

THE BEACH BOYS
AL JARDINE ON THEIR GREATEST GUITAR HITS

OZZY OSBOURNE
THE SABBATH ICON REMEMBERED BY HIS GUITARISTS



Guitarist

Issue 528

SEPTEMBER 2025

MIRADOR

HAVE JAKE KISZKA OF GRETA VAN FLEET & CHRIS TURPIN JUST MADE THE GUITAR ALBUM OF THE DECADE?

HOT GEAR

GRETSCH BROADKASTER LX

GIBSON MARCUS KING ES-345

MANSON MD-3 MIKEY DEMUS

& MORE

FEATURING

JAKE'S 1961 LES PAUL SG

MIRADOR'S RARE VINTAGE GEAR

INSIDE THE SESSIONS

& MORE

PLUS

1942 GIBSON SOUTHERN JUMBO

BRENT MASON INTERVIEW

EPIPHONE '63 DOVE

FUTURE

POLAR GO
MOBILE AUDIO INTERFACE

CALLING ALL CREATORS



THE SMALL BOX FOR BIG IDEAS

Guitarists, singer-songwriters, live streamers, or podcasters, Polar Go is your all-in-one, pocket-sized recording studio. Now you can play, sing, and record with zero hassle. No bulky gear, no complex setups. Get creating right out of the box!

ProCapture MICROPHONES
BUILT-IN PRO QUALITY STEREO MICROPHONES

4 HRS
UP TO 4 HOURS OF BATTERY LIFE

4 AUDIO INPUTS

POLAR GO
iOS, ANDROID, MAC & WINDOWS APP

AUDIO MAGIC WAND

XLR/ 1/4" COMBI JACK

POWER & RECORD WITH DUAL USB-C

Designed & Engineered by Blackstar Amplification UK

Blackstar®
AMPLIFICATION
the sound in your head

EXPLORE NOW:

www.blackstaramps.com

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

Live And Dangerous



This month's cover feature on Mirador, Jake Kiszka's new band with Chris Turpin of Ida Mae, brings to mind some really big issues that cut to the heart of why we play guitar. The band's philosophy on their debut album was very much centred on capturing the essence of a raw, near-live performance. The quality of the musicianship is superb, but there were no click tracks and the band themselves were thrown into down-to-the-wire recording sessions under heavy time pressure. Why do things that way, you may ask, when you could simply layer up the tracks at leisure, sync'd to a lockstep tempo, safe in the knowledge that you could easily 'correct' any mistakes?

Well, the answer is lots of bands do exactly that –and make good records doing so. But those records don't leave the door ajar to capturing that wild, unpredictable energy that semi-live takes do. It's that energy we hear on so many 60s recordings: whether it's Led Zeppelin live at the BBC or something from early Fleetwood Mac, as a listener we sense that there's no guardrail when the band, playing together, lock in to a certain energy and really go for it. Musicians sometimes feel a pressure to deliver a 'perfect' recording, which they will often take to mean one in which every part they played is flawless (in their estimation) and part of a tightly controlled vision of how the album should sound. And, in truth, this approach does suit certain styles of music; in complex, tightly arranged contemporary prog and metal that precision and intricate perfection is part of the desired effect.

But in music that we're meant to feel in our gut, too much control can squeeze out a kind of headlong energy and sense of creative risk, of spur-of-the-moment brilliance that is unmatchably exciting. When some people lament the fact that 'they don't make records like they used to', I believe it's this faith that magic can and will enter the room when brilliant musicians make music together in the moment, with no safety net, that they're really talking about. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Ally Venable
The American blues-rocker shares her memories of guitars loved and lost –and the fiery charisma of Gibson's Firebird **p114**



Epiphone Unplugged
The brand is on a roll with heritage-rich reissues and this trio of classics may be among its most popular yet. We review them on **p88**



Leo Lyons
What a pleasure it was to welcome the bassist who played Woodstock with Ten Years After to the studio with that very guitar on **p82**

COVER IMAGE BY PHIL BARKER, AL JARDINE IMAGE BY CLIVE LIMPKIN/EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES; OZZY OSBOURNE IMAGE BY MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES ABOVE: ALLY VENABLE IMAGE BY JEREMIAH SHEPHERD; EPIPHONE AND LEO LYONS BASS IMAGE BY PHIL BARKER

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor-In-Chief
Jamie Dickson
jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor
Dave Burrluck
dave@daveburrluck.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

Content Director, Music
Scott Rowley
scott.rowley@futurenet.com

Senior Music Editor
Jason Sidwell
jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

Contributors
Richard Barrett, Alex Bishop, Trevor Curwen, Andrew Daly, Richard Hood, Neville Marten, Huw Price, Daryl Robertson, Davina Rungasamy, Amit Sharma, Gary Stuckey, Stuart Williams, Charlie Wilkins, Henry Yates, Matt Yates

In-House Photography
Phil Barker, Neil Godwin, Matt Lincoln

ADVERTISING
MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST
UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT MANAGER Louis Grey louis.grey@futurenet.com

MARKETING
CONSUMER REVENUES DIRECTOR Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentyman frances.twentyman@futurenet.com
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS PRODUCER Nick Lee nick.lee@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION
Guitarist is available for licensing and syndication.
to find our more contact us at licensing@futurenet.com
or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com**
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF FUTURE INTERNATIONAL & BOOKAZINES Tim Mathers
HEAD OF NEWSTRADE Emma Bone

MANAGEMENT
SVP CONSUMER Kevin Addley kevin.addley@futurenet.com
BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com
HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES
APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com
ONLINE www.magazinesdirect.com EMAIL help@magazinesdirect.com
How to order & access back issues: If you are an active print subscriber, you have instant access to back issues through your iOS or Android device(s). Your digital magazine entitlement is available at no additional cost and no further action is required. Pocketmags library may not have access to the full archive of digital back issues. You will only be able to access the digital back issues as long as you are an active subscriber.
To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit magazinesdirect.com (click on 'Single issues' tab) or email help@magazinesdirect.com
BAR subscription prices: £87.75 for UK, €173 for Europe, $195 for USA, £150 for Rest of World
Subscription delays: Disruption remains within UK and International delivery networks.
Please allow up to 7 days before contacting us about a late delivery to help@mymagazines.co.uk
Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited

USPS INFORMATION
Guitarist (ISSN 0953-7023 PE 23920) is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA, United Kingdom.
Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Guitarist, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)
eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317
Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com
+3375690241

General Product Safety 2023/988: The use of our product under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use, including the actual duration of use, does not present any risk or only the minimum risks compatible with the product's use, which are considered acceptable and consistent with a high level of protection of the health and safety of consumers.

ipso. Regulated

Guitarist is a member of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) which regulates the UK print and digital news industry.

We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint, please contact legal@futurenet.com

If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

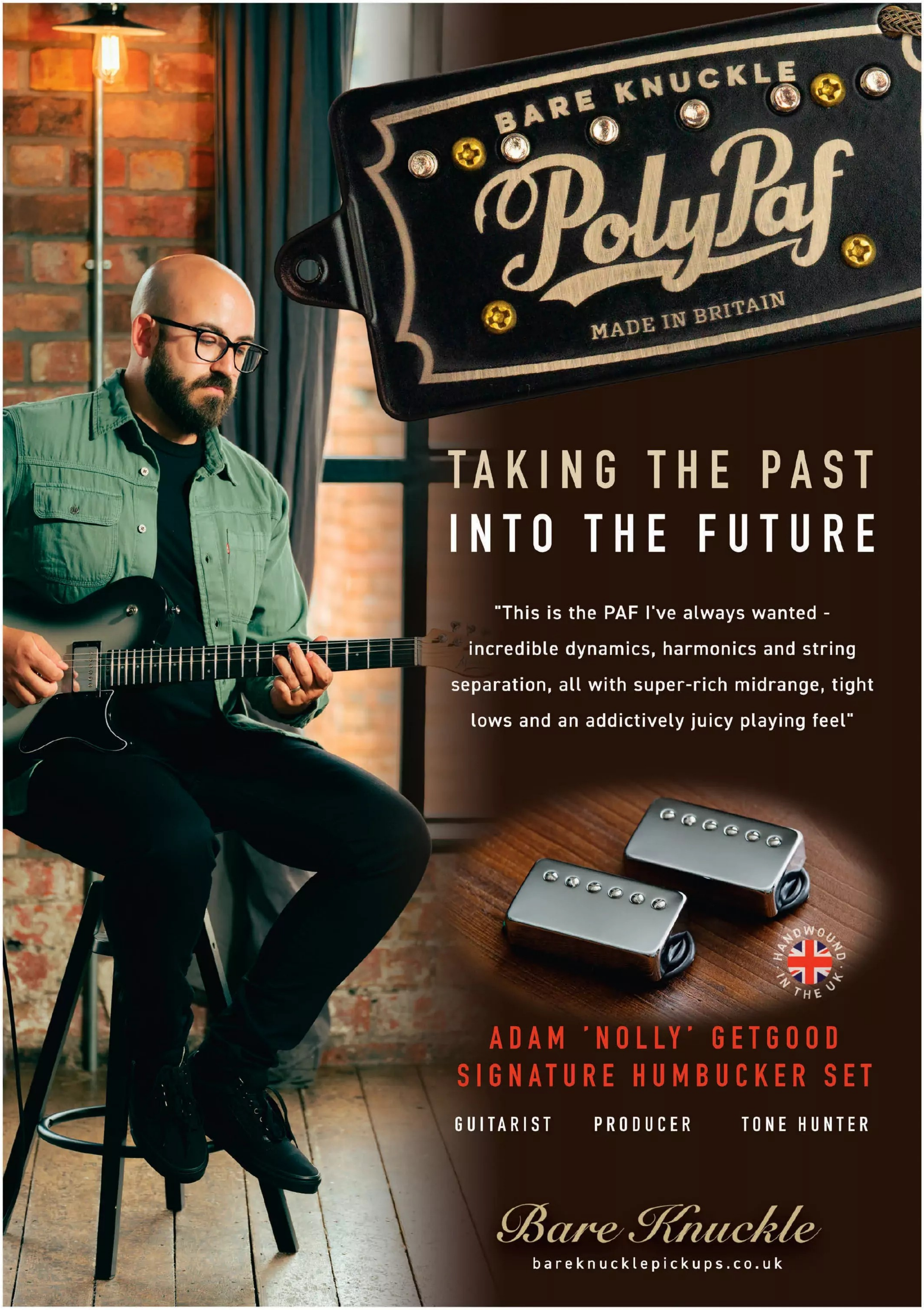
Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.


BARE KNUCKLE
PolyPaf
MADE IN BRITAIN
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"
HANDWOUND IN THE UK
ADAM 'NOLLY' GETGOOD
SIGNATURE HUMBUCKER SET
GUITARIST PRODUCER TONE HUNTER
Bare Knuckle
bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Contents



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



Guitarist
SUBSCRIBE TODAY FOR ONLY £21.93 AND SAVE 51%!
See p112 for details



PHOTO BY MATT LINCOLN

REGULARS

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

FEATURES

046 Al Jardine
052 Obituary: Ozzy Osbourne
060 Mirador
076 Brent Mason
082 Historic Hardware: Leo Lyons' 1962 Fender Jazz Bass

NEW GEAR

008 **Manson** MD-3 Mikey Demus
014 **Blackstar** ID:X 100
018 **Gretsch** Professional Broadkaster LX
024 **KMA** Geminus Stereo True Double Tracker
026 **EarthQuaker Devices** Dirt Transmitter Fuzz Driver
028 **Gibson** Marcus King ES-345
088 **Epiphone** Pre-War SJ-200 Rosewood Reissue, 1960 Hummingbird Reissue & 1963 Dove Reissue
096 **Vintage** REVO Galactica & Astrostar
108 **TC Electronic** Plethora X1

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**

The Pick
SCAN TO GET THE LATEST GUITAR NEWS

WALRUSAUDIO

MAKO MKII

SEA WHAT THESE SHARCS CAN DO

Introducing the Mako Series MKII. Powerful multi-function stereo effects that push the Sharc chip processors to their limits that include the D1 Delay, R1 Reverb, M1 Modulation, and the ACS1 Amp + Cab Simulator. Each pedal in the MAKO Series has been redesigned and rebuilt for vast improvements in tonality, new UI with the addition of an OLED navigation menu screen, new high-gain amps in the ACS1, completely rebuilt programs on the R1 and much more . Dialing in these inspiring studio grade tones has never been easier and has never sounded better.

WALRUS AUDIO

FACE Exclusive UK/EU-Distribution - www.face.be



MANSON MD-3 MIKEY DEMUS SIGNATURE
£2,099

WHAT IS IT? A new collaboration between Manson Guitar Works and Skindred guitarist, Mikey Demus, following the MD-1 and MD-2 signatures from 2018

Hyper Drive

This UK-made MD introduces a new pickup set that piles on the beef. But, as we find out, it's no one-trick pony

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker
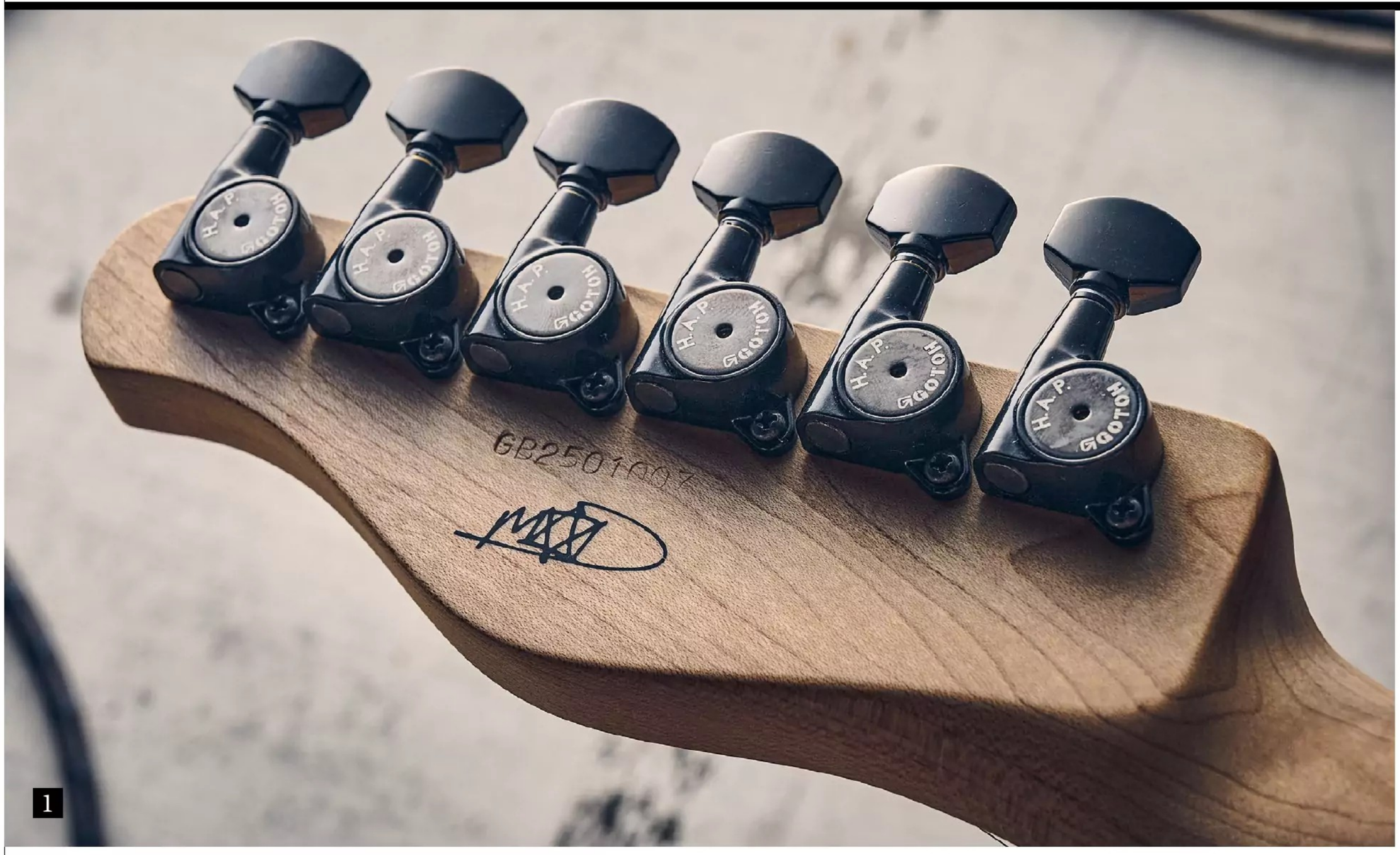
Think of Manson guitars and you'll probably visualise a complex, slightly bonkers music-making machine as wielded by Matt Bellamy (a majority shareholder in the company). But last year we took a look at the complete opposite: the single-pickup Verona and MA Juniors, which were about as simple as it gets but glorious rock 'n' roll pieces nonetheless.

Another plus for those Junior models was that they were entirely made in the UK, including the in-house Manson Dirty Rascal humbucker, listed at £1,399. To be honest, we couldn't wait for a two-pickup 'Special', and that's not far from what we have here wrapped up as a signature model for long-time Manson flag-waver Mikey Demus. One significant difference is that, while Mikey's previous signatures – the MD-1 and MD-2 from 2018 – were made in the Czech Republic and assembled at Manson Guitar Works' Devon-based HQ, the MD-3 is thoroughly crafted in the UK.

Manson's MA outline is the company's take on the Telecaster and it's less radical-looking compared with the MB shape with its pulled-out upper horn. The body here is two-piece obeche, chosen to keep the weight in check, and it's completely hidden under the Atomic Orange satin finish, one of two colour schemes in which the new guitar is offered. There are no modernist body contours here, just the standard forearm slope and ribcage cutaway, both very well shaped, while the new 'all access'







1

1. Aside from a small signature squiggle on the headstock back, there's nothing to give the game away. The MD-3 is all about quality, not least these Gotoh HAP tuners and a perfectly cut nut

2. The MD-3 uses Allen-key bolts to secure the neck while the heel area is chamfered to improve comfort in higher positions

3. Under the moody black cover here is a Manson Benchmark neck humbucker. Mikey wanted to start with a classic Patent Applied For vibe, but then at the bridge it got hotter...

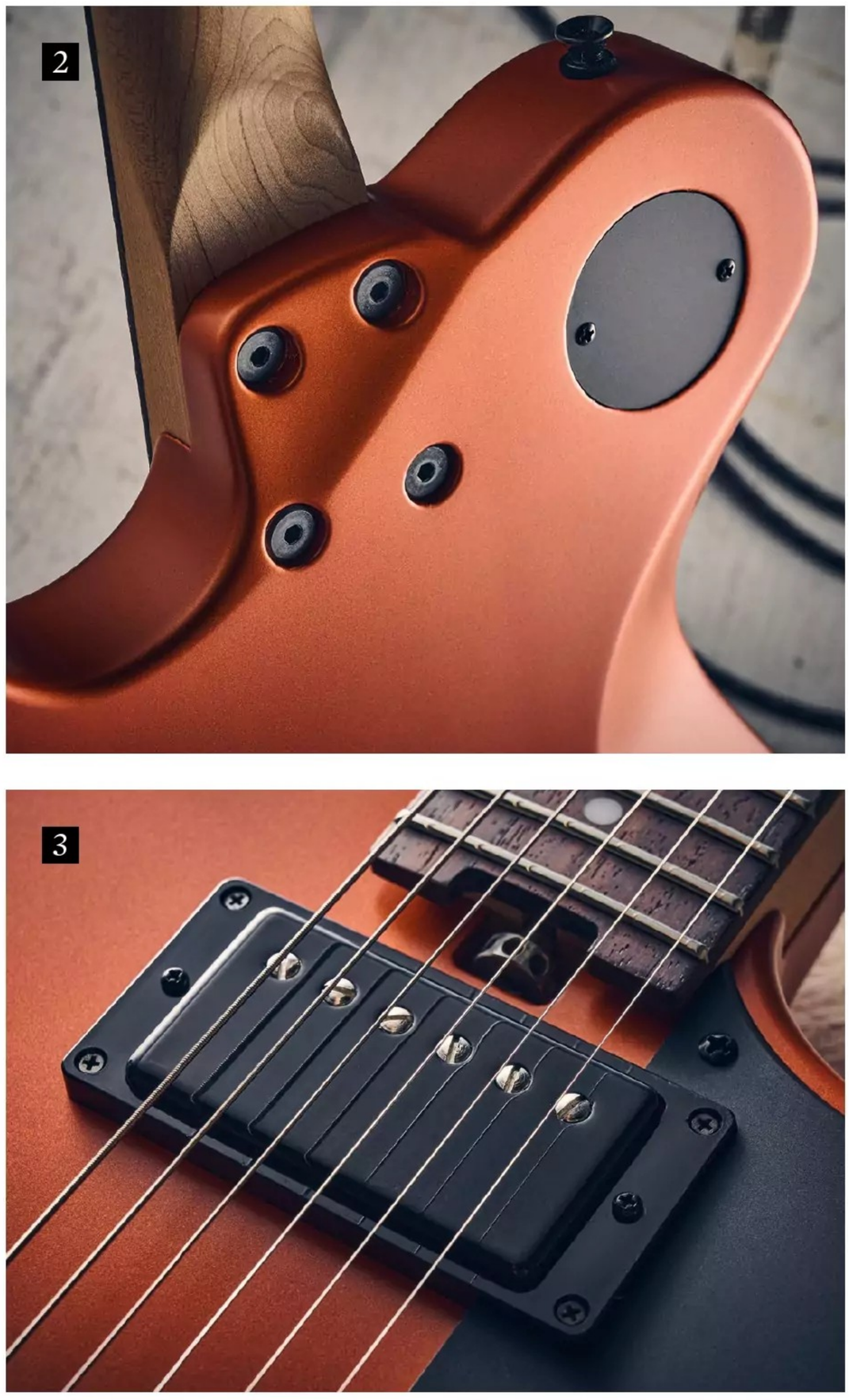
4. A major change from the earlier MD signatures is a move away from a T-style bridge plate to this Gibson-style setup. The bridge pickup started as a Benchmark but then received more winds and a ceramic magnet

heel has a nicely rounded nose on the treble side with a sloping chamfer that reduces a little bulk.

Another change here is that the neck is joined to the body with proper Allen-key bolts (not screws) that are recessed into the body and thread into insets in the neck itself. The rift-sawn neck wood has a slightly dark 'dirty maple' colouration and is a roasted maple, the rosewood 'board a classic deep brown with simple and utilitarian off-white dots.

Those neck bolts are one of the many changes to the original MD guitars, which both featured a Tele-style bridge plate with a dual-rail single-coil-sized humbucker, plus a standard-sized humbucker in neck position. Here, the MD-3 swaps to a classic tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, and the pickups are both full-size humbuckers. Like the earlier models, they're controlled with a shoulder-placed three-way toggle pickup selector switch and individual volume and tone controls for each pickup, here with proprietary knurled-edge aluminium control knobs. The tone controls have a pull-switch function, too, which voices each humbucker in parallel and (unlike a coil-split) remains hum-cancelling.

As you can see, all the hardware and pickup covers are black plated, including the rugged metal output jack plate, while the inverted pickguard is black plastic that's bead-blasted by Manson to give it a lightly textured matt finish – as are the recessed rear-cavity covers. It's a Manson and details are all-important.



2

3

Feel & Sounds

Of course, there's considerable familiarity here. The weight is good for the style, neither feather-light nor over heavy, and as you'd expect with its signature artist aim, it's totally gig- and tour-ready: tune it up and off you go. While the spoke-wheel truss rod adjuster means any necessary neck adjustments are swift to execute, we didn't need to touch it, despite our play time coinciding with the June heatwave in the UK. The setup is mainstream, the 0.010s providing a little fight in combination with the longer Fender scale length, and the medium jumbo gauge frets (measuring 2.58mm wide with a good height of just over 1.2mm) are immaculately installed on the 305mm (12-inch) radius 'board.

Dimensionally, the neck is very close to those previous MD models: 22mm deep at the 1st fret, 24mm by the 12th, with a width at the nut of 43.65mm and 51.75mm at the 12th. It has a very light matt sheen that virtually feels like raw wood, with a quite full-shouldered 'C' profile that feels comfortably full without it being excessive in the least. There's zero neck flex, intonation is bang on and tuning stability is first class, no doubt helped by the perfectly cut friction-reducing nut and straight string-pull to the Gotoh tuners with their height-adjustable posts (HAP) that make string trees unnecessary. Perfect craft.

There's zero neck flex, intonation is bang on and tuning stability is first class

Okay, twin-humbucker four-control T-styles aren't unique, but the combination of the longer Fender scale with that classic Gibson-style bridge setup certainly influences what we hear, and unplugged there's a smooth attack to the big ring. In that regard, again, it's classic Manson.

We carried out our first sound tests without any information on the moody looking humbuckers, but we're met with a big 'overwound' voice at the bridge contrasted by the flutier and beautifully vocal neck humbucker. The look of the guitar nods to the Telecaster and yet what we're hearing is way more 'Les Paul' with a big thickness at the bridge that recalls a late 70s popular pickup mod – maybe the bridge humbucker here should have double cream bobbins? It seems a perfect fit for a gained amp and/or your favourite dirt pedals, and if that's where you live, this



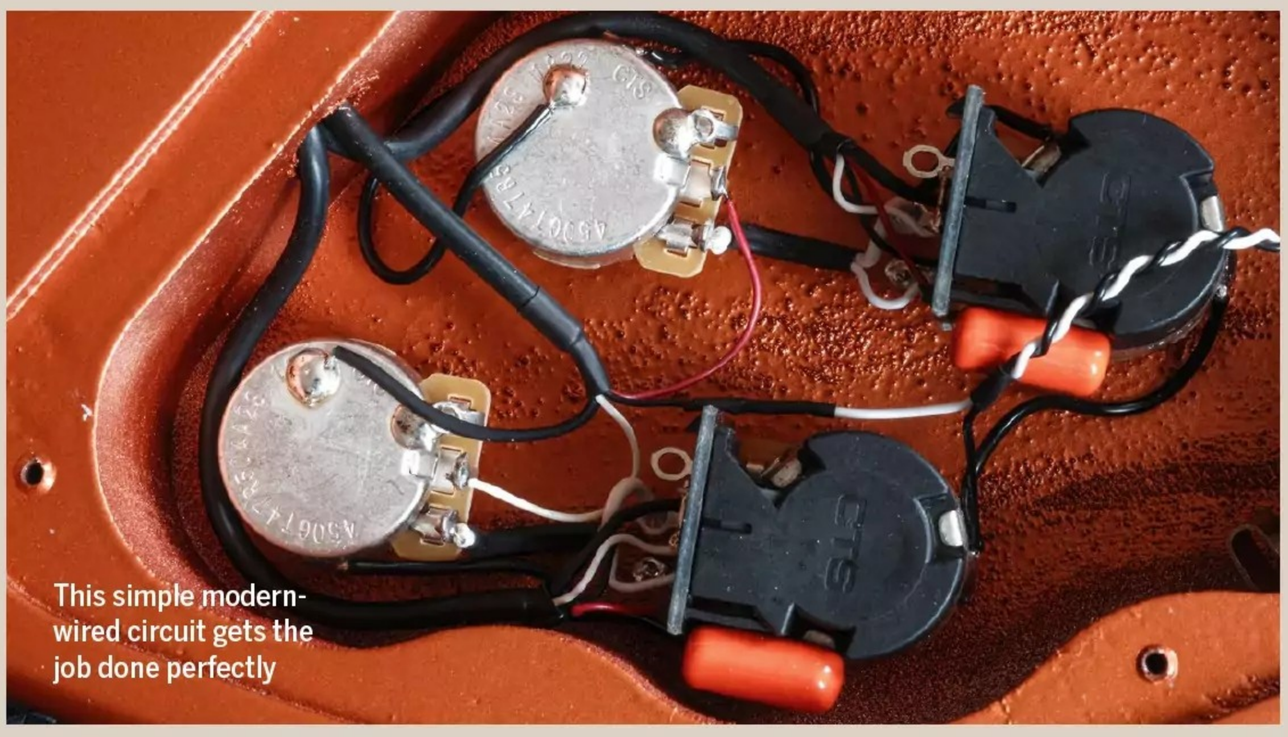
UNDER THE HOOD

What tricks are at play here?

In the large unscreened cavity there's certainly plenty of room for the components. Both volumes are standard CTS with a custom taper and a nominal value of 500kohms, while the tone controls are the modern-style CTS pull-push switched pots, again with a custom taper and valued at 500k. Two large Orange Drop 200-volt .022µF capacitors for the tone controls complete the circuit. There's no treble bleed on either of the volumes, and the circuit is wired modern-style.

Those switched pots are used to change each pickup's standard series wiring of its two coils to parallel, which retains the humbucking nature but provides a cleaner, more single-coil-like sound. This is something that Manson prefers over just dumping one coil to ground to achieve a standard coil-split – which, of course, isn't humbucking. Mounted on a push-push switched pot, as with the Verona and MA Junior we looked at back in issue 511, Manson calls this series/parallel option the Mojo switch.

The DCRs of the pickup set underline the style: measured at output the neck is 7.58k in series and 1.92k in parallel; the bridge rises to 13.72k in series and 3.53k in parallel.



This simple modern-wired circuit gets the job done perfectly

SIGNATURE AIMS

Artist guitars have played a big part in the long-running history of Manson Guitar Works. We catch up with Mikey Demus to discuss his latest collaboration

Working with the likes of Muse frontman Matt Bellamy, some of Manson's signature builds have pushed the concept of the electric guitar further than most, but, this time, the new Mikey Demus MD-3 is somewhat more 'everyman'. We met the Skindred guitarist and songwriter to find out more.

How did you first discover Manson Guitar Works?

"Well, it's going back a bit. My drummer is from Exeter, he knew the Manson shop and knew the company and the guys, so they became kind of like my inherited family. I'd been touring with Fender stuff, which I obviously love, but I had a load of guitars go missing on a flight. Although I did get the guitars back, I retired them as some were irreplaceable.

"So I was looking for a company that could put something together that I'd be able to use onstage every night. Manson seemed the obvious choice. I was kind of surprised that someone would want to make a *signature* guitar with my name on it. I hadn't really thought that would be something that would happen to me. I guess this was around 10 years ago. They sent me a couple of production models to play with, which were great. I just wanted to tweak a couple of things and we took it from there."

You pretty much only use Manson guitars these days, certainly onstage anyway.

"Yes, I own loads of guitars, all different kinds of stuff, but having something that's solid-bodied, stays in tune, sounds right and feels lightweight – that's my main criteria. The signature or custom route is always something I'd done myself in the past. When I played Fenders I'd always modify them a lot as you couldn't really get anything left-handed that rang my bell. I would always be taking something stock and making it my own – locking tuners, pickups that can handle higher gain.

"I'm an old punk rocker at the end of the day! I've always loved Telecasters, Les Paul Juniors. I've never been into pointy metal guitars, they never quite felt like mine. So when we did the first signature guitars [the MD-1 and MD-2] it was really, 'Lets start with the Telecaster – the Manson MA shape – and take it from there.'"

The new MD-3 is a very everyman working guitar

"Yes, I didn't want anything that was too niche – you're only going to play this if you play in a reggae-rock, punk-rock, heavy metal and electronic band. Well, there's not many of them! I want people to do their own thing with the guitar – I didn't want anything too weird."

The earlier signatures were a little more 'Tele', the new one a bit more 'Les Paul'. Why?

"I'd started a new band, King Sugar, in the time we've been prototyping, which I'm fronting and is still in the works. My guitar of choice for that was a Gibson and I just really got to grips with something that has a tune-o-matic bridge and full-size humbuckers. I thought if we ever do another signature guitar I'd love to explore that kind of thing but still retain everything about the MD-2 that I love. For me, we were trying to do the perfect crossover between a Telecaster and a Les Paul. I love both guitars and I really wanted to achieve something right down the middle."

> "We were trying to do the perfect crossover between a Tele and a Les Paul. I wanted something right down the middle"

We understand you started with a pair of Manson Benchmark humbuckers but needed more heat at the bridge?

"I'm not sure exactly what Simon [Thorn – Manson's in-house pickup expert] was doing, but he would send me a new version and it only took a couple of times to get it right – that's the one! I'm not a massive fan of really high-output pickups, but then some stock pickups don't have enough, so it's somewhere in-between. Simon did a great job and I guess you can call them custom pickups."

Are you a fan of the parallel humbucking sounds?

"Yes, live, I find those more useful than a coil-split, which can feel like too much of a jump, not least with a bigger sounding humbucker. It can sound too thin and obviously be noisy, too.

"Because of the reggae thing we do, I need to be able to change to a smaller sounding guitar, almost as if you want to pick up a different guitar. But then I don't want the sound to change too much and the parallel mode is perfect for that. I'm also the only guitar player in the band so I need to cover a lot of ground – so it's versatile but usable, too." **[DB]**



Skindred's Mikey Demus with his new Manson signature, the MD-3

© MANSON GUITARWORKS BY JOLYON HOLROYD



These machined aluminium Manson knobs, with small 'M' pointers, have lightly knurled sides, and the tone controls are easy to pull up to switch the pickups to parallel

MD-3 has your name on it. We spent far too long with a smile on our face reliving our rockier days!

It'll be a little too pushy at the bridge if you're chasing a more classic 'Burst-era voice, and on cleaner amp voicings with a little hair we might suggest a treble bleed on both those volumes to maximise the clarity when you turn down. But pull up those tone controls to voice the parallel modes and it's almost like a completely different guitar: cleaner, snappier and more single-coil-like but still humbucking, so there's no noise even with those heavier gains but a lot more clarity. There's jangle aplenty here, too, or some well-voiced funk, before you slam back into series mode and pile on the rock. With both pickups on, you can mix the series/parallel modes to good effect: plenty of girth with a little more edge. All in, it's an easy drive and quite a ride, too!

Verdict

While plenty of signature guitars employ numerous twists to control circuits, not to mention unique colours or artist-themed inlays, the MD-3 is almost an *anti*-signature. Aside from Mikey Demus's small signature squiggle on the headstock back, there's nothing to give the game away. The black hardware nods to harder rock style, which is easily handled, but the MD-3 is capable of a much more nuanced, broad voice. The pull-switch parallel voices provide single-coil-like contrast but remain humbucking, another important bit of insurance for the gigging musician. And, as ever for a Manson build, there's not a hair out of place: it's unfussy and very fit-for-purpose guitar making. A faultless, well-tuned and well-voiced working guitar. G

The black hardware nods to harder rock style, but the MD-3 is capable of a much more nuanced voice



MANSON MD-3 MIKEY DEMUS SIGNATURE

PRICE: £2,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Single-cut solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece obeche
NECK: Roasted maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/43.65mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white dots, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Gotoh tune-o-matic style bridge and stud tailpiece, Gotoh SG 381 HAP tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Manson Benchmark+ black-plated covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls (w/ pull switch parallel option)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.09/6.8
OPTIONS: Colour only; Dry Satin Black model is £1,999. Both colours supplied with Hiscox case. Limited custom-order slots available (£POA)
RANGE OPTIONS: M-Series focuses on MB shape with tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece, Manson PF-1 and Stealth Pro Sustainaic system. Options include onboard Z-Vex Fuzz Factory (from £1,999). UK-made MA Junior is £1,399
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra cost
FINISHES: Atomic Orange (black hardware and scratchplate, as reviewed), Dry Satin Black (Wildcat Orange scratchplate, nickel-plated bridge and tailpiece and black-plated tuners) – matt polyurethane to body and neck

Manson Guitar Works
01364 653751
www.mansonguitarworks.com

Guitarist GOLD **10/10**

PROS Detailed unfussy build; excellent weight; big rock series voicing with parallel mode contrast; new heel design with proper neck bolts

CONS Some might prefer a bridge pickup with a little less heat, but then it wouldn't be the Mikey Demus signature model!

FIRST PLAY



BLACKSTAR ID:X 100
£379

WHAT IS IT? 100-watt combo amp using digital modelling that also features speaker-emulated outputs

Modelling Moves

Blackstar's latest digital modelling amps pack in a comprehensive feature set, with hands-on control, to suit many scenarios

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

Blackstar has had digital modelling amps in its roster for a while, the most recent being the ID:Core, but the brand has now released a new pair of high-powered digital combos that are said to go above and beyond previous releases: the 50-watt ID:X 50 and, the subject of this review, the 100-watt ID:X 100.

The amp features six selectable amp voices with hands-on control over all of the necessary gain and tonal parameters, as well as an effects section that can place up to four effects in series. All this feeds into a power amp that drives a 12-inch speaker and can be set for 100-, 10- or one-watt operation. There's also an effects loop that lets you place pedals between the preamp and power amp, or feed the power amp from a different sound source, such as an amp-in-the-box pedal, for example.

Besides use as a conventional amp, you get a stereo line out for silent headphone practice that features Blackstar's CabRig speaker emulation. There's also a summed mono version of this on XLR to feed a PA or for recording. For computer recording, you get four USB output channels to cover all eventualities: stereo (mirroring the



The ID:X 100 is easily portable and great for gigging – but it goes way beyond that


Blackstar

1. These are speaker-emulated outputs using Blackstar's CabRig IR-based DSP. You have to use the Architect software to set it up, but you can save the CabRig setting per patch or have one of two global settings (select with the button)

2. These Power and Response selectable options use DSP to shape the characteristics of the power amp. You can reduce the 100-watt output to either 10 watts or one watt without losing tone or feel, and choose between three emulated power valve types

3. The ID:X series integrates with Blackstar's Architect software (for PC and Mac), which lays out everything logically with clear graphics on your computer screen, and allows for in-depth editing and patch management



1



2

emulated line out), a dry mono signal, and a mono signal taken from immediately after the preamp allowing the use of your own IRs if desired. A USB also provides a stereo input for bringing music into the ID:X, something you can also do through a 3.5mm line input.

With a huge range of options available for tailoring tone, some way of saving those sounds is pretty essential and the ID:X doesn't disappoint as it features 99 patch locations for storage. These are arranged in 33 banks of three, and the first three banks are immediately hands-on available from the amp itself. To access all of the patches, you can use MIDI (not available on the 50-watt version), which can also take care of parameter changes, or you can connect a two-button latching footswitch for patch up/down.

For more flexibility, use of Blackstar's FS12 foot-controller adds bank up/down control to the patch selection, as well as assignable effects on/off. While tweaking sounds from the amp's top panel is very straightforward, all aided by a small but clear display panel, for really getting down to the nitty gritty of things and organising your patches there's the free Blackstar Architect software for PC and Mac, which lays everything out logically with clear graphics on your computer screen.



3

SOFTWARE IMAGE: BLACKSTAR

Sounds

Straight out of the box you can use the patches in the ID:X as Blackstar has programmed the first three banks with some choice sounds covering a range of possibilities. Alternatively, you can press a button to go into Manual mode for WYSIWYG operation and start setting up your sounds.

The six amp voices provide a range of familiar tones: Clean Warm, Clean Bright and Crunch take us through Fender, Vox and 60s Marshall-like tones; Super Crunch heads into the Mesa/Boogie realm of cascading gain stages; while OD1 and OD2 offer two sides of the high-gain coin. Bass, Middle and Treble knobs will instantly tweak the sound like a conventional amp, and you also get the Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) knob that shifts the response of the whole tone control, effectively running from Fender-ish to Marshall-like and all stages in between. On top of these are Presence and Resonance (power amp bottom-end response) controls, accessed by holding down the Shift button; this also gives you access to an easy-to-set-up noise gate.

The power amp has some DSP voicing to add in the sense of power amp valve clipping, too, with the three options for different output valve types – EL84, EL34 and 6L6 – covering all of the primary colours.





The four effects categories are each represented by an illuminated button. Press the button and you will see the effect's name in the display along with two main parameters. The push/turn knobs allow editing and there's also a Tap tempo button

What we're hearing are really good touch-sensitive playable amp sounds to suit all kinds of music. The combinations of preamp and power amp, together with all of the available tonal adjustment, give you plenty of options to dial in the familiar or zone in on something more bespoke.

There are over 35 different effects types onboard spread between four categories that run in a logical order: Pre FX, Modulation, Delay and Reverb. Pre FX offers compression, boost, envelope filter and a whole slew of different drive and fuzz options, including modelled Klon, Big Muff, Tube Screamer and Rat among others, all of which complement the amps really well.

All the major modulation effects types are covered, with Bias, Opto and Harmonic tremolo and a Uni-Vibe, and there are five different delay types including Shimmer delay and solid emulations of BBD analogue delay and Tape Echo with new and old tape-age options. There are also five reverb types to choose, with Spring actually having an adjustable Drip parameter.

Adjustment of any of the effect parameters is quickly carried out by a pair of small knobs with both turn and push action below the display, which clearly shows you the parameter values. The process is even easier in the Architect app where you get the four effects graphically displayed as pedals with knobs that you can grab with the mouse.

What we're hearing are really good touch-sensitive playable amp sounds to suit all kinds of music

If you're using the rear-panel outputs for recording and more, Blackstar's IR-based CabRig DSP comes into play with a small but great-sounding choice of 1x12, 2x12 and 4x12 cabs, with microphone choice and adjustable room emulation. You can save the CabRig setups into the amp patches or set up a global CabRig, which works for everything.

Verdict

An easily portable 100-watt combo, the ID:X can handle gigging with ease, but it goes way beyond that and is not so much an amp, more a do-it-all guitar player's toolbox. While it's easy to use with no-messing hands-on control and has a great set of sounds, the range of extra facilities here confer massive flexibility that will take care of a player's needs in any practice, recording or gigging scenario. Boss may be the market leader for this sort of thing with its extensive Katana series, but it looks like Blackstar is poised to shake things up in the genre with this latest offering. G



BLACKSTAR ID:X 100

PRICE: £379
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: 100W 1x12 modelling combo
OUTPUT: 100W
DIMENSIONS: 530 (w) x 250 (d) x 440mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 14.3/31.5
CABINET: Open-backed combo with 12" Anthem speaker
CHANNELS: 3
CONTROLS: Voice selector, Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, ISF, Master Volume, Manual button, Bank button, Channel buttons (1, 2, 3), Effects Type, Effects Page, Pre FX button, Mod button, Delay button, Reverb/Tuner button, Tap button, Power button (1W, 10W, 100W), Response button (EL84, EL34,6L6), CabRig Select (Global 1, Global 2 or patch), CabRig Volume
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard effects send/standard effects return, 3.5mm Line In/ Streaming input, standard line output, XLR DI output, MIDI In, MIDI Thru, USB, footswitch socket
FOOTSWITCH: Dual footswitch capability (optional extra)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 99 patches, onboard effects, tap tempo, tuner, software editor, USB audio interface capability, MIDI control, aux input, headphones output, XLR direct output, noise gate
OPTIONS: FS-18 2-way (£45) and FS-12 5-button (£79) footswitches
RANGE OPTIONS: ID:X 50 (£292)

Blackstar
01604 817817
www.blackstaramps.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Nicely portable; affordable; various power options; selection of amp types to suit most players; onboard effects; speaker-emulated outputs; USB recording facility; software editor/librarian app

CONS It probably won't appeal to valve purists, but in its genre we can't really fault it



GRETSCH PROFESSIONAL BROADKASTER LX
£2,849

WHAT IS IT? A semi-hollow Gretsch guitar with punchy pickups, without losing the charm of its pedigree

Radio Ready

The Broadkaster is back on the air, this time with a number of modernised features to make this a contemporary, high-performance semi-hollow rocker

Words Stu Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

The Broadkaster name has been a constant in the Gretsch instrument family since the 50s, but before it grew a neck and had strings attached to it, the Gretsch Broadkaster was (and remains) *gulp*... a drum kit. Not only that, but it was the drum kit whose trademark changed the trajectory of rock 'n' roll forever when it rock-blocked Leo Fender's use of the name Broadcaster, resulting in the now-infamous wilderness-era 'Nocasters', before 'Telecaster' was settled on. All's well that ends well, because otherwise we'd all be abbreviating Leo's lightning-in-a-bottle design to something ridiculous, like, 'Broady'...

But that was then, and this is now, and ironically, since 2002, the Fender stable has handled production and distribution of Gretsch guitars worldwide. Which brings us to the latest iteration of the Broadkaster for 2025: the Professional Collection Broadkaster LX Center Block. That's right, no confusing G-prefixed string of numbers, just a good old descriptive moniker.




VOX
GRETSCH
Bigsby
PATENT



1. To our ears, these Pro Twin Six pickups have more of a traditional humbucker tonality than 'Tron twang. But they work well for rock styles, and have a lot of character and distinction between the two units. They're both responsive and very versatile

This version sees the Broadkaster retain its essence – an archtop, semi-hollow design using laminated maple throughout for the body, glued-in maple neck, a pair of humbuckers and a Bigsby. But, all these features (and more) have been overhauled to give the Broadkaster LX a high-performance spec. It starts with the body design, which sees the cutaways redrawn to offer better fret access above the 17th when compared with its Players Edition counterpart. Under the hood sits a centre-block, but rather than a single piece of spruce or maple, here Gretsch has split the difference by merging the two with its Channel Core design. The block itself is chambered, with the intended result being extra bite from the maple, punch from the spruce and resonance all round.



Electronically, it's the standard Broadkaster layout with a pair of humbuckers, individual volume controls plus a master tone and master volume control and a three-way switch. But those humbuckers are Gretsch's new Pro Twin Six humbuckers, which use Alnico V magnets in the neck, and Alnico IV in the bridge-position unit, with Gretsch describing them as some of its "most modern and powerful pickups to date".

The 'performance' aspect continues with the hardware selection, too: a string-through Bigsby B7 to make changes easier and faster, and at the other end, Gretsch-branded Gotoh locking tuners to achieve the same speedy threading combined with stability. Below this there's a TUSQ nut; the bridge is Gotoh; and the side of the neck is adorned with 2mm diameter Luminlay side-dots, outlined neatly in black, which makes them feel less apologetic and more of an attention-grabber than some executions we've seen.

2. The feedback-busting centre block here uses Gretsch's new Channel Core design. This is a mix of maple and spruce pieces, which are then chambered to help everything resonate. Gretsch says this method helps with punch and clarity

3. Here, Gretsch has made some additions to what is quite a traditional instrument, prepping it with stage-ready timesavers such as locking tuners and a string-through Bigsby while aiming for a more modern tonality. It works very well for classic rock and indie

4. Gretsch has made the cutaways deeper for better access to the upper frets, and while it's still a stretch to get all the way up to the 22nd, the added air definitely helps in this regard

Feel & Sounds

Tradition tells us that few guitars shout 'class' like a big-bodied, ebony semi-hollow. Pulling the Broadkaster from its case takes things a step further as it comes out with enough drip to appear like it's just ransacked a jewellery shop. From the gold tuners and metal headstock plate down to the pickup covers, volume controls, bridge and the meaty Bigsby (even the binding matches the gold hue) we can only conclude that *this* was the contents of the briefcase that illuminated Travolta's face in *Pulp Fiction*.

All of this might allude to a traditional player. But the U-shaped neck profile offers a modern ride without feeling too waify. The ebony fingerboard is flawless, and it's joined by 22 medium-jumbo frets.

