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Guitarist

Issue 541

SEPTEMBER 2026

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Frame By Frame



With so many famous players letting go of the guitars they used to acquire their fame, it's interesting to watch the reactions of fans. There's often a kind of outcry – why would these musicians be parted from the guitars of their finest hour? It seems like a desecration, almost. But perhaps that's because we rarely see our heroes as they really are. They are, at root, just people like anyone else.

They may have exceptional talent but some worry how their family will cope with selling everything off after they die, while others are pragmatic and simply recognise that the cost of insuring and securely storing historically important guitars that rarely get played is unjustifiable. With that said, it's surprising how often guitarists who have done almost everything they once hoped to achieve – such as Mark Knopfler and now Johnny Marr (see page 58) – seem to have a more philosophical take.

Artists shouldn't be insects trapped in the amber of their own history. In letting the guitars go, they are perhaps freeing themselves to do what music itself must do: change and evolve and continue to surprise audiences. And that, ultimately is the job of the artists themselves and not their tools. To paraphrase Chet Atkins, when you put the guitar away in a case, how good does it sound now? However, it still remains true that nearly all great guitarists hope new guitars will shake loose a song or two – and not necessarily because they are perfectly made or easy to play.

Speaking in early August with German guitarist Carl Carlton who was in Robert Palmer's band for many years (look out for a feature soon), he said that sometimes a challenging guitar such as an old archtop with a high action will draw something out of you by making you play differently or outside your comfort zone. As the writer GK Chesterton said: "Art consists of limitation. The most beautiful part of any picture is the frame."

Looking at Marr's choice of guitars over the years – beautiful 'frames' indeed – it's hard to disagree. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Latter-Day Jansch

We've been enraptured with the haunting folk guitar style of Sam Grassie who is emerging as a rightful inheritor of the 60s Brit-folk sound **p54**



On The Down Low

Gretsch's Electromatic series of attainably priced guitars includes baritones and premium-grade versions of its classic Jet. Review on **p102**



Dave Gregory

He's a real gent and a superb player – the former XTC guitarist takes us inside their breakthrough '79 album *Drums And Wires* **p78**

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FEATURE

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REVIEW



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FIRST PLAY



**FENDER JOHN OSBORNE
TELECASTER**
£1,849

WHAT IS IT? An alder-bodied Telecaster with a three-way toggle switch and B-string bender

Around The Bend

Fender and John Osborne have created the first signature model fitted with a B-Bender, plus a host of other custom features

Words Huw Price **Photography** Lucy Robinson

John Osborne is a virtuoso guitarist and songwriter with the multi-platinum selling, Grammy-winning modern country band, Brothers Osborne. He made his name playing a 1968 Telecaster that he found in a Nashville guitar shop, and acquired by trading in a load of gear and borrowing \$700 from his mother.

His friend, country musician Keith Gattis lent him one of his B-Bender Teles and John fell in love with it. Rather than hack into his own treasured guitar, John sourced a body already equipped with a B-Bender, and swapped over the '68's neck and parts. Chief Product Officer at Fender, Max Gutnik, describes using this modified instrument to develop the John Osborne model that was launched as part of the Tele's 75th anniversary celebrations.

Fender's B-Bender differs significantly from the mechanism that The Byrds' drummer Gene Parsons designed for the band's guitarist Clarence White in 1967. Parsons and Californian folk singer Meridian Green later developed an evolved version specifically for Fender. This unit was mounted on a large metal plate that screwed onto the back after the body had been routed.

The mechanism on the John Osborne Tele looks fairly similar to the Parsons-Green unit, but it's mounted directly onto the







1. Traditional volume and tone controls are matched to a non-traditional three-way toggle switch
2. The tree retains all three plain strings to optimise the break angle over the synthetic bone nut, and the late-60s-style tuners work smoothly and hold true
3. Visible beneath its clear plastic cover, the highly evolved B-Bender looks like a Science Museum exhibit, but the cover can be easily removed to adjust spring tension

alder body under a recessed, clear plastic cover. This probably explains the oversized pickguard since something was needed to conceal the mounting points. The shape is very much in the tradition of country customisations. We love it, and the Road Worn finish, but see what you think.

Compensated brass barrel saddles were not a '68 feature, but John prefers them to the more period-correct threaded steel type. The pickups are described as 'custom voiced', and while the bridge unit appears conventional, the neck counterpart features an open cover. Other interesting points include a three-way toggle switch and a single string-tree that retains all three plain strings.

Feel & Sounds

Trying to get to grips with something like a B-Bender while struggling with a guitar that hasn't been set up proved too much of a challenge. But after fettling the nut slots and fine-tuning the action, the B-Bender began to feel like a whole lot of fun. Although the bending mechanism is the guitar's point of

difference, let's come back to that later and assess how the Osborne model holds up as a straight-ahead Telecaster.

Teles with retrofitted Parsons-White systems are very heavy beasts, but at a smidge over 3.4kg the review guitar quickly dispelled any concerns. The unplugged tone is lively, with full mids and an even string-to-string balance. It's also very loud and we sense extra acoustic energy emanating from the bender cavity – much like a Stratocaster with its spring cover removed.

This review is being written during a prolonged hot spell so we'll forgive some slight fret sprout. The neck's oil finish will

4. Some Telecaster neck pickups can sound slightly dark or even muffled, but open-top covers have become popular for Tele players who need a bit more clarity and treble

After fettling the nut slots and fine-tuning the action, the B-Bender began to feel like a whole lot of fun





3



4

probably divide opinion too, because it couldn't be described as smooth. Many will appreciate the bare wood feel, while others may experience a tad too much friction when trying to zip around. The '68-style neck profile, however, is bang on the money with a soft-shouldered, medium C that fills the hand without being clubby. In fact it feels like home from the get-go.

The bridge pickup ticks a lot of boxes, with an authentically vintage quack bolstered by a robust and overdrive-friendly midrange. It's extremely responsive and provides plenty of contrast when moving from picking between the pickups to twanging near the saddles. Telecaster diehards may crave a touch more treble sizzle but the pickup is commendably free of spikiness. It also has the sort of natural compression that encourages you to dig in, making it very easy to live with.

The neck single coil has ample clarity, with sweet trebles and a balanced and neutral midrange. It has a more airy quality than many Tele neck pickups thanks to that open cover, and makes the most of the guitar's impressive natural sustain.

With the factory-set pickup heights there's a slight drop in output in the middle position, accompanied by a pleasingly hollow and 'phasey' midrange character. It's slightly funky and low-fi but ideal for slide and fingerpicking.

Despite being based on John Osborne's 1968 Telecaster, a set of compensated brass saddles is mounted on a classic-style bridge with a string guide routing the B string to the bender attachment



FENDER JOHN OSBORNE TELECASTER

PRICE: £1,849 with hard case

ORIGIN: Ensenada, Mexico

TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Oil-finished maple with 1968 C profile and body end adjustment

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone /42mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple cap

FRETS: 21 medium-jumbo

HARDWARE: Four-screw vintage-style bridge

with three compensated brass saddles, custom single-ply back plastic pickguard, knurled dome knobs, three-string retainer, 'F' branded vintage style tuners, B-Bender mechanism, locking strap-buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: John Osborne pickups with open-top neck cover, two CTS 250K pots, three-way toggle selector switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISH: Road Worn nitrocellulose, Olympic White

Fender GBI

01342 331700

uk.fender.com

Check out this guitar on Fender's website and you'll find a link to some B-Bender setup instructions. The two adjustment points are a stop-screw just beneath the strap button to ensure that full tone bends are pitch perfect, plus there's a spring tension regulator.

Trying out the bender itself, the default factory setting is fairly stiff, but it's easy to remove the mechanism cover and loosen the spring tension. It's something of a balancing act, because if you set it too loose, the weight of the guitar is sufficient to bend the B string sharp. So there needs to be enough string tension to prevent that, thus allowing the spring to return the string exactly to pitch.

Even after loosening the tension, a degree of effort is required to create a bend, but the transition to a full-tone lift is pretty quick, and it doesn't take too long to become

"An impressive Tele with [...] a design that combines vintage vibes with modern innovations"

reasonably competent at using it. We would suggest a wide and padded strap to protect your shoulder, though, and strap locks are definitely recommended. After that, it's just a case of figuring out how to create some tasty-sounding steel-style licks. And that's where the fun really begins.

Verdict

Judged as a straight-ahead guitar, this is an impressive Telecaster with quality hardware, ample natural resonance and a great-sounding set of pickups. The design combines vintage vibes with modern innovations, and the three-way toggle is arguably an ergonomic upgrade on the regular Tele switch.

This is important because if you don't take to the B-Bender, or don't need it very often, you won't be lumbered with a guitar that doesn't hold its own with regular Teles. With the usual six ferrules installed, you can even bypass the bender altogether and load the B string in the usual way.

So, in summary, when you consider the cost of purchasing a Parsons-White bender and having it retrofitted to a body, the John Osborne Telecaster seems rather like a really good Tele with the B-Bender thrown in for free. What's not to like? **G**

8/10

PROS The guitar holds its own as a fine Telecaster, with a great-feeling neck and excellent pickups, thus making the B-Bender itself a welcome bonus

CONS The setup needed a tweak, the nut corners were a trifle sharp, and the oil-finished neck could feel a lot smoother

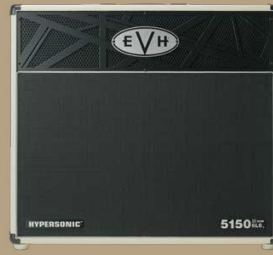


F-50C
African Blackwood
Adirondack



The new EVH 5150 sees a change to digital, but the aim is still to offer that familiar full-throated roar that was Eddie Van Halen's sonic trademark

FIRST PLAY



**EVH 5150III HYPERSONIC
6L6 2X12**
£1,399

WHAT IS IT? Digitally modelled
2x12, 50-watt, three-channel
combo with reverb and
switchable output

Digital Eruption

EVH attempts to replicate the complex gain,
tone and dynamics of the valve-based 5150
in this new digitally based incarnation

Words Martin Smith Photography Lucy Robinson

Edward Van Halen is arguably as revered for his tone as for his world-changing techniques and music. His life-long dedication to sonic perfection raised the bar for rock guitar to a height that has been rarely equalled since his death in 2020. Working alongside highly acclaimed amp guru Jose Arredondo, the fabulous 'brown' sound coming from Edward's 1968 Marshall 'Plexi' Super Lead head was often attributed to Arredondo's much-rumoured modifications.

During the early years, Eddie kept the finer points of this legendary sound close to his chest, though all was revealed on release of his first signature amp with Peavey in 1992. Developed through an exhaustive process with amplifier designer James Brown, the 5150 produced huge gain from the lead channel of this 120-watt two-channel monster. The Peavey collaboration ended in 2004, forcing the company to rebrand the amp as the 6505. Meanwhile, the guitarist's own musical

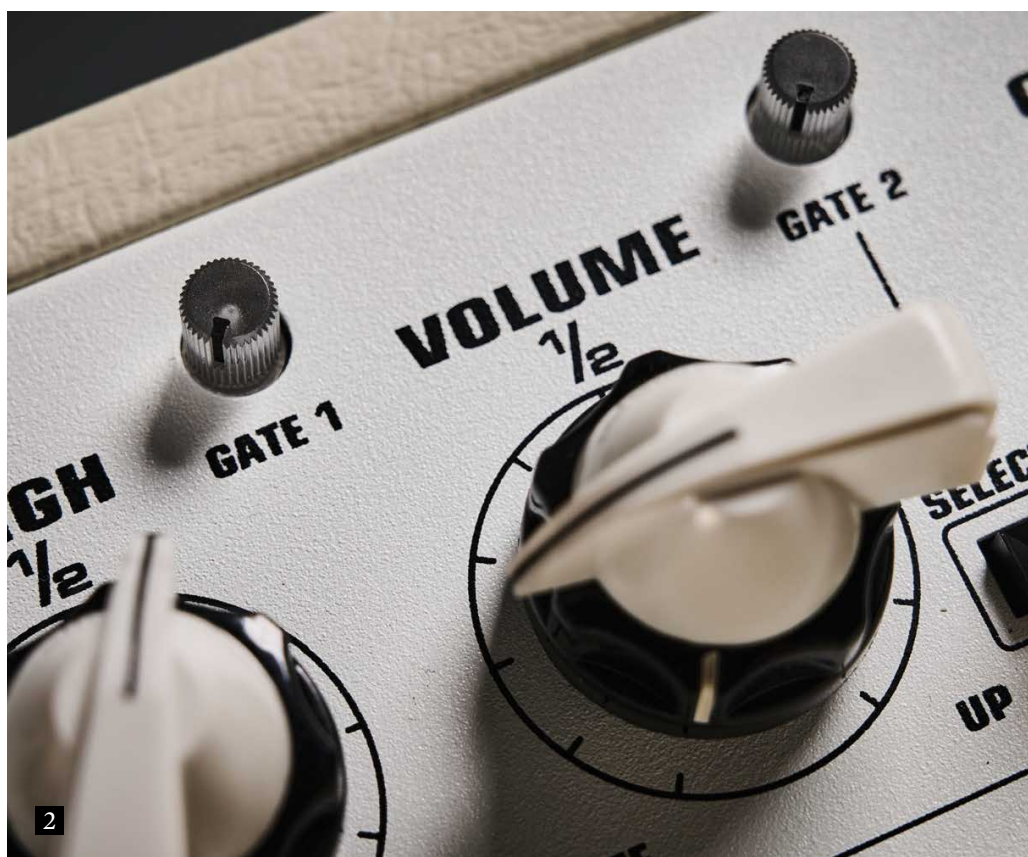
instrument venture, known simply as EVH, was being conceived. This ultimately led to a partnership with the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation in 2005. In 2007 EVH released a brand-new incarnation of the 5150, imbued very much with the same sonic fingerprint as that original Marshall. The first combo version emerged in 1994, boasting incredible tone, albeit with hernia-inducing weight due to its all-valve layout and over-built cabinetry.

Following in the footsteps of Fender's highly successful Tone Master format, this brand-new Hypersonic model attempts to bring the 5150 sound into the digital-era using a proprietary modelling system, which EVH purports to be indistinguishable from its all-valve siblings.

Before we plug in and put this claim to the test, however, it's worth appreciating the bold looks of our chunky behemoth. This ivory-covered model looks smart yet imposing, while its all-black counterpart offers the stealth-style aesthetic beloved

1. The selectable output wattage enables the amp's output to be reduced from 50 watts down through to a single watt, although since the digital power section remains relatively linear throughout its range, it might not be so essential

2. The Hypersonic 5150 features three fully independent channels (Clean, Crunch and Lead), each with its own dedicated gain, EQ, Volume and adjustable Noise Gate. The Green, Blue and Red channels can be selected from the control panel or supplied footswitch



of the metal fraternity. The weight – while not incredibly light at 25.5kg (56lb) – is certainly a good deal more manageable than the original's whopping 38.3kg (84.5lb). The outfit includes a five-button footswitch fed by a marvellously designed lead – essentially a Cat 5e ethernet-style cable and plugs housed inside a male XLR.

With the maximum 50 watts selected from its range of options (50, 35, 25, 15, five watts and one-watt), in order to judge the full headroom we reached for our humbucker-equipped Strat and launched into the Red (Lead) channel. Searching for maximum high-gain satisfaction we were amply rewarded. Overdrive roared from the twin Celestion EVH speakers with the deep-yet-creamy sound that players have come to expect from the 5150. The noise floor is held to a minimum by individual noise gates for the three channels; this did startle on occasion due to no increase in background hum or hiss, which usually indicates that, when the guitar is struck, things are going to be loud.

Sustain and harmonics are every bit as dazzling as you'd want, and inspired some spirited lead playing. To add to the fun, there are also the power section's Resonance and Presence controls, which, when increased, bring dollops of low-end thump and increased top-end sheen for a very modern character.

3. EVH uses some signature colours to mark out its products and these Hypersonic amps use the ivory shade established on its Wolfgang guitars, so often played by the man himself. Black is also available, of course

We did find the dynamic interaction of the guitar volume pot to be less effective as the gain was increased, and at the Hypersonic's highest settings it became more like an on or off switch. Similarly, the broad range of picking dynamics one might expect from a traditional valve amplifier were somewhat narrower here, but the core tone provided enough satisfaction to put this point to the back of our minds.

4. A feature that has become standard on digital amplifiers (and seen on the Fender Tone Master series) is the IR output. This is an XLR socket supplying two selectable digitally modelled speaker sounds, plus the option to bypass in favour of your own



4



EVH 5150III HYPERSONIC 6L6 2X12

PRICE: £1,399
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Digital
VALVES: None
OUTPUT: Switchable, 50, through 35, 25, 15, 5 and 1W
DIMENSIONS: 699 (w) x 300 (d) x 620mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 25.5/56
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKER: 2x12" Celestion EVH G12H 30W Anniversary Series
CHANNELS: 3 (Clean, Crunch and Lead)
CONTROLS: Independent Gain, Low, Mid, High, Noise Gate Trim & Volume on all three channels plus Reverb, Resonance and Presence on channel three
FOOTSWITCH: 5-button footswitch and cable included
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Mute switch, headphones socket, MIDI, USB-C (Firmware Update), footswitch, effects loop, output power switch, cab sim selector, line out control, ground Lift
OPTIONS: Black or Ivory covering
RANGE OPTIONS: 5150III Hypersonic 6L6 1x12 (£1,299)

EVH
www.evhgear.com

8/10

PROS Authentic 5150 tone and gain; lower weight than valve-based amps; great looks; the fabulous Van Halen heritage

CONS Dynamic range is less nuanced than valve alternatives at high-gain settings; clean channel is perhaps a little less characterful than some players may wish for

Switching down through the gears the Blue channel is capable of tighter, less overwhelming rhythm tones and a more classic lead voice. This channel offered the best version of the original Uli Jon Roth-era 'brown' sound, and dialling in a bit of onboard reverb put us very much in mind of the chamber reverb heard on Van Halen's debut album. While it could be dialled back to 'edge of break-up' level, this is not what this amp is all about; its most pleasing character begins at 80s LA rock and runs right through to modern high-gain metal.

The Hypersonic's Green (Clean) channel has its controls cleverly double-ganged together with that of the Blue, allowing for maximum control with minimum componentry. There's a good amount of headroom at low-gain, high-volume settings, with break-up kicking in as we wound up the wick. The reverb character on the clean channel comes in the form of a digitally modelled 'Hall' profile. This pairs well with the higher-gain sounds while providing a less characterful ambience for players with more vintage tastes. That said, this is not really the amp to satisfy classic spring reverb desires; the 5150 just wants to dispense venue-shaking rock tones, and this iteration has that ability in spades.

Extra functionality on the rear panel includes the standard accoutrements of effects loop, the aforementioned switchable

When increased, Resonance and Presence controls bring dollops of low-end thump and increased top-end sheen

wattage, firmware update USB C port, and an impulse response XLR output with two switchable cab profiles – whose output does a reliable job of providing a speaker-free direct feed for recording and live use.

Verdict

The classic high-gain 5150 sound is rendered here in digital form, bragging much lighter weight, a whisper-quiet noise floor, and those impulse response outputs. The technology's dynamic character may require a little more work. The major win here is that, at the amp's core remains the full, fire-breathing nature of the original 5150. Plus those 2x12 Celestions throw out more than enough volume for gigs and rehearsals, even when battling enthusiastic drummers. Naturally, of course, to fully appreciate the sound and dynamic feel of the 5150III Hypersonic 6L6, you really need to try it. So, 'Beat It' down the 'Mean Street' to your nearest EVH dealer and 'Jump' on one today! **G**

FIRST PLAY



**EPIPHONE MARCUS KING
EL DORADO**
£949

.....
WHAT IS IT? A limited edition recreation of Marcus King's first Epiphone acoustic

King's Ransom

Epiphone revives its early 1970s Japanese-made El Dorado acoustic in the form of a very special Marcus King limited edition

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

The history of the Epiphone El Dorado might seem a little convoluted, but bear with us while we offer a thumbnail sketch of this model's past. Originally made in Gibson's Kalamazoo factory in Michigan, the El Dorado was introduced into the USA catalogue in 1963, its square-shouldered dreadnought shape and large 412.7mm (16.25 inch) body width mimicking Gibson's own recently released Hummingbird and Dove acoustics. It was dropped from the USA line at the beginning of the 1970s, when Epiphone manufacture was switched to Japan, and was subsequently built at the Matsumoku factory. Here it became known as the FT-350 and enjoyed a few cosmetic changes while keeping its large dread credentials. It was a Japanese El Dorado that became the soulful, genre-straddling guitar virtuoso Marcus King's first guitar. And in honour of this, Epiphone has released a time-limited, made-in-China edition that sits just underneath that all-important £1k price point.

Casting a casual eye over the Epi El Dorado we have in front of us, it doesn't exactly scream 'signature model'. But then the eye is drawn to the outline of Marcus's home state of South Carolina in mother-of-pearl on one side of the bridge and







1

1. One sign that the El Dorado is a signature model is that the guitar's bridge has the shape of Marcus King's home state of South Carolina on one side and the Tri-Star emblem of Tennessee on the other

2. The El Dorado is, we're told, only available for a limited time, but Epiphone has given no details regarding exactly how long these guitars will be available. So snap one up soon if you like what you see!

Tennessee's Tri-Star emblem on the other. Flip the guitar over and just above the neck volute it's possible to make out Mr King's signature in gold. All very subtle touches, devoid of any unnecessary flash. We like it. Meanwhile, if you were wondering about the somewhat 'mod art' pickguard, this apparently is modelled after the one on Marcus King's original 70s guitar.

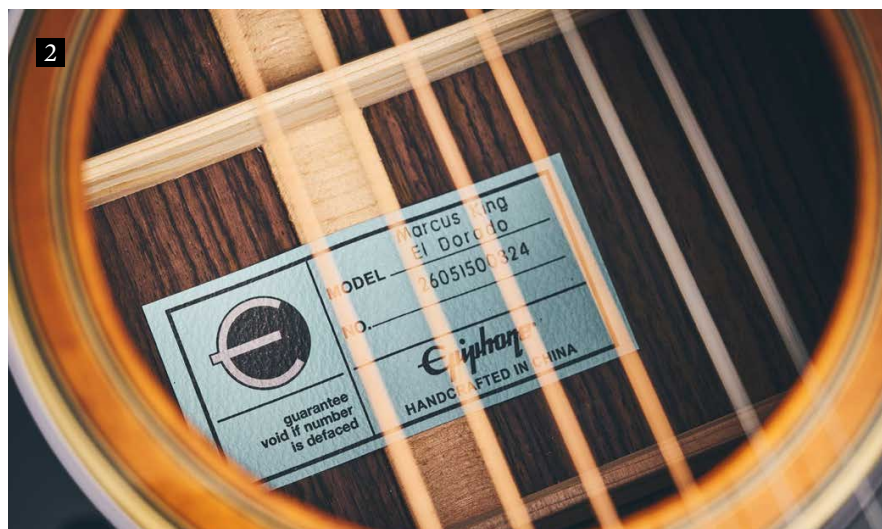
Perusing the El Dorado's spec, we find a spruce top, unspecified as to which exact type, but Sitka would be very high on the list of suspects as it's a fairly common timber to find on Chinese-made

instruments. In any case, it looks very fit for purpose and the Antique Natural gloss finish sets it off a treat and offers a subtle helping of vintage chic along the way.

The guitar's back and sides are rosewood (again, no precise designation, but we suspect Indian) but the finish hasn't done the grain pattern any favours on our example as it's barely visible. A shame, because rosewood can be a beautiful wood to look at. But, of course, results may vary from guitar to guitar and so on other models it might be more apparent. The neck is mahogany, with a rosewood 'board, festooned with real mother-of-pearl block inlays.

From what we've seen so far, the fixtures and fittings on the El Dorado reach far beyond its modest retail price, especially when we mention that the guitar comes in a very attractive black hard case, itself embossed with Marcus's signature in gold.

Elsewhere, we find bone used for both the 43mm nut and compensated saddle, plus Epiphone's own Kluson-alike Deluxe tuners with metal buttons and a headstock shape that once again doffs its cap to Marcus King's original Japanese-made model. There's also an onboard pickup in the form of an LR Baggs Element Bronze VTC, with the controls tucked away out of sight at the top of the soundhole.



2



The Antique Natural gloss finish sets it off a treat and offers a subtle helping of vintage chic along the way

Overall, it's an attractive package, especially if you're a fan of larger dreadnought guitars. And if you're curious as to what it sounds like, so were we...

Feel & Sounds

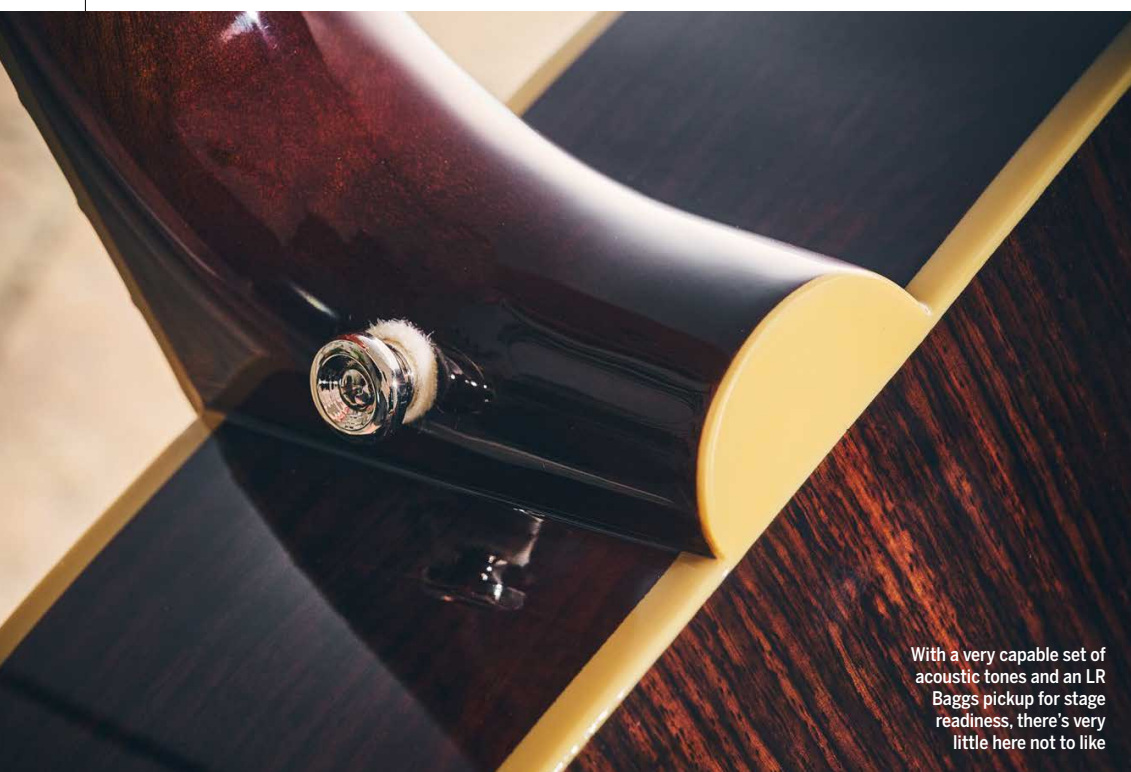
Turning the guitar over in our hands, there are no badly polished frets to contend with, and no sharp edges as we run our fingers along the neck, so we can assume that Epi's Chinese-based quality-control department is well up to speed. There were a couple of 'pings' from the nut when we were tuning the guitar, but these soon disappeared after a while and afterwards the Epi held its tuning well throughout the time we spent with it.

The neck is what Epiphone refers to as a "rounded C" and feels slightly chunkier than a 60s Strat but is far from being unwieldy. We did notice that the guitar feels weightier than we would have expected. At approximately 2.49kg (5.5lb) it's certainly a lapful, but that's far from a deal breaker.

Experimenting with a few campfire chords, we found a full and strident voice –

3. The rosewood back and sides sit under a fair dollop of finish, hiding the attractive grain pattern. The rather posh hard case can be seen underneath the guitar

4. We could find no fault with the fit and finish of the El Dorado. Neck binding and fretting has been very well carried out



With a very capable set of acoustic tones and an LR Baggs pickup for stage readiness, there's very little here not to like



EPIPHONE MARCUS KING EL DORADO

PRICE: £949 (inc hard case)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Square-shouldered dreadnought

TOP: Spruce

BACK/SIDES: Rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 124mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 407mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75 inches)

TUNERS: Epiphone Deluxe

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: LR Baggs Element Bronze VTC

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.49/5.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other signature dreadnoughts from Epiphone includes the Eric Church Hummingbird Dark (£699) and the Miranda Lambert Bluebird Studio (£699). There is also the standard Epiphone Hummingbird at £671

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Antique Natural gloss poly

Epiphone

00800 444 27661

www.epiphone.com



9/10

PROS A well-made and nicely voiced dreadnought with an extra helping of collectability

CONS A little weighty and not everyone's a fan of larger dreads

if you've ever picked up and strummed, say, a Gibson Hummingbird, then you'll know what we mean. There's quite a reserve of power to the dynamic range and the guitar remained perfectly musical from a whisper to a roar. We tried some fingerstyle as well and the El Dorado gave a very good account of itself here, too. If we were being hypercritical, we'd say that there are a few notes around the F# in the lower register that don't ring out quite as stridently as the rest, but these weren't

There's power to the dynamic range and the guitar remained musical from a whisper to a roar

dead spots as such, and possibly merely a foible with this particular instrument.

It's always difficult to look into the future and foretell how an acoustic guitar will develop given the passage of time. But, from what we hear today, there's every chance that the El Dorado could turn out to be quite an investment.

We tried it through the acoustic channel of our handy Boss Katana-50 EX and hit our first hurdle as the battery that comes with the guitar was flat. This has happened often in the past – and it's really nobody's fault – and we always have an emergency battery standing by just for this sort of eventuality. It did remind us

what a faff it is to slacken off all the strings and wrestle with the little Velcroed pouch attached to the neckplate, though. But all the detuning and retuning got rid of those 'pinging' strings we mentioned earlier and so the journey was worthwhile.

What we heard before we retrieved our precious Duracell was what we expected. The LR Baggs does a very good job of enhancing the natural sound of the guitar and setting a sound we enjoyed was quick and trouble free.

Verdict

What can we say? A perfectly capable-sounding dreadnought with a bit of history and collectability thrown in for good measure, for under a grand? The Marcus King El Dorado easily hits the benchmark that Epiphone has set for itself over the last few years in that it's a nicely built, well-equipped guitar with a set of very capable sounds that compares well with instruments costing at least twice as much.

Furthermore, despite the fact Epiphone isn't saying exactly what 'time-limited edition' means in this context, it's got to be factored in that it could very well hold its value and even sport the sort of second-hand premium that signature models sometimes attract in the future. If you ever find yourself in the market for a fully equipped and stage-ready dreadnought then the Epiphone Marcus King El Dorado should definitely feature on your shopping list. **G**



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FIRST PLAY



**STRYMON CANOGA
VINTAGE SILICON FUZZ**
£199

WHAT IS IT? Vintage-style
two-transistor silicon fuzz



Basic Instinct

Strymon keeps it simple with this analogue two-knob pedal that provides responsive 60s-style fuzz

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. The Level knob adjusts the output level when the pedal is engaged. A substantial gain increase is available for a lead boost or to drive your other pedals and amp harder
2. Inside the pedal there's a jumper that sets the initial power up state as either bypassed or engaged
3. This is an unbuffered, low-impedance mono-instrument input. Position Canoga as the first pedal in your signal chain for most effective interaction with your guitar's pickups

Think Strymon, and complex digital pedals may come to mind. But recently the company has started adding purely analogue pedals to its roster in the form of the Series A line. The first of these was the Fairfax Class A Output Stage Drive, and the second is this Canoga Fuzz, based on an original design from a few years ago by Strymon CEO and analogue engineer Gregg Stock, when looking for a fuzz to work with the brand's UltraViolet Uni-Vibe-style pedal. Basically, it's a tweaked version of a vintage silicon Fuzz Face.

