

# Guitarist

Issue 533

FEBRUARY 2026

RISE OF THE FIRST SUPERGROUP

## CREAM

INSIDE

**CARLOS SANTANA**

LOOKING BACK ON  
HIS SIX DECADE  
CAREER  
& MORE

PLUS

CHRISTONE  
'KINGFISH'  
INGRAM

FENDER REISSUE  
'62 SUPER AMP

LEO LYONS ON  
TEN YEARS AFTER

& MORE

60<sup>TH</sup>

ANNIVERSARY

FEATURING

THE MAKING  
OF CREAM'S  
DEBUT ALBUM

THE GUITARS &  
AMPS THAT FUELLED  
CLAPTON'S SOUND

MYTH-BUSTING  
THE BAND'S  
BREAK-UP

& MORE



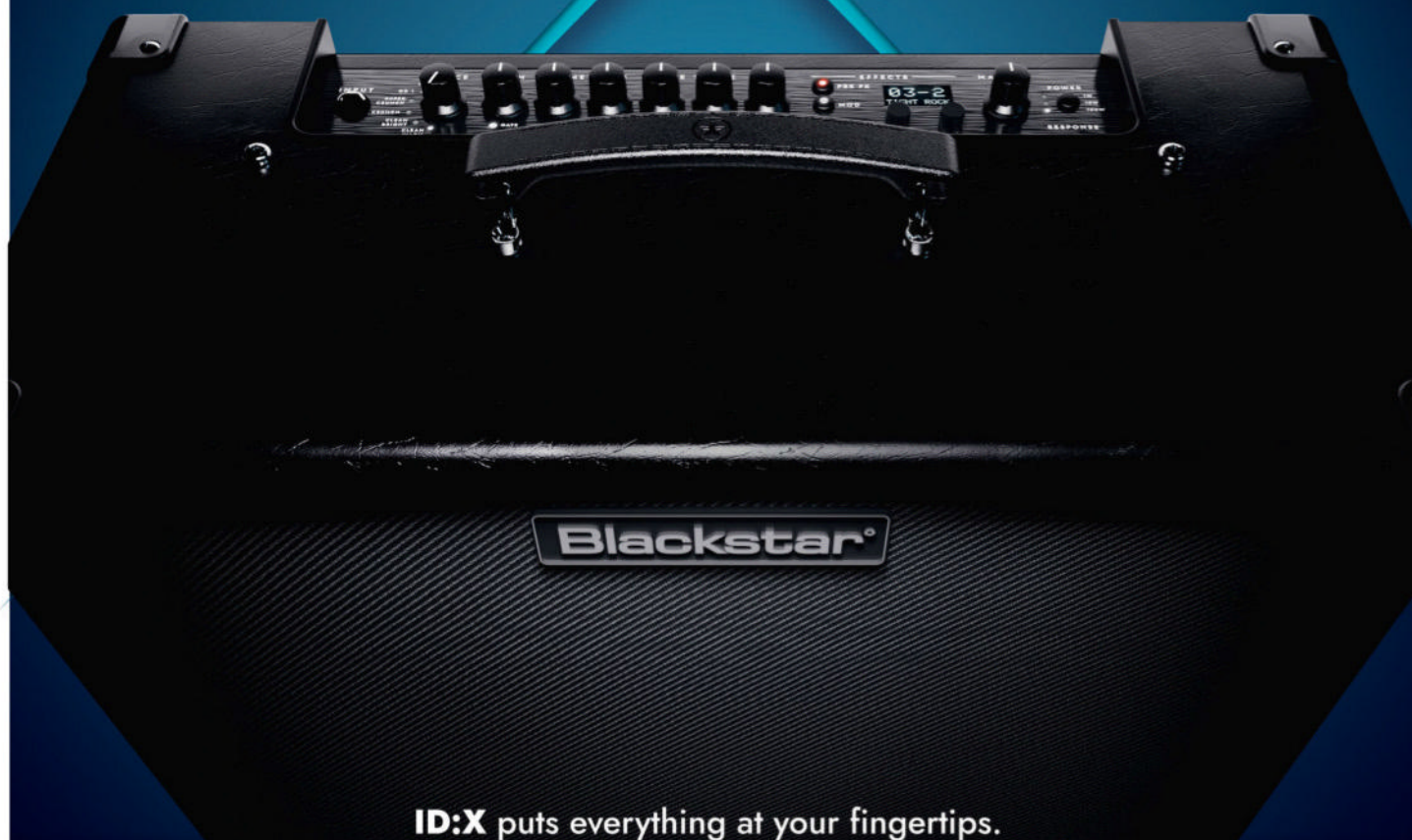
PLUS  
BOSS XS-100 & XS-1 REVIEWED  
1961 SILVERTONE RESTORED  
MIKE VENNART



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## Still So Glad



It's not often you can say, with absolute certainty, where you were and what you were doing when you heard a band for the very first time. But if you can, you know it must have been something of a turning point in your own musical development, both as a listener and, in my case, as a guitarist-in-waiting. This was certainly true for me with Cream. Hindsight hereabouts is absolute. But first, permit me to fire up my virtual time machine to remind ourselves how we gentlefolk of a certain vintage consumed music back in the late 1960s.

With the internet and all its dark arts still decades away, the way we would come across new bands was usually via our school chums. One of us would buy a new album and then invite close buddies around to our teenage bedrooms to share in the discovery. It was a whole network of information in itself, peer to peer. And so it was that in the winter of '69 I found myself at a friend's house in Hertfordshire for a weekend sleepover, and the soundtrack to that weekend was, in part, his new discoveries, one of which was Cream.

The first notes I heard from Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker were on the track *I'm So Glad* from the album *Goodbye Cream*. True to say that I didn't know exactly what I was listening to, having been brought up on The Beatles, Beach Boys and the like. But I knew I was hooked. I also knew that I wanted a guitar for Christmas.

Since then, my journey as a musician and, latterly, a journalist has been accompanied by blues-rock in all its many forms. Years later, I found myself sitting with Eric Clapton at Olympic Studios in Barnes, talking about the very short time that Cream played together. He said to me, "I think my overall feeling about it now is that it was kind of a glorious mistake... and it ended up being a wonderful thing."

A wonderful thing, indeed. And so our celebration of Cream forming 60 years ago was a chance to reevaluate the band's immense impact on the music scene then and, it must be said, ever since. Enjoy the issue and we'll see you next month!

David Mead **Deputy Editor**

## Editor's Highlights



### Vintage Glory

With 40 watts of classic twang and, let's agree, looks to die for, does Fender's reissue of the '62 Super still have that magic mojo? **p14**



### Still Got The Blues?

The current generation of blues players recount how they constally look back to the idiom's glory years for insight and inspiration **p42**



### Leo Lyons

Ten Years After's bass player recounts the story of the band's early years and their path to glory at the Woodstock festival in '69 **p50**



# Guitarist

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# Contents

COVER FEATURE



56

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## REGULARS

- 030 Gas Supply
- 032 Fretbuzz
- 034 New Music
- 036 Tones Behind The Tracks
- 040 Opinion
- 044 Substitute
- 046 Feedback
- 102 Subscribe
- 110 Bought & Sold
- 114 Mod Squad
- 120 Nitty Gritty
- 124 Vintage Icons
- 130 Next Month

## FEATURES

- 048 Obituary: Steve Cropper
- 050 Leo Lyons
- 056 Cream 60th Anniversary
- 072 Carlos Santana
- 078 Historic Hardware:  
Candy Apple Red Fenders
- 104 Blueprint: Fender '62 Super Amp

## NEW GEAR

- 008 West Valley Indiana
- 014 Fender '62 Super Amp
- 018 JWW Chorale Select
- 024 Manson Guitar Works  
Supermassive Black Fuzz
- 026 Dinosaural Hypoid Drive
- 028 Newman Torn and Frayed Edition
- 086 Gibson Les Paul Junior Double Cut  
& Les Paul Special Double Cut
- 098 Boss XS-100 & XS-1

## TECHNIQUES

- 126 Blues Headlines  
with Richard Barrett

REVIEW



86

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FEATURE



36

PHOTO BY KATRENA WIZE

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## FIRST PLAY



**WEST VALLEY INDIANA**  
£3,350

**WHAT IS IT?** Original retro-style UK-made solidbody that sounds as old as it looks

# Into The Valley

A new name on the UK's vibrant guitar-making scene, West Valley comes to market with a vision inspired by the golden era of guitar design

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Matt Lincoln

**W**hile so many small guitar-makers can't seem to shake off the obvious classics when it comes to style, West Valley's Josh Stopford has a different vision. The Indiana is far from an inspired-by design: this is a lightly offset outline that can play host to various hardware and pickup setups. Along with offering the start-up, single-pickup Junior model and the semi-solid Slim, our top-line model shows off the full potential of his vision.

Based around the longer Fender scale length with a mahogany neck attached with bolts (not screws) to a thin maple-topped obeche back, the Indiana is hard to pigeonhole. It's offered with an offset-style vibrato, but our sample's tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece nod to Gibson style, which is reflected in the Sunbear humbucker at the bridge and soapbar-sized staple-magnet pickup in the neck position. The drive is fast with just a master volume, tone and three-way toggle, with no extra sounds from pull-switch pots.

From the off, it comes across as a very purposeful gigging tool, and with Josh's











1

1. Unlike the angular offset body, the headstock shape is pretty classic. Alongside vintage-style Gotoh tuners, the nut is very well cut

background in setup and maintenance for a number of bands (including Idles, Supergrass, Siouxsie And The Banshees, The The, Massive Attack and The Stranglers), that's not so surprising. What's more, this build has detailed craft, with the classy tortoiseshell top-edge binding enclosing a wide black/white purfling,

Like the aged Gotoh and TonePros hardware, there's little impression that this is a shiny new production guitar

which also surrounds the fingerboard with an inner and thin white coachline.

The guitar's face is flat, but there's a light ribcage contour on the back, though the heel stays old-school and rectangular. Then there's the finish: the Vintage White face is aged with plenty of cross cracking that'll get more noticeable as use wears in. The thinner oil/wax finish to the vertically striped grain of the obeche is stained to tie in colour-wise with the almost bare-wood feeling of the neck.

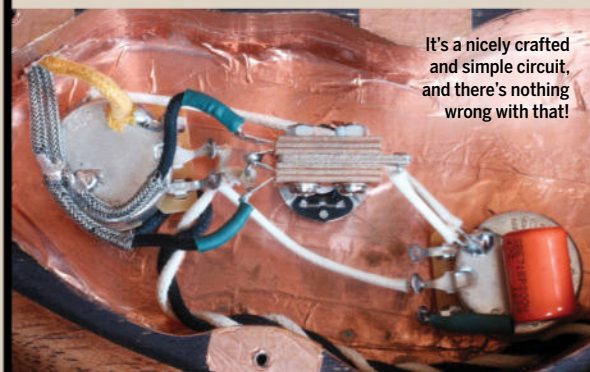
Overall, like the aged Gotoh and TonePros hardware or the rear offset

## UNDER THE HOOD

A simple circuit done well

**I**nside the carefully copper-foiled control cavity you see a nicely wired simple circuit using CTS 500kohms pots, separated by the low-profile three-way toggle switch. It's a standard modern-wired circuit with no treble bleed and a large 200-volt .047µF circular orange-coloured capacitor.

Like an increasing number of makers, Josh does wind his own pickups, but – as with the Sunbears here – you can order aftermarket sets, too. For more info on the Sunbear 58 Archive SB-PAF humbucker and Staple V soapbar size P-90 single coil, head over to [www.sunbearpickups.com](http://www.sunbearpickups.com).



It's a nicely crafted and simple circuit, and there's nothing wrong with that!



At the bridge is the Sunbear 58 Archive SB-PAF humbucker, closely modelled on a 'Burst's Patent Applied For pickup. It uses an Alnico II magnet with a DCR of 7.83k measured at output



Josh Stopford likes his binding! Here, the tortoiseshell binding is well crafted and the white coachline helps the material to 'pop'

neckplate, there's little impression that this is a shiny new production guitar. This almost antique, old-guitar impression continues with the guitar's neck geometry. More like a Fender, there's little back angle to the neck pitch, and where it joins the body it sits quite high, not least due to the tune-o-matic bridge. Both pickups sit high as well, so perhaps a taller mounting ring, certainly at the bridge, would suit.

### Feel & Sounds

Rather like its purposeful intention, the Indiana doesn't follow the ultra-light trend and weighs in at a beautiful solidbody heft of 3.5kg (7.7lb). Like the excellent strapped-on or seated feel, things feel very right straight away. That impression is helped by the neck profile, which seems to cross Fender-like width (at the nut it's 42.3mm and 51.5mm by the 12th fret) with quite a deep C profile that feels a little fuller than its depth dimensions suggest: 20.8mm at the 1st fret 23.4mm by the 12th.

The fretting is beautifully done, particularly at the domed ends and polished tops to the 'narrow tall' wire (approximately 2.47mm by 1.2mm). They're perfectly installed on the stripy brown ebony fingerboard with its quoted



## BEHIND THE BRAND

Increasingly, some of the most interesting new builds are coming from small enterprises such as Josh Stopford's West Valley Guitars

**S**ince we caught up with Josh Stopford in issue 521's 'Introducing' column, his West Valley Guitars business has been busy. The guitar we featured was called 'Custom' in early 2025, but it now has a name.

### Let's start with that name – where does it come from?

"[The Indiana model] was named after my first born and it's currently my one and only model. I call it an offset, surf rock-inspired bolt-on, which I build entirely by hand in my workshop here in the rolling Somerset hills on the edges of the levels near Glastonbury. The design is heavily inspired by a 1950s aesthetic, with all of the bold, optimistic style of the mid-century and a hint of futurism. The colour palette is heavily honed and draws on car manufacturers of the time, often – but not always – with a matt finish, a nod to that melamine diner look."

### Do you favour specific woods for your builds?

"The guitars are generally traditional tonewoods such as mahogany or swamp ash, but I do use lighter woods such as obeche, as you have there, when the guitars aren't chambered. As you can see, I love binding and I bind my guitar bodies and necks – often double, sometimes triple – using white behind the tortoiseshell to make the binding glow, despite dark wood beneath. Necks are carved by hand, too – in fact, everything is done without CNC."

**The design and resulting guitar seems to merge elements of both classic Fender and Gibson, yet it still comes out as very much its own thing.**

"The Indiana is thin, 5mm thinner than a Fender Telecaster, for example, but the overall feel and ergonomics are more Fender than Gibson. But the neck is bolted on, not screwed, with threaded inserts, and the neck sits high in the pocket, like a Rickenbacker, to avoid a neck angle, something I didn't want. I feel like the strings' distance from the body really adds resonance and sustain."

### What about the pickups?

"Along with using outsourced pickups, obviously a customer choice like the Sunbears you have there, I do wind my own pickups – typically either double P-90s or a P-90 at the neck with a humbucker at the bridge. If humbuckers ever do go near the neck position, they tend to be mini-humbuckers or Firebird style to avoid any muddiness, and these guitars are far more single-coil in their vibe."

### Would you class yourself as a full-time guitar maker at this stage?

"No, not every day is spent building guitars as I also run a repair shop, which really keeps my eye in and enables me to master my setup and fretwork skills – a crucial part of the building process. I believe handling a plethora of guitars every day helps hone an eye for detail and helps keep standards really high."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSH STOPFORD

"I also teach courses in guitar building and maintenance, which have proved very popular and provide some respite from what can be a solitary job! The USP of my build courses is that they are one-to-one. I feel this is an important difference from other schools. Building a guitar for the first time is a lot to take in and you need a lot of guidance, something you can't always get when the teacher's attention is spread over multiple students. My maintenance courses can take up to three students at once and cover everything from a one-day setup or fret-dressing course, two-day refret to a full three-day restoration course where the whole guitar is stripped back and reassembled with new pickups and hardware." [DB]

Like all the hardware, these Telecaster-style knobs are lightly aged. The drive is simple, though – just master volume and tone with no wiring tricks



254mm to 305mm (10- to 12-inch) PRS-to-Gibson-like radius. The setup really suits the guitar and nothing seems to get in the way of the important bit: playing. Well, that's not entirely true, you do notice the square treble-side edge of the heel in upper positions, so a little rounding to make that 'disappear' wouldn't go amiss.

There's a good liveliness when unplugged that seems to reflect the slightly longer scale/bolt-on style, but with that there's the noticeable push and firmness of the well-anchored bridge

While West Valley's Indiana model is not reinventing any wheel, [it's] timeless and musical with subtlety and power





Although Josh winds his own pickups, he'll fit whatever the customer wants. The Sunbear Staple V soapbar size P-90 is fitted with an aged nickel-plated cover and a DCR of 7k at output

and tailpiece. It kind of sounds tough and strong, and after warming up our amps with a Knaggs Kenai – itself a big-sounding guitar – the Indiana holds up with slightly cleaner lower mids and a bit more sparkle on top.

As with every Sunbear pickup set we've encountered, these pickups seem to tell a story. The bridge has superb clean blues snap and attack with a mid-honk that's behaved, not over-peaky. Add some lighter crunch and it's a big ol' sound, and just pulling back the volume seems to enhance that almost Fender-y ring. The Staple at the neck, however, doesn't pile on the cream – there's an almost hollowed character that allows the snappy single-coil-ness to shine, and that makes the dual-pickup mix both bouncy and articulate.

Back to clean and there's certainly more single-coil character to those two positions, and the articulation and depth of the neck is very musical indeed. We'd love to hear this pickup set on the West

Valley Slim platform, especially if your tastes lie in the jazz/blues realm.

We'd say it's not reinventing any wheel or providing a host of switchable sounds, but, for many, that would in fact be the advantage. Timeless and musical with subtlety and power.

### Verdict

While it's early days for West Valley, the Indiana seems a more than credible debut, or perhaps a statement of intent. Each guitar is a custom build based on an outline that's both striking and original with an almost bygone vibe, and there are plenty of ways to style it, in both looks *and* sound.

There's some great craft on show, too, but this guitar seems to be very focused on the important bits: the feel and sound, both of which are very good indeed. It's an instrument that needs a stage, too – classic voicing, simple yet versatile and very road-worthy. West Valley is certainly one to watch! 



## WEST VALLEY GUITARS INDIANA

**PRICE:** £3,350 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** UK

**TYPE:** Offset twin-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Obeche back w/ maple top

**NECK:** Mahogany, 'C' profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.3mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound ebony, mother-of-pearl dot inlays, 254-305mm (10-12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** TonePros locking Nashville-style bridge with stud tailpiece, Gotoh vintage-style tuners – aged nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Sunbear 58 Archive SB-PAF humbucker (bridge) w/ Staple V soapbar size P-90 single coil (neck), 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and master tone

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.5/7.7

**OPTIONS:** Effectively each guitar is a custom-build. The base-price of the Indiana is £2,995. Current lead-time from order to delivery is approx. 10-12 weeks

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Indiana Slim (from £2,690) is semi-solid with more of a T-style sonic intent; the single-pickup Junior (from £2,250) strips things back with plenty of options

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes

**FINISHES:** Vintage White (as reviewed) – aged nitro top colour oil/wax to back and neck

**West Valley Guitars**

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[www.westvalleyguitars.co.uk](http://www.westvalleyguitars.co.uk)

**Guitarist CHOICE**

**9/10**

**PROS** Original yet practical style; good solidbody weight; excellent craft and fretwork; superb setup and playability with some classic sounds to match

**CONS** We'd like to see and feel a more rounded neck heel, but it's not a dealbreaker; as ever, quality costs







The brown Nubtex cabinet covering meets an aged wheat grille cloth for period-correct visuals. Beneath the skin is a traditional high-quality solid pine cabinet construction, but we're slightly sad not to find the traditional valve chart stapled to the inside cabinet

## FIRST PLAY



**FENDER '62 SUPER AMP**  
£2,439

**WHAT IS IT?** 40-watt all-valve, twin-channel 2x12 combo with Harmonic Tremolo and plenty of history

# Golden Brown

Fender reaches into its archives to bring this lesser-known classic back to life. Let's see if it captures the original magic

**Words** Martin Smith **Photography** Neil Godwin

**L**eo Fender, despite being rather busy defining the future of the electric guitar, undoubtedly became one of the amp world's most prolific builders, bestowing an incredible lineage of designs upon the guitar world. The historic brand launched in 1946 with a series of uncovered combos nostalgically referred to as the 'Woodies'. Not a guitarist per se, Leo relied on a small cabal of trusted professionals, including Fred Tavares and Carl Perkins, to offer feedback on the player's experience with his instruments and, ever the innovative businessman, Leo would keenly listen to suggestions regarding the tone and features these players felt would be desirable. An example of this relationship debuted in the brown-panel's player-friendly front-facing controls (read more on the amp's history in our Blueprint feature on page 104).

In those pioneering days of audio engineering, conjuring up sufficient clean headroom was often the hardest trick to pull off. However, thanks to Leo's ambitious tenacity, the sparkling 'Fender Clean Tone' would prove to be the brand's enduring legacy. Over the decades the product line



1. Kitted out with a pair of custom-design 10-inch Celestion speakers, this amp packs a sonic punch without the heavy weight one might associate with, say, a Twin Reverb. While Celestions are lesser seen inside Fender cabinets, their character suits the softer break-up of the brown-panel series
2. In common with most post-tweed Fender amps, input channels have two quarter-inch jack sockets with low and high sensitivities for matching with a range of input gains. This goes back to when bandmates would simultaneously play through one amp, almost as a crude PA system
3. The period-correct incorporation of the beguiling Harmonic Tremolo effect relies on modulation of the power-valve bias to achieve wobbly fluctuations in both the amplitude and phase. This effect was also notably used by the historic Magnatone amp brand



1



2

would see era-defining cosmetic refreshes – indicators to the circuit evolutions under the hood. Sonically, the Woodies and tweed elders with their lo-fi, low-headroom classicisms lay at one extreme, and the black-panel – leading to silver-panel – clean machines at the other. In between the grunge and the sparkle there's a small collection of hidden gems referred to by their brown control-panels, and it's to these we turn our attention.

Brown by name and nature, this short-lived incarnation, spanning from around 1960 to '63, was imbued with a warm, woody character. There was more clean headroom than previously available, progressing into a deliciously sweet overdrive, something the later incarnations were designed to eliminate.

You will almost certainly have heard the brown-panel sound on records by artists as disparate as The Beach Boys, Dick Dale, The Stray Cats and ZZ Top.

Rumoured to be Leo's favourite Fender amp, the Super featured a pair of 6L6s to produce 40 watts from two 10-inch speakers, complete with the groovy Harmonic Tremolo effect.

At the end of 2025 Fender added this reproduction of the 1962-era Super to the higher end of the brand's American Vintage line-up, comprising reproductions of classic models hand-assembled at the California factory. For players looking for a wider sound dispersal from their combo, while not at the expense of back issues, on paper the Super provides just the solution.

## Feel & Sounds

Our Strat seems the natural choice for first dibs. Plugging into the first (high-sensitivity) input of Channel 2 reveals every bit of the classic twang in all the usual pickup selections. There's a deceptively broad frequency range produced by these custom-design 10-inch Celestions that's also partly attributable to the solid pine cabinet. As we increase the volume we begin to appreciate the classic subtle sag in response to harder playing, a virtue of the period-correct valve rectification. One can only imagine the reception this amp must have had on a music world familiar only with its low-headroom tweed forebears.

Turning our attention to a Telecaster, we find the sweeter-sounding character of this amp is a great match. And we get a gloriously gnarly rock 'n' roll sound at around 7 on the volume. It's tight and tough-sounding but with just enough sag to feel responsive and playful to the touch. Feed this amp a characterful guitar, a DeArmond-equipped Gretsch in our case, and bask in the nuance it reveals. With bucketloads of woody, vintage twang on tap, we engage the Harmonic Tremolo, inspiring spirited renditions of the intro from *Born On The Bayou*.

If you weren't already aware, Leo mistakenly reversed the terms 'tremolo' and 'vibrato', and rather than bow to orthodoxy, Fender didn't relabel the effect. In this circuit, what is labelled the Vibrato channel actually employs the Harmonic Tremolo – created by modulating the



3





The brown-panel period introduced a player-friendly, front-facing control panel for the first time on a Fender amp. The distinctive colouring was used for the range with the warmest, brownest tones



## FENDER '62 SUPER AMP

**PRICE:** £2,439

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** All-valve twin-channel combo

**VALVES:** 2x 6L6 output valves, 6x 12AX7 preamp valves, 1x 5AR4 rectifier valve

**OUTPUT:** 40W

**DIMENSIONS:** 610 (w) x 267 (d) x 457mm (h)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 21.7/48

**CABINET:** Pine

**LOUDSPEAKER:** 2x custom-designed Celestion 10"

**CHANNELS:** 2

**CONTROLS:** Channel 1 (Normal): Volume, Treble Bass; Channel 2 (Vibrato): Volume, Treble, Bass,

Speed, Intensity, Presence

**FOOTSWITCH:** 1-button included

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:**

Harmonic Tremolo, cover

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The American Vintage series features numerous classic combos from the 50s and 60s: '57 Custom Champ (£1,409), '57 Custom Deluxe (£2,359), '65 Super Reverb (£2,719) and '65 Twin Reverb (£2,109)

**Fender Musical Instruments**

**EMEA**

**01342 331700**

**[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)**



**9/10**

**PROS** That magic Fender clean tone; wonderful break-up at higher levels; beautiful valve-biased Harmonic Tremolo; great weight-to-power ratio for gigs

**CONS** If you want its all-valve saturation, be prepared for some serious volume (which may be a pro point for some!)

bias of the power valves – adding wide and dimensional phase shifting to the expected volume pulsations. In real terms, that adds up to a richer pulsation with a synchronised phaser effect subtly mixed in.

The negative feedback signal and fixed bias techniques used to clean up this brown-panel line achieved much in terms of increased headroom, but tech in the early 60s wasn't quite ready to fully render Leo's aims. And so as we increase the volume above halfway, things begin to get progressively more saturated.

Things will get loud, however, when we reach for those creamy overdrive sounds heard on the ZZ Top album *Tres Hombres*, for instance. With our classic Patent Applied For-equipped Les Paul, we enter that realm with the volume around midway. Levels above that increasingly soften the transients and compress the dynamics. Past 7 on the volume, the amp becomes fully saturated in a very vintage manner, which we can only really describe as 'farting out'... While it's certainly a distinctive sound, we enjoyed staying in the shallower end of this pool.

Finding the sweet spot between the feel, the tone and the volume is key to getting the most from this amp. It would certainly prove ideal for studio work, where it can be dialled in to perfection. But despite the warm, thick tones on tap, this is still a Fender, with all the fast and clean treble you could desire, while the Celestion speakers magnify the result with responsiveness and sensitivity.

## This classic is the perfect vessel to navigate sonic waters between the tweed crunch and the black-panel twang

### Verdict

This vibey, brown box-of-tone paints period-correct colours, from finely detailed cleans to washes of warm and sweet overdrive. With only a single volume control per channel, be prepared that, due to the lack of any master volume assistance, you only achieve lift-off at near-gigging volume levels. They would likely be very fun gigs, though, helped in part by the comparative light weight of this combo.

As effects go, Harmonic Tremolo is an inimitable time capsule of sound, and all of that 60s swirl is fully realised here. 'All-valve', 'US hand-assembled construction' and 'solid wood cabinetry' are three high-value ticket items that are reflected quite fairly here in this amp's not inconsiderable cost.

But this brown-panel classic is the perfect vessel to navigate lesser-plundered sonic waters between the tweed crunch and the black-panel twang, to a place where volume meets saturation with boatloads of gooey, vintage vibe. All aboard the good ship Super. Bon voyage! **G**



## FIRST PLAY



**JWJ CHORALE SELECT**  
£2,145

**WHAT IS IT?** A downsized slope-shouldered acoustic that has been specially voiced to accompany a singer

# Singing Quality

This latest acoustic from JWJ aims to provide a better blend between a singer's voice and the guitar, all via cunning lutherie. Let's take a look

**Words** David Mead **Photography** Neil Godwin

**T**he fundamental design of acoustic guitars has remained fairly static for many years. Take the dreadnought, for instance; that particular design came about more than 100 years ago and is still in use, pretty much unchanged, today. But recently we've noticed a distinct shift. Maybe it's the leap forward in amp, PA and particularly acoustic pickup technology that has allowed artists to use smaller-bodied guitars to achieve the effect they want, or perhaps it's the current generation of luthiers putting their own twist on tradition – it's hard to tell. We suspect it's a combination of both.

One such twist is before us today, in the shape of a new design from Rich Jones at JWJ Guitars. Sure, it may look like a dread with a Gibson J-45 somewhere in its family history, but the fact is, it's something a little bit more than that. Or, realistically speaking, something a little *less*, as this is a downsized version of the famous dread blueprint. And its voice doesn't correspond to a dread's familiar boom and bombast, either. So what exactly is going on here? Rich Jones reveals all on page 21, but the main reasons











1. The bulk of the Chorale has been trimmed down in order to make it more comfortable to either sit or stand with while playing – and its voice has been remodelled to suit a singer's voice, too

for going a little topsy-turvy on the established dreadnought formula are as follows. Simply put, the Chorale has been downsized to make it more comfortable to play, and revoiced so that it provides better accompaniment for vocals by realigning the low and mid ranges.

In practice, the first thing to be aware of is how much the Chorale has 'shrunk', when compared with a standard dread. A J-45, for instance, is 406mm (16 inches) at the body's widest point, while the Chorale is a slimline 375mm (14.7 inches). And the body depth has reduced from a regular

For the top, we have torrified Sitka spruce that has been hand-sprayed with a satin nitrocellulose sunburst finish and topped off with a teardrop tortie scratchplate. For the back and sides Rich has gone with Indian rosewood – slightly unusual, as he's more of a Honduras mahogany fan for his guitars' back and sides, but here he thought Indian rosewood was a better fit for the Chorale's revised tonal palette. In any case, the rosewood here has a great-looking grain pattern with that darkish chocolate hue so typical of the genus.

2. The JWW's bridge is ebony, with a compensated bone nut and a string spacing of 57mm, and the top is torrified Sitka spruce with an attractive wide grain pattern. The superb sunburst was hand-sprayed in satin-finished nitrocellulose

The Chorale is revoiced to provide better accompaniment for vocals by realigning the low and mid ranges

122mm (4.8 inches) to the Chorale's slightly slimmer 110mm (4.3 inches).

So while we're seeing a significant reduction in dimensions, we're not exactly talking about a Martin Dreadnought Junior here. In short (no pun intended), it's compact and perfectly proportioned and, as we usually expect with instruments from JWW, its spec comprises some top-notch components.





## ON THE BENCH

JWJ's Rich Jones tells us how the new Choral acoustic came about



JWJ's Rich Jones found himself on a mission to make a different kind of dreadnought

### What was the initial concept behind the Choral?

"The whole quest really began when I went to a vocal coach who told me that my slope shoulder was bad for my posture and that I should try a smaller guitar. When I got home I tried a few but found that I could hear my voice better over the slope shoulder, despite it being the loudest guitar. That got me thinking about why, and gave me the idea to create a smaller guitar for singers, as I see a lot of people using smaller guitars at open-mic nights."

### Why did you settle on a smaller dreadnought body shape?

"It wasn't really intended to be a small dreadnought, that's just the way things worked out. I was really after something around the size of an OO, which it is. Obviously, it's lighter in the bass than a dread but has as much as an OM, which I've always liked, especially in a live situation where you tend to cut some bass anyway."

### How does that work out as far as construction is concerned?

"The voicing was mostly to do with the body shape and wood choice. A narrow waist tends to promote midrange, so I went wider there, plus the lower bout is deeper to add bass, whereas the upper bout is more shallow to help it feel compact and comfortable. The rosewood obviously accentuates treble and bass, too, but then adds more harmonic content – the bracing was set to try to encourage more fundamentals to counter that as I generally prefer the drier sound of mahogany. But, ultimately, players may or may not choose to use it the way I intended, but it's another sound with its own character that will hopefully inspire someone." [DM]



No expense has been spared on the fixtures and fittings – take these vintage-style open-back Kluson tuners, for instance

Mahogany features for the one-piece neck, complete with a nicely carved volute just south of the headstock (which itself is adorned with a set of vintage-style Kluson open-back tuners). Fretboard duties are given over to ebony, with snowflake abalone position markers in all the usual places.

As we've seen before from JWJ, workmanship is faultless and the body furnishings, including herringbone trim and cream binding, are perfectly applied.

All in all, it's a finely wrought build, but we can't help but be fascinated by the effect produced by the revoicing of the instrument. A dread that thinks it's an OM? Time to investigate.

### Feel & Sounds

Freeing the Choral from its hard foam case, we noticed at once how light the guitar feels in the hand. Compared with a few other acoustics that have come our way recently, this really is a featherweight. We've always liked the carve on a JWJ neck in the past, as it has that Goldilocks quality of being not too chunky but a very business-like C-shaped handful at the same time. The satin nitro finish here really seals the deal, too, as the feel it gives to the neck makes it a joy to have in the hands.





Indian rosewood features on the Choral's back and sides – a step away from JWW's usual preference for Honduran mahogany



## JWW CHORALE SELECT

**PRICE:** £2,145 (inc hard foam case)

**ORIGIN:** UK

**TYPE:** Downsized slope-shoulder dreadnought

**TOP:** Torrefied Sitka spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** Indian rosewood

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 110mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 375mm

**NECK:** Honduras mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 632mm (24.9")

**TUNERS:** Kluson 18:1 open geared

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.5mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony

**FRETS:** 20 medium

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony w/ bone saddle/57mm

**ELECTRICS:** N/A

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.8/4

**OPTIONS:** LR Baggs HiFi pickup adds £300; custom builds from £1,845

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Select Series also includes a full-size Slope-shoulder, Orchestra and Melody models

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes

**FINISHES:** Natural – satin nitrocellulose

**JWW Guitars**

**07968 590718**

<https://jwwguitars.co.uk>

There's always a risk when you begin to mess with a well-established formula, that you might throw the whole thing out of balance. But we're happy to report that the downsizing has kept everything nicely in shape. Firing up a few campfire chords reveals some surprises. You can't help being convinced that if a guitar looks like a dread, then it's going to sound like one, too. But not here.

