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Guitarist

Issue 543

NOVEMBER 2026

"HE LOVED THE GUITAR. HE TRULY LOVED IT"

Charles Berry Jr shares the untold story of how his father invented rock 'n' roll

Stars on Chuck's legacy & '57 Gibson ES-350T

Plus

MARTIN TAYLOR

THE ARCHTOP MAESTRO ON JAZZ SECRETS FOR BLUES PLAYERS

Reviews

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FENDER '62 DELUXE AMP
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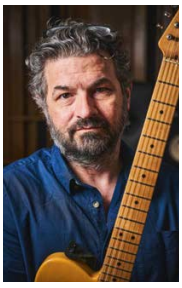
A Particular Place To Go



Looking back with fresh insight on Chuck Berry's life and music, a century on from his birth, I'm struck by how some people just embody the breaking of a great wave in music and culture in general. Without Chuck, there wouldn't be The Beatles or The Stones – or not as we know them. Because it needed someone to marry blues and country, the great American folk-music traditions, in one fistful of irresistable riffs. Jazz (and a certain debonaire drawl) is present, too, in Chuck's sound – inherited from T-Bone Walker but delivered with the swaggering energy of a new era. Louder, sassier, wittier. Rock 'n' roll, in other words. And it took Chuck Berry, with his magpie ear for great melodies and wide-ranging tastes to make that all available in one package to listeners.

In the process he transformed the landscape of music, making genre music look dully hidebound compared with the optimism and vim of his irresistible hooks and adroit eye for a great story. If the guitar playing made you want to dance, the lyrics made you feel as if you had boarded that Greyhound bus across the *Promised Land* with him – breakdowns, crises and eventual triumph included in the price of the ticket.

For young listeners in rainy 60s Britain, Chuck's wisecracking portraits of American life must have seemed achingly glamorous – and propelled the likes of Keith Richards onto the stages of London clubs – and kicked off their own huge chapter of rock history. It's hard not to give Chuck the lion's share of credit for such cultural earthquakes in British music.

As with all historic artists, we should be careful not to gloss too much, however. Though Chuck claimed he was trying to catch a worker suspected of dishonest conduct, and wrongdoing was never proven in court, a settlement was made in 1990 with women who brought a class action against him for installing a video camera in the bathroom of his restaurant. Nonetheless, his musical contribution to 20th century guitar music is nothing short of titanic and, in the following pages, we explore why it changed everything. Enjoy the issue.



Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights



'62 Fender Deluxe

Fender's brown-panel amps often receive mysteriously little love in the Fender pantheon, so it's nice to see a reissue correcting this **p14**



Martin Taylor

What have 70 years on the planet taught Britain's pre-eminent jazz maestro about guitar, creativity and more? We find out over on **p74**



Ronnie Wood

There's a charm and nostalgia for when arts and music were really important in people's lives that is irresistible in Ronnie Wood's guitar biography **p90**

COVER: CHUCK BERRY PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES STEVE VAI & JOE SATRIANI PHOTO BY LARRY DIMARZIO RONNIE WOOD STRATOCASTER PHOTO COPYRIGHT © 2026 GENESIS PUBLICATIONS LTD
ABOVE: FENDER '62 DELUXE AMP AND MARTIN TAYLOR PHOTOS BY LUCY ROBINSON; RONNIE WOOD PHOTO BY RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

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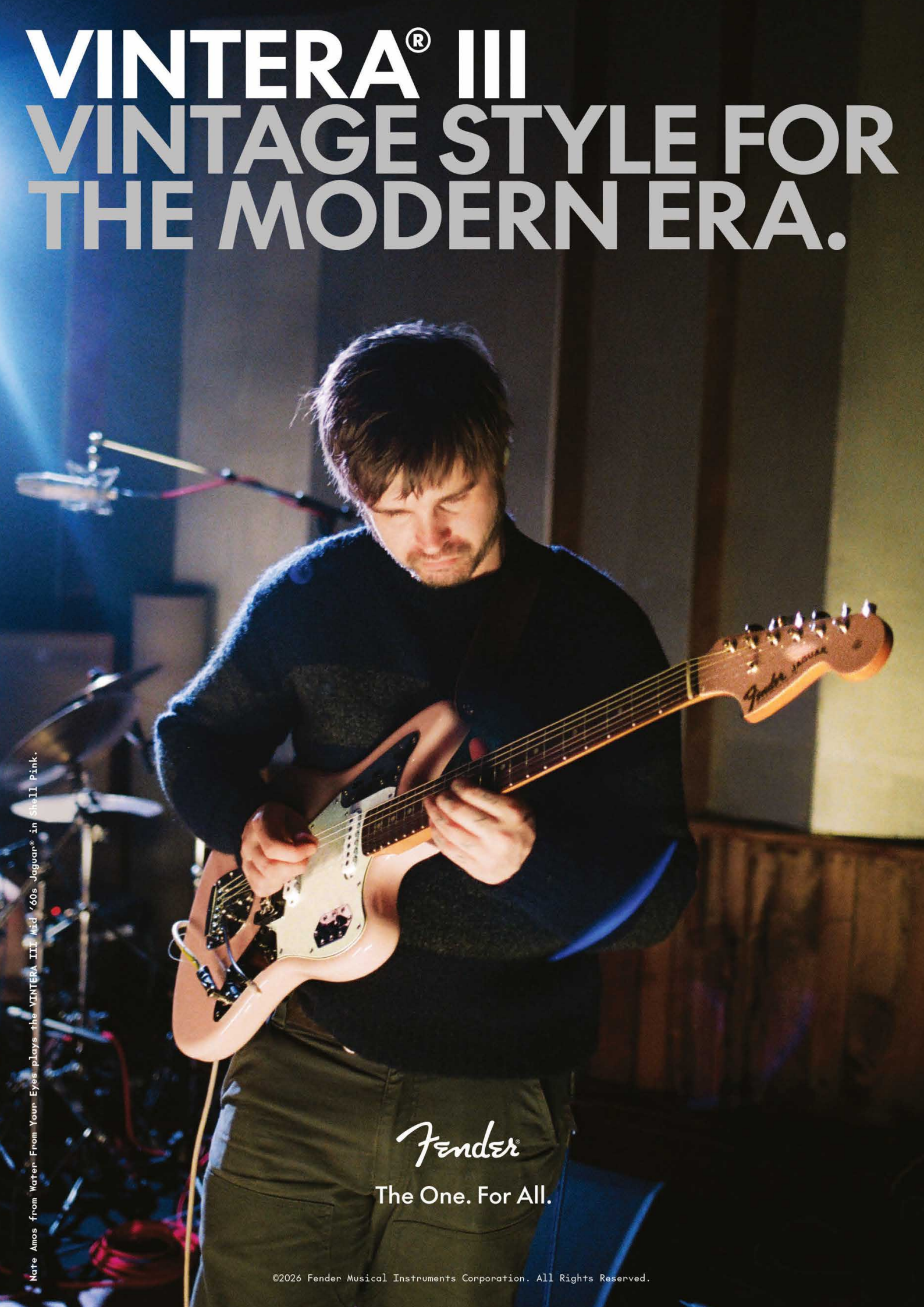

Nate Amos from Water From Your Eyes plays the VINTERA III Mid '60s Jaguar® in Shell Pink.

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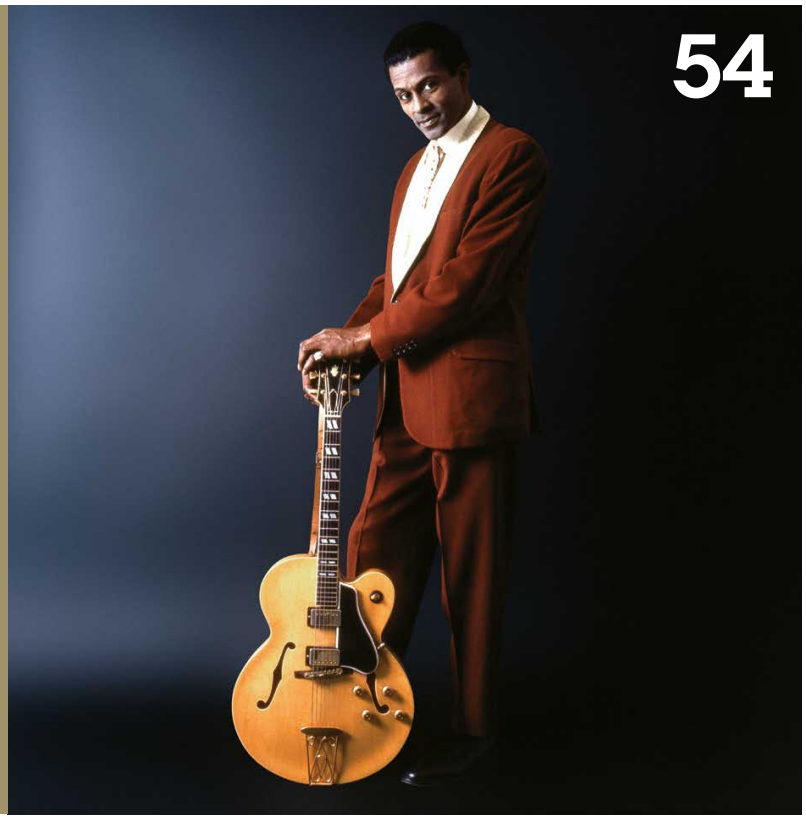

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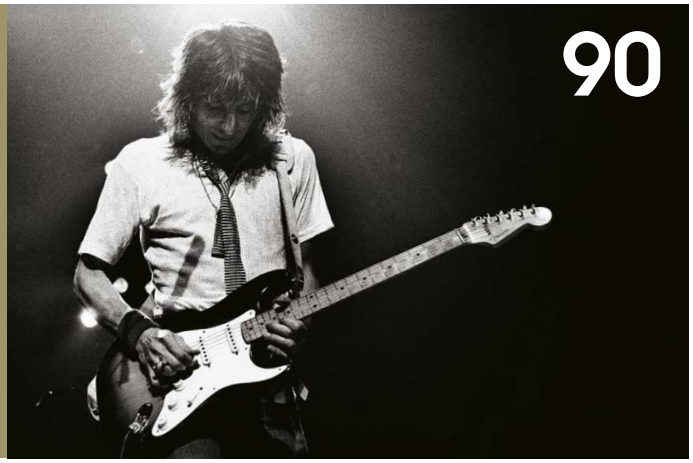

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GRETSCH G6134T-58 LIMITED EDITION PENGUIN WITH STRING-THRU BIGSBY
£3,699

WHAT IS IT? Japanese-made single-cutaway with a chambered mahogany body, laminated maple top and vintage-accurate TV Jones Ray Butts Filter'Tron pickups

Rare Bird

The mythical Penguin, one of the rarest vintage guitars of all, gets reissued in an eye-catching Light Blue Pearl finish with plenty of bling and some exciting pickups – it can only be a Gretsch

Words Ed Oleszko **Photography** Olly Curtis



The Gretsch 6134 Penguin is among the rarest and most elusive of all vintage guitars, with collectors paying six figures to pick up one of the few (rumoured to be less than 50) originals that left the Brooklyn factory between 1955 and 1962. On its 1955 release (no doubt in response to Gibson's brand-new Les Paul model of 1952) the Penguin was effectively a fancier Duo Jet with top-of-the-line White Falcon appointments, a striking white finish, gold hardware, fancy inlays and DeArmond Dynasonic single-coil pickups, along with a smart gold 'Cadillac' 'G' tailpiece. A new one in 1959 would cost roughly $490. To put that in context, a Gibson Les Paul Standard, now known as a 'Burst, would have only set you back roughly $265. In today's vintage market, purchasing either would raise that figure to the hundreds of thousands...

The first major revision to the Penguin's spec came in 1958 with thumbnail fingerboard inlays. Crucially, there was also the addition of the new Chet Atkins approved 'Patent Applied For' Filter'Tron Pickups (designed by engineer Ray Butts) to remove the hum associated with the single-coil Dynasonic pickups. Debate still rages in quiet corners of the internet


Mars
GRETSCH
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BY
Bigsby







1. The Light Blue Pearl finish is a nod to the retro drum finishes the company used in the 50s and 60s. Could anyone but Gretsch make it look so achingly cool?

2. The Penguin shares the same huge headstock design with the legendary White Falcon. Retro-looking Grover Imperial tuners complete the grandiose design

as to whether Ray Butts or Gibson's Seth Lover (or indeed others) invented and first patented the guitar humbucking pickup.

The pickups Gretsch has chosen to fit to this Limited Edition Penguin are the TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity units – accurate recreations of his original 1950s design that are not wax-potted, promising more high-end sparkle and a tighter bass response than regular TV Jones Classics.

Although listed as part of Gretsch's solidbody line, the Penguin actually features a chambered mahogany body

While the single-cut shape might suggest a typically Les Paul midrange heft, it puts us more in mind of a good ES-335

3. The TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity pickups offer the most authentic vintage-correct classic Gretsch tone yet, with plenty of growl and top-end sparkle

4. A string-through Bigsby B3CP tailpiece replaces the non-vibrato 'Cadillac' tailpiece of the original 1950s version; a significant upgrade giving wobbles galore

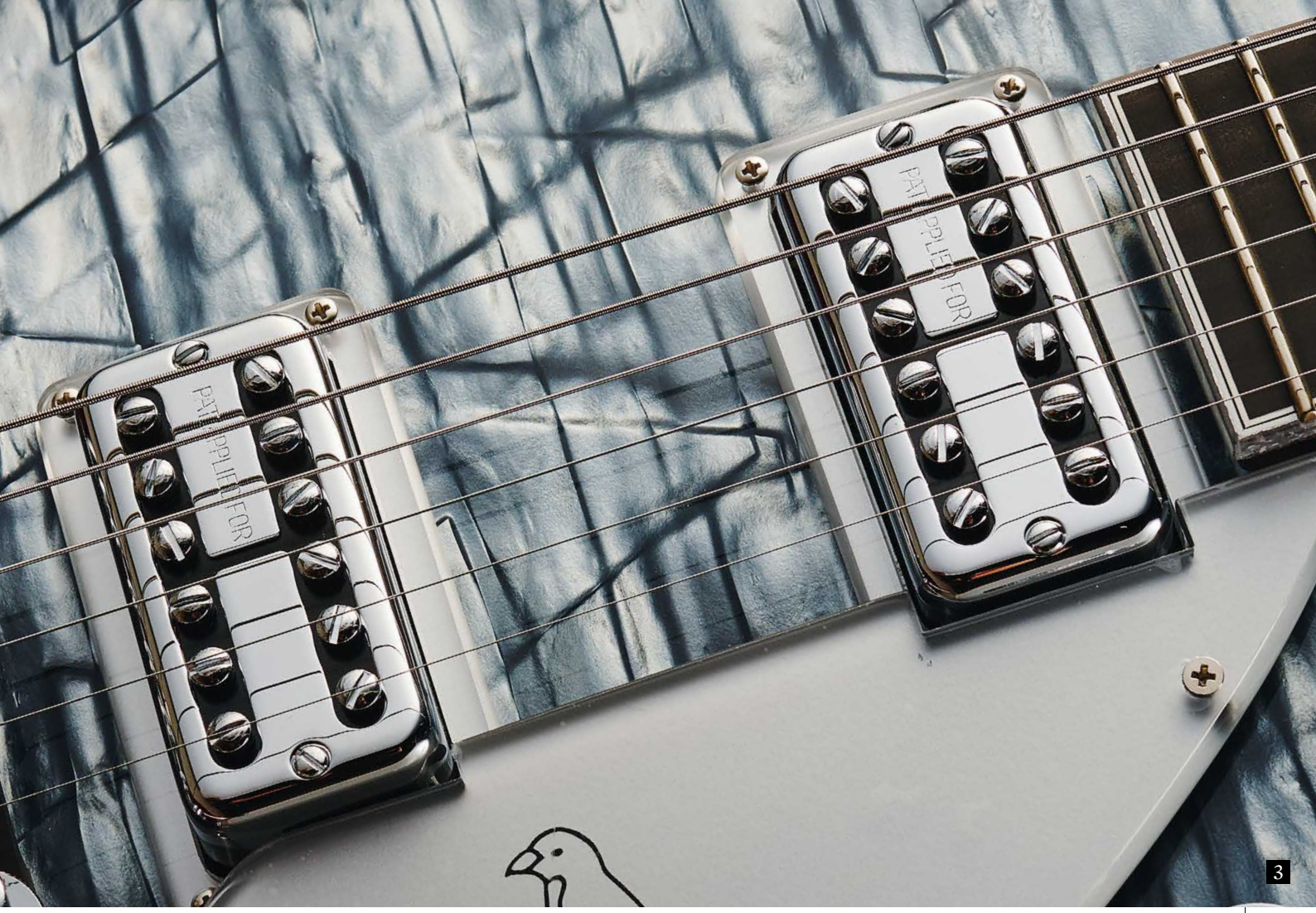
with an arched maple laminated top, and – if you haven't noticed it already – a particularly eye-catching top finish that Gretsch refers to as 'Light Blue Pearl'. It's not vintage-accurate for a 1950s White Penguin, but it totally nails the finish found on some vintage Gretsch drum kits of the 1960s.

While the body outline nods to a slightly bigger Les Paul, a Gretsch Penguin's 337mm (13.25-inch) wide and 51mm (two-inch) deep body – also used for the Duo Jet models – is easily differentiated on a dark stage by the huge, magnificent headstock borrowed from the White Falcon with its ever-so-subtle Gretsch logo and regal Grover Imperial tuners.

The set U-shaped mahogany neck features a beautiful dark 305mm (12-inch) radius ebony fingerboard featuring 22 medium jumbo frets, 'Luminlay' glow-in-the-dark side dots, and surprisingly restrained Neo-Classical thumbnail inlays. Adding more bling for the buck, silver sparkle with w/b/w purfling features just about everywhere and joins a hefty chrome-plated arm guard (typically idiosyncratic Gretsch and a feature borrowed from banjos), chrome 'Jeweled G-Arrow' (in Gretsch parlance) control knobs for the individual volume controls for each pickup, and the treble bleed cap-loaded master volume control. The dual switches are a standard three-way pickup selector accompanied by a three-way tone switch that uses different value capacitors to give preset tone control sounds.

The strings rest on a vintage-looking partially pinned Space Control bridge, which has significant movement back and forth for intonation control but can move under aggressive string bends and string changes. The modern string-through Bigsby B3CP vibrato tailpiece is a marvel of engineering for anyone who has ever





3



4

struggled with changing strings on a traditional Bigsby unit. Special mention also to the screw-on strap locks that have been a welcome addition to Gretsch guitars since the 1950s.

Feel & Sounds

Taking the Penguin from its plush hard case, at 4kg (8.8lb) we are immediately stuck by both its heft and sheer presence. Unmistakably Gretsch in its opulence, the striking Light Blue Pearl finish and all that chrome and silver sparkle is a colour scheme that reminds you that you're playing something special.

The Penguin's chambered mahogany body contributes a wonderful sense of smooth, airy warmth and depth to our first few unplugged strums. Single notes and chords have a rounded attack and a smooth and surprisingly long sustain, not something we'd usually associate with smaller-bodied Gretsch models especially, but it bodes well for plugged-in adventures.

While the Penguin's single-cut body shape might suggest a typically Les Paul midrange heft, plugging the Penguin into our Princeton Reverb puts us more in mind of a good ES-335. There's less midrange and immediacy to the attack; instead the Penguin has a smoother, more open and sparkly voice. Perhaps it's all that air in the chambered mahogany body with the



The Gretsch Space Control bridge is a tuneful and effective design, with the rollers allowing for precise string-spacing adjustment

laminate maple top, or the combination of floating bridge and the most musical of vibrato units adding sonic sparkle.

If you haven't spent much time playing Filter'Trons then we urge you to do so, particularly these TV Jones Ray Butts units. Warm yet gritty, these pickups have plenty of sparkle and bite with a tight low-end, sitting somewhere between a classic Fender single coil and a Gibson humbucker – a versatile yet instantly familiar sound.

Carefully balancing the individual pickup volume controls with the master volume with its treble bleed capacitor allows a huge range of tones, from clean snappy Beatle-y chime to gritty snarl perfect for Neil Young Americana and country runs when plugged into a Tweed amp.

The surprisingly useful tone switch is bypassed in the middle setting, rolls off some treble in the down position, and is most useful in the upper position by virtue of engaging a different value tone capacitor. It gives a superb almost cocked-wah midrange boost for additional textures and is great for punching lead lines out of a mix.

Up the amp or pedal gain, and you're greeted by harmonically rich tones with superb note definition and a beautiful compression that gels notes perfectly even under serious volume and gain. As AC/DC found, along with many alt-rock artists in the late 90s, it's just about the perfect rock rhythm tone.

> There are a huge range of tones, from snappy Beatle-y chime to gritty snarl for Neil Young Americana

Verdict

Modern Gretsches are built to more exacting standards than so many of the vintage originals, and this Limited Edition Penguin is no exception – it is a visually striking and beautifully voiced bird. The addition of the TV Jones Ray Butts pickups is a masterstroke, offering a wide range of authentic Filter'Tron tones and – once you become accustomed to the idiosyncratic controls – hours of inspiration. The colour scheme may not be for everyone, but who wants 'standard' anyway? It's a Gretsch Penguin, after all!



GRETSCH G6134T-58 LIMITED EDITION PENGUIN WITH STRING-THRU BIGSBY

PRICE: £3,699
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Single-cutaway, chambered body electric
BODY: Mahogany body with arched maple top and vintage chambering
NECK: Gloss-finished U profile mahogany set-neck
SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.86mm (1.6875")
FINGERBOARD: Ebony with mother-of-pearl Neo Classical Thumbnail inlays
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Bigsby B3CP String-Thru vibrato, Grover Imperial Tuners, Space Control bridge, Jeweled G-Arrow Control Knobs, chrome banjo-style arm rest and hardware
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.4mm
ELECTRICS: Twin TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity Filter'Tron pickups, 3-way pickup selector switch, individual pickup volumes, master volume, classic Gretsch tone switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.0/8.8
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: G6134TG-58 Limited Edition 1958 Custom Penguin with Bigsby in Nightbird Emerald finish (£3,739)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Light Blue Pearl (as reviewed)

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
0333 200 8765
www.gretschguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Eye-catching; wonderfully smooth to play; versatile pickups sound magnificent across a range of musical genres

CONS The finish may be too cool for some; a more vintage-correct nitro finish would be good; bridge could be pinned more firmly

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FENDER '62 DELUXE AMP
£1,699

WHAT IS IT? Recreation of a classic 20-watt, all-valve combo with two channels and tremolo



Between 1959 and 1963, Fender revised its amp line-up: from the Tweed range with its rear-facing controls and saggy response, to the improved headroom, componentry and cabinet design of the brown-panel series. These models are generally regarded to have the most mid-focused gain-potential of any of the classic models

Chocolate Box

For a brief period, Fender made amps that could roar with midrange-forward gain – and the brand's taking us back to that fabled brown-panel era once again

Words Martin Smith **Photography** Lucy Robinson

Nestled chronologically between the lo-fi tweed originals and the higher-headroom black-panel series was a short period of lesser-known brown-covered Fender amps, spanning the period from '59 to '63. By virtue of their upgraded components, circuit and speaker efficiency, these amps had unique sonic attributes distinct from any other period of the company's history. More bold headroom than the tweeds yet a less scooped midrange than the later black- and silver-panels, the brown amps had a mid character unique to themselves, along with the ability to achieve a thick overdrive.

Mr Fender was not entirely satisfied by this unholy saturation, however, and by the middle of '63 the company had moved forward with his quest for maximum clean headroom in the guise of the black-panel amps, and the brown range was quickly phased out to become a rarely seen historical quirk. Until the 90s, that is, when Fender reissued its super-rare and desirable brown-panel 2x10 Vibroverb. Although famously used by the late Jeff Buckley live and on record, the amp is not quite a faithful reproduction and didn't quite summon up the saturation potential of the originals.

Fender is now revisiting its brown-tinted past with this reproduction of the '62 Deluxe with its 6G3 circuit designation in which two 6V6 valves push out 20 watts through a single 12-inch custom-designed Celestion driver. The bias is fixed in this amp – in contrast to other brown-panel models – achieving a tighter and faster response. Those same 6V6 valves are utilised to produce the mesmeric valve-biased tremolo sound, which throbs with a depth all its own at the tap of the vintage brown footswitch.

The Deluxe, in its future black incarnation, has historically found favour among the US studio elite players of the golden era of record making, and as a result we've heard its sonic profile possibly on more records than any other. However, with this '62 brown-panel variation we have a more aggressive beast for our perusal, said to be favoured by both Billy Gibbons and Keith Richards.

Feel & Sounds

Pulling the combo from its packaging with its thankfully comfortable brown-leather handle, its period-correct Nubtex covering and wheat grille cloth cut a distinctive dash. Its traditional pine cabinet keeps





1. Fender has used solid pine for its cabinetry since the 50s due to its light weight and resonant acoustic properties, and the '62 Deluxe Amp is no different, being assembled in the company's California factory

the weight down for an easily manageable lift. Scrutinising the faceplate we find a minimal control set for this four-input, two-channel circuit. As per Fender protocol, input 1 (for either of its channels) is tuned for higher-gain sensitivity, in contrast to the slightly attenuated second input(s). The two channels aren't footswitchable within the amp's circuit, but they are in-phase, allowing for an ABY pedal to switch between the two or use both simultaneously.

We plugged our Strat into input 1 of the Normal channel and immediately rejoiced in the tight mids that rounded out the tone of our vintage-output single-coil pickups. In the neck position, the fabled woody depth was rendered wonderfully, without excessive power-sapping low-end. Its top-end, meanwhile, though unmistakably Fender, has none of the brash treble that can put a little too much sting in the tail of brighter-sounding guitars. As a result, the Deluxe achieves a distinctive condensed sound that brings to mind the classic US studio guitarist tone, exemplified on recordings from Steely Dan to The Jacksons, and much in between.

2. The famed modulation of this amp is achieved by way of the valve-biased tremolo, which creates a lush, pulsating effect whether at subtle or exaggerated depths. This effect works best with well-matched power valves in this fixed-bias circuit





Over the decades of production, Fender has fitted a range of speakers inside its combos, ranging from early Altecs and Jensens to the bold-as-brass JBL D120 silver-capped drivers. In this instance we have a custom 12-inch Celestion designed specifically for Fender

Engaging the vintage-looking conical-brown footswitch released the luscious throb of the valve-biased tremolo circuit. Out of the variety of tremolo circuits used in guitar amps, the valve-biased design has a very organic and pleasing ramp to its modulations. It requires two well-matched power valves to get the strongest effect and is working very well with the Deluxe's 6v6s. The speed has the more usable part of its range between 5 and 10 but fulfilled all our speed requirements.

Lastly, it was time to push the gain on the Bright channel to find out how wild things can get. True to form, this amp has a hefty slab of mid-heavy gain to give fluidity to leads and lovely weight to riffs and chords. The particular frequency focus is perfectly chosen, neither sharp like a Marshall nor rotund like some Boogies. Stepping on the familiar green overdrive, used by legends such as Stevie Ray Vaughan to boost Fender amps, shaved off a little more low-end and gave more point to notes coming from our Les Paul. It was noticeable that, even at higher gain levels, there was still a clarity and coherence to notes.

Celestion has supplied a custom 12-inch speaker for this amp, which looks perhaps to be a ceramic design, known to subdue the brightest frequencies, accentuate the mids and perform well during break-up. We found this amp really shines with classic pickups and perhaps the addition of a reverb and boost-pedal complement.

A tidy combo with the tone of a rarified era … with valve-biased tremolo that really shines

Verdict

Price-wise, this amp resides at the lower end of the American Vintage range, likely due to minimal control set and lack of reverb. However, it is still an outlay worthy of some consideration as for that price you get a classic all-valve Fender that can be serviced and repaired (should that be necessary) to give many years of wonderful service. There's not much to learn or work out, just choose your guitar and amp channel and you're off! At 20 watts you should be able to get the valves cooking in rehearsals and small to moderate-sized gigs.

The brown-panel sound offers a wonderful option for players looking to lose some highs and put the focus on the mids, for anything from rock to fusion, blues to country. Its wondrous valve-biased tremolo really shines here. Supplied with its tremolo footswitch and soft cover, it's a tidy little gig-and-studio combo with the tone of a rarified era. It will likely appeal just as much to players who have their technique and instruments dialled in as to less experienced students of the instrument. In either case, glorious sepia-coloured sound awaits. G



FENDER '62 DELUXE AMP

PRICE: £1,699
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: All-valve combo
VALVES: 2x 6V6, 3x 12AX7, 1x GZ34
OUTPUT: 20W
DIMENSIONS: 533 (w) x 241.3 (d) x 432mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 15.4/34
CABINET: Solid pine
LOUDSPEAKER: 12" custom-designed Celestion
CHANNELS: 2, Normal and Bright
CONTROLS: Normal Channel: Volume, Tone; Bright Channel: Volume, Tone; Vibrato: Speed, Intensity
FOOTSWITCH: Tremolo footswitch included
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Hard-wearing cover included
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
0333 200 8765
www.fender.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Wide gain range from clean-as-a-whistle to muscular-sounding overdrive; vintage-sounding valve-biased tremolo circuit with a subtle and organic throbbing modulation

CONS While the original didn't have reverb either, we were occasionally left yearning for that recognisable springy halo



CORT AP550M OBPK
£139

WHAT IS IT? A high-spec parlour-sized guitar at an amazingly low retail price

Parlour Games

Can one of the largest manufacturers in the world turn out an instrument at this price that is actually worth buying? Let's see...

Words David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

It's not often that we dive this deep into the budget end of the acoustic guitar market, but when we heard that Indonesian mega-manufacturer Cort had produced a parlour guitar that has a lot to say for itself at a staggeringly low price, we had to take a look. And if your eyes just drifted up to the retail price at the top of this page, then yes, that's not a typo or a misprint: the retail price of this guitar really is £139. What's more, the AP550M's spec looks amazingly reasonable for this end of the market, and when you factor in Cort's reputation for producing quality instruments bearing surprisingly low price tags, let's say breath is somewhat bated around these parts.

Cor-Tek, Cort's parent company, reportedly turns out around 25,000 acoustic guitars per month across its massive 10-building manufacturing facility in Ngoro, Indonesia, and makes guitars for numerous big-name brands, too, including PRS's very highly regarded SE range. But even this mind-boggling statistic and the supposition that mass production at this kind of epic scale could keep prices low doesn't seem to justify the somewhat meagre ticket price for this little parlour guitar. But enough of the theorising, it's time to open the box and examine the goods.







1

For starters, it has to be said that the AP550M is a very handsome little chap, from its slotted headstock to its open-pore matt black finish. In fact, the slotted headstock raises another point: if cost-cutting is at a premium here, then surely a solid headstock would be cheaper to manufacture? We're still full of questions.

Spec-wise, the parlour's top, back and sides are mahogany, and it's just possible to see a little of the distinctive grain pattern through the finish. It would seem that the back is made up from four pieces of timber, and the seams inside the guitar – viewed through the soundhole – confirm this. Of course, this also bears out the fact that it's solid woods we're dealing with here. It's also worth mentioning that multi-piece backs are not necessarily a cost-cutting manoeuvre on Cort's part as many manufacturers have produced acoustics this way, including Martin's celebrated D-35. The top, however, is the standard bookmatched two-piece.



2

The neck is once again mahogany with a separate heel, and it doesn't look like there's a scarf joint for the headstock, but the density of the finish hereabouts defeats our investigative eye.

Fingerboard duties are given over to a new timber for us – merbau – and the Wood Database tells us that this particular wood has many aliases including kwila, ipil and sometimes Borneo teak or Johnstone River teak. Here, it's practically a dead ringer for the more accustomed rosewood and is reputedly extremely durable. It certainly has the sheen of a fine rosewood, too. Along its course the 19 frets are not only neatly seated, they have been polished and had the ends finished so that there are no sharp edges as you move your hand over the playing area. We noticed that there were a couple of rough edges above the 12th fret, but nothing that would make us deduct any points. We'd swear that the fretboard edges have been lightly rolled, too, which came as a very pleasant surprise. We can't stop thinking about the retail price; there's evidence of a lot of finesse in the guitar's fit and finish, and Cort's quality control is, as ever, at optimum levels even on its budget instruments.

It's merbau once again for the Cort's bridge, the 'pyramid' ornamentation at either side being a very nice touch. If we were to aim just one slight criticism at the



1. The 'pyramid' bridge is made from merbau, which has a similar appearance and grain texture to rosewood

2. A slotted headstock adds a touch of elegance to the Cort's overall appearance and is very much a standout feature

fittings on the AP550M it would be that the nut and saddle are both made from Polyphenylene Sulfide, or PPS for short. This is a material that echoes the Corian nuts and saddles used on some Martin acoustics in both feel and appearance. We can't help thinking that bone would have been a better option and wouldn't have added too much to the price. There would be a tonal upgrade to be had which might add to this little parlour's allure somewhat, too.



It has its rough edges… But when we say 'rough' we're really talking characterful. We had a great deal of fun

3. The open-pore matt finish to the guitar's body enhances the feel of the guitar. The back is a composite of four pieces of mahogany, which is not unheard of in the world of lutherie

4. The Cort's rosette appears to be a very clever decal, imitating abalone. But it's a very nice touch on such an inexpensive instrument

Feel & Sounds

It would be difficult to sum up exactly what our expectations were when we began exploring the AP550's sound potential. If so much care has been taken on the aesthetics, then surely an equal amount of time would have been spent on ensuring a good sound.

Examining the guitar in the playing position, the neck is a very welcoming C profile and so players more used to electric guitar necks shouldn't have too much trouble acclimatising. It's also a very light instrument, just 1.6kg (3.5lb), and so it's easy



Even the three-a-side tuners don't look cheap – Cort really has taken care with the fixtures and fittings on this guitar

to manoeuvre while sitting. There is no second strap button on the heel, but these are dirt cheap and easy to fit if desired.

The action is spot on – a lowish medium – and so our first chords were a breeze. And then there's the sound. Whereas this might have been the Cort's downfall, it turned out that the AP550 sounds as good as it looks. Campfire chords ring out with a surprising amount of bass register supporting some very sweet trebles. A few parlour models we've played in the past have been boxy and lacking in bass and lower mids, but that isn't the case here. In order to make sure our ears weren't deceiving us we grabbed a nearby small-bodied acoustic we had to hand – which, incidentally, cost 20 times this price – and although it definitely sounded smoother and more rounded than the Cort, there certainly wasn't the kind of difference we would have expected.

It has its rough edges, for sure: its voice seemed to demand anything with a country blues lilt to it. But when we say 'rough' we're really talking characterful. And after playing it for way longer than is necessary for this review, we also realised that we were having a great deal of fun with this little parlour guitar. It proved very difficult to put down.

If it scores in the chord department, how about when we travel up the neck into the single-note soloing zone? Even here, the low action, nicely polished frets and good-feeling neck profile all provided a great playing experience with notes that sang out with tonal polish and a very good amount of sustain.

At a price point that's cheaper than the average drive pedal, it isn't a difficult decision to make

Verdict

As we said, we'd heard good things about the AP550 and our curiosity was well rewarded. We can remember a time when buying a cheap acoustic meant a tortuously high action, a bad setup and an indifferent, shallow tone. But that's not the case here. For a youngster who is just setting out on their guitar journey, this guitar would be an absolute gem. Easy on the eye and the pocket, and an instrument that doesn't want to fight back with an agenda of unplayability. But seasoned players who want a sofa buddy or even just a bluesy knockabout would be well advised to seek one out. At a price point that's cheaper than the average drive pedal, it isn't a difficult decision to make, after all!



CORT AP550M OBPK

PRICE: £139
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Parlour
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 116mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 358mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Vintage classic
NUT/WIDTH: PPS (Polyphenylene Sulfide)/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Merbau
FRETS: 19
BRIDGE/SPACING: Merbau with PPS compensated saddle/55mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6/3.6
OPTIONS: Available in plain mahogany finish
RANGE OPTIONS: Parlour-sized guitars on Cort's website are in short supply, but the Cort PE Mahogany (around £376) is another option. See website for more info
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Open pore black

440 Distribution
01943 818599
www.cortguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A great deal of good, fun sounds for the price; good workmanship and great looks

CONS We can't help thinking that a bone nut and saddle would up the ante even more


lowden
GUITARS
lowdenguitars.com
Passion in every note, excellence in every detail.



WALRUS AUDIO LÜM TEXTURE ENGINE
£259

WHAT IS IT? A pedal that uses 'grains' of your signal to create atmospheric textures

Textural Toolkit

Taking its cues from previous Walrus soundscape pedals, the Lüm combines granular textures and atmospheric ambience

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The X knob controls grain size in Modes I and II, and reverse reverb feedback in Mode III
2. This toggle switch selects the three modes and also selects the three Moment automation glide times when the bypass footswitch is held down
3. Walrus's Lüm pedal has three onboard presets that are scrolled through and called up by pressing both footswitches simultaneously and indicated by the LED lighting red, green or blue

Walrus Audio is well versed in the creation of textural ambient soundscapes. We've previously looked at its Slö Reverb, Lore Reverse Reverb and Fable Granular Generator pedals, and the latest in the genre, the Lüm Texture Engine, draws on elements of all three of these precursors. The general idea here is to transform your signal to create atmospheric textures by 'fracturing' it into tiny grains wrapped in different washes of reverb. The pedal centres around three different modes and has knobs to adjust Decay time, a low-pass Filter (effectively EQ), and Mix, which adds a proportion of the effected sound to your dry sound up to fully wet. There's also an X knob that has a different function for each mode, and a Stretch knob for time-stretching the effects from half- to double-speed with consequent pitch shifts.

Grain Cloud (Mode I) mode offers a granular texture built from dual taps reading from a feedback delay line. It's an ambience fractured by glitches that are not unlike unsynchronised delay repeats or wayward tremolo pulses, with the X knob controlling the grain size – basically, the speed of the glitching. Grain Verb (Mode II) is more of the same but delivers an increase in spacey ambience as it incorporates reverb built from dual taps reading from the delay memory of a reverb algorithm tank. Forward/Reverse Verb (Mode III) is perhaps the most conventional of the three, with a forward reverb algorithm running into a reverse reverb algorithm whose decay is adjusted by the X knob, producing deep pulsing reverb.

Whether you're carrying out measured juxtaposition of the knobs or tweaking them randomly looking for happy sonic accidents, the pedal is ripe for creative exploration, and there are three easily switchable presets to store and recall favourite sounds for onstage variation without resorting to knob twiddling. There's no provision for an expression pedal here, but the Moment footswitch allows you to automate any one of the five knobs. You hold the footswitch to glide to a defined target with a choice of 10ms, 1,000ms and 5,000ms glide times. It's highly effective in injecting a sense of movement or as instant drama. Moment settings can be saved with each preset.

Verdict

Complementing your standard delay and reverb, and stacking nicely with dirt pedals, the Lüm offers a great way to build some textural ambience into a standard guitar chain, either as subtle ear candy or the main event. G



WALRUS AUDIO LÜM TEXTURE ENGINE

PRICE: £259
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Textural ambience pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, Trails or Instant Cut bypass modes, 3x onboard presets
CONTROLS: Decay, Filter, Mix, X, Stretch, Mode/Ramp switch, Bypass footswitch, Moment footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard Input, standard output
POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 100mA minimum
DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 125 (d) x 60mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
www.walrusaudio.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; three modes; onboard presets; built-in momentary expression

CONS The fact that it is mono only may be disappointing to players who wish to have a full stereo rig



THE RIVALS

The Red Panda Particle 2 (£289) is a granular delay/pitch shifting pedal that "chops your signal into small grains and then rearranges, shifts and mangles it using the techniques of granular synthesis" to produce a wide range of sounds, says the brand. The MXR Textures Granular Synth Engine (£275) is described as a powerful ambient sound design pedal that transforms your playing into shimmering pads, glitchy soundscapes and evolving cinematic textures. The Chase Bliss Mood MKII (€469) is a multi-effect with two channels that work in conjunction; one half samples and loops brief moments, the other is a collection of real-time spatial effects.



PHOTO: WWW.JIMDUNLOP.COM



ELECTRO-HARMONIX PERCOLATOR
£89

WHAT IS IT? A dirt pedal inspired by a rare cult-classic valve simulation

Central Perc

Electro-Harmonix not only revives a rare fuzz/distortion from the 1970s but expands its versatility, too

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. An internal trim pot can be adjusted to further enhance and bring out the sub-octave while also adding even more gain to the circuit
2. This Bias knob sets the bias of the gain circuit, creating sounds from smooth drive to pseudo-octave fuzz and gated fuzz tones
3. When in the Fuzz position, this switch engages the clipping diodes – they're not used in Drive mode

The Interfax Harmonic Percolator – a rare Milwaukee, USA-built pedal from the 1970s – has become a bit of a cult classic due to its use by guitarist and producer Steve Albini. The original's combination of a germanium PNP transistor and a silicon NPN transistor produced a distinctive sound based around even-order harmonics that has inspired several of the more boutique pedal companies to produce their own versions. Now, Electro-Harmonix has got in on the act with the EHX Percolator, expanding the original format by adding a Bias control and a secondary clipping mode that bypasses the diodes.