There's nothing complicated about the Canoga – it's a simple two-knob pedal with a Drive knob turning up the dirt amount and a Level knob setting the output volume with plenty in the tank for a substantial boost. In old-school fuzz style, this is a pedal that is best placed at the front of your chain with the guitar plugged directly into it for nuanced interaction with the pickups.

With a standard starting position of both knobs at midday, first impressions are underwhelming because there is an immediate drop in both treble and volume... But give it a touch more Level and get the Drive knob beyond 3 o'clock and the pedal comes alive, actually sounding at its best with the Drive knob max'd where you'll get the full fuzz experience with a sweet top-end and plenty in the midrange.

This is how the pedal is meant to be used: turn its Drive up full, set the Level for the your preferred point of interaction with your amp, and use your guitar volume knob to control the amount of dirt in your signal, as the pedal responds superbly to whatever adjustments you make. That interaction will bring out the pedal's inherent tonal flexibility, cleaning up through various shades of drive with good chordal clarity and without any loss of treble in the process. Having tried it with clean and dirty amps, we liked it best into an amp that's already got a bit of hair on it. Needless to say, it's a perfect partner to a Strat and a Marshall if Hendrix is your thing.

Verdict

Firmly rooted in that familiar late-60s two-transistor silicon circuitry, the Canoga offers up that sound in a practical pedalboard-friendly form and is a shoo-in as an always-on pedal for players who like to control the whole sound from their guitar volume knob. **G**



STRYMON CANOGA VINTAGE SILICON FUZZ

PRICE: £199

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Drive, Level, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 50 mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 115 (d) x 59mm (h)

Strymon
www.strymon.net



PROS Pedalboard-friendly chassis; great vintage fuzz sound; excellent response and clean-up

CONS The financial outlay is quite significant here



THE RIVALS

Dunlop has the rights to the Fuzz Face trademark and has several models including some with the original round form factor, but check out the MXR Classic 108 Fuzz Mini (£124, pictured right) for both authentic sound and pedalboard space-saving. A perennial favourite is the Analog Man Sun Face (from \$195, plus delivery and taxes), available with a choice of various options including the circuit's transistors. If you like the idea of an evolved Fuzz Face, the SolidGoldFX If 6 Was 9 MKII (£199) incorporates a variety of new features aimed at bringing the design into the modern age.



FIRST PLAY



**MAD PROFESSOR
LITTLE GREEN WONDER
HANDWIRED**
£269

WHAT IS IT? High-headroom
overdrive/booster pedal from the
Finnish electronics company



Go Green

Mad Professor brings back the overdrive/booster pedal in a hand-wired incarnation with its very own flavour

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

1. Solidly built with a two-part sheet metal enclosure, the pedal has all the connections in our preferred place, plus an ergonomically sloped top
2. The Body control sets the frequency of the overdrive. Turn anti-clockwise for more bass and low mids with some treble boost; turn clockwise to get a more mid-focused tone with less bass
3. It might be green, but this is not a Tube Screamer clone. While it can sound like one, it retains low-end and has a more adjustable midrange profile

Besides its standard range of pedals, Mad Professor has a Handwired series, handmade in Finland. These pedals feature a rugged sheet metal enclosure housing top-mounted Switchcraft jacks, high-quality through-hole components, plus Alpha pots and switches. The company's Sweet Honey Overdrive, Deep Blue Delay and Royal Blue Overdrive are now all available as Handwired pedals, too, but the latest to be released is a version of the Little Green Wonder. The LGW first appeared about 20 years ago and came out of Mad Professor's desire to create an overdrive pedal that could fulfil a similar function to a Tube Screamer, albeit while doing its own thing.

This Little Green Wonder Handwired is a weightily solid pedal that is definitely pedalboard-friendly with its top-mounted connections and a sloped top surface. Sounds are dialled in with standard Volume and Drive knobs, and the intriguingly named Body knob takes care of EQ functions via a specialised curve. Starting with the Body knob at its most neutral midway position and the Drive at minimum, the sound is clean and you'll hit unity gain around 11 o'clock, leaving plenty for a boost. Advancing the Drive knob, it becomes clear that the LGW has a wide range of gain from adding just a touch of hair right through to a raunchy distorted roar. All of this can be focused with the Body knob to give you what you need to work best with your rig.

To the left (anti-clockwise) you'll get an increase in the 'presence' area of top-end coupled with added girth as it also dials in more bass and lower mids and inevitably more saturation at higher Drive levels. To the right (clockwise) there's less low-end for more of an upper-mid focus, plus a lift in the airier top-end frequencies. It's an interesting approach to the task that works really well, offering practical tonal settings to suit both humbuckers and single coils. Add in that wide-ranging gain and you have a pedal that can sit with both clean and driven amps, and that stacks nicely with other drives for flexible pedalboard dirt combinations.

Verdict

Its versatility makes the Little Green Wonder Handwired a veritable workhorse of a pedal, delivering boost and drive for sole use or for stacking. Okay, there's a premium to pay for a hand-wired pedal, but you'll be getting something that feels built to last. **G**



MAD PROFESSOR LITTLE GREEN WONDER HANDWIRED

PRICE: £269

ORIGIN: Finland

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Drive, Body, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 4mA

DIMENSIONS: 65 (w) x 128 (d) x 55mm (h)

First Line Distribution

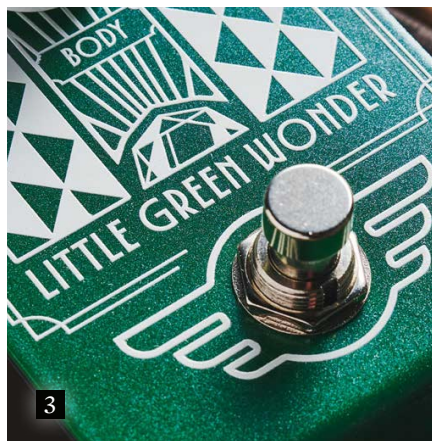
01626 832410

www.mpamp.com



PROS Compact size; really solid build quality; top-mounted jacks and power input; wide range of gain available; unique Body control for tonal shifts

CONS Some might find the Body control less intuitive than separate Bass and Treble knobs



THE RIVALS

Mad Professor actually has other versions available: The Green Wonder (£191) eschews the Body control for separate Bass and Treble knobs, while the Little Green Wonder also exists in a less expensive PCB version (£159), rather than hand-wired. Another green pedal with a practical gain range and its own take on an EQ knob (Spectrum) is the Nobels ODR-1X (£129, pictured), which also has a Bass Cut knob. Continuing the green theme there are obviously loads of variations on the Tube Screamer, but how about the Keeley Noble Screamer (£189), which mixes and matches TS808 and Nobels ODR-1 flavours in a single pedal?





Gas Supply

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

Orange Baby Terror £199

CONTACT **Orange Music Electronic Company Ltd** PHONE **020 8905 2828** WEB www.orangeamps.com

JARGON CRUNCHING IR

IR stands for Impulse Response. While not exactly new, it's a term you've probably heard a lot. Much like 'captures' of an amp, IR harnesses the tonal qualities of a mic'd speaker, or multi-speaker cabinet at a static point, allowing you to apply your favourite cab to any amp sound you like.

Wait, a guitar amp... do people still use those?

Contrary to what the internet might be leading you to believe, AI, digital modelling and FRFR cabs haven't quite taken over every rig just yet. Here, Orange has delivered a new addition to its Terror lineage, with real controls that you actually move by hand. Touchscreen? Wouldn't have thought so. App control? Not today. What you see, and more importantly, what you hear, is what you get.

I had a Tiny Terror! So is this valve then?

No, while Orange might be sticking with the tactile approach, the Baby Terror is still moving towards a more

modern application combining lightweight portability with enough power to fuel a 4x12 cabinet. But in this case it's achieved via a solid-state design featuring four stages of cascading, single-ended JFET gain, which, according to Orange's Ade Emsley makes the Baby Terror sound 'very tube-like'. The end result is an amp head that weighs just 1.5kg, and measures 165x140x100mm. Orange calls it a 'micro-lunchbox', but we'd say it's more snack-pack.

Right, so this is really just for bedroom players and beginners then?

Not at all! In fact, you might recall the previous non-valve

GIG-READY

It's single-channel, but Orange has included a footswitchable second volume control and a full three-band EQ-plus-presence control set, making this a tiny, versatile amp head for the stage.

TUBBY SWITCH

If you need to fatten up your clean sounds, the Tubby switch is on hand to add warmth and beef at lower gain settings. It's operated by a toggle rather than a footswitch.

PORTABLE

At 1.5kg, it weighs the same as a bag-and-a-half of sugar, and measures just 165 x 140 x 100mm. Orange even supplies the Baby Terror in a padded gig bag for protecting it on the go.





As well as being able to drive an 8/16 ohm cabinet, the Baby Terror comes equipped with a balanced DI out for running into speaker emulations/IRs for recording or going direct to a PA system

Terror amps such as the Micro Terror and Micro Dark. Those versions have an ECC83 valve in the front end, but control and features-wise were aimed much more at home use with a headphone socket and simple gain/tone/volume control layout.

The Baby Terror is derived from the first channel of Orange's Dual Baby amp that was launched in 2025,

It has a full three-band EQ (plus Presence control) for a lot more tonal tweakery should you need it

and features a footswitchable (not included) second volume control for when you need an output boost.

As well as this, it comes with a full three-band EQ (plus Presence control) for a lot more tonal tweakery should you need it. One point you might notice is there's no headphone socket, so Orange clearly has designs on this thing being heard.

What's a Tubby switch?

Good spot. That's another added feature for the Baby Terror. The Tubby toggle is designed to help fatten up the low end when the gain is set to cleaner tones. Flick the switch and you'll get added timbre without pushing your sound into higher gain territory. Like a reverse Mounjaro for your clean/crunch tones.

So we're losing the valve and gaining an EQ section, basically?

No, we're not finished yet! There's more going on at the back of the amp too. Starting with an effects loop, which is your common-or-garden series send/return affair, but nonetheless a welcome addition to the Baby Terror's utility belt. But one of the most interesting additional features is the DI output. It's un-emulated, so you're getting the full fizz of the amp without cab filtering, the intention being that you can run it into a DAW or hardware cab sim and use your favourite IR or speaker emulation for recording or sending to a PA.

Sounds like a useful little amp, what are we talking price-wise?

This little amp will see you parting with £199, and includes a padded gig bag to make transportation easy. The Baby Terror is in stores now. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...

SHERGOLD TELSTAR STANDARD 12-STRING £409

Everyone loves the chorus-y chime of a 12-string, right? But it's often viewed as an extravagance for those of us who aren't in a Byrds tribute band. Shergold is here to challenge that, though, by continuing the brand's decades-long association with 12-string electrics courtesy of its new Telstar Standard 12-string. With a poplar body, maple neck and laurel fingerboard, plus a pair of FilterSonic humbuckers, it's built on the same platform as the impressive Telstar Standard 6-string. As with all of Shergold's guitars since its reboot in 2017, the design has been overseen by none other than Patrick James Eggle, and it's available now priced at £409. www.shergoldguitars.com



HARLEY BENTON £215

It's been years since 'pre-aged' guitars first reared their heads, and we think it'll be a fair few years before the debate around them comes to an end. But, if you want the battered look on a budget, Thomann-owned Harley Benton's latest release should catch your attention. Its Aged Series offers Heavy Aged (HA) or Light Aged (LA) guitars priced at just over £200. With three shapes in the range (ST-62, TE-62 and JA-62), the Aged Series is packing some serious specs to boot with American alder bodies, caramelised Canadian maple necks, and stainless-steel frets, while the electronics are taken care of by HB's own ISOLA pickups. For the full range of finishes, head to the Harley Benton website.

www.harleybenton.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: Amit Dattani

Album: *Wrong Kind Of One* (self-released)



Amit Dattani's second album, *Wrong Kind Of One*, is Americana to the core www.amitdattanimusic.com

On his second album, *Wrong Kind Of One*, Birmingham-based folk singer-songwriter Amit Dattani is taking listeners deep inside the heart of Americana. Songs such as *Steady The Boat*, *Gathering Acorns* and *One Too Many Mornings* are brimming with a sense of soul-baring honesty, almost like a musical confession, one where the guitar tones are every bit as exquisite as the voice accompanying them.

Fingerstyle Fan

Though he grew up listening to blues masters such as Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy, it was the fingerstyle approach of Blind Blake, Mississippi John Hurt and Elizabeth Cotten that helped guide Amit towards the musical style he would pursue. "Hearing them cover so many bases with their fingers blew my mind wide open," he says. "It was magic. I got pretty obsessed with trying to work out how the heck they managed it, spending weeks and months working on my right hand – learning how to syncopate, mute and emphasise different notes."

Open Approach

This led to Amit discovering the likes of Kelly Joe Phelps and Paul Curreri, and looking deeper into their techniques. "That's when I got into open tunings," he continues, "as well as wrapping your thumb over the top of the neck to grab those lower strings, giving more freedom to my fingers. I was amazed by how they were able to merge voice and guitar in such a unique way. Now I listen to folks like Ali Farka Touré, Joseph Spence and contemporary

players like Kris Drever or John Doyle. I'm always interested in new picking patterns and ways to express yourself through guitar in ways that best serve a song."

Custom Creativity

On his latest recordings, Amit can be heard playing his custom Hammett Guitar Co Astro Strat. "It's a hollowbody electric fashioned after the old Harmony Stratotones," he says. "I'd always been an acoustic player. In 2018, I got diagnosed with a genetic degenerative nerve condition that impacts my hands and my feet. Long story short, the prognosis was I'd likely have two years of playing left in me before the batteries in my hands ran out. I got talking to Pat Hammett and we hatched a plan to create a custom electric with lower string tension and a flatter angle for my picking hand, plus super wide string spacing. It has single-handedly helped me carry on playing."

Electric Connection

The album was recorded live with Steph Sanders on drums. "I plugged my Astro Strat into a Tone King Imperial amp," Amit says. "Stepping into the electric space as a fingerstyle acoustic player has been so fun. Everything was in straight takes with my incredible drummer Steph. I find her musicality so inspiring. I wanted to make an album that sounded like the stuff I listened to as a kid – stripped back, live and all about the energy and performance. It's all about connection between the folks in that room in that moment."

Under The Thumb

A Rory Gallagher DVD inspired Amit to give thumbpicks and fingerpicks a try. "He was on an old National and I just loved the sound," Amit says. "By then I was already sort of hybrid picking with a plectrum and using my middle and ring finger to pick melodies, so the transition to a thumbpick felt natural. I find using it with fingerpicks helps me to play cleaner and more articulately. The main thing for me is making sure the thumbpick blade is tiny. I file it right down so it's more like an extension to my thumbnail. I would recommend experimenting lots and making sure it's on tight – I once had one fly off mid-concert before, which was not fun." [AS]

Standout track: *Golden Days*

For fans of: Mississippi John Hurt, Big Bill Broonzy

Amit worked hard on his right-hand fingerstyle technique to produce the accompaniment style of his country blues heroes



PHOTO BY RUSSELL WHITEHEAD/PHOTOGRAPHY

HAPPINESS IN GUITARS

Amit picks his favourite guitar moments on *Wrong Kind Of One*...

"There's a semi-improvised take on the hymn *Just A Closer Walk With Thee* that felt super emotional to record. And the song *Now I Can Play On* is an ode to my guitar and literally being able to play on. It makes me smile because I can sort of hear the joy I'm feeling from being able to play along to Steph's drums in full flow. The hardest song to play is the title track. It's a pretty detailed picking pattern, and depending on what kind of day my hands are having, it can be tricky to keep up."

"I wanted to make an album that sounded like the stuff I listened to as a kid - stripped back, live and all about the energy and performance. It's all about connection"



Albums

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



This posthumous release features tributes to Bernie Marsden's own inspirations

Bernie Marsden

Stage

Conquest Music (available now)



Poignant final bow for Bernie's blues

This posthumous collection of live recordings is curated from four contrasting performances by the late ex-Whitesnake guitarist Bernie Marsden, who passed away in 2023. A good friend of this magazine, hearing Bernie's friendly voice on the phone was a simple enjoyment that is still very much missed, which is why it's a bittersweet pleasure to hear the man in his pomp on this well-chosen selection of live performances.

Available in a 2-LP gatefold sleeve set or as a 2-CD deluxe digipack with accompanying booklet, *Stage* offers up 15 cuts from standout gigs at Under The Bridge in London in 2020, Notodden Blues Festival in 1996, Keeping The Blues Alive At Sea 2019, and the Radcliffe Centre in Buckingham from 2008. Poignantly, the set opens with a beautiful acoustic performance of *Till The Day I Die*, which perfectly demonstrates how strong Bernie was as a soulful vocalist as well as a guitarist.

However, this record also forms the final part of Bernie's *Inspirations* Series, in which he paid homage to the musicians who inspired him, so we get satisfying renditions of the Lead Belly/Rory Gallagher classic *Out On The Western Plain* plus Freddie King's *I'm Tore Down*, Peter Green's *Love That Burns* and many more essential songs. Like an evening with a friend, this is time well spent and a satisfying encore for a fine and very-much-missed player. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Out On The Western Plain*

For fans of: Whitesnake, Peter Green, Free, Rory Gallagher, BB King

Warren Haynes

Dreams & Songs: A Symphonic Journey

Provogue/Artone Label Group (available 18 September)



Southern rock with an orchestra? Why not...

It seems to be a dream of many artists in the rock sphere to perform with an orchestra, but few ever end up with the opportunity to do so. But it's obviously been on Warren Haynes' mind for some time, because this double CD takes a dive into the musician's back catalogue with a full 64-piece orchestra in tow. And before you question the combo of a rock and classical congress, rest assured it definitely works.

Warren and band take tracks from Gov't Mule, The Allmans and various solo projects and breathe new, fully orchestrated life into them. Recorded live in 2019 at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in Haynes' hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, tracks such as *Dreams* and *Raven Black Night* find a new dimension and *Whipping Post* retains its relentless power. Needless to say, Warren's guitar shines, as always, throughout. **[DM]**

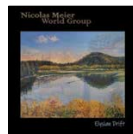
Standout track: *Makes No Difference*

For fans of: Gov't Mule, The Allmans

Nicolas Meier World Group

Elysian Drift

MGP Records (available 28 August)



Intriguing international sounds from former Jeff Beck sideman

'World Music' might be a bit of a broad term, but in Nic Meier's case it covers jazz, Turkish, flamenco, tango and more, employing an array of guitars, including nylon-string fretless. On *Elysian Drift* he teams up with Demi Garcia Sabat (percussion), Richard Jones (violin) and Tom Mason (bass), Alex Hutton (piano) and vocalist Randolph Matthews to produce a musical postcard that shifts styles and genres almost every track, while maintaining a cohesive and very melodic, whole.

Many tracks have a distinct subtext; album opener, Charlie Chaplin's *Smile*, was inspired by a visit to Chaplin's home in Switzerland and *Last Tango* is a hymn to Argentinian tango specialist, Astor Piazzolla. *A Night In Sant Cugat* features flamenco guitar from special guest, José Almarcha, adding a magical touch to the brooding sonic landscapes. Enchanting. **[DM]**

Standout track: *A Night In Sant Cugat*

For fans of: Rodrigo y Gabriela, Pat Metheny



Ben Poole covers a broader style on his first studio album in eight years

Johnny Winter

The Woodstock Experience

Floating World Records (available 25 September)



'69 redux for Texan blues superstar

The pairing on this double CD set might seem a little unusual, but any excuse to revisit the genius of Johnny Winter and his guitar in any form is worthwhile.

What we have here is Johnny's eponymously titled first album from April 1969, plus a second disc featuring his 65-minute live set from the Woodstock Festival later that year. The studio album introduced Winter's guitar to the world and climbed to 24 on the Billboard charts. Songs such as *Mean Mistreater* are just pure gutbucket blues, whereas *Be Careful With A Fool* shows his early guitar prowess to an absolute tee.

The live set is a different thing altogether; a raw, powerful testament to a blues player who had found his stride. Winter's 15-minute take on BB King's *You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now* shines as a masterclass in electric blues. Brilliant stuff! **[DM]**

Standout track: *You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now*

For fans of: SRV, Albert King

Ben Poole

Post-Midnight Behaviour

Gypsy Soul Records (available 25 September)



Renowned blues-rocker ventures into new territory

The last time we heard new material from Ben Poole was eight years ago on 2018's *Time Has Come*. Since then he's released a couple of live albums, but this new material comes as something of a departure from what has gone before, and we're just as impressed.

The blistering guitar is still there, but it's embedded in songs that cover a broader stylistic range. "I wanted this album to showcase my evolution as guitarist and singer-songwriter," Ben told us, "my singing voice has matured, and my influences have varied. I still get to let loose on the guitar, but within a more subdued and reflective manner." Opener *No Second Chances* showcases the new direction, with a riff-laden intro, followed by a very solidly constructed song and powerful hook. There are subtle traces of John Mayer's artistry at work throughout the album, too, especially on tracks like *Summer Haze*. Watch out for live UK dates this November. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Summer Haze*

For fans of: Robert Cray, John Mayer



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Tones Behind The Tracks

After a 15-year wait, guitarist **Deirdre Cartwright** has released a jazz trio album of standards, pop tunes and original compositions

Artist: Deirdre Cartwright

Album: *Organik* (Blow The Fuse Records)



Organik is Deirdre Cartwright's first album as leader for 15 years

Many people will always associate Deirdre Cartwright with the BBC Two programme *RockSchool*, which ran from 1983 to 1987 and was hosted by top players and teachers of the day: Henry Thomas, Alastair Gavin and Geoff Nicholls. The show featured tutorials on various styles of popular music as well as pro tips on maintaining gear. Since then Deirdre has become a well-known jazz player on the festival and club circuits and has released a string of albums under her own name, as well as been an ensemble player on many more. Her most recent album, *Organik*, finds her back in the role as band leader.

Why the 15-year gap between albums?

"I've led lots of really great bands. Some of them involved musicians from Europe, and it's a lot to organise – touring, getting gigs and all the rest of it – and I think I just became a bit wiped out with it all. At the same time, Alison Rayner, who I've played with for a very long time, wanted to form her own band because she wanted to do more composition. She had written a little bit for my band, but it was mostly my compositions, so she said she was going to form ARQ, the Alison Rayner Quintet, and that started in about 2012, 2013. I actually thought, 'Oh, it's so nice just to

be in a band, as opposed to leading a band,' because when you lead a band, you also have to do all the organising as well. So I've done four albums with ARQ, and that's been great. I really love working with that band, and hopefully that will continue.

"But gradually I began to get back much more into what I'd call classic jazz, if you know what I mean, and I got into exploring again all those wonderful guitarists – Wes Montgomery, Pat Martino, Kenny Burrell and Grant Green – all that kind of playing. I had started to play with Pete Whittaker [Hammond player]. We were doing a sort of jazz-duo gig, and I hadn't really played with organ before. We just got on really well. And then Gary Hammond, who's a wonderful conga player and percussionist, played in my bands in the 90s, and he ended up playing with The Beautiful South. He was down in London and so I thought, 'Okay, let's just try doing an organ trio.' We've only ever done about half a dozen gigs [as *Organik*], but it really gave me enthusiasm again for playing and, I suppose, leading a band again."

What gear did you use to record the *Organik* album?

"When I first started playing with *Organik*, I was playing a Heritage, which is based on a [Gibson] Super 400 so it's a really big guitar. I'm relatively tall, but I thought, 'Wow, this is a really big guitar...' I often go down to Cornwall and I know a jazz guitarist down there called Martin Bowie. When I'm down there we often do a duo gig together and he has a Gibson L-4. So I had a little go after a gig and I said, 'This guitar is just a little bit smaller and it feels really nice to play.' I thought I would love to get a blonde 175 like Pat Metheny, who I've loved since the 70s.

"I'd been down to the Bath guitar auctions [at Gardiner Houlgate], and they had about half a dozen 175s and L-4s, and I thought I might get one from there, so I tried them all out. I also spotted an L-4 and I thought what a beautiful guitar it was, in really beautiful condition. Anyway, when the auction came up, I put a bid on a 175 [and won], and I put a lowish bid on the L-4. I'd just arrived in Greece, looked at my phone and it said, 'Congratulations, you've got the L-4', and I went, 'Oh my God!' So I ended up with two guitars and they're both really fantastic. They're both beautiful. So on the album I use the 175 and a Lazy J amp."

The making of *Organik* saw Deirdre channel her love for jazz guitarists such as Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell and Grant Green



PHOTO BY POLLY HANCOCK

"I've fulfilled a lot of my aspirations But it doesn't stop there. I always want to learn more and keep bringing what I observe and hear into the music"

Which model Lazy J is it?

"It's a 20-watt model reverb. I used that on the album and then I realised halfway through that it was making a slightly odd sound. I actually discovered afterwards there was a problem with one of the reverb springs, and it was just rattling around a bit. So I also used my little Fender Princeton, which is a 12-watt amp, but it has a 12-inch speaker in it. It's a 1971, but it looks like it's not really a 70s one inside; it's all totally 60s still. It's got the most beautiful sound. It's a little too quiet for most gigs, but it's got wonderful sounds, so that's what I used on the album: the 175, the Lazy J a little bit, and a Fender Twin that was in the studio and was a little bit bright, and then my Fender Princeton."

Any effects?

"No effects. I'm getting less and less into effects. I started off always playing with effects pedals, but I think [not doing so] really improved my technique and my playing. I think it's really made me focus on the notes more. You have to be able to do it all. So all I had was the guitar lead into the amp, and that was it."

"Funnily enough a couple of weeks ago, I was talking to [jazz guitarist] Rob Luft, and he's got a pedalboard. He was using what looked to me like a Gibson L-5 through all these effects. And I came home and I got my old [Line 6] Pod out and I started playing with the delays and I thought, 'Oh yeah, maybe for the moment I'm not using effects, but maybe I'll try the 175 or the L-4 through a couple of things,' you know? I won't do a Ted Nugent, though."

You've included quite a few jazz standards on the album, including *The Gentle Rain* and *On Green Dolphin Street*. Are these particular favourites?

"Yeah, I've always loved *The Gentle Rain*. I've always kept that in my repertoire, even though I play other bossa novas. I went to see Pat Metheny playing in the 90s at the Mean Fiddler. He played all standards that night – and maybe a couple of his tunes but mostly standards – and he played *The Gentle Rain* and I thought, 'Oh, that's gorgeous!' It just made me think, 'I've got to learn that tune.'"

Are you going to take *Organik* on tour?

"Yeah, I would like to do some more gigs. I'm going to be getting some gigs in the autumn and next spring,



PHOTO BY POLLY HANCOCK

Deirdre managed to acquire a brace of Gibson jazz boxes at a recent auction. On the left an L-4 and on the right an ES-175

that's the thing. I've been offered a couple, which is really nice, because people don't really know about it and I play with two or three different groups, but I definitely want to tour *Organik*.

"I've actually fulfilled a lot of what I wanted to do when I was younger, just being able to play certain things, and I've fulfilled a lot of my aspirations, you know? But it doesn't stop there. I just always want to learn more and improve and keep on bringing what I observe and what I hear into the music. There's a couple of great jazz standards I really want to learn, and I heard Bill Frisell playing a fantastic version of *Epistrophy*, and I just think, 'Oh, that'd be great.' So who knows, on the next one I might do a couple of Thelonious Monk tunes." [DM]



Deirdre Cartwright's new album, *Organik*, is available now on Blow The Fuse Records

www.deidrecartwright.com



Peculiar Places

Neville Marten recalls gigs he's played in somewhat unusual venues, and one or two in slightly strange circumstances, too...

While I've been lucky enough to have played at London Palladium, Wembley Arena and the Royal Albert Hall in various guises, this issue's musings describe some of the weirder venues at which I have plied my trade.

You will, of course, know Tower Bridge, which spans the River Thames and opens in the centre to allow tall ships through. Well, joining the two end towers is a long glass walkway that is rather capacious. Our function band had a gig up there one Christmas, and it was absolutely Baltic inside; unfortunately punters couldn't care less that we were there, and at the last minute the band leader said, "They want 45 minutes of solo acoustic guitar during pre-dinner drinks. There's an extra 50 quid in it." This wasn't up for debate.

It would have been fine had I any kind of solo acoustic guitar repertoire. As it was, I sat on a stool with my Taylor and just piddled about for the duration. My fingers were barely functioning with the cold, and the punters pretty much ignored the music save for one

Museum. We set up on the stairs in the entrance hall with Dippy, the establishment's superstar diplodocus, overseeing proceedings. Again, we were totally ignored by champagne-swilling revellers but it was an interesting experience (not to mention a very different version of a 'historical' gig...).

Tiger Feet (Or Head!)

Once, in another band, we travelled on an executive jet (with non-stop bar service) to Edinburgh. We were playing at a very swanky mansion that had animals' heads displayed on plaques around the walls. A beautiful Bengal tiger was one of the unfortunate exhibits. Our keyboard player was Reg Webb, the blind genius who also played with Lenny Kravitz, Linda Lewis, Nik Kershaw and others.

At the mansion, we were feeling impish. We helped Reg stand on a chair, and said, "Reach up and see what you can feel." He held his arms around the tiger's enormous head, feeling its ears, whiskers and those menacing feline gnashers. He knew instantly what it was, and I'll never forget the look of wonderment on his face as he took in the immensity of this once vital but now sadly ex-magnificent being.

With this same band, fronted by a TV personality and talented female country singer, we played Gleneagles Hotel. Her manager was also present. When the drummer and I checked into our rooms we found ourselves in glorious, palatial suites. At dinner later, both singer and manager complained that their accommodation was not quite what they were expecting – nice but not spectacular. Alan and I said nothing. Needless to say, we had a fabulous stay!

Gigs like these are nothing if you're The Stones or Bon Jovi, but we were just a bunch of Joes doing functions who happened to find themselves in unexpected situations. Got any similar stories? We'd love to hear them.

"We set up on the stairs in the entrance hall with Dippy, the establishment's superstar diplodocus, overseeing proceedings"

drunken lady who told me my instrumental slaughter of *Till There Was You* was "very pretty".

Incidentally, precarious situations on Tower Bridge apparently run in the family as when I was growing up in South East London, the number 78 bus ran to and from Dulwich and we regularly got on it. On 30 December 1952 that bus jumped the gap as Tower Bridge began to unexpectedly rise, but driver Albert Gunter chose to accelerate, rather than stop and risk toppling back. Family lore has it that my grandma was on that bus.

Anyway, another time with the aforementioned function band, we played London's Natural History

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH Hello Wembley!

What? Tone King Imperial Preamp **Where seen:** Peach Guitars, Colchester **Price:** £599

Pedal amps offer a great bridge between modellers and standalone amplifiers. The Tone King Imperial is legendary for its crisp clean tones and articulate leads. Putting the preamp, with three 12AX7 valves, twin channels and glorious reverb and tremolo into a pedal was a great idea. Each channel has its own attenuation, so you can balance it with separate volumes for the level of pristine or dirty that you require. On the back are the usual connections including XLR to front of house, FRFR cab or mixing desk. It's as tough as old boots in its rugged metal case. I've used it (into the PA) on two different gigs with a Strymon Brig delay and a Fulltone OCD overdrive just to add that extra panache and grunt. Bloody marvellous!



