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Issue 524

JUNE 2025

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Changing Times



The only constant in life is the inevitability of change. But even so it was sad and sobering to hear that one of the pillars of British musical instrument retail, GAK of Brighton, closed its doors on 25 March and (at the time of writing) has yet to re-open. The only thing now viewable on its website is a message saying it is 'currently unavailable'. At almost the same time, another big guitar and instrument store Bax Music, in the Netherlands, was declared bankrupt, though it is reported that its owner is considering a relaunch at some point in the future.

Our first thoughts are, of course, for any staff and suppliers affected by these events. And though these are but two examples, it's hard to avoid feeling like the tectonic plates of our world of guitars and gear are shifting. Furthermore, it's hard to imagine that the recent imposition of trade tariffs by the USA (and counter-tariffs from affected countries) will make the situation for retailers any easier. In the face of such potential sea-changes to how we buy guitars and what we pay for them, what can we, as players, do? What indeed *should* we do? Perhaps we can start by simply thinking about what we value most. If, in economically unstable times, what weighs heaviest in the balance is affordability, clearly the used market and giant retailers who can sell decent quality own-brand guitars very cheaply have an undeniable allure.

On the other hand, uncertain times may make some of us more determined to buy exactly the right guitar, set up perfectly from a retailer that really allows us to sit and play until we are sure – because if we mean to buy a 'keeper', possibly as a hedge against potential future price hikes, it had better be the right one. In that scenario I can think of few better places to buy than a high street store that really looks after and guides customers to the right guitar. And, as the world becomes ever more connected yet, paradoxically, ever more insular, it still feels good to buy a guitar in person – so we must use it or accept we may lose it. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



A New Man

The Newman Honeycomb Senior reminds this editor of the Chandler Austin he lusted after in 90s issues of *Guitarist* – with updates **p10**



Lita Ford

It was a pleasure to join the American rocker to hear about the ups and downs of guitar ownership over the years over on **p114**



Good Cat

It was poignant to see Matchless co-founder Mark Sampson's last amp design, the Era 30, get a faultless score in our review **p16**

Guitarist

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Contents

COVER FEATURE

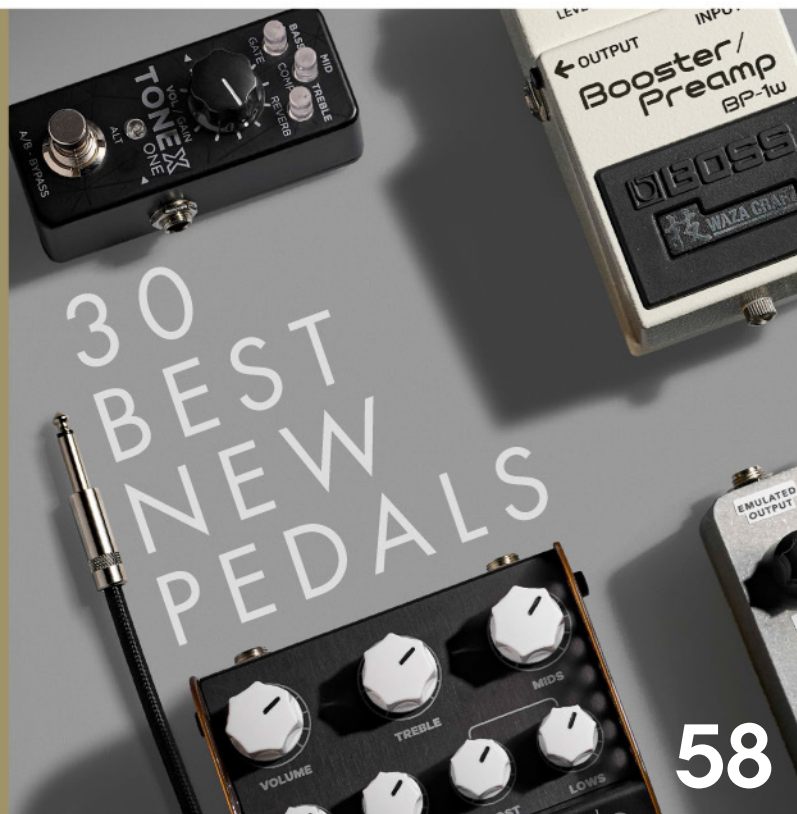


PHOTO BY JOLLY CURTIS

REGULARS

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

FEATURES

- 048 H.E.A.T
- 052 Mike Campbell
- 058 30 Best New Pedals
- 080 Cory Wong
- 086 Historic Hardware: Guild Starfires

NEW GEAR

- 010 Newman Honeycomb Senior
- 016 Bad Cat Era 30
- 020 Walrus Audio Mako M1 MKII & Mako ACS1 MKII
- 022 ThorpyFX Six Zero
- 024 Gibson Custom Shop Brian May SJ-200 12-String
- 090 Atkin JH3001
- 096 Taylor Gold Label 814e SB
- 106 Marshall 1959 Super Lead, JCM800 Lead Series, JCM900 Hi Gain Distortion, DSL Dual Super Lead Distortion & JVM Distortion & Noise Gate pedals

TECHNIQUES

- 126 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio': <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



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FEATURE



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96

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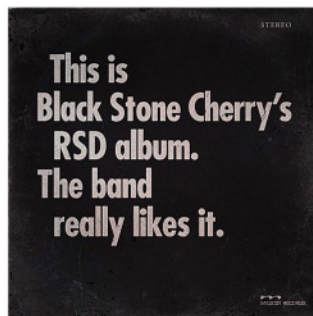
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(You Still Got Me)



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ROBIN TROWER
A Little Bit Of Freedom
(Come And Find Me)



TRACK #3
BLACK STONE CHERRY
Have You Ever Been Lonely
(Record Store Day exclusive)



TRACK #4
MATTEO MANCUSO
Paul Position
(Single)



TRACK #5
DINOSAUR PILE-UP
'Bout To Lose It
(I've Felt Better)



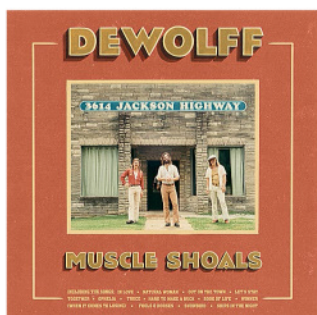
TRACK #6
MASTERS OF REALITY
Mr Tap n' Go
(The Archer)



TRACK #7
STORM ORCHESTRA
Superplayer
(Get Better)



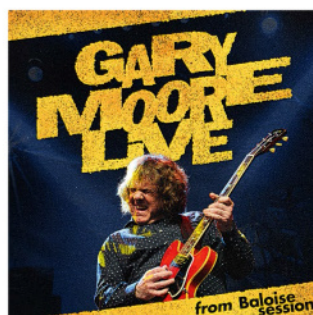
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CALVA LOUISE
Aimless
(Edge Of The Abyss)



TRACK #9
DEWOLFF
Natural Woman
(Muscle Shoals)



TRACK #10
THORBJORN RISAGER &
THE BLACK TORNADO
Already Gone (House Of Sticks)



TRACK #11
GARY MOORE
Since I Met You Baby
(Live From Balaise Session)



TRACK #12
YNGWIE MALMSTEEN
Top Down Foot Down (live)
(Tokyo Live)

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FIRST PLAY



NEWMAN HONEYCOMB SENIOR £2,999

.....
WHAT IS IT? UK-made, dual-pickup version of Ted Newman's late-70s vision with honeycomb chambered body and Guitar-X swappable pickups

All Down The Line

It started with a five-string, now the UK-made Newman range has a fully formed six-string with dual swappable pickups and oh-so-70s credentials

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

It's pretty rare that we get to document a guitar from blueprint to production, but that's been the case with Newman Guitars, a US company founded by Jeff Smith and dedicated to continuing the work of roadie-turned-luthier Ted Newman Jones III after his adventures with The Rolling Stones during the 70s. Latterly, Jeff befriended Ted and digitised his design, which Ted signed off before he passed away in 2016.

The USA Newman models are, and always have been, built by various independent makers, but the tie-up with Cream T here in the UK has slowly created a more production-led line-up, which started with the 5 String (the original Newman design intended for Keith Richards) followed by a single-pickup Honeycomb Junior GT-40 six-string. Now, we have this dual-pickup Senior. As we've documented, Billy F Gibbons is onboard, not least with his collaboration with Cream T pickups, and he's not only playing USA Newmans but has recently strapped-on the UK-made models, too.

The first run of these dual-pickup Senior models comes in a trio of Ferrari-inspired colours, specified by Billy G, which keeps







1

1. This intonated Music City wrapover bridge is used by pros such as Robben Ford, Vince Gill and Tom Bukovac, and primary designer Joe Glaser is a legendary figure in the US guitar-repair world

up the automotive vibe of that Junior GT-40. Effectively red, black and white, each with contrasting binding around the top edge of the body, the gloss finish also covers the neck back and headstock. It gives a rather simplistic look to the guitars, but there is quite a bit more going on here, hidden from view.

Firstly, as the name indicates, the body is chambered in a honeycomb pattern then capped with a thin maple top. The maple neck is chambered then reinforced with dual carbon graphite rods and features an asymmetric profile. While the chambered

The 'radical' outline is a cult classic, a 70s vision that was used by plenty of rockstars back in the day

body precludes any contouring (the standard 45mm deep slab body is flat to the front and back), the outline is totally unique and very practical. It's quite a visual statement, too, like you're joining a rather exclusive club.

As with the original Ted Newman design, the fingerboard sports 24 frets and here it's cleanly bound with that same tortoiseshell-coloured plastic, which trims the back-angled, six-in-a-line headstock. The neck screws to the body on a pretty

standard extending heel with some contouring on the treble side, the four screws sitting in inset washers – there's no neckplate.

The apparent simplicity of the design is echoed with the Music City wrapover bridge, designed by Joe Glaser and Nick Drushel of Glaser Instruments and championed by Billy Gibbons. It's classic wrapover in style but with numerous improvements, including the intonated ridge and very firm mounting to the studs so that the bridge doesn't tip forward like many originals. The nickel plating is matched by the two quite closely spaced covered humbuckers in cream plastic surrounds that match the truss rod cover and switch tip. The push-fit Tele-style knurled knobs look to be chrome plated, but they certainly don't spoil the fun. It's quite the sharp dressed guitar!

Feel & Sounds

The deceptively simple style extends to the neck. Its profile is pretty conventional in dimension but subtly asymmetrical in shape – flatter on the treble side and rounder on the bass, which actually makes the neck seem a bit beefier than its dimensions suggest, but in a good way, to this writer at least. It's more of medium size, approximately 21.3mm deep at the 1st and 23.2mm by the 12th, with a good width at the nut of 44.6mm, and

2. Despite the bolt-on maple neck style, the scale length here is 629mm (24.75 inches) and the bound edge rosewood 'board has a 254mm (10-inch) radius. What you can't see is the chambering in the neck with its dual carbon graphite rods

3. Both the volume and tone controls are also pull-switches to split the mounted humbuckers (neck and bridge respectively) to single coil, voicing the inner slug coils



36.5mm string spacing. The fingerboard radius is a standard 254mm (10 inches), and while the design almost suggests a longer Fender scale, it's a shorter 629mm (24.75 inches) in reality.

With very well-fettled medium jumbo fretwire (measuring 2.65mm wide by 1.2mm high) and a very good setup, it's a really good player, and intonation from that Music City bridge is pretty close to being 100 per cent spot on. It feels great strapped on and a little SG-like played seated. This Senior is a little heavier than the featherweight GT-40 we spent a little time with back in issue 518, which accounts for a subtly more conventional drive, and it turns out that, for structural reasons, the body wood has changed from obeche to mahogany.

Changes aside, you hear a hint of that chambering when unplugged, particularly on the lower strings, which adopt an almost semi-solid thinline character but enveloped with a long ringing sustain. This is no jazz box!

Our guitar shipped with a pair of Guitar-X mounted Cream T Whiskerbuckers (you can order any pair from the Cream T range, plus you'll also get a free Nidge humbucking P-90-style pickup when you register your purchase). They may be cloned from Billy's prized 'Pearly Gates', but we wouldn't say this Newman Senior sounds like a 'Burst. It's less wide



4. Our Newman Senior came with a pair of Cream T Whiskerbucker pickups, as used by Billy F Gibbons, who is also flying the flag for Newman Guitars, including the UK-made variety

sounding but with plenty of midrange, though far from over-nasal. We'd suggest it all sounds like quite a neutral platform, and the Whiskerbucker at the bridge is slightly fuller and less defined than the same pickup on a Cream T Aurora. How do we know that? It's another facet of the Guitar-X pickup swapping: you can quickly listen to the same pickup on different guitars.

Speaking of which, the neck-pickup position here is closer to the bridge compared with that Cream T Aurora because the Guitar-X system requires

5. Like virtually every aspect of the design, the back-angled six-in-a-line headstock goes back to Ted Newman's original from the late 70s

6. The Guitar-X pickup swapping is only visible from the back and the necessary recesses are covered with a backplate that attaches with small magnets

quite a large rectangular rear cavity and its positioning is dictated by the offset slope of the treble cutaway. Put it this way, the neck-pickup position here is as far north as it can go! This obviously affects what we hear – and that's a tighter, less deep response from the neck pickup.

The dual-pickup mix also sounds more Strat-like – less wide than a more classic single-cut – and especially so when you engage the coil-split for each pickup. Here, the inner slug coils of each humbucker are voiced, which are actually spaced about the same distance apart as the bridge and middle single coils on a Stratocaster. Individually, then, the splits do sound a little bright and thin, but in this closer-proximity middle-position mix they give some real character – a different voice – which this Newman has in spades.

For a standard fixed-pickup guitar, this would be the point where we'd end our sound test. But with the Guitar-X pickup swapping, it's just the beginning. This is no gimmick. While the Whiskerbuckers provide pretty effortless roots-to-classic-rock voices and really suit the ringing vibe of the guitar and its construction, swapping them for a set of the Cream T -made Newman Sticky Fingers, which have a slightly beefier midrange, adds a little more clout and really suits the platform. Likewise, putting a Cream T Banger & Mash at the bridge revoices the





NEWMAN HONEYCOMB SENIOR

PRICE: £2,999 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Original offset-shaped chambered electric
BODY: Honeycomb-chambered mahogany with thin maple top

NECK: Maple, chambered with dual carbon graphite rods, asymmetric Newman profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.6mm

FINGERBOARD: Tortoiseshell bound rosewood, m-o-p dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 24, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Music City wrapover bridge, enclosed Gotoh tuners – chrome/nickel plating
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Cream T Whiskerbuckers with Guitar-X mounting, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume, master tone (both controls with modern CTS pull-switch pots for individual pickup coil-splitting)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.05/6.71

OPTIONS: You can choose your pickups on order from Cream T's extensive range. Once you register your purchase you'll receive a Cream T Nidge P-90-style single coil, T-shirt and other goodies FOC

RANGE OPTIONS: Honeycomb Junior GT-40 (Baby Blue & Blackout finishes) from £2,999 (2x pickups included). 'Ultimate Billy Edition' (£3,499) comes with 5x Guitar-X mounted Cream T pickups. Newman 5 String with dual fixed pickups (£1,999)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not yet

FINISHES: Rossa Corsa (as reviewed), Nero Daytona, Bianco Avus – gloss polyurethane

Aurora Music Works

<https://newmanguitars.co.uk>



9/10

PROS Well-crafted build; unique construction; lightweight and practical in use; super hardware; very in-tune and stable with vibrant response and superb sounds from those Whiskerbuckers; classy, heavy duty gigbag

CONS Ordinary finishes; neck-pickup positioning means it's more like a middle pickup; the price and not-for-everyone shape will limit appeal

guitar with a steelier Fender-y bite. Same guitar, different flavours: no soldering. The Newman shape and geometry makes for a great slide guitar, too – we'd love to test out Cream T's DT Derek Trucks set!

Cream T also offers proper humbucking-sized single coils such as the Duchess and Nidge P-90s, while the Single Shots turn the Senior into a pristine clean machine. Of course, if pick-up hum is a problem with those, just slot a humbucker back in; no need to change your guitar. It's just the tip of the tonal iceberg, but it should come with a word of warning: being in charge of what you want to hear, whenever you want, is really quite addictive. We're hooked.

Verdict

Let's be honest, not everyone is going to enjoy the 'radical' outline here. It's a cult classic, a 70s vision that appealed to and was used by plenty of rockstars back in the day. Overall, the guitar is built to a high standard and even though the differences such as the neck reinforcement and honeycomb chambering are hidden, their effect is evident. This is a very stable bolt-on that barely needed tuning during our test time, and while it's about 0.43kg (1lb) heavier than that earlier Honeycomb Junior, at 3.05kg (6.72lb) it's still lightweight and very comfortable. It rings like a bell, plays like butter, and even with just a pair of Whiskerbuckers

With a unique specification, this is one heck of a rock 'n' roll vision – and it sounds glorious

it sounds top drawer, while the Guitar-X pickup-swapping potential really shouldn't be overlooked.

Yes, the finish options are rather standard; the gloss polyester finish is hardly 'boutique' in style. If you live on a neck pickup, it's probably not for you as the positioning here means it sounds more like a trimmer middle-meets-neck pickup. Then, of course, there's in-house competition from the recently released Cream T Standard models, of which the Crossfire – which we looked at a couple of issues back – is a more conventional twin-humbucker bolt-on. It's only slightly heavier, too, but still features the same Guitar-X pickup swapping and checks in at half the price.

The trouble is, with what is a totally unique specification, this is one heck of a rock 'n' roll vision. It's no cheap date, but it sounds glorious and has huge tonal flexibility thanks to the pickup-swapping system. Oh, and it doesn't look like a Fender! 

FIRST PLAY



BAD CAT ERA 30
£3,399

WHAT IS IT? Hand-wired, 30-watt, two-channel amp head designed by the late Mark Sampson

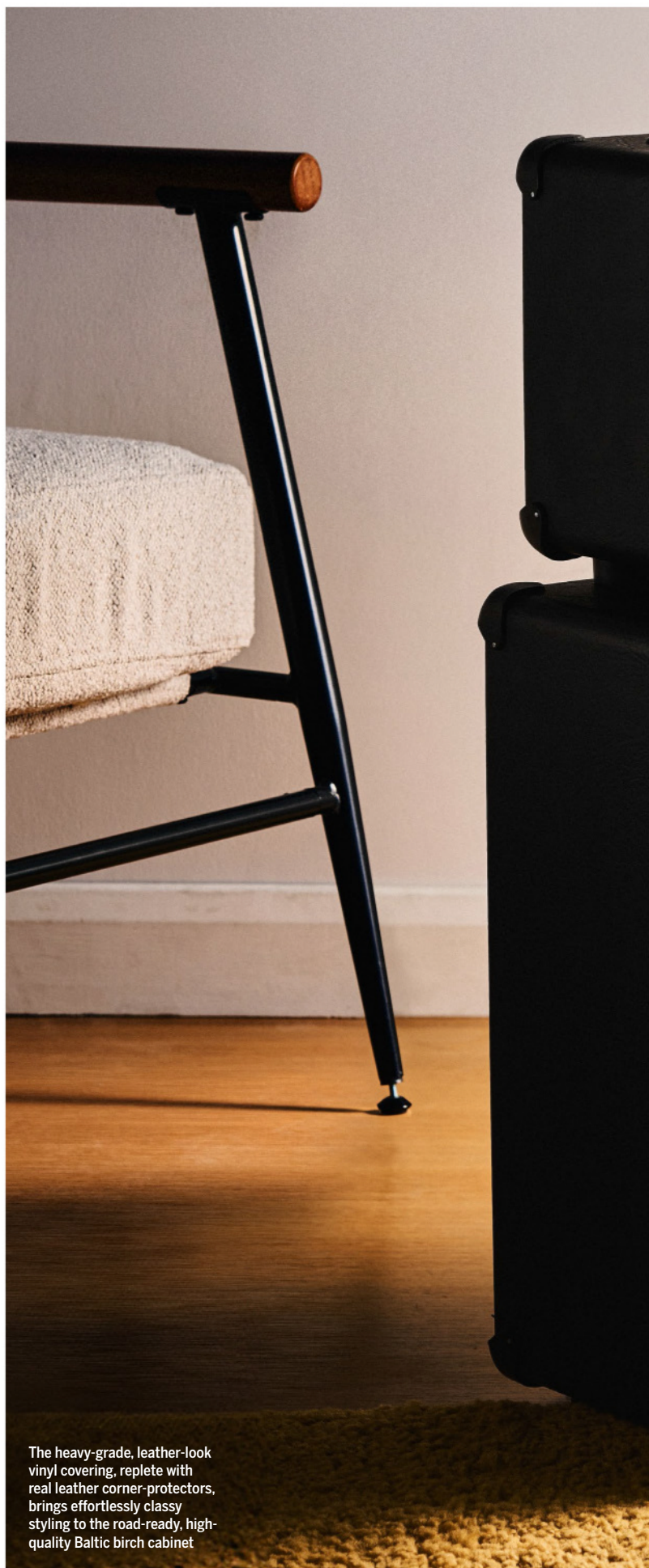
Back In Black

Mark Sampson's final opus for Bad Cat is the culmination of a lifetime of design excellence and could be his finest creation

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Phil Barker

There are countless companies producing highly usable amplifiers spanning the gamut of features and price points. Then there are a select bunch of designers who – through their uncompromising dedication to reach beyond established frontiers – have become legends. Mark Sampson, who we sadly lost only weeks ago, was one such pioneer. He leaves in his wake a dazzling legacy of sonic excellence.

With his formative beginnings repairing radios alongside his father, Mark progressed into guitar amplifier repairs and sales, gaining a particular notoriety for his deep knowledge of the Vox company's designs. Armed with a desire to manufacture reliable and tonally flexible AC30-style amps, he co-founded Matchless in 1989 with Rick Perotta, eventually helping launch the Bad Cat company in the late 90s. His ethos was simple: leave no stone unturned in creating the most reliable and sonically excellent amplifiers possible.



The heavy-grade, leather-look vinyl covering, replete with real leather corner-protectors, brings effortlessly classy styling to the road-ready, high-quality Baltic birch cabinet



After a period of absence from the company, Mark was commissioned by Bad Cat's owner, John Thompson, to design a 25th anniversary model as a summation of the decades of research and innovations that both Mark and the company had amassed. The Era 30 is the result.

Clad in the same plush leather-effect vinyl for which both Matchless and Bad Cat are synonymous, this highly attractive stealth-black amplifier head features the brand's classic back-lit logo design. The detailing is continued with tough leather corner protectors and the matt black faceplate completes the luxury-stealth aesthetic, furnished with the kind of high-quality switch gear that operates with smooth turns and satisfyingly solid clicks.

Removing the back panel reveals an easily overlooked detail. The cup hooks holding the backplate screws – often the culprit of vinyl-tearing – are backed by two washers that prevent damage from over-tightening. Not simply a minor detail but an auspicious pointer towards the excellence we are likely to find throughout.

The point-to-point, hand-wired circuit is a thing of electronic beauty, with a component layout designed to minimise the cross-talk and over-heating issues associated with its Vox inspiration. Years of painstaking evolution led Mark to place the EF86 valve in such a position in the chassis as to render it uncannily quiet and reliable. This was in contrast to the Vox company, who had to discontinue use of this particular valve after a short few years due to excessive noise and, in some cases, spectacular failure.

The amp offers two footswitchable channels (each representing a different period of AC30 history), revealing the reason for the Era name. Channel 1 is a vintage-voiced, EF86-based circuit circa the late 50s. In contrast, Channel 2's 12AX7 valves deliver the characteristics heard in Vox amps from the early 60s onward.



The transparent plexiglass logo plate, complete with Bad Cat logo design, illuminates upon ignition, with the 'Cat's Eyes' also becoming lit when standby is activated

This is quite simply a masterfully built amplifier, inside and out. The matching semi open-backed 1x12 cabinet supplied for the review shared the same level of quality, featuring a highly complementary custom-designed Celestion speaker.

Sounds

With the supplied channel-switching and blending footswitch connected and the power engaged, smiles abound as the plexiglass logo panel illuminates. After a brief warm-up, smiles turn to giggles as the eyes of the Bad Cat flash to life with a flick of the standby switch. A Telecaster seems an appropriate first point of reference, and with all controls set to mid position, a highly rewarding journey

of discovery begins, revealing the sonic personalities of the two channels.

In Channel 1, the EF86 valve in this circuit produces a large, somewhat three-dimensional tone, simultaneously deep and bell-like. The preamp gain, teamed with the channel master offers a huge gain range from a velvety clean through to a saturated and swampy fuzz with all the stops in between worthy of a prolonged visit. A sonic fingerprint of this channel is the subtle, almost imperceptible compression that both enhances delicate fingerpicking and de-stings hard plectrum-bashing. It jangles joyfully without harsh edges – no mean feat when faced with a Telecaster bridge pickup played with spirit!



1

1. The matching half-open-backed speaker cabinet offers the same construction details as the head, including the plexiglass logo. It's fitted with a custom-designed Celestion 12-inch speaker

2. The point-to-point, hand-wired circuit has details that are uncommon on most production amps, including insulated component legs and a valve layout refined over decades of research to provide reliability and ultra-low noise



2



The buffered effects loop allows for the seamless integration of the full array of effects units available, both historic and contemporary. Once unplugged, the loop returns to an audibly invisible state

The ability to incrementally shelve the ample bottom-end using the Depth switch allows for tuneable tightening of response and brings focus to fatter-sounding guitars such as a Les Paul. Finally, cranking the channel volume, usefully placed in a pre-phase inverter circuit position, unleashes a harmonically rich squish, perfect for heavier overdriven sounds.

Stealing ourselves away from Channel 1, the second and 12AX7-based channel has its own distinct character – less bold and deep, instead more present and punchy. Tighter in its response, it is capable of sparkling clean tones with huge dynamic range – neither harsh nor soft – and it stays in its sweet spot throughout its entire gain range. A regular bass control seems a good choice for this channel due to its more traditional controllability. Even at its extremes, the saturation available is the kind that suits timeless sonic tastes such as classic rock and the like and doesn't veer into more extreme terrains, which are already more than adequately catered for by more metal-oriented amplifiers.

Just when you think all the fun has been had, the blend switch conjures up the Era 30's finest trick. Clever engineering combines both channels in-phase to deliver 'best of both worlds' tones that are simply stunning. Combining the EF86's rich bottom with the taut attack of the 12AX7 unleashes a range of possibilities such as saturation with bell-like clarity

Cranking the channel volume unleashes a harmonically rich squish, perfect for heavier overdriven sounds

through to punchy mids with a halo of depth and sheen. Such is the dynamic range, like us, you may be left discovering fresh sonic variations for quite some time.

The buffered effects loop effortlessly interfaces with a wide-range of effects from our Roland RE-301 tape echo to a Lexicon PCM70. Once unplugged, the loop is disengaged from the circuit so as to be sonically invisible.

Verdict

For most guitarists, dropping this kind of money on an amp is not done without considerable deliberation. There are very few purchases we can make on gear that don't cause at least some small frisson of worry as to the worthiness of our decisions. However, in the form of the Bad Cat Era 30 no reasons could be found for anything other than abject delight and inspiration.

If you seek complete Vox-style satisfaction without shortcomings or compromises, the Era 30 comprehensively delivers on all fronts. A very fitting legacy for its designer. **G**



BAD CAT ERA 30 HEAD

PRICE: £3,399

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All valve, point-to-point, hand-wired 30 watt head

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 1x EF-86, 4x EL84, 1x 5AR4

OUTPUT: 30W (Cathode Bias)

DIMENSIONS: 640 (w) x 380 (d) x 380mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 14/31

CABINET: Baltic birch ply

CHANNELS: 2x independent, footswitchable with option to blend both channels simultaneously

CONTROLS: Ch. 1 (EF-86): Gain, Depth, Treble, Volume. Ch. 2 (12AX7): Gain, Bass, Treble, Volume, Global Master

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button metal footswitch (supplied) changes channels and toggles channel blend

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Padded slip cover with embroidered logo (included). True bypassable buffered effects loop, custom Pacific transformers

OPTIONS: Available with black, cream or grey panel (no upcharge)

RANGE OPTIONS: Matching Era 1x12 open-back extension cabinet w/Custom UK-made Celestion Bad Cat Speaker (£799). Matching Era 2x12 cabinet (£1,199). Black, cream or grey panel choice to match head at no upcharge

Bad Cat
020 8050 1821
<https://badcatamps.com>



PROS Exceptional construction quality and aesthetics; exquisite Vox-oriented tone, spanning two eras; transparent effects loop and illuminated logo

CONS None

FIRST PLAY



WALRUS AUDIO MAKO M1 MKII HI-FIDELITY MODULATION MACHINE £385

WHAT IS IT? Second version of stereo pedal with six fan-favourite modulation programs



WALRUS AUDIO MAKO ACS1 MKII AMP + CAB SIMULATOR £435

WHAT IS IT? The US company's revamped 'amps and cabs in a box' – and quite a bit more



Mako Makeover

Walrus Audio releases updated versions of its multi-algorithm Mako pedals – now with even greater ease of use

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. Gone are the toggle switches and instead is an OLED display showing parameters adjusted by three adjacent push-and-turn knobs
2. The M1's Tap/Skip footswitch allows you to choose the desired LFO rate (scaled by the selected tap division). Press and hold for the Skip effect to automatically repeat the last few milliseconds of audio
3. The ACS1 MKII allows you to save three onboard presets by pressing and holding the Bypass and Boost switch footswitches simultaneously – then press and release the footswitches to cycle through your presets
4. At the rear are connections for MIDI In and Thru, headphones (ACS1) and USB-C to connect to a computer for firmware updates (and uploading IRs with the ACS1). Each pedal measures a 'board-friendly' 73mm by 125mm, with a 60mm height, and requires a nine-volt DC adaptor (not supplied)

The first of Walrus Audio's Mako Series pedals, the D1 High-Fidelity Delay, launched in 2020, followed by the R1 Reverb, M1 Modulation and ACS1 Amp + Cab Simulator. And now the company has decided it's time for a comprehensive update, releasing MKII versions of this quartet of stompboxes. All of the series' multi-algorithm pedals can be run in mono or stereo and each has a small number of easily accessible onboard presets out of a full 128 – if you use MIDI, which also offers full control over all parameters. Here, we're focusing on the updated M1 and ACS1.

Walrus says the MKII offerings have increased headroom and lowered noise floor, but the main visible difference is that there's now an OLED navigation menu screen with three encoders in place of three mini-toggle switches. Operationally, this is a step up: it's quick and easy to use as you get a clear readout of what you're tweaking, plus there's increased sonic flexibility with more parameters than previously.

Programs have apparently been rebuilt and fine-tuned based on user feedback and that seems to have taken care of two of our previous review's gripes. We were surprised that the M1 had no flanger, but now that has been remedied with flanger sound added to the Chorus algorithm. Meanwhile, the ACS1, which we thought would benefit from more gain, now has three new higher-gain amp models added to the existing Vox, Fender and Marshall staples. Six new cabs have also been added for a total of 12.

Both pedals offer a quality set of sounds and have a good complement of thoughtful facilities, such as the reverbs and the possibility of running two amps together in the ACS1, and the M1's ability for lo-fi sound degradation.

Verdict

There's no doubt that these MKII pedals have a greater versatility than the older versions, but are they for you? The small footprint makes the M1 a real contender for anyone wanting to add a utility multi-modulation pedal to their 'board, while the ACS1 has plenty going for it, covering headphone practice, recording and stage use – it's a great option for a get-out-of-jail emergency gigbag item. Today, though, four years on from its 2021 release, it now faces stiffer competition in its genre and we're not convinced that it justifies that £400-plus asking price. **G**



WALRUS AUDIO MAKO M1 MKII

TYPE: Modulation pedal

FEATURES: Selectable relay bypass or buffered bypass, 9 onboard presets, 128 presets via MIDI, tap tempo, Lo-Fi parameters

CONTROLS: Program selector, Rate, Depth, Lo-Fi, 3x encoders, Tap footswitch, Bypass footswitch

EFFECTS PROGRAMS: Chorus, Phaser, Tremolo, Vibrato, Rotary, Filter (3 types of effect/program)



PROS Range of usable modulation types; lo-fi parameter; tap tempo

CONS A bit of a learning curve



WALRUS AUDIO MAKO ACS1 MKII

TYPE: Amp and cab simulator pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, 9 onboard presets, 128 presets via MIDI, 6 amp types, 12 factory IRs, IR loading

CONTROLS: Volume, Gain, Room, 3x encoders, Boost footswitch, Bypass footswitch

AMP & CABS: Fullerton, London, Dartford, Red, Citrus, Tread; 12 combo speakers & 4x12 cabs

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
walrusaudio.com



PROS Amp sounds; headphone output; footswitchable boost; onboard reverb; IR loading

CONS Expensive; USB audio interface capability would be good

THE RIVALS

The Strymon Iridium (£379) pre-dates the ACS-1, is a little larger and has a smaller range of amps. Of a similar size to the ACS-1 and less expensive is the Boss IR-2 (£179), and smaller still is the IK Multimedia Tonex One (£149) with access to a huge library of amps and rigs. There are plenty of multi-modulation pedals available, including the Strymon Mobius (£399), Eventide H9 Max (£529), Boss MD-200 (£239) and Line 6 HX One (£219) – they're all larger than the M1 MKII, but there are smaller-footprint budget models available such as Electro-Harmonix's MOD11 (£145) and NUX Mod Core Deluxe MKII (£99).

FIRST PLAY



THORPYFX SIX ZERO
£249

WHAT IS IT? 60s-style fuzz tones and tremolo squeezed into one pedal



Pulsing Fuzz

It's a jump back to the golden age for ThorpyFX with a pedal that combines vintage fuzz with tremolo

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker



THORPYFX SIX ZERO

PRICE: £249

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Tremolo and fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Depth, Rate, Attack, Volume, Trem footswitch, Fuzz footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 35mA

DIMENSIONS: 100 (w) x 125 (d) x 53mm (h)

ThorpyFX
www.thorpyfx.com



PROS Fuzz and tremolo in one pedal; great interaction of the two effects; solid build quality; relatively compact size

CONS You can't put a buffered pedal in front of it – placement at the front of your chain is best

1. The Tremolo footswitch and controls are on the left, with Speed and Depth knobs controlling the choppy pulse

2. On the right of the pedal you'll find the Fuzz footswitch and controls: Level sets the output volume, while Attack determines the nature of the fuzz sound

3. 'X' marks the spot of ThorpyFX HQ on the contour map. The precise co-ordinates feature above the Six Zero logo

Combining fuzz and tremolo in one pedal might seem like a wacky idea, but not so much if you consider it a homage to the early to mid-60s when – besides echo and reverb – the only effects in town were fuzz and tremolo. This new Six Zero was originally designed in collaboration with music retailer Andertons to celebrate its 60th anniversary in 2024, the basic premise being to design a modern pedal with a fundamentally vintage sound at its core. That run of 200 limited-edition pedals has long sold out, but ThorpyFX has brought the pedal back in a new colour scheme to make it available for all.

The fuzz circuit here is based on an original MKI Tone Bender, albeit equipped with silicon transistors, rather than germanium, while the tremolo is an early design by Dan Coggins. The pedal places fuzz before tremolo, with no option to reverse the effect order as a particular design aim was the interaction of fuzz feeding tremolo, and, in true vintage fashion, the fuzz will not operate correctly unless it 'sees' the correct signal, so therefore can't have a buffer in front of it.

The pedal's Level knob has plenty of travel beyond its unity gain point for boosting the signal, while the Attack knob, rather than going from minimal fuzz to more fuzz, seems to be messing with the bias, delivering a range of variation starting from gated sputtery at the fully anti-clockwise position. Advance the knob and you'll find a favoured sweet spot for throaty saturated fuzz with smooth sustain, although this is not fuzz that cleans up – keep your guitar volume knob wide open or roll it back a touch for more broken-up sputter.

The tremolo is not your typical smooth sine wave; it verges more towards an on/off square wave sound and has plenty of range from a subtle shimmery pulse to really chopping things up.

Combine both fuzz and trem and things really take off. A low Depth setting can imbue the sound with an almost Uni-Vibe phase-y throb, while ramping it up can get you straight into The Smiths' *How Soon Is Now* territory. No shrinking violet, this pedal will stamp its authority on your tone.

Verdict

Quirky in a very good way, the Six Zero puts two effects in one box that, while both excellent for individual use, are greater than the sum of the parts when combined. **G**



THE RIVALS

Stone Deaf says its Rise & Shine (£199) pedal offers a blend of "classic fuzz, octave up fuzz and dynamic octapulse tremolo/vibrato" to help colour your tone.

Two pedals from Keeley feature fuzz coupled with various modulation types: the Monterey Rotary Fuzz Vibe (£319, pictured right) has Hendrix as its inspiration, while the Dark Side (£319) looks to David Gilmour. Catalinbread's Antichthon (£135) is described as a dynamic fuzz tremolo, and you can tweak the speed and sound of the tremolo by turning your guitar's volume knob, too.



Keeley's Monterey Rotary Fuzz Vibe



the Wishlist

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

Gibson Custom Shop Brian May SJ-200 12-String £6,899

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE 00800 44427661 WEB www.gibson.com WORDS **Neville Marten** PHOTOGRAPHY **Gibson**

It's bewildering that Gibson never gave its big-bodied super-jumbo the 12-string treatment and offered it in its regular line-up. The company did create the occasional special based around the concept, but in reality left the door open for Guild to fill the 12-string jumbo hole with its F-512 – a big, bold beast beloved of players as diverse as John Denver and David Gilmour. And indeed the subject behind this month's Wishlist, who used one (and in earlier days an Ovation Pacemaker 12-string) for his solo spot with Queen, performing the spine-tingling *Love Of My Life*.

