

Guitarist

Issue 522

APRIL 2025

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Guitars Without Frontiers



This month's feature on Japanese guitars is a great lesson in how mercurial the world of guitar making can be, and how slow, sometimes, our own prejudices are to react to rapidly changing realities. Looking at some of the wilder designs that Japanese companies such as Teisco, Kent or Guyatone – to name but three – put out in the heady days of the 60s, you can see why some players in the UK and America might not have taken them that seriously at first. Festooned with buttons, odd-looking pickups and outlandish body shapes, it must have seemed like something was lost in translation from American guitar-making to Japan's home-grown efforts to make rock 'n' roll instruments.

But any complacency the big American makers may have felt on that score was unwise. By the late 70s, Japan was turning out clones of classic US electrics that equalled or even bettered the wobbling quality control of Fender and Gibson at the time, while the post-lawsuit original designs of companies such as Ibanez were strong enough to attract interest from players such as Jeff Beck. In the 80s, Fender began manufacturing guitars in Japan, and this sideline helped keep the great brand afloat after Fender employees bought out the company from CBS and they moved US production from Fullerton to Corona. It didn't harm, of course, that the MIJ Fenders were immaculately turned out and continue to be so. By the time of 90s shred, Ibanez and other Japanese makes completely outpaced the innovation of US firms with bleeding-edge instruments such as Steve Vai's JEM model.

What useful lessons can we draw from this? Firstly, that lazy stereotypes – positive or negative – about the quality of guitar making in a given country have a habit of being proven wrong. Ultimately, how committed, equipped and driven a company is to make great guitars is more important than country of origin. Secondly, we can learn that early experiments that don't quite work are no barrier to successful evolution – in fact, they may fuel it. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Smith/Kotzen

This fiery alliance between Maiden's guitar man and one of the most gifted alumni of the 90s shred movement has yielded a great album **p36**



Need For Tweed

Fender's Deluxe has been arguably its most important amp, in its various guises. So it's very interesting to see where it all started **p120**



Yvette Young

We join the Californian instrumental guitarist to hear about the gear that has helped define her sound – and stuff that didn't **p114**

Guitarist

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FIRST PLAY



LOWDEN F12
£3,400

WHAT IS IT? Spruce-fronted flat-top acoustic with Lowden's all-new lightweight bolt-on neck joint system

Stunning Simplicity

A new model from Lowden is something of an event, and when that instrument involves a reimagined neck joint, we're instantly intrigued

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Phil Barker

Having said “a new model from Lowden”, there were actually two fresh acoustic releases from the Northern Irish company at this year's Winter NAMM Show, our F12 being the spruce-topped stablemate to the otherwise identical cedar-fronted F10. We didn't want to use the term ‘entry level’ for this guitar as it's a fully grown-up instrument. That said, it's made more simply than even the simpler models in Lowden's roster. So we spoke to company founder George Lowden in order to put the instrument into context within his extensive catalogue: “My aim with this guitar was to provide a ‘real’ Lowden but at a more affordable price,” he tells us. “Also, I've been itching to design a bolt-on neck at a lighter weight for several years, so this seemed like the ideal opportunity.”

Featuring satin-finished rosewood back and sides, a three-piece mahogany neck (not Lowden's usual five-piece mahogany and rosewood construction), ebony fingerboard, cherry wood binding, and rosewood and maple soundhole rosette, as with all Lowdens the F12's beauty lies in its visual simplicity. However, beneath the surface lies the interesting development that George alludes to, one that's already







1. Gold Gotoh tuners with ebony buttons are among the F12's high-end appointments. Note, too, the stylish Lowden logo on the satin-finished rosewood headstock faceplate

employed by US manufacturers such as Taylor and Collings, plus Alister Atkin on these shores, and many others.

"I have used a dovetail neck joint system for 50 years," George affirms, "but I always wanted to bring a lightweight bolt-on design to the party alongside our traditional dovetailed instruments. Dovetails are great as long as they are fitted correctly, without gaps that can

allow the neck angle to come up over time, necessitating a reset. The new bolt-on system has maximum surface-to-surface contact for transference of sound between neck and soundbox – but also for structural stability."

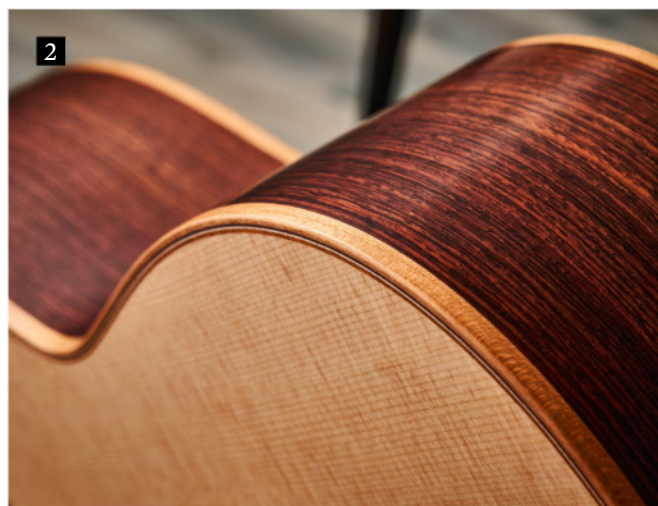
The F-style is Lowden's mid-sized body shape, sitting neatly between the O-style jumbo and the smaller-bodied S-style. However, rather than instantly presume this makes the F12 and F10 'fingerstyle' guitars (Lowden players include legendary pickers such as Pierre Bensusan, Alex De Grassi and Richard Thompson), Lowden wanted the new F models to be suitable for any playing approach. "I adjusted the bracing a little in both the F10 and F12, stiffening it up slightly because I wanted these guitars to be maybe the most versatile in terms of flat-picking, strumming or fingerpicking. So it's voiced somewhere between all of these styles."

Lowden instruments feature a beautiful satin sheen finish achieved by using, again according to George, "multiple coats of lacquer, rubbed down between each one with fine abrasives, so that the final film thickness is very low – 70 to 150 microns depending on which part of the guitar.

2. You can see from this close-up the accuracy in the F12's construction, and even though it's a simple guitar, cosmetics-wise, the cherry wood binding is a nice touch

3. Many top companies are utilising grainier ebony that would once have been discarded due to the streaks. We happen to love both the motive and the visual effect

4. This split bone bridge provides fantastic intonation, although it rather restricts one's amplification choices to bridge plate systems or soundhole pickups



Then the final coat is rubbed down using 2000 Abralon silicon carbide paper.”

Along with the all-natural bindings and purflings, the straight-grained spruce top, rosewood body and laminated mahogany neck, the F12 is both impeccably constructed and reeking of understated elegance. And not for a moment is there any suggestion of ‘junior’ or ‘beginner level’ instrument here.

Feel & Sounds

Lowden guitars’ popularity among fingerstyle guitarists is in part due to their generous nut width. The extra fretboard expanse it provides helps with the dextrous fretting-hand moves often employed by such players, which narrower necks might otherwise curtail. At 45mm here and 57mm where the neck meets the body, there’s plenty of real estate on the ebony ‘board and its 20 medium frets for even the most adventurous of players.

However, although quite a wide neck, it’s not overly deep. The gentle C-section

“I’ve used a dovetail system for 50 years. I wanted to do a lightweight bolt-on design” **George Lowden**

profile increases from around 20mm to 23mm from the 1st fret to the 10th, where it begins to flare out into the heel. We don’t know for certain whether a cutaway option is in the pipeline to further enhance playability for the more adventurous among us, but we wouldn’t be at all surprised.

At 405mm, or just under 16 inches wide, and with a maximum depth of around 120mm (4.25 inches), the F body size is ideal for playing either sitting down or standing. And that wide and medium-profile neck mated to Lowden’s renowned buttery action makes a player feel very at home. Even if you’re used to a 43mm nut, it takes virtually no adjustment to feel comfortable.

So taking Mr Lowden at his word and grabbing a trusty red Dunlop Jazz III pick, we bashed out all those Eagles and Beatles strummers, and our F12 delivered the goods with aplomb. It’s warm-toned and with no brash treble, but the bass doesn’t boom and there are no ‘honky’ middle tones, either. Mustering up this reviewer’s finest James Taylor and Ralph McTell impressions, the F12 spoke back in the most musical manner. String-to-string





The F12 features George Lowden's newly designed lightweight bolt-on neck system, which is totally invisible from the outside

separation is fantastic, and again the balance across the tonal spectrum makes for an extremely musical set of voices. The guitar is very dynamic, too, so responds equally well to anything from gentle folk songs to the dirtiest Delta blues.

Verdict

Price-wise, and even given its understated nature, we feel this is a lot of guitar for the money. There's been no skimping where it counts, and that's in the hand craftsmanship, the quality of materials (the nut and bridge saddles are real bone, all the bindings are genuine wood, the tuners are gold Gotohs with ebony buttons and so on), and, of course, in playability and sound. The F12 is in all respects a fully fledged Lowden that will relish everything from sofa noodling to professional gigs, once the pickup of your choice is installed.

George Lowden contextualised the model's position for us perfectly: "The rest of our models range from just over £4,000 to around £10,000, and then there's the

very limited-edition Master Series, of which we can only make around 20 each year; these are all £20,000-plus. We really love pushing the boat out on our guitars at all price points, and just want to provide 'our' sound and make our instruments

The balance across the tonal spectrum makes for an extremely musical set of voices

available to as many players as possible. But we don't want to be a large company: good is better than big!"

Apparently, the F10 and F12 were the stars of Lowden's 2025 NAMM Show, and for good reason we reckon. There's nothing about the guitar that's not to like, and while Lowden is indeed a comparatively small guitar company we feel the F12 and its cedar sibling deserve big success. Look out for them in the shops from late February! 



LOWDEN F12

PRICE: £3,400 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: Mid-sized flat-top acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 120mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 405mm
NECK: 3-piece mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Gold Gotoh with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: 2-piece bone/55mm
ELECTRICS: None
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.88/4.15
OPTIONS: None at the time of launch
RANGE OPTIONS: F10 (£3,400), as above but with cedar top
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin lacquer

Lowden Guitars
(028) 44 619 161
www.lowdenguitars.com



PROS Delightful to behold; plays great; sounds fantastic; built up to a standard, not down to a price

CONS There's nothing not to like here – however, if you're not a fan of 45mm nut widths, then perhaps it's not for you

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FIRST PLAY



ORANGE O TONE 40
£329

WHAT IS IT? Single-channel Class A/B solid-state 40-watt combo with effects loop, tremolo and reverb

Tangerine Dream

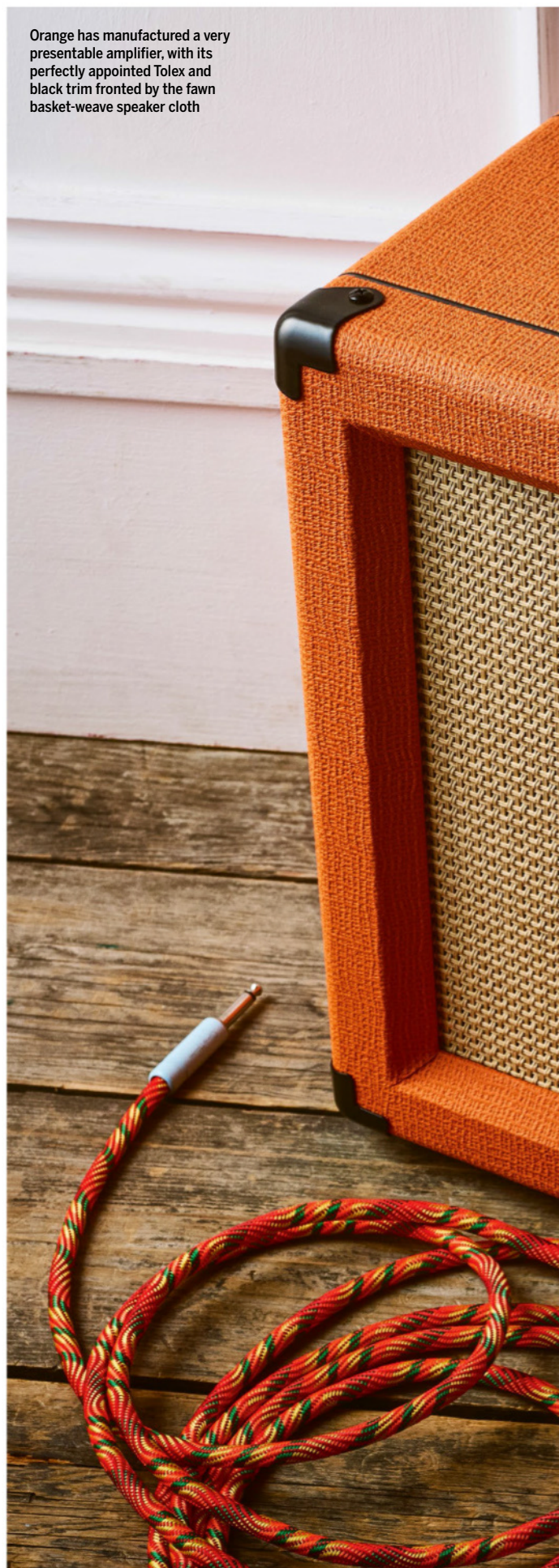
What's loud, light and orange?
The latest solid-state and affordable combo from Orange

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Olly Curtis

Cliff Cooper, Orange's first CEO, founded the company back in 1968 during the beat combo heyday of British music, creating one of a select handful of history-making British valve amplifier brands. Orange had no issue marking itself out with a slew of oversized, colourful cabinets and even a trendy London store called, naturally, the Orange store. Business boomed and soon the brand had expanded to include both a record label and an artist management company. Ownership and production issues from 1978 to 1998 led to only a few products being manufactured with various partners including Gibson. However, since the millennium Orange has managed to rebuild its market position, retaining the esoteric sound and styling that has set the brand apart since its inception.

Today's market for guitar amps can perhaps be split into two general categories: powerful heads and cabs for professional touring musicians, and smaller units for smaller gigs, practice and domestic use. The new O Tone 40 attempts to bridge

Orange has manufactured a very presentable amplifier, with its perfectly appointed Tolex and black trim fronted by the fawn basket-weave speaker cloth





1. Orange's penchant for 'picture' control labels is continued here. It may take some moments to fathom, but the graphics do at least make sense

2. The deep, sealed-back cabinet design allows for a tight and punchy bottom-end response, far exceeding our expectations

3. The integration of the effects loop allows for the best connection to your reverb, delays and certain modulation effects



this gap, being loud enough for band use but portable enough for a one-hand carry. This is achieved by combining A/B Class solid-state topology with a sealed-back cabinet, housing the custom-designed 'Voice of the World' speaker. While such a small combo would often feature an open back, allowing for pedal and cable cartage, that isn't possible with the O Tone's sealed cabinet, and so extra luggage will likely be necessary. That said, this is a traditional design feature of Orange amps that produces the punchy sound many users know and love. The extra depth of

this cabinet combined with the clean gain brings the Roland Cube amps to mind for their clean power and portability.

The clean single-channel structure of this amp would certainly suit players who have their pedal game dialled in to perfection and who may regard amps as anywhere from a device to make their pedals louder to a necessary inconvenience. In response, Orange wisely designed this to be small, light and loud. This amp leaves the character of the sound wide open for whichever guitars and pedals are appropriate for the application.

A line output is provided to feed a power amp or recording device perhaps, but it's worth noting that this isn't a speaker emulation or an impulse response signal.

Feel & Sounds

We thought a suitable test for this amp would be an old-fashioned jam session with a drummer and bass player in our studio's live room. A wide array of the usual suspects, pedal-wise, were rigged up, anticipating the potential for some extensive tone flavouring. Beginning with the straight-up natural sound of the amp, we were greeted to a much larger soundstage than expected from its small form. This combo could be a contender for the loudest, smallest amp we've used and it had more than enough horsepower to hold its own against our loud rhythm section. The depth of sound emanating from the single 12-inch speaker was impressive.

Responsiveness to touch on the strings is a huge contributor to the enjoyment of playing electric guitar. Powerful notes may cause the amp to sag, resulting in a form of compression that feels sympathetic to the player. It's a beautiful thing – and thankfully we can feel a certain amount of that familiar response here. What usually accompanies this compression effect, certainly in most valve amplifiers, is saturation. This would come in the form of glassy excitement courtesy



Two onboard effects are incorporated in the form of a very pleasant-sounding spring reverb emulation and tremolo. The tremolo is footswitchable, the reverb isn't



ORANGE O TONE 40

PRICE: £329
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state combo
VALVES: None
OUTPUT: 40W
DIMENSIONS: 440 (w) x 395 (h) x 230mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 11.5/25.9
CABINET: MDF
LOUDSPEAKER: 12" "Voice of the World"
CHANNELS: 1
CONTROLS: Reverb, Tremolo Depth, Tremolo Speed, Bass, Middle, Treble, Gain.
FOOTSWITCH: For tremolo only (not included)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 1/8" jack playback input, 1/4" headphone output, effects loop, 1/4" line output
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None

Orange Amplification
 020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

8/10

PROS Tons of bold, clean headroom; lots of depth for a small 1x12 cabinet; very light and portable

CONS We would have liked a switching jack for both the reverb and tremolo effects – only the tremolo is footswitchable here

of electrons screaming through metal grids inside glass bottles.

With solid-state design, we don't have an overdrive facility built-in, but there are many reasons why it may be preferable for an amp not to distort. Indeed for the jazz, country and folk fraternities, the lack of hairy sizzle would be quite desirable, and with the O Tone's addition of reverb and tremolo this amp may make a very good partner for the cleaner-sounding guitarist.

It's a great-sounding digital reverb, too, tuned very much to our taste with a classic drip of presence and a good amount of dwell. The tremolo effect performed its throbbing duties in the expected way; however, its top speed is perhaps a little less than dizzying.

There's plenty of tone-shaping potential available via a three-band tone stack comprising the usual bass, middle, treble. These controls, due to the circuit design, offer more effective range than passive EQ, as found in traditional valve amplifiers like Fender and Marshall, for example. There's a solidity and boldness, too, resulting from the A/B Class power amp combined with the custom driver and cabinet, and we were able to achieve a slinkier tone by rolling off some bass and increasing the treble, contributing to a more Fender-y tone. Conversely, bringing up the mid control and reducing the top and bottom achieves a more Marshall-like frequency profile, overdrive pedal permitting.

This combo could be a contender for the loudest, smallest amp... and it held its own against our loud rhythm section

Kicking in a subtle amount of valve-style overdrive provides a base layer of colour and personality and begins to illustrate where you can take the amp. We were even able to produce the sizzling saturation Orange is known for by the addition of a certain rodent-themed distortion pedal, with the amp staying tight and punchy despite some punishing gain. The effects loop is usually the most suitable place to connect some final reverb and delay, and we were soon swimming through a sea of modulated reverb.

Verdict

The balance of power and convenience here is ideal for the rehearsing/gigging guitar player, and the onboard reverb and tremolo have you covered for a wide range of clean sounds, extended further by the effects loop. Of course, where you take the amp is down to you and your pedalboard, but the O Tone supports that potential diversity, offering bags of power and punch in a tiny and very portable package. **G**

FIRST PLAY



CREAM T CROSSFIRE STANDARD £1,499

WHAT IS IT? UK-made hardtail offset with unique Guitar-X pickup-swapping system

Far From Standard

Once upon a time, Cream T just made pickups. Not any more. We welcome guitar number four... but haven't we seen it before?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's just three years since we first got our hands on a Cream T Crossfire, and barely had the paint dried before the manufacturing hub that made it, UKGB, got hit and went down. To be honest, it seems longer, not least that Cream T dusted down, found a new UK manufacturing partner and simply carried on. Since then we've seen a Mk II version of the brand's first electric guitar, the set-neck Aurora, while its first new post-UKGB design was the mainstream super-S Polaris, followed by the T-style Astra 'Decades', which features some quite inspired and unique circuitry.

These models have all been limited in numbers and some, but not all, use the Guitar-X (originally Relish) pickup-swapping system where you can swap a pickup in seconds to instantly revoice the guitar. All good.

For the start of 2025, however, Cream T announced the Standard series – including the Polaris, Astra and the returning Crossfire, which will retail at £1,499. All three new Standards also feature the same dual humbucking-size pickup-swapping facility, too. The guitars are still made in the UK and come with their own logo'd padded gigbags, which remind us of the Mono products. 'Standard' seems a



CREAM T CROSSFIRE STANDARD | FIRST PLAY

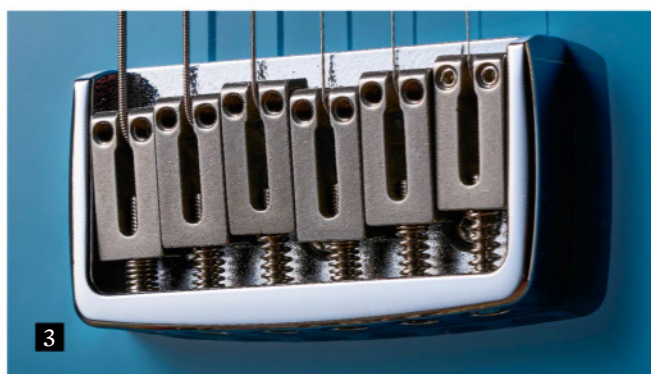




1. The included pickups are the "hot Patent Applied For"-style Hot Sauce humbuckers, but any compatible Guitar-X pickup can be used (see Under The Hood, right)

2. The Crossfire is a simple offering, but it uses high-quality parts such as these rear-locking staggered-height Gotoh tuners. Overall, it's a very stable, in-tune guitar

3. This walled bridge design is used on all the new Cream T Standard guitars and features through-body stringing



INNOVATION IN ACTION

The new Crossfire offers a more aggressive price and broadens the Cream T range

Innovation is one thing; creating a viable product is another. Relish Guitars is a case in point: sadly, Relish is no more, but its pickup-swapping technology was purchased by Cream T owner Tim Lobley (above) and renamed Guitar-X, and it lives on in an increasing number of guitars from Cream T and Newman (by Cream T), while other brands, such as Maybach, intend to utilise pickup swapping as the year progresses.

With Cream T's new Standard models, the choice is also widening. "Exactly – the idea of the Standards is simply to broaden the range," says Tim. "That model adds breadth, plus we've now got new Polaris and Astra Standards, too."

Another advantage of these new Standards is that you can choose the three pickups it comes with from Cream T's pretty wide range, which includes the fabled Whiskerbuckers, plus new designs like the Sticky Fingers and Single Shot (humbucking-sized true single coil).

Will there be a Standard version of the original Aurora? "We haven't got there yet. As it's a set-neck guitar, trying to achieve the

lower 'Standard' pricing isn't quite as easy. But I'm sure we'll do it at some point.

"I don't think we'll go on releasing new [Cream T] models," Tim reveals, "as we've now got a Les Paul-style, S-style, T-style and offset-style with our Aurora, Polaris, Astra and now the Crossfire, so it's a case of filling in the price points. "The Customs are around £2k, the Standards are £1.5k, and below that we're working on a sub-£1k price point. If you add Newman [Guitars], there's been an awful lot of development and prototyping in quite a short space of time." To add to that, Tim is bringing the Stromberg brand back to the market.

"What is also really gathering pace is the sales of aftermarket Guitar-X pickups: Seymour Duncan, Fralin, Gibson, Bare Knuckle, Cream T; later in the year we'll have our own Guitar-X pickups, too. We're also talking to quite a few pickup makers to provide a pickup-swapping guitar they can use to demo their own pickups. We've already done that with Monty's here in the UK.

"Perhaps this is where it turns around," muses Tim. "From, 'I'll buy a guitar and swap the pickups' to, 'I've now got a bunch of pickups, I'll swap the guitar! It turns it on its head doesn't it?'" [DB]

rather uninspired catch-all when these instruments are absolute shoo-ins for any working musician.

To remind ourselves of the Crossfire, it's a smart and simple guitar that's loosely based on a Fender offset, with a solid and lightweight obeche body and typical contouring front and back. The neck reverts to a plain untinted slab-sawn maple neck (the first Crossfire we looked at featured quarter-sawn figured and roasted maple) that screws to the body; the original version used proper bolts. There's a round-nosed heel but no neckplate as those screws sit in thick washers in quite deeply drilled holes. Fingerboards are either rosewood or maple (as here), very cleanly crafted with simple dot inlays and well-fettled medium-gauge frets on a 305mm to 356mm (12 to 14-inch) compound radiused fingerboard face. As with the previous Astra and Polaris, truss rod adjustment is via a spoke wheel at the body end of the neck.

The beauty of the pickup swapping is that we can instantly have a different guitar

UNDER THE HOOD What's inside this pickup-swapping beast?

Aside from the Free-Way switch (3B3-01), the circuit here is dead simple with a pair of CTS 500kohm pots for the volume and tone, plus a Cream T paper-in-oil .022µF capacitor.

The Hot Sauce humbuckers were designed by Richard Whitney, Cream T's production manager for pickups and electronics: "The Hot Sauce magnets are Alnico V and they're a hot Patent Applied For-style wound with 43 AWG, similar in wind count to something like our ceramic-magnet Afterburner, although I'm a sucker for the warmer Alnico magnets myself," he tells us. "In order to keep that top-end that you can

lose when switching from ceramic to Alnico, I've also opened the winding pattern up in a similar way to the Whiskerbuckers. Combined with the thinner wire gauge, it gives them a nice push in the mids without getting muddy. In terms of potting, we've just done the coils using our signature beeswax mix; again, it's thin enough that there's barely any change in tone from unpotted, but it makes them a bit more usable at higher gains/volumes."

How about the unusually titled Nidge? "Well, we've had a lot of success with the Duchess [covered P-90 style], so there's definitely shared DNA in terms of the double Alnico V magnets

and a custom wire gauge. It comes down to the smaller differences with the Nidge: I wanted to use an open-face cover to give it a more open sound than the Duchess, something the lower wind count helps with as well. There's still more than enough power in both positions thanks to the dual magnets, but the reduced resistance means this one plays particularly well with humbuckers, for example, and in either position."

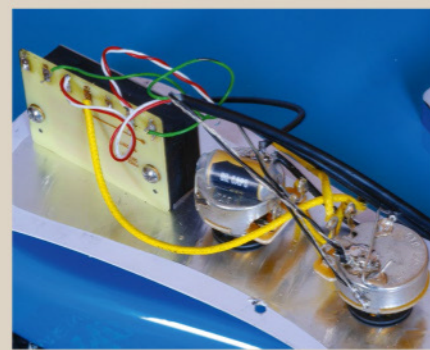
The Hot Sauce's DCRs in humbucking mode read 12.39k, and the neck is 11.88k; they're almost exactly half that when split. The single-coil Nidge, meanwhile, has a reading of 7.84k.



You can also change the look of the Crossfire instantly. Here's a Cream T Banger & Mash at the bridge with a Nidge at the neck. A great-sounding combo, too!



Despite its humbucking size, the Nidge is a P-90-style single coil (above). The secret to the Crossfire's switching is the Free-Way six-position switch (right)



We get some smart rear-locking Gotoh tuners with dual-height string posts, and an equally good-looking walled bridge with six block saddles and Tele-style through-body stringing. Despite its offset inspiration, though, there's no sign of a vibrato version as yet.

In terms of the pickups and electrics, there's very little offset style to be seen here, either. Our Crossfire came with a pair of Cream T Hot Sauce covered humbuckers, plus a third pickup – a new P-90 single coil designed to be used in either neck or bridge positions and called the Nidge. Geddit? But if that trio doesn't suit you, you can choose *any* three Cream T Guitar-X pickups when you place your order.

Along with the quite closely placed master volume and tone controls is a Free-Way selector switch, as found on the original Crossfire. It's actually a three-position switch, but the lever wobbles between humbucking (down) and split single-coil (up) modes.

Feel & Sounds

The combination of the downsized outline and the body wood offers a very comfortable offset, with a good weight that doesn't feel insubstantial. While it would certainly suit a more vintage-feeling neck and fingerboard, the more

modern vibe here doesn't spoil the party. It has a pretty standard width and mainstream modern depth (21.6mm at the 1st fret, 22.8mm at the 12th), and the classic 'C' profile is nicely done and feels very good, not least with its satin finish.

Strumming unplugged, there's a good lively ring and response – this is a very inviting guitar, and without an offset's vibrato it's more direct sounding, too. With the Hot Sauce humbuckers in place, we have a pretty powerful, girth-some voice combined with even a fairly lightly

gained amp sound. You do lose a little of the high-end with the volume pulled back – some players would definitely prefer a treble bleed circuit on the volume control – but if your tastes lie in the classic-to-contemporary heavier blues and rock areas, then these play very well. Selecting the coil-splits (to voice the outer screw coils) is very fast, cleaning things up and lifting the apparent treble response, which becomes quite present. You can't split the pickups individually to combine full neck humbucker with split bridge, for example,



The Standards also share the same simple control layout with master volume and tone and that tricky six-position Free-Way switch – another great piece of UK engineering and design



These Guitar-X mounted pickups simply push in (they're very firmly held in place by small magnets) and pull out. No need for a soldering iron! The central brass thread on each mount adjusts the pickup height



CREAM T CROSSFIRE STANDARD

PRICE: From £1,499 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway, offset solidbody electric

BODY: Obeche

NECK: Maple, C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.6mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, measured 305-356mm (12-14") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Hardtail walled bridge with block steel saddles and through-body stringing, Gotoh Magnum Lock rear-locking tuners (SG381 MG-T) – nickel/chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Cream T Hot Sauce bridge and neck covered humbuckers (with Guitar-X mounts), 6-way Free-Way lever pickup selector switch (3B3-01), master volume and tone controls.

Also included is the Cream T Nidge single coil (for either neck or bridge positions). See Options

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.19/7

OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard (N/C). You can choose any 3 Cream T Guitar-X pickups, at order, to power your Standard

RANGE OPTIONS: The new Standard range also includes the Astra and Polaris, both with the same features and price as the Crossfire

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently

FINISHES: Etna Blue (as reviewed), Black, Shell Pink, Trans Midnight, Vintage White, Surf Green – gloss finish body, satin neck/fingerboard

Cream T Guitars

www.creamtcustomshop.com



10/10

PROS Straightforward style; great weight; excellent hardware; rock-ready voicing with good coil-splits from the Hot Sauce humbuckers; the extra Nidge adds P-90-like single-coil flavour; wide pickup choice at order

CONS An offset-style vibrato would be cool: watch this space!

but the simple drive of the Free-Way switch is definitely part of the appeal here.

And it doesn't stop there. The beauty of the pickup swapping is that we can place the Nidge, for example, in the bridge position and we instantly have a rather different guitar. We're fans of Cream T's covered Duchess P-90 and this Nidge is pretty similar, but to our ears it has a little more sparkle and works well with either Hot Sauce, especially when they're split – change a few amp sounds and effects and you're into a different sonic territory.

And if, like us, you're into this pickup-swapping lark, we can tell you that this Crossfire is quite the platform. For example, with a pair of Cream T's Whiskerbuckers installed, it sounds dangerously close to that 'Tele on Steroids' cliché, while a Banger & Mash at the bridge with a loud pretty clean amp voice is a righteous old honky and biting blues wail that's quite some way from where we started this sound test.

Verdict

Despite Cream T's web address (www.creamtcustomshop.com), there's very little 'custom shop' about this guitar. It comes across as a very well-made production instrument – and there's nothing wrong with that. Shape aside, there's very little 'offset' about it, either, but it's a great player with an excellent gig-ready weight and lively resonance. It's very fit for purpose and, style-wise, could easily sit in plenty of musical genres without

'Standard' seems a rather uninspired catch-all as these are shoo-ins for any working musician

your band leader or MD telling you that your guitar looks wrong for the gig.

Ironically, this slightly bland exterior hides the huge pickup-swapping potential, meaning you can voice the guitar for different gigs – hey, even different songs. That might be a bit of a stretch on a gig, but for the writing and recording musician who needs to cover different sounds and styles, there might not be a better tool out there.

To enjoy the potential you'll need to buy additional pickups from around £139 each. But you can slowly build up an arsenal of sounds, plus the Guitar-X mounted pickups would work with any pickup-swapping Cream T guitar and others such as the Cream T-made Newman line, which will have a six-string dual-pickup-swapping model later this year. Other brands like Maybach are also planning to offer Guitar-X compatible guitars.

It's not only good to have the Crossfire back, but in this new, very attractively priced Standard range, it has to be worth a punt – along with the Polaris and Astra. It's dangerously close to being a very viable new way to buy into a guitar and pickup brand, and a high-quality one at that. **G**

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FIRST PLAY



**CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS
HEATSEEKER**
£235

WHAT IS IT? CTC's Christos Ntaifotis presents Angus Young's guitar sound in a pedal



Hot Shot

A one-box recreation of Angus Young's AC/DC guitar sound for those about to rock

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Adam Gasson

1. This Amp Voicing toggle switch adapts the pedal's internal circuitry to match the sonic qualities of three different Marshall amps: JTM45 (45), 1959 Super Lead (SL) and JMP 2203 (MV)
2. You engage the 'Wall of Sound' (WoS) circuit with its dedicated switch – this circuit is designed to emulate using multiple amps and cabs
3. The right-hand side of the pedal offers footswitching for the Boost/Enhance section with knobs for enhancement and level (up to 15dB of clean gain)
4. The send/return loop lets you add in other pedals between the boost and amp sections, or set them up as separate entities using a switcher

Crazy Tube Circuits has a penchant for creating pedals that pair classic amp sounds with a classic drive or boost pedal. Following on from the Crossfire, Unobtanium and Hi-Power is the fourth in that twin-footswitch series, the Heatseeker, which is inspired by the gear setup of AC/DC's Angus Young, pairing a Marshall amp sound with footswitchable boost, plus enhancement from the circuitry of a vintage wireless system.