PHOTO: WWW.TONEKING.COM



Rescue Mission

Alex Bishop plays his part in saving a discarded Romantic guitar and picks up the hand tools to commence its restoration

When my friend Will, a local school music teacher, recently announced a musical instrument amnesty he was maybe expecting the usual slew of inexpensive unbranded guitars, donated by well-meaning parents whose children had abandoned their musical ambitions. But when he spied one dusty wooden 'coffin' case nestled among the soft cases, he opened it with a raised eyebrow. Inside was a stunning (if damaged) Romantic guitar, constructed from Brazilian rosewood and adorned with engraved mother-of-pearl. Politely refusing it, he suggested that the owner should take it along to my workshop for an appraisal and potential restoration. And so it was, a number of weeks later, that the guitar found itself on my workbench.

Romantic-era guitars are significant for bringing into fashion six strings (rather than five courses). This particular model, built by French violin maker Honoré Derazey in about 1830, also features an original set of Chappell & Co geared machineheads – a worthy upgrade to friction pegs and something that we take for granted on today's guitars.

Got It Cracked

My first challenge was to improve the old repair work. A cumbersome wooden block had been glued to the inside of the ribs in an attempt to patch a yawning split on the treble side, which had failed to stop a crack running along the whole length of the body. Luckily, this was removed with little effort and so I was able to clean out the old glue from within the split. I prefer modern glues for building new guitars, but a sensitive restoration job requires a different approach; I prefer to prepare a hide glue, just like when it was first made. Animal glue is easier to work with for repair as it will release with heat and moisture, and can even be reactivated decades later.

Then it was time to turn my attention to some of the finer details of the instrument. The particularly decorative rosette was emblazoned with engraved mother-of-pearl, but with a section worn smooth through playing it would be down to my steady hand to copy the design from the opposite side of the soundhole, blending in with the original as best as I could. Hard materials such as pearl can be scratched with a graver, and then these details are filled with ink to stand out. An artist can add any amount of detail to a design, and the floral pattern on this guitar presented a substantial challenge. Luckily, each element of the rosette was slightly different so with a little artistic licence, it ended up with a fairly pleasing result.

Compared with the 'no-frills' approach of some modern luthiers, 19th century guitar makers were clearly unafraid of a bit of ornamentation. Rather



than the usual one-piece ebony bridge, this guitar consisted of six separate ebony elements carved and glued together to form a kind of flowing banner design. Intriguingly, six individual adjustable metal screws allow the player to raise the action of individual strings – a simple, ingenious solution to the problem of giving the player an easy way to tweak playability before the invention of the truss rod.

Most of the bridge required removal from the top because it was already detaching in a serious way. Old

Alex's repair on this 200-year-old Romantic guitar involved careful updates to make it structurally, aesthetically and tonally sound

"The sweetness of the tone of such an instrument cannot be overstated; one could feel the delicate soundboard vibrating effortlessly"

attempts to reglue it had failed, so a complete refit would be required. Copious amounts of a mystery sticky residue was scraped off, and with a new fit to the surface established, the bridge was glued back down. I turned some ebony finials on the lathe to replace the missing ones, guided by a pair of faint silhouettes in the finish of the soundboard.

With the structural repairs complete, the instrument was finally beginning to resemble the guitar that left Derazey's workshop almost two centuries ago. All that remained was to polish up the metal hardware, lubricate the gears and string it up. The sweetness of the tone of such an instrument cannot be overstated; one could feel the delicate soundboard vibrating effortlessly as soon as tuning up began. It's a joy to hear the music restored to a historical piece such as this, connecting my hands with the craftsman who built it almost 200 years ago. **G**



Count Me In

Pondering the neck-to-body join on your next acoustic guitar? You're not alone – **Michael Watts** assesses the implications

The fretboard of an acoustic guitar can be a lovely place to live – inspiring, rewarding, nice view et cetera. However, when it comes to the number of frets that should ideally sit between the nut and the body join, there remains plenty of room for debate. In the following numerical stream of consciousness I'll shed light on the two most popular choices and one increasingly prominent outlier.

From its classical roots to the first flat-top prototypes, the 12-fret neck-to-body join has been the original choice for an acoustic guitar. More traditionally entrenched players to this day continue to see any diversion as an evolutionary dead end. There are evidently pros and cons involved, of course. Let's look at the good stuff first.

It is undeniable that the sound of a 12-fret instrument is one of the primary advantages. The architecture of these guitars involves a neck that joins the body at a nodal point and a bridge location on or near to the centre of the guitar's lower bout. This lends a voice that players often describe as rich, sophisticated and complex. You can certainly expect a more diffuse response that pushes the soundboard's monopole and cross dipole in a different way from a 14-fret instrument, especially when playing fingerstyle. Some players – myself included – also enjoy the visual logic of each string meeting the body join at the octave as you sight down the neck, very helpful.

In the cons column we have to address the fact that many of us make extensive use of at least one capo. On a non-cutaway 12-fret guitar it doesn't take long before things start getting cramped. We should also add the fact that the majority of 12-fret instruments are built in the vintage style and that inevitably means a chunky old neck and the challenge of changing steel strings on a slotted headstock without bleeding out on the floor.

While cutaway 12-fret guitars do exist, they tend to be the preserve of bespoke acoustic luthiers such as Marc Beneteau and Michael Greenfield. Some such as Casimi Guitars of South Africa go so far as to make 12-fret instruments almost exclusively (bar the 13-fret C5 Baritone in this case). As ever, the sublime comes at a price.

Numbers Game

Now let's address the 14-fret guitar. Martin's short-lived relationship with the banjo superstar Perry Bechtel is often credited with the introduction of the 14-fret guitar when he approached the company in 1929, but Gibson's 14-fret Hawaiian models were released around the same time, following on from the success of its L-5 archtop, launched in 1923. Ironically, Bechtel himself defected to an L-5 within a couple of years of Martin's first 14-fret models leaving the production line. The perfidy of that banjo player may never be forgotten, but he did play a part in some wonderful guitars.

Let's face it, the vast majority of flat-top steel-string guitars in the world today feature a 14-fret neck-to-body join. There are some very good reasons for this. The 14-fret design addresses most of the 12-fret equivalent's foibles, giving unfettered access to loads of notes (including a far more comfortable octave E blues scale), a solid headstock, a slimmer neck, and a voice that loves being driven with a pick and cutting through a band mix.

While the 14-fret dreadnought dominates in the acoustic guitar domain, there is now increasing love for Orchestra, Grand Auditorium, Grand Concert, Jumbo and Small Jumbo instruments that go up to 11 – plus three. If you're reading this then the chances are that you own and love at least one similar instrument.

Now it's time for our wildcard: the 13-fret acoustic guitar. Setting aside any latent triskaidekaphobia, we need to look back to the very first acoustic steel-string guitar signature model – the Gibson Nick Lucas Special – which in between its 12- and 14-fret iterations briefly saw the sun as a 13-fret model. But why?

Logic dictates that a 13-fret guitar should occupy a happy medium – a fine balance between the warm, intimate tones of a 12-fret and the muscular articulation of the 14-fret. So what went wrong? Well, things sometimes just don't work out, and while the 13-fret Nick Lucas did not last as a production model, original examples are now highly prized by players and collectors alike. Bob Dylan had one, which helps.

Bob Dylan performing at BBC TV Centre, London, on 1 June 1965 with his 13-fret Gibson Nick Lucas model



PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS



Credit for the current resurgence of interest in 13-fret guitars must go to the late Paul Hostetter who collaborated with Richard Hoover of the Santa Cruz Guitar Company to produce a deep-body 13-fret version of the Nick Lucas design under the H13 model. This is, it has to be said, a superb guitar.

The past few years have seen adoption of the 13-fret instruments by several prominent players – in fact, it seems like all the cool kids have got one. Martin Simpson

Blind Guitars' B-24L, hand-crafted by French luthier Virgile Pilon, was designed with its 13th-fret neck join at its core

“Logic dictates that a 13-fret guitar [exists] between the warm, intimate tones of a 12-fret and the muscular articulation of the 14-fret”

and Louis Campbell can both be seen toting 13-fret Fylde instruments, and bell harmonic maestro Alan Gogoll has been melting faces around the world with a 13-fret signature model by Swedish luthier Ted Åstrand.

This reinvention of the 13-fret instrument's popularity has led to some luthiers making standard models with this design. *Regardez s'il vous plaît* the elegant Blind Guitars B-24 model by French luthier Virgile Pilon (pictured above) that we featured in last issue's Wishlist as one such example. That whole instrument was designed as a 13-fret guitar and Virgile is sticking to his guns – there are no plans for any other iteration.

In practice, what this all means for us – as lovers of the guitar and its music – is that once again we stand to benefit in this golden age of acoustic lutherie. Choice is a beautiful thing, especially when it is guided by in-depth collaborations between guitar makers and the musicians who play their work. No matter what configuration you choose, the options for ergonomic joy, aesthetic depth of meaning and sonic splendour are more varied than ever before. Give thanks. **G**

THREE TO GET READY

From 12 to 14 in three easy steps



Gibson Century Collection From £1,999

If you're into the 12-fret idea then Gibson's new Century Collection should very definitely be on your radar. As 2026 brings with it the centennial of the brand's flat-top acoustics, Gibson has released 12-fret versions of the venerable J-185 small jumbo, small-body L-00 and slope-shoulder dreadnought J-45 (pictured) models. That's a lot of tone to go for. Which to choose? That's up to you. Maybe all three!



Åstrand Guitars \$21,000

While still rare and wonderful, 13-fret guitars are indeed out there. Among the finest I've heard recently was Ted Åstrand's new 00 Signature Goldfish model for Alan Gogoll (both pictured above). I had the pleasure of hearing this instrument in action while producing Alan's album *Echidna's Parade* at Hansa Studios in Berlin when it was only days old. A beautiful sound and the ideal starting point for a bespoke creation.



Greenfield Guitars G1 From \$30,000

Looking for one guitar to rule them all with a choice of neck joins? Michael Greenfield's G1 model is now available in both 12- and 14-fret configurations with no difference in base price. Players from Keith Richards and Andy McKee to Tony McManus and Paul Stanley are devotees of this S-Tier Canadian luthier. There's a waiting list, of course, but that could give you time to save up.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIBSON

PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATTS

PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATTS



Forgetting Your Roots

With the humble C chord, **Richard Barrett** shows how experimenting with voicings can open up the sounds at your fingertips

As guitar players, we need to take a flexible approach to how we voice our chords. Not to suggest that there's anything wrong with open-position 'cowboy' chords, but we have the practical consideration of six strings and five fingers, as opposed to the 88 keys and 10 fingers available to a keyboard player... Of course, preference does come into this at some stage. It's just that this tends to be secondary in the face of finding a suitable chord voicing for a given song.

That's where this article comes in. The below examples are all based around a C chord, but they show how we can juggle the voicing to have different notes on the top – or bottom, as none of these examples take the conventional approach of having the root down there. This has a sound of its own, as well as opening up the higher strings for embellishments, whether that be chord extensions or licks, in the way Jimi did. More details below! 🎸

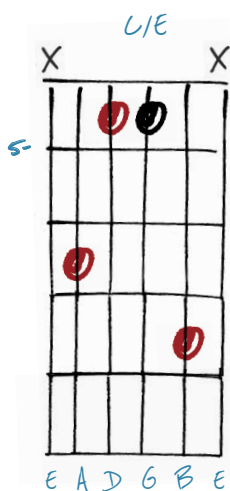
Nile Rodgers would often look to clever chord inversions in his playing, such as on Chic's anthem *Le Freak* and David Bowie's *Let's Dance*



PHOTO BY MARIANO REGIDOR/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

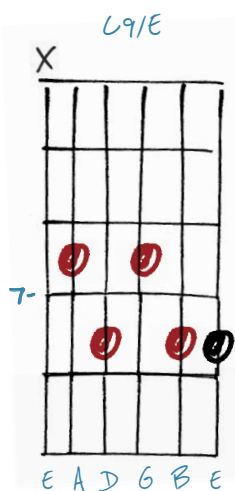
Example 1

This C/E chord has the 3rd (E) on the bottom and the C major triad (G-C-E) on the fourth, third and second strings respectively. But if you look at the chord box, you'll see that there's a G added at the 8th fret of the second string. Feel free to hammer on/pull off like Curtis Mayfield, or try hammering on some of the other strings.



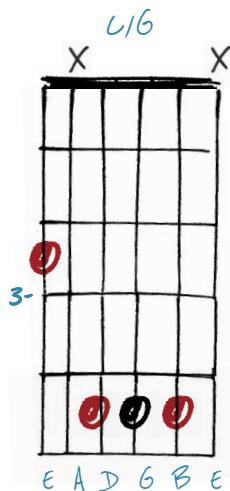
Example 2

This C9/E is perfect for *Stormy Monday*-style blues playing, though in that song the bass does play the root underneath – sometimes it's about reaching the higher notes/extensions, rather than shifting the root for its own sake. This can be used anywhere there is a dominant 7th voicing for some added finesse.



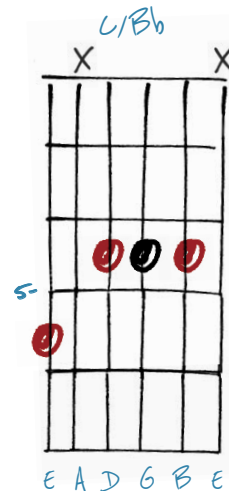
Example 3

Shifting back to the regular C major triad, here is a C/G chord. In this case, the G (5th) at the bottom seems to have a profound effect, giving the chord quite a grandiose sound. Be sure to mute the fifth string. Eric Clapton used to play the 5th on the bottom of his powerchords with Cream, knowing that Jack Bruce would underpin it with the root on the bass.



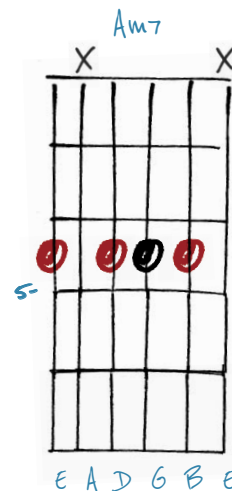
Example 4

Taking the same triad and putting the dominant 7th (Bb) on the bottom gives a very different effect from a regular C major chord. This works particularly well resolving to an Am7 (see Example 5), or an F/A chord. Classical types would likely call this a 'third inversion', but it's more helpful for us guitarists to look at this as a C/Bb.



Example 5

So good we've named it twice: this can be viewed as a C/A chord, but it makes more sense to call it an Am7. The C major triad is identical to Am7 in this context, with the A on the bottom. So I guess there are some root notes in here after all!



WestValley

THE FEVER



28.09.2026



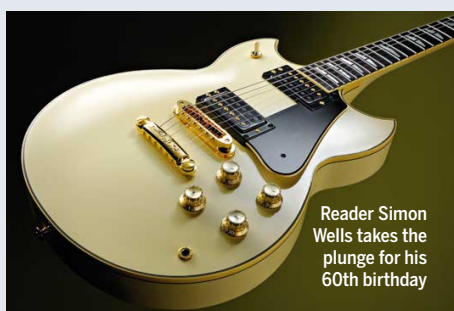


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Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
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STAR LETTER

(BIG) COUNTRY GENTS



Reader Simon Wells takes the plunge for his 60th birthday

As my 60th birthday approaches, I decided it would be nice to get another guitar to join my modest collection. After visiting my local guitar shop (Peach Guitars) I couldn't decide whether to go different, a Gretsch or maybe a PRS? However, upon reading the article in *Guitarist* issue 536,

featuring Bruce Watson of Big Country, my mind was made up. The guitar I always wanted but could never afford was the Yamaha SG2000 that I had enviously watched the likes of Big Country and Steve Rothery use in the 80s.

Obviously you can't just go to the local guitar store and pick one of these up, so I found the Yamaha SG Appreciation page on Facebook and promptly joined, asking for advice on purchasing. It was suggested that I approach Elite Vintage Guitars in Scotland, who returned my message with a list of possibilities. I whittled it down to two and was delighted when the owner said he could bring them both down to East Anglia for me to try out.

Long story short, I am now the proud owner of a 1987 SG2000 in Tobacco Sunburst in near mint condition and loving every minute of owning my dream guitar. I'm in debt to Jay from EVG for finding me this amazing guitar (and who, incidentally, knows Bruce Watson and let him play it and give it his seal of approval prior to delivery), but also to the Facebook page for the advice, support and encouragement that these SG fans provide. I'm also staggered that Yamaha stopped production of the guitar dubbed 'The Les Paul Killer' as it is such a fantastic instrument.

Simon Wells

Thanks for your story of finding 'the one', Simon – like you, we agree that those SG2000s very much stood apart from the pack. Though people have always compared them with that great twin-humbucker landmark, the Les Paul, they have their own unique thing. If you doubt that, one only has to remember the Yamaha Weddington, the company's 90s 'Burst-a-like electric, to see the concept behind the SG2000 was rather different, while retaining undeniable Les Paul influences. We wish you every happiness with your dream guitar and your Star Letter prize...

PEDAL POWER

My 10-year-old grandson has recently developed an interest in guitars – more specifically *my* guitars. His favourite is a 2019 Indonesian-made Hamer flat-top, over both Fender and Gibson instruments. He likes its light weight and flame-maple veneered top. However, he recently discovered my 25-year-old pedalboard. This bit of gear is crude and heavy, but it got me through umpteen gigs over two decades with little trouble. It currently has five Boss compact pedals, an ancient Maxon wah, MXR Uni-vibe and a modified ProCo RAT all powered by a stabilised nine-volt 1,000mA power supply. The supply is hard-wired to a Euro-socket mounted in the pedalboard's side, so it takes the ubiquitous kettle lead beloved by so many.

My grandson asked whether it would be possible to replace the mains-powered nine-volt supply with a rechargeable power pack because he wouldn't want (what he considers) an unnecessary mains lead when using it. For home use, it is acceptable, but he does raise an interesting question: are there rechargeable nine-volt supplies available that can drive an eight-pedal 'board? It is a mostly analogue setup so current draws are modest. When it comes to new technology I confess to being a dinosaur – my cutting-edge guitar is a late-80s Fender Strat Plus! I did point out that my pedalboard is rather old-hat, but his reply was that it sounds good, so what does it matter? Any suggestions would be gratefully appreciated.

Richard Underwood

Hi Richard, as it happens there are a few rechargeable power supplies for pedalboards out there. One is Harley Benton's PowerPlant Powerbank at just over £30 if you wanted to try out the idea of using one or more of these units, or similar devices, to power your eight pedals. But we have to say, with the fashion towards vintage effects growing ever more pronounced, we think your vintage 'board might be coming on trend again... Maybe persuade him to use it as is, in all its glory. Character forming!

LEFT OUT?

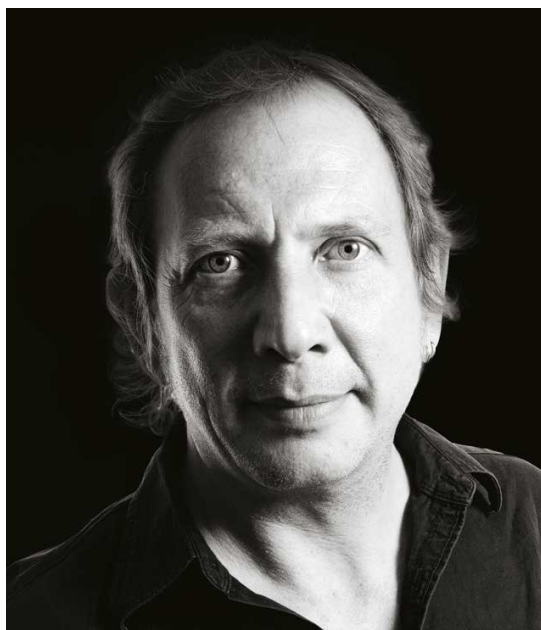
I often wonder what guitar companies have against us lefties! Bearing in mind some of the greatest and most influential players played left-handed – Hendrix, Albert King, Otis Rush, Ollie Halsall to name but a few – we get a very poor deal on the choice of instruments.

In my 57 years of playing there are lots of guitars I would love to have had the opportunity to play (Firebird, Flying V, Explorer, etc), but finding a left-handed option has always been a problem. My first two Gibsons in the 1970s, a 330 and an SG, were both

KORG

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Reader John Holmes bemoans the lack of lefties on the current guitar market (far left); *Guitarist*'s late and sorely missed reviews editor, Dave Burrluck (left)

right-handed, though not by choice, and when I finally acquired a left-handed Les Paul in 1973 it had to be a Deluxe model in Cherry Sunburst, because that was all there was. I bought my Strat in 1989, and the shop told me they had four in stock left-handed, which sounded very promising, but it turned out they were two in Gun Metal Grey and two in black; oh for a nice red one! Not that I'm complaining as my black Strat has served me very well for hundreds of gigs.

Over the past decade or so things have got a little better, with both Fender and Gibson producing an improved range of left-handed models, although not so much in their more upmarket range, but, generally, during my time of playing, we lefties have undoubtedly been the poor generation of guitar players. Maybe that's one of the reasons why we are so special?

John Holmes

Thanks John, it is sadly the eternal – and entirely understandable refrain – of left-handed players that there just isn't enough variety offered to them by the guitar industry in any era. Somewhere between 2 to 5 per cent of guitar players play left handed. It's telling that the percentage of left-handers in the general population is somewhat higher, just into double figures, showing how many lefties have gritted their teeth and forced themselves to learn to play right-handed to avoid the inconveniences. There are some halfway-house options between a custom order and hunting for off-the-shelf lefties that suit your tastes. For example, Fender's Mod Shop lets you specify the left/right orientation of the guitar you build in its configurator at, seemingly, no extra cost.

REMEMBERING DAVE

I will never forget the month Neville Marten's editorial was the obituary of Alan Murphy. It was like a punch in the stomach. Having been born in 1968 I'd experienced the death of Elvis and John Lennon but hadn't fully

understood them. Murphy's death was after I had started obsessively reading liner notes and it came from nowhere. But it has paled to nothing compared to the news of the passing of Dave Burrluck. I don't engage with social media and only discovered it the afternoon I picked up the magazine. I have no words to express my shock and sadness at this brutal news. Please accept my deepest condolences and my heartfelt sympathy at this incredibly difficult time.

Victoria Sutton

I've just received the latest copy of *Guitarist* and I can't believe what I've just read.

Dave and I only swapped emails – as we did most months – at the end of May. He was teasing me about another PJD Carey that got away (running gag between us) from me. I'm in shock and we never even met – just exchanged emails for many years – so I can't imagine what you and the team must be experiencing.

It feels like I just lost the friend I never got to know properly in real life – the plan was always to meet up some time in London for a drink if I was up there on work. I will dedicate our next gig to him – that man has cost me quite a lot of money over the years, with all the investment in guitars he's thought highly of – and (he'll be laughing at me now) I still don't have a PJD Carey... RIP Mr Burrluck

Steve Broadhead

A heartfelt thank you to you both, Victoria and Steve – and to the scores of readers who sent us thoughtful, comforting messages about the passing of our dear friend and colleague Dave Burrluck. It's such a shame Dave didn't get to see just how much love and respect people had for him, both among our readers and the industry at large. He would have been touched and surprised by it, because he never took himself to be someone special – just a diligent and passionate chronicler of guitars who was doing his job. His loss is irreplaceable and we will all miss him very much.

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



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WAYNE RICHARD CHARVEL

1941 – 2026

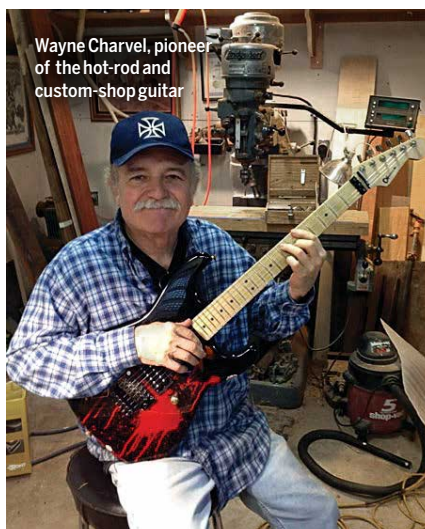
Master luthier and pioneer of the hot-rod guitar leaves
a legacy spanning 50 years of innovation

Words Ed Oleszko

Legendary guitar designer and luthier Wayne Charvel has died, leaving behind a legacy that includes the pioneering guitar design DNA that runs deep and wide throughout Superstrat and hot-rodding custom-shop guitar culture.

As quoted on the website Wayne's Guitars, Wayne shared how it all began: "I bought my first new Fender Strat and amplifier in 1959... I was working in a sign shop as a spray-painter, and in about 1960 I decided to take my Strat apart and paint it Candy Apple Blue. It was then that I became interested in repairing and refinishing."

Charvel's early hot-rodding experiments eventually led to a job with Fender in 1971. At the time the company needed someone to do their out-of-warranty refinish and



Wayne Charvel, pioneer of the hot-rod and custom-shop guitar

"I was working in a sign shop as a spray-painter, and in about 1960 I decided to take my Strat apart and paint it Candy Apple Blue..." **WAYNE CHARVEL**

modification work and sent many a 'rock-star' customer Wayne's way including Deep Purple. Customers also included The Who's legendary guitar tech Alan Rogan, who commissioned Wayne to build a clear plastic bass for John Entwistle.

Word got around and Wayne was soon creating guitars for ZZ Top and others, alongside creating a line of custom guitar parts that retrofit Fender and Gibson guitars, helping plant the seed that upgrades and modifications were a way for players to easily 'hot-rod' stock-bought instruments for themselves.

In 1974, Wayne set up Charvel's Guitar Repair Centre in Azusa, California where along with a small team, he worked designing, building and finishing high-performance Superstrat guitars and parts. These often used 'Boogie Bodies' that he helped build with his friend the renowned guitar-maker Lynn Ellsworth.

Typified by their bright finishes, slim necks built for speed, jumbo frets, high-output pickups and high-performance vibrato systems, Charvel guitars soon

attracted the hottest young players paving the way in Hollywood's burgeoning heavy-metal scene.

These loud guitars – with even louder finishes – were each customised for the player, and forever conjure up images of wild nights on the Sunset Strip where long-haired, Spandex-clad club icons graced the stages of small clubs such as The Roxy and the Whiskey A Go Go.

Beloved of countless players such as Warren DeMartini of Ratt, and Jake E Lee, it was perhaps his work helping a young Edward Van Halen that remains a pinnacle of Wayne's career, as he himself remembered in an interview with Tony Bacon in 2021: "Eddie came in, we became good friends. He'd sit on the floor in my shop and noodle around on the guitar."

Charvel supplied EVH with a guitar body and neck that Eddie painted and assembled into an early version of his famous 'Frankenstrat', and Wayne himself built EVH's famous yellow-and-black 'Bumblebee' that features on the back cover of the *Van Halen II* album.

Wayne went on to hire luthier Grover Jackson for administration work and later sold his Charvel guitars company to him, which led to the continued success of the brand, which still carried the Charvel name on the headstock as well as the much sought-after San Dimas heritage.

In his later years, Wayne's innovative spirit saw him designing guitars for both Gibson and BC Rich, while also continuing to build high-end custom-built USA-made guitars as part of the Wayne guitar company, which he set up in the 90s with son Michael.

Some years later, in November 2018, tragedy struck when Wayne's home and workshop in California were destroyed in the forest fires. Losing a lifetime of jigs, templates and custom tools, the family vowed not to be defeated and, with partial support from the music community raising funds via a NAMM-shared GoFundMe campaign, the family were able to relocate and restart Wayne Guitars.

When asked by Tony Bacon about his enduring legacy, Wayne modestly attributed much of his success to timing and luck: "The artists liked what I did," he said. "Am I the best guitar builder in the world? No, there's a lot of great builders out there, and there's a lot of builders that never had the luck that I had. Again, that's part of what happens: luck is a big factor. And timing is so important. Being in the right spot at the right time with the right product."

Perhaps Wayne's ultimate legacy is best summed up in the way his pioneering design work creating hot-rodded Superstrats gave generations of guitarists the high-performance tools required to push boundaries and introduce new musical directions in the golden era of 80s heavy metal. In the documentary *The Original Charvel Gang*, master builder Todd Krause nods to Wayne's legacy of empowering guitar players to modify their own guitars for higher performance, by simply stating: "Charvel changed the way the world built guitars."

Wayne Charvel is survived by his wife Susan, his daughter Jennifer, sons Michael, Richard and Robert, and three grandchildren. **G**

ERIC JOHNSON

Amid the pre-gig chaos of the second UK date of EJ's Texaphonic tour, we managed to find a quiet-ish space to talk guitars, gear and how learning piano helped Eric develop his signature sound

Words David Mead Photography Adam Gasson

It's been 13 years since *Guitarist* stood onstage with Eric Johnson for a tour of his rig. And we muse that it had probably seen some changes since that time: "Not as many as you'd think," he says with a laugh, explaining that he actually ships his USA rig across to Europe, rather than hiring backline on this side of the Atlantic. "Yeah, it's pretty extravagant," he continues. "I'm going to go home broke because I shipped everything over here, so I'll be eating bread and cheese for the next year or two, but that's okay, at least I'll have my sound, I guess."

Known for his connoisseur-level guitar tone, we were surprised to find that the actual sum of parts doesn't comprise anything that might be described as 'exotica'. We were even more surprised to find

that Eric has been experimenting with digital amps. But the 21st century hasn't quite found its way onstage with the Tonemeister General quite yet...

"[Shipping my US rig over means] I'm going home broke, but at least I'll have my sound"

Could you give us a guided tour of your live rig?

"I use three different sounds: the guitar goes into two A/B boxes, the first A/B selects whether it's going to be lead or it's going to be a choice of rhythms. So it comes out for the lead, goes into a wah-wah, and then it goes over to an Echoplex and a Tube Driver, and it comes out of that and goes into a Marshall [JMP]

We caught up with Eric at the Cheese And Grain in Frome, Somerset – the second date of his UK Texaphonic tour

head connected to the bottom [Marshall] cabinet. I can then switch to a second A/B box, which will give me a choice of rhythm.

"The first is a clean rhythm, which goes into a loop box for the Deluxe Memory Man, which goes into another Echoplex and a TC Stereo Chorus. That goes into two [Fender] Deluxe Reverbs. If I choose the other type of rhythm, I can switch this second A/B box and get a dirtier rhythm, which goes into an [Ibanez TS-808] Tube Screamer, an [Arbiter] Fuzz Face, and an MXR Digital Delay. That goes into a Two Rock Classic Reverb amplifier, which goes into the top Marshall cabinet. So it's really just a matter of having three different sounds: one clean stereo rhythm, one dirty rhythm with fuzz, or a lead with

A portrait of Eric Burdon, a man with grey hair, smiling and holding a Fender Stratocaster guitar. He is wearing a blue denim shirt and a patterned guitar strap. The background is dark.

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Eric talk about his
gear setup, his '54 Strat
and guitar technique
on video...

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the tube overdrive. Pretty much the same as it's been for years, although the particular amps might change, but the general structure and architecture stays the same."

A lot of players have a single amp set-up and use pedals for a clean boost, crunch and a lead sound. When did you discover the three-amp system worked for you?

"Well, one thing is the gain structure of the amps. I was able to get a better lead tone out of a high gain or a higher gain amp like a Marshall. And I was able to get a better rhythm tone out of a lower gain amp like a Fender. Also it's the way the tone controls work on the amp. The tone controls are in a different place in the schematic on a Marshall than they are on a [Fender] black-panel, so it affects the sound. So to try to get that clean country tone, or *Wind Cries Mary* kind of tone, the black-panel Fender works for that. But the Marshall works better for that blues rock thing, so I just had to part it out because I could never figure out a way to make it work just using one amp and getting all those sounds. I wish I could do that. I think they actually call that the Neural DSP [Quad Cortex], don't they?"

