models in '57, when the decorative 'Chesterfield' pearloid inlay nicknamed after the cigarette brand also appears. The logo's D has been touched-in on this example, and the low four-digit serial number is stamped into the rear of headstock where you'd expect it.

Metalwork is gold-plated throughout, including the pickups' polepiece screws. The G-logo lyre tailpiece is common to

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In April 1954 Guild would release its first catalogue and price list, referring to itself as "The Stradivari of Guitars"

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This 1958 M-75 Aristocrat displays Guild's distinct 50s sunburst and has numerous unique parts, with playing wear and tear common to many of these instruments



1. The Franz pickups look (but don't sound) like P-90s and their covers are notoriously variable in colour. The wooden bridge with separate feet is unusual, too



2. Just as unusual are the thick, unmarked transparent control knobs, which are clouded with age and reminiscent of those seen on late 40s ES-175s



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several Guilds, but the machineheads – gold-plated Klusons with ivory plastic buttons – are unique to the model and so almost impossible to replace if, as can happen, one fails, which might explain the old but aftermarket Grovers on the red one. The gold-plated strap button located inconveniently close to the neck heel is correct and contrasts with an ivory plastic peg at the tail, which becomes metal on later examples.

The unmarked control knobs are redolent of those seen on early Gibson ES-175s from 1949 and 1950. By '59, Guild introduced its version of reflector knobs (some carry a G logo, these don't) with gold pins functioning like Gibson's collar-mounted pointer arrows.

Pickguards were bevelled three-ply plastic with a thick white core. The thinner and rather ornate bellied truss rod cover was also three-ply. By '59, a single-ply pickguard with rounded edge and Guild legend took over, while the truss rod cover became black anodised metal with an etched shield motif.

The earliest examples have 10 block-inlay neck position markers, the upper two disappearing by the end of '58. Neither of these has seen any crystallisation, shrinkage or lifting of body or neck binding, which was a common occurrence among early plastics.

The pickups look like Gibson soapbars, but they were made by New York state neighbours Franz

The pickups – always two on an M-75 – look like Gibson soapbars, but they were made by nearby New York state neighbours Franz and known as 'Frequency Tested' pickups. With lower DC resistances of typically around 5kohms, they're not as rich or warm as Gibson's rightly celebrated P-90, which measure between 7.5k and 9k. History has judged that they were poorly made and inconsistent, but they have a distinct tone of their own, whether clean or driven.

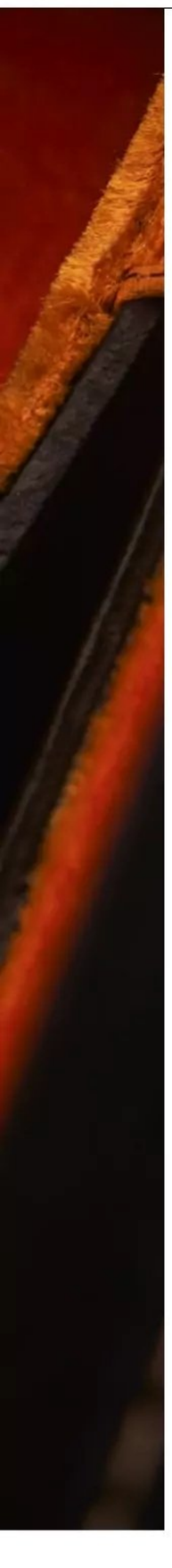
In the middle position, both pickups are engaged in series and sound quite reedy, further emphasising the hollowbody's woody sound. The guitar has no soundholes but is still susceptible to feedback, and the pickups are quite microphonic. The sunburst's pickup covers don't match, which was not uncommon in 50s guitars. A case of slack quality control or those early plastics again? The last models from 1962 to '63 sometimes sported DeArmond Dynasonic single coils like those on earlier Duo Jets. Guild was also using these on its Starfire models by then.

Vintage Appointments

Early Aristocrats had an archtop-style wooden bridge with a straight saddle and two separate feet, adjustable for height only. The sunburst's intonated one is aftermarket; they were among the several changes introduced in 1959 in order to remain competitive.

Tops often crack along the spruce's longitudinal grain around the pickup selector switch, and the later red example has a 'poker chip' surround protecting its mahogany top. Output jacks on both guitars are original and in good shape, despite being mounted direct into the sides, and the accompanying cases followed Gibson's trajectory from brown, sometimes snakeskin, with maroon lining to yellow-lined black later.

Aristocrat models lend themselves more to roots than rock, and don't tend to fetch

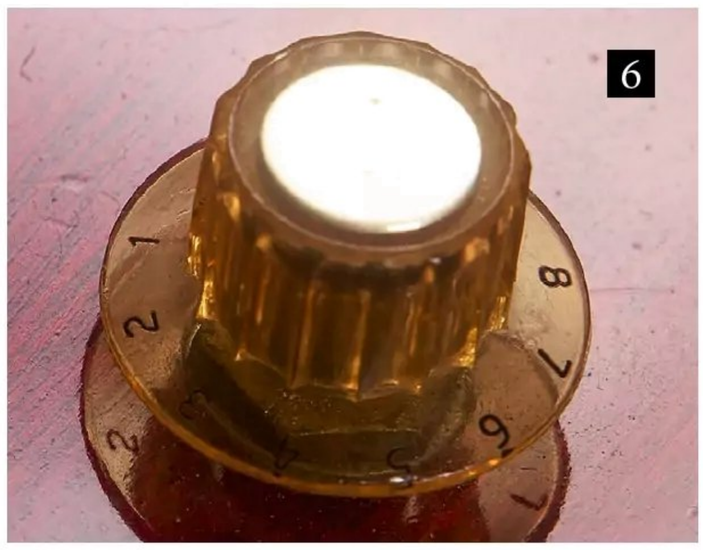




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3. The '58 model features a touched-in headstock logo and 'Chesterfield' inlay, with unique tuners and a shaped laminated truss rod cover

4. This rare model from 1962 is a transparent-red-over-mahogany example and shows unusually little player wear. Note the 'poker chip' switch surround

5. While the '62 has the same headstock features as the '58 model, it differs slightly with its thin metal truss rod cover

6. This later numbered control knob hides a gold-plated marker pin that's set into the body, just out of view

7. The rear of the '62's headstock evidences three-piece mahogany/maple neck construction and early (but probably not factory) gold-plated Grover tuners

serious vintage money, though their prices still reflect their scarcity. Good ones are hard to come across, but every Guild this writer has played has been well built. Maybe Guild as a company felt it had to try harder, or perhaps the builders were just more conscientious. These are no exception, though; being hollow, they're also really light, almost flimsy.

Famous players are few but include John Lee Hooker, John Mayer, St Vincent and Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys. The M-75 was reintroduced in 1967 and became known as the 'BluesBird' in 1968 – apparently named by Louis Dronge (younger brother of Guild founder, Alfred) due to its popularity with blues players – and it's this model that has been associated with West Coast fusion sessioneer Larry Carlton, though corroborating pictures are hard to find. The M-75 would pave the way for several excellent if still rather marginal successors, including the Nightbird/BluesBird series. G

With thanks to Hans Moust, author of *The Guild Guitar Book*, to UK performer, teacher and collector Tim Pells for additional information, and his colleague who prefers to remain anonymous for kind access to the red '62



Different Strokes

Along with its high-profile limited-edition releases, Gibson continues to consider the working musician, as this pair illustrates: two new additions that couldn't be more different!

Words
Neville Marten (ES-330)
& Dave Burrluck (Les Paul Studio)
Photography
Olly Curtis



GIBSON ES-330 & LES PAUL STUDIO £3,099 & £1,599

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

What You Need To Know

1. **Two very different guitars!**
Yes, the always affordable solidbody Les Paul Studio is the 'standard' version, which sits alongside the more expensive Modern Studio model that launched earlier this year. The often overlooked ES-330 hasn't been available for some time. But now it's back!

2. **What's the deal with the ES-330?**
Launched back in 1959, it's the only all-hollow model in the current ES-300 series line-up. Its neck joins the body at the 16th fret, rather than the 19th as with the semi-solid 335/345/355. It also features 'dog-ear' P-90 single-coil pickups and was sister model to the Gibson-built Epiphone Casinos beloved of The Beatles and Stones.

3. **And the Studio?**
From its launch back in the early 80s, the Les Paul Studio was always intended as the start-up proper Les Paul, and this Burstbucker Pro-equipped new release is the lowest-cost maple-topped 'Paul in the current USA range.

Trying to keep up with Gibson's avalanche of new releases is becoming a full-time job: blink and you might miss something. For example, hot on the heels of the Les Paul Modern Studio released earlier in 2024 is this new Studio, and we understand from Gibson that there will be a third Studio variant released before the end of the year.

After the success of the US-made Epiphone Casino reissue from 2023, it was almost inevitable that Gibson would follow up with its own branded version of essentially the same guitar. It's great to have the ES-330 return at a time when its charms might be better appreciated than back in those blues-rock salad days. Let's take a closer look...

ES-330

What compromised the ES-330's popularity was that – due to it being a fully hollow construction, with no centre block as in the ES-335 – it was a feedback nightmare through big, loud amplifiers. And since its neck sat further into the body than its semi-solid sister models, top-fret forays were off the agenda. But with today's move towards smaller amps, in-ear monitors and less of a desire for dusty end widdle-fests, these woes pale against the instrument's super-light weight, ultra-comfy neck, effortless playability and seriously cool vibe.

Checking the guitar over reveals a beautifully built instrument in the period-correct shade of see-through cherry red, the thin-skin nitro lacquer expertly applied and buffed to a perfect gloss. The body's arched top and back are the result of the maple-poplar-maple laminate being pressed into shape, with internal spruce bracing supporting the top. A one-piece mahogany neck is topped off by a block-inlaid dark rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets. Gibson sculpts the neck binding to create 'nibs' that cover the fret ends; when done well, as here, it's a sophisticated solution to the age-old problem of sharp tips snagging the fingers or catching strings.

The black plasticware looks classy, offset as it is by cream binding all round save for the headstock. Hardware comprises white-button classic Kluson-style tuners, nickel-plated tune-o-matic bridge, diamond embossed trapeze tailpiece, and slightly larger than vintage-style aluminium strap buttons.

Electrics-wise, we get a pair of Gibson dog-ear P-90 pickups mated to twin volume and tone controls with black top-hat knobs, 500kohms pots and Orange Drop capacitors.



1. Our ES-330's rich cherry finish is evocative of earlier times, while the guitar's P-90 pickups offer everything from an almost acoustic tone to full on distortion

2. The headstock carries a set of three-aside Kluson style tuners with white buttons. There's no central pearl decoration, but the logo is real shell, and the nut is GraphTech



Les Paul Studio

While we have to keep schtum about that imminent third Studio, we looked at the Modern Studio back in issue 511 and if you thought that was a bit too modern for your tastes with its satin finishes, compound radius ebony fingerboard, contoured heel and those new-fangled pull-switch controls, not only is this new Studio £300 less expensive, it comes in a pretty old-school style. It still features Gibson's Ultra-Modern weight relief and pull-switch volumes (not tones) for the so-called 'coil-tap' option for both humbuckers, which here are covered Burstbucker Pros. The Modern Studio employs a covered 490R in the neck position and a 498T at the bridge.

Pulling the new less-modern Studio from its very gig-ready soft-shell case, that weight relief is clearly playing its part: at 3.71kg (8.16lb), it's the lightest Les Paul we've hand in our hands recently, with the exception of the thinner-bodied, all-mahogany Modern Lite at 3.03kg (6.67lb); the Modern Studio was a little heavier at 3.85kg (8.47lb). Speaking of body thickness, like the Modern Studio at just a shade over 57mm (47mm at the rim), this Studio is fractionally thinner than the full-fat Les Paul, like our reference 2019 Classic, which measures 61mm overall (50mm at the rim).