This guitar isn't necessarily aimed at those looking for the archetypal 'great Gretsch sound' – and that's not a bad thing

It's bound and subtly rolled at the edges making an overall comfortable playing experience. Our review guitar comes perfectly intonated, with a pretty low action while the 625mm scale length gives a familiar, just-shorter-than-Gibson feel. But with the addition of the Bigsby, it feels less slinky with a little more perceived tension on string bends. As always, though, it plays nicely offering effortless flutters in both directions and returning to pitch with ease and accuracy.

Everything is put together nicely, even down to the pickup selector, which feels weighty and includes a purposeful 'clunk' when changing positions. Talking of weight, don't let that semi-hollow construction fool you. The Bigsby keeps things anchored at the body end, which removes any potential for neck-dive, but also means the overall weight of this guitar is far from svelte at 3.99kg (8.8lb).

Acoustically, it's vibrant, with the sort of unplugged volume we'd expect from a guitar of this type. Plugged in, we get to discover what the Pro Twin Sixes are all about. In the bridge position, there's a fairly well-balanced frequency response, which, as promised, comes punching out with plenty of attack. The master volume is wired with a treble-bleed circuit and the master tone is a no-load type – with

3



4





It's gold – and there's a lot of it! This Broadkaster is well stocked with third-party hardware from Gotoh (locking tuners and bridge), along with a Bigsby B7 vibrato. There are no nickel or chrome options, though, so if bling is your thing, you'll love it

a 'Squeezebox' capacitor – effectively removing itself from the circuit with the control dialled all the way up. Despite this, we still found ourselves reaching for the treble and presence control on our amp a little just to lift things in the upper frequencies. Yet surprisingly, the pickup still performs well under plenty of gain, maintaining note clarity and separation well.

It's always nice to encounter two pickups with distinct voices, and the Broadkaster LX delivers on this front. Flipping to the neck position reveals a bit of a midrange scoop between 800Hz and 2,000Hz,

It'll span plenty of rock ground, from classic to modern indie, while giving you a high-end 'Nice Gretsch' as your platform

and the tonal result is more chime and an almost Fender-ish snap to the note. This is emphasised with the volume rolled back a little too, giving some extra percussion, and like its opposite number, the neck position is full of piano-like clarity under'drive.

Verdict

This isn't necessarily aimed at those looking for the archetypal 'great Gretsch sound', and that's not a bad thing. Outside of its vintage rock 'n' roll stereotype, Gretsch's 'modern' iterations often get lumped in with quiff-inspired punk and its sub-genres, but the Broadkaster LX provides something different. It'll span plenty of rock ground, from classic to modern indie, while giving you a high-end 'Nice Gretsch' as your platform.

The build is fantastic, and there are plenty of uprated appointments, which means you're unlikely to mod it, because it's already been done for you! Proof, once more, that semi-hollows can rock as hard as the clichés, even if they are bedecked with gold. G



GRETSCH PROFESSIONAL BROADKASTER LX

PRICE: £2,849 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Semi-hollow electric
BODY: Laminated maple
NECK: Maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.86mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, pearloid Neoclassical thumbnail face inlays, Luminlay side dots, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Gotoh locking tuners and tune-o-matic-style bridge, Bigsby B7 vibrato (string-through)
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch Pro Twin Six pickups (neck w/ Alnico V magnet, bridge w/ Alnico IV), master volume w/ treble-bleed, master tone w/ no-load 'Squeezebox' capacitor, individual pickup volume controls, three-position toggle pickup selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.99/8.8
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: Broadkaster Jr LX Center Block (down-sized single-cut) at £2,849; G6609TG Players Edition Broadkaster (£2,699); Electromatic LTD Flame Okoume Broadkaster (£1,039)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Black (as reviewed), Cadillac Green – high gloss

Fender
0333 200 8765
www.gretschguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Excellent build; very well set up; lots of tonal variation in the pickups

CONS Too much bling for some; no hardtail version; bridge pickup could use some more bite

Lowden
GUITARS

lowdenguitars.com



KMA GEMINUS STEREO TRUE DOUBLE TRACKER
£199

WHAT IS IT? A pedal that gives the illusion of two guitars playing together

Double Take

Deliver a studio trick live on stage with Geminus, a thickener and widener that can deliver the feel of two guitars from just one

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Matt Lincoln



1. You use the TDT Width knob to set how widely panned you'd like the double-tracking to be: the centre detent position is for 50 per cent left and right; fully clockwise offers 100 per cent left and right; and fully CCW is mono/centred

2. Add movement to your doubled signal with some pitch modulation via the Pitch switch. Its central position has no modulation, and the other two positions offer different modulation strengths

3. The sockets are TRS so can be used with mono or TRS jacks – you set their operation with the Mode switch for stereo in/stereo out, mono in/stereo out or mono in/mono/out

Double-tracking has long been a studio technique to fatten up and widen your guitar sound, but an instant version of it has also been available in a select few dedicated pedals. The latest of these is the KMA Machines Geminus, which uses a tweaked iteration of the double-tracking facility found in the company's more complex Endgame, a pedal with IR cab and power amp simulation that's designed to sit at the end of your signal chain.

Double-tracking in the studio means recording the same part twice so you have two performances that can be panned apart in stereo to create a bigger sound, aided by the inevitable slight differences between the two performances. What this pedal does is Automatic Double Tracking (ADT), giving the sense of two guitars playing by adding in a delayed – and possibly modulated – version as you play.

The Geminus has TRS input and output with three toggle-switched modes of operation, the ideal mode being a mono input and a stereo output emulating what traditionally happens in a studio. You can also run it as stereo in/stereo out or mono in/mono out.

What's going on under the hood is AI-powered and is impressively effective in the way it immediately delivers a rich spacious stereo sound from a single guitar: once you've heard it, you won't want to turn the pedal off. Three knobs have notched centre detent positions that give you expertly dialled-in tones straight out of the box, although there's plenty of variation if you want it. The large knob sets the width of the stereo field, while the Time knob adjusts the 'tightness' of the double-tracking, allowing a looser feel if desired, and the Level knob balances the volume of the doubled signal against the original source.

For more variation in the sound, you have the option of adding pitch modulation – a detuning in the doubled signal for more spaciousness, and a practical alternative to using a stereo chorus pedal, working particularly well on clean sounds. While this is definitely a pedal that should be used with a stereo output, the Geminus is not redundant in mono as you can use it for slapback or chorus.

Verdict

With a big sound in a compact footprint, the Geminus is an excellent, extremely easy-to-use pedal that's not just for double-tracking but also for spacious stereo modulation. G

KMA GEMINUS STEREO TRUE DOUBLE TRACKER

PRICE: £199
ORIGIN: Germany
TYPE: Stereo double-tracking pedal
FEATURES: Switchable True/Buffered Bypass, silent relay-based soft switching
CONTROLS: TDT Width, Time, Level, Pitch switch, Stereo Mode switch, internal bypass selection dipswitch, bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard TRS output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 100mA
DIMENSIONS: 67 (w) x 123 (d) x 53mm (h)

Audio Distribution Group
www.kma-machines.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; various mono and stereo configurations; great dual-tracking effect with practical adjustments; optional pitch modulation; top-mounted jacks

CONS The TRS sockets require a Y-cable for stereo use – separate L and R sockets would maybe have been more convenient



3

THE RIVALS

The TC Electronic Mimiq Doubler (£89) gives players the option of adding up to three additional guitar tracks, with control over the tightness of the doubling and the blend between dry and effected signals. Strymon's Deco V2 (£349) is designed to deliver analogue tape-style saturation and compression but has a second footswitch for a double-tracking effect with several adjustable parameters. Elsewhere, Keeley's 30ms Automatic Double Tracker (£190) has two voices that can be tuned up to 30 cents sharp or flat and delayed by up to 30 milliseconds for doubling sounds; it can also feature reverb when used in mono.



EARTHQUAKER DEVICES RANCHO DE LA LUNA DIRT TRANSMITTER FUZZ DRIVER
£189

WHAT IS IT? New version of EarthQuaker's discontinued two-transistor fuzzbox

1

2

3

Rancho Raunch

The return of EarthQuaker Devices' Dirt Transmitter fuzz sees it in a compact format with new desert studio-inspired artwork

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Matt Lincoln



1. The Bias knob adjusts the voltage to the transistors. Turn it clockwise for more natural fuzz tones. It is 'properly biased' at 5 o'clock

2. The footswitch offers both standard latching operation and momentary operation where you hold the footswitch down for as long as you'd like to use the effect

3. The Rancho de la Luna-themed graphics for this edition of the pedal were created by Mike Egan, an artist who calls on an unlikely background as a funeral director in his artwork

You may have heard the Dirt Transmitter Fuzz Driver name before as there have been various iterations of the pedal in the EarthQuaker roster over the years. It debuted in 2008 as a three-knob fuzz pedal, taking its inspiration from the Fuzz Face. Not too long after that release, a variable Bias knob was added – and it's that four-knob configuration that we find in this new 'Rancho de la Luna' version of the pedal with artwork from Mike Egan. Rancho de la Luna is a recording studio in Joshua Tree, California, run by Dave Catching, a touring member of numerous bands, including Eagles Of Death Metal and Queens Of The Stone Age, and this special edition of the pedal was conceived by him and EQD's Jamie Stillman to celebrate 30 years of the studio.

Key to the pedal's sound is said to be the circuit's particular silicon transistors. EarthQuaker says that they are lower gain, with a warmth similar to germanium transistors when overdriven. These transistors still possess the top-end grind typical of silicon-based fuzz pedals, enabling the sound of the pedal to cut through.

Our ears can confirm that. The Fuzz knob runs from lean raunchy drive through to thicker saturated sustain at the end of its travel, with plenty of sweet spots along the way. It's all nicely dynamic, too, allowing you to set the dirt level with guitar volume. The Tone knob sets the top-end presence to suit, from sludge to screech, but the Bias knob delivers the most sonic influence, offering wide variation on the actual character of the fuzz. Set correctly for conventional fuzz pedal operation at fully clockwise, you can roll it back, initially for subtle variations and then into the textured ripping fuzz realm where the sound gets gated, until you get to extreme 'broken pedal' sputter. What's more, if you'd like to dish out the dirt in short blasts, the pedal's Flexi-switch allows momentary action as well as standard latching – press and hold for as long as you want the fuzz to be active.

Verdict

It's good to see a Dirt Transmitter back again, especially in a compact enclosure. An evolved Fuzz Face with an edge, this is no single-sound pedal but one with loads of scope to dial in your favoured fuzz flavours. G

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES RANCHO DE LA LUNA DIRT TRANSMITTER FUZZ DRIVER

PRICE: £189
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: Relay-based true bypass, Flexi-Switch momentary and latching operation
CONTROLS: Level, Fuzz, Tone, Bias, footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 3mA
DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 121 (d) x 57mm (h)

440 Distribution
0113 2842342
www.earthquakerdevices.com



THE RIVALS

There are plenty of pedals around that take the Fuzz Face circuit as inspiration, but if you want the flexibility of variable bias, the SolidGoldFX If 6 Was 9 BC183 MKII Silicon Fuzz (£199) not only has variable bias but also has a variable voltage pump, supplying anywhere from five to 15 volts DC from a single nine-volt power source. If you don't mind ordering from the USA, you get to choose which transistors you want in the Analog Man Custom Sunface with Sundial (bias) knob (from $220). For a lot less outlay there's the JHS Pedals 3 Series Fuzz £99 with a Bias knob and Fat switch.

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Wide range of fuzz sounds; Bias control; cool artwork; compact size; volume knob clean-up; low noise floor

CONS This edition is limited so may not stick around too long



the Wishlist

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

Gibson Marcus King ES-345 £3,499

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 44427661** WEB **www.gibson.com** WORDS **Daryl Robertson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Matt Lincoln**

Gibson's semi-hollow middle-child has long lived in the shadow of its more popular siblings. Not as universally loved as the simpler ES-335 and not as flashy as the top-of-the-line ES-355, the ES-345 can often be overlooked or forgotten. But one look at Marcus King's latest take on this Gibson classic, and you certainly won't forget it in a hurry.

King has been fortunate to receive not one but two signature models based on his somewhat quirky Sideways Vibrola-equipped 1962 ES-345. The original guitar is a cherished family heirloom, passed down from his grandfather to his father, before landing in the hands of this South Carolinian virtuoso.

The original run of King models was unveiled in 2021, with the Custom Shop recreating his unconventional semi-hollow in exquisite detail. Fast forward to 2025, and this time the guitar enters the Nashville line-up, complete with several design adjustments born out of King playing the original live for so many years.

One notable update is the switch from stereo wiring to a simpler mono setup, making it easier to plug and play. The Varitone circuit has also been eliminated, and while, at first glance, it appears to boast the Sideways Vibrola, it's actually a fixed tailpiece in disguise.

Even though this new model abandons some of the classic ES-345 characteristics, it retains a fairly traditional construction. Sticking to the tried-and-tested recipe of a three-ply maple/poplar/maple body, solid-maple centre-block, and quarter-sawn Adirondack spruce bracing, this guitar is plenty resonant, just like a good ES should be.

As we move to the neck – crafted from mahogany, of course – we find an effortlessly playable rounded profile that's the perfect handful. The fingerboard is adorned with the ES-345's famous split parallelogram inlays and is peppered with 22 medium jumbo frets.

At the tonal core of this model is a duo of Gibson Custombucker pickups, hand-wired electrics with Orange Drop capacitors, delivering that classic bell-like chime that large semi-hollows are known for. Whether you're diving into juicy blues leads, smooth jazz comps or raucous rock riffs, this ES-345 can do it all.

Okay, some will argue that, with so many ES-345 features missing, this new Marcus King model is now more akin to a fancier ES-335 than its original inspiration. However, we don't think it really matters. This is a fantastic semi-hollow that we encourage you to seek out and try for yourself. G

1. The guitar has a Marcus King plaque under the bridge, but you can switch it out for the 'Custom Made' variation included in the case if you prefer

2. In keeping with ES-345 tradition, this guitar features sparkling gold hardware from head to tail, from the gilded Grover Rotomatic tuners to the fixed, non-functional Vibrola

3. Sideways Vibrolas were never designed to fit ES guitars. When used, the arm would scratch King's original finish and cause tuning instability, which explains why it was ultimately removed



1



2


3

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

4. Aiming to recreate the sacred Patent Applied For tone, Gibson's Custombuckers have become the go-to pickup for the Historic Reissue models (as well as many new Epiphones) and were even featured in the pricier Custom Shop King model

5. Split parallelogram inlays are a quintessential ES-345 trope, and they look as good as ever sitting atop a gorgeous Indian rosewood fingerboard – another carryover from the Custom Shop run

6. The neck is fairly standard for those familiar with Gibson's current Nashville output. Billed as a rounded profile, it's not too big, not too small, and is seriously playable



THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

Gibson Custom Noel Gallagher 60s Les Paul Standard £17,499

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

JARGON CRUNCHING

Ageing
Simulates roughly 50 years of careful use and includes hardware patina, natural wear from playing, pick trails and some lightweight dings.

Well...what's the story?

This summer, Oasis – a gang of hopefuls from Manchester – have been doing a few small dates around the country. To celebrate, Gibson has teamed up with guitarist Noel Gallagher (look him up) to release a Les Paul based on the guitar he's playing on stage. It's a limited edition run of 25, and each one will come with handwritten lyrics to an Oasis song.

I thought Noel G played semi-hollows?

He does, and there's a strong pedigree of Gibson/Epiphone hollow and semi-hollows in the Oasis annals, marked by a number of special releases over the years. There was the 90s Epiphone Supernova, and most recently the Gibson Noel Gallagher ES-335 and Epiphone Riviera models. But Noel has had a love for Les Pauls throughout his career, too, with an Epiphone

LIMITED RUN

There are only 25 guitars in existence, made as replicas of Noel's custom-ordered Made To Measure Les Paul. The only difference is that the replicas feature lighter ageing from the Murphy Lab than Noel's

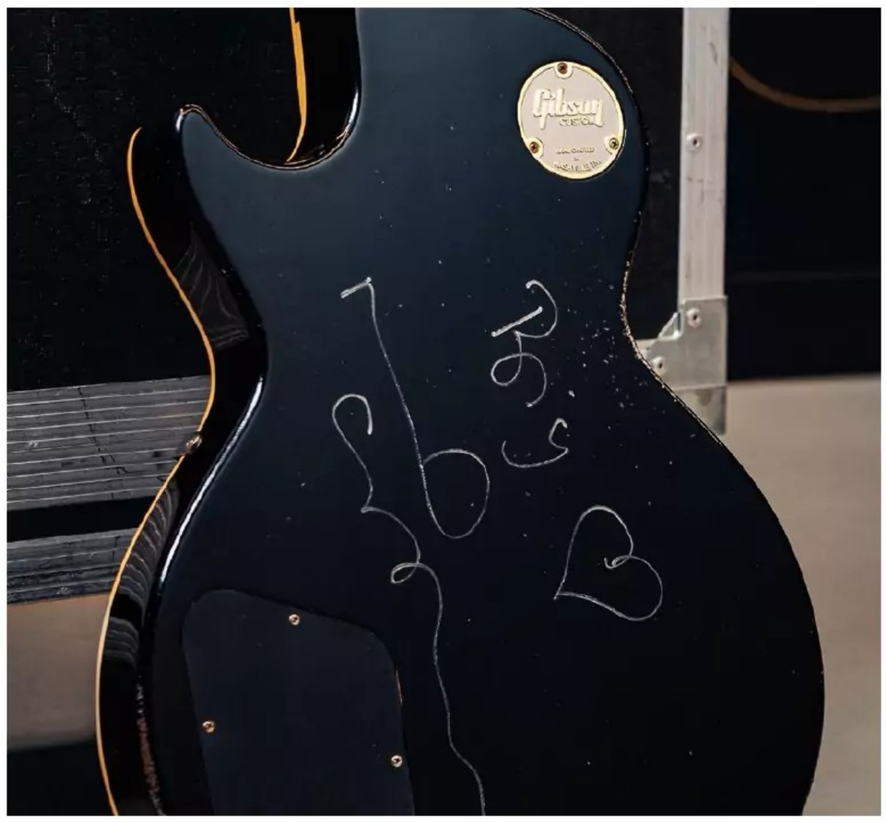
YOUNG INFLUENCE

Noel appears to have partly channelled Neil Young for his latest collaboration with Gibson – an Ebony Les Paul Standard loaded with P-90s

WORDS COUNT

Each guitar comes with a lyric sheet to one of 25 Oasis songs, handwritten by The Chief himself. It's pot luck as to which one is paired with which guitar, but the selection was made around the potential Live '25 setlist. As well as the lyric sheet, each guitar comes with a handmade Bear guitar strap and 70s-style case







While Noel is often associated with hollow and semi-hollow Gibson models, his first main guitar was an Epiphone Les Paul. Here, he's going back to a solidbody with a Les Paul Standard

LP Standard serving as his main guitar in the early days, and a well-documented Les Paul Custom gifted to him by Johnny Marr being two examples.

For this tour, Noel commissioned a Custom Made To Measure Les Paul, and that's the inspiration for this limited run of guitars.

The Wonderpaul! It's got P-90s, though?

Very good. Yes, Gibson tells us that the switch to P-90s comes from Noel's use of USA Casinos in his other band the High Flying Birds, and we'd speculate that given Oasis is currently a three-guitar line-up, the P-90s offer some tonal variation. Here, the brief was to get the P-90 sound in a format better suited to high-volume performances. However, it wasn't originally intended to be released, remaining a one-off until Noel and Gibson clapped eyes on it, at which point the idea for a limited-run came about.

I've seen that guitar in some of the clips from the gigs! So these are exact replicas?

Gibson says they're identical in every way – 60s slim-neck profile, nickel hardware, P-90s... They've even included a handmade Bear strap like Noel's. The only difference is that the 25 guitars available for purchase feature a Murphy Lab Light Aged treatment to the Ebony finish and hardware, while Noel went a bit heavier for his guitar. But you can add your own 'mojo' for free!

Let's talk case candy. What about the extras?

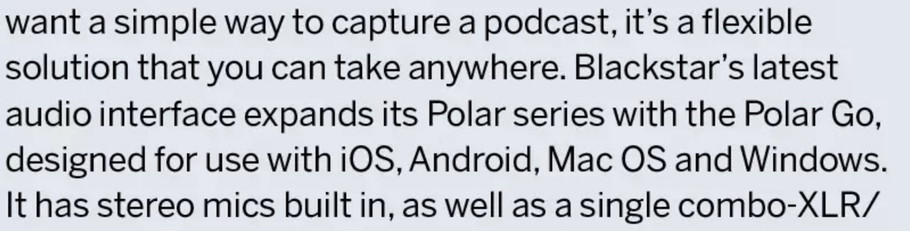
As mentioned, there are 25 guitars. Noel has handwritten the lyrics to 25 Oasis songs, and each guitar will come with an original lyric sheet. There's no selection process, though – the lyric sheets and guitars have been paired randomly – so it's luck-of-the-draw as to which guitar comes with which songsheet. The good news is, the songs were chosen by Noel, based on the potential Live '25 setlist at the time of production. In addition, you'll get that Bear strap (the same one that Gibson issued with the NG ES-335) and a custom 70s-style case to keep it in.

Sounds good... but very expensive!

Ah, yes, the price. These guitars will be available to purchase exclusively through Gibson Garage London, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, they aren't cheap. The tag says £17,499, and with only 25 in existence, we have our capos ready and clamped in the hope of more accessible versions in the future. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

BLACKSTAR POLAR GO £79



Recording to a tablet or smartphone is now common. Whether you're recording guitar tracks on the go, or want a simple way to capture a podcast, it's a flexible solution that you can take anywhere. Blackstar's latest audio interface expands its Polar series with the Polar Go, designed for use with iOS, Android, Mac OS and Windows. It has stereo mics built in, as well as a single combo-XLR/jack input for connecting an external mic (phantom power included) or your guitar. There's a rechargeable battery offering six hours of use, and the unit can be powered over USB-C with a dedicated power socket. It pairs with the free Polar Go app, which also offers video capture and syncing, and is available now.

www.blackstaramps.com

BOSS RT-2 ROTARY ENSEMBLE £229

Boss is no stranger to shrinking the sound of a mechanical Leslie speaker into a pedalboard-friendly form factor. But now, it's squeezed things even further with the RT-2 Rotary Ensemble. This compact-sized pedal places authentic rotary speaker effects at our feet with stereo operation, a virtual rotor display and controls for level/drive plus rise/fall transition speeds. There are three modes, with traditional rotary speaker sounds as well as additional spatial effects available, and thanks to the inclusion of an external footswitch/expression socket, you can control speed, brake and more. It's out now, and we'll have a review coming shortly.



www.boss.info

THE LINEUP

Fretbuzz

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

Artist: Pete Roth Trio Feat. Bill Bruford

Single: Looking Forward To Looking Back (PRT Music)

Pete Roth Trio (left to right) Mike Pratt, Roth and ex-King Crimson legend Bill Bruford

The recently formed Pete Roth Trio are well on their way to becoming one of the most exciting new names in modern jazz. Led by German-born, UK-based guitar instructor Pete, with session musician Mike Pratt on bass and ex-King Crimson legend Bill Bruford coming out of retirement to sit behind the kit, they've been amazing crowds across the UK, Europe and Japan with a bold take on contemporary fusion. Their current setlist features original compositions like *Looking Forward To Looking Back* and *Dancing With Grace*, as well as daring interpretations of famous works by John Coltrane, Charlie Parker and Antonín Dvořák.

Back To The Beginning

"I didn't really plan on doing this," says Pete Roth, on how the band got formed. "Bill called me two years ago and suggested jamming. We knew each other from teaching at the Academy Of Contemporary Music. I was also his drum tech in my early 20s. We decided to try some jazz standards, it went well, so then we needed a bass player. I was touring a lot with Mike Pratt at the time, so I invited him along to the next jam with no aspirations other than stepping into a room and making good music."

Giant Steps

Though the music generally falls under the jazz bracket, this band really does take inspiration from everywhere. "It was a conscious decision to play a real variety of styles," says Pete. "None of us really wanted to play straight jazz. Mike is a funky player, Bill comes from a prog rock and traditional jazz background, while I'm more hard rock and blues. You can hear all of that in there. We've been playing tunes like *Billie's Bounce* by Charlie Parker, but giving it our own twist."



PHOTO BY ROB VAN DALEN

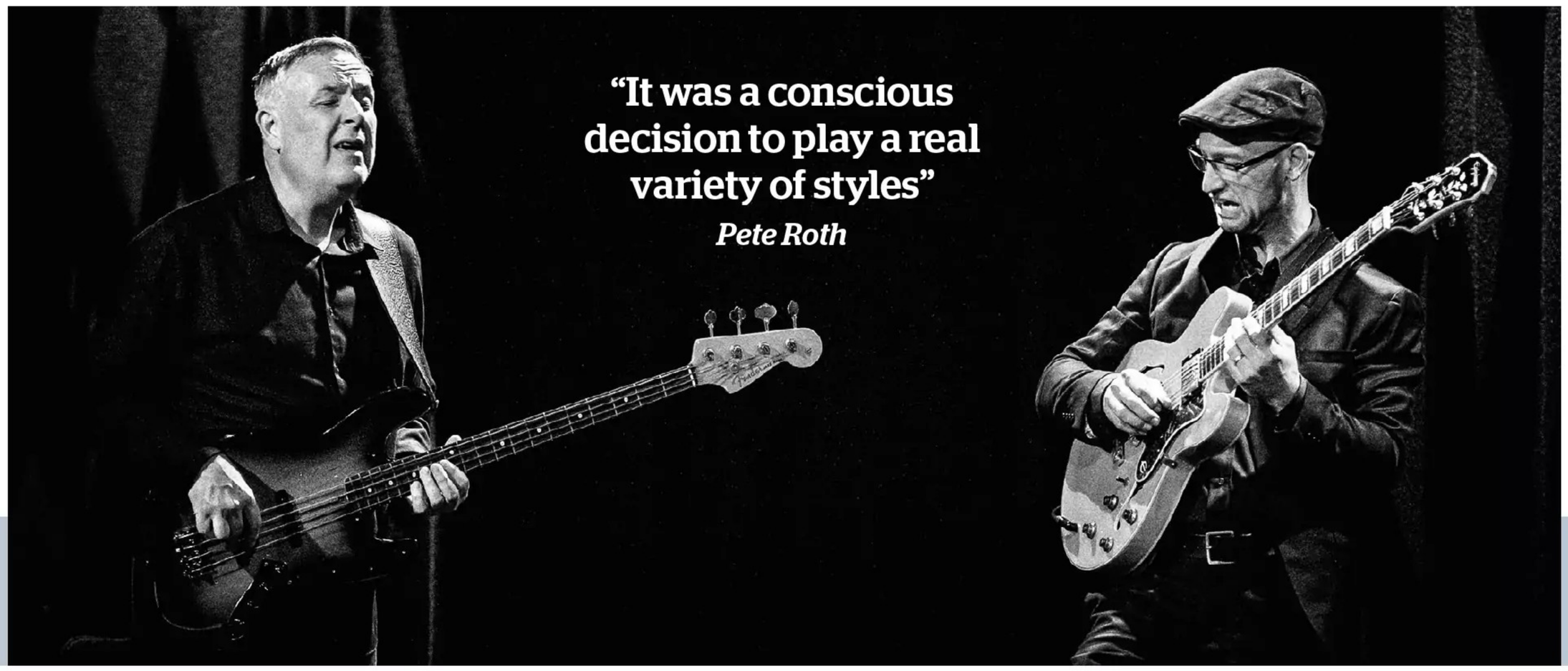


PHOTO BY PINO ROMEO

LESS IS MORE

How working as a trio gives each musician more space for expression

For the Pete Roth Trio, a lot of excitement comes from the sonic space each member has to create on stage and in the moment. "Playing as a trio lets us step into each other's frequencies more than bigger bands," admits Pete. "That's part of the fun. We will look at each other and work it all out there and then, making each other play differently. It's a small, intimate sound guided by opportunity. This is a live band rather than a studio band – it's all about capturing the connection with each other and the audience, and how it all bounces around."

Pete describes their music as "near-jazz", but they take inspiration from diverse sources

Take Five

According to Pete, this is a band who place great emphasis on melodic and harmonic freedom. Given his background as a session player, it's something he finds greatly rewarding. "It's the first time I've been in a situation where all answers are 'yes'," he grins. "This band interacts and reacts. No two nights are the same. There's a risk in working like that but also a beauty to the freedom. It's something we're not willing to give up, regardless of the safety net that comes with things being more meticulously planned. Of course, there's some musical scaffolding, but the middle section is always up for grabs."

"This band interacts and reacts. No two nights are the same. There's a risk in working like that but also a beauty to the freedom" **Pete Roth**



In The Mood

As for tools of the trade, Pete's main guitar is an Epiphone Sheraton that gets plugged into a Fender Deluxe and a Dr Z EZG-50, running in stereo. "I get width from the Dr Z, but there's a lovely directness that comes from the Deluxe," he notes. "We deliberately use interesting effects for texture, [such as] my Boss SY-1, which has everything from bells and synths to organs. There's nothing straight about what we are doing, I would call it 'near-jazz', rather than proper jazz. I also have a first generation Fulltone Full-Drive, which I absolutely love. My always-on is the Xotic RC Booster, and I like the Boss CE-2 for chorus. There's a Boss DD-7 for digital delay, plus a TC Electronic reverb and looper."

The Beat Goes On

Working with one of the most deeply admired drummers in progressive rock has certainly helped get things off to a good start, though Pete would be the first to admit Bill's wealth of knowledge has also opened doors creatively. "Bill has made a huge difference to my style," smiles Pete. "I might play from muscle memory, but he has such a sharp musical mind, he can tell when you are just waffling. He always tells me to double down on the ideas that are more specific and less generic. I'm amazed by the depth of his talent. His knowledge is incredible." **[AS]**

Standout track: *Looking Forward To Looking Back*
For fans of: Joe Pass, Larry Carlton, John Scofield

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



Jake Kiszka and co channel the spirit and fire of 60s rock on Mirador's debut

PHOTO BY DEAN CHALKLEY

Mirador
Mirador

Guitarist CHOICE

Republic Records (available 19 September)



Reckless, unscripted rock with a folk-gothic spirit

Those unfamiliar with Mirador need only turn to page 60 to find out how this low-key supergroup got together, but their remit to weave British folk traditions into a headlong rock album has yielded a record of darkly unbounded energy and emotional gravity. From the very first bars of opener *Feels Like Gold*, you sense the urgency of a fully committed band, recording the tracks almost live in the studio with Chris Turpin of Ida Mae delivering an absolutely all-in vocal performance. It would fail to do the band proper justice to compare them too closely with the giants of 60s rock, but the gritty energy of Led Zeppelin's first album finds an echo here, though Mirador's sound is rather more esoteric and darkly romantic in spirit. In the standout track *Roving Blade*, a hard-striding highway ballad, we get a sense of both evocative atmosphere and explosive power – the band manage dynamics and drama with huge elan, but it's clear that they are playing by the seat of the pants throughout, which adds to the sense of palpable excitement in every track. Kudos is due to the band for not treating their softer ballads such as the plaintive *Must I Go Bound* as an afterthought but as fully developed landmarks in the twilit, mythic soundworld the record conjures into being. Nonetheless, it is sweeping rock that many listeners will be looking for and Mirador have made sure they get it on full-tilt rockers such as *Ashes To Earth*, with Jake Kiszka striking showers of sparks with his solo on *Roving Blade*. An absolutely galvanic, gripping debut. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Roving Blade*
For fans of: Greta Van Fleet, Ida Mae, Bert Jansch, Led Zeppelin, Rory Gallagher

Walter Trout
Sign Of The Times

Provogue (available 5 September)



Blues-rock veteran tells it like it is

Hot on the heels from 2024's No 1 Billboard album, *Broken*, *Sign Of The Times* finds Walter Trout despairing about the state of the world: "I wanted to convey the anger and angst going on in the world," he declares, "Writing these songs is therapy." The result is some of the most animated, scorching guitar playing we've heard in a while. There's a definite swing to a heavier sound here, with the occasional oasis of calm in acoustic tracks like *Mona Lisa Smile*. But the opening track, *Artificial*, sets a course for the album's mood with a raucous riff and genuinely angry lyrics – Walter apparently isn't a fan of AI. And check out for the Hendrix vibe to *No Strings Attached*. The whole album is a pleaser from start to finish. **[DM]**

Standout track: *No Strings Attached*
For fans of: John Mayall, Canned Heat

LA LOM
Live At Thalia Hall

Verve Records (available 12 September)



Melodic, electric guitar with a flavour of 1950s Cuba and beyond

Regular readers may recall LA LOM – Los Angeles League Of Musicians – from our recent feature when the group toured the UK. The band is, admittedly, a rather small 'league' being built around the nucleus of Zac Sokolow on guitar, Jake Faulkner on bass and percussionist Nick Baker on congas and other rhythmic implements. But what an expansive sound they make on this satisfying live album, recorded at a sold-out 2024 show at Thalia Hall in Chicago. The live setting is, for once, genuinely transformative as Sokolow drives his amp harder than on the band's eponymous debut studio album, immediately pulling his tone into the soundworld of all the 50s blues guitarists who pushed small combos to the limit on the live stage – so we are treated to rather hotter than usual versions of the band's standout songs. notably the rippling, dancing rythms of *Angels Point* and the sweltering groove of *Figeroa*, which feels like the soundtrack to a bus ride up the slopes of an Andean mountain, with its panoramic, almost heroic melodic refrain and percussion excursions. The songs are carefully constructed, but the live context lets us see this intriguing band really cut loose and enjoy the moment. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Figeroa*
For fans of: Ry Cooder, Chris Corcoran, The Shadows

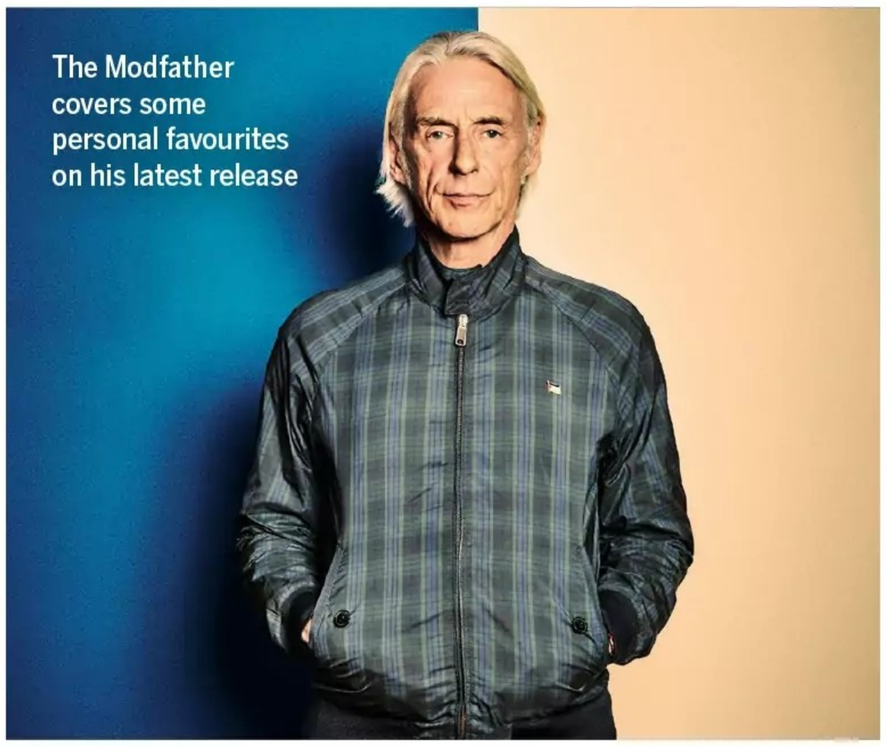


PHOTO BY DEAN CHALKLEY

Paul Weller
Find El Dorado

Parlophone (available now)



The Modfather delivers surprise covers album

Paul Weller's latest album isn't, as you might expect, another set of originals from a renowned songwriting ace but a collection of cover songs that have left a mark since the ex-Jam man was a mere youngster. He's engaged a fighting force of guest stars to join him, too, from fellow Britpop pioneer Noel Gallagher through Ocean Colour Scene's Steve Cradock (who also produced the album) to Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant. The album runs the gamut of music styles, including country on Merle Haggard's *White Line Fever*, classic pop on the Bee Gees' *I Started A Joke*, and Kinks stalwart Ray Davies' *Nobody's Fool*, plus a superb reading of Richie Havens' *Handouts In The Rain*. Each song is given a very slick production, making the album a delightful sneak peek into a seasoned songwriter's own influences. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Clive's Song*
For fans of: The Jam, The Style Council, Oasis

Kirk Fletcher
Keep On Pushing

VizzTone (available now)



Old-time Chicago blues in the hands of a master

A few years touring with Joe Bonamassa brought Chicago blues devotee and former Fabulous Thunderbirds guitarist Kirk Fletcher to worldwide acclaim, but a health scare in the form of a stroke in July 2023 meant that his career was suddenly interrupted. *Keep On Pushing* celebrates a return to health and the release of his first studio album since 2022's *Heartache By The Pound*. Make no mistake, Kirk is the real deal and the album is brim full with his masterful Chicago blues-influenced playing. The general sound, mix and production take you right back to the glory days of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Buddy Guy, with the opener, *It's Love, Baby*, setting out the store in fine style. *I'm Gonna Dig Myself A Hole* ups the tempo, while slow blues *Lost Love* features Kirk at his soulful best. Special mention must go to Kirk and co-producer JD Simo, who manage to capture that perfect smoky bar atmosphere on the album. It's just like being there, with a superb bluesy vibe and some excellent playing! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Lost Love*
For fans of: BB King, Eric Clapton



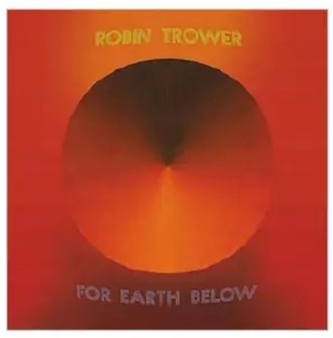
THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Two albums recorded 50 years apart – the gear might have stayed the same, but the recording experience is completely different

Artist: Robin Trower

Albums: *For Earth Below* 50th Anniversary Edition (Chrysalis)
Come And Find Me (Provogue)





50 years separate: *For The Earth Below* (top) and *Come And Find Me*

Robin still favours his 70s-inspired signature Strats and Marshall amps

There have been two album releases from Robin Trower this year: one is a 50th anniversary reissue of the 1975 album *For Earth Below*, while the other is a brand-new studio album, *Come And Find Me*. With the former – originally the follow-up to 1974's hugely successful *Bridge Of Sighs* – some might think there would have been added pressure to satisfy fan expectations. "I don't think any of us were thinking about that particularly," Robin tells us. "The full concentration was on trying to make as good an album as possible with the material that we had."

Fast-forward half a century and the new album was conceived and recorded under somewhat different circumstances. Gone are the immense studio costs, analogue tape and the running-time constrictions that came with vinyl; these days album-making marches to a completely different beat...

There must be a wealth of contrasts between recording processes for *For Earth Below* and *Come And Find Me*?

"Well, I think the main difference between now and then is that, fundamentally, the main guitar, bass and drums would go down live. And then you would fill in the gaps and do the solos and the vocals afterwards, which is completely different to how I work now. These days I put down the guitar part or arrangement to machine drums and then build it up from there. So it's really different. But I like the modern way I work now because I can get every note, every part, exactly how I want it."

Can you remember what gear you were using in the studio back then?

"Well, I'm pretty sure it would have probably been two 4x12s, each with 100-watt Marshall head on, and I think at that time I was using a special overdrive pedal, which a friend of mine made for me – it was really just a volume booster, just to drive the amps a bit more."

Moving on to *Come And Find Me*, what is the writing process like for you now – do you have a particular way of doing things?

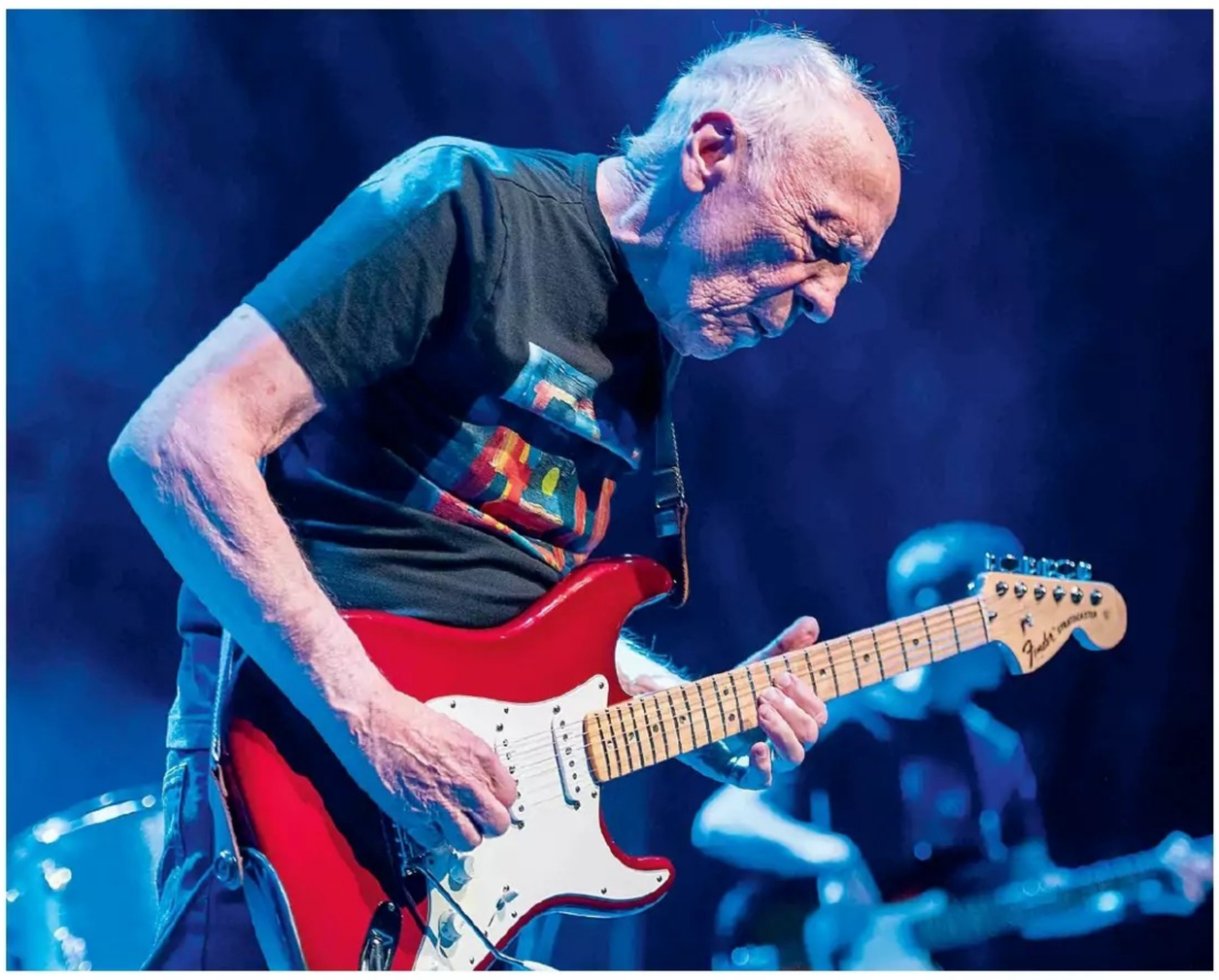
"Well, I like to pick up the guitar every day because it's fun to play. If I come up with a guitar part that I think has a groove or vibe about it, then I pursue it and turn it into a song. So everything begins with the guitar and that's really what it's all about.

"Generally, you get the germ of an idea and if it tickles my fancy then I work on it until it's a complete guitar arrangement. And probably at the same time, I'm thinking about the vocal line. Once I've got that, then I go into the lyrics. And that is the thing that takes the most time.

"I'm coming up with songs all the time. I mean, I've just finished another album that's in the can. So that'll give you some idea of how much material I've got. That's how I've been turning it out. I think because I try to play every day, there are ideas coming along all the time."

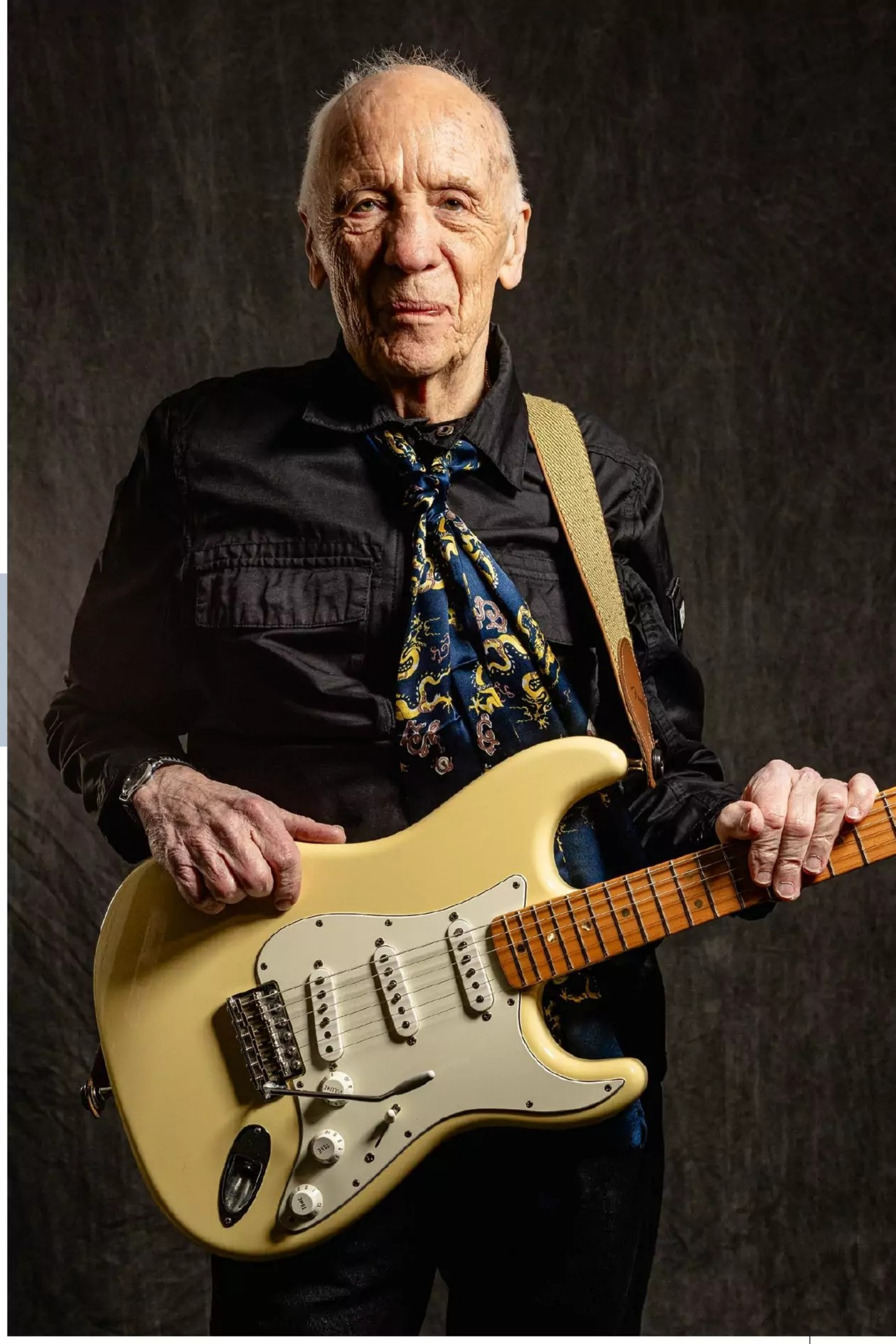
How do you get your ideas down? Do you have recording gear at home?