Have you experimented with digital amps?

"A little bit, yeah. The Tone Master by Fender and the Neural [Quad Cortex]. Still messing with it. I'm trying to decide whether to try to replicate



PHOTOS BY RICH WARD

"Its strength is using [a digital amp] as its own tool instead of making it sound vintage"

my sound or to just go with it in a different sonic direction. I think at this juncture it seems that its strength is to use it as its own tool instead of trying to make it sound exactly like a vintage amplifier, you know?"

What about guitars?

"I just use my '54 Strat, and I have one of my EJ rosewood [fingerboard] Stratocasters with me. But the Strat is the main thing I use for most of the show. I also brought a Custom Shop Les Paul along for a few songs."

1. Eric told us that his current stage favourite '54 Strat has only been a part of his live setup for around four months

2. Despite driving a very complex live rig, Eric's pedalboard is surprisingly old school and much more sparse than many gearheads would think

Do you have very specific set-up requirements for your Strats?

"I like the fretboard a little flatter with bigger frets, and I hook [the lower] tone control up to the bridge pickup. The neck and middle are the old pickups, but I replaced the bridge pickup with a HS2 DiMarzio. But I don't hook up the bottom coil, I just leave it single coil, so it has a little bit more gain than a regular Fender pickup. The action is not too low, but kind of low; so that it doesn't fret out, you know?"

"It's been refinished and [the neck] was already flattened before I got it, which is perfect because nowadays you don't want to touch it anymore. But in the old days it didn't matter. I mean, I used to find [50s





The setup on the '54 Strat features a lowish action, the bridge pickup – a DiMarzio HS2 – wired to the lower tone control, a flatter fingerboard profile and larger frets



Strats] for 400 bucks and you could do whatever you wanted. But it's kind of become a stigma now. This is the only '54 I have and it's a good guitar, although it's not particularly original, but it does the job."

What about the profile of the neck? Is it a soft V?

"It's not too sharp, which I like. It's kind of rounded, that's really my favourite neck. They're smaller than they were in the later 50s, but they're thicker and rounded, which I find to be kind of nice because with the smaller neck you can do different [chord] voicings and stuff like that."

What gauge of strings do you use on your Strat?

"I just use a stock 10 through 46: 0.010, 0.013, 0.017, 0.026, 0.036, 0.046. I was using a little bit thicker [gauge] but it kind of got to where I thought these were more balanced."

You actually started on piano. How do you think that influenced your guitar playing?

"It was in a pretty major way because I kind of assimilated all the nuances and technique of piano and so when I started guitar, I wanted to get those chord voicings. So it's almost like your principal

"I assimilated the technique of piano and when I started guitar, I wanted those chord voicings"

language in a way, whether you got real good at it or not, you think that way, and so I transferred that to guitar, and it helped me not be too myopic about how I looked at chord voicings or tone.

"I like the sound of the piano because it's a lot of note and not a lot of attack. Usually on a nice piano, and similarly with some of

3. Hidden away behind Eric's main stage rig sits the Two Rock Classic Reverb, an MXR Time Delay, a TC Electronic Chorus/Flanger, a Tube Driver and an Echoplex

4. Eric uses a Variac to keep his US rig's voltage at around 119 volts. He says he auditioned a load of different Variac units before he came across this vintage model. Why 119 volts? "Trial and error," he says

my favourite guitar players, there wasn't a lot of noise or attack. It was just the blooming of the note, like Wes Montgomery, or in particular steel-guitar players. They get this sound where it just jumps out because of their picking."

Do you think it's true that guitar players learn chords and scales using patterns or diagrams, whereas a keyboard player would learn the same information from a more musical perspective – note names, key signatures and so on?

"That's true, and I think most guitar players are still somewhat trapped in patterns. But I think the less you are, the better, obviously. We're all trying to get out of that and become more liquid and just be able to play melodically. When I started playing guitar and didn't know how to play, one of the first things I did was teach myself by



This Custom Shop Les Paul is used for a couple of songs in Eric's current live set



sitting at the piano with the guitar in my hand and taking the notes and moving them over [to the guitar]. So what I had to do with this strange way of learning guitar was learn all the notes on all the frets; that's one of the first things I did. And I think it helps if you

5. During the acoustic set in the Texaphonic tour, Eric features songs like *Resolution*, *Abelia* and *Chester* on his Maton Custom Shop guitar

“[I like to] keep the door open and stay a student of the guitar and learn from everybody”

look at a string on a fret, and you immediately know what note it is. So that you're not so bound by those patterns.”

Guitarists can find it very difficult to break away from shapes and patterns...

“One of the first things [to do] is just sit down and learn – to where you [can do it] without thinking –

6. The set's closer, the Grammy-winning *Cliffs Of Dover*, features an extended intro from Eric, sometimes stretching the song to a marathon 12 minutes!

to look at any fret on any string and know what note it is. It is a daunting task, but it's totally doable. And then, once you get it, it's like breathing. We don't think about breathing, we just do it, and it really helps free you up and not be so stuck on the pattern thing.”

In the past you've said that your style is a mixture of diverse influences, from Eric Clapton's period with John Mayall to jazz players such as Wes Montgomery. How did that come about?

“You know, when I was really young, my dad loved music so much he just played all these records of all these different styles. And I saw how much it made him happy. [I thought] ‘Oh, there must be something to this music thing’. Then you start listening to different music, which continues to this day. I mean, you can find stuff in any style of music. It's just



incredible, and I think it kind of broke the conceptual mould for me. I realised I just like the sound of the guitar, whether it's Chet Atkins or Jimi Hendrix or Django Reinhardt or Wes Montgomery or Jerry Reed. With all these musicians there's something there, so I think that's what prompted me to keep the door open and stay a student of the guitar and learn from everybody. And you never really arrive on your journey because you go back to the 30s and 40s and listen to all the sax players or keyboards, all different instruments, and you go, ‘Oh well, I'm not doing anything new!’ I should have started when I was two years old if I wanted to catch up with these people, you know?” **G**

To keep up to date with Eric Johnson's tour dates, clinics and album releases, visit his website at www.ericjohnson.com



This rosewood 'board EJ signature Strat is another guitar on the tour. Of Eric's maple-necked 'Victoria' model, Eric confesses that he's still trying to "find the right one"

Hawk Eye

If you've hankered for the unvarnished, beautiful acoustic sounds of the 60s British folk scene, you really need to check out Sam Grassie, one of the most authentic, beguiling folk guitar talents we've heard in a long time

Words Dan Bradley

Portraits Ben Beauvallet

Anyone looking for a natural inheritor to Bert Jansch and John Renbourn should pay serious attention to rising Scottish guitarist Sam Grassie. Grassie grew up around traditional folk music in Glasgow, and his deft, melodic guitar playing was shaped by the influence of British players including Dick Gaughan, Dave Goulder and the aforementioned Jansch and Renbourn. His blending of folk and trad, with complex yet expressive playing, has seen him share stages with Robert Plant, Martin Carthy and Gwennifer Raymond.

Having played with Scottish trio Avocet, Grassie moved to London in 2022 and immersed himself in the folk community, playing in 'travelling folk club' Les Caravanes and London collective The Broadside Hacks. He has now released his solo debut, *Where Two Hawks Fly*, 11 tracks featuring both traditional and Grassie-penned arrangements, with a host of collaborators. When he spoke to *Guitarist*, Sam seemed happy with how the guest-filled LP translated to the live stage: "I toured with Alfie Jones [grandson of Wizz Jones] on electric guitar, which really works well depending on the venue," Grassie explains. "It was great to have lots of people involved on the album, but the nice thing about acoustic guitar playing in the vein that we're chasing is that if you're on stage, feeling calm and your fingers are working, the guitar can do a fair amount of talking."







Sam had the opportunity to play this 1948 Martin D-28, which once belonged to American folk guitarist Jackson C Frank, and says "it's probably the best guitar I've ever played". It was photographed for *Guitarist* while in the possession of Martin Simpson

You've played in various line-ups on the British folk scene. Why did now feel like the right time for your solo debut?

"I love collaborating and probably never want to do this alone, but I've wanted to create my own album for as long as I've been recording anything. When Avocet came to an end, I tried to work on my singing, but chronic fatigue meant I'd get dizzy. It was hard to practise as I was so ill. In some ways it happened as early as it could.

"My *Sandwood* EP [2024] did better than I expected, so I wanted to build on that. Luckily, on that day I actually managed to play in time! Going from trying to play technical guitar that was above me and too fast, I realised that all the greats are just playing *in time*, and that's why it sounds so bloody good.

"I sent the tune that became *Abhail's* to Alfie Jones [Wizz Jones's grandson]. He added some lap steel, and that little bit of alchemy on a bare guitar track made me think that could be the sound of the album. I went for it and ran off to Berlin to record it as quickly as I could."

"It's an asymptotical relationship – I'll never [play quite like Bert Jansch], but it's that freedom I chase, his dexterity and fluidity"

What did you learn from the recording process?

"There was enough material to create something fairly coherent, but I was a bit slapdash when I went to Berlin and the guitar I recorded on was a nightmare! My friend Herbie Loening, who played double bass on the record, is a trad strummer and lent me his Yamaha FG-110: small body, high action, not good for fingerstyle. There's so much reverb on the track [so] the guitar sounded like a metallic Transformer walking down the road!

"[Another thing I learned was] just be way more ready than you think you need to be. Because every time you sit down, you make loads of mistakes and you've spent £300 per day!"

You often cite Bert Jansch as a major influence. How has your relationship to his music changed over time?

"I like that it hasn't [changed]; it's a constant. The deeper I go, the more admiration I have. It's an asymptotical relationship – I'll never be able to do what he was doing, but it's that freedom I chase, his dexterity and fluidity. When I started getting into guitar and writing my own stuff, I thought he was the GOAT, and if I could ever do anything like that it'd be fun.

"I still come back to tunes like *Come Back Baby* from the really early days and just think, 'Fuck, that's it.' For me, it doesn't really get any better – it's raw, rugged, gritty, stubborn, dark but free. Production-wise, it's interesting to see how the pressures of being a proper recording artist affected his later work, but I'm lucky that I'm unsuccessful enough that those pressures won't be on me! But he always stayed true to what he wanted to do."

Your 2025 EP, *Jarabi, Winter Has Gone*, blended Celtic trad with Malian blues. What drew you to that crossover?

"What's cool in London at the moment is quite gritty, while in Scotland, everyone is playing super fast and technical; it's light and breezy with electric guitar, synth and a token gesture towards dance music with the thumping bass. But that lighter aspect isn't raw. So there's dark folk that's raw, but the light folk is very clean, and something that's trying to be light doesn't need to be clean.

"Martyn Bennett took Scottish trad music and fused it with drum and bass and jungle – his albums will knock your socks off – so when all these bands take light folk and add all this soft stuff, it's like, 'Surely, you're all aware of this guy?' He managed that, and we should all be striving for the same.

"I came across Malian music by attending gigs at the Fringe, like banjo player Jayme Stone with kora player Mansa Sissoko playing *Africa To Appalachia*. Malian music is the closest you can get to the sound of life and the natural world. It's so free, fluctuating, fluid and absolutely beautiful. I'd love to find a collaborator to do more of that, but I don't know if I have the tekkers!"

You've had the chance to play Bert Jansch's and Jackson C Frank's guitars – and you recently performed a set for Turnstone Guitars with a Select Series TG model. Do you have a preference between vintage or modern instruments?

"I love vintage guitars, but the Turnstone guitar [made from katalox and Swiss moon spruce] knocked me out, to be fair. I love playing beautiful modern boutique luthier guitars, and some aspects are better than vintage for live, especially unamplified. That Turnstone guitar echoed through the room, it was like playing a harp.

"For recording, I really prefer vintage. Modern guitars have so much to say, so there isn't much space left for giving it what you want to. You have to do what the guitar tells you to do – modern guitars are all light and amazing and everything is 'Wow!' But what if the song is sad? It's different tools for different jobs.

"I've literally just been to the [New Kings Road] Vintage Guitar Emporium to play a 000-28 from 1967. It was fucking amazing! But for gigging I use a modern Martin that I've set up myself to sound twangy and old. I've got a 1968 000-28; I love playing it, but I don't have enough money to risk taking it around the place.

"I have Bert's Yamaha [LL11e] from the 90s. It's strange playing that because if you're a big fan you're thinking of the 'Blue Album' [self-titled debut] when he had a Martin. Yamahas are great, but for me [they] don't stand up to a high-end Martin. I've had nice moments sitting with it, thinking, 'Shit this is Bert Jansch's guitar and I'm lucky to hold it,' but, playing-wise, it's not super inspiring. However, Jackson's guitar was a [1948] Brazilian rosewood D-28 and it's probably the best guitar I've ever played, like a whole other thing, and speaks to the fact it was there. It was inspiring to play that, and felt like there are songs still in there."

In a recent interview, you talked about coming from a rich folk tradition that's being chipped away by TikTok. How do you think social media has shaped your playing?

"Hopefully it hasn't! The more you engage with it,



Sam prefers to ignore the noise of outside influences, such as social media, and allows the guitar itself to inspire him, describing the instrument as "a torch to follow"

the more you're vulnerable and likely to be malleable to it. It's like an alternate reality that we believe to be the same as our own. For me, the guitar is opposite to all that. There are all these things in life that try to compartmentalise and distract and atomise, but when you're playing guitar – and if you manage to get to that nice spot – you're in a nice state of flow. If anything, it's decreased the frequency and ease with which I can get there, but what I'm making isn't tailored to that at all.

"One of reasons I've stuck with the guitar is that it's like a torch to follow; the 'me' when I'm playing guitar in the way that I want to play it, or [am] trying to, is a better person than me outside of that. I can learn from that self. If I could take a leaf out of the 'guitar Sam' book and apply it to other things, that'd be good – and one of those things is fuck social media changing how I do this thing."

What have you got planned next?

"I'm going to get a dreadnought Martin, as I've missed that. And it'd be really cool to record the next album live. I want to get the funds together to get everyone in the room and capture that moment over a few days or weeks. Giving tracks to people to work on at home is not the same as working together in the room; people can inhabit the songs and find their space within it." 📍



Sam Grassie's debut album, *Where Two Hawks Fly*, is out now on Broadside Hacks Recordings

<https://samgrassie.bandcamp.com>



JOHNNY MARR

As the indie-rock legend clears his vault at next month's Christie's auction, he tells us about a life in guitars, hungover shopping trips with Noel Gallagher, why some electrics feel like 'living things' (that it would be a crime to keep cased under a bed), and what he'll do if a tech bro starts the bidding...

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photography Jesse Wild

Johnny Marr woke up last night in a cold sweat. "I had a bit of a 3am attack of the 'oh-my-Gods'," he tells *Guitarist*. But there's no need to ask the 62-year-old the cause of his palpitations. On 17 September, the indie-rock legend will follow the biggest names in blue-chip rock 'n' roll – David Gilmour, Mark Knopfler, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton – and auction off his four-decade guitar collection at Christie's of London.

For a player whose instruments have so often seemed like an extension of his arm, it's practically an amputation. "This auction is a bit of a wrench," admits Marr. "But for me it's boom or bust. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to go for it. And once I made up my mind that I was going to go through the rest of my life without these guitars, I've tried to hold that position and not get too sentimental."

That's Johnny. As well as being a shining example of a human being (a proportion of auction proceeds will go to charity), the guitarist has never been one for nostalgia. It's the reason he quit the greatest indie-rock band of

them all – The Smiths – at their '87 peak for a kaleidoscopic solo career taking in everything from teaming up with Bert Jansch to the *Inception* soundtrack. Likewise, it's why he chose to jettison these fabled guitars to record new solo album, *The Age Of Everything*, with a box-fresh signature Jaguar.

"With this guitar collection that I've had for 40-odd years being suddenly absent, it's definitely going to feel like my life is different," says Marr. "And I'm quite excited about that, y'know?"

What was the motivation behind your auction?

"While I was documenting these instruments for the *Marr's Guitars* book, there was a kind of catharsis. I'd go home from a day's shoot and really be able to remember who I was and how I felt when I was using those guitars in the 80s, 90s and onwards. Then we did the events in New York, Manchester, London and Dublin, and when they were being put back in cases, it felt like putting them in a cage at the zoo. It seemed really weird because they had become these living things to me again. So that

was the overriding emotion – that they should be cherished on a daily basis by somebody."

How have you found working with Christie's?

"It's been fascinating. From the transportation to the climate-controlled rooms to the forensic analysis. Y'know: 'Why is this decal different? You must have changed it.' It's mind-boggling, the expertise. I did enjoy nerding out with guitar nerds. And with all due respect, everyone I've worked with at Christie's are real guitar nerds!"

Let's start by talking about the '82 Rickenbacker 330 Jetglo.

"Anyone who's been in a successful group will tell you the early days are unmatched. So all of that is synonymous with that Rickenbacker: the excitement of the early songs, but also The Smiths taking off at the age of 19, which is how old I was when I got that guitar. I bought that with the first bit of money I made, and I immediately started writing things like *Still Ill* and *Accept Yourself*. And because that guitar had such a vibe, it stayed with me all the way through, even to the solo records."

Ever the forward-looking musician, Johnny Marr is pictured here holding the latest version of his popular signature Fender, the Limited Edition Johnny Marr Signature Special Jaguar RW with lipstick tube Kent Armstrong pickups



You loaned it to Noel Gallagher. Weren't you worried that he'd damage it?

"It never occurred to me that my guitars would be damaged. I've always been very loose like that. I cherish them, but I also leave them leaning up against amps, lying on the floor. I'm a bit of a liability where guitar stands are concerned, so my guitars are actually safer leaning up against amps. It's an aesthete thing as well. I always thought guitar stands looked clumsy. Maybe it's to do with being the oldest in an Irish family and being let loose to do whatever the hell I wanted when I was about 11. But I have the same attitude with my guitars. Like, 'They'll be all right.'"

"I suppose I'm a bit cavalier, but I've been pretty lucky. I've only had significant damage to two guitars, caused by myself. One was my '73 Custom. My tech had come down with food poisoning so I had to use New Order's tech, who had no idea about tunings, he only knew about synthesizers. So the gig was a disaster and, in frustration, I threw the guitar up in the air. Miraculously, it only damaged one of the machineheads. Another time, it was a Flying V. But they're notorious for breaking their headstocks."

Didn't Noel once break a Les Paul of yours?

"Yeah, in a fracas on stage in Newcastle. There's probably some Geordie guy who's still got the bruises to show for it."

We have to talk about the '60 Cherry Red ES-355...

"Seymour Stein of Sire Records came to wine and dine The Smiths one night in 1984. It was a done deal we were going to sign to Sire. We'd have happily paid him: it was our dream label. But I was asking about The Stones in the 60s, and he made the mistake of telling me he'd always take Brian Jones to get a guitar. So I saw my opportunity. I told him if he bought me a guitar, The Smiths would sign to Sire."

"On a snowy day in New York, I hung around the Sire offices all day, so Seymour wasn't going to escape. We walked to We Buy Guitars on 48th Street and, as is



often the way – and it's a bit like this with pets – it already felt like I owned it when I saw it.

"There's this romantic notion many musicians have – myself included – that instruments have music in them. As soon as I got that 355 back to the hotel, I wrote *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*. Which took about 10 minutes. Then I immediately wrote *Girl Afraid*. There's a few guitars like that in the auction. If they end up in the hands of songwriters, they'll definitely deliver songs."

Did your '84 Roger Giffin 'Telecaster' have songs in it, too?

"It did. Although it might be a trick of the mind because it was a very prolific time. That was a gift from my girlfriend [now Marr's wife], Angie. It was probably the second time we felt like we were suddenly wealthy. It probably cost £400. It was just such a beautiful surprise, that my girlfriend put in the thought and research."

"How she lugged it over from Tower Bridge to the West End, where we were recording that day, is beyond me. It's the heaviest guitar you'll ever come across because it's got loads of brass. But that means it's got an amazing sound. It's so loud. I was such a little guy back then, probably only seven-and-a-half stone. I'm not such a big guy now. But I would only be able to play three songs on it during a concert, and then I had to swap over to an acoustic to recover."

1. Johnny and Morrissey during the 1985 US *Meat Is Murder* tour at the Royal Oak Music Theatre in Michigan

"Because it's such a stable machine, it held tunings really well. I wrote songs on it like *Meat Is Murder*, which is open G, and then *The Headmaster Ritual*, which was open D. I played overdubs, too, things like *Nowhere Fast*. It's funny with guitars. There's this associative thing. For instance, in the 90s, if a guitar player came across his mate's Epiphone, he'd probably start playing like Noel Gallagher. So because it was a Telecaster, *Nowhere Fast* was somewhat of a rockabilly song."

Did you hold any guitars back from the auction?

"There's a few. Bryan Ferry gave me a Hagstrom: it's [in the gatefold] of the Roxy Music album *For Your Pleasure*. I have one of Nile Rodgers' first signature Strats. There's the Telecaster that Chrissie Hynde gave me. It's been a selection process. Like, there's a signature Strat that Edge gave me that I did put in the auction because it's for charity, and I think because it was previously owned by a name player, it'll raise a bit of money."

"I've kept a couple of '73 Strats. My son owns a few of my Modest Mouse Jazzmasters, so I'll be borrowing those off him. Another workhorse I've kept is a '63 SG. In theory, I could get another, but I thought, 'Well, this one's perfect, so why bother?'"

"There's this romantic notion that instruments have music in them – if they end up in the hands of songwriters, they'll deliver"

How have you adapted your gear choices to record your latest studio material?

"My workhorses have been easy to decide on. There's a '63 335, just an amazing instrument that delivers – I used that on my new album, *The Age Of Everything*."

This new album has so many different tones, from Spin's edge-of-distortion chime to the glassy funk of *Ophelia*. How did you dig them all out?

"Rather fortuitously, the most recent version of my signature

2. Johnny has been an eclectic player in terms of guitar choices over the years but has now settled on the Jaguar as his main tool for music making

Jaguar has even more tone options. My Jags have 11 sounds, without any of them crossing over. But the Signature Special with lipstick pickups, it also has a position where it does all of that but with the added middle pickup. There's one other option, too, which is just the middle pickup but with high-pass filter. I've lost count of how many sounds I can do, but I used that guitar really extensively on the new album and it works a treat."

Isn't there a danger of you inadvertently building up yet another collection?

"Yes, there is. And who would blame me? That's quite a nice prospect. But the remaining guitars that I have now – and there's not loads of them – I really appreciate them."

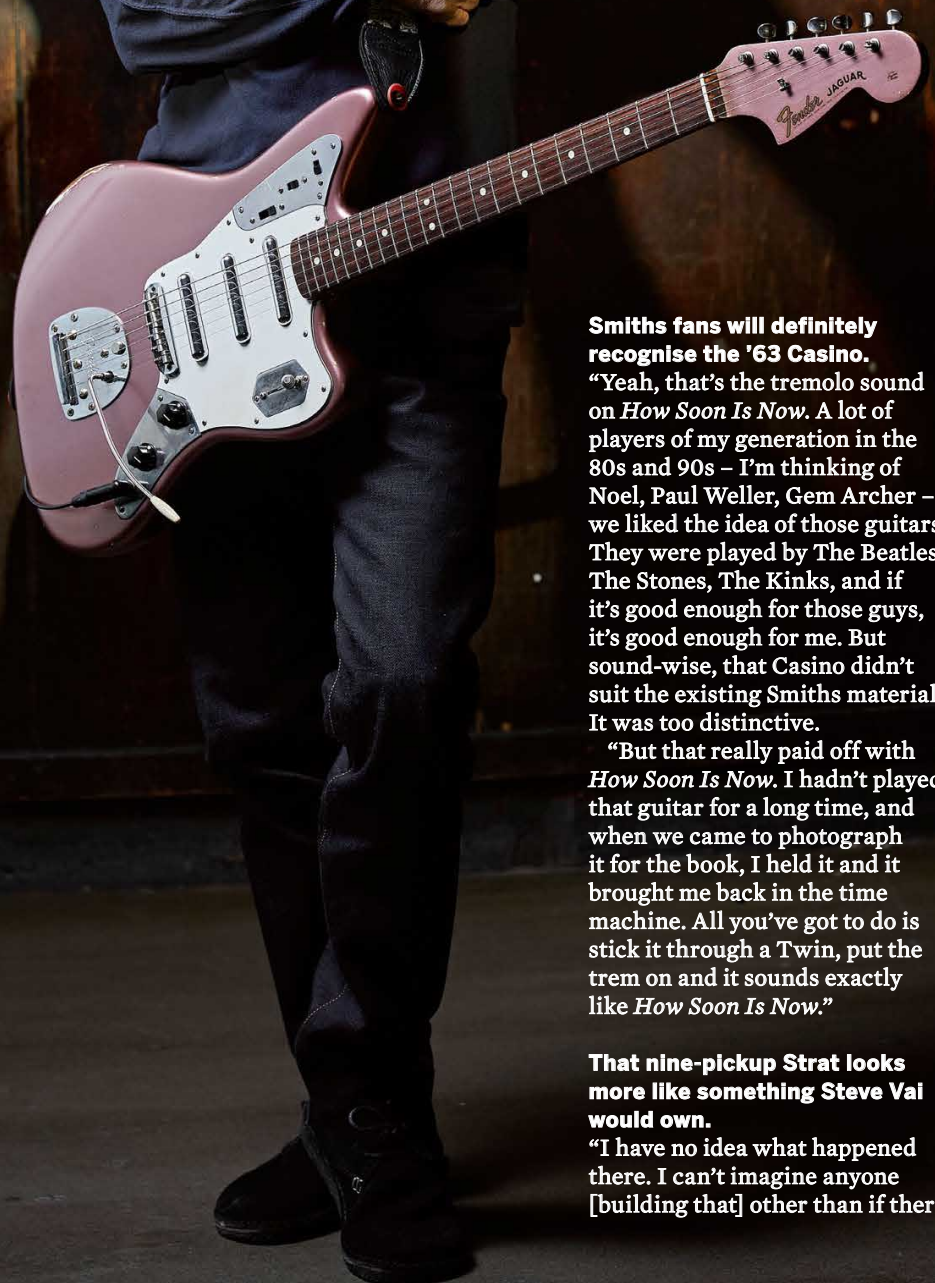
The '84 Standard is another icon.

"I put the Bigsby on that in late '85, I think. I always wanted a Bigsby, but I wanted a short one and back then they weren't easy to find. Again, I've got Angie to thank. On tour, she went to some guitar store and came back to the soundcheck: 'There you go, darling.' She's quite a woman. That's why I'm still with her. It's all because of the guitar gifts."

"That Bigsby changed the way it felt significantly. Then I swapped the pickups to Seymour Duncans and put on partial-taps. I'm aware that, in theory, keeping a guitar stock, particularly where wiring's concerned, usually means a better tone electronically. However, in the case of that Les Paul, everything came together brilliantly."

"I investigated that guitar more fully – forensically, in fact – last year when Gibson made some copies for the Teenage Cancer Trust. We looked into the pitch angle, which is somewhat of an anomaly because it's 14 degrees. So the combination of the Bigsby, pitch angle, pickups and the partial-tap – which applies to the inside coil of the humbucker – makes it not behave like a regular Les Paul. Which I think is why I ended up playing it almost exclusively clean, like on the top line for *The Headmaster Ritual*. But you really hear it on *Regret* by New Order."

"I hadn't played the '63 Casino for a long time – when we came to photograph it, it brought me back in the time machine..."



Smiths fans will definitely recognise the '63 Casino.

"Yeah, that's the tremolo sound on *How Soon Is Now*. A lot of players of my generation in the 80s and 90s – I'm thinking of Noel, Paul Weller, Gem Archer – we liked the idea of those guitars. They were played by The Beatles, The Stones, The Kinks, and if it's good enough for those guys, it's good enough for me. But sound-wise, that Casino didn't suit the existing Smiths material. It was too distinctive."

"But that really paid off with *How Soon Is Now*. I hadn't played that guitar for a long time, and when we came to photograph it for the book, I held it and it brought me back in the time machine. All you've got to do is stick it through a Twin, put the trem on and it sounds exactly like *How Soon Is Now*."

That nine-pickup Strat looks more like something Steve Vai would own.

"I have no idea what happened there. I can't imagine anyone [building that] other than if there

was a guitar player who joined Kraftwerk in 1984. I bought that the first time Noel Gallagher and I went to a guitar shop together [in 1992]. I wasn't actually drunk, but I'd definitely have been hungover. I was also very into Kraftwerk and just thought it looked amazing. It only came good in 2001, when I used it for *Spirit Power And Soul*. So it got there in the end."

There's a Lake Placid Blue Jaguar in the auction. How did you fall for that model?

"The first night I got together with Isaac Brock from Modest Mouse, he had a Jag and my Telecaster just would not compete with his sound. That's partly because he was playing through a Super Six. I had to abandon my Telecaster and Deluxe, and the only guitar at hand was a Jaguar. I thought I didn't get on with them, but I played this black '63 of Isaac's and came up with the riff that became *Dashboard*.

"After that, I went through a period where [people kept] offering me Jaguars. Angie told me, 'You're like one of those weird [people] who takes in every cat in the neighbourhood. Do you have to own every old Jag in the world?' And I said, 'Yes, I do.' But to be fair, they were much cheaper than they are now."

"It's not just someone who wants to buy the 'How Soon Is Now' guitar and stick it in a glass case. I want a fan to buy these guitars"

Was that how your signature model came about?

"Yeah. When I joined Modest Mouse, that was 2005, and in Portland, Oregon, at the time, everybody was making knock-ups, y'know, custom guitars. That led me to the idea of making my own Jag. I was experimenting with necks and pickups, and doing it all in what I call 'absolute conditions'. In other words, because we were playing arenas, the stages and the distance from your amps were the same every night. So if you change your guitar mid-set, you immediately hear it: 'Oh, that pickup is brighter.' We



3. Marr now has his own signature model M6 and M7 Martins. The latter is pictured above, with its seventh string adding a surprisingly strong suggestion of that 12-string jangle

were playing so much that any change in my routine, I was able to evaluate straightaway.

"I was absolutely obsessive for about two years. At that time, Fender contacted me and said, 'Why don't we do a signature?' I said to them, 'Look, leave me to it and I'll make myself my perfect Jag – with Bill Puplett – then you can just copy it.'"

How do you feel about the estimates at your auction?

"Well, compared with other auctions, the prices don't look too horrible. The people who follow me might not necessarily be the same people who follow Mark Knopfler or David Gilmour. Two people I've got the utmost respect for. But my appeal as a guitar player is coming from a different place and a different time. That's the main reason I put a lot of my Jags in there, precisely because they're not heritage antiques.

"My hope is that someone who's got a regular job in Glasgow, who fancies a good guitar but wants one of mine, will be able to afford it. They're not all tens of thousands. In the past, I've never regretted selling, like, one of the *Playland* guitars or something I used on *The Messenger*. Because I know it's someone who really cares about [what I've done in] my career overall. It's not just someone who wants to buy the *How Soon Is Now* guitar and stick it in a glass case. I want a fan to buy these guitars."

4. Even Johnny Marr isn't immune to the appeal of a guitar owned by a revered guitarist, naming Jeff Beck's 'Oxblood' as the one he would most liked to have bought at auction for himself

How do you feel about the notion of a tech bro bidding on the Rickenbacker?

"It's not really for me to control if someone wants to hang it up in a collection, but something tells me that isn't going to be the case. Precisely because I come from a different culture from Jeff Beck and David Gilmour. And not to say that their fans aren't [guitar fanatics]. But y'know, I'm an indie-rock musician and I've got a feeling it's going to be an indie-rock fan who buys my guitars."

When you take a bird's eye view of your collection, are there any themes? You seem to prefer classic stuff.