It's easy to see what Rich means by the shaping of the guitar being dictated by the sound he was going for. Having set out to make something more like an OO size, the dreadnought outline of the Choral came about almost by accident. After all, if you take the traditional hourglass shape of an OM and broaden it at the waist, it's going to begin to take on some of the

## The sound is uncluttered in the bass and low mids, with beautiful articulation and clarity

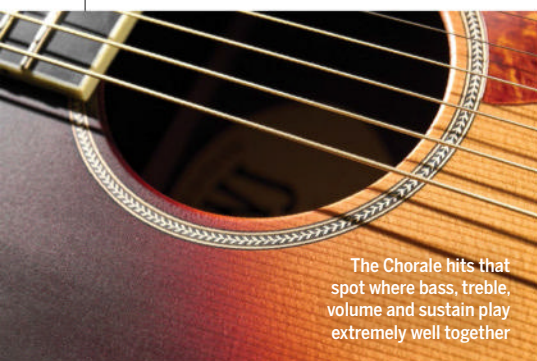
characteristics of a dread. Factor in Rich's fondness for slope-shouldered dreads and the deal was done.

The result is a sound that is uncluttered in the bass and low mids, with beautiful articulation and great note separation and clarity. There's bags of volume present here, too. Strum it lightly and it responds accordingly with a gentle but rich voice; get a little more energetic but your right hand and the Choral provides the goods without even breaking a sweat.

## Verdict

What can we say? The Choral is another hit for JWW, and the fact that it's light, compact and easily portable makes it an absolute boon for players who want to travel or commute to various open-mic nights or gigs.

We'd love to hear it with the optional LR Baggs HiFi pickup as that would have been the cherry on top. But, even as it stands, the Choral is a very worthy addition to a catalogue that's already bursting at the seams with great instruments. **G**



The Choral hits that spot where bass, treble, volume and sustain play extremely well together



9/10

**PROS** Expertly built downsized dread with a mud-free bottom-end, great sustain and clarity

**CONS** Nothing, really – though traditionalists might be put off by the smaller dread shape



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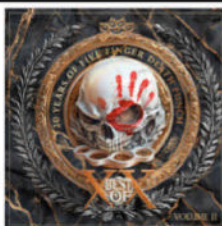
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**MANSON GUITAR WORKS  
SUPERMASSIVE  
BLACK FUZZ**  
£259

**WHAT IS IT?** Fuzzbox “personally  
tone-tweaked and spec’d” with  
Muse’s Matt Bellamy





# Fuzz Revelation

Manson Guitar Works' first stompbox delivers a high degree of variation in your fuzz tone

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. These control knobs are crafted from exceedingly strong 6082 T6 aluminium and each is engraved with unique custom art to represent its function
2. The toggle switch determines whether the EQ (controlled by the Warp and Dimension knobs) is in or out of the circuit
3. The Peak footswitch toggles between two boost modes for bandpass filtering or a louder bandpass versus all-pass/static phase filter

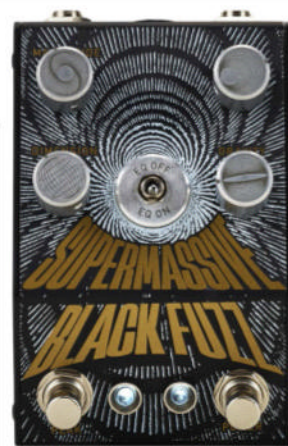
UK guitar-maker Manson Guitar Works has had a long history with Matt Bellamy of Muse, who is now the majority shareholder in the company. Business matters aside, Matt and the Manson team have worked together over several years to come up with the company's first pedal, the Supermassive Black Fuzz. Solidly constructed by fellow UK brand ThorpyFX, it certainly has a distinctive look, featuring aluminium knobs that are intricately engraved with custom artwork. While the lack of a defined line makes it difficult to see at a glance where the controls are set, there's no mistaking where to put them if you hit a chord and use your ears. The Magnitude and Gravity knobs set the output level and gain respectively (as you'd find on most dirt pedals), but the tone can be tempered by a filter, brought into the circuit by a toggle switch. A Warp knob adjusts the filter cut-off frequency after the fuzz circuit and has a range from 350Hz to 5kHz, while the Dimension knob adjusts the Q (bandwidth) of its response, with clockwise movement sharpening and narrowing the peak.

Without the EQ, the vibe of the pedal is full-on thick vintage fuzz from the get-go with the Gravity knob gradually ramping up the intensity. The tonal character here is well balanced across the frequency range with plenty of top-end and perhaps just a hint of midrange scoop. It's very usable as an everyday richly textured traditional fuzz, feeling responsive under the fingers and cleaning up nicely with your volume knob. Bringing in the EQ is a whole other ball game as the juxtaposition of the Dimension (Q) and Warp knobs unlocks a myriad of tones, shifting the midrange emphasis until you find your sweet spot, which may be basic fuzz with a certain tonal character like some cocked-wah stridency, or more extreme finely tweaked distortions such as really thinned-out fuzz with a crispy treble edge.

More variation and onstage flexibility is provided by the Peak footswitch, which adds a boost with a tonal element. With EQ off, it offers a practical level jump and increased presence that would work for solos, but with the EQ on, it delivers a radical tonal shift to any sound that you have dialled in.

## Verdict

Whether you're a Muse fan or not, the Supermassive Black Fuzz's radical approach to shaping the sound, along with alternative footswitched options, make it a pedal that can fulfil a host of requirements. **G**



## MANSON GUITAR WORKS SUPERMASSIVE BLACK FUZZ

**PRICE:** £259

**ORIGIN:** UK

**TYPE:** Fuzz pedal

**FEATURES:** True Bypass, optional EQ, foot switchable boost

**CONTROLS:** Magnitude, Warp, Dimension, Gravity, EQ On/Off switch, Peak footswitch, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

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

**DIMENSIONS:** 83 (w) x 126 (d) x 64mm (h)

Manson Guitar Works

01364 653751

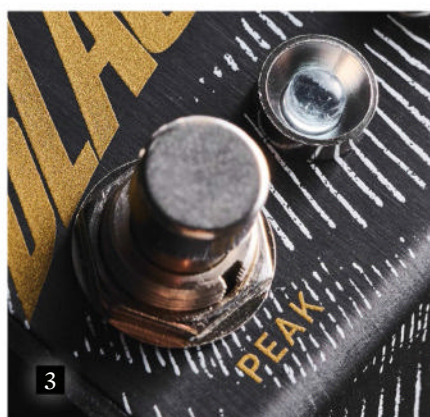
[www.mansonguitarworks.com](http://www.mansonguitarworks.com)



9/10

**PROS** Compact size; solid build quality; Peak boost footswitch; extended tonal range

**CONS** Control knob settings can't be seen very clearly



## THE RIVALS

Matt Bellamy has been a long-time user of the five-knob Zvex Fuzz Factory (£189). Other fuzzes with extended features include the Death By Audio Crossover Fuzz (£329), which, according to DBA, "takes your signal, slices it into high and low frequencies, and then absolutely wrecks each band with our signature fuzz". Old Blood Noise Endeavors' Alpha Haunt (£229) has no less than six knobs and three toggle switches to set up the fuzz, and also has a three-band EQ on faders. For less outlay, the Dod Carcosa (£119, right) is a versatile fuzz with sounds ranging from smooth to very nasty.





## FIRST PLAY



**DINOSAURAL  
HYPOID DRIVE**  
£182

**WHAT IS IT?** A standalone pedal version of the central drive section from the Dinosaural Cogmeister





# Top Gear

Dan Coggins makes the drive section of his award-winning Cogmeister powerhouse available as a pedal of its own

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. This Shift switch offers three different midrange contours by modifying the low-frequency range of the (low-to-high frequency balance) Tone knob
2. The artwork details the spiral-bevel gears found in the drive mechanisms of vehicles
3. Power is via a standard nine-volt supply or from a battery (unscrew the bottom plate for access)

Long-time *Guitarist* readers will no doubt be familiar with the Cogmeister, a previous release from the Dinosaural brand and brainchild of designer Dan Coggins. The triple-footswitch pedal, which featured in the Drive category in our Gear Of The Year list back in 2023, basically put three drive/boost pedals in one chassis. Now, not all players needed three components of the pedal in one place and some folks asked for them to be made individually. Luckily, Dan was happy to oblige.

First, we saw the Cogmeister's final boost section singled out as the Dan Solo pedal, and now it's the turn of the central drive section – the beating heart of the Cogmeister – to be set apart with the release of the Hypoid Drive. That section of the Cogmeister was itself derived from two previous Dinosaural drive pedals, the long-discontinued Tube Bender and OPA-101, but Dan says that the Hypoid Drive is the final incarnation of the design.

What we get is a drive pedal with the standard Volume and Sustain (gain) knob duo and a Tone knob linked to a three-position Shift switch, which brings in three distinct midrange contours, all of which seem perfectly voiced for guitar. The central switch position can be thought of as the flat position, offering the fullest iteration of the midrange and putting us in mind of Marshall sound, while the other two positions have different degrees of mid scoop. Between these three options and the Tone knob, to balance low and high for just the right degree of top-end presence, there is plenty of scope to get the pedal to perfectly complement whatever amp and speaker setup you may be using.

With the Sustain knob turned down, you can dial in a clean boost from about one o'clock onwards on the Volume knob, but the pedal's most salient feature is the wide spectrum of driven tones it is capable of. Advancing the Sustain knob takes you from a clean sound with a bit of 'hair' through increasing degrees of break-up and gloriously throaty driven amp-style distortion, culminating in something verging on smooth fuzz at the end of its travel. All of this with great string clarity and Volume-knob clean-up.

## Verdict

The Hypoid Drive offers classy sound with flexibility. It's a stunning drive pedal that will run the gamut from boost through to fuzz-flavoured distortion, all with tonal options to match it to any rig. **G**



## DINOSAURAL HYPOID DRIVE

**PRICE:** £182

**ORIGIN:** UK

**TYPE:** Drive pedal

**FEATURES:** True bypass,

**CONTROLS:** Volume, Sustain, Tone, Shift switch, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9-12V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 73 (w) x 121 (d) x 55mm (h)

**Coggins Audio**

07733 016732

[www.cogginsaudio.co.uk](http://www.cogginsaudio.co.uk)



10/10

**PROS** Compact size; solid build quality; wide range of gain; midrange contour choice

**CONS** Some may not like the power input's side location



## THE RIVALS

If you want the Hypoid Drive with a footswitchable 60s-style transistor treble boost in front of it and a 'solo' boost after it, go for the Cogmeister (£299). Or you might want a drive pedal with a decent range of gain and practical midrange adjustment options. The Origin Effects M-EQ Driver (£259) lets you choose between three mid-boost frequencies based on a vintage Pultec studio EQ. KMA Audio Machines Logan Transcend Drive (£159, right) has an active three-band EQ, including a fully parametric Mid-EQ that can be before or after the main gain stage and has a separate footswitch.







# the Wishlist

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

## Newman Torn and Frayed Edition £3,299

CONTACT **Aurora Music Works** Phone **01695 338900** WEB [www.auroramusicworks.com](http://www.auroramusicworks.com) WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Matt Lincoln**

**A**lthough unavailable for many years, the late Ted Newman's unique solidbody – originally conceived for Keith Richards back in the 70s – has made quite a return since the introduction of the 5 String in 2024, the first of an ongoing series of limited-edition models made in the UK under the stewardship of the Cream T Custom Shop. Along with that guitar, there's been the single-pickup Honeycomb Junior GT-40, the dual-pickup Honeycomb Senior (both with either Guitar-X swappable or fixed-pickup options), and towards the end of 2025 this Torn and Frayed addition, "a limited edition run of guitars designed to celebrate the history of Newman Guitars and Cream T Pickups". It's offered in artfully and heavily aged nitrocellulose Butterscotch Blonde (as pictured), Black, Cherry Burst and Vintage White.

The Newman design centres around the offset single-cutaway slab body, which – under the worn paint here – is solid obeche, contributing to its light weight of 2.58kg (5.68lb). With a comfortable asymmetric profile, the bolt-on neck has 24 frets and, with a shorter 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length, is topped off with that distinct and lightly back-angled six-a-side headstock.

There's no Guitar-X pickup swapping here, though: the Cream T Banger & Mash humbucker mounts on the black scratchplate, the new Mint T single coil in the aged Gotoh T-style bridge plate. The controls obviously follow the Telecaster's more modern configuration albeit with a pull-switch on the tone control to split the neck humbucker.

Rolling Stones fans will know the origin of the name, and there's more than a whiff of Keef's fabled old Telecasters about the style, enhanced by pretty big frets suggesting an earlier refret. But it's a seriously practical design, not least strapped on, with good access to the upper frets, the comfort helped by the lightly rounded neck heel. At the bridge the Mint T doesn't sound overwound, it's bright and spanky and seems to suit some crunch where it comes across as raw and cutting, while the Banger & Mash almost sounds like it looks – a big Tele neck voice that has clarity with humbucker width that can be split to clean things up and drop back to a really classic mixed pickup combination. It's not just the finish that looks old – the guitar sounds it, too.

Just like the song goes, its "coat is torn and frayed, it's seen much better days. Just as long as the guitar plays, let it steal your heart away". **G**

**1.** Alongside the unique shape and distinctive headstock with the ambigram Newman logo, the 24-fret neck is a key ingredient of the Ted Newman design, with its Gibson-like 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length and asymmetrical soft 'V' shape neck carve

**2.** Originally designed at the request of Keith Richards and tech Pierre de Beauport, the Banger & Mash combines two Tele neck pickups as a humbucker. Billy F Gibbons already had his Cream T Banger, so Keith suggested the Mash!

**3.** This is the first of the UK-made wave of models that has used a standard through-strung T-style bridge, here by Gotoh with 'In-Tune' compensated brass saddles







4

4. The Torn and Frayed introduces the new Cream T Mint T single in the bridge position. "It was a recreation of the bridge pickup in an all-original 1957 Tele that the owner very generously gave us access to," explains Cream T's Richard Whitney. "We ran it through our analogue spectrum recorder and then matched the readings using Alnico V magnets and plain enamel 42 AWG wire. If you were to compare it to something like our Caster bridge, it has a flatter EQ curve thanks to the lower number of winds, resulting in more bass and treble and less emphasis on the mids"

*Torn And Frayed* was recorded at the Nellcôte mansion just outside Villefranche-sur-Mer in the south of France at some point during June to November 1971, along with the majority of The Stones' *Exile On Main St.* Keith is credited with the acoustic guitar and electric overdubs, Mick Taylor is on bass. The pedal steel was by Al Perkins, added during the later USA sessions at LA's Sunset Sound Studios





# Gas Supply

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

## Gretsch Abbey Road RS201 Studiomatic £1,249

CONTACT **Fender GBI** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB [www.gretschguitars.com](http://www.gretschguitars.com)

### JARGON CRUNCHING High-Pass Filter

The Gretsch RS201 uses high-pass filtering in the Rumble Filter circuit, but that's a term (along with low-pass filtering) that often causes confusion. It's simple, though: the high-pass filter removes low-end, allowing high frequencies above the designated cut-off point to 'pass' through the filter. The opposite is true for low-pass, which removes everything above your designated frequency.

### Wow, Gretsch has been busy this year!

Hasn't it, just? Since the clocks changed we've seen the new CVT models, the new Electromatic and Streamliner Jet series, and the return of the Synchromatic line, bringing with it affordable Falcon and Nashville models. Now, for the brand's latest release, Gretsch is teaming up with the world-renowned Abbey Road for a collaboration that places a piece of the studio technology at your fingertips.

### It doesn't look big enough to be hiding a mixing desk. What have they done?

No mixing desk, although arguably it does borrow an element from an old-school desk. The answer is filtering. If you've ever spent any time mixing guitar tracks, you'll know that a common first stop on the EQ controls is to roll off low-end. This removes unwanted harmonics and bass frequencies that can create a muddy mix or might clash with other instruments, while keeping the core of your tone intact. For the RS201 Studiomatic, Gretsch has incorporated a circuit inspired by Abbey Road's Rumble Filter into the guitar.

### Okay, but why not just turn the EQ down on your amp or in a plug-in?

You could do that. But as BB King – another player whose guitar was equipped with preset filter controls – once said: "Why you working so hard?" The RS201's custom-voiced Rumble Filter is controlled by a rotary switch, which offers two levels of filtering, and the nifty part is that you can apply it to either or both pickups by using the push-pull tone controls to engage the circuit.

### What's with the name? Shouldn't it be a G and a load of numbers?

Well, the RS201 breaks from Gretsch's tradition and instead adopts one of Abbey Road's. Throughout the last century, Abbey Road's proprietary designs, spearheaded by the REDD (Record Engineering Development Department) team, each received its own 'RS' (Recording Studio) number. The Rumble Filter's is RS97, and this guitar sees Gretsch awarded the honour of making the first musical instrument to be given an Abbey Road RS number.

### CLASSIC GRETSCH

It features all of the hallmarks we'd expect from a classic Gretsch guitar: hollowbody design, Filter'Tron humbuckers and a Bigsby. The Abbey Road team spec'd the Classic Walnut Stain finish and, combined with the gold hardware, it cuts a striking figure

### RUMBLE FILTER

The RS201 Studiomatic includes a two-position high-pass filter switch, based on Abbey Road's own Rumble Filter, for removing low-end mud and offering expanded tone-shaping options





As well as the model name and nameplate on the headstock to mark the collaboration, there's plenty of Abbey Road candy in the case – itself borrowing the colours from Abbey Road furniture



### Okay, so there's the Abbey Road technology – what else do we have going on?

Filter switch aside, the RS201 ticks many classic Gretsch boxes. The hollow maple body is 57mm (2.25 inches) deep with parallel bracing. This meets a 625mm (24.6-inch) scale-length maple neck equipped with an ebony fingerboard that's inlaid with Gretsch's Neo-Classic 'Thumbnails'. It's fitted with a pair of Custom Filter 'Trons, based around Alnico V magnets, with two tone controls and a master volume knob. And, of course, it comes with a Bigsby. The hardware is gold throughout, and there's a matching metal Abbey Road model plate on the headstock face.

### Does it come with a case?

Yes! The case is finished in the same colour as many of Abbey Road's furnishings, and inside its plush interior has been matched to the colour of an old paint layer from Studio Two's main doors. It's a limited edition, but we've got our hands on one and will be bringing you the full review shortly. [SW]

### LIMITED EDITION

The Gretsch Abbey Road Studiomatic is a limited edition, but Gretsch hasn't put a number on just how limited it is. So, if it catches your eye and you'd like a less-expensive-than-we'd-expect slice of music history, it's advisable not to wait too long!



## ALSO OUT NOW...

**FENDER TOM MORELLO'S 'ARM THE HOMELESS' GUITAR** £1,699



Think of Rage Against The Machine and you're probably imagining huge riffs, shredding solos and, of course, sounds that you wouldn't imagine could come from a guitar. But they did, and Tom Morello's most distinctive instrument is his 'Arm The Homeless' – a mongrel pieced together from bits years before RATM began. Now, Fender has teamed up with Morello to recreate his mainstay axe in forensic detail. We get an alder Strat body, finished in Ice Blue Metallic and adorned with the infamous 'Arm The Homeless' graphics, plus recreations of the hippo doodles Tom painted on his. The maple neck is painted black, with a large 'hockey stick' headstock and rosewood fingerboard. There's a Gotoh double-locking vibrato, and the pickups are an EMG H single coil in the neck position, with an 85 in the bridge. Fender even supplies it with the 'hammer and sickle' sticker, and proceeds from each guitar will be donated to Midnight Mission and Covenant House, two LA organisations chosen by Morello.

[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)

### FRACTAL AM4 £789

As the modelling wars continue to heat up, Fractal has just thrown its latest into the ring. The AM4 is a compact amp and effects modelling unit that Fractal says is its "most user-friendly modeller to date". Central to the AM4's architecture is the brand's latest Cygnus X-2 amp modelling technology, which Fractal claims is its most accurate and dynamic modelling ever. In addition, it comes with Fractal's DynaCab modelling, allowing for virtual mic type and placement adjustments, and you can create up to four amp and cab blocks per preset. In total, we get 240 amp models over 45 DynaCab models and more than 325 effects, which can all be stored in one of the AM4's 104 preset slots. It's available now.

[www.fractalaudio.com](http://www.fractalaudio.com)







# Fretbuzz

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

## Artist: Pavey Ark

Album: *More Time, More Speed* (self-release)



*More Time, More Speed*, Pavey Ark's second album, is out now. To hear the tracks and find out more, visit [www.paveyark.co.uk](http://www.paveyark.co.uk)

With their 2020 debut, Hull-based folk collective Pavey Ark established themselves as a firm addition to the UK's thriving indie-folk scene, mixing the vintage warmth of their old-school heroes with the cinematic ambience of the modern age. Their second album, *More Time, More Speed*, takes the sound further with singer/guitarist Neil Thomas's gentle fingerpicked guitars and emotive vocals supported with strings, trumpets and horns.

### Easy Influences

New tracks such as *Out Of Here*, *Stop These Games* and *Yesterday Is Done* have many influences due to Neil's use of streaming service Spotify as a mood board. "I'm more into albums than the artists who made them," he says. "*Fully Qualified Survivor* by Michael Chapman is a perfect record. I like compositions that feel rich, anything from Rob Rodriguez and Laura Marling to Father John Misty. One of my favourite albums is *My Finest Work Yet* by Andrew Bird. I had the guy who mixed that record, Paul Butler, to help with [our new album]."

### Strength In Numbers

Neil's background was mostly solo acoustic before he grew Pavey Ark into a nine-piece collective. "The first gig we did was a BBC *Introducing* session," he says. "I wanted strings, so I contacted the music department at a local university. Chris Heron, who played violin on that first session, now writes all the strings for the band. We have a core group of six players and then the others rotate, but they're all part of the band."

### Special Selection

For the recordings, Neil stayed with his Martin OM-21 Special, but also had a little help from his Cordoba C9 Crossover as well as a nylon-string he picked up on his travels. "I've had that OM-21 Special for about seven

years," he says, "I found it on eBay. I had my eye on an OM-21 or 28 because they're both good for picking and strumming. I use a mixture of the two. On *Your Sweet Time*, you can hear a nylon acoustic that I picked up for \$60 in New Zealand. I don't even know the brand. I used my Cordoba C9 Crossover a bit, too. I also have a Larrivée OM-03, but it's not on the album because the Martin sounded so nice."

### Both Sides Now

"I might be an acoustic player, but it's nice to find extra texture using pedals," says Neil. "There's a track called *Stop These Games* where I play this big solo on my acoustic. I'll run my Martin through distortion and reverb. I love the sound of acoustics and electrics, which is why I try to merge the two. If you go to a folk night, people play acoustics all night long, but I prefer bigger textures. I have a fairly big pedalboard, there's this [Fire-Eye] Red-Eye preamp that sounds warm, with a boost that I leave off for the strummy songs and kick in for the fingerpicking. I love tremolo, so you can hear that on some tracks. It's the green Boss one, but Keeley-modded, which allows me to adjust the volume."

### String Theory

When it comes to tunings, Neil likes to take his guitars a step down to D, and occasionally he goes even further from there. "Detuning a whole step sounds fuller and is easier to play," he says. "Sometimes I'll bring my G string down another half step – it's the kind of thing Nick Drake used to do. I don't know the names of the chords to most songs I've written. It's nice to experiment and find what sounds nice. All that matters is you like what you hear and it gives you that buzz." [AS]

**Standout track:** *Your Sweet Time*

**For fans of:** Radiohead, Joni Mitchell, Father John Misty

The full Pavey Ark line-up, with guitarist Neil Thomas fifth from right. The band comprises six core players with additional members who join them depending on commitments





"I love the sound of acoustics and electrics, which is why I try to merge the two... I prefer bigger textures"



### TAKE YOUR PICK How Neil nailed fingerstyle

Ditching plectrums and switching to fingerstyle opened a lot of doors for Neil, musically and otherwise. He says: "I stopped using a pick a while back, but my fingernails were always breaking, so I ended up going down the salon and asking them to put clear acrylic nails on the three I use. I've become a regular! If we're playing a festival, I'll even ask them to put on some colour."





# Albums

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

Indulge in a star-studded tribute to the master of the blues for his 100th birthday



PHOTO BY TT NEWS AGENCY / ALAMY

## Joe Bonamassa And Friends



### BB King's Blues Summit 100

KTBA Records (available 6 February)



#### Star-laden birthday tribute to the king of the blues

When Joe Bonamassa discovered that there were no plans from the record industry to celebrate the 100th birthday of BB King on 16 September last year, he swung into action. "Very few people in music define the genre in which they flourish – and BB King is one of them," Joe told us. "When BB was alive and active, he was the blues – he was the sun around which all planets rotated."

A plan evolved to put together a collection of songs with guest players paying homage to BB by playing tracks from his long career. And once things came to fruition, guitarists and singers began lining up at the studio door. Tracks from the album have been filtering through since the announcement, but the album itself – a double-CD or triple vinyl – is due for imminent release. No fewer than 32 tracks with guitarists including Eric Clapton, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Derek Trucks, Robben Ford, Buddy Guy and a host of others can be found playing BB's staples such as *The Thrill Is Gone*, *Paying The Cost To Be The Boss*, *Sweet Little Angel* and *You Upset Me Baby*. JoBo's band was on hand to accompany the guest stars, and the result is an amazing tribute to a true blues legend.

Highlights come too thick and fast, but Clapton's take on *The Thrill Is Gone* and Eric Gale's on *Heartbreaker* are two that have immediate impact. Cardinal Black's Chris Buck appears on *Think It Over* and unleashes a characteristically wonderful solo. Great stuff! **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *Sweet Little Angel* (Buddy Guy)

**For fans of:** BB King, Joe Bonamassa, Buddy Guy

## Cory Wong

*Lost In The Wonder*

Roundwound Media (available 3 February)



#### Funk master casts his net wider

As we watched his steady rise from the Minneapolis club scene to the O2 Arena, Cory Wong has been hailed by this very tome as "the next funk master". Yet it's a billing that the Vulfpeck guitarist seems somewhat keen to outrun, or at least augment, on this latest of his many, many solo albums. As Cory himself points out: "A lot of people know me as 'the rhythm guitar guy', but it doesn't tell the whole story." *Lost In The Wonder* starts off on familiar territory with the airtight muted hits of the irrepressible *Stay With Me* and the clean 'n' clipped licks on *Afterglow*, each track worthy of prime-time Nile Rodgers. But then come the unexpected curveballs, ranging from the Daft Punk-style electro stylings of *Tongue Tied* right through to Wong's soaring, sustained solo on the mid-tempo pop piano ballad *One Way Road*. Pigeonhole him at your peril but enjoy the ride while you're at it. **[HY]**

**Standout track:** *Stay With Me*

**For fans of:** Chic, The 1975, Daft Punk

## Danny Bryant

*Nothing Left Behind*

Jazzhaus Records (available 6 February)



#### British blueser makes vibrant return

He might have been to hell and back following hospitalisation for alcohol abuse, but on his latest album a leaner, healthier Danny Bryant is proving you simply can't keep a good man down. Opening track, *Tougher Now*, sets the mood perfectly, with the British blues singer's glassy Strat tones at the very forefront of his story of survival. With more input from his bandmates, especially co-producer and guitarist/keyboardist Marc Raner, the music certainly feels like more of a collaborative affair, tastefully navigating a smorgasbord of styles and sounds. Songs like *Swagger* and *Lover Like You* hit hard and heavy, while elsewhere confessional ballads such as *Enemy Inside* and *Redemption* – as well as a mighty fine cover of Bob Dylan's *Nothing Man* – provide golden opportunities for deep contemplation and reflection. Ultimately, it's a compelling ode to human resilience. **[AS]**

**Standout track:** *Not Like The Others*

**For fans of:** Walter Trout, Bernie Marsden, ZZ Top





Some unusual inspiration plays out on Paul Gilbert's latest release

## Paul Gilbert

WROC

Music Theories Recordings (available 27 February)



### Etiquette lessons from the shred lord

Paul Gilbert was flying home from Tokyo with Mr Big when he realised he was stuck for lyrics for his next solo album. Curiously, his solution was to take the teachings from George Washington's *Rules Of Civility*, an etiquette guide written by the US President in 1744, and set them to shred, boogie and harmony-heavy prog. And what seems preposterously high-concept actually proves surprisingly effective. *Show Not Yourself Glad (At The Misfortune Of Another)* repeats its altruistic maxim over a punky Ramones chug, while *Maintain A Sweet And Cheerful Countenance* is both solid advice and Gilbert's chance to fuse scalded funk with a reworking of Deep Purple's *Black Night* riff. Conceptually, it's just about the most ambitious shred album we've heard – at least until Joe Satriani recreates the *Magna Carta* with sweep-picked 16th notes... [HY]

**Standout track:** *Show Not Yourself Glad (At The Misfortune Of Another)*

**For fans of:** Steve Vai, Ramones, ZZ Top, Hamilton

## Marcus Deml

Pure

Triple Coil Music (available now)



### Atmospheric Strat from a virtuoso

There's an almost supernatural potency to Prague-born, Hamburg-based guitarist Marcus Deml's latest release. Its nine instrumental tracks are rich in both

flavour and tone, and despite the majority of his sound simply coming from a vintage Strat plugged into non-master Marshalls via one signature overdrive, there's an otherworldly quality to what he manages to achieve. The album's opening track, *Budapest*, feels as ancient and romantic as the city it's named after, while *Csárdás Blues* is a potent C minor thriller that transports the listener into an darkly lit basement bar as the midnight hour fast approaches. With breathtaking whammy bar stunts that are highly evocative of the late great Jeff Beck – particularly on the title track and heartfelt Allan Holdsworth tribute *Yorkshire Man* – it's a truly stunning body of work that will have you gripped every step of the way. [AS]

**Standout track:** *Csárdás Blues*

**For fans of:** Jeff Beck, Andy Timmons, Michael Landau



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# Tones Behind The Tracks

On latest record, *Hard Road*, Mississippi-born singer-guitarist **Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram** is sounding more soulful than ever

## Artist: Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram

Album: *Hard Road* (Red Zero Records)



*Hard Road*, Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram's third studio album, is out now. For more information, visit [www.christonekingfishingram.com](http://www.christonekingfishingram.com)

**H**e may only be approaching his late-20s, but at this stage of his career, blues singer-guitarist Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram can no longer say he's the new kid on the block. He's a Grammy-winning artist who has earned the respect of his elders and peers, with his own Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe signature through a Fender Twin, along with invites to open for artists such as The Rolling Stones, Slash and Joe Bonamassa. Last year saw the release of his third studio album, *Hard Road*, which features more musical nuances than ever before. It's still a blues-rock record all in all, although Ingram has broadened his horizons by moving away from heavier tones in favour of cleaner and more soulful musings.

### There's more variety to the new music than anything you've recorded to date.

"I wanted to focus on my artistic growth; that's all I wanted to showcase on this record. My sound hasn't changed too much, there are still some heavy tones in places, but I did think about my sound just before we started recording. Certain songs needed a cleaner approach, so I decided to experiment and try out some things I haven't done in the past."

### So where exactly did these songs come from?

"I'll explore new directions and navigate through whatever might be happening in my personal life. This album is like a documentation of my last four

years. Some of the songs were written during the sessions for [Grammy-winning previous studio album] 662 but ended up conveying how I've felt in the time since, too. I've also been working with a few external writers. There was one song I did all by myself [*Clearly*], where I was in the studio alone one night. I'm proud of how it all came out."

### What gear are we hearing on this album?

"I used my signature Tele a lot, as well as an ES-335 on some songs. The semi-hollow wasn't mine; it was an early 2000s model that the studio had. The album was mainly recorded with my live rig, so you can probably hear pedals like my Marshall ShredMaster on there. The main amp was a regular Fender Twin. I even plugged straight into the board for some of the rhythms. That was about it."

### The opening track, *Truth*, benefits from some funky single-note lines, a screaming wah solo and some of your catchiest vocals to date.

"That was all done on a Strat – it was the purple Custom Shop one seen on the cover of my 662 album. Singing is definitely another area I'm trying to grow in. I've always felt my voice is just as good as my guitar playing, so this record was about trying to push both at the same time."

### *Bad Like Me* has some chord shapes that move up and down chromatically, as well as some jazzy ideas at the end of the solo. It's not a million miles away from the kind of thing Stevie Wonder would write.

"Yeah! That was a fun thing to do because it was so out-of-the-box. It helped me come up with things I haven't done before vocally. There are some cool changes in there. I think the jazz influence comes from doing a lot of listening – and not just listening to guitar players but other instruments as well. [Pianist] Oscar Peterson is one of my favourite jazz musicians, and the same goes for [pianist] Art Tatum and [saxophonist] Charlie Parker."

### So which guitar players have influenced this side of you?

"People like Charlie Christian demonstrated how much you can achieve with simple bebop lines, which led to me trying to implement them into rock and blues.