Like the Studio of old, there's no body-edge binding, the plain top is centre-joined maple with a pretty subtle 'burst, while the mahogany back is two-piece with an offset join that's pretty hard to see through the translucent cherry red back.

A big change, however, is the classic fingerboard binding. While the Modern Studio actually has near-invisible black plastic binding around the ebony 'board, the cream binding here, along with the classic dark rosewood fingerboard and those acrylic trapezoid inlays, not only imparts a more classic Les Paul look but also subtly alters the feel – which we'll get to in a moment.

The ES-330 certainly deserves another shot at the spotlight; it's just such a usable instrument



The ES-330's neck pickup is warm, woody and musical. When combined with the bridge P-90 and using the controls, it produces a huge array of tones

3. The ES-330 followed Gibson's standard control layout of two volume and tone pots, plus a three-way pickup selector toggle. This arrangement offers a plethora of tones

4. Gibson creates fret-end 'nibs' to provide a neat and pleasing finish. When done well this aids snag-free playing. The rosewood 'board is dark and grainy, with small acrylic block markers

The hardware is Gibson USA standard, but the tuners ape old-style Klusons (albeit with face washers, not bushings), the same as you'll find on the Les Paul Standard '50s. The budget doesn't stretch to a toggle switch surround, we get a cream plastic plate for the output jack, and the classic cream pickguard is left sharp-edged and a little unfinished, whereas models like that Classic have smoother chamfered edges.

Feel & Sounds

Strapping on the ES-330 reveals why it was a favourite with rhythm players (along with its sister, the Epiphone Casino) or those who majored in riffy, rock 'n' roll style soloing. With the neck being three frets further into the body, open chords are easy to reach, while barre shapes are a doddle up to the 12th fret. The guitar's ultra-light weight makes it supremely comfortable, too, especially when worn a little higher on the strap.

With its rounded 'C' profile, the neck is incredibly comfortable, and the 10-gauge strings fitted as standard feel slack and bendy. Where some new guitars are hard and uninviting to play, this one lets you right in, to the point where you almost feel at one with the thing. No, you can't blaze pentatonics at the 17th fret, but virtually anything else you could desire is right here at your fingertips.



UNDER THE HOOD

Different pickups – and what exactly is going on with the Studio's coil-taps?

As you'll know, Gibson has a huge selection of humbuckers, and while the unpotted Burstbuckers are known for their classic original PAF-alike voicings in three degrees of heat – 1, 2 and the 3 – with slightly offset coil winds and Alnico 2 magnets, the Burstbucker Pros are wax-potted, again with slightly offset coil winds and with Alnico V magnets that provide a bit more bite and oomph, in theory. With measured DCRs of 8.07kohms (bridge) and 7.68k (neck), they're certainly not overwound and will provide a different voice to the Modern Studio's hotter 490R/498T pairing.

While the Modern Studio utilises the four pull-switches for coil-tap, out of phase and direct out, our standard Studio retains just the coil-taps on the pull-switch volume controls.

As we've commented before, 'coil-tap' typically refers to a tap wire that's taken at, say, 70 per cent of a coil wind to offer a lower output than the full coil. These coil-taps don't mess with the coils, instead passing one coil (the screw coil) through a .033µF capacitor (with a 333 code) that you can clearly see in front of each volume control.

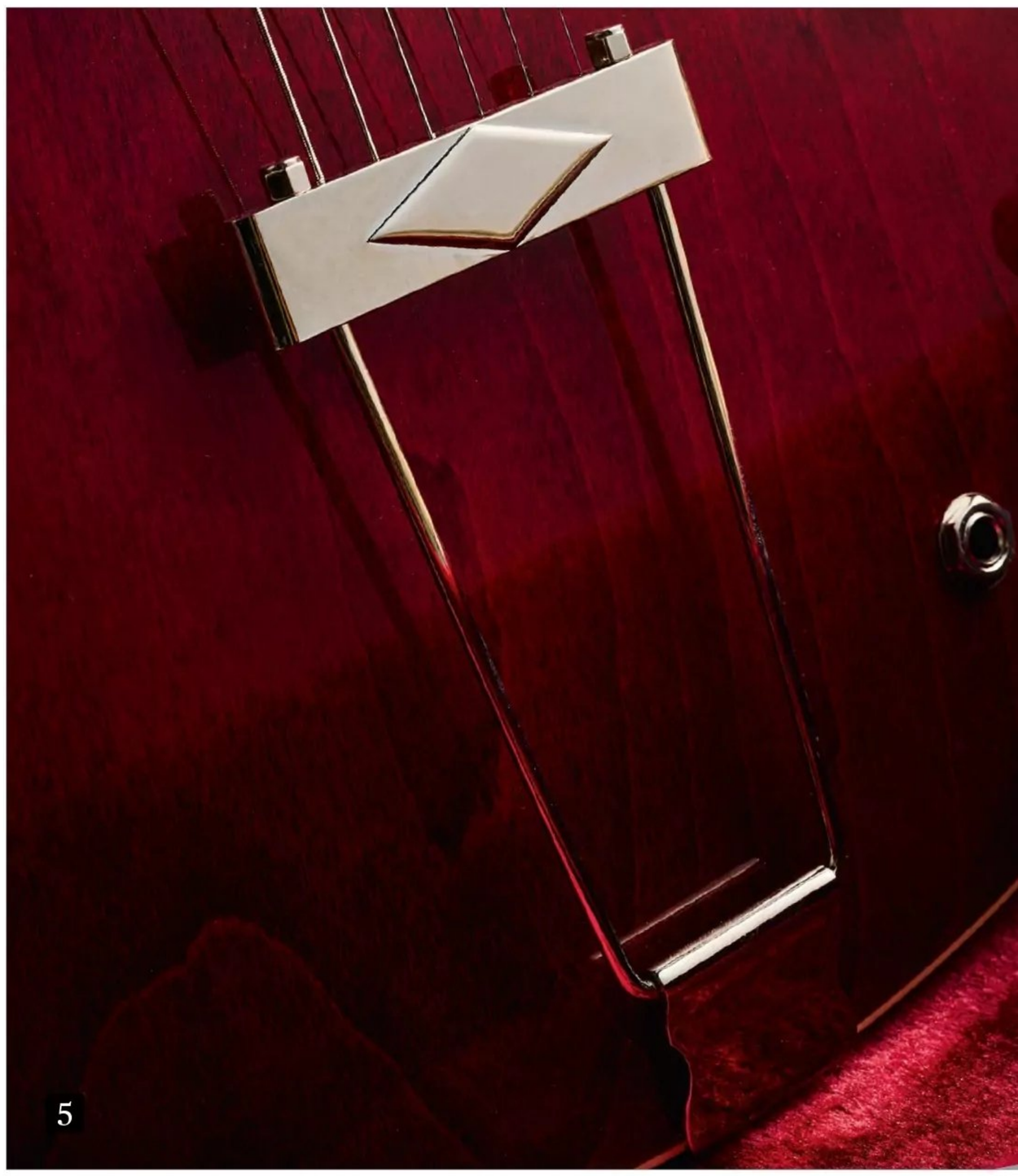
It's effectively like passing that one coil through a rolled-off tone control, audibly pulling down the resonant peak. It's a little different from the circuit in the Les Paul Classic and the Modern Studio, too, which both use the lighter value .01µF caps for the coil-taps.



The Studio's PCB mounting results in very clean and tidy electronics



Each coil-tap uses the same value capacitor to 'filter' one coil


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Plugging into a Boogie Mark I reissue combo reveals a versatile set of tones that would suit almost any genre of popular music. Jazz, blues, pop or light-to-medium rock are all dutifully served. Even when played clean, P-90s have a slight rasp that makes for an organic tone that, when turned right down to 2 or 3, can sound almost acoustic in nature. And with the amp set so there's a healthy dose of drive on tap, one can go from clean to gnarly with no more than a twist of a control.

5. Our ES-330 features the diamond embossed trapeze tailpiece found on many of Gibson's ES models. A long Bigsby vibrato tailpiece was a popular replacement and looks ultra cool

Strapping on the ES-330 reveals why it was a favourite with rhythm players or riffy, rock 'n' roll style soloing

With the neck pickup on about 6 and some tone rolled off, we go from straight jazz to vintage blues, with both knobs cranked a notch or two. And flipping to the bridge pickup on about 8, with the tone all but full up, is rock 'n' roll heaven. Given that both BB King and Chuck Berry had ES-330 phases, this should come as no surprise. Both P-90s on is a fabulous choice, as balancing the controls provides an immense array of sounds. Of course, such is the model's and its Epiphone E-230 cousin's association with 60s British beat



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music that all manner of Stones, Beatles and Kinks tones are on tap, too. And when we cranked the Boogie to gigging volume, the ES-330 didn't feed back unless the guitar was pushed up close to the speaker. It's quite a piece!

Let's not forget, though, that the new Studio is half the price of the ES-330, and while there are obvious cost-cutting elements here, side by side with our Les Paul Classic – which currently costs £800 more – we're not feeling short-changed. Visually, of course, the Studio's no-body binding style won't satisfy everyone, but from the player's perspective you don't notice that. You do notice the neck, of course, and with the binding here it looks and feels like a pukka 'Paul, even though there's a slight ridge where the colour coat has presumably been scraped away during the finish process.

This new Studio is front-line infantry: a guitar purpose-designed to compete with the plethora of 'inspired by' or copycats models

Along with the excellent weight, our Studio is very well set up with none of the tuning issues that have plagued some previous review samples. Typically, the frets stop at the binding, the 'ends' formed by the binding, and while, as we've said before, a slightly bigger and higher fretwire wire gauge would be preferable, it feels just like a good Gibson Les Paul should. The similarity with the Classic is shared by the same 60s-style SlimTaper neck, which is pretty much identical (with a nut width just a shade over 43mm, and a depth of 20.5mm at the 1st fret and 23.2mm by the 12th) and a very similar relatively full-shouldered shallow 'C' profile.