The amp portion of the pedal offers a choice of three different Marshall models with full tonal control available via a six-knob array consisting of Volume, Master, Bass, Middle, Treble and Presence knobs. Using an all-analogue JFET circuit, it does a great job of delivering that Brit amp flavour. Juxtaposition of the Volume and Master knobs will run the gamut from glassy cleans through the various levels of break-up and crunch, to the distorted roar associated with a Marshall stack at full pelt. The three different models that are represented here give you a valid set of alternative tonal choices. In increasing order of the gain available, you get a JTM45, a 1959 Super Lead, and a late-70s JMP 2203 Master Volume model (same as a JCM800).

In addition to this you get the pedal's secret sauce, the 'Wall of Sound' (WoS) switch, which – via a touch of extra output and some judicious EQ – delivers an uncanny impression of multiple amps.

The boost section recreates the preamp and dynamic expansion circuit of the Schaffer-Vega Diversity System that added an extra component to Angus Young's tone. Keep it turned on if that's what you're after, but there's up to 15dB of clean boost, which is plenty for an extra switchable element to the amp sounds for lead breaks or used independently to add some hair to your amp. That boost is coloured by the Enhance knob, which, with quite subtle changes over its travel, works on dynamic and harmonic components to offer a certain enrichment to the sound, which you can dial in to taste.

Verdict

Anyone looking for those Angus Young tones will find a shortcut straight to them via the Heatseeker, which can be easily set up to match any amp with its impressively flexible tone section, or connected to a DAW for recording (add your own speaker simulation). Whether you're an AC/DC fan or not, there are some classic tones to be found within this little box of rock. **G**



CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS HEATSEEKER

PRICE: £235

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Master, Volume, Presence, Bass, Treble, Middle, Level, Enhance, WoS switch, Amp Voicing switch (45/SL/MV), Amp Bypass footswitch, Boost Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard send, standard return

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 115mA

DIMENSIONS: 118 (w) x 95 (d) x 53mm (h)

FACE bvba

+32 3 844 67 97

www.crazytubecircuits.com



PROS Accurate emulation of Angus Young's sound; effects loop; compact size for a twin-footswitch pedal; 'Wall of Sound' facility

CONS Black legending on red is quite hard to read



THE RIVALS

The Schaffer-Vega Diversity System is currently replicated in the SoloDallas Storm pedal (£188), which can be paired with a Marshall amp or a 'Marshall in a box' pedal. The 'MIAB' of the moment seems to be Universal Audio's UAFX Lion '68 Super Lead Amp pedal (£310). Several pedals offer Marshall sounds paired with a boost: the Carl Martin Plexi Ranger (£122, right) is based on the much-favoured combination of a Marshall amp and treble boost; JHS Pedals offers the twin-footswitch AT+ Andy Timmons Signature Drive (£198); and also check out the Friedman BE-OD Deluxe Dual Channel Overdrive Pedal (£235) for M-style tones.





Gas Supply

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

NAMM 2025 Report

Five years on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the NAMM Show seems to have well and truly recovered. This year saw big players back in the exhibition halls, and while we seem to get a steady flow of new releases throughout the year, there were still plenty of tricks up the guitar industry's sleeve for the

event at the end of January. This year, we saw a strong trend towards 90s revival, plus (we're glad to report) plenty of gear that won't require a remortgage. The guitar, it seems, is in one of its healthiest places in years. Here, we present some of our favourite releases that you'll see in the months ahead. **[SW]**



MARSHALL JCM800 MODIFIED, 1959 MODIFIED & STUDIO 900 **From £1,099**

Marshall made a strong return to NAMM presenting two classics with 'wishlist' mods built-in: the JCM800 Modified (£2,699, above bottom) includes a switchable gain boost, tone-shaping mid-boost and tight switches; and the 1959 Modified (£2,999, above middle) adds a master volume control, gain boost and switchable 'bright cap' for definition. Elsewhere, 90s fans will be cooing at the Studio 900: a shrunken 20-watt (switchable to five watts or less than one watt) UK-made version of the JCM900 with two channels, each with independent controls for spring reverb, available as a head (£1,099, above top) or Celestion G12-loaded 1x12 combo (£1,199). www.marshall.com



FENDER STANDARD SERIES **From £499**

If you thought the Mexican-made Standards had been replaced by the Player II series, you'd be correct. But for 2025, Fender has revived the Standard range, taking up production in Indonesia. The range currently includes staple models: Stratocaster (SSS and HSS), Telecaster, Precision Bass and Jazz Bass. Each guitar features a poplar body and satin-finished maple neck, with maple or Indian Laurel fingerboards (depending on finish). They're equipped with high-output, ceramic-magnet Standard series pickups, two-point vibratos for the Strats, and six-saddle string-through-body bridge for the Tele. Hardware is satin chrome. Prices start at £499 for the Strat and Tele; £549 for the HSS Strat and basses. www.fender.com



FENDER ACOUSTASONIC STANDARD TELECASTER & JAZZMASTER **£549 each**

Hold on to your capo: Fender has also announced its most affordable Acoustasonic models yet. As with the Player Series Acoustasonics, the Acoustasonic Standard is available in Telecaster and Jazzmaster flavours, centred around a blendable electronics system comprising the Shawbucker magnetic humbucker and Fender/Fishman-designed undersaddle pickup. The bodies and necks are nato with solid Sitka spruce tops; fingerboards are rosewood. The models also include Acoustasonic staples such as Fender's Micro-Tilt adjustment and SIRS soundhole. At almost half the price of the Player models, we're expecting these to be popular! www.fender.com



JACKSON X-SERIES SURFCASTER **£669 & £749**

Offsets have become rather popular in recent years – and we're all for it! But they're not just for the grunge revival set and shoegazers, as Jackson is setting out to prove. The brand has revived its cult-classic Surfcaster model, taking a chisel and a rattle can to the ol' man's Jazzmaster to deliver an affordable humbucker-loaded metal machine. What's more, there's a single-pickup seven-string version, too. Both the SC HT6 (£669) and HT7 (£749) have a poplar body, 304.8mm to 406.4mm (12 to 16-inch) compound radius, graphite-reinforced maple neck and 24 frets in an Indian laurel fingerboard. The hardtail bridges and tuners are Jackson's own, as are the High-Output pickups.

www.jacksonsguitars.com

NAMM 2025 DIARY

EDITOR JAMIE FINDS MUCH TO ADMIRE WITH THE RETURN OF LEGENDS AT NAMM



"This year was the first time I've attended the NAMM Show in Anaheim, California, since the pre-pandemic days of 2019. So it was oddly nostalgic to walk the show floor once again, with its sense-assaulting sounds of slap-bass drunkenly mingling with aggressive but comically fizzy metal riffs and someone playing congas too loud. With **Fender** and **Gibson** present but keeping a low profile at invitation-only events, one had to look a little harder for seismically important guitar launches – but everywhere there was inventive new gear well worthy of further investigation.

"At the stand of French pedal maker **Anasounds** I lost myself in the jagged, thunderous sounds of its La Grotte spring reverb pedal, available to pre-order at €349 and made in collaboration with Jack White. Darker and wilder than other 'verbs, it was like surf reverb gone to hell. Likewise, it was nice to see vibey Greek maker **Crazy Tube Circuits** bring out an updated take on the celebrated BK Butler Tube Driver, as used by Eric Johnson and others; the shortly-to-be-released **Venus** (£TBC) is half the size of the late-70s unit that inspired it, but like the original has a valve at its heart, in this case an ECC832. The Venus runs off a nine-volt power supply and features a bias control and tone-tweaking options to extend the classic sound.

"For me, though, NAMM's most interesting stories involved the return of other legends. Intriguingly, there was a **Dumble** booth, where long-time friend of the late Alexander Dumble and 'Burst expert Drew Berlin explained that very limited production of Overdrive Specials using NOS parts had resumed – mainly, he said, to prevent protections on the Dumble trade-name from lapsing, which could have meant open season for copyists. It was also great to see the tone guru behind **Matchless** amps, Mark Sampson, returning to team up again with **Bad Cat** on its rather enticing new twin-channel Era 30 head (£3,399), based around a Vox-ish EL84 power stage paired with an EF86 valve in the preamp of one channel and a 12AX7 in the other, offering two distinct voicings and gain profiles. **[JD]**

www.namm.org

The Lineup



PEAVEY DECADE TOO £299

Queens Of The Stone Age fans will know that Joshua Homme's 'secret weapon' is none other than the humble Peavey Decade practice amp. It's now celebrating its 60th anniversary and Peavey has turned to Homme to collaborate on the Decade Too, bringing this once-affordable 10-watt practice amp back to the home, stage and studio. At Homme's request, you'll find bass and tone boost switches, plus a transformer-isolated, cab-simulated DI output. In addition, Peavey is offering us the Decade tone in pedal form, too, with its new line of preamp pedals, which also includes front-end recreations of the Rock Master, Bandit Supreme, VTM and Session LTD 400, priced at £179 each.

www.peavey.com



MESA/BOOGIE 90S DUAL RECTIFIER £3,599

Throw out your solos, dig out the long shorts and set your tuner to 'drop' because Mesa/Boogie has just reissued the amp that – to players of a certain era – is its signature sound. The 90s Dual Rectifier looks to deliver the quintessential Dual Rectifier tone: searing high-gain, accompanied by crystal cleans and pretty much everything in between. This 100-watt, two-channel (with multi-modes per channel) amp has five 12AX7s in the preamp stage and a quartet of 6L6s (swappable for EL34s) in the power stage. You'll also find some modern features: channel cloning for the Vintage and Modern modes on either channel, a Variac switch to deliver Bold or Spongy response, plus switchable valve/diode rectification.

www.mesa-boogie.com



ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN CORY WONG STINGRAY II From £2,999

Ernie Ball Music Man has kicked off 2025 with a new signature for funk-stylist extraordinaire Cory Wong. His StingRay II comes in regular (£2,999, top) and Deluxe (£3,299) versions – and nope, it's not a bass. Both are alder-bodied with roasted, figured maple necks, 22 stainless-steel frets in a rosewood 'board, and dual humbuckers courtesy of custom-designed Music Man Cory Wong HT pickups. The gold hardware includes a Music Man Custom Modern Classic vibrato, with Schaller M6-IND locking tuners at the other end. The Deluxe model adds a roasted maple fingerboard, parchment binding and a matching headstock.

www.music-man.com



CELESTION PEACEKEEPER £199

We all know that our amp's sweet spot is often found when it's cranked. The problem with this is that cranking amps is becoming increasingly difficult in both at-home and onstage situations. Enter Celestion's new Peacekeeper speaker, which looks to solve this issue. Described as a "revolutionary new attenuating speaker for guitarists", the ceramic-magnet-loaded Peacekeeper is capable of absorbing the power of your amp operating at high levels, while delivering your tone at a manageable volume. It's available as a 12-inch, 50-watt speaker in a pressed steel chassis, and Celestion reckons it will fit many amps – all without colouring the resulting sound. Consider us intrigued!

www.celestion.com



DIGITECH HAMMERON £219

Few brands are as passionate about pitch-shifting as DigiTech, and the latest from the Whammy pioneers is the HammerOn, a seven-mode pitch-shifting pedal that's capable of creating everything from digital capo/drop-tuned transpositions through to tempo-synced arpeggios. The HammerOn has a potential four-octave range, and can be activated in an instant via a momentary footswitch. Blending your guitar's original pitch in with the shifted sounds allows for the creation of harmony parts, while the sequence modes will yield synth-inspired step-sequencer-style arpeggios. We've heard it in the flesh – it sounds crazy and that's why we're glad to have DigiTech back!

www.digitech.com



TAYLOR GOLD LABEL 814e From £5,399

It might be the more 'modern' of the big-name acoustic brands, but Taylor is drawing inspiration from the 1930s and 40s for its new Gold Label series, which offers four guitars based around its 814e design, including an all-new body shape. The Super Auditorium is derived from the Grand Auditorium, adding additional footprint with an increased body length and wider lower bout, with Taylor's new fanned V-Class bracing system. The Gold Label 814e is available with Honduran rosewood or Hawaiian koa back and sides; all four models are offered with either natural or sunburst Sitka spruce tops. The result, says Taylor, is increased projection and power while maintaining clarity and dynamics.

www.taylorguitars.com

X-RATED TONE

BON JOVI GUITARIST PHIL X STOPPED TO SHOW US ROUND HIS NEW DRIVE PEDAL



Few guitarists are as irrepressibly upbeat as Phil X of Bon Jovi – and just as few sound as good as him, especially with full-tilt gain tones under his fingers. And although we already reviewed his new signature-model **PXO dual overdrive by J Rockett Audio Designs** last issue, giving it a well-deserved *Guitarist* 'Choice' award, we couldn't resist asking him to give us a personal tour of its features when we ran into him at NAMM, asking how they relate to his stage needs with Bon Jovi. "Chris Van Tassel knows what I like," Phil said referring to the man behind J Rockett's designs. "So we've been talking for years. But then this past year, he started sending me overdrive circuits and saying, 'Check this out' and I'd say, 'It's close...' But then he sent me a couple in particular where I was like, 'Oh yeah, man – I think this is the one. But I also like this one!' So we talked about different EQ situations and we decided to put both circuits in one pedal. And now I have [the PXO dual overdrive] on my Bon Jovi 'board, I have it on my Phil X & The Drills 'board – it's always there. I take it to every session, and everybody goes, 'What the hell is that?' It looks great, too."

The pedal features both a Boost and a Drive circuit, and you can select which comes first in the signal path via a switch on the pedal's face.

"I honestly thought the pre- and post- thing was a myth," Phil admits. "But then they sent me the prototype that had a footswitch in the middle instead of a slider switch, so I could go back and forth as I played until it hit me that it makes [a big] difference."

The Drive side has its own Treble and Bass EQ controls, while the Boost side has an interesting 'Tilt EQ' knob that adjusts the overall treble/bass balance by turning it either side of the noon position on the dial.

"I roll it up when I want more presence. But I also love rolling off the Tilt EQ and getting this beautiful 'woman' tone. Because when I play with The Drills, I don't use a neck pickup. So that's my 'woman' tone," Phil explains. "I know it sounds like I'm pushing it because it's mine – I'm selling cars [laughs]. But it's just true. I love it" **[JD]**

www.rockettpedals.com

The Lineup



EASTMAN FULLERTONE SC '52 & DC '62 **£799 & £899**

Eastman always pulls something interesting out of the bag, and this year it's the FullerTone series – a pair of solidbody electric designs that manage to be simultaneously familiar and new. The single-cut SC '52 (£799) and double-cut DC '62 (£899) are born from the limited D'Ambrosio series and share common design points such as limba bodies, roasted maple necks and adonised 'guards. The neck is attached via Eastman's long-tenon, two-bolt system, said to increase surface contact by three times and resulting in greater vibration transfer and sustain. Pickups are from ToneRider: gold foiled-covered Soapbar Humbucker and TQ1B-BK single coil in the SC '63; the same pickups in an HSS configuration for the DC '52.

www.eastmanguitars.com



IK MULTIMEDIA TONEX CAB **€799**

With the rise of modelling, FRFR speaker cabs are everywhere. And who better to join the party than IK Multimedia, whose Tonex products have captured the attention of plenty of players over the past 12 months. The brand claims its wood-cabinet offering is the most compact 1x12 cabinet of its kind, weighing just 12.7kg (28lb). With a rating of 350 watts (RMS), it's loaded with a Celestion driver and one-inch Lavoce tweeter, and features a programmable three-band EQ, a custom IR loader with eight onboard presets, an XLR/jack combo input, aux input, XLR direct output and full MIDI implementation. You even get swappable grille cloths, and tilt-back legs so you can angle it correctly.

www.ikmultimedia.com



BLACKSTAR DA100 RUBY **£1,249**

It's been a long time coming, but Doug Aldrich has finally developed a signature amp, and he's chosen Blackstar to collaborate with. Decked in Ruby Red Tolex, the DA100 Ruby (£1,249) is a 100-watt, three-channel amp head loaded with a quartet of EL34s, with multiple voicings on each channel that promise to take you from "buttery cleans to the ballsiest sound you've ever heard", according to Doug. There's two-band EQ for the clean channel, and three-band plus Blackstar's staple ISF shared between the two OD channels. Blackstar's CabRig is also present for going direct. Of course, there's a matching cabinet (£1,199), housing four Celestion Vintage 30 speakers.

www.blackstaramps.com



BOSS WAZA TUBE AMP EXPANDER CORE **£605**

Who says valve amps are dead? Not Boss, who has just launched its Waza Tube Amp Expander Core – a cut-down version of its Waza Tube Amp Expander that's designed to bring modern functionality to your treasured valve amp. But 'cut-down' doesn't equate to 'lacking' by any means as the Core version can work as a reactive load box for your amp, an analogue power amp in its own right, an IR loader, and speaker emulator and effects loop all in one. There are 10 impulse responses or 'Rigs' built in, and connectivity includes an input from your amp's speaker output, a speaker output of its own, stereo line outputs, headphones, MIDI input and effects send/return.

www.boss.info



MARTIN STANDARD SERIES From £2,299

NAMM 2025 was slightly quieter on the acoustic front, but Martin took the opportunity to update its workhorse Standard series, with the big news being that it has added its Golden Era bracing pattern – as found on Martin’s Modern Deluxe acoustics – to the range. In addition, all Standard series guitars now come with a new GE modified low oval neck profile, thinner fingerboards with bevelled edges, GE modern belly bridges, and bone or ebony bridge pins. Martin has also added three new models to the Standard series: the mahogany-bodied D-17 Dreadnought and Auditorium 000-17 (both £2,299), and the spruce-topped OM-45 (£10,499). You can check out the full Standard series at Martin’s website.

www.martinguitar.com



GIBSON 1955 NAMM SHOW COMMEMORATIVE EDITION LES PAUL £5,699

70 years ago, Gibson attended the 1955 NAMM Show and displayed the fledgling Les Paul model in five custom metallic colours. It’s marking the occasion with five new Murphy Lab Light Aged Les Pauls, built to faithful 50s specs including one-piece mahogany bodies, two-piece plain maple caps, and one-piece long-tenon mahogany necks (featuring a chunky D-shape carve). The model comes in Copper Iridescent (above top, which you’ll recognise from our review of Epiphone’s Joe Bonamassa 1955 Les Paul Standard), Samoa Beige, Nugget Gold, Platinum (above) and Viceroy Brown. 70 will be made in each finish, with 350 guitars produced in total.

www.gibson.com

YOUNG AT HEART

YVETTE YOUNG GIVES US A TOUR OF HER NEW SIGNATURE MULTI-EFFECTS PEDAL



If you like instrumental guitar that weaves a whole world of sound into being, you’re probably either already familiar with Yvette Young’s music, or a prime candidate to enjoy her texturally rich, at times dazzlingly ornate fingerstyle playing. Yvette often extends her expressive range with effects – and now indie effects company **Walrus Audio** has made a signature pedal for the Californian guitarist that goes beyond being a soundscape machine and enters the realm of being an instrument in itself.

“I come from a visual background,” Yvette told us when we met her on the NAMM show floor. “So, for me, a melody is like a black-and-white drawing but effects offer ways that you can selectively colour that drawing to help it come to life. I think in the past, I probably strayed more towards using effects just to enhance a sound. But these days, this pedal is, for me, a compositional tool. It’s actually a springboard for [writing] inspiration.”

That’s why her signature pedal is not a set-and-forget device but is designed to be used dynamically to drop sudden washes of reverb, freeze and hold phrases, add movement to phrases through rich modulation and more. Called the **Qi Etherealizer**, the pedal has a pretty busy front panel, but Yvette says it’s intuitive in use.

“It looks really daunting, but it’s actually really easy. It’s four effects, three knobs each. You’ve got your modulation, your delay, your granular phrase sampler stuff, and then this is your reverb with tone and a wet/dry [control], and you have a series or parallel [option] – something that, after I started recording, I wanted as an option because then you can maximise the wetness of the reverb but still not walk over [your core tone]. The chorus was inspired by the JC-120,” she explains.

The granular effects section is the most intriguing, throwing glitchy samples of your own playing back at you. “All of the other effects are straightforward, but this is great if you want the pedal to generate something abstract that you would never think of on your own. It’s kind of ‘let’s see what happens’...” [JD]

www.walrusaudio.com



Fretbuzz

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

Artist: Lea Thomas

Album: *Cosmos Forever* (Triple Dolphin Records)



Cosmos Forever is Lea Thomas's fourth studio album
www.lealealea.com

Growing up on the Hawaiian island of Maui inspired Lea's love of nature, which can be heard in her musical storytelling

Hawaiian-born and based in New York state's Hudson Valley, guitarist and singer-songwriter Lea Thomas makes beautiful, spacious music that combines pop-oriented sounds with something more ethereal and less focused on traditional structures. The music is quietly complex, with precise production, but Lea is also an adept live performer, something seemingly innate. "I remember being at this piano recital at around five years old with one of my best friends," Lea laughs. "We had the complete opposite experience of being on stage. I was having a great time and thinking everyone's going to be fucking stoked that I'm killing this recital, and my friend was mortified and so shy. It was the first moment I felt that I liked this and not everybody did."

Live & Learn

Perhaps we humans are split into those who love being on stage and those who find it incredibly uncomfortable, but Lea feels she went on a journey with the whole process. "At first I was not nervous at all," she says, "but I think it's been a whole arc for me. I went from being genuinely excited to be on stage, to thinking too much about it and putting too much pressure on myself. That was probably around my early 20s, and as I've gotten older and played a bunch of shows – some great and some not so great – I've recognised that it's an experience you can offer and that the audience is responsible for its own experience, too. It takes the pressure off of you wanting to be received in a certain way."

Sound Affects

Lea's sound balances more traditional pop music with a delicate, looser structure, plus some more muscular playing in places. We wonder when she realised she was honing her own style? "I was writing songs from around eight or nine years old," she tells us, "but once I got a guitar I began to deeply identify with music, more than just what was popular, and building an arsenal of influences. And then a family friend on Maui was leaving the island, so he sold us a mini-kit of dynamic mics and capos and Logic and stuff. We turned my brother's room into a studio when I was about 15 – it meant the last two years of high school were spent in deep exploration, writing songs, layering harmonies, arrangements and production. That led me to going to an audio engineering trade school in New York."

Sonic Landscapes

Lea's fourth long-player, *Cosmos Forever*, is her second collaboration with partner and producer John Thayer, and sees her further evolve the sound captured on 2021 predecessor, *Mirrors To The Sun*. "It's always evolving," she smiles. "This one feels slightly more atmospheric, while bringing in my early influences of folk guitar and fingerpicking, especially that nylon-guitar sound. But I really enjoy that ambient sound and [John] is very skilled at that – his style is more about those soundscapes. When we do these collaborations, it tends to bridge those worlds and *Cosmos* felt like the first time it really lined up in a way that represented my songs. I really enjoyed it."

Seeking Harmony

Although we mention the delicate side of Lea's music, with songs such as *We Must Be In Love* springing to mind, there is a more intense side to her work, which comes to the fore on the title track in particular. "Oh yeah, it can get heavy. I've always been a bit intense, thinking about what's not working in the world and why we can't come back to the harmony we see in nature and learning from the rhythms and cycles of the seasons... There is an intensity to that, so it's not just fluffy stuff. It was an interesting practice to see how to lean into that without it being alienating. It's fun, you know?" [GK]

Standout track: *River Runs Through Us*

For fans of: Low, Marissa Nadler, Sharon Van Etten, Juni Habel



PHOTO BY WYNDHAM GARNETT



“Once I got a guitar I began to deeply identify with music, more than just what was popular”

GOOD AS GOLDTOP

A go-to single-cut that keeps it in the family

Lea's father used to build guitars as well as playing them, meaning she's always been surrounded by instruments. "Right now, my favourite is this Goldtop replica," she says, showing us a familiar-outlined single-cut. "He built this about 10 years ago and almost all of his guitars were focused on Japanese replicas. There was a time when Tokai were really going off and mastering these Goldtop Gibsons especially. I love this one because it's pretty and heavy and it has this really long sustain, so it's good for music with moments of space and quiet."



Albums

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

PHOTO BY KEVIN WESTENBERG



Steven's latest release is literally out of this world

Steven Wilson

The Overview

Fiction Records (available 14 March)



The fearlessly mercurial Mr Wilson returns to guitar-based prog with his space-themed eighth studio album

When we spoke to Steven Wilson back in 2021 in issue 474, around the time of the release of his album *The Future Bites*, he painted a very bleak picture of the guitar's relevance to modern music. "I don't think guitars really reflect the world that we live in any more," he said. "I know that's quite a depressing thing to say..." So imagine our surprise when it was announced that Steven was releasing a prog album that comprises just two longform tracks and that guitars were very much back on the menu.

Its central theme is outer space – you can't get any more prog than that. Wilson explains: "It is a 42-minute long journey based on the reported 'overview effect' whereby astronauts seeing the Earth from space undergo a transformative cognitive shift, most often experiencing an overwhelming appreciation and perception of beauty, and an increased sense of connection to other people and the Earth as a whole."

As it turns out, *The Overview* is itself a thing of great depth and beauty. On the first track, *Objects Outlive Us*, Wilson deals with the mundanity of life on Earth when compared with the unfathomable goings-on of the cosmos. Meanwhile, the title track takes the listener on a cosmic ride to the end of the universe and the destruction of our planet. Deep stuff. But with consummate songwriting skills, out-of-this-world production techniques and some particularly fine lead-guitar work from Randy McStine, he pulls it off. Brilliantly. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Objects Outlive Us*

For fans of: Porcupine Tree, Yes, Pink Floyd

Little Barrie & Malcolm Catto

Electric War

Easy Eye Sound (available 18 April)



Cinema-noir psyche-rock with top-drawer 60s guitar hooks

Regular readers will know that we're big admirers of Barrie Cadogan, the guitarist and founding member of Little Barrie.

He's a deep scholar of blues, soul and R&B and has impeccable taste – but we have to say we like how his collaboration with London drummer and producer Malcolm Catto, which kicked off with their 2020 *Quatermass Seven* album, has brought out a darker, more abstract side of Barrie's work. The title track sees Barrie constructing the melodic frame of a 60s thriller soundtrack from sparse electric lead lines over Catto's precise yet in-the-pocket grooves that recall The Meters in a low-key mood. Despite the cinematic feel, these are fully fledged songs, with Barrie on vocal duties, as on the murky, evocative *Spektator*. Elsewhere on the excellent *My Now*, we find riffs that hit like The Doors but sound like something Johnny Kidd & The Pirates might have cut – it's an intoxicating blend, shaken not stirred. **[JD]**

Standout track: *My Now*

For fans of: The Doors, Lalo Schiffrin, The Meters

Seth Lakeman

The Granite Way

Honour Oak Records (available now)



Renowned folk artist returns with narrative rich album

Devon's foremost folk artist's new album was recorded over the course of a week at Plymouth's Momentum Studios and released as an overture to a February UK tour. As we've come to expect, these 10 tracks take their lyrical lead from stories of haunted moors, sailors drowned at sea, murder and mishap – in other words, the acknowledged stuff of the West Country's storytelling folk tradition. It's not all doom and gloom, though; the track *One More Before You Go* centres on the value of friendship and good times. A further tradition that was upheld during the recording was that all the musicians involved were playing together in the same room, like we've seen many times on BBC's excellent *Transatlantic Sessions*. You can tell, too, such is the intimacy and interplay between all the musicians involved. Excellent stuff. **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Huntsman And The Moon*

For fans of: *Transatlantic Sessions*, Martin Carthy

Erja Lyytinen
sharpens her edge
on her latest self-
produced record

PHOTO BY VILLE JUURIKKALA



Erja Lyytinen

Smell The Roses

Tuohi Records (available 28 March)



Finnish blues-rockers is coming up roses with riff-heavy new album

It's been more than 20 years since Erja released her debut album, the superb *Wildflower*, introducing herself to the blues-rock scene, and her touring and album release schedule has been relentless ever since. Her latest effort, *Smell The Roses*, however, is her heaviest, most riff-laden album to date. Speaking of the title track, Erja tells us: "The message is simple – wake up and smell the roses. There's so much beauty in the world, so why don't we stop and enjoy it rather than fighting and wanting more?" From the outset, angry guitars pound out of the speakers with some of the catchiest riffs we've heard in a while. And while it's not all rock 'n' roll on 11, even some of the more ballad-orientated tracks such as *Wings To Fly* have their weightier guitar moments. If you want to catch the energy in real life, watch out for Erja on her UK tour in early April! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Dragonfly*

For fans of: Joe Bonamassa, Joanne Shaw Taylor

Yes

Close To The Edge (Super Deluxe Edition)

Rhino (available 7 March)



New expanded edition of classic album

Yes's 1972 album, *Close To The Edge*, was the absolute pinnacle of everything that was truly great about 70s prog. As adventurous as it was epic – in both concept and execution – it catapulted the band towards international superstardom and remains an album against which all others of the genre are measured. Various reissues, remasters and a Steven Wilson remix have appeared over the years, but now the album receives another dust-off with a special edition that sees a five CD/LP/Blu-ray set featuring a newly remastered version, plus previously unreleased rarities, a live set from The Rainbow Theatre in 1972, and Steven Wilson's 2025 album mixes in Dolby Atmos. With 21st century technology providing higher contrast and greater definition, the album sounds as good as it ever did. And the various rarities – singles and radio edits – are the cherry on top. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Close To The Edge*

For fans of: Genesis, King Crimson, Pink Floyd



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Tones Behind The Tracks

Richie Kotzen and **Adrian Smith** dig into the intention, tones and gear that define Smith/Kotzen's sophomore record

Artist: Smith/Kotzen

Album: *Black Light/White Noise* (BMG)



Adrian Smith and Richie Kotzen's debut self-titled album set the tone for the duo's sound, and they're now set to release album number two

Thinking back on his unlikely pairing with the ever-nomadic Richie Kotzen, Iron Maiden's Adrian Smith says, quite simply: "I can see it. I can see a place for us out there." But it wasn't always that way. Before their successful self-titled 2021 debut, Adrian was sceptical. "The blues-rock thing is something I've wanted to do," he says. "My wife, who was a fan of his music, said, 'Why don't you get together with Richie?' I said, 'Well, he's got a lot going on, his band; I don't see how that would work.'"

Against the odds, Adrian Smith and Richie Kotzen's union did work, leading them to their 2025 follow-up, *Black Light/White Noise*. "Adrian might do something with a solo that I wouldn't, something that elevates the composition to a place it wouldn't have gone because I wasn't inspired in that way," Richie says. "And that goes both ways. That's the beauty of it. It has to do with maturity. We don't have this weird desperation of, 'Listen to me sing this line,' or 'Listen to me play this melody while I do this trick on guitar.' We don't have any of that garbage. The music speaks for itself; it's honest and transparent."

The Smith/Kotzen project allows Adrian Smith to explore a different kind of guitar dynamic from that of Iron Maiden

Is the record's title meant to symbolise the differences between you as guitarists?

Richie Kotzen: "Wow, I never put it together that way. That would be a cool spin – I'm going to keep that in my back pocket [laughs]. That would be a great backstory with one of us as 'White Noise' and one as 'Black Light'. I wish I had thought of that!"

So what's the origin of the title track?

Richie: "The song *Black Light* is one of my favourites on the record. When we were writing that, we almost threw it away because there was something in the chorus that we just weren't feeling. We took it back to the drawing board and came up with what's on the album – and it's a standout. Those up-tempo songs can be very elusive. You know, it's not usual when you sit down with a guitar in a room and you're writing where you're super amped up. A lot of those barnburner-type tunes are a different type of energy. When you get one that works, it's exciting."

Adrian Smith: "I usually try to come up with a tough-sounding verse with a good riff, which is great because we end up coming up with these really melodic and very different choruses. I don't think too many people are doing what we're doing with having two singers and two guitarists. I think it's different."

Your professional backgrounds are vastly different. Why does Smith/Kotzen work?

Adrian: "Richie's been all over the map as a solo artist, but we're actually not that dissimilar. Going way back to the 70s, I grew up listening to Free and Bad Company – Paul Rodgers is one of my favourite singers – and I love Deep Purple. So, guitar-wise, Richie and I have a lot of similar interests in that way."

Richie: "I might tend to get a little more fusion or funk-oriented, maybe some old-school R&B – I can go there pretty easily. But we're both rock guys, and that's kind of what I bring. But I think I lure Adrian more toward the fusion realm than he'd normally go."

What song best demonstrates where you two meet in the middle?

Richie: "I would say *Black Light*. Adrian was messing around with the verse and I was in the other room, and when he started singing it, I said, 'Oh, wow, that's really cool.' I thought it was on the funkier side, which is not something you'd normally expect from Adrian."



“Adrian might do something that elevates the composition to a place it wouldn’t have gone. And that goes both ways” **Richie Kotzen**

Adrian, you’re mainly known as a guitarist, but you’re singing here, too.

Adrian: “I grew up playing guitar because Dave Murray [Iron Maiden] was one of my oldest friends. Dave had already been playing guitar, so I said to him, ‘I’ll be the singer’ – I wanted to get in with Dave and learn guitar, too. I learned how to sing and play guitar there and did it until I joined Maiden. So from the age of 15 until I was 24, I did that. It’s second nature to me. I don’t have much range, but I have a tone. Having Richie, who has incredible range, allows us to cover a wide spectrum.”

Is it hard to find space on the tracks, considering you both can rip it up on guitar?

Richie: “No. If I’m not really feeling something, I’ll say, ‘Adrian, you want to see if you can make this come to life?’ On the other side of the coin, I might say, ‘I really feel like I want to take this solo. I have something in my head that I think would be perfect. Do you mind?’ Those simple conversations lead us to things maybe we wouldn’t have found or put on the back burner.”

Adrian: “You just try to make the guitar sing and fly, you know? We’ll sit down and run through the solos until we have something we’re happy with. If you have to leave something for too long, there’s something wrong. In the early days of Maiden, I used to do a lot of improvisation; I like to have two cornerstones and then I just solo around it. The song inspires the choice of notes.”