"Yeah, because when I first got known in The Smiths, playing what we know as 'classic' or 'vintage' guitars was quite unusual. There were other players doing it, like Edwyn Collins in *Orange Juice*, or Geordie [Walker] from *Killing Joke* played a 295, Will Sergeant played Jaguars. But there weren't really many people playing semi-acoustics and certainly not Rickenbackers – although Paul Weller had done it before me.

"Even for someone of my age to play a Tele in '83 was unusual. But I was somewhat of a classicist, really. I remember, it being the 80s, Ovation gave me a loaner because I'd started using acoustics on songs like *Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want*. But whereas people in more mainstream bands would've just been happy to play the Ovation, it was important to me that as soon as I could afford it, I got a Martin D-28. I had enough about me to know about quality, from a recording point of view."

What was your first 'proper' guitar? Not a schoolboy knockabout, the real deal.

"It was a black [Les Paul] Standard. I think it was a 1980. I had that in a couple of bands before The Smiths. I couldn't afford a Gretsch Country Club, a 6120 or a Chet Atkins, but just before I formed The Smiths I felt I had to have the right guitar and that had to be a Gretsch. So I [traded the Les Paul and] got the Super Axe and that's what I did *Hand In Glove* – and wrote all the first album – on."

Do you remember the first time you ever saw a guitar?

"I was about five. At a party, my uncle put his Chelsea boot up on a chair and played a few chords. That blew my mind. But the most significant thing was at my cousin's christening. I'm from an Irish family and at weddings and christenings there was always the same show band. Before they played, my dad approached the guitarist and said, 'My boy's guitar mad. Can he see your Strat?'"

"So this guy dutifully opened the case. I can still smell it. It was this otherworldly object, like something out of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. It was all the things that people from the generations before me say about Strats, y'know, that the design was space age. And I was obsessed. I was really into football and my bike. But not like I was into guitar."

Would you ever consider bidding on a guitar yourself?

"The one I really wanted was Jeff Beck's Oxblood Les Paul. I think you have to be either a Jeff Beck freak or a guitar freak to understand the appeal. Because I've got a couple of mates who love rock music and it's just a brown guitar to them. The other would be Rory Gallagher's '61 beat-up Strat, which I've had the good fortune to have played."

Do you remember how it felt to scrap for your next guitar?

To sell one to afford another?

"Oh, Jesus, yeah. Or swapping a guitar with somebody and hoping that it was better than yours, and that they didn't realise that. It doesn't seem that long ago when I was hustling – putting myself in some pretty precarious situations – to get my first proper Les Paul. So it's not beyond me how amazing this whole thing is..." 

"The [guitar] I really wanted was Jeff Beck's Oxblood Les Paul. You have to be a Beck freak or a guitar freak to understand the appeal"

Marr's Guitars: The Johnny Marr Collection is held at Christie's London on 17 September. To find out more, visit the website at www.christies.com. Johnny's latest album *The Age Of Everything* is released 2 October on BMG <https://johnnymarr.com>

EVERYTHING MUST GO

In a cathartic echo of the title of Johnny Marr's new album, the former Smiths guitarist is selling 100 of his most treasured instruments, including the guitars with which he first won fame in the Smiths. We joined Amelia Walker, Christie's Head of Iconic and Private Collections, to walk through Marr's groundbreaking recordings, guitar by guitar

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Phil Barker

The sale of a great player's guitar collection is sometimes lamented by fans, however, it's something we are seeing more often as celebrated musicians reflect on the road travelled and the road yet to come. As a player always ready to embrace the future, Marr is clearly no servant to his own backstory. But why is he choosing to sell some of the most important guitars, amps and even the gold and platinum discs that he's picked up over the years?

"He found the process of writing and publishing the book *Marr's Guitars* in 2023 quite a cathartic experience," says Amelia Walker, Christie's Head of Private and Iconic Collections, who is overseeing the sale. "In the process of writing the book about the guitars, he was getting them all out, holding them... finding the muscle memory of all these amazing songs that he'd written on them – particularly some of the earliest guitars – and then going out after the book was published and speaking about them... And then when that whole tour wrapped up, and it was time to put them away, the impression I got was that he didn't want them just to get put away in cases again.

"With his [signature] Jag, he's basically created an instrument that does everything he needs – so he doesn't see as many opportunities to use a lot of these instruments in the future.

And yet he wants them to be played, he wants them to find new owners and I think he really loves the idea of people coming up to him in years to come and saying, 'I've just written a song on your D-28', or 'I've just played your Rickenbacker on stage,' or whatever it might be. Or even if it's not someone who performs, just 'I love your guitar,'" Amelia says.

"The final lot count is 111," she continues. "There are about 90 guitars and we've got about 10 gold records... actually gold, silver and platinum. Mainly Smiths, but also one for Electronic's [eponymous debut] 1991 album

"I think he really loves the idea of people coming up to him in years to come, saying, 'I've just written a song on your D-28'"

and a recording he made with Bryan Ferry, which are all being sold for charity. And then there's a collection of concert posters and promo posters, which again are all being sold for charity. There are about 10 amps as well – no pedals – and I think most of them are amps that he's had for his whole career."

It's an impressive collection even when viewed simply as vintage instruments – but when you consider the music made with them, it adds real depth to Marr's decision to let them go, and pass



Amelia Walker is the specialist Head Of Private & Iconic Collections at Christie's in London and has overseen auctions of some of the most important guitar collections in the world

the proceeds of around 20 lots on to his chosen charities (The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and the National Autistic Society). Before they go under the hammer, we took the opportunity to take a close look at the most important (and distinctive) of his guitars, with Amelia as our guide.

1963 EPIPHONE CASINO

"Compositionally, a lot of his songs start on acoustics, but *How Soon Is Now* was written on the Casino, over what sounds like the most prolific songwriting weekend of all time, when he wrote *William, It Was Really Nothing* and *Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want* and then *How Soon Is Now* as the third, just to top it off [laughs]. The fact he wrote the song on the Casino and then also used it to record that riff makes it very, very special.

"He used the Casino at Glastonbury in 1984 which, by all accounts, was the moment that the festival kind of shed its hippie roots and went into pop because [The Smiths] were in the pop sphere by that year. Then everyone rushed the stage and there were these guys who were trying to climb up the sheet metal in front of the stage, while he's playing that guitar. Casinos have such a strong association with the music that he loved from the 60s that he was listening to. So yeah, it's a really cool thing, and everyone loves that song."

PHOTO BY VALERIE MACON/AP/GETTY IMAGES

The juddering tremolo riff of the Smiths' classic track *How Soon Is Now?* was written and recorded with this 1963 Casino, which also reflects the influence of the Beatles on Marr





PHOTO BY PETE CRONIN/RED FERNS/GETTY IMAGES

1959 GIBSON ES-355

"So this guitar is probably the one guitar – other than the Rickenbacker – that is most associated with the Smiths. I think it was probably the third guitar he owned in that band: he had a Gretsch [Atkins Super Axe, see page 72], the Rickenbacker and then this. He got it because the Smiths went to New York between Christmas and New Year in 1983, and they were due to play their first show and to sign to Sire Records with Seymour Stein – they were already signed to Rough Trade in the UK but they were going to do their US deal [with Sire]. And I think Johnny had heard about Sire doing a

1. The Smiths perform live on the music show, *The Tube*, 1984. Left to right: Andy Rourke, Mike Joyce, Morrissey and Johnny Marr

2. The yellowed binding and split-diamond inlays tell a story of miles travelled and years past on this grand old 300 Series Gibson semi

similar deal with Brian Jones, so he cheekily said, 'We'll sign to Sire if you buy me a guitar'.

"So they played their show on New Year's Eve at Danceteria, and then on 2 January, Johnny marched Seymour to 48th Street and bought this guitar, which is a thing of beauty. He got back to the hotel and I think before even sitting down he wrote *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*. Johnny talks about songs 'falling out of

him' and sort of just coming to him, as well as guitars giving him songs – and it seems that this guitar inspired him to do that. He then used it to record a lot of the Smiths' second album [*Meat Is Murder*] and it's seen on stage throughout 1984 and 1985.

"He made a few modifications to it. It was, obviously, originally a stereo [output] guitar but he didn't want it to be stereo so he switched it to mono. And then I think at some point in the late 80s, Bill Puplett replaced the wiring harness but unfortunately we can't date that because everything's shielded and it's really hard to see. But we still have the original [wiring harness]

"Johnny talks about songs 'falling out of him', as well as guitars giving him songs – and this one inspired him to do that"

The late, highly respected luthier Bill Puplett, who was also involved in the development of Marr's signature Jaguar, changed out the original wiring loom in this 1959 ES-355 at some point in the late 1980s



that he took out and from that we can tell the original pots must have been taken out before he bought the guitar as the harness that was in there dates to '83 – all the pots are '83. But it's still got these lovely [original] Patent Applied For pickups. The Varitone must have been switched out as well because that dates from a bit later than 1959. The guitar's factory order number dates it to late '59, but then it was shipped on 2 February 1960. So it's a bit of a hybrid, crossing over '59 and '60."

1992/93 RICKENBACKER 330

"When you think Johnny Marr, really you think Rickenbacker. This particular guitar also appears

on the front cover of *Supersonic* by Oasis – just lying on the floor. That says a lot about Johnny's generosity in lending instruments to other musicians and further underlines that he wants his guitars to be played. He wants them to give songs to other people. The Rickenbacker is [the sound of] *This Charming Man* and so many other songs. It's his jangly sound and I think it was a deliberate choice at the time – he wanted his playing to go in a certain direction and that's what the Rickenbacker did for him. His melodic arpeggio playing and picking out the individual strings of the chord, rather than just strumming, is so intertwined with the Rickenbacker.

"Marr's arpeggio playing and picking out the individual strings of the chord is so intertwined with the Rickenbacker"

"He got it in '83 and he used it to record the single *This Charming Man*, which was tracked along with a Telecaster that belonged to producer John Porter. I think Johnny only had two guitars at the time [this and the Gretsch Super Axe], and John thought he needed another one on that track. He then used it on most of the Smiths' first record as well. I think a lot of that record was written on the

3. The so-called Hi-Gain singlecoil pickups, blend control knob mounted beside volume and tone controls for each pickup, and the paddle headstock are all part of the Rickenbacker's classic pedigree



The bouncing, chiming riff of *This Charming Man* sprang from this guitar although a Tele was used in the recording too, to thicken things up





Gretsch because he didn't have the Rickenbacker at the time, but the recording itself is a lot of Rickenbacker with the Tele added in. It's really so connected with the Smiths emerging and their whole story."

CUSTOM ROGER GIFFIN T-STYLE

"So that guitar was custom-made by Roger Giffin. I think having played John Porter's Tele, Johnny really wanted one. So Alan Rogan, who worked with The Who, Keith Richards and George Harrison, put [Marr's then girlfriend, now wife] Angie in touch with Roger Giffin and she bought the guitar for him.

It's heavy – it weighs around the same as Tiger [Jerry Garcia's custom electric built with exotic woods by Doug Irwin], around 10lbs. But the Roger Giffin guitar is iconic because of its unique look, and so many fans will remember it as the guitar he played on *Top Of The Pops* with the Smiths. Johnny switched out the neck humbucker after a while because originally it had a Mighty Mite zebra-coil

"The Roger Giffin guitar is iconic because of its unique look – many will remember [Marr playing it] on Top Of The Pops with the Smiths"

4. This spectacular T-Style electric built by luthier Roger Giffin was originally constructed for another of his clients but ended up in Johnny's hands

pickup fitted. But now it's got a different humbucker with these very distinctive hexagonal pole pieces – a Bare Knuckle 'Juggernaut'. We don't know when that mod was done but again the work was completed by Bill Puplett.

1963 LAKE PLACID BLUE FENDER STRATOCASTER

"That was a John Entwistle guitar, so that came from him, via Alan Rogan. There were about seven or eight guitars that came from John, who seemed to have the most amazing, huge collection of guitars... there's a fantastic photograph taken around 1977 of him in his living

This 1963 (body) Fender Strat has seen one or two neck switches over its time with Johnny, including – for a long period – a well-worn maple neck from a sunburst Strat



room, literally surrounded by guitars – and we managed to spot one of Johnny's in the photo, which is pretty cool [a Gretsch 6120].

"It's actually composite – it's got a '65 neck, and the body is '63, which is why he would have wanted it. He used it on *Strangeways Here We Come*, for the solo in *Paint a Vulgar Picture* – which is notable because it's his first proper solo on a Smiths record.

"We don't know what neck it had on it originally, but at some point in the late 1980s he took the neck off his sunburst Strat – which had this really beautiful bird's-eye maple neck,

and is really distinct because it has particular wear on the first and third fret, and switched it onto this Lake Placid Blue guitar. In late 1989 he was photographed with it for the cover of the January 1990 issue of *Guitar Player* magazine, with the maple neck. I don't know when he put this [current] 1965 rosewood neck on it – we're still verifying that."

1977 GRETSCH ATKINS SUPER AXE

"This was Johnny's only guitar for I don't know exactly how long. It's pre-Morrissey, pre-Smiths and I think – until he got the Rickenbacker – it was

"Marr wrote the whole of *The Smiths*' first album on [his 1977 Gretsch Atkins Super Axe], and recorded 'Hand In Glove' on it"

the only guitar he had. I think it was some sort of part-exchange when he sold his [prior] Les Paul. And it's interesting that he chose this model. I don't know if it was literally what was available in the shop, or if he was on the lookout for a Gretsch... but he was clearly looking to move away from the Les Paul when he swapped it for this. He wrote the whole of the first album on this, and recorded *Hand In Glove* on it."

5. The Gretsch Atkins Super Axe was one of the guitar industry's sporadic attempts to put effects, including a phaser and compressor, on board an instrument



5



Marr's 1984 Les Paul Standard is the perennial workhorse of his collection, used in The Smiths, The The and solo work and modded with a Bigsby and Seymour Duncans





1984 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD

"He got this new in 1984. Again, I'm not sure of the exact date, but it was probably around September. When he bought it, it didn't have a Bigsby – he put that on himself in about the summer of '85, because we have photos of him with the Les Paul without a Bigsby on in December '84 and March '85. But then by the time the Smiths were on *Top Of The*

"Marr has said that if the building was on fire, the 1984 Gibson Les Paul Standard would be the guitar he'd grab"

6. The bizarre nine-pickup modification of this 1978 Strat was the brainchild of brothers Stephen and Richard Liddard. The pickups are by Kent Armstrong

Pops in October '85, it had the Bigsby on. He's said that if the building was on fire, this would be the guitar he'd grab.

"Because I think he's done more on that guitar than any other in terms of consistent use throughout his career, even up until his current record that's about to come out [*The Age Of Everything*], there are parts on that record that have been played with this particular Les Paul.

"It's got Seymour Duncans in now and I think they were double blacks originally, but they always had covers on them during his time in The Smiths, and then at some point they got swapped out again by Bill Puplett. We're still

investigating when the Seymour Duncans were fitted but, again, I think it would have been late 80s, because he used the Les Paul in the music video for The The's track *Dogs Of Lust* and you can very clearly see there's a zebra in both positions – and that was in 1993."

1978 9-PICKUP MODIFIED FENDER STRATOCASTER

"We initially had no idea who created this, but we had another look at the instrument when we took some of the guitars to New York for an exhibition in late June. And we found a label indicating who [had carried out the major modifications]. It seems as though the idea was the concept of one

The wiring for the pickups and switching that lies beneath the scratchplate is complex but scrupulously tidy – impressive work from the otherwise obscure Liddard brothers



brother, Stephen Liddard, with the work itself done by a Richard Liddard in 1991. So that would have been just before Johnny bought it from Music Ground in Doncaster. He bought it on a trip there with Noel Gallagher, just a day or two after they first met... Noel remembers Johnny saying, 'Let's go for a sandwich. Never buy guitars on an empty stomach.' But anyway he bought the 9-pickup Strat and, much later on, it was used in the video for his solo record *Spirit Power And Soul*. It's amazing, just about the maddest thing you'll ever see, and it was the concept of the Liddard brothers in, I presume, somewhere near Doncaster."

"Noel [Gallagher] remembers Johnny saying, 'Let's go for a sandwich. Never buy guitars on an empty stomach...'"

1963 GIBSON J-160E

I think [he acquired this guitar] at the same time he bought the Casino when he was very Beatles-focused, and wanted that Beatles sensibility in his playing. This was around the time The Smiths moved to London just after they released their first record, and that was when he met Alan Rogan. This was when he started to have a bit of money to buy guitars and when his guitar-

7. Marr's 1963 J-160E is another expression of his Beatles influence and another one of the guitars in the collection from the year of his birth

purchasing really sort of started taking off. He went from only having two to suddenly having three... five... seven guitars, and wanted them so he could do different things for specific reasons and sounds. He used it, as I mentioned before, when he wrote three of the most epic Smiths songs on a quiet weekend when the band had nothing on – *William, It Was Really Nothing* and *Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want* were both written on that guitar." 

Marr's Guitars: The Johnny Marr Collection will go on sale at Christie's in London on 17 September. For more info see www.christies.com



Gibson launched the J-160E in 1954 and, unusually, it featured a laminated spruce top as a means to suppress feedback from its uncovered P-90 pickup



GREAT GUITAR
ALBUMS

DAVE GREGORY

Twisting punk's brutal template with angular riffs and solos, XTC's *Drums And Wires* was essential listening for artsy kids circa '79. Dave Gregory remembers butchering his SG, out-of-tune parts, and the gigs that spun out of control

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photography Phil Barker

The British punk scene was as simple as 1-2-3-4! But by the end of the 70s, this spittle-flecked, safety-pinned hooligan was flanked by its more sophisticated, open-minded cousin, billed by the weekly music press as 'New Wave'. Dave Gregory had looked on with admiration – and perhaps a little envy – as his old mates from the Swindon circuit had broken through with 1978's *White Music* and *Go 2* ("I thought, 'It's kind of punk, but they've got something those other bands don't, some musical skills and really good songs'"). But as the 73-year-old guitarist reflects, he had no inkling the phone was about to ring with an invitation to join XTC for 1979's classic *Drums And Wires*.

You joined just in time for *Drums And Wires*...

"I'd been in the band three months and suddenly we had an album to make. So it was a big thrill for me. I wasn't sure how long that thrill would last, but I was going to make the most of every minute. XTC had been keyboard-based for the first two albums and Barry Andrews was a huge part of their sound, so to replace him with me, I thought, 'That's a pretty drastic move. Thank you for being brave, fellas. I'll do what I can...'"

What was your own musical experience?

"By '76, I'd quit the prog band I was in. They couldn't get any work and I was fed up of being skint. So I came



XTC's third album, *Drums And Wires* was released on August 17 1979 on Virgin Records

back to Swindon, tail between my legs, got a job and was doing local deps for country and western groups. New Year '79, the phone rang. My brother answered: 'Oh, I just had a call from [XTC guitarist] Andy Partridge.' I think they were desperate to keep the ball rolling. We started rehearsing in a freezing cellar. Next door was the kitchen for the Rendezvous Chinese restaurant. So we'd be doing battle with pots and pans, people yelling at each other through the breeze-block wall."

Was XTC an easy adaption for you?

"When it came to rehearsing the new stuff, I was winging it. But Andy was winging it as well. He didn't like rock 'n' roll. He didn't like rock 'n' roll clichés. He didn't want to repeat anything that had been done before, by anybody else, for any reason at all. No more wailing around, playing blues clichés. Any hint of a blues cliché was out. The songs were so good: they were full of melody, plenty of hooks, rather than just showing off for the sake of it. So there was that unwritten discipline that I was happy to comply with."

How did the sessions get started?

"After *Life Begins At The Hop*, Virgin wanted another single straightaway, and Colin [Moulding, bass] had this melody that became *Making Plans For Nigel*. We went into the studio the first week of June '79 for two days, with Steve Lillywhite and Hugh Padgham. Then it was



*“The songs were
so good: they were
full of melody, plenty
of hooks, rather than
just showing off for
the sake of it”*

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Watch Dave Gregory
talk through the 1979
release that marked his
entrance into XTC
www.bit.ly/guitaristextra





like, 'Right, we want you back here in 10 days to do the album.' We knew we had three weeks to record and mix *Drums And Wires*, so that meant cutting two or three basic tracks a day, then overdubs and vocals. Amazingly, we did it. That's why I like listening to the album today – because it wasn't fussed over."

How did *Making Plans For Nigel* come together?

"Well, that 'dah-dah-dah' riff, that's Andy. I'm doing these slashing chords, locking in with the bass and drums, fleshing it out. The great thing about Andy is, he can throw his left hand on the neck and something comes out. He will not move his left hand unless he absolutely has to. He's thinking more laterally than longitudinally. So he'll make a false nut with his first finger, then he'll mess around. That's how that riff came about. There's hardly any movement. It's so typical Andy. Brilliant. And I could certainly relate to Nigel because my parents were not happy about me having a career as a rock musician..."

How did you slot in with Andy's playing?

"Again, we just winged it. We never sat down face to face and said, 'Right, what do you want to play?' We'd just keep running the songs in rehearsal until it felt right, and sometimes we'd get so far then he'd point at me and say, 'Solo.' That meant I'd get eight bars to do something with. But on *Drums And Wires*, most of the leads are his. Because I was the new boy, I wasn't going to challenge him."

What did you play on *Making Plans For Nigel*?

"Well, it was this Strat. I bought that used from a friend in 1978, so I'd owned it for about a year when I joined XTC, and it was actually Sherwood Green metallic, a custom colour that today would be worth a fortune. But it didn't go with the rosewood 'board at all. I thought it looked really dull, so I got it lacquered with a sort of antique violin stain.

"The guitar itself is extraordinary. It's the loudest Strat I've ever played. There's something about how it's set up, the components, and I guess the wood. The neck had a twist in it. That was a reason the guy wanted to sell it because it was difficult to set the action. There was a big lump that meant you had to have the action high. I didn't mind that because my hands were quite strong. That funny neck gave it a certain timbre."

What else did you use?

"I used this SG on one or two songs. It's the first Gibson I ever bought, and I bought it used in 1972. It's an early '65. Again, I was playing in this country and western band. And what everyone was doing in those days was taking the covers off the pickups because you were going to get more output and sustain and all the rest of that nonsense.

"So I removed the cover from the bridge pickup and broke the wrap. A friend said, 'Oh, I could fix that for you.' And he basically destroyed it. It wasn't easy to get Gibson spares in the 70s, but someone had some humbuckers for sale. I bought one and wired it in, but it just wasn't a patch on the original. Just so weak and skinny. But then, at some point in '77 or '78, someone advertised an original [Patent Applied For pickup] in the *Melody Maker*, taken from the middle position of

"[Andy and I] never sat down face to face and said, 'Right, what do you want to play?' We'd just keep running the songs in rehearsal until it felt right..."

1. XTC performing onstage in Chicago in February 1980. Pictured are Andy Partridge, Colin Moulding, and the then-new member Dave Gregory, embarking on what he recalls as a 'thrilling' debut period with the band

2. Swindon's finest (from left to right): Colin Moulding, Dave Gregory, Andy Partridge and Terry Chambers on the crest of a New Wave

a Custom. I paid £60 for it, and once I put that in, the guitar came back to life.

"But then, when I joined XTC, I thought, 'They're not going to want a big full-throated Gibson tone. I'll get some coil-taps.' It kind of worked, but it didn't do anything the Strat wouldn't do better. The one song I used this SG for was the solo on *Outside World*, and I might have played it on the rhythm part to *Complicated Game*."

Speaking of *Complicated Game*, how did that song come together?

"It's Andy's creation. He just wanted this huge outburst of frustration at things being messed up by other people. Live, it would start with a whisper, then it would build, and you had this massive key change into the middle eight and this extraordinary guitar solo. Andy, at the time, had been using his Ibanez 2619. Quite a rare guitar, I've never seen another one. But I seem to remember, for *Drums And Wires*, he had a sunburst Les Paul Standard and a little Marshall, one of the first 210 combos, 100-watt. Horrible thing! I hated the sound, but it suited his style because it was visceral and spiky."



PHOTO BY PAUL NAKIN/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY PETER NOBLE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Dave Gregory's 1963
Fender Stratocaster
(refinished from
its original, and
an extremely rare
Sherwood Green
livery!) was one of
the sonic pillars of
Drums And Wires



Helicopter has an entirely different energy...

"It's like a little nursery rhyme. That used to have the kids pogo-ing. The Strat plays the riff and solo and it was through my little Tremolux with the shimmer on it. It's just Fender nonsense, all done on the bridge pickup."

What bands were you listening to?

"Well, Talking Heads were definitely featured. Television. Iggy Pop. David Bowie, who was always new wave, despite being an old hippie. A lot of dub reggae: Andy and Colin were well into that. Terry was more into traditional rock 'n' roll like Hawkwind and Pink Fairies. I just liked everything and was open to being educated, but a lot of it didn't click with me because there wasn't enough blues in it. I still retain a strong instinct for blues music. It's always going to be there, but I had to rein it in because it wasn't to Andy's liking at all. But we would listen to whatever was floating around."

Tell us about Scissor Man.

"Andy had given me the riff to play and Lillywhite wanted it doubled. I would've thought it was easier to just put a bit of slapback echo on it, but no. So I doubled it and I thought, 'You'd never know that was two separate takes.' So I'm very happy with my playing on that. When we played *Scissor Man* live, it used to go at such a pace. We just released this bootleg of a 1981 gig in New Jersey. I was horrified at how fast everyone was playing, and mostly it was my fault. But we thought speed equalled energy, equalled excitement, which to an extent it does. But to listen back, it's a bit exhausting. You just think, 'Whoa! Slow down, boys. Where's the fire?'"

When You're Near Me I Have Difficulty is a kind of socially awkward love song...

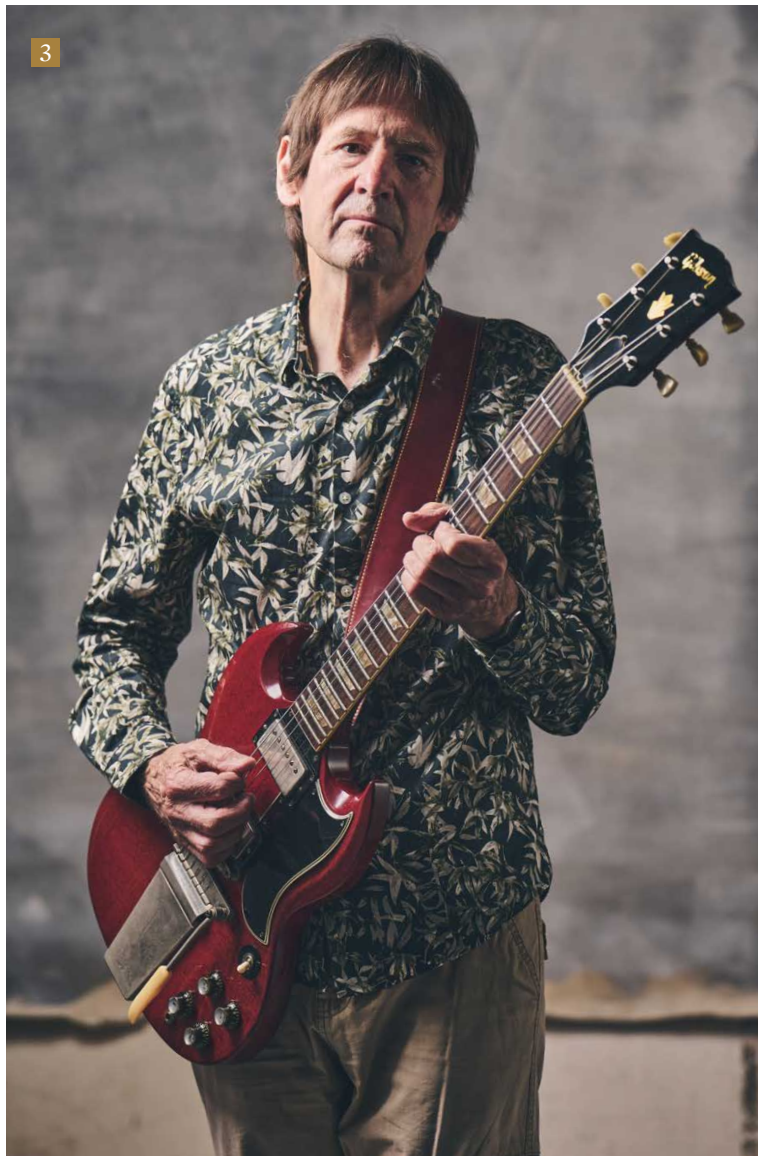
"One of my favourite songs on the album. I thought, 'This is a McCartney song, surely? No, it's Andy.' What a joyful noise. I even liked my out-of-tune intro. Steven Wilson corrected that when he remastered everything. But I miss it. So if I want to hear my out-of-tune guitar intro, I'll put the original vinyl on."

"We thought speed equalled energy, equalled excitement, which to an extent it does. But to listen back, it's a bit exhausting"

Beyond the Tremolux, what were you using when it came to amps?

"As far as I can remember, that's the only amp I had. The Tremolux, it's a piggyback amp, with a cabinet with two 10-inch speakers. But the speakers had blown. So I had an old Selmer bass cabinet and I bought a brand-new ATC 12-inch 100-watt speaker that I knew would cope with as much noise as the Tremolux could send. I used to turn everything up to 7. And that was the sound."

"There might have been a little Mesa/Boogie, too. But this was the one set of sessions where I didn't keep a daily log. I wish I had now. Of course, you don't realise at the time that 47 years later you're going to be pinned down about details. Y'know, were we still going to be alive in 10 years' time? Would people still remember this album when we're old and grey? Well, the amazing thing is, yes, they do, and they're still buying it."



3. Dave had a few trials and tribulations with his 1965 SG before he secured an original Patent Applied For humbucker to replace the bridge unit that had been destroyed in a botched repair

"I also did a couple of solos direct to the desk, like *Ten Feet Tall*. I used the 335 for the arpeggios. Then Andy took the first four bars of the solo, then handed me the 335 and I played the second four bars."

How did you feel about the album's reception?

"I remember, when we were sitting on the studio couch, Andy turned to me and said, 'It's going to be a good album.' And I thought, 'Actually, it does sound pretty good already. And it's not even finished.' And he was right. It is a good album, and it remains one of my favourites because of the fun we had making it."

"We were still friends. We were still up for anything. And when the album came out, we were happy to see so many good reviews. Nobody slagged it, and you have to remember the inkies would jump on anything and rip it to pieces. But sales were slow until we had the hit with *Nigel*, then things started to pick up..."



Live Boots: Emerald City, New Jersey, 17th April 1981 is out now on Ape House

<https://burningshed.com>

Dave's restored and de-modified 1963 ES-335 also appeared on *Drums And Wires* and had already played an interesting role in British music history in the hands of Eddie Phillips of the Creation before Dave acquired it



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GARY MOORE'S 1955 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

The Les Paul Junior was a stripped-down student solidbody that became a professional favourite

Words Huw Price Photography Olly Curtis

Picture the scene if you will. It's Christmas morning in 1950s America, snow is falling, Bing Crosby is crooning carols on the wireless, and a family is gathered around a tree with presents arranged beneath. Having grown out of little league baseball and lost interest in push bikes, Johnny has been begging his parents for an electric guitar and it looks like his dreams are about to come true.

Johnny has promised his parents that he will take lessons and learn those wholesome standards they so enjoy. But we all know that will never happen because Johnny has been secretly listening to Elvis and Chuck Berry, and his family doesn't know what's about to hit them.

No doubt countless guitar-playing journeys started with fortunate kids tearing wrapping paper off a Fender Esquire and a Champ, or a Les Paul Junior and a GA-5. They were the relatively affordable products that the manufacturers of the time marketed as 'student models'. But the most remarkable thing about those guitars, and to a lesser extent the amps, was that many were good enough to become career instruments.