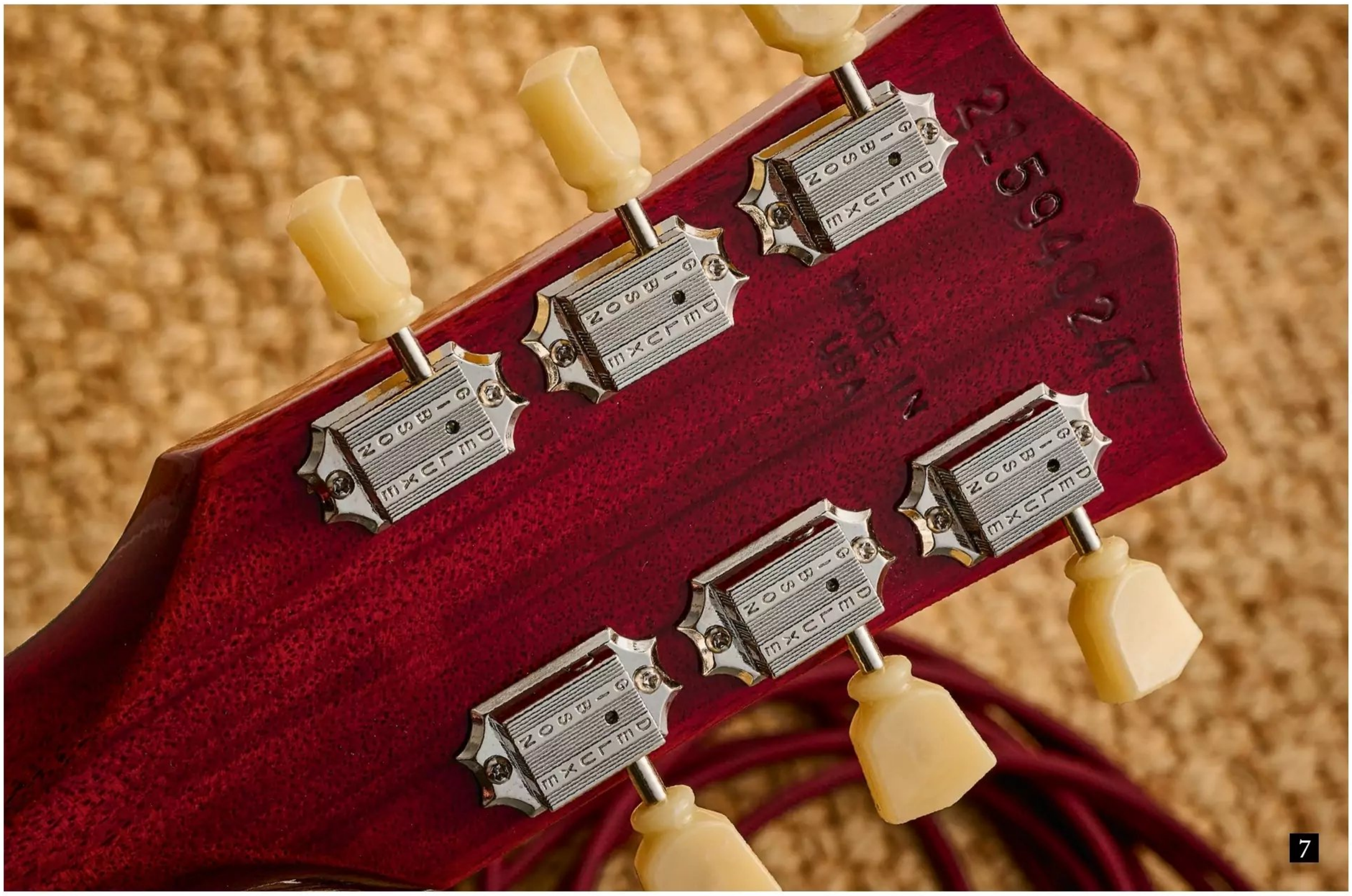
No surprises, then, that it sounds like a good Les Paul should, too! There's a little more solidarity to the overall voices compared with the retrofitted Burstbucker 1 and 2 of our Classic – which also has a different nine-hole weight relief to the body – and there's a little more clarity compared with the Studio. But it's not chalk and cheese and, to be honest, for general rock use the Studio might have the edge for those thicker, creamier voices. If you're used to vintage-style wiring, the modern-wired setup here is less versatile, without those thinner, cleaner voices as you pull back the volume and tone: here, it's simply quieter and
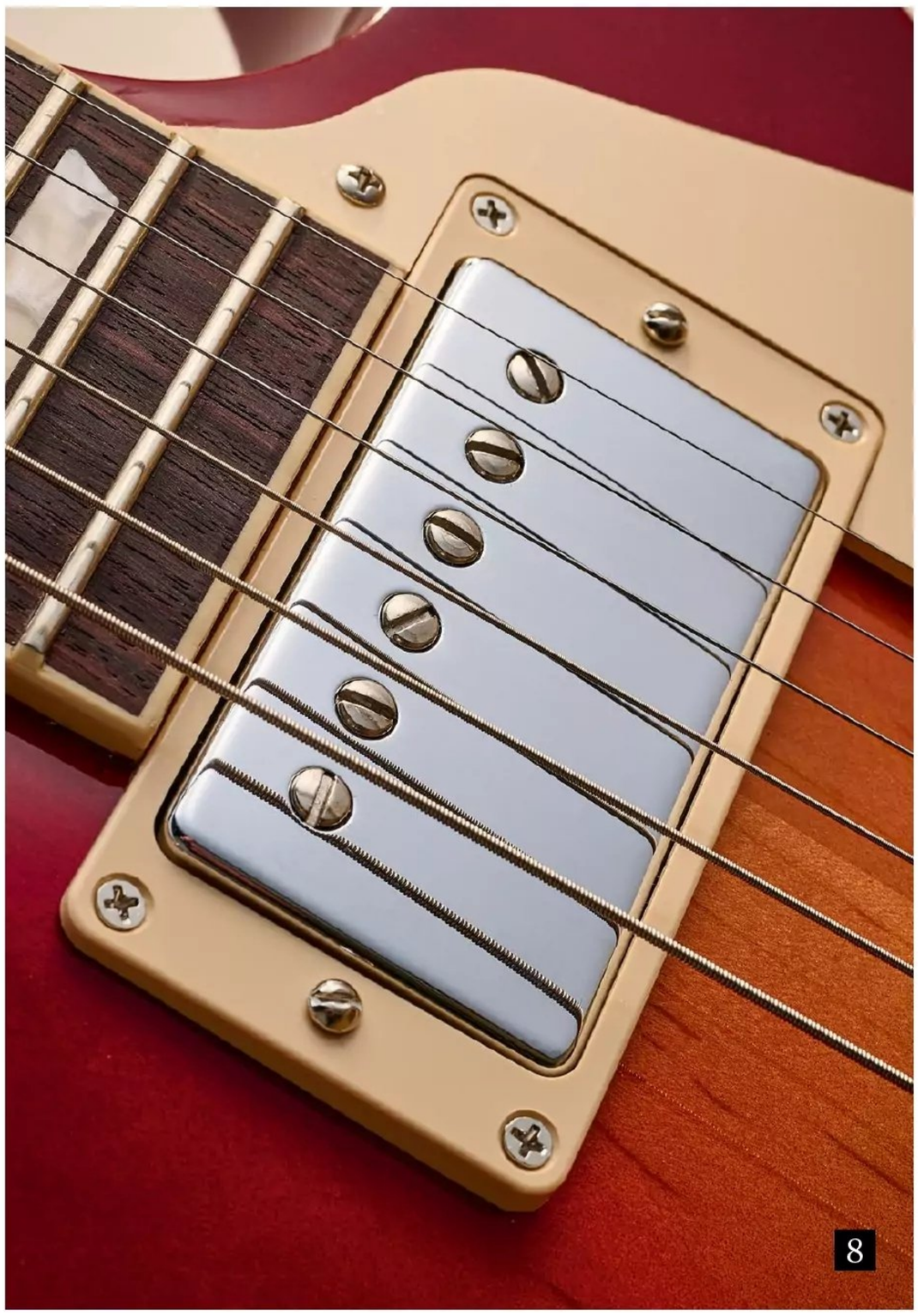
THE RIVALS

The obvious less-expensive rival to the ES-330 is its Chinese-made cousin, the Epiphone Casino (£709). Built to similar specs, it features a laminated maple body, mahogany neck, laurel fingerboard with parallelogram inlays, dog-ear P-90s, plus Epiphone LockTone bridge and trapeze tailpiece.

Eastman's excellent T64/TV-T (£1,899) features an ivoroid-bound deluxe maple laminate body and maple neck with block-inlaid ebony fingerboard. Hardware is top-notch: Lollar P-90s, CTS and Switchcraft electrics, Gotoh hardware all round, and bone nut. A brilliant mid-priced choice.

Either side of the Les Paul Studio is the thinner-bodied all-mahogany Les Paul Modern Lite (£1,499) and the satin-finished, upgraded Modern Studio (£1,899) with four pull-switch controls for extra sounds. Epiphone offers a huge choice: try the 1959 Les Paul Standard Aged Dark Burst (£969) with Gibson USA Burstbucker 2 and 3 and, one of our favourites, the Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard (£1,499) with its magnetically out of phase Gibson USA Greenybuckers for those key Peter Green sounds.





a little darker. But for the aim, and price point, you really shouldn't feel you're missing anything.

The coil-taps? Well, that's another thing to either ignore or get used to. No, they don't sound like simple coil-splits, but pulling up the bridge volume immediately softens the mid-forward honk for much more of a single-coil-like voice albeit with a softer high-end but without the volume drop of a typical coil-split. At the neck, the coil-tap almost sounds a little too 'tone control rolled off', but again it pulls back that stridency. Listening to the Classic's coil-taps, well, they sound different, too – a little honkier. So, while the bridge coil-tap here is definitely usable, the neck is less obviously so, not least that with the volume control pulled back, which loses a little clarity, as we said.

Verdict

We love it when Gibson gets it right, given how we've had cause to criticise quality control over the years, and both of these diverse pieces are very well set up with no tuning issues. The ES-330 certainly deserves another shot at the spotlight; it's just such a usable instrument. It plays like butter and is packed with a fabulous range of recognisable tones. True, flat out through a 100-watt Marshall stack is not particularly feasible with an all-hollow

6. The Studio uses Gibson USA's standard Nashville-style bridge with a lightweight aluminium stopbar tailpiece

7. These Vintage Deluxe tuners look like old-style Klusons, but they're a more modern design and the same that you'll find on plenty of other USA models, not least the Les Paul Standard '50s

8. Another difference from the Modern Studio is the pickups, which are covered Burstbucker Pros here that use Quick Connect no-solder connectors



9. The control layout is standard, but each volume control has a pull-switch to voice Gibson's unique 'coil-taps' – without the out-of-phase or direct-out options of the Modern Studio

guitar, but open your mind and heart to this delightful instrument and you'll discover a faithful musical pal for almost any occasion.

But if the ES-330 is more about restoring a classic into the catalogue, this new Studio is front-line infantry: a guitar purpose-designed to compete with the plethora of other brands' 'inspired by' or copycats. Its classic big and thick voicing is

If the Modern Studio was a bit too modern for your tastes, this new Studio is £300 less expensive and comes in a pretty old-school style

archetypal Les Paul in anyone's book, and along with a great weight there's little to complain about. Those coil-taps won't be to everyone's taste – to our ears, the bridge coil-tap has more legs than the neck – and although we don't get the refined body binding of the upper-market models, that's offset by the lower cost. All in, of the recent lower-end 'Pauls we've played, this new Studio is very hard to argue with. G



GIBSON ES-330

PRICE: £3,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway, hollowbody electric
BODY: Fully hollow, cream bound maple/poplar/maple laminate top, back and sides
NECK: Mahogany, 'rounded C', glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech/ 43.1mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian rosewood with small acrylic block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Gibson ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, diamond embossed trapeze tailpiece, white-button vintage-style tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Gibson 'dog-ear' P90 neck and bridge single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector, volume and tone for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.75/6.05
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Gibson ES-335 (£3,399), centre block body with 19th-fret neck join, dot-inlaid rosewood fingerboard, twin humbuckers; Gibson ES-345 (£3,499), as above but with double parallelogram markers, gold-plated parts and multiple body binding
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Sixties Cherry (as reviewed), Tobacco Sunburst, Antique Natural, Ebony (online only) – gloss nitrocellulose

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Super build quality and attention to detail; ultra-light weight; extremely comfortable; classic clean and dirty tones

CONS Some may not like its deeply inset neck; played very loudly the guitar will feed back – but that's the nature of this particular beast



GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO

PRICE: £1,599 (inc soft case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany with unbound carved maple top and Ultra-Modern weight relief
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream bound Indian rosewood, acrylic trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Nashville tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Vintage Deluxe tuners w/ keystone buttons – chrome/ nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Covered Gibson Burstbucker Pro humbuckers (neck and bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup with pull-switches on volume controls for 'coil-tap'
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.71/8.16
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Les Paul Modern Lite (£1,499), Les Paul Modern Studio (£1,899), Les Paul Studio Session (£TBA), Les Paul Classic (£2,399)
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Wine Red, Blueberry Burst, Ebony – gloss nitrocellulose

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Nicely turned out LP with excellent weight, setup and tuning stability; fingerboard binding; pretty classic sounds; we'd head straight to a gig with this

CONS Visually, we miss the body binding; the 'coil-taps' won't satisfy everyone, especially at the neck

lowden
GUITARS



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Eighties Icon

Boss creates the opportunity to put some classic 1980s digital delay sounds onto any pedalboard with its compact reproduction of the rackmount Roland SDE-3000

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker



BOSS SDE-3 DUAL DIGITAL DELAY £169

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

What You Need To Know

1. **Another Boss delay pedal...**
There have been a few of them in the past couple of years, but each of them absolutely fills its own niche.

