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MARSHALL SIGNATURE
GREEN DAY'S 'DOOKIE'-ERA 1959BJA AMP



Guitarist

Issue 542

OCTOBER 2026

THE UNTOLD STORY OF ROBBY GALLAGHER

EXCLUSIVE!

*Inside the
Irish hero's life,
music & death
– by his brother*

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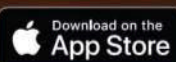
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Love And Fate



Making this month's cover story about the life of Dónal Gallagher and his brother Rory – one of the most influential guitarists of our time – is a poignant moment. As the feature explains, I was fortunate enough to aid Dónal with writing the book *Edged In Blue: A Rock 'n' Roll Odyssey with Rory Gallagher* and during the six years we worked on it the pandemic raged and subsided and, in my own life, children were born, loved ones died, serious illness was overcome and homes were switched for new ones. The work we devote our lives to is never just the work. Somehow it is also the landscape we carried the work through until we could finally lay it down at its destination. I hope you'll forgive these personal reflections because they helped me see Dónal and Rory's life in a deeper perspective as I was working on the book.

Rory's success was not just about his brilliance on guitar, it was also about his remarkable mother, Mona, who had the foresight and devotion to buy a wildly expensive (for the time) Strat for her 15-year-old son because she sensed the purpose in him and decided to nurture it, even if it meant sacrifice for herself. She was supporting the family on her own wages alone. Yet she did it. That is also an act of faith – faith that things can be not just better, but greater than anyone could have imagined, if we only back our love and instinct for good. Fans of Rory (as I most certainly am) will doubtless also feel grateful to Dónal and family for opening the doors of the past and permitting us to see scenes from an extraordinary life – not just the public triumphs we know about but a brother's perspective on the obstacles, personal costs and ultimately fatal influences that led to Rory's death, far too young, in 1995, at the age of 47.

The book took six years to write but I hope readers will agree it was worth the effort – for we understand music better when we understand how the greatest guitarists, and their loved ones, rise to meet their destiny. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



Martin Simpson
Britain's folk-guitar maestro reflects on 50 years in the business and shows us round his extraordinary collection of hand-crafted acoustics **p48**



Malina Moye
One of the most energised and exciting performers in blues-rock joins us to talk about her brand-new Kramer electric on **p110**



Richard Thompson
Brilliant, sometimes bleak, but always inspired, Thompson's music is one of our great treasures – he joined us to talk about his latest album on **p80**

Guitarist

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Storm warning



This is a shopping forecast issued on behalf of customers of Christopher Ward, Bell Street, Maidenhead. General synopsis for September 2026. **Trident Biscay Automatic.** New pressure north, occasionally backing north-west. Anodised aluminium bezel, 250 HV Vickers, moving 0 to 12. Anti-cyclonic, 360 degrees. Visibility clear. Legibility and luminosity excellent to depths of 200 metres. Movement accuracy variable, minus four, veering plus six, constant. Sales storms, force 10, imminent.

Do your research.



Christopher
Ward

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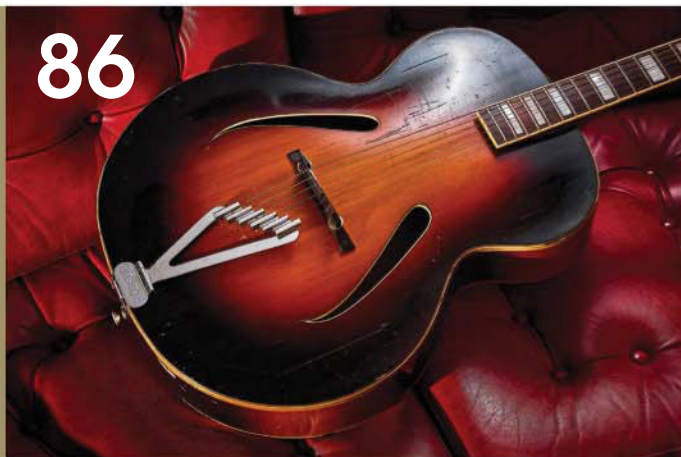


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REVIEW



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FIRST PLAY



KNAGGS KENAI-TREM
£3,398

WHAT IS IT? US-made boutique dual-humbucker solidbody with proprietary vibrato system

River Cruise

With the addition of the sustain-enhancing Chesapeake vibrato system to the Kenai blueprint, Knaggs adds versatility and a refreshing feel to its most popular solidbody design

Words Ed Oleszko **Photography** Phil Barker

Since establishing Knaggs Guitars in 2009 with co-founder marketer Peter Wolf, former head of the PRS Private Stock programme Joe Knaggs (who grew up on the same street as Paul Reed Smith) has become known as one of the US's most respected independent luthiers. In the hands of artists such as Steve Stevens, Doug Rappoport and Eric Steckel, Knaggs guitars – built largely by hand in an old baseball glove factory in Greensboro, Maryland – are renowned for their supreme build quality, eye-catching finishes and sonic prowess. The brand's key emphasis is utilising carefully selected woods and proprietary bridge designs to craft instruments that produce as much sustain and harmonic richness as possible, known as the 'Knaggs ring'.

The Kenai-Trem joins the range of well-established Kenai models (continuing Knaggs' thematic nod to North American rivers) and is part of the company's more Gibson-looking Influence series, denoting a 628.6mm (24.75-inch) scale length, rather than the more Fender-esque feeling 648mm (25.5-inch) Chesapeake range.

The Kenai-Trem's Tele-meets-Les Paul outline wears both its Maryland and Kalamazoo influences proudly, with a







1. The Kenai features a beautiful figured ebony headstock veneer and 'Morning Star' motif. Locking Gotoh Magnum lock tuners help minimise string slippage

refined take on the former's attention to detail married to a time-honoured Gibson-like construction recipe of flamed maple top, solid mahogany body, set mahogany neck with a beautifully dark East Indian rosewood fingerboard, simple clay dots and three-aside ebony faced headstock, complete with a morning star inlay. A pair of Lollar Imperial K pickups and traditional individual controls for volume and tone, plus a shoulder-mounted three-way toggle, round out the familiar theme.

The Tier 2 flamed maple top is impeccably finished in a semi-gloss three-colour 'D Allman Burst' sunburst with subtle black/white/black purfling inside

solid steel plate securely anchored with three screws to maximise body resonance transfer, married to a rear section with six solid block intonation adjustable saddles. This pivots smoothly utilising two captured ball bearings. A traditional claw, block and springs setup completes the setup round the back.

The addition of the vibrato to the standard Kenai widens the string spacing at the bridge by 4mm or so, giving a more Fender-like picking feel. It's subtle, but we felt it. It's well documented by now that Fender's nomenclature nonchalance in the 1950s blurred the lines in the correct use (or otherwise) of the terms Tremolo and

3. Beautifully sleek contours make the Kenai comfortable to play and admire

4. Lollar Imperial K pickups are a collaboration with Knaggs for a sweet vintage 'Bucker voice

The subtle purfling inside the maple 'faux' binding adds an enviable 'how did they do that?' level of craftsmanship

2. Dual volume and tone controls will be familiar to most, a hidden push/push splits the neck pickup for tonal diversity

the maple 'faux' binding, and it adds an enviable 'how on earth did they do that?' level of elegant craftsmanship.

As the name suggests, the Kenai-Trem borrows Knaggs' proprietary solid steel bridge plate and hinge vibrato system from its Chesapeake range. While not as visually svelte as Leo Fender's time-honoured design, the Knaggs Trem incorporates a





3



4

Vibrato. But as it's a core ingredient of this guitar's own appellation, the wobbly bit at the bridge is indeed a vibrato, which alters the pitch of the strings when depressed or pulled up, as opposed to modulating the volume of the signal like a true tremolo. To be fair, Kenai Vib(rato) perhaps doesn't roll of the tongue as smoothly, either. With corks duly sniffed, we pluck the Kenai-Trem from its rather executive-looking leather-edged case.

Feel & Sounds

At only 3.8kg (8.4lb), the Kenai-Trem is a well-balanced and supremely resonant instrument. The neck profile is a chunky C with a hint of shoulder removed giving a touch of a V, which very much reminds us of vintage Gibson instruments of the mid-50s.

The Kenai's sumptuous back carve melts the guitar right into your body, and even a casual unplugged strum reveals a beautifully resonant voice, plenty of snap and springy top-end balanced beautifully with the guitar's natural rich midrange and a taut low-end, pleasingly devoid of the somewhat stout honky voice of our reference Les Paul sans electric. Single notes and chords almost feel like there is a high-end studio compressor on with a very balanced attack, smooth decay and long sustain – that 'Knaggs ring' in action, perhaps?



The smooth operating Chesapeake Trem system is a joy to use



KNAGGS KENAI-TREM

PRICE: £3,398 with hard case

ORIGIN: Greensboro, Maryland, USA

TYPE: Single-cut carved top solidbody electric

BODY: 1-piece mahogany with carved maple Tier 2 top

NECK: Unbound mahogany, Knaggs C with slight V profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/ WIDTH: Graphite/42.9mm

FINGERBOARD: East Indian rosewood, clay dots, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated Knaggs Chesapeake Tremolo System, Gotoh Magnum Lock Trad locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54.5mm

ELECTRICS: Dual Lollar Imperial K covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls, push-pull neck tone pot for coil-split

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.81/8.4

OPTIONS: 3-a-side Kenai (as reviewed) or 6-a-side (Severn) headstock, varying wood tier, finish and pickup configuration options

RANGE OPTIONS: Standard non-vibrato Kenai with Knaggs Influence 2-in-1 bridge, 3x ascending Tier options

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: D Allman Burst semi-gloss nitrocellulose (as reviewed); wide range of transparent, opaque and custom options available – see website

Knaggs
www.knaggsguitars.com



9/10

PROS Sublime build quality and player comfort; superb-feeling neck; range of refined traditional solidbody sounds; super-smooth feeling vibrato

CONS Body shape might not appeal to traditionalists; shame not to have coil-splits on both pickups; we'd prefer a fully gloss finish

Plugged into a 1965 Fender Princeton Reverb set clean, the guitar's very balanced response shines through. With plenty of the warm midrange you'd expect, combined with superb clarity as notes bloom into that beautiful resonant harmonic sustain, it's Green and Kossoff heaven.

The dual Lollar Imperial K pickups have a pleasant Patent Applied For-like voice that amplifies the guitar's natural, very balanced acoustic voice faithfully, albeit perhaps not quite having the articulate vocal chewy midrange and airy top-end sparkle of our genuine reference 1950s reference Patent Applied For set in our Les Paul.

Be in no doubt, however, this guitar can still rock with the best of them. Knaggs has many artists who employ higher gain, and that heritage is clear in the smooth, muscular tones the Kenai outputs when shown some serious gain from an amp or pedal. The vibrato system, together with the superbly cut graphite nut and locking tuners, copes admirably with any Hendrix and even EVH-style wobbles, and seems to add a springy, subtle halo over notes that Strat players will be familiar with.

A quick push on the neck tone control splits the neck pickup, adding percussive snap and Hendrix-y sweetness alone, or a more semi-acoustic voice when combined with the bridge pickup in middle positions. Our only real gripe is the sonic versatility isn't continued by having a similar coil-split for the bridge pickup, which seems a glaring omission. And we're being picky here, but this vintage guitar fan can't help wondering how much better that D Allman Burst would look with a full gloss finish and 10 years of playing wear.

Verdict

Combining elements of some of the most classic designs in guitar history can be the stuff of school-time dreams, yet this is far more than a 'PRS-quality built Les Paul with a Strat trem and a Tele outline'; instead, the Kenai proudly stands on those lofty shoulders as its own unique, valid design.

A beautiful example of guitar craftsmanship, the Kenai-Trem is easily up there as one of the best modern solidbody guitars we've ever played. A wonderfully

A wonderfully resonant, alive instrument with an expanded palette of very musical and balanced tones

resonant, alive instrument with an expanded palette of very musical and balanced tones combined with slick playability and great looks – what's not to love?

Guitars of this ilk don't come cheap, and yet we think the price is justified by the meticulous build quality, wood choice, bespoke hardware and sheer quality of craftsmanship on display here. None of which would matter, of course, if it played and sounded like a dog... yet the Kenai-Trem does anything but. It's that rare beast of an instrument that immediately draws you in and feels like a long-lost friend. The Kenai-Trem is a river we'd happily take a cruise upon. **G**

A photograph of five Manson guitars standing in a row in a workshop. From left to right: a semi-hollow electric guitar, a solid-body electric guitar, a bass guitar, a solid-body electric guitar with a yellow headstock, and a semi-hollow electric guitar. All guitars have a blue and purple nebula finish. In the background, there is a large industrial machine with a robotic arm and various workshop equipment.

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*Nebula Range shown



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The old-school control layout is simplicity itself, but with the Low input it's possible to get some loud, full, ringing clean tones out of the 1959BJA. Once you've plugged into the High input, though, you'll probably forget about all that...



FIRST PLAY



**MARSHALL 1959BJA
BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG
SIGNATURE**
£3,099

WHAT IS IT? Single-channel, valve-powered guitar amplifier head with 100 watts RMS output

Screaming Blue Murder

The legendary Green Day frontman's new amp – will it be the *Time Of Your Life* or a *Basket Case*?

Words Connor Flys Photography Lucy Robinson

For anyone who grew up watching MTV in the 2000s, the deluge of mega-hit singles from Green Day's *American Idiot* was inescapable. The world was enthralled by the songwriting, attitude and visuals of the title cut, *Holiday*, *Wake Me Up When September Ends* and the epic *Jesus Of Suburbia*. But don't forget the magnificent guitar sound.

Of course, frontman Billie Joe Armstrong had years of form in that department already. The band's 1994 breakthrough album, *Dookie*, is also well-known for its tone; that sound has been replicated for several successful runs of MXR's Dookie Drive.

There's a common thread, and it's a pair of Marshall amplifiers – two Super Lead reissues that Armstrong acquired around the *Dookie* era and then had modified. These have formed the backbone of Armstrong's tight, percussive, snarling tone ever since. Over Green Day's long, highly successful career, then, these two Marshalls have left a sizable footprint on rock history.

Now, the British brand has chosen to commemorate Armstrong with a hand-wired signature amp, based on those long-serving Super Leads with their so-called 'Dookie mods'. Marshall's model

code for the 100-watt Super Lead is 1959 (nothing to do with the year; a common misconception) – so this amp becomes the 1959BJA. As expected, given its price and top-rung status, the head is put together with care and precision in the factory that's been turning out these big old amps for generations. It's a hand-wired, British-built Marshall; the componentry, assembly and finishing is all tried-and-tested.

The front panel has Master and Gain screenprinted in the style of a label-maker, a fun little touch that calls to mind modified amps of yesteryear. In the top corner, there's a commemorative plate in Marshall's trademark brass, bearing the model name, the 'Dookie' logo, and Armstrong's signature. It's a nice addition that stamps some artist personality onto the amp, without being overbearing.

Like other Super Lead models, though, the head shell's corners are unprotected. That's an oversight in terms of durability. It might not be such a worry on a normal, more functional-looking black Marshall, but do you want that tasty blue Tolex getting scuffed and torn?

Construction is gloriously traditional for the most part, then, but so is the form factor – and that's not without its old-fashioned flaws. There's one central



1. The silk-screen of Armstrong's signature sits on the rear, rather than prominently marking the front. Of course, that blue Tolex does give the game away as to whose amp this is. Just be careful with those unprotected corners...

handle on top, and the amp's substantial weight is unevenly biased – it's tilting uncomfortably against you all the time you're carrying it. Practical it ain't. But once it's sitting on a cabinet, the BJA looks cool enough to forgive it for the backache... almost.

The front panel, meanwhile, offers some clues to the amp's character before you even switch on. There are two inputs, for starters, not the Super Lead's usual four: just Low and High, for different gain stages. Importantly, there are also controls for Gain and Master Volume. These functions point not towards the Super Lead but the later JCM800. Interesting.

As for the rear panel, well, there are the speaker outputs, impedance and

mains voltage selectors, as well as a nice silk-screen of Armstrong's signature, but not much else in the way of features. In particular, the lack of an effects loop seems a notable oversight; anyone using effects will have to do so through the amp input, which severely restricts functionality for delay or reverb pedals in particular.

Feel & Sounds

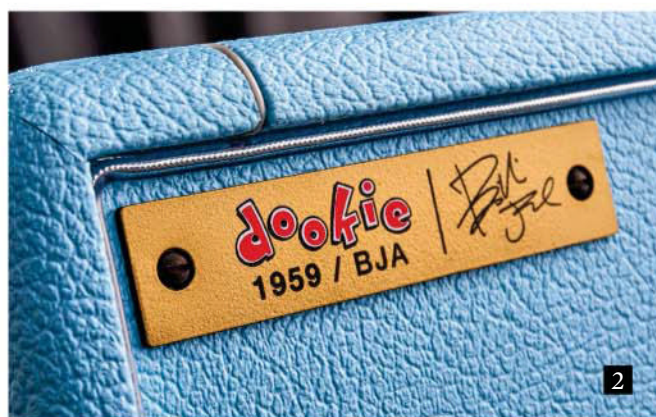
We tested the BJA through an industry-standard Marshall 1960A cab, with a humbucker-equipped Les Paul (the ideal pairing for most Marshalls) and this writer's prized 1962 SG/Les Paul Junior. Armstrong has been relying on Juniors for many years, so this is surely the most appropriate guitar to start with.

The Low input first, with Gain and EQ controls around 12 o'clock. It's a bright, punchy and ringing clean tone: classic Marshall. Winding the Gain up (and ducking the Bass down to keep the low-end tight), the BJA began exhibiting those classic 'Plexi' overdrive characteristics we know from countless recordings.

The Master volume allows this to happen at *slightly* more sensible levels. But, make no mistake, this amp is ridiculously, devastatingly, extravagantly loud. From our rehearsal room, we caused numerous earthquakes throughout Bedfordshire with the knob at a mere 10 o'clock. We once measured a dimed Marshall DSL100

2. The front of the amp features this neat little brass plate, with the instantly recognisable 'Dookie' script paying tribute to Green Day's 1994 breakthrough album. *Dookie* was the first outing for Armstrong's beloved modified Super Leads, the inspiration for the 1959BJA

3. The control panel features two controls not usually found on a Super Lead, Master Volume and Gain – they're screenprinted in the style of a vintage label-maker. Note also the pair of inputs, rather than the Super Lead's usual four





MARSHALL 1959BJA BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG SIGNATURE

PRICE: £3,099

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Valve-powered amp head

VALVES: 4x EL34, 3x ECC83

OUTPUT: 100W RMS

DIMENSIONS: 741 (w) x 210 (d) x 294mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 20.1/44.3

CABINET: Birch plywood

LOUDSPEAKER: N/A

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Presence, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master, Gain

FOOTSWITCH: None

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Front panel: 2x ¼" instrument inputs, Low and High gain. Rear panel: 2x ¼" speaker outputs (selectable impedance, 16, 8 or 4ohm)

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: None

Marshall Amplification
www.marshall.com

at 124dB, and it feels very much as though the BJA would top that. Earplugs are non-negotiable.

That's to say nothing of the High input. With the Gain only around 10 o'clock and the Master towards noon, there's already a hell of a lot of gain, the P-90 in our Junior tipping into feedback without any encouragement – but those 'Dookie' mods pay dividends, as this is the sound in every Green Day fan's head. Fat, and full of midrange punch, but with superb definition in the high-end.

At the upper reaches of the Gain knob, it's far beyond Green Day – well into classic metal territory with a Les Paul, for example. As the controls suggest, the BJA does operate much like a JCM800, and has easily as much gain available, but the voicing is still Super Lead through and through. In a word? Magnificent.

Artist signature Marshall amps don't come along all that often and, however good they are, they tend to be hard to get hold of – often amounting to little more than catnip for collectors, buying them to speculate while the general public gets barely a sniff. That may well prove to be the case here, too. But does this amp deserve better?

Yes, it's far too loud for almost any situation short of Green Day's stadium tours. Yes, it's highly impractical and inflexible, lacking any modern conveniences whatsoever; forget power

scaling or reactive load, it doesn't even have an effects loop. The most modern feature is the Master Volume.

If it were a series production amp, this would certainly be a limiting factor in its appeal, but the market for this hand-wired status symbol likely won't care. And if you do happen to get into a room with one, and a decent guitar, you tend to forget about all that as it pulverises your brain and eardrums – into *Brain Stew*, if you will.

Make no mistake, this amp is devastatingly, extravagantly loud. Earplugs are non-negotiable

This review might be academic for many, who wouldn't have any use for such an amp even if it were attainable. Imagine if it were a readily available 20-watt Studio model with the same voicing, though. We can but dream.

Verdict

The 1959BJA is the first artist-signature Marshall amp in over a decade, and it might remain out of the grasp of many – but the modified Super Lead tone, in a format that apes the master-volume JCM800, is truly a magnificent playing experience. Try it, if you can. **G**

8/10

PROS Cool aesthetic; hand-wired quality and credibility; circuit design, combining Super Lead tones with JCM-style functionality; awe-inspiring sounds

CONS Even with a master volume, it's far too loud to be practical for most; an effects loop and some corner protectors wouldn't have gone amiss; likely a collector's item first, player's amp second

FIRST PLAY



**MARTIN SHAWN
MENDES 000-10E**
£1,069

WHAT IS IT? Mid-priced
Auditorium-size electro
signature model

Eagle's Flight

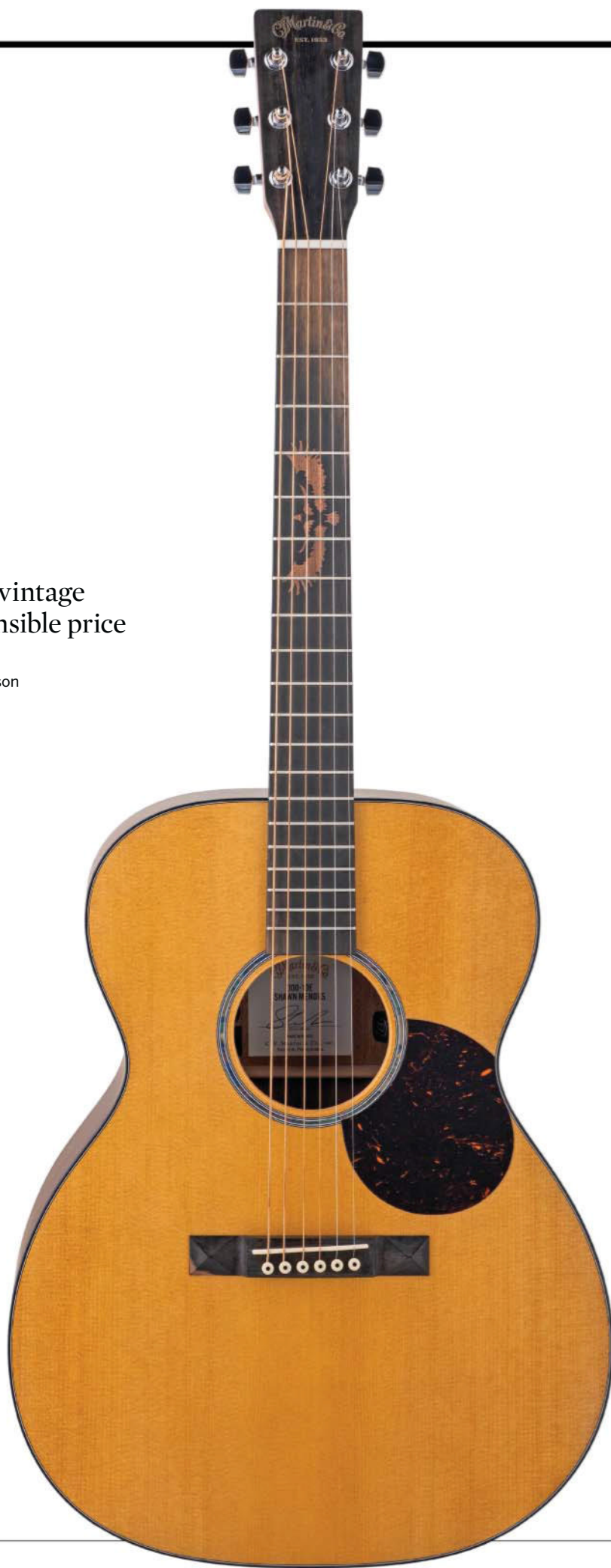
A big-voiced workhorse with vintage vibes and star appeal for a sensible price

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Lucy Robinson

Like the Jason Isbell 0-10E that crossed our path recently, this tidy 000-size guitar, honouring the hit Canadian songsmith Shawn Mendes, is loosely based on a pre-war Martin that the artist himself owns – and blends vintage styling with modern functionality at a price everyday players won't instantly balk at.

The 000 body shape is one of the best-loved platforms in the Martin canon, being favoured by everyone from Clapton to Mendes himself. While it resembles Martin's equally famous OM model, the 000's scale length is slightly shorter at 632mm (24.9 inches) as opposed to 645mm (25.4 inches), giving a slightly looser, more relaxed playing feel than the OM (at a given tuning and with the same strings). That's made it a favourite with fingerstyle players and trad bluesers over the years, with bends and delicate fingerwork all falling easily to hand.

Like many mid-price acoustics, the Shawn Mendes 000-10E features a solid spruce top with solid sapele back and sides. Sapele is a commonly used, cheaper alternative to mahogany with broadly similar tonal qualities and appearance, hence it finds its way onto a lot of guitars in this price bracket and does them no disgrace.







1

1. The onboard tuner sits just inside the lower edge of the soundhole and tracks pitch adjustments positively and accurately

2. The eagle inlay on the fretboard matches a tattoo Shawn Mendes has – and is, considering it depicts a large bird of prey – surprisingly inobtrusive, visually

Because this 000-10E is loosely based on a rare pre-war Martin, it's been given a bit of a vintage glow-up. For the first time on a Road Series guitar, for example, we get that lovely archaic-looking straightline bridge with crisply carved pyramids at either end. The faux tortoiseshell scratchplate, too, is patterned on that of Mendes' pre-war 000. So much for tradition, however, because there's also an eagle inlaid into the fretboard that's based on one of Mendes' tattoos. Eat your heart out, PRS.

As a modern electro, we also get the Martin E1 pickup system and a built-in tuner, too, which definitely aren't to be found on Mendes' pre-war 000. Martin doesn't specify if the FSC-certified spruce top is Sitka or some other type, but the amber toner used on it gives it a suitably vintage look, while scalloped spruce bracing does its usual job of balancing strength with ample resonance.

The neck, meanwhile, is made from what Martin calls 'Select Hardwood' – a catch-all term that typically means a tropical hardwood, such as sipo (sometimes called utile) or sapele, that performs a role similar to true mahogany at a lower cost. The vagueness of the term is intentional, allowing Martin to switch supplies sustainably and interchangeably without having to revise product descriptions.

The ebony 'board's 20 frets are tidy, though the fret slots are cut quite deep and filler is very faintly visible under some of the fret ends. The enclosed chrome tuners are perfectly effective, though we do wonder if an open-gear set would have looked the part better alongside that vintage bridge. The nut, meanwhile, is made of white Corian, while the saddle is white Tusq, which is compensated for accurate intonation through clever shaping of its top edge.



2



Its strong, appealing sonic personality is not the subtlest, but harmonious and clear with a good amount of power

Feel & Sounds

Straight out of the box, this 000-10E has a fairly high action, measuring just under 3mm on the high E side at the 12th fret, so a little extra effort is required to get around the fingerboard, though a quick truss rod tweak would remedy that niggle and the 44mm nut width gives decent room for fingerstyle playing. The neck has what you might call a 'happy medium' feel. The Performing Artist profile is not skinny, not clubby, just familiar and comfortable, while the guitar voices and intonates single notes and chords clearly and holds its tuning well once the strings are played in a bit.

Strumming the 000-10E in standard tuning, we're surprised to find it has quite a bold voice, louder and more bassy than many guitars of its size, with a crisp midrange. In fact, it almost comes across like a mini dreadnought, though it lacks some of the breathy sweetness that really good Auditorium-size guitars often have. Overall, it's a guitar with a strong, appealing sonic personality – not the subtlest, but harmonious and clear with

3. Solid sapele is used for the back and sides of the instrument, as a quality substitute for true mahogany

4. The contemporary, sealed tuners are effective and perfectly decent but we would love to have seen what vintage-style open-gear tuners looked like on this model, considering its pre-war-style bridge

Martin's straight-edge bridge with pyramids was first introduced on their guitars around 1850



MARTIN SHAWN MENDES 000-10E

PRICE: £1,069
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Auditorium-size '000'
TOP: Solid FSC-certified spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid sapele
MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm (4")
MAX BODY WIDTH: 381mm (15")
NECK: Select Hardwood, Performing Artist profile
SCALE LENGTH: 632.4mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Enclosed chrome
NUT/WIDTH: Corian/44.45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony straightline pyramid pattern/55mm
ELECTRICS: Martin E1 pickup system; phase switch; tuner
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.88/4.1
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: If your budget will stretch there's the USA-made Martin Standard Series 000-18 (£3,099). For star-affiliated Road Series fingerpickers the Martin 0-10E Retro Jason Isbell is excellent (£1,075)
LEFT-HANDED: Yes, 000-10E Shawn Mendes LH

Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.martinguitar.com

8/10

PROS It's a stage-ready Martin with a big voice and vintage details at a fair price

CONS Not the subtlest Auditorium-size acoustic we've played; minor setup niggles

a good amount of power. It's a guitar we'd trust to get the point across on a live stage.

Lastly, we come to the amplified sounds. You plug into the guitar via a baseplate that also houses the battery compartment next to the guitar's endpin. This is a good system that obviates the need to fish around inside the guitar when it's time to replace the battery and also ensures the strap button doesn't need to be oversize to accommodate a jack input – we've found these a pain to push strap eyelets over and prefer the more standard button used here.

Very much a modern performer's guitar, its assertive voice is more 'festival' than 'folk club'

As tested through the acoustic preamp setting of a Blackstar Beam Mini, and also through a Roland Cube Street II, the amplified voice of the guitar is clear and reasonably natural-sounding for an under-saddle piezo pickup. Judicious

EQ tweaking of the mids in particular allowed us to dial in a warm, balanced tone with little to no piezo 'quack'. The chromatic tuner, whose display sits just inside the lower rim of the soundhole, tracks well and gives a nice positive reading. It's activated using the control panel inside the upper edge of the soundhole, which also houses the tone control (which acts more like a bass/treble balance adjuster) and volume dial, plus a phase switch for suppressing problem feedback frequencies.

Verdict

Despite its hip vintage vibe, the Shawn Mendes 000-10E feels very much a modern performer's guitar and its clear, assertive voice is more 'festival' than 'folk club'. Some of the styling choices seem to be pulling in different directions, such as the modern tuners, eagle inlay and the vintage bridge, but it's a fairly priced guitar with custom-style touches and strong workhorse potential – and you won't have to be a fan of Mendes to appreciate its power and utility. **G**



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FIRST PLAY



**DOD DRAG
ANALOG DELAY**
£199

WHAT IS IT? Analogue delay pedal with added performance features



Joy Ride

DOD builds on the legacy of its Rubberneck with a new analogue delay that's sure to get your attention

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. The Curve button is used to change the Drift Curve (tap), Friction mode (hold for one second) and Bypass mode (hold for two seconds)
2. Dial in the modulation depth and speed with the Drift knob. The pedal artwork shows three segments: light, medium and heavy. It also indicates whether the pedal is active or bypassed
3. You can set the onset and recovery attack dynamics for delay time warping with the Friction knob. It's split at the centre position for two separate (LED colour-coded) modes

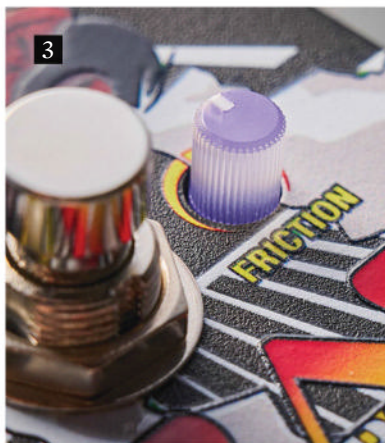
Analogue delay continues to be a popular choice for guitar players due to its ability to blend so well with guitar tone. The latest iteration to hit our pages is the Drag from DOD, a brand that has previous form in the area with its Rubberneck pedal, which featured footswitchable performance features, including an eponymous control that gives a momentarily octave-up or -down pitch shift of the repeats. Performance features seems to be what the Drag is all about and DOD has themed these after anime motorcycle manoeuvres, particularly the Akira Slide where a red motorcycle skids to a smoking, sideways halt (hence the pedal's artwork). These effects – triggered by a footswitch-hold and adjusted with the Friction knob – can be the aforementioned Rubberneck, plus the SlideStop for a pitched-down effect, and Evade, which is meant to emulate a skidding sound.

Putting those effects aside for one minute, the pedal functions as a standard delay from basic doubling and slapback up to longer delays of 750ms. Alongside adjustable delay Time, Level and Feedback, there's crucially a Filter knob to set the EQ of the repeats – roll it back to subdue the top-end. The repeats are typically analogue in that they degrade organically and are voiced with enough top-end for them to cut through as needed, but the Filter control can really darken them up for a pleasant mushiness as they blend in. You can add modulation to the repeats with the Drift knob. There's a choice of four curves (Sine, Reverse Saw, Square, Random) with variation from a slight chorusing to a full-on wobble.

While tweaking the four main knobs isn't a chore, setting up the modulation and modes can be a faff as you keep track of LED colours to see where you are, but you can throw in a range of pitch-shift curveballs if desired. If you like momentary off-the-wall effects, these will be right up your street, although you'll still have to twist the Feedback knob by hand for a runaway oscillation effect unless you add the FS3X footswitch, which will also give you tap tempo.

Verdict

The performance modes are this pedal's unique feature and will hold an appeal for some players. But beyond the razzamatazz let's not lose sight of the fact that, at its heart, the Drag is a decent BBD analogue delay pedal with plenty of cool modulation variation. **G**



THE RIVALS

Another analogue delay with extra features is the Beetronics Bee Bee Dee (£279) whose Lo-Fi mode and particularly the Pitch mode take you well beyond the conventional analogue delay functionality. Boss markets the DM-101 (£399) as the "ultimate analog[ue] delay", featuring 12 unique modes, stereo operation, tap tempo and onboard memories. There's plenty of love for the EHX Memory Man, the original analogue delay with modulation from the 70s still going strong today in various versions, particularly the Deluxe Memory Man (£219). The MXR Carbon Copy (£159) offers a popular pedalboard-friendly take on analogue delay with modulation, too.



DOD DRAG ANALOG DELAY

PRICE: £199

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue delay pedal

FEATURES: Selectable bypass modes (True bypass, Tails on, Tails on + dry kill), Reversible baseplate (rubber or Velcro), 60ms to 750ms delay time, provision for a FS3X triple footswitch

CONTROLS: Time, Level, Feedback, Filter, Drift, Friction, Curve switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, Standard output, FS3X footswitch input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 120mA

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 120 (d) x 50mm (h)

440 Distribution

0113 2842342

www.dod.com



PROS Compact size with connectivity in the right place; solid analogue delay sound; Filter (EQ) knob; adjustable modulation

CONS Setting up via the Curve knob and coloured LEDs is confusing; tap tempo is only available with an added FS3X footswitch

FIRST PLAY



THORPYFX KUDU
£209

WHAT IS IT? Overdrive pedal from esteemed UK builder designed to make everything sound better



Leaps & Bounds

Named after a huge antelope, the colourful new ThorpyFX drive pedal is a versatile tone-enhancer designed for stacking

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Lucy Robinson

1. The Clip switch offers three clipping options: Soft, Hard and Soft+, which were specifically chosen to complement certain types of amp

2. This is the standard footswitch, but for an extra £10 you can add a colourful and larger Kudu or ThorpyFX footswitch topper

3. The aptly named Bite knob has the ability to help your sound cut through as it adds top-end presence turned clockwise

Following a trend started by the Hanami pedal, this latest offering from ThorpyFX has a colourful paint job that doesn't follow the usual military theme. It's named after a South African antelope called the Greater Kudu because, as Adrian Thorpy told us in issue 539's Blueprint feature, "it makes everything greater".

What you're getting here is a drive pedal that started out as a modified MXR Distortion + but in the design process evolved into something with much more versatility – while still being easy to use. That versatility comes about via a choice of three toggle-switched clipping options that basically set the pedal for optimal operation depending on what amp you're using. Besides this, the usual Drive and Volume knobs are complemented by a Bite knob for EQ functions. Now, we kid you not, but there's a South African sport of 'kudu dung spitting' where the winner is the contestant who can spit a pellet of kudu dung the furthest distance. A bite is the last thing you'd want in that situation... But with *this* Kudu's dirt, the Bite knob is essential as it adds in presence and treble, really focusing the tone.

The Soft clipping option provided by silicon diodes offers drive with squidgy compression as a direct contrast to the more in-er-face LED-driven Hard clipping, while the Soft+ option delivers elements of both to our ears. All of this means that whatever amp you're using – clean or already compressing and saggy – there's a setting here to complement it. The actual gain ranges from clean through to a medium gain that'll make a clean amp at bedroom levels really sing, and there's strong clarity at all levels as well as great touch-sensitivity and clean-up characteristics. The transparency that sees the Kudu blend with any amp also translates to stacking with other dirt pedals where it'll slot into a pedalboard and give them extra dimension.

Verdict

Truly an amp improver, this ThorpyFX pedal can offer those subtle shifts in perspective that you'd instantly miss if you turned it off. Beyond that always-on capability, the Kudu could be your go-to switchable asset that moves the game up a level when needed, either as your primary drive pedal or as a gain-stacking adjunct to other dirt pedals for boosts and enhancement. It's endowed with a versatility that will deliver a positive sonic contribution to any rig or pedalboard. **G**



THORPYFX KUDU

PRICE: £209

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Level, Bite, Drive, Clip switch (Soft/Hard/Soft+), Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 30mA

DIMENSIONS: 65 (w) x 125 (d) x 53mm (h)

ThorpyFX
www.thorpyfx.com



10/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; three clipping options, potent Bite control

CONS Nothing



THE RIVALS

Let's look at some more drive pedals that are equipped with more than one type of clipping. EarthQuaker Devices' Plumes (£125, right) is a Tube Screamer-style pedal that offers three options: symmetrical LED clipping, asymmetrical silicon diode clipping and a no-clipping option that delivers wide open op-amp drive for clean boost. The Wampler Pantheon (£179) is a Bluesbreaker-style pedal with a three-position Overdrive Voice switch that selects between hard and soft clipping or a mix of both; it also has a three-way Gain Level switch. The MXR Timmy (£139) has a Clip switch that provides three different clipping styles.





