

Guitarist

Issue 539

AUGUST 2026

CLAPTON'S

OTHER LOST LES PAUL

58 Years On,
The Guitar
Behind Cream's
Debut Album
Resurfaces

EXCLUSIVE

Up Close With Eric's
'Andy Summers'
1960 Les Paul



Plus
**ORANGE
OR60**

STUNNING NEW HEAD
MEANS BIG AMPS
ARE BACK

Players

**AL
DI MEOLA
JULIAN
LAGE
DEEP
PURPLE**

& More



PLUS
FENDER VINTERA III STRAT & JM
DANELECTRO MANO & COOL ELECTRICS
LAURA COX INTERVIEW

BEAM MINI

THE ULTIMATE PORTABLE GUITAR AMP

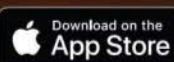
PLAY TIME.



Beam Mini is a compact desktop amp built for the way you play today. Engineered with advanced component-level modelling, it delivers the dynamic feel of a real valve amp in a tiny package.

Explore the world's largest tone library. Native NAM A2 capture support with access to over 200,000+ NAM captures.

Acoustically engineered for sound far bigger than its size, Beam Mini delivers world-class audio and can go anywhere with its 18+ hours of battery life and IP66 rating. **Play, practise, record, create.**



TONE3000

EXPLORE OVER 200,000 FREE
NEURAL AMP MODEL (NAM) CAPTURES

moises

ISOLATE VOCALS AND INSTRUMENTS
LIVE WHILE STREAMING ANY SONG
(Firmware update available August 2026)



 Designed & Engineered
by Blackstar Amplification UK

Blackstar®

AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

EXPLORE
NOW:



www.blackstaramps.com

Loss & Legacy



This month's story on the reappearance of Eric Clapton's 1960 Les Paul Standard – used for Cream's 1966 debut album, *Fresh Cream* – after nearly 60 years (see page 62) can't help but make you reflect on the shifting sands of ownership, celebrity and legacy. It's really the story of a guitar that Gibson had decided to stop making, which then got used by a young guitarist in the first flush of international celebrity, which then disappeared from view for decades.

Like *Sleeping Beauty*, the 'Summersburst' slumbered in a private collection from the mid-80s onwards. But in the years that followed the entire market for vintage guitars came into being. As that market grew and grew, the cherry sunburst Les Paul Standard went from being Gibson's late-50s failure to being one of the most sought-after instruments in existence largely because Eric Clapton and other guitarists had used them in the 60s and made landmark recordings with them, which then inspired young music fans to want to own them when they became older and wealthier. Snakes and ladders, swings and roundabouts, and other symbols of reversal of fortune come to mind. The lesson is, perhaps, that legacy is a house built on dunes, subject to the action of wind, wave and time.

That thought was in my mind, too, when considering the hottest topic in the guitar world at present: Fender's issuing of cease-and-desist letters to makers large and small whom it deems to have copied the Strat body shape in their own designs. The move has stirred up widespread disbelief – and, for many, anger – as it was long considered to be a settled matter, both legally and by long established precedent, that the Strat body shape was fair game for guitar makers to use. While the whole furore (some would say debacle) is too complex to cover here, look out for an in-depth article on the rights and wrongs of the matter – and what might happen next – next month. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Screen To Stage
French guitarist and online sensation Laura Cox explains how she took the leap from YouTube rocker to pro touring musician **p50**



Double Trouble
We review the latest addition to Gibson's affordable Les Paul Studio range, featuring the classic 'Double White' uncovered pickups, on **p96**



Back In Town
Brian Robertson treats *Guitarist* to a rare interview as he opens up on his time in Thin Lizzy and writing those legendary twin-guitar lines **p56**

Guitarist

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

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jamie Dickson

jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

DEPUTY EDITOR

David Mead

david.mead@futurenet.com

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC

Scott Rowley

scott.rowley@futurenet.com

REVIEWS EDITOR

Dave Burrluck

dave@daveburrluck.com

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR

Jason Sidwell

jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

ART EDITOR

Darren Phillips

darren.phillips@futurenet.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Lucy Rice

lucy.rice@futurenet.com

CONTRIBUTORS

TONY BACON, RICHARD BARRETT, ALEX BISHOP, MILFORD COPPOCK, OLLY CURTIS, TREVOR CURWEN, ANDREW DALY, RICH DAVENPORT, MARTIN HOLMES, RICHARD HOOD, NEVILLE MARTEN, PER OLSSON, HUW PRICE, DAVINA RUNGASAMY, AMIT SHARMA, MARTIN SMITH, DANIEL VINCENT, MICHAEL WATTS, CHARLIE WILKINS, STUART WILLIAMS, HENRY YATES

IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHIL BARKER, MATT LINCOLN, LUCY ROBINSON

ADVERTISING

MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

GROUP COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com

ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com

MARKETING

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MARKETING INTEGRATION Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com

SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER Maaya Mistry maaya.mistry@futurenet.com

SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com

DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com

DIGITAL EDITIONS PRODUCER Daniel Short daniel.short@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION

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

CIRCULATION

BRAND DIRECTOR Tim Mathers

HEAD OF FUTURE NEWSTRADE Emma Bone

MANAGEMENT

SVP MAGAZINES, SUBSCRIPTIONS, EVENTS, NEWS, WEALTH, SPORTS & KNOWLEDGE

Joel Griffiths joel.griffiths@futurenet.com

MANAGING DIRECTOR MUSIC, PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN

Stuart Williams stuart.williams@futurenet.com

GLOBAL DESIGN DIRECTOR Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com

HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES

APP SUPPORT apps@futurenet.com

ONLINE www.magazinesdirect.com EMAIL help@magazinesdirect.com

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

You will only be able to access the digital back issues as long as you are an active subscriber.

To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit magazinesdirect.com (click on 'Single issues' tab) or email help@magazinesdirect.com

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

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

Please allow up to 7 days before contacting us about a late delivery to help@mymagazines.co.uk

Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited

USPS INFORMATION

Guitarist (ISSN 0953-7023 PE 23920) is published monthly with an extra issue in May by Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA, 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

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)

eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317

Tallinn, Estonia

hello@eucompliancepartner.com

+3375690241

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



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

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

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

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

Chief Executive Officer Kevin Li Ying
Non-Executive Chairman 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 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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

VINTERA® III VINTAGE STYLE FOR THE MODERN ERA.



Nate Amos from Water From Your Eyes plays the VINTERA III Mid '60s Jaguar® in Shell Pink.

Fender

The One. For All.

©2026 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

Contents

COVER FEATURE



PHOTO BY VOLLY CURTIS

FEATURE



PHOTO BY OLAF HEINE



Guitarist
SUBSCRIBE TODAY
FOR ONLY £28.49
AND SAVE 37%!

See p110 for details

REVIEW



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

REGULARS

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

FEATURES

- 046 Obituary: Alan Entwistle
- 048 Obituary: Steve Clarke
- 050 Laura Cox
- 056 Brian Robertson
- 062 Eric Clapton's Lost 'Burst
- 076 Al Di Meola & Julian Lage
- 082 Historic Hardware: Paul Kossoff's 1955 Gibson Les Paul Custom

NEW GEAR

- 008 Danelectro Dan O Cool & Mano
- 014 Orange OR60
- 018 Cort Gold-A10 Cocobolo
- 024 Beetronics Pollinator Hazee Delay
- 026 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi 2
- 028 Marshall Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary Edition 1959 JMH Half Stack & Fuzz Face
- 088 Fender Vintera III Late '50s Stratocaster & Mid '60s Jazzmaster
- 096 Gibson Les Paul Studio Double Trouble
- 104 Blackstar Beam Mini
- 112 ThorpyFX Kudu

TECHNIQUES

- 126 Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

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



**SCAN TO GET
THE LATEST
GUITAR NEWS**



GENOME 2.0

All-in-One Amp Modeler, FX Suite, and Virtual Cabinet Engine for Guitar and Bass

**More Components. More Control.
More Ways to Build Your Dream RIG!**



GENOME 2.0 isn't an update—it's a full-bore upgrade, now available on Desktop and iPad. It begins with **GENOME Intro**—a free entry point delivering pedals, TSM™-Ai amplifiers, DynIR™ cabinets, and studio-grade FX in one unified environment.

Then comes industry-first AmpNet multi-parametric capture compatibility via PARADEX—bringing dynamic, control-aware amplifier modelling into the workflow. With Global Transpose, an expanded TSM™-Ai amplifier arsenal, deeper control, and faster workflows, GENOME 2.0 sets a new benchmark for the modern digital rig.

Available on  Desktop (VST3, AAX, AU, Standalone)  iOS (Standalone)

[GENOME.two-notes.com](https://genome.two-notes.com)

Claim Your **FREE**
GENOME Intro License



FIRST PLAY



**DANELECTRO
DAN O COOL**
£689

WHAT IS IT? Historical hotchpotch centring on elements from the 50s with more power to its Lipstick single coils



**DANELECTRO
DAN O MANO**
£689

WHAT IS IT? Same deal as the Dan O Cool but with a pair of soapbar single coils. Both use the 'Full Bell' headstock and have a 'Dano' not Danelectro logo

Strange Times

Danelectro presents a pair of far-from-historically-correct Short Horns. Where to start?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Matt Lincoln

For a brand that originally shut its doors in 1969, Danelectro's rebirth some 30 years later has subsequently given us a huge number of reissues and mash-ups. Although prices have crept up in recent years, Danelectro models still fall into the affordable part of the market with a retro vision and a reminder of a different time. Head over to the brand's website and you'll find a dizzying number of available models, not least this year's new crop to add to the stew.

These 2026 models definitely fall into the mash-up category: they're not model- or period-specific but come with features that span quite a period, from the get-go in the mid-50s to the return of Danelectro in the mid-90s and on to the present day. All three new models centre on the double-cut Short





Horn outline, with a 635mm (25-inch) scale length and – uniquely for any reissued model – a repro of the original and short-lived Full Bell headstock. More unusually, there's even a logo change: as you can see these are branded 'Dano'.

The three Dan O models offer subtly different themes. First, the Golden 50's features "the show-stopping body/headstock graphic that is borrowed from an authentic 1950s kitchen table top", the press release gushes, and is combined with a pair of hot Lipstick pickups. There's no scratchplate, which allows that "kitchen table top" feel to shine in four solid colours of Cream, Black, Maroon and Green. Next is the Dan O Cool, the first of our review models and effectively the same guitar with the 'rare' U3-style pickguard (originally from 1955) in Black, Maroon, Blue and Green. A 12-string is offered in Aqua Blue, plus there's a baritone in Green only. Finally, the Dan O Mano swaps the overwound Lipstick single coils for two soapbar single coils, there's no scratchplate here and just three colours of Maroon, Black and Silver.

"With their Atomic Age styling – drawing heavily upon Danelectro's boldly original 1950s roots – and turbocharged retro vibe, the Dano line might be the company's most true-to-the-spirit guitars ever," says Danelectro. Although exactly what the rationale here is, is far from concrete – the brand has been drawing on its 50s roots

The Lipstick single coils have appealing clarity and definition, and are archetypal Danelectro

since the guitars became available again in the late 1990s.

Conversely, Danelectro might well have created some of its more fit-for-purpose electrics in its now quite extensive history. For example, the so-called 'Short Horn' outline is a Danelectro classic, and although not mentioned directly in the marketing blurb – "back to the magic of the 1950s Danelectros" – was first unveiled in 1958. It's never been paired with that original and short-lived headstock, and with the Dano logo here it looks quite modern, far from 1950s. Likewise, the moulded 'D' logo plastic truss rod cover, which follows the pickguard, style-wise, and the electrics cavity cover on the back.

Construction is ignored by Danelectro's PR, and indeed its own website. Alex Davis from the brand's new distributor Strings & Things says: "The publicly available info does leave a little to be desired, but official build specs are pretty much unchanged in decades with the neck a hard Canadian maple and the fretboard in rosewood."

1. This 'Full Bell' headstock was used on the first Danelectro guitar from 1954. It doesn't appear to have been used again, until now! Very much a part of the original Danelectro recipe and used since the mid-50s are the aluminium nut screws to the end of the rosewood fingerboard. New to these Dano models, however, is the moulded plastic truss rod cover, along with the pickguard and rear control cover

2. The Short Horn shape first appeared in 1958 and features this long heel that extends to the 14th fret. Upper-fret comfort wasn't a thing back in the 50s!



While Alex states that “the body frame is solid spruce [and] the top and bottom panels are hardboard”, these look more like what we’d call MDF. Another original-style Danelectro feature is the vinyl tape applied to the sides, though here it’s virtually identical to the body colour whereas back in the 50s it was typically contrasting. Again, nodding back to the original design is the long heel, quite long and square edged, the strap button placed at its tip, so it’s not doing much to help upper-fret access or comfort.

The hardware certainly looks back and we have the original-style ‘four-way adjustable bridge’ with its one-piece rosewood saddle, liked by many for its sound, less so its accurate intonation. Uniquely, Danelectro is including the much later six (metal) saddle, fully adjustable bridge in the box so you can easily swap: a nice touch, not least that getting hold of Danelectro spares isn’t easy.

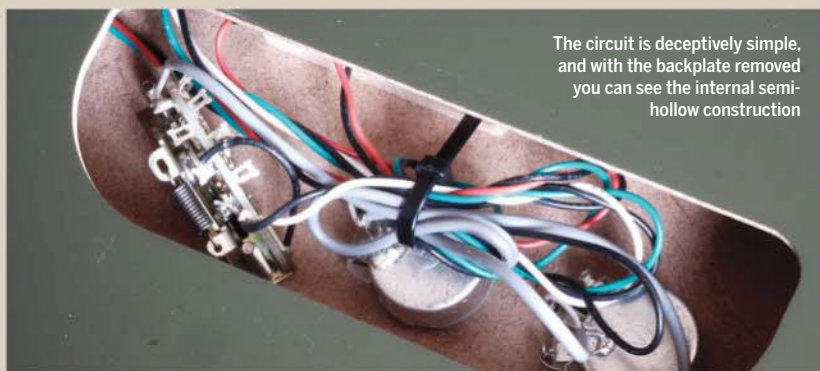
Another specific feature is the ‘Skate Key’ tuners. Well, we don’t have any from the 50s to compare, but these have pretty basic Kluson-style backs with pressed metal buttons, quite thin and small-feeling though perfectly usable. The nut, as per the originals, is aluminium screwed onto the end of the rosewood fingerboard. Details such as the fingerboard radius aren’t divulged, but historically Danelectro has quoted 356mm (14 inches), which is pretty much what we measure.

Internally, it’s all very clean, the rear cavity opening cut after the guitar is finished, we’d wager. As to how hollow, well, there seems to be a narrow centre block, less wide than the pickups with a pretty large block around the bridge. The actual sides – which are a part of this ‘frame’ – are quite thick, too, and the lower body is certainly much more hollow than the almost solid horns.

Feel & Sounds

We’d call the setup functional, rather than dialled in. The nut’s slots are a little wide but not deep, and the strings are held by a good back angle to those tuners. The string angle from nut slot to tuner post is fairly straight, too, splaying only slightly. The radius at the rosewood saddle bridge is closer to 305mm (12 inches), so with standard string heights at the 12th fret it does mean the inner strings are a little higher than most would set with separate saddles.

The intonation is nowhere near as ‘off’ as the one-piece saddle would suggest, and while you can tilt the saddle (there’s a small screw under the bridge that holds the saddle in place and allows this angle change), it really is pretty close as supplied.



The circuit is deceptively simple, and with the backplate removed you can see the internal semi-hollow construction

UNDER THE HOOD

A simple circuit or not?

Removing the ribbed plastic coverplate allows you to access the electrics and peer into the semi-hollow construction that has been part of the Danelectro blend since the mid-50s. The circuit appears simple, just two Alpha ‘Made in Korea’ pots for master volume and master tone, each with a nominal 500kohms value.

There’s no treble bleed capacitor on the volume, and the tone cap is rated at 0.1µF. The two-pole, three-way lever switch is good quality and the wiring is pretty tidy, although the only ‘shielding’ is a piece of

foil on the back of the coverplate that isn’t connected to ground.

There’s scant information on the pickups. We’re told the “1950s Lipstick” single coils are hotter, the bridge by 30 per cent, the neck by 20 per cent, but that’s it. Measuring the DCRs, they remain low for the pickup style: 4.1k (bridge), 3.74k (neck) and 7.7k (bridge and neck, in series). The P-90 soapbar single coils of the Dan O Mano – the first time this style has been fitted to a Danelectro, we’re told – have low DCRs, too: 5.89k (bridge), 5.3k (neck) and 11.08k (bridge and neck, in series).



Originally the ‘Four-Way Adjustable’ bridge (up, down, forward, back), the basic bridge is another part of the recipe. You can’t intonate it precisely and, while it sounds good, there is a tendency for it to ‘collapse’ under string tension. At least a modern six-saddle option is included in the box



3. Apparently, these 'Skate Key' tuners date back to 1958, but they're pretty standard Kluson-style with a different pressed button

The fretwork is pretty neat, too – a medium gauge, approximately 2.68mm wide by 1mm high. Overall, then, while not the most dialled-in setup that you should expect from a modern guitar, it ain't bad, certainly if you live on the bluesier side of the style tracks. Same with the neck, which feels a little wider than it actually is, perhaps because of the flatter radius. But it's a pretty classic shallow 'C': 20.5mm deep at the 1st fret, 22.8mm by the 12th – no issues at all.

Despite the overwound claims of these new Lipsticks, they are still a pretty low output, although today that's not really an

4. Inspired by radio knobs from the 1930s, these plastic affairs suit the retro appeal. It's just a simple master volume/master tone setup, though, unlike many Danelectros with stacked volume/tone controls

issue – a little clean boost or whatever takes your fancy easily compensates. It's the very clear tonality that impresses. Add in a big reverb and it's a twang-fest at the bridge, fuller and softer at the neck – which really is almost a middle position – but with a nice clarity. The surprise (again due to the total lack of specification) is that in the both-on

The original-style 'four-way adjustable bridge' is liked by many for its sound, less so its accurate intonation



middle position on the selector we have more output and a bigger voice, instead of the expected bounce and funk. A quick check with our multimeter and the pickups are wired in series (the pickup's individual outputs are combined), which, of course, is typical Danelectro. There's still some of the both-on character here, though; it's just louder with slightly rounder highs.

So you really have some choices. Those individual coils are classic Danelectro; the middle series voice is certainly familiar if you've played any of the two-pickup models with stacked volume and tone controls. However, with just the master volume and tone we have less ability to shade the voice, which might well be an advantage for many players. The controls give a very direct feel: the volume has a good taper, the tone less



5

so, with not a lot happening until the near end of travel where we drop to a woolly roll-off rather quickly.

The same trick is pulled off on the Dan O Mano. The soapbar single coils have a fuller and warmer tonality overall compared with the Lipsticks and, from the off, seem to suit a little more grit. Again, the middle position combines the pickups in series so there's more heft and this one sort of has it all: power with clarity. But, again, the three sounds are distinct here – as with the Dan O Cool – and give both guitars their own voice.

Verdict

The backstory here is a bit laboured as the majority of contemporary Danelectros since the late 90s reference the 50s. Nothing new there. It is good to see the rosewood bridge back (with the modern six-saddle unit as back-up), which might not be perfect but really suits the lo-fi vibe. And while these finishes give a contemporary and quite moody sheen, the sounds are anything but. The low-output soapbar single coils really suit the lightweight resonant platform; the Lipstick single coils are far from 'hot' but have a really appealing clarity and definition, and are archetypal Danelectro.

In-store, these will drop below £600, with the exception of the baritone and the 12-string. Not exactly bargain basement but then neither are the guitars, which remain strangely unique after all these years. **G**

5. These soapbar single coils were never a part of the original Danelectro vision but prove to be quite an inspired choice. They're not overwound and retain the jangle with a little more depth



DANELECTRO DAN O COOL

PRICE: £689

ORIGIN: Korea

TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-hollow electric

BODY: Composite top and back over solid wood frame

NECK: Maple, C profile bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Aluminium/ 41.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, small white dot inlays, 356mm (14") radius

FRETS: 21, medium

HARDWARE: Hardtail rosewood saddle bridge, Kluson-style 'Skate' tuners – chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x single-coil Lipstick pickups, 2-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.81/6.24

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: There is a Dan O Cool 12-string (£759) in Aqua Blue only with different pickups, plus a Baritone (£759) in Green only

LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model, but lefty versions of the '59M NOS+ (the 'Page' model), Vintage 12-String and Baritone are available

FINISHES: Green (as reviewed) Black, Maroon, Blue – all gloss with vinyl-tape sides

Strings and Things Ltd

01903 942 600

www.danelectro.com

8/10

PROS Tidy build that recalls plenty of Danelectro's past; good light weight; pretty classic pickup voicing with series combination in middle position

CONS Plenty of Danelectro-isms such as the 14th-fret neck join, low output, the crude bridge – and why rebrand the guitar?



DANELECTRO DAN O MANO

PRICE: £689

ORIGIN: Korea

TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-hollow electric

BODY: Composite top and back over solid wood frame

NECK: Maple, C profile bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 635 mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Aluminium/ 41.7mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, small white dot inlays, 356mm (14") radius

FRETS: 21, medium

HARDWARE: Hardtail rosewood saddle bridge, Kluson-style 'Skate' tuners – chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x soapbar single-coil pickups, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.83/6.23

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Along with our reviewed models are the Dano Golden 50's models (£689) with the same specs as the Dan O Cool but with a graphic top in Cream, Black, Maroon or Green

LEFT-HANDERS: See Dan O Cool

FINISHES: Maroon (as reviewed) Black, Silver – all gloss with vinyl-tape sides

8/10

PROS Few complaints with build quality; optional adjustable bridge on both models; light weight and resonance really suits the soapbar single coils, with series combination in middle position

CONS Ditto the Dan O Cool, though the pickups here do have a little more poke in terms of output



Since its inception in 1968 Orange has remained faithful to its oversized cabinetry, eye-catching vinyl and 'picture-frame' mounted basketweave grille cloths on its 4x12 speaker cabs. Traditional 'Pics Only' labelling also features on the controls here

FIRST PLAY



ORANGE OR60

£2,099

WHAT IS IT? All-valve, single-channel head with switchable output and valve-buffered effects loop

Smooth Operator

Orange swaps the grit for growl to make this new release its purest-sounding premium all-valve head yet

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Phil Barker

Orange has long been known for its iconic brand of sonic savagery, and its punchy low-end served up with crispy treble has helped define the music of a great many artists. While the primary drive of the valve-amplifier industry is towards refined vintage tone, Orange filled the niche for a more aggressive sound. Styles such as punk, doom-rock and indie-rock embrace the more cutting frequency range and punchy response these characterfully coloured cabinets exude. However, with this new amp Orange offers its take on a more refined all-valve design, aiming to please a wider range of tastes while sticking with brand-building features such as pedal-friendliness and huge overdrive ability.

The all-valve refinements carry through to the ECC82-buffered effects loop to provide enhanced clarity and coherence when using modulation-based effect processors, always best placed in the effects loop. We have two wattage options incorporated into the standby switch, selecting between the full 60-watts output

1. Our first gain stages are modified by the three-position Bright switch and gain control. In position 1 the Bright switch accentuates the highest frequencies, yielding that US-style sparkle. Position 2 is neutral for pedals and finally position 3 imparts an overall treble boost, great for articulate high-gain sounds

2. The rear-panel houses the essential connections needed to operate the amp. A pre-selection of two 8ohm outputs and one 16ohm jack feed your speaker cabs. The valve-buffered effects loop allows for integration of post-preamp-style effect devices such as delays, reverbs and modulation with improved clarity

3. Incorporated into the standby switch is a choice of 460 volts or 335 volts, which effectively takes the full 60 watts using the supplied 6L6s down to 30 watts in the reduced setting. Other similarly pinned power valves can be used once the amp is rebased using the circuit's bias controls on the circuit board



or 30 watts to better match smaller environments. Improved top-end tailoring comes in the form of a redesigned presence circuit that works more effectively across the amp's entire volume range, and a three-position Bright switch allowing for neutral, narrow-band (think 'sparkle') and wide-band (including some upper mids) options.

Orange has also included a bass Resonance control – a feature becoming de rigueur for modern high-gain amps. This, along with the Presence control, functions within the negative feedback circuit to tighten or extend the range at both ends

of the frequency spectrum. And, yes, we're looking at you, detuned metal players! A second footswitchable volume control (not master volume as, strictly speaking, this is not a master volume-equipped amp) allows solo boosting for stage use, an indication of the type of environment Orange foresees this amp being used in.

Built in England using the same familiar chunky cabinets that have become a visual trademark, the brand continues its reputation for hardy, giggable construction quality. An assembly inspection shows care was taken to withstand the rigorous

routines of the road. A heavy-duty PCB board lies at the heart of this cathode-following, self-biasing design using two 6L6 valves to produce 60 watts. The amp can be biased to accept other common output valves such as the EL34, though the real-world wattage that will be achievable would be governed by the valves' output rating. Worthy of mention is that the smaller OR30 30-watt version turns into Class A operation with the wattage switch at half power, imparting a highly musical touch-sensitivity.

Sounds

Plugging in our Les Paul, we spent a few bemused moments checking out the pictures that label the controls. We're undecided if the quirky fun is worth the brain resources needed to convert these cryptograms back to knob names, but it's something die-hard Orange aficionados might enjoy.

First, we were astonished by the range of gain available from the first control as the second and third gain stages are being controlled by this one knob. From spanky cleans to all-out Armageddon, whatever your particular gain needs are this amp has you covered. If you are, however, the kind of player who simply has to put a boost before anything, the OR60 is more than ready to play ball. The Orange reputation for pedal-friendliness is fully in evidence. However, there isn't a great necessity to add extra gain for most sounds.





That solid, almost compressed sound for which Orange amps are famed is still very much in evidence and, as expected, our Stratocaster's single-coil pickups came punching through with impressive authority. A rich and full sustain renders lead licks with plenty of fluidity of the bravado-inspiring kind.

We found the Bright switch well tuned to best present a variety of guitars. The sparkle setting introduced the chimy top-end that flatters cleaner sounds wonderfully. The neutral position is recommended to get the most flexibility from tone-shaping pedals and the full-bright position introduces a wider band of top-boost starting lower down the frequency spectrum where upper-mids reside. This settling brings back some of the traditional treble aggression that metal and punk players will expect from Orange but with an altogether more refined air. The sandpapered grittiness, long described as an Orange hallmark, is less apparent and a smoother, more fluid voice takes its place.

As the gain level gets irresistibly nudged further clockwise, the Resonance and Presence controls help sculpt the response and we found it a doddle to dial up mosh-pit-approved tight low-end. With the Bright switch and the Presence control it was possible to get an appropriate, aggressive top-end from any of our guitars. We found the frequency response of the mid-control well tuned to either get that US scoop or, at the other extent, the British

mid-forward classic rock sound. Indeed, the range of sounds achievable from the OR60 is huge, not due to channels and switches but simply from the power of the gain and EQ controls.

The range of sounds is huge, simply from the power of the gain and EQ controls

Verdict

If the abundant punch and gain of the Orange sound appeals but the trademark top-end sizzle doesn't, the OR60 could be the solution for you. Like a fist in a velvet glove (granted, that's quite a barbaric metaphor) the OR60 – and its smaller sibling, the OR30 – brings a newly refined clarity to the brand's sonic palette.

Worth noting is that this is a weighty beast to lug around, and with the price coming to around £2k this amp will very much be a deliberate choice for purchasers. The same range of musical styles can be played through the OR60, of course, as with previous models due to the abundance of gain and the touch-sensitive response. However, now they'll be imparted with a smoother, posher high-end and improved touch-sensitivity. To reappropriate the words of another cultural classic, the OR60 is an 'elegant weapon for a more civilised age'. **G**



ORANGE OR60

PRICE: £2,099

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All-valve, single-channel head with switchable output and valve-buffered FX loop

VALVES: 3x ECC83, 1x ECC82, 2x 6L6 (EL34 possible with re-biasing)

OUTPUT: 60W, switchable to 30W

DIMENSIONS: 550 (w) x 245 (d) x 270mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 19.3/42

CABINET: Baltic birch

CHANNELS: 1 with an additional switchable volume

CONTROLS: Resonance, Presence, FS Volume, Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass, Gain, Bright Switch

FOOTSWITCH: Not included

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Valve-buffered FX loop, footswitchable volume

OPTIONS: No

RANGE OPTIONS: OR30 (£1,799)

Orange Amplification

020 8905 2828

www.orangeamps.com



9/10

PROS Classier, less abrasive top-end will suit players of more classic styles; Resonance and Presence add modern control over power amp response via the negative-feedback loop; excellent construction quality – giggable and serviceable well into the future

CONS An included footswitch for the switchable volume control would be a worthwhile addition; slight interference was occasionally detectable on the volume control

FIRST PLAY



**CORT GOLD-A10
COCOBOLO**
£1,899

WHAT IS IT? A grand auditorium acoustic made from premium tonewoods

Wild Wood

Cort introduces a gold standard to its acoustic line with a grand auditorium model that pairs two of the mightiest tonewoods

Words David Mead **Photography** Lucy Robinson

It has to be said that we've been impressed by virtually every instrument we've seen from the Cor-Tek Corporation in recent years. The company is also responsible for building a number of guitars outside of its own Cort house brand (including PRS's SE range) and the quality is always tip-top with playability that hits the mark every time.

This Gold A10 hails from the company's highly automated acoustic guitar facility in the Jinzhou District of Dalian, Liaoning, China, and just reading the spec put us in a bit of a swirl even before opening its case. Cocobolo back and sides with a torrefied Adirondack spruce top? That's a match made in heaven if ever there was one – on paper at least.

The company's website proclaims that "the Cort Gold-A10 Cocobolo exudes boutique-style craftsmanship that extends beyond gorgeous tonewoods and distinguished accoutrements, with time-intensive hand-rolled fret edges, tone-enhancing torrefied materials, and Fishman Flex Blend electronics for unforgettable performance". And at a price that won't break the bank (too badly, anyway...).

So, what's all the fuss about the woods that are involved? Well, first let's take a look at cocobolo. To begin with, it's a member of the rosewood genus *Dalbergia retusa* and







1. The controls for the onboard Fishman Flex Blend electronics sit amid the beautifully grained cocobolo

2. The A10's top is torrefied Adirondack spruce, complemented here by its ebony bridge with a bone saddle

is often employed by luthiers as a more than able substitute for that *Dalbergia* superstar, Brazilian rosewood. There are tonal variations between the two, of course, with cocobolo being renowned for its bright tone, lower register resonance, articulation and note distinction. Native to Mexico and Central America, it is also renowned for its wild grain pattern, which often challenges all but the most sublime Brazilian variety. As you can see from the pictures here, the back wood has a beautifully complex pattern with the paler sapwood running down the centre. It's

strange that all the fuss is made about the beauty of back woods on acoustic – and classical – guitars when it's the part your audience never sees. But that's all part of the fun of owning such an instrument.

The cocobolo's running mate on the Cort A10 is torrefied Adirondack spruce, and this is another tonewood that goes hand in hand with exceptional levels of tone and performance. Known for its "ringing yet complex and nuanced tone that carries right through high volume levels where other spruces start to break up", according to the Wood Database, 'Addie', as it is affectionately known, has graced the tops of some celebrated pre-war Martin acoustics. Indeed, its legend continues, optimising as it does an acoustic's dynamic and tonal ranges.

But the equation doesn't end there as we find a mahogany neck, very good-looking reddish-brown padauk binding and maple purfling to both body and neck, plus an ebony fretboard – with mother-of-pearl and abalone inlays – to complete the body timbers. We're told the neck is also reinforced with strips of walnut either side of the truss rod underneath the 'board for extra stability and reinforcement. Factor in a bone saddle and nut, with Grover open-gear tuners and a factory-fitted Fishman Flex Blend pickup and you can see what excited us when we scanned the A10's bill of goods in the first place.





The cocobolo is the star of the show, and if this guitar sounds half as good as it looks, then we're on to a real winner

Oh, and if you're thinking that it would have been nice of Cort to include a scratchplate to protect the top from those wilder plectrum wielding moments, fear not, there's one in the case for you to fit yourself if you want to. Nice touch.

Freed from its case and turning the A10 over in our hands, its finish and build look as exemplary as we've come to expect from Cort. The cocobolo on the back and sides is the star of the show – and we mustn't forget that the precise patterning of the wood will vary from instrument to instrument – but if this guitar sounds half as good as it looks, then we're on to a real winner.

Feel & Sounds

Every player would agree that no matter how good looking a guitar is, it's the playing surfaces – neck, fingerboard, et cetera – that either win or lose the day. In the case of the A10 we're happy to report that the satin-finished neck is a very comfortable C profile that feels like it belongs in the hand. It sits in that area where it's neither too chunky nor too skinny, measuring 21.5mm deep at the

3. If crazy wood grain is your thing, then the A10 delivers in spades!

4. The ebony 'board has mother-of-pearl and abalone inlays



Top, back and neck have reddish padauk binding with maple purfling



CORT GOLD-A10 COCOBOLO

PRICE: £1,899 (inc case)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Grand Auditorium

TOP: Torrefied AA-grade

Adirondack spruce

BACK/SIDES: AAA grade cocobolo

MAX RIM DEPTH: 113mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 402mm

NECK: Walnut reinforced mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Grover gold open gear

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: Fishman Flex Blend

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.4/5.2

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Cort's Gold range currently extends to 12 instruments, including the Gold-MC6 Ovangkol (£999), the Gold-A6 Bocote (£999) and the Gold-A8 (£1,049). See website for details

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Natural gloss with satin neck

440 Distribution

01943 818599

www.cortguitars.com



PROS A well-built, good-sounding instrument with at least one foot in the rarified boutique market

CONS Not much to see here – mahogany back and side fans might want to look elsewhere

1st fret, broadening only slightly to 22mm at the 8th. The nut has been expertly cut and the 'board is very nicely finished, too, with those hand-finished rolled fret-ends adding extra boutique swish.

When we first tried a few pioneering chords the sound was a little compressed. But we concluded the A10 had very likely not been out of its case since it left China many moons ago and would probably respond to a day or two left on a stand to come up to room temperature and prevailing humidity.

We also made sure to give it the occasional campfire chord serenade each time we passed and it began to open up nicely. Basses became stronger, trebles noticeably sweeter and, although it's impossible to measure, we could swear it got louder, too. Of course, all this is in line with how new acoustic guitars can come out of storage hibernation and begin to blossom and bloom – everything we would expect from an Addie top backed with a nice member of an elite rosewood family. And, of course, it bodes well for the future as we're sure there's plenty more opening up to be done by the guitar in the months and years ahead.

The instrument responded well to both fingerstyle pieces and chordal workouts, the latter offering a very good blend of clarity and complexity.

The Fishman Flex Blend pickup and preamp system adds another important dimension to the sound. Combining an under-saddle piezo with an internal mic,

The A10 responded well to chordal workouts, offering a very good blend of clarity and complexity

the plugged-in sound reflected that of the A10's acoustic nature when interfaced with our Boss Katana-50 EX. The Fishman's tone control added more colour with a variable midrange that you can adjust for chordal oomph or fingerstyle finesse. It has a built-in tuner, too.