From seventh grade to stadium, Christone's journey with the blues has earned him worldwide critical acclaim





"I've always felt my voice is just as good as my guitar playing, so this record was about trying to push both at the same time"



Christone with his signature Fender Kingfish Delta Day Telecaster Deluxe in Daphne Blue. The guitar features two Custom Kingfish humbucking pickups "voiced for growling, overdriven blues-rock"

PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN





Christone on his intuitive approach: "It doesn't matter if you pick every note or use legato or economy picking – if it sounds good, go with it"

Josh Smith is amazing at that stuff; he's someone who I really look up to. The way he plays is how I want to sound one day in the future because it's a mixture of blues and fusion."

**The self-penned track *Clearly* features some beautiful jazz voicings. It could be the jazziest song you've ever written.**

"There's definitely some major 7s in there. I had that groove in my mind for a long time. I was struggling with it for a while, but one night in the studio, it just all came out really easily."

***Nothin' But Your Love* is a ballad in A $\flat$  major. When you play on a song like that, are you thinking more in A $\flat$  major or F minor in terms of where you place your fingers?**

"I will be thinking more in terms of A $\flat$  major, trying to paint a picture in my mind and tell the story. I might use some swells or go for a more mellow attack. It's the opposite to what I normally do. I'm more used to playing like that nowadays, though it wasn't always like that because blues tends to be more minor. When you play in major, you really have to dig deep."

**This music is indicative of how confident you must be feeling at this stage of your career.**

"It's like riding a wave. I have three Grammy-nominated records – and one of them was a winner – as well as all these other blues awards, so I'm just trying to keep on doing what I'm doing."

**You've been championed by Eric Gales, having played on his 2017 *Middle Of The Road* album, as well as his latest release, *A Tribute To LJK*.**

"Yeah, I played on the track *Help Yourself* on the *Middle Of The Road* record, and then *Rockin Horse Ride* on his latest one. When I was expanding my sound, I remember being influenced by Eric's brother Manuel, who we all knew as Little Jimmy King. Then hearing Eric is what made me want to push the blues-rock envelope. Here was this black dude from Memphis, which isn't too far from where I was in Mississippi, with this hip-hop persona but also playing fiery blues riffs with all the soul you'd get from people like BB King. That's what did it for me."

**A lot of people would say he's the best blues guitarist alive today. What did you end up learning from him musically?**

"Mr Gales was my introduction to the whole Eric Johnson pentatonic approach. That's something I took from him, looking at that scale and playing it in different positions all over the neck ascending or descending in groups of four, five or six. It's a very melodic and rhythmic kind of sound. That's what got me caught up on my speed, though we all know he can play soulful as well. I'm still learning this stuff, but I was able to cheat my way in thanks to watching how Eric Gales was doing it. It doesn't matter if you pick every note or use legato or economy picking – if it sounds good, go with it."



PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN





PHOTO BY VAL PEREIRA/GETTY IMAGES

Ingram on stage in New Jersey, spring 2025, performing at the all-star Experience Hendrix Tour. Jimi Hendrix is a big influence of Kingfish, who once played *Red House* on the roof of London's Hard Rock Hotel, Jimi's last-known residence

**Buddy Guy, who has spoken very highly of you, also appears on Eric's latest album. He's one of the last living original blues legends.**

"Yeah, of that crop of blues musicians, I would say Mr Guy is the last link. He's the one who started this whole style of blues-rock playing that felt kinda wild and crazy. I feel like he was the one who pushed the envelope while all the other guys were playing with more restraint. He was the one who said, 'Hey, I'm going to knock this out the park and past the wall!' And that's exactly what he did. His bends never seem to end. I sound like shit when I try that, but Mr Guy always makes it sound good."

**You're very comfortable with the pentatonic scale. What helped you break out of the classic box shapes?**

"If you just listen to blues, it might show. I enjoy anything from MonoNeon to Ghost-Note and Snarky Puppy. If I hear something I like, I will try to implement that into my own sound. You have to keep trying to find different ways to make the blues sound interesting. That means playing it in different positions, rather than sticking in the first couple of boxes or changing your tone for certain songs. I also think it's important to add extra notes in places or even take certain notes away. Sometimes I double-pick certain notes to really bring out their quality. It's all about doing stuff like that."

**If you could have a lesson from any guitar player, living or dead, who would it be and what would you ask?**

"I would choose Prince because he was a great example of shredding and being melodic at the same time. I'd ask him about his approach to the solos because he

always seemed to play the right thing. I often wonder if he was thinking in terms of scales or just feeling it right there and then."

**There's that classic *Purple Rain* performance at the Super Bowl in 2007, but maybe the one people talk about the most is his *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* solo at the 2004 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame Induction.**

"Hell, yeah. He killed it big-time on that. He was an incredible lead guitar player, but he could do it all, to be honest. He could write songs, play keys and bass, as well as sing. He was such a versatile musician in that sense. My favourite Prince songs are ones like *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, *Erotic City* and *Kiss*. That funky pocket playing ended up being a huge influence on me. I think it came from him being influenced by players like Catfish Collins and other people who played with James Brown."

"Prince was an incredible lead guitar player, but he could do it all, to be honest. That funky pocket playing ended up being a huge influence on me"

**Finally, where do you want to go next as a guitar player?**

"I'm really working on playing over the chord changes and bringing out more of my jazz influences. That's my main homework right now." [AS]



Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram's new album, *Hard Road*, is available now via Red Zero Records

[www.christonekingfishingram.com](http://www.christonekingfishingram.com)





# Change Of Heart

**Neville Marten** revisits the Essex guitar store where he'd spied his 'Les Paul to die for', only to come away with something else entirely

If you read last month's column, you'll recall how I found myself getting a guided tour of Peach Guitars in Colchester, a massive emporium of droolsome delights. The shop stocks pretty much every top brand from the affordable basics, right up to Custom Shop Gibsons, Martins and Masterbuilt Fenders for wallet-scaring sums. Other boutique brands are available, too, from the likes of Collings, PRS, Knaggs and Duesenberg.

"I like the cut and thrust of a bricks-and-mortar guitar store. I love talking to the guys, getting their opinion, delving into their knowledge"

Anyway, I'd spied a Murphy Lab '59 Les Paul that looked like the guitar of my dreams but whose price tag was more on the nightmare side. So I went away to ruminate on it. Should I trade in my '56 actual Tom Murphy Goldtop, one of the first ever built? Or how about my John Cruz Master Design '56 Strat? Dare I dip into the retirement fund instead? What transpired a few days later underlined various points I've made in these monthly musings. Follow me, dear reader...

On my return to the store they set me up in a demo room, delivered said Les Paul and plugged me into a boutique combo with drive and reverb so I could have a proper play. After a few short minutes, and having tweaked the amp to within an inch of its life, the guitar revealed to me that, although it was everything I loved visually and from a playing point of view, it didn't deliver

what I was looking for tonally; it didn't exactly 'sing' for me. So I let the guys know I wouldn't be going down that particular route today.

However, since the GAS had firmly embedded itself into my mind (having short-circuited the 'you don't need another guitar, mate' part of my brain), I'd already spotted a few alternatives should what did happen, happen. Two sunburst dot-neck Custom Shop ES-335s (not Murphy Lab) were dangling enticingly before me, as was a lovely '64 SG Standard in cherry. I told the guys in the store that the LP wasn't doing it for me and asked if I could try these.

## Prime Numbers

Cleverly, they suggested I put the Lester through a different amp and, sure enough, it was miles better. But I'd already decided it wasn't for me so I asked to try the SG. Within a minute I'd put that one down, again due to no fault of the guitar but for my own failure to adapt to its vagaries. "Could I try the '61 ES-335?" I quipped. Oh yes, now we're getting somewhere.

I've always said, and probably mentioned it before in this column, that I instinctively gravitate more towards 335s and Teles than to Les Pauls and Strats. And that was definitely the case here. The guitar was more open, more transparent and, to these ears, more musical. Having stupidly sold the exact same model only last year, this was going to be the one. I then asked, just out of interest and in order to eliminate it from my inquiries, to try the '59.

You know the rest. It sounded and felt even better (again, I'll stress this was to me and others might disagree). It proved to be even more sprangy, dynamic and airy. There was tons of power and, probably due to its particularly light weight, the improvement in responsiveness was palpable. This time it *did* speak to me. The deal was done and I left a happy, if somewhat poorer, individual. But, as well as reinforcing my innate 335 bias, it also proved another point that I made here only recently. And that is how I like the cut and thrust of visiting a bricks-and-mortar guitar store. I love talking to the guys, getting their opinion, delving into their knowledge, trying different instruments through different amps, and coming away with something totally different from what I'd intended to purchase (my initial quest the week before had been for a 12-string acoustic).

Within a week of owning the guitar it made its debut at Witham Public Hall in Essex, where it received rave reviews from band and audience members alike.

Do you have any stories of how a visit to a guitar store changed your buying intentions? Or indeed whether you're an affirmed internet purchaser? See you next month for more. **G**

## NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Joining The Dots

**What?** Collings I-35 LC Tobacco Sunburst

**Where seen?** [www.maksguitars.co.uk](http://www.maksguitars.co.uk)

**Price?** £6,499

This is the Austin, Texas brand's boutique take on the dot-neck thinline semi and, as you can see, it's not cheap. But the best, sadly, never is cheap. The I-35 is a scaled-down take on the thinline semi. It's built from the very finest maple laminates (the late Bill Collings developed his own) with a maple and spruce centre block; the neck is Honduran mahogany and the bound fingerboard pearl-dotted rosewood. Pickups are Lollar's fabulous Low Wind Imperial humbuckers, bridge and tailpiece are Kluson's ABR-1 and stopbar, with tuners by Gotoh. The quality of these guitars is hard to match, so if you're in the market for something extra special, this could be the one.

PHOTO BY MAK'S GUITARS







# Action Plan

This month **Alex Bishop** gets forensic on lowering action, and explains how to get the best playability from your guitar

A good guitar setup is often looked upon as somewhat of a dark art. Much like taking your car to a trustworthy mechanic, it sometimes feels like only an experienced luthier should be allowed under the bonnet to probe around looking for something to fix. However, as I often teach my students, guitar setups are easy if you know how.

Besides acquiring a few simple tools and clearing the kitchen table, there is nothing to stop the casual guitarist from getting into basic guitar maintenance, and the benefits can be game-changing. I'm not suggesting you fire up your espresso machine's milk frother to steam off a Martin neck, nor am I advocating ripping out frets from your custom shop Tele. But I do think that with a little knowledge and some basic kit, a well-set-up guitar can shave years off the practice schedule. Sometimes the struggle is not the less than nimble fingers, rather a guitar that is fighting back instead of giving back.

A high action is the symptom of a poor setup. Most players will appreciate that if the strings are even slightly higher from the surface of the fingerboard than is optimum, it will be significantly more difficult to play. To put this into perspective, I explain to my customers that with an adjustment of only 0.3mm, all players will notice a difference – not just the seasoned pros. But what is the cause? The obvious way to fix this problem is to lower the bridge. Whether electric or acoustic, metal or bone, the principle is the same; by making some adjustments here, you can lower the height of the strings. The problem is, there are many ways to change the height of the strings, not just by adjusting the bridge, and these should all be checked before even thinking about cutting down that precious tone-producing component.

## Rod Steward

The first thing I always check is the truss rod. This clever component embedded inside most guitar necks is designed to counteract the pull of the strings, which otherwise would cause the neck to bow forwards. By tightening the truss to keep the neck (almost) straight, the strings are successfully lowered closer to the fretboard. However, the truss rod should not be solely relied upon for lowering the action, as over tightening causes the neck to bow backwards, creating a hump in the middle and resulting in the notes 'fretting out' across the first few frets.

So if the action remains high, the next step is to check on the nut. Much like the saddle, lowering the nut slots by even a small amount can have a profound effect on the feel of the guitar – crucial for getting those cowboy chord changes as effortless as possible. A set of nut files is required for this, as each slot needs to be sized




to fit the diameter of each string as closely as possible. I check the height by fretting each string at the 3rd fret, and observing the distance between the string and the 1st fret. An almost-imperceptible gap should show, barely big enough to pass through in a thin sheet of paper. Go too far and the open strings will rattle on the 1st fret, but get it just right and those flatpicking bluegrass licks will fly out from under the fingers.

It's at this point that one should consider taking the saddle down, if all else has failed. Acoustic guitars are

If the truss rod isn't sorting the guitar's action sufficiently, the next stop for Alex is the nut slot; using a nut file, he will carefully lower the slots

"Most players appreciate that if the strings are even slightly higher than optimum, the guitar will be significantly more difficult to play"

trickiest, since material has to be shaved off the bottom of the bone or plastic saddle. I use a piece of sandpaper on a board (keeping everything flat and perfectly fitted is essential for producing a robust tone) and the process is easy enough if one takes care and frequently checks progress.

The result should be an instrument that feels easier to play, dialled in perfectly to balance the player's demands for playability and tone. If, however, the guitar is uncomfortable, there may be other factors in play. Whether it's reshaping the neck, a bridge replacement or a fretboard overhaul – it might be time to call in your friendly local luthier. 





# Under The Influence

**Charlie Wilkins** uncovers how early British blues shaped today's scene, and hears from some of the guitarists carrying the torch forward

**L**ike a lot of aspiring players, I grew up chasing my guitar heroes. I listened to everyone, but the ones who really stayed with me were the players who played fiery blues licks with melodic phrasing that made every note feel alive. When I finally dug into who influenced them, everything pointed back to the same source: the British blues explosion of the late 60s and early 70s. Clapton, Page, Beck, Green, Kossoff and Hendrix (despite being American, Hendrix was so tied into the London scene that you can't separate him from it).

The guitarists from that era were influential because they reshaped what the electric guitar could be. British blues took the soul of American blues and turned it into something heavier, grittier and unhinged. Suddenly, the guitar wasn't just a clean supporting instrument. It became a voice that could cry, sing, scream, whisper or set the world on fire. These players' phrasing had emotion, their tone was otherworldly and their attitude gave the

instrument a voice that still resonates half a century later. Today, we have a new generation of players – Samantha Fish, Zach Person, Philip Sayce, Jared James Nichols, Marcus King and others – who grew up on the sounds of that era and aren't afraid to show it.

After years of playing guitar, at some point I realised that most of your tone comes from your hands and your soul. The great British blues guitarists proved this long ago and musicians such as Philip Sayce and Marcus King agree. Philip tells me: "You can have the same guitar and amp, but it'll never sound the same in two people's hands. Tone is who you are."

Marcus adds: "Those old players had nothing to hide behind. Just their hands, their feel and the truth coming through the speakers."

What always amazes me about the British blues era is how much emotion lived inside the phrasing. They didn't need fast runs. They could make a single bend feel like a whole conversation. Jared James Nichols sums it up: "Those guys could bend one note and it would just stop you. It wasn't speed, it was the feel. You can't really copy players like Clapton or Beck. You can play the notes, but getting it to sound right? That's a whole different thing."

This was also the era when the limits of the electric guitar were broken wide open and the songwriting became timeless snapshots of the moment. Built on emotion instead of formulas, classic songs like *White Room*, *Purple Haze*, *All Right Now*, *Heartbreaker* and *Black Magic Woman* still hit with the same impact today.

Zach Person says he grew up "listening and trying to mimic all the sounds, tones and techniques that Page and Clapton built their songs around".

For Samantha Fish, the British blues wave wasn't just about guitar, it opened the door to the deeper roots: "Two of my biggest influences were Jimmy Page and Keith Richards," she says. "That era of rock guitar, influenced by the blues, was my gateway. It introduced me to Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf because those were the heroes of the British guys. Once you start digging back, you realise how interconnected it all is."

US-based Marcus King is the most direct about his songwriting roots: "I always go back to Eric Clapton," he says. "Not just for his playing but his ability to evolve as an artist, especially becoming recognised as both a singer and songwriter."

Philip Sayce agrees: "Clapton was the guy for me. He wasn't just a guitar player; he sang great, wrote great songs and played beautifully. That's what I aspire to be."

Jimmy Page stopped Philip in his tracks, too: "Page's approach to songwriting and production had a big influence on me. Watching how Zeppelin built those records showed the level those guys were operating at. And Jeff Beck's phrasing was fearless. He just used his hands, volume and tone knobs and his imagination."

Marcus King takes his influence right back to Clapton, "not just for his playing but his ability to evolve as an artist", he says



PHOTO BY JOSH BRASTED/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



## Foundational Tone

Gear also played a huge role in defining the era. The setup was simple: a Gibson Les Paul into a cranked Marshall. Clapton, Beck, Page, Kossoff and Green built their tones on that foundation, while Hendrix forged his own identity with Fender Strats through Marshalls. Effects were minimal by today's standards, but early fuzz pedals, wahs and treble boosters, such as the Dallas Rangemaster,

For Samantha Fish, discovering Jimmy Page and Keith Richards led to deeper roots as she uncovered their influences, too. "You realise how interconnected it all is," she says

"Emotion lived inside the phrasing. British blues didn't need fast runs - they could make a single bend feel like a whole conversation"

helped push those amps into the thick, singing overdrive that became the sound of classic rock. The first time I dimed an old Marshall Super Lead, I quickly realised why those classic tones became legendary.

Marcus King's current rig continues to reflect that heritage: "I was infatuated by the aesthetic of Marshall stacks and captivated by the clarity of Fenders," he says. "When I was young, I was lucky to have early Fender Super Reverbs and a Marshall 'Plexi' around the house."

In fact, King's signature Orange MK Ultra amp nods directly to that era: "It's like a traditional British tube amp but with elements of American amps. It's hand-wired and non-master volume, so you crank it up all the way just like those old amps."

Zach Person proudly keeps carrying the torch for the classic Les Paul into a Marshall formula: "My favourite amp is the Marshall JTM45, which is basically a hot-rodged Bassman. It's the perfect sound for me... Clapton's tone in Cream is by far my favourite."

Sayce's approach to gear is rooted in the same spirit: "I mostly play old Strats and I've settled on high-headroom Fender or Marshall-style amps. Turn them up and hit the front-end with a pedal."

Talking with these modern players reminds me how deeply the British blues influence runs. The phrasing, tone, soul and songwriting all trace back to an era that changed guitar forever. Music and players have evolved, but the British blues influence is still unmistakably intact. I think we all have a little British blues DNA in our playing, whether we realise it or not. **G**

## THREE TO GET READY

Retro Vibes For Your Rig



### Marshall Studio Vintage Combo £999

The all-valve SV20C packs 20 watts of real Marshall 'Plexi' DNA, with a pair of EL34 valves and a 10-inch Celestion V-Type speaker that you can crank without blowing your eyebrows off. Compact, affordable and dripping with Clapton-era mojo, it's the perfect gateway 'Plexi' for players who want that vintage Marshall roar without the vintage-amp price tag.

[www.marshall.com](http://www.marshall.com)



PHOTO: FULLTONEUSA.COM

### Fulltone Custom Shop Ranger £259

The Fulltone Custom Shop Ranger pedal resurrects the classic treble-booster formula with six Rangemaster voices via a rotary switch, all powered by a warm germanium transistor. It tightens lows, lifts highs and kicks your amp into tonal bliss. One stomp and even the most polite, well-behaved amps bark, growl and bite with tone straight out of 1968.

[www.fulltoneusa.com](http://www.fulltoneusa.com)



PHOTO COURTESY OF BARE KNUCKLE PICKUPS

### Bare Knuckle The Mule Humbucker From £350

If your guitar needs a crash course in vintage mojo, the Bare Knuckle Mule set should do the trick. Hand-wound with Alnico IV magnets, these pickups deliver woody mids, crisp highs and open dynamic response that Patent Applied For pickups are known for. They're touch-sensitive, super musical and perfect for chasing the tones of Clapton, Green and Kossoff.

[www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk](http://www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk)





# Chord Names: 13ths (PART 3)

**Richard Barrett** wraps up this short series on extended chords by taking a look at the often-mystifying world of 13th chords

In the world of extended chords, this is as far as we can go. As discussed previously, chords at this end of the spectrum frequently deviate from their strict theoretical definitions in the real world. To recap; an extended chord goes beyond the major (or minor) triad, on to the 7th (or flat/dominant 7th) then 9th, 11th and 13th. In theory, all of these would be present in ascending scale order, but in practice this can lead to some dense, even dissonant, chords. There's also the issue of playing a seven-note chord on an instrument with six strings...

In the examples below, I attempt to demystify some of the theoretical terms and demonstrate strategies enabling us to play beautiful-sounding 13th chords. When choosing which notes to omit, the 5th is usually high on the list. In the case of 13th chords, the 11th is very often omitted, too, which is nice for us guitarists because that's one less note to go searching or stretching for...

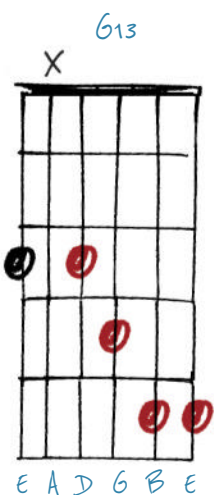


(PHOTO BY LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES)

The extended Emaj13 chord gives a unique sound to the Stevie Ray Vaughan track Lenny

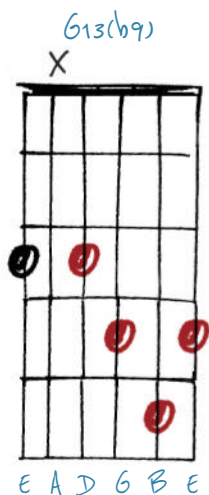
## Example 1

This G13 omits the 5th (D) and the 11th (C), leaving us with, in ascending order, the Root-7th-3rd-13th-9th (G-F-B-E-A). The fifth string is muted, which can make simultaneously playing all the notes tricky, unless you use your picking-hand fingers like Joe Pass (or leave it to the bass player!).



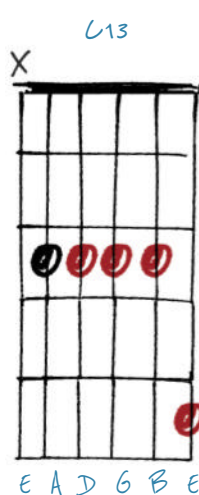
## Example 2

By flattening the 9th at the top of our G13 chord from Example 1, we get a G13(b9). Altered chords such as this are often used to create a 'tension and release' effect, resolving to somewhere more harmonious, such as a Cmaj9 or G/C. In a film soundtrack context, composers often create tension by not resolving chords like this.



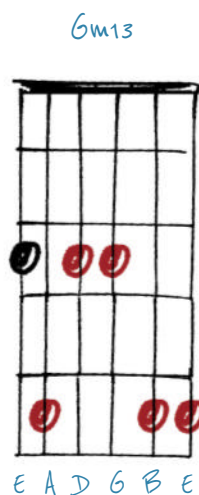
## Example 3

This C13 gives us a slightly different flavour by featuring the 11th, though we do omit the 3rd (E) and the 5th (G), for practical as well as harmonic reasons. We are left with Root-11th-7th-9th-13th (C-F-Bb-D-A) in ascending order. Like all the other examples, this shape is movable to any key.



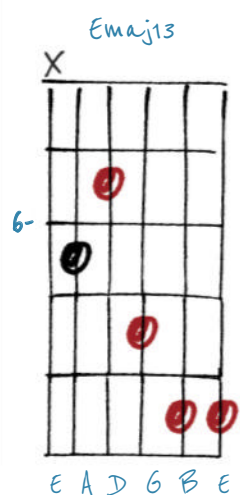
## Example 4

This Gm13 consists of Root-5th-b7th-b3rd-13th-9th (G-D-F-Bb-E-A) in ascending order. As with all the examples, it's not possible to feature all the notes in ascending scale order, and this isn't necessarily desirable anyway. The inclusion of the 5th is unusual and completely optional. In a band situation, you may well find yourself omitting the Root and 5th.



## Example 5

This Emaj13 takes part of its name from the major 7th it features – a regular E13 features a flat/dominant 7th. In ascending order, we have Root-3rd-maj7-3rd (again)-13th (E-G#-D#-G#-C#). We omit the 5th (B), the 9th (F#) and the 11th (A), but what's left holds up very well – good enough for SRV in Lenny!





GUITARIST   PRODUCER   TONE HUNTER



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# Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

Drop us a line at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)

## STAR LETTER

### TELE TALE



Matthew gave his heavy reliced auction win (left) a whole new look

I enjoy reading *Guitarist* every month and am particularly interested to see Huw Price's articles, as his expertise and knowledge inspires me to have a go myself, albeit on some less valuable guitars than the ones he deals with.

Recently, I bought a Squier Affinity Telecaster at a local auction. It had been given a heavy relic finish and, although I like a played-in look, I'm not keen on the heavy wear and damage elements of some of the

guitars you see. I've included before and after pictures of the results of my efforts.

After stripping the body, I found a burr poplar veneer and a thick plastic binding to the top. I liked the plain back, but the veneer didn't suit the Telecaster so I sanded it off. The neck was stripped, reshaped to a slight V and some deep yellow ochre artists' oil paint was rubbed into it until I could match the yellowing of some 50s models from my New King's Road Vintage Guitar Emporium Catalogue from 1999. I used some oil-based gloss picture varnish on the fingerboard and headstock and beeswax on the back of the neck. The body was treated with beeswax so it should relic pretty quickly. I put some signwriters' enamel on the sides to cover the binding.

Finally, the guitar was reassembled after taking the shine off all metalwork including some new vintage-style tuners, string tree and output socket. I stripped back completely the control and bridge plate, and I think the copper colour works well against the blonde body. I've often felt the control plate doesn't look straight on Telecasters, so I was very careful to make sure it was parallel to the bridge plate when reattaching. However, it still didn't look quite right. I wonder whether anyone else has found that moving the bottom out a bit solves this?

**Matthew Stevens**

It looks fabulous! The guitars we treasure the most are the ones we reconfigure to our own exact specifications. That might mean a new bridge, tuners or some other minor adjustment. But you've gone the whole hog and it's turned out brilliantly. And if any of our readers can answer the query of the parts lining up precisely, do let us know at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com).



## KORG

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg SH-PRO Sledgehammer Pro clip-on tuner!  
[www.korg.co.uk](http://www.korg.co.uk)

### NEW TRICKS

I was a late starter on guitar, but have been playing for many years now. However, one of the things that has always frustrated me is my inability to completely learn all of the fretboard. I'm pretty confident on the E and A strings, obviously the most useful, and can work out the notes on the other strings, but despite several attempts over the years using various suggested methods, instant recall has continued to elude me, until now.

Partly inspired by Richard Barrett's excellent articles, I really felt the need to learn the 'board to make things like finding chord fragments automatic, rather than having that horrible momentary delay while I work it out. So I developed my own strategy involving a deck of cards, using them as 1 to 13 for fret numbers. I shuffle them, turn the top one over and name the note for that fret on the low E string. Next card, fret/name on the A string, next card D string, and so on, rotating around the strings until the deck is finished. I now do this as my first job every time I pick the guitar up.

What I've found after only a short time is a massive increase in my fretboard memory. Initially, I needed to look at the fretboard, but very quickly I started getting a good number without looking, and that number is increasing quickly. It's actually quite enjoyable, highly satisfying and only takes a couple of minutes each time. If at first you don't succeed and all that, woo hoo.

**Peter Collister**

We've come across many ways that players have used to become familiar with the names of the notes on the fretboard, but we have to say that yours takes the biscuit for the most imaginative. Knowing where the notes are opens up a whole new channel of learning, and any method that actually works is priceless.

Roland's solid-state Blues Cube Hot has the tone and volume to convert even a die-hard valve fan



IMAGE COURTESY OF ROLAND



## HOT DATE!

I was interested to read the letter from Nigel Adams in issue 531, about getting the required level of distortion from HH amps. Having been playing in bands since 1971 (I'm now coming up on 73!), I remember being very snooty about such amps. My first amp was a Selmer Treble N Bass 50, and from there I went through the obligatory Marshall stack, Fender Twin and Pro Reverbs, Peavey 30, Mesa/Boogie Mark III and Studio 22, and a Dr Z 18-watt, with a Fender Blues Junior as backup.

While we didn't mind lugging stacks and unsplit Hammonds into our Transits in our 20s and 30s, this didn't seem so attractive as we went through our 40s and 50s, and faced the dreaded 60s. By then, as with most bands, it was combos all round, and I have to say my Boogie Mark III was an incredible amp – but it weighed about 64lb, I recall, which wasn't good for my ageing back, so reluctantly it had to go, to be replaced by ever lighter combos.

But then I read about the Roland Blues Cube Hot, and was intrigued enough to read loads of reviews and look at the YouTube demos. It certainly seemed to sound good, and the weight of around 24lb was obviously attractive. I also liked the fact that you can run it at 30 watts, 15 watts, five watts or 0.5 watt. None of the shops near my area had one in stock, so I took a massive chance and ordered one from Absolute Music in Poole. When it arrived a few months ago, I checked it was functioning okay and then took it straight to a gig that night. I have to say I was hugely impressed by the sound, especially as someone who wouldn't have touched a solid-state amp with a barge pole for decades. As a confirmed valve player for in excess of 50 years, I have to ask if Roland has finally cracked the valve sound with this amp. I believe they have. In addition, it's loud! I've never had to use it above 15 watts as yet, whether in a pub, theatre, arts centre or village hall.

I wonder how many other guitar players have used this amp and been as pleased with it as I have. I don't recall seeing a review for the Blues Cube Hot in *Guitarist*, so maybe it's time for you to have a look at it. Oh, and I still have the Blues Junior – that's not going anywhere!

**John Holmes**

Many of us here have found that solid-state amps these days are extremely giggable and generally less of a weighty proposition than their valve-based forebears. Modellers, too, have their place on modern stages with the Line 6 Helix, Neural DSP Quad Cortex and Kemper Profiler leading the charge. And there's definitely a reason why the Boss Katana is one of today's bestsellers, too.



## LIFE STORY

I thought I would show my life in pictures, from a humble beginning at the age of 14 to age 81. Not being able to afford an expensive guitar, I had to make my own – pink and black, as in the photo. I formed a little band and played Friday nights at a local hall; Duane Eddy's *Forty Miles Of Bad Road*, along with many others popular at that time in the 50s. As the years passed, I eagerly gathered a wonderful collection of beautiful guitars that I cherish so much. A love affair that has stood the test of time.

**Robert Kenney**

What a wonderful story it is, too. Anyone would have been proud to not only make their first ever gigging guitar – but to end up with a wall of fame like yours is something many of us are wishing for!

Rob Kenney has shared pictures of his life in music, from the self-built guitar of his early playing days (top) to his wonderful – and enviable! – collection of instruments today

**Send Your letters** to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)



# STEVE CROPPER

1941 – 2025

The departed soul man was the Stax band's MVP, writing and driving the R&B classics that ruled the 60s

Words Henry Yates





## STEVE CROPPER

October 1941–December 2025

Interview a few star guitarists and you'll soon hear the old lie: "I just play for the song (man)". But Steve Cropper really did. Immune to egomania and content to exist at the edge of the spotlight, the Missouri-born rhythm man – who has died at the age of 84 – always weighed and measured his guitar parts to serve that day's material, his metronomic yet soulful right hand often cited among the best in the game.

As the cornerstone of Stax Records' house band, Booker T & The MG's – not to mention a producer, engineer and co-writer of standards such as Otis Redding's (*Sittin' On*) *The Dock Of The Bay*, Wilson Pickett's *In The Midnight Hour* and Eddie Floyd's *Knock On Wood* – Cropper was the engine room behind soul and R&B's golden age.

In person, however, he was a good-humoured pragmatist happy to function as a cog in a machine. "My playing has always sucked, but it sells because I keep it simple," Cropper told Phil Weller for *Total Guitar* in 2024. "If you play too far outside the box, people aren't gonna like it. I'm not a guitar player. I use it as a tool."



Booker T & The MG's in 1968  
(left to right): Steve Cropper,  
Al Jackson Jr, Donald 'Duck'  
Dunn and Booker T Jones

PHOTO BY DON PAUL/SEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

*"Steve was on the session when history was made. He came up with the parts we all studied. He produced the records we all worshipped"* **JOE BONAMASSA**

Favouring an Esquire or Telecaster, Cropper wove his choppy, economical parts so seamlessly into the fabric of each song that a casual listener could miss him (despite Sam Moore's holler of "Play it, Steve!", prompting the puppyishly excited bends in Sam & Dave's *Soul Man*). Yet the players always knew his value. "Words fail me in describing his impact," wrote Joe Bonamassa. "He was on the session when history was made. He came up with the parts we all studied. He produced the records we all worshipped."

Steven Lee Cropper was born in Dora on 21 October 1941 but was forged in Memphis, where he moved aged nine, channelling the city's blues, R&B and gospel into his high school band, The Royal Spades. In a lucky twist, the sax player's mother and uncle – Estelle Axton and Jim Stewart – owned an indie label, Satellite Records, which released the group's instrumental *Last Night* (before rebranding as Stax to avoid legal action).

Cropper found he preferred the insular life of a studio bod to the swashbuckling antics of a road warrior, and soon became Stewart's fixer and best-paid lieutenant. With the guitarist finding easy chemistry with the interracial MG's line-up – keys prodigy Booker T Jones, drummer Al Jackson Jr and original bassist Lewie Steinberg – the band chalked up countless credits alongside their own 1962 hit, *Green Onions*.

As Cropper told *Total Guitar*, that loping vamp – with Jones's woozy organ lines punctured by his strident guitar stabs – was never intended as an instrumental. "A singer was meant to come into the studio, but he'd been singing all night and couldn't even say his name in the morning. So we were just jamming around waiting."