Gas Supply

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

Fender 75th Anniversary Collection Telecasters **From £789**

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

JARGON CRUNCHING **Heirloom Finish**

First rolled out for 2025's American Ultra Luxe series, the Heirloom finish offers a more understated, lighter ageing effect. The subtle checking to the nitrocellulose lacquer is in line with the way a guitar's finish deteriorates without the beating. Perfect if you want authenticity without screaming, 'Road Worn!'

Why so many Teles?

It might have escaped your attention that 2026 marks 75 years since the introduction of the Telecaster. Astonishing as that might be – along with the realisation that The Beatles' first releases are now equidistant to the turn of the 20th century as they are to the present day – it's actually been longer than 75 years since the world first clapped eyes on that formative electric guitar shape. But to celebrate three-quarters of a century of what many consider to be Leo Fender's finest (and earliest) success, Fender has announced its next wave of commemorative guitars.

Hang on, one of them doesn't say anything on the headstock...

Correct! That's because before the Telecaster came the Broadcaster. As mentioned in these pages before, great minds were clearly thinking alike because Gretsch (at that point having no affiliation to Fender, unlike today) had also chosen the Broadcaster name for its drum kit – a line that still remains in the Gretsch Drums catalogue today. In a move that now seems entirely implausible, the titan of twang fired off a polite request to Fender via telegram and the Broadcaster name was abandoned.

75TH ANNIVERSARY

Tele addicts will already know that 2026 marks the 75th anniversary of the Telecaster. This wave of releases is the second to mark the occasion this year, and the Tele also shares its birthday with the Precision Bass

PLAYER II MODELS

If you can't stretch to the elusive Nocaster, consider the Player II Anniversary models, which deliver the contemporary playability and stability required for a busy workhorse but are adorned in popular 50s finishes

BARITONE TELECASTER

We're seeing an upturn for down-tuning, and the Tele is perfectly primed for Spaghetti Westerns, surfing and shoegaze. With a 686mm (27-inch) scale length, it comes set for B-to-B tuning. Just add reverb





NOCASTER

Devoid of markings on the headstock aside from the Fender decal, the Nocaster reissue (below, far left) celebrates the Tele's wilderness period as an addition to the American Vintage II line up

Sounds familiar... so what did Fender call it?

For a short period, nothing. These guitars are known as Nocasters because they fall into the nameless transitional period post-Broadcaster, pre-Telecaster. Before 1951 was out, the Telecaster came along and absolutely nothing of note has happened ever since. The guitar pictured (opposite, far left) is the 75th Anniversary American Vintage II 1951 Nocaster (£2,899), and it comes fitted with a number of period-correct appointments including a U-shaped neck profile, ash body with Blonde, Heirloom nitro finish, a 184mm (7.25-inch) radius and Anniversary Blackguard Telecaster pickups.

The Player II models combine contemporary features and playability with classic visuals

I see some in funky colours there, too.

Fender might have rattled a few cages of late, but when it comes to anniversaries, it isn't all about the high-end and collectors. Also newly announced is the 75th Anniversary Player II Telecaster (£789, opposite centre). Don't let the retro 50s colours (Daphne Blue, Sea Foam Green, Candy Apple Red and Aztec Gold) fool you; everything else about these guitars is designed to bring contemporary features and playability in combination with those classic visuals. As such, they have the standard Player II menu of alder body, C-shaped neck with a 241mm (9.5-inch) radius 'board, six block saddle bridge and Alnico V pickups.

That's more accessible! What's the other one?

As you might have noticed, there's been quite a resurgence in baritone guitars in the past couple of years. But before you start running to grab your Quad Cortex and relearn your modes, we should point out that the 75th Anniversary Baritone Telecaster (opposite, far right) falls towards the more classic end of the baritone canon than the bearded side. It's also a Player II model, but it sticks to the Tele-prompt with the same appointments as the Player II model above, with a couple of exceptions. Obviously, it's a longer scale (686mm/27 inches) tuned B to B as standard, and it comes in a choice of four finishes: 3-Color Sunburst, Black and Lake Placid Blue models (£889) come with an alder body, while the Butterscotch Blonde version (£979) is packing an ash torso. All models are available now. [SW]

ALSO OUT NOW...

MARSHALL HENDRIX 60TH ANNIVERSARY £129 TO £1,749

Remember the JMH half-stack and Fuzz Face set from a few issues ago? If the £3,799 price tag left you lacking Experience, then here's your second chance. Marshall continues its celebration of 60 years of association with Jimi Hendrix with the announcement of the JMH Studio Bundle (£1,749), alongside Hendrix-themed versions of its Emberton III Bluetooth speaker (£149) and Major V Bluetooth headphones (£129). The amp puts the Jimi-flavoured 1959 into a more manageable (and affordable) 20-watt format, and it's switchable to five watts. Two EL34s drive the output and, as with the bigger version,

you get jumpable channels, an effects loop and a JMH 212 speaker cab. Of course, all three products are finished in the same Purple oil-in-water graphics. Available now. www.marshall.com



LINE 6 HELIX STADIUM NATIVE £399

You can't move your amp without bumping into a premium modelling unit these days, but if you want to get a taste of Line 6's flagship Helix Stadium without the need for hardware, the modelling pioneer has just dropped the solution. The Line 6 Helix Stadium Native plug-in places 27 of the brand's Agoura amp models (with a combined 55 channels), alongside 111 HX amps, 46 cabs and 274 effects straight onto your desktop. As well as the core sounds, Helix Stadium Native can load Line 6's Proxy amp clones and exchange presets between the software and hardware perfectly. The final icing on the cake? You can get a free Intro version, which gives a sample of everything mentioned above.

www.line6.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: Amani Burnham

Album: *Roots & Wings* (Blind Pig Records)



Amani Burnham's 12-track debut was recorded at Connecticut's Carriage House Studios
www.amaniburnham.com

Picking pretty much exclusively with just his thumb, Amani tracked the album with his Mexican-made white Strat

Though he's only 21 years old, Ethiopian-born and Connecticut-raised singer and guitarist Amani Burnham plays with the kind of conviction and flair you'd expect from a seasoned legend. On his debut album, *Roots & Wings*, he's channelling the greats with effortless ease using just his thumb, a Strat, some fuzz and a Fender combo – notably with a great degree of success. If you've been searching for the next Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan, look no further.

Pride & Joy

It was Amani's father who introduced him to the sounds of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Ray Charles. Hearing Chuck Berry for the first time, however, is what set him on the path towards blues greatness. "My first guitar hero was Chuck because of his stage presence as well as songs," smiles Amani. "That's when I realised I wanted to pick up the guitar and start having lessons. I got into Jimi and Stevie around high school. With Jimi, I was transfixed by his stage presence and confidence: there's a live version of *The Things I Used To Do* from the Newport Pop Festival in 1969, which was one of his best solos. It just went on and on and sounded very moving."

Vibing With Pedals

The main rig for the album was 2021 Mexican-made Fender Stratocaster through a Fender combo with a Jim Dunlop Fuzz Face. There was also a Vox wah and a

Tube Screamer to add a more controllable kind of dirt in places. "My producer had a Uni-Vibe to create that watery sound," says Amani. "I've since been in contact with Pedal Pawn in England and started using their Gypsy Vibe. They're a great company if you're into classic blues tones. Everything was done on my Strat, which is special to me because it was my second full-sized guitar, except for the Epiphone Les Paul used on *Bleeding Heart*."

Feeling The Way

The minor pentatonic goes a long way for the blues, admits Amani, but the major pentatonic is also an important ingredient to the sound. Using both together can be really fun, he notes, especially for a Mixolydian sound. "Beyond that, I don't think about scales," he admits. "I just mess around and try to find things that will sound cool when I go to the IV chord. Legato is a big part of my approach. It's good to be able to play fast, but players should remember that they don't need to do that all the time. You can hold one note and make it sound meaningful. I prefer to play with feel."

Drive Time

Amani cites the opening instrumental track *Fastlane* as his favourite guitar moment on the debut record thanks to its blend of pace and Texan twang. "It has two solos and a breakdown," he adds. "I love how the leads turned out. It probably came from the SRV approach. It's very driving and had the extra crunch from the Tube Screamer. As for riffs, I think *Lovers Till They Die* is my favourite. It's not heavy, but it's an unusual riff that I love playing thanks to its super-cool sound."

Beyond Comparison

Given some of the tones heard on his debut album, the Hendrix and SRV comparisons are to be expected. This is just the beginning of the journey, however; there's a lot more to come from Amani Burnham. "I knew I would hear those comparisons a lot," he shrugs. "I have a large backlog of songs that sound nothing like Jimi or Stevie and more like Thin Lizzy. My style is quite reminiscent of Phil Lynott. I like the ballads and funk pop ideas as much as the riff stuff. So I'm not too worried. Down the line I will show people I can do more." **[AS]**

Standout track: *The Last Thing I Remember*

For fans of: Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimi Hendrix, Albert King



UNDER MY THUMB

Why Amani Burnham chooses to play without a pick

"I play with just my thumb, I don't really bother with the other fingers," he explains. "The thumb felt more comfortable, there was more of a natural instinct for both upstrokes and downstrokes. I don't think it's that uncommon if you look at players like Wes Montgomery. If there's a wider line, like a *Blackbird*-style idea, I might use my first finger to play the higher melody while the thumb handles the bass notes. Most of the time, my thumb is all I need."

"I hear those [SRV and Hendrix] comparisons a lot, [but] I have a large backlog of songs that sound more like Thin Lizzy"





Albums

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



Steve Vai and Joe Satriani voyage on *The Sea Of Emotion*

SatchVai

The Sea Of Emotion

earMUSIC (available 6 November)



Two instrumental giants go head-to-head

Although it feels as if they've been joined at the hip over the years – from Joe Satriani giving Steve Vai lessons in the early 70s through to various G3 tours alongside other world-class talents – this debut is actually the first time these two instrumental greats have written together. The 10 tracks that make up *The Sea Of Emotion* take the listener on a journey that's less metal than what Vai is usually known for and is also less bluesy for Satriani – the sign of a true collaboration. You can certainly hear the DNA of both guitarists in the mix though; perhaps the most exciting prospect is how they deviate from the norm, each player treading new ground and bringing out different flavours from the other.

There are twists and turns on tracks like *Dancing*, *The Feeling I Know* and *Old Sins Have Long Shadows* that will excite just about any fan of instrumental guitar music, not just in terms of technical flair but also in songcraft and composition. It's their combined dedication to otherworldly soundscapes and melodies that's often the most impressive thing on display here. Deep Purple legend Glenn Hughes lends his dulcet tones to *I Wanna Play My Guitar*, still effortlessly hitting those high notes in his mid-70s, and by the time you arrive at the closing ambiances of the final title track, it's hard not to marvel at the sheer scope and ambition of this release. Given their contributions to the guitar world over the last four decades, however, this was always destined to impress. **[AS]**

Standout track: *The Sea Of Emotion Pt. 2*

For fans of: Jeff Beck, Michael Schenker Group, Frank Zappa

Johnny Marr

The Age Of Everything

BMG (available 2 Oct)



Pristine outpourings from the ex-Smiths six-stringer

The Age Of Everything is Johnny Marr's fifth full-length solo release and he describes the 10 tracks as "the most cathartic songwriting" of his career. The album was written in London and then polished on a tour of the East Coast of the US late last year before recording took place in Manchester. Marr has never been one for holding court with extended guitar solos, it's always been about the craft of songwriting and the layering of his trademark rhythm guitar jangle. Tracks like *How Come* and *Just Once More* spotlight this skill where the guitar plays an all-important cinematic foil to each song's melody. The singles that prelude the album's release, *Spin*, *Ophelia* and *It's Time* offer up clues to the songwriting on display here and the album features even more treasure. Practically perfect indie-pop! **[DM]**

Standout track: *In And Out Of Love*

For fans of: The Smiths, Oasis

Yngwie Malmsteen

Hell Or High Water

Music Theories Recordings/Artone Label Group (available 13 November)



The Swedish virtuoso still reigns supreme decades on

Though Ritchie Blackmore and Uli Jon Roth were among the first electric players to inject classical finesse into rock, it was Yngwie Malmsteen who took the idea and ran with it in the mid-80s, cementing his place as the godfather of neoclassical guitar. This latest full-length album is to the brim with harmonic minor runs, baroque pedal points and scorching arpeggios delivered with total control and endless conviction – as you'd expect, it's the sound of a Strat on steroids paying homage to Paganini, Bach and Vivaldi. Highlights include opening track *Now Or Never* and *He Is (Living A Lie)*, which also showcase the man's vocal talents. The grand finale *Father*, sees Malmsteen using slower harmonised melodies to convey sadness, grief and pride over an emotionally supercharged seven-and-a-half minutes. Inspired stuff! **[AS]**

Standout track: *Father*

For fans of: Deep Purple, Scorpions, Dream Theater

Erja Lyytinen's latest live release also celebrates her 50th birthday



PHOTO BY ELSA WELLMAN

Erja Lyytinen

50th Birthday Live 2026

Tuohi Records (available 9 October)



The slide queen celebrates a landmark birthday in superb style

It's always great to mark special birthdays, but Finnish guitarist Erja Lyytinen decided to do things a little differently by recording a live album at the House of Culture in Helsinki to celebrate her 50th earlier this year. And the cherry on top is that it's available on DVD, too.

Known for her uncompromising rock style and slide finesse – the latter evident here on tracks such as *Don't Let A Good Woman Down* and *Ball And Chain* – Erja rocks her way through no fewer than 28 tracks with vibrant exuberance evident all the way. It's not all hard rock, though; on *Torn* the decibel level drops for this beautifully harmonised ballad, accompanied by Swedish group Baskery. But, in the main, the birthday celebrations are full of hard-hitting rock, white-hot guitar and Erja's strong vocal presence. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Torn*

For fans of: Samantha Fish, Joanne Shaw Taylor

John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers

Guitar Heroes: The Decca Years 1965-1967

Fontana (available 9 October)



Your one-stop shop for truly historic blues finesse

To introduce one prodigious guitar talent to the world is, of course, thoroughly commendable. But John Mayall's Bluesbreakers proved to be the ultimate finishing school for sheer brilliance in the field, most notably during the mid to late 60s. During this time Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Mick Taylor all graduated their way into the history books and it's that precise period that is being celebrated here.

The four-disc set comprises *John Mayall Plays John Mayall* (Live at Klooks Kleeek) from 1965 and with Roger Dean on guitar, *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* (1966), *A Hard Road* (1967) with Peter Green and *Crusade* (1967) with Mick Taylor.

As such it's possible to appreciate the rise of The Bluesbreakers as well as the outstanding significance of Mayall's role as bandleader and mentor. Absolutely priceless! **[DM]**

Standout track: *Hideaway* (Eric Clapton)

For fans of: Freddie King, Buddy Guy, Joe Bonamassa



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Tones Behind The Tracks

As Mastodon release their first album following Brent Hinds' death, **Bill Kelliher** reveals the heartache and freedom of their new dynamic

Artist: Mastodon

Album: *Marrow Deep* (Loma Vista Recordings/Concorde)



Marrow Deep is the band's first studio record since 2021's *Hushed And Grim*

When Brent Hinds left Mastodon in March 2025, guitarist Bill Kelliher admits it was “a relief [though] bittersweet”. And when Hinds died just a few months later in August of last year, following a motorcycle crash, Kelliher – ever honest – tells *Guitarist*, “I was shocked, but not surprised.” So when it came time for Mastodon to write their upcoming ninth record, *Marrow Deep*, Kelliher admits, “We couldn’t just write a happy record.” So, they didn’t. Songs such as *Poisonous Weapons*, *Your Ghost Again*, *The Vanishing* and *The Three Fates* are all clearly impacted by Hinds’ exit from Mastodon and subsequent death. “I fucking cranked it,” Kelliher says of the first time he listened to *Marrow Deep* back proper. “After the first couple songs, there were tears like someone was squeezing my tear ducts. I could not control it. It was really bizarre.”

Sad as he is about Hinds being gone, Kelliher has newfound freedom. “I’m free to write whatever without having to think about Brent not liking it,” Kelliher says. “He was a different person every day. Some days he would love Mastodon. But other days he would be like, ‘I fucking hate metal.’ I’d be like, ‘Okay, we’re a metal band. I don’t know what to tell you, bro...’”

Nick Johnston joined the band on tour following Brent Hinds’ departure in March 2025

With a new line-up featuring Nick Johnston on guitar, João Nogueira on keyboards, along with original members Brann Dailor and Troy Sanders, Kelliher feels good about Mastodon’s future, though, of course, he misses Hinds. “We’d always be friends in the end,” he says. “It was really hard; we always wanted to keep the band as the four of us, but it’s onward and upward for me. This is my life. I live and breathe Mastodon.”

Was work on *Marrow Deep* started before or after Brent’s death?

“I’m constantly writing. With Brent, it was always a competition, which I didn’t understand. It was one-sided with him. He was interesting – a great fucking guitar player and songwriter – but it was difficult to write with him. With this new stuff, I’m writing all the time and putting riffs into my phone. But with Brent, after a while, he was just on his own wave... He just wasn’t into it any more. I was like, ‘Dude, how great is it that we get to go up on stage, have people buy our albums and worship you?’ But he just had this self-destructive streak. It just became that we were on totally different ends of the spectrum as far as guitar and personality. We did have a lot of things in common, but he was dangerous. I think that’s what made the Mastodon we were in the early days. He would just do whatever the fuck he wanted to do, but that got old after a while.”

How did it feel when Brent left the band?

“Honestly, it was like a big weight had been lifted. I was doing the lion’s share of the writing, but I always had to think, ‘Is Brent gonna like this?’ And pretty soon, he just didn’t like anything that we would come up with.”

How did living and working in a post-Brent world impact the writing of *Marrow Deep*?

“The subject matter definitely changed a lot. After losing Brent, we were like, ‘This is huge. We can’t ignore this. We have to pay tribute. We have to talk about it and get it out and off our chests.’”

What has Brent’s replacement, Nick Johnston, brought to the band?

“Nick’s got really big shoes to fill – but Nick has really big feet. No-one could replace Brent, and we’re not trying to. But Nick is a wonderful human being and he doesn’t play a wrong note. He’s got such a unique style, so it took a second when he first joined, but he’s settled in now.”





"It was really hard; we always wanted to keep the band as the four of us, but it's onward and upward. I live and breathe Mastodon"

What's the story behind the track entitled *Your Ghost Again*?

"That song was totally different at first. I wrote most of the song and Brann wrote a chorus, and slowly every riff came out of the song and got replaced with what's there now. It happens like that sometimes, where a riff here or there gets cannibalised, but since we overdub the vocals last, we always focus on the song structure, riffs and harmonies."

What about *Snakes For Dinner*, which features Josh Homme?

"Josh is the Elvis of our generation. He's got the swagger, the coolness, and he's handsome as hell [laughs]. He's been a friend of ours for a long time, and so he ended up on that song. But the chorus of that song just came out of me sifting through my pile of riffs. We were putting it together, and I'm like, 'Oh, I might have a riff that might go well there,' and I went through my phone and found it."

What guitars did you lean on while you were recording the album?

"I have a white Les Paul Custom that's yellowed now. It's a '77 and it has these old Lace pickups in there from before I designed my signature [Mojotone Hellbender] pickups. Man, whatever that guitar does, it just sounds fucking

Now a five-piece, Mastodon added touring members João Nogueira (far left, keyboards) and Nick Johnston (far right, guitar) to the permanent line-up this year

amazing. Nick used it a lot for his solos, too. I also used an ESP Viper Baritone on a bunch of stuff, like *Barbarians Blood* because it stays in tune really well. Nothing else would stay in tune for that song but the ESP."

This is a new era for Mastodon. What's your outlook as you move forward?

"I'm still processing it. It's not something I'll ever fully process... it's bittersweet. Unfortunately, he's gone, and I was shocked but not surprised. I was waiting for that phone call about him because he was always living on the edge. But he's at peace now... he just seemed like he couldn't find peace, you know? And, honestly, with the band now, I see great things continuing to happen. But if it ended today, I'd be appreciative, and if I could say anything to Brent now, it would be, 'No hard feelings.' I'd say, 'Hey man, remember the good times? Because there were a fucking lot of them.' I mean, every night was a good time, dude. People change and you fall out of love with people and you don't wanna be in a band any more. That's fine. It's water under the bridge." [AD]



Mastodon's new album, *Marrow Deep*, was released on 28 August via Loma Vista Recordings/Concorde www.mastodonrocks.com



El Greco

Neville Marten recounts a tale about his recent bar gigs in Greece, and how a chap he'd never even met came to the gear rescue

You may recall I was nipping over to a Greek island to do a couple of gigs with long-time musician friends Adrian and Julie. Since they were driving across much of Europe to get there, they kindly took my equipment, too. I was pretty sure I'd packed everything – spare strings, capo, cables, picks and so on – so all would be fine once I got there.

“I’m on a small Greek island with no music shop. Our first gig is tomorrow and internet ordering still depends on the goods catching the ferry...”

The guitar in question was my Fender John Cruz Design two-tone sunburst Strat with maple neck and Bare Knuckle Trilogy Suite pickups. Plus a Blackstar Amped 2. On arriving on the island I grabbed the guitar bag, took it to my digs and set about checking I had all the correct bits and pieces.

First issue. Like an idiot I'd decided to put light strings – ie, 0.009s – on the guitar. At the time I thought it would be nice to make life easy for myself. But this Strat, which feels easy with 11s on, was more like one of those ‘rubber band’ Ashbory basses – remember

them? Add to that I'd gone and put the wrong capo in my bag. I thought I'd packed my lovely adjustable D'Addario one but, no, it was a cheapo lookalike whose Incredible Hulk-like stranglehold sent my skinny wires miles sharp. No probs. There's a spare set of 10s in the case... No, another pack of skinnies.

Now, I'm on a small Greek island with no music shop. Our first gig is tomorrow and internet ordering from the mainland still depends on the goods catching the ferry. I was stymied. Luckily, we had a rehearsal or two and I worked out that putting the capo on the actual fretwire more or less solved the tuning problem. Obviously, it made playing chords somewhat cramped – especially as one number required having it at the 12th fret for a faux mandolin sound. Another issue was that, due to the temperature/humidity changes, the neck had shifted and the strings were almost lying on the lower frets. Fortunately, a borrowed screwdriver and quick truss rod adjustment sorted that. But, for goodness sake, man, how long have you been doing this?

I struggled through the first night but played embarrassingly badly. Thankfully, it seemed worse to me than to almost everyone else, so I just about got away with it. The following night we had dinner with some friends who own a fantastic restaurant and hotel on the island. With them was a guy I didn't know, actually the hotel manager, who turned out to be very knowledgeable, musically savvy, and we ended up discussing my gear problems. It turned out he'd been a reader of *Guitarist* back in the day and could even recall certain features and articles.

Explaining the plight that my lackadaisical pre-gig preparation had put me in, and how I probably couldn't get strings and a better capo before our next gig only two days hence, he said, “Leave it with me.”

Greeks Bearing Gifts

As you can imagine, I was not holding out huge hopes for the next event – on the street outside a cafe/cocktail bar – so resigned myself to more capo conundrums and slack-string struggles.

However, in the nick of time Adrian received a call for us to go over to the ferry port and pick up a parcel from the boat. In the package were two sets of strings, 10s and 11s, Elixirs and D'Addarios, which I'd said were my preference, and a lovely new capo. It cost quite a few Euros, and remember I hadn't known this guy from Adam the previous day. He'd gone to considerable trouble, laying out his own cash up front, just to ensure I'd have a more enjoyable final gig on their lovely island. I can't think of many strangers who would do that.

Now, remind me, what is it they say about Greeks bearing gifts? Don't believe a word of it! Anyway, thank you, Vassilis, you saved my souvlaki! **G**

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Horses For Courses

What? Hora M1090 Concert Bouzouki **Where seen?** hobgoblin.com **Price?** £549

Description? While bouzoukis are primarily a Greek thing, different types are used in Celtic and other musical styles. This one is Irish style, very well priced and would be great if you were thinking of taking up another guitar-related musical instrument. Tuning is CFAD (low to high), with the top two courses in unison and the bottom pair in octaves. That's like the top four string pairs of a 12-string guitar but a whole tone down. With a maple back, sides and neck, spruce top and 23-fret rosewood fingerboard (including a zero fret), the instrument has a 660mm (26-inch) scale length and 35mm nut width. There's a pretty wooden soundhole rosette, and the hardware is gold. A bouzouki would add a lovely rich and ringing texture to any acoustic duo or band. I think I'll try one!



PHOTO: HOBGOBLIN.COM



Social Skills

This month **Alex Bishop** reshapes his electric guitar model, and raises the hackles of the online guitar community...

For all its ills, social media is a fascinating way to gauge the temperature on a range of topics, and the relatively small world of lutherie is no exception. As an active (yet reluctant) participant in the circus of online self-promotion, I'm intrigued by the content that most piques my audience's interests – the goal is, after all, to crack that mysterious algorithm ruling over our news feeds.

I was surprised to discover a recent video of mine went modestly viral with a collective three million views, but the success of it was easy to see why: a punchy edit of a headstock repair, showing off some novel repair techniques with enough audio ASMR to titillate even the most casual fan of woodworking was always likely to gain a bit of traction.

Other reels, however, can attract a big view count just for stirring up controversy, as I discovered last month. It's not often that I stray outside of the realm of acoustic guitars (at least not with my making projects), but videos showing me carving the body and neck for a new electric guitar model using my favourite chisels certainly got the online community sharpening their own knives.

As with running any business, compromises have to be made. They say every manufactured object can be assessed on three criteria: quality, time and cost. This 'Good-Fast-Cheap' principle states you can have two but never all three. In my case, I chose to protect the hand-tool processes that I so deeply enjoy – necessary, I believe, for building the finest quality guitars. Even when it comes to building electric guitars.

But by eschewing the conventional approach of using routers to contour the body or CNC machines to shape the neck, a few users were keen to point

out that there were "quicker ways to do it" or plainly commenting "I don't see why you bother". In my opinion, they were missing a bigger point: making things slowly imbues an object with meaning, helping people think and feel more deeply about the things we interact with on a daily basis.

Naturally, I'm completely biased, but as tools for music-making I think guitars hold a special place in the pantheon of everyday objects. Just as a favourite song can occasion a powerful dose of nostalgia, a treasured musical instrument is the vessel for a lifetime of memories, extending way beyond the wood and strings making up its constituent parts. It only feels right that I spend my valuable time ensuring every instrument I build is done to the highest standard and paying greatest respect to the materials that I am so lucky to use.

Quality Over Quantity

Next up on my bench is a new take on this electric guitar model, featuring a shorter scale length, wider neck and the glorious simplicity of a single bridge pickup (a Lollar P-90). Of course, I'm documenting parts of the process again to share online, but it got me thinking again. The armchair critics were right: CNC machines are faster. But the whole point of this guitar is to be tailored to the needs of the client, not to make carbon copies of my own instruments with the hope that each player will adapt. Every player's hand is different, so every hand-carved neck should be different, too.

Thinking about it, by the time a CNC machine has been reprogrammed for every guitar with a new combination of neck length and width, a skilled maker would likely have shaped a neck in half the

No two hand-crafted guitars will ever be exactly the same. And therein lies the beauty of the slow-and-steady approach of using hand-tools; the resulting guitar will be as unique as the player



"Making things slowly imbues an object with meaning, helping people think and feel more deeply about the things we interact with"

time anyway. But this realisation may never dawn on a maker who sinks all their time into computer programming, rather than hand-tool skills, assuming that digital efficiency reigns supreme over my apparently outdated analogue ways.

I'd even argue that the learning curve is roughly the same. Developing the mastery to wield a chisel is barely more effort than navigating the complex world of tool path programming and 3D CAD design, not to mention the start-up cost is significantly less.

But perhaps the real value of making things slowly is not simply that they are well made but that someone has taken the time to make them properly – and make them yours. **A**



Chord Vocabulary (PART 1)

Richard Barrett guides you around the fretboard, finding different chord shapes to suit a variety of scenarios

Jazz and fusion players like Larry Carlton (pictured right), Joe Pass and Mike Stern use a variety of different dominant 7th chord shapes in both comping and soloing

Vocabulary is a word that can strike fear into the hearts of music theory students, but rest assured our purpose here is to demystify such terms. So here goes. We can take an E7 chord and find those same notes in a variety of positions around the fretboard. This benefits us by giving several options; after all, the kind of E7 chord you may want in a strummed acoustic accompaniment will likely be different from the taut, funky guitar figure more appropriate for a Chic-style tune. And seeing as we guitarists like to think in shapes, there is also a strong case for referring to these chords when picking out chord tones and arpeggios in addition to any scale-based lines when soloing or playing melodies.

In combination with concepts such as the CAGED chord approach and the pentatonic boxes, we can find lots of ideas all over the fretboard without needing to learn endless exotic scales or becoming a theory genius. **G**

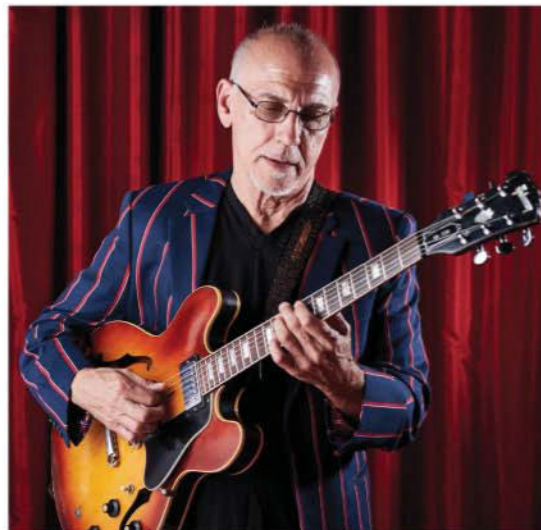
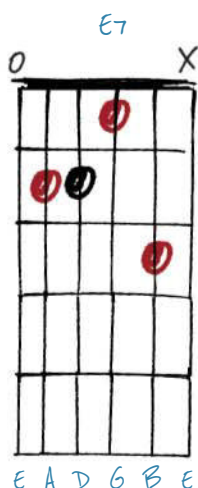


PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

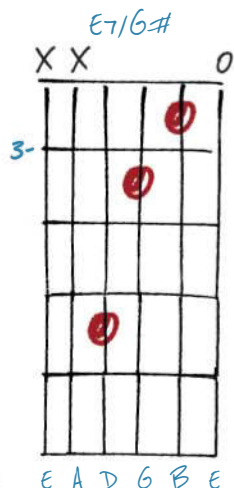
Example 1

Here's a version of the open position E7 chord to refer to as our baseline. We can add another 7th (D) by playing the fourth string open and/or adding another root by allowing the open first string to ring. It's all down to personal taste and what fits best in the context of the song.



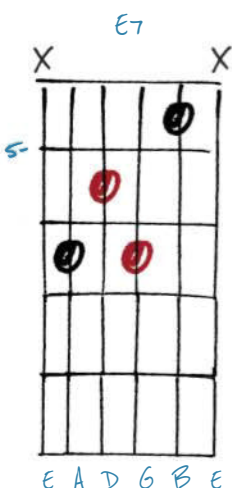
Example 2

Another E7, this has a G# (3rd) as the lowest note, played on the fourth string. Though the G# is mentioned in the name, the assumption is that in practice a bass, or perhaps another guitar, will be playing the root or a fuller version of the chord such as Example 1.



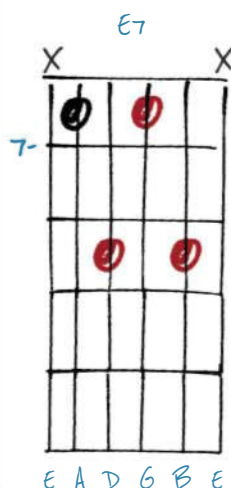
Example 3

This E7 is a little fuller than Example 2 with the root reappearing at the bottom. It's also movable to any key. 'Closed' chords such as this with no open strings tend to suit best when we're looking for a darker, less strident sound – think more Barney Kessel and less Tom Petty!



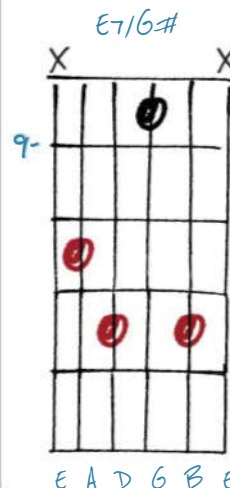
Example 4

Another closed voicing, this E7 is also movable to virtually any position or key, though in this key it might be worth experimenting with the open low E as a root, and/or the high E as a jangly overtone. Note the similarities to the shape 4 E major pentatonic, too.



Example 5

Our final take on E7 is this higher register E7/G#. As with Example 2, the assumption is that another instrument is providing the root, as is very often the case with jazz and funk styles. Another movable shape, it also contains notes from the shape 5 E major pentatonic, plus E Mixolydian mode.



JACK J HUTCHINSON

"A name to watch out for"
(Guitarist Magazine)

New album 'Soul Believer' out 22 January

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STAR LETTER

SCALE 'LECTRICS



I thought I would drop you a line about a fairly costly revelation that came to me some 60 years into my guitar-playing life. As I progressed through Höfner to Burns and eventually a Strat and Tele during my band days in the 60s, I had no idea there was a theme that would eventually let me down...

As I got older and had a bit more money to spend on guitars (much influenced, I believe, by the reviews of fabulous PRS guitars in your journal), I purchased a new PRS McCarty 594. This was going to be my joy from that point on. But I never found it comfortable to play and constantly harked back to my Fender days that seemed to make me sound better too.

It finally dawned on me that the scale length might have been the main problem. I have been used to the 25.5-inch Fender (and equivalent) length all my life and found it almost impossible to adapt comfortably to the shorter length adopted primarily by Gibson and the like. The guitar shop I bought the PRS from in 2017 agreed to take it back some eight years later in part exchange for a new Tele (and a hand-wired Vox), and normal service has been resumed. I have seen too many guitarists play an assortment of guitars, so I can only think this might be an exclusive limitation to me!

Richard Gorrell

Thanks for your interesting perspectives, Richard. Guitar is funny – some players, like our very own Nev Marten, switch between Gibson, Fender and PRS seamlessly like someone switching between vehicles in a multi-car family. If one is unavailable they'll just hop in another one to pop to the shops, like it's no big deal. However, other players already know that they just prefer one thing over another – editor Jamie realised he likes slightly shorter-scale acoustic guitars such as Martin 000-18s or the Beard Deco Phonic Southside that's his main stage guitar. The key thing is that you've identified your tastes and, although it might seem limiting in the sense that you'd perhaps like to get on better with PRS guitars etc, you could also get satisfaction from having gained insight into who you are as a player, as that at least helps you walk the path forwards with your guitar-playing more confidently. And it takes some of the dilemmas out of which one to buy next!

KORG

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SLIDING BACK?

My brother-in-law played in a band before he suffered a severe stroke. He is currently in a stroke rehab unit where he is slowly recovering the use of the left side of his body but, as a right-handed player, he is worried whether he will be able to play again. It occurred to me that a lap steel guitar might be the way forward to recovering his dexterity without weight over his shoulder. I have been a long-term *Guitarist* reader but I do not recall any articles specifically aimed at lap steel – features, reviews or otherwise?

Andrew Harding

Hi Andrew, first allow us to express our support for you wanting to help your brother-in-law get back to guitar as part of his healing process. The answer to the lap steel question is shamefully that, no, we can't remember doing much on that subject for quite a while. But the instrument is certainly far more accessible than its more complicated cousin, the pedal steel, and there are some fabulous practitioners of the art out there, such as Megan Lovell of Larkin Poe. So maybe we could start with something about the heritage of lap steel guitars from Huw Price or David Davidson and move on to what you need to know about getting started? If other readers like the sound of that, let us know and we'll have a crack at it.

NEW MODEL ARMY

Like many I have been using AI for various aspects of life, whether it's work-based projects or checking how to fix stuff at home and so forth. I decided to start using it to help me get better guitar tones from a well-known digital amp effects modeller after having purchased some tones online that sounded woolly and not that clear or inspiring. My problem was the tones were set up for being played through a real amp at gigging level. As I was playing through monitor speakers at home, the settings were in need of some serious tweaking. That was a little beyond me as diving deep into modelling tweaks is not the same as turning knobs on your amp.

I told the AI my exact gear, down to the pickups on my guitars, all my pedals, my specific monitors and even asked how to get the sound of a certain artist/song. I can report it worked well, even getting a great sound from my acoustic guitar. To tap into the combined knowledge of countless people who know a lot more than I ever will and to get virtually instant fixes to your guitar sound is amazing. We are lucky to have this tool available to us, as it means we can spend less time changing settings on real or digital amps and more time playing and getting the tones that inspire us to create music and play more.

Trevor Garland



Alas, the venerable lap steel guitar has been overlooked in *Guitarist* a little, but things might be set to change...



Thanks Trevor, AI is a very layered subject – certainly for musicians. A producer friend of the mag recently told us that 30-45 percent of daily new music uploads to Spotify is now AI-generated. It's saddening that, as a species, we are doing this to ourselves – removing the direct creative and emotional connection to each other that exists through music and outsourcing it to AI. We are probably denying musicians income they might have earned for making music the way it's been done since humans first played hide drums and bone flutes. On the other hand, the situation you've described shows what is arguably the most useful and positive aspect of AI – helping people find a quick path to a solution for a practical problem or closing a knowledge gap quickly. If it helps you make music and do so with more relish than before, then perhaps that's a musical application for AI we can get behind. Do any other readers have positive or negative views on AI in music-making? Send your viewpoints in and we'll print the best.

AGEING NICELY

I want to thank the *Guitarist* team for all the help and advice you've given me over the years. It's been decades since I first subscribed and I can remember many years ago when I phoned Neville Marten to ask him a question about the Fender Strat Plus with Lace Sensors before I bought it. He was more than happy to answer my question on the phone in depth!

I've been playing guitar for decades now and since retiring I've been getting quite a lot of session work purely because I'm available during the week and not necessarily because I'm the best guitarist out there. A couple of months ago, a producer asked if I could do some guitar parts for an up-and-coming young grunge band's debut album. On the morning of the session, I was introduced to the band in the studio, who were very good and aged between 18 and 24. The session went really well, with them explaining to me what they wanted and I thoroughly enjoyed it. At the end, I was packing my things away as the band was leaving and one of the members called out to me, "Thanks, bro". I laughed at the next bit because one of them said, "Dude, that was wicked". At the age of 72, it felt very weird being called 'bro', let alone 'dude' and being told it was 'wicked'.

My point is that age is irrelevant. I'm 72 years old and my message to all guitarists is to remember, if you can't see the person playing it's totally impossible to tell their age. Age is just a number, it's your ability to play, your love of the guitar and of the music itself that matters.