What solo are you most proud of?

Richie: “There’s a song on the album called *Beyond The Pale*, which, funnily enough, almost didn’t make it. It has an unexpected transition at the end, and there’s some nice soloing there from both of us. I think I kicked off the first solo at the end section, and I’m pretty sure I used a Strat in the middle position, which is a sound that I love. I’m sort of using the bar, a vintage tremolo, so it’s kind of tricky because sometimes it doesn’t like being in tune. That might be a cool moment.”

What gear did you use on the album?

Adrian: “We recorded at Richie’s house and I did not have access to all my gear, which was in a warehouse in England. Richie has a hand-wired Marshall that we used quite a bit – but I was worried because I didn’t want our guitar sounds to be the same, though they’re not. He plugs in and it sounds one way; I plug into the same amp and it just sounds different.”



Richie: “On the first record [*Smith/Kotzen*], we actually used one of my Victory amps and then went into a Marshall ‘Plexi’. But that particular hand-wired 1959 Marshall we used on the album – I have a lot of them – is one we just plugged into, and we got great sounds.”

Adrian: “For 90 per cent of the album, I used my signature [San Dimas] Jackson. I have the green one, which is tuned to a semitone below concert, and I put heavier strings on it, and my white one I used for drop D. You can get the humbucking, sort of meaty sound, but they’ve also got single coils for more SRV bluesy sounds. That’s all I really need.”

Richie: “I also have my Sansamp by Tech 21; I turn that on and use it to drive the amp a little bit. It seems to open things up and make the amp sing. Other than that, I mostly used my signature Fender Telecaster, which I also used on a lot of my last solo album, *Nomad*.”

What have you learned working together?

Richie: “The most important thing is to be in a position where if somebody has an idea and you don’t think it’s a good idea, you can flat out say: ‘That does not appeal to me.’ Finding a way to deal with the psychology of getting through creatively so the result is positive and moves the composition forward is the ultimate.” **[AD]**

Richie Kotzen has an extensive solo catalogue, alongside his band work, and he brings “a little more fusion or funk-oriented” playing to the mix, he says



Smith/Kotzen’s new album, *Black Light/White Noise*, is available on 7 March via BMG

www.smithkotzen.com



In A Jam

Neville Marten recalls being invited to jam with one of the world's greatest musicians. He wasn't a guitarist, but you'll know his name!

Before we get onto that particular fellow, back in the early to mid-70s I shared a house with a great friend who was and still is a fabulous guitarist. He owned the 1963 Vox AC30 that I've often talked about and which we both jammed through, full blast, with our respective SG and ES-335. His sister also lived there (it was their family home) with her husband. He was and still is a fabulous saxophone player called Dave Winthrop. At the time, Dave was

"He flattered me into doing a jazz jam: "It's just like blues, old chap. You'll be fine." I took my 335 and the Vox and, of course, it was disastrous..."

in a new band that had had some success with their debut album but not yet hit the big-time. They were called Supertramp. Dave and I also played in a local Essex rock 'n' roll band and had a joyous time doing so, too. But we also used to quietly noodle, just the two of us, in the living room, often with Dave on flute.

One day he said, "I'm playing with some jazzers in Chelmsford tonight. Do you fancy sitting in?" Not having a jazz bone in my body I discreetly declined. Of course, Dave flattered me into doing it: "It's just

like blues, old chap. You'll be fine." So I took my 335 and the Vox and, of course, it was disastrous. I couldn't play the changes and was left floundering in keys I wasn't familiar working in; you know, those ones ending with 'flat'. Dave clearly thought that, being able to jam over blues and rock 'n' roll chords, it would be the same for me with jazz, as it was with him. Sadly, no. It was my fault entirely as I shouldn't have submitted to the flattery.

Dave and Supertramp parted ways and the band became worldwide stars. But he went on to share stages with many of the greats in the blues and rock world, and is currently a highly sought-after artist who does complex drawings of otherworldly beings. His pieces are highly prized all around the world.

On The Fiddle

Nigel Kennedy is perhaps classical music's biggest star. I recently listened to him on BBC Radio 4's excellent *This Cultural Life* where he was intelligent, insightful and highly entertaining. They played snippets of his music, including the sublime *The Planets* suite where he brings unimaginable passion, heart and fire to Gustav Holst's seminal work.

Nigel, though, is also a huge fan of jazz, rock and blues. As a teenage student he would seek out Stéphane Grappelli gigs where he'd go and jam with the great man, and at 16 was invited to play with him at Carnegie Hall. Anyway, not surprisingly given the breadth of his musical taste, in 1999 Nigel released an album entitled *The Kennedy Experience*, on which he performed the songs of Jimi Hendrix. He toured the album, too.

As editor of *Guitarist* at the time, I put in for an interview as I thought it would be educational to hear a top classical musician's view on a similarly great blues-rock one. The interview was immediately granted and I was invited, with a photographer, to Nigel's house in London. I had a white Strat in a gigbag over my shoulder, as my arty idea was to see if Nigel would pose with it under his chin, with a bow. He politely but firmly declined.

We had a great time during the interview, conducted with Nigel wearing his customary Aston Villa top, and as we finished he said, "Okay, man – are we gonna jam?" Imagine it! I too politely demured, since I was terrified that my gross limitations would be laid bare in front of this legendary musician. He pushed me somewhat, but I made my typically limp excuse of, "I need to get back to the office." What a moment to pass up!

Do you have any jamming triumphs (or tragedies) that you'd care to share? If so, we'd love to hear them. Write in to the usual address and we'll print the best. **GI**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

The White Stuff

What? Fender Custom Shop 1959 Stratocaster, Journeyman Relic
Where seen? www.peachguitars.com
Price? £4,399

Apologies for going high-end this month, but this featured instrument – spotted at Peach Guitars – is just like my own '59 Strat that I'd often jam on with Dave Winthrop, and similar to the one I took to Nigel Kennedy's house. You know the score: selected alder body with matched quarter-sawn maple neck and dark rosewood fingerboard, aged green pickguard. The Journeyman Relic tag means the finish is not unrealistically beaten to death (I'll write more about this next month); instead, it looks age-worn, used and loved. Three hand-wound Custom Shop pickups ensure it's packed with vintage tone, but the 241mm (9.5-inch) radius fingerboard means it plays like a more modern guitar. It's a bit nice!



PHOTO COURTESY OF PEACH GUITARS



VINTAGE FUZZ REBORN

In response to an ever-growing demand from players, **Rotosound** has sourced a limited number of N.O.S. germanium transistors and is hand-building pedals from its factory in Kent. Once again, players can lose themselves in the **RFB1 Fuzz**'s chewy fuzz tones that was first heard in 1967 at Rotosound's Denmark Street showroom.

Find out more at rotosound.com





Tuning In

Alex Bishop imagines being stranded on a desert island with nothing but lutherie tools and one big tuning problem...

Tuning a guitar is probably the first thing everyone is taught to do when they initially pick up a guitar. Regardless of your choice of axe, clip-on tuners are pretty ubiquitous these days and they make getting the process of bringing everything up to pitch a doddle. Gone are the days of banging a tuning fork against a table edge, or aggravating pets by blowing into a pitch pipe.

However, players comfortable tuning their guitars without such aids may have noticed that there are occasional discrepancies between these clever gadgets and their own well-honed perception of pitch. If you've ever struggled with tuning the B string in particular, you may know what I'm talking about.

"The surprising truth is that guitars are supposed to be 'wrong' and the tuner is right – but don't worry, your ears aren't deceiving you"

As a guitar maker, it's my job to understand exactly what's going on here, otherwise I can't rule out the possibility of sloppy workmanship – and I'm not sure that's something my fragile ego could take. Surely an expensive handmade guitar should be nothing short of perfect? The surprising truth, it turns out, is that guitars (and for that matter, all fixed-pitch instruments such as pianos and synthesizers) are supposed to be 'wrong' and the tuner is right – but don't worry, your ears aren't deceiving you.

If a tuner is out of reach, leaning on natural harmonics and the 'cycle of 5ths' can help bring your guitar into tune

To understand this fully, we can run a kind of lutherie-based thought experiment. Imagine you're stuck on a desert island with some rudimentary guitar-making equipment (not a bad situation to be in, if you ask me) and you have everything you need to build a guitar except any kind of tuning device. We've also lost our memory, and can't remember where the frets are supposed to go. How can we go about building a musical system from scratch without a tuner to guide us?

The easiest way is to start by building a monochord. This ancient instrument is simply a box with a hole in it and a string stretched between a nut and a bridge: essentially, a one string guitar with no fretboard. We tune this string to a note, and let's imagine that we happen to tune it to match the bottom E string of a guitar. How can we then find new notes that will sound harmonious with this root note?

The answer is natural harmonics. These are the notes that ring out when you rest your finger on the string at specific points along its length. The first harmonic halfway along the string (at the 12th fret) sounds out a note that is one octave above the original E, but the second harmonic (found around the 7th fret and one third of the way along the string) produces a perfect 5th.

A 5th above E gives us our first new note – B. Let's add a string to our monochord and tune it to that note exactly. What then? Now we can easily pluck out the second harmonic on this string to produce another new note one 5th above the B, giving us an F#. Continue adding strings and something familiar will start to emerge: it's the cycle of 5ths.

Everything Equal

If the mention of music theory has sent you into a cold sweat, don't panic. All you need to know is that the cycle of 5ths passes through every note in the chromatic scale before ending up back where it started. In our thought experiment that means we've ended up building a kind of harp with 12 strings tuned perfectly through all 12 chromatic notes from E to E.

Here's the catch: the final E note we reach is not in tune with the one we started with. Inconveniently, there is a small discrepancy that has to be dealt with, and the heretical solution is to slightly detune all the other strings by an equal fraction to close the gap. This is the only way to build an instrument that will perform equally well (tuning-wise) in all keys. We call this tweaking 'equal temperament' and the result is that the 3rd intervals (such as the gap between the G and B strings) are widened considerably. That explains my weird tuning problem, and I'm thrilled that shoddy craftsmanship had nothing to do with it. Phew! 

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



PHOTO BY ALUNCALENDER

lowden
GUITARS





Voicings/Inversions

Richard Barrett explores various voicings of the Bmaj7 chord in the search for different characters

We get different voicings of a chord when we shuffle the order of the notes around. Though we still have the same chord harmonically speaking, it will have a slightly different character. We can also arrange to have the Root, 3rd, 5th, 7th (or any other extension) at the top or bottom to facilitate chord melody arrangements or Bach-style moving basslines. In the classical world, this practice would usually be called 'inversions' of a chord.

Briefly, a major or minor chord with the 3rd shifted to the bottom (such as D/F#) is a first inversion. Move the 5th to the bottom (D/A, for example) and we have a second inversion. If we were to take a dominant 7th chord and move the 7th to the bottom (D/C, for example), we'd have a third inversion. In the jazz/pop/rock world, we normally talk in terms of voicings or slash chords, but it's useful to understand the various terminologies. In the meantime, enjoy the versions of Bmaj7 in the examples and I hope you feel inspired to apply this approach to other chords. **G**

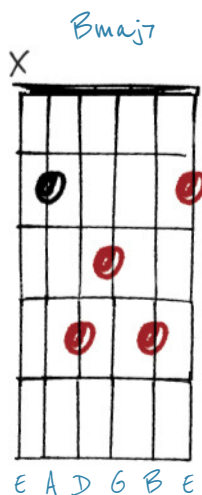
Jazz legend Martin Taylor regularly uses chord inversions in his playing



PHOTO BY SERGIOME INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

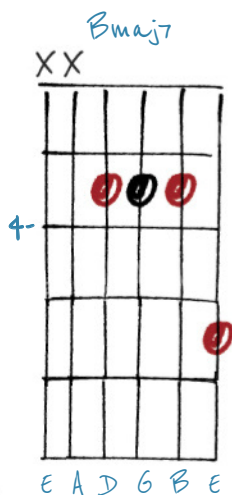
Example 1

Based on the CAGED shape of A major, this movable Bmaj7 shape is one of the most popular maj7 voicings, as seen in many chord books. We have the Root (B) on the fifth string, then the 5th (F#), maj7th (A#), 3rd (D#) and another 5th (F#) in that order as you strum across the strings. The duplicated 5th is optional, but it makes a nice top note.



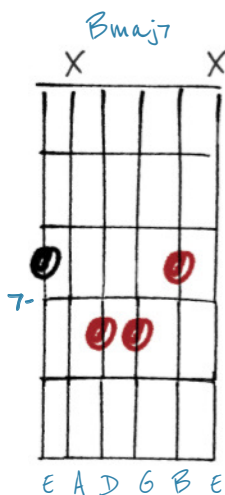
Example 2

This voicing of Bmaj7 has the 5th (F#) on the bottom, so could technically be called a second inversion. The rest of the B major triad is also here at the 4th fret, so we have the full set: F#-B-D#, in that order. The maj7th (A#) appears on the first string, which is a nice way to accentuate what is unique about this chord.



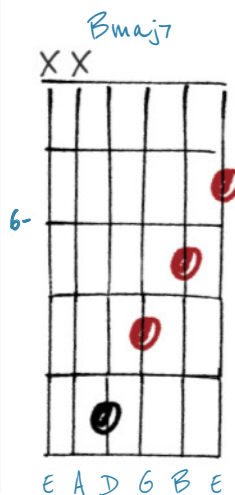
Example 3

This version of Bmaj7 has a jazzy feel as the 5th (F#) is separated from the Root (B) by an octave. This is common in jazz because it allows the other more delicate intervals to come to the fore. In fact, the 5th is often omitted completely. Compare with Example 1 to hear how much more 'rock 'n' roll' the Root and 5th (B-F#) sound at the bottom.



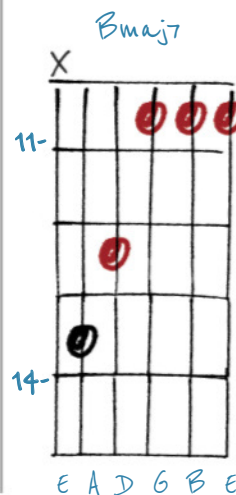
Example 4

Played on the top four strings, this version of Bmaj7 is great for funk rhythm parts where you want to keep things light without too much low-end muddying things up. Over a G# bass note, this voicing would also make a very nice G#min9 chord, which is the relative minor key.



Example 5

Using the CAGED Cmaj7 shape, here is yet another voicing of Bmaj7, with the root on the bottom. You could almost view the first finger of your fretting hand as a temporary capo and move this shape to any key, though it does require a bit of stretch and strength in the lower registers.





TOUR 2025

**Double headliner with Andy McKee*

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25/05 NEWCASTLE	Cluny 2
02/06 MANCHESTER*	Band On The Wall
07/06 LONDON*	Bush Hall



TOUR JUNE 2025

01 // PHILHARMONIC MUSIC ROOM // LIVERPOOL
02 // BAND ON THE WALL // MANCHESTER*
03 // ORAN MOR // GLASGOW
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Feedback

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

STAR LETTER



HISTORY REBORN

I thought readers may be interested in something a little different. Clearly inspired by the cigar-box diddley bow guitars made in America around the turn of the 20th century, my grandad Harry Aldridge made this [see pics] on his return from that country around 1908. My brother and I inherited it in a dirty and broken state. I've restored it, retaining the original colour, wear and tear, and evidence of minor repairs over the years.

I gave it a good clean to remove over 100 years of grime then used guitar polish to bring life back to the wood and bring back the original colour. The body is French-polished pine, the top left natural. The smooth slender neck and man's head carved headstock is out of one piece of mahogany, and the frets are oak glued into sawcuts. I slightly reshaped the oak tuner, which was an unfinished repair. The few new fixings I made are aged to match the originals.

Like grandad, I play it with a bow or (think Justin Johnson) pluck it like a guitar. The blues on my 100-year-plus-old diddley bow is brilliant. It is a historic instrument I'm privileged and proud to have restored, and by keeping it as original as I could I feel I've added my own effort to its history. The sound and tone of it brings grandad back within arm's reach.

Leslie Jones



This handmade diddley bow is over 100 years old

Thanks Leslie and what a fascinating – and toneful – piece of history you have. We spend a lot of time talking about the benefits of finely crafted guitars, but the reality is that people have made entrancing music on pretty basic instruments down the centuries. You did well, while cleaning it, to conserve the original character of the instrument, too. If, in the name of 'restoration', we remove all the marks of time and circumstance from an object, we cut the thread that connects us to lives (and music) gone by. Your diligence earns you this month's Star Letter prize.



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

A KIND OF MAGIC

I first wanted to thank you for publishing great content over the years. Because of your well-researched content and insightful discussions, I have gained knowledge of the different kinds of guitars and gear that are being manufactured today. Also Richard [Barrett]'s input on the chord progressions in every copy is a delight for people like me who want to bring in more versatility to their playing.

I came across your interview with the iconic Mr Brian May in your March 2025 edition and I must say it was a delightful read. The challenges Queen faced as a band and as individuals were intricately captured through the interview. In some ways we can all relate to it, be it the need to gain approval and recognition from our parents or fighting through the struggles we face in our own lives.

But the main motive is to keep the resolve and belief like the Queen did. Despite being turned away by record companies repeatedly, they believed that they were doing something special, and they had that intense optimism that led them to work hard at it and finally reach the pinnacle of their careers. It's a story of how the power of belief, passion and hunger can help one overcome all the struggles and achieve success. Mr May also wanted his own distinct sound. He did not want to follow the crowd of guitar players playing Marshalls. This led him to make his own guitar and use Vox amplifiers. We should definitely be our own person and not simply emulate the strategies of others.

I again take this opportunity to thank you for publishing this fantastic conversation. Looking forward to similar interviews in the upcoming editions.

Abhinandan Ghosh



Many thanks for your kind words about last issue's interview with Brian May, Abhinandan – we're glad you enjoyed it. With hindsight, we can look at a band such as Queen and think, 'Well, of course they were always going to make it big.' But before the hits came rolling in, how could Brian May or any of the band have known that? Especially when even those closest to you are questioning your decision to keep at it? That's why it's so important to make music that you personally have an inner conviction about – no matter how leftfield or out of sync with fashion it may seem.

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Thought I would give you all a bit of a giggle. I bought a Chinese-made Squier Sonic Series butterscotch Telecaster a while back for £140, so I cannot complain, but it's a bit weak in the sonic department. So as it already had locking tuners fitted as standard, I thought it's an ideal platform for my first ever attempt at modding. I bought a secondhand pair of N3 noiseless pups locally online, a premium wiring kit pack with a four-way selector, 250k CTS pots and Orange Drop capacitor, and a gold tortoiseshell scratchplate. I downloaded a wiring diagram and thought, even though it's 50 years since I soldered anything, it's like riding a bike.

Well, the wiring diagram from Fender's site didn't match the colours of the cables on the pickups, which had three cables to the wiring diagram's two, and the Chinese parts were metric whereas the American ones were imperial, so nothing fitted – even the control panel and knobs didn't fit each other.

Long story short, after I thought a like-for-like wiring swap would suffice, nothing works and I'm now contacting a local guitar repair guy in North Shields to fix my hapless first attempt at modding. I hope it's worth it!

Dave Cross

Ah, Dave, we feel your pain – modding can be a very satisfying pastime, but it can also lead to hair being torn out! I'm sure even our own Dave Burrluck would sympathise with his own experiences for The Mod Squad and beyond. It's worth adding that quite a few UK guitar makers offer guided courses in guitar-making, setups and maintenance (Crimson Guitars or our own Alex Bishop's workshop come to mind) that can refresh rusty skills or grant confidence in new ones – so maybe your next investment could be one of those? Either way, sometimes discretion is the better part of valour and we hope your guitar comes back to you with a really inspiring upgrade.



NEW YORK, NEW YORK

It's January 2024 and I'm searching for reliable information about New York City guitar stores in preparation for an upcoming trip. I'm ultimately thwarted by the sketchy AI-generated claptrap, finding nothing trustworthy. I'm deeply unsatisfied.

In January 2025 *Guitarist* publishes the article that I desperately needed one year ago. Where were you when I needed you the most? But seriously, love the magazine and wish that I had discovered it sooner.

Bryant Brabson (Franklin, TN, USA)

PERSONAL SHOPPER

It was great to read Huw Price's article on New York guitar shops in issue 520. I (along with many readers) am unlikely to ever go to New York to experience this for myself, so the article had limited practical insight for me, but was nonetheless a great way to celebrate the importance of real-life guitar shops in this world of internet shopping.

How about something similar that celebrates the UK retailers? A nationwide tour looking further afield would reveal that this country has some superb guitar shops including the small but excellent Hippo Guitars in Derby, the well-stocked Rich Tone in Sheffield, not to mention Coda, Peach, World Guitars and the well-known chains.

I'm a big fan of supporting real-life shops and the value of sitting down and trying something, getting to know staff and benefitting from face-to-face advice and customer service, so it would be great to see an article that gives them a plug.

Matt Jones

Thanks Bryant and Matt for your separate letters on Huw's fascinating safari through NYC's guitar shops, surely one of the great capitals of the world for six-string finds. We've been thinking that it might be good to do a regular-ish feature on these lines called 'What's In Store', taking a look at interesting guitar shops around Britain and the world. We won't pledge to do it every month, but when we get a chance to take a look round somewhere special we might well do this again. Interested? If so, let us know and we'll get rolling.

Huw Price's journey around New York City's guitar stores reminds us of the thrill and community to be found from shopping in brick-and-mortar businesses

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

JOHN SYKES

1959 – 2024

The journeyman virtuoso made his mark on both Thin Lizzy and Whitesnake, but cruel timing and clashes with David Coverdale kept him from rock's super-league

Words Henry Yates



JOHN SYKES

July 1959 – December 2024

John Sykes belonged to that exclusive club of musicians – a golden circle whose members also include David Crosby, Ronnie Wood and Dave Grohl – notable for their vital roles in not one but two major bands. Unlike those galacticos, there's a case that the former Whitesnake and Thin Lizzy guitarist, who died in December aged 65 after battling cancer, never became as famous as his talent deserved ('underrated' being the key word in the tributes paid). Yet those who found Sykes followed him until the end. "In John's final days," ran the statement on his website, "he spoke of his sincere love and gratitude for his fans who stuck by him through all these years."

John James Sykes was born 29 July 1959 in Reading, and discovered his gift for guitar through studying the blues licks of Eric Clapton. Yet it was the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal that gave him his start in the early 80s, and while early band Tygers Of Pan Tang were relative



John Sykes was known for his "mind-boggling" playing in both Thin Lizzy and Whitesnake

"John didn't sound like any other previous guitarist. [On 1987's 'Whitesnake'] his thumbprint is an indelible part of that record" STEVE VAI

minnows, Sykes' lead work was among the gutsiest on the scene. "The *Spellbound* album [1981] was a game-changer for me," former Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman told *Blabbermouth* of Sykes' scalded alternate picking and wide vibrato, played on a 70s Les Paul Custom. "He was the first guy who was just playing mind-boggling guitar in that context."

Post-Tygers, Sykes failed an audition for Ozzy Osbourne's solo band (other star vehicles missed over the years included Def Leppard and Guns N' Roses). But when Thin Lizzy drafted him in 1982, the new boy quickly made his mark, steering the following year's *Thunder And Lightning* towards a heavy metal sound that divides fans to this day. In any case, by then, Lizzy was running out of road. "I feel sorry for John," Scott Gorham told *Classic Rock*. "We knew that was going to be our last album. I don't think we informed John because we couldn't believe it ourselves, but it was definitely going down. John got short-changed on the whole thing."

Fortunately, by 1984, he'd signed with another notable British band – this one headed in the right direction. "I wanted Whitesnake to be leaner, meaner and more electrifying," frontman David Coverdale told *Metal Hammer*. "The reason I invited John Sykes into the band was to actually afford that transition, or someone of that style, and it happened to be Sykes. And that was it."

Sykes tracked guitar for that year's six-million-selling *Slide It In*, then burnished his songwriting credentials on Whitesnake's self-titled album of 1987, co-writing nine songs including mega-hits *Is This Love* and *Still Of The Night*. But there was always friction with Coverdale and the guitarist was out of the line-up before the album had even started its march towards eight million sales – leaving a string of high-profile players including Viv Campbell and Steve Vai to fill his shoes. "He didn't sound like any other previous Whitesnake guitarist," the latter told *Guitar World*. "His thumbprint is an indelible part of that record."

As for Sykes, he went on to form Blue Murder – envisaging a "very heavy" power-trio alongside bassist Tony Franklin and drummer Carmine Appice – but the tide had turned and grunge was in the ascendancy. "It's amazing sonically," Myles Kennedy told *Classic Rock* of Blue Murder's self-titled debut. "But more than that, it was about John Sykes' guitar. He's a soulful player with chops balancing technique and emotion. Why didn't they become superstars? Timing: a sea-change happened with *Appetite For Destruction*, a precursor to the 90s – raw, in your face. The era of slick 80s rock was almost over when Blue Murder's album came out. They made a second a few years later, but it didn't stand a chance."

From the mid-90s into the post-millennium, the ever-prolific Sykes released four solo albums, while (somewhat divisively) fronting a reformed Lizzy line-up in place of the late Phil Lynott. Commercially, he never again hit the heights of 1987's *Whitesnake*, and claimed to have "no interest in ever talking to [Coverdale] again". But when news of his death broke, alongside tributes from Slash and Glenn Hughes, his former frontman posted a heartfelt farewell: "Just heard the shocking news of John's passing – my sincere condolences to his family, friends and fans." **G**

MUIREANN BRADLEY

At the age of only 18, Muireann Bradley and her interpretations of original country blues songs are causing quite a stir among players and devotees of the style. We met up with her on tour to find out what attracts her to a form of music that's nearly a century old

Words David Mead Photography Phil Barker

With an ultra-clean fingerpicking technique and a vocal delivery that straddles Irish folk and Americana, Muireann Bradley first came to prominence via YouTube when she was 13 years old, gaining thousands of views for her versions of the blues standards, *Vestapol* and Blind Blake's *Police Dog Blues*. Her subsequent independent album, *I Kept These Old Blues*, gained her even more attention, particularly from the producers of Jools Holland's annual *Hootenanny*, who booked her to appear on the show in 2023. Remarkably, she handled playing on live TV like an absolute pro, even though she'd only played a handful of local gigs beforehand.

Now that her album is being remastered and released on a major label and her tour schedule is positively bustling, she looks back on a time when martial arts very nearly eclipsed her love of blues guitar.

When did you start playing?

"Well, I started playing when I was nine years old. My dad got me my first guitar for my ninth birthday and when he first started me on lessons, he was teaching me fingerpicking straight away because that's what I wanted to learn. I'd grown up seeing him playing the old fingerstyle country blues guitar and Americana-style stuff and ragtime as well. And that's what I

wanted to learn because I grew up hearing all the old CDs, like Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Blake, and all that kind of thing. So he started off teaching me fingerpicking straight away. I played for about a year and a half maybe, and I got to a certain stage, I got pretty good, I suppose, and then I started training in boxing and jiu-jitsu. When I was about 10 or 11, I got very into that. So I kind of put the guitar up for a wee while, and I was training [in jiu-jitsu] for about three or four years."

What was it that took you back to the guitar?

"Lockdown hit when I was about 13, so I couldn't train any more for about two years pretty much because I was stuck at home. So I decided to pick the guitar up and start playing again – I was bored and I needed something to do with myself. I went back to my dad and said, 'Can you start teaching me again?' I just wanted to learn properly from him. I mean, why wouldn't I when I've got a teacher like that? I learned *Vestapol* when I was younger, and then during lockdown I learned to play Blind Blake's *Police Dog Blues*. And I decided, just for fun, to put it up on YouTube – for no reason at all, really. But when we did that, it got quite a lot of attention, a lot more than we'd expected. I put up *Vestapol* as well shortly after that, when I'd learned it fully, and it got a lot of attention, too. So that's how things started for me."

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Muireann play and
discuss her technique in our
exclusive video filmed at
the *Guitarist* studios
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra



*“During lockdown I learned
to play Blind Blake’s ‘Police
Dog Blues’ and put it on
YouTube just for fun. It got
a lot more attention than
we’d expected”*



1. An appearance on Jools Holland's *Hootenanny* show brought Muireann instant acclaim from blues fans nationwide

2. Vermont-based Iris Guitars was set up by luthier Adam Buchwald, whose mission is to "put high-end handmade guitars into the hands of working musicians"

What attracted you to the country blues style?

"Well, I have two siblings as well and they would have grown up hearing the same kind of music, but they never took it. I suppose I just connected with it; I really loved listening to it. I don't really have a reason, I just really love it."

Did you learn these tunes exclusively from your dad or did you start doing your own research into the style?

"At first, my dad taught me the songs himself, and through his teaching I became independent and able to learn [songs] from the records myself. I would slow them down to hear exactly the notes that they were playing. So I just learned them from the records, pretty much. I don't read tabs or anything, I don't read music; I learned by ear."

Who are your favourite players from that era?

"Blind Blake is one of my favourites. I really love Reverend Gary Davis as well. He played in the 30s as well, but he became famous in the 1960s. And I really love Mississippi John Hurt – and Memphis Minnie, I love her as well, she's very good. A few of my favourites are by Lemon Jefferson, too."

What songs do you play in your live set?

"I do about a 90-minute set – maybe 75 minutes to 90 minutes, it depends. I play all the songs that are on my album [*I Kept These Old Blues*, Decca], but I've learned a couple of new ones as well. I originally learned Blind Blake's *That'll Never Happen No More* and I also play a Blind Lemon Jefferson song, *Black Horse Blues*. And I play a couple of instrumentals, such as a John Fahey song called *Sligo River Blues*."



1

Right-hand fingerstyle technique is notoriously hard to master. When you're playing, you rest a couple of right-hand fingers on the body of the guitar. Is this something you've been doing from the start?

"Yeah, my pinky and my ring finger. That's just how my dad taught me. He taught me to rest my finger just there when I started learning. I started learning open tunings first because it was a bit easier for me – I was small and it was easier on my hands as there's no big chords. We don't really play big chords in open tunings

"At first, my dad taught me songs, and then I became independent and able to learn [songs] from the records myself"

very often. But when I started learning, I [practised alternate bass with my thumb] for about a week till my thumb was kind of independent, until I was able to do that without thinking. After that, I think maybe I started adding in some melody notes. And so, over a long period of time, it all started to come together."

You've brought a few guitars along with you today. Tell us about your Waterloo WL-S Deluxe T-Bar.

"It actually belongs to my dad. He got it before I even started playing, but [it's] definitely one of my favourites – it's got a really small body and I'm quite small, so it's easier for me to play. It's a 12-fret so it's got a short scale and it was easier for me to learn on this as well. It's got a really nice neck on it – a kind of a V – and it sounds amazing as well."

You use another Waterloo acoustic, too. What do you use this one for?

"This is another Waterloo [a WL-14 X]. It's one of my favourite guitars as well. I have this one in open A tuning so I don't have to [retune on stage]. It's got a pretty similar V neck [to the WL-S]. It's got a wee bit bigger body and all, but it's pretty similar."

And the third guitar you have with you on this tour...

"This is an Iris [a custom-built MS-00]. It's a really good guitar. It's got a pretty strong V neck and, again, a small enough body..."



2



3

3. Muireann's Waterloo WL-S Deluxe T-Bar guitar is essentially a replica of a late-1920s Oscar Schmidt Stella

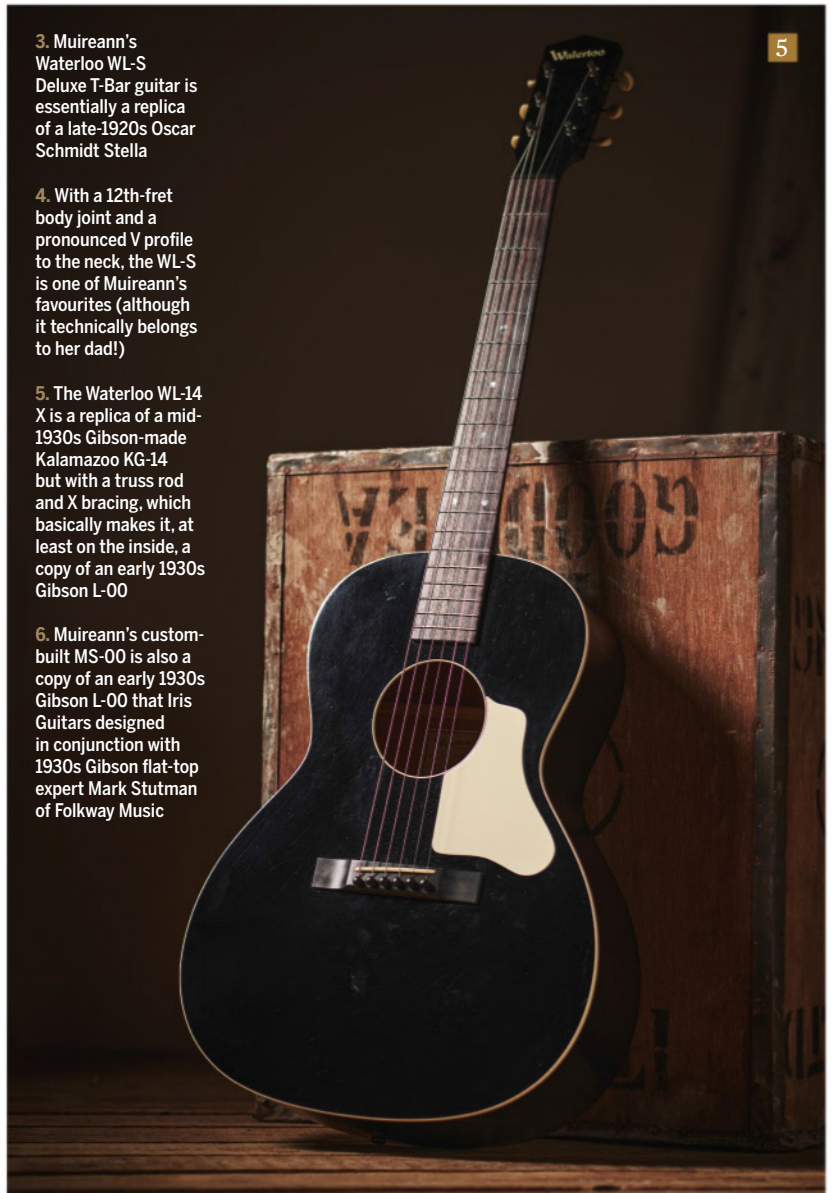
4. With a 12th-fret body joint and a pronounced V profile to the neck, the WL-S is one of Muireann's favourites (although it technically belongs to her dad!)