Maintaining Standards

A degree of compromise followed by a series of upgrades is pretty typical with modern entry-level guitars, but things weren't always like that and Gibson's 1950s student models are a case in point. In 1954 the Les Paul Junior became Gibson's second solidbody and it predated the two-pickup Special by a year. When designing a more affordable version of the Goldtop, Gibson clearly decided to simplify the production process, rather than compromise quality, and that distinction is crucial.

Instead of joining and carving maple pieces into an arch, Gibson dispensed with maple altogether (though some early Juniors with maple bodies are known to exist), opting for a flat and unbound slab of mahogany – much like the approach taken by another manufacturer then coming to prominence out on the West Coast.

Bolt-on necks would have been anathema to Gibson, so the Junior had a set neck attached with Gibson's regular hide glue. There was no body binding, and simple celluloid dots were installed, but the unbound fretboards were still made from Brazilian rosewood.

Although fixed to a single plate, rather than mounted individually, the inner workings of the Kluson tuners were no different from the ones fitted to the Goldtop. As for the wraptail bridge, it was identical to the one that would feature on Goldtops from 1953 and is considered to be tonally superior to the later tune-o-matic.

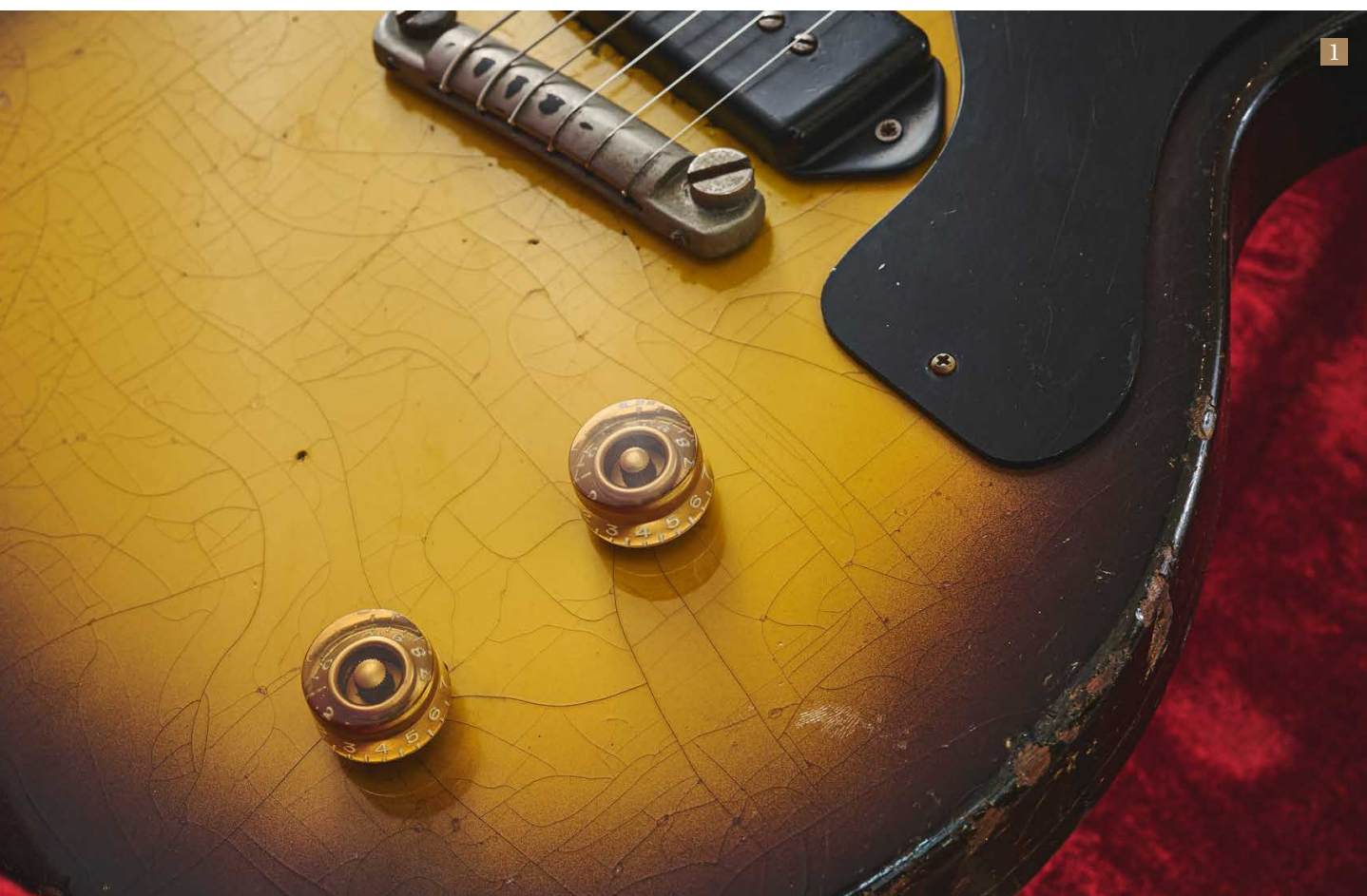
Potentiometers varied in value, with 250k sometimes used for tone, but they were the same Centralab units featured in Gibson's most prestigious models. Depending on when they were made, 1950s Juniors were also equipped with the 'Grey Tiger' and Sprague 'Bumblebee' tone capacitors.

Most remarkably, Gibson decided to install a P-90. Granted, you only got one, but the Junior's P-90 was no different from the ones in Gibson's top-end guitars. Besides a vogue for replacing tired Klusons with cast tuners in later decades, there was nothing about Les Paul Juniors that could be or needed to be upgraded.

Building 'student models' to a standard – not a price – could be viewed as shrewd. In the 1950s the thinking was that budding guitarists who had a good experience with their first guitars would stay loyal to the brand and eventually go more upmarket.



Gibson's stripped-down 'student model' featured a single P-90, a wraptail bridge and a slab body that was almost always mahogany but occasionally maple



1. 1955 Juniors retained the speed knobs, and tone potentiometer values varied between 250k and 500k
2. The back displays elegant playwear, rather than abuse – Gary's old Junior is a 'player's guitar' in the best sense
3. The original truss rod cover would have been one-ply black, and Schaller tuners have replaced the Klusons





3

Cheap Thrills

During the 1970s there wasn't a vast variety of quality guitars to choose from, and cash-strapped musicians would often seek out secondhand Fender and Gibson models that had fallen out of favour. With all the 'Bursts and 335s hoovered up by heavy rockers and prog players, pub rockers and proto-punks started buying Juniors and Specials.

Gary Moore cottoned onto Les Paul Juniors early on, maybe having heard what they could do in the hands of Leslie West and Mick Ralphs. Pete Cummings, who was road manager for Gary's band Skid Row, has told of an incident that occurred in Cincinnati in the early 1970s.

"When we were there Gary saw an ad for a Gibson Les Paul Junior somewhere about 50 miles from the city," he recalled. "We went to a private house in a rural location and Gary went into the house while I waited outside. About 15 minutes later Gary emerged with the guitar and a battered case. That was certainly his first Les Paul Junior."

It wasn't to be his last because Gary acquired this 1955 Junior from Steve Jones of The Sex Pistols. Over a decade on from Gary's death, Bonhams handled the sale of his guitar collection – The Final Encore –

"[It] used to be Steve Jones', but he left it at my house one day... so I gave him £250 for it"

GARY MOORE

and managed to trace some of its history. According to Bonhams' lot notes, "Steve Jones of The Sex Pistols left this guitar at Gary's Hampstead flat for some months before Gary bought it from him".

In his autobiography *Lonely Boy: Tales From A Sex Pistol* Steve Jones details some of the gear he acquired before he became famous. According to Jones, the Les Paul Junior he sold to Gary Moore was taken from Mott The Hoople, but it didn't belong to Mick Ralphs. It was actually one of two mid-50s Les Paul Juniors that his successor Luther Grosvenor – aka Ariel Bender – used on Mott's 1974 US tour.

When we contacted Luther, he stated that in 1974 after he had left Mott The Hoople and was forming the band that would become Widowmaker, they were "rehearsing on New Kings Road

in a basement that lots of people used. I suggested having a break and when we came back, the guitar had gone..."

Unlikely as it may seem, Gary and Steve Jones played together in a band called The Greedy Bastards that was formed by Phil Lynott in 1978. Although the project proved shortlived, black-and-white footage of the band playing a gig at The Electric Ballroom in Camden can be found online. Gary appears to be playing a Les Paul Standard, while the Junior is being wielded by Steve Jones.

In the March 1987 edition of *Making Music* magazine, Gary said that his Junior "used to be Steve Jones', but he left it at my house one day... so I gave him £250 for it..." The Junior was definitely Gary's by 1979 because there is plenty of photographic evidence of him using it on Thin Lizzy's *Black Rose* tour that year. In that same issue of *Making Music* Gary said that he used the Junior for guitar harmonies on his *Wild Frontier* album, and it was also the main guitar on *Victims Of The Future*.

California Dreaming

In November 2025, Bonhams sold the Junior for £40,960 including premium to Matthieu Lucas of Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris. "We had sold Steve Jones' Les



The Junior's new owner assures us he has no issues with the wraptail bridge and was delighted the case contained Gary's old strap

"I started playing some 'Victims Of The Future' stuff and it just sounded exactly like on the album"

WILL WALLNER

Paul Custom a couple of years ago and I really wanted to get another Sex Pistols guitar," Matt tells us. "I bought it believing it had potential to go to a Sex Pistols collector, but we were contacted by Will Wallner, who is a professional guitarist and a massive Gary Moore fan. He was disappointed that he couldn't get the guitar when Bonhams auctioned it, so it's great that he was able to buy it from us.

"The Junior is a very interesting guitar," Matt continues, "because it has such a fat neck and the P-90 sounds amazing. It was modified by Gary over the years and he tried another pickup at some point, but he went back to the original P-90. It had a typical late-70s or early 80s refret with medium jumbo wire, and the tuners were changed for Schallers. It's not too light or heavy, and more of a riff machine than a lead guitar, but that didn't stop Gary because he was such a genius player."

Will Wallner was born in Devon but has been based in LA for most of his adult life. Formerly a member of White Wizard, Will is now a solo artist, session player and currently plays with Seattle-based metal band Sanctuary. "Gary is my favourite



Most remarkable for any Gary Moore-owned Gibson is the fact that the headstock has never needed repair

guitar player," Matt says, "and I may have the largest collection of his gear. I have lots of his guitars and amps, including the amp he used to record *The Loner*, the 'Plexi' that he used on the BBM album [*Around the Next Dream*], his two main DSL heads, 70s stuff like 20-watt Marshall heads, and a nice 1959 Gibson combo.

"The main reason I wanted the Junior is the clip of him jamming backstage with Phil Lynott and, of course, he played it with Thin Lizzy. When I first opened the Junior's case and tuned it up, I played some of Gary's old stuff, like *Victims Of The Future*, and it sounded exactly like it did on the album.

"It's a beautiful instrument, everything works perfectly and I have no problems with the bridge," Will tells us. "It's beaten

up, but that makes it more special. I read an interview with Gary describing an [incident] at his flat with Steve Jones. Apparently, Steve threw the Junior against the wall, stormed out and never came back to get it. When I look at the knocks, I imagine one of them must be from the wall at Gary's place.

"I had never played a Junior before this one, but I've been playing it non-stop since I got it and I used it on a recording just a couple of days ago." Will assures us that Gary's Junior will continue to be played live and in the studio, and we can't help feeling it has ended up in exactly the right place. **G**

With thanks to Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris for allowing us to photograph this guitar
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Thin Is King

After the success of its 50s and 60s Les Paul Standards it's no surprise that Gibson has applied the same approach to the world's favourite thinline semi

Words Neville Marten Photography Lucy Robinson





GIBSON ES-335 50S & 60S £3,099 & £3,099

CONTACT **Gibson** PHONE 00 800 4442 7661 WEB www.gibson.com

What You Need To Know

1 Was the ES-335 the first thinline semi-acoustic?

It was the first to contain a centre block. Rickenbacker's 330 debuted later that year. Its body was routed from a slab of maple with a glued-on back; it suppressed feedback by leaving the walls thicker. Gibson's Byrdland from 1955 was all hollow, but still designated 'Thinline'.

2 Why is the body laminated?

It's a quality ply of maple/poplar/maple. It was originally to provide structural strength, to curb the feedback so prevalent on this style, but mostly to mitigate costs compared to hand-carving spruce.

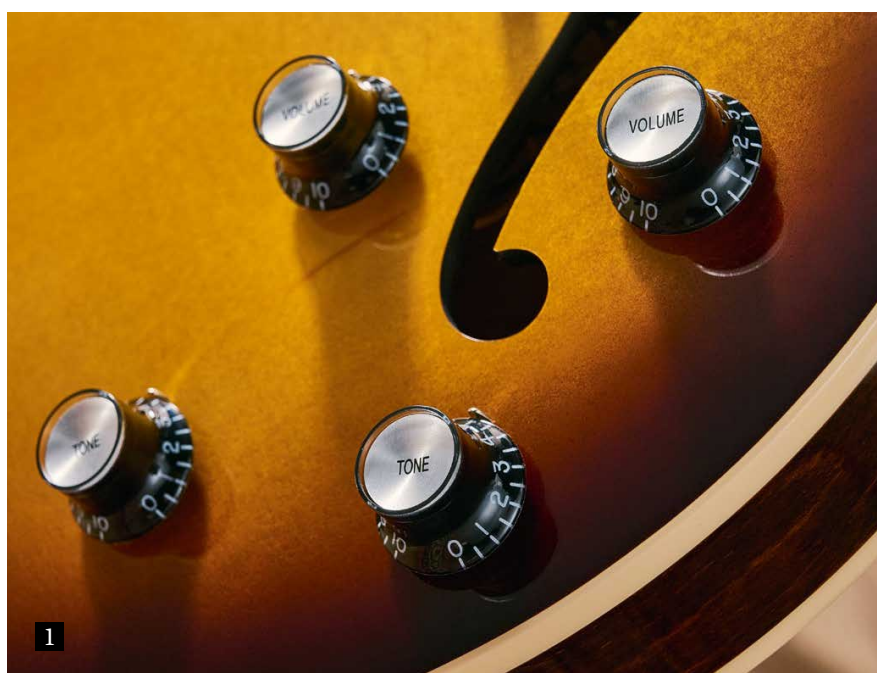
3 Was the ES-335 Gibson's first all Cherry Red guitar?

Actually, no. The 1958 Les Paul Junior beat it by about a year. The Cherry Red ES-335 (and others in the series) didn't arrive until late 1959 or 60.

Creating a composite of a particular guitar model's general or specific era has become a bit of a thing of late. Just think of Fender's all-encompassing Vintera range. When, in 2019, Gibson unveiled its 50s and 60s Les Paul Standards following broadly the same pattern, they were an instant hit. Hardly surprising, either, since they were great guitars at a reasonable price. Equally

predictable is this formula being applied to the company's all-conquering thinline semi. Built in Nashville, Tennessee and featuring various visual, hardware and electronics traits of ES-335s from the same illustrious decades, they look set to become just as successful.

While the differences wrought to the ES-335 model between its debut in 1958 until the end of the subsequent decade



1. Black top-hat volume and tone knobs with silver inserts are classic 60s fare. Tons of tonal variety at your fingertips, too



are relatively minor, they're significant enough to make players prefer one style over the other. We'll check out the common factors first, then look at where the two models diverge.

With its laminated maple/poplar/maple body and solid maple centre section the ES-335 (and fancier siblings the ES-345 and ES-355) was a game-changer. Marrying the virtues of all-solid guitars with those of completely hollow instruments such as the ES-175, led to one of those somewhat rare but welcome results: a win-win situation.

The feedback resistance offered by the centre block, and the greater sense of airiness all that extra, well, air, provided, meant that players from almost every musical walk flocked to the 335. This has remained the case for almost 70 years; from the blues players and beat groups of the 50s and 60s, all the way up to Brit rock and beyond, the model is among the most revered of all time.

Necks of ES-335s have almost always been mahogany, and nothing has changed

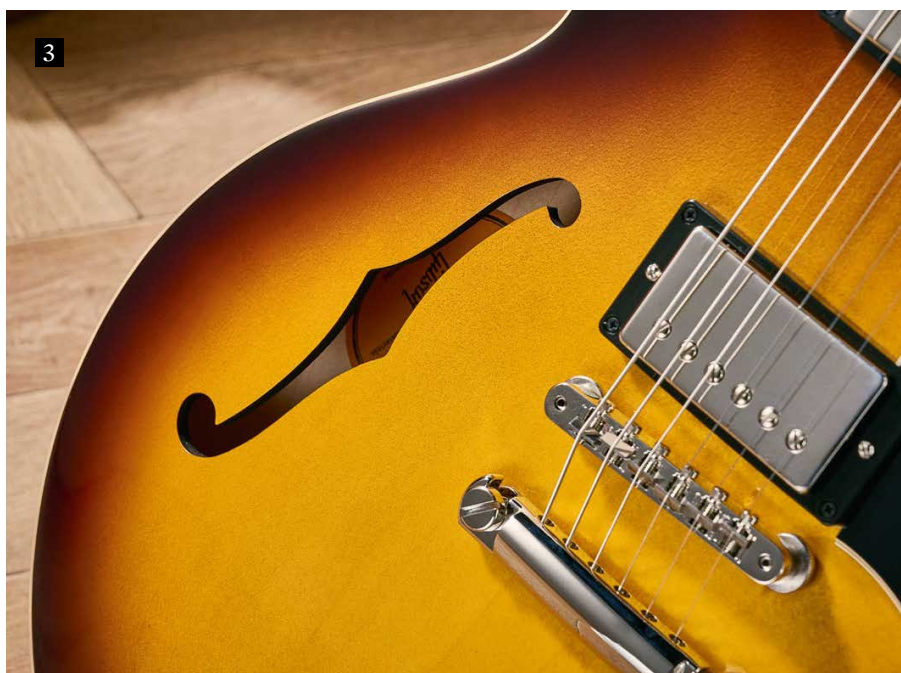
here. Instruments from the early decades used the Honduran variety whose use is now limited due to both regulation and a desire for greater sustainability, so we see African or Fijian timbers used on most modern Gibsons.

Other commonalities include cream body and neck binding, rosewood fingerboards, and nickel-plated bridge and tailpiece. These are modern-style

2. Our black 50s ES-335 evokes something of a tuxedo vibe. Originals in this colour were extremely rare

3. The 60s guitar features the modernised ABR-1 bridge with no retainer spring, and the classic stop-bar tailpiece

From blues players and beat groups to Brit rock and beyond, the 335 is among the most revered of all time





THE RIVALS

Epiphone is the natural destination if you want something built under Gibson's guidance but for less. The Epiphone ES-335 Figured, in Raspberry Tea Burst (£619) is beautiful. And with Alnico Classic PRO pickups, Epiphone LockTone ABR-style bridge and stud tailpiece, layered AAA-grade maple body with centre block, it's a no-brainer.

Heritage guitars are built in Kalamazoo. The H-535 TRC (£2,399) features Seymour Duncan '59 pickups, flamed laminated maple body with centre block, dot-inlaid rosewood fingerboard, locking bridge and tailpiece, and Grover tuners. The connoisseur's choice.

In the middle, pricewise, sits Eastman's T59/TV (£1,599). With Seymour Duncan Antiquity humbuckers, all top-notch Gotoh hardware, deluxe maple laminate body and maple neck with split pearl-inlaid ebony fingerboard and lightly aged finish, it's a lovely thing to behold.

ABR-1s designed to not require the wire saddle retainer added around 1962–3 to stop the saddles dropping out, most consequentially should a string break while playing live. Nuts are GraphTech TUSQ, scale length a matching 628.8mm (24.75"), and finish is gloss nitrocellulose.

The first and most obvious area where the guitars depart towards their designated decades, is in Gibson's colour selections. Now, between 1958 and 60 there were only two options available, Natural and Sunburst. So in order to create the magical third choice on our 50s model, they've chosen Ebony (almost unheard of), and not Cherry (which became standard alongside the other two a year or so later). But actually this is not so daft...

For the 60s ES-335 Gibson went with Vintage Tobacco Sunburst, Cherry and Dark Walnut (which appeared around 1968 but was in reality a more 70s thing), and, of course, the company works a lot with Kirk Hammett, who owns one of the few verified 1959 ES-335s in Ebony.

Other visual contrasts are the 60s model's small pearloid block inlays, first seen around 1962 and which replaced the

original dots, as well as the long pickguard of the 50s' ES-335 that stayed until late 1960. You might also spot Grover M6 Rotomatic tuners on the 60s instrument. While Gibson never did supply these during the 1960s, fitting them was probably the most common upgrade. So again we don't argue with the thinking behind it.

Anyone who's played a few Gibsons will recognise the feel. It's traditional and comfy, if a little on the fat side

The control knobs are different, too. On the 50s guitar we find the clear gold top-hat variety, while on its stablemate sit black ones with silver inserts.

Not so visible are the slightly different neck shapes. Our black 50s-style instrument has that decade's rounded C-profile, while the ostensibly later model features a 'modernised' slim taper neck.



4. It's brighter toned T-Type (or T-Top) humbuckers on the Vintage Sunburst 60s ES-335...

5. ...and ever so slightly thicker sounding Custombuckers on its Ebony sibling

6. Gibson didn't fit Grover tuners to 1960s ES-335s, but it was the commonest upgrade

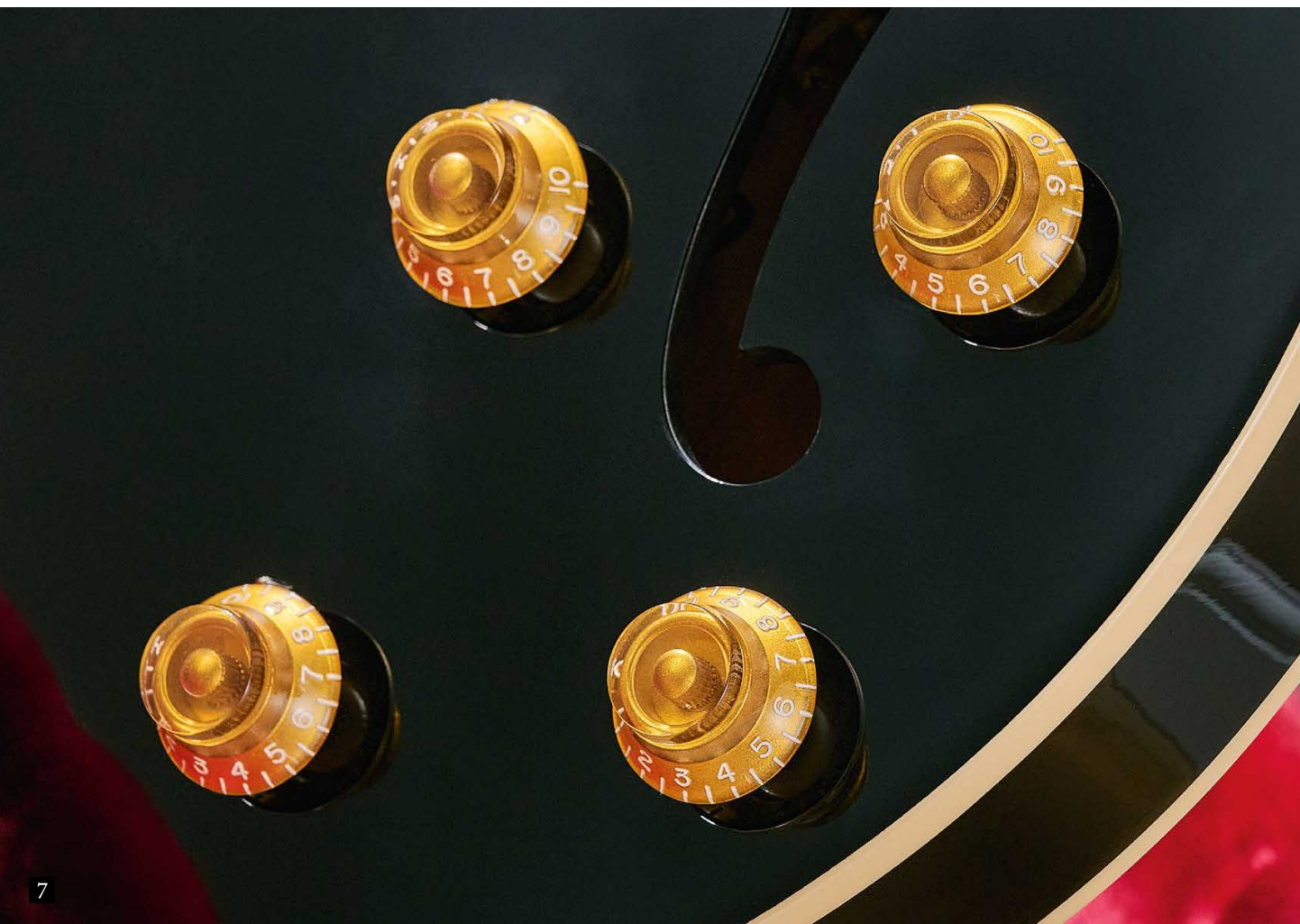
Pickups, too, are not the same. Twin Custombuckers are favoured for the dot neck, while we find T-Type on the block-inlaid guitar. T-Types (or T-Tops) superseded the patent number humbuckers of early to mid-60s Gibsons. Here their materials and construction are replicated, and they are said to offer brighter, perhaps more articulate tones than those of the PAF-styled Custombucker. And with a Custom Shop '59 ES-335 on hand to compare, we can't wait to put these guitars properly through their paces.

Feel & Sounds

Plugging into a Tone King Imperial pedal amp through a Blackstar full range, flat response cabinet with a Fulltone OCD distortion pedal in line, things are about to get toneful. Let's try them chronologically – so, 50s ES-335 first.

Anyone who's played a few Gibsons will instantly recognise the feel. It's traditional, it's comfy, familiar, if a little on the fat side for some. It's not tiring to play though, and the 22 medium jumbo frets and almost totally accessible fingerboard just let you get on with it. No issues. Just





7



8

a solid, friendly, and eminently enjoyable instrument to spend time with.

Switch to the 'younger' sibling and it's the same if not marginally better. There's an immediate, 'Ooh, this is a bit chunky' reaction to the black one, whereas our sunburst semi seems more 'normal' right away. The more slender neck with exactly the same 304.8 radius fingerboard and frets, seems (to this reviewer), a more

7. Gold knobs and cream binding offer a nice contrast against the all-black 50s guitar's finish

8. This nickel-plated pickguard bracket is a real throwback to Gibson's archtop jazz guitars of the 1930s

With the 60s guitar, flicking the 'on' switch of our self-contained rig reveals a rich and chiming clean set of tones from every pickup selection

welcoming place to be. It's everything its 50 sister is, but just that bit less of a compromise if you're not used to larger necks on your instrument.

Sticking with the 60s guitar and flicking the 'on' switch of our self-contained rig reveals a gloriously rich and chiming clean set of tones from every pickup selection. From jazzy chords to Beatles-esque arpeggio run-downs, it's all you could



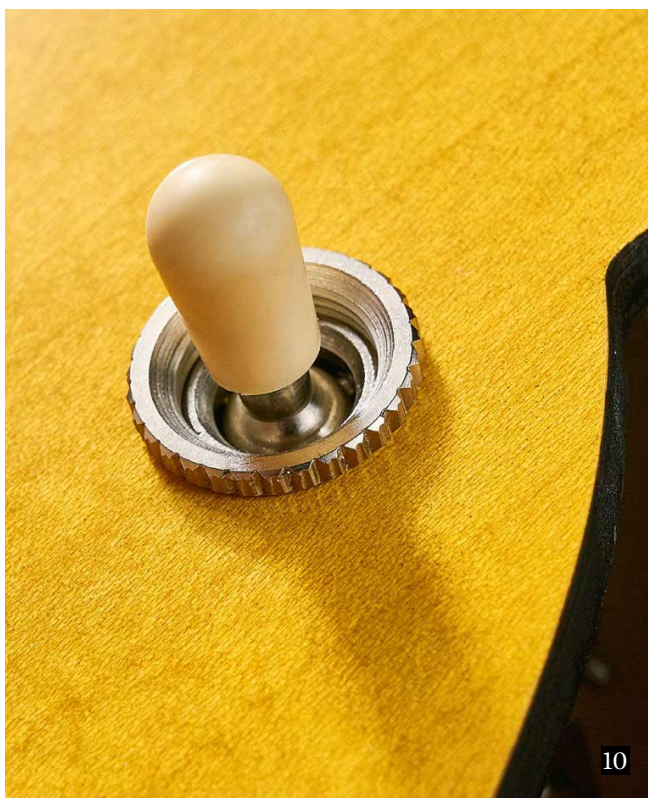
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want from an electric guitar. Jump on the OCD and a lovely, crisp drive happens. It's strident, but with an edge to the bridge pickup that's redolent of Clapton's *Badge* solo, while the neck is not unlike a fat Strat and the middle setting has that twangy, funky, country tone that's usable in so many situations.

Chopping and changing between this, the 50s guitar (which sounds just that bit ballsier) and the Custom Shop '59 there's so little in it that it's hard to say which one we prefer. The CS instrument probably sits in the middle for neck feel and general tones, but the truth is that each of the three will answer any call requested of it. Of the two new guitars we'd award it to the 60s semi. On points. Just.

Verdict

Again Gibson's venerable semi does not disappoint. Both these guitars look fabulous, the sunburst block-neck more classic and the black guitar just that tad cooler. Playability and tonewise it's down to what you prefer. The bigger neck and Custombucker pickups of the 50s instrument may well provide some extra



10

9. The 60s model's rosewood fingerboard could use a little lemon oil but looks worse than it is up close

10. You'll find a three-way toggle switch on almost every Gibson electric; with the control pots it provides a ton of sounds



11. The neck joint on the ES-335 has always been a thing of guitar-building beauty

heft, but one would be a fool to say that either guitar is 'better'. It could even come down to colour: if you like a 'Clapton' 335 then obviously opt for the Cherry 60s model; if jazz or beat bands are your thing then surely it's a sunburst of either persuasion. If you want to be different and ultra cool then go for the Ebony dot-neck. There's no losers here.

