



**ROBBEN FORD SECRETS**  
 JAZZ-BLUES MASTER ON JONI, MILES & MORE

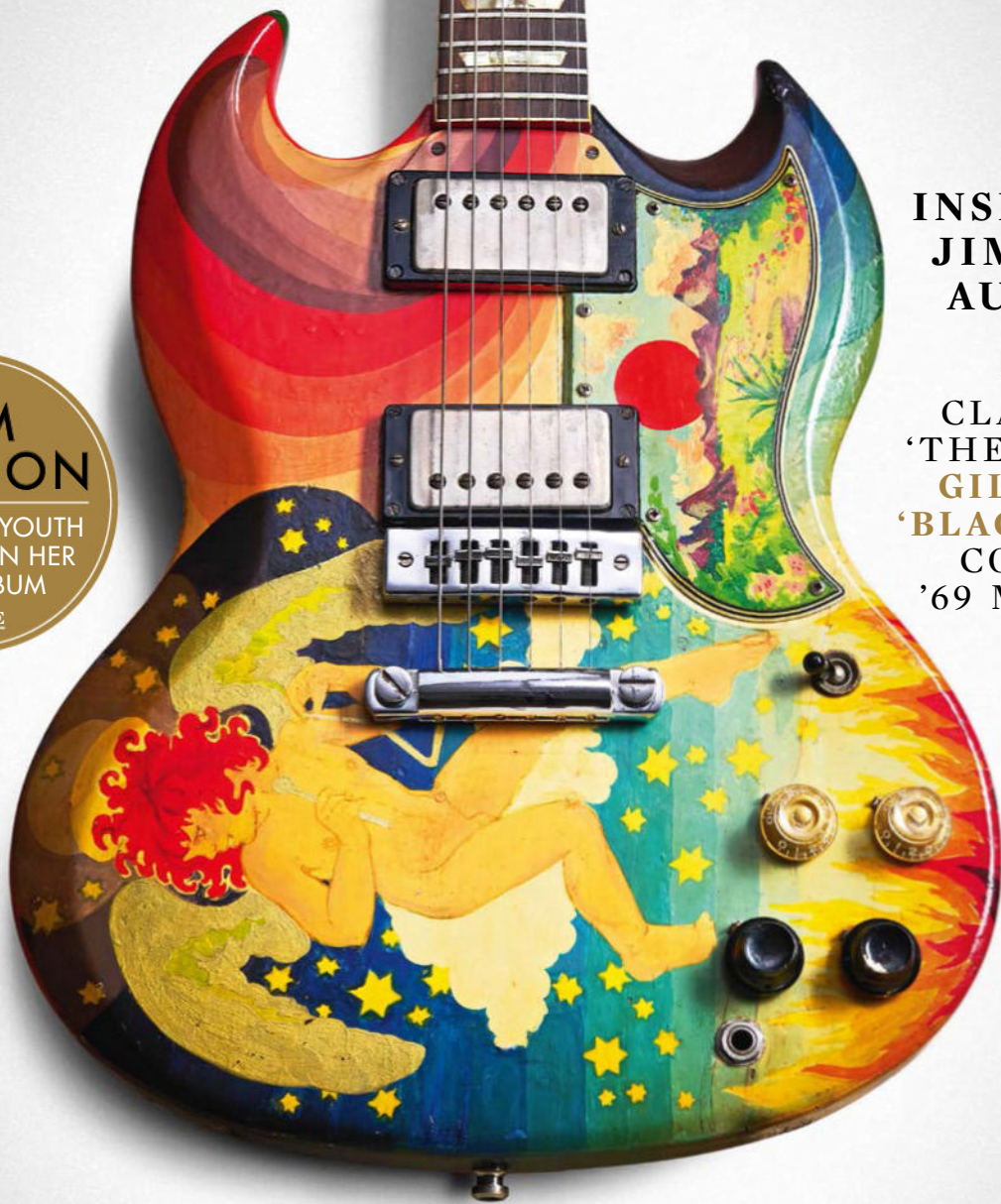
**GIBSON MICK RONSON**  
 ALL-NEW LES PAUL CUSTOM REISSUE MODEL



# Guitarist

Issue 535

APRIL 2026



**INSIDE THE  
 JIM IRSAY  
 AUCTION**

**FEATURING**

CLAPTON'S  
 'THE FOOL' SG  
 GILMOUR'S  
 'BLACK STRAT'  
 COBAIN'S  
 '69 MUSTANG

**& MORE**

PLUS  
**KIM  
 GORDON**  
 THE SONIC YOUTH  
 PIONEER ON HER  
 NEW ALBUM  
 & MORE

# ICONS

TREASURES FROM THE GREATEST  
 GUITAR COLLECTION

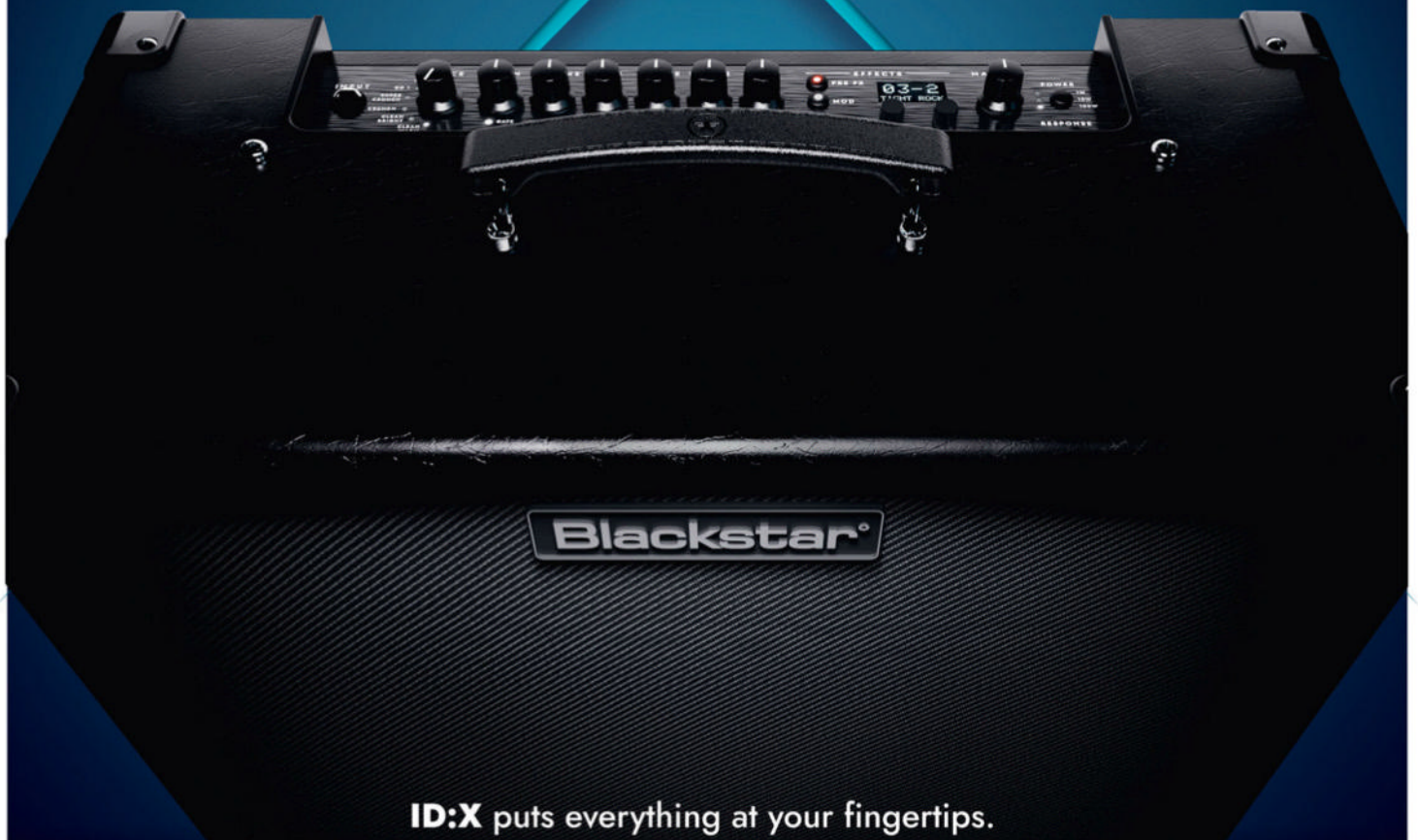


PLUS  
**PJD ORIGIN SERIES ELECTRICS**  
**EPIPHONE FATOMATA DIAWARA SG**  
**ALTER BRIDGE**

# ID:X

ADVANCED DSP MODELLING AMPLIFIERS

## A CUT ABOVE



**ID:X** puts everything at your fingertips.

Real-time control, USB-C audio, CabRig speaker and mic simulation, XLR out, headphones, MIDI (100W only) and selectable power modes, all in a compact, gig-ready combo.

### MORE TONES. MORE FEATURES.



DISTINCT AMP VOICES



CLASSIC EFFECTS



EASY 'ON-AMP' EFFECTS CONTROL



PATENTED ISF TECHNOLOGY



AUTHENTIC VALVE RESPONSES



IR-BASED CABRIG™



MIDI CONNECTIVITY (ID:X 100 ONLY)



POWER REDUCTION



Designed & Engineered by Blackstar Amplification UK

**Blackstar**<sup>®</sup>  
AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

EXPLORE NOW:



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

## Heroes & Halos



Looking at the incredible guitars that belonged to Jim Irsay's almost unparalleled collection, I was struck by the enigmatic relationship between artist endorsement and the popularity of certain guitars thereafter. In the case of 'The Black Strat', it's probably fair to say that, after Hendrix, the Floyd guitarist has probably done the most to persuade guitar buyers that a Strat is the ultimate electric – after all, if an instrument can take both *Purple Haze* and *Comfortably Numb* in its stride, there isn't much it can't do. And indeed, before Hendrix came along, the Strat's sales were waning in comparison to the Telecaster. I'm sure there will have been a similar bounce effect for the Strat because Gilmour has championed it for so many years.

But fame isn't an automatic guarantee of widespread adoption. While replicas of Prince's Cloud guitars are no doubt available, it's not a style of guitar you'll see at the Dog And Duck's next open-mic night. Partly that's because of its flamboyance, no doubt – it's a lot of guitar to live up to – but also because Prince, while an absolutely formidable guitarist, was too varied and ambitious an artist to neatly fit the 'guitar hero' label that tends to sell artist-affiliated guitars by the truckload, and perhaps he had no interest in popularising things like signature models.

Consider the influence of someone like Kurt Cobain and the case is altered once again. Yes, there are very famous individual guitars he used that have been much copied and replicated, but his main influence on guitar sales was, arguably, to repopularise Fender's student guitars and offsets in general – be that a Mustang or a modded Jag. He represented a kind of visceral anti-cool that gave those previously marginal guitar designs a cultural relevance and edge that has carried forward to the present day, which even Leo Fender would have struggled to foresee.

In this way, visionary artists, and what they play, help us see the potential in guitars that even their designers never suspected. Enjoy the issue, see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

## Editor's Highlights



**Fatoumata Diawara**  
 A unique new SG model with vibrant aesthetics for a captivating artist – Epiphone extends the SG's remit once again over on **p8**



**Southern Comfort**  
 Huw Price reaches the summit of a rather splendid restoration of a 1961 Gibson Southern Jumbo – with a lovely new 'burst finish **p120**



**Doug Aldrich**  
 The stalwart rocker takes us inside the amp tones that inspire him and what it took to capture those sounds on his DA100 Ruby head **p108**

# Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA11UA  
Telephone 01225 442244 Email [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com) Online [www.guitarist.co.uk](http://www.guitarist.co.uk)

## EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Jamie Dickson**

[jamie.dickson@futurenet.com](mailto:jamie.dickson@futurenet.com)

DEPUTY EDITOR

**David Mead**

[david.mead@futurenet.com](mailto:david.mead@futurenet.com)

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC

**Scott Rowley**

[scott.rowley@futurenet.com](mailto:scott.rowley@futurenet.com)

REVIEWS EDITOR

**Dave Burrluck**

[dave@daveburrluck.com](mailto:dave@daveburrluck.com)

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR

**Jason Sidwell**

[jason.sidwell@futurenet.com](mailto:jason.sidwell@futurenet.com)

ART EDITOR

**Darren Phillips**

[darren.phillips@futurenet.com](mailto:darren.phillips@futurenet.com)

MANAGING EDITOR

**Lucy Rice**

[lucy.rice@futurenet.com](mailto:lucy.rice@futurenet.com)

## CONTRIBUTORS

TONY BACON, RICHARD BARRETT, ALEX BISHOP, MILFORD COPPOCK, OLLY CURTIS, TREVOR CURWEN, ANDREW DALY, MARTIN HOLMES, RICHARD HOOD, NEVILLE MARTEN, HUW PRICE, DAVINA RUNGASAMY, JOBY SESSIONS, AMIT SHARMA, MARTIN SMITH, ALVIN WEETMAN, CHARLIE WILKINS, STUART WILLIAMS, HENRY YATES

## IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHIL BARKER, MATT LINCOLN

## ADVERTISING

MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR **Clare Dove** [clare.dove@futurenet.com](mailto:clare.dove@futurenet.com)  
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR **Lara Jaggon** [lara.jaggon@futurenet.com](mailto:lara.jaggon@futurenet.com)

## MARKETING

CONSUMER REVENUES DIRECTOR **Sharon Todd** [sharon.todd@futurenet.com](mailto:sharon.todd@futurenet.com)

## PRINT & PRODUCTION

HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US **Mark Constance** [mark.constance@futurenet.com](mailto:mark.constance@futurenet.com)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER **Frances Twentyman** [frances.twentyman@futurenet.com](mailto:frances.twentyman@futurenet.com)  
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER **Jo Crosby** [jo.crosby@futurenet.com](mailto:jo.crosby@futurenet.com)  
DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER **Jason Hudson** [jason.hudson@futurenet.com](mailto:jason.hudson@futurenet.com)  
DIGITAL PRODUCER **Daniel Short** [daniel.short@futurenet.com](mailto:daniel.short@futurenet.com)

## INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION

Guitarist is available for licensing and syndication.  
to find our more contact us at [licensing@futurenet.com](mailto:licensing@futurenet.com)  
or view our available content at [www.futurecontenthub.com](http://www.futurecontenthub.com)  
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING **Rachel Shaw** [licensing@futurenet.com](mailto:licensing@futurenet.com)

## CIRCULATION

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

## MANAGEMENT

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

## CUSTOMER SERVICES

APP SUPPORT [apps@futurenet.com](mailto:apps@futurenet.com)

ONLINE [www.magazinesdirect.com](http://www.magazinesdirect.com) EMAIL [help@magazinesdirect.com](mailto:help@magazinesdirect.com)

**How to order & access back issues:** If you are an active print subscriber, you have instant access to back issues through your iOS or Android device(s). Your digital magazine entitlement is available at no additional cost and no further action is required. Pocketmags library may not have access to the full archive of digital back issues. You will only be able to access the digital back issues as long as you are an active subscriber.

To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit [magazinesdirect.com](http://magazinesdirect.com) (click on 'Single issues' tab) or email [help@magazinesdirect.com](mailto:help@magazinesdirect.com)

**BAR subscription prices:** £87.75 for UK, €173 for Europe, \$195 for USA, £150 for Rest of World

**Subscription delays:** Disruption remains within UK and International delivery networks.

Please allow up to 7 days before contacting us about a late delivery to [help@mymagazines.co.uk](mailto:help@mymagazines.co.uk)

[Magazinesdirect.com](http://Magazinesdirect.com) is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited

## USPS INFORMATION

Guitarist (ISSN 0953-7023 PE23920) is published monthly with an extra issue in May by Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA11UA, United Kingdom.

Air freight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Guitarist, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

## GPSREURP (for authorities only)

eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-1411317

Tallinn, Estonia

[hello@eucompliancepartner.com](mailto:hello@eucompliancepartner.com)

+3375690241

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



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

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

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

**Future** Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

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

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**  
Non-Executive Chairman **Mark Brooker**  
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

All contents © 2026 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008889) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA11UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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



**GRETSCH** x **|||** ABBEY ROAD  
**LIMITED EDITION RS201 ABBEY ROAD STUDIOMATIC™**

# Contents

COVER FEATURE



60

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

## REGULARS

- 030 Gas Supply: NAMM 2026 Report
- 034 Fretbuzz
- 036 New Music
- 038 Tones Behind The Tracks
- 042 Opinion
- 046 Substitute
- 048 Feedback
- 106 Subscribe
- 114 Bought & Sold
- 116 Mod Squad
- 120 Nitty Gritty
- 126 Vintage Icons
- 130 Next Month

## FEATURES

- 052 Obituary: Ralph Towner
- 054 Robben Ford
- 060 The Jim Irsay Collection
- 078 Kim Gordon
- 108 Blueprint: Blackstar Doug Aldrich Signature DA100 Ruby

## NEW GEAR

- 008 Epiphone Fatoumata Diawara SG
- 014 Victory MKX Lunch Box Head
- 018 Faith PJE Legacy FG4 Earth
- 024 Flattley The Outlaw
- 026 Crumar Burn
- 028 Gibson Custom Mick Ronson 1968 Les Paul Custom Collector's Edition
- 084 Duesenberg Starplayer CBR
- 092 PJD Origin Series Carey Apprentice & St John Apprentice
- 102 Betronics Bee Bee Dee

## TECHNIQUES

- 128 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

FEATURE



78

PHOTO BY ELENA DI WINGENZO/ARCHIVIO ELENA DI WINGENZO/AMADORI PORTFOLIO VIAGETTY

## VIDEO & AUDIO

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



**Guitarist**

SUBSCRIBE TODAY FOR ONLY £28.49 AND SAVE 37%!

See p106 for details

REVIEW



92

PHOTO BY MATT LINCOLN



SCAN TO GET THE LATEST GUITAR NEWS



# The Bel Canto: what all the noise is about



On its launch day, the **C1 Bel Canto** sold out immediately. A second version, released days later, went in under three hours. (Or just three chimes.) Never before has a watchmaker launched a 'Sonnerie au Passage' to such a clamour. Never before has a 60-minute chiming mechanism (a 60-part adaptation of an already-modified movement) resembled a songbird. Cometh the hour, cometh the hammer (the bird's tail) striking the titanium case—resulting in a crystal-clear, 'D' note. Since launching in November 2022, it's somewhat appropriately attracted a number of industry gongs. And a cacophany of ringing endorsements, like Hodinkee's "Shockingly affordable".

Can we look forward to hearing from you?

**Do your research**



[christopherward.com](http://christopherward.com)



## FIRST PLAY



**EPIPHONE FATOUMATA  
DIAWARA SG**  
£599

**WHAT IS IT?** A big shout-out to a fast-rising Malian artist and a very credible, expanded-sounding SG

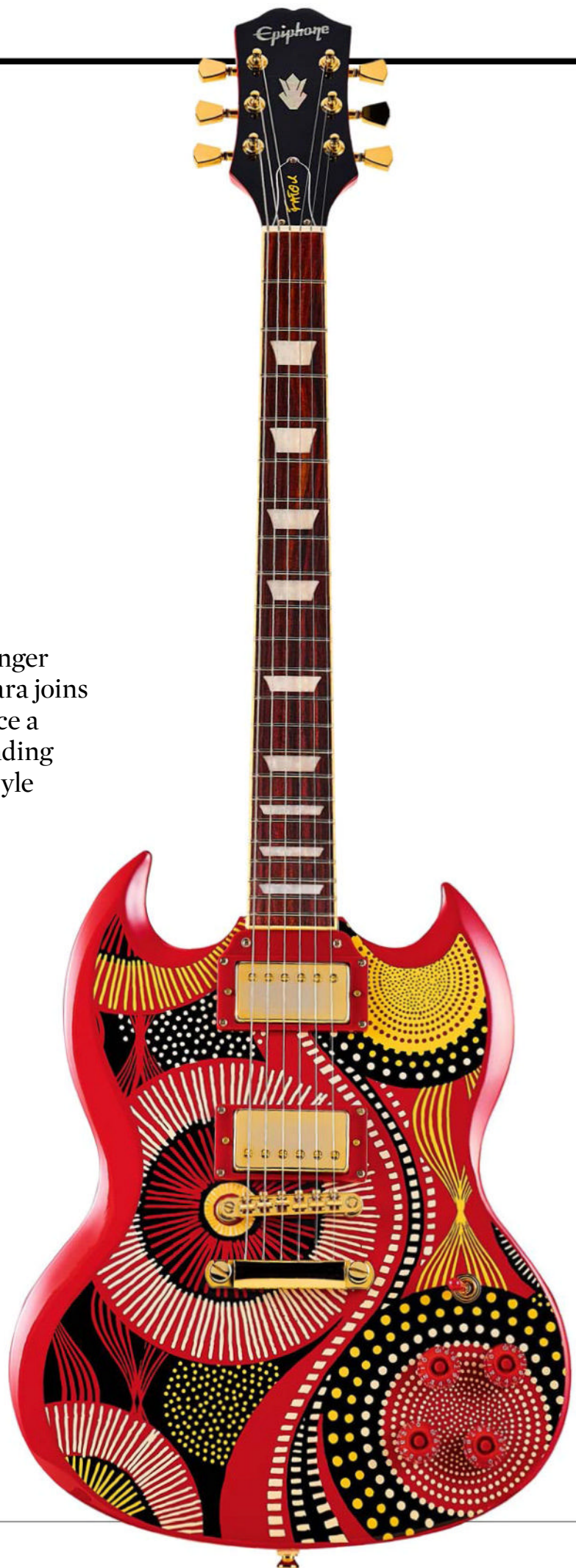
# African Queen

Grammy-nominated Malian singer and guitarist Fatoumata Diawara joins forces with Epiphone to produce a vivid-looking and wicked-sounding SG that's a celebration of her style

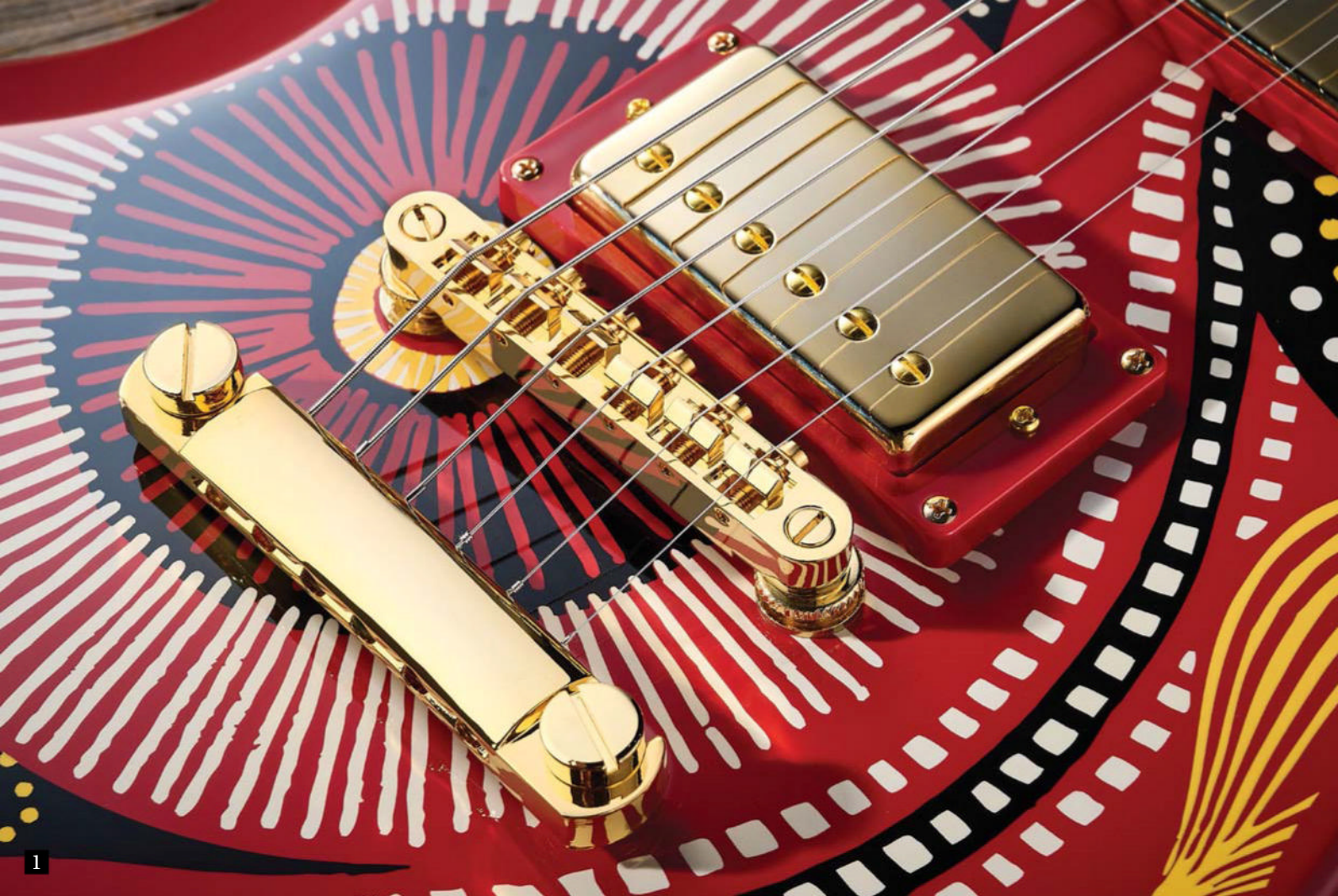
**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Matt Lincoln

**I**rrespective of the artist and the admittedly hard-to-miss graphic finish, Epiphone has typically packed a lot into this guitar, not least that it comes with a pretty robust hard case. The company posts that Fatoumata's "passion for the Epiphone Muse SG led to this collaboration", and that discontinued model certainly informs the new signature with its same 'Custom C' neck profile and expanded electronics, the latter only offered on the current SG Modern Figured.

While the Ember Red gloss covers all the wood with the exception of the mid-brown rosewood fingerboard, the spec sheet tells us it's all mahogany. That muted red hue also colours the humbucking mounting rings and the rather classy speed knobs; even the switch tip is colour co-ordinated. The Lock Tone bridge and tailpiece also feature on other lower-ticket Epiphone models like the SG Standard, of course, but here we also get rear-lock tuners – a bit of a luxury for a hardtail guitar – while every bit of visible metal is gold-plated.







To be honest, many would have stopped there, but this release keeps punching with not only the Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers but also the pull-switch control functions. Each volume features a proper coil-split, and the neck pickup tone's pull-switch adds out-of-phase when both pickups are selected.

## This release keeps punching with Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers and also the pull-switch control functions

Seated or strapped on, not least with its heel-placed strap button and seemingly extended neck, the SG has a different feel from a Les Paul. But we've found that the balance here strapped on is good, as is the weight, and there's no lack of ring when unplugged.

On this platform there's plenty of bite from the bridge pickup, which is easily tamed by the tone control if you need, but it certainly produces that righteous sting played clean and loud that so many love about older-style Patent Applied For-style humbuckers. The neck pickup is nicely graduated in output, obviously

3. The headstock is Epiphone's usual style, as opposed to the open-book profile found on the brand's Inspired By Gibson models

1. Alongside the stunning artwork, Fatoumata's SG is decked out with gold hardware all round

2. The two volume controls are pull-switches that coil-tap the SG's humbuckers, whereas the neck pickup's tone control pulls up for out-of-phase sounds with both pickups selected

### Feel & Sounds

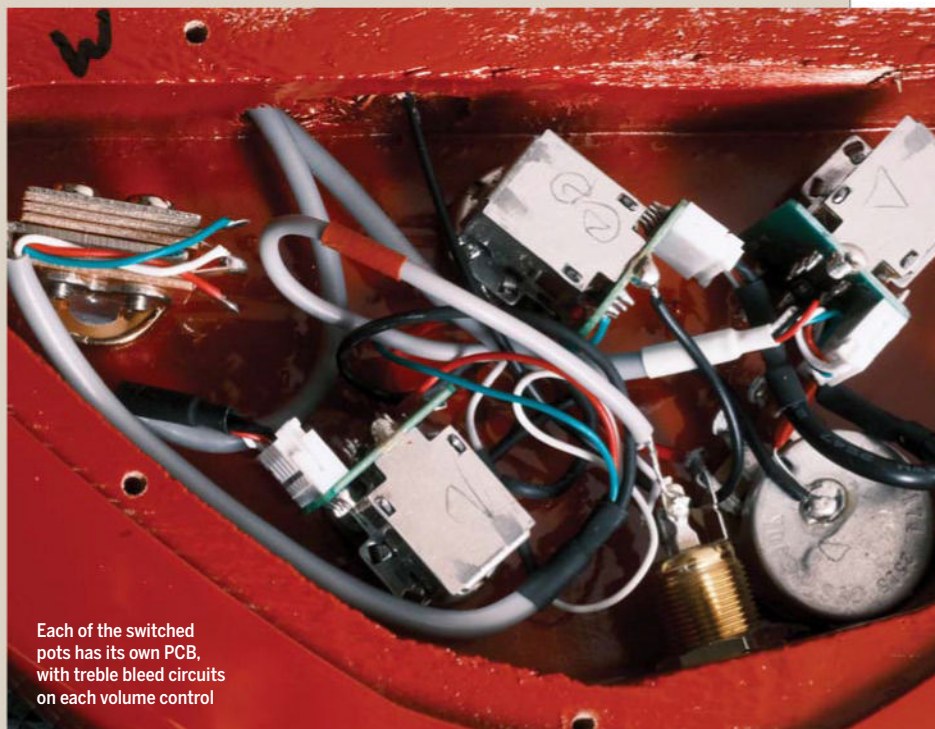
There's some good craft on show, especially from the fingerboard, which has very cleanly installed medium gauge frets, mirror polished and of a good size: approximately 2.3mm by 1.19mm high. To be picky, there are a couple of slightly sharp fret ends, but you really don't feel them in playing position. The nut width measures a little narrow at 41.4mm (with 34mm string spacing) but doesn't really feel it because the profile is quite a full-shouldered C, which tapers from 21.2mm at the 1st fret up to a 24.5mm deep, meaty handful by the 12th. Structurally, that taper is good and there's virtually no neck flex at all. Overall, tuning stability is solid; the setup is perfect.



## UNDER THE HOOD Expanded tones means some tricky switching

**W**hile you might expect to see a Quick Connect-style PCB system where all the components mount to a large PCB base, pulling off the recessed back coverplate we're met with quite a complex-looking array of wiring and standard-mount pots. Each of the switchable pots, presumably 500kohms, has its own PCB mounted to the pot. The pickups use a similar (but not identical) push-in connection as Gibson's Quick Connect to plug into the volume controls, and these volume-pot PCBs appear to have surface-mount components, a resistor and a capacitor, for a treble bleed. Likewise, the PCB on the neck pickup's tone control also features a surface-mount micro-sized capacitor, which we'd guess is .022 $\mu$ F. The bridge pickup tone control is old-school, a CTS 500k pot with a standard .022 $\mu$ F cap wired in as usual. The recessed barrel jack output is a nice touch here, too.

As we've discussed before, Epiphone doesn't seem to share official pickup specifications, but the Alnico Classic PROs measure right in the classic Patent Applied For range, and measuring the coil-splits, too, they're exactly half, which suggests a symmetrical wind of the two coils. So at output we get 7.85k (at the bridge), which when split measures 4k. At the neck we have 7.49k for the full coil and 3.78k when split. [DB]



Each of the switched pots has its own PCB, with treble bleed circuits on each volume control

3



adding depth but retaining that clear high-end response of the bridge. It might drop you right into Muddy-era Chicago, but it ain't muddy in the least. No, there's considerable jangle, especially in the mixed pickup position, a really lively bouncy voice. This is helped by the slightly closer proximity of the pickups, and the treble bleed circuits on both volumes also assist in keeping things clear as you pull them back.

For many, the sound might be a little too thin and nasally out-of-phase, but just pull one volume control back and you can cover those *slightly* out-of-phase 'Greeny' tones. The guitar's bright edge is retained with grittier, light break-up, but again pulling the tones back a little and voicing the neck gets you right into creamier Mick Taylor and Carlos Santana. At volume, you do notice the neck pickup is slightly microphonic, but we can't help thinking that actually adds to the liveliness of the voice.

The fun continues with the coil-splits, which select the inner slug coils of each pickup and obviously thins the sounds. But with a little gain or level boost, these splits make for some pretty rootsy rhythm tones and prove surprisingly useful, particularly with both pickups on where you can split one pickup and keep the other full power. Again, that mismatch works well with the out-of-phase option.

## PRIDE OF AFRICA

Fatoumata Diawara talks us through her new signature model

**Y**ou must be very proud to make history as the first woman of colour to have an Epiphone signature model.

"I can't believe it, especially in times like this where music is totally changing. More and more people are using electronic equipment, even in Africa. So I feel like this signature is a good message for the world. I hope this goes on to encourage future generations. That's why I'm so happy – not only for me because I'm writing my own history – but if I can help wake up a new generation of African or female players, that makes me twice as proud. People following me will see this guitar and say, 'Okay, it's possible for a Black woman to do this!'

"Some people think a woman's only project is to get married, that's the only thing they are meant to do. I've seen that in Mali, Senegal, a lot of West Africa, so I want this model to have a big impact. I want to show people that women can play instruments and change those old perceptions.

"Because a lot of people think if a woman works in music, she can only be a singer, rather than play traditional instruments like the kora or ngoni. People think women are too impure to capture music in a spiritual way and that then makes them think they are not allowed to touch or play the instruments. So yes, this is a historic moment."

**So what drew you to the SG?**

"I like SGs because they are light and sound amazing, plus I find the shape attractive. I've used a lot of guitars in the past, but an SG will make me feel more comfortable and play better. I love the colour scheme we came up with for this signature, it's like a painting. The design was inspired by African fabrics; it's mainly red with a touch of yellow and black. You just look at it and feel the good vibrations. It's all about being at one with the world and living in peace. It's totally me and reflects how I sing, think, look and dress. I usually stay on the bridge pickup when recording and performing."



Fatoumata makes history as the first woman of colour to have an Epiphone signature; the model is based on the Muse SG

"If I can help wake up a new generation of African or female players, that makes me twice as proud"

**Fatoumata Diawara**

**What kind of things are you plugging this SG into?**

"I've been mainly using a Fender amp on stage, but that's going to be changing soon as I now have a Supro Black Magick Reverb. It's my new favourite. I like to keep finding new things in order to improve my sound. The same goes for pedals – I've got so many and keep switching them. But I guess the one pedal I couldn't live without is my wah-wah."

**And who is your biggest hero as a guitarist?**

"It has to be Jimi Hendrix because everybody wishes they could play like him. I don't think anyone has changed the world as much with their guitar. I'm trying to do something similar through my own music, using my personality to create, and inspiring people in the process. It's all about finding your own sound, something that's completely unique to you. I'm learning by myself and trying not to listen to other people. I didn't study anything; I'm just making it up as I go along, finding my way through the blues. It's more about the human soul, emotion and self-expression. I just want to play from the heart. It's about quality, not quantity. That's what Jimi did." [AS]



4



5

4. The Epiphone Alnico Classic Pro pickups have a whiff of Patent Applied For tonality to them, and the coil-taps open up a raft of different sounds

5. Fatoumata's SG comes with gold-coloured Epiphone locking tuners, which is an unusual touch for a guitar with a stop tailpiece

It's up to you to add the playing styles, of course, but – so long as you're happy to manipulate the controls – the range of tones available here is very impressive for the cost of this guitar.

### Verdict

The celebration of an artist as accomplished as Fatoumata gets our endorsement, although we admit that we were expecting the instrument itself to be a bit of a token gesture. It's great to be proved *very* wrong: it's a classy and affordable SG that's not only smartly turned out and co-ordinated, but the combination of the Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers and the expanded circuit really gives it a very broad and usable range of voices. Add in luxuries like those locking tuners and a decent case, plus a great neck shape, playability and setup – and it's gig-ready, something we don't always say about Epiphone, or indeed Gibson. Considerable thought and care has gone into this one, and it shows. **G**

A classy and affordable SG [with an] expanded circuit that gives it a broad and usable range of voices



## EPIPHONE FATOUMATA DIAWARA SG

**PRICE:** £599 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway, solidbody electric

**BODY:** Mahogany

**NECK:** Mahogany, Custom 'C' profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech/41.4mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Cream bound rosewood, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece, Epiphone locking tuners – gold plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm

**ELECTRICS:** 2x Epiphone Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup. Coil-split switches on each volume control; phase-switch on neck pickup tone control

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.23 / 7.1

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The only other Epiphone SG signature guitar is the Yungblud SG Junior (£549 w/ hard case). Standard models start with the bolt-on SG Tribute (£249); the set-neck SG Standard is £439. The SG Modern Figured (£607) also features the coil-split/out-of-phase switching

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model

**FINISHES:** Ember Red w/ Malian Graphic (as reviewed) – gloss

Epiphone  
00800-44427661  
www.epiphone.com

Guitarist  
CHOICE

9/10

**PROS** A very well-turned-out SG with a good weight and neck shape and excellent fingerboard detailing and setup; expansive sounds from the pull-switch controls – an SG that can go well beyond blues-rock

**CONS** A few minor sharp fret ends, but they don't ruin the fun





While there are no rules for the dimensions and chassis of lunchbox amps, this is a very conveniently sized, gloss black enamelled example – as eye-catching as it is robust. Semi-perforated for natural cooling, it accommodates a double row of controls

## FIRST PLAY



**VICTORY MKX  
LUNCH BOX HEAD**  
£1,399

**WHAT IS IT?** 50-watt (switchable to nine watts) all-valve, three-channel lunchbox head

# On Your Marks

Victory's most advanced compact amp to date promises huge tone-potential in a lunchbox-sized package. We're feeling hungry...

**Words** Martin Smith **Photography** Phil Barker

**D**uring a design career spanning Marshall, Cornford and now Victory amps, chief designer Martin Kidd has gained an army of illustrious fans, including Guthrie Govan and Chris Buck, due to the excellent sound, features and construction quality of his creations. Victory's first amps rolled out of the factory in 2013 with the Baron combo and the Earl and Duke heads. The much-vaunted Kraken head was unveiled in 2015 in partnership with riff-lord Rabea Massaad and has established a reputation for Victory as the high-gain provender to the modern metal scene. Further releases, however, have made it more than apparent that Victory's sonic attributes cover all bases, from pristine cleans to out-and-out gain-Armageddon and all the classic semi-dirty tones in between.

The MK range, from which this amp spawned, was designated as the brand's "ultimate, no-compromise amplifier collection". Feature-packed and fully hand-crafted, these amps can certainly be considered premium: the MK Overdrive



model for instance, weighs in at the not inconsiderable price of £5,099. Since it was most likely out of reach for less fiscally blessed players, Victory cleverly found a way to cater for this end of the market by way of its compact and portable lunchbox-style amps. Indeed, it is to the MK family lunchbox that we eagerly turn our attention.

Emerging from a smart padded gigbag is a stout and sturdy enamelled unit, with its heat-dissipating – and somewhat militaristic – semi-perforated steel chassis housing an eye-opening array of front-panel controls. The MKX is festooned with two rows of controls, the top row for the Clean channel and the bottom row for the two overdrive channels, which share a common

Diving into the OD II channel, it becomes clear why Martin Kidd's designs are a favourite of many a virtuoso

tone stack after the individual gain controls. The reverb and master controls take the last millimetres of front-panel real estate, though we do still have the Resonance and Presence controls, which can be found nestling on the rear panel alongside the very helpful bias points, speaker outputs and the series, non-switchable effects loop. Finally, the mains power is integrated into the rear IEC socket, while the front-panel standby controls the wattage selection between the 50 watts of full power or the nine watts' reduced power output.

### Sounds

Armed with a small armada of guitars and cabinets, we commenced our sonic inspection with the Clean channel. Martin has expressed that his goal was to offer a fully independent Clean channel, rather than a shared topology with potential compromises. Our Stratocaster's single-coil pickups appreciated the benefit, being rendered with a depth and gentle natural compression that made licks and even lead parts hold their own. Speaker-wise, the company is known to use Celestion Vintage 30s for their balance of traditional tone with improved high-end

clarity, and we found this to be the case for achieving some clean sparkle from the MKX. The rear-mounted Presence control further enhanced the top-end excitement appreciably.