Brian May is already using his new guitar live and loving it: "I used the Guild for a long time, but I have to admit to favouritism now – because this is *it!*" he says.

Brian and Gibson spec'd the instrument between them, the company deciding on the timbers and Brian stipulating personal design elements. So we find AAA Indian rosewood for back and sides, matching fingerboard and moustache bridge with 60s-style agoya shell inlays, AAA Sitka spruce top, and a neck of AAA flamed maple. Other classy appointments include a walnut 'stinger' on the headstock's rear, 12 gold-

plated mini Grover tuners, bone nut and bridge saddle. The guitar also comes equipped with Fishman's Matrix preamp with undersaddle piezo pickup and soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls.

Where things become more personalised is in the aesthetics department. Look to the headstock, fingerboard inlays and pickguard, and you'll find some very special ornamentation – all designed by Brian himself. The elongated headstock is the perfect setting for Brian's ubiquitous 'eight-pointed star' logo, inlaid in iridescent agoya shell and mirrored along the fingerboard. But the *pièce de résistance* is the pickguard, where the usual floral pattern is replaced by a design reflecting Brian's other love, that of astronomy. It's both elegant and rather touching since pride of place, perhaps unsurprisingly, is given to Mercury.

Could you have imagined that the company that made J-200s for Elvis, Bob Dylan and Jimmy Page would offer to build you one – a special one at that?

"It was beyond my wildest dreams, and I so wish my dad had been around to see it because he would have

1. The elongated 12-string headstock is the perfect showcase for Sir Brian's cosmic star, inlaid in attractive agoya shell. Note, too, the signed truss rod cover 'bell' and the dozen Grover mini Rotomatic tuners

2. Back and sides are Indian rosewood and not the maple found in later J-200s. Gibson spec'd the guitar's timbers, while Brian dealt more with its cosmetic and aesthetic features

3. The Brian May 12-string is certainly an imposing beast. Note the cosmic star inlays on the rosewood fingerboard, and the 60s-style bridge (like Jimmy Page's J-200, rather than Elvis Presley's 50s model)





3

4. Unsurprisingly given his other passion, Brian chose an astrological theme for his SJ-200's reimagined pickguard, with Mercury looming large in the middle of our photo as a tribute to his old friend who's "always with me"

5. The Brian May guitar comes with all the usual Gibson Custom Shop 'case candy' paraphernalia, including this hardback booklet containing the instrument's Certificate Of Authenticity

6. A beautiful leather-handled hard shell case with plush plum-coloured lining is supplied with the guitar, not only to protect it but to add to the grandeur of the project. It comes with Brian's signature in gold running down the centre, too!

been so happy and so proud. I mean, even touching one of those things back then was a dream. You'd go into a guitar store and if you didn't have any money, and it was obvious that you didn't have any money, people wouldn't let you touch anything. They made you feel so unwelcome. And that's why I love what Gibson has done with the Garage in London; they encourage kids to come in and look and play and make a noise."

The Brian May SJ-200 has a rosewood body like the earliest examples and not maple, as later ones would be. Was this decision based on historical factors or for sonic reasons?

"Ah, now you're asking me technical questions that I probably can't answer! I'm more of an instinctive player and, while, of course, it was a bit about Elvis, for me it was more of an Everly Brothers thing. They were such a huge influence on me, not only because of the harmonies but also because of the way they played their guitars. They had '12 strings' because they played two acoustics."

And Phil had his in regular tuning while Don was tuned to open G, which gave them an even broader, more spacial sound.

"Ah, I didn't know that. That explains *Wake Up Little Susie* with that opening riff. I was playing it last night, funnily enough, and I've got this guitar with the bottom E tuned down to D, which is such a glorious sound. It's a gorgeous instrument. And it's friendly, too. It's easy to play; your fingers just fall in the right places and it doesn't hurt you."

We can see you playing a prototype of the guitar on *Love Of My Life* during 2022's *Rhapsody Tour* at The O2. It certainly sounds fantastic live.

"Well, the guitar has quickly become an old friend. And that's a very lovely moment as it's a 'me and the audience' thing. I hardly have to sing at all. I just play and they sing – and, of course, at the end Freddie kind of 'comes back.'"

The strings are configured like a Rickenbacker, with the thicker of each octave pair uppermost.

"Yes, I strung it that way because I pick the strings upwards. And *Love Of My Life* is a good example because if you pick upwards you want the finger to hit the high string, the melody note, first."



The planetary motif pickguard and eight-pointed star inlays are tasteful touches, especially as Mercury takes pride of place.

"Well, Freddie is always with me. He was like a brother, and now I have a Mercury on my guitar, too, which makes me very happy."

Were the fingerboard inlays influenced by the stars on the Gibson Everly Brothers jumbos?

"Indirectly. Gibson offered that to me at first, but I said I'd rather have my cosmic stars. They said, 'We can't promise anything because it's very tricky cutting the shell.' But after a few weeks, they said, 'We've done it, just wait until you see it!'"

We were pleasantly surprised at the price tag here compared with other artist models that have been around £15k. So will Gibson make a Standard model available? No news from Montana as yet. Whatever happens, it's clear from Brian's enthusiasm that he and his fabulous SJ-200 are meant for one another. In fact, one could say the stars have aligned! **G**





TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

"This is the PAF I've always wanted -
incredible dynamics, harmonics and string
separation, all with super-rich midrange, tight
lows and an addictively juicy playing feel"



ADAM 'NOLLY' GETGOOD SIGNATURE HUMBUCKER SET

GUITARIST PRODUCER TONE HUNTER

Bare Knuckle

bareknucklepickups.co.uk



Gas Supply

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

Fender Player II Modified From £899

CONTACT **Fender EMEA** PHONE **0333 200 8765** WEB www.fender.co.uk

JARGON CRUNCHING Treble bleed circuit

The natural capacitance of your volume control results in a loss of high-end frequencies as it is turned down. By adding a treble bleed circuit, the high frequencies are still passed or 'bled' when you turn down your guitar's volume control.

Another month, another new Fender range...

Sort of, but spare a thought for the Fender design team. Should they dare stray too far from the blueprint, they'll risk being cursed by die-hard fans who insist a Strat should only have three positions on the selector. Keep things too similar, however, and they'll suffer equal wrath for not innovating. It's a truss rod for Fender's own back, you could say. But here we have the all-new Player II Modified models – less of a series and more of a sub-genre to Fender's workhorse range.

Right, so where are these made?

These five new Player II models are coming out of Fender's tried-and-tested Ensenada, Mexico, factory. The new additions are comprised a Stratocaster, a Stratocaster HSS, Stratocaster HSS with Floyd Rose, a Telecaster and a Telecaster HS.

Why are they called 'Modified'?

The 'Modified' expansion builds on the already decent Player II series models to offer additional options for

CONFIGURATIONS

In addition to regular SSS and SS pickup configurations, Fender has added humbuckers to the Telecaster (in the neck position) and Stratocaster – to give an HSS configuration for the latter

NOISELESS PICKUPS

The Player II Modified range gets a pickup swap from Alnico V to Fender Noiseless pickups across all single-coil placements

ADDITIONAL ELECTRONICS

As well as a global treble bleed circuit, Fender has added push-pull switching to the tone controls, offering series/parallel switching, coil-splitting or additional pickup blends depending on the model

LOCKING TUNERS

Fixed-bridge and standard vibrato models come with Fender's locking tuners for speedy string changes, while the HSS Strat is also available with a Floyd Rose and wider 304.8mm (12-inch) 'board radius





On the Telecaster HS (below) push-pull switching offers additional wiring options



sound and performance. Starting with the pickups, Fender has added its Noiseless units in all the traditional single-coil positions, and the HS Telecaster and HSS Stratocaster see their humbuckers upgraded to a higher-output model.

Sounds like it's just a pickup change?

Not so – as well as the pickups, the Player II Modified models feature push-pull switching and come with a treble bleed circuit to maintain your high-end when you roll down the volume control.

What does the switching do?

This varies on each model. On the Stratocaster, the additional switching engages the neck pickup on positions 1 and 2. For the two HSS Stratocaster models, it splits the humbucker, and on the Telecaster it offers series/parallel wiring of the pickups.

Sounds good, what about the hardware – are there any changes there?

Yep. We mentioned that the upgrades cover performance as well as tone, and that comes from some sleek-looking block saddles at the bridge and the Fender locking tuners that take care of stability – as well as speedy string changes – at the headstock. But that's not all because the HSS Strat is available with a two-point vibrato or Floyd Rose Special double-locking bridge.

What are the finish options?

The Stratocaster and Telecaster come in a choice of six finishes, with either rosewood or maple fingerboards depending on which finish you choose: Olympic Pearl, Harvest Green Metallic, Sunshine Yellow, Dusk, Electric Blue and 3 Tone Sunburst. The HSS Stratocaster is available in Olympic Pearl, Sunshine Yellow, Dusk, Electric Blue and 3 Tone Sunburst options, while the HSS Stratocaster Floyd Rose comes in Olympic Pearl, Dusk and 3 Tone Sunburst. Finally, the Telecaster SH is available in Olympic Pearl, Dusk, 3 Tone Sunburst and Sunshine Yellow finishes.

Crikey... How much, then?

Prices start at £899 for the Stratocaster and Telecaster. The Telecaster SH and Stratocaster HSS are £949, and the Stratocaster HSS Floyd Rose is £999. They're out now and should be arriving in retailers as you read this. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...

PRS SE EXOTIC VENEER LIMITED EDITION FROM £1,039

'Exotic' often translates to 'expensive', and you'd be forgiven for thinking that the guitars pictured are the latest to mark PRS's high-end anniversary celebrations. But these are SE models, which take four popular PRS SE models and dress them up with fancy wood veneers. Each guitar is available in set finishes (high-gloss nitro), with only 2,500 being made worldwide. There's a Custom 24 Burl'd Ash (Lake Blue, Natural); Custom 24-08 Poplar Burl (Charcoal Cherry Midnight Burst, Lake Blue Midnight Burst); SE McCarty 594 Laurel Burl (Vintage Sunburst) and DGT Laurel Burl (McCarty Tobacco Burst). Prices start at £1,039 for the Custom 24, while the remaining models are £1,125. Head to the PRS website to find your nearest stockist.

www.prsguitars.com



HARLEY BENTON NASHVILLE NYLON BLACK £254

Thinline nylon-string guitars have made a bit of a comeback in recent years, thanks in part to Polyphia's Tim Henson and his Ibanez TOD10N. Likewise, the Cordoba Stage caught our attention when we reviewed it in these pages, too. Now, Harley Benton is getting in on the action with the Nashville Nylon, an affordable, stage-ready nylon-string guitar for just £254. It has a mahogany body with a spruce top, and a mahogany neck with jatoba fingerboard (648mm/25.5-inch scale length). An onboard piezo/preamp system offers bass, treble and volume controls, and it comes finished in a slick-looking Gloss Black finish. Head to the Thomann website for more information.

www.thomann.co.uk





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: Red Sky July

Album: *Misty Morning* (Shadowbirds Records)



Misty Morning by Red Sky July is out now on Shadowbirds Records www.redskyjuly.co.uk

With their fourth album, *Misty Morning*, Red Sky July continue to blur the sounds of British folk and vintage Americana in ways that will hook in just about any listener. The music pairs warm acoustics with enchanting harmonies, yielding some jaw-dropping results on tracks such as *Kings Of Better Things* and *Cut Me Down*. The band was formed by husband-and-wife duo Ally McErlaine (Texas) and Shelly Poole (Alisha's Attic), and features Haley Glennie-Smith making her recording debut on the latest release. Ally explains why they decided to venture beyond the Top 10.

Going To California

As a founding member of Scottish chart-toppers Texas, Ally started Red Sky July in 2009 as a vehicle for his more folky endeavours. "When Texas started we had a big Americana influence with a lot of slide," he says. "As we became more poppy, there was less space for guitar. I found myself missing playing other styles. In Red Sky July we're quite free; it's just me and the two [other band members]. We're quite self-contained. Our biggest influences are Fleet Foxes, Big Thief and leftfield Americana. Our songs are rooted in blues and country."

Natural Harmony

"Usually, it all starts off on acoustic," Ally says. "That's how the songs come about. I've got an old Epiphone Texan from 1965, which is really warm-sounding – that's one of my main guitars. I also have a Martin, which is also

very warm. I don't like any harshness in my acoustics. Maybe it comes with getting older, but I don't enjoy hearing aggressive sounds and prefer to stick with tones that are more inviting. That's the vibe we're going for in this band. Normally, we'd go into a studio and record it all live, but this album was mainly done at home."

The Spice Of Life

From a technical standpoint, there are many different approaches explored on *Misty Morning* – from delicate fingerpicking to single-note lines and full-chorded strumming. "We try to make our music as varied as we can," says Ally. "We don't want to strum our way through a set. We like to mix in some fingerpicking, some electric and mandolin to make it more interesting. Strumming for an hour can get tedious. Fingerpicking is something I didn't learn until about 10 years ago. I didn't try it before because in Texas I didn't need to. Eventually, I got into Bob Dylan and Nick Drake, and forced myself to learn."

Magic Touch

Though they're predominantly an acoustic band, there are some standout electric moments on tracks like *Two Magicians*. "That song is in DADGAD but with a capo on the 2nd fret," notes Ally. "You wouldn't normally have fuzz on a song like that, but I didn't want this album to be too run-of-the-mill. I preferred wild things jumping out unexpectedly. I used the Chase Tone Fuzz Fella with a lot of reverb. My favourite electric is my early 70s sunburst Gibson ES-335. There was a short period where they made them with a coil tap. 335s can often sound too fat on recordings, but this switch helps me get around that. You can thin it out and make it sound like a Tele."

Texas Flood

Ally's first American tour resulted in him seeing one of his biggest guitar heroes just months before tragedy struck. "I love Stevie Ray Vaughan and was lucky enough to see him live, purely by accident," he recalls. "I was 19 and Texas were on the same bill as him in Atlanta, a few months before he died. I remember being absolutely blown away. His band sounded so loud, I couldn't believe my ears. He looked so cool with his Strat. I had no idea it would be the last chance I'd get to see him." [AS]

Standout track: *Kings Of Better Things*

For fans of: Dolly Parton, Fleet Foxes, Band Of Horses

Red Sky July (left to right): singer Haley Glennie-Smith, singer-songwriter Shelly Poole, and guitarist and songwriter Ally McErlaine



PHOTO BY ADAM REGISTER



MY BIGGEST HIT

How the soul greats inspired Ally's most famous single

Released as the lead single from *White On Blonde*, the 1997 album by Texas, *Say What You Want* paved the way for international success. As Ally reveals, it was deeply rooted in vintage soul music, and through that they found a new bridge to universal appeal. "We were listening to a lot of Marvin Gaye and Al Green when we wrote it," he says. "I was still quite young then. Hearing those 7th chords and descending ideas came from Al Green. I probably should have played it with a capo, but I didn't think of that at the time!"

"I don't like harshness in my acoustics and prefer to stick with tones that are more inviting. That's the vibe we're going for in this band"



Albums

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

Gary Moore was often at his best in relatively intimate settings such as the Baloise Session



PHOTO BY DOMINIK PLÜSS

Gary Moore Live - From Baloise Session

Provogue Records (available 23 May)



Fiery archive material from much-missed blues guitar superstar

The Baloise Session is an annual festival held in Basel, Switzerland, renowned for its intimate club-like atmosphere and star-studded performances. Such was the case on

13 November 2008 when Gary Moore strode out on stage and captivated the attending audience with a blistering 52-minute set, which, luckily for us, was not only recorded for posterity but also filmed. On this occasion Gary was accompanied by Pete Rees on bass, Vic Martin on keyboards and his old Thin Lizzy bandmate Brian Downey on drums.

We've had the chance to preview the Blu-ray of the gig, which is available as part of the two-disc set, and we'd heartily recommend it as it not only provides an all-important extra dimension to the audio, the fretboard close-ups also give you a chance to view the man's stunning technique in glorious detail. Plus you get a chance to see some of Gary's guitars in action. In fact, the first four tracks alone see Gary fire up a flame-top Les Paul on the opener, *Oh, Pretty Woman*, a cherry ES-335 on *Since I Met You*, a Telecaster for *Thirty Days (To Come Back Home)*, and a Goldtop Les Paul for *I Love You More*.

Highlights include a reading of Thin Lizzy's *Don't Believe A Word* and white-hot renditions of setlist staples like *Still Got The Blues* and *Walking By Myself*. Why this set has been in the vault for so long we couldn't say, but we're so glad it's seeing the daylight it so richly deserves now! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Thirty Days (To Come Back Home)*

For fans of: SRV, Joe Bonamassa, Thin Lizzy

The Pretenders

Kick 'Em Where It Hurts

Independent release (available 13 June)



Hard-hitting Hynde in club mode, with outstanding rock 'n' roll guitar on tap

After an enforced absence from touring during the pandemic, The Pretenders decided to return to the fray via up-close-and-personal club gigs where they felt free to shake things up and move beyond the hits-heavy tours they'd settled into prior to lockdown. Accordingly, what we get here is an almost punkishly raw selection of Pretenders deep cuts with outstanding seat-of-the-jeans playing from the excellent James Walbourne. For sure, there's a smattering of well-loved back-catalogue tracks such as *Talk Of The Town* – but even these have a wilder, freer feel to them, as if PJ Harvey were producing, if you will. Hynde's voice is never less than mesmerising, and here we're treated to its power to make darker undercurrents flow through the music in more recent material such as *Losing My Sense Of Taste*. Walbourne, meanwhile, is absolutely in his element on the rockabilly-esque *Thumbelina* from earlier in The Pretenders' career – channelling Luther Perkins with effortless style. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Thumbelina*

For fans of: Patti Smith, PJ Harvey, Brian Setzer

Envy Of None

Stygian Wavz

Kscope (available now)

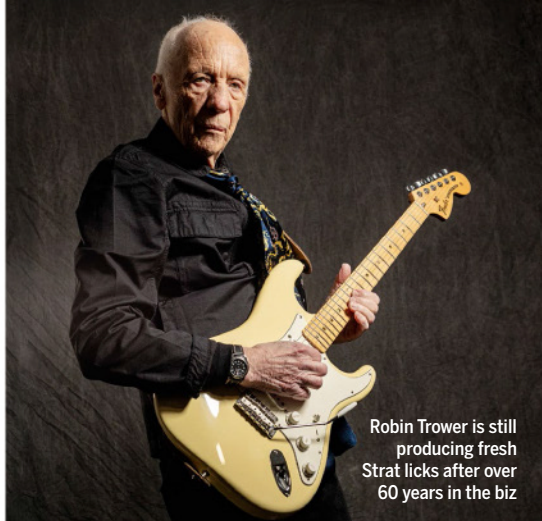


Alex Lifeson's prog-pop opus is so much more than a side project

When Rush called it a day back in 2015, nobody would have blamed Alex Lifeson if he wanted to spend the rest of his days kicking back and relaxing after years on the road. But it was not to be; 2022 saw the release of *Envy Of None's* eponymous first release, to which this year's *Stygian Wavz* is the worthy sequel. Whereas a lot of superstar guitarists' side projects tend to be relentless shredfests, this is certainly not the case here as Lifeson's tasteful landscaping guitar is ably partnered by vocalist Maiah Wynne's hypnotic, breathy lead vocals – think Peter Gabriel or Kate Bush at her most prog and you're in the ballpark. Add bassist and programmer Andy Curran and keyboardist Alfio Annibalini into the mix and the scene is set for some of the best prog-pop we've heard in a long while. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Handle With Care*

For fans of: Kate Bush, Peter Gabriel, Rush



Robin Trower is still producing fresh Strat licks after over 60 years in the biz

Robin Trower

Come And Find Me

Provogue Records (available now)



Mean, moody and pristine album from Strat master

Robin Trower turned 80 this March, but you really wouldn't know it from the youthful Strat-assisted good vibes he's kicking up on this, his new album. His signature neck pickup through a Marshall (with the occasional wah or trem) guitar sound is unmistakable, as is his songwriting style. Robin employs his trusted studio band comprising Chris Taggart on drums, Glenn Letsch on bass (on two tracks, Trower himself plays the remainder) and Richard Watts delivers his usual heartfelt vocals. The Hendrix influence is still there, apparent on *Without A Trace* for instance, but the compositions come from a variety of influences, some quite surprising. For example, *Take This Hurt Away*: "That song actually started when I thought to myself... 'I wonder what I would come up with if they asked me to write a song for a James Bond film,'" he tells us. We're sure 007 would be both shaken and stirred! **[DM]**

Standout track: *I Fly Straight To You*
For fans of: Jimi Hendrix, Leslie West

Young Gun Silver Fox

Pleasure

Candelion Records (available 2 May)



Latter-day West Coast yacht rock with real feeling and slick writing

The London-based duo of vocalist Andy Platts and guitarist Shawn Lee – who also collaborated with Barrie Cadogan for their Ultrasonic Grand Prix project – are on their fifth album now, with the release of *Pleasure*. Recent Royal Albert Hall shows are testament to how they've been quietly gaining a groundswell following, and with the quality of the writing and grooves on offer here, it's no surprise. The musical touchstones here are undeniable – from Steely Dan and Michael McDonald to more esoteric yacht rockers such as Eric Tagg. Yet Platts and Lee bring it all together with real style and freshness of spirit. Opener, *Stevie & Sly*, laments the passing of the golden era of late-60s soul and funk, while the flowing grooves of *Holding Back The Fire* recall Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall*-era work. Lee's guitar work is deft, supportive of the song with tasty moves when it's time to solo. A pleasure indeed. **[JD]**

Standout track: *The Greatest Loser*
For fans of: Steely Dan, Larry Carlton, Toto



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Tones Behind The Tracks

Samantha Fish's new album is her heaviest blues-rock opus to date, with heartfelt vocals underscored by scorching guitar riffs 'n' licks

Artist: Samantha Fish

Album: *Paper Doll* (Rounder Records)



Samatha's heavy riffs are met with a new-found confidence in her vocals

This month sees the release of Samantha Fish's latest studio album, *Paper Doll*. A ferocious, riff-laden powerhouse, it's energised still further by the fact that it was recorded while her band was on tour and so the vibe throughout is stage fresh and positively electrifying. Later this year Samantha brings her celebrated live show to the UK, complete with her cigar-box sidekick, her faithful Gibson SG and possibly a new companion in the form of a very special Christmas present she awarded herself last year...

You recorded this album when you were out on the road with your band. How did that work out for you?

"It required quite a bit of flexibility. I know a lot of musicians have done it this way – it was just new for me. But we were on tour and we had a pretty hectic schedule, so it was like, 'All right, we've got two days off in Texas, let's go into a studio between shows and start chipping away at this.' And, you know, five, six or seven sessions like that throughout the summertime, that's pretty much how the record was made. I think it kind of lent itself to having this live energy."

Are you able to write while you're touring?

"It depends on the schedule. The day of a show is kind of tough for me because my day is planned out. I have a routine and it makes it difficult. You have to really dedicate the time to it and make it fit and it means you're sacrificing something else. You just have to be in the right headspace, too. You can't be rushed about it, you know? It's not something I can just sit down for; I have to marinate an idea or a song and come back to chip away at it. But sometimes you're running to soundcheck and a lyric idea will pop into your head, and it's like, 'I'll take a second to write it down,' and then it's something I come back to."

You've said you're happy with your vocals on the new record. Are vocals something you've found challenging on any of your previous releases?

"I don't think I'm ever going to be very happy with anything like that, but I do feel like I have tapped into figuring out how to do the thing I do on stage in the studio, which feels great because it's a completely different environment. If you came up singing on stage, there's a bit of freedom in that. You're comfortable, right? So going into the studio, where you're wearing these isolating headphones, it's totally different and even these minute differences can change how you hold yourself. I've been in studios more and more over the years, and so you kind of get comfortable. Unfortunately, you have to learn to get comfortable under a microscope! Everything's being recorded, so there's not a lot of room to experiment and fail and grow and all that. But I feel like I finally got to this point where I'm like, 'Okay, I can do the thing in here that I do out there.'"



Samantha's new sparkle-finish ES-335 was a Christmas present she bought herself last year

“[Recording on the road] required quite a bit of flexibility... but I think it kind of lent [the record] this live energy”

It looks like there's been a new addition to your guitar collection. Tell us about the sparkly ES-335.

“Yes, it's a new acquisition. I got myself a Christmas present last year. I've been wanting a big-bodied guitar and when we recorded *Sweet Southern Sounds* from the new record I played a 335 in the studio. And I'm like, 'Yeah, it's time...' I've been looking at that style of guitar for years, and that solo, it needs a big-bodied guitar, you know? There's this, like, wild abandon with the way that it feeds back and you just get all this extra noise. It's hard to tame, and that song requires that kind of an approach. It's gorgeous. I got it from this guitar shop in St Louis, Eddie's Guitars. They get custom finishes from Gibson there. It's kind of a special deal that they run with that particular shop.”

Is it stock or have you had the pickups changed or anything on the guitar?

“No, I think [the pickups are] whatever they put in their Custom Shop guitars. I'm sure they've got a little extra sparkle to them... The whole guitar itself is incredibly special.”

Which other gear did you take into the studio with you for *Paper Doll*?

“We were on the road with the bus, so I had access to my entire arsenal of touring guitars. And then when we were going out to the California sessions – those were fly dates – I really could only bring, like, two guitars with me. So my SG is my go-to and comes with me everywhere. I was actually having some issues with my SG last summer, just because I beat the hell out of it on the road. I'm constantly having to make little repairs to it, and I wasn't totally comfortable with the way that it was intonating over the summer. So Gibson was really amazing and sent me a backup SG, so I could have my sound on the record. That was the only one that I really pulled for from my own arsenal.

“I brought my cigar-box guitar. But I love going into studios and playing with the gear that they have. Bobby [Harlow, producer] said, 'This studio is going to have all these guitars. You don't even need to bring any.' Well, I'm going to bring one at least to make sure I feel good about what I'm doing. I brought my Firebird for the Austin session. I brought my Jazzmaster, but the studio had Les Pauls, 335s and a really cool Telecaster. The studio we played at in California – Savannah



PHOTO BY DOUG HARDESTY

Studios – they had a range of stuff, kind of wild, funky, weird little guitars. We were just trying to find the best sounds. I was like, 'I don't care what it is. Let's just pick it up and hear how it sounds in the context of the song'. It's fun to do it like that.”

Were you able to use your own amps and pedals in the studio?

“We used what they had in the studio. They had some really cool old [Fender] Deluxes and stuff. I really like using small amps in the studio. You know, it's an old Led Zeppelin trick, right? But they just sound pretty incredible. I'm gonna have to go back through my photos to find out exactly what I played on which songs. But we kind of just set up a room full of amps and when something wasn't quite working for a song, I said, 'Hey, switch it to the other amp.' But really, for me, especially over the last few years and different recording sessions, I like the Deluxes in the studio. You can just kind of crank them up and they're very consistent, and you can get a full range of sounds and it's one of those things where if I can get the tone out of just the amp and the guitar, I'm not going to try to put an effect in place. I'm not going to mess with a bunch of gained-up distortion pedals or anything, but I did have my Analog Man King Of Tone there, ready to go.” **[DM]**

Paper Doll was recorded while Samantha was out on the road with touring bandmates Ron Johnson (bass), Jamie Douglass (drums), and Mickey Finn (keys) – and a Gibson SG provided her signature sound at all times



Paper Doll is available now via Rounder Records. Samantha tours the UK from 28 May to 1 June. See website for album and ticket details
www.samanthafish.com



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Under Pressure

Neville Marten recalls the first time he met Brian May and how it nearly went so wrong – luckily, it was salvaged by the good-natured rockstar!

When I caught up with Sir Brian May recently to chat about his fabulous Gibson SJ-200 12-string (see page 24), he said to me, “We go back a long way, don’t we?” I reminded him that it was, in fact, 40 years since we first met. I had gone to interview him at Queen’s offices in London all those years ago and, needless to say, I was terribly nervous. At the time he was the biggest star I’d ever met, and he’d stipulated to my boss – who’d arranged the interview when they’d met at some event or other – that “the interviewer mustn’t be late, as I have another appointment that day”.

“To my utter horror I heard myself widdling all the way through our chat. On Brian’s own guitar! I’d never normally be so disrespectful”

As a stickler for punctuality myself, I allotted a good hour or so longer than the time it would take me to get from my home in Essex down to West London. All was going well until the A12 came to a halt at Brentwood. And it stayed that way for more than two hours. Tragically, there’d been a terrible pile-up. In 1985 mobile phones were not the all-pervasive monsters they are today. I certainly didn’t have one, and looking around no-one else seemed to, either. I was in the middle of a blocked dual carriageway and couldn’t leave the car to find a phone box. Panic set in and all I could do was wait. I turned to my A-to-Z and plotted a route across town. But even once the traffic had got moving I had to keep pulling over to check that I was on the correct route. It was getting later and later...

Don’t Stop Me Now

I finally arrived at the Queen office almost an hour late. I parked my car half on the pavement outside and dashed in, expecting a deserved tirade. I gasped my profuse apologies, but Brian couldn’t have been calmer. “You’d better move your car, though, or you’ll get a ticket,” he said. This I did, and found my

way back, now well over an hour behind schedule. Now, although I was a lover of Queen’s music and a huge fan of Brian’s playing, I didn’t know every little detail about him as a person; for instance, the fact that he wore white clogs... Well, guess who also favoured exactly the same footwear, and had done since working for Gibson in Holland? Brian beckoned me to follow him up the wooden steps to the room where the interview was to take place, and it was then that I spotted them. My heart sank! “Oh no, he’s going to think of me as some sad copycat fanboy,” I said to myself as we clattered loudly up to the first floor.

Sitting there in the room was a huge flight case. Brian lifted its lid, said something like, “Here’s the beast,” and gestured for me to pick it up, which I duly did. Having primed my Sony Walkman with a fresh BASF C90 cassette, I pressed ‘record’ and off we went. The interview went well. Brian couldn’t have been more forthcoming.

When we finished I loaded the guitar back into its case and we went downstairs, where together we chose the feature’s pictures and cover shot from a filing cabinet full of transparencies. We chatted some more, I bade my farewells, located my vehicle and started back to the *Guitarist* office in Cambridge.

I slotted the cassette into my car’s stereo as I always did, to check that it had come out okay. Luckily, it had, but to my utter horror I heard myself widdling all the way through our chat. On Brian’s own guitar! How humiliating. It must have been subconscious nerves as I’d never normally be so disrespectful. So not only the clogs, now this, too. Would he ever speak to me again? Luckily he did, and it was so nice to catch up with him and hear how proud he is of his new Gibson.

I’ve never asked Brian about the clogs incident, nor me playing non-stop through our first interview. He’s certainly never mentioned it and quite possibly never even noticed it, either, but I still get the chills whenever I remember. Got any star-related embarrassments to report? Do share and I’ll see you next time.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN MAY GUITARS

NEV’S GAS OF THE MONTH

By Royal Appointment

What? Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry **Where seen?** www.gear4music.com **Price?** £849

It could only be this guitar, couldn’t it? A collaboration between Brian May, his tech, Pete Malandrone, and House Music, this is a great-looking remake of Brian’s legendary guitar. It comes with a chambered mahogany body and mahogany top, a triple array of BM Tri-Sonic style pickups wired in series, a floating Wilkinson knife-edge vibrato, master volume and tone rotaries, plus six slider switches for on-off and phase reversal. Brian is a stickler for detail, so expect a great-playing, great-sounding, right royal guitar!



Best Efforts

Alex Bishop weighs up some of the pros and cons of making a new jig to assist with fretwork

Chat with any guitar maker about their processes and you will inevitably find yourself chatting about jigs. These are the shop-built fixtures to assist in the construction of the guitar, and might range from fingerboard-slotting fixtures to saddle-slotting guides and lots, lots more.

As a lutherie teacher, however, one of my biggest responsibilities is time management. Building jigs takes up a lot of headspace and takes time away from actually building guitars, which – let's face it – is the fun bit. For my students I have to weigh up the benefits of going down the rabbit hole when it comes to rigging up a new tool.

That said, when one of my students, Usman, recently expressed a desire to take his fretwork up a level, we decided that a new setup was going to be necessary. Usman is building a fanned-fret Gypsy jazz style guitar and – not one to make life easy for himself – he was keen to install frets with semi-hemispherical ends. The advantage of this kind of fret job is that the neck will not suffer from protruding fret ends as the dryer seasons cause the wooden fingerboard to contract slightly. The comfort provided all year round is unparalleled as there is no interruption from bevelled fret ends as you slide your hand up the neck.

This does, however, mean that every single fret needs to be dressed at each end into perfect ball-shaped 'hemispheres'. Doing this with a file and sandpaper is punishing work, and with 24 frets there were no less than 48 frets ends to individually file and polish before we could even begin to think about installing them. Previously, I had made a simple plywood workstation for shaping fret ends, with a slotted block for holding the fret while a crowning file was used to do the shaping. Something new was needed if we were to avoid the pain and suffering that goes with doing things the hard way.

Box Of New Tricks

With an ever-expanding arsenal of tools in the workshop, I've learned to take pause and consider if there is a better way of doing a job you have been doing, out of habit, in the same way for years. Lately, I'd tried using my Dremel multi-tool in new ways for fretwork, so it made sense to have a go at rigging something up with this handy, versatile power tool. I poked about inside my accessories box and found a small silicon carbide grinding wheel about 20mm in diameter. It was a little bit wider than the width of a fret, so an ideal candidate for bastardising into a concave fret-end shaper.

First of all, I needed to clamp up the Dremel in a horizontal position so we could sit grinding away in comfort, hands-free. There are probably a few useful



Dremel attachments for doing this, but always looking to save some cash I made a simple clamping jig by drilling a 45mm hole in a piece of pine. This was cut into two pieces and bolted together around the waist of the Dremel. By mounting this to a board, I could easily pop it into my bench vice and adjust for different heights so all my students would find it comfortable.

The grinding disc needed to be shaped into a concave profile so it would work like a kind of rotary crowning file. I fished out a round diamond file from a box of old hand tools, masked up and switched on the Dremel at high speed. By gently touching the surface of the spinning

Ready, steadied, go! Alex clamped up his Dremel tool in a makeshift jig ready for some speedy, pain-free fret finishing

"With a bit of control and the right technique, it was possible to get perfect semi-hemispherical fret ends every time in just under 30 seconds"

disc with my file, I was able to gradually carve it into a fret-shaped curve, into which my frets would fit snugly.

Next came the moment of truth. With the wheel spinning away from us, we brought the fret end of a fret against the wheel. With a bit of careful control and the right technique, it was possible to get a perfect ball-ended finish. Just a bit of sanding and micro mesh to finish off *et voilà*: perfect semi-hemispherical fret ends every time in just under 30 seconds. And best of all, no more cramping fingers or aching shoulders. It certainly pays to work smarter and not harder. **G**



Latin Lessons

Interested in nylon-string guitar but don't know where to start? Three experts from the International Guitar Foundation join us to help

How do flamenco and classical guitars differ from each other – and why?

Samuel Moore: “Although the basic construct of flamenco and classical guitars is similar, it is subtle structural differences that make each instrument type unique. For example, flamenco guitars tend to be more lightly built than their classical counterparts, with shallower bodies, thinner tops and lighter internal bracing. Additionally, the types of wood used to construct flamenco guitars tend to be different from classical instruments. Although both commonly have a solid spruce top – cedar is sometimes used as well – the materials used to construct the guitar's back and sides are different. When constructing a classical guitar, luthiers tend to favour heavier woods such as mahogany or rosewood.

“By contrast, when making a flamenco guitar, luthiers tend to favour lighter woods, such as cypress. Alongside this, the *golpeador* (tap plate) attached to all flamenco guitars, is an appendage not commonly

found on classical instruments. The purpose of the *golpeador* is to protect the wood on the guitar's top from *golpe* (a percussive technique seldom used in classical music). Finally, the action tends to be lower on flamenco instruments.”

Why is the fretboard of classical guitars typically the widest and flattest among all six-strings?

Tom Kerstens: “Because the polyphony and counterpoint – several voices played at the same time – are easier to realise. There is more space for the left hand to separate the different lines, or melodies, in the music. Rock or folk techniques use chords as blocks more and that is easier with a more narrow and rounded fingerboard. However, some fingerstyle playing also needs space on the fingerboard.”

What do you look for in a good classical and/or flamenco guitar?

Tom: “A certain ‘speaking’ quality – hard to define, I know! After all, when you play a piece of music, you're telling a story, and a great guitar helps tell it. More technically, I like a guitar that responds quickly to what I do. Some famous guitars have great volume and presence but respond little to what the player is doing. I mean specifically the so-called lattice top guitars that sound great but are also pretty uniform and samey. Also, I look for a singing sound and subtlety and variety of sound. I find I need to spend quite a lot of time with the guitar to find out what it can do.

“A quick word about different historical instruments: I also play Baroque and 19th century instruments like Stauffer and Torres guitars. I found that these guitars really helped me to find the right way of playing certain music, such as Mertz or Tárrega. In a way, the guitar tells me how to play the music – after a lot of trying! I'm sure that's the same with electric guitars like Fender Stratocasters and Les Pauls.”

What are the origins of flamenco?

Tom: “Flamenco comes from Andalusia, a mixing pot of Gypsy, Jewish, Arab and European folk music. Originally, the singer (*cantaor*) was the most important, then the dancer, and the guitar was only accompaniment – it only gradually became a solo instrument. Ramón Montoya is often credited with being the first guitarist who became centre stage.”

Flamenco is extremely percussive and rhythmic – what are the key techniques?