5. The Waterloo WL-14 X is a replica of a mid-1930s Gibson-made Kalamazoo KG-14 but with a truss rod and X bracing, which basically makes it, at least on the inside, a copy of an early 1930s Gibson L-00

6. Muireann's custom-built MS-00 is also a copy of an early 1930s Gibson L-00 that Iris Guitars designed in conjunction with 1930s Gibson flat-top expert Mark Stutman of Folkway Music



4



5



6



Muireann says her McNally Custom S guitar is too precious to take out on the road

PHOTO BY GILES MULLIGAN

MUIREANN'S McNALLY CUSTOM S MODEL

Ciaran McNally on discovering Muireann's playing and customising a guitar to her needs

"I was stunned by Muireann's performance on Jools Holland," Ciaran tells us. "I think I might have contacted her management right after she stopped playing! As she is only about two hours away, I invited her to the workshop to try out some guitars. Her playing was even more impressive in person.

"The S model was her favourite, and we discussed it from there as to how we could make it custom for her. We modelled most of the specs on the Nick Lucas L-00s of old. Muireann chose Celtic inlay designs that roughly match the inlay shapes on those guitars, but opted for a Celtic 'M' on the 7th fret.

"The guitar has a Sitka spruce soundboard with figured maple back and sides, a figured maple neck with a pinstriped ebony headstock and fingerboard with a 45mm nut. It has Celtic pearl inlays and gold Gotoh machineheads with ebony buttons and a tiger-stripe pickguard."

We hear that you have another guitar at home that's really rather special?

"Yeah, I have a guitar that's made by Ciaran McNally [see left and below]. I don't like taking it away with me because it's kind of precious. It's a custom-made guitar and I got to design the inlays in the neck. It's a very pretty guitar. I suppose it's definitely one of my favourites. It sounds amazing as well."

Do you play in many open tunings?

"Well, mainly I just play in standard tuning, but I do play a couple of songs in open tunings. I play *Vestapol* and I play *Police Dog Blues*, they're both in open E tuning. Well, they're actually in open D, but I [capo] the guitar up to open E, so it's easier for me to sing. And I play *Frankie* and *When The Levee Breaks* in open A tuning. And then [I do] the same thing for that: it's usually played in open G, but I tune it up to open A so it's easier for me to sing because I don't have a very deep voice. I do a couple of songs in drop D. I started learning in open tunings, but when I went to standard tuning that was actually harder for me. I'm probably more used to standard tuning now, but I don't really have much trouble playing in an open-tuning style."

"Learning open tunings first was a bit easier for me – I was small and it was easier on my hands as there's no big chords"

How did your appearance on Jools Holland's Hootenanny come about?

"My album was actually being released just before the *Hootenanny* and my dad had the idea to ask the record label to get in contact with people and let them know that it's gonna be out there. He got in contact with the producer of the *Hootenanny* and the *Later...* show as well. Not to get on the show, just to kind of let them know my album's gonna be out there. And when he did that, it turned out [the producer] had already bought my album and everything came together after that. They had an idea to do a thing like Seasick Steve did a few years ago – a little acoustic recording after the big band, after midnight. An acoustic act, bring the lights down, something like that. I'd never been on television before, of course. It was a really big jump. Before that I'd only played three or four gigs – small gigs – and, like, just in my home town, pretty much, in Ireland. So I wasn't used to that at all. I was very nervous to go on and be in a big studio. It was crazy!"

After all the success you've seen since then, what's next for you?

"Well, at the minute I'm on tour, getting myself out there. I am trying to get new songs in my repertoire. I'm preparing to record a new album as well. But I'm not too pushed to record one very soon. But there will be another one, maybe later this year." 📺



Muireann's album, *I Kept These Old Blues*, is out now via Decca Records

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M A D E I N J A P A N

We dig into the Japanese guitar industry of the 1960s and 70s and find notable brands, mischievous copies, diligent makers and original designs that led to the electric guitar's renaissance in the 1980s and beyond

Words Tony Bacon Photography Phil Barker

It's the late 70s, and Paul Stanley of KISS tells an interviewer about the band's great successes – he guesses they've sold something like 20 million records, and they're just back from a Japanese tour. It was there, he says, that he found out more about the abilities of Japanese guitar makers. He discovered they have the skills, as he puts it, “to make anything”. That's a lot more than can be said for America at the moment, he adds. “Japan,” Stanley concludes, “really is the country of the future.”

Japan's guitar industry was certainly healthy when he made those comments, and it surely had no reason to doubt that the future would be just as rosy. It had overcome a shaky start,

when critics said it simply copied well-known designs, and it had weathered some crippling ups and downs. Now, though, Japanese companies were showing themselves in many cases to be the equal of American makers – and in some cases perhaps to have overtaken them. Let's take a look at how that came about and who made it happen.

EARLY ORIGINALS

The origins of perhaps the most famous Japanese guitar brand, Ibanez, lie with its parent company, Hoshino. Matsujirou Hoshino started the family business around 1900 in Nagoya, about 175 miles west of Tokyo, when he opened a store to sell books and stationery. He soon added a section for musical

instruments run by his son, Yoshitarou, who set up Hoshino Gakki Ten – the Hoshino Musical Instrument Store company.

Following a tour by the great Spanish classical guitarist Andrés Segovia in 1929, which inspired many Japanese people to take up the instrument, Hoshino began importing Salvador Ibáñez guitars from Spain. The Spanish factory closed by the late 30s, so Hoshino adopted the name for itself and made acoustic guitars in Japan, at first branded as Ibanez Salvador and soon simply as Ibanez. The company began to offer electric guitars around 1957, and from then until the mid-60s Hoshino made some instruments itself in its new Tama Seisaku Shone factory, set up in 1959, but also

This 1988 Fender Japan Jazzmaster in Candy Apple Red, currently at Gas Station Guitars, is very early for an official Japanese Fender offset but was the fruit of a long process of evolution in Japanese lutherie



bought in guitars from other Japanese firms.

Some of the early Japanese guitars from this time had features loosely borrowed from American Fender and Gibson, say, or British Burns models. Not exactly copies – they didn't duplicate every detail of an existing model – but more like Japanese interpretations of Western designs with touches of Eastern taste.

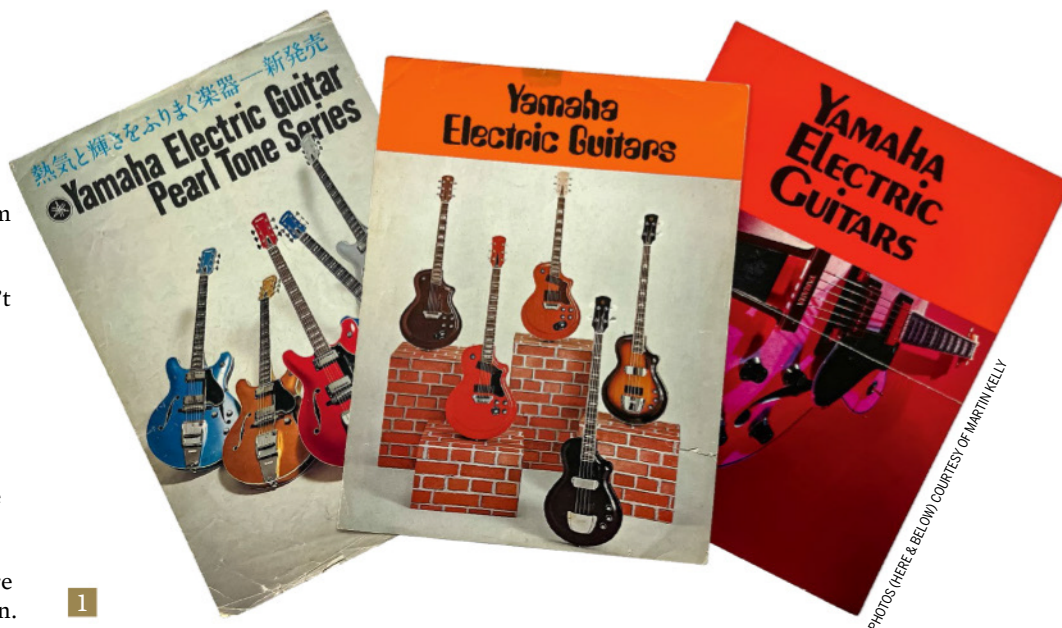
In Japan in the 60s, many budding young guitarists were just as keen to form groups and find stardom as anyone in America, Britain – or anywhere else that the pop bug had bitten. In Japan, the scene was known as Eleki and then Group Sounds, and bands such as The Spacemen, The Blue Comets, and The Jacks enjoyed success.

Japanese companies, including the big names like Teisco and Hoshino/Ibanez, not only sold electrics to that growing home market but also began to actively export instruments, notably to wholesalers in Europe, the United States, Australia and elsewhere. And a complication arises here for anyone trying to grasp the ins and outs of Japanese guitar history.

It ought to be simple: companies manufactured guitars and either

Japanese companies like Teisco and Hoshino/Ibanez sold electrics to the growing home market and also actively exported instruments

sold them at home or exported them. However, many of the foreign customers who bought instruments from Japan had their own brand names put on the guitars. This is often called OEM – original equipment manufacturer – which means a company that makes a product to be sold by another company under its own name. It meant nearly identical instruments being sold in various locations bearing different brands and, conversely, guitars with one brand originating from a variety of sources. Add to this an array of often interrelated factories and sales agents and distributors, and the picture can be a baffling one.



1

1. Yamaha was a 60s success story and pace-setter for original guitar designs made in Japan. Other brands either took a more quirky approach to designing new guitars or, more frequently, cloned the work of big US brands – setting the scene for landmark legal battles

For example, the American and British firms that bought from Hoshino in the early days used brands such as Antoria and Star in the UK and Maxitone and Montclair in the USA, among several others, although some guitars did have Ibanez on them. Some Ibanez catalogues from the period feature guitars with blank headstocks, accentuating the 'your-name-here' policy.

There was similar OEM activity at Teisco – a firm born in Tokyo in the 40s, adding guitars in 1952 and electrics a couple of years later. Its exports to Europe and America had brand names such as Audition, Top Twenty, Gemtone, Jedson, Mellowtone, Kent, Kingston, and Norma. Teisco also sold a line of models at home with its own Teisco brand and, from around 1965 in the USA, Teisco Del Rey.

Teisco had success through its American distributors – at first Westheimer, who later bought from Kawai, and then WMI, who came onboard around the time the Teisco Del Rey brand name appeared. The Sears, Roebuck mail-order catalogue company was another US customer for Teisco, who provided some of the guitars Sears sold with its own Silvertone brand.

And here's another wrinkle: as with many of the firms for whom Teisco made guitars, the Silvertone models exported to America by Teisco were sometimes almost identical to a Teisco-brand instrument sold at home. An example of this is the

mid-60s four-pickup Silvertone 1437, which in the homeland was the Teisco ET-440.

In 1965, Teisco sponsored a movie, *Eleki No Wakadaisho* ('The Young Electric Guitar Wizard'). It starred guitarist Yūzō Kayama as a member of the fictional Young Beats group, who entered a battle-of-the-bands competition – and, naturally, they all played Teisco guitars through Teisco amps. Despite such cultural landmarks, as well as the opening of a new factory in Okegawa and the export of instruments to Britain, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the US and elsewhere, Teisco battled with financial problems. It declared bankruptcy early in '67 and was bought by Kawai, which continued to use the Teisco brand for a few more years.

GUYATONE, KAWAI, YAMAHA, ARIA

Rivalling Teisco and Hoshino/Ibanez as the big name in 60s Japanese guitars was Guyatone. It was founded by Mitsuo Matsuki in Tokyo in the 1930s, introduced its first solidbody electric in the mid-50s, and its LG models in particular proved popular in Britain and elsewhere toward the end of that decade. These early LGs were sold in America by Buegeleisen & Jacobson (as Winston), and in Britain by Arbiter (as Guyatone) and JT Coppock (as Antoria).

Guyatone's range and quality expanded during the 60s, with models such as the LG-160T,



Guyatone instruments enjoyed some success in the hands of blues and rock guitarists such as Rory Gallagher, but the company was founded in the 1930s



There was boom and bust in the Japanese guitar business in the period from 1966 to '68... resulting in a reset of the industry

Space oddity: this Teisco SS-3L, up for sale with guitar auctioneer Gardiner Houlgate at time of writing, typifies the experimentation going on at Japanese guitar firms in the 60s – unsure of what would work, they tried everything from novel switching to all-new body styles and pickup designs

complete with a handy body-hole, as well as a couple of SG and MG hollowbodies, and the LG-200T, which had four pickups and multiple push-button selectors.

Probably the best-known Guyatone today is the Sharp 5 signature model, introduced in 1967. The Sharp 5 band, part of the Group Sounds trend that spread across Japan at this time, was led by Munetaka Inoue and guitarist Nobuhiro Mine, and their break came in '67 when they signed to Columbia Records. Guyatone saw an opportunity for a liaison with the band, renaming its LG-350T guitar as the Sharp 5 model. Mine played the 350 Deluxe, with blue finish, three pickups and gold-plated metalwork.

Kawai dates back to the 1920s, when Koichi Kawai started a keyboard company in Hamamatsu. The firm began making guitars in the 50s, expanding its Kawai-brand lines during the next decade and exporting widely to OEM customers. Among the brand names used in the US were Domino, Kent, Kimberly and TeleStar. By the late 60s Kawai had become another big player in Japanese guitar making.

These companies still competed for attention in the home market, and a notable new contender in the mid-60s was Yamaha. It was,



2. Rory Gallagher's 1965 Teisco TRG-1, which, with its Gold Foil pickup and internal loudspeaker, typifies how Japanese makers of the era tried to win over players with unusual features, styling and sounds

American band's successful tour of the country in 1964.

The Arai company, founded in Nagoya by the classical guitarist Shiro Arai in 1956, made classics at first but added electric guitars in the early 60s, soon using the Aria and Aria Diamond brands. In the 70s and later the company would become better known for its Aria Pro II brand. Aria was the Japanese distributor of Fender guitars in the late 50s, so it's not surprising that some of its own models were Fender-like in appearance.

THE JAPANESE GUITAR GAME

Let's step aside for a moment and play 'Loser, Looker, Player'. We'll tell you ours, to get things going, and then you can have a go.

LOSER: Our choice is an Ibanez copy of a Gibson double-neck. Did you say 'so what'? Ibanez introduced the line in 1974, about six years after Gibson had dropped its SG-style originals, and offered a six-string plus 12-string (model 2402) and a six-string plus bass (2404). So far, so Gibson. But here's our choice of Loser: Ibanez Model 2406 boasted two six-string necks. Correct, two six-strings on one (rather heavy) body. Gibson had never made such a thing, of course, but Ibanez had other ideas. This guitar, it enthused, would be good to have to hand in "open-tuning slide guitar and standard tuning". We rest our (rather large) case.



Quaint designs, such as this Californian Rebel by Domino, aimed to capture the free spirit of American rock – but looked like nothing else. Today, they have cult appeal

Tokai in particular made players think anew about what 'Japanese guitar' could mean – and sent shockwaves through the industry

of course, an old name, founded in the 1880s as a keyboard manufacturer and diversifying as the decades went by into many other areas, not least motorcycles.

The first Yamaha budget electrics appeared in 1964, and then the better SG models two years later. Among these early SGs were the conventionally shaped and Fender-inspired SG-2 and 3, along with the reverse-body Mosrite-influenced SG-5 and 7, with an extended lower horn to the body and a long, slim headstock. The flipped-body style of Mosrite's Ventures model was a popular shape among Japanese makers following the

LOOKER: An impressive example of over-the-top Teisco Del Rey style was the solidbody Spectrum 5, introduced in 1966. It was a luscious creation, with a thin, curving, sculpted mahogany body, covered with what Teisco claimed as "seven coats of lacquer", parachute-shape fingerboard inlays, a spring-less vibrato, two jacks for mono or stereo output, and three pickups, split so as to assist with the Spectrum 5's stereo feed when required. The model name derived from what Teisco described as "five different basic colour tones [that] can be produced with this unusual guitar", indicating the colourful pickup and phase switches on the upper part of the model's pickguard. Spectacular!

PLAYER: How about a Tokai Les Paul Reborn? The firm began soon after World War II in Hamamatsu and launched Tokai electrics in 1967. 10 years later, the copies began. Yes, there were many copies about, but Tokai in particular and its Les Pauls-styles (and Strat-styles and more) made players think anew about what 'Japanese guitar' could mean – and sent shockwaves through parts of the instrument industry. The Les Pauls came with a few different names during the key period from 1978 to '85 or so, and they looked the part, too, some bearing 'wow-could-it-be-a-'59' flamey tops, and many found them to be great players at decent prices. One of Tokai's cheeky British ads turned the tables with a headline that read: "Beware of imitations." This did not go unnoticed.

COPYCAT CRAZY

There was boom and bust in the Japanese guitar business in the period from 1966 to '68. One of the factors may have been the USA's doubling of customs duties on imported electrics, and domestically some makers were caught with excessive stocks when demand died, at home as well as abroad.

Whatever the causes, the bust toppled Teisco, Guyatone and others, resulting in a reset of the industry. Some of the stronger businesses survived, including



It was in the early 70s that a wider move to copies began in Japan. Interpretations of the real American things, there was no doubt about the inspiration

There's no getting away from the fact that many major Japanese brands gained ground by cloning US designs, even fairly niche ones such as this 1972 Ibanez 2380 – a copy of the Gibson Les Paul Recording model of the era

Aria, Fujigen and Yamaha. But the upheaval at this time provides yet another complication for anyone expecting a straightforward situation where guitar A was made by B, has the brand C, and was sold by D. The rest of the alphabet will come in handy if you want to dig deeper.

To generalise, then, it was in the early 70s that a wider move to copies began in Japan. These could still be described as interpretations of the real American things, but now there was no doubt about the models that provided the inspiration. Hoshino had been sourcing guitars from Teisco and Fujigen Gakki since it shifted its Tama factory to drums only in 1965, and by 1970 Fujigen was its main supplier, coinciding with this emphasis on copies. Hoshino continued as a trading company, one that buys and sells products without manufacturing anything itself.

Fuji Gen Gakki Seizou Kabushikigaisha – the Fuji Stringed-Instrument Manufacturing Corporation – was started by Yuuichirou Yokouchi and Yutaka Mimura and produced its first guitar, a basic nylon-string acoustic, during 1960, adding electrics three years later. It had a new factory operational by 1965, based in Matsumoto, home to several furniture makers and guitar builders. As well as its OEM work,

Fujigen had its Greco brand, in partnership with distributor Kanda Shokai.

Fujigen's Greco and Hoshino/Ibanez copies were among the most popular of the period, and some of the initiative to make and develop them came from American and British outlets. The first British distributor to buy Ibanez-brand guitars from Hoshino was Maurice Summerfield, who started doing business with them in 1964. From the early 70s, he added the CSL brand for electrics alongside Ibanez, and then the Sumbro brand as a cheaper line below Ibanez and CSL.

In America, one of the outlets Hoshino worked with was Harry Rosenbloom's Medley Music store in Philadelphia, and his Elger Company became Hoshino's eastern US distributor for Tama and Elger guitars, Elger banjos and Star drums. In 1972, Hoshino and Elger set up a joint venture to become the American distributor of Ibanez guitars as well as Hoshino's other brands and instruments, and a few years later Hoshino took sole ownership of the operation that had become its valuable American HQ.

Staff at the new offices, both Japanese and American, noticed that at first the quality wasn't great on some of the guitars shipped over to them, and they fed regular suggestions and ideas back to Japan, many of



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTIN KELLY

3

3. Teisco Del Rey's marketing brochures promised popularity through music made on its striking guitars

4. This Teisco Del Rey Spectrum 5, which belongs to Andy Fairweather Low (see interview, page 74), has stood the test of time as one of the more usable, even low-key iconic, original designs from 60s Japan

which were used to broaden and improve the lines.

Maurice Summerfield in Britain recommended that Hoshino add to the line a copy of a Gibson Flying V, recently given a low-key revival by Gibson. As with the original Les Pauls, players at the time were rediscovering the excellence of old Vs. Ibanez launched a Flying V copy in 1973 based on a late-60s original that Summerfield sent to them,

Some of the initiative for Fujigen to make and develop copies during the 60s came from American and British outlets



4

and soon a Gibson double-neck copy appeared, again thanks to Summerfield's encouragement.

By 1976, Les Paul copies were the most numerous of the Ibanez catalogue, with more than 20 varieties on offer. In the USA, they were pitched from the cheapest, the best-selling bolt-neck \$260 Les Custom 2350, through the \$299.50 Les Deluxe 59'er 2340 in sunburst and the \$340 Sunlight Special 2342IV, and up to the most expensive – a set-neck version of the 2350, the \$495 2650CS Solid Body DX. That same year, Gibson's regular line of five Les Paul solidbody models ranged from the \$599 Les Paul Deluxe to the \$739 Les Paul Custom, so it's not difficult to understand one of the prime attractions of the



You won't get far in the world of Japanese electric guitar history without coming across the word 'lawsuit'

Typical of the so-called 'Lawsuit Era' electrics made in Japan is this 1975 Ibanez copy of a Gibson ES-335, which at time of writing is up for auction at guitar sales specialist Gardiner Houlgate as part of a collection of Japanese guitars

copies, beyond any considerations of accuracy or quality.

There were many other Japanese companies making copies, of varying quality and exported with any number of brands, including Penco, Mann, Jason, Kasuga, Heerby, Burny, Tokai, Fernandes, Honey, Conrad, Ventura, Fresher, Electra and HS Anderson. Fujigen and Kanda Shokai's house brand, Greco, was in the upper bracket of quality, and by 1981 Greco's Stratocaster copy line ranged from the SE-380, which retailed at 38,000 yen, up to the SE-1200, at 120,000 yen. A straightforward conversion into US dollars of the time provides an equivalent range of about \$260 to \$530. That same year, Fender's cheapest Stratocaster retailed for \$720.

LAWSUIT? WHAT LAWSUIT?

You won't get far in the world of Japanese electric guitar history without coming across the word 'lawsuit'. In the 70s, Ibanez in particular and Japanese brands in general were irritating the hell out of Gibson, Fender and the other US companies targeted by the copyists.

It wasn't until 1977 that Gibson made a legal complaint to Ibanez

(through its US arm, Elger). Gibson and Ibanez/Elger settled out of court, with Elger agreeing to stop infringing Gibson's trademarked headstock design and to stop using Gibson-like model names in sales material. In February 1978, Gibson's complaint was closed.

In fact, Ibanez was already using a new headstock design, and had been offering some original-design guitars for a number of years. That term 'lawsuit' stems from this brief legal spat and is often used these days to describe any Japanese copy guitar of the period, whether or not the brand suffered legal action. Oddly, it's gained a cachet, presumably because 'lawsuit-era guitar' sounds more dramatic than '70s Japanese guitar'.

One of the reasons Fender chose Fujigen to manufacture its first Squier guitars in the early 80s was because Fender's strategy to beat the Japanese copies was simply to make better copies itself, with the added prestige of its own brand. And Fujigen's existing Greco guitars proved that Fujigen was already good at what Fender required. Gibson later reset its Epiphone brand in similar ways – and Epiphones had



PHOTO BY JESSE WILD

5. Ibanez made a stunningly successful pivot from copyist to a genuine innovator with a new generation of original models made for high-performance players that redefined guitar design, such as this original 1987 JEM in sought-after Desert Sun Yellow finish, shot at World Guitars

first been made in Japan way back in 1969. These developments, and guitars such as Yamaha's SG2000 in the 70s and the Ibanez Steve Vai-related JEMs of the 80s, would underline a new confidence among Japanese makers.

One of the original designs that Ibanez (and Greco) introduced well before the Gibson legal complaint was The Flash, introduced in 1975 and soon renamed the Iceman (Ibanez) and M series (Greco). There



6. A new generation of 80s synth-pop acts inspired new designs from Japanese makers such as this Fernandes Art Wave electric, currently residing at Gas Station Guitars in Somerset

Ibanez was already using a new headstock design, and had been offering some original-design guitars for a number of years

were influences at work, for sure, the body looking as if someone had given a Firebird a curved, pointed base and added a Ricky-like hooked lower horn. But it added up to an attention-grabbing original. And in 1978, a signature version for Paul Stanley appeared. Ibanez also made him a custom PS10 with a cracked-mirror front, providing sparkling reflections at KISS's already dazzling shows. No wonder Stanley thought that in the guitar-making world, Japan was the country of the future. **G**

With thanks to Gardiner Houlgate (www.gardinerhoulgate.co.uk) and Gas Station Guitars (www.gasstationguitars.com) for allowing us to photograph these guitars



Fender's strategy to beat the Japanese copies was simply to make better copies itself, with the added prestige of its own brand

Bold colours, locking trem and humbuckers signalled the priorities of the shred era. Fender turned to Japan, with its extra freedom to depart from canon, to make this 1985 ST-555 Boxer Series Telecaster finished in Torino Red and made by Fujigen

CLONE WARS

The 60s might have given birth to the Japanese guitar industry, but things got really interesting in the 80s when ever-more accurate and high-quality copies of classic US electrics emerged and even received official sanction from some US guitar brands.

Keith Anderson of Japanese specialist Gas Station Guitars picks up the story

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

The 1960s and 70s were formative years for the Japanese guitar industry, but they really hit their stride in the 80s with official Fender reissues, accurate clones of Les Pauls and the like. What models stand out, for you, from this period, we ask Keith?

“The late 70s through to the early 80s is when Japanese brands like Tokai and Greco really got their act together with the Les Paul clones. Tokai, from around '78 to about '85, were doing the LS Series, which was originally called the Reborn series – a range of Les Paul copies – though after a while they changed the name to Love Rock. But the original LS series, from the LS-50 all the way to the LS-120, are amazing guitars. The LS-50 that was built from the late 70s to the early 80s was the entry-level model, basically a three-piece-top Les Paul clone.

I get them every now and then. They put to death any theories that Les Pauls shouldn't have a three-piece top because they're amazing guitars. And that was only their entry-level model, you know? They still stand up today.

“Then Tokai went to the LS-60, which was a step above and had a two-piece top. Again, a really good guitar. And then there was the LS-80 and they went to a two-piece top with a nitro finish for that. After that they had the really high-end stuff: an LS-120 that was nitro finished and made around 1983/'84. For some reason, the Japanese would put veneer tops on the higher-end models, like the [Greco] EGF-1200, just

7. Greco and Tokai both specialised in clones of well-known Fender and Gibson electrics. The main problem this posed for the US firms was that their offerings were well built and very competitively priced. Eventually, both Fender and Gibson (via its Orville By Gibson sub-brand) realised that to beat them, they'd need to join them and launch officially sanctioned Japanese production models themselves

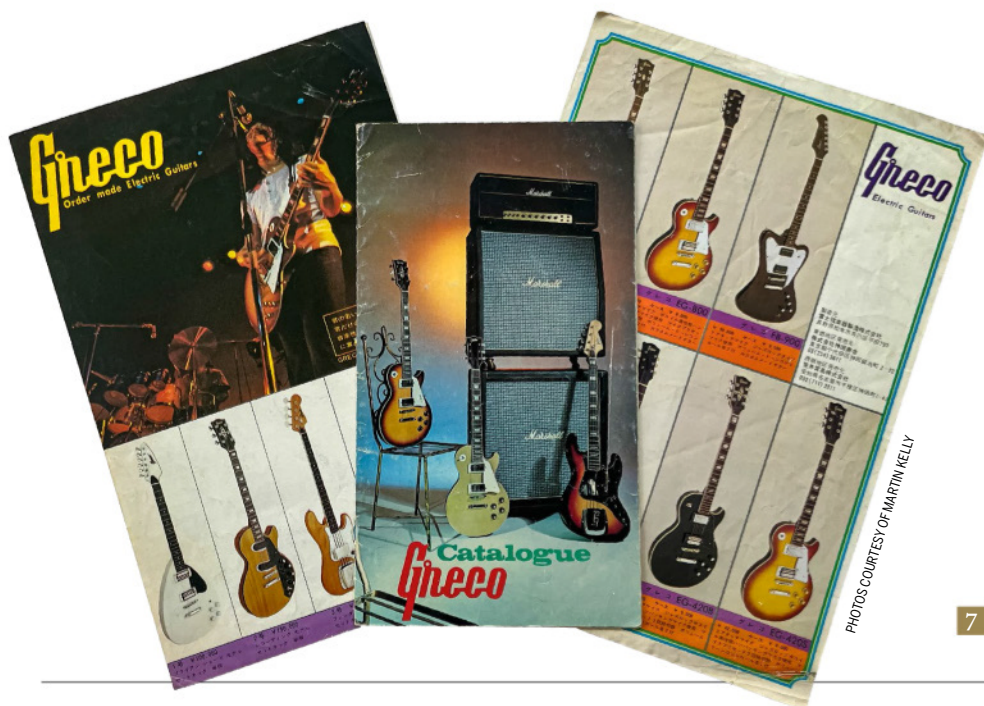
“Tokai's LS series are probably the best-built Les Paul-style guitars that have ever come through my shop” KEITH ANDERSON

so they could get a really good-looking maple flame. So they kind of deviated a bit from the standard build by putting this veneer over the top – which was kind of weird because those were their highest-quality models, although, to me, they still sound great. However, there are some solid-top EGF-1200 Grecos and they're really, really collectible. But most of them you'll find will have the veneer top on because they could choose a better flame for that.

“Another thing that probably sets the Greco apart a little bit from the Tokai is the pickups they were using. So the EGF-1200 came as stock with Dry Z pickups from Maxon, which are fantastic pickups. I think a lot of people look out now for EGF-1200s purely for the pickups, which command a really high price on their own.”

Of the better quality clones did one brand – Tokai or Greco, for example – stand out as better than the others for quality?

“No, I don't think so, although personally I prefer the Tokais. In that period between '78 to about '85, the LS series were absolutely amazing guitars. Regardless of the electronics, they're probably the best-built Les Paul-style guitars that have ever come through my shop. If they ever come up for sale [in Japan], I buy them and I've got quite a few in my own collection. For build quality, they were the best there was at the time. It should be said that the pickups on the entry-level models, like the LS-50, weren't great. But if you swap them out for something better you've got a fantastic Les Paul-style guitar that you never want to let go.”





"Something that probably sets the Greco apart a little bit from the Tokai is the pickups they were using" **KEITH ANDERSON**

This top-spec Greco EGF-1200 was "almost considered royalty when it comes to vintage Japanese Les Paul clones", says Keith Anderson of Gas Station Guitars

How about on the Fender side of things – how did the copyists come to make official Fender Japan guitars?

“Japan was doing a lot of Fender copies throughout the 70s, to varying degrees of quality – they were a bit hit and miss. But it was Tokai that Fender noticed. Basically, Fender said, ‘Hang on a minute: these are really good.’ I believe Fender were originally thinking they had to have a presence in Japan because the clones were getting so good. And I think it was their intention to use Tokai to start making Fender guitars. But in the end, it went to Fujigen, who basically started building the first Fenders for them.

“At the time, in the late 70s, I think the costs of building guitars in Japan was significantly less than it was in the US. So it was the two reasons, really: to get the cost down, and also to actually have a presence in Asia where – kind of like China is today – they were just cloning everything with varying degrees of success. But Fender identified Tokai as the best.

“At that point, they were building the ‘Springy Sound’ Strat clone and Fender must have felt, ‘They are as good, if not better, than we are at doing this. So let’s go to Japan to start building Fenders [under licence]’. I don’t know why, but in the end they did end up going to Fujigen [rather than Tokai] and they built Fenders up until that ended in 1997. Tokai took over production briefly – literally just for a few months – until Dyna Gakki could handle the full level of production that Fujigen had been producing.”

Were the vintage-style Fender guitars they made pretty faithful to the originals?

“I don’t think Japan ever really set out to make exact replicas of classic American models. But they would give them a name that would hint at that – so the model name ST 62 would be basically saying that this is a version of a 1962 Strat, and there’d also be an ST 65 and an ST 72, for example. But Fender Japan never really had a custom



shop together in the same sense that the US did. So I don’t think it was ever really about creating the exact replicas of the classic guitars, just having a version that evoked a certain era and that they believed would be more appealing to Japanese people.

“For example, the range of finishes was miles better than the US and I think it still is, to be honest – which really appeals to the culture. They also used a lot of different tone woods for the Japanese guitars. So the earlier models would start off with basswood and then go to alder and ash for the Telecasters. A lot of the Japanese guitar necks vary a lot from the American necks – and I find they tend to be on the slimmer side, especially on the offsets.”

Did Fender Japan make the full range of classic models right from the start?

“No, in the early days it was mainly Strats and Telecasters. The offsets didn’t really get into production till the early 90s, I would say. They didn’t start churning out Jaguars, Jazzmasters or Mustangs until then, and grunge and Nirvana had something to do with that. But they were building the odd Jazzmaster and Jaguar in the

80s. We’ve had a few through and they’re a little bit different from the ones they put into mass production in the 90s. For example, they were made from sen ash, whereas later all the main production offsets – Jaguars and Jazzmasters – were alder-bodied. But the earlier ones had sen ash bodies, and they had things like Fender-stamp neckplates, which they removed from the main production models of the offsets.