"For the past two or three years, I've just been putting ideas on my phone. And then, when I go in the studio, I've got a complete song with a complete arrangement, either on the phone or in my head. And that's when I start to build it up, like I say, from there."



PHOTOS BY SIMON GREEN

"I like the modern way I work now because I can get every note, every part, exactly how I want"



There's a lyrical centre to the new album about all the red tape and hurdles we have to cross in society these days. Is that something you feel particularly passionate about?

"Well, I do think there's more red tape, more rules, more laws. And like the song says [*A Little Bit Of Freedom* from *Come And Find Me*] 'I don't need no-one to think for me, telling me what's on my mind...' I think we're getting clamped down more and more on what we can think, which is not good."

On the track *Take This Hurt Away* you've said your inspiration was what you would come up with if you were ever asked to write a Bond theme. We even detected the familiar four-note guitar part...

"Yeah, that's right. I started to think, 'Could I come up with something that would be a fit for a James Bond movie?' And I came up with a musical idea that was in the ballpark. But then, obviously, once I started to think about it as a song for myself, it sort of went off in a different direction, but the initial vibe of the piece was definitely inspired by the idea of it being for a James Bond film."

Are you still using your signature Strats?

"Yeah. The signature models are built for me by [Fender Master Builder] Todd Krause and they've got my specific idea of the perfect Strat. I like to have the bigger headstock because I think a bit more wood might add a bit more resonance. I don't know if that's true or not, but it's just an idea I have. I use three different reissue pickups: the 50s on the neck and the 60s in the middle, and a Texas Special in the bridge. And the bridge is a vintage bridge. It has locking tuners, larger frets and a five-way switch. I think that's about it."

What about amps? Have you switched to smaller cabs?

"I'm using 50-watt Marshalls. I think they're called the 1987, and Marshall made me some open-back 2x12 [cabs]. So, you know, one 2x12 on each 50-watt. That's the basic amp setup. Because I use the neck pickup on my Strat, a 4x12 I found was just too much bottom-end. So an open-back 2x12 I find is right for what I need."

What pedals are you using these days?

"They're all Fulltone pedals, made by Mike Fuller in California. He actually doesn't make pedals any more, but all the ones I have are his, like the Deja Vibe and the Clyde wah. At the moment, I'm using an OCD overdrive, but I tend to switch between them. I have a pedal that [Mike Fuller] made for me personally, which is called a WahFull – instead of a foot sweep wah, it's on a tone-control thing that you can preset at one position."

How much do you think volume plays in your guitar sound? Vintage Marshalls only give you that signature sound if you use them wound up – are you still of that school as a player?

"Yeah. I mean, it's more difficult in the studio because you can't get that 'circle of sound' going so much. But live, it's very important that the guitar pickups are seeing the speakers, as it were. And you get that singing thing going between the two. I love it. Yeah, I love playing live." **[DM]**

Robin's daily playing sessions have inspired so much new material that there's already another album awaiting release!

PHOTO BY ROB BLACKHAM / BLACKHAM IMAGES





Come And Find Me is out now on Provogue Records and *For Earth Below – 50th Anniversary Edition* is available now via Chrysalis Records

www.robintrower.com

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE



Price Of Fame

Neville Marten talks about how several very big names have, he's sure of it, deliberately given him a 'moment' designed to be cherished forever

It must be very strange being exceptionally famous and instantly recognisable. But even the biggest names have to do mundane things like shopping, eating out or simply getting around. So encountering average people in these situations must be weird, too. Some famous stars will often sit in a restaurant with their back to the room so as not to be recognised. And then others, musicians like Rihanna, Jay Z, Ed Sheeran and Chris Martin, actors like Benedict Cumberbatch and Hugh Grant, politicians like Tony Blair and Boris Johnson, happily use the London tube and don't even mind the odd fan pic. But occasionally a star will give you, as I've mentioned, a special and deliberate 'moment'.

"McCartney squatted down on his haunches and played and sang Beatles classics *Blackbird* and *Things We Said Today*. It was amazing"

I'll avail you of three that happened to me. I've told you before of how, along with the late Ken Hensley of Uriah Heep and artist relations manager at Ampeg, I delivered a black Alvarez guitar to Paul McCartney in his *Top Of The Pops* dressing room. Now, Paul could have looked the instrument up and down and thanked Ken, perhaps played a few chords on it and nodded his appreciation. Even done a few bars of some old rock 'n' roll song. Instead, he squatted down on his haunches and played and sang Beatles classics *Blackbird* and *Things We Said Today*. It was amazing. I was convinced then and am convinced now that he was giving us both our 'McCartney moment'. As a giant Beatles nut, I'll treasure that encounter forever. So thank you, Paul.

On another occasion I found myself on a Sunday evening TV programme, Harry Secombe's *Highway*, with the American country singer Diane Solomon. Diane and the group had recorded the track previously, but we were asked to mime (lip sync) to it, walking along Southwold beach in Suffolk. I repaired guitars for CBS/Fender at the time, so, with permission from service manager Jeff Pumfrett (he of Machinehead Music and World Guitars), I borrowed four cutaway acoustics from my repair stock. After filming we were given lunch at a nearby hotel. Harry, a main cast member of British comedy royalty The Goons (he was Neddie Seagoon) and also a fine tenor singer who'd had huge hits including *If I Ruled The World*, went round to each table chatting and giving everyone a 'Secombe moment'. After watching him do this to others, grinning widely he sidled over and greeted us with "What-what-what-what-what?", one of his famous Goon catchphrases. He could have just said, 'Hello, chaps,' but I know he wanted to give us that little bit more. A little bit of him. Cheers, Neddie!

Stop Messin' About!

My final 'moment' came courtesy of the legendary British actor, comedian and chat show stalwart (Google him with Michael Parkinson) Kenneth Williams. I'd been in London interviewing someone for *Guitarist* and was driving along the Westway, back home to south Warwickshire. At some traffic lights near Marylebone station I was the middle car in three lanes of stopped vehicles. I instantly spotted Kenneth, wearing a classic British Mackintosh raincoat, waiting to cross. As he stepped briskly on to the zebra crossing, he looked at the driver of each car. Being the only one who noticed him, I smiled warmly at this guy who'd made me laugh out loud on so many occasions. Williams then drew his cheeks in, put his chin down to the left on his chest in a deliberate sideways nod, as I'd seen him do dozens of times in the famous *Carry On* and *Doctor* films. He was doing a 'Kenneth Williams' for me, I'm convinced of it. Sadly, the great man died only three weeks later. But thank you, Mr Williams, you made me smile that day and I'll indeed cherish the moment forever.

Sadly, of the three stars only Paul McCartney is still with us. But Harry Secombe and Kenneth Williams live on in memories that bring a glow whenever I recall these generous incidents. Have you had any similar encounters, preferably with guitar-type celebs? I'd love to hear about them. G



PHOTO: ALVAREZGUITARS.COM

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Black Suede Shoes

What? Alvarez AG70ce Blacktop
Where seen? guitarguitar.co.uk **Price?** £599

This Blacktop Alvarez is not like McCartney's. Carl Perkins had got the company to make a lefty model for Paul after the ex-Beatle had admired his own guitar, so I suspect they were specially crafted. Anyway, it still looks mighty fine. Alvarez says: "The AG70ce Blacktop is a beautifully responsive grand auditorium guitar delivering glistening trebles and a robust, clear bass response that makes this guitar suitable for most styles of music. It has an understated elegance with striking contrast between the [black painted] natural AA Sitka spruce top and dark Indian rosewood back and sides." The neck is African mahogany, rosewood is the fingerboard material of choice with a stylish 12th-fret inlay, and the nut is bone. The guitar is also fitted with LR Baggs' StagePro Bronze side-mounted EQ/preamp/tuner, mated to the ever-dependable Element undersaddle pickup. All this at such an unbelievable price. So purchase one and perhaps you, too, can play *Blackbird* on your Blacktop!



Talking 'Shop

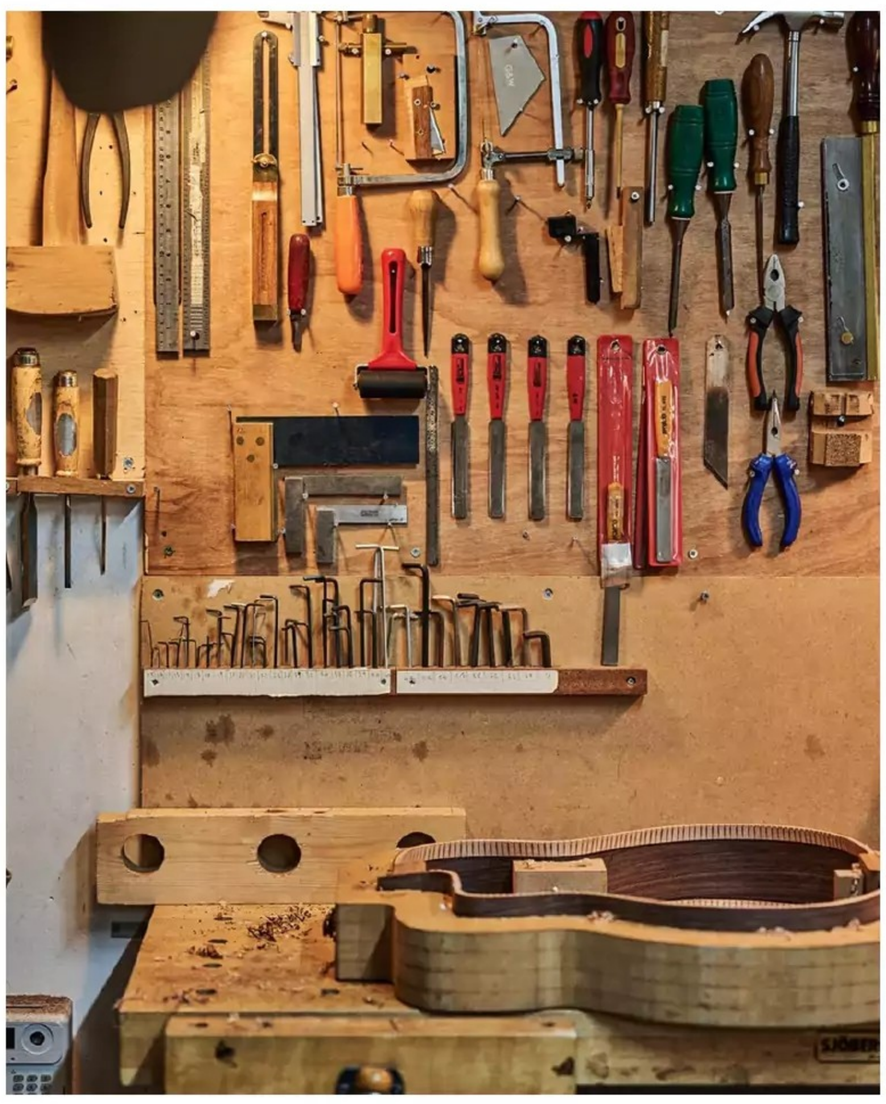
This month, **Alex Bishop** tours the studio, and considers how to plan out the perfect lutherie workspace

With targeted ads and AI-driven algorithms driving every digital interaction we have online, a budding guitar maker could easily be led to believe that getting into lutherie is all about loading up a credit card with the latest tools and fancy jigs. I'm as guilty as anyone when it comes to 'Tool Acquisition Syndrome', but all that gear is going to need a home, and my advice would be to start planning the workspace before ploughing into your overdraft.

My own workshop has developed organically over time, and the trauma of moving address every few years compelled me to update the space periodically. My current workshop is generously spread across two rooms in a studio complex in Bristol, but the last workshop was installed in the gents of a tiny converted Victorian toilet block. It's not the size that matters but how you use it, so I'm told.

Zonal Marking

Regardless of whether it's acoustics or electrics that float your boat (I build both), I've found there are a few dedicated 'zones' in a guitar-making workshop that are indispensable. The first, obviously, is a flat bench or table to work on. My main workbench is the command centre of the workshop; get this bit right and just about anything is possible, even with rudimentary tools. While I've met a number of aspiring craftspeople who have built instruments on their kitchen table, I recommend a sturdy workbench in a dedicated garage or shed. Screwing it into the wall or floor is a must, not just because a wobbly bench is annoying but because developing correct hand-tool technique depends upon it. Whether you're repairing, restoring or building guitars, you will need a way to grasp the neck of the guitar to prevent movement when fretting, filing and sanding. There are some lovely vices out there designed to hold a guitar in any which way, but a simple cam clamp secured in a vice at one end of the bench works perfectly – the lever acts as a very handy quick release mechanism, too.



Tool storage is a key consideration – you'll need easy access to the most frequently used hand tools, such as chisels, planes, nut files and saws

"My main workbench is the command centre of the workshop; get this bit right and just about anything is possible, even with rudimentary tools"

Tool storage is the next consideration. Not everyone opts for a tool wall above the workbench (a dropped saw will cause serious damage to a newly French polished soundboard, take my word for it). But you'll need easy access to the most commonly used hand tools: chisels, planes, nut files and saws to name a few. Drawers beneath the workbench are a great substitute for rooms starved of wall space, and labelled stackable boxes are ideal for awkward-shaped jigs and contraptions.

A smaller workspace will dictate a reliance on hand tools, so I can't emphasise enough the importance of a dedicated sharpening station. Much like the old adage about keeping a guitar out of its case to encourage you to play it more often, a sharpening stone or wheel adjacent to the main workbench will encourage you to keep your tools in fine fettle (I spent 10 years sharpening my chisels and planes by hand before I upgraded to a proper powered sharpening station – well worth the investment).

If you have room for a larger powered tool, make sure a bandsaw is at the top of the list. Ideal for negotiating the curves of a guitar outline, or chopping dowels for simple repair jobs, a small bench-top bandsaw will pay dividends. Don't be fooled (like me) into thinking that you'll need a huge floor-standing machine unless you plan on resawing slabs of timber. If there is any room left, a drum sander for thicknessing will save a lot of physical work, although you'll need to find somewhere for an effective dust extractor.

Now that your woodworking paradise is set up, you might be fooled into thinking the next step is to start building guitars. I'm afraid you are likely struck by another lutherie-induced affliction known as 'Wood Acquisition Syndrome'– sadly, there is no known cure for this one. In my experience you can try to hide it in the attic, lock it in the boot of your car or stuff it under your bed, but it's no good; you'll still be wanting more. G

PHOTOS BY JOSEPH BRANSTON

RAISING THE TONE



Taming The Beast

Charlie Wilkins delves into the world of power attenuators, revealing how to push valve amps to their edge without the punishing volume

It's hard to describe the rush you get from playing a cranked, high-powered valve amp wide open, but once you feel it, you'll never forget it. There's a certain magic that stirs up something deep inside your soul. I found that out for myself in the late 80s with my first serious rig: a Carvin X100B half-stack. I soon realised that low volume settings were dull and lifeless, but with the volume cranked wide open, it was an absolute tone beast! The compression, the bloom and the authority of every note was just glorious. But it didn't take long for the noise complaints to roll in. First from the neighbours and then eventually from club sound guys who couldn't fully appreciate my grandiose 'wall of sound'.

"Attenuators are like fine-tuned 'sweet spot' knobs, letting you drive your tubes hard while keeping the volume in check"

Sadly, pushing a high-wattage valve amp to its sweet spot isn't always welcome. Unless you're playing arenas or you're out in the middle of a corn field, running a 100-watt head wide open just isn't practical. I eventually stumbled into the world of power attenuators and it completely changed how I chased tone from that moment on.

An attenuator is a load device that sits between your amp and speaker, absorbing some of the amp's power before it reaches the speaker. This lets you push the valves into that rich, saturated sweet spot without the deafening volume. Early attenuators, introduced decades ago, were basic and often harsh on tone. They controlled volume by converting power into heat, but they didn't sound very good. Sure, they brought volume down, but they often sucked the life out of your tone in the process. Fortunately, these once crude devices have since evolved from 'tone killers' into refined tools that are now indispensable for many players.

My first experience with an attenuator was the THD Hot Plate, introduced in the 1990s. I was amazed that you could take a cranked non-master-volume Marshall Super Lead and play it at a level that didn't make your ears bleed. But there was a compromise. Although it likely outperformed earlier attenuator designs, it didn't quite deliver the same satisfying feel or dynamics of a wide-open amp. For many players, the compromise was well worth it and the Hot Plate became one of the most iconic and widely used power attenuators in the world. The Scholz Research & Development Power Soak and the Marshall Power Brake were also early attenuator designs that gained some popularity but suffered similar 'side effects' as their predecessors.

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON



Fryette's Power Station is an example of a reactive attenuator – which can produce a more musical result

Amp's Best Friend

Today, modern attenuators come in a variety of designs and many are far more transparent, versatile and feature-rich than their predecessors. At the core, there are three main types of attenuator designs: resistive, reactive and loadbox/cab-sim hybrids.

Resistive attenuators are the simplest of the bunch and include devices like the Bugera PS1 or early Weber Mass units. They reduce volume by converting your amp's output into heat using resistors. These are typically more affordable, but they can lack the complex impedance interaction that makes a valve amp feel and respond naturally. The tone can sometimes sound flat or lose some dynamics, especially at lower volumes.

Then you have reactive attenuators, which are more advanced and arguably sound more musical. They simulate the dynamic behaviour of a speaker's impedance curve so your amp still 'sees' a load that feels like a real speaker. Units like the Fryette Power Station and my personal favourite, the Tone King Ironman II, fall into this camp. These tend to retain more of your amp's personality and natural feel, especially when playing at very low volumes.

A major innovation in recent years has been the development of hybrid loadboxes with built-in impulse response (IR) technology (loadbox/cab-sim hybrids). Units like the Two Notes Torpedo Captor X, Universal Audio OX and Suhr Reactive Load IR serve dual roles: they manage amp volume and deliver convincing cabinet simulations for direct recording or live use. This eliminates the need for mics and speaker cabinets entirely, while preserving the authenticity of your tone.

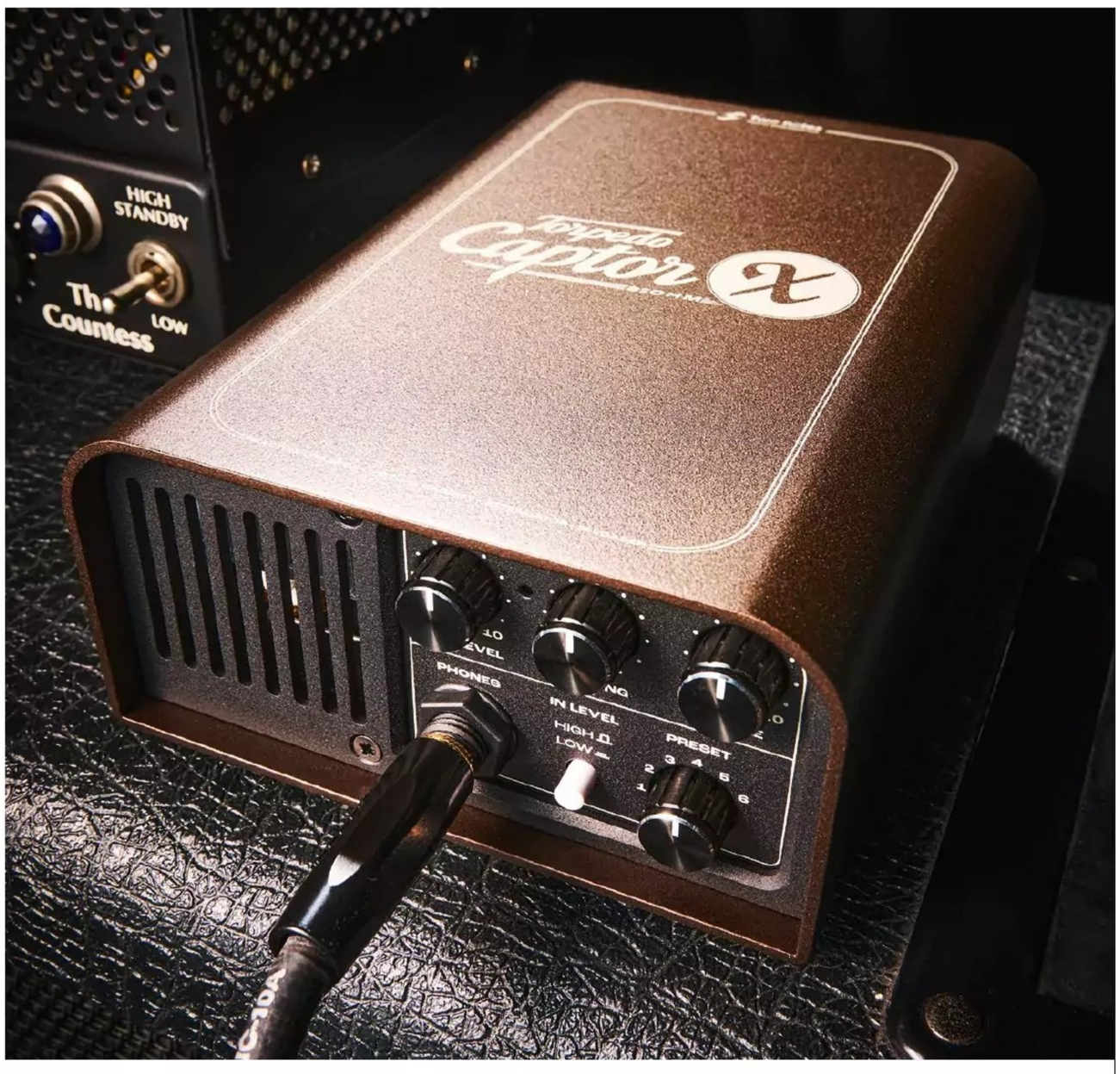


PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

You can practice at bedroom levels with your favourite amp or capture glorious, cranked tones straight into a DAW. It's the ultimate balance of raw tube amp dynamics at controllable volumes.

So which amps benefit the most from an attenuator? Pretty much any valve amplifier with more than 15 watts that you want to push into its sweet spot. Vintage Marshall Plexi Super Leads, which sound glorious fully cranked, are textbook candidates. So are Fender Twins, which can be ice-picks at lower volumes but deliver creamy, blooming cleans and edge-of-break-up textures when pushed. Even high-gain beasts like Mesa/Boogies and Soldanos can benefit, especially if you're trying to tame stage volume without resorting to preamp-only distortion.

Previously only accessible to pro guitarists, attenuators are now within reach of anyone and many models are quite affordable. Of course, some purists will argue that an attenuated amp will never feel quite the same as a roaring stack moving air, and you also run the risk of wearing out your power tubes prematurely. They're not entirely wrong. Attenuators are not transparent, but, in my book, the small trade-off is worth it for the convenience, control and tonal access you gain.

Beware: there's a big difference in how various attenuators sound and feel. Reactive load designs have become the preferred standard, but there's still a wide tonal gap between models, not to mention a diverse range of features. So, which one is best? Well, that's for you to decide. Do your research and try out as many as possible.

Attenuators are like fine-tuned 'sweet spot' knobs, letting you drive your tubes hard while keeping the volume in check. They let you tap into the full flavour, richness and depth of your amp's tone at any volume. If you love your valve amp but fear your volume knob, get yourself an attenuator. G

The Captor X loadbox from Two Notes enables digital flexibility and pro-studio sounds from any valve amp

THREE TO GET READY

Worthwhile amp companions



PHOTO: JHSPEDALS.INFO

JHS Little Black Amp Box £59.99

Big amp, small room? No problem. The JHS Little Black Amp Box is a passive volume control designed for amps with effects loops. Place it between the loop's send and return, and you can drive your preamp hard while dialing back the output volume. It's not a loadbox or attenuator in the traditional sense, but it's an incredibly cost-effective, no-fuss tool for achieving cranked tone at sane levels.

www.jhspedals.info



PHOTO: ENGL-AMPS.COM

ENGL Cabloader £199

No cab sims included with your favourite attenuator? No problem. Feed your attenuator's line out into the ENGL Cabloader and unlock pro-level cab tones. This compact IR cabinet simulator delivers studio-grade tone straight to your DAW interface or front-of-house PA, no mics required. Load your favourite IRs, fine-tune the EQ, and enjoy the feel of a roaring cab without waking the neighbours.

www.engl-amps.com



PHOTO: ROLAND.COM

Boss Waza-Air Wireless Guitar Amp Headphones £319

When cranking a real amp isn't an option, Boss's Waza-Air headset lets you go full tilt in total silence. Packed with Katana amp models, effects and immersive spatial audio, they deliver convincing 'amp-in-the-room' tone minus the noise complaints. Add Bluetooth playback and motion tracking, and you've got a full practice rig that lives on your head. Big tone, no volume. Problem solved.

www.boss.info

SUBSTITUTE

AUDIO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra



First Inversion Chords

This month, **Richard Barrett** explores how a chord can sound completely different when its basic note order is rearranged

Way back when decent folk could be relied on to keep the notes in their chords in scale order (Root on the bottom, then 3rd then 5th ascending), it was deemed necessary to find a name for the different permutations that occur when this order was intentionally changed. In this case, we'll take a look at what happens when the 3rd is shifted to the bottom, replacing the Root as the lowest note. Though still theoretically the same chord, the sound is different enough to warrant acknowledgment in the name.

In classical circles, this would be known as a first inversion, but in most other styles that are played these days, we'd refer to it as a slash chord: for example, a G major with the 3rd at the bottom would be called G/B.

As a guitar player, you may not always feel it necessary to conform if the bass player is already covering the 3rd, but it can never be a bad thing to know your triads and inversions! G

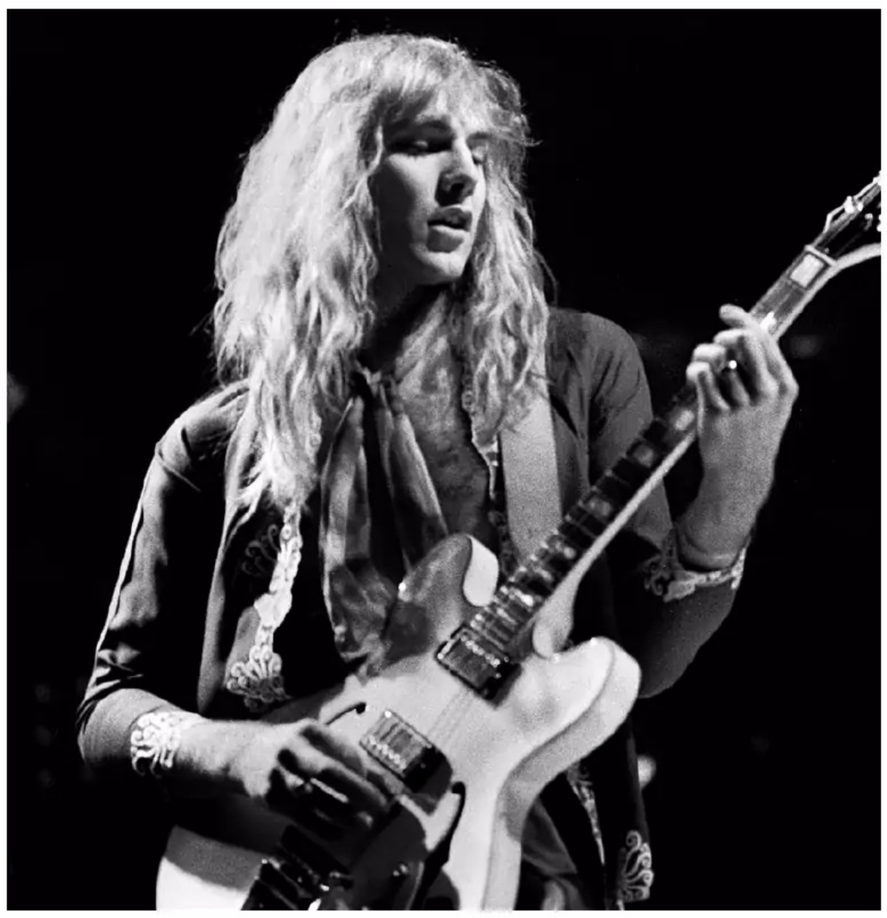
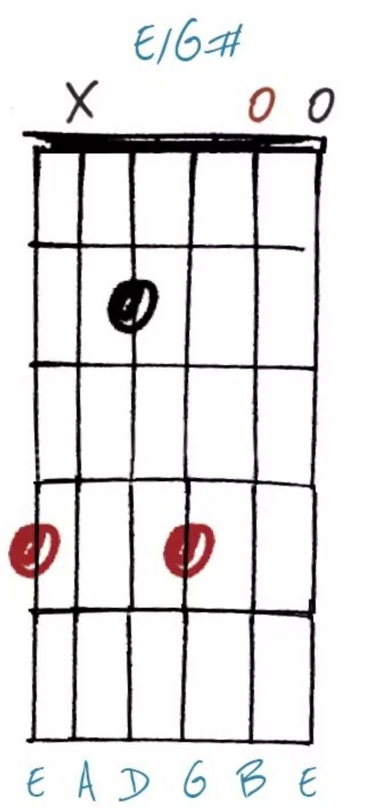


PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Rush's Alex Lifeson was no stranger to certain first inversion chords during the band's early years

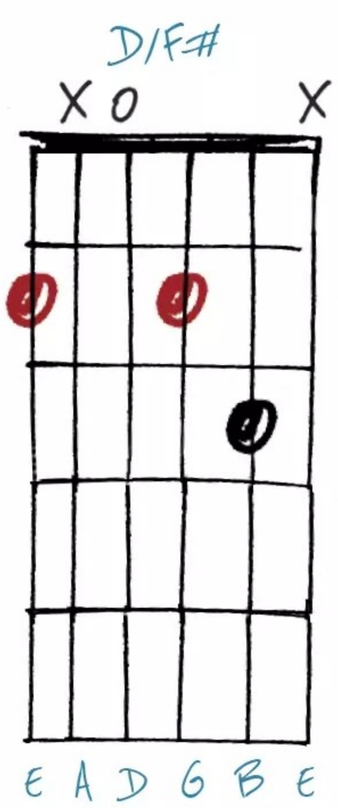
Example 1

This E/G# follows the first inversion convention of having the 3rd (G#) on the bottom. This necessitates muting the fifth string as this would clash. We also get a nice bit of natural chorusing from the duplicated B (5th) on the third and second strings. 1970s-era Alex Lifeson was very fond of this voicing.



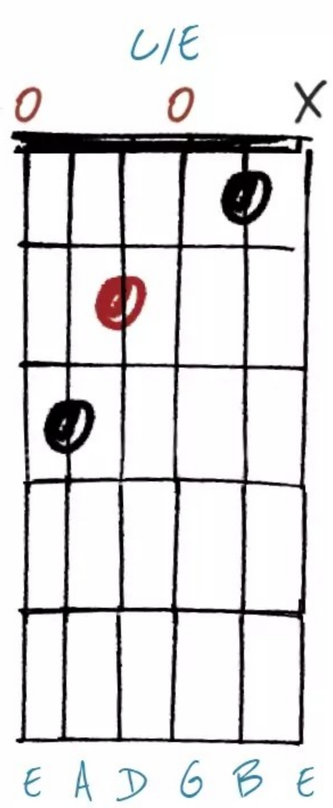
Example 2

This D/F# (or first inversion) chord takes the 3rd (F#) from the first string and shifts it to the sixth string. The open fifth string would add in an A (5th), too, but for clarity it is muted here. Try both – you'll likely find both versions have their uses.



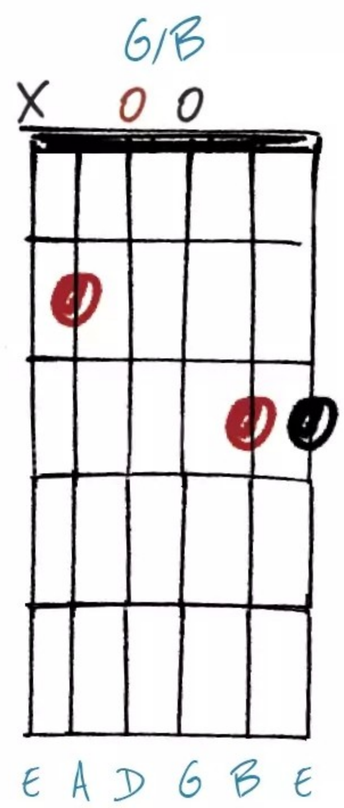
Example 3

Many of us will have been taught not to allow the sixth string to ring under an open position C chord! Now you can try it guilt-free and discover the joys of a C/E chord. Try playing an F major (or minor) chord following this and you'll get an idea of how slash chords/inversions can work in context.



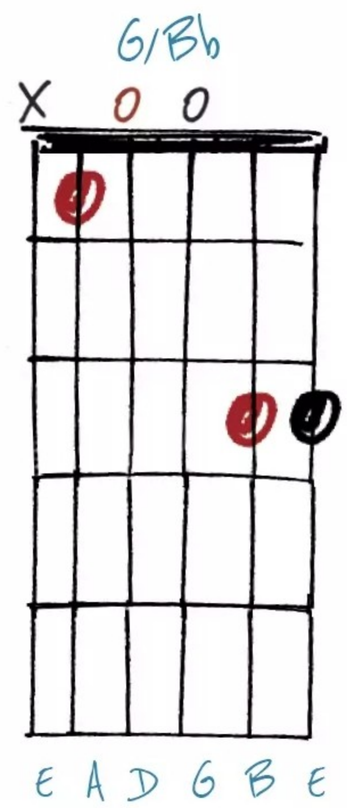
Example 4

While we're looking at these open chord shapes, here's a G/B. By omitting the usual Root (normally played at the 3rd fret of the sixth string as you almost certainly know), we shift the whole emphasis. Moving to a regular C major and back gives a classic chord move from many popular songs.



Example 5

So what about first inversion minor chords? Just like regular minor chords, the only difference is that we lower/flatten the 3rd by a semitone. In this case, we're calling it G/B♭ – but we could also call it Gm (first inversion , or 'inv' for short). Try flattening the 3rd in the other examples (except maybe Example 3) and you'll see they also work.



VINTAGE SPIRIT
TIMELESS TONE

SE NF 53

The PRS SE NF 53 is a powerful, modern guitar inspired by classic tones and design. Built on the foundation of a swamp ash body and 22-fret, 25.5” scale length bolt-on maple neck and fretboard, the PRS SE NF 53 delivers articulate low-end with the snarl and twang you’d expect – all without the hum. This guitar is ready to work. Find out more at an Authorized Dealer near you or at www.prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS®

SE®

FEEDBACK

Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

FLYING THE FLAG



Brit maker Watkins made history with its Copicat tape echo

Endless column inches have been written in *Guitarist* over the last 40 years about Leo Fender, Ernie Ball and Paul Reed Smith, yet what about the British innovators? I'm talking about John Birch, Jim Burns and Charlie Watkins. They stirred up a right old storm from the 50s to the 70s with guitars, amps and effects that were offered by them for professional guitarists. Who could imagine Hank Marvin without his Copicat? Come on, *Guitarist*, educate your readers on our rich homegrown luthier history.
Leo Blottib

Thanks, Leo. You're right, of course – we have, in this country in general (we blush to admit) been remiss not to fully recognise the quality of sounds created on all-British kit in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Your point is especially timely in the respect that British guitar-making seems to be having something of a renaissance and has been for the past five to 10 years arguably. This time round, we seem to have no problem acknowledging the quality and influence of makers such as PJD, ThorpyFX and Gordon Smith to name but three – let alone the fine pickup and component makers out there. And, of course, we have seen a few legacy British brands reimagined, from Shergold (in the talented hands of designer-luthier Patrick James Eggle) and the new-generation Rapier guitars designed by Alan Entwistle, which were inspired by the 60s Watkins models, bringing your point full circle. We'll ponder on the proper way to honour those makers of the past (perhaps in Huw Price's Historic Hardware features) and in the meantime continue to feature the best of more recent British innovation.



KORG

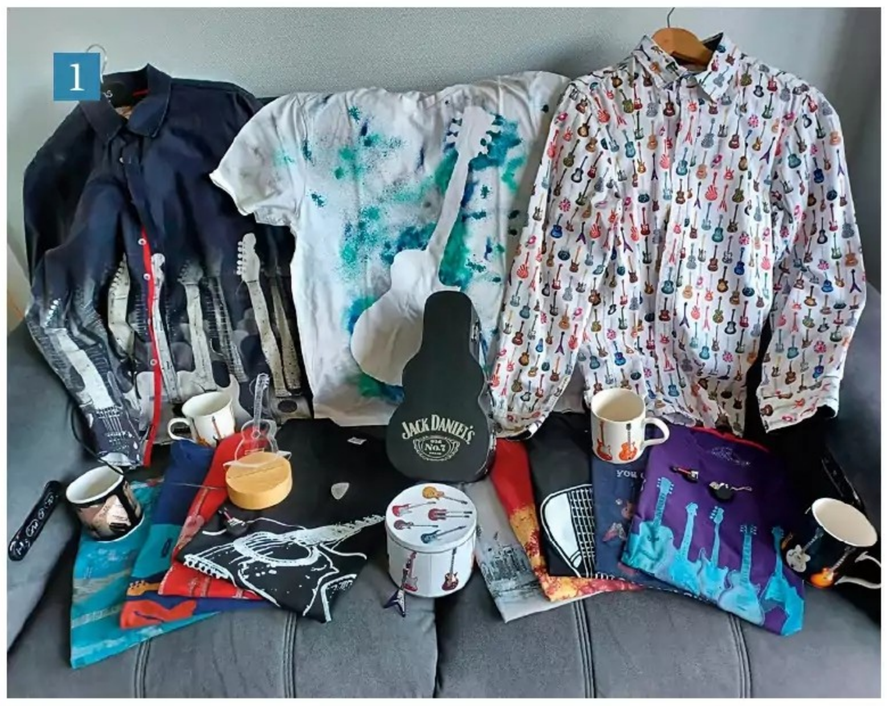
Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg SH-PRO Sledgehammer Pro clip-on tuner!
www.korg.co.uk

ED'S NOTE

Back in issue 526, we published Landan England's letter asking if any other readers collected miniature guitars and other guitar paraphernalia. Well, it seems you do as this month we received a deluge of letters sharing pictures of your collections of guitar 'stuff' – and very nice they are, too. Rather than hold back, we decided to devote the majority of this month's letters pages to your fine six-string collectibles...

TAKE YOUR PICS

1. Here is a photo of my guitar paraphernalia: a selection of T-shirts (my daughter, when 10, made me the central tie-dye), smart shirts, a bottle of JD in a guitar case, a selection of mugs, silver plectrum, a couple of memory sticks, a Flying V keyring, a guitar light, and a guitar tin. I didn't have any room on the sofa to add my guitar books! Hope your readers may find it of interest.
Dave Morrissey







3

2. I was just reading the August '25 issue and you were asking for pics of any guitar paraphernalia we have in our homes. Well, I have quite a large collection of miniature guitars and amplifiers including a complete set of Randy Rhoads' guitars and his white Marshall amp! I've attached a few pics.
Howard Sugars

3. I have got a collection of about 20 guitars, amassed over my 49 years of playing. Along the way friends have fed my passion by giving me guitar-related socks, T- shirts, mugs, phone covers, and all types of cards, birthdays and festive. I have a little shrine to these things in my man cave. The little black Strat I made when I was 16 and the bigger, brown Strat I built when I was 17 and it helped me get on to an Industrial Design course in Coventry. For one project I built a double-neck guitar with interchangeable necks, which we used in my college band. The rest of the stuff is gifts from friends. Keep 'em coming, folks.
Eddie Van Rental

4. I love to read the mag, simply the best there is, and I noticed in the last issue you're asking pics of what you call paraphernalia. Well, over the last 43 years I have collected a nice amount of guitars: 92! I've sent some pics – the real guitars (I can't get them in one picture) and the amps [above]. Thanks so much for the monthly issues – of course I keep them, too!
Peter Gillis

5. You were asking about guitar paraphernalia at home. I've stocked my office lounge with three Marshall full stacks. Does that count?
Dr JP Jakonen

6. I don't collect guitar ephemera. I was a Fender Club member years ago and I own some things that I'm not gonna sell. For me, the thing I can noodle on and make noise with is more important. While reading the issue some items were within reach, so I've sent a picture.
Christian Hoerold

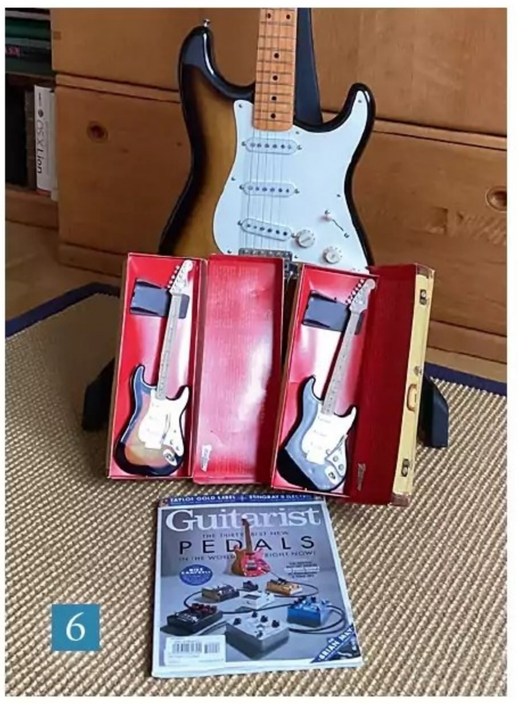
7. I was reading the Feedback section of the recent issue of *Guitarist* mag and there was this letter about miniature collections. I am totally crazy over guitars and have collected many miniatures as well over the years. I have attached some of the pics I have and more can be found in my personal photoblog (ricfreak.com/tagged/miniatures).
Rodney Lim



4



5



6


7

My goodness – what a cornucopia of cool collections. The allure of miniature guitars, keyrings, memorabilia and the like is relatable, of course, but Dr Jakonen's office-based collection of three perfectly understandable Marshall stacks also counts, we believe. They could come in handy at any time during the working day! Likewise, starting a guitar paraphernalia collection by making the guitars themselves the 'paraphernalia' was an inspired choice by both Eddie and Peter. We salute readers' magpie eyes – we'd love to see if any of you have any collections of former shop display kit from big brands such as Fender and Gibson, too, like neon signs and whatnot. Send them in and we'll print the best!

The *Guitarist* inbox overflowed with examples of readers' cherished guitar-related gubbins this month, from the miniature to the mighty!

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

AL JARDINE

The underappreciated rhythm guitarist joins *Guitarist* to recollect on Brian Wilson's legacy and The Beach Boys' impact on 60s surf and guitar culture

Words Andrew Daly



The Beach Boys

On 11 June 2025, we lost Brian Wilson. He was unwell and aged 82, so the news wasn't shocking. Nevertheless, losing one of the most iconic musical minds of the 20th century is still a big gut punch. After all, this was the man who gifted us *Pet Sounds*, not to mention sunshine surf hits like *California Girls*, *I Get Around* and *Good Vibrations*, to name just a few. The word 'few' is certainly operative here, as Wilson's catalogue is as cavernous as his impact. Of course, Wilson's old six-string-slinging cohort, Al Jardine, knows this.

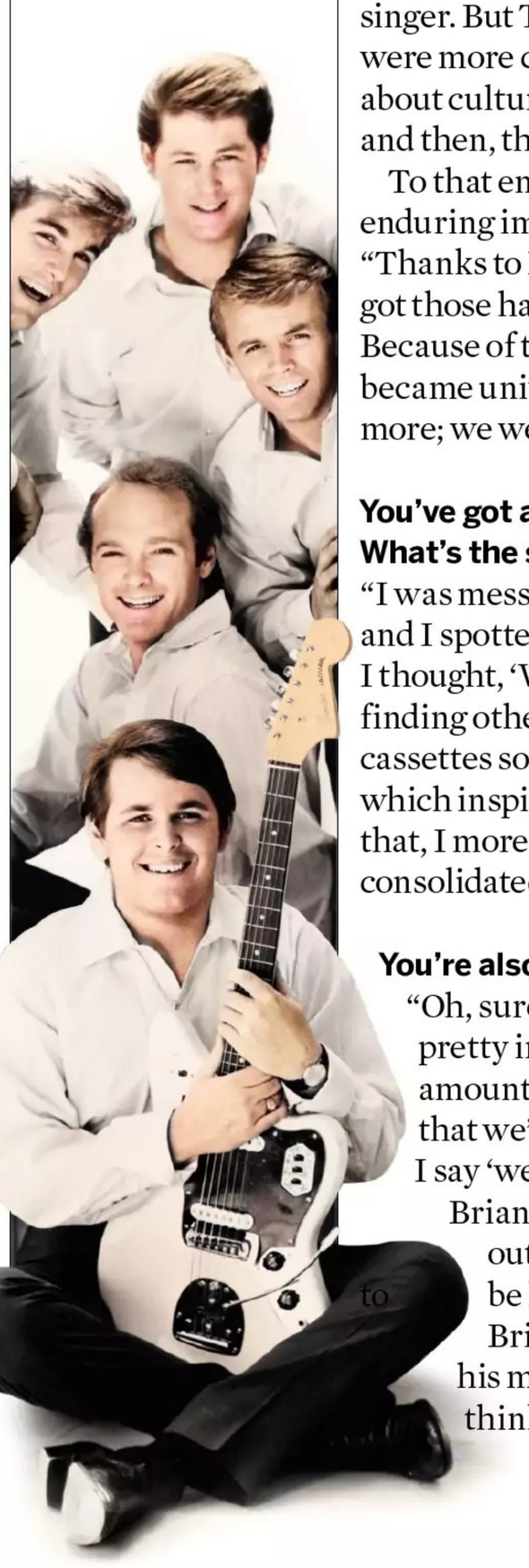
"These people, these kinds of musicians and composers have visions coming from them," Jardine says of Wilson's boundless talent. "It's probably like a cosmic consciousness that is streaming right directly through him to us. And we were his messengers. What else can I say?"

And yet, Jardine isn't done talking... or singing in the beautiful, harmonised fashion that he, alongside Wilson, made famous. Jardine himself is nearly 83, but that's not stopping him from releasing very Beach Boys-esque music in the form of a new four-song EP, *Islands In The Sun*.

"It's probably like a cosmic consciousness [was] streaming right directly through [Brian Wilson] to us. And we were his messengers"

"I just had a lot of fun doing it," Jardine says of the group of songs that he found on an old cassette tape. "I don't know... It's like restoring an old piece of furniture. I really don't know what the right analogy is, to be honest [laughs]. Maybe it's more like restoring an old guitar, right?"