Samuel: “The rhythmic techniques that are essential for flamenco are *rasgueado* and *golpe*. Perhaps more than any other technique, *rasgueado* personifies

Few players did so much to popularise flamenco as the late Spanish guitarist Paco De Lucía. If you want to get to grips with it yourself, IGF has a tailor-made course for you at its August 2025 Summer School





the sound of flamenco. It's a strumming technique and requires considerable precision to execute well. There are many different types of *rasgueado*, each demanding different technical considerations and finger strum combinations. *Golpe* is a distinctive percussive technique; at a basic level, it consists of your right hand's ring finger tapping against the body of the guitar. Most commonly, *golpe* is used in conjunction with other techniques, such as *rasgueado* or a thumb strike, but it can also be used on its own."

A broad fingerboard and widely spaced strings are a feature of classical guitars to facilitate polyphony and counterpoint. But combined with a very flat fingerboard, this can lead to an unfamiliar and rather stretched playing experience for guitarists coming from a rock and pop background

"I look for a singing sound and subtlety and variety of sound. I need to spend quite a lot of time with the guitar to find out what it can do"

For the uninitiated, how does classical vibrato differ from that commonly used in folk and rock playing on acoustic?

Francisco Correa: "Classical vibrato is typically subtle and controlled, created by rolling the fingertip back and forth on the string using a combination of finger, hand and arm motion to slightly alter pitch. It's even and continuous, adjusting in speed and depth for expressive nuance. In contrast, folk and rock vibrato is often wider, faster and more dramatic, achieved by pulling the string side to side, similar to bending. This results in a more pronounced effect that enhances individual style and helps notes stand out in a mix."

How does bossa nova as played on nylon-string acoustics relate to classical or flamenco traditions, if at all?

Francisco: "Bossa nova on nylon-string guitars blends classical and flamenco influences. Its fingerstyle technique and chord voicings draw from classical guitar, while its syncopation and rhythmic drive echo flamenco. Unlike flamenco's percussive attack, bossa nova favours softer dynamics and harmonic richness, creating a smooth, intimate sound rooted in both European and Afro-Brazilian traditions." **[JS/JD]**

The IGF Summer School is held at Bath Spa University, 12 to 17 August. Tom Kerstens is the artistic director and CEO of the International Guitar Foundation. Francisco Correa is the leader for the classical course and Samuel Moore is the leader for the flamenco course. There are also contemporary guitar courses: Electric Foundations with Jon Bishop, Rock and Blues Foundations with David Mead, Acoustic with Chris Quinn, Groove with Jason Sidwell, Vintage Electric with Chris Corcoran, Blues and Country with Andy Saphir, and Jazz with John Wheatcroft. For more info, visit www.igf.org.uk/bath-summer-school-2025

THREE TO GET READY

Nylon-strings with crossover appeal



Córdoba Stage £599

Want a nylon-string guitar that integrates with your gigging setup easily and handles like an electric? Try the Cordoba Stage, which has a fully chambered, thinline mahogany body with a spruce top (faced with a figured maple veneer) for a lively, resonant, natural acoustic response. The amplified side of things is served by a capable Fishman Stage pickup system with volume, EQ and Body Blend controls for tone tweaking.



Yamaha NTX 3 £771

Designed specifically to cater to guitarists crossing over from conventional steel-string acoustics and electric guitars, the NTX series offers less dauntingly wide necks than traditional classical guitars for easier playability. The range starts with the sub-£500 NTX 1, but we really liked the 3 model, with its slim neck, solid walnut back and sides, solid spruce top and the highly effective Atmosfeel pickup system.



Lowden S-23J £4,910

If you feel truly called to the nylon-string guitar but want a guitar that isn't as rigidly defined by tradition as a high-end classical guitar, Lowden's superb S-23J deserves your serious consideration. In our review, we said: "Superbly detailed build, excellent hybrid stage-aimed design, simplistic style and world-class voicing, both plugged in and acoustically." Finely crafted crossover nylon-strings don't get much better than this.



Dim & Half Dim Chords

Richard Barrett untangles the difference between these diminished chords and expands your harmonic knowledge in the process

Nowhere is the world of musical jargon more confusing than when dealing with guitar chords. Unlike a piano keyboard, we have to find the notes within a limited selection of strings, frets and fingers – forced to take liberties by omitting notes and jumping octaves. It's actually incredible what can be done within these limitations, and many would argue that this can lead to greater creativity.

There is no doubt that expanding our harmonic knowledge is a good thing. And so, here, we're looking at a couple of chords many shy away from. In the title you'll see two options, but what's the difference? There is one different note between diminished and half diminished: 'half' diminished consists of Root-♭3-♭5-♭7. Many call this a m7♭5, which makes sense as it describes the chord perfectly. Just be aware that it is sometimes known by that other name: chord VII in the diatonic harmonised chord scale. Diminished consists of Root-♭3-♭5 and ♭7. Yes, that's double flat – more info below! **G**

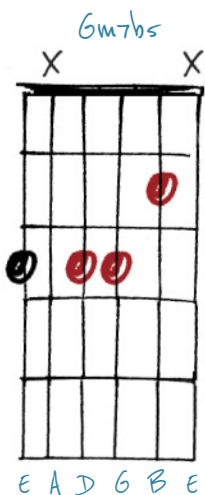
The *Love Over Gold*-period Mark Knopfler was very keen on m7♭5 and diminished chords. Check out *Private Investigations* to hear for yourself



PHOTO BY EBET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

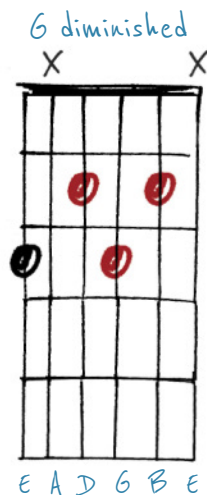
Example 1

This Gm7♭5 omits the fifth and first strings, but elsewhere you may recognise a relocated Am shape over that G root note. The chord stacks up from low to high: Root (G) - ♭7 (F) - ♭3 (B♭) - ♭5 (D♭). Try shifting the root note (G) down a semitone to F♯ and you'll get an F♯maj7, which goes rather well with this.



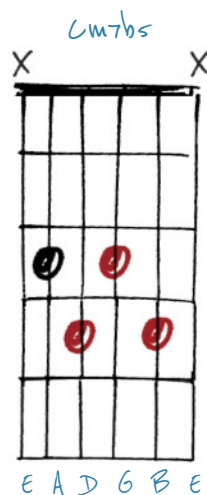
Example 2

This G 'full' diminished chord takes the ♭7 (F) and lowers it another semitone to E, which in this context would be F♭ (double flat). Interestingly, if you lower the root note (G) down to F♯ again, we now get F♯7. This is just a bonus bit of knowledge really, but it's always worth keeping an eye on harmonic relationships such as this.



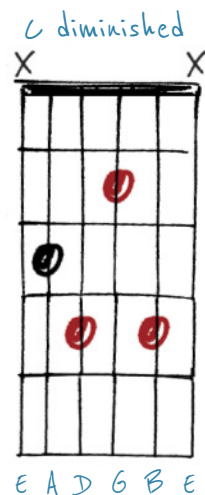
Example 3

Here's another m7♭5/half diminished shape, this time in C. It stacks up from low to high: Root (C) - ♭5 (G♭) - ♭7 (B♭) - ♭3 (E♭). Both the sixth and first strings are muted, making this movable to any key. If you lower the root note a semitone (to B), you'll find a Bmaj7 chord.



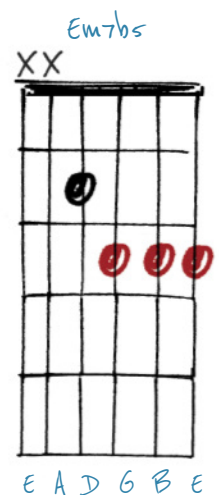
Example 4

For this C diminished chord, we lower the ♭7 (B♭) a further semitone to B♭. Yes, this would be called A on any other day, but this is all about the context within the chord! Again, lowering the root by a semitone to B gives a nice modulation, this time to B7.



Example 5

This Em7♭5 stacks up from low to high: Root (E) - ♭5 (B♭) - ♭7 (D) - ♭3 (G). Lower that D (♭7) to D♭ (yes C♯, but you know the rules now!) and you'll have E diminished. Lower the root to E♭ and you'll find E♭maj7. This makes more sense on the fretboard. Don't try to do it in your head!







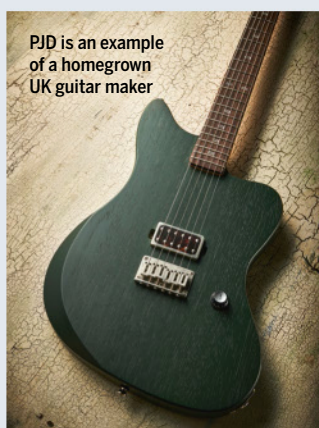
Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

STAR LETTER

HOME MARKET



PJD is an example of a homegrown UK guitar maker

Our world is changing at some pace and there is much rhetoric about the potential impact of price tariffs coming from over the water. This is likely to have a negative impact upon some highly respected guitar-producing countries including Canada, Mexico and China, and with possibly more to follow, it is likely that guitar buyers will see price hikes. It is not for me to comment on the politics, but one notable point emanating from that same place is the notion to manufacture locally, and I think that is more relevant for us here in Britain than ever.

In the hallowed pages of *Guitarist*, you all do an amazing job of keeping us updated on what's what, as well as who's who. You have detailed some amazing British guitar makers and their products. It would be unfair for me to single them out – I wouldn't want to insult any I missed – but it must be said that the designs and quality out there are amazing and represent the highest artistic levels and skills. Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales are all represented, and some appear head and shoulders above many from overseas that have been historically revered by us all. Issues 521 and 522 highlight examples, and if that isn't inspiration enough for us to buy British, I don't know what is. I am coveting one from issue 521, which I can only describe as breathtaking. Now, if only I could start again!

John Williamson

Thanks for your thoughts, John. While it's too soon to determine all the knock-on effects of the tariffs situation, we could perhaps draw parallels with the other great spanner in the works of global trade that has befallen us in recent times. During the pandemic, many British guitar firms started making a greater percentage of their components in-house – PJD and Gordon Smith being two good examples – to avoid being caught in the trap of rising costs or unavailability of parts from overseas. As US tariffs take effect, as well as counter-tariffs being levied by affected countries, it may turn out that some of the most affordable quality guitars we can buy are manufactured here in the UK. But it is a very complex situation, so look out for an in-depth analysis feature on this worrying subject in *Guitarist* soon.



KORG

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg SH-PRO Sledgehammer Pro clip-on tuner!
www.korg.co.uk

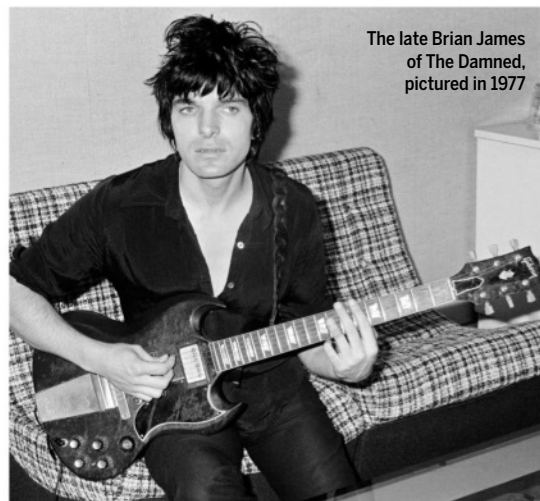
BRIAN JAMES

Brian James, founder and original guitarist of The Damned and Lords Of The New Church, who has sadly died, took the sound of The Stooges and MC5 and helped kickstart a whole genre, turning punk from a whisper into a roar. His guitar playing was visceral but melodic, wielding his SG and, latterly, a Tele with a skill that few contemporaries possessed in those early days of 1976. His songwriting was prolific: *New Rose*, the first punk single, still sounds fresh today. It was wonderful to see him join the original members of The Damned for a tour in 2022 and how the crowds reacted to them.

I wonder, however, how many people who read your magazine have heard of Brian, or acknowledge what he or others from those times brought to music and continue to do so. Brian's replacement on guitar in The Damned, Captain Sensible, is an amazingly skilled guitarist and innovative musician, and could certainly give many of the somewhat derivative players who often grace the pages of your magazine a run for their money. (No need to mention *Happy Talk*, though!) The Damned continues to push boundaries and make fantastic new music, as well as bringing songs from their 49-year career of anarchy, chaos and destruction to new audiences.

So raise a glass of your favourite red to Brian James and recognise the contribution he made to guitar music in that revolution of '76/'77 and his enduring influence. And, as punk reaches its 50th anniversary, let's see *Guitarist* celebrate those times and the guitarists who really could play and still do, like Jake Burns from Stiff Little Fingers. Get Captain Sensible in for an interview – you're sure to be both informed and entertained.

Chris Moon



The late Brian James of The Damned, pictured in 1977

PHOTO BY ERICA ECHENBERG/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Thanks for your heartfelt tribute to Brian – our sympathies and, we're sure, those of the mag's readers go out to his family, friends and fans as we reflect on the musical legacy you describe so well. As you say, punk and New Wave (as well as 80s pop, we'd argue) are certainly corners of guitar music that we would do well to devote more attention to, so look out for more of that in the mag in coming months. Readers, feel free to write in with your band and artists suggestions and we'll see what we can do.

AMPLIFIERS 101?

Hello folks. First of all, thank you for a fantastic magazine. I've been a regular reader since the first Covid lockdown when I became reacquainted with playing guitar again after many years away. The quality of the articles, reviews and photos is never less than top notch. Since I started reading your mag regularly again, I've found that there is a lot of basic knowledge that I'm lacking, particularly in regards to amplifiers. When I read about 'line outs' and 'FX loops' and the like, I more often than not find myself reaching for my favourite search engine to look up what these things mean! For people like myself, would you consider running an article, or even articles, as a beginner's guide to modern amps and what the various knobs and switches and bits are for? I'm sure I'm not the only person who'd appreciate it!

Tony O'Brien

Great idea, Tony – we did a cover feature called All About Amps many years ago, but it's perhaps time for a refresher. Would readers like to see the '101' treatment given to any other areas of gear, in case there's scope for a small regular feature on jargon busting? If so, let us know...

TIMES PAST

It was a pleasant surprise to read Dave Winthrop's name in Neville's Advocate (issue 522). Dave's younger brother Max was my childhood friend. Occasionally, this cool mysterious figure would appear and the two younger boys would abandon their Action Men and chance their hands at wrestling him to the ground! If I was very lucky, I got to witness The Mooche rehearsing in a large basement room known as The Nursery. Neville mentions he played at one point with Dave in a local Essex band and I wonder if it was The Mooche, and whether I may have heard him play in that nursery?

Ralph Morse

Neville Marten replies: What an amazing coincidence. I lived with Dave and his then wife in Witham, Essex, in the early 70s. Dave and I would often just jam together in the house, and also with his wife's brilliant guitarist brother. No, I wasn't in The Mooche; that was the incredible Ian Pierce. Sadly, Ian died not that long back. What a loss.

Funnily enough, back when I was *Guitarist's* editor in the 90s my phone went one day and, having not seen him for 20 years, a voice said, "Is that Neville Marten?" "Yes," I replied. "Winthrop here," was the retort. He'd picked up a copy of the mag in a music shop. So there you go...

THE PRICE WAS RIGHT

I was sorting through some old photos when I came across this picture [shown above] from, I'd guess, around 1978. It's part of the guitar wall at Coast Music, a great little shop in Bournemouth and the focal point of many bands in the area (there's a website called the Bournemouth Beat Boom with comprehensive information from that time).

Terry Hazelden, the owner, was gracious in mentoring me in the history and development of guitars, which formed the basis of my dissertation at college, and a lifelong love of playing. But of more interest to readers, if you look closely, are the prices: how about a Gibson Les Paul Custom for £465? Or a Sunburst for £30 less? What is the price of that Shergold or Rickenbacker now?

Kenneth Palmer

Thanks for those lovely memories, Ken, which are especially poignant given the recent news of long-established guitar retailer GAK, in Brighton, closing its doors. As you put it so well, bricks-and-mortar stores can support players through a lifetime of playing and do so much more than simply transact gear sales.

Yet clearly it's a tough game out there to either carve out a sustainable niche on the high street or grow big enough, for long enough, to compete with the huge names in guitar retail that are out there. One thing's for sure, you don't really get a feel for if a guitar will really work for you until you have it in your hands, and for that, high street guitar shops are without rival. And yes, how tantalising it is to see those prices!

Just for a bit of fun we put them into the Bank of England's online inflation calculator and found that in today's money that Gibson Les Paul Custom would cost £2,495 – rather cheaper than the current list price (of the Custom Select model), new, of just over four grand. Be interesting to know what elements beyond simple inflation factor into that.

The guitar wall of Bournemouth's Coast Music, chock-full of instruments waiting to be played, photographed in the late 70s by reader Kenneth Palmer

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



**WORTH
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**WORTH
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Pedals signed by the stars!

Phil X and Yvette Young have inked their signature pedals, just for you

We've two pedals to give away this month – and just to put some extra pump in your stomp, both have been signed by the artists they were designed to serve. Firstly, there's Phil X's J Rockett PXO boost and overdrive combo, heard in stadiums worldwide as an essential part of Bon Jovi's electrifying guitar sound. Then there's Yvette Young's Walrus Audio Qi Etherealizer, combining chorus, delay and grain effects in order to add some wild atmospheric landscapes to your guitar work. So what are you waiting for? All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning each pedal is head to the links opposite and follow the instructions. Good luck!

J Rockett PXO: Phil X joined Bon Jovi after the departure of which guitarist?

- A) Richie Sambora
- B) Dave Sabo
- C) Matt O'Ree

Enter at: <http://bit.ly/git524pxo>



Walrus Audio Qi Etherealizer: Yvette Young is a member of which band?

- A) Cover
- B) Covet
- C) Coven

Enter at: <http://bit.ly/git524qi>



CLOSING DATE 26 JUNE 2025. GOOD LUCK!

Terms and conditions: The competitions open at 00:00 (UK Time) on 24 April 2025 and close at 23:59 (UK Time) on 26 June 2025. The competitions are free to enter and entries must be submitted via <http://bit.ly/git524pxo> and/or <http://bit.ly/git524qi>. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Open to all residents of the UK aged 18 years and over, except employees of Future Plc and its group of companies ("Future") and sponsor FACE bvba ("Sponsor"). Entries limited to one per household per competition regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices or methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. There will be two winners in total, one entitled to the J Rockett PXO (£359 retail value) and one entitled to the Walrus Audio Qi Etherealizer (£449 retail value). The winners will be randomly drawn from all valid entries received and shall be notified by Future by email within 28 days of the closing date and will be required to supply details of a UK delivery address. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn. Future will deliver the prizes. Future and Sponsor reserve the right to substitute any product with an alternative product of equivalent value. The prizes are non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative. No purchase required. Void where prohibited. By taking part in this competition, you agree to be bound by these terms and conditions, the competition rules at: www.futureplc.com/competition-rules/ and collection of personal data in accordance with Future's privacy policy at: <https://www.futureplc.com/privacy-policy/>

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H.E.A.T

They may have titled their latest album *Welcome To The Future*, but make no mistake, Swedish rockers H.E.A.T are paying homage to the past. We meet guitarist Dave Dalone to find out more

Words Amit Sharma

It takes only a split-second to figure out that Swedish quintet H.E.A.T are completely and utterly obsessed with all things 80s. It's not just how they dress, it's everything from the key changes and vocal hooks to the scorching guitars and celestial keyboards – the kind of musical references that can only come from a keen interest in the works of vintage greats such as Europe, Scorpions and Whitesnake. Their latest full-length, *Welcome To The Future*, however, sounds anything but dated, with a modern sheen that gives their ideas a contemporary edge regardless of how far back the influences may date. For founding guitarist Dave Dalone, who briefly left the group in 2013 before returning three years later, it's a love-letter to a time when driving riffs, soaring melodies and ambitious leads ruled the world.

"I grew up listening to players like John Norum and Kee Marcello from Europe," he tells *Guitarist*. "Both of them have this melodic nature that really sets them apart from the usual shredders, but at the same time you can't really argue with the technique aspect. In my band, we're trying to play a similar kind of melodic rock."

It all started when he was 11 years old and his older brother presented him with an 80s mixtape along with a stack of old magazines that effectively served as a time capsule. Something clicked and he quickly realised he'd found his true calling.

"Gary Moore was my gateway into the genre. He had this sense of melody that was out of this world. He'd write things that anybody could listen to"

"The songs sounded so cool to me," Dave continues. "I would go up into my parent's attic and feel a bit like one of those people who would dig for dinosaurs. It was the mid-90s by that point, so this era of music already felt quite old. I didn't really have any friends who shared the same kind of interest until we started this band."

Who was the first guitarist that impressed you?

"The first guitarist I was obsessed with was Gary Moore. His tone was simply magical. There was something really special about how he attacked the blues. I didn't start off listening to blues; the old stuff came to me much later on and that was all because of Gary. He was my gateway into the genre. He had this sense of melody that was out of this world. I think that's what really set him apart as a guitarist and composer. He'd write things that anybody could listen to and enjoy – you didn't have to be a guitar player to appreciate the things he'd come out with. And that was such a massive strength, being a guitar player who could impress everyone, not just other guitar players.

"After Gary Moore, it was people like Yngwie Malmsteen, who I discovered completely by chance. I heard his name somewhere, went to the record store, bought an album and felt like I'd hit the jackpot."



You own a 1972 Marshall 'Plexi' that's been heavily featured on your recordings of the past. Is that what we're hearing on the new album?

"In the studio, I swear by that head. It's on pretty much every recording I've done because it's such a monster amp. I bought it 15 years ago and it was one of my first real amps. Before that, I had solid-state combos, which didn't sound as good. So I would say, for my first valve amp, it's definitely served me well. It's been around a lot – I used to tour with it. I think it was travelling with me for about 10 years before I made the decision to go digital for our live shows. That's what you're hearing on this latest album, as well as a 100-watt Mesa/Boogie Triple Rectifier. That's another great amp that pairs up really well with the Marshall."

A vintage Marshall with a pedal in front is as classic as it gets. What kind of overdrives do you tend to rely on, on your pedalboard?

"I'm a big fan of the yellow Boss SD-1. Mine is the classic version, though I might invest in the Waza Craft one at some point. Frequency-wise, they do something very special. The character of the distortion is very nice. I find some overdrive pedals don't have a particularly nice sound, but this one just has this midrange warmth. I guess it's a very classic circuit that's been copied to death. I also like

1. H.E.A.T (clockwise from left): frontman Kenny Leckremo, guitarist Dave Dalone, drummer Don Crash, keyboardist Jona Tee and bassist Jimmy Jay

PHOTO BY MARCEL KARLSSON

2. For Dave Dalone, Kramer guitars capture the spirit of the 80s with which he is so enamoured: "I grew up obsessed with the 80s... everything, from art and film to music and design"

how it takes a little bit of the bass out – when you're palm-muting on a Marshall, things can get pretty muddy. For our kind of 80s hard rock, you want a bit less bass and a bit more clarity. I also like the Revv G3 distortion, it's another one that works super well in front of my Marshall. Chorus is important for our sound, so I've used one of the blue Boss pedals for that in the past."

You mainly seem to be using Kramer guitars these days. What made you switch from Les Pauls?

"The new album is 90 per cent Kramer, I would say. I grew up obsessed with the 80s, which is obvious from our music. It's a strange obsession, but I just love everything about the 80s, from art and film to music and design. And I think Kramers are the peak of 80s innovation. It's the pinnacle of guitar building from that period, at least in my eyes. That's what caught my interest. I'm in love with the brand and the whole history behind it. So around six years ago, I stopped playing Les Pauls and started collecting vintage Kramers."

Well, they were good enough for Edward Van Halen...

"Exactly. I guess he was the one who helped turn them into such a global brand. At one point they were the biggest guitar company in the world. Can you imagine Kramer being more successful than Fender and Gibson? It sounds crazy, but Eddie made that happen. It's quite an interesting story, I think, how a company can go from nothing to on top of the world and then just fade out. I think Eddie had the same kind of effect on Peavey amps. Whatever he touched became valid; people realised it was good gear because he made it sound phenomenal. Now Gibson owns Kramer, but in my eyes it's not really the same thing. I have one Kramer from the Gibson factory, but it's a 1985 reissue from 2005 that's American-made. It's solid maple, so it's too heavy for me to use live."

We've seen you playing a Strat copy made by FranFret Guitars in Spain. How did you hear about the company?

"It's a small business, just one luthier [Francisco Rodríguez] building everything in his own custom

2

"On this album I was less worried about showing off or playing fast. There's a maturity in my playing that wasn't there before"



shop, basically. He ended up sending me this Strat-style guitar that I've been using quite a bit at home. It's a really good instrument and I've actually used it on some of our tracks. There are a lot of great companies making Strat copies out there, but this one felt like a cut above the rest. And it's in one of my favourite finishes, Olympic White, which for me is up there with Fiesta Red. I just love Strats. There's something about that single-coil sound. I grew up with that kind of tone and it's very hard to get that from another style of guitar. Strats have this very special sound and feel – they make me play a certain way.”

“I just love Strats. There’s something about that single-coil sound. They have this very special sound and feel – they make me play a certain way”

Do you own many Fenders, then?

“I don’t really collect them. I have a couple lying around – there’s an old Road Worn Strat, made in Mexico, which I upgraded with DiMarzio HS-3 pickups. It’s the old Yngwie Malmsteen set; I’d probably say they are my favourite pickups of all-time. In my house, you will find a lot of parts just lying around: a neck here, a body there, loaded pickguards and so on. I like collecting different parts and then building them into something unique. It’s fun to have a never-ending project that’s always going.”

What else felt new for you on this latest album?

“Apart from the drums, everything was done in our own studio. Which was nice because we got to make all the decisions, from what mics to use and what cabinets to use them on. We could choose how many overdubs were needed and that brought this creative freedom that we all ended up loving. Recording guitars can be pretty time-consuming. Having your own studio means you don’t stress about it as much. You can take as long as you want and not be too bothered about how much it costs. And less stress means better performances. As a result, my playing is a little different on this album.”

In what sense?

“If you compare it with our other recordings, I feel like there’s more focus on the melodies. Before this point, I would play and play and play, until I found the right angle to build on. On this album, I went in having composed my solos and melodies. I was less worried about showing off or playing fast. There’s a maturity in my playing that wasn’t there before. I’m playing what fits the song best and that kind of focus only comes as you get older.” 



H.E.A.T’s new album, *Welcome To The Future*, is available now on earMUSIC

www.heatsweden.com



3. Dave Dalone spins a mixture of influences into his guitar sound, with Gary Moore at the top of his inspiration list

4. From denim and leather to searing guitar solos, H.E.A.T live and breathe the glory days of the 80s

PHOTO BY JACOB PAPINNIEM



PHOTO BY MARCEL KARLSSON





MIKE CAMPBELL

As he celebrates the release of his memoir, *Heartbreaker*, Tom Petty's right-hand man and dear friend tells us how the duo's "magical connection" led to a career's worth of enduring hits, and why he "never doubted the music"

Words Andrew Daly Photography Chris Phelps

Known as the chiming lead guitarist for Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers, and his tendency to brandish a beloved beaten Broadcaster, Mike Campbell was born to strum six strings. "I loved it right off the bat," he tells *Guitarist*. That's obvious as Campbell's mojo-laden connection with fellow songsmith Tom Petty manifested music for the ages. Albums such as *Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers* (1976), *Damn The Torpedoes* (1979), *Long After Dark* (1982) and *Southern Accents* (1985), to name a few, feature droves of Campbell-penned and -assisted cuts. And it was as easy as it seemed.

"It was just one of those things you can't explain," Campbell says. "It's a lot of luck and hard work, and here we are. I don't know if people realise how much work and sacrifice we put into it," he says. "Before things started to happen after *Damn The Torpedoes*, and we started to get some commercial success, it wasn't easy. It took a long time – and it wasn't overnight."

Challenging as it was, songs like *American Girl*, *Breakdown* and *Refugee* told Campbell that he was on the right path. "I never doubted for a second that, somehow, it was going to work out," he says. "And it worked out beyond my dreams."

More than 50 years later, and Campbell was in the position to write his life story in a book, the aptly titled *Heartbreaker*. He lost the man he calls a "brother", Tom Petty, in 2017, joined Fleetwood

Mac for a spell around a year later, and has carried on with his band, The Dirty Knobs, ever since.

"It's a lot of emotions," Campbell says of writing his book. "I don't generally look back, but I was kind of forced to relive some of the things I went through. Mostly, what I feel is gratitude. I realise how lucky I am. I'm grateful for the life I've had."

And why shouldn't he be? In addition to his Heartbreakers exploits, Campbell has lent a hand to Stevie Nicks, Don Henley, Johnny Cash and dozens of others. He doesn't fancy himself a session player but admits he's always been filled with songs.

"It was never a challenge," he says. "I just did what I wanted to do. I stuck to my guns and to the integrity of who I thought I was. And with Tom, he could take my music and his music and write those great songs with his personality. Those songs still hold up. I think that's what set us apart, that we had strong songs."

To that end, Campbell still feels sadness when he looks back on Petty's untimely death. He feels they left nothing on the table, though they had more to do – but it'll never stop him from continuing. "He and I had a connection," he says. "Tom and I wrote the songs together, and there was something that we both felt was special and once in a lifetime; it was a connection and it's magical. I don't know why we found each other when we did, but there was something really strong there and it sustained us through the whole career."

Looking back, what was the lightbulb moment for you when it came to the guitar?

"It was an instant connection when I got my first guitar. It was kind of unplayable, but I didn't know that at the time [laughs]. I would play until my fingers split, literally, because I was just so enamoured with it; I felt like I found my purpose. The more inspired I was, the more I realised I had a knack, felt very connected and that it was something I could do for the rest of my life."

"I loved what we were doing and I believed in it. I would have done it even if we weren't financially successful – it was in my heart"

What do you think made you the right guitarist for The Heartbreakers?

"That's quite a question. It was like magic, honestly. It's magical that my path crossed with Tom's when it did, and with all the other guys in the band. All the things that led us through our dream together, it's some kind of bizarre destiny. I don't know why... but I'm awe-inspired by how things worked out."

What was the secret sauce between you and Tom?

"We had the same influences, so we immediately connected. We loved 60s music, like The Beatles, The Stones and The Beach Boys. We had both been listening to all the same stuff and were inspired by the same things, so when we met it was almost like we knew each other."

1. The year after Tom Petty's untimely death, Mike Campbell joined Fleetwood Mac on their world tour. The dulcimer in this image, which features on the cover of The Dirty Knobs' 2024 album *Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits*, was gifted to him by Stevie Nicks

2. Campbell and Tom Petty on stage as Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers at London's Hammersmith Odeon before their show in May 1977

**Do you remember the first time you sat down to write with Tom?**

"He was starting to write songs and I was messing around trying to write, too. I remember one day after I'd known him for – I don't know – maybe a few days, we sat down and he showed me a song he'd been writing. He already had a good handle on writing, but I was still learning. I said, 'Well, here's something I've been messing around with...' I was trying to channel a Byrds-type piece of music and I saw Tom's eyes light up, like, 'Oh, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm trying to do,' you know? We instinctively tried to accomplish the same things and play the same types of chords. We immediately bonded."

That bond between you both was apparent in early Heartbreakers songs like *American Girl* and *Breakdown* from the band's eponymous debut album. What gear were you using back then?

"When I first met Tom, he was writing on guitar, but he mostly played bass in the band that we were in, Mudcrutch. When we got to LA, I had a '64 Stratocaster that I got for \$200, which is now probably worth 200 grand! [laughs] Tom didn't really have a good electric guitar, so I let him use that one when he switched over to guitar. Then I went out and got this Fender Broadcaster from some little shop – I had to put our PA on consignment to afford it [laughs]. I brought those two guitars to the studio, and we really found that sound."

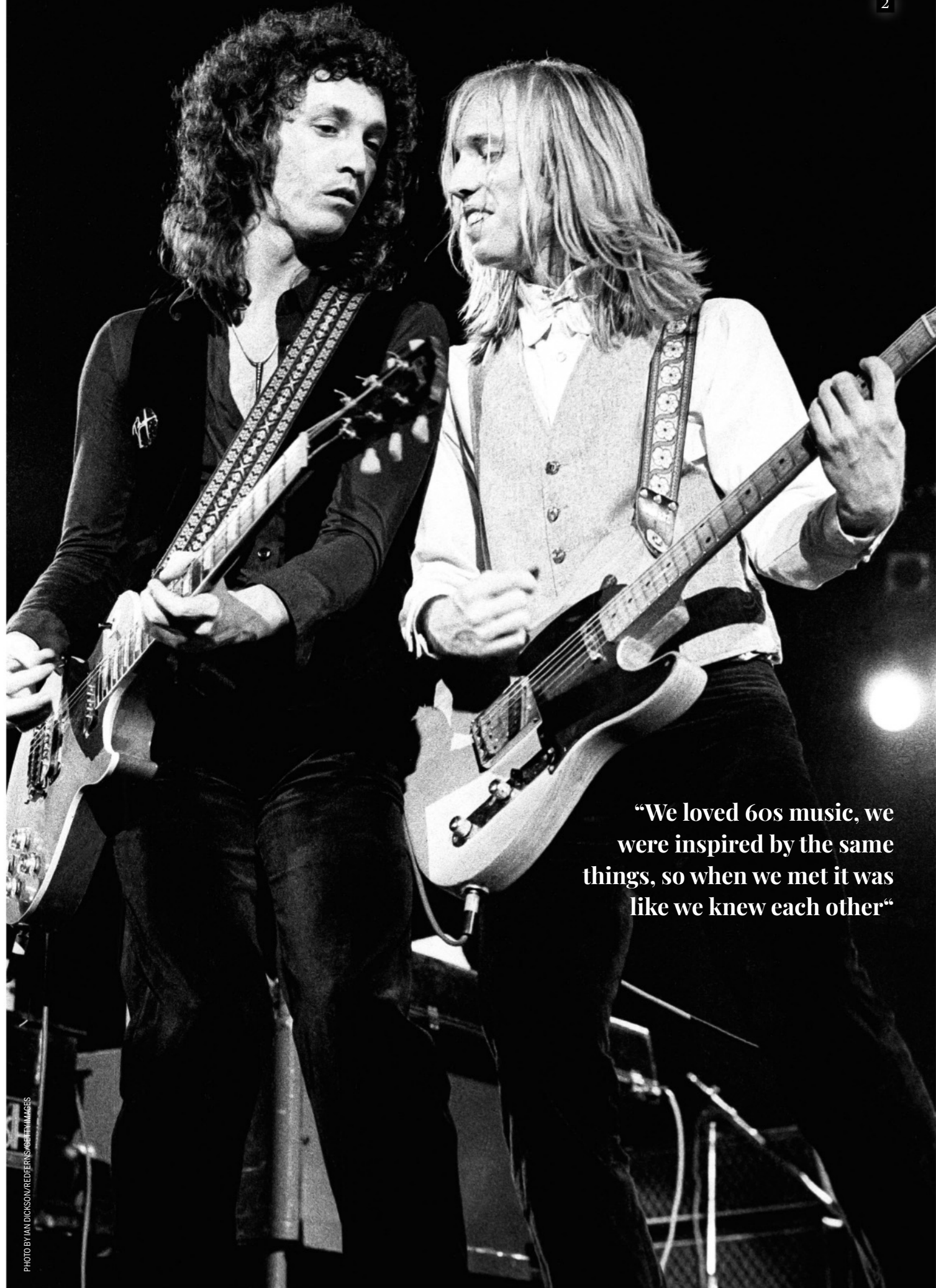
"I had the Broadcaster and Tom had the Strat. He was playing Bo Diddley chords, you know, and we wanted to get a 12-string sound on top of it. I love The Byrds, but we didn't have a 12-string, so on my Broadcaster I played the octaves with a low-D drone to try to sound like a 12-string. Suddenly, this harmonic happened that became, to me, the Heartbreaker sound. The way we played guitar, the way I voiced against Tom, we found it on *American Girl*. It was very exciting when I heard it. I thought, 'Wow... nobody sounds like this. This is us.' Those two guitars helped make it happen."

The Heartbreakers had a string of gold and platinum records through the 70s and into the 80s. And the perception is that the success was overnight... but was it actually that way?

"It got stronger, the more successful we got. But the truth is – and I said this in the book – I think people may be surprised by how much sacrifice, struggle and how many years it took to start having success. Our first two albums weren't financially successful and we scraped by for a long time, sleeping on mattresses on the floor and living on corn flakes."

Did any of those struggles lead to periods of self-doubt for you?

"I never doubted the music. I didn't know if it would be financially successful; I hoped it would. But I loved what we were doing and I believed in it. I would have done it even if we weren't financially successful because it was in my heart. Of course, you always have self-doubt and concern... I always wanted to be better than I was."