Three grand is a fair old outlay, but a guitar like this will mature with you, never let you down, and rise to any musical occasion

Both of these instruments are fine examples of their breed. Three grand is a fair old outlay, but a guitar like this will mature with you, last you for life, never let you down, and (shy of vibrato-arm divebombs), rise to any musical occasion. Go and try both, and see which one gets your vote. But, as far as we're concerned, there's barely a whisker in it. **G**



GIBSON 50S ES-335

PRICE: £3,099, with brown Gibson hard shell case
ORIGIN: Nashville, Tennessee
TYPE: Double-cutaway thinline electric
BODY: Maple/poplar/maple laminate with solid maple centre block, bound back and front in cream
NECK: One-piece mahogany, rounded C profile
SCALE LENGTH: 628.7mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with 304.8mm (12-inch) radius, dot inlays
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, pickup covers and jack socket; aluminium strap buttons; gold top hat knobs
TUNERS: Gibson vintage style, nickel with Keystone buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two Gibson Custombucker pickups, two volumes, two tones, three-way selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8.2
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Gibson 60s ES-335 (£3,099) with T Type pickups, slim taper neck and small block inlays
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Black (as reviewed), Vintage Tobacco Burst, Vintage Natural



PROS One of the charismatic classics. You'll never look anything but cool with one of these around your neck. Great looks. Familiar feel. Fabulous set of versatile tones

CONS Some may feel the black finish is not '335'. Others might feel the neck is a little too chunky, but both of these 'criticisms' are down to personal taste



GIBSON 60S ES-335

PRICE: £3,099, with brown Gibson hard shell case
ORIGIN: Nashville, Tennessee
TYPE: Double-cutaway thinline electric
BODY: Maple/poplar/maple laminate with solid maple centre block, bound back and front in white
NECK: One-piece mahogany, slim taper profile
SCALE LENGTH: 628.7mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with 304.8mm (12-inch) radius and pearloid block inlays
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, pickup covers and jack socket; black top hat knobs with silver inserts
TUNERS: Grover Rotomatic with kidney bean buttons
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two Gibson T-Type humbucking pickups, two volumes, two tones, and three-way selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8.1
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Gibson 50s ES-335 (£3,099) with Custombucker pickups, rounded C-profile neck and dot inlays
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Vintage Tobacco Burst (as reviewed), Vintage Cherry, Dark Walnut



PROS Timeless, effortless to play, beautiful looks, and a fantastic array of totally usable tones. A must for any guitar connoisseur

CONS There's almost nothing to call out here. Gibson could have fused chrome hardware and narrowed the nut to mid-60s specs, but neither of these changes were deemed an improvement

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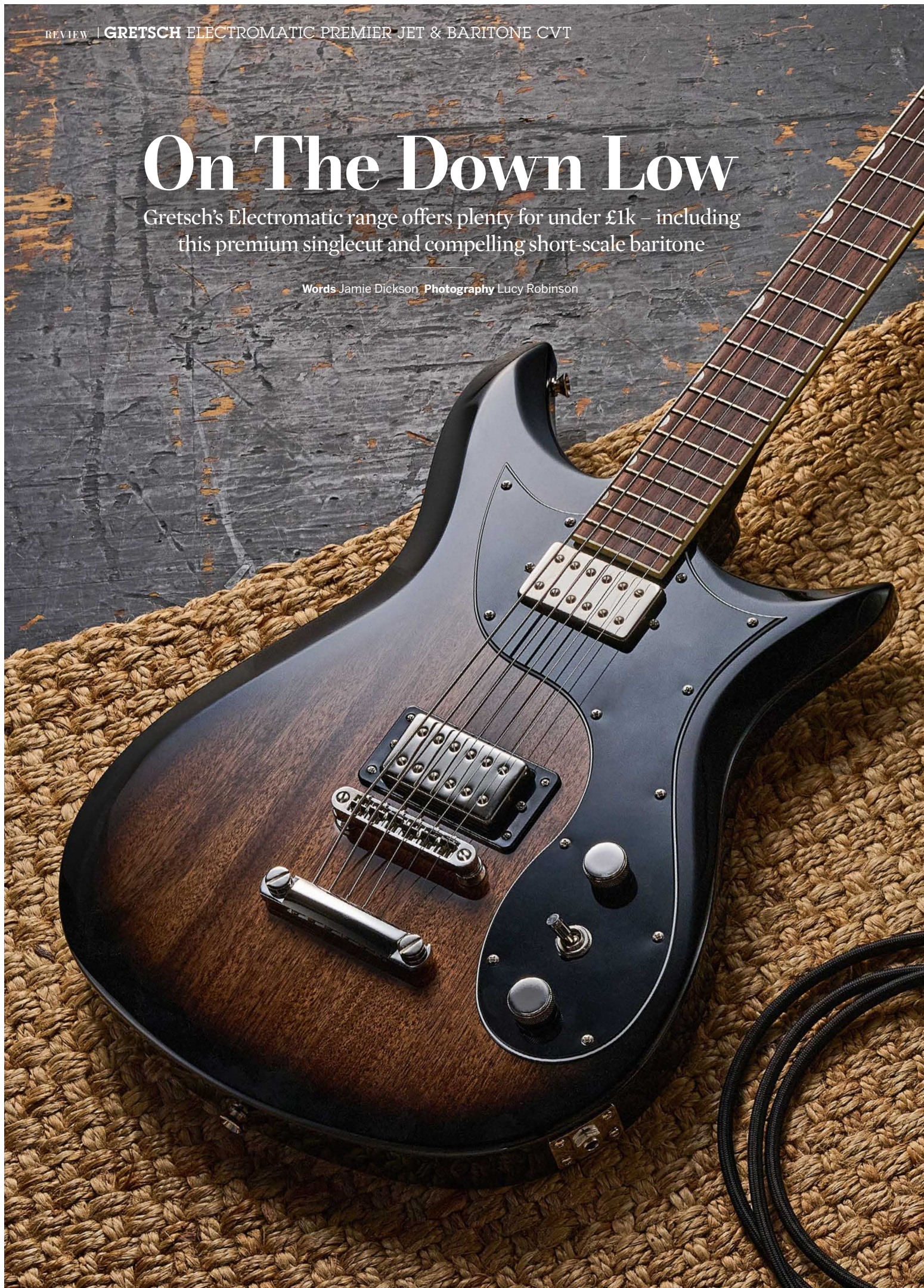
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REVIEW | **GRETSCH** ELECTROMATIC PREMIER JET & BARITONE CVT

On The Down Low

Gretsch's Electromatic range offers plenty for under £1k – including this premium singlecut and compelling short-scale baritone

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Lucy Robinson







GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC PREMIER JET & BARITONE CVT £709 & £599

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What You Need To Know

1

Where do Electromatics sit in Gretsch's range?

Gretsch's most affordable guitars are the Streamliner range – originally a 50s tradename, then rebooted in 2016 and now contains hollowbody and solid electrics. The Electromatic range sits above the Streamliners and represents the lower-mid tier of Gretsch's guitars, typically with very tidy build and finish

2

How is a baritone guitar different?

A regular six-string guitar is tuned to E standard, whereas a baritone is tuned to B standard (B-E-A-D-F#-B) and typically has a longer scale length of 27"-30" to accommodate that. It will also be fitted with heavier strings typically in the area of .013-.062 or .014-.068).

3

The CVT's body shape is familiar...

That's right, it's based on the Gretsch Corvette, a solidbody that debuted in 1961 with a slab body but was then given SG-style bevels to its double cutaway design around 1963. While never, perhaps, a truly iconic design, Rory Gallagher used a modded version to glorious effect and the original design deserves a bit more love than it often gets.

For a long time, Gretsch meant rock 'n' roll in its 50s leathers – twang on steroids. But lately the company has broadened its offer, and one of the main tools used to do that is its Electromatic range. The name 'Electromatic' derives from the first electric guitars and amps the company ever sold, back in 1939. But the name was resurrected in 1998 for a range of affordable instruments that offered an easier entry point to the brand than its premium Japanese-built models.

Another useful thing about the Electromatic range, from Gretsch's perspective, is its malleability. Gretsch

offers Electromatics with P-90s and a variety of pickups that offer a more contemporary drive than the traditional Filter'Trons, as with the Sphera Twin Six humbuckers fitted to the Electromatic Premier Jet on test here. All this helps them get the attention of guitarists who wouldn't normally reach for a Gretsch, including the increasing number of players who use baritone electrics for girthy high-gain riffs and evocative, brooding cleans. Indeed, Gretsch now offers two baritones in the Electromatic range – an Electromatic Jet Baritone with a 755.65mm (29.75") scale length and the



1



double-cut CVT Baritone with its more hand-friendly 685.8mm (27") scale. Before we come to that, however, let's first turn our attention to the Premier Jet.

Our review model comes in what appears to be a plain black 'Onyx Storm' finish but a closer look in direct light reveals a subtle sparkle deep in the tint – a little nod, perhaps, to the glittering drum-coverings that ended up on quite a few Jets back in the day. Like other Jets before it, the body of the Premier is chambered mahogany with a bound maple top. This is paired with a glued-in mahogany neck with widish frets whose 'nibs' sit over the binding – a tidy enough job, even if the fret ends could be a little smoother.

The engine room of the guitar is a pair of Sphera Twin Six humbuckers with 12 adjustable poles, evoking Gretsch's famous Filter'Tron humbuckers. Built around a pair of Alnico 6 magnets, the idea behind the Twin Six is to 'bridge the tonal gap between modern Alnico 5 clarity and vintage Alnico 2 warmth'.

As this is the 'Premier' Jet model we also get some hidden extras. For example, the tone controls for bridge and neck pickups feature 'no load' pots that, when fully open, take the tone control out of the circuit completely for an Esquire-style straight-through sound that is a touch fiercer and brighter. Turn the knob and it clicks free of a subtle detent and functions like a normal tone control for the rest of its range. There's also a push-pull volume pot that

activates what Gretsch is calling a 'Lumen Filter' – a passive capacitor network that rolls off a little of the low end and some of the inherent thickness of the humbuckers for those times you want a little more cut and air. The idea is reminiscent of the passive Focus Switch found on certain Yamaha Revstars, and the Premier Jet does feel like a spiritual counterpart to those contemporary-but-cool models.

Other premium features include a 22-fret compound-radius (254mm-355.6mm) ebony fretboard that ensures soloing higher up the neck, where it flattens out, is precise and

1. Locking tuners are very much in vogue and they don't look too bulky on this larger, updated Electromatic headstock

2. The Sphera Twin Six pickups on the Premier Jet are based on Alnico 6 magnets for a blend of modern bite and vintage warmth, and take drive very nicely

3. The Jet's master volume has a pull-push pot that activates what Gretsch call a Lumen Filter that shelves off bass and provides an airier, lighter voicing. The neck and bridge tone controls are of the 'no load' variety





4

4. There's an echo of the iconic Gretsch White Falcon in the headstock shape of the current range of Electromatics

5. Pull-push pots on the CVT Baritone's control plate activate coil splits for both humbuckers

6. The Alnico 5 Twin Six humbuckers on the CVT Baritone sound full and powerful with both coils in play but we found the coil-split sounds had very attractive clarity

choke-free. We're also treated to locking machineheads, Luminlay side dots that are easy to pick out on a dark stage, and an intonation-adjustable wraparound 'Lockdown' bridge that stays attached, via locking screws, to the posts during restringing so it doesn't come clattering off. The new, flared White Falcon-esque headstock with its 'V' indent in the top has more presence and, we think, looks classier than the skinnier headstock of earlier Electromatic Jet models.

Turning our attention to the CVT Baritone, though cheaper, the general fit and finish is very much on a par with



5

THE RIVALS

At around £700, the Premier Jet sits in a crowded marketplace, but Yamaha's Revstar RSS20 (£699) is a good match. It also features a chambered mahogany body but offers more conventional Alnico 5 humbuckers and stainless-steel frets. Its carbon-reinforced neck provides stability and its passive 'Focus Switch' circuitry mimics overwound humbuckers. Comes with deluxe gigbag. Also look at Charvel's Pro-Mod Plus San Dimas Style 1 HH (£999) with a 304.4-406.4mm compound radius and Seymour Duncan humbuckers. For shorter-scale baritones try Reverend's Descent baritone electric (£1,199) with its unique Railhammer Chisel pickups.



the Premier Jet. As previously mentioned, the CVT Baritone is one of two in the Electromatic range but this one has the shorter scale of the two, making it a bit easier on the fingers.

Featuring a solid mahogany body with bevelled edges, our review guitar is finished in a smoky Bristol Fog sunburst – the only finish option available for this model. The body appears to be three-piece, although the dark sunburst obscures some of the top, making it hard to confirm. The 22-fret neck is made of maple, though it's covered by black gloss paint so we'll have to take Gretsch's word on that. The fretboard is bound rosewood.

The CVT Baritone also sports a pair of Twin Six humbuckers – except these have Alnico 5 magnets and not Alnico 6, as found in the Premier Jet, so we might expect a more conventionally brightish, mid-forward sound here. It has a trick or two up its sleeve in terms of electronics, too. There's a treble bleed on the master volume so the sound doesn't get muddy when you turn it down, plus it features a pull-push pot that engages a coil-split on the neck pickup. Meanwhile, the single tone control has a pull-push pot that operates a coil split for the bridge pickup.

Feel & Sounds

At just north of eight pounds the Premier Jet is comfortable to wear, with no neck dive despite that chunky headstock and locking tuners. In play, the guitar's action, as supplied, feels a tiny bit high at 2mm on the treble side at the 12th fret – not too bad but ripe for a mild tweak. That aside, the playing experience is pretty comfortable, especially when soloing higher up thanks to that compound-radius 'board.

Despite the Premier Jet's Les Paul-like shape, it has its own persona. The top end of the Sphera Twin Six humbuckers seems more tight and crisp than you might expect of a Gibson, say. The only thing that seems slightly unbalanced is the pickups' low end, which feels a little too broad and blurry when playing powerchords. Adjusting the pickups' height so they sat lower on the bass side helped, however. Incidentally, the pickup rings may look black but they're actually clear – the body colour beneath simply creates the illusion that they are opaque.

Played clean, the Jet has an intriguing voice – fuller than a Fender but almost as crisp. Engaging the Lumen Filter gives a fresher, airier voice. The Lumen Filter doesn't suffer the traditional thinness of coil-taps (which it differs

It feels like a guitar for writers, rather than noodlers, and it's all the more satisfying for it

from, as it's a capacitor array not a tap) and while the output drops a little with it engaged, it's useful for shelving off low end and adding clarity. Overdriven, the humbuckers yielded a wiry voice that remained warm yet crisp. This Jet feels much more of a rock machine than its 50s forebears and we think it would give a Les Paul Studio a serious run for its money in a hard-rock role.

Moving on to the CVT Baritone, we enter a world of brooding, low chords, and melodies with drama and grandeur. You can't play all your old, familiar clichés – there are no bluesy bends on the stiff strings of a baritone – so you have to 'say something' and take the melody somewhere. It feels like a guitar for writers, rather than noodlers, and it's all the more satisfying for it.

Reverb, delay and drive all pair powerfully with the CVT – though we



[Playing the CVT] is a really intriguing and rather addictive experience, bridging the gap between bass and guitar

7. The CVT Baritone has a bolt-on neck joint, though we might more properly describe it as four screws countersunk into metal ferrules

found ourselves using the coil-splits more often than the full humbucker sounds for added clarity. The action is comfortable and that shorter scale means it's not a struggle to reach or fret notes. It's a really intriguing and rather addictive experience, bridging the gap between bass and guitar.

Verdict

The Premier Jet, despite its 50s lineage, is a focused, modern rock machine – one might almost say a latter-day Les Paul Custom in spirit. We'd argue that the 'Premier' frills, like the Luminlay side dots and compound radius, add finesse but aren't essential to that core identity, which it fulfils well. A/B it with the cheaper standard Jet in case you feel you don't need the extra trimmings, though.

The Baritone is a more intriguing proposition – for around £600 it does something quite special: it opens up a new sound-world, new paths of expression for the uninitiated. And it does so comfortably, effectively and affordably. **G**



GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC PREMIER JET

PRICE: £709

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Chambered mahogany with carved maple cap

NECK: Mahogany, gloss finish with painted headstock and 'C' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.88")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone 42.86mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony; compound radius 10-14"; pearloid thumbnail position markers with Luminlay side dots

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Lockdown locking adjustable wraparound bridge; single-ply acrylic pickguard

TUNERS: Sealed locking machineheads

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm

ELECTRICS: Sphere Twin Six Humbucker set; three-way selector; push-pull master volume pot with treble bleed and Lumen filter, no-load tone controls for both pickups

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.68/8.1

OPTIONS: See Range Options

RANGE OPTIONS: Electromatic Jet Club 1 Pickup (£499), single-pickup variant. Electromatic Jet Club (£549) Sphera Twin Six humbuckers. Electromatic Jet Two 90 (£609) with twin P90 pickups, Bigsby-equipped version available.

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Onyx Storm (as reviewed); Robusto Burst; Vintage Pearl; Clairvoyant

8/10

PROS Focused, capable rock guitar with a generous array of features and upgrades. It's fairly priced, too

CONS The humbuckers sound fantastic in the top end and upper mids but could use a touch more composure and definition in the bass. No gigbag



GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC BARITONE CVT

PRICE: £599

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double cutaway solidbody baritone electric

BODY: Solid mahogany

NECK: Maple with painted headstock, with Performance 'C' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 685.8mm (27")

NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech NuBone/40mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood. 241.3mm (12") radius.

FRETS: 22 nickel silver, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Nickel-finish Adjusto-Matic bridge, three-ply black/white/black acrylic pickguard, knurled plain top metal knobs

TUNERS: Die-cast sealed

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm

ELECTRICS: Two Twin Six humbuckers. Master volume with treble-bleed, push/pull for coil splitting neck pickup, master tone with push/pull for coil splitting bridge pickup. Treble bleed circuit.

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.8/8.4

OPTIONS: See Range Options

RANGE OPTIONS: The standard-scale Electromatic CVT is a capable doublecut and comes in three finishes at (£529). For a smaller outlay, the Streamliner CVT (£299) has a pair of uncovered Hotwire humbuckers and a bolt-on neck

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Bristol Fog (as reviewed)



9/10

PROS An inspiring, easy-playing entrée into the world of baritone guitar that will open up your ears to new directions in writing. A nicely put together instrument.

CONS Some more finish options and a gigbag would be nice but it's not a dealbreaker

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Bridging The Gap

Electro-Harmonix offers an elegant solution for integrating your pedalboard with your computer recording system

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Lucy Robinson





ELECTRO-HARMONIX EFFECTS INTERFACE HARDWARE PLUGIN £279

CONTACT **Electro-Harmonix** WEB www.ehx.com

What You Need To Know

- 1 That's an odd-looking pedal...**
Well, yes, it's got a footswitch, but you're right, this is no ordinary pedal. The Electro-Harmonix Effects Interface Hardware Plugin is designed as a bridge between your DAW and your pedalboard.
- 2 How's that?**
It's an enabler: it will let you integrate your hardware pedals into your DAW as plug-ins, or it can live on your pedalboard to bring effects from your DAW into your hardware signal chain.
- 3 That sounds complicated!**
Not at all, this represents the easiest way to do those jobs – and it does them seamlessly.

It may be fair to say that guitar players generally regard hardware and software as two distinct things. On the hardware side, we are all accustomed to the traditional approach of plugging into a set of pedals and an amp, or more recently into a digital processor such as the Helix et al. The software side of things comes into play when we're using a DAW for recording where the possibilities for transforming a guitar sound are seemingly endless by applying software plug-ins to the guitar track.

Regular DAW users will be well aware of just how much stuff is out there, be that amp and speaker simulation like AmpliTube or studio effects from companies including Universal Audio, Waves, Soundtoys and so on. Now, while we may regard the hardware and the software as two separate strands, there are two instances where they can integrate and work together: it's possible to use

guitar pedals as plug-ins within a DAW, and it's also possible to use DAW plug-ins as an integral part of your pedalboard chain.

While setting up either of those scenarios can seem like a bit of a head-scratcher, there's now a really simple way to do it, courtesy of the Electro-Harmonix Effects Interface Hardware Plugin, which the company describes as “a first-of-its-kind piece of equipment purpose-built for making use of pedals and other physical guitar equipment with your DAW easy and seamless”.

In Use

The Effects Interface is a pedal around the size of a standard Big Muff that physically connects to your computer via USB. It has left and right inputs, and outputs to connect to a stereo (or two mono) effects chains, and it also sports a headphone output that will be needed if you use it in its third defined role as a standard audio



The input sliders control the level of signal into the Effects Interface from the L and R input jacks, while the output sliders set the level of the signal sent by the effects interface on the L and R output jacks

It is effectively a send and return from the computer that works independently of your audio interface

interface. While the pedal can take its power from USB, it can also be powered from a standard nine-volt supply. A software driver for the unit is placed on your (Mac or Windows) computer and appears as an installed plug-in named as 'Effects Interface' in your DAW, available to be placed on a track like any standard DAW plug-in but allowing that track to be processed through any real pedal(s) connected to the hardware component – it is effectively a send and return from



1. Press the footswitch to enable/disable the Effects Interface loop. When the associated LED is lit, the effect is active; when it's off, the unit is in bypass mode

2. This is how the plug-in appears on your computer screen with various drop-down menus in which you set things up, sliders for setting input and output levels, plus the knob for setting a balance between dry and wet sound

3. If you want to use the Effects Interface as your audio interface, pressing this Direct Monitor button will let you monitor the signal from the input jacks. The Headphone Level knob above it sets the volume for any headphones you have connected

the computer that works independently of your audio interface.

The first time you use the software plug-in, you get a calibration screen to adjust buffer settings and more to match your computer. But once it's done, it's done – and those settings will remain unless you wish to change them at a later date. The plug-in window gives you various options for using the Effects Interface, first port of call being setting a mode of operation. To use your physical pedals as plug-ins you need to select Audio mode and then

you can choose stereo or mono operation. Stereo will obviously let you connect a stereo rig, but the mono mode is Dual mono, which means that you can actually have separate send and returns for two different mono pedals or pedal chains and that will allow you to use the plug-in on two separate DAW tracks each with a different mono effect. An obvious use is if you have recorded a clean guitar track but want a dirtier sound – just add a drive pedal, set the input and output levels and you're good to go.

One very useful feature controlled from the plug-in window is a Dry/Wet knob, which means you can add just a portion of effects to a track. We found it particularly useful in applying a drive pedal to a track so we could add just a touch of grit to it, rather than sending the whole sound through the pedal.

The whole thing works very well, and not just on guitar tracks as you can send drums, keyboards, vocals or whatever through your effects. We got great results connecting up phasers and the like. Now, of course, DAWs will have decent plug-ins for a lot of effects types, particularly reverbs and delays, but the EHX lets



THE RIVALS

The precursor to this model is the Big Muff Pi Hardware Plugin (£229), which is the same basic idea, but rather than letting you use a choice of pedals, it puts a Big Muff in the box. While there is no direct equivalent to the EHX Effects Interface's methodology, there are some 'audio interface in a stompbox' pedals out there. We reviewed the Orange OMEC Teleport (£109, left) in 2018, and there's also the Hotone Jogg (£79). Any audio interface with multiple inputs and outputs should let you undertake similar tasks to EHX's Effects Interface, albeit with a little more setting up needed.



As a visual guide, these LEDs light up when signal is present at the input L and R jacks: the more LEDs that are lit, the higher the signal level. The orange LED lights when the signal level is above -6dB, and the red LED lights when the signal is above -3dB

you use the real thing, rather than an emulation of it, if you happen to have access to such. We successfully connected up real spring reverb, tape echo unit and BBD analogue delay units.

Retaining the thought that a DAW's software effects can be of really great quality brings us to the whole idea of integrating those into your pedalboard. Taking a laptop on stage and adding computer-based plug-ins as extra sonic flavour to your pedalboard in a gigging situation might not be something that many would embrace, but the Effects interface is the tool to enable it with its single footswitch bringing in whatever you have on your computer. Effectively, using a plug-in just like a normal pedal on your 'board or utilising a software amp sim as your core sound. This requires the pedal's inputs and outputs to be used for your guitar and amp with the send/return going via USB.

To use it in this way, you set up an effects chain on one DAW track with one instance of the Effects plug-in at the start of the chain and another instance at the end of it. Latency can make its presence felt when initially using this mode, but

You can use your entire pedalboard as a DAW plug-in or add a whole different world of effects to your hardware 'board

you can reduce it to the point where it's not noticeable by opening the software's Notice Options menu and reducing buffer and block sizes.

Verdict

There are other ways to integrate pedals and DAW, maybe with the audio interface you already have if it has the spare connections. But for outright convenience, the Electro-Harmonix Effects Interface Hardware Plugin is the way to go, not least because it connects to your pedals at instrument level. It will allow you to use your entire pedalboard as a DAW plug-in or, alternatively, add a whole different world of effects to your hardware 'board with a single footswitch. If the asking price isn't too much of a stretch, it's a very useful widget to add to your toolbox. **G**



ELECTRO-HARMONIX EFFECTS INTERFACE HARDWARE PLUGIN

PRICE: £279

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: USB effects interface/hardware plug-in

FEATURES: Connection for stereo or dual mono, headphone connection, plug-in for Mac (VST3, AU, AAX) and Windows (VST3, AAX)

CONTROLS: Input faders (L&R), Output faders (L&R), headphones level

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L&R), standard outputs (L&R), standard stereo headphone output, USB

POWER: USB bus power or 9V DC adaptor (supplied) 125 mA

DIMENSIONS: 122 (w) x 146 (d) x 67mm (h)



PROS Instant bridge between physical and plug-in effects; can be used as a standard audio interface; easily operable physical controls; stereo/dual mono options

CONS Can be a bit fiddly to set up the software connections

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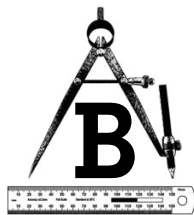
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« BLUEPRINT »

THE MIDDLE CHILD

The '62 Deluxe Amp returns to reveal why Fender's 'brown-panel' period remains one of the most intriguing chapters in amplifier history. Fender product manager, Rick Heins, joins us to tell the story

Words Charlie Wilkins Photography Lucy Robinson

Fender's brown-panel amps have always occupied a fascinating place in the company's history. Sitting between the raw grit of tweed and the familiar sparkle of black-panel designs, they offer a warmer, more mid-forward voice that really comes alive when pushed into break-up. For players who already know the appeal of these amps, the new '62 Deluxe Amp is a chance to revisit a distinctive and often underrated tone. For everyone else, it's an invitation into a part of Fender's catalogue that's often overlooked. We sit down with Fender product manager, Rick Heins, to discuss the '62 Deluxe Amp, how it came together and what makes it special.

After the success of the '62 Super Amp reissue, what made the Deluxe the next logical brown-panel amp to resurrect?

"Once we decided to do the '62 Super Amp [released last year], it felt right to round out that part of the line with a Deluxe, too. There's something really cool about bringing attention to an amp that people have heard about but few have actually played. Brown-panel amps have a very loyal following, but they're still a little under the radar compared with some of Fender's better-known classics. This amp gave us a chance to show people another side of Fender that has always been there, even if it hasn't always been front and centre."



What was Fender trying to capture by returning to this design?

"We wanted to honour Fender's history but also introduce something that has a new flavour to it. There are players out there who already know how great these amps can be, but there are plenty of people who haven't really heard what a brown-panel Deluxe can do. This amp gives them that chance. It wasn't just about copying an old circuit because it looked nice on paper. It was about making sure the character of the amp came through in a way that felt relevant to players now."

What's the first impression you wanted this amp to make?

"If someone plugs into this amp and gets that immediate reaction... that sense that the amp is doing something a little different, then we've done our job. We wanted it to feel like a discovery, not just a reissue. The big appeal is that it gives you a lot of Fender tone in a very usable package. It has warm cleans, great tremolo, and beautiful break-up when you push it. It's also lightweight and grab-and-go, so it's the kind of amp that works well in a band, in a studio or at home if you want an amp that feels alive."

"I think the first thing people notice is that it doesn't behave quite like the more familiar Fender amps they may already know. There's a different kind of warmth, and the way it moves from clean to drive feels really musical. It's responsive but not in a fussy way. It gives you enough under the fingers that you feel connected to it, which is something we wanted to preserve."

How does this amp distinguish itself from Fender's other recent reissues?

"The main thing is that this amp really has its own voice. It's not just a smaller version of something else that we've done, and it doesn't sound like the black-panel amps or the tweeds. Brown-panel Fenders sit in a really nice middle ground; they've got warmth, midrange and they have a really musical overdriven sound when you



1. Fender's product manager, Rick Heins, says that the Deluxe follows in the footsteps of last year's '62 Super reissue

2. The brown-panel amps are sought after by players for their distinctively warm sound

BLUEPRINT: Fender '62 Deluxe Amp

"It has a lot of Fender tone in a very usable package. It has warm cleans, great tremolo, and beautiful break-up when you push it"





turn them up. That middle ground is what makes it so interesting. It can be clean and elegant, but it can also get into this really rich, chewy overdrive.”

How faithfully does the Deluxe follow the original circuit?

“We tried to keep the circuit very faithful to the original, but we did make some refinements that improved usability. The tremolo, for instance, was extremely fast on the original Deluxe, so we slowed it down to give it a much better range and make it more playable. That sort of decision is always about asking what a player needs from the amp now, not just what the original happened to do. So the process is really about refinement, rather than reinvention.”

Were there any areas where modern components forced you to engineer around unavailable vintage parts?

“Most of the parts in this amp are still things you can get, so we weren’t fighting against a lot of obsolete components. The bigger challenge was making sure the circuit did what it was supposed to do and getting the speaker and tremolo right.”

The original Deluxe allows both channels to be used together. Was preserving that part of the design important?

“Yes. Both channels have tremolo and they’re in phase, just as they were on the original. That means you can use an A/B/Y setup with a clean sound on the normal channel, a driven sound on the tremolo channel, and combine the two. It’s a hidden feature that makes the Deluxe feel almost like a three-channel amplifier.”

“Our goal was to capture a great-sounding Fender Deluxe and make it more consistent from amp to amp”

Since the original Deluxe was hand-wired, was there ever a point when the team questioned whether PCB construction could deliver the sound and feel you were after?

“Not really. Personally, I’ve never had a problem with PCB sounding great. If the circuit is right and the components are right, the amp is going to do what it needs to do. What mattered to us was being meticulous about the circuit and using the original as the starting point. What mattered most to us was the sound, the feel and the way the amp responds.”

3. A lot of thought was put into maintaining the amp’s original sound in the switch from hand-wired circuitry to PCB

4. The reissue promises all the visual chic of a vintage amp with modern reliability built-in

5. Fender worked with Celestion to produce a custom speaker for the Deluxe, to deliver great cleans and powerful overdriven tones

6. Combining channels is a trick up the Deluxe’s sleeve that can make it feel more like a three-channel amplifier



When you revisited this amp, were you thinking about how it sounded when it was new, or how a vintage example sounds now?

“We just wanted it to sound great right out of the box. An old amp can be magical, but it can also be tired, noisy or just inconsistent. Our goal was to capture the zone of a great-sounding Fender Deluxe and make that experience more consistent from amp to amp. That’s a big part of what a reissue should do. It should give you the essence of the original without making you hunt for the one magical example that happens to still be in perfect condition.”

How much of the original Deluxe character depended on getting the speaker right?

“That was a big part of it. We tried a number of off-the-shelf options, but the best result came from something we developed with Celestion specifically for this amp and it made a huge difference. We wanted a speaker that would give us great cleans *and* overdrive, not just one or the other. The speaker is one of those things that can quietly make or break an amp. You can have the right circuit and still miss the mark if the speaker isn’t doing the right job. Sometimes that means taking a bit more time and doing the work from scratch.”

How closely did the final speaker need to behave like the original Alnico design?

“The original Alnico speaker from our reference amp was tired, so it wasn’t really a fair reference for the whole story. We tried a few different things, and in the end the custom Celestion just suited the amp better. The extra effort paid off because the speaker became part of the amp’s personality, rather than just a component that was inside it.”

Did developing a custom speaker mean you could go beyond what Celestion already offered?