Jardine makes a fair point. But when it comes to guitar, Al Jardine, and The Beach Boys, things get murky. Sure, he was, more or less, the band's 'rhythm guitarist' alongside 'lead guitarist' Carl Wilson. But early on, David Marks was in the mix, a player who, Jardine says, "knows more than anyone when it comes to guitars and gear from those [early] days". (See page 51 for more.)



The Beach Boys in 1964 (top to bottom): Brian Wilson, Dennis Wilson, Al Jardine, Mike Love and Carl Wilson

Then there's the matter of The Wrecking Crew, who Brian Wilson deployed on later Beach Boys albums in place of Wilson and Jardine. And once the 70s came along, Jardine was playing a bit of bass, a smidge of acoustic, and probably – though "not a whole lot" of – electric guitar.

All this is to say that, while Jardine certainly was the band's rhythm player when The Beach Boys played live, it's hard to suss out just how much guitar he played on the band's studio albums, not that Jardine seems to care: "I don't know," he shrugs. "I just enjoyed playing and singing. I'm basically a folk singer. But The Beach Boys were more than that. They were more conceptualised and advanced. We sang about cultural things having to do with California, and then, thanks to Brian, we grew beyond that."

To that end, when he speaks of Brian Wilson's enduring impact on us all, Jardine smiles, saying, "Thanks to Brian, and the world of *Pet Sounds*, we got those harmonies and that type of subject matter. Because of that, it went beyond California and we became universal. We weren't just in California any more; we were universally accepted."

You've got a new EP out called *Islands In The Sun*. What's the story there?

"I was messing around with a bunch of old cassettes and I spotted some versions of this stuff on them. I thought, 'We ought to finish this,' and then I started finding other songs in the same way. Those old cassettes sound really great, even better than CDs, which inspired me to finish *Islands In The Sun*. After that, I more or less discovered the other tunes and consolidated them into a four-song set."

You're also touring with Brian Wilson's old band.

"Oh, sure! Man, getting ready for this has been pretty incredible. I mean, it's been a massive amount of rehearsing because we're doing music that we've never performed before. And when I say 'we', I mean the Pet Sounds Band aka the Brian Wilson band. But we've put ourselves out there and it sounds pretty damn good, to be honest with you. These guys are pros. Brian handpicked these people to represent his music, so it's been a big challenge, but I think we have it down now."

LEFT: PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS RIGHT: PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Brian passed in June, which must have been hard for you. When you think of him, where does your mind wander to?
"His talent transcends... if there's even a word to describe it. He shared his amazing vision with us. In my opinion, he literally invented a form of singing, writing and composing that, to this day, is, I don't know... like Amadeus [Mozart]. Maybe that's going too far [laughs]. But his vision was transcendent."

You're not only a guitarist but a songwriter, too. As far as the guitar goes, though, who were your biggest influences early on?
"No, I'm not a songwriter, really. I learned from Brian. I struggle with writing songs. So I'm just the opposite! I really have to be highly focused if I'm going to come up with anything and it takes me forever. Whereas with Brian, it was instant. He was streaming from another world, another consciousness that I don't have the luxury of using."

Would you say that your greatest influence was Brian?
"I guess my influences were Brian Wilson and, of course, the doo-wop era and the folk era, and the Capitol [Records], in the tower [building] era, where we all recorded. We recorded a lot of our music in the Capitol [Records] Tower, featuring musical iterations from those famous groups. I guess that somehow we were destined to be on a label that had such important groups, like The Kingston Trio, The Beach Boys and The Beatles; we all were on Capitol Records. I mean, there's got to be a reason for it. It's probably another one of those things called destiny, I guess. But those are my influences, those kinds of artists."







PHOTO BY KEYSTONE FEATURES/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES PHOTO BY HERB BALL/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"Thanks to Brian, and the world of 'Pet Sounds', we got those harmonies and that type of subject matter. It went beyond California and we became universal"

How did Brian view guitars within The Beach Boys' music? Sure, it powered a lot of 60s pop, but it seems like Brian's songs were written and harmonised from a pianist's perspective. How did that impact you, Carl Wilson and David Marks as players?
"Well, Brian had to teach us all those chords. Carl and I were just, you know, like Chuck Berry. Hell, I wasn't even a Chuck Berry guitarist; I was just a singer. I had to learn how to play the electric guitar, which, well, it wasn't a big chore. I mean, you just translate things to a different instrument. But none of us were trained musically. So Brian would convert us all or teach us all. He would teach Carl the chords on the guitar, and then Carl would teach me. And then we'd go on down the line like that. But David Marks was also a big part of The Beach Boys' guitar idiom."

Do you recall what gear you were using early on with The Beach Boys?
"We all played Stratocasters, as I remember. We started off with a Stratocaster and then Carl branched into the Jaguar; I think he had that Jaguar for a while. And he tried a Telecaster, I'm sure he tried them all. Oh, then we went over to Gibson and we had an ES-335, which we enjoyed greatly. And we also had a 12-string, which had just come out, and we used it on *California Girls*, which gave it that sound."

Were you also using Fender amps?
"Yeah, we used all the Tweeds. We had the Bassman and later a Twin Reverb. But that would have been a later thing, they didn't have the Twin Reverb early on, I don't think. But I do remember having the Fender Bassman, the one with the tweed cover. Later, we liked the Twin, which had two speakers in it. I think all of our amps had two speakers in the cabinets, but I can't be certain."

Was it difficult to translate The Beach Boys' intricate vocal harmonies to early 60s live stages with primitive monitoring?
"We didn't have any monitors then! [Laughs] So the key was to get around one microphone with three guys so that you could hear each other pretty easily. You just had to make sure that you had an equal balance. And Brian was tall, so he could sneak in and cut in between Carl and I, but he'd also push us away! It's so funny... I didn't even think of that until now. But I remember that sometimes he'd push us [laughs]. We'd have a little tussle around the microphone, and then Mike [Love], of course, would sing most of the leads, so he had his own mic. And then Dennis [Wilson] was up on the drums. But Brian eventually

1. The Strat and Jaguar, held respectively by Mike Love and Carl Wilson above (with Al Jardine in the centre), helped shape The Beach Boys' mid-60s sounds

2. Al Jardine (shown far left in 1964) explains that the band would have "a little tussle" around a single mic on stage

3. Al describes Brian Wilson's talent and vision as "transcendent", and indeed this was a sign of the times with peers (The Beach Boys' Mike Love is third from left) and fellow celebrity devotees of the Mahareshi Mahesh Yogi heading to the Himalayas to study transcendental meditation

got his own mic, which settled that issue of tussling, and so Carl and I would be on one mic."

How did you and Carl divvy up the guitar duties, especially after David Marks left the band?
"Oh, I don't know, I think we played through the same amp, to be honest, because we just didn't have enough help. We were pretty new to that genre, or whatever you'd call it, and that method of touring. So we had to lug our own stuff around. We didn't have crews, so pretty much we were on the same mic, and because it was us lugging it around, we were on the same amp. But it kind of worked. Carl would do the leads and I'd do the rhythm, so it worked out pretty good actually when I think about it."

Did The Beach Boys' approach evolve much by the time later albums, like *Surf's Up* and *Holland*, were recorded in the early 70s?
"Well, we finally got monitors [laughs]. That really helped! Because there were more people on stage than there were initially when it was just the four or five of us. As soon as you start adding musicians, since we couldn't do it all, we had to have monitors and get more amps and guitars."

You even started playing a bit of bass after Brian left the band.
"Yeah, he had been playing a Fender P-Bass for a while and so I had to learn to play the P-Bass after he left. I guess we just evolved with the technology is what I'd say about it – everything kind of exponentially developed as we went along and so we just adapted to the times."

You've often said that you prefer acoustic guitars to electric. Did you play much acoustic guitar with The Beach Boys?
"We didn't use too much of that. Carl and Brian had a relationship, songwriting-wise, and acoustic guitars didn't really enter into the picture until the 70s, really. But I do remember that Carl and I played acoustic guitar on *Sunflower* [1970] and I really enjoyed doing acoustic work. You can hear a bit of that on the song *Add Some Music To Your Day*. I used my 60s Gibson Hummingbird for that. That was fun."

When you look back on it, where do you think surf music and surf guitar would be without The Beach Boys?
"Well, I think The Ventures were really the big surf guitar guys, you know? They were the ones. They really started that whole thing and got it going, pre-surf or whatever you want to call it. So they were the guys. We were just imitators. But yeah, we did a few instrumentals, but that was early on and it was mainly Carl and David Marks. David, who was on the first few Beach Boys albums, did a lot of instrumentals, but after he left we quickly moved on beyond that genre. And once I started back in the band and was playing more guitar, things started to change pretty rapidly."

And when you look back on your journey with Brian Wilson, how will you ultimately remember him?
"As a practical joker [laughs]. He was so funny. He just had a certain way of putting everyone at ease with his sense of humour, you know? We always had fun just hanging out and being goofy with each other."

4. Al played guitar and bass during his time with the band – and here, on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in September 1964, he's using a 12-string Rickenbacker that can be heard on *California Girls*

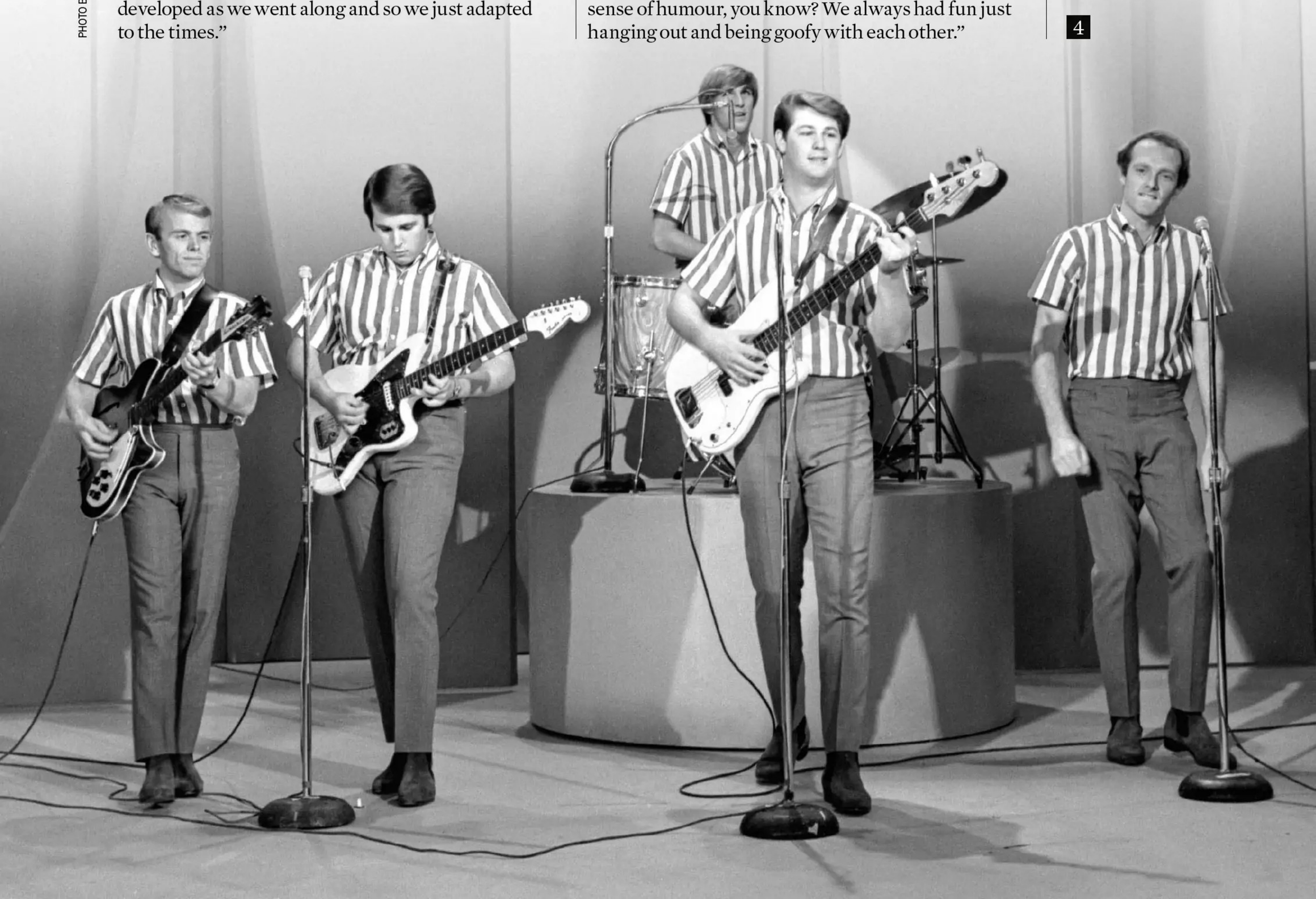


PHOTO BY CBS VIA GETTY IMAGES



5. Al Jardine sharing some good vibrations on acoustic with the original line-up of the band. Al says: "Carl and I played acoustic guitar on *Sunflower* [1970] and I really enjoyed doing acoustic work"



6. Following the band's Fender preferences of the mid-60s, Gibson guitars would later appear in The Beach Boys' music

PHOTO BY STEVE MORLEY/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES PHOTO BY GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

What can you say about how Brian impacted you and Carl as guitar players within The Beach Boys?
"We really learned a lot from him. Carl did, and I know I did. We learned how to produce, to write music and to compose. Brian was great, and through experiences with him you'd learn things, you know, by watching Brian work. It really was a lot of fun and a very big, big learning curve for us. When Brian stopped producing, Carl and I pretty much took on that role and began to produce our own music as The Beach Boys, along with Bruce Johnston, who also did some of his work with us later during the 70s. So when you think about it, Brian was a great teacher without even having known that we were his students."

"We really learned a lot from [Brian]. Carl and I learned how to produce, to write music and to compose. It was a lot of fun and a very big, big learning curve"

A good example of such would be *Kokomo*, right?
"Yeah! That was retro and sounded like a certain period of time. A lot of Beach Boys fans love *Kokomo*, which was an outside production that happened to take off like wildfire. It was typical for the time, and it wasn't a Brian Wilson production, but it was a huge hit nonetheless."

***Islands In The Sun* kind of carries that vibe.**
"For some reason, I gravitated toward that, I guess. It was that fantasy world, you know? And I came up with a nice little melody, kind of Harry Belafonte style, one of my favourite songs. And then I have a little Beach Boys touch on it, which I think is pretty interesting sounding. It's got that beautiful harmony section and that style of singing that I love. It's really very lovely, so there you have it."

7. David Marks (far right) pictured with the band in LA, August 1962. A childhood friend of the Wilson brothers, he would play on the band's first four albums, including countless live performances, before leaving the line-up in 1963

Why is it important to you to continue to represent California's surf culture and music, which are the ideals that The Beach Boys championed early, only musically?
"I just still enjoy playing and singing. For that style of music, it's just fun. It's fun doing all the old stuff and the new stuff and the unheard-of stuff from the EP that we're going to be doing shortly. It's just great to hear the strains of the overture of *California Girls* when we play it live. That's a big payoff for me. It's like an overture for me, so that's amazing. And the band that we have is just so beautiful; the band is perfect. I mean, when you hear them live, you'll see what I mean. They're really incredible. It's just a great backup band to have. Let's put it that way. I don't have to do anything! All I have to do is sing [laughs]."

Of course, you still enjoy that... along with a bit of guitar playing.
"I really do still enjoy it. The payoff is wonderful. I'm lucky to still be able to do it. I'm lucky to still have my voice. So you've got great material, great instruments, great players, great music and a great audience. It's fun for me to sit and hear the band play sometimes. And I have a few leads, but we try to share them around, so everybody gets a chance, you know? And obviously, I still love to play, I'm still doing that. I still have my white Fender Strat, so you'll see that with me at the show. I think I got that in '64 and I've still got it. I may bring my acoustic out there, too. Those old guitars are still great guitars – and they look good. That's good because the band is great and has it all. So come out and see and hear us. What else is there to say?" G



Al Jardine's new EP, *Islands In The Sun*, is available now on Universal Music

www.aljardine.com

ON YOUR MARKS

'Lost Beach Boy' David Marks looks back on his early days beside the Wilson brothers, injecting rock and surf elements into Brian Wilson's songs

How did you meet the Wilson brothers?
"My family moved across the street from them in 1956 when I was around seven. As we were moving in, Carl and Dennis were throwing garbage and car parts into our yard, yelling, 'Hawthorn rules. Inglewood sucks' [laughs]. Our street was the border between the two towns, so that's how we met."

After picking up the guitar, you started jamming with Carl. Did that lead to Brian taking notice?
"Brian was picking up on what Carl and I were doing, which was playing rock music like Dick Dale and The Ventures. Brian was more into jazz, but after Dennis decided that Brian should write a song about surfing, the song *Surfin' Safari* came about. And then Brian recruited Carl and I to play some Chuck Berry-style guitar behind that."

What sorts of gear did you and Carl use?
"The first guitar that I had was a blue and white Sears Silvertone acoustic. The strings were like an inch off the neck [laughs]. Carl had either an electric Sears guitar, a Kay or a Stella. I think it was a Kay... he usually played it unplugged until he figured out how to hook it up to the family stereo."

Eventually, you and Carl shifted to Fender guitars, which became synonymous with The Beach Boys.
"Carl had gotten his Stratocaster, so my parents broke down and got me one, too. After a while, Carl got a Jaguar and we played that through Fender Dual Showman [amps]. They had outboard reverb units and when we kicked them it sounded distorted, like surf hitting the beach."

What do you remember about putting together songs like *Surfin' USA* and *Surfer Girl*?
"When we did our first demos, Murry Wilson, Brian and Carl's dad, shopped the songs to every record company in town. We were turned down by every record company except Capitol, who took a chance on us. Those songs were definitely recorded at United Western, a little cosy studio with a special sound. You could hear the difference between that studio and the big studios with Capitol."

Is it true that you overdubbed the lead on *Don't Worry Baby*?
"Carl usually played the leads, which is what Murry wanted. And I had stopped going on the road with them, but I'd still visit Carl every day after school. When they got off the road, they'd overdub stuff, and one day Brian asked me if I wanted to do a lead. I got excited and was ready to shred [laughs]. But it turned out to be just this little guitar break, like a chord of upstrokes. So, yeah, that's a true story."

It's often rumored that you left The Beach Boys because Al Jardine returned, but it wasn't quite that simple, right?
"Brian had stopped touring, and Al came back and toured with us, played some bass, and basically saved our asses [laughs]. But I was just a child and didn't understand business. Murry tried to drill it into my head, but Dennis and I just wanted to party. Carl was basically in charge of me and Dennis on the road, which was a big burden... I was rebellious and didn't realise the hugeness of where The Beach Boys were headed...

"Into my 30s and 40s, I was resentful. But I became grateful for the time I did have, and when I was invited back, it was a beautiful thing. Our band was wonderful."

People say The Beach Boys weren't a guitar band. Based on albums like *Pet Sounds*, that's true. But with you in the band, things were different. How do you look back on that?
"It definitely was guitar-oriented. Along with Brian's vocal stuff, I think that created our sound. The first four or five albums created a foundation for Brian to operate on. A lot of that was influenced by Chuck Berry, so it was definitely a heavily guitar-oriented sound." **[AD]**

"The first four or five albums created a foundation for Brian to operate on. A lot of that was influenced by Chuck Berry"



PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



OZZY OSBOURNE

1948 – 2025

The late heavy-metal icon did not, could not, play guitar. Yet his contribution to the scene – whether giving a platform to fledgling gunslingers or igniting their talents – was inestimable

Words Henry Yates

PHOTO BY MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

OZZY OSBOURNE

December 1948 – July 2025

Read the tributes to Ozzy Osbourne since his death in July at the age of 76, and you'll hear salutes to every side of his considerable skill set. The flesh-creeping feline yowl. The underrated ear for a melody. The knack for turning a macabre lyric. The madhouse stage presence. But whatever else he was in life – heavy-metal icon, reality TV pioneer, berserker, survivor – Osbourne was no guitarist. As the Black Sabbath and solo star readily admitted, to cast him as a 'musician' in the traditional sense – or as an 'instrumentalist' in any sense – was off the mark.

"I don't play an instrument, I don't understand music, I can't even play chords on a guitar," Osbourne insisted in one video interview with his son, Jack. During a separate 2017 encounter with *Rolling Stone*, a rueful note crept into the frontman's voice. "That's one of my biggest regrets. I can play a little bit of harmonica, and that's about it. It's been interesting, because I can't communicate on a musical level with other musicians."



Ozzy's eerie vocals were the perfect counterpoint to Tony Iommi's down-tuned riffs in Black Sabbath

PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Osbourne's passing marks the exit of metal's most captivating frontman and a lightning rod for the genre's towering guitar players

Unlike other figures we have bade farewell to in 2025 – among them Mick Ralphs, Brian James and Joe Louis Walker – Osbourne never put fingers to fretboard to play a single classic riff, much less an essential solo or trailblazing technique. And yet, his impact and influence on the guitar scene over the past half-century is deep, profound and undeniable. Remove the singer from the narrative and some of the rock era's greatest six-string moments would either never have existed or else gone down in a drabber, much-diluted fashion. Lift him from the timeline – were such a thing even possible – and a fistful of hungry young rough diamonds might never have caught their break or blossomed into all-time greats.

It feels a little glib to cast him as 'the heavy-metal John Mayall', but perhaps there's something in the comparison. Like the Brit-blues godfather – or, indeed, that other supreme talent-spotter, David Bowie – Osbourne had an eye for untapped genius and the ability to ignite it. Time and again, he drew hard-rock and metal's most promising gunslingers to him like an industrial magnet, then lit the fuse that turned base metal into gold.

"It's like shopping for a new suit," Osbourne told editor Brad Tolinski of his recruitment policy. "There may be a whole rack of blue suits, but only one will grab you. There's no ritual, there's no formula. I've just been lucky that everybody's liked my taste in guitar players."

Osbourne's first guitar foil, of course, does not belong in this category. Even in his early 20s, Tony Iommi was no ingénue in need of a guiding hand. Rightly recognised as the chief architect of Sabbath's thunderous, industrial shudder, his steely de facto leadership meant the Birmingham band would likely have gained a level of notice with or without Ozzy onboard.

Yet the best rock 'n' roll has counterpoint, and it is hopefully not sacrilege to argue that Iommi's pulverising SG grooves – especially after he began drop-tuning for songs like *Children Of The Grave* – might have been too torpid, too sludgy, too heavy without Osbourne's insistent, agonised upper-register vocal as a catalyst. From *Paranoid* to *Iron Man*, the riffs landed so hard precisely because of that tension between razor's edge and blunt instrumentation.

His firing from Sabbath in '79 should have been the end of Ozzy. But while future wife Sharon Arden must take credit for pulling the drug-wrecked singer out of the dirt, his nascent solo career only flew thanks to him identifying the neo-classical wizard Randy Rhoads as a breath of fresh air among the Iommi clones lining the corridor to audition.

"I was all over the fucking place," Osbourne told this writer in 2011. "But fucking hell, when I first heard Randy play, it was poetry in motion. I thought, 'Wow, I'm on to a good thing here.' Who knows why we worked so well. Who knows the answer to anything. But sometimes you'll meet a girlfriend and it's more than just a night in the sack."

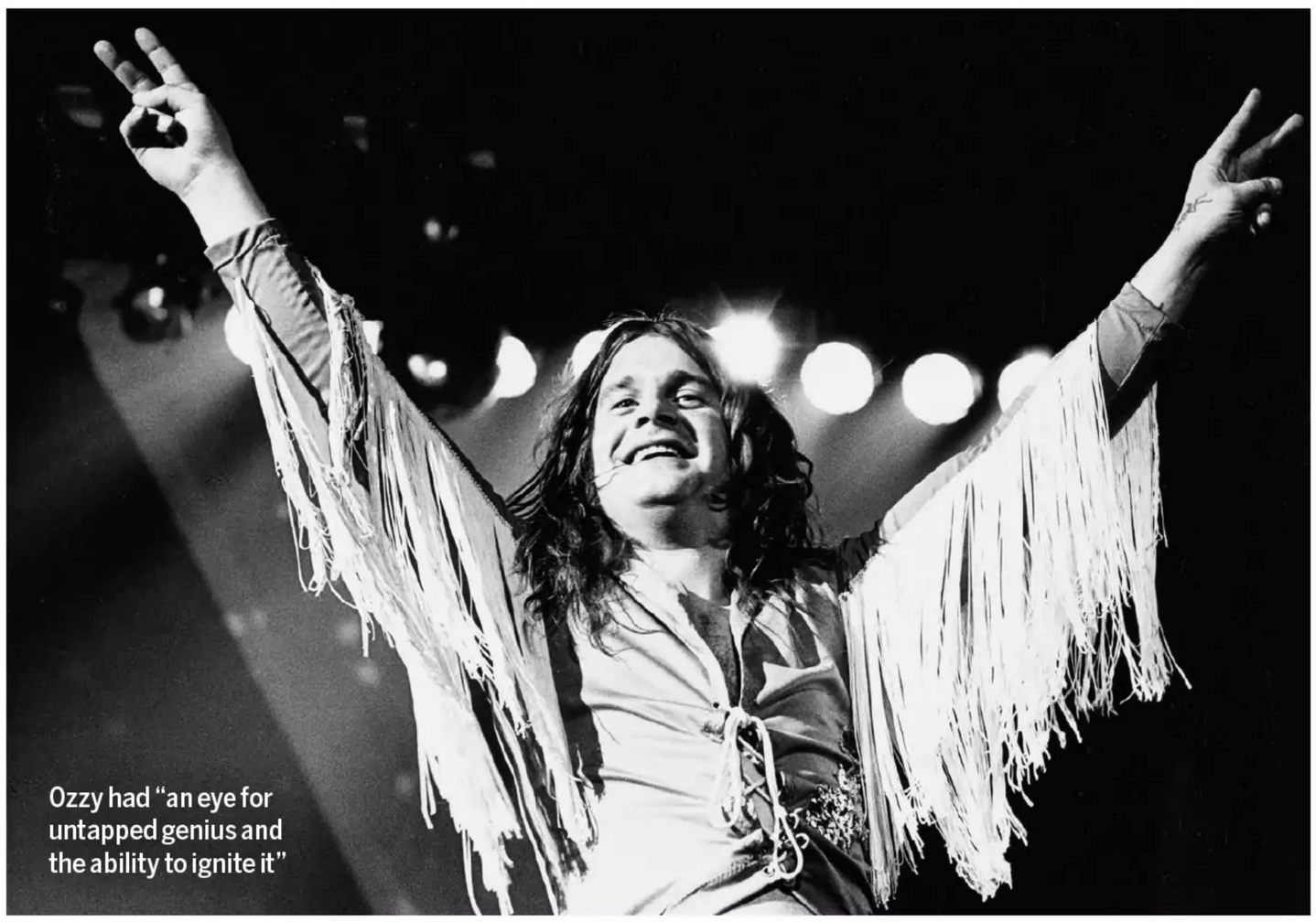
Osbourne and Rhoads – with vital input from bassist Bob Daisley and drummer Lee Kerslake – were a true creative team, fixing each other's holes, working nose-to-nose and exploring tone and pitch to ensure both vocals and guitars exploded from the mix on standouts like *Crazy Train* and *Mr Crowley*. "I'd give him a melody, and he'd work a riff around it," the frontman told journalist Jas Obrecht. "What we both worked out [was], every heavy metal band sticks to one key. So we made a rule that every number we recorded was never played in the same key."

OZZY OSBOURNE

December 1948 – July 2025

The magnanimous singer even defied record label bosses to let his then-unknown junior partner perform an unaccompanied classical vignette, *Dee*, on 1980's *Blizzard Of Ozz*. In hindsight, it was an unprecedented and ballsy move for a make-or-break debut solo album. "For me," Osbourne told this writer, "if it's just fucking headbanging from start to finish, that's not an album, it's just a fucking racket. So when Randy says to me, 'Do you mind if I put this classical instrumental piece on?', I said, 'What are you fucking asking me for? It's your album as well. Just go for it, y'know?'"

Two years later, Rhoads' death at 25 in a stupid, senseless prank-gone-wrong might have put Osbourne back to square one. Yet the singer somehow managed to replace the irreplaceable, unearthing a volley of stellar players and urging them to contribute. Some were dazzling-but-transient placeholders, like Brad Gillis or Bernie Tormé. Others, though, stuck around to become part of the mythology. Jake E Lee proved a tough and fiery sideman when he joined for 1983's *Bark At The Moon*. Later that decade, a Viking-haired Rhoads-acolyte named Zakk Wylde was pumping gas until divine intervention (or glorious dumb luck, you decide) led Ozzy's hand to his audition tape.



Ozzy had "an eye for untapped genius and the ability to ignite it"

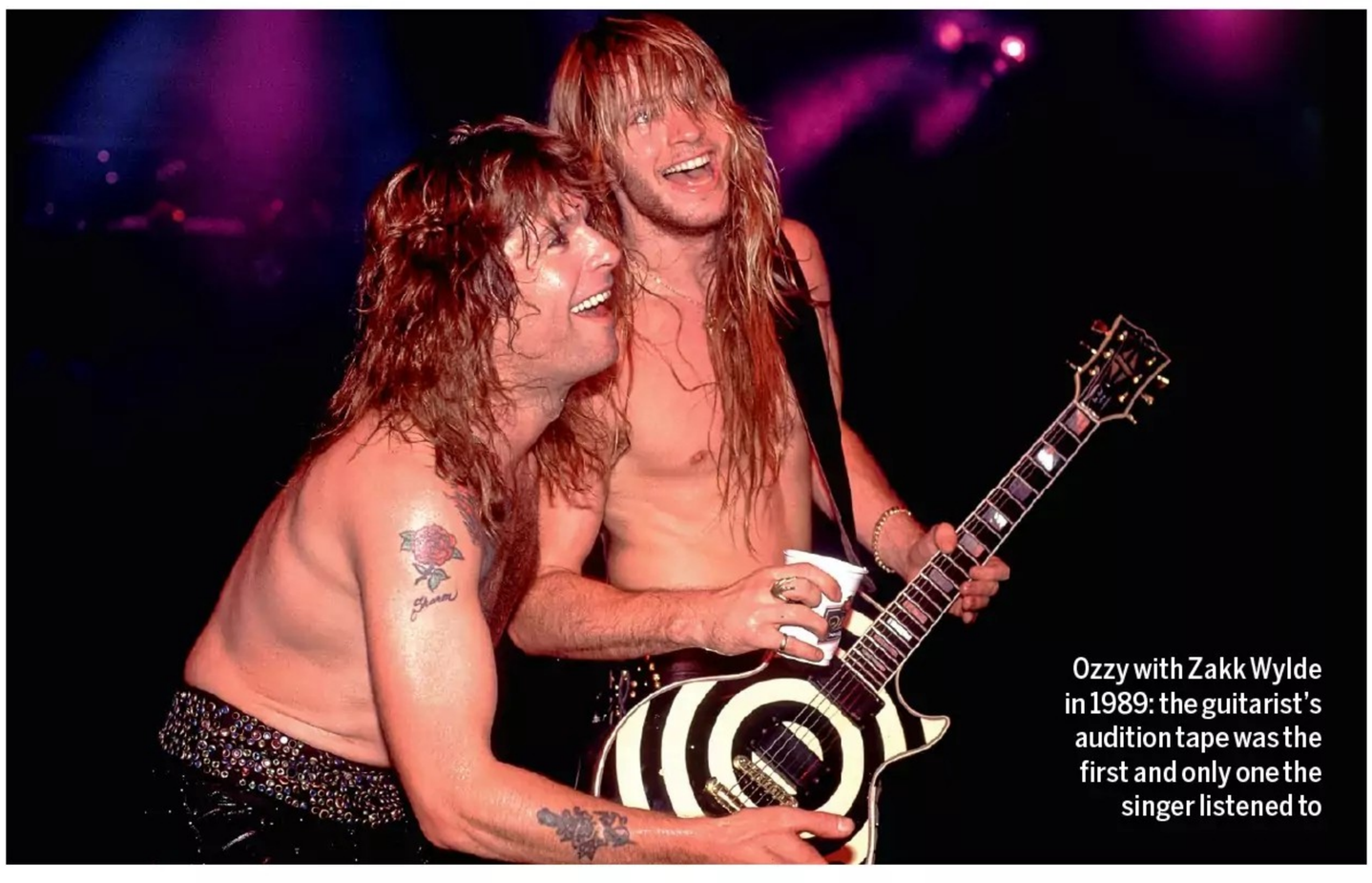
PHOTO BY GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> *"The thing is, with Ozzy, he introduces you to the world, and whatever you want to do is up to you..."* ZAKK WYLDE

"You can imagine how many guitarists sent in their résumés – it was fucking mind-boggling," recalled the frontman in an interview with Joe Bosso. "So after a while, Sharon started bugging me – 'When are you gonna listen to these tapes?' I just didn't want to deal with it. So one morning I decided, 'I gotta do this.' I stuck my hand in a bag and pulled out a tape, and Zakk's tape was the first and only one I listened to."

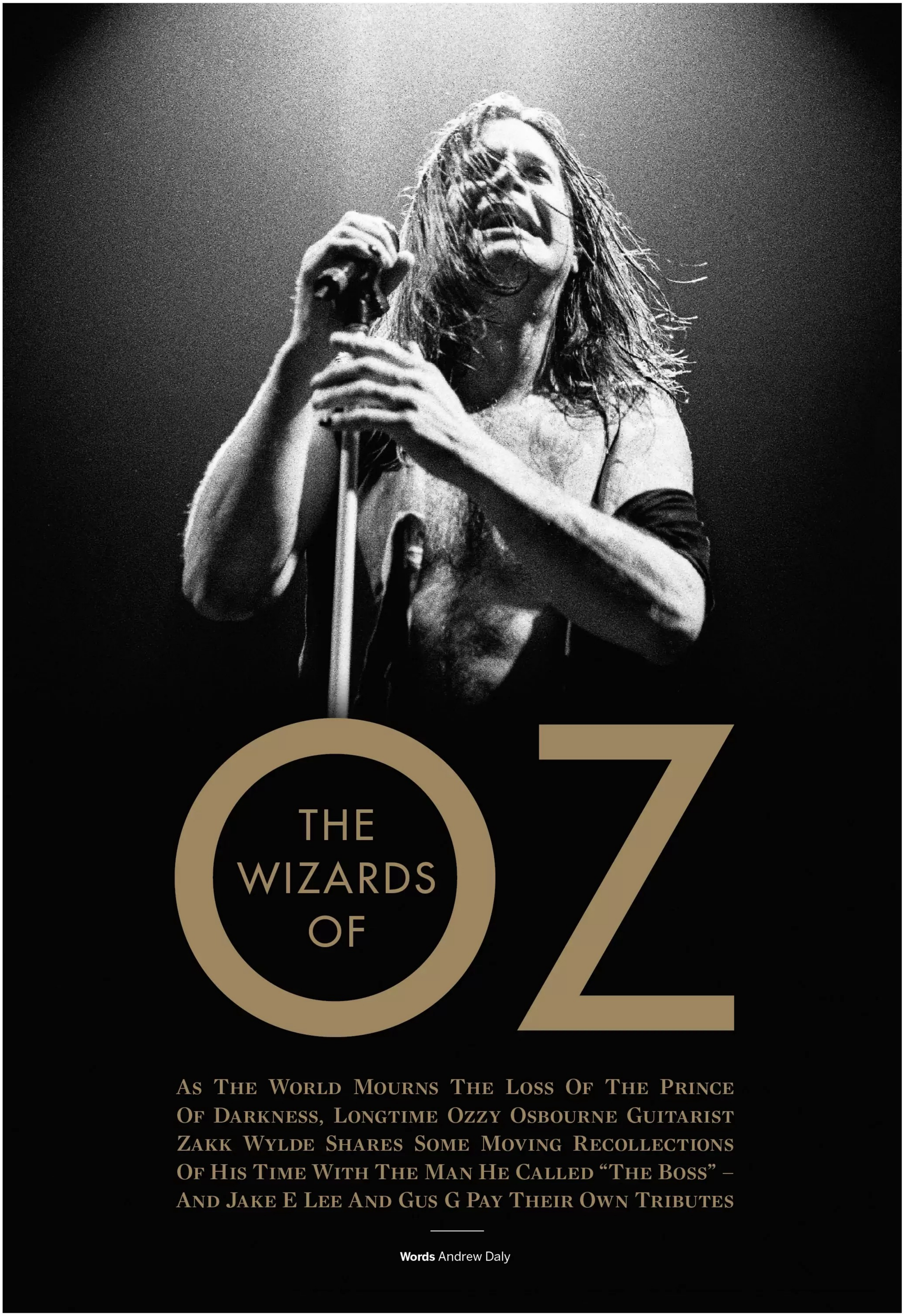
Once again, Osbourne and Wylde's partnership bore instant fruit ("Back then it was just us in a room jamming," the guitarist told Andrew Daly. "We'd be blasting it out in a room. The first song we worked on was *Miracle Man*..."). And even when Wylde stepped away from the line-up in the post-millennium to tend to Black Label Society, the ripples kept spreading, with one Osbourne Band axeman informing the next. "I grew up on Ozzy and Sabbath – if you're into heavy metal, that's your father," late-period sideman Gus G told *That Metal Interview* podcast, adding in a separate interview with Rob Laing that "the first Ozzy album I got on cassette was *Diary Of A Madman*. When I first heard Randy, I thought, 'Whoa, who is this guy...?'"

No guitarist, then. But Osbourne's passing marks the exit of both metal's most captivating frontman and a lightning rod for the genre's towering players. Perhaps Wylde spoke most succinctly for the long line of Osbourne alumni – not to mention the wider hard-rock guitar scene – when he laid it on the line in a 2015 interview with Australia's *Heavy* magazine. "Without Ozzy, I wouldn't be talking here with you right now. The thing is, with Ozzy, he introduces you to the world, and whatever you want to do is up to you..." G



Ozzy with Zakk Wylde in 1989: the guitarist's audition tape was the first and only one the singer listened to

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



As The World Mourns The Loss Of The Prince Of Darkness, Longtime Ozzy Osbourne Guitarist Zakk Wylde Shares Some Moving Recollections Of His Time With The Man He Called "The Boss" – And Jake E Lee And Gus G Pay Their Own Tributes

Words Andrew Daly

PHOTO BY MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES



'The Boss' and Zakk Wylde became a dynamic duo

PHOTO BY JIM ROGASH/GETTY IMAGES

OZZY Osbourne always had a ripping guitarist by his side, from Tony Iommi and Randy Rhoads to Brad Gillis, Jake E Lee and Gus G, among others. But Zakk Wylde, who is probably best known for his playing on Ozzy's solo albums (including 1988's *No Rest For The Wicked*, 1991's *No More Tears* and 1995's *Ozzmosis*) was more than just Ozzy's guitarist. "It was definitely beyond us just playing in a band together and making music. I was always like, 'I worship Sabbath' [laughs], so anything I'm gonna be writing is going to have Iommi as the base of the soup. If I'm writing the riffs, that's just in there. It's in my DNA."

Growing up in Bayonne, New Jersey, Zakk was deeply impacted by Ozzy's work with Rhoads and Lee. And so when he got the chance to step in after Lee left Ozzy's band in 1987, he grabbed the bull by the horns. "Oz was just the best," Zakk says. "He was almost like an older brother. There was nearly a 20-year age gap between us, so that's how it was. If I ever needed advice, I could talk to him."

That bond led Zakk and Ozzy to write songs such as *Miracle Man* and *No More Tears*, which are compared favorably to Ozzy's work with Rhoads and Lee. "I think you usually gravitate toward something because it feels natural," he says. "And it felt natural to do it with Oz. Very rarely would things turn into a math equation, where you needed a manual to figure out a part. If that starts, then it's probably not going to happen."

> ***"What Ozzy gave me with Sabbath, and then with Randy and Jake, it's a beacon of light... He gave me purpose to be a musician."*** ZAKK WYLDE

Zakk weaved in and out of Ozzy's musical life throughout the 90s and early 2000s, before setting back in for good in 2017 for the 'No More Tours II' tour, which was to be Ozzy's final jaunt. Zakk also stuck around for Ozzy's Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame induction in 2024 and was by his side during his final solo performance at 'Back To The Beginning' on 5 July 2025 at Birmingham's Villa Park. "I am blessed and grateful, man," he says.

You were a young and less experienced musician when you first met Ozzy in the 80s – is it fair to say that he didn't just show you the ropes musically but also life as a working musician?

"Without a doubt. You're always gonna learn along the way. You trust somebody, and then you get screwed on a business deal, or whatever, and when anything would happen, Oz would be like, 'Oh, Zakk, I remember with Sabbath this or that...' Oz would always be there for any advice I needed. He'd poke me in the eye and I'd be like, 'What was that for?' He'd say, 'Life's tough. That's why.' [Laughs] I'd go, 'Yeah, but I really didn't need that.' He'd go [in a British accent], 'Oh, whatever, go make me a sandwich, light on the Colman's. I don't want it to overpower the flavour of the sandwich.' [Laughs]"

The first album you made with Ozzy was *No Rest For The Wicked* in 1988. What was that like?

"It was a different thing than it is now. Later, when we were getting ready to do stuff, I'd be like, 'Oz, I'll just record a bunch of stuff and you do whatever you like.' Back then, it was just us in a room, jamming. We'd be blasting it out in a room."

"The first song we worked on was *Miracle Man*. Oz would say, 'Well, where

"Oz was just the best. He was almost like an older brother"

ZAKK WYLDE

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Zakk was Ozzy's first choice for the band's axe slinger in the late 80s – and the pair remained like family until the end

do I come in with the vocal?' I said, 'Why don't we just do this riff, and you come in and sing on that?' And I'd say nine out of 10 times, the first thing that came out of his mouth was it. He'd say, 'Zakk, keep playing that riff,' and we ended up doing that thing.

"With *No More Tears* we ended up doing that call-and-response thing, like *War Pigs*, you know? It was the vocal and then the guitar, so the first thing that came out of his mouth was usually it. Very rarely would he go, 'Zakk, I don't like what I'm singing on that, let me come up with something better.'"

Looking at No More Tears, a lot of fans hold that album in the same regard as *Blizzard Of Ozz* and *Diary Of A Madman*. How do you view that album now?

"Just like with *No Rest For The Wicked*, when you look back at the evolution of bands, all the bands we love made albums that get them to where they are. It's like Led Zeppelin, if they could have made the fourth album [*Led Zeppelin IV*] right away, they would have [laughs]. But you need all the other albums to evolve. And *Blizzard* and *Diary* were done back to back, so Randy didn't have years to come up with more ideas.

"With writing and evolving, like all of us, when I look at the evolution from *No Rest For The Wicked* to *No More Tears*, people ask, 'Did you do anything different?' And I mean, my love for the Allman Brothers, Albert Lee and Lynyrd Skynyrd was creeping in more, so I was trying to incorporate that in more perhaps."

What guitar techniques would you call out to that end?

"[Maybe] like country-type flatpicking stuff on *I Don't Want To Change The World*, and on the solos and stuff. And on *Mama, I'm Coming Home*, there's a little country thing

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Things might have gotten messy when Jake E Lee was fired from Ozzy's band in 1987, but looking back he admits that Ozzy "changed everything for me"

Jake E Lee was one of LA's fiercest guitar guns in the early 80s, but that spotlight was hotter than hot as it came with the added pressure of replacing Randy Rhoads, who had died in a plane crash in '82. "*Bark At The Moon* was such a good tune," he says, reflecting on the title track of his first studio outing with the band. "It helped confirm that Ozzy wasn't over just because Randy had passed and that he was still a viable force. I'm proud to have been a part of that."



Lee brought fire to the fretboard during his five-year tenure

Where is your head at after Ozzy's death, especially after reconnecting at the 'Back To The Beginning' show?

"I hadn't seen him in almost 40 years. Even though we hadn't been in contact, he might be the single most important person that happened to me in my life – other than my wife! He changed everything for me; he put me in the spotlight. He's who I'm connected to as far as the general public is concerned. And the fact that he's gone now, I'm still wrapping my head around it... I always wanted to reconcile and let him know that there weren't any hard feelings and that we could end things on a friendly note. I got to do that."

Was it a certain magnetism that drew people to him?

"Yeah, magnetism is a good word. He was bigger than life, but deep down he was a kind man – it just shone from him. It was palpable. You just liked him. He was this clownish, funny, sweet guy when it comes right down to it."

Ozzy had a unique relationship with his guitar players. What was your relationship like?

"Well, [he was] not really a father figure and not really a brother. We never really got that close and I don't know why that is. Our personalities didn't mesh as closely as with Randy or Zakk. He was the boss; that's how I looked at him. But on stage it worked and there was a definite connection."

In LA in the early 80s, you were one of the few players who could say that you weren't trying to emulate Randy or be an Eddie Van Halen clone.

"Out of all the other 80s players, particularly out of LA, I did sound different from all of them. Maybe it's because I had a little bit of punk in me. When I came to LA in '80 or '81, punk was big and I liked it; I liked the energy. But I couldn't go to any of the shows, which was the ultimate deciding factor because I had long hair... and I liked long hair [laughs]. If you went to those shows back then and you had long hair, you were guaranteed to get your ass kicked.

"I was welcomed with open arms by the LA metal community, but I always really liked punk. I mean, X was my favorite LA band, more so than Van Halen – and I loved Van Halen. I always had this sort of violent attitude towards my guitar. I was more aggressive than a lot of other LA guitar players and maybe that helped define the difference between me and the other guys."

How do you look back on what you accomplished with Ozzy?

"I'm proud of what I did with Ozzy. In Hollywood, I was maybe considered the top guy, or at least in the top three, as far as guitar players. But when I joined Ozzy, I got a lot better. It was sort of a do-or-die moment. He made me look at my guitar playing more...

"The solo from *Bark At The Moon* is an example. I had the second half all worked out and the first half was something completely different in my mind; it was more melodic and more like a Neal Schon thing. I was sure that it was gonna work. I spent all night trying to get it the way it sounded in my head, and I know [producer] Max Norman was getting frustrated. And I was frustrated.

"But Ozzy walked in there, listened to it, and said, 'What the fuck is that? No, no, that's not working.' Then he said, 'Just go out there and jam on your guitar.' And I think the solo from *Bark At The Moon* that ended up on the record was my second take of just jamming. I was like, 'Really? I didn't put any thought into it. I'm just sitting here ripping it out. How can that be the solo?'"

So Ozzy made you a better player by recommending that you put your mind at ease and just play? That's good advice for any young player.

"Years later, I can look back and go, 'Oh, yeah, I see how that works.' He made me rethink how to play the guitar. I appreciate that." **[AD]**

PHOTO BY RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

at the beginning with the pedal steel. So that was definitely creeping in more on *No More Tears*. Whereas *No Rest For The Wicked* was just straight-up metal and hard rock, you know what I mean?"

What kept you and Ozzy close while you were separated, to where you could reunite in 2017 and through to his death?
"We'd always keep in touch. People were always like, 'Zakk, why doesn't Ozzy have you writing on all his stuff?' Because the songs would often already be written later on, and Oz would say, 'Zakk, can you just come in and play?' I'd go, 'Yeah, whatever you need me to do. No problem, man.'