2. **What makes this one special?**
The main thing is that it puts Roland's digital delay sounds from the 1980s into a compact pedal. The sought-after sound of the classic SDE-3000 rackmount unit was channelled into two recent triple-footswitch SDE-3000 pedals, but now you can get it in this smaller and less expensive pedal.

3. **Why is it called a dual delay?**
Because that's its most notable feature: it can give you two delays in parallel, the second one offset from the first by an amount that you can set.

The trend of putting classic rackmount digital delay sounds into pedals continues in Boss's latest compact series. We most recently saw TC Electronic do it with the 2290 P, but prior to that Boss had brought out two pedals reviving the classic Roland SDE-3000 that launched in 1983: the SDE-3000D, and a specialised Eddie Van Halen version of it in the form of the SDE-3000EVH. The triple-footswitch pedals' large footprints and price tags north of £300 may have discouraged some players, so now Boss has given us the SDE-3, which puts their sounds and much of the functionality into a compact chassis.

This pedal can be used in mono with a massive 1,600ms of delay, or in stereo with a maximum of 800ms. There's modulation with Rate and Depth knobs, plus the usual delay Time, Feedback and Mix knobs, with Hi Cut for the repeats. What really sets this apart from other compact pedals, though, is that it can deliver dual delay via an Offset knob that sets the timing of the second delay against the first.

In Use

Great functionality is crammed into a standard compact pedal chassis by Boss's use of dual concentric knobs, making the SDE-3 a real hands-on pedal with all you need for everyday use right there on the front panel – although you will have to consult the manual to set it up for certain modes of operation that require particular juxtapositions of the knobs while switching power. While the pedal is capable of running in mono in/out, mono in/stereo out and stereo in/out configurations, we started out by using the pedal in mono and just setting up a range of standard single delays.

This pedal can be used in mono with a massive 1,600ms of delay or stereo with a maximum of 800ms

The actual sound of the repeats here is clear, but it's not squeaky clean or harsh, and there's a certain warmth and smoothness that reflects the sound found in the 16-bit tonality of the original SDE-3000 rackmount units. If you want to tweak the sound of the repeats, the Hi Cut knob controls a low-pass filter to shave off some high-end and presence. To our ears, it doesn't actually deliver any tonal shift in the sound of the first repeat, but subsequent repeats can be made to sound darker, enabling a long trail of repeats to better blend into your sound.

The amount of delay time available ought to provide everything you'd want



Besides the standard bypass function, you can press the pedal switch for at least two seconds to switch to tap tempo mode, which operates in quarter-note intervals



1



2

By juxtaposition of your delay time and the Offset setting, you can set up the relationship between the two repeats

1. The dual-concentric knobs pack all your hands-on control into the limited space – the central knobs are for the main delay parameters, while the outer rings are used for modulation Rate, Depth and Hi Cut. Next to the Time control, the Offset knob offsets the output B delay time to get different delay times for the left and right channels. When it's set to Off, the left and right delays sound at the same time. Turning it up full sets the amount of offset up to a dotted-eighth note, and you can find an eighth note in the marked segment between noon and two o'clock

to do with straight delays, but the Time knob has a lot to cover in its travel, so you have to be a bit careful in order to get the exact sounds you want. This is especially true in its lower settings, say, if you want to dial in short delays for some pure chorus or flange in conjunction with the modulation knobs. Besides using the Time knob itself, there are two other methods of setting the delay time: via tap tempo or by using MIDI, as the SDE-3 will synchronise to MIDI clock, which overrides its Time knob and tap tempo functions.

Of course, it's the second delay that makes everything more interesting. The first half of the Offset knob's travels will bring in a delay somewhere between 0 and 100ms. Very short offset delays are great for thickening up your sound or putting a flam on the repeat, but then you get into a whole other level once you start to hear the offset distinct from the first delay; by juxtaposition of your delay time and the Offset setting, you can set up the relationship between the two repeats, perhaps using the two taps to create a patterned delay. Beyond the 100-millisecond mark, there are two settings on the Offset dial that represent timed delays. Both eighth notes and dotted-eighth notes are available, perfectly synchronised to the first delay for anyone who wants to get some rhythmic delay happening.

While the two timed delays exist in marked sections of the Offset dial, the offset time ramps in a linear fashion between the eighth note to dotted-eighth note settings in the unmarked arc between the two o'clock and four o'clock

2. You can select from three different output modes: a mix of dry and wet from both outputs; dry from one and wet from the other; or wet from both outputs with the direct sound muted

3. The Carryover switch operates a trails function: set it to On if you want the repeats to carry on and fade naturally after the effect turns off; set it to Off and they'll cut dead with the footswitching action

THE RIVALS

If Boss's latest offering appeals to you, but you'd like a bit more control, check out the SDE-3000D (£329) and the SDE-3000EVH (£399). Both have triple-footswitch operation so you get a dedicated tap tempo switch and separate footswitches for each delay. You can set up exact delay times in milliseconds and there are 100 onboard memories.

Also consider the Strymon Dig V2 (£359), another dual delay pedal based on early rackmount digital delay sound, here with three different digital delay voicings to choose from. It has switched settings for modulation, plus a dedicated tap tempo footswitch and a useful range of parameters for setting up the delays.



3

positions for a different range of first and second delay interaction.

If you can use the pedal in stereo, you have two options as to how the two delays work together. The pedal's default setting, as shipped, is for standard stereo, but this can be changed to ping-pong with delay bouncing repeatedly between the two outputs. Either mode offers a huge opening up of the soundscape, especially if you add a bit of modulation to the mix. There's loads of scope for dialling in your modulation, too, with the easily accessible Depth and Rate knobs, both of which cover a wide range. The lower reaches of the Depth knob can add a bit of tape delay wobble or a fairy dusting of chorus to your standard delays, but as you turn it up you'll be getting towards more extreme pitch-detuning and a host of freakier 'out there' psych sounds. A delay time set low offers access to a great range of pure modulation effects.

For ease of use in a gigging situation, holding down the footswitch to get into tap tempo mode won't suit everyone's way of working, so you can connect up an external footswitch to the CTL/EXP socket for tap tempo or, alternatively, use it for a 'hold' function, which will keep the repeats going as long as the switch is held down. If you connect a dual footswitch you can have both functions at once. There's also the possibility of plugging in an expression pedal to adjust one or more parameters in real time.



Connect a footswitch for tap tempo or a hold function, or an expression pedal to morph between knob values

Verdict

The SDE-3 is an excellent little pedal for a useful range of delays and is especially adept at familiar 80s sounds. There's plenty to explore here, but with so much variation available there may be times when you come up with a great sound and get frustrated that you can't save it to a memory – but that's the SDE-3000D's thing, not the SDE-3's. This one is for those who want instant hands-on tweakability in a pedalboard-friendly chassis. G



BOSS SDE-3 DUAL DIGITAL DELAY

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Feedback, Time, Hi Cut, Offset, Depth, Rate, Carryover on/off switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (A&B), standard outputs (A&B), CTL/EXP input, MIDI In
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor 75 mA
DIMENSIONS: 73 (w) x 129 (d) x 59mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; two parallel delay lines; hands-on practicality; wide-ranging modulation options; tap tempo; stereo capability; MIDI clock synchronisation

CONS Dual-concentric knobs can be fiddly; setting up some modes requires a bit of faffing with the knobs and turning power on/off

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BOUGHT & SOLD

BILLY MORRISON

The former Cult and Billy Idol guitarist shares his love for Gibson guitars and Friedman heads, plus why he can't be bothered to open his pedal tray...



Billy has been a fan of Gibson single-cuts since his first guitar, an LS-6

PHOTO BY MEDIOSY MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

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

"With my own money? I think it was a Gibson LS-6, which, by the way, you can't find these days. But it had a head shaped like a Les Paul; it was a single-cut and made out of one piece of cheap wood. And it had a rotary six-position knob that looked like it came off a Vox AC30. That was my first Gibson, which was all I cared about."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I haven't bought a guitar in decades, really! Well, not really. I have a signature Les Paul and there are perks that come with that. But I do use Gretsch guitars a lot and they've been very kind to me, too. I've gotten a few Falcons and a Country Gentleman, and I did buy a '72 Les Paul Deluxe with mini-humbuckers that's absolutely original. It's Wine Red and absolutely beautiful."

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

"You know what? I have a 1980-something black Les Paul Standard, and I bought that from a pawn shop for something like 600 bucks. It's one of those Les Pauls that... you know how, from guitar to guitar, you can have them play differently? Well, I just picked this thing up from off the wall and it plays the same today as it did when I first got it back in that shop in London."

> "Quality in is quality out – you start where your hands and your instrument are"

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

"Pretty much everything in my recording studio [laughs]. When you buy it, as soon as you have it, it's out of date and the new model is out. But I bought a couple of heads – and I'm not going to name what they are – that haven't even made it out of rehearsal. They've been sitting in my storage locker since the same day I bought them because I just went back to my Friedman heads."

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

"Oh, 100 per cent. I had the most gorgeous Alpine White Les Paul Custom and it was used in a very high-profile Super Bowl commercial by a friend. I think it was for Samsung TVs. After the commercial was filmed, Samsung contacted me and wanted to buy the guitar for a museum or something. I didn't want to sell it, so I threw out a stupid price and they said, 'Yes.' I sold it

BILLY'S GO-TO RIG

"I use either my Knaggs Signature Keya-J, with Fralin noiseless P-90s, or my Gibson Les Paul Signature with Seymour Duncan JB and '59 pickups. I have two Friedman BE-100 Deluxe heads and they run through a Shure wireless [system] into a Radial four-way selector. Then into the rack switching system is an RJM switcher, controlled by a Rocktron floor controller, a Line 6 rackmount modulation, a delay, filter units, a pedal tray with various overdrives, and an octave. Unfortunately, I don't know exactly what's in that drawer as I never open it! [Laughs] But I do know that there are things by MXR, Suhr and Boss in there... And everything goes into a Two Notes speaker cab emulator."

to them and I wish I hadn't, though it was a lot of money for that particular guitar. But I regret it; I wish I still had that guitar."

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking for their ultimate guitar?

"Don't listen to anyone else. When you go out to buy your ultimate guitar, don't be swayed by what anyone else plays or likes. You will know your ultimate guitar when you put your hands on it and you play it. Go by how it sounds and feels; you will know. Don't let your friend who is standing next to you put their hands on it and play it or tell you, 'Nah, man, you should try and buy this one.' No, you get the one that feels right in *your* hands."

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window or browsed online and what were you looking at?

"I've always gone into guitar shops, but if I'm on tour and walk past one, I'm just looking at what they've got. I can tell you that these days, going into a guitar store has become rarer for me because most of us shop online. But recently I was on Reverb looking at a Paul Stanley Ibanez Iceman. Paul is a friend of mine, and I don't own one. Of course, I don't want to ask Paul, but I would love a Cracked Mirror [PS1-CM] one; that's a pretty cool one. Those guitars have such a beautiful shape, they're unlike anything else. But I only want the most expensive version – obviously because I'm an idiot – so I need the custom-built one [laughs]. Paul Stanley, if you're reading this, you know where I live and who you can contact!"

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?

"I think I would go with the expensive guitar and the cheap amp. I say that mainly because I believe that quality in is quality out. So you start where your hands and your instrument are."