Ted Gribben

Thanks Ted, music can span the gap between generations instead of divide them – and all kinds of other divides, too – when there is that marvellous feeling of connection in a jam or recording session. More power to you!

Reader Ted Gribben illustrates how age is no barrier to making music – and if anyone can prove that age is really just a number, then 93-year-old Willie Nelson certainly can!

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

VINTERA® III

A woman with dark hair, wearing large headphones and a dark jacket, is playing a red electric guitar with a white pickguard. She is positioned in a recording studio, with a microphone on a stand in front of her. To her right, a drum kit is visible, and another person is partially seen in the background. The studio has soundproofing panels on the walls. The lighting is dim, with a blueish tint.

VINTAGE STYLE FOR THE MODERN ERA.



Noté Amos from Water From Your Eyes plays the VINTAGE III Mid '60s Jaguar® in Shell Pink. Al Nardo plays the VINTAGE III Early '60s Bass VI in Candy Apple Red.

Fender

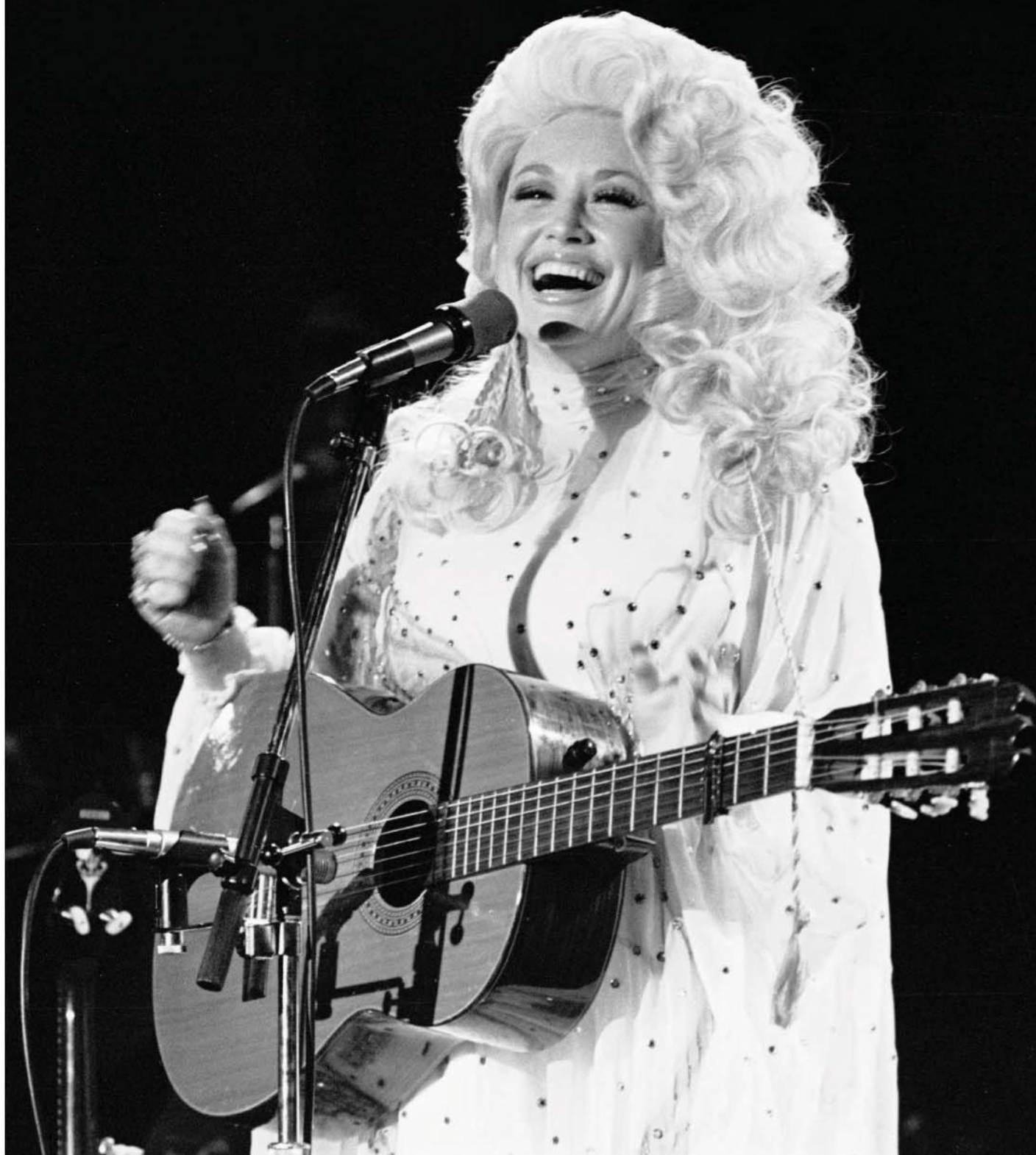
The One. For All.

DOLLY PARTON

1946 – 2026

The country queen leaves a rich legacy. From her quick wit to her remarkable fretting hand, there will never be another like her

Words Henry Yates



DOLLY PARTON

January 1946 – August 2026

Sometimes, there are so many reasons to mourn a departed star that what should be headlines are reduced to footnotes. Over her seven-decade career of many colours, Dolly Parton was everything, to everyone: a singer-songwriter, actress, activist, author, sex symbol, chef, philanthropist, businesswoman and theme park impresario – not to mention one of the rare public figures able to reach across modern America's bitter Democrat-Republican battlelines.

Socially, politically, culturally, Dolly's thumbprint and spreading ripples are such that even the most lavish tributes paid to the country star – who died last month aged 80, after a short battle with cancer – could only scratch the surface of her formidable musicianship, and her underrated talents as a guitar player, in particular.

Few would describe Parton as a guitarist first and foremost (and it's true that most of the final album parts were played by



Dolly takes to the stage in Phoenix, Arizona, 2014

“Guitar is the only thing I can do a really good job at. I’ve been playin’ enough to know everything I played – just straight chords – since I was eight” **DOLLY PARTON**

studio sessioners such as Jimmy Colvard, Chip Young, Wayne Moss and Kent Wells). Yet the bulk of her original songs began life with a guitar on her lap, while Dolly rarely took the stage without a three-quarter-sized (and occasionally rhinestone-studded) acoustic, the five-foot-nothing singer favouring the equally diminutive Martin 5-18 Terz or a custom Taylor GS Mini.

Factor in Dolly's incredible fretting-hand style, and it's no wonder that serious instrumentalists – including Slash, Steve Stevens, Richie Sambora and John Mayer – paid tribute as the sad news broke, with Jack White (whose most famous band, The White Stripes, covered *Jolene* in 2000) summing up the mood of the guitar community with his two-word salute: “Instant sainthood.”

Sparks Of Colour

That glittering future seemed unthinkable when Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on 19 January, 1946. Released in 1971, her classic *Coat Of Many Colors* – its self-penned lyric telling of a little girl mocked at school for

wearing a garment sewn by her mother from a “box of rags” – was a true account of a rural Tennessee childhood that the singer herself described as “dirt poor”.

As the fourth of her sharecropper father's twelve children, Dolly had few material possessions, but the musical family kept a few instruments around the house, and welcomed a flash of glamour whenever her uncle, the country songwriter Bill Owens, came calling. “He used to come to our house all the time, when it was time to eat on Sunday or when he needed a place to flop,” she wrote in her 2020 book *Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life In Lyrics*. “Uncle Bill had this big ol’ red Gretsch electric guitar and he was good. He kind of fancied himself that he was going to be a star.”

No doubt, it was Owens' early offering that sparked his niece's preference for small-bodied guitars. “When he saw how serious I was about my music, he gave me his little Martin guitar,” she told *Reverb*. “It was my treasure. My plan was always – when I got rich and famous – to have it fixed up. But the loft burned out of

our house and burned up my guitar, so I only have the neck of that one. But I have collected little Martin guitars all through the years. I have some classic little guitars, especially the baby Martins.”

Writing songs was instantaneous, but that first Martin bit back, she wrote in *Songteller*. “I remember, I got these deep old blisters and calluses from practising. Oh, it was so painful trying to learn. I kept saying, ‘It hurts’. And [Uncle Bill] kept saying, ‘No, you’re going to have to learn’. You gotta wait until those ol’ calluses harden until you won’t feel it anymore, and that’s when you’re going to be serious. You can’t cry and complain about that.”

While her circumstances meant she understandably never learnt to read sheet music, Parton could feel her way around a dizzying array of instruments, including banjo, violin, piano, harmonica, recorder, saxophone, dulcimer and autoharp. But as the singer told *Music City News* in 1967, on most of these, she considered herself a dilettante.

“Guitar is the only thing I can do a really good job at. I’ve been playin’ guitar enough to know everything I played – just straight chords – since I was eight. I’m really not a master on guitar. I just play my own songs and I don’t play any lead. I’ve always fooled around on the guitar, but I started playin’ on the shows when I started singin’ in Knoxville when I was 10 years old.”

Those aforementioned shows – as the guest of Tennessee radio star Cas Walker – set in motion an early career that was at first frustrating, with Dolly miscast as a pop puppet. But she never forgot Johnny Cash's encouragement when she begged him for a support slot at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in 1959 (“He looked at me as if he was thinking, ‘You know, this kid is really serious’”). Having been hired in 1967 as the latest female co-host for *The Porter Wagoner Show*, she emerged from the nudie-suited country star's shadow with her own string of hit singles on the RCA label – and wrote 1974's *I Will Always Love You* as a kiss-off to their sometimes volatile partnership. As Parton once admitted: “Every time I’m on stage, something will remind me of something I learned from Porter – something he said or sung.”

Independent Ways

Parton's first solo single to top the country chart – 1971's *Joshua* – announced her writing talent, but in a 1984 encounter



Known principally for pint-sized acoustics, Dolly could sometimes be found rocking out with an electric guitar

DOLLY PARTON

January 1946 – August 2026

with *Interview* magazine, she hinted that her creative wellspring was practically bottomless. “I’ve published 3,000 songs. Since I was five years old, I’ve been writing songs. I started playing guitar when I was seven, I started making up stuff before I could write.”

As for Dolly’s left-hand fingering technique – born from necessity when she started wearing inch-long acrylic nails – it called to mind the old quote about the theoretical impossibility of a bumblebee taking flight (but doing so anyway). To make fretting feasible, she combined open tunings and barres with a deft plucking pattern rooted in the ‘thumb and flick’ style of Maybelle Carter. “I figured out a way to do it,” she told Chet Atkins in one televised duet. “Cos I’m so sissy. I like the nails. So I’m not going to give them up.”

As Dolly told *The Graham Norton Show* many years later, she made some concessions, removing and filing down



Dolly employed special left-hand manoeuvres to work around her famous acrylic false nails

“I was writing [9 to 5] on the film set, just clicking the rhythm with my nails. I had my guitar there. I figured it out in my head. It all came at once” **DOLLY PARTON**

her talons for writing purposes. “The [right-hand nails] work great as picks, there’s no problem with this hand – but these [left hand] are the ones I have a problem with. I’ve learnt to do open tuning, mostly, when I’m writing and stuff. But if I’m really serious about it, I just have to saw ‘em down.”

But as she recalled in a vintage interview with *Playgirl*, the 1980’s ode to office drudgery *9 To 5* (from the comedy film of the same name), wouldn’t have existed without them. “I was writing it on the film set, just clicking the rhythm with my nails. I had my guitar there. I figured it out in my head. It all came at once. The rhythm is like the sound of typewriters, when the little bell rings and the telephone’s ringing.”

Meanwhile, if *9 To 5* was the most upbeat of Parton’s signature tunes, her most-streamed song, 1973’s *Jolene*, was perhaps the ultimate tear-streaked country lament, supposedly inspired by the red-haired bank teller who flirted with her husband, Carl Dean (“It was a running joke between us. I was

saying, ‘Hell, you’re spending a lot of time at the bank. I don’t believe we’ve got that kind of money’”).

As Dolly told *The Guardian* in 2014: “The thing I remember most was all the musicians when I came up with the little guitar lick, the *Jolene* lick, saying, ‘Damn, that’s so good. That’s the coolest little lick’. I remember all the guys learning to play it and everybody thinking how cool a rhythm it was. It was a little out of the norm for the things we’d been doing up to that time. I remember everybody in the studio just loving that song.”

By then, Dolly’s status was such that she could call on the best session men (Wayne Moss and Chip Young tracked the *Jolene* guitar parts you hear on the record). Yet she always gave her players a creative steer, even if that meant offering Jeff ‘Skunk’ Baxter some sweetly baffling advice on *Baby I’m Burnin’* (from 1978’s *Heartbreaker* album). “I was working with my Roland guitar synthesizer,” the Steely Dan and Doobie Brothers legend told *Guitar Player*, “and Dolly said, ‘Can you just make it, like, reds and greens

and sparkles?’ So I thought about it for a second, and then with one hand I played as many notes as I could while the other hand was working the Roland’s [pitch] transposer, slapping it back up and down. She was going, ‘Yeah, yeah, that’s it. Wheel!’”

Enduring Influence

In later years, Parton’s affinity with guitar players was evidenced again on what turned out to be her swansong album, 2023’s *Rockstar* (whose A-list guests included John Fogerty, Peter Dinklage, Joan Jett, John 5, Chris Stapleton, Sheryl Crow and Paul McCartney). Nobody, it seemed, was Dolly-proof. “I’ve always been a fan,” Warren Haynes told *Blues Rock Review* this year, having appeared on *I Want You Back*.

“She was kind of the exception to the rule for me back growing up, when I didn’t really love a lot of the artists that she would be compared to. Somehow I always really liked her songs. So when she announced she was going to do a rock record, I thought, ‘Oh, that’s really cool’. And then, when I got the call to be part of it, I was just all smiles, y’know, it was a fantastic experience.”

There’s no doubt that ‘guitarist’ should be added to Dolly’s dazzling array of hats worn. But perhaps it was that unique ability to unite the warring factions of the music world, and beyond, that should win out as her greatest gift to us. In viperous times, just for a heartbeat, the passing of the country queen – who steadfastly refused to talk politics in interviews, and whose charity drive to improve children’s literacy chimed with practically everyone – seemed to tap our common humanity.

“I was having lunch by myself this afternoon at Nate ‘n Al’s (not exactly a bastion for country music) when the news broke of Dolly’s passing,” posted Joe Bonamassa on X. “All of the conversations I overheard consisted of people commenting on what a wonderful human being she was. It was perspective we all need especially in the music business. There was no mention of her 11 Grammy awards, honorary Oscar, countless ACM or CMA awards nor of the 100,000 million records she sold over a seven-decade career. It was about the person she was, how she always gave back and remembered her roots. A true unifying force and someone irreplaceable by all standards.” 🎸

Martin Simpson

Toasting his 50th anniversary as a recording artist with a wishlist-fulfilling new album, the folk giant tells us about oddball electrics, the epiphany of Pentangle, and why making people cry is a noble profession

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

Photography Adam Gasson

Fifty years. The timeline does not lie – even if 73-year-old Martin Simpson is liable to (“That’s obviously impossible because I’m only 28!”). Fortunately, the Scunthorpe-born folk hero has wasted not a beat of his half-century since 1976’s debut, *Golden Vanity*, planting his flag as a songwriter, performer, collaborator, author and teacher. Simpson’s new album, *Some Kind Of Jubilee*, cannot hope to entirely distil that fascinating career. Yet it comes closer than you might think, nodding to his back pages on formative standards and fan-favourites reimagined with cello and pedal steel, while airing bold new songs that announce he’s far from done.

Over a summer’s afternoon at his home in Sheffield, the affable maestro held court, spinning war stories, airing his formidable fingerstyle and nudging *Guitarist* to pass over so many of his favourite instruments that we started to feel like a golf caddy.

How does it feel to reach that 50-year milestone?

“It’s beautifully shocking. Without being sentimental, it’s allowed me to really look at my 50 years of recording. And the thing I like is that I feel like I’m actually at my best now. I also think I’ve grown to love what I do more and more as time passes.

“Making this latest record was like a series of dreams come true. I recorded with Louis Campbell – he’s 25 now and a monster guitar player – Liz Hanks [cello] and Ben Nicholls [bass]. We started in a place out on the North Yorkshire moors. Then we went to Jackson Browne’s studio in Santa Monica [Groove Masters] because I really wanted to work with Greg

Leisz. He’s my favourite pedal steel player. There’s so many recordings where I’ve gone, ‘Who the hell is playing that?’ And it’s always Greg, y’know?

“We sat down – very close, as far away as we are now – and he would be playing a Weissenborn or a National Tri-Plate and overdubbing pedal steel. Back in England, I got Zak Hobbs to come in and do overdubs on three tracks. He’s Richard Thompson’s grandson and just a great player. The record sounds huge. It’s really orchestral-sounding, which is funny because it’s all guitars, except for the cello.”

What’s the vintage of the material on this record?

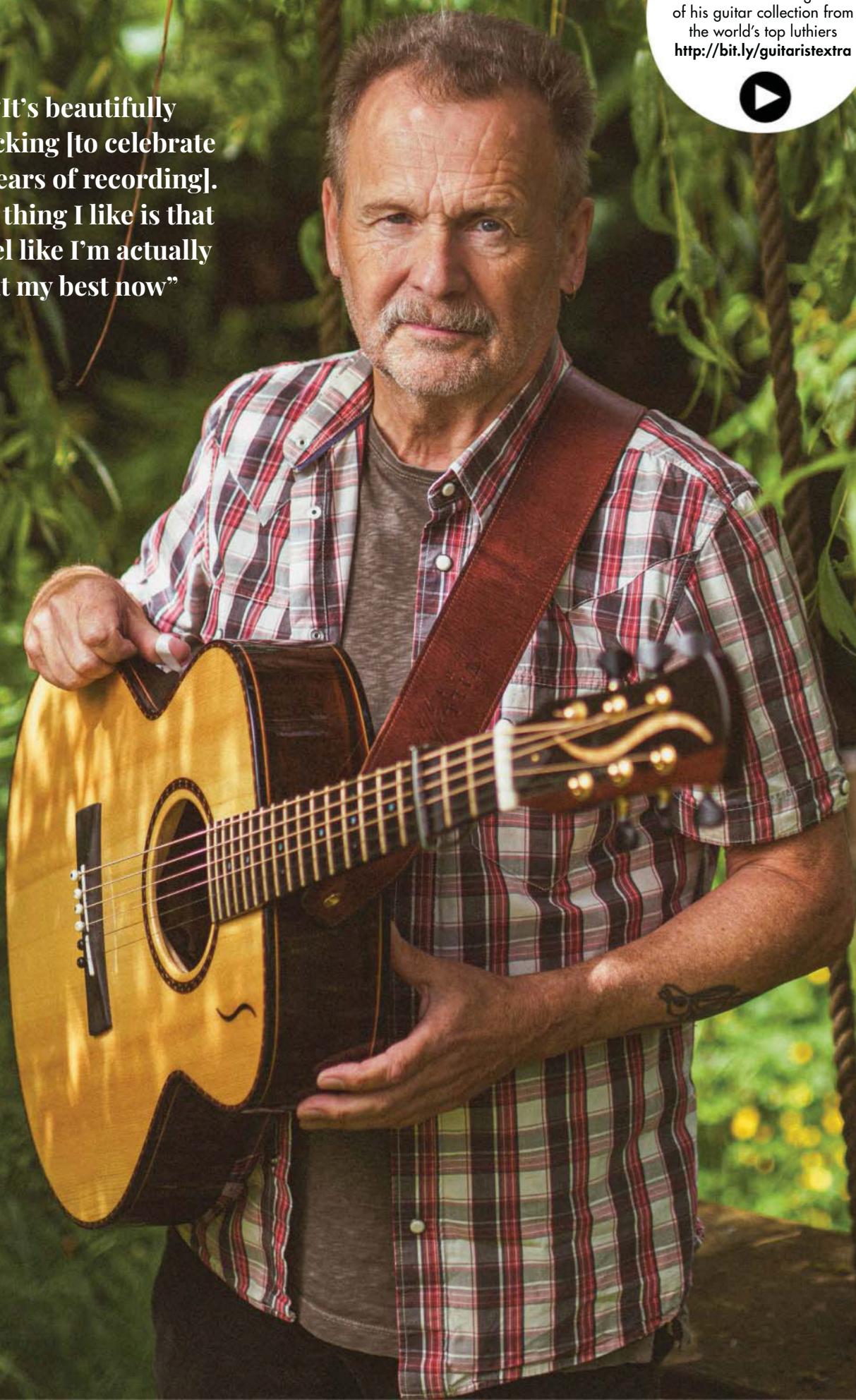
“I’ve allowed myself to be retrospective. When I lived in the States, I wrote a song called *Love Never Dies* about a road trip from Memphis to Little Rock, Arkansas. I never felt I’d recorded it right. So we did that live, with Greg playing National on his lap, then overdubbing pedal steel.

“It’s a body of work that goes back a long way. When I was four, my mother had a 78 of spirituals. I heard Paul Robeson sing *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child* and that was it for me. I could not understand how a piece of music could make me feel so much. And the feeling was of extraordinary melancholy, which I totally adored [laughs]. I joke about it, but I decided that when I grew up, I was going to make people cry for a living. Which I think is a noble ambition, and it seems to have worked. So each of the vinyl editions of this new album finishes with a different version of *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child*.”

“It’s beautifully shocking [to celebrate 50 years of recording]. The thing I like is that I feel like I’m actually at my best now”

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Martin talks us through some of his guitar collection from the world’s top luthiers
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>





How about the new songs you wrote for the album?

“One is called *Ruby Bridges*, which I wrote on that banjo that’s currently being photographed. She was the first black child to break the segregation in New Orleans schools. There’s another called *Survivor* that I wrote about an elm tree in the valley down there, and it just moves me every time I walk past it.”

What tunings are you working in?

“CGCFCD is the tuning that comes up the most at the moment, like on the tune called *The Recruited Collier*. One of the things about open tunings – and I always say this in my workshops – is that they dictate and it’s up to you to go, ‘Don’t tell me what to do.’”

“I got my first guitar when I was 12, and literally 400 yards from where I lived was the home of the Scunthorpe Folk Club”

Let’s look at the guitars you’ve picked out for us...

“They’re utterly remarkable for how dissimilar they are and each one has an incredible backstory. We recorded a track for the record with Paul Reed Smith at his studio in Maryland. He’s mad as a box of frogs, in the best possible way. This is an Angelus Cutaway. Cocobolo, curly mahogany neck... it’s so beautiful. The guitar itself had been shipped to Japan in 2012 with some of the first acoustics that Paul made. Unbeknownst to him, they had decided there was no market for PRS acoustics. So they put ‘em in

1. Martin’s PRS had been warehoused in Japan for 13 years before anyone realised this gem of a guitar had gone AWOL

2. Vintage banjos remain a true passion for Martin and he owns a range of different types

3. Martin’s go-to right now is a Stefan Sobell guitar made in 2022 using German spruce and Brazilian rosewood

a warehouse. And they didn’t tell him. So this guitar sat in a warehouse for 13 years. You might think that when it came out of the case, it might sound a bit closed down. But I cannot believe this guitar. It’s insane.”

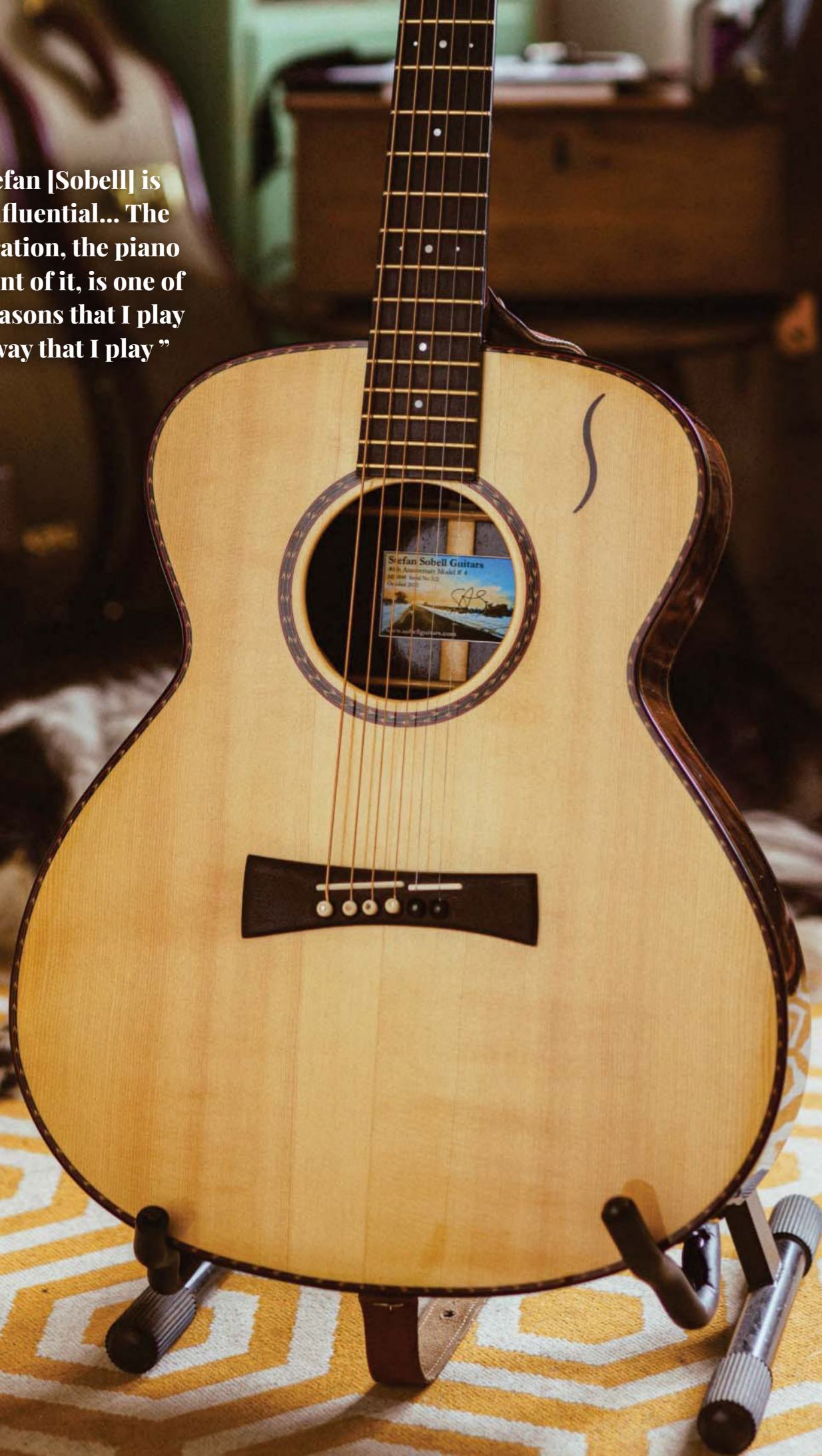
And the next is a Stefan Sobell creation, right?

“Yeah. This is the guitar that gets used the most at the moment. Doesn’t sound like anything else. Stefan is so influential. Completely different sound. And, for me, the separation, the piano element of it, is one of the reasons that I play the way that I play. They’re all wide fingerboards. Stefan made this guitar in 2022, and it’s one of his 40th anniversary models. The woods are stupid. I’ve never seen German spruce that looks like that before: gorgeous. And the Brazilian rosewood: that insane green thing happens.

“Stefan has been putting Highlander pickups into guitars for me since I met him. I first came across Highlanders when I was living in California. Most guitar makers just say, ‘I’m not going to put a Highlander in a guitar. I don’t want to do it. It’s too difficult. It’s just a nightmare. It’s arcane.’ And, in fact, Highlander is no longer in business.

“But Stefan bought 12 of them from Japan, and one of the things that he’s utterly brilliant at is the installation of these pickups. He said to me, ‘If you tell anybody how, I’ll have to kill them.’ It’s got a Highlander and a K&K, so it’s the two signals. I use them both at the same time – two DI boxes – and every soundman I’ve worked with since I had this installation has gone, ‘That’s the best acoustic sound I’ve ever heard.’”

“Stefan [Sobell] is so influential... The separation, the piano element of it, is one of the reasons that I play the way that I play”





And this next model is a Turnstone build by Rosie Heydenrych, isn't it?

"I'm sure she wouldn't mind me telling this story. Rosie had built a guitar for me, which I loved, but at the end of a couple of hours, my right hand was going, 'I don't like this.' So I called her up and said, 'Rosie, I hate to say this. This guitar is absolutely fucking brilliant, but...' And she said, 'Hooray! I've been listening to you play and thinking about your tone production, and I really wanted an excuse to make you another guitar because I think I can do it better.'

"So we ended up making this. This is Mexican royal ebony, which is called Katalox as well. It's an Adirondack top; I like European and Adirondack. I just think they do the business. And it has an English sycamore neck, which I just think is absolutely incredible. Her work is insanely beautiful."

What can you tell us about this Fylde?

"I had a 1931 Martin 000-18 12-fret, which was just revelatory. Everybody that played it went, 'For fuck's sake! Oh my God!' But I didn't keep it because it was such an iconic instrument. I couldn't put pickups in it. I couldn't take it out. I'd play it in the studio and wrote a bunch of stuff on it. Then I went, 'Let's see what other people do with this idea.'

"I've allowed myself to be retrospective [on *Some Kind Of Jubilee*]. It's a body of work that goes back a long way"



4. Martin's stunning custom Turnstone, made by the exceptionally skilled luthier Rosie Heydenrych, boasts wonderfully named wood choices with its Mexican royal ebony AKA Katalox for the body and Adirondack spruce for the soundboard

5. Martin's Taran is an exquisite guitar built by a recognised contemporary master of the craft, Rory Dowling – some of its most figured woods came from a Bentley

6. Martin and Fylde guitars have had a very long association – and despite its looks, this example features a neck modelled on that of a 1931 Martin

"Roger [Bucknall] makes my 12-fret guitars, and this was the second one that he made. Sonically, it's always been just absolutely ridiculous. But it had some intonation issues. Roger, fortunately, is a very flexible human being. So he said, 'Well, why don't I put a new neck on it?' And I said, 'Yeah, great. Why don't you model it on my old Martin?' The neck is ebony, dyed maple and mahogany. It's got a huge voice."

Let's take a closer look at the Taran.

"If you were to talk to the absolute woodworking kings, like Ralph Bown, their opinion is that the guy actually pushing the envelope the most is Rory [Dowling]. This has done at least 250 gigs. It's the most in-tune guitar. Before he built it, Rory asked me, 'What's your favourite colour?' I said, 'What is this, *Smash Hits*?' He said, 'Just wait.' So if you look at the interior walls, they're Kingfisher Blue. When I got this guitar, I went, 'Oh fucking hell!' I called Rory and said, 'Right, my first question is, where did you get that burl?' I could hear him grinning down the phone. He said, 'From a Bentley.'"

On the electric side, tell us about this Galanti?

"I saw this at Rich Tone. It belonged to one of the guys that worked there. I went, 'What the fuck is that?' And they said, 'It's a '65, Italian.' It's clearly Italian. You know, this is one of the best electric guitars I've ever played in my life. Look at the quality of that piece of construction. This whammy bar is so beautifully made. Stays completely in tune. They should have licensed it to everybody because it's way



“Sonically, [this Fylde] has always been just absolutely ridiculous. But it had some intonation issues. So Roger said, ‘Why don’t I put a new neck on it?’”



7



8

better than [better-known vibrato formats]. And, of course, Galanti is an accordion maker, so it's got the mute button.

"The interesting thing about this, for me, is that everything about it, spacing-wise, is friendly to an acoustic player. I think it's cool as fuck. I've just been getting further and further away from what most people think are great electric guitars. That [Jazzmaster] completely changed my life, too. It sits right. It feels like a proper guitar."

"I've grown to love what I do more and more as time passes. Making this latest record was like a series of dreams come true"

We're celebrating your half-century of music-making. Where did it all start?

"I got my first guitar when I was 12, and I was very fortunate that literally 400 yards around the corner from where I lived was the home of the Scunthorpe Folk Club. It kicked off round about the same time as I got my guitar, so that'd be 1965.

"At that point, the folk scene was absolutely on fire, and it was very eclectic. So there was the chance you might go and see somebody playing blues, like Mike Cooper, who was a phenomenal technician, used to play country-blues stuff really, really well on a National Tri-Plate. The next week it might be The Watsons, which was equally avant-garde, when you think about it – this family of travellers singing wild harmonies.

7. Martin's collection of vintage and modern acoustic instruments is one of the most enviable we've encountered

8. The elegant inlay stands for Sobell, but also appears in diminutive form on the soundboard. The secret? It covers a tiny (and rare) flaw spotted late in the build...

9. Martin says his exquisite and distinctive Stefan Sobell anniversary model guitar sounds like nothing else in his collection

"Stefan Grossman. Martin Carthy. Mike Chapman. Nic Jones. Everybody would come through the folk club. These people who were incredible, pushing the envelope."

It must have been amazing to be at that flashpoint.

"Meanwhile, I had two teachers at my school who formed the John Leggott College Folk Song Society, and they'd take us on school trips to see Pentangle. Obviously, there was Bert [Jansch] and John [Renbourn], but what blew me away was Danny Thompson doing a solo on *Blue Monk*. That was beyond belief to me. I could kind of comprehend the role of the guitar in this. I could not comprehend this guy with this unbelievable huge instrument playing a solo Thelonious Monk piece. I will never forget that."

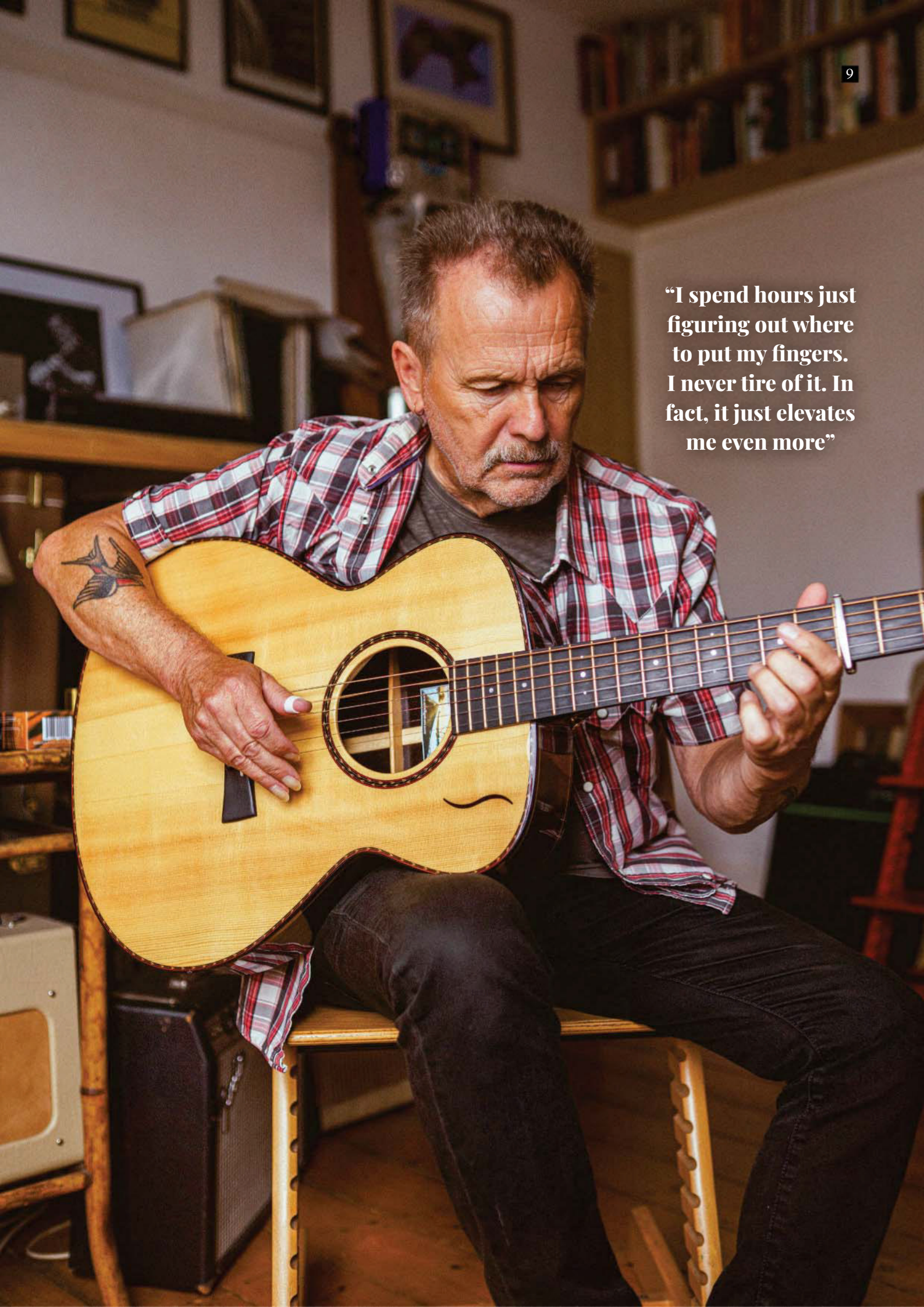
All these years later, what's your next move?

"I absolutely love what I do. I absolutely love playing the guitar. I love the mechanics. I love when you find the right way to play a phrase. I spend hours sometimes just figuring out where to put my fingers. I never tire of it. In fact, rather than tiring of it, it just elevates me even more, I think. This album is a big piece of work. It's finished. It's mastered. And I find myself thinking, 'Right, what are we going to do now...?'" **G**



Some Kind Of Jubilee is released on 25 September via Topic Records

<https://martinsimpsonmusic.com>

A man with a mustache and short grey hair is seated on a wooden stool, playing a light-colored acoustic guitar. He is wearing a red, white, and blue plaid shirt over a dark t-shirt and dark trousers. A tattoo of a bird in flight is visible on his left upper arm. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The background is a cluttered room with bookshelves filled with books, framed pictures on the wall, and various items on shelves. A black guitar case is on the floor to the left.

“I spend hours just figuring out where to put my fingers. I never tire of it. In fact, it just elevates me even more”

RORY
GALLAGHER

EDGED IN BLUE



Rory Gallagher was a man of destiny. Music was his first and last obsession, the passion that saw the Irish guitarist become one of the most influential players of all time. But the endless miles of road he toured and the burning zeal he had for music also led to his tragically early death. Now, for the first time, that poignant and extraordinary story has been committed to print in a fully authorised account of his life, as seen through the eyes of his brother, Dónal. We joined him to find out what walking on the hot coals of a relentless life in music with Rory felt like, from boyhood to the great stages of the world.