**“We loved 60s music, we
were inspired by the same
things, so when we met it was
like we knew each other”**

3. The Jaguar was a key sound in *Surf-N-Burn* from 1997, the one record produced by the then-anonymous band Blue Stingrays, which featured The Heartbreakers' Mike Campbell, Ron Blair and Randall Marsh

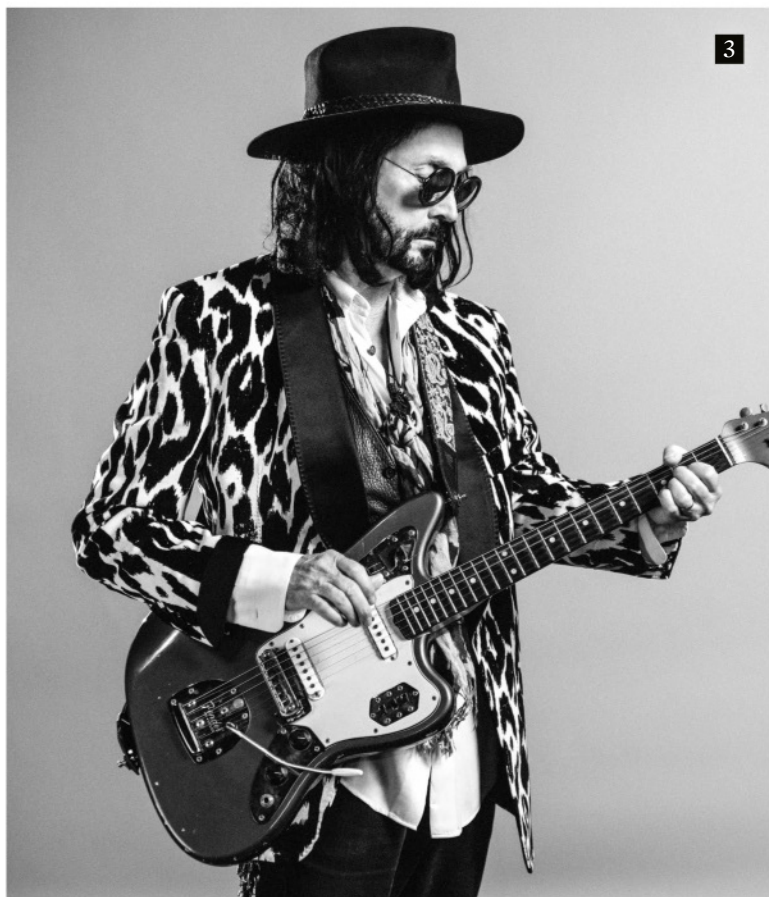
Damn The Torpedoes was the game-changer for The Heartbreakers. How had your rig evolved by then?

"I was getting better all the time. I had the Broadcaster and a Les Paul Goldtop, and I loaned my Strat to Tom. So I had two guitars and that's pretty much all. Later in my career, when I could afford to buy more, I did, but I would use those two guitars with my four-track to write music that Tom would hopefully like and put words to. Songs like *Refugee*, *Here Comes My Girl* and *Stop Draggin' My Heart Around* were all written on that four-track."

"Tom passed on [*Boys Of Summer*], but Jimmy Iovine liked it and had met Don Henley, who was looking for a song..."

In the 80s, you started doing a lot of session work with artists such as Stevie Nicks and Don Henley, yielding big-time hits. How did that happen?

"To be honest with you, I never considered myself a session player. I was a songwriter and I would write my songs with my guitar style. I didn't venture out of The Heartbreakers much to do sessions, but if I had a song that Tom didn't want, I might go to Stevie and she would help me write it and finish it. So there's only a few people I really worked with, like Don Henley, of course, on *Boys Of Summer*. That was a great moment for me, but I didn't do it as a session. I wasn't like a hired guitar player per se. I was mostly focusing on writing songs."



What do you particularly remember about writing *Boys Of Summer*?

"[Producer] Jimmy Iovine was the catalyst. I played the music for *Boys Of Summer* to Tom and Jimmy one day and had a different chorus. It was the same track, but it went minor key on the chorus, which was not that good. Tom listened to it and said, 'Oh, it sounds kind of jazzy because of the chord in the chorus,' but Jimmy thought it had something going on."

"Tom passed on it, but Jimmy liked it and had met Don Henley, who was looking for a song. So Jimmy called me and said, 'If you've got something for Don...' I went back and changed the chorus chords to a major key, which was more uplifting, and that's the version I played for Don. I don't know... I was on a roll. This just came to me; I don't know why."

Later in the 80s, Tom started recording albums without The Heartbreakers, but he always kept you on. He must have really valued your input.

"It says a lot and comes back to our relationship. It was a very strong, mutual respect. It was stronger than any brotherhood you could think of. It's to his credit – and my credit – that when he decided to do a solo record, he could have called anybody, but he respected me."

Does that go back to the connection you two immediately shared in the early days of Mudcrutch?

"He knew I had a knack for bringing something to his songs that made them special, and that I loved his songs. He wanted me there, and I did the best I could to help his vision – and he helped mine as well. We were just really close; we had great respect for each other all the way through."

In the late 90s and early 2000s, you worked with Johnny Cash on the American Recordings albums. What was it like working with Johnny?

"Rick Rubin saw something in me that he thought was valuable. He was going to do the Johnny Cash project and called me in to help him. I was completely blown away because Johnny was a big influence and a hero of mine. I came in and connected with Johnny; we made those records, which was gratifying. I'm very proud of that."

Was it very different working with Johnny when compared with your work with Tom?

"That's a good question. They're very strong songwriters. They're very, in their own ways, distinct vocalists. You know who Johnny and Tom are the minute you hear them, so there's a personality there that's identifiable. I would try to bring anything I could to the songs and the voices and make them sound better. But with them both, it's all about those two, their voices, personality and lyrics. They're very powerful. My job, if I was working with them, was to enhance that without screwing it up."

Tom passed away very suddenly in 2017. Did that leave you in a space where you were having doubts about wanting to continue making music?

"Losing Tom was huge – and is still huge for me. It's like I lost my right arm. It took part of my ability to be who I was with him, to some extent. But making



4

music is too much a part of my being to stop. I felt depressed and sad carrying on without him, but I just did the best I could. It never once occurred to me to stop. It was not going to stop me from playing music. Nothing will.”

To that end, you hooked up with Fleetwood Mac in 2018 after Lindsey Buckingham left the band. That must have been a challenge.

“That challenge came to me... They called me and offered me the job. I considered the challenge of stepping into Lindsey Buckingham’s shoes, knowing I couldn’t replace him. I learned a lot digging into those songs and trying to bring the essence of them the best I could and how he performed them. I think I did a pretty good job, but no-one can beat Lindsey Buckingham. I had to learn a lot of those guitar parts because they were essential to the songs. So I dug in and it was a challenge because I wasn’t used to it. I’m used to doing my own songs, but I’m glad I did it.

“They treated me like gold. We toured around the world and saw the sights; it was like a great paid vacation. I enjoyed playing with Stevie a lot because we have a friendship. It was a joy for me and really helped me through my grief. It took my mind off it and gave me something constructive to do.”

Because Tom died unexpectedly, do you feel like you left anything on the table as far as The Heartbreakers go?

“Well, I don’t know... we had plans. His death was sudden. It was not expected. He was going to get

surgery on his hip and we were going to make another record. That was the discussion that we had. But there’s nothing on the table because we used everything we had at the time. And since Tom passed, I’ve had my own band [The Dirty Knobs] and I’ve been writing songs with them. That’s been a good challenge and fun for me.

“I don’t have any regrets. I mean... I look at my life and what can I regret? Everything that I ever wanted came my way, except for losing Tom. But I have no control over that. I wish he was still here. But since he’s not, I have to carry on. And there’s always a new song, you know? There’s always a new challenge to keep me going.”

How do you hope to be remembered as a guitarist?

“As an all-around cool dude [laughs]. I would like to be remembered as someone whose dreams came true. That if it can happen for me, it can happen for you. If you have determination and really have a passion for what you love to do and you do it, you can have an enriched life. And I’ve had an enriched life and I’ve got more to go. I’m not done yet. I guess if I have to be remembered, it would be to be remembered for the art, songs and music. Hopefully, that’ll bring joy to the people.” 

4. Campbell and mixing engineer Martin Pradler have worked together on all three Dirty Knobs albums; Martin’s mentor Don Smith engineered on Heartbreakers records throughout the 80s



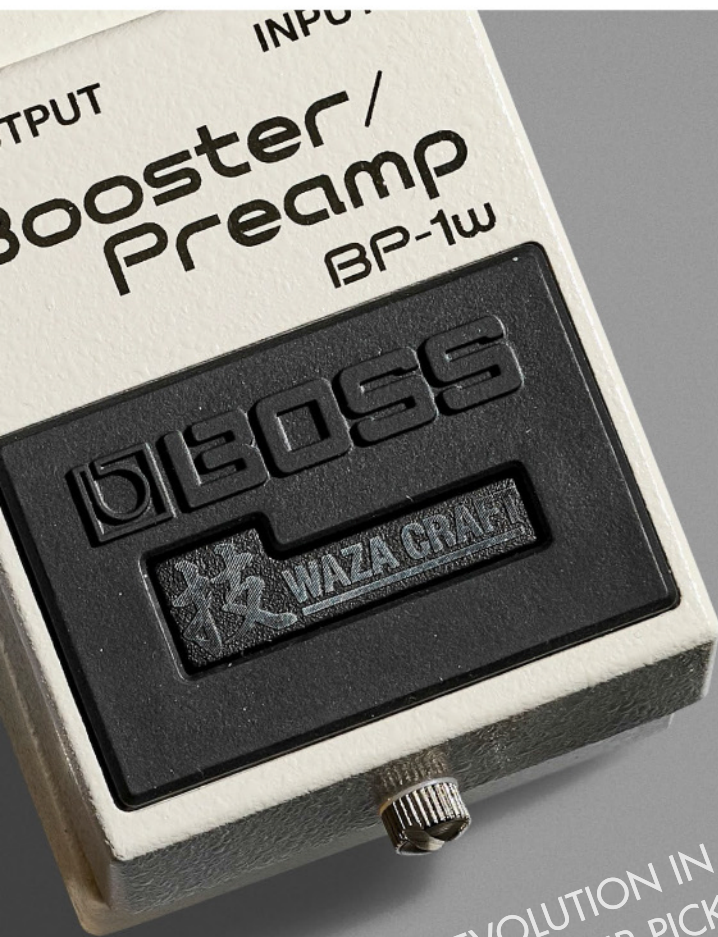
Mike Campbell’s memoir, *Heartbreaker*, written with Ari Surdoval, is available now via Grand Central Publishing

www.thedirtyknobs.com



30 BEST NEW PEDALS





THERE'S BEEN A REVOLUTION IN EFFECTS PEDALS IN RECENT TIMES. HERE'S OUR PICK OF THE BEST FROM THE PAST FIVE YEARS – ALONG WITH EXPERT TONE ADVICE FROM TOP PEDALBOARD PROS...



Words
Trevor Curwen
Jamie Dickson
Connor Flys
Charlie Wilkins
Stuart Williams

Photography
Olly Curtis

ANASOUNDS/THIRD MAN HARDWARE LA GROTTE

TYPE: ANALOGUE SPRING REVERB



Spring reverb pedals with genu-wine springs in 'em seem to be making a comeback at the moment via interesting pedals

such as Crazy Tube Circuits' White Whale and Gamechanger Audio's Light reverb. But neither go quite so far into a dark and stormy night of jagged sound as La Grotte (French for 'The Cave') made by Anasounds in collaboration with Third Man Hardware and Jack White. Both the sonics and the features are brilliant, starting with a great-sounding internal preamp based on Tampco's Tone Oven. The three-spring reverb tank itself is a quality Accutronics / Belton unit and there's a two-band EQ that influences only the reverb itself. Lastly, it can be run in either true bypass or buffered mode: with the former, the reverb is shut off abruptly when the pedal is bypassed, but in buffered mode, as Anasounds charmingly puts it, "we leave the tails [to] die with elegance". Wild, unmissable and worth it. **[JD]**

PRICE: £350

WEB: <https://thirdmanstore.co.uk>

BEETRONICS LARVA MORPHING PHASER

TYPE: PHASER



You couldn't walk over any guitar player's stage in the 1970s without tripping over a phaser, and they are still popular.

However, with all the different modulation effects available these days, many of them packaged in multi-effect pedals, any company bringing out a new dedicated phaser had better make it a bit special – and that's exactly what Beetronics has done with the Larva Morphing Phaser, a six-stage analogue phaser with an element of digital control. The sounds here are classic 70s phasing or vintage vibrato with adjustable rate and depth, and a resonance knob for greater intensity, all coupled with a preamp that can be turned up to build in valve-like overdrive. The star feature, though,

is that you can footswitch between two presets with a user-selectable ramp shape and speed for the transition for standard switching between the two, evolving transitions from one to the other, or quick momentary blasts. **[TC]**

PRICE: £239

WEB: www.beetronicsfx.com

BENSON STONK BOX

TYPE: FUZZ



The Benson Amps Stonk Box is a meticulously crafted fuzz pedal that

revives the iconic tones of the 1960s while addressing the quirks and inconsistencies of vintage designs. Inspired by the MKI Tone Bender, it incorporates Benson's Automatic Thermal Bias technology, continuously monitoring and warming its germanium transistors to ensure consistent performance

1. Jack White's collaborations with various effects makers via Third Man Hardware have been unexpected, unusual but always sonically thrilling as with the La Grotte spring reverb pedal by Anasounds

BENSONAMPS.COM

regardless of external temperatures – this innovation eliminates the notorious temperature sensitivity associated with classic fuzz circuits. The Stonk Box offers an expanded control set beyond the original MKI, featuring Filter and Volume knobs, along with added tone and Trim controls. This allows for a versatile range of sonic textures, from subtle boost to aggressive, searing fuzz or smoother more refined tones. Never harsh nor congested, tone remains clear, articulate and musical at any gain level. The Stonk Box offers a full spectrum of stunning vintage fuzz tones with warmth, clarity and stability. It's the fuzz pedal you didn't know you needed. **[CW]**

PRICE: £289

WEB: www.bensonamps.com

No other pedals go quite so far into a dark and stormy night of jagged sound as La Grotte (French for 'The Cave')

BOSS BP-1W BOOSTER/PREAMP

TYPE: BOOST



There has been a long history of guitarists taking advantage of the preamps in certain equipment – sometimes while using the effects in that unit, sometimes not. Two 70s Roland/

Boss units that fall into the category are the CE-1 Chorus Ensemble and RE-201 Space Echo. While peak-condition original vintage units may be hard to find, not to mention expensive, Boss has made the sound of its preamps accessible to all using analogue circuitry in the Waza BP-1W Booster/Preamp. A three-way toggle switch lets you choose either preamp or a natural transparent sound, while a gain knob can add grit to the Level knob's output volume. In the world of boost pedals, the choice of three boost options – particularly the two preamps each bolstering the midrange while adding their own distinct character – makes this not just versatile but also a gateway to some vintage tone enhancement for your signal chain. **[TC]**

PRICE: £149

WEB: www.boss.info



PHOTO BY ELEANOR JANE

**IK MULTIMEDIA
TONEX ONE**
TYPE: AMP SIM &
DRIVE PEDAL

Why you want it:
a universe of amp
models for £149



J ROCKETT PXO
TYPE: DRIVE & BOOST

Why you want it:
it's a versatile,
stadium-tested
drive and boost
powerhouse



**BEE TRONICS
LARVA**
TYPE: PHASER

Why you want it:
a vintage phaser
with shapeshifting
powers that inspire



BOSS SDE-3
TYPE: DELAY

Why you want it:
a legendary 80s
rackmount delay
in a compact pedal



Boss's SDE-3 is a
source of classic 80s
digital delay sounds
with instant hands-on
tweakability that will
fit on any pedalboard

**BOSS HM-2W
HEAVY METAL****TYPE: HIGH-GAIN DISTORTION**

The word 'icon' is much over-used, but the original Boss HM-2 truly deserves it. Made in Japan then Taiwan, from 1983 to 1991, it found its calling in the nascent Swedish

death metal scene of the early 90s, and its uniquely malevolent 'chainsaw' sound is still coveted among metallers. Unlike the tight and focused noise-gated metal distortions on the current market, the HM-2 sounds more like the unholy union of a cranked Rat and an old Shin-ei fuzz, with a staggeringly powerful two-band EQ and an avalanche of barely controllable, seething distortion. Made in Japan once again, Boss's superb Waza Craft reissue recreates the HM-2 to modern standards – with more volume, better buffering and less noise – while also adding a whole new Custom mode that caters to down-tuned players with increased low-end punch. Nothing blasts its way to the front of a mix quite like it. **[CF]**

PRICE: £159**WEB: www.boss.info****BOSS SDE-3 DUAL
DIGITAL DELAY****TYPE: DELAY**

The SDE-3 stands apart from other compact delays in that it can give you two delays in parallel, the second one offset from the first by a user-adjustable

amount. It is based on the classic 1980s SDE-3000 rack mount unit and features the warm and smooth sound found in the 16-bit original. There's 1,600ms of delay in mono, 800ms in stereo, modulation with Rate and Depth knobs plus the usual delay Time and Feedback knobs, and a Hi Cut control for the repeats to make subsequent repeats darker, enabling a long trail of repeats to better blend into your sound. Whether you dial in chorus and flange sounds, very short offset delays for thickening things up, or a longer offset where the relationship between the two delays can deliver a distinct pattern, you're getting a source of classic 80s digital delay sounds with instant hands-on tweakability that will fit on any pedalboard. **[TC]**

PRICE: £162**WEB: www.boss.info****BROWNE AMPLIFICATION
PROTEIN DUAL OVERDRIVE V4****TYPE: DUAL OVERDRIVE**

The Protein Dual Overdrive V4 houses two independent overdrives: the 'Blue'

side, inspired by the Marshall Bluesbreaker, and the 'Green' side, modelled after the Nobels ODR-1, both with tweaked circuits and more gain. These can be used independently or stacked for a total of three different gain levels. This fourth iteration of the Protein introduces a three-way Hi-Cut switch

What truly sets the Protein Dual Overdrive apart is its transparency, which makes it feel like a natural extension of your amp

2. Boss's 80s innovation, the SDE-3000, has been used by guitarists as diverse as Eddie Van Halen and Ed O'Brien – and now the SDE-3 brings digital benefits to the iconic sound

to the Blue side for more tonal options and versatility. Unlike many overdrives that sacrifice bottom-end for definition, the Protein retains a full-bodied low-end while keeping note articulation intact and never becomes overly compressed or lifeless. What truly sets the Protein apart is its transparency, which makes it feel like a natural extension of your amp without feeling like you're playing through a pedal. The Protein isn't just about more gain, it wakes up your amp adding depth, sustain and responsiveness without losing what makes it special. **[CW]**

PRICE: £339**WEB: www.browneamps.com****CAROLINE GUITAR COMPANY
WAVE CANNON ZERO****TYPE: DISTORTION**

First of all, who wouldn't want a pedal called the Wave Cannon on their 'board? Second, it's a versatile, beautifully

made and highly original distortion that sounds amazing at any level of gain, from jangling light overdrive to a crushing wall of noise. While loosely based on classic op-amp distortion circuits such as the DOD 250 and Pro Co Rat, the Cannon adds extra controls for shaping the



I AM THE WALRUS

Colt Westbrook of innovative US indie effects maker Walrus Audio on the pedals he relies on most – by Walrus and other makers

"When it comes to Walrus pedals that I really love and that I use constantly, there's three of them. I use the 385 Overdrive all the time; it's modelled on the audio section of an old film projector. I also [constantly use] the Monument tremolo, and then the Julia for vibrato – it's just always on.

"And then when it comes to stuff by other manufacturers, I love what Chris Benson is doing. I've got the [Benson Amps] Preamp, the Germanium Boost, and his Delay. I think Chris Benson is really innovative. I also think Source Audio [maker of the Collider delay/reverb pedal] has some of the best algorithms out there – in fact, Source Audio and Eventide have some of the best DSP engineering sounds in the whole game. And then there's other fun ones: some [pedalboard] staples for me are the EarthQuaker Bit Commander and the JHS Color Box is also incredible, [JHS's] Angry Charlie, too – all that stuff's not going away."



EQ and the gain structure – and then there's the Havoc switch. Originally a happy accident on the workbench, this is a secondary footswitch that generates wild feedback, warped and shifted by the knobs or even your guitar's controls. The latest Wave Cannon Zero offers a voltage starve control for those dying-battery fuzz sounds, as well as a whole extra control specifically for tweaking the Havoc feedback – for those who tend to close their band's set by kneeling down on stage, creating apocalyptic noise. **[CF]**

PRICE: £279

WEB: <https://carolineguitar.com>

CHASE BLISS AUTOMATONE PREAMP MK II

TYPE: PREAMP PEDAL



This groundbreaking collaboration with Benson Amps integrates Benson's preamp circuitry with advanced digital control.

The sleek brushed aluminum chassis and wooden side panels give the Automatone a high-end, studio-grade aesthetic reminiscent of vintage recording consoles, while motorised faders for EQ, volume and gain physically adjust to match saved presets, delivering instant visuals of your settings.

3. The Monument tremolo pedal (and variants like the Monumental harmonic tremolo above) is a favourite of Walrus Audio's Colt Westbrook – but he has plenty of admiration for the work of other makers

4. Source Audio's pedals come recommended across the industry, notably by legendary players such as Johnny Marr, who has had a Collider on his pedalboard – and the quality of the DSP engineering is one of the reasons

The pedal features MIDI, 30 presets and extensive tonal shaping via push-button switches – Jump, Mids, Q, Diode and Fuzz – each with three distinct settings. These controls allow for extensive customisation of gain staging, midrange, bandwidth, clipping diode configurations and fuzz, while delivering exceptional sound quality. Dialing in tones from clean to fuzz is incredibly easy and it's certainly a blast watching the faders move by themselves when a preset is selected. The Automatone MK II redefines stompbox preamp functionality, making it one of the most advanced pedals for stage or studio. **[CW]**

PRICE: £580

WEB: www.chasebliss.com



COPPERSOUND/THIRD MAN HARDWARE TRIPLEGRAPH

TYPE: DIGITAL OCTAVE/KILLSWITCH



Gear that's associated with Jack White is almost guaranteed

to be brilliantly strange, and the Triplegraph – designed by CopperSound Pedals and Jack White – is no exception. What we have here is a triple-width unit boasting three large and elaborate piano pedal-esque footswitches, controlling an advanced DSP unit that offers a perfectly tracking lower octave, upper octave and, most interestingly, a kill circuit to cut out the dry signal of your guitar, leaving only the effect signal. Then, when combined with the pedal's built-in effects loop, you can use the killswitch to hear momentary bursts of your other pedals, in parallel with the octave signal. Combine the Triplegraph with modulation for organ-esque sounds, or with fuzz for instant octave-doubled sludge, or any number of more leftfield effects to create... well, who knows? The possibilities for sonic experimentation are endless, and there are sounds to be found here that you simply may not be able to achieve by any other means. **[CF]**

PRICE: £325

WEB: <https://thirdmanstore.co.uk>

CHAIRMAN OF THE 'BOARD

Daniel Steinhardt of *That Pedal Show* and The GigRig has an intriguingly innovative new range of pedalboards out this year. We join him to talk 'boards, tone and his personal Top 5 pedals from the past five years

Words Jamie Dickson



Daniel Steinhardt is well known for co-presenting YouTube tone-advice channel *That Pedal Show*, along with former *Guitarist* editor Mick Taylor. And while Dan keenly shares his favourite pedals with us from the past five years (see opposite page) – to give you something inspiring to put on your 'board, regardless of origin – his deep well of knowledge comes from decades of building

1. The GigRig ethos is "all about finding a sound that inspires you", and to that end the company's new range of modular 'boards makes it even easier for you to assemble – and switch up – your current roster of pedals

pro-grade effects gear with his company The GigRig. Now, for the first time, he's built a range of pedalboards with uniquely practical features only a pedal obsessive would think of.

"Everything that I've done has always landed on a pedalboard," Dan reflects. "And there's just been a couple of things that have always niggled me, that I always had at the back of my mind, and had thought, 'One day I'll find a solution'. Then that day happened after a period of insomnia and a strong cup of coffee [laughs]. Bang: I had this idea for the second tier on the sliding rail."

As always with Dan, we go straight down the rabbit hole into the exacting needs of pedalboard users. The GigRig's new pedalboards have a modular design that allows you to position pedals and/or an effects-switching system, such as The GigRig G2 or G3 units, at floor level with an elevated deck or 'tier' above it to mount further pedals on. Traditionally, that upper tier of pedals sits above internal cabling, power supplies and any switcher operated pedals that are hidden inside the pedalboard itself.

On other pedalboards, access to these internal devices is typically via a hinge at the back of the top tier that allows you to open it like a car bonnet to give access to the



DANIEL STEINHARDT PHOTO COURTESY OF THAT PEDAL SHOW



space below. But on The GigRig's new UK-built range of 'boards, you're offered a host of options. You can choose to have the upper tier hinge open at the back or the front, according to taste, or you can remove it completely in seconds via quick-release fastenings. Furthermore, on selected models a unique rail system allows you to simply slide the front row of pedals on the top tier forwards

2. A flexible hinge system allows you to lift the upper tier of pedals from the front (as shown) or back – with additional options including a sliding rail

"A couple of things have always niggled me... and then I had this idea for the second tier on the sliding rail" DANIEL STEINHARDT

(towards the user) to give access to the space below with no hinging involved. This can reduce the amount of internal cabling needed by up to 15ft on larger 'boards. Dan says, compared with opening the whole tier like a hinge, which requires you to fit a surplus length of cable between the pedals and the switcher or I/O sockets to permit the tier to open fully.

The range offers four sizes of 'board: Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large – though a 'double tier' of two rows of pedals on top is only available on certain models, as Dan explains.

DAN'S TOP 5 PEDALS OF THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Via his roles at The GigRig and *That Pedal Show*, Daniel is in the privileged position of being surrounded by the best pedals, every day

1 CHASE BLISS MOOD MKII

TYPE: AMBIENT MULTI-EFFECTS



"Okay, so the first one is the Chase Bliss Mood MKII – and if the original Chase Bliss Mood had been made in 2020 I would have said that. But, thankfully, the Mood MKII came out in 2023! What I love about this pedal is that it puts you in a very different place as a guitar player, right? So many of us work so hard at trying to play a certain way and we all need to do that and find our own voice. But you plug into this thing and it just starts creating sounds that puts you in a very creative space.

"You can absolutely master it and find out exactly how it's doing that, or you can just plug in and have fun. And there are a lot of pedals that have done this in the past – whenever we bought our latest multi-effect, and we'd sit down and plug in and go through the presets, and there'd always be some wild and wacky things in there, and they are fun but relatively pointless. But the thing about the Mood is that the soundscapes that it creates are firstly so inspiring and secondly sound flipping awesome."

2 KEELEY HALO ANDY TIMMONS DUAL ECHO

TYPE: MODULATED DUAL ECHO DELAY



"Lots of guitar players are defined by their gain-staging [stacking sources of gain such as multiple drive pedals], and Andy Timmons' gain-staging is as good as they come. But there have been things that he's always achieved with his delays, these otherworldly effects... and the name Halo is just perfect – people have been having a go at [replicating] it for a long time.

"Andy hasn't been that secretive about exactly how he's done it, but it's been a very hard thing to try to replicate. In fact, I introduced Andy to Robert Keeley back in the day because Andy

had asked who'd be a good fit [to make a signature delay for him]. Robert is a dear friend and he is a genius. But also, I know Andy's standards: there's no compromise with Andy Timmons on anything, right? That's why he is the player that he is. His motto is 'the best sound on the day, wins'. It took them years of working together to get these sounds dialled in.

"It's my favorite compact delay pedal. Sonically, it's astonishing. You plug in, turn it on and there it is – there's the Andy Timmons sound. But if you dive a little bit deeper in it, there are so many other things in there that it can do. It's so clever."



3. The GigRig's new pedalboards come in four different sizes, with the two largest formats also available in double-tier (extra-deep) configurations

"Small only comes in a single-tier version, and the Extra Large only comes with a double tier. The Medium and Large are both [available in single-tier and double-tier configurations]. Also, if we have a look at our Large pedalboard, for example, I can put in a thing we call the 'wah wall' [a divider that creates an alcove for a wah or expression pedal] then put a smaller tier beside it [to act as

"On our Large pedalboard, I can put in what we call the 'wah wall', plus a smaller tier and a riser – all as standard"

DANIEL STEINHARDT

a platform for compact pedals] and there's a riser, too, that you can use [to bring the wah up to the same height as the upper-tier pedals]. And this all comes with the pedalboard as standard."

It's a level of attention to the practical needs of pedal-loving guitarists that you'd expect from one half of *That Pedal Show*, and it stands out from the common run of perfectly usable but workaday pedalboard systems.

www.thegigrig.com

WWW.JAMPEDALS.COM

3 JAM PEDALS DELAY LLAMA XTREME

TYPE: ANALOGUE DELAY



"I love Jam, they are the best people. I love their build philosophy; their passion for sound is just as good as it gets. The smaller version of the Delay Llama was already great, but the Delay Llama Xtreme adds the modulation in – but then it does these amazing things where it will automatically halve the delay speed or

double the delay speed, throwing it up or down on octave. And it does these random steps in there, so it almost becomes like a pseudo harmonizer – and all this in an analogue delay.

"Now, there are pedals that do similar things, but something about the Delay Llama Xtreme [is that] there's a quality to it that's just so organic and fun. It doesn't take long to get your head around the UI of it and so you can just use it as a straight-sounding, awesome analogue delay pedal with beautiful modulation on the trails. Or you can just go trippy with it. It's really, really fabulous."

4 THORPYFX HEAVY WATER DUAL HIGH HEADROOM BOOST

TYPE: DUAL BOOST



"I think this started life as the boost side of the ThorpyFX Dane [overdrive and boost] and then they added another boost to it. I thought, 'What the hell is heavy water?' But I plugged it in and the richness of the boost just has a clarity to it that is completely dynamic off the volume control, so beautiful. So that in itself is winning. But when you combine the boosts together, and you get the stacking of the gain stages, you get this really beautiful, organic drive sound. You know, every time that we've used it,

it's always made things sound better. If you're the sort of player that has a Deluxe Reverb, a simple amplifier you've turned up with a bit of reverb in there or whatever, and you're just looking to punch it a bit... in those situations, overdrive pedals really might not be the answer. This thing, though, if you plug it into an amplifier that's working [turned up a fair bit] it's far out – absolutely wonderful."

5 CUNNINGHAM AMPS DUAL RANGE FUZZ RCA GERMANIUM

TYPE: FUZZ



"I've got to throw a fuzz in here. There's an amp company in New Zealand called Cunningham and they sent us a bunch of stuff to try. We really like fuzzes and we have them on the [*That Pedal Show*] show a lot. We try to look at as many different fuzz variants as possible – and there are loads. But when we plugged this Cunningham Dual Range Fuzz in, it's just that instant connection. It sounds great with

humbuckers and single coils and is made by someone who really cares. As soon as you take it out of the box, there's an aura around the thing – you can just tell every little detail is looked after. Build quality is second to none. But we have pedals through with amazing build quality that might sound fine, but this is my favorite fuzz pedal in recent memory. It sounds absolutely killer. Because it's made by a company that makes amps, they know how to put these things together using awesome components. But there's obviously someone there who is a great guitar player, too. Because there's no way you end up with a fuzz like this that hasn't come from a great guitar player."

WWW.CUNNINGHAMAMPS.CO.NZ

CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS HI POWER

TYPE: DRIVE/BOOST



David Gilmour's soaring leads and glassy cleans are legendary, and Crazy Tube

Circuits' Hi Power attempts to bring those tones straight to your pedalboard, combining a Hiwatt-style preamp with a Coloursound Power Boost recreation. The Amp section models the Hiwatt DR103 and DR504, offering Normal and Bright

The Hi Power has punch, sustain and an expressive lead voice that never stops singing – it's like getting a Gilmour tone cheat-code

channel inputs along with a Linked setting that blends the two channels for increased gain and punch. The Boost circuit lets you choose between 18 volts for aggressive drive and a nine-volt Overdriver mode for smoother break-up. Other features include four-band EQ on the Amp side, Bass/Treble controls on the Boost side, Master Volume, and a send/return loop to integrate other pedals. The moment you engage the Boost, those familiar soaring lead tones pour out of your speakers with endless sustain. With the Hi Power, you're practically getting a Gilmour tone cheat-code – it's got punch, sustain and an expressive lead voice that never stops singing. [CW]

PRICE: £235

WEB: www.crazytubecircuits.com

CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS WHITE WHALE II

TYPE: TRUE SPRING REVERB & TREMOLO



"My multi-effects unit has spring reverb in it, though!" Not like this, it doesn't.

Crazy Tube Circuits' White Whale II squeezes a genuine spring reverb tank into a pedalboard-friendly format. But it's not just taking inspiration from vintage amps for its 'verb sound; CTC is also looking to the 50s and 60s for its tremolo sounds, too. The reverb features a

triple-spring tank that can provide 'short', 'medium' (both using two of the three springs) and 'long' reverb times. You can adjust the Dwell control to send more or less of your guitar signal into the springs, and the tone control can take you from bright and bouncy to smooth and vintage, with a Mix control blending the reverb amount. Pair it with the three-mode tremolo, which now includes a golden-era-inspired Harmonic mode, and you've got authentic depth and character to hand for any amp. [SW]

PRICE: £299

WEB: www.crazytubecircuits.com

DINOSAURAL COGMEISTER

TYPE: DRIVE PEDAL



Gain-staging by stacking up several complementary drive pedals is

the route to flexible tonal nirvana for many guitarists. But what if all the gain stages were in one box, rather than separate individual pedals? That is exactly what the quite unique triple-footswitch Cogmeister gives you. At its heart is the Drive section with a three-position Shift switch for three distinct midrange contours reminiscent of different amp types, and that is preceded by the Push 60s-style silicon transistor treble booster and tailed by the Solo section for boost and/or extra gain at the end of the chain, both with eminently practical EQ options. The three sections can be used singly or in any combination and – set up to complement each

other – could provide all your shifting gain needs on stage. Beyond that, the pedal is also capable of building a massive range of composite drive, distortion and fuzz sounds. [TC]

PRICE: £349

WEB: www.cogginsaudio.com

DIRTY BOY CO DIRTY BOY PREAMP

TYPE: ANALOGUE PREAMP PEDAL



Based on an amplifier designed by Alex Saraceno (father of guitarist Blues Saraceno), the Dirty Boy all-analogue preamp pedal is a

flexible powerhouse with a variety of roles. Essentially an amplifier simulator in pedal form, the Dirty Boy preamp features two outputs. The first delivers the raw sound of the preamp for use with a power amp and speaker setup, plugged into the effects return of a conventional guitar amp, or as a conventional boost/drive stompbox in front of an amp. The other output, featuring speaker emulation based on a 4x12 Celestion Greenback cabinet, is for connection to a mixing desk or PA for live use, or to send a signal to a DAW for recording. The sound is that of rock tones from cleanish through to full-on raunch, tempered via a tone knob and a Variac knob for simulated voltage variation. Slip one of these into your gigbag and you'll be covered for responsive amp/drive sounds in any situation. [TC]

PRICE: £264

WEB: www.dirtyboy.co

5. Pedal companies are increasingly emulating famous players' tones: Crazy Tube Circuits' Hi Power is a case in point, channelling David Gilmour's favoured Hiwatt amp and Coloursound pedal tones



PHOTO BY KOJI HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES/ DEATH BY AUDIO TIME SHADOWS II

TYPE: MULTI-DELAY

WWW.EARTHQUAKERDEVICES.COM



Plugging into the Time Shadows II feels like stepping into an alternate sonic dimension. A wild collaboration between EarthQuaker Devices and Death By Audio, this pedal isn't just about delay; it's about warping time and exploring uncharted territories. The three-way Mode switch is the heart of this adventurous pedal. The EQD Mode twists notes into a sub-octave, fuzzed-out cluster, while the DBA Mode ricochets echoes into filter-drenched chaos. And then there's the way out there !i mode, where each repeat warps unpredictably, morphing into an infinite loop of altered, psychedelic chaos. With six preset slots and intuitive knobs for Time, Span and Filter, sculpting sound and bending reality is effortless. Pushing gentle repeats into swirling textures or creating ghostly overtones is not only a breeze, it's downright addictive. Conventional delay lovers beware: this one doesn't just repeat your notes, it mutates them into lovely unexplainable madness! **[CW]**

PRICE: £249

WEB: www.earthquakerdevices.com

EMPRESS EFFECTS ZOIA

TYPE: SYNTH PEDAL



The Zoia is unlike any other effect pedal you've seen. Instead of a normal array of knobs and switches, there's a grid of 40 buttons. The reason for this is that the pedal is effectively a modular synthesizer and each button represents a module that you can link to another. Basically, these are the building blocks for creating whatever custom effect you want, and 22 of the modules currently cover all standard guitar effects including an EQ, overdrive/distortion, fuzz, compressor, noise gate, phaser, flanger, chorus, vibrato, Uni-Vibe, tremolo, envelope filter, ring modulator and cab simulator, along with three delays and five reverbs.