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

"I don't really like single coils and I don't really use them, though if it were P-90s it would be a different question! Because now they have the noiseless P-90s and I like those, so I would struggle with that choice. But between humbuckers and single coils, there's no choice for me – it's always humbuckers." **[AD]**



Billy Morrison's latest solo album, *The Morrison Project*, is available now on independent release

https://billymorrison.com

Billy's mahogany-bodied Knaggs Keya-J-M signature is loaded with Fralin noiseless P-90 and adds some bling with gold-plated hardware

PHOTO BY JANE STUART @ JANESTUARTPHOTOS

The MOD SQUAD

FINE TUNING

Judging by some of our more recent review submissions, it's fair to say final QC on new instruments is rather variable. Dave Burrluck wonders if we all need to learn to do a little DIY?

You'd hope that when you buy your shiny new axe, it would be perfectly ready to go, especially since guitars aren't getting any cheaper as we've all no doubt noticed. Over the past year, however, it's fair to say rather too many new instruments aren't quite finished when they turn up at *Guitarist* HQ. Is that acceptable today? Do guitar companies think we should either spend our own time finishing off their guitars or pay a professional? Is the QC of new guitars going down the pan?

It's impossible to generalise, but a personal bugbear for me is tuning. Can I get the guitar in tune in the first place, and will it stay and play in tune? Now, I'm not expecting to do a quick tune to pitch and then to go off and play an hour's set without the guitar drifting. Of course it will. Many of us will have our own preferences for string height and gauge, our own way of attaching strings and stretching them. But when you've gone to that trouble and the damn thing struggles to get in tune, let alone stay that way, well, you've got trouble.

You'd think price would be the obvious stumbling block, but as we've detailed many times there's no reason a lower-end guitar can't play like a high-end guitar, though it depends on quite a few factors. Has it been made correctly in the first place with properly selected and dried wood? Not always. And that's not something we, the end user, can see. But it can certainly contribute to keeping a new guitar in tune. Or not...



Tuning stability problems on new guitars rarely come from the tuners themselves, although many like to upgrade to locking types

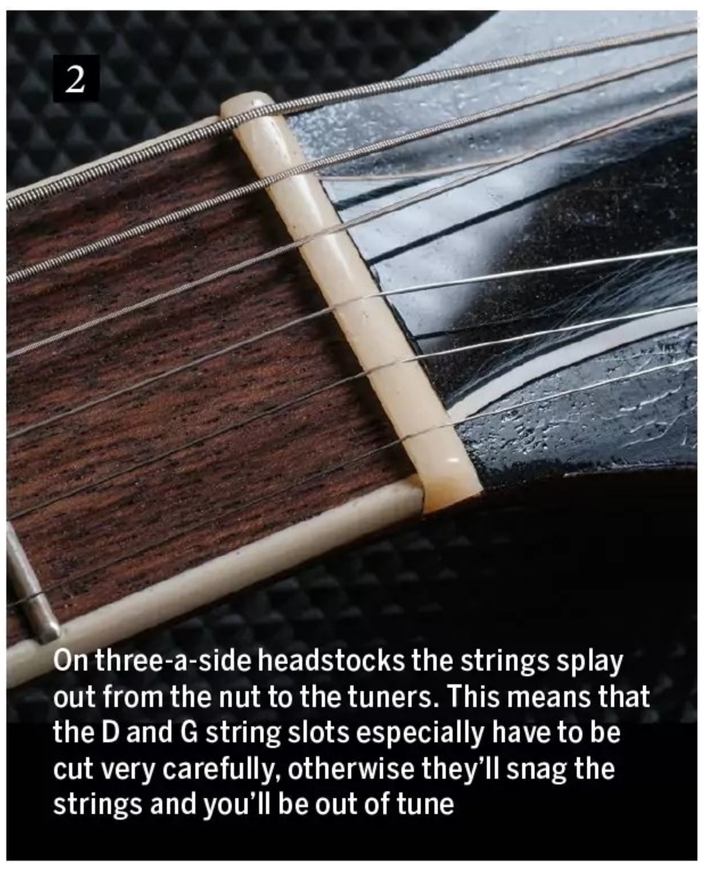
1

Evaluation

As ever, it's essential to carefully check over any new or new-to-you guitar before you consider any fixes, not least if tuning seems to be a problem. Start with the neck itself. An easy way to test a neck's stiffness is simply to check whether it moves when you push or pull on the neck in playing position. Of course, this slight flexing is a technique used by many players to add subtle vibrato. If there's too much flex, however, you've got plenty of potential issues, as with a floating vibrato, where as you raise the pitch of one string, the others will go very slightly flat. In extreme cases, this will happen as you simply bend one string. The nut therefore has to be very well cut and lubricated, otherwise stable tuning will be next to impossible. A neck with next to zero flex will hold its tuning much better from the off, so long as there are no other issues.

It's fairly obvious for a less seasoned player to point the finger at the tuners. These devices are supposed to tune the guitar, aren't they? They must be the problem! But it's rare that even a lower-end guitar will have dysfunctional machineheads. They might feel a little stiff or sloppy, but so long as you've attached your strings correctly – and stretched them when new – it's rare that they're the culprits if you've got tuning stability issues, even though that doesn't stop many people from spending more money on 'upgrading' the tuners [pic 1].

As we've often stated, the top nut is typically the real fly in the tuning and tuning-stability ointment. If the string grooves are too tight, they'll snag the string so a low-fret bend might stay slightly raised, instead of returning to correct pitch. Basic stuff. Three-a-side back-angled headstocks are especially prone to these problems as the D and G strings in particular splay out from the nut to the tuners, as well as angling down to the tuners. Fender's six-in-a-line headstocks have pretty straight string pull, but – as with any nut – if those string grooves are too tight, you'll still have a problem [pics 2 & 3].



2

On three-a-side headstocks the strings splay out from the nut to the tuners. This means that the D and G string slots especially have to be cut very carefully, otherwise they'll snag the strings and you'll be out of tune



3

Another reason to love Mr Fender: the straight string-pull over the nut means you'll have fewer problems, not least with a vibrato

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK



While we've had to work on plenty of review guitars, one brand that stands out is PRS. From its start-up SE models upwards, these models play and stay in tune and are consistently fit for purpose. This reference SE Silver Sky is in daily use and, aside from string changes and the occasional polish, we haven't touched it


4

4. You can check for straight string-pull over the nut by fretting each string at the 3rd fret. Look closely and there should be only the slightest gap from the top of the fret to the underside of the string. If the nut slots are too high, then as you fret at the 1st fret you'll be sharp. But remember, only check this when the neck is properly set with just a little relief

5. Like a nut's string grooves, those at the bridge need to be smooth and properly cut. It's particularly important if your guitar has a vibrato as well

6. There are plenty of tricks to get a Strat-style vibrato to play in tune. PRS's SE Silver Sky comes with the vibrato 'decked' flat to the body, as shown here, and there are no tuning problems


5


6

Go back a decade or so and it was pretty common to receive new review guitars where the nut was simply left too high, which not only affected the playing feel in lower positions but could also make a simple open E to 1st-fret F, for example, not be in tune as the string will go sharp as you push it down. The thinking was that the end user might want a different setup or string gauge, and the shop's tech would make the necessary tweaks before you bought it. With the advent of online commerce, most (but not all) manufacturers pay much more attention to this, but, to be honest, I've lost count of the number of guitars I've had on review, certainly in the sub-£1k price bracket, that have needed a little TLC in the nut department. Either way, that top nut is probably the most common problem with any lower-end mass-produced guitar. Just saying [pic 4].

At the other end of the string is the bridge saddle. Like the nut, if the saddle snags the string you can have problems

"It's rare that the tuners are the culprits if you've got tuning stability issues, though that doesn't stop people 'upgrading' them"
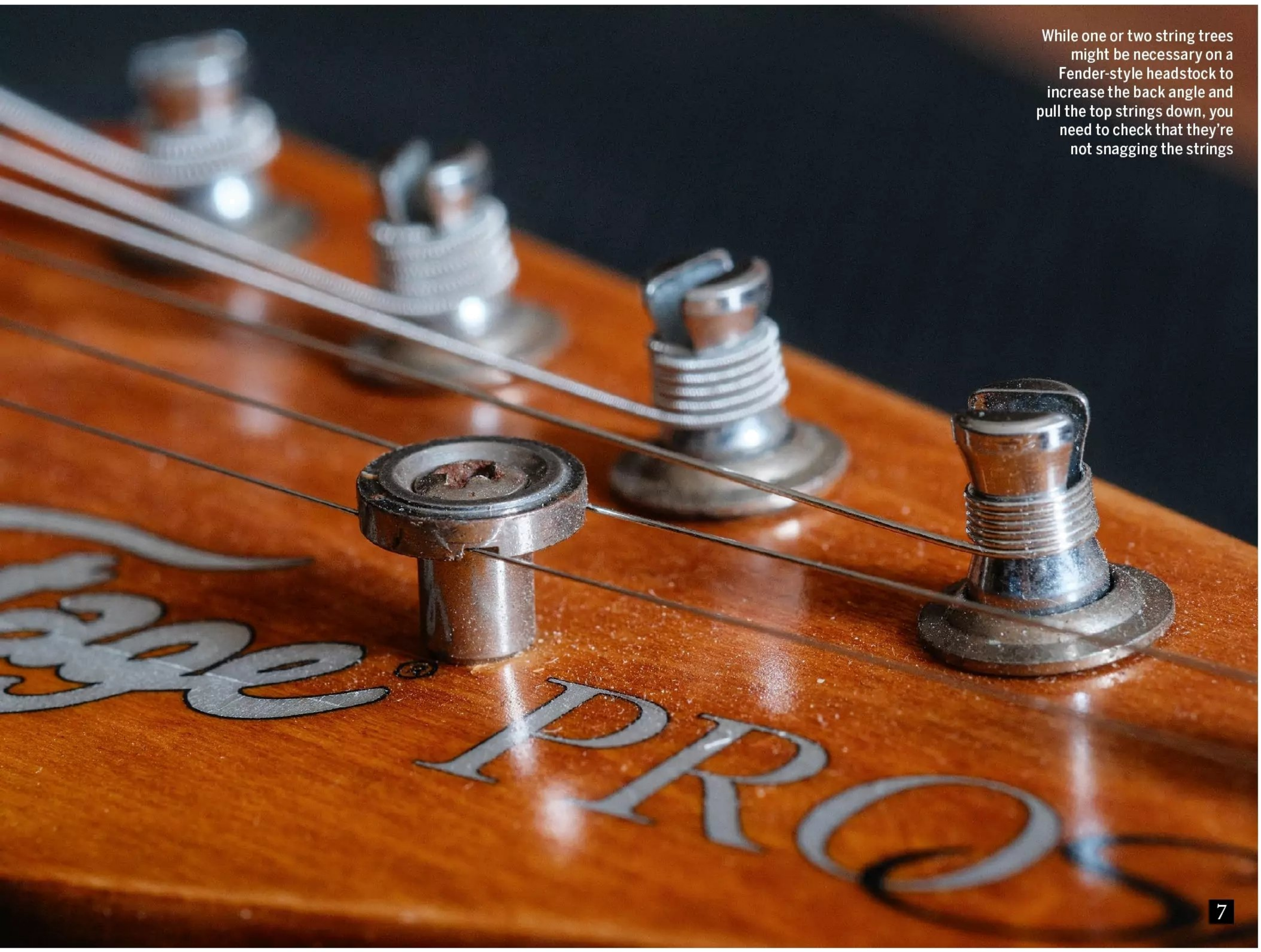
[pics 5 & 6]. Add in a vibrato to the equation and you have another potential problem. There's the fulcrum to consider, the break point on the saddle: is the string catching on the exit point from the block to the saddle? And going back to the headstock, don't forget that string trees can snag those top strings, too [pic 7].

Bearing all this in mind, you'd be right to expect more potential tuning problems with a Stratocaster or a Bigsby-loaded Gretsch than you would with a Les Paul Junior.