Verdict

We were aware that this is a factory build with a degree of hands-on along the way. But it successfully escapes that stereotypical 'cloned' tone set that some factory builds succumb to and when it left us was well on its way to being a standalone individual with a very good portfolio of usable sounds. Sure, if you gave a set of triple-A grade cocobolo and some Adirondack spruce to a boutique luthier you might find that further tonal refinements and build enhancements would become available. But then the price would very likely be five times what it is here. What Cort's A10 offers is a step towards the upper echelon of acoustic guitar lutherie at a very reasonable price and, from what we've heard, once the guitar has fully opened up, your investment could be, quite literally, very sound indeed. Try one, we think you'll like it. **G**



FUTURA

FUTURA STARTS NOW.

With Chromashift finishes that change color as they move under lights, stainless steel frets, compound-radius fingerboards, and powerful new pickups, the iconic shapes of the Epiphone Futura Series might be familiar but their look, feel, and tone is all-new.

Find out more and shop now at [Epiphone.com](https://www.epiphone.com), the Gibson Garage, and authorized Epiphone dealers.

FIRST PLAY



**BEETRONICS POLLINATOR
HAZEE DELAY**
\$229

WHAT IS IT? Digital delay and modulation pedal – and the California company's first fully digital offering



Hazee Days

Beetronics cross-pollinates delay and modulation to create textural sounds that blur the boundaries between them

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. This rotary switch selects your modulation mode – four filter modes in the red segment, four tremolo modes in the blue

2. Use this Mix control to set the mix between the dry signal and repeats. It runs from 100 per cent dry to 100 per cent wet for a totally transformed signal

3. The Hazee Delay is quite a tall pedal, but the footswitch being on a sloped section makes for easy switching

The Hazee Delay, the first in the Pollinator series, is a bit of a departure for Beetronics in that it's the company's first totally digital pedal. In true Beetronics style, though, this is not just a standard digital delay but a pedal that's designed to deliver textural delays and ambient sounds.

This is a pedal solely for modulated delays, not simply delays where there's a bit of wobble on the repeats – we're talking delays where the modulation is a totally integrated component of the sound as the modulation comes first in the signal chain and is then delayed.

There are eight modes of modulation available – four tremolo and four filter – each mode featuring a different type of repeat, giving you a choice of forward repeats, octave up repeats, reverse repeats and octave up reverse repeats. There are just four knobs to adjust the effect: the delay pedal staples are Time, Mix and Feedback, and the Mod knob controls the modulation rate.

The Hazee Delay controls are very interactive – small changes can have a big effect on the sonic outcome – so experimentation followed by considered adjustment is the key to getting the pedal to work for you. It can be an inspirational and creative tool in that certain modes may encourage you to adapt your playing in reaction to what you're hearing, rather than adjusting the controls to fit your playing.

There's quirky stuff here, for sure, but the modes that are most conventional are those that offer the non-pitch-shifted forward repeats. For example, the filter will give you auto-wah effects and even something that sounds like a rotary speaker at fast Mod rates, while the tremolo offers a nicely rounded pulse; keep the delay time at minimum if you want something closer to a straight effect. With the pitch-shifted and reverse repeats, the other modes offer a more 'out there' take on things and are capable of pulsing and shimmering sonic layers with rhythmic movement as the repeats and modulation interact.

Verdict

This pedal encourages you to twist the knobs until you find a favoured sweet spot and offers plenty to explore in the realm of strangely voiced repeats and finely textured ambient soundscapes to sit with your core sound. Not your average digital delay by any means, the Hazee Delay is a vibe machine that could help get those creative juices flowing. **G**



BEETRONICS POLLINATOR HAZEE DELAY

PRICE: £229

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Digital delay pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Time, Feedback, Mix, Modulation, Mode selector, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 80 mA

DIMENSIONS: 88 (w) x 131 (d) x 73mm (h)

FACE bvba

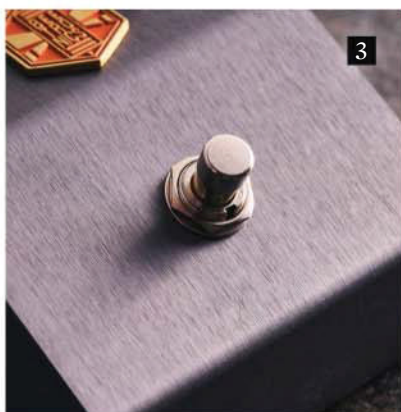
+32 3 844 67 97

www.beetronicsfx.com

8/10

PROS Rugged build; straightforward control surface; unusual range of sounds

CONS It's a bit niche; mono only



3

THE RIVALS

For a large variety of delay types, check out the 12 modes of the Boss DD-200 (£259). If you have a bit more money to spend on a pedal to provide modulated delays, there's the Meris range – the Polymoon (£306) and the LVX (£619). For other delay pedals with a difference, the Red Panda Raster 2 (£315) is a digital delay with a pitch and frequency shifter integrated into the feedback loop. Earthquaker Devices/Death By Audio Time Shadows II (£239, right) is a subharmonic multi-delay resonator pedal, while the Old Blood Noise Endeavors Bathing Liminal Delay (£349) does its own unique thing.



PHOTO: DEATHBYAUDIO.COM

FIRST PLAY



**ELECTRO-HARMONIX
BIG MUFF PI 2**
£105

WHAT IS IT? A Big Muff based on a recently discovered and previously discarded vintage circuit



Found Fuzz

Long-lost circuitry featuring two op-amps is resurrected for the latest iteration of the classic Electro-Harmonix pedal

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. The pedal's red chassis makes it stand out from the standard bare metallic finishes of most other Muffs – look down and you'll know where to plant your foot
2. Click the footswitch for normal latching functionality or use a press-and-hold for a momentary blast of Muff tone – a first for a Big Muff
3. A wide-ranging Tone knob is a staple feature of all Big Muffs and this one is no exception: left is darker, right is brighter

Electro-Harmonix has been doing a grand job of reissuing the different versions of its Big Muff Pi pedal, with all of the major circuit revisions now represented in the brand's roster. The Big Muff Pi 2 is the latest to hit the stores, but there's a twist with this one in that it was never available in the first place. This pedal is a dual op-amp version by designer Bob Myers that dates from the late 1970s. Its existence, as a hand-drawn schematic, only came to light when Josh Scott of JHS Pedals was interviewing Bob for a book, *Made On Earth For Rising Stars: The Electro-Harmonix Story*. While EHX did produce an op-amp-based Big Muff in 1978 (also known as the IC or V4 Big Muff), celebrated for its use by Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins, this new one has a different clipping arrangement and an extra gain stage.

A nano-sized pedal that will fit snugly on any pedalboard, the Big Muff Pi 2 features the familiar triumvirate of Volume, Tone and Sustain knobs, but, brilliantly, comes with a dual-action footswitch that – besides standard latching operation – can also be used momentarily for a burst of dirt for as long as you press and hold.

Plugging in, there's no doubt that this is part of the Big Muff family, but the differences from the usual four-transistor models are immediately apparent. There's a fuller midrange in place of the regular scooped sound and that fullness extends to the low frequencies with a bigger bottom-end grunt. There's plenty of variation via the Tone knob, with the sludgier stuff to the left, but we found our sweet spot at around the two o'clock mark and beyond where the upper mid presence makes itself apparent. There's also a nice clarity to the top-end, which, incidentally, doesn't get as fizzy as a standard Muff when the Tone knob is maxed. With a gritty textured edge to its fuzz/distortion, this is a pedal for big riffs and endless sustain.

Verdict

This dual op-amp version was never released back in the day as EHX boss Mike Matthews felt that it strayed from the traditional Big Muff voicing. But these days we positively embrace fuzz varieties across the board and the Big Muff Pi 2 is a valid choice, particularly for players who value something heavier and more aggressive. **G**



ELECTRO-HARMONIX BIG MUFF PI 2

PRICE: £105

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz/distortion pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, latching/momentary footswitching

CONTROLS: Volume, Tone, Sustain, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery (supplied) or 9V DC adaptor 15mA

DIMENSIONS: 65 (w) x 111 (d) x 47mm (h)

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com



PROS Compact size; a different Muff flavour; latching/momentary footswitching; battery and adaptor power

CONS It's not for those who like to use volume knob clean-up



THE RIVALS

If you like this but want more versatility, EHX has just released a Big Muff Pi 2 with Tone Wicker (£135). It features a three-position 'Wicker' switch that opens high-frequency filters in the circuit adding two additional levels of top-end, plus another switch that bypasses the tone knob from the circuit completely for full spectrum distortion. There's also the company's Op Amp Big Muff Pi (£75, right) based on the 1978 model, which is also the basis for Fredric Effects ICBM 78 (£125), featuring a toggle-switched tone bypass. The Keeley Moon Op Amp Fuzz (£159) has a Filter switch for three different EQ options.



Reissue of the classic 70s pedal at an affordable price point

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

the Wishlist

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

Marshall Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary Edition 1959 JMH Half Stack & Fuzz Face £3,799

CONTACT **Marshall Amps** PHONE +44(0)1908 375411 WEB www.marshall.com WORDS **Jamie Dickson** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

Such is the iconic stature of the Marshall stack that it's easy to forget Jimi Hendrix used plenty of other amps, such as Fender Twins and the Dual Showman model, and even had brief dalliances with the Vox AC30 in the studio. But the image of him sculpting air, to paraphrase Frank Zappa, with a white Strat and a 100-watt Marshall 'Plexi' at Woodstock is the defining image of his career – arguably the defining image of all rock 'n' roll itself, if we want to be hyperbolic.

But there was always more than just visual impact to the Model 1959 Marshall Super Lead sound. Bring to mind, for example, how that roomy bass and singing compression of a cranked 'Plexi' tamed the spikier edges of Jimi's Strat sound and gave them a truly vocal quality. And while we may not need 100-watt stacks to make up for a primitive (or non-existent) PA any more, there are plenty of reasons for modern rockers to choose one. In a recent issue of *Guitarist*, Richie Kotzen described his hand-wired Super Leads, which he uses on tour with Smith/Kotzen, as "the most responsive head I've ever played through. If I play quiet, it's quiet; if I hit it hard, it barks." And therein lies the nub of the continuing appeal of the 100-watt Plexi – it has power but also plenty of dynamics, like the Fender Bassman it evolved from via the JTM45.

To celebrate this influential behemoth of British amp tone, Marshall has just released the Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary Edition 1959 JMH Half Stack and Fuzz Face

pedal bundle, celebrating six decades of a holy trinity (if you include Hendrix himself as the third ingredient) that changed the landscape of rock.

So, what do you get for your money here? Dealing with the amp and cab first, it's basically a 1959HW (hand-wired) head paired with a model 1960 AJMH 4x12 angled cab, loaded with Celestion G12H-30s, the 'H' in that moniker standing for a heavier ceramic magnet. And while the amp sticks to the classic formula of four EL34s in the power stage and traditional but (by present-day standards) minimal controls – Volume I, Volume II, Treble, Middle, Bass, Presence – any non-cosmetic departure from the original Super Lead would probably defeat the point here, so Marshall has wisely left well alone. We do, however, get custom livery on both head and cab, which is both hazy and purple, leaving onlookers in no doubt as to the man it honours.

Also of note, of course, is the matching oil-in-water livery Fuzz Face that comes with this collector's edition amp. Though Fuzz Faces come in a hundred different specs and guises these days, the one you get here appears to be a BC183 silicon-transistor variant associated with Jimi's Woodstock-era sound, which is perhaps only fitting for this flamboyant rig.

There are even some 'Easter eggs' included in its design such as the input and output bearing the respective legends 1966 and 2026, marking the illustrious 60 years Hendrix and Marshall have been associated with one another. **G**

1. The purple 'oil-in-water' finish, which appears on the head, cab and pedal, is unique to the Anniversary rig and looks fittingly 'Purple Haze'

2. A commemorative badge with a flaming eye logo adorns the head cabinet

3. In a playful touch, the pedal's Volume bears the legend 'Jim Marshall – Loud', while the Fuzz control is marked 'Jimi Hendrix – Foxy'

4. The head itself is, with the exception of the custom livery, Marshall's hand-wired 100-watt Super Lead, as currently used by Richie Kotzen among many others

5. The angled Model 1960 4x12 cab is loaded with Celestion G12H-30s

6. The accompanying Dunlop Fuzz Face is a silicon circuit version, in line with Hendrix's Woodstock-era rig



4



5



6





Gas Supply

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

Gibson ES-335 50s & 60s £3,099

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 444 27661** WEB **www.gibson.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

T-Type Pickups

The new ES-335 60s features T-Type humbucking pickups, "a nod", says Gibson, "to the T-Top pickups made between 1966 and 1979". To nail that era-correct tone, the T-Types use the same polysol wire and Alnico V magnets as their original inspiration.

Okay, they're 335s, but what's new here?

Well, if you've looked at Les Paul Standards recently, you'll know that the starting point in your buying options is the era. Your choice of either Standard 50s or 60s will govern the neck profile, pickup and finish options available (among other things). Now, in a move that has the guitar industry asking, 'Why didn't they do that sooner?', Gibson has just rolled out its latest line of ES-335 models, and it's applied the same thinking with the ES-335 50s and 60s.

Right! Yeah, that makes sense.

It does, and here we get two flavours of ES-335, each with its own era-correct features and appointments. Both 50s and 60s instruments are made in Gibson's Nashville factory and at their core offer a lot of similarities, along with plenty of variation, too. Both models share the same three-ply laminate maple/poplar/maple body construction and, of course, they're fitted with maple centre blocks to help increase sustain

and control feedback. The necks are mahogany on each model, but that's where things start to deviate.

What are the differences?

As with a Les Paul, there are the immediately obvious spec changes. Starting with the neck profiles, the 50s features a rounded C for that palm-filling clubby neck. But if you're not a fan of the chunk, the 60s offers the ubiquitous SlimTaper profile for greater manoeuvrability. It's all subjective, but the keyword here is 'choice'. In both cases, the 'boards are rosewood.

So it's just the neck?

Definitely not! Next up are the pickups. In the 50s model we get Custombuckers, Alnico III-equipped pickups for a lower, warmer output, while the 60s model comes with T-Types, which are based on the classic T-Tops and are powered by Alnico V magnets for a little more bite. Both flavours are wired to the traditional two-volume/two-tone/three-position selector switch control layout.

ES-335

As the quintessential semi-hollow design, the ES-335 is one of the most revered electric guitars in history, and now Gibson is offering it as a choice of two standard models designed to reflect either the 1950s (three models below left) or 1960s ES era (three below right)

CONSTRUCTION

While there are a number of other design points that set these two apart, both share the same core construction with a maple/poplar/maple body, mahogany necks, rosewood fingerboards and an ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge

NECK & PICKUPS

Two of the differentiators between the 50s and 60s ES-335s are the neck shapes and pickups. The 50s version has a fatter neck profile and ships with Alnico III-powered Custombuckers, while the 60s features a SlimTaper neck and hotter T-Type humbuckers



As with a Les Paul, there are the immediately obvious spec changes, from neck profiles and pickup choices, to 'board inlays, tuners and scratchplate designs

I can see dots and blocks, too...

Yep. Again, there's a choice between the two eras of ES-335 design: dots for the 50s model, and Gibson's small-block inlays on the 60s model. If you're used to identifying Gibsons at a glance, you'll doubtless clock the difference in tuners (Vintage Deluxe with plastic Keystone buttons on the 50s offering, chrome Grover Rotomatics on the 60s). The scratchplates are different, too, with the 50s model featuring the longer '59-style 'plate versus the stubbier, curvier version on the 60s model.

What about the finish options?

There are six in total, split evenly with three for each model. For the ES-335 50s you can choose between Ebony, Vintage Tobacco Burst and Natural (below left). Meanwhile, the 60s is offered in Dark Walnut, Sixties Cherry and Vintage Burst (below right). Both come with a Gibson hardshell case, and all models and finishes are priced at £3,099. They're available now. [SW]

FINISHES

Of course, there are colour differences, too, and each model comes in a choice of three finishes: Ebony, Vintage Tobacco Burst and Natural for the 50s; Dark Walnut, Sixties Cherry and Vintage Burst for the 60s



ALSO OUT NOW...

PJD MICROTONAL NECKS £299

If you've spent any time online over the past couple of months, there's every chance you've come across Canadian duo Angine De Poitrine and guitarist Khn's microtonal fretboard. To some, it's a polka-dot-covered tribute to how Primus might sound after binge-watching *The Clangers*; to others, it's a unique musical movement. Andertons and PJD have spotted an opportunity and have teamed up to offer drop-in replacement necks for Fender Player series Strats that should require no modification: simply unscrew your old neck and attach it straight to your guitar. They're maple, with a C-shape profile, 648mm (25.5-inch) scale rosewood fingerboard, 304.8mm (12-inch) radius, Gotoh SD91 tuners and more frets than you ever knew you needed.

www.andertons.co.uk



PRS SE ED SHEERAN HOLLOWBODY I PIEZO BARITONE £1,449

Following the release of the 'Cosmic Splash' model late last year, PRS has now announced a second signature electric with Ed Sheeran and it's brimming with features. The clue is in the name with the PRS SE Ed Sheeran Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone, which offers a 703.5mm (27.7-inch) baritone scale length, combined with PRS's Hollowbody I maple/mahogany body design. It's loaded with a pair of 85/15 'S' humbuckers but also includes an under-saddle piezo pickup that can be blended or split thanks to the guitar's dual output. It's offered in the three below finishes (top to bottom) – Kaleidoscope, Pink Ombre and Orange Tiger Smokeburst – and comes with a padded PRS gigbag for protection in transit.

www.prsguitars.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: The Zac Schulze Gang

Album: *Straight To It* (Ruf Records)



Straight To It is the debut from the Gillingham-based trio featuring Ant Greenwell on bass, Ben Schulze on drums and Zac Schulze on guitar www.zacschulzegang.rocks

You can check out the Zac Schulze Gang on tour in the UK from 10 to November 2026 and 23 February to 4 March 2027. Tickets available from www.zacschulzegang.rocks/tour

With their red-hot blend of influences including AC/DC, Rory Gallagher and Gary Moore, The Zac Schulze Gang are fast becoming one of the UK's hottest new blues acts. Their debut album, *Straight To It*, certainly lives up to its name, with the hunger and urgency of a young band cranking things up and trying to leave their mark on the world. And though he's only 26 years old, frontman Zac Schulze is the kind of player who is on a mission to bring vintage sounds kicking and screaming into the modern age.

Big Guns

As with a lot of younger players, it was Joe Bonamassa who exposed Zac to the musicians ruling the world in the 70s and 80s. "I'd been playing for a year when my dad bought me the DVD of Joe playing the Royal Albert Hall in 2009," says Zac. "That's what turned me onto the blues; for people my age it was easy to relate to. That made me want to find out more about who inspired him as a player. Gary and Rory were the two I found with so much energy in their playing, as well as feel. With so many people out there doing the Stevie Ray thing, the Gary and Rory style felt a bit more unique."

In The Flesh

Aside from the vocals, the debut album was recorded live to capture the trio's natural energy. For Zac and band, it

was a case of staying true to themselves and recording something they could actually deliver on stage. "We wanted to keep it upbeat," says Zac. "There might be one or two tracks that are a bit lower in energy, but we did it all live apart from the vocals and wanted to keep that sound. In the past, I've gone into the studio and ended up recording 170 parts in one song. But what's the point in doing that if you can't pull it off live?"

Straight & Narrow

It was a simple tonal recipe for the recordings: one main guitar and one amp, with just a simple overdrive in front. "The main guitar was my Strat, which has a 1978 Fender neck with a Japanese Squier Silver Series body," Zac says. "I ended up getting the guitar on eBay for £120. Me and my dad went to pick it up from a woman's house and it turns out it was her ex-husband's. Somewhere out there is a guy wondering where his Strat went [laughs]! Lee from Green Pickups in Manchester then made me some custom pickups. We plugged it into an Orange Rockerverb with an Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer for more gain."

Take Control

With such a simple rig, Zac uses the controls on the guitar itself to dial in the tones. "A lot of magic happens through working the volume," he says. "I use the drive channel but clean it up through my guitar. That's how Clapton and Page used to do it back in the day. I use a fair amount of gain, so I have to control my signal. John Mayer once said something along the lines of, 'You end up sounding like yourself when you fail to sound like the people you're trying to sound like.' That quote really resonated with me."

Fire & Water

From the new songs, *Betterland* is the one that Zac chooses as his proudest achievement: "I wanted to base that solo on *All Right Now* by Free where it goes from a bass break into something melodic," he says. "I started with something Clapton-esque in B minor and then went for a major/minor mix, almost like how Chris Buck plays. It's a solo that builds, it goes somewhere. The same goes for *Angeline*; those two songs are more pop-rock than blues. Sometimes it's nice to play over music with more chordal elements to it." **[AS]**

Standout track: *I Won't Do This Anymore*

For fans of: Rory Gallagher, Gary Moore, Joe Bonamassa



PHOTO BY HALUK GURER



"In the past, I've ended up in the studio recording 170 parts in one song. But what's the point in doing that if you can't pull it off live?"

BLUES DELUXE

Zac on the greatest guitar tone ever caught on tape

"I think *Bad Penny* by Rory Gallagher would have to be up there because it sounds exactly like how it should sound – a battered old Strat going through a Vox AC30. I had the pleasure of playing through that amp before it got auctioned off. If you have a great song with a great tune, you've basically won. It's such a powerful tone – kind of woody but also very in your face. Similar things could be said of [Gary Moore's] *Still Got The Blues*, it was just perfect. It wouldn't have sounded the same on a Telecaster through a Twin."



Albums

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



Roger and Pete rock
the Eden Project

PHOTO BY BRIAN ROBINSON

The Who

Live At Eden Project

earMUSIC (available now)



Classic rockers raise the roof at Cornish landmark

If someone had spoken to Pete Townshend when The Who's epic live album, *Live At Leeds*, was released in 1970 and told him that one day the band would perform with an orchestra at an eco visitor attraction in Cornwall, he would probably have told them that it was never going to happen. Skip forward 53 years and that's precisely what occurred and, fortunately, the whole event was captured for posterity.

Backed by the Heart of England Philharmonic Orchestra, Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend took to the stage at the Eden Project amid the glowing biomes one balmy July evening to rock the Cornish venue's socks off. With a band that included the explosively Moon-alike Zak Starkey on drums and Pete's brother Simon on guitar and backing vocals, the setlist kicks off with a selection of tracks from *Tommy*, the orchestra embellishing Townshend's classic rock opera every step of the way. Tracks like *1921*, *The Acid Queen*, the immortal *Pinball Wizard* and *We're Not Gonna Take It* still manage to kick up the dust in the same way they did when the original album was released back in '69.

The rest of the set tracks The Who's career, focusing on big hitters like *Baba O'Riley*, *5.15*, *Behind Blue Eyes*, *Who Are You* and *Won't Get Fooled Again*, and prove that, even in the first quarter of the 21st century, The Who is still a formidable force to be reckoned with. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Who Are You*

For fans of: The Rolling Stones, The Kinks

Keb' Mo'

The Breakdown

Concord Records (available 21 August)



Blues master releases his most intimate album to date

When Keb' Mo' was rushed into a medical centre for emergency heart surgery in 2024, nobody knew that it would end up with him releasing an album of 10 songs that are his most stripped-down and confessional to date. And as if the surgery wasn't enough, the era also marked the break-up of his 20 year marriage. "It felt like everything in my life was breaking down," Keb' says. "My health, my relationship, my whole world. The only way I knew how to respond was to break the music down, too." The result is *The Breakdown*, which sees Keb' accompany himself on acoustic guitar with just the occasional contribution from the Soweto Gospel Choir and gospel sextet Take 6. It's a beautiful set of songs from the five-time Grammy winner as the bare intimacy draws the listener in and hits the emotional bullseye every time. Superb. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Walking On Water*

For fans of: Eric Bibb, Taj Mahal

Gentle Giant

In A Glass House (2026 Remix)

Madfish (available 31 July)



Long-awaited rebirth of 1970s prog masterpiece

In recent years many of Gentle Giant's albums have been reissued with Steven Wilson remixes, but *In A Glass House* was noticeably absent, due to the original 24-track master tapes having gone missing. However, recent advances in AI technology have made it possible to extract the individual stems from a stereo master – the same tech that was used at Abbey Road to remix The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's* – and that is exactly what is in play here. Grammy-winning producer Eber Pinheiro and GG vocalist Derek Shulman have undertaken the hi-tech remix and managed to deliver a 2026 version that outshines the original in every sense. There's greater stereo separation, more depth and punch; the instruments positively sparkle and glow in their reimagined soundscape. An amazing refurbishment of a 1973 prog classic. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Experience*

For fans of: Yes, Pink Floyd



German duo are back with another dose of Americana

Carl Carlton & Melanie Wiegmann

Miles of Time

Timezone Records (available 17 July)



Duo delivers some classy Americana

Carl Carlton has worked extensively in the late Robert Palmer's band, plus being a sideman for artists that include Joe Cocker, Eric Burden and Paul Young, to name a few. Meanwhile, his partner Melanie Wiegmann is an actress and singer, and this is the second album the pair has released, the first being *Glory Of Love* in 2023. Accompanied by Wayne P Sheehy (Hothouse Flowers, Ronnie Wood Band) on drums and Yoyo Röhme (Bad Seeds) on bass and keyboards, the music veers from Americana anthems such as opener *Crazy Love*, through to covers like Joni's *Both Sides Now* and all-out country rockers including *Daddy's Little Pumpkin*. Every track has a country rock slant to it, with deftly played acoustic guitars acting as the cohesive element that binds the music together. All in all, an excellent ride. **[DM]**

Standout track: *This Time Tomorrow*

For fans of: The Band, Levon Helm, Eagles

Robyn Hitchcock

The Confuser

Tiny Ghost Records (available 24 July)



Obliquely brilliant, incisively surreal songcraft

Robyn Hitchcock's music touches on psychedelia but refuses its easy tropes in favour of a surrealism that is as idiosyncratic as the man himself (his previous album titles include *Olé! Tarantula* and *Moss Elixir*), abounding with wiry Telecaster riffs and charmingly oblique lyrics. "You control yourself better than I could ever do... it wouldn't suit me," he declares, with amusing primness, on *Yesterday's Rain*, and that line is somehow a fitting emblem of *The Confuser*, which is – by our count – Hitchcock's 26th studio album. When measured against his brilliant 1981 solo debut, *Black Snake Diamond Role*, the new album finds Robyn (who now lives in Nashville) with a more poised, polished sound and a slightly more melancholic edge on beautiful ballads such as *Ghost In Sunlight* but also harder-rocking numbers, such as the nihilistic funk of *Building From The Ruins*. Arresting, unpredictable and oddly affecting, *The Confuser* is a fine addition to his wayward canon. **[JD]**

Standout track: *My Dead Astronaut*

For fans of: The Soft Boys, David Bowie, Syd Barrett



Performance 3 Guitar Capo

ENGINEERED FOR **PRECISION**
BUILT FOR **PERFORMANCE**

ART® DELIVERS UNRIVALLED
TUNING STABILITY

The Capo Company



www.G7th.com

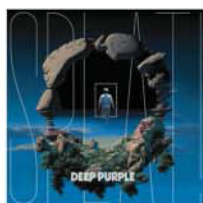


Tones Behind The Tracks

Simon McBride tells us how *Splat!*'s "big, powerful sound" evokes Purple's 70s-era heyday - and is one of their heaviest albums yet

Artist: Deep Purple

Album: *Splat!* (earMusic)



The title of Deep Purple's 24th studio album, *Splat!*, is said to signify a sudden halt in reality and a new consciousness emerging...

Frontman Ian Gillan describes the band's current line-up (left to right: Ian Paice, Don Airey, Roger Glover, Gillan and Simon McBride) as "like a very 'now' version of Deep Purple as it was in the 70s"

Simon McBride has been with Deep Purple for almost four years now, but it was hard for him to believe initially: "During the first year, whenever I'd see my name attached to Deep Purple, I just couldn't make the connection in my brain," he tells *Guitarist*. That feeling carried into McBride's first record, 2024's *=1*, but listening to Deep Purple's latest record, *Splat!* (which, for those keeping score, is the band's 24th studio album) you can tell Simon has properly settled in: "The big thing for me is that things sound powerful," he continues. "It's about everybody playing in unison: like, 'This is a freight train coming at you.' Ritchie [Blackmore] and Jon Lord had that, and Steve Morse and Don [Airey] had it to a certain extent. Steve is a great player, but he's a different sort of player, so that was a big thing for me - to get that big, powerful sound. I have a lot of amps, but for most of the Purple stuff I use my live rig, which is the [Neural DPS] Quad Cortex. I can hear a lot of Ritchie Blackmore fans crying out, going, 'No! He's using digital stuff!' But it's brilliant."

Fans and critics alike are calling this the band's heaviest record in decades - with echoes of Purple's early 70s output. "Everyone is in good form and we're looking forward to doing [more of] what we love. These guys have been doing this since the 60s non-stop, so it does mean a lot [to play alongside them]. I just get on with it, but my name is attached to Deep Purple's legacy now, which is a great achievement. I'm proud of that."

***Splat!* is touted as Purple's heaviest record in ages. What sent you in that direction?**

"There wasn't any sort of board meeting: you put the five of us in a room and that's what came of it. A lot of people say it's heavy like old Deep Purple, and my background is that 80s hard-rock thing, so I guess that contributed to it. What you hear came from the first writing session. There was no intention of making this like an early Deep Purple record, like *Machine Head*. If you go into it with that attitude, you'll just come up with a load of shit [laughs]. We just went into a room and started jamming and having fun."

"We're at a stage now - especially with me being the 'new guy' in the band - where we're very relaxed around each other and comfortable. There's a clear difference between this record and my first record, *=1*. With the first record, there was a lot of pressure that I put on myself to try and make it fucking brilliant [laughs]. But with this one, I didn't really give a shit. I was like, 'Just play and we'll see what happens.'"

What gear discoveries have you come across since joining Deep Purple?

"I had to change my sound a bit because you're dealing with Don Airey, who plays keys, the Hammond and Leslie, and a Marshall head and cabinet. He's in a very similar frequency range to guitar, so I had to figure something out to make the guitar sound more powerful. So I was talking to the guys at Engl, who made Steve Morse's signature amp - it has too many buttons for me, but it's a great head. Engl gave me an Artist Edition head and I asked them to tweak it and put a lot more power in the lower mids and low-end. I knew the Leslie and Hammond didn't have that, so that could be my little space and would cut through but also make me sound powerful when we play a riff together."

Are you still mainly relying on PRS guitars?

"Yes. I played everything on this record with a prototype from PRS. The idea is that there's no truss rod. It goes back to the early days when guitars had no truss rods because I'm a firm believer that if you put a truss rod in a guitar, it sucks the tone and sustain out of it. This guitar is like an animal. It's hard to control because there's so much natural sustain, and I don't do high-output pickups. Acoustically, there's such a difference without the truss rod. [The neck] must be the strongest piece of wood they could find because it doesn't bend at all."



PHOTO BY OLAF HEINE

"[Deep Purple] is going to stop one day and that will be it. But at the moment, we'll just keep going and doing what we love"

"When we were in the studio, [producer] Bob Ezrin was recording and I changed to a different guitar. Within five seconds, he stopped the tape and said, 'There's something wrong...' I said, 'I changed the guitar...' Bob said, 'I don't like it. Give me the other one back.' It's such a versatile-sounding guitar. It's not for public release yet; Paul [Reed Smith]'s been working on it.

"Aside from that, I could get started on pedals, but we'll be here all day..."

Oh, please do.

"I use the same sound for rhythm and lead. The only difference is that I put a line booster on; I use a Jam Pedal called a Boomster, strictly for clean boost. I use a lot of Boss delays and reverbs, and I have an old [MXR] Phase 90. But the most interesting thing – and this is something that not a lot of people would expect Purple to be using – is a DigiTech Ricochet. It's like a Whammy pedal but an automatic one. I use that for crazy stuff, for little splashes of colour here and there."

What's the story behind the opening track, *Arrogant Boy*?

"That song started when we played live, and I did my little guitar solo in the middle of the gig – I do this really fast alternate picking to get the crowd going. In the studio I started that, Don joined in and all of a sudden the main riff for *Arrogant Boy* appeared. I remember Roger [Glover] telling me that *Highway Star* was kind of the same thing. But I love *Arrogant Boy*, it's really self-indulgent instrumental stuff from Don and me!"

How about *Diablo*?

"That started when Don and I were playing around. I think Don wrote the initial riff on keyboard and when it came to the verse section, that's where I started playing this simple pattern. When I'm writing riffs, I always try to keep them simple. Once you overcomplicate stuff, you lose that drive and excitement."

How did Keith Urban end up on the track?

"The studio we recorded in was owned by Keith [in Nashville], and we said to him, 'Why don't you guest play a solo on one of the tracks?' Keith was well up for doing it, so he worked out a solo section. I remember on one of Steve Lukather's records, he, Steve Stevens and Jan Hammer did this round-about of solos and I thought that was cool. I thought, 'Let's have that

The new record features Simon McBride's prototype PRS, whose defining characteristic is its lack of truss rod: "This guitar is like an animal," he says. "It's hard to control because there's so much natural sustain"

here with the two guitarists and the keyboards,' and it worked out pretty well. Keith has a different sound to me. He has more of an older, kind of vintage vibe. Once [Ian] Gillan put the vocal on it, it turned into a real song. Because with all these songs, they're all instrumentals in my head until I hear the final mix."

What's your personal favourite guitar moment of yours from *Splat!*?

"Probably *Jessica's Bra*. Don't ask me why it's titled that [laugh.] I think it was supposed to be 'Jessica's Bar', but it got switched around and Gillan loved that, so we kept it. I'd forgotten to do a solo while I was in Nashville with the band. I got home and Bob Ezrin had emailed me, saying, 'You need to do a solo...' I don't know what possessed me, but I played all this different stuff that I never would have done, like tapping and sliding, and I think that's because I listened to the whole song with words. That inspired me."

What's next for you and Deep Purple?

"With Purple, there's talk of another record, so we won't stop. This year, we're on tour until December and we have another 86 shows. And next year, we have shows booked as well, so it's pretty busy. It's going to stop one day and that will be it. But at the moment, we'll just keep going and doing what we love, which is writing and playing music."

"As for my own thing, I've just finished an instrumental record that's about to be mixed, so it'll probably be out maybe later this year or early next year. I may do a few shows with that... if I can play it because it's pretty crazy [laughs]." **[AD]**



Deep Purple's latest studio album, *Splat!*, is released on 3 July via earMusic

<https://deeppurple.com>



PHOTO BY OLAF HEINE



Old Is The New New

Neville Marten digs out a few old guitars that were moved to the back burner and discovers some great players and fond memories, too

I can't believe it's 10 years since the Fender Custom Shop built Gary Moore's signature '60/'61 Fiesta Red Strat. I knew that guitar because Gary let me play it a few times, then I got to demo it alongside the remake for the magazine. That guitar had one of the nicest Strat necks I've ever played. It was slender at the nut and, with those big frets, could do almost anything – especially in Gary's hands.

"Both needed a new set of strings and a good clean-up, but it was like finding a jacket you haven't worn for years and it's all fresh and new"

At exactly the same time that John Cruz was working on Gary's, and as a matter of pure coincidence, I also got the Custom Shop to make me a red one. I stress that mine was done by the team, not by a Master Builder. I'd seen various people playing red Strats and it reminded me of the first one I ever played – my mate Davy's up in Alnmouth, Northumberland in about 1965.

