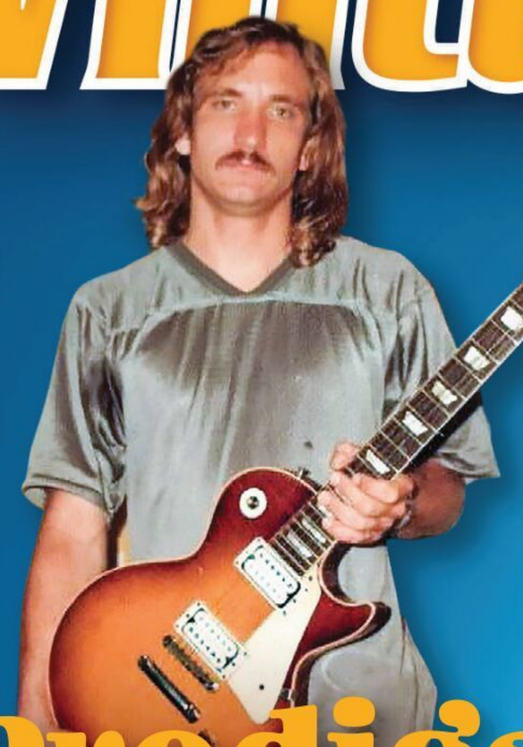
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JOE WALSH'S '59 REUNION

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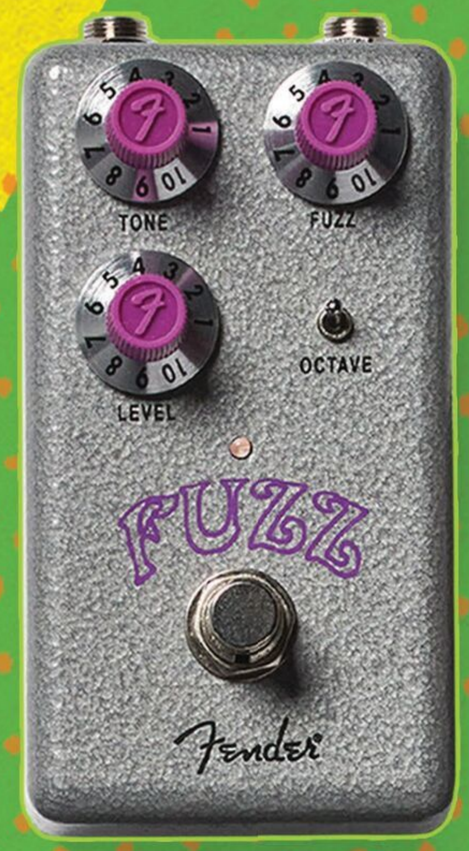
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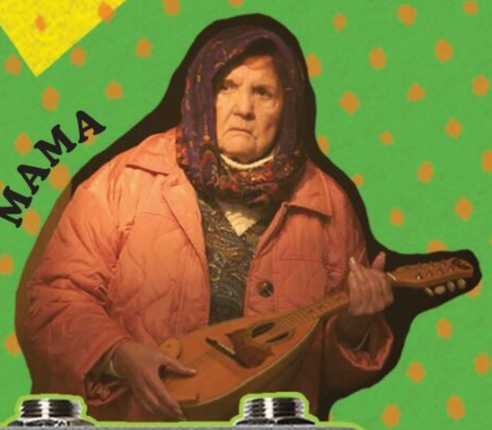




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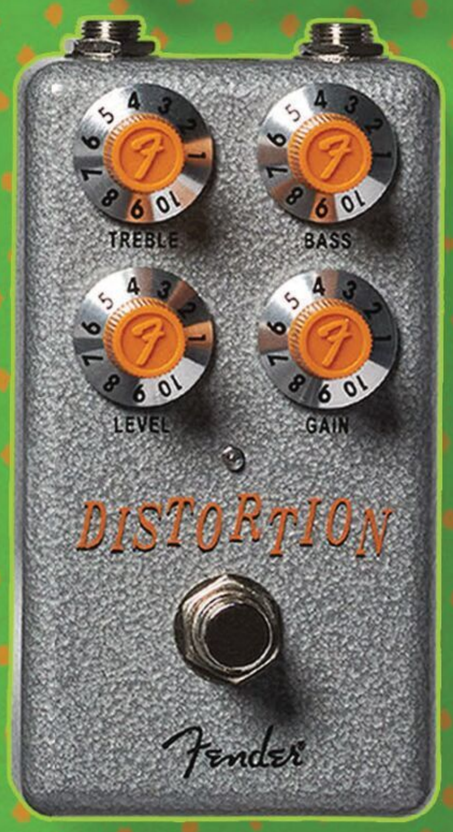
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| ***By Walter Carter***

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PHOTOS: COVER: Joe Walsh '59 Les Paul Standard: Nate Westgor. Joe Walsh: Brian Brock. Shermy Freeman: Hi-Tide Recordings. **THIS PAGE:** Nicole Damoff: Hi-Tide Recordings.

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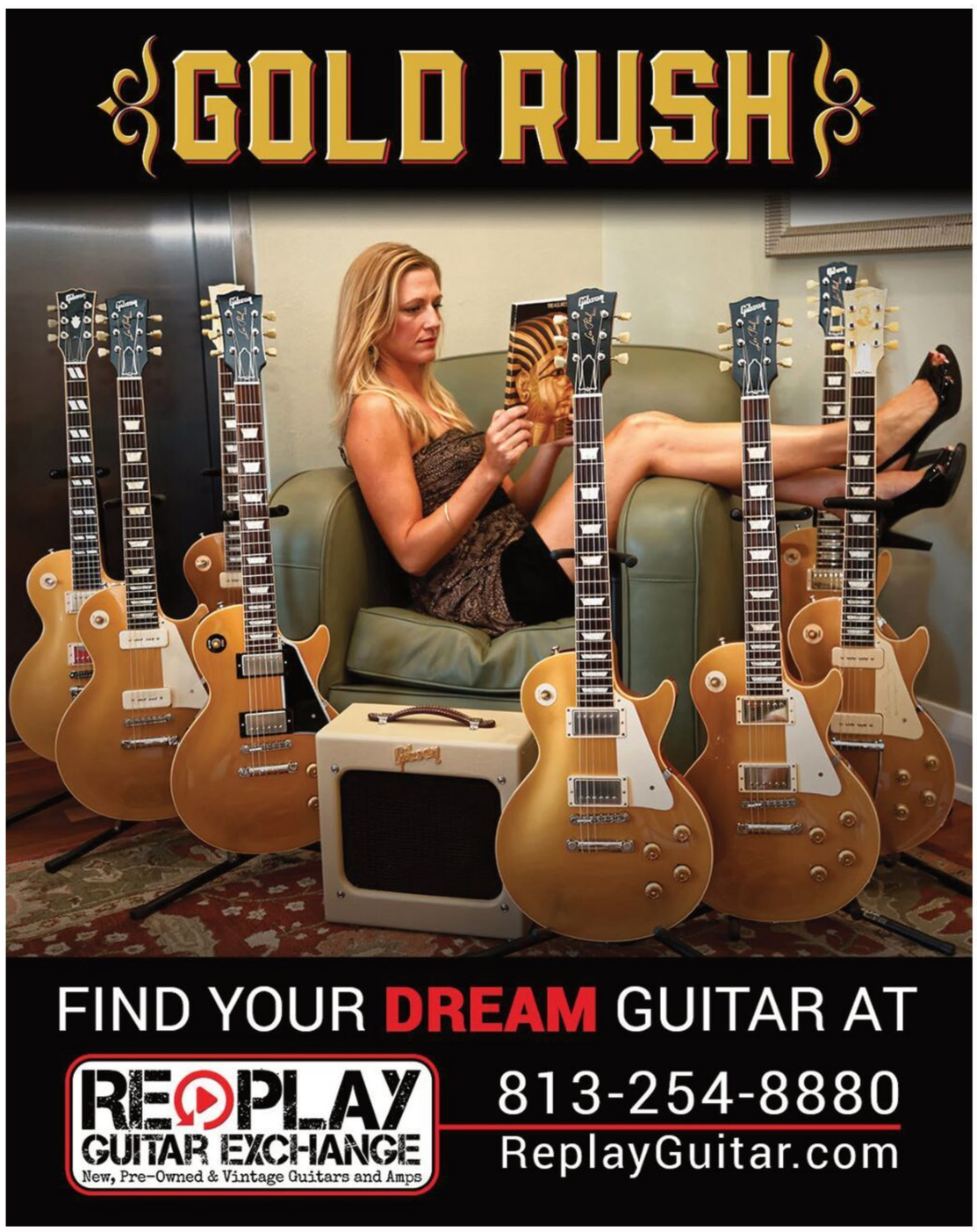
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FIRST FRET



DRAKE INDUCTED TO CMHOF

During a ceremony in Nashville on May 1, Pete Drake became the first steel guitarist to be inducted to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Drake helped make steel guitar a trademark country-music sound, adding it to hits like Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man," Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors," George Jones' "He Stopped Loving Her Today," Kenny Rogers' "Lucille," and Lynn Anderson's "(I Never Promised You A) Rose Garden," as well as records by Marty Robbins, Bobby Bare, Johnny Cash, The Louvin Brothers, Dolly Parton, Porter Wagoner, Jerry Lee Lewis, Reba McEntire, and Charley Pride. His resumé includes 59 of the 75 songs on *Billboard*'s Top Country Hits chart.

He also enjoyed success as a producer, publisher, and record-label founder. As a solo artist, he made famous the "talking steel guitar" technique that became one of his many signature sounds.

"He knew when to play, what to play, and just as importantly, when *not* to play," said Joe Chambers, co-founder of the Musicians Hall of Fame, of which Drake is a member. "He crossed most every genre of music – George Harrison to George Jones, Tammy Wynette to Bob Dylan."

Drake was just 55 when he passed away from emphysema in 1988.

NICHOLAS RETIRES FROM FENDER

Shane Nicholas, a highly regarded amplifier builder and product guru at Fender, retired from the company in early May.

Nicholas joined the company in 1997, after working at Dave Phillips Music, in Pennsylvania, for more than 10 years. A guitarist for nearly 50 years, he had intricate knowledge of amplifiers, and embodied the opinion that they are as important as guitars for creating good tone.

In 25 years with Fender, Nicholas held multiple positions including Amplifier Product Specialist, Manager of Product Education, and various division manager/director roles. He was also integral to the company's first forays into digital amplification.



ANDY SUMMERS

Fresh Harmonics

Guitarist in the megastar band the Police, author, photographer, and solo artist Andy Summers can never be accused of having false modesty. His dedication to music led to being in one of the most successful bands of all time. His current album, *Harmonics of the Night*, will augment a European gallery tour showcasing his photography, but it's the release of the multimedia package *The Police Around The World Restored & Expanded* that's got Police fans walking on the moon.

Any revelations while putting together *Police Around The World*?

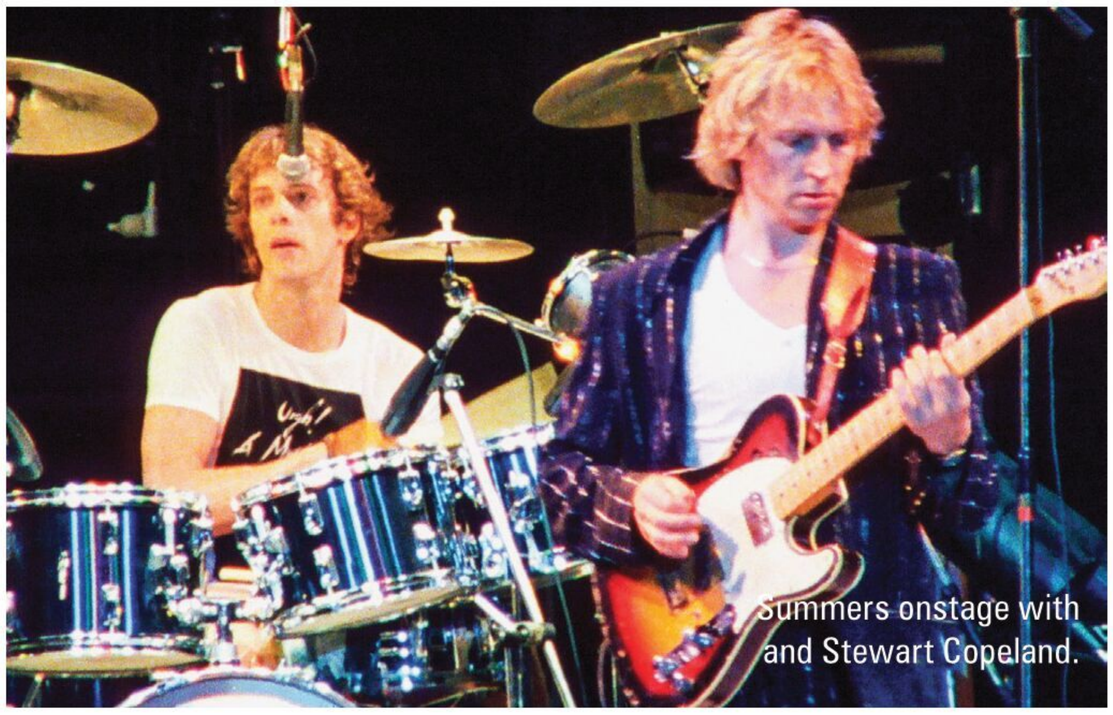
No, it was put together in the '80s, released, and was alright because we were the number one band in the world, but the film disappeared. Five years ago, I thought, "What did we do with that? We should re-establish that." I was the one who got this thing started. It was very funky because no one had it. I found it on eBay, on Laserdisc. I took it to our lawyer, and the process started. We found the original 16mm film in a basement in London and had it restored. It took five years, but I'm very pleased to see it again after all these years. A new generation of kids can see it now.

You were a music veteran before you joined The Police.

As a musician, you're curious about everything you can do on guitar. I became obsessed. I started at age 12. By the time I was 14, I was copying Wes Montgomery solos. My heaviest influences were American jazz guitarists. Later, I lived in London and played in rhythm-and-blues bands. Then I moved to California, went to college, and played classical guitar for six years. By the time I was in the Police, I was pretty broad with everything I was interested in playing. Luckily, with Sting and his good harmonic ear, I was able to play more-interesting things than the average rock guitarist. Thus, The Police guitar sound was made. We had beautiful chemistry between the three of us. It was a magical moment.

Aside from jazz, rock, and classical, reggae crept into your sound.

Pete Drake image courtesy of the Country Music Hall of Fame. Andy Summers: Mo Summers.



Summers onstage with and Stewart Copeland.

Andy Summers: Mercury Studios (archive)

No. There's no reggae. I'm glad to field this question. It's bulls**t. Bob Marley was around. We listened to him just like we listened to everything else. But I had no interest in Jamaica apart from going down there for a holiday. The only thing we interacted with was the comfort of the bassline for Sting. As a singer, he could play less on the bass and be effective rather than hammer out 16th notes to play rock music while singing. He made expressive use of that. There was no nod to reggae other than stealing their approach to bass and drums. There was certainly no guitar playing like that in reggae. Playing offbeats on the guitar would have been very boring, and I was not interested in that.

But guitarists were copying you.

Yeah, we were so heavily copied. We were popular, and everybody wanted to be popular, so they thought they could be us. That was impossible. When you're a guitar player, you learn by copying people. That's how you get your licks, and eventually, you own them and make something more of them. I think the sound of the Police was unique. No one sounded like us.

Weren't you on a short list to replace Mick Taylor in the Rolling Stones?

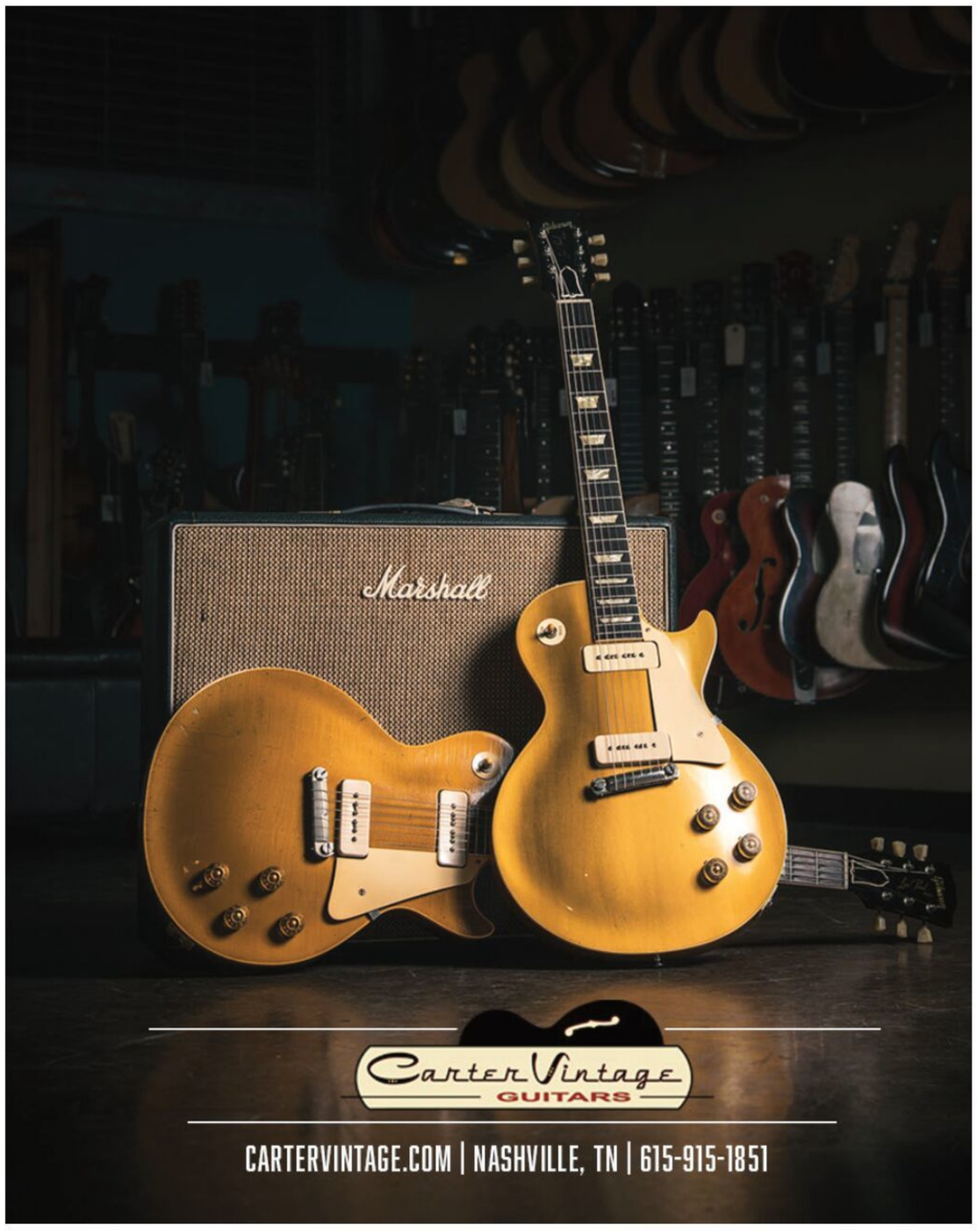
Yes. I came back from living in America to a tightly packed London scene, and my star started to rise quickly. People came to see me play, and eventually, Mick dropped out of the Stones. There was a fanciful article in *Melody Maker* where they asked, "Who will it be?" There were about six of us on that list. Ry Cooder was on it, Jeff Beck. Then, of course, Ronnie Wood turned up, and that was the end of that. My fate was to be in The Police, which transcended the Stones at that time. We were the biggest band in the world, and I remember Mick Jagger turning up at a stadium in Hartford, Connecticut. He was very sweet and wanted to know what was going on. So he sat on the side of the stage and watched the whole show.

Is your Telecaster retired?

It's not. I'm playing it a lot now. My son is a drummer and wanted to jam with me, so I pulled it out. Onstage, I generally play a Strat – my new signature model that Fender made for me (the Andy Summers Monochrome Strat). It's a beautiful guitar with photographs all over the body.

Which guitar effects interest you?

I've got the Fractal Audio System, which is incredible. You can do all sorts of combinations through it. It's hard to beat – very sophisticated. I'm also a fan of the Eventide Harmonizer, which I use in my shows. You can get so many beautiful, exotic sounds from it. Huge sounds. ***– Oscar Jordan***





IN MEMORIAM

GUITAR SHORTY

David Kearney, a.k.a. Guitar Shorty, passed away April 20. The award-winning blues guitarist, songwriter, and vocalist who brought joy to the world with his showmanship, humor, and emotional artistry was 87 and suffered health issues including congestive heart failure and cancer.

Last of the old-school "blues showman" performers like Guitar Slim, T-Bone Walker, Albert Collins, and Jimi Hendrix, Kearney distinguished himself with stage shows that included somersaults and backflips while playing ferocious guitar.

Born September 8, 1934, in Houston, Kearney was mesmerized by John Lee Hooker, Guitar Slim, and B.B. King. In his 20s, "Shorty" played with Otis Rush, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, T-Bone Walker, and his mentor, Guitar Slim. He recorded 14 critically acclaimed albums for various labels, and his spirited live shows kept him in demand around the world.

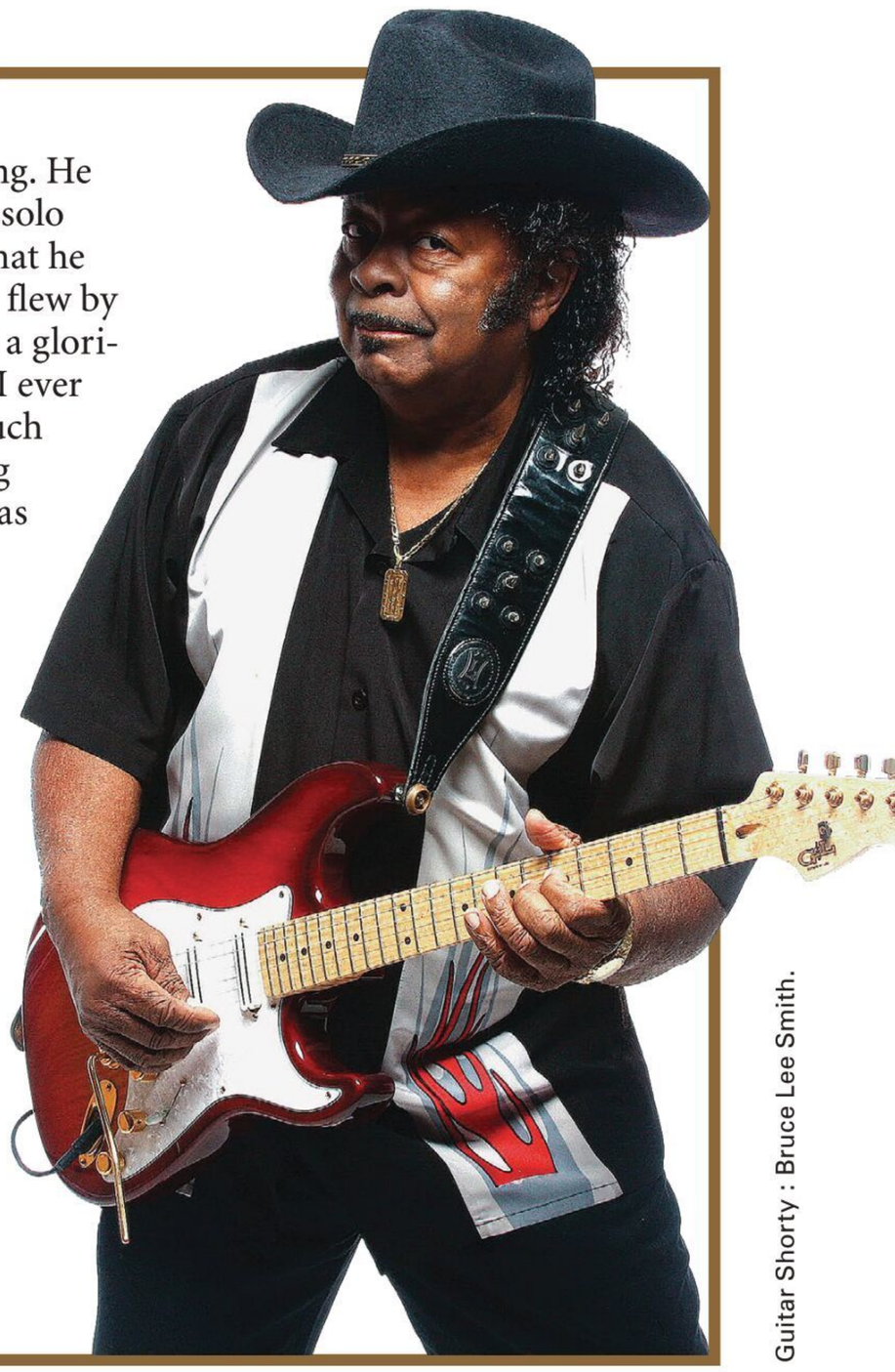
Kearney influenced millions of guitarists, including Buddy Guy and Hendrix, whom he met in the early '60s after Hendrix would go AWOL from the Army to see his shows. Hendrix admitted to stealing guitar licks from Shorty, adding, "The reason I started setting my guitar on fire was because I couldn't do backflips."

"Shorty was one of the most exciting and unpredictable guitar players I've ever heard." Bruce Iglauer, President of Alligator Records, told *VG*. "His music was rough-edged and improvisational, and his guitar sounds and note choices were constantly and spontaneously changing. He never played the same solo twice, even on songs that he played every night. He flew by the seat of his pants in a glorious way. I don't think I ever saw anyone take so much pleasure in just playing the guitar. When he was inspired, a song could take 10 or 15 minutes, during which he was constantly exploring melodies, tones, and textures. I never got tired of hearing him."

"I learned showmanship from Guitar Slim," Kearney once told *The Washington Times*. "Ray Charles taught me music."

He is survived by five children, 20 grandchildren, and a sister.

– Oscar Jordan



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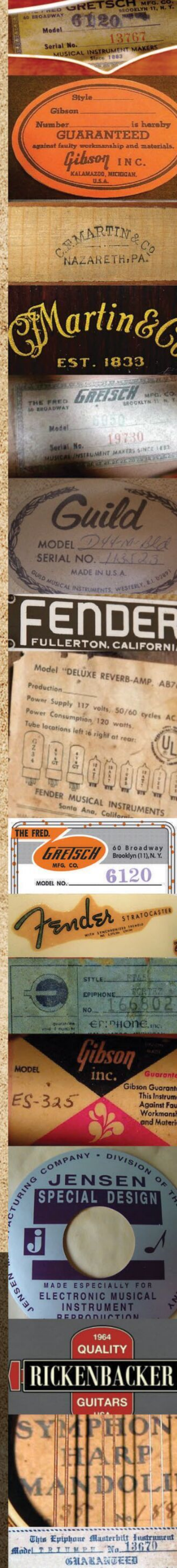
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DAVY KNOWLES

Manx Bluesman

The Isle Of Man, which sits in the middle of the Irish Sea, measures 15 by 30 miles. The quaint Manx country's claims to fame are the annual TT motorcycle races, the largest working waterwheel in the world, and being the birthplace of the Gibb brothers before they moved to Australia and became the Bee Gees.

Then came Davy Knowles, who Peter Frampton called "the gunslinger guitarist of the 21st century." Following two albums with Back Door Slam, which he formed at age 15, the 35-year-old blues guitarist and singer/songwriter's third solo effort, *What Happens Next*, ranges from the self-described "chugging low-end riff" of "Heartbreak Or Nothing" (think Bad Company) to the acoustic melodicism of "If I Ever Meet My Maker."

Growing up in such a small country, what type of music were you exposed to?

Like most kids, you have to have a host. My dad played guitar a little – folk things. But I heard his British blues records like Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac and the "Beano" album by John Mayall with Eric Clapton. It was Dire Straits that did it for me. I think "Sultans Of Swing" was kind of the epiphany. Mark Knopfler's playing was so melodic. You couldn't separate his voice from the guitar; it weaves in and out. The sound was so magical. I didn't use a pick for the longest time because I wanted to be Mark Knopfler.

My older sister, a wonderful music fan, too, introduced me to the Laurel Canyon kind of songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Crosby, Stills And Nash. But I was listening to acoustic folk by Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, and Davey Graham. I feel they're overlooked – that whole style. Paul Brady is another; he's known for songwriting, but if you try to learn his style, you'll find it's full of this Irish ornamentation.

What about older American blues players?

Absolutely, especially country blues like Mississippi John Hurt and Mance Lipscomb. A lot of the folk guys back home... if you listen to Ralph McTell, all of that bluesy American folk is there. He's fantastic.

Was there much live music for you to see?

We didn't really get big acts, but I think the local music scene on the Isle Of Man is exceptional. The pub scene was bustling, and there were great musicians of every kind. If you wanted punk or blues, too. I was into loud electric-blues guitar like Bluesbreakers and Cream, which seemed very exotic and American and far-off. If something's right in front of your nose, like traditional music and fiddle tunes were to me, you kind of dismiss it. Then I heard Rory Gallagher, who absorbed all of that. I don't think he'd studied it, particularly; it was part of his DNA. He was playing these real aggressive guitar parts, but there was something undeniably Celtic in the inflections and the triplets he leaned on. It sounded to me like a jig or a reel, but in this wild electric-guitar moment. It was a revelation. I didn't realize that was possible to marry these two worlds together. I learned to appreciate my own culture.

What are your main guitars and amps?

I love the PRS Vela. It's kind of a cross between an SG and a Telecaster, and it's a dream come true, working with the people there. Their instruments are spectacular.

I've never been much of a gear hoarder. Everything has to really serve a purpose or it gets moved on. I have a '66 Telecaster – one of those things I can't put down. There's a certain thickness to the notes, which sounds strange when you're talking about a Telecaster, but that's the best word I can think of. My first real electric guitar was a made-in-Mexico Telecaster I still have and love.

I own two amplifiers. Bludotone made a signature model because I used one of their Dumble-y things. It's a 30-watt combo, a little bit spikier than a Dumble, with a Celestion Creamback 12. The other amp is a PRS two-channel, 50-watt head. It's in my home studio, for songwriting and demos, because I can get lots of different sounds out of it.

On the new album, was it a conscious effort to not have a lot of long solos?

Yes, I feel like I've explored that on previous albums. And sometimes I get sick of hearing myself (laughs). I wanted things to be more concise and to the point. I've always felt like a guitar solo is totally useless if the song you're playing it in is crap. You've got to prioritize what's more important; showing off how well you've practiced, or is it a piece of music? Eric Corne, the producer, is not a traditionalist – not, "Let's make it sound like it was recorded in 1970." He's got a modern edge, and that's what we wanted. He did a cracking job.

Live is a different animal; it's "Let's see where it takes us." ***– Dan Forte***

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The Surfrajettes: Nicole Damoff (left), Shermy Freeman, Samantha Maloney, and Sarah Butler.

THE SURFRAJETTES

On 'Board

The Surfrajettes delight their fans with the perfect wave of jangly guitars, kooky kitsch, and '60s fashion. After several years touring and releasing singles, their first full album, *Roller Fink* – a mix of originals and carefully picked covers – has finally rolled ashore. *VG* caught up with guitarists Shermy and Nicole to talk about their surf planks, reverb tanks, and twangy tones.

What makes the Surfrajettes sound different from a thousand other instrumental bands?

Shermy Freeman: I think we've always tried to write and play what we actually like, versus trying to fit into the "surf" box.

Nicole Damoff: Also, our focus isn't really on shredding solos. We mostly care if the song is good and if it has a melody that will work as an instrumental.

Who plays what on the album?

ND: That's me in the left speaker most of the time. The divvying up of guitar parts happens pretty organically. One of us will say, "Hey, I have this melody or these chords – can you add something to go along with it?" It develops from there.

SF: At this point we also know what everyone's style is and what our strengths are, so parts are pretty much a no-brainer. Also, I'm in the right speaker and our production team has cooked up a secret stereo recipe that sounds extra dreamy.

One cool aspect of "Roxy Roller" is how that chord part *is* the lead part.

ND: We based our arrangement off of Suzi Quatro's version of the song. I'm playing the background rhythm, which I believe is the keyboard riff in Quatro's arrangement. But it translated quite well to a surfy, palm-muted guitar part.

"Surfer's Slide" has some fancy pickin' and a beat that's ready for a dance party.

ND: That's Shermy doing the fancy picking. We also added a harmony line over the main melody in one of the verses, which is one of my favorite parts about that song. It's a really fun one to play, it's so catchy.

SF: I discovered the original by Richie Allen & the Pacific Surfers a few years ago, and knew it would be a ball to cover. The picking is tricky, for sure.

"Train Kept-A Rollin'" has been covered countless times. How did you make it your own?

ND: We made it our own by adding a ton of reverb, of course. I've loved The Yardbirds' version for years, and our arrangement is almost a direct copy. It's got one of the best guitar riffs of all time and is one of our favorites to play live – we usually close our set with it.