A Harmonics control sets the amount of dirt, while the Balance knob adjusts the overall output level, and a third knob adjusts the circuit bias. Your first choice, though, is via the Fuzz/Drive switch, which toggles between standard clipping for the Fuzz mode, and taking the diodes out of circuit for Drive mode. However, in terms of usage, the boundaries are pretty blurred.

Drive is leaner and less squidgy and delivers a gritty hard-edged sound that runs – through the travel of the Harmonics knob – from chime-y mild break-up through to fuzzy distortion. All can be tempered by the Bias knob, which has no default position, although 12 o'clock is a good place to start for the practical variations in tone and harmonic intensity of the drive that it offers.

The Bias knob is arguably more influential in Fuzz mode because in one segment of its arc you can get octave fuzz with a lower octave that can have its potency set by an internal trim pot. This creates great-sounding thick textured fuzz with a pronounced response to pick attack and decent note clarity within chords. It's enhanced by plenty of variation through the Bias knob, running from smooth, through upping the Velcro rasp factor, to delivering absolutely broken sputter.

There are sounds here that may be effective in quick bursts to emphasise a passage or even a single note, and that is entirely possible due to the footswitch that – as well as its standard latching functionality – is capable of momentary action with a simple press-and-hold.

Verdict

Among the massive number of dirt pedals in the marketplace, the Percolator delivers an alternative flavour that will be fresh to many players. What's more, with two distinct modes coupled with fully adjustable bias, it offers a sonic flexibility that you won't find in many pedals at this price point. G



3



ELECTRO-HARMONIX PERCOLATOR

PRICE: £89
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Harmonic Saturator pedal (fuzz/distortion)
FEATURES: True bypass, latching/momentary footswitching
CONTROLS: Balance, Harmonics, Bias, Drive/Fuzz switch, bypass footswitch, internal trim pot
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery (supplied) or 9V DC adaptor 10mA
DIMENSIONS: 71 (w) x 111 (d) x 48mm (h)

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; two selectable voices; wide-ranging bias variations; good dynamic response and clean-up; momentary footswitch action

CONS Nothing of note

THE RIVALS

Several companies make pedals based on the Interfax Harmonic Percolator including London-based Fredric Effects: its Harmonic Percolator (£160) is a 100 per cent accurate clone of the sought-after original with the addition of a switch to offer three different clipping options, while the Utility Perkolator (£175) adds a switchable ring modulation circuit for splattery octave effects, and some DIP switches on the circuit board to remove the low-pass filter if required. The Catalinbread Karma Suture comes in Silicon (£141) or Germanium (£159) versions. And if you'd like to build your own, check out the Five Cats Percolate Me circuit board (from £4).



the Wishlist

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

West Valley Guitars Fever Rambler FROM £2,595

CONTACT **West Valley Guitars** PHONE **07923 546957** WEB **www.westvalleyguitars.co.uk** WORDS **Connor Flys** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

West Valley Guitars founder, Josh Stopford, is describing this newcomer as feeling "roughed up, modded and almost industrial". It's part of the launch line-up of West Valley's new Fever design, a new offset shape that complements the brand's existing Indiana model.

The two are very similar in outline, but where the Indiana has a comfort-contoured body and a posh-looking bound top, the Fever is more straightforward. The body is a simple, lightweight, resonant slab of American lime, with no contouring on the rear. At the front, though, we find a classic German carve – an evocative design feature that marked out many a leftfield mid-century guitar shape.

Finished in a faded, worn black, the vintage vibe is then augmented with some tasteful-looking relic work. This Fever is set off by a tortoiseshell-style pickguard and a pair of natty silver-and-black control knobs that look like they came straight off a 1960s transistor radio.

The neck on this example is a lovely deep-brown mahogany with a rosewood fingerboard; you can also order a maple neck, and/or a maple or ebony 'board, if you want. The neck profile itself fills the palm comfortably: a nice rounded C/D shape with medium depth, feeling supportive and beautifully carved. The open-pore finish is a tactile delight, too, and the fretwork is excellent.

Anchoring the strings is a Descendant Blue Collar bridge, a cut-off Tele-style hardtail. This simple and purposeful well-built bridge exudes a kind of industrial chic that suits the Fever Rambler perfectly. At the other end, we find a set of Gotoh Vintage tuners.

The Rambler model is also set apart by being the first West Valley guitar to employ a pair of Firebird-style mini-humbuckers – what a decision that turns out to be. With clarity and bite to go up against any single coil, and power not far off a typical full-size humbucker, it's a gem of a pickup set. It's not dissimilar to a Tele palette of sounds but with even more punch and growl. Wonderful.

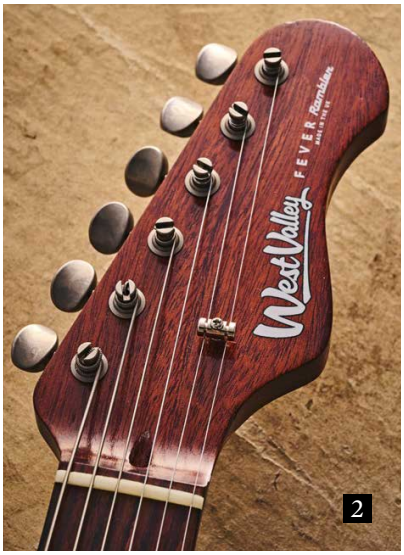
All told, the Fever Rambler is an addictively playable, lively lightweight guitar with a simple but beautifully effective range of tones, accomplished finishing and a wonderful neck – a simple recipe, executed with real flair. We'd say West Valley is onto a winner here. G

1. The 'German carve' runs the whole way around the face of the body, an unequivocal visual reference to some of the weird, wonderful guitar designs of the 50s and 60s

2. The headstock of the mahogany neck is lined with Gotoh Vintage tuners, although Klusons are also available by order. As with the rest of the metal componentry, they've been tastefully aged

3. Descendant, the company responsible for this lovely Blue Collar hardtail bridge, is best known for its excellent modernised Jazzmaster vibrato – beloved of many an offset aficionado









4. On our pictured build, the mini-humbuckers come from the esteemed Monty's Guitars; West Valley's own hand-wound items are fitted as standard. The Fever Rambler gives a punchy, ringing demonstration of just how brilliant Firebird-style pickups can be

5. Everything's handmade, and the ageing is done to the customer's taste. So if you think this treatment is a little on-the-nose (or too tame), West Valley can oblige as necessary

6. The Rambler is offered in what's termed a "refined colour palette", but no details on exactly which colours are available. It's safe to assume neon pink is not on the agenda, though

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

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

IK Multimedia Tonex Board £999

CONTACT **IK Multimedia** WEB **www.ikmultimedia.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Tone Models
In the Tonex world, a Tone Model is a similar concept to the technology employed by Kemper, Neural DSP and Line 6 – it can 'sample' your gear in its current state for recall later, whereas modelling uses processing and number-crunching to virtually recreate the behaviour of gear.

What's this, then? Yet another company telling me I don't need an amp?

Well, yes, we suppose it is, in a way. You'll almost certainly be familiar with IK Multimedia – the company that helped pioneer computer-based amp modelling nearly 25 years ago with its AmpliTube software. Since then, we've seen mobile versions, complete with phone/tablet-ready interfaces, and even Bluetooth footswitches for controlling it.

But back in 2022, the company turned its hand to a slightly different method of digitising classic gear with its Tonex app, and subsequent Tonex Pedal and Tonex One hardware releases. Now, Tonex reaches its zenith with the Tonex Board.

I remember when people were saying apps would replace my rig. What does Tomorrow's World look like now?

Crucially, nobody is saying you need to get rid of your coveted valve amps and analogue drive pedals. On the contrary, in fact. Because key to the Tonex ecosystem are its Tone Models. Confusingly, when it comes to Tone Models, it's not quite modelling in the same way that we'd think of with, say, AmpliTube or a traditional amp-modelling unit. The Tonex platform works more along the lines of a Kemper Profile, Neural DSP Capture or Line 6's Proxy Clone technology. That is, it provides a digital snapshot of any combination of a 'gain'-based pedal, amp and cabinet.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IK MULTIMEDIA

FLAGSHIP
The Tonex Board tackles the physical limitations of the existing range by adding more footswitches, greater control and expanded connectivity, making it the most viable iteration of Tonex for live use yet

TONE MODELS
It can run up to four Tone Models – IK's terminology for captured gear – simultaneously across two independent signal paths. This unlocks dual-amp setups, wet/dry and stereo configurations

EFFECTS
The effects are derived from IK's AmpliTube software. So as well as being able to capture your drives, amps and cabs, you can make use of over 75 studio-quality effects arranged into nine categories

CONNECTIVITY
To the back of the unit, there are plenty of ins and outs. Stereo inputs, dual effects loops for connecting external pedals, MIDI, two external footswitches, two stereo outputs (including XLR L/R) headphone output and more



Okay, so this whole concept new?

Tonex itself isn't new, no, but IK's flagship Tonex Board is. Here, IK Multimedia looks to fulfil the wishlists of Tonex users who want more hands-on control and audio processing power than the Tonex One and Pedal can provide. So it's equipped with a five-inch colour touchscreen, five rotary controllers, a rotary encoder and master volume control. At your feet are three multi-purpose footswitches allowing for Preset, Scene and Stomp modes, plus one for switching modes and controlling tap-tempo, and there's a heap of connectivity around the back, too.

Sorry, but I'm interested in tone, not computer stuff.

Well, there's plenty of that, too! It can load up to four Tone Models across two independent signal chains, so you can run dual-amp setups and more complex configurations such as wet/dry rigs. It comes with 2,000 pedal/amp/cab Tone Models, plus you have access to thousands more for free online.

IK Multimedia is looking to fulfil the wishlists of Tonex users who want more hands-on control

Is it just for drives, amps and cabs?

Nope. That's just the Tone Model side of things. Also present are 76 modelled effects derived from AmpliTube and Tonex, spanning nine categories: Drive, Modulation, Pitch, EQ, Filter, Reverb, Dynamic, Delay and Utility.

So I could create from my own gear?

Yes, you can. In doing so, you can not only save space on your 'board and make your load-ins a lot lighter by leaving your valve amps at home and going direct to a PA or FRFR cab, you'll also be able to upload them to IK's ToneNet for other people to use.

This all sounds expensive...

It's a competitive market, with the Neural DSP, Kemper and Line 6 products mentioned above all costing upwards of a grand, and the Tonex Board comes in at £999. So, yes, it's an outlay. We'll be checking it out very soon, so watch this space. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

SQUIER TROY VAN LEEUWEN PARANORMAL TELECASTER XII £509

If there's one thing we're not short of in 2026, it's choice. Squier's latest release is testament to this, teaming up with the Queens Of The Stone Age guitarist for a signature 12-string Telecaster. Decked in a Copper Age finish, it features a nyatoh body with a maple neck and 648mm (25.5-inch) Indian laurel fingerboard. But, of course, it's got twice as many strings. These are top-loaded at the bridge for faster string changes, and the headstock features a six-a-side layout. Pickup-wise, it's your classic Tele configuration with Fender-design Alnico models. Best of all, it's priced accessibly!
www.fender.co.uk



PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER

PRS US & SE SILVER SKY DEFENDER £TBC

Many of us like to collect things, and so does John Mayer: guitars, watches... Land Rovers. Cue his latest collaboration, which is a joint effort including his beloved PRS Silver Sky and 4x4 vehicles for the PRS Silver Sky Defender Color Collection. It's split into two Limited Edition runs, one being four US-made models offered in classic Defender colours (Arles Blue, Willow Green, Portofino Red, pictured, and Sandglow Yellow), with white scratchplates and controls. Meanwhile, the SE models are available in four contemporary Defender finishes (Petra Copper, Sedona Red, Carpathian Grey and Woolstone Green, pictured) with black scratchplates and controls – a first for the Silver Sky. US models are limited to 500 guitars per finish, and the SE models will be available to order until the middle of next year.
www.prsguitars.com



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS

THE LINEUP

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: Danny Dela Cruz

Album: So Long As There Are Stars EP (independent release)



Danny Dela Cruz is set to follow this debut EP with a full-length album next year **instagram.com/delacruzguitar**

St Albans-based guitarist Danny Dela Cruz got his big break playing in Nathan James-fronted rockers Inglorious back in 2018, and since parting ways five years later his career has been going from strength to strength. Recent highlights have included becoming an instructor for online course specialists JTC Guitar and getting hired as a session musician for pop sensation Ellie Goulding. This year, the 27 year old released his debut solo EP, *So Long As There Are Stars*.

Slow Dancing

Though he was initially known for higher gain tones as a member of Inglorious, the new EP is a celebration of Danny's softer, more melodic and neo-soul-influenced side. "It definitely felt like a risk going into this style," he admits. "I was afraid nobody would like it because most people knew me for being heavier. So I put some stuff out using my Strat to show that side of me and the feedback was good. Then it was a natural progression to create the EP and do the whole thing in that style. I feel like it's opened more doors for me as a musician. I wanted to find a balance between shredding and melody, with something like vibrato right at the top as well. My approach is thinking of it like twisting a door knob – that's what produces the sound I seem to like most."

Nothing To Gain

The tones on the new EP have more in common with players like John Mayer, Chris Buck and Mateus Asato than Slash or Scott Gorham. A couple of Custom Shop Strats loaded with Bare Knuckle pickups handled the bulk of the work, as well as a Murphy Lab 1959 ES-355 for the song *Life*. "We recorded at Momentum Studios in Plymouth and I used a hand-wired 100-watt 'Plexi' through Greenback speakers, with various overdrives stacked," Danny explains. "The main ones were my Analog Man King Of Tone, a Klon copy by a company called Ryra, plus a Tube Screamer. It's interesting with 'Plexis'. You had people like Eddie Van Halen who got a lot of juice out of them. But I don't jump the channels; I actually go into the Bright channel so the bottom-end stays tight, which is also helped by keeping the volume around two o'clock."

School's Out

As a video instructor for JTC, Danny is tasked with writing mini songs to help players learn more about technique and expression. Interestingly, this is what led to him pursuing the more melody-focused and Strat-driven ideas heard on the new release. "To begin with, I was trying to be as flashy as possible," he reveals. "The roster of players JTC has is pretty special. Everyone stepping into that world feels the pressure of the legends that came before them; you've got to level up. It wasn't until I wrote *In Another Life* for a course that I understood how it's better to write things that feel good to play. And something clicked because everyone started asking for tabs and backing tracks, which is always a good sign."





This Bare Knuckle-loaded Custom Shop Strat and Murphy Lab Collection 1959 ES-355 Reissue were used to track the new EP

PHOTOS BY DAVIDGUYLER

Continuum

Following the warm reception of the debut EP, with even Joe Satriani contacting the guitarist to congratulate him on his timing and feel, Danny is keen to keep the momentum going. "I'm working on an album for next year," he says. "I've just started doing sessions gigs, playing for people like Ellie Goulding. It's something I'd like to get into more. There are some great session players out there, like Justin Derrico who plays for P!nk, and Mateus Asato who plays for Jessie J and Bruno Mars. At the end of the year, I'm flying out to Ohio to perform at an NFL game. Last year they invited me to play *Thunderstruck* at a Cleveland Browns game that took place at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, which was pretty cool." **[AS]**

Standout track: *Life*
For fans of: Andy Timmons, John Mayer, Mateus Asato



"I wanted to find a balance between shredding and melody, with vibrato right at the top as well"

STAGES OF GAIN

A quick run through some of Danny's favourite pedals

Though he loves the sound of a cranked Marshall, Danny prefers to layer the drive going into his amp. "That way it can keep blooming and developing," he reasons. "There's a brand called Dirty Boy Co that are really cool [see page 102 for a review of the latest pedals – Ed]. They make a Dumble pedal that sounds great. The company was actually started by Blues Saraceno's dad and is now run by a guy called Danny Gomez.

"One thing I didn't use on the EP but am absolutely loving right now is the Vemuram Jan Ray pedal. It does all the right things, no matter where I put the knobs."

THE LINEUP

Albums

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



Expect doom-laden, thunderous riffs on Tony Iommi's new solo release, *From The Dark!*

PHOTO BY ROSS HALFIN

Tony Iommi
From The Dark
BMG Records (available 23 October)



The Black Sabbath riff lord returns

The man whose fingers invented heavy metal has nothing to prove at this stage of his career, though even at the seasoned age of 78, his work exudes an air of unimpeachable authority and control – the kind that few could ever courageously muster. With Ozzy Osbourne and Ronnie James Dio no longer walking among us, it's iron-lunged Norwegian singer Jørn Lande bellowing bleak tales over Iommi's earth-conquering riffs, with this line-up completed by two of Birmingham's finest: Becky Baldwin of Mercyful Fate on bass, and drummer Karl Brazil, best known for his work with Feeder and Robbie Williams.

Opener *Over The Violent Sun* packs all the venom you'd be hoping for, a monolithic structure that stands even taller thanks to long-time collaborator Mike Exeter's modern production treatment. *Black Times* packs the same kind of doom and gloom that opened Sabbath's debut of 1970 – a theme that naturally reoccurs throughout this album's eight tracks, most notably on *Beyond The Dead*, *Stormwatcher* and grand finale *Legacy*. And while no-one conjures up slow blues-based riffs quite like the guitarist lovingly referred to as the 'Iron Man' or 'Master Of Reality', tracks like lead single *World Alone* and *Return Of The Arbalist* pick up momentum and add the required sense of urgency in places with some stunning results.

Some 15 months after Iommi took his final bow with Black Sabbath at their *Back To The Beginning* farewell, *From The Dark* stands as concrete proof you simply can't keep a good man down. Never say die, indeed. **[AS]**

Standout track: *Black Times*
For fans of: Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Accept

Seasick Steve
The Last Season Of America
Eastcote Recordings (available now)



The Seasick state of the union

This album is subtitled 'Seasick Steve's Eulogy To The USA' on its press material, which prepares you for the feel of some of the 10 tracks presented here. If you remember Steve's stunning TV debut with *Dog House Boogie* on Jools Holland's *Hootenanny* in 2006, or witnessed his Glastonbury Festival appearances where he famously accompanied himself on the lo-fi three-stringed 'Trance Wonder' guitar, you might not put Steve in the 'protest song' category, but that's certainly the role he assumes here. The title track details his current viewpoint on the political status of his home country, a theme that is continued on track two, *Bad Things*. Both find Steve in a more subdued mood, and it isn't until the third track, *Above Ground Boogie*, that the familiar sound of journeyman blues returns. There's optimistic light in the thematic darkness, but Steve sure knows how to make a point. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Somebody*
For fans of: Eric Bibb, Gary Clark Jr

Richard Thompson
Hippies, Thugs And Heroes
New West Records (available 16 October)

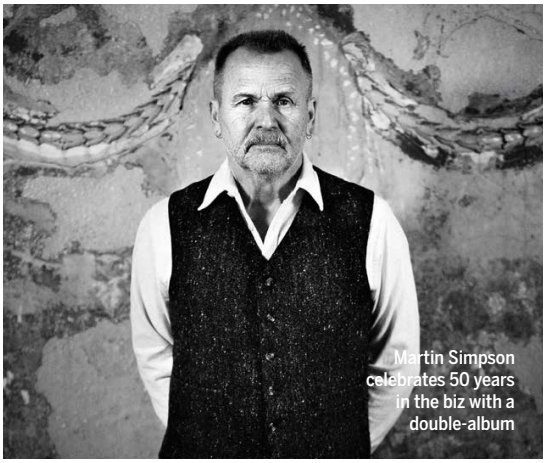
Guitarist CHOICE



Fairport founder clocks up 20th studio album release

It's been over two years since Richard Thompson's *Ship To Shore* album received rave reviews from all concerned and so this latest release was very eagerly awaited by the fanbase that has followed his solo career since he departed Fairport Convention in 1971. As the title might suggest, the lyrical theme of *Hippies, Thugs And Heroes* deals with a motley collection of individuals, some of whom have been drawn from Thompson's imagination, others more biographical. The songs are gritty and, in the main, full of Thompson's gnarly Strat tones – never more than on the album's first single, *Cocaine Walking, Booze Talking*. There are mellower moments where an acoustic guitar takes over as on *She Burns It All*, and even lighthearted singalong moments like *Everybody's Stealing*, but it's the sheer skill and finesse of Thompson's songwriting that shines brightly here. **[DM]**

Standout track: *The Big Smoke*
For fans of: Fairport Convention, John Martyn



Martin Simpson celebrates 50 years in the biz with a double-album

Martin Simpson
Some Kind Of Jubilee
Topic Records (available now)

Guitarist CHOICE



Folk legend marks half century
It's been 50 years since Martin Simpson released his debut album, *Golden Vanity*, and *Some Kind Of Jubilee* marks the landmark occasion in style. Furthermore, Martin is on record as referring to the new double-album set as "my best work to date". Featuring a mix of freshly written songs, traditional folk and re-readings of material from his extensive back catalogue, the album was recorded at Jackson Browne's Groovemaster Studios in Santa Monica and finished in Martin's home county of Yorkshire. Needless to say, *Some Kind Of Jubilee* features superbly recorded acoustic guitar with some moody and atmospheric slide work apparent on tracks such as *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child* and *Toy Soldiers*. Taken as a whole, it's a masterful piece of work and a testament to Martin's position as a leading light on the UK's folk scene. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Love Never Dies*
For fans of: Nick Drake, Martin Carthy

Troy Redfern
Astral Doorways
RED7 Records (available 30 October)



Prog instrumentals from renowned blues-rocker
When an established blues player tells you that his new album was inspired by "a meditation in The King's Chamber of The Great Pyramid at Giza in 2022", you know that you're in for something a little different. Those who have witnessed multi-instrumentalist Troy Redfern live on stage will recall the fearless resonator-driven, no-holds-barred assault on the senses. But latest release *Astral Doorways* really is something else altogether. According to Troy, the album pays tribute to "some of the greatest innovators of early 70s rock, jazz-tinged fusion and prog, as well as Eastern influences", and the intro to the album's opening track, *Suite: Astral Doorways*, reveals homage to none other than Frank Zappa, before forking off into a landscape all its own. The rest of the album truly is a fascinating ride through a multitude of different genres while retaining the listener's ear throughout. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Emanations*
For fans of: Zappa, Mahavishnu Orchestra



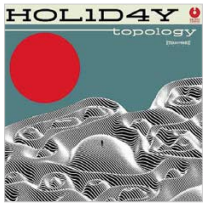
THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

With his new project, Rival Sons' **Scott Holiday** steers away from rock 'n' roll towards a more improvisational approach – but the riffs remain

Artist: HOL1D4Y

Album: Topology (Sacred Tongue Recordings/Thirty Tigers)



Scott Holiday assumes the alias HOL1D4Y for his latest solo project, taking inspiration from the alternative music in his personal collection

Scott Holiday is known for having boatloads of boutique effects at his feet and writing heavier-than-heavy riffs with his band, Rival Sons. And while he plans to keep on doing all that, at the moment he's intensely focused on his new solo offering, *Topology*, which falls under his newly minted HOL1D4Y moniker. As for the vibe he was putting down, Scott tells *Guitarist*: "I wanted to make it simple for everyone – less about rock 'n' roll and more about atmosphere. I was working on Rival Sons music, just preparing to write little bits and, amid doing that, I realised I had a group of songs that didn't seem like Rival Sons songs."

From there, HOL1D4Y was born. "They felt a little bit different and felt more personal to me," Scott says of songs like *Veridream* and *Constellations*. "I didn't want to take that into the studio with everyone else, so I had an epiphany: 'This is something I'm just gonna complete on my own as a whole work.'"

Scott recalls the process of putting *Topology* together as free, chill and off-the-cuff. This is necessary new ground for him but a welcomed return. A reset, if you will. "It was really innocent," he says. "It was all a stream of consciousness. These songs poured out really quick. I'd leave one, go to another and then come back to another. It was like painting five things at once [laughs]. I'd walk from one painting to another and circle back around. It was very freeing."

This 1966 ES-330 and '65 reverse Firebird were two of the main electrics used on the new record



Which of the songs from *Topology* came to you first?

"I think *Constellations*, an instrumental, was one. And then there was *Autonomatic*, which I felt like was just something different. Honestly, I was just creating off-the-cuff and working really quickly. A lot of the stuff is more like the music I'm listening to in my daily life; it's more like alternative, psych and instrumentals, you know? I've been listening to more jazz and instrumental music, so that's how this came about. I could have twisted them into Rival Sons songs, but there was just a bit too much of something else in them. I didn't want to take them apart."

You played bass as well as guitar on this record, right?

"I did. I said, 'I think I'm gonna play bass on these songs,' so I actually had an instrument built. My buddy at Banker Handcrafted Guitars built me this beautiful custom bass/guitar that I can switch between during songs."

What gear did you use on the album's lead single, *Veridream*?

"I used three main guitars on that – and for the whole record. I have a '61 Gibson ES-345, a '66 Gibson ES-330, and a '65 Gibson Firebird, which is a reverse Firebird. I had those three guitars at my side, and a Supro Huntington. So I used all that and didn't sit with anything for too long. I moved pretty quickly."

You're known for your effects. What did you primarily lean on?

"I had an Octavia fuzz, a Uni-Vibe and not much else, believe it or not. It's not as effects-laden and textural as some other stuff. There wasn't a ton of stuff that I really had to use. But then again, not to be contradictory... now that I think about it, when I went up to my studio and started to really take it apart, there could have been 50 things up there that I used that I'm not even thinking about [laughs]."

Digging deeper into the record in general, what inspired you?

"I would wake up every day with these songs. I'd just go in and see what was there. I'd play the whole track very casually, move through it a few times, and go back and listen to what we did. Then I'd find sections that I thought were nice and locked in. After that, I'd take a

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT HOLIDAY



This double-neck from Matthew Hughes of Banker Guitars in North Georgia, USA, was custom-made for Scott's new record

PHOTO BY RICK HORN

whole section, move that off to the side and work on something else. I'd do that with several sections, find what I gravitated toward and build around that."

What sort of tones and textures were you aiming for?

"Texturally and musically, I wanted to do something more cinematic, more indie/alternative. Initially, when I was writing *Veridream*, for example, I didn't have lyrics. I didn't think of it like that. I just looked for sections that moved, and only after I'd done that could I step away and go, 'Well, this clearly seems like a verse. This works as a chorus,' and then chop things up."

A standout track is *Constellations*. How did that come together?

"That came together in a similar way to *Veridream*. A lot of musicians will hear things in their heads, or in their sleep, and when they wake up, they hear it. I certainly do. Throughout my life, I hear melodies and ideas, and so many of the things I come up with are those things combining themselves and mashing together."

A part of this record seems to be bucking the perception that you're just a rock guitarist. You're showing a different side of yourself but not necessarily a new side...

"That's absolutely true. It's different for everyone; for me, I've always done projects, worked with different people and genres, and there were even times when I put the guitar down and just produced more electronic music. But coming from a rock 'n' roll background, even when I was young, there were times when I said, 'I don't want to play rock 'n' roll at all."

And yet the perception remains.

"Somehow it finds its way back into my life [laughs]. I'll put it down, do something else, something more psychedelic or improvisational, but somehow rock 'n' roll finds its way back into my life. And there's always an audience there waiting for it, so I'm not really fighting anything."

In that context, what does the HOL1D4Y project mean to you?

"The beautiful thing about this project is that it isn't about forcing anything. It's a real, natural extension of me. It's something authentic and genuine. It's not about being something particular, creating rules or avoiding anything – it's just what I felt. But there's still plenty of riffs! There's plenty of that on this record... it's just different."

Where do you go from here?

"I'm already working on another [HOL1D4Y] release. There will be another record behind this. And I'm back in my garage building a really great rig, which I hope to share with you all soon. After that, I plan on touring this record, and we'll be doing more Rival Sons soon. We're making plans for the next record. So we'll be exercising our ideas to the furthest degree there, too. I think this release will allow us all to come back together in a really collaborative way afterwards. I like that we draw lines without being boxed in or having unhealthy boundaries. It allows us to be freer and not have an absolute need to infuse ourselves. So we'll be more open." **[AD]**

> "This project is a natural extension of me. It's something authentic... I wanted to do something more cinematic, more indie/alternative"



Topology is available now via Sacred Tongue Recordings/Thirty Tigers

www.hol1d4ymusic.com

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE



The Wrong Solo

Neville Marten argues that one of blues-rock's most revered guitar breaks, in fact, overshadows the best solo in the song

Many of you will have guessed that I'm referring to Cream's *Crossroads* and Eric Clapton's first solo on the song. In my view it's a superior piece of work to the second, which gets all the love. Back in my early 20s I would spend days playing along to the live Side 3 of the band's third album, *Wheels Of Fire*, and it was *Crossroads*' second solo that I, too, revered. It's fast, it's furious, it's the song's metaphorical orgasm. And while it's an incredibly exciting climax to a jaw-dropping live performance, it only covers shape 1 of the minor pentatonic, with a bit of major pentatonic, major 3rd and 6th thrown in. Clapton dislikes it as at one point he loses his place and bluffs it out using Chuck Berry-style doublestops. It's still bloody brilliant, though. However...

"The song's first solo is a masterpiece of 'composing on the spot' to create musically perfect, exquisitely timed blues-rock brilliance"

The song's *first* solo is a masterpiece of 'composing on the spot' to create a musically perfect, exquisitely timed 24 bars of blues-rock brilliance. At this time Clapton was on a roll in this regard, as his perfectly crafted breaks in *Badge* and Blind Faith's *In The Presence Of The Lord* attest. So, had *Crossroads*' solo number two never existed, is it this one that history would be raving about?

It's not just Clapton that's on a roll here, either; Jack Bruce was incendiary on bass, while Ginger Baker rained down a veritable snowstorm of sticks, skins, cymbals and pedals.

While the second solo covers only three frets, from 17 to 20, solo number one begins at the 2nd fret in A major pentatonic and wends its way up and down the neck, in both major and minor, getting as high as the 15th and ending up on the open strings so Eric can return to position for the vocal verse that precedes solo number two. But he never touches those hallowed highest frets, nor plays the Berry doublestops, leaving these for the coming onslaught. He was obviously planning the shape of the song – being the vocalist gave him that extra power.

The band had been touring relentlessly, so songs with predetermined solo lengths would have already had a certain shape to them, which all three members would have played off. But this whole track is a lesson in live composition. Go back and reappraise things if your mind is already made up.

The Low Down

In September, I was involved in the Legendary Guitars event on Denmark Street with *Guitarist* and Regent Sounds. It was a fantastic evening. I co-hosted it with Jamie and we had some amazing instruments and industry celebs on hand. I arrived early and went into the shop to find Jamie, who was otherwise engaged. I exited the store to nip across the road to the event's venue, The Lower Third. I'd just walked out of the door when manager Crispin Weir ran out and said, "Oh, so sorry I missed you. Do come in. How are you?" I began to follow him back up the stairs when he said, "I remember when you did all that Amen Corner stuff here, and played a bit, too."

I saw immediately what had happened. "I think you're confusing me with someone else," I replied. "Who do you think I am?" "Andy Fairweather Low," came his retort. I quickly corrected him and we both laughed hysterically about it. I was dressed in a natty light blue suit jacket and waistcoat, white shirt and dark blue jeans, and I must admit there's an uncanny resemblance. I'm going to see Andy play very soon, and I'll definitely regale him with the story.

Meanwhile, check out the pics in Jamie's report on page 40 and I think you'll agree it was a very easy mistake for Crispin to make. And tell me if you agree or disagree about the *Crossroads* solo. I'd love to hear.

NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Foolish Game

What? Vintage VS6 MRF 'The Fool' SG **Where seen:** ebay.co.uk
Price: £650 to £1,800-plus

Description? Originally a limited run from 2007 to 2015, this guitar featured a mahogany body and neck, with 'crown' inlaid rosewood fingerboard. Hand-painted in oils, each instrument was unique and so is now very rare. Featuring twin Wilkinson MWVC humbuckers, tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece, plus vintage-style tuners, under the whacky finish lies a solid quality guitar. The one I originally saw sold the day before I rang, but others do surface (there's one for sale in Japan, for instance, plus decent-looking hand-painted Epiphone and Tokai replicas), so if the idea whets your appetite, then why not go down to the online crossroads and search out a bit of history?



PHOTO: WWW.WORLDWIDEMUSIC.CO.UK



Lap Of Honour

Alex Bishop delves into the history of lap steel guitars and the visionary work of one luthier 100 years ago

One of the hazards of running guitar-making classes is that you never know what unexplored paths your students might take you down. My evening class is quite a relaxed affair. Students don't follow a strict schedule, making it possible to build things that are not strictly 'on the menu', such as the typical OM, 000 or Dreadnought guitar shapes. Added to that, I'm like a moth to flame when it comes to building something I've never attempted before. So when Liam turned up with a pair of original 1920s Weissenborns looking to make a faithful replica parlour guitar, I couldn't resist helping him give it a go.

Like CF Martin before him, Hermann Weissenborn was a German immigrant to the United States. Arriving at the turn of the century in New York, and later Los Angeles, he set up a business making musical instruments. Responding to the wave of interest in Hawaiian music, Hermann developed the now iconic 'Hollow-neck' guitar, a gorgeous and acoustically resonant slide guitar played on the lap and constructed from precious koa hardwood.

Weissenborn offered four different levels of adornment, similar to Martin's style guide. Style 1s were utilitarian player instruments free of binding and unnecessary decoration, whereas the Style 4 was a more indulgent affair, resplendent in Weissenborn's unique 'rope-binding', a striped rosewood and holly decoration that ran not only the perimeter of the body but all around the fingerboard and soundhole, too.

The challenge was simple: we would build a copy of Liam's Style 1 parlour guitar but with the Style 4 adornments, just like on his hollow-neck. The body would need to be completed before attempting the binding, so we would have to figure out how to complete the rosette first, reverse-engineering Hermann's original based on what we could measure and following my own intuition and experience along the way.

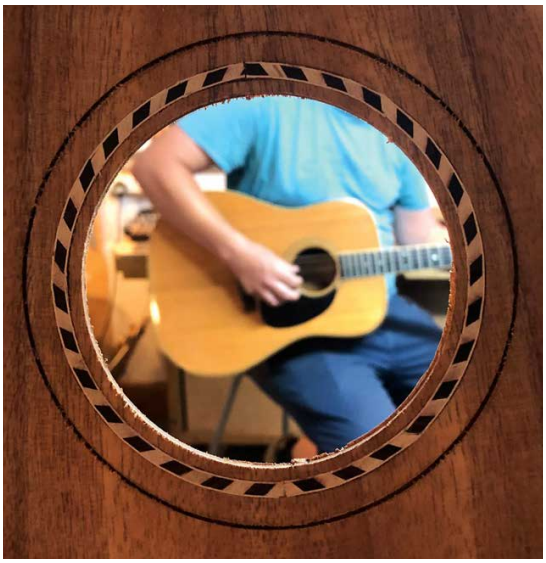
Helpfully, Liam had done a bit of digging and he knew that the woods making up the rosette were holly and rosewood. We could easily chop up one of my rosewood fingerboards, but the holly was not something I'd sourced before. The following week I took a trip to a nearby timber supplier who was only too happy to sell me a log of holly that had been lying around their timber store for the past two decades. We chopped up the log into boards, then smoothed and sliced it into strips. Glueing these up with alternating layers of rosewood created a pinstripe board, which was then cut into strips again, at a 45-degree angle. Importantly, we double-backed these delicate layered strips with maple veneers to keep everything from coming apart.

For Alex's student, the soundhole rosette was the first order of business in his lap steel build – comprising rosewood and a locally sourced holly log

The Heat Is On

Soundhole rosettes are made in lots of different ways, but a simple one can be constructed by bending and layering 0.5mm veneers sideways into a narrow channel. This creates beautiful patterns that can be smoothed to the surface of the soundboard to dazzling effect. Despite using much thicker elements of wood, we surmised that distorted shapes of holly and rosewood in the rosette on the Weissenborn Style 4 proved that it had been heat-bent.

As anyone who has built an acoustic guitar will attest, heat-bending guitar sides is tricky enough – but make the workpiece out of 66 tiny bits of wood glued together and you have an entirely new challenge on your hands.



"The end result looked like a faithful copy of a 100-year-old instrument. And we had learned how Weissenborn might have made it himself"

To make this possible, the rosette needed to be very carefully shaped first. At less than a millimetre thick it would easily distort under heat like a Pringle, but much thicker and it would likely snap. With some careful guesswork and fingers crossed, we dialled in the dimensions and started working it on the bending iron.

The end result wasn't perfect, but it looked like a faithful copy of a 100-year-old instrument. And, perhaps more importantly, we had learned something about how Weissenborn might have made it himself. But we are just at the beginning; once the box is closed the next chapter is the rope-binding itself. With almost 700 individual elements to glue together and bend around the body, I guess anything could happen. Watch this space...

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP



Living Legends

Last month, we gave 'Holy Grail' vintage guitars to two superb players to play loud live on stage – **Jamie Dickson** reports on what we learned

Regular readers may remember we put on a live event called 'The 'Burst Experience' down at the Gibson Garage in London back in 2025. On that occasion we were lucky enough to get a bunch of original 1959 to 1960 Les Paul Standards – arguably *the* Holy Grail vintage electric – and put them through their paces live on stage with superb guitarist Aynsley Lister doing the honours, while myself and Nev Marten opined on the evolution, features and history of the guitars. It was a really fun night and the packed room and smiling faces afterwards seemed to indicate the audience had enjoyed it, too.

Encouraged by that experience, we decided to do it again, except this time we wanted to be a bit more ambitious and bring in some other Holy Grail electrics from Fender and Rickenbacker. The idea was to present a live show that demonstrated how the sound of rock 'n' roll evolved through the key electric guitar models that defined it in the 50s and 60s. And, yes, that is just a grown-up way of saying we wanted to turn a bunch of absolutely belting vintage guitars up loud and hear what they sounded like in the hands of seriously good players. We called the event 'Legendary Guitars On Denmark Street'.

To make that happen we partnered up with well-known London guitar retailer Regent Sounds to have a bit of a historic guitar jamboree down on Denmark Street, the home of guitar music in the capital since the golden era of rock 'n' roll. As well as being one of the best guitar shops in town, Regent Sounds was also the venue for a lot of classic 60s recordings by The Stones and others, back when it was a recording studio. In addition to a well-stocked vintage guitar department, these days Regent Sounds is also the current keeper of T-Bone Walker's 1949 ES-5N, the guitar that – in the great bluesman's hands – kicked off the electric blues revolution that gave birth to rock 'n' roll. You could argue that it's one of the most historically important guitars in the world, on that basis. And very kindly Regent Sounds said we could take it on stage and play it.

Next, we rang round our friends in the vintage guitar collector community who came through, as they did before, with remarkable generosity, offering to lend us a treasure trove of guitars for use on the night, including the 1959 Les Paul Standards owned by Mick Taylor of The Stones known as 'Exile', and the celebrated 1959-spec 1960 Les Paul Standard known as 'Grainger', formerly owned and played by Rod Stewart guitarist Gary Grainger. We were also lucky to have author and Rickenbacker expert Martin Kelly bring along some of his rare Rickys to tell the story of how they helped define the sound of early 60s British rock.



Chris Buck (left) gets to grips with T-Bone Walker's 1949 ES-5N on stage at the Legendary Guitars event, while Chris Turpin of Mirador and Ida Mae digs toothsome tones out of an immaculate 1959 ES-335

PHOTOS BY WILL IRELAND



Chris Turpin with a '61 Strat in a rare non-Shoreline custom gold finish



A wide variety of rare and collectible vintage guitars were on show at nearby Regent Sounds' vintage lounge. Rose Farrell (above) of the band Yee Loi tries out T-Bone's iconic Gibson archtop

Some vintage collectors may want nothing more than to stash their 'investment' away in the proverbial bank vault – but not the ones we know, it seems, who were eager for their guitars to be played and heard in public. Full kudos and a huge thank you to Andrew Raymond, Simon White and Bob Wootton for putting their very valuable and personally treasured instruments onto a stage in a room full of pint-drinking guitar fans (as they should be).

Turpin & Buck

Of course, the guitars would be nothing without brilliant musicians to play them – and luckily we had several of those on hand, starting with our own Richard Barrett from *Guitarist*'s Tone Lounge, who gamely agreed to play the vintage Rickenbackers that Martin Kelly brought with him in company with Rickenbacker CEO John Hall – no pressure, then! As well as Richard, we were delighted to welcome the stellar Chris Buck of Cardinal Black and Chris Turpin of Mirador to show off the other guitars on the bill, our historic Gibsons and Fenders. With such talented musicians to show off the sounds, it was game on.