The Zoia excels at large, complex sounds and uniquely detailed effects of an experimental nature that you can save in 64 onboard memories. There's a bit of a learning curve here, but stick with it and this one pedal that can really take your musical vision to another creative level. **[TC]**

PRICE: £539

WEB: www.empresseffects.com

FRIEDMAN IR-X

TYPE: VALVE PREAMP PEDAL



The growl and feel are right, but the amp is nowhere in sight. The Friedman IR-X is a pedalboard-friendly amp-in-a-box, designed for direct-to-PA and recording setups, featuring two high-voltage 12AX7 valves delivering British high-gain tones that Friedman amps are known for. It's loaded with features combining two channels (Clean and Overdrive) with independent gain, volume, EQ,

The Time Shadows II pedal isn't just about delay; it's about warping time and exploring uncharted territories

FRIEDMANAMPLIFICATION.COM

IR loader, effects loop, DI, MIDI, headphone outputs and Boost switch. Power Amp Simulation helps the IR-X create authentic valve amp response that pushes air and feels great under your fingers, while Bright and Tight switches allow further tone shaping. The impulse responses are incredibly realistic and quite convincing through studio monitors or a live PA system. This pedal easily captures the feel, dynamics and responsiveness of a cranked valve amp. In fact, it's so close to the real thing that you may question whether you really need that full stack. **[CW]**

PRICE: £419

WEB: www.friedmanamplification.com

HAMSTEAD/THAT PEDAL SHOW REDWING

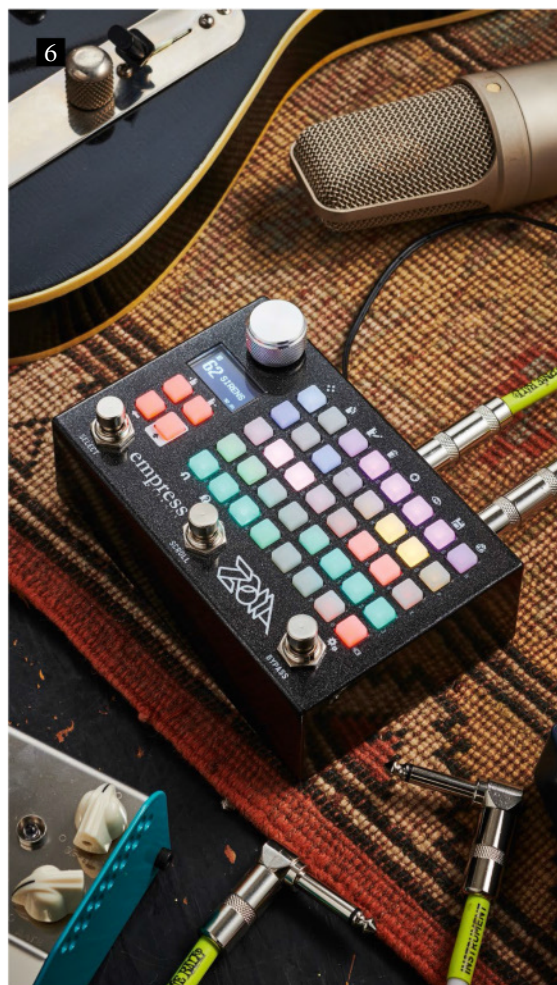
TYPE: MODULATION



There are many ways to get your modulation sounds running – from dedicated single effects pedals to all-encompassing multi-effects units – but the Redwing is something quite different. This all-analogue stereo modulation pedal offers instant hands-on control of all the parameters you need to dial in your own modulation effects. Inspired by BBD devices such as Boss's CE-1 Chorus Ensemble and the Electro-Harmonix Electric Mistress flanger, it can deliver those classic tones and beyond while being much better suited to function within a modern rig than vintage pedals. The unit creates variations on flanging, chorus, vibrato, ring modulation and rotary speaker sounds by using two independent BBD delay lines that are modulated by analogue waveform generation. There's a massive range of subtlety in what you can create here, whether you're trying to emulate a vintage effect or are looking to create something that fits your exact sonic needs. **[TC]**

PRICE: £429

WEB: www.hamsteadsoundworks.com



CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS WHITE WHALE II

TYPE: TRUE SPRING
REVERB & TREMOLO

Why you want it: all
the retro ambience



The White Whale II isn't just taking inspiration from vintage amps for its 'verb sound; it also looks to the 50s and 60s for its tremolo sounds, too

BOSS BP-1W BOOSTER/ PREAMP

TYPE: BOOST

Why you want it:
classic, tone-
flattering 'always
on' preamp sounds



WALRUS AUDIO Q1 ETHEREALIZER

TYPE: MULTI-EFFECTS

Why you want
it: the endless
soundscapes

IK MULTIMEDIA TONEX ONE

TYPE: AMP SIM & DRIVE



The Tonex One is a real gamechanger – a tiny pedal that uses 'AI Machine Modelling' technology for access to a massive range of rigs and stomps for use in different scenarios. The software captures the sound of rigs comprising various combinations of amps, cabinets and drive pedals, and Tonex One will let you incorporate those into your rig for use on stage and beyond. It comes supplied with the Tonex SE software, which offers instant access to 200 of IK's Tone Models but also gives you access online to ToneNET where unlimited Tone Models are created and shared by other users. You can feed amp and cab sounds directly into a PA, use it for recording via its USB output, or even practice via its headphone output. Alternatively, it can act as a standard fuzz/distortion/drive pedal on your 'board. **[TC]**

PRICE: £149

WEB: www.ikmultimedia.com

J ROCKETT PXO

TYPE: DRIVE & BOOST



This signature pedal for Bon Jovi guitarist Phil X features independently-footswitched Boost and Drive sections that can be stacked in any order. Two-band EQ in the drive section offers a practical range of tones to match pickups and amp, and the range of drive runs from low-level raunch through to full-on cranked-stack rock sound with plenty of compression. Tonal variation via the boost section's Tilt EQ offers an easy way to set a treble and bass balance for the boost that runs from unity gain to oodles of poke. Combining the two sections, a Pre/Post switch determines whether the boost pushes the Drive section that little bit further into distortion or

Keeley has taken the fuzz/pitch combo and bundled it into a new, highly flexible and creative pedal with the Octa PSI fuzz



PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT DUDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

7. Bon Jovi's Phil X needs a lot of flex in his drive pedals as he transitions from stadium and session work to the high-energy exuberance of his own band, The Drills. The PXO drive by J Rockett covers it all, he says

comes after it to give you a lift in volume, both instances having the benefit of that EQ tilt if needed. With more flexibility than most in its genre, this is a very practical addition to your pedalboard. **[TC]**

PRICE: £359

WEB: <https://rockettpedals.com>

KEELEY NOBLE SCREAMER

TYPE: MULTI-MODE OVERDRIVE



Overdrive fans often get caught in the same debate: Nobels ODR-1 or Ibanez Tube Screamer? Keeley's answer? The Noble Screamer! Here, Keeley has combined

two classic overdrive circuits, but there's a twist. The Noble Screamer can mix 'n' match the clipping and tone sections of each of its inspirations, offering a four-in-one overdrive. The clipping mode switch takes you from hard diode clipping in the OD setting, to more gentle, soft clipping in the TS position. Similarly, the OD/TS toggle in the tone section changes the tone control's response from a flat-to-smiley-face EQ in the OD position, to a low-pass filter for removing high-end when TS is selected. It can be buffered or true bypass (switchable without having to get inside the pedal casing) and maintains the simplicity of a three-knob (gain/volume/tone) overdrive. We've got one in our

shopping cart for under £200 as we type – and, at that price, it's worth every penny. **[SW]**

PRICE: £199

WEB: www.robertkeeley.com

KEELEY OCTA PSI TRANSFIGURATING FUZZ

TYPE: FUZZ/PITCH-SHIFTER/OCTAVER



Fuzz and octave effects are a classic pairing, but Keeley's Octa PSI takes things to a whole new level. First up, we get a 100 per cent analogue,

multi-stage transistor-based fuzz circuit with gain, level and tone controls. In addition to this, a toggle switch gives instant access to three tonal shapes (Punch, Scoop and PSI). Then there's the polyphonic octave/pitch-shifting side of the pedal, which gives plus/minus two-octave range. A second toggle allows for up/down and dual modes, but the real fun comes when combining the two sides. Here, we can change the signal chain order, configure the output to all wet or dry/wet, and engage the pitch side momentarily (including ramp speed) for instant Whammy-style pitch jumps. Keeley has taken the fuzz/pitch combo and bundled it into a new, highly flexible and creative pedal that serves up more beef than McDonald's. **[SW]**

PRICE: £265

WEB: www.robertkeeley.com

KEELEY IMAGES: ROBERT KEELEY.COM

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

Buckingham-based Origin Effects makes some of the most detailed and authentically amp-like drive pedals anywhere in the world. Product manager, John Dines, explains how it's done

Words Jamie Dickson

Origin has been praised for how authentic its pedals based on classic amps are, even in a crowded field. What makes your approach different?

"The Origin Effects way of doing things is basically going to lengths that a lot of people would think are too far in service of recreating something very specific and vintage. That's how the company kind of started, really with Simon Keats, who started Origin Effects, just chasing after this 1176 compressor slide tone and not finding it in a pedal. He basically then made it his goal to get that from a pedal. Other people kind of agreed that it was worth doing, and he started taking orders for them. The rest is history. But, yeah, it's definitely all about going to ridiculous lengths to recreate classic stuff."

So how do you even approach that?

"I mean, Origin approaches it by just building the entire thing in a pedal. There's no other way to describe it, which is why if you look inside an Origin pedal, there's hundreds of components and loads of stuff going on. It's why they come out on the more expensive end of things as well because you've just got to cram so much into the box to do it right. There are loads of good amp-in-a-box pedals or preamp-type things

on the market, but when we looked at it, we still thought there was some detail and weird stuff that vintage amps do that wasn't quite captured accurately in most pedals.

"All our amp recreations, such as our original RevivalDrive, have an entire amp circuit miniaturised inside the pedal. So that's preamp, phase inverter, output stage, reactive load, rectifier, sag – even the mains ghosting thing you get in old vintage amps was in the RevivalDrive, and that had a load of controls to adjust that stuff on the surface as well. So we were quite brazen about how much detail was going into recreating all of the parts of a vintage amp circuit."

The Deluxe55 is one of the most recent amp-replicating pedals Origin has made. How did you go about recreating that famously characterful combo?

"Well, what we've done in previous pedals is continued in the same way in the Deluxe55 – it's just a very different amp that's being recreated. So something like the RevivalDrive was very much about doing those classic 'big amp' sounds: Fender Twin, Marshall 'Plexi', a bit of Vox-y [flavour] as well, depending on how you set the controls. But the Deluxe55 is just 100 per cent 1955 Tweed Deluxe, which is a weird little



1. What sets Origin Effects apart from the rest, it says, is that its pedals – such as the pictured RevivalDrive – contain a complex array of components to recreate the sound of classic amps in staggering detail



2. Origin's Deluxe55 pedal is a direct replica of Fender's 1955 Tweed Deluxe, complete with all the quirks of the original



3. Product manager John Dines emphasises Origin's attention to detail, saying: "It's all about going to ridiculous lengths to recreate classic stuff"

amp with a lot of quirks, so the pedal sets about recreating every single quirk that amp had: there's the sag and the way it kind of collapses and turns into a fuzzy tone, the effect of swapping preamp valves [for higher or lower-gain versions].

"I think that when we got hold of the real Deluxe to test and measure it and base the pedal off, we were kind of surprised how versatile that amp is. We already knew it was more versatile than the 'Neil Young about-to-explode' thing, but it's just hugely useful for all kinds of genres – and not because it makes a lot of different sounds, just because it makes a couple of sounds that are really at home in a huge amount of styles. It was all about making the most accurate version of that amp possible in a pedal."

Many players still doubt that the subtleties of real valves can be recreated with solid-state circuits. How you tackle that problem?

"I can't give too much of the game away about the exact way that they're done... but it's a JFET-based circuit. It's mainly about recreating every single part of the amp, plus there's a lot of test and measurement and stuff as well. A real valve amp begins to distort as you crank it up, but it all happens at different times. So the power amp will start to distort first, then the phase inverter and then the preamp. And the intermingling of how those different stages distort is what gives it its character. That's where the time goes into designing one of our pedals to make sure that all of those individual stages break up at the same time and in the same way as in the real amp."

<https://origineffects.com>

ORIGIN EFFECTS REVIVALDRIVE COMPACT

TYPE: DRIVE



There are myriad digital amp-simulation pedals out there using modelling, but what makes the RevivalDrive Compact stand apart from that crowd is that it recreates amp sound by

replicating every stage of a valve amp's signal path using all-analogue components. A smaller, more pedalboard-friendly version of the 'big box' RevivalDrive, the Compact has a much more streamlined set of controls, making it easier to dial in the sounds you need while retaining the essence of its sibling's sound and exhibiting the same excellent touch-sensitivity. Amp sounds from clean to cranked are available, including vintage Fender and Marshall flavours, while a Dry knob opens up a world of blends if you'd like to retain more of your own amp's character. Add this superbly engineered pedal to your rig to get some authentic-sounding vintage amp tones and overdrive that's entirely in tune with the sound of your own amp. **[TC]**

PRICE: £329

WEB: www.origineffects.com

The Thermion Stone Age is a rich suit of fuzz tones with all the tailoring tools you need to cut your cloth exactly how you like it

SOLDANO SLO PEDAL

TYPE: AMP-IN-A-BOX OVERDRIVE



Mike Soldano's SLO (Super Lead Overdrive) amp has been revered since the 80s thanks to its high-gain performance: dripping in thick

harmonics while maintaining definition and power, it's sure to feature on the Mount Crushmore of gain. But it's 2025 now and our backs hurt... Never fear, the SLO Pedal is here. Built to replicate the amp's response, the pedal makes use of cascading gain stages to build up the heavy without compromising on clarity and detail. This means that



8. Soulful, vocal and endlessly sustaining, Chris Buck's playing style is a delight to the ears – and the Electric Lightning by ThorpyX has been designed to drive his sound with real valves at work

even if you're not looking to singe Spandex, you can still achieve the thick, smooth gain we're used to from the SLO's amp counterpart. It's a relatively straightforward pedal in terms of operation, delivering the familiar gain, volume, three-band EQ and Presence controls as found on the amp. One input, one output and a power jack later, and you can be enjoying the Soldano sound straight from your 'board. **[SW]**

PRICE: £199

WEB: www.soldano.com

THERMION STONE AGE

TYPE: MULTI-FUZZ



There's so many fuzz pedals out there that it's almost a relief Spanish effects maker

Thermion has put nearly everything you could possibly want into this hugely versatile pedal that covers the classic sounds and throws in a few more tone-sculpting tools that weren't around in the 60s. It offers four brilliant-sounding fuzz voices that roughly equate to an early 60s fuzz voice, a Maestro FZ-1-inspired fuzz, a Fuzz Face and a Big Muff-style distortion-fuzz. But it's the added features that really make the Stone Age a treat – there's a footswitchable 'Add Clean' control that allows you to blend back in some of your dry signal for overdrive-like hybrid tones, High and Low Cut controls, plus a footswitchable Octave effect – for those fluting, robotic *Purple*

Haze solo sounds. In short, it's a rich suit of fuzz tones with all the tailoring tools you need to cut your cloth exactly how you like it. **[JD]**

PRICE: £249

PRICE: www.thermion.eu

THORPYFX ELECTRIC LIGHTNING

TYPE: VALVE-BASED
DRIVE & BOOST



The design brief for this Chris Buck signature pedal was for a one-box solution to deliver Chris's own sound no matter what

backline he had access to. The result, the Electric Lightning, features a valve-based overdrive circuit fed by a high-headroom clean boost, each independently footswitched. Covering a wide range of tonal outcomes with a three-knob EQ similar to a Marshall tonestack, the Drive runs from a just-beyond-clean crunch right through to full-on heavy raunch, all with crisp string articulation and an excellent dynamic response that lets you coax out the cleaner sounds with softer strokes while digging in for the dirt. The Boost has plenty to kick that up a notch and features a Lows knob that can roll the bass off for something leaner and tighter. Delivering real valve sound in a practical package, you can pair this with just about any clean amp to deliver all the drive sounds you'll need. **[TC]**

PRICE: £429

WEB: www.thorpyfx.com

CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS HI POWER

TYPE: DRIVE/BOOST

Why you want it:
classic Gillmour
tones in a box



Delivering real valve
sound in a practical
package, you can
pair this Chris Buck
signature with just
about any clean amp



DIRTY BOY CO DIRTY BOY PREAMP

TYPE: ANALOGUE
PREAMP PEDAL

Why you want it:
vibey drive utility



THORPYFX ELECTRIC LIGHTNING

TYPE: VALVE-BASED
DRIVE & BOOST

Why you want it:
impeccably engineered
real-valve drive tones



PATCH THINGS UP

A rising British maker has a neat solution to making patch cables

If you've got a good pedalboard and plenty of great effects, it pays to connect everything together with quality cabling. While there are plenty of pre-assembled patch cables out there, they tend to be made to fixed lengths, which can be a bit restrictive as sometimes a bit of creative cabling is required to make everything fit your 'board, especially if you have a diverse selection of pedal sizes and input/output sockets to accommodate.

Visiting the recent UK Guitar Show, we were impressed by British solder-free patch cable maker PedalPatch, who supplies high-quality kits with various numbers of connectors and cable lengths.

All you have to do is cut the cable to length with a craft knife, push it into the jack terminal and bend it 90 degrees before replacing the end cap and fastening it tight with an integral screw. Making up custom-length patch cables by this method is a doddle and, in terms of pricing, PedalPatch offers a kit of 10 connectors and three metres of cable at £42.99, or 20 connectors and eight metres of cable for £79.99, with other kits available, too.

We also rate similar high-quality solderless kits by Boss, Lava Cable and Evidence Audio, but PedalPatch has a bit of an edge on value-for-money, so is well worth a look. www.pedalpatch.co.uk

UNIVERSAL AUDIO STARLIGHT ECHO STATION

TYPE: DELAY



The Starlight Echo Station is a studio-grade recreation of classic tape, analogue and digital echoes crafted with Universal Audio's legendary precision.

With three different echo/delay emulations – Tape EP-III, Analog DMM and Precision – the Starlight captures everything from warm, warbling tape echoes to lush analogue repeats and pristine studio-grade delays. The Time, Feedback and Mix controls shape your echoes, while the Color knob dials in tape age, modulation or other tone characteristics depending on the mode. Additional features include tap tempo and preset storage. Unlike many time-based effects, the Starlight sounds astonishingly good in the effects loop or in front of your amp. Each emulation is alive with nuance, capturing the quirks, warmth and characteristics of iconic delay units. Tape EP-III (Echoplex-style tape delay) has one of the warmest, smoothest echo effects for nailing those hard-to-recreate tones from the early Van Halen records. The Starlight nails it! [CW]

PRICE: £379

WEB: www.uaudio.com

VERTEX STEEL STRING SUPREME

TYPE: AMP-STYLE PREAMP



With news that Dumble amps are to resume production in extremely limited numbers, it's an apt moment to try this superb pedal

inspired by Dumble's legendary 150-watt Steel String Singer amp – of which only 12 examples were made, most famously used by Stevie Ray Vaughan. Vertex Effects of California built on its already great Steel String MKII amp-in-a-box pedal to expand the tonal nuance of this concept in the Steel String Supreme (Slight Return Edition), which features two rows of controls. The bottom three are the same as those that featured on the original Steel String (Level, Filter,

Gain), controlling the same circuit, but above these are five new controls governing tonal qualities such as the depth, fatness and brightness of the tone. Nuanced, airy, dynamic and rich, this is a Dumble-aping preamp everyone should try, and it can be used direct into cab sim/IR loaders, too. [JD]

PRICE: £227

WEB: www.vertexeffects.com

WALRUS AUDIO QI ETHEREALIZER

TYPE: MULTI-EFFECTS



Developed with guitarist Yvette Young, the Walrus Audio Qi Etherealizer multi-effects

pedal combines chorus, delay, grain and reverb into a highly versatile sound-shaping tool. With 12 rotary knobs and three footswitches, it may look intimidating, but it's actually easy to use. Two chorus modes provide immersive modulation, while the delay provides up to two seconds of repeats. The grain effect creates glitchy textures using Grain Cloud and Phrase Sample modes – and

The Qi Etherealizer's fusion of synthesized sounds, modulation and time-based effects pushes the boundaries of sound design

twisting random knobs can be quite entertaining, yielding a wide variety of unexpected sounds. Additional controls include individual Mix knobs for each effect, Dry/Mix knob for series/parallel routing, and Space and Tone for shaping Reverb. With MIDI support, preset storage, freeze function and stereo capabilities, the Qi Etherealizer unlocks limitless creative potential. Its innovative fusion of synthesized sounds, modulation and time-based effects pushes the boundaries of sound design, inspiring everything from ambient textures and dreamy soundscapes to unpredictable experimental sounds. [CW]

PRICE: £449

WEB: www.walrusaudio.com

WALRUS AUDIO SLÖER

TYPE: REVERB



For musicians looking to explore their creative boundaries, a good reverb

pedal can open up a world of tonal possibilities. The Walrus Audio Slöer is an ambient stereo reverb pedal that offers an impressive range of tonal possibilities for those looking to explore atmospheric soundscapes. It includes five distinct reverb modes (Dream, Light, Rain, Dark and Rise) that bend and shift time into unique textures. The X and Stretch sliders allow for fine-tuning effects like vibrato depth and decay times, while a three-way toggle lets you choose between wide, medium and narrow stereo width. For a quick burst of effect, the Momentary Switch function activates the Slöer only while you're pressing the footswitch. Additionally, three presets can be accessed via footswitch for easy recall. With every twist of a knob, the Slöer transforms and delivers deep, complex, haunting yet beautiful ambient textures that never fail to surprise. [CW]

PRICE: £339

WEB: www.walrusaudio.com



PHOTO BY ELI CHAVEZ

WALRUS AUDIO IMAGES: WALRUSAUDIO.COM



WALRUS AUDIO SLOER

TYPE: REVERB

Why you want it: the perfect tool for reverb dreamscapes

This all-analogue stereo modulation pedal offers instant hands-on control of all the parameters you need to dial in your own effects



HAMSTEAD/THAT PEDAL SHOW REDWING

TYPE: MODULATION

Why you want it: gutsy, organic modulation machine

ACCESSORY ALL AREAS

Gadgets and extras to finesse your effects experience

If you've got your pedals, cabling and 'board sorted, there are still a few things that can help your effects rig feel a little slicker. For those who like to play with bare feet, Barefoot Buttons – available from the website of pedal maker ThorpyFX – offers a mushroom-shaped anodised aluminium dome that fits over your existing footswitch giving a wider contact area that's easier and more comfortable to hit in the heat of the moment – available in various colours from £9 each.

If you're making up your own patch cables you might find it handy to use a Patch Cable Stripping Tool like the ones available from The GigRig for a princely £2 to help you neatly expose wire for fitting into connectors, solderless or otherwise. Also available for around the same price from online electronics retailers.

Meanwhile, if recording is your thing, check out Walrus Audio's Canvas Passive Re-Amp (£133). The company says it's "a studio tool designed to send recorded guitar, drums or other instrument tracks from your recording session through pedals and effects, or different amp combinations", unleashing the sonic sculpting powers of your pedalboard on all kinds of recorded tracks.

Finally, as users of vintage fuzzes can attest, the sound of a fading battery can really produce some weird and wonderful tones. As such, JHS Pedals designed the Vulture (£57.99, left), which lets you "precisely trim the input voltage [of pedals] to replicate the tone of a dying battery effortlessly. Designed for versatility, it works wonders on any fully analogue pedal, unearthing trippy sounds lurking within your favourite overdrive or distortion."



20 WAYS TO GET MORE FROM YOUR PEDALS

From tone-tailoring to buying what's right for you, here's our guide to putting more of what counts on your 'board

Words Jamie Dickson

1 DON'T OVERLOOK MAINSTREAM PEDALS

There's been such an explosion of interest in boutique pedals that it's easy to forget the big names in the effects industry got big for a reason. A great example of top-notch sonics in a mainstream package is the TR-2 Tremolo by Boss. This unassuming, three-knob trem can be bought for under £100, but it's still one of the best-sounding examples of the breed we've found. As always, buy with your ears and feeling of connection with the gear – try plenty and rule nothing out.

2 FIND YOUR TRIBE

Effects makers, if they're worth their salt, will make sure their design philosophy flows consistently through all their products. So if you really like one pedal by a particular brand, there's a good chance you'll like the sounds, vibe and usability of other effects they make. That's not to say don't explore more widely than one maker (you definitely should), but a brand you really 'click' with can provide a rich seam of satisfying musical experiences and offer a good starting point for auditioning new pedals when expanding your pedalboard.

3 REVISIT OLD PEDALS WHEN YOU CHANGE AMPS

Some pedals suit particular amps better than others. So if you change your amp from, say, a Marshall to a Fender, don't forget to dig out pedals that you'd previously set to one side and give them another try with the new amp. For example, a drive pedal that might seem OTT in terms of mid frequencies when paired with a Marshall, might be a perfect balance with the 'scooped' sound of a Fender. We found this approach paid dividends with the Free The Tone CC1-B Crunchy Chime boost, which sounded good into a British-voiced Laney Cub Super but absolutely outstanding into a Fender Hot Rod DeVille, softening up the glassy attack of the latter by just the right amount.

4 GET A GOOD PEDALBOARD

We've known outstanding players who use very basic pedalboards (sometimes just a bit of wood with pedals Velcro'd to it). But thoughtfully designed pro-grade 'boards make life easier – they typically have well-thought out provision for mounting power supplies and cable routing, allow easy foot-access to each pedal through well-designed tiers or

risers, and come in a case that has dedicated space for cables and more. Brands such as RockBoard by Warwick offer modular, user-customisable builds, while top-flight offerings from premium makers such as Schmidt Array are made from scratch to your exact 'floor plan' of pedals and in custom finishes. Do watch out for overall weight, though, as some tour-ready pro 'boards can be chunkily built and weigh a lot with pedals added.

5 DON'T RULE OUT USING DELAY STRAIGHT INTO THE AMP

It's become received wisdom that delay pedals should go in the effects loop in order to avoid their repeats getting distorted by the preamp stage of your amp on the way through. But with effects, it's good to remember there is no right or wrong per se, only different creative choices – and sometimes the grainier, swampier sound of delay hitting a preamp with a touch of 'hair' on it can sound glorious. Try both ways and decide which works best for you.

6 TRY AN 'ALWAYS ON' BOOST

Not many people enjoy playing through a bone-dry, glassy-clean amp. Using a clean boost in such situations can create a more flattering, expressive tone by pushing the amp to work harder across the whole frequency spectrum, promoting natural compression and 'bloom' from the amp itself. Other pedals, such as preamps, can shape



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3. Switching up your backline? Be sure to dig out and demo your stash of pedals – some stompboxes reveal a whole new appeal when paired with a different amp

6. 'Always on' pedals such as Xotic's Echoplex-inspired EP Booster can have a flattering effect on your overall tone





8

tone as well as giving the amp a kick, shelving off unneeded bass and plumping up your mids, which can also be useful. So why not use preamp, boost or compression pedals to introduce a 'shock absorber' of suppleness and warmth in front of your amp when playing with clean and near-crunch tones? A classic pedal for this 'always on' role is Xotic's EP Booster, based on an Echoplex preamp.

7 PUT FUZZ PEDALS FIRST – MOSTLY

We were lucky enough to put a Rotosound reissue of its 1967 RFB-1 fuzz pedal with NOS germanium transistors through its paces recently and it sounded glorious. But be aware many vintage and vintage-inspired fuzz pedals like the RFB-1 need to 'see' your guitar's pickups directly without a buffered pedal between them and the guitar in the signal chain. You simply won't get all the warmth and sweetly chewy expressiveness out of them otherwise, though some silicon-transistor fuzzes are more tolerant of having other pedals in front of them in the signal chain.

8 TRY USING MODULATION SUBTLY

As much as we love a lush, rippling 80s chorus, modulation pedals can also work wonders when they are used more subtly. A phaser or chorus set to low Depth settings and a relatively slow Rate can provide a sense of space and

subtle movement to clean tones that is very pleasing to the ear, even if it is barely perceptible. Also, some classic modulation pedals have tone-flattering preamps built in, a feature recognised by Boss who put the preamps of its CE-1 Chorus Ensemble and RE-201 tape delay into the BP-1W Booster/Preamp pedal simply because they make everything sound a little better.

9 TRY ANALOGUE, IT'S OFTEN WORTH IT

There is much to be said for digital effects – especially versatility and editability – and the best digital pedals can produce some truly stunning sounds. But do try genuine analogue-circuitry pedals as well. Sometimes they just have a certain

Preamp, boost or compression pedals can introduce a 'shock absorber' of suppleness and warmth in front of your amp

8. Dubbed a 'sonic sweetener' by its maker, the Boss BP-1W imbues your tone with the character of classic circuits

9. A pro-grade pedalboard with good I/O, cabling and power is a superb tool

something even very good digitally modelled effects lack. We found this when A/B'ing a J Rockett Tranquilizer phaser against a high-quality modulation pedal by a respected maker. The digital version was very usable, but the Tranquilizer just had a sonic charisma that, in the end, we found more inspiring than having multiple phaser models at our fingertips in the digital pedal.

10 DIAL IN SETTINGS AT GIG VOLUME

If you have a big gig coming up, consider hiring a rehearsal studio where you can dial in your effects at stage volume. Due to the way that sound is perceived and heard at higher volumes, and the performance characteristics of amps when

working flat out (or something like it), you'll find that overdrive and gain settings that seemed perfect at a loudish home volume can sound blown out, mushy or harshly topky at gig volume. By using a rehearsal space that allows you to run the effects and amp loud while you dial things in for live work, you can find settings that will sound great – instead of unexpectedly awful – when you hit the stage. Do watch out for your ears when testing at length, however!



11 USE THE PENCIL ANALOGY

Some drive pedals, such as Free The Tone's Dumble-like SS1-V String Slinger, have abundant crispness and clarity to help you punch through a mix. Others, such as J Rockett's 45 Calibre pedal, offer a good blend of definition on the one hand and flattering, supple compression on the other. Fuzz pedals, meanwhile, offer messy, smeary, spattery sounds for when you want to go wild. Think of these three classes of drive like pencils:



11. Different drive pedals accommodate different needs. Free The Tone's String Slinger, for example, lends itself to crisp, clear guitar lines

The treble booster is possibly the most misleadingly named effect as its real benefit lies in shelving off bass and boosting upper mids

the first is like your hard 'H' pencil for drawing sharp, clear lines; the second is like your all-rounder 'HB' pencil that can turn its hand to both lines and shading; and the third is more like a soft 'B' pencil or even charcoal – good for creative, smudgy stuff but not so good for clarity. Having all these 'pencils' present on your pedalboard means all bases are covered when it comes to drive tones.

12 FOUR-KNOB DRIVES WORK WELL

While we love classic three-knob overdrives like the TS-9 Tube Screamer, we've come to really value four-knob overdrives

12. Four-knob overdrives, such as the J Rockett Archer Select and ThorpyFX's Warthog, offer a flexibility that can really enhance your tone-sculpting abilities

that offer EQ control over both bass and treble (or otherwise expanded tone-sculpting powers) as well as gain and level. Four-knob drives can often be dialled in to suit different amps and be paired up with other effects more flexibly than simpler drive pedals – the J Rockett Archer Select is a great example, as is the ThorpyFX Warthog.

13 HAVE A GRAB-AND-GO 'BOARD

If you're into pedals, you may well have a pretty comprehensive main pedalboard, stuffed with everything you need plus a few things you only use every now and then. That's great, but we've also found it's worth making up a much smaller, lighter 'board with no more than three core effects on it for those times you just want to jump in the car and join in with a jam down the pub. We'd recommend a three-pedal line-up of a good all-rounder overdrive, a tremolo, plus a delay (or a reverb pedal if your amp doesn't have it onboard). Small isolated power supplies that can power the whole mini-'board can be had very cheaply these days, so also budget for one of those.

14 COULD ONE PEDAL DO IT ALL?

Following on from the last tip, could one pedal do all the basics, obviating the need for a 'board at all? Obviously, compact multi-effects units such as the Line 6 HX Stomp

are designed to do just this. But more traditional pedal makers such as Keeley also have some interesting takes on this concept such as the excellent DDR (Drive, Delay, Reverb), which gives you those staples of everyday tone in one compact pedal at a reasonable price of just under £200. With such solutions, your 'pedalboard' could be slipped into your pocket, not a gigbag!

15 USE YOUR VOLUME CONTROL

Back in the days of non-master volume amps, guitarists such as Rory Gallagher used to be adept at using the guitar's volume control to manipulate the gain of a cranked amp. This approach can yield rewards with pedals, too – Mick Taylor of *That Pedal Show* and former editor of this tome told us long ago that dialling back the guitar's volume when playing through a Fuzz Face yields a unique and very ear-pleasing clean tone that you wouldn't guess was there if using only the pedal's controls.

16 USE TRADITIONAL PEDALS WITH MOST MULTI-EFFECTS

If you have a digital multi-effects unit such as a Line 6 Helix or Boss's GT-1000 (to name but two), remember that most have an effects loop that allows you to utilise favourite stompboxes within the editable, internal signal chain of the multi-effects. So if you need



12



HTTPS://ROBERTKEELEY.COM/



the programmable versatility of an all-singing multi-effects but love the sound of a particular, much-loved vintage phaser from your pedal collection, for example, you can often have your cake and eat it.

17 VELCRO NO-GO? TRY GEL TO STICK PEDALS DOWN

Daniel Steinhardt of *That Pedal Show* and The GigRig says that he often uses gel-tape, such as Duck's Nano-Grab brand, to attach pedals to his 'boards. "It's a kind of double-sided tape, but it's gel so it doesn't take a crowbar to get the pedals off," he explains. "Also, if you just wash it with a bit of water, you can actually use the stuff over – and it sticks to rubber so it solves the dreaded Boss conundrum [of how to firmly adhere tape to the rubber base of Boss compact pedals]. I use gel tape for probably 80 per cent of the pedalboards I do now."

18 TRY A TREBLE BOOSTER

The treble booster is possibly the most misleadingly named effect out there, as its real benefit lies in shelving off bass and boosting upper mids, which can be fantastically effective when playing through cranked amps that have the potential to flub out when simply turned up loud with a guitar running straight into them. By pruning off what you don't need from the frequency spectrum, your tone cuts through where it counts:

Try all brands, including budget ones, and buy based on what gels with you, what excites you and what gets you writing new music

in the ear-pleasing mid frequencies. Brian May, Rory Gallagher and many more legends have relied on this useful effect for just this reason – so don't be put off by the name. Brill, not shrill, is what you'll get if you use a treble booster right, and there are many modern versions of the old-school Rangemaster out there, including the Mythos Cestus Treble Booster pedal to name but one.

14. All-in-one solutions come in different guises – from Keeley's versatile, compact DDR, to Line 6's all-singing HX Stomp amp and effects processor

19. Jam Pedals' Lucydreamer is a favourite of Kirk Fletcher and enhances your tone with its wet/dry capabilities



19 MEND IT IN THE BLEND

Some modern compression pedals and overdrives will let you blend in some dry (unaffected) signal in with the effected signal. You'll find this useful feature on pedals such as Origin Effects Cali76 Stacked Compressor or the Jam Pedals Lucydreamer overdrive, and it basically gives you a way to achieve a subtler balance of natural, clearly defined straight-into-the-amp guitar tone with just a little bit of compression or drive. If you crave natural sounds that flatter, sustain and boost in a very organic, touch-sensitive way, pedals with a wet/dry blend control are worth exploring.

20 TRY EVERYTHING

Just as with guitars, it's best to be neither a snob nor an inverted snob – try all brands, including budget ones (Jack White has a signature pedal out with affordable pedal brand Donner, after all), and buy based on what gels with you, what excites you, what gets you writing new music effortlessly. The beauty of effects is that they are, by and large, more accessibly priced than other key parts of a guitar rig, and they are easy to sell on without too much depreciation. So roam widely across the effects landscape and open your mind to the creative possibilities of every species of effect you encounter on your travels. **G**

CORY WONG

The funkmeister guitarist returns with a whirlwind of new recording projects in his wake, and a fresh new signature guitar by his side. Here, he joins us in our studios in the midst of a UK tour

Words David Mead Photography Phil Barker

Cory Wong must surely qualify as being one of the busiest guitarists we've ever met. At the time of this interview he was on tour with The Metropole Orkest, but he's also to be found taking on funk guitar duties with both The Fearless Flyers and Vulfpeck, not to mention sundry side projects like Cory & The Wongnotes. And apart from that he's a Grammy nominated producer – that's an awful lot of day jobs all rolled into one, you have to admit.

When you consider that Vulfpeck were one of the first ever bands without a manager and not signed to a major label to have sold out Madison Square Gardens – a feat that they may well pull off again this coming September – it's easy to see that funk is once again very big news.

With grooves so intense even sunlight can't shine through, all of Cory's projects benefit from his tight-as-you-like guitar work, and just recently he's added another signature guitar to his performance regimen. There's already a Fender Strat that bears his name, and now he can be seen toting a new Ernie Ball Music Man guitar, too. More of that later, but first we had to find out how he's managing to juggle all the projects he's involved with.

How's the tour going?

"I've been on a tour all around Europe and the UK, and I'm feeling very good right now. 11-piece band out on the road – absolutely *smashing*. We did a couple of US tours, we've been to Asia, so when you play that much with a band, your instincts are right in alignment. The set goes wildly from highly arranged material to completely open. That line getting blurred is really fun because a lot of times we'll go into exploration mode, but somehow we'll just all be locked into the same thing, or we'll be listening so intently to each other that it feels like it was arranged ahead of time. It's like, 'Yo, what did we do last night on that thing?' It's like, 'I don't remember.' We've got to listen back because I have no idea what we did, but we were so locked in. At this point we've been playing so much together that the band is just on fire. So the tour has been going awesome. Shows have been huge."