When my guitar arrived it was perfect. I'd specified exactly what I wanted and instantly it became my go-to guitar, and remained so for a good five years. Then I started messing around with P-90 Les Pauls,

Telecasters, ES-335s and so on, as well as a maple-necked sunburst Strat that I'd put Bare Knuckle Trilogy Suite pickups in.

Acoustic-wise, my sofa noodler is a Martin OM-42 on which I do my James Taylor impressions. It's lovely, simple but very elegant. The exact opposite is a big, bold Taylor that Marty Wilde presented to me for 40 years in his band. Marty custom-ordered it in 1996 after seeing my Taylor 912-C, with its glorious inlay work round the body, the soundhole and up the neck. But he wanted a J-200 sized, non-cutaway version so Taylor built it specially. Inside it simply says 'Jumbo Custom' and is signed 'Robert Taylor'. It's a very cool thing indeed.

Just the other day I had reason to pick up both guitars and play them. I needed to learn a couple of things and they were to hand. Both needed a new set of strings and a good clean-up. It was like they were brand-new again – like finding a jacket you haven't worn for two years and it's all fresh and new. I tweaked the Strat's pickups as they were a little on the high side, and shimmed the Taylor's bridge to lift the action a bit. That guitar has become really rich and vibrant, and I might start using it live.

If you have an old favourite that's found its way to the back of the queue for some reason, I'd heartily recommend you do the same. It really cheered me up because it also brought back all the memories of why and how I got the guitars.

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Bonanza!

What? Gretsch Rancher Falcon Jumbo Custom Acoustic/Electric

Where seen? www.andertons.co.uk **Price?** £649

Thinking of my Taylor jumbo got me looking at something equally show-stopping but rather more available. The Rancher Falcon comes in Gretsch White Falcon livery, including gold sparkle binding, an arched solid spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, and the classic Rancher triangular soundhole. The back and sides are maple, and the neck is maple with a rosewood fingerboard sporting neo-classic thumbnail inlays. It comes stage ready, too, with an onboard Fishman Isys III pickup and preamp fitted. You can even get an orange one with Filter'Tron pickup and gold Bigsby should this one not be flashy enough!



PHOTO: GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

The Case For Bass

My late brother was a talented bassist. Motown's James Jamerson was his hero, and he'd spend hours playing along to records trying to emulate the great man. When he was out I'd often put on *Diana Ross's Greatest Hits* and do the same. I found it incredibly rewarding and back then I was good enough to play bass in a couple of bands.

When my mate and Marty Wilde bassist Roger Newell died a few years back, I asked his wife if I could purchase the sunburst Precision that had been his stage bass since joining Marty in around 1990. It was originally a JV Squier and he'd had the headstock 'modified', and while I was tweaking my Strat and Taylor I thought I'd check the bass out, too. It needed a wipe over but otherwise it was solid as a rock. Plugging it into my Mustang LTX50 amp (very low volume), I connected my phone and got the Diana album up on Spotify. You know what? I was crap! But I think I'll persevere and try to get the fingers back into that way of thinking.

So, like I said at the beginning, sometimes old is the new new! Got any similar stories? Do let me know. See you next month. **G**



Back In Sync'

This month **Alex Bishop** inherits a 1940s Gretsch archtop and restores it back to its deserved 'gig-worthy' spec

Last year, the workshop received a generous donation of a broken vintage archtop guitar. The owner's brother was a repairer and maker who had sadly passed away before the work could be finished – a project that had been started many years prior. I enthusiastically accepted the challenge of receiving the instrument with a view to getting it over the line and restoring it to its former glory.

Despite being a swing enthusiast and purveyor of early jazz guitars, I had never actually played an original Gretsch Synchronomatic before. This model, built in the 1940s, had been resurrected in the 90s after being overshadowed by the explosion of solidbody electric guitars in the latter half of the 20th century. With Art Deco appointments (and a distinctive 'cat's-eyes' model), the Synchronomatic went toe-to-toe against Gibson's slightly pricier archtops.

This particular item, however, was missing some valuable assets. With no fingerboard, tailpiece or tuners, I would at least be able to rely on reissued hardware, rather than trying to get hold of original components. But the problems didn't end there: with a peeling celluloid headstock veneer, no fingerboard extension and a roughly cut channel for a truss rod (the originals didn't have one), some extensive woodwork would also be in order.

Head On

I decided to start with the damaged headstock veneer. Over the decades, celluloid will experience dramatic shrinkage and, as any restoration expert will know, crumbling bindings and curling veneers all come with the territory. Rather than go for an era-perfect restoration, I opted to upgrade to a wooden ebony veneer. However, there was no way I was going to lose the original cursive 'Gretsch Synchronomatic' logo, so after gently prising off the original veneer, this was precisely cut out with a jeweller's saw, repositioned on the newly restored headstock and inlaid once again.

The condition of the neck gave some clues as to the original repairer's intentions. There was an obvious forward bow in the neck (which the addition of strings would only make more severe), so an adjustable rod was a logical one. Conveniently, my stock two-way truss rods were only a little wider than the groove already cut, so after planing the neck surface level, a swift pass with my router was all that was needed to clean up the channel to create the perfect fit.

The elevated fingerboards found on archtops are essential for pitching the neck at the correct angle, but require a separate block beneath the tongue of the fingerboard, set into the top of the neck. I needed to make a replacement one of these, applying finish to the sides before gluing it precisely in place. In



order to provide access to the truss rod I added a channel through this block, providing a discreet access hole just below the fingerboard. This avoided removing lots of material at the headstock end, keeping everything looking a bit more original but with the convenience of being able to adjust the straightness of the neck. No longer would this guitar have to fear a set of flat-wound 13s!

Possibly the biggest challenge for me was replacing the missing pickguard. I decided I would have to leverage a bit of modern technology (for a change!)

"Possibly the biggest challenge was replacing the missing pickguard. I would have to leverage modern technology and turn to CAD software"

and turn to my laptop. Working from Gretsch catalogue pictures, I was able to draw up an outline of the original pickguard in my CAD software, scale it up and then laser-cut a Perspex master template. Offset by 1mm, this would be used to rout out a pickguard from a blank, ready for cream celluloid binding to finish it off.

Although the acoustic sound was surprisingly strong, if this guitar was going to be gig-ready once again the finishing touch would have to be an appropriate pickup. I decided to fit it out with a reissue DeArmond Rhythm Chief, and the quirky 'monkey-on-a-stick' design really suited such an idiosyncratic (or should that read 'idiosyncromatic'?) guitar. Once it was strung up, I was treated to hearing it for the first time in decades. From broken relic to working instrument, it's now ready to do what it was built for: to make music again. **G**

Above left: The archtop originally came to Alex incomplete with no fingerboard, tailpiece or tuners

Above right: Alex painstakingly cut out the original cursive text and repositioned it in the restored headstock



Hybrid Guitars

Sonic expansion or evolutionary dead-end? Acoustic/electric mash-ups can be extraordinary, as **Michael Watts** discovers

As we strive for new and exotic modes of expression, it is no surprise to see players such as Blake Mills, Molly Tuttle, Tim Henson and Tosin Abasi reaching for hybrid guitars in search of inspiring sounds and blended textures. While the origins of the acoustic guitar and its electric sibling are relatively well documented (with enough ambiguity to maintain the mystique), less has been written about the sub-genre of weird and wonderful instruments that has resulted from chimeric collisions of the two worlds. This potted history will attempt to fix that...

Necessity being the mother of invention, hybrid guitars are intended to offer the player access to 'acoustic' sound and playing experience, coupled with the comfort and feedback resistance of a solid or thinline body. While the Danelectro convertible 1959 – a hollow Masonite guitar with a lipstick pickup mounted in its soundhole – and the heroically hideous Burns Steer with its Chris Eccleshall active electronics deserve honourable mentions, the first real hybrid guitar was brought to us by Gibson guitars in partnership with one of the world's leading fingerstyle players: Chet Atkins.

Frustrated by the primitive options available when amplifying acoustic steel-string and classical guitars, Atkins approached Gibson with a new concept – a solidbody design with an acoustic voice that would allow him to turn things up. The resulting nylon-string

Gibson Chet Atkins CE/CEC hit the market in 1982, with its steel-string equivalent SST model joining five years later. It remains a favourite of players such as Mark Knopfler, David Gilmour, Johnny Marr, Lindsey Buckingham and Sting. With an average weight of 7lb, the Chet Atkins is significantly lighter than a Les Paul but still cumbersome for players more used to an acoustic, and while its piezo-driven voice is far from a natural acoustic sound, it still works well in a full band.

For many years the Gibson Chet Atkins model was the only viable option in an extremely niche market. Granted, legendary Bay Area luthier Rick Turner had designed his iconic Model 1 with Fleetwood Mac guitarist Lindsay Buckingham in 1979, but it was only later that he would add a piezo bridge option before launching his Renaissance acoustic electric model in the 1990s.

In 1993 a big ripple hit the hybrid-guitar world with the Parker Fly. Created by the late, great Ken Parker and Larry Fishman, the Fly featured a carbon-fibre exoskeleton over a tonewood core and was arguably the first production electric guitar to combine active piezo electronics with magnetic pickups. Finding immediate favour with players such as Eddie Van Halen, Joni Mitchell and Reeves Gabrels, the Parker Fly was a revolutionary instrument, but as Ken Parker himself said, "We were making a \$10,000 guitar and selling it for \$3,000."

Rick Turner's versatile Model 1 became Lindsey Buckingham's main stage guitar from 1979: "Leave the Les Paul, the Strat and the Ovation at home," Lindsey is reported to have said on trying the instrument. "This is all I need now!"



Double Design

As radical as it may have been, the production Parker Fly was actually a corporate compromise. In a conversation with Ken Parker in Colorado, he showed me his 1987 prototype for the Fly, which was no more than 10mm at its thickest point with most of it being substantially thinner. "The idea was to create a guitar that had the top of an archtop without the back and sides, so it was designed to be a resonant structure... reflective and conservative of energy, which means that it sustains a long time," Ken said. "This is pretty close to what I was hoping to manufacture at the Parker Guitars factory... but it was decided that we couldn't use non-standard magnetic pickups [so the production models were a lot thicker]. I have to be honest and say it was a little bit of a bummer... Here I am trying to make this magical new thing and they wanted me to incorporate heavy, dopey pickups that were made in the 50s. Anyway, I got over it and we produced the Parker Fly."

By the mid-1990s other brands had woken up to the musical potential (albeit coupled with limited commercial appeal) of hybrid instruments – bridge-mounted piezo systems were becoming increasingly common in guitars aimed at session players and experimental heads looking for new textures – and the big names such as Fender and PRS were starting to get properly involved.

In a rare break from its acoustic line-up Taylor Guitars launched the hybrid T5 model in 2005, which combined



Taylor active electronics with one or more lipstick pickups like the old Dano Convertible. It was later superseded by the T5z, which features a smaller body and remains in production today.

Perhaps the most outlandish hybrid design of the early 21st century was the somewhat short-lived Line 6 Variax acoustic. This solidbody electric with soundhole offered digitally modelled acoustic sounds including banjo and sitar, as well as access to altered tunings with some clever pitch-shifting. Yamaha also gave the hybrid a shot with the launch of its Silent guitars, which,

On his quest for sonic improvement, Chet Atkins tasked Gibson to create a hybrid of an electric solidbody and classical guitar. The resulting nylon-string Chet Atkins CE (and its later steel-string sibling) found favour with other big-name players such as Mark Knopfler

“The hybrid intends to offer access to ‘acoustic’ sound and playing, with the comfort and feedback resistance of a solid or thinline body”

although mainly aimed at the quiet-practice/travel-guitar market, make superb hybrid instruments. However, for some years the alternative choice was a luthier-made marvel, which includes Rolf Spuler’s Paradis model or Uli Teuffel’s Antonio.

Things changed in 2019 when Fender debuted the Acoustasonic Telecaster, with the Stratocaster arriving in 2020 and the Jazzmaster following the year after. These guitars had been created by a team that included Brian Swerdfeger, who was instrumental in the design of the original Taylor T5, chief engineer and pickup guru Tim Shaw, and Larry Fishman, who had played a vital role in the world of acoustic amplification for decades. Available in various formats and often including modelled sounds and textures, some even overdriven, the Acoustasonic range is currently the number one choice of many guitarists entering the hybrid world.

At first glance, hybrid guitars may have limited appeal – not everyone wants to play a loud acoustic after all – but those players who do use them extensively find them to be expressive and engaging instruments that can offer new and inspiring sounds. Try one for yourself! **G**

THREE TO GET READY

A smart trio of acoustic-electric guitars



Fender American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster £1,799

Yes, you can get a Telecaster or Stratocaster version, but wouldn't you prefer an achingly cool offset? Featuring a triple active pickup system, internal resonance and a plethora of different acoustic voices, this is a great choice. Fender's Acoustasonic range instruments are currently top dogs for a reason. This model even has a semi-usable unplugged sound for texture work in the studio.

www.fender.com



Parker Fly Circa £3k

Now only available on the secondhand market (because Parker Guitars closed in 2016; pictured here is the Parker DragonFly DF524 offshoot), the Fly is perhaps the apogee of the hybrid-guitar idea with its carbon-fibre exoskeleton, custom-made DiMarzio or Seymour Duncan pickups (depending on the model) and the active piezo bridge. The top horn may poke you in the moob, but you do get whammy bar dips with an acoustic sound – so it all pans out nicely.



Yamaha SLG200 Series Silent Guitar From £716

Available in both nylon- and steel-string (pictured) configurations, the Yamaha Silent guitar models are much more than quiet practice tools – they're lightweight, well designed and have a great plugged-in sound with internal reverb and chorus effects. A future update with Bluetooth connectivity would be very welcome, but in the meantime you can still have a very nice time indeed.

uk.yamaha.com



Recycled Chord Shapes

Richard Barrett shakes up conventional fretboard positions and finds some interesting new sounds from familiar chord shapes

As guitar players, we rely on shapes and patterns – consciously or not. This includes both scales and chords. Some chord shapes are described as ‘movable’, meaning they can be relocated to anywhere on the fretboard with predictable results. Conversely, others – usually shapes including open strings – are not described in this way, implying that they only work in one position.

Regular readers will know that we frequently test this imaginary boundary by taking such shapes and moving them to different positions, often with surprising and pleasing results. In this case, rather than starting in a conventional position then moving the shape, we’ve gone straight to a non-standard position – hence the term ‘recycled’.

The shape looks familiar, but the sound is not. Sometimes this can result in a complex-sounding name, but if we’re inspired by the sound this is just a detail. Coincidentally, three of these are add2 chords, so clearly this isn’t always the case. **G**

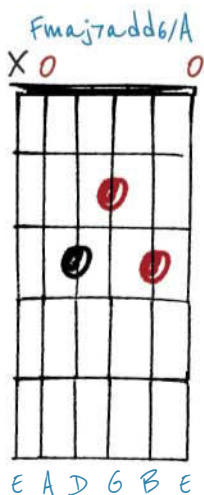
Gaz Coombes of Supergrass uses the recycled G shape Cadd2 in many of the band’s songs



PHOTO BY ASTRID VALIGORSKY/GETTY IMAGES

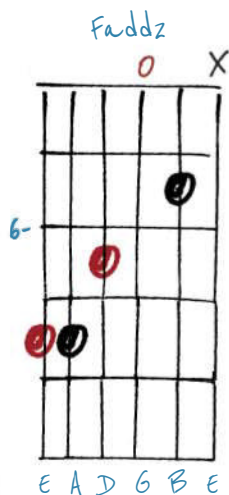
Example 1

By moving an Amaj7 up a fret/semitone, we get this jazzy Fmaj7add6/A chord. The name can be distracting – and there are other ways this could be approached, perhaps A with an augmented 5th and a sus4? But what’s important is the sound: Jimmy Page appears to have thought so when he used this chord in *Ten Years Gone*.



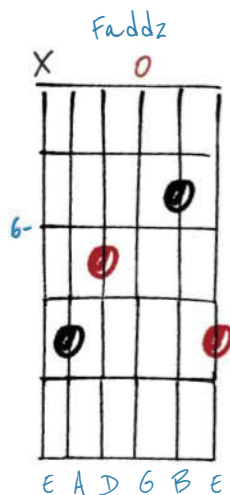
Example 2

By recycling a C major shape and moving it to the 8th position, we get this Fadd2 courtesy of the G on the open third string. If we were to allow the high E/first string to sound, this could add a maj7, too, but we’ve opted to keep things a little more concise for this example.



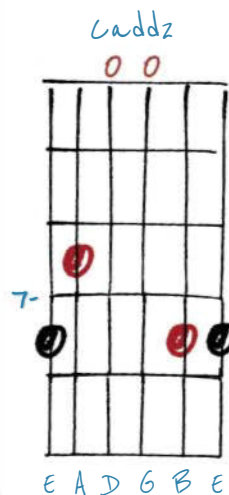
Example 3

Another take on Example 2, this is also an Fadd2 but with an extra high C (the 5th) added on the first string. We’ve sacrificed the sixth string for this, but we get a chord with extra detail in the high end. Steve Howe moves this shape around to great effect during the ‘Würm’ section of *Starship Trooper* by Yes.



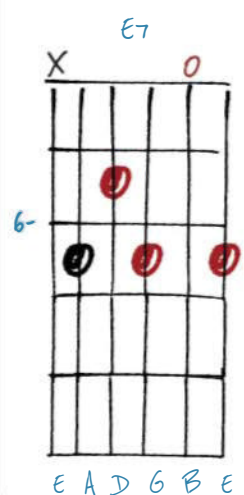
Example 4

This recycled G shape gives us this Cadd2 when moved to the 8th position. This chord has found its way into the songs of Supergrass, The Pretenders and Rush. For clarity on the name, an add2 means that the 3rd of the chord (in this case E) is present. In sus2 chords, the 3rd is replaced by the sus note.



Example 5

Taking a B7 chord and shifting it to the 7th position gives us this jangly E7. While we can’t think of an obvious example of this one in use, there will be a song out there somewhere... The open second string (B) fits in here perfectly, giving us the 5th of the chord.





TAS3C

TRANSACOUSTIC

INSPIRATION
MEETS
INNOVATION

LOOPING FUNCTIONALITY
BLUETOOTH AUDIO CAPABILITY
DELAY REVERB CHORUS



LEARN MORE



Feedback

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

STAR LETTER

ONE, OR MORE?



I recently posted pictures of my 15 guitars on a well-known social media site, asking readers to pick their favourite three. My collection is made up of largely affordable and used guitars (Squiers to Epiphones, many with US electronics, the odd Hamer and Yamaha, up to American-made Fenders). My post got over 200,000 views and about 1,000 comments, many of which bluntly said, "Sell them all and buy a good guitar." The cheek!

It got me thinking, though: would I ultimately be more satisfied owning a couple of 'good guitars' over my collection of midrangers? The answer is no. I can genuinely say I get something unique out of every single one of my guitars and I love having such a variety at my fingertips.

Brian Riordan

Thanks for your thoughts, Brian. As we've observed before in these pages, it's your connection with the guitar that matters, not the high-end credentials. From JV Squiers to PRS SE instruments such as the recent David Grissom model from that affordable line, there is no shortage of proof great guitars need not cost thousands.

What can be said of high-end guitars, perhaps, is that the chances of random variables conspiring to make a guitar mediocre are reduced because a highly experienced luthier or team of craftspeople has taken personal care of all the details, from wood selection to fret-dressing, in a way that would be hard to replicate on a mass production line. But, boy, do modern production-line guitars from quality makers give those higher-end instruments a run for their money. Tonally, for example, Epiphone's Inspired By Gibson electrics, especially the ones with the USA-made Alnico III Custombuckers, have sounded brilliant. Only an insecure guitarist mocks others for their 'lesser' gear and, in many cases, they have no idea what they're missing.

KORG

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg PitchStrap strap-mounted tuner!
www.korg.co.uk



CHORD CHEMISTRY

The first thing I do on receiving my copy of *Guitarist* each month is to try out Richard Barrett's 'Substitute', to check out if there's anything interesting. I was feeling a certain kind of way when issue 538 arrived just a few days after my sister passed away; nevertheless, I needed distraction so gave them my usual trial. 15 minutes later, after playing the F#maj11, I had a tone poem in my sister's memory fully mapped out (plus another 20 minutes to refine some of the chord inversions). A keyboard-playing friend added some piano and simple choral additions and it was complete. Thanks for the inspiration and the healing that gave me.

Brian Fitch

Firstly, Brian, please accept warmest sympathies from all the *Guitarist* team for your sister's passing – we're sorry for your loss. It's heartening, however, that Richard's column provided some inspiration that helped you remember her through music. We hope you continue to find solace and interest in happier times in these pages.

COLLINGS MYSTERY

I am writing to you regarding a piece of historic guitar provenance. I currently own a rare Collings DS2H 12-fret acoustic guitar, serial number #3217, which was released from the Texas factory on 25 June 1997. According to UK acoustic community lore, the very first DS2H imported into the UK was sent directly on a press tour and was reviewed by Neville Marten in your May 1998 issue. After the review circuit finished, the guitar was sold to a private buyer. Given the exact 1997 factory completion date of my guitar, it lines up perfectly with the print lead times for that historic May 1998 feature.

Could you please check your editorial archives for the May 1998 issue? Specifically, I am hoping you can verify if the small-print 'Spec Check' sidebar or the review text explicitly mentions the serial number of the review unit. If it lists #3217, it would officially confirm that my guitar is the exact instrument Neville Marten praised all those years ago. Thank you so much for your time and for helping me uncover the history of this incredible instrument.

Nic Vocaturo

Neville Marten replies: "I so enjoyed hearing your story, and I think I can confirm that the guitar you own is indeed the one I reviewed all those years ago. I recall thinking it was a rather odd model to put out to the press as a 12-fret dreadnought is a pretty specific instrument – an OM or regular 14-fret dread



would have been the more obvious choice. But I'm glad it was the one it was because I absolutely loved it. It was the first Collings we'd ever seen and I distinctly remember Mick Taylor and I poring over it in awe. We couldn't believe how superbly it was built and how clear and bell-like it sounded. I hope you'll cherish 'our' instrument, which should by now be very well played-in and sounding stupendous."

FAVOURITE SQUEEZE

It doesn't happen very often, but once in a while I catch a glimpse of a guitar model I own, cherish and love in the hands of a guitarist, songwriter and performer I admire and enjoy for their artistry. Thom Yorke I have spied. Billy Bragg, another. And the latest, found between the pages of this esteemed organ (issue 537), Glenn Tilbrook!

My guitar is a 1957 Gibson ES-125T [above right], which I have loved, cherished and owned since 1977. Glenn identifies his guitar as an earlier "late 1940s" build ES-125 (without the T, which denotes 'thinline'). To me, the picture looks much more closely to be an ES-125T: it doesn't appear to have the body depth of a 125, yet the T didn't start production, I understand, until the mid-1950s. It would be interesting to know if there has been a misidentification of Glenn's guitar or if my eyes do, indeed, deceive me?

As with many of these student guitars, mine had the original volume and tone controls robbed and replaced with the 'witch-hat' controls before it came into my possession. And the buttons on the tuners finally disintegrated and had to be replaced, though the machines themselves remain the original Kluson Deluxes. Everything else, the dust and blood from my fingers when losing a plectrum, are all original. It is a beautiful instrument and has given me nigh on 50 years of pleasure, inspiration, solace and joy.

Colin Gardiner

Thanks for your intriguing query, Colin. Looking again at the images of Glenn's guitar, the adjustable poles on the P-90 and the plain dots on its fretboard (that superseded the pearl trapezoid inlays used until the end of the 40s) suggest it is indeed a post-1950 guitar. However, to our eyes, when viewed more closely on the original image the body does look rather more like the full circa 3.5-inch depth of the older full-depth version than the 1.75 inches of the 'T' model. To really answer the question, we'd need to ask Mr Tillbrook to get out a tape measure, however!

PREMIUM SERVICE

I was sad to see that Lyndon Laney had passed away recently. I have three Laney VC30 cathode-biased amps and one of my fleet developed a problem. I emailed Laney support and was quickly replied to with suggestions and help. This didn't solve the problem, despite the free fuse holder, fuses and free postage. The follow-up was to send the amp to them for an out-of-warranty service, which I was informed would cost £80, including carriage to and from Laney. This was duly organised. Laney returned the amp fully serviced and even replaced the control plate with new input jacks as the lettering had faded.

In this day and age I cannot think of a manufacturing service that is so good and customer centric. Hats off to Laney.

Peter Clark

That's as fitting a testament as you'll find to the spirit in which Lyndon Laney established the company and how he operated it for so many years, and his son James is a fine inheritor of those values. Great-sounding amps, too, that have left an inimitable mark on the landscape of rock and metal especially, thanks to Tony Iommi, Billy Corgan, Paul Gilbert and other top guitarists who have made potent use of them over the decades.

Reader Colin Gardner spotted a potential twin to his own 1957 Gibson ES-125T (above) in our recent feature on Glenn Tilbrook's collection (above left). But are they really so many years apart in production?

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



ALAN ENTWISTLE

1947 – 2026

The great electronics designer has died at 79, leaving his retro-modern pickups to echo his genius in countless electric guitars

Words Henry Yates

ALAN ENTWISTLE

January 1947 – April 2026

Last month, all at *Guitarist* were saddened to learn of the loss of a giant figure in guitar electronics, not to mention an unforgettable character who preferred to bill himself as a ‘tone explorer’ or ‘sonic alchemist’, rather than a sober-minded engineer.

“Alan Entwistle – our fearless leader, innovator, guitar and pickup designer, historian, joker, vivid imaginer and very dear friend – has left us,” read the moving Instagram post from James Davies, Entwistle Pickups brand manager and close friend of 35 years. “He really was an amazing person who always lifted any room he entered with his jovial manner and quirky sense of humour.”

Speaking to us last year, Entwistle had sharp memories of the instrument that set him on his path. “The Höfner Galaxie was the first decent guitar I bought. I didn’t have Fender Strat money in my wallet! I went into Reidys in Blackburn – it must have been in 1965 – and they had all sorts of stuff, Voxes, Strats, Shaftesbury... and



Alan Entwistle designed his pickups to incorporate his love for 60s tones at an affordable production cost

“Even at nearly 80, he was still creative and highly motivated, looking forward to what his next range of guitars might be” JAMES DAVIES, ENTWISTLE PICKUPS

there was this Galaxie sat there. It was really nice, clean and, of course, it was red! It looked the business and it was on sale for 55 guineas, so I took it on a two-year hire purchase agreement. I really got into it; it had lots of sounds, different tones.”

As an art school graduate with a knack for wrangling electric setups, by the late 60s, Entwistle was much in demand as a repair man to the blues-boom generation. But he announced his talent for electronics early on – one formative project combined his father’s stereo with a microphone ‘borrowed’ from a public telephone – and rapidly gained a reputation for both his own guitars built from the ground up and the head-turning pickups within them, soon to become highly prized on the aftermarket scene.

Entwistle’s abiding love was for the classic tones of the 60s (he cited Höfner, Framus, Klira, Vox, Mosrite and Burns). But while his retro-modern pickups caught that same vintage character, he also forged ahead with a series of innovative variable tone devices, most

notably the ATN 5 and ATN Tone Shaper. “Think of the ATN as a ‘global’ control,” suggested *Guitarist*’s Dave Burrluck of the passive-circuit rotary control that Entwistle developed in the mid-80s as an evolution of the Gibson Varitone, “that filters and thins the sound progressively as you move through the positions.”

Featured on various respected brands – including Vintage, Revelation and Entwistle’s own Rapier line – the ATN gave modern players close control over his own idiosyncratic pickups. “It’s quite subtle, but it does become more dramatic if you back off your volume control slightly,” he observed. “So if you select bridge and middle, and move the ATN back anti-clockwise one or two positions, it begins to sound like an electro-acoustic and can get very jangly.”

Despite the long hours that went into these technological advances, Entwistle was adamant his products should remain within the budget of everyday players. “Alan never saw the advantage in making unaffordable guitars only available to the

few,” noted the tribute on the Entwistle Pickups website, “as he knew it was possible to produce great products at a much lower cost. This extended to his pickups, where he had no interest in hand-making boutique pickups at astronomical prices, when a well-designed, well-made factory pickup sounded just as good.”

Celebrated as a great British designer, Entwistle nonetheless spent much of his life and career in Eastern Asia and the Southern Hemisphere (where he moved in the late 70s). Sadly, in February 2026, a desperate GoFundMe appeal announced that the veteran designer was in intensive care in China, having suffered a recurrence of the brain tumour he had bravely fought a year earlier, and facing crippling medical bills.

The end came on 30 April, yet there is no doubting Entwistle’s legacy as an all-time electronics visionary, who buzzed with ideas until the very end. “Even at nearly 80, he was still creative and highly motivated, looking forward to what his next range of guitars might be,” concluded Davies’ valedictory post. “Over the last six years, I got to help him develop certain products and learned a wealth of information from him (although probably only a fraction of what he had in his head). I know I will never meet anyone quite like him and that the world is now a sadder place, but I will treasure those times.” 🎸

STEVE CLARKE

1955-2026

A scrupulously accurate expert and author on historic instruments
who authenticated some of the most iconic guitars in the world

Words Jamie Dickson

Everyone at *Guitarist* was deeply saddened to learn the news that Steve Clarke, the vintage guitar expert who authored the *Famous Frets* books, died recently after a short illness. Though not someone who often stepped into the spotlight – at least not without a guitar in his hands – Steve inspected and authenticated some of the most famous guitars in the world, including Rory Gallagher’s 1961 Stratocaster and dozens more in the course of his work with renowned auction house Bonhams and for his reference books.

Like the best experts, Steve’s enthusiasm for his subject went well beyond a mere ‘job’. If it were possible to ‘hear’ the twinkle in someone’s eye over the phone, you could surely do so Steve’s when he called *Guitarist* and said: “Hiya, Jamie, are you sitting down? I think I’ve got something you might be very interested in...”

Though always the soul of discretion when working on high-profile instruments, Steve relished sharing detailed insights on the historic instruments that passed through his workshop whenever he was able to. And, indeed, the list of guitars he worked on over the years was like a roll call of legends: Peter Green’s 1931 National Duolian, Rory Gallagher’s 1961 Stratocaster, Paul Kossoff’s ‘Stripped Burst’ 1959 Les Paul Standard, Gary Moore’s ‘Red Strat’ and many more.

Born in Wythenshawe, Manchester, on 12 March 1955 (in a strange coincidence his two siblings were also both born on 12 March), Steve first fell in love with guitar watching Hank Marvin playing a Strat with The Shadows on *Sunday Night At The London Palladium*.

“He was about nine, maybe 10,” Steve’s wife, Anni Clarke, recalls. “And after he saw that, he actually made a cardboard guitar and drew frets and pickups on it, cut it out in the shape of a Strat with strings on it, and he tried to copy where they placed their fingers. His dad eventually got so sick of hearing Steve try to make guitar noises with his mouth, he said, ‘Do you think you’d take it up if we bought you one?’”

Steve never looked back. After cutting his teeth playing guitar in cabaret acts in working men’s clubs in the North of



“Not only was Steve a master guitar technician, he was also an undercover detective – and he loved the search”

CLAIRE TOLE-MOIR, BONHAMS

England and touring further afield in Europe, he became a pro guitarist just as punk was at its vitriolic height. He played with Manchester band The Drones, who were signed to Quarry management (who also looked after Status Quo) and toured extensively. But while Steve loved the energy of the punk scene, it was not without its perils, Anni Clarke recalls: “I can remember once there was a student union club in Manchester called the Phoenix at the time, and he came off stage after a fantastic show and he actually had to stand under the shower with his clothes on, even his shoes, because he’d been spat at that many times. It was a really exciting time for Steve, but that was a side effect of punk that he wasn’t particularly keen on [laughs].”

Deepening his connection with guitar to include restoration and teching in the years that followed, Steve was prompted to become an author on guitars after writing to *Guitar & Bass* magazine urging them to give more comprehensive details of the famous instruments they covered. To his credit, then-editor John Callaghan invited Steve to provide that very service to the magazine himself. And thus a new career

was born as a scrupulously accurate and insightful writer on historic instruments, the highlight of which was the two-volume *Famous Frets* book series, which offered readers unprecedented detail on guitars belonging to Jan Akkerman, Marc Bolan and many other legendary players. To this magazine’s great benefit, Steve also worked closely with *Guitarist* in later years, becoming a go-to expert on iconic guitars that came his way for authentication via Bonhams – most notably Rory Gallagher’s aforementioned ‘61 Strat.

“I remember the day I told Steve I needed him to pop down to London to look at something special,” recalls Claire Tole-Moir, head of Popular Culture at Bonhams. “I kept him guessing for a few days, before finally revealing it was Rory’s guitar – and he cleared his diary immediately. As with every guitar, he approached it with care and professionalism while taking a closer look at it. It was only at the end of the day when he was heading home, he rang me on the train and freaked out – just a little – that he had had Rory’s Strat in his hands that day. Like so many guitarists, for him, Rory was *it*. It was a humbling moment, and a day I know he treasured.

“Steve’s encyclopaedic knowledge about all vintage guitars was incredible,” Claire reflects. “But so was his passion for them – he loved understanding the history of a guitar, where it was used, by who, how the guitarist played and how all of those factors contribute to a guitar’s make-up. Not only was he a master guitar technician, he was also an undercover detective – and he loved the search.”

Anni Clarke agrees but says Steve’s scrupulous honesty about the guitars he inspected was what kept people coming back for his services as a restorer and authenticator, although Steve modestly referred to himself simply as ‘The anorak in the North’.

“He always said, ‘Tell them if it’s right, tell them if it’s wrong,’” Anni recalls, a personal maxim that is a fitting testament to the expertise, honesty and touch of humour that Steve brought to all his work, which was also his lifelong passion. He will be much missed. **G**

Acoustic Guitar Strings by Ernie Ball



Earthwood



ERNIE BALL®

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Laura demonstrate her guitars and pedalboard, plus how internet celebrity pushed her towards the live stage and album success
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>





LAURA COX

Now a fully fledged touring artist with three albums to her credit, Laura tells us about her journey from YouTube stardom to taking her rightful place in the touring spotlight

Words David Mead Photography Lucy Robinson

French guitarist, singer and band leader Laura Cox began her career by posting videos of herself playing classic rock guitar solos on YouTube around 18 years ago, and she was amazed when the views and likes began rising to astronomical levels. Before too long, she'd formed a band, walked out on stage and entered a professional recording studio for the first time to make her debut album, 2017's *Hard Blues Shot*. Since then, she's released another three, including the latest, *Trouble Coming*, from last year.

We spoke to Laura during her UK tour in May this year and were eager to hear about how she went from playing in front of a camera at home to taking centre stage as a headline act.

Tell us about how you began your career online.

"I was around 15 when I started playing the guitar. Then, two or three years afterwards, I was really into watching YouTubers playing covers of classic rock solos, and it was really motivating for me. I thought, 'Okay, I'm gonna do the same. I'm gonna post and maybe get some feedback.' I don't know, I thought it would be fun. I was also a bit introverted, so for me it was easy to do this – easier than form a band and play on stage. So I started uploading videos on YouTube back in 2008, I think.