Sometimes a new piece of gear can unlock fresh musical possibilities, and this amp's Clean channel brings a solid fluidity that can be heard on many contemporary guitar-orientated recordings. Unlike the design ethos of many of the more historic brands, reproducing the vintage character that created their success, the Victory clean here doesn't particularly evoke specific historic references. If pushed to choose a closest match on the colour chart of amps, perhaps shades of Vox are subtly detectable. The onboard and footswitchable two-position reverb continues the theme of studio-grade sonics without historic baggage. Reverb position I yields a shorter, less dense sound that Victory suggests is more spring-like. It's not particularly splashy or metallic as springs often are, but that lends itself particularly well to the style of this amplifier. Reverb position II has more of a larger, plate-like quality, equally as perfect for solos or lush clean sounds.

1. The rear panel includes a non-switchable effects loop, helpful bias points for maintenance, an array of speaker outputs, and Resonance and Presence controls. The included footswitch allows for Channel, Gain I/II, Master I/II and Reverb

2. The onboard digital reverb has two flavours in addition to length and level controllability. Reverb I is loosely based on a spring-type effect with its shorter, brighter nature, while Reverb II opens up a larger halo, similar in nature to a studio plate reverb. A purple jewel light is accompanied by the multi-purpose standby switch: in the up position, the amp will deliver its maximum output, which, with EL34 valves, should be in the region of 47 watts; in its down position, power is reduced to nine watts

3. We're met with three gain controls and two rows of channel controls. The explanation is that the overdrive channel has been outfitted with two switchable input gain controls that share the same tone circuit



## VICTORY MKX LUNCH BOX HEAD

**PRICE:** £1,399  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** All-Valve channel switching compact head  
**VALVES:** 3x ECC83, 2x EL34  
**OUTPUT:** 50/9W RMS  
**DIMENSIONS:** 350 (w) x 190 (d) x 180mm (h)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 7.15/15.76  
**CABINET:** Steel  
**CHANNELS:** Clean, OD I, OD II (foot-switchable)  
**CONTROLS:** High/Standby/Low wattage switch, Gain (Clean), gain (OD I), gain (OD II), separate treble, middle, bass tone stack for clean and overdrive channels, 2x footswitchable master volume, reverb length and level, resonance and presence (rear panel)  
**FOOTSWITCH:** 2x two-button footswitches included  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Padded gigbag included  
**OPTIONS:** 1x12 cabinet (£349); vertical 2x12 cabinet (£949)  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The upmarket MK Clean Head is £4,899; the MK Overdrive Head costs £5,099. Other lunchbox heads include the V40 The Duchess Mk II (£1,249) and the VX The Kraken MkII (£1,349)

Victory Amplification  
[www.victoryamps.com](http://www.victoryamps.com)



9/10

**PROS** Three switchable channels with additional master volume controllability; selectable high/low output; onboard digital reverb

**CONS** Two footswitches, each with its own cable, seems a little cumbersome; a Bright switch for the Clean channel would be a useful addition for darker-sounding speakers and guitars

The OD I channel lunges forward with a punchy, responsive authority, and a gain range from light 'edge of break-up' through to JCM levels. It does an excellent job of conjuring the Marshall-esque crunch, with a nod more to the later metal-face Marshall sound, rather than the earlier 'Plexi' tones.

Diving into what may be considered as this amp's main course, the OD II channel, it becomes immediately clear why Martin Kidd's designs are a favourite of many a virtuoso. The response is lightning-fast and mid-forward, and both fast-picking and legato styles sound equally forthright and impressive. When you're ready to hold that yearning bend, there's glorious harmonic feedback aplenty for that forever sustain, given a sufficiency of master volume juice.

In the rhythm department, those crushing, heavy drop-tuned riffs will sound every bit as impressive as you'd expect, perhaps with a little midrange cut. If a little more depth is required from a thinner-sounding guitar, the Resonance control has you covered. Overall, the tone has a smooth, rich midrange character that flatters many guitar styles, especially fusion and legato, but the Presence control adds all the aggressive bite to the fore.

In a stage context, the pair of included double footswitches allows for channel selection, master volume and reverb options, which covers most of what players may wish to switch, with the exception of the effects loop status. For home use, low-power mode reduces the output to nine watts, which – together with the excellent master volume – means you can enjoy its full overdriven roar at whisper-quiet levels.

### Verdict

This amp will appeal to high-gain players without unlimited budgets, and if you've had your eye on the MK50 head but couldn't justify the cost, this one's tailor-made for you. It brings forth versatility, portability and controllability. Price-wise, it does reside at the higher end for lunchbox-style amps, but then it's worth noting that it offers more in terms of wattage and channel count than most. It doesn't, however, have cab-emulated output facilities, and the two double footswitches – each with a separate cable – are perhaps a bit of a fuff for a compact package. But if it's rich, flattering overdrive combined with scaled-down size and cost that you value, the MKX could indeed prove victorious. **G**

## FIRST PLAY



**FAITH PJE LEGACY  
FG4 EARTH**  
£1,565

**WHAT IS IT?** Mid-priced Indonesian-built electro cutaway OM designed by master luthier Patrick James Eggle

# Earth Song

Patrick James Eggle's take on the OM body shape is built by Faith's facility in Indonesia and based around PJE's Linville model from his acoustic-building days. But does it rock our world?

**Words** David Mead **Photography** Matt Lincoln

**F**aith's latest entry in its PJE Legacy range is, we're told, an all-rounder: "Big enough to perform well unplugged but small enough to be used on stage for long periods by players of any stature," states the website. It certainly sounds like a good proposition to us, but dig a little deeper and we find that designer Patrick James Eggle has taken the renowned OM body shape and tweaked it to his own taste, based on his own Linville model from his acoustic-building era. In essence, the body width of 400mm (15 inches) is the same as Faith's Venus model, but, to quote the company once again, "its overall contour is somewhat more refined".

In case you're unfamiliar with the brand, Faith acoustics first appeared in the marketplace around the turn of this century. The design team is helmed by Mr Eggle, and they have won a shelfload of awards for best in breed ever since launch. The FG4 Earth we have before us inhabits Faith's slightly higher tier of Legacy models, but it still retails at the £1.5k mark and includes a rather posh-looking ABS hard case to protect your investment. Add to that the fact the instrument is stage-ready with a Fishman Flex Blend system, combining an under-saddle piezo with an internal condenser microphone, and the FG4 would appear to be a one-stop shop for your mid-priced acoustic needs – whether you're







1

1. The FG4 Earth's top is Sitka spruce that has been torrefied, or heated and dried, to simulate a more zoned in type of tone. Note, too, the finely wrought abalone rosette and wooden pickguard

2. Fingerboard timber is Indonesian ebony, with no position markers, except for the stylised 'F' at the 12th fret. Fear not, there are dots to the side of the neck for navigation, though!

looking for a sofa buddy or a get-up-and-go open-mic companion. But that's enough of an introduction from us, time to zoom in for a close-up on the finer details.

Faith guitars have always had kerb appeal. And, opening the FG4's case, it's apparent that a lot of creative thought has passed its way – not just from the general design point of view, but also the aesthetics of the fixtures and fittings, which have a definite 'pick me up' lure.

As you'll have gathered from the guitar's full name, its finish is satin throughout and this is not only for purely artistic reasons, there's a function here, too. Faith tells

us that the finish allows the tonewoods present to work at a premium level. And if you're curious as to what those woods are, the top is torrefied Sitka spruce. In other words, it's gone through a drying and heating process whereby the wood dries out more thoroughly in order to 'age' the wood and deliver a more vintage-inspired tone. It's not a new process, for sure, but one that has had the nodding approval of builders big and small across the globe, and who have universally claimed that, yes, there is a difference in tone with this particular process.

The spruce is supported by mahogany for the back and sides, set off with the contrasting flamed-maple binding. Add in the multi-hued abalone rosette and a scratchplate of unspecified wood (that looks like figured ebony to us) and there's no doubt that the FG4 is dressed to impress. The neck is mahogany, with an Indonesian ebony 'board that is bare of the usual position markers on top, save for Faith's signature mother-of-pearl 'F' at the 12th fret.

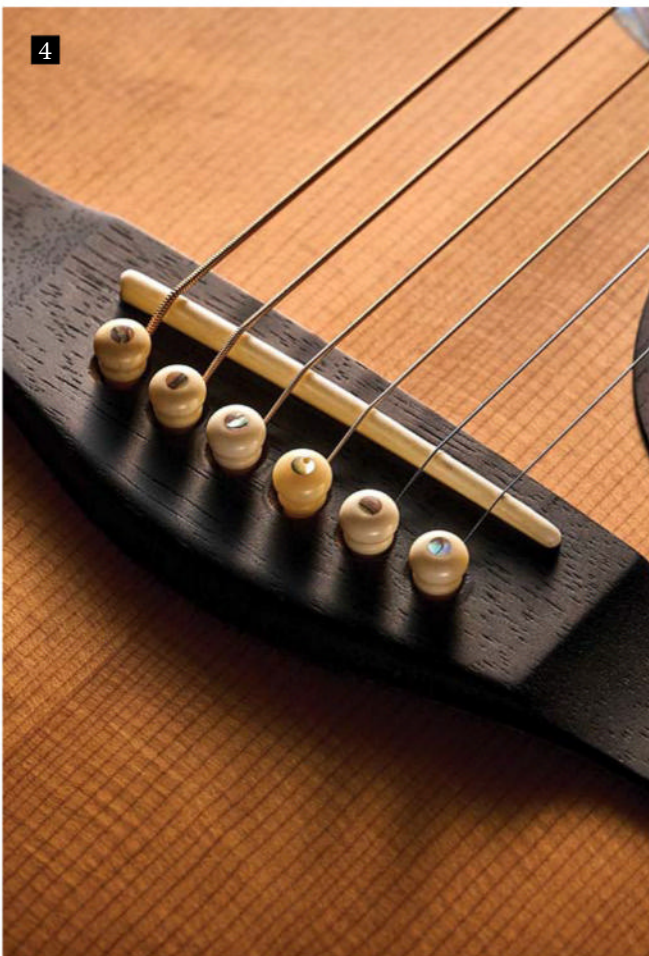
In all, there are 20 very nicely polished and well-seated medium frets that have been smartly finished with no discernible sharp edges. Both the 45mm nut and saddle are unbleached bone, the former expertly cut, the latter sitting in a Macassan figured ebony bridge. The tuners are Grover Rotomatics featuring very subtle matte-black buttons.



2



3



4

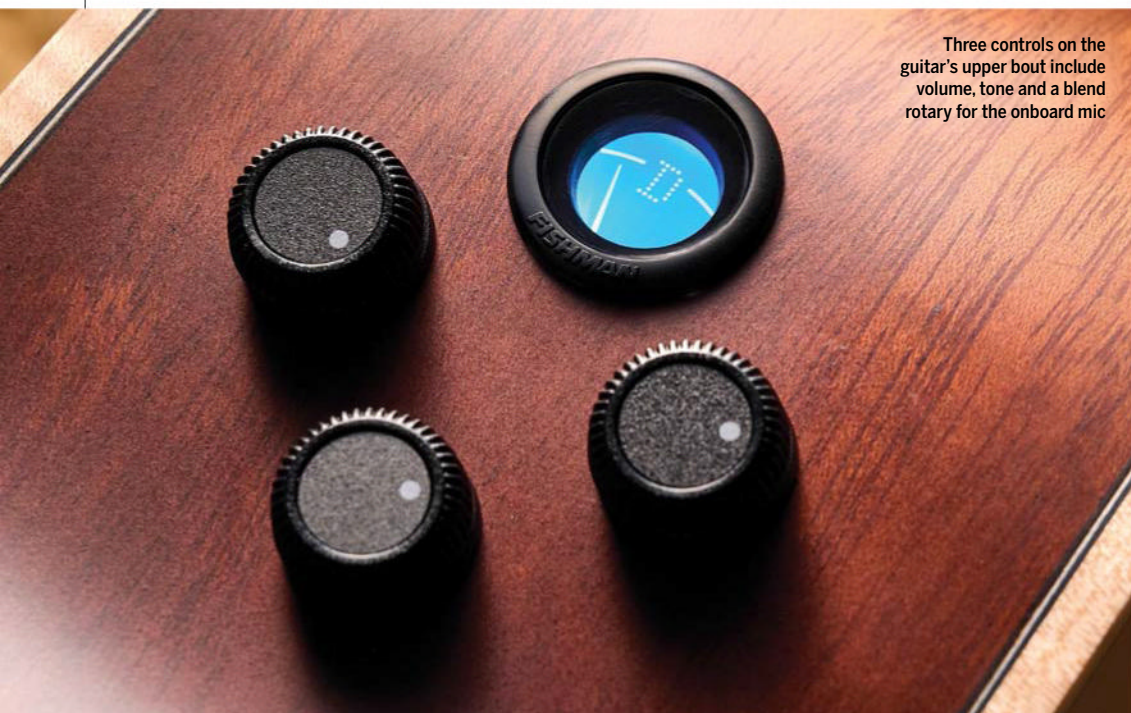
Its finish is satin throughout and this is not only for purely artistic reasons, there's a function here, too

All well and good, of course, and acoustic players everywhere will agree that the sum of the FG4's parts should add up to an extremely capable instrument. But the fun doesn't end there because if your acoustic world extends to playing in a band or being a regular at open mic spots, then you'll definitely be interested in the Fishman Flex Blend pickup and preamp system. As previously mentioned, this entails not only an under-saddle piezo but an under-bridge-mounted condenser microphone with its own blend control set into the upper bout, too, along with the regular volume and tone rotaries. There's also an onboard tuner that mutes the output when activated to ensure that keeping everything harmonious remains a strictly private player experience.

Everything about the general build quality is typically fine and dandy as we would expect, having seen some very good instruments coming out of Indonesian workshops recently. So the next thing to do is strum a few chords and see how everything sounds.

3. At the rear of the Faith's headstock we find a set of Grover Rotomatic tuners with matt black buttons, adding a very classy touch

4. Sitting in the Macassar ebony bridge, the saddle is unbleached bone and, keeping to the theme, the bridge pins are fashioned from bone, too



Three controls on the guitar's upper bout include volume, tone and a blend rotary for the onboard mic



## FAITH PJE LEGACY FG4 EARTH

**PRICE:** £1,565 (inc hard case)

**ORIGIN:** Indonesia

**TYPE:** OM cutaway

**TOP:** Torrefied Sitka spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** African mahogany

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 111mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 400mm

**NECK:** Mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm

**TUNERS:** Grover Rotomatic

18:1 nickel

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/45mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Indonesian ebony

**FRETS:** 20

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Macassar

figured ebony/55mm

**ELECTRICS:** Fishman Flex Blend

with condenser mic

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.95/4.3

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Other guitars in

the Faith PJE Legacy Earth Series

include the PJE Legacy Earth khaya

mahogany FG1HCE (£1,445),

PJE Legacy Earth dark roast

FG5HCE (£1,565), PJE Legacy Earth

rosewood FG2HCE (£1,595) and

the PJE Legacy Earth claro walnut

limited edition FG7HCE (£1,655)

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not for this model

**FINISHES:** Satin

**Barnes & Mullins**

**01691 652449**

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

# 8/10

### Feel & Sounds

Not only is the FG4's satin finish pleasing to the eye, it's also a very pleasant tactile experience, inasmuch as the guitar feels very nice in the hand. Naturally, the finish extends to the back of the neck, which will help with those rapid barre-chord changes by presenting a minimal drag factor for the left hand. The neck itself is a fairly slim and shallow C profile, which sits at that precise point where it's neither too skinny nor too chunky.

A lowish action means there is little resistance for the fingers while playing chords or single notes, and both give a good account of themselves with chords sounding full and single notes singing out exactly as they should. There's a good amount of snarl to the bass register, sitting beneath a full midrange and sweet trebles. We tried a variety of different styles – a bit of bluesy fingerstyle, chordal strumming with and without a pick and so on – and the FG4 dealt with everything we threw at it like an absolute pro.

Plugged in, the Fishman Flex Blend was a new pickup system to us. There are three rotary controls that deal with volume, tone and condenser mic blend. The tone control gives a flat EQ when fully anti-clockwise, whereas in the middle of its travel it thickens up the midrange, and at the top (fully clockwise) it scoops some of the mids out for those busy strumming sessions. Furthermore, press and hold the volume control and it activates the onboard tuner; do the same to the tone control and it reverses the phase. Very neat and compact.

### There's a good amount of snarl to the bass, sitting beneath a full midrange and sweet trebles

In practice, the controls work precisely as described, and we discovered that we had a whole range of sounds available to us with the guitar plugged into our Boss Katana-50 EX Gen 3's acoustic preset. The mic adds some necessary 'air' to the audio signal, complementing the under-saddle piezo perfectly. In short, what Faith said about this instrument being something of an all-rounder is shaping up to be bang on the button.

### Verdict

Faith's PJE Legacy FG4 Earth sits at that price point where it's well above and beyond the budget range and, at the same time, well below the boutique and bespoke world. And it fits in that midrange niche very well, ticking all the musical boxes necessary for a workmanlike, no-fuss instrument that is particularly able for both living room and gig duty, as well as giving a very good account of itself through an amp or PA.

For any singer-songwriter, busker or open-mic-night trooper it really has everything going for it. Or if you're in a band where you cover a couple of acoustic songs per gig, it has all bases covered. Seek one out and try it for yourself; we think you'll be very pleasantly surprised. **G**

# Julian Lage

15 May  
Royal Festival Hall

featuring John Medeski,  
Jorge Roeder and  
Kenny Wollesen



## PAT METHENY

SIDE-EYE III+

WEEKEND TAKEOVER  
/3 SHOWS

18 & 19 JULY  
BARBICAN CENTRE

BOOK TICKETS AT  
[SERIOUS.ORG.UK/PATMETHENY](https://serious.org.uk/patmetheny)

PART OF THE  
SUMMER JAZZ SERIES 2026



## Al Di Meola

The Guitarchitect  
25 June, Barbican



Presented in partnership with *Marshall Arts*

Book at [serious.org.uk/events](https://serious.org.uk/events)

SERIOUS

Upcoming shows presented by Serious include **Tony Ann, Bill Frisell & Eyvind Kang,**  
**Roberto Fonseca, Mario Biondi, Stacey Kent, Fatoumata Diawara** + more



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**

FIRST PLAY



**FLATLEY THE OUTLAW**  
£299

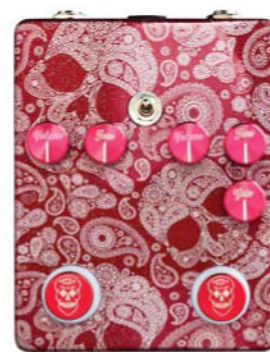
**WHAT IS IT?** 'Plexi'-style  
overdrive pedal with  
clean tone booster



# Criminal Crunch

Flattley combines the functions of two of its pedals into one chassis to create a Marshall-flavoured drive and boost

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker



## FLATTLEY THE OUTLAW

**PRICE:** £299  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** Overdrive pedal  
**FEATURES:** True bypass, 2x channels  
**CONTROLS:** Volume, Gain, Tone, Boost Volume, Boost Tone, effect order toggle switch, Boost footswitch, Bypass footswitch  
**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output  
**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50mA  
**DIMENSIONS:** 94 (w) x 119 (d) x 30mm (h)

Flattley Guitar Pedals  
 07802 455 127  
[www.flattleyguitarpedals.com](http://www.flattleyguitarpedals.com)



**PROS** Stunning looks; drive and boost in one pedal; selectable effect order

**CONS** We'd like it even more if it cost less

1. The toggle switch allows you to change the order of the two effects: either the boost feeds the drive or comes after it
2. The red halo rings that surround the footswitches are designed to diffuse the light when playing live, avoiding any off-putting brightness
3. This edition comes in red, with holographic chrome metal flake and silver paisley skulls 'hydro graphics', plus custom-etched aluminium foot toppers

The Outlaw is a twin-footswitch pedal that combines elements of two of the Lincolnshire-based pedal maker's previous pedals – the Ace tone booster and the Plexstar overdrive – and is styled after a Marshall JTM45 'Plexi' amp. What you're getting are independently footswitched boost and drive sections that can be used individually or combined. A toggle switch determines whether boost is placed before or after the drive.

The boost section features a Volume knob that starts from silence and has unity gain at around 12 o'clock, which means that there's plenty of boost available beyond that, but it also gives you the scope to use it to attenuate levels or even as a mute switch. It's allied to a Tone knob that lets you target the boost in a specific area. Kick the boost in and you'll find it at its most neutral sounding with the Tone knob somewhere around the midway point. From here, you can turn the knob anti-clockwise to thicken the sound and bring out more low-end, or turn it clockwise for more top-end sparkle, ranging up to a potent treble boost at its full-on position.

The FET-based drive section has Volume, Gain and Tone knobs and is silent until you advance both Volume and Gain. With lower levels of gain there's some gritty just-beyond-clean sounds, but advancing the knob soon gets you into increasing amounts of Marshall-flavoured crunch and raunch that responds well to playing dynamics. All of this can be tempered with a sensibly voiced Tone knob that focuses on upper-mid presence and is a practical asset for getting the drive in the right tonal space to complement your amp.

As individually used entities, both sections shine. But there are tasty performance benefits in combining them. Boost before drive expands the range of your dirt options like pushing the front-end of a valve amp, teasing out extra drive, increased sustain and harmonics for single-note leads. Placing the boost after the drive offers the alternative action of a volume boost when needed, with or without a tonal shift.

### Verdict

A drive and boost with flexible routing options in a single chassis is arguably the most practical single pedal you can put in front of an amp. The Outlaw ticks all the boxes in that role with two excellent-sounding effects that hold their own individually but really complement each other when combined. **G**



### THE RIVALS

Several pedals combine Marshall-style drive with a boost. Wampler's Plexi Drive Deluxe (£249) features three-band EQ, plus Bright Boost and Bass Boost switches; the boost is pre- the main drive section. Carl Martin's PlexiRanger (£129, right) pairs independently switched vintage British amp sound with a Rangemaster-style treble booster in front of it, while Boost Guitar Pedals' Formula B Super Plexi (£164) offers independent switching for its 'Plexi' and boost effects, which can be run in any order. If you're looking for a full 'Plexi' amp-in-a-box, Universal Audio's UAFX Lion '68 Super Lead Amp (£299) provides three different setups.



A versatile drive and boost pedal from Carl Martin

FIRST PLAY



**CRUMAR BURN**  
£229

**WHAT IS IT?** Rotary speaker simulation pedal that can be used with both guitar and keys



# Red Hot Rotary

Made by a keyboard company for use with its organs, this rotary simulator pedal has plenty to get guitarists in a spin

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. Select from slow, fast or stop with the Speed footswitch. It can also be used when powering up to engage a noise gate
2. This Front Stop switch offers the 'sweet spot' sound of the top horn's position in relation to the microphone when a rotary speaker is stationary
3. In addition to the standard input/output and headphone sockets on the pedal's back panel, a socket on the right-hand side is designed for Crumar's hand-operated speed selector (its 'Half-Moon' three-way rotary switch), but it will take an expression pedal for speed adjustment

**C**rumar might not be a name that's familiar to most guitarists, but the long-established Italian keyboard company has recently released the Burn, a mono in/stereo out rotary speaker simulator designed for both guitar and keyboard use. This is a new take on a pedal originally introduced in the 2010s by Genuine Soundware (Gsi). But where the original offered menu-based operation, this one has an instantly accessible interface with loads of hands-on control.

The pedal offers adjustable parameters, not just for rotary speaker sound but also reverb. Two reverb types are available via a toggle switch, delivering great-sounding yet diverse sonic outcomes via a spring reverb emulation that feeds into the rotary sound, or a larger-spaced ambience at the pedal's output. Another switch offers 'Memphis'-style disabling of the spinning of the emulated bass rotor, which can have the effect of making your low-end more focused. Speed switching options from the dedicated footswitch toggle between slow and fast speeds but can also bring the speaker to a halt when pressed. A Speed knob adjusts the available range by up to 15 per cent up or down, and you can also set how long the Ramp is from one speed to the other.

The basic rotary sound is very convincing, as are the speed changes with the acceleration/deceleration of the horn and rotor proceeding at different rates like the real thing. The pedal can be run with or without cabinet simulation, giving you two different sonic options to start with. The overall sonic signature can be adjusted to taste by a knob that balances the level of horn against rotor and parameters representing the simulated mic'ing, particularly the Distance control, which ranges between a focused or more diffused effect. While rival pedals offer a drive feature to emulate the growl of a vintage Leslie valve amp, there's none of that here, so you'd have to employ a drive pedal for the more driven speaker sounds.

## Verdict

The Burn offers a really good representation of rotary speaker sound with plenty of practical sonic adjustments on tap and the added bonus of reverb. It may lack some of the connective flexibility of its rivals that have optional stereo input and a designated mono output, but if mono input with a stereo output suits your signal chain needs, it could do the job for you. **G**



3

## THE RIVALS

Last year, Boss introduced the Compact RT-2 Rotary Ensemble (£229), based on a Leslie 122 cabinet and featuring three differently voiced modes of operation. Neo Instruments specialises in rotary speaker pedals and offers its flagship Ventilator II (£399), Mini Vent II (£314) and two versions of the Micro Vent, the 122 and the 16 (both £299). Two of the most popular rotary pedals are the dual-footswitch Strymon Lex V2 (£319) and Keeley Rotary (£289): the Strymon has a host of adjustable parameters and supports full MIDI implementation, while the Keeley has a more streamlined user interface.



## CRUMAR BURN

**PRICE:** £229

**ORIGIN:** Italy

**TYPE:** Rotary pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, switchable noise gate, switchable low or high input gain, reverb, optional cabinet simulation  
**CONTROLS:** Balance, Distance, Angle, Speed, Ramp, Reverb, Memphis switch, Front Stop switch, Reverb Type switch, Hi/Lo input gain switch, Bypass footswitch, Speed footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard outputs L & R, 1/8" headphone output, standard TRS expression pedal input, Crumar 'One-Cord' connector, System connector

**POWER:** Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300 mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 118 (w) x 96 (d) x 34mm (h)

**Sound Technology**

**0208 962 5080**

[www.crumar.it](http://www.crumar.it)

8/10

**PROS** Compact size; switchable speeds; onboard reverb; a really good set of adjustable parameters

**CONS** No drive effect; no dedicated mono output; no stereo input



Boss's RT-2 Rotary Ensemble offers three sound modes

# the Wishlist

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

## Gibson Custom Mick Ronson 1968 Les Paul Custom Collector's Edition £8,999

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 44427661** WEB **www.gibson.com** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Matt Lincoln**

**T**he first time this writer saw the original guitar that this latest Gibson Custom Collector's Edition model replicates was watching David Bowie on *Top Of The Pops* on 6 July 1972. Even by the standards of the emerging glam-rock scene, Bowie and the Spiders from Hull – Mick Ronson, Woody Woodmansey and Trevor Bolder – looked otherworldly, but my eyes were glued to *that* guitar. As Ziggy exploded, that 1968 Les Paul Custom was everywhere and pretty much the only guitar Mick used throughout his time with Bowie – and beyond with the numerous artists he worked with and produced. It only fell out of use after a headstock break and repair. Hey, it's a Les Paul!

In *The Spider With The Platinum Hair* book (by Weird & Gilly, the pen names of Eric Demattio and Karen Laney) it's suggested that Ronson got the black Les Paul Custom in 1968 while working with the Hull-based pro band, the Rats. They supported Mick's idol Jeff Beck in March of that year, then stood right in front of Jeff and recorded the gig so they could learn the songs from the as-yet-unleashed *Truth* album.

Building quite a local reputation in Hull by this time, Mick had met folk singer-songwriter Michael Chapman (who asked Mick to play on his second album, *Fully Qualified Survivor*, released in 1970), whose roadie Pete Hunsley saw Mick as a local hero and wanted to work for him. Apparently, Pete told

Mick that Michael had stripped the front of his Gibson J-200, and Pete did the same to the Les Paul Custom. "Whether Mick actually wanted him to or not is open to debate!" Chapman is quoted as saying. "Mick finished up with the only natural Les Paul around."

The other mods aren't documented, although if you were a fan of Clapton and Beck – as Mick was – you'd obviously remove your pickup covers, and losing the pickguard and swapping the volume control knobs for gold reflectors is done in minutes.

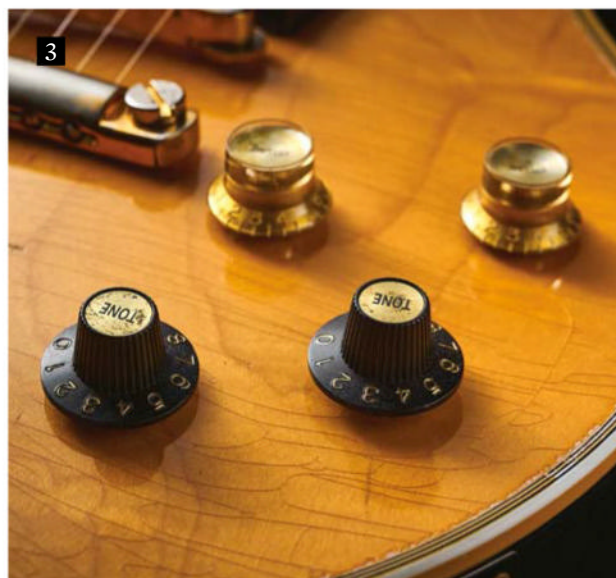
Opening the case of this latest repro, we find ourselves transported back in time some 54 years: it's *that* guitar looking like it's already been on a few world tours and played hard. The two-piece plain maple top has some attractive wavy grain, not a conventional figure, and there's plenty of wear and 'age' to the top, especially by the controls where the multiple edge binding feels bumpy to the touch. The cracked, yellowed nitrocellulose probably isn't what was on the original, but it does add to the illusion here. The back and sides are a worn-looking black (or Ebony, as Gibson prefers) with relatively little wear; there's certainly no bare wood from a belt buckle. It feels like an old Custom, too, not least the weight, a relatively manageable 4.24kg (9.4lb).

Admittedly, it's collector's money, but this guitar is an evocative reminder of the man and the music he made. Mick Ronson, who was born in 1946 and passed away in 1993, would have been 80 this year. **G**

**1.** "The pickups are unpotted and aged '68 Custom humbuckers with Alnico II magnets and no covers, which helps to give them that aggressive tone that Mick Ronson was famous for," says Gibson. Both have virtually the same DCR readings, just slightly under 7kohms. If you can play the parts, trust us – you'll sound like the man

**2.** Following the classic Custom headstock before a later repair, the ageing is especially authentic-looking and the well-cut nut is spec'd as nylon as was originally used. The gold-plated hardware is aged, right down to the backplate screws, but the Grover Rotomatic tuners do look a little 'new'

**3.** The mismatched knobs are another identifier of this classic. Inside, we find a very clean-looking (thankfully) unaged circuit, with vintage-style wiring, Gibson-logo CTS 500k pots and large Black Beauty .022µF capacitors





4

4. Classed as 'Authentic '68 Medium C-shaped', the neck profile feels a little slimmer in depth than a couple of reference 50s Custom Les Pauls: it's not a baseball bat, but it isn't whippet-thin, either. The ebony fingerboard doesn't look like a well-used guitar, rather one that's been refretted is a better suggestion – the ebony is a real dark chocolate colour, with no striping, contrasting the mother-of-pearl block inlays

5. This latest Collector's Edition is a limited run of just 100 pieces and includes a small booklet and replica strap, and comes in a Custom case with a replica signature. The Murphy Lab ageing just gets better and better to our eyes

5



# Gas Supply

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

## NAMM 2026 Report

It's been a big start to another year, and it seems like the gear industry is just getting started. As always, the latest NAMM Show in Anaheim, California, was a lucky dip of practical, workhorse instruments, technical innovation and progression, high-end, vintage-inspired reverence and the downright crazy (wireless guitar-strap pedal controller, anyone?).

It's great to see some focus applied to the more affordable end of the market this year, with bigger brands and start-ups alike putting wallet-friendly gear front and centre, while also maintaining the more aspirational side of things for us to drool over and motivate our GAS. There's a lot more to come, but here are just some of our highlights from the 2026 NAMM Show. **[SW]**



### **PATINA GUITARS** SERIES FROM £519

"Never heard of them!" No, you probably won't have yet, but you'll likely recognise the name of this new brand's sister company, Jet Guitars. Just like Jet, Patina guitars have value at their core, but unlike Jet – or, indeed, any other brand we can think of – the company is offering nitro-finished electrics at low prices. The guitars come in four series: 3 and 4 (both £519), and 6 and 7 (both £569), which offer light ageing, with all series having a shared recipe of paulownia bodies and quarter-sawn roasted maple necks (with stainless-steel frets), Alpha pots and custom-wound pickups. [www.patinaguitars.com](http://www.patinaguitars.com)



### **CORT SPACE** G6MS & G6TR £599

Cort is looking to prove that no heads are better than two, with the introduction of a pair of new headless models. Built from the same foundation of okoume bodies and roasted maple, Ergo V necks with 24 stainless-steel frets, the configuration changes between the two models. The G6MS features a multi-scale fingerboard and a pair of VTH77 humbuckers, while the G6TR comes with an HSS configuration of VTS63 single coils and a VHT77 humbucker. Both come in two finishes: Semi Gloss Turquoise/Semi Gloss Trans Black for the G6MS, and Semi Gloss Lava/Semi Gloss Lagoon for the G6TR. [www.cortguitars.com](http://www.cortguitars.com)



**CASIO DIMENSION SHIFTER \$389**

Ever looked at your guitar strap and thought, 'You could be working harder'? The boffins at Casio have, and thus the Dimension Shifter is born. It comes in two parts: a spring-loaded controller that sits between your guitar and strap, and a receiver unit that plugs into your pedal's expression or footswitch socket. Pull down on the neck and it'll send a signal to the receiver, allowing hands-free control of your pedals. It works over Bluetooth, with the transmitter powered by two AAA batteries, while the receiver requires a PSU. Bonkers? Yes – and, frankly, we can't wait to try it.

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



**EASTMAN FULLERTONE OFFSET '62 £899**

We were big fans of Eastman's Fullertone SC'52 and DC'62 when they arrived for review last year. Never one to let the moss gather, Eastman has now followed up with the Fullertone Offset '62, which offers the same innovative, sustain-boosting neck joint in a new configuration designed in collaboration with YouTuber Paul Davids. The body shape is taken from the D'Ambrosio Offset '62, it's available in Dakota Red or Gold finishes, and it features a Göldo DG Vibrato and Tonerider Soapbar Humbuckers with custom goldfoil covers, and includes a Fullertone padded gigbag for transportation.

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

**ALSO OUT NOW...**

**EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON FROM £349**



There's no doubt we've seen Epiphone pushing its standards higher and higher over the past few years, with the Inspired By Gibson and Inspired By Gibson Custom lines making upgrades to bring the affordable versions closer to the real thing. Now it's time for the next wave of improvements to the Inspired By Gibson range, and the big news is it's waving goodbye to laurel. Instead, the new IBG models feature either rosewood or ebony 'boards and also come with upgrades across the range including new contours, electronics and upscaled hardware. To start with, Epiphone has announced the Explorer 80s, EMG, Firebird, Flying V 70s, Les Paul Special DC, Les Paul Special DC Figured, Les Paul Junior, SG Special P90, Les Paul Standard (50s and 60s) and SG Standard.

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

**JBL BANDBOX SOLO & TRIO £199 & £529**

Every musician has found themselves wishing to be able to turn down individual instruments when learning songs, and not very long ago that felt like the stuff of *Tomorrow's World*. In fact, it's sort of Yesterday's News because we've been able to do that for a few years now... However, JBL has just taken things a step beyond what the current set of 'de-mixing' plug-ins and apps deliver. The BandBox can deconstruct a stereo audio file, but it can do so in real-time – and even better than that, you don't even need to have the file natively. That means you can hook it up to any streaming service and start removing or isolating instrumental parts. In addition, there's built-in modelling and effects for you to practise through. For lone practice, the BandBox Solo or Trio offer additional mic and line inputs for complete band jams.

<https://uk.jbl.com>



## The Lineup



### BLACKSTAR ARTIST FR FROM £289

With the omnipresence of modellers and preamps, you're probably aware of FRFR (Full Range Flat Response) cabinets. Blackstar has pulled up a pew at the table with its Artist FR cabs, which it hopes will take the FRFR speaker away from 'PA territory' and back to the familiarity and response of a guitar cab. There are two to choose from: Artist FR Standard (50-watt, £289) and Artist FR Special (100-watt, £339). Both feature a 1x12 custom speaker with whizzer cone and come with a three-band EQ control, plus Presence. To the back, there's a kickstand for tilting and XLR DI output for sending to the front-of-house.

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



### MXR EVH MODERN HIGH GAIN £259

When Eddie Van Halen passed in 2020, we lost a pioneer of guitar playing and tone. His influence continues to live on, and MXR has just unveiled the EVH Modern High Gain distortion, a collaboration that began with the man himself in 2015. It's based on the heaviest channel of an EVH 5150 for saturated amp-in-a-box distortion. Control-wise, we get a noise gate to tame your signal. Gain and Output controls, as well as a switchable boost circuit. But there's also three-band EQ, with a bass control changing the low-end centre frequency from 55Hz to 80Hz. We're expecting them to land in a couple of months.

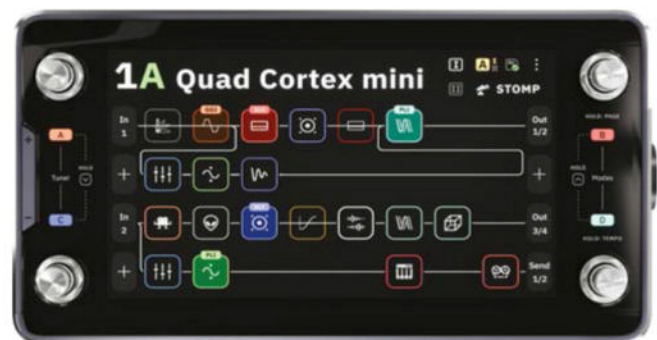
[www.jimdunlop.com](http://www.jimdunlop.com)



### LANEY BLACK COUNTRY CUSTOMS SUPERGRACE LOUDPEDAL £449

You know Billy Corgan for his sustained destruction of squashes and some of the most delicious guitar tones alt-rock has heard. Now, he's teamed up with Laney for the Loudpedal series Supergrace, a 60-watt pedal-based solid-state amp featuring two channels: Grace, based on a Carstens Grace, offering defined cleans and heavy drive from its three modes; and Supergroup, which harnesses Laney's LA100BL via Clean/Dimed modes. There's three-band EQ, a tone control, reverb and boost circuits, a USB interface, an effects loop, MIDI and the ability to run LA-IR impulse responses on the XLR DI output. Gish!

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



### NEURAL DSP QUAD CORTEX MINI £1,129

First came the Quad Cortex, which in five years has become the modelling unit against which all others are judged. Next, Neural DSP unveiled the Nano Cortex, a Capture device that delivers some of the Neural flavour at an affordable price. For 2026, the company has unveiled the Quad Cortex Mini, boasting the same processing power as the Quad Cortex at 50 per cent of the size. With a seven-inch touchscreen taking up most of the footprint, Neural has dropped the combo footswitch/encoder count to four and slightly reduced I/O (MIDI over TRS, single effects loop), but the Mini houses the same sound engine for the full Quad Cortex experience, only smaller.

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



**VOX VTB-1 TREBLE BOOSTER £115**

Thanks to Brian May, a Treble Booster and AC30 go hand-in-hand. Now, Vox has redesigned its take on the Dallas Rangemaster for the Vox VTB-1. Aiming to deliver consistency and reliability as well as authentically recreating tone, the classic germanium transistors found in the Treble Booster of yore have been swapped for carefully selected Silver Can BC108 silicon transistors. Vox reckons it's nailed the non-linear and dynamic response of an old-school treble booster, while keeping noise to a minimum. Meanwhile, the addition of a Fat switch here widens the boosted frequency range, so you can get your amp cooking even hotter.

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



**ORANGE OR60 £2,099**

The OR60 is the latest design from Orange, offering a UK-made 60-watt single-channel amp, which it says is "generous in clarity, tight in the lows and voiced to take boosts beautifully". It achieves this by delivering plenty of headroom from a pair of 6L6 power valves, and while it's a single-channel design, there's a switchable second volume control, allowing you to bump the output when you need to cut through. It's got an effects loop, can run in 30-watt mode, and there's additional tone-shaping via Resonance and Presence controls, plus a three-position Bright switch for adding definition without altering your gain.