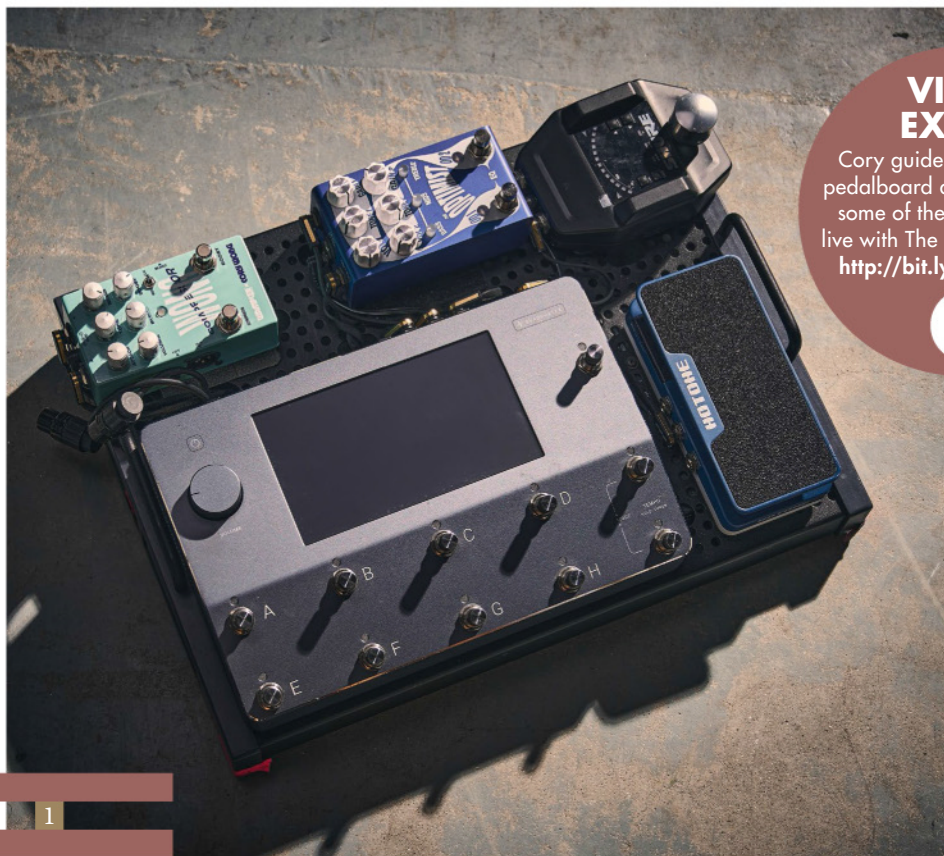
What other projects are you working on, currently?

"Putting out a new Vulfpeck album. Right now we're in the midst of releasing an album called *Clarity Of Cal* [released in March 2025 on Vulf Records] which was recorded in California in front of an audience. We actually did this with the last Fearless Flyers album

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Cory demonstrate the
tones from his brand-new
Music Man signature straight
from *Guitarist's* studios
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>





VIDEO EXTRA!

Cory guides us through his pedalboard and demonstrates some of the sounds he uses live with The Metropole Orkest
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



1. A Neural DSP Quad Cortex forms the heart of Cory's compact 'board and (right) his signature Fender Strat now shares duties with the new Music Man

[*Fearless Flyers IV*, Vulf Records] where we just go in and rehearse the tunes for a day or two. We had voice memos that we sent to each other and everybody learned the material. Then we played eight shows and we played some songs, and then it's like, 'Hey, we're gonna record our next album – right now.' We just played the album down, and then we played a bunch more music. So in the middle of our concert, we had this album session. It's not a live album, it's just an album recorded live in front of an audience. But you'd be surprised at how much isolation you can get nowadays with a lot of the stuff. It's pretty crazy. So yeah, a new album coming out with Vulfpeck. Really fun, really excited about that."

"Part of my secret to being prolific [is] when I'm on tour, I'm also mixing the album from the other thing"

Anything else in the pipeline?

"We also just recorded a brand new album with The Fearless Flyers. We were all in California for a concert and for NAMM. You know, it's one of those bands where we don't get together that often because we're all so busy individually. So whenever we can get together, let's just get the most mileage out of this thing. We knew we were all going to be together, so we had prepared for a few months on some material for a new album. We came in, tracked the album in a couple days, and I think I just finished mixing it yesterday.

"That's part of my secret to being prolific. When I'm on tour, I'm also mixing the album from the other thing, you know? It's like, sometimes I find myself in a studio on an off day where I can really work on other stuff. Doesn't always work for everybody, but, for me, it's nice to be able to do that. So that way, when I get home, I can actually have some time. Because if I didn't finish

mixing this album, as soon as I get home, I'll be like, 'All right, I gotta get into album audio...' I need it checked off my to-do list so I can actually relax when I get home.

"So there's a lot of new music coming out between The Fearless Flyers and Vulfpeck. I'm doing a bunch more touring and just always exploring different parts of my own artistry as Cory Wong, so it's been a really fun last couple years, and this year looks to be the same sort of thing. We're just getting out there and playing."

Do you find that there's an adjustment you have to make between playing with Vulfpeck, The Fearless Flyers and The Metropole Orkest?

"With any project, when I get in the right headspace, I just need to understand my role. How do I fit into this? What is being asked of me? How can I best use my skill set? [With] Corey Wong, well, yeah, I'm the front person. It's my vision. I'm the band leader. It's all my thing. And what's asked of me is to be out front, and I need to take command of the thing because that's what's expected. When it comes to Fearless Flyers, I'm a member of the band and my role in that is playing guitar, and, yes, I have leadership responsibilities in it – producing the record and mixing the record and whatever – but that's just part of the role. It's not just about me. With Vulfpeck, the headspace I'm in is also like we're a band. I'm part of this band, and we, at certain times, need to step up and take command of the stage, but the majority of the time, I'm playing what feels appropriate for the song.

"So it's all about headspace. And, actually, I think what it does is it deepens my artistry because it helps my awareness; I'm constantly trying to be aware of what any moment or any song needs. How can I do something that feels like it really contributes to this song and adds value to it but stays within the role that it needs to, to make sure that whatever is supposed to be paid attention to is being paid attention to?"

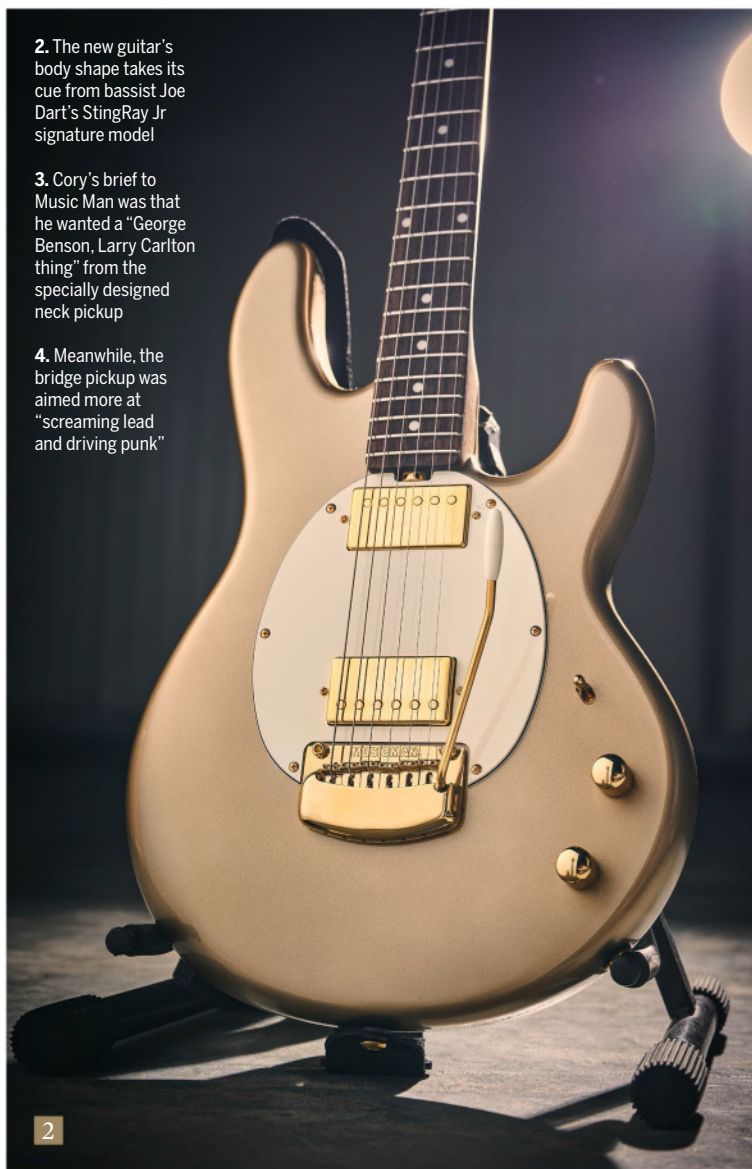
One of the busiest guitarists in the business, Cory spends a lot of time juggling different recording and touring projects

“With any project, when I get in the right headspace, I just need to understand my role”

2. The new guitar's body shape takes its cue from bassist Joe Dart's StingRay Jr signature model

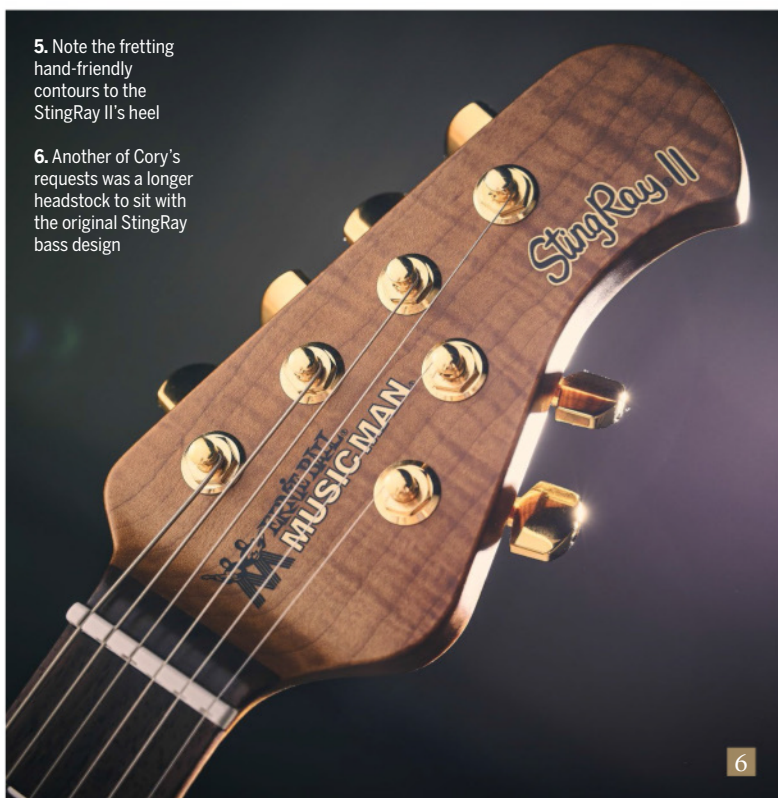
3. Cory's brief to Music Man was that he wanted a "George Benson, Larry Carlton thing" from the specially designed neck pickup

4. Meanwhile, the bridge pickup was aimed more at "screaming lead and driving punk"



5. Note the fretting hand-friendly contours to the StingRay II's heel

6. Another of Cory's requests was a longer headstock to sit with the original StingRay bass design



Your new Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II signature launched earlier this year. Tell us about it.

“I’ve been looking for a humbucker guitar for a lot of years. I finally had to accept the reality that single coils weren’t going to give me everything that the world has to offer – because, well, they’re just different. It’s a different tool, right? I love my Strat; I’m a Strat guy through and through, but I just needed a guitar with humbuckers. If I go out on tour, I just want two guitars: I want a guitar that can do everything that the Strat doesn’t do. So I want something to give me the George Benson, Larry Carlton thing. I want something to give me the screaming lead and driving punk thing in a bridge pickup. And in the middle, I want something that’s just got the Earth, Wind & Fire, Prince, funky thing that’s different from the Strat.

“I figured it was maybe impossible to get out of one guitar, but I tried a bunch of different pickups and a bunch of other guitars, and I got pretty close with some of them. Then one day, I was just scrolling the internet and I saw [Vulfpeck/Fearless Flyers bassist] Joe Dart texting me, he’s like, ‘Yo, so the Joe Dart Jr bass is coming out, check it out!’ And he sent me a picture. This thing looks amazing. It’s basically just like a miniature StingRay, and it had one pickup and whatever. I emailed Brian Ball [CEO of Ernie Ball Inc]. I was like, ‘Hey, can you just slap six strings on there and a humbucker and send me one?’ He’s like, ‘No, I can’t. That’s not how it works...’ So it’s like, ‘Okay, well, have you guys ever made a StingRay guitar? Because that shape is really cool. You guys should make one. You should do it. It’d be so awesome.’

“Then they made a render, and they’re like, ‘What do you think of this?’ I’m like, ‘It’s awesome!’ They’re like, ‘Okay, hold on. I feel like we’re kind of collaborating on this. How involved do you want to be in this?’ I said, ‘However involved you want me to be. Because what you’re doing right now is making the guitar that I want to be a companion to my Strat.’ So they said, ‘All right, let’s do this as a collaborative guitar.’”

“I finally had to accept the reality that single coils weren’t going to give me everything that the world has to offer”

Was Fender okay with you working with Music Man on the new guitar?

“I called Fender and I was like, ‘Hey, I’m looking for a humbucker guitar, and blah, blah. I’m exploring this space with Music Man, I mean, it’s a completely different guitar, you know? It’s a totally different tool.’ So it’s like, ‘All right...’ There were a lot of things that [Ernie Ball Music Man] were very set on, and there was a lot of stuff that I really wanted. I wanted a bigger headstock; they did some math and figured out how to respace this and whatever because it also makes it look a little more like the StingRay bass shape with the bigger headstock. We tweaked a couple little things just for ratios and whatnot. I wanted the same scale length as a Strat, and I wanted it to feel comfortable and familiar to me.

“But the pickups – I was like, ‘Yeah, I want to be able to do George Benson and Larry Carlton in the neck pickup. I want to be able to do Satriani and Tom

7. Cory’s turbocharged funk playing is a feature in Vulfpeck and The Fearless Flyers, as well as The Metropole Orkest



DeLonge in the bridge pickup. And I want to be able to do Prince and Al McKay in the middle.’ The fun thing about the engineers and designers at Music Man is that they’re just up for any challenge, and they’ve proven themselves. Take a look at any of the signature guitars they’ve put out with any of their other artists: they really try to get into what the artist’s vision is and let the artist lead and really express themselves. So they didn’t tell me, ‘You’re nuts. That’s not going to happen.’ I was telling myself, ‘It’s nuts, it’s not going to happen,’ because I’ve been trying to do it for the last three years, finding a guitar with a bunch of different pickups and whatnot. And within the third set of pickups they sent over, somehow they just nailed it.”

You’re obviously really happy with the guitar!

“I’m so stoked about this guitar. What it’s done is it’s really made it so that when I go on tour, I can bring my Strat and I can bring [the Music Man] for everything else, you know? It’s kind of interesting; everybody knows me as a Strat player, like that is my voice. But any professional guitar player who says, ‘Oh yeah, I just play one guitar,’ they’re lying. We all know that. [This guitar is] the perfect companion to the Strat, in every way. It’s very different. So I’ve been loving having a guitar like this, being able to work with Music Man. The attention to detail that they have is absolutely insane. They make incredible instruments.” **G**



Clarity Of Cal by Vulfpeck is available now on Vulf Records. For more info on Cory’s new signature guitar, check out www.music-man.com www.corywongmusic.com



GUILD STARFIRES

By the late 50s, rock 'n' roll was in full swing – and so for Guild, a 'jazz guitar' maker, it was time to catch up. Enter the Starfire electrics...

Words Bob Wootton Photography Phil Barker

Since its birth in New York in the early 1950s, Guild had established itself as a serious player in the US guitar-manufacture scene. Jazz was still the dominant serious musical force and, indeed, was where most makers made their reputations. Gibson, Epiphone and Gretsch were all competing with fine archtops, but things were changing fast. Rock 'n' roll was usurping the easier listening of the early 50s, though early rock 'n' roll players often played full-bodied archtops – think Scotty Moore with Elvis, Bill Haley's Franny Beecher or Eddie Cochran.

Just as the volume of dance-band horn sections drove the addition of electric pickups to archtops, so modern tastes and bigger venues demanded louder tones – and Fender, Gibson and others swept in with solidbodies that suppressed the resulting acoustic feedback.

By the late 50s, Gibson had launched its range of thinline Electric Spanish (ES) models to notable success. Other makers naturally followed, so competition was fierce and endorsements from leading players often hard-fought.

Relative to average earnings, guitars were much more expensive than today,

so as a consumer market developed, a key focus was affordable entry-level and mid-priced instruments. And so Guild launched its Starfire range into the world in 1960. The Starfire was emphatically not entry-level nor pitched at students as, say, the Les Paul Junior had been. From its first catalogue appearance, it was positioned as a serious guitar for younger artists, away from the dusty archtops the older jazzier types used. The catalogue proclaimed the instrument to be: "For the young artist with a flair for showmanship!"

In terms of shape, the first Starfires were modelled on the Guild Capri CE-100 (introduced in 1956) – the first Guild with a Florentine (sharp) cutaway – but used the thinline body depth of the Slim Jim T-100 and T-100D, introduced in 1958. While it aimed to pitch itself apart from its forebears, the Starfire was still fully hollow and – taking another cue from Gibson – was launched in a rich Cherry Red boasting a "slender, fast-action" reinforced mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard. The simplest variant, the Starfire I, had a single pickup at the neck. The Starfire II had the popular twin-pickup layout with individual volume and tone controls, and a third model, the Starfire III, added a Bigsby True Vibrato tailpiece.

Other finishes were soon offered – with Emerald Green, Honey Amber and Ebony Grain options. A couple of special-order white models turn up in pictures of the time, too.

Sixties Stars

The examples we've photographed here are II and III variants of the model. First is the Cherry Red Starfire III, whose case literature suggests it was shipped on 14 April 1961. The top is laminated maple, which is unusual because Guild more typically offered Cherry finishes over laminated mahogany. Next up, a 1961 Starfire III is seen in a rarer Emerald Green over a laminated maple top, the typical wood beneath the Green and Ebony Grain finishes that were offered. Finally, we have a super-rare 1962 Honey Amber Starfire II, which is actually a clear finish (now slightly aged) over the sapele variant of mahogany with its distinctive wide figure.

Each of these guitars is in great condition, though the Cherry and Emerald examples give a glimpse into the issue that Guild was known to have at the time of getting its finishes to adhere and remain stable. As a result, some playing wear has caused the finish on the backs to lift slightly along the grain.



*The catalogue
proclaimed the Starfire
to be: "For the young
artist with a flair for
showmanship!"*

Top to bottom: 1962 Starfire II in
Honey Amber, 1961 Emerald Green
finish Starfire III, and 1961 Cherry Red
Starfire III with laminated maple top

1. The very smooth import German Kolb tuners seen on this Cherry Starfire III were an optional upgrade. They became an increasingly popular customer order across the 1960s

2. Twangy DeArmond Dynasonic single coils were the pickup of choice on earlier Starfires. They invariably had white tops on Guild guitars and black on Gretsches



The colour and figuring, especially on the back of the Emerald model, are stunning. It evokes Epiphone's (by then Gibson-owned) entry-level single-pickup Coronet solidbody in Silver Fox, an olive/grey finish with white pore-filler highlights (black Starfires often faded to a dark, slightly murky, grey).

The neck heel of the Honey Amber Starfire II is decorated with a pearloid plate, whereas both the IIIs' backs extend right over the neck heel, an unusual feature usually seen on higher-end classical guitars to add strength. This is something that also appears on other Guilds of the time: for example, the small-bodied Economy M-20 acoustic made famous – if never actually played – by the iconic Nick Drake on the cover of his second album, *Bryter Layter*, from March 1971.

The back-painted clear plastic pickguard on each of the models is an earlier version that has a smoothly curved bottom edge. A straighter 'stairstep' contour appeared in 1963, and the icon above the brand legend evolved from an inverted arrowhead to different starbursts over time, too.

The headstocks all display the 'lip top' shape common to Guilds until they were changed to a 'raised centre' in 1964. All have the 'Chesterfield' inlay that was used on mid-range models. The earlier Cherry

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***The backs extend
over the neck heel,
an unusual feature
usually seen on high-
end classical guitars***
•

example has the typical plastic truss rod cover of the time, while the Emerald and Honey Amber Starfires each have more unusual thin metal versions that are engraved with the model name.

On to hardware and the Bigsby B3-type vibrato tailpieces on the III models carry a 'Guild Spec' legend underneath, while the Honey Amber II has the harp-shaped tailpiece that was common to many Guilds of the time. The Bigsby bridges accompanying the vibrato units rock on their metal bases to help shift pitch as the arm is moved. The fixed intonation points on the bridge, also seen on Gibson's stop tailpieces of the time, reflect the then-widespread use of a wound third string. If vintage-correct, these guitars are best strung with wound third strings whose intonation points sit some way short of a modern plain third's.

The Honey Amber's bridge, which closely resembles a tune-o-matic in style and function, is an Adjusto-Matic made by Hagstrom in Sweden.

The tuners on the Honey Amber and Emerald models are Grover Sta-Tite units in what's now called the Waverly style. The smooth and more ornate German Kolb tuners on the Cherry example were an optional upgrade that became more common across the 60s.

Most 1950s Guild electrics sported pickups made by Franz (a company then based in Astoria, New York) that resembled (but sounded quite different from) Gibson's celebrated and enduring P-90. Instead, the very first Starfires had a white-faced single-coil pickup with six slot-head screw polepieces. Only the earliest Starfires had these, probably less than 150 pieces. Hans Moust's definitive book on Guild says these pickups were made by DeArmond.

Thereafter, Starfires were among several Guild models to feature DeArmond Dynasonics, not long after Gretsch forsook them for its own now-celebrated Filter'Tron humbucking pickups. Gretsches had black Dynasonics, and Guilds had white ones; the riser shims beneath the pickups are cream-and-black-striped laminate. All Starfire variants



Starfires appeared in the hands of players such as The Kinks' Dave Davies and Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia

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carried Dynasonics until Guild, too, introduced its own version of humbuckers – the virtually mini-humbucking sized ‘Anti Hum pickups’, as they were called – in 1963.

By the end of 1964, Guild had added the double-cutaway Starfire IV and fancier V and VI designs to the catalogue – which aped Gibson’s ES-335 models – and featured a double-cutaway outline and a feedback-reducing centre block. Meanwhile, the Starfire XII 12-string joined the ranks in 1966, as did the single-pickup bass, with the double-pickup Starfire II bass following in the 1967 catalogue.

Guild’s UK profile in the 60s was disproportionate to its scale due to distribution by leading instrument and sheet music distributor Boosey & Hawkes. Single-cut Starfires appeared in the hands of famous players such as The Kinks’ Dave Davies and Grateful Dead’s Jerry Garcia, and you’ll hear the instrument on Mike Mitchell’s solo on The Kingsmen’s *Louie, Louie*. Plenty of players also embraced the later centred-blocked double-cut Starfires such as blues greats Buddy Guy, Lightnin’ Hopkins and Robert Lockwood Jr. Hans Moust went as far as saying that the double-cut Starfires were “by many players, considered the ultimate blues guitar”. 

3. As with many makers, detailed appointments changed frequently. These were Guild’s typical control knobs from 1958 to ’63, but spot the different pickguard icons!

4. The Honey Amber’s distinctive sapele back stops at the neck heel, which has a pearloid cover, whereas the other examples’ backs extend over their heels

5. Note the white Dynasonic pickup again, while an unusual Hagstrom Adjusto-Matic bridge handles string intonation as well as action

REVIEW | ATKIN JH3001



Holding My Own

What happens when a charmingly bonkers rockstar is given free rein to design his own guitar? Guess what? He comes up with something charmingly bonkers!

Words Neville Marten Photography Phil Barker





ATKIN JH3001 £2,999

CONTACT **Atkin Guitars** PHONE **01227 719933** WEB <https://atkinguitars.com>

What You Need To Know

1 What's the point of a brand-new model being heavily reliced?

Well, this one is from the creative mind of The Darkness singer and half of its dual-guitar assault, Justin Hawkins (he shares axe duties with his brother Dan). This new Atkin is simply what he wanted and has nothing to do with recreating something 'vintage'.

2 The body looks like mahogany...

Actually, it's obeche, an African hardwood that's not related to mahogany. It's lighter in colour (and weight) but can have similar grain characteristics, especially when stained, or aged as here. It's an increasingly popular guitar timber, certainly among UK makers such as Seth Baccus, Manson and PJD, as mahogany becomes more scarce and more expensive.

3 Why the clear pickguard and missing middle pickup?

Again, it's a style thing and Justin wants his signature model to make a statement. Think of it as the guitar version of a posh restaurant's 'deconstructed cheesecake'. That's as good an analogy as we can think of!

We've often wondered what would come off the drawing board were the offer of a 'signature' guitar to come our way. Let totally off the leash, would we include every option imaginable? Or simply opt for a perfect remake of a vintage classic?

When you're a person of renowned imagination, whose compositions, arrangements, playing and general antics border on the outlandish, you'd be right to expect something a little off the wall. And considering the musician behind the

signature model before us today, it's fair to say that The Darkness's Justin Hawkins hasn't disappointed. In fact, we've never seen anything quite like it.

As with all signature models, in reality the JH3001 was a collaboration between artist and builder. Here, that included Justin, his guitar tech Ian Norfolk, Alister Atkin himself, and Laurence Lock, senior luthier at the company. "Collaboration aside," Laurence tells us, "Justin did have free rein. But as he already has his Atkin Mindhorn [JH3000] signature models,





2

he was happy to go with the same obeche body wood used on those, which is our in-house favourite here.”

We all recognise this particular guitar shape as the perfect template for an instrument like the JH3001. That lightweight lump of the aforementioned obeche is beautifully sculpted and features an angled heel for improved top-end access. The instrument’s upside-down headstock – atop the quarter-sawn, roasted flamed maple neck – adds an extra touch of cool, too.

When your general antics border on the outlandish, you’d be right to expect something a little off the wall...

The most strikingly obvious thing is that large swathes of the Neon Yellow or Neon Pink nitro finish – both are available – have been removed. Next on the list is a cavity for a middle pickup, but it’s vacant, and then the pots and wiring are revealed due to the fitting of a transparent pickguard. Less radical is that the flamed maple fingerboard carries 22 tall narrow frets and black dot markers, with the model’s name appearing in large block letters at the 12th fret.

Electrics and hardware-wise, we get two powerful hand-wound Atkin pickups. There’s a Gibson-style humbucker at the bridge and a single-coil-sized double-rail humbucker at the neck – “the two-humbucker setup is home for Justin,” Laurence chips in – plus a Gotoh floating vibrato with locking nut.

There is also an angled three-way toggle switch located, somewhat unusually, on the top horn. “Justin has been sporting Charvels with Floyd Rose bridges on certain numbers for a while now,”

1. Pots and wiring are visible through the JH3001’s clear pickguard: there are two volumes and no tone control, and the humbucker has a powerful 14k output

2. Gotoh’s highly rated Floyd Rose-style vibrato system with locking nut takes care of whammy wobbles, flutters and divebombs. Note the empty pickup cavity!

3. The Atkin electric headstock works really well upside down. Use the Gotoh tuners to get the guitar in pitch, then fine-tune at the bridge and let the locking nut hold everything steady



3



4. Atkin's dual-rail neck pickup works really well opposite its Gibson-style bridge counterpart, offering a balanced array of tones, both clean and dirty, especially with the pickup selector in the middle position

5. There's no back cover for the JH3001's vibrato, while using only two springs makes the arm easy to dip and dive. We have to say that, love it or loathe it, the heavy ageing has been done superbly well

confirms Lock, "but he also wanted to get something with features unavailable elsewhere, like the selector switch mounted on the upper horn."

Two volume controls and no tone pot was another unconventional Hawkins request. And while this may seem limiting at first glance, if one juggles between pickup volumes with the selector in its middle position, an almost infinite range of voices can be extracted.

Despite the JH3001's radical appearance, look closer and everything is beautifully crafted: frets are perfectly shaped and finished; you couldn't get a cigarette paper between the neck and its pocket; and the rubbed-back, tinted neck lacquer looks fantastic. Bonkers it may be, but it's quality bonkers.

Feel & Sounds

It's a relatively lightweight guitar at 3.4kg (7.5lb), and with the beautifully sculpted body curves the guitar feels great to hold. It's a tactile experience and you find your hand wandering up and down the neck, even when you're not playing a note.

Once the fretting action begins, the slim but comfortable C profile feels not unlike that of a modern Strat in the palm, and the finish is drag-free and fast. Although locking nuts impart a different feel when bending due to the string not sliding in the nut slot, it's certainly not an alien experience, even to this classic guitar die-hard. One has to confess that tuning is extraordinarily stable once set, the nut locked down and any fine-tuning carried out at the bridge. The Gotoh vibrato responds unflinchingly to everything from Hank-type wobbles to Van Halen-style divebombs, returning to pitch every time.

We chose a Marshall Jubilee combo as this month's test rig due to Justin's adherence to the brand. Although the Atkin's pickups are high output



THE RIVALS

EVH Guitars' 'Frankie' (£1,299) in red with black and white stripes is a cracker. Featuring basswood body and graphite-reinforced maple neck with oiled finish, it has an EVH bridge humbucker and dummy neck and middle pickups, plus EVH branded Floyd Rose. Jackson's American Series Virtuoso (from £1,739) comes in a variety of configurations and finishes, but it looks great in Shell Pink with twin Seymour Duncan humbuckers, five-piece caramelised maple neck and compound radius streaked ebony fingerboard. The Schecter Omen Extreme-6 (around £555) is a great non-trem budget option. With a mahogany body, bound quilted maple cap, maple neck and 24-fret rosewood fingerboard, and twin Schecter Diamond Plus humbuckers, it offers plenty of bang for your buck.



As Justin is so used to playing Les Pauls, mounting the toggle switch on the top horn makes perfect sense

(the dual-rail a goodly 10kohms and the bridge 'bucker a whopping 14k), they tame extraordinarily well so that up to about 7 or 8 the guitar behaves like a regular humbucking solidbody. A nice way to use it, especially for those used to riding the controls, is to think of 7 to 8 as full volume, then 9 and 10 as an instant power boost for solos. Add channel switching or pedals and the options become limitless.

Delve below the gaudy exterior and innards on show like a Damien Hirst, and this is a crazily good piece of work

So with that in mind our Atkin/Marshall pairing produces a wonderfully clear and shimmering set of clean tones. The neck is warm, fluent and sonorous, while the bridge humbucker produces a bright, clanging tone that, played loud, is gigantic – think live Keef or perhaps Eddie with more gain added. Whack those volumes up, step on a distortion pedal and it's easy to see why Hawkins loves this guitar. Even at lairy gain levels the definition remains, with Gary Moore-ish melodies sounding sweet on the neck pickup, and Justin's own Darkness-style leads staying articulate on the bridge.

However, in the middle is where most fun can be had, both clean and dirty. Balancing one pickup against the other one can pull out a staggering array of sounds. In fact, some might be tempted to leave the switch here and use the volumes alone to tailor the required tones, so what looks like a potential limitation could, in fact, open up a world of sonic colour.

Verdict

We can see the Atkin JH3001 dividing opinion more than almost any guitar we've reviewed. However, delve below the gaudy exterior with its stripped-back finish and its innards on show like a Damien Hirst sculpture, and this is a crazily good piece of work. What's more, it suits the man perfectly.

Quizzing Atkin luthier Laurence Lock on whether any variants are on the way, he told us: "We've recently completed a hardtail by request, and we're currently looking at a Sustainiac option for a repeat JH3001 customer. But we are essentially a custom shop on the electric guitar side of things, so pretty much anything is possible."

Justin, brother Dan and the band are on tour in the UK until early August, so to catch the JH3001 in action (you won't miss it, even from the back row) we suggest you grab a ticket soon. Love it or loathe it, you're unlikely to encounter a more striking-looking machine. And an extremely fine one at that. **G**



ATKIN JH3001

PRICE: £2,999 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Solidbody twin-cutaway electric

BODY: Solid obeche

NECK: Roasted figured maple, slim C profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Roasted figured maple with a rubbed back finish, black dot inlays and model name inlaid at 12th fret, 406mm (16") radius

FRETS: 22, narrow tall

HARDWARE: Gotoh locking Floyd Rose-style floating vibrato with locking nut, Gotoh vintage-style tuners, T-style chrome knobs

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm

ELECTRICS: Hand-wound Atkin 14k humbucker (bridge), 10k dual-rail humbucker (neck), separate volume control for each pickup, top horn mounted 3-way pickup selector toggle

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: The JH3001 is only available direct from Atkin at the quoted price. Custom options are available (£POA)

RANGE OPTIONS: Atkin also offers more classic S-styles like The Eighty-Five (from £3,199) with HSS pickup layout and 2-post vibrato

LEFT-HANDERS: N/A

FINISH: Neon Yellow (as reviewed), Neon Pink – heavily reliced nitrocellulose



9/10

PROS Superbly built guitar that plays extremely well, sounds fantastic and is sure to turn heads; radical; bold

CONS Possibly the most Marmite guitar we've reviewed in years: some will hate its looks, others might miss a tone control

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a Taylor Gold Label acoustic guitar resting inside its open, dark brown leather case. The guitar's body is finished with a warm, sunburst or flame maple top, showing a rich gradient of orange, red, and brown tones. The soundhole is surrounded by a decorative, multi-layered ring. The bridge is made of dark wood with six white saddle pins. The pickguard is a dark, tortoiseshell-style material with a white Taylor 'T' logo. The neck is dark wood with white fret markers. The case is open, revealing the blue plush interior lining. The guitar is placed on a wooden floor with a patterned rug partially visible in the background.

Panning For Tone

A major departure from Taylor's renowned guitar architecture, the Gold Label Series has its tonal focus on the glory days of pre-war acoustics with features that couldn't be more present day

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtis



TAYLOR GOLD LABEL 814e SB £5,735

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars** PHONE 00800 23750011 WEB www.taylorguitars.com

What You Need To Know

1 This isn't just your standard issue Taylor, then?

Correct. Taylor says the Gold Label range features "a new Super Auditorium body style, a unique V-Class-inspired bracing pattern and a new long-tenon neck joint, plus a new decorative aesthetic". And that's only the tip of this very toneful iceberg.

2 A case of the old meets the new?

That's certainly the aim here. Taylor's master designer Andy Powers has created a new Taylor platform by adding and enhancing features drawn from his luthier days before joining the company, with an eye on tonality from the golden era of pre-war acoustics.

3 Honduran rosewood sounds kinda exotic.

Indeed it is. The Tonewood Data Source declares that "Honduran rosewood will produce a guitar of the highest quality and one that you will prize forever. [It's] brighter and louder than Brazilian [rosewood]." And if rosewood isn't to your taste, Taylor offers a koa version, too.

The harder you play, the louder the guitar gets, but it naturally starts to compress the sound rather than becoming mushy," Taylor's master designer and CEO, Andy Powers, says of the company's new Gold Label acoustics. "Yet these guitars also respond to delicate articulation with a broadly rich voice. When you play a simple note softly, the guitar naturally amplifies it with surprising warmth and volume."

Taylor's Gold Label guitars were fanfared at this year's NAMM Show in Anaheim and

generated a great deal of interest from the industry and players alike. Why? Because this is something genuinely different from a brand that sits at the head of the premier league of the world's acoustic guitar business. And when one of the biggest in the business creates a novel take on an age old formula, the music world cocks an ear. If you're after a brief summary of events, it's as if Andy Powers has taken a long hard look at the acoustic guitar's world stage and decided to change the scenery, combining what Taylor has always done well with a few magic touches of his own.



The bridge is made from Honduran rosewood, as opposed to Taylor's more accustomed ebony



1

1. The 814e SB's top is torrified Sitka spruce and features a newly designed pickguard with a motif shared with the fretboard markers

Enter the Super Auditorium body shape, for instance. It may look like the more established Grand Auditorium, but the body is very slightly longer (510mm/20.1 inches as opposed to 508mm/20 inches) and the lower bout a tad wider (415mm/16.3 inches versus 406mm/16 inches). But there are other factors at play here also. Starting at the headstock, you'll see there's a completely different Taylor logo – perhaps a little more old-school, like Gibson's pre-war script. And that is definitely the intention here: to recall the acoustic guitar's golden era of the 30s and 40s but using modern technology in order to do so. If you look closely, you'll see that the headstock shape is slightly slimmer, too.

We're not done with the changes yet, either. There are brand-new cosmetic details like the "Continental" fretboard inlays and a redesigned pickguard that reflects the aforementioned design. Then there's the bridge, which, Taylor says, "borrows the elegantly contoured

curve wing design used with the Builder's Edition Collection, but on these guitars it's made from Honduran rosewood, rather than ebony, and incorporates bone bridge pins". The Taylor design pot has definitely been stirred here.

Then there are the changes that are hidden from the eye, such as a new and updated version of Andy's celebrated and game-changing V-Class bracing, featuring "a fan-like arrangement of braces in the soundboard's lower bout... set in place using traditional hot hide glue", says Taylor. And a long-tenon neck joint that Powers says not only increases low-end resonance in the manner of the more traditional dovetail assembly, it's also a bolt-on, glueless affair that will aid any micro-adjustment that becomes necessary during the guitar's lifetime (see the interview with Andy Powers that follows this review).