"At the time there weren't a lot of women doing this – playing rock – and that's why it kind of worked. I didn't have any plans or strategies to get followers or views or anything. I did this on YouTube for years,

but I kind of got stuck into this pattern, you know? I wish I could have started the band earlier because I think I spent maybe eight years on YouTube and I never played with real people. So I think I was missing something, like just jamming and playing with people, sharing music together.”

Comments on YouTube guitar videos can be notoriously vicious. How was your experience?

“A lot of the comments were really positive, really encouraging and motivating. But there was also a few criticising my looks, or almost sexual harassment. But, honestly, for me, it was the internet, it was not real life. I didn’t care and I was really detached from it. And I think that’s a good way to see things because if you start to take every comment really seriously and it gets into your head, it’s not good. YouTube for me was for fun, and sometimes I checked the comments and if they were good, that’s good, and if they were bad, I’m gonna sleep tonight and it’s gonna be okay.”

Who were your influences when you started playing?

“When I started playing the guitar, I was really inspired by Slash, Mark Knopfler and Joe Bonamassa – these were my three guitar heroes – and I spent hours and hours working on their solos, and they kept me motivated. They don’t know the impact they had on me, but they made me the player I am now, for sure. And I have to say that now I’m less into guitar-hero music, and I’m more into songwriting music like in more modern bands, I would say, but I won’t forget that they made me who I am now. I’m really grateful for that.”

When did you put your band together?

“It was a bit more than 10 years ago, around 2014, and thanks to YouTube, this is what helped the project start: we found a label and booker around 2016 and my first album was released in 2017 [*Hard Blues Shot* as the Laura Cox Band], and I think YouTube really helped with this side of things.”

1. After playing Les Pauls for years, influenced by Slash, one of her formative heroes, Laura switched to playing an SG after Gibson invited her to try one. “It’s lighter and it felt good in my hands,” she tells us

What was it like going into the studio for the first time to record an album?

“Horrible! [Laughs] It was a nightmare. Because my only experience of music was playing guitar in my room in front of a webcam where I was alone, so I could re-record and re-record. But playing in the studio, recording an album with a band and engineers and every second is costing me money, I was really stressed. We had a lot of technical difficulties, the gear was falling apart and nothing was working. I was kind of going into depression after the first studio recording because we couldn’t see the end. Every day we were thinking, ‘Okay, we’re late on the schedule, we still have to record this and this,’ and it was never ending. But with the years and the albums coming out it’s getting better and better, and with my latest album I didn’t record it this way in the studio, I recorded a lot at home, and it felt way more comfortable.”

“I had been playing for eight years [and] had gathered a few million views before going on stage, so I had this pressure”

You described yourself as a bit of an introvert.

What was it like actually getting out and playing in front of people?

“It was a fun experience. What was weird is that I waited. I had been playing guitar for eight years before being on stage for the first time. Usually you play guitar, you start a band, and then you play at your high school parties with your band when you’ve just picked up the guitar and you barely know how to play. But, for me, it was different because I had already gathered a few million views before going on stage, so I had this pressure... I mean, all my first experiences in music were stressful, but now I’m trying to be less stressed about everything. At the first concert, I remember we played all the songs very fast – I just wanted the show to be done, you know?”

Let’s talk about your live gear. You’ve recently moved from playing a Les Paul to an SG – why was that?

“This guitar was a surprise for me because I’ve always been a Les Paul girl since I started playing the guitar. I was a big fan of Slash, he got me into playing Les Pauls and I’ve been playing one all my life, basically until two years ago when Gibson told me, ‘We have a new SG coming out. Maybe we can send it to you, just to try,’ you know? At the beginning, I thought, ‘Okay, I don’t need this, I don’t need to try it. I already have what I need.’ But then I told them, ‘Yeah, why not?’ So I got my hands on this guitar and it’s crazy how easy it is to play an SG compared with a Les Paul. Every time I was practising in my living room, when I grabbed the guitar, I took the SG because it’s lighter and it felt good in my hands. So I thought, ‘Okay, maybe I should use it for a gig, just to check,’ and then I didn’t want to give it back to Gibson! So I told them, ‘I’m gonna buy it. I’ll keep it.’”

What’s the main difference between the two models, would you say?

“You have to fight against the Les Paul, I think, to play it. But with the SG everything feels really fluid, really





Laura's 2013 Firebird V has proved to be stark contrast to her SG and other humbucker-equipped guitars and tends to turn heads at gigs. She very nearly sold it recently, but luckily it received a reprieve!



2. Laura keeps her 'board straightforward – the presence of two EarthQuaker Devices Gary fuzz/overdrive pedals is because one is set up for the SG, the other for the Firebird V

easy and natural and comfortable, and you don't have to fight it. So I just went for the easiest way, and once you play an SG on stage, it's hard to go back to the Les Paul. So right now, what I'm doing is switching between the SG and Les Paul Juniors on stage because [the Juniors] are the lighter version of the Les Paul.

"Now I think I've found what I was looking for. So [the SG] has been my main guitar for two years now and the neck feels really perfect. It's not too narrow, not too wide; it just feels good and it lets you play naturally."

"Once you play an SG on stage, it's hard to go back. It's been my main guitar for two years now and the neck feels perfect"

What modifications have you made?

"I changed the pickups. Originally, it had '61 Burstbuckers, which I swapped for Gibson '57 Classic pickups. But I'm still not really satisfied, so maybe I'm gonna switch back. But I really wanted the double white pickups, you know? So I'm gonna check what I can find, but I love the look with the white pickups. I changed the pickguard, too, because it was black originally, and I changed the pots and the knobs. It's mostly for the looks. I'm still looking for a few things, but I feel really, really good playing this guitar on stage, so I think it's going to stay my main guitar for the next few years."

What about the Firebird?

"I bought this one years ago, I believe it's a Firebird [V] from 2013. It's all stock, from what I know. I [haven't] changed anything because it sounds good like this. I wanted a guitar that was a bit different from my

guitars with humbuckers, so I thought, 'Okay, the mini-humbuckers can bring something else to my tone, and to my playing, and to the way I'm writing songs,' and it sounds good with a lot of things I do. It feels really fun to play live with this weird shape. It's always something that people who don't play guitar notice instantly. After the shows it's always, 'Oh that guitar looks so cool!' So, yeah, I love this one. At some point I almost thought I would sell it. And then some people told me, 'Don't do it!' and they were right because I just took it out of the storage again and now I won't let it go."

You're a Marshall endorsee, so what sort of amps do you use live?

"Live, I have two heads, one main and one spare, but they're the Studio Vintage 20. They're really compact but really loud. I used to have the matching cabs, the 2x12 cabs, but I recently changed to a 4x12, a 1960AX cab. The head is only 20 watts, so I was happy to get a bigger cab to have a bit more headroom and fullness to the sound."

Are you looking at recording another album this year?

"Yeah, definitely. I have nothing for now, but the next album should be recorded, hopefully, before the end of the year. After the UK tour, I'm gonna lock myself in my room and try to get some ideas because I don't want to wait too long between the last album and the next one. I really want to keep this inspiring dynamic. I'm really motivated to release new stuff." 



Laura's latest album, *Trouble Coming*, is available now via earMUSIC

www.lauracoxmusic.com



As fan of double white pickups, Laura has modified her SG with a set of '57 Classics, a new scratchplate and revised pots and control knobs



BRIAN ROBERTSON

Scott Gorham has long been the public face of Thin Lizzy. Now, Brian Robertson, the man behind Lizzy's trademark six-string harmonies, gives *Guitarist* his perspective on the band's classic era

Words Rich Davenport & Per Olsson

Some 40 years after the passing of charismatic frontman Phil Lynott, Thin Lizzy's enduring popularity transcends the hard rock genre. Lynott's timeless songwriting, and the contributions of a succession of stellar guitarists, resulted in a catalogue of classic material that's inspired bands as diverse as Metallica and Primal Scream. Lizzy's most celebrated and influential recordings were made between 1974 and 1978, by the line-up of Lynott, drummer Brian Downey and guitarists Scott Gorham and Brian 'Robbo' Robertson.

While Robertson's stint with Lizzy would be tempestuous, his input – both as a lead guitarist and in writing Lizzy's signature twin-guitar harmonies – helped define the band's sound, captured at a coruscating peak on 1978's *Live And Dangerous*.

“There was a bit of Hendrix about [Eric Bell's playing], and that Celtic lilt. That's what turned me on to *Vagabonds*...”

After leaving Lizzy in July of that year, Robertson recorded two albums with Wild Horses (remixed for the recent *Standing Our Ground - Complete Recordings 1978-1981* boxset), followed by stints with Motörhead and fellow Glaswegian Frankie Miller. He spent the 90s and Noughties working predominantly as a session musician and producer, and in 2011 Robertson released his debut

solo album, *Diamonds & Dirt*, reissued in May this year as *Diamonds & Dirt: Expanded Edition*, with a previously unreleased instrumental album.

Though happily retired since *Diamonds*' original release, the reissue has prompted Robertson to grant *Guitarist* a rare interview to look back on Lizzy's classic era.

You were a fan of Lizzy's *Vagabonds Of The Western World* and could play the songs before you auditioned. What did you like about Eric Bell's guitar playing?

“There was a bit of Hendrix about it, but there was that Celtic lilt to it as well. That's what turned me on to *Vagabonds*.”

Peter Green is your main influence. What did you like about his playing?

“Fleetwood Mac's *Blues Jam At Chess* is my favourite album. [I tried Les Pauls] because of that album and that specific guitar [Peter Green's 'Greeny']. We did a lot of shows with Colosseum II in Europe. Gary [Moore] was using that Les Paul from the Lizzy days, so I got to play it. It was quite difficult, the action was horrendous. Gary had big, big hands.”

When you joined Lizzy, you famously refused to replace the solo Gary had recorded on the demo of *Nightlife's Still in Love With You* before he left. Was that played on Greeny?

“Yeah, it was. I remember hearing [that] with Gary, because he was using the Echoplex a lot, on short delay. When Gary wasn't widdling it just came – and that's the magic, to me. That's why I refused.”

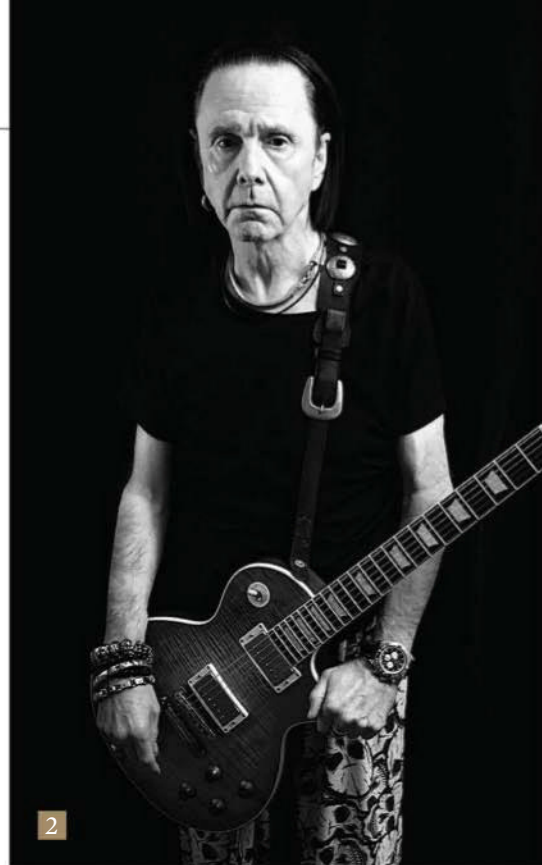
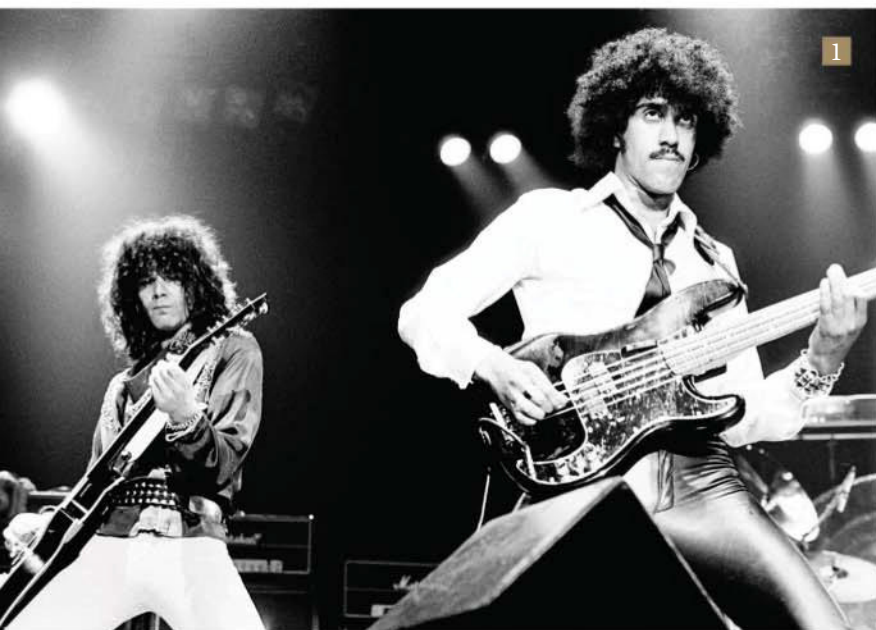


PHOTO BY JAN VENESS BLACK

You and Scott Gorham effectively replaced Gary when you joined Lizzy, after temporary recruits John Du Cann and Andy Gee didn't work out. Gary toured with Lizzy in 1977 after you'd sustained a hand injury while defending blues-rock singer Frankie Miller from an assailant with a broken bottle at London's Speakeasy Club. And when you left in 1978 Gary rejoined permanently. Despite all of that, there didn't seem to be any sense of rivalry between you.

"The press take great delight in creating umbrage where there isn't any. I always had the utmost respect for the man. There was one interview where he said something like, 'Robbo's never off that bloody wah-wah pedal,' [laughs] and that sparked this so-called feud in the press. It wasn't a feud – that was just Gary being funny."

Many fans know the name of the Les Paul Deluxe you played with Lizzy, with the finish scratched away by the bracelets you wore.

"Yeah, the 'Auld Bitch', which I've still got. It was my first Les Paul, given to me the minute I joined Lizzy. I think it was still on hire purchase [laughs]."

It was stolen around 2010, when a cab driver in Stockholm drove off before you could retrieve it from the boot of his car. 10 years later it appeared on Facebook Marketplace. Fans recognised it and alerted your friend Per Olsson, who arranged for you to buy it back. It had ended up with a 16 year old who'd never heard of Lizzy. Is it true that you spoke to him on Skype to prove the guitar was yours?

"Yeah, it's quite recognisable. I was over the moon. That sort of thing never happens to me [laughs]."

You also have a rare hollow-bodied 1953 Les Paul, purchased when you joined Lizzy in 1974. It was customised by Les Paul himself for his wife, Mary Ford, who found standard models too heavy. How did you trace its provenance?

"It was on consignment from Mick Ralphs [Mott The Hoople, Bad Company]. Mick's roadies told me it came from Mary Ford and Les Paul. They'd

1. Brian Robertson and Phil Lynott on stage at the Hammersmith Odeon in December 1977, six months before Thin Lizzy's legendary *Live And Dangerous* album would be released

2. Brian stepped away from the spotlight after recording his solo album, *Diamonds & Dirt*, in 2011

3. Robbo on stage with Lizzy during the Great British Music Festival at London's Olympia, New Year's Eve 1975

"Jeff Beck and I were rehearsing together and he let me use [his] guitar synth. That's how I got into using the synths with Motörhead"

tracked the history down. I used it on two gigs; it was dreadful because it fed back. But it looked great, Burgundy red-ish. I had to have it, even though it had a Bigsby. My contention was that we needed a spare [laughs], which is bollocks because you couldn't use it live. Plus, with the Bigsby, if you broke a string, it'd take you an hour and a half to change it. [I played it in the studio] on *Jailbreak*. Anything with slide, and anything clean-ish, is that one.

"Jeff Beck had it for a little while. We were rehearsing together in Nomis Studios [London rehearsal/recording studio, founded by Wham! manager Simon Napier-Bell]. I was rehearsing with Motörhead. I wanted to know how he got that top note on *Cause We've Ended As Lovers*, and he said, 'It's a guitar synth.' I started joking, 'You can have that if you give me your Roland guitar synth.' He let me use the guitar synth while he had the Les Paul. That's how I got into using the guitar synths with Motörhead [see 1983's classic *Another Perfect Day*]."

You were introduced to Lizzy by your friend Charlie McLennan, their roadie, in Glasgow in February 1974. You had your guitar with you and impressed Brian Downey by playing some of their songs. Shortly thereafter, you moved to London and successfully auditioned at Club Iroko, after Charlie tipped you off that they were looking for new guitarists. What do you remember about your audition?

"They were rehearsing every day and auditioning every day. Andy Gee [ex-Pete Bardens, Ellis] was still there, playing the Auld Bitch. That was his guitar. And [there was] another guy. I can't remember his name. A very straight-looking geezer. I think he was a session guy. I remember watching the two of them play, thinking, 'This is bollocks.'"

PHOTOS BY GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

“Fleetwood Mac’s *Blues Jam At Chess* is my favourite album. [I tried Les Pauls] because of that album and that specific guitar [‘Greeny’]”

“We built ourselves as a live act. [Brian, Phil and I] would work off each other, while Scott was playing a solo”

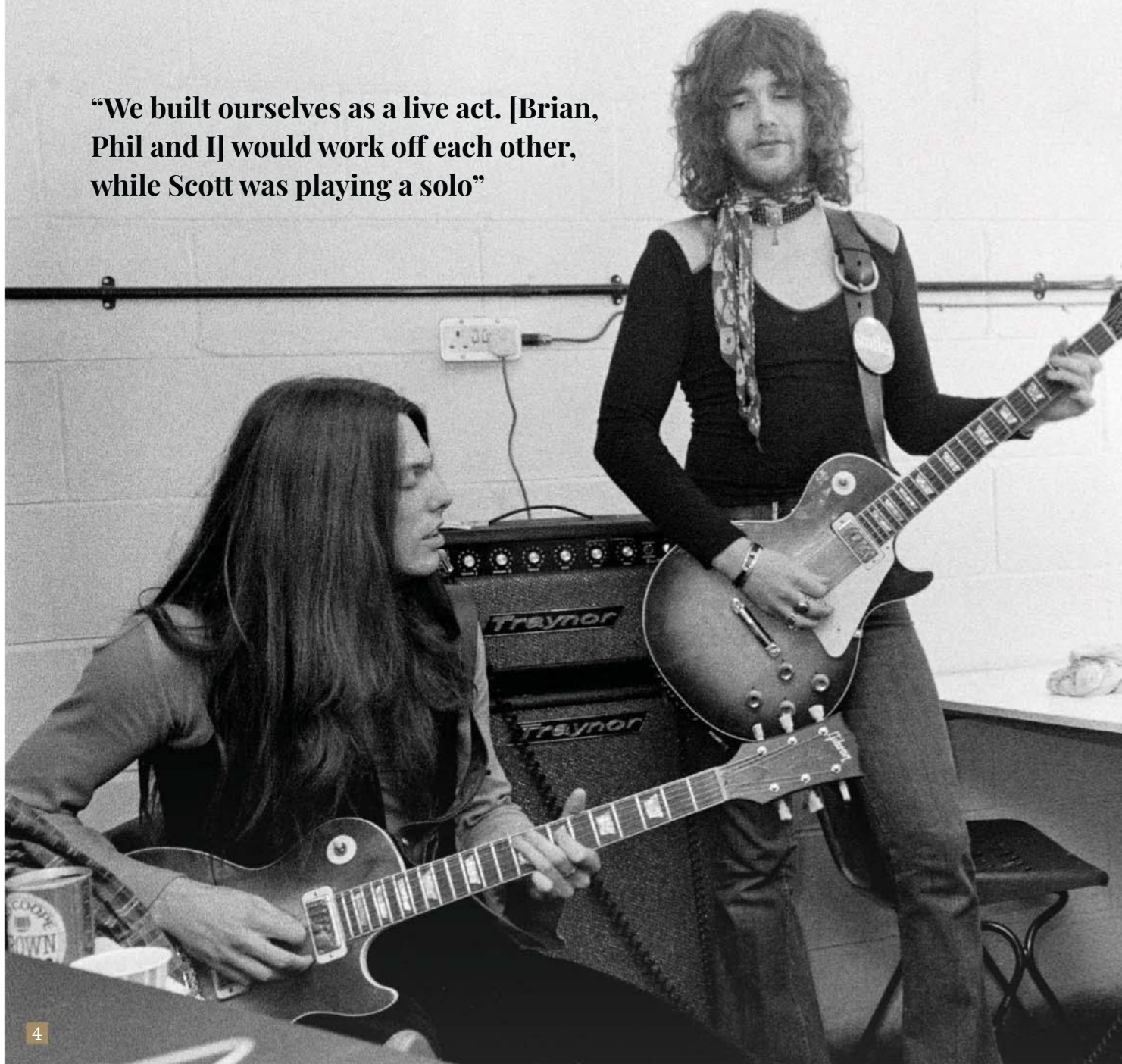


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/HULTON ARCHIVE

When you, Phil and Brian started playing, was there an immediate chemistry?

“Certainly with Downey. It didn’t matter what song they said, I already knew [them] all. I threw *Gonna Creep Up On You* back at them because it had the wah-wah on it.”

You got the gig slightly before Scott. What made him the right choice?

“It was Phil’s decision because he liked his look, and he was American. Brian and I didn’t think he was up to it, to be honest. He was perfectly capable of playing the major and minor chords in the right place, but not the lead. You’re playing a minor blues and you’d say, ‘Take a solo,’ but he played it [in] major. That’s what jarred with Brian and I.”

Scott has said you were the more advanced lead guitarist at that stage.

“He was more of a rhythm player in the beginning. The solos he *did* take were meticulously worked out. They weren’t solos, as I understand solos. Even from

4. Scott Gorham, Brian Robertson and Phil Lynott rehearse in a dressing room at the Roundhouse, London, November 1974

5. Away from the stage and studio, Brian likes to customise his Les Pauls in his workshop



A new six-CD boxset *Standing Our Ground: Complete Recordings 1978-1981* is out now via Cherry Red and includes remixes and rarities from Robertson’s post-Lizzy band, Wild Horses

the early days, I would just say, ‘Run the track and I’ll just jam.’ We’d do it three or four times, and then edit them, so there’s some spontaneity.

“I’d write a riff or a melody line [of the guitar harmonies]. I started off by just banging on the tape echo. I’d show Scott the easiest part, or the part that suited him best, then I’d put the other part on top. I was playing by ear.”

Were you influenced by Fleetwood Mac’s harmonies on songs like *Albatross*?

“No, I was listening to the lead playing more than the harmonies. I was into Wishbone Ash, that probably had some effect. Definitely the Allman Brothers’ *At Fillmore East*.”

Lizzy released the classic *Jailbreak* and *Johnny The Fox* albums in 1976. Scott has said that your management and label said the band was in danger of losing its record deal if you didn’t get a hit.

“I don’t think we knew we were on the chopping block. We were aware that the contract was coming



up, so we knew that it had to be a good album. But when you're that young, you think, 'Nah, it'll be cool.' I've got a soft spot for [Johnny The Fox]. There was tension because it was so quick after *Jailbreak*. Rather than just doing what Phil had got on his acoustic, there was more involvement from the band. That led to stress [laughs]."

You assumed you'd been fired after the hand injury at the Speakeasy and began forming Wild Horses with former Rainbow bassist Jimmy Bain. Scott has said that he wanted you back for the *Bad Reputation* album. Despite not being pictured on the cover, your input was far greater than anyone realised.

"When they asked me to do it, I'd already started Wild Horses. I went out there as a session [player]. When I got there, it was skeletons. There were no harmonies on the riffs, just Scott's guitar, so what you were hearing was very small. I doubled everything. On *Dancing In The Moonlight*, you can hear the same augmented chords I put on *The Boys Are Back In Town*. I was pretty focused on that one and a bit pissed off about the way it was handled – the album cover and all that nonsense."

You stayed for the *Bad Reputation* tour and subsequent *Live And Dangerous* dates, then left in July 1978. To set the record straight, as far as you're concerned, you were never back in the band as a permanent member?

"Yeah. There was no big blow-up. It might have been a build up of little things [laughs]. It fizzled out. It was time to go back to Wild Horses."

You maintained a close friendship with Phil until the end of his life. Phil and Gary guested with Wild Horses, and Phil and Scott had writing credits on the band's first album, so things must have remained amicable?

"Yeah, exactly."

Gary Moore replaced you for the *Black Rose* album. However, you'd played *Waiting For An Alibi* and *S & M* live, and the title song during a soundcheck. What did you think of *Black Rose*?

"I didn't like the sound: very compressed, no definition on the guitars. The identity had gone a little bit. Gary's sound was different to mine. My sound was a substantial, clean sound. When I left, the sound was smaller."

Gary later said that the line-up with you and Scott was his favourite. Most fans consider *Live And Dangerous* to be Lizzy's definitive album because the band was at its best on stage. Do you agree?

"Yeah, we built ourselves as a live act. If we were having a good night, I would pick up on accents that Downey was playing, Phil would latch on to it, and we'd work off each other, while Scott was playing a solo. We enjoyed playing live. We had to – we were doing two world tours a year [laughs]." 



PHOTO BY JAN VENESS BLACK



Diamonds & Dirt: Expanded Edition is out now via HNE; 3-CD/1-Blu-ray release, *Thin Lizzy (Deluxe Edition)*, is available on 10 July on UMC/Decca www.facebook.com/Brian.Robbo.Robertson

ICED CREAM

When Eric Clapton's fabled 'Beano' 'Burst was stolen at the height of his mid-60s Bluesbreakers fame, he turned to Andy Summers for a replacement. That guitar, a 1960 Les Paul Standard, was the one Eric used for his next project, an all-new power trio named Cream. Hidden away from public view for nearly 60 years, the guitar – as influential in its way as 'Beano' – has now resurfaced in Paris, and we were able to get up close with it and tell its remarkable story in the following pages

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Olly Curtis

Back in the mid-1960s, Gibson's cherry sunburst Les Paul Standard had been discontinued five years previously. But some devotees of blues guitar, such as a young Eric Clapton, knew that, if you could find one, the pre-SG Les Paul was an instrument to be reckoned with. The problem was finding one. A post-war embargo on American luxury goods and musical instruments had ended only a few years previously, in June of 1959, and US guitars, such as Strats and Les Pauls, were rare birds and genuine examples coming up for sale were hunted down diligently by London's leading guitarists.

So when Eric's 1959 Les Paul Standard he used on John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton – aka 'Beano' – was stolen from a church hall in Brondesbury, London, where he

was beginning rehearsals with Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker for their nascent supergroup Cream, Eric needed to get his hands on a replacement in a hurry and there were very few to be had. In the end, Eric turned to another young pro on the London scene, Andy Summers, and implored him to sell his 1960 Standard.

Despite Summers' initial reluctance, money – to the princely tune of £300 – soon changed hands and Clapton had the guitar he needed to press on with recording *Fresh Cream*, the debut album for a group that would become every bit as influential as Clapton's era-defining work with John Mayall. Beano's replacement wasn't perfect, however. Not that it mattered much at the time, but it featured a newer style of sunburst that Gibson had debuted in 1960 to avoid fading

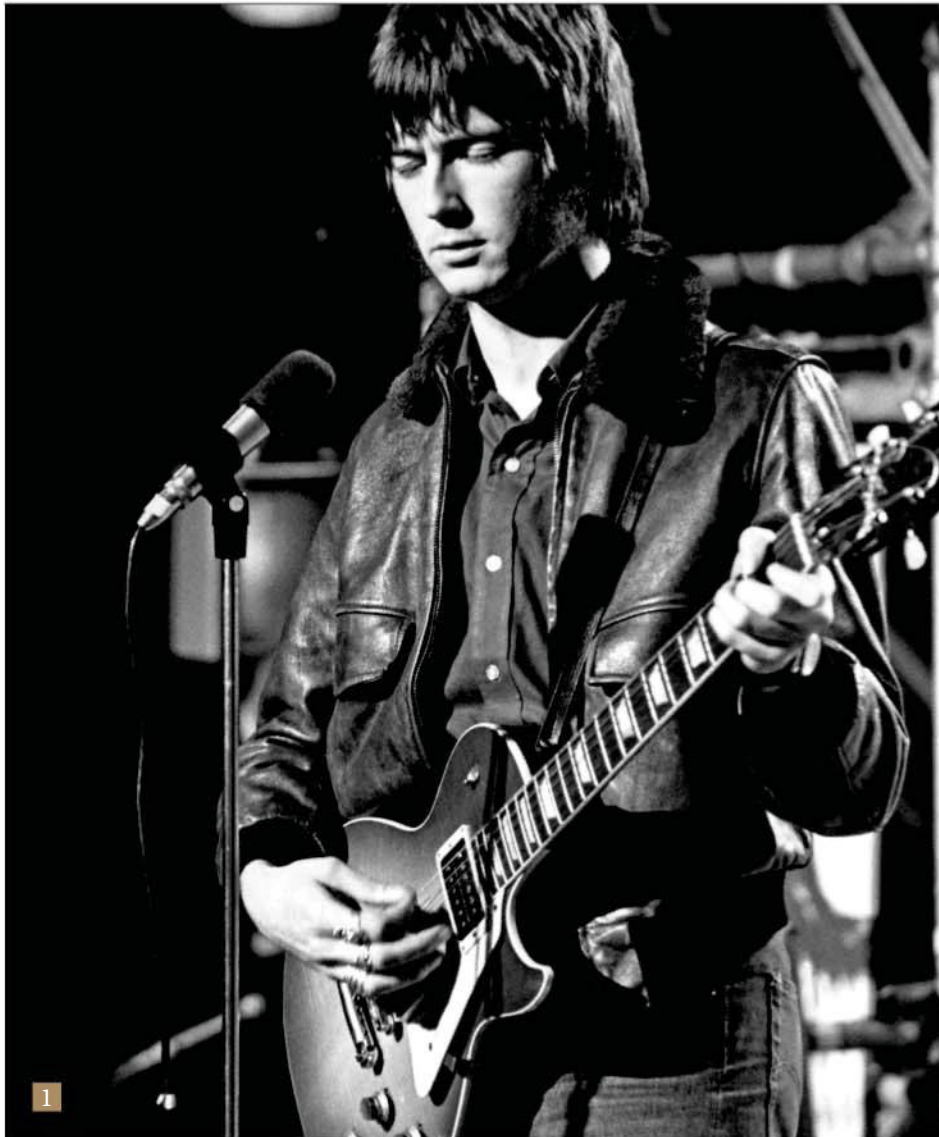
red tints in the finish – a process that customers didn't like at the time, but which has since passed into 'Burst lore – and this newer finish had a gaudier 'tomato soup' tone to it.

Eric's new Lester also had a malfunctioning bridge pickup that would need sorting out, too. But in the cut and thrust of the 1966 music scene none of that mattered much – it could all be fixed or overlooked – because the sound that guitar made was tarnishless gold.

By turns biting and mellifluous, the voice of that guitar is all over Cream's debut album, recorded at London's Rayrik and Ryemuse studios and released in the UK on 9 December 1966, which featured tracks that shaped what blues could be in a new, free-thinking era of psychedelic rock. Tracks such as *Spoonful*, *I'm So Glad* and the single *I Feel Free*, which

The vivid cherry of the finish is the so-called 'tomato soup' or 'tangerineburst' of the later 1960 Standards, which utilised a non-dye-based colourant that withstood fading better than previous sunburst finishes but was bolder in hue





Richards was already playing one [in The Rolling Stones], and I think his was the very first sunburst Les Paul to appear on [British] TV, so he was playing his. But in '64, it was not easy to get one in London.

"During my research, I've seen Andy talking about how he got the guitar at Rose Morris and Clapton was playing with John Mayall already at the time, and then Clapton saw this beautiful Les Paul that Andy had in the case, and he said, 'Wow. Where did you get that?' Andy told him that he bought the guitar at Rose Morris's shop, and so Clapton went right away and bought the guitar we all know as 'Beano'."

"Then Andy was not really using the guitar that much and, in the meantime, as we all know Eric's 'Beano' 'Burst got stolen – and we are still wondering where that guitar is. So Clapton kept calling Andy Summers and reportedly he said something along the lines of, 'You need to sell me your guitar. I'm going to record *Fresh Cream*, I need a Les Paul, that's the sound I want.' Andy initially said no because he wanted to keep the guitar for himself, but, apparently, Clapton [persevered] and pressed him to sell him the guitar and, in

appeared on Atco's 1967 US release of the album.

But though the guitar's story as a famous instrument began in London, it ended – or rather went dark – across the Atlantic in New York, where Clapton and Cream soon ended up, initially playing dates at the RKO Theater in March of 1967, before returning to record their follow-up album, *Disraeli Gears*, in May of that year. Somewhere in among these New York trips, Clapton's Les Paul suffered what is now believed to be the second of two serious neck breaks and he took it to Dan Armstrong's repair shop, where it was given a 'creative' headstock replacement that was crafted to please the young guitarist but prompted him to dump the guitar at the shop after refusing to pay the bill.

And there, after changing hands a few times, the guitar came to rest – in New York, in a private collection, kept out of sight

through all the years that saw original sunburst Les Pauls change from being somewhat obscure, niche collector's items to icons of mid-20th century guitar making. There it stayed, widely speculated about but seen only in scarce photographs. Until today. Now, Matthieu Lucas of Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris has acquired the guitar, which has sometimes been dubbed the 'Summersburst', and wants to share it with the world while it remains in his keeping. We join Matt to pick up the story...

How did this guitar come into Clapton's hands originally? And what was Andy Summers' connection to it?

"So this guitar was bought by Andy Summers originally, way before he went into The Police, in 1964, to the best of my knowledge, at Rose Morris in London. At the time, there were only about two Les Pauls available in London – or very few. We all know that Keith

"I decided to make it public because this guitar is a major piece of the 60s and British music history" **MATTHIEU LUCAS**

1. The 'Summersburst' makes a TV appearance on *Ready Steady Go!* in November 1966

2. The neck pickup is the original Patent Applied For humbucker that the guitar received in the Gibson factory in 1960 and has a thick "creamy" tone, says Matthieu Lucas. The 'Patent Number' bridge pickup is thought to be an in-period replacement for the original Patent Applied For humbucker that was malfunctioning when Eric bought the guitar from Andy Summers

the end, Andy accepted. I think he charged him £300.

"An interesting point to draw attention to is that when Andy sold the guitar to Eric, the bridge pickup didn't work properly and Andy was already using a Tele at the time, which he still has today. So he sold him the guitar, and after that Cream were rehearsing in London and recorded *Fresh Cream*."

The headstock on the guitar today is very clearly non-original – what's the backstory of the neck on this guitar and how did it end up with this mandolin-style headstock?

"In my opinion, Clapton broke the headstock of the guitar twice.



The first time was very early on after he bought the guitar from Andy Summers. I can't tell where and when, but when you really search the archives, in the very early pictures of Clapton with that almost 'bowl' haircut, you can already see that the headstock has been badly repaired and it has already been broken off, in a major way, a first time.