Buzz, Rattle & Hum

Now, even if these elements prove problem-free, a neck needs to be straight (with or without a slight concave 'bow', called relief) and the frets level. If there's too much relief in the neck when you make those adjustments to the height of the string grooves in the nut and then straighten it, you might well find those nut grooves are too low and you're now getting string buzz on your open strings. The only fix here is a new nut or a Super Glue drop-fill. So, yes, there is a process to follow in any instrument setup, old or new.

Buzz, fret 'rattle', whatever you want to call it, isn't always easy to pin down, especially since some of us have heavier picking hands than others. But these technique-related issues – often 'fixed' by simply raising the string height and/or going up a gauge of string – can mask the real culprits such as those low nut slots or, obviously, a high fret that hasn't been seated properly or has become unseated. Sometimes that annoying buzz you hear



While one or two string trees might be necessary on a Fender-style headstock to increase the back angle and pull the top strings down, you need to check that they're not snagging the strings

7

might not even be a fret/neck issue; it could be anything from a vibrating spring on a humbucker mounting ring to a loose-fitting truss rod that's not under tension.

So while playability/tuning issues are the primary issues, that's not to say there won't be problems with the hand-wiring that's in the vast majority of lower-end guitars: switches wired the wrong way around, tone controls that don't work and, on occasion, loose pots or jack sockets, or a dry joint on an earth wire. I like to check the electrics *and* the pickups. I've certainly had guitars advertising 'pickup A' when the actual pickups are something different.

Case In Point

A recent new launch from a major manufacturer involved three new models being shipped to HQ, review stock for ourselves, *Total Guitar* and our online teams to review. All good – although a couple of reviewers complained about rattles and string buzz. It wasn't my review, but I asked for one of the guitars to be sent out to me to see what the problem was. Fair play to our reviewers because 'rattle and buzz' was an understatement. The guitar I was shipped was unplayable. Now, I didn't ask if either of the reviewers had had a go at fixing anything, but it appeared that, at best, the guitar had missed out on a final QC check when it'd landed in Europe, and at worst no-one at the factory had bothered to finish the job or even basically set up the guitar.

> "I've lost count of the number of guitars, certainly in the sub-£1k price bracket, that have needed a little TLC in the nut department"

Anyway, to sort it out I reset the neck relief, added a neck shim, reset saddle heights and radius, reset the vibrato, reset string heights, recut the top E and B string nut grooves to remove the sitar-like response, and drop-filled the low E nut slot as it had been cut too low. Personally, I'd have restrung the guitar with a heavier string gauge, too, as it was still quite 'snappy' sounding, but that's a personal preference.

Now, if you'd received that guitar from an online retailer, you'd be sending it back, wouldn't you? In-store, well, the overworked tech would be tasked to do what I had to do. The thing is, aside from a drop of Super Glue, nut powder and a thin piece of veneer for that shim, the guitar hasn't changed and yet it's gone from 'unplayable' to 'perfectly good'.

A sign of the times? I'm not sure. Making a guitar is one thing, and that should include final tweaking and setup, shouldn't it? I don't think it's the job for the end user, or the reviewer, to have to finish it off. Let us know your experiences at the usual address. G



Huw Price's Nitty Gritty

Without modulation, we wouldn't have vibrato, chorus, flanging or phasing

Modulation

In our recent Nitty Gritty feature on tremolo (issue 515), we described how a valve can be configured to create a low-frequency oscillator (LFO) that can modulate amplitude. You can't actually hear the oscillator itself, merely the effect it has, and that effect isn't restricted to tremolo. In addition to amplitude, an LFO can be used to modulate pitch, frequency response, phase and delay – and that leads us onto vibrato, chorus, flangers and phasers.



The Vibratone was Fender's answer to the heavyweight Leslie rotating speaker

Doppler Vibes

Many of us will have experienced the acoustic phenomenon of the pitch of a police car siren appearing to increase in pitch as it approaches and decrease as it moves away. It's called the Doppler effect, and if the volume and pitch remain constant you're probably in trouble.

Engineers have developed clever ways to replicate natural acoustic phenomena such as reverb and echo, so it's hardly surprising that they did the same for the Doppler effect. During the late 1930s a radio repair engineer called David Leslie bought a Hammond organ, but he found himself disappointed with the sound. He designed a speaker cabinet that utilised spinning horn speakers for the upper frequencies and a rotating baffle for a fixed low-frequency driver. Hammond wasn't interested in the speaker cabinet, so David Leslie started his own company and his rotating speakers quickly became synonymous with Hammond organs.

The Uni-Vibe was an excellent alternative to a Leslie and became a mainstay for Jimi Hendrix

The onboard valve amplifiers of Leslie cabinets would overdrive very nicely, so it was probably inevitable that guitarists eventually discovered them. More closely resembling a phone box than a stompbox, the Leslie nevertheless provided guitarists with the first opportunity to experience the intoxicating mélange of pitch modulation, tremolo and phasing that they create. You can hear this on *Badge* by Cream, Hendrix's *Little Wing* solo and several of David Gilmour's guitar tracks on Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*.

The main drawback of Leslie cabinets, however, is that they're so heavy you need road crew to move them. Various companies subsequently developed their own rotating speaker cabinets with more guitar-friendly dimensions and easier portability. The Vaughan brothers both used the Fender Vibratone and David Gilmour favoured the Yamaha RA-200.

Even so, the advent of solid-state electronics was ushering in the era of the effects pedal, and the Shine-ei Uni-Vibe proved to be an excellent alternative to a Leslie. It soon became a mainstay for Jimi Hendrix and is most closely associated with Robin Trower. Featuring a chorus/vibrato switch on the front, it provided a four-stage phasing with photo resistors and could be operated with a foot controller.

Modern stompbox Leslie simulators are plentiful, so check out the DLS RotoSPIN, Strymon Lex, Boss RT-20 and Hammond Leslie G. The now discontinued valve-driven Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere was always highly regarded, and pre-loved examples are easy to find. Also, many DAWs provide rotary speaker plug-ins.

1. Boss's RT-20 is one of a host of modern pedal-based Leslie simulators

2. In 1976 the Boss CE-1 arrived as the world's first chorus pedal



1



2

Vibrato

The Doppler effect occurs because the time interval between each wave peak gets shorter as the sound approaches, and longer as it moves away. Clearly, Leslies work by replicating the physical conditions mechanically because the rotating speakers direct the sound towards the listener and away. Time delay and therefore phase shifting contribute to the Doppler effect.

As discussed in our tremolo feature, most amp tremolos use a phase shift oscillator circuit with a three-stage capacitor/resistor (CR) network. The time taken for each capacitor to charge and discharge causes a tiny delay, and by manipulating the delay time engineers can control phase shift. This means that Doppler-style effects can also be created electronically.

One approach is to create two copies of the guitar signal with a 90-degree phase shift between them. These signals are mixed together and the summing amplifier is modulated to move from one side to the other. As it moves, the summed output is effectively modulating the delay and it creates a pitch-shifting effect. It's more of a pitch wobble than the whooshing phasey sound of a Leslie, but it has a sonic character of its own.

Vibrato circuits are more complex to build than tremolos and so they were a luxury on amplifiers

As early as the 1940s, an engineer called John Hannert developed a vibrato for Hammond, and Wurlitzer's Model 44 Organ had a vibrato effect in 1953. The schematic for Wurlitzer's vibrato was published by Richard H Dorf in the April 1954 edition of *Radio And Television News*, and is thought to have 'inspired' the vibrato design Dick Denny would later use in the Vox AC30.

Dorf wrote: "A phase change can be detected as a frequency change as long as the phase is continuing to change." This is crucial because it states that, although we perceive a change in pitch, the actual pitch doesn't change. In that regard, electronic vibrato effects and the acoustic Doppler effect are the same.

By 1956 Gibson had a standalone vibrato effect unit called the GA-V 1, but the most famous amp vibrato first featured on Magnatone's 200 Series amps in 1957. The circuit employed silicon carbide voltage-dependent resistors (varistors) to alter pitch. Varistor resistance would vary depending on the voltage across them, and higher voltage lowered resistance. The effect more closely resembles a pitch-shifting tremolo than a Leslie, and it was famously used by Duane Eddy and Lonnie Mack.

Vibrato circuits are more complex to build than tremolos and require more expensive components so they were a luxury on amplifiers. Maganatone switched from varistors to light-dependent resistors, and transistors had replaced valves by the late 1960s. By then it was possible to build vibrato effects into stompbox enclosures.

The Bigfoot Magnavibe and Malekko Omicron are both designed to produce vintage Magnatone-style vibrato, and the Boss VB-2 compact pedal has a strong following. In addition to Speed and Intensity controls, a modern vibrato pedal may have a Rise Time control to set how quickly the effect kicks in, and expression pedal compatibility.

Chorus

Some chorus effects feature vibrato/chorus switching, and even if they don't it's often possible to dial in a vibrato using a chorus pedal because the two effects are so closely related. Once again, we can trace things back to Hammond organs – and the work of John Hannet. In the 1940s he developed a chorus effect, and Hammond organs were equipped with a switch labelled Tremolo and Chorale. The trick is to combine the dry signal with the vibrato effect.

The Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble was the first commercially available chorus pedal when it was released in 1976. Boss began offering it in stompbox form when the onboard chorus effect in the Roland JC-120 amplifier became so popular. The same technology was also built into a rackmount enclosure called the Roland Dimension D and became a mainstay of the 1980s studio scene. The pedal's Depth and Rate controls were self-explanatory for anybody familiar with tremolo and vibrato, and the Chorus/Intensity control combined the wet and dry signals. It also had a second footswitch that toggled between chorus and vibrato, and the CE-1 added richness and complexity.

The pedal itself was fairly sizable and required mains power, so it wasn't long before Boss introduced the CE-2 in the rectangular small-box battery-powered form that has characterised Boss pedals ever since. The vibrato option was dropped, possibly because it appeared too dated, and pretty soon every pedal manufacturer had a chorus in its product line. 1980s guitar music would have sounded very different without them.

Flanging

Flanging can be traced back to a trick performed by studio engineers. Les Paul was doing it in 1952 using acetate disks and later engineers used tape. Famous examples of tape flanging can be heard on The Beatles' *Revolver*, *Itchycoo Park* by the Small Faces and *Life In The Fast Lane* by the Eagles.

With two reel-to-reel machines playing the same material in sync, one machine is slowed and sped up by applying gentle hand pressure to the supply and take-up spools respectively. The idea is to move the playback forwards and backwards in time by a tiny amount.

Modulating the delay time is key because if the delay time remains fixed, all you get is comb filtering. This can be represented as a series of peaks and troughs on a graph that resemble the teeth of a comb. To achieve the flanger swoosh, the delay time has to modulate so those troughs sweep across the frequency range, and some flangers have delay feedback controls to intensify the effect.

Again, this is a fairly simple effect to create electronically and MXR was the biggest player in the early days of studio flanging. Another early classic was the Electro-Harmonix Electric Mistress, which included a 'filter matrix' setting that deactivates the delay modulation.

There's a fun flanging trick that works particularly well when adding reverb to acoustic guitars and clean electric guitars during mixing, and it's very easy to do with a DAW using native plug-ins. Try routing the reverb send through a subtle flanger effect and see what happens. The key is to keep the flanger itself out of the stereo bus.

Phasing

Flanging and phasing are similar in principle, but phasing is simultaneously cruder and more complex. So-called 'all pass filters' are used to create notches or troughs in the frequency response by isolating specific frequencies then flipping their polarity before recombining them with the dry signal. In short, this is induced phase cancellation at specific frequencies, rather than delay-induced phase shift.

The more filter stages a phaser has across the frequency range, the greater the intensity and smoothness of the effect. But fixed notch filters alone will only result in rudimentary comb filtering. Like flangers, phasing is characterised by that swooshy sweep, but to achieve that the notch filter frequencies are modulated, rather than delay.