Words Jamie Dickson

“I suppose that it keeps hammering at me, why didn’t we slow down?” Dónal Gallagher reflects. “Why didn’t we take life easy? It’s all those questions. But that was part of ‘Rory the Dynamo’. And probably that’s what happened when he was starting to get ill – the Dynamo kept going, but he couldn’t stop.”

But of course Dónal’s brother, Rory, one of the hardest-charging guitarists of all time, just didn’t work that way. And that, beyond all else, is the story told in Dónal’s new book, *Edged In Blue*, an autobiography of his life as sibling and road manager to one of the most influential guitarists of all time. This book, by extension, is also the *de facto* first authorised biography of Rory himself: the man who inspired The Edge and Johnny Marr to play, who toured the world so intensely that there was barely a fleck of paint left on many parts of his famous ’61 Strat when he died in 1995.

And what a story it was. The book contains stadium riots, parties so wild that the National Guard had to be called out to stop



Dónal Gallagher was Rory’s roadie and then *de facto* manager for his whole career

them, limousines overturned by cattle backstage with ZZ Top, Johnny Rotten scandalising nuns on a flight to Cork and coffins sneaked into Beat-era clubs as stage props. It contains epochal encounters with a roll-call of musical legends from Muddy Waters to Janis Joplin, John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jerry Lee Lewis, Captain Beefheart, Elvis, Bob Dylan (who got turned away by mistake at Rory’s dressing-room door), U2 and scores more.

But more importantly it is a portrait of a man who, in some ways, remained a closed book, even to his brother, throughout his life. It’s the first authorised account of Rory and Dónal’s childhood in Derry and Cork and of their mother Mona’s courage and devotion in nurturing Rory’s extraordinary talent, even when the family could scarcely afford to buy guitars. We run, with Rory, alongside JFK’s motorcade on the president’s 1963 trip to Cork and experience life on the colourful and sometimes violent showband circuit in Ireland in the 1960s. We look over Rory’s shoulder as he writes songs that would become legendary among fans, and see Belfast through the eyes of musicians playing there at the grim height of the Troubles.

Above all else, though, it is the story of two brothers, the remarkable woman who raised them, and how a Fender guitar in a shop window changed not only their lives but the path of music history in Ireland and beyond. It’s a lot to sum up, as Dónal freely admits.

Speaking of Rory’s early days in his first band, Taste, Dónal

says it was obvious that Rory's dedication to music was an almost sacred mission to him, even in the early days of his career.

"My mother would be like, 'When are you coming home? Haven't you done enough now?' But Rory would say, 'No, we're only just starting this.' I'd be missing my pals back in Cork... your day was completely upside down to what was a pleasant life back home. But we just kept pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing."

This calling to music provides the continuous, vivid thread of their lives together that was only broken with Rory's death and, in a sense, not even then. And Dónal was there to witness it all, from boyhood stage appearances together in Cork to becoming Rory's roadie and then road manager throughout thousands of gigs and untold highway miles.

Dónal's first sense that taking care of business on the road with his brother might become a serious career was when Taste was invited to support Blind Faith on tour in the States in 1969 – and, even then, it seemed there were no guarantees, he recalls.

"I didn't know whether Taste were going to take me to the States in '69 because I really felt that I'd be surplus to requirements – I thought that there'd be a communal PA system and Taste were a three-piece so there wasn't so much gear – so I always made it look heavier and bulkier than it was [laughs]. But



then when we got over there, you found out that basically Blind Faith's production was really unsatisfactory, to put it that way. So you had to get stuck in.

"But it was a great way to bond and form friendships with their crew and the other musicians. I mean, at that time, Eric Clapton didn't have his own roadie, though Steve Winwood had a guy who looked after his keyboard, and Mick Turner was looking after Ginger. But if you think of how many people would be required to stage an arena tour today, all the crew, catering, trucking companies and transport companies that would

1. The second lineup of Taste, pictured in 1970 with (from left to right) John Wilson, Rory Gallagher and Richard McCracken. They were to split the very day they played the huge Isle Of Wight Festival that year

be involved... Back then it was just one bus."

The book is also a salutary reminder that nobody, including management and the bands themselves, really knew the best way to go about touring continents back then. Chaos often reigned, crowd control was dangerously poor, and long nights blending into endless motorway miles, with sleep a distant, fractured memory, were daily realities. For Dónal, touring as Rory's roadie and seeing the world for the first time, all this was a baptism of fire.

"There was no-one there to tell you – you learned the hard way.



"If you think of how many people would be required to stage an arean tour today... Back then it was just one bus" DÓNAL GALLAGHER

2. Blind Faith pose for a portrait in 1969. The lineup of Steve Winwood, Ric Grech, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton was stellar – yet the band's US tour was poorly organised at first and, sadly, the group soon fell apart

But there was a certain luxury to the fact that somebody paid for you to get on a plane, like it was unheard of, you know? I mean, we were doing it for free virtually because you were just so honoured to be on the tour like this," he recalls of that early milestone tour with Clapton and co.

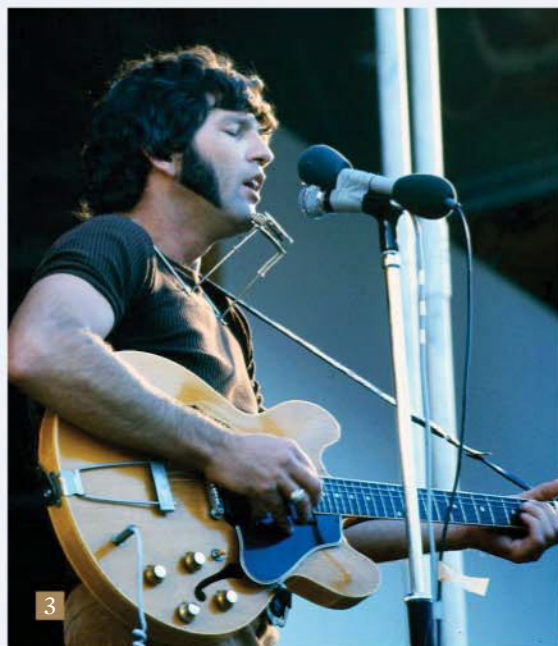
Taste's subsequent split and the beginning of Rory's 40-year solo career – after an incandescent set at the Isle of Wight festival in 1970 – marked the point at

which Rory truly matured from a promising newcomer to the major stages of the national music scene into the man of musical destiny he was always meant to be.

"It was such an enormous thing at the time, certainly in terms of the size of the audience," Dónal recalls. "We'd been slogging away, doing gig after gig in a transit van up and down the motorway into Europe, in and out and back and forth... and then we got a slot on the Friday night at the Isle of Wight and the band's equipment got stolen the night before – or part of it was – out of the van. It was so chaotic, and the band had already decided to split up and decided that the Isle of Wight was the last gig. And there were allegedly over 600,000 people there, you know. We were thinking, 'Will people even be able to hear the performance? Will people be able to see it?' But on the other hand, Rory was such a fan of all the other musicians around the festival that he was almost there just to watch Tony Joe White play [rather than just to perform with Taste]. So that was the great thing about Rory – he kept his feet on the ground. He was always about the music."

That sense of mission was sometimes the only frayed cord that kept them tethered to sanity at times. The book recounts bandmates having onstage hallucinations brought on by sheer exertion and unforeseen obstacles, up to and including having trucks full of gear towed away by the production crew of a James Bond movie, all of which made Rory's life maddeningly unpredictable at times.

"Rory had great leadership in that sense. He kept very cool," Dónal says. "I mean, behind the scenes, he'd let you know what he was unhappy about. But you had to think on your feet. You had to improvise. I mean, again, it's one of the stories in the book, but we'd arrived to do a show at the arena where Elvis Presley had done the *Roustabout* movie, and it was huge – it could hold 100,000 people. We arrived there and we'd been sent the day sheet to say Rory was on at 11, so we got there that evening and the promoter said, 'Where are you going? You were supposed to be on at 11 o'clock this morning,' and we laughed. I mean, Rory doesn't play in the morning."



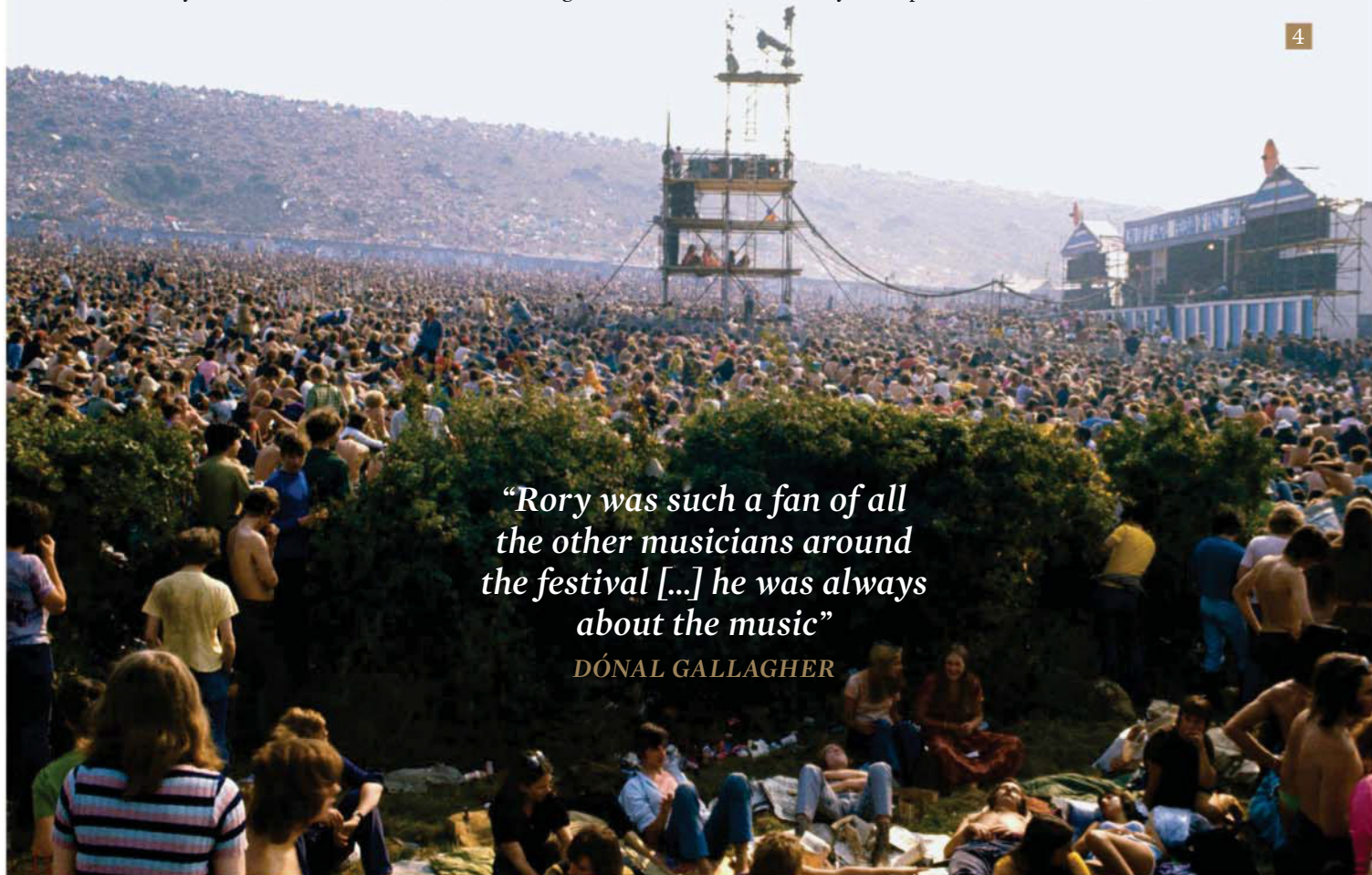
"So the promoter said, 'Well, that's it, guys. Sorry. Alice Cooper is closing the show, so there's no room.' And we're kind of standing there thinking 'Christ, we've come all this way...' But the guy took pity and he said, 'Look, you can play to the audience on the way out. That's all I can do for you now. I'll give you a few bucks for your expenses.' So there was

3. Tony Joe White was one of many artists at the Isle Of Wight Festival that Rory admired – he was always as much a fan of music as a player

4. The Isle of Wight Fest 1970 was an absolute behemoth of an event with an estimated 600,000 fans in attendance

"Rory was such a fan of all the other musicians around the festival [...] he was always about the music"

DÓNAL GALLAGHER



a bit of humming and hawing, but Rory straightway was like, 'Fine, let's do it.' And I said, 'Well as it happens they have a second stage, so we'll be ready to go if everybody's up for it.' And, yeah, they tore the place apart."

And that's another common theme of the book. Encores that lasted hours. Legendary acts being scared to follow the force of nature Rory became when he hit the stage – a man who even had the power to save the world's most disastrously chaotic festival on Bull Island by sheer stage presence and stamina. Because sometimes when Rory was tearing the place apart he was also, in a sense, holding it all together.

This was never more true than when Rory later toured Ireland as a solo artist – including the North at the terrifying height of the Troubles – on his celebrated Irish Tour in '74. Dónal argues that Rory's family background made him uniquely placed to be a unifying force in music at a time when any common ground at all was bitterly hard to find.

"From our childhood, we had the experience of living in the North and understanding the social parameters and the differences and the subtleties and all that growing up. And it wasn't alien to us to go back up North. And then we had the experience

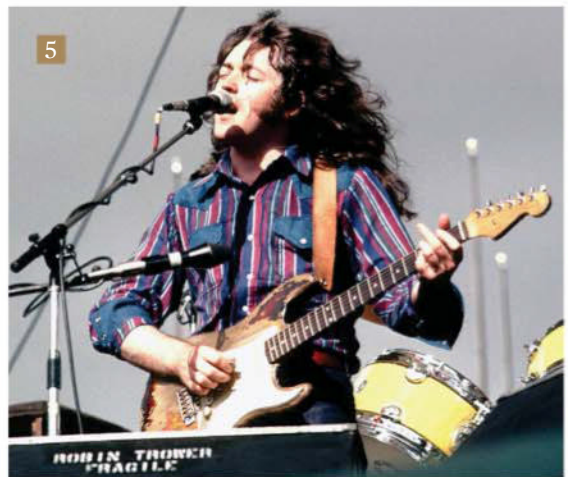
of being there from '67 with Taste, actually living in Belfast. You could see the tensions rising then, but it was nothing like what turned into in the 70s, when it really went downhill, big-time. And then really very quickly, it had descended into war, really.

"So people on all sides appreciated the fact that you know Rory [had roots in the North as well as in Cork], and many of his musicians were from Belfast, too. I mean, if you look at various line-ups there was Wilgar Campbell, Lou Martin... They were all people from Belfast. So, in a way, Rory stands to, why wouldn't I come back and play for these people? The real challenge was really for the promoter to get the venue and insurance to play there – or *not* get the insurance, as it might turn out."

What's striking and, in the final analysis, tragic about the book is how little space Rory left in his life for any rest or private life. Recording and the road were his ruling passions and the book is partly so eventful because Rory, at least until the 1980s, very

"That was his downtime: going to Denmark Street and then getting to know the guys there"

DÓNAL GALLAGHER



5. Rory playing the Agora Ballroom in 1973, with Robin Trower opening the show. His epochal tour of Ireland, the following year, remains a high-water mark of his career in many senses

6. The Royal Albert Hall was the scene of many triumphs for Rory, such as this solo-band performance from December 1975

rarely took time to stop. Going hunting for guitars was as close as he got to a relaxing hobby, Dónal says.

"That was his downtime: going to Denmark Street and then getting to know the guys down in Denmark Street. Because he was trading all the time and it was part of what all the guitarists like Jimmy Page did... they were vinyl collectors as guitar buyers... that's their downtime. It's not like, 'Oh, damn I have to go out and buy a new guitar because I've got to play the Albert Hall, what a terrible chore that's going to be...' I mean, Rory couldn't wait to get out the door and come back with something. But I suppose because of our kind of humble beginnings



PHOTO BY ALLSTAR PICTURE LIBRARY LIMITED/ALAMY

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*“People on all sides
appreciated the fact Rory
[had roots in the North as
well as in Cork] – many of
his musicians were from
Belfast, too”*

DÓNAL GALLAGHER

Rory rocking the
1984 Pistoia Blues
Festival in Italy. As
that decade unfolded,
Rory finally found
time to slow down –
but he was always a
candle that burned
bright and all too fast



there was this guilt [about spending money on guitars] and so he would negotiate the best price he could.”

The book, of course, charts the tragic cost of Rory’s single-mindedness and his inability to accept the natural limits of the human body when put through the absolutely relentless demands of the road for too many years. Although both Dónal and Rory observed periods of abstinence from drink, it was an ever-present palliative for fear of flying, and beer flowed like water in numberless backstage get-togethers. But when back pains from shouldering heavy guitars, red-eye fatigue from far too many flights – and other side-effects of Rory’s relentless touring schedule – brought strong prescription painkillers and sedatives into the picture, the path to self-destruction had unwittingly begun and, sadly, that, too, is charted by the book, witnessed with love and a sense of helplessness through his brother’s eyes.

“And at the end of the day, it’s all about your health,” Dónal reflects of what writing the book brought to the surface for him. “If you don’t have your health, you have nothing. Doesn’t matter how many guitars you’ve collected, how much money you might have made, or how many records you put out. At the end of the day, if you haven’t got your health, it’s zilch. So I suppose the focus is very much back to that for me. And it is very cathartic in the sense that you think

“If you don’t have your health, you have nothing – [no] matter the money you made or the records you put out” **DÓNAL GALLAGHER**

about what else you could have advised or influenced or tried [to help the situation]... that’s the hardest part. You say to yourself, ‘My God, why did I say that or do that or not say that?’ or whatever... and you can’t regret. But on the other hand, having left 30 years to [pass before beginning to write] the book, you’re able to reflect and then say,

7. Rory trying out new equipment at Nomis Studios in West London, 1989. Though his health was starting to be in decline, he remained a fiercely powerful player, writer and performer

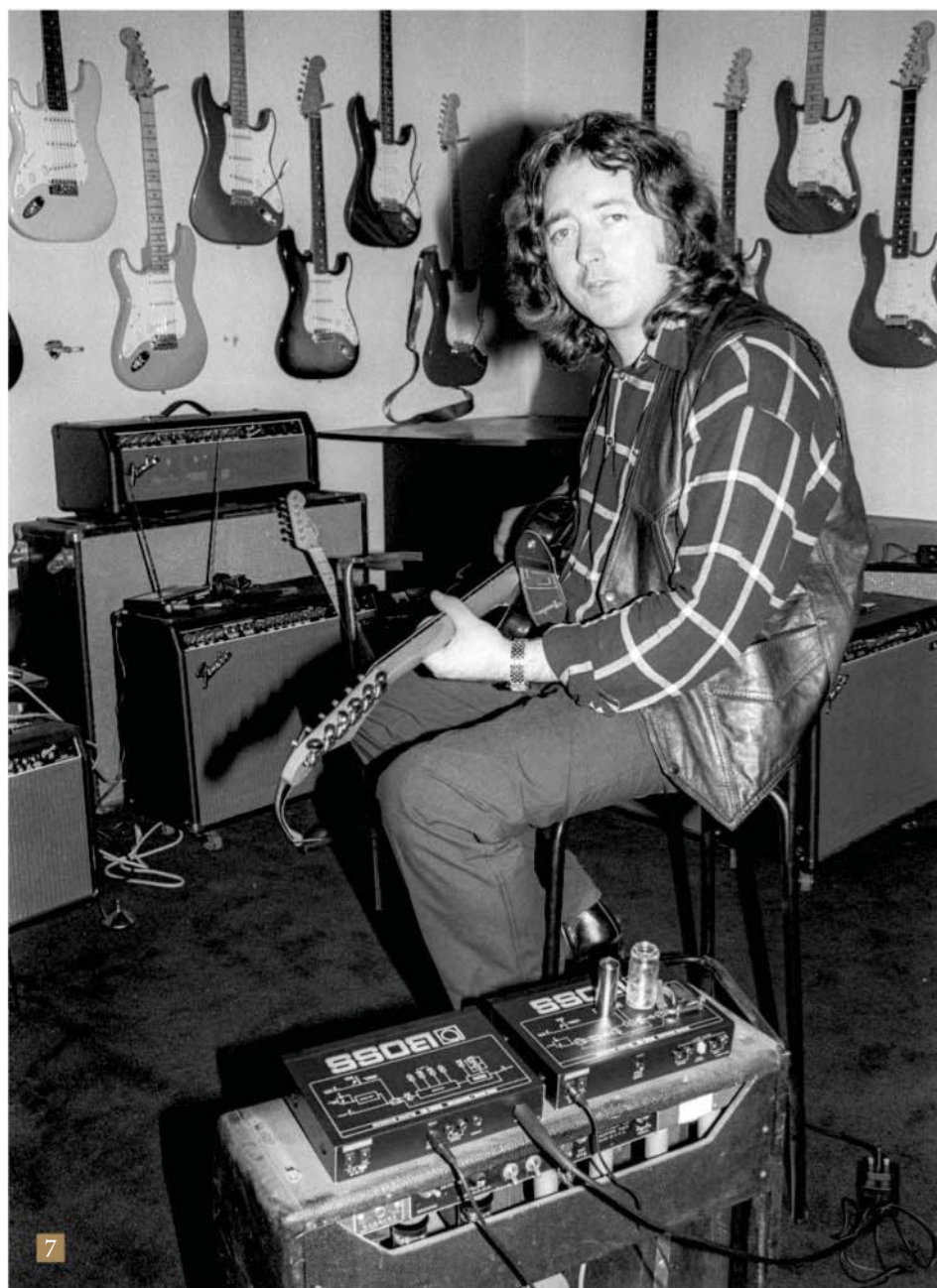


PHOTO BY ODDIE NOEL/LAMY

‘Well, you see the counterbalance is his legacy’ – because it seemed after Rory died, it could have all just dissipated.”

And yet it never did. Partly that’s because Rory’s family – Dónal foremost among them – have worked incredibly hard to keep Rory’s music alive, through festivals, reissues of classic recordings and unearthed sessions, and even public art like the statue of Rory that was unveiled in Belfast last year. But it is, ironically, the vital spark in Rory’s music – that volatile yet boundless creative energy that consumed him – that keeps people

coming back to him. His charisma, his warmth and humanity as a writer, and that absolutely headlong, wild beauty to his guitar playing is what continues to captivate. 30 years on from his death, he’s playing encores.

In the following pages, we join Dónal and Rory in some of the most eventful episodes from their remarkable lives together in exclusive extracts from the new book. **G**

***Edged In Blue: A Rock ‘n’ Roll Odyssey with Rory Gallagher* by Dónal Gallagher with Jamie Dickson, out 26 September 2026 via Red Stripe Press**

West Valley

THE FEVER



28.09.2026



RORY
GALLAGHER

SCENES FROM A LIFE



In the following extracts from *Edged In Blue*, we gain a behind-the-scenes look at Rory's remarkable life and career. From buying the famous '61 Strat at Crowley's in Cork to the festivals, tours and meeting and playing with his heroes, Dónal Gallagher was at his brother Rory's side. The book details the perils of the early gigs, before the behemoth trucks and hundreds of deck hands that feature in today's touring arsenal had become the accepted norm. Just van life and hundreds of miles between venues. But out of all the chaos, a legendary figure in the guitarscape would emerge, his profound influence still in place today.

Words Jamie Dickson

EXTRACT ONE

WHO'S THAT COMING?
In this extract, Rory and Dónal first encounter the '61 Strat that would become Rory's constant companion for thousands of gigs and an icon of his music – though not before landing in hot water with their mother, Mona, for secretly bringing the guitar home...

'Are you awake?' Rory said, shaking my shoulder. Big brother was back late from a gig with news as urgent as if a spacecraft had landed in the city.

'There's a Buddy Holly guitar in the window of Crowley's music shop,' he exclaimed, 'Can you believe it – a Fender Stratocaster in Cork? Will you come and look at it with me tomorrow? I might buy it – it's only one hundred pounds.'

'What?' I said, rubbing my eyes and sitting up in bed. I felt like I was still dreaming. 'And which bank do we rob? That's the price of a car ... for God's sake, Rory.'

'Don't say anything to Mammy until I see if I can get a deal on it,' my sibling warned.

Standing outside Crowley's store at Merchants Quay the next day, my brother and I gazed at

the contoured, sunburst-finished instrument displayed on a stand in the window. To me, it had all the serenity and presence of Our Lady's statue in a grotto.

'Come on, we're going in,' Rory ordered.

Reluctantly, I followed him into the small store, which had stringed instruments hanging from every wall like Christmas tree decorations. I tried to make myself as small as possible as Michael, the shop's genial owner, retrieved the Stratocaster from the front window at my brother's request.

Rory confidently caressed the guitar's sleek contours and strummed it acoustically. Even unplugged, its voice was strong and distinctive, the fragrance of its polished lacquer adding to the instrument's allure.

'Do you want to plug it into that amp?' Michael asked Rory.

Rory nodded and, moments later, my ears tingled with shimmering, mirage-like notes that magically filled the shop. The warmth of the amplified chords from the Fender seemed like something from another world.

'Where did the guitar come from?' asked Rory.

'The Royal Showband,' Michael replied in his soft-spoken way. 'Their guitarist, Jim Conlon, is after a red one like Hank Marvin has, to suit the band's new look or something. He only hung onto this one until he could get the red one shipped over from California.'

'What kind of trade would you give me for my Solid 7 and the Selmer amp – and how would that work with the hire purchase scheme?' my brother enquired coolly.

Michael did some calculations, his pencil moving quickly as he glanced at the hire purchase rate chart.

'With the trade-in, it would work out at about £2 and 10 shillings over the next 36 months,' he said. 'Sure, why not take the instrument home, try it out at a gig. But obviously, you'll have to have your mother's consent and signature for extending the commitment you already have,' Michael added.

We returned to my grandmother's house full of glee and trepidation, carrying the »

guitar in its beautiful buff-coloured case, with stitched tan leather binding at both ends.

'You're not to say anything to Mammy or anyone. It's a secret,' big brother said gravely.

I nodded.

'I want you to swear you won't tell anybody for now. You can guard it when I'm not around in case someone sneaks up from the bar.'

'Can I play it?' I asked.

'No. You can look at it, to make sure it's safe, but you can't take it out of the case', he ordered. Rory also informed me that the guitar was to be hidden under my bed.

'Mammy will never look there – you're the pet,' Rory explained.

During the following days, I'd return regularly to check on the guitar and admire its perfection, swaddled up in its reddish-gold lining and cradled by the case's inner structure. But what started as a quick peek once a day became an hourly occurrence. While I kept my word not to touch the guitar, I had a good look through the case during these inspections. I remember there was a blue bottle of Fender-branded polish inside that seemed more like a solvent. Later, when Rory first began using the guitar in the band, I'd always ask him if he wanted the guitar polished – without quite realising, I was getting a bit addicted to the fumes from the stuff.

"It was 1963 and he was 15 years old. Getting that guitar was a huge moment for Rory and it would become his lifelong companion"

It wasn't long before our cover was blown. One evening, my mother bumped into Michael Crowley in the street and he soon told her about the arrangement he'd made with Rory regarding the Strat. This was news to her, of course, so she came back with a face like thunder.

'What's this about another guitar?' she demanded.

'Oh, Michael's just lent it to me,' Rory replied, all innocence.

'Well, you know we can't afford that. You'll have to take it back right away,' she said.



1. Rory's 1961 Stratocaster became synonymous with his music and, seen here pictured for *Guitarist* three decades after his death, bore the marks of thousands of gigs. But when he bought it, it was a pristine, gleaming symbol of American guitar making

Then she turned to me.

'And what about you? The guitar's under your bed.'

I explained that I was just minding it for Rory, but my mother shook her head again.

'No, it goes back.'

Rory was so upset.

'We won't ever get to be professional if I don't have a proper guitar,' he protested.

But my mother wouldn't budge.

'We won't be able to pay for it – you'll never get the money,' she said, with a note of finality.

To be fair to her, the whole situation raked up difficult feelings. On the one hand, she had unflagging support for her brood. But she also had painful memories of my father, Danny, falling into debt and having to pawn his piano accordion – and it was only the money she earned as a seamstress that had allowed him to get his instrument back again.

Rory kept at it, however.

'Look, if I had that guitar, then we wouldn't need a rhythm player and I could get paid twice as much because I could play rhythm and lead.'

This argument seemed to tip the scales a little and, after some careful thought, my mother said she could spare an hour to go to Crowley's with us that Friday and talk things through with Michael.

And so, the big day finally came. We went back down to Michael, who set out terms for extending the hire purchase agreement that my mother already had with him for Rory's earlier instruments.

This now went from an 18-month 'jail sentence' to a five-year extended contract. Michael had this wonderful look about him that used to make me think of the Beatles' suave producer, George Martin: he was so cool and calm, and he was a very rational man.

Many years later, when Michael died, his daughter told me that Michael had inherited the shop at the age of just 14. Having built the business up from there, he knew how difficult it was to make your way as a young man getting started in music – and he had a kind heart. He reassured my mother that Rory had never missed a payment on the previous equipment he'd had.

'Look, if he can't pay for it, I'll be taking it back off him and selling it to somebody else,' he said.

So, with my mother's help and Michael Crowley's forbearance, Rory got his Strat. It was 1963 and he was just 15 years old. Getting that guitar was a huge moment for Rory and it would become his lifelong musical companion. Having been granted my mother's blessing, the guitar was now legitimate and I wanted to take a picture of Rory holding it. To do this, we had to climb out the window onto the roof because it was too dark to take pictures inside.

My mother said, 'Stand beside the parapet. I'll take a picture of you both with the guitar.'

But Rory protested.

'No, you can't take a picture of Dónal holding it. He doesn't even play the guitar!'

'Yeah, I can,' I said, taking it off him and holding down a simple chord. This didn't satisfy Rory, however, who begged my mother to take the guitar off me.

But she said, 'Oh, go on. It's only a photograph.'

Rory compromised and said I could hold his acoustic guitar instead and so, with a small 'click', the picture was taken, capturing us both smiling as Rory took possession of the guitar with which he would make his name.

I'M MOVING ON

*In this passage from the book **Rory and his then-band Taste support Cream for the supergroup's epochal final gig at the Royal Albert Hall and Dónal receives a unique keepsake of Clapton, Baker and Bruce's final parting...***

Cream were the band everyone wanted to match up to, but the musical ménage à trois of Jack, Ginger and Eric finally reached its end in November of 1968. There was universal disappointment at the news that another studio album would not be forthcoming and even a sense of mourning that this incredible band would no longer be around. Cream's farewell concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London would, therefore, be a highlight of the year. Being given a support slot on that show was akin to achieving a top position in the charts any day of the week, so every agent around vied to get their act the slot. Fortunately, Robert Stigwood – who was Cream's manager – was also the agent for Taste, so the two coveted support slots would go to Taste and rising prog outfit Yes.

The 5,500 tickets for this swansong gig sold out immediately, which led to

calls for another performance. Economics favoured putting on a matinée show, as the venue was already paid for. Though this move pleased fans, it was a technical nightmare that meant proper soundchecks didn't take place, which proved detrimental to the documentary footage that Tony Palmer was able to capture of this milestone show.

A dispute soon broke out between the two support acts as to who would go on first, who was bigger than who, and so on. This storm in a teacup was resolved by Taste agreeing to open for the matinée, with Yes opening the second show later on. It proved a good solution, as both bands were well received and won new fans from the experience. The chaotic environment on stage wasn't conducive to an easy performance, though. Roving camera men, assorted bystanders and the low-lying stage itself proved a challenge for the small stage crew trying to concentrate on their work. I was, therefore, given privileged access to the high altar of the stage itself and told to repel any boarders. From this exalted position, I was able to hobnob with the Bee Gees and the Byrds' David Crosby.

To top off an already unforgettable night, I was asked to take guitars back to the dressing room for Eric and Jack. When I arrived with the instruments, I suddenly realised I was the only other person in the room when Eric, Jack and Ginger had their final hug as bandmates. There were no managers and their own crew were busy packing down. Not wanting to intrude, I said, 'I'll leave,' but they said, 'No, no, that's okay.'

Seizing the last ever opportunity to do so, I said, 'Guys, if you don't mind, can I get your autographs?'

They kindly agreed and I ran into Rory's dressing room and grabbed the first bit of paper I could find, tearing it from a pad. Then Eric, Ginger and Jack signed it for me, writing their names in a spoked shape that resembled a Mercedes badge.

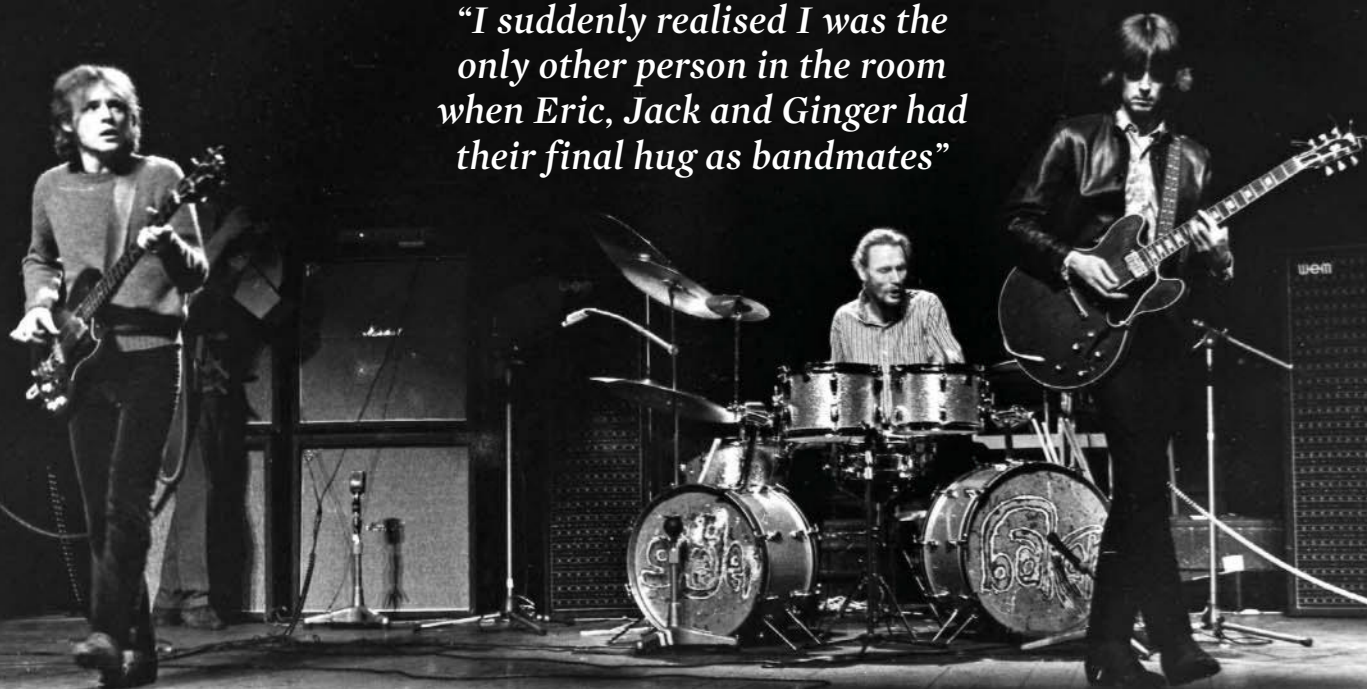
Rory was a little less delighted by this than me, however. In my haste, I'd torn a page out of the jotter he used to write song lyrics in.

'I was writing a song and now the lyrics are on the back of your autograph!' he complained.

But his annoyance did little to reduce the thrill of receiving the last autograph Cream ever gave, backstage at their farewell concert.

Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton perform on stage during Cream's farewell performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 26th November 1968

"I suddenly realised I was the only other person in the room when Eric, Jack and Ginger had their final hug as bandmates"



LIVIN' LIKE A TRUCKER

In this excerpt, Rory and the band play what would go down in infamy as 'the world's worst festival' on Bull Island in America – and save a deteriorating situation from complete collapse by keeping the volatile crowd enraptured for hours with a brilliant, marathon performance...

Stranger by far [than the previous Peachtree Celebration at the North Carolina Motor Speedway] was playing the infamous Erie Canal Soda Pop Festival on Bull Island. In our innocence, we had no idea what we were letting ourselves in for.

'Get to Bull Island,' our agents told us.

'Where's Bull Island?'

'It's on the Wabash River. It's going to be a big festival and you're going to be on early, so don't make the same mistake as you did in North Carolina.'

'Okay, if it's a big festival audience, then yeah,' we replied.

Rory ordinarily loved to play at night, like most musicians, but a large captive audience was enticement enough. So, we eventually found our way to Bull Island, which had the peculiarity that the bridge to Bull Island was in Indiana, but the island itself

was part of the state of Illinois.

The promoters had chosen the site cleverly because its location made it a grey area, legally speaking. That set the festival up to be a complete dope-fest, as there was no police control over the island. The Illinois state police would have to go into Indiana to get the bridge onto the island, but that wasn't going to happen because they would need the Indiana governor's permission to do so, which seemed great at the time but was to have dire consequences.

When we got out there, we immediately realised this was one of the biggest audiences we'd ever seen in our lives. But as we threaded our station wagon through the heaving crowds, trying to get backstage, we realised something was amiss. Normally, when you're driving up to a festival, there's a bass throb or some kind of sound system blaring, but the stage was silent. When we finally made it backstage, we could see there was a bit of PA set up, but nothing else. The promoter practically kissed us when we arrived.

'Oh, thank Jesus you guys arrived! Oh, wow!' he gushed.

We were getting hugs and the complete red-carpet treatment.

'Do you guys want food? Beers? A coke?' he offered, ushering us towards the refreshments.

2. The chaotic 1972 festival on Bull Island – which was billed as the Erie Canal Soda Pop Festival – was so badly organised that many of the top acts on the bill pulled out, seeing the awful conditions on the ground. Rory waded in, however, and provided crucial musical relief for the embattled crowd of 300,000 fans

It soon emerged that tens of thousands more people than the festival promoters had planned for had turned up, swamping the roads and overwhelming the basic facilities. To make matters worse, many of the big-name acts scheduled to appear had got wind of the situation and pulled out, leaving the festival dangerously overcrowded, packed full of drugs and with no music. The Faces, Joe Cocker, Black Sabbath, John Mayall, Cheech & Chong, Canned Heat, Fleetwood Mac, the Doobie Brothers, Foghat, Nazareth, REO Speedwagon and the Doors had all been scheduled to play, but only a fraction of the artists on

"He played his heart out in a set that lasted well into the night and, by the end, the huge audience was in the palm of his hand"

the impressive bill actually made it to the festival. Unbeknownst to us, booking agents for the bigger bands had flown over the festival by helicopter and judged it to be unsafe for their artists, and so had advised them to stay away. There was no medical centre at the festival either and I read later that, when the site was being cleared up, two people were found dead. When we arrived there, the whole situation was teetering on the brink of disaster.