"I remember Oz saying, 'Zakk has left the nest. He's his own guy now." He was like, 'Zakk, I don't want to be the lead singer of Black Label Society [Zakk's own band formed in 1998].' And it's like I told everybody, 'I completely get it, man.' It's like if Randy had stayed with Quiet Riot, and then he's coming back to Ozzy, and it would be like, 'Oh, is Ozzy the singer of Quiet Riot now?'

"And it's the same with Jake and Badlands. It's like, 'Oh, Jake is having success with Badlands on his own, and it sounds like Badlands...' But if you put Ozzy on that stuff, now it's an Ozzy record, you know what I mean? Jake can't help but write like Jake, and it's the same with me or anyone else, like Eddie Van Halen or Dime[bag Darrell]."

So, none of that ever impacted your working relationship with Ozzy later on?
"People write the way people write.

IT'S A SCREAM

Gus G had the fairytale entrance to the band in the late Noughties after Ozzy saw clips of him playing on YouTube

What was it like working with Ozzy?
"It was a wonderful experience. We recorded *Scream* [2010] at Ozzy's home studio, so every morning [producer] Kevin Churko would pick me up from the hotel and we'd drive to Ozzy's and start working on the songs. We took our time and made sure everything sounded right. It was an already recorded album, so I tried to give it that Ozzy stamp and vibe, and have a few bits here and there that were reminiscent of his classic players. But, of course, I brought my own game when it came down to the solos."


Gus played alongside Ozzy between 2009 and 2017

How do you feel *Scream*'s legacy has evolved with time, compared to other records with Randy, Jake and Zakk?
"I think *Scream* is a strong album overall with some fantastic moments. It's more up to the fans to decide, but I still get a lot of [positive] comments from the young generation of that time who discovered Ozzy from the *Scream* album. I guess it's partly a generational thing. On the other hand, the classics are the classics. His early albums are the staples of his career and of the heavy metal genre in general."

You left Ozzy's band after he reunited with Zakk Wylde in 2017. What was that like?
"Of course, I was bummed because I knew I'd probably never see him or play with him again. On the other hand, it made sense. Ozzy and Zakk have so much history together; it was inevitable."

How will you remember Ozzy, the man and the musician?
"Ozzy was everything you imagined him to be: proper rock royalty, very caring for those around him, big-hearted, generous – he was the funniest guy I've ever met. His aura was so strong that when he walked into a room, everyone stopped immediately and looked at him." **[AD]**

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

> *"Ozzy was everything you imagined him to be: proper rock royalty, big-hearted, generous – he was the funniest guy I've ever met"* GUS G

I completely understood what Ozzy was saying. If anything, at the end of the day, it's a compliment. It's like, 'Zakk, it doesn't sound like it's my band any more. It's like I'm in your band.' It would be like if Jerry Cantrell were doing the writing; it's gonna sound like Alice in Chains. I was like, 'No, I understand what you're saying.'"

What are your most poignant memories of what ended up being your final show with Ozzy on 5 July 2025 at Villa Park in Birmingham?
"I was just more worried about making sure that Oz was okay for the whole performance, you know? So with *Mama, I'm Coming Home*, when we got the acoustic out, I had to be like, 'Keep the guitar away from the microphone so I can sing,' because Oz was having trouble [singing] certain notes. I was just like, 'I need to make sure I'm always there so I can double him' – and I was 3ft away from the microphone when I started playing the song. [But then] it was, 'I gotta get near the microphone,' so I had to almost stop playing, lift the guitar up, and put it over the mic. It was actually pretty funny, but it was business as usual. But yeah... It's supposed to be, like, the most important show ever, but everything's on the fly [laughs].

"After that, because obviously everybody and their mother were in the backstage dressing room, I just wanted to give him a break. I figured we'd see him later on, the next day or whatever. But no, the last text I got from Oz was saying, 'Zakky, sorry, it was like a madhouse back there. Sorry I didn't see you.' He goes, 'Thanks for everything,' and it was just us talking, saying, 'I love you, buddy,' and everything. So yeah... that was it."

Where would you be if you'd never met or played with Ozzy?
"To have music be the thing that turns the lights on at the end of the day, instead of some job that you can't stand, it's everything. Everything revolves around playing and music. If I didn't have Oz, I'd continue playing... but it's how Ozzy would say what The Beatles did for him, you know? What he gave me with Sabbath, and then with Randy and Jake, it's a beacon of light. It gives you purpose. So even if I hadn't played with him, he gave me purpose to be a musician. And without a doubt, that'll always be with me." G


Selmer
HIWATT
Marshall

THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

WILD ROVERS

Greta Van Fleet's Jake Kiszka is one of the most feted players in the world, but his new project, Mirador, with Ida Mae guitarist and vocalist Chris Turpin, is a lightning-strike among modern records, combining the raw spontaneity and unpredictability of 60s classics with a very modern, dark energy of its own. We meet Kiszka and Turpin to find out how British folk, microphonic SGs, high volume and intense time pressure yielded one of the most electrifying debut records of the past 10 years

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Phil Barker

"It was the last day of recording, and the engineers have packed down all the mics and the drums, and Dave said, 'Fuck it. We need another fast one. You've got half an hour. Go down, write it and come back...'"

Vocalist and guitarist Chris Turpin is describing the breakneck tempo of writing and recording Mirador's debut album in the humid depths of the night in Savannah, Georgia, under the exacting eye of veteran producer Dave Cobb, a nine-time Grammy Award winner.

The intensity of the story is at odds with the bucolic setting in which it is told. It's a Sunday afternoon and Chris and Mirador bandmate Jake Kiszka (better known as guitarist with globe-conquering rock band Greta Van Fleet) are sitting in the beer garden of one of the oldest pubs in England, wafting wasps away from their drinks and trying to explain how they captured lightning in a bottle at first attempt with Mirador's eponymous debut album.

Dark, brooding and twitching with unpredictable energy, the record is the kind we all grew up on – even if we were born too late to be there as it happened. It's a record whose spiritual home is a live BBC TV soundstage, somewhere in the early 70s – or perhaps a churned festival field somewhere in Somerset in '69. Or maybe a setting older still, somewhere in the dim folkways of pre-war America and pre-industrial Britain. It has guitar solos that launch out of the speakers like crooked javelins, vocal performances that seem ripped out of the singer's heart like pages from a profane bible – and its sound is steeped as much in the folk music of a lost England as it is in blues.

Listening to it, you wonder, 'Why did we stop making records this way?' Once upon a time, guitarists like Hendrix played from the hip with such complete abandon yet still said something profound with every bar. But ever since then, some might argue, we have traded the intoxicatingly volatile spirit of that kind of rock for increasing precision and replicable virtuosity. Mirador want to go the other way and, in the best sense, they have succeeded. Yet there are also contemporary textures and sounds, making it a striking beast on the landscape of modern rock music – an album deeply rooted in tradition and made like bands used to do, without a click-track in sight, yet very much of its own time, too.

For Jake Kiszka, the journey is not without risks. Greta Van Fleet are already one of the world's most acclaimed rock acts and not without reason as their epic, soaring reimagining of the classic rock idiom has gained them a huge and obsessively devoted following around the world. And Jake's role as guitarist in Greta has placed him on a pedestal that few ever get to stand on. So when Mirador embarked on their recent debut US tour opening for Greta Van Fleet, Kiszka knew he – and the otherwise all-British Mirador line-up rounded out by Nick Pini on bass and Mikey Sorbello on drums – would be under the microscope.

"I think the scrutiny that we knew we'd be under lent itself to the atmosphere of the record. It was like everybody had their back or backs up against the wall. So we really had to come out swinging," Jake reflects. Lest that sound melodramatic, Jake and Chris recall their surprise when they realised that, between their first ever live performance and the second, fans had pieced together the lyrics of Mirador's songs, despite none being made public as recordings at that stage, well enough to sing them back to the band as they played.

"The scrutiny we were under lent itself to the atmosphere of the record. We really had to come out swinging" *JAKE KISZKA*



1



2

MIRADOR PHOTO BY DEAN CHALKLEY IDA MAE PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Kiszka and Turpin met when Chris's roots-rock duo with Stephanie Ward, Ida Mae, were supporting Greta Van Fleet six years ago. A common interest in the folk music of America and Britain brought Kiszka and Turpin together and tour-bus jams gradually coalesced into a conviction that the pair should write and record something together that stood apart from their other work. The other resolution was that the outcome would fan life back into the embers of rock as it used to be written and performed – spontaneously, almost recklessly, with a match-fit band and an electrifying live feel to the resulting recordings.

So with Kiszka and Turpin back in the UK to promote the debut Mirador album, *Guitarist*

1. Mirador are an Anglo-American band, fusing the blues heritage of the States with British folk traditions in the footsteps of Jansch, Renbourn et al

2. Chris Turpin with Stephanie Ward, who write and perform together in the excellent roots-rock band Ida Mae

Jake says he looks for abundant resonance in a good SG, as is evident in his ‘Beloved’ 1961 SG-shape Les Paul



3


4

joined Jake and Chris to talk about the increasingly forgotten influence of folk on rock, the crucial importance of playing at high volume, what a great SG can do that no other Gibson electric can, and why working with only minutes to get a take can provide the jolt of pure musical electricity that is missing from all too many recordings today...

You both have successful bands with their own distinctive sounds – so how and why did Mirador spring into life?

Chris Turpin: "Mirador was entirely unplanned. We got friendly and were just hanging out and trading licks. Jake played on an Ida Mae album, and we got to be pals that way and sort of had curry and drank beer and did what friends do. And then Jake said, 'Hey, do you want to do something?' And I kind of went, probably too arrogantly, 'Well, if we do something, we *do* something' – it has to be good, you know? And then that's when the writing process began."

Jake Kiszka: "Chris and I got together, we're like, 'Let's just write a couple songs for fun, you know, in that stage of things.' And I had this old Victorian house in East Nashville [where] we got together and started writing a few tracks. The first day it was like, two or three songs. And I was like, 'Well, this is quite fast – a matter of a couple hours. So let's try for some more tomorrow.' And that process went on, but by the end of the week, we basically had 12 tracks – we had a whole record in a matter of a week. At that point, it was like, 'There's something taking shape that is, in some ways, out of our hands.'"

Mirador's sound has plenty of American folk-blues influences, but you can also hear the influence of seminal British folk guitarists such as Bert Jansch and Martin Carthy in your music, even though it's very hard-rocking in places. That's quite an unusual blend in this day and age...

Jake: "So many of my influences growing up were European artists and traditions. I really looked to the UK, specifically, for a lot of that stuff, and Chris looked to America for a lot of those influences. So I learned a lot of early English folk music, and some of the bands that I really loved had some elements of that, like Fairport Convention and some of that lineage. So when I was playing with Chris early on, it was a surprise – and something that I really enjoyed – that Chris could do all that stuff.

"I think that was a huge part of getting British players [to form the band] who could come from that influence. Because, you know, you don't really get that in America. Even with the amount of technology and resources we have to learn and listen to new music. It's like there's this sort of built-in thing about British players so they can kind of do that. And I think that was a huge part of what was interesting in making something different [with Mirador]."

Chris: "Yes, growing up in the UK, you take it for granted – what you have around you – and you look to America as so many Brits have, and it's vastly more exotic and cool and interesting. And that's why, while my dad was taking me to go and see Bert Jansch and Fairport and all these folkies coming through, growing up with John Martyn and Nick Drake sort of glosses over you. But you're like, 'What's that? Is that Bukka White? That's cool!' I think because you can't get it, you can't find it, you can't read it, and it just becomes much more intoxicating. As well, I think at the age that I heard that music, I discovered the likes of Free, Fleetwood Mac at the same time as The White Stripes and early Black Keys. So it

3. Les Paul's name on the truss rod cover serves as a reminder that the SG (in body shape, at least) was initially sold as his signature model until 1963, when it officially became the Gibson SG Standard

4. Extremely heavy buckle rash on the back of Jake's 1961 Les Paul bears witness to all the Greta Van Fleet gigs he's done with it – but also a long life prior to his ownership

"Mirador was entirely unplanned. I said, 'If we do something, it has to be good.' That's when the writing process began" CHRIS TURPIN

"I tried to get further away from the world that I have been living in and build a new vernacular of licks"

JAKE KISZKA

Jake and Chris relied on a varied mix of amps for the album and associated live shows, from vintage Selmer heads to Marshall JTM45s and more



5



6

was all sort of homogenising to the same thing. And then I was seeing a lot of acoustic players – Martin Simpson was the first person I saw play slide, for example. I saw Bert Jansch, and I was learning from Stefan Grossman DVDs how to play country blues.

"I was learning the thumb-picking styles and no-one was teaching me that. I was just absorbing it and pulling it off old CDs... Celtic guitar-playing meets country-blues playing, meets ragtime, meets Piedmont blues meets whatever it might be. As soon as you pull anything onto a flat-top acoustic guitar... when you put it into that context, they're really not that distant from each other.

"But it was like you say: some British folk elements have been disregarded and I have various theories for why they have been. For example, one morning at 2am, I said, 'Jake, you've got to listen to Martin Carthy. Listen to this.' I think you thought for a second I was probably insane... Anyway, we ended up writing *Roving Blade*, which is one of my favourite tracks on the album, after listening and diving into those songs. We went to Bradford-on-Avon and saw Martin Carthy just after Jake came over to the UK. We only saw half the show because you'd just stepped off a plane. But we got a picture with him."

Jake: "I think what was so fascinating to Chris and I was, how can we take this stuff that we were influenced by, that we really love, and inject it into what we're writing in a fresh, new way? And that was a big part of the challenge. So I think one of the successes of this record – for me, personally – is that we were able to take some of those ancient folk sensibilities and translate them in a very modern way."

Chris: "I went to see Martin Carthy at the Green Note [in Camden] and he played to about 12 people in the afternoon.

"So many of my influences growing up were European artists and traditions. I really looked to the UK" *JAKE KISZKA*

He was talking about folk traditionalists and [lampooning them as] very sort of jacketed, intense individuals, telling musicians about 'the way it should be done,' and 'What version is that?' and 'You're playing it wrong. Don't sing it like that! It's too inflected'. And Martin Carthy basically said, at the ripe old age he is: 'Fuck that – pick it up and take it and do whatever you want with it. Just change it. It's the whole point. It's a living, cultural moving target.'"

5. Chris Turpin's Martin Custom 00-28 features a very old Martin scratchplate design and some other deep cuts from the company's long history such as the fret-marker design. It is a companion piece to Jake's similarly spec'd and outwardly very similar 00-28 acoustic

6. Chris's 12-fret 00-28 has the medieval-vibed Mirador logo on the headstock while Jake's has the logo on the fretboard. The backs of both guitars are, notably, made from the same larger piece of stunning rosewood

There are some incredible guitar sounds on the album – and in terms of tones, it's layered up with all kinds of classic guitar sounds. Did the gear you both used stand apart from what you normally use in Greta Van Fleet and Ida Mae respectively?

Jake: "I would say yes, I tried to get further away from the world that I have been living in for some of the previous Greta records. And that's just guitar selection, amplifier selection, and obviously through what we were doing in our songwriting. I think probably what I end up using on a record is typically what's closest at that moment. But when we were forming Mirador, it was a question of whether I was going to bring in my guitars or my amps, and I decided to try something different and build a new vernacular of different licks and things like that – look at myself as a separate [kind of player] within Mirador. So, yeah, I did bring my 1961 Les Paul – the 'Beloved' – with me to the studio. And I use that quite a bit. That's kind of my fallback approach, to use that. But I think there were a handful of guitars that I brought that maybe showed up.

"But Dave Cobb is a guitar player as well and he has quite a significant collection of really beautiful and historic guitars that do very particular things. He had

Pictured, fittingly, in a medieval barn with their brace of custom Martins, Jake and Chris have produced a sound with Mirador that is full of spontaneous energy but has deep roots in folk tradition

"Growing up in the UK, you take for granted what you have around you... America was vastly more cool and interesting"

CHRIS TURPIN

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!

Watch Chris play and discuss the guitars used on Mirador's self-titled new album

http://bit.ly/guitaristextra



7



8

a Telecaster there that I used quite a bit; I think it was a white '56 Tele. And there was an early 70s Burgundy Sparkle 12-string 335. And that was actually given to me by Daniel Wagner, Greta's drummer, as a birthday gift. And so any time I did 12-string stuff that's what I was using."

Chris: "Dave also had a Danelectro that once belonged to Daniel Lanois. It had a lipstick pickup in the neck and a Tele pickup in the bridge. That was quite important and it got used for overdubs on *Ashes To Earth*."

Jake: "The Danelectros have a very particular sound with those lipstick-tube pickups – great dubbing instruments. With a lot of this stuff, what the material was calling for was humbucking pickups. And then Chris and I would end up layering it up with [further parts recorded with] single-coil lipstick pickups."

Chris: "On the acoustic side, Dave had an astonishing Martin 000-28 that you used for a lot of the acoustic stuff. We'd just done the end of the first opening tour with Greta, so we had our Martin 'Mirador' guitars [see pics] with us. And so for *Must I Go Bound* I used my Martin 'Mirador' and Jake used a Martin nylon-string."

Jake: "Yeah, I used that for the solo in *Must I Go Bound*, so that was interesting. There was also a black 50s J-200 of mine, a really early one, that got used. That was really fun, finally getting to use that for some stuff – because there was a lot of layering of acoustic over electric on the record. There was also a late-60s Flying V that showed up halfway through. You remember that?"

Chris: "Yeah, it's the really cool one [of the type] that Andy Powell used on *Argus* by Wishbone Ash. So, for me, on the guitar side, I used my 'Mirador' Martin for the acoustic stuff, although I use Jake's Duolian resonator for the track *Ten Thousand More to Ride*. And then it was my '66 Strat for most things – for example, *Roving Blade* was that '66 Strat. And then the '70 Les Paul Custom was used for [the album's debut single] *Feels Like Gold* and most of everything else. Then the only other thing I used, Dave has a '57 Sparkle Gretsch Duo Jet, which he got from the Gretsch family, that has that shimmery Gretsch thing. Actually, I tell a lie – I used the black Trini Lopez for overdubs."

"On the acoustic side, Dave had an astonishing Martin 000-28 that Jake used for a lot of the acoustic stuff" *CHRIS TURPIN*

7. Jake's Martin Custom 00-28 features a factory aged finish that is worn through to the wood – something Martin doesn't normally offer. Chris Martin personally authorised the move and even completed the ageing work himself!

8. The headstock of Jake's Custom 00-28 is very classic, though Jake and Chris believe their 00-28s may be the only black-finish examples of that model ever made

Jake: "That was actually a new Gibson Custom Trini Lopez, but it turned out to be an incredibly good one."

Sometimes guitarists can go into the studio determined that a certain instrument they love is going to define the sound of a record, but often something completely different emerges as a better option once the music starts flowing – even gear that just happens to be lying about in the studio. Did that happen on this record to any extent?

Chris: "We had that with amps. Jake had just been touring a Selmer Zodiac, but it was a rare Zodiac, like a 30- or 35-watt one with two 12s. And you weren't quite happy with the sustain on it, but it sounds fucking cool. And I had this '62 brown Fender Pro, which has a big, rich 15-inch speaker. We were loving the mix of those live, but you put them under the microscope of the studio and we both reverted to different things."

Jake: "They definitely made for great live performance amplifiers, but they didn't translate in the same way to the studio. So that was interesting. We really ended up using a lot of combo amps."

Chris: "Dave had a Marshall Lead and Bass 20 that had been modded by Dumble and Dave had paid him [Alexander Dumble]

"One of the successes of this record was that we were able to take some of those ancient folk sensibilities and translate them in a very modern way"

JAKE KISZKA

Jake says he has been able to pursue more musically esoteric themes in Mirador than he arguably could in the hugely successful Greta Van Fleet



9



10

with a Nutribullet! I used that through a 112 or a 115 Supro cab, a newer one. And I used a [Fender '62 Princeton Chris Stapleton Edition] for a couple of tunes..."
Jake: "I used the shit out of the Princeton..."
Chris: "You have a silver-panel Princeton that Dave gave you, which is a badass amplifier with a 12-inch speaker. That was the bulk of the tone for Jake. And we used a black-panel Vibrolux Reverb for some of the dubs, too."
Jake: "It ended up being that Chris was doing the classic Marshall-stack thing to a certain degree, and I would kind of come in with a combo somewhere around that. We used a newer silver-panel Fender Champ, too."
Chris: "With *Heels Of The Hunt*, it was the last day of recording, and the engineers had packed down all the mics and the drums, and Dave said, 'Fuck it. We need another fast one. You've got half an hour. Go down, write it and come back.' So that's what we did. The engineers suddenly panicked and ran around like shit, putting the drum kits back up, rewiring. And Dave, as we were sort of writing and arranging things, he has a black-panel Champ and a silver-panel Champ. They're normally mic'd up and they sound great – *Heels Of The Hunt* is just those two Champs cooking..."

Who is it that whoops in triumph at the end of the track?
Jake: "Mikey [laughs]"
Chris: "That song was literally written and finished 10 minutes before we cut it..."
Jake: "It was a stream of consciousness, from thought and completion to record immediately. And if you listen to the end of that track, you can hear Mikey breathing [hard]! That was only, like, two takes or something. That's all Mikey ever got – or anybody got."

Jake, you're one of the highest-profile SG players in rock for decades. What should a good SG be, in your view?
Jake: "A good SG? Well, the early 60s ones – which were [branded] Les Pauls at first – with the thinner neck are highly microphonic. If you tap anywhere on the body and it's making that sound, it's just very thin lacquer. Mine's basically been sanded off [by playwear] entirely. So the thing about an SG that differentiates it from other Gibson guitars is that it's really microphonic, and you can feel every nuance of the guitar.

"And so, for me, that's highly important because I like to play guitar as if it's a full-body thing. I really like to play with my body – and even pulling the neck slightly back and moving things and tapping on it. It's responding in more than just one way. It's not just the strings and the connection between that and the pickup. Obviously, the early humbucking pickups, the Patent Applied For pickups, those are significant to that sound. And I find that early Les Paul/SGs have some of the greatest [examples of that style of] pickups. The thing about those guitars is that they all sound so different from one another – it's radical and I have yet to find one that sounds like my 'Number One', outside of the one Chris has 'stolen', right?"
Chris: "The guitar I call 'the one that got away.'"

9. The headstock of Chris Turpin's 1966 Strat, with the gold transitional logo

10. Plenty of dings and honest playwear on the Strat attest to its central role in Chris's music – it was a key guitar for the debut Mirador album

"There were certain expectations that with two guitar players coming together, the guitars were going to be loud!" *JAKE KISZKA*

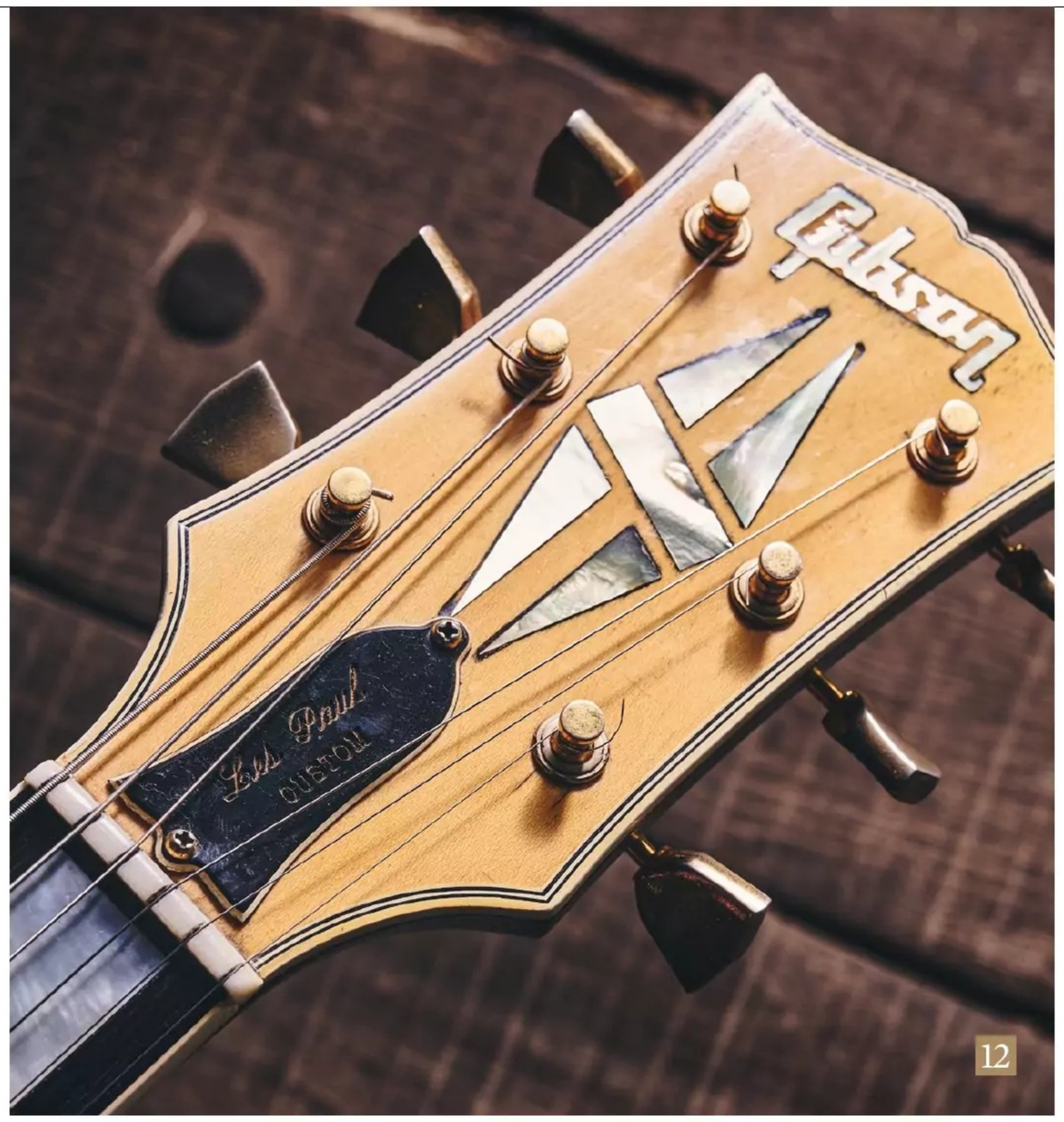
Jake: "Yeah, but it didn't exactly get away..."
Chris: "It was from Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars and I may have swiped that guitar from underneath Jake – after he swiped a very nice Park amp from underneath me! [laughs]"
Jake: "Only fair. I've swiped a lot of things."
Chris: "You know, even in Jake's sphere, you're lucky if you're even able to play a lot of those '61 SGs because Jake hasn't had backups [for his 'Number One']. We were

“There was such an intensity with Dave [Cobb]... You could only move on a sort of visceral adrenaline”

CHRIS TURPIN

Chris’s 1966 Strat is not, as it might first appear, an original Firemist Silver example but was refinished years ago by legendary British luthier and finish expert Clive Brown





going to guitar shows and every time you'd see one and pick it up to try it – especially those '61 SGs – you know, acoustically, whether it's going to do the thing or it's not going to the thing *very* quickly. They're not all the same at all. So this particular one that I stole from underneath Jake has some of the thing that Jake's guitar has, but there's a nuance to it that is separate. Because Jake's guitar is very lively. It's got a real bark and it's really agile, and there's a huge amount of dynamics in those pickups, even for fingerpicking."
Jake: "An SG, I think, is a really dynamic, dynamic guitar..."

11. Quirks and unique features abound on Chris's 1970 Les Paul Custom, whose strident tone is a central plank of Mirador's sound. The storybook sticker, needless to say, was not a factory feature!

12. The most obvious unusual feature of the guitar, which was purchased secondhand at an auction, is the stripped natural finish – even including the headstock, a seldom seen modification

"We loved [certain amps] live, but under the microscope of the studio we both reverted to different things" *CHRIS TURPIN*

Chris: "...which you wouldn't necessarily think of a humbucker-[equipped] Gibson guitar. But that's not the case when you get a real one."
Jake: "That's the thing – and I value it highly – that you can play soft, but you don't even have to change the volume or tone knobs. I've seen so many people with actual Les Pauls – the Golden Age rock 'n' roll guitar heroes – who are really controlling the guitar [with volume and tone knobs] a lot, yeah? But with the SG for me, I can play really gently and have my amps turned up as loud as they're going to be for the heavier stuff. Sort of a delicate approach that really makes it more acoustic-like, even with amps turned up all the way. But as soon as you dig into it, it responds like you'd want it to. Being able to take that kind of approach, just based on dynamic range... you don't see that in a lot of other guitars, period."
Chris: "When I first played with Jake, he was playing a Marshall-based amplifier and that SG, and I thought, 'Well, what's going on on the floor?' And generally, at those early shows, it was like two Electro-Harmonix Holy Grails and an MXR Micro [Amp] booster, the white pedal – maybe one or two of those. Then you had another pedal that you didn't use [laughs]. That was the rig. And that was for playing shows to five-and-a-half thousand people three nights in a row, sold out. Having toured for the best part of 10 years up to that point, I'd never seen a guitar player really do that. The thing is, those iconoclastic players that Jake's talking about... Jake was doing it, and he doesn't appreciate how spectacularly special that is. That's partly due to the amplifier, partly due to the player, partly to the guitar."
Jake: "I think it was just really out of necessity at the time..."
Chris: "But still, Jake, your rig is essentially the same [laughs]. Every time you get something else out to play with, it's like, 'No, just amp and guitar.'"
Jake: "It's interesting. When I had the opportunity to take an amp down and drive it more with a pedal, just for volume and things like that, or to get different preamp and drive sounds, I always prefer to take the pedal out and push the amp up more for some reason. For me, that always just sounds better. I don't think that I would be a traditionalist or purist by some people's standards, but I probably end up in that territory just based on the way I've approached guitar playing."

Jake, what does Mirador allow you to express, musically, that you can't easily do within Greta Van Fleet?
Jake: "You know, there are certain evolutions that Greta has taken. Some of our first or earlier records were maybe on the more primitive side, and maybe reflected more of a blues influence and some early traditional, folk elements that I really felt were worth exploring more. Perhaps we're [now] at an evolutionary state with our music that wouldn't necessarily allow that exploration. We've gone in other directions already, and I have so many different ideas

“On the last day of recording, Dave said, ‘We need another fast one. You’ve got half an hour. Go down, write it and come back’”

CHRIS TURPIN

Chris says he added the Bigsby to his formidable 1970 Les Paul, which features the pancake body sometimes derided by purists – but the guitar sounds sensational, putting the lie to that myth

that just wouldn't get past the filtration system of Sam [Kiszka, bass/keyboard], Josh [Kiszka, lead vocals], some other people in the band, you know... mainly Josh [laughs]. Again, that chemistry with those guys – and obviously being brothers with them – writing with them is different. So when I met Chris that was like finding another brother. We were coming from the same world because we grew up on blues music and folk music and cultural music and just scenes from all over the place. And, all of a sudden, it was gonna be possible to explore those territories again in this band, whereas we might have evolved past some of those possibilities in Greta."

Roving Blade, arguably one of the album's defining songs, has an incredible solo that really leaps out at the listener. Tell us about tracking that.

Jake: "Yeah, that was loud, wasn't it? I think there were certain expectations that with two guitar players coming together to do a record, the guitars were going to be loud! Which they definitely were on that solo in particular. The way we mixed it was not too dissimilar from the way that you'd mix a classic record. So we'd have the faders and we'd basically be [riding] the volume levels, playing it through, and that's how it was mixed, very traditionally. When the solo for *Roving Blade* came up, the fader maybe got knocked a little too high by someone..."

"The SG is really microphonic – you can feel every nuance of the guitar... For me, playing guitar is a full-body thing" *JAKE KISZKA*

Chris: "I think we can quote Dave as saying, 'I know it's fucking stupid, but it's cool.' [Laughs]"

Jake: "Absolutely, it's like – that's really loud, but it works. Why not? It sounds good. It feels great. Leave it."

Chris: "That was pretty much the second song we did. And I'm in full British-folky mode on position 4 on the Strat and it's a Richard Thompson-esque situation. Then there's the big *Roving Blade* solo moment, which is Jake. You tried to beat that solo, but that [solo that made it onto the record] was live in the take. So the vocals that you're hearing everything, that's essentially all live. Other than my slide guitar piece, which had to be cut separately – that solo is live. It's just the real deal."



13. Chris and Jake are keeping an open mind about where Mirador will go from here but feel the strong start they've made must surely bear further fruit. Their debut single, *Feels Like Gold*, is out now

The _Mirador_ record was very much made by tapping into the energy of musicians feeding off each other in a semi-live recording. Looking back at classic rock tracks made in a similar way in the 60s, you can hear moments when the wheels leave the ground and the whole band starts flying – like just after the 'Mr Mojo Rising' section in _LA Woman_ by The Doors. Were there any breakthrough moments like that when you were recording _Mirador_?

Chris: "Well, arrogantly I would say everything! [Laughs] But I think there was such an intensity with Dave – with how he recorded and how he was pushing us to track at the pace that we did. You could only move on a sort of visceral adrenaline. That was the only way you could cope."

Jake: "I think the way we approached this record, in terms of tracking it, was such a fever-pitch thing. It was such a frantic approach that, in essence, there was not enough time to psychologically digest what was going on. We were acting purely on instinct. The scrutiny that we knew we'd be under lent itself to the atmosphere of the record. It was like everybody had their backs up against the wall, you know. So we really had to come out swinging."

Chris: "The other moment I think of like that is with *Raider* – that's the first song we tracked in all of those sessions, and it's an ugly riff, you know? It's heavy duty and the band is not perfectly together, and it's heaving and it's ugly. I just think that, for me, was another moment of just falling off the end of this arena tour for the first time – high intensity, where we were thrown in front of Greta's audience. Our first show was in front of 12,000 people and there's a lot to prove. Then here we were in this studio, late at night in Savannah, after probably too many tequilas. It was like, 'Okay, we're gonna lean into this. Here we go.' And you can feel that energy. You can't do that to a clicker."

That spontaneity and playing by instinct can really be heard on _Ten Thousand Left To Ride_.

Jake: "That was, honestly, one of my favourite guitar solo tones on the record. I was in the control room and that's typically where I'll take solos if I get the chance, if they're not already baked into the track. It was really inspiring. And again, it just comes in loud as shit at the end. That was honestly another good example [of loud guitar parts working]: Dave, Chris and I were looking at each other because it really was too loud [laughs]. I was laughing and having a childlike moment, really. I couldn't stop from grinning, because it was so badass. I really loved how it sounded. I was really excited. And it was like, 'This is the moment.' Where you hear a guitar and it just makes your life, man." G



Mirador's self-titled debut album is out on 19 September on Republic Records
www.miradorband.com

“When I met Chris it was like finding another brother. All of a sudden, it was possible to explore blues and folk territories again in this band”

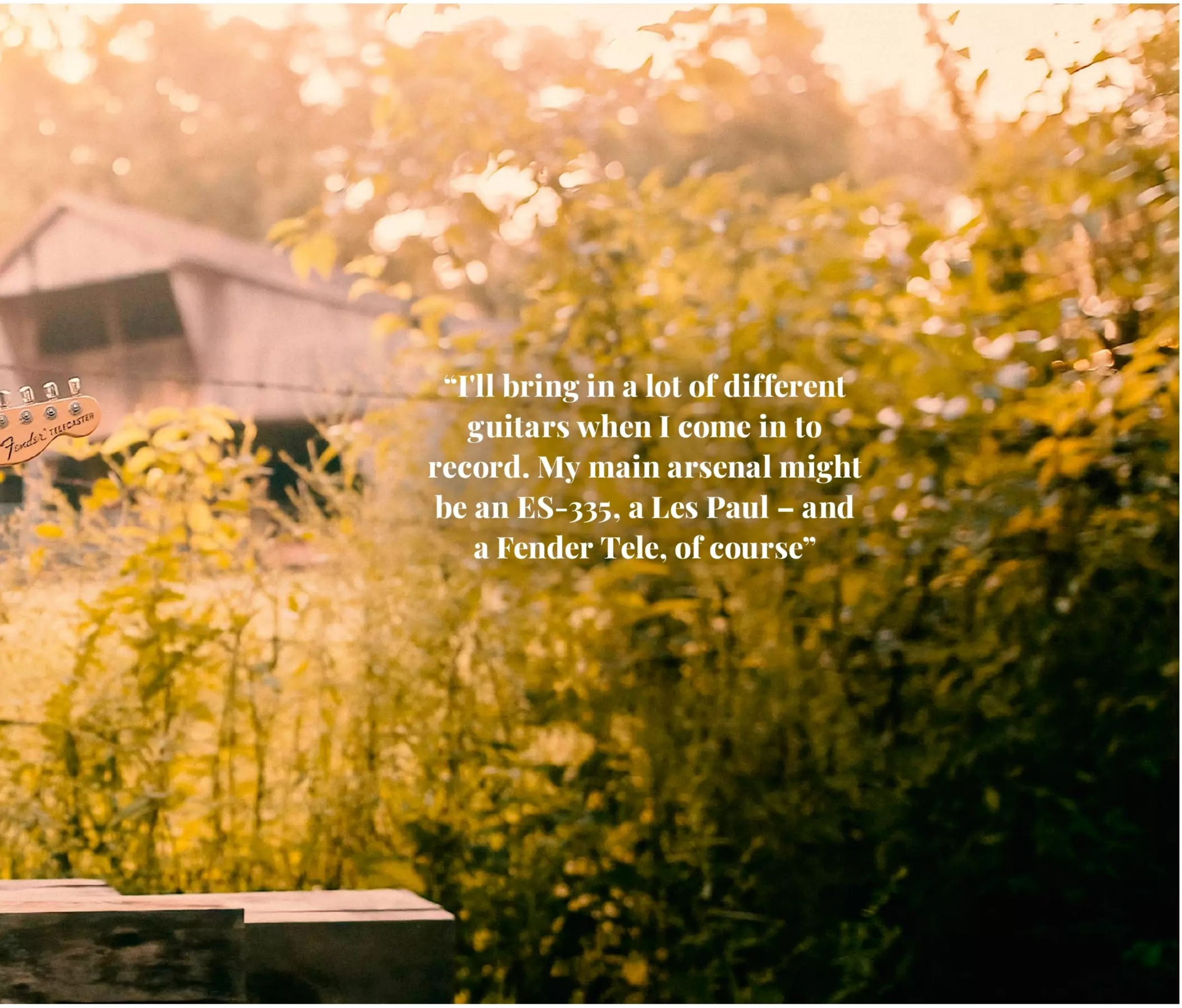
JAKE KISZKA



BRENT MASON

Decorated with accolades from the Grammys to the Academy Of Country Music, the legendary Nashville sessioneer has played on over a thousand records. Here, he shares his go-to gear, why he surrendered to the metronome, and how "letting the emotion escape" is the key to nailing that first take

Words Andrew Daly **Photography** Fender



With his well-worn Primer Gray Tele in hand, Brent Mason has redefined session excellence throughout his stellar career, which includes appearances on over a thousand albums.

While appearing on records by George Strait, Alan Jackson, Shania Twain, Zac Brown, Randy Travis, Tim McGraw, Reba McEntire and Willie Nelson, to name a few, there's a simple six-string principle that's guided Mason: "When things get worked out too much," he tells *Guitarist*, "they kind of lose their charm. The first takes are usually the best takes."

Simple as that sounds, Mason's unparalleled longevity, and habit of ending up on hit albums by iconic country musicians, is anything but. In short, there are plenty of players who aspire to what Mason doesn't but few who understand what he learned long ago: "You're playing to service the artist," he explains. "You want to complement their record. It's not about you. You need to get into the head of the artist and try to connect with them. You need to be a real listener and you've got to pay attention. It's like school, you know?"

What's your secret to being so effective across so many genres?

"Gear-wise, it's a little bit of everything, along with the education of the different styles of music. I'll bring in a lot of different guitars when I come in to record. My main arsenal might be an ES-335, a Les Paul and a Fender Tele, of course. But a lot of times, a baritone is real useful in sessions, you know? I'll grab one of those if somebody wants something a little different; it transforms things into something else. But most of the time, it's the Tele, and mainly it's just the whole mindset. It's just about conforming to whatever they've got in mind and [what they're] wanting."

Specifically, what's the key to getting into such an open-ended mindset?

"It's just understanding the character of the artist. Artists bring a certain characteristic to the music, and I'll say, 'Okay, I see where he's coming from.' But if you join in with them, they still might hear something different, and say, 'Well, I want to do something a little different...' Sometimes you get a heads-up when you walk in – because in Nashville,



1. Across his storied career as an in-demand session musician, Brent has worked with such artists as Tim McGraw, Shania Twain, George Strait, Reba McEntire and many more

you really don't know what you're going to play till you get into the studio. [That's] what sets Nashville recording apart from just about anything, really. Somebody just makes out a number chart and you kind of fill in the blanks from there."

Do you have a tried-and-true method for nailing your parts in one take?
"Just by letting the emotion escape. Right away, when you feel a song, you go, 'Wow, that's a great song,' and sometimes, instead of sitting there and working out a solo note-for-note, you just turn it on. Your thoughts about the song and the emotion and soul just come, and that's the first take, and you go, 'Wow, I don't know if I can top that.'"

"You're playing to service the artist. It's not about you. You've got to pay attention. It's like school, you know?"

And is it that easy to accept that you can't do better?
"Well, I'll go, 'I think you're right, that's pretty good...' but then my perfectionism comes into play [laughs]. Literally, it's like, 'I wish I woulda ended it right there,' you know? Sometimes I'll paste an ending onto something, maybe on that first take, just because it's hard to resist. But it's that first take that really captures that emotion. Any take after that is you trying to play something you like on the first take and duplicate that. You'll think you did, but it never comes off that way."

Why do you think that is?
"Oh, you know, it doesn't have squeaks or the right vibrato. In other words, it sounds 'worked out'. That starts to get into the sound and it becomes redundant. There are some songs that you need to work out, or some solos if they're melodic, and you mess up the melody. You'll want to perfect that."

Are there any techniques that you needed to master to get to the point you're at now?
"When I first started doing sessions in Nashville, you needed to have a great sense of timing. I remember a lot of times, I was working up things and didn't have a metronome – and we all hate metronomes [laughs]. It's just clicks that are uninspiring. But now, you can set up in your hotel room and practise, so it's about timing. When I first started doing sessions, I found out that I was speeding up a little bit, and guys would go, 'Hey, you're on top of the beat, man.' I always heard that and now I know that it's about timing and dynamics. Those two things, timing and dynamics, without even bringing up melody or notes, it's about those things."

What are some common pitfalls that session players often fall into?
"You gotta watch out when you go in there. Studio musicians like to play a song, jam and get loosened up to check and see if everything is clicking. But sometimes you can play too much. You've really gotta listen to the vocalist and mark down on your chart where the fields go, make sure you're off the vocal point and make sure you understand what the artist wants."

Is it just a matter of simple communication?
"Yeah, a lot of times, you can ask the artist, 'Hey, give me your vision of what you're looking for on this...' Then you can sit down with a pen and pad of paper and take notes... if you want to look real dignified [laughs]. Or you could just nod your head, and go, 'Yeah, I got you!'"

We touched on gear a bit earlier, when you mentioned the 335, Les Paul and Tele. Those aside, do you have a very large collection of vintage gear, or do you mostly use newer guitars?
"It's a little bit of both. I'm always real fond of vintage instruments, you know? But I always have a Gretsch 6120 as a main guitar; it's not a real vintage one, but it sounds killer. I bought it in the 80s. And I've a '65 sunburst Strat that I'm pretty fond of. I just make sure that I've got the guitars I need, you know?

"It's good to have some different kinds of guitars that are a little bit off-kilter. I even have a sitar and, like I said, I carry a baritone, which I use a lot. And the Gretsch has got that nice Bigsby, and the



2



3



4



5

Strat, you know, I like to set it up to where I can bend the tremolo bar a little bit. So it’s just carrying different things that inspire you to play a little differently on a song. It helps to have those extra guitars, and I have quite a few different ones.”

Do you find yourself using mostly studio amps, or do you generally use your own?

“I bring my own amps. Lately, I’ve been using a [black-panel] ’67 Deluxe with a lot of reverb. It has some vintage Celestions in it and it’s sturdy. I found myself using that thing a lot because it marries up to pedals really nice, especially different distortions. And I’ve got a Matchless and a Marshall, but it’s mostly that Deluxe lately. It’s surprising what that thing will do.

“So I bring my own amps and I’ll only use the studio amps if mine all blow up or if I see one in the studio that’s cool. I’ll go, ‘Hey, is that an old Vox? You mind if I use that?’ Some studios have a good supply of amps and some you really can’t count on at all, so you want to make sure your amps are working really good and are tubed up.”

2. Brent's signature Telecaster is modelled on a ’67 Tele he discovered in a Nashville guitar store in the 80s that had been sprayed with car primer

3. The Stories Collection Primer Gray Tele features the Glaser Bender System. The bender on Brent’s original has rather more fight: “You just gotta muscle it down, so it doesn’t warble,” he says

4. The custom pickup set consists of three Seymour Duncan pickups: Vintage Stack Tele at the bridge, Hot Stack Strat in the middle, and Vintage Mini HB at the neck

5. The Tele has an ash body, maple neck, and the three-way switch and push/pull pot for



6. Brent's preferred rig of late is a '67 Fender Deluxe amp along with such "secret weapons" as an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man, a Boss GE-7, a Tube Screamer and his signature Wampler Hot Wired pedal

In terms of pedals, do you have any particular secret weapons?

"I love those old EHX Memory Man pedals. It's got one feature that's really cool, which is that it's got a gain knob on it, so it's like you're taxing an amp. It's so natural sounding, and when you start adding a little edge on it and crunch, it's perfect. And I've had the Boss GE-7 seven-band equaliser, the kind of off-white one, since the 80s. Now, when I walk around and see other guitar players, I see one of them stuck to their 'boards and I say, 'You get that off of me?' [Laughs.] They go, 'Yeah, as a matter of fact, I did. Man, you've used these for a long time.'"

Your own personal contribution to the tone of many sessions, even ones that you're not on...

"I kind of puff my chest up and say, 'Yeah, I can probably take credit for that [laughs].' But those pedals right there – and they're just basic pedals – are great. Other than that, I've probably got more distortion pedals on my 'board than any other kind of pedal, like a Tube Screamer and my [signature Wampler] Hot Wired pedal."

What's the story behind your first signature guitar, the Valley Arts Custom Pro Telecaster?

"That was the first deal that I had with the Valley Arts Custom Shop. It had a bigger neck on it – it really had a lot of wood and it had an oil finish, which made it nice... but it was really big. When they were shaping that neck, I said, 'Stop right there, it sounds great. It feels good... but the neck is big [laughs].' Some guitar players say, 'That neck is just too frickin' big,' and some of them shave it down a little bit. But I haven't played that guitar in a long time, and then I went to Paul Reed Smith [for the PRS Brent Mason signature], but we weren't trying to duplicate my Telecaster; it was kind of a three-pickup guitar that had a floating tailpiece and all that."

It sounds like the Valley Arts Tele was nice but not quite right. Is that why you eventually hooked up with Fender for your Stories Collection signature Tele?