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

**ALSO OUT NOW...**

**GIBSON FLAT-TOPS FROM £2,699**



2026 marks 100 years since Gibson introduced its flat-top models, so naturally the brand is marking the occasion by reintroducing its Original Collection, with three reissued flat-tops that helped put Gibson on the map thanks to the likes of The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin and more (pictured left to right, above): the J-160E (£3,499), SJ-200 60s (£4,999) and LG-2 50s (£2,699). The big-bodied SJ-200 pairs a AAA figured maple body with a AAA spruce top, complete with 60s-era-correct nitro lacquer, moustache bridge and that scratchplate. The smaller-bodied LG-2 50s is a mahogany body/spruce top combo, and comes fitted with an LR Baggs VTC pickup, while the J-160E packs a P-90 magnetic pickup. All three models are built in Gibson's factory in Bozeman, Montana, and are available now.

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

**PRS SE ED SHEERAN COSMIC SPLASH £1,599**

Having nearly single-handedly spearheaded a boom in travel-friendly acoustics, former lone looper Ed Sheeran has done a Dylan and gone electric. The guitarist has teamed up with PRS for the Cosmic Splash, a limited-edition SE model adorned with Ed's artwork from his 'Cosmic Carpark' paintings series. It's based around an SE Hollowbody I design, except it marks a first for the company as a 703.5mm (27.7-inch) baritone. Inlaid with Play, Pause, Rewind, Fast-Forward and Stop symbols, it's also loaded with 85/15 S pickups and a PRS/LR Baggs Piezo system. The Cosmic Splash is limited to 1,000 guitars, each including an eight by eight-inch print of the artwork, hand-signed by Sheeran.

[www.prguitars.com](http://www.prguitars.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: Laura Snowden

Album: *This Changing Sky* (self-release)



Laura Snowden's debut album, *This Changing Sky*, features 10 original compositions and two folksong arrangements [www.laurasnowden.co.uk](http://www.laurasnowden.co.uk)

Away from her solo endeavours, Laura has collaborated on many projects including with film director Sally Potter, and she also performs with alt-folk group Tir Eolas

There's a profound sense of poetry to *This Changing Sky*, the debut album from English classical guitarist Laura Snowden. Its 12 tracks combine her love for spoken word, humming and singing, alongside the stunning fretwork she's become known for, taking the listener on a theatrical journey like no other. The tracks were written and recorded predominantly on one guitar, and the music is as honest and pure as it gets, although Laura chose a range of harmonics and tunings, as well as her glass slide, to get the most out of her instrument.

### Finding Your Way

For her first solo full-length, Laura documented the journey of a lead character going from a place of disconnection and isolation to somewhere more familiar and positive. "It's meant to be about the feeling when you've lost your sense of self and the path to finding your way back," she explains. "That's why the album starts in such a dramatic place, eventually finding its way to somewhere more hopeful. I like the mixture of dark and light. Some of the stuff I listen to is disturbing and intense, but I like that because I find it reassuring that other people have the same feelings and experiences that I do. At the same time, I wanted that beautiful intimacy of classical guitar, representing the love of family and friends that helps you through darkness."

### The Chosen One

Laura's main guitar has been with her for nearly 20 years and was made by the Oxfordshire-based luthier

Christopher Dean. "I love this guitar so much that sometimes I think if something happened to it, I'd stop playing," she says. "It probably sounds a bit dramatic, but that's how much I depend on it. The guitar is so colourful and sweet-sounding, I am incredibly committed to it. I often play without amplification because most of the venues I play don't need it. My main accessory would be the glass slide I use on *The Unknown*, where I play the guitar on my lap while humming."

### In Harmony

Perhaps one of the most unusual aspects of Laura's playing is her creativity with natural harmonics – such as playing two at the same time and allowing one to die out, thus creating the effect of a bend, or using her voice to achieve similar results. "I think I came up with that when I was noodling around," she tells us. "The classical guitar is very interesting in terms of how it sounds. It offers a lot of interesting resonances. On the song *Home* I use harmonics to accompany the main melody and add this twinkle that almost sounds like a music box. With the classical, I find it's best to play to the instrument's strengths. Of course, I could try to play something incredibly triumphant, but I'm not sure if that's the thing that suits the instrument the most. When I use harmonics, I'm thinking about magical sounds that almost no other instrument could do, things that embrace the magic at the heart of it."

### Top Of The Class

Laura studied with nylon master Julian Bream, one of classical guitar's most distinguished minds, who invited her to perform premieres of his newest commissions at Wigmore Hall. "He taught me a lot about phrasing," she says. "He'd always tell me to trust my instincts and made me listen to myself more. With classical, you're often playing other people's music. Julian helped me sound more instinctive. He'd ask me to think about what the music is saying. I'd be looking at a score and he'd say, 'Get louder here because of all the drama before you get quiet because you're tired and weary!' He was full of gestures and meaning. There was an emotional reason behind everything."

"Another big influence is a classical guitarist from the olden days called Luise Walker [born in 1910]. Her way of playing was really expressive and personal." [AS]

Standout track: *The Puppet Master*

For fans of: Luise Walker, Julian Bream, David Russell



PHOTOS BY SEQUOIA ZIFF

## LOW & BEHOLD

Laura gets more mileage out of her guitar by using different tunings

"A lot of classical repertoire is in drop D," she explains. "Sometimes I play in DADGAD, though I didn't on this album. For *Picking Up The Pieces*, I tuned my A string down to G. Some songs like *The Puppet Master* and *The Unknown* are in alternate tunings with four strings tuned differently. Some songs have just the low string tuned down: *The Dragon's Lair* goes to C# and *The Trap* goes even further to B. That low note can make things creepy."

**"When I use harmonics, I'm thinking about magical sounds that almost no other instrument could do"**





# Albums

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

PHOTO BY ROSS HALFIN



Chris (left) and Rich Robinson return with 11 tracks of gritty rock 'n' roll

## The Black Crowes

### A Pound Of Feathers

Silver Arrow Records (available 13 March)



#### Southern rockers get the punk out

After the Grammy nomination for 2024's *Happiness Bastards*, The Black Crowes, alias brothers Rich and Chris Robinson, weren't going to let the dust settle for long. They returned straight to the studio to keep the momentum

happening. "It was a natural progression," says Chris. "We experimented more, we wrote on instinct and how we were feeling in the moment. Rich brought a spontaneity to the record that I can't describe, but it's the best shit he's ever done." The result was *A Pound Of Feathers*, which took only a whirlwind 10 days to record.

The new album continues the musical thread that has been at the core of the band's activities since the early 1980s, but it's devilishly hard to pin it down to a single genre. Described as "bluesy and ballsy, ecstatic and electrifying, and soulful and soaring", they have refused to tread a single path, deciding to go where the feeling strikes them, with multi-platinum success. And who can forget that memorable alliance with Jimmy Page back in 1999? Heavy friends, indeed.

Two singles have preceded the album's release, the Stones-y, slide guitar-laden *Profane Prophecy* and the punky acoustic ballad *Pharmacy Chronicles*. The latter track's unplugged vibe continues on the album with *Queen Of The B-Sides* – but it's the electric power of tracks such as *It's Like That* with its pounding fuzzy riff, electrifying vocal and anthemic chorus and the moody, brooding *Doomsday Doggerel* that show the band off at their best. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *Doomsday Doggerel*

**For fans of:** Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith, Lynyrd Skynyrd

## Bireli Lagrene

### Elegant People

Peewee (available 3 April)



#### Multi-faceted mood swings from jazz virtuoso

Biréli Lagrène first came to notice as a child prodigy in the 80s, playing Gypsy jazz and hailed as the natural successor to Django Reinhardt. Since then he has moved through just about every style of jazz you can name, and that chameleon-like character is what we find on *Elegant People*. For starters, the title track is a take on the composition from jazz fusion legends Weather Report and the album opens with Biréli's guitar-focused interpretation. In fact, the first three tracks on the album find him very much in electric jazz mode, even reaching for the overdrive pedal on *King's Cross*. On *A Time For Love*, the more traditional tones of an electric archtop take centre stage with some beautiful jazz lines, the mellow mood continuing through *My Foolish Heart* and *Anjo de Mim* before the more upbeat ensemble strikes up once more. Masterful. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *My Foolish Heart*

**For fans of:** Wes Montgomery, John Scofield

## Retreat From Moscow

### The Illusion Of Choice

White Knight Records (available now)



#### Richly satisfying classic prog

Welsh four-piece prog outfit Retreat From Moscow – which originally formed in Cardiff and were heavily active on the live circuit from 1979 to 1981 before reforming in more recent years – really remind us what classic prog can do, at its best, with this soaring, thoughtful longplayer, the third the band has released in recent years. The band's style has a foundation of classic prog that recalls Steve Hackett at times, but there are shimmering threads of other influences everywhere you look, including Ozric Tentacles, Trevor Rabin-era Yes, Steven Wilson and a subtle but pervasive presence of Celtic lyricism, which adds a touch of mythic grandeur. Standout tracks such as *Navigators Of The Trym* showcase wonderfully fat, sustaining melodic lead lines from guitarist John Harris, who is superb throughout, while Andrew Raymond's keys add drama to a rich sonic canvas. Recommended. **[JD]**

**Standout track:** *Navigators Of The Trym*

**For fans of:** Yes, Steven Wilson, Ozric Tentacles

PHOTO BY MONI HAWORTH



Kim Gordon's latest is 30 minutes of furious alt-rock

### Kim Gordon

Play Me

Matador Records (available 13 March)



#### Alt queen blurs the lines

As a founding member of noise-rock pioneers Sonic Youth, Kim Gordon has played a vital role in shaping the sound of the future. *Play Me*, Gordon's third solo full-length, serves as a firm reminder that she's not resting on any laurels – mixing elements of electronica and hip-hop with her famously fuzzed-out tones, much like her double-Grammy nominated second solo effort from two years ago. Songs like *Play Me*, *Girl With A Look* and *Not Today* are palpably trashy and impressionistic, with her compositions feeling off-the-cuff and improvised – placing rawness and honesty at the forefront of socio-political commentary. With many tracks sitting around the two-minute mark, there's a sense of transience and urgency that makes every beat count, while also touching on the rhythmic repetition and melodic minimalism from the Krautrock movement of the late 60s and early 70s. [AS]

Standout track: *Not Today*

For fans of: Sonic Youth, Big Black, Swans

### Van Halen

5150 (Expanded Edition)

Rhino (available 27 March)



#### A must-have for die-hard fans

The 5150 era marked a new lease of life for Van Halen, who had parted ways with original singer David Lee Roth in 1985, releasing their first album with replacement frontman Sammy Hagar the following year. This 40th anniversary expanded edition features the 2023 remasters, overseen by the group's long-time engineer Donn Landee, as well as some newer versions for this year. And there's more – the package is completed by the recordings from their 1986 *Live Without A Net* album, the new line-up's debut live release captured at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum in New Haven, ending with a rousing cover of Led Zeppelin's *Rock And Roll*. While the band as a whole sound unstoppable, effervescent six-stringer Edward Van Halen is very much the star of the show on tracks like *Good Enough*, *Summer Nights* and *Love Walks In*. The world will never see his like again. [AS]

Standout track: *Summer Nights*

For fans of: KISS, Led Zeppelin, Scorpions



Performance 3 Guitar Capo

ART<sup>®</sup> OFFERS UNRIVALLED TUNING STABILITY SO YOU FOCUS ON YOUR PLAYING

The Capo Company



www.G7th.com



# Tones Behind The Tracks

Recorded at Edward Van Halen's fabled 5150 Studio, the latest album from **Alter Bridge** could very well be their most riff-laden to date

## Artist: Alter Bridge

Album: Alter Bridge (Napalm Records)



The band's self-titled eighth album was recorded at 5150 Studio in LA

Given how they juggle their time between playing in Creed, Slash's band and various other projects including a Sinatra tribute, the two six-stringers in Alter Bridge are likely up there with the busiest musicians working in rock 'n' roll today. But despite the excess of musical activity, the band they play in together still remains top priority for singer/guitarist Myles Kennedy and lead guitarist Mark Tremonti – the songwriting force whose creative exploits turned the group into one of the most widely respected arena headliners of the modern age. After making the decision to record their self-titled eighth record at Edward Van Halen's 5150 Studio in Los Angeles, the music was born in an environment heavily steeped in guitar history.

### This record seems to live on the heavier side of the Alter Bridge sound.

**Myles Kennedy:** "Yeah, [the track] *Tested And Able* came out almost like a heavy metal Morse code riff. It's super rhythmic and detuned. Maybe that was partly influenced by knowing we'd be at 5150, which is like hallowed ground for guitar riffs, right? Mark and I knew we had to show up with the biggest riffs possible, which helped dictate what this record was going to be. I was playing baseball in the backyard with my brother in the summer of 1983 when I heard *Eruption* by Van Halen and their cover of *You Really Got Me* by The Kinks. That

afternoon I decided what my life would be. Eddie's genius guitar playing was that awesome. *Eruption* sounded like it was from outer space. It's a piece of music that genuinely changed my life."

### So it was a conscious decision to focus more on heavier riffs than ballads?

**Mark Tremonti:** "I remember calling Myles, asking how he felt about not doing any ballads and it all being high energy. We sort of agreed. Then we got to the studio and it was all pretty heavy. The last song we recorded, *Hang By A Thread*, ended up being the ballad. It's not necessarily a super-ballad, but it's the most ballad-esque song on there."

### What was it like for you both working in such a legendary studio?

**Myles:** "It's not a super-facility. It's a very functional utilitarian setup for people who want to go in and work without distractions. That's what I loved about it. Some studios are nice because you can play Xbox for a few hours. 5150 is more like, 'Here's a great-sounding room with some great gear. Go in and work'. It was a really important part of forming this album. Any time we hit a wall creatively, wondering where to go next, we couldn't help but feel some of the ghosts of the past in there helping inspire us. Maybe it was more of a psychological thing, but I could almost hear a voice saying, 'Play the D chord!' It's like the walls were telling us what to play next, and it was always the D chord [laughs]. That was pretty awesome."

### Songs like *Scales Are Falling* feel very experimental in places, showing how you are still finding ways to tread new musical ground.

**Mark:** "It ended up being one of my favourite guitar moments on the album. I remember my brother saying how much he loved Myles' leads in the bridge and I had to tell him, 'That's my solo!' He was surprised because my approach is usually more aggressive. But I love that kind of melodic playing over a clean section, I just don't get the opportunity to do it much. *Scales Are Falling* is in open G Minor, which gives it a lot of that character and personality."

**Myles:** "The solo I played in the outro was my tip of the hat to David Gilmour. I played a few solos on this record. Any time I do, I'm happy. Lead guitar is the best. And,

Mark's first signature PRS made its debut in 2001 and the partnership is still going strong 25 years later



**“Mark and I knew we had to show up with the biggest riffs possible, which helped dictate what this record was going to be”**  
**Myles Kennedy**



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN BARZ

Mark Tremonti (left) and Myles Kennedy agreed to set the energy levels to high throughout this record, with just one ballad-style track



THE  
LINEUP

**“It’s always important to keep expanding and trying new approaches. As a band, you need to keep testing the possibilities”**

**Myles Kennedy**

Recording at Edward Van Halen’s 5150 Studio helped set a high bar for the band. “We couldn’t help but feel some of the ghosts of the past in there helping inspire us,” says Myles Kennedy

yeah, it’s an unorthodox song. The phrasing is strange; it leaves the listener wondering where the ‘one’ is. It’s always important to keep expanding and trying new approaches. As a band, you need to keep testing the possibilities.”

**You’re both PRS signature artists. Is that what you stick with in the studio?**

**Myles:** “It was mainly my PRS signature, which was their first version of a T-style guitar. I was honoured to be part of that process because Paul and the team knew how much I love those kinds of guitars. So we got on the horn and they asked if I’d be interested in helping them step into that realm. What I learned is that it’s difficult designing a guitar from the ground up. Even if you have a broad overall view of what you want it to be, every little detail matters. I have a newfound respect for R&D, that’s for sure.”

**Mark:** “I had about seven guitars with me, but there’s a black and grey one with a Van Halen sticker that I used a lot. We do this thing where we get PRS to send us a

bunch of guitars, then we’ll track an individual song with each of those guitars and our fans can buy the guitar that ended up on the record. This one got sent to me a few albums ago. While I was playing it, I was like, ‘No, I’ve got to keep this.’ As close as they all are, each guitar has its own personality. This one just sang to me. I use it all the time.”

**Myles, you used Jeff Buckley’s 1983 Telecaster in Paris for a performance of Hallelujah back in 2019. That must have been quite an experience.**

**Myles:** “*Grace* is an album that gave me the same feeling as hearing *Eruption*, with my brain wondering, ‘Whoa, what’s happening here?!’ I also felt that way when I heard Julian Lage. Playing Jeff’s guitar was amazing, though I truly didn’t feel worthy of it. I was a little uncomfortable, to be honest. I gradually convinced myself that it was okay. It’s just a guitar that’s part of this incredible history. All I had to do was not taint that history [laughs].”



**What do you think is so special about that instrument?**

**Myles:** "It's just an early-to-mid 80s Tele, but there's something weird about how the pickup was wired. Apparently, there's something technically wrong with it, at least from what [Matt's Guitar Shop owner] Matt Lucas explained to me. That's what gives it that beautiful shimmering sound. It's all down to this imperfection, which makes it even cooler. When you plug it in, you think, 'Oh yeah, there's that sound!'"

**Guitar brands aside, in Alter Bridge you and Mark have quite different preferences when it comes to amp brands.**

**Myles:** "I usually stick with my Diezel VH4. But when we started at 5150, all my amps were in the warehouse, so they let me borrow one of the 5150s, which sounded great. In the end, we blended my VH4 with that. Now I'll be using both amps live."

**Mark:** "I mainly used the clean and dirty channels on my PRS MT 100. On top of that, just like with my

live rig, I used my Synergy amp. The modules I had were the SLO II preamp, to pair with the MT 100 dirty channel, and then the Fender[-style] TDLX preamp with the clean. That 5150 III in the studio sounded killer, so I blended all three. Like Myles, I'm going to incorporate it into my live rig.

"I'm a big fan of multiple amps when it comes to tone. Each one has its own frequency range, together they fill a bigger space. That approach works for us as a band as well as within my own rig."

**Were there any pedals involved or was it mainly direct?**

**Mark:** "The one I rely on most is my [signature] Morley wah. I love the attitude and scream of a wah. If I solo and it doesn't have a wah on it, I almost think it doesn't sound right. It's been like that since I was a kid. I love using my Electro-Harmonix Micro Synth to make single-string lines sound heavy. That thing is like our secret weapon. Our producer calls it 'the Alter Bridge pedal' because he never uses it with anyone else. What I love is that it's not just one sound. It's an actual living thing that sounds different every time. We might track that five times before we find the perfect sweep."

"I love the attitude and scream of a wah. If I solo and it doesn't have a wah on it, I almost think it doesn't sound right" **Mark Tremonti**

"We also used the Kemper Profiler shimmer effect for the beginning of *Scales Are Falling*. It sounded perfect on the demo, so we kept it on the final recording. It's funny, when the album came out, one of the first responses was, 'Glad to see somebody is digging the Kemper shimmer,' which made me think, 'Good ear!'"

**The name Julian Lage cropped up earlier. What do you think makes his playing so special?**

**Myles:** "He's got the whole thing figured out harmonically. It's so interesting because he's moving it forward and it's exciting to see for the rest of us. It's rare to hear something like that done so well, where the guitarist isn't just regurgitating the same thing over again. He's breaking new ground, which is something all of us strive for, while making it look effortless. I've seen some of his recordings with Dave King on drums, who is one of my favourite drummers. The interplay between Julian and him is special."

**Mark:** "Julian is such an intelligent and sophisticated player, half of it probably goes over my head. If you're not fully theoretically bulletproof, you might not even understand how or why he's playing like that. It would take a lot of work over many years for me to play like that, but I still try to take in as much as I can." **[AS]**



Alter Bridge's new self-titled album is available now via Napalm Records

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



# Starry Eyed & Laughing

**Neville Marten** recalls an early guitar influence that no-one else ever seemed to have heard of. Until an illuminating musicianly encounter...

Neville (left) with guitarist Ross McGeeney, one half of Starry Eyed And Laughing, pictured in the 70s at Neville's family farm

**B**ack in the early 70s a great friend of mine took some sensational shots of me and my siblings in our northeast Essex house and the beautiful countryside surrounding it. Bob had Nikon F and F2 cameras and a fantastic eye for a shot. I had hair halfway down my back and wore pink and purple clothes with homemade moccasin shoes, and my older sister and two younger brothers had their own take on this timeless sartorial style. We looked like Jefferson Airplane, Renaissance or some other female-fronted 60s band.

Bob knew some musicians in London who were forming a Byrds-influenced, neo-country band with Rickenbacker 330/12, Roger McGuinn style, and B-Bender Telecaster, Gene Parsons style. He invited them up to meet me since he thought our personalities and musicalities might be a good fit. I'd become half decent on the electric guitar and was just getting into fingerstyle acoustic. Bob's friends were Tony Poole and Ross McGeeney, and they went under the name of Starry Eyed And Laughing, taken from a line in Bob Dylan's song *Chimes Of Freedom*. Ross and I hit it off and sat jamming for hours on my black '67 Tele and white 'Jimi' Strat through the Fender Dual Showman stack that stood in the corner of our living room. He corrected my chords in James Taylor's *Sweet Baby James*, not in a patronising way; I absorbed loads from him in just a few hours. We also did a fantastic long jam



PHOTO BY BOB PARSONS

“Ross McGeeney and I hit it off and sat jamming for hours on my black '67 Tele and white 'Jimi' Strat through a Fender Dual Showman”

on Crosby, Stills & Nash's *Wooden Ships*, me on the neck pickup of the Strat and Ross adding strums and fills on the Tele. If you were around then, you'll get the vibes!

Ross came up another time and there's a lovely 'Bob' photo of us (above) at the end of the farm drive where I lived with my brothers. I've got long hair and the Strat, and Ross a shock of dark curls and my Gibson ES-335. The day was a glorious summer one, the setting rurally idyllic.

The last time I saw Ross and Tony was at a rehearsal studio in London, where we piddled around but didn't exactly achieve anything. Starry Eyed And Laughing should have been big. They did several BBC Radio 1 *Peel Sessions* and supported various acts both here and in the States. Sadly, the Byrds similarities almost certainly dashed their chances. But put into Google: 'Starry Eyed And Laughing, *Money Is No Friend Of Mine at Rockpalast*' to see Ross on black B-Bender Tele and Tony on Ricky 12. Then check out *The Girl In A Gene Clark Song* to hear the band's beautiful mellifluous sound.

Whenever I've mentioned Ross and his influence on me to other musicians, I'm inevitably met with blank disinterest. No-one has known him or his band. Until...

## Favourite Squeeze

I was recently dispatched to South East London to interview Squeeze's supremely gifted guitarist, singer and songwriter, Glenn Tilbrook. I've always loved the band's clever musicality, Chris Difford's insightfully witty lyrics, and Glenn's intricate weaving guitar solos. During our chat (to be featured in these pages soon), I asked Glenn about the all-black Tele nestling in the rack. "Have you heard of a guitarist called Ross McGeeney?" he chimed. "I got it from him." I could have fallen off my chair! "Wait," I said, as I fumbled through my phone for that pic of Ross and me; Glenn was as flabbergasted as I was. He kindly plugged me in and let me play his old B-Bender guitar. What an otherworldly experience.

Ross McGeeney is still around, and it would be great one day to hear new music from a musician who made a far bigger impact on an impressionable young me than he could ever know. See you next time. **G**

## NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Bend Me, Shape Me

**What?** Fender Nashville B-Bender Telecaster  
**Where seen?** [www.worldguitars.co.uk](http://www.worldguitars.co.uk)  
**Price?** £2,999

You'll see very few of these around, but if you want that Gene Parsons, Jimmy Page, Bernie Leadon-style sound, World Guitars in Stonehouse may have the answer. Fender did a short run of Nashville Teles with the Hipshot Parsons/Green B-Bender mechanism (far lighter than the original Parsons/White version). You just push down on the guitar strap and it raises the second string by a tone as the moving button instigates the mechanism. With three-pickup 'Strat-O-Tele' switching, alder body and 241mm (9.5-inch) radius maple neck, it's a weighty-ish beast at just over 4kg (9lb). But splash out and your own 'chimes of freedom' could be just three grand away.



PHOTO WORLDGUITARS.CO.UK



# Master Class

**Alex Bishop** reflects on 20 years at the workbench, and considers the lessons he has learned along the way

I can still clearly picture my dad's face when I explained to him that I wanted to quit my degree in aerospace engineering and become a guitar maker. He was, and still is, a very patient and measured man (and not one to react to surprise events with hyperbole or too much emotion). "Interesting... do you think you'll be able to make any money doing that?" he responded calmly, with poorly concealed consternation written across his face. Unperturbed, I plunged into three years of study, pieced together a workshop and learned all about running a business in this niche industry.

Now, 20 years on and I'm still at the bench quietly proving my case, even if my dad's expression suggests the jury hasn't quite reached its verdict. Realising this two-decade milestone, I found myself thinking about the words of the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, who said: "An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field." I feel that this sentiment rings true for me. Take, for example, the fourth guitar I ever made. I had a beautiful back-and-sides set of yellow cedar, a pristine tight-grained timber (which, for the record, is vastly underrated as a tonewood) with the most remarkable bell-like tap tone. I successfully bent the sides around the horn of a particularly challenging cutaway, but then cut out the back the wrong way around. 'No problem,' I thought, 'I'll just flip it over.'

To my horror there was a large brown knot streaked along the middle of the back, now obviously visible on the outside of the instrument. Reluctant to turn it to firewood and cursing my mistake, I settled on executing

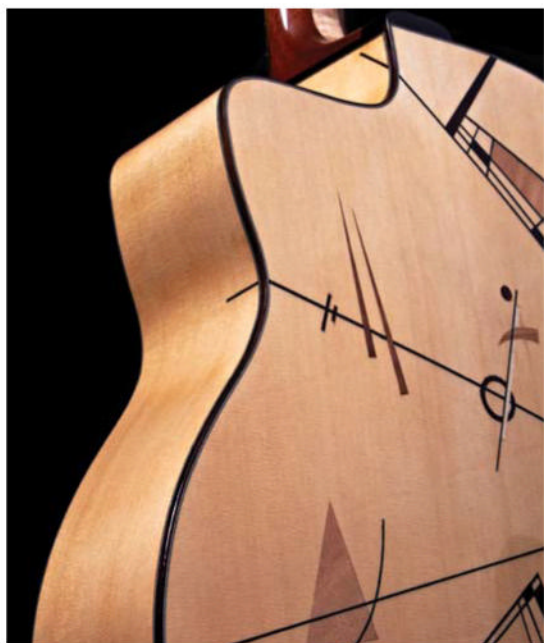
an ambitious geometric inlay design inspired by Art Deco shapes so that I could replace the unwanted blot. The end result was hugely formative and ultimately forged my identity as a guitar maker. It taught me that when there is a problem there is always plan B or C, and these alternative routes can sometimes turn out far better than what was intended in the first place.

Early on I identified that building good jigs was a key part of lutherie: custom-made devices to make the process of guitar building easier and more consistent. A side-bending machine, for example, ensures that by simply turning some cranks and flicking a switch, a pair of sides will effortlessly mould into the shape of the guitar with little or no effort, regardless of the stiffness of the timber. The reality was that by the time I set up the machine, heated it up, bent the sides, waited for them to cool, and placed them in the mould, I could have done it all in half the time around a bending iron, and have a lot more fun in the process. I found that when I let hand tools guide the work, guitar making felt far more engaging and meaningful.

## Out Of Hand

Occasionally, though, the repeatability of a process made the jig-making unavoidable. Take braces, for instance. Most acoustic guitars have at least eight, curved on the underside to push the top and back into specific arches. I started planing this shape in by hand but found keeping the precise curves consistent was very difficult. I then discovered a method that involved

Geometric inlays transformed a knotty problem for Alex in this early build



"When there is a problem there is always plan B or C, and these routes can sometimes turn out better than what was intended in the first place"

bending the brace blank into a forced arch and planing it flat. It would spring back to a neat curve, but each piece ended up settling into slightly different shapes. Then I used routers to cut the shape from a template, which were more consistent but didn't feel easy to operate. Now, I have a method that works by running the braces against a cutter on a router table. It took around four different permutations, but the lesson was to always be willing to try new techniques, and never assume the first method you learned is the best one (it rarely is!).

There is no question that I still have much to explore in guitar making, but there is deep satisfaction in the incremental progress over time. My time at the bench has taught me that mistakes, experiments and small refinements aren't failures – they're the essence of craft. Guitar making is a continuous journey of curiosity, patience and adaptation. It's the process, more than the finished instrument, that makes it truly rewarding. **G**



# Five-Figure Woods

Rare and beautiful woods are common in the world of handmade guitars, many fetching eye-watering prices. **Michael Watts** asks why

These are Darwinian times in the world of handmade guitars. While some boutique houses are banking on recreations of Depression-era sub-labels such as Recording King and Kalamazoo, an upper echelon of guitar makers continues to specialise in instruments made for individual clients.

Over the past five decades a market has emerged for a bespoke approach thanks to guitars such as Jim Olson's SJ model in the hands of James Taylor, and John Monteleone's archtops as treasured by Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler. We should also acknowledge John D'Angelico, Jimmy D'Aquisto, Tony Zemaitis, Michael Gurian and Ken Parker as trailblazers.

Choice of materials is a vital part of any bespoke process. Mass-market options such as Indian rosewood and Sitka spruce still have a role to play, but there is increasing demand for rare, heavily figured woods commanding thousands of dollars for the raw materials alone. I'm talking specifically about 'The Tree' quilted mahogany, Brazilian rosewood, Pernambuco and African blackwood for the back and sides, and moon-harvested Alpine spruce for the soundboard.

Michael Greenfield is an S-tier luthier whose sublime creations are the spoils of war for globe-straddling rock

lords such as Keith Richards and Paul Stanley, and leading lights of solo instrumental guitar Andy McKee, Tony McManus and others. Michael is the ideal person to speak to about super-rare woods. On a recent visit to his Montreal workshop, we did exactly that.

## Money Don't Matter 2 Night

Doing justice to the story of 'The Tree' would take an article of its own. This obscenely quilted mahogany came from a single tree found, lost and then found again in the jungle of Belize. Until you see it up close, it is impossible to truly appreciate the deep chatoyant lustre of its figure.

"This is an irreplaceable material," Michael tells me. "There is no second chance with a set of 'The Tree'. The figure is just ridiculous – it is not easy to work with and there is a huge amount of pressure. From the point of view of sound, it's mahogany. This is, however, old-growth Belizean mahogany that has had to fight through a forest canopy to survive. It may be the same species, but, regardless of the figure, the density and properties of this wood is very different from most of the mahogany available today.

"Sonically, there is an added something that comes from the quilt that you don't get with straight-grain mahogany. I have found that guitar backs made from 'The Tree' tend to be more active than regular mahogany. It's high-density wood, with a greater overtone series and slightly slower attack. It can sound incredible and just look at it – it's unbelievable – and it's mother nature."

*Dalbergia nigra* was the original rosewood used in Martin guitars until 1969, and its status today as a CITES protected species means it commands a price-point analogous to that of 'The Tree'. Good quarter-sawn Braz (not the slab-sawn stump wood so often offered in its place) remains a strong option for the buyer who resides in the same country of origin as the guitar.

Michael has this to say: "Brazilian rosewood – *Dalbergia nigra* – is regarded by many to be the Holy Grail of guitar woods. It's a fabulous material, but by itself doesn't make a good guitar. Musical instrument makers have understood this for centuries.

"Good Braz is increasingly rare and precious. I have sets with the density of African blackwood, others with the density of koa – it's all Brazilian rosewood. This is why I don't talk about sonic characteristics of woods in general terms. Bass and treble do not live in 'tone wood'.

"High-density woods can present a very lush, wet, reverb-y sound, which for certain things can be wonderful. African blackwood is another example. It's a potentially superb wood and it likes a big hammer – a player who will dig in and commit to the note."

True Pernambuco – the stuff that was used in purple dye and gave Brazil its name – is the wood of choice for concert-grade violin and cello bows. It comes from

In the Greenfield Guitars Montreal workshop assistant luthier Julien Saint-Jalmes makes a guitar back from African Blackwood

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL WATTS





a tiny little tree, so sets of wood big enough for a guitar are very rare. Be very wary of anyone who offers you a Pernambuco jumbo...

"You can tell from handling good Pernambuco that it is very dense and vitreous," Michael says. "I measured the sets I have and the speed of sound through it is very fast. It rings in a very musical way. Once again, scarcity plays a part: I have three sets. That's it, all spoken for."

Good soundboard woods may lack the visual impact of exotic hardwoods, but that doesn't stop a hierarchy forming in the minds of buyers. Forget the Adi vs Sitka debate, what about Moon spruce?

"Moon spruce is *Picea abies* that was harvested in Switzerland by a family that specialises in wood for

"They harvest the wood according to the cycle of the moon. Whether this approach makes a difference - I don't know..."

stringed instrument makers," Michael explains. "They've been doing this for generations and they harvest the wood according to the cycle of the moon. Whether this approach makes a difference - I don't know. What does make a difference is the sawyer. How 'The Tree' is selected and felled, bucked up, split and sawn has a huge effect on quality. I no longer talk about spruce when I deal with my customers: we talk about their needs and I select a set for the soundboard purely according to its properties, not its genus."

Right now, sensational guitars are being made from exotic materials in workshops all around the world. As we have said before in this column, wood is a source of potential, nothing more. Ultimately, only you can decide if a handmade instrument created from woods such as those mentioned here is the right choice for you and your budget. **G**

Master luthier Michael Greenfield pictured with a soundboard made from Alpine moon spruce

\*PRICES ARE BASED ON AVERAGE LUTHIER UP-CHARGE, WHICH INCLUDES SELECTION, CURING AND VOICING OF THE WOOD TO YOUR REQUIREMENTS

## THREE TO GET READY

If you're feeling flush...



### 'The Tree' Quilted Mahogany \$15k-plus

Regarded by many as the original ultimate guitar wood, 'The Tree' brings dramatic, lustrous quilt to the traditionally straight-grained world of mahogany. As the name suggests, this is wood from one unique tree and as such is extremely rare. Expect to pay an upgrade charge of at least \$15,000 for 'The Tree', with the more highly figured sets commanding more.



### Brazilian Rosewood \$20k approx

While vintage Brazilian rosewood guitars are relatively accessible, the wood itself is now heavily protected and priced accordingly. While a perfectly quarter-sawn, straight-grained set of Braz remains a thing of deep joy, you will be looking at a premium of around \$20,000 for wood of that quality, should the luthier in question have access to it. CITES regulations make a modern Braz build even more challenging.



### Alpine Moon Spruce \$1k

In contrast to the back and side woods, soundboard timbers tend not to have such a large up-charge, with many top-tier luthiers offering the best spruce they can find as a matter of course. Alpine moon spruce harvested according to the lunar cycle and the time of year when the sap is lowest has become an attractive alternative to old-growth Adirondack spruce. As an upgrade, moon spruce tends to go for around \$1,000.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATTS

PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN

PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATTS



# Alternative Voicings

This month **Richard Barrett** embellishes some open-position chords to find that satisfying jangle

Sometimes open-position chords are just the job for filling out an accompaniment or providing the sole backing for a singer. However, what if there could be a few extra touches to elevate your accompaniment, without sounding like you'd swallowed a jazz chordbook for breakfast? To demonstrate some possibilities, we've taken the commonly heard C-G-Am-F (or I-V-VI-IV) progression and given it a twist. Think The Pretenders, Tom Petty or Sam Fender.

As we're playing in open position, the open strings add a nice jangle, which we're looking to maximise. Another feature is the G at the 3rd fret of the first string. This remains constant through all of the examples, giving a nice 'shine' in whatever order you play these chords. A hint of overdrive can really help smooth out any unwanted spiky transients, while emphasising the sparkle and adding a bit of texture to push you forward in the mix. For the full Pretenders experience, add a bit of chorus, too! **G**

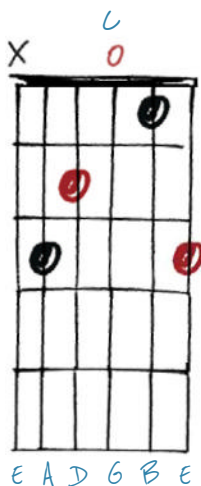


PHOTO BY ROSS MARINO/GETTY IMAGES

James Honeyman-Scott of The Pretenders was a master at creating interesting parts from ostensibly simple chords

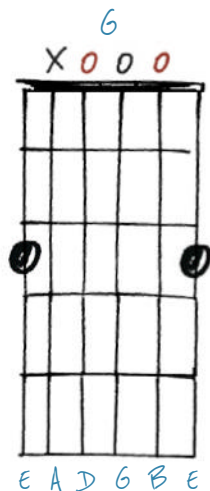
## Example 1

A regular C chord, but adding G on the first string really emphasises the upper part of the chord, particularly effective for asserting the guitar's place in a band mix. As well as making this a more 'jangly' chord, the G on top carries over to the other examples, offering a sense of continuity.



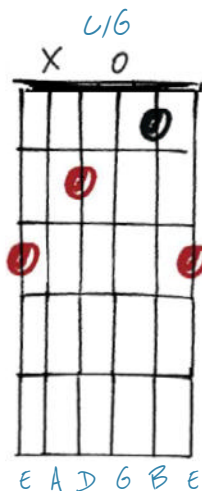
## Example 2

This is the first of two possibilities for the G (V) chord. There's a reason why this is played with two fingers, omitting the fifth string, but you'll need to look at Example 3 to see what that reason is... In the meantime, this is one of the best open chords on the fretboard.



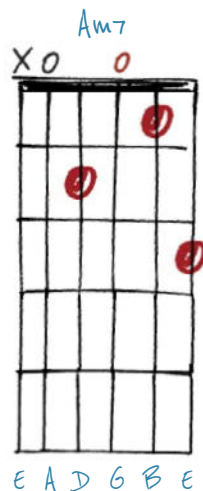
## Example 3

This C/G could also be called G6sus4 – both names are technically correct. It's meant to be added as a momentary embellishment, rather than a replacement for Example 2. To hear this voicing in the wild, check out the intros to the Eagles' *Take It Easy* or Bowie's *John, I'm Only Dancing*.



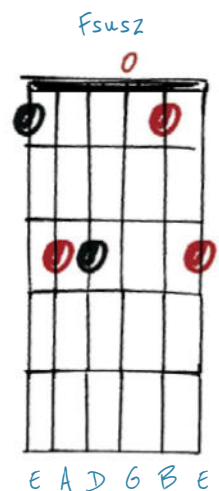
## Example 4

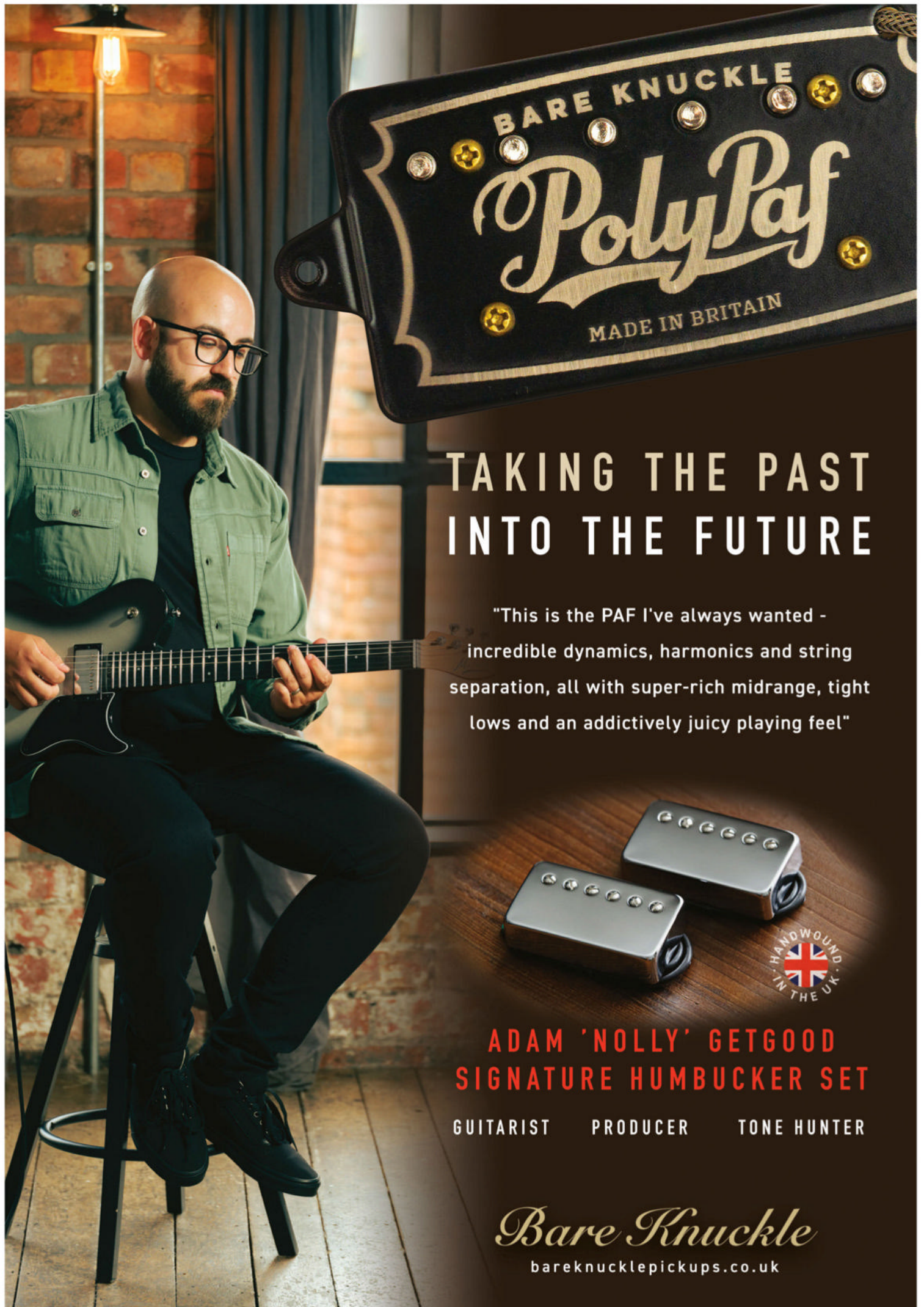
This Am7 continues the same jangly theme. It's a great substitute for a regular Am chord, or can combine well if there's another guitar playing Am. Check out James Honeyman-Scott's distinctive playing on The Pretenders' *Talk Of The Town* to hear this in action, complete with just the right amount of overdrive and chorus.