The more filter stages a phaser has across the frequency range, the greater the intensity and smoothness of the effect

A capacitor and resistor are combined to create the filter, and the centre frequency can be moved by modulating the resistor value. The various ways to do this include applying a low-frequency oscillator signal to light-dependent resistors (Mu-Tron Bi-Phase and Uni-Vibe), J-FETs (MXR Phase 45, 90 and 100), and operational transconductance amplifiers' (EHX Small Stone).

The Bucket Brigade

A final mention should be made of the microchips known as bucket brigade devices (BBDs) that made all these modulation effects small and cheap enough to build into pedals. Numerous capacitors could be accommodated on a single chip and they could be configured like the capacitor chain of the low-frequency oscillator we discussed in our tremolo feature.

BBDs such as the Phillips TDA1022 could hold several hundred capacitor stages on a single chip. With each stage charging and discharging, the greater number of capacitors created the potential for delay times that could greatly exceed minor phase shifts. Mods for rockers, indeed. G

www.huwpriceguitar.com



3. EHX's Electric Mistress debuted in 1976 and remains in Neo and Stereo formats



4. Today's MXR Script Phase 90 integrates vintage phasing with modern convenience

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David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Introduced to compete with Gibson, these Gretsch solidbodies weren't really solid at all

Gretsch 6130 & 6121

"The Gretsch 6130 Round-Up premiered in 1953, but customers didn't start seeing it until 1954. The Western motif inlay at the 1st fret didn't appear until 1955, which is the year this one was made. The knotty pine top wasn't something that could be ordered and some of the guitars just came that way while others didn't, with no explanation from Gretsch. The pine was usually very thin, and if these guitars aren't packed well and there's an accident, the control knobs can push right through the top.

"They had every bell and whistle that Gretsch could offer you besides the bejewelled knobs, which were reserved for the Falcon and Penguin. But it has the Western motif inlays, gold hardware and the belt buckle tailpiece with the lasso scene.

"They were originally priced at around $300, which was more than a $182 Stratocaster but less than a Goldtop Les Paul. Gretsch was trying to produce something to compete with Gibson's Les Paul model but at a price point about $100 lower. Round-Ups are a lot lighter than a Les Paul because they're chambered, but they did that to save money, not to make the guitars light. Gretsch pricing included the case, whereas Gibson charged additionally for their cases.

"Believe it or not, the Round-Up guitars remained in the catalogue until 1960. They weren't actually pictured after 1955, but Gretsch did state they were still available. However, I don't know of anyone who has ever seen one made later than 1956. In effect, the 6121 was a replacement for the Round-Up and both models tend to produce a very specific sound. Some avid Gretsch players that I know claim to hear a difference between Round-Ups and 6121s with DeArmonds. To my ears, they sound pretty much identical, despite the 6121 having a thicker mahogany top.

"The 6121 has a much brighter colour and it's what we call 'Gretsch Orange' today. All the Western motifs are gone and the steer-head inlay in the headstock changed to a horseshoe inlay. Gretsch also modified the shape of the truss rod cover. 6121s have humpback inlays starting at the 1st fret and Filter'Trons replaced the DeArmond Dynasonic pickups in 1958; my old friend Brian Setzer prefers the Filter'Trons.

"This example has a factory-equipped Bigsby, and in the early days the Bigsbys Gretsch fitted weren't gold-plated or anodised, even if all the other hardware was gold-plated. The fretboard material was no longer beautiful Brazilian rosewood, and you tend to start seeing Indian rosewood at this time. It's a much lighter colour compared with the deeper and richer brown of the earlier ones.

"The earlier Melita bridges were replaced by the Space Control bridge,



The 6130 Round-Up's 'Western motifs' included a belt buckle tailpiece, steer heads, a studded leather belt around the body and a branded 'G' logo

Although similar in structure and sound, the 6121 was considerably less kitsch and featured a Bigsby and Space Control bridge combination

which worked really well with Bigsbys because they rolled as the strings moved. It was pretty ingenious for the time considering it was just a piece of threaded rod. An aluminium nut also replaced the Round-Up's bone nut. The pickguard shape was changed and the steer-head motif became a Chet Atkins signpost logo. Chet had become the ambassador for Gretsch and every model became a Chet Atkins something or other.

"I don't aggressively seek out Gretsch guitars for my store and I wouldn't travel to a trade show just to buy one, but sometimes they come to me. The only exceptions would be Falcons and Penguins because they are what they are and many people feel they need to be a staple of their collections. Despite not being a huge Gretsch player myself, they are kind of neat and different. If you're a collector, something like a 6130 would look good, too.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / WELL STRUNG GUITARS

"The knotty pine top wasn't something that could be ordered and some of the guitars just came that way"

"In truth, the build quality of vintage Gretsches can be hit and miss. I remember being told by a former Gretsch employee that they would go out and have five-Martini lunches and then try to put guitars together in the afternoon. Another time, many years ago, I had a 1957 6120 hanging on the wall and an older gentleman came into the store and told me, 'I made that guitar.' I didn't believe him, but he insisted: 'If you take the pickup out you'll find my initials FGJ written inside.' I eventually took the guitar down, looked under the neck pickup and there they were. I hadn't realised the gentleman was actually Fred Gretsch Jr. Far from being a crazy old man, he was the man himself and I felt like such a fool." **[HP]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

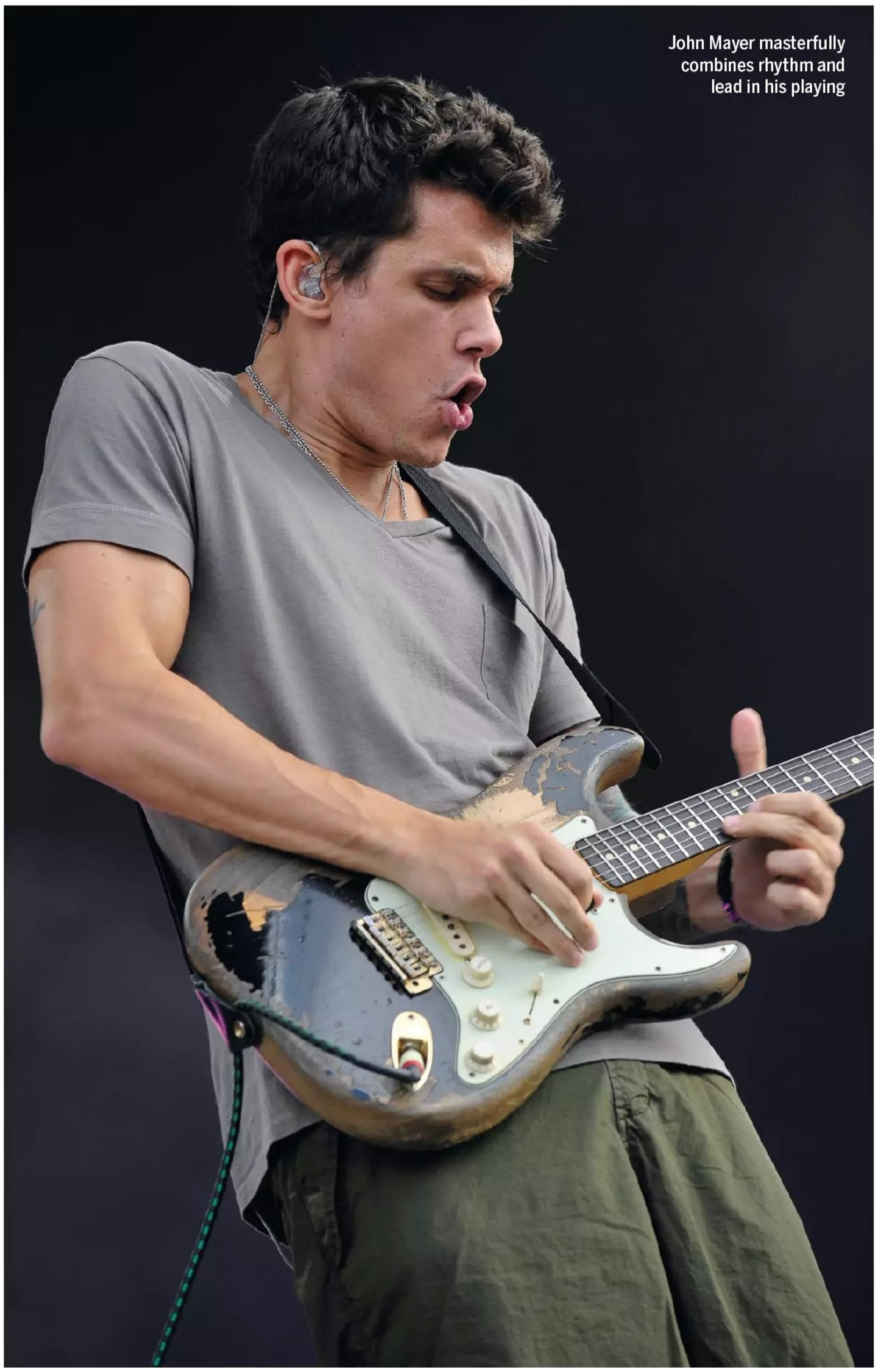
Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Rhythm & Swing

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Lewis Pequeno Bastardo & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example



John Mayer masterfully combines rhythm and lead in his playing

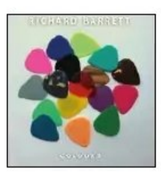
PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

WHETHER YOU'RE A PRO musician or play with bands in your spare time, chances are you'll spend the majority of your time fulfilling rhythm guitar duties. You're certainly not alone in this – many great soloists are also fantastic rhythm players, covering both rhythm and lead parts and frequently blurring the lines between the two. Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan are great examples of this blending of styles, with the solo/examples here (broadly speaking) inspired by the latter.

We're working in a 'trio' format, with just bass and drums for support, so we need to cover harmonic, melodic and rhythmic areas far more comprehensively than we would in a conventional lead/rhythm or guitar/keyboards line-up. Linking chords with pentatonic embellishments via an awareness of the CAGED patterns really helps when exploring these ideas.