"Yeah, this guitar with Fender, finally it was the right people. And why is that? It's a Fender Telecaster that I've always played, right? It was like the perfect match-up and, finally, with the right company and



vendor. They got it perfect for the most part. It’s got the Glaser G-Bender, which Glaser showed the guys at the Custom Shop how to work and put together. So that guitar is definitely my favourite. It was a dream come true for me since I was a little youngster to have a signature guitar of my own.”

Why do you prefer the Glaser G-Bender over the B-Bender system?

“With the Glaser, I can set the tension a little bit better. And now, these new signature model Fenders have the new Glaser with the new and improved G-Bender in it. But my original guitar still has the old one in it because I’m just used to it. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks [laughs]! With the old Clarence White [B-Bender], I played Marty Stuart’s and you know that he plays the shit outta his. I grabbed it and it was a little too flimsy, but he had it set light. With mine, a lot of guys go, ‘Holy shit, is this working?’ because the tension is so high. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s the way I want it, man. You just gotta muscle it down, so it doesn’t warble.’ With Marty’s, it’s like having two guitars glued together or something. That’s the whole thing. But with my Tele, I didn’t want to alter it too much and the Glaser only takes out about one per cent of the wood; it’s just a pathway to the saddle from underneath the bottom, right where the neck goes in the body. But everybody likes a different thing. I’m just kind of stuck with my style, so like I said, it’s like trying to teach an old dog new tricks.”

You seem as busy as ever. Will you ever slow down?

“I’m getting more selective about what sessions I do now. Back in the day, I was hitting the sessions until my eyeballs were popping out. I’d go in early in the morning, start at 10 and get home at 11 or midnight. It was starting to wear me down, so I’m happy to say that I don’t have to do that any more. So I don’t hit it that hard any more, but there’s some young guys who do. I see them doing it, and there’s some great players out there right now. I see a lot of young guys doing what I used to do and hitting it hard, and they get them big black eyes, you know? It’s like Don Kelley used to say when he saw somebody tired like that, ‘Your eyes look like two piss holes in a snowbank!’ [laughs]” G

www.brentmason.com

LEO LYONS' 1962 FENDER JAZZ BASS

Meet the bass guitar that has appeared at Woodstock, featured on countless records, been played by Hendrix and had two famous owners. Throw in an instrument swap (plus 15 quid) and a bunch of anxiety, and it becomes the stuff of legends

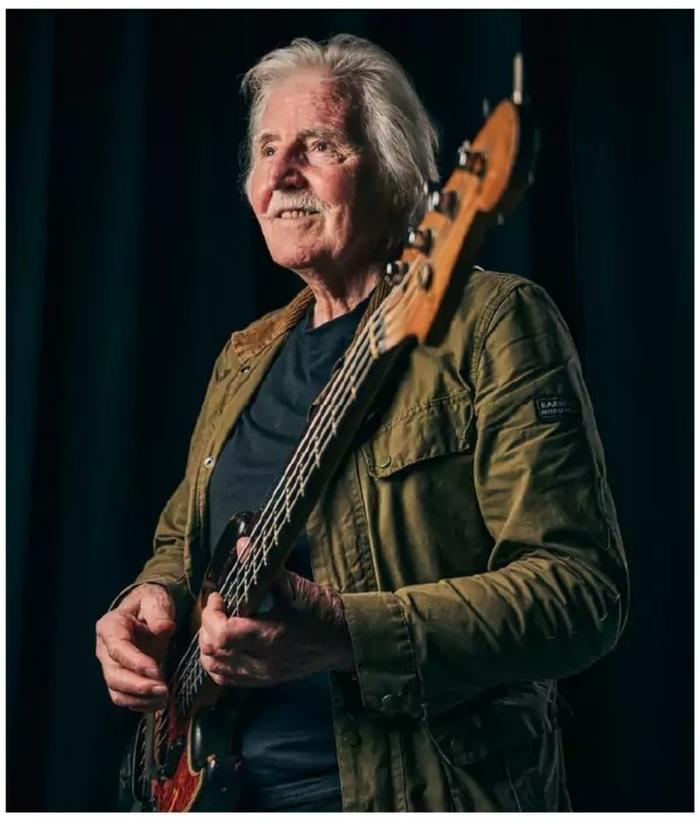
Words Huw Price **Photography** Phil Barker

Leo Lyons achieved success as the bass player for blues-rock band Ten Years After before moving into record production and professional songwriting in Nashville. Through most of his career, Leo has mainly been a one-bass guy, but his hands aren't the only ones to have played his road-worn 1962 Jazz Bass. Leo takes us back to the beginning.

"I went for guitar lessons when I was 11 and my teacher introduced me to a couple of his other pupils. They had one of those bands that rehearsed twice a week and gigged twice a year. There were four guitar players and a drummer and they needed someone to play the bass, so I started playing the bass lines on the low strings on my guitar.

"I really took to it, so I sold my bicycle and my guitar and bought a Höfner bass on hire purchase. There weren't many bass guitars around in those days and the only one in my hometown in Mansfield was the one I got. I played that until I found a 1960 Precision in Jennings on Charing Cross Road.

"It came with me to Germany when we began playing the Star-Club in 1962. A bassist in the other house band had a Jazz Bass and I preferred the narrow neck and the chrome parts, but I couldn't afford one. In late 1962 we were back in England playing a gig in Norfolk and the guy in the support band was playing a Jazz Bass. We got talking and I asked if he wanted to sell it or do a swap. He told me he wasn't really a bass player and had bought the bass from a music teacher just so he could get the gig. We agreed to swap instruments and I gave him £15 on top. That guy was Ian Hunter who went on to form Mott The Hoople, and the last time I saw him he offered to return the £15 in exchange for a commission for every gig I've done with it. He actually still owns my 1960 Precision."



Ten Years After bassist Leo Lyons has played this 1962 Fender Jazz Bass throughout his illustrious career

Precious Hard Work

Leo acquired his Jazz Bass the same year it was made, and he confirms it was almost like new: "It came from the second run of Jazz Basses that Fender made. The earliest ones had volume controls with dual concentric tone controls, but mine has two volumes and a separate tone control. It was from that changeover period in 1962."

One glance at the bass and it's clear to see it's had a lot of use, as Leo explains: "I used to clean it after every gig and put it into a velvet bag before I put it back in the case. I was very precious with it, but the varnish eventually got worn down and I made an indentation in the wood that you can probably see in the photographs.

"It did a lot of work and was used on stages where history was made. I didn't tour with several basses; I just took my Jazz Bass. If I broke a string, somebody would talk to the audience or the band would simply carry on playing without me while I put on a new one. It has been on all the records I've done, too."

Despite carrying the scars of several decades of touring, Leo's Jazz Bass remains largely original and even retains its chrome coverplates



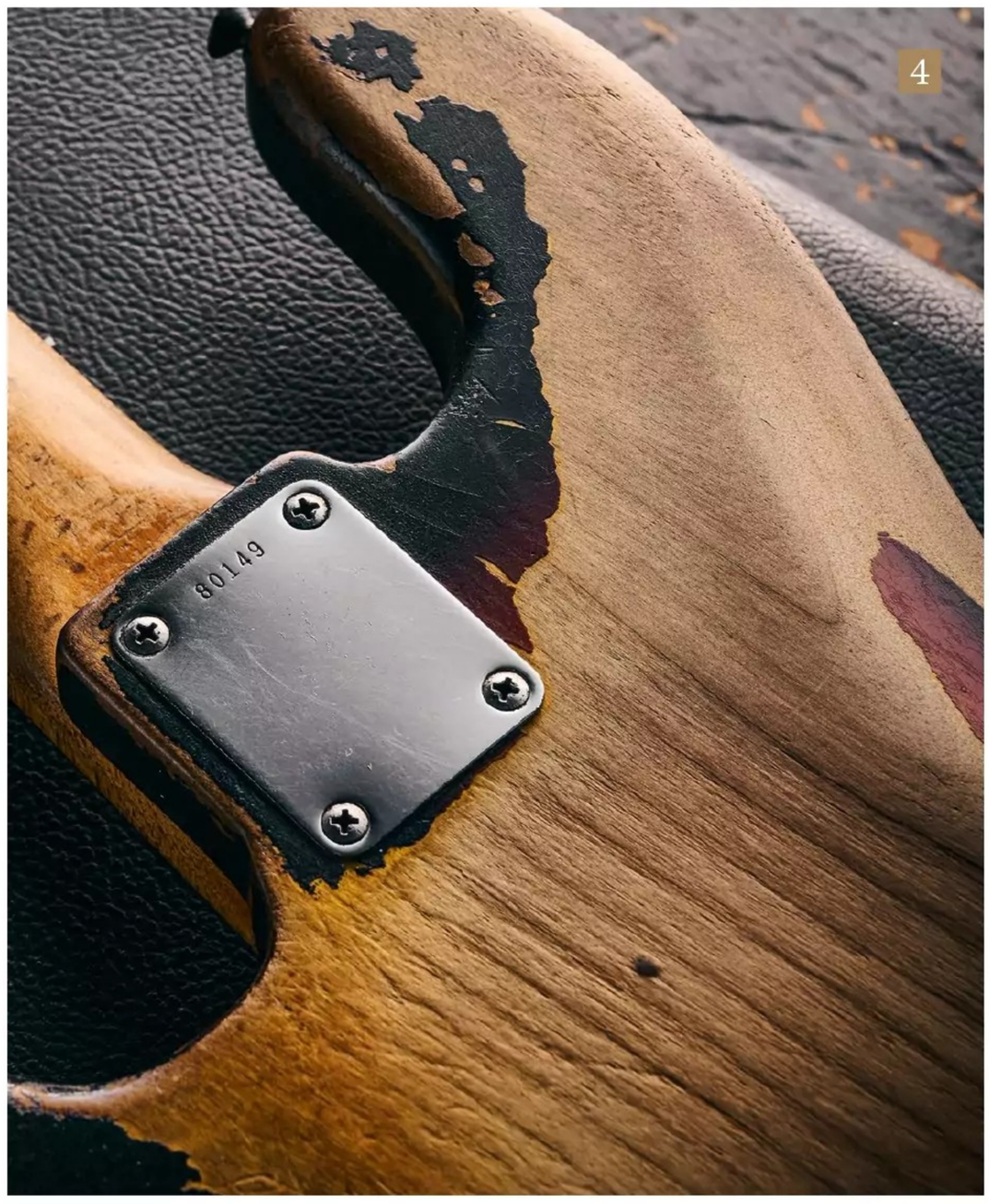




1. The original tuners still work perfectly and have been turned by other famous players, including Jimi Hendrix

2. Much of the decal has worn away, but there is no doubt over the provenance

3. While the bass has been refretted, the fingerboard and 'clay' dots remain in excellent condition



4. Big belts were fashionable throughout the 60s and 70s, and this could be described as a severe case of buckle rash

5. Although it's a first year Jazz Bass, the individual volume controls and master tone control are consistent with a production run later in 1962

Studio Stories

By the time Ten Years After came off the road in the mid-70s, Leo had already started producing. The band's label, Chrysalis Records, had just bought Wessex Studios and asked Leo to supervise the refurbishment and manage the facility. During his production career, Leo's Jazz Bass was always on hand and proved popular with other musicians.

"I produced three records with UFO, and Pete Way always played my bass," Leo says. "He had that old Gibson Thunderbird that looked really good hanging low at the hip, but it sounded like crap. It was the same with the Magnum records I did."

Quite a few famous bands used Wessex Studios, including Queen, but Leo's stint lasted for little more than a year. "Chrysalis wanted Ten Years After to go back on tour," he says, "so I had to give up the job. After that, I bought a Neve desk and built my own studio, which I ran as a commercial facility."

However, one of Leo's earliest recording studio experiences was in 1960 when a nascent Ten Years After, then called The Jaybirds, signed a deal with the legendary Joe Meek. Leo remembers: "Joe was very



eccentric, but he wasn't too bad with us and he was very innovative. He had an 8ft-square room with a couple of tape recorders and he would bounce tracks between them. The floor was always covered with pieces of edited tape. He would DI the bass, the piano had drawing pins pressed into the hammers, and the echo chamber was the bathroom."

Jimi Jams

Leo's bass has also been played by Jimi Hendrix. "In the late 60s we were all doing the same gigs and hanging around together," Leo explains. "It was the time when the headline act only gave you half the PA power, you couldn't use lights and you had to set up in front of the other band's equipment. Everybody was a musician, we all mucked in together and we all knew each other.

"When Jimi first came to London, Chas Chandler was looking after him and I met them down the pub. I knew Chas and he asked if I'd be interested in joining Jimi's band. They were offering good money, maybe £40 per week, but Alvin and I had put so much time into Ten Years After that I didn't want to do it.

"We hung around a few times and used to play in The Cromwellian Club, where lots of musicians would come to jam. Jimi also played my bass in New York at The Scene, and on another occasion Mitch Mitchell came up to jam."

Taking Woodstock

Ten Years After's Woodstock performance in '69 has long since passed into legendary status, but Leo recalls how, at the time, it seemed anything but. "Nobody expected the gig to be that big," he says. "There were lots of festivals during that period and we were on the road with Nina Simone and Dizzy Gillespie as part of the Newport Jazz Festival tour. We had played Missouri the night before and when we arrived in New York to travel up to Woodstock, we learned it was total chaos and the roads were blocked.

"We checked into a Holiday Inn nearby and flew into the gig, and that's when I saw how many people were there and what it was like. There was rain and mud slides, and the stage was covered in cables and wires with water running between them. The audience was great, but when we came off stage we hadn't eaten for 24 hours and the helicopters had stopped flying. By the time we got back to New York they had given away my hotel room and I had to sleep on a table in a conference room. It felt like just another gig, but people soon began asking about it – and after the movie came out things went supersonic. Before Woodstock we were playing to crowds of 3,000 in the US, and within a few years we were drawing 50,000."

"Before Woodstock we were playing to crowds of 3,000 in the US, and within a few years we were drawing 50,000"

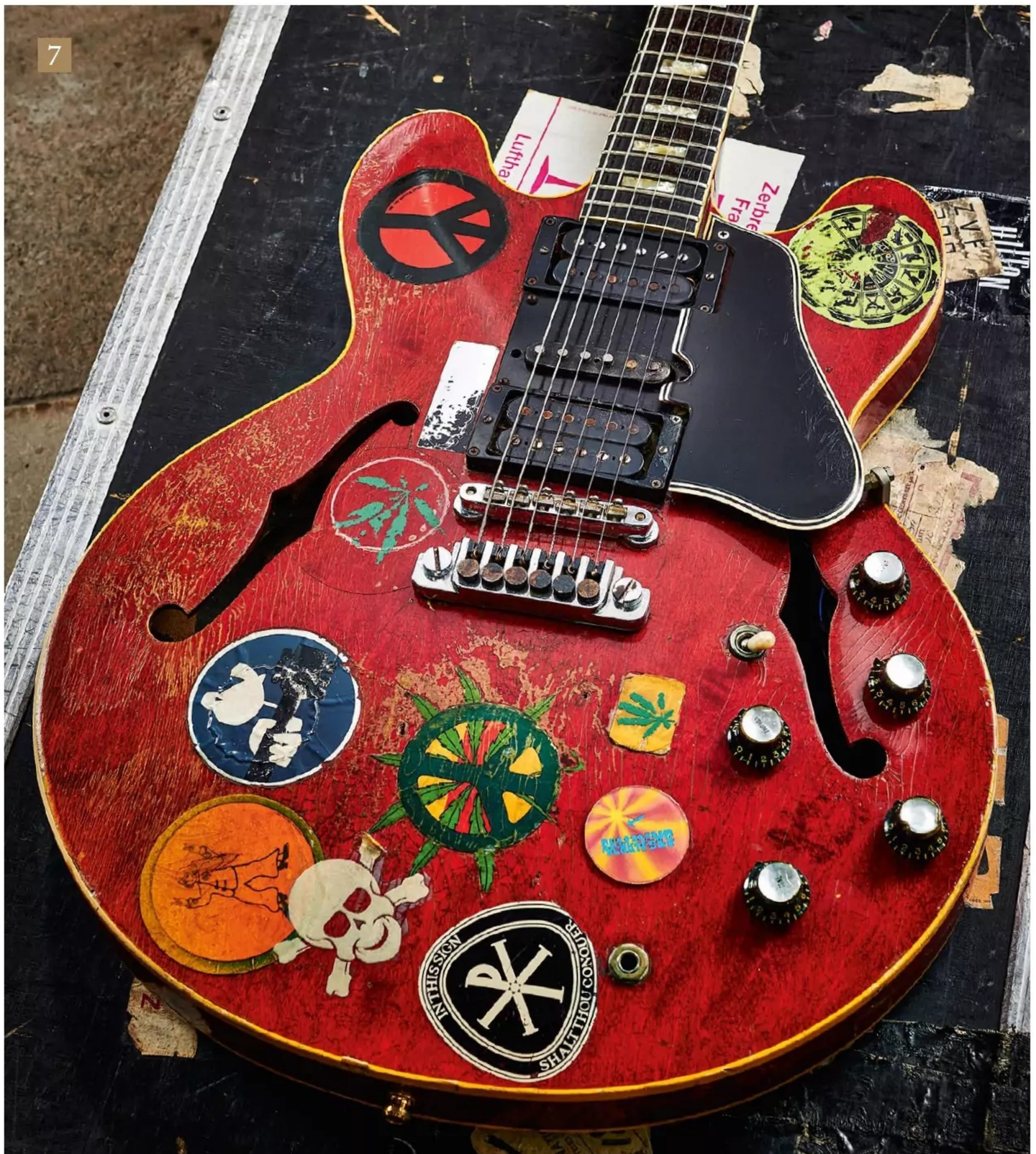
Power Struggles

Leo has used some very cool amps over the years, including a few that were seldom used for bass. "Alvin and I started out with a Vox AC15 each and our rhythm

6. As vintage dealers are wont to say, there's a story behind this road-worn instrument and it's indivisible from Leo's own

7. With Alvin Lee's fretwork on this ES-335 and Leo holding down the low-end, Ten Years After's Woodstock performance passed into legend





guitarist had an AC10," he says. "Then I started using valve hi-fi amps like Leaks and Quads with a 12-inch speaker in an old TV cabinet before I went on to 18-inch speakers and enclosures that I built myself powered by 25- and 50-watt stereo amps.

"My friend, who played bass for Shane Fenton And The Fentones, had a deal with Jennings Musical Instruments [Industries], so he had Jet Harris's AC30 Super Twin. I bought that when he emigrated to America and I used it until Watkins started providing us with gear.

"I stopped using Watkins amps when we began touring America because we couldn't get Watkins gear over there. That's when we changed over to Marshall amps and I stuck with them through most of my Ten Years After career. I was using two 100-watt heads with 16 12-inch speakers. I've also used Acoustic, Fender, Ampeg and Genz Benz over the years, but recently I've gone back to Watkins."

All That Jazz

Despite having used his Jazz Bass almost exclusively, Leo has still acquired 26 basses along the way, including a quintessential pawn-shop find courtesy of Billy Gibbons. "That was when we were playing in Houston, Texas," he tells us, "and I got on well with the guys in the other band, which included Billy. We had a few days off, so I went back to Houston to hang out with them and Billy took me to a pawn shop where they had a 1955 Precision in the window. I really liked it, so I bought it, but I've only played it live once at The Isle Of Wight Festival and I recently gave it to my son.

"I used to clean it after every gig and put it into a velvet bag before I put it back in the case. I was very precious with it"

"I also own a replica of my original Jazz Bass that was made by Barry Moorhouse at The Bass Centre in London. It's his Leo Lyons signature 'Woodstock Bass' and I've been gigging it almost exclusively with my band Hundred Seventy Split because it looks and sounds almost exactly the same.

"The original just became too valuable to take on the road and when I did sneak it out, the crew guys would start to feel uncomfortable. I couldn't leave it on stage and I'd have to take it out of the van every night and keep it in my hotel room. I'm not a collector; I'm a musician who believes instruments are meant to be played. That's why I am considering selling my Jazz Bass if I get the right offer for it.

"Everything about the bass is original besides one potentiometer, and it has been refretted. I've owned quite a few Fender basses, but this Jazz Bass is unique and whenever I use it on a record I do wonder why I bothered to buy all the others. It's a historic artefact that has been on countless records and even appeared in the *Eurovision Song Contest* when I lent it to a friend. I'm 81 now and I'm thinking, 'What are my boys going to do with it when I'm gone?' If I sold it now, I'd probably be doing them a favour." G

To find out more about Leo Lyons' gear and guitars, visit his website at *www.leolyons.org*

• MARK BOWEN FROM IDLES PLAYS THE **PLAYER II MODIFIED TELECASTER® SH** IN DUSK

Fender®

PLAYER II MODIFIED

HOT-RODDED. READY TO GO.

©2025 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Power Trio

Following on from the superb Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom instruments that recently passed through our hands, we now have three acoustics from a sextet of new historic reissues. Needless to say, expectations are high...

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker



EPIPHONE PRE-WAR SJ-200 ROSEWOOD REISSUE, 1960 HUMMINGBIRD REISSUE & 1963 DOVE REISSUE £1,399, £1,099 & £1,099

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

What You Need To Know

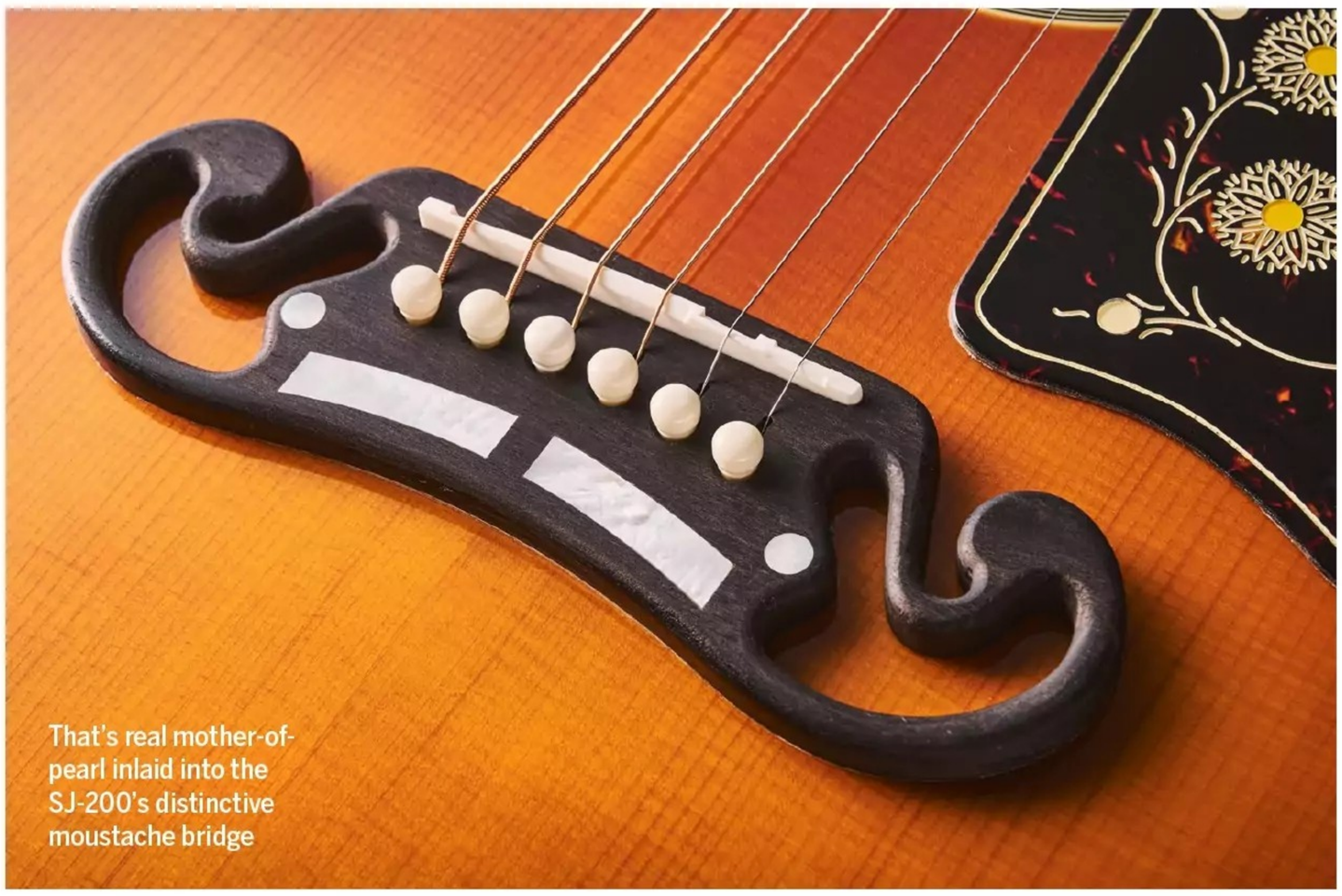
1 More Inspired By Gibson Custom models from Epiphone?
Indeed. These guitars represent half of Epiphone's new range of acoustic historic reissues and join the long line of Inspired By Gibson Custom we've had in for review recently. Solid woods, high spec, Gibson headstock shape – whoever came up with this idea needs a pay rise.

2 Why the specific years or eras?
Essentially, they are bookmarks or waypoints from Gibson's rich history. The pre-war rosewood SJ-200 is highly prized by collectors because the back wood changed to maple after the war. The other two here are accompanied with their own historic significance, too.

3 Solid woods at this price?
Well, it has to be said that this is a trick that other manufacturers manage to pull off in this price range, too. But they haven't got the rights to Gibson's design back catalogue – something that adds considerable cachet to these Epiphones.

Epiphone has certainly upped its game in recent years. Whereas we were once used to seeing bargain-basement copies of famed Gibson originals, these days the brand has clearly been rummaging through its parent company's history books to produce some extremely worthy replicas of time-honoured and highly sought-after guitars.

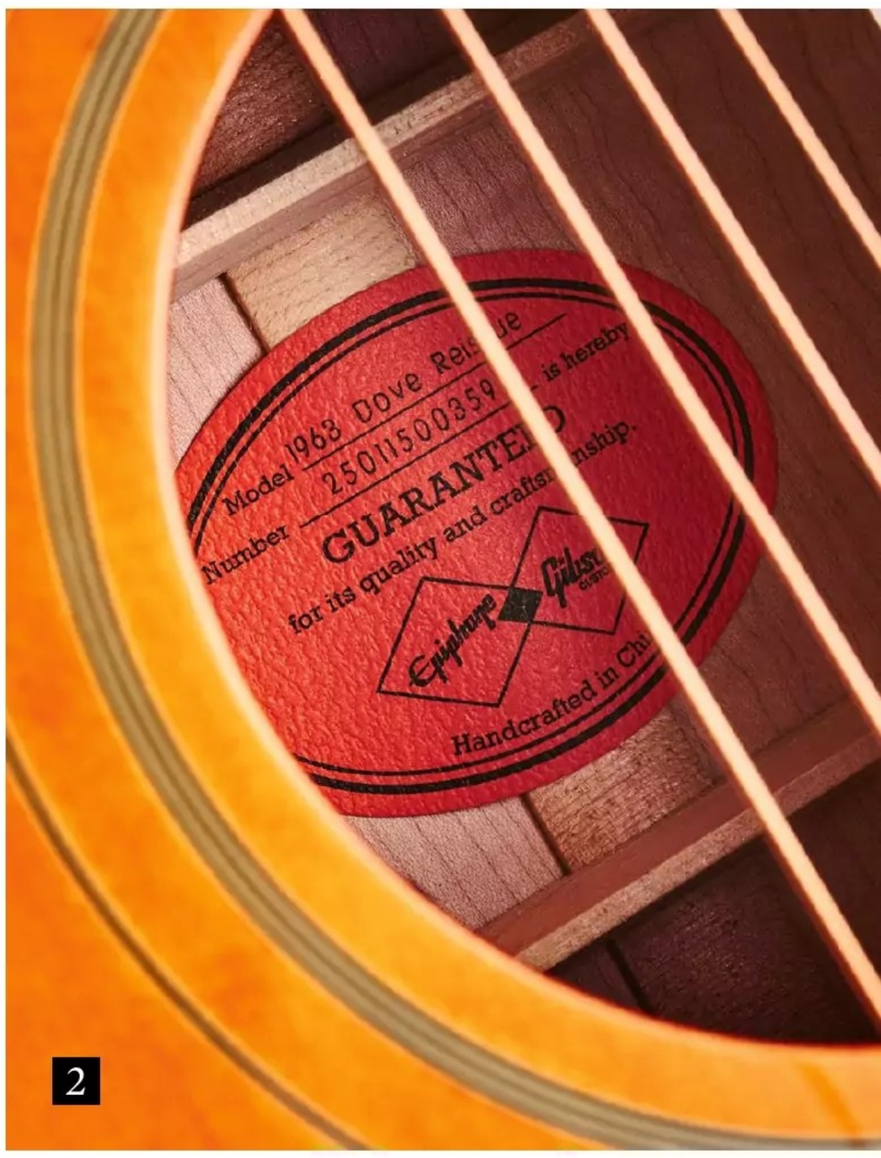
Hooking up with Gibson's Custom Shop has provided us with era-specific editions, such as a 1959 Les Paul Standard, a 1959 ES-355, a 1942 Banner J-45, plus Firebirds, Flying Vs and Explorers. Some die-hard critics have whinged a little about the price hike needed to produce instruments that feature USA parts and electronics, solid woods and so on. But we remain with eyebrows raised at the output that has landed with us so far and consider the price tags reasonable in view of what exactly is on offer. Okay, so we have identified the



That's real mother-of-pearl inlaid into the SJ-200's distinctive moustache bridge



1. One of the most distinctive features on the Gibson original, any recreation of the Hummingbird just wouldn't be right without its ornate pickguard



2. Having established a working relationship with Gibson's Custom Shop, Epiphone's distinctive 'double diamond' logo has become something of a mark of quality in itself

occasional flaw – the weighty matter of the Goldtop from issue 525, for example – but, in general, everything has been pretty much in tip-top shape.

So when Epiphone told us there were six new Inspired By Gibson Custom acoustics waiting in the wings, breath in these parts became somewhat bated. After all, we agreed that the Banner J-45 we reviewed back in issue 512 was a tough one to let go at a smidge under £1,200. It really was that good (as the 10/10 Gold award also demonstrated).

What is really intriguing about the trio we're looking at today is that each comes with a little bit of historic detail. For instance, take the Pre-War SJ-200. Why this particular period? Well, when the model first appeared in Gibson's catalogue in 1937, it had a back and sides made from rosewood and, thanks to a knock-on effect from the 1929 financial crisis in the US, only a handful of Gibson's costly flagship acoustic ever saw the light of day.

In 1947, after supply shortages post-WWII, backs and sides were changed to maple. This means the rarer early pre-war models have become the most sought after on the collector's market. And even 1940s SJ-200s go for around £15,000-plus today, so making the original spec available at a tenth of that price is very sound reasoning in our book.

We'll look at each of these guitars individually as they are all quite different. And seeing that we've already begun talking about the SJ-200, we might as well start there first.

Pre-War SJ-200 Rosewood Reissue

Gibson's history reveals that, on release, the SJ-200 "quickly earned the title 'King Of The Flat Tops' due to its superior sound, physical size, outstanding projection and majestic appearance". And it certainly is something of a whopper – the 'SJ' in the model designation stands for 'Super Jumbo', after all – with a maximum body width at a very fulsome 427mm (16.8 inches). But Gibson is right about the majestic appearance, with gold Grover Imperial tuners, real mother-of-pearl 'graduated crown' inlays, ornate pickguard and two-bar 'moustache' bridge. The pre-war-style script logo on the headstock is a nice touch, too.

Rarer early pre-war models are highly sought after, so making the original spec available at a tenth of that price is very sound reasoning

We're reminded that this was the instrument – a '65 borrowed from Mickie Most – that Jimmy Page used on Led Zeppelin's first album for the acoustic tracks *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You*, *Your Time Is Gonna Come* and *Black Mountain Side*. Jimmy is on record saying that Mickie's came with a tune-o-matic bridge, a Gibson experiment that only lasted for a couple of years.

Epiphone's homage is a looker in every sense of the word. But so much for cosmetics and ornamentation, it's time to take a peek under the SJ-200's bonnet.

We've already seen that we have rosewood for the back and sides and this is complemented by a "thermally aged" spruce top, meaning the wood has been heat-treated to simulate the drying-out process that would normally take years, if not decades. The neck is a two-piece maple affair with a rosewood 'stinger' to the back of the headstock. The bridge is ebony, with mother-of-pearl inlays, and both string saddle and nut are bone.

It's interesting to note that Gibson's paperwork for each instrument states that the Epiphone models are "inspired by" the originals, as opposed to being historically accurate dead-ringers. The history books

3. The spec is impressive on all three instruments, with solid woods, bone nuts and saddles, mother-of-pearl inlays and the 'correct' headstock shape

4. The SJ-200 maintains its renowned flagship status featuring multi-ply binding to the top, back and headstock, and single-ply binding to the ebony fretboard

5. Challenging the Hummingbird and SJ-200 for decorative bling, the Dove has m-o-p inlays in its colourful 'guard, with the bird motif reflected on the bridge



3


4

tell us that the 1937 models came with an adjustable bridge and a scale length of 660mm (26 inches) as opposed to the static bone saddle and 648mm (25.5 inches) we find here. In fact, the SJ-200 went through several iterations in its youth, with the spec only relatively recently settling down to the guitar we know today.

Like its siblings, this SJ is kitted out with an LR Baggs Bronze Element VTC under-saddle pickup and preamp, with the controls accessible via the soundhole.

1960 Hummingbird Reissue

Switching over to the first of our two 'birds', the timestamp here is the beginning of the 60s and a whole new era in music and guitar players alike. Arguably, Gibson's most revered of its high-end acoustic range, opening the Hummingbird's case was like greeting an old friend.

Gibson's first square-shoulder acoustic to enter its catalogue, the Hummingbird was seen in the hands of the new breed of 60s guitarists, notably Keith Richards and Brian Jones of The Stones and, coming more up to date, Joe Bonamassa, Gillian Welch and Thom Yorke. Second only to the J-45 as a do-it-all workhorse, this 'Bird was known for its ability to handle virtually anything from energetic strumming to sensitive fingerstyle.

Epiphone's tribute captures the moment with a fine-looking Cherry Sunburst finish – poly here, of course – fancy pickguard, mother-of-pearl split-parallelogram inlays, bound rosewood fingerboard, gold tuners and the 'proper' headstock shape.

> The SJ showed its true character – loud, proud and with all of that wonderfully woody depth and tone for which this model is renowned

Once again we find a thermally aged spruce top, but this time the back and sides are mahogany, as is the one-piece thermally aged neck. Bridge pins, string saddle and nut are all bone and the 'belly up' bridge itself is rosewood.

In contrast to its two companions, the Hummingbird's scale length is 629mm (24.75 inches), which is more familiar to players who pack a Les Paul and, again, if you're thinking of taking the Hummingbird to your next gig, it's stage ready with that LR Baggs Bronze Element VTC.

1963 Dove Reissue

Our third glimpse into Gibson's acoustic past comes in the form of the Dove. First introduced in 1962 as the company's second square-shoulder acoustic, our Epiphone model is, according to the spec, "a stunningly authentic recreation of the iconic early Dove models from 1963". Why not 1962? That's not clear.

The Dove was partnered with some impressive names from the pop and rock world, too, with artists such as Elvis, Tom Petty and Alex Lifeson among its many fans, but it perhaps doesn't quite have the same legendary status as the other two models here. Its spec is similar to the Hummingbird, save for the fact the Dove's back and sides are flamed maple, as opposed to mahogany or rosewood. We've also returned to the longer 648mm



(25.5-inch) scale length, as opposed to Hummingbird's shorter version.

A closer look at the body woods reveals that the top is, as before, thermally aged spruce, but this time the finish is Natural and so more grain information is evident. There's a slight mottling to the top – we're not clear whether this is a clear coat of poly that hasn't been evenly applied, or just that the torrification process sometimes produces this effect. In any case, it's only slight and miles away from a dealbreaker.

The maple is gloriously stripy on the sides, but the back shows only a slight rippling effect. The Dove has a one-piece mahogany neck with an Indian rosewood fingerboard, mother-of-pearl split-parallelogram inlays, and Kluson Waffleback tuners with metal keystone buttons.

As far as decorative features are concerned, the Dove-style pickguard is a work of art, with the mother-of-pearl dove reflected in the bridge.

Needless to say, electronics are courtesy of an LR Baggs Bronze Element VTC once again. So the next stage is to hear how these historic reissues sound in action.

Feel & Sounds

Returning to the SJ-200, and before we've even played a note, our attention is drawn to the weight and bulk of this guitar. As far as the actual proportions are concerned, well, it is what it says on the tin – a Super Jumbo. So you'd expect a guitar with that designation to be something that's a bit of a lapful. A lower-bout body-width of the aforementioned 427mm is certainly not for the faint-hearted, after all.

Where the weight is concerned – all 2.5kg (5.6lb) of it – we suspect this is down to the same variable we found with the Goldtop we mentioned earlier; simply that timber can swing between super-light to 1970s Les Paul Custom super-heavy, depending on what manufacturers have in the factory at the time. So your experience here could vary. Aside from that, it's a big guitar and so it's going to weigh in more than, say, a dreadnought or OM.

Epiphone describes the neck profile as being a "round D" and at 22.3mm deep at the 1st fret it certainly feels quite chunky. Action at the 12th fret is slightly higher than we'd choose – at just under 3mm on the bass side, if your preferred string-height is lower, the saddle would need a

THE RIVALS

If your shopping list is very model specific then the first place to go to add context to the value inherent in this trio is Gibson itself. If you were after a Gibson SJ-200 you'd be looking at a price tag of around £4,799, while era-specific reissues would see the price go ever more skyward, with the 1957 SJ-200 coming in at around £5,399. To complete the picture from the Gibson catalogue, a 'no frills' Hummingbird will cost between £3,300 and £3,600 and a Dove in the same rank and file will be around £3,499.

You can pick up an Epiphone Dove for as little as £400 and there are still Epiphone 1957 SJ-200s available for around £1,279. An Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Hummingbird streets at £749, which means there's plenty of choice if you want to stay on brand.

Elsewhere, we highly recommend Eastman's acoustic models, where a J-45-inspired E20SS/v, for instance, comes in at £1,949.



6



7



6. Each of our trio of Epiphone acoustics comes equipped with an LR Baggs Bronze VTC Element pickup and preamp system

minor adjustment. The nut could probably have done with a few more minutes on the workbench, too, as a couple of the strings were a little 'sticky' on tuning and some of the slots were cut too high.

However, when we played our first chord, all the minor niggles vanished as the SJ showed its true character – it's loud, proud and possesses all of that wonderfully woody depth and tone for which this model is renowned. And for only a fraction of what the Gibson equivalent would cost, too. If you were looking for those Jimmy Page *Led Zep I* acoustic tones, they're all here – and you'd be ready to take centre stage, thanks to the onboard LR Baggs Bronze Element VTC.

Freeing the Hummingbird from its case, its dreadnought body size, lighter weight and shorter scale-length all deliver a sense of compactness, after the bulk and weight of the SJ. The neck profile here is what Epiphone enigmatically refers to as merely "rounded", but we measured the 1st-fret neck-depth at a substantial 23mm. A close look at the nut revealed the Hummingbird has fared better than its bigger sibling, but, alas, the action is still higher than we would like.

Once again, though, sitting and playing the instrument turned out to be easily on a par with what we found on the SJ. It sings. Simple as that. Volume and power is combined with that familiar woody sweetness and authority throughout the range and it certainly doesn't suffer from a lack of bassy grunt, either. It definitely has that Gibson vibe to the sound, but for only a fraction of the cost.

The Dove sits well in line with its two partners in that the action is on the high side, but the cut of the nut is definitely the best of the three. And with a 1st-fret neck depth of 21mm, we're back to a slimmish C profile – although Epiphone still refers to it as simply "rounded" here, too.

Sound-wise, that maple back and sides, and possibly the longer scale, brings brightness to the sound picture, but all the power that we've already met from the other two guitars is still present. It's as if someone has turned up the treble control on your amp a little, that's all. Otherwise, it's a similar ride to the others.

The LR Baggs pickup system is common to all three and it proved a faithful companion to have onboard, giving a very good representation of the guitars' acoustic characteristics.

7. Epiphone's Deluxe tuners with green-tinted keystone buttons adorn the headstock of the Inspired By Gibson Custom Hummingbird

8. Other than the action height and nut-slot niggles, the workmanship evident on this threesome really is up to the standard we've come to expect

The Hummingbird's volume and power is combined with that familiar woody sweetness and authority throughout the range



Verdict

It's difficult to know where to start when summing up these three new Epiphones. However, the first thing that springs to mind is the value for money when compared with their Gibson forebears. Each of our Epiphones give a very good account of themselves in the sound stakes – the SJ and the Hummingbird probably neck and neck for their rich and sonorous acoustic sound. The Dove slips very slightly behind due to its more trebly response not being to everyone's taste. But this is only by a smidge, and let's not forget that sound can be very subjective.

Then there are the niggles. We would say that if these guitars have been set up to a factory standard then it needs reviewing because lower actions on acoustic guitars are largely what's expected these days. A little more care with cutting the nuts wouldn't go amiss, either. It must be emphasised, however, that both these factors could easily be sorted at point of sale since many guitar shops have their own in-house tech to put things right and so you'd end up with an extremely nice acoustic guitar at a very affordable price.

As always, it's very much a case of seeking these new models out and auditioning them for yourself. You might just find you're as impressed as we were. G



EPIPHONE PRE-WAR SJ-200 REISSUE

PRICE: £1,399 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Super Jumbo
TOP: Thermally aged spruce
BACK/SIDES: Rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 123mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 427mm
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Grover Imperial
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/55mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Bronze Element VTC
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.5/5.6
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Apart from the three guitars here, the new Epiphone acoustic range includes a 1942 Banner J-45 Reissue (£1,099), a Hummingbird Deluxe EC (£1,099) and a 1957 SJ-200 Reissue (£1,399)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Vintage Sunburst

8/10

PROS Great-looking and great-sounding guitar with a prestigious heritage

CONS Nut and action need further attention; weight and bulk might be an issue for some



EPIPHONE 1960 HUMMINGBIRD REISSUE

PRICE: £1,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Square-shoulder dreadnought
TOP: Thermally aged spruce
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 123mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 404mm
NECK: One piece mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Epiphone Deluxe with green keystone buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.91mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/56mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element Bronze VTC
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.08 /4.6
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See left
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Heritage Cherry Sunburst

8/10

PROS Gibson-esque sounds at a fraction of the price; boasts stunning looks, too

CONS As before, more time on the QC workbench would seal the deal here



EPIPHONE 1963 DOVE REISSUE

PRICE: £1,099 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Square-shoulder dreadnought
TOP: Thermally aged spruce
BACK/SIDES: Figured maple
MAX RIM DEPTH: 121mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 404mm
NECK: Thermally aged mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Kluson Waffleback with metal keystone buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/55mm
ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element Bronze VTC
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.1/4.8
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: As left
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Natural

8/10

PROS Another stunning looker straight out of the pages of Gibson's history

CONS Slight bias towards the treble end of the spectrum; nut and action as before


Vintage REVO Series
Alan Entwistle

The Twilight Zone

Revisiting guitars of yesteryear, Vintage's latest REVO models continue to move the brand away from slavish repros to rather inspired retro champions for not a lot of money. Let's hop in that time machine and take a look

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker



VINTAGE REVO GALACTICA & ASTROSTAR

£649 & £549

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

What You Need To Know

1 Haven't we seen these before?
Not as Vintage models. The Galactica and Astrostar we have here, plus the Waverider and Sessionman, were added this year to the REVO line-up that launched back in 2024 with a considerable 15 introductory models.

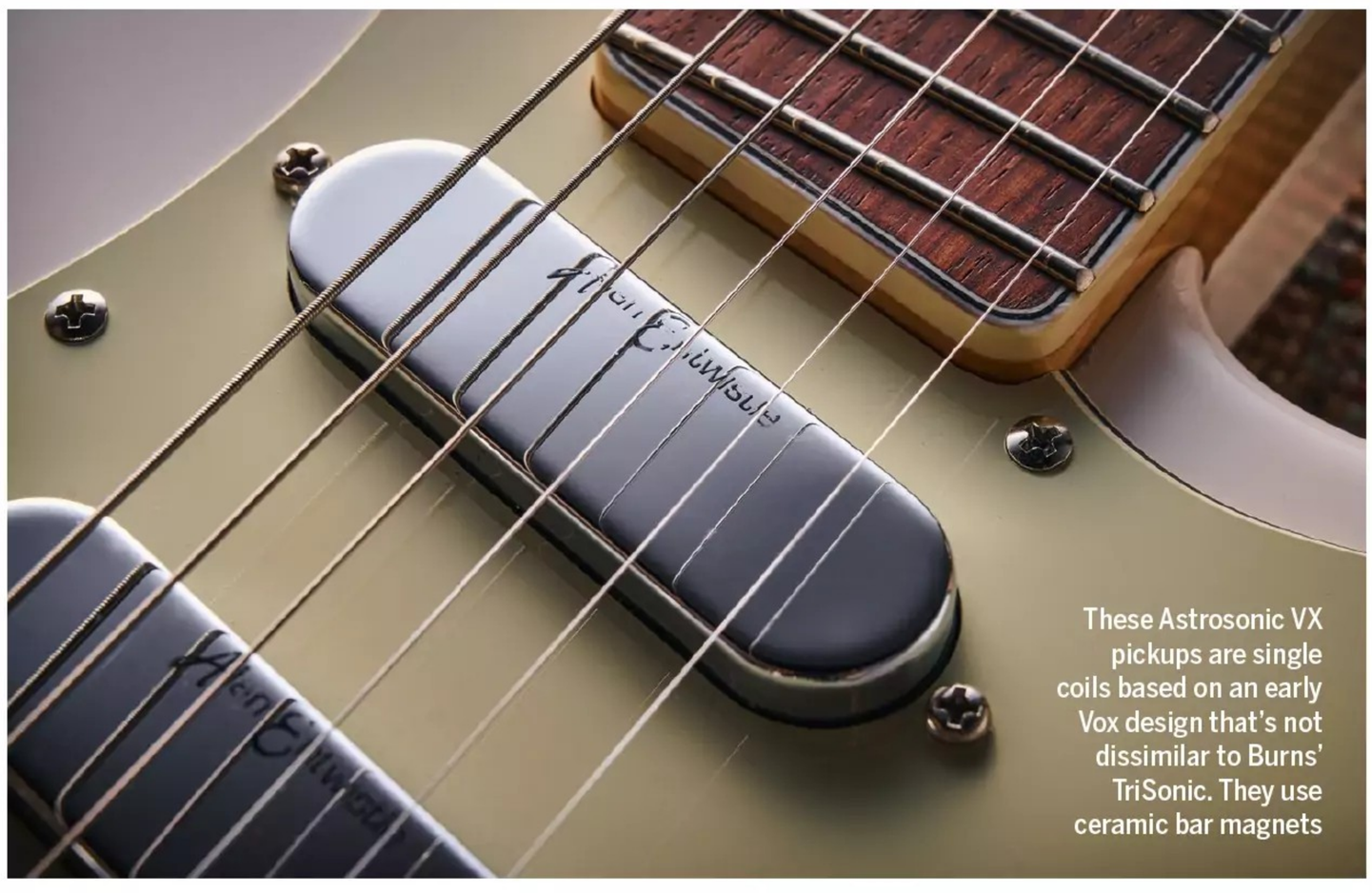
2 And REVO?
It stands for 'REtro Vintage Originals', which is a pretty accurate catch-all. If you think our two models look a little familiar, that's because they're based on specific Höfner and Univox designs models from the 60s. They're not slavish copies, though.