## Example 5

This Fsus2 further continues the jangly theme, with the G on the first string, plus another from the open third string. The F (Root) on the sixth string is optional. If you can get your fretting-hand thumb to oblige, great! Otherwise, it can still sound pretty full using the C on the fifth string as the lowest note.





# TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

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



**ADAM 'NOLLY' GETGOOD  
SIGNATURE HUMBUCKER SET**

GUITARIST    PRODUCER    TONE HUNTER

*Bare Knuckle*

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



# Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.

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

## STAR LETTER

### DIFFERENT STROKES



PRS's Paul's Guitar features TCI pickups

I'm really surprised by the amount of guitars coming out of the woodwork with a humbucker at the bridge and a P-90 in the neck position. To me, that's a jack of all trades and a master of none. I say this because if you like high-gain sounds, the humbucker will be great, but the P-90 is going to hum. Conversely, if you like 'edge of break-up' and roots sounds, the P-90 will excel but the humbucker may be too hard sounding. That's like having two single-pickup guitars.

However, what perplexes me more is that with fairly recent mods to the wiring of a humbucker, popularised by PRS, it's now possible to squeeze a lot more sounds out of a good old twin-coil pickup. You can use a partial coil-tap – and a humbucker with a partial coil-tap does sound very similar to a P-90 (and I know because I have both fitted to guitars). You can also use the EQ switch that is a recent PRS modification and is a tuned high-pass filter. The EQ switch produces a really nice sound with a lot of similarities to a single coil, but the pickup is still humbucking. It also works on two-conductor pickups, and that was a great addition to my early PRS SE Semi Hollow that couldn't be coil-tapped.

So I don't get it. Why limit the tones a guitar can produce when fitting twin humbuckers, when wiring mods can do so much more?

**Keith Marriott**

Thanks for your views there, Keith – as you say there's much more to great, flexible tone than just the pickup configuration. And speaking of versatile tones, the editor of this tome used to love how many sounds his 90s-era Gibson Nighthawk Special SP3 had on tap through its unusual three-pickup design. It was wired to deliver coil-tap voicings and more in addition to the natural tonal diversity offered by a slanted bridge humbucker, middle-position single coil and an M-Series mini-humbucker at the neck. The 90s-era 'Hawk (in all its variants, not just the SP3) was unconventional and not everyone loved its unorthodox styling – but it certainly delivered a host of highly usable sounds.

Can readers think of any other guitars that offer brilliantly flexible sounds via pickup or wiring configurations that go beyond the usual suspects? Send your suggestions in and we'll print the best. In the meanwhile, Keith, we hope you enjoy our Star Letter prize for your thoughtful views on pickups.



# 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)

### ALL HAIL THE KING

I very much enjoyed the extensive coverage you gave to the great BB King in issue 534. You rightly praise the wonderful *Live At The Regal* album, but, to many fans of BB, it is surpassed by *Blues Is King*. The album was recorded on firework night – 5 November 1966 – at a small Chicago club, and fireworks it is indeed! BB's opening remarks to the audience pretty much sum up the concert: "We're gonna do our very best to try to move you tonight. If you like the blues, I think we can."

BB's playing simply writes the book of blues guitar here, and the whole band sounds more relaxed than on the *...Regal* album. I bought my vinyl copy when it was released in 1967, and the CD reissue contains a long extra track (*Sweet Sixteen* pts 1 and 2), which was originally issued as a single. Although both *Live At The Regal* and 1971's *Live In Cook County Jail* significantly outsold *Blues Is King*, in my humble opinion the latter outranks them both!

I subsequently saw BB's first UK performance on 22 April 1969 at The Royal Albert Hall, the first night of a 10-date tour, with Duster Bennett, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Fleetwood Mac, and made the pilgrimage to see him on virtually every other occasion he came to this country. I was lucky enough also to experience live shows by Albert and Freddie King, Buddy Guy, Albert Collins, Otis Rush and countless more of the blues greats, but no-one has left a mark on me (or my semi-pro attempts at playing guitar) as much as BB. He truly was The King of the Blues – and a true gentleman as well!

**John Holmes**

Thanks for sharing those wonderful memories, John. Again, we're struck by what a gentleman BB was, his natural humility that of a monarch with nothing to prove. It's also great to get your alternative view on the greatest BB live album – which, as you say, is often chalked up as *Live At The Regal*. So there's a thought, folks: are there any other albums by famous guitarists or guitar bands that are usually cited as

the 'best' they ever did but that you think are actually bettered by less-well-known recordings from their back catalogue? Send in your answers and we'll print the best.



*Blues Is King*, a live album recorded in Chicago in 1966, goes down as an unsung BB favourite

## Feedback

Dave Morrissey's 20th Anniversary American PRS Custom 24 was an unlikely and fortuitous match



### POINT OF SALE

Following Neville Marten's 'Change Of Heart' piece in issue 533, this is my story regarding a change of buying intentions. After saving up for more years than I can recall, I eventually had enough money to buy the guitar of my dreams, a Gibson Les Paul. My desire for owning such a guitar stemmed from watching the guitar heroes of my youth: Jimmy Page, Brian Robertson, Gary Moore and many others coaxing magical sounds out of such instruments. So off I went to my local guitar store, credit card at the ready, plugged in a few to try, only to be devastated that I didn't enjoy playing them. I went home gutted.

My next plan, in a different guitar store, was to try Fender Stratocasters, my next best perceived guitar to own, following my early heroes Eric Clapton, Ritchie Blackmore, Rory Gallagher and many others, only to be equally disappointed. Then I tried a Gibson SG. No better. Went home, again perplexed.

Then I went to another guitar store and I tried a guitar from a brand I had not been aware of previously. The guitar just spoke to me. It was magical to play, but I dithered, unsure of the colour. So I left empty-handed again.

However, a week later, while laying on a beach in Egypt, I got a call from the sales guy I had spoken to previously, informing me he had managed to source the colour I wanted from one of their other stores, and that they had arranged to have it sent to my local store so I could try it out on my return from holiday. I bought the guitar in question, which has given me joy way beyond any other material item I have ever

# Manson<sup>®</sup>

## GUITAR WORKS

### BLACK EDITION



*'If I could only have  
one guitar  
in the world then  
Black Edition would be it'*

- Matt Bellamy



[www.mansonguitarworks.com](http://www.mansonguitarworks.com)  
[sales@mansonguitarworks.com](mailto:sales@mansonguitarworks.com)  
+44(0)1364 653751



Burns Of London was originally founded in 1959, and one of its flagship guitars of the 1960s was the Hank Marvin model

owned. I set off on a mission to buy my dream guitar, which I succeeded in doing, despite my initial flawed preconceptions. My advice, always: play before you buy. The guitar in question? A 20th Anniversary American PRS Custom 24 in Matteo Blue.

**Dave Morrissey**

This is really the most fundamentally important advice that can ever be given to guitar buyers: try it. Your connection with any given guitar is such a personal thing that there's really no telling in advance if something is going to feel right, even if it's something you've craved for years – as you found with the Les Pauls. And don't fall into the trap of thinking that all guitars of the same make, year and model will feel the same, either. Even when it comes to tightly QC'd production instruments, there's often a subtle difference in weight, resonance, playability and so on between one guitar and another of the same type. And that subtle but perceptible difference can make all the difference between 'maybe' and 'definitely'. Yes, you can send guitars that you bought online back and get an exchange or a refund if you don't like it when it arrives. But far better to take your time, try a wide variety of guitars in person and find a keeper.

### LITTLE-READ CORVETTE

I would love to see an article on the lesser-known guitars of the early 60s. Rock 'n' roll was booming and many diverse companies decided to cash in on the new craze. This led to an amazing era of guitar design.

Here in Sweden, we had Hagstrom. They produced some lookers, like the Corvette, the Kent, the Standard 80, to name but a few. Japan also produced many great-looking guitars during that period. In the UK there was Burns, who made some noteworthy contributions to the times. It would be interesting to know the stories behind these guitars. Were any of them any good? Or was it style over substance?

**Roy Pendleton**

Thanks for your great suggestion, Roy. These questions are the kind that our friend Martin Kelly, author of *Fender: The Golden Age*, often likes to answer as we happen to know he has an unprecedented collection of rare and obscure Japanese guitar brochures and the like, so perhaps we'll look into it with him. In the meanwhile, look out for upcoming features on embargo-era late-50s Höfners in these pages.

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

**NEWTON FAULKNER PRESENTS**  
**feels like home tour**  
 ..... dotting around **4**  
**2026**

**PRESTON**  
12/05 - 53 DEGREES

**CARLISE**  
14/05 - OLD FIRE STATION

**HADDINGTON**  
15/05 - CORN EXCHANGE

**FROME**  
11/06 - CHEESE & GRAIN

**DUNKELD**  
15/07 - BIRNAM ARTS

**GLOUCESTER**  
27/08 - GUILDHALL

**CASTLETON**  
28/08 - DEVILS ARSE  
(NO GUITAR WORKSHOP)

**HOLMFIRTH**  
29/08 - PICTUREDROME

†VIP package and guitar workshops  
 THEGIGCARTEL.COM | NEWTONFAULKNER.COM  
**THE GIG CARTEL**

THE GIG CARTEL & PLANET ROCK PRESENTS  
**Philip Sayce**  
 THE SOULFUL MASTER OF THE STRATOCASTER  
 10/10 GUITARIST MAGAZINE

**SPECIAL GUEST**  
**Tom Moriarty**  
 A PERFORMER OF RARE TALENT  
 UK PRESS ASSOCIATION

**ADDITIONAL SPECIAL GUEST**  
**CHANTEL MCGREGOR**  
 HOLMFIRTH ONLY

**PLANET ROCK**  
 WHERE ROCK LIVES

TUE 19 MAY | BRISTOL FLEECE  
 WED 20 MAY | NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS \*  
 FRI 22 MAY | HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME \*\*  
 SAT 23 MAY | GLASGOW ST LUKES \*  
 SUN 24 MAY | NEWCASTLE ANARCHY BREW

WED 27 MAY | BASINGSTOKE THE HAYMARKET  
 THU 28 MAY | BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX  
 SAT 30 MAY | CHESTER THE LIVE ROOMS \*  
 SUN 31 MAY | CARDIFF THE GLOBE  
 WED 3 JUN | ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL \*

THEGIGCARTEL.COM | PLANETROCK.COM  
**MEET & GREET\* / VIP TICKETS AVAILABLE AT PHILIPSAyce.COM**  
 ADDITIONAL SPECIAL GUEST 18%  
 PHOTO CREDIT: MARTY MOFFATT

THE GIG CARTEL BY ARRANGEMENT WITH HEXAGON BOOKING AGENCY PRESENTS  
**ERIC JOHNSON**  
*Texaphonic*  
 2026 TOUR EUROPE

WED 22 JULY | WOLVERHAMPTON KK'S STEEL MILL  
 FRI 24 JULY | FROME CHEESE & GRAIN  
 SAT 25 JULY | ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL  
 SUN 26 JULY | BASINGSTOKE THE HAYMARKET  
 MON 27 JULY | SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK  
 WED 29 JULY | NORTHAMPTON ROADMENDER

THU 30 JULY | NORWICH EPIC STUDIOS  
 FRI 31 JULY | HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME  
 SAT 01 AUG | EDINBURGH THE QUEEN'S HALL  
 MON 03 AUG | SUNDERLAND THE FIRE STATION  
 TUE 04 AUG | LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION

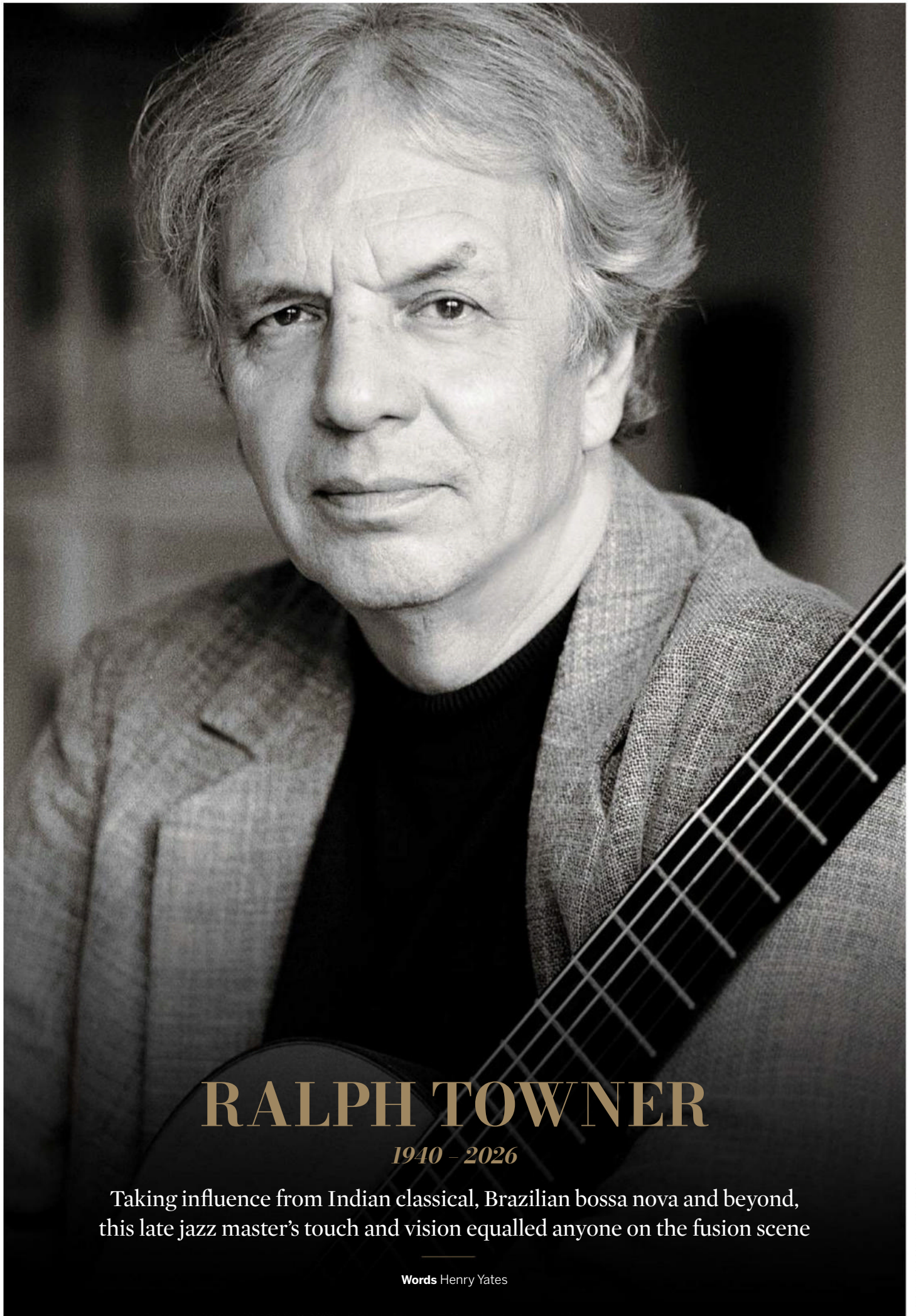
THE GIG CARTEL.COM / ERICJOHNSON.COM  
 PHOTO CREDIT: MAX GRACE

THE GIG CARTEL PRESENTS  
**MIKE DAWES**  
 THE PROGRESSIVE ACOUSTIC TOUR  
 UK 2026

THU 10 SEP | BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX  
 FRI 11 SEP | LONDON UNION CHAPEL  
 SAT 12 SEP | FROME CHEESE & GRAIN  
 SUN 13 SEP | SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK  
 WED 16 SEP | SOUTHPORT THE ATKINSON

THU 17 SEP | GATESHEAD GLASSHOUSE  
 FRI 18 SEP | GLASGOW ORAN MOR  
 SAT 19 SEP | MANCHESTER STOLLER HALL  
 SUN 20 SEP | STAMFORD CORN EXCHANGE

THEGIGCARTEL.COM | MIKEDAWES.COM  
 WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE TICKETS AVAILABLE



# RALPH TOWNER

*1940 - 2026*

Taking influence from Indian classical, Brazilian bossa nova and beyond, this late jazz master's touch and vision equalled anyone on the fusion scene

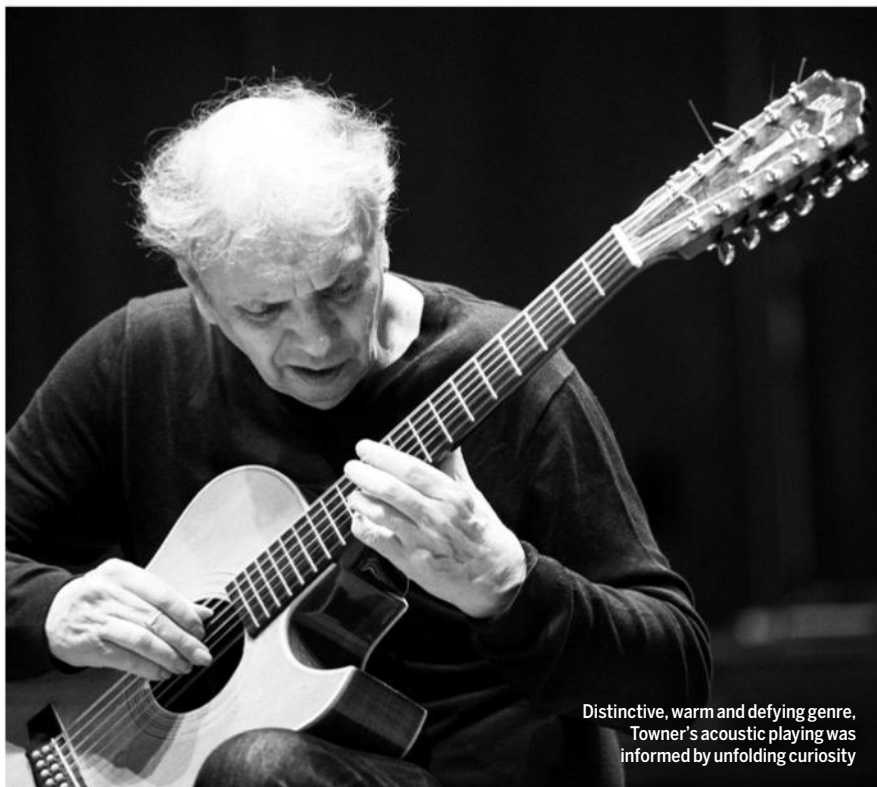
Words Henry Yates

## RALPH TOWNER

March 1940–January 2026

It was not for a lack of talent that Ralph Towner never quite matched the profile of fusion's elite. Commercially, it could be argued that the Washington-born jazz man, who passed in January at the age of 85, was held back by his chosen instrument. "I never liked the electric guitar," he said of his nylon-string leanings in a 1975 interview. "I'm not on an anti-electric campaign or anything. I'm just not drawn to it." Creatively, however, what seemed like a stubborn stipulation ultimately made Towner one of the most distinctive voices to emerge from the New York scene of the early 70s.

Born in March 1940, and captivated by overhearing the lessons given by his piano-teacher mother – his mill-worker father also played trumpet – it was as a self-taught classical pianist that Towner made his first mark at the University Of Oregon in the late 50s. There, he told this magazine in 2023, his head was turned by the guitar: "I heard a student playing a classical piece, probably Bach. I can't remember the piece, but it was just the beauty of the instrument and the resemblance to a keyboard. It



Distinctive, warm and defying genre, Towner's acoustic playing was informed by unfolding curiosity

PHOTO BY CATERINA DI PERRI / ECM RECORDS

*He played everything from 12-string to gong on [his] solo debut 'Diary', then went on to guest with everyone from Bill Bruford to Robben Ford*

didn't enter my mind that this was going to be my major instrument. But when I heard the guitar it struck me."

After graduating in 1963, Towner wrote a begging letter to the Vienna Academy of Music's Karl Scheit (sometimes dubbed the 'Segovia of Austria'). Though penniless and unaware that the school was in Europe, he made the crossing and impressed the famed guitar instructor with his audition. The next few years would be spent practising and studying "in a tiny room, seven days a week", before Towner returned to New York, joining Paul Winter's Consort band to play on the saxophonist and world music pioneer's highly influential *Icarus* album (1972).

Running alongside their work with Winter, the Consort line-up had their own ideas, which took glorious flight as Oregon, a collective that began in 1970 and endured until the various band members' deaths and retirements forced its dissolution

in 1979. The early Oregon albums – in particular, 1972's *Music Of Another Present Era* – hold a special kind of magic, Towner's eloquent, rippling touch often softer and more emotive than the fusion scene's alphas, though no less technical (revisit the unfathomable cascade that opens *The Rough Places Plain*).

In any case, Towner argued in Anil Prasad's book *Innerviews: Music Without Borders*, what he played was often as much a surprise to him as it was to us. "Writing is like reading for me. Similar to when I start a book, if the material reaches out and grabs me, I'm pulled along just like a reader is, wondering where the piece is going to go. In that way, I'm almost a member of the audience, seeing how the piece will unfold."

Even Oregon's wide remit – across 30-odd albums, the group alighted on Indian ragas, English folk, Brazilian bossa nova, intergalactic jazz and out-there

psychedelia – wasn't a broad enough canvas for Towner. He struck out as band leader with 1973's *Trios/Solos*, played everything from 12-string to gong on the following year's solo debut *Diary*, then went on to guest with everyone from Bill Bruford to Robben Ford.

The quality and breadth of his output was fabled in his own small-ish pond. Yet Towner always distrusted anything that came between his fingers and the strings of his Ramírez: "The thing about amplification, although it's improved so much over the years, is that it's always sustaining beyond the dynamics of what you're playing," he told us. "It doesn't really sound like your sound that much." This practical roadblock – coupled with his reluctance to neatly embrace a single genre – inevitably kept his shows smaller than they might have been and his profile just a faint blip on the mainstream radar.

But you only had to scan Towner's career moves to know it was never about fame. Settling in Rome, where he practised every day until his recent hospitalisation, he remained curious and questing to the last, a player whose life's work tested the limits of the guitar in every direction, and who came closer than most to solving its riddles. **G**



# ROBBEN FORD



With a long-awaited studio album, *Two Shades Of Blue*, poised for release, the master of jazz-flavoured blues dropped by the *Guitarist* studios to talk about his new record and the guitars he's used during his career, and record two exclusive videos

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtis

**A** new solo album from Robben Ford is always a major event in the guitar calendar. And *Two Shades Of Blue* doesn't disappoint. Recorded in the UK and US, with two different sets of crack musicians, the album was originally intended to be a tribute to Jeff Beck. In fact, Robben went out and bought a Strat specially for the project and had Daniel Steinhardt from The GigRig put together a new pedalboard that echoed some of Beck's guitar textures. Robben also cites his guitar tuition site, the Robben Ford Guitar Dojo, as the inspiration for writing instrumental music once again. As it turned out, the album became an equal split between vocal and instrumental pieces, fused together with Robben's unmistakable guitar sound.

Apart from the newly acquired Strat, another recent purchase was an original 1952 Gibson Les Paul, making its debut in Robben's hands on the new album. Meanwhile, he continues to tour with his faithful 1960 Telecaster – and you'll find him demonstrating that as well as the new pedalboard in the video we filmed on the day of his visit.

All this talk of guitars led us on to discussing the various instruments that have featured over

Robben's career, which has included gigs with George Harrison, Joni Mitchell and Miles Davis, as well as his own band, The Blue Line.

**You're using a Strat and a '52 Les Paul for the new record. Tell us about these sessions.**

"The genesis of this album is found in the three songs that finish the record, and those are all instrumental. They were cut in the US with Darryl Jones [bass], Larry Goldings [keyboards] and Gary Husband [drums], and I played the Strat for all those sessions. I was really trying to learn how to play the instrument, and, as you know, the record was meant as a tribute to Jeff Beck, so the Strat was a way for me to just do something new, use different sounds, use the vibrato bar, inspired by Jeff Beck.

"The recordings only yielded three songs, ultimately. So I came back to the US and cut tracks with my blues band and it was all cut with my Telecaster. And then I overdubbed a '52 Les Paul that I fairly recently acquired. So the Les Paul is playing the solos on *Make My Own Weather* and on *Black Night*. But the Tele is playing *Jealous Guy* and *Perfect Illusion*."



**VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Robben talk about his 1960 Fender Telecaster and demonstrate his touring pedalboard, plus jazz-style blues lesson!  
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



**What about amps?**

“Man, that was really a trip because the owner at Eastcote Studios [in London] had a Deluxe that was modified by Alexander Dumble. I thought that I would redo the guitar, but [the Deluxe] was a better amplifier because it was smaller to cut the tracks with. It turned out really well, so we kept it – except for those guitar solos on *Black Night* and *Make My Own Weather*. But playing through that little Deluxe with the Dumble mod, it just really is a cool and slightly different sound than I normally have. Then in the US, with the Stratocaster, I was playing through my Little Walter amps.”

**“I was a blues guitar player with a big-body guitar, who knew jazz chords. And nothing’s changed!”**

**Over your career you’ve used a variety of guitars.****Where did your journey begin with the instrument?**

“When I was 16, I think, I finally bought my first really good electric guitar. It was a Guild Starfire III, which is a semi-hollow single-cutaway with a point on it and f-holes... Mike Bloomfield was my first big hero, and when I plugged it in at the store I started playing it and I felt like it was the Mike Bloomfield sound. He was actually playing a Telecaster, like I do today. I heard that sound and I’m like, ‘This is it. I’m getting this guitar,’ you know? So that was my instrument until I started working with my brothers [The Ford Brothers Band]. When we first went out, I traded the Guild and cash for a [Gibson] L-5, and then I traded that plus some cash for a Super 400. And that I set aside because I got my first big gig, which was with Joni Mitchell and Tom Scott in the LA Express in 1974, and the Super 400 would just feed back, playing it through a Fender Twin. So that’s where the ES-335 came in. And I became very identified with the 335.”

**The big-bodied guitars like the Super 400 and the L-5 would be considered jazz guitars. Were you listening to a lot of jazz in those early days?**

“Well, I was listening to Jim Hall, Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery, but I couldn’t play that music. It was way beyond me to play that music at that time. But I

thought I wanted to be a jazz guitar player, so I got the L-5 and I got a book of chords. I started learning the chords and I was able to apply them to a blues band. At that time, I was with Charlie Musselwhite, but I was a blues guitar player with a big-body guitar, who knew jazz chords. And nothing’s changed! [Laughs]”

**Was the jazz influence something you called upon when you played with Joni Mitchell?**

“Well, it was just an incredible learning experience. I was trying to play jazz and, for the first time, I’m playing with some of the finest musicians in the world. You know, John Guerin [drums], Tom Scott [saxophone], Max Bennett [bass], Roger Kellaway [keyboards], and they all became friends. But I started learning how to accompany someone else. And, basically, I was playing what Larry Carlton had played on [Joni Mitchell’s] *Court And Spark* record. That was sort of my role. Larry couldn’t do the tour, so they went looking for someone and they found me.

“The LA Express, of course, was a fusion band, but you don’t really hear any jazz out of me. It’s blues playing, but I also have a sense of melody, you know? And I would try to play melodies as opposed to riffs. And, again, nothing’s changed; that’s still how I function. But I started learning more and more about harmony. So that’s what’s allowed my blues playing to expand and make use of harmony that is not found normally in traditional blues.”

**And Joni invited you to play on her following album, *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*, in 1975, too.**

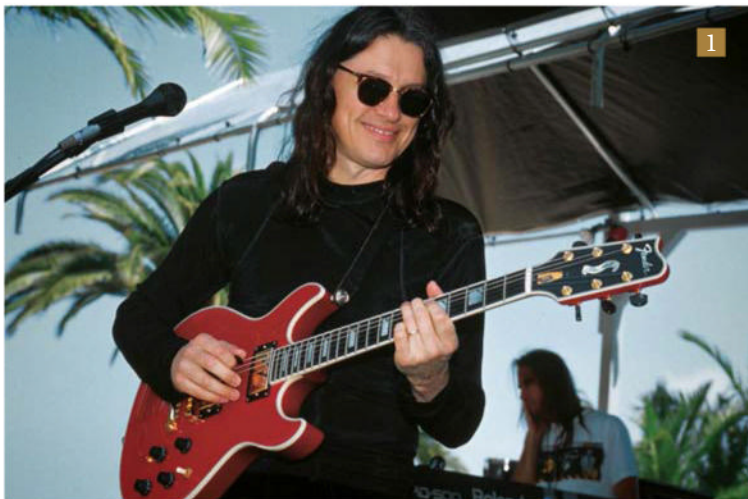
“Yeah, we’d done the tour, which was nine months off and on, and she went back into the studio to cut *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*. I was living in Colorado and they flew me out and put me up, and I played, I think, on four songs on that record.”

**Another time you used a Strat was when you played with Miles Davis.**

“I started fooling around with Strats because I wanted a different sound and finally bought a ’58 – a beautiful, great guitar. When I got the gig with Miles, the Strat was the better call for that gig because it was, again, an accompanist, rhythm guitar. So I played the ’58 Strat with Miles. The 335 was the king guitar for a while and then the sound changed. Synthesizers and the Fender Rhodes came into practice and they took up all that middle range that the 335 used to swim through. So the Stratocaster was able to cut and really took on a whole different style of playing rhythm guitar. The Stratocaster became *the* guitar, you know, where the 335 had been.

“Also I had developed a guitar with Fender, which was the Robben Ford custom model, the Esprit Ultra. It wasn’t initially called that – I was the only guy playing that guitar. It was their version of a semi-hollow, which it wasn’t, but it had sound cavities in it and the woods were very bright. And somehow I was comfortable with that guitar. It just sort of worked. I was a part of the choice of woods and design and everything, and I had this inclination to go towards solidbody instruments instead of the 335, which I’d been using really up until that point. Fender approached me about making something, so we did, and I used that guitar a ton.

1. Robben playing his Fender Esprit Ultra signature model that featured on his *Talk To Your Daughter* album. “It just sort of worked,” he says



2. Inspired by his high regard for the guitar playing of Mike Bloomfield, this must be Robben's most significant impulse purchase. He'd only gone into a music shop to buy some guitar strings and came out with this 1960 Fender Tele, which has subsequently featured heavily on studio recordings and live shows throughout his recent career





3

That's the *Talk To Your Daughter* [1988] album. And I used one guitar exclusively for a few years. So people started asking Fender about it and they decided to make it a Custom Shop Robben Ford model."

**You're playing your Telecaster more now. What was the thinking behind that?**

"Well, the Telecaster's run through all of it, except for the *Bringing It Back Home* [2013] record, which was the Epiphone Riviera; I played that on the entire album. When I went on the road touring that album I was using both the Tele and the Epiphone. The Tele

**"The [1960 Telecaster] has just been my best friend ever since I got it. It's been the most-used instrument that I've played"**

was for cranking up and playing loud. I considered it a strong blues guitar. The Epiphone had a little bit of a jazzier quality to it. So the Telecaster has just stayed in there. It always seemed to come forward more, over time."

**How did you come to switch to the Telecaster?**

"I walked into a music store in San Francisco – when we were on the road – to buy some guitar strings. I looked to my left and [the Tele] was sitting there. And I am just drawn to it. Mike Bloomfield was playing one of these. His was a '63, but it looked exactly the same, you know? And I [must have] thought, "That's the guitar Mike Bloomfield played. I need to at least check it out."

3. Robben's touring pedalboard was put together for him by Daniel Steinhardt at The GigRig. Listen to a full demo of the sounds in our exclusive video!

Something like that must have been going through my head. I walked over, started playing it and I just had to buy it. So I did. The first album that it appeared on was the *Mystic Mile* [1993] album, the Blue Line record. *Start It Up* [from *Robben Ford & The Blue Line*, 1992] is on a Telecaster, but that was a 50s with a maple neck, so it's a little brighter and thinner.

"This guitar [the 1960 Tele] has just been my best friend ever since I got it. It's been the most-used instrument that I've played. It's got a hot treble pickup and that is a huge part of why I like this guitar. The neck pickup actually has been rewound. I was really unhappy about that, but someone was taking the pickup out and they broke one of the wires. I'm like, 'Oh, man...' but it was rewound by Lindy Fralin and it's been good to me. It's not quite as loud as the original one, but that's okay."

**Will the immediate future be focused on touring in support of *Two Shades Of Blue*?**

"I'll be touring in Europe later this year for sure, and I'll come back to England at the end of the year. We're already putting that together. I'll probably be back in the UK in October, something like that. But I'll be living in Italy and I'll be touring throughout Europe. I just came from China and we're going to Japan later in the year. This little group I have with Ianto Thomas on drums and Jonny Henderson on organ, it's just a great trio!"



Robben Ford's new album, *Two Shades Of Blue*, is due for release on 27 March via Provogue/Artone  
[www.robbenford.com](http://www.robbenford.com)  
[www.robbenfordguitardojo.com](http://www.robbenfordguitardojo.com)

YOUR SOUND  CENTER STAGE



## HELIX STADIUM

Leveraging powerful DSP and the entirely new Agoura™ modeling methodology, Helix® Stadium processors deliver extraordinary sound and responsiveness, a sophisticated yet intuitive user interface, and unparalleled control capabilities. The family comprises the **Helix Stadium XL Floor** and **Helix Stadium Floor** processors, the **Expand D10** digital I/O expansion unit, the **EX2™** expression pedal, and the **Helix Stadium Backpack**.



Learn more at [line6.com](https://line6.com)

© 2025 Yamaha Guitar Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

Line 6, the Line 6 logo, the Helix logo, Agoura, Helix, and EX2 are trademarks or registered trademarks of Yamaha Guitar Group, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other jurisdictions.



# ICONS

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Joby Sessions

Jim Irsay, the late owner of the Indianapolis Colts American football team who died last year, amassed an astounding collection of iconic guitars that outstrips that of the world's top museums. Following his passing, this extraordinary trove, which also includes Holy Grails of pop culture such as the hand-written lyrics to Bob Dylan's *The Times They Are A-Changin'* and more, has come up for sale. In the following pages, we explore the crown jewels of Jim's collection, including the most famous guitars the world is likely to see – now or ever.

GUITARIST WOULD LIKE TO THANKS CHRISTIE'S FOR GRANTING US ACCESS TO THIS INCREDIBLE COLLECTION

## VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!

Take a look at some of the instruments featured in the Jim Irsay auction!

<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>



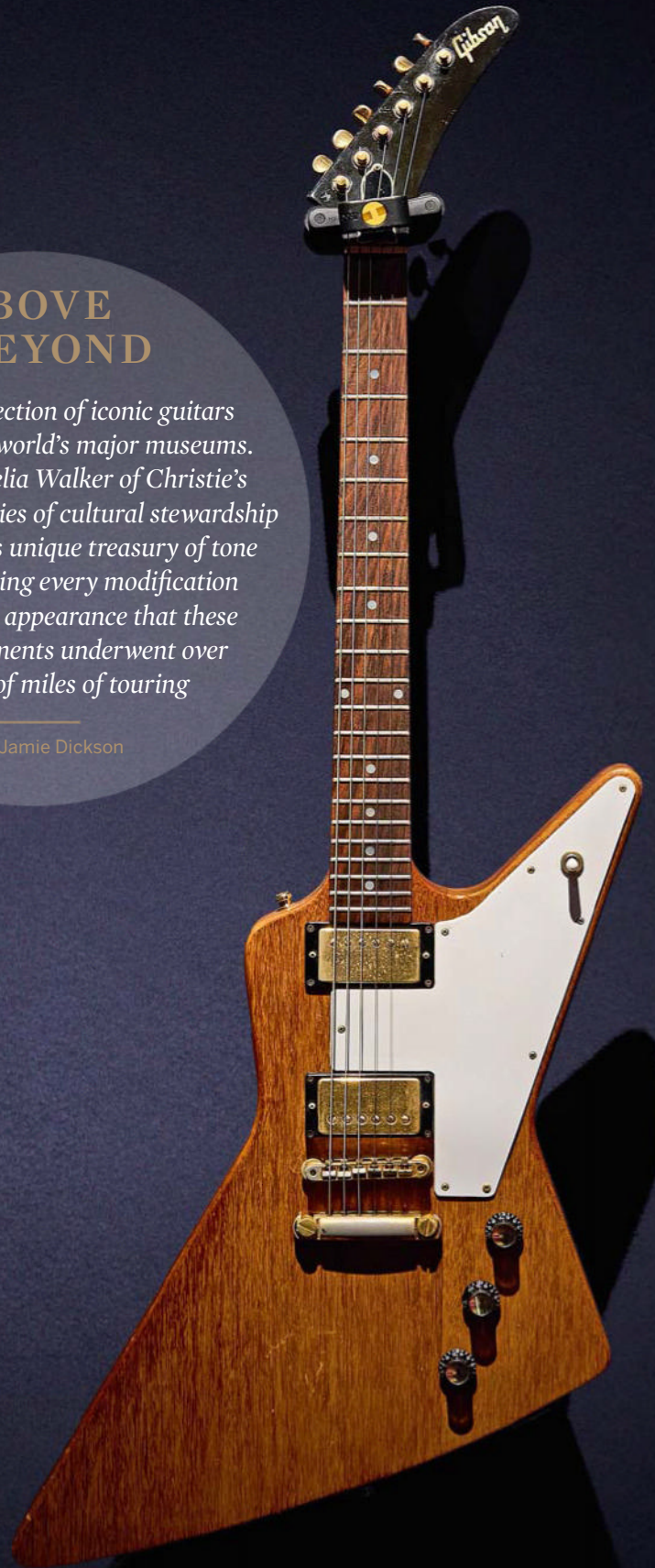
## ABOVE & BEYOND

*Jim Irsay's collection of iconic guitars rivals that of the world's major museums. We speak to Amelia Walker of Christie's about the complexities of cultural stewardship and preparing this unique treasury of tone for auction, tracing every modification and major stage appearance that these historic instruments underwent over thousands of miles of touring*

Words Jamie Dickson



This 1966 Vox Kensington prototype embodies the spirit of Flower Power-era design. It was used by both John Lennon and George Harrison, and was present in the studio for the *Magical Mystery Tour* sessions



This solid korina-body 1976 Gibson Explorer reissue was used by U2's The Edge as a back-up guitar on the band's *The Joshua Tree* tour back in 1987 and on later tours

Many famous guitar collections are simply impressive – but some go far beyond that. So far, in fact, that they become as culturally important as anything found in a museum and raise questions about the role private guitar collections play in preserving pillars of modern culture.