The first pair of guitars we put into the hands of Messrs Turpin and Buck was T-Bone's 1949 ES-5N and a beautiful 1959 Gibson ES-335 in sunburst owned by *Guitarist* contributor and collector Bob Wootton. The idea of this pairing was to show what a difference a decade made in the design of Gibson's guitars. Chris Buck got T-Bone's main squeeze ES-5 to play – a guitar all the more remarkable because it still bears the scars of a bullet hole shot in it at the Charlotte Armory Auditorium in October 1953, when a woman shot at her lover, with whom she had quarrelled, but hit T-bone who was performing on stage. Like the apocryphal wartime bible in a soldier's pocket that stops a bullet, the bullet was deflected inside the guitar's body to punch a hole in the back, missing T-Bone's body by inches.

Despite that dramatic event, the guitar sounds excellent today, with Chris Buck coaxing some slinky melodic playing from it, though wisely avoiding pastiche of T-Bone's distinctive style. He even put a cautious amount of drive on the venerable ES-5, and the dog-ear P-90s didn't disappoint, producing a thick, vocal lead tone that went a fair way beyond anything heard on T-Bone's records, which mostly featured a clean tone with a bit of small-amp 'hair' on it, showing that even a boat-like '49 archtop can wail a bit without departing into uncontrolled feedback.

> "We wanted to turn up a bunch of absolutely belting vintage guitars loud and hear them in the hands of seriously good players"

Nevertheless, when Chris Turpin on the '59 ES-335 was given his turn it soon became clear what that transition over a decade to the slim body and centre block of the 300 Series guitars did for music. Turning up his Cogmeister Overdrive, and with the guitar running into a 50-watt Marshall 1987X head, Turpin pulled a handful of absolutely savage notes from the guitar, with that toothed snarl immediately evoking British Blues Invasion tones from the Cream era incredibly powerfully. It's easy to forget, as stages get quieter again, that cranking muscular 100-watt heads was the main way to put the point across in the late 60s. And for that, the trend to thinlines was probably essential if Gibson was going to stay in touch with its archtop roots while entering the rock 'n' roll era.

PHOTO COURTESY OF XXX



Our very own Richard Barrett and Nev Marten get their jangle on with vintage Rickys on stage

Gold Standard

Next, the duo were passed a pair of stunning 1954 Goldtops. We had hoped to pit one of those Goldtops against the 1954 Tele belonging to former Bowie and Iggy Pop sideman Kevin Armstrong, but after a beautiful solo set at the start of the evening with the Tele, Kevin not unreasonably took his '54 with him when he had to depart for another engagement! So Goldtop vs Goldtop it was, and we have to report that quite possibly the most thrillingly visceral, exciting tones of the night were heard from this pair of 72-year-old guitars. Both players praised the warmth and growl of the Goldtops, with that P-90 tone focused through the substantial solid maple and mahogany body, and not a few audience members, chatting with us afterwards, thought they had the edge on the 'Bursts that followed.

The two '54 Goldtops nearly outshone everything else – on their day they're unbeatable



But before we got to that, there was the small matter of two stunning Strats to attend to: a beautiful 1955 model, made just a year after the Strat was launched, and a 1961 Strat in a rich gold believed to be a custom factory-applied automotive gold paint corresponding to the very scarce golds found on some later-50s Fenders before Fender standardised on Shoreline Gold Metallic (also automobile derived) on the 1960 to 1965 Custom Color chart. And with these two guitars we really had the Alpha and Omega of classic Strat tone: one ash guitar with early pickups and one alder-bodied example with a slab 'board.

Buck took the former and Turpin played the latter. The results were interesting but supported the widely held view that the 50s Strats were on the whole more bright, spry and springy tonally, while the early 60s Strats had a bit more wallop and darker timbre to their sound. Chris Turpin got some incredible overdriven sounds from the '61 into the Marshall, channelling Hendrix at his molasses-thick tonal best through a driven neck pickup.

Finally, we got to our concluding trio of 'Bursts: an original 1958 example, the 1959 'Exile' 'Burst, and the 1959-spec 1960 'Grainger' 'Burst. Chris Turpin snagged the 1958 while Chris Buck was passed 'Grainger' – a superb-sounding guitar he's already well familiar with. A really toothy jam followed. But what was interesting was how the 335 Chris played earlier had the same

PHOTOS BY WILL IRELAND



Bowie and Iggy Pop guitarist Kevin Armstrong brought along a lovely 1954 Tele that he played in his superb solo set at the start of the evening – but he also took a shine to the 'Bursts!

savage timbre but was just a little bit more expansive, showing how the tonal palette of rock has always benefited from these nuances that get thrown into greater contrast by high-volume playing.

It's probably true to say that each design has a volume range or performance envelope where it really gives of its best and it was fascinating to see that play out on stage – including, lest we omit mention of them, the vintage Rickenbackers that Richard Barrett decided to play with just a bit of crunch on them to show how their edge as well as jangle was a foundational sound of early 60s rock 'n' roll. And it was a treat to hear John Hall describe the design elements, particularly the neck joint and pickups, that contributed to the unique sonic soul of those magical Capri series guitars.

> "Quite possibly the most thrillingly visceral, exciting tones of the night were heard from a pair of 72-year-old Goldtop guitars"

So, ears echoing with some of the most delectable sounds an electric guitar can make, our evening concluded. If you came down to see us on the night, thanks very much for helping make it such a special experience. Is there anything you'd like to see us do that we didn't cover and that you'd like to see us talk about and play next time? Let us know and we'll ready the Legends for another big night out... G

Check out T-Bone's ES-5N and more beautiful vintage guitars at ***www.regentsounds.com***

THREE TO GET READY

Vintage Gibson & Fender tones for less



Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom 1962 ES-335 Reissue £1,099

It's the quintessential 335 spec to have and this Inspired By Gibson Custom model comes loaded with excellent Gibson Custombucker pickups and CTS pots with Black Beauty paper-in-oil capacitors. At this price, you won't get a more authentic classic 335 experience.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER

Squier Classic Vibe '50s Stratocaster £415

A 50s Strat is one of the pillars of electric guitar tone as we know it, and you can recreate that magic pretty affordably with Squier's nicely turned out Classic Vibe version, featuring Alnico pickups, a vintage tint to the maple neck, and – departing from tradition a little but in a good-sounding way – a pine body (on the 2-Color Sunburst and White Blonde models). Oh, and you can get it in none-more-classic Fiesta Red, too.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.MAKSGUITARS.CO.UK

King Snake Two Bone T £2,199

Made in the same Japanese Terada factory as high-end Gretsches, this evocative hollowbody very clearly tips a nod to the ES-350T favoured by Chuck Berry and will 'do' T-Bone style tones beautifully, too, with its pair of TB-1 P90 pickups. It's not a budget guitar but a lot cheaper than some reissues of the original – check out UK dealer Mak's Guitars in London for more (www.maksguitars.co.uk).



Chord Vocabulary (PART 2)

This issue **Richard Barrett** moves onto extended chords – experimenting with scale order for different effects

Last issue, in our first instalment on chord vocab, we looked at various ways to play an E7 chord around the fretboard. Some of those were great for open, strummed acoustic accompaniment, but others were more suited to jazz or funk – or as shapes to play with when soloing. The same is true of these minor 9th and 11th chord examples, but, as the different names suggest, there's a little more to them.

These are extended chords, which means they go beyond the initial Root-3rd-5th of the scale. Those named Em9 add both a ♭7th (D) and a 9th (F#) to the minor triad, giving us Root-♭3rd-5th-♭7th-9th (E-G-B-D-F#). Just to mix things up a bit more, extensions such as the 9th and 11th don't need to appear in the strict scale order as written here, so the 9th can be lower than the 7th as you strum across the chord – see Example 1. The Em11 chords are basically Em9 plus an 11th (A), giving us: E-G-B-D-F#-A. Check out the examples for more info.

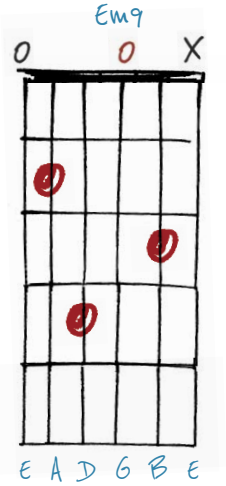


PHOTO BY WILL IRELAND

Jazz and fusion players, like Lee Ritenour (pictured right), rely heavily on extended chords to add depth and harmonic richness to their playing

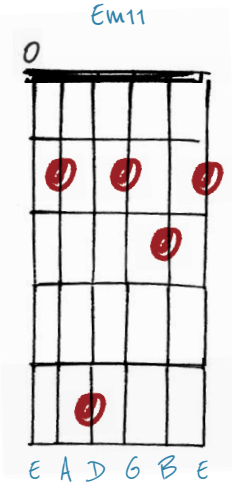
Example 1

This Em9 contains the ♭7 and the 9th, but not in the order you might expect to find them if thinking in terms of scales. From low to high we have: Root-5th-9th-♭3rd-♭7th or E-B-F#-G-D. I could have included the open first string for another E at the top, but it seemed nicer like this. All down to personal taste!



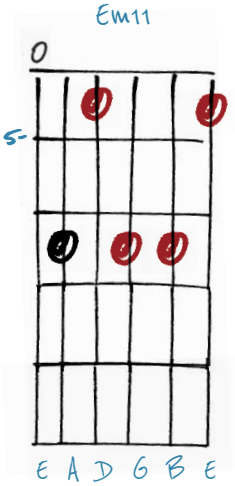
Example 2

An Em11 such as this adds an A, but as you can see this isn't appearing on top of the chord as counting through the scale might suggest – this is merely a way to name the sound of this combination of notes. From low to high we have: Root-5th-♭3rd-11th-♭7th-9th or E-B-G-A-D-F#.



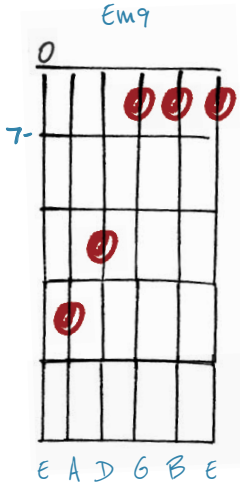
Example 3

Another take on Em11, this one largely preserves the scale order of the notes (low to high): Root-Root-♭3rd-♭7th-9th-11th or E-E-G-D-F#-A. As in both Examples 1 and 2, I've used the open sixth string to give these a strong base (and bass), but this one is movable complete with its root. We have no 5th (B), but this isn't uncommon in extended chords like this.



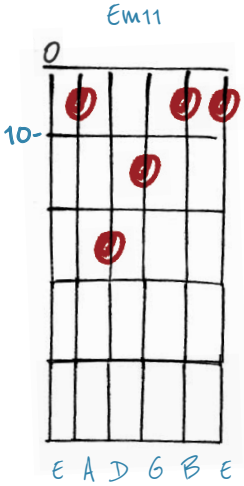
Example 4

Back to Em9. Looking at this from the CAGED chord concept, what would be a Cmaj7 shape in open position is here moved above a 7th-fret barre. The open sixth string gives us our root, but this shape could still be moved around using just the top five strings, leaving the root to the bass or another instrument.



Example 5

This Em11 spells out a D major triad (low to high: F#-A-D) on the top three strings, giving an insight into how players such as Larry Carlton superimpose different triads over chords when soloing. There's also more than a hint of Gmaj7 in the G-D-F# found on the fifth, fourth and third strings.

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STAR LETTER

MARR'S GUITARS

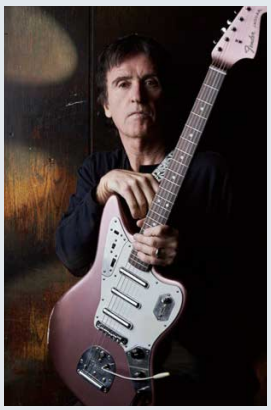

PHOTO BY JESSE WILD

I just wanted to thank *Guitarist* for opening the door to Johnny Marr's music for me. I am lucky enough to work within a short walk of Christie's. In fact, I often walk right past it on my lunchbreak stroll. I had never been in there before, though, but ventured in on the back of your article on Marr putting up some 90-odd of his guitars. There were some truly beautiful guitars in there, as well as some oddments like an old multi-track tape machine, quite a few playworn amps, and some platinum/gold discs. More importantly, it opened my ears to Marr's guitar style, which had largely passed me by, until now.

My guitar playing style has always been very much focused on strumming chords, and to a lesser extent arpeggios and fingerpicking, with almost no interest in solos or riffs. Strictly rhythm, I guess. So this sudden discovery for me of Johnny's music has very much been a case of 'Where have you been all my life?'!

So right now I'm digging back through The Smiths' work, as well as Marr's work with Electronic, Modest Mouse and his solo stuff. The early singles from his new album sound great, too. I've also bought his autobiography and made a start on reading it. There's a great little piece right in the back of that book about the joy of playing guitar, which was an article published in *The Guardian* some years ago. And I've been watching interviews with Marr over the years, on YouTube. He seems like a decent bloke, which is a bonus.

So, thank you *Guitarist*, for bringing Marr's Guitars, and Johnny Marr, to my attention. Not sure I would have found him without your timely article.

Rob Kaczmarek

Thanks Rob, glad you enjoyed. Johnny's one of those players who, the more you listen to him, the more you admire his skill and impeccable service to the songs. In fact, we'd say it's ironic that his guitar parts work so well that sometimes it's easy to forget that such brilliant lines aren't just naturally occurring somehow – it takes a superbly musical player to make the dancing, jangling riff of *This Charming Man* feel so alive and beautifully whole. He's also versatile, too, and his playing with The The was just as impressive, catching the darker tone of that band beautifully.

KORG

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a Korg PitchStrap strap-mounted tuner!

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ICED GEMS

Reading Neville Marten's article on unusual venues he's gigged in [issue 541] reminded me of the time my band played an ice rink in Birmingham. The stage was right up against the ice. It was, of course, blimmin' cold. Our fingers didn't work properly and it wasn't the best we'd ever played. Not that it mattered because the sound was terrible and it echoed all over the shop. I'm guessing anyone more than 10ft away from the stage couldn't make anything out. And because we played to people skating around the rink, this was an issue as people spent most of their time away from the stage, only coming close once per lap. People who weren't great at skating passed slowly, gripping on to the front of the stage as they went by, sometimes giving us a thumbs up, sometimes avoiding all eye contact. People who were good at skating whizzed by. People fell over. A lot. It was a struggle not to laugh. We laughed. A lot.

In many ways it was a terrible gig as people couldn't hear us, or weren't really listening. It was difficult to play because of the cold, and there was a general feeling of 'Why are we here?'. But, honestly, it sticks in the memory because, despite all that, it was a lot of fun and we had a good laugh.

Chris Kendall

Thanks Chris, your frosty gig story put a smile on our faces – the Doppler effect alone must have made listening an 'interesting' experience for the skaters! If it wasn't for difficult gigs in bizarre venues, however, where would we get all our 'laugh about it later' stories from?

KIT BLAG

Hopefully you can answer a question that's been bugging me for a while. Where do review guitars come from? I'd always assumed they were sent out by the manufacturer, or their local representative. If so, I am amazed that such guitars often arrive with setup niggles! Surely you'd make sure a guitar you sent out for review was in pristine condition? I suppose the best way would be to buy one off the wall from a retailer, but I can't really see that being a practical approach for frequent reviewers such as yourselves.

Al Mills

Hi Al, it's a good question – they can come from a variety of sources, ranging from direct from manufacturer overseas or from a high-street retail stockist in Britain; from a massive regional distribution hub to a single luthier working from a home workshop. In fairness to the big brands, shipping guitars from far flung places with a very different climate, plus all the knocks and bumps of transit, can do no favours



Matthew Stevens has adorned his modified Squier Strat with a vibrant tribute to the 1978 film adaptation of *Watership Down*



Matthew's impressive artwork – which covers the majority of the guitar – depicts the story's sun god, Lord Frith (above, left), and the Black Rabbit of Inlé is cleverly placed on the neckplate

to what may have been a decently dialled-in setup as the guitar left the factory. In other cases, it is a little baffling why easily corrected setup niggles didn't get attended to before review guitars come out, and this seems to happen often enough to prompt some retailers to set up all of their guitars themselves, in-store, before putting newly delivered stock on the wall.

Stuff coming direct from high-end luthiers, by contrast, is often perfect – but every once in a while something totally unforeseen will happen (we had a recent example involving a heavily figured maple neck), so that even when all the care in the world has been taken before sending, stuff can still occasionally go awry. Some makers such as Furch in the Czech Republic have recently taken steps to sidestep the effect of humidity and heat changes on guitar setups, however, with clever compensating neck joints such as CNR System Active that are worth paying attention to.

WARREN PIECE

Jamie Dickson's coverage of the sale of the Irsay collection in April's magazine [issue 535] (and the video interview with Amelia Walker) was fantastic. Thank you. Joby Sessions photographed 'The Fool' SG brilliantly, which made for a very striking cover showcasing the artwork perfectly; I've never seen it in this much detail before.

Painting guitars is a newfound interest of mine and I thought I'd share my latest Stratocaster decorated with artwork from the 1978 film adaptation of Richard Adams' *Watership Down*. The imagery depicts the creation story, which appears at the beginning and end of the film; Lord Frith, the sun god, the Black Rabbit of Inlé and Fiver's vision of the Blood Field. It's a Squier, which has been modified with more pronounced body contouring, along with fittings to resemble a vintage Fender Stratocaster and then painted on all but the back of the neck. I hope it is of some interest to your readers, and thanks again for a great magazine.

Matthew Stevens

Thanks for the kind words, Matthew – glad you enjoyed the absolutely mindblowing stuff in the Jim Irsay Collection. Whatever your thoughts and feelings about wealthy collectors, it was remarkable to see so many milestones of 20th century music in one place and we'd recommend taking advantage of the public viewing days that big auction houses such as Christie's and Bonhams put on before a big sale as they are typically free of charge and beautifully curated.

OUT OF DATE?

I have a question about the Rory Gallagher article in issue 542. At the bottom of page 58 column 4: "Taste's subsequent split and the beginning of Roray's 40-year solo career – after an incandescent set at the Isle of Wight festival in 1970...". Does this mean that Rory died in 2010 (1970 plus 40 years)? I thought he died in 1995? Please help me with my confusion!

Willy Bogaard

Well spotted, Willy – we do make every effort to be accurate, but you caught us in an honest typo there, though we certainly wish Rory had gone on for four decades after embarking on that dazzling solo career, so perhaps it was a case of wishful thinking.



FAST FRIENDS

Nobody embodies instrumental guitar quite like Joe Satriani and Steve Vai. As the New York wizards release their first joint studio album, they tell us about the health of the shred scene, the web's double-edge sword, and where the next gunslinger will come from

Words Henry Yates **Photography** Jen Rosenstein

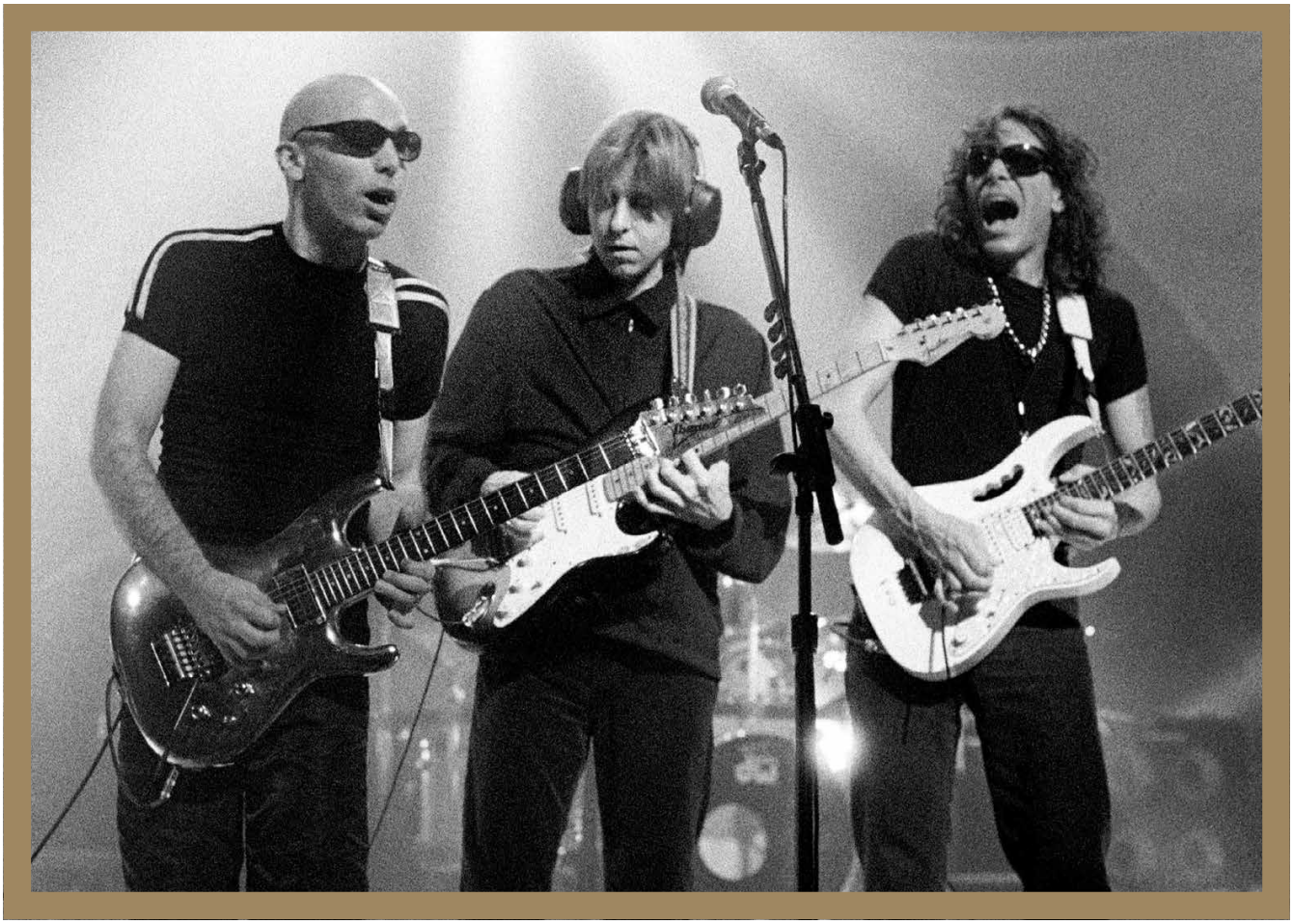


PHOTO BY EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

On the inaugural G3 Tour of 1996 Joe Satriani, Steve Vai and Eric Johnson (pictured at NYC's Beacon Theatre on 25 October) joined forces to celebrate their incendiary instrumental music

The primal urge to play guitar with fire, skill and dizzying velocity is as old as rock 'n' roll itself. But while the godfather of shred is debatable – you could equally fight the corner for Les Paul, Ritchie Blackmore, Alvin Lee, Eddie Van Halen and Yngwie Malmsteen – there's no doubting the guitarists who have flown the flag highest since the mid-80s.

It hardly needs restating that Joe Satriani and Steve Vai were – and are – mindblowing players. But the New Yorkers also redrew the landscape of instrumental guitar. By launching the all-star G3 tour in 1996 – an era in which Satriani recalls that hotshot guitar players were told: "Don't stand next to that guy because he's your competitor" – the pair proved virtuosity and community needn't be mutually exclusive.

But does shred still have a place in the modern world? With the web churning out gunslingers, and the limits of human physiology surely now in sight, is the pursuit of hard, cold technical prowess, as Keith Richards once put it, "a dead-end street"? As Satch and Vai hit the promotional trail for their first joint studio album, *The Sea Of Emotion*, they open up on the new material and take the pulse of the scene they helped create.

Let's start with *The Sea Of Emotion*. Are you pleased with how the album's come out?

Joe Satriani: "Well, it's too late now [laughs]."

Steve Vai: "My affection for it grows every time I listen. And it started out very high."

You've helmed your respective solo careers for decades now. What was it like relinquishing a little control on this joint album?

Satriani: "When we're working together, it's the best feeling of comradeship, competition and support all wrapped up into one. If there was one person I would trust to push me into areas I didn't think I could play – or say, 'That sucks, Joe, can you do something else?' – it would be Steve."

Vai: "Well, the feeling is mutual. It takes a certain chemistry to help you to raise your own bar. But it just happened so organically. Each of us knew if something was working or not. When Joe would write back and go, 'You know what? Let's put this one on the shelf' – because we had, like, 17 tracks we were working on – I would always instinctively feel, 'Yeah, he's right.'"

> "If there was one person I would trust to push me – or say, 'That sucks, can you do something else?' – it would be Steve" JOE SATRIANI

Satriani: "If we're critiquing each other about how we build things, y'know, I [tend to] want to underproduce something and Steve might want to overproduce something. I'm always like, 'Sorry, I only have two guitar parts for this song.' And he's like, 'Sorry, I've only got 17 guitars already on this song.' But somewhere it all makes sense."

Which guitar parts really pushed you out of your comfort zone?

Satriani: "The nylon-string intro to *The Sea Of Emotion Pt 2*. When I first composed that, I had full distortion, stereo echo, chorus, and I'm playing it on electric guitar. And I'm so excited, like, 'This is huge!' But then reality sets in. So the song made this journey from a grown man who still thinks like a 14 year old, sitting by his amplifier, having a rock 'n' roll moment, to seeing that I should play it on a nylon-string and leave space for what Steve did, which is that electric violin-type dreamscape. But playing that on nylon-string – and keeping it well intonated and not squeaky – was hard because I hardly ever play those instruments. It was a piece of cake on the electric but not on the acoustic."

Vai: "One of the big challenges for me was *Old Sins Have Long Shadows*. Joe had a riff and I wanted to create something that didn't get in the way but didn't copy it. When I approach a part, there's kind of two sides of me. One of them is thinking, [panicked] 'My God, what am I going to do? I don't want to ruin this!' Then there's the part of me that just shuts up and waits. And what came out was, 'You're gonna make it sound like a ghost and play a fretless guitar.' Fretless guitars – they're not my expertise. I struggle with them. But to get that ghostly, weird, offbeat riff, it had to be, y'know? All the vibrato and little shakes – it doesn't sound like a guitar. It sounds like a ghostly spirit."

How did you react to that contribution, Joe?

Satriani: "It's completely insane that Steve would think that way. When he comes up with these parts, the first time you hear it, you often go, 'What the hell is that?' But the next time you hear it, if that track isn't on there, you go, 'Well, where's that really cool part?'"

Vai: "For me, the thing that's always fascinated me to death about Joe is just his musical instincts. He's able to just touch the notes in a way that perfectly fits. Like, after you hear what he does, you just think, 'Well, it really couldn't have been anything else,' y'know?"

How do you see the health of the instrumental guitar scene today, compared with when you guys set out back in the early 80s?

Satriani: "It's changed a lot. There's less attention on it. But the market is bigger because the world has opened up. When Steve and I started out, we didn't have the internet to tell everyone, all at the same time, that we had a new album coming out. So we didn't get invitations to tour the world. But as the internet opened up the planet to us, we got invited to play everywhere. We could literally stay on the road 12 months out of the year.

"So that's been wonderful for us. But for instrumental guitarists who are just starting out? The talent is fantastic. The technique is the best it's ever been. But their only outlet is Instagram or TikTok, and that is changing how they play because they figure, 'I only got 30 seconds, I better give them everything, or dress up, do something really weird, play with my cat on my head.'

> "The first artist that really moved me was Jeff Beck. He was handing you the melody on a silver platter" STEVE VAI

"It's totally different from, let's say, when I went to a New York club to see Allan Holdsworth back in the 70s. He's up there thinking, 'Well, I got three hours to play in front of 14 people.' It was a very poorly attended event [laughs]. But can you imagine if Allan was 18 today and looking to make a name for himself – I mean, can you imagine his Instagram posts?"

Do you think guitarists can realistically get much more technical?

Vai: "Yes, but it's going to depend on a unique individual to do it. The funny thing about us humans is that we come across something that feels new and we think, 'That's it, it's not going anyplace from here.' It's a kind of ignorance and arrogance. There's always those individuals who will not give up, who look at the intense guitar technique that's already there and say, 'Okay, this is where I start.' Those glass ceilings are always shattered by people who don't even recognise the ceiling.

"And God knows where they're going to go. Even in the 90s, when shreddy 80s guitar playing took a hit, it seemed there was this underground movement of kids just wanting to shred the shit out of the instrument. They're the ones that will take that particular torch and burn it brighter. When I listen to Tosin Abasi in Animals As Leaders, say, he's doing something really melodically challenging. It sounds different."

Do you hear young players, Joe, who prick up your ears?

Satriani: "Every single day. Some of them have been around for a long time: I just never knew about it. And some are just kids. Y'know, all of a sudden, there's a kid from New York or Tokyo or Moscow or China, and you go, 'Oh wow, that's elevated the level of guitar playing.' Like, you take two players like Alyssa Day and Ariel Posen. They're from different worlds, but they're both amazingly accomplished players using the internet to spread their musical message."



Satriani and Vai's musical partnership began over 50 years ago – and they've brought this history into their new collaborative record, *The Sea Of Emotion*, by using a sample from an early guitar lesson that Steve took with Joe

PHOTO BY JEREMY CHAN/PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES



Joe and Steve live in Chicago, June 1987, when each guitarist only had one album under their respective belts

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

What do you think is the key to writing great instrumental music?

Vai: "The first artist that really moved me was Jeff Beck. He was handing you the melody on a silver platter. There was something in Beck's melodies that made songs sound like pieces of standalone music, y'know, with a voice. I thought Carlos Santana was doing some really cool stuff, and then, of course, there was more fusion stuff like Al Di Meola and John McLaughlin. But really, I didn't hear [those melodies] again until Joe. And then, on top of that, the sheer technical evolution of the instrument in his hands.

"I'm sure there's a lot of beautiful instrumental guitar records that have come along since then. And there's a lot of great contemporary players doing fascinating, impossible things, technique-wise. But for my personal ears, some of it lacks those kind of melodies that are handed to you on a silver platter. And I think that's the thing that gives artists and songs real shelf life."

Would you agree or disagree that the internet has made people better technical players?

Satriani: "Well, it's helped me a lot. I'll give you two examples. A couple of years ago, I was listening to a song called *4+20* by Stephen Stills. It's an acoustic song, just him playing acoustic, Travis picking while he's singing. It sounds like a Civil War-era kind of a song. I always loved it, always thought it was really spooky and beautiful. Then I thought, you know, 'I don't know how to play that.' How stupid is that? Like, I can play all this stuff. I've been listening to this song since I've been a teenager and I don't know how to play it.

"Obviously, within about 30 seconds, I'm looking at a guy on YouTube going, 'This is how you tune your guitar for *4+20*.' A minute later, there I am playing it and I'm like the happiest kid in the world, you know?

"Another example is when Alex [Van Halen] and Dave [Lee Roth] called me about the Eddie Van Halen tribute tour. After I explained to them, 'I don't know how to play any of those songs' – because I've avoided it on purpose, y'know? – I thought, 'Well, damn, how do you play that stuff anyway?' It's basically a sort of glorified cover gig but in the most extreme. Covering Robert Fripp and Eddie Van Halen – that's like super extreme and it took a lot of physical work.

"So, of course, the internet opened me up to this community of thousands of amazing players who have dedicated themselves to figuring out exactly how Eddie played all these songs. And when you see a 15 year old nail *Mean Streets*, you go, 'Okay, it's achievable.'"

PHOTO BY LARRY DI MARZIO



Was this new album recorded nose-to-nose or remotely?

Satriani: "The only time we were together was when we recorded Glenn Hughes singing *I Wanna Play My Guitar* at Steve's house. The rest of the time we were engineering on our own in our separate pods, separated by 400 miles."

Vai: "There is actually one little snippet we did play together because the technology to record remotely didn't exist. That's the intro to *The Sea Of Emotion Part 3: Reflections On A Year And A Half*. That was recorded during one of my guitar lessons with Joe when I was, like, 13. We still don't even know who played what, but it's eight minutes of these teenage kids having

"It takes a certain chemistry to help you to raise your own bar. But it just happened so organically [between us]"

STEVE VAI



PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN



PHOTO BY DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

total freedom. So I took a little snippet of that. That's the only time on the record we're sitting in the same room playing together. And it was over 50 years ago."

So what guitars were you both playing when you recorded the new album?
Satriani: "[Deadpan] I did all my guitar parts on the Hydra."
Vai: "So did I – at the same time [laughs]!"
Satriani: "No, it was a small cache of my 'home' guitars. So I had my [Ibanez] 'Chrome Boy', the very first gold JS, the MCR #2, and the Paisley prototype. I had a Taylor nylon, a Guild acoustic 12-string, my '72 P-Bass and a Jerry Jones sitar. Steve and I are always putting sitars on our albums. No amps, no mics. Basically, SansAmp, Tonex, Brainworx plug-ins, Neural DSP..."
Vai: "Similar to Joe, a lot of my gear was in transit. So I used JEMs and PIAs – the Evo, Flo III, my black onyx PIA. And I have this crazy seven-string sitar Sterling Ball made for me."

Satch's Ibanez Chrome Boy was one of his "home guitars" to feature on the new record, while Vai opted for his signature JEMs and PIAs, as well as a "crazy seven-string sitar" made for him by Sterling Ball

"I had a very snobbish attitude [towards plug-ins, but then] I started fooling around with SansAmp and realised how easy it is" STEVE VAI

So you guys have both come around to plug-ins?
Vai: "After I heard Joe's album, *The Elephants Of Mars* [2022], he told me he'd used plug-ins. And I was stunned because I had a very snobbish attitude: 'Oh, you have to have microphones.' So I started fooling around with SansAmp and realised how easy it is. Now, it's mostly the Neural stuff that I use.

"There were a couple of things where I still used a combination of my [Carvin] Legacy 3 amp and my Synergy module. And I would mic things ad nauseum. Y'know, I'd have two stereo cabs, three mics on the front of each, one in the back, then 4ft away. And then sets of stereo 414 room mics. And it's nice... but it's a lot of setup, a lot of work."

You both have such towering reputations. Every time you put your fingers to a fretboard, do you think, 'This has to be amazing,' or does that not cross your mind?
Satriani: "It's funny. It doesn't bother me that much when I'm working on my own stuff. It certainly was a concern these last couple of years where I had to play like somebody else. When I had to play with Van Halen, a couple of times I was thinking, 'Oh, I bet people in the audience are thinking that it doesn't sound exactly like the albums.' But Steve and I both had to get over that with our extracurricular gigs."

Finally, which two guitarists would you most like to see record an album together?
Satriani: "I mean, we don't have enough Jimmy Page, first of all. Steve and I really love Jimmy Page, and he just hasn't recorded enough for us, if I'm going to be selfish about it. If he was a friend of mine, I'd call him up and I'd say, 'Will you please record yourself more?' But who would you pair with Page? I mean, Jimmy Page and Brian May..."
Vai: "Yeah, they would work together well, I think."
Satriani: "Or Tony Iommi and Page would be good. Two guys that are so close to each other in where they come from and when they were born and how they grew up, but wow, what different players and entirely different composers. I'd be fascinated to hear that." G



SatchVai's new album, *The Sea Of Emotion*, is due for release via earMUSIC on 6 November. Pre-order the album at **www.satchvaiband.com**

100 Years Of



CHUCK BERRY

A walking contradiction with the smile of the Cheshire Cat, Chuck Berry was smooth and urbane in his vocal delivery, savage in his licks, and stood playing guitar at the crossroads between country and blues until everyone from The Beatles to The Who took their musical direction from him. A century on from his birth, we examine the imperfect genius and astonishing influence of St Louis' most famous guitarist

Words Jamie Dickson

CHUCK BERRY GRAPHIC CREATED FROM PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

FATHER TO SON

With Chuck Berry's passing in 2017, it seemed the rock 'n' roll trailblazer would forever remain an unknowable icon. Now, in this revealing interview with his son, Charles Berry Jr, we discover a husband, father, guitar collector and lifelong music lover

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates

The myth and the music are known to all. But when it comes to the man, Chuck Berry kept the world at arm's length for 90 years. Fiercely private, rock 'n' roll's founding father snubbed most media requests and soon tired of those who slipped through the net. "If he doesn't like you or is uncomfortable, the interview will probably only be five minutes," *Rolling Stone*'s Neil Strauss was warned by management in 2010. "And talk slowly. He gets frustrated when he can't hear and might walk out."

The best way to understand what made Berry tick – to dig down to the human being behind the duck-walking showman – is to ask those closest to him. And none were closer than the guitar legend's only son, Charles 'Butch' Berry Jr. Born to Berry Sr and his wife Toddy Suggs in the early 60s, he's not just a fine player in his own right – joining his father's band in the post-millennium and a catalyst on 2017's swansong, *Chuck* – but a rare window into one of the 20th century's towering cultural figures.

As talkative as his father was guarded, Berry Jr is delighted to play his part in our 100th anniversary issue. "The goal," he says, "has always been to keep dad's music alive."



1. Chuck Berry with his favourite 1978 Gibson ES-355TD, performing alongside his son, Charles Jr, at the BB King Blues Club & Grill in 2011. Centenary celebrations will continue into 2027 and include concerts and events in both the UK and US, including a new feature-length documentary directed by King Hollis that will include footage from live shows and previously unseen family archive video of Chuck in action

PHOTO BY BOBBY BANK/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

What was your earliest awareness of what your father did?

"The first time I saw dad on television. I was four years old. I noticed that he would leave home and he wouldn't come back overnight. Y'know, I'd wake up, run into my parents' room: 'Where's daddy?' 'Oh, he's on a business trip.' Or, 'He went to do a concert.' 'I don't understand what that is, but okay.'

"But when my father was doing something on television, my mother would yell out to me and my three sisters: 'He's on!' Well, the other kids on my street, I never saw their fathers or mothers on what you guys in the UK call 'the telly'. So the realisation starts to kick in. I'm seeing these gold records and now I'm starting to understand: 'Oh, that's because he made a song that people liked.' So I'm four years old and it's like, 'Ding! Okay, he's not the milkman. He's doing something a little different.'"

How often did you find your father's instruments around the house?

"There were two guitars I always remember. I was playing hide and seek, and behind the drapes I bumped into this large brownish box. One day, I decided to open it. It's a white guitar with two necks. And I'm counting the tuners, like, 'Why does this one have more? I don't understand it.' Turned out it was an original white 1958 Gibson Double-12.

"As a little kid, there were always hosts of 330s, 345s and 355s around the house. I remember this 345, which he'd had for years. The Varitone knob had fallen off into the body of the guitar. Probably 40 years later, it was in a closet in my parents' cellar. I open the case and said, 'Hey dad, I haven't seen this thing in years. What's the deal?' 'Ah, it's just an old guitar.' I'm like, 'Wait a minute, this is a '59 or '60 345. This is a great guitar. Tell you what, dad. How about if I get it fixed for you and you start playing it again?'

"So I get it fixed. He plays it a couple of times. But by this time he's got that '78 Wine Red 355. His favourite guitar. Not to belittle the 350Ts he had, but he fell in love with this Norlin-era 355. He played that one guitar longer than any other. And y'know, he probably had 40 or 50 guitars over his career."

Ultimately, musicians choose what they connect with, whether it's 'golden era' or not.

"[Nods] He didn't care at all. It was how it played, how it sounded, and he just stuck with it. There were other guitars off-and-on. He had a Country Gentleman, an '82 335, countless guitars. Anyway, years go by and it's like, 'Hey, dad, what are you doing with that white doubleneck?' 'Oh, I don't know, man. I can't play it live. It's too big.' I said, 'Well, I'm gonna buy it from you.' He said, 'Oh no, you can just have it.' So from 1978 to today, I owned that guitar – and I also owned that 345 with the Varitone."

Chuck Berry's burgeoning fame wasn't immediately apparent to his son, but when he started appearing on television things changed

"So I'm four years old and it's like, 'Ding! Okay, dad's not the milkman. He's doing something a little different...'"



PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Where are the rest of your father's instruments now?
"Mom – she has 15 of his guitars in her possession. They're at a climate-controlled, fireproof storage location. Literally, bank-vault safe. Then there's several dispersed in museums in the United States, and the London Hard Rock Cafe, they've got one of his."

What are your favourite stories behind some of his guitars?
"Well, my dad had several Cadillac convertibles. One time, he forgot his guitar was in the boot and he lets the top down and the mechanism crushes the case. So there was a 330 that bought it like that. He did the same thing to a 345 [laughs]. Way back, he started with a Kay and a Silvertone. So this is before I was born, before he was famous, when he went to Chess Records and cut *Maybellene*. I do believe at least a couple of the takes were recorded with that Kay. So it's not [all] Gibson that stuff was recorded with originally.

"But then the Chess brothers convinced him: 'Oh, you need to have a flashy guitar. Y'know, you're famous now.' So he got a '55 350T – with the dog-ear P-90s – and played the living daylights out of it. He kept that guitar, but then he bought the first 350T with the humbuckers. He loved it, but you try and crank that in a big room, it's gonna start to feed back. So that's what he was dealing with."