SF: It's definitely a banger and fan fave. My favorite part on the recording is Nicole's "choo-choo" bends.

Blondie's "Heart of Glass" seems like a perfect surf jam. How did you stumble on that idea?

SF: When we first thought of the roller skating concept for the album, our bass player, Sarah, told us how she used to have "Heart of Glass" on vinyl as a kid. She rollerskated around her basement to it. It was fun to pay homage to that.

ND: Initially I wasn't really sure how well it was going to work, but now it's one of my favorite tracks on the album. We kept the disco feel with the bass and drums, but the guitars are pretty dreamy and surfy.

The Surfrajettes are a super-tight band. How do you coordinate parts so you're not stepping on each other's toes.

SF: Everyone is conscious of what others are playing. Additionally, if we do need to play the same chord in a section, we do different inversions, or octaves. Each player needs their time to shine.

ND: Yes, we're good at listening to each other and being aware of how each of our parts should complement the others. Thankfully, there's a lack of ego in this band, and we're all good with sitting back when the song calls for it.

What gear did you use on *Roller Fink*?

ND: My Strat is the only guitar I used on this album, played mostly through a Fender Excelsior amp. The reverb came from my EHX Canyon pedal. Our guitar tones remained pretty consistent throughout the sessions.

SF: I used my Creston Electric Creature guitar, Fender Excelsior, and SolidGoldFX pedals for reverb, compression, and delay. I also have a '64 blackface Fender Reverb Tank. In the studio, we're also lucky to have use of an original stereo EMT 140 plate reverb from the '60s.

You gotta have reverb for surf, but what's the sweet spot? Is there a point where it's too much?

ND: If there is indeed a point where there's too much reverb, we haven't recognized it yet.

SF: I always double-check to make sure mine is maxxed. ***– Pete Prown***

Surfrajettes photo courtesy of Hi-Tide Recordings.

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ALEX LIFESON

Fresh Sonic Horizons

What do you do when you're the beloved guitarist in a legendary band whose career was ended by the premature passing of a core member? When you're Alex Lifeson, you move forward creatively, and explore a new realm of playing. The result is Envy of None, consisting of Lifeson, bassist/guitarist/programmer Andy Curran (formerly of Coney Hatch), guitarist/keyboardist/programmer Alfio Annibalini, and vocalist/keyboardist Maiah Wynne.

The project – Lifeson hesitates to call it a band – just released its self-titled debut, a mesmerizing blend of alternative, ambient, and industrial styles with pop melodies. It sounds nothing like Rush and, for Lifeson, that was the point. The seeds were planted when he released the instrumental songs "Kabul Blues" and "Spy House" on his website in 2021 to promote the new Epiphone Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axcess Standard. They've been updated for *Envy of None*.

Musically, this album is about layers and texture.

There *are* a lot of layers. It's texture. It's ambience. It's soundscaping. There are *some* synths, but a lot of the sounds you're hearing are guitars that have been manipulated. I did a lot of backwards stuff. My goal was to create otherworldly sounds from a guitar that are not recognizable as a guitar. I'm really happy with the way it turned out because I can hear all that stuff I did that *sounds* like a synthesizer, or not quite, but *adds* to the song and makes the song unique-sounding and very densely rhythmic. That was the other goal here – to make a record you couldn't stop tapping your foot to and moving to. There's so much movement in all these songs.

You do some soloing, but not a lot.

I spent 40 years playing crazy solos on just about every song we wrote and recorded in Rush. That was the thing. It was part of it, and I love doing it. It's a great creative outlet I very, very much enjoy. I'm just not there anymore. It seems superfluous, like it takes up air and space in a song now where you could have other things going on – vocal or dynamic events that brings more to the song than noodling.

It was a different mindset, even more so than when you did 1996's *Victor*?

Totally. That was 26 years ago. That was a solo record where I did want to express *my* songwriting as opposed to Rush's songwriting. I also wanted to show my chops and technique and all of that. It was a different time, and I was a different player.

Alfio and Andy are also credited with playing guitar. Who plays what?

Alf played the more-traditional guitar parts, so when you hear a line in a verse, it's primarily him. I loved everything he did, and I didn't want to replace anything. In my mind, I was not the "guitar player" of this project. I was just one of two and a half guitar players. I give Andy a half-credit because he's a bass player (laughs)! He wrote a lot of the basic parts, and would link them with a little guitar moment he put in. I got so used to them, and they were so cool, so we kept all that stuff. That allowed me to do stuff in the background and create these curtains behind what was going on – and make a beautiful platform for Maiah's voice, which is fantastic; her delivery is great and her lyrics are excellent.

How did you achieve your sounds?

Generally, I would record all guitars clean, and add effects later. There's such a library of plug-ins now – *weird* effect plug-ins – and it's better to have a clean signal. When I say clean, it could still be dirty, but unaffected, and you could do whatever you want. If it works, great, if it doesn't work, well, you can go back and try something else.

Which guitars did you use?

I used my '57 Les Paul goldtop for a lot of stuff, especially the earlier stuff like "Kabul Blues" and "Spy House." I also used a Gibson Alex Lifeson R40 Les Paul Axcess with a stop tailpiece custom-built for me, the standard Axcess with the vibrato on a couple of tracks, and a PRS CE 24. For acoustics, I played a PRS Angelus, including on "Western Sunset" [a bittersweet instrumental tribute to late Rush drummer Neil Peart] and a Martin. ***– Bret Adams***

Alex Lifeson. Photo: Richard Sibbald.

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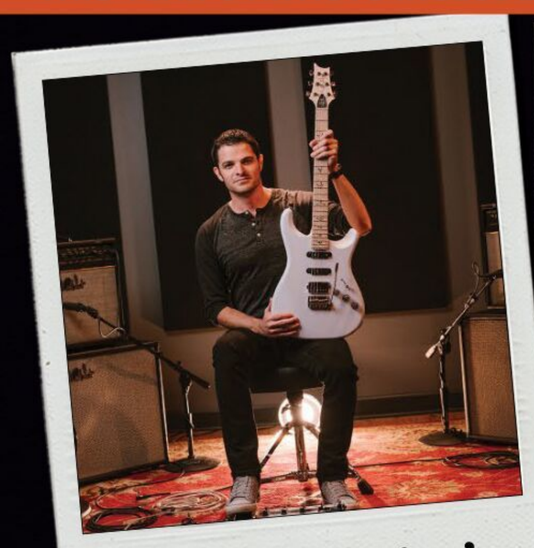
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HARVEY VALDES

Switched-On Bach

Ever since Andrés Segovia elevated the nylon-string guitar to a serious classical instrument a century ago, players have been performing the music of J.S. Bach – the gold standard of classical-guitar literature. Today, Harvey Valdes is continuing the tradition, with one huge difference – he's using a solidbody electric. On *Novare: J.S. Bach Lute Works on Electric Guitar*, Valdes displays a virtuoso's approach on a Teuffel Tesla, a steel-string that sounds full and beautiful, yet is wholly electric. What would Maestro Segovia think?

First, why Bach on electric guitar?

The electric guitar has a tremendous amount of sonic range and I'm interested in exploring contrapuntal music on it. Obviously, it's not the instrument of choice in interpreting works from the Baroque period, but I believe playing Bach on electric guitar widens the audience for that music, and breaks down the perceptions of how it should sound.

Did you record the whole album with the Teuffel Tesla?

Yes. I believe [builder] Ulrich Teuffel had clarity and resonance in mind when he designed the Tesla; it produces a clear, articulate, and balanced sound. The Tesla has two pickups – a single-coil in the neck position and humbucker in the bridge. There is no piezo. I played everything on the neck-position single coil.

What do all the knobs and buttons do?

It has a standard Volume and Tone knob, and a pickup selector. The three buttons below the strings are noise buttons; one activates 60-cycle hum, another is a kill switch, and the last activates a small mic under the neck pickup, for controllable feedback.

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I spent a lot of time thinking about tone for this music. I wanted a full-bodied and focused clean tone, with reverb for dimension. I played everything on the neck pickup because it produces a full and open sound.

The other part is the titanium saddles on the bridge. When I roll off the treble with the Tone knob, I get a warm sound, but retain a focused tone because of those saddles; it adds an acoustic presence, or shine, to the notes. I also use my right-hand nails and a bit of flesh on the string. I do daily maintenance to my nails – keep them filed, buffed, and at the right length. If they're not maintained, my tone suffers significantly, even if things are dialed in properly on the gear side.

What kind of electronic processing are we hearing?

Essentially, I created a wet/dry/wet rig. I recorded the album in my home studio through a Fryette GP/DI 1-watt amp. The GP/DI has an analog-speaker simulation, and I sent the cab-sim signal to a channel into my DAW. I sent another signal to a Two Notes Torpedo VB-101, which is a rackmounted speaker-and-mic simulator. In that, I set up a stereo cabinet rig with two cab and microphone combinations panned hard left and right, and then sent that into my DAW. We used a Bricasti reverb, Lexicon 224 reverb, a touch of Roland Space Echo, a Highland Dynamics BG2 compressor, and Manley EQ. Finally, we bounced the mixes onto tape, which sweetened up the whole tonal spectrum.

Was there one Bach piece that was particularly difficult?

All the pieces have detail I had to contend with. For the bass notes in "Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E-Flat Major, BWV 998," I worked to keep them big and resonant, yet not to overpower everything else. I had to pay close attention to a balanced right-hand attack, so the bass never overpowered the melody. On "BWV 998 Allegro," which is a really fast piece, I had to work on staying relaxed to play at a faster tempo and not have any notes jump out or sound louder in the phrases. Basically, the right hand dictates everything. If it's not functioning, the music falls apart very quickly.

How do you approach dynamics, which are so important to classical guitar.

Again, there's a bit of compression before the amp, and a little in post. I used it to fatten the tone and not squash the attack – the *last* thing I want is for a compressor to color the dynamics in my playing. I also do most of my practicing on a nylon-string classical because I enjoy its intimate relationship to sound production. I try to approximate that approach onto the electric guitar. Again, it all comes down to right-hand control, since that's where the sound begins. With the Teuffel, I like to feel the guitar and amp working together as a breathable instrument. ***– Pete Prown***

Harvey Valdes: Shervin Lainez.

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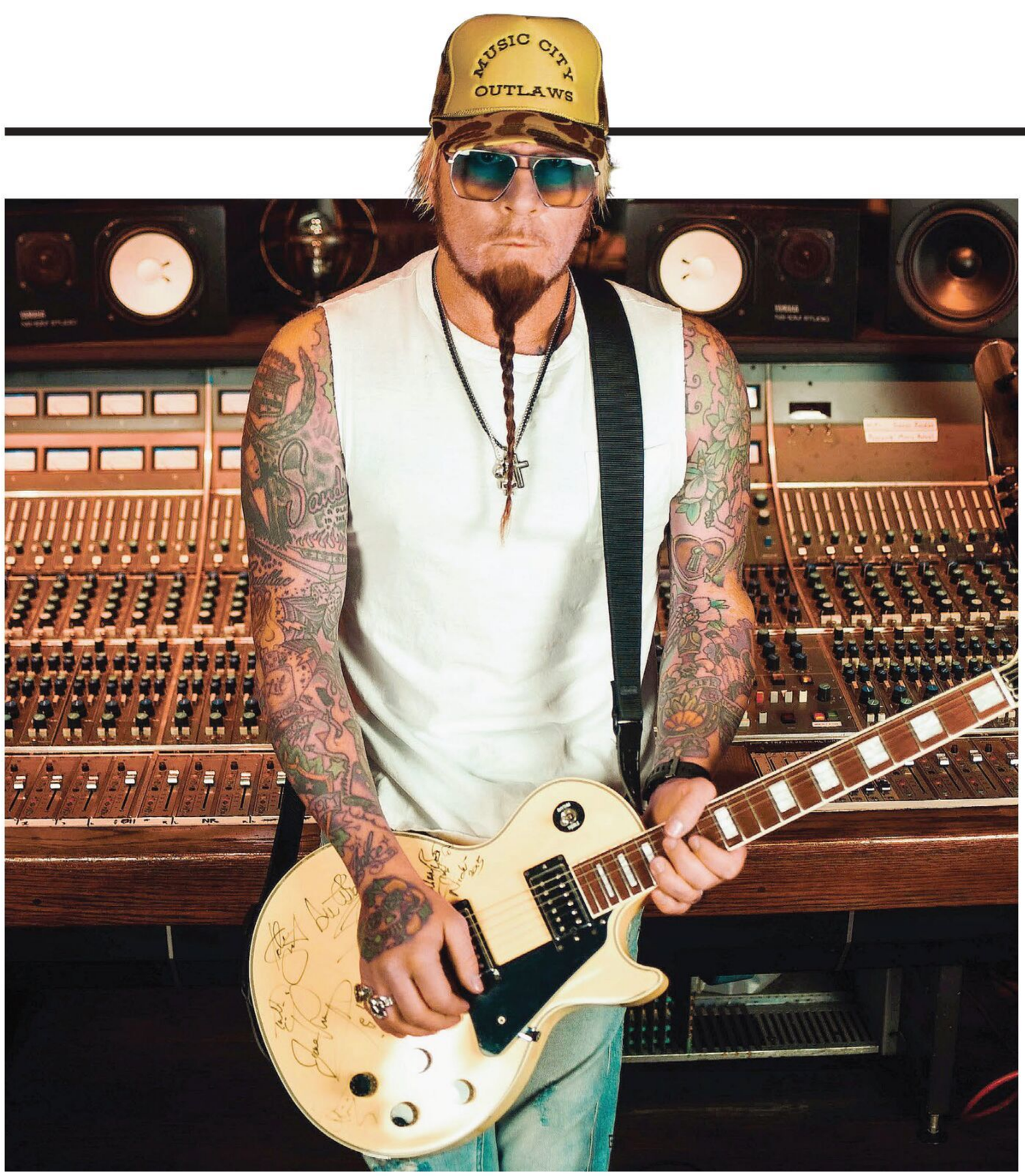
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JEREMY POPOFF

Gettin' Lit Again

After the gloom of grunge, the late '90s saw a surge of energetic sounds, mixing hard rock, pop, and punk into an irresistible confection. Green Day, Weezer, and Blink-182 were in the vanguard, but comin' up fast was Lit. Hailing from Orange County, California, the band hit pay-dirt with the infectious singles "My Own Worst Enemy" and "Miserable." With a brand-new album, *Tastes Like Gold*, Lit is preparing to hit the road. *VG* caught up with guitarist Jeremy Popoff for the details.

After years of downcast grunge, Lit was a breath of fresh air.

We grew up on a lot of metal and classic rock; there has always been a lot of that in our tone. Songwriting-wise, we were really influenced by Elvis Costello, The Cars, and that kind of '70s and '80s pop stuff. We are definitely kids of the MTV generation.

You're a melodic player whose parts focus on the song, as in "Do It Again."

I've always been a fan of melodic guitar parts and catchy riffs. I prefer solos that you can sing along with, like those in "Don't Stop Believing" or "More Than A Feeling." My influences were Dave and Adrian from Iron Maiden, Glen and K.K. from Judas Priest, Tom and Barry from Boston, and Steve, Pete, and Phil from Def Leppard. George Lynch is also one of my favorite players.

"Life That I Got" is quintessential Lit – heavy, simple, and melodic.

That was one of maybe three songs my brother [Lit singer Ajay Popoff] and I wrote over Zoom during the lockdowns; we wrote it with Zach and Matt from American Authors. The mission was to write simple, catchy, good-time anthems that have nothing to do with politics or viruses. That was a fun one, though honestly, we hate Zoom writes!

How did you get that clean, lo-fi rhythm guitar part on "Yeah Yeah Yeah"?

We did a lot of stuff at Sienna Studios, in Nashville, which used to be the famous Quad studios. But we also recorded a lot at the house. That one was my Duesenberg Fullerton into a Kemper that Marti Fredriksen let me use. He has an encyclopedia of sounds in that amp.

In 2000, Lit contributed "Over My Head" to the animated movie, *Titan A.E.* How did that gig come up?

They asked us to write a song for the soundtrack, but we were so busy I first said "No," then I found out [songwriter] Glen Ballard was producing, and I didn't want to miss that opportunity. We were home for less than two days between tours, and I managed to write that in a couple hours while packing and getting ready to leave again for three months. We recorded it on the first three days off from the tour. In Boston, Steven Tyler stopped by and hung out – that's his high harmony on the chorus.

Which guitars, pedals, and amps did you use on the new album?

I haven't changed my setup much in 25 years; I have a 1979 or '80 Marshall JMP combo with Vintage 30s that is an absolute beast, and a Kemper on which I modeled a couple of my prized Marshall JMP and JCM 800 heads. My pedalboard has a Morley Bad Horsie wah, Boss SD-1 overdrive and a DD-3 delay, MXR Phase 90, and an original Digitech Whammy Pedal. For guitars, I have a Les Paul Custom signed by Iron Maiden; I use it a lot in the studio, but it doesn't go on the road. I also used my silver-sparkle Fender Custom Shop Tele and my white Duesenberg. My favorite pickup is the Seymour Duncan Trembucker.

Do you have any vintage guitars?

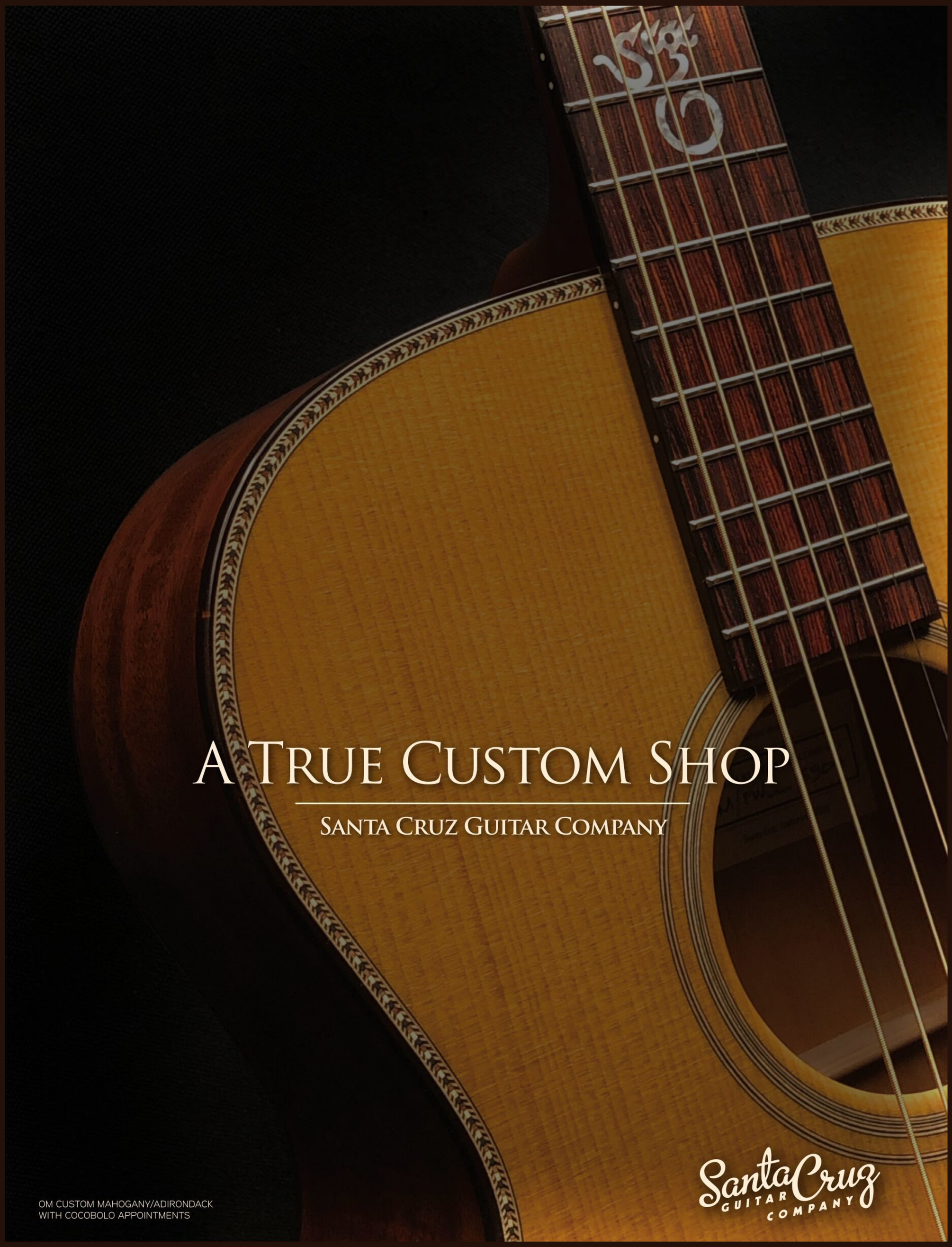
I have a couple of cool old Gibson acoustics, covered in road scars and stories. At this point, some of my main guitars were bought new, but I beat the hell out of them. I just want to play them and take them on the road. That's also why I don't have any unopened bottles of Pappy or vintage wine – cuz I'll drink that sh*t!

"Brother bands" are notorious for fighting: – The Kinks, Black Crowes, and the Everly Brothers come to mind. But you and Ajay somehow figured it out.

We're the only two kids in our family, and are only two years apart, so we were always close. And we've been in a band with [bassist] Kevin Baldes since high school, so we're all brothers, really. Sure, we fight, but we love what we do together more than we get on each other's nerves. ***– Pete Prown*** **VG**

Jeremy Popoff: Gabbi Rae.

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EMG

Classics

In November of 1954, 16-year-old Jack Jones walked into a Seattle pawn shop and noticed a strange doubleneck guitar. "It was like a magnet – I *knew* it was meant to be mine," he said. The tag was marked "$125."

"I offered the entire $110 that was in my pocket," he added. "The guy's wife told him to 'Let the nice boy have it,' so he did."

The guitar's story was almost cliché in a port town like Seattle – a sailor had pawned it, triggering fanciful scenes in Jones' mind... "I bet it was won in a poker hand," he thought to himself.

Guitarist in the country-western band The Jack Day Trio, from 1956 through '68, Jones gigged six nights every week in area honky-tonks, plugging his Mosrite doubleneck into a Magnatone amp to supplement his earnings as a butcher and helping put food on the table for his six kids. He also backed Tommy Collins, The Platters, and many others with this guitar before jumping genres to jazz in '68, when he bought a Gibson Tal Farlow.



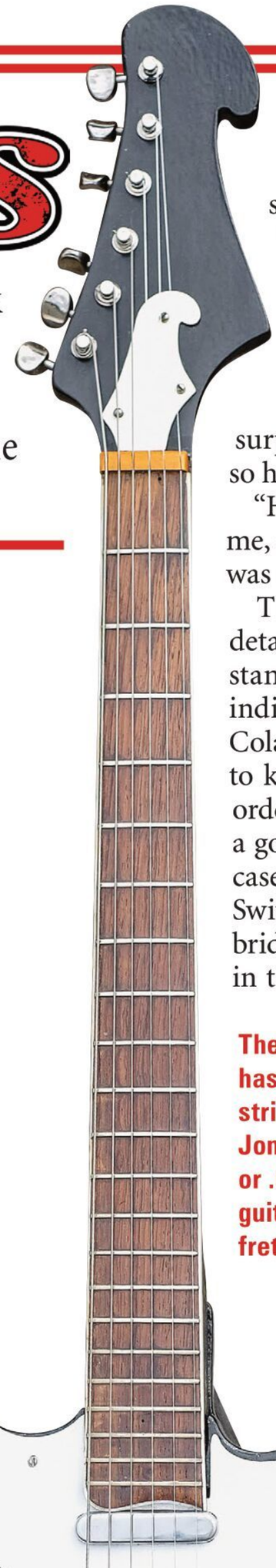
Jack Jones today with the doubleneck.

For most of his time with it, Jones wasn't sure what he had, referring to it as "My Fender guitar."

"Someone once told me Bigsby made the necks, and that was all I knew," he said.

That source was wrong, of course, and its real identity remained a mystery until 2012, when *VG* contributor Johnny Cola found a picture of The Jack Day Trio, with Jones on guitar, while searching the internet for old guitars.







The octave neck has mandolin strings, and Jones used .011s or .012s on the guitar neck. All frets are original.

"I knew what it was in an instant," Cola said. "The headstock shapes, truss covers, the space between the D and G tuners, the wave at the end of the fretboards, the angled Carvin pickup, the small dot inlays – that's a Semie Moseley guitar!"

Intrigued, Cola was pleasantly surprised to find Jones on Facebook, so he reached out.

"He was more than happy to talk to me, and I was a bit shocked to hear he was still playing gigs," he said.

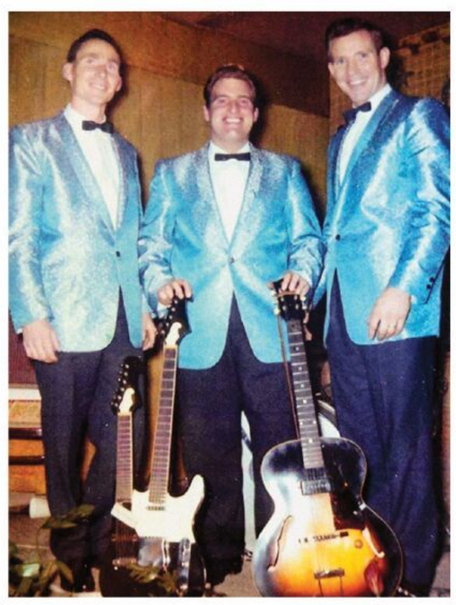
Their conversation unearthed details including the guitar's bridge-stamped serial number, 5300, which indicates it's from late 1953, which led Cola to dig further. He says it's hard to know whether this was a custom order, or if he simply saw the Tele as a good starting point. Whatever the case, he used an ash body from Fender. Switching is three-way – neck/both/bridge – with the octave neck added in the middle. Volume and Tone do not blend.

Astoundingly, the guitar has never had a case ("I could never find one to fit!" Jones said) and has never been given so much as a setup, let alone been taken apart.

"It's the exact way I bought it except for string changes," Jones said. "I use the octave neck when needed for the song, but I'm on the lower neck 95 percent of the time.

Cola arranged for Mosrite authority Deke Dickerson to visit Jones and see the guitar in-person, and he believes it's one





Jones with the Jack Day Trio in 1959 (above), at the Orchard Club, Wenatchee, Washington. That's Day with his ES-125, and drummer, "Sullie." A different version of the band in '61, with bassist Johnny Saunders.

of the first half-dozen instruments built by Semie Moseley.

"The necks are what Semie was famous for – thin and narrow at the nut," Dickerson noted. "They feel great – to me, better than a Tele neck of that era. The standard neck is definitely maple, but the octave addition is hard to say because it's hidden under that black paint. I would *guess* it's maple, too. Overall, the guitar is surprisingly well-balanced and comfortable to play."

Now in his mid 80s, Jones will play at least 120 gigs in 2022 – two or three per week, mostly solo at restaurants, but some in duos and trios, some with the Mosrite.

"He's an amazing guy," said Cola. "He tells me he has played more than 15,000 gigs, which is crazy to think about." –
Ward Meeker



The space between the tuners exists because Klusons were sold in three-on-a-side sets, so Semie had to flip a set to work in his six-in-line configuration.

Do you have a classic/collectible/vintage guitar with an interesting personal story that might be a good fit for "Classics?" If so, send an e-mail to ward@vintageguitar.com for details on how it could be featured.

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ORGAN TRANSPLANT

The Vox/Thomas Organ V-8 Berkeley Super Reverb

BY DAVE HUNTER

Most fans of classic British guitar amplifiers have heard the tale of how the great all-tube Vox models of the early 1960s transmogrified into disappointing solid-state Vox-in-name-only creations from the Thomas Organ Company later in the decade. But a brief rest stop on that road included nifty all-tube builds from California, like this '65 V-8 Berkeley Super Reverb.

It's hard to overstate the breakneck speed at which the culturally-hip guitar amp evolved through the '60s, and Vox offers a great example. Rarely did its flagship designs sit for a year or two before Tom Jennings, Dick Denney, and the team at Jennings Musical Instruments (JMI) imposed change or created an entirely new model.

The greatest change of all came when JMI licensed its products to Thomas Organ. Looking back today, it was an incredible move given the amps had attained peak popularity about the time the deal was penned in '64.

The Berkeley's original trolly is a collectible extra of the vintage Vox era.

This '65 V-8 Berkeley Super Reverb head and cab comes from a short period (likely less than a year) when Thomas Organ manufactured its own renditions of Vox *tube* amps, between their brief initial distribution of British-made product in the U.S. and the wholesale changeover to solid-state. As such, it's a cool missing link – and a groovy-sounding amp in its own right.

To most perusers of Vox history, JMI's embracing of the deal with Thomas Organ seems utterly bonkers. Vox was at the top of its game rolling into '64, though financial difficulties were bubbling under the surface; in '63, Jennings sold controlling interest in JMI to the U.K. company Royston Group for £100,000 (the equivalent of a little more than $2.5 million today). In theory, the cash injection would help JMI keep up with the demand for Vox – and demand there was – but the company was already in a cycle of two steps forward, one step back.

Still, you couldn't have picked a hipper brand to back at the time. In *Beatles Gear* (Backbeat Books, 3rd Revised Edition 2010), Andy Babiuk quotes a piece published in the American trade magazine *The Music Trades* in February of



1965 VOX/THOMAS ORGAN V-8 BERKELEY SUPER REVERB

- Preamp tubes: three ECC83, one ECC82
- Output tubes: two EL84
- Rectifier: EZ81
- Controls: Volume, Treble, Bass, Reverb, tremolo Speed & Depth
- Speakers: two 10" Celestion 7724, aka Vox "Bulldogs"
- Output: approximately 15 watts RMS

Amp and photos courtesy of Casey Mickelson.

NOT NEW!









SansAmp GT2 (1993)

Affectionately referred to as the "desert island" pedal, the SansAmp GT2 is unchanged (except for the DC input very early on). Consistently in production since introduced, it enables you to "architecturally" create your own rig in seconds.

SansAmp Classic (1989)

B. Andrew Barta's unique invention was the catalyst for the whole "going direct" movement over 30 years ago. Since then, SansAmp has evolved into an extensive line of pedals and racks, as well as being the heart of our Fly Rig® Series. Of the pedal formats, the SansAmp Classic is the most sophisticated.

EXCITEMENT NEVER GETS OLD



SansAmp Bass Driver DI (1994)

Often unseen, it's hardly a secret that the SansAmp Bass Driver is the secret weapon behind mammoth rigs on arena stages around the globe. It is also widely recognized as a studio staple for virtually every genre, and will make any FOH engineer smile.

DOES SOMETHING HAVE TO BE "NEW" TO BE EXCITING?

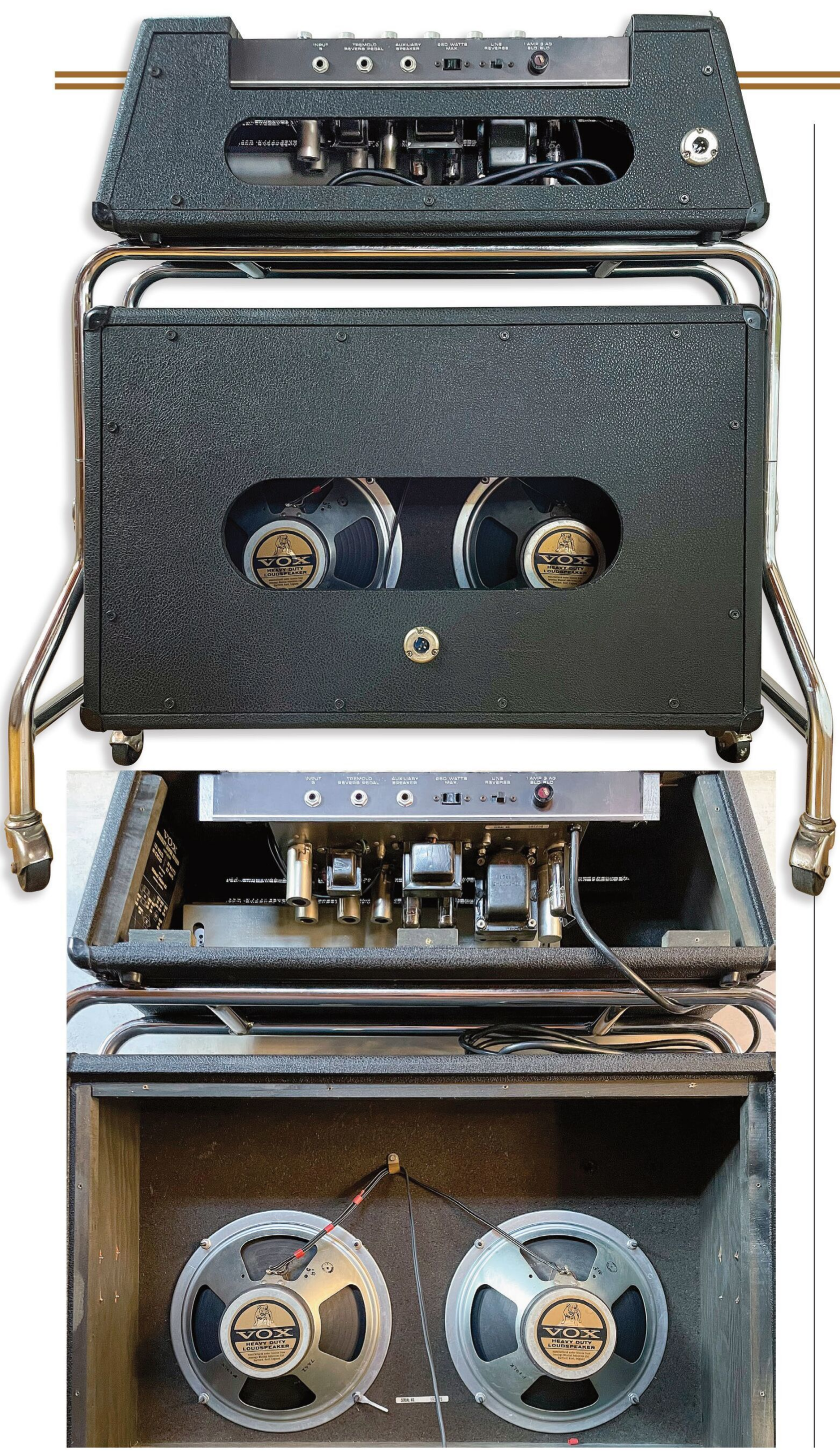
In a world of planned obsolescence and constant upgrades, it's rare an electronic music-related product can survive a lengthy lifespan. Yet these 3, in particular, have done just that. (We have more, such as the MIDI Mouse since 1995, but let's stay focused on SansAmp.)