Jim Irsay, who died last year, was that kind of collector. The catalogue of his collection reads like a roadmap of American pop culture and includes everything from the original paper-roll manuscript of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* to Miles Davis's Martin trumpet and, of course, some of the most important guitars the world has ever seen.

"As a very wealthy individual, Jim Irsay had the means to collect so many iconic objects, which most of us can only dream of," says Amelia Walker, who is specialist head of the Private & Iconic Collections at Christie's. "But I think he was genuinely just a really nice guy who loved guitars, loved music, and felt a responsibility to look after these things and steward them onto their next home. I think he was aware that you can't be buried with these things – you are but the temporary custodian of them.

"So I think his main aim was to bring them together and let people access them, and he did a lot of touring exhibitions. He got the instruments played by The Jim



1. The Gibson Hummingbird used by Bob Dylan at the inaugural concert for the then-President Elect Bill Clinton in '93

2. Walter Becker of Steely Dan's stage-played Hahn 229 S-style electric

3. Bluesman Kenny Wayne Shepherd playing David Gilmour's Black Strat after it was famously bought for Jim Irsay's collection in 2019

Irsay Band, and Kenny Wayne Shepherd played the Black Strat. So I think he was very open to sharing them. And because he was also a player, I think he knew that, where the instrument's condition allowed, these things should be played – they should be loved and warmed up and all of that sort of thing. So while he was definitely somebody who had them behind glass in his office – which I think is every guitarist's worst anticipation of what happens at auction – he did also play them," Amelia reflects.

***"Each item is amazing on its own individual merit, like you would see in a museum celebrating the best of the best"*** AMELIA WALKER

Eleanor Jane, founder and editor of *Eleven* magazine and the book *Superstar Guitars*, concurs, recalling her time documenting Jim Irsay's instruments in a similar light.

"His office was like a museum – but one in which you were encouraged to interact with the artefacts," she recalls. "I photographed the guitars up close and personal – a phenomenal collection of hitmaker after hitmaker. After the photoshoot, Mr Irsay arranged for a private concert for me and the team, demonstrating the most iconic guitars and flying in some of

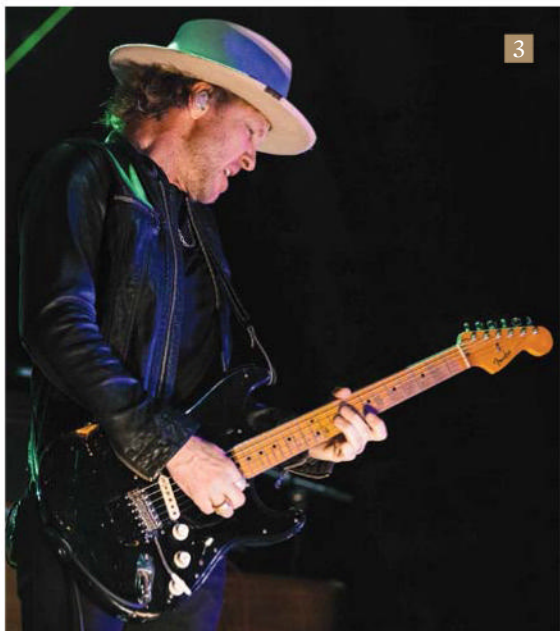


the best musicians around to perform and jam, including Kenny Wayne Shepherd. He even drove in Hunter S Thompson's iconic 'Red Shark' car as an incredible backdrop for the event. This turned out to be the first of many, much larger, free concerts and exhibitions across the USA, in which Mr Irsay brought in artists such as Billy Gibbons and Tom Bukovac to perform, allowing thousands of fans an experience of a lifetime."

All very commendable, but surely a collection of this calibre represents, in the final analysis, a cultural commonwealth of the kind that typically belongs in museums. Now that it's all up for sale, is it likely that major pieces from the collection will end up in public hands again?

"Well, it's interesting – and I've had the same conversations with people here in LA and in London," says Amelia Walker. "You looked around the room at just a few of the highlights that we had and it was sort of like a museum exhibition, rather than an auction, because each of those items is an amazing item on its own individual merit, like you would see in a museum celebrating the best of the best of whatever category – and so it is museum-quality," she reflects.

"People have all sorts of different thoughts and feelings about where collections such as this should end up, and I imagine



there will be some participation from institutions. But people also forget that museums don't have any money and it's often down to generous philanthropic donations that they get pieces like this, like The Met collection donation from Dirk Ziff, which is one of the most incredible philanthropic donations ever, in this world [of iconic guitars]. So it'll be interesting to see who bids on these items. I suspect it will be a huge, varied mixture of guitarists, collectors, museums and investors," Amelia Walker says.

Indeed, the authenticators behind high-profile sales of this kind have to employ the sort of forensic approach normally reserved for academics. With many of the modifications made

***"Jim Irsay's office was like a museum – but one in which you were encouraged to interact with the artefacts"*** ELEANOR JANE

to famous guitars taking place over decades on dim backstage workbenches or even at the hands of DIY-oriented players themselves, how do latter-day specialists determine what changes have been made (and when) in order to establish provenance? Sometimes techs

4. Paul McCartney's handwritten lyrics for *Hey Jude* – just one of many landmark original lyric sheets in the Irsay Collection

5. Beatles gear is a special focus of the Irsay Collection and goes well beyond guitars, including Ringo Starr's first Ludwig drumkit, used with the band from 1963 to 1964



5

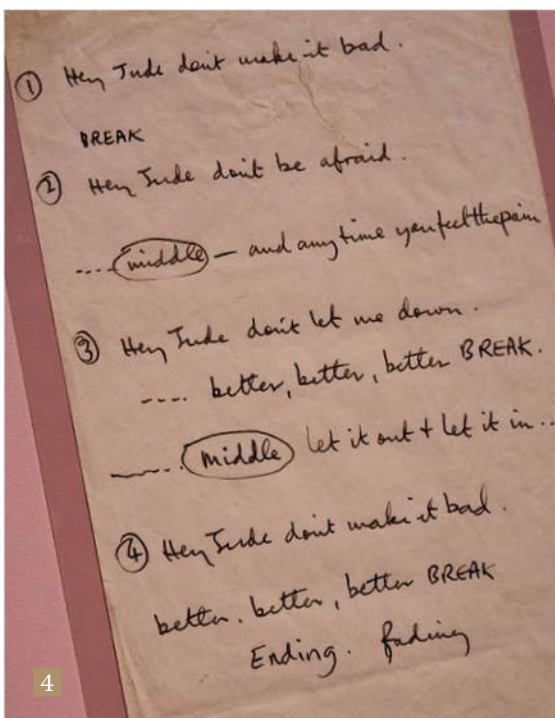
keep methodical, detailed notes over the years, but that kind of evidence is rare when it comes to fully confirming the backstory of iconic guitars.

"It's a really good question and it keeps me up at night a lot of the time," Amelia Walker says. "But we do our utmost to talk to every single person who's touched that instrument, in terms of the techs, the roadies, the restorers, the dealers. Obviously, with the Black Strat, Phil Taylor wrote a whole book about it, so he was very, very involved, so we've obviously spoken to him recently. We do everything we can to get to the bottom of modifications, and we're really lucky to be able to call up people like Seymour Duncan and ask, 'Do you remember doing this? Is that what happened?' And most of the time, people are so kind and generous with their recollections or their records, and it's part of our due diligence process," she says.

"But we do have to include a caveat that we will never be able to fully list every modification that

would have happened since 1970, for example. This was a big issue with the Jeff Beck sale because they were Fenders [Beck's Strats] and he continually swapped necks around and continually swapped the pickups around, and did it himself without telling his techs most of the time. I had such a nightmare trying to marry things up. We have a very clear line that we try to be spot-on with everything, but we cannot possibly list the full modifications, and part of being a touring and recording artist's instrument is being modified for their needs. So that's what we do. Basically, we go to pretty extreme lengths to try to get to the bottom of everything." **G**

Christie's will auction The Jim Irsay Collection: Hall Of Fame, including the iconic guitars in this feature and others, plus some of the most important cultural objects of the 20th century, on the evening of 12 March. For more information on the four-part sale series, visit [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) Photographer and editor Eleanor Jane's new book, *The Guitar Chronicles*, is due to be released on 17 September via Welbeck



4

*Ashdown  
Engineering*



*Ashdown  
Engineering*

ALL-VALVE GUITAR AMPS, PROUDLY MADE IN THE UK.  
PURE BRITISH TONE, RICH HARMONICS AND THE DYNAMIC  
RESPONSE ONLY REAL VALVES CAN DELIVER.

[WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM](http://WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM)



**ERIC  
CLAPTON'S  
GIBSON 1964  
'THE FOOL' SG**

*Clapton's iconic Cream-era Gibson  
is a 60s collision between  
art and sound*

Words Jamie Dickson

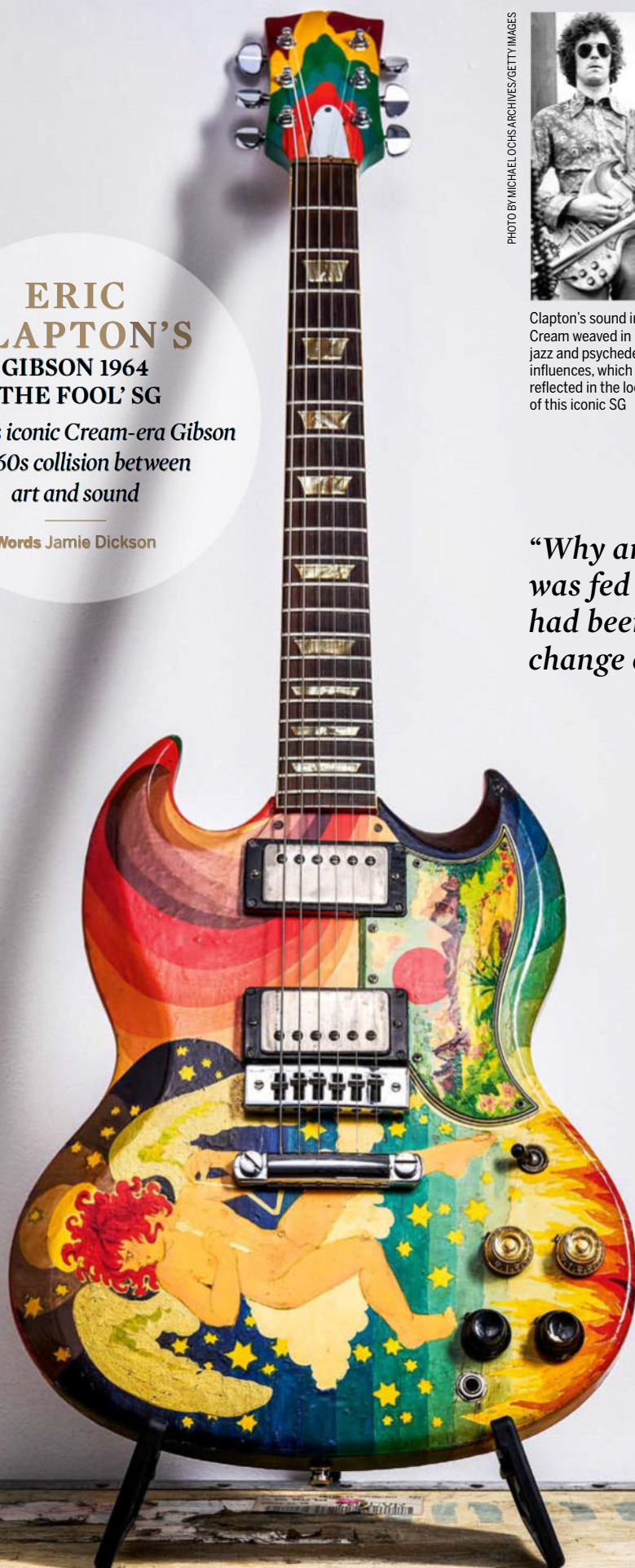


PHOTO BY MICHAEL LOCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Clapton's sound in Cream weaved in jazz and psychedelic influences, which was reflected in the looks of this iconic SG

No electric guitar on earth is so uniquely recognisable as this totem of Clapton's epochal time in Cream with Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker – but its origins remain frustratingly obscure to this day.

“There’s a lot of mystery around exactly where and when this guitar was acquired by Eric Clapton,” says Amelia Walker of Christie’s. “I’ve seen it [stated] in some places that George Harrison gave it to him, but he likely bought it in early ’67 because he was sick of getting Les Pauls stolen.”

Guitar historian Tony Bacon takes up the story here: “In the first few months of 1967, Eric Clapton went shopping and bought a circa-1964 cherry-finish

**“Why an SG? Perhaps Clapton was fed up that his two ‘Bursts had been stolen and fancied a change of style”** TONY BACON

SG Standard. His customary hunting ground was the West End of London and its music shops, notably the Gibson-centric Selmer store in Charing Cross Road, and that seems a likely source, though there’s no firm evidence,” Tony adds. “Why an SG? As Amelia Walker notes, perhaps he was fed up with the fact that his two Les Paul ‘Bursts had been stolen during the previous nine months or so and fancied a change of style – but keeping the familiar humbuckers and control layout.”

With Clapton now the proud owner of a then-three-year-old SG, the burgeoning psychedelic scene prompted Clapton’s management to suggest an unlikely collaboration with two in-vogue Dutch artists, who later became known by the collective name The Fool.

“I think that Robert Stigwood, who was their manager, hooked him up with The Fool, and as well as decorating their instruments, they also styled [the band] in terms of their fashion,” Amelia Walker says. “So we’ve got this fabulous photograph taken by



Karl Ferris, who told me that he looked after The Fool [in a quasi-managerial sense]. He took this amazing series of photos the day after the painting on the guitar was finished, so the paint was literally fresh, and they posed in the studio with their mad outfits and mad instruments. But I don't think that the artists, Marijke Koger and Simon Posthuma, were actually known as 'The Fool' collective by that exact point, though they obviously became known as such and were sought out to paint the wall at Apple studios. They also painted John Lennon's piano at Kenwood. We've got this photograph of them painting [that piano]; included in The Irsay Collection is a piano that's *behind* that [painted] one, so you can see them midway through painting it.

"[Cream] were very part of the whole 1966 psychedelia zeitgeist, so it's not surprising that Robert Stigwood, Cream's manager, wanted that look for the band: something fresh, new and hip. The reason The Fool SG has changed so much is because they didn't seal the painting, so with Eric's playing, it very quickly got very worn. There was no protective over-layer on the paint. They even painted the whole fingerboard, which clearly didn't last very long."


Tony Bacon says that Clapton adapted the guitar in more conventional ways, too, during his time with it: "The guitar still had its original Deluxe Vibrola when Eric bought it, but its cover plate came off to reveal more of the artwork. Soon he disengaged the Vibrola altogether, at first leaving the arm pointing backwards and out of the way. Later, into '68, he had the Vibrola's arm and mechanism removed, leaving just the frame as a simple tailpiece. He replaced the guitar's original Kluson tuners with Grovers, a popular move and one he knew about from his Les Pauls. Paint began to flake from the rear of the neck, and he had at least some of the extra paint there permanently removed."

Clapton, of course, moved on to other guitars – and The Fool in its turn passed into the hands of other musicians, as Tony Bacon explains: "Eric eventually let it go, perhaps to George Harrison, but it certainly went to Jackie Lomax, a musician friend of George's from the old Liverpool days. Around 1971 it moved on to Todd Rundgren, who fitted a stopbar tailpiece and an incongruous Schaller 'harmonica' Tune-o-matic. Todd had the body paint restored and sealed, and had someone replace and re-paint part of the neck and the headstock."

1. The ornate art, juxtaposing an angel with a starlit landscape, was originally unprotected by a top coat of clear lacquer and was easily worn away by playing

2. The headstock currently on the guitar, despite carefully replicated appearances, is not the original – which is now believed to be in the keeping of Perry Margouleff

"Todd Rundgren did a very good job of restoring it," Amelia Walker adds. "You can't see exactly what's been over-painted and what's original because it now has a completely clear [topcoat] layer, so nothing fluoresces under blacklight – or rather the whole thing fluoresces. When we're dealing with paintings, you can blacklight it and it will show up very obviously what's original, where it's been touched up, where it's been overpainted and so on. But with this guitar, unfortunately, you can't see it at all because of this [single, uniform clearcoat] layer that covers the whole thing.

"The headstock got pretty damaged when it was with Eric," she adds. "I don't know what Jackie Lomax then did to it, but by Todd Rundgren's account, it was sort of hanging on by a thread or had been repaired badly [when he took ownership and had it restored]. Then I think what happened is the repair person was going to throw it away. Luckily, somebody said, 'Don't do that!' [laughs] and it got rescued. The original headstock wasn't with the guitar when it was sold by Todd at Sotheby's in 2000, and when it was exhibited alongside the guitar at The Met Museum's 2019 'Play It Loud' exhibition, it was noted as being part of Perry Margouleff's collection." 



DAVID  
GILMOUR'S  
'THE BLACK STRAT'

*The most famous Strat of all  
time is also one of the most  
heavily modded*

Words Jamie Dickson



This is not the first time that Christie's has played host to David Gilmour's feted 'Black Strat' – the guitar he used on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Wish You Were Here*, countless epochal live shows, and on *Comfortably Numb*. Indeed, the first time many people heard of Jim Irsay was when he bought the Black Strat at auction at Christie's on 20 June 2019 for \$3,975,000, setting a new record for a guitar.

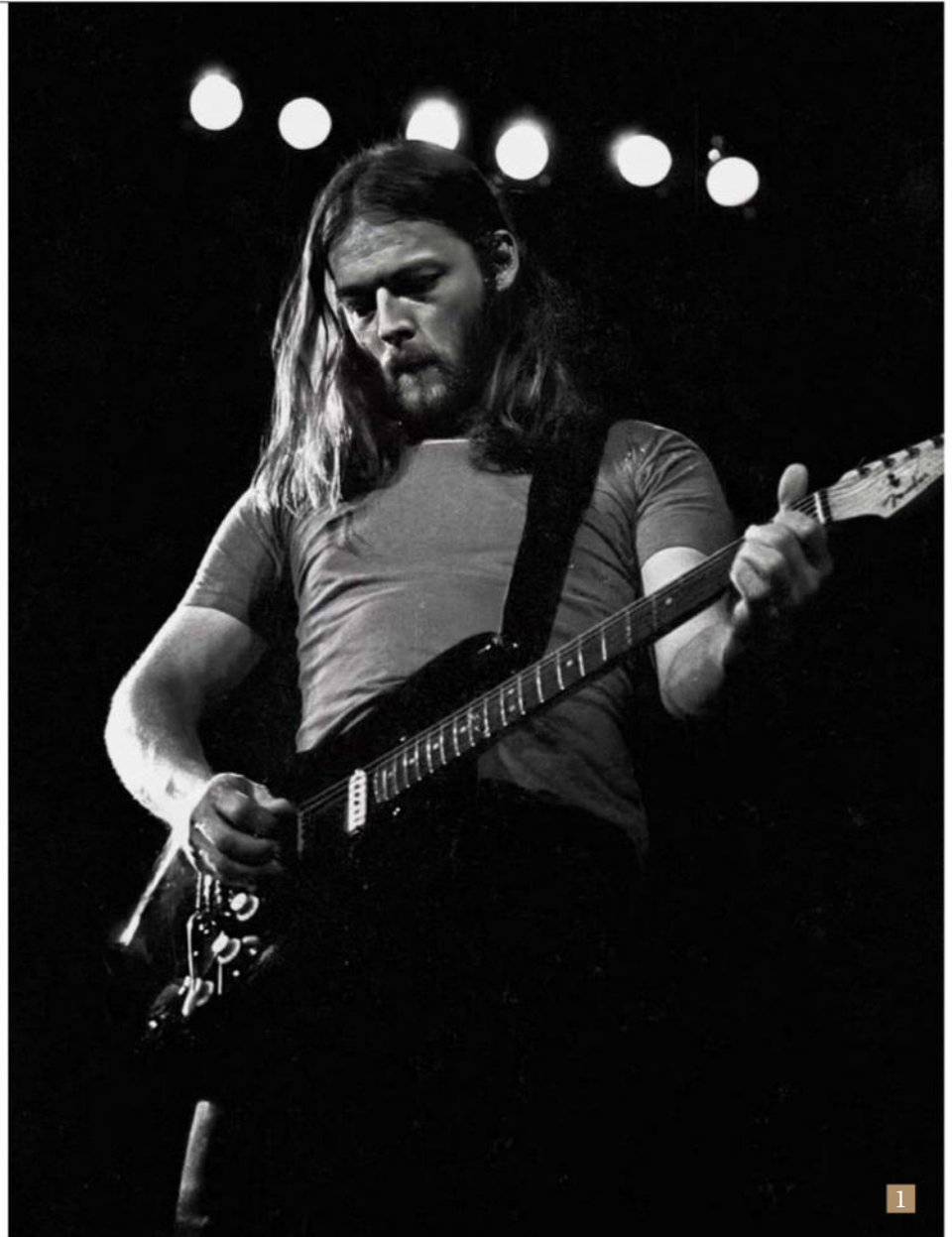
"No-one quite anticipated the amount of excitement it would cause among both fans and collectors – who are often the same people," Amelia Walker recalls. "I think we had something like 19 unique bidders on that guitar, many of whom carried on bidding to a very, very high level. For so many people, [the Black Strat] is the [centrepiece] of the Irsay Collection and is David Gilmour's calling card – its look is so distinct. I've spoken to a lot of people about it and so many of them think it will make more this time around, which is really interesting."

It began life as a Fender 1968 to '69 alder body Strat with a black finish painted over sunburst and originally featured a late-60s maple neck with large headstock and 21 frets. A switch to a rosewood neck occurred during its most famous studio

**"[The Black Strat] is Gilmour's calling card... Many people think that it will make more [at auction] this time" AMELIA WALKER**

stints, however, and it was in this configuration that it appeared on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. The neck swaps didn't end there and at one point it even had a Charvel neck fitted. At present, the Black Strat is fitted with a 1983 '57 reissue C-shape maple Fender neck with 7.25-inch radius fingerboard and 21 vintage-style frets.

The black scratchplate that gives the guitar its iconic look was fitted in 1974 and is not a



1. David Gilmour playing the Black Strat live in Los Angeles with Pink Floyd in 1975. Note that it was fitted with a rosewood neck at the time this photo was taken – that would change along with other components

factory part as Fender didn't make them to this spec at that point. Sensibly, and like almost every vintage Strat not in collector-grade condition, the original three-way pickup selector was swapped out for a five-way as late as 1985. Meanwhile, the neck and middle pickups date from 1971, while the bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan custom-wound SSL-1C, installed in 1979, which replaced a DiMarzio FS-1 that represented one of Gilmour's early attempts to get more beef out of the notoriously thin-sounding Strat bridge pickup position. There are further electronics mods in the form of a mini-toggle just below the pots to allow the

neck pickup to be switched in independently for a somewhat Jazzmaster-like tone.

Some mods of the past have been reversed, such as routing for an XLR socket on the edge of the body and a visibly refilled cavity where a Kahler vibrato was fitted – and, in fact, it was this mod that caused the Black Strat to be retired, for a time, from Gilmour's go-to guitars. "It seemed to deaden the sound somewhat," Gilmour's long-term tech Phil Taylor told *Guitarist* in 2015. "It just fell out of David's favour when the new '57 reissue Strats came out. So David agreed to loan the Black Strat to the Hard Rock Cafe." It did return to service later, but that, as they say, is another story. **G**

**KURT  
COBAIN'S**

**1969 FENDER  
'COMPETITION' MUSTANG**

*The student-model Fender that  
ignited grunge on the  
worldwide stage*

Words Jamie Dickson



With the headstock paint matching the body so well, you'd assume the neck was from 1969 itself – but it was originally built in 1966 so, plausibly, simply sat in a parts rack for three years before being finished along with the body

For many, this is *the* Nirvana guitar, made iconic by its appearance in the video for Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. Forever associated with offset Fenders that were typically modded for extra output by various means, Kurt Cobain opted for a student model for that historic video performance, sporting the so-called 'Competition Stripe' that marks it out as a 1969 instrument. However, a closer examination of its parts reveals a more complex

***"Left-handed necks [from that period] typically say 'Custom' or 'Special' as they were so seldom made and used"*** AMELIA WALKER

story that reflects how Fender made guitars in the mid- to late 1960s after CBS bought out Leo Fender, especially its rarer left-handed instruments.

"So the neck is in fact dated 1966 and it is marked 'Special,'" Amelia Walker of Christie's observes. "The left-handed necks [from that period of Fender's history] typically say 'Custom' or 'Special' because they were so seldom made and used. So they often had older necks [in storage] that they then would put on slightly later-dated guitars. The pots are '66 as well. But that's logical because, again, they would just reach into their box of [correct-spec] pots and grab whatever was in stock. But the Competition Stripe was definitely a '69 thing and serial number is also '69, so we're calling it a '69-made guitar with an earlier neck and earlier pots," she explains.

Guitar historian Tony Bacon adds some further context on the slightly tangled story of Fender's student model electrics: "The Mustang was the third model in Fender's early line of budget 'three-quarter-size' electrics. It was launched in 1964 to join the Musicmaster and Duo-Sonic, which had appeared eight years earlier, and was in effect a two-pickup Duo-Sonic

with vibrato bridge. Those two earlier models had 21 frets on a short 22.5-inch (571.5mm) scale, but from '64 they were offered optionally with longer 24-inch (610mm) scales and 22 frets – and the new Mustang, too, was available in either style. The Mustang stayed on Fender price lists until 1981.

“In 1969, Fender offered a new finish option for the Mustang,” Tony explains, “and called the result the Competition Mustang. It had contrasting ‘racing’ stripes and came in three striking variants – Burgundy (pale blue stripes on a darker blue body); Orange (red stripes/orange body); or Red (white stripes/red body) – with the headstock finished to match the body colour. They lasted in the Fender line into the early 70s.

“Around 1990, Kurt Cobain bought a blue (Burgundy) left-handed 24-inch scale Competition Mustang. It became a favourite, alongside a Jaguar, and was seen prominently in the video for *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. He had various mods done to this Mustang, including a Duncan single-coil-size humbucker swapped in at the bridge as well as a Gotoh Tune-



1. Heavy damage on the edge of the body evokes violently kinetic stage performances

2. A Seymour Duncan Hot Rails pickup installed at the bridge gave Cobain extra power to drive his gain-heavy sound to the limit

o-matic-style bridge, with the tailpiece bar flipped.

“Further into the early 90s, Kurt ordered 10 left-handed Mustangs from Fender, planned to be delivered in batches of two, in Fiesta Red or Sonic Blue finishes (in other words not Competition models). Reportedly, only six were supplied before Kurt’s untimely death in 1994. He played several, with similar bridge and pickup

mods, though often with a regular-size humbucker at the bridge. Around the time of his death, Kurt was developing a hybrid Jaguar/Mustang, and Fender would release the result as the Jag-Stang in 1996 – aptly described in the company’s promo material at the time as ‘a collision of contemporary features fused together to create a combination of Jaguar and Mustang.’”



2

**JERRY GARCIA'S 'TIGER' CUSTOM ELECTRIC**

*Ornate, laden with brass and exotic woods, 'Tiger' is a late-70s custom like no other*

Words Jamie Dickson



PHOTO BY PAUL NATHAN/GETTY IMAGES



“It’s like a work of art. And I think being British makes it quite hard for us to gauge the passion of the Deadheads [in the USA],” Amelia Walker reflects, speaking about Jerry Garcia’s ornate ‘Tiger’ custom electric. “For a lot of people, that is *the* guitar in the collection – it’s kind of the ultimate because it was the last guitar he played live before his death and it was his main guitar for about 10 years, from when it was delivered in 1979 up until to 1989. It was one of his most recognisable and favourite guitars.”

Guitar historian Tony Bacon says that ‘Tiger’ was the third such guitar Garcia owned: “Jerry

**“Jerry commissioned ‘Tiger’ in 1973 and it was delivered in 1979 – so it was six years on the bench” AMELIA WALKER**

Garcia’s custom guitar known as Tiger was made for him by Doug Irwin, who Jerry met in the early 70s when Doug worked with Rick Turner at Alembic. He bought a couple of guitars that Doug made there, the first known as ‘Eagle’, and then one named ‘Wolf’ for the snarling inlay behind the bridge on its highly figured exotic-wood body. Wolf became Jerry’s stage favourite for a few years,” Tony says.

“Toward the end of the 70s, Doug delivered another guitar to Jerry – this one, too, with a body inlay that provided its nickname, ‘Tiger’, and this one enjoyed an even longer life as a Jerry fave. He was first seen playing the guitar on stage with Grateful Dead in summer ’79 at the Oakland Auditorium in San Francisco. Jerry had given Doug free rein with the guitar’s construction, clearly evident in the deep-red body’s layered exotic woods including cocobolo and vermillion, as well as the brass strips for binding and body decoration,” Tony adds.

“Cocobolo is an incredibly exotic wood, and the maple on the back of the neck is hand-selected



1

for the most figured timbers,” Amelia Walker observes. “Even on the front, as you’re looking at the horns, he’s carved the wood in such a way as to select the peak of the grain where it curls over the arched top. It’s very, very beautifully done. It’s a sort of sandwich laminate construction, but I think it is chambered as well. Otherwise, it would weigh about a ton,” she says, adding that the chambering gave rise to some very 70s theories about why these cavities had been added.

“There was a lot of mythology around there being ‘secret drugs compartments,’” Amelia says. “I don’t think that’s the case; I don’t think that Doug Irwin specifically put in a ‘weed slot’. I think it’s just chambered and therefore to access the preamp cover, which has got this beautiful inlay, there is another little corner – which could potentially be used for transporting [small items].”

The guitar houses some quite complex electronics to serve Garcia’s broad sonic palette, Tony Bacon says: “Tiger’s DiMarzios are arranged in HHS format. The guitar was fitted with three controls (master volume; tone

for neck and bridge; tone for middle), a pickup selector, three mini-switches and two output jacks (a mono out and a stereo socket, selected by one of the mini-switches: selecting the stereo looped the signal out to an effects rack and back to the guitar’s controls, then out via the mono jack).

“The other two mini-switches were coil selectors for the humbuckers, and the five-way selector provided Jerry with ‘in-between’ pickup selections when he needed them. ‘So right there,’ Jerry told Jon Sievert at *Guitar Player*, ‘that’s like 12 discrete possible voices that are all pretty different.’ The rest of it was touch, he explained. ‘I mostly work off the middle pickup in the single-coil setting and I can get almost any sound I want out of that. And touch is so individualised. It’s something every guitar player has to find for himself.’”

Needless to say, such ornate decoration and complex electronics took a long time to craft; Doug Irwin estimated that it took a total of around two thousand hours of work in order to complete the build.

1. The ornate tiger inlay gave the guitar its name, but the complex pickup switching and signal routing hints at the guitar’s most formidable attributes

2. The headstock’s hand-inlaid eagle and globe decoration was seen on a number of Doug Irwin’s builds

“Jerry Garcia commissioned it as soon as Doug Irwin completed Wolf in 1973 and it was delivered in 1979 – so it was six years on the bench,” Amelia Walker says. “And in terms of modifications, it was delivered with white pickups and then at some point during the 80s it changed to these black pickups in an HHS configuration, which is what it has today.”

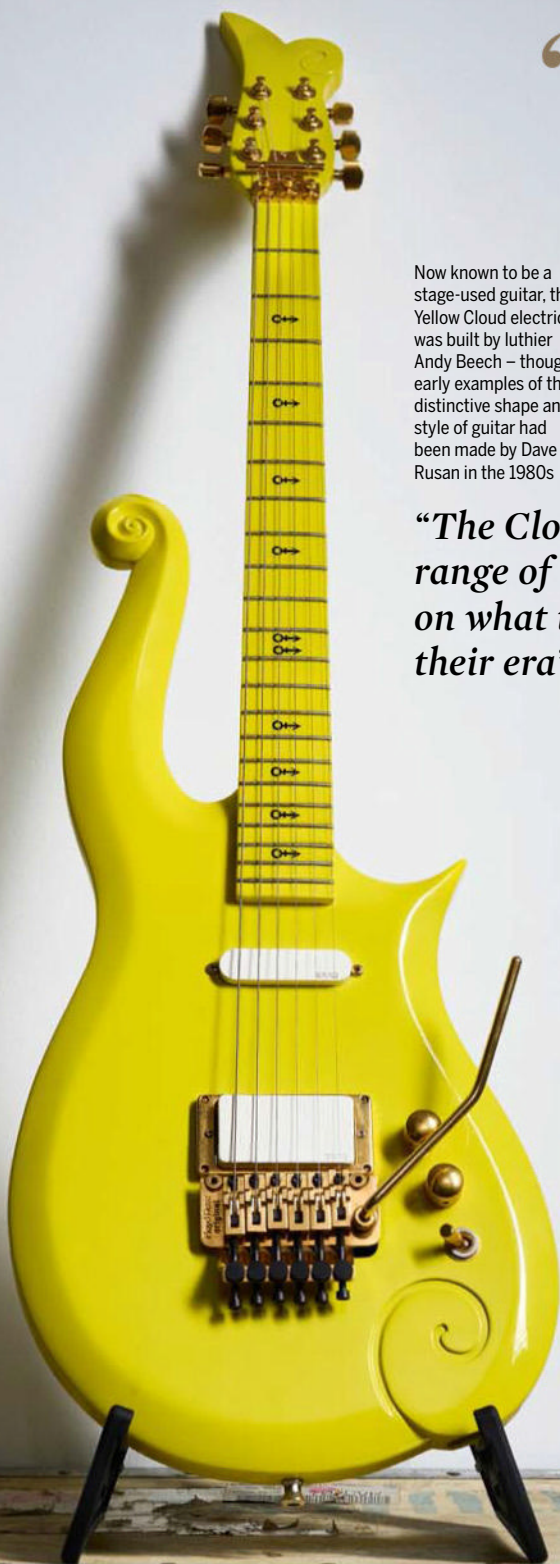


2

**PRINCE'S  
CUSTOM 'YELLOW  
CLOUD' ELECTRIC**

*Flamboyant, elegant and built to rock – it can only be one of Prince's touring guitars*

Words Jamie Dickson



Now known to be a stage-used guitar, this Yellow Cloud electric was built by luthier Andy Beech – though early examples of this distinctive shape and style of guitar had been made by Dave Rusan in the 1980s

“I love it, it’s very uniquely Prince – though it’s weirdly heavy, which you wouldn’t necessarily expect from its diminutive size,” Amelia Walker says of the fluoro yellow, baroque-looking electric, built around 1993, that originally belonged to the pop-funk genius himself.

“Prince’s Cloud guitars have come up at auction previously and have quite a range of value points depending on what era they are and what they were used for,” she explains, “and whether they were one of the first four, built by Dave

**“The Cloud guitars have quite a range of value points depending on what they were used for and their era” AMELIA WALKER**

Rusan from 1985 to ’93, one of those made by Andy Beech from ’93 onwards, or later Schecters.

“This one was a bit of a mystery because it was accompanied by a letter from [guitar tech] Zeke Clark about its usage, stating that it was Prince’s main guitar and used in most of his early videos from around 1988 to ’94. However, Prince’s first and original Cloud was donated to the Smithsonian in July 1993 and the other three Dave Rusan Clouds [2, 3 and 4], one of which was resprayed yellow at various points, have all been sold at auction between 2016 and 2020. That meant that this guitar was one of those made by Andy Beech, who was only commissioned by Prince to make Clouds from 1993 [as opposed to 1988].

“The serial number – which we now think was probably put on a bit later – didn’t appear in the

numbers listed in a Paisley Park fax dated January 1995 of all known Cloud serial numbers at the time. What we’ve since discovered is that we think this was the first one made by Andy Beech, effectively his prototype, which was delivered to Prince prior to his ‘Act II’ tour in the summer of 1993.”

Amelia adds that stage-played Yellow Cloud guitars are rare, even within the exalted niche of Prince’s collection: “Since we know that the one in the Smithsonian [Cloud 1] was donated in July 1993, and Cloud 3 was given away in March ’93, we believe that Prince used the first Andy Beech Cloud – this guitar – for his 1993 tour of Europe, and close examination of the position of the controls, which vary quite a bit among the Clouds, as well as the profile of the headstock scroll, appear to confirm this.

“Following the final show of the Act II tour at Wembley, Prince ended up playing an after-show at Bagley’s [former rave venue in London, in September ’93] and then tossed it [onto the stage floor] and the neck got broken – and that’s the last time he played it. Zeke Clark stated that he repaired the neck after a break and that he fitted the guitar with a Floyd Rose, which meant he had to move the input jack – and while you can see the ‘scar’ from this change to the scroll below the controls, the complete refin makes it tricky to see any neck repair with the naked eye.

“We were so happy to discover he’d played it live. Obviously, it got broken and mended, and it’s been completely refinished. But it’s been done so well that you can’t see any kind of evidence of the repair, even when you blacklight it. It’s a really cool thing.” **G**

## GEORGE HARRISON'S

1964


### GIBSON SG STANDARD

*Was this – or McCartney's Casino – the guitar behind the 'Paperback Writer' riff?*

Words Jamie Dickson

“With The Beatles, George Harrison was a confirmed Gretsch fan – with the occasional Rick 12, for sure,” guitar historian Tony Bacon observes. “As for Gibson, however, in Beatle terms that was a late development for George. He’d owned and briefly used an ES-345, but there he was at London’s Empire Pool in May 1966 playing a rather nice looking SG Standard. George acquired his SG probably in the early months of ’66 – it shipped from Gibson in October ’64,” Tony adds.

Amelia Walker of Christie’s says that the SG became a go-to guitar that saw a surprising amount of service over a two-year period at a crucial juncture of the band’s career. “George Harrison played the Gibson SG both on stage and in the studio

from 1966 to 1968,” Amelia says of this guitar, made early in the production run of ‘true’ SGs. “He would put the guitar into immediate use on recording sessions for the Beatles 1966 studio album *Revolver*, including on the tracks *Paperback Writer* and *Rain*. The SG would become one of his longest-serving studio instruments, used during the sessions for *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967 and the ‘White Album’ in 1968. Harrison is seen playing the SG in the promo videos for *Paperback Writer*, *Rain*, and *Lady Madonna*, and would carry the guitar on tour to Europe, the US and Japan in 1966,” she continues. “The SG would also be used by John Lennon for *Hey Bulldog* in 1968. It is incredibly rare for such a well-documented and extensively used Beatles guitar to come to auction.” 



**“Harrison put the SG into immediate use on recording sessions for ‘Revolver’, including on the ‘Paperback Writer’ and ‘Rain’ tracks”** AMELIA WALKER

While it’s likely that Paul McCartney recorded the galvanic main riff of the track *Paperback Writer* on his Epiphone Casino, it’s believed that this SG was used by Harrison for fills on the track



**JOHN  
LENNON'S  
1964 RICKENBACKER  
MODEL 1996**

*This stunning stand-in Ricky was owned by both John Lennon and Ringo Starr in its time*

Words Jamie Dickson

“Nothing’s changed on it,” says Amelia Walker of the glowing NOS look of John Lennon’s 1964 Rickenbacker Model 1996. “The Rickenbacker wasn’t used for a huge amount of time – it was a sort of replacement while his black 325 was being mended – but it’s got such a distinct look because it was one of the English [Rose-Morris] models with the f-hole like a violin,” she adds.

Guitar historian Tony Bacon picks up the story here: “In 1964, Rickenbacker began exporting guitars to the British distribution company Rose-Morris. Rickenbacker had produced some of its short-scale 300-series guitars with an f-hole, unlike

those with the regular sealed top. Rose-Morris liked the f-hole and asked for it on the bigger-body guitars it bought, too, instead of Rickenbacker’s regular slash-shape soundhole,” Tony explains. “The firm had its own model-number system and catalogued its Rickenbacker line accordingly – 1993 (Rickenbacker’s 330/12), 1995 (615), 1996 (325), 1997 (335), and 1998 (345) – but stopped Ricky imports a few years later as sales faltered.

“John Lennon had played a couple of American originals of Rickenbacker’s 325 model since his band’s early days, and it was his second 325 that suffered an unfortunate accident at a Beatles Christmas ’64 residency

*“It was used for the Beatles’ Christmas Show in 1964 [to 1965] and then it was kept in Lennon’s attic studio at Kenwood”*

AMELIA WALKER

at Hammersmith Odeon [which ran from 24 December 1964 to 16 January 1965], resulting in a crack from the nut and around the back of the headstock,” Tony continues. “Rose-Morris came to the rescue, happy to provide one of its ‘British’ model 1996 versions of the 325, finished as standard in fireglo red-sunburst, rather than John’s preferred black. He used it for the remaining shows, but soon had his regular 325 back in a reasonably playable condition, ready for the band’s first sessions of 1965 at Abbey Road. He later gave the 1996 to Ringo Starr [in 1968], who sold it at auction in 2015.”