Your father seemed to alternate between Gibson's hollow and semi-hollow designs. How would you say he dialled in his preference over the years?
"There were a couple of 330s and 335s in there. But he really started to standardise on the 355 somewhere in the mid-60s. And most certainly, when he got to that '78 355, he was like, 'This is the guitar I'm going to be playing.' But that 355, something happened to it. So for a little while, you may see him playing an Aria Pro – urgh. Or a Samick – even worse. I don't want to disparage those guitar makers. Not to say they don't make good guitars, but the particular ones he had were horrible. I remember, the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame and Hard Rock Cafe, they requested: 'Hey, can we put one of your guitars on display?' It was like: 'Send the Samick! Send the Aria! Don't send any of the Gibsons!'

"But Jimmy Marsala, his bass player of 40-odd years, got that 355 fixed for him. Like, 'No, play that.' Because everybody that sees my dad perform, they expect to see a Gibson and they expect to see some Dual Showman Reverbs behind him."

Did he own any other guitars you wouldn't necessarily expect?
"He did have a Les Paul. The colour would have been Oxblood, like Jeff Beck's. But it was burned up in a fire, along with my dad's original 350T and one of the 330s. All of them just got roasted."

"My first guitar was given to me [when] I was 12. Remember the clear acrylic Ampegs? My dad gave that to me, like, 'Here, goof with it'"

So when did you pick up the guitar yourself?
"Let's see. My first guitar that was given to me, I was 12. Remember the clear acrylic Ampegs? My dad gave that to me, like, 'Here, goof with it.' That and an Acoustic Black Widow. For what it was, with those odd humbuckers, it was actually a pretty good-playing guitar. I think he used that for a couple of the sessions for *Rockit* [1979]. I remember him taking that guitar specifically to the recording studio here in St Louis.

"So I get those guitars. Don't know how to play. Dad doesn't have the time to show me because he's out rolling. So I learned how to play *Smoke On The Water*, and I thought I was the coolest guy on the block. Like, 'I can play like Ritchie Blackmore!' 'No, you can't, kid. But you keep believing it.' Then, in 1977, I got the first guitar that was purchased for me – a 1976 Stratocaster – for my 16th birthday. It was a tri burst, black pickguard, black pickup covers, white knobs. I had that guitar until 2010 and I regret selling it to this day. I had that thing for 30 years.

"I mean, my thing is... bless Tom Murphy's heart. I think he's doing a wonderful job with Gibson and the Murphy Lab, but



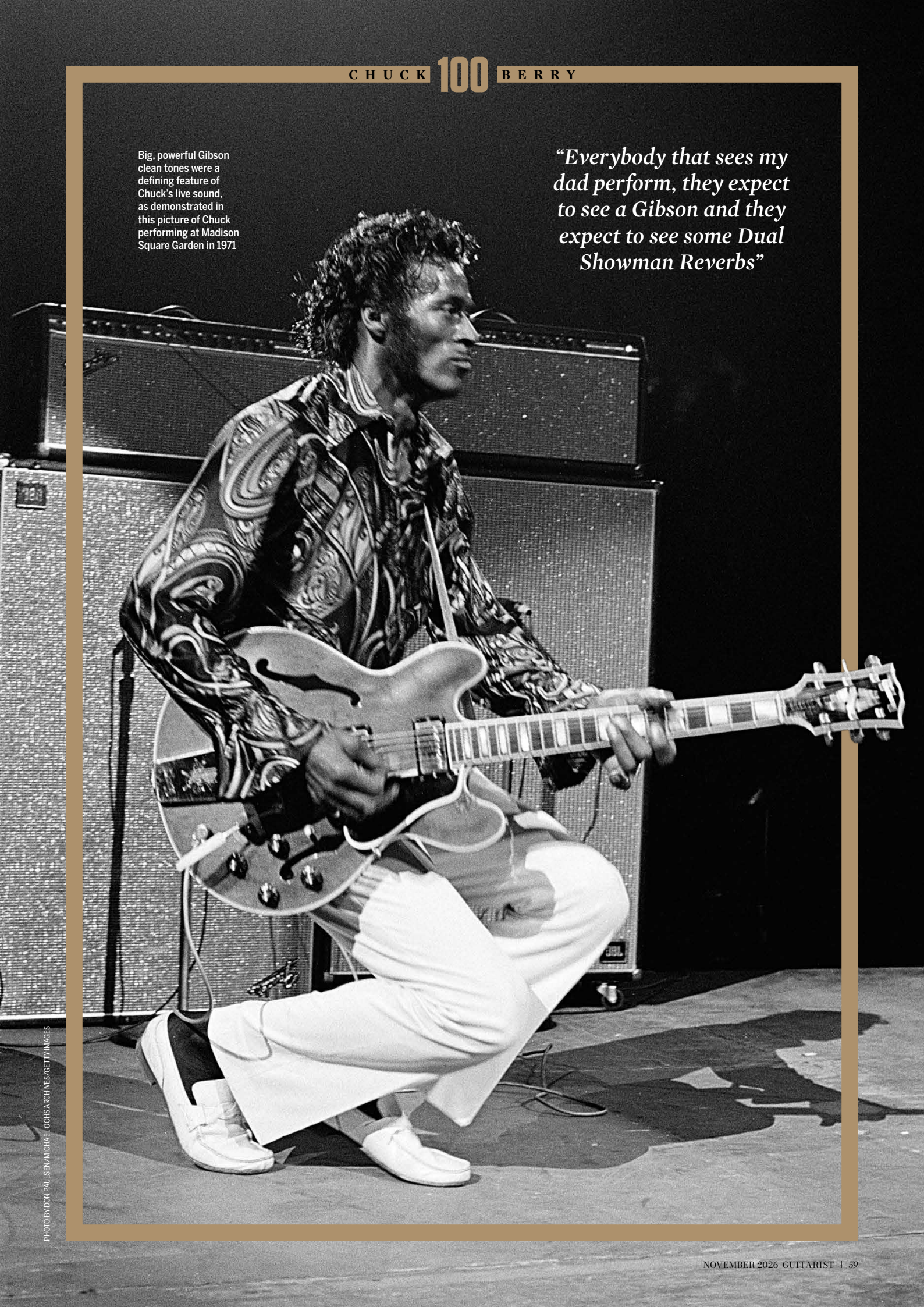
PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

2. Chuck Berry sits on a Cadillac convertible as he performs with Keith Richards, Robert Cray, Joe Walsh and friends at the Fox Theater in 1986, a gig that became the basis of the film *Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll*' Less happily, more than one guitar met its end in the folding roof mechanism of Chuck's own Cadillac convertibles

3. Chuck Berry in 1956 playing a Kay electric – Gibsons would become his go-to instruments for the bulk of his career, despite later dalliances with Aria and Samick guitars



PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Big, powerful Gibson clean tones were a defining feature of Chuck's live sound, as demonstrated in this picture of Chuck performing at Madison Square Garden in 1971

"Everybody that sees my dad perform, they expect to see a Gibson and they expect to see some Dual Showman Reverbs"

PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

me, personally, I want my guitars to look like they came straight out of the factory. Pristine. I keep mine clean. There's a market for guitars that look like they've been road-worn. Okay, if that's what you want, go for it. I'm not mad at you. It's just personal preference."

How did you end up a member of your father's band?

"I actually became a professional guitarist at 39 years old. I'd never been in a band. I'd only done a couple of performances with my dad. One was at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas [in the mid 90s]. Before that [in the 70s], there was a show here in St Louis. I go out to the show with some friends. I'm right down front. And my dad goes, 'Come up on stage. You're gonna take us out.' It's like, 'What are you talking about? *Smoke On The Water* is the extent of my playing ability.' He's playing *Johnny B Goode*. So I muddled through. People went crazy. It's like, 'You guys must have very bad hearing. But thank you.'

"In December of 2000, my brother-in-law – who was my dad's second guitarist – died of a heart attack after a complication with pneumonia. So in February 2001 my dad said, 'Hey man, if you ever want to get up on stage with us and play, just let me know.' I was like, 'Okay, so that'll never happen.' By March, my dad said, 'Hey man, I really need another guitarist up on stage with me to keep that rhythm going.' It's like, 'Okay, but you know I don't know how to play.' He said, 'Don't worry about it. I'll teach you.'

"So Charles Berry Jr learns how to play with a world-famous entertainer, one show at a time. It was unbelievable. It was 13 or 14 years I was in his band. Y'know, I picked it up. I still think I'm just a mediocre guitarist, but having fun with my dad and the rest of the band – that's what I enjoyed most."

What are your memories of life on the road with him?

"On stage, it was absolute bliss, but all that travelling – I hated that. Oh my God. All those early calls to get on planes. It was like, 'Dad, how did you do this for 60 years?' [And he'd say,] 'I'm just used to it.' It just got in his blood. It's like The Stones. They just kept right on doing it. That's all they knew. That was their job, which people don't understand. It's a business. It's how you put food on the table. It's part addiction. You can't help it. You get that rush from the crowd. And you don't have to retire from that kind of job. So just keep right on."

What was unique about your father as a guitarist?

"Well, my dad could do things on a guitar neck that most people couldn't, just because of the physical size of his hands. I mean, from thumb to pinky finger, he could almost stretch the entire octave. His hands were gargantuan. Even his first finger – he's going easily eight or nine frets up the fretboard, so he could go crazy.

"His fingers were really big, too. So they were long and they were thick. That's why he did a lot of those doublestops because it was easier for him to play two or three strings at once than individual picking. Now, I've seen the man do that, and you can hear him doing stuff like that on *Butterscotch* or *Woodpecker*, where he's just single-note-picking his brains out.

"[I learned] how to play with a world-famous entertainer, one show at a time... having fun with my dad and the rest of the band"

"Did he have any specific technique? He just played. It wasn't like he was Andrés Segovia, playing an acoustic guitar with every finger on both of his hands. He had a pick and it was mainly downstrokes, very rarely down/up."

What else can you tell us about your father as a musician?

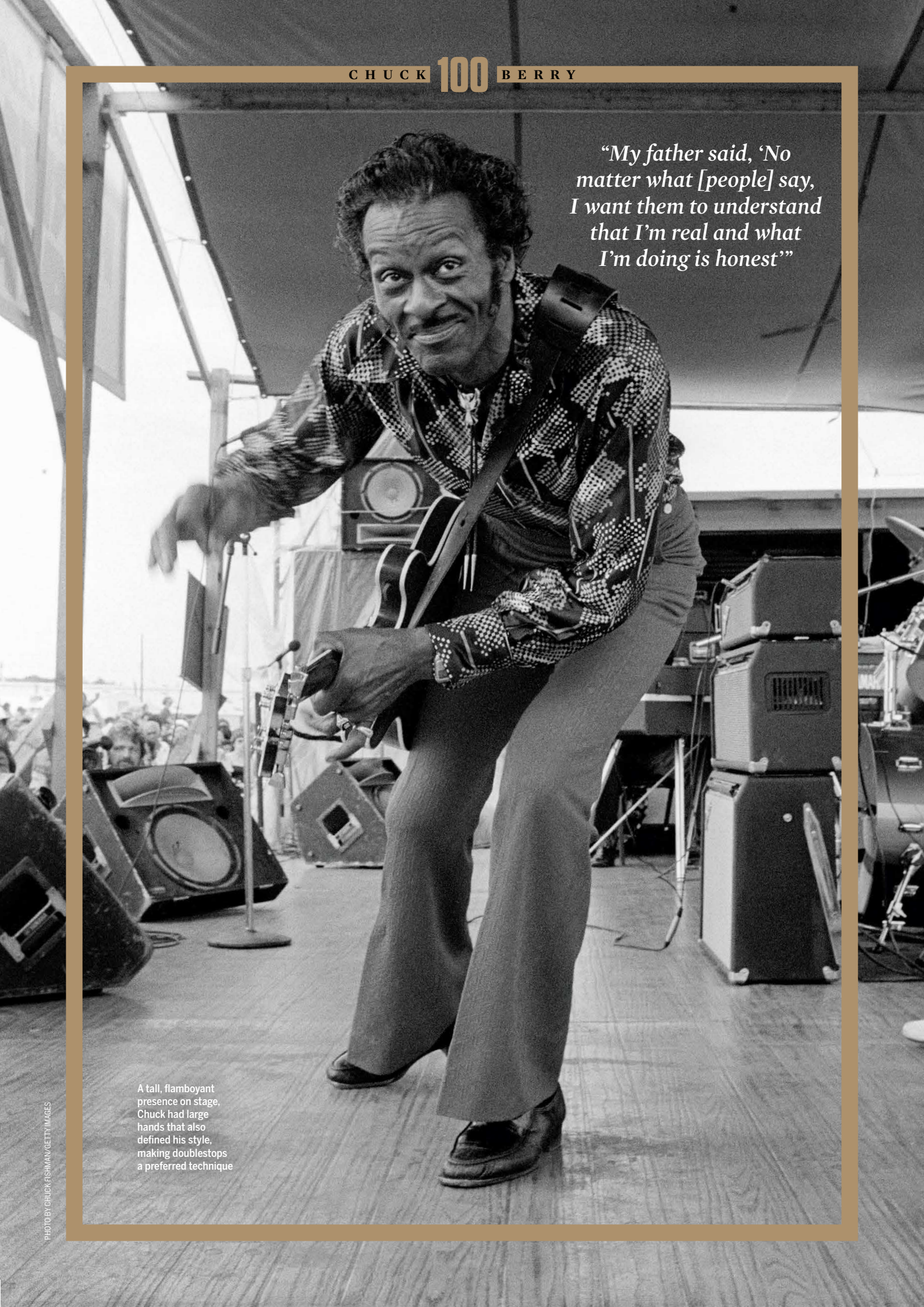
"One other tidbit about my father: he was as deaf as Beethoven. I mean, nearly stone deaf. And people would criticise him: 'Well, he's playing the right stuff, but in the wrong key. What's he doing?' It's because he could not hear. He'd be playing the right structure of a solo or whatever, but in the wrong key. Sometimes he would glance over and we'd be like, 'E!' and he'd go back into the right key, or we'd hold up our hands, like, '[Go] here on the neck!' 'Ah, oops!'

"But it just guaranteed that someone going to see my father was seeing the real thing, and that was very important to him. He said, 'No matter what they say, I just want them to understand that I'm real and what I'm doing is honest.' Because he had to go through the lip-sync era like The Beatles and The Stones. And he was like, 'I absolutely hated doing that. Why can't we just play it live?'"



4. Chuck playing a 1964 Gibson Firebird V guitar that saw action at Wembley during the 1972 London Rock And Roll Show and Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1973. On the whole, however, he preferred semi-hollow electrics

PHOTO BY GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



"My father said, 'No matter what [people] say, I want them to understand that I'm real and what I'm doing is honest'"

A tall, flamboyant presence on stage, Chuck had large hands that also defined his style, making doublestops a preferred technique

PHOTO BY CHUCK FISHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Who would you say were your father's biggest influences?
"He took stuff – and he readily admitted this – from his favourite guitarists. Carl Hogan out of Louis Jordan's band. Charlie Christian, who was in Benny Goodman's band. T-Bone Walker, who was phenomenal. Even Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who could pick her brains out. And then all the country and western players, like the Louvin Brothers or the guitarist from Bob Wills And The Texas Playboys [Jimmy Wyble]. The doublestop intro to *Johnny B Goode*, that's kind of a Carl Hogan lick. But he took that stuff and put his own twist on it. You can just hear all those flavours coming through my dad's music, how he just interpreted it then put it into action."

What were your dad's habits in the studio?
"Like most musicians, my dad had his own recording studio, out in Wentzville [Missouri]. It was state-of-the-art: MCI 24-track recorder, MCI 656 mixing board, all the DBX stuff. When he got back in town, he would do three things: come home and kiss my mom, go out to Berry Park [amusement park] to cut the 200-odd acres of grass, then go into his recording studio. And every chance he got, he would call the band members over: 'Hey, what you doing? Well, come on, let's put some tracks down.'

"So he does this for years. He never releases anything, but he's accumulating all these Ampex tapes. Then, in spring 1989, there's an electrical short that caused another fire. Burned the studio, the club, where all that stuff for *Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll* [1987] was recorded, burned it all to the ground. Oh my God. He's lost hundreds of tapes.

"So he buys another building. He finds another MCI 24-track like he had. In fact, he duplicates what he had. This stuff is now 14-year-old technology, but that's what he was familiar with. So from '89, off and on till about 2014, he's still going back into his studio. Now it's an early Pro Tools studio. And he continues to record. Then he does his last live performance in October of 2014. Now all of a sudden, he says, 'I'm not doing anything. What am I going to do? Let's get my last album out.'"

What are your memories of working with your father on 2017's *Chuck*?
"So my dad starts pushing hard to get this last album out. And he's like, 'Hey, man, do you want to be on it?' It's like, 'If you want me to be.' So I recorded something on every one of those tracks. It's primarily just rhythm stuff. It's like, 'Let the father of rock 'n' roll be the father of rock 'n' roll', y'know? Let's shine the light on him.

"My sister [Ingrid Berry] laid down her vocal tracks, and in November of 2016 myself and my son [Charles Berry III] went down to the studio in Nashville and did our solo stuff on *Lady B Goode* and *Big Boys*, if I remember right. And as we're doing this, my dad is starting to get sick. It was the last six months of his life, as a matter of fact. But y'know, it's like, 'What do you think?' 'Yeah, I like it.' So that's what we pressed. That's what we released. It was the most fun anybody could have working with a parent."

"When he [came home] he would kiss my mom, go out to Berry Park to cut the 200 acres of grass, then go to his recording studio"

Was there anything your dad said that encapsulated how he felt about music and guitar?
"I mean, he loved playing the guitar. He truly loved it. A lot of people say, 'Ah, it was just a business.' No. There were two sides. There's the obvious business side – because you have to cross the Ts and dot the Is. But then he just loved playing. He really did. I mean, just before we went on stage, he'd start playing stuff that Frank Sinatra performed or guitar versions of Benny Goodman songs. He grew up in the big band era. So all that kind of music is what he really loved playing.

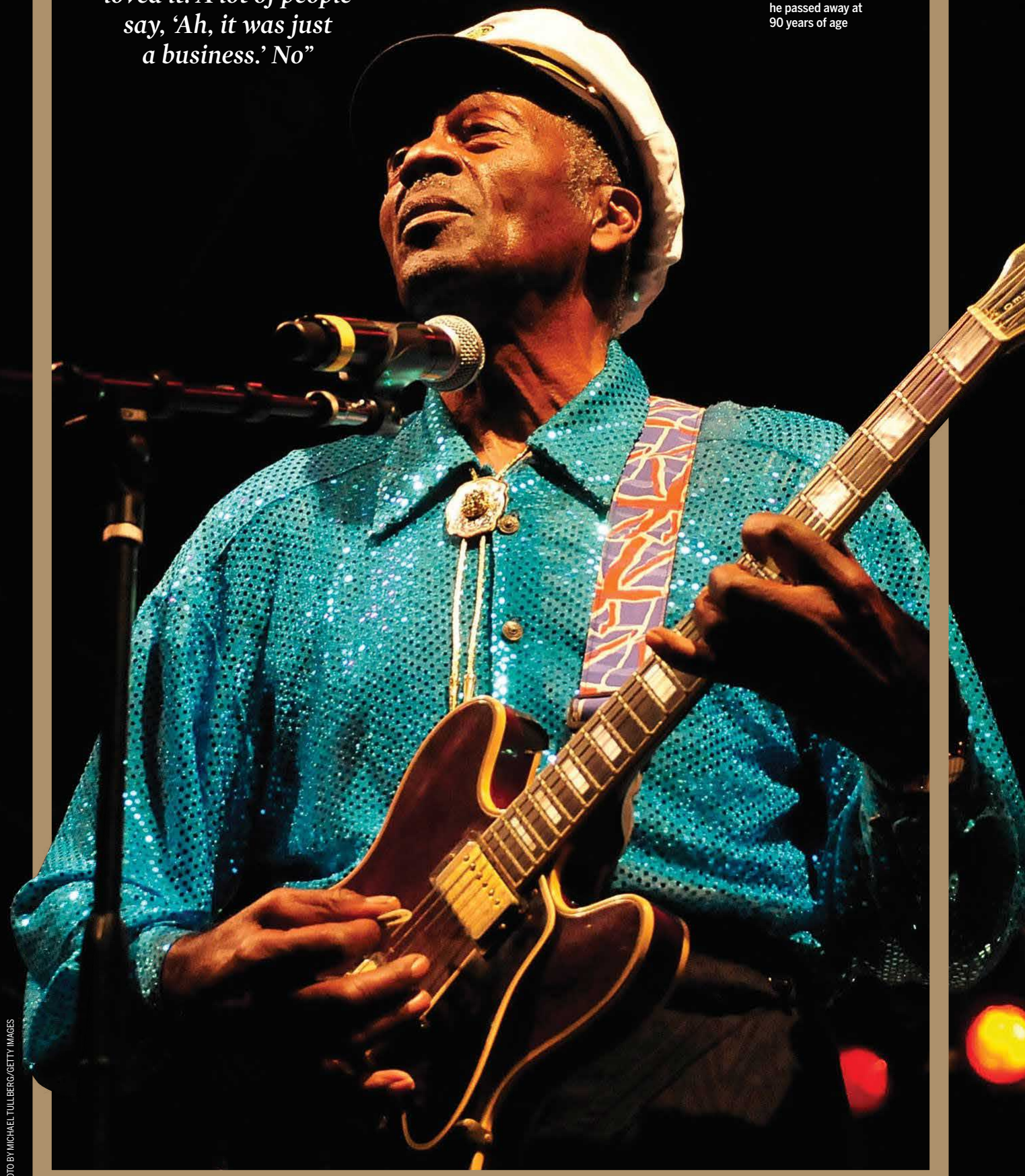
"He would just pick up his guitar every once in a while and it's like, 'Wow, man, I didn't know you could do that.' He would just strip away all the stage persona, just sit and play, and it was wonderful to watch him do that. Myself and Jimmy, we would stop what we were doing and just watch him play. It was just him. Not plugged into anything. And it was like, 'Wow, this is just beautiful...'" G



5. Chuck Berry at a Chess Records recording session in April 1970 in Chicago. He was as prolific as he was influential throughout his career

PHOTO BY JEFF LOWENTHAL/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"He loved playing the guitar. He truly loved it. A lot of people say, 'Ah, it was just a business.' No"



Chuck performing at the Long Beach Blues Festival in California, in August 2008, nine years before he passed away at 90 years of age

PHOTO BY MICHAEL TULLBERG/GETTY IMAGES

GET YOUR KICKS

Now synonymous with the godfather of rock 'n' roll, the ES-350T may look like a traditional jazzbox, but its thinline body and shortened scale heralded a new direction for Gibson

Words Huw Price **Photography** Phil Barker

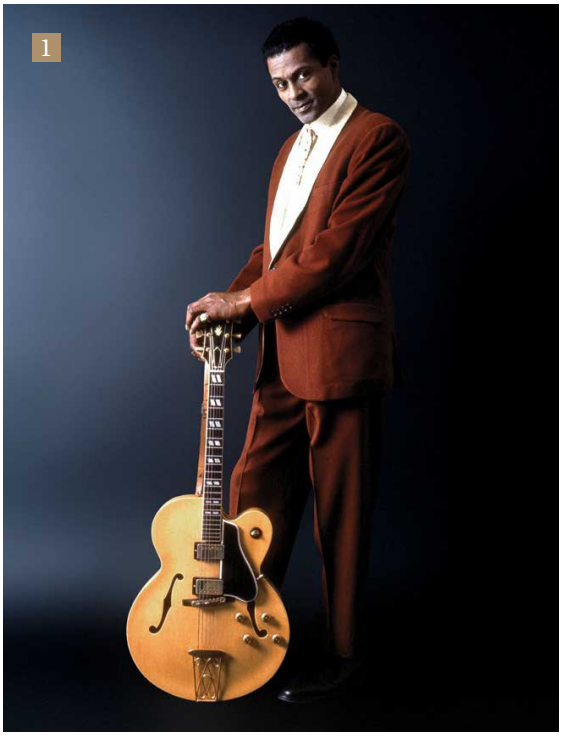
Looking back, 1955 was the year of slim pickings at Gibson, with the introduction of three new 'thinline' archtop models: the Byrdland, ES-350T and the single-pickup ES-225. Available in Sunburst ($395) and Natural ($410), the ES-350T looked much like the ES-350 from the front, but the body depth was reduced from 3 ½ inches to 2 ¼ inches. The most significant difference between the ES-350 and ES-350T, however, was the latter's shorter 23 ½-inch scale length.

Constructed with a laminated maple body, a two-piece maple neck with a centre stripe, and a rosewood fretboard, the ES-350T was equipped with Gibson's newly designed tune-o-matic bridge and a brace of P-90 pickups. The ES-350 was dropped from Gibson's catalogue in 1956, and ES-350T production continued until 1963.

Patent Applied For humbuckers replaced the P-90s in 1957; in the ES-350T, Byrdland, L-5CE and Super 400CE they all had slightly narrower pole spacing than standard. Most of these pickups measure 1 15/16 inches between the centres of the outer pole screws, but the tighter spacing was 1 13/16 inches. More changes followed, with the nut width increasing from 1 5/8 to 1 11/16 inches in 1959. In 1960 the cutaway style was altered from Venetian to Florentine, and in 1962 three-piece necks were introduced.

When it comes to famous players, the Gibson ES-350T is mostly associated with the subject of this issue's cover feature, Chuck Berry. He used one with P-90s for all of the mid-50s recordings he made for Chess Records, and he appears with it in countless photos from that era. Chuck bought one of the first Patent Applied For pickup-equipped ES-350Ts in 1957, but he was playing an earlier P-90 model when he appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1958.

It's hard to overestimate Chuck's influence on the young rock 'n' roll, R&B and blues guitarists that eventually found fame in the 60s. None seemed interested in using ES-350Ts as their main guitars – probably because they were poorly suited to the high volume levels of the blues-rock era – but Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Jimmy Page have all owned them. The example featured here belongs to former XTC guitarist Dave Gregory, who joins us to share the story.



1. Released as a mid-point between Gibson's new solidbodies of the era and its more traditional jazzboxes, the ES-350T thinline hollowbody became revolutionary in the hands of Chuck Berry

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"My ES-350T dates to December 1957, so it would have been part of the first production run with Gibson's new amazing humbucking pickup," Dave tells us. "Before I owned this guitar, I hadn't fully appreciated exactly what a brilliant pickup a 1950s [Patent Applied For humbucker] can be and why people are willing to spend so much money on them.

"I'd always wanted an ES-350T, not because it was going to be a primary guitar but just because it would be something lovely to own. It was coming up for auction at Gardiner Houlgate and I asked them if I could have a go. As soon as I plugged it into this little amp they gave me, I was amazed by its responsiveness.

"Regardless of which pickup was selected, there were no flat or dead spots. Each note, anywhere on the scale, had the same output and same sort of response. The timbre is what a harpsichord player might describe as 'well tempered', and it felt like a really brilliant piece of music-making technology despite being [more than] 50 years old.

"I was so glad I'd had a chance to sit down and experience it, but at the time I thought it was way out of my league. Even so, I thought I'd put a bid in. I was lucky because it didn't reach its full value at all, and that's the only way I could afford to buy it. I suppose not everyone wants a great big hollow-bodied guitar.

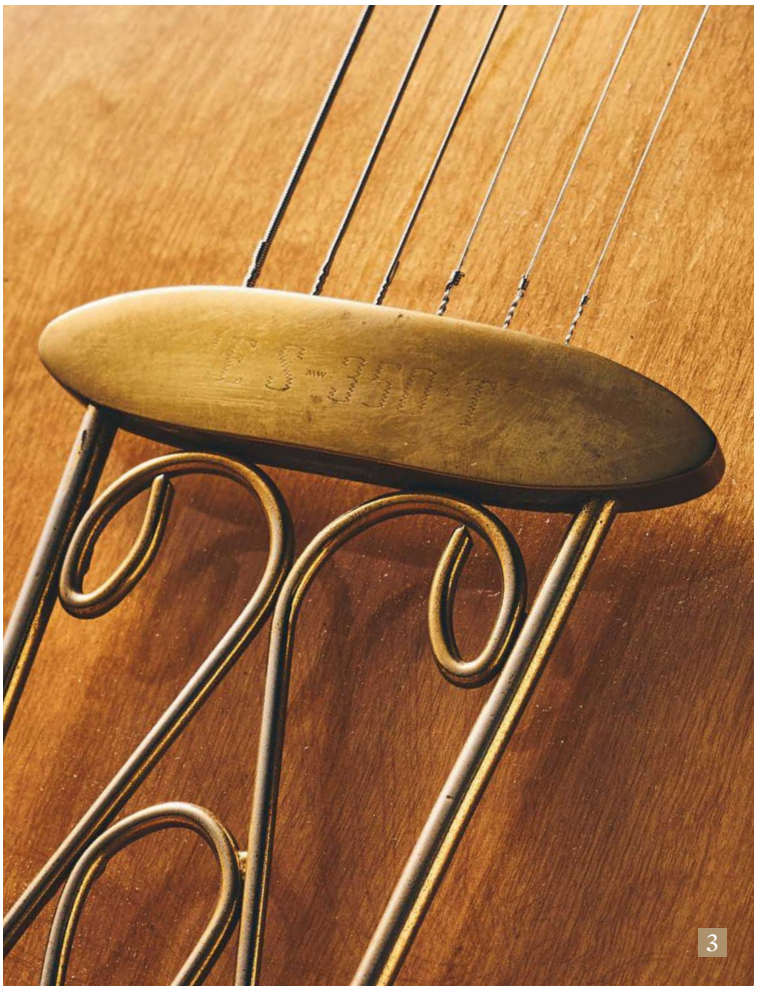
"You might wonder why Chuck Berry chose to play one, but if you listen to how he played, you'll get it" ***DAVE GREGORY***



DAVE GREGORY'S 1957 GIBSON ES-350T
With its thinline body and unusually short 23.5-inch scale length, the ES-350T was a historically important instrument for Gibson



2. The upmarket yet understated bound headstock has the same crown inlay that featured on Gibson's ES-335



3. Gibson designed individual tailpieces for its jazz guitar model and began engraving 'ES-350T' on the crossbar of the guitars in 1957



"It had suffered some damage because it had probably been hung up somewhere and fallen off. A chunk of wood had been taken out from the end-pin area, and there was a crack that went the whole way around the lower bout and almost up to the neck joint. It was just a hairline split that had been professionally repaired, and I noticed that the top and sides had been oversprayed with lacquer.

"I find it extraordinary that so many of these guitars pre-date rock 'n' roll... Yet they're some of the best ever made" ***DAVE GREGORY***

"The frets are tiny, so I'm pretty sure they're the original factory ones, and they have very little wear. I imagine the ES-350T was intended for jazz players who wanted to fly around on the neck, and from that point of view it's really comfortable. You might wonder why Chuck Berry chose to play one, but if you listen to how he played, you'll get it. I'm a huge fan of Chuck's – but even more for his lyrics than his guitar playing. I think he is underrated as a lyricist.

"I struggle a bit with the small frets because I'm not a jazz player by any means and I like to dig in and wail. But I can sit down with that guitar and spend hours noodling on it because it just feels comfortable and perfectly balanced. You've got to find a bit of extra elbow room for the picking hand, which takes some getting used to, but the fretting-hand positioning is perfect.

"The neck is quarter-sawn curly maple with the stinger at the top – I love all of that ancient Gibson stuff. I haven't played any medium-scale Gibsons other than my ES-350T, so I can't say it's a typical '57 neck profile. It's sort of a massive fistful, but it's easy to play and I think that even if you have small hands or short fingers, you will still find an ES-350T very accommodating.

"Having said that, Gibson's shorter 23 ½-inch scale length is something that I struggle with, to be honest. The nut width is 1 5/8 inches and the neck width at the 12th fret is 1 7/8 inches. With only a quarter-inch increase from the nut to the 12th fret, it feels almost parallel and it does take some getting used to.

"Unlike many of Gibson's other high-end jazz guitars, the ES-350T has a gold-plated tune-o-matic bridge on a wooden base, rather than a rosewood bridge. I have to use double-sided tape to keep it in position otherwise whenever I change strings, and take them all off as a set as I do, the bridge will go floating.

"Despite owning some amazing-sounding [Patent Applied For pickups] in my '63 ES-335, the ones in the ES-350T were better than I was expecting. Perhaps the application of them in that big hollow body without the



centre block allows you to hear more of the strings. They just draw out the music and I find them more sonically accurate and musical. You can hear every note in chords and they don't fluff out or overload.

"Higher gain pickups can produce an instant distortion, but the ES-350T's bridge pickup is 7.6k and the neck is 7.1k. I do have a 1960 ES-335 that also has Patent Applied For pickups, and they're probably closer to the '57's in tone and response.

"The potentiometers had virtually seized up, so I thought I'd pull the loom out and give them a squirt with DeoxIT. Having pulled it out, I noticed the pots were in metal casings sealed by heavy-duty solder joints. I had a little brainwave and squirted some DeoxIT down through the shafts of the pots and that fixed them. They still don't exactly fly around, but I don't need to move them that often.

"When I bought it, the ES-350T had a modern Gibson case with one of those silly combination locks. It was decent enough, but I did not like the aftermarket pickguard. If you have very deep pockets and you're desperate enough, a company called Vintage Correct Parts is quite a good source for this sort of stuff and they had an original '57 pickguard, plus an immaculate Lifton case for either a Birdland or a 350. By the time I'd paid for shipping and duty I got them both for £988.

"I bought the guitar in 2017 and in total I've spent around £5,000, so I expect it would repay me if I needed the money. Meanwhile, I've got a fantastic instrument to enjoy. I find it extraordinary that so many of these guitars pre-date rock 'n' roll and they were mostly designed as a means of amplifying strings. And yet they're some of the best instruments ever made.

"I haven't played my ES-350T on any records or sessions yet, but I've used it a lot for home recording and I have written a couple of pieces of music on it. When I first got it home and changed the strings, my fingers just fell under these chord shapes and I had a sequence within 10 minutes of sitting down with the guitar. It's funny how a new instrument can inspire you." G

With thanks to Dave Gregory

4. A tune-o-matic tailpiece updated the traditional wood bridge, and the Patent Applied For pickups had narrowed screw spacing

5. The body is made from laminated maple – and Gibson chose to use the more figured of the pieces for the back



DEAR DAD

Sheffield songsmith Richard Hawley developed an early love for Chuck Berry that endures to this day – not least because his father's band backed Chuck in the 60s, discovering backstage that country was just as deep an influence on his music as the blues

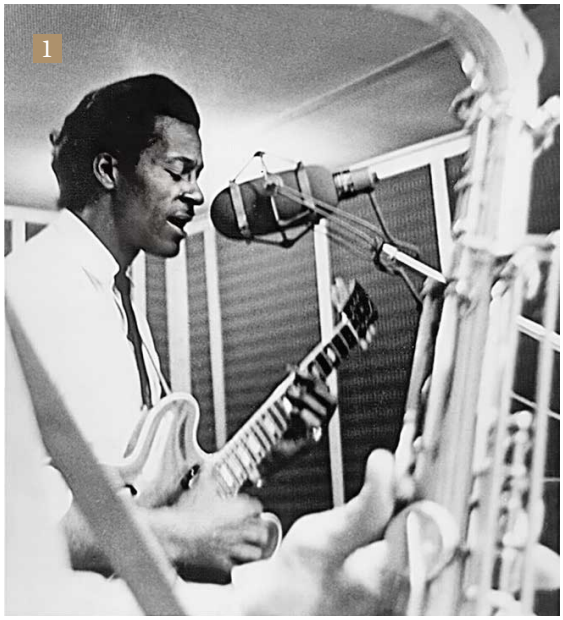
Words Jamie Dickson

"The enjoyment I've had out of those records, it never stops. I still enjoy digging up things of Chuck's now," Richard Hawley reflects. "I found one the other day that I forgot that I had called *Club Nitty Gritty*. Have you heard that?" Hawley laughs, knowing that about a minute into the interview, we've already strayed off into the undergrowth of one of his favourite subjects. "I've got to keep my focus when I'm talking about Chuck," he admits. "Because I'll just explode, I'll be like a blancmange flying everywhere [laughs]."

Like the World Tree of mythology, all of rock 'n' roll could be considered an outgrowth of Chuck's towering body of work. And yet the huge influence his music had on 60s super-bands from The Beatles to The Beach Boys was itself a product of Chuck's receptivity to earlier influences still and his uncanny knack for assimilating everything from blues to bluegrass into his sound. We sat down with Richard Hawley, whose whole musical life has been informed by Chuck's music, to hear his perceptive perspectives on the godfather of rock 'n' roll.

Chuck Berry made his name on Chess Records but his sound is broader than the blues.

"The first [Chess] LP was in 1956 [*Rock, Rock, Rock!*] and, sequentially, it's interesting because the second LP that Chess released was *After School Session* [1957], and the track *Roly Poly* off that album probably influenced all the major white English players more than any other piece of music of that era. If you listen to it, it's an instrumental, and I don't think he plays his horn-line signature thing. But all the guitar playing on that little two-minute track is pretty much what you're going to hear coming down the track from Chuck for the next few years.



1. Chuck Berry recording at Chess Records in Chicago, circa 1960. Not long afterwards, on one of his never-ending tour schedules, Chuck encountered Richard Hawley's father and they bonded over country music

"Chess was committed solely to black Chicago R&B and rural blues and other stuff as well, but from an LP point of view, the first thing they released was *Rock, Rock, Rock!*, which is a fucking film soundtrack! [featuring Chuck Berry, among other artists – Ed]. So the second album was *After School Sessions*. The third and fourth LPs that Chess released were *The Best Of Muddy Waters* and *The Best Of Little Walter*, which are seminal albums, as you know. And the fifth was *Oh! Suzie-Q* by Dale Hawkins.

"So what that tells you is that they'd been releasing blues records and R&B [singles] since 1950. Then Chuck comes along with *Maybellene* in 1955, and he's actually 10 years older than all these kids – he's 10 years older than Elvis and Buddy Holly – and Chess's focus shifts to the power of rock 'n' roll. Because Phil and Leonard Chess were not stupid guys; they were really shrewd men. And their belief in rock 'n' roll shifted pretty quick."

People often cite the country influence in Chuck's playing, alongside the blues. To what degree was it central to his sound, do you think?

"When *Maybellene* came out, that was definitely a risqué record at the time because it's essentially a country record [sings the jangling main riff of *Maybellene*]. I mean, that's way more country than all the stuff Elvis was doing, like *Blue Moon Of Kentucky*. But, of course, when Chuck plays that solo and it fucking lifts off, all the hairs on the back of my neck still stand up, you know?

"When 'Maybellene' came out, it [was] essentially a country record... way more country than all the stuff Elvis was doing"

"My dad worked with him. I think it was around the early 60s sort of era. He played rhythm with him – everybody who worked with Chuck at certain points in his career just said that he treated his bands like shit. And my dad was in the dressing room when they

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Richard Hawley argues that Chuck Berry's style was an influence on Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues*

PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

were running through songs, and Chuck was notorious for changing the keys [to familiar songs]. Chuck had asked my dad who the bandleader in his combo was [backing Chuck on tour] and he said, 'Yeah, me, I guess.' He goes, 'Okay, let's just sit in this room.'

"When they were in there, dad spotted that Chuck had got an Osborne Brothers bluegrass record. And I remember dad saying this, and he'd got Louvin Brothers and Carter Family records, too. Basically, all the records that he had with him, that he was listening to on this little tiny portable, were all hillbilly bluegrass and country stuff. That wasn't a known thing at the time, that Chuck was listening to that. But dad had already joined the dots because he really knew his shit, my dad, you know?

"Then he just said to Chuck, 'Oh yeah, wow, do you like Bill Monroe?' And Chuck was like, 'Oh wow, Bill Monroe...' My dad had worked with Bill – they'd done a German tour with him and so they got talking. Once Chuck figured out that my dad wasn't basically a white asshole, he treated my dad really well and they had a great time. I think they only did about three shows before he had to move on and do something else. But at the time, Chuck asked the agent if he could take my dad and his band [further on tour], but they couldn't; they wouldn't let him do it. So dad said he was a really nice guy, incredibly intelligent, and an unbelievable musician."



2. Chuck Berry wasn't wedded to the ES-350T or to 300 Series Gibsons in general – he's pictured here with Gibson Les Paul guitar circa 1961. Hawley had a long-running debate with his father about whether the guitar on the cover of Berry's first record was a Les Paul – but Berry's son confirmed in this issue that it was a Gretsch Duo Jet or variant of the same

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"If you really listen to that first album, I don't think Chuck had fully made his mind up about which way was going to jump"

Do you think his sound was a premeditated act of trying to fuse styles or did he find his way to it by trial and error?

"Well, the funny thing is, if you listen to that first [solo] LP, *After School Session*, it's the most revealing of them all, I think. I don't think he'd quite decided which way to jump – because he was older and Chuck was a sophisticated writer. Right from the word go... if you listen to some of those songs, like *Havana Moon*, he sounds like he's kind of trying to do a Nat King Cole, you know? And there's the instrumentals as well, and you've got the straight-ahead blues with *No Money Down*, which is a fantastic record.