For over 30 years, SansAmps have been used for every kind of music style from hardcore metal to commercial jingles and with all kinds of instruments, not just guitar and bass. Engineered for both recording and live applications, all SansAmps are 100% analog, multi-dimensional, user-friendly devices that deliver he warm, rich, organic tones of the most desirable mic'd up tube amplifiers on the planet. Is it any wonder SansAmp is regarded as the standard of the industry? Now go check out which one is right for you.

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The tubes and transformers visible imply "British amp" and there's no label on the chassis or control panel to indicate otherwise. The 10" Celestion 7724 speakers, relabeled Vox "Bulldog" for the U.S. market, hark from an era when JMI was shipping British-made components to Thomas Organ.

'64, calling out these awe-inspiring new Vox amps: "The Beatles… brought with them not only the famous haircuts but £1,000-worth of British-made equipment. The four Liverpool boys, creators of the famous Mersey Sound, insisted on taking their Vox amplifiers with them on every tour. The extra-powerful amps they are using now were specially created for The Beatles by Jennings Musical Industries Ltd. of Dartford, Kent, England. The extra power was really necessary to make 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' heard above the screaming of the teenage fans."

The Beatles taking their Vox amps to the U.S. represented a major coup for JMI, though it would ultimately do little to help dig Tom Jennings out of the hole he'd hoped Royston would fill.

In late August of '64, JMI agreed to let Thomas Organ distribute Vox products in the U.S.; JMI was already selling Thomas keyboards in the U.K., so they began sending Vox amps to the U.S. in exchange, and received cash for the balance of any sales differential.

Initially, it seemed the proverbial win/win, funneling product into a valuable market quickly and widely, but it evolved into a *major* win for the Yanks – and a resounding *lose* for Vox's beleaguered parent company – because demand for Vox amps in the wake of the Beatles frenzy was so heated that JMI couldn't come close to shipping enough units. To speed the process, JMI agreed to ship amplifier chassis and Celestion speakers so Thomas Organ could then manufacture cabinets for final assembly. It was a seemingly logical move.

Midway through '65, however, with demand for Vox still nowhere close to being met in North America, Thomas Organ's Joe Benaron requested that his company be sold the rights to the Vox name for North America so it could manufacture the amps in their entirety. Tom Jennings objected, *vehemently*. But, having sold a majority stake to Royston a year and a half before, he no longer had final say. Royston – itself badly in need of capital generation – approved the sale of the Vox brand name, and the Californians proceeded to manufacture their own Vox amplifiers.

In the midst of its deal with Vox, Thomas Organ had re-named many of the amps sent by JMI, and some of those names were adopted for the California-made line that followed. For example, the AC30 Super Reverb Twin became the Buckingham, while the AC15 and AC10 Super Reverb Twin morphed into this V-8 Berkeley Super Reverb. Once manufacture began stateside, the head-and-cab configurations remained, but Thomas redesigned them with simplified circuits. Other Thomas-designed tube amps joined a lineup populated by the likes of the four-watt Pathfinder, 17-watt Pacemaker, 17-watt Cambridge Reverb, and 50-watt Royal Guardsman (the name briefly given the JMI-made AC50).

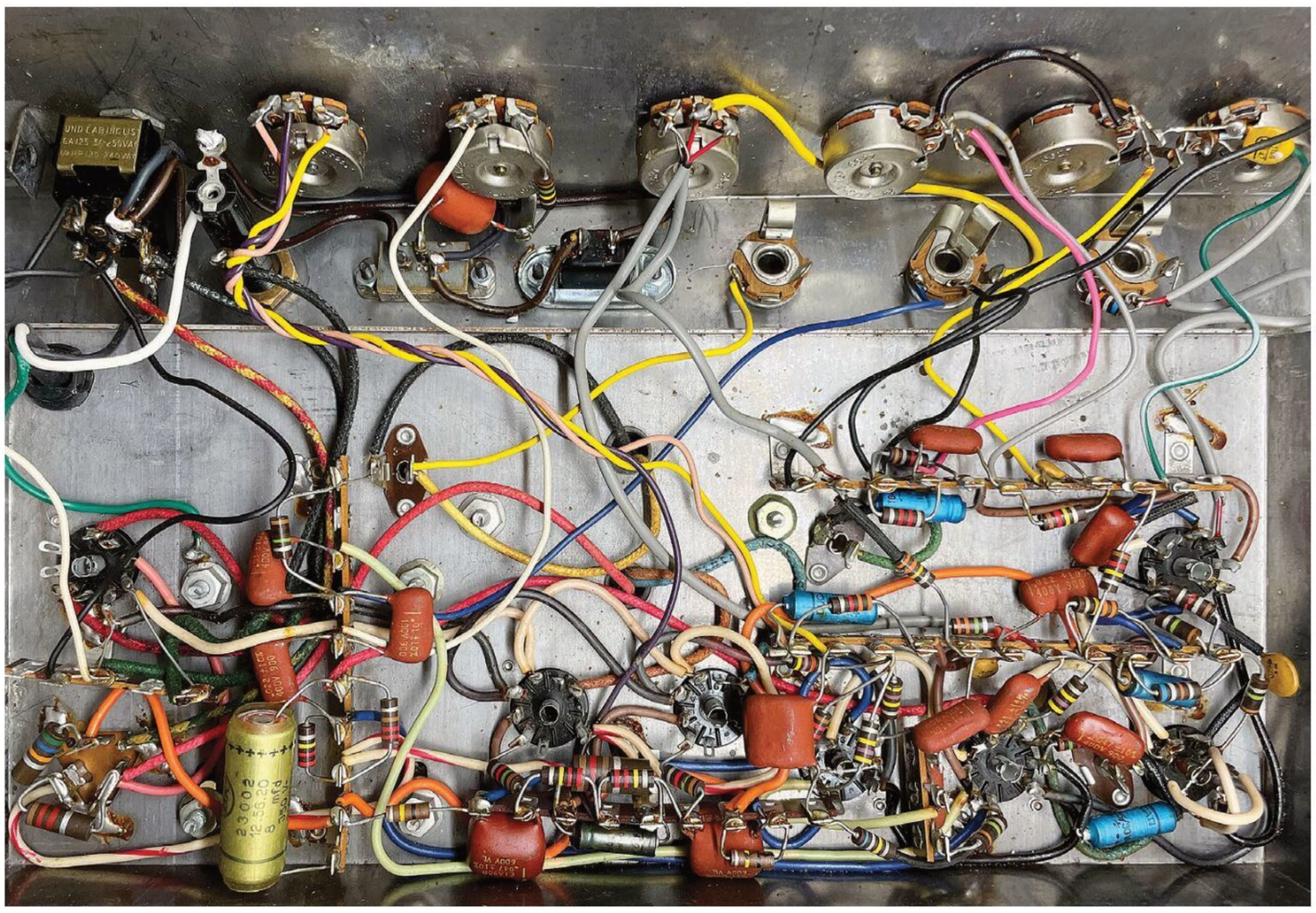
Our subject here is Thomas Organ's version of an AC15... sort of. It's something a decently skilled amp tech might build if he had studied the original JMI schematic then re-created it in his own workshop without strictly adhering to it. It has a pair of cathode-biased EL84s, three ECC83s (12AX7s), one ECC82 (12AU7), and an EZ81 rectifier tube, along with plenty of other British-made parts hanging from the chassis. The circuit is wired largely point-to-point, with just a few terminal strips to support components, while the cab houses a pair of original 10" Celestion 7724 speakers relabeled Vox "Bulldog." Given all of that, it sounds pretty darn good!

"Although it has been re-capped, I try not to push it too hard, to preserve the tubes, transformers, and speakers," reports owner Casey Mickelson, who acquired the Berkeley about 10 years ago from a player in the Midwest who gigged it regularly. "It's a beautiful-sounding amp with that classic Vox chime and overdriven growl. It idles quiet as a church mouse with hardly any discernible hum.

"There's something magical about the AC15-modeled circuit in this amp," he adds. "The controls are very usable and the tremolo and reverb are nicely balanced; it doesn't get too swampy or surfy like many vintage Fenders. There's a Black Keys riff I like to play, and this is the only tremolo I've found in a vintage amp that can get that high-speed modulation."

Given their place in history, these amps don't come cheaply on the vintage market, but for fans of the full westward transition of the brand, the VB-8 Berkeley Super Reverb offers an appealing link in the chain. VG





The knobs and control layout (top) will appear familiar to those who know Vox's solid-state amps of the late '60s, but these front an all-tube circuit. The hand-wired circuit is rendered in semi point-to-point, with disparate terminal strips to help support many components.



The amp's Vox-branded tubes were likely made by Mullard in the U.K.

Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Gil Hembree



1983 Gibson Les Paul Spotlight Special in Antique Natural.

NEW & UPDATED LISTINGS

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
2008	Breedlove Alpine			
	Master Class Mandolin		$1,825	$2,400
1964	Burns Nu-Sonic		$825	$1,125
2009	Charvel So-Cal Series		$750	$1,050
2011	Collings MT Mandolin		$2,100	$2,800
1968	Danelectro Bellzouki	1 pickup teardrop body	$850	$1,125
1967	Danelectro Dane A Series	6-string, 1 pickup, V	$1,100	$1,450
1960	Danelectro Deluxe Single Pickup	White or walnut, 1 pu	$1,150	$1,525
2011	Deering Eagle II 5-String Banjo	Resonator back	$1,425	$1,850
2000	Dubenbostel F-5 Mandolin	Loar-style	$19,000	$25,000
1998	Ehlers 16 BTM		$2,200	$2,900
1968	EKO Florentine	Dbl cut arch	$525	$700
1950	Epiphone Century Lap Steel		$440	$575
1950	Epiphone FT 110	Round shoulder	$2,900	$3,800
1930	Epiphone Recording A	Tenor 4-string	$1,150	$1,525
1998	Fender Deluxe Reverb			
	'65 Reissue Amp	22 watts, 1x12, Blackface	$750	$1,000
2003	Fender Esquire Custom GT/Celtic/Scorpion	Korea	$450	$600
1964	Fender Jazz Bass	Sunburst, late '64	$9,000	$12,000
1965	Fender Jazzmaster	Surf Green (custom color)	$10,000	$14,000
1964	Fender King	Indian, Zebra, Vermillion	$1,350	$1,800
1946	Fender Model 26 Amp		$2,000	$2,700
1966	Fender Stratocaster	Sunburst, dot markers	$13,000	$18,000
1953	Fender Stringmaster Steel (two-neck)	Blond	$1,400	$1,800
1953	Fender Telecaster	Blond, black 'guard	$37,000	$49,000
1963	Fender Telecaster Custom	Sunburst	$22,000	$29,000
1986	G & L ASAT		$1,125	$1,500
2000	G & L ASAT 20th Anniversary	50 made	$1,225	$1,625
1996	GFI Ultra 10-string pedal steel		$2,100	$2,700
1969	Gibson Citation	Sunburst or natural	$17,500	$23,500
1997	Gibson CL-35 Deluxe		$1,200	$1,600
1982	Gibson Corvus I	1 humbucker	$900	$1,200
1962	Gibson Dove	Natural	$5,100	$6,800
2004	Gibson Duane Eddy Signature		$4,000	$5,300
1954	Gibson Electraharp Steel	4-pedals, 8-strings	$850	$1,100
1963	Gibson F-25 Folk Singer	12-fret	$975	$1,300
1908	Gibson F-4 Mandolin	3-point	$5,000	$6,600
1935	Gibson F-7 Mandolin	Short neck F-5, f-hole style	$7,000	$9,500
1963	Gibson Firebird I	Sunburst, reverse, trem	$8,100	$10,700
1983	Gibson Les Paul Spotlight Special	Figured top	$6,200	$8,200
1976	Gibson Les Paul Standard	Wine Red or natural	$2,900	$3,900
1961	Gibson Les Paul Standard (SG body)	Cherry, side vibrola, PAFs	$15,000	$20,500
1961	Gretsch Chet Atkins (6120)	Double-cut	$3,300	$4,450
1972	Gretsch Chet Atkins Tennessean (7655)		$2,400	$3,200
1977	Gretsch Corvette (7623, solidbody)	2 pickups	$875	$1,175
1977	Guild Aragon F-30	Mahogany	$1,825	$2,450



Rick Hogue with a 1969-'72 Harmony Buck Owens American.

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	HIGH
1957	Guild Aristocrat M-75		$4,100	$5,400
1986	Guild Brian May BHM-1		$3,000	$4,050
1970	Hagstrom D'Aquisto Jimmy	1st design	$1,100	$1,500
1960	Harmony H1311 Brilliant Cutaway	Blond	$750	$1,000
1965	Harmony H78 Double Cutaway Hollowbody	3 pickups, Bigsby	$1,200	$1,625
1978	Ibanez IC250 Iceman		$950	$1,275
1997	Ibanez JEM 555		$525	$700
1989	Ibanez JEM7 Series	Various colors	$1,700	$2,250
1977	Ibanez Model 600 Concord Series		$625	$835
1985	Jackson Soloist	San Dimas-built, Floyd Rose	$1,700	$2,250
1985	Jackson Soloist Student J1 (USA)	San Dimas-built	$1,300	$1,700
1937	Kalamazoo KG-14/KG-14N	Flat top L-00, w/grd	$2,000	$2,650
1965	Kalamazoo KG-2/KG-2 A	Early Mustang body	$475	$625
1940	Kalamazoo KGN-12 Oriole	Oriole-logo, natural, flat top	$2,000	$2,650
1958	Kay Barney Kessel Artist	K 6701, 1 pickup	$2,100	$2,800
2010	Kentucky KM-1000 F-style Mandolin (Asia)		$975	$1,265
1927	Kona Style 2		$2,400	$3,200
1977	Kramer 450-G Deluxe		$1,100	$1,450
1984	Kramer Baretta	Various early features vary	$1,200	$2,600
1996	Larrivee 00-05	All mahogany	$1,200	$1,600
1998	Larrivee D-02/D-02E		$550	$750
2010	Larrivee LS-03R (rosewood)		$1,200	$1,600
1966	Magnatone Model 422 Amp	Lo power 1x12	$600	$800
2000	Marshall JCM 600 Amp Head		$355	$470
1976	Martin D-41		$3,225	$4,225
2011	Martin D-41A Turbo Mandolin Brothers	Adirondack	$2,900	$3,800
2011	Martin DCPA4 Shaded		$975	$1,275
2018	Martin DRS2 (Road/2 Series)	Spruce top, Mexico	$500	$650
2018	Martin OM-21	Sitka, Indian	$1,900	$2,500
2020	Martin OM-28	Sitka, Indian	$2,050	$2,750
2007	Martin OM-28 Marquis Madagascar	Madagascar rosewood	$2,800	$3,600
1997	Matchless ES/EB Cabinet	4x12	$750	$975
1999	Matchless Skyliner Reverb 15 210 Amp		$1,075	$1,400
1971	Mesa-Boogie Mark I Combo (Model A) Amp	1x12 or 1x15	$1,675	$2,225
1990	Mid-Missouri M-0 Mandolin		$340	$440
1963	Mosrite Ventures Model	Blue or red, bound	$6,500	$8,500
1970	Mossman Great Plains	Brazilian rosewood	$2,700	$3,550

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The following guitar dealers take part in the *Vintage Guitar* price survey. Their input is one of the research tools used by *Vintage Guitar*.

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Cream City Music

Dave Rogers
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David Davidson and Paige Davidson
Davidson's Well Strung Guitars

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Drew Berlin's Vintage Guitars

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Elderly Instruments

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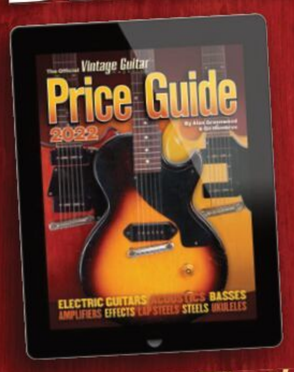
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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
2000	Music Man Albert Lee Signature	Tremolo option avail.	$1,025	$1,350
2000	Music Man Axis	2 Hums, opaque	$1,025	$1,350
1995	Music Man Sterling Bass	4-string	$875	$1,175
1942	National Aristocrat		$925	$1,225
1967	National Bobbie Thomas		$700	$925
1959	National Chicagoan Lap Steel		$325	$425
1935	National Don Style 1		$7,500	$10,200
1935	Oahu Graphic Body	Hawaiian scene, etc.	$300	$400
1935	Oahu Hawaiian Lap Steel	Sunburst, student-grade	$275	$360
1980	OME Grubstake Banjo		$850	$1,100
1916	Orpheum Model No. 1 Mandolin-Banjo		$375	$500
1955	Orpheum Thin Twin Jimmy Reed 865E		$1,225	$1,675
1985	Orville by Gibson J-160E style		$1,600	$2,100
1995	Ovation Adamas 1687	Sunburst	$1,700	$2,200
2003	Ovation Celebrity CK-057		$325	$450
1962	PANaramic Acoustic-Elec. Archtop	Cutaway, 2 pickups	$1,000	$1,300
1928	Paramount Aristocrat Tenor Banjo		$1,125	$1,450
1930	Paramount Super/Super Paramount Tenor Banjo		$2,700	$3,500
1997	Parker Concert		$1,700	$2,250
1995	Peavey Defender		$185	$250
1990	Peavey Destiny		$300	$400
1990	Pedulla MVP-4 Bass flame top		$1,400	$1,850
1968	Ramirez A/A	Brazilian, cedar	$6,000	$7,900
1939	Recording King M-4	Archtop, Gibson	$900	$1,200
1964	Rickenbacker Model 1999 Bass (Rose-Morris)		$7,900	$10,500
1959	Rickenbacker Model 320	Capri, thick body	$12,300	$16,400
1989	Rickenbacker Model 325V59		$2,500	$3,400
1969	Rickenbacker Model 4000 Bass		$7,500	$10,000
1956	Rickenbacker Model DW Steel	Legs, double neck	$850	$1,100
1892	S.S. Stewart Universal Favorite Banjo	Plain appointments	$775	$1,000
1965	Silvertone Amp-In-Case	1 pickup (Model 1448), black	$575	$800
1955	Silvertone Gene Autry Melody Ranch		$300	$450
1955	Silvertone Meteor	1 pickup	$425	$575
1938	Stromberg Master 300	2 braces, Sunburst, non-cut	$6,000	$11,000
1961	Supro Comet Steel (with legs)	Black and White	$475	$700
1962	Supro Super	Short scale	$475	$650
2010	Tacoma DR Series	Various models	$300	$1,100
2000	Tacoma M-2/M2E Mandolin		$450	$600
2010	Taylor 114ce		$550	$700
2021	Taylor 224ce-K DLX		$1,050	$1,350
2019	Taylor 352ce		$1,225	$1,625
1990	Tobias Basic B-5 Bass		$1,900	$2,500
1964	True Tone Electric Bass Models	Various	$250	$500
1970	Univox Thin Line (Coily)	6-string model	$475	$625
1934	Vivi-Tone Electric-Mandola		$4,900	$6,300
1925	Weissenborn Style #2 Spanish		$2,400	$3,300
1922	Wurlitzer Model 2077 (Martin 0-K)		$3,800	$5,100
1978	Yamaha SG-1500		$825	$1,100
1974	Yamaha SG-85		$650	$850
1990	Yamaha Weddington Classic		$675	$900

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PULVERIZING PERFORMANCE

Grand Funk Railroad's *Live Album*

By Willie G. Moseley

Brutish power chords and shrieking guitar lines abetted by pounding percussion, overdriven bass riffs, and wailing vocals – at the advent of the '70s, the "Detroit Sound" was a precursor to hard rock and heavy metal.

While embodied by the MC5, Stooges, and The Amboy Dukes, the most-successful band on the Motor City scene was a power trio from Flint known as Grand Funk Railroad. Slagged by critics, Grand Funk played for the *people*, and their huge fan base was fiercely loyal.

Mark Farner (guitar, vocals) and Don Brewer (drums, vocals) had played with Terry Knight & the Pack, which garnered a couple of minor national hits, while bassist Mel Schacher gigged with a later incarnation of ? and Mysterians (of "96 Tears" fame).

Knight was Grand Funk's original manager, and following their breakout at the Atlanta Pop Festival in July 1969, he directed their trajectory; within a year, the band had three studio albums under its belt, and all had gone gold. The music was exuberant and loud, and their balls-to-the-wall performances (Farner sometimes passed out from exhaustion afterward) garnered fans worldwide.

Accordingly, Knight decided it was time for a live album. Concerts were recorded in West Palm Beach and Jacksonville, just prior to the band's return to Georgia for the second Atlanta Pop Festival. However, the band was unaware of his plans.

"We honestly didn't know we were releasing a live record," Farner recently recalled for *VG*. "Terry did all the thinking and planning. We gullibly agreed to everything."

Released in November of 1970, the double-disc included a gatefold photo showing the band onstage in Atlanta, even though the music had been recorded in Florida a few days earlier.

"Wherever we played, people were gonna show up, and we were gonna rock their asses," Farner said. "But, Florida always has a place in my heart, and that definitely shows in the grooves!"

The album was raw and brutal, bringing power comparable to the MC5's *Kick Out the Jams* (*VG*, May '19).

Farner's guitar at the time was a Messenger, one of the first brands to use a metal neck. Its thinline body had built-in fuzztone. Schacher had acquired a Fender Jazz soon after Grand



Mark Farner onstage with his Messenger, circa 1970.

Photo courtesy of Mark Farner.

Funk's breakout, and replaced one of its pickups with a Gibson bass humbucker. His underrated bass stylings and slightly overdriven tone became integral to the mix; while Farner was singing and pounding chords, Schacher embellished the presentation with complex, melodic licks; "Paranoid" and the rapid-fire outro of "Are You Ready" are exemplary.

With one exception, all of the songs had appeared on studio albums. Farner preferred the live versions.

"In my opinion, they all came off better live (because of) the audience participation on every word and every chord," he said. "They sang 'em back to us and played air guitar and drums! They pumped us up."

The new song was "Mark Says Alright," a loose jam anchored by Brewer's toms and another melodic Schacher lick.

"That song was something I came up with in the studio," Farner detailed, "We did a little surprise appearance with it."

Extended versions of fan favorites abound on *Live Album*, including a cover of the Animals' "Inside Looking Out" gleefully embellished with drug references (The Animals' version



The cover of *Live Album* illustrates the band's freneticism while showing Mark Farner's Messenger and Mel Schacher's modded Fender Jazz.

derived from a field recording of a prison chant documented by legendary musicologist Alan Lomax). Brewer gets his obligatory drum solo on "T.N.U.C."

The lone low-key song, "Mean Mistreater," features Farner on a "suitcase model" Fender-Rhodes electric piano and impressive harmony vocals from Brewer.

Overall, *Live Album* was a rough-and-rollicking sonic assault, though "Time Machine" (the band's first hit) and "Got This Thing On The Move" weren't included.

"Both would have been great live recordings," he said. "With the emotion and wave after wave of energy that swamped the stage, I don't care what song you're doing, it's going to be better live!"

Live Album went gold a week after its release and peaked at #5 on the *Billboard* album chart. In the early '90s, it reached double platinum.

Critics have persisted over the decades, and in spite of a legendary career, the band has not been voted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"Most professional musicians know the Rock Hall is... political," he said. "Grand Funk Railroad is not in because the voices of the fans are not being heard! How does a band that has 13 gold and 10 platinum records, more than 25 million copies sold worldwide and a catalog of eight Top 40 hits, not be included?" **VG**





Fran Beecher with his '56 Les Paul Custom, onstage with the Comets; Johnnie Grande (accordian), Al Rex (double bass), Bill Haley, Rudy Pompilli (sax), and Billie Williamson (steel).

FRAN BEECHER

Rock-and-Roll Guitar Begins

By Wolf Marshall

The ripples that anticipated a rock-and-roll tsunami were in motion in the 1940s, when pop, "race records," and country converged to produce rock's first wave. Until then, pop music ranged from Top 40 crooner fare and swing jazz to Latin and novelty numbers. Race records – blues, gospel, boogie-woogie and prototype R&B – and country/western, hillbilly, folk, and honky tonk typified the sound of black and white musical forms brewing in the south and southwestern U.S.

Each contributed to the rise of rock; during Charlie Christian's tenure with Benny Goodman (1939-'41), jazz brought riff-based tunes that had colossal effect on first-generation rock-and-roll guitarists – furthered by T-Bone Walker's merging of swing and blues. Other factors resided in the growing social/musical interaction of black and white populations and burgeoning youth culture. Francis Eugene Beecher was part of that beginning.

Born September 29, 1921, in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Beecher started on his sister's ukulele at age eight. By 12, he took up guitar at a time when there were no obvious role models, teaching himself through listening to cowboy music on the radio. In his teens, he studied with Eugene Claycomb at the Honolulu Conservatory of Music, and his first group was a country sextet called The Buckaroo Ramblers. He soon graduated to working with more-professional acts like the Four Sharps, a variety band led by singer/pianist Buddy Greco (veteran of Benny Goodman's bebop group).

The amalgam of jazz and country suited Beecher, who'd come of age in country music and by the late '40s was equipped (and inclined) to tackle jazz-inflected material with Greco, as heard on his '47-48 singles "Baby, I'm True to You" and "A Stranger in Town." When Greco's group disbanded, Beecher and the rhythm section joined Benny Goodman's "modern" combo; he recorded in the studio and performed on live broadcasts like "Toast of the Town," in '48 and '49, during the leader's excursion into bebop, leaving behind the albums *Modern Benny* and *Benny Goodman at the Hollywood Palladium*.

An established and influential player on the Philadelphia/Reading scene, in the fall of '54, Beecher was tagged to cover sessions for Bill Haley after the untimely demise of Danny Cedrone ("Fretprints," March 2019). His earliest contributions were to "Dim, Dim The Lights" (#11, November '54) where he was requested to simplify his approach and play a more-basic, country-inflected style that came to be rockabilly. As session player, he lent genre-defining guitarisms to Haley's Top 40 hits "Mambo Rock" (#17) and "Birth of the Boogie" (#26). He performed "Rock Around the Clock" with Haley on TV in August of '55, and formally became a Comet in time for film appearances in *Rock Around the Clock* and *Don't Knock the Rock*. The rock-and-roll art form, its guitar component, and Beecher's legacy were established with a string of Top 40 hits that heralded

Beecher/Haley: Starstock/Photoshot/Avalon/Zuma Press.

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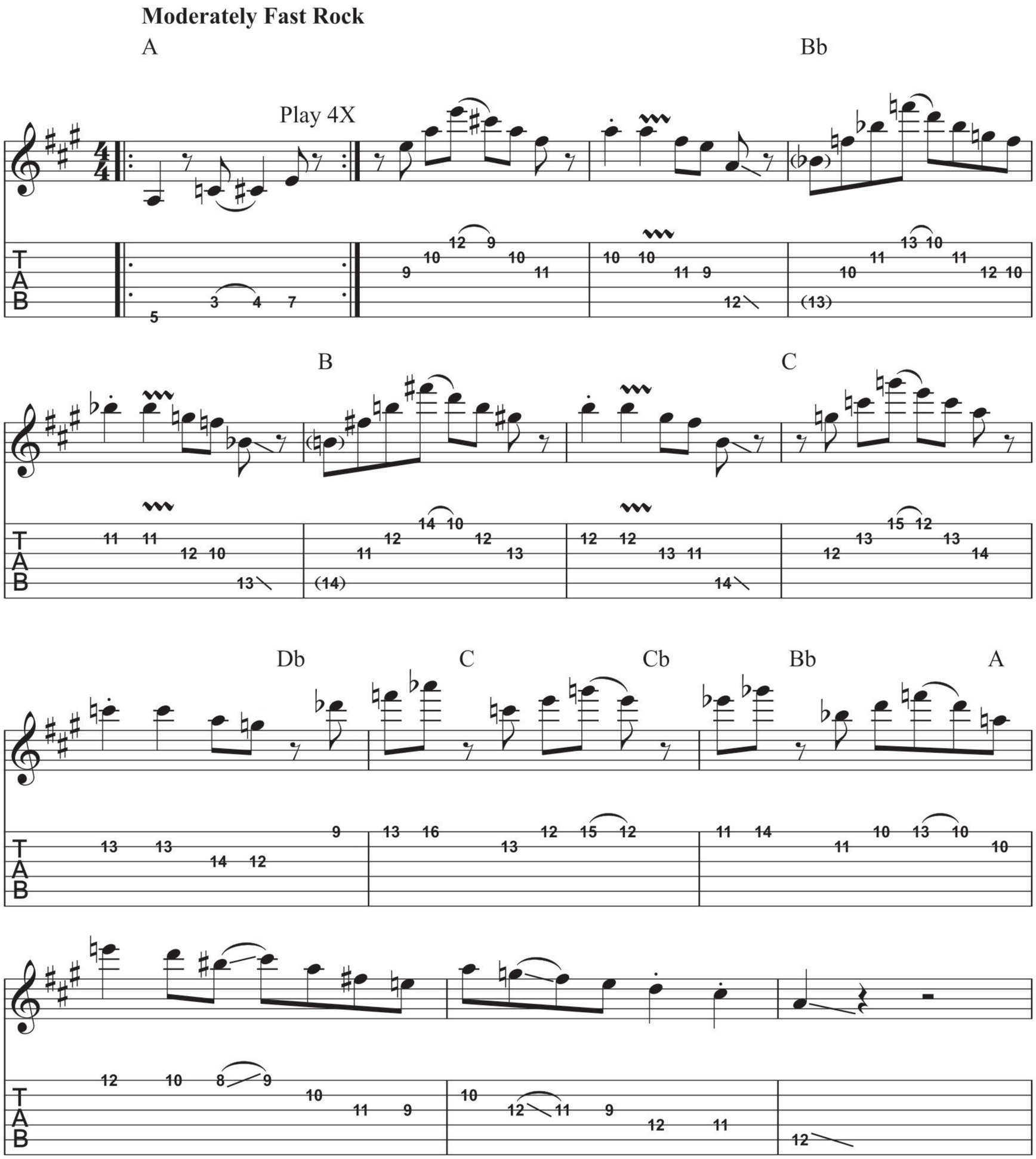
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popular acceptance of the new music; "Razzle Dazzle" (#15, July '55) flaunted prominent guitar moments, as did "Burn That Candle" (#9, November '55), "See You Later, Alligator" (#6, January '56), "The Saints Rock 'N' Roll" (#18, April '56), "R-O-C-K" (#16, April '56), "Rip It Up" (#25, September '56), "Rudy's Rock" (#34, November '56), "Skinny Minnie" (#22, April '58), and the entire *Strictly Instrumental* album of '59.

Moreover, possessing the ability to raise his voice into a child's range, Beecher was valuable as a novelty singer on "See You Later, Alligator," "Billy Goat," "Rip It Up," and conspicuously in "A.B.C. Boogie," a duet with Haley. He also wrote several tunes in the band's catalog, claiming composer credits on "Blue Comet Blues," "Goofin' Around," "The Catwalk," and "Shaky."