“The Rickenbacker doesn’t necessarily have any key recordings associated with it,” Amelia Walker adds. “It was basically used [as a replacement] at Hammersmith during the *Beatles’ Christmas Show* in 1964 [to 1965]. And then after that it was kept in Lennon’s attic studio at Kenwood. You can see the guitar in photographs right by his Farfisa and the Brenell tape machines that he had up in the attic. It’s right there, so you can assume that it may have figured in compositions or on demos, but I don’t think it was used on any [official] recordings.” **G**

This positively glowing 1964 Rickenbacker was a short-lived stand-in guitar, but Lennon gifted it to Ringo Starr after it had served its purpose



**JOHN  
LENNON'S  
1963 GRETSCH 6120  
CHET ATKINS**


*This 'Paperback Writer'  
guitar was gifted to  
Lennon's cousin*

Words Jamie Dickson

“**T**he Gretsch is pretty special,” Amelia Walker of Christie’s reflects. “But both this guitar and the Model 1996 Rickenbacker are incredible because of the provenance. In both instances, how these came into The Jim Irsay Collection is the most perfect sort of backstory you could ever want. The Rickenbacker was given to Ringo by John [in 1968], and then Ringo sold it over four decades later at auction at Julien’s [in 2015], which is where Jim Irsay bought it.

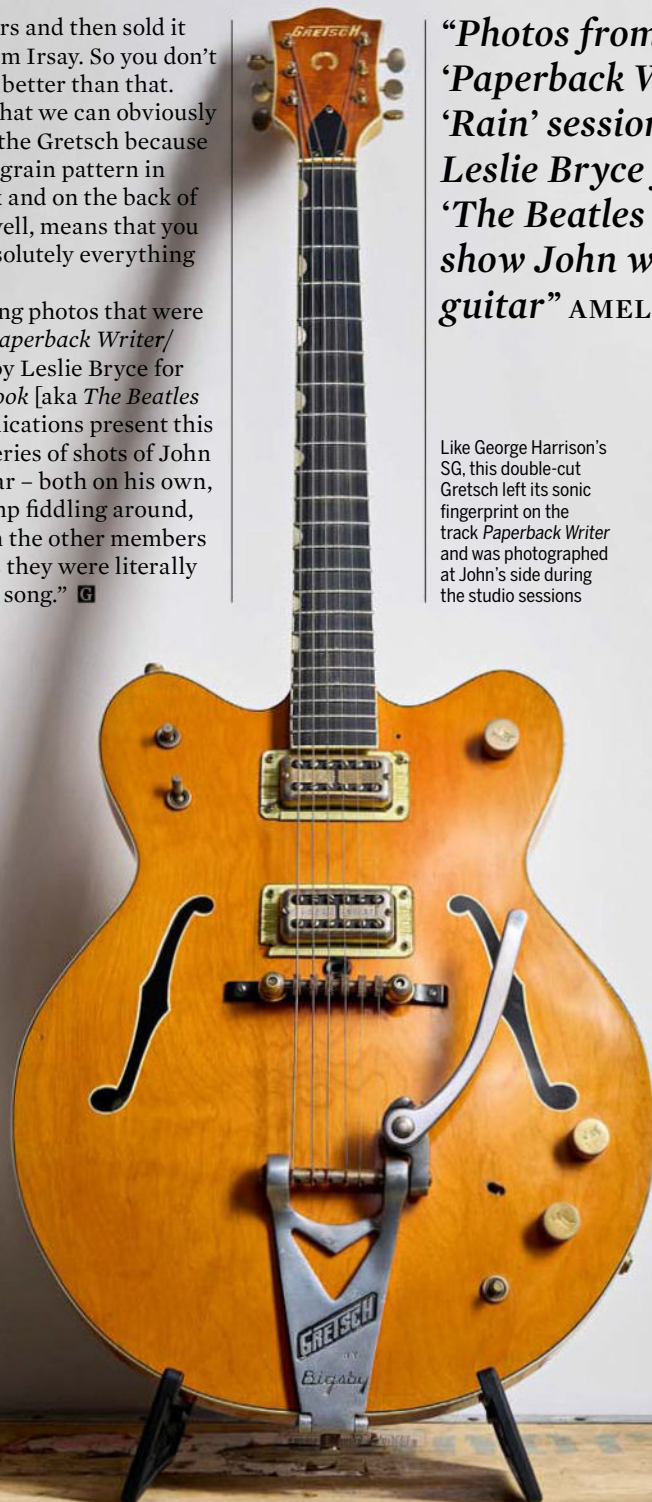
“The Gretsch was given by John Lennon to his cousin David Birch, who wanted a guitar for his own band. David kept it for

almost 50 years and then sold it privately to Jim Irsay. So you don’t really get any better than that. And the fact that we can obviously photo-match the Gretsch because of the unique grain pattern in the headstock and on the back of the neck, as well, means that you know that absolutely everything checks out.

“The amazing photos that were taken at the *Paperback Writer/Rain* session by Leslie Bryce for *The Beatles Book* [aka *The Beatles Monthly*] publications present this really great series of shots of John with the guitar – both on his own, next to the amp fiddling around, and then with the other members of the band as they were literally recording the song.” 

**“Photos from the  
'Paperback Writer'/  
'Rain' session by  
Leslie Bryce for  
'The Beatles Book'  
show John with the  
guitar”** AMELIA WALKER

Like George Harrison’s SG, this double-cut Gretsch left its sonic fingerprint on the track *Paperback Writer* and was photographed at John’s side during the studio sessions





# KIM GORDON

Returning with solo album *Play Me* – a stinging broadside against the modern age – the alt-rock talisman remembers the “shitty guitars” and renegade tunings of her 80s breakout with Sonic Youth

Words Henry Yates

PHOTO BY ELENA DI VINCENTO/ARCHIVIO ELENA DI VINCENTO/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY

A certain trepidation is natural before an interview with Kim Gordon. Despite all evidence to the contrary – the reams of historic shots of her killing it on a Thunderbird and Jazzmaster with alt-rock pioneers Sonic Youth – the 72 year old famously doesn't consider herself a musician. What's more, it's dangerously feasible that she didn't fret a note on her new solo album, *Play Me*, which would leave us with 40 minutes to talk about the weather. Add to that Gordon's slightly icy reputation among journalists back in Sonic Youth's early 90s heyday (to be clear, she was never nasty, just too damn cool to do the promotional dance, and desperate to get away).

Luckily, neither doomsday scenario comes to pass. Joining the video call from New York, Gordon is friendly, witty, thoughtful and proud of *Play Me's* socio-political battlecries (on which she *did* play, thank God). And if she's bemused to learn the name of this publication – “I'm really an artist that plays music, that's what's so funny about doing interviews for guitar magazines” – then she's happy to humour us.

**Listening to *Play Me*, it feels like there are no rules. Was that how it felt to make it?**

“Yeah, it felt pretty free. I was like, ‘Oh, I love krautrock, let's have a krautrock beat.’ Sometimes I'd come in with lyrics, like, a page with things scribbled all over it, but I didn't know exactly how it was gonna fit. I guess I really trust Justin [Raisen, producer]. This is our third record now and he just wants to keep going. It's not the way I grew up playing music, y'know? In Sonic Youth, eventually, we did have friends who we let in to work on fixing our records, but it was such a different process.”

**It sounds like you're looking around at the world on songs like *Post Empire* or *Dirty Tech*. What's keeping you awake at night?**

“Everything is so fucked-up right now. The whole AI thing is just such a nightmare. People are so seduced by technology. It's being rammed down our throats and even the people making it don't even know what it is, y'know? People don't realise it takes enormous water resources and it's going to make everyone's electricity more expensive. It's just crazy that people are so greedy they don't care about destroying the world.”

**The album ends with the vitriolic *ByeBye25!* and you sound pleased to be rid of it. But what are your hopes and fears for 2026?**

“I guess I hope the Democrats kill in the midterms and we regain the House and Senate. I just hope there’s some good news. Can music still be a vehicle for social change? I don’t want to say ‘no’. I think it can bring people together. You never know what can happen. It’s so funny how Trump keeps using music by different artists, then they end up suing him. What is he thinking? Like, does someone else just pick the music?”

“I accidentally fell into playing music, like a lot of people in the post-punk era. I really just aspired to be an artist”

**The instrumentation on this new record doesn’t sound like standard bass and guitar. How did you approach it?**

“I didn’t play any of the bass, actually – Justin played that. He also played whatever melodic guitar there is and then I played all the kind of dissonant guitar stuff. Basically, I just improvised with a bunch of different pedals and a little Fender tweed amp. On *Dirty Tech*, the guitar is super minimal and I’m unplugging the lead from a distortion box and plugging it back in, that kind of trick. There was one pedal I used a lot on *Not Today*. I can’t remember the name of the company – I’m so bad at tech stuff – but it’s like a double Memory Man, this weird, swirly circular delay. And it’s way fucked-up.”

1. Pictured here in the 90s with Sonic Youth, Kim Gordon describes her prior band and solo work as “totally different”



PHOTO BY CHRIS CARROLL/COORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

**You’re such an iconic bassist, though. How come you didn’t want to play on this album?**

“I mean, I haven’t played bass since the last Sonic Youth gig [2011]. I have this improv guitar duo with Bill Nace called *Body/Head*, and it’s just much more satisfying to improvise on a guitar. You can just get so many more textures and sounds.

“I never really saw myself as a bassist. I always played with the pick, punk-rock style. And when I first started playing music, I played guitar. But then I would play basslines on the guitar, so it made sense to just play the bass. But I don’t have any sense of identity as a bass player, strangely enough.

“I mean, I’ll give Justin some direction. For one song I put out last year, *Bangin’ On The Freeway*, I played a bassline and sent it to him, and then he had his sister-in-law – [Eva Gardner of The Mars Volta, who has toured with P!nk, Gwen Stefani and Cher] who’s also a bassist – record it on eight different basses or something. Then we cut all of that up and it was just the most fucked-up rhythmic thing. So I’m more interested in ideas than actually having to play the bass, y’know?”

**You’ve long been associated with Jazzmasters. Is that what you used on *Play Me*?**


“Yeah, it’s the same one I always use. I forget the year – it might be 2009 or 2010 – but it’s one of the Mexican Jazzmasters. I have other guitars, but that’s really the only one I play. I’m actually doing a signature guitar for Fender and it’s based on that Jazzmaster. My amazing guitar tech, Salar Rajabnik, he helped me through the process and did a lot of research. The signature model took a really long time. We finally got Fender to use Seymour Duncan pickups.”

**It’s said you hadn’t actually played an instrument until you were 27?**

“Yeah, that’s true. I mean, I was in this kind of ‘noise’ garage band in school in Toronto when I was younger. But basically, yeah, not really. I mean, my brother and I would improvise in the living room with an African drum and a gong and this upright piano, and just kinda jump around. But no musical training. But Patti Smith and Debbie Harry didn’t start playing music til they were, like, 28. So I always felt older than everyone else, but because of that, I actually didn’t feel like it was a big deal. I really moved to New York to do art. I kind of accidentally fell into playing music, like a lot of people in the post-punk era. I really just aspired to be an artist.”

**When Sonic Youth started out in the early 80s, did you have a vision for the band?**

“Without sounding pretentious, we did want to make something that was different. But it’s not like we really talked about it. We just took our influences. The music was forged from each of our personalities. There was such a high bar set by No Wave music, which was also kind of nihilistic. So we were influenced by Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Rhys had worked with La Monte Young, and so he knew about alternate tunings and putting all the instruments in ‘E’, things like that. Same with Glenn. And both Thurston [Moore] and Lee [Ranaldo, Sonic Youth guitarists] had played with Glenn. So we definitely knew the power of that, and that was part of our vocabulary.”



2. The bass forms a big part in Kim's musical history, but she admits that she hasn't played in over a decade. "It's just much more satisfying to improvise on a guitar," she tells us. "You can just get so many more textures and sounds"

"The Thunderbird was hard to play... the balancing is a bit awkward. But it does feel like it's kind of a weapon"

**Sonic Youth were pioneers of alternate tunings...**

"I think, in the beginning, we just had shitty guitars and so they didn't sound good in regular tunings doing powerchords anyway. Then Thurston stuck a drum stick under his guitar strings, for the song that became *The Burning Spear*, and he was using it to almost make a percussive sound. The funny thing about guitar is the electricity, and how it's affected by how you move with it. It's almost like a dance to me. It's very visceral."

**How was your musical headspace different working on *Play Me*, relative to Sonic Youth?**

"In Sonic Youth, there was a lot of sitting around jamming until things start getting arranged. Even if Thurston came in with the riff, we'd then all make up parts and work through the structure. It was almost like songwriting by committee, but as a band, as opposed to [manufactured pop]. *Play Me* is just me and Justin. No-one else has to agree. It's much simpler with just one other person, y'know?"

**How did you approach your bass parts when you were in Sonic Youth?**

"Because Lee and Thurston played in alternate tunings, I was really making up stuff by listening. Sometimes I would have to play a root note for a song, and that was always the least interesting part to me because I'm a creative person. I used a lot of open strings. I like minimal bass parts, so that's mostly what I played."



PHOTO BY AURORA ROSE/PATRICK MCMULLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

**Do you still have your old '76 Thunderbird IV from back in the day? And why that guitar?**

“I have it somewhere. Why the Thunderbird? Didn’t The Runaways use it? And I think the bass player in Alice Cooper had one. It was incredibly hard to play. The neck is really thin, which makes it easier, but the balancing is a little bit awkward. But it really does feel like it’s kind of a weapon or something because the neck is so long.”

**Do you still feel the guitar has some juice left in it?**

“Yeah, sure. I mean, I like working with limitations. I remember in Sonic Youth, as a band first going to England, people hated us. It was that idea of, like [disgusted], ‘Oh, you’re playing guitar?’ Because everything was about synthesisers: ‘That’s so old-fashioned.’ It’s just kind of funny how everything changes.

“I do have a vocabulary of technique, I guess, that I built up from playing for so long. But the fun of it for me is that I don’t know [much] about music. J Mascis from Dinosaur Jr and I did a gig together once. It was just the two of us, and it was a party for Marc Jacobs or something. I was in some kind of open D tuning. And I said, ‘Okay, I’m just gonna drone on this and you do what you do.’ And I guess I also did some vocalising of some sort. But my friends were there and they said, ‘Actually, that really worked.’ So it’s kind of interesting.”

**What is the guitar to you now? A magic wand? A paintbrush? Just a tool to get the job done?**

“It’s kind of a paintbrush. I mean, I’ve made a few art films with a guitar. I did one in downtown LA, kind of

rubbing it on corporate buildings. And then I did one in my house that was based on a Chantal Akerman film, where I have the guitar and it’s plugged into a small amp that you can’t see. I’m doing domestic chores like cooking and washing the bathtub and eating with my daughter, with the guitar just banging around, but I’m sort of ignoring it. I guess I see the guitar as an extension of the body, in a certain way.”

**“The funny thing about guitar is the electricity, and how it’s affected by how you move with it. It’s almost like a dance”**

**Are you more inspired by visual artists than musicians?**

“I still hang out more with art people and I’m more aligned with the art world than the bass-playing world. I guess I think about art – or movies – more than I think about music. Music is something that’s fun to do.”

**Does it ever amuse you that you’ve made such an impact on rock ‘n’ roll, without necessarily meaning to?**

“I have a little bit of imposter syndrome about it, actually. I enjoy it. But I don’t want to think about it or all the stuff around it. What people think of me, I don’t know.”

**3.** Kim Gordon sees music as a means to express her artistic voice, and *Play Me* finds her creating dissonant guitar lines with her Jazzmaster, while producer and co-writer Justin Raisen handles the guitar melodies and bass guitar parts



Kim Gordon’s latest album, *Play Me*, is released on 13 March on Matador Records

<https://kimaltheagordon.com>

Acoustic Guitar Strings by Ernie Ball



# Earthwood



ERNIE BALL®

# Reach For The Stars

It's been a while since we've dropped into the world of Duesenberg. German ingenuity, retro style and some big-name users – what's not to like?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Matt Lincoln





## DUESENBERG STARPLAYER CBR

£2,199

CONTACT **440 Distribution** PHONE **0113 2842342** WEB [www.duesenberg.de](http://www.duesenberg.de)

### What You Need To Know

#### 1 The Starplayer has been around for ages, right?

Correct, the Starplayer celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2025: the definitive Duesenberg design. It's far from the brand's only design, though. Head over to the Duesenberg website and you might be surprised.

#### 2 So this isn't a new design?

Well, it's certainly a new spin on the Starplayer with its chambered mahogany back and laminated maple top. A bit more 'Les Paul'-alike, then, but don't forget, like the standard Starplayer, this CBR is a set-neck design that uses a Fender scale length. It also nods back to the original Starplayer design.

#### 3 Doesn't Johnny Depp play one?

Yes – Duesenberg has attracted plenty of big-name users, some of whom have signature or 'Alliance' models. Currently, this line-up includes Mr Depp, Joe Walsh, Mike Campbell and Tom Bukovac, with new 2026 models for Paul Sidoti (Taylor Swift) and Joey Landreth.

Rather like how Ronnie Wood will always be the 'new guy' in The Rolling Stones, it's hard to believe that Duesenberg was founded in 1986 and that its most famous model, the Starplayer, turned 30 in 2025. It's one of a dizzying number of guitars currently offered, with many updates for this year, as well as some bass guitars, a lap steel and a 12-string electric mandolin for good measure.

A new addition to the Starplayer line-up is the CBR you see here, which

was unveiled in the model's 30th year. Outwardly, it looks like the long-running Starplayer TV, but its construction is different. Instead of the arched maple laminate back and sides with a spruce laminate arched top and spruce centre block (which Duesenberg refers to as its semi-hollow construction), the CBR has a flat back with thicker sides and slightly narrower centre block, which are machined from solid mahogany. This is capped with a flat, thin maple top – a



This humbucking-sized P-90 single coil goes back to 1978 and has long been used by Duesenberg



1

1. There's plenty of classic style to the design with the Art Deco-inspired stepped elements to the headstock face and 'D' raised logo



2

2. Duesenberg only uses nickel-plating to its hardware. These Duesenberg Z tuners are another neat functional design, although once the strings were stretched we rarely touched them – this is a very stable guitar

laminated, approximately 5mm thick. In the lightly metallic and opaque Catalina Green of our sample's top you can't see any of that wood as both the top edge and single bass-side f-hole are very neatly bound, while the treble side holds the pickguard-mounted controls and pickup selector switch.

What doesn't change on this Starplayer is the one-piece maple set neck with its longer Fender-like 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length, or the majority of the

purpose-designed hardware and pickups. Indeed, it's the unique hardware that sets a Duesenberg apart from pretty much every contemporary brand.

Let's start with the tuners. The sealed die-cast designs use stepped buttons and also have a hole that runs from the top of the string post to the back, the idea being you push your string in and wind it on and have no sharp string ends. That Art Deco-inspired 'three steps' motif occurs everywhere: from the tip of the headstock to the base of the control plate, the truss rod cover, the lower edge of the back-sprayed Gretsch-like pickup mounting rings, the unique side-mounted output jack plate, and even around the top of the side-knurlled control knobs and the selector switch cap.

And if those elements weren't enough to distinguish Duesenberg from any other electric guitar, we have the raised 'D' logo on the headstock as well as where a toggle switch would be on a Les Paul on the upper rounded shoulder, plus a smaller 'D' on the rail by the pickups and on the base of the Tremola – with the full brand name on both the control plate *and* the truss rod cover!

But this proliferation of branding doesn't get in the way of some very good design elements, not least the Tremola. Yes,

## THE RIVALS

There's certainly some classic Gretsch style in the Starplayer's design and, while they didn't have f-holes, the original Jet models were always semi-solid. There are plenty of contemporary examples, such as the Japanese-made Gretsch G6128T-53 Vintage Select Duo Jet Black (in-store at £2,699), which features dual TV Jones T-Armond single coils and a compensated aluminium bridge with Bigsby B3CCB vibrato.

As Gibson's Bigsby-equipped Les Paul styles reside in the Custom Shop, they cost. For example, the chambered twin f-hole 1956 Les Paul Standard Reissue with

Bigsby with its VOS all-over Double Gold nitro finish is a mere snip at £6,699. Back in the real world, the Chinese-made Epiphone Joe Bonamassa 1959 Les Paul Custom in Antique Ebony (£949) is quite the looker and features ProBucker pickups and a gold-plated Bigsby B70.

The UK's Gordon Smith provides quality and customisation with its Bespoke builds. The single-cut GS Deluxe Semi Solid starts at £1,399 with dual humbuckers, and while a Bigsby isn't officially offered, we're pretty sure GS would cater for you, or you can fit one – or a Göldo unit – yourself.



3



4

it's obviously based on a Bigsby, but the strings pass through open holes on the string attachment bar, not those 'orrible pins. And the unit is elevated by two collars under the baseplate, which means the string angle behind the bridge is reduced. It's hard to see other differences, such as the bearings of the string retainer bar, but it's an extremely smooth-feeling unit; it almost feels broken in. The tuneomatic-style bridge is subtly tweaked, too, and it slightly rocks as the vibrato

3. Plenty would suggest the Grand Vintage humbucker should be considered a classic! Again, long-used, it's very classic sounding, and has a slightly Patent Applied For style

It's the unique, purpose-designed hardware that sets a Duesenberg apart from pretty much every contemporary brand

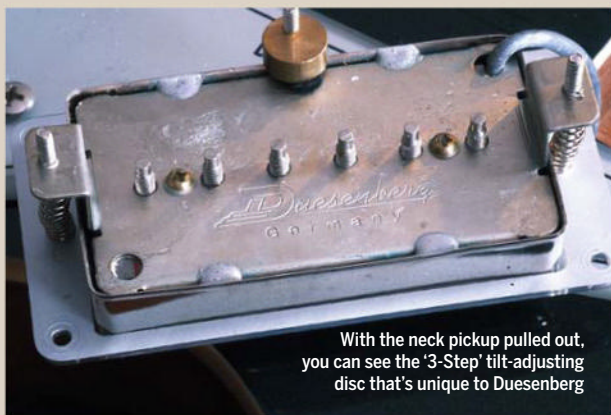
is moved. The parts look impressive but also work so well. It's a very well-sorted guitar with excellent tuning stability – not something we always say with Bigsby-equipped electrics.

#### Feel & Sounds

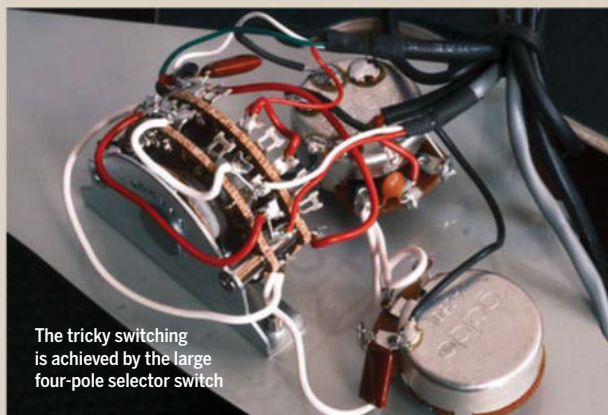
While it's not the lightest semi-solid we've encountered, the overall weight of 3.98kg (8.76lb) feels very purposeful and quite Les Paul-like. The medium D profile neck is well named and it's close to

4. It's very easy to access the electrics here – unlike many semis! And so it's also very easy to service the guitar should you need to, or to perhaps mod the wiring to really suit you

## UNDER THE HOOD Tricky wiring but everything is very accessible



With the neck pickup pulled out, you can see the '3-Step' tilt-adjusting disc that's unique to Duesenberg



The tricky switching is achieved by the large four-pole selector switch

**T**he pickguard-mounted controls mean that it's easy to peer inside the guitar, and what we see are two Göldo-lookalike large pots: the volume is stamped 'B500k' and the tone 'A250k'. The Göldo website tells us 'A' means a linear taper, 'B' is log or audio taper. There is a treble bleed capacitor on the volume, but we can't read the value, while the tone cap has a 153J code for 0.015µF.

Duesenberg doesn't exactly explain what the Flextone+ wiring actually does on the five-way, four-pole lever switch. Position 1 voices the bridge humbucker, position 3 is both bridge and neck, and position 5 is neck only. Of the two 'in-between' sounds, position 2 voices the slug coil of the bridge humbucker and the neck pickup, and position 4 does the same but the slug coil

passes through a series-placed capacitor (.022 µF), providing a bass-cut while the phase of the neck pickup is reversed.

The pickups have been long-used on the Starplayer and other Duesenberg models, and pulling the neck Domino unit from the guitar it's cleanly made and stamped 'Duesenberg, Germany' on the nickel-silver baseplate. Of the Grand Vintage bridge humbucker, Duesenberg keeps info scarce, stating that it's an "Alnico humbucker with a low to medium output, a balanced frequency response and a classic voicing that transports the sound of the 50s into the present". Ours has a measured DCR of 8.18kohms at output.

Duesenberg states the Domino P-90 neck pickup was "developed in 1978 by Duesenberg founder Dieter Gölsdorf [and]

was worldwide the first P-90-type pickup in standard humbucker size". The Alnico loaded single coil has a measured DCR of 5.39k.

Another neat trick that's found on this guitar is achieved with the small screw in the bridge-facing edge of the '3-Step' pickup mounting ring. This threads into a small brass disc, with a spring for tension, that sits under the back edge of each pickup so you can tilt the pickup to match the string rake. Yes, it needs a small semi-circular rout on the back side of the pickup cavity, but, as Duesenberg explains, the pickup routing and the top hole for the electronics plate are cut at Duesenberg's Hanover HQ after the guitar is finished and polished in the company's purpose built factory in Croatia. That might seem a little convoluted, but it's very cleanly done and clearly works.



Duesenberg and its sister brand Göldo make some very classy hardware that's also used by plenty of other brands. Yamaha, for example, selected a Göldo vibrato for its 60th Anniversary Revstar launched earlier this year. 'Nuff said

our Gibson Les Paul Classic reference in depth (21.1mm at the 1st fret, 24.5mm at the 12th), although the neck back is a little more rounded like the slightly fuller 50s profile. Either way, it's a very good profile and feels quite classic in the hand. The fret tangs are notched, so you don't see them on the fingerboard edge, and as well as going through a Plek process, the medium jumbo frets (which measure 2.72mm wide by 1mm high) are mirror polished.

Along with a perfectly dialed-in setup, it plays superbly. Some unplugged playing reveals a smooth, ringing response with just a little more apparent volume than our Les Paul Classic. It really is a smooth-playing, lively instrument – and we haven't even plugged it in yet!

The Grand Vintage and Domino P90 have been stalwarts of the Duesenberg line-up for many, many years, and reacquainting ourselves with this classic pairing you can hear why. The Grand Vintage at the bridge comes across as a slightly fuller Patent Applied For-alike,



The CBR features a chambered mahogany back and one-piece maple set neck, with a Fender-like 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length and a classic-feeling medium D profile



## DUESENBERG STARPLAYER CBR

**PRICE:** £2,199 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** Germany

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, chambered body electric

**BODY:** Mahogany (chambered) back with thin maple top

**NECK:** 1-piece maple, medium D profile, glued-in

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

**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.8mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Indian rosewood, vintage pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Duesenberg steel saddle t-o-m-style bridge, Duesenberg Diamond Prestige Tremola (w/ flat arm), Duesenberg Z tuners – nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52mm

**ELECTRICS:** Duesenberg Domino P-90 single coil (neck) and Grand Vintage humbucker (bridge), 5-way toggle pickup selector switch (Flexitone+ wiring), master volume and tone controls

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.98/8.76

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Starplayer TV (from £2,249) in 20 colour options; Starplayer TV+ (£2,549) adds piezo. Hanover Gold Ltd Series for 2026 (£TBA) plus numerous other updates

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model but Starplayer TV Black (£2,459)

**FINISHES:** Catalina Green (as reviewed), Transparent Black Burst, Vintage Burst, Transparent Vintage Orange, Transparent Honey and Checkerboard Gold (£3,949) – gloss polyurethane

nicely voiced with a splash of fatness but not overdone, and a clear but certainly not piercing high-end. We couldn't get a bad sound out of it – clean, crunchy or really quite gained.

The humbucking-sized P-90 at the neck is very well balanced in terms of output, too, clear but not weedy, a lovely jazz pickup played clean but like many good P-90s it has that flutey, vocal character when driven. The pickups mix well, too, and – particularly with the volume control's treble bleed – both on is bouncy and soulful with some volume reduction.

If we only had those three sounds, we'd be happy. But position 2 on the five-way selector is a little lighter than the middle both-on selection, a little like a Tele's middle position and again very usable, especially with a little clean boost for more Fender-style licks and leads, and very Stones-y with a bit more grit. Position 4 sounds a little fuller and like it's partially out of phase. It's a subtly different mix of the neck pickup and the slug coil of the

humbucker (the same combination as position 2). While providing a little extra texture to the voicing, it also sounds really good with a solo boost, and rolling the very smooth tone control back produces a darker but not woofy roll-off. There really are some stand-out sounds here and it covers considerable sonic ground.

### Verdict

There's a lot of deceptively clever craft on show here, all presented in faultless style. The chambered construction keeps the weight in check and, while we hear less 'semi' to the sound than you might expect, we certainly hear plenty of 'Les Paul', not least with the very well-voiced bridge humbucker. The neck P-90 is the perfect foil, almost delicate in voicing with a really characterful, musical style.

It's hugely fit-for-purpose and very functional, especially that superb Tremola, while the Art Deco-inspired details give a unique style. If Duesenberg isn't on your radar, it's time for a rethink. **G**



**PROS** Detailed build with 'all rounder' neck profile; stand-out and classic sounds; very well-sorted setup and great playability; superb hardware, especially the Tremola; even the case is solid and very functional!

**CONS** Not everyone will get the 'retro' Art Deco style; could be a little lighter in weight to reflect the chambered style

# Time To Shine

We check in with Duesenberg Guitars' co-owners, Dieter Gölsdorf and Ingo Renner, to find out about 30 years of the Starplayer and more

Words Dave Burrluck

If things had gone differently, Duesenberg would have been a heavy metal guitar brand, which it essentially was from 1986 until nearly a decade later. But founder, Dieter Gölsdorf, had a different view: “The best times of heavy metal were over and the guitarists were more into traditional values again. My concept: a new, extremely high-quality guitar design in the style of the 40s or 50s. I was overcome by a feeling that I was going on a journey through time.”

Dieter’s concept of a “smaller jazz guitar” that should be chambered for “light weight

“The original idea for the Starplayer was to create an instrument with a familiar appeal but many innovative features”

and lively sound”, plus the “Art Deco three-step idea” that informed the distinct design of the metal parts, all rolled into the Starplayer – the starting point of the brand we know today, as co-owners, Dieter Gölsdorf and Ingo Renner, explain.

**We’re guessing the Starplayer TV has been the best-selling Duesenberg for the past 30 years. How did you see the aim of the guitar back then and what was the reaction when you originally launched it?**

“Yes, that is true, although the original idea for the Starplayer was more in line with what we re-released last year with the Starplayer CBR, the guitar you have there. It was originally a chambered mahogany body guitar with flat maple top and neck, and it developed into the more traditional spruce semi-acoustic with centre-block construction over the years.

“The original idea for the Starplayer was to create an instrument with a familiar appeal but many innovative features and a unique overall look. It should also be tonally balanced and not be limited in what it can do. So, all



Dieter Gölsdorf (right), designer and founder of Duesenberg Guitars, pictured with co-owner Ingo Renner

components, especially the ones carrying the signal, needed to be of the highest quality. Extremely positive feedback from our dealer network back then came in surprisingly fast. It seemed we had hit the nail right on the head.”

**Can you remember some of the first players that started using the Starplayer?**

“The first were German artists, of course. Peter Maffay and Carl Carlton were among the very early ones, but US artists like Keb’ Mo’ and Japanese singer-songwriter Sheena Ringo quickly followed.”

**Who was the first artist to have their own signature Duesenberg model and when was that released?**

“That was Carl Carlton with his Duesenberg CC model back in 2000. [It was] technically a sized-up version of the Starplayer TV. Carl is a very tall guy and he needed a bigger-body instrument so the guitar wouldn’t look tiny on him. The CC became sort of a regular part of our line-up later, but it always had its origins in the connection and friendship to Carl.”

**Which Alliance series model has been the best-selling?**

“The Starplayer TV Mike Campbell – the blue one with white stripes that he played at the 2008 Super-Bowl half-time show – has been the best-selling Alliance model for us. It became iconic and many people have discovered Duesenberg through this particular instrument, and probably still do.”

**Coming back to the Starplayer CBR, why did you decide to bring back that specific formula?**

“We realised that something that creates that original tone, that was highly influenced by the chambered mahogany body and flat maple top, had been lost from our line-up over the years. Fittingly, we were also approaching the 30th anniversary of the Starplayer, so it seemed a perfect match to bring back the old idea in a new way. The construction is very similar to how it was done back in the beginning, but, of course, our hardware has evolved since then, so the CBR is benefitting a lot from that.”



1

1. Production is split between facilities in Croatia and Germany

2. Bodies are chambered for “light weight and lively sound”, says Dieter

3. The brand’s distinctive three-step design takes shape on a headstock

4. The Alliance Series Mike Campbell is the company’s best-selling artist model – it’s based on Mike’s blue Duesenberg Starplayer TV that he famously used during the 2008 Super Bowl half-time show with Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers



2



3

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF DUESENBERG GUITARS

**We’d guess that the Grand Vintage and Domino P90 combination is the most-used on Duesenberg guitars?**

“Yes, it’s just an extremely versatile pickup combination, especially with the way we make the pickups. We use a lot of nickel-silver components to keep the raw signal as unaffected as possible. It’s easy to reduce parts of a signal you don’t want, but everything that’s lost at the source is hard to bring back into the mix. The way we filter frequencies in the middle position of these two pickups (position 4 on the CBR) also creates a very unique but extremely usable third option.”

**When did you start using the Plek process on Duesenberg guitars? And why do you bother with it when so many makers don’t?**


“We have known the guys at Plek from the very beginning, probably around 27 years ago. When they finally came out with a working production model that fitted into our process, we ordered one right away. That must have been 2010. We do it because it’s a reliable way of

creating a consistent base for a good setup. The highest fret on a fretboard determines minimal action before buzz, so getting everything the same height is crucial when you want to make a guitar play comfortably. This can definitely be done by hand, but it’s unlikely the result will be perfect every day of the week, all year. And we want every single Duesenberg to play perfectly.”

**As of today, does your Croatian factory build all of the Duesenberg guitars?**

“Yes, although the full production is split between Croatia and Germany. Croatia handles woodwork, paint and CNC routings on the raw bodies including necks, while Germany does Plek, assembly and setup.”

**Not everyone wants to discuss production figures, but we’ll ask anyway. How many Duesenberg guitars are made annually?**

“Not enough to get one in the hands of everybody who wants one!” 



4





# Boutique Bargain

It may appear stripped down and basic, but PJD's new Origin Series Apprentice is sharply built. A new standard for affordable craft? Let's find out

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Matt Lincoln



## PJD ORIGIN SERIES CAREY APPRENTICE & ST JOHN APPRENTICE £499 EACH

CONTACT **PJD Guitars** PHONE **07891 201729** WEB [www.pjdguitars.com](http://www.pjdguitars.com)

### What You Need To Know

#### 1 You can't make an electric guitar in the UK for £499!

Dead right, that's why Brit-maker PJD has looked to Indonesia to produce its Origin Series. There's nothing new to offshore manufacturing, of course, and last year's Origin Pro models provided PJD's Elite style for a fraction of the price of the UK models. Now they're joined by an even more affordable sibling.

#### 2 This new Apprentice looks like another Les Paul Junior copy.

Er, no. It does have a single pickup, and the Carey model has a single-cut outline (the St John is an offset), but – as with PJD's UK recipe – the neck is Fender-scaled and bolt-on. A 'Junior' for Fender players is a better-fitting pigeonhole.

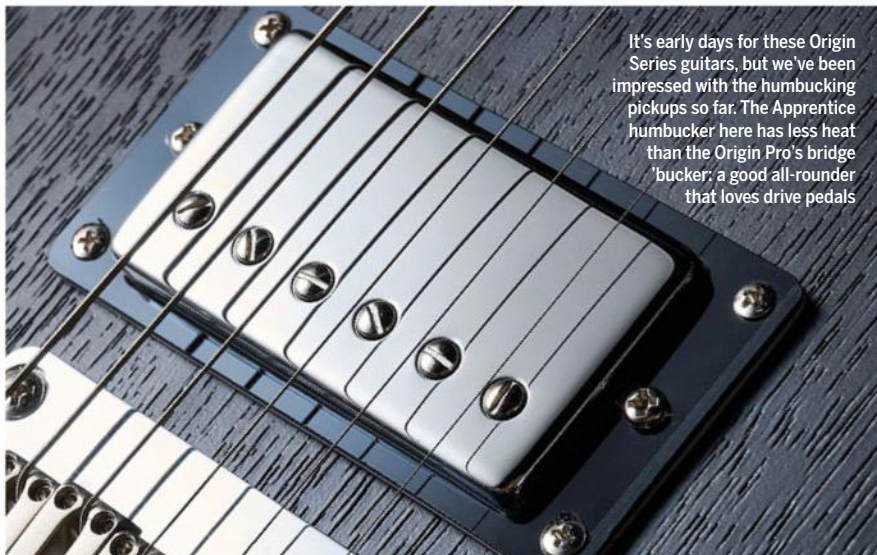
#### 3 Does PJD still make its other guitars in the UK?

The company has already built a solid reputation for its ongoing UK Standard and Custom Shop guitars, although the infeasibly priced £899 UK-made Apprentice Standard is being retired to make space for these new Origin Apprentice models.

One of the surprises of 2025 was PJD's Origin Series. As you will have read, York-based PJD Guitars has made quite a name for itself with its clean and affordable UK builds in a variety of styles. And with a current retail of £1,349, the start-up UK Standards aren't expensive in anyone's book. While the first 2025 Origin Series Pro models – the core single-cut Carey and offset St John – cloned PJD's more limited and higher-priced Custom Shop style, they are made with PJD's new manufacturing partner in

Indonesia and, complete with a standard gigbag, slashed the cost of the UK builds with a £799 in-store price. Now, you don't get the hand-wound UK-made pickups or the hard-to-beat Gotoh hardware and that super-detailed build, but the samples we saw back in issue 530 more than captured the PJD style and quality.

Today, we have the next wave: the stripped-down, single-pickup Apprentice, available in both the Carey and St John styles you see here. And with a basic gigbag these will be in-store for a miserly £499.



It's early days for these Origin Series guitars, but we've been impressed with the humbucking pickups so far. The Apprentice humbucker here has less heat than the Origin Pro's bridge 'bucker; a good all-rounder that loves drive pedals



1

1. The silver logo here identifies the Indonesian build (the UK-made models have a gold logo) and the tuners are vintage style, although they don't have the split posts of PJD's usual Gotoh tuners. The nicely cut nut is bone and there's just one string tree

As we recently documented in *The Mod Squad* (see issue 533), the Apprentice – PJD's single-pickup 'Junior' vision – dates back to 2022 when the company introduced a stripped-down but über-quality instrument with a cracked gloss nitro-finished slab body and headstock face in a PJD logo'd Hiscox case, with matching high-end price just shy of £2k. Other production runs followed and these very limited guitars found favour with plenty of tonehounds, not least Blur's Graham Coxon.

2. It might be built to a price, but it's good to see gigging-level hardware like this rugged output jack plate that's easy to service and should last a lifetime

PJD then turned the Apprentice into a much more affordable Standard production model, originally direct-order only, that was offered at £899. It didn't have the cracked nitro finish or the sumptuous roasted and figured neck, but with its open-pore finish and single PJD humbucker, well, if you snagged one of these, well done. However, a UK-made guitar at that price leaves virtually zero profit (and they are now discontinued). Which, of course, is where the Origin versions come in.