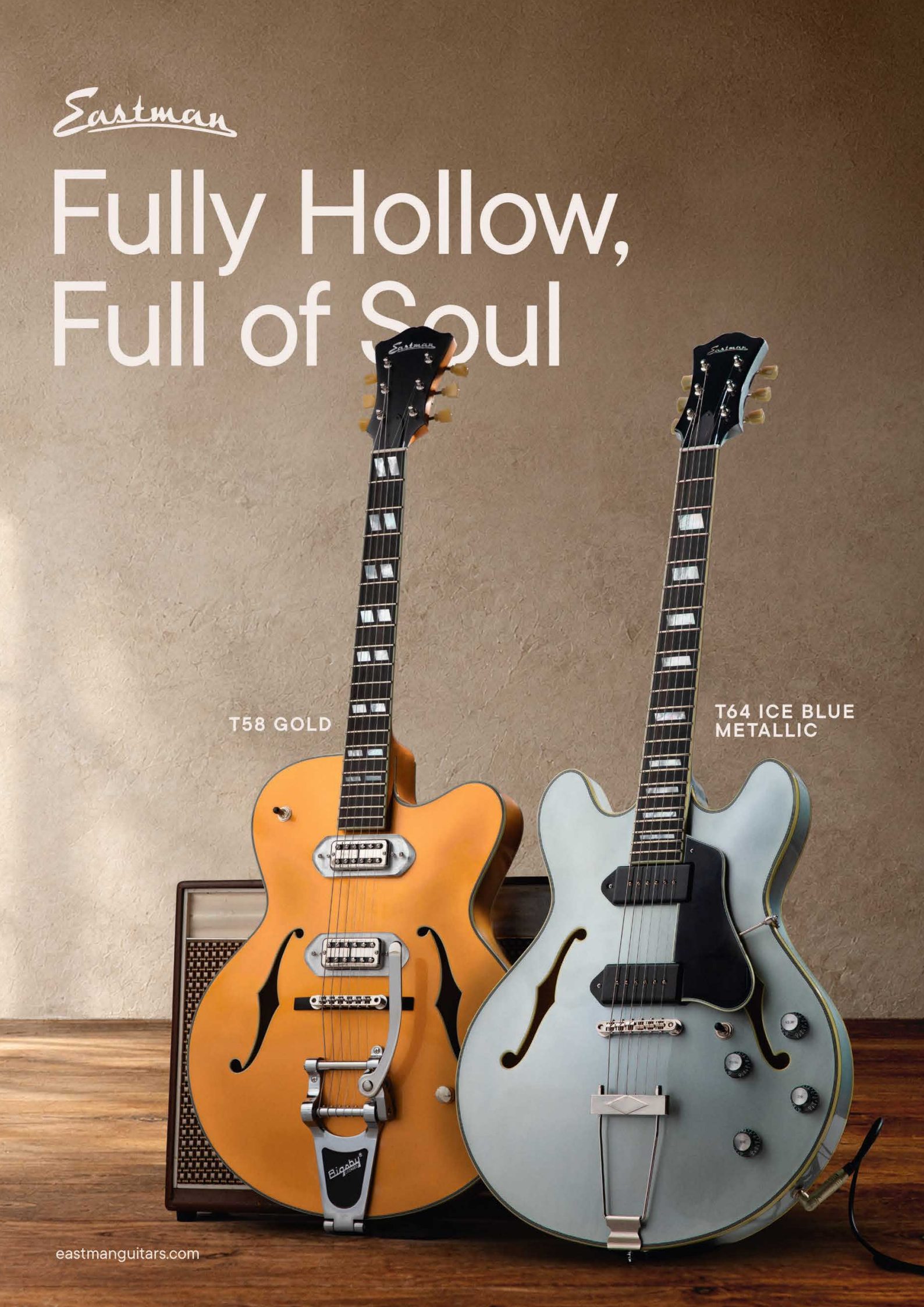
"Then you've got the rockers like *Too Much Monkey Business*, which is probably one of the greatest slabs of music ever recorded... it's fucking awesome. Chuck's vocal delivery with those wonderful lyrics is just machine-gun fast, you know?

"But then you've also got that one-chord classic *Downbound Train*. I mean, that's about as hillbilly as it gets. But the thing is, the backing band on that is Willie Dixon on bass, and you've got one of the greatest drummers of all time, Fred Below [alongside Ebby Hardy]. Now Fred played on all JB Lenoir stuff and the Little Walter stuff, all the Muddy stuff... He was the guy that influenced Charlie Watts and all those.

"So if you really listen to that first album, I don't think Chuck had fully made his mind up about which way was going to jump – because he had the capability to write really sophisticated songs. You know, he wasn't an idiot. He was an incredibly intelligent bloke, and he didn't come from the tenements and the back streets. He was from a wealthy middle class family in St Louis. He was very educated. So you have to throw that into the mix. That's why he was so verbose and literate, you know? If you listen to *Subterranean Homesick Blues* [and you ever wonder] where Bob got it from... well, I can't think of anybody else [laughs]." G

Eastman

Fully Hollow, Full of Soul



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YOU NEVER CAN TELL

Guitarist James Walbourne is one of the most exciting players on the scene, not only in The Pretenders but his riotous rock 'n' roll band His Lordship, who have recently made an album paying tribute to Chuck Berry. But he had to take things completely apart before it all came together, he says...

Words Jamie Dickson

If you haven't seen James Walbourne's raw, rock 'n' roll trio His Lordship before, it's truly a force of nature. Watching him play with drummer Kristoffer Sonne and Dave Page on bass is to see what 50s rock 'n' roll would have sounded like had it kept on going, untainted and partly feral, into the 21st century. So when Chuck Berry's family gave James and the band the nod to honour Chuck Berry's centenary with an album of covers, it should have been a shoo-in. But James discovered that to honour the spirit of such an influential artist the answer, ironically, is to toss the rulebook and do it your own way, which is – if you think about it – what rock 'n' roll was all about in the first place.

How did you come to make a record of Chuck Berry songs?

"Well, it was born out of doing this tribute show last October in St Louis that I was asked to be the guitar player in, with the St Louis Philharmonic. So I did that and I ended up meeting Butch Berry, his grandson and his wife Themetta, who was 90-something years old.

"We got along really well, so then the idea was put before me that we do a Chuck Berry record and I thought, 'Okay, well how do you do an album celebrating Chuck Berry?' I had all these ideas that we should write new songs, perhaps – a lot of ideas went through my head.

"In the end, we just got together in our studio – me, Kris and Dave; His Lordship – and thought, 'Well, we can play this stuff. It's what we grew up on, so we can play this stuff standing on our heads – we love it. We can do it. It'll sound great.' And we went in there and the first track we recorded was *Promised Land*. We did it the way we do it, in-your-face rock 'n' roll, and then we listened to it. I was like, 'Right, well, okay, well, that's not very inspiring, is it?' You know, [it's just] three blokes playing Chuck Berry, really, isn't it?

"Then I had a sort of existential crisis about the whole thing. I thought, 'I can't do this, can't do it. The world does not need this.' It's funny, when we first approached [the project] I thought we play [rock 'n' roll] like no-one else anyway, so we thought it was going to sound like us. But actually it just sounded like us playing Chuck Berry really fast [laughs].

"Then I thought about it a bit more. It was bad, it was just uninspired. No-one needs another Chuck Berry-sounding record, especially me. So we thought, 'Let's park *Promised Land* and try *Nadine*.' And it came together quite quickly. I just came up with this riff, more like a garage-rock riff, that was completely different; it's sort of rewritten a little bit. I mean, it doesn't sound like Chuck's [guitar style] – there are no doublestops on it, or any of those famous riffs. We did it all live and it's more rock 'n' roll, and that particular one had a garage-rock feel. And it suddenly sounded exciting, and we put our own mark on it.

"So we had a vision of what to do with it, and we really worked at each and every song. The thing we were trying to get across was the songs, really, because they're just so unlike anyone else's. And also for me as a guitar player, I can't be Chuck Berry. No-one wants to hear that. We've had so many people doing that. Even the doublestops I did, maybe once in the whole record and we rearranged the songs. We kind of fucked with his songs! And we rearranged them for us and to hear Chuck Berry songs [as interpreted for] now."



1. James Walbourne with His Lordship drummer Kristoffer Sonne – the band have a Chuck Berry tribute album out but also a special 7-inch vinyl single version of 'Nadine', released on Chiswick Records

PHOTO BY PAUL KELLY

"I had a sort of existential crisis... 'The world does not need this.' [But then] we did it all live. And it suddenly sounded exciting"

Did you feel a sense of trepidation reimagining such classic songs?
"I mean, it's the holy grail of rock 'n' roll. You can't fuck with it like that. I think many people have, and it's been a pointless exercise, quite honestly. There's enough of that. I met Josh Homme when I was doing a gig with him somewhere and he really inspired me with the idea that when you're making new music, it's not that you're setting out to alienate people – but not everyone's gonna get it. You want to do your own thing and be all right with the fact that not everybody is going to get it. And I think there's going to be a lot of rock 'n' roll fans who will say, 'You can't do that to Chuck Berry!', but then you think, what the fuck would Chuck Berry do?"

James Walbourne with his simple but endlessly useful SG Junior, which found its way onto the new *Promised Land* album – though the surprise breakthrough sonically was using a Guyatone that formerly belonged to Ry Cooder

"I think there's going to be a lot of rock 'n' roll fans who will say, 'You can't do that!' But what would Chuck Berry do?"

What were your go-to guitars for the album?
"I used the SG for nearly all of it. But the secret weapon in the studio was a Guyatone, a white 1960s Guyatone that was Ry Cooder's – it was one from that collection. A mad thing... mad thing. Many pickups, many switches, and a fucking Bigsby! I was thinking, 'How am I going to use this?' But I just took it down and plugged it in and... what an incredible thing! I'm going to have to get one, you get so many different tones out of it. We used it for layering guitars on the track *Promised Land*, where we wanted really distorted guitar, so the question was, how do you get [the guitar's sound] to cut through three layers of [previously tracked] guitars? We just manipulated the tone, which is kind of obvious, I guess. And then this guitar had so many configurations... it was just a little bit different, you know, and in the end it had this quite staggering array of 'fuck you' distortion on it [laughs]." G



Promised Land by His Lordship is out on 13 Nov on Psychonaut Sounds **https://hislordship.net**

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

MARTIN TAYLOR

This year the jazz and fingerstyle virtuoso celebrates his 70th birthday and so he joins us here to look back on a career that saw him begin playing from the tender age of three

Words David Mead **Photography** Lucy Robinson

Witnessing a Martin Taylor solo show has always been something of a levelling experience for the average guitar player. His guitar might have the same number of frets as ours (we've counted), but you're hearing chords, melody and basslines all at once. How does that happen? And when you realise that much of it is improvised on the spot, the tendency is to come away humbled and determined to do better the next time you head to the woodshed.

In order to celebrate his very special birthday this October, Martin stopped by the *Guitarist* studios to not only reflect on a long career in music but also record no fewer than three exclusive videos for us, including a lesson on how he works his unfathomable magic on a simple blues song.

When did you first pick up a guitar?

"I started on a ukulele when I was about three years old. My dad came back with his little uke and I just really took to it. There was just something about playing a stringed instrument, you know? Then a kid across the street from us, his parents got him a little half-size guitar from Petticoat Lane Market and I played that, and my dad went and got me one.

"There was always music being played in the house. A lot of my dad's friends used to come round and play on Saturday afternoons. They would all come round and put records on of the Hot Club De France, Duke Ellington and Ben Webster, all the classic jazz players, and then they would play along and I just really took to music."

Why do you think music had that effect on you at such an early age?

"It always fascinated me how music affected your emotions. You know, why does it make me feel sad? Why does that make me feel happy? I couldn't understand it. I thought it was really, really fascinating. It still does fascinate me. My brother was really into music as well, and in many ways he was more musical than me, but he just didn't have the wish to spend all that time playing a guitar, which had suited me fine.

"I've got that kind of mind that will just keep doing the same thing over and over and over again, and thinking it's going to get better. Sign of madness, apparently. So I really stuck with the guitar. I didn't want to just listen to it. My brother wanted to listen to it, but I wanted to play it. I wanted to be right in the middle of it. So straight away, I just got into playing. My next door neighbour was Gypie Mayo, who went on to play guitar after Wilko Johnson in Doctor Feelgood, so we started playing at the same time. He really went more into the blues side of things and became a fantastic blues player. So many people were playing guitar at that time. In fact, at one point I thought of taking up another instrument because every lad in the street was playing a guitar!"

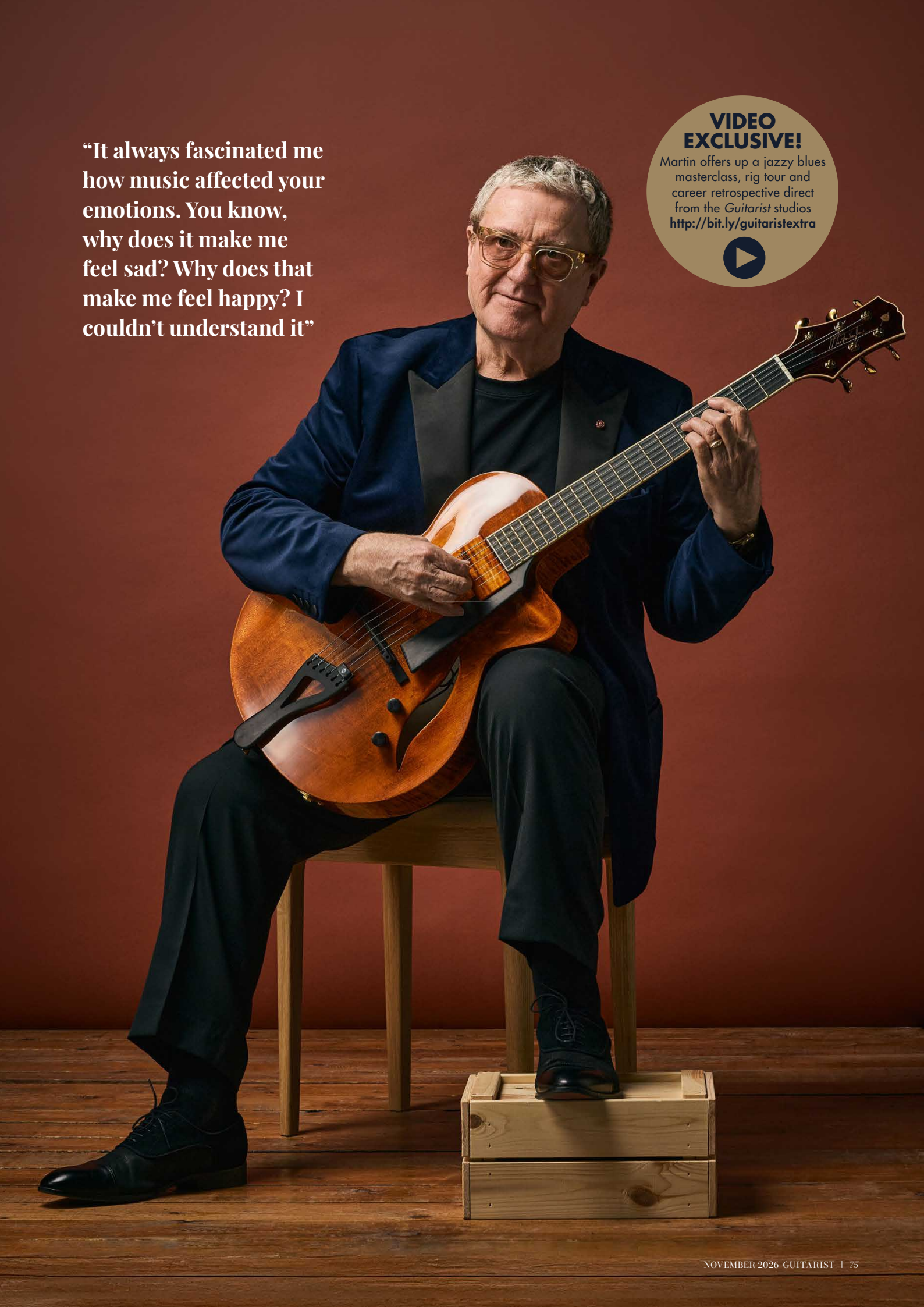
One of your earliest gigs was playing in a shop window in Harlow at the age of eight. How did that come about?

"One day Gypie – or I knew him as John in those days – came to the house and said, 'There's a shop

“It always fascinated me how music affected your emotions. You know, why does it make me feel sad? Why does that make me feel happy? I couldn’t understand it”

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE!

Martin offers up a jazzy blues masterclass, rig tour and career retrospective direct from the *Guitarist* studios **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**



1

1. Martin's signature 'Joya' guitar was designed in collaboration with the Fibonacci company and features a single, specially designed pickup by Jon Dickinson

2. The workmanship is stunning throughout and features a 15-inch wide top made from Carpathian spruce and Martin's signature on the matching headstock

2



"I just thought there was something magical about a guitar player walking on stage, sitting on a chair and playing"


3


4

up in the town, they've got guitars in the window.' It was like a haberdashery shop; they sold sewing machines and wool and knitting needles and things like that. But the guy who ran it was a real music fan. He wasn't a musician himself, but he knew quite a few musicians and he started bringing guitars in, and you could go in there to buy strings or drumsticks or all kinds of bits and pieces for the local musicians. It became a hangout.

"We went up there one day, and the guy – whose name was Alan Summers – said, 'Do you play guitar?' And John said, 'He plays guitar.' And Alan said, 'Well, play something.' So he gave me a guitar and I played *Sweet Georgia Brown* or something. He didn't expect that. So he said, 'Come along on Saturday morning.' So I turned up on Saturday morning and they'd put a chair in the shop window and an amplifier out in the street. And I sat in the shop window, plugged in this amp and that became my little job every Saturday morning until the police came along because there were too many people coming to look."

Your next big landmark was playing in the band on the QE2 cruise liner.

"That was only a few years later. I left school at 15 and, because I was doing quite a few gigs, my dad said, 'I think you should just leave school. You could always go back and do qualifications if it doesn't work out.' That's exactly what I wanted to hear. I had to promise my mum that I would go back to education if it all fell through because she wasn't too keen on the idea. Then I was very fortunate to meet a trumpet player who was playing with my dad and he played on the QE2 in a band. They needed a guitar player, and the band leader rang me up one day and said, 'Would you like to do six months on the QE2? Go [back and forth] to New York and then spend the winter in the Caribbean?' And I looked out of the window of our council house in Essex, where it was raining, and I went, 'Yes, that'll do me.'"

3. Martin uses Elixir round-wound strings as opposed to the more usual flat-wounds found on many jazz guitars, saying that they give him more of an acoustic guitar tone

4. From playing his first gigs at the age of eight in a shop window in Harlow to performing at some of the world's most prestigious venues worldwide – it's been quite a ride!

That must have delivered some new challenges...

"The bandleader said, 'Do you read music?' And, no, I couldn't read music at all. So I just said, 'Yeah.' I said to my dad, 'How long does it take to cross the Atlantic?' He said, 'Five days.' I thought, 'Well, okay, I can fake it for two. Then they're not going to turn back, are they? At least I'll get to New York.' So I found myself in the band there. Then we did a couple of jazz cruises, one with the Count Basie Orchestra, and I got to hang out with the great Freddie Green. I went to New York, saw a few people play there. So that was the beginning."

"We did a couple of jazz cruises, one with the Count Basie Orchestra, and I got to hang out with the great Freddie Green"

What happened next?

"I came back to the UK and started freelancing for a few years. When I started to play with Stéphane Grappelli in 1979, I'd already made an album of my



5

"I play with round-wound strings. Most jazz players play with flat-wounds to get that mellow, duller sound. But it's not my sound"

own about a year before. I played with Stéphane a few months of the year and then I had my own things with various bands. Playing with Stéphane was a key moment for me. I'd grown up listening to him and Django [Reinhardt] as a kid, and then suddenly at the age of 22, I'm sitting in Django's chair. And because of playing with Stéphane, we went to America. I started to get known internationally, recorded for Concord Records out in California, and then I continued to play with Stéphane for a number of years.

"I started recording for some other labels – Linn Records, and I was with Sony Columbia for a while. I think you'll find with a lot of jazz players that the defining moment for them is when they work with a very well-established living legend. When you think of all the musicians that played with Miles Davis, it just set them on a career path. There's a renaissance in Django music, but we didn't really play that. We played the great American songbook, so we didn't really play what's now labelled as 'Gypsy jazz'. We did play some of the Hot Club music, some of the things that Django and Stéphane wrote together, but mostly we just played. I didn't make any attempt to play like Django because Stéphane didn't want that."

5. The pedals that Martin uses live are all from the LR Baggs Align Series and comprise the Reverb, Equalizer and Session, which go direct to the PA as he has long since stopped using an amp

What in particular inspired you to begin playing your solo shows?

"I'd always been fascinated with playing solo guitar. Ever since I saw [Andrés] Segovia play, I just thought there was something magical about a guitar player walking on stage, sitting on a chair and playing. Just before he walked on stage, there was a piano stool and a footrest, and he just walked out, sat there and played a concert. I thought, 'That's what I want to do'.

"It took a while to get there, but to hold an audience for two hours, completely on your own... Of course, I tell stories and things as well. But I like playing for people. It's ironic, even though I'm known as a solo player, I don't like playing for myself, just sitting in a room playing for myself. Even as a kid, I liked playing for people, even though I was shy and I didn't like people looking at me. And if they came up to me and said, 'Oh, that was really good,' I'd get embarrassed, you know? I realised music is something that has to be shared, and that's what I [am] doing in my solo shows.

"You can't be put into a box: 'Oh, Martin Taylor, yeah, jazz guitar player.' Well, yes and no. Yes, I am – that's my roots – but it depends on what your perception of a jazz guitar player is. Do I play like Wes Montgomery? No. You know, the guitar is the guitar, music's music, and that's how I see it." G



Martin Taylor's latest album, *Standards Vol 1*, is out now on The Guitar Label

www.martintaylor.com

FINDING JOY(A)

Martin on his signature Fibonacci Joya guitar

"The idea was to have an archtop jazz guitar but in the 21st century. Every jazz guitar archtop is kind of based on the [Gibson] L-5 – it's the classic guitar – but I wanted a smaller-bodied instrument. So this is only a 15-inch lower bout. This is the second generation of this guitar, the Martin Taylor Joya, and this is a little bit deeper; the one before was just a little narrower.

"I've got a new pickup on it, it's a Jon Dickinson pickup and it's a wonderful pickup. This is my dream guitar, it's actually the best guitar I've ever played and it really suits me down to a T. A lot of jazz guitars, for me, being a fingerstyle player, are very middle-y sounding and I wanted more lows and highs. I wanted a bit more of an acoustic sound as well. I don't really play with a classic jazz tone. There's more of a sparkle and there's more of a bottom-end and there's more sustain.

"I play with round-wound strings. Most jazz players play with flat-wounds to get that mellow, duller sound. I like that sound, but it's not *my* sound. I think something a lot of people don't realise about jazz guitars is they're basically acoustic instruments. So sometimes you'll get an archtop and it's set up like an electric guitar, and it doesn't really come into its own unless it's set up as an acoustic instrument. It's basically an acoustic guitar with a pickup on it. It's not an electric as such.

"The top, back and sides are Carpathian spruce – from Romania, I believe. It's very, very beautiful and you'll notice it's got some 'bear claw' – and I actually like that. Some guitar collectors like guitars to be absolutely perfect, not to have any kind of blemishes on them, and you never know if a guitar is going to have a blemish on it till the process starts happening. But, for me, that is a characteristic of the guitar. That makes this guitar a one-off. I could see that guitar and say, 'That's mine.'"

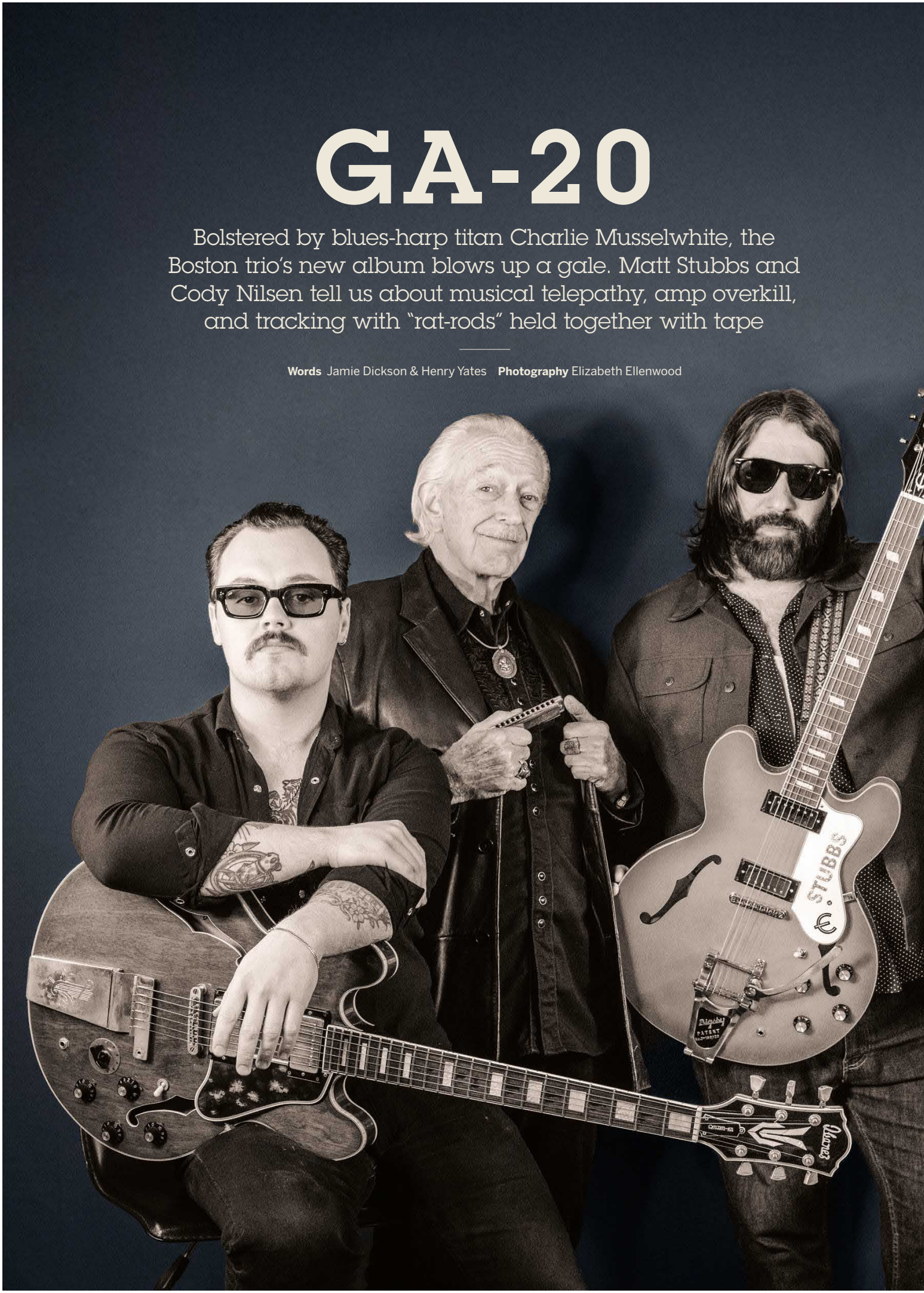


As well sharing his music on the stage, Martin also imparts his deep knowledge of the instrument via courses, books and retreats

GA-20

Bolstered by blues-harp titan Charlie Musselwhite, the Boston trio's new album blows up a gale. Matt Stubbs and Cody Nilsen tell us about musical telepathy, amp overkill, and tracking with "rat-rods" held together with tape

Words Jamie Dickson & Henry Yates **Photography** Elizabeth Ellenwood





GA-20 (from left to right): guitarist and vocalist Cody Nilsen, guest star and legendary blues harmonica player and singer Charlie Musselwhite, guitarist Matthew Stubbs, and drummer Josh Kiggans

Since their 2018 formation in Boston – originally as a money-spinner for guitarist Matt Stubbs during downtime from Charlie Musselwhite's band – GA-20 have skilfully walked the retro/modern tightrope, managing to sound like they've slipped through a wormhole from 50s Chicago but also vital and alive in your Bluetooth speakers.

As you'd hope from a power-trio named after Gibson's venerable valve combo, GA-20's four albums to date have dealt in torn 'n' frayed, militantly analogue tones, with songs tracked nose-to-nose, zero overdubs and mistakes happily waved through.

That recording ethos remains on this year's *Blues Now*, Stubbs and singer/guitarist Cody Nilsen tell us, but this time with a rogue element: the line-up was joined by Windy City blues-harp giant Musselwhite, and they raised their game accordingly.

To your mind, what differentiates old-time blues from more modern-leaning takes?

Matt Stubbs: "For me, John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Reed, a lot of those Chicago guys – first of all, the way they were recorded sounds drastically different. They were usually recording live. Lots of mistakes were happening and they didn't have a lot of time, so they kept them. But also, minimal microphones, more bleed, not a lot of isolating amps and drums. So GA-20 has always taken that approach, too. We're all in one room together. We play live. And if we don't get a good take, we do it again, rather than keep fixing individual things.

> "We record like the Chicago blues guys. We're all in one room together. We play live. And if we don't get a good take, we do it again" **MATT STUBBS**

"So that's a production standpoint. Music-wise, in my mind, modern blues is a completely different genre to traditional Chicago blues or early rock 'n' roll. It's focused more around the guitar solo than the song or story. Whereas all the traditional blues I grew up loving had a vibe and a story – and it didn't need to have a guitar solo."

To take BB King as an example – of course, he was a great player, but his voice was the main pillar and the guitar was often just replying to that.

Matt: "I mean, don't get me wrong, I love guitar solos. As blues-rock progressed, I like everything – or most of it – up until the very early 70s. But if the singing doesn't get me, it's hard for me to connect. Y'know, Buddy Guy... he's a great guitar player, but even when I see him now – and he's in his 90s – his singing's unbelievable to me."



"[In the studio] we're all within eyesight of each other. So if Matt wants to go for something, his body language will dictate that. There's a lot of communication without speaking" **CODY NILSEN**

1

1. Matt spent almost 20 years on the road with Charlie Musselwhite as part of his touring band, and now the harmonicist has joined GA-20 in the studio for *Blues Now*. "The whole concept was to be a conversation between Charlie and us, picking tunes that he personally had a connection with," says Matt

How did you get that raw sound on the new album?
Matt: "We recorded at Rare Signals in Cambridge, Massachusetts. All the amps and drums were in one room and the engineer, Brian Charles, really knows how to record blues and soul, and he knew what we were going for. Cody and Charlie were singing through some great vintage vocal microphones, and using big old mic preamps. But it really comes down to the four of us getting a good performance: because if we didn't play good, it's gonna be hard to doctor it up afterwards. I mean, all my favourite records were made that way."
Cody Nilsen: "We're all within eyesight of each other. So if Matt wants to go for something, his body language will dictate that and all of us follow. There's a lot of communication without speaking. You learn each other's moves."

Musically and personally, you can never predict how chemistry will work out, can you?
Matt: "Yeah. I've played with a lot of people, really great musicians. But I would never want to hang out and have a beer with [some of] them, y'know?"

Matt, you were the original contact point with Charlie. What was your first meeting?
Matt: "My father listened to blues music, so I knew who Charlie was from him teaching me. Fast-forward and I bumped into him a couple times when I was out on the road. We were just acquaintances. But when I was living in Los Angeles in 2007, I was touring with John Németh and his drummer was June Core – who's also been with Charlie for over 20 years. So he recommended me for the band when Charlie's guitar player gave his notice.

PHOTO BY PHOTO BY FANCEY PANSEN



PHOTO BY TAYLOR HILL/GETTY IMAGES FOR BOSTON CALLING

2. Cody's main slide guitar used on the record, the Teisco Sharkfin ET-460, is held together by tape, so this ET-230 modded by Lord Guitars joins him on the road

3. Matt's signature Waterslide T-style model has been a tour companion for a number of years and features Mojo DeArmond-spec Gold Foils and a Bigsby B5

"My phone just rang one day and Charlie said, 'Hey, you want to come and do these tours?' No rehearsals. He sent me a list of songs I needed to work on and I had maybe two months. It was pretty nerve-racking. But I stayed with him for 18 years."

There are some striking guitar tones on the album. What are your go-to rigs?

Matt: "Well, we both have a lot of guitars and amps; I've been collecting for years. It's always overkill when we go to the studio because you've got all these amps that are sitting around half the time. But most of the record was recorded on a couple of really good GA-20s. I also have a really nice 1960 Tweed Deluxe."

Cody: "All the slide guitar was through this tiny little five-watt lunchbox-looking Supro. There's something special about that amp."

Matt: "It's like a Champ. It's got an eight-inch speaker and just one knob. But most of the album was GA-20s, if you go through it. We also had a narrow-panel Tweed Pro – but that's a little loud. In the studio, we typically use smaller amps just because we're all in the same room with the drums, so if we use a 25- or 30-watt amp, it's usually too loud, and you can't control the mix as well."

You've covered Jimmy Reed's *I'll Change My Style*. What does his music mean to you?

Matt: "We've been playing that one live and it gets over, man. People love it. I think of Jimmy Reed as blues music. But it kinda walks the line of country music. His vocal melodies, his harmonica playing – a lot of times, I could confuse it as either. Also, his tunes fit nice with this band because a lot of times there's two guitars and no bass."

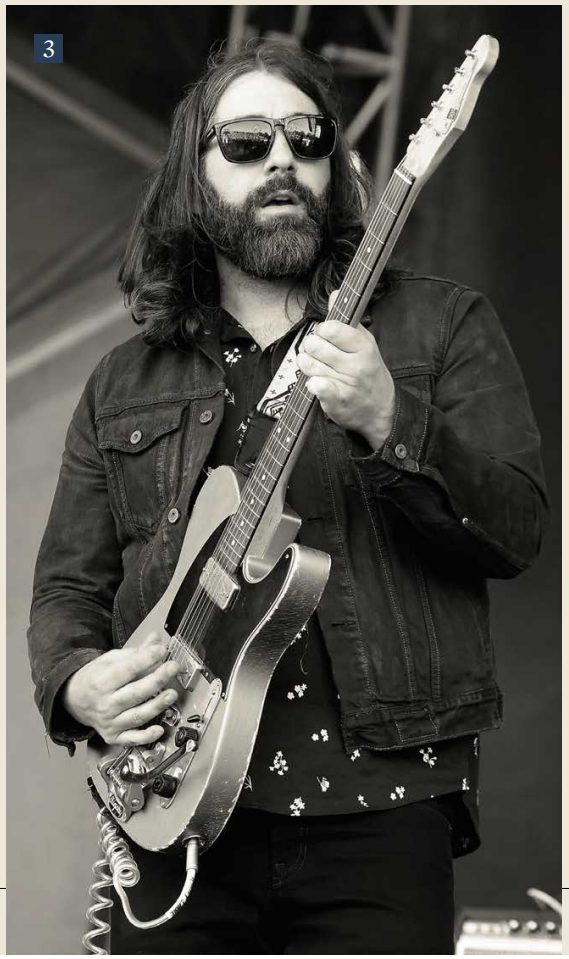




PHOTO BY TIM MOSENFELDER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Let's talk about the lack of a bassist. How did that format arise?

Matt: "GA-20 started because Charlie did a record with Ben Harper, and he was going out for a full year with Ben's band to promote it. I was his guitar player at the time, and he let me know: 'Hey, you're off next year.' I don't have a job, so I had to figure out how to make some money. At the time, I was living in Boston and it was my idea to start a little blues trio and go hustle – little clubs, restaurants, try to work five nights a week, just to pay rent. I wanted to keep it as small as possible, so it was a trio with two guitars. We kinda established the sound of GA-20 then. We thought about having bass, and we'd have people sit in, but it just never felt right."

Sometimes that framework of bass is great. But other times it's nice to leave it loose.

Matt: "Yeah. I will say, though, on this record, we did have a bass player come in. The whole concept was to be a conversation between Charlie and us, picking tunes that he personally had a connection with – like, he knew Jimmy Reed and has all these great stories – but also touching on some of Charlie's signature songs. Like, there's one called *Cristo Redentor*, an instrumental. He didn't write it, but he always plays it. I thought long and hard: 'Can we do it with just two guitars and no bass?' And I didn't think it was gonna do the song justice. So the bass player we brought in was Marty Ballou. He's played with John Hammond and we were lucky to have him. So because we had bass and I'm playing the regular guitar part, we were able to slide Cody over onto lap steel."

What are the most important blues records in your personal collection?

Matt: "One of the first ones my father gave me was *Live At The Regal*, BB King. He loved that record and made sure I heard it early on. So that's always been a touchstone. After that, man, I'm not sure I can think of a record, but in terms of different artists, like, early Buddy Guy, early Earl Hooker. As a kid, I wasn't a vinyl collector. So a lot of times back then I was buying compilations on CD, digging through and finding songs or artists I liked. Otis Rush, Magic Sam, stuff like that."

Cody: "Oh man, I always come back to Howlin' Wolf. Or the Otis Rush *Cobra Recordings* with the red cover: that's been in high rotation for me of late. The list goes on and on. I'm a huge Son House fan. *West Side Soul* by Magic Sam."



4. The band pictured at Rare Signals studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they recorded *Blues Now* with Charlie Musselwhite

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH ELLENWOOD

Matt: "*Mourning In The Morning* by Otis Rush. I always forget to mention that one. I found that a little later. That was recorded in the late 60s. And when I was starting out, I wasn't there yet. I only really liked the stuff from the 50s and early 60s. But as I got older and dug deeper, that's probably one of my all-time favourite blues records."

We talked about amps, but did you have a particular guitar for this album?

Matt: "For me, a big portion of the record was a Silvertone 1454. It's a hollowbody that originally had three Gold Foil pickups; my middle one died, so I took it out and it's got a weird hole in it. But I switched it up more than usual. Like, there's a couple songs where I used a Strat just because I was looking for that early Buddy Guy tone."

Cody: "The one guitar I can't seem to escape from is this lawsuit Ibanez from the 70s. It's a Les Paul Custom [copy] with P-90s. It just sounds fantastic and really feels like it was made for me. There's also a Silvertone 1446, the black-and-white one with Seth Lover mini-humbuckers. I used a 70s Firebird Bicentennial a little bit, and my main slide guitar is a Teisco Sharkfin ET-460. This particular one I used on the record is held together by tape, and it's just a rat-rod of an instrument. You have to fight it a bit and it sounds great."

We're guessing you don't use many pedals?

Matt: "We brought old Fender reverb tanks, but I'll be honest, man, I've been kind of hooked on this Catalinbread Topanga spring pedal. It's been on my 'board when I travel for years now. That feels the closest to a tank to me. Other than that, the only other pedal I brought in was an old Seymour Duncan pickup booster, which just hits the front of the amp harder."

Cody: "I use an [Xotic] RC booster. I've had that on my 'board for 10 years. It's never come off. For reverb, aside from the tank, I used this Boss FRV-1. But to Matt's credit, I'm now using a Topanga as well."

Matt: "They're the best, man."

Cody: "There's a volume knob that – if you turn off the mix, the dwell, all that stuff – you can use as a clean boost. So you can just hit the amp with, like, a small preamp as well."

Tell us about the track *The Blues Never Die*.

Matt: "Charlie brought that one in. That's an old Otis Spann tune. Again, Charlie was good friends with him and he's got lots of great stories. You've gotta do a slow blues on a blues record. I produced it and we had a great mix engineer – Pat DiCenso – so I mixed it alongside him. On headphones, or a really good system, that's my favourite mix on the record. The way it came out, it really sounds like the mid/late 60s. But also Charlie's delivery – the way he sings it – I mean, you can't fake that or recreate it. He just sounds like Charlie Musselwhite singing a Chicago blues song, y'know?" G



Blues Now is out now on New West Records, and GA-20 tour the UK from 20 October

https://ga20band.com



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1964 EPIPHONE RIVIERA

This Epiphone Riviera is one of Dave Gregory's long-time favourites and its mini-humbucker tones have featured on several XTC albums

Words Huw Price **Photography** Phil Barker

Introduced in 1962, the Epiphone E360TD Riviera is to the Casino what the Gibson ES-335 is to the ES-330. Essentially identical in construction to the ES-335, the major points of difference are the Riviera's mini-humbuckers and Frequensator tailpiece. The Riviera never achieved a huge following, but big-name players include Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Robbie Robertson and a young SRV. Session ace and former XTC member Dave Gregory is a big fan and he joins us here to tell the story of this 60s instrument that he kindly brought to the *Guitarist* studios.