In '58, Beecher and the Comets (sans Haley) recorded for the East West label as The Kingsmen, releasing the Beecher originals "Catwalk" and "Week End" (later covered by Link Wray), which climbed the pop charts. He left the Comets in '60 to work with the Merri-Men, recording "Big Daddy"/"St. Louis Blues" on Apt, but rejoined briefly in '61 to participate in a live session that became *Twisting Knights at the Roundtable*. After his monumental innovations in Haley's band, he returned to Pennsylvania in '62 to lead a domestic life, extant in a 60-year marriage, working at a costume shop by day and playing local engagements at night with his quartet (guitar, sax, bass, drums). In '66, the group secured a residency at the Inn of the Four Falls, purveying Fran's blend of jazz, country, Latin and standards. He participated in Comets' reunions in '81, and in '87 appeared and recorded with a reconstituted Comets lineup until his official retirement in 2006. Already honored in the Rockabilly Hall of Fame ('97), in 2012, Beecher became a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by special committee, righting a wrong denied during the Haley/Comets recognition in '87. He played guitar into his 90s and was 92 when he died of natural causes on February 24, 2014.



Rock-and-roll guitar in its earliest incarnation is capsulated in Beecher's intro to "Goofin' Around." This instrumental was a Beecher original and is prominent in the early biopic *Don't Knock the Rock*. He mixed bebop and swing-jazz sounds with boogie-woogie and Western influences, making for a potent brew. The opening melody is a familiar boogie riff in A, it gives way to series of arpeggio-based major-pentatonic theme melodies taken up in half steps from A to D♭ then back, reflecting the chromaticism of modern jazz. Note the fragmenting of the figures and syncopation while descending in measures 9-11. The phrase ending back in A is a classic Western-swing line, reimagined.

STYLE

Rock-and-roll guitar was invented on seminal recordings with Haley and the Comets. Prompted by Haley, Beecher streamlined the bebop influences he brought to guitar solos and folded jazz rhythms into shuffling rockabilly grooves suggesting Western

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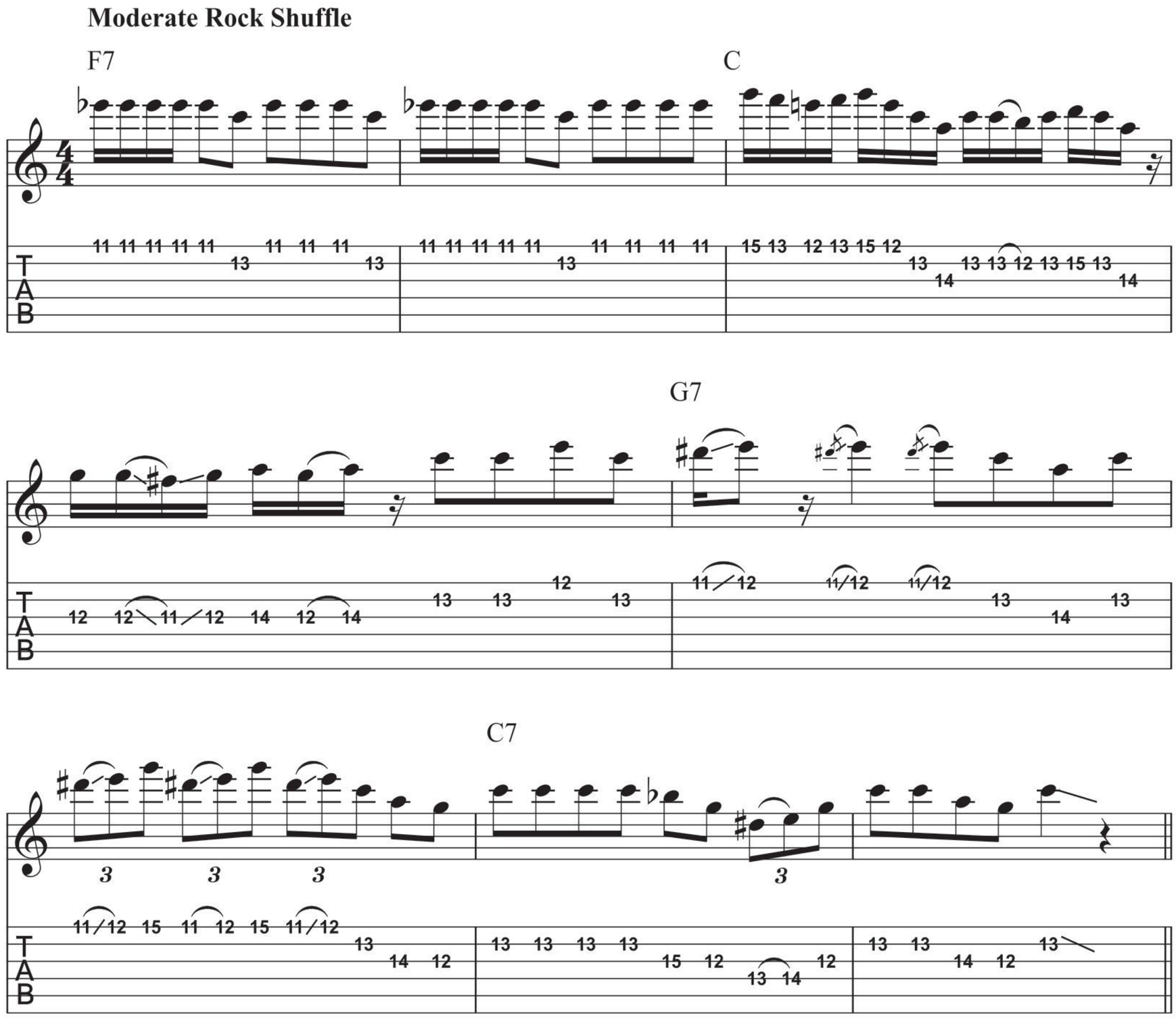
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swing. This formula yielded commercial success and the sonic recipe for early rock. Fran is renowned for his mix of jazz, blues, and country, as well as their transplantation into the music. He was an adept and inventive soloist, demonstrated by his intricate licks in "Razzle Dazzle" and "Goofin' Around," and a solid ensemble player, providing counter melodies and bluesy/jazzy fills behind Haley's vocals throughout "Saints Rock 'N Roll" and "Dim, Dim The Lights." He was often called to double sax riffs, as in "Razzle Dazzle," "Burn That Candle," and the first verse of "R-O-C-K." Beecher's improvisations relied largely on single-note and double-stop phrases. On rare occasions, he alternated textures and approaches; "Skinny Minnie" is exemplary, where he juggles the fanfare of a tremolo-picked chord riff with double-stops and boogie-woogie bass-register lines. In Comets arrangements, Haley strummed rhythm on an acoustic archtop, leaving Beecher on electric to fill with melody, comp, punch partial chords, or add triads that often suggested repurposed big-band figures ("Rudy's Rock"), defining distinct rhythm and lead-guitar roles at rock's inception.



"Razzle Dazzle" continued the evolution begun with "Rock Around the Clock." In this flight, the virtuosity of Danny Cedrone in the earlier solo was answered by Beecher's intricate lines. Like many tunes in the Haley playlist, the piece is built on the 12-bar blues form, here in C. This excerpt, at 1:13, takes place over the IV-I-V-I changes of the progression; F7-C-G7-C. Note Beecher's quick tremolo-picked approach, which alternates attacking repeated notes for an aggressive feeling in measures 1-2 over F7 to a florid fiddle-tune lick in 3-4 over C. He completes the chorus with riff-based swing-blues ideas exploiting the C major-pentatonic and leading tones over 5-8.

A versatile, colorful lead guitarist, the blues informed much of Beecher's innovation, and he was fluent with the swing, urban, and jump-blues vocabulary. In solos and fills, he tempered jazz inclinations with earthy blues elements, often juxtaposing them for an intriguing blend. Consider the Chuck Berry-inspired double-stops and T-Bone-based triplet runs, pentatonic/blues melody and string bends in "Blue Comet Blues" and "A.B.C. Rock." Though he favored a jazz approach in phrasing and tone, he routinely fused country and blues mannerisms with more-sophisticated ideas, driving the point further with his '73 reference to Howard Roberts, citing him as an influence "...because he plays with soul." That open mindset, guided by feel, is ubiquitous in Beecher's playing. Many of his landmark moments bear a similar blues-jazz-country pedigree and soulful execution. Check out the quick riffs in "Burn That Candle," "Saints Rock 'N Roll," and "Rock-A-Beatin' Boogie," which are reinterpretations of a swing-blues motif and a recurring idea in his solos. The line became a staple of rockabilly guitar, passed around and reprised by Brian Setzer in "Rock This Town." "Razzle Dazzle" features a serpentine fiddle-tune melody in a solo belying country roots, albeit tremolo-picked with an energetic rock attitude set into blues changes. In the "R-O-C-K" solo, his lead riff applied a single country-flavored pentatonic line to blues changes. Unlike Scotty Moore, et al, his country influence arose from Western swing rather than the Merle Travis/Chet Atkins school. Haley's songs were typically built on 12-bar blues and variants with characteristic I-IV-V chord progressions as is traditional in the genre, creating an organic repository for Beecher's improvisations. He clung to these precepts in "Catwalk," "Shaky" (which exploits a guitar riff reminiscent of "Peter Gunn"), "Goofin' Around," and "Blue Comet Blues." The structure, riffs and attitude in those pieces exemplify rockabilly's blues origins.

Beecher applied jazz sounds sparingly (but effectively) with Haley, reflecting time spent with Greco, Goodman, and others. Several

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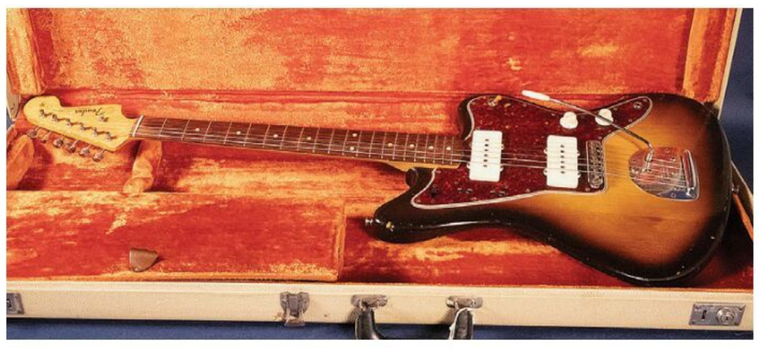
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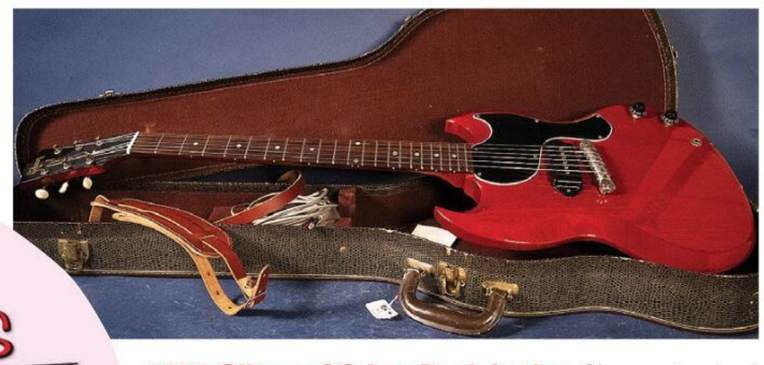
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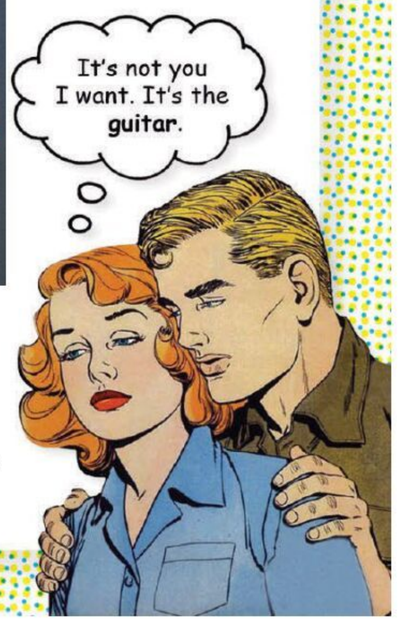




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examples make the case; the opening phrases in "Goofin' Around" contain modulating chromatic lines leading to a breezy Western-swing landing phrase. The chromatic motion and content is modern and horn-like in conception, revealing his comfort with jazz melody cells. In "Saints Rock 'N Roll," he handled solo changes with the mentality of a bebop player, outlining the harmony with updated Dixieland jazz melodies. And the ending phrase of "Rock-A-Beatin' Boogie" boasted undisguised jazz connotations in its chromaticism and swing-blues delivery colored by an appropriately edgy overdriven tone.

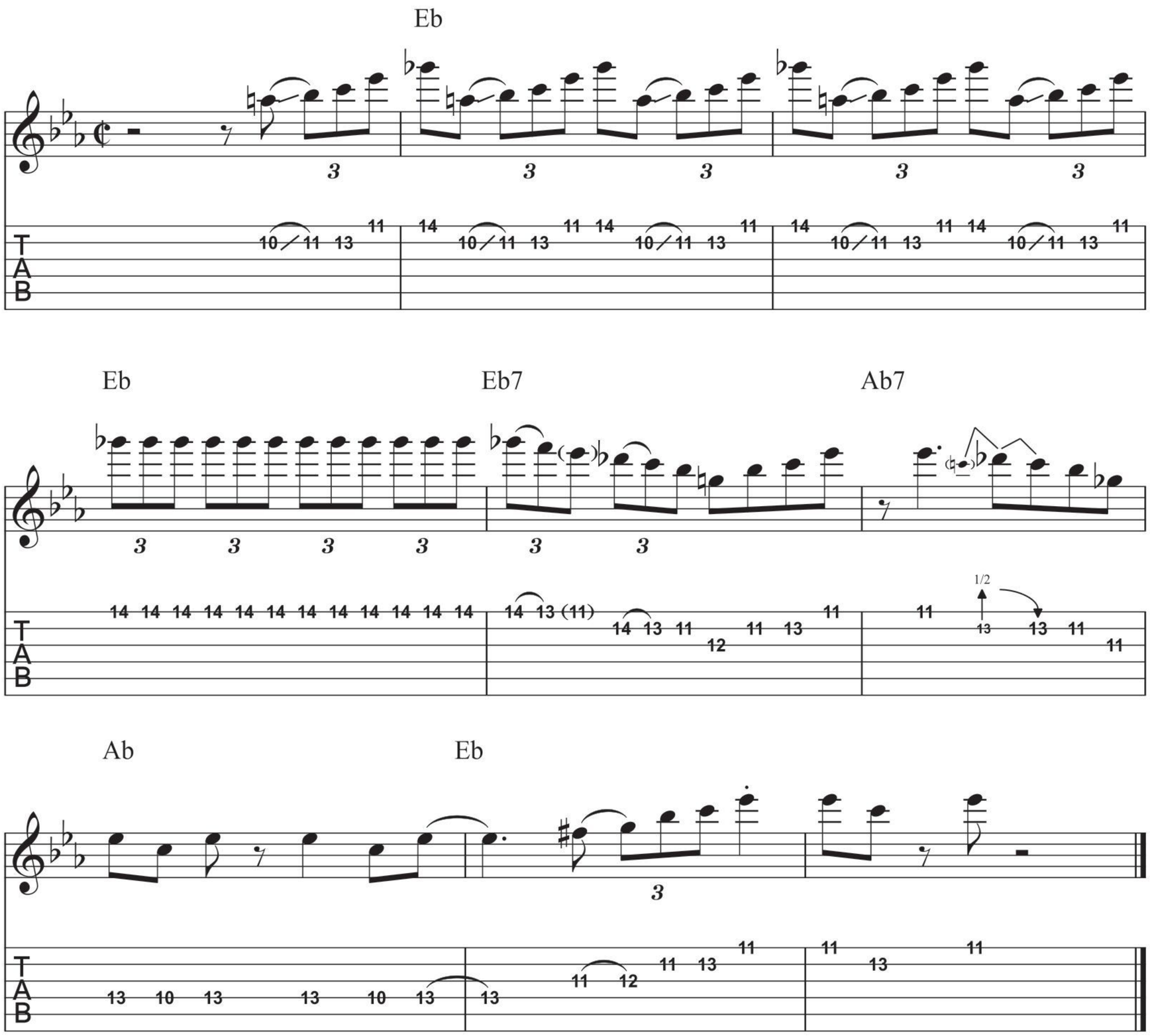
ESSENTIAL LISTENING

Bill Haley & His Comets 20th Century Masters is a serviceable compilation containing most of the famed tracks with Beecher. Also recommended is *Strictly Instrumental*, which reveals his versatility and depth.

ESSENTIAL VIEWING

Numerous vintage clips of Beecher with Haley herald the arrival of rock. Among the best are "Goofin' Around," "Hot Dog Buddy Buddy," "Rip It Up," "See You Later, Alligator," from *Don't Knock the Rock*, as well as performances from "The Ed Sullivan Show," "American Bandstand," "Saints Rock 'N Roll," "Shake Rattle and Roll" and "Rudy's Rock" from Belgium ('58).

Fast Rock



Rock guitarists from Alvin Lee and Jeff Beck to Brian Setzer and Eddie Van Halen have borrowed the energetic riff-based lines that open Beecher's "Rock-A-Beatin' Boogie" solo – if not the actual notes, certainly the intent of the assertive take-off phrase. This example is played over the first half of a 12-bar blues in E♭ taken at a fast rock tempo. The solo begins with rapid flurries emphasizing a repeated blues motif in measures 1-3. Note the presence of A, C, and G♭ in the melody. The repeated notes and bluesy descent in measures 4-5 set up IV chord (A♭7) sounds in 6 and 7. Note the half-step pre-bend and continued use of C. The return to I (E♭) is made with a slick major-mode swing-blues passage.

SOUND

Early on, Beecher played a Gibson L-5C with a floating DeArmond pickup, heard on Greco records. With Goodman, he switched to a '40 Epiphone Soloist Emperor with a DeArmond, also seen in his debut Sullivan TV performance of "Rock Around the Clock" with Haley. In '52, he purchased a new L-5CES. Haley's band was endorsed by Gibson, which provided Beecher with a number of Les Paul Customs, most notably a '56 with P-90s, the neck having Alnico magnets. In '60, he played a black '59 ES-345 on "American Bandstand," and had a blond '59 ES-350T. He strung both with Fender semi-flatwound jazz strings. In later years, he favored a cherry sunburst ES-137 Classic.

Beecher used a small tortoiseshell plectrum, adjusted his picking hand to play over the end of the fretboard for a mellower sound, and occasionally plucked with thumb, index, and middle fingers.

In the '50s, Beecher played Gibson's GA-70, GA-77, GA-200, and GA-400 combo amps, routinely at full volume. By '73, he preferred a Kustom Sidewinder with a 15" speaker. Though largely a purist, he experimented with amp tones, tremolo effects, and dabbled with a wah pedal (though not on recordings).

Wolf Marshall is the founder and original editor-in-chief of *GuitarOne* magazine. A respected author and columnist, he has been influential in contemporary music education since the early 1980s. His books include *101 Must-Know Rock Licks*, *B.B. King: the Definitive Collection*, and *Best of Jazz Guitar*, and a list credits can be found at wolfmarshall.com.





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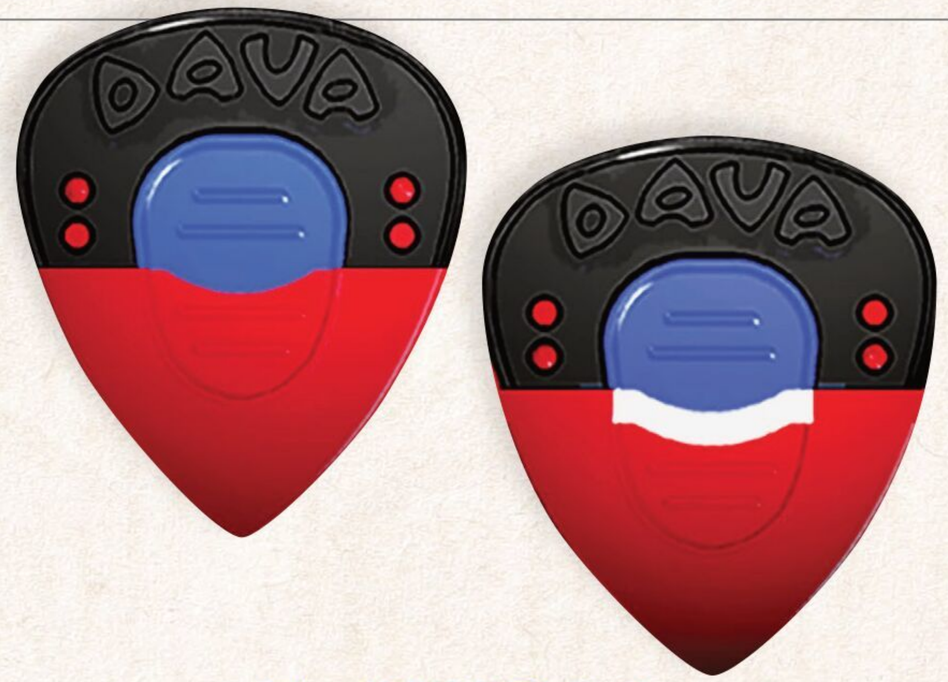
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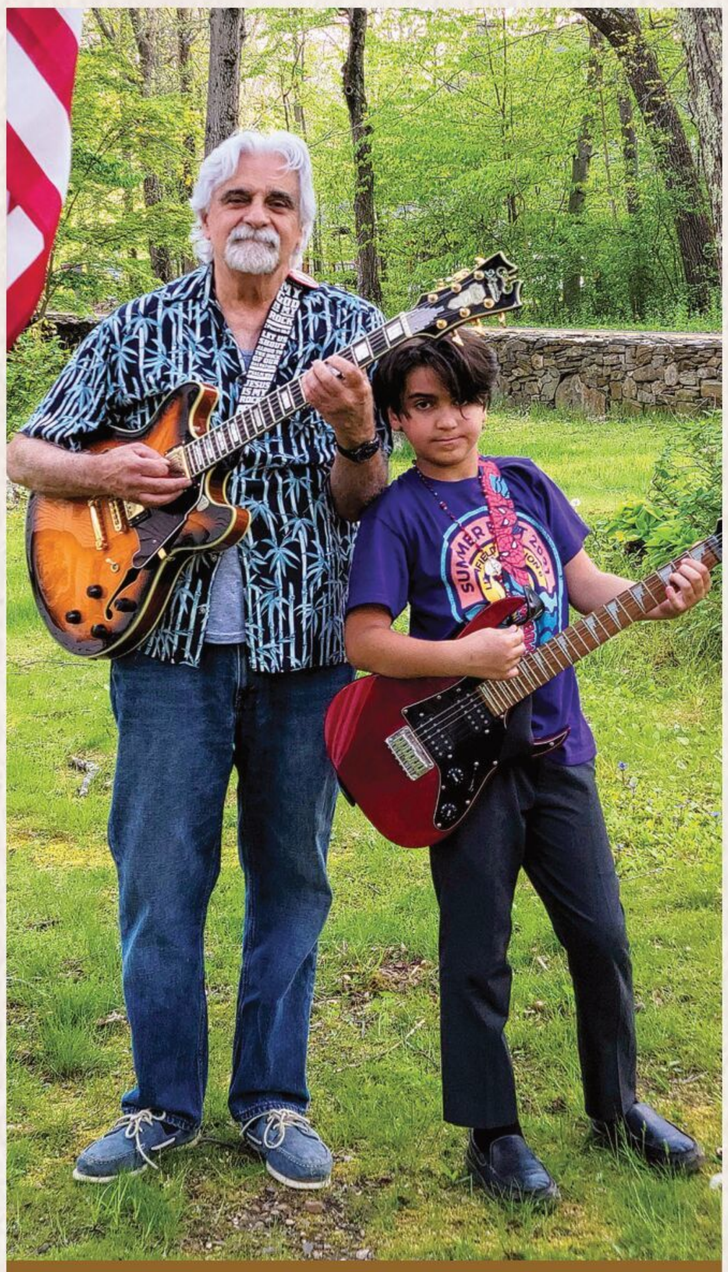
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Dominic Harris and his son, Keith, both rock-out and record in bands. Here, Dom has his 50th-birthday present, a Murphy Lab Les Paul reissue, while Keith holds a Ric 4003.



John Fanti loves playing his Ibanez with his grandpa, Tom Siano, who loves his D'Angelico archtop.



Jim Dunleavy is always ready to jam with granddaughter Cassie. "You're never too young to rock out," he said.

DAD'S DAY 2022

VG'S ANNUAL SALUTE TO FATHERS WHO INSPIRE



A few years ago, Stephen Barrett and his son, Max, played in competing bands at the DC Bluegrass Union contest in Virginia. Max used his early-'50s Juzek while Steve played his half-size. "Neither band placed," Steve says. "But, Max now plays bass with Popa Chubby, using a '78 Mustang and a couple newer Fenders."



Warren Gordon always loved playing cool old pop tunes with his dad, Edward. This shot from 2007 was one of the last times they jammed before Edward died. "Ever since, I've never heard a Strat sound so good!" Warren said.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE RAN OUT OF PAGES FOR THIS YEAR'S "DAD'S DAY" ENTRIES, BUT WE'LL SHARE THE REST ON *VG*'S FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM PAGES. BE SURE TO KEEP AN EYE ON BOTH!



William and Cole Clementi have been performing with their dad, Mark, since they were little kids. Here they were with their Squire Mini Strats while Mark holds his '65 Framus 113/5 Atlantik.



Chris Robertson and his kids, Matthew and Karli, love to turn their instruments wild with artsy pickguards.



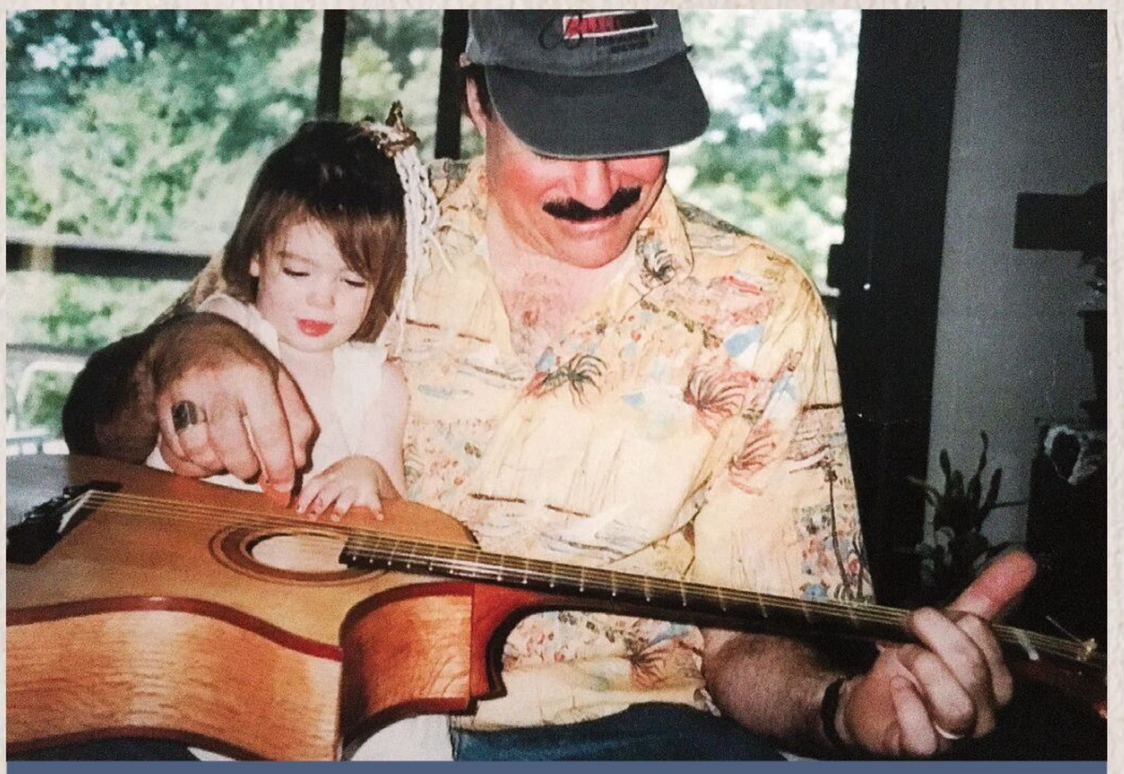
Joe Iaquinto and his son, Kevin, combined their collections for this shot in the jam room.



Michael Olsen and his daughter, Randi, perform original songs on their Charles Hoffman guitars. They recently played a benefit for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. "Dad has been battling MS for over 30 years, and every gig together is a true gift," said Randi.



Paul Gentry is the proud papa to 16-year-old triplets who all play. Here's Andrew with a '71 Les Paul Deluxe, John on a '69 SG Special, Paul with his '87 ES-175, and Luke on a'75 Musicmaster.



Here are Michael Turcot and his daughter, Sierra, at age 3, getting her first guitar lesson in 1999. "She went on to become the front person and singer/guitarist doing her original songs for a rock-and roll-band in Los Angeles," he said.

18+

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Larry Smith used his Parker Fly Deluxe at a recent jam with daughter, Lauren (bass), son, Jason (trumpet), and wife, Lori (vocals). The drummer is their friend Roger Prehoda. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime event, and the best gig I've played in 40 years!" Larry said.



Whenever possible, Gordon Hammond jams with his son, Straten Marshall. "He's a very accomplished guitarist and I'm very proud of him," said Dad.



Craig Shoesmith, his daughter, Genevieve, and son, Theo, don't mind entertaining their silver lab, Flash.



John Romano, proud father to Kaitlyn and Emily, waited two years to get this EVH guitar. "Jamming out brings him peace, joy, and is his therapy as he battles a rare type of cancer," said Emily. "When I'm playing, I don't think about being sick, the pain goes away, and all I can feel is the music," John added.



Greg Butler with his Taylor 414 CE, accompanying granddaughter Adrienne and her Princess guitar.



Bill Giles leads this musical clan, which includes Brett (on a SJ-200), Joe (D-45), mom/wife Terry (Taylor PS-14), Stephanie (Hendrix Strat), Josh (Taylor 12-string), Katie (Duesenberg), Wes (Martin CEO-7), Bill ('69 Strat), and William (beginner six-string, guarded by Belle).