“Outside of that, it was mainly Strats and Teles in the 80s. There were lots of PL 52s as they call them, which was basically their version of a 52 Telecaster. They also did a few 52s with a humbucker, a kind of unofficial version of Keith Richards’ Micawber. At the time, Fujigen had a stock of what they called white ash – and the guitars they made out of it were good, but they’re absolute boat anchors. So

“The range of finishes was miles better than the US and I think it still is – which really appeals to the culture” KEITH ANDERSON

8. Fender Japan initially concentrated on Strats and Teles, but, partly driven by the popularity of grunge, offsets followed in the 90s, such as this 1966 Reissue Jaguar with matching headstock, kindly loaned by Gas Station Guitars



A Tokai headstock on the cover of an 80s publication shows the extent to which Fender’s original was aped. Note the round string tree

these old Micawber Telecasters will give you back injuries if you play them over the long term! They’re like 4.5 or 4.6kg – way heavier than a Les Paul. They got a bit lighter in the 90s, though.

“They also made a few cool things that they didn’t really do subsequently. In the 80s, they made a really nice Esquire Custom, an amazing guitar. They’re really, really good quality. Although my favourite period of all, for outright quality, is the CIJ Q-serial period between 2002 and 2004, built at Dyna Gakki.

“In conclusion, Fender Japan had a mixed reputation back in the 80s and 90s. I got into them because they were cheap and I was quite heavy-handed on stage and did wreck a few. However, since main production has now mostly moved to Mexico, people are beginning to understand that Fender Japan guitars were on the whole beautifully crafted guitars with excellent quality control. Which has led to them being more sought after today.” **G**
www.gasstationguitars.com



"Fujigen had a stock of what they called white ash – the guitars were good, but they're absolute boat anchors" KEITH ANDERSON

This ash-bodied Fender Japan 'Micawber' style Telecaster was not an official Keith Richards signature model, but its inspiration is clear!

MISSION CRITICAL

Manic Street Preachers' new album, *Critical Thinking*, is by turns vitriolic and graceful, its sense of drama and unflinching portraits of modern life powered in no small part by the superb playing of guitarist James Dean Bradfield. We join him in the band's studio to hear how they crafted their sweeping sound the old-fashioned way in an era of throwaway content

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

It's a characteristic of the best bands that they are loved by millions but also completely unique. It's a trick that Manic Street Preachers have pulled off for years, from the angular, agit-rock of *The Holy Bible* to the beauty and tragedy of their breakthrough 1996 album, *Everything Must Go*, recorded in the wake of lyricist and rhythm guitarist Richey Edwards' disappearance, their sound is instantly recognisable and wholly their own.

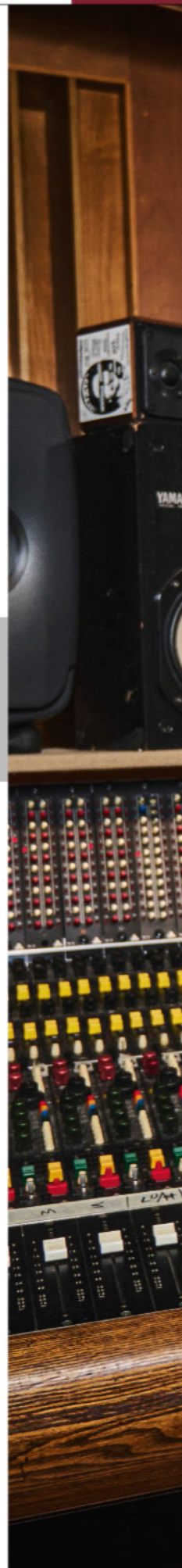
Today, with the release of their 15th album, *Critical Thinking*, that vital spark of originality and vivid honesty is undimmed – even if the band do the shopping on the way home from sessions these days, following the establishment of a permanent studio near their homes in South Wales. We join guitarist James Dean Bradfield at the studio, to hear how *Critical Thinking* was made on classic foundations: with James, bassist Nicky Wire and drummer Sean Moore feeling their way through material, jamming and experimenting – allowing the best ideas to rise to the surface. We also have a close look at an eclectic and stunning-sounding selection of James's guitars that call the studio home.

The new record took shape right here, didn't it?

"Yeah. The way we work now is just different. Like, back in the day, up until, I'd say, *Send Away The Tigers*, you'd do some rough demos. I'd do acoustic demos, Nick would do a little acoustic demo. We would just actually go around each other's houses, play to each other. But usually, we'd just give each other acoustic cassettes and then we'd hire a rehearsal room [to complete the songs before recording them] and we did it that way until *Send Away The Tigers*. Then we got our own studio.

"Starting an album would be a gradual process after that – previously, you'd book a studio and you'd do an album in four or five weeks. But ever since *Send Away The Tigers*, every album has started with a gradual process of doing the demos in our own studio. Sometimes the demos have become the masters and sometimes you've got all the demos, but you do the mastering in the same place that you did the demos.

"All the lines are blurred, in terms of where the demos end and where just recording the album begins. It's been like that since about 2007. So I'd say one of the oldest songs on this new album is two and a half years



**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

James Dean Bradfield
takes us inside the Manics'
1996 alt-rock masterpiece,
Everything Must Go
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra



old. We did do two weeks in Rockfield Studios for some finishing sessions, but most of the recording on the album is myself, Nick and Sean coming in [to our studio] at 10am, and then clocking off at 5pm to go home and have tea with the family. Sometimes I'd come back at night, when you're really going at it."

Having your own studio has clearly given you the freedom to work at your own pace, but it's interesting that you still used Rockfield to give a little extra kick to the final stages of the recording process. Do you think that working in a particular space imparts a unique energy to what gets recorded there?

"Well, *The Holy Bible* was recorded in a gritty little studio in Cardiff [Soundspace Studios]. That did rub off on it a bit, definitely. Because you'd go out late at night, two o'clock in the morning, and a pimp would be collecting money in the courtyard where the studio was, where you'd walk out the door at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and somebody would be sniffing glue. It did rub off on the gnarliness of *The Holy Bible*. But that may have been there already – I might be romanticising it. I think it was more important how we recorded it in a very sparing way. So, location, I'm not sure if it ever affects it."

1. Eastman's Juliet electric, with its Firebird-like raised centre section to the body, has become a go-to guitar for James

2. James's Juliet looks stunning in its black Antique Varnish finish and vintage-looking tortoiseshell plastics



Do you tend to write with a specific album concept in mind? Or do you just keep writing songs with an open mind until the shape of an album emerges?

"It's strange. I think with *The Ultra Vivid Lament*, everyone was coming out of the pandemic and, God, it was quite strange. It felt like a very confusing political time – look where we are now. It just gets worse and worse. But Nick was trying to create a window where [listeners] could almost intrusively look into the way we were thinking and just actually hope that it would reflect the way other people felt, too, because we'd all been through this thing. There was an MO to it.

"A lot of times, [when starting a new recording project] Nick will give me and Sean a mission statement. And back in the day, Nick and Richey would have a mission statement about what they thought the album should be, whether it be *The Holy Bible* or whatever. You'd have a loose framework – dare I say a concept – to hang a record off. It's harder doing that, I think. Now, we tend to coalesce around stuff that we find we want to play more than three or four times in a row when we're doing early versions of it. I think that's enough of a reason for an album sometimes. So this album has been like that: if a song refused to go away, we carried on working on it. As simple as that.

"Even though I've got lots of guitars, I've never really dwelled upon them. But on this record I was having epiphanies all the time"

"*Decline And Fall* was an early song, *People Ruin Paintings* was an early song, *Dear Stephen* was an early song. This is really silly, but years ago there were certain albums that I had on cassette first because it was cheaper, but then when I went and bought them on CD or vinyl, they weren't as good [laughs]. I know that's such a nebulous thing to try to describe, but some of my favourite 'cassette albums' were *In My Tribe* by 10,000 Maniacs, *Fables Of The Reconstruction* by REM, and *London Calling* on cassette – never sounded as good on vinyl. I'm sorry, but they just didn't. *This Nation's Saving Grace* by The Fall is fucking amazing on tape, absolutely amazing. That little bit of compression on tape made it feel more personal somehow.

"So after we'd made demos of those three songs, I thought, 'This feels like a cassette album.' Then I'm thinking, 'Don't be such a dick' [laughs]. But that feeling has never gone away. It feels like a cassette album, it does. I like that. It's nice."

Tell us about the title track, *Critical Thinking* – it's a straight-for-the-jugular song about society losing its way in the era of social media.

"That's another one of Nick's songs. He brought all the music, and I just had to be the guitarist and come up with the parts. The demo of it was just bits of programming and Nick's vocal and a bass. But I thought, 'Oh, God. The words are brilliant.' It's like Nicky Wire's *Falling Down* moment – without the guns. I thought, 'The guitar has got to be like a small



lieutenant: it's got to be snapping at the heels of everything he says.' So I did a 'white funk' guitar kind of thing and I used the Guild. It was the only guitar that worked on it – I loved playing that. I loved just being the guitarist and just finding my own space, and having to find different things within four chords or even three chords [laughs]. I love doing that."

Your sound has a touch of chorus on it and it kind of reminded us of Geordie Walker from Killing Joke in places.

"Yeah, Geordie... God. I remember somebody telling me once that his guitar sound was two Burman amps out of phase to each other. I did use one of my Burmans on a couple of tracks. But they just burn – they just go up in flames! I took them out on the road and there'd be fucking flames coming out of back [laughs]! But three gain stages. You can't turn that down."

Did you use a particular chorus pedal for the album?

"I use the Electro-Harmonix Neo Clone and the Fender [Hammertone] Space Delay. That particular delay pedal has got modulation on it, too, and it's brilliant. Live, if I'm struggling – if it feels like the guitar is not flying – I just put that on and it's great. Who cares if there was no modulation on the studio version of the song; there is now [laughs]. I gave one to Richard [Oakes] from Suede when we toured with them. I had a spare one and I gave it to him... I said, 'Just try this pedal – but be careful. Once you buy it, you'll want to put it on everything.'"

3. James with acoustic maker Martin's EM-18 solidbody electric from the late 70s. The model represented a short-lived attempt to break into the electric guitar market and was only made between 1979 and 1982

4. The EM-18 design is typical of late-70s trends, with a rather lavish nine-piece maple and rosewood body, two open humbuckers and a set neck

5. The scroll-like headstock is perhaps a nod to Martin's 19th century Stauffer-inspired origins. The guitar was designed by Martin's Dick Boak

So there was a bit of that [on *Critical Thinking*] – it was just a bit of modulation from the Fender Space Delay. They're really good, those pedals. They're so simple because there's not too much on them.

"I do use a hint of [pure] chorus on stuff sometimes, especially when playing clean and when playing live. But often, I'll have the chorus set at the lowest possible setting, so it gives it a little bit of spread, just like Robert Smith used to use it. Rob Smith is a really underrated guitarist. There's footage of him on Belgium TV doing the live version of *A Forest* from the mid-80s and it's fucking amazing. So many guitarists – like Stuart Adamson, Robert Smith, John McGeoch – they all used quite sneaky, surreptitious bits of chorus and that kind of thing. Obviously, Bill Nelson as well. Loads of those guitarists I loved."

What were your go-to guitars and amps on the record?

"My 1990 Les Paul Custom – my 'Faithful' – runs through the record, and it averages every other track: it's the main guitar on *Decline And Fall* as well. Richey's old Telecaster Thinline always finds some places on each record. Since the start, those two guitars have been on every album, just about.

"But on this album, it's the Guild S60-D. Basically, I found that guitar halfway through the record, and then I started putting it on everything, even if it was just a little tiny bit. It was our soundman [Robb Allan]'s guitar and it used to live in Maida Vale. I've stayed friends with him, and he's Massive Attack's soundman now.

“He finished sound with us around about 2001. Anyway, when he first became our soundman, he saw us in Camden Underworld on the ‘Motown Junk’ tour. He’s a great Scottish guy and he was the in-house sound man there at the time – but he was really good to us and afterwards he just said, ‘I want to go on tour with you.’ So we became friends with him and we’d go to his flat, where he used to have this guitar, the Guild. I used to play it and I was like, ‘You’ve got to let me take this on tour one day.’ But he said, ‘Nah, no fucking way. I’ve seen the way you treat guitars, man [laughs].’ Then subsequently, he moved to Spain, just outside Barcelona. I played the guitar again over there and I said, ‘One day, Rob, you’re going to give this to me.’ But he was like, ‘No way.’

“Anyway, I hadn’t seen him for, like, seven years and I hadn’t played the guitar for 20 years. But I was back over there, so I said, ‘Where’s the Guild?’ and he was like, ‘I don’t know.’ I was like, ‘What the fuck? That’s my birthright, that guitar,’ and he said, ‘It might be in the garage downstairs.’ So we go and look in the garage and it was there. It hadn’t been looked at for 20 years and was sad and falling apart. It was like, ‘Help me!’

6. James’s Alpine White Les Paul Custom – now nicely mellowed to a yellowed-nitro hue – was bought from Macari’s in 1990 and features on all his major recordings

“So I told Rob: ‘This is an intervention. You’ve got to let me take this guitar to get it refurb’d and everything.’ I think he was slightly ashamed, so he said, ‘Yeah, okay, okay.’ [Laughs] So I took it away and got it refurb’d and when it was finished I said, ‘Can I use it to take on the road?’ And he said, ‘Yes. Game over. It’s yours for now.’ It’s fucking amazing. You can get any sound on it. Plus, it doesn’t quite sound like any other guitar, which is brilliant. I think Graham Coxon would love it.”

What other gear was crucial on this album?

“I used that through the Blackstar St James amp, which is fucking amazing. I was having moments of clarity on this record, just loving gear. Even though I’ve got lots of guitars, I’ve never really dwelled upon them too much. I just play them and use them. But on this record I was having epiphanies all the time. So that Eastman Juliet... I used that lots. It’s got a lovely spread to its sound, and the bridge pickup is really creamy and beautiful. I also used an acoustic that was made by Richard Meyrick. He’s a bespoke maker at Abergavenny, and that was all over the record. What else? The Troublemaker Telecaster, and an old Gordon Smith, before they flipped over to new ownership.”

Tell us about the track *Being Baptised*. It’s a really amazing piece of music.

“That was one I wrote in its entirety. It was about a day spent with Allen Toussaint [the Meters, Dr John et al] when we did [BBC Four’s] *Songwriters Circle*. I’ve had that moment many a time where I meet somebody and I can tell after five minutes they’re like, ‘Get me away from this nutter.’ [Laughs]

“I actually had that with Jim Kerr in Rockfield. I was a massive Jim Kerr fan when I was young and he was in one side of Rockfield and we were in the other part, and he came into the studio one morning and he was like, ‘Okay, chaps?’ I was like, ‘What the fuck is going on?’ So I said, ‘All right, Jim?’ and he was like, ‘Yeah, sorry, I was just stealing some milk.’ But I was like, ‘I’ve got to tell you. I’m a massive fan – *Race Is The Prize*, *Real To Real Cacophony*... what a fucking record...’ I saw this look in his eyes [laughs].

“I had the same with Allen Toussaint because I sat there with him and he was such a graceful, kind of regal presence. He had that suit on and he looked so cool, and he had his wife with him. I was sat there and I was trying to restrain myself for, like, three minutes. Then I was like, ‘Fuck. I’ve got to tell you. I’ve been listening to *Holy Cow* since I was seven years old. My mum loved that song. I absolutely love that song. Do you mind me asking? What did you think when you first heard Glen Campbell’s version of *Southern Nights*?’ But I saw that after 15 minutes, he was like, ‘Get this guy away from me.’ [Laughs] But I went and got a cup of coffee and came back, and he was lovely, he kept talking about stuff. It was one of those days where you actually spend some time with somebody, and you feel like you’ve learnt something at the end – about the way to act, be a bit calmer, say less.” 



Manic Street Preachers’ new album, *Critical Thinking*, is available now on Columbia Records

www.manicstreetpreachers.com





7. James used the rarely seen Guild S60-D (left) as one of his main electrics on the new album, after patiently persuading a friend to part with it over the course of several years and then restoring it to playing condition. It's seen alongside a matching Guild B-302 bass here

"I found [the Guild S60-D] halfway through the record, and then I started putting it on everything. It's my birthright, that guitar..."

INTERVIEW | Andy Fairweather Low

HIGH RIDER

Words Neville Marten Photography Phil Barker

As pop idol, hit-making solo artist, and with the most star-studded CV of any sideman, the affable Welshman offers up his latest release, *The Invisible Bluesman*

Andy Fairweather Low's career is a smorgasbord of musical successes. He hit the big-time in 1968 with Amen Corner. Top 10 hits such as *Bend Me, Shape Me, High In The Sky* and the chart-topper (*If Paradise Is*) *Half As Nice* propelled the Cardiff-based pop-soul outfit to heady heights. Following a stint as Fair Weather and scoring a Top 10 with *Natural Sinner*, Andy forged a solo path with his beautiful composition *Wide Eyed And Legless*.

However, for decades he was guitar-playing sideman to superstars including Eric Clapton and Roger Waters, toured with Chris Rea, Paul Carrack, Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris. He's even recorded with Joe Satriani and jammed with Jimi Hendrix. And that's the tip of a very large iceberg.

Andy's new album, *The Invisible Bluesman*, could give any of his famous employers a run for their money. Here's what *Guitarist's* own David Mead said: "Andy returns 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, he covers a wealth of traditional blues in his own unique style."

The album's title alludes to Andy's status as perennial sideman. "But I'm not bitter," he laughs, as he sits down to chat about some of the album's tracks, his gear and his phenomenal backstory.

There's an extremely cohesive feel to the album, considering the tracks were recorded at different times and places.

"It's the band, the combination. Because Henry [Spinetti], the Low Riders' drummer, was going off with Katie Melua, bass player Dave Bronze said, 'Check Paul Beavis out.' And within three minutes it felt right. So Paul's on it. Dave's on it. And the thing is, the Low Riders is a co-operative. We're all in it together, so when it's good, it's really good.

"Chris Stainton [Eric Clapton, keyboards] helped us out, too – so gracious. I asked [Paul] 'Wix' Wickens, McCartney's keyboard player, if he fancied doing some gigs and he said, 'Yeah, it'd be great.' We were going to Rhyl, so the van picks him up in London, and by the time we got to North Wales he was regretting it! But no, it was all so joyful.

"Playing in arenas is great. It's about money, it's about life, it's about history, it's about what went before, and it's about what's in people's minds. But playing in small venues to 200 people, it's about what's happening right now: we control the dynamic of loud and we control the dynamic of quiet. So you get to 'be', as a player, in front of people right there and then. We do play *Paradise*, *Wide Eyed*, and *Gin House [Blues]*, but I tell them, 'Not until later or you'll all bugger off!'"

(PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES)



The legendary ARMS (Action into Research for Multiple Sclerosis) charity concerts featured a rotating roster of stellar musicians. This line-up performing at London's Royal Albert Hall on 20 September 1983 consists of (left to right): Jimmy Page, Andy Fairweather Low, Eric Clapton, Bill Wyman and Jeff Beck. In the background are drummer Kenney Jones (centre, left) and percussionist Ray Cooper (centre, right)

1. Andy has two beloved old Gibson archtops, which he told us were among his favourites. Here's an L-48 from 1953. The other is the smaller-bodied L-37. After our visit, Andy got all his guitars out: "Cos I like the look of 'em!"

Did you rehearse the studio cuts first and then lay them down?

"No, we'd already played them live. I'd finished my last album, *Flang Dang*, and decided I was not going to do any more. And then Malcolm Mills from The Last Record Company said those words, 'the invisible bluesman', and I went, 'Yeah, that's exactly how I feel through all the years of whoever I played with.'"

But you have your own niche, don't you?

"And I'm very grateful for it. And a lot of it is *not* connected to Roger Waters or Eric Clapton; it's connected to Amen Corner and my solo records. We get some fabulous, dedicated Eric fans that have continually turned up to support us. But it's a handful, considering the maybe millions I've played in front of."

My *Baby Left Me* has a lovely lazy feel.

"That's from 2007, the first time we went out. I've stolen a few bits: Robert Johnson's *Kind Hearted Woman*, Mississippi John Hurt [*Since I've Laid My Burden Down*]. But the feel is all Paul and Dave, there's nothing else going on."

***Lightin's Boogie* is fantastic, too.**

"I heard the Herald recordings from the 50s with Lightin' [Hopkins] on acoustic, then later on electric. And to play that stuff you have to know it. It's like Irish music; it's in the blood. And I knew it. I got the funny timings. I was doing a film soundtrack, *One Of The Hollywood Ten* with Glyn Johns. We recorded 19 tracks in one day. That was one of the songs, and that's the recording from that moment."

Your solo in the live *Gin House Blues* is phenomenal. And what a sound.

"Eric said, 'Who's playing that?' I said, 'It's me.' Well, I had my Fender Vibro-King, and no matter how many times I changed the valves, they got tired. So Dave Bronze brought Dennis Cornell along and he said, 'Show me what you want.' So I cranked up the Vibro-King and Dennis looked at Dave and said, 'Is he serious?' But Dennis is all about efficiency and making a wonderful amp. I want a dirty amp. I want an inefficient amp. I want one control. Albert King, BB King, Freddie King – they never had graphic equalisers. It was a lead into an amp, into a man, and into his soul."

"Playing in arenas is great... But playing in small venues, you get to 'be', as a player, in front of people right there and then"

"And I've stuck with that. I only ever had a pedal for a tour I did with Chris Rea, for one sound. And I used one pedal with Paul Carrack, and with Roger Waters it was a rack delay that they had. But I never got in-ears, and I never got a wireless system. It needs to be me, the amp and the guitar. But Dennis did make me an amp so *Gin House Blues* is the Cornell with a 4x10. The guitar was the white Clapton Strat with one humbucker. When I joined Eric, I only had one guitar, and with Eric you have to have two of everything. So they ordered this white Strat with Lace Sensors and I didn't like them, so I ripped everything out and put the humbucker in. You only need one good pickup for what I do."

Your unique, high-toned voice is perfect for blues.

"Stevie Wonder's a singer. Ray Charles is a singer. Aretha Franklin is a singer. I'm just a guy who sings. I mean, I love Ry Cooder, I love Mick Jagger, but you wouldn't say they're singers, except they sing."

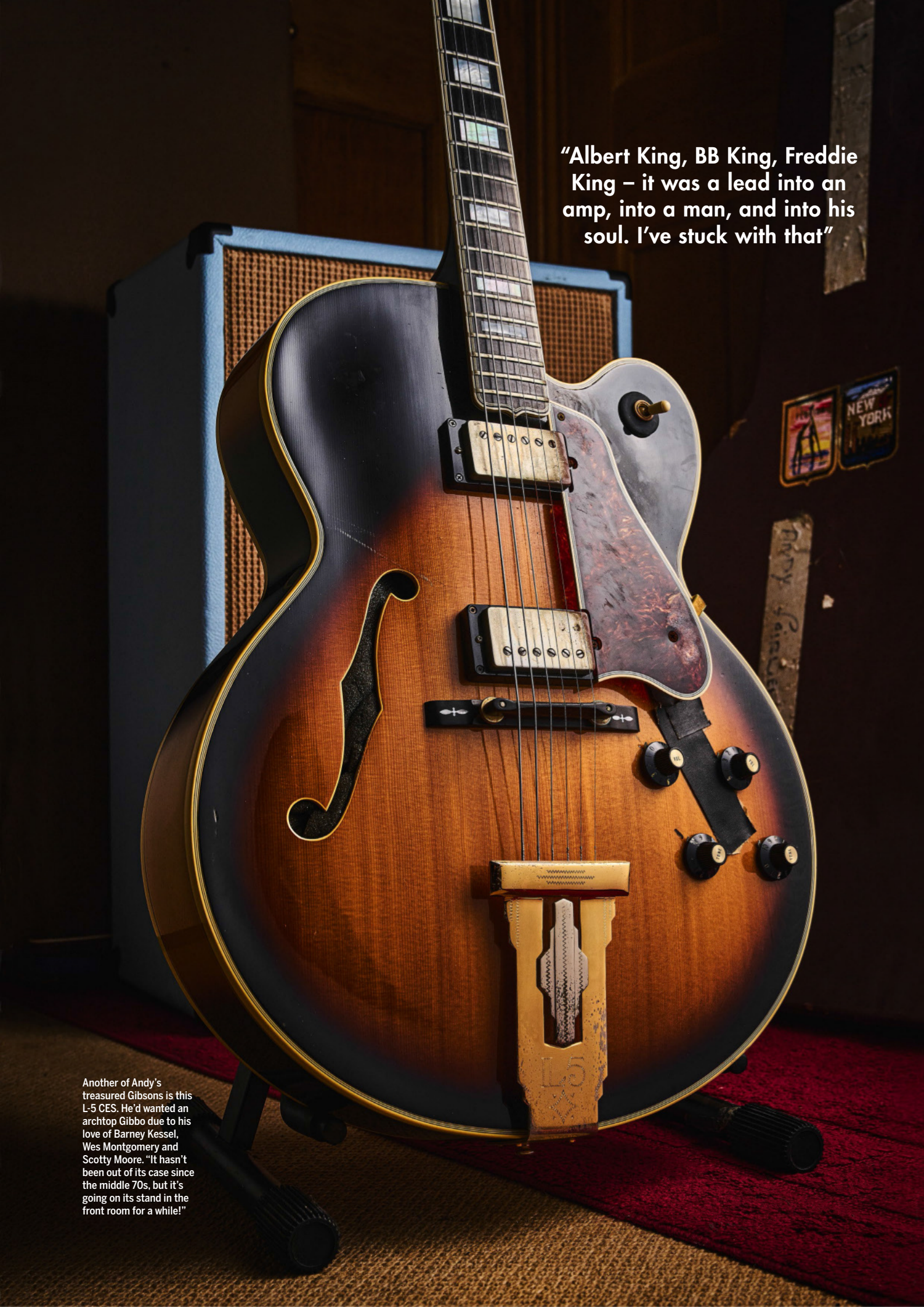
You don't do the 'pentatonic licks' thing – you play melodies over bluesy changes.

"No, I don't have that vocabulary of licks where I open the door and it's there. Before Amen Corner we were doing stuff like Otis Redding's *Don't Mess With Cupid*, Booker T's *Hip Hug-Her*, so it's all Steve Cropper licks. Then I had those years with Amen Corner and with my solo stuff I was writing. So I ended up being a guitar player that doesn't play. The rhythm player. Eric's always been taking solos. That's what he does."

But these artists trust you. Getting it right is important.

"But I can't step out of the zone the moment I want to be somebody else, which, after 13 years without it, I did."





"Albert King, BB King, Freddie King – it was a lead into an amp, into a man, and into his soul. I've stuck with that"

Another of Andy's treasured Gibsons is this L-5 CES. He'd wanted an archtop Gibbo due to his love of Barney Kessel, Wes Montgomery and Scotty Moore. "It hasn't been out of its case since the middle 70s, but it's going on its stand in the front room for a while!"

2. Andy bought a JB Hutto Airline guitar in Memphis, Tennessee, but despite his best efforts could never get the guitar to play properly. So he had the electronics built into this Strat-shaped body and a new neck built with matching red headstock. "I used to use it in our show, tuned to D," he says

Occasionally, I'd sneak a couple of my Jimmy Vaughan, Johnny 'Guitar' Watson licks in and he'd go, 'No, Andy! And that was it. I'm back in my box.'

The *Unplugged* film for MTV in 1992 must have been special to work on.

"It was. But none of those guitars were mine. The Martin is Eric's, the Super 300 Alan [Rogan, legendary guitar tech] lent me. The D'Angelico mandolin, someone lent it. But to be able to just play and not have 'a bit more bass there, a bit less something there, you're a little too loud' – no, you just play. That was glorious.

"I didn't play mandolin. I could do *When I'm Dead And Gone* and *Malt And Barley Blues* by McGuinness Flint, but that was it. And then we get to the rehearsals and Eric says, 'You play mandolin, don't you?' 'Er, not really.' So they get this mandolin and he presents me with *My Father's Eyes*. So on *Unplugged* you can see a bit of paper on the floor with triads written out of how to play *My Father's Eyes*."

Were there lots of rehearsals?

"I spent a week at Eric's house. 'Come on, we'll sit around and work some stuff out.' So we'd play through *Nobody Knows [You When You're Down And Out]*, *Running On Faith*, *Old Love* and so on. He wanted to do *Malted Milk* by Robert Johnson, which has a diminished chord, and that's the only one I had to do a bit of work on. But, man, it was a joy. We did the same for the *Concert For George* [in 2002]; I spent a week with him, routining things."

You toured with Harrison, too, didn't you?

"Eric had said, 'Look, I'll put my band together and we'll back you.' We were having a meal in Japan and George gets up and says, 'Andy was not the first choice. There were seven guitarists and he was the seventh choice.' Because Gary Moore was one, Alvin Lee was another, and eventually it came to me. But George said, 'He wasn't the first choice, but he was the right choice.' George and I had met at Ry Cooder shows backstage,

"On '*Unplugged*' you can see a bit of paper on the floor with triads written out of how to play '*My Father's Eyes*'..."

so he'd assumed I played slide. Anyway, the first song we played when I went over was *Give Me Love (Give Me Peace On Earth)*. I knew it inside out because I loved *[Living] In The Material World*. But I said, 'George, I'm the rhythm player, you play the slide. It doesn't make any sense.' Well, I learned the solo, but, believe me, there's so many nights I didn't sleep!"

And then there's Roger Waters.

"I'd done the ARMS tour for multiple sclerosis. Then we toured America with Eric, Jeff [Beck], Jimmy [Page] and a full cast. And the person who was doing press for the tour, Adie Cook, was a friend of Roger's. So when Roger was looking for a replacement for Eric for *The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking* tour, my name came up. 'Hello, Andy. Roger Waters here. Will you come up and see whether we get on?' We did get on. And I stayed for 24 years. Then I'm doing *The Wall* in 1990 with Roger, and Van Morrison is on the show. So I do the Van Morrison tour. I'm doing a charity gig at the Natural History Museum. Chris Rea is on that bill. I do the *Road To Hell* tour.

"The other connection is Glyn [Johns]. Glyn got me in with Joe Satriani, David Crosby, Linda Ronstadt, Stevie Nicks and Pete Townshend. I'm staying with Glyn and they're recording *Who Are You*. Pete says, 'Come down, do some vocals.'

"I did a live album with Joe Satriani. Me! Think about it! I phoned him up and said, 'Joe, why? Do you know what I do?' He said, 'Yeah.' He'd seen me with Eric. But I can't even think as quickly as he can play. I mean, he wasn't just in control of the guitar; it's like he'd invented the bloody thing."

Clearly, you are that safe pair of hands because all these incredible artists want to work with you.

"Well, there was a guitar player called Roy Smeck.





"I knew I had to [leave]
and not hear those
words, 'No, Andy.'
I can't pretend I'm a
guitar player next to
Eric Clapton, can I?"

"So there I am watching
Marc Park [Peter Kay]
the 'rock star' on TV with
my wife, and on the wall
of his mansion was this
beautiful blue Futurama,
like the first one I saw in
a shop window. My wife
picked up on it and for
Christmas bought me
this very guitar that I'd
coveted. It's a shocking
thing to play, but still,
it's so beautiful"

3. Below Andy is cradling the Gibson L-5 CES that he finally managed to acquire. He later saw American blues guitarist Duke Robillard playing a black model, and so ordered his own in ebony, direct from the company. However, it wasn't on display during our visit

It came to the end of a concert and someone shouted, 'You're a genius!' And he just said, 'No. I'm a lucky guy. I'm very grateful.' And that's me. I'm a *very* lucky guy, and I'm *very, very* grateful.

"And you need luck. Amen Corner got a record deal because the guy from Decca saw the band that went on before us, then left and said, 'Tell them to be in the studio Monday morning, nine o'clock.' So we turn up and we're not *that* band. He said, 'Well, we might as well do something.' So we played *Gin House*, and without that bit of luck, and a bit of payola, too, we may not have got our success."

When you were with Amen Corner, were you already into blues?

"No. In the 70s, when we were called Fair Weather, I got hold of the Robert Johnson album, put it on and said these immortal words, 'They all sound the same.' The blues came along when touring with Eric in the big band, doing baseball stadiums with Elton John around America and Europe. One day in the car he

puts on *Chicago Bound* by Jimmy Rogers, and that was his way of saying, 'Check that out – because this is what's coming.' The thing is, he'd got so big that no-one was listening any more. We came off one night and Greg Phillinganes [keyboards] said, 'Man, just like The Beatles.' And Eric looked at him and went, 'Yeah, just like The Beatles.' And that was him saying, 'I'm done with this. I need to play what I really want to play.' And that's when he seriously played. And in 13 years I never tired of any of it.

"But I wanted to play more, and it was inappropriate with Eric or Roger. I was not the lead guitarist, and I wanted to be, and that's why I left two of the best-paying and most socially comfortable gigs. I knew I had to do it and not hear those words, 'No, Andy.' I can't pretend I'm a guitar player next to Eric Clapton, can I?"

Did you meet Hendrix?

"He'd been on *Top Of The Pops*, so the word is out. Amen Corner had a residency at the Speakeasy, and one night Jimi is there and wants to play. So he borrows Clive

"I wanted to play more, and it was inappropriate with Eric or Roger. I was not the lead guitarist, and I wanted to be"

[Taylor]'s bass, flips it upside down, and we do Otis Redding's *I Can't Turn You Loose*. So great! Next night, he wanted to play guitar, so he took Neil [Jones]'s guitar, flipped it upside down, I took the bass, so it was Dennis [Bryon, drums], me and Hendrix. I have to say it was three o'clock in the morning and I wasn't very good! You gotta learn somewhere though, eh?