"Apparently, what happened – although of this we can't be sure – is that the repair [of the first break] was so bad that when the guitar was dropped a second time Clapton went to Dan Armstrong's shop in New York City to have the guitar fixed properly. Dan Armstrong was there and a then-young luthier called Matt Umanov, who checked the guitar, said, 'Well, it's not possible to fix the [original] headstock on that guitar because that's a really, really bad break that the guitar just had,' so they offered to replace the headstock for Clapton.

"And that's where Matt Umanov got very innovative with the way he replaced the headstock of the guitar. He removed the original headstock and we don't know where it went. But then he grafted a new headstock on, keeping the original binding and fingerboard intact, and what he did was create the [new-built] replacement in the shape of the headstock from an F-5 mandolin, which made the guitar unique because nobody ever did that again on a Les Paul, to my knowledge. [He] put Eric Clapton's name, with a mother-of-pearl inlay on the headstock, too, plus a [representation of someone's] face. It's unclear if it's a woman or if it's Eric Clapton's face that Matt Umanov put on that guitar with mother-of-pearl inlay."

What happened next?

"From what I can tell, Eric Clapton was very unhappy with the repair, and that way he didn't pay for the repair, but he just said words to the effect that, 'No, no, I don't need the guitar any more anyway, I'm starting to use the ES and the SG,' because he was already searching for another kind of sound. So the guitar just stayed in [Greenwich] Village of New York City, at Dan Armstrong's shop.

"Matt Umanov got very innovative with the way he replaced the headstock"

MATTHIEU LUCAS



The headstock that Clapton famously objected to certainly departs from the 'open book' shape of the Gibson original and is loosely styled after that of a vintage Gibson F-5 mandolin. Close examination reveals the inlaid silhouette of a head, in profile – possibly intended to be EC himself. Meanwhile, chunky frets, fitted later than the period when Clapton had the guitar, stand out as another mod to this unconventional 'Burst



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

“Then the guitar went to a guy called Adrian Barber, who was the guitar player for a Liverpool band called the Big Three at the time. After he quit the band, he stayed in Germany and he became a sound engineer. When he passed away, the guitar went [back] to New York with his son, who was living there. He didn’t really want the guitar, so he called somebody named Chris Such, who had a small guitar shop in the [East] Village called Mojo Guitar. Chris’s place was a little neighbourhood guitar shop, so he didn’t have the money to buy a sunburst Les Paul at the time,

so that’s how he called [collector] Perry Margouleff to offer him the guitar, and Perry met the guy and just gave him money, and then owned the guitar since 1986.

“Nobody saw that guitar for many years because, first of all, Perry was a curator for the largest guitar collection ever – and this was part of his private stash – but mainly because Perry was very attached to 100 per cent original ‘Bursts, at the time, and he didn’t care so much about the fact it had been Clapton’s guitar. And, in any case, the market for star-owned guitars didn’t really exist back then.

3. Cream perform at the Starlite Ballroom, London in February 1967 – with the ‘Summersburst’ still in one piece

“It was kept in the collection for years and, eventually, when I first met Perry 13 years ago, he showed me a lot of those guitars, and I was very blessed that he kind of put me under his wing – he was always showing me and teaching me about [vintage] guitars, especially this one. Back then, you know, I was never in a position even to imagine that I was eventually

“I think Clapton really loved a very thin neck... [This guitar] has one of the thinnest necks on a ‘60 I’ve ever played” MATTHIEU LUCAS



Top-hat reflector knobs are an obvious visual clue to the 1960 date of manufacture. Note also some light figuring to the top, which shouldn’t be surprising as less than a quarter of all original ‘Bursts had any strongly visible flame or stripes

getting this guitar 12 years later, but that’s what happened. And we started talking, I would say, around October last year. It took a bit of time, but we arranged a deal a few weeks ago and then I went to New York City and picked up the guitar myself.”

Tell us about the pickups. The bridge humbucker isn’t the Patent Applied For humbucker it left the factory with. So what’s the story behind that?

“Well, what’s interesting is that when you look at the picture of [this guitar] in *The Beauty Of The ‘Burst* book [Yasuhiko Iwanade]... We all know that picture of Perry with the ‘Burst wall behind him – there’s [famous ‘named’ ‘Bursts]

Red Eye, there's the Stanley 'Burst, the red cherry [finish] '59 Les Paul, all of those, and there is also Eric Clapton's guitar on there and you can recognise the guitar immediately from the mandolin headstock, of course. But what's interesting is that this guitar – on that picture – has a zebra bridge pickup, which, of course, it doesn't have today. That pickup is long gone and Perry doesn't have any idea where it went.

"But what Perry is sure about is the Patent Number pickup – because the pickup now in the bridge is one of those, a mid-60s Gibson pickup, which is good news for the guitar because Perry remembers that this pickup was in the case of the guitar, in the case pocket. And that matches Clapton playing this guitar with the double-black pickup in the bridge. So Perry said, 'Okay, well, we have this pickup in the case and I think that's the pickup that belongs to the guitar, I'm going to put it back, so it matches really what Clapton was playing at the time.'

"Because if Perry had restored the guitar [to a generic period-correct spec] back then, based on his meticulous restoration work, he would just have put an original Patent Applied For [pickup in the bridge] that he had back then from his stash – he would never have put the Patent Number pickup in the bridge position [but for the Clapton connection]. The [otherwise anomalous] Patent Number pickup makes total sense because when you read Andy Summers' biography, and the interviews that



Andy gave on that guitar, that's one of the reasons why he sold the guitar to Eric in '65 or early '66 – because the bridge pickup didn't work on that guitar.

"My guess is that Clapton obtained a pickup on Denmark Street – a Gibson pickup – from 1965 or early '66, which was a Patent Number humbucker, and he put the pickup in the bridge position of the guitar and then went to record *Fresh Cream* with that pickup configuration because the neck pickup on that guitar is the original Patent Applied For pickup. We checked the solder joints on the parts, and that guitar for sure has all-original solder, except for the volume pot in the bridge position – and that's the only major electronic change that's on the guitar. Back then, nobody cared about original [Patent Applied For pickups] – they were all players [not collectors], and so my guess

4. Another shot from Cream's *Ready Steady Go!* TV appearance finds Eric sporting the Les Paul – and a gold lamé jacket!

5. A set of Grover tuners has replaced the Les Paul's original Klusons. This was a common 'upgrade' for LPs back in the day

is that he just put a working pickup in the bridge position and that was it, you know?"

"So that's the journey of this guitar, and that's interesting because I knew about it for years; I couldn't tell anyone about it because that's not how Perry is working – he wants his guitars to be top secret, if I can say. But then I decided to make it public for several reasons because my theory is that guitars like this should be played, should be shared with people, and I think it's not even belonging to me, or whoever is going to buy the guitar – it's belonging to, I would almost say, humanity because that guitar is a major piece of the 60s and the

"The neck pickup is one of the creamiest neck pickups I've tried. It's not a woody sound, it's very dense" MATTHIEU LUCAS



British music and a major piece of guitar history, so my feeling is that all those guitars need to be shared and played. So that's why at some point, I said to Perry, 'I want to buy this piece, but in my opinion it's just a shame that it stays off the internet because I think it's a different time now and everybody should know what happened to this guitar,' because nobody knew where it was, basically."

Speaking of the guitar just as an instrument in its own right, what's it like from a player's perspective?

"I have had the chance to play 'The Fool' SG, I've played Eric's

335 and – with the exception of the Firebird – I've played a lot of instruments that he played in the Cream era. And it's funny because all of them [have notably slim necks], except the 335, which has more like a '64 neck but still a very thin neck. So I think Clapton really loved a very thin neck on guitars, you know? This guitar is quite the same: it has one of the thinnest necks on a '60 I've ever played.

"I would say it's a very late '60, too, probably one of the last 1960 [Les Paul Standards] ever made because of that 'tomato soup' finish and other details. It's not a lightweight guitar, but the neck is, as I say, super thin and, surprisingly, somebody did refret it at some point with huge frets – it would make sense if that was in the 80s as they were all refretted with big frets back then... But yeah, the neck is super thin. I think maybe they shaved the neck a bit when they put that new mandolin headstock on [during the repair process by Matt Umanov] and a new finish on the neck – and I would say there is a very old overspray on the guitar, too.

"Structurally speaking, it's super easy to play and super fast because of that thin neck. I would say the neck pickup is one of the creamiest neck pickups that I've tried. It's not like a woody sound, it's very creamy, very dense. It makes total sense when you put the guitar into a Marshall and you put the tone at zero – you get exactly the *Spoonful* sound.

"Also, the fact that on the bridge position you have a Patent Number makes total sense because it's really brighter in those mid-60s Gibson pickups. When you play the guitar, you really hear the *Fresh Cream* sound, which is very particular. I would say this pickup had [originally come] from an SG – it's so bright and it's such a rock 'n' roll-sounding guitar. And in the middle position, surprisingly, the tone is almost out of phase as well. Or rather, not out of phase but it's almost there – it's really close to that sound. When you play the guitar, it's incredible because that's the record, you know? It already sounds like the record." 

For more info, see www.mattsguitar.shop

The rear of the guitar's body features some light belt-buckling wear marks, and a basic form of locking strap buttons have been fitted to the guitar at some point



"When you play the guitar, it's incredible because it already sounds like the [‘Fresh Cream’] record" MATTHIEU LUCAS

TALES OF CREAM ELECTRICS

Beyond the stories of Clapton's lost 'Bursts, the guitarist reached for a variety of instruments during his tenure in Cream, from the iconic 'Fool' SG to a mid-60s ES-335

Words Tony Bacon

When Ginger Baker, Jack Bruce and Eric Clapton were putting together Cream in summer 1966, Eric had with him his Les Paul. This was the guitar that we now know as the 'Beano' 'Burst. He'd bought it the previous year when he was a member of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, but now he plugged it in for Cream's early rehearsals at a church hall in north-west London. However, before he'd had a chance to play it in public or in the studio with his new band, it was stolen from the hall. Infamously, the 'Beano' 'Burst's whereabouts remain a mystery to this day.

Eric began to seek a replacement, at first borrowing a few guitars. He used Keith Richards' Bigsby-loaded 'Burst in July for Cream's debut at a festival in Windsor (and a try-out in Manchester the night before). In a London club in August he played a cherry double-cut Les Paul Special borrowed from support group The Clayton Squares.

Eventually, probably in August '66, he bought a 'Burst from Andy Summers, the subject of the main feature in this issue. In the early months of the following year, Eric dismissed that guitar when it was the victim of an unsympathetic repair.



1. The guitar most associated with Clapton's Cream era is undoubtedly this 1964 SG Standard, known as 'The Fool'

A NEW PSYCHEDELIC FOOL

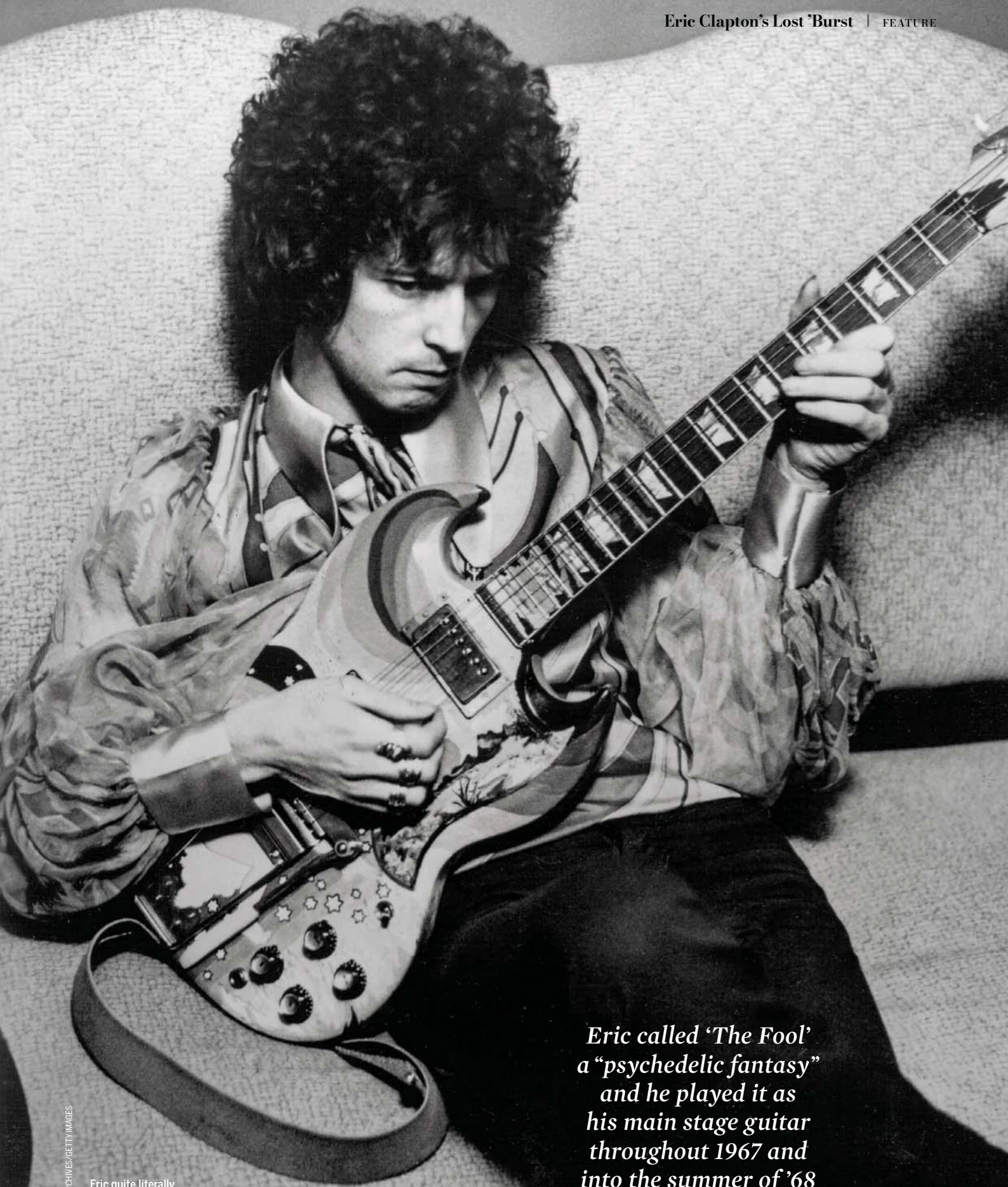
Perhaps he started to wonder if Les Pauls were jinxed for him, and he settled on a circa-1964 cherry-finish SG Standard – a different style, for sure, but with familiar humbuckers and control layout. Within a short time he took it to a pair of Dutch pop artists newly arrived in London, Marijke Koger and Simon

Posthuma, who later started an art collective – and, briefly, a band – that they named The Fool.

Marijke and Simon painted colourful scenes and swirls all over the guitar, which Cream fans know as 'The Fool' guitar. Eric later called it a "psychedelic fantasy" and he played it as his main stage guitar throughout 1967 and into the summer of '68, recording with it extensively, too, notably on much of *Disraeli Gears*.

On tour in America in spring '67, Eric scooped up a few more guitars: a three-pickup 1958 Les Paul Custom, a Fender XII and a Danelectro Standard 3021. Again, he'd record some of *Disraeli Gears* with the Custom, and played the XII on *Dance The Night Away*. On a few occasions he played the Custom and the Dano on stage, but none of the three would count among his most favoured instruments.

A significant purchase came along in May '67 when he went to Sound City in London and bought a secondhand 1956 Stratocaster, the one that later became known as 'Brownie'. He got it just days before Cream travelled to New York City to record *Disraeli Gears*, heard at least on *Tales Of Brave Ulysses*, with its Strat-like tones and aggressive wah-wah sounding like an homage to the



*Eric called 'The Fool'
a "psychedelic fantasy"
and he played it as
his main stage guitar
throughout 1967 and
into the summer of '68*

PHOTO BY MICHAEL LOUIS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Eric quite literally playing 'The Fool' in New York in 1967. This is the guitar that was played on Cream's live version of *Crossroads*, which appeared on the album *Wheels Of Fire*



2

current king of the Strat, one James Marshall Hendrix.

Aside from sporadic uses in Cream, this Fender would later feature on stage regularly with Eric when he began touring with Delaney & Bonnie toward the end of 1969, and it was also prevalent in the studio during 1970 for his first solo album and the *Layla* sessions. In his autobiography, he recalled how at age 12 he'd first seen a Strat, in the hands of Buddy Holly on a TV show. "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven," he wrote. "It was like seeing an instrument from outer space, and I said to myself: 'That's the future – that's what I want.' Suddenly, I realised I was in a village that was never going to change, yet there on TV was something out of the future. And I wanted to go there."

Meanwhile, Eric hadn't given up entirely on Telecasters: in

"It was like seeing an instrument from outer space, and I said to myself: 'That's the future – that's what I want'" **ERIC CLAPTON**

1968 he botched together a bound Custom Tele body and a contemporary rosewood-'board Strat neck. During a brief visit to Denmark in February, Cream were filmed for an of-its-time movie, *Det Var En Lørdag Aften* (*It Was A Saturday Night*). In one of two scenes in which they appeared, performing *We're Going Wrong*, Eric is seen with the unusual Tele/Strat hybrid. This oddity's most visible appearance would come in June '69 when, now with a maple neck, it was his main guitar throughout Blind Faith's debut concert in London's Hyde Park.

A further acquisition on a US Cream tour arrived in April

'68 in the reverse-body shape of a 1964 Gibson Firebird I. At the time, Firebirds were not considered to rank among the front-running Strats and Lesters and Teles that many prominent guitarists of the day treasured. But the Firebird was nonetheless a useful instrument, and his single-pickup model turned up on stage during the band's farewell dates later in the year.

MORE LES PAULS & A 335

Eric could be generous with guitars to his friends, and the most famous example concerns a Les Paul he gave to George Harrison. It was a '57 Goldtop refinished in cherry that George would name 'Lucy' and use on several 'White Album' and *Abbey Road* cuts. In September '68, he asked Eric to play the recent gift once more, on *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*,

2. Ginger, Jack and Eric perform at the Cafe Au Go Go in October 1967 in New York City

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

3



PHOTO BY SULFIATI MAGNUSON/GETTY IMAGES

an event that saw Eric become the only non-Beatle to play a guitar solo on a Beatles record.

The cherry-refin Goldtop had been owned by Rick Derringer, guitarist in The McCoys, and before that by John Sebastian of The Lovin' Spoonful. Derringer decided the guitar was so beat up it could do with a fresh new finish and, living not far from the Gibson factory, he delivered it there in the mid-60s with instructions to paint it with an SG-like cherry finish. When he got it back he felt its quality had suffered in the process, so he traded it for another guitar at a New York City store – which is where Clapton acquired it, and Clapton in turn gave it to his Beatle chum.

Toward the end of '68, Eric acquired his third Les Paul 'Burst, which he used occasionally on stage during Cream's farewell tour. This one, too, did not last

long, going to Paul Kossoff in a trade when Free supported Eric's new band, Blind Faith, the following summer.

Another key purchase that most likely took place in late '68 concerned Eric and his 1964 ES-335. Why "most likely"? There's been speculation about when he

3. In 1968, the year that Cream announced their split, Clapton purchased a reverse 1964 Gibson Firebird I that would feature in the band's final tours both in the USA and in Britain

Firebirds were not considered to rank among the Strats, Lesters and Teles that many prominent guitarists of the day treasured

got the 335 thanks to conflicting claims and a tangled history. Eric was seen with this guitar on Cream's final farewell dates at the Albert Hall in London, and he kept it until selling it in 2004 at one of his Crossroads-benefitting auctions. Eric recalled then that he'd bought it when he was still with The Yardbirds. While there

were certainly a couple of 335s around in that band – mostly played by Chris Dreja – specs and serial numbers and shipping dates prove that neither was the one Eric played in '68.

Photographer John Peden snapped Eric at a San Francisco Fillmore gig in summer '67 where, as one might expect, he played the psychedelic SG... but also apparently a red ES model, possibly a 335.

More recently, Jerry Donahue has said he sold the Albert Hall 335 to Eric a few weeks before the London shows of the farewell tour. At the time, Jerry was still an up-and-coming guitarist – this was before he'd played with Fairport Convention, Joan Armatrading, The Hellecasters and others – and he had a day job working at the Selmer music shop in London.

That leaves three possible scenarios. The first is that Eric

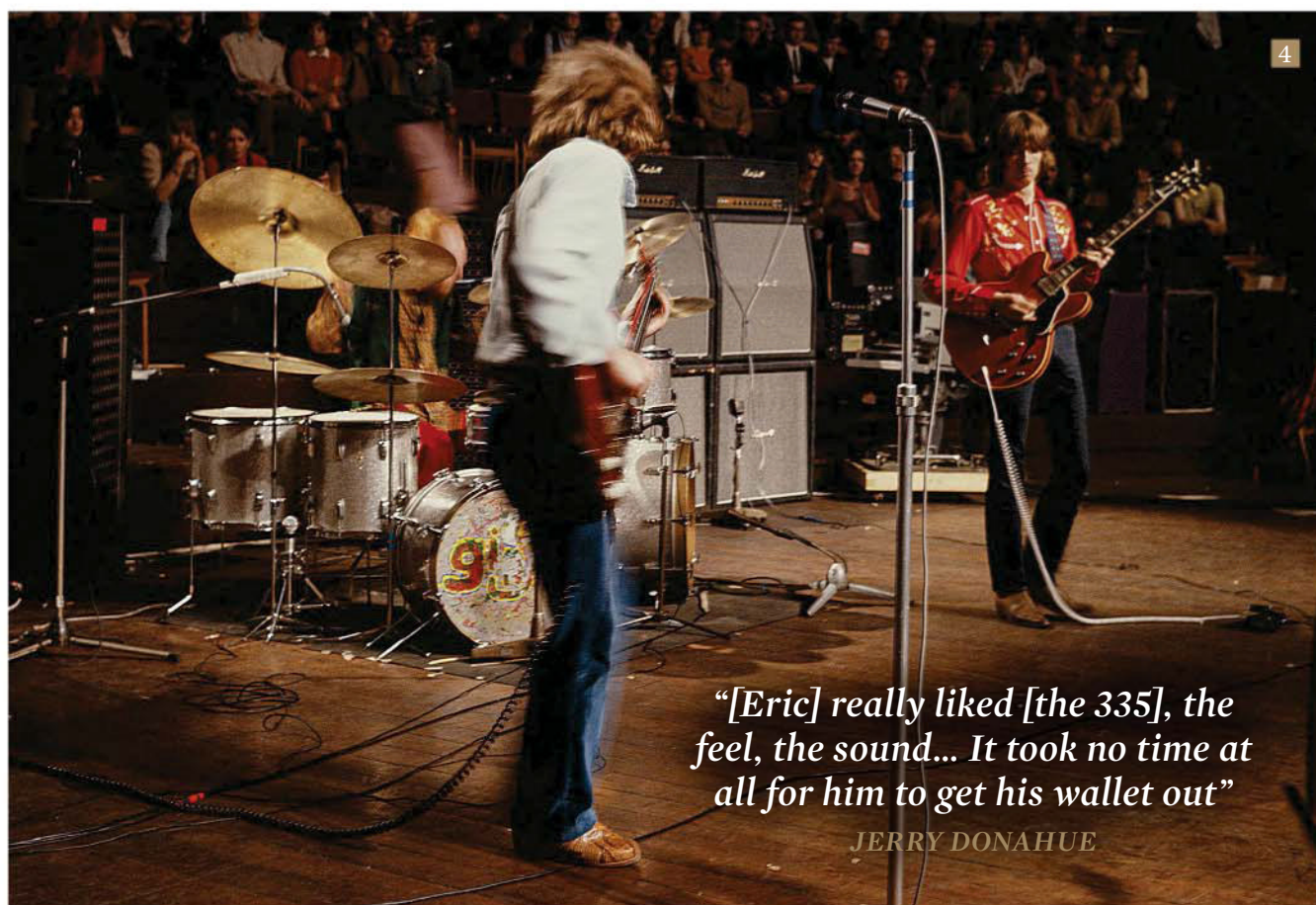


PHOTO BY MARK HAYWARD ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"[Eric] really liked [the 335], the feel, the sound... It took no time at all for him to get his wallet out"

JERRY DONAHUE

bought the Albert Hall 335 in 1964 while in The Yardbirds, never played it at the time but instead kept it hidden away for years, only pulling it out for a gig at the Fillmore in '67. Then he put it away again until the London gigs. But why would he go so long without using what is clearly a great guitar?

4. Eric brandishes his ES-335 at the Albert Hall in November 1968 as Cream take their final bow

5. A post-Cream outing with Delaney & Bonnie saw Eric break out his three-pickup LP Custom

The second is that he bought the Albert Hall 335 in San Francisco in 1967, played it on one gig, and then squirreled it away until the London shows. Same question: why would he ignore such a great guitar for so long?

The third scenario seems most likely, that Eric bought the '64 Albert Hall 335 from Jerry at

Selmer in 1968, a few weeks before the London shows. But a four-year-old guitar? Well, we know that Eric had a taste for used guitars. Of the dozen Cream-era electrics itemised in this feature only one, the Electric XII, might have been new – but even that could well have been secondhand. He was so taken with the benefits of budget-friendly used guitars that when he sat down with a 60s interviewer who wanted to hear some tips for guitar buyers, Eric said that he'd recommend seeking secondhand instruments.

He gave his reasons: such instruments are "broken in and easier to play", he insisted, and "the older the guitar the better it seems to have been made". Jerry Donahue recalled a happy Eric as the deal was sealed at the Selmer shop for that lovely ES-335. "He really liked it," Jerry said, "the feel, the sound – it was perfect. Certainly, it took no time at all for him to get his wallet out." Even when you're God, sometimes it's impossible to resist the lure of a potentially great guitar. **G**



PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES



Lowden
GUITARS

F-35
Guatemalan Rosewood
Alpine Spruce

lowdenguitars.com

JAZZ HANDS



YouTubers. Sloppy solos. Paco de Lucía's darkest tour secrets. When US jazz giants Al Di Meola and Julian Lage joined the same Zoom call for *Guitarist*, no topic was off the table

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

Round-table interviews with rockstars always carry a risk. You can make the intros. Dim the lights. But if the chemistry doesn't fire, it can feel like forcing giant pandas to mate. Fortunately, as pan-generational giants of US jazz, Al Di Meola and Julian Lage have long admired each other's work, and while the 71-year-old Di Meola remains a New Jersey tough-guy with a palpable nostalgia for the old industry, offset by the 38-year-old Lage's more abstract take on the craft and business, we're soon off to the races. All that's left to do is run the dictaphone, tee up a hot topic – from YouTube shredders to the instrument's next quantum leap – and catch the flying sparks.

Let's start with the state of the art. There were once clearly defined new frontiers for guitar, from electric blues right through to shred and beyond. Do you still feel there's a new frontier for the instrument?

Al Di Meola: "Well, there seems to be a whole new generation of great players coming up. But as advanced as a lot of them are, I sometimes feel bad that they're not in the glory days of the record industry any more. And as great of a record as they make, most of us won't know about it. You almost feel like, 'Man, you missed out on the best ever,' y'know? The brilliance is unbelievable, but I can't associate them with an album or piece of music. Unlike when we came up in the mid-70s, when you'd think of Weather Report and then you'd think of *Heavy Weather*. There's more killers out there than ever before. I'm glad I'm not starting now! It's a good thing I have a little bit of an accumulation of what could be a legacy, like, 30-something albums, and I'm like, 'Okay, phew, I got that done.'"

PHOTO COMP BY ALEXANDER MERISCH/HANNAH GRAY HALL

Julian Lage: “I think you’re right. Granted, I don’t know what the best days of the recording industry were, and I do think it’s a different topography nowadays, [but] I think everything swings back and forth, y’know? I’m not expecting the record industry to go back to what it was, but the desire to take in music the way we all received it years ago – I think that’s coming back.”

What would you say are the big obstacles for guitar players these days?

Di Meola: “Here’s the big issue that doesn’t get talked about. Back then, before cellphones and computers, we practised way more. And it was way more focused on the songs. For instance, I made an album about 15 years ago at the Power Station in New York. And I noticed, as soon as we were done with the track, which was killer, everybody ran out in the hallway. Now, back in the day, everybody would run into the control room to hear their performance. But everybody was on their phone, like, networking, y’know? And I said, ‘This is not right.’ We went as far as to tell the receptionist to hold all calls.

“That phone is always right there, within arm’s length. We got addicted to something that we can’t break. But

1. Julian Lage (pictured here with Peruvian bass player Jorge Roeder) is in good company alongside John Scofield in playing jazz on a Tele:

“This instrument, it’s gonna kick my butt, but I think it’ll do what I want,” he told us. You’ll hear T-style tones from his Danocaster on 2016’s *Arclight*

2. Julian’s view of virtuosity has shifted over the years, he says, recognising that a certain “coyness” can exist in players of his generation around displaying their full playing abilities

back in the time when we didn’t need it because it didn’t exist, our focus on our work was phenomenal. Like when I did *The Guitar Trio* with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucía: the first tour, we were in our hotel rooms practising for the show that night because we knew we had to be up on our game. There was no ‘let me check my phone’. And when I listen to those records, I cannot do what the hell I did back then now. Not that I want to, by the way. Velocity isn’t my number one desire. I’ve been devoting more time to composing.”

Is it more helpful to have constraints or freedom when you’re creating music?

Di Meola: “My record company gave me, on my last record, as much time as I wanted. And I went, ‘Boy, that’s a good thing and a bad thing.’ Because in the days when they had deadlines for shipments, you had to be done no matter what. In a way, it was good to have that pressure. Otherwise, you start experimenting, doing so many different things, and then you go, ‘Wait, let me listen to those early takes’ – and you already had it.”

Lage: “I’ve never made a record in more than a few days, ever in my life. It’s always been one or two days, or three days if you really have a big budget and everyone’s available. But I have re-made records. I once made a two-day record, and a month later I realised I wasn’t happy with it – I changed everything about it, and I did another two days. But my perception of what’s a limiting or liberating factor isn’t always accurate. I can see a situation presenting all these challenges, then

“I come from a couple of different traditions of players that really celebrate the kind of kinaesthetic experience of playing the guitar” JULIAN LAGE



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS MASON/GETTY IMAGES

in retrospect I look back and realise I had complete freedom. And vice versa: there have been times when I thought, 'I have all this freedom, why am I not getting anything I like?' So I can't say I'm the most solid barometer of what's helping me and what's limiting me."

Di Meola: "The barometer, Julian, is when you record something, and you want to hear it over and over. I recorded a whole record called *The Infinite Desire* [1998] and at the end I just didn't feel like hearing it. So I wound up re-recording the whole record. It took a lot of guts, it took some extra money, whatever, but I gotta like what I do. Then again, I am talking about a different time with better budgets than what we see on our horizon, which is like, 'Holy shit.' It looks massively different now."

Guitar virtuosity can be a double-edged sword. What does it mean to you, in its most positive and negative sense?

Di Meola: "It's a balance, man. It's the variety. It's the ingredients you put in the soup. If it's all velocity, it's overkill. Not that I haven't been accused of that a few times. But it should be a story within a story. Velocity for velocity's sake is not the key. It's about the lines you play and how they meet one another. There was a big emphasis on velocity back in the 70s. It was insane, but luckily I was with Chick Corea and playing some meaty compositions in the context of displaying whatever youthful velocity I had at the time.

"You need a composition. There's no two ways about it. If a guy's only playing licks, they might be phenomenal licks, but what's it pertaining to? So I have, over the years, been paying less attention to technique and more to developing as a composer because that's what keeps the attention of the audience. Soloing is an aspect of it, but that's not going to hold many in the audience.

"The worst thing in the world is if you hear [an ambitious part] in your head and it comes out sloppy. So that's where the ability to play technically – at the moment you hear it in your head – is important. Because there's nothing worse than sloppy."

What's your take on the virtuosity debate, Julian?

Lage: "I feel the same way about that balance, y'know? My definition of virtuosity has definitely changed over the years. I think, especially in my generation, there's often a coyness about virtuosity. Like, you might have the ability to do it, but you don't because that would be too forward or something. And I've had some pitfalls, where I maybe had the ability to play something but didn't do it at a moment when it would actually have been good for the music. I've definitely shifted my perspective on that. Anybody who's in service of the music, with whatever skills they have at their disposal, I think they're using it responsibly and beautifully.

"And as Al said, it's as much about space as it is about velocity or density or harmonic complexity, or whatever it might be. You know, I hear Julian Bream, and I think that's the mastery level I dream of. Or I think Jim Hall is one of the great virtuosos. He was so self-effacing and maybe never thought of himself as 'that player', but his mastery over space and time, you can't tell me that's not the highest level of virtuosity. But I don't think there's anything offensive about a kind of rudderless virtuosity, either. I just don't think it does anything for you as a player."



PHOTO BY HANNAH GRAY HALL

"In my head, acoustic is the louder, more luscious sonic world, and the electric is a little more penned-in"

JULIAN LAGE



“Before cellphones and computers, we practised way more. Our focus on our work was phenomenal”

AL DI MEOLA

3

How do you stay in touch with the spirit of music when you play, rather than just mechanically operating the guitar?

Lage: “I come from a couple of different traditions of players that really celebrate the kind of kinaesthetic experience of playing the guitar. You think of someone like Derek Bailey, or even Fripp, for that matter. Y’know, players who create sound with an instrument using their gestures, but in an unusual way, and there’s something that feels good about it. I’ve just never been someone who’s good at warm-ups or ratcheting things up to a certain level. I’m rather rough around the edges in those respects, to be honest. But I play a lot of guitar, and things show up. After an hour of playing, I feel different than after 10 minutes, and different again than after four hours of playing.

“If something’s still not coming together, I’ll take a moment and work on it. But not too much. When I was younger, I practised maniacally – and it was good, but I could hear in my own playing, especially on the bandstand, that I was someone who practised a lot, and that was a different thing than the players I was looking up to, who just kind of emanated this thing. So I made a decision to kind of chill out a little bit, so it didn’t sound like I was preparing all day for something. If I played different music that required it, that would be different. But I’m involved in group improvisation music and songs that are more from the Americana tradition. It’s a different swagger.”

You both have a love and appreciation for the acoustic guitar. What do you get from that instrument that you don’t get from the electric?

Di Meola: “Well, rhythm is one. The way I’d approach playing rhythm on acoustic guitar is different than with an electric. Electric is more of a voice; it’s like a singer, there’s more lyrical possibilities that you don’t have with an acoustic. But the nature of my compositions signal the necessity of playing with my nylon Spanish guitar because there’s a lot of arpeggiated, rhythmic, syncopated things. Plus, in some ways, I’ve exhausted the louder electric days. Even though I’m trying to keep it alive, my tendencies over the last 30 years have been going more and more for this acoustic ensemble. Whether it’s a trio or quartet or quintet, it’s just the way it’s gone due to aging and maturity. And the music has gotten deeper as a result.

“I feel like I’m more and more into the acoustic camp overall. I got that bug back when I was playing with Paco. With my own band, we had 10 tons of equipment and we’d be rolling up these cases to the airport check-in counter, and they’d weigh it all and at the end they’d charge me \$13,000 because it was so overweight. I’d be crying sometimes, like, ‘Please, give us a break!’ And then I’d watch Paco. Not even a spare guitar. He had his cigarettes in his suitcase, one shirt for a tour. One! I asked him: ‘Paco, how do you have one shirt?’ One day, I caught him in the bathroom, and he had his shirt off and he was taping paper towels under his armpits. I said, ‘Why are you doing that?’ And he said: ‘One shirt!’”