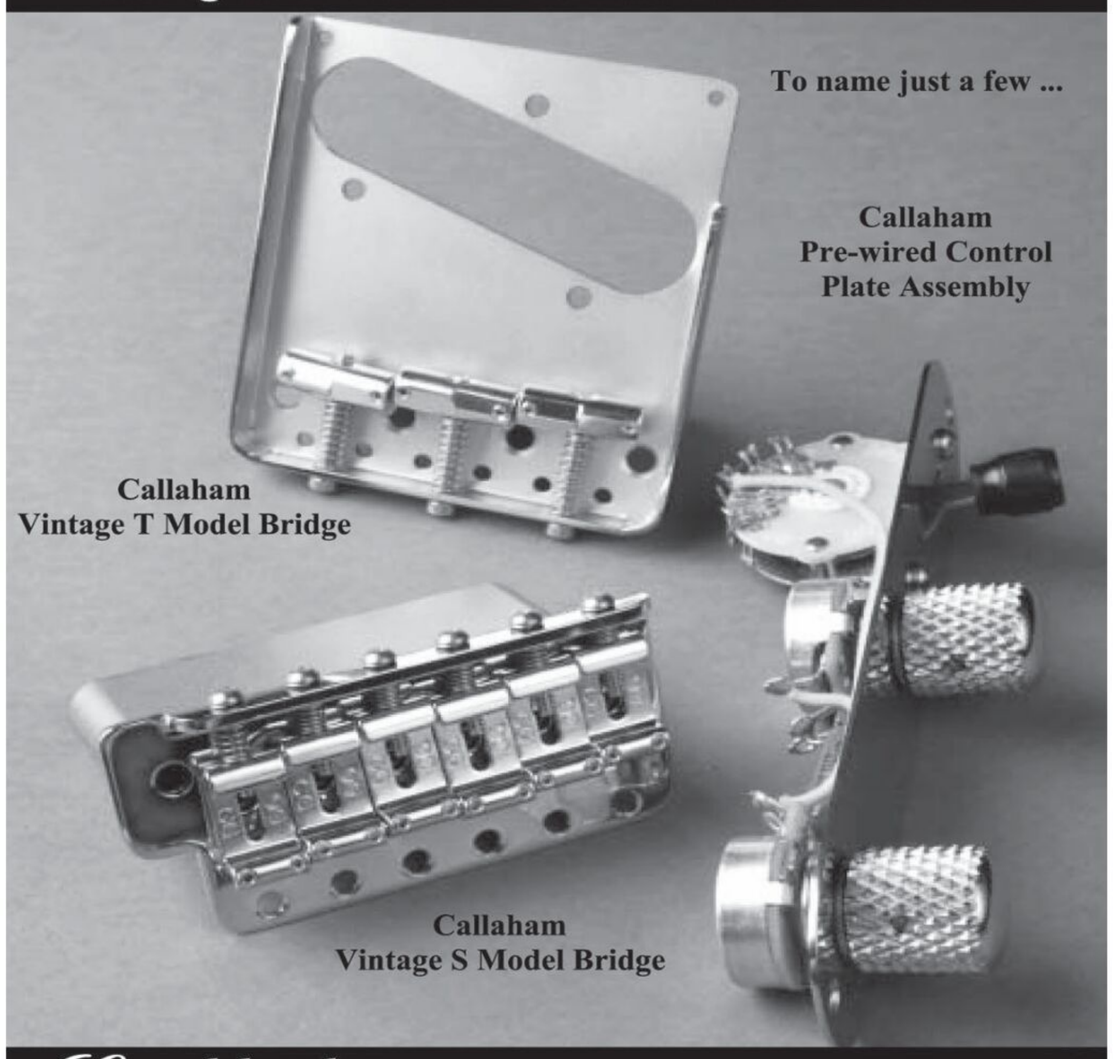
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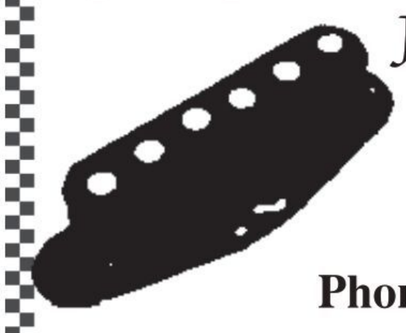
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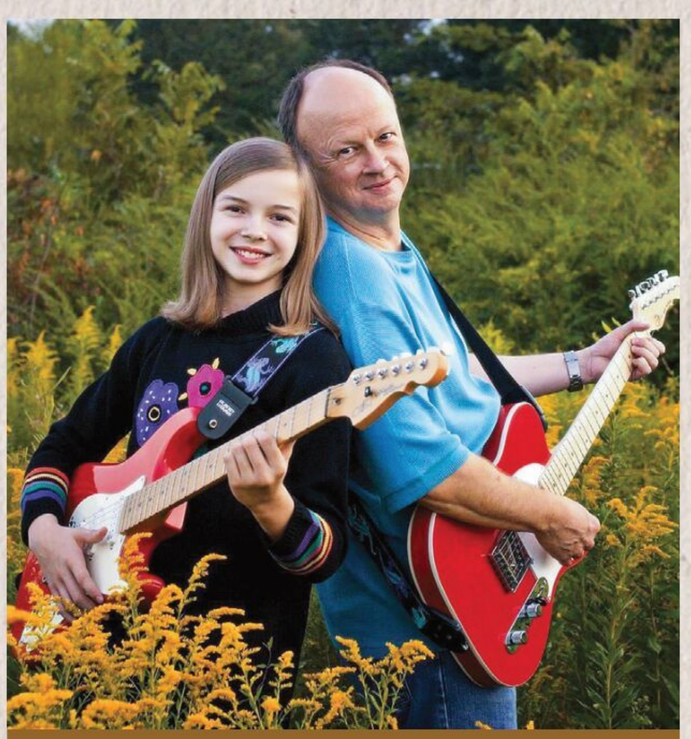
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"I raised my daughter, Samantha, to appreciate classic guitars in classic colors," said Steve Strunk. The photo is a few years old, and she's now a computer engineer.



Jim Brennan and his kids with the family's guitar collection and copies of their favorite magazine.



David Justice and his son, *VG* subscriber Paul, in Dad's guitar room. David has a Hummingbird, Paul a 000-28.



Jim Holtschlag and his boys, Matthew, 13, and Luke, 11, share a timeless love of music. Their collection includes guitars from G&L, the Fender Custom Shop, and a favorite Les Paul. "Instruments make wonderful heirlooms," said Jim.



Donald Nelson, his daughter, Cybill, granddaughter Bailey, and great-granddaughter, Tilly, are all smiles with Donald's Custom Shop Tele, '62 Strat, and 60th Anniversary Strat.



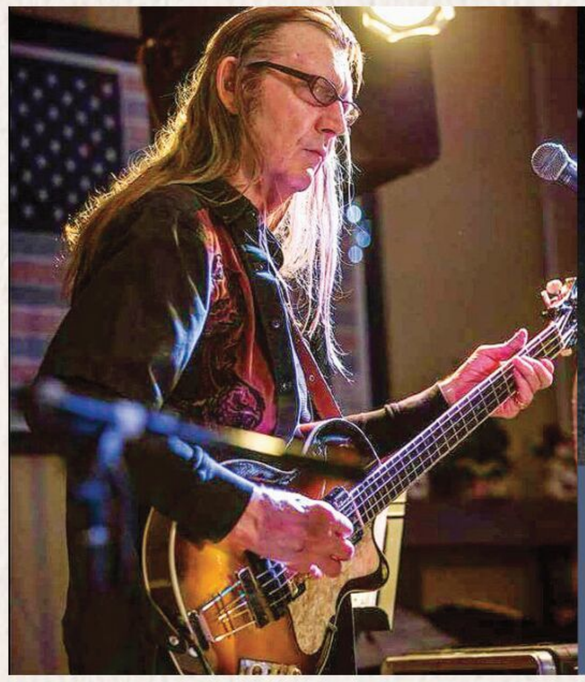
Mike Fleishman has two musical sons, Max and Cooper. Max plays piano, Cooper is primarily a drummer, but also plays guitar with his dad. Here, Cooper's playing a Peavey T-60, Mike his PRS SE Korina One.

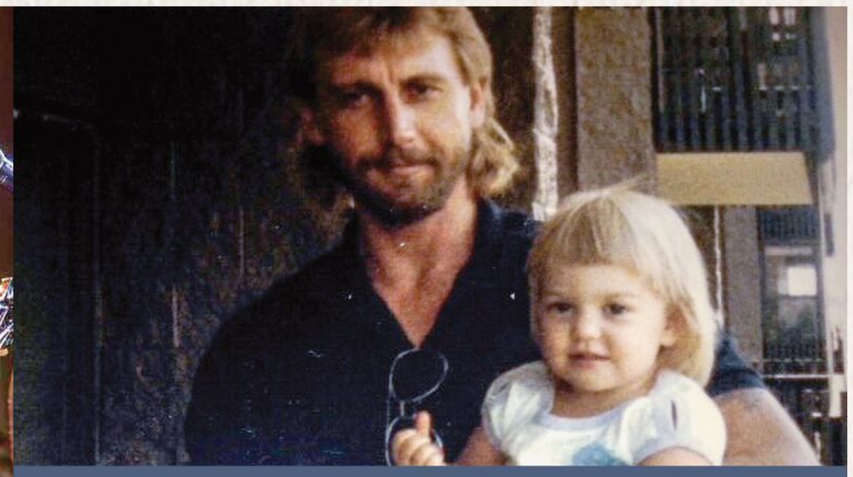


Longtime subscriber Matt Carleson builds guitars and has made them for his daughters and grandkids. Here are his daughter, Premila, Matt, daughter Preeya, and granddaughter and grandson Reena and Desmond Roe, all holding their custom builds.

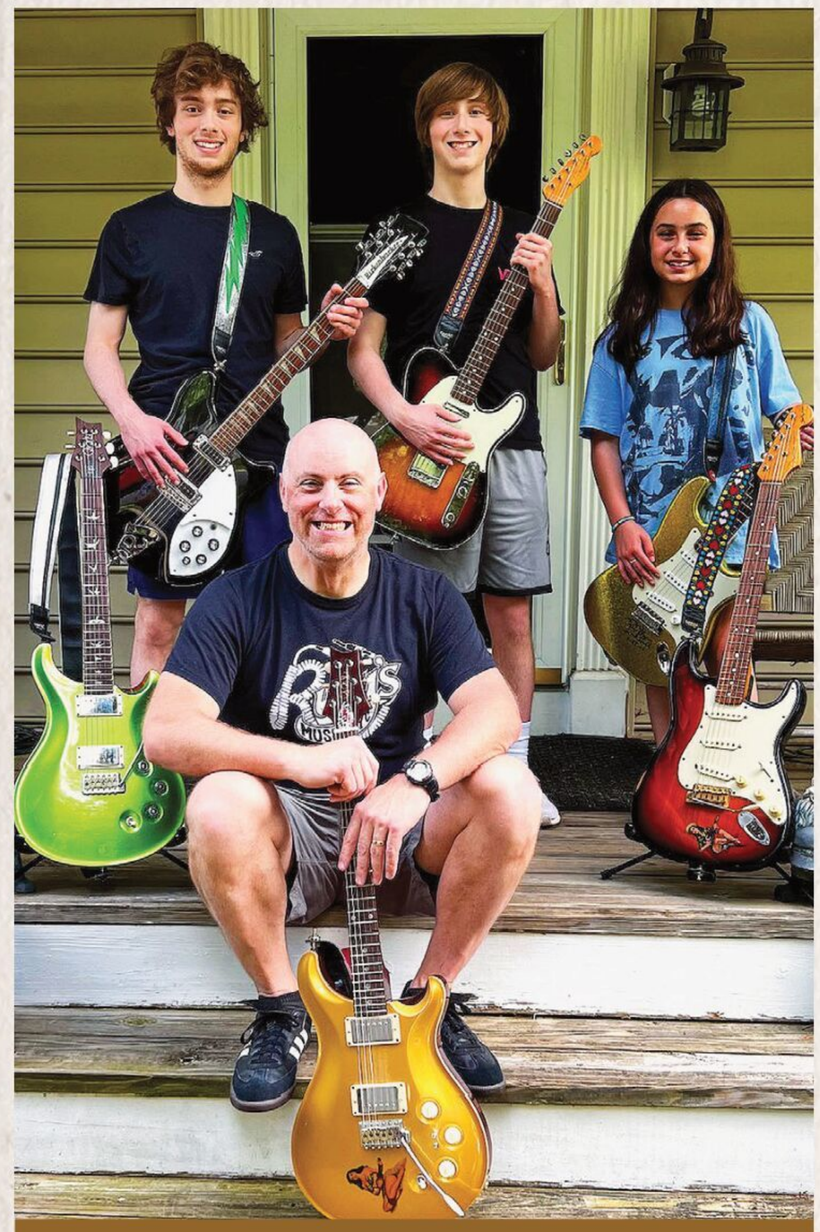


Here are Dan Pauli with his daughter, Hayley, son, Colin, and daughter-in-law, Hailey, holding their favorites from dad's collection.





Morgan Reeves' dad, Cole, has been playing since before she was born in 1983. Today, he gigs in a country/rock/rockabilly/Motown band and one of his favorite basses is a reissue Höfner 500/2 Club.



Here's Mike Duncan with his kids, Henry, Alexander, and Abby, all of whom are growing up surrounded by great gear.



John D'Onofrio and his son, Erik, have created many fond memories playing together. Here, John has a custom guitar, while Erik plays his Seagull Merlin.

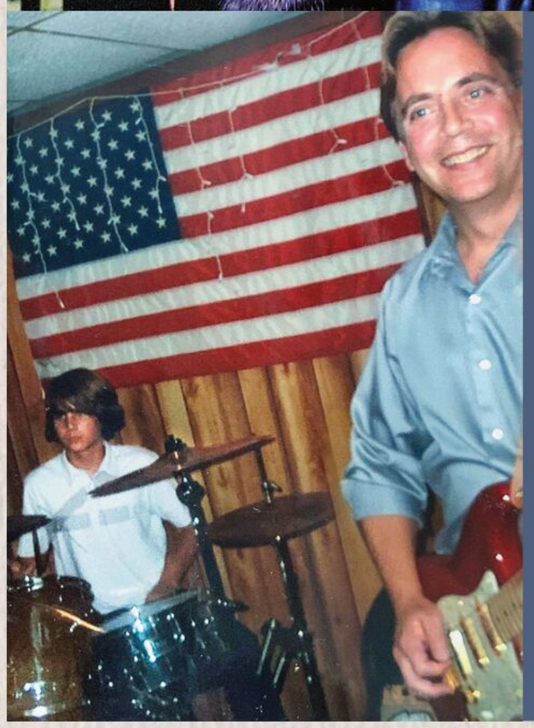




Check out rockin' dad Dave Glaser with the Les Paul he calls "Goldie." Daughter Sarah gifted him a *VG* subscription, and now (like you), he's hooked!







VG Publisher Alan Greenwood makes his first appearance in the "Dad's Day" feature with these family-album photos playing a '66 Strat for daughter, Leah, in 1994, performing for daughter Eden's third-grade class on his Aluminum Strat in '04, and jamming with son, Jack, on a '90s custom double-cut at *VG*'s 20th-anniversary party in '06.



Steve Berner and his son, Jeff, often share a laugh while playing. Jeff is playing an '84 Les Paul Custom, and his dad borrowed Jeff's '09 ES-355.



From the mid '90s, here are Aimee Christianson and her dad, amp builder Matt Quilter. "We never formed a two-person band, but clearly, you can see, I've always been his #1 fan," she said.



Making sweet music, here are the Heagy boys – Ryland on a Taylor, Kai playing a uke, and dad Jim on a Martin.



Kitt Cox uses his '60s Yamaha flat-top to entertain his grandkids. Here, they're all singing "There's a Hole in the Bottom of the Sea" on the North Shore of Massachusetts.



"Music time at our house is always fun!" said guitarist Jinx Jones, whose work has been reviewed in *VG*. Here, he's getting help with a fancy blues chord from his son, Hudson, on their ES-175.



Charlie White, guitarist for Wynonna Judd & The Big Noise, recently grabbed this photo with his son, Kolton. Their guitars are a '59 Country Western and '52 D-18.



"Grandpa Miko" Malinao loves it when his grandson, Maxwell, visits him at a gig. That's the '65 Strat that Mike got as a gift from his mom at age 13.



Paul Rosenthal recently rewired his pedalboards, and after stepping away to grab something, returned to find his daughter taking a test run. "I love the joy on her face," he said.



Like all of us, Puneet Singh and his dad, Liam, appreciate a nice korina Flying V.



"I always love it when my son, Josh, joins me onstage," said Edward Sparks. "It doesn't matter if he plays cello, bass or just sings!" **VG**



JOE WALSH REUNITES WITH A '59 LES PAUL STANDARD

Prodigal Sunburst

A master of delivering crystal-clear musical messages with an off-kilter wit, whether talking, singing, picking, or sliding on guitar, everything Joe Walsh does brings an undeniable charisma.

By Ward Meeker

For decades, Walsh lived the ultimate rock-star life, wrote hit songs about it, emerged alive, sobered up, and all the while held on to his considerable musical skill. In April, he welcomed this '59 Les Paul Standard back to his world.

More than most guitar superstars, the man responsible for showing Glenn Frey the warm-up lick that starts "Life In The Fast Lane," swapped solos with Don Felder in "Hotel California," learned slide from Duane Allman, and dished out heavy sardonicism in "Life's Been Good," Walsh is familiar with the nuances of vintage Les Paul Standards. What's more, his taste in them played a major role in their extraordinary collectibility.

When Led Zeppelin toured the U.S. in 1969, Walsh's band, James Gang, opened a half-dozen shows. One day, Jimmy Page told Walsh that for their next album, he wanted to step away from the tones of his Telecaster and into a "sunburst."

"At the time, I happened to have two ('59s)," Walsh told *VG* in 2012. "One I liked better than the other, so I kept my best one and gave him the other, which had a slightly smaller neck. He liked it a lot, and it became the

Guitar photos by Nate Westgor.

one he played on a lot of Led Zeppelin music – his #1."

Page's taste in Les Pauls had been formed thanks to his first – a 1960 Custom (*VG*, November '20) that had a smaller neck with slight V shape, so the late-'59 from Walsh was well-suited.

After the Custom was stolen during a U.S. tour in 1970, the '59 indeed became Page's famous "#1." Meanwhile, Walsh used the other to record with Barnstorm (formed after he moved to Colorado in '72), and through his early days as a solo artist.

Amongst the throng of Walsh fans is Nate Westgor, owner of Willie's American Guitars, St. Paul.

"I saw the Rolling Stones at Milwaukee County Stadium in June of '75 – their first tour with Ron Wood, which was exciting because Ronnie was one of my guitar heros," he said. "Rufus opened, then the Eagles played, and one of the things that really stands out in my memory was that they did a three-song encore, which was odd for a backup band. They came back out and said, 'We'd like to introduce our friend, Joe Walsh,' and the crowd went nuts. They played 'Rocky Mountain Way,' 'James Dean,' and 'Take it Easy.' Joe hadn't yet been announced as a member, so it was a real surprise.

"I borrowed binoculars from a stranger to take a look at Joe, and he was playing a sunburst Les Paul with humbuckers; in '75, that meant it had to be old, and I think it was this one."

It's believed Walsh bought this guitar in the mid '70s, and it became one of his primaries for writing and recording. While he can't be certain, "I'm pretty sure I played it on the live [*You Can't Argue with a Sick Mind*] album," he said. A couple decades later, when the 'Burst market began to ascend beyond the reach of mortals and a figured top brought a super-premium, he sold this guitar "to get a prettier one with more flame, and hang tags."

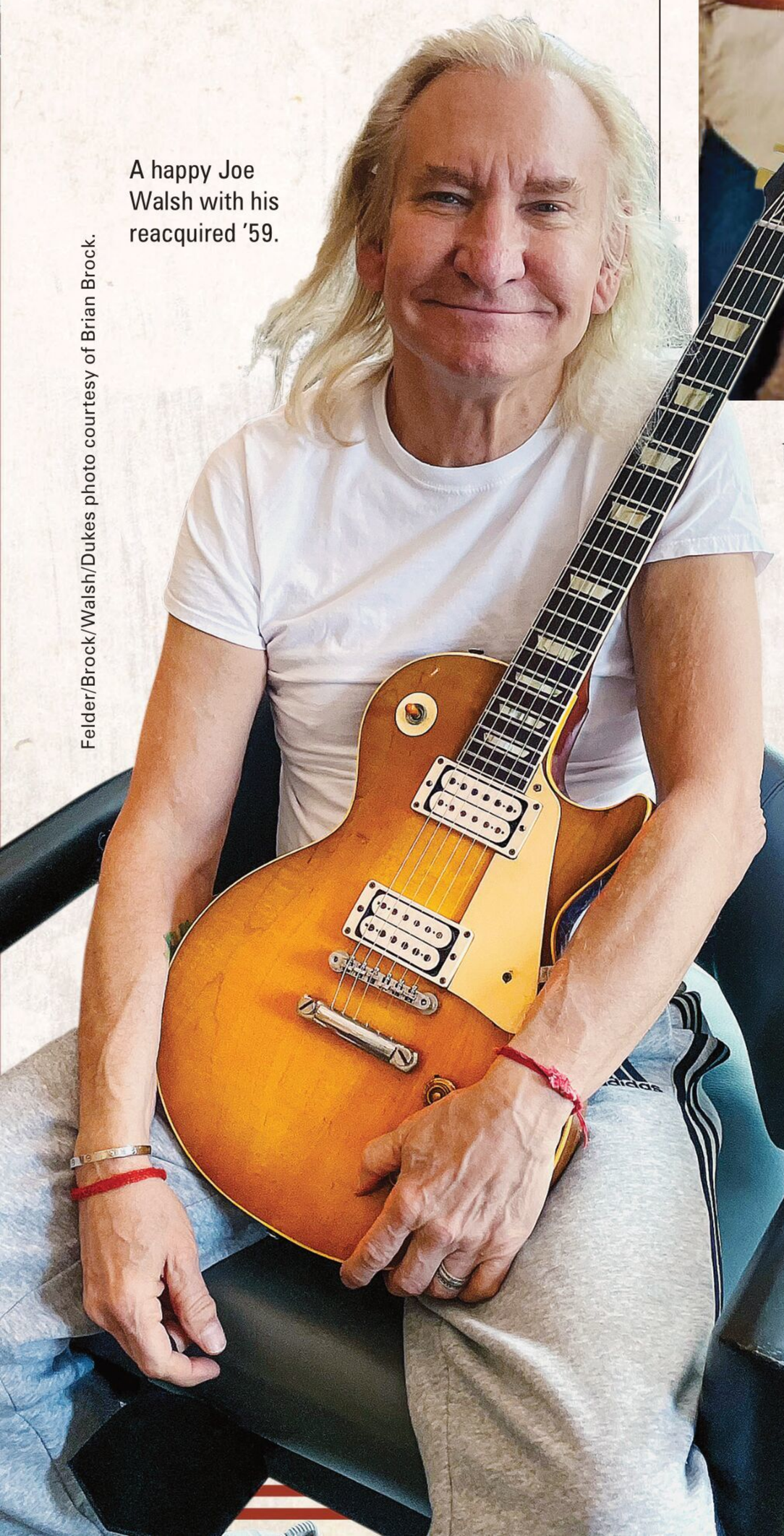
During the Arlington guitar show in 2003, Walsh (through a broker) sold this guitar to vintage dealer Eliot Michael for between $250,000 and $275,000. Soon after entering the realm of 'Burst collectors, it became known as a standout. Proprieter of Rumble Seat Music, Michael wanted it for his personal collection, and it instantly became a cherished piece.

"I bought it *because* it was Joe's," he said. "But, I fell in love with everything about it; I prefer the necks on 1960 Les Pauls, and this one was close, plus it had double-white PAFs."

While he had every intention of holding

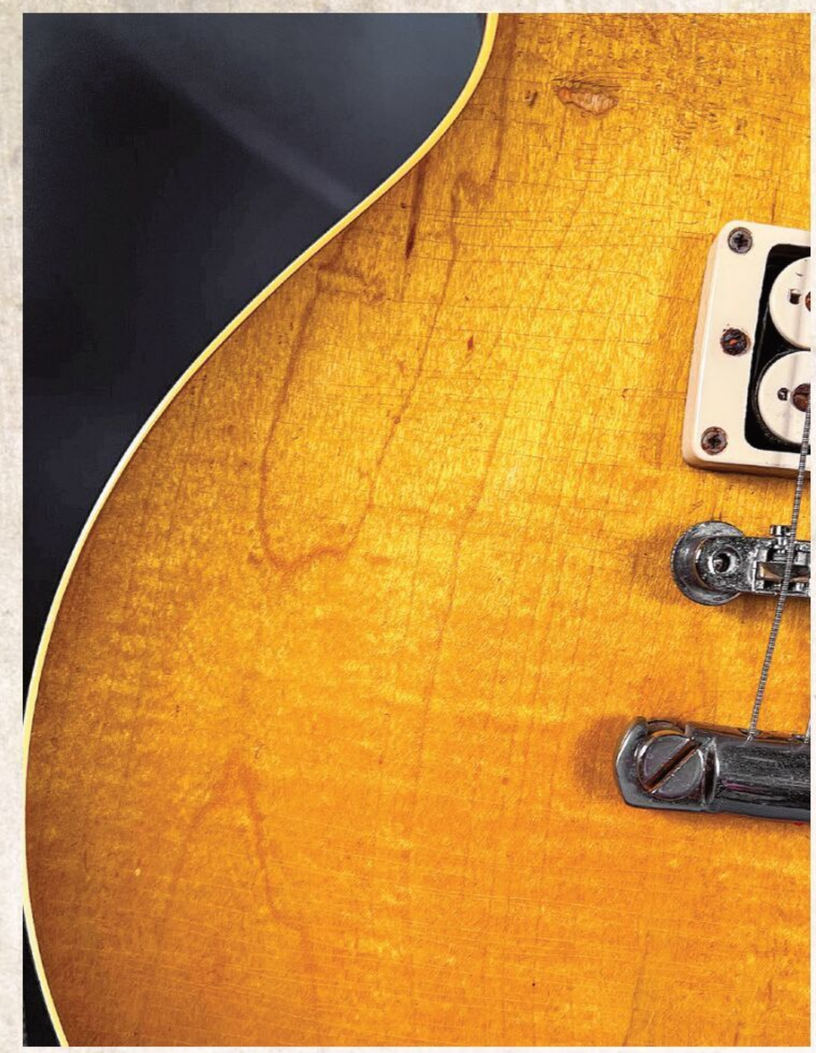


Walsh with the guitar during an Eagles tour stop in Houston, November '76. Also enjoying the Les Paul party are guitar wrangler Brian Brock and Don Felder (left) with a '58 'Burst belonging to dealer Tony Dukes (right), who's holding a rare two-pickup Custom "Black Beauty."



A happy Joe Walsh with his reacquired '59.

Felder/Brock/Walsh/Dukes photo courtesy of Brian Brock.





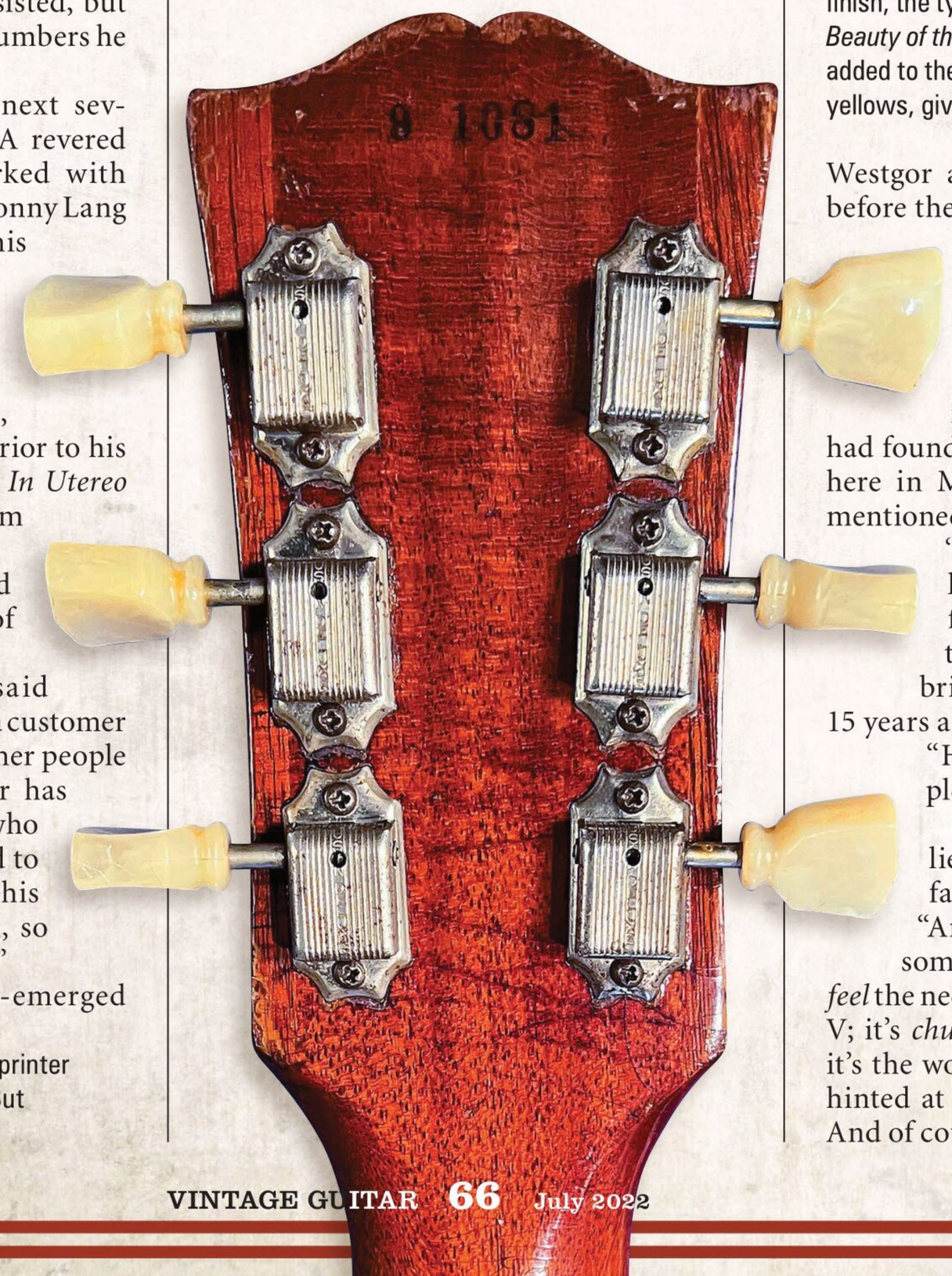
it, in 2007, Michael took a call from recording engineer/studio owner John Kuker, asking about a '61 Les Paul Custom listed in his shop's ad. Kuker also asked about the Walsh guitar, and made a legitimate offer for it. At first, Michael resisted, but eventually, Kuker was talking numbers he couldn't refuse.

The guitar then spent the next several years in Kuker's studios. A revered homegrown engineer, he worked with Minnesota acts Semisonic and Jonny Lang in the late '90s before opening his own studio, Seedy Underbelly. Circa 2004, he opened another studio in Los Angeles, then in 2011 bought and revived the well-known Pachyderm Studios, south of Minneapolis, which (prior to his ownership) recorded Nirvana's *In Utereo* as well as albums by Soul Asylum and P.J. Harvey.

Kuker was just 40 when he died of a heart attack in February of 2015.

"John had golden ears," said Westgor, who counted Kuker as a customer and friend. "He heard things other people didn't, and because this guitar has killer tone, he invited anyone who would appreciate a '59 Standard to use it. John was generous with his well-groomed guitar collection, so his guitars never sat in a closet."

In late 2021, the guitar re-emerged thanks in part to a Rolling Stones tour stop in Minneapolis, during which Pierre de Beauport, the band's engineer/producer and right-hand-man to Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, was enjoying dinner with



At a glance, a bad strike with the ink printer might lead one to think this is a '58. But close inspection confirms it's 9 1081.

The tell-tale "twin lakes" of rift-sawn wood and circular clear-coat blemish at the waist help ID this as the guitar Walsh played in the '70s and '80s. The neck-pickup cavity (right) hints that the guitar has what collectors call a "dark burst" finish, the type noted in Yasuhiko Iwanade's *The Beauty of the Burst* as a variation with a bit of blue added to the red pigment. As it fades, the lacquer yellows, giving a nearly imperceptible green tint.

Westgor at Nico's Tacos. It wasn't long before they got to talking guitars.

"Pierre told me about how Eliot considered the Joe Walsh 'Burst 'the one that got away,'" said Westgor. "I paused for a second, wondering if he was messing with me and somehow had found out that I knew the guitar was here in Minnesota, because I had only mentioned it to my closest friends. I said, 'I know who has that,' but he kept talking about how it wasn't flamed but had magic tone. I tried again, saying, 'It's odd you bring that up. My friend bought it 15 years ago. Wanna see it?'

"His hand went up; 'Check, please!'"

They were soon bound for Willie's, where the guitar and a few favorite tweed amps stood ready.