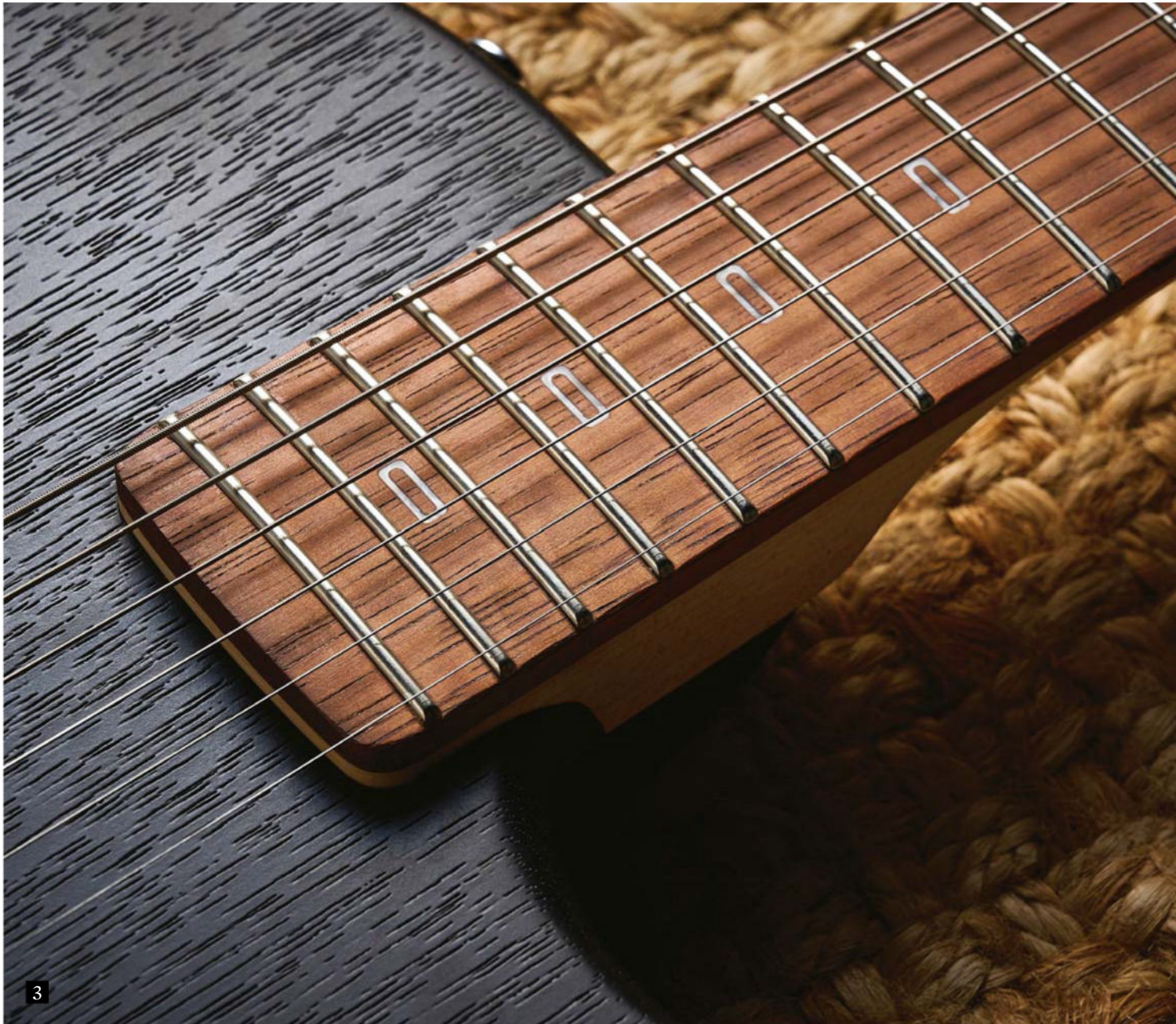


2

The Apprentice is PJD's stripped-down single-pickup 'Junior' vision and dates back to 2022

### In Build

Pulling these new Indonesian-made Apprentices out of their gigbags, on first glance and even after a quick play, it's abundantly clear they very closely follow the outgoing UK models. Like those Origins, these are available in the single-cut Carey and offset St John styles. Shape aside, they are identical. No-one's saying they're complex guitars – that's not the point – but both our pre-production



3

samples are very cleanly built, not least with the satin open-pore finish to the 42mm thick Indonesian mahogany bodies, which have a classy forearm chamfer and light ribcage cut with a comfortable edge radius.

While the necks on the earlier Origin Pro models were a dark roasted maple, here they use a whiter shade of plain maple (screwed into the body, not bolted like the UK models) with their Fender-like scale length and 254mm (10-inch) fingerboard radius. Our pre-production prototypes use a lighter and slightly red-hued wood called merbau, but the ones you'll buy will have more standard-looking Indian rosewood. Hopefully, too, the unique rectangular fingerboard inlays will contrast a little more with that darker wood than they do here. And just so you can easily tell the difference between the UK PJDs and the offshore models: the former use a gold-coloured transfer logo; the Indonesian

models' logos are silver coloured and slightly smaller in size.

The hardware changes here, too, compared with the Origin Pro models, with a different steel baseplate, block-saddle through-strung bridge (not dissimilar looking to the Gotoh bridge used on the UK guitars) with vintage-style non-locking tuners. The single PJD-designed Apprentice bridge humbucker sits in a PJD-style plastic laminate mounting ring and is a slightly lower output pickup than the one used on the earlier Origin Pro models, we're told. Plus, here there's obviously no need for a pickup switch, just a volume and tone control.

### Feel & Sounds

With nearly identical weights of 3kg, our two samples have a great feel from the off. It's not just the weight, of course – the neck profile is similarly detailed to the UK models, a classic rounded C with a

No-one's saying they're complex guitars, but our pre-production samples are very cleanly built

nut width of 42.6mm and barely tapering depth of 21mm at the 1st fret and just over 22mm by the 12th. The satin neck-back is smooth and will probably shine up a bit with use. PJD rightly prides itself on its fretwork, and these don't let the side down. The medium-gauge wire is very nicely fettled and each Origin Series model gets properly set up and checked here in the UK. Tuning stability on both our samples proved rock solid: once strings were stretched and tuned we rarely touched the tuners – always a good sign. Overall, then, both our samples have a



## UNDER THE HOOD Simple is best!

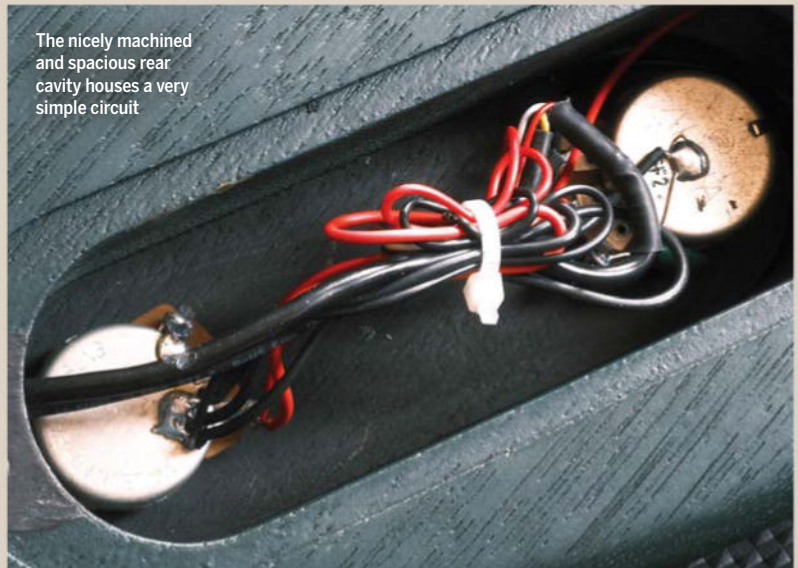
**T**he rear cavity is quite sizable, nicely machined and coated with a conductive paint (the recessed cover is foil backed, too), while the output jack is mounted on a solid chromed metal football-shaped plate. Obviously, it's a very simple circuit here with just two full-size 500kohm pots, the volume reads 'Made in Korea Jinsung', and the tone pot is by Alpha, with a small green Mylar .022 $\mu$ F cap capacitor. To be honest, both pots would benefit from smoother tapers, especially the volume, but we might be being a little churlish at this price point.

You can see in the wire bundle that the bridge humbucker is four-conductor, which

should mean you'll be able to fit a pull-switch tone pot to achieve a simple coil-split, for example, or series/parallel switch, which would keep things humbucking. Another simple mod would be to add a treble bleed capacitor to the volume control: easy to do and reversible if you don't like it. Plus, an easy change to vintage-style wiring could unleash a few more sonic shades, so long as you're happy to play with both the volume and tone controls.

Whereas the bridge pickup on the Origin Pros gave us a reading of 13.9k, the Apprentice humbuckers here are a lower wind with the Carey's measuring 9.27k and the St John's 9.18k.

The nicely machined and spacious rear cavity houses a very simple circuit



4

3. Our pre-production prototype models use this lighter coloured merbau for their fingerboards. However, by the time the guitars are on sale, that will have switched to a more classic Indian rosewood. Wood aside, though, the fret craft is excellent

4. Very similar to the UK guitars, this six-saddle through-strung bridge has a very purposeful feel. The baseplate is steel, although the non-magnetic saddle material isn't specified



PJD usually uses bolts that thread into inserts in the neck itself. The Indonesian guitars use screws that sit in recessed collar washers. The curved and rounded heel certainly adds comfort in higher positions – it's typically good craft



## PJD ORIGIN SERIES CAREY & ST JOHN APPRENTICE

**PRICE:** £499 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Indonesia

**TYPE:** Single-cut solidbody electric

**BODY:** Indonesian mahogany

**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on

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

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.6mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Indian rosewood, rectangular pearloid inlays, 254mm (10") radius (prototypes, as pictured, with merbau 'board')

**FRETS:** 22, medium-jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Through-strung with 6x block saddles; vintage-style tuners – chrome-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** 1x PJD-designed Alnico V Apprentice humbucker, master volume and tone

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.03/6.67

**OPTIONS:** Colour only. The Origin Series St John Apprentice has identical specs and price to the Carey, only the shape is different

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The new Indonesian-made PJDs also include the Origin Pro Carey and St John (both £799). The UK-made Carey and St John Standards start at £1,349

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Midnight Black (as reviewed, Carey), Nato Olive (as reviewed, St John), Cream Soda – open-pore polyurethane to body with satin neck back

quality and fit-for-purpose feel that's really very close to the outgoing UK-made Apprentice Standard models.

Both styles hang nicely from a strap and, as importantly, have a pretty vibrant ring unplugged. Played clean, the voice is well balanced with a relatively open midrange, a clean not overbright high-end, and strong but not overcooked lows. The volume rounds things a little as you pull it back, but as we switch to some light crunch the clarity is evident, dropping

### If you can't get a purposeful classic rock voice out of one of these, it's not the fault of the guitar

into that pokey Telecaster-meets-Patent Applied For area that's quite timeless.

The longer scale length is typical of PJD's builds, and, having played many examples, to our ears it definitely contributes to that clear, ringing response.

There's good old-blues snap with an 'on the edge of break-up' Fender amp voice, and with an overdrive kicked in it's more early Led Zep than thicker Slash. As you'd expect, there's not the body of a Les Paul in terms of sound, but think Junior/Special with a little more sparkle and you're on the right track. Really, if you can't get a pretty purposeful classic rock voice out of one of these, it's not the fault of the guitar. Above all, it's the quality of sound, not to mention the positive playability, that impresses us.

### Verdict

The price might suggest entry or beginner level, but there would be few guitarists – old or new – who couldn't use one of these for simple everyday practice or as a viable lightweight gigging tool (or spare) that you won't worry about. It's also a perfect guitar to experiment with open tunings and the like, not to mention slide, plus it's an ideal modding platform for swapping pickups, changing the circuit and maybe adding a coil-split. All in, a vibey 'Junior' with a stylish boutique-y finish that'll age with use. Our only dilemma is which shape we'd choose. **G**



**PROS** Very clean build with zero issues; light weight; classy body contours; good neck shape with excellently dressed frets; excellent 'all-round' voice from the single humbucker

**CONS** Low-contrast fingerboard inlays; a slightly smoother volume control taper wouldn't go amiss or a simple treble bleed



RH10-10

MULTI 10 SET PACK

ROTSOUND

LIGHT TOP / HEAVY BOTTOM  
NICKEL ON STEEL

10/52

ELECTRIC GUITAR STRINGS

10 13 17 30 42 52

ROTOBLUES  
ROTOBLUES  
ROTOBLUES  
ROTOBLUES

 MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN



## TEN TIMES THE TONE

Rotosound's new 3- and 10-pack multipacks keep you stocked up and ready to play with individually sealed sets in our most popular electric and acoustic gauges.

**MORE STRINGS, MORE MUSIC, NO COMPROMISES**

# Cut-Price Classics

Guitars are getting more expensive by the day, but there are some cracking instruments out there for very affordable prices. We pick some of our faves

Words Dave Burrluck



**SHERGOLD TELSTAR STANDARD ST14** £379

While the name goes back to the 70s, the Shergold brand was resurrected a few years back and the actual guitars – like this original Telstar here – were designed by UK guitar-making royalty Patrick James Eggle. This lowly Cabronita-style Chinese build uses a slightly offset T-style poplar body and features a Firebird-like raised centre, a Fender-scale bolt-on neck and two Page FilterSonic direct-mount humbuckers. Neat guitar, although no gigbag is included.  
[www.shergoldguitars.com](http://www.shergoldguitars.com)



**SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '60S JAZZMASTER** £409

This start-me-up offset certainly gives a great taste of the hipster classic. Perhaps surprisingly for the lowly price, we get original-style rhythm and lead circuits with Fender-designed Alnico single-coil pickups, plus that two-piece vibrato and bridge beloved of many players, not least Johnny Marr. The body wood here is poplar, the fingerboard is laurel and, while there's no gigbag included, it's available in four classic Fender gloss colours, including the Sonic Blue pictured here.  
[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)



**PRS SE CE24 STANDARD SATIN** £449

Recently upgraded with the 'wing'-style tuners and curved pickup rings, this CE – also made in Indonesia – is inspired by an early PRS bolt-on design. It packs a lot of value with its solid mahogany body and bolt-on 635mm (25-inch) scale length. Its dual pickups are the 85/15 'S' humbuckers, which can be split via a pull-switch on the tone control. We've highlighted the vibrato bridge version here, although it is available with a Stoptail: both come with a gigbag.  
[www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)



**EPIPHONE LES PAUL JUNIOR**  
**£449**

This is where the Junior story starts back in 1954, and typically Epiphone's very affordable repro is pretty tidy – coming complete with a gigbag and in TV Yellow and Vintage Sunburst (shown here, an online/Garage exclusive). It sticks with all-mahogany construction, a 50s neck profile and rosewood fingerboard – plus Gibson's shorter scale length, of course – and features a 'Lightning Bar' one-piece bridge/tailpiece and just one dog-ear P-90 Pro single coil.

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



**YAMAHA REVSTAR STANDARD**  
**RSS20 £659**

Now in its Mk II guise, the set-neck Revstar is typically Yamaha: a considered design and very well made for the money. The Standard version comes in eight Café Racer colours (pictured here is Swift Blue) with a lightly chambered mahogany/maple body, carbon graphite reinforced mahogany neck, and strong-sounding Alnico V humbuckers. It also features the passive transformer-based Focus switch and comes complete with a good gigbag. A lot of guitar for the money.

[uk.yamaha.com](http://uk.yamaha.com)



**EASTMAN FULLERTONE SC'52**  
**£799**

A little more money goes a long way and Eastman's Chinese-made FullerTone models really impress with original boutique style for much less cost. Along with a unique bolt-on neck attachment, the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale neck is roasted maple; the stylised body is made from black limba and nods to the T-style. Superb UK-designed Tonerider pickups feature: a noiseless 'single coil' (bridge) and Gold Foil covered soapbar humbucker (neck). It comes with a good gigbag, too. Very classy!

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



# Sting In The Trail

The first delay pedal from Beelectronics offers analogue sound with digital control for some time-warped creativity

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker



## BEETRONICS BEE BEE DEE £234

CONTACT **FACE bvba** PHONE **+32 3 844 67 97** WEB **www.beetronicsfx.com**

### What You Need To Know

- 1 Bee Bee Dee? That must be an analogue delay, right?**  
 Yes, Bee Bee Dee reads as BBD, which stands for bucket brigade device.
- 2 This one looks a bit more complex than your average analogue delay pedal, though...**  
 Yes, it's actually got digital control over the analogue sound, which opens the way for a more extensive feature set. The digital engine lets you bend time, shift pitch and tweak your sound in ways that conventional vintage circuits don't allow.
- 3 Why the two footswitches?**  
 One is for bypass and the other is for performance functions such as tap tempo, turning modulation on and off, and doubling or halving the delay time.

The latest in Beetronics' apian-themed pedals sees the company able to get the 'bee' word into its name twice. The Bee Bee Dee is, of course, a BBD analogue delay, but it's one that's digitally controlled, so it takes sonic flexibility way further than most.

For anyone who may be unfamiliar with what a BBD analogue delay is, it's a technology that emerged in the 1970s as a convenient solid-state alternative to tape delay, long before digital delay entered the mainstream. Its basic methodology is to delay the analogue signal by moving it in steps along a line of capacitors, the 'bucket

You get a range of practical elements you wouldn't find in a conventional analogue delay

brigade' name being derived from the analogy of a line of old-time firefighters passing buckets of water. At the heart of any analogue delay is one or more bucket brigade chips, and the Bee Bee Dee is equipped with two of them.

### In Use

The new pedal has the usual delay pedal control over delay time, dry/wet mix and repeats (feedback) but also features a Tone knob. Beyond those you get a choice of three toggle-switched operational modes for the pedal: Classic, Lo-Fi and Pitch.

Classic mode delivers straight BBD delay with the Delay Time knob offering a range of clean delay up to 600ms at about its one o'clock position – plenty to cover most practical guitar-playing eventualities and offering bathtub reverb and slapback in its lower reaches. Up to that point, the basic voice of the repeats – with the Tone knob in its neutral position at 12 o'clock – is typically analogue, giving a clean initial repeat that mirrors your dry sound, with subsequent repeats exhibiting subtle tonality changes that let them blend smoothly into your sound.

A powerful feature of this pedal, though, is that you're not stuck with a fixed voice. Turning the Tone knob to the right will thin out the body of the repeats, giving you something brighter, sharper and grittier. Turning the knob to the left rolls off top-end for warmer and darker repeats. Between the two extremes of the knob there's a whole spectrum of variation for placing the repeats exactly where you need them in relation to your core sound.

Tones from beyond one o'clock on the Delay Time knob are described by Beetronics as "stretching the circuit",



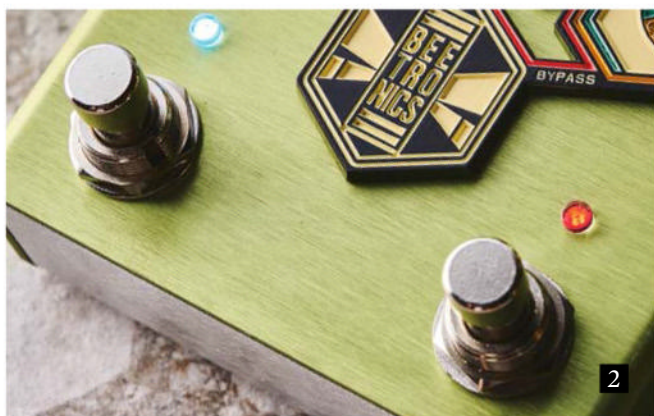
This Activity knob is basically a speed control that sets the modulation rate. In Pitch mode it sets a tempo-sync'd rate for the pitch modulation with a 1:1 ratio at 12 o'clock, slower (multipliers) to the left, and faster (dividers) to the right



1. For control over the sound of the repeats, two signals – one low-pass, one high-pass – are blended by the Tone knob. The EQ is flat at its noon position but is darker and smoother to the left and brighter to the right

and what happens is that the delay times increase but the clarity of the repeats decreases, so your first repeat isn't so close tonally to the dry sound, losing a bit of the attack and getting darker and grittier, while still being able to be tempered by the Tone knob. Using tap tempo for longer repeats up to two seconds makes this much more extreme.

If you want to add modulation to the delay, you can set it up with the Depth and Activity knobs (with Activity setting the speed). There's quite a range available here, from a subtle shift of perspective through smooth chorusing to fully radical seasick vibrato.



Now, it's perhaps best at this point to mention the footswitching functions. Besides its standard latching bypass functions, the right-hand footswitch also has momentary action for quick bursts of effect when desired. Furthermore, when latched with the effect engaged, a press-and-hold will ramp up the feedback into oscillation, letting you keep your hands on your instrument, rather than physically twisting the knob.

The left-hand (Performance) footswitch has three different functions as set by the toggle switch above it. There's tap tempo with a range of subdivisions available via the Activity knob, momentary or latching switching of the modulation, or a 2X function where a tap or a hold doubles the delay speed, also shifting the feedback by an octave at the same time, which works well in momentary bursts.

Lo-Fi mode, described by Beetronics as textured and unstable, takes that basic BBD sound and modifies the repeats. What you'll get are slightly crustier repeats with less clarity, giving you an extra set of tonal options when using non-modulated straight delay. Modulation in this mode is radically different, though. It's more irregular in nature because it shifts not just Delay Time but also Tone, so repeats can shift between brighter



## THE RIVALS

The Chase Bliss Thermae, with its pitch-shifting ability, would probably be the most obvious rival, but it's been discontinued. As far as we know, there are no other analogue delays with pitch shifting, but there are certainly several feature-rich ones. A couple with stereo operation are the Flancher FL5D (€550), and the Boss DM-101 (£391, above), which features eight individual BBD chips and 12 selectable delay modes. The Moog MF-104M Moogerfooger Analog Delay was well respected but is also now discontinued, though the good news is that Behringer has released an inexpensive clone in the form of the BM-14M Analog Delay (£109).

2. What this momentary or latching Performance footswitch (on the left) does is determined by the toggle switch directly above it – there's choice of tap tempo, toggling the modulation, or doubling the delay time and bringing in an octave jump

3. Choose the type of operation with this Mode toggle switch: Classic mode offers standard delay and sine wave modulation; Lo-Fi mode offers irregular modulation, unstable filters and shifting character; and Pitch mode offers rhythmic harmonies and melodic loops and time-warped ideas. Above this switch is the Depth knob, which sets modulation depth in Classic mode, intensity in Lo-Fi mode, and pitch-shift interval in Pitch mode, with a choice of (not very easy to read) legends for: Random, 2nd, 4th, 5th, Octave, 5th + octave, 4th + octave, 5th + 9th, and 2 octaves



## BEE TRONICS BEE BEE DEE

**PRICE:** £234

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Analogue delay pedal

**FEATURES:** Buffered Bypass, 600ms delay time (up to 2 seconds with tap tempo)

**CONTROLS:** Tone, Delay Time, Mix, Activity, Repeats, Depth, Performance switch, Mode switch, Performance footswitch, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V power adapter (not supplied) 200mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 88 (w) x 145 (d) x 70mm (h)

and darker, something the position of the Tone knob has great influence over. It all adds another layer of interest with an altered texture and sense of movement in the trail of repeats for an otherworldly undercurrent.


The wackiest of the pedal's modes is Pitch, which introduces pitch shifting to the repeats. The effect is dependent on both the Depth knob, which selects the pitch interval, and the Activity knob. The Activity knob sets the tempo-sync'd rate of the pitch modulation, which is locked to delay time. The most logical musical starting point to explore this mode is with the Depth knob at noon for an octave pitch change, automatically in tune with whatever you play. The overriding effect here is of rhythmic patterns, not unlike synth-style sequencer parts, which are at their most effective when you synchronise your playing in order to build rhythm parts.

While there is plenty to explore with this simple octave shift, things move into a different gear when you select some of the other available intervals and dial in harmonised repeat patterns. This opens the door to a range of strange and intricate sounds that some players will enjoy employing in a musical context – but may leave others scratching their heads and heading straight back to Classic mode.

### Verdict

For straight delay tasks, the Bee Bee Dee is excellent, combining classic analogue sound, a practical range of delay times and nicely applied modulation with a range of practical elements that you wouldn't normally find in a conventional analogue delay. This is particularly true of the unique tone-shaping available for the repeats and the footswitching functionality that gives you tap tempo as well as momentary and latching operation of stage-ready performance effects.

Lo-Fi and Pitch modes take you well beyond the usual analogue delay paradigm for a more expansive range of sonic outcomes

For us, that would be enough to justify purchase. But, of course, in typical Beetrronics fashion, there's rather more on offer. The Lo-Fi mode and particularly the Pitch mode take you well beyond the usual analogue delay paradigm for a more expansive range of sonic outcomes, making this pedal a delightful device for extending creativity. 

**Guitarist CHOICE** 9/10

**PROS** Relatively compact size; extended delay time range; wide sonic range for repeats; tap tempo; flexible footswitching

**CONS** Legending around the Activity and Depth knobs is difficult to read

Subscribe here

SUBSCRIBE TODAY  
& SAVE UP TO 37%!\*

# Guitarist



**+NEW  
DIGITAL  
ACCESS**  
TO 150+ ISSUES  
WHEN YOU  
SUBSCRIBE  
TO PRINT!\*\*

# SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY THESE BENEFITS

SUBSCRIBE FOR 6 MONTHS AND SAVE **37%\***

- **FREE DELIVERY** STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR OR DEVICE
- **SAVE MONEY** ON THE COVER PRICE
- **NEVER MISS AN ISSUE**
- **MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION** ONLINE VIA OUR DEDICATED SELF-SERVICE SITE



## PRINT & DIGITAL

£28.49 EVERY 6 MONTHS



## DIGITAL ONLY

£22.49 EVERY 6 MONTHS

## CHOOSE FROM 3 WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

[www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI/DJ96U](http://www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI/DJ96U)

or call 0330 333 1113 and quote 'DJ96U'

or scan the QR code here! >>>>>>>>



**Terms & conditions:** Offer closes 31 October 2026. Direct Debit offer open to new UK subscribers only. \*Savings based on cover price. The price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. \*\*Access to the digital library ends with your subscription. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For full terms and conditions, visit [www.magazinesdirect.com/page/terms-and-conditions](http://www.magazinesdirect.com/page/terms-and-conditions). For enquiries, please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email [help@magazinesdirect.com](mailto:help@magazinesdirect.com). Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than the national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



« BLUEPRINT »

# SEEING RED

Doug Aldrich reveals how decades of vintage amps, real-world touring and close collaboration with Blackstar helped shape his DA100 Ruby signature head

Words Charlie Wilkins Portrait Holly West

**D**oug Aldrich has spent most of his life standing in front of loud valve amplifiers. From learning how to coax tone out of vintage Marshalls to filling theatres and arenas with Whitesnake, Dio and The Dead Daisies, his sound has always been about feel and authority. But taking vintage amps on the road comes with some compromises: ageing components, inconsistent behaviour night to night, and the constant worry that something irreplaceable might fail mid-show or even get stolen.

The Blackstar DA100 Ruby grew out of that reality. Rather than cloning his vintage Marshalls, Aldrich wanted an amp that captured the response and punch of his favourite amps while meeting modern demands – volume control, reliability, modern switching capabilities and, of course, world-class tone and feel.

Built around the DNA of Blackstar's HT Stage 100, the DA100 Ruby evolved through months of hands-on tweaking, in-person R&D sessions and real-world testing. The result is a three-channel, dual-voiced 100-watt head, designed not just to reflect Aldrich's signature tone but to function as a practical working amp. We sit down with Doug to talk through the full journey, from his long-standing relationship with Blackstar, to the technical decisions behind the amp and cabinet, and how his approach to tone has evolved throughout his career.

## How did this collaboration with Blackstar come about?

"I've known those guys since the beginning when Blackstar was formed. A couple of them came from Marshall and back then I was playing Marshalls full-time and starting to build a relationship with Jim Marshall himself. Blackstar first reached out to me years ago, but the timing was bad because I was fully in with Marshall at that point.

"Over the years I kept running into Blackstar amps in stores or I'd hear some of my buddies playing them. Every time I plugged in, I thought, 'Man, these amps are killer.' Later, when The Dead Daisies were looking for someone to work with that was genuinely excited about the band, Blackstar stepped up. They loaned us some amps for a tour and I loved them. After that, they asked me if I was interested in collaborating on something."

## Had you ever seriously considered doing a signature amp before this?

"I had thought about it. I was always looking for something that could replace my vintage amps on the road. Those old Marshalls sound incredible, and I still have them, but parts fail, capacitors go, transformers get tired... all the stuff that comes with old gear. I talked to a few different companies about doing something. I messed around with some ideas with Marshall. I spoke to Engl, and had conversations with John Suhr about doing a Custom Audio amp, but it never really took off. With Blackstar, it felt

different right away. They wanted to come to me, hear what I liked and actually work through it together."

## From a design standpoint, where did you start with your amp?

"The starting point was the Blackstar HT Stage 100. I was already a big fan of that amp. It has a great tone and touch response that I really like, so I didn't want to reinvent the wheel. The idea was basically, 'You like this amp, so let's start here and tweak it.' That's really what the DA100 Ruby is. It's not a radical departure; it's kind of a refined version of something that already worked. People think of me as a hard-rock or metal player, but I love a lot of different styles, so flexibility was a huge part of the design. I didn't want a one-trick metal amp."

## What were the first things you wanted to adapt and in what way?

"Mostly subtle stuff. We talked a lot about the midrange and just nudging certain frequencies slightly down so it wasn't overly forward. We also talked about gain structure. I wanted plenty of gain, but I didn't want it to feel buzzy or overly compressed. Everybody knows me for heavier sounds, but I also play a lot of straight-up rock. I wanted the amp to cover that ground without sounding too heavy."

## What was the R&D process like?

"One of the coolest R&D sessions was around NAMM 2023. A few of the Blackstar engineers from England were

“With Blackstar, it felt different right away. They wanted to hear what I liked and actually work through it together”



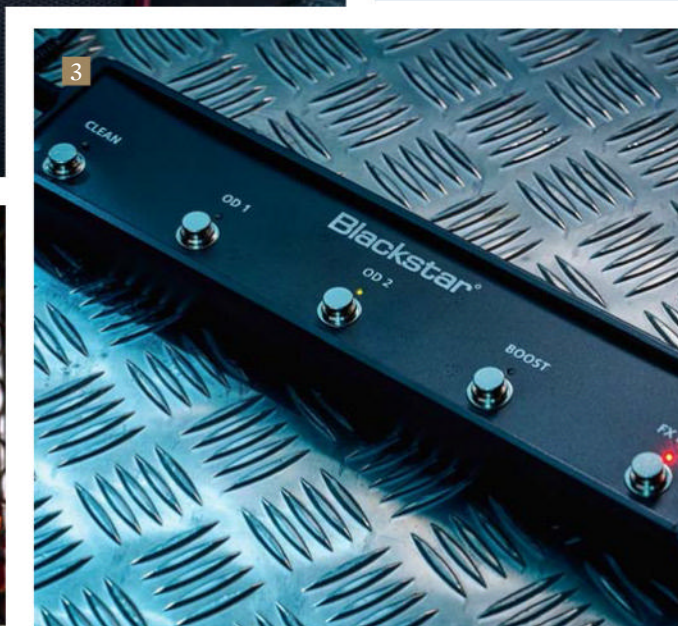
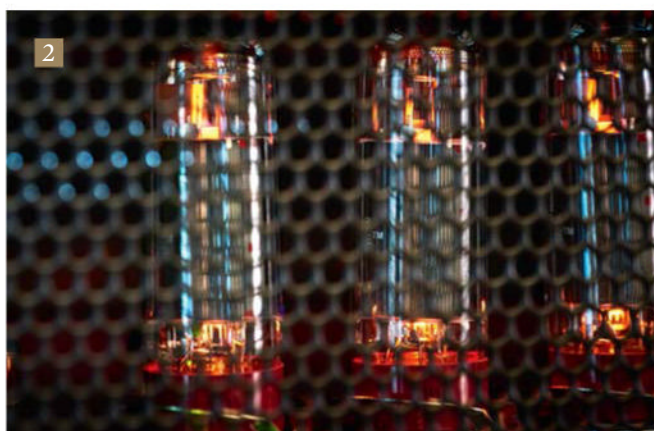
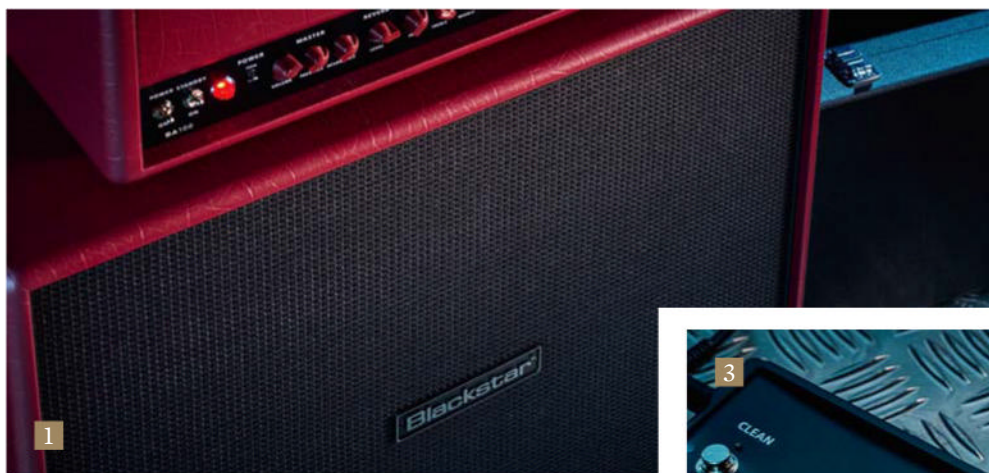
Doug Aldrich of Whitesnake, Dio and The Dead Daisies is a long-time fan of Blackstar's HT Stage 100, which was the starting point for his signature amp design



1. Doug's signature DA412B cab is loaded with Celestion Vintage 30 loudspeakers

2. Four EL34 valves power the amp, which has a switchable output of either 100 or 10 watts

3. This five-button footswitch is included for channel, boost and effects loop control



in town to work on some stuff with Jared James Nichols, so we met up at a studio in LA that Jared was working out of. [Blackstar design engineer] Paul Stevens had this prototype where the main circuit board was pulled out and wired, so we could tweak things in real-time. He'd ask what I thought, I'd listen and suggest changes, and then he'd swap components or adjust things with a screwdriver. That kind of hands-on experience was really cool."

**Roughly how long did the full development process take?**

"About eight months from the first serious conversations to the final version. After the session, they went back to the UK, refined everything and sent prototypes over. I didn't want to ask for a completely different chassis or layout. Blackstar already had a solid blueprint with the HT100, so we worked with that to get the sound and feel right.

"Blackstar has a facility here in the LA area so it was easy to get in there and test things. But they also sent a prototype from England. The cool part was that the prototype was basically exactly where we'd left off from our initial session. So there were basically two prototype test

"I wanted a really pure note off the guitar. You can add aggression with a pedal, but the core tone has to be right"

sessions before I said, 'This is it, let's go for it.' From there, it was like, 'How do we make this work with the electronic parts and keep it in line with how Blackstar actually manufactures amps?' They had a good outline to start with, so we just tweaked it."

**Did you bring your own cabs along to test the prototypes?**

"Blackstar asked me what cabinets and speakers I liked. I told them Celestion Greenbacks and Vintage 30s. When we toured, they let us borrow some cabs and they sounded great. They thought I would like the UK Vintage 30s better, so they brought 4x12 cabs loaded with those speakers for me to test the amps. There are different versions of the Vintage 30, but I think the UK-made version sounds the best."

**Was there a feature you were adamant about adding beyond the tonal changes?**

"A foot-switchable effects loop was a big one for me. I didn't want to run a long cable from a delay pedal on the floor and then back to the amp, just to get to the effects loop. I wanted that stuff back by the amps, and I liked the idea of being able to switch the loop off and on from a pedalboard.

"In the beginning, we focused on the tonal aspect and got that right. Then they went back, worked out the loop switching and built the first proper prototype that combined the tonal tweaks with a switchable effects loop, along with a five-button footswitch. I also wanted to make sure the amp's distorted sound wasn't too buzzy. I play more hard-rock than metal these days, and I wanted a really pure note coming off the guitar. You can always add aggression with a pedal, but the core tone has to be right."

**Volume management is a big issue with high-wattage valve amps. Did that influence the amp design at all?**

"Yeah, the volume issue was a big deal. In rehearsals, when the amp was loud, it sounded incredible. On tour, the FOH soundman is always on me to turn down. But it's a tube amp and you have to wind

Blackstar®

POWER STANDBY POWER MASTER REVERB EQ EQUALISATION  
ON ON  
DA100  
VOLUME PRESENCE RESONANCE GAIN UP TREBLE MIDDLE BASS

"On tour, the soundman is always on me to turn down. So I wanted to make sure the amp stays full and articulate, even at lower volumes"

Blackstar®

## Inside The DA100 Ruby Design engineer Paul Stevens on getting it right for Doug



### Why start with the HT Stage 100, rather than designing a new amp from scratch?

"Doug was already using the HT Stage 100 on tour and really liked it. He was actually wary of changing it too much. So the idea wasn't to reinvent the amp but to refine it,

keep the core feel and response, and shape it more closely around how he plays."

### Where did most of the tonal changes actually take place?

"Not much change in the preamp. It was really about the power stage and the feedback loop. Adjusting the feedback characteristics allowed the amp to feel tighter and more controlled while remaining responsive. That's where you really shape feel, dynamics and how the amp reacts to the player. By focusing on power amp behaviour,

the Ruby keeps its punch, clarity and authority without becoming overly compressed at higher gain levels. These changes really affect how the amp feels and not just how it sounds."

### Were there any changes to the voicings of the overdrive channels?

"The OD 1 and OD 2 channels weren't radically redesigned but re-engineered in how they behave, particularly in gain distribution, noise control and interaction with the power stage. The goal was to tweak how the gain behaves. Gain was redistributed so the overdrive builds more progressively. OD 1 is more of a classic British crunch, while OD 2 pushes further, adding sustain and harmonics without losing string separation or increasing noise. The Voice switching on each channel adds another layer of flexibility, changing how the gain structure and midrange behave."

### What was the thinking behind the design of the Ruby's effects loop?

"Doug wanted a foot-switchable effects loop where he could switch his delay in and out without the repeats just being chopped off. We redesigned the loop so the send switches off immediately, but the return fades out over a user-determined time. We had to rework the rear circuit board completely. The fade time can be adjusted via back-panel USB and Blackstar's Architect software."

### Did this project influence any future Blackstar designs?

"It definitely validated a few ideas. Things like the advanced loop control and the way we approached the power stage voicing are concepts we can carry forward. So there may be projects in the works that incorporate what we learned from working on this project."

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACKSTAR

it up a bit to hit that sweet spot where it doesn't sound fizzy. So I told the Blackstar guys that I wanted to make sure the amp stays full and articulate, even at lower volumes. It also has a switch that lets you go from 100 watts down to 10, which really helps sometimes. There's something about the tone of running four EL34s in a 100-watt head that you just don't get with lower-wattage amps. They sound very different. 100 watts just sounds bigger and feels better to me, so I usually stick with that."

### Tell us about the matching 4x12 cabinet.

"We experimented with different speakers and landed on the UK-made Celestion Vintage 30s that we tried initially, but the cabinet itself is different from Blackstar's standard HT cab. They had to redesign it to get it tuned right with the amp and the Vintage 30s. They used thicker wood for the baffle, which makes it heavier but more solid. The thinner baffle from the HT cab was moving a bit too much from vibration. The heavier construction on the DA412B cab sounds much tighter and way more focused. It sounds insane!"

"I want something that responds to my hands first and then gives me the option to go over the top when I need it"



A foot-switchable effects loop was an essential addition for Doug

### How do you typically run the amp live?

"It's a three-channel amp with two modes per channel, so there's a lot of flexibility. I tend to live on the Crunch channel and use my guitar volume constantly. For heavier parts I'll hit a boost or switch to the lead channel. The transitions – switching between channels – are really smooth, which is something I've struggled with on other channel-switching amps. No problems at all with this one."

### So you're still using pedals for gain?

"Definitely. You don't really need pedals for gain because there's plenty there, but the amp responds really well to boosts and overdrives. A Tube Screamer-style mid boost works great. Lately, I've also been experimenting with fuzzes and different overdrives. The key thing is that the amp has great low-end and clarity, so using various pedals is more about adding different colours and textures."

### How has your tone changed or evolved throughout your career?

"Early on I was all about maximum gain and aggression. Over a period of time I realised you don't want to always be on 10. Dynamics are now a big part of my sound: I want something that responds to my hands first and then gives me the option to go over the top when I need it. This amp is extremely versatile and really reflects where I am now as a player."