Despite this, Rory got out on stage in front of the 300,000-strong audience and gave them what they'd come for. The crowd stirred as he powered through his set and the festival seemed to be getting into gear. Despite the anarchic atmosphere, Rory was in his element. He'd crossed the Atlantic to break America and now he had over a quarter of a million people adoring him. With few other acts around to fill out the bill, he was invited to do a second set later in the evening and told he could play on all night if he wanted. Given free rein, Rory played his heart out in an extended set that lasted well into the night and, by the end, the huge audience was in the palm of his hand. He could have said, 'We're marching on Washington,' and they would have followed him. He was superb.





Ford cars loomed large in Rory's life, not least because Ford operated a large factory in Cork. Their vehicles also got him in and out of some scrapes in his time

EXTRACT FOUR

SOUPED-UP FORD

When Rory is given the unique opportunity to record with blues legend Muddy Waters he nearly blows it by losing track of time at a gig in Leicester. Only a white-knuckle midnight drive back to London, with Dónal at the wheel, gives him a fighting chance of making the longed-for session with Muddy on time...

PHOTO BY COLUM HENRY

Muddy Waters was one of Rory's biggest blues influences, going all the way back to our boyhood in Derry. To be invited to play alongside the great man himself was more than he would have dared hope for. Yet Rory's wish was granted when, out of the blue, he was chosen to play guitar on a new Muddy album, *The London Muddy Waters Sessions*, in December of 1971.

We had met Muddy before during Blind Faith's tour of America and we also went to see him play in Hampstead while Muddy was over in London in November of 1970. It was a brilliant gig: Muddy was on amazing form and Alexis Korner got up and jammed with him. After Muddy finished his set, I went over and introduced myself and, encouraged by the familiar face of Alexis Korner, Rory came over and said hello as ►►

well. Beyond this brief meeting, there was nothing to suggest Muddy had Rory in mind as a musical collaborator, so when Rory got an invite to play on his album, it left him stunned but elated. The invitation came via Polydor, who had been contacted by Muddy's label, Chess Records. At that time, record companies were pretty rigid about their artists performing on rival labels, so in-demand players would often have to perform under a false name if they really wanted to be involved in a record that wasn't on their own label. Steve Winwood would sometimes guest on other people's records under the fake name of Steve Anglo or D'Angelo, for example.

Fortunately, Rory had no need to hide his identity to play with Muddy. Polydor told Chess they were fine with Rory playing on Muddy's album; they even said they thought it would be a great thing for him to do. For their part, Chess Records was probably hoping to score a crossover hit by pairing Muddy up with musicians who were hot property on the British rock scene, including Steve Winwood and Ric Grech of Traffic, Mitch Mitchell of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Georgie Fame, who was credited as Georgie Fortune.

Rory was doubly honoured to be asked to play because Muddy had his pick of London's top guitarists at the time – although Eric Clapton was going through a period of ill health, so that put him out of the running. However, Rory had impressed Chris Barber and Alexis Korner with his feel for authentic blues and both men were close to Muddy, so that may have tipped the balance in his favour. Rory also got word later that Al Kooper, who was originally slated to produce the album, had recommended him. In fact, Rory's guitar style was well-suited to Muddy's music because it was rooted in hard-edged Chicago blues, whereas other guitarists on the scene, such as Peter Green, took inspiration from the more restrained style of BB King.

As arrangements got underway, Rory was ecstatic to learn that he was to play lead guitar on three tracks, with the sessions taking place on as many nights. There was a problem, however: the first session was scheduled for 4 December, but Rory had a gig at Leicester Polytechnic that night. Recording wasn't due to start until 9pm, so Rory optimistically promised Muddy he'd be at the studio no later than 11pm, with time in hand to record his parts.



Rory guested on *The London Muddy Waters Sessions*, which also featured contributions from Mitch Mitchell and Georgie Fame

This would be just barely possible if we hit the road the moment Rory came off stage in Leicester, but it left no margin for error and Rory didn't reckon with his own nature when he made that promise. On stage in Leicester, he lost track of time completely and by the time he'd delivered a series of headlong encores, it was touch and go whether we'd make the session at all. The instant Rory came off stage, we bundled him into the car, leaving him to get changed in the back seat as we sped down the motorway. The drive was made at terrifying speed and the drama of it was unbearable, with one hundred

“By the time he'd delivered a series of headlong encores, it was touch and go whether we'd make the [Muddy Waters] session at all”

3. Rory was mortified that he might have let down the blues legend Muddy Waters by arriving late to a session – but Muddy was gracious and put Rory at ease

miles to cover and no time left to do it. The only thing in our favour was our car, a big Ford Zodiac Executive that I'd got from a pal who worked at the Godfrey Davis car dealership. It was a brilliant motor and a mechanic friend had tuned it up a bit, so we raced down to London at literally one hundred miles an hour.

Tearing into town, we got there well after midnight. As we rushed from the car to the studio, Rory was cursing himself bitterly, saying, 'I should never have done this! Why didn't I postpone the gig? I'm so late ...', to which I could only reply, 'Well, don't do so many encores!' At last, we made it inside and there was Muddy, standing to greet us in a suit and tie, waving and smiling at Rory. Rory was so apologetic, but Muddy just said, 'Rory, you're a musician. You're lucky – you got work. I'm not going to complain about the job you had to do ... so relax.' He stood there with a glass of champagne in his hand and he was as charming as you could possibly hope for. He instantly put Rory at ease.

Heartened by this forgiving reception, Rory soon got started and the session was dynamite. The other guys in the session were Muddy's longtime sideman Carey Bell on harp and Sammy



PHOTO BY GLISBERT HANEKROOT/ALAMY

Lawhorn on guitar. Rory got on very well with Muddy, possibly because Rory was respectful and polite. He didn't come out with any of the overfamiliar banter you'd sometimes hear from British musicians when American blues musicians played with them.

To Rory's relief, that first night went well, but it went on very late. The studio was IBC, down in Portland Place, opposite the BBC's main building. You weren't allowed in the control room while recording was taking place, so I fell asleep in the hallway outside, as there wasn't even a reception where you could wait at that hour. On the journey home afterwards, Rory was like a wet rag, and I could barely keep my eyes open either. Despite my exhaustion, I realised something wasn't right with the car and made a tired mental note to get it checked in the morning.

The next day, I rang up a mechanic friend and said, 'We've got more gigs coming up, but I need to get the car checked out. It doesn't seem to be running right.'

'Bring it over and we'll have a look,' he said.

When I got to the garage, he put the Ford up on the ramp, took a quick look underneath, then turned to me and whistled through his teeth.

'What were you doing in this car last night?' he asked.

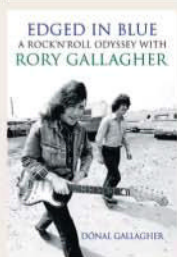
'Coming back from Leicester,' I replied.

'Well, you must have been really hammering it.'

'Yeah, I was.'

'You were bloody lucky. There's barely any tread left on the tyres. You were running on canvas by the end.'

I realised that the thumping that I'd heard underneath the car the night before was chunks of shredded rubber hitting the chassis and that we'd been one blowout from a bad accident. **G**



Edged In Blue: A Rock 'n' Roll Odyssey with Rory Gallagher by Dónal Gallagher with Jamie Dickson, is published by Red Stripe Press. Available online and in stores from 25 September, you can pre-order it here: linktr.ee/EdgedInBlue



WRITE ON HOT COALS

Guitarist editor Jamie Dickson on the daunting yet privileged, fascinating work of co-writing Edged In Blue with Dónal Gallagher

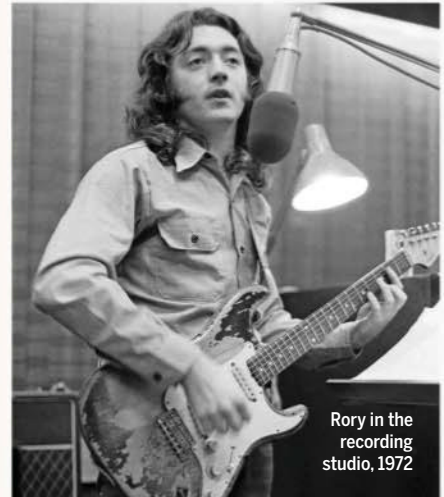
When Dónal Gallagher asked me to help him write the story of growing up with Rory and the incredible career in music that followed, I felt deeply honoured. By that point, in 2018, we'd collaborated on many Rory-themed cover features for *Guitarist* and enjoyed working together – but the book that Dónal was now proposing was on another level entirely.

As well as being a cathartic work of autobiography for him personally, any book we wrote together would also be, in effect, the first authorised account of Rory's life from the perspective of his family. No pressure then! In fact, Dónal had already made some inroads on the job and, as soon as we had agreed to work together, he handed me draft chapters covering the early years of his life with Rory and their remarkable mother, Mona.

These draft chapters told the story of Dónal and Rory's upbringing in Cork and Derry before progressing to Rory's early years playing in showbands and, later, Belfast days trying to get his first breakthrough group, Taste, off the ground. The pages of Dónal's unfinished manuscript were full of vivid vignettes of life in 1950s Ireland and wild, uproarious humour but didn't shy away from the difficulties the young family faced either, especially the dwindling presence of Rory and Dónal's father in their lives. Even so, completing those first chapters was largely a matter of carefully structuring and editing what Dónal had written in his first draft without losing the vitality and character of his natural voice.

Thirty years after Rory's death, Dónal's time and attention was still being pulled in dozens of directions, including commissioning a statue of Rory to go on public display in Belfast, reissues of live concert recordings and a raft of other legacy work. Therefore, to get the rest of the book written – covering the entirety of Rory's sprawling and hugely eventful solo career, but also his eventual decline into illness and tragic death – I would have to interview Dónal as if for the world's longest magazine article, while he explained how it all went down. And so began the deeper work: talking it through, face to face, sometimes over a pint but typically just seated in two chairs in a comfy lounge, with Dónal talking and me asking questions, taking notes and recording audio to be pored over later. As we went along, he'd have to trust me to translate his oral storytelling onto the page in the same style as the early chapters he had written himself without anyone noticing the join.

The job was fascinating, intense and laborious and took far longer than any of us could have



Rory in the recording studio, 1972

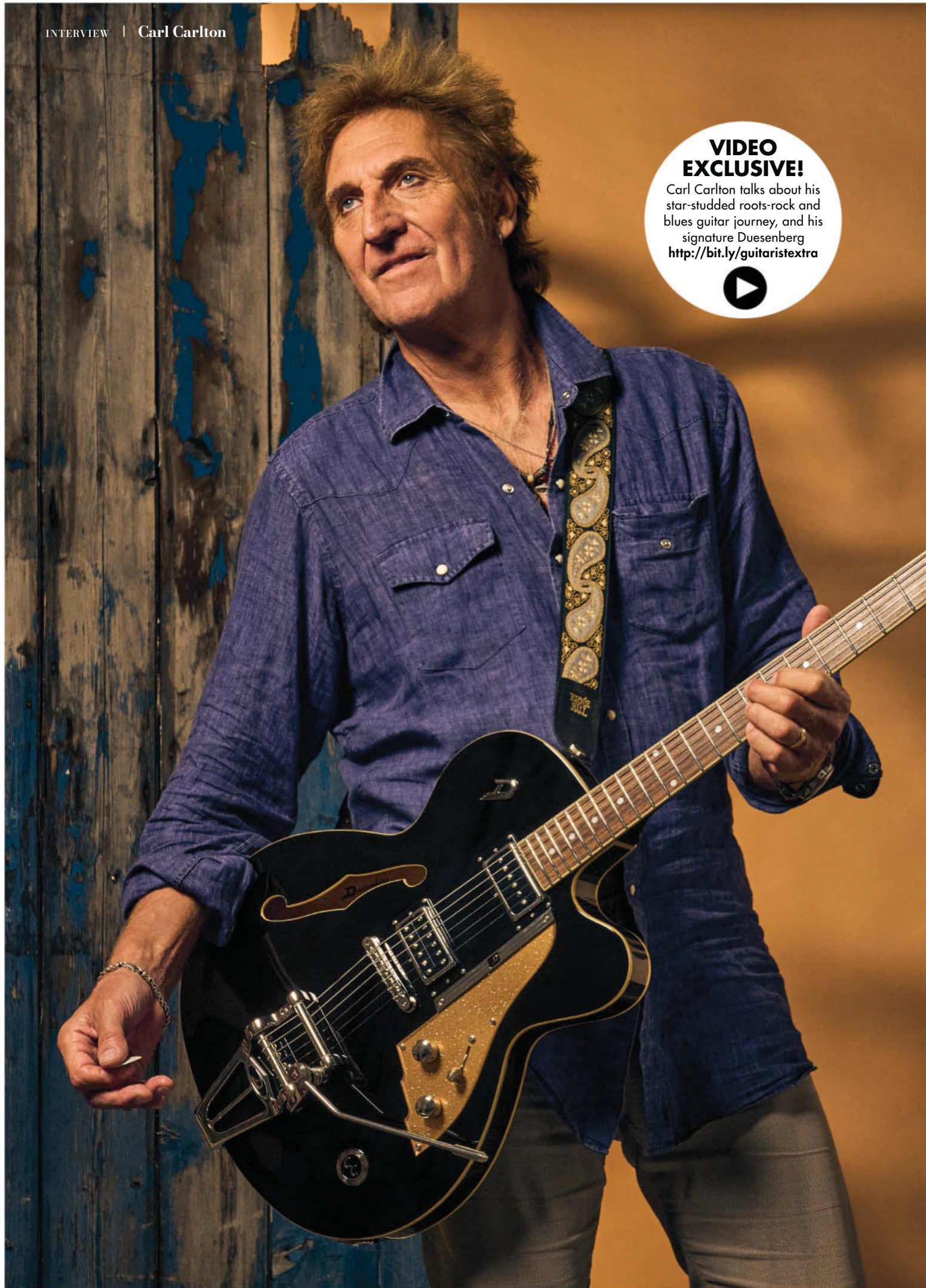
known at the outset. We began work in 2019, worked all the way through the pandemic and all the global upheavals that it brought in its wake, and pressed on as the world emerged from lockdown.

Stories that had blended into one another through long repetition needed to be carefully teased apart into their original forms and cross-referenced against tour dates, photographs and all kinds of documents that verified when and where key events happened down those long, long miles of road that Rory travelled during his storied life. It took trust, care and tweezer-fine archival work, with Rory's nephews Daniel and Eoin providing invaluable support in that area. Alison Richter also deserves much praise for wading through hours of interviews and turning them into the raw ore of composition – detailed, accurate transcriptions that would be referred to again and again during the work.

At last, in 2025, six years after we started, the job was done. I remember the moment exactly, when I asked Daniel Gallagher to send on the next batch of comments from Dónal and he replied there weren't any. For a moment, it felt like a loss. Helping to tell the story of Dónal and Rory's life sometimes felt oddly like walking into a room he had just left – the amp still turned on, vinyl from his record collection still revolving on the turntable. I felt, sometimes, like a private detective following Rory down the decades, through all the extraordinary things he had seen and done with Dónal at his side. I hope his many fans will enjoy the book, forgive any omissions, and share in my privileged sense of having witnessed the life of a remarkable family unfold, in intimate detail, upon the gilded pages of music history.

**VIDEO
EXCLUSIVE!**

Carl Carlton talks about his
star-studded roots-rock and
blues guitar journey, and his
signature Duesenberg
<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>





CARL CARLTON



Renowned as one of Europe's great slide men, Carl Carlton might also be the rock 'n' roll era's best raconteur. He tells us about tough apprenticeships in Germany's port towns, hitting the heights with Robert Palmer, and battling imposter syndrome

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates Photography Lucy Robinson

Hearing Carl Carlton spin his life story is almost as thrilling as sitting opposite him as he rattles a slide lick up the neck of his Telecaster. Born on 20 April 1955, as the son of a livestock farmer in Germany's sleepy Friesland region, the teenage guitarist found himself at the right time – but entirely the wrong place – for the rock 'n' roll boom.

Yet Carlton – real name Karl Buskohl – soon defied his circumstances, upping sticks for the country's roughneck port towns to learn his craft at the sharp end, before becoming a first-call sideman who inspired giants like Robert Palmer and Eric Burdon to Grammy-nominated career heights.

Carlton always ran his own bands in parallel, with new album, *Miles Of Time* – alongside vocalist and partner Melanie Wiegmann – the official reason for today's interview. But as the 71-year-old folds his 6ft 5in frame onto the *Guitarist* sofa, he's happy to wind back the clock.

Do you remember how music came into your world?

"My father was a farmer and once a week he'd take the animals to market. So they did the deal and afterwards we'd go to a pub with a jukebox on the counter. The publican looked a bit like a Gypsy, with a gold tooth. People loved him. And the music on his jukebox wasn't the usual German oompah or schlager. He had Ray Charles, Elvis, Beatles, Stones, Kinks. My father played cards and he always gave me coins for the jukebox. That was a revelation: 'What the fuck is this?' I'd never heard anything like it."

How did you start down the road to becoming a guitarist?

"Christmas '66, I got my first guitar. First song I learnt was *House Of The Rising Sun*. 40 years later, I'm playing a tour with Eric Burdon in Toronto, Canada. And Eric says, 'We have a guest today, the original guitar player from The Animals, Hilton Valentine.' So we're on stage together playing the first song I ever learnt. These things come in circles."

How did your musicianship develop?

"I was at a boarding school on one of the Frisian islands. All the other kids came from Berlin and Hamburg, failures from dysfunctional rich families. But there were some players. I remember guys three years older who showed me John Mayall and Canned Heat. Coming back to Friesland, I played drums, bass, whatever was needed. I played in these Top 40 bands, who also played quite progressive stuff – not just *Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep* but The Doobie Brothers.

"They were amazing musicians, and the shit sounded exactly like the record. They were very precise at copying. Most of these guys had their own 'serious' bands, but they were making good money playing covers [on the side]. I could play *Blue Suede Shoes* really well, so I did that for 15 bucks and a bottle of wine, and I was happy."

You're renowned as a slide player. How did you discover that side of your palette?

"Again, The Rolling Stones were the culprits because through them I heard so many new sounds and



PHOTO BY ALAN OVASKA

names, like Ry Cooder. Around 1970, I became a big Cooder fan and there was also Little Feat's first album. So I was sold on that slide sound. Someone who played more regular slide was Jesse Ed Davis, Taj Mahal's underrated guitar hero. Of course, you didn't have YouTube, so it took a while. They must have thought I killed a cat next door. At the same time, I learned a lot of slide and slow solo playing from Joe Walsh."

How did your early career gather momentum?

"My first bands started to clash with school. But I was really radical in what I wanted. It was the lifestyle and the music. I just broke out. I moved to a port town near the Dutch border where there was plenty of work. I learnt how to defend myself. Witnessed crime and sex for the first time. I changed my bands like my shirts, always with the dream of writing my own material."

"One of my bands opened up for a Dutch group called Long Tall Ernie & The Shakers. They had hits in Germany, Holland, Belgium, France with 50s-style rock 'n' roll. And they needed a guitar player. It wasn't all my cup of tea because they were teddy boys. I don't know what drove me. But they had flight cases and they had a crew. I thought, 'Fuck it, I'll get back to what I want later.' So I joined them. And playing in that band taught me the ABC of rock 'n' roll. We even had a No 1 in [the Netherlands] in 1977 with *Do You Remember*."

How did success change things for you?

"Out of the blue, I made what to me was a lot of money. It might have been £10,000 or something. So I bought

1. Carl with his wife and musical collaborator Melanie Wiegmann, who sings on his superb new album

2. Carl's signature Duesenberg blends elements of classic semis such as Gibson's 335 with styling that evokes jet-age Cadillacs. The more evolved features, such as an upgraded vibrato system, offers Bigsby-style shimmer but with greater stability and ease of use

a big old Cadillac, second or third-hand, and we had a summer break, so I drove down to Cannes with my dog. Ridiculous, in that big ship! I ended up at the Carlton Hotel and nearly blew all my money there. Then my car broke down in Paris. I literally gave it away at a petrol station. And I hitch-hiked home.

"When I got back, the band started calling me Carlton. And it stuck. Then some executive from the label thought that was actually my name and got it wrong on the records. But we opened up for Golden Earring with my new band and the bass player, Rinus Gerritsen, said, 'That's not a bad name. Keep it.' So because of that money, I not only got my name but felt secure enough to break out and start my own band."

"My father played cards and gave me coins for the jukebox. That was a revelation – it wasn't the usual oompah or schlager"

How did you start working with Robert Palmer in the 90s?

"I was always a big fan. At the time, I had a group of well-oiled musicians around me and we called ourselves The Treatment. In '94 or '95, Robert just had a greatest hits out, so the head of CBS called me up and said, 'Carl, could you get a band together? Robert needs horns. He needs percussion.'"

"Robert's MD came over with the setlist and, with no particular instructions, we just learned it off the records. But I went back to the arrangements from his first Island albums like *Sneakin' Sally Through*

“The Les Paul on me looks like a ukulele. So I started playing 335s, all the big Gibsons and Gretsches, [and Duesenbergs]”





The Alley [1974], y'know, when he was backed by The Meters and Little Feat. I was young and sassy. And in the middle of rehearsals, the door opens, Robert flies in, gives it a listen, throws away his coat, starts singing and that was it. I could have been fired. But Robert loved to improvise. So off we went."

Tell us about the genesis of your all-star Songdogs project around the millennium.

"We did a Robert Palmer show and Ronnie Wood was there. We talked about this band and Ronnie said, 'Oh man, let's call Mac,' – y'know, Ian McLagan from the Small Faces and the Faces. So he came and Bobby Keys, the saxophone player from The Stones. So that's how the band grew. It was almost like a summer camp down in Louisiana. And during that session, BB King's producer was there. He said he knew Levon Helm and thought he'd love what we were doing.

"That was at a low point for Levon. He'd just had cancer. It was the end of the 90s and nobody knew who he was any more. But we knew who he was. We were all like trembling schoolboys on the porch when his car arrived with his famous mandolin. Even Sonny Landreth next to me was kind of trembling. You were wondering how he could even see in the car because it was so full of weed smoke. And he became a lifelong friend. While Robert to me was like an elder brother because I had lost my parents very early, Levon really became a bit like a stepfather figure."

What do you remember about Robert Palmer's final album, *Drive*, from 2003?

"After Robert guested on [2001's Robert Johnson tribute album] *Hellhound On My Trail*, he told me, 'Y'know, I'd love to do a whole album like that.' But he said, 'Let's give it a timeframe and do rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues from the end of the 40s into '55, no later.' If you listen to the record, there's actually a bit more. Y'know, there's even a ZZ Top

"We were all like trembling schoolboys on the porch when Levon Helm's car arrived with his famous mandolin"

cover on it [*TV Dinners*]. But that was the idea, and we dug deep into the blues.

"I remember, for one song, he told me, 'Play some straight eights, but think 'swing'.' I replied, 'Robert, are you nuts? Did you have one martini too many? What do you mean?' Because I was short-tempered and not very patient. But after you've played them for a while, those eights don't quite go into a swing, but they go somewhere in-between. I'm getting the chills right now talking about it. That was Robert. He brought some authentic shit out in you, which is all pure African or Caribbean."

On your new album, *Miles Of Time*, what were your go-to guitars?

"I use different acoustics for different tunings. Because the guitars suffer if you constantly change the tunings, especially the acoustics, from the weight of the strings. So certain acoustics, I always keep in



PHOTO BY MARTIN HUTCH

3. Retro styling meets dependable modern functionality, including locking tuners, on Carl Carlton's Duesenberg signature model

4. Carl and Melanie revisited classic songs, including Big Boss Man by Jimmy Reed on the new LP

the same key. I have this old Gibson '39 J-whatever-it-is that's always in G. It even comes out of the box in tune now.

"But I also used a '55 Country Western – my birth year – and that beautiful-sounding Gibson from '39, from a pawn shop in New Orleans. I very much like the new Larson Prairie State. But sometimes I need a funny sound and I take a not-so-good-sounding new Fender Paramount. Cheap can sound good. Super-cool-sounding is not always great. Too much cake, y'know? Sometimes you want it lo-fi or dirty or whatever."

We have to ask about your signature Duesenberg CC.

"Dieter Gölsdorf and I were friends, and he said, 'Carl, what would be your ideal guitar?' Well, I'm 6ft 5in, and I always thought I was uncool because I didn't look like Steve Marriott or Paul Kossoff, these tiny men with big guitars. I mean, if Marriott wore a Gretsch, he looked so cool. Everybody says, 'Oh, be happy you're so tall.' But I wasn't. I wanted to be tiny like the Small Faces. The Les Paul on me looks like a ukulele, right? So that's why I started playing 335s, all the big Gibsons and Gretsches.

"Anyway, I said to Dieter, 'Well, it's got to be big like a 335. It needs to have a single coil and a humbucker.'



And I love Bigsby's. They look cool even if you don't use them, but they were always out of tune. So I said, 'Can you invent something like a Bigsby, but which doesn't go out of tune and it's easier to handle when you change the strings?' So he came back with this guitar and it was an amazing sound. Then they built smaller ones called the Starplayer: very similar to this but with a semi-hollow Les Paul[-style] body. That's how it all started. And it's been a big success story."

And do you use the CC for your standard-tuning, non-slide playing?

"Yeah, I more or less use my Teles or weird old Nationals for slide. But not always. Sometimes the more melodic slide, I do on the Duesenberg. My tunings depend on the song. I love the D tuning, or E, which is literally the same, just one step up or down. Every key has its own character. Like, on our new album, if I play, say, *Daddy's Little Pumpkin* in G, it doesn't sound like it would in B $\flat$. That's just the right tuning for it.

"Sometimes, the band will say to me, 'Oh Carl, does it always have to be in B $\flat$?' And I'll say 'No, let's move it to A.' But that half-step is such a big difference in vibe. All the Chuck Berry tunes are in B $\flat$. It also suits

my vocal and it's very sassy. It's kinky. It's passive-aggressive in a way. I really love that. But not for all songs. For others, I prefer D or G. Also, the capo is my best friend, y'know?"

You've achieved so much in your career. Have you ever had a moment of self-doubt?

"I always had imposter syndrome. When I played with Manfred Mann or something, I always thought, 'Any minute, they're going to find out I'm no good.' I didn't think I could be a good guitarist. It was like, 'I'm from this little farm in the middle of nowhere. I'm not from London or some hip city. I'm nothing. And they will find out.'

"But during the recording of *Drive*, Robert really helped me out without realising. I was working on a really tough tune – *Stella* – which was like a calypso groove by Mighty Sparrow. But the cassette I was working from was, like, from the 50s. It was very hard to make out. And on top of that, for whatever reason, I decided to challenge myself and do it in open G, with all these jazz chords."

What happened next?

"We went to Metropolis Studios in London to finish the song, and I just couldn't get it together. And I was so nervous because my friend Robbie McIntosh – who played with us live – was in the control room. Also, to commercialise *Drive*, the record company had suggested Eric Clapton as a guest. So rumour had it EC would be there any minute. So I got really nervous. I just couldn't get this song together, and I got really angry.

"So Robert came in, with his martini and his cigarette, and he said, 'Carl, what's the matter? Can I make you a drink? A Bloody Mary? A glass of Champagne?' And I'm like, 'No! I can't get this shit to work and Robbie's sat there and Clapton's coming any minute!' And he'd never seen me like that. He said,

"I was really radical in what I wanted... I changed my bands like my shirts, always with the dream of writing my own material"

'Please, Carl, take all the time you want. I don't want Robbie. I don't want Clapton. I want you.' And that triggered off the imposter syndrome big-time. I was like: 'That's a fucking lie!'

"But it wasn't. I had a bit of a nervous breakdown, went out to the toilet crying. But someone's girlfriend walked past me and said, 'Carl, what's the matter?' And I told her. And she said, 'No, Robert is always talking to everyone about your playing and your feel. And he wants you – nobody else.' So I found out that that was true: Robert meant it when he said he liked my playing and he was confident that I would make the song work. So that helped me out a lot. That was a big step for me..." 

5. The Göldo vibrato system on Carl's signature model is much easier to restring than on vintage Bigsby's for example, as the ball ends do not need to be fitted over posts – you simply string them through the bar itself

6. Carl says he learned so much from musical collaborators and mentors such as Robert Palmer – their insight and confidence in him granted him what he needs to make great music



Carl Carlton and Melanie Wiegmann's latest album, *Miles Of Time*, is out now via Timezone Records

<https://carlcarlton.de>

"I always had imposter syndrome... But during the recording of *Drive*, Robert Palmer really helped me out without realising"



INTERVIEW | Richard Thompson

RICHARD THOMPSON

Back with new album, *Hippies, Thugs And Heroes*, the folk giant shares his soloing secrets, why modern music makes his ears hurt, and the guitars he's lost to the airlines

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates
Photography Paul Clampin

PHOTO BY MUSICLIVE/ALAMY



1

It's hard to imagine a more tantalising album title than *Hippies, Thugs And Heroes*. And when opener *Sorcerer's Apprentice* strikes up, Richard Thompson reminds us he's as much a storyteller as songwriter, the man who once painted a perfect thumbnail sketch of a girl seduced by the petrol fumes of a silver-tongued thief on the classic 1952 *Vincent Black Lightning* now giving life to a new cast of hardscrabble characters living on their dreams and schemes.

Those vivid lyric sheets would work as poetry or short stories – but, of course, that would lose the thrilling music made by Thompson and his studio band, whose instinctive nose-to-nose performances seem born of deep friendship and musical telepathy. “On this record,” says the 77-year-old, “we were just smashing it down live and having a good time.”

It feels like the sound has shifted a bit on this latest album. It seems a little more stripped back and elemental.

“Well, it's funny. I think it turned out that way. I kind of make all the records the same way. I mean, we're still antediluvian in our recording techniques. We still record to tape, then dump it into Pro Tools. We still pretty much record live. I always go for a live vocal. Sometimes they don't work. [But] I think this time most of them worked better than when I tried to redo it. So that's the difference. You know, the band cracked everything in about two takes. So it was a very efficient process, and we finished way ahead of schedule. There was that extra spark of energy.”

Have you always gone for first-take immediacy, or have there been phases in your career where you've taken an intricately layered, carefully manicured approach?

“I think ‘carefully manicured’ might be overdoing it. I'm not good at that stuff. There are people who are very good at being in the studio and taking [the material] to bits and putting it back together again. That's not my forte. It's good to be spontaneous, and the recording process ideally should sound like it's almost in front of an audience.

“It's not always easy to achieve that. Records of mine that people love and say, ‘Oh, he'll never do an album as good as *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight* in 1974'... Thanks very much. You know, I'll go out and shoot myself now. But that's basically putting down rhythm tracks, like acoustic, bass and drums, then overdubbing everything, just because that seemed to be the economical way to do it.”

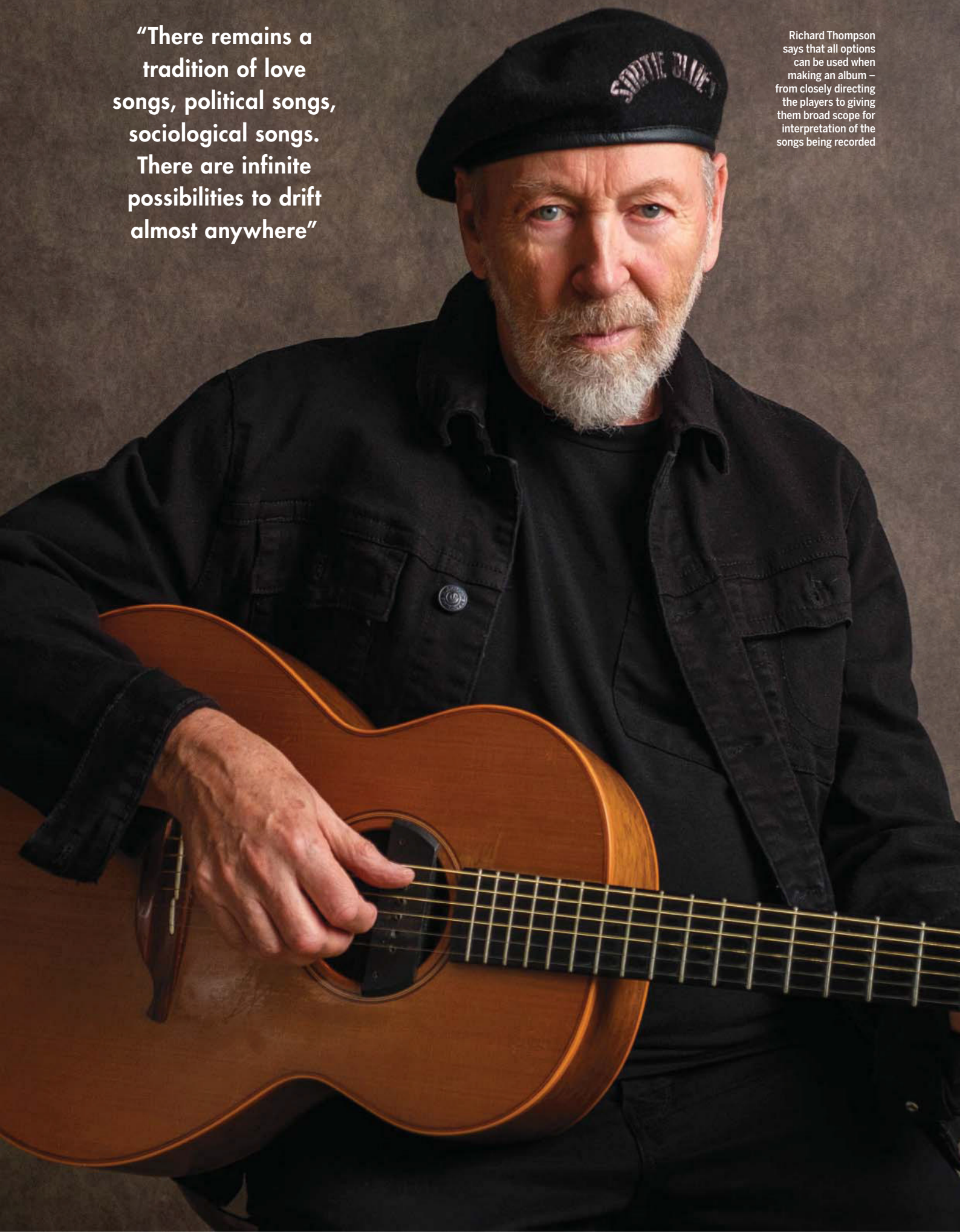
Do you like to produce yourself, or do you prefer someone else to say, “I think you have a better take in you”?

“I go backwards and forwards. It's good to have another set of ears sometimes, and that can stretch you and take you somewhere perhaps you weren't thinking you were going to go. That's the good thing. Gets you out of yourself. On the other hand, if you produce yourself, if you've got a good engineer and you've been making records for 60 years, you can figure out what to do yourself, and it might be closer to what you envisaged your record was going to sound like.

1. Richard Thompson performing at the long-established institution of British folk that is the Cropredy Convention, in August of this year

**"There remains a
tradition of love
songs, political songs,
sociological songs.
There are infinite
possibilities to drift
almost anywhere"**

Richard Thompson
says that all options
can be used when
making an album –
from closely directing
the players to giving
them broad scope for
interpretation of the
songs being recorded



"This record, not only did I produce it, but I also produced more complete demos for the musicians. So I sat in my basement, did the bass, drums, guitars, everything, and then sent those demos out to people, so there were less misunderstandings about what it should actually sound like. And I think this is much more my vision, actually, of what it should sound like. Not always a good thing. Sometimes, you want other people's visions to chip in and make it sound stranger than you were expecting."

Can it be somewhat dangerous to just make bare-bones demos?

"A couple of albums ago, I sent out just acoustic guitar demos, and there was one track called *Her Love Was Meant For Me*. I thought it was in 3/4, but I forgot to put a count on the front, so I sent it out to Michael [Jerome, drums] and Taras [Prodaniuk, bass], and they thought it was a 6/8 shuffle starting on beat 2. And at rehearsal, I couldn't beat it out of them. They couldn't envisage it another way. So I said, 'Okay, you play it your way, and I'll play it my way.' So myself and the other guitar player [Bobby Eichorn] played it in 3/4, starting on beat 1, and they played it at 6/8, starting on beat 2. And it kind of worked and had this weird kind of swing to it, like an African cross-rhythm thing going on. So I'm aware of the dangers of under-demoing, if you want to call it that."

It's really about how much you want to leave to interpretation, isn't it?

"Well, it is. Also, on this record, David Mansfield played guitar and fiddle, and he only got the demos very late in the day. So he was that spark of deviousness, if you like, who could potentially take it in any other direction."

Do you think lyricists should have any limits on what they write about?

"I think since Bob Dylan hooked up with The Beatles – and said, 'Why are you writing this sappy stuff? You can write about real things if you want to' – we as writers have permission to write about just about anything. Since Dylan kind of changed the culture, you can now have Radiohead, you can have Kate Bush, you can have people writing about esoteric and obscure things. I think there remains in popular music and in folk-rock, if you want to call it that, a tradition of love songs, political songs, sociological songs. But there are infinite possibilities to drift almost anywhere."

What were the particular guitars that you pulled down for this album?

"I used two or three Fender Stratocasters that are basically bits stuck together. I used Telecasters and Gibson SGs occasionally. And my various Lowden acoustics. Sometimes you can have a not-very-good guitar that on its own is unimpressive and actually sounds pretty bad, but it will fit that space on a record. You know, it'll have just the right frequencies to cut through in the right way. Whereas your \$15,000 Santa Cruz will just get lost. There might be three 12-strings on the intro to the



opening track. It's one of those things where it's like, 'Ooh, that sounds good. Chuck another one on.' You know, 'How much jangle do you want?'"

How many Lowdens have you played on stage over the years?

"Well, I keep using them until the airlines break them, which is not infrequently. I've played Lowden onstage since the mid-80s. I'm on number three, which isn't bad going. The head broke off the first one, but I glued it back on again and it sounds great. They smashed the whole side in of number two. Looked like a forklift truck went through it. Right through the case, right through the guitar."

"Looked like a forklift truck went right through the guitar. But that's repaired and sounds good now. Perhaps even better"

But that's repaired and sounds really good now. Perhaps even better since the repair.

"So I'm on number three. I'm still playing it in a bit, actually; it's still maturing. But that's live ones. I keep the best-sounding ones for recording. I've got a Lowden nylon-strung. I've got a Lowden electric. I have a baby Lowden as well, the little S series."