"Any time I'd hand the guitar to someone, I'd remind them to really *feel* the neck," Westgor said. "It has a slight V; it's *chunky*, but not huge. You can tell it's the work of a *person*, not the V shape hinted at by the CNC necks on reissues. And of course, old wood on a guitar that's

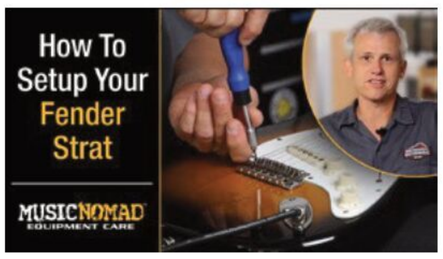
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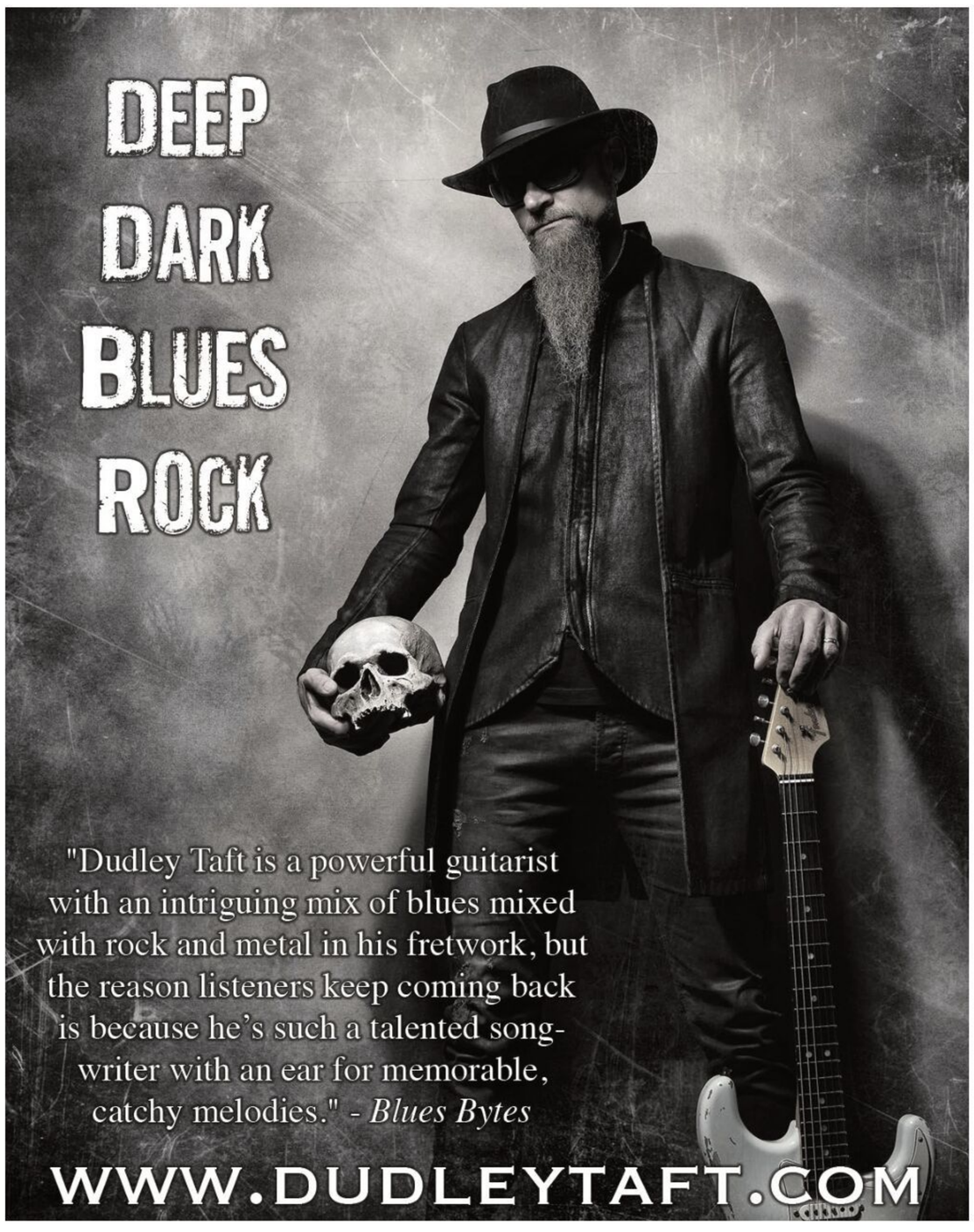
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played as much as this one just *sounds* better – period.

"Pierre has great ears, and as he started playing, he clearly got lost in its charm. He would play, laugh, play more, laugh more. It was fun. And we were there out of complete serendipity, only because he'd mentioned it at dinner."

While its resonance, weight (just over eight pounds), and neck make this 'Burst a joy to hold, the pickups are key to its musical magic; Walsh was known for favoring double-white PAFs.

"He was part of the cult that made people notice white-coil PAFs in the late '70s," noted Westgor. "I remember reading interviews where he'd talk about their tone, and this one really does have a crisp, defined magic; it's beyond what you expect, even from a 'Burst."

Former owner Michael agreed, saying, "It's definitely in the top three of the 40-some vintage Les Pauls I've owned."

In an interview with *Vintage Guitar* in 2012, Walsh recalled experimenting with the pickups in his Les Pauls.

"I went back and forth a lot about whether [removing the covers] made any difference, and in the end, I decided it did," he said. "I also tried screwing the poles all the way down and bringing the pickup a quarter-turn below where it would cause the string to ring. I've always felt that gave the most signal."

Before his passing, Kuker had spoken to Westgor about selling this guitar.

"John's true passion was recording. He'd owned this guitar for several years and loved it, but he also loved great recording gear, and classic Rupert Neve decks are expensive. Sometimes, you let stuff go.

"After he passed away, there was no real caretaker for the guitar, so selling it became logical to the family."

Once the decision was made, Westgor set about finding a buyer.

"At first, we did a 'slow show' with it," he said. "It's kinda complicated, but there are collectors who will *not* buy a high-end item unless nobody knows about it. Once it's advertised, they're not interested."

After conversations with a few potential buyers, he bought a full-page ad in *VG*.

"That was what really caught attention, and I'm pretty sure Joe's eye," he said. "Others started making inquiries, too."

Walsh's involvement reveals how even superstars are careful with – and experience doubts about – such purchases.

"The first time we talked, Joe said, 'I want it.' But then I didn't hear from him for a few days," Westgor recalled.

"I went through a couple head trips when I heard it resurfaced," Walsh confirmed. "At first, I wasn't sure it was mine, so Nate sent pictures, and when I saw them, I saw that yes, it was. But the pictures were depressing because the guitar got the s**t beat out of it. The body and headstock are water-damaged, the pickup mounting screws are rusty."

Understanding his aversion to impulse, Westgor gave Walsh more time, and fielded two legitimate offers. Then, he sent an impromptu video of Los Lobos frontman/guitarist David Hidalgo, playing it through a '55 Fender Deluxe at Willie's. Walsh called back.

"I thought, 'You know what? [The Eagles are] having a great tour, and it will *haunt* me forever if I don't get it. I finally said to Nate, 'Let's go.'

"I'd also called Rudy's Music, in New York, and they had one in perfect shape – showroom quality – for about the same price. I arranged to play it for a couple days, but it had the smaller frets. So, I called Rudy and asked if I could give it back, and he said, 'Sure,' because he's a buddy."

"Joe was doing what *all* of us do when looking at a guitar," Westgor noted. "That painstaking process of comparing it, considering the finish, the case, fretwear, and vibe."

Another push may have come from the Willie's website, which showed a page from A.R. Duchossoir's *Gibson Electrics, Vol. 1* showing Walsh in 1976 with Eagles bandmate Don Felder, each holding a 'Burst. Walsh has this one.

As the deal closed, Westgor was treated to a dose of that famous Walsh wit.

"He told me, 'It *does* seem odd that Joe Walsh is paying a premium for a guitar owned by Joe Walsh.' And it's true, but in the end I think its prodigal-son story can only help its future value," Westgor said. "The guitar is magic, and everyone who owned it played the hell out of it. It has earned its grey hairs, and I *love* the poetry of Joe getting it back."

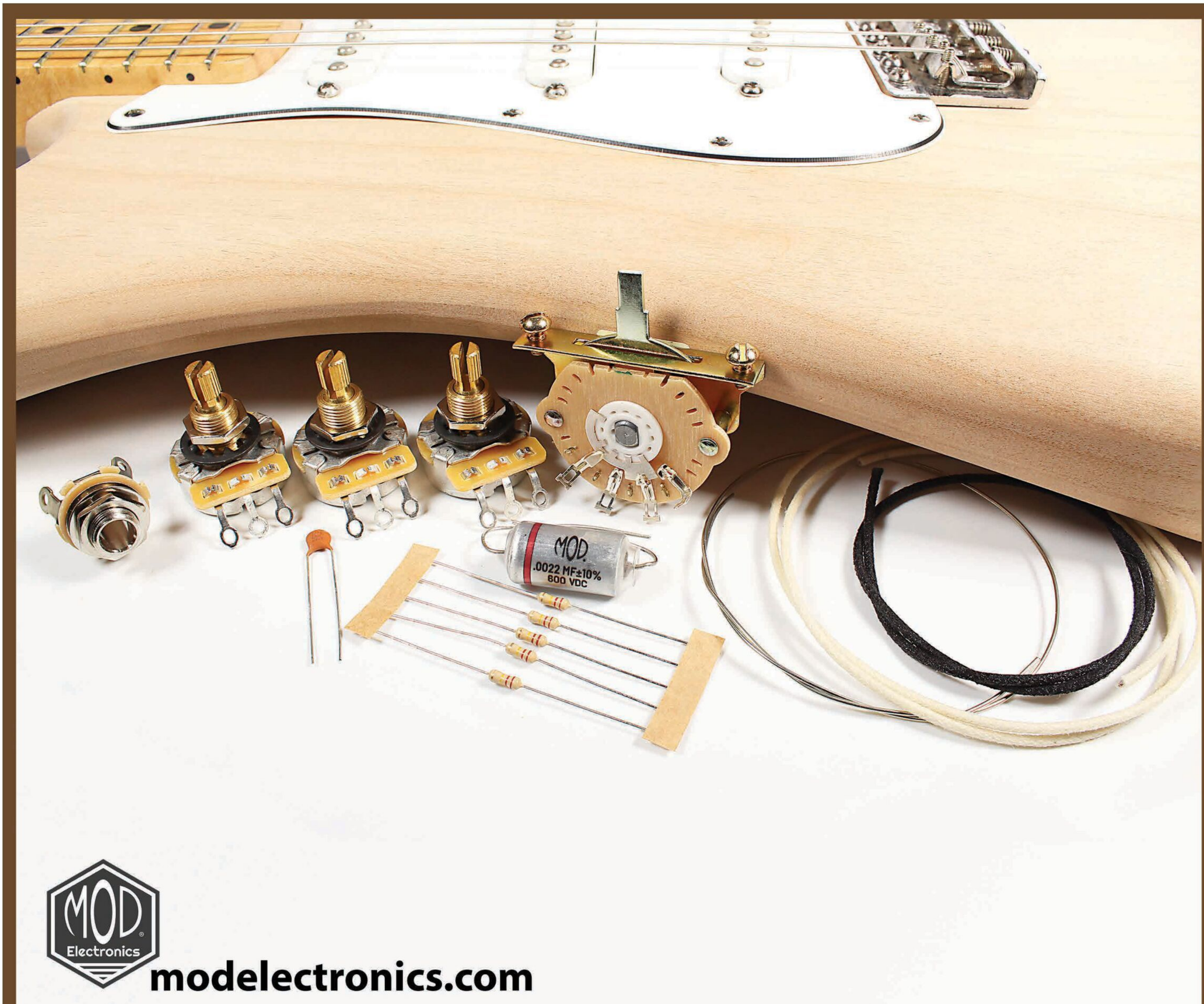
"It sounds great," Walsh said. "The neck pickup isn't too fat – it's really clear. It's just a beauty. I'm cleaning it up a bit. I got a lot of other peoples' yuck out of it (laughs)."

And while the right hands could repair it with nary a trace, because the damage is cosmetic, he says, "I'm just gonna keep it, because it plays great. It's a hoot, getting it back. It's like meeting an old friend I hadn't seen in a long time. I appreciate that Nate went out of his way to get it to me."

Bloomfield, Clapton, Green, and Richards influenced a generation of budding guitar stars to chase "old" Les Paul Standards. But, Walsh giving Page his #1, combined with Page's status as a superstar guitar hero, cemented the 'Burst as an icon. And while wire and wood *do* matter, Westgor reminds us that the human element is always foremost.

"Many see a 'Burst as a magic wand," he said, "But, without the hands of a wizard, it's just sculpture. So, thank you, Joe Walsh."

Special thanks to Albert Molinaro and Brian Brock. Visit vintageguitar.com and our socials to see the video of David Hidalgo playing the guitar through that '55 Deluxe.



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VAHDAH OLCOTT-BICKFORD AND THE MARTIN STYLE 00-44G

Of the nearly 200 artists who have been granted a "signature" Martin guitar, only *one* was given their own style number. It wasn't Clapton. It wasn't Cash. Rather, it's Vahdah Olcott-Bickford who ranks above all others.

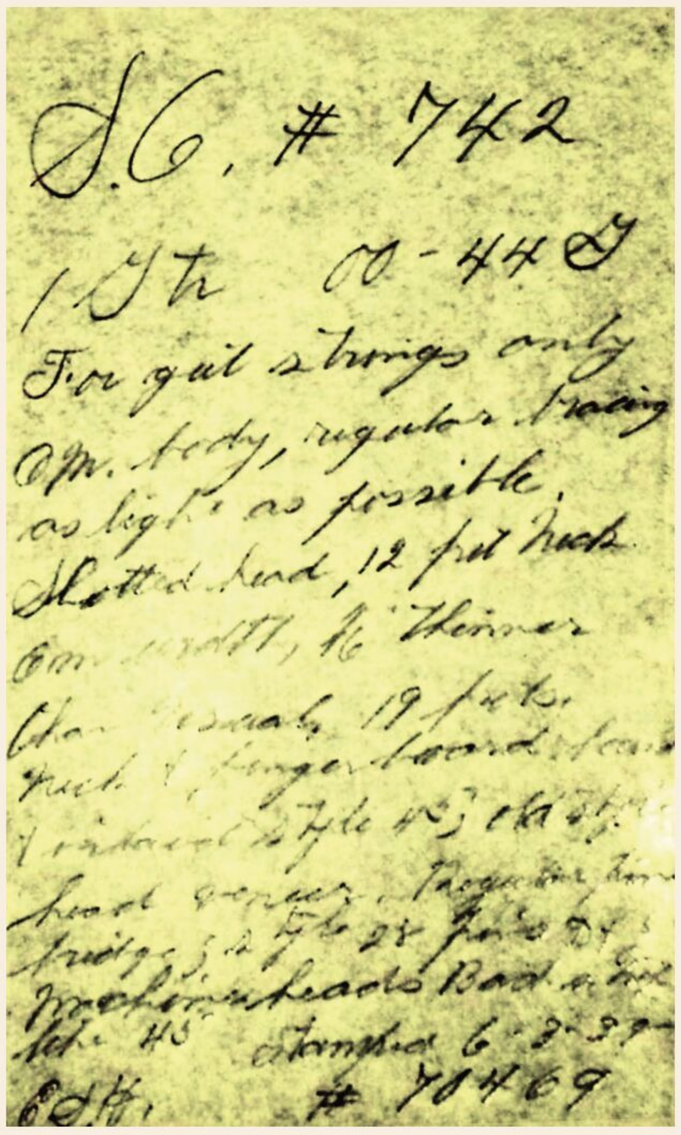
Perhaps the most famous American guitarist of the early 20th century, in her day and in her world – that of classical guitar – Olcott-Bickford was as renowned as any of today's Martin signature artists.

Born in 1885, Ethel Lucretia Olcott grew up in Los Angeles, where she began taking guitar lessons at the age of eight. At 17 or 18, she was invited to live with the family of guitar teacher Manuel Ferrer, in Berkeley. When Ferrer died in 1904, Ethel introduced herself to the classical-guitar world by publishing her first musical work, a set of variations on a theme from the Giovanni Paisiello opera "La Molinara." Onstage, as chronicled in a concert program reprinted in *The Crescendo* magazine, she served up a mix of music ranging from Schumann to Verdi to her own compositions. A 1905 review in the *Los Angeles Herald* offered perspective on the guitar's impending emergence as a solo instrument, noting it was a "hazardous experiment." But, with good technique and full



Guitar photos by Jonathan Greco, instrument courtesy of Brian Chabza.

BY WALTER CARTER



The factory slip for this – the final Style 44. Notes include "1 Gtr 00-44G," "For gut strings only," "OM body, regular bracing," "as light as possible," "Slotted head, 12 fret neck," "Stamped 6-3-39," etc.

resonant tone, Olcott succeeded in garnering several encores. The review also said she, "... has a most attractive stage presence and she made a charming picture."

It was probably the combination of Olcott's resonant tone and charming looks that attracted the attention of mandolin-orchestra leader Myron Bickford, from Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1908, *The Crescendo* announced Bickford's newest composition, "The E.L.O. Schottische." "E.L.O." was, of course, Ethel Lucretia Olcott; Bickford had written the song for her.

In '09, *The Crescendo* brought them closer together (visually, at least) when it featured a short profile of Olcott followed by a profile of Bickford. In '13, Olcott took over the magazine's "Guitarists Round Table" column, and in June she devoted half of it to C.F. Martin, Sr., including a short lesson on the dates of Martin brand stamps. She closed by saying, "Martin guitars are among the best instruments manufactured, here and abroad."

Her column did not mention any specific reason for focusing on a guitar maker, other than the opportunity to present a "splendid portrait" of C.F. Martin, but it coincided with the first production of a new guitar. Presumably, Olcott asked Martin to build a model specifically for her students. Her specs were simple; she wanted the best woods (same used for a Style 45), and she wanted no frills, no ornamentation – no pearl trim, no herringbone purfling, no fretboard markers. Even the backstripe was toned down from the zigzag or zipper patterns of the higher models to simple black-and-white lines. Though Martin put a pearl soundhole ring on models as low as Style 27 and a pearl top border on Styles 40 and higher, the company presumably gave this new model a style number befitting the quality of its woods and status of the artist who designed it – Style 44. There was no product launch, and Martin never advertised it or listed it in a catalog.



The Style 45 headstock inlay and fretboard markers are the sort of superfluous ornamentation Olcott-Bickford wished to avoid.

The idea of an "artist" model was nothing new at Martin. In the 1840s, it made guitars branded for New York guitarist and teacher John Coupa (branded "Martin and Coupa") before they'd established a nomenclature system. In 1911, Martin had begun making a line of guitars for New Jersey teacher William Foden, though these "Foden Specials" were, arguably, not true Martins.



Vahdah Olcott-Bickford, circa 1925.

They had their own model names, alphabetic from A to E, and did not have a Martin serial number.

Martin records show eight 0-44s and two 00-44s were made in 1913. For a new model, 10 instruments was an unqualified success. Consider that Martin made only 256 guitars in '13, and the Olcott models accounted for just under four percent of total production. For perspective, Martin made 107,991 guitars in 2019; to have the same impact, a model today would have to sell 4,211 units. Many of Martin's artist models fall short of announced limited runs of 50 or 100. The only artist who might come close to Ethel Olcott today would be Eric Clapton.

While no one was graffitiing "Ethel Is God" on alley walls, Olcott's career *was* gaining notice. In September '13, she relocated to Cleveland – a seemingly odd choice for an artist on the rise. But, not coincidentally, she was leading a mandolin orchestra there. And though she announced a 1913-'14 winter tour with noted classical mandolinist William Place, Jr., by the beginning of '14, she was performing with Bickford (who often provided piano accompaniment), billed as the Bickford-Olcott Duettists.

An ad in the October '14 *Crescendo* announced Olcott's move to New York, and Bickford's

Vahdah Olcott-Bickford: Oviatt Library Special Collections.

ads included his new location: New York. Olcott began working as personal secretary to Evangeline Adams, who became the first superstar of astrology after she was arrested for fortune telling (which was illegal in New York). Adams gave Olcott and Bickford new astrological names – Vahdah and Zarh certainly sound more mystical and exotic than Ethel and Myron, but the meanings of the names are unknown. It's likely that they were made up based partly on sound and partly on numerological significance. Whatever the reason, in the April '15 issue of *The Crescendo*, the name on Olcott's column was changed to Vahdah (E.L.) Bickford.

The importance of astrology in the Bickfords' lives is evidenced by a letter from Frank Theodore Allen, head of the Astrological Research Society. Vahdah had written Allen, asking him to officiate her wedding. Allen replied that he had cast an astrological chart for their wedding date and she should not be worried about Saturn being in the ascendant. However, he was not aware that a Doctor of Astrology could perform weddings in California. *The Crescendo* announced the couple's marriage in New York in September '15. Going forward, Ethel went by Vahdah Olcott-Bickford and Myron went by Zarh Myron Bickford.

After the Style 44's initial splash, Olcott's model all but disappeared. Though she was among the most prominent guitarists in the country (*The Crescendo* called her "our greatest lady guitarist"), Olcott had relocated twice in two years and increased her touring activity. It's likely she had fewer students who would have been the main buyers of her model. In '14 and '15, Martin made *no* Style 44 guitars at all. Not until '17 did production resume, but it was never more than a trickle after that – a single 000-44 in '17 and one in '18, followed by one 000-44 and one 00-44 in '19. Production peaked in '22 with two 0-44s and two 00-44s. A year later, Vahdah and Zarh relocated to Los Angeles.



The Style 00-44G is one of the plainest Martin models, yet has one of the highest ornamentation indicators – just below the legendary Style 45. And unlike any other Martin signature model, it's not a variation of an existing instrument like the D-35JC (Johnny Cash) or 000-42EC (Eric Clapton). Some touches on the 00-44G were borrowed from fancier models; at first glance, the logo on the back of the head seems out of place, but was also specified on the factory slip for one made in '38. The zipper backstripe is counter to Olcott-Bickford's desire for a basic student guitar.

Vahdah never experienced a time when the guitar was in the forefront of popular music. When she took her first guitar lessons, the mandolin was just beginning its rise. By the time she married Zarh, the tenor banjo was on the rise. There were strong undercurrents of guitar music, to be sure, but the most popular guitar music through the first two decades of the 20th century was Hawaiian. And when the spotlight finally landed on a guitar in '22, it was Nick Lucas' decidedly non-classical, flatpicked solo work on "Pickin' the Guitar" and "Teasing the Frets." This overshadowing of the classical guitar prompted Vahdah to organize the American Guitar Society in 1923. She was its musical director, Zarh its vice president.

As the guitar began making inroads to popular music styles, Vahdah continued to champion the classical guitar and even had stickers made, which she attached to correspondence, saying "Keep the guitar classical." But even within the classical world, the instrument was changing. In '28, Spanish-born Andrés Segovia performed in New York for the first time, introducing Americans to

a more-robust style and a guitar (made in Germany by Hermann Hauser) built to be more responsive to it.

It was the beginning of the modern classical-guitar era – and beginning of the end of the era represented by *The Crescendo* (which last published in '33), the Guild of Banjoists, Mandolinists and Guitarists (which *The Crescendo* represented), Vahdah Olcott-Bickford, and Martin classical guitars. By the end of the '20s, Martin was bracing its standard models for steel strings.

From 1921 through '31, Martin made only 16 Olcott-Bickford models. In '38, after six years without producing one, it made two, stamping them 00-44G (the G denoting gut-string), a designation Martin had begun using in '36. Both were sold by Schirmer's music store, in New York.

The factory slip on this final Style 44 (serial number 70469) reveals the influence of the Hauser-style guitars in its specification for bracing. Though it was to be "regular" X-pattern (rather than the fan pattern that had endured and emerged as the standard for classicals), it was to be "as light as possible" for a more-robust response.

The straight-grained Brazilian rosewood is consistent with the highest grade a Style 44 guitar would require (while highly figured Brazilian may have a higher aesthetic value, straight-grained Brazilian is considered better for tone and durability).



Associated exclusively with Vahdah Olcott-Bickford, the Style 44 is one of Martin's rarest and most obscure styles. This one bears serial number 70469.

It's not known if Vahdah was involved in ordering this guitar. Her archives contain no correspondence with Martin about guitars (only about the American Guitar Society), but she likely was not involved, as the Style 45 inlays on the fretboard, headstock, and back stripe were just the sort of superfluous ornamentation she wished to avoid.

The Martin decal on this guitar also seems out of place, but it was specified on the shop slip for the other 00-44G that came through Schirmer in '38. Some earlier Style 44s had "Olcott-Bickford Artist Model" on the headstock, if they had anything at all. None had the decal because earlier ones were made before Martin introduced a silk-screened version in late '31.

This 00-44G ended Martin's run of Style 44 guitars at 32 units. Though it made other G and later C (classical) models, Martin never had a significant presence in the modern world of classical guitar. Vahdah Olcott-Bickford remained active with the American Guitar Society and the Astrological Society. Zarh Bickford died in 1961, but even after being remarried, she kept his name, going as Vahdah Olcott-Bickford Revere. She was 95 when she died in 1980, leaving her Style 44 guitars as reminders of a largely forgotten part of the guitar's history in America. **VG**

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JUNE

Amigo SoCAL Guitar Show, June 4-5, OC Fair & Event Center, Costa Mesa, CA. For more info Larry at (918)288-2222, amigoshows@stringswest.com orvisit www.amigoguitarshows.com.

Guitars N Gear, Saturday June 18 at the Cranberry, PA Elks Lodge #2249, 20720 Route 19, Cranberry Twp., PA 16066 from 10am -4pm. For more information, call John at 412-736-2965 or email GuitarsGearNat@gmail.com

Summer Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, June 26, 2022 - Our 38th YEAR! - at the Makoy Center 5462 Center St, Hilliard, OH 43026 from 11:30 AM to 5:00 PM. For more information contact Marc at (740) 797-3351 or visit www.ohioguitarshow.com

JULY

Chicago National Guitar Show, Sunday July 17, 2022 at the Kankakee County Fairgrounds 213 W 4000S Rd. Kankakee, IL 60901 11am to 4pm. For more info, visit: https://www.guitartalkofficial.com/chicagoregionalguitarshow **(See Advertisement on page 74.)**

Great American Guitar Show (Summer Philly), July 23 & 24, at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, 100 Station Ave., Oaks, PA. For more info contact Bee 3 Vintage at (828) 298-2197 or visit www.bee3vintage.com. **(See Advertisement on page 75.)**

SEPTEMBER

The Indiana Guitar Show, September 9-11, at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds 1900 E. Main St. Danville, IN. For more information contact Eddie at (317) 272-5222 or visit www.theindianaguitarshow.com

The Grand Rapids Music Instrument Swap Sunday, September 11th at the Double Tree Hotel, 4747 28th St SE Grand Rapids MI 49512, 10am -4pm. For more information contact Shawn VanSteeland at 517-410-6409 or at info@musicinstrumentswap.com .

Jake's Guitar Show & Music Swap Meet, September 17-18, at the Indoor Treasure Barn, 1380 Rt 100, Barto, Pa. Hours 8-1. For more information contact Justin at (484)256-6515 or info@jakesfleamarket.com

Seattle-Tacoma Guitar Show, Sunday September 18th at the Kent Commons, Kent, WA. For more info contact Bruce (253) 445-1973, bruce@adolphagency.com or visit www.seatacguitarshow.com.

Chicago Vintage Guitar Show, September 25 at The Holiday Inn, 1000 Busse Rd, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007. 9am to 3pm. For Booth Information contact Beverly at 947-931-0707 or email Bakesguitar@aol.com

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NOVEMBER

Great American Guitar Show (Fall Philly), November 5-6, at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, 100 Station Ave., Oaks, PA. For more info contact Bee 3 Vintage at (828) 298-2197 or visit www.bee3vintage.com.

The Ann Arbor Music Instrument Swap, Sunday, November 6th at Weber's Inn, 3050 Jackson Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 from 10am - 4pm. For more information contact Shawn VanSteeland at 517-410-6409 or at info@musicinstrumentswap.com

Northeast Guitar Expo, Sunday, November 13 2022 at The Verve Hotel & Convention Center, 1360 Worcester St., Natick, MA. Hours 11-4. For more info call Peter Occhineri (860) 983-6774, email – NortheastGuitarExpo@gmail.com, website – www.NortheastGuitarExpo.com

2023

FEBRUARY

Orlando International Guitar & Music Expo, February 3-5, 2023 at the Central Florida Fairgrounds, 4603 West Colonial Drive, Orlando, FL. Public hours Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4. For more info contact Morty Beckman at (850) 962-4434, guitarexpo22@yahoo.com or visit www.guitarexpo.net

If you have information regarding upcoming guitar shows or events, visit http://www.vintageguitar.com/guitar-show-submission or e-mail james@vintageguitar.com. All submissions must be received by the 10th of each month, or they will appear in the next available issue. This listing is done as a service to our readers and we reserve final determination as to its contents.



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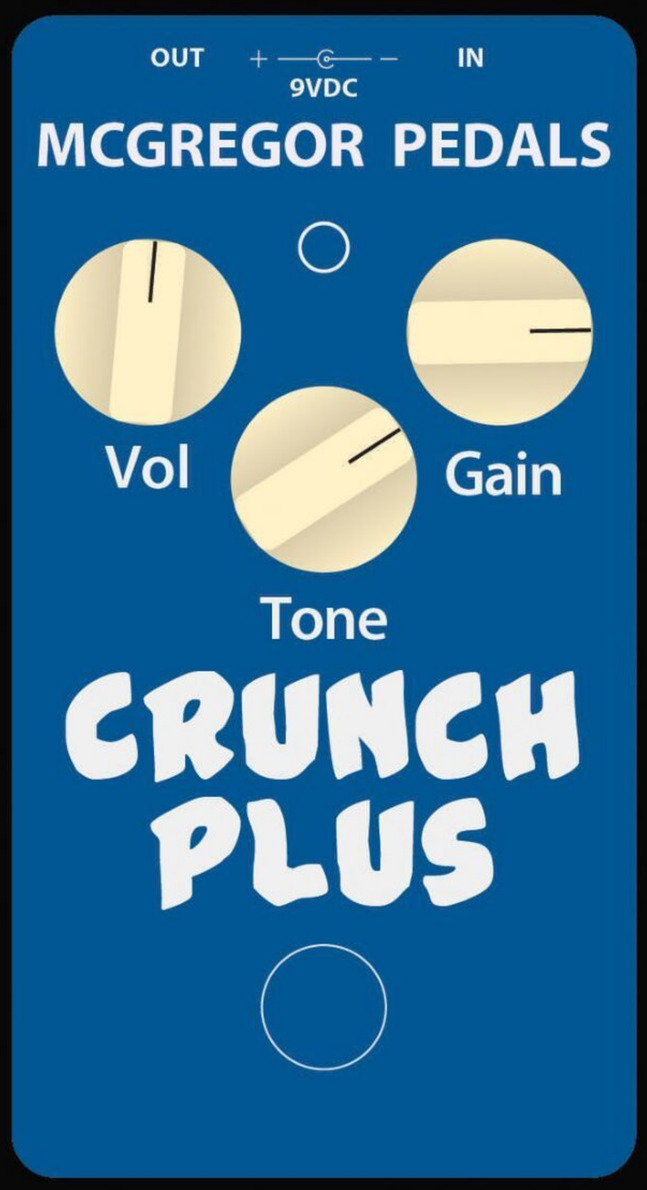
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REVIEWS



Alex Lifeson, Geddy Lee, and Neil Peart onstage during the *Moving Pictures* tour.



Rush

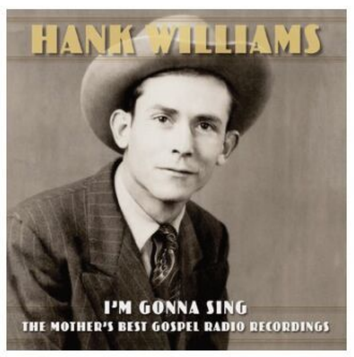
Moving Pictures 40th Anniversary

"MANDATORY" MIX

If "The Spirit of Radio" helped Rush kick open the door to FM radio, its 1981 follow-up elevated them to blockbuster status. To mark the occasion, this 40th-anniversary *Moving Pictures* comes in tantalizing combinations of CD, Blu-Ray, ATMOS and 5.1 mixes, and vinyl.

Along with the studio anthems, the jackpot is an unreleased '81 concert taped in Rush's stronghold of Toronto. This is a multi-track soundboard recording; the mix sounds like you have a prime floor seat at Maple Leaf Gardens. "Limelight" is ferocious, with Alex Lifeson's solo bathed in deep echo, chorus, and distortion. A section of the *Hemispheres* suite sounds piped-in directly from Mount Olympus, a slab of god-like prog. This alone is worth the price of admission.

Live takes of "The Camera Eye" and "Vital Signs" reveal Rush's interest in British post-punk, mixing Geddy Lee's minimalist synthesizer with Lifeson's modulation-drenched white Strat. "YYZ" finds Lee assaulting his black Jazz Bass with fusion virtuosity. Alex's classical-guitar performance of "Broon's Bane" leading into "The Trees" is rapturous. The same can be said for this entire studio/live box; if you love Rush, it's just about mandatory. – ***Pete Prown***



Hank Williams

I'm Gonna Sing: The Mother's Best Gospel Radio Recordings

Hank Williams, like other Grand Ole Opry stars, also hosted his own live shows over Nashville's WSM. These 15-minute programs sponsored by Mother's Best Flour featured him and his Drifting Cowboys, and each closed with a hymn. Pristine recordings of 1951 programs provided the tracks on this collection.

The Drifting Cowboys meshed perfectly with Hank's raw vocals. Don Helms' keening (non-pedal) steel work became a trademark of the Williams sound, onstage and on records. Sammy Pruett added tasty electric guitar, while Jerry Rivers was known for his aggressive fiddling, and Howard Watts played solid upright bass. At times, the band added haunting vocal harmonies to numbers like "Farther Along," the driving Hank original "I'm Gonna Sing" and other tunes.

While Hank's simple-yet-effective rhythm guitar set the tempos, in sacred mode, the Cowboys restrained their usual exuberant soloing. Pruett largely confines himself to rhythm licks (mostly alternating bass notes). At other at times, he contributes graceful intros and turnarounds, as he does on "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." Helms kicks off "Farther Along," then slips in his signature high-register chords, Pruett adding a smooth, melodic break. Seven decades later, the power of these 40 numbers remains undiminished. – ***Rich Kienzle***



999

A Punk Rock Anthology 1977-2020

When it comes to first-wave U.K. punk, the canon favors a handful of bands while paying cursory attention to worthy contemporaries. Take 999. As this compilation proves, the quartet was the sonic equal of The Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks, and The Damned.