Cropper could groove with anyone: who else could have backed Albert King (on 1967's *Born Under A Bad Sign*) then covered The Beatles' *Abbey Road* (on

1970's *McLemore Avenue*)? Among these projects, it's perhaps most tantalising to imagine his future partnership with Redding, had the singer not perished after recording 1968's US No 1 (*Sittin' On*) *The Dock Of The Bay*. "That Sunday, he passed away in the airplane," Cropper told WMOT, "Atlantic Records called and said, 'You got to get an Otis Redding record out.' Well, that was the only thing I thought was worthy of being a chart record."

Cropper left Stax in 1970, already sufficiently fabled that sideman work was assured for life. He could have no doubt that his music resonated, noting that he'd hear a vintage soul tune in a gas station or grocery store "pretty much every day of my life". Yet the man who was once personally sought out by Jimi Hendrix was bemused to be venerated as a guitar great.

"Even though people fly me in all over to play on their records and overdub, I think they would be better using me on the ground floor, y'know, as a building block, rather than a cherry on the cake," Cropper told Tulsa Public Radio. "I never tried to be a lead player. Really, I'm a rhythm man, and my forte is capturing the feel of a song during its inception in the studio. I think that's where I'm best." **G**





# Leo Lyons

The Ten Years After bassist survived Hamburg's Star-Club, sparked the blues boom, achieved immortality at Woodstock – and is still going strong at 82. “Music,” he says, “it’s a drug...”

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photography Phil Barker

**I**s there a more unassuming rock star than Leo Lyons? In an industry often filled with braggarts and blowhards, the soft-spoken 82-year-old bassist lets his lifetime achievements do the talking. And what achievements they are. Having partnered guitarist Alvin Lee – aka ‘Captain Speed Fingers’, for self-evident reasons – at the dawn of the 1960s, Lyons shipped British blues across the water with Ten Years After, before igniting Woodstock with the warp-speed rendition of *I’m Going Home* that stands among the festival’s most electrifying moments.

Reputationally, Lyons was set for life that day in August 1969. But in truth, Woodstock is just one chapter in the folklore of a man whose serendipity has often seen him dubbed ‘the rock ‘n’ roll Forrest Gump’. Today, the bassist fills our dictaphone with his war stories, leading us from Hamburg’s Star-Club to the studio control rooms where he produced history’s biggest bands. But it all starts with a kid spinning vinyl records in the Nottinghamshire market town of Mansfield.

**When did you sense you might become a musician?**  
“[Laughs] At nine years old? In a band, it’s 98 per cent rejection. But you have to keep going. And as long as you’re prepared to give up everything – girlfriend, car, place to sleep, shortage of food, et cetera – then that dream sustains you. It got to the stage where everybody else in the band left and it got down to just Alvin and I.

“There were a few moments where I veered a bit. I started playing sessions. And everyone thought I was mad to stick with the band because you could do two or three sessions in London – or go all the way up to South Wales with the band to play on the end of the pier for much less money. But I stuck with it. And nine years later, we started to make a living, rather than an existence.”

#### **How did the bass become your instrument?**

“My aunt and uncle had a wind-up gramophone, so I listened to Jimmie Rodgers – the singing cowboy, not the blues player – and Huddie Ledbetter, and I thought, ‘I want to play guitar.’ So I got a guitar and went for lessons, but then my teacher introduced me to a few of his pupils who had a band. We had four guitar players – and a guy playing drums with sticks on a table – and we needed someone to play the bass notes. I just loved it. Very soon, I’d sold everything else I had and bought a Höfner bass on hire purchase.”

#### **You started out as The Jaybirds – and had a 1962 residency at Hamburg’s Star-Club.**

“We were what you might call the ‘first wave’ of British bands: the weekend we arrived was the last gig The Beatles did at the Star-Club. We had to play an hour on, an hour off, seven hours a night. So you extended the songs. And that’s how we started jamming. Without that, I don’t think we would have developed at all.”







**You and Alvin played so aggressively off each other.**

"Yeah, it was like a duel. I remember producing a record for Leslie West once. He wanted me to play bass on it as well. Leslie was ill – he was having his leg amputated at the time – so I tracked the songs without him. He came in and listened to them, and said, 'Yeah, they're fine, but I thought you'd play over-the-top like you did with Ten Years After.' Because that's really how Alvin and I played: over the top. But that was the element that made it successful."

**What prompted the name change to Ten Years After upon your return to the UK?**

"We got a manager who said, 'The Jaybirds is a bit dated now. Go home for the weekend then come back with a new name.' Well, I was reading the *Radio*

## "You can't be picky. I did tours of Europe sleeping in a tent to save money. And that helped me get my first P-Bass"

*Times* and there was an advertisement for a book called *Suez Ten Years After*, about the Suez Canal. We've said all sorts of stupid things in interviews – that it was a tribute to Elvis – but that's how the name really came about."

**How did the band's hard-blues sound evolve?**

"When Alvin and I first got together, we were playing covers. But by the time we got to Hamburg in '62, we were heavily into Duke Ellington-type jazz and a little bit of country, like Chet Atkins. We both liked Elvis – he liked Scotty Moore and I liked Bill Black. We were also into Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Lead Belly and Brownie McGhee. So when the blues scene started happening, we began throwing in a few blues songs. We'd do one set of the pop stuff, then our own stuff."

**That must have ruffled a few feathers at the time?**

"I remember one ballroom manager saying, 'I'll pay you, lads, but you can't do a second set – the audience will kill you.' Because it was two guys at the front and the other 500 sat down saying, 'Play something we can dance to.' I remember, as I walked offstage, another manager said to me, 'Horrible! It's bands like you that are going to kill the ballroom business!' There was another show up in Manchester, and Jimmy Savile was the manager, and he said, 'Don't get me wrong, lads, I like it – but you'll never get anywhere playing music like that.'"

**It must have been a tough time...**

"I managed the band from 1962 up to 1966 – because no manager wants to take on a band that's not making any money, where [all the promoters] are saying, 'They're crap, they won't get anywhere, and if you send us a band like that again, you're going to lose the booking.' But I was stubborn. So was Alvin. And as long as you believe you've got something, you don't mind sleeping on the floor. A lot of kids in bands now say, 'I want to do this, but I don't want to do that.' Forget it. You can't be that picky. I did tours of Europe sleeping in a tent to save money. I asked this family if I could pitch my tent in their garden. And that helped me get my first P-Bass."

**When did you feel the tide start to turn?**

"It wasn't arrogance, but I still believed, 'You're wrong, we're going to do something.' And we gradually transitioned. We couldn't play at ballrooms, but we started to get a little bit of a name in the blues clubs up and down the UK. Then we went over to Scandinavia and Europe, and what turned the corner for us was all the people who saw us in Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany – everywhere – coming to London in '66. We'd managed to get a residency at The Marquee, but the press wasn't interested, no record label was interested. But all those people were lined up all down Wardour Street and round the corner. Then somebody had to notice, and we got a record deal."

1. Leo Lyons and Alvin Lee (right), pictured here in 1972, would energetically bounce off one another on stage in Ten Years After. "It was like a duel," says Leo



PHOTO BY GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



2

**When you returned to the UK after the Hamburg period, you traded your Precision for the '62 Jazz you play to this day. What was the appeal?**

"At first, I think I was just attracted by the chrome hardware. It looked like a 50s car, really cool. And the neck was slimmer. The Jazz had a little bit more tone variation, too. And that's what I've stuck with. Although, when I played on a record last week, I used a P-Bass. Those two, you can't beat them. Even though I've got another 26 basses!"

**What else was in Ten Years After's rig?**

"When we started, Alvin and I had AC15s and our rhythm guitarist had an AC10. Which obviously wasn't enough as we started playing larger places. So we went on to stereo amps and I started building my own 18-inch speaker cabinets. There was a book about loudspeaker design, and I went through the whole damn lot! A friend of mine got hold of Jet Harris's AC30 Super Twin, and when he emigrated to Canada, I bought it off him.

"Then we met up with Charlie Watkins, a lovely man, and he said, 'Whatever gear you want, you can have it.' Next, we went to America and, of course,

there's no backup there. So we bought Marshalls. I had two 100-watt heads and four 4x12 cabs, and Alvin had the same, although he only used one head."

**How did your first US tour of '68 come about?**

"When our first record was released, [promoter] Bill Graham sent a telegram saying, 'If you're coming over, I'd like to book you in at my venues in San Francisco and New York.' On the strength of that, we went over.

"We played the Fillmore West then the Fillmore East. Went up to Phoenix, played with the Grateful Dead. Then Huntington Beach, Los Angeles, the Whisky a Go Go. I was blown away by California. The weather. The movie stars – I was a big fan of Westerns. And I must admit: all the girls. We didn't make money from that tour, but the big score was New York and I'd say we captured that city – or made in-roads there – straight away.

"So it was a dream come true. When I came back to the UK, I was living in Notting Hill Gate, which wasn't very fashionable then, in a basement flat. And I was almost in tears. But I think it was only a month or so later that we went back again."

2. Leo switched from Precision to Jazz Bass in the early 60s, primarily due to its cool looks – and from then on, this '62 Fender Jazz has been his number one, most notably being used at Woodstock in 1969





PHOTO BY BRIAN COOKE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

**The band's tearaway performance of *I'm Going Home* at Woodstock was a genuinely iconic moment. Did you have any sense at the time that the festival would be an era-defining event?**

"No, we were playing festivals all over the place. On that particular tour, we'd already done the Newport Jazz Festival and played with Nina Simone and Dizzy Gillespie. I didn't watch TV much, so Woodstock just looked like another gig, and a bit of a pain-in-the-

**3.** Ten Years After (left to right): Alvin Lee, Ric Lee, Chick Churchill and Leo Lyons get ready to hit the stage at the Dunstable Civic Centre in April 1973

**"When I was 27, I thought I was going to retire from the road. But you keep going back. 50 years – it takes some stamina!"**

arse gig, too, because when we got to New York, our American manager told us what a disaster the roads were. It was dangerous. The stage was covered in cables with water in between them. The humidity was so high that you couldn't stay in tune. It wouldn't happen now. But it was incredible. And it sustained our career when that performance got into the movie. That will go on my gravestone: 'Here lies the man who played Woodstock.'"

**What's happened in your world more recently?**


"After Alvin quit Ten Years After, I lived in Nashville for 16 years as a writer, did a bit of engineering, not so much playing. I produced Leslie West and Savoy Brown, things like that. Then [in the post-millennium], we put

Ten Years After back together with Ric [Lee, drums], Chick [Churchill, keys] and Joe Gooch, who is a great guitar player. But how can I say it? Where they wanted to go, and where I wanted to go, were totally different. It's not an unfamiliar story.

"So Joe and I went on the road as a band called Hundred Seventy Split. We've put out five or six records. But last year, my drummer [Damon Sawyer] died. He had a brain tumour – it was very quick. So I'm just taking some time out, cancelled this year's work. People write to me, pretty much every day, asking, 'When are you coming back?' So we may do something next year."

**Are you surprised you're still an active musician after all these years?**

"When I was 27, I thought I was going to retire from the road. But it's a drug, you know? You keep going back. And the older you get, the more stupid you think you are [to still be doing it]. Because it's not easy. I've done it at the top, and I've done it in a van. 50 years on the road and back in the van – it takes some stamina!

"The whole music business has changed so much, but occasionally something [real] still breaks through, like Joe Bonamassa or Amy Winehouse. So I'm sure it will swing back around." 



Ten Years After's *Ssssh* (3-CD Deluxe Edition) is available now on Chrysalis Records

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# TRIO POWER



60 years ago, three young men were preparing to invent a new musical genre with virtuoso level musicianship at staggering volume levels...

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Words David Mead



**1966** was a significant year for music. Thanks to Jim Marshall, amplifiers were getting more powerful and the marriage between the JTM45/100-watt head and 4x12 speaker cabinet unleashed never-before-heard levels of volume and, with the wick suitably trimmed, the right amount of crunchy sustain to fuel the early onset of guitar heroics. What's more, the generation of teenagers and 20-somethings of the day were looking for something more engaging than the pop music they were surrounded by. Enter Cream. Rising from the ashes of The Graham Bond Organisation, Manfred Mann and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the combined talents of Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton merged to form rock's first supergroup – and the world was never quite the same again. In the following pages we track the emergence of the band and the release of the first album, *Fresh Cream*, and track the gear that Clapton used through Cream's short July '66 to November '68 lifespan. We also hear from Nettie Baker, Ginger's daughter, whose intensely researched new book, *Cream Chronicled*, sets out to detail every gig the band played, as well as blowing apart some of the myths about the trio that still exist today...

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BAND PHOTO: TONY GALE/ALAMY  
GUITAR & CASE: ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



# CREAM RISES

60 years ago history was made and the rulebook rewritten when Clapton, Bruce and Baker united to form one of the most influential supergroups in British music

Words Marc Roberty





By the mid-60s, as jazz bands slowly faded from the front pages of the music press, they were gradually replaced with rhythm and blues bands. One such band featured Graham Bond, a complicated figure and musical innovator who would go on to inadvertently pave the way for many bands over the next few decades. We go back to the beginning – including the bust-ups and band-member swaps – to detail the rise of one of Britain's most revered supergroups.

### THE NAME'S BOND

Bond started his career in jazz, playing with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated. He left the outfit in 1962 and formed the Graham Bond Quartet with Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce, both from Alexis's band, along with guitarist John McLaughlin. By the mid-60s Bond decided to move toward the more-successful blues scene, keeping members of the quartet together and adding Dick Heckstall-Smith to the line-up. Dick replaced Bond on sax as Bond switched over to Hammond organ and vocals. As the Graham Bond Organisation, they very quickly established themselves, and released their first album in February 1965.

### *Ginger went to visit Jack to find out if he would be interested in putting the past behind them and joining the band*

By this time, drugs had become an issue for the band, and Bond, in particular, found it difficult to deal with the associated problems. On top of that there were a lot of arguments between Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, sometimes getting violent. A stressed Bond decided to hand over leadership to Ginger Baker, who saw this as a perfect opportunity to fire Jack Bruce. The band limped on as a three-piece, but the magic had gone. Although Ginger stayed in the band for a time, he decided to quit when Bond's increased drug habits made him too unreliable.

Ginger was now at a loose end and was keen to form a band, and



1. Hailing from Manfred Mann, The Graham Bond Organisation and The Bluesbreakers respectively, Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton pose for an early press shot

2. An appearance on TV's *Ready Steady Go!* on 1 November '66 to promote the band's first single release, *Wrapping Paper*

set about finding like-minded musicians. He was already familiar with Eric Clapton and his guitar playing when they frequently met on the London club scene, and so he wanted to approach him first. It's worth knowing that at that time graffiti would often be spotted in London proclaiming that 'Clapton is God', such was the strength of his loyal following.

Part of the reason for Eric's popularity was the tone he achieved with his beloved 1959 sunburst Gibson Les Paul played through a Marshall JTM45 amp. He had bought the guitar from the Lew Davis shop in London's Charing Cross Road in 1965 with money he earned playing with John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers from 1965 to 1966. It was the album cover of Freddie King's *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away* that influenced him to buy the guitar, even though Freddie was, in fact, holding a Goldtop.

### A NEW TRIO

Ginger went to see The Bluesbreakers at a gig at the Town Hall in Oxford on 13 May 1966 and asked if it would be okay to have a jam. Ginger and Eric had an immediate musical chemistry and got on well, too. After the show, Ginger gave Eric a lift home and asked him if he would be interested in joining the new band he was forming. By this point, Eric

was tiring of copying his blues heroes and he, too, was looking for new opportunities. It didn't take long to make a decision, but his only condition was that Jack Bruce would have to be in the band. Eric had no knowledge of the past tensions between Jack and Ginger.

Ginger was taken aback but highly respected Jack's musicianship – he could see the potential for the three members coming together as a band. After some persuading from his wife, Ginger went to visit Jack to find out if he would be interested in putting the past behind them and joining the band.

At the time, Jack was under contract with the group Manfred Mann but was not happy at the pop direction they were pursuing. Jack was also familiar with Eric and his guitar playing as he was also in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers for a short period in during late 1965. Both he and Eric enjoyed the experience of playing together, and later even recorded a few tracks for a blues compilation album, *What's Shakin'*, for the Elektra label in March 1966. Jack was in and Ginger immediately suggested Robert Stigwood as their manager, having known him from his time with Graham Bond.

The three musicians wanted to be collaborative, rather than act as three soloists competing with each other. Originally, Eric





PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Clapton had visions of being the lead singer but conceded that Jack had a far more powerful voice with a wealth of experience behind him. Eric considered the band to be ‘the top of the milk’ in terms of musicianship, and suggested it made sense to call themselves ‘The Cream’.

Initial rehearsals took place at Ginger’s ground floor maisonette in Neasden, North London, before moving to St Anne’s Brondesbury Church Hall in West Kilburn. As soon they started to jam, all three felt the magic. They instinctively knew they were on to something.

*Melody Maker*’s Chris Welch was at the hall and during a break joined the band at a cafe opposite. Robert Stigwood attended the rehearsals and asked Chris if he thought they were any good. Luckily, he said yes. Had he said he wasn’t that moved, it could have been the end of the band before they even started. However, Stigwood did have a contribution and that was the band should simply call themselves ‘Cream’.

A few days in, Eric’s beloved ‘Beano’ Les Paul was stolen from the rehearsal hall. His distinctive

### ***As soon they started to jam, all three felt the magic. They instinctively knew they were on to something***

leather guitar strap with the names of his blues heroes carved on was attached to the guitar; that was also gone. With a view of getting the public’s help, Eric gave interviews in the music press, sharing details of the guitar as well as mentioning the carved names: Buddy Guy, Big Maceo and Otis Rush. With that information, it would be easy to detect the stolen items should anyone try to sell them.

As for the guitar, Eric described it, precisely to *Record Mirror* as “a Les Paul Standard, five or six years old, small and solid. It has one cutaway and is a red-gold colour with Grover machineheads. The back is very scratched and there are several cigarette burns on the front”.

It’s worth noting that toward the end of 1965, Eric had removed the metal pickup covers to reveal the bobbins: double-white at the neck, double-black at the

bridge. In early 1966, he told *Beat Instrumental*: “You’ve probably heard about me taking the covers off my pickups: this is something I would definitely recommend for any guitarist. The improvement, sound-wise, is unbelievable.”

To this day, despite rumoured sightings on the East Coast of America, nothing ever materialised. Later, Eric confirmed this Les Paul was the best he’d ever had. Although he also had a Gibson ES-335 from his time with The Yardbirds, he loved the sound achieved with the Les Paul. So for the first few months of Cream he borrowed a Les Paul, possibly from Keith Richards, before buying another ‘Burst from Andy Summers.

To twist the knife further, his original Les Paul case was later stolen from a Cream show at Klooks Kleek. Eric surmised that the person responsible for taking his guitar had now come back for the original case. Perhaps the most surprising piece of information was that Eric seriously considered getting a Rickenbacker shortly after the theft, as Les Paul guitars were hard to find at the time. It would

3. Ginger Baker initiated the idea of forming Cream, first enlisting Eric Clapton and then, after a little persuasion, his former Graham Bond bandmate, Jack Bruce

4. After a successful first rehearsal at Ginger Baker’s maisonette, Clapton is credited with inadvertently giving the band its name by declaring: “We’re the top of the milk!”



A black and white photograph of Eric Clapton playing a guitar. He is wearing a patterned jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie. He has a beard and is looking down at his instrument. The background is dark and out of focus.

*Clapton told 'Beat Instrumental': "Taking the covers off [your] pickups is something I recommend. The improvement is unbelievable"*



seem a strange decision as the sound would have been very different from a Les Paul.

## WAXING HISTORY

Stigwood set about organising press releases, tour dates and recording studio time for a single and album. The biggest issue was that Ginger and Eric were not songwriters. But Jack was a good composer and joined forces with lyricist and beat-poet Pete Brown for a selection of collaborative songs to feature on Cream's first album. It was a mix of pop numbers with a selection of well-chosen blues covers.

They spent three days in August 1966 recording at Rayrik Sound Studios in Chalk Farm with a view to getting an all-important single in the record shops and hopefully the charts. The studio was relatively primitive and better suited to demo recordings, but during their time there they recorded four songs: *Coffee Song*, *Beauty Queen*, *You Make Me Feel* and *Wrapping Paper*.

After much deliberation they decided to release *Wrapping Paper*, a somewhat bland and presumably unrepresentative song with no commercial appeal. It was more a whimsical music-hall folly than a blues or pop number, at least as far as the public were concerned. *Coffee Song* had also been considered for release but lost out.

It was disappointing and Stigwood's label, Reaction, pulled 10,000 copies from shops as they



***There were several highlights, including Ginger's epic drum solo in 'Toad', which drove the crowd crazy and demanding more***

5. Live footage of the band is very rare, with most TV appearances being mimed, as in the photo above. However, the farewell concert was filmed and remains the only real testament to what Cream sounded like on the concert stage

6. The UK version of *Fresh Cream* featured distinctive typography that differed from the US and Europe covers

could not give the single away. Eric tried to explain to *Record Mirror* at the time: "I'm tired of being called a specialist musician. People thought Cream was going to be a blues band, but it's not – it's a pop group, really."

Eric also told *Melody Maker*'s Chris Welch: "Most people have formed the impression of us as three solo musicians clashing with each other. We want to cancel that idea and be a group that plays together."

## WHIPPED CREAM

Cream's tour started with a warm-up show on 29 July 1966 at the famous Twisted Wheel in Manchester, with another set in the early hours of 30 July. The next day, they played the 6th National Jazz and Blues Festival at the Royal Windsor Racecourse in Berkshire – their official debut. They played a 40-minute set in the pouring rain, but despite the weather, some 10,000 fans cheered the band on through the electrifying and powerful set. There were several highlights, including Ginger's epic drum solo in *Toad*, which drove the crowd crazy and demanding more.

The tour carried on throughout the year around the UK, and the band often played two shows a

night. Cream were not known to invite guests on stage with them, but there was one exception during a show on 1 October 1966 at the Regent Street Polytechnic in London. Jimi Hendrix, the new kid on the block, asked if he could jam on a couple of numbers. Eric and Jimi admired each other, so although Ginger was not so keen, the band allowed the guitarist to come on. They played a powerful version of Howlin' Wolf's *Killing Floor* to the delight of the crowd. As word spread about the jam that evening, the glowing reputation of both Cream and Hendrix were now a done deal.

The recording sessions for *Fresh Cream*, the band's debut album, were fitted in during rare days off on the tour, at Ryemuse Studios in Mayfair. *I Feel Free*, backed with *N.S.U.*, was released as their second single as a taster to the album in December 1966. Completely different in feel to the first single, it screamed 'pop' song and went as high as No 11 in the UK charts, creating plenty of anticipation for the album.

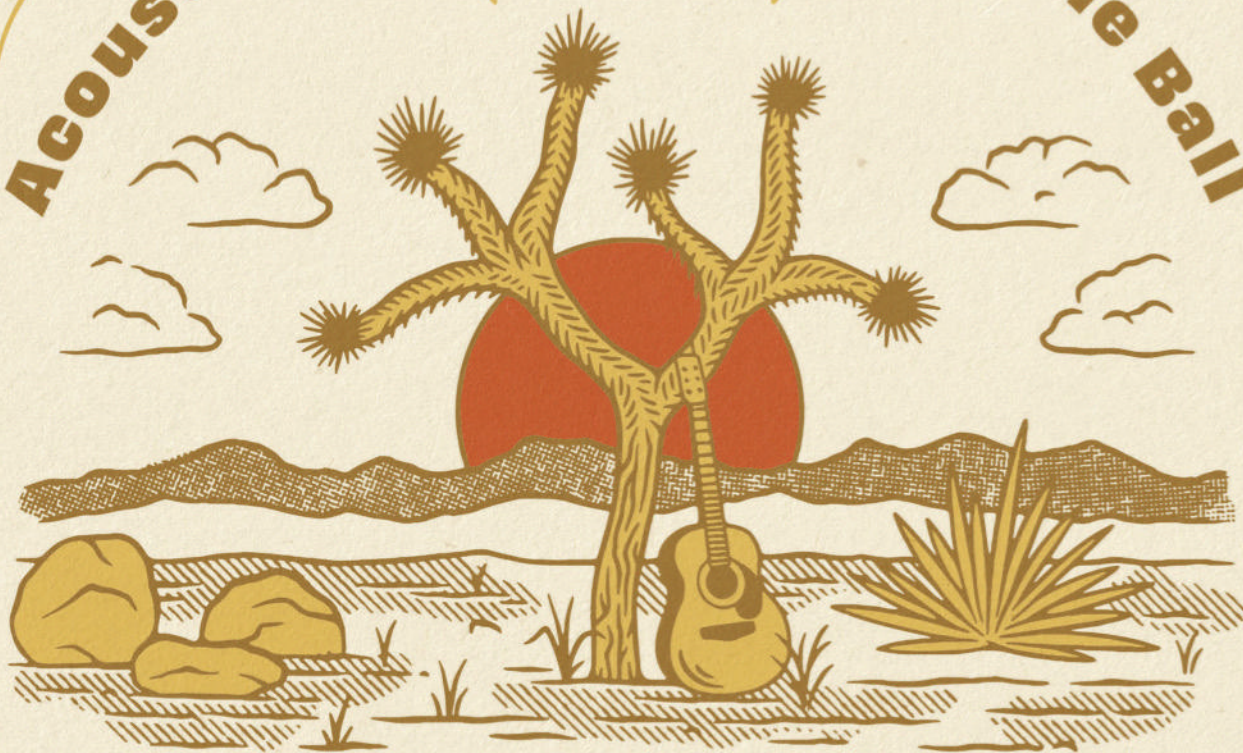
The album cover varied with different typefaces for the UK, Europe and the US. Another change was the addition of the UK single *I Feel Free* to the later US release in 1967, replacing *Spoonful*, meanwhile Europe had the benefit of having *Wrapping Paper* and *The Coffee Song* added as a bonus. Perhaps the most exciting release was reserved for the French market, though, where Polydor released a four-track EP containing a unique take of *Cat's Squirrel* with a totally different guitar solo by Eric. Needless to say this grew to be a major collectors' item over the years. Luckily, it is now readily available on the deluxe editions of the album at a reasonable price compared with the original EP.

In the days before social media, bands would promote their records by doing radio sessions for the BBC as well as appearing on popular youth-orientated television shows such as *Ready Steady Go!*. Cream's many BBC Radio sessions sealed the deal on their popularity, and over the years their debut album has grown in stature and remains an essential album to this day. **G**





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# FULL-FAT TONE

The history of Eric Clapton's guitars during Cream's brief but influential existence – from *Fresh Cream* to *Goodbye* – reveals an intriguing mix of instruments but also offers up a mystery or two

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Words Neville Marten







PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

1

A rare pic of Clapton playing his sunburst Firebird I at Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta, in October '68. This guitar also featured in the first set of the band's farewell gig at the Albert Hall a month later

We know the guitars Eric Clapton played in Cream. All of them Gibson: the 'Beano' Les Paul, the 'Fool' SG, the cherry red ES-335 and the sunburst Firebird I. While that list is, of course, correct, dig a little deeper and a few oddities and anomalies poke their heads above the parapet. But as with anything musically historical, evidence is often vague or contradictory, so what follows here is as close as we can get with the sources available.

### ***The 'Beano' Les Paul was used at the band's initial get-together at Ginger Baker's flat in Neasden, Northwest London, July 1966***

With Clapton only just having left John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the 'Beano' Les Paul was predictably his instrument of choice in early Cream rehearsals. It was used at the band's initial get-together at Ginger Baker's flat in Neasden, Northwest London in mid-July 1966, and the 'secret' two-set gig at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester, over the evening and early hours of 29 and 30 July respectively. Sadly, though

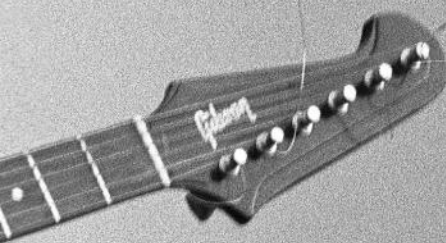
this guitar, with its recognisable double-cream open-topped neck humbucker and all-black bridge pickup, was stolen soon after.

Eric then played some early Cream shows, including the Windsor Jazz and Blues Festival on 31 July, on a Bigsby-equipped '59 Les Paul. From what we can gather, The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards loaned his *Satisfaction* Les Paul to Eric for some gigs and recording, then in 1967 Keith (or some say the band's keyboard player, Ian Stewart) sold it to Mick Taylor. Taylor used it during his tenure with The Bluesbreakers and, somewhat ironically, when he was conscripted into The Stones in 1969. It's almost certain that the guitar also appeared on Cream's debut album, *Fresh Cream*.

It currently resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met). Taylor has asserted it to be his own Les Paul that was stolen in the legendary heist of Stones guitars at Villa Nellcôte, in Villefranche-sur-Mer on the French Riviera, and is in dispute with The Met. Meanwhile, the museum claims its provenance is well documented and that the guitar was never officially owned by Taylor.

2. The Firebird I also made an appearance when Cream played New York's Madison Square Garden on 2 November 1968

PHOTO BY MARK PRATER







3. 'The Fool' SG had undergone some changes when it was sold at Julien's Auctions in 2023

**Eric loved The Fool SG's 'access all areas' neck and full-fat, fruity tones; he played it extensively until mid-1968**

Clapton's Bluesbreakers Les Paul had been purchased for a meagre £80 after Andy Summers, later of The Police and owner of a Les Paul that Eric had coveted, had tipped him off about another's whereabouts. Upon the theft of this instrument, Clapton contacted Summers to see if he could purloin his original Standard, most likely a 1960 model as Eric's first LP was also thought to have been (although some say Eric's was a '59). He has commented on how he liked its slim neck, a characteristic of 1960 models. Summers recalled: "Knowing that I had the other one, Eric starts calling me and asking if I would sell it. I'd moved on to the Fender Telecaster by then, and also there was something wrong with my Les Paul; the back pickup wasn't working. He was offering me £200 for it, more than twice what I'd paid for it."

Apparently, Clapton didn't have the bridge pickup fixed. It seems he used it (neck pickup only, the inspiration for 'woman' tone', perhaps?) and Richards' Bigsby Les Paul on the *Fresh Cream* album sessions. These began in early August 1966. It seems the 'Summersburst' suffered a headstock break and was eventually sold or stolen.

On 16 August 1966 Cream played London's legendary Marquee club, and Eric is pictured playing a cherry red 1960 Les Paul Special double-cutaway with twin P-90s. He tells the audience that it's a new guitar and he's only just getting used to it. Was this a stop-gap (some say it was borrowed) between the 'Beano' Les Paul stolen in rehearsals and getting the Andy Summers guitar?

4. Clapton's 1964 'Fool' SG Standard was given the psychedelic treatment by Dutch artists Marijke Koger and Simon Posthuma

5. EC plays the Bigsby-equipped Les Paul at the band's first official live appearance at the 1966 Windsor Jazz And Blues Festival

6. Jack and Eric's thunderous live assault was powered by twin Marshall 100-watt stacks – one in use and one as a spare

## PLAYING THE FOOL

Clapton's most famous Gibson and the one he was most photographed with in Cream is undoubtedly his 1964 SG Standard. Nicknamed the 'Fool' after the Dutch art syndicate led by Simon Posthuma and Marijke Koger who gave it its psychedelic paint job, the guitar underwent several changes during Clapton's ownership of it. The Maestro Vibrola's 'lyre' chrome coverplate was removed, presumably to display the Fool's artwork underneath. And although EC may have occasionally used the Vibrola for some light chord wobble (*White Room*, perhaps?), usually he preferred the arm swept back out of the way, especially when playing live. Later, he would remove it completely.

The Fool SG debuted on 25 March 1967 at the RKO Theatre in Manhattan. Eric loved its 'access all areas' neck and full-fat, fruity tones, and played it extensively until mid-1968, including on the brilliant live *Crossroads* and *Spoonful* from *Wheels Of Fire*.

On Cream's demise, Eric gave the guitar to George Harrison, who in turn presented it to Apple-signing Jackie Lomax. Lomax later passed it on to guitarist/producer Todd Rundgren (who produced Meatloaf's *Bat Out Of Hell* among many others). The Fool SG sold for a staggering £1.023 million (\$1.27 million) on 16 November 2023.

Another Les Paul that Clapton obtained during this time was a three-pickup, black Gibson Les Paul Custom, which he bought

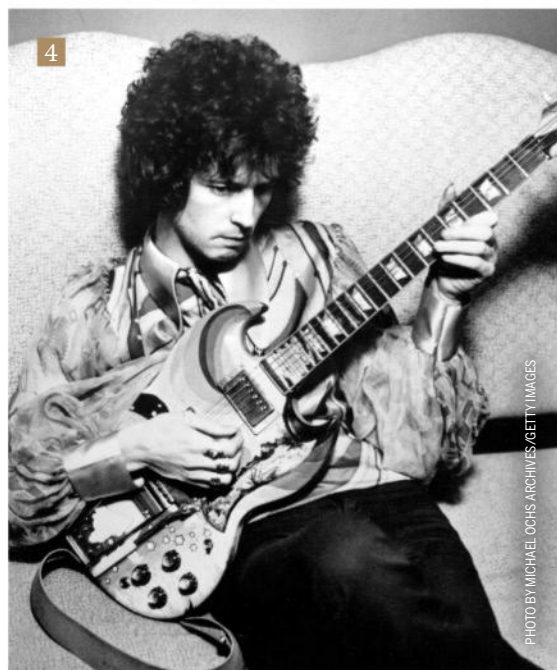


PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

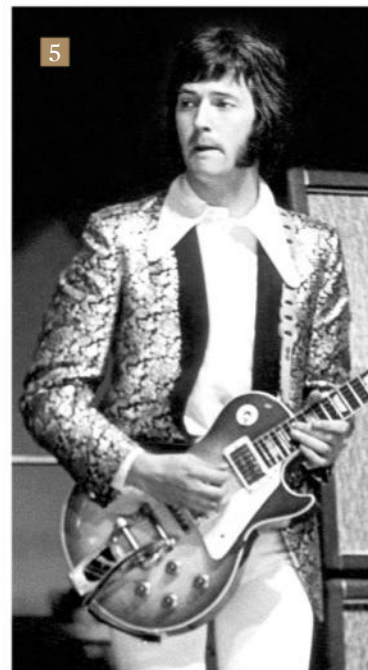


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIEN'S AUCTIONS





6

## STACK 'EM HIGH A CLOSE-UP ON CLAPTON'S AMPS IN CREAM

It's well known that during his brief tenure as a Bluesbreaker, Eric Clapton got switched on to Marshall amplifiers. Initially using a 100-watt 1959 JMP45 half-stack, he persuaded Jim Marshall to create a 'combination amp and speakers' (combo) that could fit in the boot of his car. This Jim did, and its use on the John Mayall album *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* confirmed EC as a dedicated fan of the brand, then based at 76 Uxbridge Road, Hanwell, West London. It also lent this combo the nickname 'Bluesbreaker', which Marshall itself adopted on later reissues of the 1962 2x12 model.