"The only vintage acoustic I've still got is my old 000-18 Martin, which is retired from the road. It's been abused on stage, but it's a joy to play around the house sometimes, especially if my wife [singer-songwriter Zara Phillips] pinches the Lowdens."

2. Richard's a longtime and well-known Lowden player – and he's got through a fair few of them over the decades

3. Richard's mid-60s Strat represents the best of what Fender was producing in the immediately post-CBS ownership period

Have you come to any conclusions about mic'ing up acoustics over the years?

"In the studio, often the engineer will just put up one pencil mic or one small diaphragm mic. An 84, an AKG or a Schoeps: they can all sound really good. But I like the coincidental pair – you know, where they're at 90 degrees to each other, slightly above or below the soundhole. If it's just you and a guitar, you can put the voice in the middle, and then have the acoustic just slightly moving left and right."

"I listen to a lot of classical music. I always have done, because it's a place to go to learn about harmony and orchestration"

Some artists have a whole new mic configuration for every record...

"It also depends on the key a song's in. You know, are you capo'ing the guitar up? Does your guitar sound better in C or in A? What are the overtones? How does it ring? I think in a sense you're better to use the same mic, but just place it differently sometimes, for different overtones. If you want to get extravagant about it, besides the close mic, you can put up a pair of room mics. What John Wood used to do with Nick Drake was he'd have it close mic'd then have a pair of room mics in front and a pair of room mics behind – then mix all that together. That's a pretty interesting idea."

Which musicians are on the record and where was it recorded?

"Drums and percussion, Michael Jerome, who I've been playing with for 25 years. On bass, Taras Prodaniuk: if you can spell that, you're a genius, or from the Ukraine. David Mansfield on acoustic/electric guitar and fiddle. My wife, Zara, on lead vocals. We had some wonderful horn players that came in. We did it at a place called Hobo Sound in New Jersey. I've done the odd overdub in there, and thought it might be the place to go."

Whose records do you listen to now?

"What you would call actual popular music – hardly anybody. I listen to more vintage stuff than anything else: the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and a bit of the 70s. I listen to pretty much any generation of jazz. And a lot of classical music. I always have done, since I was a teenager, because it's a place to go to learn about harmony and orchestration. I love rockabilly. A good singer-songwriter is great – and that's about it, really."

"I have a slight phobia... well, maybe I shouldn't call it a phobia. But I resent the lack of texture on modern records. And it's just because if you sample a bass drum then it sounds the same every single time you hit it. But if you have a real drummer playing a bass drum, it's different every time he hits it. Whether he's trying to do that or not, every beat is a little different. So if you sample everything and you loop everything, then I just get tired. My ears get tired of the texture. I hate to say it."

Music-making has entirely changed over the last few decades...

"It's normal now to start off with a drum loop, add a bass and build it up that way. I went to visit my old school after a long absence and I was really impressed by the music department. There's a keyboard for every kid, a guitar for every kid. It's just fantastic. But one of the kids said, 'Oh, I checked you out on Wikipedia and I listened to some of your music, and I really like that song, blah blah blah. I'm going to sample a bit of that and use it in my music.' I didn't have a reply. I mean, what could I say? I thought that was a bit sad in one sense. I mean, the world has changed, and I just sound like a grumpy old geezer. But it kind of interested me."

How do you like to approach solos when you're in the studio?

"For most solos, you want to tell a story, and in the right hands, a story should have a beginning, middle and end. You hear a great guitar solo and it absolutely does. I think you practise the bits and pieces until they're familiar and they're second nature. You practise your scales and changing scales halfway through a phrase, and you practise throwing in strange notes or missing out notes of the scale and then coming back to them. And you practise the weird scales, the whole tone scales and the diminished scales, all that stuff."

"Another good thing to practise, I think, is just playing melodies. Being melodic, especially if you take stuff from the Great American Songbook, and

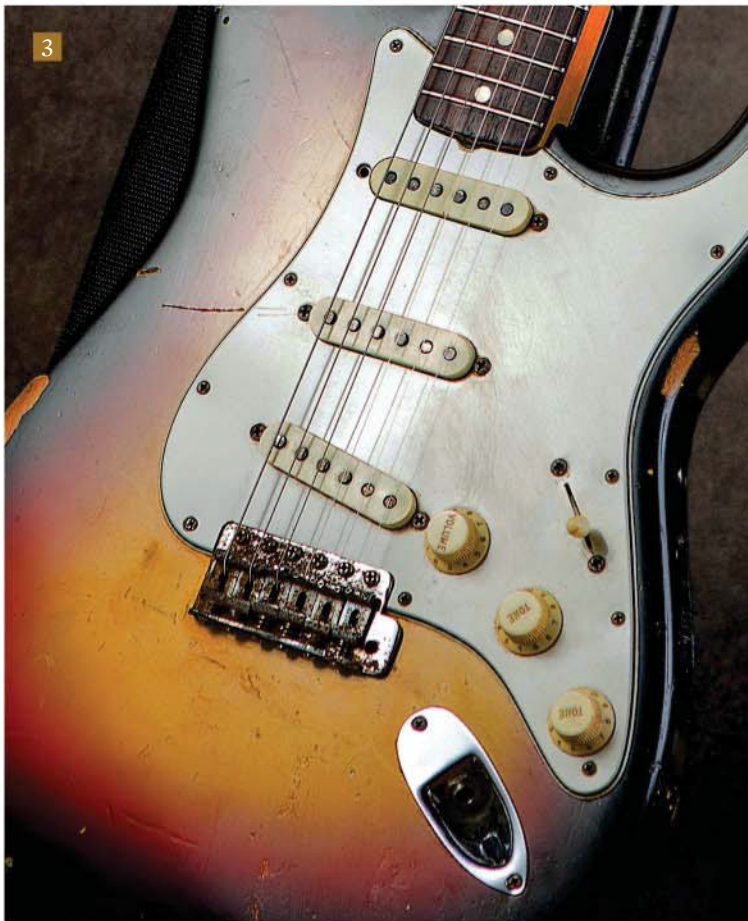


PHOTO BY ADAM CASSON

The Fender Strat remains a mainstay of Richard's sound though the new album saw him use Telecasters and Gibson SGs, too

"When it comes to a solo, you almost want to have your mind blank. Not be thinking of anything and just see where you go"

you say, 'Okay, how does that tune go?' Some of those tunes are very interesting. You should almost practise being melodic and practise being dissonant. And then, when it comes to a solo, you almost want to have your mind blank. Not be thinking of anything and just see where you go. Or you might say, 'Okay, I'm going to start with this interval. And from there I have no idea what's going to happen.' That's a kind of ideal situation."

The Way That It Shows is one of your all-time great solos. How did that develop?

"Sometimes you're thinking, 'What's an interesting quartet of chords over which to solo? And then I'll write the song later.' Which is what I did on that song. It has four different scales over four chords. But at the same time, you can play one note – a D – over all of them if you want to. And then I thought, 'Well, I'll just run off a song that will fit that.' So I did. So that's a good example of how you can be inspired for a song from any starting point. You don't have to start with lyrics. You don't have to start with melody. You can start with a chordal idea that you're going to flesh out later."

Ultimately, you can approach songs from any angle you like.

"Yeah, I think so. You know, Hendrix would change tempo sometimes to go into a solo at the end of a song. He'd go from triple time into straight time and vice-versa, turn it from 3/4 into a galloping 6/8. He was a really good arranger.

"I mean, Hendrix, harmonically, is pretty pentatonically based until he starts using the whammy bar and feedback where it goes to Mars. You know, he's no Coltrane. But if you think of the great records from the pop era – certainly the 50s and 60s – a lot of session players were playing on those records, and they were jazz musicians. Like, all the guys at Motown were R&B-slash-jazz players. James Jamerson and Benny Benjamin, these guys were proper jazz players. And over here, Big Jim Sullivan, giving us such quality and depth, sometimes on nearly forgettable popular music."

So what's next for you?

"There's the Fairport Convention festival [in Oxfordshire] coming up next weekend. This is the 59th anniversary of the band. Next year is the big one. Whoever can still walk or crawl will be there. We're planning a US band tour in January/February. A European band tour in April/May. And in spite of being busy with other stuff, I keep writing songs. So, you know, I might have to do another album..." **G**



Hippies, Thugs And Heroes is released 16 October on New West Records

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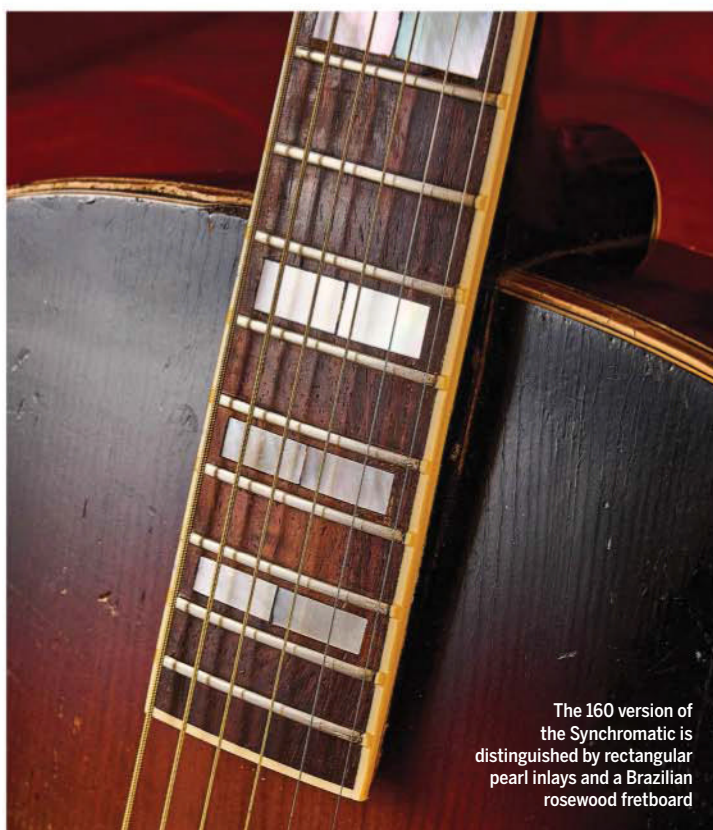
GRETSCH SYNCHROMATIC MODEL 160

Wielded by George Michael in the music video for 1987 single *Faith*,
this Gretsch Synchronomatic is an icon of 1980s pop culture

Words Huw Price Photography Matt Lincoln



Gretsch Synchronomatic headstocks varied in shape and this particular style is known as the 'light bulb'



The 160 version of the Synchronomatic is distinguished by rectangular pearl inlays and a Brazilian rosewood fretboard

In the autumn of 1987 George Michael's first solo album was ready for release and a video shoot was scheduled to promote the single *Faith*. Breaking away from Wham!'s wholesome boy band image and reinventing himself as a mature solo artist meant that George needed a new look.

By the late 80s, New Wave and the New Romantics had come and gone, and the damply dark joys of *Twin Peaks* had yet to usher in the grunge era. Whimsical Levi's adverts and blockbuster movies like *Back To The Future* typified the airbrushed and colour-saturated 1950s nostalgia then pervading popular culture. George's plans to revamp his image with torn stonewashed jeans, a black leather biker jacket, aviator shades and a Wurlitzer jukebox made sense – but one vital ingredient was missing.

Shortly before the video shoot George was exploring the Melrose district of Los Angeles when he wandered into a pawn shop and noticed a Gretsch Synchronomatic archtop hanging on the wall. Although best known as a singer and songwriter, George could play guitar and bass, but he really bought the Gretsch because he knew it would look perfect in the video.

Sync'ing Up

Gretsch launched its line of Synchronomatic models around 1939, highlighting "seven points of supremacy", but Synchronomatics



Vintage Gretsches are notorious for disintegrating binding, known as 'binding rot', which is evident all around the body

never achieved the same kudos as Gibsons, Epiphones, Strombergs or D'Angelicos. All across the range the styling was eye-catching, with a 17-inch wide body, cat's eye soundholes and a distinctive floating bridge with 'stairstep' extensions.

The Synchronomatic models also had an asymmetrical neck profile and a 26-inch scale length. The four iterations to choose from were the 400, 300, 200 and bottom of the range 160. George's Synchronomatic is a Model 160 with pearl block inlays on a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, with single-ply celluloid binding and chrome-plated hardware.

Gretsch made the Model 160 in two batches with the first running between 1939 and 1943, and the second from 1947 to 1951. The second-generation 160s had a flat-sided headstock shape, rather than the earlier 'lightbulb' profile, and gold hardware. Although we can't pinpoint the exact year, we can say that George's Gretsch came from the first run.

Put To The Sword

In October 2026 George's Gretsch is due to be auctioned by Sworders as part of *Faith & Fame: A Personal George Michael Collection*. Chairman and head of Art &

FAITH HEALING

Huw Price recalls restoring this model for Sworders in 2024

This Gretsch first appeared on your correspondent's radar in the early summer of 1988. I was flying to Greece and bought a copy of *Q* magazine in Gatwick Airport that featured a photo of George and his Synchromatic on the cover. I had never seen one before, but I thought it was a great looking guitar. Fast forward to 2024 and I received a call from Tony Salani at Sworders asking if I'd be willing to undertake some restoration work on the guitar.

In the intervening years I'd become aware of what type of Gretsch it was and I was pretty thrilled when Tony brought it over. Despite years of suboptimal storage conditions, the Synchromatic had held up surprisingly well. The all-important neck joint was still solid, the angle was perfect and none of the glue joints had let go. The top retained a pronounced arch and with no concerning rattles or buzzes when the guitar was played, so I wasn't concerned about issues with the internal braces. Although it looked a bit sorry for itself, there were no structural problems and the body mostly needed a good clean-up.

There were, however, some binding issues; principally, that the fretboard no longer had any. Inside the case was a plastic bag containing

a jigsaw puzzle of binding bits, and it soon became apparent that what was left of it was too shrivelled and curled up to be salvaged.

The headstock binding was in far better shape, and while some shrinkage had occurred, it had retained its shape and most of the pieces were just about clinging on. Tony's brief was to preserve originality wherever possible, so, knowing it would always look a bit 'gappy', I set about regluing them.

Gretsch had attached the binding with animal protein glue, and the binding pieces required little persuasion to pop off the headstock. I scraped off all the old glue from the binding channels and stuck the binding back on, piece by piece, using fish glue. With awkward curved shapes, wrapping surgical tubing around the headstock works far better than clamps. After several stages of glueing, the headstock was almost back to its best.

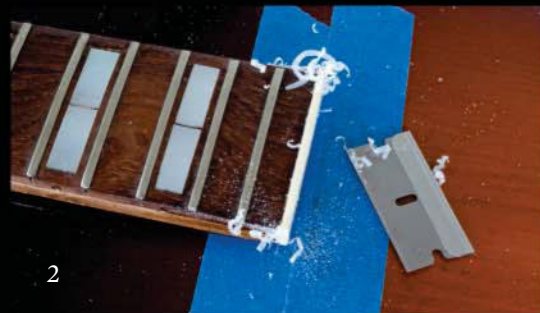
With the fretboard binding in such poor condition, we reluctantly agreed that replacing it was the only viable option. The trouble was that the ultra-wide binding available to Gretsch in the early 1940s is now extremely difficult to find in the correct colour. I eventually ordered some

2mm wide eggshell cream ABS binding from Eurospruce in Germany.

When binding a fretboard that's already been glued onto a neck, the usual practice is to sand off any excess width to create a smooth transition between the wood and binding, and then apply finish. This wasn't an option here as we didn't want to damage any of the original finish. Another layer of complication was that the binding ledge wasn't of a uniform depth, so although the binding lined up fairly well, it wasn't quite wide enough in some areas. To overcome this, I glued strips of rosewood veneer onto the sides of the 'board in the problem areas and carefully sanded it back until the binding sat flush.

Before glueing the binding, I also had to drill marker dot holes in the area beyond the body join. Once the binding was back on I trimmed it level with the 'board, recreated the fret nibs and installed all the marker dots. To finish off, I masked off the neck and applied some lightly tinted nitrocellulose lacquer over the binding using an airbrush.

For a guitar of its era, George's Gretsch is surprisingly easy to play because the neck feels slim, the action is low and it sounds really good.



1. The surviving pieces of fretboard binding were too deformed to be salvaged so a re-bind was needed to make the guitar playable
2. Rebinding the fretboard begins with the end section, which is scraped flush using a razorblade
3. To glue the new binding, a combination of clamps, low-tack masking tape and surgical tubing was used
4. With the fretboard binding complete, files and scraper blades were used to trim it flush and recreate the fret nibs
5. The headstock binding was in better condition, so each piece could be carefully removed and reattached
6. The headstock binding pieces were reattached individually using fish glue, surgical tubing and masking tape



1



2

1. Designed to create even tension across different string gauges, Gretsch's 'Chromatic Tailpiece' was chrome-plated only on the 160 model

2. One of these open-gear Waverly tuners pictured here was subjected to a running repair that became permanent

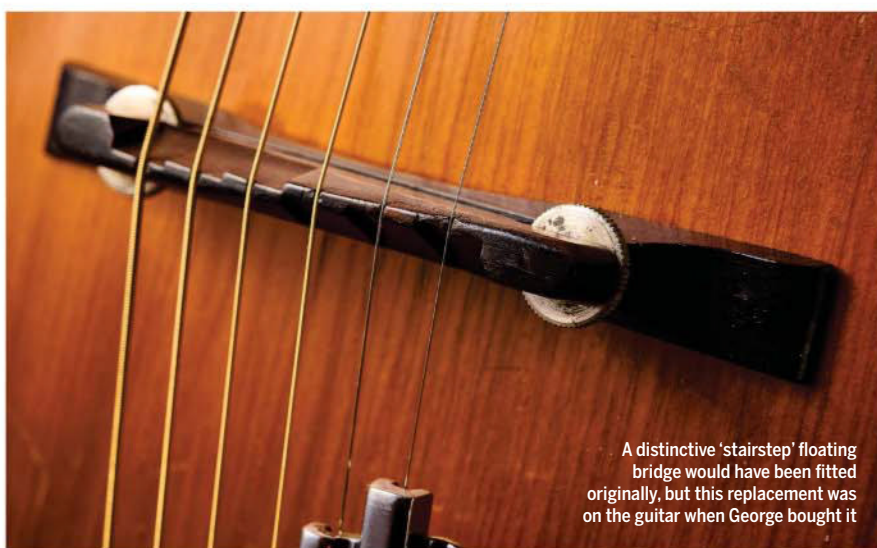
"The condition and idiosyncrasies of this guitar exactly match those in the video"

GUY SCHOOLING, SWORDS

Antiques, Guy Schooling, describes how Swords became involved: "The vendors had contacted a leading London auction room and spoken to them about the guitar," he says, "but when a serial number couldn't be found, they said they weren't interested. [Our contact] went to meet the vendors and when she saw the guitar she was completely blown away and asked if we could help."

George had gifted the Gretsch to his personal assistant, Siobhan Bailey, who worked with him for over 20 years and who died suddenly from natural causes in 2014. Guy explains how the Gretsch ended up looking a bit sorry for itself: "Following [Siobhan's] untimely and unfortunate death, [her partner] was quite traumatised and he put the guitar and all the memorabilia that comprises our forthcoming sale into his garage. [He was later] persuaded that these things couldn't stay in the garage forever because they would have deteriorated."

It is known that George owned at least two other Gretsch Synchromatic models,



A distinctive 'stairstep' floating bridge would have been fitted originally, but this replacement was on the guitar when George bought it

and they were used as stage props when he played live. We asked Guy how Swords was able to establish that this guitar is the actual one featured in the *Faith* video.

"The vendors had always believed it to be the instrument that was in the video. The fact that it had belonged to Siobhan was a great starting point. We then looked at the condition and idiosyncrasies of this guitar and they exactly match those in the video. Some of the plastic trim around the body was missing in the video and is still missing. We were also able to match up marks and cracks in the body, and that's why it was so important not to over-restore the guitar.

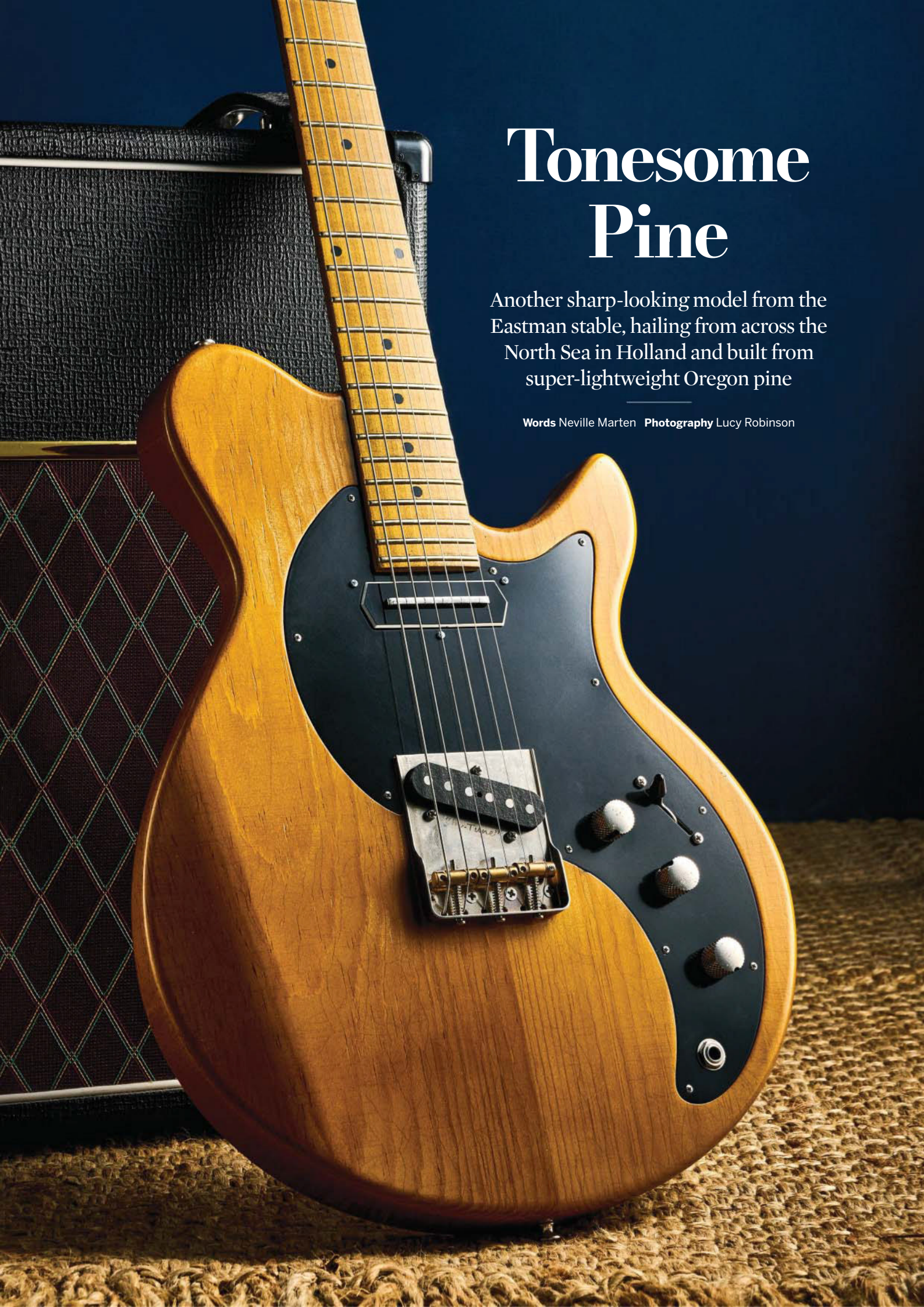
"It's taken about three years to get to this point," Guy adds, "but there's no question in our mind that it's the actual guitar, and since George's family agrees, it won't ever be contested. You could say it is now a popular music icon, and because George's leather jacket sold earlier this year for £176,400, our auction estimate is £60,000 to £120,000." **G**

This guitar is set to be auctioned on 29 October as part of Faith & Fame: A Personal George Michael Collection at Swords London
www.sworder.co.uk

This year's essential read
for any guitar player or collector



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Tonesome Pine

Another sharp-looking model from the Eastman stable, hailing from across the North Sea in Holland and built from super-lightweight Oregon pine

Words Neville Marten Photography Lucy Robinson



EASTMAN KAUFFMANN SERIES SC CLASSIC £2,399

CONTACT **Eastman Guitars** PHONE **+31 36 5404478** WEB **www.eastmanguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

- 1 Is pine a guitar tone wood?**
Pine has been used by many famous builders for its ease of machining, and for its light weight and tone. Most notably Fender, G&L, Novo and Warmoth. Remember it's also a close relation to spruce, the most popular wood for acoustic guitar tops.
- 2 What's Charlie Christian's most famous solo?**
There are many recordings of Christian with the Benny Goodman Orchestra. But perhaps his most famous is *Solo Flight*, recorded with the BGO in New York in 1941. Fabulous. Look it up!
- 3 Why is a Telecaster bridge pickup so good?**
Because it has everything: clarity when clean but a dark fatness when naturally overdriven, especially through a valve amp. It's why Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Danny Gatton and Richie Kotzen love them.

1. One external clue that our SC Classic comes with Eastman Guitars' unique FullerTone neck joint system, is this elegant curved heel end of the guitar's roasted maple neck

We've examined many Eastman guitars in the past, and every reviewer – including our late and terribly missed friend Dave Burrluck – has been bowled over by the quality, style, innovation and organic nature of the firm's instruments. Poignantly, Dave was down for reviewing this very guitar, and had made noises that he'd rather like to buy it afterwards. What Dave always said was, "Eastman guitars exude rock 'n' roll, while certain other manufacturers' instruments don't." And he had a point. While many Eastmans we've seen might not have been molecule-perfect icons like, say, a PRS, they have all possessed an X-factor that makes you want to play them, gig them, even roughhouse them – not keep them imprisoned in their cases like untouchable museum pieces.

So, with all that said, let's look at this offering from Eastman's burgeoning range of originals: the SC Classic in Asbury Butterscotch. We love the look of this entire series of novel, rather than 'tribute', models. Indeed, this writer reviewed a Juliet, one of the first of these all-new designs, and praised it highly. But where the Juliet features a Firebird-style raised centre section, a more offset look and rather more bulbous upper 'horn', this model takes the styling to the next level.

Eastmans possess an X-factor that makes you want to play them, gig them, even roughhouse them





2. We love the Eastman three-dimensional stepped headstock design. Note too the single turn on the Gotoh HAP-M locking and height-staggered tuners

The SC Classic boasts some interesting design themes, too, including an Oregon pine body, which makes for extreme lightness and resonance, and the FullerTone neck that we've seen on several other models.

All Kauffmann Series guitars – which are promoted with the tagline, 'Made in Holland, Born for Tone' – are built at Eastman's European headquarters in Mijdrecht in the Netherlands, just a few kilometres south of Amsterdam. We spoke to Pepijn 't Hart from Eastman and he put it to us: "All our bolt-on guitars



(D'Ambrosio series, Kauffmann series, FullerTone series) are built around the most important feature: the FullerTone neck designed by Otto D'Ambrosio. We like to think that we only bring an instrument to the already overfull market if it adds something new, an improvement. So that's why we would never do a Fender-style bolt-on neck joint."

Our guitar's pine body and maple neck with glued-on maple fingerboard comes in what Eastman calls its Time Travel finish. Here, the level of ageing is the brand's Light version, so the neck

3. The headstock's rear displays the guitar's proud Dutch heritage. You can also spot the hex keyhole for locking and unlocking the tuner post. Simply rotate the post to the desired height, then re-lock

4. Gotoh makes the SC Classic's T-style bridge. The base plate has no sides, which makes string damping easier. The brass saddles are intonation compensated

THE RIVALS

Fender's Limited Edition American Performer Tele Hum (£1,399) is the classic 'Micawber' Keef-style Tele with an alder body, maple neck, Yosemite Tele bridge pickup but a Double Tap (splittable) humbucker at the neck. Blade's Delta Thinline (£499) has a semi-solid American ash body with maple neck, a T-style bridge pickup and humbucker at the neck. It also carries a six-saddle bridge, die-cast tuners, a white pearl pickguard, and easy adjustment truss rod. The Yamaha PACS+11S Pacifica SC Standard Plus (£849) is a fantastic instrument with Reflectone humbucking neck and single-coil bridge pickups. With an alder body, rosewood-capped maple neck and all Gotoh hardware it's a very fine instrument.

The neck feels like bare wood under your fingers, the [body] pine's grain pores remain open. It's vibey and unpretentious

feels like bare wood under your fingers, while the body seems only lightly dusted in nitrocellulose lacquer so the pine's grain pores remain open. It's vibey and unpretentious. What's more, all the guitar's timbers are roasted, surely contributing some of that lightness and resonance we speak of, but also a much improved level of stability.

5. See the open-pore pine grain here, signifying the light misting of lacquer. Note too the sunken pickguard, and beautifully dressed and rounded fret ends



The pickup array is interesting, too. In the Gotoh In-Tune, Telecaster-style bridge plate with intonation compensated brass saddles, sits a Lollar Special T single coil with flush polepieces. Nothing so unusual there. However, at the neck we find another Lollar, this time a beautiful Charlie Christian. Jazz guitar lovers will know that this style of pickup was fitted to the Benny Goodman Orchestra guitarist's Gibson ES-150, which is, of course, how it gained its moniker. This attractive pickup, black with white bevelled edging in a 'hexagonal oblong' shape, is also single coil but with just one raised bar polepiece. Walt Fuller's original design had huge bar magnets mounted under the guitar's top, with three large visible screws holding them in place. Luckily, modern pickups like our Lollars have managed to dispense with this cumbersome method to maintain a more manageable footprint.

All the hardware is by Gotoh, including the simple-looking but highly sophisticated HAP-M tuners. These not only lock the string but also feature height-adjustable shafts and smaller holes on the three high strings for better tuning stability. They would be so easy to overlook so deserve a special mention.





6. Unlike a Telecaster's knurled knobs which have no pointers to indicate where you are, volume or tone-wise, Eastman's feature a black groove to keep you perfectly informed

The electrical components are, as always on Eastman guitars, of the highest order, too. So we find CTS 250k volume and tone pots, a Sprague Orange Drop .022 capacitor, and Gavitt Single Conductor wire with vintage cloth covering.

While we've mentioned how Eastman Guitars seem to rate playability and tones over pristine presentation, don't mistake that for sloppy attention to detail. All the woodworking is flawless, with the tightest of joints, the routing of the two-bolt neckplate and that rather interesting inset black pickguard, all micron perfect. This

The woodworking is flawless, with tight joints, the routing of the two-bolt neckplate and inset pickguard, all micron perfect

fret job, too, is very beautifully done, with perfectly crowned tops and exquisitely smoothed ends. There are 24 of these beauties, which we feel on a guitar of this type is possibly over the top. That said, you don't have to travel to the dizziest fretboard heights, but the extra frets are there should you do so.

7. All the SC Classic's timbers are roasted, including this glued-on maple neck. Notice the beautifully finished frets (there are 24), and black marker dots

8. Here you can see the nicely dressed-away FullerTone neck joint, as well as its two-bolt fixing plate. A belly cut helps with the guitar's playing comfort, especially when hanging on a strap



Feel & Sounds

A guitar this light, at only 2.96kg (6.53lb), and with that mildly aged finish, makes you just want to grab it and chuck it on with abandon. No kid gloves here! It really does feel broken in, even before you've played a note. But since that's why we're here...

As mentioned, the neck feels like bare wood, even though there's surely the thinnest trace of nitro still there. Its shape is a very palm-friendly medium round profile, neither too chubby nor too slender. Indeed, it's very close to that of a '56 Relic Strat sitting only a metre away from your scribe's desk. It feels really nice and we



9. Lollar's Charlie Christian neck pickup not only looks fantastic, but is also the perfect complement to the T-style bridge unit.

10. A standard three-way blade switch looks after the SC's twin pickups, with single volume and two tone controls

can't see it offending anyone other than the heaviest of metallers (and they would surely take no interest in such a beast).

That said, it doesn't simply play itself. There's a degree of fight back from the D'Addario 0.010 to 0.046 strings, and a lot of players do love that. Similarly, others might prefer to swap these for a set of .009s, or may we suggest 9.5s. The fingerboard and those perfectly polished medium jumbo frets feel great under the fingers. This thing is speedy, too, and quick country, rock and blues licks fall out of the SC Classic all

and P-90-equipped Les Paul to hand the comparisons should be interesting.

As it happens, the Eastman is brighter than both heritage guitars. The Tele's bridge pickup is darker with the tone on full, but they are much too close to call with the SC's tone knocked back a tad. This actually makes it more versatile as some people love that real sparkle, especially when ultra clean and with chorus and delay added. Similarly, the Les Paul. And while comparing a P-90 to a CC is hardly aural science, they're not

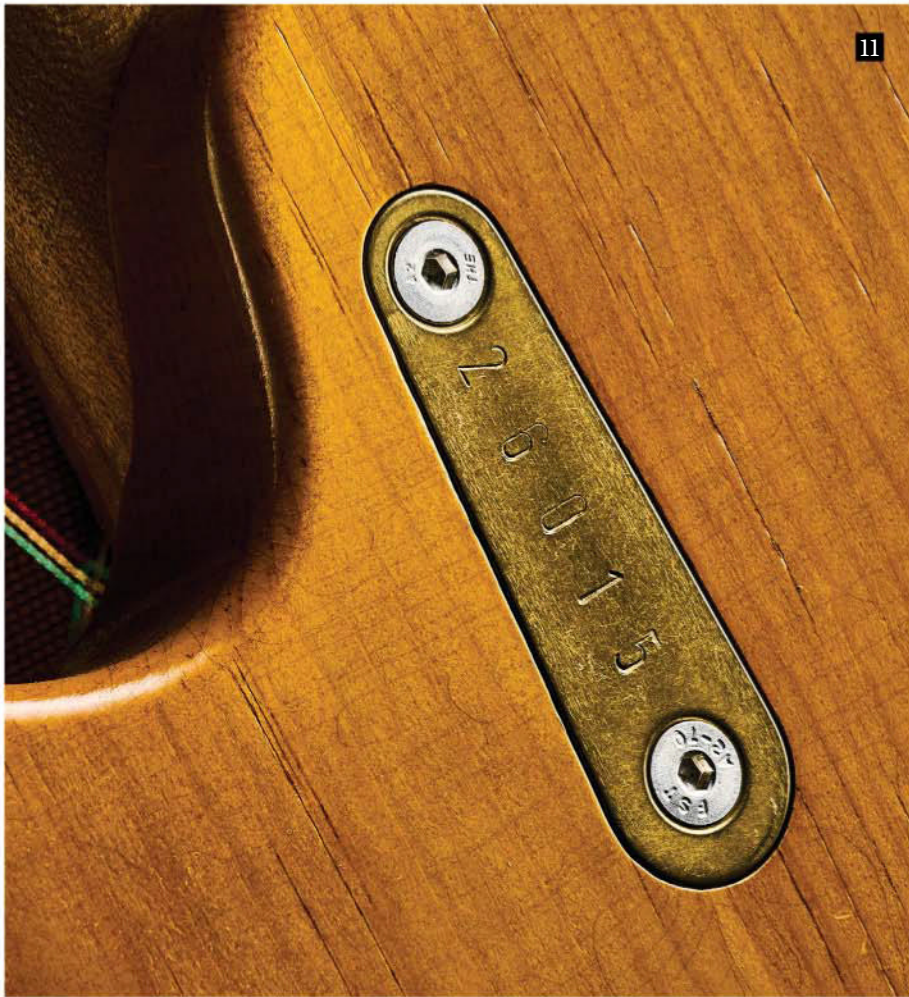
11. Here's a great close-up of the FullerTone's serial number-stamped steel neck plate. The neck tenon itself is deep, long, and is beautifully machined. It also runs under the pickguard

This thing is speedy and quick country, rock and blues licks fall out of the SC Classic all too readily. Bends too are a breeze

too readily. Bends, too, due to a 254mm to 304mm (10 to 12 inches) compound radius 'board, are a breeze, as is a healthy blues-rock vibrato and for all the above reasons.

Plugging into our Tone King Imperial, with OCD distortion in line, generates a delightful output of tones from the SC Classic. With a Custom Shop Telecaster





EASTMAN KAUFFMANN SERIES SC CLASSIC

PRICE: £2,399, with quality padded gigbag

ORIGIN: Mijdrecht, the Netherlands

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Roasted Oregon pine

NECK: Roasted maple, with rounded C profile

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Unbleached bone/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Roasted maple, integral, 254-304mm (10-12") radius

FRETS: 24 medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Lightly aged nickel plated Gotoh In-Tune Telecaster style bridge, black sunken pickguard, knurled metal knobs with position markers, aluminium strap buttons

TUNERS: Gotoh HAP-M locking, adjustable for height with smaller holes for thinner three strings

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm

ELECTRICS: Lollar Charlie Christian (neck) and Lollar Special T (bridge), 1x volume, 2x tones, 3-way blade selector switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.96/6.81/2

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS:

SC Vintage (from £2,299), with Lollar Royal T (neck) and Special T (bridge) pickups; SC Deluxe (from £2,399) with Lollar Lollartron (neck) and Special T (bridge) pickups (higher levels of ageing cost more)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Micro thin open-pore Asbury Butterscotch (as reviewed); custom colours available



PROS A great-looking and individual guitar that barely tips its hat to other models; clever construction; beautiful fret job; stunning array of tones; familiar-feeling and comfortable neck

CONS On the neck pickup the lower strings overpowered the top ones before a slight height adjustment; some might find the feel a little stiff but a lighter string gauge will cure that

a trillion miles apart so it's worth doing. The Eastman neck pickup has that same extra clarity we found with the Tele, and rolling the tone back here creates anything from the warmest jazz tone to some fabulous bluesy ones. And in the middle position with a good drenching of reverb, the SC Classic does a more than passable Peter Green impression.

Jumping on the OCD with a light to medium drive emphasises everything the Eastman has going for it. Now, obviously neither the Tele nor the Les Paul are torrefied pine with torrefied maple necks, so it seems likely that these elements – plus that tight fitting, long tenon FullerTone neck joint – are what's bringing this added clarity and airiness. One tiny niggle is that on the neck pickup with drive and the tone rolled off there was a volume imbalance across the strings, the bottom four overpowering the top two. An adjustment soon fixed this, but it's still worth noting.

Any owner of this guitar would be daft not to experiment with its tone controls, since there's a bucketful of really tasty results to be had. It's a fabulous, highly enjoyable and extremely musical-sounding guitar.