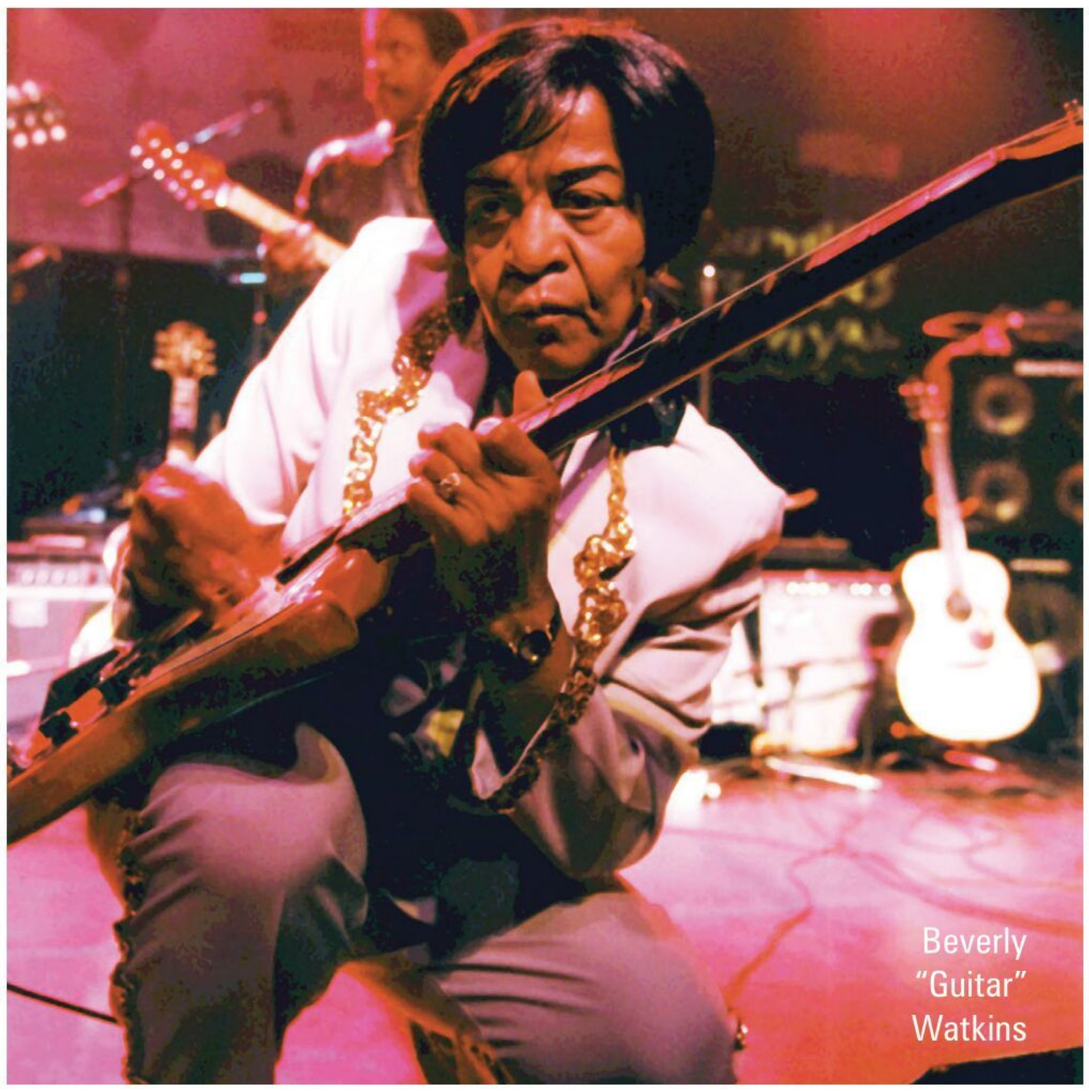
This set does an admirable job of distilling the band's discography (11 studio albums over four decades) down to 40 tracks, for if 999 fell short of other punk bands in accolades, they far outpaced them in longevity.

From the opening salvo "I'm Alive" and punk anthems like "No Pity" and "Nasty! Nasty!" to tracks like "Made A Fool Of You," the collection points to another area where 999 outpaced their peers – their musicality. In "Titanic (My Over) Reaction," lead guitarist Guy Days plays single-note lines that are actually valid orchestration.

In the insightful liner notes, frontman Nick Cash also recalls how 999 attempted to adapt as punk gave way to the next wave. As a result, "Fool" and other songs have more in common with, say, The Jam and The Pretenders. Cash's voice may be an acquired

Rush: Phillip Kamen.

CHECK THIS ACTION



Beverly "Guitar" Watkins

A MESS OF BLUES

It doesn't happen often, but I still encounter people who think the blues is strictly sad music. I tell them to listen to Hound Dog Taylor's joyful "house-rockin'" blues. Or when guitar players assume that Jimmy Reed's variation is dead simple, I quote Billy Gibbons from the January '19 *VG* cover story. "I hate it when I hear people talk about blues being mindlessly simple, just three chords," Rev. Willy stated. "Then you really listen to Jimmy Reed, and it's three *gazillion* chords."

I've lately heard four captivating releases as different as night and day, demonstrating just some of the blues' many hues.

Ryan Lee Crosby studied Indian and African music, but was also mentored by Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, in the elder's Bentonia style of blues, emanating from that part of Mississippi. On *Winter Hill Blues*, Crosby's droning pulse is often hypnotic. "Was It The Devil?" and "Going To Bentonia" are sung falsetto, recalling the town's native blues legend, Skip James, while "Institution Blues" rocks a new wrinkle on the oft-used riff from Jimmy Cobbs' "You Don't Love Me." Crosby's distorted electric is backed by drums and bass, while "Slow Down" is played solo on acoustic 12-string.

"Wish I Was In Heaven Sitting Down" has been recorded by artists ranging from Fred McDowell and R.L. Burnside to Charlie Parr and Lisa Mills. Crosby delivers a fine lap-slide version, most reminiscent of Rev. Robert Wilkins' recording.

Nashville studio stalwart **Kenny Greenberg** has played Music City sessions from Toby Keith to Donny and Marie Osmond. But he's also colored outside the country lines, working with Joan Baez and Etta James, Bob Seger, and Buddy Guy. *Blues For Arash* began life with Greenberg writing soundtrack music for a film that didn't materialize. When it didn't see the light of day, he thought the music would make a strong solo album on its own – and a wise decision it was.

"The Citadel" showcases Greenberg's electric slide (on a '62 SG or DePinto Galaxie) – equal parts blues and Middle Eastern, atop a quasi-African rhythm. Juldeh Camara of Robert Plant's Sensational Space Shifters plays one-string West African fiddle on "Nairobi, Mississippi," in call and response with Greenberg's resophonic bottlenecking and fellow Space Shifter Justin Adams' percussion underpinning. But the straight-up shuffle "Just Because I Can" lands back on familiar ground, in what Kenny accurately describes as "sort of Elmore James meets the Fabulous Thunderbirds."

The two vocal tunes, "Memphis Style" and "Ain't Got Me," spotlight deep-voiced Wally Wilson, Greenberg's collaborator and co-producer. It's a safe assumption that Greenberg's would-be soundtrack would've provided evocative music for the film that wasn't, but it stands tall as a self-contained album.

Beverly "Guitar" Watkins passed away in 2019 at the age of 80, but thankfully not before the Music Maker Foundation, which helps artists in need with living and medical expenses as well as gigs and recordings, produced her first solo album, *Back In Business*. But her career went back to the '50s, when she was hired by Atlanta-based Piano Red while she was still in high school. In 1962, as Dr. Feelgood & the Interns, Red recorded "Mr. Moonlight" with Watkins on guitar – to be covered by the Beatles two years later.

Known for playing guitar behind her head, Watkins gets plenty of bite out of a Fender Mustang on the live *In Paris*. Her singing ranges from a growl to soft and mellow, as on "Melody Cruise," a reworking of "Mr. Moonlight." She will be sorely missed.

Full disclosure regarding the next album: I was hired to write liner notes for *Strange Time Blues* by **HowellDevine**, and I confess I'd never heard of the trio before – rather embarrassing since this is their fifth outing. Two previous efforts were, in fact, released by the Arhoolie label. Its legendary head, Chris Strachwitz, remarked that their pitch was the first in years that he listened to from beginning to end, and artists singing the San Francisco-based group's praises include Bonnie Raitt and Elvin Bishop.

Collectively, guitarist/vocalist Joshua Howell, drummer Pete Devine, and upright bassist Joe Kyle, Jr. fall somewhere between country blues and electrified jug-band, between Chicago blues and jam-band. For instance, "East St. Louis" starts with the bottleneck riff from Fred McDowell's original version, backed by brushes before Devine picks up the rhythm and Kyle alternately plucks and bows; it's a study of theme and variation, of dynamics.

There are covers of Muddy Waters ("Long Distance Call"), Blind Boy Fuller ("Untrue Blues"), R.L. Burnside ("Long-Haired Doney"), and Rev. Robert Wilkins' "That's No Way To Get Along," a.k.a. "Prodigal Son." "When The Levee Breaks" ignores Led Zeppelin and goes back to the source, Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie.

But like some topical blues classics, Howell's somber "Smoke" deals with the wildfires in California, and the instrumental "Strange Time Meltdown" combines funky beats, jazzy harmony, and even a wah pedal. It dispels any "retro" pigeonhole, just as the blues evades monochromatic brush strokes.

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Beverly "Guitar" Watkins: Paul Markow.



Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler onstage with Joe Perry, spanking a Les Paul Junior, circa 1971.

taste (reminding the listener of The Only Ones' Peter Perrett), but ultimately, 999 is two-guitar rock deserving a retrospective listen. ***– Dennis Pernu***



Aerosmith
1971: The Road Starts Hear

This long-lost relic was recorded before the band's 1973 debut LP, with guitarists Joe Perry and Brad Whitford (aged 21 and 19), bassist Tom Hamilton, and drummer Joey Kramer fueling the fire behind frontman Steven Tyler.

Using Perry's two-track Wollensak 1280 tape machine, these songs were captured at their basement rehearsal space (in a Boston University women's dormitory) or during soundcheck. Though amateur recordings, the quality is surprisingly clean.

Perry and Whitford noodling on Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross" slips into a stomping version of "Somebody." The smoky Rufus Thomas cover "Walkin' the Dog" grooves heavily on Hamilton's slinky bass beat and Tyler's breathy flute fills. "Reefer Head Woman," a smoldering blues classic later recorded for *Night in the Ruts*, includes Perry's volcanic solo and Tyler's harmonica blasts. "Major Barbara" is country blues oozing with slide guitar; it was recorded, but not used for '74's *Get Your Wings* and proper studio outtakes didn't appear until decades later.

"Dream On" is close, arrangement-wise, to the legendary hit, and the band's emerging hard-rock muscle is felt on "Movin' Out" and "Mama Kin." While raw, *The Road Starts Hear* will be tempting for fans of primal early Aerosmith. ***– Bret Adams***



The Rolling Stones
Live at the El Mocambo

Amidst the late-'70s rise of punk and new wave, the Stones felt irrelevant; they were still a mammoth touring entity, but their brightest days seemed behind them. Released at last, these secret gigs at Toronto's 300-seat El Mocambo might alter that perception.

By March '77, the Stones had settled on Ronnie Wood as the permanent guitar replacement for Mick Taylor, and with startling fidelity, this tape delivers Wood in the left speaker, Keith Richards in the right. Fire up "Dance Little Sister" to hear the Stones stripping it down to elemental rock and roll, while Keef and Woody's tone is just over the line of overdrive, thanks to their newfangled Mesa/Boogie combos. "All Down the Line" lets Ronnie show off his considerable (and underrated) slide chops.

Solid crowd-pleasers are present; "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Tumbling Dice," and a too-fast "Brown Sugar" – but there are better cuts. Masters at reinterpreting other styles, the Stones nail the Caribbean feel of "Luxury" and reggae of "Crackin' Up," plus the crackling Chicago blues of Muddy Waters' "Mannish Boy." As such, *El Mocambo* reminds us that behind the arena-filling juggernaut was a richly gifted band. There's no hype here – just bar-band soul. ***– PP***



Corb Lund
Songs my Friends Wrote

Lund, the Canadian singer/songwriter known for powerful, rocking originals, departs from form to honor eight of his favorite songwriters. He isn't simply covering signature tunes, but lesser-known compositions he admires.

The Hurtin' Albertans, Lund's longtime band, retain their unvarnished, gutbucket simplicity as his voice and acoustic guitar meld perfectly with bassist Kurt Ciesla, drummer Brady Valgardson, and guitarist Grant Siemens, who moves between electric, acoustic, lap steel, and baritone.

The Albertans are in outstanding form, delivering raw rockabilly flavor of John Evans' "Pasa-Get-Down-Dena" which allows Siemens to inject rollicking boogie licks, wailing Setzer-like flourishes, and lap-steel embellishments. As Lund tears through a stomping version of Hayes Carll's "Highway 87," Siemens contributes raw, snarling leads, insistent rhythm licks and a rip-roaring break. His playing is no less intense on Carll's Chuck Berryesque "Little Rock."

Siemens is equally impressive on Lund's ballads. For Todd Snider's "Age Like Wine," and Tom Russell's "Blue Wing," he complements Lund's vocal with restraint and subtlety. The sound is simple yet full-bodied on "Spookin' the Horses," enlivened by Siemens' graceful, reverb-drenched accompaniment, something he reprises

Aerosmith: R. Agriopoulos.

extra EXTRA



TIM GARTLAND
Truth

This rootsy Nashville project by harmonica master Tim Gartland features guitarist Robert Frahm (Blues Warriors), whose clean, fluid playing bobs and weaves around Gartland's Little Walter-inspired lines. The axeman takes center stage on tunes like "Outta Sight Outta Mind" and the swinging "Mind Your Own Business." A class in taste and economy, with a splash of flash. **– *SM***



WILLIE NELSON
A Beautiful Time

On this mix of originals and covers including the Beatles' "A Little Help from My Friends," Willie, now 89 and backed by Nashville session players, delivers surprisingly powerful vocals. He's equally fierce and passionate picking on Trigger, proven by the soloing on Shawn Camp's title song and two new Willie originals – the cerebral "Energy Follows Thought" and the defiant "I Don't Go to Funerals." **– *RK***



BOB STROGER & THE HEADCUTTERS
That's My Name

The 91-year-old bassist, a mainstay in Chicago, didn't cut a solo album until 2002, after decades backing blues legends. The collection mixes originals with covers of Junior Parker, Eddie Taylor, and Bill Broonzy. The accompanying Brazilian combo features Joe Marhofer's harmonica and Ricardo Maca's impressive guitar. Not surprisingly, Stroger's bass is as supple as it is solid. **– *DF***



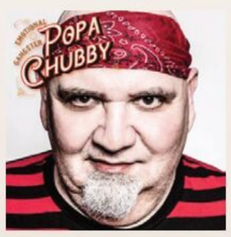
MERLE JAGGER
Trash Talking Guitars

As the name suggests, Jagger's sonic composition is a gumbo of hot country picking and blues-based rock, served atop a bed of classic guitar sounds. Frontman/guitarist Mark Christian finds a Gatton-esque need for speed on the humorous "Broken Home Yard Sale" and an amped-up "Blue Moon of Kentucky." American roots music on steroids. **– *SM***



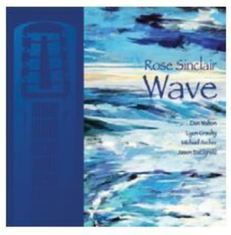
MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP
Universal

The Flying V hero is back with his "heavy melody" guitar wizardry, delivering fierce, Euro-metal solos and riffs in "Emergency" and "The Universe." "A King Has Gone" is a tribute to Ronnie James Dio, reuniting most of the 1976 lineup of Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow with bassist Bob Daisley and adding a barnburning Schenker lead. Easily the best MSG album in decades. **– *PP***



POPA CHUBBY
Emotional Gangster

Popa Chubby gets in the weeds on his latest, playing nearly all the instruments and leaning into a fresh outlook. "New Way of Walking" displays Chubby unleashing the fury on guitar with renewed vigor, while on "Tonight I'm Gonna Be The Man," he takes slide fans to school. "Dust My Broom" kills, but the witty "Equal Opportunity" is timeless Chubby. **– *OJ***



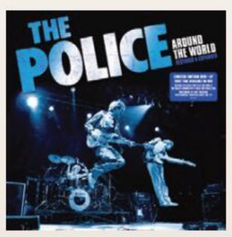
ROSE SINCLAIR
Wave

Still thinking steel guitar is strictly for country music? Check out Sinclair's self-described "cocktail steel." The six-song EP is actually a showcase of jazz, big-band, and bossa nova covers, from Ellington to Jobim. She expertly gets around her pedal-less doubleneck '61 Fender D-8, working its volume by hand. **– *DF***



ANN WILSON
Fierce Bliss

Heart broken? With the platinum band fractured yet again, it's Ann's solo turn and her voice still punches hard. Session guitarist Tom Bukovac (*VG*, January '22) shines, adding a memorable lick to "Greed." Warren Haynes wrings an intense solo on "Angel's Blues." Kenny Wayne Shepherd unleashes a wah-dripping solo on the Eurythmics' "Missionary Man" and torches Robin Trower's "Bridge of Sighs." **– *BA***



THE POLICE
Around The World Expanded

Recorded in 1979/'80, this DVD/CD/Blu-ray/LP package includes unreleased live performances from England, Japan, and Hong Kong. Behind-the-scenes footage and music from the group's first two albums display the trio as a rock juggernaut. Transcendent versions of "Can't Stand Losing You," "Truth Hits Everyone," and "Message In a Bottle" demonstrate the rhythm-guitar genius of Andy Summers. **– *OJ***



RONNI LE TEKRØ
Bigfoot TV

The former TNT guitarist's first solo record in six years finds him in top form, with catchy hooks, epic passages, tongue-in-cheek humor, and the type of craftsman-like guitar riffs and solos that made him a living legend. Highlights include "The Black Rose," "Not Today," and Le Tekrø's cocked-wah guitar intensity of "Life On Long Island." **– *OJ***



ASIA
Asia in Asia: Live at the Budokan Tokyo 1983

Broadcast on MTV, this *Alpha* tour concert finally gets a proper audio and video release. Subbing for John Wetton, former ELP frontman Greg Lake plays a Steinberger bass and his Alembic eight-string. Steve Howe, primarily wielding a Gibson ES-Artist, rips on "Time Again," delivers slippery runs on "Wildest Dreams," and solos at length on "Heat of the Moment." **– *BA***



THE SURFRAJETTES
Roller Fink

This Canadian foursome delivers surf that balances traditional twang with modern covers, plus *sick* levels of reverb. Guitarists Shermy and Nicole imbue "Roxy Roller" with perfect Fender tones, while The Beatles' "She Loves You" becomes sweet instro. The high point is a crunchy "Train Kept a Rollin'," prompting the musical question, "What if The Yardbirds had moved to Redondo Beach in 1963?" **– *PP***



Larry McCray with his bodacious Flying V.

behind Lund on his graceful rendition of Ian Tyson's "Road to Las Cruces." **– *RK***



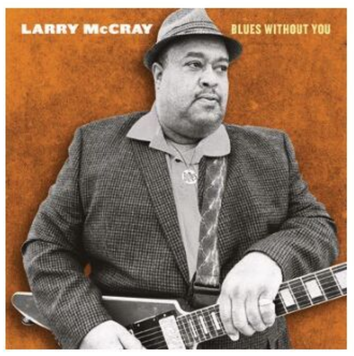
Mike Campbell & The Dirty Knobs
External Combustion

Former Tom Petty guitarist Mike Campbell's second release displays his group in tip-top shape as they push the boundaries of swampy L.A. rock and roll.

Co-produced by Campbell and George Drakoulias (Black Crowes), *External Combustion* is a backbeat musical journey with finely dimed guitar textures. Campbell's artistry should come as no surprise as he concocts tasty, fat-free licks, and his expanding songwriting chops are fully displayed on the melancholy "State Of Mind," featuring Margo Price sharing lead vocals. Rich harmonies, a well-orchestrated horn section, and tasteful slide make the song a highlight.

External Combustion also features Mott the Hoople legend Ian Hunter displaying tough-edged vocals amidst jubilant chord work on the powerhouse ditty "Dirty Job." The album also features Heartbreakers' keyboardist Benmont Tench for the Texas-tinged "Lightning Boogie."

Campbell stays within his wheelhouse, but demonstrates colorful range as his guitar morphs from the psychedelic California country of "Electric Gypsy," the rockabilly appropriations of "Brigitte Bardot" (with awesome slide), and driving Tom Petty stylings of "Wicked Mind." Dig the Lenny Breau-style harmonics on the ethereal "In This Lifetime." It's a fun listen. **– *Oscar Jordan***



Larry McCray
Blues Without You

After 40 years of playing under the radar, Rust Belt bluesman Larry McCray finally gets his big break. On *Blues Without You*, McCray receives production magic from Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith for Joe's Keeping the Blues Alive record label. The result is McCray's finest record, reflecting his talent, skill, and artistic sincerity.

Blues Without You cooks, fusing McCray's love of southern R&B and hard-hitting Midwestern blues. While McCray's playing is masterful, his vocal performances will floor everyone. Guest performances include blues slide queen Joanna Connor, Warren Haynes, keyboardist Reese Wynans, and Bonamassa.

The semi-autobiographical "Arkansas" kicks things off with a Bo Diddley beat, ballsy lead-guitar breaks, and a flawless horn section. McCray plays guitar like a champ, while Bonamassa's clear production style uplifts killer vocalizations. "Breaking News" takes the band uptown with slick urban grooves offset by McCray's earthy attack, while the mid-tempo shuffle "Roadhouse Blues" unleashes McCray's inner Albert King.

McCray join forces with Warren Haynes on the metaphorical ballad "Down To The Bottom." Sparse acoustic guitar builds to a string section, lush backing vocals, and excellent slide work from Haynes. Bonamassa and Connor perform at the highest levels of blues artistry, but McCray is blistering, fierce, and unstoppable. **– *OJ***


Justin Golden, Hard Times and a Woman

Justin Golden
Hard Times and a Woman

The word "blues" pops up in Justin Golden's bio, but "African-Americana" might be a more apt term. The Virginian's 12 originals make for an extremely impressive debut, as comfortable leaning toward country on "Can I Get Right" as blues–rural on "Ain't Just Luck," city on "The Gator," with its roaring, distorted guitar. It's an eclectic schmear, but his strong identity gives cohesion and defies pigeonholing.

It's tempting to say a tune like "Must Be Honey" could be a hit if covered by an established artist, but improving on Golden's version is unimaginable. His resonator guitar gives "Moon Far Away" a decades-old quality, as does his fingerpicking on "Call Me When The Bed Gets Cold." But the powerful, contemporary "If I Keep It Together" erases any retro notion. Lyrically, melodically, and instrumentally, it's refreshing to hear someone as "realized" as 30-ish Justin.

Adding additional guitar parts are Nate Hubbard and, in spots, bassist/producer Chip Hale. Golden switches to clawhammer banjo for the closing "Oh Lord, Oh Lord," featuring Benjamin Hunter's fiddle and a vocal choir. Kudos to all of the players here, to Hale, to engineer Lance Koehler for crackling

Larry McCray: Peggy Smith.



Blowin' Free; Wishbone Ash onstage in 1972.

production, and especially Golden, for an auspicious debut. ***– Dan Forte***



Robin Trower

No More Worlds to Conquer

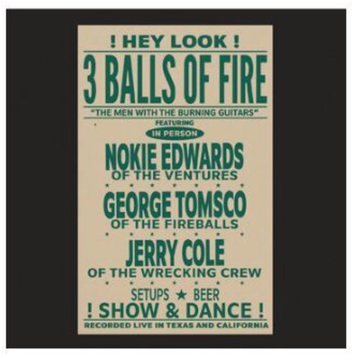
You can depend on the prolific Robin Trower dropping a new album every year or two. Here, his blues-drenched vibrato and Strat-through-Marshall tone are front and center, peppered with an array of Fulltone stompboxes. He also plays most of the bass, though Livingstone Brown thumps four-string on some songs.

An important change this time is Trower relinquishing vocals to longtime tour singer Richard Watts – it's a significant move, as the songs were admittedly out of Trower's range, and Watts' strong voice makes the album markedly better.

Doing what he does best, Trower lends especially emotive touches on the title track, with deft wah accents and tasteful bends, "Deadly Kiss" breathes hypnotically over a deep soul-funk groove, rich riffs illuminate the catchy "Ball of Fire," and the jazzy feel of "Birdsong" includes clean rhythm strumming. Trower's exquisite tone balances the pop-tinged melody of "Waiting for the Rain to Fall." The speedy "Cloud Across the Sun" features surprisingly distorted chords.

Now 77, Trower keeps progressing, yet never strays far from his iconic sound – that's why he's been a guitar hero for a half century. While not a breakthrough, *No More Worlds to Conquer* is a sturdy, tone-tasty effort. ***– BA***





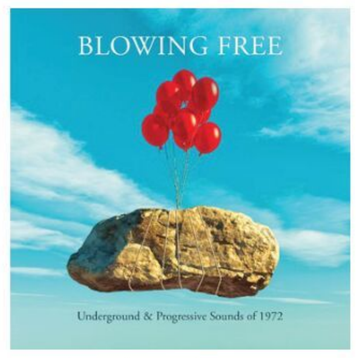
Burnin' Mike Vernon's 3 Balls Of Fire

Burnin' & Churnin' and Live! (featuring Nokie Edwards, George Tomsco, and Jerry Cole)

Of all the surf-instrumental revivalists, Vernon is one of the most prolific. Since forming Balls Of Fire in 1987, he has also dipped his toe into "crime jazz" and Hollywood soundtrack covers – played with skill and creativity.

Churnin' is moodier and a little less *burnin'* than previous releases, but showcases the six-stringer's composing on seven originals. You can almost feel the ocean breeze from "Havana Calling," while "Crime Report" is as noir as its title suggests. "Alotto Staccato" is an obligatory reverb fest that would be right at home in Dick Dale's catalog, and "Lucky Boy" is textbook bachelor pad. The set closes with "Albatross," a beautiful tribute to Peter Green.

A second CD, called *Live!*, available only by purchasing the first, features Vernon accompanying three legends of instrumental rock. The Ventures' Nokie Edwards gives a jaw-dropping fingerpicking display on "I Got A Woman," George Tomsco of New Mexico's Fireballs is in stellar form on "Rik-A-Tik," and the Wrecking Crew's Jerry Cole reaches back to his hot-rod success with "Pealin' Out." Each frontman is utterly unique, and bravo to Vernon for not only showcasing them, but for being adaptable in conforming to their distinctive styles. ***– DF***



Various artists

Blowing Free: Underground and Progressive Sounds of 1972

The Cherry Red label is spot-on at packaging vintage U.K. rock, and this boxed set is no exception. This one focuses on broadly "progressive" bands stretching the span after Jimi Hendrix died and the Beatles broke up. You know the bigger acts – Yes, ELP, Uriah Heep – but there are hip mid-tier artists here, often mixing electric and acoustic guitars with impunity.

Atomic Rooster's "Time Take My Life" has an urban feel and guitar jabs from Steve Bolton; Barclay James Harvest drops a dreamy pulse on "Medicine Man" using savage echo-fuzz licks from John Lees. Lindisfarne's "Don't Ask Me" shows what happens when northern English musicians play funk – it's not R&B, but there's an undeniable guitar groove. Al Stewart's "Songs Out of Clay" is a rock waltz with elegant layers of acoustics and electrics. Hawkwind explores acidic space jams on "Brainstorm" via guitarist Dave Brock and a pre-Motörhead Lemmy on bass.

Guitar freaks already know Free's "Wishing Well," a supreme demonstration of Paul Kossoff's Les Paul wizardry. "Blowin' Free" is typically killer boogie from Wishbone Ash. These are just highlights from this superb four-CD set. For these British musicians of 1972, the future was wide-open. ***– PP***

Wishbone Ash: Malco23/Wikimedia Commons.

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VG APPROVED GEAR

LORDY MAMA, LIGHT MY FUSE

The Banker Excalibur Derringer

Gibson guitars from the ’50s and ’60s are some of the most-soughtafter instruments on the planet, and re-creating the look, tone, and feel from that golden era is no small task. Banker Custom Guitars is an authorized Gibson “partner,” which allows builder Matt Hughes to create something new, yet familiar.

The Banker Excalibur Derringer is Hughes’ take on Rick Derringer’s ’58 Explorer, with its unique split headstock. All wood, parts, hardware and electronics are top-notch, including the one-piece Korina body, which has a stunning aged-clear finish. Other touches include Faber aged-nickel ABR bridge and tailpiece, and Throbak ESG-102B PAFs. The recipe wouldn’t be complete without a Brazilian-rosewood fretboard and Kluson tuners.

Price: $5,299
www.bankerguitar.com

Upon first strum of the Derringer, you feel a deep, resonant vibration through its neck and body, with warmth and exceptional clarity across the strings. Plugged into a modern mid-power 6V6 head and 2x12 cab with a Tone Tubby 40/40 and a Celestion Gold, the Throbaks complemented the Excalibur’s natural sustain and depth. Clean tones are bouncy and musical, while overdriven tones are rich with a beautiful singing voice, as you’d expect from a good PAF. The neck is fat (like a ’58 should be) but very comfortable with its rolled edges and excellent fret work. This guitar feels broken in right out of the case, and plays flawlessly.

The Excalibur Derringer is one of those guitars that you never want to put down. You’ll need deep pockets, but you won’t have any regrets. ***– Charlie Wilkins***



Price: $249
www.greateasternfx.com

LITTLE BIG TONES

The Great Eastern FX Small Speaker Overdrive

Recording engineers and DIYers have long known what a small amp can do in a big room – that is, sound awesome. The U.K.-based Great Eastern FX Co. has created a pedal that inverts the concept, making big amps sound smaller. But it does a lot more.

The Small Speaker Overdrive is a tone-shaping preamp that can provide boost and approximate the sound of a small Class-A amp circuit cranked to 11. This means enhanced Fender Champ tones with increased tonal flexibility.

Using its controls for High, Low, Gain, and Level, this easy-to-suss pedal offers organic break-up and a distinctive tonal signature that cuts mightily through a mix, using a 9-volt adapter. A discrete transistor circuit and judicious tweaking allows the user to approach the sound of a mic placed in front of an 8" speaker; the results are fat cleans and a richer overdrive at lower volumes. It delivers a hefty punch to the upper mids and sits divinely in a mix, a la Billy Gibbons, Joe Walsh, or Derek and the Dominos. It responds swimmingly to picking dynamics, and edges dangerously close to fuzz territory with the Gain maxed and a bit of experimentation.

The Small Speaker OD is a specialty pedal that provides mid-focused, punchy, natural-sounding ’70s low-gain grit. It’s exceptional as a DI for home recording or live use. ***– Oscar Jordan***



CONVINCING CRUNCH

The Orange Super Crush 100 Head

When speaking of guitar amplifiers that have become part of rock-and-roll lore, you best mention the iconic Orange brand as helping pave the way – their bright tolex and pictographed control panels being immediately recognizable, but more remembered for raucous tones.

Price: $499
www.orangeamps.com

The two-channel Super Crush 100 is the newest version of Orange's solid-state Crush series, with JFET circuitry designed to produce valve-like tone and response. A fully featured head, it has an effects loop, direct-out with cab simulation, and foot-switchable reverb and channel selection.

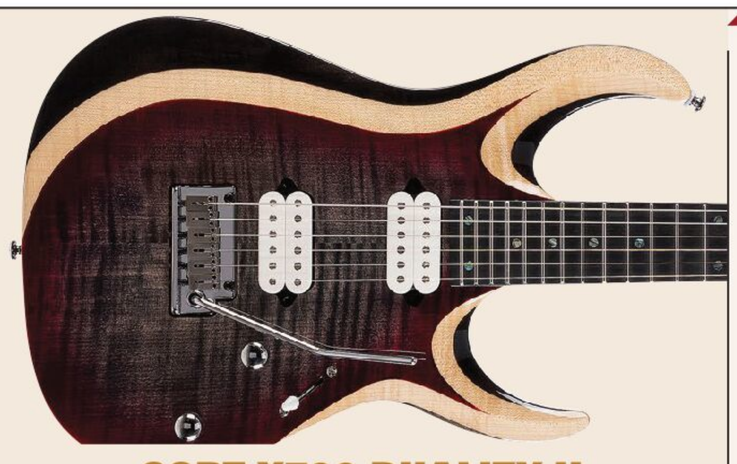
Tested using a Les Paul with PAF-style humbuckers and a Les Paul Deluxe with mini humbuckers, the amp's Clean channel (with Treble, Bass, and Volume set to straight-up 12 o'clock) yielded a warm, round, musical tone that was responsive and easy to play. As Volume increased, clean sounds transitioned to a light crunch, good for playing rhythm. While the PAFs yielded a clear, round tone, the mini humbuckers were brighter, with a more-percussive tone, closer to what you'd expect from a single-coil pickup. You won't get sparkling cleans from this amp, but the EQ section does allow dialing-in a slightly brighter tone. The amp also responded well to Volume- and Tone-knob variations on both guitars. The onboard digital reverb adds pleasant spaciousness without washing-out overall tone.