### Looking back at everything you've played over the years, where does the DA100 Ruby stand?

"It feels like the amps I grew up with but with features that fit today's world of touring, recording and volume limits. It inspires me every time I plug in and it works night after night without any drama. That's the ultimate goal. It's a killer amp!"

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

*Lowden*  
GUITARS

GL-J  
Emerald Green Burst  
Stained Maple

[lowdenguitars.com](http://lowdenguitars.com)



# JAKE E LEE

The ex-Ozzy guitarist talks about his love for SGs, his disdain for bad amps, and how you can find a connection with the most unlikely instruments

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

“Ah, that’s easy: it was a 1967 SG Standard. Before that, I had a retail-store guitar and a couple of cheap ones, but I wanted an SG, mainly because Tony Iommi played one. And so I got a newspaper [round] and worked for six months to come up with half the money for the SG, which cost \$300; my parents chipped in the other \$150. I love SGs. To this day, I have more SGs in my collection than any other guitar.”

**What was the last guitar you bought and why?**

“The very last guitar I bought was an Ovation Breadwinner. I remember the ads for them in the 70s and I always thought they looked cool. I always wanted one, and it had to be the white one. One day – because I am a terrible Reverb addict – I had a couple of drinks and started thinking, ‘I wonder if they have an Ovation Breadwinner...’ [Laughs]

“I also bought a Yungblud [Epiphone] SG [Junior]. It’s good, but I had it refretted because it had these skinny frets and I like jumbos. I prefer aluminum bridges, too, especially when it’s a one-piece tailpiece like that, because aluminum sings a bit more. But I can’t swap it with the Yungblud SG because they use a tailpiece that’s slanted and cut specifically to that guitar. But it’s a really good guitar, especially for the price.”

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

“As far as guitars, there’s no incredible bargains. But amps... I was touring with Ozzy in England, probably

for *Bark At The Moon*. I used to go into every mom-and-pop shop and see what they had. One day, we were in Northern England and I went into this one shop and an older gentleman in his 60s was behind the counter. I see this old Marshall with the plexiglass logo, covered in dust. I said to the guy, ‘How’s that Marshall? Where is it from?’ He says, ‘I don’t know... it’s been here for the last 20 or 25 years.’ I was like, ‘What? Does it work?’

“It was a 45 with the cream back panel and the gold, square plexiglass logo on the front. He picked it up, dusted it off and even though it had been sitting there for years and years, it was brand fucking new. Not a scratch. He said it had been there since maybe ‘64 or ‘65, and I was like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ He said, ‘No. Why? Do you want it?’ I said, ‘I’ll take the chance if it’s cheap enough,’ and I got it for around £60. For that amount of money, even if it didn’t work, I’d have figured it out – but it worked. I went to soundcheck, plugged it in and it wasn’t the kind of sound I was looking for with Ozzy – really creamy and sweet and smooth and compressed, with a little sag. That was my greatest find. But I think it went the way of the first SG in the early 90s... I sold it.”

**What’s the strongest case of buyer’s remorse you’ve had after buying gear?**

“About 20 years ago, I was in a local guitar shop, looking to see what they had, and there was nothing new but this ‘67 Telecaster. And I don’t like Telecasters. I don’t like the way they sound. I don’t like the way they look. I have no fondness for Telecasters at all. But I picked this one up anyway and it felt really good, so I plugged it in.

Jake’s recent purchases include this Ovation Breadwinner (below) and Epiphone Yungblud SG Junior (below right), which he updated with jumbo frets



OVATION PHOTO COURTESY OF JAKE E LEE / EPIPHONE PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



## JAKE'S GO-TO RIG

"The amp would be my Friedman JEL-50. Friedman's are great. They're the closest thing out there to a good, old Marshall, right? And the Friedman cabinet would be loaded with two 60-watt Creambacks, and I'd have another cabinet with 25-watt Greenbacks. The guitars for live would be what I'm most comfortable with, my Charvel Jake E Lee Pro-Mod [So-Cal Style 1 HSS HT RW] guitar. "For pedals, God, it sounds like I'm saying all Jake E Lee shit, but I'd need my Friedman [JR-J] Jake E Lee boost. I'd want to have an MXR Stereo Chorus, the yellow box – I like that mostly because it has a bass and treble adjustment. When you hit a chorus pedal, it almost always changes your tone on the bottom- and top-end, but this has adjustments to make sure you keep your core sound and tone, just with chorus. And you can even boost it! For a wah, I'd go with the John Petrucci [Dunlop Crybaby] model, and I'd also have an MXR Carbon Copy, which is standard because it's simple. I might also have a Strymon EI Capistan reverb and echo, which is basically an Echoplex with added reverb. And the last thing is, I have this Pete Cornish pedal that I love, but it's too expensive to tour with, so I'd want my DeJayce Ultra Gain for boost and distortion. It's made by Dannyjoe Carter here in Vegas and it's one of the best distortion/boost pedals I've ever played. When I plugged it into my Pignose amp, it sounded like a Marshall stack!"

It sounded really good and I had a connection with it. But I put it back down and said, 'I don't really like Teles... I don't even know why I picked it up.'

"Two days later, I went back in there because I couldn't quit thinking about it and it just felt right, but they'd sold it already. So that's a different kind of buyer's remorse, right? Maybe we'd call that no-buyer's remorse [laughs]. I still think about that Tele every once in a while... there was just a connection there. I really wish I'd bought it."

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

"How long have you got?! I had a '56 Les Paul Junior and a '67 ES-335 that I wish I'd held on to. I wish I still had my original SG that I sold in the 90s, too. The list is too long and too sad."

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

"Play it, don't just hope for the best. With older guitars, there are some that are really special and some that are just okay – you have to play those first. But I've bought new guitars online, like an Eastwood Messenger like [the Musicraft model] Mark Farner used to play with Grand Funk Railroad. If it's a new guitar, the quality is gonna be pretty standard.

"Going back to that Tele I mentioned before, I never would have thought about buying that guitar – and I should have bought that guitar – if I hadn't tried it. That's why you need to try a guitar. Sometimes you get a connection where you just feel it, like it's the right one. And sometimes you'll pick up a guitar that you're sure will be the right one and it's not there."

## "I don't like Telecasters. The way they sound, the way they look... But I still think about that '67 Tele"

### ***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, no! Not this question. I'd rather have a good amp. The shitty amp will make any guitar sound shitty, but a good amp will make almost any guitar sound good. I have some really cheap guitars that I love, where the action is high and [they're] kinda funky-sounding. But I don't have any amps that are shitty. The amp is more important."

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

"Single coils because that would entail the P-90, which is my favourite pickup. Humbuckers are great, but, to me, the P-90s were always the best of both worlds. They have that articulation, attack and aggressiveness that single coils have, but they're also kind of smooth and beefy-sounding, like humbuckers. I've always loved P-90s. I couldn't play them back in the day because they didn't make humbucking P-90s, so you'd have to deal with all that noise that comes with them, and at the volume I played at, it just was untenable. But these days, I'm actually experimenting with P-90s." **[AD]**

Jake E Lee's Charvel Pro-Mod signature is based on a hardtail Strat that he acquired back in 1975 and subsequently had modded to 'Charvel-ise' it

# CLUB CLASS

A simple request to fix a guitar leads Dave Burrluck on a trip down memory lane and a reminder of nearly lost guitar craft

I've always had a bit of a soft spot for Höfner guitars and basses, and reading recently that the company – originally founded in 1887 – wasn't in great financial shape didn't really surprise me. The brand was pretty important to us Brits back in the 50s and into the early 60s, but as Fender and Gibson became available, followed by the Japanese copies, the writing was on the wall. There was a fair bit of renewed momentum during the Noughties with a smattering of reissued models, jazz guitars and, of course, Chinese-made 'Contemporary' Höfners that now filled the affordable gap as costs of European-made instruments soared. Höfner's instruments always seemed rather old-fashioned and you could argue hadn't really moved on from those early users like Paul McCartney and John Lennon.

"Despite all the retro oddities onboard, it's the quality of the build and the sound that shines"

I'd offered to take a look at a friend of a colleague's Höfner, which he believed was a Club. Apparently, it wasn't working properly and that's all I had to go on. Having seen quite a few 50s and 60s examples of Höfner's craft – like many of a certain age reading this, I'm sure – I was expecting to have to call Huw Price if anything serious needed doing. But the Club I received was an altogether different beast: a rather nice reissue of a '59-era Club 50 dating from 2008. I wondered what wasn't working?

While I checked over the guitar, I was reminded of the high-level craft of these pieces that is leagues above what I remember of those original, more rustic examples. Neville Marten and myself visited the Höfner factory around this time to write and review one of these Clubs and a 500/1 Vintage 59 Violin Bass, and I can remember witnessing the old-school handcraft. There were certainly no CNC machines, just old-looking copy routers. And, not least due to the number of orchestral stringed instruments they produced, animal glue was favoured wherever possible. We met Dieter Fischer,



who had been at Höfner for 50 years. If you've played a Höfner over the past few decades, it's quite likely that Fischer will have hand-finished your neck. "Everything here takes too long to make," he laughed. "There is too much handwork involved. The aim is to replace as much handwork as we can with smart jigs and fixtures – 'smart helpers' – so each process has the same precision."

The majority of guitars made at the Hagenau factory were of the classical type with around 1,200 violin basses and around 200 to 400 electrics, from the top of the line Chancellor through to classics

like the Verythin and the Club 50 being made annually.

But I'm still struggling to find anything that's not working. A couple of emails to the owner later and I think I've found the problem: "The pickups keep cutting out and I get no signal when I try to change them. Also, there's one switch that introduces a lot of hum, especially when I'm using a gain pedal."

As Neville said in our original review back in January 2009: "What keeps the Club in the relative dark ages is its electrics layout. A rectangular panel of tortoiseshell plastic carries a volume for each pickup, an



3

on/off switch for each and a Rhythm/Solo slider. It's fiddly, potentially confusing as the switches seem to do the opposite of what they state, and you can turn the guitar right off – a no-no in this day and age.” Höfner itself makes no bones about the confusion in the little booklet supplied with the guitar saying that the ‘Bass On’ switch, for example, “turns off the treble/bridge pickup and produces bass boost”, and then adds that “there will be no sound if both the treble and bass switches are in the On position”. Of course!

The info we were given at the time said the unique pickups were “Schaller

stacked humbucking ‘bar’ pickups in black plastic covers”, and that the Rhythm/Solo switch provided a “bass boost”. Whether or not things got lost in translation, these pickups are quite unusual. With the high archtop-like neck joint that sits over the top, and the tall wooden-foot bridge, the pickups sit out of the body and are a lot wider (bass-to-treble) than the string spread, or indeed the coils inside. They’re not stacked coils, either, but side-by-side humbuckers, which you can clearly see with EMG magnetic viewing paper and hear by lightly tapping the pickups plugged in.

1. Using one of many, many headstock logos employed by Höfner, the Club’s is retro class. Note the distinct string guide behind the zero fret. There is a truss rod, too, but with a neck this size it might not be necessary

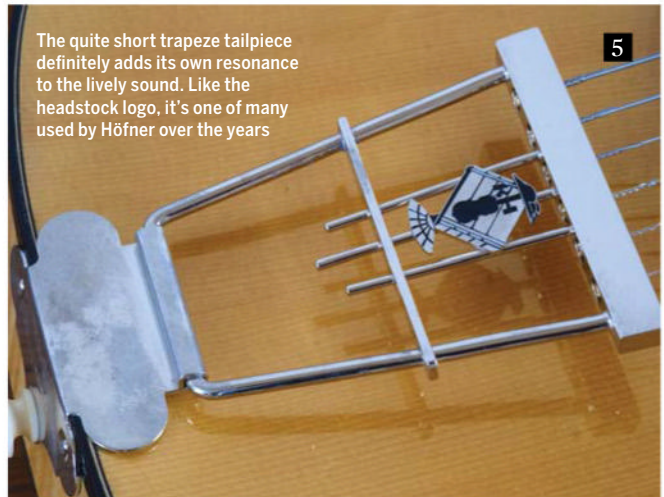
2. These are apparently Schaller-made ‘bar’ pickups with side-by-side twin coils that can be run in full humbucking or single-coil mode

3. A real touch of class, these reissue Clubs came in a very well-designed and robust case with humidifier and temperature gauge. Which was probably a good idea because the ultra-lightweight Club is a very delicate-feeling instrument



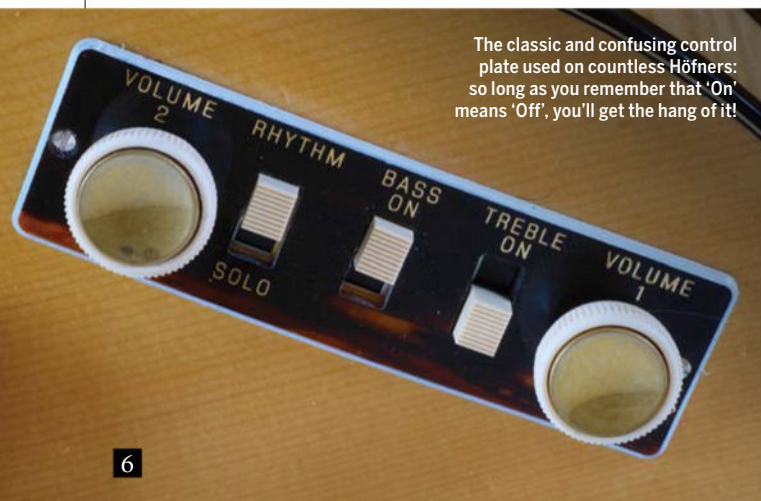
4

Höfner's classic bridge design uses snips of fretwire pushed into open slots to provide surprisingly accurate intonation. Height adjustment, like that of the pickups, is easy



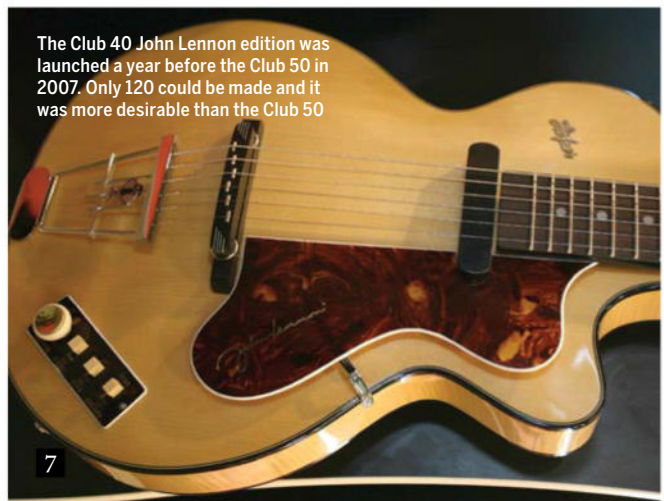
5

The quite short trapeze tailpiece definitely adds its own resonance to the lively sound. Like the headstock logo, it's one of many used by Höfner over the years



6

The classic and confusing control plate used on countless Höfners: so long as you remember that 'On' means 'Off', you'll get the hang of it!



7

The Club 40 John Lennon edition was launched a year before the Club 50 in 2007. Only 120 could be made and it was more desirable than the Club 50

So the Rhythm/Solo switch on that antique-looking control plate is effectively a single-coil/humbucker switch: in the Rhythm position just the neck-facing single coil of each is voiced; in Solo it's not a bass boost but simply both coils in series for a slightly louder, darker sound. That's supported by the DCRs that measure 11.61kohms (bridge) and 11.48k (neck) in Solo mode, while in Rhythm mode the reading drops to 6.02k and 5.94k respectively.

Now, obviously the Club 50 wasn't designed to be used with a Mesa Dual Rec, although these pickups are nothing like those used back in the day. But the 'noise' the current owner is hearing is presumably hum-pickup from the single coil Rhythm setting compared with the

"Once you learn what the pickup switches actually do, it's not quite as daft as it seems"

humbucking Solo setting. Running the Club 50 through a clean amp and with a bit of crunchy boost there's certainly nothing to concern me. Once you learn what the pickup on/off switches actually do, rather than what they say they do, it's not quite as daft as it seems.

### Still Valid?

Before I returned the guitar I got some play time – all the 'work' I did was to restring it. I'm not sure of the exact scale length, but it measures around 618mm to 620mm (24.3 to 24.4 inches). The neck joins the body just past the 14th fret, and if it was intended to be Höfner's answer to the Gibson Les Paul when it launched in 1955, it missed the mark by miles. But the hollow design, with no bridge support, is very lightweight at 2.07kg (4.56lb), the top plate is a spruce-faced laminate with beautiful violin-like contouring, the back is a maple-faced laminate with shallower dishing, while the sides have a vivid figure that's perpendicular to the dark wood binding. It's quite a deep guitar, too, with an overall depth of just under 80mm and a rim depth of approximately 54mm.

A Les Paul copy? Pah, it's a beautiful violin-inspired small archtop jazz box. Yes, the neck is a little, erm, unusual with a slightly narrow nut width of 41.35mm yet with regular 35mm string spacing, but the string spread at the bridge is narrow at 48mm. The neck is entirely covered with a black gloss lacquer, under which is maple with a centre sandwich of mahogany/beech/mahogany. It's big, rounded and chunky. Lovely.

Does it do The Beatles? If you want it to, but, actually – despite all the retro oddities onboard – it's the quality of the build and the sound that shines. Maybe the Club inspired the Duesenberg Starplayer that is featured elsewhere in this issue on page 84, but either way, as many modern makers – such as PRS, Powers Electric and even small UK builders such as Jamie Swannell – have and are proving, there are plenty of possibilities with hollow, or at least mainly hollow, builds. **G**

For an exhaustive history of Höfner models compiled by Steve Russell, head over to [www.vintagehofner.co.uk](http://www.vintagehofner.co.uk)

# HALCYON

Thinking outside the box

Mike Stringer  
signature humbucker set

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



Spiritbox

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

*Bare Knuckle*



# Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

After an unexpected delay, the 1961 Gibson Southern Jumbo restoration is finished

## 1961 Gibson Southern Jumbo (Pt 5)

**I**t has taken longer than anticipated to reach the final instalment of the Southern Jumbo restoration. The owner purchased some vintage tuners and several weeks later, the courier informed him they had been returned to California after three failed delivery attempts. I won't mention any names, but as my furious client ruefully observed, "No wonder Tom Hanks was stuck on that bloody island for four years." The Klusons eventually arrived and it was time to finish the project.

Having strung the guitar up, some issues across the lower frets became obvious. Examining well-used vintage guitars closely, you can often find clues about previous owners and I doubt that this Southern Jumbo was used for anything other than open chords. The fretboard and all the frets beyond the 6th were in excellent condition, but the first six frets had been replaced. None were properly seated and they measured slightly wider than the factory frets. Pieces of Brazilian rosewood had also been inlaid

into the fretboard at the 2nd and 4th frets as a finger-divot fix.

Renovating vintage guitars often requires decisions about what to restore and what to retain. I could have routed and veneered the patched areas between the fret slots and levelled them off. Or the two inlaid pieces of rosewood could have been removed, shimmed and levelled to retain grain continuity. Instead, we decided that – if after cleaning and levelling the fretboard – the inlays looked acceptable, they should be left in situ as part of the guitar's history. With soldering iron heat applied, ancient hide glue started bubbling along the fret edges and the first six frets almost fell out.

Superglue was used to fix any rosewood flakes, and I filled various chips and holes with rosewood dust and yet more superglue. I also wicked superglue under the loose inlays and used a capo as a clamp with Teflon sheet as a barrier. After tapping off the nut, I used a small sanding block with 180-grit paper to level the fretboard, followed by 400-

800- and 1,200-grit paper to smooth the rosewood and inlays.

By this point the fret slots were filled with compacted rosewood dust. Cleaning and preparing the slots for new frets can be a bit trickier when there's fretboard binding, and vintage binding can easily detach or even snap. Suitable tools are always preferable and I used StewMac's slot cleaning hook tool and refret saw to clear the debris.

### New Frets

The factory frets all measured 0.1-inch wide and averaged out around 0.035-inch tall, so Jescar 45100 fretwire was a close match. The width was the same and the extra 0.01-inch (0.25mm) in height could be easily dressed down to match.

The fretboard had retained its perfect 10-inch (254mm) radius, so I slightly overbent the wire, cleaned off the manufacturing oil and cut off six pieces. With all the fret nibs worn away, not to mention the sections of missing binding, I wanted to cut each new fret to fit



1. Looking back to the start of the restoration, this well-travelled Southern Jumbo sported some clear 'tan lines' and was in need of some real TLC

2. The first six frets had been replaced and two rosewood pieces had been inlaid to 'fix' finger divots

3. After pulling the frets and repairing the chips, a capo served as a clamp to glue down loose fretboard markers



A triumphant 'after'  
shot of the 1961  
Gibson Southern  
Jumbo, restored to  
its former glory in  
both looks and sound

"Harmonics linger  
inside the box in a  
way that I would  
normally associate  
with rosewood"





4. When cleaning out fret slots on bound fretboards it helps to have specialist tools to hand, such as this hooked scraper and refretting saw
5. Care was taken to reuse the original saddle, and glueing the pearl dots with fish glue will make them easy to remove for a future restorer
6. A drill press was used to bore 7mm holes through the centre of a length of 3/8-inch wide mahogany dowel

precisely between the binding so they had to be cut accurately to length.

My process was to undercut the tang at one end with tang nippers and file the end square. Using my digital callipers as a marking tool, I opened them out to the exact slot width and then locked them in position. The ends are quite sharp and pointed, so with one side butted up against the squared end, I scratched a reference mark at the opposite end of the fret. After filing that end square up to the scratch line, I undercut the tang and the fret was ready to install.

Repeating this process is time consuming, but the results are worth it. After filling the slots with fish glue, I very carefully positioned each fret and tapped them in with a 9.5-inch (241mm) radius caul placed between the fret and my fretting hammer. This ensured the fret ends were seated properly, and with the caul removed the middle of the fret was tapped flush with the 'board.

Once the glue had set overnight, I levelled and crowned the new frets then bevelled each end individually using small files to try to replicate the appearance of the factory frets. The fretboard looked significantly better after some oil was applied and, because the owner wanted to keep it, I remounted the nut on a fresh mahogany shim.

Even before I fixed the fret issues, the action was reasonably good and the

intonation was excellent. One of my briefs was to preserve everything original wherever possible, so I had no intention of replacing the saddle. I did, however, finesse the string radius and lower the action slightly across the top three strings.

I don't know if it had hardened with age, but the saddle was tougher to file and carve than any modern bone saddle I've previously encountered. I also made some slight adjustments to the nut slots and before long the Southern Jumbo was back to its best, albeit with a decades-old set of strings.

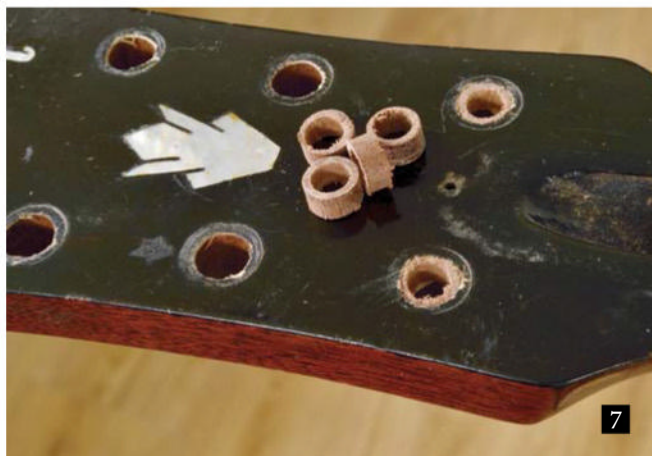
Before moving on, I cleaned the dried glue off the pearl bridge dots, squeezed some fish glue into the screw holes and repositioned the dots over the screw heads. It was one of those seemingly minor tasks that had an unexpectedly big impact, and the project suddenly looked a lot closer to completion.

### Tuner Reversion

The owner shares my dislike of chrome Schallers on vintage Gibsons, which is why he sourced a vintage set of Klusons. Replacing Klusons with die-cast tuners was possibly the most common modification performed on Gibsons and other makes of guitar during the vintage era, and doing so required widened bushing holes and additional screw holes.

The results were often quite messy because drill bits tended to tear the

7. Sawing the drilled dowel into 5mm lengths created reducer plugs for the vintage Kluson tuner bushings
8. The Kluson bushings pushed in firmly, and the black truss rod cover and screws were found in the case
9. Rather than plug the Schaller screw holes, they were left as part of the guitar's history
10. After cutting a piece of off-white binding to length, it was attached with fish glue and clamped with surgical tubing



7



8



9



10

headstock wood when entering and blow it out when exiting. Starting the hole with the drill running in reverse can minimise the former, and clamping a piece of scrap wood on the other side prevents the latter. The days of modifying vintage guitars in this manner are hopefully behind us, but if you do need to widen bushing holes, try reaming, rather than drilling.

Remounting vintage tuners is fairly straightforward, but drilled holes are always too wide for vintage bushings. The simplest solution is to use conversion bushings, which are readily available in a range of diameters.

They can look good, but these vintage Klusons came with the correct eyelet-style bushings for a 1961 Southern Jumbo. The outside diameter of the Kluson bushings was also over 1mm wider than the conversion bushings, making them better able to conceal paint chips and washer indentations. Clearly, the vintage ones were the preferred option, but fitting them would be more challenging. The holes had been drilled out to  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch (9.525mm), but the Kluson bushings required holes closer to 7.25mm for a snug fit, so I had to make some reducer plugs.

For these I used a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch (9.525mm) diameter mahogany dowel and a drill press. I started by clamping a piece of scrap hardwood onto the drill platform and drilling a 9.5mm hole straight through it. Taking great care not to move the

platform, I removed the 9.5mm bit, loaded up a 7mm bradawl bit and inserted a length of the mahogany dowel through the hole. With the dowel's underside shimmed up on blocks to the point where the 7mm bit was just above the dowel and perfectly aligned with the centre, I was able to drill straight down the middle. The drilled dowel was then cut at 5mm intervals to create six wooden rings.

I applied Titebond glue around the inside of the headstock holes and pushed in the reducer plugs until they were level with the surface. The vintage bushings were fitted once the glue had set and I was able to mount the Kluson tuners.

The headstock renovation concluded with a pleasant surprise. It's always wise to conduct a thorough search of vintage cases, and lurking under several packs of ancient strings and antique capos, I discovered a small bag containing the original truss rod cover and screws.

Reattaching the fretboard binding on the treble side had been one of my first tasks on this project. On the bass side, a length of binding was completely missing and, rather than detach the remaining pieces and run a new strip of binding along the entire length, the owner asked me to fill the gap.

This was complicated by the fact that the original binding had snapped and shrunk halfway across the 3rd-fret marker dot, and the 5th-fret dot remained stuck

**"Examining well-used vintage guitars closely, you can often find clues about previous owners"**

in the fretboard. The stray dot was easy to pull out and I filled the hole in the fretboard. I found some 0.5mm thick and 6.5mm tall off-white binding and drilled a 0.1-inch (2.54mm) hole to line up with the 3rd-fret dot.

I cut the binding halfway across the hole and, after some minor adjustments, it lined up fairly well and I trimmed the other end. Fish glue was applied and I 'clamped' the binding with masking tape and surgical tubing as it set.

After trimming the binding flush, a hint of heavily diluted Angelus Medium Brown leather dye helped to even out the colour. I cleaned up all the fretboard binding, masked off the body and neck, and then airbrushed the fretboard binding using the same amber lacquer that was left over from the body binding.

### Picking 'Guards

This project would never have looked complete without replacing the missing pickguard, and the options were to make or buy one. To make one I would have needed



11. With the original 5th-fret dot reinstalled and a hint of stain applied, the binding patch blends in fairly well

12. Amber lacquer was sprayed over the binding and the fretboard inlay patches are far less obvious now

to source some celluloid nitrate sheet of the correct colour and thickness, download a template and make a routing template. Then I would have flush-cut and bevelled the edges, polished and buffed the surface, and applied clear adhesive sheet to the underside to stick the pickguard onto the guitar.

That was certainly the plan until I discovered a Bristol-based company called JP Guitars ([www.jp-guitars.co.uk](http://www.jp-guitars.co.uk)). It offers a wide range of vintage-style and modern-style acoustic pickguards made from the correct materials with the peel-off adhesive backing already applied. Ultimately, it was more cost-effective to order one – and I’m glad I did because the pickguard I received was beautifully made and fitted perfectly.

The top of the guitar was wiped with naphtha to remove any dust and grease, and I carefully positioned the pickguard and applied some tape at the fretboard end to act as a ‘hinge’ and keep it aligned. With a brown layer peeled off to expose the clear adhesive backing, I carefully folded the pickguard back into position and clamped it down overnight.

“This incredible acoustic was well worth all the effort. The bass is tight yet thunderously deep and punchy, and the trebles are sweet”

### Finishing Touches

The owner had requested light relicing on the top, so I dropped some small screws on the top to create some minor dents in the sunburst finish. Next, I sprayed the top with an inverted air duster to freeze the lacquer and induce checking lines. Some 0000-grade steel wool knocked back the pickguard’s sheen, and I carefully removed lacquer from the area of plectrum wear on the soundhole and oxidised the wood using a steel wool and white vinegar solution followed by black tea.

With that, the restoration was complete – and this incredible acoustic guitar was well worth all the effort. The bass is tight yet thunderously deep and punchy, the trebles are sweet, and the midrange has a full and woody presence. Harmonics linger inside the box in a way that I would normally associate with rosewood rather than mahogany bodies, and there’s a touch sensitive compression that almost dares you to dig in.

As a player and a studio engineer, I have often attempted to emulate certain classic acoustic guitar tones. The Southern Jumbo has taught me that I may have been barking up the wrong tree, so to speak. As much as I enjoy them, I’m usually happy to hand guitars back to their owners at the end of a restoration project. On this occasion, however, it’s going to be a wrench. **G**

<https://huwpriceguitar.com>

13. The manufacturer recommended clamping the replacement pickguard overnight for the backing adhesive to achieve maximum strength

14. Finishing touches included dulling the pickguard’s glossiness and inducing some lacquer checking

# Guitarist

OFFICIAL APPAREL STORE



PREMIUM GARMENTS  
FOR PICKERS

**Guitarist**  
ESTABLISHED  
1984

ONLY  
£27.99

*Wear your passion for six-strings with pride, with our new line of Guitarist-branded premium cotton tees – available in a range of cool colours and classic designs*

<https://store.loudersound.com/collections/guitarist>



# David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Martin's slope-shouldered dread style meets innovative three-piece rosewood backs

## 1967 Martin D-35S



The D-35S model revived the look of the very first dreadnoughts that Martin custom-made for the Ditson music shops

**T**his Martin is very much a product of the folk era, with its slope-shouldered dreadnought body and 12th-fret neck join. The model designation is D-35S, with the S designating the slotted headstock that differentiates it from a regular D-35 dreadnought. The defining feature of both D-35 models is a rosewood back made from three pieces, rather than Martin's usual two.

"By the late 1960s, harvesting and export bans on Brazilian rosewood were making it increasingly expensive and hard to source, so Martin devised the three-piece back so they could use up remaining scraps of Brazilian rosewood that were too small for OM, 000 and dreadnought bodies. This one is fairly typical because the centre section is darker than the bookmatched sides.

"Based on the visual appearance and the lines per inch, I would say this top is Sitka spruce, rather than red Adirondack. Another thing I find interesting about this model is that the neck is wider than a regular D-28 or D-35. It's a very large neck with a rounded profile that hits the sweet spot between typical nylon- and steel-string necks.

"The design is fairly basic with five-ply plastic binding, a very simple rosette, dotted white plastic pins and unbranded three-on-a-tree tuners that are probably Grovers. At some point it went back to Martin for a neck reset, refret and a new black pickguard, and we have all the paperwork from the previous owner.

"A lot of people aren't crazy about Martin guitars of this era, but there are good and bad ones and this D-35S happens to be an exceptional playing and sounding instrument. It takes a few minutes to get used to the wider string spacing, but you can

"The S designates the slotted headstock that differentiates it from a regular D-35 dreadnought"

play light fingerstyle or hit it really hard with a pick and it responds equally well.

"I think that around the mid-1960s the quality of materials available to guitar companies was going downhill and most of the major guitar companies were struggling to meet demand. They were also facing tough competition from overseas guitar manufacturers and they had to cut costs and corners. Martin always had a way of introducing new models to make them more affordable. Examples might include the mahogany-topped guitars of the Depression era and the Style 21s that were less expensive to make than the herringbone-bound Style 28s and could therefore be sold to less affluent customers who really couldn't afford an extra 10 bucks.

"You can see differences in the thickness of Martin tops as the 60s progressed, and the grain wasn't as tight on the later ones. Of course, players could hear the differences, too, and they didn't feel the newer guitars sounded as good as those Martin made during its heyday. Everybody has their own ideas about when that heyday actually was, but nobody would argue that it was the mid-1960s onwards.

"The D-35S actually harked back to the very earliest dreadnoughts that Martin first made for the Ditson music stores back

in 1916. The model was also revived as a limited-run custom order for Wurlitzer between 1962 and 1968 and it was called the D-28W. Martin began offering 12-fret dreadnoughts, in Styles 18, 28 and 35, during 1967 and produced them for seven years.

"Despite the retro looks, the D-35S doesn't have pre-war style forward bracing and the construction doesn't really differ from the regular D-35. I can't say for sure, but I have a feeling the slot-headed models were reintroduced to use up Martin's stocks of classical necks because the nylon-string guitars were no longer selling. They would have shaved them down to make them more suitable for steel-string players, but they're basically the same necks.

"I don't usually like regular D-35 guitars, probably because the backs are dampened by the additional bracing and they don't hold a candle to D-28s. But this one is huge sounding with almost piano-esque undertones coming from the back, and it sounds better than any other late-60s Martin I've ever played.

"It's a little bit of an odd duck, but it is cool and I would love to use it for recording. It would be a monster in the studio and I think it would come across really well. I'm surprised it has stayed in the shop as long as it has because it is priced very fairly. I think people are maybe put off by the 12th-fret body join, when in reality most acoustic players don't really need those two extra frets anyway." [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



"Martin devised the three-piece back so they could use up remaining scraps of Brazilian rosewood"

Old meets new with a slotted headstock and 12th-fret body join combined with a belly bridge, black pickguard and three-piece Brazilian rosewood back

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGEDAVIDSON / WELL STRING GUITARS

# Blues Headlines

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



## Acoustic Blues

**Tutor** Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Ibanez 2846

**Difficulty** ★★★☆☆ | 30 mins

**ONE OF THE WONDERFUL** things about the acoustic guitar is its ability to be completely self-sufficient. More than that, in the right hands it can even give the illusion of two or more guitars playing together. Nobody knew this better than players such as Lightnin' Hopkins, Big Bill Broonzy and, of course, Robert Johnson. The demo piece isn't modelled on any particular one of these, but it borrows from that country/folk-blues style that inspired a surprising amount of the 60s Blues Invasion and rock bands of the 70s.

As a general rule, the picking-hand thumb plays the bass part and establishes the rhythm, with the remaining fingers adding chords and/or melody on top. However, if you watch Big Bill Broonzy's picking hand (and, luckily, we can do that online), he'll play simultaneous notes in a triad like a classical player, use his index finger in a flicking motion across the strings, and occasionally strum across a chord with his thumb. There

are also times when he'll accent a downwards strum in an almost flamenco style.

It's hard to say how systematic or methodical he was about his technique – it was most likely developed by instinct over time – but it is very effective. That's not to say we can't pick up tips and tricks by watching or listening carefully, though.

For this reason, the picking-hand technique is left to you in the example piece, but there is a logic to assigning the bass notes to your thumb. Going on from there, treat this as a starting point for your own experiments. Key considerations are to establish a strong rhythm before getting too fancy with licks, and keep it simple when accompanying a vocal. See you next time! **G**



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now to stream or buy from Amazon Music



This master of musical illusion, Big Bill Broonzy, brought multiple layers to solo guitar

PHOTO BY GERRIT SCHILP/PREFEENS

## Example 1

**WE START WITH A CLASSIC DESCENDING CHORD** line, using syncopation between the bass line and top triads. It's also nice to give those triads a little vibrato if you can. This leads to an abrupt stop on the A7, followed by the piano-style lick that will lead us to the IV chord (D7). You might need to work up some stamina in your fretting hand for those hammer-on and pull-off licks. However many arguments exist for the superior tone of heavy strings and a high action, this stuff works better with a lighter touch – there's a happy medium to be had with action height and string gauge.

Bars 4 to 8 spend most of the time sticking to rhythmic patterns, though there are a couple of flourishes. Note that open strings are often used to facilitate more seamless position changes, such as the one down to A, where there are a few quick-fire changes – almost a chord melody approach here. Bars 8 to 12 borrow more classic moves, but there is a bit of a shift in the syncopation at times, maybe more than you might typically hear, but this piece tries to cover much ground in a short time.

The final descending chords take some inspiration from Jimmy Page's ending to *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You*. The swung feel stops and we slow down for that last rake across A major.

♩ = 83 approx    A7    Adim

Swung ---

E 9 9 9 9 9 9 8 8 8 7 7  
B 9 9 9 9 9 9 7 7 7 6 6  
G 9 9 9 9 9 9 8 8 8 7 7  
D 2 9 9 9 9 9 8 8 8 6 6  
A 0 0 0 0 0 0 8 8 8 7 7  
E 0 0 0 0 0 0 8 8 8 7 7

1

## Hear It Here

### BIG BILL BROONZY THE BILL BROONZY STORY



A strongly rhythmic player, Big Bill was very adept at creating the illusion of bass/rhythm, choppy chords and ringing top notes. Seek out his performances of *Hey Hey*, *Worried Man Blues* and *This Train*. There is some really clear footage of his playing available online, which is great for analysing his technique and learning his approach. It sounds (and looks) as though he was able to coax a lot of volume out of the guitar with quite a relaxed technique.

### LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS LIGHTNIN' AND THE BLUES



Though he used a thumb-pick, Hopkins used thumb and fingers to create simultaneous rhythm and melody like Big Bill Broonzy. Hearing him play *Baby Please Don't Go*, *Have You Ever Loved A Woman* and *Ain't It Crazy*, it's easy to imagine a young Van Morrison, Jimmy Page and others getting hooked on this style and wanting to emulate it. However, there is a suggestion of power in the solo acoustic guitar, which arguably doesn't need a loud rock 'n' roll band to back it up.

### ROBERT JOHNSON THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS



Regarded by many, including Eric Clapton, as the definitive solo blues guitarist, quite a mythology has developed around Robert Johnson. Having a listen to *Sweet Home Chicago*, *Me And The Devil Blues* or *Devil Got My Woman* should explain why. The recordings are slightly 'grainy', but the power of his playing and deftness of touch come through loud and clear. Perhaps more than anyone's, Johnson's music inspired the generations that were to follow.

# Guitarist

PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



## ◀ THE TELE AT 75

Arguably Leo Fender's greatest invention, the Telecaster remains an unchallenged workhorse. We explore its origins, sounds, players and legacy

## NEURAL QUAD CORTEX MINI

New from Neural DSP – it's small and powerful, but can it win the modeller race?

## BIG COUNTRY

A look back to the dawn of the 80s to hear the story of the legendary band and the guitars that shaped its sound

*Next issue on sale  
2 April 2026*



# SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to Guitarist?  
Go digital from just £3.46 an issue!

[www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI](http://www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI)

# MT 15 AMPLIFIER

*"In 2018, we released my signature MT 15 amplifier, a compact powerhouse that quickly became a go-to for players seeking both pristine cleans and crushing high-gain tones. In 2023, we took things even further with the MT 100, delivering a full-scale amplifier that carried my signature sound to the next level. That inspired us to find a way to fit the 100's third channel into the 15's lunchbox size.*

*I'm beyond excited to introduce the next evolution of the MT 15, now featuring a push/pull overdrive control on the Lead channel and a half-power switch, giving players even more tonal flexibility to shape their sound with a compact amp. Can't wait for you all to plug in and experience it!"*

**- Mark Tremonti**



Photo by Chuck Brueckmann



**SCAN CODE TO  
LEARN MORE**

**PRS** PAUL REED SMITH  
GUITARS

# AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL CLASSIC

TESTED. TRUSTED.  
NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

Pat McCrory of Turnstile plays the ALL-NEW AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL STRATOCASTER® HSS in Faded Sherwood Green Metallic.



Fender

The One. For All.