At the time of Cream's formation in July 1966, Eric returned to the JTM45 100-watt head and single tall-front cab, and used it on *Fresh Cream* alongside Keith Richards' Bigsby Les Paul and his own ex-Andy Summers 'Burst (with the non-functional bridge pickup).

As Cream transformed into a world-conquering live behemoth, the band found itself performing to ever-larger crowds at ever-larger venues, so both Clapton and bassist Jack Bruce upgraded to full-blown 4x12 stacks. Before long even this wasn't enough and each player doubled it to twin 100-watt heads driving four 4x12 cabinets (one main rig, one spare). Thus Eric's live Cream setup comprised two

1959 100-watt Super 100 (JTM45/100) heads atop an array of two angled 1960 A speaker cabs, riding two 1960 B 'tall-bottom, straight-front' enclosures. The earliest of these featured pinstripe grille cloth, while later versions adopted the more familiar basketweave. Initially, Cream's cabs came loaded with Celestion G12M T1221 20-watt 'Greenback' 75Hz speakers, but these were soon after upgraded to the more robust 25-watt 'H' versions due to the sheer volume required and in order to minimise failures.

Despite Cream's hectic touring schedule between late July 1966 and the band's final shows in London during November 1968, their Marshalls remained incredibly reliable. Both Clapton and Bruce's use of one main stack and the second as a spare meant that the amps were kept in prime condition. Eric's live technician at the time was Bruce McCaskill who, along with tour manager Bob Adcock, would have performed basic servicing such as valve changes or replacing the occasional component. Overall, though, despite the relentless thrashing to which Cream's amplifiers were subjected, they proved largely bulletproof, leading to a reputation that made Marshall the go-to brand for rock bands thereafter.



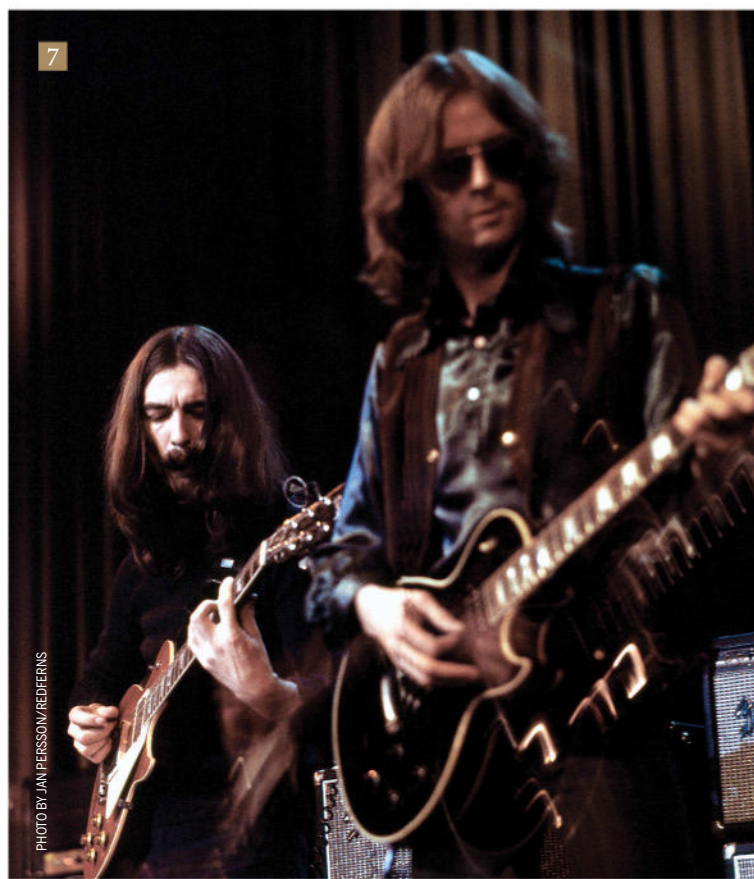


PHOTO BY JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS

in Manny's Music in New York, March 1967. Eric would often play this guitar during his Blind Faith period, but it also appeared on the album *Disraeli Gears*, released in November 1967.

Other instruments for the recordings include the Fool SG, and one or two unspecified electric 12-strings for the Byrds-like *Dance The Night Away*. These were possibly a Fender Electric XII and/or Rickenbacker 12-string. There's no evidence to suggest it, but it would be lovely to think that George Harrison gifted Eric one of his Ricky 12s.

A more surprising guitar owned and played by Clapton in Cream was a Danelectro DC-59 Shorthorn, similar to the one played by Jimmy Page. Eric later used it in Blind Faith with what looks like a sponge-effect paint job, but he was pictured playing the original black-and-white Dano with Cream at the Swan pub in Birmingham, May 1967.

For Blind Faith's free debut concert in Hyde Park on 7 June 1969, Clapton sported a 1962 bound-bodied Fender Custom Telecaster with a small-headstock

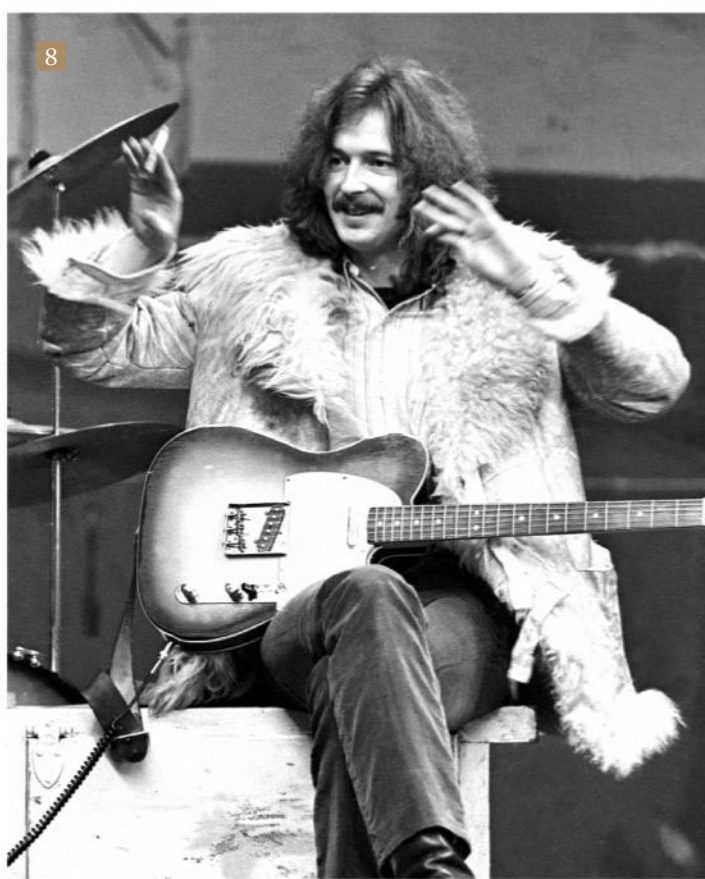
7. Eric on stage with George Harrison during a Delaney & Bonnie show in 1969. Clapton is playing the Les Paul Custom that he bought in NYC in '67 and George is playing 'Lucy', the refinished '57 Les Paul gifted to him by EC

maple Stratocaster neck. This was actually the neck from his *Layla* Strat, 'Brownie'. However, Eric had acquired the Tele in early 1968, and appeared playing it with Cream in the Danish film *Det Var En Lørdag (It Was A Saturday Night)*. Interestingly, in the film the same Tele body sported a post-CBS large-headstock, rosewood-board Strat neck. Whether it was ever played on a Cream album, we can't say.

### ***Eric gave the 1957 Les Paul to George Harrison and then played the solo on The Beatles' 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' on it***

8. Another rare pic of Clapton on the set of the film *Det Var En Lørdag (It Was A Saturday Night)* using a hybrid Telecaster – seen later when Blind Faith played in Hyde Park in 1969 – which, at the time, sported a large-headstock rosewood Strat neck

Clapton bought another Les Paul, originally a 1957 Goldtop that had been refinished in see-through cherry red by its second owner, Rick Derringer (Johnny and Edgar Winter, Steely Dan), who got it from Lovin' Spoonful guitarist John Sebastian. It's not known whether he ever used it in Cream, but Eric famously gave the instrument to George Harrison and then played the solo on The



Beatles' *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* on it. Harrison christened the guitar 'Lucy' after American comedienne Lucille Ball, and used it for his solo on *Something*.

Clapton also acquired a 1953 Les Paul Goldtop around this time and played it with Cream at Hunter College Auditorium, New York City on 29 March 1968. A Gibson guitar that Clapton enjoyed during this same year, but was not often photographed with, was his sunburst 1964 Firebird I. This instrument remained in the touring arsenal until Cream's final shows on 25 and 26 November at London's Royal Albert Hall. The Firebird featured on the first of these shows, and the ES-335 on the second. Eric is said to have bought the guitar on 13 April 1968, remarking that he loved the guitar's bright and articulate single bridge pickup. He notably used it for his blistering intro and solos in the live rendition of *Sitting On Top Of The World* from the band's farewell album *Goodbye*.

Another Les Paul that surfaced during Cream's dying days was a 1958 Les Paul known as the 'Darkburst'. Eric played it on some





**9.** A sad farewell: Cream perform live on stage at the Royal Albert Hall on 26 November 1968, the band's last gig together before the reunion at the same venue in 2005

**10.** At the farewell gig Eric played his Firebird I during the first show that night and his cherry red 1964 ES-335 at the second

1968 US Cream concerts, but in 1969 while Free was supporting Blind Faith on a few US shows, traded it to Paul Kossoff for his Les Paul Custom. It ended up with that band's singer, Paul Rodgers, who later sold it at auction, with Clapton verifying its provenance.

### SEEING RED

We've left Eric's cherry red 1964 ES-335 until last, not only because it was the final six-string he played with Cream at the 26 November Royal Albert Hall farewell concert, but also because questions abound regarding the guitar's past. Did Clapton really buy it new in 1964 while in The Yardbirds, as he has proposed? The fact that there are no photos of Eric with the guitar either in The Yardbirds, with John Mayall, or at any time prior to his last run of Cream shows suggests not.

Would he have borrowed guitars for gigs and albums had he owned this rather special guitar? Telemaster Jerry Donahue is adamant that this is not the case and that he personally sold Eric the ES-335 while working at Selmer's music store in London

in 1968. Jerry asserts it was bought for the Royal Albert Hall farewell concerts. This story seems plausible, even though it flies in the face of auction records and what many, including Clapton himself, believe. Whatever the case, the guitar sold at Christie's in New York in 2004 for \$847,500 (£645,197).

Gibson has released modern recreations of Clapton's 'Beano' Les Paul, the 'Fool' SG, Firebird I, 'Lucy' Les Paul and ES-335. There has been a Danelectro remake of the painted Blind Faith Shorthorn, and Fender even released a Blind Faith bound-bodied Tele-Strat. Such is the esteem in which Clapton's Cream guitars are held, today these instruments exchange hands for eye-watering sums.

So, that's the story of Eric Clapton's guitars from the short but extraordinary, musically spectacular period between July 1966 and November 1968. While the details of some of the guitars might remain sketchy, one thing we know for certain is we'll never see a combination of such talents – Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker – again. **G**



**10**



# CREAM ON TOP

Have you ever wondered what happened behind the scenes when Cream took to the road in the 60s? Wonder no more as Ginger's daughter Nettie Baker reveals all

Words David Mead

A new book called *Cream Chronicled*, authored by Ginger Baker's daughter Nettie, sets out to document every gig and recording session, and various major events that happened to the band between 1966 and 1968. It also covers the times Ginger, Jack and Eric got back together at the Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Fame inauguration in 1993 and the reunion gigs in 2005.

Needless to say, painstaking research, combined with an obvious love of the subject matter, has resulted in an amazingly authoritative book. We speak with Nettie about what it was like to spend so much time in Cream's glorious past.



Nettie is the eldest daughter of Ginger Baker and author of *Cream Chronicled*

1. A fatigued-looking Cream pose for the camera at their farewell gig in November '68

**One thing that struck us when we read the book was how hard Cream were worked throughout their lifetime as a band.**

"When I started researching, that's when I realised how intense their workload was and it seemed that it was a normal thing to do, and probably a lot of other bands at the same time were doing it, too.

"I think their rise was so quick, it exacerbated the pressures.

Very often they would go to all-nighters, which, at the time, was a big thing. A band would play a gig and then they would go off to another club to do an all-nighter and play from 11 till 12, and then play again at 2.30 to 4.30 [in the morning] or something like that. It was completely insane."

**Can you remember the effect that had on your dad?**

"Well, I think it was stress – the ambition and the hard work and the attention to detail. There were a lot of other things going on because at the beginning he was sort of running it, collecting the money and all of those sorts of things. I think at first he was very happy, but they did have the [burden] of going around the country in a van. No-one flew anywhere. And, as it went on, the stress began to affect him."

**In the book, you say that Ginger eventually put his foot down to playing two gigs a day.**

"I don't think anyone took any notice. I think it's very important to understand that all three of them were not in control because they were young men; they were in their 20s, and it was a new phenomenon. It was a new genre and it suddenly caught on."

**How difficult was it to research the book? Did your dad keep diaries or any other records?**

"No. I mean, I've got a BA and a MA in English Lit from Queen Mary [University of London], and they're one of the top research universities. So I was actually able to bring some of my academic qualifications into this thing, which is different from the other books I've written. And I'm a diarist, so I had diaries from the 60s and I had diaries from the 2005 [reunion], so I was able to bring a bit of that in. But you just have to find as many sources as you



PHOTO BY SUSIE MACDONALD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES





PHOTO BY LUCIANOVITI/GETTY IMAGES

can. I mean, the internet is great now, but I did go through books, too. Some of these retrospective anecdotes are not reliable at all, but you might get two or three sources that agree. So you think, 'Yeah, that's quite likely.' You just have to keep going. I just went everywhere and to everything I could find, you know?"

**You said that *Cream Chronicled* sets out to bust some of the myths about the band. Which ones were you specifically keen to clear up?**

"That they all hated each other; they never socialised; they never travelled together. That Jack and Ginger were always fighting, according to all the retrospective accounts. And on the *Goodbye* album cover, that the photos of them were shot separately and then they superimposed their heads on the picture or something. I mean, for goodness' sake!

"Later in the book I say that when they came to do the Hall Of Fame, people just got stuck on an image of axe-wielding maniacs on

**"I think the legacy of the band is immense. I'm proud to have managed to document it because no-one's done that" **NETTIE BAKER****

2. In May 2005, 37 years after disbanding in the late 60s, Cream reunited for four jubilant nights at The Royal Albert Hall



Nettie Baker's fourth book aims to set the record straight on the relationship between Jack, Eric and Ginger

drugs or if they would even speak to each other. So I tried to say that the band split mainly because of the pressures of touring and the stresses they were under. They didn't say that they didn't argue – because they were like brothers. Even in 2012 Jack was saying, 'I really love Ginger, he's my brother and brothers sometimes fight.'

"I also explained that they didn't tell everyone at the time, but they were socialising, but because people would have just said, 'Oh, are they going to get back together again?' they probably thought, 'Just leave us alone.' So yes, they socialised the whole time."

**How do you think Ginger looked back on the Cream years?**

"I think he was so proud because it was his band. I think when he

did look back he only ever wanted to play Cream songs with Cream, which was why he didn't really like BBM [the group that featured Jack, Ginger and Gary Moore] that much. He felt quite strongly about that.

"I think the legacy of the band is immense. I'm proud to have managed to document it because no-one's done that. They've just fallen down the rabbit hole of 'Oh, they all took drugs and hated each other,' which is just completely and utterly not true; even the drugs they get wrong.

"There was one heroin addict, which was Ginger, and most of the time in Cream he was not taking it. And when he did, in his own autobiography, he held his hands up. I think they did have some sort of [trauma] afterwards. 1968 wasn't a happy time for them. They really didn't want to break up." **G**

Nettie Baker's book, *Cream Chronicled*, is available now via Wymer Publishing [www.wymeruk.co.uk](http://www.wymeruk.co.uk)









# STILL SUPERNATURAL

Six decades into his career, Carlos Santana remains excited by the very thought of having a guitar in his hands. Below, he looks back on the music and gear that's soundtracked his one-of-a-kind life

Words Amit Sharma

This article first appeared in the October 2025 edition of *Guitar World*

**T**here are varying degrees of guitar hero, but Carlos Santana is someone you'd expect to find near the top of any list. Like Jimi Hendrix, Brian May or Slash, Santana has transcended guitar music and permeated his way into popular culture, his name immortalised around the globe. Of course, he's a tremendous player, but it goes way beyond that; he's a highly prolific composer and collaborator, the type of musician who can thrive in just about any musical environment, drawing from a wide pool of influences to make his guitar speak to any kind of audience or listener.

His most recent album, *Sentient*, serves as yet another reminder of these universal talents. It consists of 11 tracks, three of which were unreleased until now. The remaining songs reimagine some of his most famous partnerships over a storied career, from a moving live version of Michael Jackson's *Stranger In Moscow* to

classic cuts alongside Miles Davis and Smokey Robinson. It's an undoubtedly impressive body of work that captures the breadth of his sound and imagination while taking the listener on an unforgettable journey that defies all notions of boundary or genre. And, as the chart-topping veteran explains, it's mainly because his approach to music is a profoundly holistic one.

**You're one of the most prominent faces for PRS, but you've played all kinds of guitars throughout the years.**

"Guitars are like crayons to me. Life is the canvas and guitars are the colours you use to express your soul, your spirit, your heart, your passion and emotions. Those are the ingredients to create beauty, and guitars are the tools."

**How many guitars do you own these days?**

"I don't know, but probably not more than 100 and not fewer than 75. I guess the Fender Strats and

Gibson Les Pauls would be the oldest models in my collection. I've got Strats from 1954; some of my Les Pauls go all the way back to 1959. [There was even] a Yamaha signature model in the 80s. That's right, I had a good time with Yamaha. I learned from each one of the guitar companies. They all have their own sound, texture and feel. But I always go back to my PRS models.

"Paul Reed Smith has mastered creating an instrument that behaves. No matter what the weather is like, it will stay in tune and always give you that great tone. I'm very grateful to Paul. He came up with his own vision to create a different tone and feel. I'm grateful he did that because his designs suited my personality when it came to self-expression. We've had a relationship since the late 70s. He convinced me to come onboard. Back then, there were only three companies I knew of – Gibson, Fender and Gretsch. There were others, but those three were the main ones."



**Lately, you've been associated with the PRS signature guitar you call 'Salmon'. What makes it special?**

"I also think of that model as my 'Supernatural' guitar because that's what I used for 99 per cent of that album [1999's *Supernatural*]. As for what's special about it, I think it's the most fluid. It's the easiest instrument for me to materialise my inner vision, thoughts and emotions. There's not much struggle translating myself onto that guitar. But sometimes that struggle is nice, you know?

"Some people struggle with playing Stratocasters. It's not easy to play a Strat and get really nice tones without pedals – because some people use pedals for extra sustain. But when you play loud enough like Jimi Hendrix going straight into Marshall stacks, they can become a whole other canvas. That's why players like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Buddy Guy stuck with Stratocasters."

**PRS has continued to evolve through the years with models like the Silver Sky. Have you ever tried one?**

"A bit here and there. I thought they were pretty close to the original design it had been clearly inspired by."

**The company's SE models are also pretty well known for being some of the best guitars you can find for that kind of money.**

"That's right! From guitars to food or whatever, there are two words that are important for any business: impeccable integrity. When people put love and attention into what they make, it stands out. When

## "THE GOAL OF ANY GUITAR PLAYER – WHATEVER THE STYLE MAY BE – IS TO MAKE THE LISTENER FEEL ALIVE"

my guitars arrive from Paul Reed Smith, they are always perfectly in tune. I'm not making it up! They come to me set up perfectly because somebody at the factory is doing that final check. A lot of companies don't do that."

**You play PRS Singlecut models, too. What kind of situations call for that over a double-cut?**

"It's like wine. You've got choices like Burgundy, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The Singlecut is more like a Merlot, it's a more robust sound. When you play a double-cut,

1. The struggle (with guitars) can be real and often that's a positive, says Carlos Santana, referencing how players like Clapton, Hendrix and Beck used it to their advantage. Here, Carlos plays on stage with Clapton during a US tour in July 1975

the sound changes dramatically and you get more treble. So in situations where I want more of a rounder sound, I will go for the Singlecut. Both have their uses for different sounds and songs."

**On your new retrospective album, you turned your guitar into a voice for an instrumental version of Michael Jackson's *Stranger In Moscow*. Not many players can make their instruments talk like that.**

"Nothing is closer to the heart than the voice. To make a guitar speak to people, it's more than just volume and control. You need to put your soul into each note; when you do that, it changes the sound. There are a lot of people who play music that's more mental, which has a different type of feel. It's okay for certain things, but I prefer the sound of someone playing from their heart because of players like Wes Montgomery and Otis Rush. They made you feel what you hear.

"There are components to articulating. It's a bit like how a chef thinks about ingredients, from flavours to nutrients. To cook a delicious meal, you need more than salt and pepper."

**Which singers helped you most with your phrasing?**

"If I sang, I would want to sound like Marvin Gaye. If I were female, I would want to sound like Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston or Billie Holiday. That's what I'm thinking of when I play guitar – how to articulate. I've spent a lot of time taking my fingers for a walk with Smokey Robinson, so when I play my guitar, I become the voice through my fingers on the fretboard. It's the same way I approached *Stranger In Moscow*. I had to morph myself and get into a character, almost like an actor. When you see Robert De Niro on a talk show and he's not in character, sometimes he can be a little boring. But when he turns into the guy from *Heat*, *Taxi Driver* or *The Godfather*, he's incredible. It's a frame of mind.

"When I'm playing *Stranger In Moscow*, you're hearing a different Carlos because I'm thinking of Michael Jackson and phrasing everything differently – even if it's still got my own fingerprint."



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



**On a technical level, what were you doing to sound like the original vocal?**

"I chose to play more relaxed and behind the beat, choosing my notes carefully. It's like putting your fingers in water and sprinkling someone's face with it, or if you take a spoon to grapefruit and it squirts. Those are the good notes. A lot of people don't know how to squirt their best notes! I learned this stuff from Buddy Guy, BB King, Albert King and Freddie King. If you don't know how to squirt, everything is contained and it can get boring after a while. The goal of any guitar player, whatever the style may be – from funk and flamenco to heavy metal – is to make the listener feel alive. A good guitar solo should sound like an orgasm. I can hear it in Eddie Van Halen's playing, and the same goes for Jimi Hendrix. I live for the juicy notes."

**You knew Jeff Beck and played together on *The Nagano Sessions* (with Steve Lukather) in 1986. What do you remember most about Jeff?**

"Jeff Beck took guitar way beyond. His approach was like letting the hamster out of the cage. I was a big fan of Jeff from the second I heard him play. What I loved most was his imagination and passion. He was a very untraditional player, even though he had learned the traditional approach to blues to start with."

"I remember hearing *Truth* [Beck's first solo album from 1968] a long time ago and loving it, but I think the first song I heard by him was *Over Under Sideways Down* by The Yardbirds. He had this fuzz sound that was very special. You could also tell he'd been listening to people like Ravi Shankar or Ali Akbar Khan. He was a multidimensional player in that sense, the opposite of a one-trick pony. He learned from Roy Buchanan and Buddy Guy – I mean, we all took a lot from Buddy because he put the turbo inside the blues. Like Jeff, I learned how to take a deep breath and trust my fingers almost like a child going down a water slide."

**So it's more about heart and soul, rather than technicality?**

"Anybody can practise scales up and down. But there's something



PHOTO BY PATRICK PIEL/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES

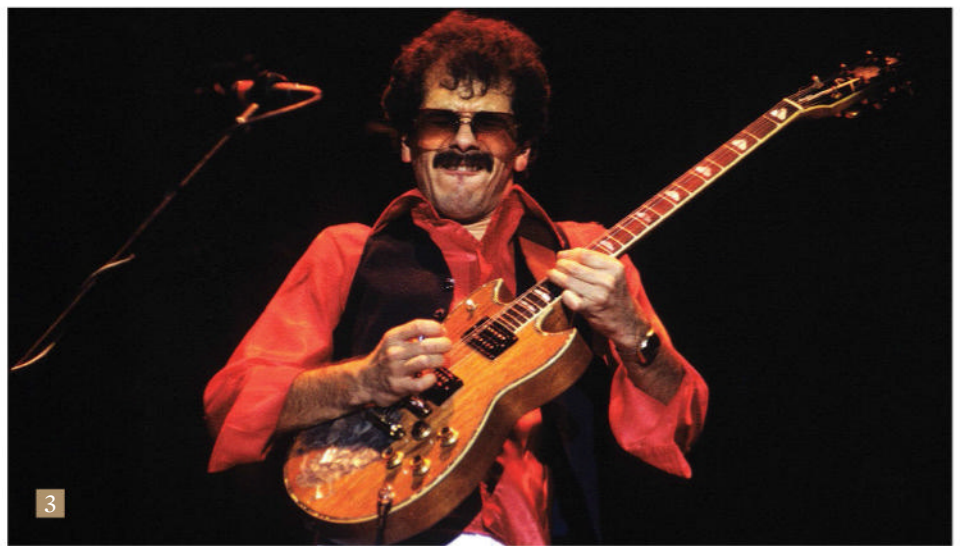


PHOTO BY LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

**2.** Carlos joins Joan Baez and Bob Dylan in concert in Hamburg, Germany in June 1984. "Don't dismiss the guitar playing of Bob Dylan," he says. "He played a lot of great guitar, which worked beautifully with his vocals"

**3.** While better known for his PRS models, Santana had a Yamaha signature in the 80s, affectionately known as the 'Buddha SG' due to its intricate body inlay work

about coming down a water slide. You don't know how you're going to land; it might be on your head or on your feet. That's what happens when you deviate from the melody. John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter taught me a lot. It's the art of improvisation, entering the unknown. People would ask Wayne how he practises, and he'd tell them, 'We don't know what we are going to play; how do you practise the unknown?'

"I learned improvisation from Coltrane. I learned cosmic music from Sun Ra. I learned down-to-earth music from the Grateful Dead because they were heavily immersed in the folk and bluegrass worlds. And don't dismiss the guitar playing of Bob Dylan. He played a lot of great guitar, which worked beautifully with his vocals."

"I've learned from many musicians, especially the incredible women I mentioned earlier. Playing along to soul singers is something nearly every guitar player could learn from. I don't care who you

are, whether you are Al Di Meola or not, I'd recommend this to any guitar player. If you spend even one day learning how to play and phrase like those lady soul singers, you will become a better musician. This is the truth."

"This is genuinely the most important part of the interview – right now. The only thing people will remember about your music is how you made them feel. They are not going to remember all the fast scales and 'Look at what I can do!' moments. But they will remember those three notes that made the hairs stand on the back of the neck and tears come out of their eyes, even if they don't know why. That's a whole other element, one I call spirit. Some people don't know how to play with spirit, heart and soul. Those are three very important ingredients."

**Music isn't a sport at the end of the day, especially for the listener.**

"If you just practise all day and night going really fast, after a while it's a bit like going to the gym and seeing





4

somebody flexing their muscles. Big deal. So what? Playing with spirit is like giving someone a hug that lasts for infinity. Time stops.”

**Are there any songs that you think demonstrates this notion best – who did it well?**

“There’s a note Jimi Hendrix plays in *All Along The Watchtower* that makes you feel like you are entering eternity. It’s like being from Kansas and having only seen the Pacific Ocean on a postcard, then going to Hawaii and putting your feet in the water; that’s when you understand the totality and absoluteness of an ocean. A lot of musicians don’t understand how to play like that, but Chick Corea can. You have to learn how to dive into infinity through one note. It’s like learning how to French kiss correctly – to be fully alive with all your senses but no guilt, shame or embarrassment. Take the inhibitions and all that stuff out. You will see how beautiful it is to interact so intimately. That’s what a guitar player is. The guitar is a very naked and sensuous instrument. That’s just the way it is.”

**The other Michael Jackson track on the album, *Whatever Happens*, has some harmonic minor lines but on**

**nylon-string acoustic. Where did you learn to use that sound?**

“I got a lot of it from my father because he played violin. It’s funny; when I started, people would say I was using a Dorian scale. But the only Dorian I knew was a girl who went to my junior high school. She invited me to go over to her house when her mom was working; I had a good time with Dorian. They also said I was using tonic scales, but the only tonic I knew was in gin and tonic.

**“PLAYING ALONG TO SOUL SINGERS IS SOMETHING NEARLY EVERY GUITAR PLAYER COULD LEARN FROM”**

“I don’t know, nor do I want to know, about scales because that will get in my way. I would rather feel like a blind man touching someone’s face. They are memorising something in a completely different way to how someone else would see it. I’m not saying ignorance is bliss; I’m saying that if you learn everything, you can take some of the magic away. Don’t lose the magic of self-discovery. There’s

4. Santana with Buddy Guy at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 2004. “We all took a lot from Buddy. He put the turbo inside the blues,” says Carlos

something so beautiful about purity and innocence. Again, it’s like that first kiss.”

**The Smokey Robinson track, *Please Don’t Take Your Love*, has a distinct, lively blues tone. What were you using?**

“That sound is a combination of three things. The guitar was a really old white Stratocaster going straight into a Dumble amplifier that was lent to me by Alexander Dumble. The tone of that Strat with the Dumble is something magical. You stop playing notes, sounds and vibrations, and it all becomes a living sensation. How many players can say they play with a living sensation? Manitas De Plata, Paco De Lucía, John McLaughlin and Sonny Sharrock. The main ingredients for me are spirituality and sensuality. Without those two things, I wouldn’t play guitar like this. I wouldn’t want to be on this planet.”

**Get On is an interesting piece of music. Do you play differently knowing someone like Miles Davis is on the same track?**

“I’m almost 80. I’ve learned how to diversify my portfolio and my Rolodex of expression, tones and

PHOTO BY LIONEL FLUSING/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES



vibration. When I first heard this song with Miles, I had to trust that I knew enough about what he was doing. Certain music comes from Africa, and that went on to influence stuff played by Cubans and Puerto Ricans, all this sensual music like *guahira*, *bolero*, *charanga*.

"If you listen to the African band Kékélé, you will hear a lot of Santana in there. I have to give credit to the musicians because they knew how to make music feel like it's alive. It's not just notes and clever inversions. I always go back to something physical. You have to make people feel. They can't take it or leave it. The song has to speak to them. They will stop all conversations because they are enthralled and captivated. The sound is making love to them. And it takes trust. If there's no trust, you won't get the goods. With music, you gotta give the goods, man. Otherwise it's just too clever and intellectual, and that stuff is boring."

**You've said Stevie Ray Vaughan once came to you in a dream and told you to use his Dumble Steel String Singer amp for a performance at Madison Square Garden. Not many people can say that, can they?**

"I call them visitations. I get visitations from Miles Davis sometimes, as well as BB King. You don't have to be dead to visit me. Sometimes a dream is not a dream; someone has come back to communicate with you. I had a dream about Miles where I went to his concert and someone said, 'Miles knows you are here and wants to see you in his dressing room.' He asked how I was doing and started writing on a bit of paper, which he then gave to me. And just as I was about to read it, I woke up. I have to analyse what he was trying to tell me.

"It's like that with Stevie Ray and Jaco Pastorius. I feel very honoured that these people come to me. Sometimes I feel like I'm like [John F Kennedy International Airport] and all these musicians are landing on me and sharing things. I have to figure out what it all means."

**What exactly did Stevie tell you in the dream?**

"With Stevie, he was saying, 'Carlos, where I am, I don't have any fingers; I am only spirit.' He missed putting



his fingers on a guitar and making the speakers push air. He told me to call his brother, Jimmie [Vaughan], and ask him to lend me his amp, the #007 Dumble, and then play it with a Strat so he could feel it through me. You know that *Ghost* movie with Whoopi Goldberg? There's a part where a ghost comes into her body so he can feel. That's what Stevie was doing. He wanted to utilise my body and hands because he missed playing guitar.

"Jimmie wasn't sure at first. Fortunately, Stevie's tech, René Martinez, had the same dream and called Jimmie, which is how we convinced him to lend me the amplifier. The last person to borrow it was John Mayer. Let's just say Jimmie doesn't loan that thing out very easily."