I've opted for a fairly low-gain sound, which allows the notes of any chords to come through clearly. Even so, I've taken care to mute unwanted strings, as shown with the open fourth string in Example 1. I've also kept the options as open as possible by keeping the bass moving to support the guitar, and avoided – or at least avoided lingering on – major or minor 3rds, so you can switch between the two or be ambiguous about it, which is such a hallmark of this style.
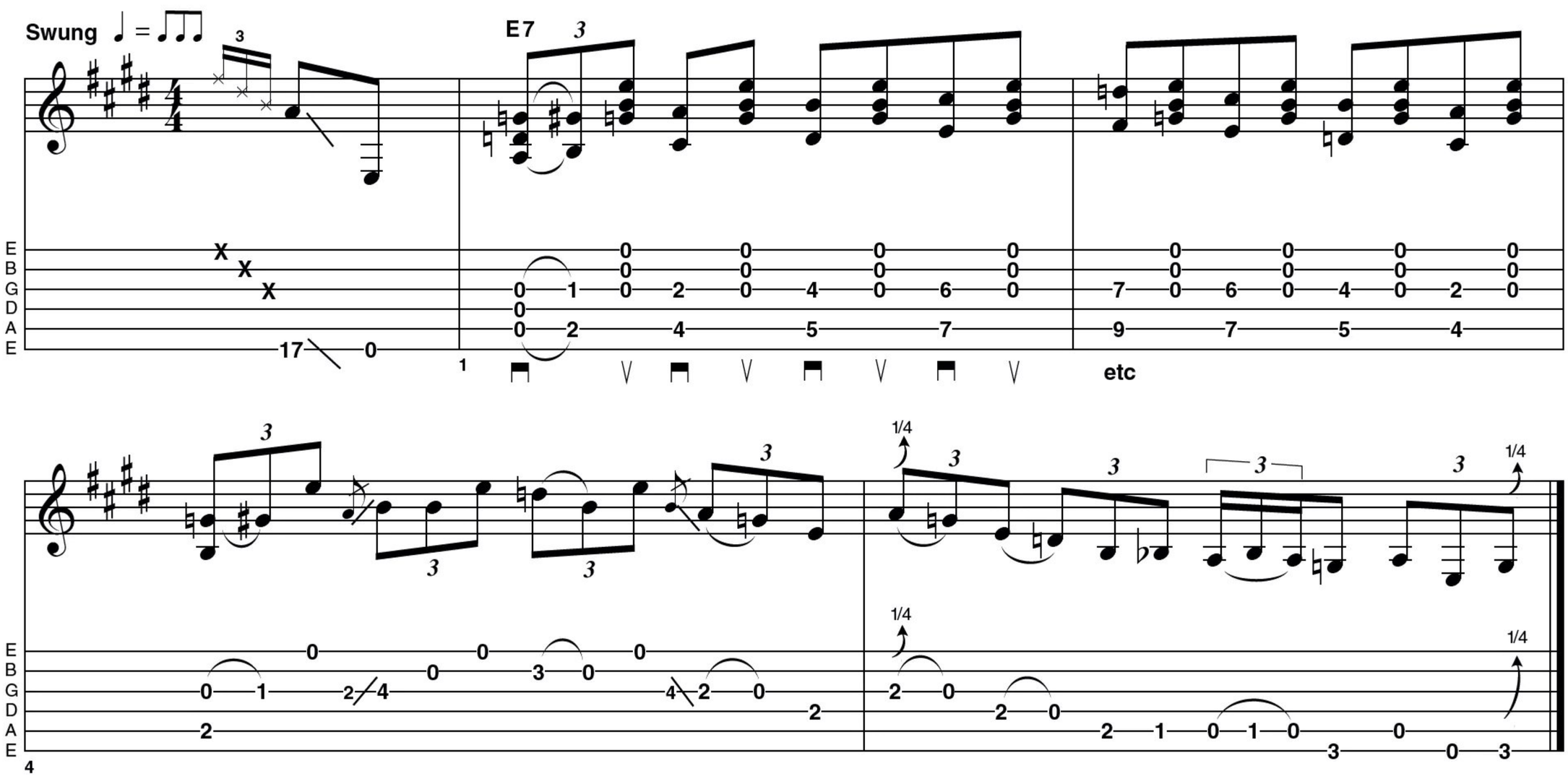
In the context of a song, details such as this are often more rigid, but it's nice to have the freedom to treat this as more of a 'freestyle jam' – a safe place to take risks as a learning experience. You'll see that I've taken groups of chords/inversions and superimposed them over what the bass often implies as a single chord. There are also a few (hopefully) useful pentatonic phrasing ideas. Hope you enjoy this and see you next time! G



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

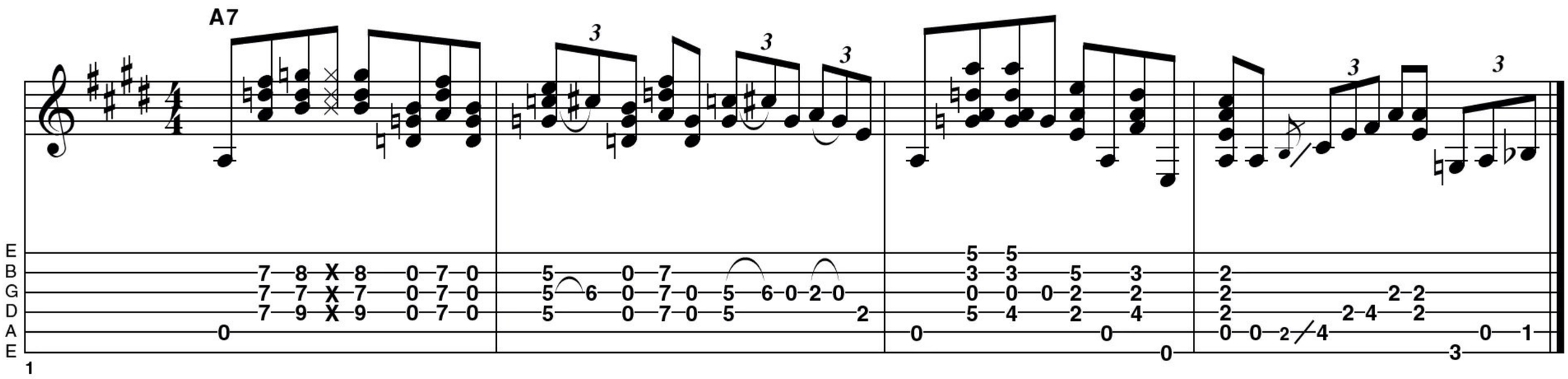
Example 1

AFTER A CHEEKY SLIDE down the sixth string to set the mood, this example features several useful chord shapes based around E major. Note the open fourth string is muted; it does feature in the very first hit of bar 1, but from then on I'm using my fretting hand fingers to stop it ringing as this would negatively affect the clarity. For ease of reading, I haven't marked these muted hits on the transcription: if the tab doesn't say it, don't play it!



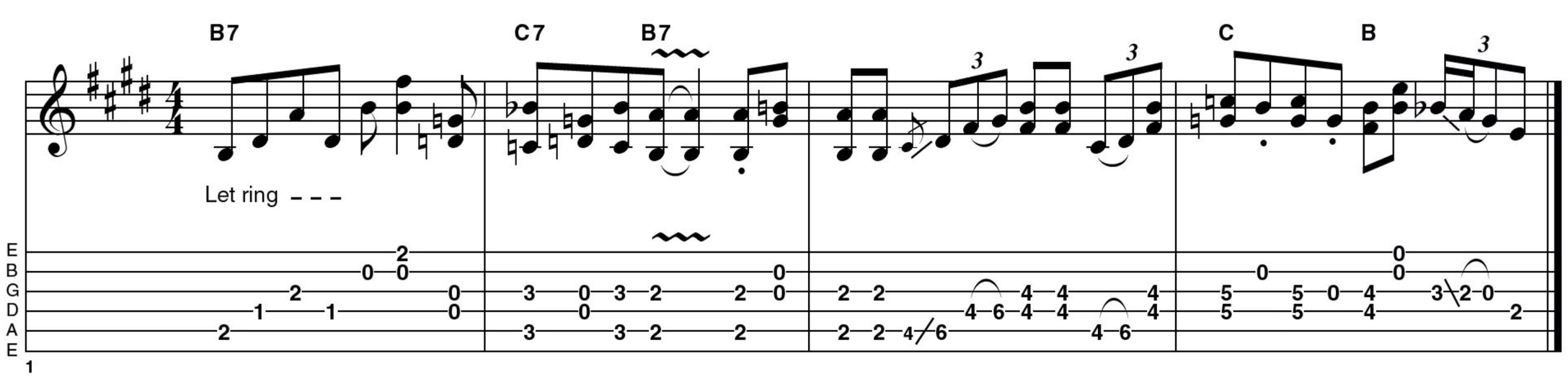
Example 2

MOVING ON TO AN IMPLIED A CHORD, this example follows a similar template to Example 1. There are a few useful and interesting chord ideas leading to a couple of pentatonic licks at the end. Also like Example 1, there's a strong swing feel, using upstrokes on the muted or open strings to give the illusion of another rhythm guitarist playing at the same time. It pays to experiment with ideas such as this because there are many more possibilities to be explored, not just what's written here.



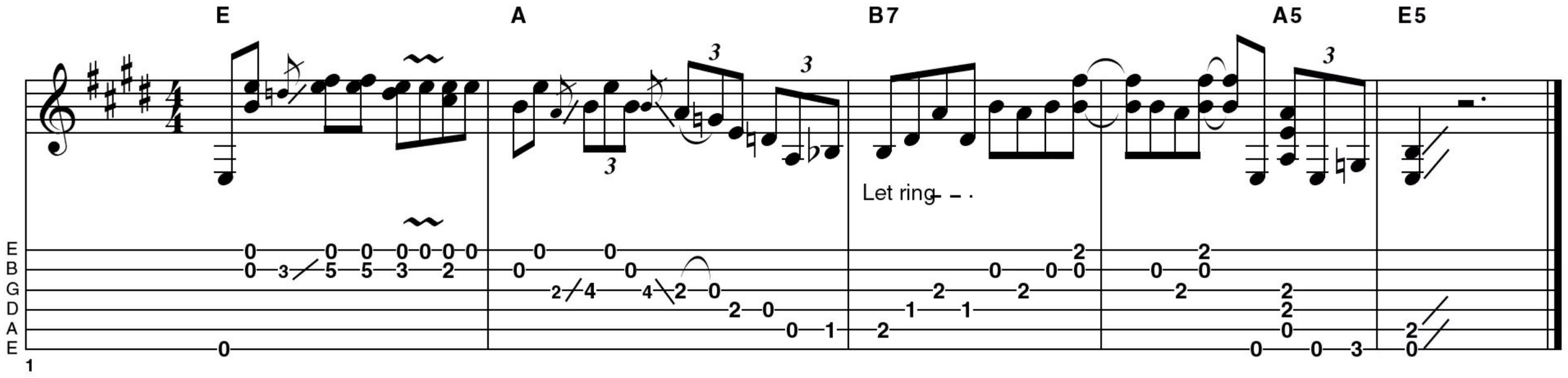
Example 3

AS IN EXAMPLE 1, I'm muting unwanted strings to keep things clear – in this case, the fourth string in those B7 and C7 chords. From bar 3, I'm experimenting with different inversions and adding some pentatonic embellishments, which fall under the fingers quite easily with these shapes. This is quite a simple principle, but it is key when coming up with these kinds of guitar parts. As with the other examples, I've played a more bluesy pentatonic lick to link with the next idea.



Example 4

THERE'S A MORE 'SOLO GUITAR' APPROACH to this final example, something I felt free to do having established a good strong harmonic basis with the earlier chords. I'm mixing open and fretted strings, and being deliberately dissonant at times. After playing around with a shape 1 open-position E minor pentatonic, we move to a ringing open-position B7, before finishing with a classic 'when-I woke-up-this-morning' style blues riff!



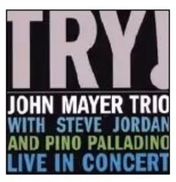
Hear It Here

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND DOUBLE TROUBLE
TEXAS FLOOD



Recorded back in late 1982 but not released until the following year, this is essentially a live album, recorded 'off the studio floor' in just a few days. Listen to *Pride And Joy* and you'll hear this was a big influence on this issue's examples. Elsewhere, check out *Rude Mood* as well as *Mary Had A Little Lamb* for further examples of the way Stevie would fill out the sound by combining bluesy licks with chords and rhythmic playing.

JOHN MAYER TRIO
TRY! LIVE IN CONCERT



This 2005 live recording covers a few different styles – but, most importantly, amply demonstrates John Mayer's ability to seamlessly combine rhythm and lead (and vocals!) in one go. Make sure you check out *Who Did You Think I Was*, *Gravity* and *Out Of My Mind* for further examples, although it's well worth a listen to all the other tracks here, too. Live trio-based albums are a great hunting ground for ideas to fill out the sound and keep things interesting.

JIMI HENDRIX
BAND OF GYPSYS



Carrying on with the 'live trio' theme, this album is also a definitive example. Jimi covers both rhythm and lead playing, using a selection of interesting chord voicings, rhythms and sometimes just playing riffs in unison with the bass. Check out *Who Knows*, *Message To Love* and *We Gotta Live Together* to hear lots of examples and a few underlying principles such as combining CAGED chords and pentatonic shapes to blur the line between rhythm and lead guitar.

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