What does the acoustic guitar mean to you, Julian?

Lage: “I think of myself as an acoustic player first and foremost. Anything I’ve ever done on electric is kind of an extension of that same sound. But they are different.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER WERTSCH

4



PHOTO BY SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

The electric basically implies that I'm playing with an ensemble, so my role is more one of orchestration – how I contribute to the sound and how I fit between the bass and the drums. And acoustic is usually more something I would be doing if it was just me, and that is a bit more 'Technicolor', frankly. I hear such a wide range of frequencies because nothing's covering it up. No other sound is there.

"So, in my head, acoustic is the louder, more luscious sonic world, and the electric is a little more penned-in, but it kinda threads a needle through an ensemble. I always wanted to have that experience of an electric being this kind of unleashed voice. But it's just not my constitution. I don't like loud sounds. I don't want to play loud."

Julian, you've just played in London at the Royal Festival Hall, and Al, you'll play the Barbican in June. What does the city and its music scene mean to you?

Di Meola: "I haven't been to London in a good five years. So there's a lot of anticipation for the show. I have a lot of reasons to love London. I once did a tribute record to The Beatles at Abbey Road, and that was one of the highlights of my career. I felt like a five-year-old at Disney World. It was so great to be in the same environment and tell the engineer: 'Pro Tools? No, no, no, I want to go 8-track analogue. Y'know, like the other group that recorded here?'"

"I did three tracks and I was very happy with the sound. Like, 'Wow, that studio really is something.'"

3. The electric's voice lends itself to "more lyrical possibilities", says Al Di Meola

Then I went back to New York to try to finish it. But I couldn't match it sonically, so I knew I had to go back. But before I went back, I rented a house in the Hamptons to really focus on arranging the rest of the pieces. And it just so happens that my next-door neighbour was Paul McCartney. We got to talking, you know, but I never told him who I was. I had this fear that maybe he wouldn't know me.

"Over the years, I've been paying less attention to technique and more to developing as a composer: that's what keeps the attention of the audience" AL DI MEOLA

4. Di Meola's work in this latter half of his career has moved further towards the nylon-string acoustic: "The music has gotten deeper as a result," he says

"But the next year, I rented the house again and by then I had the finished product. And my wife said, 'Why don't you write him a little note about what The Beatles meant to you growing up?' So I stuck the note in the CD case, and when he pulled into the drive in his brown Rolls Royce, she said, 'Go down there, give him the CD.' I said, 'Oh no, I can't.' She goes, 'Give me that thing!' She runs down – and I was so impressed that she did that for me. It was just a beautiful memory that will live with me." 

For more information on the guitarists' latest projects and forthcoming tour dates, visit <https://aldimeola.com> and www.julianlage.com



PAUL KOSSOFF 1955 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

Dubbed the ‘Fretless Wonder’, the Les Paul Custom waltzed onto the scene in 1954, resplendent in its tuxedo finish with gold-plated hardware. This particular mid-50s model found its way into the hands of both Paul Kossoff and Eric Clapton...

Words Huw Price Photography Olly Curtis

Les Paul was a man of many fine qualities, but understatement probably wasn't one of them. Rather than ease loyal Gibson customers into the concept of a solidbody electric guitar, Les came out swinging when he specified a metallic gold finish for his official signature model. Back in 1952, it would have shone like a supernova in an era of muted sunbursts.

With the metaphorical dial already turned to 10, Gibson had its work cut out when devising an even more upmarket version of Les Paul's signature guitar, but it still had a few more cards to play. It's almost as if someone on the design team pondered about the world's classiest musical instrument and decided it was probably a concert grand piano.

With its lustrous gloss black lacquer finish, gold-plated hardware and multi-ply body binding, the Les Paul Custom must have seemed like a lap Steinway when Gibson introduced it at the 1954 NAMM Show. But it wasn't simply a glitzed up version of the Goldtop because there were several differences.

Peculiar Customs

Of greatest significance was a change in the way the body was made. The Goldtops that preceded the Custom, and the sunburst Standards that followed it, are all known for their maple tops. In contrast, Custom bodies were carved from a single slab of mahogany, so they didn't have the dampening effect of a maple cap.

There were significant changes to the neck, too. While most (but not all) 1952 and 1953 Goldtops had fairly substantial neck profiles, the Custom necks often feel a bit slimmer and faster. Upmarket ebony was favoured over Brazilian rosewood for the fretboard and, rather than use celluloid nitrate inlays, Gibson 'upgraded' to mother-of-pearl blocks with wider fretboard binding.

Perhaps the most contentious change, from a contemporary player's perspective, was made to the fretwire. Les Paul would whizz around the fretboard interspersing lightning-fast runs with jazz chord voicings. To facilitate his style, Les specified fretwire that was wider and even lower than the relatively small wire used on the earlier Goldtops.

In its promotional literature, Gibson said: "Players [who] rave about its extremely low smooth frets and playing action call it the 'Fretless Wonder'." Les wanted the frets to be as close to imperceptible as possible, but for players who like to bend strings more than a semitone, Customs can feel like hard work. This may be one reason why most big-name players of the 60s and 70s chose other models and Customs have always been less popular, collectible and valuable than Goldtops and 'Bursts.

Few liked the wrap-under iteration of the trapeze tailpiece that Les Paul designed. It worked well and sounded fantastic in wrap-over form on the ES-225 and ES-295, but most players would have welcomed the stability of the fixed wraptail bridge that superseded it on Goldtops in 1953. Here's where things get contentious because some consider the wraptail to be the best-sounding bridge that Gibson ever fitted to Les Pauls, but the counter argument is that intonation can never be perfect.

Leaving aside the fact that Gibson somewhat undermined its own efforts by

*“Every artist that’s
played it goes crazy... it
has been owned by two
legends for a reason”*

MATTHIEU LUCAS



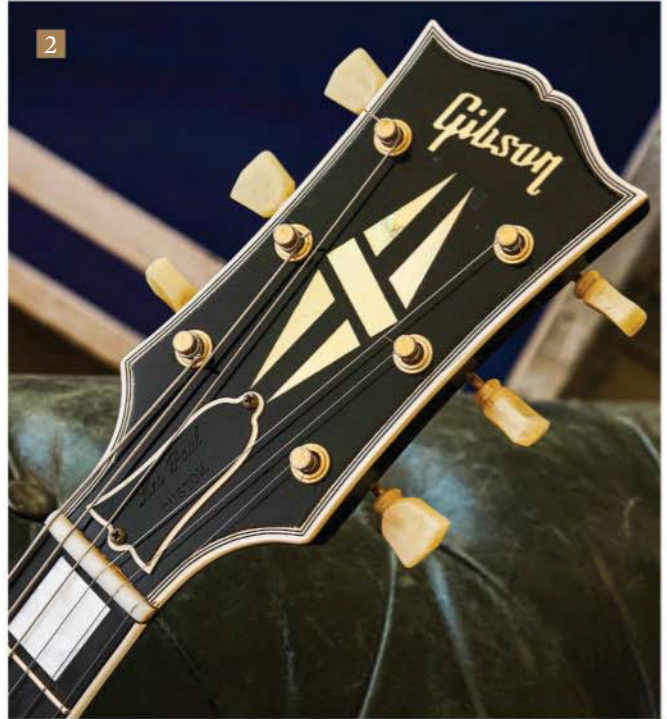
The first version of the Les Paul Custom featured two pickups and a mahogany body with no maple cap



1. The new 'Staple P-90' pickup that Seth Lover designed for Les Paul was visually and sonically similar to a DeArmond Dynasonic

2. Upmarket appointments on the Custom included multi-ply headstock binding, gold-plated hardware and a split diamond inlay

3. 'Speed' knobs appeared on Les Paul Custom models in 1954 and were later replaced by smaller 'top hat' knobs in 1956



positioning it sub-optimally, the Tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar combo allowed strings to be individually adjusted for intonation. Although the first Gibson with a Tune-o-matic was the 1953 Super 400, the Les Paul Custom was the first solidbody to have one. The two models also shared the same inlay on the front of the headstock.

Staple Diet

Another feature unique to Les Paul Customs made before 1957 was mismatched pickups, and this was almost certainly done at the behest of Les Paul himself. If you closely examine footage of Les playing very early Goldtops, you will notice that whatever pickup he had in the neck position wasn't a P-90. The giveaway is wide and off-centre round polepieces with a series of smaller holes that seem to indicate he was using a DeArmond Dynasonic under a cream plastic cover.

Whether he was actually using stock DeArmonds in disguise or, as suggested by his tech Tom Doyle, pickups that Les wound himself using DeArmond parts is open to debate. But one thing we can say for sure is that Les wasn't using P-90 neck pickups. Given that he was Gibson's number one endorser and something of a superstar at the time, this must have been seen as problematic.

"[The neck is] fuller and really not comparable to any other mid-50s Customs that I've played"

MATTHIEU LUCAS

Rather than ape Gretsch and simply buy Dynasonics from DeArmond, Gibson tasked Seth Lover with creating a Gibson version of the Dynasonic. The resulting pickup is often called the 'Staple P-90', but besides the shape and size it's a very different pickup from a regular P-90 and has a clearer and a more 'hi-fi' sonic characteristic that is oddly reminiscent of – you guessed it – the DeArmond Dynasonic.

Early Customs provide the best of both worlds because you still get the snarlier joys of a regular P-90. The Staple's power means the P-90 has to be set quite high to balance out, but with such differently voiced pickups it's a mismatch made in heaven. In that sense it's a bit like a Telecaster and yet far more versatile because the pickups have individual controls.

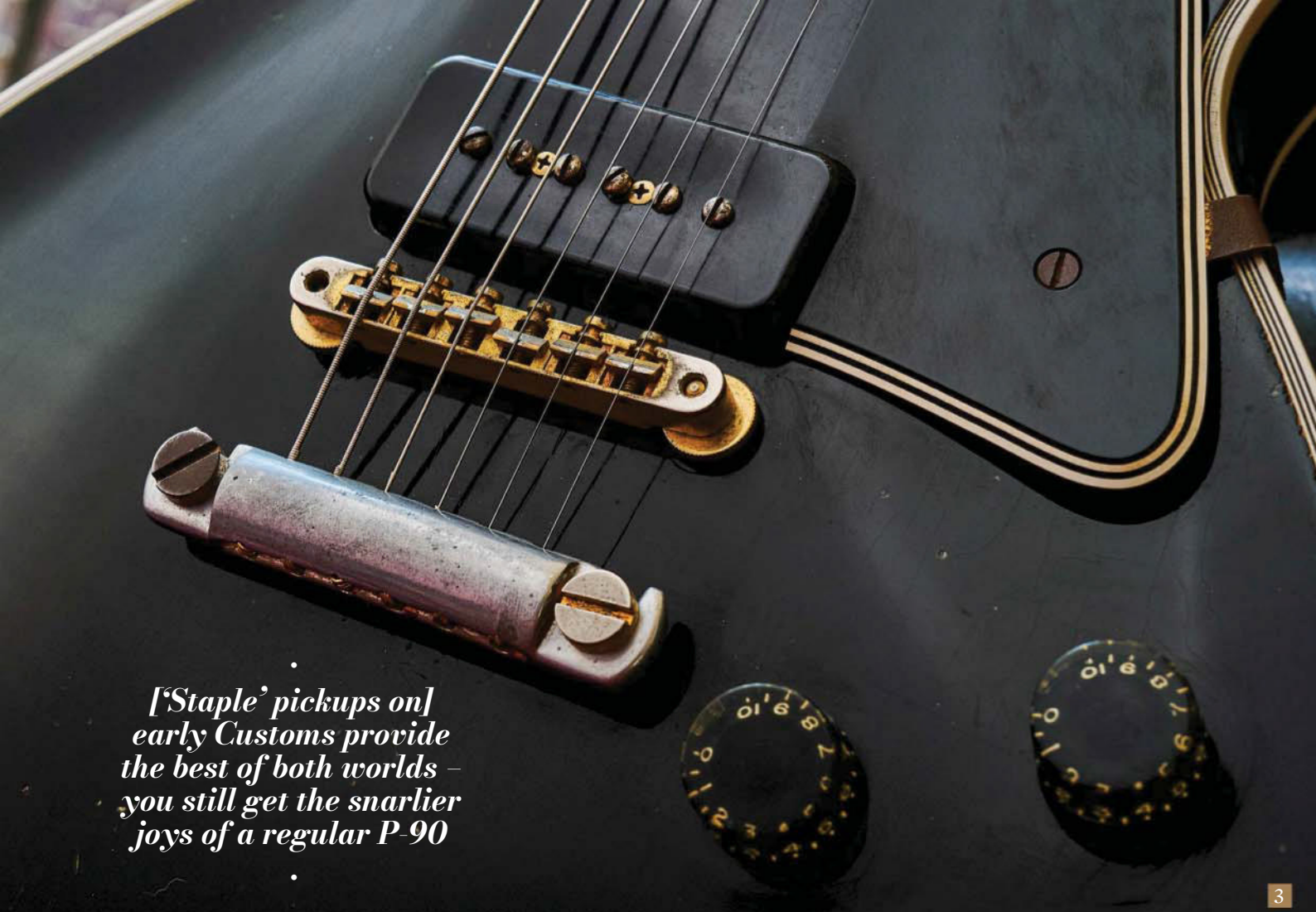
There was something about the way Gibson wired controls and wound pickups in that era that allowed volume

adjustments without losing clarity and tone finessing without losing definition. Watch any footage of Paul Kossoff and you'll see him continuously switching pickups and using the controls. It's entirely possible that he learned to do so on this actual guitar.

Prior to the introduction of the humbucker in 1957, the Staple P-90 was Gibson's most prestigious pickup and featured in various high-end jazz guitars as well as the Les Paul Custom. The 'Staple' nickname was probably inspired by the thin rectangular polepieces, all of which had height-adjustment screws. It's interesting to note that for the Staple P-90 Gibson reverted to the pickup mounting method used for a brief period on the bridge pickup of the earliest Goldtops, with screws going through diagonal corners.

Blues Boomers

Maybe it's because of the frets, the non-robust gold plating or a long-standing preference for Patent Applied For pickups over P-90s, but very few big-name players are associated with pre-1957 Les Paul Customs. The guitar we're featuring here is an exception because it belonged to two British blues legends – Paul Kossoff and Eric Clapton. We caught up with its current owner, Matthieu Lucas of Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris, to learn more about its history.



[‘Staple’ pickups on] early Customs provide the best of both worlds – you still get the snarlier joys of a regular P-90

3

“My understanding is that the guitar was brought back to England in late 1965 or very early 1966 by Paul’s father, David Kossoff,” Matt recalls. “He was an actor who travelled back and forth to the US and he bought it from Manny’s in New York. Paul was playing an SG Junior at the time, so the Custom was basically the first serious two-pickup Les Paul he ever owned.”

Paul auditioned for a North London blues combo called Black Cat Bones in 1966. The band’s drummer Frank Perry joined the band in the summer of 1966, shortly after Paul, and he recalls Paul having a black Les Paul at the time, but

[remembers Paul] quickly acquiring a sunburst Les Paul. Since Paul was only on the cusp of turning 16, he probably wouldn’t have been acquainted with a rockstar like Eric Clapton. It’s most likely he traded the black Custom for the ‘Burst at Selmer’s and, since Eric was a regular visitor, that’s probably where he bought Paul’s guitar.

“Clapton was certainly playing a 1950s Custom around that time,” Matt insists. “There are quite a few pictures of Clapton playing a Staple P-90 Custom with Cream at the Marquee Club, and we don’t know of any other pre-1957 Custom that was played by Clapton, except this one.”

It was very rare to see Clapton playing P-90 Gibsons during the Cream era, so it’s tempting to imagine him experimenting with different guitars before he moved onto the Firebird, ES-335 and SG that he’s most closely associated with during the mid-to-late 1960s. He did play another black Les Paul Custom, notably with Blind Faith and Delaney & Bonnie, but that was a three-pickup 1958 model that he later gifted to Albert Lee.

Matt offers another clue that Kossoff and Clapton owned the same Custom: “Paul didn’t like the way the binding was turning yellow, so he stripped the lacquer off the binding to make it white again. You can see in the Clapton pictures that the binding is very bright white and it remains that way today.”

Accounts suggest that Clapton left the guitar at the offices of Cream’s agent, the NEMS Organisation, in April 1967 because it was surplus to requirements for a forthcoming US tour. This is where the name Howard ‘H’ Parker enters the story because it’s thought the guitar was passed to him in lieu of payment.

Parker was a well-known face on the late-60s music scene in London who worked as a roadie and road manager for Hendrix, Pink Floyd and Cream. He kept the Custom under his bed, and when he died in 1974 the guitar passed to his friend



The guitar’s condition is remarkable because it has mostly been kept in storage or private collections

4. Paul Kossoff often applied his name and sometimes his address to the underside of his guitar's control plates – something discovered on this model at auction
5. The body binding looks unusually white because Kossoff scraped off the yellowed lacquer – current owner, Matthieu Lucas, tells us that Paul disliked the yellowing
6. Les Paul Customs were also fitted with fancy 'waffle back' Kluson tuners, but the upgrade is more for visual satisfaction than ergonomic purposes



and fellow road manager John Wilson who kept it under his bed for the next 32 years. Although aware of the Clapton connection, Wilson had no idea the guitar had belonged to Paul Kossoff. This was discovered when he took the Custom to auctioneers Cooper Owen in 2006. “They only found out about Paul’s ownership when they removed the switch and control covers,” Matt reports. “Paul used to put paper stickers under the covers and write his name on them. He sometimes wrote the serial numbers of guitars and his address on there, too.

“At some point it supposedly belonged to Duff McKagan,” Matt adds, “but I actually have no proof of that and I haven’t asked



“They only found out about Paul’s ownership when they removed the switch and control covers”

MATTHIEU LUCAS

Duff personally if he ever owned it. I just know that after Howard Parker it went through several hands and apparently went to Japan at some point. It definitely ended up in Florida when Melvyn Franks was building his guitar collection. I bought it from him about 10 years ago.”

We’re obviously curious to know how the guitar feels to play and whether the

neck profile is thinner than the ones generally found on 1958 or 1959 ‘Bursts?

“Actually no, I would say it feels quite a beefy neck to my hands,” Matt insists. “It’s actually quite fun with this guitar because it has a very unique profile. It’s fuller and really not comparable to any other mid-50s Customs that I’ve played before now. If I had to define it, I’d say it’s the type of chunky C profile I would expect to find on a ‘58 Standard.

“What’s really nice is that the original frets are almost unplayable... but still very playable at the same time. It’s very weird because when you get to the high notes, there are basically no frets left. It’s like the definition of a Fretless Wonder, but at the same time it’s very easy to play. It’s also super light for a Les Paul Custom and weighs just 3.84kg, which is just under 8.5lb.

“The hardware, frets, pickups, potentiometers and the caps are all original to the guitar, along with the finish. It remains exactly as Kossoff and Clapton left the guitar. Although I do have some photos of Clapton playing it with a white or cream pickguard. But, for sure, this guitar has either been stored under a bed or owned by collectors from that point onwards.

“That’s probably why it has survived the way it has,” Matt concludes. “It’s an exceptional-sounding guitar. Every artist that has played it goes crazy about it, and it has been owned by two legends for a reason. It’s really a special instrument.”

With thanks to Matthieu Lucas of Matt’s Guitar Shop in Paris for allowing us to photograph this historic guitar
www.mattsguitar.shop

IGF CHELTENHAM 2026

GUITAR SUMMER

CONTEMPORARY GUITAR COURSES

ROCK & BLUES FOUNDATIONS with JON BISHOP

A focus on the fundamentals from major and minor chords, the pentatonic scale, blues licks and rock riffs. From classic rock to feel good blues, this will give you vital skills to sounding great.

ACOUSTIC with CHRIS QUINN

This acoustic course promises to reveal how techniques and chords from Robert Johnson style blues through to Ed Sheeran pop will make you a better fingerstylist.

VINTAGE ELECTRIC BLUES with CHRIS CORCORAN

Referencing the sound of '40s & '50s Blues and Jump Blues via T-Bone Walker and BB King, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention.

GROOVE with JASON SIDWELL

Playing in time with energy and sophistication is what this involving course is about. From picking to modes, funk/soul/RnB styles will be covered via artists such as Jimmy Nolen, Nile Rodgers and Prince.

BLUES & COUNTRY with ANDY SAPHIR

From Eric Clapton to Brent Mason, this course looks at the techniques, harmonic approaches and lick vocabulary used in electric blues and country guitar.

JAZZ with JOHN WHEATCROFT

This course focuses on the exciting sounds of jazz, looking at players ranging from Wes Montgomery to John Scofield, George Benson to Django Reinhardt.



CLASSICAL GUITAR COURSE

COURSE LEAD: FRANCISCO CORREA

Whether you are a budding guitarist, an advanced player, or simply a music enthusiast, our programme is designed to inspire and elevate your skills while connecting you with a community of like-minded musicians.

Led by an exceptional faculty of internationally-renowned guitarists and teachers, this summer school offers a comprehensive programme of concerts, classes, and interactive sessions, catering to all levels of ability.

FLAMENCO GUITAR COURSE

COURSE LEAD: SAMUEL MOORE

Central to the philosophy of this course is the notion that mastering simple compás (rhythm) ideas (in the context of different palos) and learning how to integrate them with other performance components (such as falsetas and llamadas) is the key to unlocking flamenco's spontaneous performance elements at a basic level.



GUITAR PLAYING FOR SINGER-SONGWRITERS

COURSE LEAD: HOLLY CARTER

Award-winning artist Holly Carter shares inspiring techniques blending expressive guitar playing with songwriting insight, helping you develop confidence, creativity, and a distinctive, authentic musical voice through practical guidance.



Held in one of UK's most beautiful cities, our 4 and 5-day immersive courses fully embrace the diversity of the guitar, whatever your level, musical interest or style of guitar playing, I am sure we have something for you!

Artistic Director: Tom Kerstens



11-15
august

Guitarist

musicradar:

GUITAR

book
now

igf.org.uk





Vintage Vibes

The third iteration of Fender's mid-price, Mexican-made models brings us a selection of guitars that evoke a trip across the decades

Words Neville Marten Photography Phil Barker



FENDER VINTERA III LATE '50S STRATOCASTER & MID '60S JAZZMASTER £1,049 & £1,149

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.fender.com**

What You Need To Know

1

When did the Vintera range first emerge?

Vintera guitars debuted in 2019 as a vintage-vibed line with decade-specific design elements including neck shapes, pickup output, colours and hardware. They were not specific to a year, as with American Vintage or Custom Shop models. Vintera II (2023) and now III (2026) have added more models, colours and styles.

2

What's going on with the Jazzmaster's controls?

Although it looks complex, it's deceptively simple. The bottom controls are like a standard twin-pickup electric, with tone, volume and three-way toggle. The top set (a slider switch selects it) operates on the neck pickup only, and the thumbwheels offer tone and volume for that warmer sound.

3

Why tall narrow frets?

The vintage-style fingerboard camber (184mm/7.25 inches) is fantastic for barre chords as the convex curve makes them easier to press down. But with thin, low vintage frets bends can be a problem as the string can slip under the finger. So tall and narrow frets with a classic fingerboard radius is a great solution.

Although enjoying a somewhat modest history compared with Martin, Gibson and even Gretsch, nevertheless when Fender launched its Broadcaster in 1950 it was like a bolt of lightning had hit the guitar world. From the start the guitars were a sensation, model after model showing that this futuristic style of instrument was what modern players craved. They were cool. They were groovy. They were 'now'. They smacked of the Corvettes and T-Birds that cruised LA's boulevards, chrome and custom colours galore. There was really nothing not to like. Sure, there was the occasional misstep across the intervening years, but many of these are now particularly scarce and collectible instruments.

Unsurprisingly for a blossoming mass producer, Fender made small course corrections as the company progressed. So production methods, choices of timbers, colour ranges, pickups and hardware were all tweaked or revised. But what seemed like minuscule changes at the time have become part of the company's heritage, with each minor alteration defining an exact era. Today, this provides Fender with a bottomless well of new model variations. It's great for them, but it's good for us, too.

And so the third iteration of this now well-established strand of the Fender line-up is upon us. Vintera III takes a slightly more nuanced approach than previous releases: where earlier instruments' specs focused on a particular





2

decade, like '50s Stratocaster or '70s Tele, here we find the personality of each model defined by a more focused dive into the back-catalogue's specs. Hence before you sit the Late '50s Vintera Stratocaster and Mid '60s Jazzmaster.

As usual, upgrades are in evidence across the range. These include real-bone nuts, accurate headstock decals on top of (and not under) the finish, slab and round laminate rosewood fingerboards with clay dots where appropriate, a redeveloped colour palette, and other era-specific appointments such as neck shape, pickup winds and hardware.

Speaking of colours, it's a shame that Fender chose to send us the least exciting finish for each model. So instead of this rather staid three-tone sunburst Strat we could have had fabulous Aztec Gold or instrumental-tastic Dakota Red. Or, for the Jazzmaster, rather than the plain Olympic White – even though it does look nice with tortoiseshell pickguard – we might have got stunning Candy Apple Red with matching headstock or equally gorgeous Sonic Blue. All highly subjective, of course. Let's look at the Stratocaster first.

Having reviewed hundreds of Strats over the years we won't bore you with full details of this one's four-bolt neck join, alder body and one-piece maple neck with walnut skunk-stripe, vintage vibrato bridge and chrome hardware... but simply say that our Vintera III is put together fantastically well. It's great to know the vibrato arm has the correct bend for the

era, and the black-bobbin Alnico V pickups have a punchier wind than the glassier, bell-like-sounding Alnico III guitars that came before. The 21 narrow tall frets are a more modern feature but work superbly well with our guitar's traditional 184mm (7.25-inch) fingerboard radius.

Other appointments include bent steel saddles, vintage-style tuners and attractive parchment-coloured plasticware. The finish on both guitars is gloss polyester for the bodies and urethane for the necks.

The Jazzmaster, too, is very well crafted. While it shares the Strat's alder body, here we find a maple neck with rosewood fingerboard. It's odd, though, that Fender chose not to add binding to the

1. By the late 1950s Fender had settled on this pickup magnet stagger, the two middle poles highest, and the second string the lowest

2. Although the two Jazzmaster tone circuits sound complicated, they're not. Just think of the lower one as just like that of a Telecaster

3. The 184mm (7.25-inch) radius gives the fingerboard its distinctive camber, but the tall narrow frets are great for both chords and lead playing

The personality of each is defined by a focused dive into back-catalogue specs





The Jazzmaster's arm is push-in, and the small round button at the front locks the system in place to hold tuning should a string break

dot-inlaid, round-lam 'board, since this is what the company did briefly around 1966 and would have been an absolutely era-defining feature. As on the Strat, 21 tall narrow frets are a great match for the more heavily cambered fingerboard.

Everything else is just as you would expect from this quirky model, with two discrete tone and volume circuits controlling the wide, flat single-coil pickups, and the floating vibrato bridge with its long push-in arm and Trem-Lock lever. The lever, when pushed towards the neck, locks the system in place so that should the player break a string, the others won't go wildly out of tune. It still works as a downwards-only system, so it was quite a revelation at the model's launch in 1958.

Overall, the Jazzmaster remains a stunning piece of work from Leo Fender

Our Jazzmaster is a more complex beast. But once you've cracked the code it's very fine indeed

and his team, even though it took 60s surf music and 80s indie rock to make it cool. The only major jazz artist to use one was Joe Pass, who played both Jazzmaster and Jaguar guitars (donated by Fender) while recuperating in Synanon Drug Rehabilitation Center in Santa Monica.

Controls wise, the Jazz's lead side more or less apes that of a Tele with master volume and tone rotaries, plus three-way pickup selector. A slider switch swaps over to the rhythm (jazz) side, which operates on the neck pickup only, with two thumbwheels for volume and tone. At first it doesn't seem that intuitive, but once you understand it it's a breeze to master.

Feel & Sounds

Both Vintera III models have great but quite different necks. The Strat's D shape is fuller in the hand due to its beefier shoulders when compared with the slimmer-feeling C profile of the Jazz. But with classic-radius 'boards and tall narrow frets both feel definitively Fender. Actually, this radius and fret style is a brilliant combination because the more convex profile is perfectly suited to chord playing, while the frets' extra height offers excellent string bending and vibrato.

THE RIVALS

Jet's JJ-300 P90 (£269) has a roasted Canadian maple neck and roasted poplar body. If you don't need a complicated vibrato then the fixed bridge will please. Add throaty P-90 style pickups, a 235mm (9.25-inch) radius fingerboard and 22 medium jumbo frets and off you go.

Yamaha's Pacifica Standard Plus (£849) is simply fabulous. With Rupert Neve Design Reflectone pickups in HSS configuration, highest quality Gotoh hardware, 22 stainless-steel medium jumbo frets, alder body, maple neck with compound radius rosewood fingerboard, it's a great three-pickup alternative.

One of the original offsets, Fender's own American Professional Classic Jaguar in Sherwood Green (£1,565) blends vintage style with modern performance. With an alder body, 610mm (24-inch) scale maple neck, dotted rosewood fingerboard, and two punchy Coastline '65 single-coil Jaguar pickups, it was Fender's top-of-the-line guitar at launch – and you can see why!



4



5

The Achilles heel of the Jazzmaster has always been the extremely shallow break angle of the strings across the bridge. They can buzz and rattle or even jump out of their saddle slot. This one popped the bottom E a few times while playing, but fitting 10- or even 11-gauge strings would likely fix the issue, and there are gizmos and gadgets out there designed to do the same job should it really irk – shimming the neck is another option – so it's not an insurmountable issue.

Matching the Vintera III Strat to this reviewer's own Custom Shop guitar with Fat '60s pickups and rosewood fingerboard, the Mexican guitar is no less punchy but has more brightness and edge. You can tame the bridge pickup using its dedicated tone control – always a blessing – but in every pickup setting, clean and dirty, it's a fine Strat.

Our Jazzmaster is a more complex beast. But if you think of the bottom controls as being like a Tele with P-90-like characteristics, and maybe pre-set the top controls for when a fruitier voice is required, you'll nail it in no time. Compared directly to a Gibson '56-style Les Paul Goldtop, the Vintera was in the same rich-toned ballpark but with a touch

4. Just as the 50s turned into the 60s Fender introduced three-tone sunburst and rosewood fingerboard, but some Strats, like this one, got the three-tone and kept their maple necks

5. The new Vintera models have the fabled 'spaghetti' logo over and not under the finish. Note the vintage-style Kluson-type tuners and a nice tint to the urethane finish



6

While Fender refines the Vintera range with each iteration, the changes on these latest guitars are mostly under the bonnet

6. Unlike vintage Fenders, which mostly had serial numbers stamped onto the neckplate, on many modern guitars – like this one – they're on the rear of the headstock

more clarity and sweetness. It's great clean but takes distortion, even fuzz, really well. In fact, once you've cracked the Jazzmaster code it's very fine indeed.

Verdict

While it's true that Fender refines and improves the Vintera range with each iteration, the changes on these latest guitars are mostly under the bonnet. With the Strat, the most obvious Late '50s cue is the use of three-tone sunburst with a maple neck, which happened briefly just before rosewood appeared. And the perfect signpost on the Jazzmaster – binding on a dot-inlaid rosewood fingerboard – they chose not to implement. So many if not most of the upgrades will not be obvious to the casual observer.

That doesn't mean they're not welcome, or that these Vintera III instruments are not great guitars. They really are, in every respect. But if Fender's more subtle revisions are not enough to get your pulse racing, we'd wager that those stunning custom colours might just do the trick. **G**



FENDER VINTERA III LATE '50S STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £1,049 (incl Fender gigbag)

ORIGIN: Ensenada, Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: 1-piece maple, D profile, gloss urethane finish

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 184mm (7.25") radius

FRETS: 21 narrow tall

HARDWARE: Chrome Fender vibrato bridge with bent steel saddle and screw-in arm, parchment single-ply pickguard, pickup covers, knobs and vibrato arm tip, chrome surface mounted jack socket

TUNERS: Fender vintage style

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm

ELECTRICS: 3x Fender Late '50s Stratocaster pickups, master volume, 2x tone controls (1 for bridge pickup, 1 for neck and middle), 3-way selector

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Vintera III Early '60s Stratocaster (£1,049), with small headstock and rosewood fingerboard; Vintera III Late '60s Stratocaster (£1,049), with rosewood or maple (Olympic White only) fingerboards

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: 3-Color Sunburst (as reviewed), Dakota Red, Aztec Gold

8/10

PROS Nicely built guitar with mostly 'under the hood' upgrades; plays well with a comfy, satisfying neck; great sounds, punchy, clear but never harsh or tinny

CONS Being picky, the sunburst is a little bit boring and looks like Fender has used solid yellow in the middle as no grain is apparent



FENDER VINTERA III MID '60S JAZZMASTER

PRICE: £1,149 (incl Fender gigbag)

ORIGIN: Ensenada, Mexico

TYPE: Offset solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: 1-piece maple, medium C profile, gloss urethane finish

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, clay dot inlays, 184mm (7.25") radius

FRETS: 21 narrow tall

HARDWARE: Chrome Jazzmaster vibrato bridge with push-in arm, Trem-Lock lever, adjustable bridge; tortoiseshell-style pickguard, cream pickup covers, knobs and arm tip, black thumbwheels and black push switch for rhythm side

TUNERS: Fender vintage style

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Fender Mid '60s Jazzmaster pickups, master volume, master tone and 3-way selector switch (lead side); push switch, thumbwheels for tone and volume (neck pickup only) on the rhythm side

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.65/8.05

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The other offset in the range is the Mid '60s Jaguar (£1,149) with shorter 610mm (24") scale, Jaguar pickups, rosewood-fingerboard, 2x discrete tone circuits, string mute, chrome switch plates

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Olympic White (as reviewed), Sonic Blue, Candy Apple Red with matching headstock

8/10

PROS A cool-looking guitar that's very well made; plays easily with a comfortable and familiar neck; fantastic range of tones

CONS That common Jazzmaster problem of the shallow break angle over the bridge causing strings to pop out of their saddle (although easily curable)

Eastman

INTRODUCING

FULLERTONE OFFSET

The Offset For Everyone



eastmanguitars.com



Déjà Vu

Gibson rolled out the Double Trouble treatment last year and now brings it to a lower price-point with a Studio version. For skint rockers everywhere, it's time to rejoice!

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Lucy Robinson



GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO DOUBLE TROUBLE £1,599

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE **00800 444 27661** WEB **www.gibson.com**

What You Need To Know

1 A Les Paul Studio with a pickup swap, right?

Yes. The Les Paul Studio came back to the Gibson USA line-up in 2024, beginning with the Studio Modern at the start of the year. The everyman Studio returned in the autumn and then the Studio Session nipped in before the year end. Some 18 months on we now have a new limited version, the Double Trouble, with its uncovered Double Classic White Burstbucker Pro humbuckers.

2 Doesn't the 'Double Trouble' name reference the legal challenges DiMarzio and Gibson have been having?

Not according to Gibson USA's Jason Davidson. Along with Double Blacks and Zebras, Double Whites were common enough on old 'Bursts from 1959 to 1960 – no-one was supposed to see the bobbins under the pickup covers.