**Rightly so. For those of us waiting in vain for Jimmie Vaughan to give us the green light on the Dumble, how would you describe the sound of that amp?**

"It sounded like everything I love about Peter Green when he played a certain kind of heavenly blues. My mom once asked me, 'Mijo, do you like Whitney Houston?' and I said, 'Of course.' She then told me that when Whitney sang,

5. Now 78 years of age (pictured here in November 2025), Carlos Santana has always valued feel in his music above all else: "I always go back to something physical," he says. "You have to make people feel. They can't take it or leave it"

her voice would become a legion of angels. I think my mom knew what she was talking about. Sometimes when you play, you channel things.

"One person I haven't mentioned too much is Michael Bloomfield. I miss him a lot. He was a great player who knew how to tap into things. Those Paul Butterfield Blues Band albums, like the [self-titled] debut and *East-West*, are incredible, with songs like *Born In Chicago*. And the stuff he played with Bob Dylan, forget about it. Michael Bloomfield was a hero beyond heroes to me.

"But the guy who got me out of all that stuff was [Hungarian jazz, pop and rock guitarist] Gábor Szabó. The way he could play ballads was amazing. Listen to his album *Spellbinder* [1966] and you will hear a lot of Santana in there. Anyone reading this should listen to Hungarian Gypsy music. There is nothing more romantic than hearing that stuff. It really pulled me out of the blues, which is something we all need from time to time." **G**



*Sentient* by Santana is out now via Candid Records

<https://santana.com>

PHOTO BY VALERIE MACON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES





# CANDY APPLE RED FENDERS

Candy Apple Red was reputedly Leo's favourite finish and, as this small selection from a very large collection proves, it looks fantastic on any Fender guitar

Words Huw Price Photography Phil Barker





**M**uch like Gibson's 1950s sunbursts, the look of vintage Candy Apple Red Fenders varies considerably. We'll be discussing the reasons for that later as we examine six examples from a collection of around 50 that will be coming up for sale at Gardiner Houlgate over its next few guitar auctions.

Auctioneer Luke Hobbs tells us: "They're not all great guitars because, probability-wise, that's never going to happen – but the thing the owner really wanted was at least one example of every model in Candy Apple Red. Another issue with some of these

guitars is that the owner was a serial buffer, so in some cases he flattened the finishes down and made the lacquer checking less pronounced than it should be."

Candy Apple Red is one of those colours that divides opinions – most guitarists either love it or they quite like it. So, before examining each of these guitars in detail, let's check out the origins of the finish and discuss how the application method differs from Fender's other metallic custom colours.

From the early 1960s onwards, Fender offered a fairly wide choice of custom colours. Some are vanishingly rare and genuine vintage examples are seldom

seen, while others are almost as common as sunbursts. Of the 21 factory custom colours Fender listed during the 1960s (not including the sparkle and metal flake finishes and one-off specials), 12 were metallic.

One of those metallic finishes was Candy Apple Red, but the process of applying it differed significantly and it created a toffee-apple lustre. Most Fender colours were inspired by automotive trends and are associated with specific US car manufacturers. Candy Apple Red stood out because it came from the hot-rod scene and the method of application was developed by a car customiser called Joe Bailon.





This 1966 Jaguar is an all original example with gold hardware and a matching headstock, but some prefer to remove the press-up foam string mute

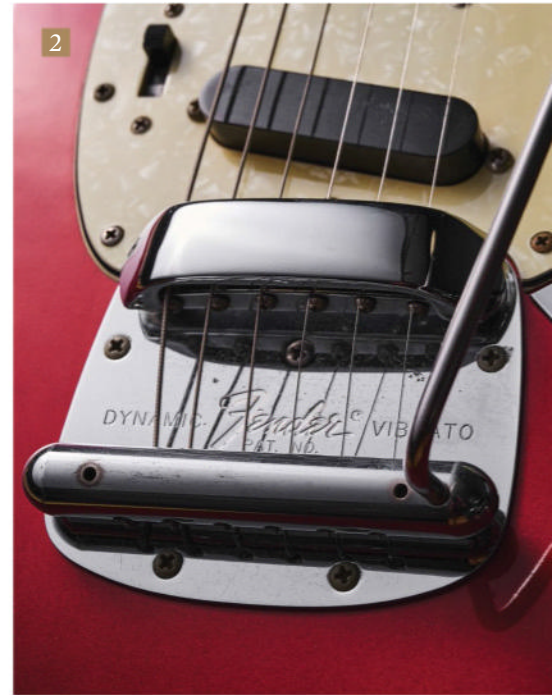






1. The distinctive stripes on Fender's Competition models were supposedly inspired by the racing livery of Carroll Shelby's hot-rodded Ford Mustangs

2. It may be Fender's most rudimentary design, but with a careful setup Mustang vibratos are fairly decent. This model also features two three-way pickup switches



*Many players have come to appreciate the Mustang's easy-playing charms, especially in the wake of Kurt Cobain*

His 'candy' painting process, which Fender adopted, was developed over a 10-year period, and Bailon began applying it to custom builds in 1956. All of Fender's other metallic finishes were mixed and applied in the same manner as Gibson's gold finishes, with metal powder mixed into coloured lacquer. Fender would usually, but not always, apply a white base coat and then spray Lucite acrylic metallic colour coats on top before building the thickness with clear nitrocellulose lacquer.

In 1963, Candy Apple Red replaced the then-unpopular Shell Pink in Fender's custom colour chart. Fender typically began by applying a white base coat, which was then oversprayed in silver. At that time, Fender's silver of choice was a Chevrolet colour called Inca Silver, and it seems probable that's what they would have used for Candy Apple Red. The red component was the same transparent red that was used

for sunbursts and it was applied straight over the silver. This provided depth, with the metallic silver glowing through the red and the topcoats of clear nitrocellulose or poly, depending on whether the guitar was sprayed pre or post mid-1968.

A change was made to the formula when CBS took over in 1965 and Inca Silver was quietly dropped. Rather than continue to buy it especially for Candy Apple Red paint orders, the factory began spraying gold instead. Firemist Gold replaced Shoreline Gold in 1965, so it is most likely the gold that Fender applied until Candy Apple Red was withdrawn in 1973.

### 1966 Jaguar

This is one of the guitars that has maybe been over-polished, but, otherwise, Luke tells us, "it checks out as a really good honest guitar". It combines play-worn gold hardware with an off-white three-ply pickguard, and the foam mute is still mounted on the bridge. Besides what might be an added strap-button screw hole on the lower bout, the finish retains a strong colour and, given that this guitar was clearly played, it's still in largely undamaged condition. The back of the neck also retains its finish and isn't worn or discoloured.

The matching headstock is a standout feature, with its gold-plated string tree, fully intact decal and a set of F-stamped

tuners. The original factory shim is still present in the neck pocket, and the paint stick shadow reveals that Fender applied a semi-opaque yellow stain prior to spraying the white base coat and colour coats.

By 1966, Fender's offset necks were being fitted out with pearloid marker blocks and fretboard binding. Fender necks weren't squared off at the body end, so there was no need for a mitre or butt joint; Fender simply wrapped the binding around, allowing the job to be done using a single strip of binding. Here, the fret ribs are in great shape, and Fender even cut nibs around the nut.

Lifting the pickguard reveals the original pickups and fully intact multi-coloured wiring, switches, components and potentiometers that are dated the 34th week of 1966. The shield plate remains taped to the underside of the pickguard and the finish is only a hair darker, so this Jaguar has barely faded. It weighs 3.85kg (8.5lb) and comes with its original case containing the factory leather strap and hang tags.

### 1970 Competition Mustang

First introduced in 1964, Fender's Mustang was a 'student' model, which was available with two shorter-than-standard necks – 21 frets with a 571.5mm (22.5-inch) scale and 22 frets with a 610mm (24-inch) scale.





Fender devised this guitar (variously called the Swinger) to use up surplus parts, and because they never settled on a name, the ambiguous headstock decal makes this Fender's second but far less desirable 'Nocaster' model







3

*The transparent red was applied straight over the silver. This provided depth, with the metallic silver glowing through*

Besides the finish, this 22-fret example's standout feature is the 'Competition' stripes. They were almost certainly inspired by the special paintwork applied to Carroll Shelby's hot-rodded racing version of the Ford Mustang, and Fender's 'Competition' colours also included dark blue, red and orange.

Competition Mustangs were produced from 1969 until 1973. This one has some minor surface scratches and dents, along with a drop-filled ding on the top and a superficial lacquer crack on the back running half the length of the body. The colour remains dark and vibrant, and the overall condition attests to the toughness of poly finishes as much as minimal use.

For a 'student' model, the Mustang is pretty well equipped, with two pickups and a vibrato. There's a three-way switch assigned to each pickup that turns them off and engages them both in and out of

'phase'. Here, the 1970 date-stamped 250k volume and tone pots are still intact, along with the original 0.05µF ceramic tone capacitor. However, the switches are a bit on the intermittent side. The October 1970 neck still has its original frets and, besides a small dent and a slightly bent top E tuner shaft, it's almost devoid of playwear.

In recent years, many players have come to appreciate the Mustang's easy-playing charms, especially in the wake of Kurt Cobain, so they are no longer as affordable as they once were. This one weighs 3.35kg (7.4lb) and comes with an original Victoria hard case.

### Swinger/Musiclander/Arrow

This fairly obscure Fender was also a 'student' model and is known by various names. It was concocted as a way of using up leftover Bass V bodies and Musicmaster hardware, and production estimates range between 250 and 600. Apparently, they were all assembled in 1969, but neck and potentiometer dates are often earlier.

On this example, the potentiometers are from the 42nd week of 1966, and the short-scale neck has a 1966 date stamp and a very slim profile. The body was refinished by Clive Brown a long time ago and it's not certain that the (now deceased) owner was made aware of that when he bought the guitar from a dealer. The overall condition

3. The faded Candy Apple Red finish looks fantastic on this model, and the bound neck with block markers typifies 1966 Jazzmasters

4. A matching headstock is always a desirable extra with any Fender custom colour, but this one has a tiny cigarette burn. Note the orange tone under the decal



4

is fairly good, with original frets, fully functioning electronics and an original Victoria hard case.

### 1966 Jazzmaster

Of all the Jazzmasters in the collection, this is Luke Hobbs' personal favourite due to the finish fading. During the 1950s and 1960s, most guitar manufacturers struggled with red pigments that lost intensity when exposed to UV light, but the fading that would have been grounds for warranty claims when the guitars were new is now highly prized by many vintage-guitar enthusiasts. The extent of the fading on this late-1966 Jazzmaster is apparent even without looking under the pickguard, where the finish retains a more intense vibrancy. With gold beneath, the exposed areas have softened to a lighter red with a hint of orange. The back is slightly less faded, and in all other regards the guitar is in extremely good condition.

There appears to be no hardware corrosion, and the bound neck retains its original nibbed frets and an unmarked Indian rosewood fretboard. The only obviously noticeable blemish is a cigarette burn on the headstock face, which shares the same faded Candy Apple Red as the body. Interestingly, the area under the logo looks even more orange thanks to the yellowed decal.





The finish has been subjected to a few touch-ups, but this lightweight '66 Tele retains all its original features, including a play-worn 'ashtray' bridge cover







5. Although it looks the part, this '66 Strat has been refinished and it's possible that the hardware has been either re-plated or replaced over the years

6. While 1966 Stratocaster headstocks were larger than pre-CBS models, Fender was still applying transitional decals from the CBS takeover period



The wiring is completely intact, with the original masking-tape pieces securing the wires flat against the shield plate. Besides the serial number, there are various pieces of information that pinpoint the manufacturing date to late 1966. The potentiometers are from the eighth week of 1966, but the neck date reads 13NOV66B and the handwritten dates on the grey-bottom pickups are 11/17/66 and 12/6/66 – in American-date style.

With its original case and a body weight of 3.61kg (8lb), we think this Jazzmaster is a real highlight of the collection.

### 1966 Telecaster

Luke considers this particular Telecaster to be “basically all good”. The finish has survived well, although it's clear numerous drop-fills have been carried out in order to camouflage dents, and there is some armwear. Similarly, the neck finish shows that the guitar has been used with some light surface wear.

The transitional decal is in fairly good shape and the double-line Klusons tuners remain fitted, along with the original pickups. The potentiometers are both replacements, with the volume and tone dating to 1984 and 1986 respectively. The instrument also has a relatively recent paper-in-oil tone capacitor, but the switch appears to be original.

*If you like heavily worn vintage Fenders with copious lacquer-checking and beautiful fading, this Strat is the stuff of dreams*

The jury is out on whether the neck has been refretted, but the frets retain plenty of life. The hardware is in good condition with only very light rusting and tarnishing that doesn't affect functionality. Its Fender case is from the 1970s, but the guitar weighs a mere 3.65kg (8lb) and, according to Luke, it “sounds incredible”.

### 1966 Stratocaster

If you like the look of heavily worn vintage Fenders with armwear on the lower bout, copious lateral lacquer-checking, beautiful fading and ‘tan lines’ around the pickguard, this 1966 Stratocaster is the stuff of dreams. The irony is that it may be the least original of the bunch.

A Strat from this era should have a paint-stick shadow in the neck cavity revealing yellow stain, as we can observe on the Telecaster, Jaguar and Jazzmaster. But besides a bit of red stain, this Strat's

neck pocket is bare wood. The finish in the pickup and control cavities appears excessively thick, and the wood fibres lining the worm rout are caked in lacquer. The solder also looks a bit shiny and reworked around the ground wire connections on the volume potentiometer.

All things considered, Luke believes that the body was refinished a very long time ago. Clive Brown has identified all the guitars in the collection that he refinished, but he didn't mention this one. It certainly looks the part, but Clive would have done the neck pocket correctly.

The potentiometers are dated mid-1966, the pickups all have hand-written dates from early November 1966, and the neck is date stamped September 1966. The fretboard shows some playwear, and the neck has been refretted with chunkier wire, but the ends are slightly protruding and need to be chased back.

Luke is unconvinced the gold bridge parts or pickup and pickguard screws are correct because the plating is so intact. It's possible they have been replaced or replated, but if the looks and 3.49kg (7.8lb) weight appeal, it's a tempting player-grade Strat that may be relatively affordable. 🎸

**With thanks to Luke Hobbs and Gardiner Houlgate for showing us this collection**  
<https://guitar-auctions.co.uk>



# Double Takes

Hot on the heels of the Les Paul Custom 70s, two more blasts from the past rejoin Gibson's USA line-up. The DCs are back!

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Matt Lincoln









## GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR DOUBLE CUT & LES PAUL SPECIAL DOUBLE CUT £1,499 & £1,699

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### What You Need To Know

#### 1 These aren't new guitars, they've been around forever!

We're sure plenty of readers of a certain age will agree! But while the classic single-cut Junior and Special have been a part of the current Gibson USA line-up for a while, these double-cut models are more recent additions: the Junior was initially available online/Gibson Garage-only, then fully released along with the Special in November 2025.

#### 2 Are they 'reissues', then?

Technically, no. If you want that attention to vintage detail, head over to Gibson Custom. Like the current USA versions of the Les Paul Custom 70s, the Les Paul Deluxe and even the Standards, these are modern production versions of what went before – and in this case, the second wave of 'student' models released at the end of the 1950s.

#### 3 But aren't the single-cut Juniors and Specials better than these?

Better? That's down to taste. Different? Yes. Some prefer the original single-cut style, plenty of other players prefer these. You now have that choice.

**A**s history buffs will know, the first Les Paul Junior launched in 1954, the most affordable 'economy' Les Paul below the standard Les Paul model and the top-line Custom. A 'TV' Junior model followed, then the twin-pickup Special launched in 1955. With an eye on sales, the new double-cut Junior and TV were launched in 1958 (the Special was announced then, but production samples weren't shipped until '59).

While the new outline didn't last long before what we call the SG took over in 1961, it was a radical redesign of the

single-cut and more traditional Les Paul shape, and in the wake of the Flying V, Explorer and the ES-335, you had access to all its 22 frets. It was a pivotal design, bridging the gap between that old-looking Les Paul and the more progressively shaped SG.

While the Junior was a sales success, in reality neither were in production for very long, not least the double-cut Special, which placed the neck pickup directly at the end of the neck and created an unstable joint. During 1959, the neck pickup was moved back a little, a new scratchplate was



These might not be reissues, but the gold screenprint logos here follow the original Junior style. The tuners are more modern in style, though, as is the Graph Tech nut





designed, and even the control layout was adapted – and that’s obviously the style Gibson has gone for here.

The design almost seems like a work in progress, then, but one that’s more than earned its place in the classic guitar era aka the Golden Age. But this isn’t an instalment of Historic Hardware, so just how do these antiques stand up in the contemporary world?

### In Build

Each of the new models is offered in Cherry, TV Yellow and Ebony, and essentially these are the same guitar with the exception of the pickup complement and subsequent control count.

The 45mm thick slab bodies are nicely centre-joined slabs of mahogany, with a good radius to the edges, which does get a bit tighter in the cutaways. There are no forearm or ribcage contours, of course, but more so than the single-cut design these feel less brutal and both are well weighted, our Junior dropping into lightweight category. It’s a big change compared with the increasingly weighty Les Pauls we’ve encountered over the past few reviews.

The one-piece quarter-sawn mahogany necks on both are identical, too, as are the dark rosewood fingerboards, the acrylic dot inlays and fret gauge (both are 22-fret guitars with the shorter Gibson scale, which measures under the quoted 629mm/24.75 inches). The only

difference is the cream binding on the fingerboard edges of the Special, but not the headstock. Here, both have model name gold-paint legends: the Junior’s ‘Gibson’ is the same, while the Special’s brand logo is a posher-looking unspecified shell, presumably inlaid.

Hardware is mirrored. Both use the Advanced Plating lightweight aluminium wrapover bridge/tailpiece; the neck angles are identical so neither bridge sits particularly high off the body face, although typically both do slightly tilt forward. Meanwhile, instead of the

**1.** The single P-90 and wrapover bridge equal maximum rock ‘n’ roll! If you want contemporary adjustment to either, it’s best you look elsewhere

**2.** The volume and tone controls help you shape the Junior’s voice, but they’re modern-wired and not as interactive as the original model







3. The 'all access' neck is a marked difference from a single-cut Junior, although the actual heel is very similarly shaped

The Junior is a guitar you can get lost in. The light weight, good setup and lively, vibrant unplugged voice make it the perfect couch noodler

'three-on-a-plate' style of the 50s originals, the tuners are individual units, stamped Gibson Deluxe with Kluson-style backs but the more modern front nut-mounting. Both retain the cream plastic buttons.

The Junior's single-ply and unnecessarily sharp-edged black plastic scratchplate is redrawn from the single-cut model and has become quite a design classic, finding its way onto plenty of contemporary guitars, not least Nik Huber's Krautster, which inspired designs such as PJD's Carey. It leaves plenty of room for the old-style dog-ear covered P-90. The Special's 'plate? Well, it's a black/white/black three-ply plastic and is distinctive, if a little odd, with its outpointing bass-side line that's clearly derived from the single-cut Special's narrower scratchplate. But don't forget, to cover up the 'moved' neck pickup this was (perhaps hastily?) redrawn from the original, itself not exactly a masterpiece.

The Junior is beautifully gloss-finished and deeply coloured. There's slightly more grain sinkage on the TV Yellow

Special, but it's minimal, while the colour is more mustardy than banana bright-yellow. There's some slightly unlevel small finish areas on both, on the top either side of where the neck joins the body, which does look a little careless.

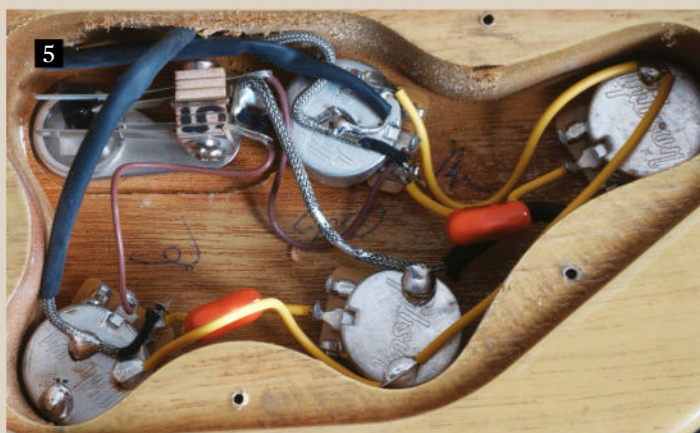
Also, the top edge of the Special's fingerboard binding is left very sharp and we struggle to understand why: surely any seasoned guitar player involved in the production and QC would have gone, 'Hang on a minute, this isn't finished.' It takes minutes to roll the binding – and, frankly, we couldn't resist – instantly improving the feel. Speaking of which...

### Feel & Sounds

This Junior is a guitar you can get lost in. The light weight, good setup and lively, vibrant unplugged voice make it the perfect couch noodler. Strapped on, the balance is perfect – the guitar disappears. The Special is little different, especially after we'd sorted those binding edges.

But it's all about the details, right? And the first thing to shout out here are the





## UNDER THE HOOD

Plenty of differences here – from circuits to neck joints!

**T**he Junior circuit is as simple as it gets. Two Gibson-logo'd pots with a nominal value of 500kohms are used with a 400-volt (223J code) .022µF Orange Drop capacitor. Rather oddly, though, it's wired modern style, when plenty of the appeal of the Junior is the different tonal shades you get by using both controls, not just pulling back your volume and rounding off the pickup's higher end as we have here. Of course, the Special's circuit gains a Switchcraft pickup toggle selector and two extra controls. Again, these are 500k pots, also wired modern style, but one difference is the Orange Drop caps, which are 200-volt (153J code) .015µF here, accounting for the slightly less 'woofy' sound when the tones are fully wound off (anti-clockwise).

The P-90s' DCRs measure (at the point they solder to the volume pots) pretty much the same: the Special's are 7.71k (bridge) and 7.68k (neck); the Junior's is 7.75k. Gibson states its P-90 uses Alnico V magnets (two per pickup) with a nominal value of 8k. They're mounted differently, too. The Junior's Dogear P-90 is screwed directly to the body, the only height adjustment is from the screw-head polepieces (although plenty of aftermarket suppliers offer shims to raise the height). The soapbar P-90s on the Special are held in place by two bolts that thread into a mounting plate screwed to the base of the pickup cavity. They are cushioned by two springs per

The Junior circuit is as simple as it gets... Rather oddly, though, it's wired modern style

pickup and the bridge pickup especially is really loose: you can hear the pickup move as you shake the guitar. We'd be tempted to add some firm rubber or stronger springs.

The Junior's neck tenon – visible with the scratchplate removed – extends some 50mm into the body, approximately 38mm wide and down to the full depth of the neck, approximately 27mm. The TV's neck joint is slightly different. The width of the tenon is about the same as the Junior's at 38mm, but it's truncated by the pickup cavity, the top edge of which sits around 21mm from the end of the fingerboard. The pickup cavity is pretty much the same 21mm in depth, and you can see a small 'foot' that goes under the pickup at the base of the cavity, but that is fairly irrelevant as it's ended by a channel that's routed under the pickup mounting plate.

4. Not much to see here in the Junior's cavity, although it's wired modern style, rather than vintage style

5. While there's much more going on in the Special's cavity, the tone caps are lighter in value than the Junior's

6. The Junior Double Cut's neck tenon sits deep into the body and is covered by the scratchplate

7. The Special Double Cut's tenon, meanwhile, is shorter and extends into the pickup cavity





8. Unlike on the first double-cut Special, the neck pickup is moved away from the fingerboard edge to improve the stability of the neck join

9. Meanwhile, as seen on the original Special, the brand logo here swaps to a shell inlay for a slightly posher look

SlimTaper neck profiles. Whether or not it's the long unsupported-by-the-body neck length, these feel slimmer than Gibson's usual SlimTaper, although both have well-shaped shallow C profiles. Dimensionally, however, they're only marginally different from the recent Noel Gallagher Les Paul's SlimTaper, for example, which measured 20.9mm deep at the 1st fret, 23.6mm by the 12th. Here, the Junior's neck measures virtually identically, 20.4mm and 23.5mm, and the Special's is fractionally slimmer at 20.3mm and 23.3mm. Both necks do have a little flex, certainly compared with our original '57 single-cut Junior neck, which is girder stiff. And although we have the all-access neck, like the SG, here the neck feels less extended than the later design, played seated or strapped on.

Fretting on both is from Gibson's standard gauge, which is more medium than medium jumbo, as we've pointed out before. We've also noticed the low height on some samples, though here it's just about okay – but they're not big, let



alone tall frets. The Junior's are slightly higher, nicely dome-topped, too; the Special's are very slightly lower in height with marginally flatter tops, presumably a result of the levelling process. It's minor, though. Both Graph Tech nuts are well cut, although both D strings stick a little and need easing, but otherwise tuning is pretty solid.

10. After the classic Les Paul-like control layout of the single-cut Special, the toggle switch here moves right in front of the volume controls and it's all a bit cramped

The Special is a vastly expanded vision. It still does dirty rock 'n' roll, but the neck pickup allows you to stretch out and the mix is superb

What about intonation with the wrapover bridges? Well, there's always a compromise with these bridges, but checking the guitars over with a Peterson Strobe tuner they're pretty close and importantly both sound musical. Just be aware of that neck flex we mentioned because it means you can easily pull chords marginally sharp or





push them flat, especially on the Special. Some players use that to their advantage; others, well, don't.

Despite the similarities, in their common bridge positions our Double Cuts do sound slightly different. There's no height adjustment on the Junior's dog-ear P-90 aside from raising the polepieces, which, in this writer's experience, can brighten the voice as opposed to raising the *whole* pickup with the poles just protruding from the cover, which we can do on the Special. So with the Junior's P-90 sitting a little further from the strings, it's the more single-coil sounding of the two; the closer-spaced Special's pickup seems to pull back the brightness, adding more thickness and a smidge more output. With our trusty '57 single-cut as reference, the Special gets closest, although neither has quite the output of the '57; they sound a little softer, less in your face.

But the Special's extra sounds created by the neck pickup, not to mention the combined mix, really broaden its voice.

Voiced on its own, the neck moves from clean jazz comping with the volume pulled back, to Clapton-y/Santana-like cream at full volume. Kick in some basic pedals and it's all here if you have to cover different sounds and styles. The mix seems to enhance the upper-end Fender-y character, possibly because the pickups are slightly closer-spaced: it's a lovely old-soul rhythm sound, plus it can be shaded by the four controls.

If you just run everything full up, you get three distinct voices. Use the volume and tone and there's a lot more, but we do have to warn you that the toggle-switch placement isn't the best. It gets in the way of those volume controls. Just saying...

Overall, then, both our Double Cut models have a different sonic footprint, not only from their older single-cut siblings but different again and lighter than the girth of a 'proper' Les Paul. Nevertheless, the P-90's character really shines here – the fat single coil with its rawer midrange is not only a classic voice, it's rather addictive.

## Verdict

Having played some pretty off-looking, feeling and sounding versions of these guitars over the years, getting them back pretty much as they were (and in the affordable USA line-up) is more than worthy. These are lighter weight, slightly more delicate-feeling (and sounding) guitars compared with the single-cuts, and both are lively, vibrant instruments.

Every rock 'n' roll guitarist needs a Junior, and while this sits on the slightly brighter side of the tracks, just crank it up and there's clarity with that midrange push. Yes, we might be tempted to quickly swap to vintage wiring (a very simple mod) to uncover some more sounds, but as is it's hard to argue with. A lovely piece.

The Special is a vastly expanded vision. It still does dirty rock 'n' roll, but the neck pickup allows you to stretch out, the pickup mix is superb and, of course, you have the extra controls. It's a real journeyman guitar, great for function players but with a host of very classic Gibson voices.





11. The bridge P-90 sits quite high from the body and needs stronger cushioning springs and/or foam. Unlike the Junior's dog-ear P-90, however, adjusting the height is straightforward

Price-wise? Well, compared to their single-cut versions, while our Special DC here is the same price, our Junior DC is actually cheaper. Then there's considerable choice from Gibson USA in this price area from the Original Collection's dual-P-90 SG Special, like our DC's with a hard case, to the Modern strand's all-humbucking Les Paul Modern Lite, Les Paul Studio and Les Paul Music City Special with soft-shell cases.

The P-90's character really shines here – the fat single coil with its rawer midrange is not only a classic voice, it's rather addictive

Yes, there are a few Gibson-isms with slightly patchy detail-finishing and the Special's pickups need more support, and not everyone gets on with the one-piece bridge or indeed the potential noise from the P-90 single coils. For others, though, that's all part of the appeal of slab-body Les Pauls, and these are very welcome reminders of the evocative and influential original designs. After all, choice is good, isn't it? **G**



### GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR DOUBLE CUT

**PRICE:** £1,499 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 624mm (24.6")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech/43.4mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, acrylic dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, medium  
**HARDWARE:** 1-piece wraparound bridge/tailpiece, Kluson-style Gibson Deluxe tuners w/ white buttons – nickel-plating  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 1x Gibson Dogear P-90 single coil, volume and tone control  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.96/6.5  
**OPTIONS:** No  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The single-cut Les Paul Junior in Vintage Tobacco Burst, TV Yellow and Ebony costs £1,599  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model  
**FINISHES:** Vintage Cherry (as reviewed), TV Yellow, Ebony – gloss nitrocellulose



**PROS** Good build; lively and resonant sound; light weight; good-sounding P-90 pickup with a simple drive

**CONS** The pickup might be in need of a shim; this model should be wired vintage style



### GIBSON LES PAUL SPECIAL DOUBLE CUT

**PRICE:** £1,699 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 624mm (24.6")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech/43.4mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Single-bound rosewood, acrylic dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, medium  
**HARDWARE:** 1-piece wraparound bridge/tailpiece, Kluson-style Gibson Deluxe tuners w/ white buttons – nickel-plating  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x Gibson Soapbar P-90 single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.28/7.22  
**OPTIONS:** No  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The single-cut Les Paul Special in Vintage Cherry, TV Yellow and Ebony costs £1,699  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model  
**FINISHES:** TV Yellow (as reviewed), Vintage Cherry, Ebony – gloss nitrocellulose



**PROS** Pretty tidy build; good weight; vastly expanded, classic sounds with the extra pickup and controls

**CONS** Unfinished 'board binding; pickups need more cushioning; shame it's not hum-cancelling in mixed position, P-90s can get noisy!





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# Special Treats

Plenty of makers have used the classic Special and Junior recipes over the years. Here are six that nod to the late 50s

Words Dave Burrluck



## **PRS SE SANTANA £799**

Before Paul Reed Smith came up with his classic outline in the early 80s, his pre-production custom instruments invariably used this Special/Junior DC outline, typically with a mahogany or figured maple carved top. Of course, it added a vibrato that was designed to make Carlos Santana happy, and originally featured a roller nut and locking tuners. Today's SE, which comes with a gigbag, features Santana 'S' humbuckers, while the scale length has recently quietly changed from 622mm (24.5 inches) to 625mm (24.594 inches).

[www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)



## **EPIPHONE IGC 1960 LES PAUL SPECIAL DOUBLE CUT REISSUE £999**

While you can snag a new Epiphone single-cut Junior or Special for £375 and £391 respectively, this Inspired By Gibson Custom Special DC (there is no Junior version) is a beauty with three-on-a-plate tuners, back-placed strap button, Gibson Custom USA P-90s, a case (included) and choice of TV Yellow or Pelham Blue. It also features a 60s SlimTaper neck profile, CTS pots and Bumblebee paper-in-oil capacitors.

[www.gibson.com](http://www.gibson.com)



## **EASTMAN SB55DC/TV £1,495**

Along with the single-cut SB54, this double-cut is a barely disguised Junior copy and a major reason why Eastman's more recent designs have all taken a more original route. It uses the mahogany-alike okoume for neck and body with an ebony fingerboard, quality Faber hardware, tortoiseshell pickguard, Antique Varnish finish and a Lollar '50s spec' dog-ear P-90. Eastman has a good reputation for detailed builds in its own Chinese factory, so if the name on the headstock doesn't bother you, it's highly recommended.

[www.eastmanguitars.com](http://www.eastmanguitars.com)





**PRS S2 MIRA 594 SATIN £1,699**

This recently relaunched Mira uses an outline that's not a million miles from where PRS started (see SE Santana, left) and could be argued to be a 'Special' that's been improved over some 40 years of guitar building. Along with the all-mahogany construction, there's the intonated PRS Stoptail bridge, and, although it's humbucker-only, the two USA 58/15LT pickups have individual coil-split switches. Superbly detailed craft as ever, the new Mira comes in Satin (as here) or Gloss nitro finishes (£1,999) and includes a premium gigbag. [www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)



**MAYBACH LESTER JR DOUBLE CUT SPECIAL TV YELLOW €2,200**

Made in the Czech Republic, Maybach's Lester Jr range includes close cousins of the single-cut Special, and the DC Junior and Special, as here. Known for their quality, this one follows the original recipe with all-mahogany build, an adjustable saddle wrapover bridge with Amber P-90 single coils. It also uses the original Larson headstock outline, either 50s or 'SlimTaper'-style neck profiles, and is available with lightly aged or new-looking nitro finish in plenty of colours. [www.maybach-guitars.de](http://www.maybach-guitars.de)



**PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON JUNIOR £3,200**

Among the many contemporary makers who are Junior/Special fans, Patrick James Eggle presents a boutique vision that's a masterclass in lutherie. The Macon Junior has an all-mahogany construction, a choice of neck profiles, a rosewood 'board, and choice of pickguard material and colour. The icing on the cake is the Mojo dog-ear P-90. Along with Grained Blonde or Black heat-treated nitro finishes, TV Yellow and Cherry are also offered, with more options via the Custom Shop. [www.eggle.co.uk](http://www.eggle.co.uk)





# Paradigm Shift

These new Boss pitch-shifting pedals have been a long time in the making, and now they're here and ready to go toe-to-toe with DigiTech

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker





## BOSS XS-100 & XS-1 £349 & £195

CONTACT **Roland UK** WEB [www.boss.info](http://www.boss.info)

### What You Need To Know

- 1 These are very blue...**  
Well, Boss wasn't going to make them red – that'd be too much like DigiTech's Whammy, for a long time the only game in town for treadle-equipped pitch-shifting pedals.
- 2 What's the USP here, then?**  
In last issue's Blueprint feature, Boss's Matt Knight told us "the idea was to create a polyphonic algorithm where users didn't need to change their playing to get what they wanted out of [the pedals]".
- 3 What sets the two XS pedals apart?**  
The XS-100 has all the bells and whistles but may be a bit large for some pedalboards, so the XS-1 offers much of what it can do in standard Boss Compact form, with an expression pedal as an optional extra.