"Then it's 1969, I'm in New York and I get a phone call. 'Jimi's in the studio. Would you come down and do some vocals?' He's recutting *Stone Free*. So we go down, Roger Chapman [of Family] is also there, so we did it. It's not a good version. There's only one version of *Stone Free*."

And you even recorded with Kate Bush!

"Oh, man. This is off the scale. I'm at home, nothing's going on. Phone rings. There's this woman who says she's Kate Bush. 'Would you consider doing some vocals on a track? You'd be absolutely perfect.' I said, 'Well, can you send me something?' 'No, just come up.' I'm apprehensive. But I get up there and gosh, she's just fabulous. She plays me *Wild Man* and we record it. I get home, send my bill in: 'Hello, Andy, I've just got your bill. You don't charge enough.' So she gave me three times more, then put the single out as Kate Bush and Andy Fairweather Low."

You've had and continue to have a long and distinguished career. What's the secret?

"The point is to keep aiming for that high bar. If you aim high and fail, it's not that bad. If you aim for a low bar and fail, then you're in trouble." 



Andy Fairweather Low's new album, *The Invisible Bluesman*, is available now via The Last Music Company <https://andyfairweatherlow.com>

A teal Teisco Spectrum 5 electric guitar is shown in a close-up, angled shot. The guitar has a cream-colored pickguard with a row of five multi-colored switches (yellow, red, red, green, blue) and a red stereo switch. The body is teal with a glossy finish. The neck is dark wood with white fret markers. The guitar is positioned in front of a brown woven amplifier with a 'CORNELL' label. The background is dark and textured.

"Keep aiming for that high bar. If you aim high and fail, it's not that bad. If you aim for a low bar and fail, then you're in trouble"

Here's Andy's stunning spaceship of a guitar, the Teisco Spectrum 5 with its multi-coloured row of switches and stereo operation. He played it on Roger Waters' track *What God Wants* from the 1992 album *Amused To Death*. And Roger even mentions it in the lyrics!





Different Strokes

Few, if any, major guitar manufacturers offer Godin's extensive range of guitar styles. We catch up with a couple of new additions that couldn't be more different

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker



GODIN 5TH AVENUE TL GOLD FOIL & LERXST BY GODIN GRACE £2,099 & £5,499

CONTACT **John Hornby Skewes** PHONE **01132 865381** WEB **www.godinguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 The 5th Avenue guitars have been around for ages. What's new?**
Correct, the 5th Avenue model was launched back in 2008 as a non-cutaway acoustic archtop. This latest addition moves to a slightly smaller thinline style and adds Lollar Gold Foil pickups to the mix.
- 2 What's Lerxst?**
It's a brand that was formed in 2012 between Alex Lifeson and MojoTone, "founded on the desire to design and manufacture a line of guitar products that reflect Lifeson's forward-thinking approach to sonic exploration and live performance", so says the blurb. The Limelight guitar appeared at the start of 2024; this Grace model at the end of the year. Both are made by Godin and are very limited.
- 3 And very expensive!**
The original Limelight run was limited to 150 pieces (75 each with Floyd Rose vibrato and Vega-Trem) and sold out to dealers at NAMM 2024. This second Grace run of 100 with each vibrato style sold out in the autumn of 2024. Each one is signed and numbered by Alex Lifeson, and there's clearly quite a demand!

Godin makes a colossal number of models that really span the diversity of the guitar: acoustic to electric and beyond! It's also only one brand in a Canadian manufacturing empire that includes Seagull, Art & Lutherie, Norman, and Simon & Patrick, not to mention the innovative Tric cases. Another brand that Godin is more recently responsible for making is the latest venture of fellow Canadian Alex Lifeson, Lerxst. So when we got the chance to take a look at one of Godin's latest 5th Avenue models alongside the second highly limited Lerxst edition, we couldn't resist. Just how good are Godin guitars?

5th Avenue TL Gold Foil

Godin's roots might lie in the acoustic guitar, but innovation – in both manufacturing and style – has long been its calling card, and electric models have been on the increase for some time now. Our 5th Avenue model illustrates that progression. Originally a single non-cutaway acoustic archtop that was introduced in 2008, some 17 years later it's grown into a 12-strong mini-range of archtops with non-cutaway and cutaway models, with and without Bigsby, and a variety of pickups that include its own range, Seymour Duncan and, as we have here, Lollar.

This new 'Thin Line' (TL) model launched in 2024. It has a thinner-depth

body (the rim measures 45mm, the same as a Gibson ES-335 as opposed to the 76mm depth of the original), and it's also a little narrower across the body, measuring 381mm (15 inches) and not the 406.4mm (16 inches) of the original 5th Avenue. So less 'big ol' archtop' and more akin to Godin's Montreal Premiere in size by design. It's still a hollowbody, though, with two longitudinal spruce braces supporting the top, instead of the 'Breathe-Through' centre block of that Montreal Premiere.

As you'd expect with the style, the body, arched front and back are constructed from laminated wild cherry with attractive bookmatching to the outer

Godin's roots might lie in the acoustic guitar, but innovation has long been its calling card

layers on the front and back. The edges are cleanly bound with a single-ply dark brown binding that does get hidden by the sunbursting of the almost light grey-to-dark brown gloss finish in places. The two f-holes are nicely stylised, and you can clearly see the classic thinline construction with thin sides and kerfed linings to increase the glueing area. It's a very tidy job.



The archtop style is referenced here by the neck, which glues to the body at the 15th fret but then extends above the body to the neck pickup. This means that section of the neck, and the pickups, sit quite high off the body. The neck itself is silver leaf maple, again with a similar 'bursting as the body, but here it's satin. The 'board is ebony, unbound, with simple dot inlays reflecting the unshowy style. In fact, only the headstock face has a fancy patterned three-ply plastic facing, hinting at a bygone style.

The pared-back aesthetic is reinforced by the absence of a pickguard, and the biggest visual statement is the pickups themselves. The Lollar Gold Foils are placed inside cream 'dog-ear' covers that sit on quite thick dark-brown height-raising spacers. The standard tune-o-matic sits on a synthetic (not wooden) foot that appears to be firmly pinned. And while the Stratocaster-style plastic knobs seem an odd choice, at least they're brown with a gold lettering, so they fit the theme rather well.

Lerxst Grace

Another illustration of the diversity and quality of Godin's manufacturing capability, it's more than a feather in the brand's cap to work with Alex Lifeson in creating contemporary versions of his classic Hentor Sportscaster (various modded Fender styles from back in the

day) under the Lerxst brand. As we've mentioned, this metallic red version is the second run, which follows on from the Limelight, and aesthetics aside, the Grace we have here is the same guitar. Now, Godin isn't new to creating electric guitars based on the good ol' Stratocaster, and currently its Session T-Pro is a stylised take on that blueprint. What is new, however, is the frankly colossal price tag of the Lerxst Grace in comparison: the production Session T-Pro is £1,749; the limited-edition Grace is considerably more.

1. As with all the 5th Avenue designs, the neck sits above the body, reflecting its archtop-like heritage. It also means the pickups and the bridge sit quite high off the body. At the bridge, the Lollar Gold Foil has a DCR of 7.12kohms; the neck measures 6.23k

HEART OF GOLD

It's one of the trendiest pickup styles of the moment – you can't keep a good Gold Foil down

While it's not confirmed whether it was DeArmond or Teisco that first created what we now call the Gold Foil, both pickups appeared in the 1950s. Championed by the likes of Ry Cooder and plenty of other leftfield visionaries since then, the Gold Foil was originally a cheap 'n' cheerful single-coil pickup, and Lollar states that its version is a "true reproduction of the famous original Teisco pickups found in older import and student guitars".

The visual style gives the pickup its name, but there is no one recipe, although those original Teisco units used low-powered rubberised ferrite magnets, as do these Lollars – like a fridge magnet. Vintage examples vary in both quality and sound, and contemporary versions are now offered by plenty of makers, not least Mojo here in the UK or Roswell in Asia. Of course, the 'gold foil' was typically coloured aluminium foil on a thin card backing that has zero effect on the sound, and some contemporary makers are using gold-coloured mesh, in conjunction with partial covers, for both conventional humbuckers and single coils, just to give them a different 'retro' look.

2. Unlike on many more contemporary HSS super-S designs, the heel of the Grace model just has a rounded treble edge and no other contouring

3. The 5th Avenue's body is edge bound, but the actual binding disappears under the dark brown gloss finish. The all-satin neck has similar colouration



But pulling this one from its classy hard case, it's a very good advert for the detailed Godin quality. You can't see the body wood under the deep-red metallic gloss, but the spec sheet says it's swamp ash. And along with what appears to be a slightly modernised outline, it's not as contoured as the Fender classic, especially in the forearm area. It's not a particularly lightweight guitar, either: our sample is a little weighty for the style.

Obviously, here we have a longer scale length than on our 5th Avenue,

measuring 648mm (25.5 inches) as opposed to 631mm (24.84 inches). We have a bolt-on neck, and while the neck heel is round-nosed, it's not as contoured as modern HSS Stratocaster models such as Fender's Ultra II, for example. The standard slab-sawn maple is pretty plain in appearance (some would even say bland), and like the 5th Avenue it features a dot-inlaid ebony fingerboard with a 305mm (12-inch) radius and mirror-polished stainless-steel frets that match the mirror (plastic) scratchplate.

The Vega-Trem UltraTrem and the staggered-height rear-lock tuners all keep the quality high, and the pickups are specifically designed for these guitars by Mojotone. The wiring is pretty simple with just that three-way toggle switch – which voices neck, neck and middle, and bridge – and a master volume and tone. Oh, and the dished jack socket cup is reversed and sticks out from the body, as per Alex's original apparently. You'll also notice that the two controls are effectively like the two tones on a Stratocaster in terms of their placement, with the volume removed. Plenty of artist-specific idiosyncrasies, then, but the craft is seriously good.

WHAT IS A VEGA-TREM?

The company's VT1 Ultra Trem aims to offer wide travel with no locks

Founded by touring roadie and pro guitar player Isaac Vega, Vega-Trem is based on the Spanish island of Mallorca, and both the VT1 UltraTrem (as used on the Grace) and the VT2 TeleTrem (designed for T-style guitars) are made in Europe and use "the same materials, quality, process and precision control used in the manufacturing of surgical materials", says the company. "[The VT1's] components are made of high-quality stainless steel, even the block is made of galvanized steel" – and it's designed to be retrofitted to a standard Fender Stratocaster. The system pivots on that front-placed bar, and the moving section uses six lock-down saddles with height-adjustment screws that sit in recessed grooves to prevent any sideways movement; they have an overall string spacing of 53.5mm. The uniquely shaped stainless-steel block allows the very wide travel and, like the Fender design, uses a standard spring claw; ours came fitted with two springs. The UltraTrem is a retrofit system that's easy to install, comes in various finishes and is available left-handed. <https://vegatrem.com>

Feel & Sounds

It's doubtful whether we could have selected two more different guitars if we'd tried, and so it's little surprise that not only do they vary in feel, the sound is contrasting, too. Let's go back in time and start with the 5th Avenue...

The reduced size here proves very comfortable, seated or strapped on, and although the neck, pickups and bridge do sit quite high off the body, there's no problem or struggle. The neck has good width, it's slim in depth in lower positions and fills out nicely by the 12th fret. And yet because it joins the body at the 15th fret, upper-fret access isn't that easy, and there's a sharp corner under the neck heel. But the main shaft of the neck is very

well shaped (a classic C), the fingerboard's edges are lightly rolled, and the fretwork, from a medium gauge, feels a little more contemporary than the style might suggest. The setup is pretty standard, but it ships with 11s, which certainly gives it some fight.

With its hollow body you get plenty of unplugged volume, all with that hint of quick attack and shorter-sustain 'archtop'-like response. You could easily put a mic in front of this one and capture a pretty good swing-era rhythm sound. Plugged in, though, and bringing up the volume of the neck pickup, there's a very evocative, thick chocolatey voice that just needs a late-50s jazz combo to fit right in. There's a slight softening as you pull back the volume (which suggests we don't have a treble bleed circuit), but full up there's just the

You could easily put a mic in front of the 5th Avenue and capture a swing-era rhythm sound

right amount of clarity. With both controls full up, the mix nods more to classic Gretsch – it's bright but with depth and a hollowed middle. Back off the volume and a little tone and it's a wonderfully softer, yet clear, jazzy voice. You can't help wondering what this TL would sound like with a volume control for each pickup.

Flick over to the bridge pickup and we're now in the 60s, with bite and quite a bit of honky depth that could be useful for any beat-band pop hit of the era. There's a little 'vibrato' if you push the neck, too, and if Godin hasn't considered a TL with a Bigsby then it should. But the quality of sound here is really something, and the volume and tone control provide more than useful shade. We're really loving this sound – and we're still on the clean channel with no effects.

Adding some dirt doesn't ruin the fun, and we're into an old-school ride with the bridge proving surprisingly aggressive. It gives a Mod classic voice that does an earthy rock 'n' roll twang nicely – great sound! Things get a little fruity at the neck, with instant swampy slide, and fuzztones implode. Here comes the feedback... Hold on tight!

By design, of course, our Grace is a very different ride. Although it is a little weighty, it's an absolute pleasure – very good looking with a neck and fingerboard that disappear under your hand and fingers. It ships with 10-gauge strings,

but with the different-tension supplied springs for the vibrato, you can go lower or higher gauge. The neck reminds us of PRS's Wide Thin in its profile with a nicely relaxed C section that's pretty slim in depth (20.7mm at the 1st fret, 22.6mm by the 12th), albeit it with a more regular nut width of 42.5mm and string spacing of 35mm. The fretwork (2.4mm wide by 1.25mm high) is exemplary, as is the perfectly cut Graph Tech nut.

But it's the voicing that's really well considered here. The neck pickup very

4. Mojo's dual-blade humbucker is based on the classic Bill Lawrence design and, says Mojo, "utilises an Alnico magnet and chrome-plated surround for a smooth treble response that cuts through the mix with punchy lows and strong midrange presence". Sitting some way in front of the bridge for a less treble-heavy tone, it's measured DCR is 10.5k

5. The 5th Avenue's fancy three-ply plastic laminate facing here adds to the retro vibe, although other Godin electrics use a similar laminate facing





subtly leans into a humbucker with what sounds like a subtle high-end roll-off – a little less sparkle than a lower wind, perhaps – but that’s where the middle position comes in with more high-end detail to those bouncy, funky sounds we’ve heard hundreds of times before. Then there’s the bridge ‘bucker that has a little more kick; it’s rounder and thicker, but it doesn’t lack clarity or presence. These are three very strong sounds that cover a wide range – one reason why a good HSS guitar such as this is a function player’s dream. The guitar plays beautifully with those super-smooth frets, which make for effortless bends.

Speaking of which, there’s quite a large range of bendability on the UltraTrem,

too. The supplied arm does sit a little high in playing position compared with our vintage-spec Strat reference, but the up-bend is huge, easily five semitones on the G string and down to very slack. Don’t forget there’s no locking nut here, but even with the strings barely stretched the tuning stability and return-to-pitch is superb. Of course, the wide range won’t suit everyone, but it’s here if that’s your style. The very smooth-feeling vibrato only uses two springs. You find three additional spring sets in the case: high tension, low tension and extra low; our fitted springs are normal medium tension. If you thought Godin only did lower-end ‘functional’ guitars, this might make you think differently. We certainly did.

THE RIVALS

If the 5th Avenue looks back to classic archtops of yesteryear, then check out D’Angelico, which has the slightly larger-bodied 406.4mm (16-inch) wide Excel 59 and Deluxe 59 (both approximately £1,800), both with laminate construction, dual P-90s with master volume and tone controls.

Another name from the classic archtop era is Stromberg, and it’s making a return to the market manufactured in the EU. Look out for very high-end and limited Masterbuilt reproductions of the Master 300 and 400 models (see next issue), along with contemporary designs in the ‘Hanover Street’ range such as the Montreux and Newport. Prices TBA.

There’s no shortage of top-quality HSS super-S styles and plenty of signature action, too. PRS’s Fiore is the signature model of Mark Lettieri and is available in new satin or gloss finishes from £2,779. Here in the UK Jamiroquai lynchpin Rob Harris hooked up with Patrick James Eggle to produce a superb HSS 96 (from £3,499) with Sunbear pickups. Elsewhere, Charvel’s Guthrie Govan models – technically HSH super-Ses – (approx. £2-3.7k) never fail to impress.





6. The pickup mounting on the 5th Avenue is quite convoluted but certainly works. The standard tune-o-matic bridge also sits on a synthetic (not wooden) foot. And Strat knobs on an archtop? Well, yes, but they match the colour of the body and work very well. Why not?

7. On the Lerxst Grace, the Mojotone single coils feature flush magnetic polepieces and they're said to be "higher-output single-coil pickups that have been carefully calibrated to match the output of the humbucker for a full and dynamic tone in every position". They have a measured DCR of just over 7k

8. While the headstock face bears just the Lerxst Grace logo, at least the back tells us who made the guitar; you'll see Alex's signature here, too. The Godin logo'd rear-locking tuners look like Gotoh's 510 tuners, too

9. The master volume and tone on the Grace are placed where the two tones would be on a Strat. And the upside-down output jack plate is by design, not error!

Verdict

Judging by this disparate duo, and in answer to our original question – just how good are Godin guitars? – we have to say, very good indeed. Always functional and fit-for-purpose, these contemporary models possess another level of quality.

The TL is a superb evolution of the original 5th Avenue that retains its

The Grace covers a wide range – a good HSS guitar such as this is a function player's dream

archtop style without the physical bulk. The Lollar Gold Foils combine to produce hugely evocative jazzy, bluesy or garage-rock swamp tones. We just can't say enough how good this guitar sounds.

We don't usually review a guitar like the Lerxst Grace because, put simply, it's a limited collector's piece and is priced accordingly – just look at Fender, Gibson and PRS who milk this market. The 'but' – and the point of this feature – is that this Grace vividly illustrates that Godin should be taken very seriously, and we can only hope that, with or without Alex Lifeson's input, this style becomes a mainstay of its line-up at a more real-world price. **G**



GODIN 5TH AVENUE TL GOLD FOIL

PRICE: £2,099 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Single-cutaway, archtop electric
BODY: Laminated Canadian wild cherry
NECK: Silver leaf maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 631mm (24.84")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.95mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, pearloid dots, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Graph Tech adjustable Tusq bridge base with tune-o-matic bridge, trapeze tailpiece, Godin logo'd enclosed-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Lollar Gold Foil single-coil pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.44/5.37
OPTIONS: Thin Line also available with Godin Kingpin P-90 single coils in Trans Cream (£1,149)
RANGE OPTIONS: The 5th Avenue range kicks off with the original non-cutaway w/ neck P-90 (£949). The cutaway models start with the full-depth model with dual P-90s and Cognac Burst finish
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model, only the non-cutaway 5th Avenue with neck P-90 (£999)
FINISHES: Vintage Burst HG (as reviewed) – gloss body, satin finish to neck



PROS Crisply made hollowbody archtop construction; excellent neck shaping; fretwork and setup; Lollar pickups provide superb old-school sounds

CONS Doesn't have great high-fret access; it's a hollowbody, so watch your onstage volume



LERXST BY GODIN GRACE

PRICE: £5,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Swamp ash
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium stainless steel
HARDWARE: Vega-Trem UltraTrem vibrato, Godin logo'd rear locking tuners – chrome/nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Mojotone overwound single coils (middle and neck), double-blade humbucker (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.96/8.7
OPTIONS: Also available with double locking Floyd Rose vibrato
RANGE OPTIONS: Lerxst Limelight (£5,149) in Limelight Cream with either Vega-Trem or Floyd Rose
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Red – metallic gloss body; satin natural neck back



PROS Inspired HSS design with plenty of neat tweaks; superb fretwork, neck shape and setup; Vega-Trem has wide travel and very good pitch stability; very considered sounds and switching

CONS Collector's-only price – if only this were a production model!

Strutting In Style

Different by design might well be a watchword for Godin, from steel- and nylon-string acoustics to compelling electro-acoustic and electric designs

Words Dave Burrluck



GODIN 5TH AVENUE P90 £949

Although Godin no longer makes an acoustic archtop, this variant illustrates the progression and development of our reviewed 5th Avenue Thin Line. The original body here is slightly larger and deeper, and this non-cutaway version really harks back to the swing era when the guitar's role was primarily as a rhythm instrument. The addition of the Godin P90 means you'll be heard. Also check out the Nightclub version (£1,949) with Bigsby vibrato and TV Jones Classic neck pickup.



GODIN RADIATOR £1,299

This model dates back to 1999 and was a retro-themed entry-level electric that fairly uniquely used a pearloid faceplate like an oversized scratchplate. The current version returned in 2020 with a more regular single-cut Godin outline, though the body is still heavily chambered (and capped with pearloid), resulting in a lightweight and vibe-y guitar. It features strong rock-ready sounds from its pair of Godin Custom humbuckers with individual volume and tone controls.



GODIN SESSION T-PRO £1,749

A classy HSS super-S with its own style, the T-Pro is based on a Canadian Laurentian basswood body and utilises a Seymour Duncan Saturday Night Special humbucker at the bridge with flat-pole SSL-2s in middle and neck positions. There's a coil-split for the Alnico IV Saturday Night Special, plus the middle SSL-2 is reverse wound/reverse polarity for hum-cancelling mix positions. You also get Godin's two-post Tru-Loc vibrato and locking tuners. Versatile? Very!



GODIN RADIUM-X £2,599

Named after the Radiator and Stadium models, this loosely T-style design is certainly a little different. It uses a mahogany body with a contoured swamp ash top and has a 648mm (25.5-inch) bolt-on mahogany neck. The Radium-X combines Seymour Duncan (Jazz in the neck position) and Bare Knuckle (True Grit humbucker at the bridge) pickups, but also packs in an LR Baggs X-Bridge vibrato for dedicated electro-acoustic tones, too.



GODIN MULTIAC GRAND CONCERT DELUXE £2,699

Godin's Multiac range includes both steel- and nylon-string (as here) electro models aimed at the performing musician. The thinline bolt-on design is specifically chambered to reduce feedback without losing acoustic response. This model also offers a very classical-like neck width (50.8mm at the nut), and the neck joins the body at the 12th fret. Electronics include LR Baggs' Lyric Mic system; other versions include synth access, too.



GODIN MONTREAL PREMIERE LTD WITH BIGSBY £3,499

The Montreal Premiere features a 381mm (15-inch) wide single-cut laminate body with a 'Breathe-Through' centre block. This limited version in Desert Green finish also features Seymour Duncan P-Rails and some tricky switching, along with a Bigsby vibrato and roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge. Hardtail non-limited versions include the Montreal Premiere HT (£2,199) and Pro (£2,399).



Heavenly Bodies

Faith says these new additions to its Eclipse series have been “designed as the ultimate stage guitars, with workhorse reliability and maximum performance capability”. They look the part, but how do they deliver in terms of quality and tone?

Words David Mead Photography Phil Barker





FAITH ECLIPSE VENUS E/CUTAWAY & NEPTUNE E/CUTAWAY 12-STRING £1,259 & £1,389

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins** PHONE 01691 652449 WEB www.faithguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 So, what's new here, exactly?
A few things, most notably the figured maple armrest bevel and the Fishman pickup system. The latter comprises the Ink Body preamp with a body sensor, which gives extra tonal possibilities to your live sound with the ability to blend the pickup with an undersaddle body sensor.

2 These are all solid woods, right?
Absolutely! The tops of both are Engelmann spruce combined with mahogany for the backs and sides. Interestingly, Faith says that no animal parts have been included in the guitars' construction: so no bone for the nuts or saddles, or even abalone for the rosettes.

3 That sounds very ecological.
It gets even better as Faith has partnered with Just One Tree, a non-profit organisation based in the UK. It plants trees in areas that have been seriously affected by deforestation. Basically, a tree is planted for every guitar sold.

These Indonesian-made Faith acoustics are two from a trio of new additions to the company's Eclipse range; the other is the baby-jumbo six-string equivalent of the 12-string Neptune we see here. Faith has been wowing the acoustic world for a while now with a host of medium-priced, feature-packed instruments, all of which benefit from the design wizardry of one of the UK's foremost luthiers, Patrick James Eggle.

In case you're not aware, after the original electrics produced under the Eggle brand in the early 1990s – which included

models such as the Berlin, New York and Vienna – Patrick moved on to build his own top-range acoustic guitars before he returned to the premium electric fold. And these guitars represent some of the very best that have passed through our hands in recent years.

Apart from the general good looks of the Faith stable, Patrick also masterminded the less obvious, more discreet but still-important factors of the range such as bracing, neck joints and other structural elements at play under the guitars' bonnets.





2

The Eclipse range is so-called as the instruments are dressed in what Faith states as Onyx Black. This shade affords the guitars an air of mystery along with some purposeful good looks. We're told that the new trio of Eclipse acoustics has been reimagined and upgraded to offer new features, including an upscaled pickup system and an ecological bent that we'll talk about in a moment or two.

Neptune

Taking this new Neptune 12-string first and running our eyes down the spec, our first thought is that 12-strings raise a unique set of demands on builders from a construction point of view. That is they have to be strongly built to survive the additional string-pull and with a body that can deal with the somewhat crowded frequencies those dozen strings produce. If the main concern of an acoustic builder is to ensure clarity, separation and premium tone from each string, then those demands are doubled with a 12, after all.

And so we were intrigued by the fact the Neptune's body size is designated as a 'baby jumbo'. In fact, with a lower bout measuring 406mm (16 inches), it's not too much of a baby, but it's not the usual dreadnought-sized whopper you might expect, either.

If you find yourself thinking that the black finish might hide a multitude of cost-conscious cutbacks, you can rest

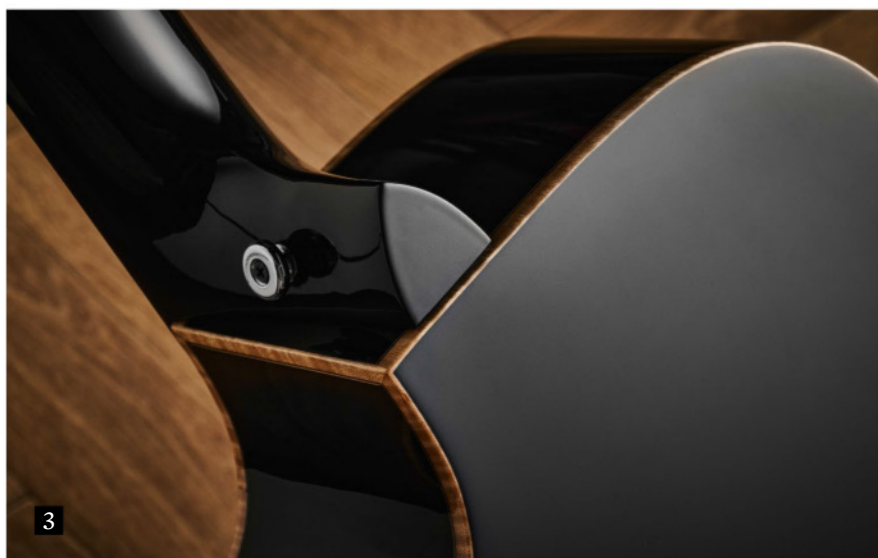
assured that the spec here reads like a top-end acoustic. The top, for instance, is Engelmann spruce, a timber found on some of the world's best acoustic guitars, and the back and sides are mahogany – and all are solid woods to boot.

A figured maple armrest bevel – a first for Faith – acts as a contrast to the guitar's black looks, and figured maple is also used for the binding, top and back on the body, and for the rosette. The same wood appears again on the truss rod cover on the headstock, which is an unusual but very nice touch.

1. The Neptune's 12 strings sit upon a Tusq saddle set into a Macassan figured ebony bridge

2. A subtle maple rosette matches the Neptune's binding and arm bevel, and contrasts the guitar's black gloss finish

3. Both the Neptune and Venus have mahogany backs and sides beneath their dark livery



3



4. Both instruments have Grover Rotomatic tuners, figured maple truss rod covers and Tusq nuts

THE RIVALS

Where 12-string acoustics are concerned, it's a niche market and smaller-bodied 12-strings are harder to find, but it's always worth exploring what the established builders have got in store. For instance, the Guild F-1512 Westerly jumbo is on the street at around £785, but you'd have to add your own pickup system, and Eastman's E1D-12-DLX dreadnought is £889. In the higher price range there's the Maton EMD12 (£1,935) or Furch's Blue D-SW/12 VTC (£1,329).

It's a different story for an electro-acoustic that fits the OM/Auditorium agenda as these are far more plentiful. Taylor's 314ce V-Class will set you back £1,899, the Martin SPOMC10E Road Series Special is available at £929, while the Furch Blue Plus OMc-SW VTC comes in at around £1,369, and Eastman's L-OMCE-QS (£1,769) is well worth a look, too.

Another upgrade is the use of figured Macassan ebony on the Neptune's fingerboard and bridge. The figuring here is more noticeable on the latter rather than the former, but it definitely sits in well with the guitar's all-black livery.

The ecological point we referred to earlier is that Faith says no animal products were used in either of these guitar's construction – so no bone nuts or even abalone inlays. But returning to the Neptune 12's spec, there are 12 Grover Rotomatic tuners with small black buttons atop the elongated headstock. We'll see if there are any top-heavy issues when we come to the playing test later on.

Venus

Switching our attention to the Venus six-string, nearly all of the spec is the same as the Neptune. So we have an Engelmann spruce top with mahogany back and sides but with the slightly more trim body dimension of 381mm (15 inches) at the lower bout, as opposed to the 12's 406mm (16 inches). Other measurements that differ between the two include the nut width (43mm here; the Neptune's is naturally wider at 47mm) and the scale length (643mm here and 654mm on the 12). In other words, they're certainly not twins, but the family resemblance here is obviously very strong.

At first glance, the workmanship on both guitars, inside and out, is well up

to the standard we're used to seeing on guitars hailing from Indonesia these days and, indeed, the quality we've seen from Faith in previous encounters.

In line with Faith's statement of intent about the Eclipse series being "the ultimate stage guitars", it's fair to take a close-up look at what the Fishman Ink pickup system has in store for us before we even plug it in. More involved than many upper-bout inlaid control fascias we've seen in the past, the Ink preamp section comprises seven discreet rotary controls that are all pretty much flush to the surface of the mounting, except for very small (2mm) raised circles on each to give something for the fingers to latch onto. There's also a lozenge-shaped section on the top left-hand side that hosts the onboard tuner.

Controls present are: Volume, Brilliance, Treble, Middle and Bass, plus a Body control, which sets the level of the body sensor that lives under the bridge, and another labelled Notch that looks after a notch filter "to remove low-end feedback".

One thing we noticed straight away (on consulting the Ink's manual) is that the preamp is only activated when a jack plug is inserted into the socket under the guitar's rear strap pin. So tuning up while passively strumming on the sofa at home wouldn't be a straightforward task, but it would certainly come into its own in an on-stage environment.



5

Feel & Sounds

Returning to the Neptune 12, first impressions are that it doesn't actually feel massive in the hand, which is the tendency of some 12-strings we've played in the past. There is some top-heaviness apparent in the form of an inclination to neck dive, but this sort of thing is almost a given with

The Neptune rewards strumming with lush chords that wouldn't sound out of place in any rhythm part

a 12-string and it's certainly not in the extreme category here, nor does it affect playability while both hands are engaged.

Tuning wasn't the nightmare that acoustic folklore often relates, and once we were there, the Grover Rotomatics didn't need any tweaking during the entire time we spent trying to avoid playing *Stairway To Heaven*.

Sound-wise, Neptune's voice is quite refined. It's acres away from being big and brash, and it certainly doesn't lack in any particular frequency range that we could hear. Instead, our strumming efforts were rewarded with thick, lush chords that wouldn't sound out of place in any rhythm part you could name. Interestingly, it

sounds like the guitar has been voiced for its electric capability, as it has all the built-in acoustic compression necessary to fit straight into a mix with no bother at all.

The similarity between the two guitars extends to the sound and general feel when moving over to the Venus, too. There's a nice even response all the way up the fretboard with single notes and ambient chords ringing out with harmonious authority. Every style we played – blues picking, ragtime, folk and so on – were ably accounted for, the spruce/mahogany back-and-sides combo living up to its reputation as a resolute all-rounder.

Inputting the Neptune to our trusty AER Compact 60, we were able to hear the Fishman Ink in action. 12-strings can be awkward in the electric domain with so many frequencies whirling about the place, fighting for their place in the mix. We found that the controls on the Ink were up to the task, though. A slight midrange scoop, with both Treble and Brightness controls kept in check and just a smidge of Body, did the trick nicely. The end result was a 12-string wash that brought out the Neptune's acoustic good nature perfectly.

The Venus gave us a much smoother EQ ride as it literally took seconds before the Ink preamp gave us a well-balanced amplified sound. Our only criticism of the unit would be that the writing identifying the individual fascia controls is very small and would be difficult to read in low light

5. Fishman's Ink preamp has a comprehensive EQ section, including a separate control for the built-in body sensor

6. Otherwise devoid of fret markers, the Venus's Macassar ebony 'board features a figured maple 'F' at the 12th fret



6



7 Both guitars have their jack sockets handily mounted below the rear strap button

– a typical moody stage lighting setup, for instance. This is a small point and one that familiarity would likely overcome... but it's a point nonetheless.

Verdict

At a time when box-ticking is an essential consideration when laying out around £1.3k for a new guitar, we'd say that both these instruments give a good account of themselves. Build quality, acoustic tone and a good-sounding pickup system that gives a variety of EQ options all feature highly on the wishlist. Factor in a hard

The spruce/mahogany back-and-sides combo of both models here lives up to its reputation as a resolute all-rounder

case, armrest bevel and sultry good looks, and you can hardly lose. Of course, a 12-string is generally an instrument that comes after your six-string acoustic needs have long been met, but if you have one on your shopping list then the Neptune is well worth a look.