Verdict

It's great to see more and more guitars that are not mere copies of a few iconic originals. We love the look of Eastman's SC Classic, and it has been a wonderful instrument to spend time with. It's somewhat weird the visual impact that the Charlie Christian pickup lends. This writer remembers seeing Lennon's LP Junior with the aforesaid coil fitted in his guitar's neck position. It was both intriguing and exciting, and it's the same here. But this Lollar CC is also a brilliant choice because it's not your usual Micawber-style humbucker, plus it looks much cooler than a Gold Foil to these eyes. Together with the Special T at the bridge there's a plethora of great guitar voices here.

The neck is particularly lovely, too, and while you may prefer a bit less of a fight and therefore fit lighter strings, the fret job and setup are so darned good that you'll feel at home in no time. Also, we feel the pricing is perfectly fair for a European-made instrument of this quality.

So, if you're looking for something vaguely T-style but with a serious dollop of genuine personality, all we can suggest is, why not go Dutch? **G**

Heart To 't Hart

Eastman Guitars' director of Fretted Instruments, Pepijn 't Hart, tells us more about the company, this Kauffmann series, and some of Eastman's principal characters

Words Neville Marten



Pepijn 't Hart, Director of Fretted Instruments at Eastman Guitars

Can you fill the readers in on Albert Kauffmann and Otto D'Ambrosio – what's their individual involvement?

"Otto D'Ambrosio is our chief designer and the one who designed and builds the D'Ambrosio series guitars in our Los Angeles custom shop. The story is that we were reaching out to Albert Kauffmann as we had a D'Ambrosio guitar with a chip out of the lacquer – it was nitrocellulose – and we asked him if he could repair the chip. His answer was, 'I can't make it better, but I'd love to make it worse.' Famous words that led to a range of Eastman Kauffmann series guitars.

"These guitars turned out better than we ever could have expected. It's really special stuff"

"There are three body shapes, just like the D'Ambrosio and FullerTone ranges: SC (Single Cut), DC (Double Cut) and Offset, which is the Offset version of the SC. With Albert we wanted to create a real vintage vibe, based on this newly designed guitar. Mainly due to his colours and his Time Travel treatment speciality, these guitars turned out better than we ever could have expected. It's really special stuff."

Why the choice of Charlie Christian pickup? Of course it's a unit we find on the original Gibson ES-150 and solidbodies used by players such as Danny Gatton, Julian Lage, Bill Frisell and, of course, John Lennon.

"Well, it's actually more because for each body shape we like to offer three pickup options. These are all Lollar pickups, and with the SC it's these: SC Vintage, Lollar Royal T in the neck and Special T in the bridge; SC Classic [as reviewed this issue], Lollar Charlie Christian in the neck and Special T in the bridge; and SC Deluxe, Lollar Lollartron in the neck and Special T in the bridge."



The SC Classic's Asbury Butterscotch finish is a nod to a legendary American singer

PHOTO COURTESY OF EASTMAN

PHOTO BY LUCY ROBINSON

1. Otto D'Ambrosio, chief designer at Eastman, working at his base in Pomona, California
2. Eastman Europe's Albert Kauffmann in his workshop in Mijdrecht, Holland
3. Here's why Pepijn describes the FullerTone neck joint system as a 'long tenon bolt-on'
4. The neck is set low into the body in a clever arrangement that only requires two bolts
5. The neck tenon in profile, so you can see how it virtually 'locks' into place in the body

The very first Fender prototypes and the short first run of actual guitars were pine, like the SC Classic. Was that the inspiration here, or was it for weight and sound?

"Well, yes, it was for weight and sound but also because of the fact that the trees grow fast. So, to me, this is the ultimate wood for bolt-on guitars. It's so resonant."

Eastman seems to have manufacturing facilities all over the place. Where exactly are the guitars made now?

"Eastman builds guitars in China, where the majority of our instruments are built; in Pomona, California, where Otto's workshop is located; and in Holland, where Albert Kauffmann and his team are building the Kauffmann series. Albert Kauffmann's workshop is in the Eastman Europe headquarters in Mijdrecht in Holland."

Is there a reason the pickguard is set into the body? Or was it simply a nice thing to do – it certainly lets the neck sit lower into the body.

"This is one of the brilliant things that Otto came up with. When Otto and I are designing the guitars, he does all the 'out of this world' stuff and this is a great example."

The Otto D'Ambrosio-designed FullerTone neck is wittily named, but it bears no relation to Fender's bolt-on system.

"And that's why we won't do a Fender-style neck joint. Otto's neck is the evolution of what Leo brilliantly did – but adding more tone, more sustain and more stability. With 30 per cent more contact with the body it is, in a way, the first 'long neck tenon bolt-on', and it uses only two bolts. It's one of the brilliant things of the FullerTone neck; it sits as smooth as can be."

It's unusual to find a tilted-back (pitched) headstock on a bolt-on guitar...

"Well, the unique FullerTone neck joint allows us to set the neck low in the body. So unlike most bolt-ons this allows us to add a slight back-pitch or tilt to give the correct string clearance over the body and pickups, and to the bridge."



PHOTO BY WIKIA PETLAKH

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EASTMAN



"When Otto and I are designing guitars we try to add as many beautiful elements as we can, without ever compromising the ergonomics or playability of the guitar. We use Gotoh tuners with the HAP-M mechanism, so we don't need a string tree."

We're presuming the colour of our guitar is a nod to the debut album and Butterscotch Telecaster of a certain legendary artist?

"The instrument you are reviewing is kindly supplied by Mak's guitars in London. It's a light relic, 'Time Travel', and the reason why we call the colour Asbury Butterscotch is indeed a hats-off to the colour of the Telecaster – actually, it was originally an Esquire – played by The Boss – *Greetings From Asbury Park*." **G**
www.eastmanguitars.com

"The weight, the sound... pine is the ultimate wood for bolt-on guitars. It's so resonant"



Six Pack

No longer just a bass pedal, this limited edition of the Anagram multi-effects is loaded with essential tones for us six-stringers

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker & Lucy Robinson



DARKGLASS ANAGRAM GUITAR ESSENTIALS LIMITED EDITION £999

CONTACT **Andertons** PHONE **01483 456777** WEB **www.darkglass.com**

What You Need To Know

1 Darkglass? Doesn't this company specialise in bass gear?

Correct, but this is a limited-edition version of its Anagram multi-effects unit that's especially for guitarists.

2 So, how is this different from the bass model?

Well, the Anagram is a plug-in-compatible platform, so new models can be loaded into it. This one comes pre-loaded with the Guitar Essential pack, which features a curated selection of 12 amp sims and three dirt pedals.

3 That's not many...

Perhaps not, but all of the original bass models and effects are already here, including reverb, delay, modulation and so on. And you can really expand things with free captures from Tone3000 since Anagram supports Neural Amp Modeler (NAM).

The Darkglass Anagram first appeared last year and has been a big hit with bass players. The modeller, which sports a powerful six-core DSP, is a plug-in-compatible platform open to third parties and designed to evolve over time. It ships packed with onboard amps and effects, has access to the Anagram Marketplace where there are more models for free download or purchase, and also supports Neural Amp Modeler (NAM) captures and IRs. While Darkglass has been a company whose products are primarily aimed at bass players, the brand is branching out into guitar territory by getting together with UK retailer Andertons, and Sweetwater in the US, to create this Limited Edition pedal that's loaded with the Guitar Essentials plug-in pack. This pack will be made available on Marketplace to any Anagram user but only when these black Limited Edition units have sold out.

In Use

At roughly the width of three Boss Compact pedals plugged in side by side, the Anagram is nicely compact whether you choose to use it as a desktop unit or

on a pedalboard with other pedals. While it will run from a nine-volt supply, it does require a minimum current of about 1.7A minimum, so you'd be more likely to add the supplied adaptor to your 'board than run it from your existing power supply, although a CIOKS DC7 with the added CRUX expander would do the job. Alternatively, it can be powered via a USB power supply that supports Power Delivery (PD) as long as that delivers at least 18 watts.

Connectivity is provided for a host of different scenarios with mono or stereo outputs available on both XLRs and standard jacks. To use the unit for silent practice or to take advantage of its USB audio interface capabilities, there's a mini-jack headphone output, while for inserting external gear into the signal chain there

Darkglass is branching out beyond bass products and into guitar territory



The Send is a dual-function quarter-inch jack that supports either a stereo send or a mono insert, allowing for the creation of an effects loop. The Return is another dual-function jack that supports either a stereo return or an expression pedal input

is a pair of sockets with dual capabilities. These can be used as a stereo send and return, or you can just use the Send socket as an insert point for a mono send and return. The return socket doubles as an expression pedal input, and while you could obviously not use this at the same time as a stereo S&R, alternatively there is MIDI capability for parameter control.

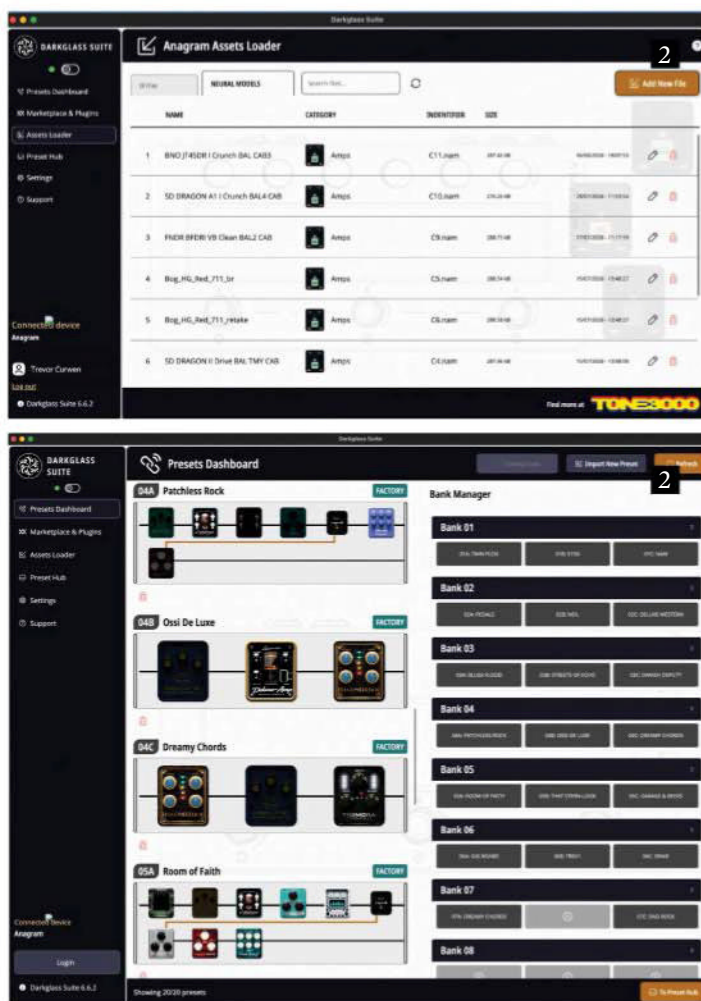
The Anagram has 126 user-programmable presets in 42 banks of three and each preset can be built from up to 24 blocks with various options for serial and parallel signal paths. The workflow to set it all up is intuitive, aided by the user interface being uncomplicated



1. Preset, Scene and Stomp modes will determine the individual function of the three footswitches. The mode can be toggled by a hold on footswitch C. Pressing two footswitches together scrolls through the banks upwards (A&B) or down (B&C)

with just a bright seven-inch touchscreen and six encoders for quick tweaks of the associated parameters below them on the screen. There's no dedicated software editor as yet (it's apparently in the pipeline), but you can connect to the computer-based Darkglass Suite for organising your preset banks, checking for firmware upgrades, accessing Marketplace and loading in any NAM captures or IRs.

Three footswitches call up your sounds and these can be set to either recall the



three Presets in a bank, three different Scenes for each footswitch, or to Stomp mode where you can assign individual effects to footswitches. There is a bunch of eminently usable factory-programmed presets to explore for use straight out of the box, but building your own is a doddle. Starting with an empty preset, a touch on an empty block position will take you to a page of six categories to choose a model for the block (amps and cabs/overdrive and distortion/EQs, filters and dynamics/modulation and pitch/delays and reverbs/utilities).

This limited-edition Anagram workstation comes with a default setting (which can be changed if desired) to hide its original bass-centric models from these menus. But those that also apply to guitar are present so you actually get eight overdrive and distortion blocks to choose from, with the likes of Rat and Big Muff emulations joining the Guitar Essentials trio of Tube Screamer, Klon and Bluesbreaker.

The description of Guitar Essentials is pretty much true when it comes to the amps. There may only be 12 of them, but all the primary colours of amp sound

2. Darkglass Suite runs on your computer and a USB connection to Anagram lets you organise your preset banks among other functions. If you click on the assets loader menu you'll be able to load any NAM captures that you've downloaded from the Tone3000 website

3. The Anagram touchscreen supports a range of intuitive gestures to streamline navigation and editing, including tapping, pressing, swiping, dragging and dropping. It has several views available including Name view, which will show your selected preset name in big letters across the screen. Every individual amplifier and pedal model features its own exclusive 3D-rendered graphical UI

THE RIVALS

Probably the closest rival to the Anagram in terms of size, cost and capability is the Neural DSP Quad Cortex Mini (£1,129), a unit with a footswitch on each corner (reviewed in issue 536). Fractal is another respected name in modelling and its four-footswitch AM4 Amp modeller (reviewed in issue 537) offers access to Fractal's modelling universe in the company's most compact package. For a lot less outlay, the HeadRush Flex Prime (£425) is a relatively compact guitar and bass multi-effects processor and amp modeller with native Neural Amp Modeler (NAM) support and direct TONE3000 access through HeadRush Cloud.



DARKGLASS ANAGRAM GUITAR ESSENTIALS LIMITED EDITION

PRICE: £999

ORIGIN: Finland

TYPE: Multi-effects processor and digital modelling platform

FEATURES: 126 presets, audio interface capability, soft-shell case, looper, tuner, tap tempo, support for NAM, IR loading

CONTROLS: 6x encoders, 3x footswitches

CONNECTIONS: Standard instrument input, XLR outputs 1/L & 2/R, standard outputs 3/L & 4/R, standard Send (Insert), Standard Return (exp), 1/8" stereo headphone output, MIDI In, MIDI Out, USB

POWER: 9-12V power adaptor, 1700mA current minimum (9V, 2000mA adaptor supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 209 (w) x 103 (d) x 62mm (h)

are represented with Fender Twin and Deluxe, Marshall JMP and JCM800, Vox AC30 (in the form of a couple of Matchless models), HiWatt 103, Peavey 5150, plus other high-gain and boutique favourites. These are all a pleasure to play through with all the nuanced response you'd want alongside quality sonics. Each of the amps has a cab sim switch, meaning you can choose its matched cabinet, but you also have separate cabinets with mic'ing options.

Further to those 12 amps, the unit supports the very latest NAM Architecture 2 (A2) and is able to run three simultaneous instances of A2 Full. A visit to the Tone3000 website will give you access to loads more amps for free.

Of the effects, there is everything necessary to build a complete signal chain with plenty of options for compression, EQ and more. All of the standard modulation types are here, as well as three octavers, plus a couple of pitch shifters, one of which is based on the whammy and requires an expression pedal. Three basic types of delay – Digital, Analog and Modulated – are available, and while these can cover a wide range of use scenarios, they

The Anagram is suitably endowed to compete with other digital processors at the highest level

are mono-only, which is disappointing because all the reverbs have mono or stereo options and you get five types: Room, Plate, Hall, Spring and Shimmer. A looper completes the feature set.

Verdict

While there's no shortage of digital processors out there, the Anagram is suitably endowed to compete at the highest level. We have no doubt that it has the attributes to take care of recording tasks, slot into live performance either as a complete rig or as an integral component of your pedalboard, and be an inspirational tool for home practice. While the provided Guitar Essentials pack provides less range initially than some rivals, the Anagram's open-platform nature, and particularly its NAM support, means that this is one that will only get better over time. **G**



PROS Compact and easily portable size; sound quality; ease of use; low latency; NAM compatibility; USB audio interface capability; effects loop

CONS High current draw means you'll probably have to use the supplied power supply; small icons can be hard to read; delays are mono-only at present; expression pedal input can't be used at the same time as a stereo S/R loop

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Introducing

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Woodfield Amplifiers AFON 20 From £1,949

CONTACT mark@woodfieldamplifiers.com WEB www.woodfieldamplifiers.com WORDS Jamie Dickson PHOTOGRAPHY Lucy Robinson

You could hardly have two higher-performance careers than being an engineer in the RAF and then Formula 1. But Mark Woodford, founder and designer of Woodfield amps, did both – and when he was done with them, he started making amps.

“It was always just a background hobby – a fascination with valve tech,” Mark says of his passion for amps, which he sustained even while working within the highly pressured world of an F1 test team. “But towards the end of my time working in F1, I started to get more seriously into it,” he says. “And the love of it just came back. I thought ‘I’ve got to make something, I’ve just got to create something.’”

The combo he created, the AFON 20, is built to the same exacting standards that Mark brought to his earlier work on radar and race cars. It takes the classic Marshalls of the 60s as a jumping-off point for a more highly evolved modern amp that still has bags of sonic charisma and classic tones in an exacting, thoughtfully built package. “It’s got a lot of headroom,” Mark says of the surprisingly loud and throaty combo that puts out 20 watts RMS in continuous power handling but peaks at 39 watts. The power stage features a pair of Harma EL84s, which Mark says he chose after A/B

testing with other valve brands for their organic compression that tempers the bright glassiness that some EL84 amps can exhibit. The amp also makes use of power scaling to offer precise volume control and a broad palette of responsiveness.

“We all love the breakup of an amp, but unfortunately that usually means you’ve got to upset the neighbours,” he says. “So I thought, well, how can I get around that? So I think I’ve achieved it through power control – basically if you tone down the power on to the anodes of the valves, you compress the output response of a valve. Obviously, you introduce other harmonics and so on, but it’s actually quite interesting.”

The power control works differently to a simple master volume (which the amp also has) and could be thought of as a ‘power delivery’ control offering everything from richly expressive squash and crunch at home-use volumes to gig-conquering projection and power at full tilt. The feature-rich control panel also has a mute switch, a three-way brightness voicing control and the option to run the amp in single-ended or push/pull configuration, which also alters the feel and headroom of the amp.

“The way I look at the amplifier, it’s an instrument,” Mark concludes. “It is as important as your guitar.” **G**



BUILDER PROFILE

NAME: Woodfield Amplifiers
FOUNDER: Mark Woodward
LOCATION: Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire
STATUS: Founded 2024; prototyping from 2015
FIRST AMP SHIPPED: 2024
CURRENT OUTPUT: 4-8 per year
STYLE: Head and combo versions
VALVES: Preamp: 2x Harma ECC83 (retro paired); power amp: 2x Harma EL84 (retro paired)
SPEAKERS: 1x 12" Celestion G12 Greenback, Qty 1 (in combo)
CABINETS: Zilla Cabs, 12mm Latvian birch ply
REPAIRS: Woodfield products only
CUSTOM ORDERS: Yes, 5 standard colour choices/3 control-panel finishes; further customer requests if required
DEPOSIT/BUILD TIME: 50%/2-8 weeks, depending on supply
WAITING LIST: 2-12 months, depending on size
DEALERS: N/A
PRICE RANGE: Head £1,949; combo £3,299



1. The AFON 20 combo features a single Celestion G12H Greenback 12-inch speaker. It's mounted in a cab built of 12mm birch ply, by Zilla Cabs

2. Woodfield amps, made in the UK, are hand-built by former F1 engineer Mark Woodward and use turret-board construction

3. The amp comes with dozens of thoughtful features, including power scaling and caged switches to avoid accidental damage or disablement





« BLUEPRINT »

SHADES OF BLUE

Malina Moye reveals how four years, four prototypes, one uncompromising vision and raw emotion turned into her first signature guitar: the Kramer Malina Moye Pacer Deluxe

Words Charlie Wilkins Photography Kramer

Malina Moye has always done things her own way. She plays left-handed with the strings in right-handed order and blends rock, blues, funk, soul and pop into her own language. So when the time came to create the Kramer Malina Moye Pacer Deluxe, an existing guitar with her name on it was never enough.

The process unfolded over four years and as many prototypes, with Moye fully involved at every turn. She stayed closely engaged throughout the process and was not prepared to settle for anything less: the finished guitar had to carry her personality as clearly as her name.

But there was more behind that determination than simply getting the guitar right. Moye had watched male players receive signature guitars and questioned when her own work would receive that recognition. Becoming the first woman of colour to receive a Kramer signature model gives the moment genuine historic weight. But above all, this is a guitar that reflects her personal vision, her standards and her refusal to compromise. We sit down with Moye to discuss how it all came about.

You described this guitar as being bigger than you. What does this moment mean?

“Man, this is everything. There are so many layers, as a woman, as a black woman and as a guitar player. I’ve said for years that manufacturers need to look at who’s actually picking up instruments. A lot of those people are women, and they deserve the opportunity to have signature guitars. So when this came along, I wanted it, but not only for me. I wanted other people to see what’s possible. This was never, ‘Here is a guitar, let us put your name on it.’ Kramer listened when I said, ‘This is how I see the guitar, this is what I need as a player, and this is how we can include more people.’ I wanted to make us proud.”

How did you and Kramer first find each other?

“It started during the pandemic. Janie Hendrix recommended me for a voiceover connected for a Jimi Hendrix project, and that introduced me to the Gibson family. I met so many great people there, and what really struck me was how many women were in the room. Everybody was forward thinking and sharp. I said I would love to do something together, and the

conversation opened from there. Kramer respected my vision and understood that I play differently. That made it feel like the right home.”

Why did the Pacer feel like the right place to begin?

“To me, the Pacer is already a ‘SuperStrat’, so it was in the right ballpark. During the pandemic, Kramer sent me several guitars, including a Baretta and a NightSwan. I spent time playing them and thinking about what I would change. I wanted to pull together elements from guitars I had used throughout my career but make them more comfortable and more ‘Malina’. The goal was to have the kind of guitar you pick up in front of the TV and then suddenly realise four hours have gone by because it feels so comfortable.”

What did the development process actually look like from your side?

“I was ready because I had spent decades performing and making mental notes. Every player has those thoughts: ‘If I could change this, or move that, the guitar would work better for me’. Kramer gave me guitars to try and I would send very specific feedback.”

"Manufacturers need to look at who's picking up instruments. A lot of those people are women"



Malia didn't just want a standard Kramer with her name on it – she had some very exacting requirements for her signature model



1. Malina has small hands and wanted the bulk of her guitar's heel taken right down

2. A special 12th fret marker offers clues that this Kramer is a signature model

3. The pickups are by DiMarzio: a Virtual Vintage Blues in the neck, with an Area '67 in the middle and a Super Distortion at the bridge



"Sometimes I could feel something that I couldn't give them measurements on, so I sent reference guitars and said, 'This is where we need to be. Please look at this neck and see how we can move in this direction.' We went through four main prototypes over roughly four years. I was never in a rush. My name was going on it, and I wanted to be proud of every decision."

What was most important to you when you played the prototypes?

"Comfort, first of all. I have small hands, and the traditional heel felt so bulky that after 20 minutes I wanted to put the guitar down. I told them we had to look toward the future and make it easier to reach the upper frets. They would reshape it and I would say, 'More. Take off more.' When we finally got there, I knew immediately. It felt beautiful."

How detailed did you get when it came to the neck specs?

"Very detailed, right down to the 10-inch fingerboard radius. I knew how I wanted the neck and I could feel when it wasn't right. I was thinking about whether I could play a 90-minute or two-hour show without my hand getting tired. That was the level of detail I wanted in a real signature guitar. I also use 0.008-gauge strings, which surprises a lot of people

because they're very light. I like the freedom they give me. Everything had to work together so that the guitar felt easy but still responded when I really dug in."

A Floyd Rose might seem like the obvious Kramer choice. Why did you go with a non-locking tremolo?

"I love a Floyd Rose, and I own guitars with them, but I'm looking at this guitar as a working player. With a Floyd Rose, if you break a string on stage, that can be the end of that guitar for the moment. You hand it off and grab another one. I wanted the standard two-point tremolo because you can put on another string and keep moving. I don't switch guitars much during a show."

The pickups cover a lot of ground. How did you arrive at that HSS set?

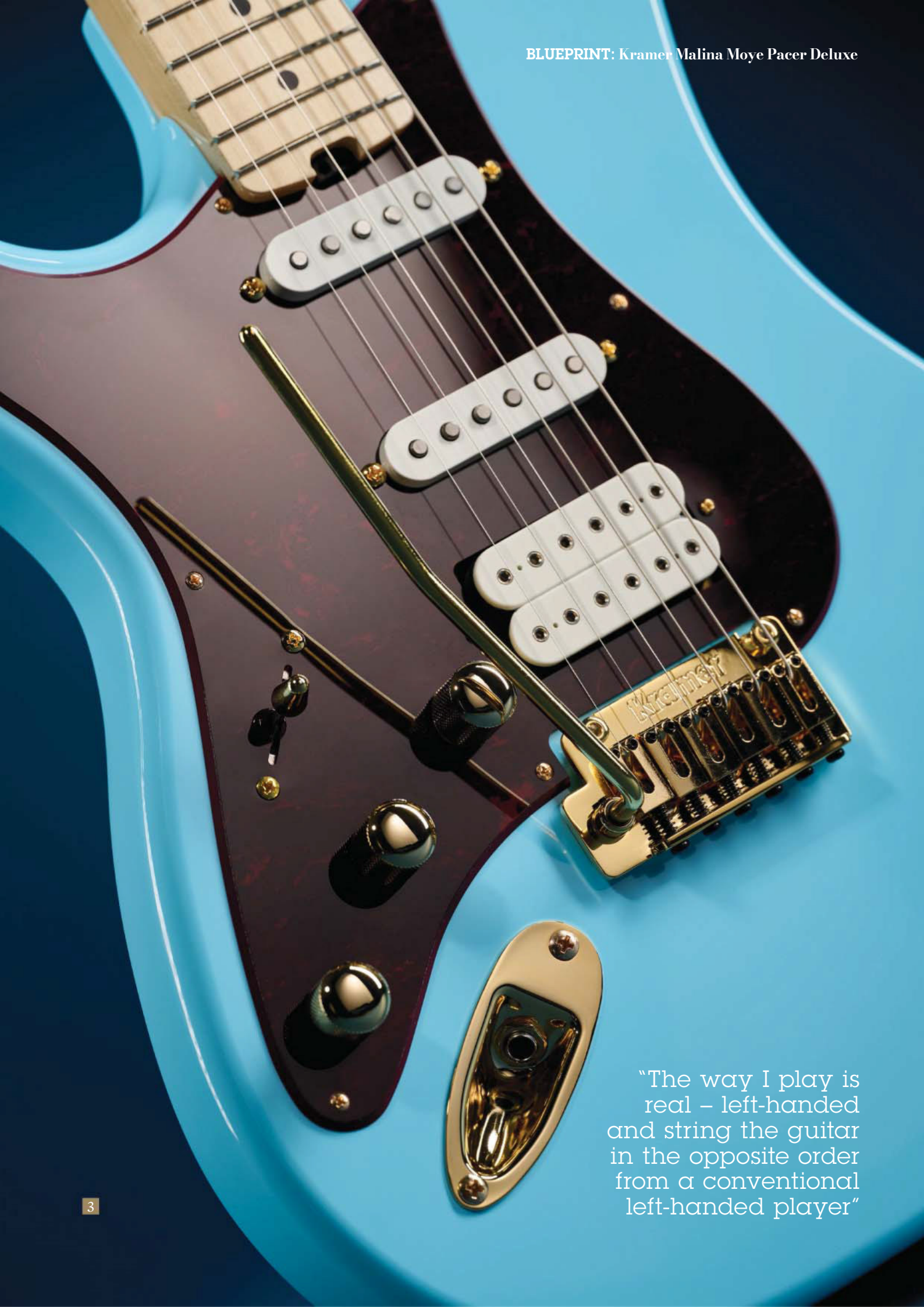
The Virtual Vintage Blues in the neck and the Area 67 in the middle have been part of my sound for years. The neck pickup is thick, beautiful, clean and clear. That's where I often go for solos. For rhythm I move to the middle because I wanted that really clean funk sound. Lead playing is great, but you can't lead without rhythm. The Super Distortion was the new ingredient. I asked Larry DiMarzio for something with more punch, and he suggested it after listening to what I was describing. I tried it and loved it. It brings

"Everything had to work together so that the guitar felt easy but still responded when I really dug in"

the hard-rocking Kramer side, while the two single coils keep all the other colours available. That combination lets one guitar speak several musical languages."

How much did your own upside-down stringing shape the design?

"People sometimes assume the way I play is just a visual thing, but it's real. I play left-handed and string the guitar in the opposite order from a conventional left-handed player. For my own guitar, that's how it has to work. But I also wanted a proper left-handed production version for players who string normally. So it's available left-handed and right-handed; I fought hard for that. Left-handed players are usually ignored, or they have to wait months for something that doesn't look exciting. I told Kramer, 'You can't release only a right-handed version when your signature artist is left-handed.' The first left-handed guitars went quickly, and people started sending me order



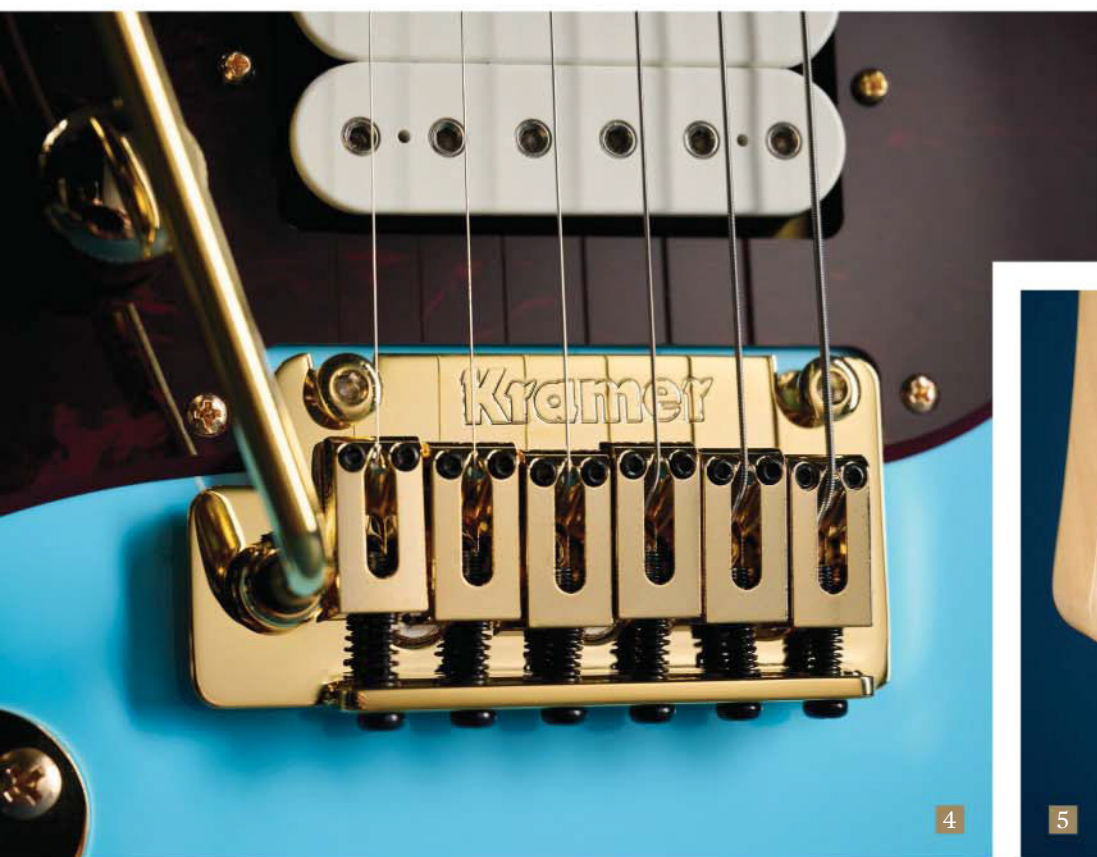
"The way I play is real – left-handed and string the guitar in the opposite order from a conventional left-handed player"



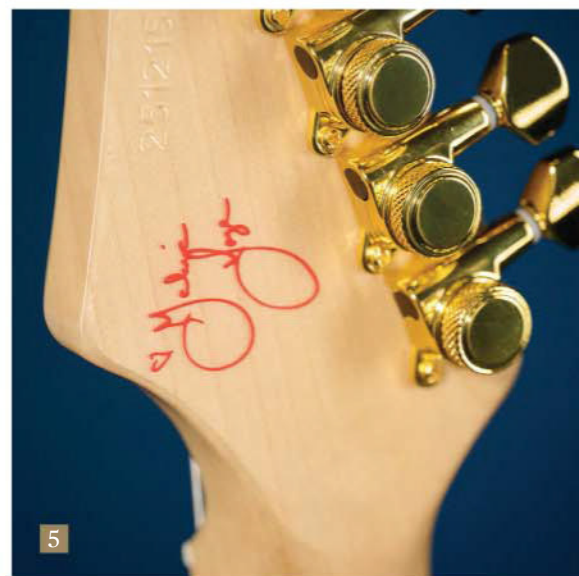
4. The guitar has a standard vintage-style trem

5. Malina's signature is in red on the back of the guitar's headstock

6. One of the main requests from Malina was that the guitar's price was kept as low as possible



4



5

screenshots from Japan and Australia. That showed there was a real audience waiting to be served."

What inspired the blue finish?

"The Splash Blue finish started with a pair of blue Christian Louboutin shoes that I got for my birthday. You can see me wearing them in my little promo videos. The colour also made me think about the blue outfit that Prince wore at the 2007 Super Bowl. I grew up in Minnesota, and I like to pay tribute to Prince and Michael Jackson in subtle ways. The tortoiseshell [coloured] pickguard became another little nod to Prince, while the gold hardware is very much me.

"I wanted the guitar to make a statement before you play a note. The reverse headstock, my logo at the 12th fret and my red signature on the back of the headstock all help it feel custom, but I kept my name off the front because the guitar is not only about me. The player should be able to make it their own."

Did you ever worry that making it so personal might narrow its appeal?

"No, because I believe this guitar does appeal to everybody. The familiar choices are already out there. You can buy a traditional Kramer or a traditional Strat. I wanted to bring something new into the space without losing what makes a Kramer

"My family always told me, 'When you don't see yourself represented, show up [...] and know that you matter'"

rock hard. The guitar still has the punch people expect, but you can create more colours. That's where players are going. People want to keep discovering, writing and crossing between styles. I'm a woman, a left-handed player and a musician with my feet on the ground. I listen to what people tell me is missing – and I wanted to answer that."

How important was the price of the guitar to you?

"Very important. You want people to pick the guitar up. I wanted it to feel like a custom piece and give you a lot of guitar, but what's the point if somebody has to give an arm and a leg to own it? When I saw the price at \$1,299 [£1,199 in the UK], I thought it was perfect. I believe everybody deserves a shot at choosing what they want to do. This instrument carries all the energy and lessons I grew up with, but it is there for somebody else to pick up and create with."

Have you had a chance to hear what other players are doing with the guitar yet?

"Yeah, I heard Gretchen Menn play a Jeff Beck piece and I loved it. Then she started playing slide. It was beautiful hearing her bring out all these different colours."

What do you hope this instrument will say to women and young players of colour who might not always see themselves represented?

"My family always told me, 'When you don't see yourself represented, show up. When you think you can't, show up anyway, and know that you matter when you arrive.' I kept showing up because other people showed up for me. I hope I made people proud. I think about all the incredible players who laid the foundation but never received this kind of opportunity. Some of them may have wondered whether anyone saw their work. I saw it. This guitar is for them, too. Now somebody else will come after me and push the door even further. That's what makes this so powerful. I don't want to tell somebody how to use it. I want to hand them the guitar and say, 'Okay, play me your story.' That's what it is all about." 

www.gibson.com/en-gb/products/malina-moye-pacer-deluxe



From Feel To Factory

Kramer Product Development manager, Aljon Go, explains how Malina Moye's ideas about feel, tone and playability became a production guitar built for everyone

Malina often described what she wanted in terms of feel. How did you turn that into something a factory could repeat?

"Sometimes the answer was simple: send us the guitar. We 3D-scanned the neck she liked, captured the profile and built that into her Kramer. We also gave her a prototype with the sculpted heel we were developing for the Pacer Deluxe. She wanted less of that chunky block at the neck joint and easier access to the upper frets. Once those pieces came together, it felt familiar, like a glove or a worn pair of jeans, but it was still distinctly hers."

The pickup combination is not typical for Kramer. What made it right for this guitar?

"It's her guitar and those pickups represent the tones she heard in her head. The Virtual Vintage Blues, Area 67 and Super Distortion each bring a different character. At the factory, the team balanced the pickup heights and made sure the three voices worked together. We also chose parchment bobbins, rather than bright white, because even a small detail like that had to sit properly with the Splash Blue finish, gold hardware and tortoiseshell [coloured] pickguard."

Did Malina's upside-down stringing create any production headaches?

"Not really, because her personal guitar and the production models are two different things. Her left-handed guitar is restrung upside-down to suit the way she learned to play. The production guitars are available in standard left-handed and right-handed versions, with conventional stringing for each. That was important. We wanted players on either side to pick it up and have it feel intuitive, while Malina's own guitar remained completely true to her. She also wanted a two-point tremolo, instead of a Floyd Rose, which still has a modern but familiar vintage look."

How did you know the final version was ready?

"The factory sent several samples to Nashville, where we checked the wiring, switches, hardware, tremolo cavity and neck fit against the specification. Then Malina took a production prototype to gigs and sent back her notes. This time the note was, 'I love it.' That was the moment. We had the neck, pickups, hardware and feel where they needed to be, at a price that still made the guitar accessible. I said, 'Great. Let's go.'"



RICKY BYRD

The former Joan Jett And The Blackhearts six-stringer digs into his love for cheap guitars, versatile tones, and why he's now a Fender amp guy through and through

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

"Because I love Leslie West and Mountain, I bought – and there's a picture of me playing it in a club when I was 16 – a 1956 single-cutaway sunburst Gibson Les Paul Junior. It was just like what Leslie West played. It might have cost me \$350, and it took a while to save that up! [laughs] I purchased it on Music Row on 48th Street in New York City. I don't know where it is now because when you're a kid, you say, 'Oh, let me trade for this, and trade for that...' But that was the first guitar that I purchased."

What was the last guitar you bought, and why?

"I bought a Maton. It's a Mini, but I'm getting a full-sized one. I do these acoustic Recovery shows and events [Ricky now has over 30 years of sobriety], and I hate having to travel with a freaking coffin [hardshell case], but this can go in a soft shell. I had seen Keith Urban using a Maton Mini, and I said to my wife, 'God, that sounds amazing,' so I went on eBay and I purchased one."