**W**hen it comes to pitch shifting effects, it's probably fair to say that most guitarists' first thought would go to DigiTech and its Whammy range. After all, it has ruled the roost for quite some time with several well-known players such as David Gilmour and Tom Morello. Boss is no stranger to pitch effects, of course, but it hasn't released a new pitch pedal since the PS-6 Harmonist about 15 years ago. Also, the company has never had a dedicated treadle-equipped pitch pedal like the Whammy – until now, that is.

The XS-100 and its compact XS-1 sibling have large-interval pitch transitions of one or more octaves, along with a smaller interval Tune Down that instantly drops the tuning or raises it like a capo would. Chorus-like detuning is also available. But what are the differences, apart from size?

#### XS-100

The larger XS-100 has one footswitch for Effect that makes the treadle active and

another for the Tune Down function. Both can be active at the same time, and there's also another switch under the toe of the treadle that can be assigned to functions such as raising pitch an extra octave.

Boss has kept the user interface simple and uncluttered. There's an encoder that supports twist and push actions, and two buttons; all three being used to set up all parameters that can be seen on a display.

Our initial thoughts are that this isn't a pedal that you'd tweak hands-on while on stage. Instead, you'd set up in advance and rely on the 30 onboard user-adjustable presets for accessing your sounds. Presets can actually be quickly scrolled through

**The XS-100 and the compact XS-1 both have large-interval pitch transitions of one or more octaves**



All editable parameters can be seen on the display – the most useful is the preset number to the right and the shift intervals for the treadle and Tune Down to the left, one above the other

with the encoder knob, but you also get a mode (entered by pressing both footswitches simultaneously) that lets you scroll through the presets with the two footswitches.

However, two values that can be quickly hands-on adjusted with the encoder knob are the pitch shift intervals that are dialled in for the treadle and the Tune Down, both clearly displayed together in the default display. But you need to get into a deeper tier of editing (called up by hitting the Effect button) to get access to all the effect parameters. There's a list of 16 to scroll through including, among others, the aforementioned pitch intervals, dry/wet mixes and the amount of any





1. There are separate footswitches on the XS-100 for Effect (treadle) and Tune Down below it, which have red and green LEDs respectively. If you hit them simultaneously, you'll enter preset mode – the LEDs turn blue and you can scroll up and down the presets



2. You can push down the treadle to raise the pitch. At the toe-down position you can also engage another switch with extra pressure – an adjacent LED shows when it is active. It is fully customisable for a range of functions

detuning (+/- 50 cents) should you wish to incorporate it into a pitch shift or just run it as a separate effect.

The Memory button calls up another set of parameters related to setting up the pedal. Scrolling through and adjusting each parameter can be somewhat tedious, but it does give you access to a wide range of possible outcomes, and once it's done and stored in a preset you can recall it time and again. However, a computer-based software editor connected via the USB socket would make the whole thing much easier, so we really hope Boss has one in the pipeline...

Any pitch shifter stands and falls on the quality of its shifted sounds, of course – whether there are any unwanted tonal shifts, audible artefacts or noticeable latency – and Boss seems to have got it right here. This is extremely clean pitch-shifting with excellent tracking. The Tune Down is brilliant for dropping down a couple of steps for playing in D and likewise for recreating a 2nd fret capo. Larger shifts all work well downward, so it's easy to switch to baritone, although larger upward shifts do have an air of artificiality that makes them less useful. Adding in a bit of detuning is a useful option, and the effect by itself (without any pitch shifting) offers a pleasantly musical alternative to chorus.

Moving on to treadle-based effects, all those familiar Tom Morello-style octave swoops are available to incorporate into your playing. But while it's an effective tool, we couldn't think of a musical use for the available three- or four-octaves up, apart from freaking out the dog.

You're not limited to just octaves, however, as you can dial in the treadle action in semitone steps – whole-tone bends can work really well incorporated into your playing. With the options of dialling in the wet/dry mix, you also get access to octaver sounds, harmony intervals and faux 12-string.

XS-100 versatility is enhanced by extensive MIDI capability, the option of plugging in a second expression pedal or extra footswitches, and an extra analogue output that mirrors the input signal so you can have some form of wet/dry setup.

## XS-1

In contrast to the XS-100's menu-diving, the XS-1 has a hands-on WYSIWYG operation. With just two knobs and a pair of toggle switches it is easy to understand in an instant. There are toggle-switched choices of standard latching or momentary operation for the footswitch, upwards or downwards pitch shift, or whether you want the Detune effect. A Balance knob rolls anti-clockwise if you want to

## THE RIVALS

The obvious rival to the XS-100 is the treadle-equipped DigiTech Whammy DT (£249), which features separately switched Drop Tune and Whammy functions; there's also the Whammy (£199) without the Drop Tune function. For the XS-1, the equivalent DigiTech pedal would be the Whammy Ricochet (£139), offering up- and down-pitch shifts, and the Drop (£129), which is capable of drop tuning of one to seven semitones or one octave but offers no upward tuning options. Electro-Harmonix's Pitch Fork (£159) can shift your guitar sound up, down or both at the same time, and it's also worth checking out the diminutive Pico Pitch Fork (£169).





add dry sound to the pitch shift, while the pitch shift interval is selected via the rotary Shift switch – up to seven semitones in semitone steps, or one, two or three octaves. It also sets the Detune range from -20 to +20 cents.

Set to an octave jump, the footswitch offers instant movement between pitches, but if you want control over the ramp time, an added Expression pedal will shift pitch by the amount set on the Shift knob. Or you can add a single or double footswitch: the pitch-shift amount can be set for each externally connected footswitch to give instant access for up to three tuning setups.

### Verdict

We wait 15 years for a Boss pitch pedal and then two come along at once... But the wait has been worth it because advances in technology have ensured these new additions work as flawlessly as possible.

While the XS-100 explores all the possibilities, the XS-1 gives you a curated selection to make it a very practical option: there's no need to have a second drop-tune guitar or a baritone on stage, this will cover it – likewise for a bit of 12-string flavour. The same goes for the XS-100, but with foot-control over your pitch bends and intricate editing capability, there's more scope for creativity and adding interest to your leads. **G**

3. The user interface on the XS-100 is minimal, featuring just two buttons and an encoder. Press on Effect or Memory to go to their menus. A push on the encoder selects items, while turning scrolls menus and changes parameter values

4. Toggle switches make the XS-1 easy to set up. Choose between Toggle (latching) and Momentary action for the footswitch, and set up the pedal for up- or down-pitch changes or a Detune effect



### BOSS XS-100

**PRICE:** £349

**ORIGIN:** Malaysia

**TYPE:** Polyphonic pitch shifting pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, adjustable pedal curve and response, 30 memories, 8-octave range, analogue output that mirrors the input signal

**CONTROLS:** Encoder, Effect button, Memory button, Effect footswitch, Tune Down footswitch, treadle

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output, standard Thru, CTL/Exp pedal input, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB

**POWER:** Supplied 9V PSB-1U adaptor (unit current draw: 160mA)

**DIMENSIONS:** 147 (w) x 225 (d) x 70mm (h)



**PROS** Clean pitch shifting; presets; smooth treadle action; footswitching for two separate effects; editability; MIDI

**CONS** There are a lot of menu items to scroll through when setting up your presets



### BOSS XS-1

**PRICE:** £195

**ORIGIN:** Malaysia

**TYPE:** Polyphonic pitch shifting pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass

**CONTROLS:** Balance, Shift, Toggle/Moment switch, Shift switch, footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output, CTL/Exp pedal input

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied). Unit current draw is 160mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 73 (w) x 129 (d) x 59mm (h)



**PROS** Compact size; clean pitch shifting; easy hands-on operation; standalone Detune effect; provision to add an expression pedal

**CONS** You will need an expression pedal if you want to unlock the full potential of the XS-1



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« BLUEPRINT »

# SUPER HERO

Long hidden in the shadows of Fender history, the early 60s brown-panel Super Amp has reemerged. Senior product manager, Rick Heins, talks us through its rebirth

Words Charlie Wilkins Photography Olly Curtis

**W**hen Fender announced the return of the '62 Super Amp as part of its American Vintage series, tone-chasers took notice. Often overshadowed by its tweed and black-panel siblings, the original brown-panel Super, produced briefly between 1960 and 1963, bridged the gap between the raw sag of the late-50s tweeds and the glassy, high-headroom clarity of the later black-panel amplifiers. Because production numbers were relatively low, authentic brown-panel Supers are rare and their tone has become almost mythical among collectors.

For decades, these Supers have been prized for their unique warm, woody, harmonically rich tone, commanding serious prices on the vintage market. In fact, the early 60s brown-panel Supers remain some of the most sought-after amps ever made.

With a 40-watt 6L6 power section, a pair of 10-inch speakers and a unique Harmonic Tremolo circuit, the Super delivered a rich, warm clean sound that bloomed into sweet, chewy overdrive when cranked. The new '62 Super Amp aims to deliver that brown-panel era experience once again. And the result is far more than a reissue; it's a vivid resurrection of the brown-panel era, capturing the organic depth and expressive feel of early 60s Fender tone.

Fender's design team studied and replicated the original circuitry with remarkable precision, meticulously



engineering the amp from the ground up. Working closely with Celestion, the team developed a new pair of 10-inch speakers voiced specifically for this amp, delivering the same punch, warmth and responsiveness that defined the original. From its period-correct brown Tolex to its unmistakable sonic character, the new '62 Super Amp (reviewed on page 14) offers an authentic brown-era experience for a new generation of players. Senior product manager, Rick Heins, reveals how this classic was brought roaring back to life.

## What inspired Fender to revisit the brown-panel-era Super Amp?

"The '62 Super has such an interesting place in Fender's history. The brown-panel amps are one of those eras not many players have experienced. They're rare, expensive, getting harder to find and

almost unobtainable at this point. We're always looking at vintage Fender amps that people still talk about as 'the ones that got away', and the Super kept popping up in those conversations.

"I remember being in New York for work and wandering into a Guitar Center that had a vintage room. I picked up a guitar and plugged into what I think was a '61 or '62 Super. It just floored me – that throaty overdrive, the warmth, the Harmonic Tremolo. It had such a unique voice. People literally started coming into the room asking what amp I was playing. That stuck with me. I thought, 'If we ever expand the American Vintage line, this could be something really special.'

"We'd also noticed on forums and in player discussions that the brown-panel amps, especially those with Harmonic Tremolo, were getting a lot of love and commanding serious prices. That told us there was real interest. Between the sound, the scarcity and the story, it just felt like the right time to bring the Super back and reintroduce an era of Fender that a lot of players have never had the chance to hear or feel."

## How long did the original Super run in the Fender line-up?

"I want to say they started making it around 1960. And then I think probably there was some crossover, like in '63 or '64, when the black-panels started coming out, so there was some overhang between both. But I would say the last ones were probably

PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER





1. Senior product manager, Rick Heins, was mesmerised by an early 60s original brown-panel amp. "We're always looking at 'the ones that got away,'" he says

2. The brown-panel era lies between Fender's celebrated late-50s tweeds and the black-panel amps of the mid-60s



"[The original Super] just floored me – that throaty overdrive, the warmth, the Harmonic Tremolo. It had such a unique voice"





around '63. So you're talking like three years or so that it was around, might even be a little longer. I've seen '60s, I've seen '62s. I'm not sure I've ever seen any '63s. They soon transitioned into the black-panel with a different circuit, so it wasn't a long run."

**Brown-panel amps fit in between the tweeds and the black-panels. What's your take on the tonal differences?**

"It was an interesting time for Fender amp circuits. When Leo was working on the tweeds, people forget, the amps were designed to amplify clean tone, not distortion. Tweeds ended up distorted and guitarists loved that, but Leo was kind of unhappy with it. So with the browns, he started working on the circuits to get them cleaner. They still had a bit of hair, still distorted a touch, but [were] more refined. That's why he moved on to the black-panels later and those got cleaner again.

"But the brown-panels have a sound that's really hard to classify. Very warm and woody. When you play a Strat,

"Browns have a punchiness, a sort of immediate feel. The power section feels more robust"

especially on the neck pickup, through a brown-panel, there's this organic, woody tone. Black-panels can be bright, which is great and what was intended, but they can lack some of that warmth in the midrange. Browns have a punchiness, a sort of immediate feel. They don't sag like tweeds. The power section feels more robust. Crank one and it's a warm, fat overdrive. Not thin, not 'paper tear' distortion, but a fuller, fatter sound. That midrange and warmth sits perfectly in a mix, whether live or recording.

"A lot of times, when you record a guitar, you end up chopping lows and highs to fit it with drums, bass and everything else. A brown-panel naturally sits in that sweet spot where you're not fighting with the bass or cymbals. When you're playing, it has a unique feel under your fingers, so very tactile."

**Why are the original Supers considered hidden treasures and why are they so rare?**

"Well, there just weren't as many made as the tweeds or black-panels. You don't see them on the market often. I think it's just one of those transitional amps. Leo was always tinkering, trying to make them cleaner. There are a few amps from that era that are cool but don't get their due, mostly because people haven't played them. It's hard to get excited about an amp if you've never heard it, right?"

**How closely does the new version follow the original circuit?**

"We bought an original in really good shape and spent a lot of time dialling it in. We tried to get it as close as possible to the sound of the original. But there are things that you just can't replicate – such as ageing a cabinet 60-plus years, original tubes like RCA – but aside from that, we went through a very rigorous process and compared it over and over again. Initially, it sounded good, but it just wasn't close enough, so we'd send it back to R&D, tweak it and try again.

"Some original components aren't available any more, so we had to find ways to match the sound with modern tech. And I think we did really well. We compared it using the same speakers as the original and, to my ears, it's very close. You can tell the difference if you're listening for it, but it feels authentic."

**Were there any changes that you had to make to the circuit?**

"No major changes. Everything was intentional. We did slow down the tremolo, though. The original tremolo is fast, even at its lowest setting it's pretty quick, and at its fastest, you almost can't hear it. We figured most players today would want it slower, more gradual. Otherwise, everything's the same. Same tube count, same Harmonic Tremolo design."





3. While minor modern concessions have been made, the original circuitry is replicated here, including the Harmonic Tremolo

4. Replacing the Jensen Alnico speakers of the 60s originals, these ceramic Celestion speakers are custom-made for the '62 Super Amp and "entirely unique"

"Turn it up! That's where this amp really sings. You'll feel the difference from clean to fat overdrive... [It's] really special"





5. Rigorous testing and review by Fender's R&D team ensured the new '62 Super Amp embodies the sound of its forebear

6-7. The amp comes complete with a vintage-style single-button footswitch and fitted cover

#### What features make the Harmonic Tremolo unique?

"It's phase-shifting, tube-based tremolo, so it's different from bias tremolo or Opto units in 60s Twins and Deluxes. It uses extra tubes to create this effect. It almost sounds like the pitch is shifting, similar to a Rotovibe or that Hendrix vibe – very subtle and musical. Leo probably moved on from this design because the extra tubes needed to make it work cost money. He was also experimenting more with tube-driven reverb."

#### How did you recreate the speakers?

"The original had Jensen Alnico speakers. Great clean tone, but they collapse when you crank it. In the early 60s, guitarists played differently and really didn't crank the amps past clean, so there was no issue with Alnicos. For the reissue, we wanted something that handles clean and cranked tones and that retains warmth

"For the reissue, we wanted something that handles clean and cranked tones and that retains warmth and woody character"

and woody character. We worked closely with Celestion to make a custom ceramic speaker, not based on originals but entirely unique. We undertook A/B testing against other modern replacement speakers, even double-blind testing, to make sure we weren't just choosing with our eyes. We got something that holds up under volume, sounds clean and warm, and is great for rock or country. It's still unmistakably a Super, with just a touch of flavour difference."

#### When placed side by side with the original speakers, do they sound the same at moderate volume?

"Close enough that you wouldn't mistake one for the other. Alnicos push differently from ceramics, but it's subtle. We're comfortable saying it sounds like a Super."

#### Are there any other modern features aside from the tremolo tweak?

"Not really. The rectifier is the same, the circuit's the same. We're using PCB instead of full hand-wiring, but critical tube sockets and areas are hand-wired. The footswitch and cover match the original. The goal was a true American Vintage feel without driving the price through the roof."

#### What did you use to voice the amp?

"We used Strats, Teles, humbuckers – they all sound great. Crank it up and it


gets fuller and fatter, really meaner, but it doesn't collapse. Also the volume knob on the reissue is gradual, unlike some black-panels where volume jumps from zero to 50."

#### Did you encounter any challenges when replicating the warm woody tone or the sparkling clean tone?

"Yes, balancing warmth and sparkle with modern components was tricky. You want that warm, woody tone, but you also need sparkle on top, especially when playing a Strat in position 4; you want that spanky, quacky sound."

"Our R&D team knows these amps inside and out and wanted [the reissue] to sound right with a Strat, Tele or humbuckers. When you crank the volume it fattens up without falling apart. It's got great overdrive that's full, fat and musical. Midrange punch and warmth are the key signatures for this amp, but they also have a lot of presence so you won't get lost in the mix."

#### Are there any other defining features of this new '62 Super Amp?

"Turn it up! That's where it really sings. You'll feel the difference from clean to fat overdrive. You can get usable sounds at low volumes, but it gets bigger as you turn up – really nice. These amps are fun to play and really special." 

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## Guitarist







# MIKE VENNART

The former Oceansize and long-time Biffy Clyro touring guitarist on his love of off-the-beaten-path six-strings, his disdain for acoustics, and why Japanese Squiers are the best bargain around

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

"I was lucky enough that I'd started playing when I was really young, so my mum got me a couple of really great guitars, namely a Squier Strat. It was a Japanese Squier Strat, which I still play to this day. It's just an awesome piece of gear. After that, I was gifted a guitar by Fender. But the first guitar that I made a point of purchasing was a Fender Jazzmaster – because in 2008 or thereabouts, it was just not possible to get a left-handed Jazzmaster in

shows, even though it's not really acoustic. It makes me feel a certain way, it's got a beautiful sound, and it's nice and easy to play. But I fucking hate playing acoustic guitar. I can't think of anything more boring [laughs], so this thing brings the best out in me – I can get a lot of inspiration out of this guitar. It's got one single P-90 in the neck, and that's all it does. It's fantastic"

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

"I don't know if I've ever really had that. Everything I've bought is stuff I've known for sure I wanted and made sure it was the right thing to get. I've bought a couple of guitars that I ended up spending a fortune modifying, trying to get them to work correctly [laughs]. But, ultimately, I try not to buy guitars off the internet because I need to play them first, you know? I can tell within one minute of playing a guitar whether or not I think it's any good or not. And it's kind of slim pickings for me as a left-handed player. I get excited when I see a good-looking left-handed guitar – I have to try it out. But if it ain't speaking to me, if I can't feel a song in it straight away, then I put it down and don't think about it again.

"But there are some guitars that I've bought over the years that I just have no choice but to buy them. I've got a 1978 Fender Strat right here... it weighs more than any Les Paul I've ever played [laughs]. It's kind of ugly; it's like a sunburst with a black scratchplate. It's really nothing to look at, but it plays beautifully and it sounds great. So I just had to buy it, and that's probably the most expensive thing I've ever bought. I think it's like 2,400 quid or something."

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

"Not as such. I had a Butterscotch Tele and I tried everything to make it playable and fun. I put new pickups in it; I just did all this stuff, but I could never work out why I wasn't feeling it. I don't know what it was... it kind of sounded just like a banjo. It didn't resonate at all. I think maybe the two pieces of wood just weren't friends with each other. And now, every so often, somebody will get in touch and say, 'Hey, did this used to be your

## ***"It's slim pickings for me as a left-handed player. I get excited when I see a good-looking left-handed guitar"***

1. According to Mike, Japanese Squier Strats from the 80s are the ultimate guitar and "will become part of the fabric of your playing"

2. This lefty Jazzmaster was made to order in 2008 by Fender Japan: "To this day, it's one of the best guitars I own," says Mike

3. This Shergold Masquerader is a new addition – a homage to his inspirations (and now bandmates) in the Cardiacs

4. The Godin 5th Avenue joined Mike in lockdown: "It brings the best out in me," he says

5. "Kind of ugly... but it plays beautifully"; this 1978 Fender Strat was a no-brainer purchase, despite its heavy weight and price tag

this country. Even though I had contacts at Fender, they told me, 'No, man, you might as well be ringing Ibanez, we just don't make left-handed Jazzmasters.' So I had to go to Fender Japan, have them build it and send it over. And to this day, it's one of the best guitars I own. It's just so versatile. I put a P-90 in the bridge and I can play heavy stuff with it, I can play really jangly tiny chords with the neck pickup. It's a whole lot of guitar and I love it. I use it a lot."

## ***What was the last guitar you bought, and why?***

"I bought a Shergold Masquerader, a British guitar brand from the 70s, and I'm a huge Cardiacs fan and I'm *actually* now in the fucking Cardiacs! So I bought this because several members of Cardiacs played Masqueraders and I thought it'd be a cool thing to have. I don't think I'm gonna use it on stage with Cardiacs – that might be a little bit too much of a homage, really."

## ***What's the most incredible find or bargain you had when buying guitars?***

"Over lockdown, I'd accumulated a ton of air miles and, obviously I couldn't use them, so I changed them into points and bought a Godin 5th Avenue on eBay for like 350 quid. It's not my usual kind of guitar at all, but it's got class, and I can kind of get away with using it at acoustic



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE VENNART



## Bought & Sold

As a left-handed player, Mike has had fewer choices, but over the years he's managed to amass a diverse guitar collection that works for him

### MIKE'S GO-TO RIG

"For Biffy, I'm using Laney amps – I'm using a Laney Supergroup because I'm a big Tony Iommi obsessive. I had to try getting more headroom because, for Biffy, right now, I'm using a lot more reverb and modulation. I needed a much cleaner signal than I was getting out of my previous amps.

"For guitars, I have a PJD Custom Saint John. It's got Wide Range [style] humbucker in the bridge and a Jazzmaster pickup in the neck. I'm also using a Rigby custom [T-style] that's got Filter Trons in it. Then I'm using a Les Paul Goldtop Standard and the Gibson Tony Iommi SG with P-90s, which sounds raunchy and ballsy but cleans up really sweet.

"Pedals-wise, I'm using a Klon clone; that's my main distortion and it just absolutely articulates. I'm also using a green Big Muff [Pi V7 Green Russian], and I've just ventured into the world of Line 6 pedals – I'm using the HX Stomp for modulation and reverb.

"I have the Boss DM-101 [Delay Machine] for my echo stuff. For the time I was in Oceansize, my echoes were the Boss DM-2, which I just think is the king of all delay pedals. But the Boss DM-101, gives all this incredibly ambient, beautifully washy delay – and it's tap tempo as well, so I was like, 'I gotta have this thing.' It's just incredible."



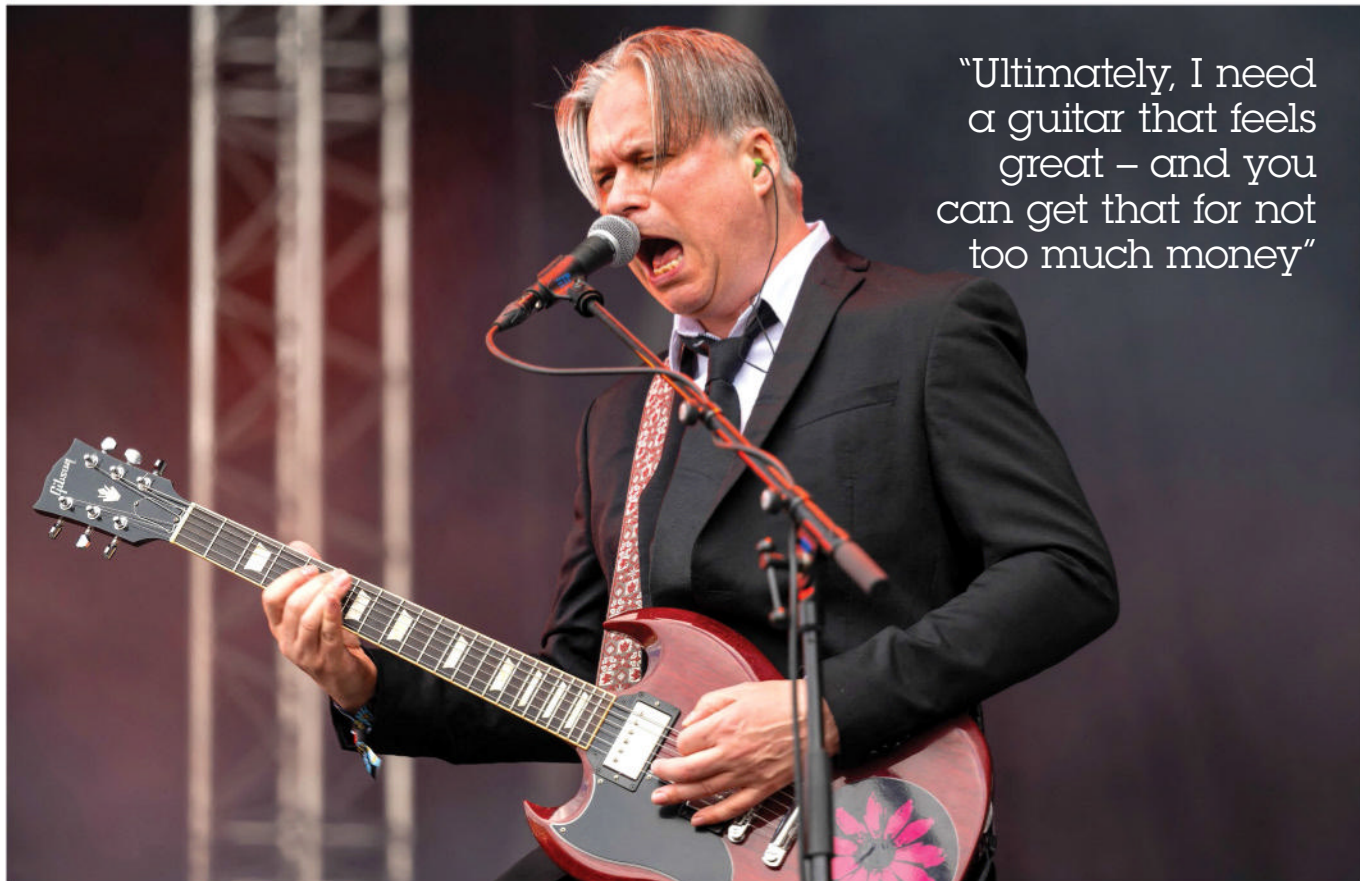


PHOTO BY TOREEN CHRISTENSEN/RITZAU SCANPIX/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Mike's use of a Gibson SG as well as a Laney Supergroup amp reveal him as a "Tony Iommi obsessive", and with Biffy Clyro he's reaching for a lot of reverb and modulation, too

guitar?' And I'll see it and I'll think, 'Fuck, I used to love that thing, but it never loved me back.' Obviously, now somebody's put a humbucker in and an EverTune bridge and all kinds of mods, but it's still the one that I'm like, 'I used to love gazing at that thing, but it just sounded like shit' [laughs]."

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

"It's always gonna be the Japanese Squier Strats from the 1980s. I mean, I've got two of them and one of them is my all-time dream guitar! I've put a few mods on it, you know, you'll probably need to change the pickups and you'll probably need to change the tuners. But if you're just getting into playing guitar and you want something that's going to make you feel good, and make it as easy as it can be, then the Japanese Squier Strats will become part of the fabric of your playing. I honestly think that they're as good as any Strats you can buy. And they're going up in value, I think, so they're kind of hard to catch these days. But fuck, they're amazing! I love them."

### ***What were you looking at the last time you looked in a guitar-shop window or online?***

"Every so often, this left-handed 1952 Les Paul shows up on the internet, and I'm like, 'Oh my God, have I got any millionaire friends out there who wanna just buy me this thing?' I do have a fantasy that one day I'll be able to own a guitar from 1976, my birth year, but I'm wary of buying anything off the internet without playing it first. And most Fenders and Gibsons from the 70s are probably going to be absolute dogs, you know? There was sketchy quality control in those days, so a 1976 anything is gonna be a very risky purchase. But I have a particular hankering for an early 70s Strat, a hardtail. They just seem to have such a beautiful resonance and that bell-like chime thing that I'm obsessed with."

### ***If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?***

"Oh, man, that is a nightmare because I can completely contradict myself both ways on that! Ultimately, I need a guitar that feels great – and you can get a guitar that feels great for not too much money. That is absolutely possible. You could build your own guitar for not too much money, you know? But in terms of amplifiers and cabinets, a lesson I need to keep learning is that it's primarily about the cabinet. You need to make sure you've got the right speakers, but with amps, I keep buying them [laughs]. I keep changing brands and I keep circling back to the same one, which is an Orange Retro 50. It's just five knobs and the truth: no bullshit, no effects loop, no attenuator, just an incredible, thick British 'Plexi' sound. It's awesome."

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

"Single coils because I could get a really beefed-up single coil for the bridge. In fact, what I use on most of my Strats is a single coil that's kind of overwound to hell. When you kick the dirt in, it sounds heavy and it really chugs like a humbucker. But then, what I want in the neck is always going to be a single coil – always. I just find that, although I love a humbucker in the bridge, a humbucker in the neck position is often too woolly for me. It's cool for solos and sounding like Slash and all that stuff, but a humbucker in the neck is just too hot. I can't quite get out of it what I want." **[AD]**



Mike Vennart's latest album, *Forgiveness & The Grain*, is available now on independent release

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# JUNIOR HIGH

What on earth is the appeal of a single-pickup guitar and how can it help you to hone your modding skills? Dave Burrluck goes in search of a giggable 'Junior'...

**A**s we celebrate elsewhere in this issue, the Gibson Les Paul Junior continues to influence our taste some seven decades after it first appeared on the scene. Its reputation as the most stripped-back solidbody can pigeonhole it as a guitar just for rockers and punks, but there are plenty of times that a single-pickup guitar is all you need. When I looked at an upcoming gig setlist, I realised that 90 per cent of the songs I'll have to play are all on the bridge pickup and, inspired by that Gibson review, I quite fancy taking a 'Junior' to the gig. Bare bones, why not?

But also – why? Surely, you don't just go onto your neck pickup and *any* dual-pickup guitar becomes a 'Junior'? Fair cop, but many will propose that *without* a neck pickup physically attached to a guitar, there's less potential string-pull from the missing magnets – therefore more sustain, man! – which is one factor why some believe single-pickup guitars, Juniors or Fender Esquires, for example, sound so good.

Whatever you believe or your experience itself tells you about that, any single-pickup guitar throws the focus on the pickup *and* the typically simple circuit, which can sometimes get forgotten about, not least if you're the type of player who uses their volume control to clean or increase the heat and your tone to pull back some highs.

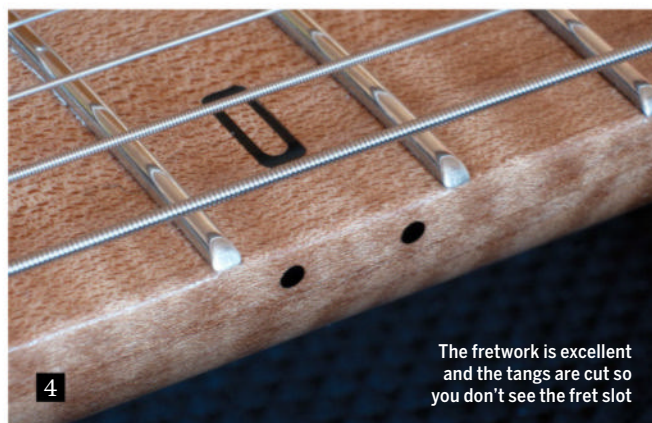
As I discuss in our Gibson review on page 86 of this issue, the original Juniors use what we call 50s or 'vintage' wiring; the modern ones use, well, modern wiring. There's no difference between the actual components – which historically are two pots with a nominal value of 500kohms and a single .022µF capacitor – just where

the capacitor solders to the volume pot. So for vintage style, you connect it to the centre output lug (the same as the hot wire to the output jack); for modern, it connects to the input lug of the volume pot, the same as the pickup. Hardly rocket science and an easy and reversible thing to try if you haven't already [pic 1].

But the actual difference is how those two controls seem to interact more with each other in vintage style than with the way-more-common modern style of wiring. Pulling back the volume, you notice there's less treble roll-off; it says clean. As you pull back the tone (with the volume rolled back a little), it thins the sound and, unusually, as you then wind the tone back up it's now adding some heat and thickness, while the actual volume stays put. A different drive.

The other thing to bear in mind is that you can use *both* styles on a dual-pickup guitar like a Les Paul. You can wire the bridge pickup's volume and tone modern style, then the neck's vintage style or vice versa. That can be fun.