3 Does Gibson offer other Double Classic White pickups?

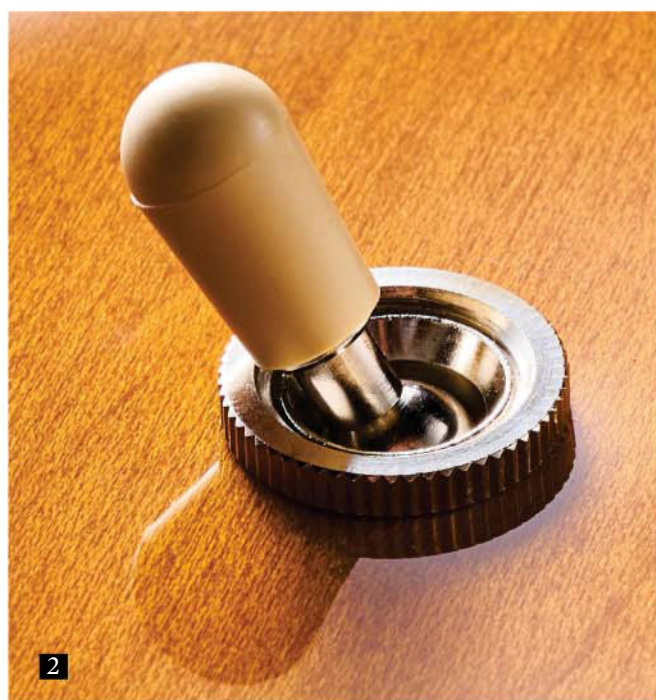
Yes, current models include the Dirty Fingers, the '57 Classic (including the Plus and Underwound versions), the Custombucker (all versions) and the new 1968 T-Top Reissue.

With no end to limited editions and artist models costing more than many of us are able to spend, it's easy to forget that Gibson's start-up maple-topped Les Paul is still the Studio, which – as you can see here – is far from overpriced. For many, its reputation as *almost* a proper Les Paul has relegated it to outside of the Premiership, but it's arguably one of the best-value and potentially super-sounding 'Pauls, especially if you don't need 'fancy'. But

even Gibson sometimes seems to overlook this gem. For example, the Studio Modern ushered in the returning level, and no sooner had the actual good ol' standard Les Paul Studio returned to the USA line-up in late 2024 than an up-spec'd option, the Studio Session, appeared and grabbed the headlines. But at least this new Double Trouble release (technically a limited edition, we're told) shines a spotlight on what might well be an overlooked gem.



You'd think a Modern Collection guitar like this would use the later 'reflector' top knobs, but these top-hats add another vintage-aimed detail. In function, of course, both volumes have pull switches to introduce Gibson's so-called 'coil-taps'



The Double Trouble name, of course, refers to the 'Double Classic White' uncovered pickups

The Double Trouble name, of course, refers to the 'Double Classic White' uncovered pickups (which are actually the same cream hue as the pickup mounting rings and fingerboard binding, slightly darker than the single-ply pickguard). Cover and bobbin colour aside, they're the same Burstbucker Pro humbuckers we find on the regular Studio and, in all honesty, that really is the only change here: as we said, you get the vibe of the full-fat Standard Double Trouble but with a saving of £900. So, what else are we missing?

The most obvious visual change is the lack of binding around the top edge of the

1. While the Double Trouble version here means we get the uncovered 'Double Classic White' humbuckers, they're actually the same Burstbucker Pro pickups that feature on the standard model

2. If you think there's something missing, don't worry – the classic cream Rhythm/Treble switch washer is in the soft-shell case for you to install yourself

UNDER THE HOOD

A very tidy PCB

Designed very much for fast, no-mistake production, like many Gibson USA guitars before it, our Studio centres around a very tidy-looking PCB. The pickups plug into the Quick Connect sockets, then there are plugs for the toggle-switch wires, output jack and ground; pretty much everything else is soldered to the 'board. While it means wiring mods and the like are a no-go, it does mean that everything is wired up perfectly. Of course, if you have any other Quick Connect pickups they're a no-solder load-in. For example, the most recent Quick

Burstbucker 1, 2, and 3], yielding a fatter, meatier tone with more drive and attack, providing classic Gibson Patent Applied For tone with a hint of attitude."

The volume controls here have pull-switches, which have a very good positive feel. These engage a 'coil-tap', which, as we've written before, is a bit of a misnomer. A coil-tap typically refers to a wire taken at, say, 70 per cent of the coil wind to offer a lower output than the full coil. These Gibson 'coil-taps' don't mess with the coils but instead pass the output of the screw coil of

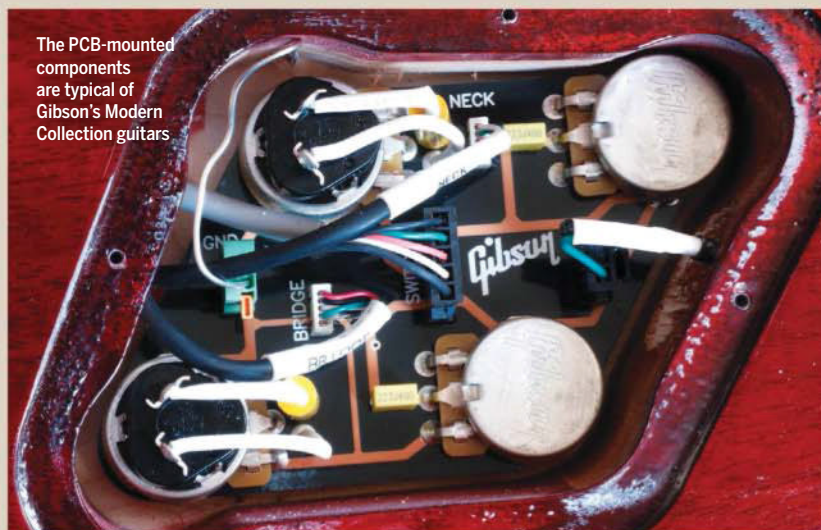
each through a .033 μ F capacitor that you can clearly see in front of each volume control. It means that the screw coil's high-end is dumped to ground, like a conventional tone control wound fully 'off'. So, the 'coil-tap' tone here has a slightly softer attack. The tone capacitors are rated conventionally at 0.022 μ F.

The pickups don't appear to be potted, either: they're certainly very lively with edge and attitude. The bridge unit has a quoted DCR of 8.3kohms, the neck 7.8k, which drops at output to 8.07k and 7.59k respectively.

The Burstbucker Pros provide "classic Patent Applied For tone with a hint of attitude"

Connect additions to the Gibson Pickup Shop are the '57 Classics and the Dirty Fingers (both available uncovered in Double Classic White).

Like the standard Studio, although uncovered, here we get the Burstbucker Pros, and Gibson says that their "characteristic sweet harmonic complexity and crystalline clarity derive from the slightly unbalanced coil windings. Alnico V magnets are used in place of the traditional Alnico II [used on the



The PCB-mounted components are typical of Gibson's Modern Collection guitars



Hardware is standard, including the Nashville bridge and lightweight aluminium tailpiece

plain maple top. Technically, the body depth is around 3mm slimmer here, but you probably wouldn't notice that. What you do notice is the weight. This Studio, like the original we evaluated from 2024, is very far from a boat anchor. It uses Gibson's most hollow Ultra Modern weight relief, and while plenty of die-hards will be saying, 'That's not a Les Paul!', well, plenty of others find the trimmer bulk quite engaging. To be honest, that includes us.

But with those exceptions the Studio is pretty much identical to the upper-market Standard DT, not least the fingerboard binding, which wasn't always a part of the Studio's recipe but here is pretty nicely done – as ever, the binding forms the fret-ends, the so-called 'nibs'.

Hardware is typical for the Modern guitars, too: a wider-travel Nashville tune-o-matic and lightweight aluminium stud tailpiece, Gibson Deluxe tuners with keystone buttons, and the well-cut nut is by Graph Tech.

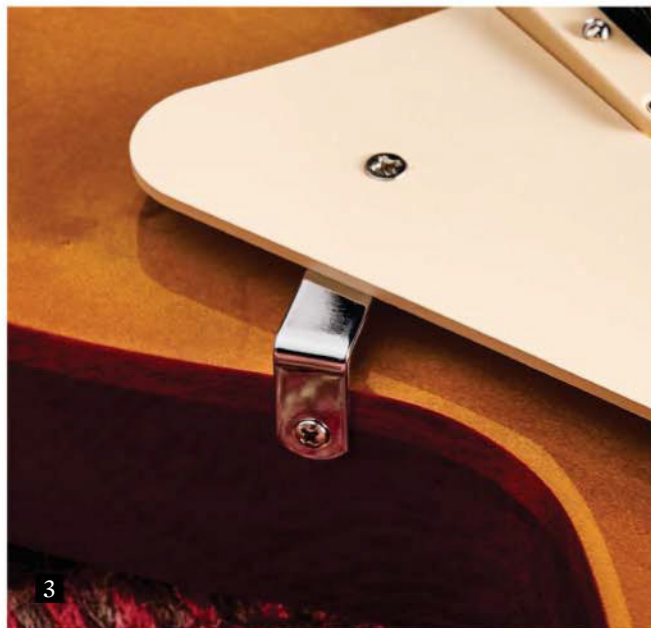
THE RIVALS

The Studio has little USA-made competition, but there are plenty of Asian-made guitars of increasing quality that should be on your radar. For example, Epiphone's Inspired by Gibson Custom 1959 Les Paul Standard Reissue (£1,199 inc hard case) includes USA-made Gibson Custombucker pickups, CTS Pots with Bumblebee paper-in-oil capacitors and, of course, the correct 'open book' headstock outline.

Another Chinese build is Eastman's SB59 in Vintage Satin Goldburst (£1,329 inc gig bag). It's certainly an 'inspired

by' rather than blatant copy and boasts a good specification that includes okoume back and neck (which keeps weight in check) with solid carved maple top and uncovered zebra-coiled Tonerider Alnico II humbuckers.

PRS's USA-made S2 McCarty 594 Singlecut lists for £2,399 and, while that is discounted in-store, it's more akin to the USA Les Paul Standard 50s/60s. But in the Indonesian-made SE line the McCarty 594 Singlecut lists at £949 with gigbag and boasts excellent attention to detail.





Feel & Sounds

There's very little here to moan about. The crisp finishing and fretwork suggests it's a higher ticket model than it is; the SlimTaper neck profile feels familiar, a shallow 'C' with a hint of a flat back. The 3.45kg (7.59lb) weight is a game-changer if your experience tells you all Les Pauls have to be a lot heavier. String height and setup is good; there's no need to tweak the neck and tuning stability is spot on.

It would be a huge disappointment if what we hear didn't reflect what we see and feel. But, again, we're smiling. There's beautiful depth at the neck, and clarity, too. Meanwhile, the bridge isn't over-sharp and has good bite that begins to earn its stripes with a little crunch, and the pickup outputs are nicely matched with no adjustment necessary. Above all, it's not overly thick-sounding. Yes, there's some smooth cream, but that's balanced with clarity. In this lower gain setting

3. Under the plain unbound maple top we have Gibson's most radical Ultra Modern weight relief, as found on all the Studio models. It certainly helps to bring the weight below 8lb

4. Typical of a lower-end model, the main Gibson logo – like the 'Les Paul model' identifier – is silk-screened. Tuners are spec'd as 'Vintage Deluxe', although stamped into each back is 'Gibson Deluxe'. Each tuner has the front retaining nut, not a vintage-style grommet

5. There's no edge binding to the Studio's body, but the fingerboard is nicely bound, blurring the gap in terms of feel between this Studio and the more expensive models

WHAT'S IN A NAME

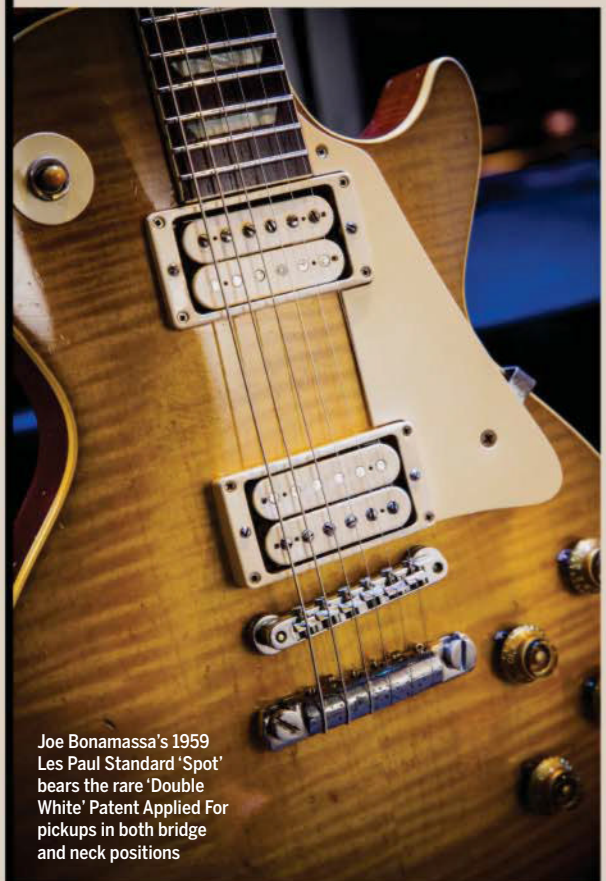
And where did the Double Trouble moniker come from?

Referring to the original guitars that launched in March 2025 in two colours with two more added later that August, Gibson USA's Jason Davidson, director of product development and Gibson archives curator, explains: "I named it 'Double Trouble' because it has Double Classic White pickups on a Les Paul and we haven't done that in a long time. It was a good name, there's nothing tongue in cheek about it – people run with ideas – but we just thought it was a good name, and people are quite taken with the guitars."

When it comes to aesthetics, the Double White bobbins give a very 70s vibe. "Absolutely, it is just a classic look," agrees Jason, "and, as I said, we haven't done that for some time on a production guitar."

Jared Brandon, the Gibson Pickup Shop's product manager and designer, adds: "If you look at books like *The Beauty Of The 'Burst* [Yasuhiko Iwanade], you'll see quite a few 'Bursts with the Double Classic White colour. That's obviously with the pickup covers removed, but it's a classic look."

In the book they're called 'Double Whites' and defined as "a combination of two cream coloured coils that appeared on the Patent Applied For pickup in 1959 and 1960". Nothing to do with the 70s, even though plenty of us will be more familiar with a set of DiMarzios than an old 'Burst with Double Whites. We think it looks like someone has swapped out the original pickups back in the day and retrofitted a pair of the then-must-have DiMarzios. And that certainly happened!



Joe Bonamassa's 1959 Les Paul Standard 'Spot' bears the rare 'Double White' Patent Applied For pickups in both bridge and neck positions

KNOW YOUR STUDIO

Same name, different specs. We take a closer look

The Studio family resides in Gibson USA's Modern Collection and the Les Paul Studio (£1,599, right) is identical to our reviewed Double Trouble version with the exception that the DT's Burstbucker Pros are uncovered, revealing the Double Classic White bobbins. Like all the Studio models, we have the Ultra Modern weight relief, a plain maple top, SlimTaper profile neck and bound rosewood fingerboard. There is a Les Paul Studio Figured Top (£1,699 typically online- or Gibson Garage only).

Next up is the Les Paul Studio Session (£1,899), which adds a AA figured maple top and bound ebony fingerboard. Pickups are the ever-popular '57 Classic at the neck and '57 Classic Plus at the bridge wired to individual pull-switch volume and tone controls for coil-tapping, phase and pure bypass switching.

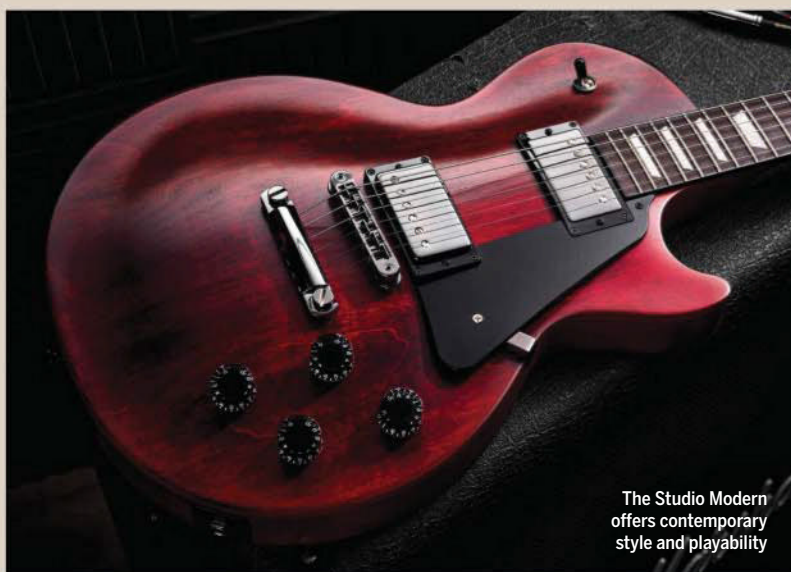
The Les Paul Studio Modern (£1,999, below right) continues the evolution again featuring the Ultra Modern weight relief and plain maple top, while the SlimTaper neck with bound ebony fingerboard gets a modern contoured heel. Humbucking pickups here

The Les Paul Studio is arguably one of the best-value and potentially super-sounding 'Pauls

are the 498T and 490R, wired with pull-switch controls like the Studio Session. Finishes are satin, not gloss.

The full-fat Les Paul Standard 50s and 60s Double Trouble (£2,499) are the standard models without weight relief but with uncovered Double Classic White bobbin 'buckers – the 50s uses the Alnico II Burstbucker 1 (neck) and Burstbucker 2 (bridge), while the 60s model goes for the Alnico V Burstbucker 61R and 61T humbuckers. As part of the Original Collection there's no truck here with pull-switch controls, these are hand-wired with Orange Drop capacitors. Also, the gloss nitro colours are slightly faded 'vintage' variations. They are limited to 500 in each colour – both the 50s and 60s are offered in Vintage Bourbon Burst, Vintage Honey Burst, Vintage Tobacco Burst and Vintage Cherry Sunburst.

The Les Paul Studio is identical to the DT, bar its stablemate's 'Double Whites'



The Studio Modern offers contemporary style and playability



The glued-in set neck features a traditional heel, and the familiar-feeling SlimTaper profile is a shallow 'C' shape

The [light] weight is a game-changer if your experience tells you all Les Pauls have to be a lot heavier

you can clearly hear the 'coil-tap' effect, too: slightly rounder in terms of attack, marginally (if anything) quieter and, in reality, it's a subtler option, rather than the more distinct full humbucker to single-coil switching that's used by so many makers (and also erroneously called a 'coil-tap' by some). It's certainly fun with both pickups on, and applying the coil-tap to the bridge pickup, for example, just helps pull back the crisp highs that are no doubt enhanced as there are no covers on these pickups.

It sounds a lot more 'vintage', if we're honest – a little played in. Very dynamic and expressive. Also, the Burstbuckers don't sound potted, which adds to the old-school appeal.

Verdict

This is a hard to put down Les Paul with bags of character, not least if your tastes lie with those earlier 'Burst-like tones. Then there's the weight, which you simply won't find outside of the real vintage deal or the higher end of the Gibson Custom range. We're not saying the weight relief doesn't change the response, but playing and living with a 'Paul of this weight is simply a pleasure. Granted, not everyone will accept the lack of body binding, and we're not spoiled for choice in terms of finish options, but when a guitar plays and sounds this good, we're not sure we care. **G**



GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO DOUBLE TROUBLE

PRICE: £1,599 (inc soft case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: 2-piece mahogany with centre-joined carved maple plain top and Ultra-Modern weight relief

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, SlimTaper profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

(NB: measured scale length is shorter)

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.6mm

FINGERBOARD: Cream bound Indian rosewood, acrylic trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Nashville tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Gibson Deluxe tuners w/ keystone buttons – chrome/nickel plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50.5mm

ELECTRICS: Uncovered 'Double Classic White' Gibson Burstbucker Pro humbuckers (neck and bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup (each volume with pull-switch 'coil-tap')

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.45/7.59

OPTIONS: The standard non-limited Les Paul Studio (£1,599) uses nickel-covered Burstbucker Pros

RANGE OPTIONS: Les Paul Studio Modern (£1,999); Les Paul Studio Session (£1,899).

The full-fat Les Paul Standard Double Trouble 50s and 60s cost £2,499 and (like the Studio version) are limited

LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model

FINISHES: Dirty Lemon Burst (as reviewed) Cherry Sunburst – gloss nitrocellulose



PROS Crisp build and finishing; beautiful light weight; spot-on setup and tuning stability; a no-issues 'Paul

CONS Limited colours and no binding. But do we really care?



Magic Beam

Blackstar expands its Beam series with
a feature-packed ultra-compact amp

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Matt Lincoln



BLACKSTAR BEAM MINI £169

CONTACT **Blackstar Amplification** WEB www.blackstaramps.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 That's an amp? It looks tiny...**
Yes, but don't let the size fool you as it can put out a really powerful sound, not for playing gigs but for at home or on the move.
- 2 We've seen practice amps before, what's so different here?**
Well, it's the first of its genre that has access to captured amp sounds courtesy of Neural Amp Modelling from Tone3000.
- 3 Can you play along to tracks?**
You can play any music you want through it via Bluetooth, and things are going to get really interesting very soon as integration with Moises AI stem separation is imminent.

Home practice sessions are something that benefit every guitar player and there's plenty of gear options out there to facilitate that when it's not possible to use a full rig, whether that be a headphone amp or something equipped with speakers that can be run at a reasonable volume. Blackstar has had the Beam Solo guitar headphone amp available for a while, and now that has been joined by the Beam Mini, a tiny desktop amp with speakers and a comprehensive set of practical features.

The Beam Mini looks and feels classy with a textured rubberised finish and sits solidly on any table with its controls easily accessible on the top. It takes its power from any five-volt (500A) USB-C charger like you would use to charge your phone – a cable is provided with the unit. A full charging session will give you 18

hours of playing time. You plug your guitar into a socket on its right cheek, and there are headphone and USB sockets on the rear. The headphone socket will also handle headsets with mics should you wish to input vocals, while the USB socket facilitates recording via the built-in audio interface with multiple audio inputs and outputs.

The unit is not only a source of guitar tones but also uses a Bluetooth connection to function as a speaker for music streaming, which you have a choice of playing along with. Blackstar has really paid attention to acoustic design here and the combination of the sealed acoustically-tuned cabinet with two full-range drivers and auxiliary bass radiator units puts out an extremely powerful sound for such a small device, with expansive imaging courtesy of Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo technology.



The Beam Mini uses Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) for data communication with the Beam app; standard Bluetooth is used for streaming audio to the unit. The LED (pictured on the unit's top) indicates Bluetooth audio status: white for no Bluetooth, blue for Bluetooth audio connection, and red to indicate battery charging.



1. This rubberised carrying strap comes in the shipping box (along with a USB-C to USB-C cable and a USB-C to standard USB-B adaptor) and attaches to the amp via a recess with a metal bar in the Beam Mini's body

2. The light Beam is a unique, context-sensitive display that provides visual feedback for the control being adjusted by the SpeedDial. The five buttons below it let you select from the five onboard patches and make quick adjustments to them with the SpeedDial. You can adjust Gain and Volume and select EQ and FX to adjust top-end and the amount of reverb respectively



In Use

The full functionality of the Beam Mini is accessed wirelessly via the Beam app, which is available for iOS and Android, but the physical unit itself is usable straight out of the box and perfectly capable of standalone use without a phone in sight. There are five user-defined patches stored onboard and accessed from the top panel, which has a small array of buttons to access various aspects of the sound to be adjusted by a rotary SpeedDial. Basically, you can choose your patch and adjust the Gain, EQ, FX and Volume – the white light Beam intuitively illuminates in line with any changes you make.

The patches are constructed in the same way as those in the ID:X Floor pedal, which we looked at recently. You get a Pre-FX in front of your chosen amp, then the amp followed by a fixed chain of three effects (modulation, delay and reverb), all passing through Blackstar's proprietary IR-based CabRig DSP. All of this is easily set up in the app, which has very clear visual representations of everything – just pair up your phone and the Beam Mini over Bluetooth and you're good to go.

The 12 modelled guitar amps include several Blackstar models such as the St James, plus the brand's Ampton range of modelled classic amps, which includes Fender Twin, Vox AC30, Marshall Plexi and JCM800, Mesa Dual Rectifier and Peavey 5150. All have fully adjustable conventional controls and you get Blackstar's ISF to adjust the tone stack characteristics from UK (Marshall) to USA (Fender) sounds. You also get some bass amps and an acoustic preamp. The CabRig facility gives you a choice of six cabinets with either a mic'd sound with a choice of mics, or the 'In the Room' option, which works really well in a practice situation, offering more of the experience of standing next to an amp while you play. With 35 effects available to populate the pre- and post-effects slots, there's a wide range of flavouring to complement the amps to create quality, playable tones for a wide variety of musical styles – something that is reflected by the factory-programmed patches provided by Blackstar in the app.

What really sets the Beam Mini apart, though, is that besides all of the modelled sounds provided by Blackstar you also

THE RIVALS

If you want similar facilities in a more compact form for use with headphones, look to the Blackstar Beam Solo (£119). There are several portable practice amps with Bluetooth speaker capability available in the vein of the Beam Mini, including the Positive Grid Spark Go (£99), which offers 33 amp models and 43 effects, and Laney's Prism Mini (£99), which features 17 amp models, 32 effects, 100 presets and a built-in drum machine. The JBL BandBox Solo (£199) is the only other similar unit that is already equipped with AI stem separation offering guitar only, 'vocal and backtrack only', and 'guitar and backtrack only'.

3. The Beam app offers a full catalogue of effects pedals, amps, cabinets, mics, plus recording tools, video lessons, backing tracks and drum loops. It also accesses an online community to share patches

4. If you scroll down the array of modelled amps in the Beam app, the last slot is for Tone3000. Select this and you get access to another menu where you can choose from a massive array of NAM amp captures



BLACKSTAR BEAM MINI

PRICE: £169

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Portable practice amp

FEATURES: 5x presets, Bluetooth audio streaming, removable carry strap, USB audio interface, app with tuner, metronome and more

CONTROLS: Power button, Bluetooth pairing button, Patch, Gain, EQ, FX, Volume, SpeedDial

CONNECTIONS: Standard instrument input, 1/8" stereo headphone output, USB

POWER: Internal Lithium-ion battery charged via USB (18 hours' use on a full charge)

DIMENSIONS: 152 (w) x 89 (d) x 79mm (h)

get access to a humongous range of amp captures. Blackstar has teamed up with Neural Amp Modelling pioneers Tone3000 for access to its open-source NAM platform. Scroll down to the bottom of the Blackstar amp menu and you can engage NAM and scroll through its range of snapshot captures of physical amps and rigs for selection for placement in your signal chain (at the moment you can't have a Pre-FX with it, but you can add the post-FX). Checking out the captures we found some excellent tones among them, and yet, as anyone can upload their own captures, there are also plenty that are a bit lacklustre. However, sort out the wheat from the chaff and you've got access to a cracking range of sounds.

The Beam app also comes with a metronome and a range of backing tracks in various styles that you can stream into the unit and play along with, but you can also stream any music you want into it, which is where an update expected in late summer will offer even more potential for practice. In August, Beam Mini will be able to integrate Moises AI stem separation, letting you isolate or remove instruments

What really sets the Beam Mini apart is that you also get access to a humongous range of amp captures

from any song, thus you should be able to take any song and remove the guitar part, allowing you to play your own part along with the band instead. The other side of that coin is that if you're struggling to learn a particular guitar part, you may be able to isolate it from the backing and the vocals to hear it with clarity.

Verdict

The Beam Mini packs all the elements you need into a fully portable practice amp and does it in style for a very reasonable asking price. Its lightweight portability, intuitive ease of use, excellent sound projection, and a great set of proprietary amps, cabs and effects – plus access to a massive, sound library via Tone3000 and the promise of stem splitting technology to come – makes this the most advanced unit of its type currently available. **G**

Guitarist GOLD 10/10

PROS Compact size; big sound; ease of use; access to a wide range of sounds; practical learning features in the app; audio interface capability; 18 hours' playing time

CONS Nothing that we can see – this covers all the angles

Bark & Bite

Exceptional guitars with classic roots and hand-tailored features



ToneWolf founder, luthier Steve Weir, has been building bespoke electric guitars in Britain for over 25 years

Remember the first time you really connected with a guitar? The sound of a chord leaping out of the amp that got your heart pumping? Or that warm, stinging lead tone that lingered in your memory?

At ToneWolf, we build guitars that make you feel that way every time you pick them up. Made with pride, precision and flair in Britain, our guitars are inspired by classics but

Crafted To Fit You

Our base models are beautifully built and styled but are also an open book for customisation with your choice of select pickups and hardware

Sigma



Tonewolf

GUITARS

possess their own unique identity and evocative sound. From the pure, uncompromising tone of the single-pickup Cub model, to the warmth and expressiveness of the Delta, our range of guitars was created to offer timeless platforms that can be hand-tailored for the individual player. From the thrilling twin-pickup performance of the Alpha to the edge and excitement of the Theta, ToneWolf guitars are made to fire your

passion – because every build is shaped by your vision of what sounds, feels and looks just right.

Each of our guitars is constructed to fit your needs. We work closely with you throughout the build, helping you define what suits your playing, your sound and your hands, using premium-grade woods and hardware. From hand-wound pickups from revered makers to light, resonant tonewoods,

we put heart and soul into everything we build, so every detail is dialled in perfectly – from beautiful neck profiles to impeccable setups. You can specify the bridge type, scale length, finish and more – and we're always happy to guide you through your options to bring your dream instrument into reality.

So if you've been looking for 'the one', try a ToneWolf – crafted to deliver pure enjoyment every time you plug it in.



For information on these guitars and more visit www.tonewolf.co.uk

Subscribe here

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
& SAVE UP TO 37%!*
Guitarist

Guitarist



+NEW
DIGITAL
ACCESS

TO 150+ ISSUES
WHEN YOU
SUBSCRIBE
TO PRINT!*

SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY THESE BENEFITS

- **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

SUBSCRIBE
FOR 6 MONTHS
AND SAVE
37%*



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

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. For enquiries, please call +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than the national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



« BLUEPRINT »

ANTELOPE IN THE ROOM

British pedal maker ThorpyFX made its name with high-impact effects with a military theme, such as the Gunshot. But its latest overdrive is named after South African fauna and its simple premise is, founder Adrian Thorpe says, that it “makes everything sound better”

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Lucy Robinson

B rackley-based effects maker ThorpyFX has been in business for well over a decade now and its distinctive high-sided pedals have deservedly won a slew of awards. Until now, the pedals have typically had military styling (founder Adrian Thorpe was in the British Army for many years), and though not all players will grasp the Cold War symbolism of, say, the Peacekeeper or the ER-2, to use but two examples, there was no mistaking the etched-crosshair motif of the company's debut overdrive, the Marshall-like Gunshot.

More recently, however, as world events have taken a darker turn, ThorpyFX has broadened its visual and sonic identity with two pedals that depart from the bellicose script. The Hanami fuzz, launched last year, took its inspiration from Japanese cherry blossom season. Now the Kudu, named after a large South African antelope, continues the nature-derived theme. The pedal took shape after a chance gift from a fellow designer Dan Coggins, inspiring Adrian to create a highly versatile overdrive. We sit down with the company's namesake and founder to find out more...



The new Hanami and now Kudu pedals are a bit of a departure from what's gone before, at least visually.

“Yes, it's been a bit of a wholesale change, really. We like to listen to customers generally, and whenever we've felt that the swell of brown noise reached a certain crescendo, we've always made changes. So when people were saying the first pedals we ever brought out were a little bit too big, we shrunk them down. And when people

were saying they couldn't see the controls because the metal was too shiny, we moved it to black anodised aluminium.

“And as a small company, these are big changes and it costs lots of money and it takes time to try to mitigate the sheer cost of doing these things. We then looked at our range and went, ‘Well, we could invest in several bits of equipment, and we could utilise our tools to essentially allow us to buy product that's blank and then customise it for this specific pedal.’

“So we invested 100 grand in lasers, UV printers and 3D printers and jigs and stuff like that. What that's enabled us to do is almost go back to my roots, so I can do custom one-offs, I can do small runs, I can do full main runs, and the base enclosure stays the same – but we just apply custom artwork and we have full control over that process.

“So it's a bit of a business decision but also a creative decision as well. It took a bit of time, but it's panned out quite nicely and it's also allowed us to, not branch away from the military thing, but tone it down a little bit – and that's a personal choice as well. I have a background in the military. I'm not a warmonger, as I have been called by some, and I believe

PHOTO COURTESY OF THORPYFX



1. The Kudu took its inspiration from a heavily modded re-working of the MXR Distortion+ circuit

2. Three clipping modes mean the Kudu can be matched to the natural compression characteristics of different amp types



"My dream amp is such a great amp from the off. But this new pedal makes it sound [even] better"





3. By popular request, ThorpyFX scaled down the size of its robust enclosures, which now feature detailed artwork

4. Tone guru Dan Coggins was behind the Kudu's flexible gain delivery

5. Level, Drive and Bite (a sophisticated presence/treble control) knobs tailor the sound

6. Recent Thorpy pedals, including the Hanami fuzz, have moved away from the previous military theme



3

I operate for peace and have good moral compass. But I wanted to change things up a bit and so we've done a few things that have stepped away from the military aesthetic. Hanami was the first one, then The J, and now the Kudu. And as we move forward, we're just sort of toning things down a little bit, art-wise, to appeal to a broader audience.

"And you know what? At some point we'll do full on Custom Shop stuff. We have it in the glide path that we're working towards, and I've done many things already for people, which was fun. I'm glad we can do it because creative freedom brings quite a lot of joy."

How did this new Kudu overdrive pedal come into being?

"I feel a bit guilty about the Kudu in some ways [laughs]. Dan [Coggins], my erstwhile analogue designer, gifted me a present [of a pedal he had made] at Christmas of 2024 because I was a bit down – I'd just lost my parents and [everything] was shit, if I'm honest. But he cheered me right up. Because as much I design pedals, I really like them – I like everyone else's pedals.

"The clipping types were very specifically chosen with certain types of amp in mind"

"Dan said, 'I'd been asked to do this for someone and when I'd finished I liked it so much I thought I'd make you one because you like Marshall amps.' Essentially, it was an MXR Distortion+ with quite a few modifications to it. Even though the Distortion+ does work well with Marshall-style amps, this works so much better. And so I use it with a Soldano and I use it with a Cornford, and [you could] use it with all these different style amps.

"I was thinking, 'This is amazing, it just works with everything' – it's a bit simple because it's just got Level and Drive. So we had this back and forth together and a few months later, Dan said, 'I was thinking about your comment about simplicity.' Dan knows what I want with stuff and he turned around and said, 'So I've sketched





5



6

this out and it takes that concept of making things better and working well with everything and enhancing the thing that you're playing into.'

"He explained that this would need to come from a wider field – so it's got more EQ, it's got more clipping options, the gain control is more flexible, and the tone control is not a true tone control; it adds presence and treble, so it's more of a 'bite'. And the control's actually called Bite because, depending on your amp, it cuts through a certain way. He just drew this schematic out from me and I was like, 'Oh, wow. Now I've definitely got to lay this out and see how it comes out.' And everything I plugged into, it made it sound better.