Similarly, the Venus is a good all-round acoustic with an appealing set of sonic credentials that would be a worthy partner in either the living room or on stage. Check them out! **G**



FAITH ECLIPSE VENUS E/CUTAWAY

PRICE: £1,259 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: OM/Auditorium cutaway
TOP: Engelmann spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 113mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 381mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 647mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Grover Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassan figured ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Macassan figured ebony w/ Tusq saddle/55mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Ink Body Preamp. Fishman S-Core pickup and under-bridge body sensor
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5.1
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Faith's new Eclipse range includes 3 models – the 2 we have here, plus the Faith Eclipse Neptune E/Cutaway baby-jumbo (£1,259)
LEFT-HANDERS: NO
FINISH: Gloss Black

8/10

PROS Good price, very able pickup system; easy playability; ace sound

CONS Perhaps not everyone is going to enthuse over the black finish; you have to plug the preamp in before being able to use the onboard tuner



FAITH ECLIPSE NEPTUNE E/CUTAWAY 12-STRING

PRICE: £1,389 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Baby jumbo cutaway
TOP: Engelmann spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 654mm
TUNERS: Grover Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/47mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassan figured ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Macassan figured ebony w/ Tusq saddle/57mm
ELECTRICS: Fishman Ink Body Preamp. Fishman S-Core pickup and under-bridge body sensor
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.6/5.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See Venus
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Gloss Black

8/10

PROS Nicely compressed 12-string sound; great build and playability

CONS The small writing on the preamp would be a factor as 12-strings tend to need more tweaking, electronically; likewise the tuner (see Venus)

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Shadow Play

With the trio of upgraded Faith Eclipse acoustics now on the marketplace, we talk to the designer behind the brand, Patrick Eggle

Words David Mead

Patrick's rationale for the Eclipse 12-string was to achieve balance so it "physically works yet is quite ergonomic"



Faith acoustics are everywhere. The chances are if you see a busker in town, an acoustic player at an open mic, or an artist in concert at a local theatre, they will have a Faith in hand. And for good reason. Faith's brief has always been to provide a quality, all-solid wood, acoustic guitar at a reasonable price point, with good looks and great tone as a given. But the acoustic world doesn't stay still for long, and Faith's stage-ready Eclipse models have just undergone a serious upgrade to make them better than ever. Faith's Patrick James Eggle tells us more.

Can you explain more about the origins of the Faith Eclipse series?

"The Eclipse was one of the earliest models and it was originally conceived as a stage guitar. A workhorse instrument to look good under stage lighting while staying within the remit of Faith, which is not to embellish them too much with expensive inlays and what have you. [The idea was to] have a fundamentally well-built instrument using the right tonewoods and proper construction."

Apart from the more obvious upgrades such as the forearm bevel, you've upgraded the pickups as well.

"Yes, we chose the Fishman Ink body preamp system, which marries an undersaddle piezo pickup with a magnetic body sensor under the bridge plate. We did some tests and I listened to a few. Don't ask me to go too deep into the technical side because it's generally not where I do my thing, but it seems to add an overall richness to the amplified tone."

Have there been any structural changes under the hood?

"No, the bracing remains the same and all the fundamentals are [pretty much] unchanged. We've basically replaced the abalone rosette and the 12th-fret inlay with maple instead. So it looks kind of visually striking and goes with the forearm bevel. But it also means they're entirely free from animal products; hopefully that will be a bonus and a good thing."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAITH GUITARS



Faith's Eclipse series comprises three models: Neptune 12-string and six-string models (back left and right), and a six-string Venus (front)

Looking at the Neptune, it's not a large-bodied instrument like a lot of 12-strings tend to be.

"I don't think you necessarily need a whopping great big body. Obviously, the larger the body, the more bass you add and arguably a bit more volume. But a smaller body is a more mid-focused sound. I think the main thing I've found over the years with 12-strings is just getting the balance right with the neck, you know? Getting the string spacing right and all that so you can play the six courses of strings with relative comfort and ease – because it doesn't come naturally to everyone. For years, the only 12-string acoustics I got my hands on, the necks always pulled off after a bit. I earned a lot of money replacing them! I just remember them being extremely cumbersome and uncomfortable to play. So the challenge is just to get the actual balance right so it physically works yet is quite ergonomic."

Are there any changes to the bracing pattern for the 12-string?

"It hasn't got extra reinforcement in it. I think that the X-bracing is slightly less scalloped, and I think the cross braces

"The Eclipse was conceived as a stage guitar. A workhorse to look good under stage lighting"

behind the bridge are larger as well. So you might describe that as extra reinforcement, but I don't think there are any extra braces in there."

Where acoustics are concerned, there are two schools of thought on how the neck should be attached to the body: dovetail or bolt-on. You're an advocate of the latter for the Faiths aren't you?

"Yes, bolt-on neck, glued-down fretboard. And that was part of the original redesign of Faith, probably 19 years ago now.

"A few years before that, I had worked doing guitar restoration and repairs and I've reset a lot of necks – acoustic guitars with dovetail necks. You steam them out and you find that a lot of the dovetail joint is full of wooden shims and glue and air. It looks tight and perfect from the outside,

which is great. But, actually, when you steam it off, you realise that isn't the full picture, and I don't believe that can give you a good transmission of sound or is good for the instrument. If a dovetail joint is a good dovetail joint, then fantastic; I don't have a problem with it at all. But I think it's easier to get a tight, good join [with a bolt-on] than it is with a dovetail. I'm not saying dovetails are worse, I think they're fantastic when they're done properly.

"The other thing was that, at the time, we were using a satin-finished neck and a gloss body. So you can finish the neck and the body separately, you can fit them first to 90 per cent of their fit, and then spray them separately, polish the body, satin-finish the neck, and then do the final fitting right at the end, so you get a nice, clean join. I've never seen a reason to change it."

What about the future for Faith? Is there anything on the horizon that you can share with us?

"Nothing I can tell you about at the moment. But you'll be the first to know when there is!" 

www.faithguitars.com



In With The Nu

Vox extends its Valvenergy range with four
Nutube-driven practical pedals

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis



VOX VALVENERGY PEDALS FROM £159

CONTACT **Korg UK** PHONE **01908 304664** WEB **www.voxamps.co.uk**

What You Need To Know

- 1 These pedals look familiar...**
That's right – that little window in the front marks these out as Vox Valvenergy pedals, which have been around since 2020. The four pedals here are new additions to the range.
- 2 Valvenergy – what's that all about?**
Vox's parent company, Korg, has developed the Nutube, which has many of the characteristics of a conventional vacuum tube (valve) but is much smaller. And it's this technology that powers these pedals.
- 3 So these have a different sound from solid-state pedals?**
Well, the idea is to put valve sound in a pedal. Vox says that the Nutube's "real triode structure produces a warm, unique vacuum tube sound".

W e first looked at the initial set of Valvenergy pedals back in issue 469, and Vox has now introduced another quartet. Where the first set (Mystic Edge, Silk Drive, Cutting Edge and Copperhead Drive) were all drive pedals with each based on a different amp, these new additions are a more varied bunch: an overdrive, boost, graphic EQ and a compressor, all based around a Nutube miniature vacuum tube that aims to add valve-like flavour to the sound.

These are solidly built pedals with a distinctive look due to a metallic top plate with an embossed pattern, and while each one fulfils a different function, they all have common features – the most apparent being the clear OLED display window. A horizontal red strip appears in the display when a pedal is engaged, and the oscilloscope-style display also depicts your changing signal in real-time.

All the pedals also have a Channel Link feature that can come into play if you're using more than one. Basically, when

they're connected by an 1/8-inch cable, you get something similar to an amp's channel switching arrangement: as you switch one pedal, the other(s) becomes bypassed. It could prove useful if you had a compressor on for a clean sound but wanted to lose it when switching overdrive in, for example.

Each pedal takes a standard nine-volt power supply, but be aware that you may not be able to run them from your usual power distributor because they need one that can supply a high current. Vox recommends 600mA or above, likely pointing potential users towards a Korg unit that will do the job at around £20. The pedals can also run from battery power, with easy access for battery changes coming via a plastic panel on the base that you can clip on and off.

Fuel Injector

This overdrive pedal has two toggle-switched modes: Natural has a bit of a scoop in the midrange, but Fat fills that in for more girth. In either mode, you can

1. Link cables are not provided with the pedals – you need a standard 1/8-inch stereo cable to link two together, or a stereo 1/8-inch splitter to link more

2. You can flip the plastic panel off with your thumb for quick access to the battery – but be sure to put it back on straight away so you don't lose it



make good use of a Tone knob, which doesn't go to extremes, instead focusing on finding a sweet spot in the top-end presence to best suit your guitar and amp. With the Drive knob at minimum, you'll find unity gain at around 12 o'clock on the Level knob, so there's plenty of scope for building in a boost, albeit with a smidgeon of dirt already, which increases in a linear fashion as you progress the Drive knob, delivering rich amp-like crunchy drive through to distortion with a solid degree of compression.

A pleasure to play through, this is nicely responsive to playing dynamics, cleaning up decently with your guitar's volume knob, and voiced just right to imbue a certain crispness and clarity to individual strings. It would make a good 'dirty' channel for a clean amp, but it also has the requisites to complement already driven amps.

Power Burst

This one delivers its boost via a single chickenhead knob in three toggle-switch-selected flavours. The Natural setting is simply your straight sound with nothing taken out or added, and you can just add boost from the knob's unity gain starting point. The Treble setting basically keeps your core sound intact while emphasising the high-end, adding some sizzle and clarity to top notes. The Middle setting rolls off bottom-end and pushes the higher portion of the midrange forward. It's not as extreme as a cocked wah sound, but it's something you might use to get your sound to cut through the mix. Vox doesn't give us any figures about how much boost is available in decibels, but there's definitely enough to not leave you wanting.



Both the drive and boost pedals have an oscilloscope-style display where a straight horizontal line will turn into a jagged waveform dependent on knob settings and signal input strength

Smooth Impact

Vox says that the Smooth Impact offers "a novel approach compared [with] traditional VCA, optical or FET compressors [due to the] dynamic gain variations of the Nutube". So, besides the Compression and Output knobs, you get a Tube Gain knob that adjusts the signal level sent to the Nutube with the aim of introducing gradual distortion.

What this means in practice is that you can have compression with a side order of dirt, or you can keep the compression knob at zero and just use the pedal for what is basically a nicely organic low-level drive. Three modes of operation are available: Natural is the most subtle; Vintage is more aggressive, emphasising note attack that's useful for country picking; and Sag is designed to replicate the sag effect of vintage valve amps and offers a nice feel.

There's plenty of variation available here, giving you the option of kicking in the pedal for effect. But we really liked it as an always-on tone conditioner where you can dial in a favoured mix of boost, squash and dirt.

Tone Sculptor

There's a school of thought that says a graphic EQ pedal is the most practical addition you could make to a pedalboard, not just for cutting or boosting selected frequencies that can transform the sound of your guitar or amp but also for the level boost it's capable of.

The Tone Sculptor offers six adjustable frequencies as well as a Level slider that can add up to 12dB, which can make a big impact in hitting the front-end of your amp, or pushing a drive pedal to another level. But the pedal's flexibility lies in the six-band EQ, whether that be in reducing a boomy low-end, initiating a smiley face midrange scoop or a mid-boost to cut through the mix, or creating something quite extreme.

Verdict

Vox may have taken some time to expand the Valvenergy range, but the wait has been worth it as the four newbies here all have plenty to commend them. In the drive pedal world of ever-increasing variations on the same few designs, the Fuel Injector does its own thing and also gives you a flexible range of drive tones to complement any amp. Flexibility is the watchword with the others, too: three flavours of boost from the Power Burst would suit multiple scenarios, as would the Smooth Impact's trio of compression choices with optional dirt, while the Tone Sculptor is exactly what its name states. Check them out in-store. **G**



In the Tone Sculptor's display, a series of blocks roughly relates to the EQ curve and rises vertically according to the input signal level

THE RIVALS

The Nutube isn't quite the same as a conventional valve, but here are some valve-based alternatives to these pedals. Blackstar has the Dept 10 Dual Drive (£199), and Crazy Tube Circuits' Space Charged V2 (£207) has drive and boost, as has the ThorpyFX Electric Lightning (£419).

For valve-based boost, there's the Blackstar Dept 10 Boost with two-band EQ (£139) and Effectrode's Fire Bottle (£249), offering up to 30dB, plus a tone knob. Effectrode is also the place to go for a valve-based compressor in the form of its PC-2A (£299) Tube Compressor. We don't know of a valve-based graphic EQ, but the seven-band Boss GE-7 (£95) is pretty much the industry standard.



VOX VALVENERGY FUEL INJECTOR

PRICE: £159

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Level, Tone, Drive, Fat/Natural switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link jack

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; Nutube circuitry; good range of drive; nicely dialled in Tone knob; two voices

CONS High-current power supply needed and not included; detachable battery cover



VOX VALVENERGY POWER BURST

PRICE: £159

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Boost pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Boost, Treble/Middle switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link jack

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; Nutube circuitry; three tonal flavours; plenty of boost available on tap

CONS High-current power supply needed and not included; detachable battery cover



VOX VALVENERGY SMOOTH IMPACT

PRICE: £169

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Output, Compression, Tube gain, VTG/NAT/SAG switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link jack

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; Nutube circuitry; three compression types

CONS High-current power supply needed and not included; detachable battery cover; no Dry Mix knob



VOX VALVENERGY TONE SCULPTOR

PRICE: £169

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Graphic EQ pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: 6x frequency sliders (100, 250, 570, 800, 2.2k, 5.6k), Level slider, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Link jack

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 600mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

8/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; Nutube circuitry; practical EQ options

CONS High-current power supply needed and not included; detachable battery cover; no notched detent

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« BLUEPRINT »

JANGLE UNCHAINED

Since he rose to glory in the mid-80s with The Smiths, Johnny Marr has been the king of crystalline chime. Now, he reveals how his new M-7 Martin signature – complete with octave G string – puts that shimmering voice at your fingertips

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

Given that it was designed by the man who quit The Smiths at the peak of their powers in 1987 – having single-handedly invented indie-rock – perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that Johnny Marr's new signature Martin M-7 doesn't stick to the script. Teaming with the fabled Pennsylvania-based luthier for the project is a logical move: Marr has been loyal to the Martin brand since he hired his first D-28 for The Smiths' 1985 *Meat Is Murder* album (and refused to give it back).

But from the hybrid body shape to the three-piece back – not to mention the pièce de résistance, an octave G string – the 61-year-old's creation is anything but a cynical rebadge, its widescreen jangle and seventh tuning peg making fans question their eyes and ears when he walks on stage. "You have these instruments that you already think are perfection, so, in my case, the D-28 and D-35," he considers. "But then, when you change or personalise one aspect, you start getting into invention..."

How did this collaboration start?

"Well, Fred Greene [Martin's VP of Product Management] contacted me a

couple of years ago. We got together at a show in Pennsylvania, near the Martin factory, and about halfway through our conversation, I realised I was being invited to invent my dream Martin out of thin air. Which was such a privilege and surprise. What Fred drew out of me were my enthusiasms about different aspects of the guitar. So the M-7 and M-6 [the standard six-string equivalent] were designed very organically. I realised I was daydreaming of this ideal acoustic."

The acoustic has always been in your toolkit, hasn't it?

"Yeah. My connection to acoustic guitars goes back to the very first guitar sound I was drawn to, which was the strumming of Don Everly on *Wake Up Little Susie*. But at the same time, also, *C'mon Everybody* by Eddie Cochran, where the acoustics are layered and loud. There's this idea that acoustic guitars are about fingerpicking and folk accompaniment. I'm an acolyte of Bert Jansch, so I can testify to that. But that really loud, layered, straightforward strumming on those rock 'n' roll records is a singular sound. You hear Jeff Lynne pay homage to it on *Runnin' Down A Dream* by Tom Petty. Or *Queen Of Hearts*

by Dave Edmunds. They're all echoes of this signature technique that snagged me when I was six or seven.

"I've had a lifetime of doing this now, all my adult life. And I've always incorporated acoustic guitars into what I do. I mean, this thing I'm talking about – just really driving the acoustic into the ground – I did it on a song from my last solo album called *Counter Clock World*. Other times, I'm playing in tunings, which is something I got from Joni Mitchell, via David Crosby. Through all the records I've made, I was very deliberate in putting acoustic guitars to the foreground."

You've said Rory Gallagher was the player who turned you onto Martins?

"Well, that was the first time I ever saw a D-35, when Rory used to do *Out On The Western Plain*. Sadly, but luckily for me, I got to play that very D-35, not long after Rory passed away. And then, my D-28 that I got in the Smiths days in around '85 – I hired that, and within about 10 minutes, I said to myself, 'This is not going back.' That one has magic in it, and I've done a lot with it over the years. But then, almost to break out of that, when I started playing with Bert, I used a 70s D-35.

"The concept was [for the M-7] to behave like a regular six-string but have something that just delights your ear"

Johnny Marr has been a Martin devotee since he first got his hands on a D-28 for The Smiths' *Meat Is Murder* album in 1985



1. Both models are equipped with LR Baggs' Anthem pickup and mic system

2. Solid East Indian rosewood features on the guitars' backs and sides, and there's no room for "any satin finish nonsense" on the neck back, says Johnny



PHOTOS BY ERIC DOWD, COURTESY OF MARTIN

"When I was a kid, I could name the owner and whereabouts of every guitar within a 20-mile radius. And as an adult, I can reel off a whole load of musicians and what acoustic guitar they own. For example, Bernard Butler's got an amazing J-200, as does Ronnie Wood. Then again, one of the best D-28s I ever played belonged to Beth Orton. They really make an impression on me, these guitars. Always have done."

Let's talk about the M-7's flagship feature. What inspired that octave G?

"My friend Bill Puplett – who is sadly no longer with us, but he worked on my guitars from 1987 – we had a conversation about a British blues player in the 60s. I've forgotten his name, but he added an extra tuning peg, pin and string to his acoustic, and pioneered this seven-string model. I also saw Roger McGuinn talking about his signature model on stage in the late 90s. I'd never played a seven-string – or heard one in person. But the concept intrigued me and I hoped it would do what I thought it'd do, which was to behave, technically, like a regular six-string acoustic but have something that just delights your ear."

Sonically, the M-7 seems like a close cousin of a 12-string?

"Over the years, I've always kept up playing 12-string. Every so often, I'll go through phases of playing 12-string to keep my acoustic chops up and not get lazy. And then, a few days into that,

"Regular six-strings almost sound like they're missing something to me now"

I always go through the same thing, which is, I think, 'I'm going to get rid of every six-string I own. There isn't a better sound than this, and anyone who bitches about them being hard to grapple with – buy a tuner.'

"However, sometimes you just don't want all of that high-octave stuff. So my M-7 does what you think it's going to do, but it sounds like it's got added production on it. When I've been using it live, I tend to forget that it's even got the high octave on it. And then, sometimes, I'll really dig in and make a point of playing a little more around that octave. I've been living with it now for a long time and I've found that regular six-strings almost sound like they're missing something to me now."

It's that little bit of extra harmonic information, isn't it?

"Exactly. Within minutes, you forget it's there. But you'd notice if it disappeared. In spite of that, it was my idea to do the six-string version [M-6] because when I was talking to other players, I could see that when I said 'seven-string', they got stuck on that information and I had to qualify what I'd done by saying, 'But even

without the seventh string, it's still a great instrument.' I thought we should offer people who may only want one luxury instrument the option of not having that seventh string.

"The six-string version is killer anyway because of all the other things about it. Y'know, the bracing, the shallower M-style body, the three-piece back, et cetera. The neck, as well, is not trying to be all things to all men. Which I find frustrating with some modern guitars because in trying to please everyone, sometimes the feel is just so generic. So I was very specific about the dimensions and absolutely adamant that we didn't have any satin finish nonsense on the back."

You're not a fan of satin necks?

"As I understand it, satin necks were a 90s idea. But I'm of the opinion: 'If it's too problematic moving your hand up and down a glossy neck, you're in the wrong job, mate.' I used to read that in the 80s with some metal players: 'Oh, I can't handle it when there's too much gloss on the neck.' The only person who's allowed to say that is Eddie Van Halen. I've got friends who have taken sandpaper to the neck because they can't handle the gloss. But it's like, 'Stop being a baby. Put the hours in and wear it down yourself.'"

How did you settle on the body shape?

"The seventh string was the first thing I thought of, and then the dimensions of the M-7 was the last remaining piece. I said to Martin, 'Can I make the front like a D-28

"Without a pick, it really holds up. But then, if you hammer it like a rhythm guitar, it sounds like The Who"



In developing his signatures, Marr was after a specific body shape and depth: "I said to Martin, 'Can I make the front like a D-28 and the back like a D-35: has anyone ever done that?'"



3. Johnny worked with Jen Tabor of Souldier to create this exclusive 70s-style strap with a peacock pattern and debossed signature

4. The M-7 offers a touch of that 12-string harmonic magic, without the excessive tuning requirements



PHOTOS BY ERIC DOWD COURTESY OF MARTIN

and the back like a D-35: has anyone ever done that? What I love about both the six- and seven-string version is that the bottom is essentially the size of a dreadnought but the depth means that if you want to play unaccompanied arpeggios and do the West Coast thing – without a pick, just with fingers – it really holds up. But then, if you hammer it like a rhythm guitar, it sounds like The Who.”

Martin acoustics have a reputation for mighty bottom-end.

“That’s right. I’ve got a friend in a well-known band, and he’s sometimes peeved me about my use of Martins because he says they have unnecessary bottom-end. My retort was always: ‘Well, you need to learn to play properly using the lower strings and start writing songs in tunings.’ Because he’s a Hummingbird and J-200 freak.

“But with my signature models, I’m trying to do that thing where they sound good recorded and they will take that really punchy rhythm playing. That’s why I say it sounds like The Who. I think a bit of that is down to them being slightly shallower than the dreadnought, but they still have the rest of those dreadnought dimensions.”

Do you find the M-6 and M-7 more comfortable than a dreadnought?

“Well, that was an unexpected bonus. As soon as it arrived, I went, ‘Oh, hello – I could get used to this.’ I’ve been touring with my seven-string and I don’t miss that

“I don’t miss that extra depth of a dreadnought, particularly on stage through a PA”

extra depth of a dreadnought, particularly on stage when you’re going through a PA. You absolutely don’t need it. As for the electronics [LR Baggs Anthem], I just went with Martin’s advice. I’ve used them live and they sound great.”

The new guitar sounds like it would really sing with a capo.

“I almost use capos too much. I’m trying to wean myself off ‘em somewhat. I’m not joking. Just Google pictures of me: more often than not I’m using capos, and so many times on the 4th fret. For some reason, guitars like capos on the 4th fret; they sing out really well. In my live show, I move capos around all the time. That’s something I learnt really young, when I was copying players like Stephen Stills, and what Bert, Martin Carthy and John Renbourn were doing. These days, on electric, I use G7th capos, but the last few I’ve been using [on acoustic] were actually my old Jim Dunlops, believe it or not. They’re fantastic.”

The spruce top and rosewood body have a lovely warm finish.

“I was really pleased to get the top colour

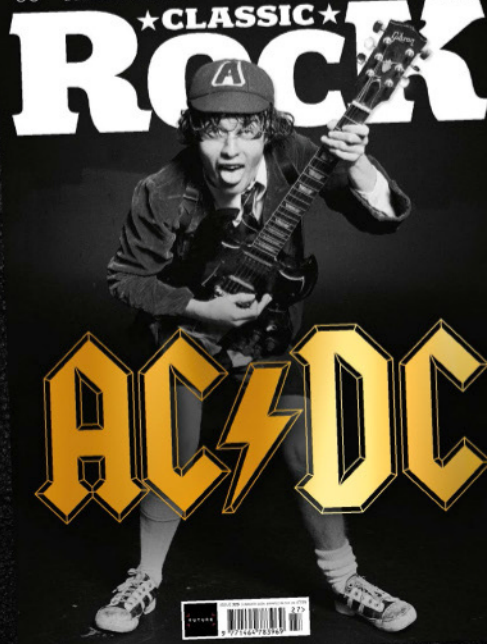
in a shade that I consider to be ‘classic’. Because there’s a lot of acoustics that come out, for some reason, in a shade I don’t like. Martin were great about it. I drove them a bit mad about the shade. And I had the option to relic it, but I wasn’t going to do that, given my feelings about the neck. The thing about old guitars is that people beat them up through playing them, and that’s what I wanted. If someone buys one of my guitars, one day it will be old. It doesn’t need to come out of the box looking pseudo-old.”

Finally, what inspired the retro-cool Souldier strap supplied with the new guitars?

“I’ve had all kinds of different designs with Souldier, and when I came to do these acoustics I wanted a classic colour scheme, and Jen [Tabor, founder] gave me a few options. Because I was a kid in the 70s, I was seeing a lot of acoustic players, so I went for a sort of 70s style. I get quite obsessive about these things, so I tried out way more designs than I ought to have, but I got there in the end. I remember when you couldn’t get decent straps – I call them the dark times. In the 80s, when I was coming up in the Smiths days... Oh, man. I’d go into guitar shops and could I find one without skull and crossbones on? No. So it’s definitely progress!” **G**

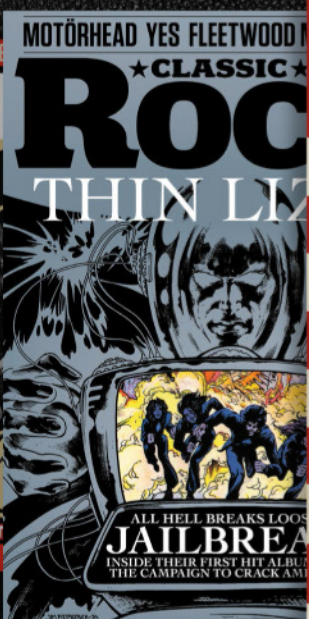
Johnny Marr’s M-6 and M-7 are available now from Martin Guitars. See the website for more information www.martinguitar.com

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YVETTE YOUNG

The sometime teacher and modern-day math-rocker recounts the gear that's made an impact – and gives us a rundown on her most-loved rig



PHOTO BY ELL CHAVEZ

A sneak peek of Yvette's latest Ibanez signature model that's set to debut next year, featuring Wilkinson P-90s

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

"That one's interesting! And I have two answers. The first guitar I had was a C1-E acoustic that I actually taught myself guitar on. It's one that I got during high school, when I was trying to write my own stuff and trying to learn. And then the first actual serious guitar that I had was an SX Tele[-style model] that I traded for a drum machine [laughs]. At the time, I didn't have any money, but my friend Ethan from Louisiana needed a drum machine, and he was like, 'Yeah, I'll give you my Tele for a drum machine.' So he's kind of responsible for me playing electric guitar."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"Let me think... I feel rather privileged because I have the Ibanez endorsement [Yvette's signature YY10 and YY20 models, with a new P-90 version also in the works]. I haven't really had to ever buy another electric guitar. But I purchased a nylon-string acoustic from Brazil because I just love how nylon-strings sound – and because I wanted something that was a little more dead-sounding."

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

"This is more gear-related, but I scored a really cool reel-to-reel recently for, like, \$100 [laughs]. That was really good, really nice. It needed some repairs, but that was pretty exciting."

"I love shopping in person. I have to hear it before I decide to buy – and comfort and feel are so important, too"

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

"My worst case of buyer's remorse was probably an impulse-buy banjo [laughs]. I was third-wheeling on a date, and I felt awkward and needed to fill the void with an unnecessary purchase. I never play it because the high string trips me out. I wish I got a banjitar instead!"

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

"I have actually never sold a guitar! But I loaned an acoustic guitar to someone. It was a really nice Cort acoustic guitar that I lent one of my students. But then they moved, took it with them and I won't ever get it back. So that wasn't a trade and I didn't sell it; it was more like, 'I'm loaning it to you to learn,' and then they just took it."

YVETTE'S GO-TO RIG

"Right now, I'm playing my P-90 [Ibanez] Talman, which is something I'm working on releasing to the public. So it's the P-90 Talman through a Silktone, which is kind of a boutique amp, and I love it. It's so balanced and nice. I usually play [Vox] AC30s, but I kind of love how I can get something out of the Silktone without losing definition and clarity. Charles Henry is the best – I'll hype him forever, he's an outstanding person; I think he's brilliant. Those amps really sound so smooth, and I feel like they just make me play better.

"Pedal-wise, I've got an EarthQuaker Devices Warden [optical compressor], and I'm using the Meris MercuryX for my chorus, vibrato and reverb sounds. Then I've got a Boss OC-6 [Octave], an Electronic Audio Experiments Longsword [overdrive]. I've also got an EarthQuaker Avalanche Run delay and an MXR Carbon Copy delay. I've been using a lot of DigiTech stuff, like the Whammy Ricochet [pitch shifter], and the Hologram [Electronics] Microcosm [granular effects pedal], which is absolutely essential for me."



PHOTO BY DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

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

"You have to try it. You have to feel it. You have to see how it makes you feel. You have to spend time with it and really see if it inspires music out of you. I've played guitars that look cool and have the hype, but they just feel kind of uninspired to me. But I've played guitars that I don't know if they'd really aesthetically be my first choice, but they just feel and sound amazing.

"So I would say you need to make sure you try the guitar in your own rig, too. Sometimes, if you're playing out of another amp, it might be brighter than you're used to. Try to simulate the environment that you're going to be using the guitar in as accurately as you can. Don't go by looks because you're not going to pick up a guitar that looks good but feels like crap."

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

"I was looking at mics because I've been really getting into recording myself. Honestly, I've been looking at a lot of Universal Audio stuff and plug-ins. I'm looking for stuff that can do what some of my pedals do – and I've been hunting for a really nice cello because I want to learn cello.

"I love my local music store in the Bay Area, Guitar Showcase. Such lovely staff there, and they have a

pretty nice vintage selection from what I remember. I love shopping in person. It's music, so I have to hear it before I decide to buy – and comfort and feel are so important, too."

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 feel like a cheap guitar and a good amp because 'cheap guitar' doesn't mean a bad guitar. I have plenty of guitars that are cheap, but I feel like they still sound really impressive for the price point. I think that with an amp, it's like ruining a really nice audio file with... I don't know... something that's going to degrade it a lot. There's no point, right? I'd rather go for the expensive amp."

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

"Single coils are articulate, dynamic and twinkly. For the style that I play, I just need a lot of dynamics, so I'd have to go with single coils." **[AD]**



Yvette Young's latest single, *Always*, is available now on independent release

<https://yvetteyoungmusic.com>

Yvette pictured at this year's NAMM Show in California, where she presented her new signature multi-effects pedal, the Walrus Audio Qi Etherealizer. Read more from Yvette in our NAMM Report on page 31

PHOTO FINISH

After some weeks of delay and procrastination, Dave Burrluck finally gets around to considering a finish for his Maybury/Sunbear collaboration

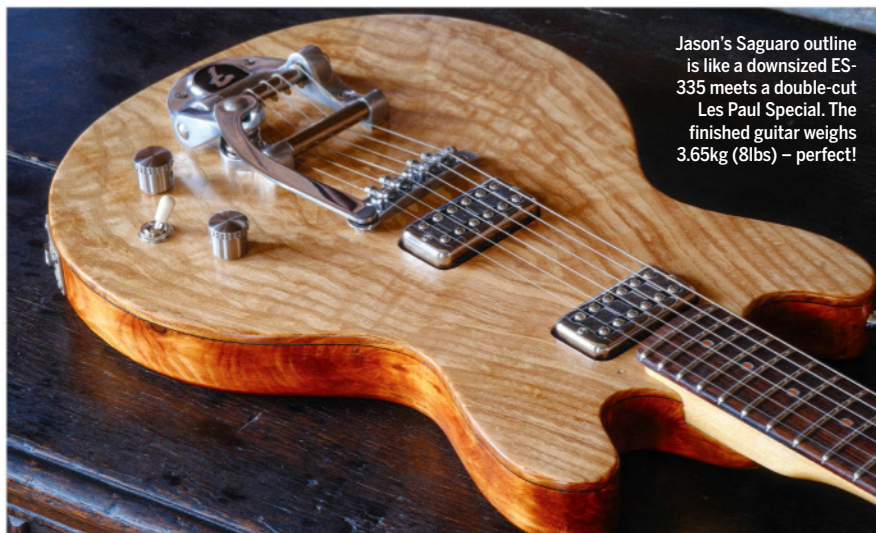
Back in issue 518 I'd begun a custom build with Jason Snelling at Maybury Guitars. We wanted to create something a little different from the Fender-style partscaster builds that many of us end up creating, purely out of convenience. The idea was that The Mod Squad would supply the parts (pre-used if possible) and Jason would create a body based on his own Saguaro outline using recycled wood: the top is a slice of figured-ash chopping board, and the quite heavily chambered back is from old pine that was salvaged from the office of a long-ago-demolished garage.

Because Jason had done such a good job of lining everything up, putting it together in the white – without a finish – was pretty easy, even though I got a bit delayed discussing the offset bridge options (issue 520). It may seem odd to put a guitar together, wire it up, then string and set it up... only to then dismantle it all before applying a finish. But effectively, because this wasn't a run-of-the-mill partscaster, I had no idea if all these separate parts would actually amount to a viable instrument. I was actually creating a bare-wood 'prototype'.

Having been a fully functioning guitar for these past weeks, prototype or not, it's had plenty of use. And the combination of that outline, the good weight, a nice ring and, of course, those Sunbear Beartron pickups has created a pretty viable design that completely unwittingly pulls in a nod to the big three – that is, Gibson, Fender and Gretsch.