3 There are a lot of switches on the Galactica!
Indeed! The designs and electric circuits come from veteran designer Alan Entwistle, who splits his time between the UK and China. He specialises in recreating pickups from past brands including Burns, Vox and plenty more, added to his own spin with clever passive circuits such as the ATN 5 that features here on the Galactica.

Known for pretty tidy lookalikes, and celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, the Vintage company certainly hasn't stood still these past decades. Last year, the brand took the wraps off some 15 models under the new REVO banner that nodded to some of the classics, recalled a few forgotten gems and added a few more. That wave continued earlier this year when Vintage launched four more additions, two of which we have here, the Galactica and Astrostar.

Now, there's obvious Höfner Galaxie DNA in the Galactica. The Astrostar's inspiration appears less obvious, but it seems squarely modelled on a Japanese-made mid-60s Univox UC3. Neither is a direct copy, though, and perhaps 'inspired by' would be a better descriptive term.

Veteran designer Alan Entwistle is behind these new models again, and



These Astrosonic VX pickups are single coils based on an early Vox design that's not dissimilar to Burns' TriSonic. They use ceramic bar magnets



These Entwistle mini-humbuckers are designed in the style of Höfner from the early 60s but use neodymium magnets. Each one has its own on/off slide switch

we'll speak to him later in this piece, but pulling both guitars from their cardboard shipping boxes – there's no gigbag included in the prices – we're met with very clean and tidy-looking pieces that really could have come from some catalogue back in the day.

Both guitars use okoume for their thinner bodies – the lightly offset Galactica is 40mm in depth, the Astrostar marginally thicker at 42mm. With the high-gloss opaque finish you can't see the wood, although the Galactica has the usual contours, the forearm bevel is a little light, and the ribcage cut on the back is hardly vintage-Fender deep. The Astrostar is quite radically offset with a light forearm-area top chamfer and a light ribcage cut. Both have heavily radiused edges – more Strat than Tele – and while the Galactica's heel platform is Fender-like, the racy Astrostar's heel has a boat-bow point just like the Univox it's modelled on.

You'd think the bolt-on necks would be pretty similar, but no – not in terms of the details. The Galactica's maple is slab-sawn, the cleanly cream-bound fingerboard is a mid-brown rosewood (last year's first wave of REVO models used jatoba) that has those striking Höfner-style stripe inlays and clean-looking fretting from a wide and relatively low-height gauge. In

There's an appealing retro vibe in this pair, inspired by Höfner and Univox builds from back in the 60s

contrast, the Astrostar's neck is quarter-sawn and we have a rather attractive flaming to its back – it's probably a one-off, but it's very welcome, adding a real touch of class. The 'board here is a deeper dark brown with cream/black/cream edge binding and pearloid dot inlays that run down the bass-side edge between the low E and A strings, just like that Univox guitar. Oh, and in case you missed it, while the Galactic uses a Fender scale and has 22 frets, the Astrostar goes for the shorter 629mm (24.75-inch) scale and has 21 frets.

One feature both guitars share is the roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, the Galactica's sitting in front of what appears to be a fairly generic-looking Fender-style offset vibrato. The Astrostar's bridge sits on the top plate of the Rapier Hi Lo vibrato (based on the original design by Watkins, we believe). We don't get locking tuners, but we do get those Wilkinson E-Z types with

THE RIVALS

There's a considerable choice of similar-style guitars in the rest of the broad Vintage REVO range with designs based on some Fender classics such as the three-pickup T-style Trio (£499), with offset vibrato. The offset Surfmaster is actually a semi-solid, and the Quad (£549) houses four Astrosonic VX single coils, each with their own on/off switch, plus the Entwistle ATN 5 passive filter.

Alan Entwistle also introduced the Rapier brand a couple of years back based initially on some classic Watkins designs such as the three-pickup Rapier 33 (£479). Later additions use original Burns and even Supro designs to create some viable retro mash-ups.

Eastwood, not to be confused with Eastman, has long offered repros of lesser known pawn-shop prizes (as well as joint venturing with Dennis Fano to create the Rivolta models). At the time of writing there is no UK distributor, although a few European dealers are listed at on the brand's website and it advertises worldwide shipping.



1

1. Unlike the expansive switching options of the Galactica, the Astrostar sticks with a Strat-style five-way lever pickup selector with a bass-cut switch and master volume and tone controls

dual string holes in each post to lock the string, or simply to offer a choice of string heights. Technically, these have staggered-height posts anyway, although the Galactica has three full-height tuners, three lower ones, while the Astrostar has only the low E and A string tuners full height, the other four are lower.

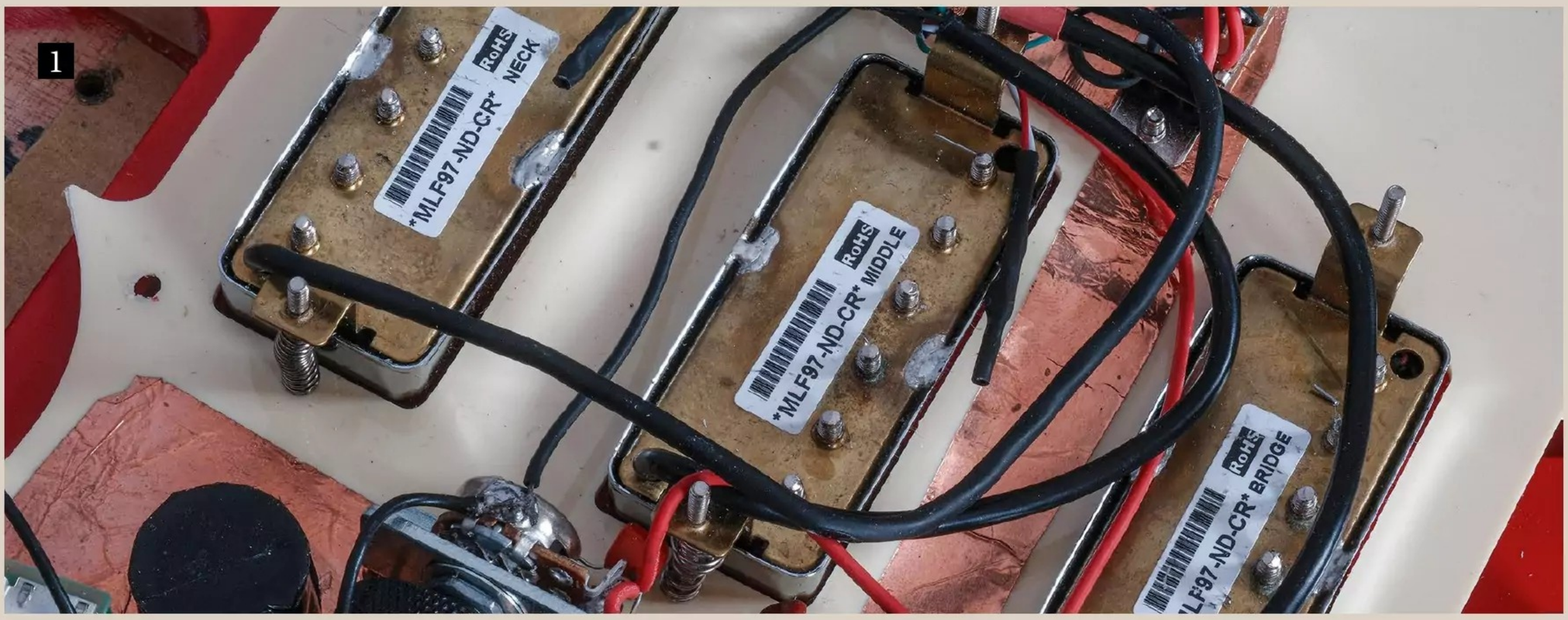
There's little parity when it comes to the electrics, either. Yes, both have three pickups. The Astrostar is the more simple drive with a five-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone and a bass-cut switch. But the Galactica? Best you take some notes. On the bass side of the cream scratchplate, each pickup has its own on/off switch, plus there's a single phase slide switch below those. Starting at the top on the treble side is a five-way rotary ATN 5 passive filter circuit, conceived by Alan Entwistle, with its chickenhead knob. Below that are two rotary-wheel controls with quoted 'mid-tone' and 'warm-tone' functions, and below that is a single volume control and where the tone should be we have the output jack. Got that?

The Astrostar's bass-cut is quite a throwback tool if you're chasing authentic 60s garage tones

Feel & Sounds

Both guitars have a good weight for their bolt-on style and, playing seated, the Galactica feels most conventional, while the Astrostar is more Fender offset-like. From a strapped-on perspective, that observation is similar and the necks on both seem to sit into the body more than your Telecaster. The Astrostar's top strap button is unusually on the inside of the upper horn, but both feel perfectly good and are nicely balanced.

The setups, with 0.009-gauge strings, are more similar than many of the guitars' other features: the Astrostar has minimal neck relief and a string height of 1.5mm (0.06 inches) on both treble and bass sides. The Galactica is virtually identical with just a little more height on the bass side at the 12th fret of 1.8mm (0.07 inches). Both nuts are cut nicely and all the strings are low over the 1st fret, although the fret edges of the Galactica are left a little sharp and square, and with a higher overall nut the string grooves sit quite low. The final finishing on the











1. Each of the Galactica's mini-humbuckers are wound for their position

2. The Entwistle-designed ATN 5 uses a five-way rotary switch and a coil encapsulated in epoxy

3. Instead of a capacitor-based bass-cut, the Astrostar uses these two small inductance coils

4. Like the Galactica, the Astrostar's single coils are also wound for their positions

5. Under a thick backplate are the springs for the Hi-Lo vibrato, plus you can also see the mahogany-like okoume used for both REVO bodies

UNDER THE HOOD

Lots of switches, yes – but what else is hiding inside?

Taking a look inside the Galactica, all the pickups, switches and pots, plus the output jack, are loaded on that large scratchplate – all it needs is a bridge ground to link it to the body. There's a full 'swimming pool' rout in the body, too, and overall the machining looks pretty clean.

Despite the HFS63 (as in Höfner '63) name, the pickups here have 'ML97' codes with a 'CR' suffix and labels, suggesting each is wound for position [pic 1]. These use neodymium magnets, too, we're told. The (250kohms) rotary pots are all mini-pots with zero markings, including the volume pot, which has no treble bleed. As for those two tone controls, the upper roller tone uses a 0.015µF capacitor; the lower-placed tone uses a lighter 0.0068 µF (680pF). Overall, while certainly complex, the wiring is all very neatly done.

On the tip of the scratchplate you can see the ATN 5 [pic 2], which consists of an inductance coil encapsulated in epoxy and a five-position rotary switch to which a small PCB with surface-mount components is attached – you wouldn't find that in a guitar from the 1960s!

The Astrostar's body has routs for each pickup and a vastly simplified circuit. Again, we have small pots for the volume and tone (with nominal 250k value), a block-style five-way pickup selector switch, and the tone control uses that same value 0.015µF capacitor. One surprise is that instead of a capacitor to create the bass-cut switch – as used on a Jaguar, for example – the leads from the switch pass to a small block-sized device [pic 3] that slips into its own rout in the body and houses what look like two small transformer coils. "They work a little like the ATN; they're an inductance," Alan Entwistle explains. "I had to put two coils in series because with just one there's too much circuit loss. It makes the bass-cut a little more top-end-y. To my ears, it's a slightly more twangy bass-cut."

The Astrostar's pickups are clearly from the same source, again position-specific, and despite being called Astrosonic VX (the same pickups that are used on the existing REVO Surfmaster Quad and Thinline 12) have a TS3-CR product code [pic 4]. "The Astrosonic VX draws inspiration from the very early 60s chrome-covered Vox guitar pickups," we're told. "It has a single ceramic bar magnet and a special coil. The VX captures those early rock sounds perfectly and is ideal for use with 60s-type circuitry, such as bass-cut switching, and so on."

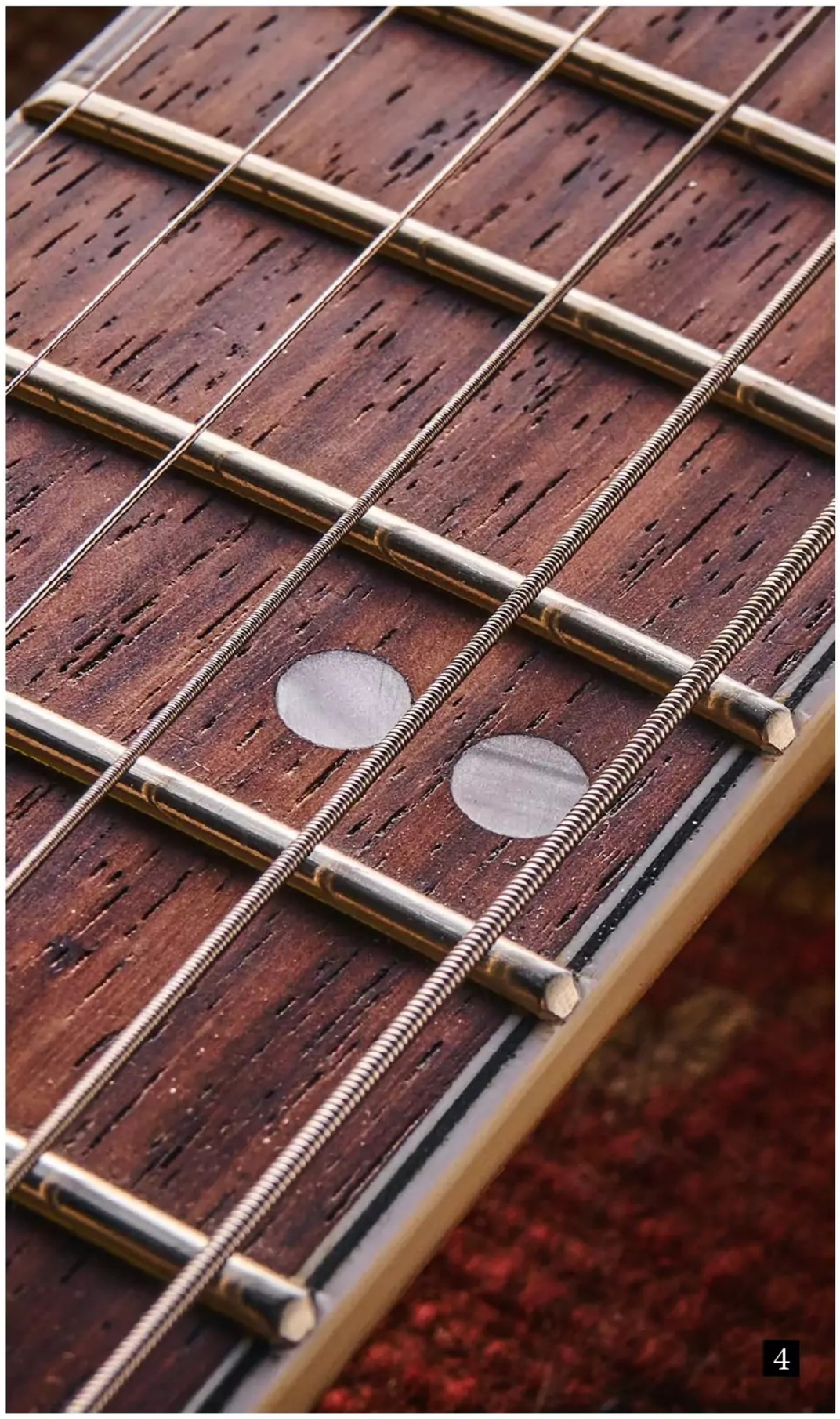
As to pickup DCRs, despite the position-specific labels, the Galactica's mini-humbuckers all measure 6.58k at output. The Astrostar's single coils measure 7.51k, 6.49k, 6.56k for bridge, middle and neck.



2



3



4

2. There's no conventional tone control here, but the Entwistle ATN 5, controlled by the chickenhead knob, adds four passive filter voices, while the two roller tone controls have subtly different roll-offs

3. The Vintage headstock is well known and has been used for 30 years. The Vintage logo was originally designed by the late company founder, John Hornby Skewes

Astrostar's nut is much neater: the edges are rounded and, as the overall nut height is lower, the grooves are less deep. Both necks do go for a similar slim C profile, though, the backs are glossed on both, and dimensionally the Astrostar is slightly deeper (21.5mm deep at the 1st fret, 23.5mm at the 12th) but only fractionally.

The Galactica's 'everything-but-the-kitchen-sink' switching certainly won't be for everyone. Starting with the ATN 5 out of circuit (fully clockwise) and with both roller tone controls fully up (towards the neck), you can audition each pickup individually and there's good, quite tough-sounding 'fat Strat' voicing here. It's biting with a good characterful midrange nose but not shrill at the bridge, and there's more depth with just enough clarity at the neck – a rather good old-style blues voice. Meanwhile, a best-of-both-worlds middle pickup keeps some of the bridge's midrange colour with a little more depth. On this platform, these pickups come across as rather well voiced and sit between the bluster of a good Les Paul and the thinner Strat. It's a lot tougher sounding than it might appear.

Of course, as each pickup has its own on/off switch there's a total of seven sounds here with the added potential of all-three-on plus bridge and neck, compared with a Strat, and the ability to entirely mute the guitar.

The phase switch is on the bridge pickup, so with bridge and middle you get that typical out-of-phase thinness, likewise with bridge and neck. Its effect is lessened with all three pickups on, making it more usable. There's choice.

The two roller tone controls are global and not assigned to a specific pickup, as they would be on a Strat, and the

4. Just like the Univox UC-3 it's inspired by, the Astrostar's position dots are placed on the bass side of the rosewood fingerboard with its three-ply binding

5. This Hi Lo bridge was re-engineered from an original Watkins design. Here, it uses the 'Resonance long-plate' type, which employs three springs that are adjustable under the rear backplate

The Astrostar is quite the space-age looker while the Galactica is a little more familiar and, sounds aside, more conventional



5

differences in their shading are pretty subtle. Neither tone overly cuts back the high-end, and in use either you ignore these or perhaps just pull one or both back to subtly shape the overall tone and leave as is. Neither is as useful as a faster-to-use standard rotary tone, but then not everyone uses that, either.

If all this switching and tone manipulation isn't enough, there's still the ATN 5. Again, think of this as a 'global' control that filters and thins the sound progressively as you move through the four positions (it's bypassed in position 1, fully clockwise). From the off position to the fully anti-clockwise notch, there's really quite an increasing difference and it seems to benefit from pulling back the volume control a little, actually giving the ATN sounds a little more clarity. It's really like a pickup-voicing control, pulling the sounds back to lighter shades, and at the extreme an almost electro-acoustic strummy response. Would you use all these sounds? On a function gig, perhaps not, but for the recording guitarist, not to mention any 60s-aimed stylist, there's considerable potential here.

The Astrostar is a lot simpler, apeing the Stratocaster with a Jaguar-like bass-cut switch. So, unlike the outline, the voice is more familiar: single coils but not lacking in output, with good definition and depth. They're lively sounding, too, with thickness and plenty of percussion. There's a bit of a 'clonk' if you hit any of the pickups with your pick, suggesting they're not overly potted, and we suspect the covers are also helping to pull back any excessive highs. They seem quite 'quiet' for single coils, too, in terms of pickup hum, and in the two mixed-pickup positions they're hum-cancelling. The bass-cut does what it says and really does thin the sound, not least when the volume is rolled back a little. Useful? With old-style fuzz, it certainly produces some wiry sounds and it's quite a throwback tool if you're chasing authentic 60s garage tones.

Both guitars have vibratos, but they are rather different. The Galactica's has a push-in arm and works really smoothly for light shimmers. Once its strings are stretched, it holds its tuning pretty well, too. The Astrostar's vibrato – which has a screw-in arm but with no swing-tension adjustment – needed a little help. Even without using the vibrato it wasn't keeping in tune, so running a nut file over a couple of too-tight nut grooves and adding some lubrication quickly fixed that and kept things in pretty good tuning, for light vibrato shimmers certainly. There's more range to the Astrostar's vibrato: under a thick backplate you see there are three springs and it's that lower string anchor bar that actually pivots against the top plate. It's quite different from the top-loading offset vibrato of the Galactica. With its shorter scale, we'd be tempted to ship this with one with 10s.

As ever, the string length from the bridge to the string anchor on the Galactica, like a good offset, adds appealing overtones, which are less apparent on the Astrostar.



6

If these REVO models aim to offer something a little different, with vibey and diverse sounds for not a lot of money, well, they succeed!

6. This pointed heel is another Univox feature that's retained here, and our sample actually has an attractive flame figure to the glossed neck-back

Verdict

There's an appealing retro vibe in this pair, inspired by Höfner and Univox builds from back in the 60s. Neither aims to clone the originals, and the Galactica has considerable tweakability in terms of the diverse sounds it can produce. The Astrostar is a pretty radical-looking offset with fewer sonic options but strong, clear and big-sounding single coils. The vibrato and overall tuning needed a little minor help, and with its shorter scale we'd be recommending some heavier strings. But it's quite the space-age looker, while the Höfner-inspired Galactica is a little more familiar and, sounds aside, more conventional.

But it's not just the looks: the core sound of both guitars is really strong. The Galactica's mini-humbuckers have a punchy and focused voicing that's good for a lot of styles, from 60s clean with a little grit to dirty blues, roots rock and Americana – these are all areas that the Astrostar fits perfectly, too.

If these REVO models aim to offer something a little different, with vibey and diverse sounds for not a lot of money, well, they succeed! G



VINTAGE REVO GALACTICA

PRICE: £649
ORIGIN: China/Vietnam
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway electric
BODY: Okoume
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, pearloid double cross-bar inlays, measured 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage offset vibrato, roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, Wilkinson E-Z Lok tuners – nickel/chrome
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Alan Entwistle HFS63 mini-humbuckers each with on/off switch, phase switch (on bridge pickup), master volume, 'warm' and 'mid' roller tone controls, 5-position rotary ATN 5 passive tone control system
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.47/7.63
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: The 3-pickup REVO Superthin (£699) uses the same mini-humbucking pickups and is another nod to Höfner
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Firenza Red (as reviewed), Cappuccino, Green/Yellow Burst – gloss to body and neck back

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Very competent repro of Höfner classic; good-sounding pickups and expansive switching, plus the ATN 5 passive filter; good tuning stability

CONS Very little, but the twin-tone setup is quite subtle in use and all this switching potential won't be for everyone



VINTAGE REVO ASTROSTAR

PRICE: £549
ORIGIN: China/Vietnam
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway electric
BODY: Okoume
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, offset pearloid dot inlays, measured 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Rapier Hi Lo Resonance long-plate vibrato, roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, Wilkinson E-Z Lok tuners – nickel/chrome
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Alan Entwistle Astrosonic VX pickups, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone, bass-cut switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.26/7.17
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: Plenty of offset action in the REVO range like the 4-pickup Surfmaster Quad (£549) and 3-pickup Surfmaster Thinline 12-string (£529)
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Vintage White (as reviewed), Boulevard Black and Metallic Gold – gloss to body and neck back

8/10

PROS Unusual inspiration; crisp build and flamed maple neck; vibey-sounding pickups with low noise; like the Galactica, it's a good weight

CONS Our sample needed a little TLC to get the tuning stable; be nice to see swing-tension adjustment for the vibrato arm

HALCYON

Thinking outside the box

Mike Stringer
signature humbucker set



"From crushingly heavy tones to glassy cleans, Halcyons deliver consistently and without compromise"

Spiritbox

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Bare Knuckle

Recreating The Past

Just back from a long stint in China where he oversees the design and production of Vintage guitars, Alan Entwistle delves into what makes REVO that little bit different

Words Dave Burrluck

It's a common misconception that building guitars in East Asia is dead simple. While some may think you just send your chosen factory a few CAD files and a few weeks later a container or two of perfect instruments arrive on your doorstep, the reality is very different – as the designer behind the Vintage REVO and Rapier brands, Alan Entwistle, well knows, having been living and working in China for well over a decade. Recently back in the UK after virtually a year away, Alan admitted, "It's been fairly intense. It's not just the guitars, it's the pickups and stuff and looking after the production," which includes nearly 20 REVO models since 2024 and another 12 or so Rapier models that were first released in 2022.

With little background info on the two new REVO guitars while we were reviewing them, we had to guess the origins. And there's no mistaking the Galactica is based on the original Höfner Galaxie.
"You're right. It was the first decent guitar I bought. I didn't have Fender Strat money in my wallet. Actually, I didn't really have Höfner Galaxie money in my wallet! I went into Reidys in Blackburn – it must have been in 1965 – and they had all sorts of stuff, Voxes, Strats, Shaftesbury... and there was this Galaxie sat there. It was really nice, clean and, of course, it was red! It looked the business and it was on sale for 55 guineas, so I took it on a two-year hire purchase agreement. I really got into it; it had lots of sounds, different tones."

Remaking old-design pickups for the modern market is a big part of your design ethos. Tell us more about these units.
"The Galactica's HFS63 mini-humbuckers have neodymium magnets, two coils. They're quite toppy for a smaller mini-humbucker: there's that edge if you need it. They're all wound the same. I mean, Fender has done that since the early days. I like it, I haven't got a problem with that. Also those pickups are four-conductor so you could split them. If someone was really adventurous, instead of the two-way on/off slide switches that are on the guitar you could [retrofit] three-way switches so you could actually split each pickup as well. But that might be a bit OTT!"

The roller tone controls use much lower value capacitors than most electric guitars old and new.
"I really like the .015µF capacitor, especially with distortion sounds. It's creamy, almost Santana-like."

The .0068µF used on the lower 'warm tone' roller tone takes less of the overall sound away so they don't turn the guitar into a woofy mess. That's the idea, right?
"Exactly. At one time I called a regular tone with a heavier cap a 'mudometer'."

The Galactica's ATN 5 design goes back quite a few years, doesn't it?
"It does. I think you were the first person to review it on what would have been a Hohner JT60 ATN, the one that had a sort of Jaguar offset body and was produced in the early 90s. It's purely an inductance [referring to the coil itself]. It's a couple of Henries and provides a more open sound. Try it with the volume pulled back a little – that's how I use it."



Industry veteran Alan Entwistle designed the Vintage REVO and Rapier models. The Galatica is based on the first proper guitar he bought back in the 60s – a Höfner Galaxie



The Custom Supreme (left) is inspired by a Grimshaw guitar played by Pete Townshend in the 60s. The Trio (right) mashes up a T-style with an offset and features two pickup selector switches!

You wouldn't find a circuit like that in a Höfner from the 60s...

"There were a couple of versions of the Galaxie and one had a five-position rotary switch, but that just used capacitors and resistors. If they'd had the inductance coil, it would have worked pretty much like an ATN. Also, during the 60s there was a character called Enrique Keller, in Northern Spain, who made and distributed Höfner-branded guitars under licence. He had a version, very similar-looking to the Galaxie, which actually had a transistorised circuit in it, which had *six* coils under the hood and a push-button for each one, plus all of the normal circuit as well. It was nuts!"

Continuing our 'guess the guitar' game, the Astrostar appears to be modelled on the Eastwood Univox UC3. Is this correct?

"Well spotted! I actually bought a Univox UC3 when I was still working in Australia. I really like the Univox stuff. It had a neat vibrato with that fixed bridge at the front and it added some resonance. That's what I've tried to do with the vibrato on the Astrostar.

"The pickups on that old Univox were amazing, too. They had really tall Alnico magnets, I'd say about 12mm. They weren't wax potted and they sounded incredible – a real twang. It had a good neck, too, and it really makes you wonder about the Japanese guitars produced back then. They weren't so bad at all.

> "Under the hood, the Astrosonic VX single coils are almost identical to the early Vox pickups"

"Under the hood the Astrosonic VX single coils are almost identical to the early Vox pickups. They have a coil and in the centre is a ceramic magnet. 'TS3' is the pickup maker's designation. I also make the Burns Tri-Sonic pickups, and the Astrostar's pickups are basically Tri-Sonics and so were the original Vox pickups. There were slight differences, but [they were] more or less the same and, unlike the original Tri-Sonics, they don't have a loose coil, it's a proper bobbin.

"You're right that the pickup covers do round the sound a little bit. They're obviously not hum-cancelling, but the covers certainly help to reduce noise. And I do give the pickup factory instructions on [making sure they don't sound overly potted]. I want them to be lively, alive."

We understand you discovered the unusual dual-coil gizmo used for the Astrostar's bass-cut in an electronics store in China that specialises in transformers.

"Yes. They work a little like the ATN, they're an inductance. But I had to put two [coils] in series because otherwise there would have been too much circuit loss. When you engage the bass-cut, the signal goes through the two coils, which have a laminated steel core, and then to earth, which actually makes the bass-cut more top-end-y.

"If you go back to the 60s, Fender had their 'strangle' switch, as it was nicknamed on the Jaguar. Burns had their Wild Dog switch, which is actually something a little different. But they're all heading for basically the same effect. I don't think those circuits were that popular, but today people are finding a way to use them, certainly if you want some extra jangle."

Another new REVO model for this year is the Sessionman, your take on the Les Paul Recording guitar that baffled most players back in the day.

"We had fun with that. [It's not just a repro], we've added coil-splits, which the original didn't have, and we're using the ATN on there, too. The Les Paul Recording sounded okay if you set it up right. I actually had one and found I needed an outboard preamp to make it sound okay. The pickups we're using now on the Sessionman are high impedance, not low impedance. Actually, Gibson's original low-impedance pickup measured a staggeringly low 8ohms! The pots were really low values, too. I did try all that, but I wasn't too impressed with the results, so I went to high impedance and more regular values."

https://vintageguitarsrus.com

Multiple Choice

TC Electronic makes all of its TonePrint effects available in one compact stompbox that will slot neatly into any pedalboard

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker



TC ELECTRONIC PLETHORA X1 £130

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

What You Need To Know

1 This isn't the first Plethora from TC, is it?
Correct. It was always likely that TC Electronic would bring out a single-footswitch model to sit alongside the X3 and X5 model, and here it is.

2 So it's a multi-effects unit like those others?
Not exactly. While the others can chain multiple effects together, this offers one effect at a time, but it does have a huge range to choose from.

3 How's that?
The clue is in the name: it's a TonePrint Loader so it can house any of the sounds that you'll find in TC's TonePrint pedals, including the Hall Of Fame reverb, Flashback delay and many more.

TC Electronic's TonePrint concept must be a familiar thing to all of us by now as it's been evolving since 2011 when it was introduced with the company's initial run of compact digital pedals, which included the original Flashback delay. As it stands, according to TC, a TonePrint is "a unique signature preset of an effect that's built from the ground up by an artist to suit his or her needs, or made by you to finally nail that sound in the back of your mind that's been eluding you forever". In short, any TonePrint-equipped pedal can connect to the TonePrint app, which has a comprehensive editor to tweak all aspects of that pedal's sound, or to load a preset from a library that includes many created by well-known guitar players.

Bearing in mind the DSP basis of all of this, TC was able to come up with the Plethora series of multi-effects pedals that can house the sounds from across the whole range of the individual TonePrint pedals. The X1, specifically named as a 'TonePrint Loader', is the baby of the series and comes with a large range of TonePrints already onboard – TC describes it as 14 TonePrint pedals in one.

In Use

With a very pedalboard-friendly footprint and both mono and stereo operation, the Plethora X1 features a rotary switch that selects one of seven different slots into which the effects are loaded. Following the format established with the X3 and X5, TC calls these slots 'boards' as each can host two separate effects – A and B – but more on that later.

Without any recourse to the TonePrint app, there are a range of tweaks you can carry out straight from the pedal. First off, you can change the TonePrint of a board's effect by using the small two-way toggle switch to scroll through the options. For example, as shipped, there's a Hall Of Fame 2 reverb as board 1's A effect and



This one-inch LCD screen displays effect type and parameter info. Turn a knob and its linked parameter and its value will appear momentarily in the display. Active effects are illustrated by a horizontal coloured line. It can an also show MASH animations and tempo

We've long championed the idea of the 'chameleon' pedal – and that is exactly what the X1 is

you have alternative choices of Shimmer, Plate, Room, Hall or Cathedral reverbs. Basic effect chosen, you then have the other three knobs on the pedal (A, B and C) to tweak it. Now, each of these knobs at its most basic can offer a linear tweak of a single parameter, but they're actually capable of much more complex actions that can be set up in the app. Each can alter

THE RIVALS

If the TonePrint paradigm appeals to you, but you'd like more flexibility and access to more than one effect at a time, check out the Plethora X3 (£249) and X5 (£399). There are also various contenders if you're looking for a multi-effects pedal to add a range of different effects to your 'board in a relatively compact footprint. Prime position among those goes to the Line 6 HX One (£219), while for players with deeper pockets, there's the Eventide H9 Max (£529). Those on a tighter budget may wish to check out the Mooer Prime Minimax M1 (£89).



2



3



2. On the rear panel you'll find the necessary facilities to connect to the TonePrint app. There's a USB-C socket to connect to a computer and a Connect button that you press to facilitate connection to a Bluetooth device

3. The Mash LED will light up when this function is engaged by pressing down firmly on the footswitch. The LED gets brighter as the footswitch receives more pressure to indicate the modulation strength of the parameters assigned to this function

4. This app page shows you the 14 effects loaded into the pedal, as well as the graph for mapping the movement of up to three parameters for the selected effect to each of the A, B and C knobs

up to three parameters simultaneously, and you can map exactly how each parameter will change with the knob's travel on a graphic display.

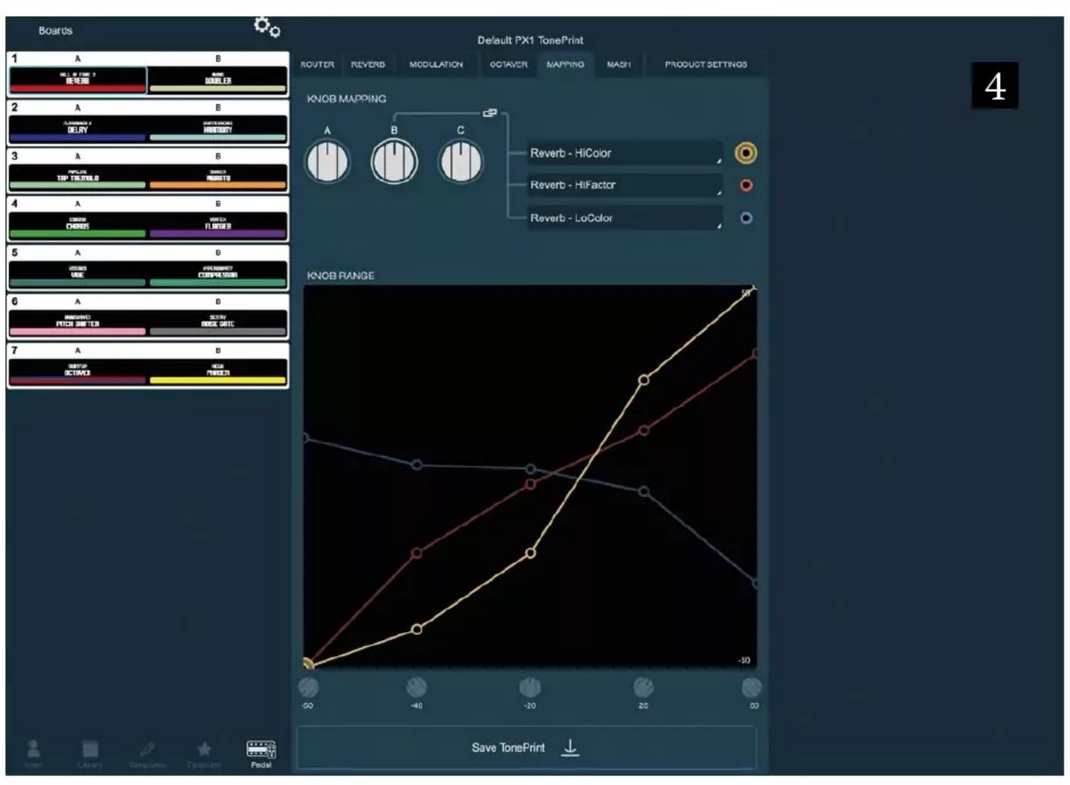
The footswitch is crucial to the pedal's operation and has many functions that can be chosen by the toggle switch while holding the footswitch down. You can store a chosen function for each of the seven boards. You get a choice of standard default latching action for effect bypass, or momentary action where the effect is active for as long as the footswitch is held down.

There's also the opportunity to set the footswitch up for TC's Mash function, which basically utilises the pressure-sensitive footswitch as an expression pedal; downward pressure adjusts a parameter's value. This works by default in tandem with a footswitch set up for latching action, but if you want momentary action and Mash together, there's also an option to set that up.

Another footswitch function that works alongside latching bypass is the switching between the A and B effects – and this, in fact, is the only way to access the B effects. Be aware, though, that due to the long-press needed, the switching isn't instantaneous so you'd have to be careful with timing if changing in the middle of a song. There are also a couple of footswitch functions that can be set up for specific effects: tap tempo input for Flashback 2, Vintage Echo and the Pipeline Tap Tremolo FX, and a Ramp function for transitioning between the two modulation speeds of the Viscous Vibe.

By default, the pedal comes shipped with 14 differently named TC pedals (one of each of the seven boards' A and B

5. A rotary switch is used to select a 'board'. Each board can house two effects, A and B, but the only way to access the B effect is to have switching between A and B stored as that board's sole footswitch function



4

SOFTWARE IMAGE: TC ELECTRONIC



effects). You can use it straight away like this if you want to because TC has been quite astute in its parameter choice for each, giving you a range of curated sounds straight out of the box.

However, to reach its full potential and really integrate the pedal into your rig with the exact sounds that you'll need for a gig requires engagement with the app and either loading some ready-to-go presets or experimenting with your own creations. The X1's latest firmware update allows the pedal to host newer TC pedals, including the Infinite Sample Sustainer, and we had no problem using USB to work with the TonePrint app on a Mac and via Bluetooth on an iPhone, although the former's larger screen makes editing easier.

Any TonePrint can be played through and auditioned before loading, and you have plenty of flexibility as to what you put into the pedal. You may wish to use it purely as a delay pedal by simply loading the boards with a bunch of different delay TonePrints, or alternatively you may wish to set it up as your main modulation pedal with a host of different types, or maybe as a smorgasbord of disparate effects designed to accommodate a particular setlist.

Verdict

Considering the fact that you may want, say, a flanger, chorus or phaser at some point in your set but don't really want a dedicated pedal for each on your 'board, we've long championed the idea of the 'chameleon' pedal, a single pedal that can be anything you want while keeping your rig concise – and that is exactly

With the added advantage of a really compact footprint, plus built-in expression capability, it's a great onstage asset

what the X1 is. With the added advantage of a really compact footprint, plus built-in expression capability, it's a great onstage asset that will provide you with whatever range of sounds you wish to load it with. The TC effects have been proven to be a class act over time, and giving you access to them all makes the Plethora X1 a supremely powerful pedal for a surprisingly reasonable price. G



TC ELECTRONIC PLETHORA X1

PRICE: £130
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Multi-effects pedal
FEATURES: True or buffered bypass, kill dry function, tap tempo
PEDALS COVERED: Hall of Fame 2, Flashback 2, Sub n Up Octaver, Corona Chorus, Viscous Vibe, Quintessence Harmony, Pipeline Tap Tremolo, Brainwaves Pitch Shifter, Helix Phaser, HyperGravity Compressor. Mimiq Doubler, Sentry Noise Gate, Shaker Vibrato, Vortex Flanger, Alter Ego Vintage Echo, Infinite Sample Sustainer
CONTROLS: Parameter A, Parameter B, Parameter C, Board Selector, toggle switch, Connect switch, Footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (Mono & Stereo), standard outputs (Mono & Stereo), USB
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 250 mA
DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 48mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Compact size; very reasonable pricing; massive range of available effects; universal tweaking knobs; various footswitching modes including Mash; software app

CONS Not the most intuitive pedal – to access a B effect for a board you have to forgo any other footswitch function for that board

Subscribehere

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
& SAVE UP TO 51%!*

Guitarist

+NEW DIGITAL ACCESS
TO 130+ ISSUES WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT!**

Subscribehere

SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY THESE BENEFITS

SUBSCRIBE FOR 6 MONTHS AND SAVE 51%*

- **FREE DELIVERY** STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR OR DEVICE
- **SAVE MONEY** ON THE COVER PRICE
- **NEVER MISS AN ISSUE**
- **MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION** ONLINE VIA OUR DEDICATED SELF-SERVICE SITE



PRINT & DIGITAL

£21.93 EVERY 6 MONTHS



DIGITAL ONLY

£17.55 EVERY 6 MONTHS

CHOOSE FROM 3 WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI/DJ85T
or call 0330 333 1113 and quote 'DJ85T'
or scan the QR code here! >>>>>>>>>

Terms & conditions: Offer closes 17 October 2025. Direct Debit offer open to new UK subscribers only. *Savings based on cover price. The price is guaranteed for the first 6 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. **Access to the digital library ends with your subscription. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries, please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays), or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

BOUGHT & SOLD

ALLY VENABLE

The blues-rocker recalls the gift of a precious pedal from an old friend and a recent Hendrix-inspired guitar purchase



PHOTO BY JEREMIAH SHEPHERD

Ally acquired her 1990 Les Paul Limited Colours Edition when she was still in her teens and has used it in her live shows ever since

What was your first serious guitar?

"My very first guitar was a Mexican Strat from my dad and then I got a 50th or 60th anniversary Stratocaster with a sunburst finish. That was probably my first serious guitar. Then, I'm trying to think, I got a Gibson Les Paul. That's the one I use today. I got it when I was 18 years old, and then I got a Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul with all this gold hardware on it. But I actually traded that guitar for a non-reverse Firebird from 1965.

"When I got my first guitar, I wanted to accompany my singing just for fun, you know? And just to see if I could play songs I liked at the time, and then it kind of snowballed into, 'Oh, let me see if I can play this thing live in front of people,' and then, 'Let me see if I can form a band and play with other musicians.' And one thing led to another..."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"I think the Firebird was the last guitar I got. I just liked the look of it, you know? We took the Bigsby off so I could play it live and the intonation would be a bit better. It has P-90s in it, and I just liked how it sounded. I think that's what drew me to it – how it felt and how it played. It's almost like in *Harry Potter* when the wand chooses the wizard. It's kind of the same thing with guitars, right?

"Guitars are not one-size-fits-all. Everybody's hands are different, everybody's influences are different"

"It's not a one-size-fits-all type of instrument. Everybody's hands are different, everybody's essence is different, everybody's influences are different. And, for me, the guitars I have now and the gear I have now, I feel like I've honed in a really cool sound."

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

"I would probably say my Analog Man King Of Tone pedal, I've used it for years. My good friend Devon Allman gifted it to me when he recorded with me on my *Heart Of Fire* album. We co-wrote a song together, and he produced and played lead on it. After he was done in the studio, he's like, 'Hey, do you want this pedal?' And I was like, 'Oh my God, that would be awesome.' It just sounds so good."

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

"Maybe this is a hoarding problem, but I try to keep my gear as much as I can without having to sell it. Whenever I do receive something, it's a special moment. So I try to save that moment with all the guitars that I have. I have quite a few guitars – a lot of guitars, actually."



PHOTO BY DENIS CARPENTIER

ALLY'S GO-TO RIG

"I use a Category 5 Andrew amp. I just love those amps, they have a great sound. I run through the clean channel on that amp and right now I'm using a half stack with it to get a big, thick sound, you know?

"Pedals-wise, I have a [Vox] Jimi Hendrix Anniversary 1969 wah pedal, and, because it only takes batteries, we drilled a hole in the bottom to attach it to my power bank. The power bank I use is [a Big Joe Stomp Box Company iSO8] lithium battery that I charge all my pedals from, so I don't have to rely on the power of the venue – the power at venues changes constantly. Right next to the wah is my Analog Man King Of Tone pedal, and then I have a [MXR] Carbon Copy Analog delay, and a cool [Midnight Vibe] Uni-Vibe [style] pedal by Rick Weaver, and it sounds so good. It's definitely like that Jimi Hendrix vibe. It has a little light bulb in there, and you can adjust the level or the amount of intensity, as well as the speed at which the wave is fluctuating. I also have a Keeley Monterey pedal that I use for an octave Uni-Vibe, and it also has a fuzz feature. It just sounds really cool if you combine the fuzz with the Uni-Vibe sound and get that Hendrix tone. And there's also a [TU-3W] Boss tuner to end the chain with.

"For guitars, I've been rotating between my 1990 Gibson Les Paul Limited Colours Edition and my Jimmy Wallace Fiesta Red S-Type. I just got a Flying V by Epiphone, which is the 'Love Drops' Jimi Hendrix signature guitar. I love that guitar."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Play the guitar first before you buy it, or if you're feeling on the edge, I guess you could buy it without playing it. But I would say get a feel for it and [ask yourself] what are your intentions with buying it? What do you want to achieve with this guitar and does it make you feel creative? Does it inspire you? Does it make you want to write a song or play a cool riff? Check the price tag, too!"

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

"I look at Sweetwater, I look at Reverb, Facebook Marketplace all the time. The last guitar shop I was at was in Garland, Texas, at Jimmy Wallace Guitars – they have an amazing selection. That's one of my favourite shops of all time. I just browse and see what's there. I like looking at vintage guitars a lot, you know? Old-school, like Les Pauls and Strats. But even some of the newer stuff is pretty cool, like the reissues of a lot of the old classic guitars. The other day I saw a Gibson Les Paul, but it was, like, real sparkly and pink. I thought that was a pretty guitar."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a really good amp?

"Oh, can I make customisations to the cheap guitar? I would do that. I don't know, I guess it would depend on how it sounds. I think price sometimes doesn't matter if the guitar and the amp sound good to you. But a cheap guitar and a really good amp, I would say – I would get the cheap guitar and a really good amp, and then make some customisations to the cheap guitar, maybe change out the pickups, change out the tuners. I think that would do the trick."

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

"That's hard, because I play both, and I love them equally. Hmm, humbuckers with a coil-tap! Yeah, I'll do that." **[DM]**

Ally's Jimmy Wallace Fiesta Red S-Type is an onstage favourite, and a Hendrix 'Love Drops' signature makes regular appearances, too



Ally Venable's new album, *Money & Power*, is released by Ruf Records. She tours the UK from 14 to 18 October. For album and ticket info, visit **www.allyvenableband.com**

The MOD SQUAD

MINOR MODDING

After quite a few playing hours under its belt, Dave Burrluck gets the Epiphone Oxblood back into the garage for a bit of a tinker and a tune-up

We don't always get a lot of time to evaluate an instrument for our review pages. There are deadlines to be met, photography to be done, maybe a video to create, before we're on to the next one. Quite often there are minor issues with the instrument, the sort of thing us modders can easily fix but can't always address during a review. Even simple things such as a different string brand and gauge can noticeably change our engagement with the guitar, not to mention a tweak to pickup heights or a slight setup adjustment. While the guitar itself doesn't change, what we feel about it after some minor modding certainly can.