"My dream amp has long been the Cornford MK50 II, which won *Guitarist* awards when it came out. I bought one then and later sold it, then ended up buying it back because it's my favourite amp. It doesn't need anything, truthfully – it's such a great amp from the off. But then I plug this thing that we designed into it and it makes it sound better. It's one of those moments where my go-to amp that I could just plug into now has been



7. For the uninitiated, a kudu is a large member of the antelope family with long, rather goat-like horns



7

ruined: I now have to have this thing sat in front of it because it sounds better. So I'm like 'Great!' [laughs]. But a shared misery is better than suffering in silence, so we've decided to release the thing so everyone else can have this pedal where they have to keep it on all the time..."

Why did you choose to name it after an antelope specifically?

"We went to release it and, I have to say, it was [co-director and Adrian's wife] Georgia's idea. She was like, 'This needs to get out there because you know people don't always have control over their backline – people don't even necessarily have control over what amps they can use at home – but they want a sound that's like the thing's rocking at high volume when this kicks in.' And so I actually turned around to Georgia and said, 'Well, you design it, then.' She did all the art and the layout and everything – Georgia is doing a lot more sort of the creative side, which has been really good.

"We ended up calling it the Kudu because I spent a bit of time in South Africa and I've seen quite a lot of animals out there like the springbok, and then I saw

these kudus and the one I saw was called a greater kudu, and that just seemed to fit: because it makes everything greater."

What are the core tones it generates and how can you use them?

"Well, I hate to use this word, but it's fairly transparent at low-gain settings because we have an ethos of having low noise and high clarity, generally, and lots of string separation, so that's baked in as a must, right? Then you wind the gain up and I would say the mid focus of it sits perfectly for a standard tuning guitar. Across the strings, it is absolutely perfect. So that's where we centered everything.

"Then as you wind the gain up more, it overdrives itself in just a perfect way, but it does have three clipping options: Hard clipping, which is LED; Soft clipping, which is silicon; and then Soft+ clipping – they're Schottky diodes and they have a response and feel exactly the same as germanium. They have a soft 'knee' and a flubbiness that is identical to germanium. But we haven't put germanium in there because if we did germanium, we could only do a certain amount and it would make the pedal more expensive.

"As we move forward, we're toning things down, art-wise, to appeal to a broader audience"

"The reason the three [clipping styles] are available is because you may have, say, a Fender 'Drip Tray' Princeton, that's fairly clean and clear, so you can get away with something that's a little bit softer on the clipping, something with a bit more sag and flubbiness. But if you've got a Tweed combo, you really need harder clipping because you've already got the compression from the amp and so you don't want to be compressing and compressing. So the clipping types were very specifically chosen with certain types of amp in mind: Soft is great for Marshall-style amps; Hard is great for something with more sag; and then Soft+ is really if your amp is more present and with less negative feedback, so something like a Two-Rock." **G**

<https://thorpyfx.com>



THE SAINT

ROASTED TO PERFECTION
BUILT TO INSPIRE



#SPOTTHEVU

ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM



JEFF TWEEDY

Wilco's alt-country-leaning guitarist reveals how Billy Gibbons came to own his two greatest bargains and why Japanese guitars are at the top of his latest wishlist

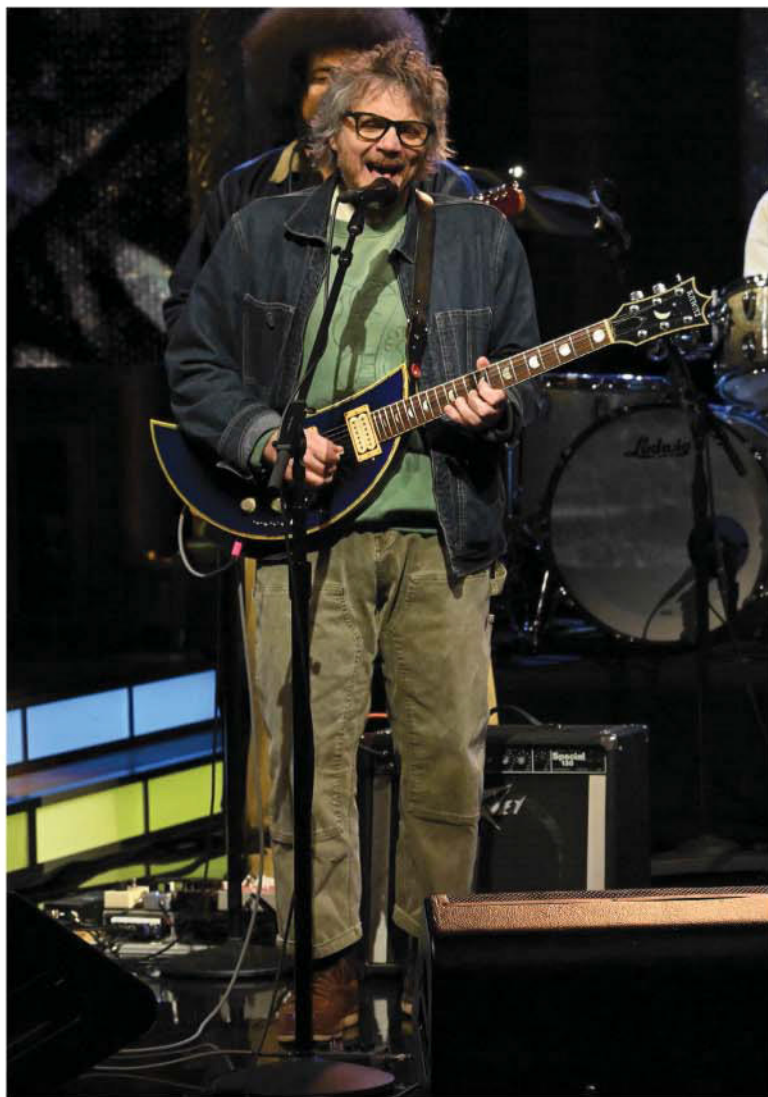
What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"I bought a late-50s Gibson J-45. I'm not sure of the exact year, maybe a '57. But it had been stripped and it was still just barely something that I could afford [laughs], it was like \$600. I still have it. It's the one that has 'Wilco' spelled out in stickers across the neck. I got the stickers at a stationery store."

What was the last guitar you bought, and why did you buy it?

"Geez... I buy a lot of guitars. It's kind of a gross amount of guitars [laughs]. I bought a Martin 00-18 from the first year that they made them. I collect those from that weird period in the late 50s and early 60s. It's gotten to be famous as the 'Kurt Cobain guitar', but I just like them, so whenever I see one, I try to get it."

Jeff is always on the hunt for 70s and 80s Japanese gems, such as this Kawai Moonsault MS-80 model, which he played recently on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*



What's the most incredible find or bargain that you've ever had while buying guitars?

"I have to credit my mom with this one. When she got it in her head that I was really serious about playing guitar, she'd look for them at auctions and garage sales. She went to a farmer's auction, like an estate sale, and she got a '56 Gretsch Duo Jet for 70 bucks. And then she got a 50s prototype ES-350 with three pickups, which was probably one of the first guitars with three P-90s. She got that for 120 bucks."

"I mean, a lot of the guitars I own would sound like fantastic stories now, but they didn't feel cheap at the time [laughs]. I bought the Epiphone Casino for 100 bucks, and I use it all the time. The neck had snapped off and the guy didn't think it was going to be fixable. I told him I'd buy it and I did. And then, when we came back years later to St Louis, and he came to our show, he saw me playing it and he was mad at me. He said I took advantage of him. I was like, 'You were gonna throw it away...'"

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?

"There's a ton of stuff that I own that I haven't used as much as I thought I would. But I don't know that I really get sad about stuff like that. I figured out that if I hang onto it, eventually I'll find a use for it. Or somebody else will come through our studio, pick it up and fall in love with something that I've never really made a connection with."

"My mom got a '56 Gretsch Duo Jet for 70 bucks at an estate sale, plus a 50s ES-350 for \$120"

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"Oh, yeah, tons. I traded the two guitars I mentioned earlier that my mom got at the auction. Uncle Tupelo was going on the road and Jay [Farrar]'s amp was broken. We didn't have time to fix it, so I traded one of those for a Fender Twin for him. The other one I think was at the same place, but I can't remember what I got for the 350. But I know where they are because Billy Gibbons came through town in St Louis, I think it was at Silver Strings guitar store, and they told me that he bought both of them. And I did talk to Billy, and he confirmed that he has those guitars."

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking to buy their ultimate guitar?

"I guess you should play a lot of guitars. You should go to guitar stores and really get a good grip on



JEFF'S GO-TO RIG

"My main guitar right now – and everything I'm about to say contradicts what I've said [about single coils] – is a Jaguar with one humbucker in it. It was Candy Apple Red, but it was pretty bad when I got it, so I stripped it but left the headstock red. My friend Woody [John Woodland], who invented the Mastery bridge, helped me put together this Jaguar a long time ago. It's got a Mastery floating tremolo and it's just a magical guitar. The pickup is this sort of underground humbucker, so it's not super saturated.

"My pedalboard is almost all Fairfield Circuitry stuff. I'm probably one of the only people who has a 'board that's all one manufacturer [laughs], but I just started out making it that way because I liked the way it looked... I have added one pedal to it that's not Fairfield, which is a Rose Electric Audio Console Overdrive. It has what looks like Neve [console] knobs on it and it's a really great overdrive pedal.

"As for amps, when I'm with my band doing solo material, it's just a 50s Fender Deluxe. There's a specific period that I like, and I have a couple of them as backups. For Wilco, I have a Fender Vibrolux that's been modified – it's basically been made to be like a standalone Fender Reverb – and then a narrow-panel [5E3] Deluxe."

what the differences are, you know? Before you buy a Rickenbacker, you should really know what a Rickenbacker is all about. There are guitars that people buy because they see lots of people playing them, but they're not all created to do everything. So if you have a specific task, you probably know what you're looking for.

"If you just want an everyday guitar and have a dream of being a certain type of guitar player, you should get your hands on one. Try to learn about how different some guitars are from year to year. The shape of the body does not necessarily mean it's the same guitar at all."

What were you looking at the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window, or browsed online?

"I spend an insane amount of time doing that. It was maybe 20 minutes ago that I was doing that! I have a list of stuff that I'm looking for and, lately, it's Japanese guitars from the late 70s and early 80s. I have been really enjoying those and have a bunch of them. I've been swapping them out for the Gibsons I play live because they're getting ridiculously expensive – I don't mind taking [the Japanese guitars] out on the road because they're supposed to be used, and they're tools – but I feel a bit self-conscious when I get handed a guitar that I can see somebody in the front row going, 'Oh, my God, that's an expensive instrument.' I don't like that feeling [laughs]. So the Grecos from that era are what I've been playing a lot. If you see me playing an SG, it's usually a Greco."

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?

"A shitty guitar is useless. I could probably get sounds that I enjoy out of a cheap guitar and a good amp. But I think it could go both ways... it depends on the cheap amp. Some cheap amps, to me, sound better than the most expensive amps. So it's all relative."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose, and why?

"Can't we have both? I know it's a hypothetical question... For the last 20 years or so, I've probably played single coils on records more than anything else, and my main thing in the studio has been an Esquire top-loader." **[AD]**

The only trace of this mid-60s Jaguar's original Candy Apple Red finish is on its headstock – Jeff stripped the rest. Note the Mastery vibrato, made by John Woodland



Jeff's latest solo album, *Twilight Override*, is available now on dBpm Records

<https://jefftweedy.com>



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

A pro install of this pickup system is an option, but you can also enjoy doing it yourself

LR Baggs HiFi Duet Installation

Prior to embarking on an unplugged tour, Cardinal Black guitarist Chris Buck decided he needed a really good acoustic. He chose a lovely used Atkin OM37, but there was one slight hitch: it needed a pickup system. After doing some research, Chris decided on LR Baggs HiFi Duet and asked me to fit it for him.

Although some of the procedures are specific to LR Baggs, much of the work required applies to acoustic pickup systems in general. The HiFi Duet comprises two pickups and a small electret microphone, all of which attach to the bridge plate. There's also a control unit with an internal preamp and an output socket that doubles as a strap button.

Holey Moley

The scariest procedure in most acoustic pickup system installations is making and/or widening holes in the body. The first hole I'm referring to is the one that often needs to be drilled through one end of the saddle slot to install an under-saddle piezo pickup. Thankfully, there's no need to do so with this system, but some under-saddle pickups require an angled hole and care must be taken not to drill through the X-brace.

Most pickup systems have the output socket mounted through the tailblock and that usually means widening the strap

button hole to around 12.5mm or 1/2 inch. Loading a 1/2-inch bit into your drill and just going at it is dangerous because the bit will most likely bounce around before it gets a grip and chip the finish.

Granted, the Atkin is reliced and that takes some pressure off, but I'm sure all but the most ardent anti-relicers can agree there's a difference between tasteful ageing and damage. To avoid the latter, my advice is to use a step cutter because they're easy to get hold of, inexpensive and ideal for the job. I bought my first set from the 'middle of Lidl' several years ago and they're still going strong.

The existing strap-button hole will help to guide the step cutter and the hole should get incrementally wider while retaining a crisp edge. Once the step cutter has opened up the outer part of the hole to the required diameter, I swap over to a regular drill bit of the same diameter to continue through the tail block. If you can get your

"The scariest part in most acoustic pickup system installations is making or widening holes in the body"

arm inside, try pressing a scrap chunk of wood up against the tailblock to minimise tear out and don't forget to vacuum out any debris.

LR Baggs suggests fitting the output socket assembly after installing the pickups and before the microphone. Given all the messing around inside the body needed to install the socket, I decided to fit it first, rather than risk knocking the pickups off the bridge plate.

The entire socket assembly is threaded and a cover screws onto the inside end to protect the solder joints. A nut fixes it in place, and both can be adjusted to match the depth of any tail block so that about a millimetre of the wider threaded section protrudes outside the body.

It may take a few attempts to get it just right, but you can make things simpler by placing a long screwdriver or a piece of dowel through the hole that's thin enough to enter the socket. You can use this to guide the socket assembly through the tailblock hole and slip over the first washer with the wider aperture followed by the second one, which goes over the narrower threaded section.

The small nut goes on next and, once it's finger tight, you can push an Allen wrench through the holes in the narrow threaded section to prevent the assembly from



LR Baggs' HiFi Duet system comprises two pickups, a microphone, a control unit, an output socket and a fitting jig



1. The strap button hole must be widened to 12.5mm to accommodate the output sockets' wider threaded section

2. The safest way to increase the hole's diameter is to use a step cutter

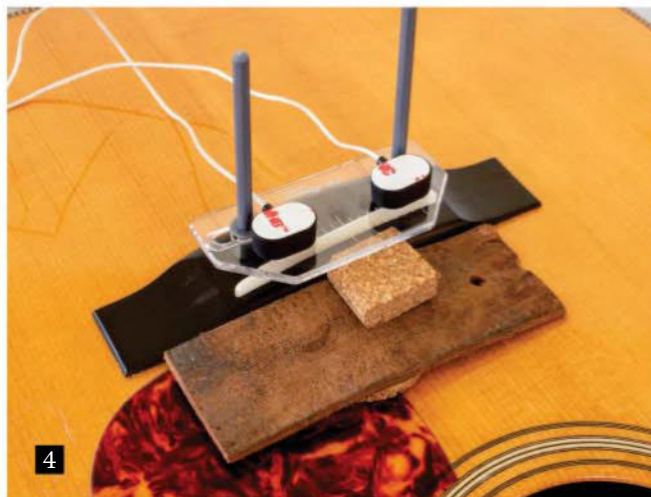
"The system delivers a dynamic and natural acoustic tone that's pleasingly devoid of piezo quack"



Chris Buck's new Atkin OM37 was lacking a pickup system so he opted to have Huw install the LR Baggs HiFi Duet



3



4



5



6

3. After placing the washers, an Allen wrench prevents the unit from turning as the nut is being tightened. A bronze-coloured collar provides the finishing touch and doubles up as a strap button

4. With the pickups aligned over the saddle on the fitting jig, they're ready to be fixed to the bridge plate

5. The grey rods go through the outer pin holes to guarantee perfect placement

6. Masking tape strips mark the position for the control unit, and the pickup, battery and output connectors are ready to be connected

turning as you fully tighten the nut. Lastly, the outer collar/strap button is screwed on to cover the small nut and washers.

Fixing The Bug

LR Baggs specifies a minimum 3/4-inch of bridge plate in front of the bridge pins for mounting the sensors. I used my phone camera to look inside the Atkin's body and found there was just enough space to mount the pickups. After ensuring the surface was smooth and free from glue, I gave it a wipe down with isopropyl alcohol as instructed.

Speaking of instructions, none are included with the product, but you can scan a printed QR code and follow the link to a video demo explaining the installation procedure. Like other LR Baggs pickup systems, the HiFi Duet comes with a jig for aligning and installing the pickups. This comprises a clear Perspex plate and two pairs of rods. Each pair of rods has a different diameter and you should choose the pair that is closest in diameter to your

guitar's pin holes. The rods mount onto the plate and can be adjusted to align with the outer pin holes before you tighten them up.

The short end of the rods are placed through the outer pin holes, and the pickup positions should be aligned with the saddle with the leadout wires running between the top E and B pins and the low E and A pins. They are then temporarily fixed to the Perspex plate using small sticky pads that are stuck over the LR Baggs logo.

If you're feeling confident, you can peel off the adhesive pad coverings and go ahead with the installation. I chose to perform a dry run before exposing the adhesive to assess the difficulty of getting the rods to go through the pin holes. It turned out to be fairly easy and I just went ahead with the installation. After pressing the pickups firmly against the bridge plate, the alignment jig can be pulled clear leaving the pickups in situ.

Power Stations

It's suggested that this is a good juncture to test that everything is working before installing the microphone. In order to do that, the pickups must be connected to the control unit and the battery pouch must be installed so the system can be powered up.

To make battery changes easier, the pouch is secured by Velcro so it can be

7. The sockets are clearly labelled on the underside of the control unit and there's a 'hidden' control for microphone volume

8. The control unit fits perfectly and there are controls for overall volume and setting the pickup and microphone balance

9. After verifying the system is working correctly, it's time to fit the microphone

10. To complete the installation, pliable metal hooks are placed inside the body to organise the cabling and prevent rattles

11. The microphone and pickup cables are secured by a hook positioned just behind the bridge plate

"I used my phone camera to look inside the Atkin's body and found there was just enough space to mount the pickups"



taken in and out. The conventional location is up against the neck block, but you should ensure that the pouch doesn't obstruct truss rod access. For this guitar, I decided to put the pouch in sideways, rather than upright.

The control unit has a moulded notch to clear any braces placed in the vicinity of the soundhole. If the braces are unusually thick, it may prevent the control unit from attaching firmly, so you need to find out if it will fit and identify the best position. I had no problems finding a workable location and I used low-tack masking tape for a visual reference.

After connecting the battery, pickup and output wires, I peeled off the adhesive pad coverings and stuck the control unit under the soundboard. I put the strings back on the guitar, tested it through an amplifier and everything worked as it should with an even string-to-string balance and a strong output level. The strings were then removed once again to install the microphone.

Final Hook Up

Installing the microphone is done by feel, rather than jig. It's positioned between the two pickups, and the leadout wire passes between the D and G bridge pins. When positioning it, try to leave sufficient space for the ball-ends of the strings. The microphone cable must also be

connected to the control unit by feel, but again it's not tricky at all.

The final part of the installation involves tidying up all the cables that are loose inside the body. Pliable metal hooks with adhesive pads are provided and LR Baggs is very generous with both the hooks and spare adhesive pads. In fact, if you store all the spares in the box, you'll be able to transplant the entire pickup system to another guitar if you ever decide to. I have also seen identical metal hooks at B&Q if you need more.

I prefer to partially pre-bend the hooks prior to installation because it makes it easier to gauge when the wires are in position. After all, this is yet another part of the installation that is done by feel. I placed the first hook just behind

the bridge plate and used it to secure the pickup and microphone wires.

Although some fix the hooks to the soundboard itself, I prefer to keep that to a minimum. Instead, I attach the remaining hooks to the side just under the kerfing, with the second hook placed as far inside the body as I could reach to retain the output wire. The third hook was positioned on the bridge side of the waist to grab the pickup, microphone and output wires, with a fourth on the other side of the waist. The object of the exercise is to ensure that there are no loose cables inside the body that can rattle about and create unwanted noises.

Plug & Play

When testing the sensors without the microphone installed, I had noticed that I was still getting signal when the mixer control was fully set to 'Mic'. That's because the mixer also acts like a crossover to attenuate the pickup's highs while retaining some of the low-frequency content to beef up the tone in microphone mode. The mic level control provides additional tone shaping and, overall, the system delivers a dynamic and natural acoustic tone that's pleasingly devoid of piezo quack. 🎸

www.huwpriceguitar.com





David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

Although both instruments were made in 1954, these Stratocasters are quite different

1954 Stratocasters



Both Strats were made in 1954, but small details such as the greyish pickup covers, sharply bent vibrato arm and elongated truss rod plug reveal which one was made earlier in the year

The first of these two 1954 Strats is dated March 1954 and it has serial number '0108' on the spring cover. The rumour is that the Strats with trem-cover numbers were actually salesman samples. They're often very heavy and the bodies were usually made using multiple pieces of ash, rather than the single pieces Fender did later. The weight difference can be as much as 3lb.

"I've had a couple from January 1954 in the past, but the earliest Stratocaster I currently have pre-dates the '0108' by a couple of months. I've had some with slot heads for the switch or pickup-adjustment screws, but this is the only one where every screw in the guitar is a slot-head.

"The potentiometer date stamps on the '0108' show the 42nd week of 1953 and there's no 'worm rout' in the bridge

pickup cavity. Fender later figured out how to cut a wire channel in there by using a rounded router bit, but with very early Strats they just notched the wood out with a chisel. It has the more translucent polystyrene pickup covers, which gives it a much cooler look because they go a little grey as they age. There's also the short skirt knobs, the round spring cover holes and the football-shaped switch tip.

"I've had maybe 20 trem-cover serial-number Strats in my life and they always sound darker and a little boomier, especially on the middle and neck pickups. I wouldn't say they're as sonically balanced as the later '54 guitars were. The early pickups also had softer-sounding Alnico III magnets with a shorter G-string slug.

"The darkness may also have something to do with the 100k potentiometers Fender

used on the earliest Strats, rather than the 250k. I definitely think it's the extra weight, too, just like heavy 'Bursts always have a deeper roar than lighter 'Bursts.

"The body shapes are similar, although the belly cut is just a little deeper on very early ones. By late '54, you see a lot more one-piece bodies and some very pretty quarter-sawn ones. The white polystyrene covers don't go translucent and there's the full skirt polystyrene knobs. The neck profile was not as big by late-'54 guitars and centre-pocket tweed cases replaced the form-fit cases.

"The very early trem arms have a sharper bend that was soon softened out and continued getting straighter throughout the 50s and 60s. We know Fender got a lot of feedback from the musicians when they lent guitars to local

Although the 'prototype' Strats remain sought after by collectors, David believes that models made from late 1954 onwards play easier and are better instruments



barn-dance guys and I'm sure the biggest complaints about the early guitars were the weight and the neck size. That early U-shaped profile is kind of clubby, and although collectors prefer them, I don't know many players that do.

"In mid-'54, Fender started to make hardtails. People often think that option came later, but Fender planned that from the beginning and I think that was done to try to sell Stratocasters to Telecaster players. Not everyone wanted a vibrato on their guitar, and because hardtail Strats sustain better they just prefer the overall sound. Putting in five springs and locking that bridge plate down gets you pretty close, but the hardtails always sound a bit better to me.

"These guitars are both very original. At some point the earlier one had somebody's

"That early U-shaped profile is kind of clubby, and although collectors prefer them, not many players do"

name across the body and they used little brads to put the letters in. There are lots of tiny holes, but they just look like regular nicks and I haven't been able to figure out the name.

"We've also had a lot of '54s with the big elongated truss rod plug. We used to think they were modified to match the Strat Fender used in the publicity photos, but from what I understand now, it's because Fender often had to do some

reworking in that area. They either had to make a larger plug or paint around the general area to hide evidence of work being done.

"Collectors get very excited about owning very early '54 Strats because they're so scarce. Fender only made around 200 and the majority of them have been monkeyed with. The late '54 we're looking at is essentially the same as a '55 because by around August or September of '54 Fender had settled on the production version. My feeling is that Strats made from late 1954 onwards are the best for tone and playability." [HP]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001(516)221-0563

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Blues Jam

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Fender Stratocaster & Marshall JTM45 MkII Reissue

Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example



SRV would blend lead and rhythm together to make the trio format sound cohesive and whole

PHOTO BY CLAYTON CALL / REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THERE ARE SEVERAL BENEFITS to be taken from this solo, even if I do say so myself, depending on how you might choose to approach it. First, the selection of ideas is particularly useful to call upon in a trio situation where there is limited harmonic support available from a simple groove-based backing like this.

Second, there are useful pentatonic/blues scale ideas, transferable to any key and not limited to the trio format. And, not least, third, there is a kind of SRV vibe, so that's always nice!

In a broader sense, this solo is also an exercise in rhythm. Often the phrases coincide with the drums, but, as you'll hear, the first example plays swung eighth notes, which deliberately contrast against the accents of the kick drum and bass guitar. Elsewhere, I'm somewhat mindful of where there should be a space, to let a drum fill breathe or simply to take a moment to decide where to go next.

One of the most steep learning curves we can embark on is to record ourselves improvising in a scenario like this, then listen back and evaluate the results. To get the full benefit, it's important that we make an 'honest' recording – don't overthink or compose anything at first. Listening back can be tough, but this is information nobody else can give you. It's also true that there can be some nice surprises, often resulting from the moments when we feel we slipped and didn't play something the way we intended to in that moment.

Coming back to an earlier point, many players are also surprised to hear how much they're filling the space, especially in a slower/half-time context such as this. All that said, do use these ideas as extra vocabulary, but aim to improvise as freely as you can. Hope you enjoy and see you next time! 



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now to stream or buy from Amazon Music

Example 1

WE START THIS OPENING PHRASE with a series of swung eighth notes, deliberately contrasting against the accents from the bass guitar and kick drum. I'm drawing on pentatonic patterns here up to and including the second bar (not counting the pickup bar). In bar 3, we change to some rhythmic doublestops, but there is an overall feeling of keeping those swung quavers as a bottom line. Note the quarter-tone bend applied to that final doublestop at the very last moment.

♩ = 110 Half time feel E (chords implied by bass)

Swung — 3

E B G D A E

1

Example 2

WE'RE STARTING WITH QUITE A LONG PICKUP BAR here but moving swiftly on to break the flow a little. This allows some of the bass guitar and kick drum accents to 'poke through' during the gap, giving the feeling of interplay between the elements – and avoiding possible listener fatigue from a constant barrage of notes... The overall feel is derived more from triplets (both quaver and semiquaver) than swung quavers. The last E will be reused at the beginning of Example 3. We thought this phrase sounded better with it in isolation and didn't want to cut it from the next phrase!

♩ = 110 Half time feel

1/4 A 1/4 1/4

E B G D A E

1

E

Let ring

E B G D A E

4

Example 3

STARTING WITH THAT DUPLICATE E, this final example has one of the longest pickup bars we've seen, but it all makes sense once you land on beat 1 of bar 1! This starts with some sustained blues bends, before mixing up some triplets, swung quavers and doublestops in bar 2. We revert to a more rhythmically simple pattern in bar 3 before digging in to some heavy accents on an E7#9 chord. This coincides somewhat with the drum accents, but the most important consideration is to dig in with confidence. A good drummer will probably follow...

♩ = 110 Half time feel

The notation is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1, 2, and 3. Measure 1 starts with a pickup bar and a half note E. Measure 2 contains a triplet of eighth notes and a doublestop. Measure 3 features a triplet of eighth notes and a doublestop. The second system contains measures 4, 5, and 6. Measure 4 starts with a half note E and a quarter note. Measure 5 features a half note E and a quarter note. Measure 6 features a half note E and a quarter note. The bass line includes fret numbers and chord labels like BU and E7#9.

Hear It Here

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE

TEXAS FLOOD



This album is packed with exemplary playing in a trio format. What's more, it was recorded live from the studio floor. There is something to be learned from every track, but perhaps the most relevant to the approach highlighted in the example solo are *Pride And Joy*, *Texas Flood* and *I'm Cryin'*. Though always technically proficient, Stevie manages to create excitement without sounding like a rock player. His rhythms also sound super confident.

ROBIN TROWER

ROBIN TROWER LIVE



Another example of a trio-based record, here Robin fills a lot of space without coming across as unaware of the other instruments or the vocals. His soloing can oftentimes be frenetic, but there are many areas where he'll happily hold a note and let the bass and drums carry things. Check out *Too Rolling Stoned* (with its somewhat conspicuous edit!), and for the ultimate laid-back live feel make sure to have a listen to *Daydream*. The live version *Day Of The Eagle* is also one to track down.

PHILIP SAYCE

THE WOLVES ARE COMING



This is a very 'in your face' production, but the arrangements are carefully constructed to allow all the instruments to have their place in the mix. Have a listen to *Oh! That Bitches Brew*, *Your Love* and *The Moon Is Full*. Honourable mention also goes to *Intuition* for its more laid-back feel, dynamics and bluesy soloing. Though this is very much a studio production complete with rhythm guitar and keyboards, it's not too hard to imagine this arranged for the trio format.

Manson[®]

GUITAR WORKS



Guitarist
CHOICE

ORYX

*'effortless to play,
gorgeous to look at,
sounds amazing'*

- Adam 'Nolly' Getgood



www.mansonguitarworks.com
sales@mansonguitarworks.com
+44(0)1364 653751



Karl Longbottom Guitars

A small **twist** on **tradition**



**Handmade guitars using the
finest quality materials,
proudly built in the heart of Yorkshire**

karl@karllongbottomguitars.com
karllongbottomguitars.com

Guitarist

Nextmonth



◀ SIGNATURE GUITARS

What's in a name? How instruments made for premium league players have moved the needle for guitar design

VALIANT MERCURY

Made in Ukraine by two brothers, Valiant guitars seek precision and perfection

PIERRE BENSUSAN

The DADGAD maestro on the philosophy behind sublime acoustic guitar performance

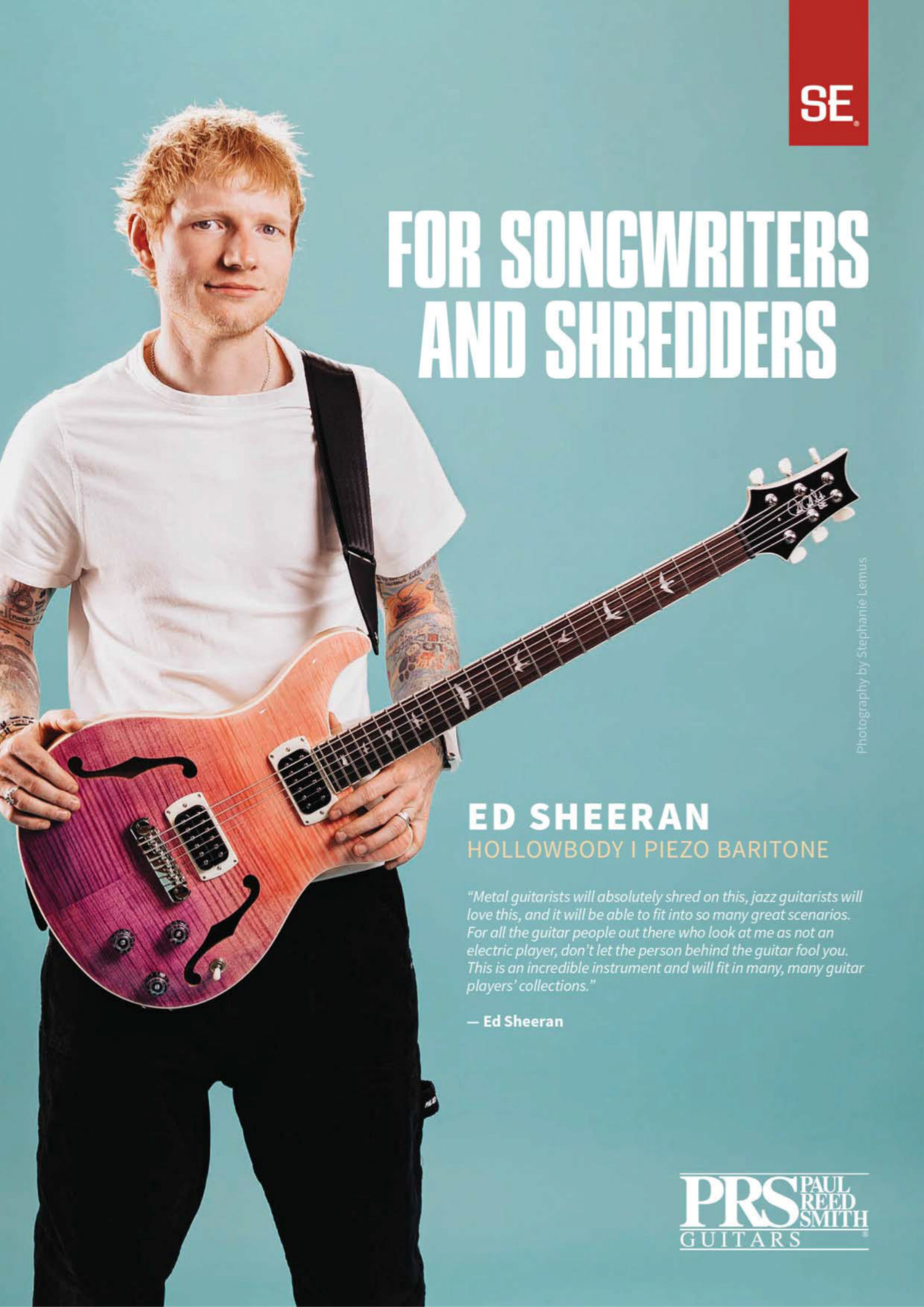
Next issue on sale
24 July 2026



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR DIGITAL EDITION AND SAVE!

Want instant access to Guitarist?
Go digital from just £3.46 an issue!

www.magazinesdirect.com/GUI

A full-page photograph of Ed Sheeran, a man with short, light brown hair and a light beard, wearing a white t-shirt and black pants. He is holding a PRS Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone guitar, which has a vibrant orange-to-red gradient finish and a dark fretboard with bird-shaped inlays. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid teal color.

SE

FOR SONGWRITERS AND SHREDDERS

Photography by Stephanie Lemus

ED SHEERAN

HOLLOWBODY I PIEZO BARITONE

"Metal guitarists will absolutely shred on this, jazz guitarists will love this, and it will be able to fit into so many great scenarios. For all the guitar people out there who look at me as not an electric player, don't let the person behind the guitar fool you. This is an incredible instrument and will fit in many, many guitar players' collections."

— Ed Sheeran

PRS PAUL
REED
SMITH
GUITARS

GRETSCH®



ELECTROMATIC® BARITONE JET™ + CVT

LEARN MORE AT [GRETSCHGUITARS.COM](https://www.gretschguitars.com)

©2026 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.