Among the list of new appointments on the Gold Label 814e SB we find more traditional fare: the top is torrified Sitka spruce and the back and sides are Honduran rosewood, a timber that is certainly up there with its more celebrated Brazilian cousin but still not on the highly endangered Appendix I CITES list. The rosewood is pale in colour here, matching

2. To accentuate the fact that this guitar sits slightly outside the Taylor norm, there's a new 'handwritten' logo atop the headstock

3. The volume and tone controls for the onboard LR Baggs Element VTC sit just inside the instrument's soundhole

The intention here is to recall the acoustic guitar's golden era of the 1930s and 40s but using modern technology

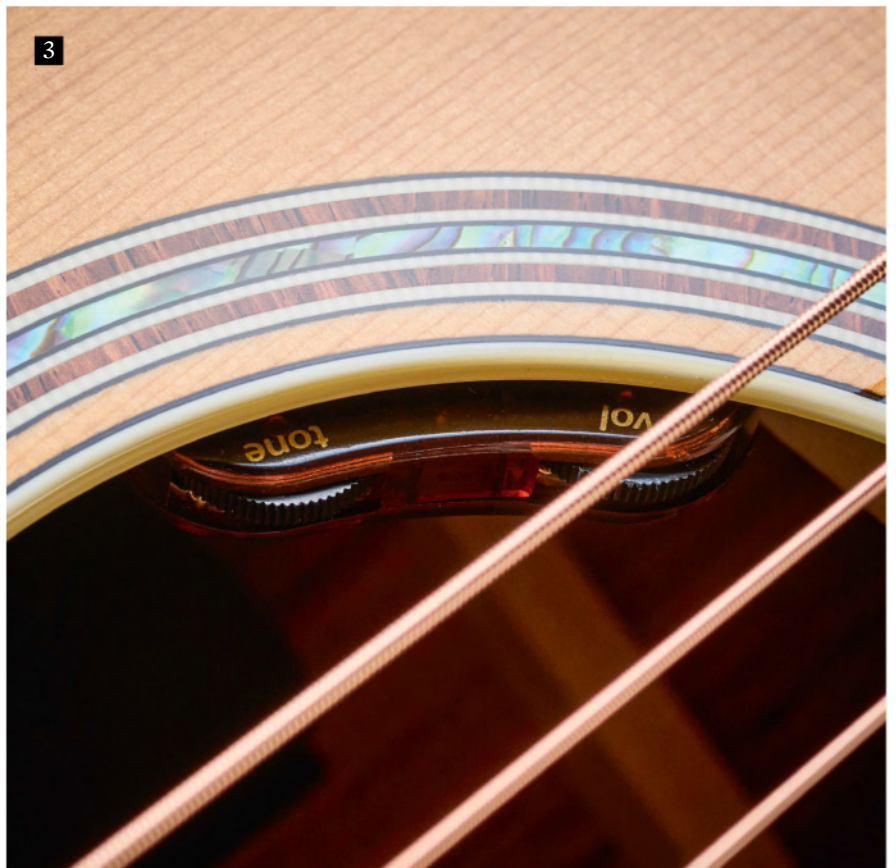


the top's subtle sunburst, and has a reputation for superb tonal characteristics and for being brighter and louder than the Brazilian equivalent.

The back of the instrument comprises a four-piece composite of Honduran rosewood and, such is the expertise at play here on behalf of Taylor's lutherie team, you'd be hard pressed to see the joins. The wildness of the grain pattern certainly helps conceal them, but great skill has been employed to make things seem this seamless, it must be said.

The neck and fretboard timbers fall more within Taylor's norm, with mahogany for the former and ebony for the latter, the company's established standard carve to the back of the neck and a 45mm nut fashioned from Tusq.

One other feature that departs from Taylor's usual manifest is an LR Baggs Element VTC pickup and not the company's homegrown Expression System 2 with the signature three controls on the upper bout. This guitar really is full of surprises. And while we're here, we noticed that the deluxe hard case our Gold Label arrived in has a vinyl covering displaying a light brown colour that Taylor has named "British Cocoa". We're not quite sure what to make of that...





Gotoh 510 antique chrome tuners keep the Gold Label in harmonious accord



Feel & Sounds

Freeing the 814e from its case, we're reminded just how good a Taylor neck feels. Many different models have passed through our hands over the years, and the feel of the neck has been a consistent highlight. Neither too chunky nor too thin but always in orbit around that player-friendly sweet spot, which is exactly what you need to aid that all-important bonding experience with a new instrument. The smooth satin finish here enhances the playing experience, too.

The new Super Auditorium body size is a good fit. Still retaining those elegant figure-of-eight curves of an OM, it sits in the lap with no fuss, to the extent that we didn't notice the extra width of the lower bout at all. You realise that

There's plenty of muscle in the sound of the Gold Label – a very characterful bass, and the lower mids are rich and well balanced



you're wrangling a larger instrument, but it doesn't come close to what some players term as the 'dreadnought syndrome' where you can occasionally feel a little overwhelmed or even a tad uncomfortable in a playing situation due to the body size.

We could tell from the first strummed chord that there's plenty of muscle in the sound of the Gold Label. There's a lot of very characterful bass, which could easily be the Honduran rosewood showing its colours. The lower mids are rich and well balanced, and we can hear what Andy Powers means by the natural compression that comes into play when things get a little more enthusiastic with the picking hand. It has the effect of making chords sound 'produced' – as if they've been through some kind of electronic processing – which translates into a very powerful but still very musical sound. Dropping the tuning to D accentuates this still further, of course, but everything stayed supremely sonorous with both a pick and fingerstyle.

Pulling back the dynamics and trying some gentle picking brought out another side of the 814e. On some acoustics we've played, gentle strumming can become weedy and thin sounding

but not here. Everything remained beautifully transparent during those quieter moments; think of the intro to Led Zeppelin's *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You*. And, as a further reference point, it went on to handle the louder 'flamenco moments' in that tune like a pro as well.

Although we were initially surprised that the 814e didn't include the Expression System 2 pickup and preamp, the LR Baggs VTC here ably demonstrates why it's the go-to pickup for many manufacturers today. Every virtue of the instrument is faithfully transported into the electronic domain with the absolute

4. The 814e SB has an old world vibe with some classic-looking markers set into its West African Crelicam ebony 'board

5. Highly figured Honduran rosewood is master designer Andy Powers' choice for the guitar's back and sides

THE RIVALS

Electro-acoustics that seek to emulate the classic tone of pre-war models? If actual body shape isn't an issue for you, then it's worth looking at the various flavours Gibson has to offer with its legendary J-45. It's available at all price points from the bargain basement Epiphone (£349 for the Studio) right up to a Custom Shop version at £4,799 and beyond. If you're set on the classic 'hourglass'-shaped big-bodied acoustic, then Gibson's SJ-200

(from £5,199) might fit the bill. The L-00 (£1,699 for the Special Vintage Sunburst) will dish out some classic vibes, too. And while you're there, the 1942 Banner LG-2 (£4,399) has all the necessary qualifications.

Martin's Streetmaster 000-16 (which retails at around £2,150) not only comes with an old-timey tone, it's also been relaced to look like a guitar that's seen plenty of action. Martin's Authentic Series is worth a look, too.



A new design with an ancient soul, the 814e has all the benefits of a modern acoustic with a heart of old gold

minimum fuss. We were able to keep the EQ on our test AER Compact 60 amp flat, and the simple onboard volume and treble controls were enough to give us all the sounds we sought.

Verdict

It's always a brave move when a company with an established and successful heritage takes a step or two outside the box to introduce something totally new to its catalogue. And that's exactly what we're dealing with here. So much change, too: new bracing, new logo, new body shape, and so on, not forgetting that implication that the sound design here is to salute a much-loved and sought-after era. Has it succeeded? It kinda has, in that the instrument itself as a standalone is really very good. Andy Powers has harnessed a tonality that sits outside the Taylor norm but maintains the same excellent build quality and general execution. Does it sound like a vintage Gibson or Martin?

Powers has harnessed a tonality that sits outside the Taylor norm but maintains the same excellent build quality and execution

Not really, no. But there's an undeniable tip of the hat in that direction present, and time – and plenty of strumming action – is going to open up the Sitka spruce top and its voice will perhaps veer evermore down that route.

Meanwhile, a retail price that just brushes the underside of £6k might seem a little steep, but there's really everything you need here for a trustworthy companion that will entertain virtually every style you can imagine. We'd strongly advise you to seek one out and audition it yourself. You might just find your perfect music-making partner. **A**



TAYLOR GOLD LABEL 814e SB

PRICE: £5,735 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Super Auditorium

TOP: Torrefied Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Honduran rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 109mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 415mm

NECK: Neo-tropical mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Gotoh 510 Antique Chrome with ebony buttons

NUT/WIDTH: White Tusq/45mm

FINGERBOARD: West African Crelicam ebony

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Honduran rosewood with Micarta saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element VTC

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.08/4.6

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Gold Label 814 range includes the 814e plain top (£5,399), 814e Koa (£5,939) and the 814e Koa Sunburst (£6,275)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Gloss with satin neck



9/10

PROS A great-sounding acoustic with all the power and tone you could need for practically any musical endeavour

CONS The price and 'shock of the new' may deter a few players



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Neck Deep

A chance encounter at this year's NAMM Show gave us the opportunity to sit down with Taylor's master designer, Andy Powers, to hear more about the new Gold Label acoustics

Words Jamie Dickson & David Mead **Photography** Charles Torrealba/Taylor Guitars

When we met up with Andy Powers at NAMM in January, word of the new Gold Label Series was still very fresh – and it was obviously a design project very close to Andy's heart. "I think I'm probably more excited about this than most things that we have done," he enthused, "because this feels like blending the kind of thing that I loved in my pre-Taylor life with what Taylor's known for." As you've seen in the review, there are plenty of new features on the 814e SB, some of which are distinctly un-Taylor-like...

What was your thinking behind the new Gold Label model?

"What made most sense was to align it with a lot of family resemblance; you know, things that Taylor is known for. You have great sustain, great volume, super-good balance, great pitch

sensitivity – very accurate. If you have something like one of the Builder's Edition guitars, well, that's like the pinnacle of ultra-modern acoustic guitars. But I wanted to build a counterpoint. There are parts that I want to serve musicians well with: I want it to be balanced, I want great pitch accuracy, I want great playability, all that kind of thing. But I also want a different character because sometimes you want a different flavour in your mouth, right?"

And it's been designed to have what you call an 'old soul'?

"I wanted something that feels like or sounds like it came out of guitar history because that was the world that I lived in before Taylor. And so I wanted to take some of that sonority and put it into [the new design]. So by the time I put all the pieces together, it feels special. It's such

a different character; that's what led me to change the aesthetics. It's literally like a pencil-drawn logo, flaws and all, a new headstock design... this is actually something similar to what I used to build into guitars, pre-Taylor. So it's like a melding of that, plus Taylor swoops and points."

How does the new model fit into the Taylor catalogue?

"The internal architecture is [V-Class bracing] based, but it's a different arrangement of how that gets tuned. It's actually taking some cues from the classical guitar building tradition, hence the different material for the bridge. This is an ebony fretboard and a Honduran rosewood bridge, which is less common on an acoustic steel-string guitar, but it's like the standard thing you do on classical guitars. And so this has a somewhat

Taylor's master designer Andy Powers pores over his new creation...

"This feels like blending the thing I loved in my pre-Taylor life with what Taylor's known for"



fan-based [bracing] arrangement in parts mixed with the V-Class idea. The shape is new. We're going to call it an 814 because it's Auditorium sized, and so that makes sense, but it is a different shape. So the dimensions are kind of similar – they're pretty close – but the curves that connect those dots are different."

And the neck joint is totally new?

"One of the big departures is that the neck joint and the neck design are different. It's a fun juxtaposition. It's like the most technologically advanced neck we've ever made that looks like the most traditional. It's what I would describe as a long-tenon neck design – the neck actually extends into the body, almost like a traditional dovetail or mortise and tenon kind of thing, except that this one is adjustable.

"It's sort of shocking in a way because if you thought about the progression of

"It feels special. It's such a different character; that's what led me to change the aesthetics"

Taylor designs, the goal was to serve musicians well. Okay, so you make the guitar serviceable, predictable, easy to work on. Those are good, practical things. So for the first 25 years of Taylor Guitars, we built guitars by attaching the heel to the body with hardware, glueing the fretboard down. This one, you do a neck reset by just turning a screw. The geometry is worked out, so it ends up sounding like a traditional dovetail, and mortise and tenon neck joint, right? But it has this adjustment that's, like, next level. That's the way forward. That'll be the thing that I build guitars with for the next 25 years. They feel like they're the most friendly sounding guitars. It feels good, it's warm. It's really well balanced. But it's got this thing that makes you go, 'I do feel like playing guitar.'" 

www.taylorguitars.com



The Gold Label guitars feature a slightly larger Super Auditorium body



Another of the new Taylor models features a plain top with koa back and sides



The Real Deal

Marshall decides enough is enough and brings out its own range of authentic Marshall-in-a-box pedals

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker



MARSHALL PEDALS £139 EACH

CONTACT **Marshall** PHONE **01908 375411** WEB **www.marshall.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 Those look cute – like miniature Marshall amps!**
Yes, that's the idea. Each of these pedals represents a particular Marshall amp model.
- 2 Can they be used instead of an actual amp?**
That's not really what they're designed to do. These are to be used in the same way as standard drive pedals in your signal chain in front of your amp.
- 3 Do these cover every era of Marshall pedal?**
More or less. There isn't a pedal specifically representing the earlier JTM45, but we start with the 'Plexi' era and move towards the latter-day high-gain amps.

Over the years, many companies have been making drive pedals that aim to be a 'Marshall In A Box' (MIAB), designed to add the flavour of that classic British sound to your signal chain. Perhaps it was the thought that everyone else was doing it – apart from them – that kicked the Marshall R&D department into action because we've now got the real thing. And not just one but five bona fide Marshall MIAB pedals, each one representing a different stage in the development of the highly respected, historic British amp line.

The new range starts with the 1959 Super Lead pedal representing the classic rock amps of the 1960s and 70s. It then moves on to pedals representing the later master volume-equipped amps: the JCM800 Lead Series pedal, JCM900 Hi Gain Distortion, DSL Super Lead Distortion and JVM Distortion & Noise Gate.

The aesthetics here are unmistakably Marshall: a golden top half just like an

amp's front panel is paired with a graphic representation of the cloth speaker grille below it – a subtly different design for each pedal. Quite large for a single-footswitch stompbox, they're heavy, too, at 0.74kg (1.6lb) with a reassuringly solid build quality. The exception is the flimsy plastic cover for the battery compartment that flicks out a little too easily and could go astray – although that wouldn't present a problem in the typical use of being mounted on a pedalboard and powered from a nine-volt adaptor.

Marshall has eschewed the digital modelling route for this new set of pedals. These are all-analogue pedals that are designed to be used in front of an amp, so there's no speaker simulation onboard and no menus to be navigated, just a user-friendly four-knob control array. In fact, the only fancy thing about them is the white ring around the footswitch that lights up brightly when the pedal is active.

1. It's our usual bugbear, but still worth mentioning: it might be good for swift battery changes, but when the lid to the compartment doesn't attach to the pedal it can easily get lost – a hinged cover would have been good

2. All the other pedals have single gain knobs, but the 1959 has High Treble and Normal knobs that turn up the gain in different frequency ranges and can be used individually or blended together like on an amp with jumped channels



In Use

While all the pedals have knobs for tone and their overall output volume, their other two controls are more specifically related to the original amp they represent. The four pedals that are based on Master Volume amps each sport a gain knob, plus one other knob that controls a defining aspect of their sound. However, the 1959 has what is basically a pair of gain knobs that can be used independently or blended together. These knobs control the high-frequency input level (H.Treble) and the low-frequency input level (Normal), and in terms of the original 1960s model they would be the equivalent of the Volume I and Volume II knobs that could be used together if the channels were jumped. There is, of course, a definite Marshall sound here. By itself, we did prefer the fatter sound of the Normal over the leaner bright voice of H.Treble knob, but there's some great tone to be had by mixing the two, particularly in bringing in the H.Treble to complement the Normal.

All the sounds can be tempered with the tone knob, which is wide ranging and is the same for all five pedals. It's a high-frequency roll-off that attenuates the top-end as you wind it back from its fully clockwise (very bright) end and stop. As such, it's great for placing the pedal's sound in context with your overall tone, matching it to your amp or dialling in the right amount of presence to cut through the mix when you kick the pedal in.

Marshall brought in Master Volume amps in the 1970s, and the JCM800 – which appeared in 1981 – is favoured by many players. The original JCM800 amplifier had High and Low Sensitivity inputs, and that option is replicated here



JCM800 amps have High and Low Sensitivity inputs, and the Sensitivity knob on the pedal straddles the range between the two – to not only reproduce the sounds of either input but all the sounds in between those two extremes

by a single knob covering a whole range of sensitivities. Its role in fine-tuning the nature of your distortion works in conjunction with the gain knob itself. Overall, there's a little more gain than the 1959 but not overly so.

Guitarists who wanted a Marshall with more gain still may well have turned to the JCM900 in the 90s, and that is amply represented by the pedal version. Crucial to the sound is a Contour knob that works on the midrange. It has a centre detent position and will scoop the mids turned anti-clockwise but boost them if turned clockwise, adding a very practical tonal flexibility.

In 1997 Marshall introduced the JCM2000 range with two-channel Dual Super Lead amps and three-channel

Triple Super Lead amps, and our DSL pedal is based on the second channel of a Dual Super Lead. Besides that standard tone control, here you get a Deep knob that has a similar function to the Contour knob on the JCM900 but focuses more on the low-end, offering a more fulsome sound than the earlier three.

The Marshall JVM is probably best described as the company's flagship amp, designed to have a 'Marshall's greatest hits' versatility as well as being capable of the highest gain of the lot. The pedal mirrors that, but as high gain can be noisy the special Gate knob here controls a noise gate that's pretty easy to set up for unobtrusive use. It can also be set for really tight gating, which works a treat for certain styles of rhythm playing.



The JCM900 and DSL pedals each have extra tonal flexibility beyond the ubiquitous tone knob. The JCM900's Contour knob works on the midrange and can give you a more 'scooped' sound when rolled back, while the DSL's Deep knob covers a lower frequency range

Verdict

If you want some Marshall amp flavour on your 'board, you can now get it from Marshall itself. Okay, you could arguably also find this in the company's recently reissued set of four drive pedals (Bluesbreaker, The Guv'nor, Drivemaster and Shredmaster), but this fivesome offers some tasty Marshall raunch as well as each pedal providing a special focus. This means any choices you make for a potential purchase could be closely related to the type of music you want to use it for.

Classic rock and blues players will gravitate to the 1959, while the JCM800 is a crunch workhorse for many styles. Beyond that, it may be down to how much gain you like to work with: the JCM900 and DSL are valid choices if dialling in midrange or girth is important, while metal players might find the JVM and its gate a natural choice. **G**

The JVM has an onboard noise gate. To get rid of hiss, start rolling it clockwise until the hiss disappears and then make fine adjustments to suit your playing. Turning it further clockwise will give you really tight gating for staccato-style playing



THE RIVALS

For slightly less outlay you can get the TC Electronic AmpWorx JIMS 800 Preamp (£119) pedal with two channels and footswitchable boost. The most recent pedal promising Marshall sound that we reviewed is the Crazy Tube Circuits Heatseeker (£235). Designed to recreate Angus Young's sound, it features three selectable Marshall amp types with a separate boost section and should cover what the 1959 and JCM800 pedals do. Universal Audio's UAFX Lion '68 Super Lead Amp pedal (£379) uses modelling to emulate the sounds of three distinct 100-watt 'Plexi' amplifiers, while the Tsakalis AudioWorks Room #40 (£175) offers the sound of two different Marshall amps – 'Plexi' and JCM800.



MARSHALL 1959 SUPER LEAD

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: H. Treble, Normal, Tone, Volume, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 55mA

DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 131 (d) x 52mm (h)



PROS Solid build quality; authentic Marshall flavour; battery and adaptor power; two gain knobs that can be combined

CONS Battery compartment cover is not attached



MARSHALL JCM800 LEAD SERIES

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

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

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 55mA

DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 131 (d) x 52mm (h)



PROS Solid build quality; authentic Marshall flavour; battery and adaptor power; Sensitivity knob

CONS Battery compartment cover is not attached



MARSHALL JCM900 HI-GAIN DISTORTION

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

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

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 55mA

DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 131 (d) x 52mm (h)



PROS Solid build quality; authentic Marshall flavour; battery and adaptor power; Contour midrange control

CONS Battery compartment cover is not attached



MARSHALL DSL DUAL SUPER LEAD DISTORTION

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

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

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 55mA

DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 131 (d) x 52mm (h)



PROS Solid build quality; authentic Marshall flavour; battery and adaptor power; Deep knob for low-end adjustment

CONS Battery compartment cover is not attached



MARSHALL JVM DISTORTION & NOISE GATE

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

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

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 55mA

DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 131 (d) x 52mm (h)



PROS Solid build quality; authentic Marshall flavour; battery and adaptor power; noise gate

CONS Battery compartment cover is not attached

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Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to Guitarist's longterm test report



Boss Cube Street II

With Jamie Dickson

Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Guitarist Editor-in-chief



Now that Jamie has tested out the Cube Street II's busking capabilities, he decides to explore other onboard features, including electric guitar amp models and the built-in looper.

Having enjoyed busking and gigging with my acoustic guitar and the Cube Street II, both in Glastonbury and in London, and experimented with deeper editing of effects and sounds via the Cube ST2 app for iPhone, I decided it was time to try out some of the amp's remaining features. The most obvious of these is that it has three electric guitar amp models onboard, in case you want to busk Stevie Ray tunes instead of John Renbourn. Predictably enough, there's Clean, Crunch and Lead modes – as well as, slightly confusingly, an Acoustic Sim mode so you can play unplugged music while, er, plugged in if you should so wish.

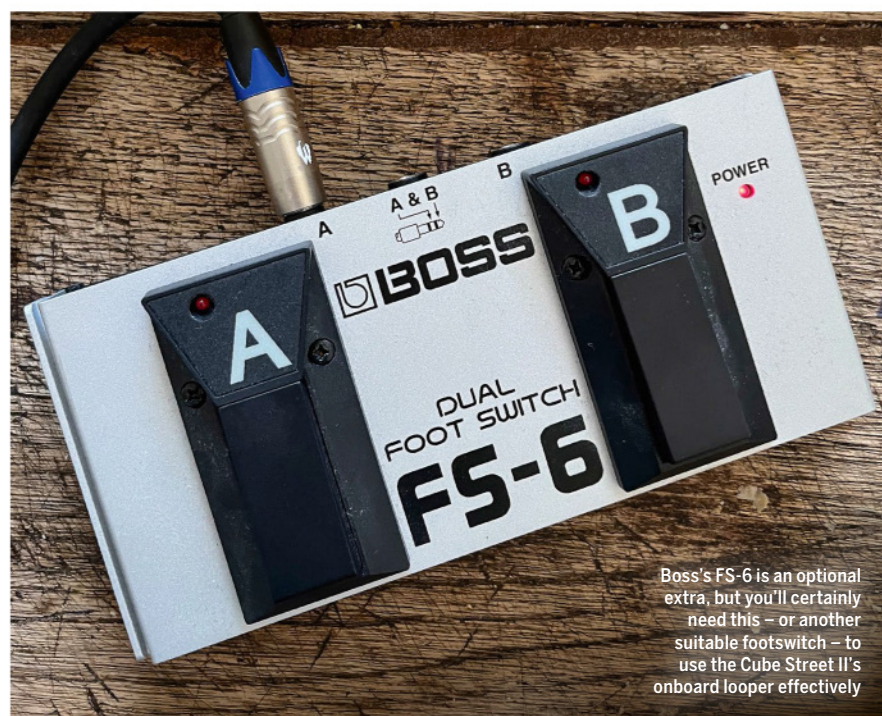
Picking up my modded PRS CE solidbody with humbuckers I plugged in to the Cube Street and went straight for Lead mode – and was greeted with a saturated DS-1 into a Marshall type sound. This lead voice was perfectly acceptable, if generic, but then I decided to switch to my Fender American Vintage '52 Tele and was rewarded by a much nicer tone: wiry yet fat, compressed and

"I've come to regard this 'battery powered busking amp' as a very useful general utility amp"

sustaining but still with plenty of edge. No, it's not going to give your Friedman head a run for its money but, with the Tele especially, the Lead mode sounded pretty decent.

Crunch was fine with both guitars, perfectly good enough for riffing through covers on the high street, while clean – perhaps leaning into Roland's JC-120 heritage – delivered a nice warm, clean sound. I felt I could hear a compressor in the circuit somewhere, as the tone was quite squashy in a pleasant way. Add in a touch of the onboard chorus and we were in 70s jazz-fusion territory, even if my chops weren't.

Although I won't personally be busking much with electric guitar on the Cube Street II, my quick try-out of these capabilities proved the little amp can handle that just fine. So long as you don't expect Two-Rock grade valve



Boss's FS-6 is an optional extra, but you'll certainly need this – or another suitable footswitch – to use the Cube Street II's onboard looper effectively

tone, I doubt you'll be disappointed with the results, especially if you play with single coils.

Going Loopy

Another useful function on the Cube Street II that I initially overlooked was its built-in looper. There are basic record/play/overdub controls on the amp's control panel, but if you want to use the looper while playing (er, who doesn't?) and don't have a suitable footswitch to hand, you'll have to get a friend to operate the buttons! I was lucky in that Boss supplied an FS-6 Dual Foot Switch (£69.99 at Andertons currently) for the purpose of review, but please be aware this would ordinarily have to be bought as an extra and would not come boxed with the amp. I personally would love to see Boss offer factory 'deluxe' bundles that include Bluetooth functionality and a simple single-pedal footswitch for operating the looper, which – let's face it – is the only practical way to use one.

The pedal-and-looper combination is simple to get going. All you have to do is plug the FS-6, in this case, into the SW2 footswitch input on the back of the amp, and use the switches on the rear of the FS-6 to select 'momentary' (rather than latching) mode from your choice of either its A or B pedals. Then, as with loopers everywhere, you start playing and tap the pedal once to record, then once again to stop recording and begin playback. Another single tap lets you record overdubs and a brisk double-tap stops playback. Finally, holding the pedal down for a few seconds erases the whole loop.

It's really simple and, unlike some loopers, the timing of the loop points isn't tricky to nail accurately with the footswitch. It's just a good, clean simple looper and it does its basic job well. In fact, with an electric plugged in, it makes a really good home-jamming tool for practising soloing over, as well as being useful for street performance.

A final capability of the Cube Street II that I confess I haven't explored much is its ability to amplify mic'd-up vocals. This did get a test-run of sorts when someone in our village organised a public meeting on a nearby playing field. There being no power sockets to hand, I volunteered the Cube Street II, and, while I can't vouch for its ability to handle singing with grace and nuance (I only play instrumental acoustic guitar), 30 or so people heard a speech clearly through it without distortion or feedback, so it definitely provides a useful PA capability in that regard.

All in all, I've really enjoyed my time with the Cube Street II. And I've also come to view it differently the more I've used it. I started out thinking it was a battery powered busking amp with some handy extras but I've come to regard it as a very useful general utility amp: I've used it as a practise tool for electric playing at home and as a small PA system; I've used it as a lightweight, failsafe backup for my main acoustic amp; I've used it to play acoustic guitar on the streets of Glastonbury. In time, I feel sure I'd find yet further uses for this Swiss Army knife of an amp. And, at just under £300, I honestly think you can't take things to the street much more affordably and capably than that. **G**

Reviewed N/A **Price** £299 **On Test Since** May 2024 **Studio Session** No **Gigged** Yes, busking and in a venue **www.boss.info**



LITA FORD

The Runaways gunslinger reflects on her guitar hauls, from her first plastic axe of the late-60s to the “sick” Neal Moser custom she just commissioned



Lita with her BC Rich Warlock guitar also known as 'Morice'

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

“When I was 14, I lied about my age and got a job working at a medical facility in Long Beach, California. I went in and told them, ‘I need a job and I’m 16,’ and they hired me. So I worked for them for a few months and was able to save up \$350. I then went to the local music store and bought myself a chocolate Gibson SG, which I played in The Runaways.”

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

“Right now, I’m in the process of getting this guitar made by Neal Moser. He’s been with BC Rich for the long haul, and he’s made all the biggest and the baddest guitars, in my opinion. Recently, he joined forces with another company and they created this guitar called the Raven. I saw it and thought, ‘I have to have that. It looks futuristic, dangerous and sexy at the same time.’ But I said, ‘It needs to have a Kahler tremolo and DiMarzio Super Distortions, and it’s got to be black on black, no inlays.’ Because I like to mess people up when they look at me play. They don’t see the inlays, so they don’t know where I’m at. When you see it, you’ll just think, ‘Wow, that guitar is sick.’”

“You’d be surprised what you can plug into. If it makes a noise, you could probably use it as an amp”

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

“Only people stealing from me! I remember, one of my guitars went missing. It was a gorgeous guitar, like, a turquoise-green Mockingbird, ebony fretboard, no fret inlays. And there was a time when I was auditioning guitar players. They were coming over to my studio and one guy comes in with that turquoise guitar. I looked at it and I thought, ‘That’s my guitar.’ And he looks at me and says, ‘Oh yeah, isn’t this a great guitar? I bought it off some guy on the street for 350 bucks. Can you believe that? It’s my favourite guitar ever.’ I just couldn’t take it away from him. I let him have it. Of course, he didn’t get the audition, but he got to keep the guitar and he didn’t know it was mine.”

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

“It’s not really happened. Y’know, I usually work pretty closely with a lot of these music stores and I get the inside scoop on everything. I think the only amp I ever returned, that I didn’t like, was the Kerry King Marshall. But the only reason I returned it was because it has a gate on it. I mean, I like everything to be wide open. Hissing, feeding back, making as much noise as possible. Gates – no.”

LITA'S GO-TO RIG

"I love the JCM800s, although they're not always easy to find on the road. So I will use a Kemper, because they're small and lightweight and they're easy to travel with, although my first choice is the real deal. And, of course, the Vintage 30 cabinets – I like to use two and split them. I don't always like them to be perfectly next to each other on the stage. I prefer to prop them in places that sound right. I use a Jerry Cantrell wah, they have the deepest swoop, and if you can find an older one, those are probably the best.

"My white BC Rich doubleneck has a preamp in the six-string neck, and then you switch over and there's a flanger-phaser in the 12-string neck. So I don't have to be at any certain place to step on a pedal on stage, I have it built right into the guitar.

Boss makes pretty good delays, of course, and then I've got a BlueChorus, which is made by AFX, and it adds a really nice shimmer to the

12-string sound on *Close My Eyes Forever*."

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

"Oh, tons of them. My Gibson SG that I had when I was a kid. I don't know why I sold that. You just do stupid things sometimes. You just get bored with stuff and you think, 'I'll sell it.' It was just the wrong move. But I know who has it. I don't think he'll sell it back to me, but maybe it'll come back to me one day."

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

"I've never really gone shopping for guitars. Usually, I just have them made. But I would say: be sure you know what you're looking for as far as sound goes. What do you want to sound like? What do you want to do with that guitar? It's like when my mom and dad bought me a plastic department store guitar for Christmas when I was 11. I couldn't play Black Sabbath on that, it just didn't sound right. So don't do that. Make sure you know what you want to sound like. Because a guitar can look pretty, but it may not sound like you want it to sound."

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

"I don't do it so much any more, but I used to really love finding the little pawn shops in the areas where we were performing. I'm like, 'This is the middle of nowhere, let's see what's in this pawn shop.' And I've picked up some interesting little bits and pieces that way. I got an old Danelectro bass that was interesting. Pedals.

Old guitars. If people are in trouble and they need the money, they pawn all kinds of stuff."

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 mean, you'd be surprised what you can plug a guitar into. If it makes a noise, you could probably use it as an amplifier. So I would say I'd like to have a somewhat decent guitar, and if I had a heap-of-shit amplifier, then I would probably find something to modify it with. In these electronic digital days, there's a lot of that stuff, so..."

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

"Well, the only thing that has single coils on it is my Tele. And y'know, that's just my cooking guitar. I'll put that on and clunk around while I'm cooking. But, of course, it's humbuckers. I'm a humbucker girl. I've always used DiMarzio Super Distortions. They are a little on the muddy side, but they are the ballsiest pickups. And I don't mind the noise; I like a little bit of noise. I like a little bit of woof on my playing. So they're the perfect pickups for me. I've tried others. But y'know, if it's not broken, don't fix it." [DM/HY]

Lita Ford and her band will be appearing with Vixen on the 'Girls' Night Out' live dates in July. Visit the website for more details www.litafordonline.com



Live and loud: Lita's BC Rich doubleneck has some hidden talents, with a preamp in the six-string neck and a flanger-phaser in the 12-string neck

PHOTO BY JESSE GRANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR NAMI

TUNING YOUR TONE

We're no strangers to aftermarket pickups here, but why, questions Dave Burrluck, do so few makers consider the *sound* of the control circuit and what it can bring to the tone table?

Paul Reed Smith was one of the first contemporary guitar makers who, from an early stage in his career, put forward the proposition that the good ol' electric guitar could be viewed as a two-part construct: the acoustic instrument, the 'singer'; and the electric circuit, the 'microphone'. While the internet endlessly debates such observations, I don't know of many guitar makers who'd disagree.

However, not every maker – large or small – looks at the electric side of the instrument as a two-part signal chain: the pickups and then the control circuit (or three-part if we include your guitar lead).

"PRS experimented more than most, since its guitars offered humbucking and single-coil sounds from the off"

That means your pickups might simply not be matched as well as they could be to your volume and tone control circuit, not least when we get into things like coil-splitting and the like.

Most control circuits are simple affairs and typically stick to simple principles. So a 'darker' humbucker needs a 500kohms pot, and a Fender-like single coil needs a 250k pot to tame some of the inherent brightness of the design. Except when a Jazzmaster is involved and a 1meg pot is deemed a better fit with the different-design single-coil pickups. Tone controls typically (but not always) follow the

volume control in terms of value, and many, many guitars select a tone capacitor value on the 'that's what they used back in the day' principle: Fender (.047µF), Gibson (.022µF), and so on.

While these historically based rule-of-thumb values work well enough, when makers (and us modders!) started bunging bridge humbuckers on Strats or neck 'buckers on Teles, it wasn't always a perfect match – and still isn't. Simple coil-splits (humbucker to single coil) create another dilemma: the humbucker wants to 'see' a 500k pot; the single-coil coil-split needs a 250k. Or does it?

Doing The Splits

PRS has certainly experimented more than most major makers, I'd wager, particularly since its guitars offered both humbucking *and* single-coil sounds from the off. Those early Customs and Standards didn't allow you to voice just an individual single coil; they were always combined. However, what later became known as the 'McCarty' switching – 500k volume and tone with a .033µF cap, the tone pot being a pull-switch type that switches both humbuckers to single coils simultaneously – offered six easily accessed sounds via the three-way toggle pickup selector and that pull-switch tone. The 'problem' here was not only the volume drop between the louder humbucker positions and lower level single coils but also that the single coils could be a little thin and bright.

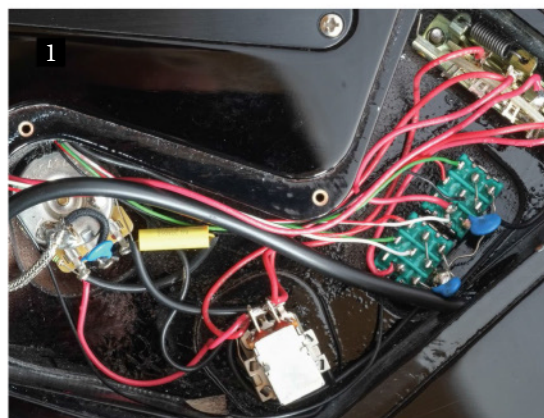
A subtle mod certainly helped and created what is called a 'partial coil-split'. This is where adding a small resistor (2.2k at the bridge and 1.1k at the neck) between the coil junction and ground leaves some of

the usually fully dumped coil in circuit for a fuller single-coil sound. It's a tweak that PRS has popularised, but exactly who came up with the idea isn't fully documented. UK repairman/guitarist Brinsley Schwarz brought the idea to my attention, albeit using a trim-pot variable resistor, and another contender is PRS user and long-time endorsee/advisor David Grissom.

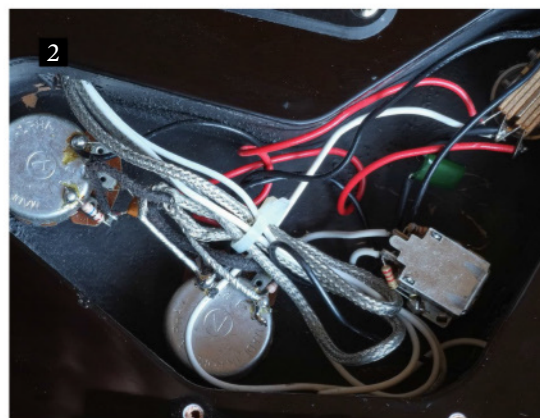
PRS's more recent TCI (Tuned, Capacitive, Inductive) process might sound a bit sci-fi, but it's actually the opposite and in many cases just uses simple components such as those partial coil-split resistors as well as simple capacitors to 'tune' the control circuit and/or the coil-split. PRS has also used just capacitors to tune the coil-split. How so?

Put simply, the capacitors we typically use in a guitar circuit allow high frequencies to pass, while lower frequencies are blocked. The value of the capacitor, for our purpose here, dictates a crossover point, if you like. Wired to ground like a tone control, they'll filter out the high-end above that point; wired in series, like a treble bleed on a volume control, the frequencies below that crossover point are removed, retaining the high-end portion.