What's the most incredible find or bargain that you've ever had when buying guitars?

"Yikes! I moved into the neighbourhood I'm in now and I met some guy at a store who said, 'You're that musician guy... I've got a couple of guitars. Maybe you'd be interested?' It was like he'd just come out of *The Godfather* or something [laughs]. So I met him at my house, he opens his trunk and he says, 'I've got these two guitars...' It was a cheap Danelectro, like the one Jimmy Page used with the lipstick pickups. I bought it for a few hundred bucks and I used it with Southside Johnny for like a year, even though it was a one-trick pony."

What's your strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?

"Let me put it this way: there are guitars that you buy because you know, at some point, you're gonna trade it or sell it for something else. There are different categories of stuff that I have. Some stuff I fell into, like maybe I'll use it to barter for a better thing. But some of those guitars are good for certain things. Like, a Hagstrom that's sitting on a rack is dirty and hasn't been cleaned in ages. The strings are probably 20 years old and the action is really high. But when I'm gonna do slide, maybe I'll pull out that Hagstrom. So there's a guitar for every purpose. They're all valid."

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"I had a '53, a dark red double-cutaway Les Paul Junior, that was like the one Keith Richards had. I used it all the time with Joan [Jett], and I remember being on tour with Ian Hunter and he wanted to buy it. I appreciate it more now, and I used it on a lot of Blackhearts stuff, but it was a one-trick pony and it had one P-90. One day, GE Smith called me and said, 'Chelsea Guitars has a '53 gold ES-295... I believe it belonged to one of the guys that played with Otis Redding on the road.' So I ran down there and I traded that Les Paul Junior plus some cash for that ES-295. It was great. It was beautiful. But I sold it."

"I got a good price for it. But now, if you look on Reverb, some of them are going for like \$17,000 [laughs]. I mean, who is buying these guitars? Who can afford to just spend \$17,000 on a guitar? When you have a house and need a new roof or the freaking hot water heater needs to be replaced, you can't do that. But, I mean... somebody is buying these guitars."

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking to buy their ultimate guitar?

"I would go down and sit in the room, and pull them off the wall one by one, and find out what you lean toward. Are you a Fender guy? Are you a Gibson guy? Are you an Epiphone guy? I mean, parents will ask me what they should get their sons and daughters who want to play, and they're like 15. I always say not to get them anything expensive to start. There's plenty of really good, not-too-expensive guitars, so don't spend a lot of money starting

The Les Paul outline has been important to Ricky since his early playing days when he snagged his first Junior, inspired by Leslie West. He bought this 1975 blue sparkle Les Paul Deluxe in '84 and used it on the *I Hate Myself For Loving You* tour with Joan Jett in the late 80s

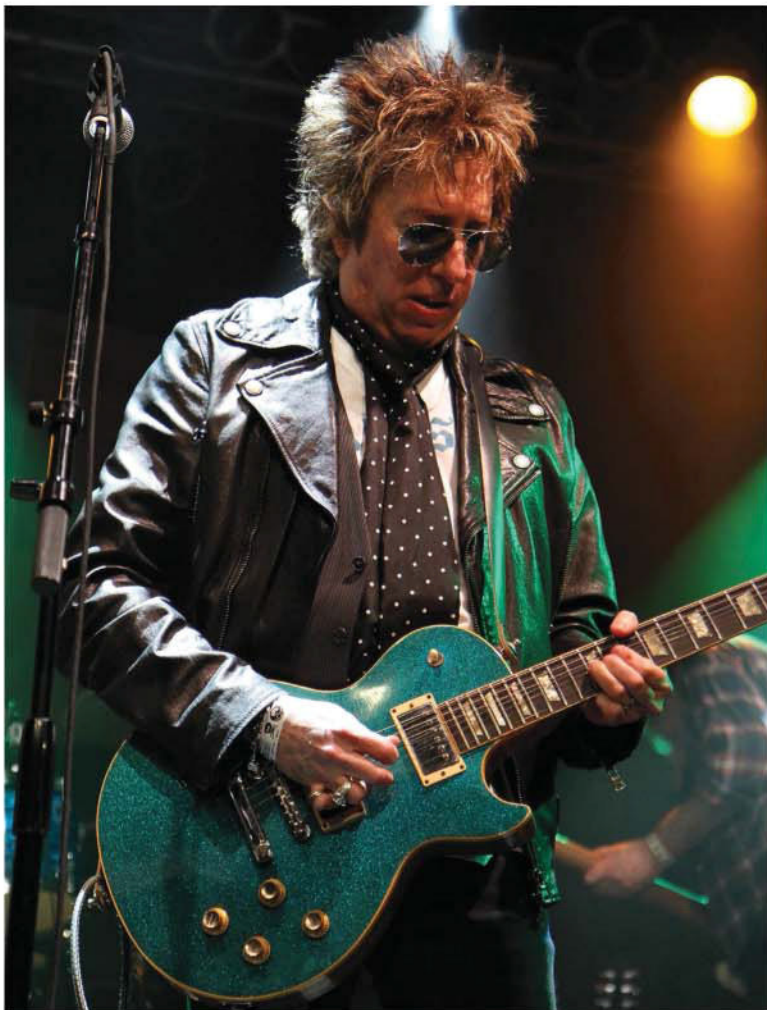


PHOTO BY TAYLOR HILL/GETTY IMAGES

RICKY'S GO-TO RIG

"I can't tell you the last time I used a Marshall amp. For amps, it's all Fenders now. I'll try Marshalls every once in a while, but I don't like the way they sound and they hurt my ears these days. I don't know what it is, but I'm just a Fender guy, even though the Marshall was my signature sound for years with the Blackhearts.

"I've got a few Les Pauls from the early 70s and a Gibson ES-335 that I love. I've also got a '73 Fender Tele and a 'Franken-Tele,' which is all body parts with nothing Fender about it. And I have a tiny pedalboard, with just the essentials: I've got a tuner, an overdrive, a delay and maybe a chorus – all plugged direct into a Fender amp."

off. As a teenager, I was obsessed, but some people go through phases, right? They wanna play guitar and then they wanna do something else. And for someone playing for a long time, if you want to buy a really special guitar, pull it off the wall and try it out."

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window, or browsed online, and what were you looking at?

"You know, you see something in a magazine, or you see somebody playing something, and you go, 'I need that guitar.' And I'm not really a collector, I have maybe 25 guitars, but guitar playing and collecting is an addictive disease! I'm on this kick with 1970s guitars because that's when I was a teenager, you know? I saw this black 1974 ES-335 and, man, you know what happens when you look at something on social media and then it grabs you by the short and curlies [laughs]? It's only a matter of time before I hit PayPal, right?"

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?

"I don't have a freaking clue! But listen, you could get a cheap amp and get a great sound; I'm into that. I can't give you a good answer, but I can give you good options. If you want to be a unique guitar player with your own sound, get

"The blues guys used what they could afford. And those are records that we drool over"

a different kind of amp. Look for the real mutt in the store, where you go, 'What's that? Let me try it...' I mean, what do you think the blues guys used? Do you think they used Marshall stacks? No. They used what they could afford. And those are records that we drool over."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be, and why?

"Man... I love P-90s. Listen to Leslie West's sound and that squeal when you pinch the note at the end of the pick, I love that. But there are certain things you really can't do with a P-90, so humbuckers are great. They're both good! I can't give a good answer because it depends on what you're doing. P-90s are crunchy and crude, and you can do that with humbuckers, but it's different. It's got a handicap, like you're playing golf, or something." [AD]

<https://rickybyrd.com>

Ricky's 'Franken-Tele' is a true partscaster, he says: "All body parts with nothing Fender about it"



Huw Price's *Nitty Gritty*

For Huw's latest vintage restoration project he's tackling a '55 Gibson Les Paul Special

Gibson Les Paul Special (Part 1)

There are countless reasons why people buy vintage guitars. For some they're investments, others relish the thrill of owning an instrument from the era that spawned their favourite music, and some simply experience something in the playing feel or tone that they can't get from modern guitars. And then there are those of us who are drawn to the 'rescue dogs'.

I recognise the historic importance and monetary value of pristine vintage guitars, but they don't do that much for me emotionally or aesthetically. Even if I had unlimited funds, I couldn't see myself buying one. The vintage guitars that get me most fired up are those that have been stripped of their finish or parts and may even be unplayable.

As a full-time guitar restorer, my biggest kicks come from hitting the proverbial 'factory reset button' on guitars that others might consider not worth the effort. I'll occasionally keep one, but mostly I'm happy to send the vintage guitars that I restore back out into the world. I promise you this Les Paul Special is not as bad as it looks, and I'll be documenting its journey back to vintage specs.

Special Qualities

I bought this guitar off my friend and fellow guitar journalist Ed Oleszko several years ago. The original plan was for me to restore it for Ed, but before I could get started, Ed found another player-grade mid-50s Special that was heavily road worn but sounded fantastic and was ready to gig.

As a full-time guitar restorer, my biggest kicks come from hitting the proverbial 'factory reset button'

Finding himself with a spare Special in kit form, Ed offered it to me. Soon after acquiring the guitar, I reassembled it and documented the process on the video channel I share with Ed called Tone Twins TV. The guitar's controls needed a fair bit of work, and I even stripped down the potentiometers to give them a thorough internal clean. The Grey Tiger capacitors were still functional,

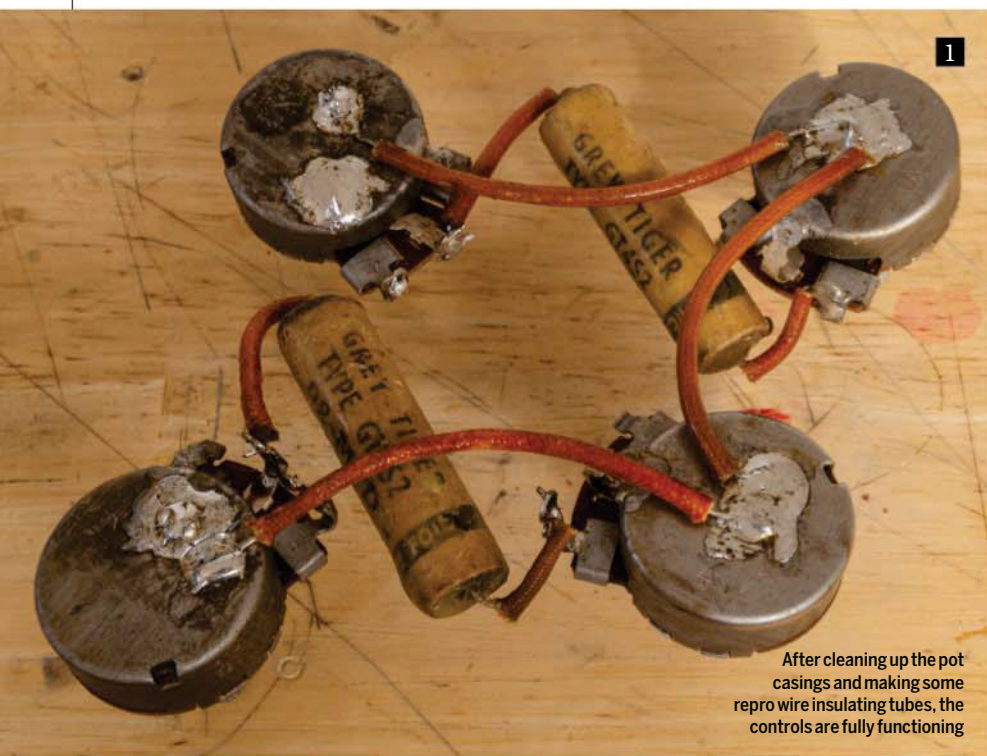
and both the pickups turned out to be in perfect working order.

At the time the Special was fitted with a set of cast Grover tuners and it had a modern set of 'top-hat' control knobs. The wraptail had been replaced by a Badass bridge long before Ed bought the guitar, so I reassembled it using a repro.

First-Year Features

Any 1950s Les Paul Special will be a desirable guitar, but it's particularly exciting that this one appears to be a first-year example. The serial number that was stamped into the back of the headstock when the guitar was refinished in brown corresponded to 1955, but that would have been easy enough to fabricate by looking for photos of 1955 Specials online and choosing a number in the same range.

But dating vintage guitars by the serial number alone – particularly when they're no longer visible – isn't the most reliable method, to say the least. In most cases, vintage guitars have features that are specific to certain years, and the Les Paul Special is a case in point.



After cleaning up the pot casings and making some repro wire insulating tubes, the controls are fully functioning



2. On 1955 Specials there are particularly wide gaps between the pickguard and the P-90 covers



3. All four potentiometers are Stackpoles, and the 134522 code on this casing indicates the 22nd week of 1955

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

Left in its case for the past few years due to some troublesome frets and issues with the post bushings, this mid-50s Special is now ready for its restoration

Any 1950s Les Paul Special will be a desirable guitar, but this one appears to be a first-year example





4. The earliest 1955 Specials had speed knobs, and this vintage set was sourced to bring the guitar back to original specs

5. The wires are incorrectly routed, but two wire channel holes in the top left corner are a 1955 feature

The first thing to examine is the pickguard. I don't know if it's because the pickguard dimensions were different or perhaps due to later repositioning of the bridge pickup, but in 1955 there were big gaps between the pickguard and the pickup covers. On single-cut Specials made from 1956 onwards, these gaps are noticeably smaller. On this guitar the gaps are wide and the bridge pickup cavity is close to the bridge post, so that's an encouraging start.

I can be pretty certain that all four potentiometers have been together as a set since the guitar was built because the date codes are all within a week of one another. The codes read 304522 and 304523 – with 304 representing Stackpole, the 5 designating 1955, and the remaining digits corresponding with the 22nd and

23rd weeks of that year. I can't say for sure that the potentiometers are original to the guitar, but it's another tick in the plus column.

The very first Specials were equipped with black speed knobs, just like the early Les Paul Customs, before Gibson changed to top-hat knobs in 1956. This guitar arrived with repro top-hat knobs, but I noticed something interesting when I found a seven-year-old Reverb listing for this actual guitar when it had a gloss brown finish.

The vendor correctly listed all the features but described the speed knobs that were fitted to the guitar in the photos as 1970s replacements. Given how worn and yellowed they appeared, maybe he assumed they were replacements because the overwhelming majority of 1950s Specials have the later-style knobs. Either way, the knobs were taken off the guitar before he sold it. The next owner was based in Texas and he did a very decent job of disassembling the guitar and stripping it before selling it to Ed.

There is something I hadn't been aware of prior to reassembling the guitar, but it might be the most compelling clue. There are actually two wiring channels leading from the bridge pickup cavity to the control cavity. The first was drilled at

6. The wire holes visible in the pickup cavity suggest Gibson was still figuring out how to build solidbody guitars

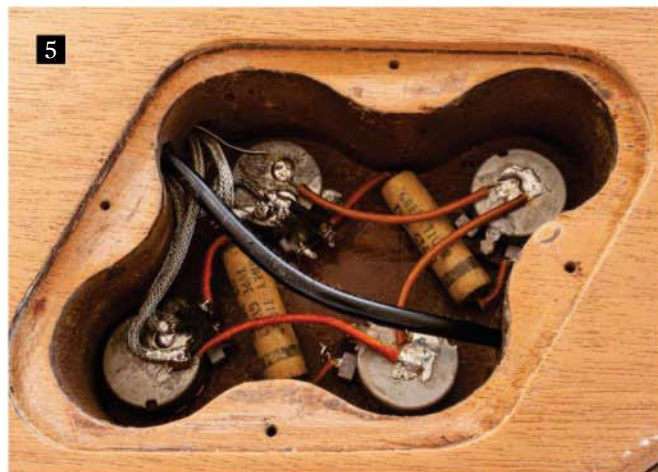
7. These short bushings are a 1955 feature and weren't up to the task of resisting string tension

8. The socket and switch were made by Switchcraft and both appear original

9. The thin knurled nut is typical of the era, and the poker chip and switch tip look like they're the correct colour and shape

10. Both pickups are working and have all the features expected of mid-50s P-90s, including the yellowed masking tape

11. Traces of the TV finish survive in the pickup cavities along with the brown lacquer that replaced it



All four potentiometers have been together as a set since the guitar was built – the date codes are all within a week of one another



an angle from the treble side corner of the pickup cavity into the control cavity. The second was drilled from the output socket hole through the control cavity wall, under the treble side bushing hole and all the way to the switch cavity.

I have found detailed photos of another 1955 Special's control cavity showing the second hole being used for the bridge pickup's output and switch wires, with the neck pickup's output and switch wires and the output wire passing through the first hole. By 1956, Gibson was routing all the wires into the control cavity via a single hole.

Finally, the post bushings that came with this guitar were half an inch long and

they are notorious for allowing the posts to develop a forward lean under string tension. By 1956 Gibson had transitioned to 7/8-inch long bushings and moved the bridge pickup further away from the bushing hole in an attempt to solve the problem. On balance, I believe it is accurate to call this a 1955 Les Paul Special.

Part Master

Some of the other parts can't be dated precisely, but age can be assessed on construction and visual details. The switch was definitely made by Switchcraft, and since it has no lettering, we can conclude that it dates to the 1950s. Another way to tell is by the direction of

the screws holding the 'leaves' together. With the switch oriented so the dual terminals are uppermost and the three terminals are at the bottom, vintage switch screws go in from right to left.

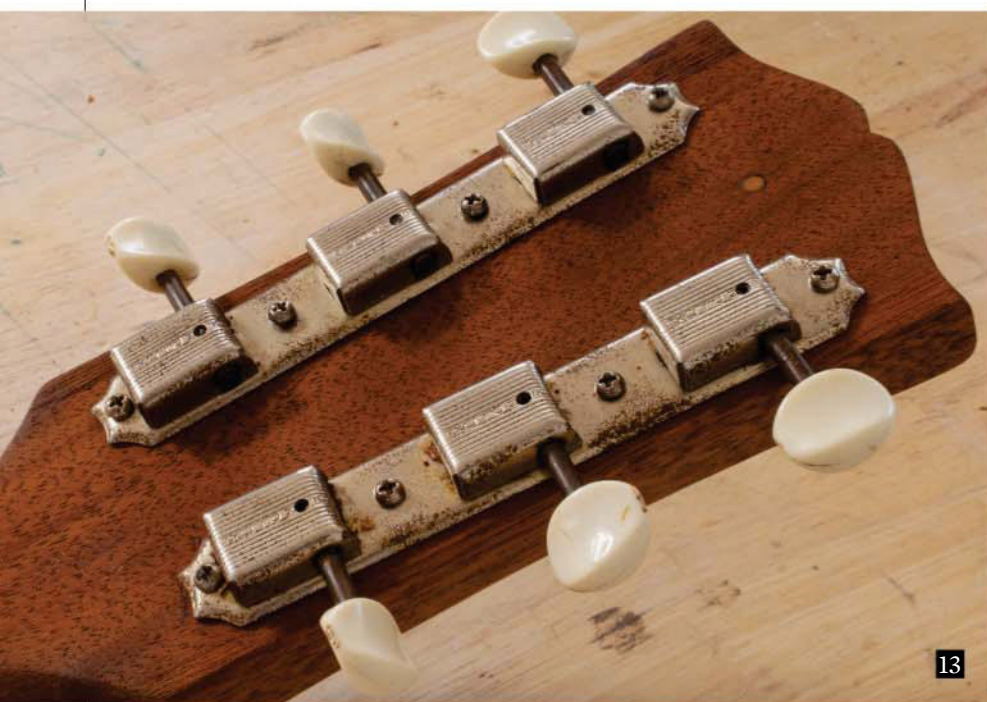
The nut is nylon, fits the guitar perfectly and looks very old, and the switch tip has an orangey amber colour, a vintage taper and hairline cracks that I'd associate with Catalin, not modern plastic. Rather than test it with chemicals or melt it with a hot pin, I'm going to trust my instinct and call it good.

Ditto the pickguard, coverplates, poker chip, three-ply jack plate and truss rod cover; they all look ancient and have roller marks consistent with 1950s

12. Look closely and you'll see the frets on the left are wider than the factory frets on the right

13. No-line Klusons may be correct for 1955, but this single-line set fits perfectly and it's close enough

14. The silkscreen logo was removed when the guitar was refinished and the replacement reads 'Model', rather than 'Special'



The stripped body makes this a player-grade example, so I want it to play as well as possible

manufacturing practices. The pickup covers have clearly lived a life, and the vomit odour indicates they are butyrate. They also have UC452B markings on the underside, so they look and smell the part and are definitely old.

The black rubber grommets in the baseplates, black leadout wires, two-braid hookup wires and slothead bobbin screws are all features associated with mid-1950s P-90s. The neck and bridge read 8.03k and 8.22k respectively, with capacitance and inductance readings that are consistent with other 50s P-90s I've measured.

The Gauss meter on my pickup winding machine isn't the most accurate, but the readings I took off these magnets put them at the stronger end of the early/mid-50s spectrum. The top of the bridge bobbin has a split, which is all too common, but it's still working and I'll try to handle it gently until it's back in the guitar. Again, the look, smell and construction detail all point to mid-50s originals, and they sound that way, too.

Planning Ahead

The biggest challenge with this project will be recreating the TV finish. Having found traces of original lacquer in the pickup cavities, I have a pretty good idea of what to shoot for, and wherever possible I'm going to try to reveal the original finish and preserve it.

Although mostly original, the stripped body makes this a player-grade example, so I want it to play as well as possible. The original frets measure 0.07-inch wide and 0.02-inch tall, and one of the reasons this guitar has spent the past few years in a case is that the frets make it tiring to play. I can also report that the first six frets have already been replaced, so my decision to do a refret was made somewhat easier.

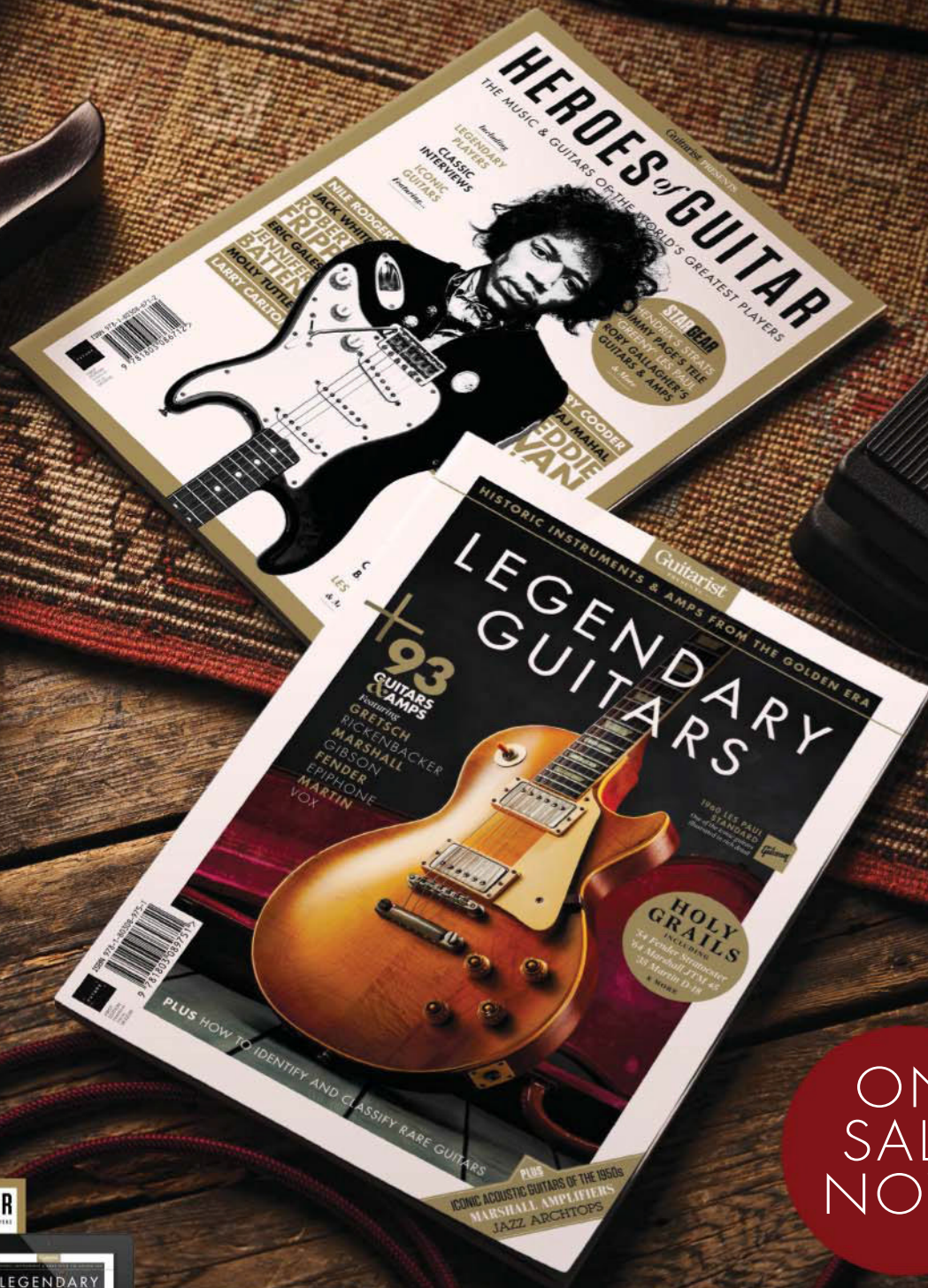
Another reason I haven't been using the guitar is that I didn't want to exacerbate the post-leaning issue. I have discussed this issue with David Davidson at Well Strung Guitars and he's a strong advocate for replacing half-inch bushings with longer ones, even in vintage instruments.

Over the last few years, I've acquired some three-on-a-plate Kluson tuners and a set of 50s speed knobs, so the only part left to find is a wraptail. Check in next time to see how it all comes together. **G**

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David Davidson's *Vintage Icons*

This model has a unique finish and is one of the best examples Well Strung Guitars has owned

1964 Fender Jazz Bass



This Jazz Bass has all the features you would expect from a 1964 example plus a one-off Tangerine Sparkle finish

This Jazz Bass was made in February 1964 and it features a Tangerine Sparkle metal flake finish sunburst with a matching headstock. Besides that, it has a maple neck, an alder body, a green nitrate pickguard and a nicely figured rosewood fretboard with clay knots. In other words, all the earlier desirable pre-CBS features are included, plus a one-of-a-kind finish.

"It has a very thin 'A' neck, and everything on the inside is perfect. We had to do a refret when we got it because it did not play particularly well with the frets that were on there. They were not the originals, so we redid it properly and it plays wonderfully now. In fact, I would say it's one of the best basses of any kind we've ever had in the shop – and whenever a really good bassist comes in, it's the one we give [customers] for testing bass amplifiers.

"The neck plays really evenly all the way down, and there are some particularly good pickups on this one. They're very well balanced and they have a true ring to them. The neck pickup cover is a vintage-style replacement, but when I find an original, I'll put it on.

"I don't really have much history on this bass. I didn't get it from anybody famous and I acquired it when stuff like this was very inexpensive. I bought it out on the West Coast from a friend of mine maybe 15 years ago and it came in its original white case.

"The playability is amazing. I mean, sometimes you just know when an instrument is 'The One' the second you pick it up. You can often tell from the

"The playability is amazing. Sometimes you know when a guitar is 'The One' the second you pick it up"

weight or the balance, and every aspect of this bass has that quality. Judging by the condition of the paintwork, whoever owned it obviously felt the same way because it has been played and played and played. The finish is especially worn on the back and a lot of wood has been exposed.

"Popular folklore says that Fender used hot-rod and car body shops for sparkle finishes, and I'm sure they did. I think Fender just asked sprayers for a rate for painting bodies and if one said they'd be able to do it for \$20 and somebody else was \$18, they would give the job to the cheaper guy. Fender was using a Binks Model 7 spray gun with a suction cup, but the pressure was insufficient to pull up larger metal flakes. The hot-rod shops used gravity-fed paint guns and Fender didn't get those until 1966.

"If forced to guess, I would say Dennis Swiden sprayed this finish because he had access to paint with very heavy and large metal flakes and he also owned the specialist equipment needed to spray it. Dennis did spray cars, but he was more of a furniture painter who worked out of his parents' shop. He was friends with some people at Fender and he used to come to the factory – often parking in George

Fullerton's spot – and load up the trunk of his car with bodies. After he had sprayed them with sparkle finishes, Dennis would then bring the bodies back to Fender for assembly. Dennis's style was different and he had a very definite way of doing things that became very popular among surf-rockers and Bakersfield country players.

"The sunburst on the headstock is particularly unusual, and that provides another clue that this is a Dennis paint job. I had an Aqua Mist Jazzmaster from '59 that had a matching headstock just like it but in aqua and green. Back then, Dennis was the only one who was doing anything like that because matching headstocks weren't even a thing on Fenders until early 1962. The headstocks on this bass and the Jazzmaster were painted in exactly the same way.

"In pictures it looks like there's a grey primer coat, but it's actually silver metallic. The middle is gold, but I have a feeling it could have been silver and turned gold as the clear lacquer aged. And the sunburst was created with red sprayed around the edges. The red could have been transparent or metallic and it looks amazing. Either way, I've never seen anything quite like that. I've kept this bass for a long time and I'm probably asking too much for it. Maybe I'll come down eventually, but it's the only one there is, so I'm not rushing to sell it." [HP]

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

"The red could have been transparent or metallic and it looks amazing. I've never seen anything quite like that"

Most likely sprayed by Dennis Swiden, the centre section of this metal-flake finish may have turned from silver to gold as it aged

PHOTOS BY PAGE DAVIDSON WELL STRUNG GUITARS

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks



With EJ In Mind

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Fender Stratocaster, Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer & Marshall JTM45 MkII Reissue
Difficulty ★★★★★ | 20 mins per example

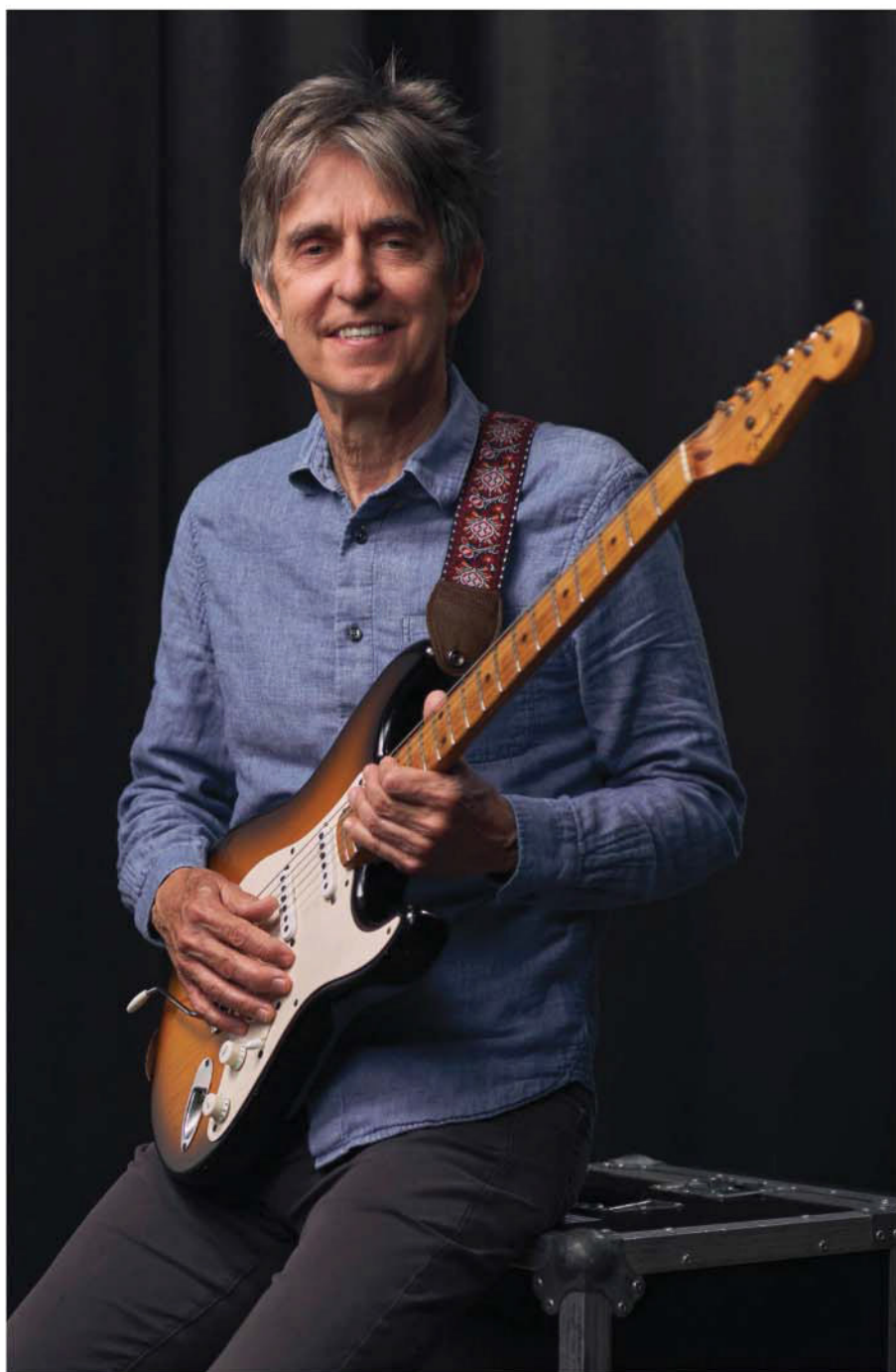


PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

ERIC JOHNSON is one of those rare artists who has created a unique style from classic elements of blues, jazz and rock. His playing covers a diverse range of sonic bases, from delicate harmonics and super-clean crystalline chords to edgy rhythms and roaring distorted solo lines. He delivers all these using a vintage or signature model Strat, according to his preference of the moment. His modest pedalboard features a few carefully chosen pieces, plus the switching for his multi-amp setup – a rig that has hardly changed since his debut solo record, *Tones*, dating back to 1986.

Although Eric is renowned for his forensic approach to getting the perfect tone, he certainly isn't one to jump on the latest fads looking for shortcuts and isn't seduced by the novelty of new gear. It's worth noting that Eric has more recently been experimenting with modern digital units, so clearly has an eye on the future when it comes to his rig, but in the meantime recently shipped his whole backline to Europe, to avoid compromising his sound. That's commitment to the art over profit!

The example solo, though split into four sections, was played as a continuous take. It borrows heavily from Eric's approach to pentatonics, arpeggios and touches of Texas blues. And while I don't claim to have duplicated Eric's tone or style definitively here, this solo is very much inspired by him. It contains quite a few ideas that can hopefully be of use should you wish to incorporate a bit of the 'EJ magic' into your own playing. This isn't a fast 'shred'-type affair, but it does require sustained accuracy and concentration. Very much a case of building up to it, rather than expecting to jump straight in... Hope you enjoy and see you next time! 🎸



Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now to stream or buy from Amazon Music

Example 1

THIS FIRST EXAMPLE AIMS TO ESTABLISH THE FEEL, featuring a Texas blues shuffle-style riff with some pentatonic fills. As there's a fairly sparse backing here of just bass and drums (echoing the line up of Eric's live band), it felt important not to rush into a single-note solo immediately. The feel is fairly loose – though there are some staccato notes, you'll hear the open fourth and fifth strings ringing occasionally, such as in bars 1 and 3.

♩ = 137 Swung (all figs) A5 (chords implied by bass)

Example 2

THE ASCENDING RUN during the first two bars features some wide intervallic skips based around D-Em-D7-G-Am chord shapes – all superimposed over a D on the bass. I've opted to pick these, but Eric will sometimes use a hybrid pick-and-fingers style, as he does on *Cliffs Of Dover*. We break out of this into a more melodic D major based run, then some bluesy doublestops and 6ths (F#) as we move back to A in the bass.

Example 3

OVER THE C MAJOR AND D MAJOR CHORDS I've opted to play a line influenced by Eric's playing on the track *Camel's Night Out*, then changed position with a few slides and legato moves to land at a D major arpeggio, which is played in triplets. This is one of those moments that can be deceptively difficult to articulate, but running it through slowly (in fact, very slowly is surprisingly helpful) while maintaining a relaxed posture will definitely get you there. More haste, less speed...

Example 4

JUMPING DOWN FOR THAT LOW E helps fill the gap between solo guitar and bass, followed by an E pentatonic/Mixolydian run and an E major arpeggio-based pattern. Framing the chords with arpeggios like this can also help with filling in any harmonic 'information' in this trio format, as we saw in Example 3. The pinched harmonic at the end can be a hit and miss affair. Eric has a pretty good hit rate on these, but it's important to be realistic – try just behind the neck pickup and you'll find it somewhere there!

Hear It Here

ERIC JOHNSON AH VIA MUSICOM



From Eric's second solo album, we're coming in here with the most obvious first choice, *Cliffs Of Dover*, a track that definitively demonstrates Eric's blazing lead tone and cascading pentatonic lines. Also, check out *Desert Rose* for more of his unique take on pentatonics, plus chord harmony in his solo lines. While you're there, have a listen to *Trademark* to hear Eric switching between tones/amp rigs to great effect. Finally, *Righteous* is a great demonstration of Eric's approach to a fast Texas blues shuffle.

ERIC JOHNSON VENUS ISLE



A lot to check out on this record. Firstly, Eric's Hendrix-style chord accompaniment and stratospheric solo on the title track. There's also a lovely extended solo at the end of *All About You*. Elsewhere, it's well worth a listen to *Camel's Night Out* (apparently played on a Gibson Flying V) and *When The Sun Meets The Sky*. You'll hear some switches in tone – sometimes a switch between amps, sometimes maybe a punch-in during the recording process. Whatever, the results speak for themselves!

ERIC JOHNSON LIVE FROM AUSTIN, TX



It's always interesting to check out the live versions of tracks for extra insight into the creative process and production/arrangements. Here, it also demonstrates that Eric is every bit as astonishing live as he is in the studio. We hear him switching between amps, tones and techniques in real-time on tracks such as *Trail Of Tears* and an extended intro on *Cliffs Of Dover*. Live versions of *Righteous* and *Zap* feature lots of fluid solo playing. It's worth noting that many of these tracks are available on video, too.

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Nextmonth

PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN



« SATCHVAI

The colossi of daredevil instrumental guitar sum their talents on a new album release, *The Sea Of Emotion*

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Another classic amp reissue takes its turn in the *Guitarist* review spotlight

MARTIN TAYLOR

As he approaches his 70th birthday, the jazz guitar maestro looks back on his long career in music

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