"In January 1983 we were in London mixing tracks at Air Studios on Oxford Circus for the album that would become *Mummer*," Dave tells us. "On mixing sessions, the engineer usually needs a day to set everything up and get things ready for the band to come in and meddle. We had a free afternoon, so I was wondering what I could do on such a cold and windy day.

"I strolled down Oxford Street, made it to Denmark Street and was browsing around the vintage guitar shops. I can't remember which one it was, but there were a number of semis hanging on the wall and I noticed this Epiphone in virtually mint condition. I was interested because it was pretty and looked a bit different, but it was pricey. I think they wanted £550 for it, which was quite a lot of money in those days.

"It lodged in my brain and I decided to keep an eye out for one. Then a couple of days later I went through the classified ads at the back of *Melody Maker* and noticed someone was selling a Riviera in London. I called him and made an appointment, and when I went round I told him about the one in Denmark Street. He said, 'Well, actually, that was my guitar and here it is. I'm not going to ask that much.' We settled on £380, which was quite a big wedge for me at the time, but it was kismet."

Studio Debut

"I brought it to the studio and everybody was looking at it. We didn't plug in because we were mixing and couldn't make any noise. But I do remember Andy Partridge tuning it to an open E chord and strumming away acoustically. It turned out to be the riff to *Train Running Low On Soul Coal*, which was a song that would appear on *The Big Express* album the following year [1984]. That was when I was first introduced to the riff and was shown how to play it in this odd tuning that he devised.

"It's a lovely guitar to play because the neck is absolutely perfect for my hand. I always thought that if I get the chance to have a guitar made, I should take the Riviera to whoever is building it and tell them to copy this neck.

"It took a while to get used to the sound because I was expecting it to be closer to a 335, but it sounds more Fender-like because of those little humbuckers. They have a nice bright attack with none of that usual Gibson mud, and it's great for leads and rhythm playing.

"I love the Royal Tan sunburst because it's a very pretty colour, especially for a semi, and the other great thing was it hadn't been messed with. I think I might have lost the bushing from the low E tuning peg at some point when I was changing strings. Because they're the cheaper tuners, they have little tin eyelet bushings and if you tip the headstock upside down, they can drop out.

"The neck is slightly narrower than the earlier ones. Mine is 1 5/8-inch, so you're only talking about a 16th of an inch, and they became even narrower in 1966. The neck



In contrast to Gibson's teardrop shape, Epiphone sunbursts followed the body outline and this lighter shading is called Royal Tan



1. Dave's Riviera has Epiphone's classic elongated headstock, with its original Kluson tuners and distinctive truss rod cover and inlay
2. The control knobs look identical to Gibson reflector knobs – because they are!
3. There's a pleasing contrast between the cherry-finished maple body and the mahogany neck
4. Dave isn't convinced that the Frequensator tailpiece provides any tonal enhancement, and yet he would never replace it with a Bigsby
5. Beyond the Epiphone branding, the Riviera is essentially an ES-335 with mini-humbuckers







has a very pronounced C profile and it's nice and chubby. It's not like a Les Paul Junior, but it's deep and you can really get your hand around it. It's so easy to play I don't want to put it down because it feels so natural."

Split The Difference

"The Frequensator tailpiece is really what sold it for me because I'd been intrigued by them in catalogues and watching Epiphone players. I always wondered how it worked. But, basically, it's just a couple of flimsy trapeze-shaped broad structures with little notches for the strings to slot into. The theory was that if you had a bit of extra length on the bass strings, you'd get more sustain and tone, and it would balance better with the shorter length of the treble strings. I don't know about that, but I know that if you play the guitar fairly aggressively unplugged, you'll hear the frequency vibrating in a very irritating way. I think it looks really cool and I would never put a Bigsby on my Riviera, not for love nor money.

"One of the original volume knobs had perished with a sort of verdigris underneath that had turned greenish black. While I was replacing that, I pulled the pots out to check the stamps. They all dated April 1964, which lines up the serial number. I imagine it left the factory in late summer that year.

"It sounds somewhere between a Strat and Steve Howe's ES-175. The Riviera can do what an ES-175 does"

"The neck pickup measures around 6.3k, which is what you would expect for a mini-humbucker. The bridge pickup is about 9k, and you can hear it has a lot more power. It took me a while to optimise the distance from the strings. Too close and the low E would overload it, making a horrible distorted crackling noise. I eventually found the correct height, with the front edge sitting 3/32-inch below the string. It sounds somewhere between a Strat and Steve Howe's ES-175. If ever I've needed to play guitar in his style, that's the guitar I go for, rather than a cumbersome jazz guitar, because the Riviera can do what an ES-175 does.

"I took the Riviera to America for our American recording sessions with Todd Rundgren for the *Skylarking* sessions. It was used on a couple of Colin Moulding's



songs, *The Meeting Place* and the lead lines on *Grass*. *The Meeting Place* was based around this cycling riff that Colin had written in an odd tuning and he gave it to Andy to play. We put the capo on the Riviera and Andy started playing this riff that's the main hook of the song.

"While we were recording, Todd said he was having a problem with the third string. It was louder than all the other strings and messing up the arpeggio. So he took a small screwdriver and removed the G string polepiece screw from the neck pickup. I did warn him not to lose it, but Todd and his screwdriver sorted the problem out. That's how it sounds on the record, but as soon as it was done I made sure the screw was replaced.

"Then we did the Dukes of Stratosphear album *Psonic Psunspot* with John Leckie. We did another one of Colin's songs called *Shiny Cage*, which was basically a sendup of *I'm Only Sleeping* by The Beatles. It has this lovely backwards guitar solo and he played it on the Riviera. He nailed it and it was so brilliant I thought, 'Wow, I wish I could have done that.'"

Long-Time Love

"We went back to the States to do *Oranges & Lemons*, I took the Riviera and I used it for the solo and all the lead lines. I also used it for the solo on *Pink Thing*, which has become a bit celebrated in recent years because it's difficult to play. I figured if I stood any chance of playing that solo, I'd have to play it on a guitar that would help me. I needed a couple of drop-ins, but I got it recorded and people seem to like it.

"When I was with Big Big Train, they had a little instrumental called *The Gentlemen's Reprise*. I can't remember which album it's on because it's a long time ago [*The Second Brightest Star*, 2017 – Ed], but I do remember it was just a knockout thing we mucked about with for fun. I used the Riviera to duplicate a sort of Steve Howe kind of tone, but it's just a little throwaway instrumental. It wasn't anything significant, really.

"I also gigged it with a 60s revival band group called The Retros. I remember we did an amazing show for the Women's Institute conference. I thought, 'Right, we're going to Liverpool and I don't have an Epiphone Casino, but I do have this Riviera.' It sounded great through a Matchless amp and we left the stage to storming applause.

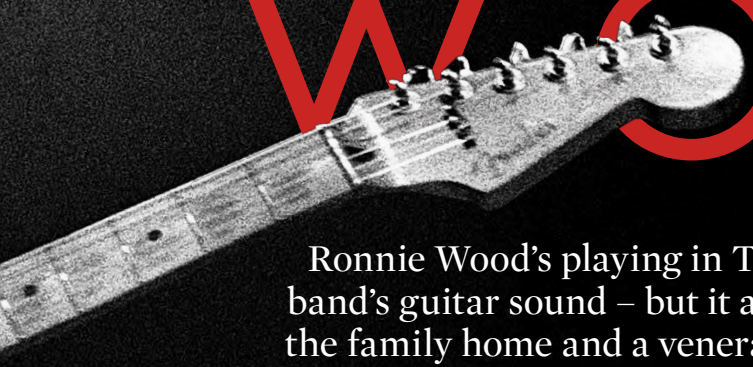
"You know how it is when you fall in love with an instrument and you'll move heaven and earth to get it if necessary. I've never fallen out of love with my Riviera, and it has never crossed my mind to sell it." G

With thanks to Dave Gregory



PHOTO BY RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

TONE WOOD



Ronnie Wood's playing in The Stones was the backbone of the band's guitar sound – but it all began with riotous jazz parties in the family home and a veneration for guitars that never left him, as we find out in his new six-string biography, *Fearless*

Introduction by Jamie Dickson

Ronnie Wood is one of those guitarists who is part of the landscape of British rock 'n' roll. His steady-rolling riffs and rough-diamond charisma have made him a pillar of The Rolling Stones' sound for years, but he's also known for being an artist in the fullest sense of the word, with painting just as much a part of his life as music.

However, Wood has released a new biography that is, among other things, a love letter to the guitar. Entitled *Fearless*, the book documents his rise through the ranks of the 60s blues and R&B scene, including his time as bassist with the Jeff Beck Group, but also lovingly describes and catalogues the guitars that have been most significant in his musical life, with all-new photography of these historic instruments. In the following pages, we share extracts, both literary and photographic, from this remarkable document of one of Britain's best-loved players.

EXTRACT ONE

ALL THAT JAZZ

In this extract, Ronnie remembers formative early years of riotous family shindigs, jazz and that never-forgotten first guitar...

"My parents, and all my family going back to the 1700s, were water gypsies. They lived on longboats and barges. My mum was born on a boat called the Orient, and my dad on the Antelope. I suppose that makes me a nomad. We live out of suitcases – it's what we do.

"There's a rhythm to the nomadic life, to mooring up somewhere new. I have vague memories of being a kid down in the cabin of my dad's boat, drinking condensed milk. By the time my brothers and I came along, though, it was really the end of that legacy. We were the first in the family to be born on dry land.

"Life on the water had been a tight-knit community, but it was also a hard-drinking, hard-smoking world, and I grew up around that atmosphere. My dad was always in the pub, and he'd bring home this incredible mix of people from all walks of life – rag-and-bone men, binmen, characters you'd never normally meet.

"We lived in a council house, number eight Whitehorn Avenue, and it became the party house. The place was so tiny that we couldn't even get the upright piano into the living room, so it ended up wedged by the front door, near the stairs. People would climb over and under it just to get into the room.

"Everyone brought something – a barrel, a keg, whatever they could manage. Soon there'd be 40 people crammed into the back room, rocking along while dad played his harmonica, telling stories and cracking jokes. He was a real music-hall type of man. The fuller the house got, with everyone singing, the more the place seemed to throb with energy. Everyone was a performer. When they played, they always included me, whether it was on comb and paper, kazoo, or washboard.

"When I was still tiny, my parents even gave my brothers the back room for their music. They knocked a hatch through the wall so refreshments could be passed through. They were incredibly broad-minded like that. My eldest brother was Art, and Ted was the middle one. They were 10 and eight years older than me. Both were artists and musicians, and they were always encouraging and proud of little Ronnie. They'd bring home records like *Smokestack Lightning* by Howlin' Wolf, *Hoochie Coochie Man* and *Little Brown Bird* by Muddy Waters, *I'm Walkin* by Fats Domino and *Shame, Shame, Shame* by Jimmy Reed. I loved Jimmy Reed.

"Those were some of the first blues songs I ever heard. God knows where they found those albums, but I was lucky. Their art school friends would put the feelers out and somehow we'd get imports. Later I started digging around myself, discovering Chuck Berry and learning his stuff.

"Ted was the jazz fanatic – a real purist. He played right up until the end of his life with a band called Colin Kingwell's Jazz Bandits. At one time he was also in the Temperance Seven,



Ronnie's collection of 1950s Fender Stratocasters (left to right): 55 or Old Strat, 54, Scratchy, New/Old and Primo

"Apart from the fact Buddy Holly and Jimi Hendrix played them, it was the magical sound of the three pickups that made me fall in love with Strats," Ronnie says. "I use the Strat for the bulk of the songs we play in the set. I have many spares and they're all great. I have what I call my basic buddies – 54, Scratchy, New/Old, and the newer one called Primo. So there are four basic Strats. There's another one, 55, which is nice, but it doesn't have an immediate feel; it's not as friendly. There are very subtle differences between them. Nowadays, Primo is my favourite – just the feel of the guitar makes it different from the others; it's lightweight."

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a wonderfully eccentric group of characters who used to come round to the house.

"Art, on the other hand, was deep into R&B and blues. He had a band called the Artwoods and also played with Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies. Charlie Watts was in Alexis's original band with Art, so those guys were probably some of my earliest influences on the R&B side. I went to see Art play with Cyril Davies' band at the Station Hotel in Harrow a few times.

"Art and Ted kept all their instruments in the back room, and while I was still in short pants I'd sneak in there whenever I could. The music, the art, the theatre, the humour – and the girls – made my brothers' lives look incredibly appealing. I was drawing by the age of four, and I remember clearly that drawing and painting came first, then the guitar. By the time I was seven and playing guitar, I knew I wanted to be a musician.

"Music was what I wanted to do and I wanted a bigger piece of it, so I took it upon myself to learn how to play all the instruments that my brothers' friends brought with them to the parties. There were clarinets, cornets, banjos, guitars, saxophones, trumpets, harmonicas, kazoos, comb and paper, a homemade drum kit with Chinese wood blocks, and the washboard. When there was no-one at home, I'd sneak in and bash away at the drums, try a bit of trombone or banjo, pick up the guitar – whatever I could get my hands on. When they painted, I painted. When they played, I played. The first instrument I ever played on stage was the washboard with Ted's skiffle group.

"It was obvious to everyone how interested I was in music and how desperate I was to learn chords. Two of my brothers' friends noticed and kindly drew a guitar neck on a piece of paper for me, marking the frets and putting dots where my fingers should go. I carried that bit of paper everywhere. The first chord I learned was an open E. Then came A. B7 was always the tricky one. I actually started out on the drums, and I still love them. I joined my first group at secondary modern school. I dropped out of the choir and became the drummer in a jazz combo before eventually forming the Birds. To this day I still keep a drum kit set up in my living room.

"I experimented with brass instruments and tenor and alto sax, but the guitar runs through everything. It's the most practical way for me to express myself – like a paintbrush, or the basic pencil of it all.

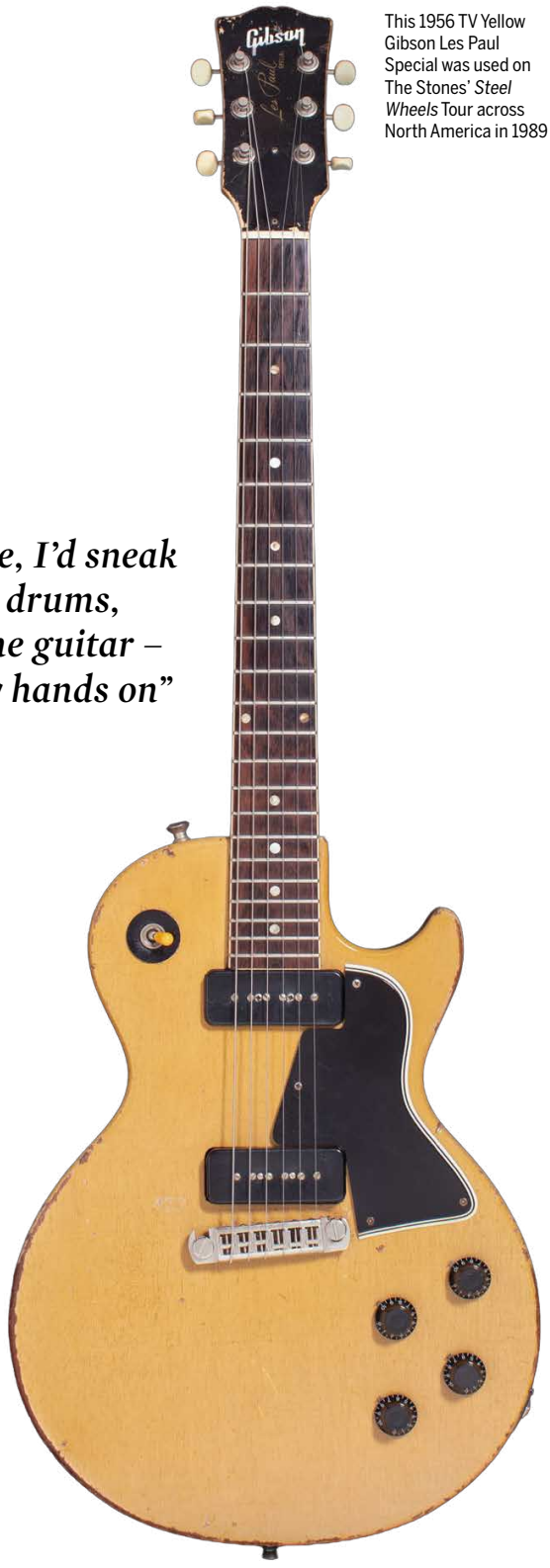
"I'm self-taught. I can read music to a point, but eventually I gave up. I didn't want to know every note I was playing. Knowing too much can take away the spontaneity – the inventiveness.

"When no-one was home, I'd sneak in and bash away at the drums, try trombone, pick up the guitar – whatever I could get my hands on"

"I got my first guitar when I was seven. It was an acoustic that my brothers borrowed from their friend Peter Hayes. Unfortunately, he went into the army and needed it back, so I only had it for a few months. Losing it was heartbreaking.

"After that, my brothers saved up a deposit and got me another guitar on hire purchase. It was an old beat-up acoustic with terrible action – the strings sat high on the neck and it hurt my fingers to play. But I was ready for the blisters and cramps. Nothing was going to stop me getting to know my new spokesman. I'd sit in my bedroom with a tiny little record player and learn solos by ear. I learned a huge amount just from listening – Chuck Berry, Wes Montgomery, Ken Burrell, people like that.

"That was the first guitar I actually owned. Later, once I started earning a bit of money from odd jobs, I went down to Franklin's music store and bought myself a new guitar on what we used to call the 'never-never'. My parents signed for it and I paid Franklin's two and six every week for years. The guitar cost £25, which felt like a fortune at the time. It was a blonde, double-cutaway electric – a Roger Model 54. I even used to put dots on the strings to help me keep track of them, from the thick ones to the thin."



This 1956 TV Yellow Gibson Les Paul Special was used on The Stones' *Steel Wheels* Tour across North America in 1989

This 1956 'TV Yellow' Gibson Les Paul Special was given to Ronnie by guitarist Jesse Ed Davis following his stint in the Faces. It is a favourite of Ronnie's and he played it in the 1980 promotional video for *Emotional Rescue*.

"When I lived in LA, Jesse Ed Davis was a good friend of mine," says Ronnie, "and he asked me if he could come on the road for a Faces tour. So we had Jesse Ed along with the Memphis Horns. Bless his heart. All the great records he made with Taj Mahal in the early days, he played this guitar on. It's very special to me – and it's very adaptable. It has a special sound I can use for many different songs."

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EXTRACT TWO

BENDING THE RULES

In this extract Ronnie recounts how even strings became obsessed-over guitar gear during the rock 'n' roll revolution of the late 60s

"You can customise guitars in little ways to make them your own. You can fiddle with the wiring, the knobs and the tone. You can also get different machineheads for tuning, and if you get the best ones, your guitar doesn't go out of tune so quickly. Grover machineheads were a fad at one point.

"I used to put light-gauge Ernie Ball Super Slinky strings on my guitars. When they first came out, they were only available in a shop on Earlham Street, near Cambridge Circus, so I used to trek up to London especially. It was the only place in England where you could buy these strings, so all the guitarists that bent the notes for the blues went there.

"If Bo Diddley bust a string during a song, he'd take a new one out of his pocket and change it himself. He would chat to the audience until the string was back in tune and he could carry on. He had the front to be able to do that, but if I broke a string on stage, it felt like the end of the world! I had to learn to change strings really quickly."



"I didn't want to know every note I was playing. Knowing too much can take away the spontaneity"

A representation of the main guitars Ronnie was using towards the end of his time with the Faces and at the beginning of his career with The Rolling Stones (left to right): 1955 Fender Stratocaster, 1971 disc-front Zemaitis, and 2005 metal-front Zemaitis, similar to the model he was playing at the time. Behind them is a Vox AC30 amp.

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EXTRACT THREE

WOOD WORK

In this extract, Ronnie has a milestone meeting with guitar maker Tony Zemaitis whose guitars, with their distinctive engraved and inlaid styling, would forever be associated with Ronnie's time in The Stones



One of Tony Zemaitis's signature designs was the metal-front electric guitar, which features an aluminium top that shields the electrics from interference and bears custom engravings by Danny O'Brien

"Ronnie Lane took me to meet Tony Zemaitis when he lived in London. He was a dedicated guitar maker and he really was an artisan when it came to working with wood. He understood the finer points of bending wood and the different tonal qualities that created. The neck was one of his specialities and the accuracy of the octaves across the fretboard. His guitars had 24 frets and they were all tonally correct. Fantastic.

"My [Zemaitis] guitars are really precious, which I found out the hard way when one got nicked... I had to learn to live without it"

"He would make everything by hand, and never make two guitars the same. If you lost one he'd say, 'Well, sorry, that's gone. I can make you one very similar, but I can't make the exact shape and you can't have the exact same carvings on it. But you can have the same pickups, the same machineheads, and 24 frets.'

"My guitars are really precious, which I found out the hard way when my first one got nicked in Holland. I had to learn to live without it and rent another one. Later, three or four of my Zemaitis guitars got nicked. Tony Zemaitis made me more, but they were never the same. No-one should dare steal Tony Zemaitis guitars because he made them so individual. He plastered your name all over them." G

Ronnie Wood's biographical opus, *Fearless*, is available now from Genesis Publications www.genesis-publications.com

COURTESY OF ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME

"Danelectros were the cheapest guitars you could buy back in the 60s and 70s," says Ronnie. "They used to cost about 50 quid, but they were good. This modern one has got a whammy bar. This was my *Brown Sugar* guitar."



2016 Danelectro 64 in Metallic Orange, which was modelled on a classic design by Californian maker Mosrite

This guitar was commissioned by Ronnie for The Rolling Stones' 1978 US tour. It features illustrations referencing Wood and The Stones, such as a horse and carriage with 'R.W on Tour' written on it, departing 'Fort Woody' in an area named 'Stones Hill'. Ronnie can be seen playing this Zemaitis on songs such as *Miss You* and *Shattered* in the concert film *Some Girls: Live In Texas '78*.

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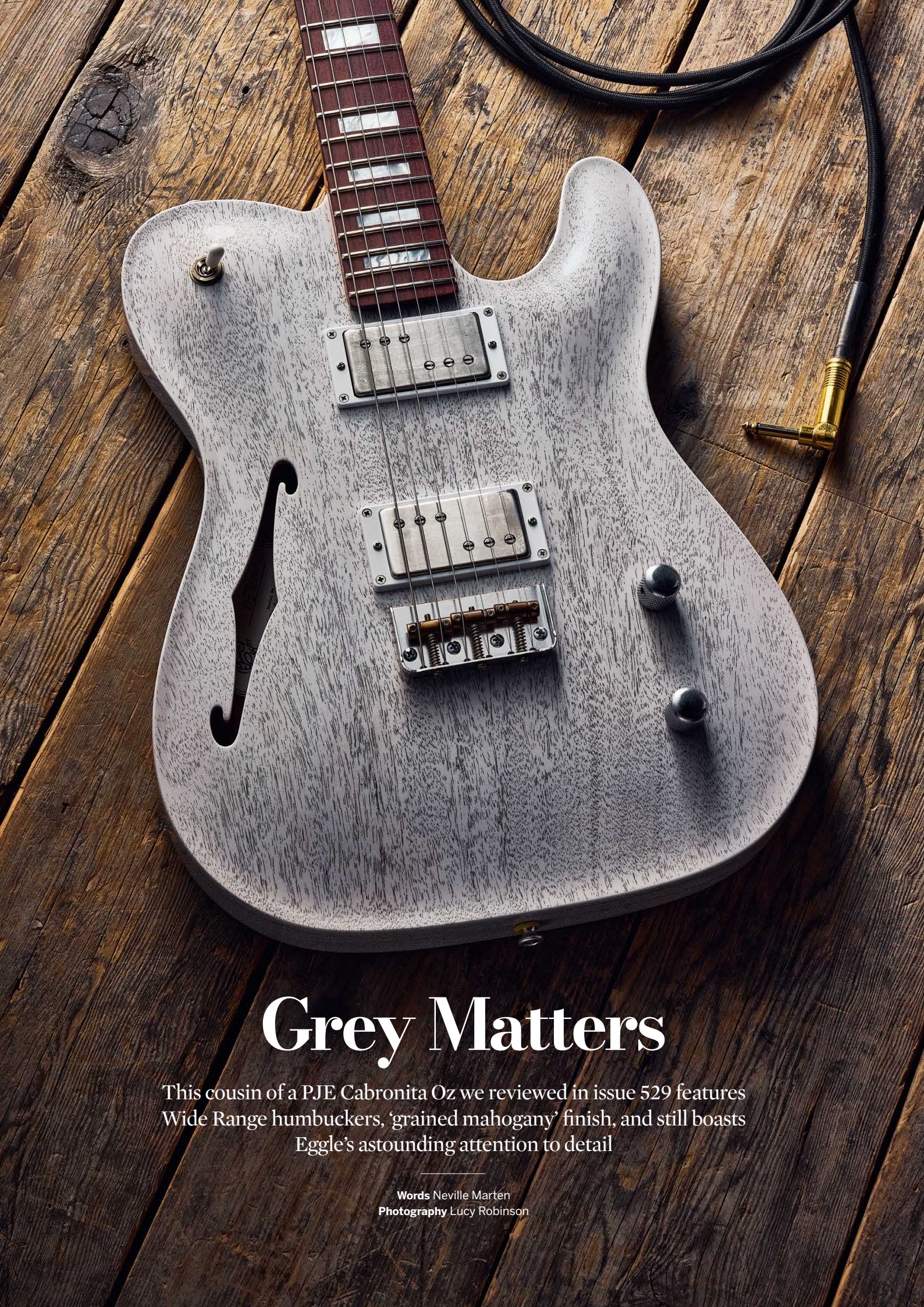


Grey Matters

This cousin of a PJE Cabronita Oz we reviewed in issue 529 features Wide Range humbuckers, 'grained mahogany' finish, and still boasts Eggle's astounding attention to detail

Words Neville Marten
Photography Lucy Robinson



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE
OZ CARVED TOP £4,920

CONTACT **Patrick James Eggle** PHONE **01691 661777** WEB **www.eggle.co.uk**

What You Need To Know

1 Wide Range CuNiFe pickups: what exactly are they?
Designed by ex-Gibson employee Seth Lover for Fender's early 70s Custom, Thinline and Deluxe Telecasters, the Wide Range's CuNiFe (Copper-Nickel-Iron) polepieces helped to create the brighter, 'non-Gibson' sound Fender wanted.

2 The Oz's neck is AAA grade maple. Is the rating an industry standard?
No. The rating system is informal but generally agreed on. It runs from AA (standard) up to 5A, 7A and Master Grade, noting factors such as area of 'board covered, clarity, contrast between background and flame/quilt/figure, lack of blemishes and so on.

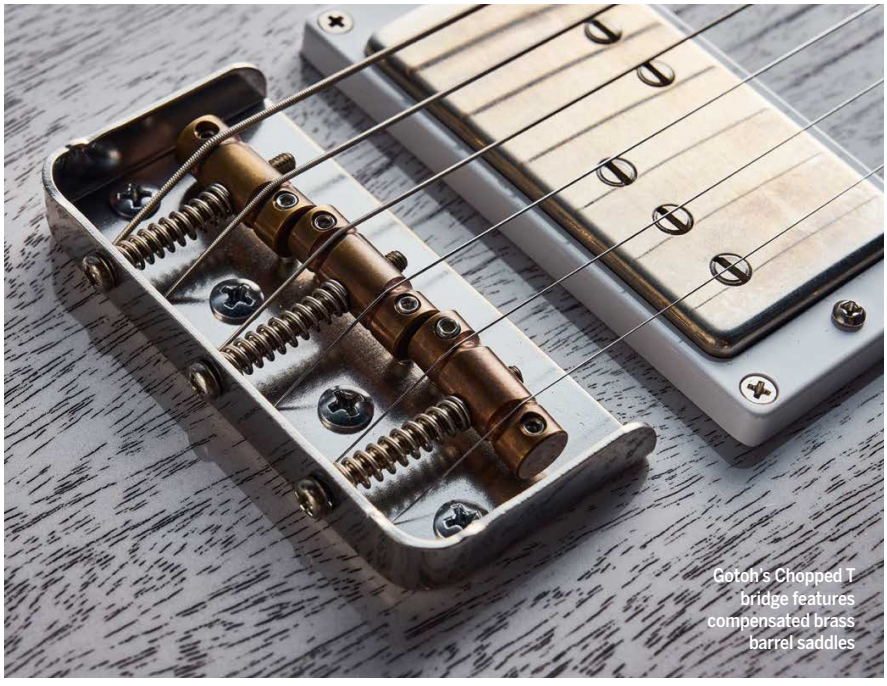
3 What separates a semi-hollow body from a solid one, tone-wise?
There's no definitive answer, but the general consensus is that hollow and semi-hollow guitars offer an 'airiness' of tone that solidbodies don't, with perhaps greater clarity and dynamic response – it's no doubt why Gibson makes both Les Pauls and ES-335s.

The previous guitar from Patrick James Eggle that passed through *Guitarist*'s portals was indeed a stunning single-pickup Cabronita-style Oz model. And while that was in traditional tobacco sunburst on swamp ash with a single humbucker at the bridge, today's instrument – which obviously shares the same basic DNA – has a different personality altogether. And if you've ever wondered where the name 'Oz' comes from, it's simple, as Mr Eggle himself reveals: "The name Oz refers to Oswestry, the home of Patrick James Eggle guitars."

Our particular Oz sports a pair of Mojo's twin Wide Range pickups on a carved mahogany body with just one f-hole. Its milky grey 'grained mahogany' finish provides a more contemporary look and takes us somewhere else entirely. Look closely and the wood's 'strawberry pip' grain is clearly visible through the thin nitrocellulose finish. This monochrome look is rather smart, and it's always great to see something less run-of-the-mill.

"We try to keep things tasteful but away from the norm, where possible," explains Patrick. "And this one's not too outlandish. We took it to a few shows and a lot of people were commenting on the finish."

But even with this unique look and twin humbucking pickups, in sheer hardware and electronics terms it's still a pretty straightforward guitar.



Gotoh's Chopped T bridge features compensated brass barrel saddles



1. This Grained Mahogany finish is like the grey version of the yellow 'limed' treatment given to certain Gibson LP Juniors and Specials

As usual with Eggle instruments, pulling it from its super-quality branded gigbag and looking it over from the end-pin to the tip of its roasted maple headstock reveals a flawless build. The neck joint is perfectly hewn and paired, and each cavity cover rout exquisitely done. Not to mention the sheer pleasure of holding in your hands something that's clearly a cut above.

Patrick tends to use AAA figured maple on most of his necks, and the roasted birdseye construction you see here is no exception. The roasting, or torrefaction, lends a deliciously nutty hue to the wood, as well as greater stability. And while it doesn't look 'vintage' per se, it does remove the often anaemic glare that pure naked maple can exude. Our Oz's 'board is dark, reddish rosewood and boasts the only outwardly 'flash' element here: large pearl block position markers. If you think simpler dots might work better, these can of course be specified. As it is, we rather like it this way.

Speaking of that fingerboard and the 22 Jescar jumbo frets that adorn its 648mm (25.5-inch) extent, we can honestly say we've never seen it done better. The rolled edges and elegantly dressed and rounded fret ends are a thing for any guitar lover to behold and enjoy. This is what a true custom maker has the time and indeed the expertise to do, and you'd be hard pressed to find anywhere near this level of care on a production line instrument.

Creating a semi-solid guitar body can be done in a number of ways, but Eggle prefers

2. We don't recall a finer fret laying, crowning and finishing job than the one on this PJE guitar

3. This simple toggle switch wields an awful lot of sonic power!

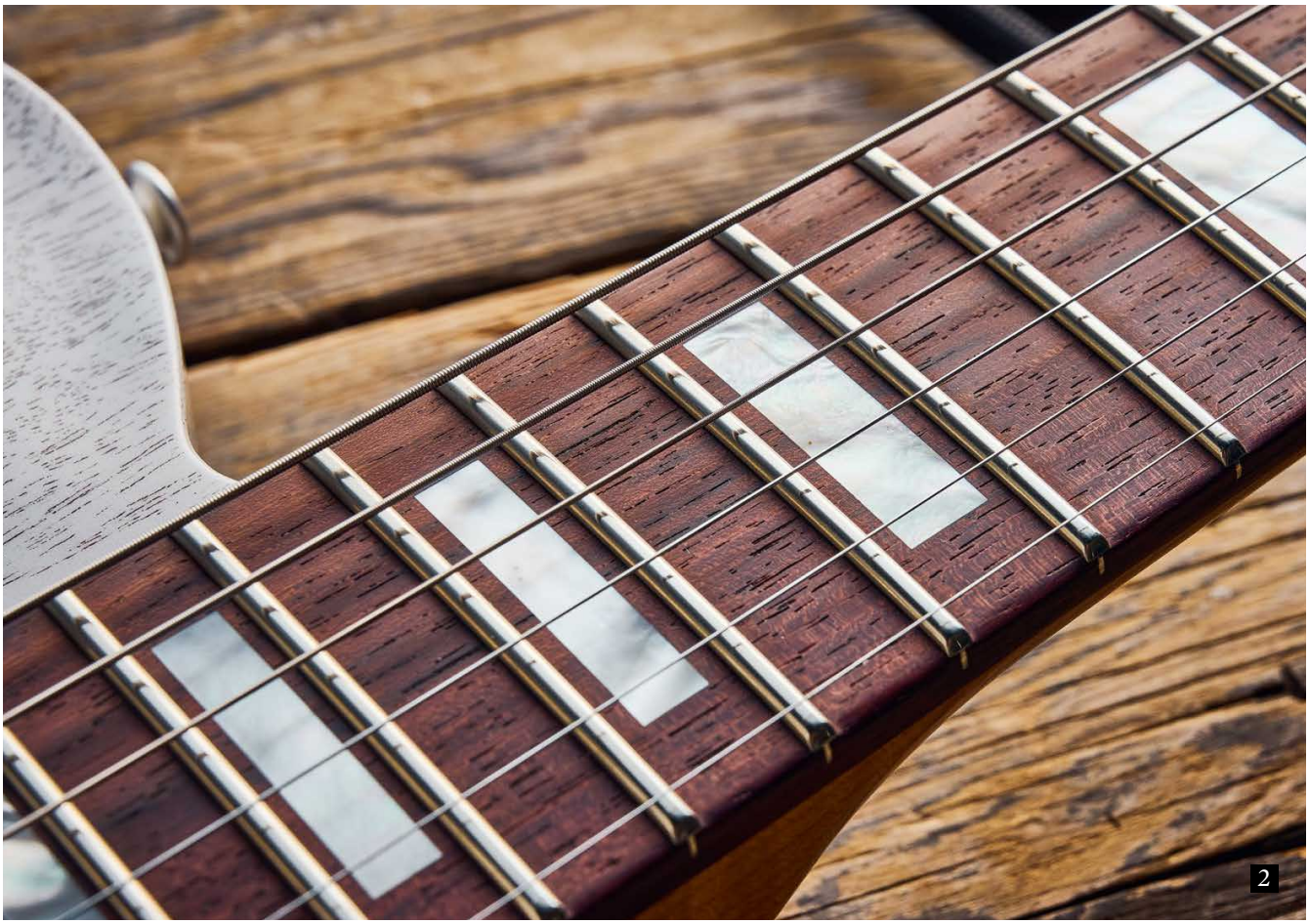
THE RIVALS

Suhr's Alt T in three-tone sunburst (£2,999) is a boutique-quality guitar that looks and plays superbly. With a thinline swamp ash body and 60s profile compound radius maple neck, Suhr SSV humbuckers and locking tuners, it's a fine instrument indeed.

For £500 or so less you could pick up Fender's own American Vintage II 1972 Telecaster Thinline (from £2,439) with a semi-hollow f-hole body, maple neck and maple fingerboard with vintage radius and 21 vintage tall frets, bone nut and twin Fender Wide Range CuNiFe pickups. A cracking guitar.

Much more affordable and the leftfield choice here is PRS's SE NF 53 MN in Black Doghair (£777). With a solid swamp ash body, maple neck with maple fingerboard, brilliant vibrato and a trio of PRS Narrowfield DD 'S' pickups, it punches miles above its weight.

The 'board's rolled edges and elegantly dressed and rounded fret ends are a thing for any guitar lover to behold and enjoy



to carve out the mahogany blank's innards before glueing the top on afterwards. This allows Patrick to leave the solid centre section intact. In theory, of course, this means the top could be maple, koa or any other timber that will suit the base timber or perhaps a later colour choice.

"Actually, both back and top are routed from the inside before glue-up," Patrick clarifies. "The top is carved from the inside to leave a thickness of approximately 5mm, and the back is chambered and carved in the area of the belly cut to match the outside. And yes, the centre section is solid."

Hardware-wise, we find a Gotoh Chopped T bridge with three compensated brass barrel saddles, vintage-style but rear-locking Gotoh tuners, cream control and toggle switch covers, plus a recessed neckplate whose outline follows the contour of the beautifully sculpted body heel.

For the electrics we're treated to a setup of twin Mojo Wide range 'CuNiFe' pickups (a style originally designed by Seth Lover of Gibson humbucker fame, and here with outputs of 7.3k for the neck and 10.0k powering the bridge). Single volume and tone controls with a coil-tap on the tone pot, plus a shoulder-mounted three-way pickup selector switch, complete the operational picture.





4. Note the dark, reddish brown rosewood fingerboard, and the CuNiFe pickups with their opposing, staggered polepieces

5. The Oz's electrics setup is simple, but the tone pot pulls up to provide some single-coil twang

6. Check out the roasted maple neck with its pleasing birdseye grain; there's a little flaming here and there, too

7. The heel is beautifully curved away to provide a touch more top-end fretboard access

Feel & Sounds

The psychology of neck shapes is interesting. While our Oz's nut is a traditional 43mm, its profile is a shallow C. This gives the impression of being wider than it actually is. But whatever its dimensions, the Oz's neck is a dream to play. It feels smooth and refined, with the most perfect action we've played in a while. The fat frets, which are smooth as silk under string bends, supply all those facilities we regularly speak of, like easy bending and strong, fluent vibrato. All this no doubt aided by the fingerboard's 254mm to 406.4mm (10- to 16-inch) radius. It's clear just how much Eggle has laboured over the crowning, levelling and polishing, and we'd dare anyone to say it's not one of the finest necks they've played.

The guitar is light in weight, too – at 3.1kg, just under 7lb – and with its generous belly cut is great to play standing up.

Plugging into our Tone King Imperial valve pedal amp, with added Fulltone



The build quality is supreme, playability hard to match, and the set of sounds on offer will satisfy even the meanest of ears

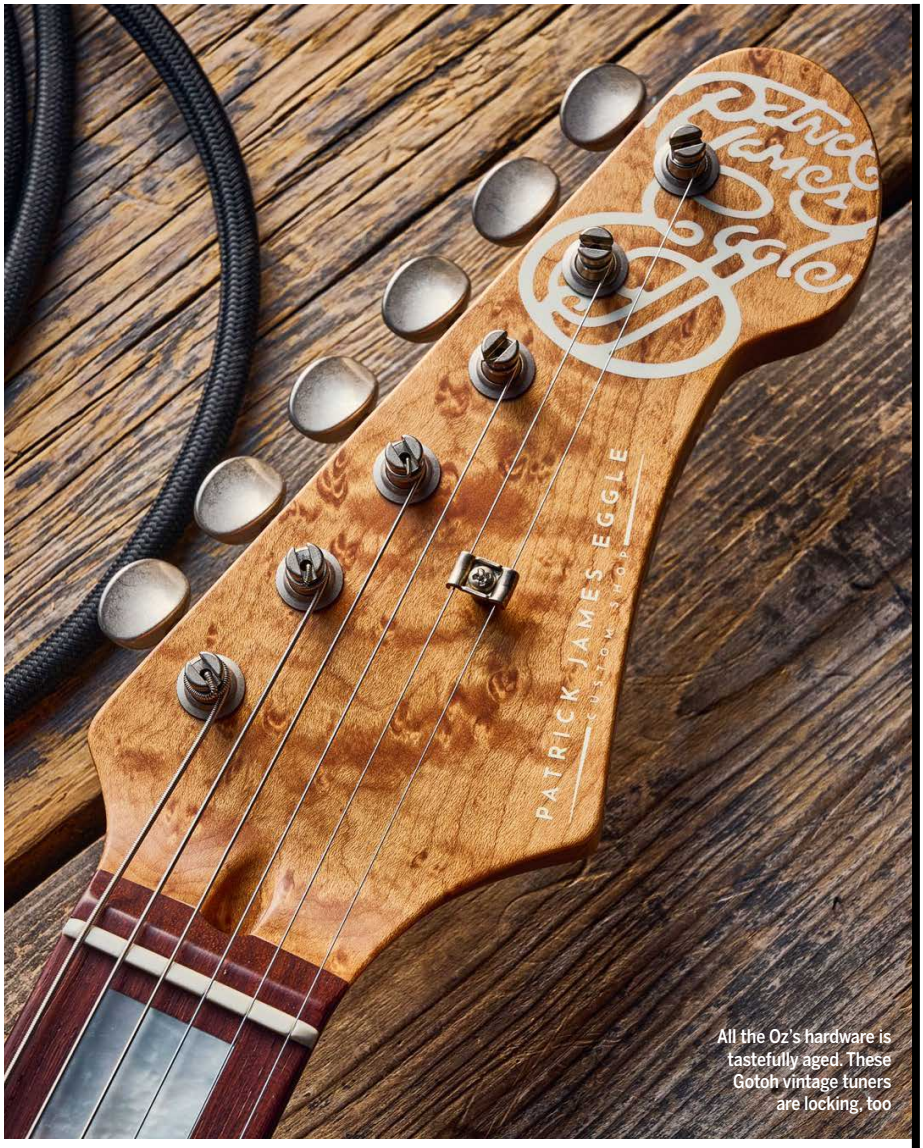




OCD overdrive and Strymon Brig delay, we're expecting good things. Wide Range humbuckers (CuNiFe magnets comprise copper, nickel and ferrous elements) tend to sound brighter than their Gibson-style counterparts. And the Oz's semi-solid construction is sure to add to that clarity and articulation.