> "Reshaping the nut to look a little more like a Gibson from the 50s is too tempting not to do"

Case in point is the recent launch of the Epiphone Jeff Beck Oxblood 1954 Les Paul, which I initially reviewed for Guitarworld.com and then wrote an extended feature in the last issue of *Guitarist*. In order to get to know the Oxblood, there were quite a lot of playtime hours involved, along with reference-listening with other Les Pauls, and a couple of band rehearsals. Wedged between those two reviews, our editor-in-chief, Jamie Dickson, and our long-time guitar hotshot Richard Barrett put the Oxblood through its paces in a video appraisal for the *Guitarist* YouTube channel. In other words, our single sample has been through a few very experienced hands. Not everyone will agree with what we collectively had to say, but at least we put in the hours.

After getting the guitar shipped back from Jamie and Richard, I swear it was playing and sounding better than when it had left me. New guitars need playing to settle them in and to make everything work together in the same direction, if you like. If we could bottle and simulate the effects of what Richard's tasty, bendy licks have on the feel of the frets and fingerboard, then we'd have a best-selling product on our hands! The fret tops honestly feel smoother, the neck back even more glossed. But before a necessary string change, I wondered if I could make it better still? Let's take a look.



1 The 'wrong' Grover tuners are perfectly functional and the guitar is very stable, tuning-wise


2 The original Graph Tech nut looks a bit 'production line'

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Details Matter

One particular off-spec aspect of our Epiphone Oxblood (and some others we've seen in the wild), is that, as reported, the tuners are Grover Rotomatics, not Schaller M6 series like the original, albeit with those more Schaller-like buttons [pic 1]. An obvious mod, then, would be to fit some Schallers!

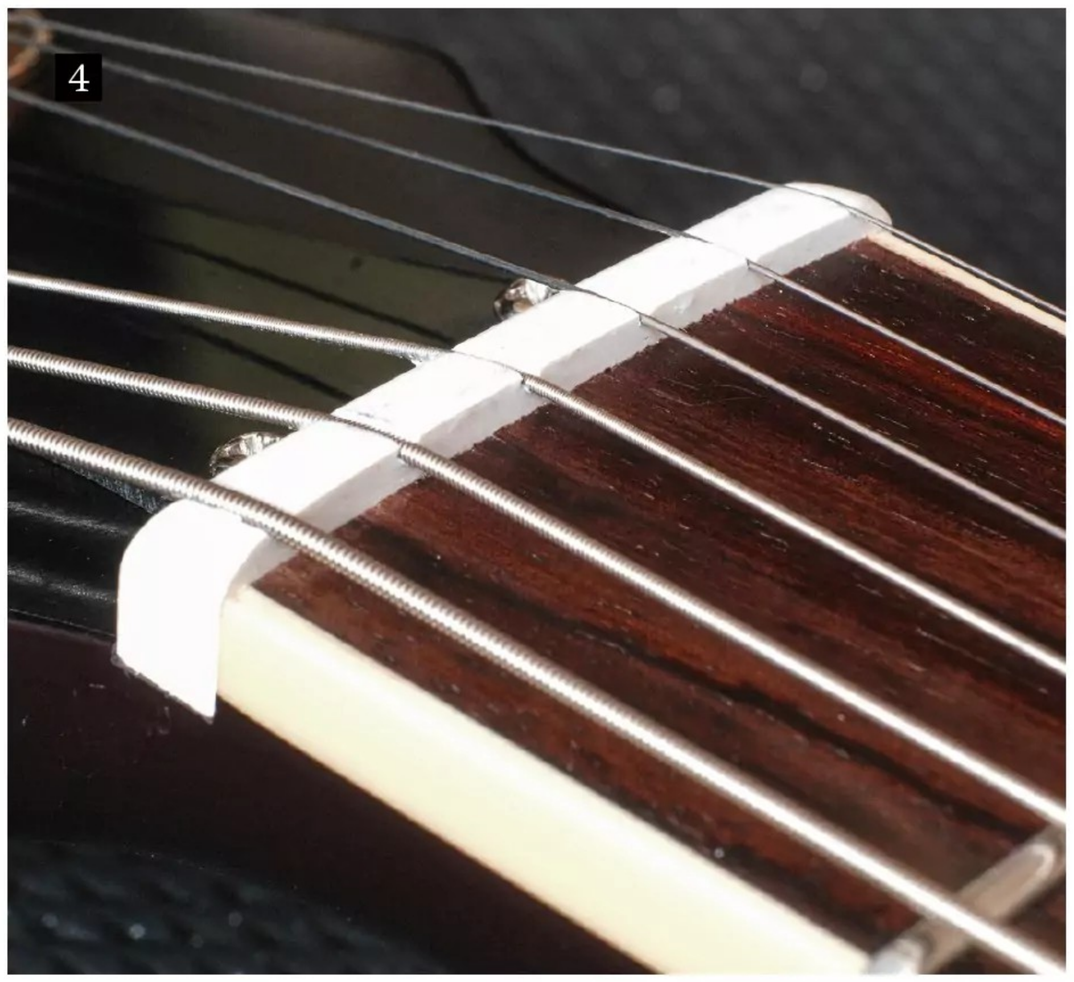
Today, you can buy direct from Schaller in Germany. A set of M6 90s – which have the rear screw on a lug directly under housing and not angled to the side – look like the best fit. Schaller offers a choice of post heights: the closest, from the back of the headstock to the hole in the string post, are Schaller's 21.7mm height. With basic DHL shipping Schaller quoted me €109. Do you need to change tuners? If you want to get as close to Jeff's guitar as possible, why not? But with such good tuning stability as we'd reported, it wouldn't be a necessity for any functional reason.

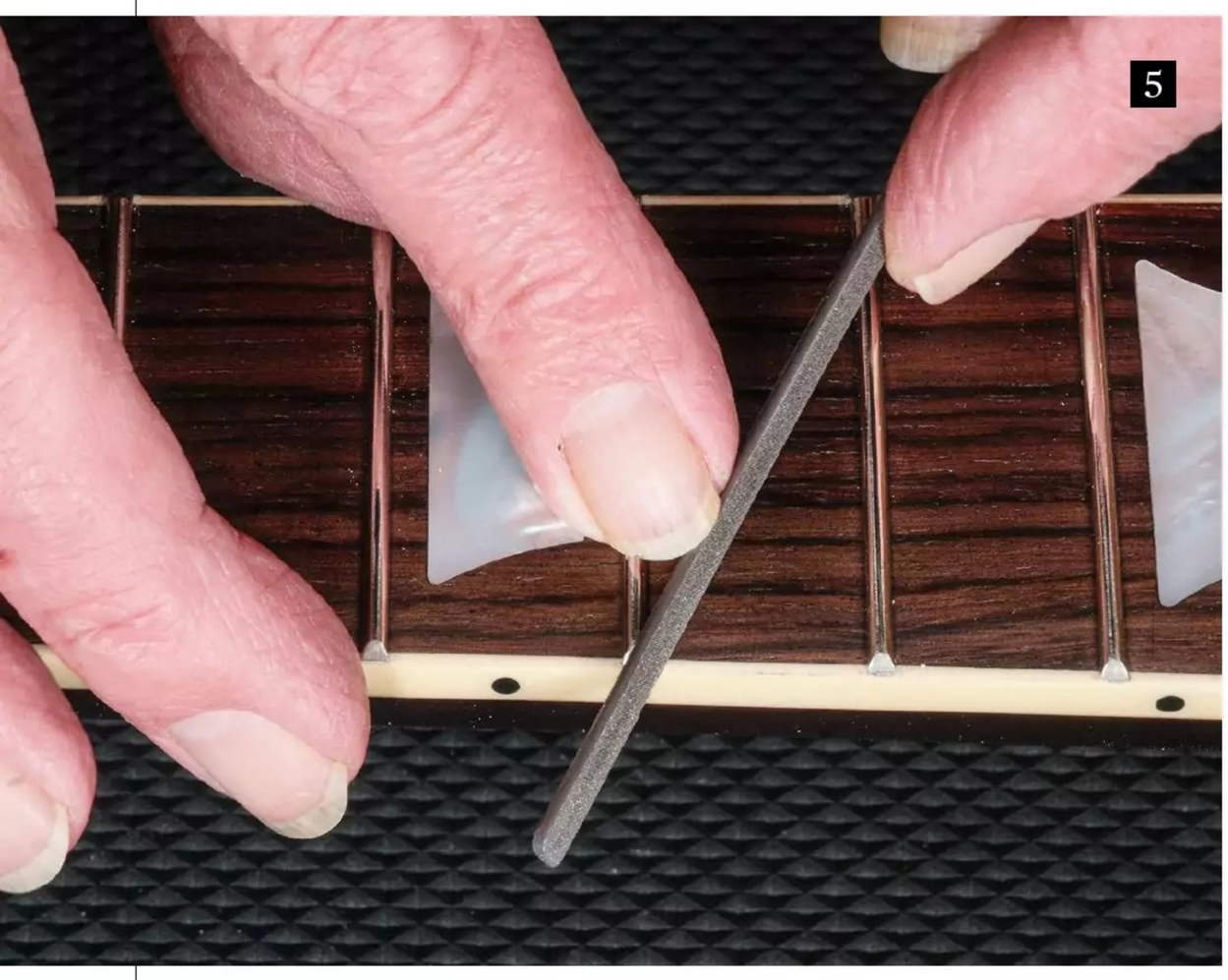
The Graph Tech nut is nicely cut [pic 2]. I did just lightly file a couple of slots to

"Do you need to change the tuners? If you want to get as close as possible to Jeff's guitar, why not?"

Finally fettled and finished off, the Oxblood is quite the player. But will it stay or will it go?









3-4. Cutting the top back with StewMac nut files (pic 3), then smoothing with 400- and 600-grit paper, is easy to create a more luthier-like appearance

5. I used a small StewMac fret file to round the fret ends, then lightly rounded the fingerboard top edges with a backed razor blade and smoothed with 600-grit paper. Using a hardwood block with 600- then 800-grit paper, I lightly smoothed the fret tops (across the fingerboard, not up and down)

6. Finally, I polished the frets with a Nomad fingerboard shield, wiped off any excess with white spirit, then applied a dab of fingerboard oil to bring out the colour

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

improve tuning during my review time and, again, functionally there was nothing wrong, although reshaping the nut (which can be done in situ) to look a little more like a Gibson from the 50s, and lose a couple of sharp edges, is too tempting not to do [pics 3 & 4].

As we reported, although the fretting (a medium and not over-high gauge) is pretty good, the actual fret ends haven't been rounded and feel a little sharp to the touch. It really doesn't affect the playing experience, although it's the sort of minor niggle that, frankly, people like me notice. Likewise, although you wouldn't expect a bound-fingerboard edge on an old Gibson to have heavily rolled or over-worn edges, I'd be tempted just to round the top edge of the binding here in order to feel more like my old 50s (unbound) Les Paul Junior [pics 5 & 6].

That 'no sharp edges' mantra continues to the pickguard. Its edges are square to the face, not angled, but the top edge is left a little sharp – something that's easily fixed [pic 7]. While they look great, those speed knobs also have quite sharp top edges and feel a little cheap. Again, easy to fix [pic 8]. The rather archaic knob pointers aren't over-sharp and, although I certainly don't use them to gauge the control positions, they don't bother me. If they bother you, then they can be easily removed, and actually the pots (and therefore the knobs) could sit lower to the guitar's face.

Bridge Concerns

The final bit of real estate is of course the Oxblood's pre-tune-o-matic wrapover bridge/tailpiece [pic 9]. For some, this seems like a real throwback design from the early 50s, which, of course, it is,









and some seven decades later is surely obsolete. As Jamie and Richard observed in their video, it does alter the appearance compared with the tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece setup. It's very comfortable to palm-mute with, too, and really pretty much bang on in tune. There's a very slight 'sitar-y' effect on the high E, but in the heat of battle, not least if you're playing some gutsy rock 'n' roll like Jeff did on the original, I don't think either is an issue.

That said, there are plenty of potential upgrades out there from the likes of Faber, Music City, Pigtail and plenty of designs with pre-set intonation ridges or fully adjustable saddles. A future upgrade then, but, like the tuners, not essential.

Typically on an 'import' guitar such as this you'd expect to add a new wiring loom, perhaps with vintage-style capacitors, to your upgrade list, but while there's nothing stopping you from doing that, again, I'm going to live with the guitar a little more. The CTS pot tapers feel good and the vintage-wiring, with Mallory caps, really does open up the sound potential.

Finally...

One thing you might like to try is setting the pickups a little like Jeff did – at least according to the final pictures of the Oxblood before its Christie's sale. You can clearly see the screw poles are screwed out from the bobbin on the bridge pickup, the high E, B and D being the tallest; the G is screwed down a little from those. The A string pole is flat to the bobbin top and the low E very slightly, if anything, raised. And, overall, the pickup is screwed down a little more into the body on the treble side, which would, in theory, give a little more single coil-y attack, not least that the pickup is closely placed next to the bridge anyway. That's easy to do. If you don't like it, then it's completely reversible [pic 10].

> "There are plenty of potential upgrades out there for the pre-tune-o-matic wrapover tailpiece"

It may be a raft of subtle tweaks and a little bit of fettling, but, as ever, what really is a rather good Les Paul, with its relatively light weight and that big neck, now feels finished. It's a very tempting proposition.

That lot should keep you busy till next issue. In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line. G



Huw Price's
Nitty Gritty

If you want to sound great on stage and off, there are a few tricks you should know

Dealing With Sound Engineers



Most modern venues provide engineers with multiple mixer channels and mics – which can cause complications

PHOTO BY AIRE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Any guitarist who has played live is pretty much guaranteed to have been asked to turn down by the front of house (FOH) sound engineer, with the inevitable tonal compromises that ensued. Equally, most sound engineers have felt obliged to ask guitarists to turn down at one time or another because they can't deal with the volume.

As well as being a guitarist, I worked for many years as a 'live sound guy' in venues all over Europe, so I can relate to both sides of the argument. That said, I made a point of principle never to ask a guitarist to turn down. The volume wars drag on, but a little mutual understanding and knowing some simple tricks might smooth the path to peace and great sounds, both on and off the stage.

What's Watt

Clearly, this is *Guitarist* magazine, so most of you won't need me to dwell on the issues we face. We all understand that guitar amps need to be turned up to reach the sweet spot where valves and speakers combine to optimise tone and playability. When sound engineers tell us we have to turn down, we know that our tone will suffer, our rig will be harder to play and we probably won't enjoy performing as much as we should.

> "A little mutual understanding might smooth the path to peace and great sounds"

Engineers often insist they need 'complete control', and that means being able to balance every component of the band. If you're playing in an arena or an outdoor festival that's fair enough, but we're not discussing that here. In smaller venues with musicians and punters crammed into enclosed spaces, it doesn't actually make sense because some elements, such as drums and guitars, are often sufficiently loud not to require additional amplification.

Think of it this way – in addition to being integral to the sound guitarists produce, our amps serve as individual PA systems and onstage monitors that allow us to hear ourselves and the audience to hear us, too. So long as the amp isn't excessively loud, there is surely no point in compromising our tone to simply hand more control to an engineer who may be completely unfamiliar with the sound of your band.

Worse still, the engineer will most likely place a fairly low-quality moving-coil dynamic microphone on your speaker and add mixing desk equalisation in a futile attempt to compensate for the sonic qualities lost by forcing you to turn down.

At the end of this process, the guitar signal will end up going through a speaker system that has been optimised for vocals or drums, rather than guitars. It will probably feel somewhat disconnected because you'll be hearing more of your guitar sound from the PA speakers than you can on stage.

Inevitably, you'll need to have some guitar routed to the nearest monitor wedge, but it will probably sound rubbish, and if your vocals are also coming through the monitors, they'll be harder to hear. In essence you're forced to be quieter so that someone else can make you louder, sound worse and struggle to hear yourself. It's not ideal.

A Balance View

My preference, whether I'm in the audience or operating the mixing desk, is to feel like I'm listening to the band, rather than the PA system. Any time I have attended a gig or concert in a smallish venue where the sound is excellent, it's almost as if the PA system isn't there.

"The key is to optimise your onstage balance before anything goes through the PA"



PHOTO BY CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

One professional term that I like is 'sound reinforcement' because it actually describes how sound systems in small- to medium-sized venues can function really well. It's a pretty simple concept to grasp when you consider that in a typical guitar band line-up, the drums, bass and guitars are loud while acoustic guitars and vocals are relatively quiet. Unlike string quartets or acoustic folk ensembles, guitar bands are inherently imbalanced and a primary function of the FOH sound system is to rectify that.

By this, I mean balancing those quieter elements with the natural acoustic sound of the louder ones. The vocals will be entirely dependent on the PA system for audibility, but there may be no necessity to put electric guitars through the FOH speakers. In a medium-sized venue, a little bit of guitar may need to go through the PA system for 'reinforcement' or an occasional lift for solos, but it's fine if 80 per cent or more of the guitar sound that the audience hears comes straight off the stage.

The same applies to drums and, for reasons that should be obvious, I've never heard any sound engineer ask a drummer to turn down the snare. In small- or medium-sized venues, there's probably no need to mic up overheads or high hats. Toms usually need a little help, and it's fine to reinforce kick and snare drums.

But the common misconception that drums have to be louder in the PA than they are acoustically causes many problems. When drums are over-amplified, it becomes harder to get the vocals loud enough, those turned-down guitar amps will be inaudible unless they also go through the PA, and the resulting mix often ends up being something to endure – rather than enjoy.

Most modern venues provide engineers with multiple mixer channels and loads of microphones. While this may seem like a step forward, it causes complications by shifting power from musicians to mix engineers. Rather than seeing their function as serving the interests of bands, some engineers seem to fixate more on the gear than the music and may even put their own interests and convenience above that of the band.



In order to play at sweet-spot volume levels, you need to make friends with the sound engineer

PHOTO BY JESS WILD



Be willing to take instructions from the sound engineer!

PHOTO BY GURUXOOX/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Working In Harmony

The life of FOH engineers, particularly in-house engineers, is not an easy one. They work antisocial hours and are usually overstressed and under paid. A typical night may include several bands, all with different line-ups, and soundchecks can be noisy and chaotic. Taking control of their environment is a typical coping strategy for stressed people, and one way engineers attempt to do this is by limiting onstage volume levels.

There is nothing to be gained by making enemies of sound engineers, so be courteous and co-operative. Take the time to introduce yourselves when you arrive – always on time – and be sure to remember the engineer's name. One way to be helpful and professional is to provide a sheet of paper with the band's name, line-up and the positions they prefer on stage. Also tell the engineer which members sing and who will need DI boxes.

Remember that the soundcheck is not an opportunity to practise or work on arrangements. You should soundcheck with songs that are representative of your sound and the overall vibe of your set, rather than the feedback freakout you usually end with.

Be willing to take instructions from the sound engineer – start and stop playing when you are told and allow the engineer time to work on the FOH sound as well as your monitors without pressuring them. If you need more vocals in your wedge, don't hassle the engineer when they're busy working on the drums or bass. Pick your moments, and if you can make the engineer's job as easy as possible, they will usually be more inclined to help.

Guitarists should consider how their rig is going to work at any given venue. For instance, if you rock up to a pub gig with a 100-watt amp and expect to run it loud, you will be asked to turn down – and rightly so. On the other hand, if you bring a more appropriate 10-watt or 15-watt amp and the engineer asks you to turn that down, you might be justified in worrying about their professional competence.

Having a collection of amps to suit every venue isn't a practical or affordable option for everybody. If you only have one amp and it's often too loud, investigate attenuators and switch boxes that allow you to disengage speakers.

Wedged In

For pub gigs and smaller venues, you may only have one or two monitor mixes and it's most likely that a single engineer will be running the FOH as well as the monitors. Rather than expecting miracles, there are ways that bands can help themselves to get a decent onstage sound.

The key is to optimise your onstage balance before anything goes through the PA. Start by getting the bassist and drummer to play together and adjust the bass amp to achieve a balanced rhythm section.

If you have two guitarists, make sure their amps are spread out on the stage or the guitars will sound indistinct and lacking in width. On records, two guitarists are usually panned left and right, so mimic this arrangement with your amp placement for a bigger onstage sound.

Set the amp levels so they balance with the rhythm section and everybody can hear what they need to hear. If necessary, put amps up on chairs or beer crates so they're not firing towards your ankles and the bass won't sound boomy. Try toeing them in slightly so they fire across the stage, as well as forward – this will help your bandmates hear what you're playing and vice versa.

> "Remember, the soundcheck is not an opportunity to practise or work on an arrangement"

Before you put any instruments into the monitor wedges, make sure the vocals can be heard. If you can achieve a good onstage balance, you can keep what's going into the monitor wedges to a minimum. Ideally, all you'll need is a bit of kick and snare in addition to the vocals. And remember the golden rule of mixing: if you can't hear something, that doesn't mean it's too quiet – it's more likely that something else is too loud. G

www.huwpriceguitar.com

Advertisement

SET OFF SATISFIED.

From city breaks to sandy toes, get more information and compare quotes.

GO. COMPARE.

Two notes
AUDIO ENGINEERING

Reload II

Multi-Impedance Reactive Load Box
& Active Attenuator

UNLEASH THE BEAST, TAME THE ROAR



Introducing Reload II.
The latest instalment in Two notes' class-leading reactive load solution legacy marking the definitive watershed in contemporary backline control.

Its mission is simple: unleash the power of any amplifier or line-level source without compromise. Armed with a ground-up rework of our defining reactive load for a Celestion® Approved Load Response, the match is set to drive any amp's power-stage to perfection.

Scalable from a whisper to a full-throttle onslaught, Reload II's dual-mono 215W (per channel) amplifier/attenuator and paired speaker outputs preserve every facet of your tone.

Add a Stereo FX Loop, twin DI outputs and **GENOME** Reload II Edition (software download) into the mix and Reload II doesn't just enhance your rig, it redefines it.

INCLUDES

CELESTION APPROVED LOAD RESPONSE

GENOME *Reload II Edition*

Reload II Series-R
DynIR CABINET COLLECTION

24 Virtual Cabinets From Celestion®
& Two notes Audio Engineering

reloadII.two-notes.com



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This first-year Gibson Southern Jumbo is far more than a J-45 in fancy dress

1942 Gibson Southern Jumbo



The earliest Southern Jumbos featured rosewood backs and sides, a 'belly down' bridge and the iconic 'banner' headstock

"The reason I wanted to feature a Gibson flat-top is that people are very excited about them now. Of course, they've always been popular, but I'm now hearing that sound on virtually every record. I'm just not hearing people banging on Martins any more, especially in the Nashville scene.

"With that in mind, I have this extraordinary Gibson Southern Jumbo that's a real sweetheart. Not only does it sound good and play superbly, it's also pretty much pristine and has the banner headstock logo. The 'H' suffix with the FON stamp denotes '1942', which is the first year Southern Jumbos were made – although the model wasn't officially released until the following year.

"The guitars Gibson was making during wartime often reflect a number of shortages they had to deal with. That's why the company used various types of tuners, such as Waverlys and Grovers, and different types of wood. For instance, rosewood guitars like this one featured Indian rather Brazilian backs and sides.

"They sometimes also had mismatched tops, maybe half Adirondack and half Sitka, and Gibson would occasionally put a stripe down the centre seam of the top to disguise the fact the pieces weren't bookmatched. I'm sure there was a stack sheet showing how many guitars were supposed to be built, so Gibson did whatever they had to do to keep the production line moving.

"The necks varied, too; I've seen photos of laminated Gibson necks from that era, rather than single piece. They usually used mahogany but sometimes maple. This

"The guitars Gibson was making during wartime often reflect a number of shortages they had to deal with"

guitar has the typical 1.75-inch nut width, or 1.77-inch to be exact, so it's quite a hefty and deep single-piece mahogany neck that fills the hand completely.

"I find it amazing how at that time in Gibson's history they were able to adapt. Of course, other guitar companies had to do the same thing and I'm planning to do a deeper dive and learn more about that wartime era. Gibson retained some key craftspeople and women were trained up to work on the production line. These days, if you visit Gibson's Custom Shop, there are still a lot of female luthiers.

"When we first acquired this Southern Jumbo we noticed a repaired crack on the bass side of the upper bout. It was about two inches long, but it had been repaired a very long time ago – they did such an amazing job you need to look hard to find it. You can blacklight the area and it doesn't even show up.

"I've gathered a lot of information about Gibson's wartime production and I discovered that many guitars with factory-repaired defects were shipped as brand-new guitars because they didn't always have enough wood to fix or replace every piece. If a guitar cracked during production, they'd find a way to repair it and ship it out.

"I can't guarantee this guitar was factory repaired, but it was done a very long time ago by someone who really knew what they were doing. There are many people who can do work of this quality these days, but back then there would have been far fewer.

"Comparing the tone with a mahogany J-45 or J-50 from the same era, the rosewood produces a deeper, richer and fuller tone. In contrast, the mahogany's tone is more focused on the midrange, which is why so many people favour them for recording. I happen to think the banner SJ would be a great live performance guitar with a bass end that carries through well.

"If you grade guitars from one to 10, with 10 being the best, this banner SJ is a 9.8 because it's like new. When we got it, I gave it to my luthier for a setup and new set of strings. He then called me into his office to show me the truss rod nut because it had never been adjusted. You can tell because Gibson sprayed lacquer over them knowing it would easily flake off the first time a wrench was used to turn it.

"We're talking about a neck that has stayed straight for decades. Considering all the crazy weather conditions we have here, that's amazing and shows just how well they were made. The precision was incredible, and as one of Gibson's fancier and rarer models, you can usually expect to see higher quality wood on a Southern Jumbo than on similar but more affordable J-45 and J-50 models." **[HP]**

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



It's suggested that this model was designed to appeal to Southern sensibilities, with premium woods, multi-ply binding and fancier inlays

"This extraordinary Southern Jumbo is a real sweetheart. It plays superbly and is pretty much pristine"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / WELL STRUNG GUITARS

Blues Headlines

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



Sliding In Open E Tuning

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

OPEN E TUNING (low to high: E B E G# B E) gives on the open strings what would normally be heard by playing the three-fingered open position E major chord. It's a very popular tuning, particularly with slide players – Derek Trucks, Johnny Winter and Joe Walsh have all used it to great effect. This tutorial leans more towards Joe Walsh, with a 12-bar shuffle feel. The aim is to provide some helpful vocabulary for those new to bottleneck playing, plus hopefully some useful ideas for the more experienced. It involves techniques to get the best out of slide in any tuning, plus some key ways of thinking to navigate melodies, turnarounds and minor chords. Obviously, there you can look through the examples for their practical application, but let's talk about the thinking aspect for a second...

Playing melodies along a single string is probably the most difficult way to produce anything other than long held notes with reliable tuning. Fortunately, there are other more traditional approaches that are very effective. One of these is using the major triad we find on the fourth, third and second strings (E-G#-B). We also have the 5th (B) on the fifth string, plus the root on the sixth, fourth (already mentioned) and first strings. Placing the slide across the strings at the 5th fret gives us an A major chord, then moving to the 7th gives B major. So there we have our I-IV-V chords for a start!

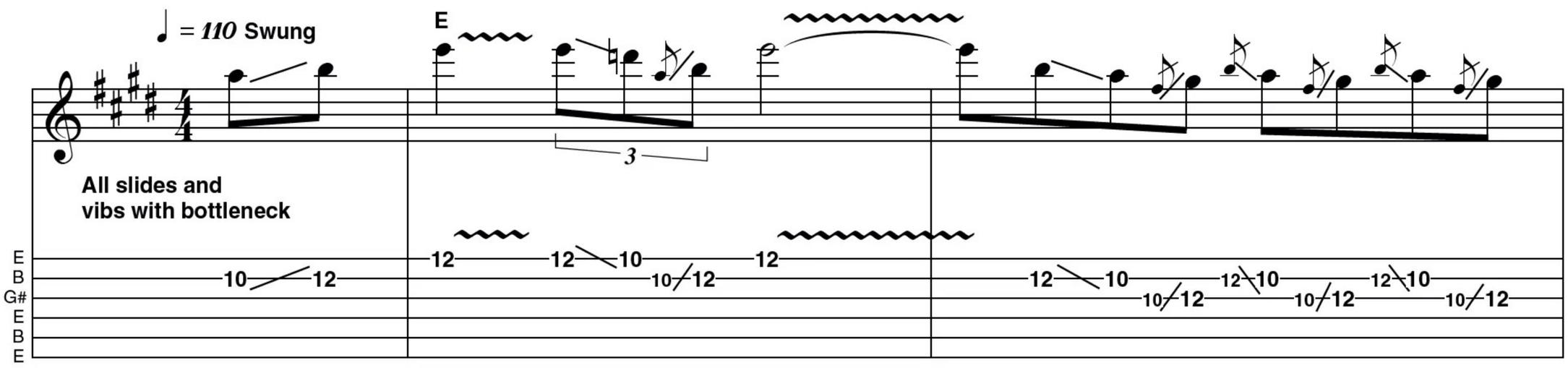
Example 1 is centred around the 12th fret (E major), though you'll notice there's some sliding between the 10th and 12 frets; lots of classic slide phrases can be found with this approach. Sliding up three frets from the E, A or B chord can provide some useful licks, too, as you'll see in Examples 2 and 4. Hope you enjoy and see you next time! G



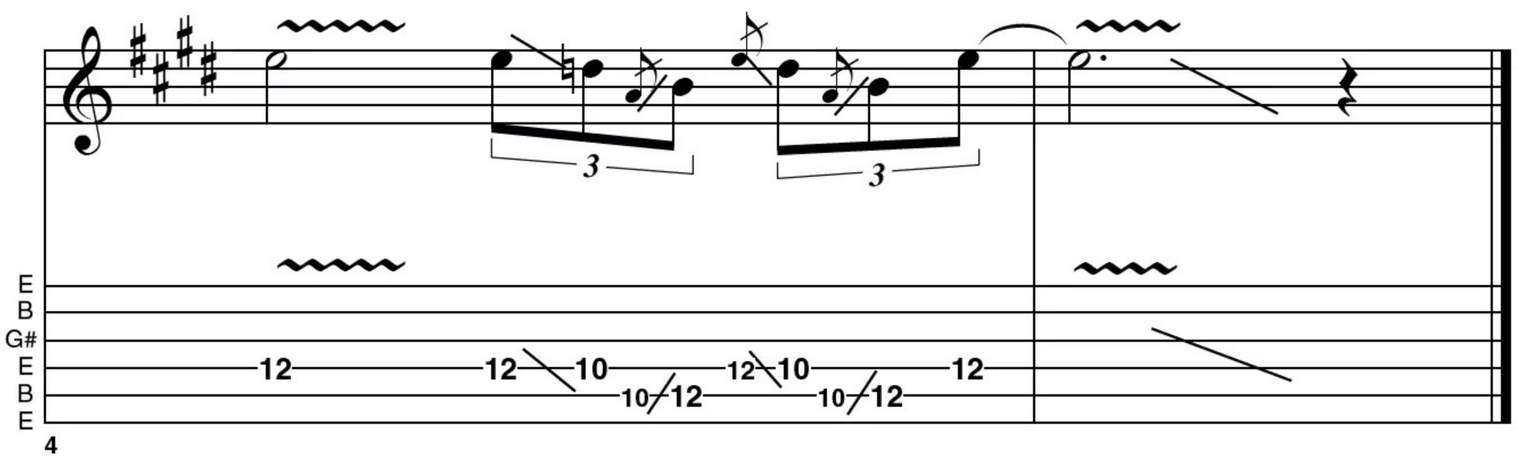
Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon

Example 1

IT MAY NOT BE OBVIOUS from the transcription, but it's worth pointing out that this phrase relies heavily on sliding between the 10th and 12th frets. In this case, we're using single notes, but the whole triads of D and E major (found at the 10th and 12th frets respectively) could be quite effective, too. You wouldn't want to dwell too long on the D, but as a 'tension and release' type phrase, it works great.

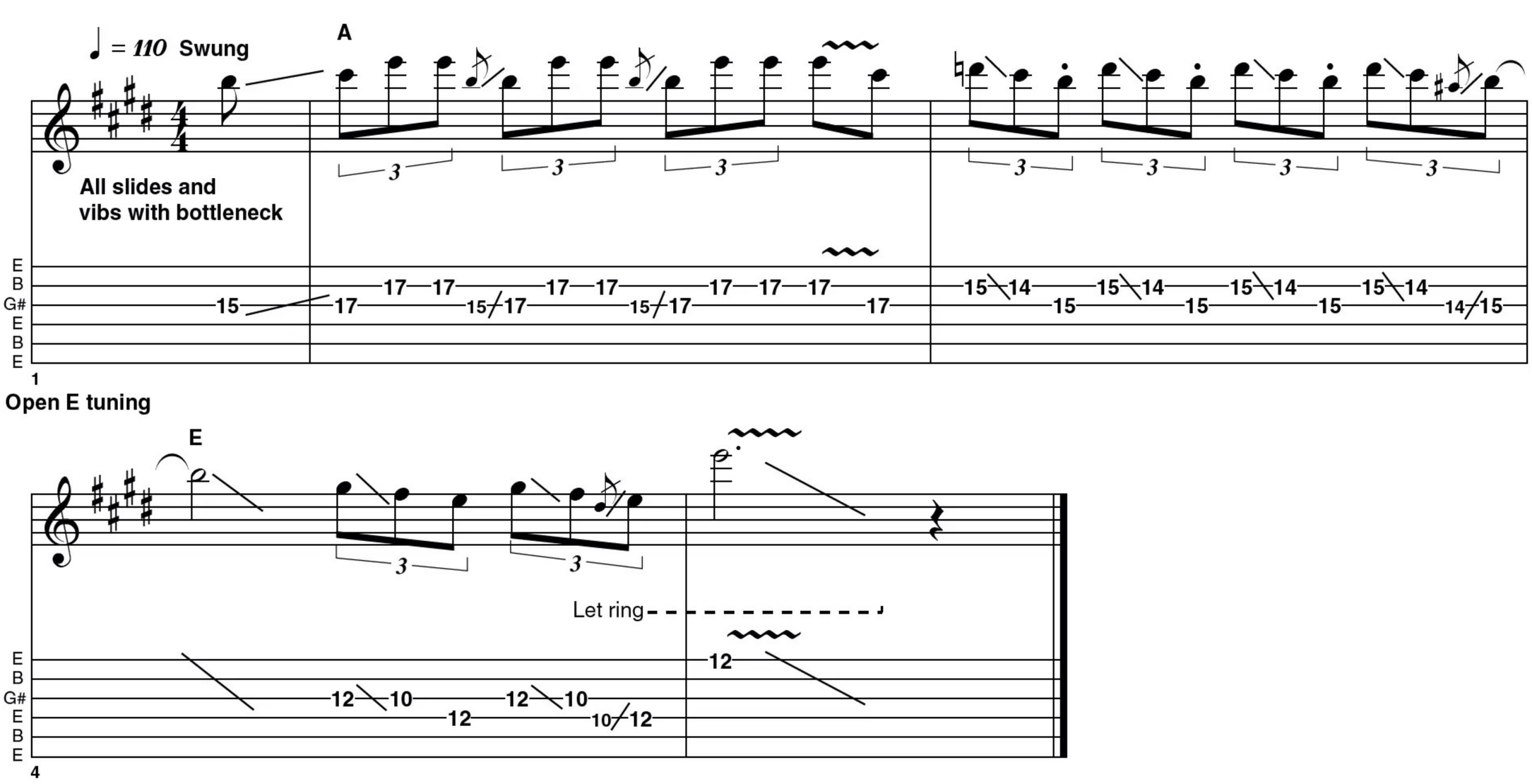


Open E tuning



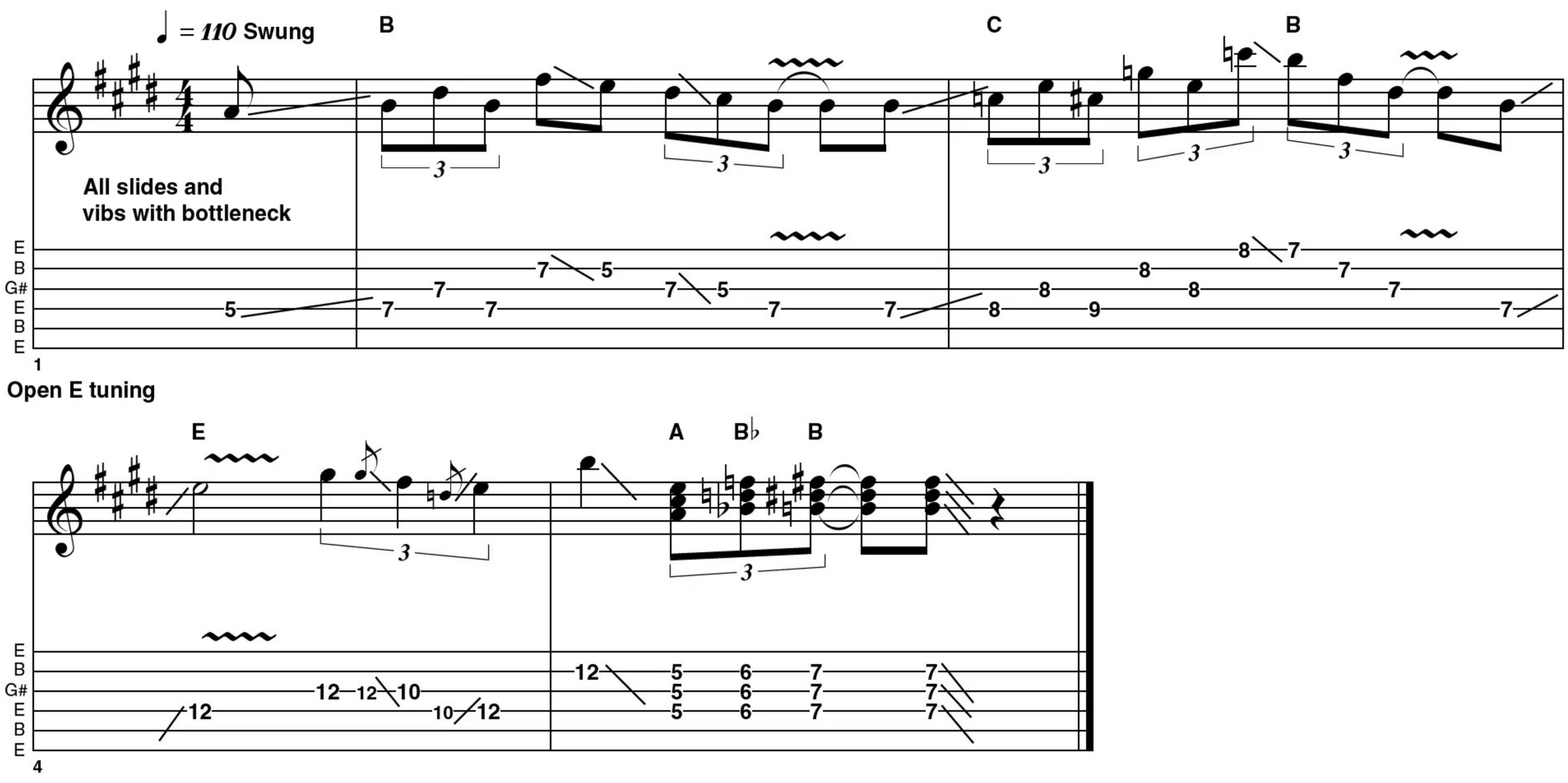
Example 2

FOR THE IV CHORD (A), we're heading up to the 17th fret, giving us an A major chord to play with. This is approached via the 15th fret, using the same approach as Example 1. However, we then shift our main focus on to the G major chord at the 15th fret, sliding repeatedly down one fret to C# on the second string. This is slightly dissonant over the A chord, but all makes sense once we get to the E chord again.



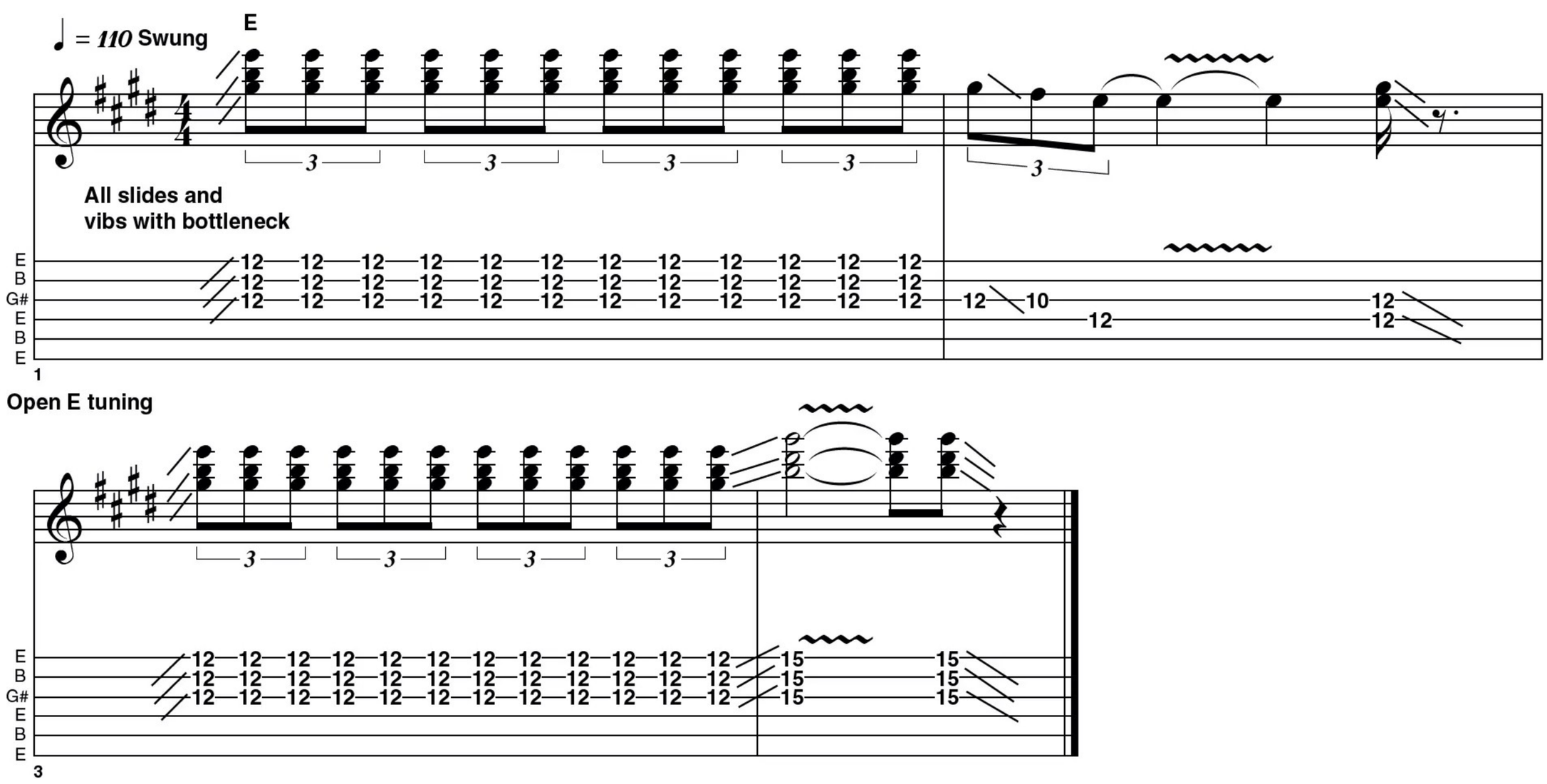
Example 3

THIS EXAMPLE GETS A BIT MORE AMBITIOUS, swooping around the fretboard. Look closely, though, and you'll see that it basically follows the chords – even the brief excursion to C major in bar 2. Perhaps the trickiest part is the jump from the 12th to 5th fret in bar 4. The chromatic jump through the 5th, 6th and 7th frets was always going to be a risk... Luckily, perfect pitching isn't always the most important consideration when going for 'vibe', but don't be too forgiving, either!



Example 4

WE ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH EXAMPLES to make a complete solo, but here's an alternative take over bars 1 to 4. This takes a much more aggressive approach, using the top four strings to sound whole chords. Again, we're seeing the movement between the 10th and 12th frets – the two-fret move already mentioned, which occurs so often in this style of playing. The shift up three frets to the G major at the 15th gives a little dissonance, but this would resolve nicely moving to the forthcoming A major chord.



Hear It Here

JOE WALSH
THE SMOKER YOU DRINK, THE PLAYER YOU GET

Joe's most famous use of open E tuning is on *Rocky Mountain Way*, though we'll need to look at other albums for further examples, such as *Heartache Tonight* from the Eagles' *The Long Run*. It's worth noting that most open E slide licks can transfer to open A if you play a string down (meaning notes from the third string would move to the second). This allows us to include *Life's Been Good* from Joe's *But Seriously, Folks...* album!

JOHNNY WINTER
SECOND WINTER

Johnny leans heavily on open E tuning for this 1969 album. Check out the aggressive fills on *I Love Everybody*, his cover of Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*, and his reworking of Little Richard's *Slippin' And Slidin'*, the solos of which sound very much like the same open E tuning. Sometimes it's hard to be sure if we're hearing open E or standard, but open E does have a distinctive resonance, so I'm pretty confident on that last one.

THE DEREK TRUCKS BAND
ROADSONGS

Derek plays in open E most of the time, whether he's playing slide or not, but he is rightfully known for his astonishing technique as well as his soulful lines. Just don't say I didn't warn you if you attempt any of this stuff! Check out his playing on *Key To The Highway*. Derek also played great versions of *Statesboro Blues* (originally by Blind Willie McTell) and *Desdemona* with The Allman Brothers Band on their 2024 live album, *One Way Out*.

Guitarist

OFFICIAL APPAREL STORE



PREMIUM GARMENTS
FOR PICKERS

ONLY £27.99

Guitarist
ESTABLISHED
1984

Wear your passion for six-strings with pride, with our new line of Guitarist-branded premium cotton tees – available in a range of cool colours and classic designs

https://store.loudersound.com/collections/guitarist



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

SPIRIT OF '65

Tracing the history of Fender's sale to CBS, the 'Hendrix Era' Stratocasters and those infamous big headstocks

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE

An Oz-T Cabronita from the Oswestry-based master builder. Does it twang?

BLACKSTAR DOUG ALDRICH

A close-up look at the ex-Whitesnake maestro's new signature DA100 Ruby amp

Next issue on sale
19 Sept 2025



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to Guitarist?
Go digital from just £3.46 an issue!
www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI



WELCOME TO THE SLINKY FAMILY



ERNIE BALL®

SINCE 1962

GRETSCH®



9020

PROFESSIONAL COLLECTION BROADKASTER®
& BROADKASTER® JR. LX CENTER BLOCK

LEARN MORE AT GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

9000

©2025 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation.
All Rights Reserved.