Serendipity

But how exactly I was going to finish the guitar became less and less obvious



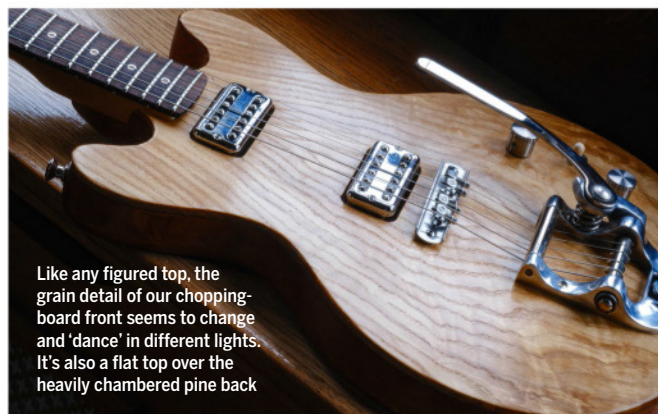
Jason's Saguaro outline is like a downsized ES-335 meets a double-cut Les Paul Special. The finished guitar weighs 3.65kg (8lbs) – perfect!

by the day. Spending rather too long on Instagram checking out guitar makers – plenty that I knew, and plenty that I didn't – I began to imagine quite a few mental moodboards. At one point, I was researching silver paint, which I thought might look good over the chopping-board front in a sort of light wash. I was then reminded of Patch Rubin's Wide Sky guitars – he's another who has a sort of downsized ES-335 model, typically with a figured top and an oh-so-tasty-looking old burnished finish. Would that work? Then there's Carmine Street Guitars in New York who crafts rather wonderful looking instruments using old pine from demolished buildings – "the bones of New York City".

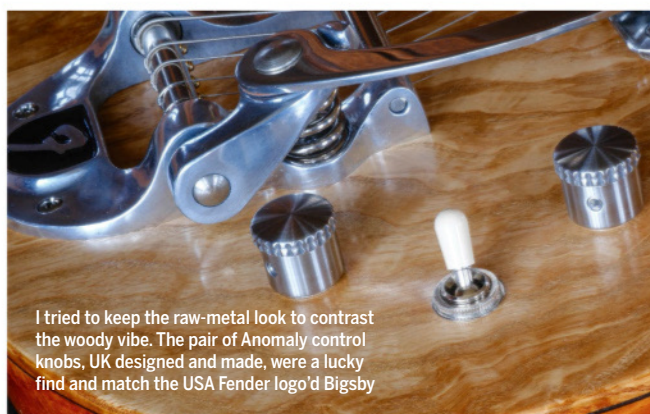
I assembled quite a long list but with no obvious front-runner, not least that in these long winter months *any* finish work needs to be carried out indoors.

Meanwhile, I'd been organising some reviews with George Lowden who was keen to send us his new electric model. With no PR or anything while we discussed delivery logistics, I was a little surprised when I eventually got to open the case and saw the GL-J (reviewed in issue 521). Frankly, it's not a million miles away in style to Jason's Saguaro outline, a sort of downsized Gibson ES-335.

Now, the GL-J is built with all the experience and care that Lowden has proven over these past 50 years, and I'm reminded that the finish really just enhances the natural beauty and colour of the wood used. There are no 1950s car colours here, glossy or reliced. Originally, Lowden used an oil/wax finish on its electric models, but it has subsequently moved over to its standard acrylic finish, which is cut back and hand-buffed to that hallmark slinky smooth satin.



Like any figured top, the grain detail of our chopping-board front seems to change and 'dance' in different lights. It's also a flat top over the heavily chambered pine back



I tried to keep the raw-metal look to contrast the woody vibe. The pair of Anomaly control knobs, UK designed and made, were a lucky find and match the USA Fender logo'd Bigsby



This collaboration with Jason Snelling and Stuart Robson might have started with some pretty disparate parts, but the finished guitar has a strong voice. There's just something about 'Trons and a Bigsby



1



2



3

1. This pair of Sunbear Beartrons was previously used to revoice a Shergold guitar. The control circuit is simple: 550k CTS pots and an Orange Drop .022µF capacitor

2. Having tried an original Jazzmaster bridge and Fender American Pro Mustang-style bridge, I settled on this beautifully designed and machined Mastery Offset bridge

3. The Wilkinson kit neck originally had a Fender-style headstock outline that Jason Snelling remodelled into this shape. I haven't fitted a string tree in an attempt to maximise the offset-style resonance. Tuners are old split-post Gotohs

Now, while our build isn't quite in the same league in terms of the timber used – far from it! – it still has some character. The hard chopping-board ash top has a pretty strong figure that seems to move under different lighting. Rather oddly, too, in the few images I'd taken of the guitar, it almost looks like the top is carved, not flat. The back, meanwhile, is a rather bland-looking pine, but there's some dramatic swirling grain on show and even knots that look like little pictures on the sides and back. It's not AAAA or suchlike, but it does have character – a part of the instrument's story that I don't want to lose.

After much deliberation (aka procrastination), I decide on a pretty simple finish that's easy enough to do at home and will just deepen – and hopefully enhance – the natural wood. Basically, my plan is to apply some wood dye to the body to enrich the colour and figure, and then seal it with a simple French polish. The neck is quite plain and white when unfinished, so I'll keep things fast and simple and use a light toning stain then a standard oil and wax application. Will it work? I don't know.

Preparation

Doing a few colour tests on an additional piece of chopping board Jason had sent me, along with some strips of pine, my wood dyes and French polishes are all looking a

little too muted or dark. I want – or at least want to aim for – the richer and deeper colouring that those Wide Sky guitars have, or that natural deep-chocolate of the Lowden's Tasmanian blackwood top, or perhaps even that beautiful richness of colour of an old violin.

I order up some 100ml samples of Morrells Light Fast Wood Stain (spirit-based-stain fast-dry easy application) in Honey Pine, Golden Oak and Antique Mahogany, which should enliven and augment the deeper stains I already have in the Mod Squad cupboard.

Disassembling the custom Saguario is a faster job than its assembly, and with the exception of the bridge thumbwheels (which aren't coming out), I'm back to the two wood parts: neck and body with all the bits safely stored.

As you might have realised by now, Jason Snelling is a diligent man and so very little prep of the wood parts is needed – he'd already done a superb job. I lightly resand both neck and body with some 320-grit Finishing Sandpaper from Wickes, then some 400- and 600-grit wet & dry paper (Halfords or similar is a good source). Once that's done, I wipe the wood with a damp cloth and, when dry, it will have very slightly raised the grain so you then cut back with the last grade of paper you've used. I go a little finer with 800-grit wet & dry on that maple neck,

4. Jason's Saguario model is usually a set-neck design, but with the Fender-style neck he improvised with this rounded heel and inset washers for the neck screws

5. I didn't quite achieve the 'old-floorboard' look for the salvaged pine back, but the idea is there. Jason also used a chopping-board backplate to cover the electronics cavity

6. These knots and swirling grain look like little pictures on the body. There are a few dings and filled cracks, too, which are all part of the old pine character



which is going to receive just a Danish Oil finish. Finally, I give it a good rub with 0000 wire wool to achieve an almost burnished finish.

Before you start staining or finishing, you need to give a bit of thought to the application and drying. I decide to treat the body as two processes: the pine back and the chopping-board wood top. I start with the back, which is easy to hold via the pickup cavities, then leave it

“Partnered with some pretty high-level hardware, the sound is anything but ‘homemade’”

to dry resting on a MusicNomad Cradle Cube neck support: perfect. Using that Morrells Golden Oak, diluted a little with methylated spirit, I begin wiping on some colour to the pine – and with all its swirling grain and knots, it produces a quite random and well-used floorboard kind of look. I’d love to say I know what I’m doing here, but eventually after using both dark and clear French polish to seal the stain I have – sort of – what I’d intended.

In between coats I give the neck a very light wipe with the Honey Pine stain

(again slightly diluted), which enhances some light figure and just deepens the colour. When that’s dry I slowly apply three coats of Danish Oil after letting each coat dry. You can’t rush drying time. And rather than going ‘bare wood and used’, there’s a quite proper-looking gloss to the neck finish, which I decide to keep. The beauty of a thin finish such as this is that if I want to go down the old-Fender look and feel at a later stage, I can.

At this rather advanced stage, I’m still not exactly sure of the top colour. While I’ve considered toning it to a darker hue inspired by the natural colours of Lowden’s build and its high-end timbers, time to get this all done is fast running out. After giving the top a coat of sanding sealer, which really enhances the vivid grain (and dries very quickly), I decide to leave it there and simply wipe on a couple more coats of the sealer.

The final job, once everything is dry, is to lightly cut back with 600-grit to level and 0000 to matt the finish down, and then I use a Briwax to hand-buff to a light burnished sheen.

Final Thoughts

With the finished guitar, well, finished and playing really rather nicely, I think I’ve achieved my goal of creating something a little different from the usual partscaster Fender-style build. Of course,

that difference has only been only possible on the Mod Squad’s kitchen table with the considerable outside help of Jason Snelling, which would add to your outlay in the real world.

But the ‘difference’ is not only about a body outline; I’m not sure I’ve ever encountered an electric guitar with quite these specs – and especially not one that uses recycled materials. The chopping-board top is really rather fabulous, isn’t it? And partnered with some pretty high-level performance hardware and pickups, the overall quality of sound is anything but ‘homemade’.

We’re not talking about creating a saleable product – some of my finishing and fine detailing wouldn’t satisfy our review criteria (understatement). But that isn’t the point. For someone who built their first guitar back in the 70s, I’m definitely still learning, and although you shouldn’t underestimate the time involved, it’s still quite a rush to create your *own* instrument, whatever path you take. Above all, a project such as this just deepens my respect for all the proper guitar makers out there. This lark ain’t easy. **G**

With many thanks to Jason Snelling (www.mayburyguitars.co.uk), Stuart Robson (www.sunbearpickups.com) and Trev Wilkinson’s guitar kits (www.scan.co.uk and www.stewmac.com)



Huw Price's Nitty Gritty

Aptly nicknamed the 'TV Front Deluxe', the 5A3 is the 5E3's older sibling

Fender 5A3 Deluxe

Say the words 'Tweed Deluxe' and most guitarists will automatically think of the 5E3 that is so closely associated with Neil Young, Mike Campbell, Larry Carlton, The Edge and pretty much every guitarist in the Eagles. But the 5E3 was just the last in a line of Tweed Deluxes that began in 1949 with the 5A3 and developed from the even earlier Model 26 'Woodie' Deluxe.

Every iteration had a pair of cathode biased 6V6 power valves, but there were some significant differences. The 5A3, 5B3 and 5C3 all had octal preamp valves, with smaller nine-pin valves only appearing in the 5D3 and 5E3. Negative feedback from the speaker output was unique to the 5C3, and for the 5E3 Fender reconfigured the inputs and changed the phase inverter from paraphase to cathodyne.

There were other changes in component values, speaker connections and so forth, but when refurbishing a vintage Tweed Deluxe, or indeed any small or medium-sized tweed Fender, the process is largely the same – as we'll see with this 1950 5A3.

The Main Thing

This amp would have left the factory with a two-prong mains plug and no ground connection. Fender connected a capacitor from one of the mains wire connections to the chassis, and its purpose was to provide radio frequency shielding and minimise noise. It was intended for the neutral wire to be connected to the capacitor, but two-prong US plugs can go into wall sockets upside down, and if the live wire ended up going to the capacitor as a result, you could



get a mild shock from touching the chassis. If the capacitor ever shorted out in the US, you'd get an unpleasant 55-volt shock, but in the UK it could be a potentially lethal 240-volt shock – which is why it's known as the 'death cap'.

Vintage die-hards may not agree, but the simple way to avoid shocks is to ditch the 'death cap' and fit a modern mains wire with a three-prong plug and a ground wire attached to the chassis. This amp already had one fitted, but the ground wire was just tacked onto the chassis with solder, rather than mechanically fixed, and the 'death cap' remained.

After draining all residual charge from the circuit, I drilled a small hole in the

chassis for a solder tag and used a star washer and nylon nut to ensure it would stay fixed. The modern safety protocol is to connect the white neutral wire directly to the mains transformer. The black live wire goes first to the fuse, then to the power switch and finally to the mains transformer. I also fitted a modern strain relief into the chassis for the mains cable to prevent it from being pulled out.

I would never begin working on a vintage amp before it's securely grounded and properly connected to the mains. It's also worth mentioning that the 'death cap' I pulled out from this amp had started to disintegrate, so maybe I sorted it just in the nick of time.



1. The amp arrived with a modern mains wire installed, but the ground wire was tack-soldered to the chassis and the 'death capacitor' was still wired in
2. This is how the 'death capacitor' looked when it was removed
3. This chassis ground connection is the most important solder joint in the amplifier; you can see the new strain relief clip in the rear corner



PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

The 'TV Front' tweed amps, such as this 5A3 from 1950, followed the original Fender-branded 'Woodie' models of the mid-to-late 1940s

WARNING

Working on valve amplifiers is dangerous and potentially lethal, so this feature is intended as an overview, rather than a step by step guide to maintaining and modifying. If you're unsure how to make an amplifier safe to work on, please leave it to a qualified professional.





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4. Original-spec 16 μ F filter capacitors were installed along with two five-watt 10k dropping resistors

5. Mallory 150 capacitors will be inserted and sealed inside these repro paper tubes to combine vintage looks with modern reliability and safety

6. After sealing the ends with brown-tinted epoxy glue, the reassembled capacitors were dipped in molten paraffin wax and then in a vacuum cleaner bag to coat them in dust

7. There's no technical requirement to recreate the vintage look, but it is a lot of fun to do!

Filter Capacitors

This amp had been refurbished fairly recently, but the previous tech installed three 22 μ F capacitors, rather than the original-spec 16 μ F. This is often done to tighten up the amplifier's sound – but if that's your priority, then a Tweed Deluxe is probably the wrong amp for you. The owner asked me to return it to stock values because he prefers the natural smoothness and compression that's part of the Tweed Deluxe character.

Besides valves and replacement transformers, filter capacitors are probably the most expensive components when you're restoring an amplifier. There are cheaper options than the Sprague Atoms I fitted here, but I have always found them reliable. Two 10k dropping resistors bridge the three positive leads from the capacitors. The

originals were still in the amp, but they looked tired and I installed new five-watt rated resistors as a precaution.

Any electrolytic capacitors from the early 1950s are going to be long past their use-by date, so I always replace them as part of the refurb process. In this case, they had recently been swapped out for Spragues, so I was able to skip this step. When you're replacing electrolytic capacitors, make sure you get the positive and negative leads the right way around.

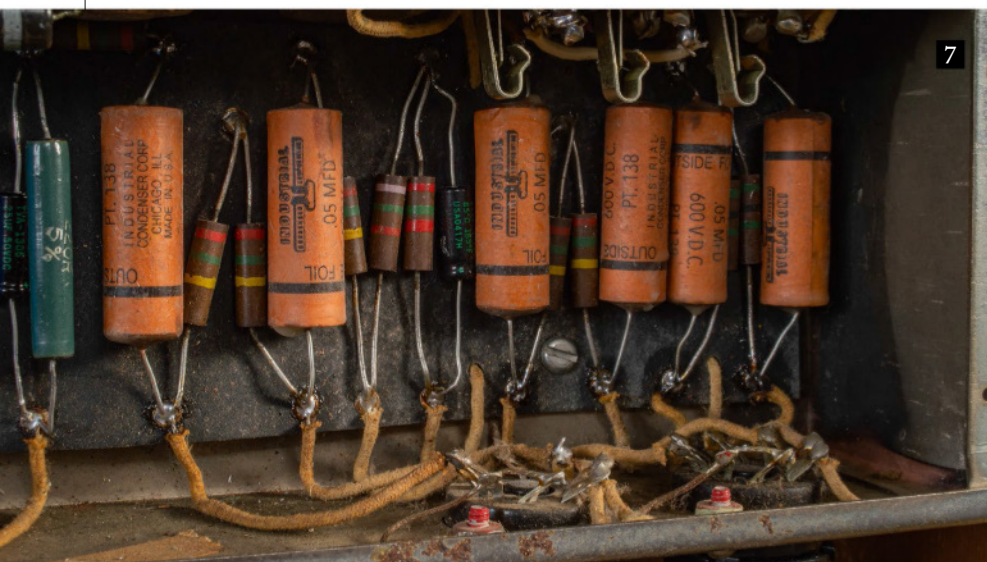
Cannelloni Caps

This amp had been treated to a thorough makeover, and all of the signal capacitors had been removed and replaced with Sprague 'Orange Drops'. These were a perfectly valid choice and I have no doubt that all the originals would have been leaky and therefore a danger to the

amplifier. Leaky capacitors can cause power valves to 'red plate', and this can result in destroyed valves and blown output transformers. In fact, that might be why the 6V6s and output transformer in this 5A3 were replaced.

Some vintage amp enthusiasts frown upon changing any components, but my view is that safety and reliability are more important than originality. Fender amps were designed for easy maintenance and component changes, but there is

The paper/foil capacitors would have been stuffed into cardboard rolls and dipped in wax



7

something wonderful about a circuit board that looks original.

In vintage restoration circles, it's common practice to stuff modern capacitors into original casings for aesthetic reasons, and you can do the same with some vintage guitar amp capacitors. The paper/foil capacitors Fender installed in this amp would have been stuffed into cardboard rolls that were sealed at each end and dipped in wax.

If the original capacitors are still with an amp, you can take them off the board and bake them in the oven at around 100 degrees centigrade for about five minutes. This softens any wax and glue, then the paper-and-foil roll can be pushed out of the cardboard tubes. In this case, the original capacitors were long gone, so I made my own tubes instead.

This involved recreating the graphics as closely as possible and printing the design onto a piece of orange craft paper I bought at The Range. The original dimensions were 38mm long and 12.7mm in diameter, so I cut out the paper, applied wood glue to the inside surface and wrapped it around a 10mm dowel to dry. Covering the dowel with plastic wrapping tape prevents the tube from sticking to the wood, and I ended up with six rigid tubes.

To improve the colour, I sprayed the tubes with amber-tinted clear lacquer and they were ready to stuff. The internal diameter does restrict the choice of signal capacitors, but Mallory 150s fit nicely. The other advantage is that they're inexpensive, easy to source and I think they sound excellent. Back in my amp-reviewing days I would routinely take a look inside, and the amps I liked best usually had Mallorys. If they're good enough for Carr and Swart...

Oscillation Degradation

On all the Deluxe models up to but not including the 5E3, you will often find a 0.0001µF 'stability' capacitor wired between the plates of the phase inverter valve. Fender installed this because the signals on the plates are in opposite polarity, so any high-frequency oscillation will cancel out. In fact, the same principle was used by some amp manufacturers for tone control – or rather treble roll-off – by combining a capacitor with a potentiometer.

Fender used a 0.0001µF capacitor to confine this phase cancellation to the very highest frequencies, but there were problems from the get go because the value was actually too large. A 100pF capacitor is the same sort of value that is often used as a bright capacitor in Fenders and Marshalls. If 100pF can be used to add brightness, when wired across the phase inverter plates it will inevitably reduce brightness.

But it gets even worse because the capacitor type Fender used tended to drift upwards in value as it aged. The one in this amp actually measured 350pF, which brought the roll-off even further down into the upper midrange frequencies. And as if that wasn't bad enough, the capacitor tested leaky at 150 volts, which is more or less the voltage you would expect to see on the phase inverter plates. The result was a dramatic reduction in volume as well as treble.

Whenever I've worked on push-pull tweed Fenders from this era, which also include TV Front Pros and V Front Supers, I've found that they come alive when the oscillator cap is removed. I've



8. This little oscillation capacitor was installed as a precaution, but if you still have one in an early tweed Fender, it's probably killing your tone

9. The two instrument inputs in the middle and right of the photo are both the same level, and used individually half of the guitar signal goes to ground

10. For high/low inputs, separate the switch and ground solder tags, place a 1M resistor between the high tip connection and the ground and switch tags, and connect the low switch and high tip tags

never noticed any issues with oscillation, but the capacitor was used to protect the 6V6 valves.

If you do feel a capacitor should be there, Cricklewood Electronics sells a blue 100pF polypropylene capacitor rated at 630 volts that will do the job. It can even be housed inside the original cardboard tube if you want to retain the original look. Maybe experiment with smaller values such as 22pF or 47pF, but ensure the capacitor voltage rating comfortably exceeds 300 volts.

Highs & Lows

All the Deluxe models before the 5E3 had three inputs: one was for a microphone and the other two were mixer inputs for instruments. The mic input is very hot because there is no grid stopper resistor between the jack socket and the grid of the first valve, and if you plug in a guitar, you get a dark and thick overdrive tone.

Used individually, the instrument inputs are both 'low' in nature because the 75k grid stopper resistors combine to dump half the guitar signal to ground. Since nobody shares amplifiers these days, this feature is of no practical use and prevents the amp from delivering its full potential. Fortunately, it's easy to reconfigure the

instrument inputs to high and low, and modified load impedances will be roughly 1M and 150R respectively. Do a Google search for '5E3 input wiring' and it's easy to figure out.

Clear Bias

Checking amp bias is dangerous and you shouldn't attempt it unless you really know what you're doing. Even so, ensuring an amplifier is properly biased is essential when it's being serviced or restored. There are various methods of doing it, but we don't have the space to get into them here. As usual, I found the bias a little cool with the original 250R cathode bias resistor, and dropping the value to 220R got the bias exactly where I wanted it.

Although less revered than the 5E3, a modified 5A3 more than holds its own and produces a smoother overdrive with fatter midrange. It's not quite as loud or aggressive, especially with the original speaker installed, but it's not as fuzzy sounding, either. Of the two, I prefer 5A3s and they remain cheaper than 5E3s, but the days when you could find one for under £1,000 are sadly gone. 

www.huwpriceguitar.com

With thanks to Tony Berrington



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

This all-original mid-60s Strat is distinguished by a rare combination of factory features

1964 Stratocaster



Inca Silver Stratocasters are very rare and this 1964 example is one of very few to have left the factory with gold hardware

You could probably count on one hand the number of Inca Silver Stratocasters with gold hardware that Fender made. Even though gold hardware was very inexpensive, maybe five per cent on top of the price of the guitar back then, most people didn't want to pay extra. Gold hardware on a silver guitar might seem like it's a bit too much, but whoever had the foresight to order this must have realised it would look fantastic.

"The paintwork is still very silver and it hasn't greened up. There are some blemishes on the back, and the neck finish has worn through quite a bit because this guitar was played. This is a loved guitar that retains its original white case and weighs just 7lb 3oz [3.26kg].

"Because it was most likely a special order, it probably took a while to put together. That's why the neck has a March date stamp and the pots date to the third week of 1964, but we can tell the body is from late 1964 because there are no spacer nail holes. A special order like this may have been shelved for a while until a batch of Inca Silver bodies had been sprayed or some gold hardware had come in.

"The spacer nail hole chronology isn't universally understood. The nails were originally used because Fender sprayed the bodies on a lazy Susan. The front was done first and bodies were then flipped over with the nails elevating them above the surface as the backs were sprayed. Later, they started fixing a stick to the neck pocket so the sprayer could hold a body and spray the whole thing at once.

"For a while, Fender continued using spacer nails along with the paint stick,

"Even though gold hardware was very inexpensive, most people didn't want to pay extra"

but they eventually realised the paint stick could also be used to hang the bodies up for drying. That's why nail holes are not present on bodies that were sprayed from around October 1964 onwards. Some people think Fender stopped in 1965, but it was actually slightly earlier.

"If the body had been sprayed in 1965 or later, it would have been Firemist Silver because Inca Silver was discontinued in 1965. Firemist Silver is a completely different colour so the colour and absence of nail holes pinpoint the body date to late 1964.

"I don't know how many Strats they made like this, and I've only had two Inca Silver Strats with gold hardware in my life. In the pantheon of Fender custom colours, Inca Silver is one of the scarcer ones and I divide them into four different levels of rarity. Candy Apple Red, Lake Placid Blue and Olympic White are the most common, followed by Shoreline Gold, Fiesta Red and Sonic Blue. Inca Silver and Foam Green are the next level, and the rarest of all are Surf Green, Shell Pink and Sherwood Green. Also, remember that Inca Silver was the original primer colour for Candy Apple Red before Fender swapped to Firemist Gold in 1965.

"The owner obviously played the guitar with the 'ashtray' bridge cover attached because on half of it the gold plating has worn down. The tuners are double-line Klusons and the truss rod nut is gold, too, which wasn't always the case with gold hardware guitars during the 1960s. The string tree is also gold and it has the plastic spacer that was introduced in mid-1964.

"The neck has a full and rounded C profile that feels like a slice of heaven between the 1st and 7th frets. It consumes the palm of your hand and I think that's why it was so well played and loved. It still has its original frets, and even though they're on the smaller side, it's easy to bend strings and it doesn't choke anywhere. The way the guitar is set up really allows you to manipulate it.

"Reading 5.57k, 5.57k and 5.54k neck to bridge, this is a nicely balanced set of black-bottomed pickups. The bridge pickup can do that 'cat scratching on glass' tone and give you a great lead tone, depending on how you set your amp. The middle pickup brings out the natural woodiness of the guitar, and the neck pickup is warm and kind of wet. It has a good mush sound if you roll back the tone control and it's very chimy when you open it back up.

"I bought this guitar many years ago from a friend. It was over in the UK for a while with Phil Hylander, but he sold it back to me and I'm glad to own it again." [HP]

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

Although in excellent, unmodified condition, the tarnished plating on the bridge cover and lacquer wear on the neck reveal that this guitar was played a lot

“The neck has a full and rounded C profile that feels like a slice of heaven between the 1st and 7th frets”



Blues Headlines

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



Flatpicking Bluegrass

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Atkin J43T

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 15 mins per example

IN THIS MONTH'S BLUES HEADLINES

we'll be looking at an unaccompanied acoustic piece. The tempo marked is approximate as this was played 'freehand' without a metronome. Flatpicking is a bit of a catch-all term since the piece contains crosspicking, alternate picking, Carter picking and strumming.

Crosspicking, as the name implies, uses the pick to cross the strings, giving a similar effect to fingerpicking but with a bolder and more consistent tone. This is a different discipline to the two- or three-note-per-string alternate-picked scale patterns more commonly used when soloing. Having said this, the crosspicked arpeggios towards

the end of the example piece are alternate-picked, though there are other options. See the captions for more details on this.

The other technique mentioned is Carter picking. This is named after Maybelle Carter and involves picking out melodies and bass lines using the lower strings, while maintaining a strumming pattern on the higher strings. This gives a more detailed accompaniment and can potentially sound like two guitars playing together. Although I'm not spelling out any traditional Carter picking licks in the example piece, it is very influenced by that approach, letting any strummed chords and open strings ring wherever possible.

Beyond specific picking styles, there are a couple of picking-hand positions worth considering to help with articulation. The strummed parts are played with a looser wrist, raised away from the guitar body. For the single-note parts and arpeggios, try bringing your wrist in towards the guitar body until you can feel the heel of your hand resting lightly against the bridge. It's amazing how much this can help with consistency on the single notes! **G**



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

Example 1

WE START WITH AN UPSTROKE RAKE across the G major chord. This is worth special consideration as the fifth string is muted, fretting only the lowest and highest notes with the third and fourth fingers of your fretting hand. Perhaps the thumb could be used for that sixth string, but that's up to you. The main thing is, the first and second fingers of your fretting hand are then free to add in the Am7 shape used as an embellishment in the second half of bars 1 and 3. Bring your picking hand wrist in close to the guitar body for the alternate-picked lines.

Example 2

STAYING WITH A SIMILAR FORMAT of alternating strummed and picked patterns, this example changes to C for bars 1 and 2. Strictly speaking, this isn't Carter picking, but the way it picks out the sus4 embellishment is very much from the same school of thought. After returning to the G chord, there is a rapid alternate-picked triplet-based line, using the G major pentatonic scale. Again, keeping your wrist in close to the guitar body really helps with articulation.

♩ = 102

C Csus4 C N.C.

E 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
B 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
G 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
D 2 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3
A 3 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 2
E 1

3 0 1 2 0 2 1 3 2 0 3 0 1 2 0

■ ■ V ■ V ■ V etc

G C/G G C/G N.C.

E 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
B 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1 0 1
G 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
D 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 0 2
A 3 3 3 3 3 3 X X X
E 3

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3 5 6 7 5 6 7 5 0 7 8 9 7 8 9 8 9 8

■ ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V

Example 3

THIS DESCENDING DOUBLESTOP LINE is based around a D major chord. Notice how upstrokes are used to accent these. Another embellished C chord comes next, with that slightly Carter-picked influence again. This segues straight into the descending G major-based arpeggios. These are alternate-picked, which seems counterintuitive at first but allows the picking to stay relaxed and consistent. However, you could also try a 'down-down-down-up' economy picking approach, in case that works better for you. We finish with a bluesy lick around a D5 chord.

♩ = 102

Em/D D Em/D D C/D G/D C Csus4 C

Let ring ———

E 8 10 10 10 8 8 8 7 5 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
B 9 11 11 11 9 9 9 7 5 4 4 0 0 0 0 0 0
G 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
D 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
E 1

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0

■ ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V ■ V

G G7 G6 Gaug N.C. D5

E 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3
B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
G 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3
D 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
E 3

3 4 0 0 3 0 3 4 0 1 2

■ ■ V ■ V ■ V etc

Example 4

THIS OUTRO SECTION IS A RECAP of the main strumming pattern that begins the piece. Note that there is a bass note at the beginning of each measure, followed by strumming on the higher strings – another nod to the Carter family style. In bar 3, there is a slide from E to F on the fourth string, giving a momentary sus4 embellishment to the G chord. This is a bit of a stretch, but it's worth the effort.

Example 4 is a musical score for guitar, showing a recap of the main strumming pattern. The tempo is marked **♩ = 102**. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two systems, each with a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar staff below it.

System 1:

- Measures 1-2: Chord **G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 3-4: Chord **C/G A7**. Treble staff shows a quarter note C5, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (D5-E5). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 5-6: Chord **G C/G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 7-8: Chord **C/G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note C5, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (D5-E5). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 9-10: Chord **G C/G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).

System 2:

- Measures 11-12: Chord **G7 G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 13-14: Chord **C/G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note C5, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (D5-E5). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 15-16: Chord **G C/G**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).
- Measures 17-18: Chord **G9**. Treble staff shows a quarter note G4, followed by a strummed eighth-note pair (A4-B4). Fingering: 3 (E), 0 (B), 0 (G), 0 (D), 0 (A), 0 (E).

Hear It Here

ROB ICKES & TREY HENSLEY BEFORE THE SUN GOES DOWN



Tennessee-based musician Trey Hensley was voted 2023 Guitar Player of the Year by the International Bluegrass Music Association – and it isn't hard to see why. This album is a collaboration with Rob Ickes on resonator/slide guitar and features some particularly impressive playing from both of them. Check out *Lightning*, *Georgia On A Fast Train* and *Workin' Man Can't Get Nowhere Today* to hear all the techniques featured in the example piece in a 'real-world' context.

MOLLY TUTTLE & GOLDEN HIGHWAY CROOKED TREE



Molly Tuttle has become very respected over the past few years, articulating the featured techniques at breakneck speed – all while singing! Check out *She'll Change*, *The River Knows* and *Nashville Mess Around*. Apart from her technical chops, there is an assuredness about Molly's rhythm playing that underpins the whole thing. The good news is practising the techniques from the example piece is a very effective way of moving toward that point in your own playing.

MAYBELLE CARTER FOLK LEGEND



The title says it all – so let's go back to the origin of many of today's bluegrass/flatpicking techniques. Maybelle manages to articulate strummed chords and melodies simultaneously on *(Bury Me Under The) Weeping Willow*, *Wildwood Flower* and *Lover's Farewell*. These are just three examples pulled from an album containing 41 tracks, but their relatively stripped-back arrangements really highlight how self-contained a single guitar can be when handled right.

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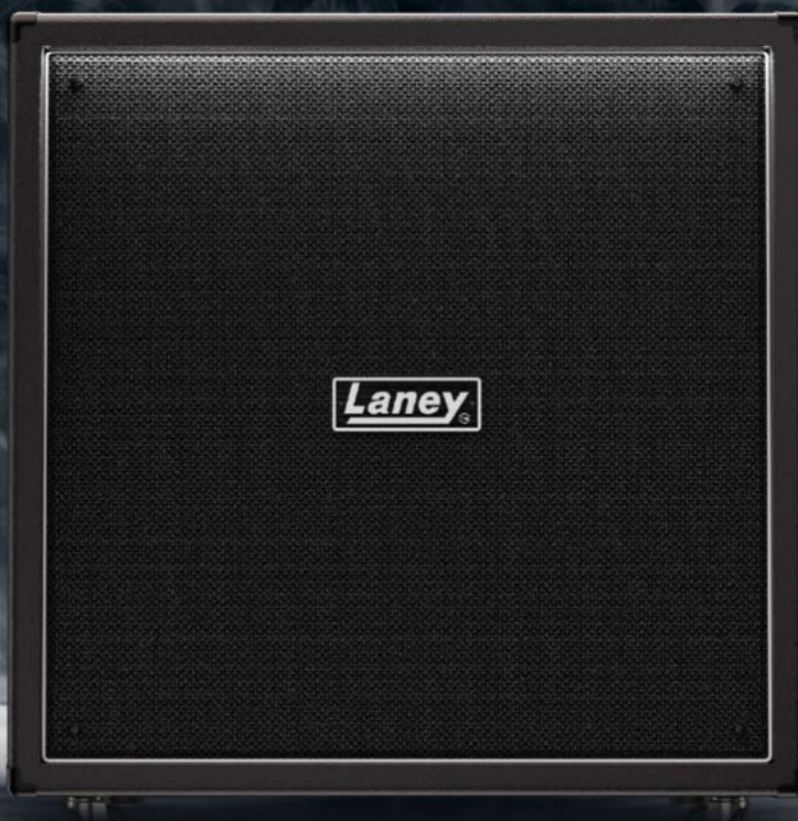
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