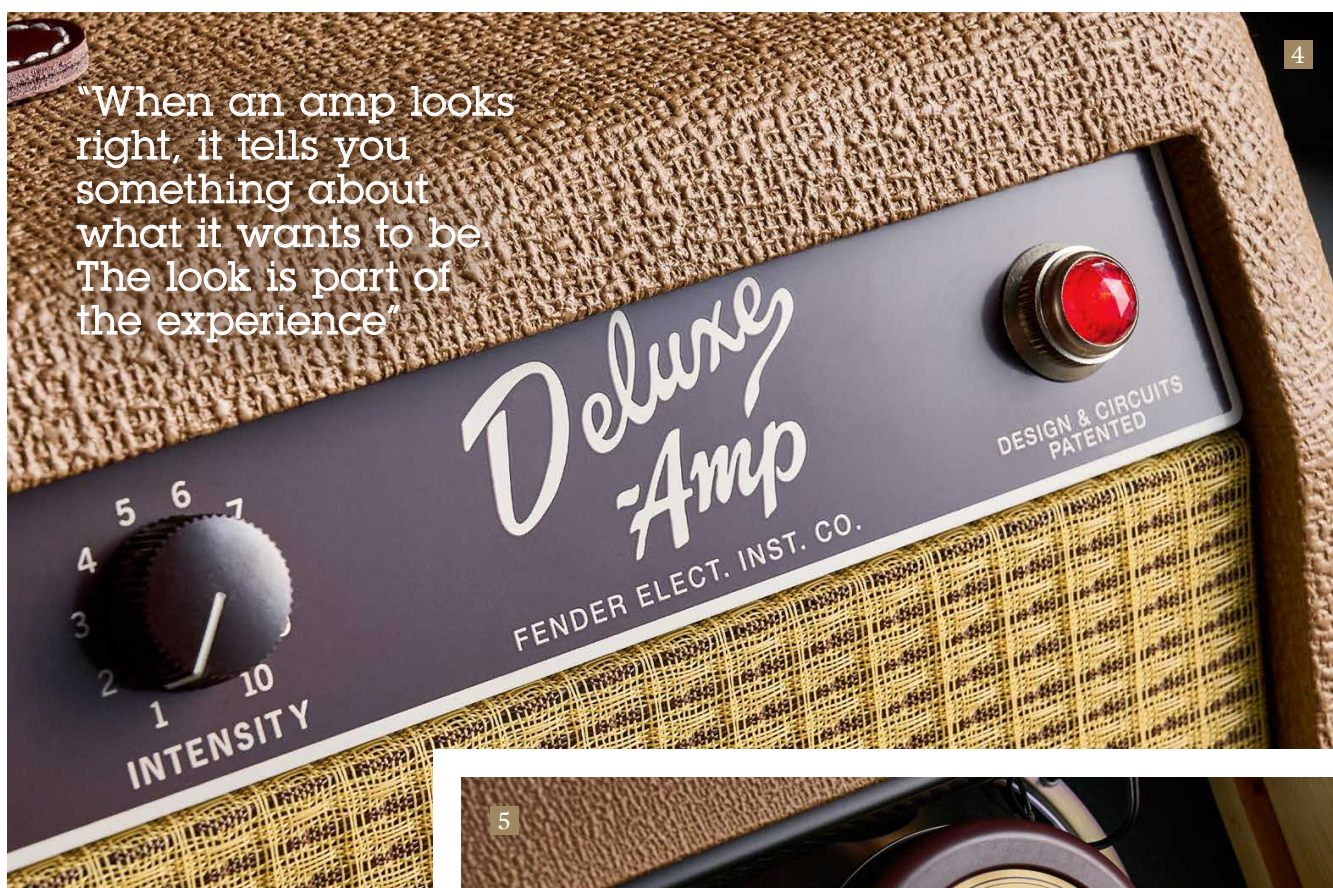
“Yes, even the speaker basket is different from anything else Celestion makes, so it brings its own character, rather than sounding like a Creamback or Greenback. We tried the V-Type, too, but to our ears the final speaker was less strident, more organic and had more of that swirling quality in the tone.”

The brown-panel look brings a lot of character on its own. How important was it to keep the visual side of the amp intact?

“Quite a lot, actually. The original brown-panel amps had a very distinctive look, so it felt right to keep that visual identity intact. When an amp looks right, it already starts telling you something about what it



"When an amp looks right, it tells you something about what it wants to be. The look is part of the experience"



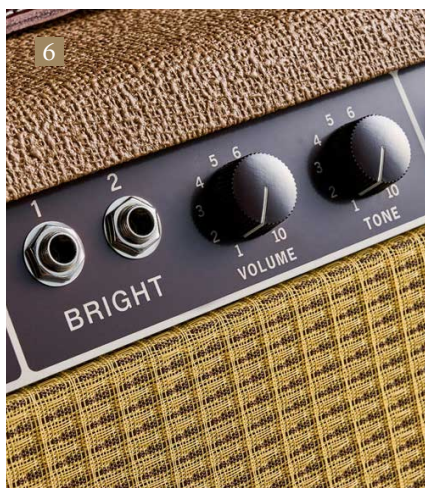
wants to be. With this one, the look is part of the experience. It helps frame the whole identity of the amp."

What do you think gives brown-panel Fenders their own distinct character?

"They've got a really special midrange warmth and a beautiful way of breaking up. They're not as scooped as black-panels and not as raw as tweeds. They sit in a very musical place, and a lot of players really respond to that when they hear it. I think that's what makes them so compelling. They don't shout in the way some amps do. They have a way of sitting in the mix and feeling natural under your fingers. When you hit the strings, they give back something that feels rounded and alive. That's a hard thing to put into words, but players know it when they hear it."

How does a vintage valve reissue like the '62 Deluxe fit alongside Fender's modern digital development?

"Fender is moving forward in a lot of directions at once, but the goal is to keep doing both the vintage tube thing and the modern digital thing exceptionally well. Those worlds aren't opposites to us. What we learn from building tube amps influences what we do with digital products, and vice versa. At the same time, it's about respecting the past without



getting stuck in it. The tube side keeps us close to the roots of what made Fender special in the first place, while the digital side lets us keep innovating and serving players in new ways."

What do you hope players take away from the '62 Deluxe?

"I hope they hear something inspiring and maybe discover an era of Fender they haven't spent much time with. More than anything, I hope it reminds people that Fender's story is bigger and more varied than the best-known chapters. If it gets more players into that brown-panel world, that's a win." 

www.fender.com



ANDY POWELL

A tale of precious 50s Flying Vs and how the Wishbone Ash guitarist's journey began with a packet of Rice Krispies...



PHOTO BY ROB MONK/TOTAL GUITAR

Andy Powell has been known for using Flying Vs in some shape or form throughout his career

What was the first serious guitar that you bought with your own money?

"It was a Burns jazz guitar. Burns hooked up with, I think, Rice Krispies and if you entered this competition on the back of the cereal box, you could win this guitar. There was no chance that I would win, although I think I did enter the competition. But, like a lot of kids in the 50s, I had a paper round and I managed to save up money.

"Somebody had won one of these guitars – this must have been about a year or two later – and wanted to sell it. So my mother pinned all the money I'd earned from the paper round to the inside pocket of my school blazer, and I went down on the train and I bought this guitar off this boy and came back on the train. And that was my first serious guitar. It was a great guitar, it was a short scale and it had a tremolo arm on it, so I was able to emulate my hero, Hank Marvin.

"Later, just before I joined Wishbone Ash, I decided I was going to go on a big adventure to Morocco overland. I'd had the guitar for a few years and played in bands with it, but I decided that I needed to travel more than I needed the guitar and I sold it. I went up to London, sold it to Macari's Musical Exchange and I believe at the time they gave me 40 quid for it, which was enough to go on this overland trip in a Land Rover with a bunch of strangers and end up in Marrakesh with food poisoning!"

"I used to collect guitars and had about 85 – I had Stratocasters from '54 through to the early 60s"

What was the last guitar you bought, and why?

"Well, I'm known for being a Flying V player, but the last really good guitar I bought was a Fender Custom Shop Stratocaster. I used to collect guitars and I had a collection of about 85, and I had Stratocasters all the way from '54 through to the early 60s. Anyway, I bought this Stratocaster and it's the closest I've found to some of the vintage ones. It's a good one, you know? It has a resonance to the body and you can get all the Strat tones out of it, and it's just absolutely brilliant. They finally figured out how to remake them. I paid way too much money for it, but it will find its way onto an album."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've had when buying gear?

"Probably the most incredible guitar I got was a '58 Flying V. Later on, I got a '59. So those two would be the most amazing guitars that I was offered. I was playing a '67-style V; different concept, really, but also a great guitar. I never realised, but they only made about 100 of [the '59s], but the '58, I think they made



ANDY'S GO-TO RIG

"I'm doing a lot of festivals in the summer, so I have gone over to using a semi-digital amp called a BluGuitar made in Germany by Thomas Blug. I can throw it in a backpack, and then no matter what speakers they give me at a festival, I can plug that in. I met Thomas and he's shown me how to do a few tweaks on it. And so, yeah, that amp with two 2x12 speaker cabs. I do prefer 10-inch speakers, to be absolutely honest with you."

"I'm using fewer pedals compared with what I used to. My main overdrive is an Analog Man King Of Tone. It's got two channels and I use one as a crunch and one as an overdrive, and then if I really want to go berserk, I bring in an Ibanez Tube Screamer on top. Then it's just a standard Boss Delay and I use an Analog Man chorus unit. Oh, I use an [Xotic] EP booster, too. I use that a lot, especially if I want to bring the level down and I want more definition for picking. I went through a whole phase of using piezo pickups on the guitar. I had some Flying Vs made with piezo pickups in the bridge, and I would often take a signal off and run that through the PA system. But these days I've found I'm going simpler and simpler. It's all about gain management: how much do you need? When do you need it?"

And how do you manage it?

"As far as guitars are concerned, I have to play a V. I mean, I have no choice!"

about 98 of them. They were subsequently sold, and I made good money on selling them. But I would say the first '58 I got, I just couldn't believe it. I think I appreciated these things as works of art, actually – as well as being guitars, they played great and they sounded fabulous."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've experienced when buying gear?

"I had two Firebird VII's. The most gorgeous-looking one that I bought was an original white Firebird VII with gold hardware, and I tried and tried to make that guitar sound good. But what had happened was, at the Gibson factory, they had put so much paint on the guitar – there was probably about 3lb of paint on that guitar – it would come off in chips a 16th of an inch thick. I tried to bring it into the stage show, but it was a thin-sounding guitar because the lacquer had simply killed the tone of the wood. I never really regretted it, I loved having it as an artefact sitting around the house, but eventually it got sold to Stephen Stills."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"Well, that would be the '58 V. I mean, I could have put my sons through college with the money from that! I could have bought a house for that! Well, times two because I had the '58 and the '59. They sounded amazing and they were great, but they had big old necks on them. Albert King had big hands, he could

master one of those things. I've got small hands, you know? So it was quite a beast, but as a thing, as a beautiful instrument, as an investment, as a piece of history, yeah, I pretty much intensely regret that."

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"Well, first of all, don't plug it in. Just put it on your knee and play it. Does it feel as if the whole thing is resonating? Is it responding to your touch? And if that's happening, then plug it into an amplifier, preferably an old tube amp, and then see if the pickups are matched with each other. Does it seem balanced? I'd say those are my two big tips. The guitar has to work acoustically, it has to give you something back."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp, or a cheap guitar and a top notch amp?

"Oh, that's a really tough question. If you were looking to make a big, good sound on stage, and you were looking to make the right kind of sound on an album, probably the amplifier would make a big difference. You could compensate for a lot of things that were wrong with the guitar with your fingers. I mean, I've got a '59 Bassman sitting over there in the corner. That's been on many albums, and if you plug a cheap guitar into that amplifier, it would sound very good." [AD]

Wishbone Ash's UK tour begins in Derby on 17 September
www.wishboneashofficial.com

For this year's festival season Andy is travelling light with a Thomas Blug BluGuitar amp



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

A brand-new Les Paul Junior VBT gets some era-specific parts upgrades and mods

Vintage-Inspired Modifications

My friend James had been gassing for a 50s-style single-cutaway Les Paul Junior and got a pretty good deal at Gibson's Garage for a sunburst VTB model. To be fair, the VTB version is more 'in the spirit of' than an accurate vintage reissue. Gibson's VSB VOS Junior ticks that box very nicely, but it costs around £2,000 more than the VBT.

Rather than break the bank, James bought the cheaper version and asked me to get it closer to vintage spec. This project isn't going to demand any advanced luthier skills and there'll be no refinishing or finish relicing. Instead, I'll mostly be swapping and upgrading parts to give the guitar a 'closet classic' look and, hopefully, a more vintage tone.

Strip Down

Since so many parts were being changed, I began by completely stripping the guitar. With no pickup, controls and tuners onboard, I couldn't resist the opportunity to put the husk in my freezer to see if I could force the lacquer to check. In all honesty, I did so more in hope than expectation and, sure enough, nothing happened.

Gibson claims to use nitrocellulose lacquer and, having stripped it for relic refinishes, I can confirm it is very combustible and it produces a camphor smell when you scrape or sand it. I'm happy to take Gibson at its word, but the nitrocellulose it uses below the Murphy Lab level contains a lot of plasticiser to prevent checking and it does that job very effectively. An inverted air duster might have worked, but James's brief was to leave the finish intact if the freezer failed.

Pots, Cap & Pickup

With the pickup disconnected and the controls removed, I grabbed the chance to measure the potentiometers. You can verify pot values by taking a resistance reading across the outer solder tags with the pot turned fully open. Both potentiometers read slightly over 500k, but I'm always bewildered by 50s-style Gibsons – such as this guitar – that aren't wired 1950s style.

During the 1950s and early 60s, Gibson wired tone controls to the centre tag of volume controls, rather than the input tag. It may seem like a minor detail, but it generally results in a more pronounced darkening of the tone when volume controls are turned down. James had sourced a paper-in-oil 'Bumblebee' replica

try out a 250k potentiometer for the tone control because they often featured in 1950s Juniors and apparently soften the treble response.

The stock P-90 was wax-potted and gauss readings also exceeded those I took from a couple of mid-50s P-90s. This suggested that the factory installed magnets are more likely to be Alnico V than mid-50s-spec Alnico II or III. Although swapping the magnets would have been simple enough, James wanted non-potted coils so he sourced a boutique pickup that was closer to vintage specs and also reliced.

Plastic Parts

In another departure from vintage specs, Gibson equips the Junior VBT with black control knobs, not gold. Similarly, the truss rod cover is a black/white laminated item, rather than one-ply black, and overall the plastics look a bit too shiny. James sourced some gold knobs and a butyrate P-90 cover and asked me to perform some light relicing on the parts.

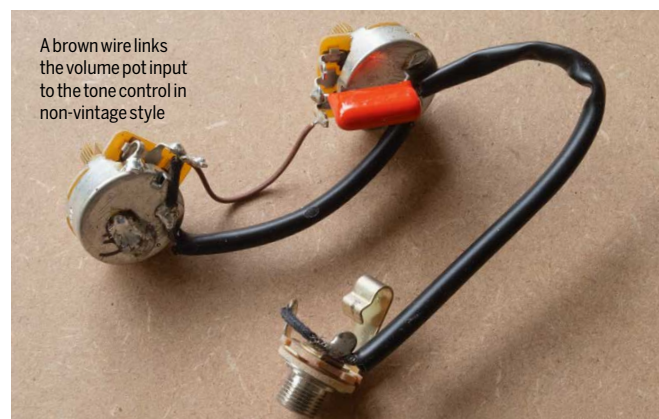
Sourcing a one-ply truss rod cover wasn't straightforward. My go-to suppliers didn't stock them and those I found online were eye-wateringly expensive. Sometimes, however, it pays to cast the net a bit wider and I eventually found one for less than £7 on Amazon UK.

Using a scraper blade, I softened the edges of the pickguard, control cover and truss rod cover and knocked back the glossiness using 0000-grade steel wool. At this point, the plastic will often look a bit too muted and so I usually give it a light polish with Meguiar's Scratch X to bring it back to a dull sheen.

"This project isn't going to demand any advanced luthier skills – I'll mostly be swapping parts"

capacitor, so I installed that 1950s style and removed the factory Orange Drop capacitor and brown jumper wire between the volume and tone pots in the process. If you find that your Gibson or Gibson-style guitar gets a little dark when you turn down the volume, take a look at the controls to see how they're wired.

Changing to 50s wiring is one of the simplest mods you can do, and if you own a soldering iron, it won't cost you a bean. Hardcore Junior fans may also wish to



A brown wire links the volume pot input to the tone control in non-vintage style



A Bumblebee capacitor is installed 1950s style with the tone control's centre tag grounded

"Changing to 50s wiring is one of the simplest (and cheapest) mods you can do"

After stripping back the guitar, Huw updated and aged its parts and wiring to bring this Junior's 50s style to life





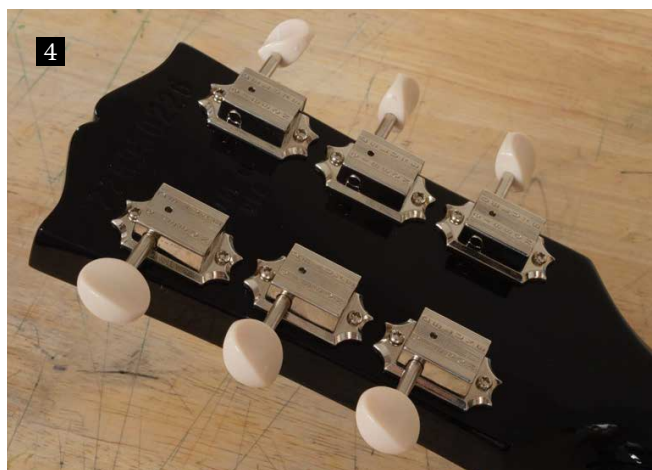
1



2



3



4

1. Gold paint is scraped away from the underside of the knobs and metallic green paint is added
2. With the 'verdigris' showing through and amber stain applied, the knobs look gently aged
3. The factory tuners have modern-style screw-down bushings and washers
4. 1950s Juniors had three-on-a-plate Klusons, rather than individual tuners

Gold top-hat knobs are actually made from clear plastic and painted on the underside with gold lacquer. I used a scraper blade to shave off the gold around the edges and applied metallic green enamel mixed with a darker green to simulate verdigris. I then used a cotton bud to apply StewMac's amber and medium brown tints mixed with diluted acetone onto the outer surface and set the pots aside to dry.

Tuner Swap

Although the factory fitted tuners worked perfectly and looked fairly good, the plan was to replace them with vintage-correct three-on-a-plate Kluson replicas and 10mm conversion bushings. This is where I ran into a slight problem because the bushing holes were not drilled in a straight line. This was deliberate on Gibson's part because if you look at vintage Gibsons with three-on-a-plate and individual tuners, the A and B strings are often in contact with the E string posts. Locating the A and B string bushings closer to the centre of the headstock solves the problem, but it

makes fitting three-on-a-plate tuner sets a bit more complicated.

Placing masking tape strips between the outer bushing holes made it easy to see how far off the centre line the A and B string bushing holes actually were. I only needed to make an adjustment of about 1.5mm, and I used a round rasp to modify the shape of the bushing hole. I did need to ream the outer bushing holes fractionally wider to get conversion bushings to go in, but I was just shaving off excess lacquer, rather than wood.

Doing so enabled me to position the tuners accurately so I could test fit the A and B string bushings. It was simply a case of filing, testing and then filing some more until the centre bushings pressed down into their modified holes. The plates covered all the original screw holes and a couple of them even lined up, but fresh holes had to be made for the other replacement tuner screws, so this isn't a modification that can be reversed without leaving telltale evidence.

Brazzing The 'Board

Another feature that distinguishes this Junior from its VOS counterpart is a far paler rosewood fretboard. Although I didn't have a VOS on hand to compare, I would imagine the feel of the 'boards must differ, too, because James's Junior had the roughest fretboard I've ever seen on

5. Placing masking tape between the outer bushing holes indicates how off-centre the centre one is

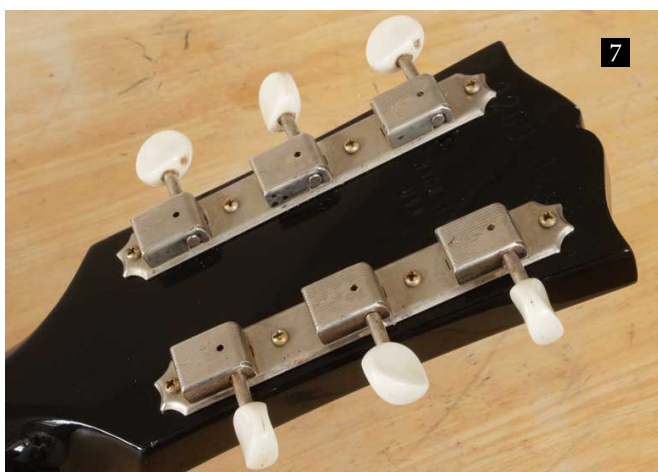
6. A one-ply truss rod cover has been fitted, and with the A and B bushing holes modified, 10mm conversion bushings are installed

7. These three-on-a-plate replica tuners look the part and work smoothly

8. Compare the rosewood at the 11th fret after scraping with the rougher wood on either side

9. A before and after shot of the fretboard after one application of dye shows the rosewood and marker dots changing colour

"Whether you approve of aged parts or not, the specs are now far closer to Gibson's VOS model for considerably less outlay"



a brand-new guitar. I can only compare its texture to dried out snakeskin leather, and there seemed to be a real prospect of getting splinters.

Sanding between frets is tricky, but scraping is fairly quick and easy. For this job, I used single-sided razor blades, which are sold online as glass scrapers. Quality can vary, but I've had good luck with Personna-branded blades. After scraping, I used 0000-grade steel wool to clean away the rosewood shavings and make the 'board even smoother.

To darken the fretboard, I used Angelus Dark Brown leather dye. I applied it with a cotton bud, taking care not to allow the dye to run over the 'board edges. The dye

is spirit based so it doesn't raise the grain like water-based stains, and once it's dried it doesn't rub off. I'd recommend wearing latex gloves to apply it because if it gets on your fingers, it won't wash off in a hurry. The dye also gave the marker dots a more vintage appearance. After it had dried, I followed up with some fretboard oil.

Junior School Report

So, has all this work actually improved the guitar? Visually, at least, it's now closer to what James wanted, but any judgement would be entirely subjective. The replacement tuners work very smoothly and tuning is stable with maybe a tad less neck heaviness.

As for the tone and playability, the guitar was pretty great from the get-go, with perfectly levelled frets and nut slots that couldn't be faulted. Then again, a lightweight mahogany body with a set neck, wraptail bridge and a P-90 is about as close to a slam dunk as it's possible to get in guitar making.

All James's guitar needed was a quarter turn of the truss rod nut to reduce neck relief. The replacement pickup is more microphonic than Gibson's and has the sweeter treble and quackier midrange you probably want from a pickup wound to vintage specs with lower gauss magnets. The 50s wiring has also made the volume control more usable.

James had already fitted a lightweight aluminium Faber wraptail bridge as well as installing a full set of reliced screws before bringing the guitar to me. Whether you approve of aged parts or not, the guitar's specs have ended up far closer to Gibson's VOS model for considerably less outlay.

That said, the VOS version is built with hot hide glue, rather than (presumably) aliphatic resin glue, and disassembling James's guitar to rectify that would have been both impractical and insane. All things considered, this has been a worthwhile project and well within the scope of most guitar tinkerers. **G**
www.huwpriceguitar.com





David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

This mid-50s cutaway model is one of only seven made by the Boston-based company

1953 Stromberg Master 400C



A super-rare 1953 Stromberg 400C cutaway model that displays high craft and superb acoustic sound

I have two Strombergs in stock: Hank Garland's Master 400 and this Master 400C, which is the first cutaway I've seen because Stromberg only ever made seven cutaways. At one time they were as valuable as 'Bursts and cost around \$100,000. This one is in really nice shape and was made in 1953, which means it's a fairly late guitar.

"Charles Stromberg and his son Elmer were the only archtop guitar builders to rival John D'Angelico, and some people will say Strombergs are better guitars. Strombergs were extremely well made, and if you look inside the body with an inspection mirror, the cleanness of the work and the bracing is very impressive.

"The choice of materials was always paramount for both builders, and they did whatever they had to do to acquire the best timber. Even so, this guitar is constructed from standard woods. There's a carved spruce top, figured maple back and sides, a very full laminated maple neck and an ebony 'board with a matching overlay on the back of the headstock that extends along the neck.

"Both of my Strombergs have 17-inch wide bodies, but the non-cutaway is a little bigger sounding. The cutaway is rarer, but rarity doesn't always equate to desirability and, although the standard body gives a bit more flavour, we're talking about subtle nuances. We did have to do some work on the old headstock overlay because it's a 3/16-inch layer of celluloid and pearl, and when that stuff off-gases it starts to come apart. This one was lifting up at the top, so we applied some hide glue and clamped it for a few

"They were craftsmen who went to work and, like guys who built furniture, were just doing their job"

days. Thankfully, it didn't shatter and came out looking good. Whenever you try and fix these overlays you're taking a chance, but we couldn't offer it for sale as it was.

"The case still contains some original correspondence between the Strombergs and the client. One letter from the Strombergs reads: 'Your letter of March 23rd arrived and I'm very pleased to hear from you again. We'd be pleased to have you come in and see us on Saturday, if that is convenient for you. We're open all day on Saturdays. Two of the models which we have at display are the Master 400 and a cutaway model.'

"The letter also says that a natural-finish guitar cost \$420 and the case was \$60. In another letter, Stromberg says: 'I'm pleased to inform you that your Master 400 will be ready for you one week from next Saturday, June 6th. I want to thank you for your patience. We realize that this is a couple of weeks late on the schedule.'

"It hasn't been played that much, but there could be various reasons for that. Reading between the lines in the correspondence, it seems like the buyer was a professional jazz guitar player who knew the right people and mentioned them in his letters. He also said that he was gigging on

the coast and he was obviously somebody of some notoriety, at least locally, because at \$420 it was a pretty expensive guitar.

"People sometimes ask me how Strombergs compare with D'Angelicos, but I couldn't take the blind taste-test. If I just heard them both on recordings I don't think I could tell the difference, and it would take a more attuned player to do so. If I'm playing amplified electrics or flat-tops I can tell, but archtops have always confused me a little and it remains my weakest area.

"What I can say is that D'Angelicos and Strombergs are on a par with one another. There are some incredible modern archtop builders, but they all come from the same lineage and I have never heard one that sounds nearly as good as a golden-era Stromberg or D'Angelico. Some people will spend up to \$50,000 to have one built, but for the same money, they could buy the real thing.

"They're not growing wood that's any better than the wood being used back then. Nowadays, everything is force dried and it's not the same. A guitar made in the 50s probably had wood cut in the 1910s or 1920s that finally made its way onto a guitar. Back then, those guys were just trying to make a living for their family and I don't think John D'Angelico or the Strombergs were wealthy men. They were craftsmen who went to work and, like guys who built furniture, they were just doing their job." **[HP]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

"Stromberg was the only archtop builder to rival D'Angelico, and some will say Strombergs are the better guitars"



The 400C features an ebony fingerboard and a carved spruce top with figured maple for the back and sides

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



Bluegrass Folk Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Martin D-15

Difficulty ★★☆☆☆ | 60 mins

WHETHER AS A SOLO INSTRUMENT

or the centrepiece of a band, the acoustic guitar continues to be one of the world's most popular instruments, in just about any style you could name. This example piece is played unaccompanied (*Blackbird*-style foot taps are optional, of course), so you're responsible for holding the whole thing together. If you take a look at the transcription, you'll see this isn't a hugely complex exercise, but keeping the alternating bass clear and regular is crucial, so tapping your foot (audibly or not) is a good idea.

I chose to use a pick-and-fingers approach, as this got more definition out of the all-mahogany Martin I used for the recording, while keeping the sweet treble response. Depending on your guitar and/or preferences, you could also try a thumbpick or simply fingerstyle.

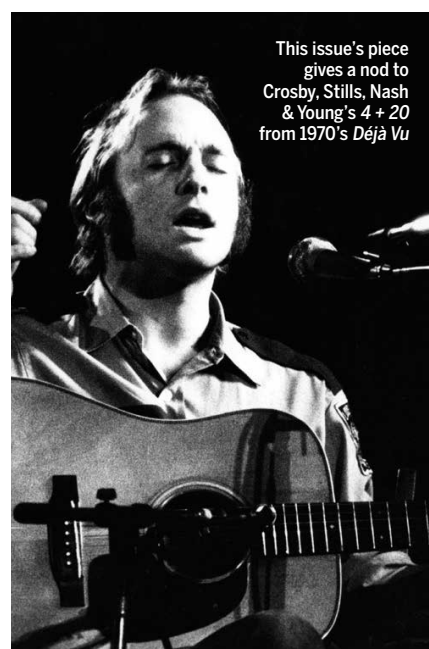
Breaking the example piece down into its component chords, we have versions of D7,

D5, F6/9 and G5 in the first section. F6/9 is a chord that will likely raise questions. This version of F uses the open third and fourth strings, so we have a G (9th) and a D (6th) respectively. As with all unusual chords, there are multiple angles from which this could be described theoretically. The simplest seems to be F6/9, rather than F6sus2, which is also correct – though neither of these names addresses the fact that the 3rd (A) is omitted! Also of note is the Em9 in the next section, which takes an influence more from the English-style folk of John Renbourn or Bert Jansch than American bluegrass, but it's a nice chord.

As with any new piece, it's best to take things slowly and patiently while the muscle-memory/conditioned reflex develops. **G**



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now to stream or buy from Amazon Music



This issue's piece gives a nod to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's 4 + 20 from 1970's *Déjà Vu*.

PHOTO BY MICK GOLD/BENEFITS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Example 1

FIRST, NOTE THAT THIS IS IN DROP D TUNING, meaning that the low E is lowered by a tone. The overall feel of this piece owes a little something to 4 + 20 by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Sometimes the bass alternates between octaves, usually wherever we're playing any kind of D chord. This changes to root and 5th for virtually everything else. One notable exception (which escaped our notice until transcribing this...) is bar 7, where the low D swaps to beats 2 and 3 of the bar. This must have helped with playing the doublestops above! It can be helpful to separate the bass notes and chords/doublestops at first, then build up to some of the more complex moments such as in bar 14. This is the only other time we break the rhythmic pattern of the bass. Lastly, be sure to slow down in the last two bars for a grand finish.

♩ = 155 D7

Let ring - - - -

F6/9 G5

E
B
G
G
D
A
D
D

1 2 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 5

Drop D tuning

The solo is written on a six-string guitar with a key signature of two sharps (D major). It consists of four measures, each containing a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The chords are indicated above the measures: D5, F6/9, Gadd11, Am7, Em9, and D5. The solo includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, triplets, and rests. The bass line is primarily composed of open strings and simple fretted notes.

Hear It Here

**CROSBY, STILLS, NASH
& YOUNG**

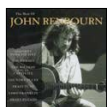
DÉJÀ VU



4 + 20 is the best style-match for the example piece, with its alternating bass fingerstyle pattern, even though this was playing in an open tuning (similar to open D). You'll hear the same alternating bass pattern (albeit strummed) in *Teach Your Children*, which is completely driven by the acoustic guitar. Elsewhere, the acoustic's presence is very evident in the title track. As an extra bonus, try to imagine waltz-style *Country Girl* without the strummed acoustic!

JOHN RENBOURN

THE BEST OF JOHN RENBOURN



This collection of tunes allows us to hear not only the inestimable John Renbourn but also his collaborations with Bert Jansch and the group they went on to form, Pentangle. Be sure to check out *Can't Keep From Crying*, *Lord Franklin* and – with the disclaimer that it may be intimidating on the first listen – *I Know My Babe*. If this collection should make you curious about what else Mr Renbourn was capable of, then we urge you to check out *Faro's Rag* from 1976's *The Hermit* as well.

**ALISON KRAUSS &
UNION STATION**

PAPER AIRPLANE



If you like great acoustic, bluegrass and blues playing, we're confident you'll love this album. Check out the title track, followed by *Lay My Burden Down*; this flatpicking style could be played hybrid or with fingers only, but the accuracy and attack from the pick is hard to beat. Another version of the alternating bass style drives album closer, *My Opening Farewell*. Also, listen out for some exemplary slide/resonator playing from the great Jerry Douglas.

Guitarist

Nextmonth



◀ MARTIN SIMPSON

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MARTIN TAYLOR

Approaching his 70th birthday, the jazz maestro looks back on his long career

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE 96

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PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON



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