Sure enough, with everything set clean but with a dribble of delay, the openness and dynamics are palpable, the guitar responding to every playing nuance. The neck humbucker is bright, clear and yet somehow mellow, while the beefier bridge is sharper, more strident and forceful. Pull the tone switch and one coil is switched off to create a genuine single-coil experience (see accompanying interview that follows this review). Due to the guitar's construction, the Oz's personality remains intact, just a tad more spanky and crisp – more Strat or Tele than ES-335 perhaps. The middle setting supplies that lovely scoop in the tone we love on ES-335s and Telecasters, so in fact why not think of the guitar's middle tones as not a million miles away from these illustrious forebears?

Our Fulltone OCD pedal is set for a medium drive, which suits the Oz's every pickup and switch selection. Clear, clean tones are usually a better platform for



All the Oz's hardware is tastefully aged. These Gotoh vintage tuners are locking, too

driven ones, since adding mush to mush is never a great sonic recipe. Hence the drive tones simply propel our already musical tones to fantastic levels of single-string expression.

In the final analysis this relatively simple guitar will cover any base, from classic blues and rock to country, fusion and even modern jazz. It's also supremely easy and intuitive to use, and that's a boon to any musical instrument's desirability.

Verdict

Guitarist has reviewed a number of Patrick James Eggle's guitars over the years and every one has received huge praise. The thought and care that goes into the design, build, fit and finish is extraordinary. And the team doesn't do this just because a magazine is reviewing one; every customer's guitar receives the exact same level of care.

As for this particular instrument, it's a perfectly honed example of PJE's craft. You really can't fault anything. From its

This relatively simple guitar will cover any base… It's also supremely easy and intuitive to use

conception to the final execution, everything is unimpeachable. The build quality is supreme, playability hard to match, and the set of sounds on offer will satisfy even the meanest of ears. Yes, the price looks pretty painful, but this kind of quality really can't be acquired on the cheap.

Above everything, the Oz Carved Top is a finely honed musical instrument that deserves an airing at every opportunity. In the words of our late colleague Dave Burrluck who pored over that previous Oz: "It's no posh case queen; it would be criminal if this guitar didn't hit a stage." We can say no more, other than it's another clean sweep for PJE! G



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE OZ CARVED TOP

PRICE: £4,920, with posh grey padded gigbag
ORIGIN: Oswestry, UK
TYPE: Single-cut, T-style thinline electric semi
BODY: Semi-solid mahogany, carved top with f-hole
NECK: 1-piece roasted, AAA birdseye maple, shallow C profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 254-406.4mm (10-16") with pearl block inlays
FRETS: 22 Jescar 57110, jumbo
HARDWARE: Chopped-T bridge, rim mounted jack socket; aluminium strap buttons; knurled nickel knobs, lightly aged
TUNERS: Gotoh SD-91 vintage, rear locking
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Mojo Wide Range CuNiFe humbuckers, volume, tone with coil-tap, 3-way selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.1/.6.8
OPTIONS: A broad range of pickup, timber and hardware is available
RANGE OPTIONS: Oz (from £3,000), PJE's take on the classic model; Oz Cabronita (£3,200), thinline swamp ash, single pickup; Oz Drop Top (from £,3700), with figured maple cap 'dropped' over the forearm chamfer and twin humbuckers
LEFT-HANDERS: On request
FINISH: High-gloss Grained Mahogany (as reviewed), Faded Gold Burst, Island Blue Burst, Denim Burst, Tea Burst, Tobacco Burst, Gold Top, plus many others available

Guitarist GOLD **10/10**

PROS A guitar that excels on every level: be it build quality, fit and finish, playability or sound, the Oz Carved Top will deliver in almost any musical situation

CONS We debated whether the hefty price should drop the Oz a point, but then builders like PJE price their instruments in order to cover costs and make a fair living – so the rating stays

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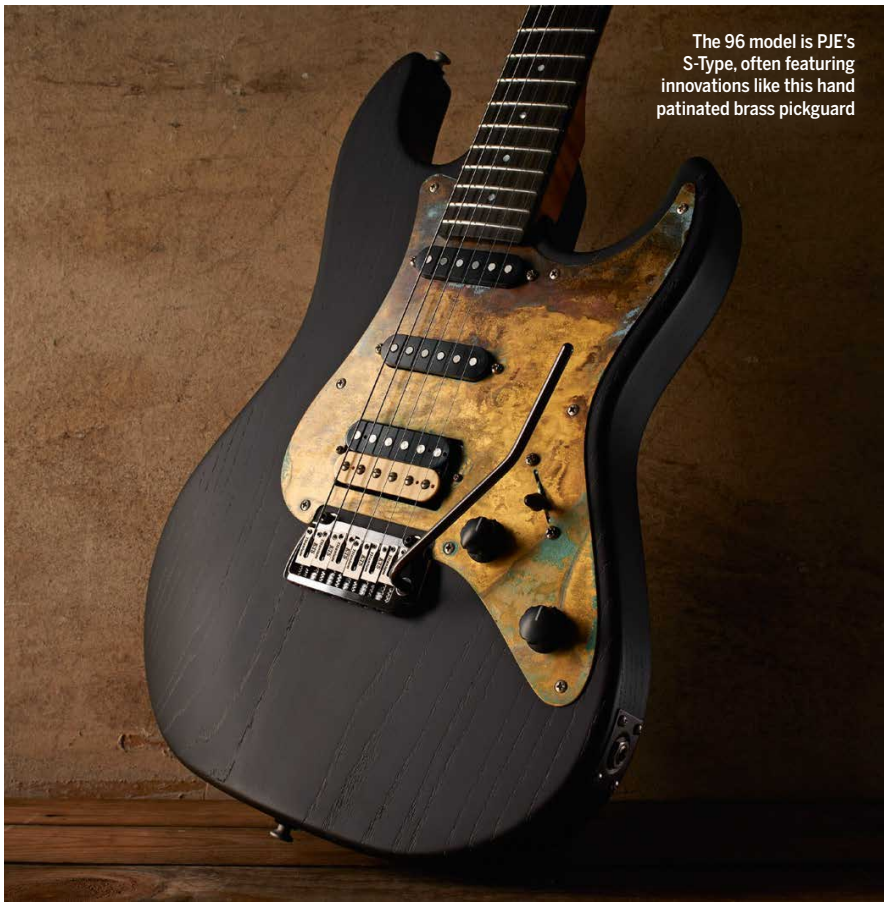
Eggle Eyes

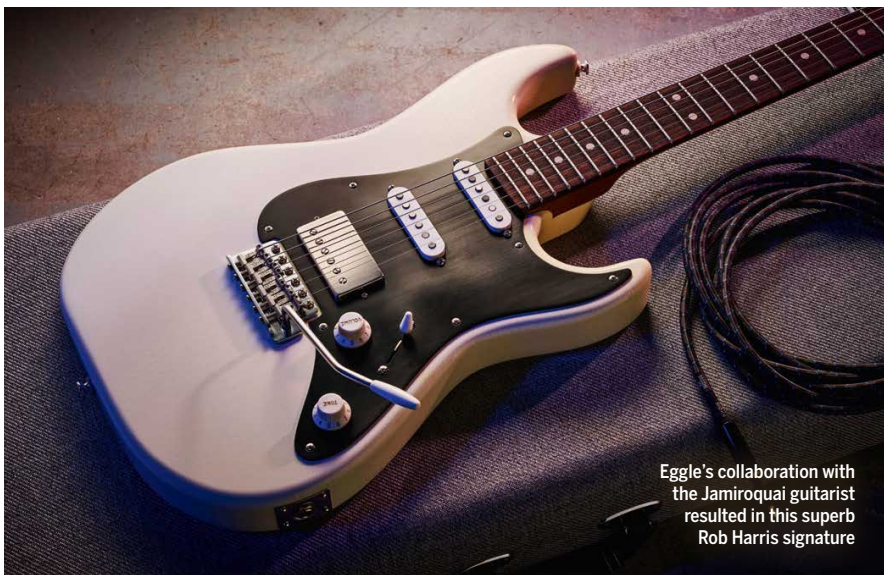
One of the finest luthiers out there, Patrick James Eggle takes a moment to share his thoughts on craft, timbers and world-class tone

Words Neville Marten



The 96 model is PJE's S-Type, often featuring innovations like this hand patinated brass pickguard

PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN



Eggle's collaboration with the Jamiroquai guitarist resulted in this superb Rob Harris signature

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Whenever we receive a guitar from Patrick James Eggle we always endeavour to grab a few words with the man himself, both regarding our review model and guitar building in general. As usual, his replies are clear, succinct and intensely knowledgeable.

In our last interview you told us you wanted to get away from the more outlandish-looking instruments that some of your customers specify. And yet our Oz is hardly a shrinking violet.
"I don't think it's too out there. It's not breaking new ground, but this kind of finish is maybe not so usually seen on this style of guitar."

"Highly figured maple looks amazing, but regular maple can also be very desirable and have its own aesthetic appeal"

Your 96 model has obvious derivations, as do so many instruments from other manufacturers. But your body shape is a sleeker, modernised version of the original. Do you have plans to do something similar with the Oz models?
"Yes, but it's not high on the list. We're happy to keep things as they are for now."

The last Oz we looked at was made from semi-hollow swamp ash, whereas this one is mahogany. What differences, if any, would you say each timber exhibits, either from a building or tone perspective? For instance, is one more tricky to work than the other, or is one brighter or darker toned?
"I like both. Ash has more contrasting grain, which can be used to achieve some interesting effects, such as our 'torched' finishes. It's also brighter sounding, with more clarity. Mahogany has a regular and porous grain, and the tone is warmer and more 'mids' focused."



This beautiful swamp ash Oz Thinline was the last Eggle review from Dave Burrluck. Dave awarded it his coveted 10/10 score

PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

What does the semi-solid thinline body do to a guitar's tone?
"It scoops out the mids and, of course, it's acoustically louder."

You've mentioned a scrabble by guitar builders for the best woods. Do you feel that lovers of 'posh' guitars prize the look of these woods over the instrument itself? And if so, would you ever risk losing figured maple necks and outlandish timber bodies?
"I'm sure there will always be a demand for beautiful timber. We always have highly figured maple on the shelf, but if many guitar makers are building similar guitars, based on classic designs and comparable in quality, then it turns into a contest for the best-looking top. Highly figured maple looks amazing, but regular maple can also be very desirable and have its own aesthetic appeal."

Your guitars often feature coil-splits but are usually pretty straightforward from a features standpoint. Are you a fan of simpler pickups and switching?
"Yes! Maximum range with minimum switching is always the goal."

Our review Oz features a push-pull pot. Is this a coil-tap or a coil-split? And what's the difference?
"A coil-split turns off one coil. A coil-tap is just reducing output but maintaining pickup characteristics. Ours use a coil-split, with a small amount of the second coil allowed to bleed through, to keep the resistance closer to that of a true single coil (around 1.2k's worth: paper-in-oil tone cap at .022µF and a treble bleed of 150k res + .001µF cap)."

Is the use of CuNiFe Wide Range pickups part of this reasoning process?
"Yes. We opted to use Wide Range pickups as we find they retain more clarity and sparkle when split but are also generally more clear, articulate and a little brighter due to the independent CuNiFe magnets. We find it's more fitting for this style of guitar as it helps retain some of the original single-coil characteristics, even with humbuckers. We also use custom taper high-tolerance pots, with a low rotational torque and made to our own specs by Alpha."

Your guitars are finished in traditional nitrocellulose. There must be modern alternatives available now that do just as good a job and are less tricky to use?
"Yes, we use pure nitro. No poly basecoats – only nitro. I find it less troublesome, maybe because I've been working with it for over 40 years. We still try alternatives from time to time but always come back to nitro. It's very thin, looks right and ages beautifully."

What about using timbers that are outside the regular palette traditionally used by guitar builders?
"We are always looking at alternative tone woods and have used less traditional timbers in the past. For instance, I think we were one of the first, if not the first, to use bog oak on a regular basis."

You've previously mentioned that a wholly original Patrick James Eggle design might be on the cards soon. How is this progressing?
"Very well. We should have something ready to show you in a few weeks!" G
www.eggle.co.uk



Play Dirty

A collaboration with Warm Audio lets you get those Dirty Boy pedal sounds at a more accessible price point

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Lucy Robinson



WARM AUDIO DIRTY BOY JR OVERDRIVE PREAMP, BOOSTER & FUZZ £169 EACH

CONTACT **Warm Audio** WEB **www.dirtyboy.co**

What You Need To Know

1 Doesn't Warm Audio make affordable recreations of classic gear?
Yes, that's right – among others, the WA-C1 is the brand's take on the Boss CE-1, while the Foxy Tone Box pays tribute to the Foxx Tone Machine.

2 So why have these got Dirty Boy logos on them?
Dirty Boy wanted to get the sounds of its (admittedly expensive and hand-built) pedals to a wider audience and chose Warm Audio as a partner to build them for sale at a lower price point.

3 Are these based on the original Dirty Boy pedals?
Correct: the Jr Overdrive Preamp is based on the Preamp, the Jr Booster on the Ball Buster, and the Jr Fuzz on the Afro Fuzz.

The boutique Dirty Boy brand was founded by Alex Saraceno, father of the Kingdom Come and Poison guitarist Blues Saraceno. In 2024, on Alex's retirement, the brand was acquired by musician and product designer Danny Gomez, who may be best known for his proprietary TAE (Tube Amp Emulation) technology. The first product under the new regime was the Dirty Boy Preamp (based on an amplifier designed by Alex Saraceno) and reviewed in issue 517. Now, a new version of that pedal has been developed, along with a couple of others that recreate Dirty Boy originals. The difference here is that these 'Junior' pedals cost a lot less than the hand-built boutique versions – they're about half the price.

Danny Gomez wanted to make the Dirty Boy sound available to a wider range of players and so has teamed up with Warm Audio, who's taking on the actual pedal builds. Despite their more affordable price point, the Juniors are said to be built around authentic circuits to preserve the tone and feel of the hand-built originals.



The Pre Output on the Overdrive pedal outputs the raw analogue preamp signal without speaker emulation for connection to a power amp, amplifier effects return, recording interface or additional pedals

Danny Gomez told us: "We're still building our boutique pedals by hand, and those aren't going anywhere, but the Jr Series allowed us to faithfully recreate these Dirty Boy circuits in a format that more players can experience. The goal was to preserve the tone, response and personality of the hand-built originals, and Warm Audio is the partner we trust to help us do that without compromise."

> The 'Juniors' are built around authentic circuits to preserve the feel of the hand-built originals

The all-analogue pedals follow the established Dirty Boy look of a plain metal box with stickers for the legending and graphics. But where you apply the stickers yourself with the boutique series, these have them printed on, which is a lot more practical in our view. They all feel really robust, feature true bypass switching, and can be powered by any standard nine-volt supply.

Jr Overdrive

Based on the Dirty Boy Preamp, the Jr Overdrive offers much more than any standard overdrive pedal – it's actually a fully analogue amplifier simulator in pedal form, with various options for how it is used, largely due to the fact that it features two outputs. One is a standard pedal output for use with your amp, but the other features speaker emulation based on a 4x12 Celestion Greenback cabinet so can be used straight into a mixing desk or PA for live use, or to send a signal to a DAW for recording.







1. The Fuzz pedal's six-position (Freq) frequency selector changes the overall voicing and frequency response of the fuzz circuit, ranging from thick, low-end-heavy tones when fully to the left, to sharper, more cutting textures as you click it clockwise

2. Moving the Overdrive Preamp's Variac knob clockwise simulates reduced voltage to the circuit, introducing sag, compression and voltage-starved fuzz characteristics for a more vintage, spongy response

Making good use of the TAE technology, the basic sound is dialled in via a trio of Gain, Volume and Tone knobs, offering some familiar rock tones ranging from just beyond clean through to vintage cranked Brit-amp raunch. The Tone knob can set the presence just right before applying the secret sauce courtesy of a Variac knob, which adjusts voltage levels downwards for characterful variations, from dialling in a bit of sag, finding an edgier crunch, or sputtery gated sounds when really rolled back.

Jr Booster

This new release features the original Dirty Boy Ball Buster circuit, which was conceived to drive the front-end of vintage single-channel amps – the sort of scenario that vintage treble boosters such as the Rangemaster were designed for. It offers an initial jump in gain when engaged, winding things higher as you advance the Drive knob, with more than enough on tap for most boosting scenarios; at its upper reaches it engenders a fuzz-like quality to the drive. A three-position Freq switch shapes low-end response with Low, Mid and High settings, letting you keep a full low-end or roll it off to reduce muddiness for a tighter sound. That sound is further shaped by a Bass knob working on girth and punch, and a Treble knob that (past its mid position) can really get things screaming. While it'll work with a clean amp, we liked it best with an amp that was already cranked – it worked perfectly into our late-60s Marshall JMP50, bringing out a singing quality with emphasised harmonics.

Jr Fuzz

The final pedal in this mini series is the Jr Fuzz, which is based on the Dirty Boy Afro Fuzz circuit. Besides the standard Fuzz and Level knobs, it features a six-position Frequency selector to reshape the circuit's overall voice over a really practical range. You'll find a big, fat and warm voice in position 1, but reducing bass and lower mids as you run through the positions ultimately offers something much leaner, sounding like it could cut a scythe through the mix.

3. The Booster's Freq low-end voicing switch selects between three low-frequency response profiles: High tightens the low-end for focus and articulation, Medium provides a balanced full-range response, and Low increases bass response for thicker, heavier tones

4. In addition to the standard 'Pre' output for the raw overdrive/preamp sound, this 'Emu Out' outputs the speaker-emulated signal that is voiced after a closed-back 4x12 'Greenback' cabinet and offers a direct connection to mixers, audio interfaces, PAs or a recording system

Some may prefer a rotary knob, but we liked the consistency of the six-way switch in letting you select a favourite sound

THE RIVALS

If the Dirty Boy aesthetic appeals to you and you have a bit more money to spend, the original pedals are still available: Preamp, Ball Buster and Afro Fuzz (£349 each). For an overdrive/preamp with a speaker emulated output we can look at Orange – its Guitar Butler (£249) is a dual-channel guitar preamp that's comprehensively equipped, while the Getaway Driver (£129) is a less expensive option. For a booster pedal with EQ, the Electro-Harmonix LPB3 (£119) is a practical buy. And for an evolved Fuzz Face that goes beyond the two-knob paradigm there's the SolidGoldFX If 6 Was 9 MKII (£199).



This is a two-transistor fuzz that's loosely based on the Fuzz Face, something that's reflected in both the sound and feel of the pedal. While there's crunchy drive to be had lower settings of the Fuzz knob, it may be at its best full-on, where clean-up adjustment with guitar volume is a tried-and-trusted way to go. While some may prefer a rotary tone knob, we liked the consistency offered by the six-way switch in letting you select a favourite sound and stick to it.

Verdict

Dirty Boy isn't exactly a household name, but it's certainly a respected one with pedals that are used by John Frusciante, Neal Schon, Tom DeLonge and Phil X, among others. And now, with the Junior series, it may reach a wider audience. Of the three pedals, the Overdrive Preamp is a multi-use asset that can deliver an impressive driven valve amp sound, either as a drive and boost into your amp's front-end, or to give it a different voice when plugged into the effects return to drive its power section. It's also an easily portable backup to an amp, and an instant recording tool with that speaker emulated output. The Booster is also a practical adjunct to an amp, preferably one that's already cooking and ripe to be taken to the next level. The Fuzz, arguably, isn't really bringing anything sonically new to the table, but it does have great character and those selectable frequencies give it a practicality that steals a march over similarly derived two-knob fuzzes. G



WARM AUDIO DIRTY BOY JR OVERDRIVE PREAMP

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Volume. Variac, Tone
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard Pre output, standard speaker-emulated output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 51 (w) x 122 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; robust build; more accessible revival of a boutique pedal; amp-like sound; speaker emulated output; useful tonal variations via the Variac knob

CONS Nothing of note



WARM AUDIO DIRTY BOY JR BOOSTER

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Boost pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Drive, Frequency selector, Bass, Treble
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 51 (w) x 122 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; robust build; more accessible revival of a boutique pedal; large amount of gain on tap; practical EQ options

CONS Bass knob effect can be quite subtle



WARM AUDIO DIRTY BOY JR FUZZ

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Fuzz, Level, Frequency selector
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 51 (w) x 122 (d) x 65 mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; robust build; more accessible revival of a boutique pedal; six-position frequency selector

CONS Markings around the Freq knob to indicate the six positions would have been good



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RICKY WARWICK

From New Model Army and The Almighty to Thin Lizzy and Black Star Riders, this is Ricky Warwick's story in guitars



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICKY WARWICK

Ricky's first guitar was a Japanese-made 1980 Westbury guitar. In recent years another of its ilk was gifted to him by a venue owner in Blackpool

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

"The first guitar I ever got was a Westbury, made in Japan. It was quite expensive, costing £160 back in 1980, which was a lot of money in those days. I saved up doing odd jobs for people. A few years ago I played The Waterloo in Blackpool, run by a guy called Ian Fletcher. He said he had a present for me – a Westbury he found and bought for me on eBay. I used it that night. It was emotional, a full circle moment. And you know what? It sounds fucking great. I'll definitely be using it in the future."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

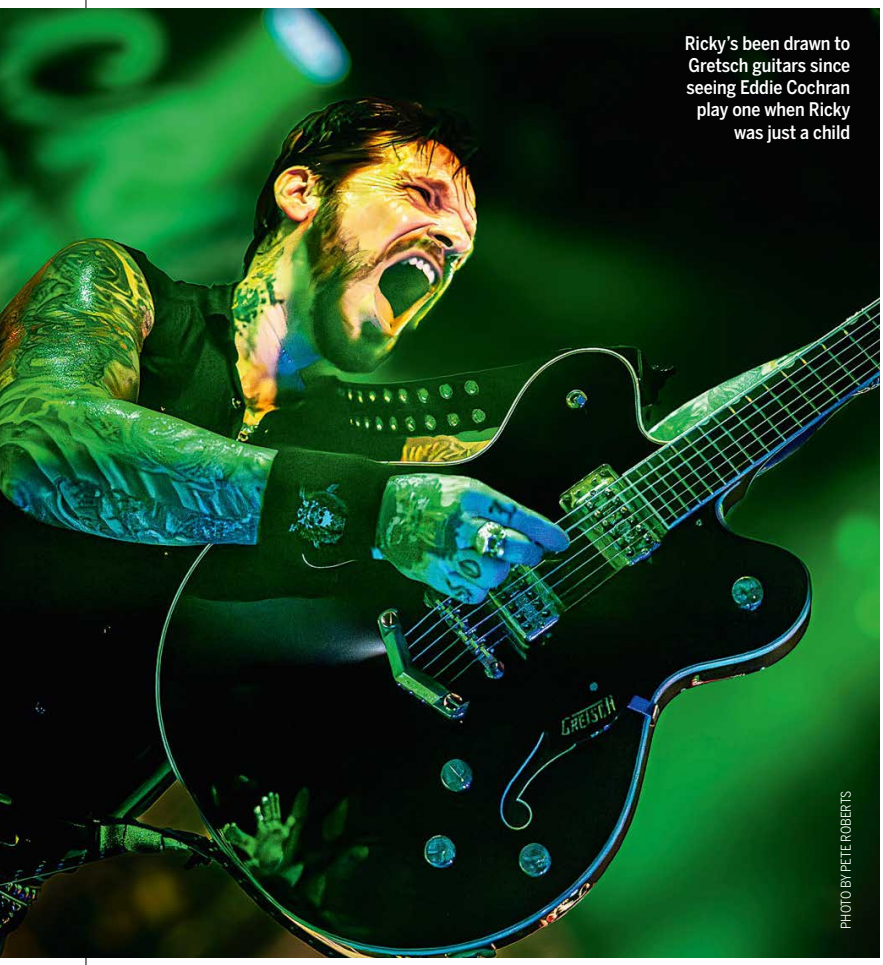
"The Les Paul Classic that's in my current live rig. I got it from Guitar Center in Nashville about four years ago. I wanted a backup for the Custom, but I didn't want another Custom. I felt it would be hard to find one as good without spending an incredible amount of money. My next guitar is on the way, though. My manager [Adam Parsons] got me another Les Paul Classic for my birthday, with a custom paint job of my skull logo. It's still being finished but will be with me soon."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying guitars?

"I remember being on tour with The Almighty in 1983. We found this pawn shop in Lincoln, Nebraska, and there was this black Gibson SG on the wall. It was in really good condition and on sale for $175. I couldn't believe it, so obviously I bought it right there and then. There were no cracks or breaks, so I'm guessing the guy at the store had no idea of its actual value. I ended up giving the guitar away to a friend. Maybe that's a good reason why I don't drink any more [laughs]!"

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?

"I've been lucky, but there was one Gibson that I ended up returning. Other than that, I haven't really bought any turkeys or duds. I try not to have too many guitars. I've been selling a few recently because I don't play them. I see them sitting there and feel like it's a bit of a waste. I've got about eight or nine in the arsenal right now. That's all I need. Of course, I'm always looking for that next insane guitar, but anything not getting used might need to go."



Ricky's been drawn to Gretsch guitars since seeing Eddie Cochran play one when Ricky was just a child

PHOTO BY PETE ROBERTS

> "Sorry to all you pointy-guitar lovers out there. If you're in my band, it ain't happening"

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"That's easy. When I was in (sic), the band I formed after The Almighty split up, I had this orange Gretsch Country Gent. It sounded amazing and I loved it so much. It was this bitchin' guitar. I came back to Dublin later on and had a few things going on in my personal life. I needed the money and sold it. I really regret that now. It's the one guitar I miss not having."

What's the one famous guitar you wish you owned?

"I guess Gary Moore's 1959 Les Paul ['Stripe'] would be something else. I've had the honour of playing a few famous guitars. Steve Clark from Def Leppard had those three-pickup Gibson Les Paul Customs. Joe Elliott has one of them at his house, and when I was working with him on my first solo album, he let me use that guitar on a couple of tracks. When we were in Australia with The Almighty many years ago, Pete Wells from Rose Tattoo came down to a show and played with us. He used this beat-up 80s Squier Tele for slide and then gave it to me at the end. I still have it and have used it live. The fact it belonged to one of my favourite bands means a lot to me."



RICKY'S GO-TO RIG

"My main live amp is a JCM800, though in the studio I will supplement that with a Dual Rectifier. Those Marshalls are close to 20 years old, made around 2008 or 2009. I picked them up when I joined Thin Lizzy and I usually run the head into two cabinets, sometimes even three depending on the venue size. With The Almighty, my main overdrive is my Boss SD-1 and I also really like my MXR Flanger. My main guitars are a Gibson Les Paul Custom, a Gibson Les Paul Classic and the custom-painted 1988 Gibson SG I call my 'Jesus Loves You' guitar.
"With The Fighting Hearts, I plug into my Gretsch Broadkaster, my Gretsch Duo Jet and one of those Les Pauls as well. In that band, I use a Boss Blues Driver and the MXR Micro Chorus. That's it, pedal-wise. I like to keep it simple. I don't want anything fancy. I just want a great guitar going through a good amp and cabinet, not too much in the way. For what I do, I don't need anything else. I just want a fat and crunchy rhythm sound."

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking for their ultimate guitar?
"Find somebody who knows more about guitars than you do and bring them along so you can ask their opinion. But really, all you need to do is pick it up and play. If it sounds good and feels good to you, that's all you need. It's that simple. You might want to think about how much it weighs or if it frets out anywhere on the neck. Also, if it sounds good not plugged in, that's a good start because that will mean it will sound even bigger and better when you stick it through an amp."

Are there any common design features on electric guitars that are an instant turn-off when auditioning potential new additions?
"Anything pointy, apart from a Flying V because those things are sexy. Any guitar that's super pointy is an instant no for me. There was an era when those guitars were popular and I still wasn't interested. I remember auditioning guitar players when The Almighty got back together at the start of the century and one guy came in with a pointy metal guitar. Poor guy was doomed before he'd even played a note. Sorry to all you pointy-guitar lovers out there. If you're in my band, it ain't happening. I don't mind if you use it in the studio where nobody else sees it, but don't bring it out on stage."

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window or browsed online and what were you looking at?
"We were in Edinburgh the other day and ended up in GuitarGuitar. They had a Telecaster with P-90s, which I'd never seen before. I was quite intrigued by it but didn't have enough time to try it out. It made me want to know more about the model and how it sounds, so I might have to do a little bit of exploring on that one."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp, or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?
"A cheap guitar is better. There are so many good ones out there, and I don't think that's the case with cheap amps. Even the Westbury guitar that was gifted to me was probably cheap to get. It's harder to find a good-sounding cheap amplifier. But if you have a good amplifier, you can get away with a cheap guitar, especially if you bastardise it and change a few things. It's not hard to make a guitar sound decent."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be and why?
"That's tough. I love them both because they sound good for different reasons... But it's got to be humbuckers because they will cover everything within reason. I love the P-90 sound and would be sad to lose it, but you can almost get away with making a humbucker sound like one. I don't think that works the other way round, though. My favourite humbucker is the Seymour Duncan Invader, which is quite high in output. I put them in my Les Pauls. I did have the silent P-90s for a while, too; they're great because they get rid of the hum." **[AS]**



Ricky Warwick's new album, *Fire & Vengeance*, is available now via Earache Records. Ricky tours the UK and Ireland in November
www.rickywarwick.com

A companion to The Almighty's early 90s track *Jesus Loves You But I Don't*, this custom-painted 1988 SG is still a go-to among Ricky's rig

PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON / GETTY / REDFERNS

The MOD SQUAD

BRING TO 'BEAR

Huw Price finds out if Sunbear's KZ 57 SBPAF set can transform this stock PRS CE into a vintage-voiced tone monster

There's been a short break in Mod Squad proceedings following the sad passing of our gear reviews editor, Dave Burrluck, in June. But we're pleased to bring back this popular column in the capable hands of Huw Price. So do continue to send in your modding and tweaking conundrums to guitarist@futurenet.com. Over to Huw...

This PRS has become a fixture at *Guitarist*, where it has been used for testing amps and pedals, and served as a benchmark for evaluating similar guitars. It's a particular favourite of editor-in-chief Jamie's, who ruefully admits to marring the open-pore finish by using an unsuitable polish.

Although there's nothing wrong with the stock pickups, Jamie fancied a change and decided it was an ideal opportunity to test drive Stuart Robinson's Sunbear KZ 57 SBPAFs. Since the Sunbears were destined for a PRS, Stuart assembled them with 'short leg' baseplates because PRS pickup cavities aren't routed deep enough for vintage-sized ones.

Other specs include Alnico II and unoriented V magnets at the neck and bridge respectively, and steel bobbin screws. These pickups are wound slightly differently to replicate the looser and more random coils that were characteristic of the KZ/LP-115 Geo-Stevens machine Gibson used for 1950s P-90s and the earliest Patent Applied For pickups.

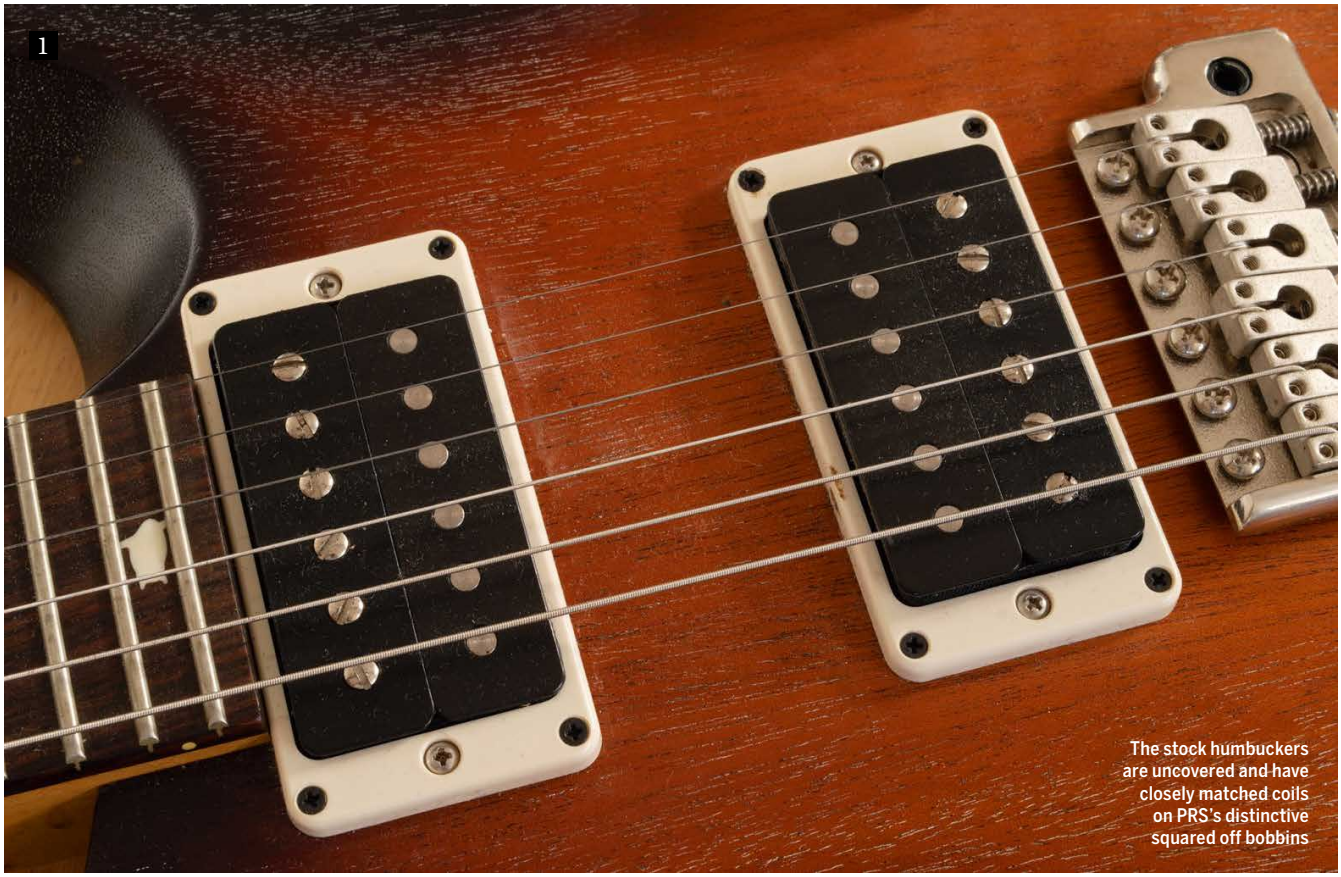
Tapping Out

Since I wasn't familiar with the guitar, a test drive was in order before replacing the pickups. To my ears, they had a strong output level that effortlessly pushed the tweed Deluxe circuit I was using into overdrive. Without sounding particularly bright, they had a decent amount of clarity and could clean up at a lower volume control setting without becoming too muddy – albeit with some assistance from a treble bleed capacitor.

> "Coil-splitting this style of humbucker lowers inductance but leaves the magnetic field unaltered"

There wasn't much pick attack because their response was quite compressed, but that made them well suited for legato lead lines. I was particularly impressed with the coil-tap tones because they became brighter without sounding thin and there wasn't an excessive volume drop when switching between full humbucker and coil-tap modes.

Rapping on the pole screws and slugs revealed that both coils remained active in coil-tap mode, so one coil was being attenuated, rather than disconnected entirely. Taking one coil completely out of circuit (coil-splitting) turns a humbucker into a single-coil pickup with a DCR reading roughly half that of the same pickup in humbucker mode. For most split Patent Applied For-style humbuckers, the DCR could be anywhere between 3.5k and 4.5k. In contrast, vintage-style S-type

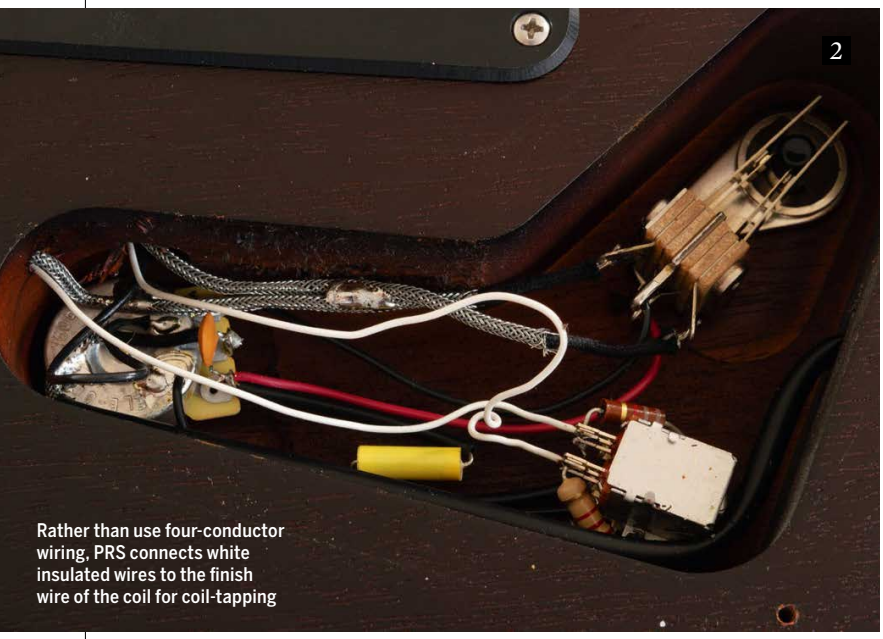


The stock humbuckers are uncovered and have closely matched coils on PRS's distinctive squared off bobbins

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE



A familiar face at *Guitarist* for many years – but can a pickup upgrade offer a wider tonal palette?



Rather than use four-conductor wiring, PRS connects white insulated wires to the finish wire of the coil for coil-tapping



Split humbuckers have one coil connected direct to ground, but PRS uses 1.1k and 2.2k resistors for partial tapping



pickups tend to range from 5.6k to 6.3k. DCR isn't the sole determinant of output level or tone, and some low DCR pickups, such as Filter'Trons, sound wonderful by combining low-wind coils with higher magnetism.

Coil-splitting a Patent Applied For-style humbucker lowers inductance but leaves the magnetic field unaltered, so it doesn't have the tight focus of a single coil. And don't forget that the single coil remains connected to a 500k volume potentiometer, rather than a 250k, which further accentuates the brightness associated with split coils.

The PRS coil-tap switch took the DCR reading at the neck from 7.7k to 4.72k and 8.3k to 5.6k at the bridge. If the PRS coils were evenly wound in each pickup, we might expect the neck and bridge readings in single-coil mode to be around 3.85k and 4.15k respectively, so it was definitely a partial-tap – and a peek under the control cavity cover confirmed this.

Rather than simply grounding one coil from each pickup, PRS made the ground connections via two resistors: 1.1k for the neck and 2.2k for the bridge. Partial coil-tapping has become a widespread alternative to coil-splitting in recent years. In addition to maintaining a more usable output level, the pickup will still buck some hum.

"The most noticeable difference [of the pickup swap] was an increase in the singing sustain"



The Sunbear KZ 57 SBPAF set showcases Stuart Robinson's artfully aged reliced covers



One of the factors that affects a humbucker's tone is the amount of coil offset. If both have closely matched DCR readings, you can expect the pickup to have thicker mids and seem darker. By slightly offsetting the coils, you can de-emphasise the midrange, which creates more apparent brightness. With higher offsets, humbuckers begin sounding more like single coils and that's what partial tapping is actually about.

Placing a small resistor between the coil-tap and ground creates a pseudo coil-offset and the resistor value determines the degree of offset. The object is to hit that sweet spot where you can enjoy the decongested midrange and treble sparkle associated with single-coil pickups while retaining strong output with sufficient body.

Dropping In

The PRS pickups had vintage-style single conductor braided wire with white plastic insulated wire connecting the joined finish wires of the coils to the coil-tap switch. Removing the pickups entailed breaking the solder joint tying the braided wires together and another on the volume pot casing. I then de-soldered the hot wires from the selector switch and the white wires from the coil-tap switch.