The Dirty channel is where the magic really happens. With Bass, Mid, and Treble set at 12 o'clock and Gain at 10 o'clock, the Super Crush delivered an open tone with slight breakup. Moving Gain to 1 o'clock created a thick, muscular sound with sustain and harmonics for days. With the gain dimed, palm mutes and pick harmonics were executed with ease. You won't get super tight low-end response for metal tones, but you *will* get dark, grungier tones – perfect for stoner rock. And while it's voiced on the darker side, the sound retained string-to-string definition and clarity.

Has Orange cracked the code for getting authentic tube-like tones from solid-state circuits? In our tests, the Super Crush 100 never sounded artificial, and at times was downright convincing; notes bloomed as you'd expect, with dynamics traditionally delivered only by tubes. Low-end response was ample but lacked a bit of the thump you'd get from a 100-watt tube amp.

Tone is subjective, of course, so you'll have to judge for yourself, but here, we offer kudos. ***– Charlie Wilkins***

GEARIN' UP



CORT X700 DUALITY II

Cort's X700 Duality II has a mahogany body with flame-maple top, bolt-on maple neck with 15.75" radius, 24 frets, abalone dots, ebony fretboard, 25.5" scale, and stainless-steel frets. Other features include CFA-III vibrato and Fishman Fluence Open Core Classic humbuckers with five-way switching. Finish options are Lava Burst and Polar Ice Burst.



GIBSON SIMMONS G² THUNDERBIRD

Gibson's Gene Simmons G² Thunderbird has a black nitrocellulose-lacquer finish, black-chrome hardware, T-Bird pickups with individual Voume controls and master Tone, bound ebony fretboard with pearloid reverse-split-diamond inlays, GraphTech nut, Hipshot tuners and bridge, and Mirror Plex pickguard and truss cover with laser-engraved logo.



GREZ MENDOCINO SHORT SCALE BASS

Grez Guitars' Mendocino Short Scale Bass has a semi-hollow body made from salvaged old-growth redwood and finished in satin nitro, a mahogany neck, 30" scale, ebony fretboard with 12" radius and 18 jumbo frets, Curtis Novak pickups, Babicz saddles, and Gotoh Res-O-Lite tuners.

Got something new and cool? Let us know at www.VintageGuitar.com/Gearin-Up-Submission



TONE OF THE BEAST

Tech 21's Steve Harris SH1 Signature SansAmp

Tech 21's Steve Harris SH1 Signature Sans Amp celebrates the tone of metal icon Harris, Iron Maiden's bassist, songwriter, and driving force.

For 40 years, Harris has delivered a brash tone via Marshall 4x12 cabs with 12" EV speakers and a Precision Bass with flatwound Rotosound strings, delivering more clank than you'd expect. For his side band, British Lion, he wanted to retain his trademark tonal voice without hauling Marshalls to clubs and other small venues. Jumping to his rescue, Tech 21 somehow miniaturized his rig into a purely analog SansAmp pedal.

Decorated with a tattered British flag and finished in bright West Ham blue (in tribute to Steve's favorite soccer team), the SH1 plugs in as a conventional stompbox or to an amplifier's effects return; for super-quiet signal, there's an XLR out for connecting to a mixer or computer interface. There's also a tuner, plus four bands of EQ (Low, High, and two powerful Mids).

Price: $329
www.tech21nyc.com

The Blend knob dials-in the amount of tube emulation, and having two Gains and two Levels means you can use the SH1 like a two-channel amp with footswitchable boost to enhance solos and/or heavy riffs. The Bite switch adds the Harris thump you expect and, sure enough, the SH1 can get feisty; the Mid controls are critical for setting aggression, but don't forget there's also a range of clean settings, adding to its overall versatility. Whether your bass has active or passive pickups, you can adjust the SH1 to taste, readily finding both warm tones and truly ferocious overdrive.

In all, the SH1 Steve Harris is a formidable bass preamp, offering a range of beastly direct tones for live, practice, and studio performance. Like all Tech 21 gear, it's made in America – or in this case, "Maiden USA." ***– Pete Prown***



Price: $2,599.99
www.fender.com

GOOD TIMES

Fender's Nile Rodgers Hitmaker Stratocaster

Guitarists know Nile Rodgers as funkmaster general of Chic, but he looms even larger as a Grammy-winning producer whose skill has helped sell more than 500 million albums. Fender's Artist Series Hitmaker Stratocaster honors him with a reproduction of the guitar he used on countless hit songs.

The Olympic White alder body on Nile's hardtail guitar varied from a typical '60s Strat, being slightly smaller, thinner, and more-contoured. This one follows on all counts. Also per the Niles guitar, its one-piece maple neck (with maple fretboard) carries the 1959 version of a C shape, with a 9.5" radius, medium jumbo frets, satin finish, and a Nile Rodgers/Chic logo on the back of the headstock. The three single-coil pickups are custom-voiced to replicate the originals, and sit in a mirrored/chrome-plated brass pickguard with white Gibson-style "speed" knobs. It also boasts Sperzel locking tuners.

Plugged in, the Hitmaker is a no-nonsense funk machine that delivers all the goodies one would expect. It's comfortable, though the smaller neck width brings a different feel that may not appeal to larger hands. It has an authentic Strat sound yielding all kinds of cluck, quack, chime, and nuance. The string-through-body gives a solid tone that stays in tune.

Perfect for chord work of any genre, the Hitmaker is also great for soloing; its sounds sparkle when touched by overdrive, delivering tones with the expected clarity. ***– Oscar Jordan***

BOOM BOX

Martin's D-42 Modern Deluxe

Martin's new Modern Deluxe line offers a tantalizing idea – a traditional-looking/playing premium acoustic, *but* with high-tech innovations under the hood. Being a revised take on an iconic dreadnought, it brings high expectations.

As a dread, the acid-test for the D-42 is relatively easy; just give it a big strum and listen for the cannon-powered roar (with balanced treble) that many acoustics promise, but few deliver. Key ingredients here include a solid Sitka spruce top that has been roasted using Martin's Vintage Tone System (VTS) torrefaction treatment. It has East Indian back and sides, and a mahogany neck with ebony fretboard that meets the body at the 14th fret (20 frets total).

Price: $7,199
www.martinguitars.com

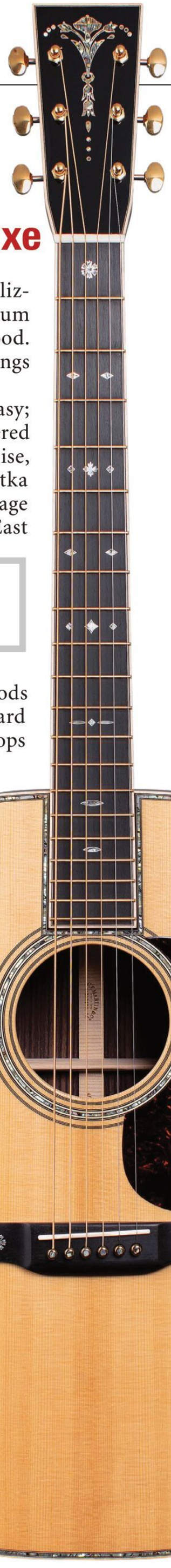
Another critical trick is the use of natural protein glue, which lets the tonewoods vibrate for best tonal benefit. Also look for "forward shifted" X bracing, as found in the best Martin flat-tops from the '30s. For some reason, X braces of this era were closer to the soundhole than the bridge, resulting in that fabled tone.

The "modern" part of the equation includes Liquidmetal bridge pins and a composite carbon-fiber bridge plate that increase volume and projection, assisting the D-42's naturally loud demeanor. The result is a beautifully bold tone, with bass rivaled by few other body shapes. Specifically, it delivers that enormous low-end, but with midrange thats warm and uncluttered, and sweet high-end.

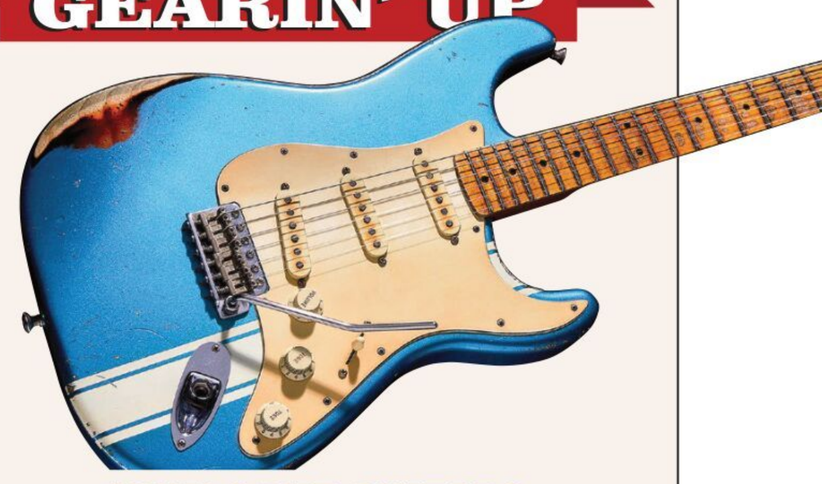
In hand, the asymmetrical neck profile (Martin calls it "high-performance taper") offers a comfortable, fast grip for fingerpicking, strumming, or old-school flatpickin'. Being a D-42, you also get sumptuous inlay on the fretboard, flamed-maple body binding, and more. The headstock "torch" inlay is a particularly impressive piece of artisanry.

The Modern Deluxe D-42 isn't cheap by any stretch, but it's a once-in-a-lifetime Martin tone machine that will provide decades of joy.

– Pete Prown



GEARIN' UP



JOHN CRUZ GUITARS CROSSVILLE ST

The John Cruz Guitars Crossville ST has a body made of alder, mahogany, or ash, quartersawn 25.5"-scale maple neck with a large-C shape and 12"-radius maple cap or rosewood fretboard, 21 jumbo frets, 1 11/16" Graph Tech nut, Gotoh SD91 tuners, Cruz Custom Design pickups, Gotoh 510TS-SF2 bridges with Highwood compensated saddles, and a five-way switch.



ORANGE MARCUS KING MK ULTRA

The U.S.-made/30-watt Orange Marcus King MK Ultra signature amp uses custom Heyboer transformers, a pair of 12AX7 preamp tubes, two cathode-based 6L6GC power tubes, and has controls for treble (Sing) and bass (Deep).



TWA SH9 SCOTT HENDERSON DISTORTION

TWA's SH9 Scott Henderson Distortion has a tone stack that shifts center frequency for focused lows and lower-mids, and thicker highs. U.S.-made with a JRC4558 opamp, it can be used with optional 18-volt DC power. Other features include true-bypass switching and die-cast zinc enclosure with custom powder coat.

FROM SURF TO CINEMA

The Gretsch G5260 Electromatic Jet Baritone

In the days before seven- and eight-string guitars, the easiest way to go low was to grab a baritone guitar. Radio waves and film scores of the '60s were filled with examples of the middle sister of the guitar family – from surf to country to cinematic Westerns.

A rebirth of sorts is in session, and Gretsch's G5260 Electromatic Jet Baritone fits nicely into the traditional role of a baritone, but also offers something for the more-modern role of the baritone – metal. The balance is tricky, but Gretsch has found a pleasing middle ground.

Price: $649.99 (stoptail)/
$749.99 (Bigsby)
www.gretschguitars.com

Loaded with Gretsch mini humbuckers (they're not given a clever name), the Jet is remarkably versatile. A little delay and reverb do a serviceable job of re-creating the spaghetti Western-sound; add some tremolo and you're surfing. The mini humbuckers don't seem to have the output to really match the drive of a modern metal sound – some experimenting is likely in order.

With a 29.75" scale length, the G5260 actually matches up with the Bass VI scale instead of the typical baritone. Out of the box, the .014-.072 strings tuned B to B feel a little stiff. There's room for lighter strings – and there's also room to go very low with the factory gauge. Our tester handled G to G tuning without issue.

The setup was comfortable; fit and finish on the mahogany body/maple neck were impeccable, with nicely manicured fret ends. And while its price is mid-range, it certainly doesn't look, feel, or play like a budget instrument.

One downside of the mini humbuckers is that the options for replacement are limited or require a rout. Another potential hang-up is the extra-long scale length, which may present a learning curve. And at nine pounds, this guitar isn't hefty, but it's definitely a bit of a chunk.

On balance, Gretsch has done a fine job of producing an affordable, versatile, and stylish baritone that can be appreciated by a wide swath of players looking to go low. **– *Michael Shirek***





Price: $180
www.duskyamp.com

LET IT BURN

The Dusky Electronics Toasted Overdrive

Dusky Electronics' new Toasted Overdrive is an upgrade of the company's two-stage MOSFET amp in a box; builder Chris Rossi grew dissatisfied with the tonal quality of the first version, so he smoothed the pedal's natural gain characteristics by giving the Color Knob a broader sweep.

The Toasted's Heat knob controls gain of the first stage, increases harmonics and distortion, and overdrives the second stage. Color affects treble frequencies; higher settings will brighten humbuckers, lower settings enhance single-coils. The More control adjusts output, and hidden inside (access is easy) is a DIP switch Meat control for adjusting low-end.

Tested using a Strat through a vintage 15-watt Ampeg Reverberocket, with the More and Heat controls dimed and the Color set at 10 o'clock, the Toasted served up incendiary overdrive a la Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," with heaps of top-end response. With Heat down to 3 o'clock, treble was more subdued, bringing up thoughts of Hendrix tone from "Manic Depression."

Through a Les Paul and with More at 2 o'clock, Heat dimed, and Color at 1 o'clock, signal was pure crunch, with midrange frequencies accentuated – think Pearl Jam's "Evenflow." With all controls dimed, the tone exploded with in-your-face raunch, with lots of top-end chime and plenty of cutting power.

Powered by 9-volt battery or wall wart, the Dusky Electronics Toasted OD is a worthwhile choice in a crowded field. **– *Bob Cianci* VG**

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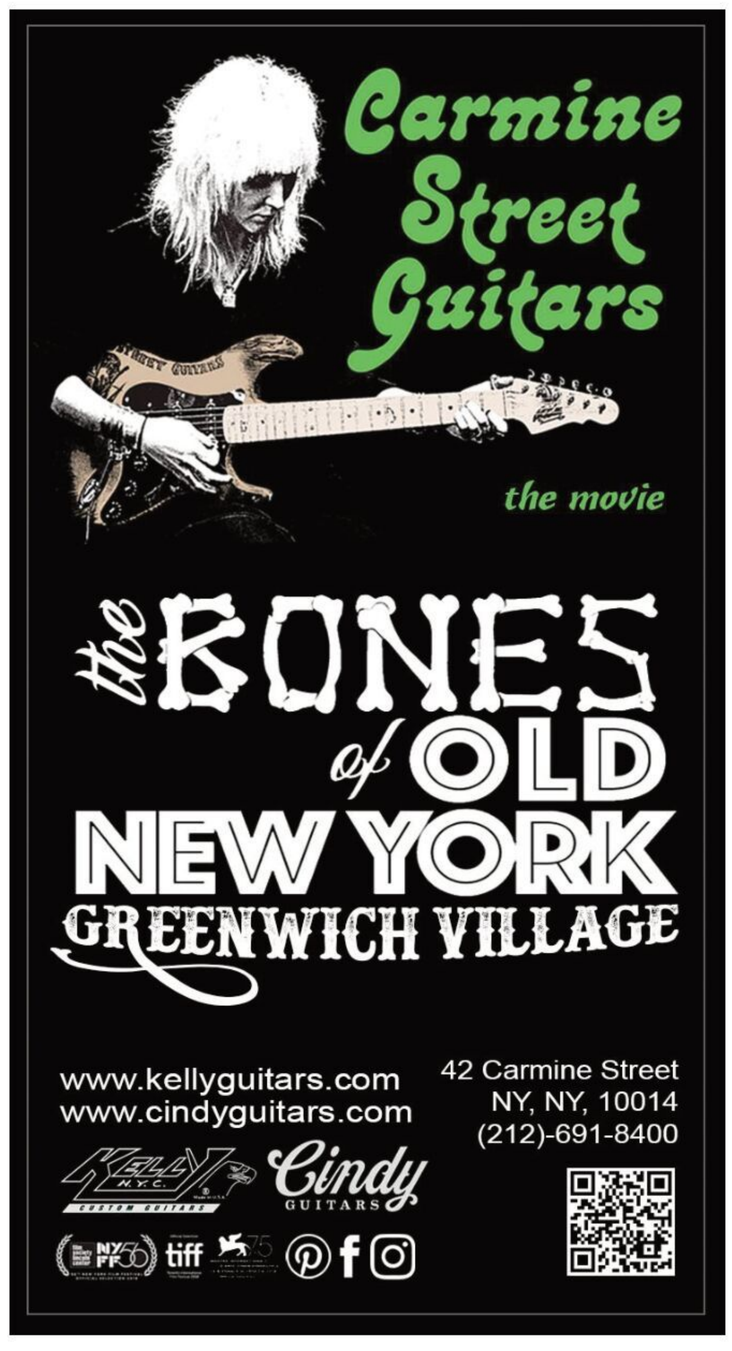
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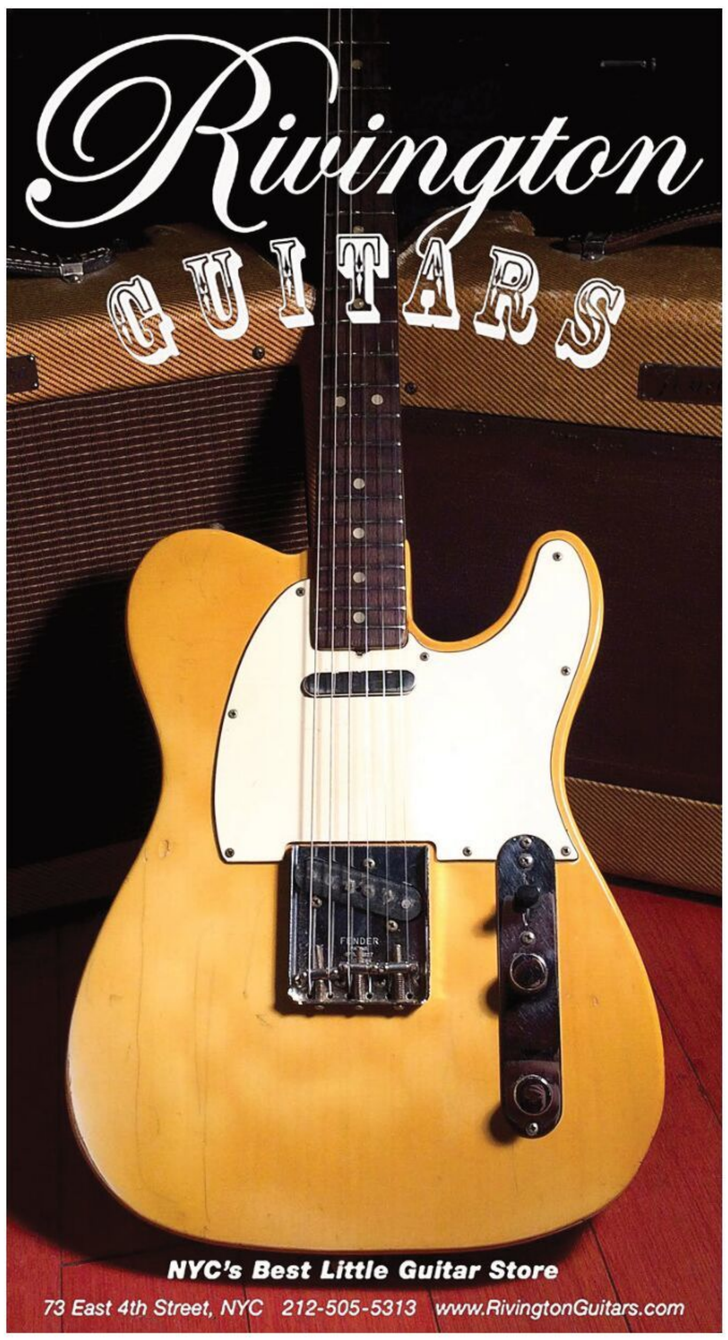


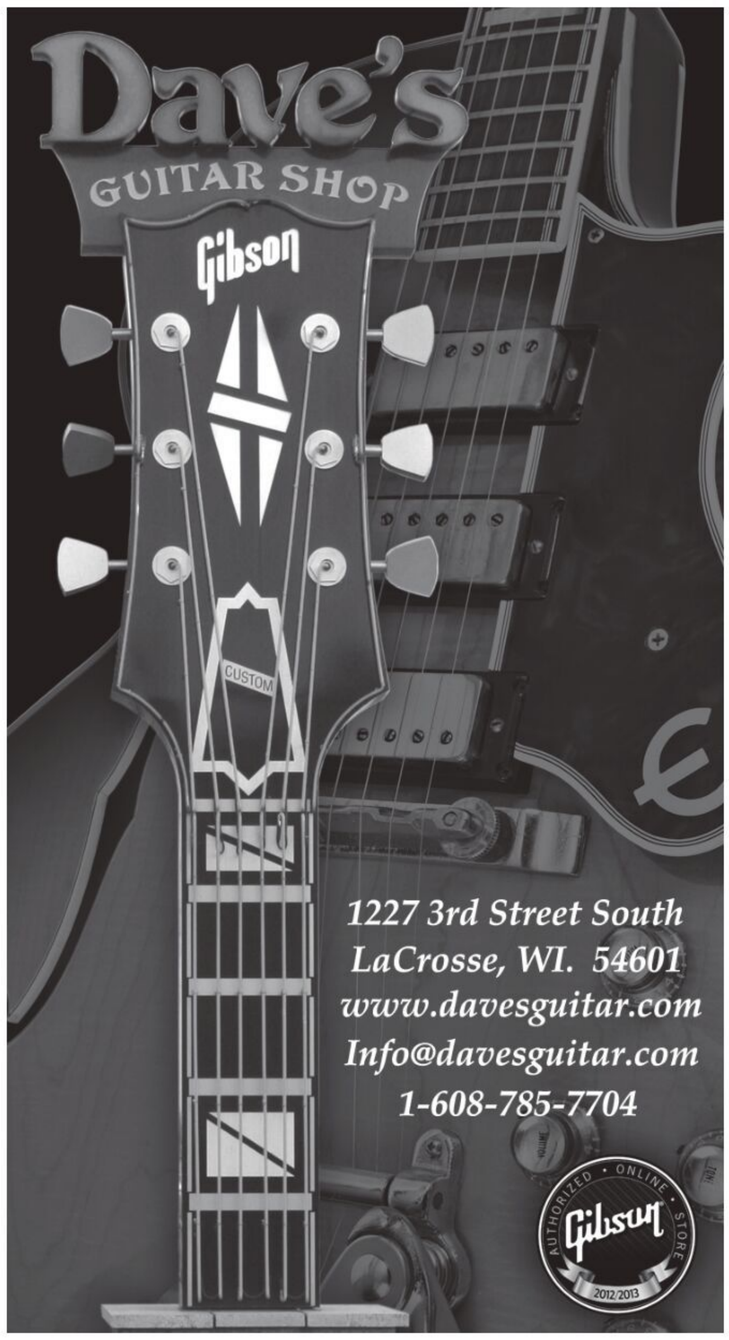




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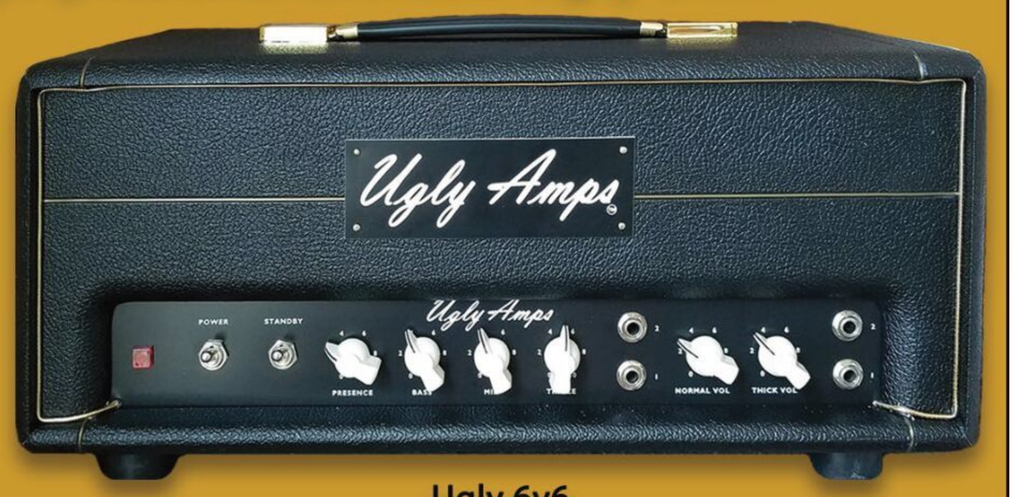
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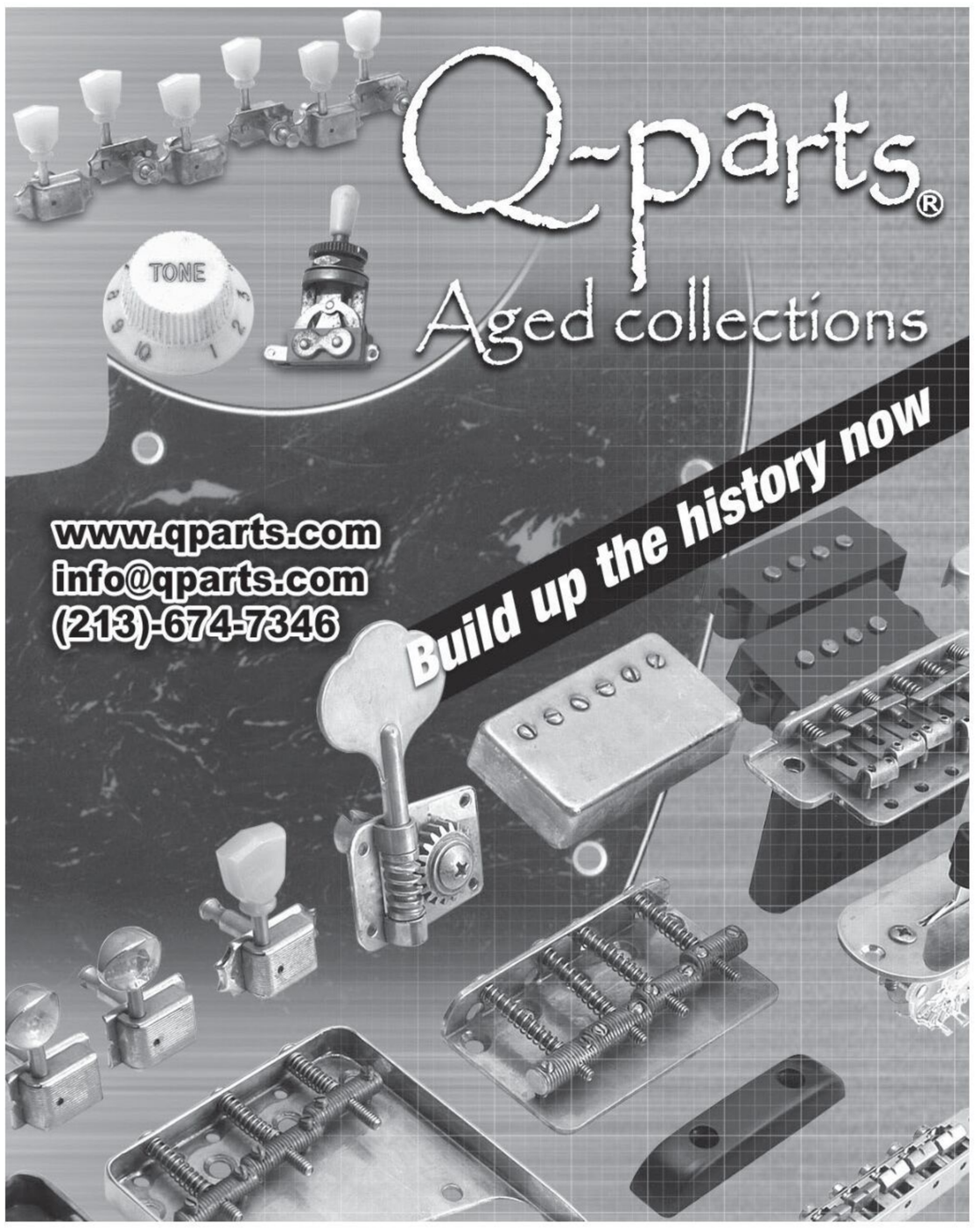
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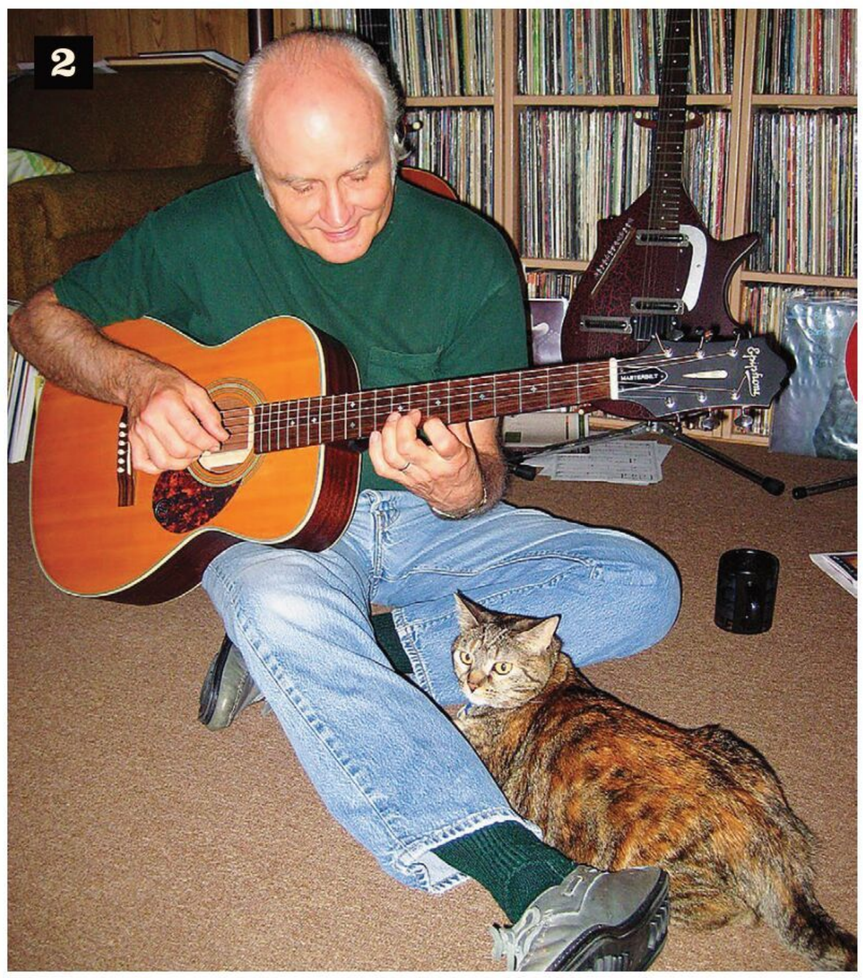
READERS Gallery

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Doug@VintageGuitar.com
Subject: Readers Gallery

Readers submit photos with the understanding that they may be used in any *VG*, Inc. project. Due to the volume of photos we receive, we are unable to return them, please do not send your only print.


1

1) During the pandemic, longtime reader Doug started adding Nationals and electrics to his collection. It now includes (front, from left) an American Professional II Tele, an SG Standard '61, and a Pro II Strat. In back are a 000-18MC, 000-28VS, J-45 Standard, L-00 Vintage, J-185 Original, Triolian, and a Style 1.


2

2) "This was the smartest cat I've ever seen," Dean Nissen said of Bastet. "She would sit and listen, turning her head like her brain was processing the music." Here, he entertains her with a 2006 Epiphone Masterbilt; behind him is a Rogue electric sitar.


3

3) Longtime subscriber Joe Fluken's collection includes (top) a Bonamassa Amos Flying V, '78 Les Paul Pro Deluxe, modern ES-335, and a Les Paul Classic. Along the bottom are a '62-reissue Strat, Gretsch 6121, '03 Tele, and a Takamine. Out front are his Lego Strat and Princeton.


4

4) Chip Lovitt used to comb yard sales and auctions to pick up old, often unplayable guitars that looked cool. "Here are two," he said. "An S.S. Stewart archtop with sweet binding, and what I think is a Kay electric; the owner must've been a Marine, since he nailed a USMC pin into the headstock and etched his name on the pickguard.



5

5) Cohn Rude keeps his original copy of the Ibanez flier known as the "woodshed catalog" and original hang tags in the case with his '76 Rocket Roll Sr.

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