"The Junior can get pigeonholed, but often a single-pickup guitar is all you need"





The UK-made PJD Carey Apprentice, a single-pickup guitar with a Fender-y bite







Just running a nut file through the string groove to improve the exit angle and tuning stability



Unlike most Juniors or clones, the Gotoh bridge here is fully adjustable for height and individual string intonation

## Junior & Beyond

Today, in the mainstream market, single-pickup guitars aren't that common outside of Gibson's offerings (or clones thereof) or replicas of classic Van Halen-style hot-rods, of course. While I was researching the topic, I was reminded of a guitar about which I'd previously said: "If Leo Fender was asked to make a Les Paul Junior, it might have turned out just like this." That guitar was a UK-made PJD Carey Apprentice, a sort of 'Telecaster' with its bolt-on Fender scale neck and through-strung hardtail bridge but with a single-cut shape and originally a single soapbar P-90 with volume and tone. At launch back in 2022, these limited pieces weren't cheap at £2k, though, not least in their cracked nitro finishes.

After tracking down a sample (actually five that were showing on the website!), I thought it wouldn't hurt to call the local-to-me dealer and just see what the best price on one might be. I don't know if wires got crossed, but when the quote came back as being 60 per cent off the original retail price (albeit with no Hiscox case or build certificate), well, I arranged to pop in and take a look. This could be a blistering Black Friday deal!

The history of Regent Sounds on London's famous Denmark Street is certainly evocative of past times and it does a great impersonation of that old-guitar-shop vibe, albeit more spacious than I remember, with guitars in the window and on every available bit of wall space. I quickly saw the reason for my visit: a little out of reach were three rather forlorn-looking simplistic guitars (I'm not sure what had happened to the other two), appearing identical, that I was there to check. The hang tags sort of tell the story: 'PJD Carey Jr Nitro.'

The idea was simple: I'd play through the different guitars and choose the one I liked best. In theory, that was doable, except it was plainly obvious that the trio still had their original strings, all could do with a bit of TLC, and they'd probably been sitting



The Apprentice is also through-strung and here the rear ferrules are surrounded by fine finish cracks

around for the past three years. While Regent Sounds did offer me a free setup, I declined – but I did accept their offer of a couple of sets of D'Addarios. I had a quick strum, gauged the light weight, made a choice, paid up and headed off before someone realised their error.

## Sticking To The Style

Like the original Gibson, PJD's 2022 Apprentice is seemingly as basic as it gets. The luxuries are the volume and tone controls, which should open up some usable variation. That's assuming we have a good voice to work with in the first place. The body is obeche, contributing to a light weight of 2.94kg (6.5lb), and it became a more visible body wood a little while back proposed by highly regarded makers such as Seth Baccus. It has found its way onto many UK builds since then and is used by PJD on its current start-up UK-made Standards. Whether it has that vague tonal stamp that we associate with alder, light ash, mahogany and so on, however, is less clear. But as a good, lighter weight and hopefully resonant platform (if a little neutral-sounding), it needs to be driven: it really needs a stiff neck, a solid anchor

and ring from the hardware. It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that ring – and this Apprentice has that in spades.

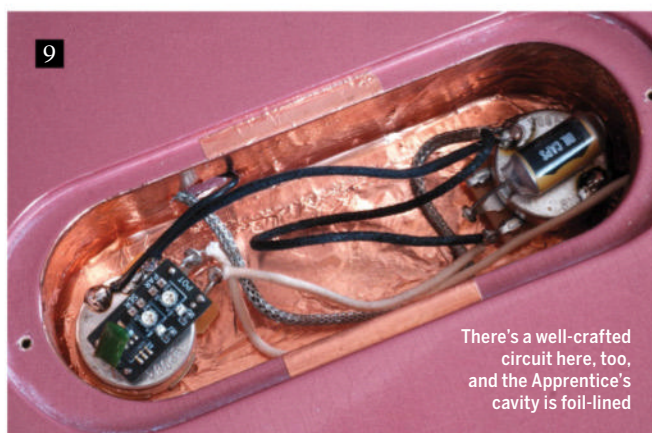
As originally, call anything 'Junior' today and it just has one pickup. Needless to say, that's pretty important. Gibson obviously used its dog-ear P-90 single coil and a soapbar on the later double-cuts, and here we clearly have a soapbar P-90. But I wasn't sure exactly what pickup is used on this new-to-me Apprentice [pic 2]. The first run of 12 guitars used a Cream T soapbar, which I'd tested and reviewed. But the next run? It seems some used a new pickup coined the 'Fat Nacho' (great name!) by PJD's Josh Parkin, who had begun making pickups in-house at PJD. But pulling out the pickup, it's clearly a Cream T-made Fat Nacho, a pickup the Brit-based company has next to zero info on today [pic 3]. This one measures a little hotter at 8.24k, but Cream T's Richard Whitney confirms, "yes, the Fat Nachos were a PJD [Josh]-designed pickup that certainly were made with plain enamel wire and Alnico II magnets, but I think we only made 12 here in the end".

PJD still makes a pickup with that name, which it likewise describes as being wound

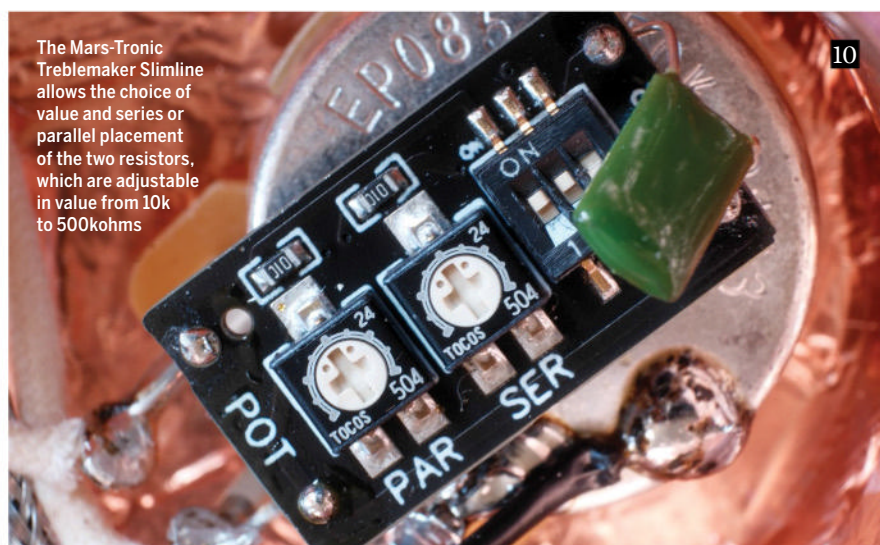




There's some lovely custom shop-like flamed figure to the quarter-sawn neck



There's a well-crafted circuit here, too, and the Apprentice's cavity is foil-lined



The Mars-Tronic Treblemaker Slimline allows the choice of value and series or parallel placement of the two resistors, which are adjustable in value from 10k to 500kohms

using 42 AWG plain enamel wire over Alnico II magnets: "Featuring a cooler wind than the Parkins Cream, this vintage-accurate mid-50s P-90 offers tones with a pronounced treble, which is rounded off with a sweet midrange and rich bass."

### Some TLC

Pickup aside, for a guitar that has been sitting-in-store for the best part of three years, presumably with the occasional play, the Apprentice is nearly 100 per cent ready to go. Obviously, a good rub-down is in order with a dry cloth, then a little buff and polish of the frets helps to refresh the guitar. The Jescar frets are beautifully installed with domed ends and the tangs are cut so you don't see any fret slots on the fingerboard edge. Nice craft [pic 4].

Then, as usual, a quick truss rod check revealed a slightly too-straight neck that just needed a quick relaxing adjustment to introduce some minimal relief. The bone nut looks well cut (I did bring the top down a little and round all the edges), but it had a slight 'zing' on the top E, so I ran a MusicNomad nut file through the groove to slope it to match the exit angle of the string to the tuner [pic 5]. That worked,

so I did the same on the other grooves. Really minimal work, but after the new strings were stretched and everything settled in, it's proving very stable.

Unlike a Junior's wrapover bridge, the six block-saddle Gotoh bridge [pic 6] can be more accurately intonated and, to be honest, I didn't need to touch it. Or string height, either: after that truss rod tweak it was bang on 0.06 inches on the high E and 0.07 inches on the low E. A few minutes of basic work and, well, it's playing like a new guitar, and a real quality one at that.


The body's cracked nitro finish, with just a couple of minor dings, looks neither old nor new, just a bit used [pic 7]. But it's glossed, not a faux satin or matt, and the dark pink Frozen Berry looks like a classic car colour from the 50s. Until the new Standard line came along in 2023, PJD's necks were all a quarter-sawn roasted maple with a caramel colouration, dark grain stripes and (as here) quite a flame-y figure, which really adds to the 'custom shop' vibe [pic 8]. It's a little fuller feeling in the hand, too, certainly in lower positions, than my 2019 Carey Standard and feels more old Telecaster-like, its satin back almost bare-wood in feel.

The circuit on these original Apprentices is also a little unusual. For example, both pots are 250k, wired modern style, with that Mars-Tronic variable treble bleed [pics 9 and 10 in detail]. Setting pickup height to your taste is another basic task, but the soapbar here is seeming quite stiff in its mounting and I couldn't get it quite close enough to the strings. There is a foam cushion under the pickup, but I also added a couple of small strong string springs to push the cushion-tension up and then it was quick to set the height to where I wanted as a starting point.

Now, it might be a very different guitar from an actual Gibson Les Paul Junior, but it's a similar thickness sonically, with a Fender-y bite and a little more zing. It's in the right throaty midrange area full-up

### "PJD's Carey Apprentice has a similar thickness sonically as a Les Paul Junior"

and, particularly thanks to that treble bleed, cleans up rather nicely, too, the tone pulling back the highs or creating a rounder faux-neck pickup voice. In anyone's book, this is a very good 'Junior'.

How it's possible to stumble across a custom shop-quality UK-made guitar going begging for the price of a much lower-ticket mass-produced instrument is beyond me. Perhaps one day the market might reset itself and we'll return to valuing guitars as musical instruments. But either way, use your Mod Squad skills and keep your eyes peeled. There are some *great* guitars out there just needing some love. 

The Mod Squad would like to thank Regent Sounds for its great service ([www.regentsounds.com](http://www.regentsounds.com))



# JUNIOR CALLING

An underground classic in the making?  
Here's the Apprentice lowdown

**P**JD's Carey Apprentice first took flight towards the end of summer 2022 as a small run of just 12 pieces with a cracked gloss nitro-finished slab body and headstock face (which introduced a new gold decal logo) in either 3 Tone Tear Drop Burst [pic 1] or Butterscotch, six in each colour. Unlike the typically chambered light ash or mahogany of the then-Standard models, the Apprentice introduced solid obeche for the body wood, while the neck was quarter-sawn roasted 3A figured maple with a satin nitro back, PJD's standard at the time.

The original pickup was a Cream T Apprentice 59 P-90 soapbar single coil – a slighter hotter version of Cream T's The Duke soapbar, we were told – with a measured DCR of 7.78kohms along with a volume control that included

the Ben Marshall-design Mars-Tronic Treblemaker variable treble bleed circuit and a tone control.

A second run followed, initially teased in September 2022, which came in three lightly dinged and cracked nitro colours: Midnight Black, Dalby Forest Green and Frozen Berry, limited to 12 pieces in each colour. Other colours were made, too, such as Cream Soda and a Wine Red, the former finding

"Gone was the nearly £2k vintage-y ride, replaced by a real fit-for-purpose UK-made guitar and still a bargain today"

its way into Graham Coxon's hands for the reunited Blur tour during the summer of 2023.

Within two years, the Apprentice reappeared initially in PJD's offset St John style, followed by the Carey. After rejigging the company and introducing the new Standard models, first at £1,200, the new Apprentice now had to drop below that, becoming a direct-only order from PJD at £899 with gigbag. Gone was the nearly £2k vintage-y ride (with its logo'd Hiscox hardcase), replaced by a real fit-for-purpose UK-made guitar that's still a bargain today. Today's Apprentice – in Carey and St John styles [pic2] – uses a low-gloss, open-pore nitro-finished body with a single humbucker, the in-house PJD-made Wadfather, with just a single volume control. **G**



## MOD SPEC

**PRODUCT:** PJD Carey Apprentice (circa 2022)

**PRICE:** Originally £1,950 w/ hard case

**ORIGIN:** UK

**BODY:** Obeche

**NECK:** Quarter-sawn roasted 3A figured maple, bolt-on

**FINGERBOARD:** Quarter-sawn roasted 3A figured maple, rectangular black acrylic inlays, compound 254-305mm (10-12") radius

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.2mm

**FRETS:** 22, medium (Jescar 55090)

**HARDWARE:** Gotoh Strat-style hardtail bridge with block steel saddles and through-body stringing, vintage-style split-post tuners – aged chrome and nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Cream T Fat Nacho P90 soapbar single coil, volume w/ Mars-Tronic Treblemaker and tone control

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.94/6.5

**FINISHES:** Frozen Berry (pictured in main images), Midnight Black, Dalby Forest Green – aged gloss nitro to body and headstock face; satin nitro to neck back

**PJD Guitars**

**01904 947288**

**www.pjdguitars.com**

*That should give you something to think about till our next issue.  
In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.*





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26

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# Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

Having survived the West Coast punk scene, this 1961 Silvertone is ready for a refurb

## *Silvertone 1446 Spruce-Up*

**C**hris Imlay bought this 1961 Silvertone 1446 'Chris Isaak' from a music shop in Arcata, California, for \$225 in 1989. At the time he was playing in a *Star Trek*-themed instrumental surf-rock band called Thee Shatners and, according to Chris, "We always used gimmicks to obfuscate our lack of talent, and in this case it meant wearing *Star Trek* crew outfits with plastic bubble space-helmets over our heads – walking from the cold outside into the warm sweaty music venue always caused the helmets to fog up..."

One night a partially blinded Chris fell and he and his guitar became wedged between the stage and a wall. After his bandmates helped free him, he discovered the instrument's cable and socket had been knocked inside the body and a hasty road repair was conducted – a new hole was drilled into the body and a metal jack plate added. Only intended as a temporary fix, the damaged area had deteriorated over the years and Chris decided a permanent solution was required, along with a few other repairs to get his guitar back up and running.

Of greatest concern was the area around the retrofitted jack plate because the sides had completely split apart. This was caused by the two massive

screws securing the plate to the guitar. In addition to being way oversized, I suspect the pilot holes weren't drilled prior to fitting the plate and the screws split the side apart.

Having been left for so many years, the cracks extended all the way to the previous jack-socket hole on one side, and almost back to the Bigsby hinge on the other. Some areas had also shifted out of alignment, but there was sufficient contact for glueing and clamping.

After cleaning out as much dust and debris as possible using 320-grit paper, I massaged some Titebond Original glue into the cracks and clamped everything together overnight. Fortunately, the cracks weren't that wide so relatively little clamping pressure was needed and everything stayed together after the clamps were removed.

The larger hole where the original jack socket was wrenched off the body was more splintered. Again, I used Titebond and clamped everything together, but the repair wasn't as neat as before because there was so much missing wood. To add extra strength and make everything level, I mixed up a small quantity of black Milliput. It's an epoxy filler that also acts as an adhesive, and when it had set rock hard, I scraped and sanded it smooth.

### Nu-Metal

Chris decided to leave the smaller jack hole unrepaired because it had become part of the guitar's story and wasn't unsightly. Our plan was to use the original socket hole and cover it with a metal plate. There wasn't sufficient room to reinforce the cracks with internal cleats, so in addition to providing a solid mounting for the jack socket, it was hoped that the metal plate would conceal the damage and prevent the cracks from pulling apart. The curvature of the body and the area that needed to be covered meant I had to make one.

Aluminium strips from DIY outlets can be used. I picked one that was a perfect 40mm wide and then cut the length to 65mm. Once I had squared everything up, I marked the centre point for the jack socket and drilled a 9.5mm hole. I also drilled and counter-sunk six 3mm screw holes. Feeling inside the socket hole, I could tell that the kerfing was fairly

"Having been left for so many years, the cracks extended all the way to the previous jack socket"



With a great collection of stickers on its back, this Silvertone is a real period piece

wide and substantial, and I wanted to screw into that, rather than into the flimsy single-ply maple side.

I used a mallet to bend the plate into a radius that would match the side of the body. I sanded the exposed areas with 400-, 800- and 1,200-grit paper and polished out the scratches with the buffer wheels I use for polishing frets. It turned out quite shiny, but it will probably dull down to match the Bigsby over time.

Checking lines are common on old nitrocellulose lacquer, but on some very old guitars it may begin to crack and flake off. That was happening to the Silvertone's sides, but there is an effective fix. I drenched the flaky areas with n-Butyl, which slows lacquer-drying time. Finishers use a dash of it to avoid the whitish blush that can form if nitrocellulose lacquer is sprayed in humid conditions, and restorers use it to disguise unsightly scratches.



## NittyGritty

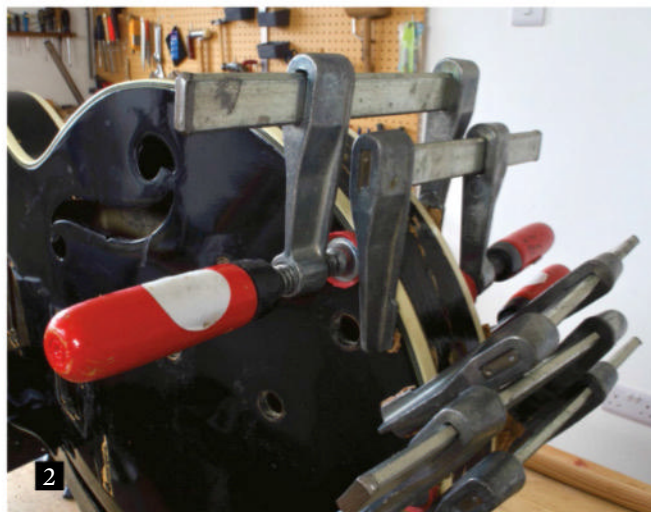
The shopping list for the Silvertone's repairs included Titebond, Milliput, aluminium strips and a splash of n-Butyl







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1. Oversized fixing screws for the jack plate caused splits and worsened the damage caused by the initial accident

2. Once glue was applied into the cracks, the body was clamped together and left overnight

Here, I applied it neat, and over the course of several hours it melted out the cracks and made the lacquer re-adhere to the wood. Once it was fully dry, I sanded the lacquer and applied flash coats of thinner with just a dash of lacquer and n-Butyl. The repair can then be polished out after a few days.

## Pots & Pups

It was clear that the volume pots may have reached the end of their working life. I decided to see if I could revive them and when I pulled the harness through the bridge pickup hole I discovered the potentiometers were all enclosed in metal cases. After desoldering the covers, I tried cleaning the potentiometers with DeoxIT, but they were too far gone. I replaced them with Bare Knuckles 550k pots and, having learned the hard way, I tested the circuit before reinstalling the loom. That's when I discovered the neck pickup had become somewhat intermittent.

After much investigation, I found that the pickup leadout wire had started to degrade and the signal wire was shorting out against the braid. I tried chasing it back by about 100mm, but eventually bowed to the inevitable: I would have to open up the pickup and attach a fresh leadout wire.

If these pickups look a bit like Gibson mini-humbuckers, it's because that's exactly what they are. Gibson made the offset pole-screw version especially for Silvertone. Attaching the new leadout wire was a bit fiddly, but I got it done and I was able to reinstall the harness.

Chris was also keen to keep the knobs that he had repurposed from an old cooker,

3. After some minor finish touch-ups, a newly fabricated metal jack plate was used to strengthen the structure and conceal the damage

4. Four Stackpole pots dated the 20th week of 1961 were installed in Gibson metal enclosures

5. The lettering suggests the harness had been taken out previously and a new bridge volume potentiometer installed

6. For this mini-humbucker, there's a full-length bar magnet underneath and each bobbin has half a snapped bar magnet with three pole screws

7. The knob on the right had a missing grub screw so a new one had to be made

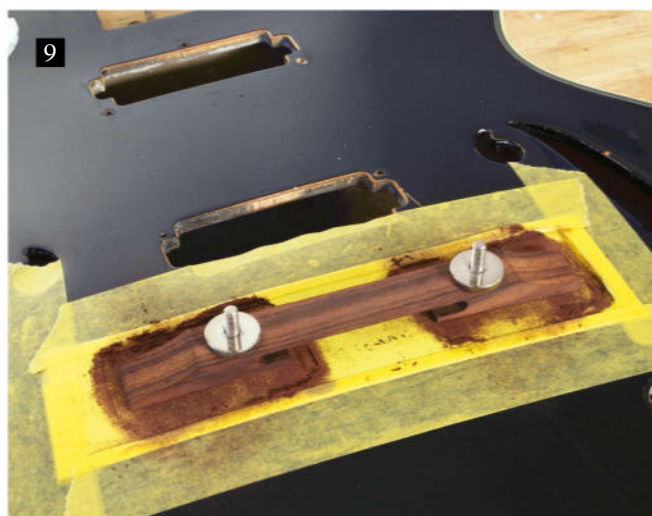
8. Superglue residue prevented the bridge from making proper contact against the top, limiting positioning

9. With the glue removed, sandpaper was taped to the top and the bridge base reshaped



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but one of the large ones was missing a grub screw. I tried various bolts until I eventually found one with a diameter and thread that matched. I then sawed it down to a suitable length, filed it level and sawed a notch in the end so I could turn it with a flat-head screwdriver.

### Blackening The Bridge

The original bridge would have been a fairly basic strip of ebony with a bone saddle inlaid in the top and an ebony base with thumbwheels. The guitar arrived with a Gotoh-made tune-o-matic on a rosewood base, and it was clear that attempts had been made to glue and pin various bridges in position. For optimum tone transfer, floating bridge bases need to make good physical contact with archtops, but this one was wobbling about on blobs of dried superglue. Using a razorblade scraper, I carefully removed the worst of the superglue and sanded off the remainder using wet and dry paper. We decided to leave the patches of missing lacquer, but I buffed the finish back to gloss.

To optimise bridge-to-body contact, I taped 180-grit paper to the top, drew pencil lines on the bottom of the base and began sanding. I moved the bridge back and forth in the direction of the strings

and, once all the pencil lines had been sanded off, the fit was greatly improved.

Lastly, I wanted to improve the looks because I found the pale rosewood a bit jarring. After removing the threaded metal posts, I applied black leather dye and once that had dried, I sealed it with three coats of Tru-Oil. Hey presto, a faux ebony bridge!


### Play Time

Although it needed structural repairs and some electronic maintenance, part of Chris's brief was to optimise the guitar's playability. Having established that the truss rod still functioned and the neck could be set straight, I set to work levelling and crowning the frets. Play tests had shown that the nut slots were worn too deep and some of the strings were actually playing a step sharp because they were taking off at the 1st fret. The original nut was still attached, but it had already been shimmed, so I decided it was time for a new one. Making new nuts requires more explanation than I can provide here, but I chose bleached bone to match the look of the original.

With the repaired harness and pickups reinstalled, and the Bigsby back on, I screwed the neck back onto the body and

"Floating bridge bases need to make good contact, but this one was wobbling on dried superglue"

put on some strings. The most striking feature of Silvertone necks is that between the nut and body the width barely increases and, with the centrally notched saddles on the Gotoh bridge, both E strings tended to slip off the fretboard. At a later date, I'll install a new set of saddles and adjust the string spacing so it's a better match for the neck dimensions.

Chris and I have also discussed overspraying the area on the upper bout where some old sticker residue and superglue was removed but took some of the black lacquer away with it. But, for now, the guitar is structurally solid and fully functioning once again, and although quite bright in tone, the pickups do not disappoint. So that seems like a good place to leave it at present. 

*With thanks to Chris Imlay for allowing us to feature his Silvertone guitar here*  
[www.huwpriceguitar.com](http://www.huwpriceguitar.com)





# David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Did the ES-5 inspire the Strat as well as Peter Green's famously phasey in-between tones?

## Gibson ES-5 Switchmasters

**T**he earlier example isn't technically a Switchmaster for the very obvious reason that it doesn't have a switch, but these are both three-pickup Gibson ES-5 models. Gibson introduced the three-pickup ES-5 in 1949 and described it as 'the supreme electronic version of the famed Gibson L-5'. It's widely accepted that the ES-5 was the first production guitar with three pickups. Gibson only made 22 examples that year and one of them was to become the instrument that T-Bone Walker used throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

"I don't think that the natural finish became an option until 1951, which is when the first of these guitars was built. I have the original bill of sale and Gibson shipped it out to Germany to a guy whose surname was actually Gibson. He was in the armed services and stationed out there at the time.

"The construction details are all very standard. The 17-inch wide body is maple and it has the laminated maple neck construction with an ebony 'board and pearl marker blocks. The early ones had the same three-diamond tailpiece as ES-175s, but on the ES-5s they were gold-plated. They later went to the fancier engraved ES-5 tailpiece with all the curly lines, but both guitars have floating rosewood bridges with the wound G-string compensation.

"In the absence of a switch, Gibson equipped the ES-5 with three volume controls and a master tone control by the cutaway. It's just like the model T-Bone Walker played, and the stock wiring had the middle pickup magnetically out of phase with the other two. With fully independent volume controls, you can get a very wide range of tones.

"In 1955, Gibson put a four-way switch in place of the master tone control and changed to individual tone controls. The switch allows each pickup to be selected individually, and the down position, which is labelled 'All', activates all three simultaneously. The next big change occurred in 1957 when the newly introduced 'Patent Applied For' humbucker replaced P-90s in the ES-5 and all of Gibson's prestige models.

"I've had plenty of time to fool around with these guitars and you can really hear the differences in tone. Most obvious is the warmth that the P-90s give you, although you can almost duplicate that by rolling off the tone controls on the [Patent Applied For] guitar a little bit, but it's not as sweet. To me, it's much more of a true jazz guitar with P-90s. The Patent Applied



The Gibson ES-5 was essentially an ES-350 with a third pickup, and Patent Applied For humbuckers replaced the P-90s in 1957



The added switch allowed all pickups to be selected individually or in combination, and individual tone controls replaced the master tone



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / WELL-STRUNG GUITARS

For pickups are really cool, and they have the full-width pole spacing, but the P-90s sound like a more natural match on this particular model.

"If you look closely, you'll see that the '51 has the 'tall boy' speed knobs, as you tend to find on 1952 Les Paul Goldtops. Of course, the '57 has the same 'bell cap' knobs that were fitted to the '57 Goldtops. The tuners are also different because Gibson fitted 'waffle back' Klusons in 1951 and Grovers later in the 1950s. Both guitars have the 'widow's peak' at the end of the fretboard, but only the '57 has the 'widow's heel'.

"Both guitars are in pretty remarkable condition. Mr Gibson, who owned the 1951 originally, took extreme care of it and it's virtually brand-new. My feeling is that they didn't all look like this because the top, back and sides are so wildly flamed. I don't know

**"The early models had the same three-diamond tailpiece as ES-175s, but on the ES-5s they were gold-plated"**

if he knew somebody at Gibson or he had a bit of local fame and that's why he got such a special guitar. Or maybe he just 'hit the lottery' on the day he ordered it.

"In contrast, the 1957 has some figuring, but it's nowhere near as pronounced. The neck profiles also vary a little bit, with the 1951 feeling very rounded and club-like, and the 1957 feeling more like a Les Paul Goldtop neck from that year with very

soft shoulders and less fullness. Of course, both guitars still have their original cases, but I only have all the paperwork and history for the '51.

"These days, I don't usually buy archtops unless it's something very special looking because most people aren't really into big-box jazz guitars any more. So they have to have a lot of eye appeal, and the 1951 has that amazing figuring, while the 1957's gold hardware is still glistening. Against the natural finish it really looks great. The blonde archtops, ES-330s and ES-335s all attract a premium because they're fairly scarce." **[HP]**

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



# Blues Headlines

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



## Modern Blues

**Tutor** Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Gibson Les Paul & Marshall JTM45 MkII reissue  
**Difficulty** ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

Richard's reimagining of a folk, jazz, blues and Celtic music combination inadvertently embodied Mike Oldfield's innovative style

**THE IDEA BEHIND** this month's example solo is to try to 'reinvent the wheel' by wilfully ignoring the rich tradition of blues/pentatonic soloing – which has evolved over decades – and imagine folk, jazz, blues and Celtic music combining as if for the first time in a parallel universe... In theory, this could give a brand-new perspective on vocabulary, tone and so on. In practice, it reminded us a lot of Mike Oldfield!

Mike is best known to many as the composer and performer of *Tubular Bells*. Though renowned as a multi-instrumentalist, Mike has said that he regards himself primarily as a guitarist, having initially been influenced by acoustic soloists such as John Renbourn and Bert Jansch. However, he was also very struck by the emotive blues-influenced soloing of Free's Paul Kossoff and the electronic soundscapes of Terry Riley. In fact, the more we look into Mike's playing, the more apparent it becomes that he was already going through the thinking process described above back in 1973. He invented something that incorporates elements of all the styles mentioned, with his own take on melody and harmony – plus an unusual violin-style vibrato and fingerstyle technique, even when playing with lots of overdrive.

Mike's amplification setup was similarly unconventional, employing overdriven channel strips, multiple stages of EQ, limiting and noise gates. We're definitely not talking about someone who just went out and bought what everyone else was using!

The example solo, though not originally played with the specific intention of emulating Mike, does include many of the elements he combined to form his own style. It isn't very pentatonic (though there are moments) and makes more use of arpeggios, often superimposed over different chords. I hope this will be useful to anyone searching for some fresh ideas for their blues licks. **G**

PHOTO BY MICK GOLD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



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



## Example 1

**THIS OPENING PHRASE** starts and finishes with recognisably pentatonic ideas. The descending line between the two quotes directly from the D major arpeggio in different positions – or inversions, if you prefer. Either way, the notes are D, F# and A in various permutations. The fact that we're playing D major patterns in the context of E minor is an interesting twist. When you consider an Em11 chord is made up of E, G, B, D, F# and A (Root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th), it begins to make sense.

♩ = 70 bpm

Em7

8va

BU BU BD BU

14 12 14 (16) 14 (16) (14) 12 14 (16) 12/14 15 17 14 17 14 15 14 10 10

10 10 11 10 11 12 9 9 12 12 12/14

1

4

## Example 2

**AFTER AN ANGULAR PENTATONIC BEGINNING**, we revisit the idea of superimposing different triads/arpeggios over a static underlying chord. Over the A minor, we have a descending run derived from the arpeggios of C major, B minor and the chord itself, A minor. The B minor part functions as a passing phrase between the C major (relative major to A minor) and the A minor arpeggio itself. It doesn't have enough notes in common with the E minor to be used as a starting point for melody.

8va

Am7

Em7

14-12 14-12 15-12 15-17 15-14 17 13 15-12-15-12 13 14 14-10 12 8 10 10/12 10

10 8 8 7 9/11 12 9 12 9 9 12 9

1

4



## Example 3

**AFTER A BLUESY PENTATONIC BEGINNING**, complete with bends and vibrato, we move onto some more superimposed arpeggios. By now, this concept may be starting to seem familiar: we have fragments of D major and B minor mixed in with pentatonic style lines, using shape 1 of the E minor boxes. It's worth experimenting to see what triads/arpeggio shapes sound good to your ear, rather than aiming for what 'should' work. No risk, no reward!

The musical notation for Example 3 consists of two systems, each with a guitar staff (treble clef) and a bass staff (bass clef). The guitar staff includes a dashed line for the 8va (octave) and a solid line for the BU (bottleneck) position. The bass staff shows fret numbers for the left hand.

**System 1:**

- Chords:** Bm7, Am7
- Guitar Staff:** 8va line has a wavy line. BU line has a wavy line.
- Bass Staff:** Fret numbers: 9, 10, 10/12, 10, 14, 14/15, 14, 15, 12, 15 (17), 15, 14, 12, 14/16.

**System 2:**

- Chords:** Em7, Bm7
- Guitar Staff:** 8va line has a wavy line. BU line has a wavy line.
- Bass Staff:** Fret numbers: 15, 17, 14, 15, 14, 15, 12, 14, 15, 14, 16, 12, 14, 11, 12, 14, 12.

## Hear It Here

### MIKE OLDFIELD (WITH DAVID BEDFORD)

FIRST EXCURSION



Recorded in '76 through Mike's unusual setup and further amplified at high volume (through a Fender Twin), Mike makes extensive use of the feedback and sustain this enabled. Folk-influenced grace notes, superimposed arpeggios and soaring melodies dominate here. There are fewer string bends than in a traditional blues solo and the tone is unconventional, too, but this is expressive nonetheless.

### MIKE OLDFIELD

TUBULAR BELLS



Though there is some very interesting guitar on both *Parts One* and *Two*, there is one area that is particularly relevant.

At around 11:30 of *Part One*, Mike starts a harmonised blues shuffle. It builds into something more shrill but is certainly an interesting vision of how blues influences can lead to different places – some far removed from what some might call the 'mainstream' these days. To be fair, that was the case when this was released in 1973, too...

### MIKE OLDFIELD

INCANTATIONS



The latest of our three examples, released in 1978, this album also has some very accomplished playing that isn't widely discussed in blues circles. From 3:33 of *Part Three*, there is a long guitar solo that showcases Mike developing further on themes he was already experimenting with a couple of years earlier. Once again, this is unconventional stuff, but if we put aside the more widely accepted boundaries of guitar soloing, there are ideas worth 'borrowing'!



This year's essential read for any  
guitar player or collector



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# Guitarist



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