With the PRS pickups extracted, I was able to confirm that both had matched coils and my estimate of each individual

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE



Stage one is complete, with the red hot wires connected to the selector switch and heat shrink keeping everything tidy

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The Sunbears' green and white coil finish wires are twisted together and soldered to the coil-tap switch

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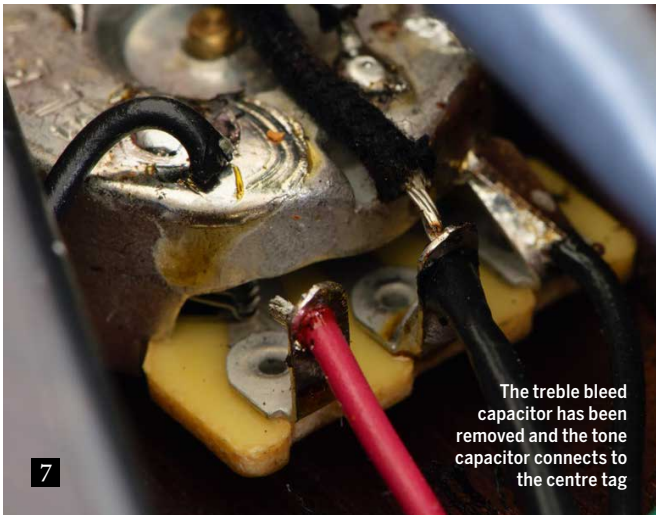


The treble bleed capacitor has been removed and the tone capacitor connects to the centre tag

7

coil's DCR was spot on. Before installing the Sunbear set, I took DCR readings and individual coil readings. The neck measured 7.26k at full strength and the coils were 3.33k and 3.73k. The bridge was 8.18k with 4.26k and 3.92k coils, so both pickups had the sort of coil-offsets associated with vintage Gibson coils that were wound on machines without auto-stops.

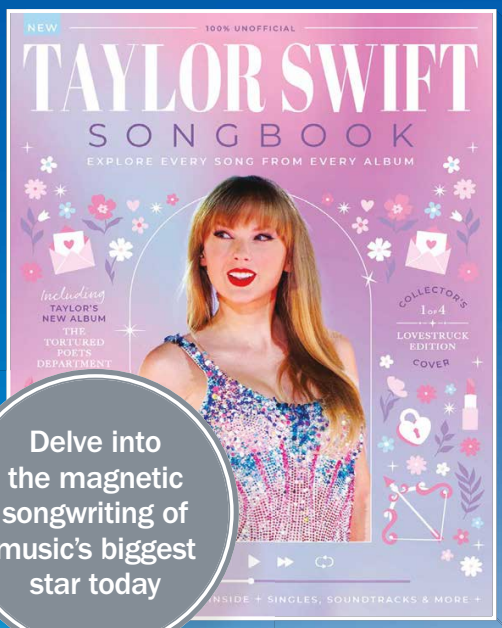
Stuart had made this set with four-conductor leadout wires specifically for coil-tapping. I twisted together the black and shield wires for grounding, and the green and white coil finish wires for the coil-tap switch. The remaining red wire was the hot connection for the selector switch.

Grin & 'Bear It

As expected, the Sunbears' sound and response was markedly different to the PRS pickups. They were brighter, clearer and far more dynamic, with an unmistakable vintage voicing. The bridge had a pleasing midrange snarl with just the right amount of cocked-wah honk, and the neck offered a mellower and more rounded contrast while retaining a hint of aggression.

Both pickups delivered that clicky Patent Applied For pick attack that was entirely absent from the PRS set, but the most noticeable difference was an increase in the singing sustain that is such a huge part of the appeal of vintage Gibson humbuckers. Given their naturally brighter and less congested tone, it wasn't entirely surprising that both Sunbears sounded more like single coils in tapped mode.

I finished up by removing the treble bleed capacitor from the volume potentiometer because proper Patent Applied For replicas like Stuart's render them superfluous. I also moved the tone capacitor connection from the input to the output tag of the volume pot – 1950s style. Going forward, I might feel inclined to experiment with some higher resistor values, or even some trim pots to dial in the tapped tones, but overall the Sunbears had a transformative and entirely beneficial effect. G



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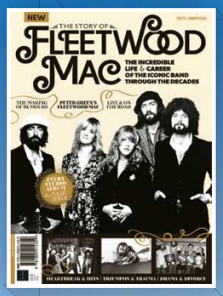

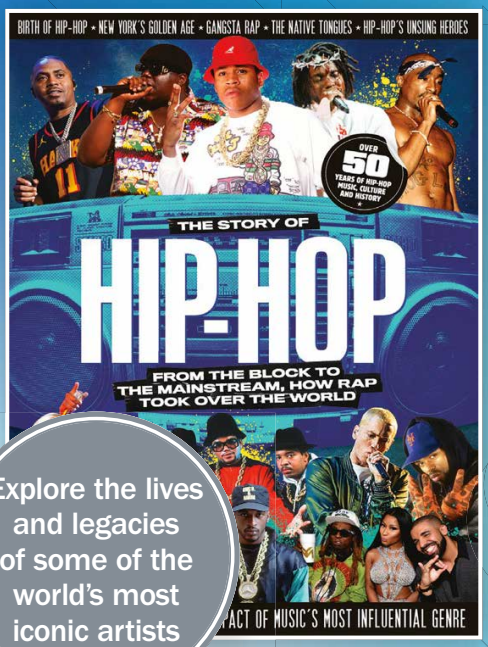

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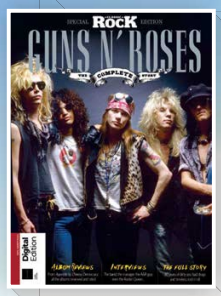





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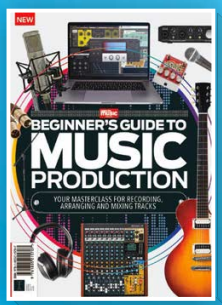



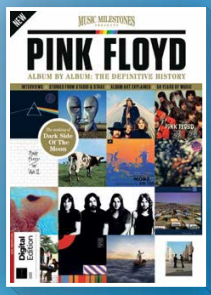

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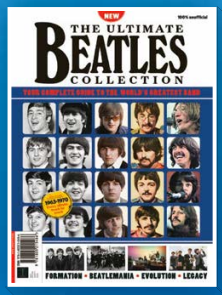

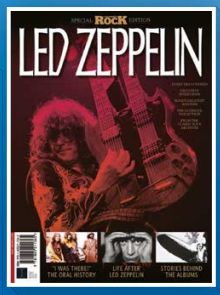



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Huw Price's
Nitty Gritty

This restoration starts with some tricky lacquer removal and a wiring conundrum

1955 Gibson Les Paul Special (Part 2)

David Davidon recently observed that, during the vintage era, Fender guitars were pretty much fully developed by the time they hit the shops while Gibson's new models were sometimes works in progress. Supporting evidence includes dodgy neck angles, inadequate bushings, suboptimal bridge location and wraptails with intonation compensation for wound (rather than plain) G strings.

Compromised wire routing could be added to that list. When the Les Paul Special was first introduced in 1955, Gibson was probably still figuring out how to get wires from the switch to the control cavity in a solidbody with no maple cap. Most guitar restorations follow the same trajectory – refret, refinish, relic, rewire, reassemble and return to owner – but this Special was about to throw us a curveball. Before getting onto that, however, the remaining brown lacquer had to go.

Scraping The Bottom

When stripping a guitar for refinishing the most difficult areas to get at are pickup routs, control cavities and vibrato recesses. If the brief is to strip off every trace of old finish, getting those cavities back to bare wood generally takes longer than stripping the areas that will actually be visible after reassembly. It can be done, but given the time and added costs involved, many refinishers will simply leave the lacquer in the cavities and spray over it. Whoever sprayed this guitar chocolate brown left the original lacquer in the cavities, which I discovered when I took a sharp chisel to prise off the overspray.

In addition to confirming that this was originally a TV finish, I realised that exposing the surviving lacquer would provide an excellent colour reference for the refinish, and any remaining brown overspray would just be part of the guitar's story.

Paint stripper and acetone weren't options because both would strip away the factory lacquer as well as the overspray. Instead, I continued sharp-prising off the brown lacquer one chip at a time. It wasn't quick, but I was pleased enough with the outcome to take the same approach at the bottom of the control cavity.

The sides of the cavity were a lot harder to get at and the chisel proved ineffective on the end grain areas. Rather than apply stripper and make a mess, I used a polishing brush attachment fixed to the end of my Dremel tool's flexible shaft extension. Starting with a very soft nylon brush I was making good process, but the nylon strands soon wore down. I switched to a brass wire brush and found it quickly removed unwanted lacquer while leaving the wood unscathed. The same wire brush also turned out to be ideal for cleaning the output jack and switch holes.

> A brass wire brush quickly removed unwanted lacquer while leaving the wood unscathed

With the control cavity sides stripped I could see lines indicating the cavity had been routed in four stages to achieve the required depth. The first three passes went down half an inch at a time, and the final pass removed 1/8-inch. There were also two grain-filler drips extending from the potentiometer holes, suggesting the guitar was held upright when the filler was applied.





1. Removing the dark brown lacquer while trying to preserve the original TV finish required patience and a sharp chisel

2. Some remnants of the brown remain, but traces of the TV finish will be useful for colour-matching when the guitar is sprayed



In the neck pocket it was apparent that Gibson's white basecoat wasn't sprayed heavily enough to fill the cavities

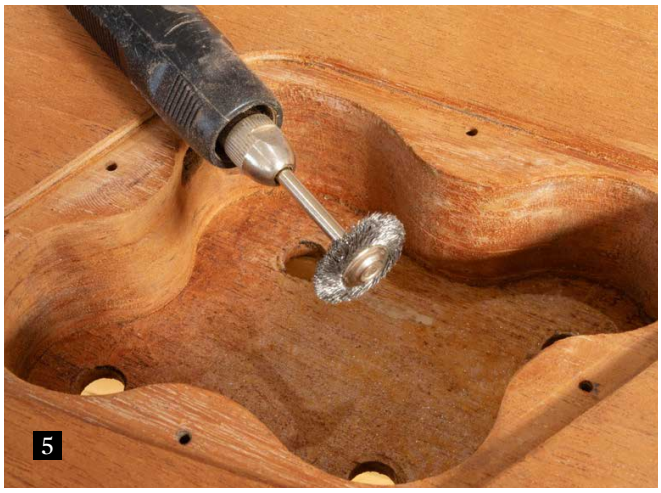
PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE



Work in progress: Huw assembles his tools to work on the guitar's finish, wiring and frets

Exposing the surviving lacquer would provide an excellent colour reference for the refinish









4. Exposing the bottom of the control cavity was easy enough, but flaking the brown off the sides proved too difficult

5. A soft wire brush attached to a Dremel extension quickly removed the lacquer without harming the wood

6. The bridge pickup wire goes through a hole in the corner with the other four wires feeding through a channel under the bushing hole

7. The bushing is secured in a vice attached to a press drill loaded with a 6.5mm bit

Bush Craft

In the first instalment of this project last issue, I observed that there were two holes connecting the bridge pickup cavity to the control cavity. It appears this was only done on the earliest Les Paul Specials, and the hole going all the way from the control cavity to the switch passed directly through the treble-side bushing hole.

I previously stated that the bridge pickup's leadout and switch wires were routed through this hole, but I need to make a correction. All the braided wires were routed through this hole into the control cavity, with the exception of the bridge pickup's output wire, which actually went through the hole in the corner of the bridge pickup cavity. This presented a problem because I had planned to replace the half-inch bushings with one-inch bushings to cure the forward-leaning bridge post issue. The factory bushing holes were deep enough to accommodate the longer bushings, but inserting a one-inch treble side bushing would block the wire channel.

All the braided wires were routed through a hole into the control cavity, with the exception of the bridge pickup's output wire

When I first reassembled this guitar, I routed all five of the braided wires and the ground wire through the corner hole. It was an extremely tight fit, and although it would be easier with fresh wires, gnarly old wires with solder blobs on the ends made the task a bit too challenging. Rather than attempt to widen the corner hole to accommodate the wires – and lose a quirky but defining original feature – I had two options: I could shorten the treble side bushing from 1-inch to ¾-inch, or drill a hole through it that would align it with the other wire channel. I decided on the latter.

I had to establish the required diameter for the bushing hole, so I inserted various drill bits through the jack-socket hole and into the wire channel. The largest bit I could push through the hole was 9.5mm, but it was a little loose. Gibson used imperial drill bits, rather than metric, and since 9.5mm equates to 0.374-inch, I think it's safe to assume Gibson used a ⅜-inch (0.375-inch) bit.

I had ordered one-inch St Helens bushings from Schwartz Guitar Parts (www.schwarz-guitarparts.de) made with 24 knurled teeth and the same steel alloy as 1950s originals. Since they're nominally half an inch in diameter, I didn't want to drill a ⅜-inch hole through the bushing because I was concerned it would weaken or damage it.

8. With the hole widened to 8mm, the one-inch bushing is ready to be installed

9. A 9.5mm drill bit is inserted in the wire channel as a visual guide for aligning the bushing

10. With the bushing and ground wire in place, a quick test with wire offcuts proves successful

11. After running a razor blade down each side, each fret is heated with a soldering iron and extracted with a fret-pulling tool

12. A soft clamp is applied to protect the binding as the slots are cleaned out with a refret saw and a slot scraper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The point of doing all this was to fix the leaning bridge posts, so I had to determine the minimum hole diameter I could get away with. I bundled four braided wires together and, after measuring with my callipers, I figured a 6.5mm wide hole should be the starting point. From there, I used the callipers to measure the distance from the top of the body to the bottom of the wire channel. I wrapped the bushing with masking tape, and after allowing for the recess between the top of the body and the bushing, I marked the bottom of the wire channel's position onto the bushing. From there I was able to mark the channel's centre point onto the bushing and I was ready for some metalwork.

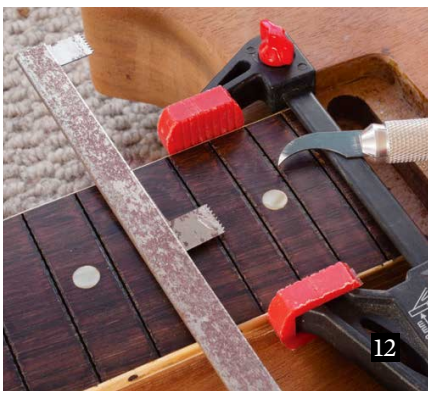
This is not something that I could have done without a drill press and a drill press vice to hold the bushing in position. Thankfully, the steel alloy was softer than expected and the drill bit was able to cut through with just a little oil added to keep things cool.

After threading four braided wires through the 6.5mm hole, I decided it was a bit narrow and I repeated the procedure with an 8mm bit. I carefully aligned and inserted the bushing and was pleased to find that all four wires would pass easily through the bushing hole into the control cavity.

It might have been simpler to reduce the bushing length to ¾-inch, but this seemed like a more elegant solution that would provide maximum resistance to string tension. I reliced the tops of both bushings to dull the shiny surface before installation and remembered to put the ground wire in place before inserting the treble-side bushing. Both bushings will remain in the body throughout the refinishing process.

Refret Rien

I was back on familiar ground as I began the refretting process by extracting the remaining 16 original frets and the six replacements. During the 1950s, Gibson installed frets with animal protein glue, so heating them with a soldering iron melts the glue to make pulling the frets easier and minimises fretboard chipping.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With bound fretboards, I'm careful to set the soldering iron temperature as low as possible and I never let the tip get closer than about 5mm to the binding because I don't want to melt or discolour it. I generally find 325°C is sufficient to get the glue bubbling.

Proper fret pullers are essential for this job, and once I've worked the puller under the treble end of a fret I reapply the soldering iron and follow it along the length of the fret with the pullers. This turned out to be a very clean extraction, and after a light scuff sand with 800-grit paper and 0000-grade steel wool to remove loose wood fibres and any remaining finger grot, the fretboard looked totally unscathed.

The final step was to clean out the fret slots. With delicate vintage binding I secure a soft plastic clamp across the slot before scraping out any remaining traces of glue and sawdust with a refret saw followed by slot-scraping hook. I always work away from the binding towards the centre – first in one direction and then the other. It's all too easy to slip and, without the clamp to protect it, the binding can become detached or even split.

Next time I'll be completing the refret, prepping for spraying and getting into the mysteries of vintage Gibson TV finishes. G

www.huwpriceguitar.com



David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This mid-50s 'Golden Red' model once belonged to John Entwistle

1956 Gretsch Rancher



Gretsch isn't famous for acoustic guitars, but the 6022 Rancher is an iconic model produced from 1954 to the early 1960s

"We rarely see Gretsch Ranchers, and I think they're cool despite the fact they're not super-high-quality guitars. In looks and spirit they're a bit like the flat-top counterpart of the 6120 and the 6121 Roundup. The Rancher was introduced in 1954 and this one was made two years later. It came from John Entwistle's estate and it actually featured in the book of his guitar collection.

"John Entwistle was a good client of the store, and after he passed away Sotheby's had an auction. I was lucky enough to get his Fender Broadcaster and I got this Rancher. I didn't have one at that time and I thought to myself, 'Even though they're not high-end acoustic guitars, they're quirky.' I like quirky stuff and I thought that this would be a neat piece to have in the store. I eventually sold it, of course, but at some point I got it back in a trade deal.

"In some ways these are nothing more than curiosities to me, but I just love the way they did the triangular 'French' soundhole and the G-brand, and it has this incredibly funky bridge. It also has traditional Gretsch features such as a horseshoe inlay on the headstock and 'mother-of-toilet-seat' humpblock inlays. Earlier versions had block markers with engraved Western motifs, and when thumbnail markers replaced the humpblocks in 1958, the G-branding was dropped.

"There's a spruce top with flamed maple for the arched back and sides, and a two-piece maple neck with a narrow ebony stripe running down the middle. The fretboard is rosewood, but it's not Brazilian, so I think Gretsch used whatever they could buy cheap.

> "I love the triangular soundhole and the G-brand, and it has this incredibly funky bridge"

"I particularly like this big pickguard that's screwed onto the front. They were made from clear Lucite that was gold painted on the rear side, like most Gretsch plastic parts. The G logo was genuinely branded into the top to scorch the wood, and Gretsch fitted their oddball electric guitar strap-locking buttons. The overall condition is very good, with just a few dents in the 'Golden Red' finish and plenty of attractive lacquer checking.

"Gretsch mounted an aluminum tailpiece on top of the ebony bridge with a height-adjustable compensated aluminium bridge that looks like it was made by Bigsby. It's likely that Gretsch bought them from Bigsby because they did so much business together and it was cheaper to buy in parts like that, rather than try to make something similar themselves.

"The body's binding is five layers of white and black, while the neck and headstock just have single-ply white binding. At 6lb 1oz it's kind of heavy for an acoustic, but Gretsch was not really known for making flat-top acoustic guitars. It's a very original guitar and it comes with its original white case featuring tooled-leather belt edging.

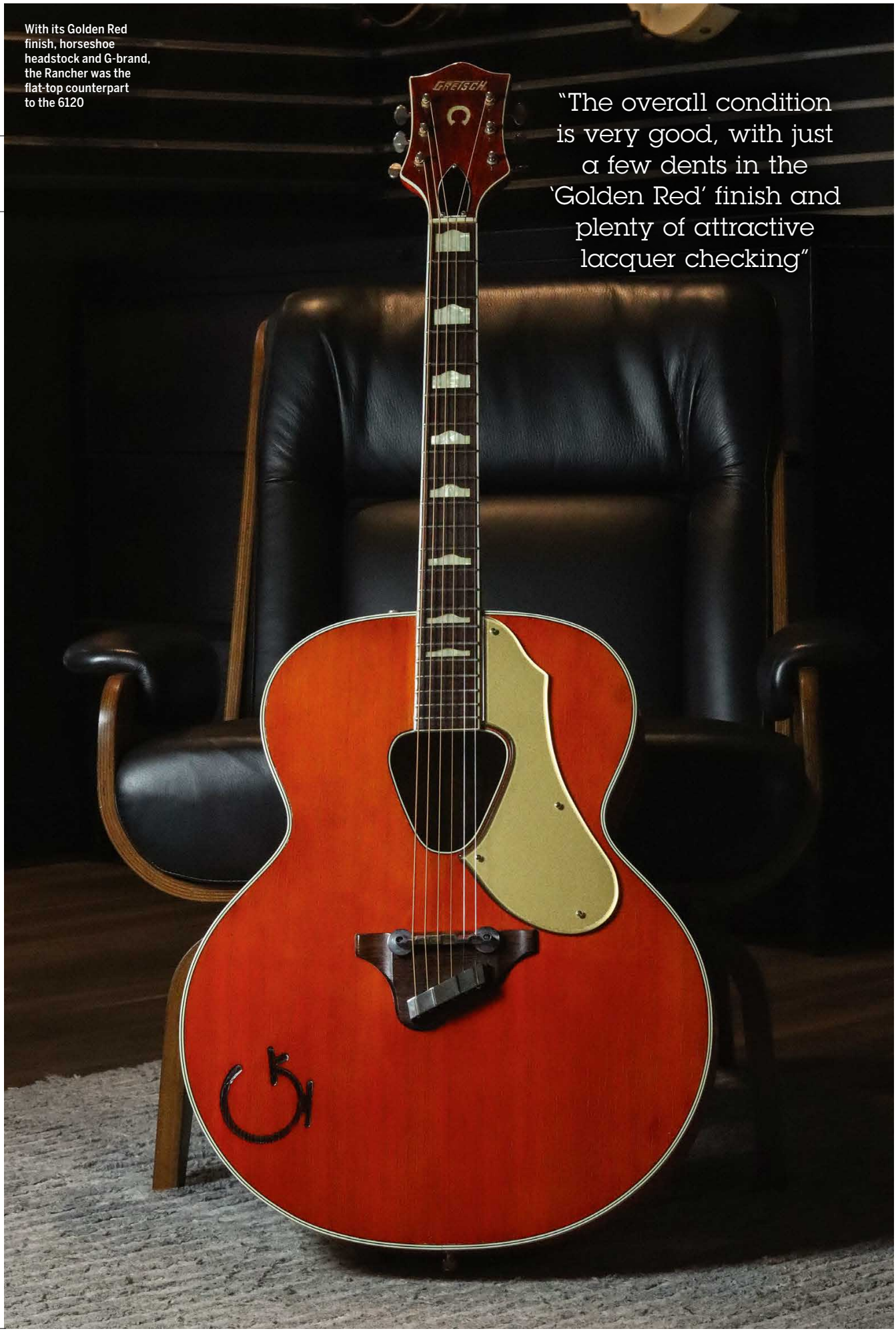
"Like the strap buttons, the open-geared Grover tuners are gold-plated. It still has its original frets and nibs, but they're fairly tiny and a guitar like this would definitely benefit from taller frets. The neck profile is a big and clunky C, which feels very full in your palm of your hand. However, the neck is not too wide at the nut, so it's more about depth than width and feels a little different from typical Gretsch electric-guitar necks of the era.

"The string anchor on the bridge looks like they've used the end of a trapeze tailpiece and disposed of the trapeze part. It's held onto the bridge with pins and elevated a little bit above the bridge with a piece of rosewood as a spacer. It doesn't make much sense to me because it changes the break angle at the bridge for the worse. I guess that's the way Gretsch made them, but they might have been better guitars without it.

"There's no binding deterioration at all, which is something that has plagued many Gretsch guitars that I've owned previously and some I own now. My tech is always telling me these things are like ticking time bombs and I should sell them as quickly as possible because he hates replacing sections of binding that have turned to powder.

"As a store, we don't aim to buy many Gretsch guitars. There used to be a pretty good Gretsch market, but I think a lot of the Beatles guys no longer play in Beatles cover bands. They're not buying Gretsches or Rickenbackers like they once were." **[HP]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563



With its Golden Red finish, horseshoe headstock and G-brand, the Rancher was the flat-top counterpart to the 6120

"The overall condition is very good, with just a few dents in the 'Golden Red' finish and plenty of attractive lacquer checking"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE 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



Rhythm 'n' Lead

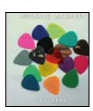
Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Fender Stratocaster & Marshall JTM45 Reissue
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example

REGULAR READERS will know how much I love a trio format – it puts the guitar front and centre and focuses our attention on what we're contributing in terms of harmony, melody and rhythm. The bass can imply a lot in harmonic terms, but on this backing track it plays a largely supportive role. A major blues such as this can be something of a challenge to those who think purely in terms of the minor pentatonic/blues scale, but there are a couple of ways round this.

One method is to look up the major pentatonic shapes. If you haven't done this before, you'll be delighted to find they are basically identical to the minor pentatonics (albeit numbered differently) and will instantly give you much more of a vocabulary in a major context. As with so many patterns and scales on the guitar fretboard, it's really a case of looking at the shapes we already know differently, rather than learning an endless succession of new and more complex ones.

Another idea is to look at the basic chord structure of a piece and check for where the notes in a given chord fall within scales and patterns such as the pentatonics. The example solo will provide some useful material to explore this concept.

The solo/examples take inspiration from Robben Ford, SRV, John Mayer and Jimi Hendrix – and probably others subconsciously, too. It combines the traditional roles of 'rhythm' and 'lead' guitar, taking ideas from each. In a real-world musical scenario, you may find there are parts of a song or instrumental where you want to get louder/busier, or alternatively drop right down, perhaps even stop playing completely for a couple of bars for dynamic effect. However, that does go a little beyond the scope of this article... 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

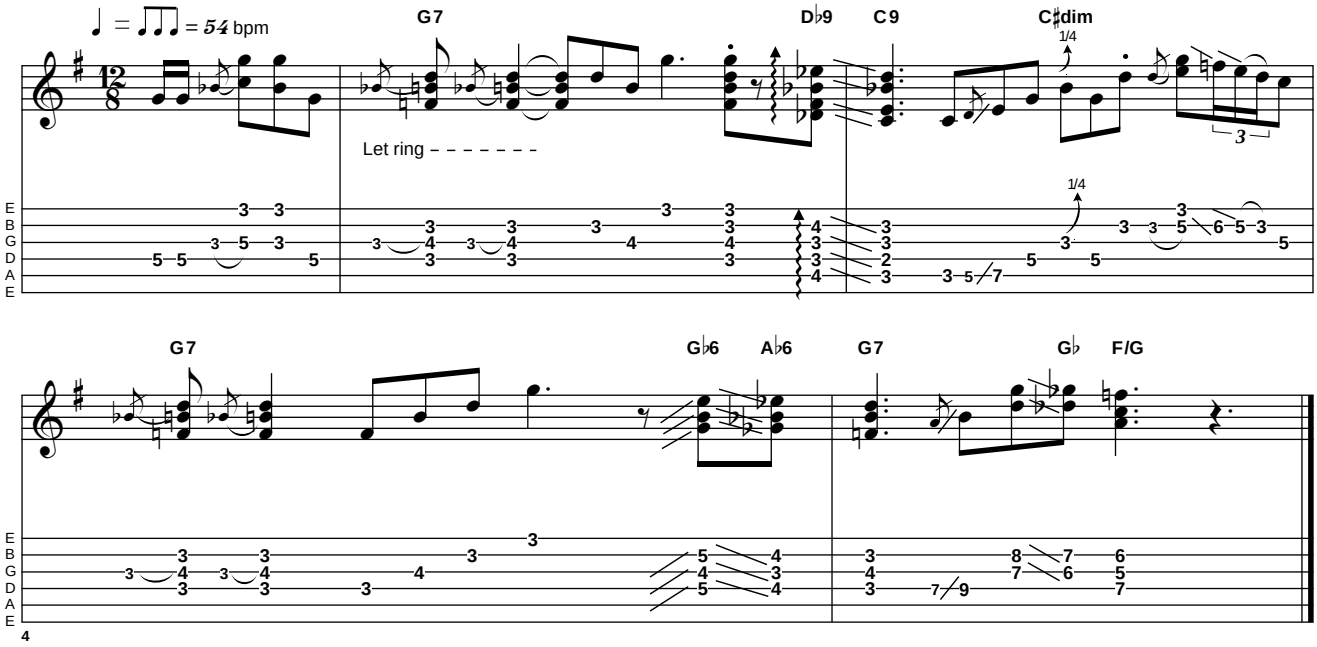


Richard takes his lead from SRV and co for this issue's solo, combining lead and rhythm approaches

PHOTO BY PETER SHERMAN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

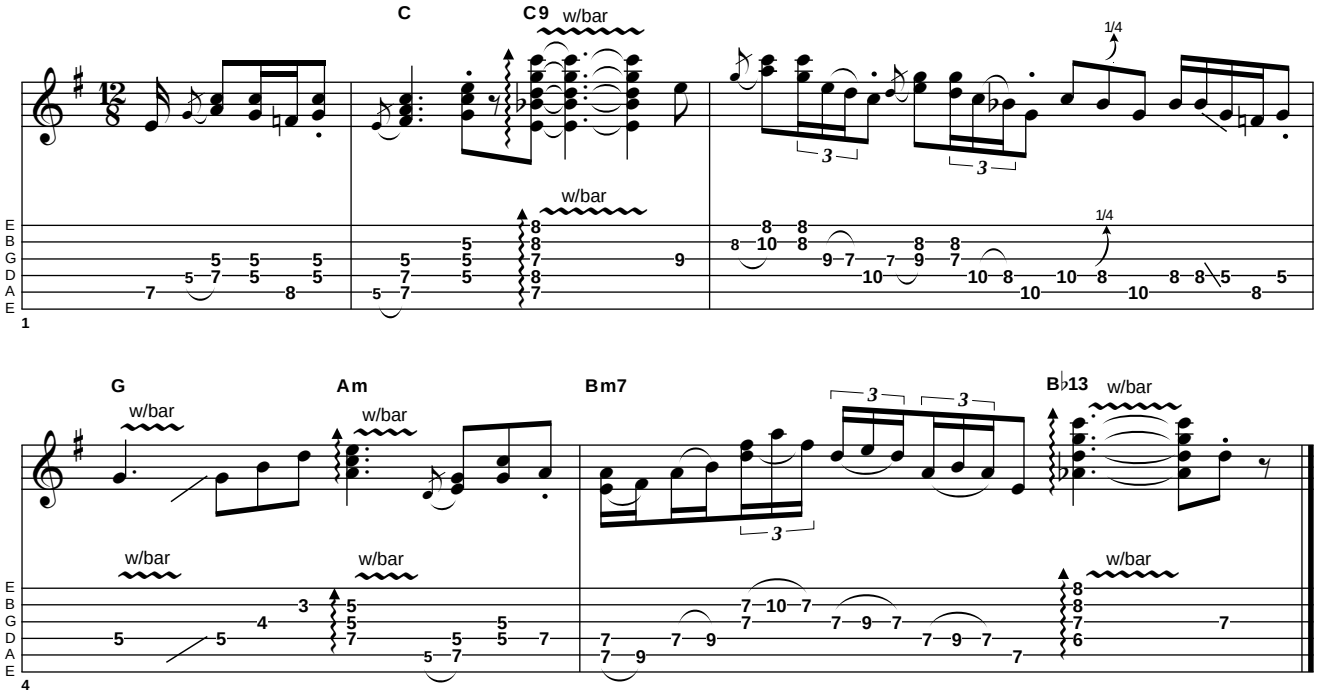
Example 1

AFTER A BRIEF PICKUP USING DOUBLESTOPS, this opening phrase stays close to the chord progression, with a few embellishments. Note the contrasting ringing and staccato chords: watch your timing with these and aim to come down with the snare hit. The only recognisably pentatonic lick after the intro comes at the end of bar 2, where we straddle a couple of positions to frame the C# diminished chord. To finish, we move on to some sliding chromatic passing chords. No need to overthink these; they're an embellishment that doesn't need to relate strictly to the backing chords.



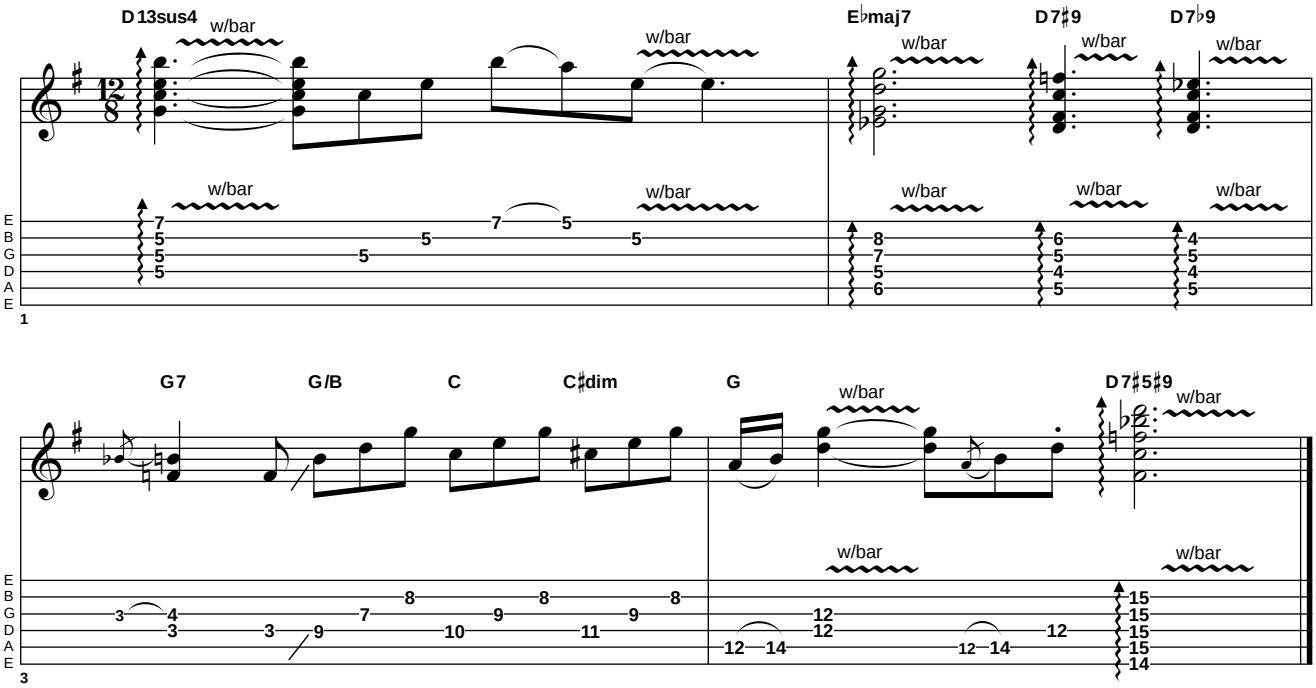
Example 2

STARTING WITH A HENDRIX-STYLE DOUBLESTOP, we then get a little more complex in this second example. The SRV/John Mayer-style lick in bar 2 relies heavily on raking upwards across the strings. Check out the video for extra hints on that technique. We move on to borrow from *Little Wing* and SRV's *Riviera Paradise* (and *Lenny*) for the final two bars. Note how the pentatonic lick in bar 4 almost perfectly outlines a Bm7 chord. Liberal 'shimmer' from a vibrato/tremolo is desirable but only optional!



Example 3

THIS FINAL EXAMPLE is built almost exclusively around the chord shapes implied by the backing track. Again, there's plenty of wobble from the bar, but this isn't essential. After some nice jazz/blues chord shapes in the first two bars, the ascending triads in bar 3 pick up the pace, spelling out the G7-G/B-C and C# diminished suggested by the bass, before finishing with a D7#5#9 chord inspired by Robben Ford's *Worried Life Blues*.



Hear It Here

ROBBEN FORD
VARIOUS



As already mentioned, the final chord of the example solo was lifted from *Worried Life Blues* (albeit in a different key), which features on Robben Ford's *Mystic Mile* album. Robben is great at incorporating interesting jazzy chords and phrases into his music – have a listen to *Ain't Got Nothin' But The Blues* from his *Talk To Your Daughter* album. Finally, check out the solo phrasing on the track *Help The Poor* from the same album, a slightly different tone and style but containing ideas well worth stealing!

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND DOUBLE TROUBLE
VARIOUS



The two most obvious candidates for mentioning here are *Lenny* from the album *Texas Flood*, and *Riviera Paradise* from *In Step*, with their jazzy chords and doublestops. We'd also suggest searching out any live versions you can find, as there's nothing like being able to see how an artist works on the fly. The *Live At The El Mocambo* album is particularly recommended. Elsewhere, be sure to check out the title track of *Texas Flood*!

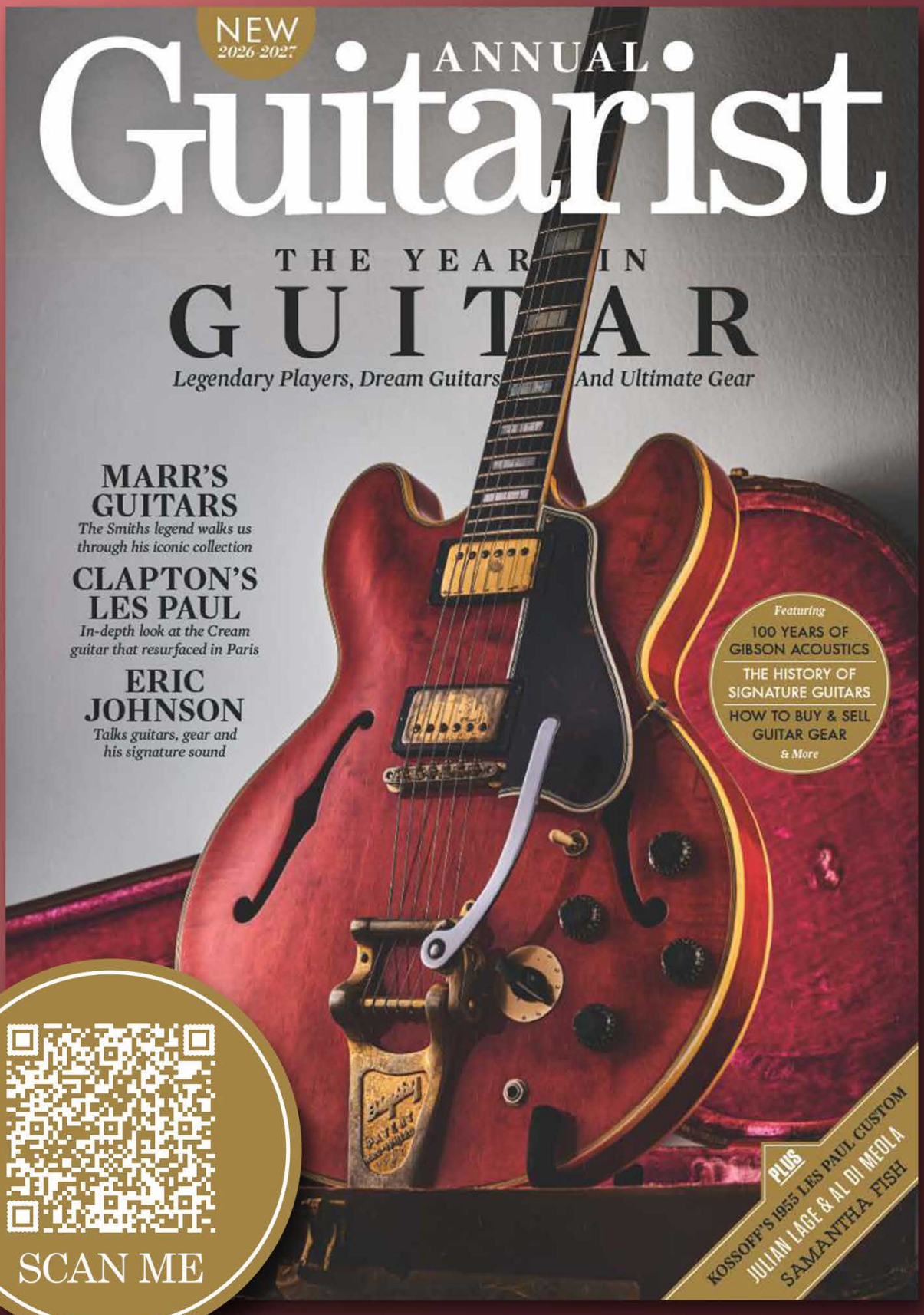
JOHN MAYER
VARIOUS



John Mayer has experimented with many musical styles over the course of his career, but he is particularly well known for his ability to channel Stevie Ray Vaughan/Hendrix-style rhythm and fills. The album *Where The Light Is* gives a great overview of his acoustic and electric playing, offering up a few well-chosen cover versions along with his own material. Also, check out *Try!*, another live album, this time by the John Mayer Trio, featuring tracks such as *Gravity* and *Out Of My Mind*.

This year's essential read

for any guitar player or collector



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Getting up close and personal with the Quo man's battered Telecaster that quite literally rocked all over the world…

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– John Mayer

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