Another trick used on the original PRS Silver Sky, the later Modern Eagle V (pre-2024) and on David Grissom's DGT is to add a resistor in parallel from the input lug of the volume to ground, effectively altering the value of the pot that the pickups see. For example, on the Modern Eagle V (pre-2024) [pic 1] there's a 1.5mega-ohm resistor, which means the pickup sees around 375k, if the pot is exactly 500k, subtly pulling down some of the high-end. The DGT [pic 2] uses a 10mega-ohm resistor on both



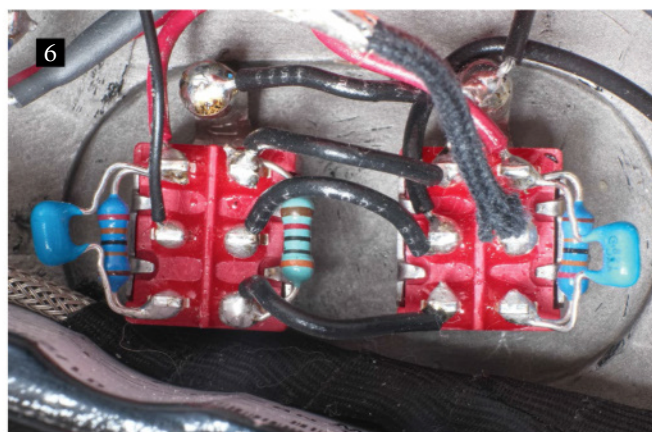
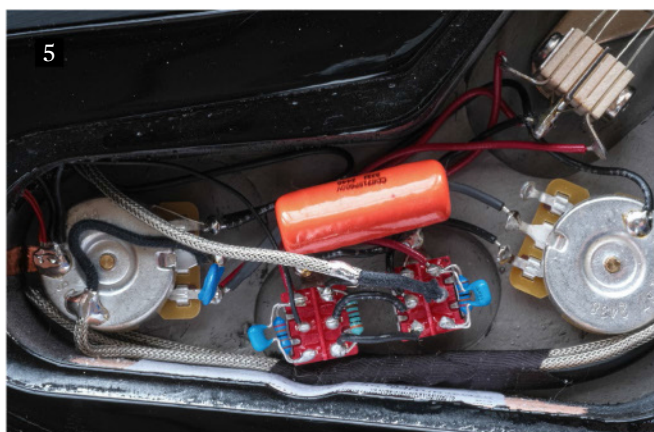
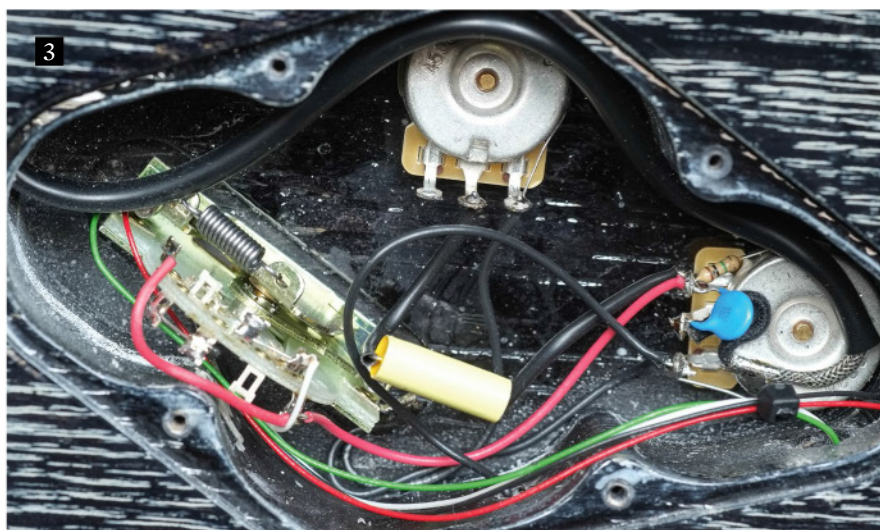
1. Inside the pre-2024 Modern Eagle V are a parallel resistor on the volume pot and a treble bleed capacitor. Similar capacitors are used on the two mini-switches to sweeten the high-end of the 'true bypass' single-coil switching



2. The SE DGT features similar tuning tweaks to the Core model: additional resistors on each volume control, and two partial coil-split resistors on the pull-switch tone (right)

Royalty in the form of a 2025 Custom 24-08! Not only is the build typically superb, there's plenty of tone-tuning tweakery to be found inside, too





3. Like the all-single-coil Silver Sky, the T-style-inspired NF 53 uses a parallel resistor (1mega-ohm) on the volume control to bring down the total resistance

4. These discreet mini-toggle EQ switches are a new feature on the 2025 Custom 24-08

5. Inside the 2025 Custom 24-08 you can see that large Orange Drop capacitor, plus the capacitor and resistor high-pass filters on each pickup's mini-toggle switch

6. Close up, the wiring is easy to see. The extra 30k resistor (middle) modifies the tone control when the EQ mode is on for both pickups. PRS says: "It adds 30k to the tone pot and stops it from rolling off too much signal. It's only on the one switch, but both switches must be in the up position before it takes effect. If either switch is still in 'standard' mode, that resistor is bypassed"

its volume controls, which gives a pot value of 476k. The Silver Sky typically uses a 300k volume pot, but again that's tuned down – certainly on the early USA models – with a parallel resistor (3mega-ohm) to around 279k [pic 3].

If you remember the Private Stock run of the Modern Eagle V, there was even a 500k pull-switch pot that emulated a 250k pot by adding in a parallel resistor. In theory, a 500k value would do the trick (although my notes tell me PRS used a 430k resistor) and can also be added to any coil-split switch. It's subtle, but it's another example of how PRS can easily tune a simple circuit – and we can, too!

The McLaughlin Effect

For this year, however, there's been yet another change in the PRS tone-tweaking canon. Instead of using those resistors, or capacitors, to affect the coil-split voice, guitars such as the Custom 24-08 and Modern Eagle V (plus the 40th Anniversary Charcoal Phoenix and 40th Custom 24-08) now have "EQ switches" [pics 4, 5 and 6] as originally conceived for the high-end PRS Private Stock John McLaughlin model from 2023.

Combining a capacitor and resistor (in parallel) wired onto each DPDT mini-toggle switch in series, a simple high-pass filter is created that shelves out the lower-mids and bass to create a leaner, more single-coil-like voicing. But it's still fully hum-cancelling as the whole series output of each humbucker is filtered, not just one coil. While the component values are slightly different, it's exactly the same principle as the so-called Dry Switch used on Yamaha's Revstar guitars: a simple high-pass filter that actually works well with both humbuckers and P-90s.

Now, if this writer's understanding of electronics is correct, that capacitor is effectively acting as the crossover point, and the resistor is affecting the amount of midrange and low-end that you're losing. Is that correct? "Yes, exactly," confirms Paul Reed Smith during a lengthy conversation. "The capacitor is allowing only treble through. The resistor is allowing how much of the regular signal runs around it."

"It takes the bass and low midrange down," continues Paul. "It's a shelf. You hear that the bass and low midrange goes down, but it doesn't go away – it's still

hum-cancelling. It cleans the tone up in a beautiful way and still retains its hum-cancelling properties. So the tone control turns the treble down, but these EQ switches turn the bass and low midrange down. It's a different animal.

"I gotta tell you, it's not a single-coil industry standard type of switch," Paul adds, "which has been hard for all of us – including our customers, people in this building [the PRS factory] and our dealers – to wrap our heads around. There are two pedals it doesn't work well with. If you plug into a Fuzz Face, which has a really strange input device, or a really early non-buffered wah-wah pedal, it doesn't like it very much because it doesn't want to see that shelf. But every other pedal, if you put a buffer in front of it like a tuner pedal, it works perfectly. So it is affected by the input impedance of the device it goes into. But, in general, in 99.9 per cent of the stuff in our industry, it works great."

"In these days of digital-this and digital-that, these EQ switches seem really quite old technology"

In these days of digital-this and digital-that, though, these EQ switches – not to mention other tuning tweaks PRS is using – seem really quite old technology, we challenge. "You're right, you win!" retorts Paul. "It's a very simple 6dB-per-octave shelf. In our world, a single pole filter, a resistor and capacitor is the best way to do it. I didn't really think of it as old technology or not; I just thought, 'Does it work? And do I like the sound of it?' So, yes, it is quite simple, but then so is a coil-split: you run a wire out of the pickup to ground. I mean, you can't get any simpler than that! We're always looking for the simple, elegant solution here."

And to confirm, does PRS use the same component values for both the Treble and Bass pickup EQ switches? "Yes, the TCI pickups in those guitars [the Modern Eagle V and the Custom 24-08] are wound pretty similar[ly] so we use the same component values. That said, it took about four months to hone those values in right; it's very sensitive as to the value of the capacitor and the resistor, really sensitive."

Is the coil-split dead? Long live the EQ switch! "Will we move over to these? The answer is: I don't know," says Paul.



This Private Stock John McLaughlin signature was the first to feature the EQ switches when it appeared in 2023

There are plenty more tweaks that have been employed, not least the additional-length screened cables that we most recently found in the 2025 Core Standard 24 Satin's control cavity. Here a piece approximately 460mm long is used from the volume control to the output jack, when 150mm would easily do the job. "That wire is between 7pF to 10pF an inch [in terms of its capacitance], and every inch changes the tone of the guitar. So it brings the resonant peak gently down in frequency, not in amplitude," says Paul.

Catching The 24-08

Having played that 2023 John McLaughlin signature, a mere snip at £14,995, I was keen to reacquaint myself with these EQ switches and managed to divert a new 2025 Custom 24-08 on its way to a UK dealer. Considerably less expensive than the JM signature at a mere £4,825, it's still like royalty has just popped in for a cuppa and a bacon sarnie. We bowed.

Very carefully unscrewing the control cavity backplate reveals many of these ongoing changes and improvements. The new EQ switches appear to have the same value capacitor and resistor as the John

McLaughlin (820pF and 230k), plus we get that new large 600-volt Orange Drop tone cap rated at .033μF along with the extended screened cable from the volume to the output jack we saw on the new Core Standard 24. As ever, the treble bleed cap on the volume is valued at 180pF.

Plugged in, once again I'm reminded of just how well *every* detail of the guitar performs. Did I miss those good ol' coil-spilts? Not a bit: it seems I've become an EQ switch fanboy like a certain Mr McLaughlin. "I asked him if he wanted to get rid of the EQ switches," concludes Paul, "and he said, 'No! Why would I want to get rid of all those good sounds?' I adore him; you guys birthed a genius. There's no question about that!"

Note that you'll find a huge resource of PRS guitar-wiring diagrams on the company's website. As you'd expect, the newer 2025 diagrams will take a little while to get posted. While the superb Custom 24-08 isn't cheap, installing EQ switches and many of PRS's tuning tweaks to your own guitar will cost just a few pounds. If it's good enough for Paul and John, it's got to be worth a try, hasn't it? 

www.prsguitars.com



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

From analogue tape to digi plug-ins, knowing how they work ensures the best results

Analogue Tape

In 1988 this writer blundered into his first job as a recording studio 'tape op' and continued working in pro audio until 2003. This period spanned the end of the analogue era and the transition to hard-disk recording. The typical morning routine involved demagnetising tape heads, cleaning the transport with isopropyl alcohol and distilled water, aligning playback and recording levels, and setting bias. 15 years later we were simply booting up the computer and hard drives and cracking on.

Analogue versus digital has been debated to death and we're not rehashing that here. The move to digital was first driven by a desire to eliminate tape noise, and top studios began using 32-track digital tape machines. They were hugely expensive, and as Steve Hillage once put it, "Digital recording on tape is like photocopying on papyrus" (*Guitarist* June 1986, Vol 3 Number 1).

While hard disks were getting up to speed and inching towards affordability, we struggled with video cassette formats such as ADAT. Compared with highly evolved analogue recorders, audio quality was less pleasing to the ear, but budgets were tightening and they were cheap.

The move to digital, and particularly hard disk recording, was driven more by fiscal considerations than a quest to improve

audio quality. Besides the specialised maintenance that tape machines often required, tape costs were astronomic. Album projects typically required 10 to 20 reels, which record companies had to purchase and store. Running at full speed, a two-inch tape provided 15 minutes of recording time and cost around £130 during the late 1980s. Tape costs could equate to a week of studio time.

Some specialised studios offer analogue recording for discerning clients, but most contemporary music is recorded and mixed 'in the box'. Interest in analogue tape endures, however, even among those who may never have experienced the real thing. There are numerous hardware devices that purport to reproduce the audio characteristics of tape, as well as highly regarded plug-in effects that emulate the classic machines of Studer, Ampex and others.

Buying a multi-track analogue recorder these days would probably be way too expensive and impractical, but mixing onto a stereo tape machine – rather than doing an internal bounce or routing mixer outputs back into the box – remains a viable option.

Revox made excellent reel-to-reel recorders, and secondhand examples cost about the same as a pro-quality microphone preamp or compressor. Also

consider Teac and Tascam if your budget is tight. Even if you prefer working digitally, understanding what certain tape recorder jargon means will help you explore the full potential of your tape plug-in parameters.

Magic Rust

The operating theory behind tape recording predated the technology and equipment needed to make it function. Magnetic recording was proposed by Oberlin Smith in 1888 and first demonstrated by Valdemar Poulsen in 1898. Early devices used wire, and the first 'tape' recorders ran steel tape.

By the 1930s, BASF in Germany had developed paper tape coated with an oxide layer that moved across a static recording head at a constant speed. When acoustic energy is converted to an electrical current, the signal is an analogue of the original sound. Applying this signal to a recording head 'prints' a magnetisation pattern onto the tape.

As Steve Hillage once put it, "Digital recording on tape is like photocopying on papyrus"

For playback, the head senses magnetic field variations on the tape and converts them back into an electronic signal. Ideally, playback and input signals would be indistinguishable, but until the 1940s tape recording remained too noisy, distorted and lacking in high frequencies for critical recording. The missing ingredient was AC bias.

Valdemar Poulsen had discovered that applying a DC (direct) 'bias' current to the tape while recording decreased distortion, but audio quality remained inadequate. In 1921, two US navy engineers called WL Carlson and GW Carpenter accidentally discovered that applying high-frequency alternating current (AC) greatly increased recording sensitivity and improved audio quality.

They applied for a patent, but since nobody was interested in recording onto tape, their AC biasing method was



Mixing down onto two-track tape may be preferable to bouncing internally or routing your mixer outputs back into the box

The Otari two-track recorder in the corner is placed next to an Otari MTR-90 MkII 24-track machine

Album projects required 10 to 20 reels. A two-inch tape provided 15 minutes of recording time and cost around £130



Ampex tape machines were highly regarded, and digital plug-ins, such as this Universal Audio ATR-102, provide a taste of their classic American sound

overlooked and forgotten. During the late 1930s, AC biasing was rediscovered by groups of engineers working independently in the US, Japan and Germany. It was the German technology that would change everything.

During World War II, the allies noticed that German radio broadcasts were transmitting from various time zones simultaneously. The audio quality seemed too good to be a recording; there was no stylus noise and their duration exceeded the maximum allowed by disks. Using Fritz Pfleumer's paper/oxide tape with Eduard Schüller's ring-shaped heads and Walter Weber's rediscovered AC biasing technique, AEG had created the first

AC biasing was rediscovered by engineers in the US, Japan and Germany. It was the German tech that would change everything

high-fidelity tape recorders. After the war ended, a US army electrical engineer called Jack Mullin was sent to Germany on a fact-finding mission.

A British officer tipped him off about an AEG Magnetophon tape recorder with extremely low distortion and a frequency response comparable to human hearing. Mullin quickly headed to a small town called Bad Nauheim, where Radio Frankfurt had a studio, and found one of these machines, along with the schematics that showed how to modify the circuitry for AC bias.

This Studer A800 plug-in from Universal Audio lets you 'inside' to make fine adjustments to the parameters just like old-school analogue engineers



IMAGE: WWW.UAUDIO.COM

He shipped two machines and 50 reels of tape back home, where he reassembled them and began designing tape recorders of his own. These were the first tape recorders used professionally in the US and spawned an industry that revolutionised audio recording. Allowing infinite erasing and re-recording, and easy editing, analogue tape inevitably replaced acetate disks as the recording medium of choice.

Bias Thinking

Setting the bias was once a routine task for studio engineers, and different brands of tape required different bias settings. Alignment involved recording a 10kHz tone onto the tape with the bias adjustment rolled back. Turning the bias adjustment clockwise caused the VU meter needle to move upwards until it reached a peak and then dropped.

For tapes such as Ampex 456 and BASF 911, the manufacturers recommended 2.5dB over bias, so engineers had to watch the VU meter and stop turning once the needle had dropped 2.5dB below its maximum level. Some machines had global biasing, while others required each track to be biased individually.

The goal was unattenuated high-frequency response and low distortion, but modern producers often regard tape

Waves Audio's Studer J37 plug-in is designed to recreate the machines that were used and modified by engineers at Abbey Road Studios for mixdown and slapback echo



recorders and tape plug-ins as colouration devices. If a tape plug-in allows you to adjust the bias setting, listen to the way you can fine-tune the high-frequency response and induce interesting distortion characteristics.

For several decades, recording tape has been made with a Mylar or Melinex plastic substrate coated with a binding material containing magnetic particles. Tape brands always had their own 'sound', and if your plug-in offers various 'tape types', experimentation can reveal how a 'standard level' tape like Ampex 456 compares with 'high level' Quantex GP9. Also try altering the level calibration settings to go from pristine high headroom to clipped and crunchy.

Head To Head

Most pro-quality machines employ two or three heads. The tape first passes the erase head, which can remove any unwanted recordings. Next up is the record head, which prints the new recording onto the tape but can also play back. This is used when overdubbing to eliminate time delay between the input signal and previously recorded tracks.

For optimum audio quality, a playback head requires a slightly different design to a record head. This is the reason why

professional multi-track machines feature a dedicated playback/repro head that's used for mixdown, and on two-track machines it allows audio to be monitored as it's being recorded. Sophisticated plug-ins offer a choice of heads for different characteristics.

Tape and tape heads come in various widths, with two-inch supporting 16- and 24-track formats, and one-inch supporting eight and 16 tracks as well as high-end two-track stereo. For stereo mixdown, the most common tape formats are 0.25 inches and 0.5 inches. Again, tape plug-ins should allow you to select 'head with', and you may find yourself preferring the tighter and punchier characteristics of 0.25-inch tape to fatter, smoother and more dynamic 0.5-inch or 1-inch formats.

Speed Limits

The speed at which tape passes from the supply spool to the take-up spool is always quoted in 'inches per second' (IPS). Cassette players and domestic reel-to-reels run at 3.75 and 7.5 IPS, while professional machines operate at 15 or 30 IPS. Tape speed affects dynamic range and frequency response, with 30 IPS tending to have extended high frequencies and greater dynamic range, while 7.5 and 15 IPS sound somewhat darker

The challenges of tape include hiss, hum and fluctuations in speed known as 'wow and flutter'

but fatter in the low frequencies. With tape, higher speeds may be required to minimise noise, but plug-ins allow you to select your preferred speed based on audio characteristics with no noise floor concerns.

The challenges of tape recording include hiss, hum and fluctuations in speed known as 'wow and flutter'. Engineers invested significant effort in overcoming these issues by designing robust tape transports and developing noise reduction systems that arguably culminated in Dolby SR. The use of tape plug-ins to make productions sound dirtier and more distorted may have been seen as absurd, or even an abuse of the format by Jack Mullin and those engineers who followed. No doubt plug-in parameters that reintroduce noise and speed fluctuations would have seemed equally baffling to them – but tastes change. 

www.huwpriceguitar.com



David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

As one of Gibson's first thinline archtops, the Byrdland inspired the 330, 335 and more

1957 Gibson Byrdland



Introduced in 1955, the Byrdland was one of Gibson's first 'thinline' archtop models

The Goldtop Les Paul and the Les Paul Custom were a significant new direction for a traditional archtop guitar manufacturer like Gibson. The winds of change would soon blow through the company's hollowbody range, and Gibson asked Nashville studio players Billy Byrd and Hank Garland to collaborate on some new ideas.

"The idea was to provide archtop players with models that felt more compact and comfortable to play, and the resulting 'thinline' model was given a name that honoured their contributions. The Byrdland made its debut at the 1955 NAMM Show alongside two other thinline archtops – the ES-350T and the ES-225. In essence, the Byrdland is a thinner bodied L-5 with a shorter scale length for easy chord stretches and an ABR-1 bridge on a floating wooden base.

"Appointments, like the 'flowerpot' headstock logo and extra layers of binding cut into the fingerboard, also lean towards L-5 specs. Then there's the little point at the end of the fretboard, gold hardware and multi-layer pickguard binding, plus seven layers of binding around the front of the body and three layers at the back.

"The neck is a two-piece maple construction with a walnut centre strip. It is very flamed and there's an ebony fretboard and a 'stinger' on the back of the headstock. The body sides are also very flamey, but the back has bird's eye figuring, which could be interpreted as a visual pun on the model name.

"These earlier backs were carved from bookmatched maple blanks with a join running through the centre line that lines

"The idea was to provide archtop players with more compact and comfortable models"

up perfectly with the neck's centre strip. Gibson retained the 2 1/4-inch body depth through a later switch to laminated maple construction, but Byrdlands always had carved spruce tops. The label inside this example carries an 'A25' serial number and the FON [Factory Order Number] corresponds with April of 1957.

"Gibson used Kluson Sealfast tuners, which I think are just about the best ever. They're unbelievably precise and, unlike regular Klusons, you don't need to detune and then bring the string back up to pitch. With the Sealfasts, you can detune a tiny bit, pull the string and it won't move.

"Celluloid pickguards are prone to off-gassing. If you leave one of these guitars in a case indefinitely, you'll open the case one day and the pickguard will have started to disintegrate. Their wood needs fresh air and some humidity or they will fall apart.

"A lot of people don't give these guitars any credit because of the short scale and narrow neck. This is particularly true of the later version, which had modified humbuckers with narrowed screw spacing. They weren't the same as the regular Patent Applied For pickups that were installed on other archtops like the ES-175. Similarly, these Alnico V pickups couldn't be mounted onto an L-5.

"The Alnico V pickups are often called 'staples' or (inaccurately) 'staple P-90s', and here they have Bakelite dog-ear covers with spacers under both pickups. The way the polepieces are adjusted is interesting because there are tiny screws for each one. When the screws are loosened, you can manipulate the angle of the polepieces to optimise alignment with the strings.

"The Alnico V was earlier used in the neck position of the Les Paul Custom. Many believe Seth Lover was tasked with designing it because Les Paul was replacing the P-90s in the neck position of his Goldtops with DeArmond Dynasonics. I know of a couple of Goldtop prototypes that were fitted with Alnico Vs at the factory.

"Virtually every professional musician that I deal with, from celebrities to studio players, has a guitar with Alnico Vs. They're fantastic tools and I greatly prefer these Alnico V Byrdlands to the Patent Applied For version. It's one of the nicest-sounding guitars for jazz, even without the full body depth of an L-5.

"This guitar is 100 per cent original and untouched. The frets are original, with virtually no wear, and all the nibs are there. The playability is lovely because the neck angle is perfect and the bridge doesn't lean at all. The blonde finish has mellowed very uniformly to a lemony golden haze and the top retains a nice bevel so it hasn't flattened down and was obviously taken care of. This guitar is a sweetheart." [HP]

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

Many Byrdland appointments derive from the L-5, but it has a shorter scale length and Alnico V pickups made for narrower string spacing

"It's one of the nicest-sounding guitars for jazz, even without the full body depth of an L-5"



Blues Headlines

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Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Haynes Inflection & Marshall JCM900 Studio 20

Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

STEVE LUKATHER IS RENOWNED for his virtuosic yet melodic playing with Toto. And then there are his numerous solo albums and prolific session work for Michael Jackson, Earth, Wind & Fire, Lionel Richie, and an unfeasible amount of the other albums and artists that emerged from LA during the late 70s and 80s. Much of his skill was put to use creating memorable hooky parts on tunes such as Michael Jackson's *Human Nature*, but Steve's first love was blues-based rock, with him citing Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, David Gilmour and Joe Walsh (among others) as primary influences. Though Steve is able to rein in his playing when the song requires

it, anyone who has ever heard Toto's *Hold The Line* or his solo material will know he is just as skilled at letting rip with the best of them!

The examples here were played separately but with the intention that they would work when heard together in the form of a continuous solo. Their objective is to demonstrate how Steve uses blues-based licks in a more 'polished' setting, rather than being a technical showcase. The emphasis is on melody over scale patterns, though there are a couple of more rapid chromatic ideas in the final bars to add a bit of excitement. Think Toto, Steely Dan or any of the melodic 'yacht rock' bands.

I've gone with a fairly high-gain tone and occasionally opted for the neck pickup, as this is a tone Steve is fond of. These ideas can be easily adapted (or 'reverse-engineered'!) to fit over a more traditional blues backing if that's more your thing. Key areas to watch are the pitching/accuracy of string bends, not being afraid of pauses between phrases, and rhythmic tightness where relevant. I hope you enjoy these examples. **G**



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

Example 1

THIS FIRST EXAMPLE can be viewed as predominantly D minor pentatonic (starting out in shape 4), but there are elements of the D minor scale, too. After that first bend, I'm touching the harmonic 12 frets up (at the 20th fret) to get a pseudo 'feedback' effect an octave above. This is worth trying elsewhere as well, but it works best at volume or with a healthy amount of gain. Note the rhythmic phrasing towards the end, contrasted with the long held divebomb to finish the line.

♩ = 63

Dm9

8va

*** Touch harmonic with picking hand**

Bbmaj7/D

w/bar

BU **TCH** **BD**

BU **BD** **BU**

8 (10) (20) (18) 6 5 5 7 7 (9) (7) (9) 5 6 7 7 5

5/7 7 (8) (7) 5 3 5 3 5

Example 2

PREDOMINANTLY BASED AROUND the shape 1 D minor pentatonic, this example makes a feature of the 9th (E) at the start, in keeping with the Dm9 chord in the backing. As we go on, held notes are deliberately contrasted with quicker bursts, before we shift to shape 2 and a signature bend with a semitone raise to B $\flat$ added with the fourth finger. This can be surprisingly tricky, so don't be too annoyed if it doesn't fall into place immediately!

Example 2 musical notation, measures 1-4. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a tempo of 63. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first system shows measures 1-3 with a Dm9 chord indicated above the staff. The second system shows measures 4-6 with a Bbmaj7/D chord indicated above the staff. The notation includes various guitar techniques such as bends (BU, BD), triplets (3), and sixteenth notes (1/4). The fretboard diagrams show fingerings and bends for each measure.

Example 3

SWITCHING TO THE NECK PICKUP, we're about to get more rhythmic – but not before a couple of Joe Walsh-style double string bends. By this, I mean bend one string up, then switch to the adjacent string for a pre-bend, then down. This sounds way more complicated than it is, so check the transcription and watch the video and you should be fine. Elsewhere, the rhythmic patterns are 90 per cent pentatonic, but see if you can spot the D minor scale additions...

Example 3 musical notation, measures 1-3. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a tempo of 63. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first system shows measures 1-3 with a Dm9 chord indicated above the staff. The second system shows measures 4-6 with a Bbmaj7/D chord indicated above the staff. The notation includes various guitar techniques such as bends (BU, BD), triplets (3), and sixteenth notes (1/4). The fretboard diagrams show fingerings and bends for each measure.

Example 4

IF YOU LOOK PAST the jazzy chromatic runs for a second, you'll see that the basic patterns here are very much pentatonic, with extra embellishments added to the more conventional two-notes-per-string approach. Though Steve is very adept at alternate picking, he often mixes in more legato playing like this, with slides and pull-offs for a smoother, more relaxed feel. Once again, ideas like this fall under the fingers a lot more intuitively than it might seem at first.

♩ = 63 8va Dm9

1

2

3

Bbmaj7/D

BU

Hear It Here

TOTO

HYDRA



Released in 1979, Toto's second album combined rock riffs with tight funk rhythms, plus, of course, lots of fleet-fingered soloing. The title track contains elements of prog and some nice bluesy soloing. Also check out *Mama* and *White Sister* to hear Steve in full flight. It's interesting, decades later, to reflect on how much more 'produced' recordings generally sound in 2025, so to hear Steve's tone and licks already fully formed like this really is testament to his tremendous talent.

EARTH, WIND & FIRE

FACES



Here are some great examples of Steve's session work from back in 1980. He manages to make it sound as if it's the most natural thing in the world to move from soul/funk to rock soloing – and maybe it is for him! Check out his 'front-and-centre' riffing and solo in *Back On The Road*; *You Went Away* also features some lovely (albeit more subtle) soloing on the play-out. Elsewhere, be sure to listen to the intro for *Take It To The Sky*, which has some impressive harp-style harmonics and jazz chord moves.

STEVE LUKATHER

I FOUND THE SUN AGAIN



This 2021 solo album showcases how pivotal Steve's guitar playing and vocals have been in Toto. *Along For The Ride* switches from a heavy psychedelic style riff to an out-and-out rock solo by the end, and you get the feeling this could have been the first take, as has often been the case in Steve's studio work. *Journey Through* displays a Jeff Beck influence with expressive whammy work. Be sure to listen to the title track to hear him negotiate some tricky chord changes while keeping a bluesy feel.

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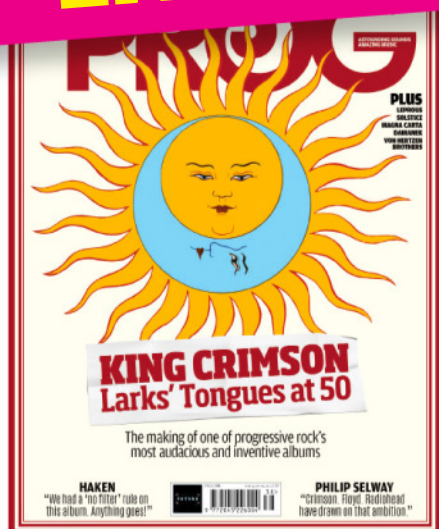
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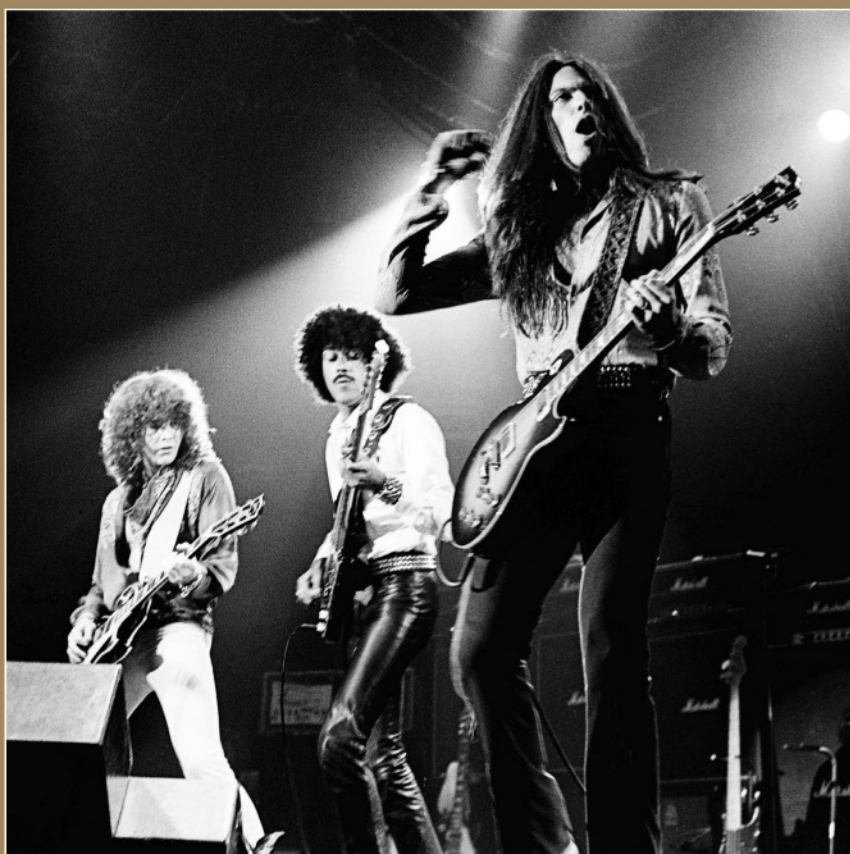
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15

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Guitarist
— PRESENTS —

ICONIC GUITARS

*A visual celebration of 15 fine, historic & rare
guitars from the Golden Era*



History shows that a love of cars and guitars has gone hand in hand through the 20th century, from auto-inspired finishes to the futuristic curves of Ray Dietrich's original Firebird design. Perhaps that's because both guitars and cars – at their best – represent a perfect union of function and graceful form. True, some evolutionary branches of the guitar tree grew in a wilder direction, such as the near folkloric Gibson Moderne that may or may not (depending on who you listen to) have been

made into working prototypes by Gibson. But mostly, it's timeless, deftly proportioned design that stands the test of passing years, and it is this quality that this 20-page collector's edition photo-magazine celebrates.

Sourced from private collections, specialist retailers and high-end guitar auctions, the guitars that we present in the following pages are some of the most historic ever built, showing stunning examples of classic electric and acoustic instruments with reference-grade photography. You'll also find insightful spec and history details accompanying each guitar – but we're sure you'll revel in the sheer beauty of these iconic guitars, which have been printed on presentation-grade heavyweight paper so they can be removed and framed should you so wish. We hope you enjoy immersing yourself in these icons of Golden Era guitar design as much as we enjoyed making this publication. See you next time. 📖

A stylized, handwritten signature of Jamie Dickson in black ink.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

The beautiful original vintage guitars in this publication were originally shot for *Guitarist* magazine by kind permission of private collectors, and the following organisations who specialise in fine vintage instruments. *Guitarist* would like to acknowledge and thank:

ATB Guitars of Cheltenham (www.atbguitars.com)

Bonhams of London (www.bonhams.com)

Gardiner Houlgate of Corsham (www.guitar-auctions.co.uk)



CONTENTS

1961 FENDER STRATOCASTER

1959 GIBSON ES-335

1954 GIBSON LES PAUL GOLDTOP

1955 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD

1968 RICKENBACKER 360-12 JETGLO

1959 GIBSON ES-5 SWITCHMASTER

1967 EPIPHONE OLYMPIC SB722

1957 FENDER STRATOCASTER

c.1982 GIBSON HERITAGE SERIES MODERNE

1955 FENDER TELECASTER

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

1965 EPIPHONE TEXAN

1963 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

1954 GRETSCH COUNTRY CLUB



Guitarist

1961 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Privately owned since 1975, this stunning Strat is near-original, barring a 2008 Bill Puplett refret and minor hardware changes. The owner adds that the finish is, anomalously, a factory custom gold colour, not Shoreline Gold – the standard gold finish option offered in '61.



Guitarist

1959 GIBSON ES-335

This remarkable ES-335 is fully original except for replica tuner buttons fitted after the originals crumbled. It has an early-spec thin three-ply top and double white Patent Applied For pickups; the neck pickup has a notably hot output of 9k.



Guitarist

1954 GIBSON LES PAUL GOLDTOP

This quintessential P-90 era Goldtop is all-original except for a 2007 Bill Puplett refret. Its top has darkened in places but with no visible greening from player perspiration. Its owner says its "earlier P-90s have a bark to them – sounds best at volume!"



Guitarist

1955 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

Few guitars embody 'simplicity is strength' like a Junior, and this all-original early single-cut example from '55 still resides in its original snakeskin cardboard case. Its owner says it is a "lightweight, magic, simple guitar".



Guitarist

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD

While the 1959 Standard may be better known, 1958 Sunburst Standards have a vibe of their own. Belonging to a private collector, this beauty features a chunkier C-shaped neck profile and less strident pickups than many later 'Bursts.



Guitarist

1968 RICKENBACKER 360-12 JETGLO

This charismatic Ricky dates from April '68 and features the familiar single-coil 'toaster' pickups that produced its jangling sound in stereo or mono operation. This example features a factory refinish in Jetglo Black over sunburst, its owner explains.



Guitarist

1959 GIBSON ES-5 SWITCHMASTER

There are few guitars as opulent as an ES-5 and this beautiful late-50s example, currently residing at ATB Guitars, has a classic spec, with three long-magnet Patent Applied For pickups providing the tone, and a figured curly maple top.



Guitarist

1967 EPIPHONE OLYMPIC SB722

This late-60s, single-pickup Epiphone Olympic solidbody with Maestro Vibrola, currently at ATB Guitars, is a rare bird indeed as it is clad in the vanishingly rare Pacific Blue finish that stands distinct from the more familiar Pelham Blue.



Guitarist

1957 FENDER STRATOCASTER

No Stratocaster year is so iconic as 1957. With neck and body dating from September of that year, this immaculately original example at ATB Guitars has the classic 'soft V' profile that has become a hallmark of Strats from this period.



Guitarist

c.1982 GIBSON HERITAGE SERIES MODERNE

While no known originals exist, this futuristic stablemate to the late-50s Korina Flying V and Explorer was said to be prototyped by Gibson, though no irrefutable evidence exists. This 'replica' was presented for sale at Gardiner Houlgate.



Guitarist

1955 FENDER TELECASTER

Representing a refreshed look and spec for the Tele after the previous (and equally iconic) Blackguard format, the neck on this incredible blonde-finish Fender from ATB Guitars has a V-shaped profile and is dated December 1955.



Guitarist

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

It's rare indeed to see a three-pickup Les Paul Custom this clean, so this example, currently residing at ATB Guitars, is a real gem, with a middle pickup far more useful and characterful than internet lore would suggest.



Guitarist

1965 EPIPHONE TEXAN

This counterpart to Gibson's J-45 differs from its 'cousin' in having a longer 25.5-inch scale length, among other details beyond the obvious branding. The model's main claim to fame is that McCartney wrote *Yesterday* on a Texan,



Guitarist

1963 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

What could make a better matching pair with the black '58 Les Paul Custom on the previous spread than its successor? This 1961 SG-shape Custom features three short-magnet Patent Applied For pickups, unusual to see factory-fitted on a guitar as late as 1963.



Guitarist

1954 GRETSCH COUNTRY CLUB

This elegant mid-50s Gretsch with twin Dynasonic pickups formerly belonged to the late Maxi Jazz of Faithless and went under the hammer at Bonhams in London in June 2024. It was a favourite of the singer, who named it 'Garbo'.

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